

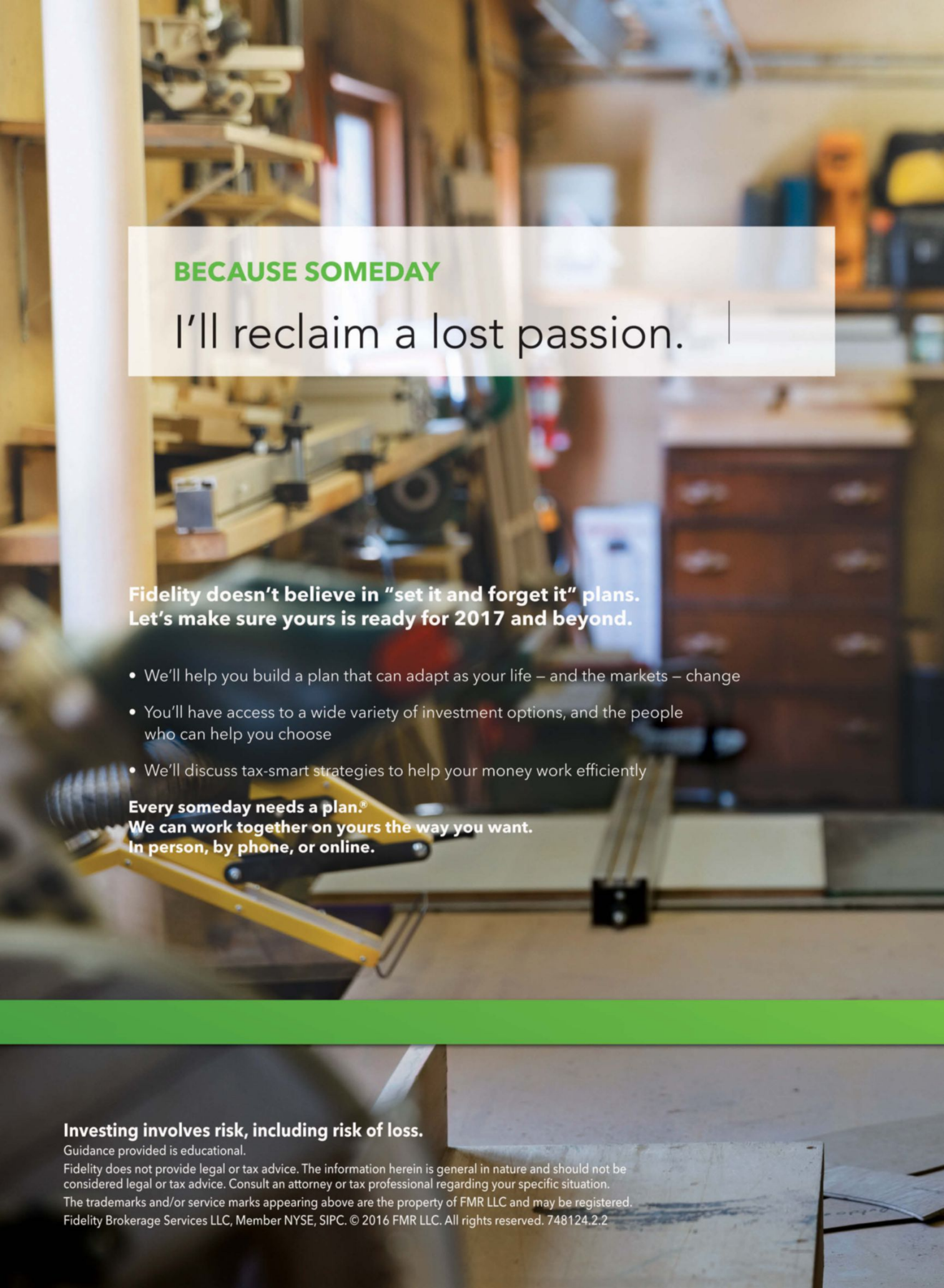
PRICE \$8.99

OCT. 10, 2016

THE NEW YORKER



B. Blitt



BECAUSE SOMEDAY

I'll reclaim a lost passion. |

**Fidelity doesn't believe in "set it and forget it" plans.
Let's make sure yours is ready for 2017 and beyond.**

- We'll help you build a plan that can adapt as your life – and the markets – change
- You'll have access to a wide variety of investment options, and the people who can help you choose
- We'll discuss tax-smart strategies to help your money work efficiently

**Every someday needs a plan.[®]
We can work together on yours the way you want.
In person, by phone, or online.**

Investing involves risk, including risk of loss.

Guidance provided is educational.

Fidelity does not provide legal or tax advice. The information herein is general in nature and should not be considered legal or tax advice. Consult an attorney or tax professional regarding your specific situation.

