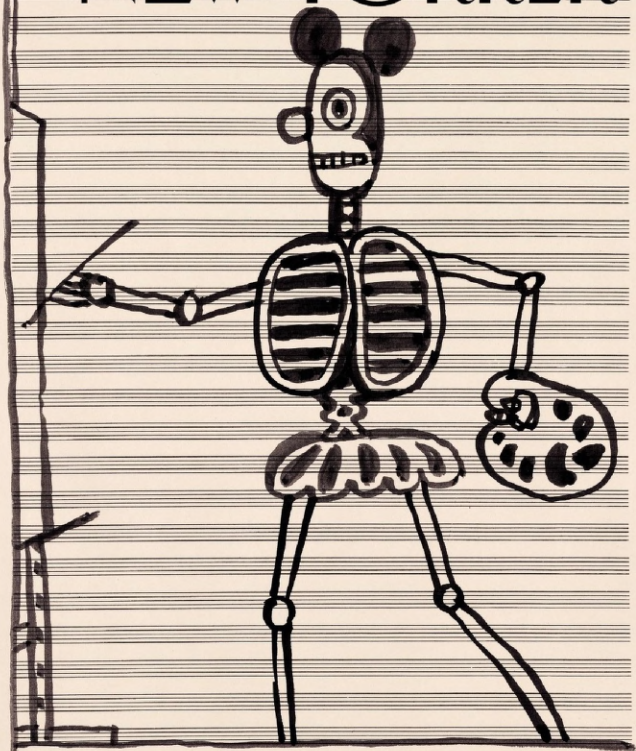


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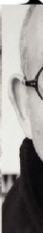


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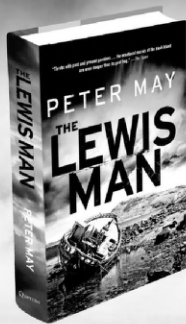
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*The New York Times*



## CONTRIBUTORS

**JEROME GROOPMAN** ("THE TRANSFORMATION," P. 46), the Recanati Professor at Harvard Medical School, is the co-author, with Dr. Pamela Hartzband, of "Your Medical Mind," which is available in paperback.

**CORA FRAZIER** (SHOUTS & MURMURS, P. 44) is a writer and editor living in New York.

**KELEFA SANNEH** ("THE ETERNAL PATERNAL," P. 36) joined the staff of *The New Yorker* in 2008.

**JOHN LAHR** ("CAUGHT IN THE ACT," P. 58) is the author of "Tennessee Williams: Mad Pilgrimage of the Flesh," which comes out later this month.

**WILLIAM FINNEGAN** ("DIGNITY," P. 70) has been a staff writer since 1987. His books include "A Complicated War" and "Cold New World: Growing Up in a Harder Country."

**DANIELLE McLAUGHLIN** (FICTION, P. 80) will publish her first collection of short stories next year in Ireland.

**ALEX ROSS** (A CRITIC AT LARGE, P. 88), the magazine's music critic, has written two books, "The Rest Is Noise" and "Listen to This."

**JEN McCLANAGHAN** (POEM, P. 90) is the author of the poetry collection "River Legs."

**EMILY HUSSBAUM** (ON TELEVISION, P. 96) won a 2014 National Magazine Award for her television commentary.

**SAUL STEINBERG** (COVER), who died in 1999, contributed to the magazine for nearly sixty years. To celebrate the centennial of his birth, exhibitions of his work are being held in New York this fall, at the Pace Gallery, the Sculpture Center, and the Center for Architecture.

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**FICTION AND POETRY:** Readings by Danielle McLaughlin and Jen McClanaghan.

**PODCASTS:** On the Political Scene, Ryan Lizza and Steve Coll join Dorothy Wickenden for a discussion about President Obama's foreign-policy crises. Plus, Kelefa Sanneh, Sarah Larson, and Michael Agger on Out Loud.

**VIDEOS:** John Lahr on Al Pacino; Kelefa Sanneh on Bill Cosby.

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## THE MAIL

### ROOTED IN SCIENCE

Michael Specter undermines his argument in favor of genetically modified crops, which is couched in a negative portrait of the environmentalist Vandana Shiva, by failing to mention major scientific concerns ("Seeds of Doubt," August 25th). Nearly all G.M. corn—which is about ninety per cent of the corn in the United States—is grown using neonicotinoids, a class of neurotoxic insecticides. Neonicotinoids are systemic, meaning they are absorbed by tissues and fluids of the treated plant, including nectar and pollen, and in the food produced by the plant. A large body of scientific evidence points to these chemicals as the main reason behind the recent die-off of honeybees around the world. As a result, the most widely used neonicotinoids have been banned in the European Union for at least the next year and a half. They are found in ground and surface waters and in the food we eat, and they have been shown to disrupt nerve-cell activity in mammals. I am deeply concerned that neonicotinoids may harm humans as well.

*Eric Chivian, M.D.*

*Founder and Director Emeritus, Center for Health and the Global Environment, Harvard Medical School  
Boston, Mass.*

As a former genetic engineer who carried out safety studies to gain F.D.A. approval for the world's first genetically engineered whole food to be brought to market (the Flavr Savr™ tomato), I know firsthand the risks that this technology presents. Research suggests that we should proceed more cautiously. Long-term animal studies and human clinical trials have been carried out for a number of commercially available G.E. drugs, like the insulin Specter mentions; in the United States, those drugs are labelled, so patients can make informed decisions. When it comes to groceries, however, Americans are not given full disclosure about G.E. foods; in poll after poll, people indicate they want that opportunity. I agree with Specter that we will need many approaches to farm-

ing in order to feed the world. But we'll also need more precise and thorough descriptions of genetically modified products.

*Belinda Martineau  
Davis, Calif.*

Specter's article demonstrates that many objections to genetically modified crops are biased, and contrary to the findings of scientific inquiry. He shows how misguided activists affect the complex regulation of agriculture in the U.S., Europe, and the developing world. Elected officials, poorly informed or merely wishing to keep their jobs, prevent the cultivation of safe and nutritious crops to feed growing populations. Specter's piece quotes several articulate and persuasive experts who are clearly frustrated by the influence of able communicators like Shiva, whose broad-brush generalizations disseminate fear. Scientists are far less inclined to spread their message to the public, and Specter is helpful in bridging the gap.

*Regina Linder*

*Professor Emerita, Medical Laboratory Sciences, Hunter College  
New York City*

Specter's report points to a serious dilemma for both farmers and seed breeders: get too far in front of public opinion at your own risk. The level of misinformation and hysteria over G.M. crops, combined with a romanticized view of organic farming, means that our more efficient producers must either put on the brakes or be vilified. The upscale farmers' market allows affluent consumers to act locally and support boutique agriculture, but thinking globally requires that seed breeders and large-scale farmers apply every available tool to feed a growing population with diminishing resources.

*Joe Hogan*

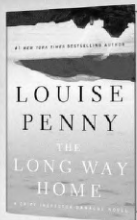
*Chico, Calif.*

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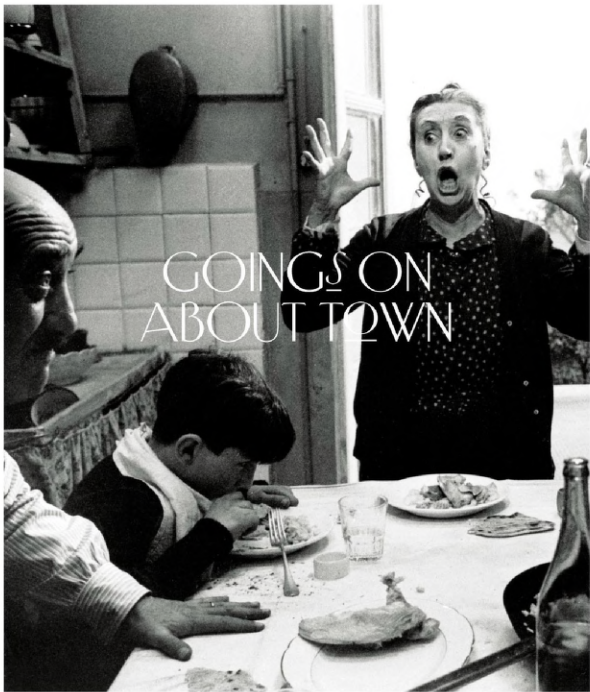
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# GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN

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**AS BEYITS THE BIRTHPLACE** of opera, Italy sets its movies to music with a particular verve, nowhere more than in the work of Federico Fellini, whose rollicking 1973 coming-of-age comedy, *Amarcord*, includes a sumptuous, nostalgic score by Nino Rota. It will be featured in "La Dolce Vita: The Music of Italian Cinema," the New York Philharmonic's season-opening program (Sept. 16-17), in which Alan Gilbert also leads the orchestra in excerpts from Rota's scores for Fellini's "8 1/2" and Luchino Visconti's "The Leopard," as well as Ennio Morricone's music for Sergio Leone's "Once Upon a Time in the West," among other gems. Renée Fleming, Joshua Bell, and Josh Groban add their special lustre to the concerts, with Martin Scorsese welcoming the audience on opening night.

MOVIES | THE THEATRE  
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CLASSICAL MUSIC  
FOOD & DRINK



Hou Hsiao-hsien's "Flowers of Shanghai," from 1998, opens a complete retrospective of his work.

## THE MEMORY MAKER

*Hou Hsiao-hsien takes the long view of Taiwanese history.*

IN THE NINETEEN-EIGHTIES AND NINETIES, the Taiwanese director Hou Hsiao-hsien made a series of masterworks that helped to shift world cinema's center of gravity toward East Asia; then he lost his edge. A retrospective of his films, at Museum of the Moving Image (Sept. 12-Oct. 17), displays both his enduring achievements and his artistic frustrations.

Born in mainland China in 1947, Hou was brought to Taiwan as an infant, when his family fled civil war. That disruption is at the heart of his grand autobiographical drama, *"A Time to Live and a Time to Die,"* from 1985, about a boy growing up in remote southern Taiwan in the nineteen-fifties and sixties. As his educated family faces poverty and disease as refugees, he yields to reckless, liberating impulses. Hou's teeming yet oblique long takes serve to conceal action as well as reveal it; his images suggest a struggle to discern the particulars of a past that holds him in its grasp.

Politics come to the fore in Hou's *"A City of Sadness,"* from 1989, another family story, which begins with Japan's surrender, in 1945, releasing Taiwan from a half century of Japanese rule. But the threat of Communist rule and the rise of organized crime spark violence that tears a family apart and ensnares a dedicated and principled artist, the photographer Wen-ching.

Hou's greatest work, *"The Puppetmaster"* (1993), tells the real-life story of the puppeteer Li T'ien-lu, whose artistic vocation arose from a rough childhood and took a strange turn during the Second World War, when he devoted himself to pro-Japanese propaganda. Li himself, now elderly, appears onscreen from time to time, punctuating the action with his reminiscences, by turns droll and horrific. The reflexive touch is not narrative gamesmanship but, rather, a mark of Hou's own memory-steeped perspective.

Yet, as Hou gained worldwide acclaim, he both broadened that perspective and thinned it out. Long takes became a familiar trope of international art cinema, but the ones that he made highlighted theatrical performance. Trying out the styles of other directors, he sacrificed a piece of his own personality. This year, though, Hou finished the complex shoot of a martial-arts film, *"The Assassin,"* set in ninth-century China, which suggests a return to the historical vision that made his name.

—Richard Brody



### NOW PLAYING

#### The Congress

Robin Wright, playing a version of herself, is a beautiful and maturing movie actress who agrees, out of desperation, to be electronically "scanned" and preserved for all time by a vicious studio boss (Danny Huston). The first half of this film by Ari Folman (*"Waltz with Bashir"*), based on a novel by Stanislaw Lem, bitterly suggests that the corporate future of movies depends on the extinction of the live actor. But, rather than showing Wright's digital avatar at work in future movies, in the second half of the film Folman turns everyone into animated versions of themselves, with Tom Cruise and many others wandering dully through a cartoon Valhalla. The anger drains out of the picture, and we watch in a state of passive appreciation and indifference. Harvey Keitel gives a marvelous performance as Wright's tough-talking but sympathetic agent. With Paul Giamatti and the voice of Jon Hamm. —David Denby (In limited release.)

#### The Dawn Patrol

Battling better trained and better equipped German fliers, the stalwart British airmen of Howard Hawks's First World War drama, from 1930, are measured by a stern code of self-mastery and energized by a youthful bravado that places courage under the sign of play. Under the command of Major Brand (Neil Hamilton) and the moral leadership of the tight-lipped pilot Courtney (Richard Barthelmess), young recruits are sent airborne toward certain death, but Hawks locates a strange joy in their grim fate. This song-filled early sound film is a virtual war musical, with the most exotic performance reserved for a number that includes a captured German pilot who is welcomed like one of the boys. The laughter that sends off the dead and the ribald jokes about a near-fatal bullet hole "five inches from the behind" are of a piece with the pilots' wild aerial exploits. Yet their death-defying antics are matched by their flatline glower (a specialty of the haunted Barthelmess) in the face of impossible orders issued by implacable, invisible authorities—a cosmic blankness that the fliers face down with games of love and chance. —Richard Brody (MOMA; Sept. 13.)

#### Frank

To cast Michael Fassbender in a title role and then conceal him from the

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**OPENING****ARCHAEOLOGY OF A WOMAN**

A drama, directed by Sharon Greytak, about a woman who is suffering from dementia. Starring Sally Kirkland. Opening Sept. 12. (In limited release.)

**ATLAS SHRUGGED: WHO IS JOHN GALT?**

The third part of the screen adaptation of Ayn Rand's novel, directed by James Manera, starring Stephen Tobolowsky and Rob Morrow. Opening Sept. 10. (In limited release.)

**BORN TO FLY: ELIZABETH STREEB VS. GRAVITY**

A documentary about the choreographer, directed by Catherine Gund. Opening Sept. 10. (Film Forum.)

**THE DISAPPEARANCE OF ELEANOR RIGBY: THEM**

Reviewed this week in *The Current Cinema*. Opening Sept. 12. (In limited release.)

**THE DROP**

A crime drama, directed by Michael R. Roskam, about employees in a bar that's used to launder money. Starring Tom Hardy, Noomi Rapace, and James Gandolfini. Opening Sept. 10. (In limited release.)

**THE GREEN PRINCE**

Nadav Schirman directed this documentary about Mosab Hassan Yousef, the son of a Hamas leader and a spy for Israel. Opening Sept. 12. (In limited release.)

**MY OLD LADY**

Kevin Kline stars in this comedy as a struggling American man who inherits a lavish apartment in Paris. Written and directed by Israel Horowitz, based on his play. Opening Sept. 10. (In limited release.)

**NO GOOD DEED**

Taraji P. Henson stars in this drama, as a woman who confronts an intruder (Idris Elba) in her home. Directed by Sam Miller. Opening Sept. 12. (In wide release.)

**REVIEWS AND FESTIVALS**

*Titles in bold are reviewed.*

**ANTHOLOGY FILM ARCHIVES**

The films of Ed Wood. Sept. 11 at 7:15 and Sept. 15 at 9: "Glen

**MOVIE OF THE WEEK**

A video discussion of Joseph L. Mankiewicz's "All About Eve." From 1950, in our digital edition and online.

neck up feels like a waste of vital resources. Yet that is what Lenny Abrahamson picks in his new film, which seldom dips the obvious path in narrative and tone. Frank spends most of his time with a large, painted, and easily dented fake head placed over his real one; why this was done is never explained, nor does it need to be. What matters is how expressive he remains, both in the larly language of his body and in the desperate cries and croonings of his voice—a virtue of sorts, since he is the lead singer in a band. The musicians' devotion to their art, their fierce indifference to success, and their curt flirtation with fame, on a trip from Ireland to Austin, Texas, are shown through the marvelling eyes of Jon (Domhnall Gleeson), their freshly recruited keyboard player; yet he seems a very pale, diluted presence beside people like Frank and Clara (Maggie Gyllenhaal), the band's resident ice queen, who plays the theremin. The whole thing is in danger of becoming arch and quirky, yet Abrahamson steers the final act of his drama toward a somber, unhappy rumination. Fassbender, in finally doffing his cheap head, somehow reveals more than he did with his unadorned nakedness in "Shame."—*Anthony Lane* (Reviewed in our issue of 8/25/14.) (In limited release.)

**Guardians of the Galaxy**

Marvel Studios strikes gold again with this sci-fi superhero treat. The plot's MacGuffin is a mysterious orb that the newly formed team of Guardians (played by a ragtag group of actors, augmented by C.G.I. effects) must keep out of the hands of an evil, universe-threatening maniac. The film, directed and co-written by James Gunn, is joyfully irreverent. Gunn lends his underachiever superheroes a geeky, comic camaraderie, and he brings a sly touch to the wacky intergalactic adventure. Chris Pratt, overflowing with charisma, plays the leader of the pack of misfits, and his blissed-out space cowboy (with a love for seventies music) is so full of good will that he buoys the film and its requisite whizbang special effects. With Zoe Saldana, Dave Bautista, and Lee Pace, and featuring on-the-button voice work by Bradley Cooper, as a gun-toting raccoon, and Vin Diesel, as a sentient walking tree called, unfortunately, Groot.—*Bruce Dinos* (In wide release.)

**If I Stay**

Mia (Chloë Grace Moretz), a promising cellist, fresh from an audition for Juilliard, is in a car wreck on an icy road, together with her father (Joshua Leonard), her mother (Mireille Enos), and her brother (Jakob Davies). As Mia teeters on the brink of death, her spirit (which remains nicely dressed) watches events at the hospital and reflects

on the times preceding the crash—in particular, on the love that bonded between her and a brooding rocker named Adam (Jamie Blackley). R. J. Cutler's film, adapted by Shauna Cross from the young-adult novel by Gayle Forman, is delectous to behold and unerringly doomy in tone, as its target audience demands. It's also in no hurry whatever; the title refers to Mia's fraught decision—should she cling to existence or just give up?—and, well before the end, even loyal viewers will be begging her to hurry up and choose. With Stacy Keach, as her grandfather.—*A.L.* (9/8/14) (In wide release.)

**Last Days in Vietnam**

The director Rory Kennedy's masterpiece of the compilation-documentary form reconstructs, with abundant historical footage and recent interviews, the tragic final days of the American presence in Vietnam. It focuses on Ambassador Graham Martin, who, unwilling to admit that the game is over, refuses to begin an evacuation (he wouldn't even countenance the word); his decision strands hundreds of South Vietnamese citizens who may have otherwise gotten away. Yet a variety of American military personnel, defying orders, conspire to help the most vulnerable South Vietnamese escape. Who goes? Who has to stay? As a portrait of America in a moment both of idealism and betrayal, the movie is heartbreaking as well as inspiring. Among the many participants whom Kennedy interviews are Henry Kissinger, the Army colonel Stuart Herrington, and the C.I.A. analyst Frank Snek. Written by Mark Bailey and Kevin McAlester.—*D.D.* (In limited release.)

**The Last of Robin Hood**

Not, sadly, the tale of an old man in faded green, shuffling through Sherwood Forest with a witless feather in his cap, but the unsavory final chapter in the life of Errol Flynn. By the late nineteen-fifties, his capering days are gone; he lives in California, with a swimming pool and a sea of vodka, and the best he can manage is a few airy sword thrusts on a diving board. Kevin Kline inhabits the role with a courteous and melancholy grace. (It makes a shabby companion piece to the sprightly Douglas Fairbanks whom Kline played in "Chaplin.") The story concerns the illicit—and illegal—affair between Flynn and Beverly Aadland (Dakota Fanning), who was fifteen when they met. Fanning looks frozen throughout, and you can see the dilemma—if she made her character at all provocative, it might lend a dangerous leeway to Flynn's offense. More engaging are the moves and motives of Florence (Susan Sarandon), Beverly's mother, whose ambition knew no bounds; Sarandon's timing, as she charts this rising recklessness, has never been more precise. But the movie around

her, written and directed by Richard Glazer and Wash Westmoreland, looks lowly and limp, and we seldom feel just how much is at stake. The hero's demise, at fifty, comes as a welcome release.—*A.L.* (9/8/14) (In limited release.)


**Love Is Strange**

In Sach's film begins with a bedroom scene: to be exact, with a tranquil shot of naked legs and feet, stilling in slumber. That pretty much sums up the air of decorum in which the tale, whose tones could have proved incendiary, unfolds. The limbs belong to a painter called Ben (John Lithgow) and a music teacher called George (Alfred Molina). They have been together for years and have grown used to the shape of each other's bodies and souls. We join them on the day of their wedding, and thus at the start of their troubles. George, once hitched, loses his job at a local Manhattan church, and with it goes the couple's ability to pay for their apartment; the rest of the movie becomes an awkward and very parochial quest for real estate. The newcomers are forced to live apart: George with the gay cops downstairs and Ben with his nephew (Darren Burrows), whose wife (Marisa Tomei) and teenage son (Charlie Tahan) are both moved and exasperated by his stay. The film becomes a meditation on the lure of the city and the inesorable crawl of time, and it inches close to dullness; what lends it spirit is the performances, both major and minor, and Sach's determination to dramatize same-sex love not as groundbreaking, but as securely rooted—rent control and all—in common ground.—*A.L.* (8/25/14) (In limited release.)

**Lucy**

The director Luc Besson grafts a visionary science-fiction story onto a bloody pulp-fiction framework. Scarlett Johansson plays the title role of an American student in Taipei who is kidnapped and forced to become a mule to transport a strange new drug. A pouch of it bursts in her body, and the substance ramps up the percentage of brain space that she can tap into. Her new powers aren't merely intellectual but also telepathic. Lucy travels to Paris to consult a neuroscientist (Morgan Freeman) and to thwart her kidnappers. The story's metaphysical shift is Besson's license to thrill; Lucy is a walking machine of special effects, and the director delights in her ability to pin opponents to the ceiling and empty their gun cartridges from across the room. But he also visits territory covered previously in films by Terrence Malick, contriving fantastic images that delve into the molecular and range into the cosmic in order to conjure the seemingly supernatural scope of Lucy's transformation.

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or Glenda' (1953). • Sept. 11 at 9:30 and Sept. 16 at 7:19. • 'Bride of the Monster' (1955). • Sept. 12 at 7. • 'Plan 9 from Outer Space.' • Sept. 13 at 9 and Sept. 15 at 7. • 'The Sinister Urge' (1960). • Sept. 12 and Sept. 16 at 9. • 'Night of the Ghouls' (1958).

#### BAH CINEMATEK

'Nonesuch Records on Film.' Sept. 12 at 2, 4:30, 7, and 9:30. • 'Julius and Jim' (1962, Francis Truffaut). • Sept. 13 at 2, 4, 6, 8, and 9:30. • 'Shoot the Piano Player' (1960, Truffaut). • Sept. 14 at 4:30, 7, and 9:30. • 'Rebel Without a Cause' (1955, Nicholas Ray). • Sept. 15 at 5:15 and 8. • 'Two English Girls' (1971, Truffaut).

#### FILM FORUM

In revival. Sept. 25 (25 call for showtimes). • 'Rome, Open City'

#### FILM SOCIETY OF LINCOLN CENTER

The films of John Waters. Sept. 10 at 9. • 'Female Trouble' (1974). • Sept. 11 at 7. A discussion with Waters, moderated by the critic Dennis Dermody. • Sept. 13 at 3 and Sept. 14 at 8. • 'Cry-Baby' (1990). • Sept. 13 at 9:15 and Sept. 14 at 6. • 'Pink Flamingos' (1968). • Sept. 14 at 4. • 'Pecker' (1998).

#### FRENCH INSTITUTE ALLIANCE FRANÇAISE

Special event. Sept. 16 at 7:30. • 'Mississippi Mermaid.' The screening to celebrate the publication of the book 'François Truffaut by Lillian Ross from *The New Yorker*, 1960-1976,' will be introduced by Richard Brody, of this magazine.

#### MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

'The Great War.' Sept. 12 at 4:30. • 'The Lost Squadron' (1932, George Archainbaud). • Sept. 12 at 8 and Sept. 14 at 2:30. • 'Hell's Angels' (1930, Howard Hughes). • Sept. 13 at 2. • 'The Dawn Patrol.' • Sept. 13 at 5. • 'The Dawn Patrol' (1938, Edmund Goulding). • Sept. 13 at 8 and Sept. 14 at 5:30. • 'Wings' (1932, William Wellman). • Sept. 15 at 4:30. • 'Lafayette Escadrille' (1938, Wellman).

#### MUSEUM OF THE MOVING IMAGE

The films of Hou Hsiao-hsien. Sept. 12 at 7. • 'Flowers of Shanghai' (1998). • Sept. 13 at 2:30. • 'Cuto Girl' (1980). • Sept. 13 at 4:30. • 'HHH: A Portrait of Hou Hsiao-hsien' (1997, Olivier Assayas). • Sept. 13 at 7. • 'The Puppetmaster' (1993), introduced by the critic J. Hobeman. • Sept. 14 at 2:30. • 'A Summer at Grandpa's' (1984). • Sept. 14 at 4:30. • 'Cheerful Wind' (1981). • Sept. 14 at 7. • 'Three Times' (2005), introduced by the critic Amy Taubin.

Her effortless, mighty control over time and matter leaps as far into the wondrous as it does into the absurd; Besson's visions are exhilarating and imaginative, goofy and bombastic.—R.B. (In wide release.)

#### Memphis

Tim Sutton's second feature, starring the young contemporary musician Willis Earl Beal as a musician with the same name, captures the mood of the blues with pitch-perfect sensuality. As depicted, Willis is a bluesman with artist's block—he's nearly unable to compose or perform, and when he does play he feels inadequate and unmotivated. His attempts at self-healing take him on a round of visits to older friends bearing tough love and bitter wisdom, to the guided ecstasy of a Baptist church, to the bruising pleasures of rollicking night spots, to the arms of a lover. Along the way, he drifts through a symphony of sights and sounds—steamy sunlight piercing vaulted foliage, dusty streets teeming with hidden life, the wind in the trees, train whistles, birdscalls—accompanied by haunting score of elusive fragments and dreamlike twiddles that could be coming from Willis's studio or from his solitary yearnings. His heavy tragedy on a game leg suggests weariness of historical dimensions; the harmonious mysteries of the urban landscape are themselves the essence of his art. A brilliant sequence of musicians at work gets away from familiar modes of filmed performance and into the depths of inner experience.—R.B. (In limited release.)

#### Mississippi Mermaid

François Truffaut's doom-laden romantic thriller, from 1969, stars Catherine Deneuve as Julie Roussel, a mail-order bride who travels from her home in Paris to the island of Réunion to wed Louis Mahe (Jean-Paul Belmondo), a wealthy businessman on whom she has predatory designs. Louis is inhibited and Julie is cagy; she ensnares him in a net of sexual obsession that pulls him, open-eyed and willing, down into the dregs of life. The film's methodical pacing bears the anguish of a slow-motion catastrophe; long silences are built into the story of the tentative couple. Under starchy bourgeois formalities, Truffaut finds a rampant daily eroticism of leers and glances, proings and pawings that are all the more enticing for their air of dirtiness. His tautly controlled widescreen images lend an unnatural chill to the garish tropical light of Réunion; their complex and delicate piroettes thrub with the thrill of sex and violence. Under her cold manners and glossy looks, Julie is another of Truffaut's feral survivors of a wild childhood, a vengeful outcast from a society that tormented her from the start. The redemptive power of love is joined with a stifled guffaw of irony.—R.B. (French Institute Alliance Française; Sept. 16.)

#### The One I Love

The talented stars of this arch romantic-comedy reboot work hard to infuse the fantasy premise with a glimmer of life. The marriage of Sophie (Elisabeth Moss) and Ethan (Mark Duplass) is on the rocks; their therapist (Ted Danson) sends them off to reconnect at a country retreat. There, they endure a Dostoyevskian twist of fortune—a mysterious encounter with another couple which makes them doubt each other and themselves all the more. The trick is a good one, but the director, Charlie McDowell, and the screenwriter, Justin Lader, don't pull it off. They can't decide whether the marvel, at its core, is metaphysical or medical or even criminal, so the ground rules of the game are hopelessly tangled, and its emotional import—regarding those we love and how we'd wish them to be—remains undeveloped. Ethan and Sophie are never more than playthings of the premise; Moss and Duplass are the sole sources of nuance and vitality, and they seem unduly hemmed in by the movie's unimaginative confines.—R.B. (In limited release.)

#### Pink Flamingos

Produced, directed, written, and filmed by John Waters, and guaranteed to offend every taste, *Divine* is obscenely funny as "the filthiest person alive," living under the name Babs Johnson in a trailer in Phoenix, Maryland, with her mother, Edie (Edith Massey), the extremely lovely Egg Lady; Cotton (Mumy Vivian Pearce), who reads "Humpty-Dumpty" to Edgar; and Babs's son, Crackers (Danny Mills), whose sexual appetites are, well, catholic. Connie and Raymond Marble (Mink Stole and David Lechary) do everything conceivable to strip *Divine* of her title—keep slaves, sell babies, deposit waste products in the mail—but they don't have a chance. Lewis Carroll could have written the mock trial at the end, if he had been criminally insane. Released in 1972.—Mary Norris (Film Society of Lincoln Center; Sept. 13-14.)

#### Plan 9 from Outer Space

Like the philosopher who was so busy gazing at the stars that he tripped into a well, the oft-ridiculed director Ed Wood stared so fixatedly at his own grandiose designs that he stumbled upon the stuff of filmmaking. This extravagant example of his sublime absurdity, from 1956, links a trio of zombies—played by Bela Lugosi, Vampira, and the muscle-bound hulk Tor Johnson—to an alien invasion intended to prevent nuclear war and other man-made disasters. The flimsy sets, flagrant acting, perfunctory staging, and hectic montage of stock footage convey a frenzied vision of cosmic catastrophe that comes to life only in the awesomely silly special effect of a flying saucer aflame in the night sky. Wood lacked both the dramatic sense to unfold

his speculations in action and the technique (as well as the money) to embody, in any plausible way, his spectacular fancies, but their crude approximations vibrate with his stifled exaltation. He had the imaginative intensity of an artist with none of the craft, the dreams without the taste; he's an auteur despite himself.—R.B. (Anthology Film Archives; Sept. 12.)

#### Rome, Open City

Handheld cameras tremble with the urgency of open wounds and violent emotion in Roberto Rossellini's 1945 drama of the Italian resistance to the capital's occupation by Nazi Germany. It's a tale of two women: Pina (Anna Magnani), a widowed mother who is pregnant with the child of a resistance fighter whom she is about to marry, and Marina (María Michi), a night-club performer in love with another leading resister and longtime anti-Fascist. Yielding to spur-of-the-moment impulses, one sacrifices for the resistance, the other sacrifices the resistance. Magnani's—and Pina's—natural and earthy theatricality conveys an art of living, which is also the stuff of Rossellini's art. Pina's young son and a patriotic priest are involved in the tense, meticulous plotting of clandestine warfare, which unfolds against unstinting depictions of the German occupiers' cruel psychological games and depraved physical exactions. Rossellini's tense, bloody, death-haunted film conjures an authenticity that's based less on its quasi-documentary style than on a vision that brings ideas to life. The drama reveals a deep grid of underlying connections: the unity of Communists and nationalists against the German occupation and their Italian Fascist allies, and the popular legitimacy of the resistance. It offers a template for a postwar renewal of Italy, as well as of Italian cinema.—R.B. (Film Forum; Sept. 12-25.)

#### The Trip to Italy

In this hilarious sequel to their 2010 film, 'The Trip,' also directed by Michael Winterbottom, the bryot comics Steve Coogan and Rob Brydon have been given a tough assignment by the Observer—an all-expenses-paid journey through the most beautiful parts of Italy, where they are required to eat lavishly and stay in exquisite small hotels, all so that one or the other can write high-brow culinary drivel for the paper. As they amble through paradise, the two men take turns topping each other with impressions of famous movie stars. They aren't interested in anyone's soul; they seek themselves as professionals in an exacting trade that requires getting Christian Bale's guttural whutter and Roger Moore's English-butler cron exactly right. This hedonistic jape is so short through with middle-aged melancholy and the fear of death. Both movies, it turns out, are about the impossibility—and the necessity—of male friendship.—D.D. (9/1/14) (In limited release.)

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**MUTUAL  
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STOCKS, OPTIONS, AND  
EVERY ETF SOLD,  
MY PORTFOLIO  
**HAS A LOT OF  
DIFFERENT LOOKS.**  
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# THE THEATRE

## ALSO NOTABLE

### ALADDIN

New Amsterdam

### AND I AND SILENCE

Pershing Square Signature Center, Through Sept. 14.

### BEAUTIFUL—THE CAROLE KING MUSICAL

Stephen Sondheim

### BOYS AND THESIS

59E59

### CABARET

Studio 54

### DRY LAND

HERE

### A GENTLEMAN'S GUIDE

### TO LOVE AND MURDER

Walter Kerr

### HEDWIG AND THE ANGRY INCH

Belasco

### IF/THEN

Richard Rodgers

### Jersey Boys

August Wilson

### JUÁREZ: A DOCUMENTARY

### MYTHOLOGY

Rattlestick

### Kinky Boots

Hirschfeld

### LADY DAY AT EMERSON'S

### BAR & GRILL

Circle in the Square

### MATILDA THE MUSICAL

Shubert

### LES MISÉRABLES

Imperial

### THE MONEY SHOT

Lucille Lortel

### PIECE OF MY HEART

Pershing Square Signature Center, Through Sept. 14.

### Pippin

Music Box

### ROCK BOTTOM

Public

### RODGERS + HAMMERSTEIN'S CINDERELLA

Broadway Theatre

### UNCLE VANHA

Pearl

### WAITING FOR GODOT

Borrow Street Theatre

### WICKED

Gershwin

## OPENINGS AND PREVIEWS

### Almost Home

In this play by Walter Anderson, a Marine returns home to the Bronx from the Vietnam War to find his family in trouble. Michael Parva directs the Directors Company world premiere. Previews begin Sept. 12. (Acorn, 410 W. 42nd St. 212-239-6200.)

### Bedbugs!!!

In this sci-fi musical comedy, written by Paul Leschen and Fred Sauter, an exterminator is out for revenge after bedbugs kill her mother. Robert Bartley directs. In previews. Opens Sept. 14. (ArcLight, 152 W. 71st St. 212-868-4444.)

### The Country House

Manhattan Theatre Club presents the world premiere of this play, by Donald Margulies and starring Blythe Danner, about a family of actors gathered during the Williamstown Theatre Festival. Daniel Sullivan directs. In previews. (Samuel J. Friedman, 261 W. 47th St. 212-239-6200.)

### The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time

Marianne Elliott directs a new play by Simon Stephens, adapted from the novel by Mark Haddon, about the inner life of a fifteen-year-old boy on the autism spectrum. In previews. (Ethel Barrymore, 243 W. 47th St. 212-239-6200.)

### Indian Ink

Rosemary Harris stars in the New York premiere of a romantic drama by Tom Stoppard, in which a British woman recalls her older sister's love affair with an artist in India in the nineteen-thirties. Carey Perloff directs the Roundabout Theatre Company production. In previews. (Laura Pels, 111 W. 46th St. 212-719-1300.)

### Love Letters

A. R. Gurney's romantic epistolary play, from 1988, reveals the relationship between two grade-school friends through their letters to each other over five decades. Gregory Mosher directs a rotating cast that begins with Brian Dennehy and Mia Farrow, followed by Alan Alda, Candice Bergen, Carol Burnett, Anjelica Huston, Stacy Keach, Diana Rigg, and Martin Sheen. Previews begin Sept. 13. (Brooks Atkinson, 256 W. 47th St. 877-250-2929.)

### Ndebele Funeral

Zoye Martinson wrote this play, presented by Smoke & Mirrors Collaborative, about three characters living in post-Apartheid South Africa. Awoppe Tymo directs the play, which won Best Play at FringeNYC last year. Previews begin Sept. 11. Opens Sept. 16. (59E59, at 59 E. 59th St. 212-279-4200.)

### Scenes from a Marriage

Ivo van Hove conceived and directs this production, adapted by Emily

Mann, based on Ingmar Bergman's Swedish television series, from 1973. Starring Tina Benko, Susannah Flood, Arliss Howard, Alex Hurt, Dallas Roberts, Roslyn Ruff, and Carmen Zilles. Previews begin Sept. 12. (New York Theatre Workshop, 79 E. 4th St. 212-279-4200.)

### Solitary Light

Randy Sharp directs this musical, presented by the Axis Theatre, with music and lyrics by Sharp and Paul Carbonara, set against the backdrop of the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory disaster, in 1911. Part of the Theatre:Village festival. In previews. Opens Sept. 15. (1 Sheridan Sq. 212-352-3301.)

### Teach, Teacher, Teachest

David Koteles wrote this play, inspired by Eugene Ionesco's "The Lesson," about the power dynamics between a tutor and his female pupil. Daniel Izriary directs. Previews begin Sept. 12. (INTAR, 500 W. 52nd St. 212-352-3101.)

### To the Bone

Cherry Lane begins its ninetieth-anniversary season with the world premiere of a drama by Lisa Ramirez, about a group of Latina immigrants who work on a poultry farm in upstate New York. Lisa Peterson directs, for the Theatre:Village festival. In previews. (38 Commerce St. 866-811-4111.)

### The Valley of Astonishment

Peter Brook and Marie-Hélène Estienne conceived and direct this piece, for Theatre for a New Audience, which explores what it would be like to experience the world differently. Previews begin Sept. 14. (Polonsky Shakespeare Center, 262 Ashland Pl., Brooklyn. 866-811-4111.)

## NOW PLAYING

### Dead Behind These Eyes

"This is a drinking kind of show," the director, Kathryn Hamilton, said, pointing audience members toward the bar. Presented by Sister Sylvester, this louche adaptation of John Osborne's "Look Back in Anger" crowds into a private room at Sing Sing Karaoke. A dozen or so spectators mingle with three performers who pass the time with crossword puzzles, BuzzFeed quizzes, minor dance crazes, and Katy Perry sing-alongs. Occasionally, they speak some of Osborne's lines. Sometimes, they dress in furry suits. "Dead Behind These Eyes" asks how to live an authentic life when even rebellion seems scripted, though videos of protests in Ferguson trouble this dynamic. Despite moments of real spontaneity, the approach is ultimately too nebulous, and the performer-audience interaction too uncertain, dithering between confrontational and conciliatory. (81 Avenue A. 212-352-3301.)

### Red Eye of Love

In the booming nineteen-twenties, Wilmer Flange (the triple threat Josh

Grissett), an unemployed dreamer, falls in love with the voluptuous Selma Chergesse (Alli Mauzer) the first time he sees her dance, but Selma is already engaged to an older businessman (Kevin Partout) who owns a thriving meat department store in Manhattan. Wilmer stays close for the next thirty years—through the Depression, the wars, and the postwar boom—as Selma waffles between him and the promising meat man, not wanting to forego either love or money. Arnold Weinstein and John Wulps' old-fashioned musical comedy, directed by Tad Sperling, is based on Weinstein's play from 1961. Some of Sam Davis's music is beautiful, and the supporting cast are all very talented singers and dancers, but the story is thin and irrelevant, and the characters, particularly the women, are undeveloped and clichéd. (Amas Musical Theatre at diCapo Opera Theatre, 184 E. 76th St. 212-868-4444.)

### Trade Practices

If the Wharton School put on a haunted house, it might resemble Kristin Marting and David Evans Morris's interactive theatre piece, which begins HERE's season. A drab building on Governors Island serves as the headquarters of Tender, Inc., a fictional company that makes paper for stationery and currency. Audience members buy "shares" in one of several story lines; you can join a focus group led by the sultry head of communications, for instance, or follow the singing C.E.O. and his one-eyed heir. Between scenes, you can swap shares or sell them for a profit, as the company hurtles toward the 2008 crash. The rules of the game are never quite clear, but perhaps that's the point: in boom times, it's easier just to go along with the frenzy. (Pershing Hall, Governors Island. The Governors Island ferry departs from the Battery Maritime Building. 212-352-3101.)

### Wayside Motor Inn

A. R. Gurney's 1977 play, the first in his Signature Theatre season, positions motel rooms as places of both anonymity and intimacy. Beside a highway somewhere near Boston, nine travellers and a coffee-shop waitress pass the night—in hope, in despair, in resignation. The situations are familiar, but the visual conceit is nifty: all the guests occupy the same generic motel room at once, forcing the director, Lila Neugebauer, and her actors to execute some very nimble choreography. Gurney has made a career of chronicling the habits and habitats of Wasps, so the lack of diversity isn't a surprise, though the almost exclusive focus on men's devices and desires is. There isn't much to move you to care about these people, but most of the performances are so fine—particularly Jenn Lyon's waitress and Jon DeVries's retiree—that, when checkout time comes, it's hard to leave. (Pershing Square Signature Center, 480 W. 42nd St. 212-244-7529.)

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**MUSEUMS SHORT LIST**
**METROPOLITAN MUSEUM**

"The Art of the Chinese Album." Through March 29.

**MUSEUM OF MODERN ART**

"Christopher Williams: The Production Line of Happiness." Through Nov. 2.

**GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM**

"Kandinsky Before Abstraction, 1901-1918." Through March 29.

**WHITNEY MUSEUM**

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

**BROOKLYN MUSEUM**

"Killer Heels: The Art of the High-Heeled Shoe." Opens Sept. 10.

**ASIA SOCIETY**

"Nam June Paik: Becoming Robot." Through Jan. 4.

**JEWISH MUSEUM**

"From the Margins: Lee Krassner and Norman Lewis, 1945-1952." Opens Sept. 12.

**NATIONAL MUSEUM OF THE AMERICAN INDIAN**

"Robert Davidson: Abstract Impulse." Through Sept. 14.

**NEW MUSEUM**

"Here and Elsewhere." Through Sept. 28.

**RUBIN MUSEUM OF ART**

"Francesco Clemente: Inspired by India." Through Feb. 2.

**GALLERIES SHORT LIST**
**UPTOWN**

Helen Frankenthaler  
Gagosian  
980 Madison Ave., at 76th St.  
212-744-2313. Opens Sept. 11.

**Saul Steinberg**

Pace and Pace/MacGill  
32 E. 57th St. 212-471-3292.  
Opens Sept. 11.

**CHELSEA**

Allora & Calzadilla  
Gladstone  
515 W. 24th St. 212-204-9300.  
Opens Sept. 13.

**Harun Farocki**

Greene Naftali  
508 W. 26th St. 212-465-7770.  
Through Oct. 4.

**Jason Rhoades**

Zwirnner  
537 W. 20th St. 212-517-8677.  
Opens Sept. 11.

**DOWNTOWN**

Rob Pruitt  
Brown  
620 Greenwich St. 212-627-5358.  
Opens Sept. 13.

**Mika Tajima**

Art in General  
79 Walker St. 212-219-0475.  
Opens Sept. 13.

**MUSEUMS AND LIBRARIES**
**Metropolitan Museum**

"The Pre-Raphaelite Legacy: British Art and Design"  
The Pre-Raphaelites were in the political avant-garde of nineteenth-century Britain, documenting the upheavals of the Victorian age, from industrialization to the rise of Socialism. Unfortunately, you wouldn't know it from this pallid display, a monotonous cavalcade of what the curators call "visual splendor," devoid of any reflection of labor, empire, or Ruskinian virtue. Ford Madox Brown, one of the great artists of urban life and social turmoil, appears thanks only to a pastel of his dying mistress; the firebrand William Morris is reduced, quite literally, to wallpaper. Through Oct. 26.