The trademarks and/or service marks appearing above are the property of FMR LLC and may be registered.

Fidelity Brokerage Services LLC, Member NYSE, SIPC. © 2016 FMR LLC. All rights reserved. 748124.2.2



Fidelity
INVESTMENTS

800.FIDELITY
Fidelity.com



THE NEW YORKER THE MONEY ISSUE

OCTOBER 10, 2016

13 GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN

33 THE TALK OF THE TOWN

Jelani Cobb on Hillary Clinton's next challenge; Bridgegate; parody punditry; an anti-quant; James Surowiecki on the racial wealth disparity.

THE WORLD OF BUSINESS

Sheelah Kolhatkar 40 The Anti-Uber
A new strategy in the ride wars.

SHOUTS & MURMURS

Douglas McGrath 47 The Pences Visit Manhattan

LETTER FROM STOCKHOLM

Nathan Heller 48 Cashing Out
Do we need paper money?

A REPORTER AT LARGE

Larissa MacFarquhar 56 Trumptown
How a West Virginia county turned deep red.

PROFILES

Tad Friend 68 Adding a Zero
Sam Altman, the Yoda of Silicon Valley.

WORK FOR HIRE

Justin Torres 60 Leashed
Shonda Rhimes 64 Scoop Dreams
Tom McCarthy 72 Model Behavior
Gillian Flynn 78 Costume Drama
Alison Bechdel 82 The Fellowship

FICTION

Kevin Barry 84 "Deer Season"

THE CRITICS

A CRITIC AT LARGE

Louis Menand 90 *Rehistoricizing Karl Marx.*

BOOKS

James Wood 98 *David Szalay's "All That Man Is."*
101 Briefly Noted

Continued on page 4



WHEN YOUR
TRADITIONS
SET THE
STANDARD,
YOU'VE MADE
HISTORY.

This watch is a witness to one of the world's greatest opera houses, the home to nearly 30 groundbreaking productions each year. Worn by those who always push art to new heights. It doesn't just tell time. It tells history.