**American Museum of Natural History**

"Pterosaurs: Flight in the Age of Dinosaurs"  
The familiar name "ptero-dactyl" refers to just one genus of pterosaurs, of which there are thousands. Not quite birds, not quite dinosaurs, the winged prehistoric reptiles were the first animals to fly, with air-filled bones stretching through batlike wings. Because of their fragile skeletons, pterosaur fossils are rare (although paleontologists made a huge discovery of remains last month, in Brazil). You can get a sense of their diversity here, as you move past a tiny Chinese pterosaur skeleton, with a wingspan of ten inches, and on to a soaring model of Quetzalcoatlus northropi, which is bigger than some New York apartments. Children, or shameless adults willing to push them out of the way, can stand in front of a virtual-reality screen and flap their arms to simulate pterosaur flight. It's tiring. Through Jan. 4.

**Frick Collection**

"Men in Armor: El Greco and Pulzone Face to Face"  
One of the finest shows of the year has only two pictures, one of which you probably know: El Greco's Titianesque portrait, made around 1575, of a soldier in a silver cuirass and baggy green knee-breeches. Its wide brushstrokes and hazy detailing contrast sharply with the outrageously elegant 1574 painting that inspired it, by the Roman portraitist Scipione Pulzone, now on loan to the Frick from a private collection. El Greco's man glowers; Pulzone's is at ease.

The Italian paints lace with dumbfounding care; the Greek Spaniard does it with just a few waves of white and gray. In the Pulzone, the armor shines evenly, each bit of ornament glistening, while El Greco captures sun on metal via a blistering silver-white chevron. The hasty conclusion is that El Greco is better because he's more modern, the origin of an express train running from Manet and Picasso to us. But art history is not teleological, and the exquisite Pulzone dismantles fictions of progress to remind us that art's highest attainment is not novelty but nobility of spirit. Through Oct. 26.

**Noguchi Museum**

"Isamu Noguchi, Patent Holder: Designing the World of Tomorrow"

Before his 1938 breakthrough with the façade of 50 Rockefeller Plaza, the Japanese-American sculptor attempted a Leonardesque panoply of inventions, functional objects, interior designs (including a swimming pool for the filmmaker Josef von Sternberg), and a few baffling art works. Though his designs were too bold to win any contracts from the W.P.A., Noguchi did collaborate with the electronics company Zenith on an infant-monitoring radio, whose rounded edges and slotted front recall a fencing helmet. (The kidnapping of the Lindbergh baby created a market.) By the end of the thirties, Noguchi held thirteen patents, though not all of his design work was of any clear use. One of the most mysterious pieces here is his model for "Thousand Horsepower Heart," a vortical collision of curves and spirals: futile or functional, practical or utopian, who knows. Through Jan. 4.

**Studio Museum in Harlem**

"Men in Another Name"  
Organized by Thomas J. Lax, a gifted young curator who recently moved to MOMA, this show of works from the museum's collection highlights artists who consider the nature of one medium—painting, carving, photography, performance—using the tools of another. Terry Adkins, who died earlier this year, transposes music into sculpture with two wall-mounted wooden ellipsoids, one honey-colored, like a guitar, the other a violin-like russet. The provocateur Clifford Owens affixed graphite to his hands, then enlisted the renowned performance artist

Joan Jonas to drag his limbs across sheets of paper. (Unfortunately, the Björk soundtrack that accompanies the video documentation cheapens the gesture.) Stanley Whitney, one of the finest abstract painters around, energizes the gallery by treating color like notes in a jazz score. Through March 8.

**GALLERIES—UPTOWN**
**Ray K. Metzker**

The great, underappreciated Chicago photographer turns eighty-three this month, and he celebrates with a show of one-of-a-kind images made between 1957 and 2007. Restlessly experimental, Metzker is famous for his darkroom wizardry: photograms, multiple exposures, and smoky, cameralike light drawings that suggest Impressionist landscapes. Some of the show's most complex images are collages, including a dense grid of a hundred and fifty-four tiny pictures of pedestrians striped by the shadows of an overhead railing. That approach to pattern and repetition defines much of the work here. Through Oct. 25. (Laurence Miller, 20 W. 57th St. 212-397-3930.)

**GALLERIES—CHELSEA**
**Issel Suda**

The Japanese photographer's pictures are direct, informal, and immediately engaging, combining snapshot-style spontaneity with an unerring eye for composition. For one group of images here, from the nineteen-seventies, Suda stopped passively on the street to take their pictures, and the quiet moments he captured retain a vital sense of life rushing by. His still-lives and fragmented landscapes—a curtain of bamboo, a torn poster, a flowering bonsai on a bicycle seat—are more contemplative but just as soulful. Through Oct. 18. (Yoshinaga, 547 W. 27th St. 212-268-7132.)

**GALLERIES—DOWNTOWN**
**Erica Baum**

Printed matter has poetic possibilities and a matter-of-fact physicality when seen through Baum's camera lens. In her new series, "Stills," the photographer zeros in on the dog-eared pages of illustrated books, creating cool abstractions in which atomized half-tone patterns alternate with fragmented images: a man's profile, silhouetted figures with guns, a pair of legs in high heels. The pictures' titles—"Kent State," "Executive Yoga," "Interrogation"—hint at their sources, but Baum unthethers her raw material from its original context while nodding to like-minded avant-gardists from Kazimir Malevich to Luis Buñuel. Through Oct. 26. (Bureau, 178 Norfolk St. 212-227-2783.)

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# NIGHT LIFE



The electropop duo Sylvan Esso features the soaring vocals of Amelia Meath and the ingenious beats of Nick Sanborn. The pair's headlining fall tour brings them to Rough Trade NYC and the Bowery Ballroom this week.

## ROCK AND POP

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

## Chromee

The school year may have started, but it still feels like summer in Central Park, where Ramsey Playfield becomes a huge outdoor dance party featuring Chromee, a Montreal-based duo (the guitar player and vocalist David Macklovitch and the Lebanon-born keyboard player Patrick Gemayel). The pair matches smooth funk and disco with wonky, Kraftwerk-like computer sounds and playfully intelligent lyrics. Its most recent release, "White Women," includes a swoon-worthy cast of collaborators, including Solange, Toro y Moi, and Vampire Weekend's Ezra Koenig. With **Big Freedia**, the New Orleans queen of bounce music. (Mid-Park at 69th St. ticketmaster.com, Sept. 12.)

## Jad Fair and Danielson

In Uniontown, Maryland, in the mid-seventies, the brothers Jad and David Fair formed the group Half Japanese, a sort of suburban counterpart

to the New York no-wave scene, and achieved cult status almost instantly. The group's primal, off-kilter approach to art punk inspired countless bands. (Kurt Cobain was wearing a Half Japanese shirt on the day he shot himself.) Jad recently joined forces with the oddball Christian indie rocker Daniel Smith, and the two have released a collaborative album, called "Solid Gold Heart," through Joyful Noise Recordings, (Glasslands, 289 Kent Ave., between S. 1st and S. 2nd Sts., Brooklyn, theglasslands.com, Sept. 12.)

## Karen O

Karen O'zolek, the frontwoman of the Yeah Yeah Yeahs, recorded her solo debut, "Crush Songs," a few years ago, but is issuing it only this week, on Julian Casablancas's label, Cult Records. "Rapt," the first single off the album, has a lo-fi sound and personal feel similar to that of "Moon Song," the Oscar-nominated ballad that O co-wrote with Spike Jonze for his 2013 movie, "Her." To coincide with her record's release, the captivating chanteuse has engineered a short tour of small venues in North America and Europe that match the

intimate nature of the work. (Sept. 9-11, at the Manderley Bar at The McKittrick Hotel, 532 W. 27th St.; Sept. 12, at Le Poisson Rouge, 158 Bleecker St. karenomusic.com.)

## Lorde

Of all the recent pop smashes, "Royals," by the seventeen-year-old New Zealand-born singer Lorde, is arguably the most layered. It inspired a debate about the signifiers used in hip-hop (the lyrics include "gold teeth, Grey Goose, trippin' in the bathroom"), and it spawned a takeoff by the Parodist-in-Chief "Weird Al" Yankovic. The song also cast a long shadow over the pop landscape, eclipsing not only work by other artists but also other material on Lorde's own debut album, "Pure Heroine"—the songs "Tennis Court" and "Glory and Gore" stalled in the lower reaches of the charts. An exception is the single "Team," which ascended to the Top Ten, thanks in large part to a striking video, filmed in Red Hook, that imagines a world populated exclusively by teen-agers. If you want to experience something like that world, go see one of Lorde's three New York dates. (Sept. 14, at Pier 97, W. 55th St. and the Hudson River; Sept. 15-16, at the United Palace, 4140 Broadway, at 175th St. livenation.com.)

## Spoon

For more than two decades, this act from Austin, Texas, has been making music that fuses elements of post-punk, art pop, and straight-up rock and roll. Ending a four-year hiatus, during which its lead singer and guitarist, Britt Daniel, focused on his other band, Divine Fits, Spoon returns with its eighth album, "They Want My Soul." The new LP finds the group in fine form, trafficking in catchy hooks, plucky lyrics, and mind-bending noise, and, from time to time, even exhibiting a synth-laden soft side. (Central Park SummerStage, Mid-Park at 69th St. ticketmaster.com, Sept. 10.)

## Sylvan Esso

The North Carolina Research Triangle, which includes Chapel Hill, Raleigh, and Durham, has long been a hotbed for sophisticated companies and elite universities. These three cities are also an incubator for musical talent: James Taylor, Clay Aiken, and the new electro-pop duo Sylvan Esso honed their sound in the region. Sylvan Esso arrived last summer, with a snaky ode to catcalling, "Hey Mami." Like all of the group's music, the song is centered on the vocalist Amelia Meath's buttery, zigzagging style, honed out there as a backup singer for Feist. The band released its self-titled debut album in May. (Sept. 11 at Rough Trade NYC, 64 N. 9th St., Brooklyn; Sept. 12 at the Bowery Ballroom, 6 Delancey St. bowerypresents.com.)

## JAZZ AND STANDARDS

### Evan Parker

An astonishing tenor and soprano saxophonist, known in part for his mastery of circular breathing, which allows him to play lengthy improvisations without breaking for any intakes of air, Parker has been a stalwart of the European free-jazz scene since the sixties. He's joined here by an impressive set of collaborators, including the pianists **Matthew Shipp**, **Sylvie Courvoisier**, and **Craig Taborn**, as well as by the drummers **Millard Graves** and **Tyshawn Sorey**. (The Stone, Avenue C at 2nd St. thestonenyc.com, Sept. 9-14.)

### Odean Pope, Pharoah Sanders, James Carter

These three saxophonists can certainly temper their effusive natures, yet each is also known for tapping into the kind of lusty, cascading improvisations that were made famous by John Coltrane in the latter part of his career. They are joined here by three other luminaries—the pianist **Gerri Allen**, the drummer **Jeff (Tain) Watts**, and the bassist **Reggie Workman**—for a run that will be recorded for a live album. (Blue Note, 131 W. 3rd St. 212-475-8592, Sept. 9-14.)

### Kurt Rosenwinkel

This astonishingly fluid and harmonically adventurous guitarist is among the most gifted players in the generation that followed such visionary six-string giants as Pat Metheny and Bill Frisell. Here, he introduces a quartet with a new bassist, **Orlando E. Fleming**, and drummer, **Allen Mednard**, along with the quartet's longtime pianist, **Aaron Parks**, with whom Rosenwinkel has a fruitfully synergistic relationship. (Village Vanguard, 178 Seventh Ave. S., at 11th St. 212-255-4037, Sept. 9-14.)

### Jerome Sabbagh

The tenor saxophonist Sabbagh's fine new album, "The Turn," calls attention to the connection that he's developed with the guitarist **Ben Monder**, who joins him here. Sabbagh's quartet, though deeply touched by the epochal music of the late Paul Motian, has discovered its own expressive voice. (Cornelia Street Cafe, 29 Cornelia St. 212-989-9319, Sept. 12.)

### Vinnie Sperrazza

The drummer Sperrazza, recently seen in the Oregon premiere of Steev's new musical, "Family Album," is a familiar face on New York's new-jazz scene. He appears here with his own quartet, which includes the guitarist **Brandon Seabrook** and the saxophonist **Loren Stillman**, celebrating the release of his highly satisfying debut album as a bandleader, "Apocryphal." (Barbès, 376 9th St., Park Slope, Brooklyn. 347-422-0248, Sept. 14.)

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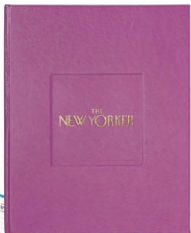
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# DANCE



Elizabeth Streb creates works in which dancers jump from heights and dive through panes of glass.

## FLYING TIGERS

*A new movie, at Film Forum, looks at the risk of injuries in dance.*

IN CATHERINE GUND'S DOCUMENTARY "Born to Fly," which opens on Wednesday, at Film Forum, the choreographer Elizabeth Streb says that when she went to college she wanted to enroll in the phys-ed department but that all the women looked to her like lesbians, so she majored in dance instead. Apart from the fact that she later became an enthusiastic lesbian, Streb's career has more or less unfolded from that decision. Her troupe, the STREB Extreme Action Company, produces what most people would call dance, but you certainly need a physical education in order to perform it. Her dancers jump from great heights, dive through panes of glass, hurl themselves against walls, hang upside down from wires and scream. Cushions are used, as well as harnesses and the like, but, to Gund's and Streb's credit, the film does not suggest that this kind of dancing is really good for you. The dancers speak quite casually about injuries. "I got hit by a steel I-beam once, but it was not a big-deal thing," one recalls. "In my world," Streb says, "part of the deal is that you walk into the room and you agree to get hurt." She wants to take physical action "across the Great Divide, across the Red Sea, or some sea," and you can't do this while trying to protect yourself.

These days, Streb's work is starting to be more visual, less crash-bang. At the end of the movie, she says that when a piece of hers succeeds it's because she has been able to show "physical archetypes" that spectators recognize—an experience that makes them "quake inside." I think that's true, but mystic joys are only part of her secret. Streb would not be Streb if her programs didn't include a heavy dose of punk: theatre of cruelty, or at least of impoliteness. The last time I saw a show of hers, it was preceded by an announcement that we should remember to turn our cell phones on. Aptly, the company is based in a former mustard factory in Williamsburg. This fall, rehearsals are open to the public.

—Joan Accella

**National Ballet of Canada / "Alice's Adventures in Wonderland"**

Christopher Wheeldon's adaptation of Lewis Carroll's novella is clever and colorful, with fanciful designs by Bob Crowley augmented by animation and puppetry—including a Cheshire Cat that assembles and dissolves before your eyes. Even better is the musical score, by the British composer Joby Talbot, full of ingenious motifs and dancey rhythms. The choreography is sophisticated, too, with little winks to the balletomanes in the audience. These New York performances mark the National Ballet of Canada's first visit to the city in almost a decade. (David H. Koch, Lincoln Center, 212-496-0600. Sept. 9-11 at 7:30, Sept. 12 at 8, Sept. 13 at 2 and 8, and Sept. 14 at 2.)

**"Three Acts, Two Dancers, One Radio Host"**

In this variety show, Ira Glass, of "This American Life," joins forces with Monica Bill Barnes, a choreographer with an absurdist sensibility. Glass's storytelling is complemented by danced interludes, performed by Barnes and her longtime collaborator, Anna Bass. Topics range from the awkwardness of middle-school dances to friendship, marriage, and,

finally, death. (Town Hall, 123 W. 43rd St. 212-840-2824. Sept. 10-12 at 8.)

**BEAT Festival**

This borough-pride festival opens at the Brooklyn Museum on Sept. 11, with dancers and musicians taking over the building. This year's main draw is the Bed-Stuy Veterans, who glide and pop with dramatic and musically precise expressivity. The group appears in the afternoon programs at MetroTech Commons on Sept. 12 and in front of the Barclays Center on Sept. 14. On the weekend nighttime tours of Greenwood Cemetery, catch the local Butoh troupe Leimay. (Various locations. 347-762-3281. Sept. 11-20.)

**Dances Patrelle / "Romeo and Juliet"**

The avuncular Francis Patrelle, a popular ballet teacher and a devoted storyteller, marks twenty-five years on the New York scene with a reprise of his 1993 staging of "Romeo and Juliet," set to the familiar Prokofiev score. The roles of the young lovers are performed by two former "Nutcracker" veterans who graduated to the ranks of the Los Angeles Ballet. The rest of the cast is a mix of professionals—including Matthew

Dibble, a veteran of Twyla Tharp's "Come Fly Away"—and students. (Kaye Playhouse, Park Ave. at 68th St. 212-722-4448. Sept. 11-13 at 7 and Sept. 14 at 2.)

**Fall for Dance**

For the second year in a row, City Center's popular sampler, which will pack four programs into the middle of October, is preceded by two free shows at the Delacorte Theatre, in Central Park. The setting of trees and night sky is magical, and this year's programming is stocked with crowd-pleasers. New York City Ballet brings the extreme partnering and cutesy humor of William Forsythe's "Herman Schmerman Pas De Deux"; Hubbard Street Dance Chicago incarnates the showy sensuality of Nacho Duato's Mediterranean-themed "Gnawa"; and Bill T. Jones's troupe romps through his determinedly cheerful "D-Man in the Waters." The truest delight is Lil Buck, a Memphis street dancer whose liquid motion is made incandescent by his joyful performance. (Central Park. Enter at 81st St. at Central Park W. 212-967-7555. Sept. 12-13 at 8.)

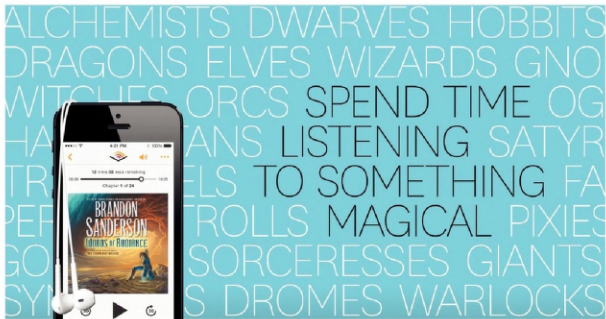
**Trajal Harrell**

In 2009, Harrell presented his first version of "Twenty Looks

or Paris Is Burning at the Judson Church," a work that cleverly staged a collision between the aesthetics of nineteen-sixties postmodern dance and the voguing of Harlem balls. More installments followed, each labelled with a size, from extra-small to large. The ambition behind the project fuelled exciting sequences—Harrell imported some fabulous dancers from Europe—but it also made the self-indulgence and pretension more grating. Now, for the first time in the United States, the full series can be seen in the course of a single week. (The Kitchen, 512 W. 19th St. 212-255-5793. Sept. 14 at 4, 5, 7, and 8 and Sept. 15-16 at 8. Through Sept. 20.)

**Melissa Fenley and Company**

This one-night-only program combines a revival of "Esperanto," one of Fenley's exhaustively patterned and Asian-inflected pieces from the nineteen-eighties, with two recent works. "Redwood Park," made for the Oakland Ballet, is a kind of walk in the woods, and "Dance an Impossible Space" delimits a restricted area for its range of motion. (Judson Memorial Church, 35 Washington Sq. S. 888-749-9998. Sept. 16 at 7:30.)



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ABOVE &  
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## Honey Week

New York's beekeepers, honey-smiths, and sweets lovers unite for an annual honey binge. In years past, the gathering has been only one day long, but this time it lasts for a week, through Sept. 14. Liquid gold is examined from culinary, educational, environmental, and kid-friendly perspectives. Events include honey-themed dinners, honey tastings, cooking classes, beekeeping classes, cocktail hours, tours of local apiaries, workshops, and discussions. A sweet spot is Honey Fest, a free day-long celebration on Rockaway Beach, on Sept. 13. It includes the Be a Bee Parade (there's a costume-making workshop earlier in the week), as well food, drinks, live music, arts and crafts, and a marketplace of local goodies that will put Burt's Bees to shame. (For more info, visit [nychoneyweek.com](http://nychoneyweek.com).)

## "We'll Have What She's Having"

Twenty-five years ago this July, "When Harry Met Sally" opened in theatres. Written by Nora Ephron and directed by Rob Reiner, the movie follows loosely in the steps of Woody Allen, telling the stories of self-absorbed, neurotic, and humorous New Yorkers who are looking for love (a tradition since upheld by shows like "Seinfeld" and "Sex and the City"). It features an uproarious (and, at the time, risqué) scene in which Sally (Meg Ryan) demonstrates a fake orgasm for Harry (Billy Crystal) at Katz's Delicatessen. "I'll have what she's having," remarks an older female onlooker (Estelle Reiner). Paying homage to this seminal rom-com, Forced Meme Productions presents an

interactive screening of the film that includes drink specials, movie trivia, food from Mile End Delicatessen, and a raffle. (Bell House, 149 7th St., Brooklyn. 718-643-6510. Sept. 10.)

## AUCTIONS AND ANTIQUES

With the calendar turning to autumn, the auction houses get back to business. The season kicks off with a week of sales of Asian art: Chinese bronzes, Indian modernist paintings, Tibetan Buddhas. At Christie's, opening day (Sept. 16) is split between Chinese landscape painting, in the morning, and South Asian pieces, mostly devotional, in the afternoon; one of the more striking works in the latter sale is an eighteenth-century mandala from Tibet, rendered in brilliant emerald and ruby tones. (20 Rockefeller Plaza, at 49th St. 212-636-2000.) • Sotheby's opens its Asian auctions on Sept. 16, with a brief review of eight elegant Song Dynasty ceramics from a Japanese collection, led by a pale-green jug carved with stylized illustrations of boys at play—a popular theme that was meant to evoke thoughts of wealth and male progeny. Chinese bronzes, textiles, and jades follow. (York Ave. at 72nd St. 212-606-7000.) • Doyle, the go-to auction house for the estates of colorful New York personalities, is selling off memorabilia and personal items—including a pair of silk pajamas—from the collection of John Perona, the founder of the El Morocco night club, famed for its strong cocktails, zebra-striped décor, and strapping clientele. (Sept. 16). (175 E. 87th St. 212-427-2730.)

## READINGS AND TALKS

## "Brooklyn Voices"

This lecture series, organized by St. Joseph's College and Greenlight Bookstore, presents a pair of events. On Sept. 10 at 7:30, Greil Marcus discusses his new book, "The History of Rock 'n' Roll in Ten Songs," with Sasha Frearc-Jones, the pop-music critic for this magazine. The indie-rock band the Brooklyn What will perform. On Sept. 16, also at 7:30, David Mitchell, the author of "Cloud Atlas," talks about his latest novel, "The Bone Clocks." (Tuohy Auditorium, St. Joseph's College, 245 Clinton Ave., Brooklyn. [greenlightbookstore.com](http://greenlightbookstore.com).)

## "Ocean of Poets"

Betsy Andrews, Jon Coleman, and Niki Koulouris read from their new books of poetry about the sea. (Housing Works Bookstore Café, 126 Crosby St. 212-334-3324. Sept. 11 at 7.)

## "On Elena Ferrante"

The translator Ann Goldstein (an editor at this magazine) and the writers Roxana Robinson and Stacey D'Erasmo consider the mysterious Italian novelist, whose latest book, "Those Who Leave and Those Who Stay," has just been published in English, in Goldstein's translation. (The Center for Fiction, 17 E. 47th St. 212-755-6710. Sept. 16 at 7.)

## George Herms

The Los Angeles-based artist, a member of the Beat Generation long noted for his assemblages, is in town to discuss "The River Book," the first comprehensive survey of his career. He'll be in conversation with the critic John Yau. (Strand Book Store, Broadway at 12th St. 212-473-1452. Sept. 16 at 7.)



# CLASSICAL MUSIC

## CONCERTS IN TOWN

### New York Baroque Incorporated: "Il Grosso Baroque"

The young Gotham group is making its mark with a grand survey of the literature of the concerto grosso, the archetypal Baroque genre. Its next program, offered first at Le Poisson Rouge, includes not only music by Stradella, Telemann, and Vivaldi but also "Distant Mountain," a new exploration of the form by the up-and-coming Chinese-American composer Huang Ruo. (158 Bleecker St. Iprny.com. Sept. 10 at 7:30. The concert will be repeated at St. Ignatius of Antioch Church on Sept. 12 at 7:30.)

### "Two Premières and a Reunion"

Like a latter-day Virgil Thomson, Conrad Cummings writes a deceptively plain kind of music that reveals the unexpected joys and shadowy depths of the American experience. He'll host a festive program at the National Opera Center, which will feature two new pieces ("Thoroughfare," with the Met tenor Keith Jameson, and "Golden Gate Fantasy," with the intrepid violinist Gregory Fulkerson), as well as music from dramatic works (with lyrics by Vikram Seth and Michael Korie), sung by Hai-Ting Chinn and Jesse Blumberg. (330 Seventh Ave. Sept. 10 at 7:30 and 9. Tickets at the door.)

### Paul Jacobs

Like his predecessor atop the American organ world, E. Power Biggs, Jacobs has a special devotion to the German tradition. His recital at Juilliard's Paul Hall focuses entirely on music by Bach (including the Prelude and Fugue in D Minor, "The Fiddle") and by the Master's early-twentieth-century disciple Reger (the "Fantasy and Fugue on B-A-C-H," among other works). Juilliard School, Lincoln Center. Sept. 10 at 8. Tickets are available at the Juilliard box office.)

### 4 x 4 Festival

The fruitful relationship between Juilliard's Historical Performance Program and Wall Street's Trinity Church continues with this Baroque mini-fest at St. Paul's Chapel, led by the stylish keyboardist Avi Stein. The four concerts—"The Grand Overture," "Zimmerman's Coffehouse," "Concerts Spirituels," and "From Darkness to Light"—offer suites, sonatas, and sacred vocal works by Telemann, Handel, Zelenka, Ramens, and Bach, among others. (209 Broadway. Sept. 11-13 at 7 and Sept. 14 at 4. A donation is suggested.)

### "Interpretations" Series:

#### "A Tribute to Robert Ashley"

With the passing of Ashley (1930-2004), America lost a musical voice that was not only daringly experimental but also deeply human. The baritone Thomas Buckner, a longtime collaborator on Ashley's invention of new operatic forms, headlines an all-Ashley evening at Roulette; he performs with such esteemed musicians as the pianist Stephen Gosling and the conductor Petr Kotik in "Tract," "World War III, Just the Highlights," and excerpts from the opera "Atlanta (Acts of God)." (509 Atlantic Ave., Brooklyn. roulette.org. Sept. 11 at 8.)

### Bargemusic 9/11 Memorial Concert

The floating chamber-music series' annual offering to the city features reflective music by Chopin,

Bach, Rachmaninoff, and others, performed by the barge's director and violinist, Mark Peskanov, and friends. (Fulton Ferry Landing, Brooklyn. Sept. 11 at 8. No tickets required; doors open at 7:30. For full schedule, see bargemusic.org.)

### David Leisner: "Sonic Stories"

In a concert at Symphony Space, the admired guitarist joins two impressive colleagues (the flutist Tara Helen O'Connor and the violinist Philippe Quins) for an evening of musical storytelling, with works by Ned Rorem ("Romeo and Juliet"), Óvaldo Golijov, Piazzolla ("Histoire du Tango"), and Rossini. (Broadway at 96th St. symphonyspace.org. Sept. 12 at 7:30.)

### SubCulture PianoFest

The vital new underground venue continues its ambitious programming with a fall keyboard festival. Sept. 13 at 7:30: Camera RCO, a chamber group comprised of members of Amsterdam's magnificent Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra, joins the young Taiwanese piano virtuoso Weiyin Chen for an intermissionless evening of music by Mozart (including the Piano Concerto No. 12 in A Major) and Mendelssohn. • Sept. 16 at 7:30: SubCulture takes its piano advocacy a step further this fall, with the introduction of Gregg Kallor as its first composer-in-residence. A pianist adept at fusing the classical and jazz traditions, he performs

his New York-tribute suite "A Single Noon" as well as a new work commissioned by the venue. (45 Bleecker St. subculturenewyork.com.)

### Music Mondays Series: "After Nine"

The Argento Chamber Ensemble and the JACK Quartet, each highly expert and intensely committed to new music, have a formidable program before them: an evening that features not only Klaus Simon's chamber-orchestra version of Gustav Mahler's Ninth Symphony but also recent works inspired by the awesome masterpiece, by the young composers Matthew Ricketts and Taylor Brook. Michel Galante conducts. (Advent Lutheran Church, 254 Broadway. Sept. 15 at 7:30. No tickets required.)

## OUT OF TOWN

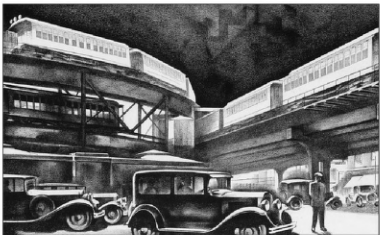
### Music Mountain

Northwestern Connecticut's string-quartet shrine wraps up its season with a program by the pianist Ursula Oppens and the Cassatt String Quartet, performing a slate of standards: Dvořák's "American" Quartet, Beethoven's String Quartet in G Major, Op. 18, No. 2, and Franck's Piano Quintet in F Minor, a summertime mainstay. (Falls Village, Conn. musicmountain.org. Sept. 14 at 3.)

### South Mountain Concerts

The vibrant Pacifica Quartet is exceptionally skilled at blending modern masterworks in with standard repertory. Its concert in the late-summer Berkshire series includes Ligeti's String Quartet No. 1 ("Métamorphoses Nocturnes"), as well as works by Haydn and Brahms (the Piano Quintet, with the venerable Manahem Pressler). (Pittsfield, Mass. southmountainconcerts.org. Sept. 14 at 3.)

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# FOOD & DRINK

## BAR TAB DOMINIE'S HOEK

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In 1642, when a small, scraggly hook of land east of Manhattan was awarded to a reform minister, or *dominie*, in Dutch, it became known to its first European settlers as Dominië's Hoek. The *dominie* died in a shipwreck five years later, and the settlers were unceremoniously booted back to Manhattan by the Mespetches Indians, one of the thirteen tribes native to the region. But, nearly four centuries later, his legacy endures. "Five, six, seven times a week I come here," explained an old-timer, between gulps of his third vodka-and-soda. His own heritage was more Atlanta than Amsterdam, and his decadal-long devotion to the appealingly rumbled hangout has earned him a nameplate—"Nice Guy Mike"—affixed to the dark-wood counter. A narrow, tin-ceilinged corridor gives way to a trellised outdoor patio. (Nice Guy Mike: "Yuppies who are pricing me out of this neighborhood have to sit somewhere.") A rangy bartender in a sriracha-branded T-shirt delivered pints of Allagash and six-dollar sangria. (Prices are gentle; pours are generous.) Happy hour had long passed when a first-time visitor to Dominië's, and to New York City, found herself gazing at a sliver of the Manhattan skyline through the window: "Whoa, you can see the Empire State Building!" It was, in fact, the spire of the Chrysler, but no one corrected the pilgrim.

—Jiayang Fan



## TABLES FOR TWO

### WIZARDS FROM OZ

*The Musket Room, 265 Elizabeth St. (212-219-0764);  
Flinders Lane, 162 Avenue A (212-228-6900)*

**THE GREATEST MISCONCEPTION OF ANTIPODEAN** food is that Vegemite, a spread made from leftover brewer's yeast, tastes bad. It doesn't; you're just doing it wrong. (It should be scraped, not schmearred, and it is best understood as a delivery mechanism for butter.) Another is that there is no such thing as modern Australian or New Zealand food. There are now plenty of places to grab an Australian-inflected coffee; in some parts of town, the flat white threatens its frothier cousin, the latte. But two new restaurants make a convincing argument for something bigger: a coherent regional cuisine, drawing on the countries' colonial past and overlaying it with the southern European and Asian influences of postwar migration.

You could eat the six-course tasting menu at the Musket Room, in Nolita, without realizing that the chef, Matt Lambert, intended it as homage to his home country of New Zealand. Lambert's art is in showing, not telling, as in a dish of cold scallops hidden under a silver cloche, to capture the smell of the manuka wood chips with which they were smoked. It's a comforting aroma for those who know the tree, which is native to New Zealand, and, for those who don't, a briefly transporting experience. The scallops are from Maine, but the venison, a standout entrée, is from New Zealand. It's pleasingly sinewy and chewy, and tastes like the deer got to really roam some vast verdant fields. There's a nicely astringent flavor, too, because the filet is cooked in gin.

On a recent evening, the bar was packed by eight o'clock, and a cluster of young women in wrap dresses kept ordering boulevards. The drinks were barrel-aged, of course, because the Musket Room takes everything seriously. The expat-nostalgia factor seemed low; not so at Flinders Lane, a few blocks north, in the East Village. There, the storefront had been flung open—no worries that the pungent musk of Avenue A was especially assertive on this late-summer night—and homesick Australians were stoked to see that the bar menu included a sausage roll. (Imagine if Dominië's Ansel crossed a hot dog and a croissant.) At a table, the menu gets more refined: softshell crab with a Thai chili sauce; a lovely poached-chicken salad with peanuts and pea shoots; Australian lamb, encrusted with wattle seed, from the indigenous acacia tree, with a taste approximating peas and coffee.

For dessert, there are distinctly Australian ice creams: one based on Milo, a popular malt beverage; another on the Anzac biscuit, a much-beloved cookie made with coconut and oats; and the best, Lemon Myrtle, from another native plant with an intense flavor, like incredibly excited citrus. Does the proliferation of Australian cafés mean we've reached peak flat white? Possibly. But, as these restaurants—and the continued false equivalence of Vegemite and cream cheese—demonstrate, there is still much to discover.


—Amelia Lester

The Musket Room, entrées \$26-532; Flinders Lane, entrées \$16-525.



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## THE TALK OF THE TOWN

### COMMENT WORLD-WEARY

Even the most forgiving judge of Barack Obama, one willing to overlook his preference for chipping onto the sunlit greens of Martha's Vineyard rather than brooding in the fluorescent glare of the Situation Room, must admit that the President has sometimes been a thick-tongued steward of his own foreign policy. How did the author of "A More Perfect Union" become the author of "The world has always been messy"? Obama, who prides himself on late-night preparation, unshakable rationality, and a writerly ear, is compiling an anthology of botched pronouncements that have, at best, muddled his intentions. August, 2012: "We have been very clear to the Assad regime, but also to other players on the ground, that a red line for us is we start seeing a whole bunch of chemical weapons moving around or being utilized." September, 2013: "I didn't set a red line. The world set a red line." August, 2014: "I don't want to put the cart before the horse. We don't have a strategy yet."

After six years in office, Obama broadcasts his world-weariness with wan gestures and pauses, with loose moments in the White House press room. The world has stubbornly denied him his ambition to transcend its cruelties, pivot smartly to the East, and "do some nation-building here at home." Obama's halting cool at the lectern now reads too often as weakness, and when he protests against the charges of weakness he can seem just tired. As the Middle East disintegrates and a vengeful cynic in the Kremlin invades his neighbor, Obama has offered no full and clarifying foreign-policy vision.

His opponents and would-be successors at home have seized the chance to peashoot from the sidelines. What do they offer? Unchastened by their many past misjudgments, John McCain and Lindsey Graham go on proposing escalations, aggressions, and regime changes. Rand Paul, who will likely run for President as a stay-at-home Republican, went to Guatemala recently and performed eye surgeries as

a means of displaying his foreign-policy bona fides. Was Bashar al-Assad, Syria's ophthalmologist-in-chief, impressed?

Chris Christie insists on the efficacy of big men and tough talk—the Great Jersey Guy theory of history. Recently, he suggested that Vladimir Putin would not dare sponsor the bloody destabilization of Ukraine were Christie in charge. "I don't believe, given who I am, that he would make the same judgment," Christie said at a meeting of Republican activists. "Let's leave it at that." Christie is trying to bone up on world affairs by reading Kenneth Adelman's book on Ronald Reagan. Adelman was the cheerful adviser to Donald Rumsfeld who insisted that the U.S. invasion of Iraq, in 2003, would be a "cakewalk." Rick Perry, another 2016 hopeful, took a more parochial view of the geo-strategic crisis when he suggested that Obama had blithely overlooked the "very real possibility" that the black-hooded executioners from the Islamic State in Iraq and al-Sham had already infiltrated the United States by way of the Mexican border. (According to Michael Barbaro, of the *Times*, this piece of intelligence elicited "eye rolls" from Pentagon officials.)

A more punishing critique came from Hillary Clinton, Obama's former Secretary of State, who, hoping to win herself some distance from an unpopular President, told the journalist Jeffrey Goldberg, "Great nations need organizing principles, and 'Don't do stupid stuff' is not an organizing principle." Clinton had a point: "Don't do stupid stuff"—a mantra in the West Wing—does not have quite the analytical penetration of the Long Telegram. Nor does it account adequately for Obama's thinking on when American force should and should not be used. But the admonition isn't without value. Think of the "stupid stuff" in the history of American postwar misadventure: Eisenhower backing C.I.A.-led or -abetted regime change in Iran and Congo; Kennedy sanctioning an invasion of Cuba at the Bay of Pigs; Johnson's colossal escala-



tions and failures in Vietnam; Nixon's covert efforts to depose Allende in Chile and conduct a war in Cambodia—the beginnings of a list that culminates in George W. Bush's decision to invade Iraq. To be mindful of such episodes, with all their unintended and far-reaching consequences, does not make one a weak-kneed fool.

The recurring Republican fantasy is that Ronald Reagan—resurrected in the person of a steely, handsome governor, say—would know what to do amid the lurid cruelties and corruptions of the current Middle East. He would, with plainspoken guile backed by the 101st Airborne, set everyone to rights. This fantasy leaves out the reality of Reagan's unapologetically rapid exit from Lebanon after the Marine Corps barracks were bombed there, in 1983, his enthusiastic support of Saddam Hussein, and his secret overtures to Ayatollah Khomeini.

Obama does himself no favors with his periodic slumbers, his indiscretions of conception and rhetoric. He and his aides take too much comfort in their sense of being misunderstood and stymied. Their mistakes are not few. John Kerry's recent effort to forge a settlement with Israel and Palestine was heroic, if unsuccessful, but the Administration should have had a serious Plan B, laying out intermediate steps that would sustain negotiations; its failure to do so contributed to the disaster that followed.

Yet it is a mistake, as well, to dismiss caution as weakness, to react to the medieval executions and depredations of ISIS and the adventurism of Vladimir Putin by mocking the very

idea of strategic calculation. In foreign policy, there are sins of commission (Vietnam, Iraq) and there are sins of omission (Bosnia, Rwanda). History may find Obama guilty of both, but he has never been incapable of using American leverage and power. Even as he was being mocked as feckless last week, he ordered an air strike in Somalia successfully targeting Ahmed Abdi Godane, the commander of the militant group al-Shabaab. Although American interests, tightly conceived, may not be much implicated in Ukraine, Obama has taken the lead in creating a Western bloc that has imposed intensifying sanctions against Putin's regime. Putin would not be talking about a ceasefire otherwise. Last week, at the NATO summit, in Wales, Obama also assembled a coalition that would take on ISIS and provide a model for an international response to extremist groups.

This is not a foreign policy that offers the satisfactions of self-expression; it lacks the snarl and the swagger that Obama's domestic rivals yearn for. But, halfway through this President's second term, negotiations over Iran's nuclear program have, at last, a realistic chance for success. Russia's recent aggressions in eastern Ukraine may end in an uneasy truce. The gains have been unshowy and incremental. But when your aim is to conduct a responsive and responsible foreign policy, the avoidance of stupid things is often the avoidance of bloodshed and unforeseen strife. History suggests that it is not a mantra to be derided or dismissed.

—David Remnick

## DEPT. OF COMMEMORATION TAKE PICTURE



In June, 2001, Konstantin Petrov, an immigrant from Estonia, got a job as an electrician at Windows on the World, the restaurant atop the north tower of the World Trade Center. He was given a little office without cabinets, and after he built a shelf there, by bolting a steel plate to an exposed steel girder, he sent his friends a photograph of himself lying across it, and boasted that if the shelf ever collapsed the building would go down with it.

Petrov worked the night shift. This suited him, not only because he had a day job, as the superintendent of an apartment building at the other end of Manhattan, but because he was an avid photographer, and the emptiness of the Trade Center at night, together with the stunning vistas at dawn, gave him a lot to shoot, and a lot of time and space in which to shoot it. In the summer of 2001,

he took hundreds of digital photographs, mostly of offices, table settings, banquettes, sconces, stairwells, kitchen equipment, and elevator fixtures. Many shots were lit by the rising sun, with the landscape of the city in the background, gleaming and stark-shadowed, more than a hundred floors below.

This past summer, Erik Nelson, a documentary filmmaker, was trying to finish cutting a film called "9/10: The Final Hours," for the National Geographic Channel. He'd dug up all kinds of footage shot the day before the September 11th terrorist attacks, but very little of what the buildings had looked like inside. Amid a desperation for interiors, there was talk of abandoning the project. Then one of Nelson's film researchers came across a trove of Petrov's pictures, on an Estonian photo-sharing site called Fotki.

Nelson felt as though he had stumbled on the tomb of King Tut. For whatever reason, this Petrov had turned an archivist's eye on the banalities of an office building and a sky-top restaurant, which, though destroyed in one of history's most photographed events, had hardly been photographed at all. The pictures were

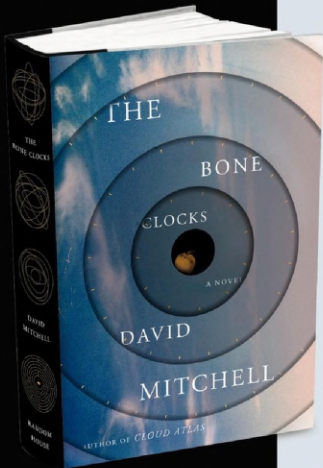
beautiful, too. Devoid of people, and suffused with premonitory gloom, they made art out of a site that most New Yorkers, at the time, had come to think of as an eyesore. Petrov seemed to be a kind of savant of the commonplace, as though he'd known that all of it would soon disappear down a smoking pit. Inadvertently or not, he left behind a ghostly record, apparently the only one, of this strange twentieth-century aerie, as though he'd been sent here for this purpose alone.

Nelson and his crew tried to track him down, but the trail was cold. His file





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“THE LEVELS OF AWESOME IN *THE  
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— *JOE HILL*, bestselling author of *NOS4A2*

on Fotki had pictures dating back to 1990. Kids with boom boxes and giant cell phones on the outskirts of Tallinn. Birthday snapshots, of Petrov and his friends brandishing bottles of vodka and ketchup. Even some photographs of Ground Zero and the area around it after the collapse. But after June, 2002, there were no more photos.

Eventually, Nelson reached the founder of Fotki, an Estonian named Dmitri Don. Don, a computer programmer, had come to New York in 1995 and had developed Fotki with his wife so that he and his friends could share photographs with people back in Estonia. This was well before Flickr and Facebook. "We were the first," Don said last week, via Skype. He tried for many years to interest investors in New York in his photo-sharing concept, but no one seemed to get why anyone would want to post pictures on the Internet. "They all said, 'Why not just use e-mail?'" Eventually, he ran out of money and prospects and had to move back to Tallinn.

In 1998, Don had persuaded Petrov, a friend and childhood neighbor, to move to New York. Don was twenty-two, Petrov twenty-five. Petrov, who in Estonia had made and sold boxes to hack TV signals from Finland, took out a classified ad offering his services as an electrician. For a while, he worked without a license. Eventually, he got a student visa, and then a green card, via marriage. "When he got this job at World Trade Center," Don re-

called, "we were all, like, 'No way! World Trade Center is, like, so cool!'"

Petrov's shift ended at 8 A.M. Usually, he stuck around to have coffee with the morning staff, but on September 11, 2001, he decided to go straight home. He went down to the parking lot in the basement to get his car, and, as he was driving out, the first plane hit the building. He saw debris but nothing else and thought little of it until he got home and turned on the news. He called his friends at the restaurant. It was the last time he spoke with them.

Nelson, in looking through Petrov's pictures (he wound up using forty-four of them in his film), had noticed a lot of motorcycle photos. He developed a theory that Petrov had been killed in a motorcycle crash. He asked Don about this. Don recalled that the first day Petrov had a motorcycle in New York he got six tickets, the first for speeding past a police car. Don once rode on the back of Petrov's bike, in Brooklyn, at a hundred and twenty miles an hour. "I was scared so much!" Don recalled. Anyway, Nelson was right. A year after getting the job at Windows on the World, and the morning after a big party, Petrov flipped his bike on the West Side Highway, while passing a cop. Don said that he was pronounced dead on the spot.

"It's a big lesson to all of us," Don said. "Take picture now of what we have."

—Nick Paumgarten

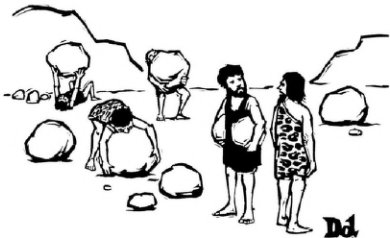
## THE MUSICAL LIFE DOWN IN HISTORY



Paul Williams, the songwriter and the president of ASCAP, stopped by the Brill Building not long ago, went up to the sixth floor, and stood outside an opaque glass door with the words "St. Nicholas Music Inc." in rusty gold paint on the transom. The last small music publisher left in the Brill Building, which served as the hit factory for American pop songs in the early sixties, St. Nicholas had to go: it was moving to the Studio 54 building, a few blocks uptown. The building's new owners are clearing old tenants out, and the small warrens where songwriting teams such as Pomus and Shuman, and Leiber and Stoller, once banged out songs are being razed, in the hope that open floors will attract a big tech company.

At seventy-three, Williams, a lyricist on a handful of hits in the seventies ("Rainy Days and Mondays" may be his masterpiece), is enjoying an improbable renaissance as a songwriter: he shared the 2014 Grammy for Album of the Year with Daft Punk for "Random Access Memories." Sure, the French electronic wizards were mainly responsible for the album, but they invited Williams to contribute, and in making the acceptance speech he became the face of the faceless duo. And what a face—a cross between Ezra Pound and Burl Ives, in rose-tinted specs. To anyone who remembers the corduroyed munchkin who used to pop up regularly on the "Tonight Show" with Johnny Carson, it's some transformation.

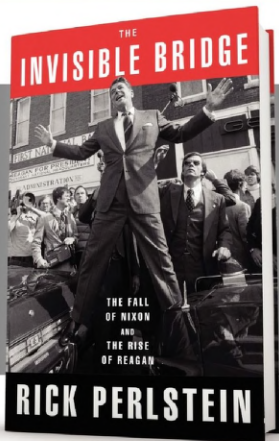
Since 2009, ASCAP has been one of Williams's main gigs. At the Brill Building, he noted that St. Nicholas Music was the living embodiment of ASCAP's mission: to insure that its members are fairly paid when their work is used commercially, whether on the radio or in a restaurant or at a basketball game. St. Nicholas owns the copyrights to four classic Christmas songs written by the late Johnny Marks: "Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer," "Silver and Gold," "A Holly Jolly Christmas," and "Rockin' Around



"I gotta go home. Brenda doesn't like me spending so much time at the gym."

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the Christmas Tree." Marks died in 1985, but song copyrights live on for decades after the writer's death. ASCAP has sent plenty of whopping performance royalty checks through the mail slot of this door. "Rudolph" is the second-best-selling Christmas single of all time, after "White Christmas."

Williams's plan had been simply to photograph the door. But all at once it opened, and a tall man with longish gray hair emerged from the gloom.

"May I help you?"

He was Michael Marks, the composer's last surviving child, now sixty-five. ("I was born the same year 'Rudolph' was written.") He invited Williams in.

It was like stepping through a time portal. The walls bore layers of peeling paint from different eras. From the back windows, one half expected to see Broadway Danny Rose going down Forty-ninth Street. Every chair and flat surface, including the upright piano where Johnny Marks wrote some of his tunes, groaned under sheet music, Christmas songbooks, and old trade magazines.

"There it is!" Williams cried, spying Johnny Marks's ASCAP membership certificate, dated 1940, hanging on the wall. "It's as old as the Consent Decree!" (The Consent Decree regulates ASCAP's right to collect and distribute licensing fees.)

"The Consent Decree is a joke!" Marks declared, with some heat. Williams allowed that it needed to be revised for the digital age, as did some other aspects of the rights organization, which is celebrating its centennial this year. Mentioning Pandora, ASCAP's principal legal adversary these days (the Internet radio service wants to pay songwriters lower rates), Williams said, "We want a future where everyone can thrive."

Marks replied, "I'm sure Pandora would happily thrive without paying a dime to songwriters if they could!" He added, "All I know is our royalties from CD sales go down every year."

Williams said that every songwriter who has ever lived, including Phil Spector and John Lennon, wanted to write a hit Christmas song, because it pays perennially.

Marks replied, "My dad was always frustrated being the Christmas-song guy. He wrote a lot of different songs." He

gestured toward the enormous piles of Rudolphiana he was sorting through in preparation for the move. "But Christmas was all anybody ever wanted from him."

—John Seabrook

## THE PICTURES MODERN LOVE



In Mike Nichols's classic 1967 film, *The Graduate*, Benjamin Braddock, the fretful college grad played by Dustin Hoffman, rejects his parents' life of conformity and drives around to Simon and Garfunkel songs. "Where are you going?" his dream girl, with whom he's been on one date, asks. "Elaine," he says, "you're going to have to stop asking me that." Oh, and he also has sex with Elaine's mom.

Nearly half a century later, Nichols's son, Max, has directed his own comedy about aimless grads. In *"Two Night Stand,"* which opens later this month, Megan and Alec, played by Analeigh Tipton and Miles Teller, exchange flirtatious messages online, hook up in real life, quarrel the morning after, discover they're snowed in, smoke some weed, talk languorously, and turn an assignation into something more. Nobody has sex with anybody's mom.

Over dinner outside at Lulu & Po, in Fort Greene, in Brooklyn, Max Nichols said, "To me, what's current about the film is that, instead of having the scene where a buddy says, 'Forget about her, go and have a palate cleanser,' and points out a cute girl at the bar, now electronic dating slash hooking up has made the aftermath of being jilted, as Megan just was, easy and private." As black clouds massed overhead, he continued, "Megan and Alec aren't Tinder junkies—they're awkward about the protocols." (Megan instantly nixes the guys who respond to her tentative I.M.s with "Sup?" and "HEY SEXXY GIRL.") "But maybe technology allows young people to be more honest with themselves about who they really find attractive." He rubbed his chin and added, "And maybe I should have put more of that in the movie."

Nichols is forty, and he and his wife, the CNN sports reporter Rachel Nichols,

have twins, yet he retains a goatee and a graying pompadour. He said that while the film's soundtrack, which includes songs from *Freelance Whales* and *Wild Nothing*, harks back to the synth-pop of his youth, it's also apt for a couple nearly half his age: "I don't consider myself young in any way, but I do feel part of a generation that's somewhat arrested. And the first time you stay up all night with someone, drinking and talking and maybe fooling around, you hear music in a totally different way." The heavens opened, and he laughed and stood to carry his Narragansett beer inside.

Nichols grew up on MTV and came to features after fifteen years of directing music videos for everyone from Willie Nelson to Kirk Franklin. When he began reading scripts, he waded through piles of "super bro'd-out comedies and by-the-numbers rom-coms" before he found Mark Hammer's story about a love that begins in lust. Though Nichols had a budget of only \$1.6 million (which gave his snowstorm a bags-of-flour quality), he strove to emulate the immersive atmo-



Max Nichols

sphere of the films he loved growing up: "The candid ones that gave you great characters, a great sonic palette, and awesome laughs. Movies like *'The Breakfast Club,'* and *'Sixteen Candles,'* and *'Fast Times at Ridgemon High,'* where if you saw them before you were in high school they shaped your expectations: 'Man, I can't wait to get to that world of music and clothes and hooking up!'"

Alec and Megan look very 2014, but, Nichols said, "personal aesthetic is now

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far less a signifier of subcultural allegiance than folks might expect—Megan's tattoos and nose ring in no way define her." He went on, "Megan and Alec remind me of the wonderfully unremarkable people who are your actual, real-life friends." They look and act young, but they're on the fast track to middle age. Megan was pre-med, but she confesses to Alec that she really just wants to be a wife and mother. And Alec is content to work at a bank—not a master-of-the-universe iBank but an actual bank that might lend you money. His longest speech is an "ambition is such bullshit" rant about old folks' careerism and consumerism.

When his father read the script, Nichols said, "he wisely introduced the topic of whether Megan and Alec's relationship to ambition was a pitfall—whether it would make them unsympathetic, or unrepresentative. We ultimately concluded that they were giving each other permission to want what they really want, rather than what they're supposed to want. And that's a mantra I first heard from my wife when we were dating."

Didn't Benjamin Braddock also lack ambition? Nichols grinned through a last bite of burger. "One of the biggest gulfs that grows between the young perspective and the old," he said, "is that later on, when you acquire the skills of responsibility, it's easy to forget how inaccessible they once were to you. When I talked it through with my dad, we concluded that running around being lost in all that there is to see and smell and taste is an essential part of being young."

—Tad Friend

## THE BOARDS STOP, FRISK, SING



In a parlorlike practice room at South Oxford Space, in Brooklyn, on the Friday night of Labor Day weekend, the new-music ensemble Two Sides Sounding rehearsed an opera scene called "Stop and Frisk." Its librettist, Daniel Neer, who is white, conceived of the piece during the Bloomberg administration; at rehearsals, the recent events in Ferguson were on everyone's mind. The piece, part of the

BEAT Festival, will make its debut at a farmers' market in East New York this Saturday. (A ticketed performance will follow next week, at the Brooklyn Historical Society.) "Stop and Frisk" is the first scene of a three-part opera in progress called "Independence Eve," which takes place on July 3rd in three different eras and consists of dialogues about race relations, set on a park bench. The small audience included Neer; the composer, Sidney Marquez Boquiren; the director, Ted Gorodetzky; and Two Sides Sounding's artistic director, Eleanor Taylor.

The practice room had yellow walls, French doors, and yellow upholstered chairs, three of which had been pushed together to make a park bench. Jorell Williams, an African-American lyric baritone in a gray polo shirt and jeans, sang into a cell phone. "Will the cops be there?" He sang, "I'm nervous as hell, not sleeping, anxious." He looked sad. "Happy Fourth to you, too," he sang, and hung up.

Brandon Snook, a Caucasian "light lyric tenor slash leggiero tenor," as he later put it, came onstage. He wore an orange checked oxford shirt and khaki shorts. The pianist, Mila Henry, pounded out some minor notes. "Hey, buddy, sorry I'm late," Snook sang, elongating the words. Even during the recitative lines, both singers' voices were as loud as bagpipes, reverberating off the walls. Snook, standing, sang at length about a baseball game, while his friend sat behind him, distracted. "Holiday weekend coming up—the world's our oyster," Snook sang.

Williams leaned in and looked at Snook. "I'm suing the city," he sang. Snook was taken aback. He sang, "You're what? You're what? You're what?" "Suing. Those cops," Williams sang, his voice growing to fill the room.

"You're obsessed with this," Snook sang. He encouraged him to shake it off, and to get some wings and some beers with him. Williams looked annoyed.

Gorodetzky interrupted them. "Let's hold for a second before this aria," he said. Williams smiled, instantly lighthearted, and began making metronome noises with his tongue. Gorodetzky went on, "This is where the real awkwardness begins. With 'the world's our oyster,' really try to get that jocular attitude—play it up, to contrast with 'I'm suing the city.'"

Williams stood for his aria. "I know you're trying to cheer me up, Joe—but

you can't understand how this feels," he sang. "Treated like a criminal in front of my neighbors—do you know what that does to a soul? That night I experienced a whole different world, and I'm not sure I can ever come back." The piano played a creeping, tense melody. Williams sang, "I came home from work—dressed in a suit. Walked past three cops in the lobby. They saw me and nodded—one even said 'Hi.'" He sang that he had gone upstairs and changed into sweats to shoot hoops at the gym. "When I got to the lobby, those very same cops grabbed me and asked who I was. They had a 'reasonable suspicion,' they said, and told me they knew I had drugs. . . . I was stripped and searched because of my skin."

Snook sang that the situation sucked, but asked if he might have provoked the cops somehow, by acting "strange." His friend handled this suggestion better than most people might have. A minute later, they sang a fond but bitter duet about their shared youth—baseball games, frat parties.

"A fantasy world," Williams sang.  
"A fantasy world," Snook sang.

The scene was unresolved, but not without hope. At its conclusion—"Later"—the small audience applauded.

Boquiren had a note about the duet. "The tension is the fact that you're singing the same text, the same melody, but you're not in the same world."

Neer wanted them to enunciate. "I have some diction-police things," he said. "Kick the can, 'judge's robe,' first a bill, then a law—it's super-beautiful legato singing, but you can truncate a bit to get those consonants. *Drug-z*."

Gorodetzky said, "And 'Leave me the fuck alone'—don't be afraid to be too big with that."

Like their baseball-playing frat-brother counterparts, Williams and Snook are old friends; they were apprentices together at Des Moines Metro Opera, in Iowa, six years ago.

Gorodetzky said, "Just one thing about the section in the duet where you did both look at each other. It seems like there's a mix of camaraderie and confusion."

"You smiled at each other," Neer said.

"That was because I dropped a line," Williams said. Everyone laughed.

"All of a sudden, it got very chummy," Neer said.

—Sarah Larson

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BY KELEFA SANNEH

*For decades, Cosby was America's ideal dad. His real life was more complicated.*

A warm summer weekend was just beginning in Salisbury, Maryland, and cars were pulling into the parking lots that surround the Wicomico Civic Center. People had come to see Bill Cosby, who would remind them, that night, that he was "seventy-six and eleven-twelfths years old," and who surely has neither the time nor the need to do anything he doesn't want to do. What he does want to do, even now, is comedy: he performs about a hundred times a year, mainly on weekends, following an itinerary that often leads him into what promoters call tertiary markets, where fans are not just happy to be able to see him in person but surprised, too.

The Civic Center arena had been converted for the night into a theatre

with about two thousand seats, most of which were full by the time Cosby shuffled onstage, a few minutes past eight. When he began his career, more than fifty years ago, Cosby wore natty suits and narrow ties, but these days his performance attire tends to be casual, often flamboyantly so: T-shirts, sweatpants, sandals, socks. He had been provided a chair and a small side table, and as he settled in he rubbed his knees and looked around. "Well, here I am," he said. He asked what else the arena was used for. "Rodeo!" someone shouted. "The circus," someone else said. Cosby brightened. "I remember hearing about the circus as a child," he said, and then stopped short. When other comics talk about Cosby, they often mention his

willingness to pause without filling the silence, certain that the audience trusts him enough to keep listening. When he began again, he was talking about being too poor to go to the circus, which set him off on a twenty-five-minute riff about childhood and poverty and an armchair so rickety that his father had to sit perfectly askew so that it didn't fall apart.

Cosby has always been an economical but effective physical comedian; people howled as he shifted cautiously in his seat, imitating his father in that chair. But his greatest weapon is his strained and stentorian voice, which is easy to imitate but hard to parody, because Cosby's bewildered vehemence can scarcely be exaggerated. Often, his jokes come alive only in performance, fuelled more by the telling than by the words. In Salisbury, he reminisced about his wife, Camille, who was nineteen when he married her, in 1964. "She was not who she is today," he announced, and the audience was laughing already. "She was a nice person." More laughter, and then applause. "You know what I'm saying. If you are married, then you know the way you look at him." He imitated a wife's disapproving appraisal, his face serving as the punch line.

In Cosby's comedy, he returns endlessly, even obsessively, to this basic plot: the struggle of a man against the woman he has chosen and the children he hasn't. When "The Cosby Show" made its debut, in 1984, he was already one of the most successful comics of his generation, and a television star of long standing. The show made him an American archetype: the personification of fatherhood, a word that was also the title of his best-selling book of observations and advice. When he takes the stage, he remains more than anything an exasperated father. Confronting the cosmic impertinence of a child who moans, "I didn't ask to be born," Cosby responds, as always, with fond irritation. "Yes, you did," he says. "About nine months before you were born, I released about sixty million—you were one of 'em. The idea is, first one to the egg locks the door. The others die." He pauses to let the laughter subside, then turns accusatory: "You could have hung a left."

Cosby's current tour is part of a long comeback. His most recent comedy

special, "Bill Cosby: Far from Finished," was broadcast on Comedy Central last year, and he is at work on a new NBC sitcom, tentatively scheduled for 2015, which would reunite him with Tom Werner, one of the executive producers behind "The Cosby Show." At the same time, he is living through an extended retrospective celebration. In 2009, he collected the Mark Twain Prize for American Humor, and earlier this year Chris Rock presented him with a lifetime-achievement honor at the American Comedy Awards, calling him "the greatest comedian to ever live." Now comes "Cosby: His Life and Times" (Simon & Schuster), a biography by Mark Whitaker, the former editor of *Newsweek*; the book, written with Cosby's participation, is invaluable but not, of course, impartial. Unlike most of the lions of American comedy, Cosby is known for routines that aim to avoid giving offense, and yet he has proved surprisingly controversial: for decades, he was regularly criticized for being insufficiently attentive to issues affecting black communities; more recently, he has been passionately attentive, transforming into a culture warrior to deliver fierce indictments of what he diagnoses as an African-American social pathology. And, in the years since "The Cosby Show," a series of revelations and accusations—including allegations of sexual assault—have jolted fans who had grown used to conflating his work and his life.

During Cosby's nineteen-eighties heyday, though, he seemed untouchable, and younger rivals, especially African-American ones, bristled at his dominance. In the 1987 concert movie "Raw," Eddie Murphy told a story about Cosby calling him up and urging him to use less profanity in his act, for the sake of his young fans, including Cosby's own son. Murphy recalled being so offended that he telephoned Richard Pryor, who offered some defiantly un-Cosby-like advice: "The next time the motherfucker calls, tell him I said suck my dick." Years later, the idea of rebelling against Cosby's old-fashioned propriety has itself come to seem old-fashioned, making it easier to appreciate his persona as a sustained comic performance, one based on an uneasy tension between fondness and disgust. His vir-

tuosity endures, even as his age begins to dictate not just the content of his comedy but its form.

In Salisbury, Cosby held forth for two hours, without notes or an intermission, and at times he seemed to forget what he was talking about, only to recover with a joke designed to make it impossible for the audience to pity him. As he was sprawled on the stage, during an absurd explanation of how to fend off a bear attack, his face went blank. "Um, this is embarrassing," he said. "Because I really don't know how I got down here." People laughed and cheered, trying to figure out whether this was part of the act. "I don't know why I started talking about the bear," he said, and then he became once more an exasperated father. "I mean, I know why: to save your lives." He frowned. "But why would I care enough?"

In 1962, the *Times* introduced its readers to a Temple University student who was spending his summer telling jokes at the Gaslight Café, the prototypical hipster coffeehouse, on Maccougal Street. The headline was "COMIC TURNS QUIPS INTO TUITION," and the story portrayed Cosby as an accomplished athlete and a low-key provocateur: "a young Negro comic who is working his way through college by hurling verbal spears at the relations between whites and Negroes." What followed was a warm tribute to an unknown performer of "considerable promise," but Cosby wasn't flattered. "He had opened up to the reporter, tried to show him how thoughtful he was, and he was pigeonholed as another angry Negro comic," Whitaker writes. (The article had mentioned jokes about the Ku Klux Klan, neighborhood integration, and the first Negro President.) In the months that followed his appearance in the *Times*, Cosby began to reinvent himself, scrapping riffs on current events and instead describing for audiences a childhood that sounded more easeful than his own.

Cosby was raised in North Philadelphia, the grandson of a steelworker and the son of a man Whitaker describes as "an unreliable drunk." His mother, Anna, worked as a maid and moonlighted as the instructor of a makeshift charm school, which held its classes in the family apartment. Cosby dropped



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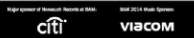
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out of high school and joined the Navy, as a Hospital Corpsman, but he eventually earned a G.E.D. and enrolled at Temple, where he discovered, in a remedial English class, that his funny stories could take over a room. From the start, Cosby seems to have been unusually confident, rarely doubting that audiences would find him excellent company. He drew inspiration from the rapid-fire, multivoice style developed by Jonathan Winters, who would become a mentor to Robin Williams. But while Williams used this technique to conjure up a boundless universe of characters, Cosby used it to animate his own small world. He was a storyteller, not a joke teller, and he had a smooth style that borrowed only sparingly from the black vernacular. In one of his best early routines, he portrayed himself as a young boy, about to get his tonsils removed. The boy didn't know what a tonsil was, only that he had been promised all the ice cream he could eat, and he worked himself up into a delirious frenzy of anticipation:

Listen: you know what I'm going to do? When I get my first bowl of ice cream, I'm going to—I'm not even going to touch it or eat it or nothin'. I'm going to smear it all over my body, man. Just smear it all over my face and eyes and hair and everywhere. And then I'm going to put a green cherry in my nose. And I'm going to be the most beautiful chocolate sundae you've ever seen in your life. Ice cream! I'm going to eat ice cream!

Like more than one of Cosby's sixties routines, this one may have been a drug joke in disguise: the child's voice is suspiciously dopey. And, like a surprising number of his bits, this one has a sardonic edge. As the boy exults, the surgeon's knife draws ever closer, with Cosby playing both the unsuspecting victim and the cool-blooded narrator, chuckling at the boy's fate.

Cosby seems to have impressed everyone who ever saw him perform, and he was rewarded with more attention, some "Tonight Show" appearances, and a meeting with a powerful television producer named Sheldon Leonard, who had an idea for a show built around an interracial pair of protagonists. The show was "I Spy," and when it had its premiere, in 1965, it became the first drama on television with a black actor in a main role. Cosby played a spy working undercover as a tennis coach, travelling

the world with a white tennis player, played by Robert Culp, who was also a spy. Cosby and Culp agreed that the show should make a point of avoiding overt discussions of race, as a way of encouraging viewers to imagine a world where racism wasn't so powerful. "Our statement will be a nonstatement," Culp said. Compared with Cosby's high-spirited standup routines, "I Spy" can seem muted, perhaps deliberately so. As a boy, Cosby had hated broad and boisterous Negro comedies, like "Amos 'n' Andy," which he found insulting. (Whitaker has him thinking, "It was as if the show was making fun of all Negroes!") Cosby wanted to make sure that Alexander Scott, his "I Spy" character, retained his dignity, and he succeeded. But that insistence on dignity also helps to explain why a modern viewer might find the show's eighty-two episodes less memorable than an audio recording of Cosby onstage, howling about ice cream.

By the time "I Spy" went off the air, in 1968, Cosby had become one of the biggest names in Hollywood, tending to a growing number of miscellaneous pursuits. He co-founded a record label, Tetragrammaton, which released John Lennon and Yoko Ono's "Unfinished Music No. 1: Two Virgins," an album best known for its cover, on which the artists wear nothing but each other. He wrote a fifty-thousand-dollar check to Melvin Van Peebles to help finance "Sweet Sweetback's Baadasssss Song," one of the most politically militant films ever to have been widely screened in



America. (Its poster advertised it as "RATED X BY AN ALL-WHITE JURY.") In his next television series, "The Bill Cosby Show," he played a hip but mild-mannered gym teacher named Chet Kincaid. His mixed record in Hollywood included a trilogy of popular all-black comedies, beginning with "Uptown Saturday Night," and a notably unpopular black Western, "Man and Boy." On the side, he became a children's star: the creator of "Fat Albert and the

Cosby Kids," a didactic but funky cartoon, and the face of Jell-O pudding.

All of this activity demonstrated Cosby's ambition, and perhaps also some uncertainty about his place in the comedy world. He had begun his career by imitating Dick Gregory, who made jokes about racism the centerpiece of his act; once he resolved to stop following Gregory's example, he quickly eclipsed his former idol. But as Cosby ascended into the elite, he attracted his own imitators, none sharper than Richard Pryor, whose early routines were essentially Cosby pastiches, only wilder. (In 1966, Pryor ended a buttoned-down appearance on "The Ed Sullivan Show" by stuffing a still-smoking cigarette into his mouth and scurrying offstage.) After a few years, Pryor gave up on what his friend and collaborator Paul Mooney once called "copycat Cosby bullshit" and began to embrace the kind of excess that Cosby took pains to avoid: profane language, unsparring revelation, emotional turmoil. The two were friendly and sometimes worked together—Pryor appeared alongside Cosby in "Uptown Saturday Night." But although they were born only three years apart, they came to symbolize different eras. In Eddie Murphy's bit from "Raw," he begins by announcing, "I've been a big fan of Bill Cosby all my life," and he proves it—the heart of the routine is his accurate Cosby imitation. Cosby says that Pryor called him up afterward, to deny uttering the insults that Murphy attributed to him. Nevertheless, what follows sounds like an act of comedic patricide: Murphy killing off one father so he can claim another. "Richard is the rawest motherfucker in show business," Murphy says, adding, "Richard's the one that made me want to do comedy."

It's a shame, in retrospect, that Cosby had to spend so much of his comedy career making records, which forced listeners to focus on his lines, instead of on the facial expressions that he uses to animate them. In 1983, he released his first comedy movie, "Bill Cosby: Himself," which played briefly in theatres and endlessly on HBO, allowing peers and fans alike to study the way he made punch lines superfluous. Recalling the birth of his first child, he swells with naïve pride: "Now, this is the greatest

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moment in our lives! This is what we asked God for! This is what we wanted to see"—pause—"if we could make. And I looked at it." He closes his mouth, blinks five times, squints, leans forward slightly. "And they started to clean it off. And it wasn't getting any better." His nose wrinkles and he permits himself half a sniff. The audience is enjoying itself even before he mimics the way the infant's head lolls about on its feeble neck.

By the time the movie came out, Cosby was famous but no longer hip, which turned out to suit him fine; many comedians view "Himself" as Cosby's greatest work. Marc Maron first watched it a few years ago, and he was taken by the casual way Cosby sat and talked, as if he had no fear of the audience members and no need to impress them. In a recent *GQ* retrospective, Larry Wilmore argued that the movie also marked a subtle change. "Until that moment, he was always talking from the point of view of the child in relationship to his parents," he said. "In 'Himself,' he became the adult." This evolution enriched Cosby's comedy: now his speciality was not just childish confusion but its more bittersweet adult analogue, too. It also gave him another chance to rewrite the harsh stories of his boyhood. Early in his career, he recalled his father as a drunken "giant," lumbering home and passing out while his children rifle through his pants pockets for change; when they're caught, their mother implicates herself in the theft, to spare them a beating. (He recounted this so cheerfully that listeners might not have registered the underlying terror.) In the adult version of that story, the giant is Cosby, sober and good-naturedly outraged at the "thief" in his family who goes through his pockets while he sleeps.

Around the time that "Himself" was released, Cosby set about creating "The Cosby Show," which he intended as a family program—that is, a program modelled on his own family, with a few improvements. In one early version, Cosby played a chauffeur, an idea that he liked until he heard objections from Camille, who is a perceptive but resolutely unfunny presence in Whitaker's account. ("Nobody is going to believe that *you're* a chauffeur," she told him.) So

he became Heathcliff Huxtable, an obstetrician married to a formidable lawyer, Clair, raising four children—and then, magically, five children, when Cosby decided that the cast needed a college-going eldest daughter, for mimetic reasons. Cosby also gave himself a loving father, a former jazz musician named Russell, after his own younger brother. Before they were America's favorite family, the Huxtables were a psychologically complicated exercise in wish fulfillment.

"The Cosby Show" was a great sitcom, perhaps a perfect sitcom, created just as the golden age of sitcoms was ending. It was only five years later that "Seinfeld" and "The Simpsons" arrived, each mocking the kind of idealized family life that programs like "The Cosby Show" portrayed. But Cosby was skeptical of sitcoms, too. He hired the psychiatry professor Alvin Poussaint, a frequent collaborator, to make sure that the scripts weren't too jokey. "Sitcom writers like to use a lot of put-down humor," Cosby told him. "I don't want any of that." As Cliff, Cosby allowed himself to act like a comedian—illustrating simple points with absurd shaggy-dog stories, or mugging his way through extended set pieces—because he knew that he was playing an authority figure in a household that took authority seriously. In a famous exchange from the pilot episode, Theo, the recalcitrant teen-age son, earnestly explained his poor grades by telling Cliff that he just wanted to be a "regular person" with a "regular life"—not a doctor or a lawyer. "Maybe you can just accept who I am and love me anyway, because I'm your son," he said. Cosby waited for the studio audience to stop applauding before responding. "Theo," he began, softly. "That's the *dumbest* thing I've ever heard in my *life!*" This was a reprimand delivered both to Theo and to the audience, and Whitaker describes how the audience members reacted: "They hooted and hollered and jumped to their feet to give him a standing ovation. The applause was thunderous, and it went on for several minutes." They liked knowing that Cliff was in charge—and that Cosby was, too.

Even while delivering this message, "The Cosby Show" made room for moments of ambiguity and daring. Theo

seemed to inspire in Cliff a feeling of lingering heartbreak—you felt not only that Cliff cared about Theo but, more affectingly, that he cared slightly too much. Cliff took a grandfatherly delight in Rudy, the youngest, and maintained a faintly flirtatious relationship with Denise, the stylish high-school student. His marriage to Clair was, by sitcom standards, unusually decadent: episodes often ended with the couple in bed or on the couch, nuzzling and purring. Occasionally, the show would leave plot behind altogether. An episode called "Jitterbug Break," about Denise wanting to go to a concert, ended with the children moving the living-room furniture aside in order to have a dance party. Some of their friends are break dancing, and then a few older friends of Cliff and Clair's show up and start swing dancing, and soon the living room is playing host to a multigenerational dance battle, which doubles as a black-cultural-history lesson. The scene lasts nearly six minutes, with almost no dialogue and no explanation—it just keeps going until the credits roll.

For five of its eight seasons, "The Cosby Show" was the most popular show on television, and its success earned its principals the kind of riches typically associated with less funny industries. (Cosby tried and failed to buy NBC; Tom Werner, the executive producer, succeeded in buying the San Diego Padres and then the Boston Red Sox.) Its success also inspired an ongoing argument about what it meant that so many white viewers were choosing to spend so much time with a fictional family that was black, rich, and content. The Huxtables didn't have much to say about black poverty, and some worried that their prominence somehow made black poverty easier to overlook. One reason the characters didn't often argue about race was that all the show's major characters were African-American. In that sense, the show reflected what Whitaker calls "the segregated world of strivers" that Cosby knew when he was a boy, and perhaps it also gestured at the ideal of black self-sufficiency—the notion that, with enough time and effort, African-Americans could build their own communities, fix their own problems. Depending on the emphasis, this can seem like either a very conservative

dream or a very radical one, and both interpretations help explain why "The Cosby Show" made some racial liberals uncomfortable.

The morning after Cosby's appearance in Salisbury, he travelled across Chesapeake Bay to Hagerstown, near the West Virginia and Pennsylvania borders, where he had sold out two concerts at the venerable Maryland Theatre. Police blocked off streets and directed traffic, and the town's young mayor, Dave Gysberts, appeared on-stage before the second set to give Cosby a key to the city: "He does push the envelope, especially on certain social issues," Gysberts told a local reporter. "He keeps us on our toes, and we learn a lot because we laugh a lot." In fact, Cosby's success has a lot to do with his career-long disinclination to mix comedy with social commentary. But Whitaker makes a convincing argument that issues of race and politics have preoccupied Cosby throughout his life. As a boy in segregated Philadelphia, Cosby sometimes encountered white people who went out of their way to help him, and in private he referred to them using a term of high praise: "abolitionists." He viewed his own ability to survive, and thrive, as an implicit rebuke to a racist system.

Cosby must have noticed the perception, particularly among blacks, that he didn't care about the project of liberation, and in the late sixties and early seventies he seized opportunities to strike a more defiant pose. In 1968, when he accepted his third straight Emmy Award for his role on "I Spy," he issued a proclamation from the stage: "Let the message be known to bigots and racists that they don't count!" In one interview, he seemed to disown the gentle approach of "I Spy," saying, "I just can't keep making the joyful noise." And the next year, when *Playboy* asked him to reject the violent rhetoric of the activist H. Rap Brown, Cosby questioned the wisdom of Brown's approach while being careful not to impugn his message. "Rap and the other militants all speak the truth when they let America know that the black man is not going to take any more bullshit," he said.

Of course, Cosby did "keep making the joyful noise," which helped him

amass a fan base that seems to be predominantly white. (There were very few African-American faces in the audiences in Maryland.) It is tempting to think of Cosby as a comedy idealist, insistent that his act should remain unswayed by the dirty business of politics. But, if anything, it seems that he took politics more seriously than comedy. Whitaker relates an explanation that Cosby once gave to Poussaint: "The Cosby Show" was a *comedy*, and he didn't want to trivialize serious problems by trying to make them funny." Unlike Pryor, Cosby didn't believe that a routine could encompass all of life's joys and sorrows. For him, comedy was smaller than life. When he was at work on "Cosby," his moderately successful follow-up to "The Cosby Show," he was asked about reports that he had intervened to make his character less cantankerous than the British character on which it was based. "If the critics complain that Bill Cosby's got such a nice image he's afraid that he can't do evil things like this Englishman—well, that is correct," he said. "And that is nothing to be ashamed of if you're in show business."

In 1976, Cosby earned a doctorate in education from the University of Massachusetts, after writing a dissertation about whether teachers found "Fat Albert" useful. (His conclusion: they did.) In presenting his findings, Cosby noted

the "inherent racism in American schools," and he deplored "the pervasive racist myths that dehumanize our children." Lurking beneath his prescriptions was a quasi-religious faith in the power of "Fat Albert"—that is, the power of Cosby's own developing philosophy of self-improvement through stubborn striving. In the nineteen-eighties and nineties, plenty of African-American leaders and activists grew frustrated that the promise of the civil-rights movement seemed to remain unfulfilled, but Cosby's frustration was amplified by a fatherly sense of betrayal: young African-Americans needed help, but they seemed no more interested in obeying his commands than Eddie Murphy had been.

Cosby's anguish and anger found expression in 2004, in a monologue that he delivered during an N.A.A.C.P. banquet held to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of Brown v. Board of Education. It became known as the "pound cake" speech, because of its shocking central anecdote, which portrayed the hypothetical killing of an unarmed young black man in a skeptical light:

These are people going around stealing Coca-Cola. People getting shot in the back of the head over a piece of pound cake! And then we all run out and are outraged: "The cops shouldn't have shot him." What the hell was he doing with the pound cake in his hand? I wanted a piece of pound cake just as



"I should have known—I hate the beach."

bad as anybody else. And I looked at it and I had no money. And something called parenting said, "If you get caught with it you're going to embarrass your mother."

Cosby accused poor people of "not holding their end in this deal," and built to an expression of metaphysical disgust. "You can't keep asking that God will find a way," he said. "God is tired of you." The definitive TV father had run out of patience.

The speech said very little about public policy, yet it was widely interpreted as a political manifesto, earning Cosby a host of new allies and opponents. One of the most vocal opponents was the scholar and pundit Michael Eric Dyson, who published a book-length retort called "Is Bill Cosby Right? Or Has the Black Middle Class Lost Its Mind?" Dyson accused Cosby of being insensitive to the trials and triumphs that defined the lives of poor African-Americans, suggesting that his "tough love" posturing masked a "bourgeois disgust for the economically humbled." Dyson linked Cosby's righteous indignation to a fear, historically held by "the black elite," of being humiliated and possibly harmed by the embarrassing behavior of "poor black folk." The "pound cake" speech metastasized into a tour, and eventually a book called "Come On, People," a collaboration between Cosby and Poussaint, which combined stern exhortation ("We need to steel ourselves with the will to get better") with medical advice ("If parents choose to use formula, they should make sure it contains Omega-3 fatty acids"). At one point, the two issue a tart response to critics of "The Cosby Show": "People who don't like Dr. Heathcliff Huxtable don't like—or don't know—their own fathers."

If "The Cosby Show" helped establish Cosby as a cultural conservative, the "pound cake" speech earned him a misleading reputation as a political conservative, a courageous African-American willing to stand up to the liberal establishment. Online, his name is sometimes linked, spuriously, to criticism of President Obama, whom Cosby has supported. And excerpts from the speech tend to resurface whenever the question of racial justice is in the news, as during the protests in Ferguson, Missouri. Along the bottom of Cosby's Web site, a band of photographs automatically

displays people who have recently tweeted about him, and the lineup often includes a user sharing a quote from "pound cake." One day this summer, a tweet included a link to the speech, with a tendentious summary: "Bill Cosby Bashes Negro Thugs and Black Welfare Moms: 'We Can't Blame the White People Any Longer.'" The name on the Twitter account was @WhiteResister.

Cosby's comedy is a celebration of the inevitable. The birth of a baby, the rebellion of a teen-ager, the irritation of a spouse: these are things to be en-



dured and, if at all possible, enjoyed. But with the "pound cake" affair Cosby was calling for change, for a black cultural revolution, and in the process he inadvertently proved just how little influence he had, even—or especially—among African-Americans. For many who had been following his career, the dream of Cosby as the nation's wise paterfamilias began to fade in 1989, when he gave a startling interview to the Los Angeles *Times* in which he discussed his daughter Erin, then twenty-three, whose time at a drug-rehabilitation clinic had recently been uncovered by the *National Enquirer*. The news of her struggles was surely less damaging than Cosby's in-temperate reaction: he described her as "really very selfish," adding that she "uses her boyfriends" and that she had the emotional maturity of an eleven-year-old.

According to Whitaker, Cosby reconciled with Erin only after a tragedy: the death, in 1997, of his son Ennis, the model for Theo, who was murdered next to a California freeway by an eighteen-year-old immigrant from Ukraine. The same day that Ennis was killed, Cosby received a blackmail threat, via fax, from a young woman named Autumn Jackson, who claimed to be his daughter from an extramarital affair. Cosby denied paternity, and she was eventually convicted of conspiracy, extortion, and crossing a state line to com-

mit a crime. But it was true that Cosby had had an affair with her mother, and the case forced him to acknowledge his infidelity. Whitaker acknowledges it, too, though he is scarcely more enthusiastic than his subject. He mentions Cosby's "roving eye" twice and tells a brief story about an unnamed "longtime girlfriend." To mark the demise of their relationship, Cosby invited her on what must have been a very strange goodbye date with him and her own mother.

Stories like these can't help but inform the way we hear Cosby's routines depicting marriage as an ongoing project to train and socialize husbands. He once said that he knew he was getting older when he was no longer tempted by the prospect of "sex with a young, beautiful girl who has plenty of energy." But it's not clear that age has rendered him entirely immune to such temptations. One night in 2003, filling in for David Letterman, Cosby conducted a rather unsettling interview with Sofia Vergara, the Colombian actress, leaning in to her and murmuring inane questions in a pseudo-Spanish accent. And the lone uncomfortable moment in his Salisbury performance came when he singled out an elegant young mother in the front row and quizzed her about the financial details of her marriage, clasping her right hand in both of his. "Whose money left the account to buy these tickets?" he said, imperiously.

"Our money," she said, drawing applause, and Cosby sent her back to her seat with a warm kiss on the forehead.

In the past decade, the tales of infidelity have been joined by much more serious allegations. At least four women, using their own names and telling similar stories, have accused Cosby of sexual assault. The accounts, made public in outlets that include the "Today" show and *People*, depict Cosby luring each woman to a private place, drugging her, and assaulting her. Cosby settled a lawsuit filed by one of the women, but he has never spoken of the allegations in public. (Earlier this year, his publicist dismissed one of the stories as "discredited.") Whitaker doesn't mention them, either—a remarkable omission. Unlike Cosby's extramarital affairs, these alleged assaults can't easily be integrated into a consideration of his work: no

doubt many of his fans will find it easier to put the claims out of mind or, especially if more information emerges, to put Cosby out of mind instead.

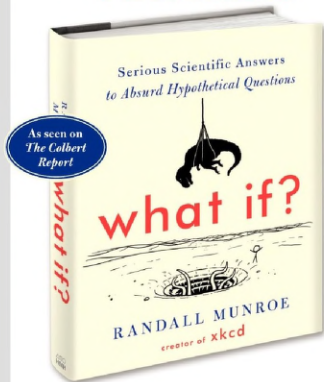
The older Cosby gets, the easier it is to be grateful, instead of frustrated, that he has kept his comedy separate from his other interests and troubles. This decision has come to look like an act of self-preservation, Cosby's way of making sure that, whatever else happens in his life or in the world, he will always be able to escape to the stage. The most recent evolution in his act has been a minor one: the famous father is now a grandfather, with failing eyesight and a sometimes unreliable memory, and he is adjusting to the reality that soon enough he may be, for the first time since childhood, someone else's responsibility. These days, if an audience member speaks out of turn, he will usually respond not with a sharp glance but with an exaggerated eye roll, letting his mouth hang slack—the beloved grandfather momentarily regressing into a petulant adolescent.

Cosby's career was made possible by his assurance that the public would appreciate both his stories and his advice. It's harder now to see him as an ideal father, which might just mean that it's easier to see him clearly. During one of his routines in Maryland, Cosby talked about bringing his children together—at gunpoint—to remind them of the father he used to be. "I changed your diaper," he said. "I wiped your behind. When you threw up on yourself, I took the shirt off and cleaned you and put a fresh one on." He asked them to fetch soap, a towel, some deodorant, a clean pair of underwear, and a bucket of warm water. "Right now, I'm going to poop on myself," he said, and he expected them to take loving care of him, just as he had taken care of them. "First one tries to dial to put me in a home, you're dead—every last one of you!" This routine was a calculated risk, built around the striking image of a great comedian and proud father at his most vulnerable. The audience laughed and applauded, still happy to listen to what Cosby had to say, and to give him an excuse to say it. ♦

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# ON IDEALS OF FEMININE ACCOMPLISHMENT

BY CORA FRAZIER

"A woman must have a thorough knowledge of music, singing, drawing, dancing, and the modern languages, to deserve the word ["accomplished"]; and besides all this, she must possess a certain something in her air and manner of walking, the tone of her voice, her address and expressions."

—*Caroline Bingley, in "Pride and Prejudice."*

## APPEARANCE AND GROOMING

Proper Hygiene is of the Upmost Importance for a Lady who wishes to be considered "Accomplished." Principally, the Lady of Accomplishment is able to shave in the Shower without the water washing off all the shaving cream before she gets to that part.

In manners of dress and of Bearing, the Lady of Accomplishment outfits herself in such a way as to get Her Date, his Brother, and their underage Cousin into the club, while still fitting the Description "down to earth."

She does not glue her Real Eyelashes together while putting on False Ones, resulting in the loss of a Significant portion of the far-left upper and lower Eyelashes.

This Lady wears items of clothing other than cutoff Jean Shorts. At the very Least, she washes her Jean Shorts.