OYSTER PERPETUAL DATEJUST 31

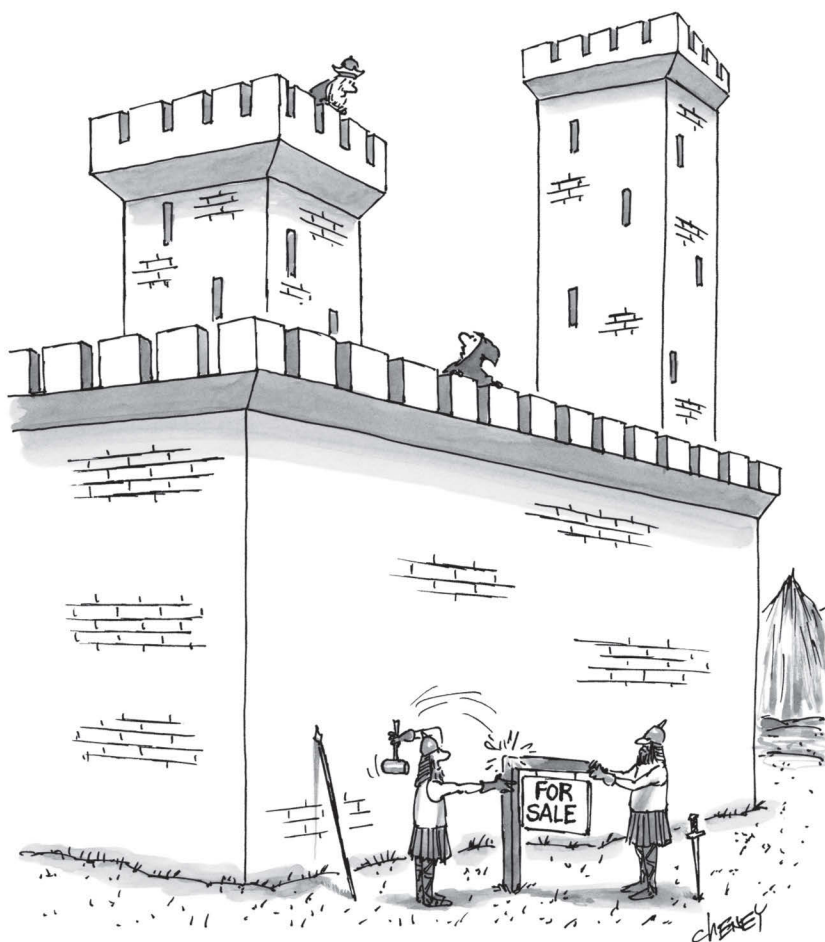
The Met
ropolitan
Opera



FOR AN OFFICIAL ROLEX JEWELER VISIT ROLEX.COM
ROLEX OYSTER PERPETUAL AND DATEJUST ARE ® TRADEMARKS. NEW YORK

		DEPT. OF DISPUTATION
Vinson Cunningham	102	<i>"The Birth of a Nation."</i>
		ON STAGE
Hilton Als	106	<i>Amy Schumer's standup.</i>
		THE CURRENT CINEMA
Anthony Lane	108	<i>"American Honey," "Deepwater Horizon."</i>
		POEMS
T. R. Hummer	81	<i>"As for the Housefly"</i>
Sharon Olds	86	<i>"Her Birthday as Ashes in Seawater"</i>
		COVER
Barry Blitt		<i>"Miss Congeniality"</i>

DRAWINGS *Tom Cheney, Edward Steed, Benjamin Schwartz, P. C. Vey, Shannon Wheeler, Liana Finck, Will McPhail, Tom Chitty, David Sipress, Frank Cotham, Tom Toro, Victoria Roberts, Michael Crawford, Pat Byrnes, John McNamee, Mick Stevens, J. C. Duffy, Peter Kuper, John Klossner, Zachary Kanin*
SPOTS *Tamara Shopsin*



"It's not a siege—it's a flip."

GRAVES

EX-PRESIDENT. NEW TERMS.



NICK NOLTE SELA WARD

GRAVES

SERIES PREMIERE
SUN OCT 16 10/9C

epix

"America's
favorite poet."

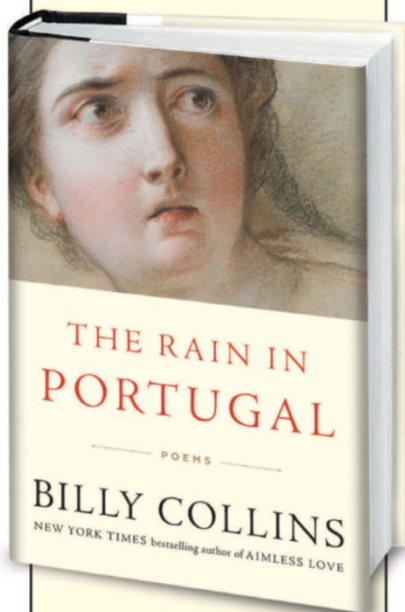
—*The Wall Street Journal*

"A remarkable
artist."

—J.J. Abrams,

The New York Times Book Review

BILLY
COLLINS



"A poet of
plenitude, irony,
and Augustan grace."

—*The New Yorker*

"Has earned rock
star status."

—*The Christian Science Monitor*

BILLYCOLLINSPOETRY.COM
f/BILLYCOLLINSPOETRY

A RANDOM HOUSE HARDCOVER, EBOOK, AND AUDIOBOOK

CONTRIBUTORS

Larissa MacFarquhar ("Trumpton," p. 56) is the author of "Strangers Drowning," which is just out in paperback.

Jelani Cobb (*Comment*, p. 33) teaches in the journalism program at Columbia University.

Sheelah Kolhatkar (*The Talk of the Town*, p. 38; "The Anti-Uber," p. 40) is a staff writer.

Nathan Heller ("Cashing Out," p. 48) has been writing for the magazine since 2011.

Douglas McGrath (*Shouts & Murmurs*, p. 47) is a filmmaker and a playwright.

Tom McCarthy ("Model Behavior," p. 72) has written four novels, including "Satin Island."

Alison Bechdel ("The Fellowship," p. 82) is the author of two memoirs, "Fun Home" and "Are You My Mother?"

Tad Friend ("Adding a Zero," p. 68) has been a staff writer since 1998.

Louis Menand (*A Critic at Large*, p. 90) was recently awarded the National Humanities Medal by President Obama.

Shonda Rhimes ("Scoop Dreams," p. 64) is the author of "Year of Yes," a memoir, and the creator and producer of "Grey's Anatomy" and "Scandal."

Justin Torres ("Leashed," p. 60) teaches at U.C.L.A. His novel, "We the Animals," is being made into a feature film.

Gillian Flynn ("Costume Drama," p. 78) has published three novels, including "Gone Girl," and a stand-alone short story, "The Grownup."

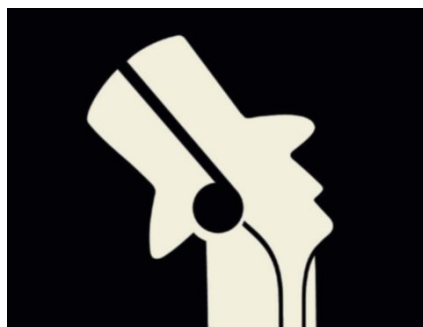
Kevin Barry (*Fiction*, p. 84) is the author of, most recently, "Beatlebone."