Indeed, when her father tells her to brush her hair, the modern woman of Accomplishment is able to graciously pronounce that "that's the style."

## GENERAL DEPARTMENT AND MANNERS

Mealtimes are an Opportunity for the Accomplished Lady to Set Herself Apart with cordiality & grace. She is able to eat a full Meal without dribbling curry on herself or accumulating such an amount of Detritus at her place that she feels obligated to contrive a joke about it to the waiter when he clears away the Plates.

The Accomplished Woman does not purchase takeout Vegan Chili only to bring it back to her apartment and add cut-up Cold Cuts and Pepper Jack cheese.

## LANGUAGES

It takes true Accomplishment to know how to respond to the sequential text messages "Yeah shes ok I guess" and "Sorry sent that to the wrong person whats up?"

## MUSIC

The Accomplished Lady has an appreciation for the Musical Arts that she



shares with those in her company. She displays a genius for memorizing all the words to "Rapper's Delight," while concealing the fact that she also knows the words to all the songs on the "Born to Die" album.

Additionally, true Accomplishment entails appropriately dealing with her complicated feelings about Robin Thicke.

## DANCING

Dancing is an occasion for a Lady to endear herself to a Gentleman without having to endure the vexing gaze of a Chaperone. The Woman of True Accomplishment is able to dance in a circle of female friends in such a fashion that would lead none to construe that she's trying to signal a Helicopter for rescue, neither would it suggest to Men that they should stand behind her, motionless and watching.

## MAKING AN ADVANTAGEOUS MATCH

Securing an appropriate & advantageous marriage is important for the modern Lady, but it is secondary to choosing a clever hiding place for her Sweaty running clothes while staying the night in a Gentleman's rooms, lest He and his Flatmates have the misfortune of inadvertently discovering them, in her presence, along with an unwelcome and alarming Smell.

Furthermore, the Accomplished Lady does not inquire of her date why he has brought several Wide-Brimmed Dodger Hats on a two-day trip to New York City. She does, however, make a Mental Note of it.

## SECULAR MISCELLANY

As an additional Addendum to these mores & Genteel behaviors: The Accomplished Woman is able to perch over a Portable Toilet without peeing all over her platform sandals.

She does not go from the Lab, where she has had significant amounts of blood drawn for a Medical Reason, immediately to a Happy Hour.

Accomplishment entails not repeating to herself, "You're O.K. You're O.K.," in an audible voice in a public area.

## DUTIES, MORAL FORTITUDE AND THE PUBLIC SPHERE

O Gentler Sex, Heed your calling; to truly merit the word "Accomplished," it is not sufficient for a female to display her Virtues exclusively among her close social Circle. On the contrary, she is to act as a Beacon among the Sexes in the Public Realm; for example, by employing the phrase "best practice" in a business meeting with the authority of someone who knows its true Meaning.

This Lady uses her oratorical gifts of Discourse & Debate to Impress Upon her landlord that a room with mushrooms growing from the ceiling—the unhappy result of Water Damage—is a completely Unacceptable habitation for a Human being.

It is her privilege to set a Moral Example, chiefly in her refusal to purchase Ivanka Trump shoes. Or in telling the man in the Bodega not to speak to his girlfriend in such a horribly Vulgar way, even though now she will have to find a new place to buy her Hard-Boiled Eggs. ♦

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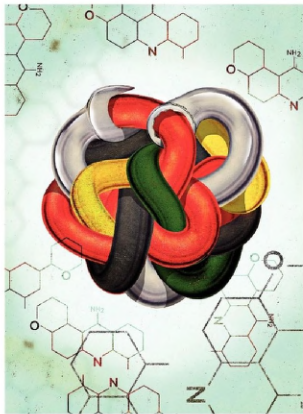
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## THE TRANSFORMATION

*Is it possible to control cancer without killing it?*

BY JEROME GROOPMAN



For almost thirty years, William Kuhens worked on Staten Island as a basketball referee for the Catholic Youth Organization and other amateur leagues. At seventy, he was physically fit, taking part in twenty games a month. But in July of 2013 he began to lose weight and feel exhausted; his wife told him he looked pale. He saw his doctor, and tests revealed that his blood contained below-normal numbers of platelets and red and white blood cells; these are critical for, respectively, preventing bleeding, supplying oxygen, and combating infection. Kuhens was sent to the Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center, in Manhattan, to meet with

Eytan Stein, an expert in blood disorders. Stein found that as much as fifteen per cent of Kuhens's bone marrow was made up of primitive, cancerous blood cells. "Mr. Kuhens was on the cusp of leukemia," Stein told me recently. "It seemed that his disease was rapidly advancing."

Leukemia is a disorder of the blood cells, which form in the bone marrow. For reasons not always clear to scientists, immature cells fail to develop properly into mature ones and instead continue to multiply, crowding out normal blood cells. Patients are at risk of massive bleeding and sepsis, a severe complication of infection. There are

many kinds of leukemia, depending on the type of blood cell involved and the pace at which the cancer advances. Kuhens was developing acute myelogenous leukemia, or A.M.L., which is estimated to occur annually in at least fifty thousand people worldwide, most of them adults, and is usually lethal; fewer than a quarter of patients survive for more than five years. Kuhens knew that his prognosis was grim, likely measured in months. Stein treated him with four courses of chemotherapy, to no significant effect.

The only options were experimental. Stein had sent a sample of Kuhens's bone marrow to be analyzed for the presence of thirty or so gene mutations that are known to be associated with blood cancers. The tests revealed one notable mutation, in a gene that produces an enzyme called IDH-2. Normally, the enzyme helps to break down nutrients and generate energy for cells. When mutated, it creates a molecule that alters the cells' genetic programming. Instead of maturing, the cells remain primitive, proliferate wildly, and wreak havoc.

About fifteen per cent of all A.M.L. patients carry the mutated enzyme. In recent months, Stein had been participating in a Phase 1 clinical trial of a drug, AG-221, designed to target it; the drug was developed by the pharmaceutical company Agios. Phase 1 studies represent the very first tests of a new drug in humans; they are mainly meant to assess a new drug's safety, with little expectation that the treatment will help. Of the first ten patients who had been treated, three had died from their disease before the drug's effects could be evaluated. But the data on six of the seven remaining patients were striking: five had gone into complete remission and one entered a partial remission. (The other patient did not improve, and his leukemia continued to grow.)

Stein described one patient to me, a woman in her late sixties with A.M.L. She had already undergone a bone-marrow transplant, had relapsed, and then had more chemotherapy; nothing helped. To Stein's surprise, after three months on AG-221, her leukemia had gone into complete remission and her blood count had returned to normal. "It was transformative," Stein said. "She

*An experimental new drug can make some leukemic cells mature into healthier ones.*

gained weight and told me that the pep in her step was back." Another patient, a sixty-year-old man with A.M.L., also had failed to benefit from several regimens of chemotherapy, and he, too, went into remission after taking AG-221. Moreover, the side effects of the medication, which is given orally, have been manageable—mostly mild nausea and a loss of appetite.

This past spring, Kuhens entered the drug trial and received his first dose. Within weeks, the leukemic-cell count in his bone marrow had fallen from fifteen per cent to four per cent, and his counts of healthy blood cells improved markedly; he has been in complete remission for four months. The most noticeable side effect has been a metallic taste in his mouth. "For some reason, I can't stand mayonnaise," Kuhens told me recently. He just celebrated his fiftieth wedding anniversary. "I want to be around for a while," he said, "and I don't know how long this drug will last."

In April, Stein presented his findings to a packed auditorium at the annual meeting of the American Association for Cancer Research, in San Diego. It was the first public airing of the results of AG-221; patients with progressive A.M.L. had never improved so quickly and definitively.

I received the news with tempered excitement. In the nineteen-seventies, when I trained in internal medicine, and later in hematology and oncology, acute myelogenous leukemia was the cancer to beat. The disease typically overwhelms its victims, relegating them to the intensive-care unit, where they require intravenous antibiotics, blood transfusions, and, as their lungs and heart fail, support on ventilators. The most effective initial treatment was, and still is, a pair of highly toxic chemotherapy drugs, daunorubicin (or sometimes a related one, adriamycin) and cytarabine. The side effects are profound: the first family of drugs causes arrhythmias and heart-muscle damage, often leading to cardiac failure; the second drug is toxic to the central nervous system, particularly the cerebellum, resulting in severe lack of balance and coordination. Combined, the two agents might kill the leukemic cells in the marrow, but they also kill healthy

blood cells, causing patients to enter a limbo with an "empty marrow," during which we doctors used to pray that their normal cells would regrow. Daunorubicin and adriamycin have a distinctive red color, and in my day medical interns referred to them as "the red death," because most of the patients who took them ultimately died of their disease. In response, my mentors argued that "desperate diseases require desperate measures."

By comparison, Stein's results were breathtaking. Still, his trial hadn't involved many patients, and they hadn't been followed for long. Cancer is wily, and some drugs that target mutations can show benefits that soon evaporate as the tumor adapts. In June, however, at the European Hematology Association conference, in Milan, Stéphane de Botton, a hematologist at the Institut Gustave Roussy, near Paris, presented updated results that were equally promising. The findings covered thirty-five patients, most of them with A.M.L. Ten had died within a month of entering the trial, from complications related to the disease. But fourteen patients had improved on AG-221, including nine whose leukemia went into complete remission. Five were stable but showed no change; in six, the leukemia continued to grow. The patients also experienced few side effects, de Botton told me recently, and some patients have been in remission for more than six months.

"These data signal the first real advance for A.M.L. in thirty years," Stephen Nimer, the director of the Sylvester Comprehensive Cancer Center, at the University of Miami, and an eminent leukemia researcher and clinician, told me. "It's a huge step forward."

The breakthrough is notable in part for the unconventional manner in which the drug attacks its target. There are many kinds of cancer, but treatments have typically combated them in one way only: by attempting to destroy the cancerous cells. Surgery aims to remove the entire growth from the body; chemotherapy drugs are toxic to the cancer cells; radiation generates toxic molecules that break up the cancer cells' DNA and proteins, causing their demise. A more recent approach, immunotherapy, coopts the body's immune

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*"It'll have to be your place. I Airbnb'd myself out of my apartment tonight."*

system into attacking and eradicating the tumor.

The Agios drug, instead of killing the leukemic cells—immature blood cells gone haywire—coaxes them into maturing into functioning blood cells. Cancerous cells traditionally have been viewed as a lost cause, fit only for destruction. The emerging research on A.M.L. suggests that at least some cancer cells might be redeemable: they still carry their original programming and can be pressed back onto a pathway to health.

**M**ost cancers, once they spread, are incurable. Cancer researchers are desperate to raise the number of patients who go into remission, to prolong those remissions, and to ultimately prevent relapse. So when a new way of attacking cancer comes along, it is often greeted with incautious euphoria and an assumption that the new paradigm can be quickly converted into a cure for all cancers.

In 1971, President Nixon announced the War on Cancer, based on the mounting belief, born of research in the nineteen-sixties, that cancer is caused by viruses. As it turns out, although viruses often cause cancer in lower animals, they do so less frequently in humans. In

1989, Harold Varmus and Michael Bishop won the Nobel Prize for their discovery, thirteen years earlier, that normal genes could mutate into cancer-causing oncogenes, which appear to drive the unchecked growth and behavior of malignant cells. Cancer was now seen as a genetic disease, and in some cases, such as familial breast cancer, genetic tests were developed that could indicate whether an individual was at high risk for the malignancy.

Advances in DNA technology and in computing led to the mapping of the healthy human genome, and of other genomes, including those of various cancers. Scientists assumed that they would soon decipher how tumors arise and find a way to stop them. In the case of some cancers, that promise has been fulfilled, but for most, especially once they have spread, it has not. In 1998, after the development of new drugs that could shut down certain cancers by choking off their blood supply—an advance, known as anti-angiogenesis, that has given rise to the drug Avastin—the Nobel laureate James Watson predicted that this work would “cure cancer in two years.” Immunotherapy has recently been shown to be highly effective against melanoma and kidney cancer, but

many other cancers manage to evade this type of therapy.

The more scientists learn about cancer, the more diverse and vexing their opponent appears. Most cancers have several potential ways of developing. Even within a single tumor, individual cancer cells may follow separate road maps. A drug designed to target one pathway may succeed in destroying only a fraction of the tumor, leaving the rest to grow, spread, and kill. The IDH-2 mutation is just one of many enzyme mutations that are found in acute myelogenous leukemia. Recently, Timothy Ley, a researcher at Washington University, in St. Louis, and an expert on the genetics of blood cancers, published a study involving two hundred patients with A.M.L.; he found that each patient harbored a unique set of mutations. “It’s complex, but I’m not daunted,” Ley told me. “At least now we know what we’re dealing with.”

Agios hopes that AG-221 will become a key in treating those cancers which are driven by IDH-2. In March, the company launched clinical trials of another drug, AG-120, which targets a different mutated enzyme, IDH-1. The mutation occurs in as many as ten per cent of A.M.L. patients, but it’s also found in seventy per cent of patients with a type of brain tumor called a glioma and in fifty per cent of cases of cancer of the cartilage. The treatment of cancer, which traditionally adopted a destroy-the-village strategy, is becoming ever more like precision warfare. “We treat people with the specific mutation who may benefit,” David Schenkein, the C.E.O. of Agios, told me. “We don’t treat people who would not respond to the drug.”

**O**ne day in July, I visited the Agios laboratory, not far from the M.I.T. campus, in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Precision medicine has been made possible in part by advances in computer technology, enabling scientists to depict enzymes, receptors, and other key cellular molecules in exquisite, three-dimensional detail. Pharmaceutical companies like Agios have large databases that keep track of known drugs and their physical contours. Finding or creating a drug for a cancer-causing molecule can be a matter of deciphering the molecule’s shape and determining



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## FRIDAY/OCTOBER 10

### STORIES FROM HOME

The Golden State  
With **Michael Chabon**,  
**Ryan Coogler**, **Miranda July**,  
and **Robert Towne**.  
Moderated by  
**Deborah Treisman**.  
7 P.M. Directors Guild Theatre  
110 West 57th Street (\$35)

### Mother India

With **Katherine Boo**,  
**Mira Nair**, and **Akhil  
Sharma**. Moderated by  
**Sasha Weiss**.  
7 P.M. Sheen Center  
18 Bleecker Street (\$35)

### The Emerald Isle

With **Gabriel Byrne**,  
**Anne Enright**, **Colum  
McCann**, and **Colm Tóibín**.  
Moderated by  
**Paul Muldoon**.  
7 P.M. MasterCard Stage at  
SVA Theatre 2  
333 West 23rd Street (\$35)

### Across the Pond

With **Tessa Hadley**, **Hari  
Kunzru**, **Hanif Kureishi**,  
and **Zadie Smith**.  
Moderated by  
**Cressida Leyshon**.  
10 P.M. MasterCard Stage at  
SVA Theatre 2  
333 West 23rd Street (\$35)

### Jersey Boys

With **David Chase**,  
**Junot Diaz**, and **Sam  
Lipsyte**. Moderated by  
**David Remnick**.  
10 P.M. Directors Guild Theatre  
110 West 57th Street (\$35)

### The Sunshine State

With **Donald Antrim**,  
**Carl Hiaasen**,  
and **Karen Russell**.  
Moderated by  
**Willing Davidson**.  
10 P.M. Sheen Center  
18 Bleecker Street (\$35)

### CONVERSATIONS WITH MUSIC

**Randy Newman** talks  
with **Susan Morrison**  
*Cynical romantic.*  
7 P.M. Gramercy Theatre  
127 East 23rd Street (\$40)

### IN CONVERSATION

**Hill Hader** talks with  
**Lizzie Widdicombe**  
*Breaking character.*  
7 P.M. MasterCard Stage at  
SVA Theatre 1  
333 West 23rd Street (\$40)

### Stephen Sondheim talks

with **Adam Gopnik**  
*Isn't it rich?*  
7 P.M. Acura at SIR Stage 37  
508 West 37th Street (\$40)

### Lena Dunham talks with

**Ariel Levy**  
*Ask Lena.*  
10 P.M. Acura at SIR Stage 37  
508 West 37th Street (\$40)

### Evan Goldberg and

**Seth Rogan** talk with  
**Andy Borowitz**  
*The Canucks of comedy.*  
10 P.M. MasterCard Stage at  
SVA Theatre 1  
333 West 23rd Street (\$40)

### ABOUT TOWN

**Fake Wine**  
**Patrick Radden Keefe**  
will discuss wine  
fraud with **Maureen  
Downey**, **Michael Egan**,  
**Jason Hernandez**, and  
**William Koch**.  
Non-counterfeit wine and  
hors d'oeuvres will be served.  
7 P.M. Ticket buyers will  
be contacted concerning  
the location. (\$10)

## SATURDAY/ OCTOBER 11

### PANELS

**The Map of Your Brain**  
*The chemistry of memory.*  
With **Cori Bargmann**,  
**Hippocampal**,  
**Kristen Harris**, and  
**Rafael Yuste**. Moderated by  
**Michael Spector**.  
10 A.M. Directors Guild Theatre  
110 West 57th Street (\$35)

### Murder, They Wrote

*Dark thoughts.*  
With **David Grann**, **Lynda  
La Plante**, **Scott Turow**,  
and **Leigh Whannell**.  
Moderated by  
**Jeffrey Toobin**.  
1 P.M. Directors Guild Theatre  
110 West 57th Street (\$35)

### LGBTQ TV

*Out of the box.*  
With **Brad Falchuk**,  
**Jenji Kohan**, **Michael  
Lannan**, **Peter Paige**,  
and **Jill Soloway**.  
Moderated by  
**Emily Nussbaum**.  
1 P.M. Acura at SIR Stage 37  
508 West 37th Street (\$35)

### Income Inequality

*What per cent are we?*  
With **David Brooks**,  
**Jacob Hacker**, and  
**Niall Stamp**. Moderated  
by **George Packer**.  
1 P.M. MasterCard Stage at  
SVA Theatre 1  
333 West 23rd Street (\$35)

### Extreme Makeover

*Hollywood transformers.*  
With **Greg Cannom**,  
**J. Roy Helland**, and  
**Robin Mathews**.  
Moderated by  
**Judith Thurman**.  
4 P.M. Directors Guild Theatre  
110 West 57th Street (\$35)

### Blunt Talk

*The legal-cannabis debate.*  
With **Steve DeAngelis**,  
**Jodi Gilman**, **Carl Hart**,  
**Mark Kleiman**, and  
**Kevin Sabet**. Moderated by  
**Patrick Radden Keefe**.  
4 P.M. MasterCard Stage at  
SVA Theatre 1  
333 West 23rd Street (\$35)

### TALKS

**Malcolm Gladwell**  
*A Tolstoy Problem*  
10 A.M. MasterCard Stage at  
SVA Theatre 1  
333 West 23rd Street (\$40)

### Louis Menand

*How Cold Was the Cold War?*  
1 P.M. Sheen Center  
18 Bleecker Street (\$35)

### MASTER CLASS

*Confessions of a  
Comma Queen*  
**Mary Norris** will conduct a  
master class in grammar.  
10 A.M. Sheen Center  
18 Bleecker Street (\$40)

### THE VIRTUAL INTERVIEW

Real-time interviews  
with subjects who can't  
be in New York.

### Ai Weiwei talks with

**Evan Osnos**  
*Life imitates art.*  
10 A.M. MasterCard Stage at  
SVA Theatre 2  
333 West 23rd Street (\$25)

### Edward Snowden talks

with **Jane Mayer**  
*Is everybody listening?*  
1 P.M. MasterCard Stage at  
SVA Theatre 2  
333 West 23rd Street (\$25)

### Kim Dotcom talks with

**Daniel Zalewski**  
*Get off of my cloud.*  
4 P.M. MasterCard Stage at  
SVA Theatre 2  
333 West 23rd Street (\$25)

### IN CONVERSATION

**Roz Chast** talks with  
**Bob Mankoff**  
*Let's talk about  
something pleasant.*  
10 A.M. Acura at SIR Stage 37  
508 West 37th Street (\$35)

### Larry David talks with

**David Remnick**  
*Don't curb your enthusiasm.*  
4 P.M. Acura at SIR Stage 37  
508 West 37th Street (\$40)

### Denis Johnson talks with

**Deborah Treisman**  
*The man of the world.*  
4 P.M. Sheen Center  
18 Bleecker Street (\$35)

### ABOUT TOWN

**Aboard "The Last Ship"**  
Following a preview  
performance of "The Last  
Ship" on Broadway,  
**Adam Gopnik** will moderate  
a panel with **Sting**, who  
wrote the music and  
lyrics, **John Logan**, the  
playwright, **Joe Mantello**,  
the director, and the  
actress **Rachel Tucker**.  
2 P.M. Neil Simon Theatre  
250 West 52nd Street (\$160)

## YOU, THE JURY: CATS VS. DOGS

**Anthony Lane** will lead a team in defense of felines. **Adam Gopnik** will lead a team in defense of canines. **David Remnick**, the judge, will preside. Supporting arguments and readings from **Jill Abramson**, **Billy Berloni**, **Jerry Coyne**, **Jesse Eisenberg**, **Malcolm Gladwell**, **Alexandra Horowitz**, **Anthony Hutchinson**, **Ariel Levy**, and **Joyce Carol Oates**. Cats and dogs will take the stand. May be the best domestic animal win.

Saturday, October 11th, at 7 P.M. Acura at SIR Stage 37  
508 West 37th Street (\$45)



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\*\*Prizes available to MasterCard cardholders only during The New Yorker Festival, from Friday, October 10, 2014, through Sunday, October 12, 2014. Cardholder must show MasterCard card to receive prize. One prize per cardholder. While supplies last.

## SHNEAK PREVIEWS

### "Listen Up Philip"

A preview screening of the feature film, followed by a conversation between **Richard Brody** and the director, **Alex Ross Perry**, and the cast members **Jason Schwartzman** and **Elizabeth Moss**.  
10 P.M. MasterCard Stage at SVA Theatre 2  
333 West 23rd Street (\$40)

## ABOUT TOWN

**Fresser's Trill**  
Join Calvin Trillin in conversation with **Mark Russ Federman**, **Niki Russ Federman**, and **Josh Russ Tupper**—the third- and fourth-generation owners of Russ & Daughters—for an evening of nosh and natches.  
12 noon. The Morgan Library & Museum  
225 Madison Avenue (\$35)

## TABLES FOR TWO

**Travelling Dinner Parties**  
Join Tables for Two for a critic-curated dinner featuring a favorite cocktail, appetizer, main course, and dessert, each served in a different restaurant (wine included). Above  
Fourth Street hosted by **Amelia Lester**; below  
Fourth Street hosted by **Shauna Lyon**; Brooklyn hosted by **Hannah Goldfield**.  
Transportation provided.  
7 P.M. Ticket buyers will be contacted concerning each meeting location.  
(Uptown: \$25, Downtown: \$25.0, Brooklyn: \$25)

## SUNDAY/OCTOBER 12

## ABOUT TOWN

**Morning at the Frick**  
**Peter Schejbal** will lead his seventh annual tour of the museum before public hours begin, followed by coffee and conversation.  
10 A.M. The Frick Collection  
1 East 70th Street (\$820)

## Come Hungry

**Calvin Trillin** will lead his thirteenth annual walk from Greenwich Village to Chinatown, stopping at his favorite eateries.  
11 A.M. Ticket buyers will be contacted concerning the location. (\$150)

## THE NEW YORKER COMEDY PLAYLIST

Hit "Play" and enjoy an evening of back-to-back sets starring **Patton Oswalt**, with **Todd Barry**, **Michael Che**, **Susie Essman**, **Jena Friedman**, **Al Madrigal**, **Marc Maron**, and **Morgan Murphy**. Hosted by **Andy Borowitz**.

Saturday, October 11th, at 10 P.M. MasterCard Stage at SVA Theatre 1  
333 West 23rd Street (\$40)

## One Hundred Years of

**Saul Steinberg**  
**Ian Frazier** will moderate a panel discussion celebrating the life and work of the legendary New Yorker artist. With **Barry Blitt**, **Richard McGuire**, **Melissa Renn**, and **Joel Smith**. There will be a special exhibition of original work.  
12 noon. The Morgan Library & Museum  
225 Madison Avenue (\$35)

## IN CONVERSATION

**Roger Angell** talks with **Mark Singer**.  
*Home run.*  
11 A.M. Acura at SIR Stage 37  
508 West 37th Street (\$35)

## Karl Ove Knausgaard

talks with **James Wood**  
His struggle.  
11 A.M. Sheen Center  
18 Bleeker Street (\$35)

## Phil Jackson

talks with **Ben McGrath**  
The coach's coach.  
5 P.M. MasterCard Stage at SVA Theatre 1  
333 West 23rd Street (\$35)

## Neil Young

talks with **Nick Paumgarten**  
Renaissance rocker.  
5 P.M. Acura at SIR Stage 37  
508 West 37th Street (\$40)  
(This event does not include a musical performance.)

## TALKS

**Atul Gawande**  
Being Mortal  
11 A.M. MasterCard Stage at SVA Theatre 1  
333 West 23rd Street (\$35)

## Jill Lepore

The Secret History of Wonder Woman  
2 P.M. Directors Guild Theatre  
110 West 57th Street (\$35)

## Jeremy Denk

Comedy and Convention from Mozart to Seinfeld  
2 P.M. MasterCard Stage at SVA Theatre 2  
333 West 23rd Street (\$35)

## PANELS

**Fly Me to the Moon**  
Personal space travel.  
With **Wally Funk**, **Bas Lansford**, **Adam Steltzner**, and **Bill Stone**. Moderated by **Burkhard Bilger**.  
11 A.M. Directors Guild Theatre  
110 West 57th Street (\$35)

## Hit the Road

Travel writing.  
With **Elif Batuman**, **Dina Mustagata**, **Gary Shteyngart**, and **Paul Theroux**. Moderated by **Philip Gourevitch**.  
2 P.M. Sheen Center  
18 Bleeker Street (\$35)

## The Political Scene

A live taping of *The New Yorker's* weekly podcast. *The Middle East*.  
With **Jon Lee Anderson**, **Steve Coll**, **Dexter Filkins**, and **Robin Wright**. Moderated by **Evan Osnos**.  
2 P.M. MasterCard Stage at SVA Theatre 1  
333 West 23rd Street (\$35)

## CONVERSATIONS

WITH MUSIC  
**Laurie Anderson** talks with **Alex Ross**. Experiments in speech and sound.  
5 P.M. MasterCard Stage at SVA Theatre 2  
333 West 23rd Street (\$35)

## SNEAK PREVIEWS

**"The Humbling"**  
The U.S. premiere of the new drama, based on the novel by Philip Roth, starring **Al Pacino** and **Greta Gerwig**. After the film, **David Denby** will speak with the director, **Nancy Levinson**.  
5 P.M. Directors Guild Theatre  
110 West 57th Street (\$35)

## POETRY

**Poets Read Their Work**  
With **Michael Dickman**, **Jorie Graham**, **Terrance Hayes**, **Philip Levine**, and **Tracy K. Smith**. Hosted by **Paul Muldoon**.  
10 P.M. Sheen Center  
18 Bleeker Street (\$35)

## BOOK SIGNINGS

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## SATURDAY / OCTOBER 11

12 noon **Carl Hiaasen**  
1 P.M. **Junot Diaz** · **Zadie Smith**  
2 P.M. **Dina Mustagata** · **Sam Lipsyte**  
3 P.M. **Paul Theroux**  
4 P.M. **Scott Turow**

## SUNDAY / OCTOBER 12

12 noon **Rogerorman**  
1 P.M. **Atul Gawande**  
2 P.M. **Karen Russell** · **Akhil Sharma**  
4 P.M. **Elif Batuman** · **Gary Shteyngart**



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## HOW TO PURCHASE TICKETS

Tickets for The New Yorker Festival will go on sale at 12 noon E.T. on Friday, September 12th.\*

Online: ALL tickets will be sold at [newyorker.com/festival](http://newyorker.com/festival).

**At MasterCard Stage at SVA Theatre!** The theatre box office will sell all remaining tickets throughout Festival weekend. Box-office hours: October 10th: 10 A.M. - 10 P.M. October 11th: 9 A.M. - 10 P.M. October 12th: 10 A.M. - 3 P.M.

Tickets will be available at the box office up to 2 hours prior to each event. The theatre is at 333 West 23rd Street (between Eighth and Ninth Avenues). First come, first served.

**At the door:** A limited number of tickets will be sold at the door to each event one hour before start time. First come, first served. Cash only. For exceptions, please visit [newyorker.com/festival](http://newyorker.com/festival).

Will-call orders may be picked up at each event one hour before start time. All international orders will be held at will call.

\*MasterCard cardholders get early access to tickets for all Festival events beginning at 11 A.M. E.T. on Thursday, September 11th, through 11 A.M. Friday, September 12th.

To purchase, go to [newyorker.com/festival](http://newyorker.com/festival). While supplies last. (Online only.)

Tickets are not available for purchase by telephone.

Please note that purchases are subject to service charges. New York City taxes may be applicable for certain events. For venue access restrictions and wheelchair accessibility, please visit [newyorker.com/festival](http://newyorker.com/festival). Production services provided by the Overland Entertainment Company.

All programming is subject to change.

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On Saturday and Sunday, **ACURA** will be offering complimentary shuttle service in an Acura MDX, one of the world's most intelligent sport utility vehicles. Transportation will be provided from McNally Jackson Books and Acura at SIR Stage 37 to select Festival venues.

Take a break between events and enjoy Festival-friendly hospitality at the **UNITED AIRLINES** Lounge, across the street from MasterCard Stage at SVA Theatre. Join us for refreshments, special appearances, and promotions throughout the weekend. Be sure to stop in on Saturday to view a sold-out Festival event streamed live.

Indulge in a new flavor experience with a free **HÄAGEN-DAZS** Gelato Bar, available at Häagen-Dazs carts outside MasterCard Stage at SVA Theatre and at Acura at SIR Stage 37 throughout the weekend.

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what sort of drug would best match it, like fitting a key to a lock.

AG-221 came to exist in much this manner. For several years, scientists had been aware that some patients with acute myelogenous leukemia carry the mutated IDH-2 enzyme. The healthy enzyme helps the cell generate energy by breaking down a molecule called isocitrate, leaving another, called alpha-ketoglutarate, as a by-product. In 2009, Agios researchers discovered that the mutated enzyme leaves a different by-product, a molecule called 2-hydroxyglutarate, or 2-HG, which appears to switch off certain genes in the cell nucleus. As a result, the cell fails to mature into a fully functioning blood cell and instead multiplies dangerously. An Agios team soon devised AG-221, which binds to the abnormal enzyme and prevents it from creating 2-HG.

The researchers were nonetheless surprised when the malignant cells matured into healthy ones. As it turns out, a cell containing the mutated IDH-2 enzyme also still contains the healthy enzyme; the healthy one functions correctly, but its benefits to the cell are swamped by the effects of the aberrant enzyme. Once the mutant enzyme is neutralized, the healthy one puts the cell back on track. In effect, the leukemic cell harbors the genetic program to behave normally; the drug allows the program to be accessed and enables the cancer to grow up.

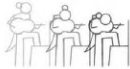
At Agios, a bioanalytical chemist named Kelly Marsh showed me how the drug works. In a large laboratory space, Marsh and her colleagues were preparing to test the efficacy of a second-generation version of AG-221. She sat at a lab bench with a plastic tray the size of an index card; it had ninety-six wells, each containing a few drops of clear liquid—suspensions of leukemic cells with the IDH-2 mutation. Some of the wells had been treated with increasing doses of the drug; others were untreated, to serve as controls. Marsh's analysis would show how effective the drug was at neutralizing the errant enzyme.

The most prominent object on the lab bench was a mass spectrometer—a machine about the size of a steamer trunk, with fine plastic tubing emanating from it. Marsh lined up the plastic

tray so that an automated pipette drew up about a tenth of a drop from each of the wells and sent it through the tubing and into the machine. Within the spectrometer, the liquid would be heated into a gas and passed through a powerful electric field, where its mass could be calculated to several decimal points and its molecular makeup could be determined. A computer readout indicated how much 2-HG, the by-product of the aberrant enzyme, remained in each well.

Marsh would have to run the test scores of times before she had sufficient data to draw statistically valid conclusions. Still, the results from this run were easy to grasp. As the dose of the drug was increased, the amount of 2-HG fell, in some cases as much as ninety per cent. The leukemic cells had been neutralized, as they had been in the clinical study of patients like William Kuhens.

That afternoon, I examined microscope images of the bone marrow of a patient who had not been treated with the drug. As a hematologist, I often dread taking in this view. Up close, healthy marrow looks like an Impressionist painting—a variegated landscape of cell types and colors. Leukemic marrow is a monotonous canvas of cancer cells; the images I was looking at showed hardly any normal blood cells being made. Then I examined images from a patient who had received the Agios drug. Typically, when a patient with A.M.L. is treated with high doses of chemotherapy, the marrow is emptied of all living cells; what's left is a moonscape



of fat globules and fibrous tissue. The images at Agios showed robust marrow: the leukemic cells had been forced to mature and had reverted to functioning white blood cells, red blood cells, and platelets. They were transformed.

I had seen something similar only once before. The first scientific paper I ever wrote, some thirty-five years ago, was about an unusual blood cancer called acute promyelocytic leukemia, or

A.P.L. My paper noted that patients typically died from massive hemorrhage and that even after intensive chemotherapy their remissions lasted only a year or so. In the nineteen-eighties, the disease became a curiosity for scientists, because of a new drug that was being employed against it, one whose effects mirror those of AG-221.

The drug, called all-trans-retinoic acid, or ATRA, causes leukemic cells to abandon their relentless growth and to mature into white blood cells. ATRA and AG-221 attack different molecules in their respective cancers: AG-221 targets an enzyme that, when not mutated, is essential to the cell's metabolism; ATRA attacks a hybrid protein—the result of chromosomes breaking and faultily recombining—that should not otherwise exist. Nonetheless, when ATRA came into use, it was the first time that a cancer had been neutralized by forcing its cells to mature. The slides I saw of marrow from patients treated with AG-221 looked a great deal like the slides I'd seen from patients with acute promyelocytic leukemia who had been treated with ATRA. The principle was the same: cancer cells could be made healthier again.

The idea for ATRA grew out of research by Zhen-yi Wang and Zhu Chen, of the Ruijin Hospital, in Shanghai. They were studying acute promyelocytic leukemia and wondered whether there was another way to treat the cancerous cells besides killing them. Wang was inspired by a passage from the Analects of Confucius: "If you use laws to direct the people, and punishments to control them, they will merely try to evade the punishments, and will have no sense of shame. But if by virtue you guide them, and by the rites you control them, there will be a sense of shame and of right." Wang later wrote, "If cancer cells are considered elements with 'bad' social behavior in our body, 'educating' rather than killing these elements might represent a much better solution."

Wang and Chen were aware of work by Leo Sachs, a researcher at the Weizmann Institute of Science, in Israel, who had found that some leukemic cells seemed to have retained their ability to mature into healthy cells, at least in laboratory experiments. For a



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treatment agent, the Chinese scientists turned to all-trans-retinoic acid, a derivative of Vitamin A, which in Shanghai had just been approved to treat skin diseases such as psoriasis and acne. When the researchers exposed leukemic cells to ATRA, they appeared to mature, released from their primitive state.

In 1985, Wang treated his first patient with ATRA: a five-year-old girl with acute promyelocytic leukemia who had not improved with chemotherapy and was dying. Within a week of treatment, she had begun to improve, and by three weeks she "miraculously went into complete remission," Wang and Chen wrote in 2008, in the journal *Blood*. The authors noted that she was now twenty-six years old and healthy. In 1988, the Shanghai Institute of Hematology had published the results of a study in which twenty-four patients were given ATRA: twenty-three entered a complete remission, their leukemic cells having matured. This success was soon confirmed by other hematologists across the globe.

But researchers discovered that the benefits of the drug often were not lasting. The leukemic cells, reprogrammed to mature and behave, exhibited a strong tendency to become cancerous again within three to six months. Chen, drawing on the work of researchers at Harbin Medical University, in northeastern China, experimented with arsenic trioxide as a follow-up agent. (Arsenic compounds were an active ingredient in an anticancer remedy popular among local healers.) It seemed that arsenic trioxide caused mature blood cells to commit suicide, a process called apoptosis. The resulting treatment was a one-two punch: ATRA triggered the leukemic cells to mature, whereupon they became vulnerable to the second drug, which destroyed them. Three decades ago, the remission rate for acute promyelocytic leukemia was forty per cent. Today, with the combination therapy, it is ninety-five per cent, and most of those patients are cured.

The effectiveness of ATRA was long viewed as an anomaly, but today researchers working on AG-221 and acute myelogenous leukemia often cite it as an inspiration. "A.M.L. is a disease that we all fear," Harold Varmus, who has followed the ATRA research for years, told me. "There were findings in

the laboratory suggesting that leukemia cells could differentiate, and it is gratifying to see this approach moving into the patient setting."

The critical question is how long the benefits of AG-221 will last. "The issue is durability," Martin Tallman, the chief of the Leukemia Service at the Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center and a professor at Weill Cornell Medical College, told me. "Some patients have been in remission for six to eight months. But, based on prior studies in acute leukemia, the concern is that these people may ultimately relapse." Tallman believes that the next step in treatment should involve combining AG-221 with a chemotherapy drug, as well as with other targeted inhibitors of gene mutations, or with bone-marrow transplantation.

One potential virtue of highly targeted drugs is that their side effects are far less severe than those of traditional chemotherapy drugs. "No major toxicity with AG-221 has been observed so far," Tallman said. "And it seems that, as you increase the dose, patients go into remission more quickly."

**I**n medical school, we were taught that although cancer comes in many forms, it has one immutable characteristic: it is composed of immature cells. The research on these blood cancers, however, suggests that this trait may be reversible after all, and that the cancer cells, when prompted to mature, become susceptible to therapies to which they would otherwise remain resistant.

Blood cancers are a fairly small subset of cancers as a whole. Recently, scientists working with solid tumors of the lung, ovaries, and pancreas have had success in forcing those cancer cells to mature into something like normalcy. These achievements have sprung from research not on metabolism but on stem cells. In the early nineteen-sixties, the Canadian biologists James Till and Ernest McCulloch showed that, in mice, all blood cells originate from primitive, undifferentiated cells in the bone marrow. These blood-forming stem cells are rare—perhaps one in a hundred thousand cells—and are unremarkable when seen under the microscope: small, bland, and round, offering no indication of their marvellous capacity to reconstitute the entirety of our blood system.

# What We Do

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Scientists have since shown that many of our body tissues also arise from specialized stem cells; there are neural stem cells in the brain, intestinal stem cells in the gut, and cardiac stem cells in the heart. Researchers are now investigating what triggers these cells to differentiate and develop into our various tissues, and to what extent those instructions can be manipulated.

In 1994, John Dick, now a professor at the Princess Margaret Cancer Center and at the University of Toronto, posited that cancer, too, might originate from its own particular stem cell. Dick's work was highly controversial, but subsequent researchers have reported evidence of stem cells in breast cancer, colon cancer, and melanoma, as well as in cancers of the prostate, the lung, and the pancreas. The definitions can be unclear. To some scientists, the leukemic cells in A.M.L. include cancer stem cells; to others, they are simply immature blood cells. And not everyone sees the same value in the research.

"I understand full well the attractiveness and the seduction of the cancer-stem-cell model," William Kaelin, a cancer biologist at Harvard's Dana-Farber Cancer Institute, told me. "But so far it hasn't made any predictions that I wouldn't have otherwise made. I think we already knew that cancers tended to coöpt stem-cell pathways that are important for normal stem cells. And I think we already knew that many genes that are involved with stem-cell biology were occasionally mutated in cancers."

Nonetheless, investors and drug companies have leaped at the notion of cancer stem cells. Robert Weinberg, a prominent cancer researcher at M.I.T., recently co-founded a company called Verastem, while Regeneron, an established biotech company, added cancer stem cells to its research portfolio. In 2004, scientists at the University of Michigan and the University of Texas joined the molecular biologist Larry Lasky and a lawyer, Robert Gavin, to start OncoMed, which is investing heavily in cancer-stem-cell research. The company has five drugs in early-phase clinical trials, under the direction of the oncologist Jakob Dupont; some six hundred million dollars in hand; and potential funding of more than five billion dollars, should its

# Who We Really Are\*

\*When We Think No One's Looking



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milestones be met, from pharmaceutical giants like Bayer, GlaxoSmithKline, and Celgene.

Whether or not cancer stem cells actually exist, the search for them has highlighted at least one useful insight, involving a mutation in a gene that plays a key role in prompting stem cells to mature. The mutation was discovered in 1917, by Thomas Hunt Morgan, an American biologist who revealed the importance of chromosomes in heredity. Much of Morgan's work was performed at Columbia University, where he studied mutations in *Drosophila melanogaster*, the common fruit fly. Morgan found that a certain gene, when mutated, produced a cleft in the fly's wing. The gene, called Notch, has turned out to be critical in the development of mammalian embryos, including humans, helping to make sure, for instance, that our blood vessels are patterned correctly. But when the gene is mutated it can become overly active and prevent the cell that contains it from reaching maturation.

In 2008, OncoMed began a clinical trial of an experimental drug. Like AG-221, it was designed for a distinct subset of patients, in this case those whose cancers carry a mutated form of the Notch gene. The drug effectively dampens the overactive gene, enabling cells to mature. One of the first patients was a woman with ovarian cancer; her tumors had metastasized and could not be cured by surgery, and she had undergone a dozen treatment regimens, including chemotherapy. All failed. But the anti-Notch drug stopped the cancer, after a fashion: her tumors did not shrink, which in oncology is the classical criterion for response, but neither did they grow. Her cancer seemed to have entered a kind of equilibrium, as if frozen or paralyzed. This arrest in its growth lasted for more than five hundred days. But the effects eventually waned, the cancer regrew, and she died of the malignancy.

So far, the trial has included fifty-five patients; more than a third of them have shown a similar response. Cancers of the pancreas, lung, and ovary have been paralyzed for a hundred days or more. Further research has found that targeting the Notch mutation in these three cancers can prompt the cells to

mature and more closely resemble normal tissue cells. I studied microscope images of some of those cancers. Before the anti-Notch therapy, the malignant cells of a pancreatic tumor were primitive and aggressive in appearance, with large nuclei, and multiplying profusely. After treatment, the changes were striking: the cancer cells resembled mature pancreatic tissue.

The Notch blocker "pushed the cells down the differentiation cascade," John Lewicki, the chief scientist at Onco-



Med, told me. "What we've largely observed in all our pre-clinical work to date is that when you block these pathways you largely get stable disease. To me, that's not surprising, because we're not necessarily killing cells." In recent clinical trials, the Notch blocker has been given to patients in conjunction with chemotherapy. "When you combine these agents, you change the stem cells' fate," Lewicki said. "You not only differentiate them but you make them much more susceptible to the impact of chemotherapy."

This spring, I spoke with Gerald Wildes, a sixty-seven-year-old former truck designer in Tennessee. In November of 2011, he developed pancreatic cancer and underwent surgery; he was also treated with radiation and chemotherapy. About a month later, the cancer showed up in his lungs. Wildes entered the Notch study in combination with chemotherapy.

"The way I understand it, this treatment is supposed to get to the intelligence of the tumor," Wildes said. "At the time, I was probably the first primate in Tennessee—something above a hog, anyway—to jump into the program." During his first fifteen months of treatment, he experienced no new growths of cancer, and the tumors in his lungs shrank slightly. Since then, the benefits have faded, but Wildes told me that he was grateful for the quality time he gained.

In October of last year, Usha Malik, a forty-six-year-old homemaker in New York City, learned that she had pancreatic cancer that had spread to her liver. Surgery was not an option. She saw Eileen O'Reilly, a pancreatic-cancer researcher at the Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center, and O'Reilly got her into the experimental trial.

"It was a tough decision," Malik told me. "I have a daughter who is twenty-two years old. My husband needs me and my daughter needs me." Malik received the anti-Notch drug along with standard chemotherapy. The treatment regimen gave her nausea and diarrhea and left her exhausted. But the tumors in her liver nearly disappeared, and the mass in her pancreas became markedly smaller. "I was back driving, trying to do everyday work," Malik said. The benefit was sustained for six months, until a CT scan revealed that one of her tumors had grown slightly.

O'Reilly noted that the survival rate for pancreatic-cancer patients like Malik, whose disease has spread to the liver, is typically no more than several months. "Pancreatic cancer is a disease where new approaches are keenly needed," O'Reilly said. "This experimental drug appears to get at, at least theoretically, one of the fundamental issues of cancer resistance to treatment." OncoMed is planning to test the Notch-blocking approach by comparing the results of treatment using a combination of standard chemotherapy and the Notch drug with the outcome of treatments based on standard chemotherapy alone.

Cancer does not have one fatal flaw. It advances along many paths, sometimes incrementally, often unpredictably, like the science arrayed against it. Nonetheless, these latest findings offer an unanticipated opportunity for scientists to reexamine what many of us took for granted: that cancer cells must be destroyed if the patient is to improve. These discoveries could enable researchers to target cancers that were previously beyond treatment. For patients, they offer evidence that it is possible to live longer, and better, with cancer—and they provide hope that scientists are advancing on a cure. ♦

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## CAUGHT IN THE ACT

*What drives Al Pacino?*

BY JOHN LAHIR

Nearly fifty years ago, when Al Pacino was at the start of his career, Marlon Brando gave him two pieces of advice: don't go to court and don't move to Los Angeles. At seventy-four, Pacino has managed to avoid the courts but not Beverly Hills, where he has taken up reluctant residence, for more than a decade, in order to share custody of his now thirteen-year-old twins, Anton and Olivia, with their mother, the actress Beverly D'Angelo. (Pacino, who has never married, also has a twenty-four-year-old daughter, Julie Marie, an aspiring writer and filmmaker.) Every half hour or so, an open-topped tour bus crawls its way along the wide, manicured boulevard where Pacino holes up for most of the year, with a cargo of rubbernecking out-of-towners, cameras at the ready. Inevitably, they stop in front of his rented house, which, like the actor, is elegantly disheveled. Green canvas has been woven through the bars of the long iron fence to hide the place from street level; low-hanging Indian laurel trees seal off any visible signs of life from above. Nonetheless, the buses stop, the guides burble, and the tourists crane for a sign of the actor or his children. On my second day with Pacino, I happened to be parked in front of his house as a tour bus rolled up. The guide leaned down. "You were here yesterday," he said. "You know Al?" I nodded. Above me, camera shutters clattered.

At that moment, Pacino was reclining in a deck chair at the far end of a wide lawn behind the house, doing business on a cell phone. Beyond him was a fenced-off swimming pool, and beyond that was what he calls "the bunker" (as in "I hunker in the bunker"), a drab beige outbuilding, where he sometimes goes to incubate his roles. Pacino was dressed for the bright day in his usual sombre getup: black jacket, shirt, slacks, and shoes, with a long gray cravat loosely knotted at the chest. He

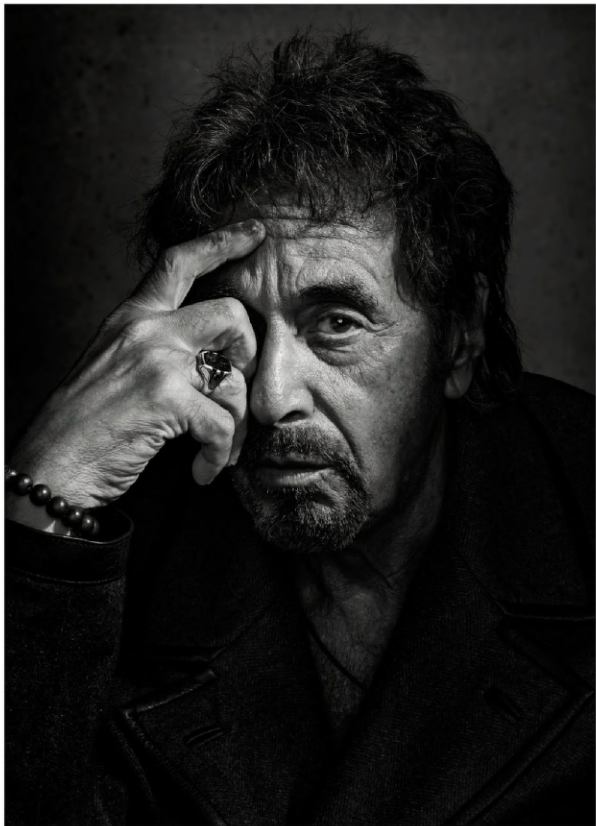
keeps a well-pressed assortment of these dark camouflage outfits on a wardrobe rack in the alcove off his living room, alongside his infrequently used barbells and a folded-up running machine. His comfortable house, with its absence of texture, is remarkable for its indifference to externals: no paintings, no designer furniture or fripperies. Pacino's focus, the house makes clear, is resolutely inward.

As an actor, Pacino has always been unafraid to do what he needs to in order to be in the moment; he trusts his instincts and explodes with whatever feelings come up. Performing, for him, is not so much a profession as a destiny. "This is what I'm meant to do," he told me. "It's the cog in my life. With this, everything suddenly coheres. And I understand myself in that way." Pacino has given complex shape to some of his era's most memorable creations: Michael Corleone, the college boy turned Mafioso, in "The Godfather" trilogy (1972-90); Frank Serpico, the police whistle-blower, in "Serpico" (1973); Tony Montana, the Cuban drug lord, in "Scarface" (1983); the hapless thief Teach, in "American Buffalo" (1983); Tony Wortzik, the would-be bank robber, in "Dog Day Afternoon" (1975); the gangster Big Boy Caprice, in "Dick Tracy" (1990); Ricky Roma, the smooth-talking salesman, in "Glen-garry Glen Ross" (1992); and Roy Cohn, the closeted lawyer, in the HBO version of Tony Kushner's "Angels in America" (2003)—to name just a few of the more than a hundred roles he has taken onscreen and onstage. In recent years, he has painted brilliant, eerie film portraits of such obsessives as the euthanasia activist Jack Kevorkian, in Barry Levinson's HBO movie "You Don't Know Jack," and the eponymous swami of rock and roll, in David Mamer's HBO film "Phil Spector." Pacino regrets that many of his Hollywood

movies of the past decade ("Righteous Kill," "The Son of No One," "88 Minutes," "Jack and Jill") have been business chores, taken on for primarily financial reasons. "If you don't have that alacrity of spirit, then you have to check yourself—because where's the pony in all this horseshit?" he said. "I worked for United Parcels once, and I don't want to have that feeling with my own craft—that it's just a job."

Because of the protean nature of his attack, Pacino has often been compared to Brando, another truth-seeking force of nature. When Pacino was thirteen and performing in a school play, an adaptation of "Home Sweet Homicide," he already identified so strongly with his role that when his character was supposed to get sick onstage he became nauseated. ("Somebody came up and said to my mother, 'Here's the next Brando.' I said, 'Who's Brando?'" Pacino recalled.) But between Brando and Pacino there is this crucial difference: Brando, who, over time, became reclusive and indifferent to acting, disappeared into his gift; Pacino has survived his—and is still working to refine it. "I believe I have not reached my stride, which is why I persist," he told me in an e-mail. "The day I turn to you and say, 'John, what I just did in this role was a real winner, I hope you'll have the courage and decency to throw a wreath around my head, and then so very quietly and compassionately shoot me.'"

Pacino has three films awaiting release in the next year: Barry Levinson's "The Humbling," in which he plays an aging actor who has lost his magic; David Gordon Green's "Manglehorn," a film about an eccentric small-town locksmith; and Dan Fogelman's "Danny Collins," an amiable redemptive fable about a slick pop star who wants to turn his art and his lush life around. At seventy-four, Pacino sometimes asks himself, "When am I just gonna sit back



*"This is what I'm meant to do," Pacino says of acting. "With this, everything suddenly coheres, and I understand myself."*



*"It's the Singularity—the machines are taking over!"*

and smell the golf balls?" But, with two new movies waiting in the wings (Martin Scorsese's "The Irishman," about the man who supposedly killed Jimmy Hoffa, and a Brian De Palma biopic about Joe Paterno), and a David Mamet play, "China Doll," in the works for Broadway in 2015, the answer is not soon.

Most of Pacino's house has been ceded to his kids. The den is a sort of Camp Pacino, overflowing with toys: a pinball machine, a drum kit, electric guitars, dolls, a mound of games, balls, rackets, and swimming gear crammed into baskets against the back wall. A low table holds a sprawling Lego construction in progress. Outside, a punching bag hangs incongruously beside the patio barbecue. (It's there for Pacino's son; when I asked Pacino if he used it, he said, "Like Oscar Wilde, whenever I get the urge to exercise I lie down until it passes.") Pacino usually spends weekends with the twins, because "their mother knows I'm a slacker at the homework."

At one point, Olivia came in to ask a favor:

OLIVIA: Daddy, I really want to see the boy next door. He usually comes over by the weekend.

PACINO: Does he really? But I don't even know what his name is. What's his name?

OLIVIA: I forgot. It's been so long since I've seen him.

PACINO: Do you want to go over and say—What do you want me to do? Me? I'm the—What am I, the go-between?

OLIVIA: No. Just see if Jared [Pacino's weekend assistant] can call.

PACINO: But Jared's not here. He could do it tomorrow, when he comes in. Do you want Mike [Pacino's regular assistant] to do it now? Mike will do it.

OLIVIA: I don't think Mike knows anybody there.

PACINO: Jared knows someone there? Ask Mike if he could just find out.

Pacino's father left him and his mother when he was two, and he carries the shadow of that abandonment with him. "It's the missing link, so to speak," he said. "Having children has helped a lot. I consciously knew that I didn't want to be like my dad. I wanted to be there. I have three children. I'm responsible to them. I'm a part of their life. When I'm not, it's upsetting to me and to them. So that's part of the gestalt. And I get a lot from it. It takes you out of yourself. When I do a movie, and I come back, I'm stunned for the first twenty minutes. These people are asking me to do things for them? Huh? I'm not being waited on? Wait a minute. Uh-oh, it's about them! That action satisfies. I like it."

He pointed out a watercolor beside the fireplace. "My son painted this when he was four. 'New York in the Fall,'" he said, then steered me back into the living room and deposited me on a sofa to watch "Wilde Salomé," a docudrama he directed, starred in, and largely bankrolled, which premieres this month. The film represents Pacino's eight-year attempt to "inhale" Oscar Wilde by chronicling the mounting of a 2006 Los Angeles production of Wilde's 1891 tragedy, in which he was Herod to Jessica Chastain's Salomé. ("Wilde Salomé" will be released in tandem with a film of the play itself.) Pacino first encountered "Salomé" in London in 1989, without realizing that it was written by Wilde. "Who wrote this? I'd like to know this person," he recalled thinking. "I just felt a connection. A kindred spirit. I think it was a mischievousness, a subversiveness." Pacino relates to Wilde as an outsider. "I feel like an outsider who got on the inside, so I'm inside out, if you know what I mean. Or outside in," he said.

Like "Looking for Richard," Pacino's 1996 movie about Shakespeare's "Richard III," "Wilde Salomé" is a dramatic mosaic that jumps from historical facts to performance to interview to enactment. Pacino is the director yelling at the crew to hurry up; he's the lubricious Herod eying his gorgeous daughter; he's the interviewer prodding Tom Stoppard, Tony Kushner, Gore Vidal, and Bono to talk about Wilde; he's the professor offering tidbits of Wildeana; and he's the anthropologist trudging through the desert with kaffiyeh and camel. At one point, Pacino, with a carnation and a floppy handkerchief in his jacket pocket, even pops up as Wilde himself.

Part of Pacino's fervor for Wilde comes from a desire to claim the writer's intelligence and eloquence. "I'm quite timid when it comes to challenging the status quo," he said. "Oscar had the brains to back it up." Pacino, whose formal education ended in tenth grade, grappled for years with a sense of intellectual inadequacy. Early in his career, after a breakthrough performance in Israel Horowitz's 1968 play "The Indian Wants the Bronx," Pacino appeared on "The Merv Griffin Show," and, in front of a television audience of millions, he froze. "He just couldn't do it," Horowitz

recalled. "He felt he had nothing to say. He was humiliated by his own presence. He wasn't the character he was playing—he was Al." Pacino's devotion to acting is, in a way, a defense against that self-doubt. Having a script to work from gives him, he said, a kind of license. "I can talk, I can speak, I have something to say," he explained. "You don't need a college education. All the things that you were inhibited to talk about and understand—they can come out in the play. The language of great writing frees you of yourself."

Most actors of Pacino's stature—Brando, Jack Lemmon, Dustin Hoffman, Robert De Niro—began in the theatre and rarely returned. Pacino, however, craves the derring-do of working in front of a live audience, an activity he compares to tightrope walking. Stage acting, he likes to say, quoting the aerialist Karl Wallenda, is life "on the wire—the rest is just waiting." Onstage, in the zone, he told me, "you're up in the sky with the theatre gods—love it, love it, love it." As a list of some of Pacino's more esoteric stage work demonstrates—Eugene O'Neill's "Hughie," Bertolt Brecht's "The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui," Shakespeare's "Richard III" and "The Merchant of Venice"—the theatre is where he goes to challenge himself and to think. "There are more demands put on you when it is on the stage," he said.

To Pacino, there is no such thing as a fourth wall. "The audience is another character in the play," he said. "They become part of the event. If they sneeze or talk back to the stage, you make it part of what you're doing." Once, when he was performing "The Basic Training of Pavlo Hummel," the first play in David Rabe's Vietnam trilogy, in Boston, in 1972, Pacino made a strong connection with a pair of penetrating eyes in the audience. "I remember feeling a focus I never experienced before—intense, so riveting that I directed my performance to that space," he said. "I found at curtain call for the first time that I needed to find out who belonged to those eyes. So, as we were bowing, I looked over to the space where I believed the look was coming from and there it was, two seeing-eye dogs still looking at me. They must have found the curtain call as engaging as the performance."

Acting, according to Pacino, is about "getting into a state that brings about freedom and expression and the unconscious." Mamet compares Pacino's excavations of his characters to the way Louis Armstrong played jazz: "He's incapable of doing it the same way twice." While Pacino was shooting his last scene for the movie "Devil's Advocate" (1997), in which he played Satan, for instance, he suddenly broke off from the script to launch into a rendition of "It Happened in Monterey." "It's just absolutely out there, surreal and brilliant," the actress Helen Mirren, whose husband, Taylor Hackford, directed the film, said. In the final movie, Pacino lip-synchs to Frank Sinatra's version of the song; according to Mirren, the studio had to pay "a huge sum for the rights, but it was worth it."

Pacino sometimes develops his characters by observing others. When he was working on his performance in "The Indian Wants the Bronx," he would walk for hours with Horowitz. "What he was doing was finding a character in life," Horowitz told me. "He'd spot a guy on the street and go, 'Wait, wait, wait! We'd follow the person for hours, just to observe the walk, the posture. And the costume was important, too. He had to find the costume, rehearse in the costume, live in the costume.'"

"Some actors play characters. Al Pacino becomes them," Lee Strasberg, the longtime director of the Actors Studio,

said. "He assumes their identity so completely that he continues to live a role long after a play or movie is over." Once, when Pacino was playing Richard III in Boston, Jacqueline Kennedy came backstage to greet him. "I didn't even get up," he said. "I was so into it that night that I continued to be the King. I can almost not forgive myself for that."

When preparing for a role, Pacino has a tendency to circle the airport before arriving at his destination. "I'm a slow learner," he said. "I don't believe in memorizing lines. That's not how I come upon a role. My thing is eventually coming to the words, making the words part of you, so that they're an extension of your emotional state." Pacino's "nibbling away at a character," according to Barry Levinson, is a subtle process. After the first few readings of the script for "You Don't Know Jack," Levinson recalls wondering "when Kevorkian will show up." "I remember we were in wardrobe. Al had his hair done, and his suit. We were talking and, all of a sudden, I could sense that Kevorkian was coming alive," he said, adding, "Once he latches on, then he's off to the races." At the finale of "You Don't Know Jack," after Kevorkian has unsuccessfully defended himself in court, the judge looks at him and asks if he wants to take the stand. Pacino doesn't answer at first. "It takes literally a minute," Levinson said. "He's trying to decide if the defense rests. It's a brilliant moment. No words—it's a look, a



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glance, small things that really inform the character."

Over the years, there have been rumblings about Pacino's overacting. He can certainly roar; he can pound the furniture; he can go big with the facial expressions; he has made some dud movies. But the drama, for Pacino, is almost always inherent in the character he's hoping to convey. His portrayal of the blind Lieutenant Colonel Frank Slade in "Scent of a Woman" (1992), for instance, was considered hammy by some, but, in Pacino's thinking, the character was a lunatic—a suicidal, narcissistic man who drew attention to himself through his affectation of swagger—and he played him that way. "I paint the way I see it, and some of the colors are a little broader and a little bolder than others," he said, adding, "Sometimes you take it to the limit, sometimes you may go a little overboard, but that's all part of a vision. I say, go with the flow. If an effort is being made to produce something that has appetite and passion and isn't done just to get the golden cup, it isn't a fucking waste. Yes, there are flaws, but in them are things you'll remember."

Pacino protects his talent by leaving it alone, which accounts for his vaunted moodiness. "There are various superstitions connected with reaching his center, and he doesn't want to discuss them ever," Mike Nichols, who directed Pacino in "Angels in America," said. "He's consulting somewhere else. And the somewhere else does not have to do with words." Pacino almost never talks shop. When he was at the Actors Studio, in the late sixties, whenever Strasberg gave him notes, he said, "I would actually count numbers in my head not to hear what he was saying. I didn't want to know. I thought it would fuck up what I was doing, where I was going with my own ideas."

Even Pacino's speech patterns, which forge a kind of evasive switchback trail up a mountain of thought, serve as a defense against too much parsing of his interior. "Al is dedicated, passionately, to inarticulateness," Nichols said, pointing out that in conversation Pacino has no "chitchat." Playing dead in social situations is his instinctive strategy. "He was so sensitive that he was insensitive to his surroundings," Diane Keaton, with whom Pacino had an on-again-off-

again relationship in the seventies and eighties, wrote in her memoir "Then Again." "Sometimes I swear Al must have been raised by wolves. There were normal things he had no acquaintance with, like the whole idea of enjoying a meal in the company of others. He was more at home eating alone standing up. He did not relate to tables or the conversations people had at them."

Pacino refers to acting as "close to magic." To invoke that spell, he observes many rituals, which sometimes include shaking hands with everyone on a film set before shooting a scene, and heading off for a walk before going onstage. "The calm before the storm—only sometimes the calm becomes the storm," he explained. In 2012, when he was appearing in Mamet's "Glengarry Glen Ross" on Broadway, Pacino was skulking around midtown in a hooded coat when a parking attendant accosted him. "You! Get out! What are you doing here?" Pacino recalled him shouting. He added, "Oh, it felt so good."

While working on his first production of "Richard III," in 1973, at the Church of the Covenant, in Boston, Pacino and his assistant developed a pre-show routine for launching him into the role of the anarchic, manipulative "lump of foul deformity" who would be king. Pacino's dressing room was the church rectory. "She'd peek through the door and say, 'Half hour,' then, 'Fifteen minutes.' She'd come back again and say, 'Five minutes.' I would say, 'Fuck off,' each time," Pacino told me. "She'd say, 'The audience is out there waiting for you.' And I'd say, 'Fuck off!' She'd say, 'I'm coming to get you.' She'd grab at me, and she'd throw me out of the dressing room. I guess it was the right spirit, because it worked. They called me out six times after I bowed." After the show, he added, "I would bawl my eyes out. I roused so many things in myself."

Pacino's allegiance to the stage, his compulsion to connect with a live audience, is due, perhaps, to a need to re-create his relationship with the person he calls his first and "indeed my best audience," his mother, Rose. To be seen and to be accepted was the promise behind his early performances. The theatrical interaction gives him, he said, "a sense of being at home, together again."

Pacino's father, Salvatore, was eighteen when Alfredo was born, in East Harlem, in 1940, and twenty when he left. He paid a few memorable visits, twice going to see his son perform in high-school plays, but Pacino saw very little of him, even after he had become a star. By then, Salvatore, who married five times and for decades worked as an insurance salesman for Metropolitan Life, owned Pacino's Lounge, a restaurant and bar in Covina, California, where he frequently joined the band to sing, play the maracas, and shake his booty. "When a friend met my dad, he looked at him and said, 'There it is with you, Al. I see it. The survivor,'" Pacino said. "I got that from my dad."

Rose, according to Pacino, was a reader who had "a sensitivity and a connection to the theatre." She took Pacino to see Tennessee Williams's "Cat on a Hot Tin Roof" on Broadway. She was playful, with a good sense of humor, but also volatile and reclusive. She often refused to leave her room when company came over. "She reminded me of a Tennessee Williams character. She would have been a really good Laura, also a good Amanda. She had both," Pacino said, referring to Williams's play "The Glass Menagerie." In other words, she was a troubled, fragile, controlling, somewhat hysterical soul, who fought a losing battle against her own desperation. Despite the family's meagre income, Rose scraped together enough to pay for visits to a psychiatrist. To treat her chronic depression, she resorted to electric-shock therapy. Eventually, she became addicted to barbiturates, which may have been the cause of her death, at forty-three, in 1962. The stain of her possible suicide hangs over Pacino's memory of Rose. "Poverty took her down," he said. "Not long before she died, Pacino recalls rushing to a casting session for Elia Kazan's "America America." "I had one of the few fantasies I've ever had in my life," he said. "I would do well, my mother would be O.K. with it all, and I could say, 'Mom, we got it. We're gonna make some money. It's gonna be O.K.'" As it happened, Pacino arrived late and missed the audition.

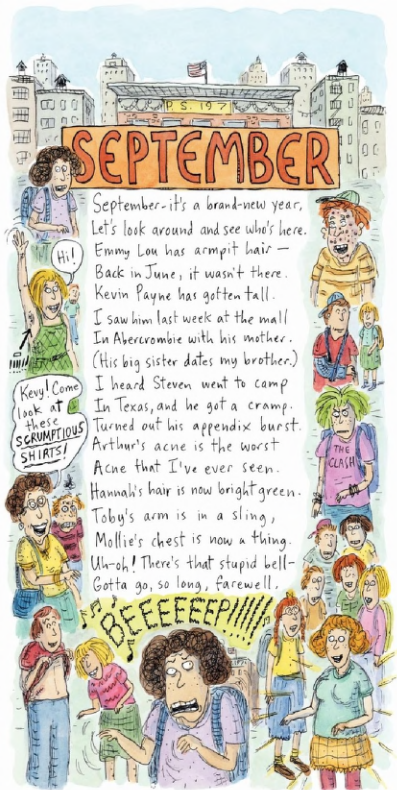
After Salvatore left, Rose and Sonny (as Pacino was known throughout his childhood) moved in with her

parents, James Gerardi, a plasterer who was an illegal immigrant from Corleone, Sicily, and his wife, Kate. In their cramped three-room apartment in the South Bronx, which sometimes housed as many as seven people, Pacino never had a space of his own. ("I remember years of sleeping between my grandmother and grandfather," he said.) At the same time, he was an only child, often left to his own devices. "I was always sort of building stories, creating stories," he said. "It was a way of filling up the loneliness."

Storytelling ran in the family. In warm weather, Pacino's grandfather, with whom Pacino had what he calls "one of the great relationships of my life," would sit with him on the tar roof of their tenement and spin tales about his rough Dickensian youth in turn-of-the-century New York. "He got the shit kicked out of him by cops with helmets and big clubs—"You little wop! Get over here, you stinking Guinea!" Pacino said. "He'd talk about running away from home, living off the farms, how he would steal milk. He just loved talking to me, like we were on some little row-boat." The roof, Pacino added, "was our terrace. There was this cacophony of sound—the Poles, the Jews, the Irish, the German, the Spanish. This definitive melting pot is what I came from. In some Eugene O'Neill plays, you hear the same thing."

Among many odd jobs, Rose worked as a cinema usherette, and when Pacino was three or four she began to take him to the movies. "The next day, I would act out all the parts," he said. "I think that's how it started." Pacino was often coaxed into performing scenes for his extended family, which included a deaf aunt. His party piece was an imitation of Ray Milland in "The Lost Weekend," playing an alcoholic writer desperate for a drink. Pacino would open cupboards and doors, pretending to search for a hidden stash of booze. "I never understood why they were laughing, because I didn't think it was funny," he said. "But I knew it produced laughs."

On Bryant Avenue in the forties and fifties, people escaped their small, hot apartments to sit on stoops or hang out under street lamps to roll dice or play poker. To disarm bullies and find friends, Pacino used the same strategy on the



September—it's a brand-new year, let's look around and see who's here. Emmy Lou has armpit hair — Back in June, it wasn't there. Kevin Payne has gotten tall. I saw him last week at the mall In Abercrombie with his mother. (His big sister dates my brother.) I heard Steven went to camp In Texas, and he got a cramp. Turned out his appendix burst. Arthur's acne is the worst Acne that I've ever seen. Hannah's hair is now bright green. Toby's arm is in a sling, Mollie's chest is now a thing. Uh-oh! There's that stupid bell—Gotta go, so long, farewell.

street that he'd used at home: he performed and enlisted others to perform with him, earning the nickname "the Actor." "We'd act out parts from joke books and comic books," he told me. "Kids make videos today, but it was kind of an unusual thing then to get street urchins to join you in acting out comics. Of course, it never got off the ground; there's a comedy in there somewhere." "He was always full of drama," said his neighbor Ken Lipper, who would later become the deputy mayor of New York and a producer and screenwriter of "City Hall" (1996), in which Pacino starred. "He loved to take on different personas. He used to go to 174th Street and pretend he was a blind child." Pacino's bravado and good looks got him noticed. "The girls in the neighborhood would say, 'Sonny Pacino, the lover bambino.' The boys would say, 'Sonny Pacino, the bastard bambino,'" Pacino told me. "It started early."

Pacino was smoking at nine, chewing tobacco at ten, and drinking hard liquor at thirteen. He walked the edges of rooftops and jumped between tenement buildings. His favorite place was "the Dutchies," a swampy labyrinth on the Bronx River, where truant kids hid in high marsh grasses. Pacino played third base for the Police Athletic League team, the Red Wings, which became a "quasi street gang," with Al as its de-facto leader. In black wool jackets with a red stripe down the sleeve, the Red Wings patrolled their turf and protected it from roaming invaders, like the Young Sinners and the Fordham Baldies. Once, when they were twelve and sitting on the steps of a tenement after finishing a game of stickball, Lipper said, "some guy came over who was thirtyish and started menacing us. Al got up and whacked him with the stick." Pacino's wild crew, "tough kids with high IQs and tragic endings," became a template on which he modeled many of his memorable characters. "These people were a springboard for my profession," he said. "They were part of what I consider the best time in my life."

Pacino was less popular with the authority figures around him. "I wasn't out of control, but I was close," he said. "My mother had to come to school to talk to the teachers. Their conclusion? That I

needed a dad." When Pacino's junior-high-school drama teacher, Blanche Rothstein, climbed the five flights of stairs to talk to his grandmother about his acting skills, it was, he said, "the first time I ever had encouragement." He went on, "The world we came from, the encouragement just wasn't there. We weren't seen. Or we weren't regarded. Do you think ever, once in my life, my mother or any adult ever said, 'How was school today?' Never! It was unheard



of." Nonetheless, Ms. Rothstein spotted a spark when Pacino read Bible passages in school assembly—"I didn't know what I was talking about, but I felt it," he said—and she cast him in school plays. Thanks to his talent, at the end of junior high Pacino was voted "most likely to succeed."

Pacino was accepted into Manhattan's High School of Performing Arts, which meant that his South Bronx street life was more or less a thing of the past. "All that remained was acting," he said. His stay at the school, however, was a short one. "You gotta be kidding," he told his Spanish teacher, when he discovered that the class was conducted entirely in Spanish. And he found the Stanislavsky method boring. "What does a kid who was thirteen, fourteen know about Stanislavsky?" he said. "All I knew was you sing, you dance, you have fun, you imitate. Now I was looking at my navel twenty-four-seven. It took me I don't know how many years to get over that." By his own admission, Pacino was that "dunderhead" at academic work, and by the time he dropped out of school, at sixteen, to support his mother, he was ready to go. Rose, who had at first approved of his ambition, now saw it as foolhardy. "Acting isn't for our kind of people," she told him. "Poor people don't go into this." Pacino said, "I didn't know what she was talking about. On an unconscious level I did, but it didn't mean anything to me. I'm a survivor. Survivors only hear what they want to hear."

Between odd jobs, Pacino attended auditions, where he soon learned that, as an Italian-American of a certain class and demeanor, he didn't "look right" for most parts. His instinct was to bide his time. "I knew, when the opportunity came, all I'd have to do is be there," he said. But his mother's death, when he was twenty-one, sent him into a tail-spin. Within a year, his grandfather, too, was dead. Pacino had buried the two people to whom he was closest. "And I had no father," he said. "I think that was my darkest period. I felt lost."

On Pacino's living-room mantelpiece is a small moody photograph of him in profile in his early twenties, in an Off-Off Broadway production of August Strindberg's play "Creditors." The image marks the seminal moment, he said, "when I knew that nothing mattered except that I became at one with the play." "Creditors," a tragicomedy about a credulous young artist whose mind is poisoned against his wife by her bilious ex-husband, was directed by Charlie Laughton, an actor turned acting teacher at the Herbert Berghof Studio, whom Pacino first met in a Village bar when he was seventeen. Laughton, who'd also had a hardscrabble early life, recognized both Pacino's talent and his difficult circumstances. Over time, he became Pacino's mentor, his sidekick, his drinking buddy, his dramaturge, and, ultimately, his business partner. Laughton also introduced the teen-age Pacino to the works of Joyce and Rimbaud. "He would read them, and then I would read them myself," Pacino told me. In those knock-about years, he added, "I dealt with whatever was bothering me through reading. You could not find me without a book."

Still, in the early days of rehearsing "Creditors" Pacino, surrounded by classically trained actors, panicked and wanted to quit the show. Laughton sat him down and went through the script with him until he fully understood what was going on. Pacino had been spooked in that way before, in his Off-Off Broadway debut, in a production of William Saroyan's "Hello Out There," which grew out of Laughton's classes. Pacino's first line got a laugh, but he didn't understand the joke. In the alley,

during intermission, he burst into tears and didn't want to continue. Laughton talked him through it. "It was a very important moment for me," Pacino recalled. "I went back in there and finished the run."

Laughton, who was for years wheelchair-bound with multiple sclerosis and who died in 2013, at the age of eighty-four, remained an emotional bulwark for Pacino until the end. Pacino visited him in his last days, at a hospital in Santa Monica, and they got to talking about the time that Pacino was taking Laughton's class at the Berghof Studio and performed a scene from Reginald Rose's "Crime in the Streets" in front of Berghof and the rest of the school. After he finished, he said, "Berghof got up there and started to put me down. He started screaming at me, 'How dare you!' He was absolutely flipping out." Pacino asked Laughton, "What was going on?" "A new era," Laughton said. "He saw a new era."

On January 17, 1967, for his first scene at the Actors Studio, Pacino presented a monologue from Eugene O'Neill's "The Iceman Cometh," which morphed into a soliloquy from "Hamlet." It was risky, but, as Pacino said, "It's a risk *not* to take risks." Breaking a long-standing Studio tradition, the audience of actors applauded his performance. Lee Strasberg then asked Pacino to play O'Neill's character, Hickey, as Hamlet, and Hamlet as Hickey. Afterward, he addressed Pacino. "The courage you have shown today is rarer than talent," he said. Pacino had broken through. "I was now an actor," he said. "I had an identity."

He spent much of the next year in Boston doing plays (Clifford Odets's "Awake and Sing," Jean-Claude van Itallie's "America, Hurrah"), in which, he said, "I played notes that fell flat and I didn't connect." But when Israel Horowitz delivered his one-act "The Indian Wants the Bronx" to Pacino, in a messy basement room in a building on West Sixty-eighth Street, where he was earning fourteen dollars a week as a superintendent, Pacino found the perfect vehicle—a script about two taunting teen-age louts in the Bronx who take out their frustrations on an Indian man at a bus stop.

Over the next months, Pacino and Horowitz performed the play in and out of town to raise interest in a production. But when a producer was eventually found she had her own ideas about casting. "On audition day, she brought in the actor she wanted: blond, blue-eyed, tall, untalented," Horowitz wrote in a memoir. "I said no, absolutely no. She said, fine, O.K., she wouldn't produce the play. I said, 'Let both actors audition.'" Pacino was furious with Horowitz for putting him in this position; since he didn't belong to Actors' Equity, he was forced to attend an open call. "It seemed like every young, non-union actor in New York City showed up that day," Horowitz recalled. When it was Pacino's turn, he came out singing, then crossed to downstage center and looked directly at the producer:

Hey, Pussycat, can you hear us?  
Can you hear your babies singing' to ya?

"Startled and terrified," according to Horowitz, she agreed to cast Pacino.

"The Indian Wants the Bronx" opened at the Astor Place Theatre, on January 17, 1968. Of all the debuts I attended in more than fifty years as a theatre critic, Pacino's was the most sensational: immediate, arresting, and inex-

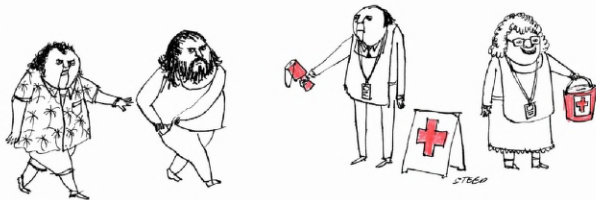
pliable. "I saw an actor up there with a shaking jaw, who was on the verge of tears," Horowitz recalled. "The circumstance of the play was bringing him to a deep place of pain. And the audience connected to this terrible sense of humiliation, of unworthiness." Pacino won an Obie for Best Actor, and a Tony the following year, for his performance in Don Petersen's "Does a Tiger Wear a Necktie?"

All I could see was Al Pacino's face in that camera. I couldn't get him out of my head," said Francis Ford Coppola, who nearly got fired from "The Godfather" (1972) for insisting that Pacino play Michael Corleone, the educated youngest son of Don Corleone, the Mafia kingpin. The studio lobbied for such bright box-office names as Robert Redford, Warren Beatty, Jack Nicholson, and Ryan O'Neal. But Mario Puzo, who wrote "The Godfather" and adapted it for the screen, came to Coppola's defense and gave him a letter to be used at his discretion. "Above all, Pacino had to be in the film," he said.

On the day of his first screen test, however, Pacino was hung over; he didn't know his lines, and he ad-libbed the



"Hey, you forgot the GoPro."



*"Don't—they'll just spend it on drugs."*

scene. Puzo felt that Pacino "was terrible. Jimmy Caan had done it ten times better." Puzo went over to Coppola. "Give me my letter back," he said. "Wait a while," Coppola said. Pacino tested three times for the role. The back-and-forth agitated him to such a degree that he finally refused to take Coppola's calls and made the actress Jill Clayburgh, his girlfriend at the time, speak for him. "Francis, you're making him crazy. He doesn't want to be where he's not wanted," Pacino recalls her saying.

When Pacino was finally offered the part, he almost couldn't take it. A few months earlier, he'd signed on for an adaptation of the Jimmy Breslin book "The Gang That Couldn't Shoot Straight," and M-G-M and the producer, Irwin Winkler, refused to release him. Winkler and Horowitz were sharing a house on Fire Island, and Pacino begged the playwright to intercede on his behalf. "This was the door opening, and they wouldn't let him out of his contract," Horowitz recalled. "I went crazy with Irwin, and he said, 'You find me a young Italian actor that's as good as Pacino, and I'll let him out.'" Horowitz took Winkler to see a performance by a young unknown named Robert De Niro. "He took De Niro, and he got two options on Pacino and two on De Niro," Horowitz said.

After Pacino got the "Godfather" role (for which he was paid a flat fee of thirty-five thousand dollars), he walked from his apartment, on Ninetieth Street and Broadway, to the Village and back,

thinking about how he'd play it. "I didn't see Michael as a gangster," he said. "I saw his struggle as something that was connected to his intelligence, that innate sense of what's around and being able to adjust to things." He added, "The power of the character was in his enigmatic quality. And I thought, Well, how do you get to that? I think you wear it inside yourself, and you find a way to avoid, as much as you can, the obvious." However, after his first week of avoiding the obvious, according to Pacino, "they wanted me fired—they didn't see what I was doing. Luckily for me, the Sollozzo scene"—in which Michael earns his Mafia spurs by executing two men in a Bronx restaurant—"was the next day. When they saw that scene, they kept me."

Pacino's performance in "The Godfather" put him at the center of one of the great cinematic sagas of the century and on a first-name basis with the world. He was showered with accolades and offers. (Coppola asked him to star in "Apocalypse Now," but he declined. "You know, sometimes you look into the abyss?" Pacino said. "I'm, like, this is the abyss. I'm not gonna go there.") He also turned down "Star Wars," "Die Hard," and "Pretty Woman.") But perhaps the most satisfying response came from Puzo, who wrote, "It was, in my eyes, a perfect performance, a work of art. I was so happy . . . I ate crow like it was my favorite Chinese food."

Pacino's other great early successes—"Serpico," "The Godfather, Part II," and

"Dog Day Afternoon"—only added to his momentum. But, of all his performances in those years, the sleeper was his embodiment of the garish, vulgar, sensationally violent Tony Montana, an impoverished Cuban refugee who becomes the most powerful drug trafficker in Miami, in "Scarface." The role was dismissed as "macho primitivism" at the time, but, over the years, it has emerged as a challenger to Michael Corleone as Pacino's most popular creation. The director, Brian De Palma, designed "Scarface" as a kind of hyperbolic pageant. "The picture had a fire to it," Pacino said, in "Al Pacino: In Conversation with Lawrence Grobel." "The violence blown up, the language blown up. The spirit of it was Brechtian, operatic." To play Montana, Pacino drew inspiration from the swagger of the Panamanian boxer Roberto Duran and from Meryl Streep's committed rendering of the traumatized Polish immigrant Sophie, in "Sophie's Choice." As an actor, Pacino said, "you're always looking for that thing that's going on besides the words." In "Scarface," he connected with Montana's raging ambition and the rebelliousness in his epigrammatic lines: "All I have in the world is my balls and my word, and I don't break them for no one"; "You know what capitalism is? Getting fucked!"; "You wanna play rough? O.K. Say hello to my little friend!"

In the twenty years following the release of "The Godfather," Pacino made seventeen films and was nominated for an Academy Award six times. (He

finally received one, in 1993, for his performance in "Scent of a Woman.") But he was discombobulated by the distractions of his success. "I felt like the fighter that was in Round 8, exhausted in the corner, they're pouring water over my head and rubbing Vaseline on my face, then *ding* went the bell, and I was back out there in another film," he recalled. "It was a whirlwind." Pacino disappeared into work, and, after hours, into a bottle. "I don't remember much of the seventies," he said. "All that stuff—the explosiveness of my life change. It would be almost fair to say I wasn't really there. It was too much for anyone to handle." Eventually, Laughton called Pacino on his alcohol abuse, which had been a constant since he was a teen-ager. He stopped drinking in 1977.

During his first year of sobriety, a time of great stress, Pacino made "Bobby Deerfield," a plodding Sydney Pollack melodrama, in which he played a celebrity race-car driver, who hides his vulnerability behind sunglasses and a carapace of toughness. His next movie, "Cruising" (1980), William Friedkin's thriller about a serial killer who targets gay men—which sparked protests in the gay community—was "a terrible experience" for Pacino as well as for the critics. "Author! Author!" (1982), which was written by Horowitz, was also a bust. "Scarface" came out to mixed reviews, and was followed by "Revolution" (1985), in which Pacino played a Scottish fur trapper with a Bronx accent, who gets embroiled in the Revolutionary War. "Revolution" was proof, if more was needed, that on the Hollywood merry-go-round Pacino had lost track of who he was. The movie cost twenty-eight million dollars to make and grossed less than \$360,000. It was one disaster too many.

In a radical move, at the height of his celebrity, Pacino called a halt to movie-making and moved to Snedens Landing, in Palisades, New York, with Diane Keaton. There he settled, he said, "into something that was wonderful with Diane and my life. I didn't feel rushed or that I had to put out. I felt relatively content." The stoppage was a crucial emotional recalibration. "It is the very nature of fame that the light is on you a lot," he said. "I sort of wanted to turn the light out of my face, so I could see."

Pacino's return to New York was also a return to theatre. He appeared in Dennis McIntyre's "National Anthem" at the Long Wharf Theatre, in New Haven. He played Mark Antony, in a disastrous "Julius Caesar" at the Public, a role he could never find his way into. But his main creative focus was on "The Local Stigmatic," a little-known 1969 one-act by Heathcote Williams, about two British ne'er-do-wells who grievously harm a famous actor whose success enrages them. Pacino produced and starred in a fascinating film version of the play. "I took almost a year to edit this fifty-two-minute play," he said. "I had no one wanting it to work or not work. It was under my control. I was free." (The film was never released theatrically but was included in the DVD boxed set "Pacino: An Actor's Vision.")

Although Pacino remembers this time as "probably the best period" of his adult life—"It was as close to egoless as I've ever been"—four years into his self-imposed exile from Hollywood he was running out of money and Keaton was running out of patience. One day, according to Pacino, she read him the riot act. "What do you think you're doing?" he remembers her saying. "Do you think you're gonna go back and live in a rooming house again? You've been rich too long, buddy. You can't go back. You think you're on the A-list, but you're not. You're out because you put yourself out. You've got to go back to work." Keaton added, "This script. This is your thing. This is what you've got to do." She handed him Richard Price's screenplay for "Sea of Love." "It was so sweet of her," Pacino said. "It was so giving, so caring. I have to say, she is right."

"Sea of Love" (1989), the story of a cop in a midlife crisis who falls for a woman who may be the killer he's pursuing, made a star of Ellen Barkin and restored Pacino's box-office clout. In the next five years, he made "Dick Tracy," "The Godfather, Part III," "Frankie and Johnny," "Glengarry Glen Ross," "Scent of a Woman," "Carlito's Way," and "Heat."

As Pacino paced his living room, a tall, striking woman with long auburn hair swept in, draped an arm over his shoulders, and pulled him to her, like a swan taking a cygnet under its

wing. Lucila Sola, a thirty-five-year-old Argentinean actress, spoke in Latin-inflected English. "I am his longest relationship—seven years," she said, by way of introduction. Sola, who studied law and sociology before switching to acting, is the latest in a long line of strong, smart actresses with whom Pacino has been involved—Tuesday Weld, Kathleen Quinlan, and Marthe Keller, among them. The two met at a dinner party in 2005, when his twins were four and her daughter, Camila, was seven. They were both dating other people, but their kids got along and they found themselves going to movies together, swimming in Pacino's pool, taking trips to San Diego, the beach. "We were friends. For two years—*two years*—nothing," Sola said. "When people ask, 'How long have you been together?,' I say, 'Forty-nine years.' A year with Al is like a dog year because it's so intense." She explained, "He's a medium. He's channelling something. When he's doing a part, it's hard to be around him because he's very different. Al has left the building."

The conversation turned to Diane Keaton's bittersweet second memoir, "Let's Just Say It Wasn't Pretty," which had been published the week before and in which she discussed "the lure of Al." "His face, his nose, and what about those eyes?" Keaton wrote. "I kept trying to figure out what I could do to make them mine. They never were. . . . For the next twenty years I kept losing a man I never had." Sola expounded on the astuteness of Keaton's observation. "Al has this ephemeral, childlike quality about him," she told me. "His friend Charlie used to say he's like smoke. He's there, but he's not there. That's maybe what drove the women crazy. You want to catch him, but you can't because Al is—"

"Leave John alone," Pacino cut in, bringing the conversation effectively to an end.

Sola had persuaded Pacino to accompany her to a friend's birthday bowling party the next day. That evening, complaining about the "fucking bowling shoes"—"I can't stand putting on my shoes every day. Imagine putting on bowling shoes," he said—Pacino got behind the wheel of his white Range Rover and headed for Lucky

Strike, in Hollywood, which turned out to be more of a bowling den than an alley.

A bookshelf extended from the entrance into the large underlit space; jokey signage—a poster advertising “10 Rules for Sleeping Around”—hung from the walls; from a distance, beyond the bar, came the echo of ricocheting pins. The birthday girl, Kam, in blue satin shorts and a diamanté tiara, waved Pacino and Sola over to the leather banquettes where her posse of svelte girlfriends and their men were huddled. While Sola plunged into the crowd of chatty celebrants, Pacino took a barstool at a table behind them and ordered a plate of barbecued chicken. As he ate, the standup comedian Billy Bellamy, who is credited with coining the phrase “booty call,” appeared. “We’re blessed, man,” Bellamy said. “I’m blessed. You killed in that Liberace shit, man.”

“That was Michael Douglas,” Pacino said, wiping barbecue sauce off his fingers.

As Pacino was putting on his bowling shoes, a Lucky Strike staffer approached. “Sorry to disturb you,” he said, holding up his cell phone to indicate a promotional photo op. “But would you mind?”

“I don’t do that,” Pacino said.

Sola pulled him away toward the party. “Once that starts, it’s over,” she said.

Pacino guttered his first ball. His second swerved left and picked off five pins. By the next frame, his score was fifteen. He sat down on the sofa.

“I usually get myself into a Zen place and am just very quiet,” he told me later. “People give you room when you get real quiet with your disposition.” At the bowling party, however, the tactic wasn’t working. The phones came out, and Pacino was swarmed with requests for selfies. Having done his duty, he slumped back down on the couch. From his body language, Sola could tell that the night was over. Thirty minutes after they arrived, she was leading Pacino toward the exit.

In the garage, he fumbled for his parking ticket and couldn’t find it. “You know me, I’m in pictures,” he said to the attendant. At the exit, he struggled again, this time to fit his new ticket correctly into the machine. The barricade

finally lifted. “I’m a natural, baby,” he said, as he accelerated into the balmy night. “I just pick things up.”

In mid-2010, Pacino learned that his business manager, Kenneth I. Starr, had been arrested for embezzling his clients’ money in a Ponzi scheme. (Starr is currently serving seven and a half years in prison.) There had been warnings. Early on, Mike Nichols, who had taken his money out of Starr’s company, had raised suspicions. “I’ll get to it,” Pacino told Nichols. “Then I never got to it,” he said. “Millions of dollars were gone,” Sola said. “Gone.”

Pacino took the loss in stride. “I thought, Hey, this is the world. It’s real,” he said. “Not one day I saw him down or depressed,” Sola said. “He was, like, ‘O.K., now what do we do? Roll up our sleeves and go to work.’”

Pacino’s agent, John Burnham, told me, “In his halcyon days he made around fourteen million a picture, but the industry’s changed. Nowadays, he gets five million. With a gun—seven million.” It has taken Pacino four years to work himself back to a position where, he says, “compared to a normal person, I have a significant amount.” He sold a Snedens Landing property, did commercials, took out a loan, and signed on for Adam Sandler’s dismal but profitable “Jack and Jill” (2011)—a “kids’ movie,” according to Pacino, in which he sent up both his legend and his financial predicament. In the film’s best moment, a hip-hop ad for



Dunkin’ Donuts, Pacino can be seen dancing and pitching the “Dunkacino”: “You want creamy goodness/I’m your friend/Say hello to my chocolate blend.”

“I’ve recently come to terms with the fact that I can only do something I am creatively connected to,” Pacino told me. “The Humbling,” based on the 2009 Philip Roth novel, which Pacino optioned, is part of that mission. The novel tells the story of a depressed,

aging actor whose talent is slipping away and who tries to rejuvenate himself through an affair with a younger woman (who in the movie is played by Greta Gerwig). “I liked the idea that an actor is losing it and wants to revive not so much his career as his life, and finds that there’s no life there,” Pacino said. “He’s trying to be a real person, and discovering that he doesn’t have the appropriate tools to do this. I felt that these things were sad and almost farcical.”

Barry Levinson, the director, who enlisted Buck Henry to write the screenplay, was also taken with the novel. “It was a great character study,” he said. “We wanted to flesh that out a little bit more, to apply some of the things that Al’s gone through in his life, and, hopefully, not in a super-serious fashion. There’s a dark comedic trail to the piece.” The film was undertaken with a free-wheeling spirit. “We did a lot of improvisation,” Levinson said. “The Humbling is about as homemade a movie as you can make. We made it for two million dollars in twenty days. We shot part of it in my house, because we didn’t have enough money to go somewhere else.”

Pacino’s legend is based on the films of his youth, for which he drew on his anger, his sexuality, his energy. The films he’s interested in now tend to dwell, like “The Humbling,” “Manglehorn,” and “Danny Collins,” on old age and the issues of decline. They are of a different amperage and a different spiritual mind-set. They are not, so to speak, the rock-em-sock-em Pacino of old but a new Pacino: a man who is consolidating his family, regretting some of his life choices, and living under the strictures of his fame.

In late June, I met up with Pacino in Boston, one of the twenty-three cities in which he would be performing “Pacino: One Night Only,” a business junket disguised as a lap of honor. The promoters referred to this form of entertainment as “talk theatre.” In essence, Pacino was taking himself on the road. He had flown in late the previous night from Ottawa, where he’d sold out a twenty-six-hundred-seat theatre at the National Arts Centre. In Boston, he was at the Wang Theatre, a fun palace built to hold thirty-seven hundred customers, who were shelling out up to a hundred

and seventy-nine dollars a seat—plus an extra three hundred if they wanted to attend a meet-and-greet after the show.

A slick eight-minute montage of clips from Pacino's movies opened the evening. He told Sonny Corleone, "It's not personal, Sonny. It's strictly business"; he shouted, "Attica! Attica!"; he jumped Ellen Barkin's bones. When Tony Montana drunkenly turned on the scowling patrons of a swank restaurant ("Say good night to the bad guy!"), the audience roared. The lights came up, and Pacino entered to a standing ovation. He let the volley of sound wrap around him, then, with his hands clasped together in front of him, he bowed low.

After a few reverent questions from Ty Burr, the *Boston Globe's* film critic, who was his interlocutor for the evening, Pacino picked up his legend and ran with it: performing as a kid for the deaf aunt ("started my overacting, I guess"); the high-school teacher who called him a prodigy ("How do you spell that?"); when he knew he had "it" as an actor ("I hope I never do"). Pacino played off the hoots of approval—"riding the bull," he calls it—taking the audience into his confidence, and, when he went off course, letting it guide him back to his story. "Where was I? Oh, yeah—I was a super-intendent. . . . I put an eight-by-ten picture of me on the door—kind of looking handsome. Underneath, I wrote 'Super.' And there wasn't a girl that went into that apartment that I didn't go after!"

Afterward, at the meet-and-greet, Pacino sat on a stool in front of a camera for forty-five minutes while premium ticket holders lined up for a photograph. The night before, he had obliged a blind woman who handed off her cane and asked him to dance. Tonight, the fans approached him solemnly, like communicants, uncertain how to arrange themselves beside their icon. Some leaned in, some stood apart, some asked if it was O.K. to put an arm around his shoulder. (It was.) One woman planted a kiss on Pacino's cheek, then placed a lily and a rose in his lap. Another woman, in formal evening gloves and a gray dress, who positioned herself in front of Pacino to speak to him, told me later that she had devoted her life to theatre after seeing Pacino act in "The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui,"



on her twenty-first birthday, thirty-nine years before. "He gave me a passion for the theatre," she said. "It was a great gift."

At Logan International, a private jet was waiting to take Pacino and his crew to New York. "There'll be a crowd at the airport," Pacino warned me, as the bags were loaded into his two-car convoy. As predicted, a group of autograph hunters were waiting like spectres outside the reception area. "It's their job," Pacino said. "At first, I didn't know. I just thought they were strange people who kind of looked alike, but they do it for a living." As he got out of the car, the scum of about twenty pushed forward. "AII! AII! Over here, AII!" they called, flourishing photographs and memorabilia. Head down, Pacino walked straight through the glass doors and into the bright silence of the lounge.

At takeoff and landing, Pacino crossed himself and kissed his fingers. During the flight, he talked about another kind of blessing he'd felt that day. In the late afternoon, with his bodyguard a hundred feet away, Pacino had

spent an hour on Boston Common, sitting unnoticed on a bench and watching the passers-by. "It felt like I was back on the block, back home," he said. "I felt lonely, but I always feel that way. I could feel connected to myself, just like when I sat there fifty years ago. I started there, in that park and that town. I didn't feel I had changed. I was still me. The park was still the park. I'll remember that moment." The temporary anonymity had brought "a kind of peace," which, he said, "is pretty much a luxury." Later, he told me, "I haven't been in a grocery store or ridden the subway in fifty years. My kids have a difficult time going out with me publicly. We have yet to go on a camping trip. But one day I want to rent a small house on a lake. It's my dream—I don't know how to get to it yet, but I'll give it another year." Still, he said, "I'm fine not having anonymity. I've learned how to live with the other thing, and the sort of enjoyment that comes with that. It ain't bad." He added, "Not that I recommend it, but, like they say, you should try it sometime." ♦

## DIGNITY

*Fast-food workers and a new form of labor activism.*

BY WILLIAM FINNEGAN

For the customers, nothing has changed in the big, busy McDonald's on Broadway at West 181st Street, in Washington Heights. Promotions come and go—during the World Cup, the French-fry package was suddenly not red but decorated with soccer-related “street art,” and, if you held your phone up to the box, it would download an Augmented Reality app that let you kick goals with the flick of a finger. New menu items appear—recently, the Jalapeño Double and the Bacon Clubhouse, or, a while back, the Fruit and Maple Oatmeal. But a McDonald's is a McDonald's. This one is open twenty-four hours. It has its regulars, including a panel of older gentlemen who convene at a row of tables near the main door, generally wear guayaberas, and deliberate matters large and small in Spanish. The restaurant doesn't suffer as much staff turnover as you might think. Mostly the same employees, mostly women, in black uniforms and gold-trimmed black visors, toil and serve and banter with the customers year after year. The longtime manager, Dominga de Jesus, bustles about, wearing a bright-pink shirt and a worried look, barking at her workers, “*La linea! La linea!*”

Behind the counter, though, a great deal has changed in the past two years. Among the thirty-five or so non-salaried employees, fourteen, at last count, have thrown in their lot with Fast Food Forward, the New York branch of a growing campaign to unionize fast-food workers. Underneath the lighted images of Big Macs and Chicken McNuggets, back between the deep fryer and the meat freezer, the clamshell grill and the egg station, the order screens and the endless, hospital-like beeping of timers, there have been sharp and difficult debates about the wisdom of demanding better pay and forming a union.

Most of the workers here make minimum wage, which is eight dollars an hour in New York City, and receive no benefits. Rosa Rivera, a grandmother of

four who has worked at McDonald's for fourteen years, makes eight dollars and fifty cents. Exacerbating the problem of low pay in an expensive city, nearly everyone is effectively part time, getting fewer than forty hours of work a week. And none of the employees seem to know, from week to week, when, exactly, they will work. The crew-scheduling software used by McDonald's is reputed to be sophisticated, but to the workers it seems mindless and opaque. The coming week's schedule is posted on Saturday evenings. Most of those who, like Rivera, have sided with the union movement—going out on one-day wildcat strikes, marching in midtown protests—suspect that they have been penalized by managers with reductions in their hours. But just-in-time scheduling is not easy to analyze.

Arisleyda Tapia, who has been working here for eight years, and makes eight dollars and thirty-five cents an hour, says she was fired last year by a supervisor for participating, on her own time, in a protest. She was reinstated three days later by cooler management heads, but Tapia, a single mother with a five-year-old daughter, says that she now gets only thirty hours a week. She used to average forty. “And they don't really post the schedule anymore,” she told me. “They just give you these.”

She waved a thin strip of paper in the air. It was like the stuff that comes out of a shredder. Tapia laughed, and mimicked a manager frantically snipping each line out of a printed schedule, for individual distribution. “This way, it's harder for us to see what's going on at the store. You see only your own hours.”

Tapia was a nurse in Santiago de los Caballeros, the second city of the Dominican Republic. She had two children, Scarlet and Steven. Her husband drove a taxi. Her mother, also a nurse, raised orchids. When Tapia's marriage fell apart, she felt her hopes for her children



*A demonstration by fast-food workers last week*



*in Manhattan. One recent study found that fifty-two per cent of fast-food workers require some form of public assistance.*



*"Take your pick—those people are talking schools. Next to them is real estate, and over by the stairs is money."*

dimming. It was 2003; a banking crisis had cratered the Dominican economy. With her mother's blessing, she left her job at a big university hospital where she had worked for twelve years and moved, alone, to New York. She rented a shared room in Inwood, a working-class neighborhood in upper Manhattan, for fifty dollars a week, got a job at a McDonald's in Inwood, and then a second job, at the 181st Street McDonald's. She made minimum wage. Still, she was able to send most of her paychecks home. "I made more in a week here than I did in a month as a nurse there," she said. Her children were provided for. College remained a possibility. Her Facebook cover photo has a woman's closed eye with long lashes and a big tear trickling down. "That's for missing my kids," she told me.

Tapia struggled with depression. Her immigration status was work-authorized, letting her obtain a Social Security number, and then it wasn't. She got scammed by a lawyer. She feared she would be

deported. Tapia makes friends easily—if you walk the streets of Inwood with her, you will see her merrily accosted by neighbors—but she felt isolated. The *sueño americano*—the reason she still gives, half-reefully, for emigrating—had taken on nightmarish colors. She felt trapped in a cold, foreign, overwhelming place. She felt that people were following her. She went for therapy at public clinics. Tapia, who is deeply religious, found herself looking for a sign from God. One night, in church, she got it. Her anxiety receded. She talks about the experience in awed, fierce tones.

She took up with a man—a taxi-driver—and on New Year's Day, 2009, she gave birth to a daughter, Ashley. The relationship with the taxi-driver did not last. Tapia was thirty-seven. She found an apartment on Sherman Avenue, in Inwood, across from the 207th Street Subway Yard. The apartment was small and dark, partitioned to create more rooms, and Tapia shared it with other renters.

She and Ashley slept in a single bed in a closet-size alcove. They still sleep there. Tapia had already bought, sight unseen, a small rental house in Santiago; her mother manages it, and the rent helps support Scarlet and Steven.

With an infant, Tapia had to quit one of her jobs. Money got tighter. She and Ashley received food stamps—a hundred and eighty-nine dollars a month—and, crucially, an earned-income tax-credit refund. But day care was expensive, and Tapia could never get enough hours at work. Wary of the courts, she received no child support. Still, her spirits were strong. Now she lived for Ashley, who was bright and mischievous. Friends and co-workers deluged the child with love and toys. Somebody gave her a little plastic cash register. She banged away on it, piping, "Welcome to McDonald's. How may I help you?"

One of Tapia's closest friends was Dominga de Jesus, her manager. La Dominga, as everybody calls her, is also Dominican. She lives in the Bronx, started at the bottom herself at McDonald's, and has a daughter slightly older than Ashley. The little girls are friends. La Dominga was kind to Tapia in her despair. In turn, Tapia helped Dominga when she had housing troubles. Between crises, the two women loved to party together. Tapia was delighted for Dominga when she went off to Hamburger University, the McDonald's training center, in Oak Brook, Illinois, where she earned a degree in Hamburgerology. The course there "sounded like a good party," Tapia told me, grinning.

In 2012, community organizers from New York Communities for Change, a Brooklyn-based descendant of ACORN, started sniffing around the McDonald's in Washington Heights. La Dominga—perhaps forewarned, or simply aware of the long-standing vigilance at McDonald's against any stirrings of union sentiment—spotted a suspected organizer on one of her closed-circuit cameras. His name was Alfredo Miase. He was Dominican. Tapia recalled, "She told me, 'Don't talk to him.'"

But Tapia had recently had a run-in with another manager, who kept her working, even though she had a fever, for hours. "Finally, I couldn't take it," she told me. "I just couldn't stand up anymore, and I went home. She suspended me for a week for that. She's gone now, but she was abusive. That experience left me ready to

do something. "So Tapia met with Miase, down the block, beyond the closed-circuit cameras, skulking, scared. And she was not the only one. "He was a very thoughtful, sympathetic guy," she said.

A small group of workers, nearly all women, started meeting with Miase and another organizer, Marisol Vasquez, at a nearby Chinese restaurant called Jimmy's. They discussed their problems and what might be done. Tapia, unlike some American workers, already had a solid grasp of what a union is. In the D.R., she had been a member of the national nurses' union during a major dispute with the ministry of health. That fight culminated in strikes that caused a national furor. Doctors had also walked out. "Patients were dying," she remembered. In the end, the government agreed to meet with the strikers and address their demands.

The Service Employees International Union, the second-largest union in the United States, was quietly funding the fast-food campaign. The first public act was a one-day strike on November 29, 2012. Some two hundred workers, from around forty fast-food outlets in New York City, gathered at dawn outside a McDonald's on Madison Avenue in midtown, chanting, "Hey, hey, what do you say, we demand fair pay." They had walked off jobs at Burger King, Wendy's, Taco Bell, Kentucky Fried Chicken, Domino's Pizza, and McDonald's. Their goals, they told reporters, were an industry-wide raise to fifteen dollars an hour and the right to form a union without retaliation. It was a day of rallies, walkouts, and a march through Times Square. The *Times* called it "the biggest wave of job actions in the history of America's fast-food industry." Tapia and several co-workers from Washington Heights were in the thick of it. La Dominga was shocked to see her friend's face in the crowd in a photograph on her Facebook news feed.

The protests spread to the Midwest, with hundreds of fast-food workers demonstrating in Chicago, St. Louis, Kansas City, and Detroit. By the summer of 2013, workers in sixty cities across the United States, even in the traditionally anti-union South, were staging coordinated one-day walkouts and marches with a single message: fifteen and a union. In December, it was more than a hundred cities. The movement picked up political

support. President Obama renewed a long-neglected pledge to raise the federal minimum wage, which is \$7.25 an hour—it should be nine dollars, he first suggested, and then lifted his sights, in early 2014, to \$10.10. That's a modest proposal; in 1968, the minimum wage, in current dollars, was \$10.95. Even so, minimum-wage legislation has no chance of passing in this Congress. But opinion polls show wide public support for a hike. Some cities and states have been biddling up their own minimum-wage laws. In June, Seattle decided to raise its minimum wage to fifteen dollars. Fast-food workers rightly took credit for having made plausible a minimum wage that, less than two years ago, sounded outlandish.

The fast-food giants have seemed clumsy, and wrong-footed by the surge of protest. Their traditional defense of miserable pay—that most of their employees are young, part time, just working for gas money, really—has grown threadbare. Most of their employees today are adults—median age twenty-eight. More than a quarter have children. Particularly since the onset of the global recession of 2009, McJobs are often the only jobs available. And seventy per cent of fast-food workers are indeed part time, working fewer than forty hours a week.

McDonald's has tried to acknowledge the real lives of its workforce by providing counselling through a Web site (since taken down) and a help line called McResource. A sample personal budget was offered online last year. The budget was full of odd assumptions: that employees worked two full-time jobs, for instance, and that health insurance could be bought for twenty dollars a month. The gesture made the corporation look painfully out of touch. The same thing happened with a health-advice page. Workers were advised to break food into pieces to make it go farther, sing to relieve stress, and take at least two vacations a year, since vacations are known to "cut heart attack risk by 50%." Swimming, one learned, is great exercise. Fresh fruit and vegetables are good for you, McDonald's declared. A mother of two in Chicago, who had worked at McDonald's for ten years, called the help line and found herself counselled to apply for food stamps and Medicaid. This was, at least, realistic. A recent study by researchers at the University of California-Berkeley

and the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign found that fifty-two per cent of fast-food workers are on some form of public assistance.

Sensitive to the beating that their brands are taking in the escalating confrontation with employees, the fast-food giants have been leaving the hardball response to their lobby, the National Restaurant Association. "The other N.R.A.," as it is known, is an enormous organization, with nearly half a million member businesses, but its strategic thinking seems to be dominated by the major chains. It has fought minimum-wage legislation, at every level of government, for decades. It has fought paid-sick-leave laws, the Affordable Care Act, worker-safety regulations, restrictions on the marketing of junk food to children, menu-labelling requirements, and a variety of public-health measures, such as limits on sugar, sodium, and trans fats. Its press releases now deride the demands of fast-food workers as "nothing more than big labor's attempt to push their own agenda." But internal N.R.A. documents, leaked this spring to Salon, show the group's concern about the "reputational attacks on our industry." They say that N.R.A. agents are "closely monitoring social media for any plans or signs of activity," and are even tracking the movements of one activist. Scott DeFife, the chief N.R.A. spokesman, told me that the crowds at the protests actually consist of organizers: "There's often not one restaurant worker to be found among the crowds of organizers."

McDonald's has rarely hesitated to act aggressively on labor issues. In 1990, it sued a tiny group called London Greenpeace for libel, because of leaflets the group had distributed attacking the company. According to Eric Schlosser's book "Fast Food Nation" (2001), McDonald's had been successfully using Britain's plaintiff-friendly libel laws to intimidate British mass media for many years. Two members of London Greenpeace fought back. Although they could not afford a lawyer, the court proceedings went on for more than a decade, revealing, among other things, the extensive use by McDonald's of spies—some meetings of London Greenpeace apparently had as many spies in attendance as real members. The "McLibel trial" was, from start to finish, a public-relations fiasco. For the second-largest

private employer in the world (after Walmart), with more than thirty-five thousand restaurants in a hundred and nineteen countries, McDonald's can be, in the court of public opinion, remarkably inept.

In recent months, Fast Food Forward and its many partners—Fight for 15 (Chicago), Stand Up KC (Kansas City), STL Can't Survive on \$7.35 (St. Louis)—have been rhetorically thrashing their corporate opponents. The Berkeley–University of Illinois study, commissioned by Fast Food Forward, found that American fast-food workers receive almost seven billion dollars a year in public assistance. That's a direct taxpayer subsidy; the activists argue, for the fast-food industry. Taxpayers are also, by that logic, grossly overpaying the industry's top management. According to the progressive think tank Demos, fast-food executives' compensation packages quadrupled, in constant dollars, between 2000 and 2013. They now take home, on average, nearly twenty-four million dollars a year. Their front-line workers' wages have barely risen in that time, and remain among the worst in U.S. industry. The differential between C.E.O. and worker pay in fast food is higher than in any other domestic economic sector—twelve hundred to one. In construction, by comparison, the differential is ninety-three to one.

The fast-food chains insist that if they were to pay their employees more they would have to raise menu prices. Their wages are "competitive." But in Denmark McDonald's workers over the age of eighteen earn more than twenty dollars an hour—they are also unionized—and the price of a Big Mac is only thirty-five cents more than it is in the United States. There are regional American fast-food chains that take the high road with their employees. The starting wage at In-N-Out Burger, which is based in Southern California, and has two hundred and ninety-five restaurants in California and the Southwest, is eleven dollars. Full-time workers receive a complete benefits package, including life insurance—and the burgers are cheap and good.

McDonald's, throughout its history, has denied responsibility for the labor practices of its franchisees, who own and operate nearly ninety per cent of its more than fourteen thousand outlets in the United States. In March, seven class-action lawsuits were filed against the com-

pany in three states—California, Michigan, and New York—alleging wage theft and other violations of labor law. In late July, the general counsel of the National Labor Relations Board ruled, in connection with another set of complaints, that McDonald's is a "joint employer" with its franchisees. The corporation exercises, through its standard contract, the most elaborate possible control over virtually every aspect of its franchisees' operations, and the pay and the treatment of workers are very largely determined by that control. Indeed, the lawsuits allege that the crew-scheduling software that McDonald's franchisees are required to use leads directly to the cost-cutting practices that amount to wage theft.

McDonald's will fight the ruling and its implementation, both on its own behalf and on behalf of other major franchisors. The implications of the ruling, if it is upheld, are profound. Not only will the responsibility of corporations for millions of workers be increased sharply but the prospects for fast-food unionization will brighten. Shop-by-shop organizing in what the economist David Weil calls "the fissured workplace" is a Sisyphean chore. Having the legally chosen representatives of the industry's workforce sit down with the leaders of McDonald's, Burger King, and Wendy's, all of whom are capable of a cost-benefit analysis of their business model, makes more sense.

I asked Arisleyda Tapia who she thought could raise her pay. "Bruce," she said immediately. "He's rich."

She meant Bruce Colley, the owner of the McDonald's where she works. Colley owns twenty-nine McDonald's franchises, including nineteen in Manhattan. He grew up in Westchester County, and graduated from the Trinity Pawling School and Cornell. When he joined the family business, in 1980, his father, Dean, owned more than a hundred McDonald's franchises in the Northeast. Dean was master of foxhounds of the Golden's Bridge (New York) Hounds. Bruce is a polo player. His net worth is not a matter of public record. Still, you can see where Tapia got her impression.

Colley found himself in the news when, in 2003, he was reported to be having an affair with Kerry Kennedy Cuomo, triggering her divorce from Andrew Cuomo. According to the *Post*,

Kerry was "crushed" when Bruce decided not to leave his then wife for her. Otherwise, Colley does a good job of staying out of the papers. (He declined to comment for this article.) In July, 2013, during a heat wave, Sheliz Mendez, one of Colley's employees at the McDonald's in Washington Heights, fainted in the kitchen and had to be hospitalized. Some of her co-workers walked off the job, protesting the lack of air-conditioning, and began chanting on the sidewalk outside. Reporters showed up. So did Colley. CBS New York described him as a "McDonald's spokesman." He apologized for the inconvenience to customers and employees and said that two of the store's three air-conditioning units were already repaired. His workers said that they had been complaining about the heat for months and that the units were turned on only because camera crews had appeared. Janine Izquierdo, who has worked at the Washington Heights outlet for nine years, said she had never seen the air-conditioning on before.

A year later, on another hot July day, I stopped in the store and found it stifling. Managers were setting up big portable fans near the counter. Colley did not want another labor incident. I was waiting for Tapia to finish her shift. There was a new freestanding sign, touting the Bacon Clubhouse with a cryptic boast: "Artisan is how this club rolls." On the workers' uniform caps, multicolored stitching declared "FAMOUS CRISPY FUN LOVEABLE." Was William Burroughs writing ad copy from the next world? Having clocked out, Tapia emerged, looking drained, and eating Fruit and Maple Oatmeal from a paper cup.

We walked south on Broadway. A rainstorm had broken the heat. We passed through the spooly, puddled maw of the George Washington Bridge Bus Station, its concrete arms hulking overhead like a Soviet brutalist ruin. Tapia had sent Ashley, her five-year-old, to visit her grandmother in the Dominican Republic. She couldn't afford to go. It had been eleven years. She Skyped with her kids and her mother several times a day, but it was strange, this free time that she suddenly had. There was a national conference of the fast-food workers' movement coming up, in Chicago. The union was sending a couple of buses from New York. Maybe she could go. We found a Dominican restaurant down Broadway.



*Arisleyda Tapia, who has worked at a Washington Heights McDonald's for eight years, makes eight dollars and thirty cents an hour.*

Did she really believe that Bruce Colley could unilaterally raise the pay of all his employees to fifteen dollars an hour?

Tapia looked down. "He used to give us just one shirt," she said, finally. "We tried to give a petition to La Dominga about people getting their hours reduced, but she wouldn't accept it. Then Bruce came and had a meeting with us. He came because we have a strong union committee. He didn't go to any of his other stores. He listened to us. Then they gave us each a box with four uniforms. That was a real strike victory." She sighed. "But we know who our real opponent is. It's the corporation, McDonald's."

The space between franchisees and a parent company is nowhere more opaque than at McDonald's, where the price of admission is exceptionally high: applicants must show at least seven hundred and fifty thousand dollars of unborrowed money even to be considered for a franchise, and the investment costs go up from there. Very few franchisees fail to observe the code of *omertà* that governs their relationship with the corporation. One disgruntled franchisee in California recently broke the silence, telling the Washington

Post that McDonald's executives had advised her to "pay your employees less" if she wanted to take home more herself. Two former McDonald's managers recently went public with confessions of systematic wage theft, claiming that pressure from both franchisees and the corporation forced them to alter time sheets and compel employees to work off the clock.

Having a union will put a stop to this type of injustice, Tapia believes. And she was not wrong, I thought, about the importance of tangible victories, however small. Building confidence was crucial, even in the fissured workplace—showing doubters that standing up for yourself need not always bring down the wrath of the bosses on your head and could actually achieve benefits. "Some people are too scared to say anything," she said. "They're scared to talk to you, for instance—the media." I could confirm that. "It's not that everybody working there supports the union. But they all want us to keep fighting. They're afraid to fight themselves, but they know they'll benefit when we win."

But would the boat parties be reinstated?

Tapia laughed. Bruce Colley was fi-

amous for taking his employees on an annual summertime cruise on the Hudson. Tapia had to admit that they were a blast. Colley danced with all the women. But last year, she said, she had not been invited. She blamed her activism. And this year there had been no boat party at all, as far as she knew.

More important to Tapia—far more important—was her friendship with La Dominga. Things between them had cooled lately, she said, but not really, not in her heart. It was only this situation at work. On Dominga's birthday, Tapia and some of her co-workers had given her a big bunch of flowers. Dominga understood the message: none of this conflict was personal. When the fight for a union was over—after the workers had won their rights—"things between me and Dominga will be just like they were before."

The modern American labor movement rose out of the struggle over the eight-hour day. Mary Kay Henry, the president of the Service Employees International Union, told me, "This fight for fifteen is growing way beyond fast food. It's getting to be what the eight-hour day

was in the twentieth century." That may be so (or it may be a stretch), but labor unions, the centerpiece of the movement to improve working conditions in the last century, have definitely shrunk to the margins. Fewer than seven per cent of private-sector workers are union members today—that's the lowest density in nearly a century. The landscape of American business has changed, reflecting the shift from a manufacturing to a service economy, but unions have not changed with it. The S.E.I.U., with more than two million members, has probably done the best job among large unions of adapting to the new workplace, organizing health-care workers and janitors, for instance, in circumstances that did not allow for traditional industrial organizing.

The Justice for Janitors campaign of the nineteen-nineties offers a good precedent for the current fast-food campaign, Henry said. The janitors were fissured by the broad move of commercial property owners to subcontracting, much as fast-food workplaces are fissured by franchising. Their nominal employers, small cleaning companies, had no power and thin profit margins. The tactics of the janitors were unorthodox, and included mass civil disobedience: closing freeways in Los Angeles; blocking bridges into Washington, D.C. Their goal was to get building owners to the table, and in time they succeeded, in some cases nearly doubling with their first contract the compensation they had been earning. The movement was largely Latino, and crucially strengthened by undocumented immigrants who stepped up, risking deportation. But big-city janitors had been unionized, historically—and in some cities, like New York, still were—so the fight was really to reorganize and rebuild. There is no comparable history in fast food. More important, the fast-food workforce is just under four million and growing, and the main companies are so rich and powerful that the stakes are higher than in any labor struggle in recent memory.

To date, it's been "more air war than ground war," as Ruth Milkman, a sociologist of labor movements at the City University of New York Graduate Center, puts it. The one-day strikes, which aren't really strikes, since they don't usually close shops or try to shame (non-existent) strikebreakers, get larger each

time. This May, the fast-food workers staged simultaneous protests in two hundred and thirty cities worldwide. They have gathered endorsements from a very long list of labor groups and others, including the seventy-six-member Progressive Caucus in the United States Congress and the Boston Wobblies. For the fiftieth anniversary of the March on Washington, an editorial in the *Times* declared, "The marchers had it right 50 years ago. The fast-food strikers have it right today." The percentage of the workforce actually committed to the movement still seems quite small, however, and the organizing tactics still decidedly nontraditional. None of this acclaim will translate anytime soon into a shop-floor union vote presided over by the National Labor Relations Board.

The S.E.I.U. leadership sometimes suggests that it is merely following the lead of a spontaneous workers' movement, but it invested about two million dollars in organizing in New York before the first public protest, in November, 2012, and it has continued to fund organizing nationwide—to the tune of more than ten million dollars. It has retained the services of Berlin Rosen, a progressive political-consulting firm that helped propel Bill de Blasio from dark-horse-dominion into the mayor's office.

In the vacuum left by the subsidence of labor unions, a rough movement sometimes known as Alt-Labor—community groups, "worker centers"—has emerged. New York has an abundance of such groups, including the New York



Taxi Workers Alliance, launched in 1998, which has successfully defended drivers against exploitation by medallion owners, and the Restaurant Opportunities Center, or ROC, which was originally founded as a help center for displaced restaurant workers after the September 11th terrorist attacks and has since grown into an all-purpose resource for food-sector employees, offering training, conducting research, and filing complaints and lawsuits. Thirty-two cities now have their

own ROC. The group has thrown its energy behind the fast-food movement. The National Restaurant Association has targeted ROC, apparently considering it a serious threat.

Alt-Labor groups, by legal definition not unions, will never be bargaining units. Fast Food Forward and its numerous allies in the fast-food campaign, though all closely tied to their funding source, S.E.I.U., are in many ways Alt-Labor, which makes the movement's path forward rather difficult to picture. Mary Kay Henry told me that the S.E.I.U. is supporting the movement "because it helps our members." She said that "6.5 million workers have already had their wages increased owing to minimum-wage increases" driven by fast-food activism. Minimum-wage legislation is great, she said, but "collective bargaining can set a standard that obviates legislation."

So is she hoping to sign up millions of new members from the food industry?

"Membership is not our foremost question," she said. "Our first concern is winning fifteen dollars and a union. The workers will then choose whom they want to represent them." That answer seems to dodge the question. Henry, like other labor leaders, likes to sketch a climactic meeting with the big fast-food employers: "The Big Three"—McDonald's, Burger King, Wendy's—"are going to have to see the union part, and not just the minimum-wage part, and get their heads around that, before they come to the table."

The golden arches glowed at dawn above Danville, Pennsylvania, and, later, above other towns—Sharon, Mercer. For Tapia, they were a familiar touch in an unfamiliar land. Also Burger King, Dunkin' Donuts. Tapia napped on and off all morning. She was near the front of the charter bus. It had departed from downtown Brooklyn at 2 A.M., in a convoy with another bus. It got stuck in 3 A.M. traffic on Canal Street, but now they were flying westward. The driver and his alternate were chatting in Chinese. Tapia was the only person from her McDonald's going to the conference. Across the aisle was Corina Garcia. She worked at another McDonald's—at Broadway and 145th—that was owned by Bruce Colley. Garcia, who is fifty-six, looked very put-together, with a sweet smile and a sharp little travel bag. She had been an executive secretary for ten

## JAPANESE MAPLE

Your death, near now, is of an easy sort.  
So slow a fading out brings no real pain.  
Breath growing short  
Is just uncomfortable. You feel the drain  
Of energy, but thought and sight remain:

Enhanced, in fact. When did you ever see  
So much sweet beauty as when fine rain falls  
On that small tree  
And saturates your brick back garden walls,  
So many Amber Rooms and mirror halls?

Ever more lavish as the dusk descends  
This glistening illuminates the air.  
It never ends.  
Whenever the rain comes it will be there,  
Beyond my time, but now I take my share.

My daughter's choice, the maple tree is new.  
Come autumn and its leaves will turn to flame.  
What I must do  
Is live to see that. That will end the game  
For me, though life continues all the same:

Filling the double doors to bathe my eyes,  
A final flood of colors will live on  
As my mind dies,  
Burned by my vision of a world that shone  
So brightly at the last, and then was gone.

—Clive James

years in the Dominican Republic, she said. Stacked on the seat next to her were cases of water, bags of apples, and a box full of small cans of Pringles. People from farther back in the bus, which was packed, made occasional raids on the supplies.

Tapia was excited about going to Chicago. She had never been west of New York. The cornfields of Ohio seemed to go on forever. It was so different from *el campo* back home. No grasslands, rain forest, cane fields, coffee farms. She wondered about the cost of living out here. It was surely cheaper than New York. But you would probably need a car, which was expensive. Hearing that South Bend, Indiana, had a famous Catholic university, she made a mental note—possible college for Ashley. At the rest stops, the younger men sauntered across the strangely wide Midwestern forecourts, wearing baggy basketball shorts, neck pillows still in place. But most

of the conferencegoers were older. Alvin Major, the father of four teen-agers, was from Guyana and worked at a K.F.C. in Brooklyn. His oldest was going to college upstate this fall. He sometimes worked three jobs, collecting three paychecks, all from K.F.C.—but no overtime, which wasn't right. Jorel Ware worked at a McDonald's in midtown. He was thirty-one. He still made minimum wage, after two years. "They say the franchisee is just a small man in the middle," he said. "If that's true, then who am I? I'm just a dot on the wall. I just want to be able to get an unlimited MetroCard. I can't afford *nothing*."

Shantel Walker, who works at a Papa John's in Brooklyn, jumped up as the bus approached Chicago. She wore a gold-billed cap and a big crucifix. She had a microphone. "I work too hard," she chanted, "for a little income." The bus erupted, workers chanting the lyrics after

her. "Your story is an inspiration/ People are with you/ New York is proud of you, HEY."

Tapia, who speaks little English, chanted softly: "People are with you/ New York is proud of you, hey." She was looking pretty sharp herself, in form-fitting jeans, black suede loafers, a black shirt with a cheetah-print panel, long gold earrings.

Walker: "You got to work hard, HEY/ To get a union and fifteen."

Tapia: "You got to work hard, hey/ To get a union and fifteen."

Walker: "Detroit's gonna be there, remember. Chicago. We gotta represent. We the original starter of this movement." Cheers, shouts, whistles.

Chicago, to Tapia's disappointment, never appeared. Was it a very small city, then? No, the conference was in a convention center out in a western suburb, Villa Park, and the bus took a route that never went near Chicago proper.

The conference, however, did not disappoint. Buses pulled in from every direction—St. Louis, Detroit, Greenville, North Carolina. Delegates in red T-shirts practiced their chants in the late-afternoon sun. Inside the convention center, twelve hundred workers filled one end of a vast space. There were elaborate shout-outs from each delegation, a ritual that seemed to go on for hours. But the energy stayed high. There were videos, rappers, a driving beat. The proceedings were directed by an organizing committee of a dozen-plus people on a stage. They never seemed to call for order. They just drove the thing forward. The New York rep, Naquasia LeGrand, a twenty-two-year-old K.F.C. employee from Canaris, said, "I got to be on my feet all day, and you don't want me to go to the foot doctor? You want me to smile at customers, but you won't give me a dental plan?" Mary Kay Henry gave a passionate speech, declaring, "I am proud to bring into this room two million workers who are in this with you to win it!" After Henry's speech, Tapia was on her feet, along with the rest of the crowd, chanting, "We believe that we can win!" She was rocking, clapping, smiling excitedly.

On the second day, delegates were directed to sit at tables with people from other cities. Tapia found herself at a Spanish-speaking table with workers from Denver and Chicago. The best part of the

conference, she told me later, was sharing stories with Martina Ortega, who was originally from Guerrero State, in Mexico, and Otilia Sanchez, from Denver, about raising families on minimum wage in El Norte, and what their respective union committees were doing. Tapia filled a notebook with names and contact information. Each table was asked to report to the conference as a whole, and Otilia Sanchez rose and delivered a forceful speech, in Spanish, about how this would be not an armed struggle but a political fight waged by peaceful means—strikes, boycotts, media—and how if the workers stayed strong they would make history.

Tapia said afterward that she was surprised to see that the movement was predominantly African-American. "That's good," she told me. "Because they're not afraid. They have nothing to lose. We're all afraid of getting deported. They're not."

The history of the civil-rights struggle was constantly invoked. The N.A.A.C.P. had just formally endorsed the fast-food workers' movement at its national convention (without mentioning the central demand for fifteen dollars an hour, possibly to spare the fast-food franchisees among its leadership the shock of that stark figure). The Reverend William Barber II, the head of the North Carolina N.A.A.C.P., gave a stand-up-and-shout sermon after lunch. Barber talked about President Franklin Roosevelt's belief that a minimum wage should allow American workers to "live decently," then offered his own gloss on that idea. "I want to be able to live," Barber said. "I want to be able to pay my rent, feed my kids, put gas in my car, maybe buy a house—and every now and then *fix my*

*hair!*" Representative Keith Ellison, co-chair of the Congressional Progressive Caucus, was on hand. "Income inequality is an existential threat to the American Dream," he told me. "And these people are doing something about it." In his conference speech, he said, "In the richest country in the world, you should not be working full time and still be on food stamps."

I noticed Tapia nodding seriously when this was said, as she did when Terrence Wise, a Burger King worker from Kansas City with three children, said, "Most of us are doing this for our kids. For the next generation. If somebody was hurting your kid, you would crush them. And that's how we need to think about these corporations. They're trying to destroy our families, hurt our kids."

The return bus left that afternoon, arriving in New York at nine the next morning. Tapia took the subway directly to work. She stashed her travelling bag under a storage bin, where the manager was unlikely to see it and ask questions. Fortunately, it was Sunday, La Dominga's day off.

Tapia applied to ten charter schools for kindergarten for Ashley. She got into none. She was wait-listed at three, though, including at Tapia's first choice, a new Success Academy school opening on Fort Washington Avenue, in Washington Heights. The school's Web page wouldn't load on Tapia's phone. "I need to get Internet," she said. We were in her apartment, and she pointed out an old Dell desktop wedged among other appliances on the dresser she shares with Ashley. Internet access is about twenty dollars a month. Something would have to give. It could not be her unlimited-ride Metro-

Card. That was a hundred and twelve dollars a month—a giant bite out of her paycheck, and a purchase that many people couldn't manage, but it was indispensable. If she rode the train or the bus (she preferred the *guagua*, as everybody in her neighborhood calls the bus) eighty times a month, it cost less than half what it would for individual rides.

If she got a raise to fifteen dollars an hour, she could buy new work shoes, help her mother, get Ashley a good winter coat. Even so, fifteen dollars an hour is not considered adequate for a basic household budget by economists who study the matter. Not in New York City, anyway. A recent study found that, assuming you get forty hours a week, which Tapia never does now, it might be enough for a single person living in Montana. In New York, the bare minimum comes to \$22.66. For a single parent with a child, it's \$30.02. I didn't mention these figures to Tapia. We were sitting in her tiny railroad kitchen, talking in whispers, because the other renters might be asleep. A message came in on Tapia's phone. It was a photograph of her son, Steven, now a strapping fifteen-year-old and a serious baseball player. He was a lefty, looking snappy at bat, in full uniform. "I could not live without Facebook," Tapia said. "I'll get a photo of Steven when I'm at work and McDonald's cannot bother me."

She had told La Dominga about Chicago, after all. "She understands," Tapia said. "We're not fighting her. But she's getting all this pressure."

I had asked La Dominga for an interview. When we spoke, on a busy Saturday afternoon at the store, she had agreed that her own story was a good one for McDonald's. But she needed Mr. Colley's permission to talk, and that had not come.

Tapia pointed to the light switch on the kitchen wall. It wasn't a sign from God, but it was, in her opinion, close. Under many layers of paint, there was, still discernible, a raised plaster decoration around the switch which, after a moment's study, revealed itself as a traditional depiction of Christ. Tapia carried a photograph of this odd little miracle in her phone.

We took a walk through Inwood. Her church, the Church of the Good Shepherd, stands above Broadway. It is big, imposing yet sedate, Romanesque Revival, beautifully maintained. Wooden confessionals are built into the walls,



"Look, I know you think you've got the stuff, but I'm telling you: walk God."

along with a poor box with a brass door. Many of the Masses are in Spanish. Tapia tries to come every Tuesday evening. "They welcome you especially, and individually," she whispered. "It's a community of brothers." She has done a great deal of crying here. "I had so much rancor toward my ex-husband," she said. "It has finally left me now." One of the best things about Good Shepherd was the number of young people it attracts. "I came here to pray when my mother said that my kids were becoming impossible teen-agers. I prayed for help. Now my mother says they are acting better."

We stopped at a McDonald's on 207th Street. Tapia had worked here, long ago. We started talking about local politicians who now reliably show up at fast-food protests, and also at the next-morning "walk-backs," when strikers are escorted by sympathetic crowds back to their restaurants. Some of the politicians are sincere; all want the media attention. Then Tapia shushed me. She texted me from across the table: Don't talk union—the store manager had spotted her, and he was eavesdropping on us. I saw that she was right. Her expression was strangely mixed: fear, paranoia, mischief, pride. What could this manager possibly do to her? Her activism wasn't a secret. But struggles for dignity are complex. We talked about Ashley. Tapia was praying hard for that charter school.

Speaking at a Laborfest rally in Milwaukee on Labor Day, President Obama declared, "All across the country right now, there's a national movement going on made up of fast-food workers organizing to lift wages, so they can provide for their families with pride and dignity." The President was blunt about the central issue. "You know what?" he said. "If I were looking for a good job that lets me build some security for my family, I'd join a union. If I were busting my butt in the service industry and wanted an honest day's pay for an honest day's work, I'd join a union."

A few days later, the fast-food campaign mounted actions in a hundred and fifty cities. In New York, there was an early-morning sit-in outside a McDonald's in Times Square. Nineteen strikers were arrested for blocking traffic. Tapia missed it, because she was busy taking Ashley to school. (Her prayers had been



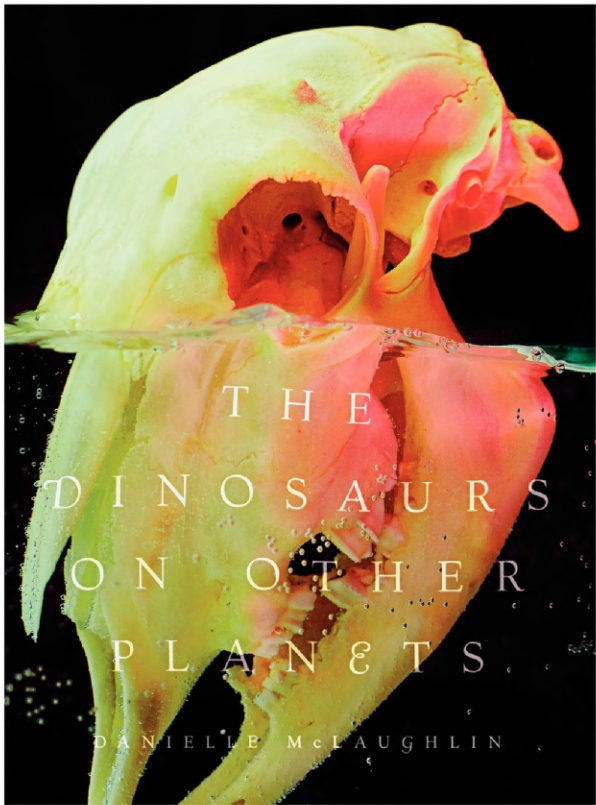
*"As my stunt double, you'll be doing all of my press conferences, court appearances, and family reunions."*

answered. Ashley was admitted to Success Academy—a high-powered bête noire of New York's teachers' union.) Among the several hundred protesters, there were a fair number of labor organizers, but many more fast-food workers. I noticed Jorel Ware, Naquasia LeGrand, Shantel Walker, and other activists from the conference in Chicago, and an all-female delegation from the Washington Heights McDonald's. Workers were also being arrested in Detroit, Chicago, Little Rock, and Las Vegas. Among those arrested in Times Square was an eighty-one-year-old McDonald's janitor named Jose Carrillo.

Tapia made it to the day's second sit-in, a few hours later, outside a McDonald's at Eighth Avenue and Fifty-sixth Street. The protesters first marched up Eighth, beating on drums, blowing vuvuzelas and kazooos, and chanting, "What do we want? Fifteen and a union!" There were rabbis, priests, preachers, a Buddhist monk, and a full complement of local politicians. Some of the marchers wore their McDonald's uniforms. Tapia was in civilian clothes. It was midday, hot. She and the rest of the protesters were steered by police into a

containment pen, built of interlocking metal barricades, on the east side of Eighth. Diners on the second floor of the adjacent McDonald's looked out on the scene, chewing distractedly, and returned to their phones. Cars honked. Then fifteen protesters, quietly avoiding the pen, made their way into the center of the intersection, which was in full blazing sun, and sat down in a circle on the asphalt. Most were dressed in black. Most were women. Nearly all looked to be African-American. Shantel Walker was among them.

Tapia, at the front of the pen, watched closely, her face full of anger and admiration, as the demonstrators were brought to their feet one by one, not roughly, by police, and had their hands cuffed behind them. The police used disposable restraints—white plastic "flexicuffs." They led their captives toward two large white vans, herded them inside, and shut the doors. The energy level of the protest dropped. Tapia and the other women from the Washington Heights McDonald's checked their phones. Some had shifts to work. Tapia had to pick up Ashley from school. ♦



THE  
DINOSAURS  
ON OTHER  
PLANETS

DANIELLE McLAUGHLIN

From the ditch behind the house, Kate could see her husband up at the old forestry hut, where mottled scrubland gave way to dense lines of trees. "Colman" she called, but he didn't hear. She watched him swing the axe in a clean arc and thought that from this distance he could be any age. Lately, she'd found herself wondering what he'd been like as a very young man, a man of twenty. She hadn't known him then. He had already turned forty when they met.

It was early April, the fields and ditches coming green again after winter. Grass verges crept outward, thickening the arteries of narrow lanes. "There's nothing wrong," she shouted when she was still some yards off. He was in his shirtsleeves, his coat discarded on the grass beside him. "Emer rang from London. She's coming home."

He put down the axe. "Home for a visit, or home for good?" He had dismantled the front of the hut and one of the side walls. On the floor inside, if floor was the word, she saw empty beer cans, blankets, a ball of blackened tinfoil.

"Just for a few days. A friend from college has an exhibition. I wasn't given much detail. You know Emer?"

"Yes," he said, and frowned. "When is she arriving?"

"Tomorrow evening, and she's bringing Oisín."

"Tomorrow? And she's only after ringing now?"

"It'll be good to have them stay. Oisín has started school since we last saw him."

She waited to see if he might mention the room, but he picked up the axe, as if impatient to get back to work.

"What will we do if the Forestry Service come round?" she said.

"They haven't come round this past year. They don't come round when we ring about the drinking or the fires." He swung the axe at a timber beam supporting what was left of the roof. There was a loud splintering but the beam stood firm, and he drew back the axe, prepared to strike again.

She turned and walked toward the house. The Dennehys, their nearest neighbors, had earlier that week sown maize, and a crow hung from a pole, strung up by a piece of twine. It lifted in the wind as she walked past, coming to rest again a few feet from the ground, above the height of foxes. When they

first moved here, she hadn't understood that the crows were real, shot specially for the purpose, and had asked a discomfited Mrs. Dennehy what cloth she sewed them from.

After supper, she took the duvet cover with the blue Teddy bears from the hot press and spread it out on the kitchen table. There were matching pillowcases and a yellow pajama holder in the shape of a rabbit. Colman was on the other side of the kitchen, making a mug of Bovril. "What do you think?" she said.

"Lovely."

"You couldn't possibly see from that distance," she said.

"It's the same one as before, isn't it?"

"Well, yes," she said. "But it's a while since they visited. I'm wondering, is it a bit babyish?"

"You're not going to find another between now and tomorrow," he said, and she felt the flutter in her eyelid start up, the one that usually preceded a headache. She had hoped the sight of the duvet cover might prompt an offer to move his stuff, or at least the suggestion that she could move it, but he just drank his Bovril and rinsed the mug, setting it upside down on the draining board. "Good night," he said, and went upstairs.

Next morning, she started with his suits. She waited until he'd gone outside, then carried them from John's old room to their bedroom, across the landing. The wardrobe there had once held everything, but now when she pushed her coats and dresses along the rail they resisted, swung back at her, jostling and shouldering, as if they'd been breeding and fattening this past year. For an hour she went back and forth between the rooms with clothes, shoes, books. The winter before last, Colman had brought the lathe in from the shed and set it up in their sons' old bedroom. It had been a gift from the staff at the Co-op on his retirement as manager. He would turn wood late into the night, and often, when she put her head around the door in the morning, she would find him, still in his clothes, asleep on John's old single bed. There began then the gradual migration of his belongings. He appeared to have lost interest in the lathe—he no longer presented her with lamps or bowls—but for the better part of a year he had not slept in their bedroom at all.

Colman had allowed junk to accumulate—magazines, spent batteries, a cracked mug on the windowsill. She got a sack and went around the room, picking things up. The lathe and wood-turning tools—chisels, gouges, knives—were on a desk in the corner, and she packed them away in a box. She put aside Colman's pajamas and dressed the bed with fresh linen, the blue Teddy bears jolly on the duvet, the rabbit propped on a chair alongside. Standing back to admire it, she noticed Colman in the doorway. He had his hands on his hips and was staring at the sack.

"I haven't thrown anything out," she said.

"Why can't the child sleep in the other room?" He went over to the sack, dipped a hand in, and took out a battery.

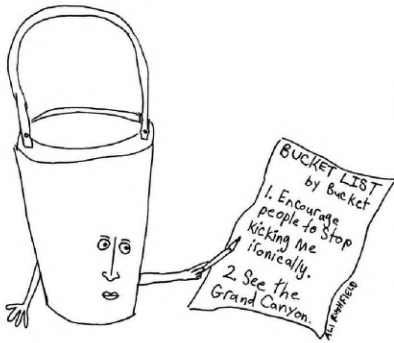
"Emer's room? Because Emer will be sleeping there."

"Can't he sleep there, too?"

She watched him drop the battery back into the sack and root around, a look of expectancy on his face, like a boy playing lucky dip. He brought out the cracked mug, polished it on his trousers, and then, to her exasperation, put it back on the windowsill.

"He's six," she said. "He's not a baby anymore. I want things to be special. We see so little of him." It was true, she thought, it was not a lie. And then, because he was staring at her, she said, "And I don't want Emer asking about..." She paused, spread her arms wide to encompass the room. "About this." For a moment he looked as if he were going to challenge her. It would be like him, she thought, to decide to have this conversation today, today of all days, when he wouldn't have it all year. But he picked up his pajamas and a pair of shoes she had missed beneath the bed and, saying nothing, headed across the landing. Later, she found his pajamas folded neatly on the pillow on his side of the bed, where he always used to keep them.

Colman was on the phone in the hall when the car pulled up in front of the house. Kate hurried out and was surprised to see a man in the driver's seat. Emer was in the passenger seat, her hair blacker and shorter than Kate remembered. "Hi, Mam," she said, getting out and kissing her mother. She wore a red tunic, the bodice laced up with ribbon like



a folk costume, and black trousers tucked into red boots. She opened the back door of the car and the child jumped out. He was small for six, pale and sandy-haired. "Say hi to your granny," Emer said, and she pushed him forward.

Kate felt tears coming, and she hugged the child close and shut her eyes so as not to confuse him. "Goodness," she said, stepping back to get a better look, "you're getting more and more like your Uncle John." The boy stared at her blankly. She ruffled his hair. "You wouldn't remember him," she said. "He lives in Japan now. You were very small when you met him, just a baby."

The driver's door opened and the man got out. He was slight and sallow-skinned, in a navy sports jacket and round, dark-rimmed glasses. One foot dragged a little as he came round the side of the car, plowing a shallow furrow in the gravel. Kate had been harboring a hope that he was the driver, that any moment Emer would take out her purse and pay him, but he put a hand on her daughter's shoulder and she watched Emer turn her head to nuzzle his fingers. He was not quite twice Emer's age, but he was close—late forties, she guessed. Kate waited for Emer to make the introductions, but she had turned her attention to Oisín, who was struggling with

the zip of his hoodie. "Pavel," the man said, and, stepping forward, he shook her hand. Then he opened the boot and took out two suitcases.

"I'll give you a hand with those," Colman said, appearing at the front door. He wrested both cases from Pavel and carried them into the house, striding halfway down the hall before coming to a halt. He put the suitcases down beside the telephone table and stood with his hands in his pockets. The others stopped, too, forming a tentative circle at the bottom of the stairs.

"Oisín," Emer said, "say hello to your grandad. He's going to take you hunting in the forest."

The boy's eyes widened. "Bears?" he said.

"No bears," Colman said, "but we might get a fox or two."

Pavel shuffled his feet on the carpet. "Oh, Daddy," Emer said, as if she'd just remembered, "this is Pavel." Pavel held out a hand, and Colman delayed for a second before taking it. "Pleased to meet you," he said, and he lifted the cases again. "I'll show you to your rooms."

Kate remained in the hall and watched them climb the stairs, Colman in front, the others following behind. Pavel was new, she thought; the child was shy with him, sticking close to his

mother, one hand clutching her tunic. Colman set a suitcase down outside Emer's old bedroom. He pushed open the door, and from the foot of the stairs Kate watched her daughter and grandson disappear into the garish, cluttered room, its walls hung with canvases Emer had painted during her goth phase. Colman carried the other suitcase to John's old room. "And this is your room," she heard him say to Pavel as she went into the kitchen to make tea.

"How long is he on the scene?" Colman said when he came back downstairs.

"Don't look at me like that," she said. "I don't know any more than you do."

He sat at the table, drumming his fingers on the oilcloth. "What class of a name is Pavel, anyway?" he said. "Is it Eastern European or what? Is it Lithuanian? What is it?"

She debated taking out the china, but, deciding it was old-fashioned, went for the pottery mugs instead. "I expect we'll hear later," she said, arranging biscuits on a plate.

"She shouldn't have landed him in on top of us like this, with no warning."

"No," Kate said, "she shouldn't have."

She found the plastic beaker she'd bought for Oisín's last visit two Christmases ago. It was decorated with puffy-chested robins and snowflakes. She polished it with a tea towel and put it on the table. "Every time I see Oisín," she said, "he reminds me of John. Even when he was a baby in his pram he looked like John. I must get down the photo album and show Emer."

Colman wasn't listening. "Are we supposed to ask about the other fellow at all now?" he said. "Or are we supposed to say nothing?"

Her eyelid was fluttering so fiercely she had to press her palm flat against her eye in an effort to still it. "If you mean Oisín's father," she said, "don't mention him, unless Emer mentions him first." She took her hand away from her face and saw her grandson standing in the doorway. "Oisín!" she said, and she went over, laid a hand on his soft, fine hair. "Come and have a biscuit." She offered the plate and watched him survey the contents, his fingers hovering above the biscuits but not quite touching. He finally selected a chocolate one shaped like a star. He took a small, careful bite and chewed slowly, eying her the way he had eyed

the biscuits, making an assessment. She smiled. "Why don't you sit here and tell us all about the airplane." She pulled out two chairs, one for the child, one for herself, but the boy went around to the other side of the table and sat next to Colman.

He had finished the biscuit, and Colman pushed the plate closer to him. "Have another," he said. The boy chose again, more quickly this time. "Tell me," Colman said, "where's Pavel from?"

"Chelsea."

"What does he do?"

The boy shrugged, took another bite of biscuit.

"Colman," Kate said sharply, "would you see if there's some lemonade in the fridge?"

He looked at her, a look both guilty and defiant, but got up without saying anything and fetched the lemonade.

They heard footsteps on the stairs, and laughter, and Emer came into the kitchen with Pavel in tow. Opening the fridge, she took out a litre of milk and drank straight from the carton. She wiped her mouth with her hand and put the milk back. Pavel nodded to Kate and Colman—an easy, relaxed nod—but didn't join them at the table. Instead, he went over to a window. "They're like gods, aren't they?" he said, pointing to the three wind turbines rotating slowly on the mountain. "I feel I should take them a few dead chickens, kill a goat or something."

"Those things have caused no end of trouble," Kate said. "Our neighbors say they can't sleep at night with the noise of the blades."

"Perhaps not enough goats?" he said.

She smiled and was about to offer him tea, but Emer linked his arm. "We're going to the pub," she said. "Just for the one. We won't be long." She blew Oisín a kiss. "Be good for your granny and grandad."

The boy sat quietly at the table, working his way through the biscuits. "We could see if there are cartoons on television," Kate said. "Would you like that?"

Colman glared at her as if she had suggested sending the child down a mine. "Television will rot his brain," he said. He leaned in to the boy. "Tell you what," he said. "Why don't you and I go hunt those foxes?"

The boy was already climbing down off his chair, the biscuits and lemonade forgotten. "What will we do with the

foxes when we catch them?" he asked.

"We'll worry about that when it happens," Colman said. He turned to Kate. "You didn't want to come, did you?"

"No," she said, "it's O.K. I'd better make a start on dinner." She walked with them to the back porch, watched them go down the garden and scale the ditch at the end. The boy's hair snagged as he squeezed beneath the barbed wire, and she knew that if she went to the ditch now she would find silky white strands left behind, like the locks of wool left by lambs. Dropping into the field on the other side, they made their way across the scrub, through grass and brambles and wild saplings, Colman in front, the boy behind, almost running to keep up. The grass was in the first rush of spring growth. Come summer, it would be higher, higher than the boy's head and blonder, as it turned, unharvested, to hay.

They reached the pile of timber that used to be the hut, and Colman stopped, bent to take something from the ground. He held it in the air with one hand, gesticulating with the other, then gave it to the boy. Goodness knows what he was showing the child, she thought, what rubbish they were picking up. Whatever the thing was, she saw the boy discard it in the grass, and then they went onward, getting smaller and smaller, until they disappeared into the forest.

An hour later, her husband and grandson returned, clattering into the kitchen. Oisín's shoes and the hems of his trousers were covered in mud. He was carrying something, cradling it to his chest,



and when she went to help him off with his shoes she saw that it was an animal skull. Colman went out to the utility room and rummaged around in the cupboards, knocking over pans and brushes, banging doors. "What are you looking for?" she said. The boy remained in the kitchen, stroking the skull as if it were a kitten. It was yellow-white and long-nosed, with a broad forehead.

Colman returned with a plastic bucket and a five-gallon drum of bleach. He took

the skull from the boy and placed it in the bucket, poured the bleach on top until it reached the rim. "Now," he said, "that'll clean up nicely. Leave it a couple of days and you'll see how white it is."

"Look," Oisín said, grabbing Kate's hand and dragging her over. "We found a dinosaur skull."

"A sheep, more likely," his grandfather said. "A sheep that got caught in wire. The dinosaurs were killed by a meteorite millions of years ago."

Kate peered into the bucket. Little black things, flies or maggots, had already detached themselves from the skull and were floating loose. There was green around the eye sockets, and veins of mud grained deep in the bone.

"What's a meteorite?" the boy asked.

The front door opened, and they heard Emer and Pavel coming down the hall. "The child doesn't know what a meteorite is," Colman said when they entered the kitchen.

Emer rolled her eyes at her mother. She sniffed and wrinkled her nose. "It smells like a hospital in here," she said.

Pavel dropped to his haunches beside the bucket. "What's this?" he said.

"It's a dinosaur skull," Oisín said.

"So it is," Pavel said.

Kate waited for her husband to contradict him, but Colman had settled into an armchair in the corner, holding a newspaper, chest height, in front of him. She looked down at the top of Pavel's head, noticed how his hair had the faintest suggestion of a curl, how a tuft went its own way at the back. The scent of his shampoo was sharp and sweet and spiced, like an orange pomander. She looked away, out to the garden, and saw that the afternoon was fading. "I'm going to get some herbs," she said, "before it's too dark," and, taking scissors and a basket, she went outside. She cut parsley first, then thyme. Inside the house, someone switched on the lights. She watched figures move about the kitchen, a series of family tableaux framed by the floral-curtained windows: now Colman and Oisín, now Oisín and Emer, sometimes Emer and Pavel. Every so often, she heard a burst of laughter.

Back inside, she found Colman, Oisín, and Pavel gathered around a box on the table, an old cardboard Tayto box from beneath the stairs. Overhead, water rattled through the

house's antiquated pipes: the sound of Emer running a bath. From the box, Colman took some dusty school reports, a metal truck with its front wheels missing, a tin of toy soldiers. "Aha!" he said. "I knew we kept it." He lifted out a long cylinder of paper and tapped it playfully against the top of Oisín's head. "I'm going to show you what a meteorite looks like," he said.

Kate watched as Colman unfurled the paper and laid it flat on the table. It curled back into itself, and he reached for a couple of books from a nearby shelf, positioning them at top and bottom to hold it in place. It was a poster, four feet long and two feet wide. "This here," Colman said, "is the asteroid belt." He traced a circular pattern in the middle of the poster, and when he took away his hand his fingertips were gray with dust.

Pavel moved aside to allow Kate a better view. She peered over her husband's shoulder into a dazzling galaxy of stars and moons and dust. It was dizzying: the unimaginable expanses of space and time, the vast, spinning universe. We are there, she thought, if only we could see ourselves. We are there, and so is John in Japan. The poster was wrinkled and torn at the edges but otherwise intact. She looked at the planets, pictured them spinning and turning for all those years beneath the stairs, their moons in quiet orbit.

"This is our man," Colman said, pointing to the top left-hand corner. "This is the fellow that did for the dinosaurs."

The boy, on tiptoe, touched a finger to the thing Colman had indicated, a flaming ball of rock trailing dust and comets. "Did it only hit planet Earth?"

"Yes," his grandfather said. "Wasn't that enough?"

"So there could still be dinosaurs on other planets?"

"No," Colman said, at exactly the same time that Pavel said, "Very likely."

The boy turned to Pavel. "Really?"

"I don't see why not," Pavel said. "There are millions of other galaxies and billions of other planets. I bet there's lots of other dinosaurs. Maybe lots of other people, too."

"Like aliens?" the boy said.

"Yes, aliens, if you want to call them that," Pavel said, "although they might be very like us."

Colman lifted the books from the

edges of the poster, and it rolled back into itself with a slap of dust. He handed it to Oisín, then returned the rest of the things to the box, closed the cardboard flaps. "O.K., sonny," he said, "let's put this back under the stairs," and the boy followed him out of the kitchen, the poster tucked under his arm like a musket.

After dinner that evening, Kate refused all offers of help. She sent everyone to the sitting room to play cards while she took the dishes to the sink. Three red lights shone down from the wind turbines on the mountain, a warning to aircraft. She filled the sink with soapy water and watched the bubbles form psychedelic honeycombs, millions and millions of tiny domes glittering on the dirty plates.

That night, their first sharing a bed in almost a year, Colman undressed in front of her as if she weren't there. He matter-of-factly removed his shirt and trousers, folded them on a chair, and put on his pajamas. She found herself appraising his body as she might a stranger's. Here, without the backdrop of forest and mountain, without the axe in his hand, she saw that he was old, saw the way the muscles of his legs had wasted and the gray of his chest hair. But she was not repulsed by any of these things; she simply noted them. She got her nightdress from under her pillow and began to unbutton her blouse. On the third button, she found that she could go no further and went out to the bathroom to undress there. Her figure had not entirely deserted her. Her breasts when she cupped them were shrunken, but she was slim, and her legs, which she'd always been proud of, were still shapely. Thus far, age had not delivered its estrangement of skin from bone: her thighs and stomach were firm, with none of the sagginess, the falling away, that sometimes happened. She had not suffered the collapse that befell other women, rendering them unrecognizable as the girls they had been in their youth, though perhaps that was yet to come, for she was only fifty-two.

When she returned to the bedroom, Colman was in bed reading the newspaper. She peeled back the duvet on her side and got into bed. He glanced in her direction but continued to read. She read a few pages of a novel but couldn't concentrate.

"I thought I might take the boy fishing tomorrow," he said.

She put down her book. "I don't know if that's a good idea," she said. "He's had a busy day today. I was thinking of driving to town, taking him to the cinema."

"He can go to the cinema in London."

"We'll see tomorrow," she said, and took up her book again.

Colman put away the newspaper and switched off the lamp on his side. He settled his head on the pillow but immediately sat up again, plumping the pillow, turning it over, until he had it to his liking. She switched off her lamp, lay there in the dark, careful where she placed her legs, her arms, readjusting to the space available to her. A door opened and closed, she heard footsteps on the landing, then another door, opening, closing. After a while she heard small, muffled noises, then a repetitive thudding, a headboard against a wall. The sound would be heard, too, in Emer's old bedroom, where the boy was now alone. She thought of him waking in the night among those peculiar paintings, dozens of ravens with elongated necks, strange hybrid creatures, half bird, half human. She imagined specks of paint coming loose, falling on the boy in a black ash as he slept. Colman was curled away from her, facing the wall. She looked at him as the thudding grew louder. He was quiet, so quiet she could barely discern the sound of his breathing, and she knew that he was awake, for throughout their marriage he had always been a noisy sleeper.

As soon as she reached the bottom of the stairs the next morning, she knew she was not the first up. It was as if someone had cut through the air before her, had broken the invisible membrane that formed during the night. From the utility room she heard the boy's high, excited babble. He was in his pajamas, crouched beside the bucket of bleach, and beside him, in jeans and a shirt, his hair still wet from the shower, was Pavel. Oisín pointed at the bucket. In the pool of an eye socket something was floating, something small and white and chubby.

Kate bent to take a look. Her arm brushed against Pavel's shoulder, but he did not move away or shift position, and they remained like that, barely touching, staring into the bucket. A film of tiny insects and bits of vegetation lay upon the

surface. The white thing was a maggot, its ridged belly bloated. Oisín looked from Pavel to Kate. "Can I have it for a pet?" he said.

"No!" they said in unison, and Kate laughed. She felt her face redden, and she straightened up, took a step back from the bucket. Pavel stood up, too, ran a hand through his wet hair. The boy continued to watch the maggot, mesmerized. He was so close that his breath created ripples, his fringe flopping forward over his face and almost trailing in the bleach. "O.K.," Kate said. "That's enough," and, taking him by the elbow, she lifted him gently to his feet.

"Can I take the skull out?" he asked. Pavel shrugged and glanced at Kate. He seemed downcast this morning, she thought, quieter in himself. She looked at the skull and at the debris that had floated free of it, and something about it, the emptiness, the lifelessness, repulsed her, and suddenly she couldn't bear the idea of the boy's small hands touching it. "No," she said, "it's not ready yet. Maybe tomorrow."

Emer didn't appear for breakfast, and when finally she arrived downstairs it was clear that there had been a row. She made a mug of coffee and, draping one of her father's coats around her shoulders, went outside to drink it. She paced up and down past the kitchen window, her phone to her ear, talking loudly. When she came back in, she called from the hall, "Get your coat, Oisín. We're going in the car."

Oisín and Pavel were at the table, playing with the contents of the Tayto box. The two-wheeled truck and the soldiers had been commandeered for a war effort. "I thought Oisín was staying with us," Kate said.

Emer shook her head. "Nope," she said. "He's coming with me."

"I'll drive you," Pavel said quietly, getting up from the table.

"No, thank you, I can manage."

"You're not used to that car," he said. "I don't have to meet your friends. I can drop you off, collect you later."

"I'd rather walk," Emer said.

Colman was in his armchair. He had a screwdriver and was taking apart a broken toaster, setting the pieces out on the floor. "Listen to her," he said, to no one in particular. "The great walker." He put down the screwdriver, sighed, and stood

up. "We'll go in my car," he said. He nodded to Oisín—"Come on, sonny"—and without saying more he left the kitchen. The boy abandoned his game and trotted down the hall after his grandfather. Already he had adopted Colman's walk, a comically exaggerated stride, his hands stuck deep in his pockets. Emer gave her mother a perfunctory kiss and followed them.

After they left, Pavel excused himself, saying he had work to do. "I'm afraid I'm poor company," he said. He went upstairs, and Kate busied herself with everyday jobs, though she didn't vacuum, in case it might disturb him. She wondered what he did for a living and imagined him first as an architect, then as an engineer of some sort. She put on her gardening gloves and took the waste outside for composting. The garden was a mess. Winter had left behind broken branches, pinecones, and other storm wreckage: the forest's creeping advance. She remembered how years ago a man had come selling aerial photographs door to door. He had shown her a photo of their house and, next to it, the forest. She had been astonished to see that, from the air, the forest was a perfect rectangle, all sharp angles and clean lines. Raising the lid of the compost bin, she tipped in the waste. There used to be a bench on the

patch of concrete where the bin now stood. In the early years, when the children were at school and Colman at work, she'd often been seized by a need to leave the house and would put on a coat and sit in the garden, reading, as the wind deposited pine needles and bits of twig in her lap. The Dennehy's, she knew, had thought her behavior odd, and Mrs. Dennehy, meaning well, had once mentioned the matter to Colman.

Noon passed, and the day edged into early afternoon. She listened for the sound of Pavel moving about the room overhead, but everything was quiet. Eventually, she went upstairs to see if he would like some lunch. She knocked and heard the creak of bed springs, then footsteps crossing the floor. When he opened the door, she saw papers spread across the bed, black-and-white street-scapes with sections hatched in blue ink, and thought, Yes, an architect after all. "You could have used the dining-room table," she said. "I didn't think."

"It's fine," he said. "I can work anywhere. I'm finished now anyway."

She had intended to ask if she could bring him up a sandwich, but instead heard herself say, "I'm going for a walk, if you'd like to join me."

"I'd love to," he said. She put on her boots and found a pair



"I'll agree to a pre-nup if you'll agree to a non-compete clause."

for him in the shed. They didn't climb the ditch but went through the gate and took an old forestry path that skirted the scrub. Passing the pyre of timber that was once the hut, he said, "I saw your husband chopping firewood this morning. He's remarkably fit for a man of his age."

"Yes," she said, "he was always strong."

"You must have been very young when you married."

"I was twenty-three," she said. "Hardly a child bride, but young by today's reckoning, I suppose."

They arrived at an opening into the forest. A sign forbidding guns and fires was nailed to a tree, half the letters missing. He hesitated, and she walked on ahead, down a grassy path littered with pine needles. She slowed to allow him to catch up, and they walked side by side, their boots sinking into the ground, soft from recent rain. They stopped at a sack of household waste—nappies, eggshells, foil cartons spilling over the forest floor. "Who would do such a thing?" Pavel said.

"A local, most likely," she said. "They come here at night, when they know they won't be seen." Pavel tried to gather the rubbish back into the bag, a hopelessly ineffective gesture, like a surgeon attempting to heap intestines back into a ruptured abdomen. When he stood up, his hands were covered in dirt and pine needles. She took a handkerchief from her coat pocket and handed it to him.

"Does it happen a lot?" he asked.

"Only close to the entrance," she said. "People are lazy." He had finished with the handkerchief and seemed unsure what to do with it. "I don't want it back," she said, and, grinning, he put it in his own pocket.

It was quieter the farther in they went, fewer birds, the occasional rustle of an unseen animal in the undergrowth. He talked about London and about his work. She talked about how they'd moved from the city when Colman got the job at the Co-op, the years when the children were young, John in Japan. She noticed his limp becoming more pronounced and slowed her pace.

"Thanks for going to such trouble with the room," he said.

"It was no trouble."

"I was touched by it," he said, "especially the bear duvet and the rabbit."

She glanced at him and saw that he was teasing. She laughed.

"She didn't tell you I was coming, did she?" he said.

"No, but it doesn't matter."

"I'm sorry it caused awkwardness," he said. "I know your husband is annoyed."

"He's annoyed with Emer," she said, "not with you. Anyway, it doesn't matter."

They had arrived at a fallen tree, and, sensing that he was tiring, she sat on the trunk, and he sat beside her. "How long have you known Emer?" she said.

"Not very long."

She tilted her head back and looked up. Here there was no sky, but there was light, and as it travelled down through the trees it seemed to absorb hues of yellow and green. A colony of toadstools, brown puffballs, sprouted from the grass by her feet. Pavel nudged them with his boot. They released a cloud of pungent spores, and, fascinated, he bent and prodded them with his finger until they released more. He got out his phone and took a photograph.

"I've seen Oisín three times in the last four years," she said. "Emer will take him back to London tomorrow, and I can't bear it."

He put the phone away and, reaching out, took her hand. "I'm sorry," he said. "I don't understand why Emer would live anywhere else when she could live here. But then I guess I don't understand Emer."

"I'm a stranger to him," she said. "I'm his grandmother and I'm a stranger. He'll grow up not knowing who I am."

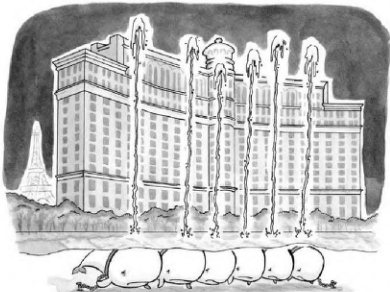
"He already knows who you are. He'll remember."

"He'll remember that bloody skull in the bucket," she said bitterly.

Very softly, he began to stroke her palm with his thumb. His touch was gentle but inquiring, as if there were something about her that might reveal itself through the skin. She pulled her hand away and got up. Standing with her back to him, she pointed to a dark corridor of trees that ran perpendicular to the main path. "That's a shortcut," she said. "It leads down to the road."

This route was less used, tangled and overgrown, obstructed here and there by trees that leaned in a slant across the path, not quite fallen, resting against other trees. Ferns grew tall and curling, and the moss was inches thick on the tree trunks. In the quiet, she imagined she could hear the spines of leaves snapping as her boots pressed them into the mud. The path brought them to an exit by the main road, and they walked back to the house in silence, arriving just as Colman's car pulled into the driveway.

They were all back: Colman, Emer, Oisín. Emer's mood had changed. Now she was full of the frenetic energy that often seized her. She opened the drawers of the cabinet in the sitting room and spread the contents all over the carpet, searching for a catalogue from an old



The DARK UNDERBELLY of VEGAS FOUNTAINS

Suzanne  
Stones

college exhibition. Oisín had a new toy truck that his grandfather had bought him. It was almost identical to the truck from beneath the stairs, except that this one had all its wheels. He sat on the kitchen floor and drove it back and forth over the tiles, making revving noises. Colman was subdued. He made a pot of tea, not his usual kind but the lemon-and-ginger that Kate liked, and they sat together at the table. "How did you get on with Captain Kirk?" he said.

"Fine," she said.

Emer came in from the sitting room, having found what she was looking for. She poured tea from the pot and stood gazing out the window as she drank it. Pavel was at the end of the garden, taking photographs of the wind turbines. "Know what they remind me of?" Emer said. "Those bumblebees John used to catch in jars. He'd put one end of a stick through their bellies and the other end in the ground, and we'd watch their wings going like crazy."

"Emer!" Kate said. "They were always dead when he did that."

Emer turned from the window, gave a sharp little laugh. "I forgot," she said. "St. John, the Chosen One." She emptied what was left of her tea down the sink. "Trust me," she said. "The bees were alive. Or at least they were when he started."

Oisín got up from the floor and went over to his mother, the new truck in his hand. "If I don't take my laser gun, can I take this instead?" he said.

"Yes, yes," Emer said. "Now go see if you can find my lighter in the sitting room, will you?" She made shooping gestures with her hand.

The child stopped where he was, considering the truck. "Or maybe I'll take the gun and I won't take my Lego," he said. "They probably have loads of Lego in Australia."

"Australia?" Kate said. She looked across the table at Colman, but he was staring into his cup, swirling dregs of tea around the bottom.

Emer sighed. "Sorry, Mam," she said. "I was going to tell you. It's not for ages anyway, not until summer."

In bed that night she began to cry. Colman switched on a lamp and rolled onto his side to face her. "You know what that girl's like," he said. "She's never lasted at anything yet. Australia will be no different."

"But how do you know?" she said, when she could manage to get the words out. "Maybe they'll stay there forever."

She buried her face in his shoulder. The smell of him, the feel of him, the way her body slotted around his, was as she remembered. She climbed onto him so that they lay length to length, and, opening the buttons of his pajamas, she rested her head on the wiry hair of his chest. He patted her back



awkwardly through her nightdress as she continued to cry. She kissed him, on his mouth, on his neck, and, undoing the remainder of the buttons, she stroked his stomach. He didn't respond, but neither did he object, and she slid her hand lower, under the waistband of his pajama bottoms. He stopped patting her back. Taking her gently by the wrist, he removed her hand and placed it by her side. Then he eased himself out from under her and turned away toward the wall.

Her nightdress had slid up around her belly, and she tugged it down over her knees. She edged back across the mattress and lay very still, staring at the ceiling. The house was quiet, with none of the sounds of the previous night. She could hear Colman fumbling at his pajamas, and when she glanced sideways she saw that he was doing up his buttons. He switched off the lamp, and after a while she heard snoring.

She knew that she should try to sleep, too, but couldn't. Tomorrow, they would return to London: Oisín, Emer, and Pavel. Come summer, her daughter and grandson would leave for Australia. Pavel, she assumed, would not. She thought of Oisín sleeping, and pictured him waking early the next morning, sneaking down to the bucket at first light to get the skull. Swinging her legs over the side of the bed, she went downstairs in her bare feet.

A lamp on the telephone table, one

of Colman's wooden lamps with a red shade, threw a rose-colored light over the hall. The door of the sitting room was partly open, and she thought she heard something stirring. She went to the door and, in the light filtering in from the hall, saw a shape on the sofa. It was Pavel, banished she presumed by Emer, with a rug over him and using one of the cushions as a pillow.

He sat up and reached for his glasses on the coffee table. He appeared confused, as if he'd just woken, but she noticed how his expression changed when he realized it was her. "Kate," he said, and she was conscious, even in the semi-darkness, of his eyes moving over the thin cotton of her nightdress. He had stripped to his underclothes, and she saw that his body, like her own, was no longer in its prime but was strong yet, young enough still. She remained in the doorway. He said nothing more, and she understood that he was waiting, allowing her to decide. After a moment, she turned and walked down the hall to the kitchen.

In the utility room, she put on a pair of rubber gloves and, dipping her hand into the bucket, lifted out the skull. It dripped bleach onto the floor, and she got a towel and dried it off, wiping the rims of the eye sockets, the crevices of the jaws. She sat it on top of the washing machine and looked at it, and it returned her gaze with empty, cavernous eyes. Not bothering with a coat, she slipped her feet into Colman's Wellingtons and carried the bucket of bleach outside.

It was cold, hinting at late frost, and she shivered in her nightdress. In the field behind the house, the pile of newly chopped wood appeared almost white in the moonlight, and moonlight glistened on the galvanized roof of the Dennehy's shed and silvered the tops of the trees in the forest. There were stars, millions of them, the familiar constellations she had known since childhood. She tipped the bucket over, spilling the bleach onto the ground. For a second it lay upon the surface, then it gradually seeped away until only a flotsam of dead insects speckled the stones. ♦

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Danielle McLaughlin on her story.

# THE CRITICS



A CRITIC AT LARGE

## THE NAYSAYERS

Walter Benjamin, Theodor Adorno, and the critique of pop culture.

BY ALEX ROSS

In Jonathan Franzen's 2001 novel, "The Corrections," a disgraced academic named Chip Lambert, who has abandoned Marxist theory in favor of screenwriting, goes to the Strand Bookstore, in downtown Manhattan, to sell off his library of dialectical tomes. The works of Theodor W. Adorno, Jürgen Habermas, Fredric Jameson, and various others cost Chip nearly four thousand dollars to acquire; their resale value is sixty-five. "He turned away from their reproachful spines, remembering how each of them had called out in a bookstore with a promise of a radical critique of late-capitalist society," Franzen writes. After several more book-selling expeditions, Chip enters a high-end grocery store and spends his slim gains on an overpriced fillet of wild Norwegian salmon.

Anyone who underwent a liberal-arts education in recent decades probably encountered the thorny theorists associated with the Institute for Social Research, better known as the Frankfurt School. Their minatory titles, filled with dark talk of "Negative Dialectics" and "One-Dimensional Man," were once proudly displayed on college-dorm shelves, as markers of seriousness; now they are probably consigned to taped-up boxes in garages, if they have not been discarded altogether. Once in a while, the present-day Web designer or business editor may open the books and see in the margins the excited queries of a younger self, next to pronouncements on the order of "There is no document of culture which is not at the same time a document of

barbarism" (Walter Benjamin) or "The whole is the false" (Adorno).

In the nineteen-nineties, the period in which "The Corrections" is set, such dire sentiments were unfashionable. With the fall of the Soviet Union, free-market capitalism had triumphed, and no one seemed badly hurt. In light of recent events, however, it may be time to unpack those texts again. Economic and environmental crisis, terrorism and counterterrorism, deepening inequality, unchecked tech and media monopolies, a withering away of intellectual institutions, an ostensibly liberating Internet culture in which we are constantly checking to see if we are being watched: none of this would have surprised the prophets of Frankfurt, who, upon reaching America, failed to experience the sensation of entering Paradise. Watching newsreels of the Second World War, Adorno wrote, "Men are reduced to walk-on parts in a monster documentary film which has no spectators, since the least of them has his bit to do on the screen." He would not revise his remarks now.

The philosophers, sociologists, and critics in the Frankfurt School orbit, who are often gathered under the broader label of Critical Theory, are, indeed, having a modest resurgence. They are cited in brainy magazines like *n+1*, *The Jacobin*, and the latest iteration of *The Baffler*. Evgeny Morozov, in his critiques of Internet boosterism, has quoted Adorno's early mentor Siegfried Kracauer, who registered the information and entertainment overload of the nineteen-twenties.

The novelist Benjamin Kunkel, in his recent essay collection "Utopia or Bust," extolls the criticism of Jameson, who has taught Marxist literary theory at Duke University for decades. (Kunkel also mentions "The Corrections," noting that Chip buys his salmon at a shop winkingly named the Nightmare of Consumption.) The critic Astra Taylor, in "The People's Platform: Talking Back Power and Culture in the Digital Age," argues that Adorno and Max Horkheimer, in their 1944 book "Dialectic of Enlightenment," gave early warnings about corporations "drowning out democracy in pursuit of profit." And Walter Benjamin, whose dizzily varied career skirted the edges of the Frankfurt collective, receives the grand treatment in "Walter Benjamin: A Critical Life" (Harvard), by Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings, who earlier edited Harvard's four-volume edition of Benjamin's writings.

The Frankfurt School, which arose in the early nineteen-twenties, never presented a united front; it was, after all, a juggle of intellectuals. One zone in which they clashed was that of mass culture. Benjamin saw the popular arena as a potential site of resistance, from which left-leaning artists like Charlie Chaplin could transmit subversive signals. Adorno and Horkheimer, by contrast, viewed pop culture as an instrument of economic and political control, enforcing conformity behind a permissive screen. The "culture industry," as they called it, offered the "freedom to choose what is always the same." A similar split appeared in attitudes toward traditional forms of culture: classical music, painting, literature. Adorno tended to be protective of them, even as he exposed their ideological underpinnings. Benjamin, in his resonant sentence linking culture and barbarism, saw the treasures of bourgeois Europe as spoils in a victory procession, each work blemished by the suffering of nameless millions.

The debate reached its height in the wake of Benjamin's 1936 essay "The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility," a masterpiece of contingent optimism that praises mass culture only insofar as mass culture advances radical politics. Many readers will sympathize with Benjamin, who managed to uphold a formidable critical tradition while opening himself to the modern world and writing in a sensuous



voice. He furnishes a template for the pop-savvy intellectual, the preferred model in what remains of literary life. Yet Adorno, his dark-minded, infuriating brother, will not go away: his cross-examination of the "Work of Art" essay, his pinpointing of its moments of naïveté, strikes home. Between them, Adorno and Benjamin were pioneers in thinking critically about pop culture—in taking that culture seriously as an object of scrutiny, whether in tones of delight, dismay, or passionate ambivalence.

The worst that one Frankfurt School theorist could say of another was that his work was insufficiently dialectical. In 1938, Adorno said it of Benjamin, who fell into a months-long depression. The word "dialectic," as elaborated in the philosophy of Hegel, causes endless problems for people who are not German, and even for some who are. In a way, it is both a philosophical concept and a literary style. Derived from the ancient Greek term for the art of debate, it indicates an argument that maneuvers between contradictory points. It "mediates," to use a favorite Frankfurt School word. And it gravitates toward doubt, demonstrating the "power of negative thinking," as Herbert Marcuse once put it. Such twists and turns come naturally in the German language, whose sentences are themselves plotted in swerves, releasing their full meaning only with the final clinching action of the verb.

Marx adapted Hegel's dialectic to the economic sphere, seeing it as an engine of progress. By the early twenties, a Marxist-Leninist state had ostensibly emerged in Russia, but the early members of the Frankfurt School—notably, Adorno, Horkheimer, Marcuse, Friedrich Pollock, Erich Fromm, Franz Neumann, and Leo Lowenthal—were far from starry-eyed about it. Although Marx was central to their thought, they were nearly as skeptical of Communist ideology as they were of the bourgeois mind-set that Communism was intended to supplant. "At the very heart of Critical Theory was an aversion to closed philosophical systems," Martin Jay writes, in his history "The Dialectical Imagination" (1973).

Nazism sundered the lives of the critical theorists, almost all of whom were Jewish. Benjamin committed suicide on the Franco-Spanish border, in 1940; the

## BORN AGAIN

We gather in fall's orange florescence to mourn  
the baby girl and be born again—twinned  
out of gutters of our once tender skin.  
We talk to the nuns at the Laundromat, and  
at the box store we see the dual nature of things:  
the corner's Tupperware of legs,  
the dead frozen in sleeping bags, the Igloo cooler found  
with a four-year-old girl folded under Coke cans.  
It is now October. The trees are not a mellow gold, not  
a meditation on change, and we wonder about her mother.  
A detective's wife bought the girl's white burial dress.  
The nuns look past their soap flakes,  
there is beauty, they say, folding their old habits.  
After twenty-two years a cousin is arrested.  
The sun, the moon, their beautiful foxtrot moves us.  
Baby Hope is Anjelica, we learn—remote angel,  
little girl tied to a table at home. No.  
There is the list of wounding details that sneak up,  
the slow erosion of optimism we are fighting.  
We go home and rake our leaves into temples.  
We put our children's clothes in the wash,  
the bright stains of the day—the mud and paint  
and milk, fading like stars in morning.

—Jen McClanaghan

others escaped to America. Much of their work in exile focussed on totalitarianism, although they assessed the phenomenon from a certain remove. For them, the genocidal state was not merely a German problem, something that resulted from listening to too much Wagner; it was a Western problem, rooted in the Enlightenment urge to dominate nature. Raymond Geuss, in the preface to a new edition of the Frankfurt School's U.S.-government-sponsored wartime intelligence reports, notes that Nazi Germany, with its barrage of propaganda and of regulated entertainment, was seen as an "archetypally modern society." Anti-Semitism was, from this perspective, not merely a manifestation of hatred but a means to an end—a "spearhead" of societal control. Therefore, the defeat of Mussolini and Hitler, in 1945, fell short of a final defeat of Fascism: the totalitarian mind lurked everywhere, and America was hardly free of its influence.

Chronically disapproving as these thinkers were, they were not disengaged from the culture of their day. In order to dissect it, they bent over it. One great con-

tribution that they made to the art of criticism was the idea that any object, no matter how seemingly trivial, was worth a searching glance. In the second volume of the Harvard Benjamin edition, covering the turbulent final years of the Weimar Republic, Benjamin variously analyzes Mickey Mouse ("In these films, mankind makes preparations to survive civilization"), children's books and toys, a food fair, Charlie Chaplin, hashish, and pornography ("Just as Niagara Falls feeds power stations, in the same way the downward torrent of language into smut and vulgarity should be used as a mighty source of energy to drive the dynamo of the creative act"). You often feel a tension between the intensity of the scrutiny and the modesty of the subject, as if an electron microscope were being used to read the fine print on a contract. Adorno, during his American exile, took it upon himself to analyze astrology columns in the *Los Angeles Times*. Upon reading the advice "Accept all invitations," he hyperventilates: "The consummation of this trend is the obligatory participation in official 'leisure-time activities' in totalitarian countries."

Benjamin took a different tack. In his maturity, he struggled to reconcile materialist and theological concerns: on the one hand, the Marxist tradition of social critique; on the other, the messianic tradition that preoccupied the Jewish historian Gershom Scholem, a close friend from student days. (The struggle yielded Benjamin's most famous image, in the 1940 "Theses on the Philosophy of History": the "angel of history" who is blown backward into the future by the storm of progress.) The messianic urge set off sparks of mystical hope that were fundamentally foreign to Adorno. Tellingly, when Benjamin addressed the subject of astrology, he was more sympathetic than censorious, seeing it as evidence of a largely extinct identification with nature: "Modern man can be touched by a pale shadow of this on southern moonlit nights in which he feels, alive within himself, mimetic forces that he had thought long since dead."

To read the biographies of Benjamin and Adorno side by side—Eiland and Jennings's new book, seven hundred and sixty-eight pages long, takes a place on the shelf next to Stefan Müller-Dooch's hardly less massive 2003 life of Adorno—is to see the fraying of the grand old European bourgeoisie. Benjamin was born in Berlin in 1892; his father, Emil Benjamin, was an increasingly successful entrepreneur, his mother something of a grande dame. "Berlin Childhood Around 1900," the most lyrical of Benjamin's works, conjures the sumptuousness of his family home, although his all-seeing eye pierces its burnished surface: "As I gazed at the long, long rows of coffee spoons and knife rests, fruit knives and oyster forks, my pleasure in this abundance was tinged with anxiety, lest the guests we had invited would turn out to be identical to one another, like our cutlery."

Adorno was born in Frankfurt in 1903, in conditions of comparable ease. His father, Oscar Wiesengrund, ran a wine-merchant business, and his mother, Maria Calvelli-Adorno, had sung opera. From earliest childhood, Adorno, as he chose to call himself on leaving Germany, swam in music, forming ambitions to become a composer. "Early on, I learned to disguise myself in words," Benjamin wrote. Adorno hid in sounds.

Benjamin had the more complicated personality. Staggeringly intelligent, he was so consumed by the life of the mind that he routinely lost track of reality. Even Scholem found him "fanatically closed off." At the same time, Benjamin indulged in bohemian tendencies: gambling, prostitutes, drinking, drugs. After failing to win an academic position, he took on journalistic assignments, coming to prefer "inconspicuous forms" over the "pretentious, universal gesture of the book." His family life was disorderly. Those who picture him as an innocent martyr, poring over Baudelaire as history closes in on him, may be disheartened to read of his callous treatment of his wife, Dora Sophie, from whom he begged money while conducting a string of "smutty affairs," as Dora put it. "All he is at this point is brains and sex," she wrote.

Adorno, a canner and less conflicted character, established himself in academia, writing dissertations on Husserl and Kierkegaard. He also studied composition with Alban Berg, one of the supreme musical figures of the twentieth century. Adorno was industrious, imperious, brusquely brilliant—the picture of the child prodigy who never fully grows up. But there was a bohemian strain in him, too. Kracauer, who began guiding Adorno when the latter was still of high-school age, wrote an autobiographical novel called "Georg" in which Adorno appears as a "little prince" named Fred, or Freddie. (Adorno was nicknamed Teddie.) Georg and Freddie go to all-night fancy-dress balls and one night end up in bed together, hovering on the edge of erotic contact.

Benjamin and Adorno met in Frankfurt in the early twenties, when Adorno was still a university student. At first, Adorno acted like a Benjamin disciple, virtuously interrogating culture high and low. Later, he behaved more as master than as follower, subjecting Benjamin's work to sometimes scathing criticism. In the new biography, Adorno comes across as a petty enforcer, trying to make Benjamin conform to Frankfurt School norms. Yet Eiland and Jennings may misunderstand the give-and-take of the relationship. In one letter, Adorno urges Benjamin to stop paying halfhearted tribute to Marxist concepts and instead to pursue a more idiosyncratic vision. Benjamin, for his part, was no hapless victim. When

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Adorno sent along a scenario for an ill-conceived music-theatre piece based on Mark Twain, Benjamin's unconcealed disdain—"I believe I can imagine what you were attempting here"—probably caused Adorno to abandon the project. The two served each other best by challenging assumptions at every turn; it was a mutual admonition society.

With the advent of the Nazis, Benjamin left Germany at once, taking up residence primarily in France. Adorno, whose post-doctoral thesis was published the day Hitler took power, hesitated to break from Germany, occasionally making slight gestures of accommodation with the regime. When his part-Jewish ancestry made his position impossible, he settled for a time in Oxford. In 1935, Horkheimer took the Institute for Social Research to New York; in 1938, Adorno reluctantly joined him. He and his wife, Gretel, urged Benjamin to follow them, casting New York in a seductive light. In one letter, Adorno announces that Seventh Avenue in the Village "reminds us of boulevard Montparnasse." Gretel adds, "There is no need to search for the surreal here, for one stumbles over it at every step." Presciently, though, she anticipates that Benjamin will be unable to leave Paris: "I fear you are so fond of your arcades that you cannot part with their splendid architecture."

She was referring to the "Arcades Project," Benjamin's would-be magnum opus—a kaleidoscopic study centered on the glass-covered shopping arcades of nineteenth-century Paris, intermingling literary analysis and cultural history with semi-Marxist sociology. At the heart of the scheme was Baudelaire, the prototype of the compromised modern artist, who casts off the mask of genius and surrenders to the life of the street. Baudelaire is depicted as a ragpicker, cobbling poetry from discarded fragments. At the same time, he stands apart from the crowd, enacting a ceremony of "mourning for what was and lack of hope for what is to come." Baudelaire's fascinated indecision in the face of nascent popular culture mirrors Benjamin's own. The fact that the "Arcades Project" never came to fruition—a magnificent chaos of materials was published in English in 1999—suggests that,

for this most hypersensitive of thinkers, the ambivalence was paralyzing.

When Benjamin committed suicide, apparently in the mistaken belief that he could not leave Nazi-occupied France, he carried with him an American entry visa, which the Institute for Social Research had obtained for him. It is hard to picture what might have happened if he had made it to New York—or, for that matter, to Jerusalem, where Scholem tried to get him to settle. The story might still have ended sadly: Eiland and Jennings emphasize that Benjamin had been tempted by suicide long before the cataclysm of 1940.

Adorno, for his part, eked out a living at various institutes and think tanks in America, and when he returned to Frankfurt, in 1949, he became a monument of German intellectual life. He died in 1969, of a heart attack, after a hike in the shadow of the Matterhorn.

Last year, the German publisher Suhrkamp, as part of its ongoing critical edition of Benjamin's works, released a volume devoted entirely to "The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility." It contains five distinct versions of the essay and related manuscripts, dating from the years 1935 to 1940, and four hundred pages of commentary. Benjamin might have scorned the scholarly fuss, but he knew the value of what he had achieved. The essay's governing question, about what it means to create or consume art when any work can be mechanically reproduced, has grown ever more pressing in the digital age, when Bach's complete cantatas or the Oxford English Dictionary can be downloaded in moments. In Benjamin's lifetime, intellectuals busied themselves debating whether the new forms—photography, film, radio, popular music—constituted art. Benjamin pushed past such panel-discussion topics to the more fundamental issue of how technology changed all forms, ancient and contemporary.

First, Benjamin introduces the concept of the "aura," which he defines as the "here and now of the artwork—its unique existence in a particular place." To know Leonardo or Rembrandt, one

must be in a room with their paintings. Chartres exists only at Chartres. The journey toward art resembles a pilgrimage. The treasures of the canon have always been embedded in ritual, whether it is medieval dogma or the "art for art's sake" theology of the nineteenth century. In the age of reproduction, however, aura decays. When copies compete with originals, and when new works are produced with technology in mind, the old values of "creativity and genius, eternal value and mystery" fall away. Far from lamenting this development, Benjamin hails it: "For the first time in world history, technological reproducibility emancipates the work of art from its parasitic subsequence to ritual."

Free of that velvet prison, art can assume a political role. Benjamin's dream of a radicalized mass culture emerged, in part, from his conversations with Bertolt Brecht, who believed that popular media could be marshalled to revolutionary ends, as in his and Kurt Weill's "The Threepenny Opera." Benjamin called the process "reception in distraction," meaning that the masses can internalize, say, Chaplin's images of a mechanized dehumanization and begin to question the rules of society. These spectators approach watching a film not as supplicants before an altar; rather, they take pleasure in the images and appraise them critically. They do not passively contemplate; they are alert eyewitnesses. Indeed, in the documentary films of Dziga Vertov, the masses themselves become actors, and the divide between author and public disintegrates. Benjamin's essay is furiously perceptive, although he never quite specifies how a filmmaker can sustain an explicitly radical agenda within the commercial mainstream. Chaplin's decision to flee to Europe in the fifties illustrates the difficulty.

When Adorno read "The Work of Art," he readily accepted the concept of the aura and its decay. Unsentimental about his own highbrow milieu, he had already done his bit to puncture the affectations of bourgeois aesthetics, and in particular the fantasy that classical music floats above society, in an apolitical haze. In the 1932 essay "On the Social Situation of Music," Adorno wrote, "The same type of conductor who undertakes an insatiably engrossed celebration of the Adagio of Bruckner's Eighth lives a life

closely akin to that of the head of a capitalist combine, uniting in his hand as many organizations, institutes, and orchestras as possible." Later in the decade, in the study "In Search of Wagner," Adorno depicted the composer of the "Ring" as a master illusionist and a harbinger of Fascism.

Benjamin's pivot toward popular culture was, however, another matter. In a 1936 letter, Adorno complained that his friend had too cavalierly consigned bourgeois art to the "counter-revolutionary" category, failing to see that independent spirits—the likes of, say, Berg, Pablo Picasso, and Thomas Mann—could still carve out a space of expressive freedom. (Adorno believed that Benjamin was too much under the spell of Brecht, who appeared ready to cast highbrow forms on the rubbish heap.) Benjamin, Adorno said in his letter, had "startled art out of every one of its tabooed hiding places," but he was in danger of falling under new illusions, romanticizing film and other pop forms. Adorno wrote, "If anything can be said to possess an auratic character now, it is precisely the film which does so, and to an extreme and highly suspect degree." The cinema was the new Chartres, a venue of communal rapture.

This is an insight as profound as any found in Benjamin's essay. Pop culture was acquiring its own cultic aspect, one neatly configured for technological dissemination. Why, after all, would the need for ritual subside when the economic system remained the same? (Benjamin once wrote, "Capitalism is a purely cultic religion, perhaps the most extreme that ever existed.") Celebrities were rising to the status of secular gods; publicity stills froze their faces in the manner of religious icons. Pop musicians elicited Dionysian screams as they danced around the altar of the stage. And their aura became, in a sense, even more magical: instead of drawing pilgrims from afar, the pop masterpiece is broadcast outward, to a captive world congregation. It radiates and saturates.

When Adorno issued his own analyses of pop culture, though, he went off the beam. He was too irritated by the new Olympus of celebrities—and, even more, by the enthusiasm they inspired in younger intellectuals—to give a measured view. In the wake of "The Work of Art," Adorno published two essays, "On

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Jazz," and "On the Fetish Character of Music and the Regression of Listening," that ignored the particulars of pop sounds and instead resorted to crude generalizations. Notoriously, Adorno compares jitterbugging to "St. Vitus' dance or the reflexes of mutilated animals." He shows no sympathy for the African-American experience, which was finding a new platform through jazz and popular song. The writing is polemical, and not remotely dialectical.

In the 1936 letter to Benjamin, Adorno offers a subtler argument—more of a plea for parity. Commercial logic is triumphant, he says, ensnaring culture high and low: "Both bear the stigmata of capitalism, both contain elements of change. . . . Both are torn halves of an integral freedom to which, however, they do not add up. It would be romantic to sacrifice one for the other." In particular, it would be a mistake to romanticize the new mass forms, as Benjamin seems to do in his mesmerizing essay. Adorno makes the opposite mistake of romanticizing bourgeois tradition by denying humanity to the alternative. The two thinkers are themselves torn halves of a missing picture. One collateral misfortune of Benjamin's early death is that it ended one of the richest intellectual conversations of the twentieth century.

If Adorno were to look upon the cultural landscape of the twenty-first century, he might take grim satisfaction in seeing his fondest fears realized. The pop hegemony is all but complete, its superstars dominating the media and wielding the economic might of tycoons. They live full time in the unreal realm of the mega-rich, yet they hide behind a folksy façade, wolfing down pizza at the Oscars and cheering sports teams from V.I.P. boxes. Meanwhile, traditional bourgeois genres are kicked to the margins, their demographics undesirable, their life styles uncool, their formal intricacies ill suited to the transmission networks of the digital age. Opera, dance, poetry, and the literary novel are still called "elitist," despite the fact that the world's real power has little use for them. The old hierarchy of high and low has become a sham: pop is the ruling party.

The Internet threatens final confirmation of Adorno and Horkheimer's dictum that the culture industry allows

the "freedom to choose what is always the same." Champions of online life promised a utopia of infinite availability: a "long tail" of perpetually in-stock products would revive interest in non-mainstream culture. One need not have read Astra Taylor and other critics to sense that this utopia has been slow in arriving. Culture appears more monolithic than ever, with a few gigantic corporations—Google, Apple, Facebook, Amazon—presiding over unprecedented monopolies. Internet discourse has become tighter, more coercive. Search engines guide you away from peculiar words. ("Did you mean . . .?") Headlines have an authoritarian bark ("This Map of Planes in the Air Right Now Will Blow Your Mind"). "Most Read" lists at the top of Web sites imply that you should read the same stories everyone else is reading. Technology conspires with populism to create an ideologically vacant dictatorship of likes.

This, at least, is the drastic view. Benjamin's heirs have suggested how messages of dissent can emanate from the heart of the culture industry, particularly in giving voice to oppressed or marginalized groups. Any narrative of cultural regression must confront evidence of social advance: the position of Jews, women, gay men, and people of color is a great deal more secure in today's neo-liberal democracies than it was in the old bourgeois Europe. (The Frankfurt School's indifference to race and gender is a conspicuous flaw.) The late Jamaican-born British scholar Stuart Hall, a pioneer of cultural studies, presented a double-sided picture of youth pop, defining it, in an essay co-written with Paddy Whannel, as a "contradictory mixture of the authentic and the manufactured." In the same vein, the NPR pop critic Ann Powers wrote last month about listening to Nico & Vinz's slickly soulful hit "Am I Wrong" in the wake of the unrest in Ferguson, Missouri, and catching the song's undercurrents of unease. "Pop is all about commodification: the soft center of what adapts," Powers writes. "But sometimes, when history collides with it, a simple song gains dimension."

One way or another, the Frankfurt School mode of criticism—its skeptical ardor, its relentless scouring of mundane surfaces—has spread far. When online recappers expend thousands of words de-

bating the depiction of rape on "Game of Thrones," or when writers publish histories of sneakers or of the office cubicle, they show intense awareness of mass culture's ability to shape society. And in some cases the analysis takes a recognizably dialectical turn, as in Hua Hsu's 2011 essay, for Grantland, on Kanye West and Jay-Z's album "Watch the Throne." A dispassionate hip-hop fan, Hua Hsu ponders the spectacle of two leading rappers making an "album against austerity," in which they mark their ascension to a world of "MoMA and Rothko, Larry Gagosian, and luxury hotels across three continents," and at the same time forfeit a hip-hop tradition of fantasy and protest. Citing the Kanye track "Power"—"Grab a camera, shoot a viral / Take the power in your own hands"—Hsu writes, "This version of power is entrancing—it explains an entire generation. But it also confuses ubiquity for importance, the familiarity of a celebrity's face for true authority." There is no telling how Adorno and Benjamin might have negotiated such contemporary labyrinths. Perhaps, on a peaceful day, they would have accepted the compromise devised by Fredric Jameson, who has written that the "cultural evolution of late capitalism" can be understood "dialectically, as catastrophe and progress all together."

These implacable voices should stay active in our minds. Their dialectic of doubt prods us to pursue connections between what troubles us and what distracts us, to see the riven world behind the seamless screen. "There is no document of civilization which is not at the same time a document of barbarism": Benjamin's great formula, as forceful as a Klieg light, should be fixed as steadily on pop culture, the ritual apparatus of American capitalism, as it has been on the art works of the European bourgeoisie. Adorno asked for only so much. Above all, these figures present a model for thinking differently, and not in the glib sense touted by Steve Jobs. As the homogenization of culture proceeds apace, as the technology of surveillance hovers at the borders of our brains, such spaces are becoming rarer and more confined. I am haunted by a sentence from Virginia Woolf's "The Waves": "One cannot live outside the machine for more perhaps than half an hour." ♦

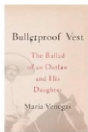
## BRIEFLY NOTED



**THE MAGICIAN'S LAND**, by *Lev Grossman* (Viking). In the final installment of his Harry Potter-for-adults trilogy, Grossman ushers his young wizards into adulthood. The book interleaves a series of epic quests—a journey to Antarctica, an attempt to steal a mysterious valise, a showdown with a lover turned demon, a battle to save an enchanted land—and gathers the strands into a redemption narrative. The strength of the trilogy lies not in its fantastical aspects but in the characters, whose inner lives and frailties Grossman renders with care and empathy. Quentin Coldwater, the protagonist of the series, matures from a teen-ager who is “innocent and naïve, as yet unscuffed and unmarred” into a humble adult, “one of those crude, weather-beaten shopworn things,” whose magical journey is deeply human.



**CUTTING TEETH**, by *Julia Fierro* (St. Martin's). Five pairs of variously overmedicated and undersatisfied Brooklyn parents head to a Long Island beach house for Labor Day weekend with their cranky, drooling, pampered progeny. What could possibly go wrong? In this comically energetic debut novel, Fierro, a mother of two who runs a writing workshop in Brooklyn, examines how easily privilege, neurosis, and love freighted with overwhelming fear of failure can turn even the sanest women into “sancti-mommies.” As her characters struggle to tame their toddlers without becoming fractious children themselves, Fierro reminds us how complicated the task of rearing human beings is, even in the most liberal of enclaves.



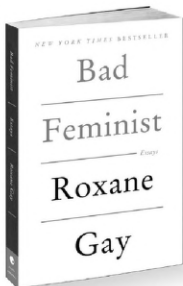
**BULLETPROOF VEST**, by *Maria Venegas* (Farrar, Straus & Giroux). When Venegas was in eighth grade, in Chicago, her father was stabbed by a neighbor during a card game. He shot the man dead, and left for Mexico with a small arsenal of guns concealed in his truck. Though she kept loose track of his whereabouts—in Colorado, with a new family; in a Mexican prison, for killing his brother-in-law—Venegas refused to see him for fourteen years, until she visited him at the hacienda that she and her siblings left as young children when they came to the U.S. As Venegas gets to know her father, the reader's sympathy shifts along with hers. Through vivid prose and psychological shading, she turns blockbuster material into a novelistic portrait of a renegade who lived his life on the border “of what was fact and what was myth.”



**THE ROMAN GUIDE TO SLAVE MANAGEMENT**, by *Jerry Toner* (Overlook). To convey in fine detail the attitudes of a society in which owning a slave was “a simple fact of social life,” Toner, a classicist, comes up with an ingenious device. He creates Marcus Sidonius Falx, an ancient-Roman nobleman and the imagined author of a treatise on how to buy, breed, and train a slave. Falx's text, illuminated by Toner's commentary, is by turns charming, haughty, and brutal. “A lot of slaves are nowhere near as dim-witted as they make out to be,” Falx writes. He mixes philosophical musings on the morality of slave-owning with practical tidbits: if your slaves are of various nationalities, we learn, it's harder for them to conspire against you.

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## DEMOGRAPHIC ART

*Genre trouble in "Red Band Society" and "Outlander."*

BY EMILY NUSSBAUM



**R**ed Band Society," a jaunty teen-mortality series from Fox, begins with a bang: a cheerleader collapses, mid-cheer, onto the gym floor. Fellow-students form a circle, snapping pictures with their cell phones. Only one uses her phone to call for medical attention—a crushed-out girl who, when instructed to perform CPR on her idol, says, "Really? Yes!," then dives in for mouth-to-mouth resuscitation.

As this sequence suggests, "Red Band Society"—which is set in a hospital, among a group of sick teen-agers who party, bond over impending surgeries, and engage in a variety of doomed, freighted romances—isn't especially in-

terested in the downside of terminal illness. Everyone is Abercrombie hot; cancer, in this world, seems suspiciously correlated with high cheekbones. It's basically "Glee" plus "Grey's Anatomy," with a streak of "Scrubs" and a touch of "The Lovely Bones." (The story, which is adapted from a Catalan show, is narrated by a wise little boy in a coma, who silently absorbs the melodramas around him.) The show mines a primal adolescent fantasy: that sickness might be a form of glamour, making a person special and deeper than other humans. "Everyone else thinks that when you go to the hospital life stops," Coma Boy intones. "But it's just the opposite: life starts."

Whether you find this conceit offensive or escapist will depend on your mood. For me, the crassness outweighed any charm. Zoe Levin plays the sick cheerleader, Kara, a mean girl with an enlarged heart—the kind of irony that the show plays for every possible beat. The amazing Octavia Spencer is a tough but caring nurse, who shows up with a coffee mug reading "Scary Bitch." There are hunky doctors, as well, and a set of teenage boys who spar and bond: the bad boy Leo (Charlie Rowe), who has bone cancer; the sensitive Jordi (Nolan Sotillo), who also has bone cancer; and Dash (Astro), who has cystic fibrosis (and who—in the pilot, at least—is stuck in the slang-slinging black-best-friend/player role). There's also Emma (Ciara Bravo), who wears a quirky-girl hat straight out of the Amy Grant "Baby, Baby" video, and who suffers from anorexia, although her illness is treated more as a romantic obstacle than as a potentially fatal disease. On occasion, the dialogue delivers a rude punch, as in the banter about what Jordi will do with his amputated leg after surgery: "Yeah, I'm planning to freeze it." Like wedding cake, Emma responds. But, mostly, the show is a bid for a ready-made audience: the ones who ate up John Green's young-adult novel "The Fault in Our Stars," which has sold ten million copies and inspired a hit movie starring Shailene Woodley.

That commercial gambit may pay off, but not because the texts are all that similar: "The Fault in Our Stars" is a far more thoughtful work. A romance between a very sick girl, Hazel Grace Lancaster, and a dreamy boy, Augustus Waters, who has bone cancer, the book is aimed at teenagers without being tailored to their needs alone. Unlike "Red Band Society," "The Fault in Our Stars" treats its heroine's parents like real people, not like cartoons—which is often the watermark of ambitious teen stories in any medium. Among the many appealing qualities of Green's novel is how much it's about storytelling itself, and the way in which books function as a badge of identity, a marker of taste and values. Hazel is obsessed with an experimental, adult literary novel, "An Imperial Affliction," which was created by a David Foster Wallace-like genius. Her private love for this novel—she reads it again and again, like a bible—is an expression of her

*"Red Band Society" mines an adolescent fantasy: that sickness is a form of glamour.*

identity as an outsider, an intellectual girl, forced to reckon with questions that her friends can't understand, such as the effect that her inevitable death will have on her parents. But Hazel has no problem with the fact that her boyfriend, Augustus, prefers a different kind of book: a series of video-game novelizations, whose simple, blunt formulas satisfy his own needs—for a fantasy in which he saves lives, over and over. For all its romantic contours, "The Fault in Our Stars" is centrally a dialectic about why people seek out stories, one that never quite takes a stand on the question of whether we're right to wish for greater clarity in our art, characters we can "relate" to, or, for that matter, a happy ending.

"The Fault in Our Stars" has inspired a roiling debate about the popularity of Y.A. fiction, particularly among adult readers. Several critics have called it flat-out shameful for a thirty-five-year-old to scarf down modern Y.A., arguing that the popularity of these books indicates that literary culture has been "dumbed down," with readers seeking what's easy and fun rather than struggling for deeper, more lasting rewards. The messy part about this discussion is, of course, that plenty of the most potent and enduring "literary" works focus on adolescent identity, from "Romeo and Juliet" to "The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter." Often, it's hard to distinguish the debate about art from the one about marketing, and from the thrumming anxiety about the economic survival of literary fiction—which is, after all, a genre itself. As with crime novels or science fiction, labelling entire genres "popular junk" or "ambitious art" is too simplistic: the teen book you like is Y.A.; the teen book I like "transcends the genre."

This debate has focussed on books. The funny thing is that, in television, the situation is nearly reversed: seeming "teen shows" were the ones that, in the nineties, smartened up the medium, becoming a bellwether of psychological complexity. The one-season series "My So-Called Life" and "Freaky and Geeks" were more groundbreaking and radical than practically any show on network television at the time—certainly more so than splashy adult dramas like "Ally McBeal," and, arguably, more than a much praised crime series like "N.Y.P.D. Blue." During the era of "The Sopranos," other shows emerged that blended teen drama with such "degraded" categories as hor-

ror and noir, "Buffy the Vampire Slayer" and "Veronica Mars" among them. Like any work that emphasizes the emotional life of teen-age girls, these series faced condescension, and were often conflated with greasier fare, like "Beverly Hills, 90210." And yet they were the shows that began to erase the distinction between comedy and drama, to muddy established genres, and to forge a way to be warm and humane without falling into sentimentality. Contemporary shows on ABC Family, including "The Fosters," fall into this same double bind: it's hard to convince an audience seeking ambitious television that a show that's designed to reach teens as well as adults might challenge them, particularly when it lacks the formal signifier of TV for grownups—looking like a movie. But how is it a guilty pleasure to watch a thoughtful show about family life? Is it the pleasure that's the problem?

"Outlander" is a new show on Starz that is smartly made, but it, too, falls into a tricky genre category: the female-skewing action adventure. The series is based on a hit literary fantasy series by Diane Gabaldon, which is to say, a romance novel—but that shouldn't block snobs like me and you from watching such a lively, rich, and emotionally satisfying story. We all have our demographic kinks, but if you take a brazen brunette from the nineteen-forties, send her back in time to eighteenth-century Scotland, dress her in corsets and furs, and leave her tom between her twentieth-century husband (a witty, ardent scholar) and her eighteenth-century crush, Jamie (a well-built redhead who is capable of "gentling" horses), well, welcome to my TiVo's Season Passes.

Caitriona Balfe stars as Claire, a nurse who, in the aftermath of the Second World War, goes on a second honeymoon with her historically minded husband, hoping to rekindle a marriage that has been strained by years of wartime separation. In the Scottish Highlands, she finds herself transported, via witchcraft, to an era when brawny laddies are fighting the redcoats—and nobody knows about disinfectant or germs. (Between "The Knick," "Outlander," and "Call the Midwife," cable television these days is practically an advertisement for Obamacare.) As Jamie, who

leans very close to Claire during all their conversations, Sam Heughan helpfully fills the shirtless-male-redhead slot left empty by "Homeland" and "Dexter," so that the couple's protracted game of Scottish footsie flares with convincing eroticism. Yet this love affair has gravity, too, because it's woven into a tragedy: Claire is embedded among Jacobin rebels, a culture that she knows is on the losing side of history, doomed to be crushed by the English. With each episode, the series intensifies, invoking interesting parallels with modern political issues—about nations whose enmity is so ancient that it feels indelible, links between wartime violence and sadomasochism, and the ethical questions raised by conflicts of unequal foes.

The show has sumptuous cinematography and gorgeous period costumes: everything is lushly green, or covered with mud, and, for anyone interested in details of the era, there are fascinating sequences set in the castle where Claire is trapped, suspected of being an English spy. Instead of panicking, she uses her nursing skills to make herself invaluable. The ensemble is full of great characters, including one of her husband's ancestors, the vicious English officer Black Jack (Tobias Menzies, who also plays Claire's husband, Frank); a hilariously witchy Lotte Verbeek, as a trophy wife who advocates that Claire adopt feminine wiles to survive this violent, patriarchal universe; and Graham McTavish, as a Scottish elder who begins as Claire's enemy but becomes her ally. Claire is a satisfying character—alternately sharp and naive, cunning and impassioned—but, then, she's a fantasy herself: a feisty avatar for female viewers, in much the same way that brilliant male characters have operated on so many adult cable shows, both good ones ("Mad Men") and bad ("Californication"). The female perspective is a welcome change, particularly in a cable landscape that finds every possible excuse for a middle-aged male detective to interrogate a teen-age stripper in her dressing room. But the show is more than fit for tat: it's sheer pleasure, no guilt allowed. ♦

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From the Minneapolis Star Tribune.

A tree fell during a thunderstorm onto a tent, killing a Minneapolis woman who was inside and injuring a man.

## LONELY PEOPLE

*"Starred Up" and "The Disappearance of Eleanor Rigby: Them."*

BY DAVID DENBY

*Ben Mendelsohn and Jack O'Connell play a father and son in prison, in "Starred Up."*

The level of suspense in the new British prison drama "Starred Up" is extraordinarily high—"crackling," in the journalistic language of years ago. Nineteen-year-old Eric Love (Jack O'Connell), incarcerated in a young-offenders pen, has become violent and unmanageable; the authorities transfer him to a brutal adult prison, where he is stripped, humiliated, and deposited in a cell. Soon afterward, in the prison yard, an older man with a narrow jaw and a fixed stare walks toward him, plants his face a few inches away, and, uttering something about a "junky slut" (Eric's mother?), tells the boy, who has apparently attacked a "geezer," that he's nothing special, just another "ordinary cunt" in the yard. The C-word and several other such endearments adorn virtually every sentence in "Starred Up," as they did in "Black Watch," Gregory Burke's celebrated 2006 play about a Scottish Army unit stationed in Iraq. In these confined male spaces, someone you can successfully insult is someone you have mastered. As we guessed, the older man, Neville (Ben Mendelsohn), is Eric's estranged father. Neville is a lifer, but he

tells his son that he could be released fairly soon if he behaves well. Instead, Eric goes on spectacular rampages; he may be trying to impress his father and destroy the old man's authority at the same time, and soon father and son, in a tangle of love and hatred, are cursing each other out, too. The movie threads an angry family quarrel through both the violent rituals of prison life and the corrupt relations of inmates, guards, and administrators. At first, you may think, Oh, it's that damn prison movie again, but "Starred Up" has a much more intimate texture of affection and disdain than most genre films. You're held by every exchange, every fight.

The movie was directed by David Mackenzie ("Perfect Sense," "Young Adam"), working with a first-time script by Jonathan Asser, a poet whose creative-writing sessions with inmates gave way to general therapy for the most violent prisoners; he wound up working for twelve years in Wandsworth Prison (some of the movie is based on his experiences there). Mackenzie, with Asser by his side, took over a former penitentiary in Belfast—a single location, which allowed

him the rare luxury of shooting in sequence. He also had a pair of editors immediately make a rough cut of every scene, so the edited body of the film was, so to speak, only a few hours behind the shoot. The actors could comfortably take off from the script without losing their way. Norman Mailer, in his failed movie efforts forty-five years ago ("Wild 90," "Maidstone," etc.), would establish the idea of a sequence and then let the actors improvise their way through it, a desperate attempt at "existential" cinema that demanded too much from actors and usually produced sub-Cassavetes chaos. But "Starred Up" is both tightly woven and explosive. An inmate walks into another inmate's cell, and you never know what's going to happen—an exchange of money and drugs, or a fight, or a passionate embrace.

Eric Love, as embodied by the extraordinary twenty-four-year-old Anglo-Irish actor Jack O'Connell, is an indelible character—as distinctive in his aggression and hurt as the rebellious young men played by Marlon Brando and James Dean sixty years ago. Slender and strong, lithe, very quick, O'Connell throws his shirtless tattooed body around with animal ferocity. He has flared nostrils, full, curved lips—a stallion, I'm afraid, is the appropriate visual comparison. Many young actors could probably match him in snarling anger, but few could switch, as he does, from rage to baffled vulnerability with such liquid ease. His Eric Love is not an anti-authoritarian, not a revolutionary: rough treatment and prison are all he's known in life, and he accepts both. Nor is he an example of the imperishable dignity of the human spirit, like the two friends in the pompous and unbelievable "Shawshank Redemption." Asser and Mackenzie's conception of the character is bracingly unsentimental: Eric fights for himself. He upsets the system of favors and bribes that rules the prison, but that was never his intention. Resisting all the way, he's taken in hand by the encounter-group therapist Oliver Baumer (Rupert Friend, playing the Jonathan Asser figure), and he finds companionship with black prisoners in Baumer's group, who recognize him as a fellow-outsider. Yet the movie is not a conventional liberal plea for prison rehab or for racial solidarity—it's too violent for

that. Fights break out among the men in the group, set off by no more than a few words, an implication, even a thought. All of these men are overprepared to respond to threats, even when the threats are only imagined. Since a betrayal of need instantly turns you into a despised "cunt," any connection at all—even between father and son—has barriers of contempt to overcome.

Such scenes would play even better if we could understand more of the working-class prison slang. We get the general emotional tenor of what's going on—you'd have to be blind and deaf not to—but, to American ears, a third or more of the dialogue is indecipherable. I would never recommend the atrocity of dubbing (standard practice in Europe), but a few subtitles would have helped. The filmmakers have argued that any titles would harm the over-all aesthetic unity of images, movement, and words. I don't buy it. Arguing on the same ground, Mozart, Verdi, Wagner, and Strauss would withdraw their works from the Metropolitan and any other opera houses that provide supertitles. "Starred Up" is an exciting film, but the arrogant confidence without which it couldn't have been made should now, for American distribution, be leavened with a bit of show-business savvy.

If I heard less of "Starred Up" than I wanted to, I heard more than I could bear of "The Disappearance of Eleanor Rigby: Them," a romantic drama measured out in teaspoons of misery. The movie is an anomalous object. Ned Benson, a first-time feature filmmaker, initially made two movies about a happy

marriage that breaks down after the death of the couple's baby boy: "Him," which presents the point of view of Conor (James McAvoy), and "Her," told from the point of view of Eleanor (Jessica Chastain). The two movies will soon open in limited release. Meanwhile, what we have in "Them" is an uneasy amalgam. The film begins in reckless rapture, as young Conor and Eleanor dash out of a restaurant without paying the bill. After a gusty tumble in a New York park, Conor says, "There's only one heart in this body. Have mercy on me." Chastain, with her mile-wide smile, galvanic torso, and mass of orange-red hair, is demanding and irrepressible as Eleanor, and Conor is nuts about her. In these short scenes, Chastain and McAvoy have a sensual responsiveness to each other's moods that is now rare in movies and feels like a blessing.

"Them" skips to a few years after the tragedy; the couple has separated. Eleanor jumps off the Manhattan Bridge. Rescued, she retreats to her parents' house in Westport, while Conor molds in the mostly empty Village bar that he has opened, with his best friend (Bill Hader) as cook. McAvoy, with his thin, scruffy beard and melancholy eyes, his theatre-trained voice, solid and distinct even at low levels, makes romantic desperation attractive. Chastain's Eleanor, withdrawn and frightened, has a skull-like stillness animated by flickering signs of recognition when she sees someone she loves. But Chastain half alive is a great actress half wasted. Until the end of the movie, these two talented performers appear together only briefly; the dissolution of the marriage was covered in scenes left out of "Them." What remains is

mostly knowing, allusive, but muffled conversation—earnestness stalled by pauses and misgivings.

Ned Benson's courage is impressive, his naïveté disarming. Moods of grief and depression are almost impossible to make exciting unless a director possesses something comparable to, say, Bergman's theatrical intensity ("Persona") or Antonioni's mastery of psychology and landscape ("L'Avventura"). Benson and the cinematographer Chris Blauvelt create beautifully melancholy tracking shots of Conor or of Eleanor wandering through downtown Manhattan at night, but most of "Them" consists of sensitivity garnished with culture. Eleanor clutches the literary magazine *n+1*; her mother (Isabelle Huppert), a French classical musician who gave up her career for parenthood, holds a glass of wine and makes rueful, worldly-wise remarks; her father (William Hurt), a shrink and an N.Y.U. psychology professor, speaks so hesitantly (he doesn't want to hurt Eleanor) that you feel you should applaud when he finishes a sentence. Most of this educated sorrow comes off as mere enervation; I wish Benson had played it as satire. Eleanor's friendship with a sympathetic professor at Cooper Union (Viola Davis) might have worked when embedded in "Her," but here it's a fragment leading nowhere. I don't know how the two movies might have been rescued, but "Them"—apart from a few affecting scenes—is a hollow, high-minded folly. ♦

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## CARTOON CAPTION CONTEST

Each week, we provide a cartoon in need of a caption. You, the reader, submit a caption, we choose three finalists, and you vote for your favorite. Caption submissions for this week's cartoon, by Michael Maslin, must be received by Sunday, September 14th. The finalists in the September 1st contest appear below. We will announce the winner, and the finalists in this week's contest, in the September 29th issue. The winner receives a signed print of the cartoon. Any resident of the United States, Canada (except Quebec), Australia, the United Kingdom, or the Republic of Ireland age eighteen or over can enter or vote. To do so, and to read the complete rules, visit [contest.newyorker.com](http://contest.newyorker.com).

### THE WINNING CAPTION



"I've gotta go—the exterminator is here."  
Trilby Tener, Dingmans Ferry, Pa.



### THE FINALISTS

"I hate Fashion Week."  
Eric Berger, Rye Brook, N.Y.

"Get me my flats—I'm going out to the mound."  
Neil H. Schott, Reno, Nev.

"They won't laugh when I slide into second base."  
Irwin Perr, Bellevue, Wash.

### THIS WEEK'S CONTEST



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