Vinson Cunningham (*Dept. of Disputation*, p. 102), who recently became a staff writer, has contributed to the *Times Magazine* and *McSweeney's*.

Barry Blitt (*Cover*) is working on a retrospective book of his work, which is due out next year.

NEWYORKER.COM

Everything in the magazine, and more.



NEW YORKER RADIO HOUR

This week, reporting on isolated Amazonian tribes and a conversation with Harry Belafonte.



NEWS DESK

Depictions of Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump from the magazine's archives, dating back to 1983.

SUBSCRIBERS: Get access to our magazine app for tablets and smartphones at the App Store, Amazon.com, or Google Play. (Access varies by location and device.)

ILLUSTRATIONS BY BARRY BLITT, STANLEY CHOW, MARK ULIKSEN, TOM BACHTELL, ROBERT RISKO

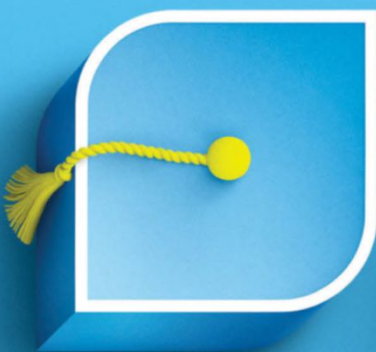
Out Here

SOME THINGS ARE BETTER EXPERIENCED
THAN EXPLAINED.





**HAVE MORE MONEY
FOR THE THINGS MORE
IMPORTANT THAN MONEY.**





An income stream for life
can help you maintain your
lifestyle in retirement. Start
now at [TIAA.org/results](https://www.tiaa.org/results)



TIAA

INVESTING | ADVICE | BANKING | RETIREMENT



BUILT TO PERFORM.

CREATED TO SERVE.

Lifetime income is a guarantee subject to TIAA's claims-paying ability. TIAA-CREF Individual & Institutional Services, LLC. TIAA-CREF products are subject to market and other risk factors. C32772

She loves Brooklyn.

So she gives.



Financial planner Nicole Francis advises clients to work with **The New York Community Trust** for smart philanthropy. They set up charitable funds to support causes they care about, from the arts to the environment.

Nicole follows her own advice — The Trust is already in her will. She'll help her favorite cause: the elderly in Brooklyn.

What do you love?

We can help you with charitable giving.

www.GiveTo.nyc

Contact Jane Wilton: 212.686.2563
or janewilton@nycct-cfi.org



THE NEW YORK COMMUNITY TRUST
nyccommunitytrust.org

THE MAIL

WHY MOTIVE MATTERS

In Jeffrey Toobin's Profile of Bryan Stevenson, a remarkable lawyer and social-justice activist, the Alabama state senator Dick Brewbaker says, "Why is racially motivated violence worse than any other kind of violence? I don't give a damn what the motive of the offender was if an act of violence was committed" ("Justice Delayed," August 22nd). But the motive for an act carries with it the key to its prevention. Although society cannot prevent violence that results from jealousy or personal animus, violence stemming from racism is not personal. It is a learned behavior, and part of the legacy of slavery in this country, and for that reason it is preventable in ways that other types of violence may not be. Stevenson and others in the criminal-justice and educational systems work to combat institutionalized racism, thereby helping to reduce the type of violence that arises from it. Elected representatives should be an integral part of this endeavor. If Brewbaker is truly committed to reducing violence, he should begin by acknowledging that racially inspired violence is preventable.

*Clara Cohen and Daniel Wolf-Root
State College, Pa.*

ART AND THE ENVIRONMENT

As an artist working in the land-art movement, I was interested to read Dana Goodyear's piece on Michael Heizer's massive desert work, "City" ("Earth-mover," August 29th). Goodyear's story of a broken man and his monument is dramatic, but it skims over the unpleasantness of the destruction of the landscape; the commercialization of "pure" art work; and the energy and resources required to build, allow access to, and maintain art that goes largely unseen. There has always been tension within the movement between projects like Heizer's and ones that are more subtle and ethereal, which leave few or no footprints. Artists such as Michael Singer, whose studio I have worked in for fifteen years;

Helen Mayer Harrison and Newton Harrison; and Alan Sonfist create art that is the antithesis of "City"—collaborative, scientific, regenerative, and physically accessible. There is something to be said for art that goes beyond a solely aesthetic engagement with the viewer, and does something to ameliorate a condition. There is a place for monumentality and shaping the earth, but artists who make projects on such a scale have an inherent responsibility to consider their environmental impact.

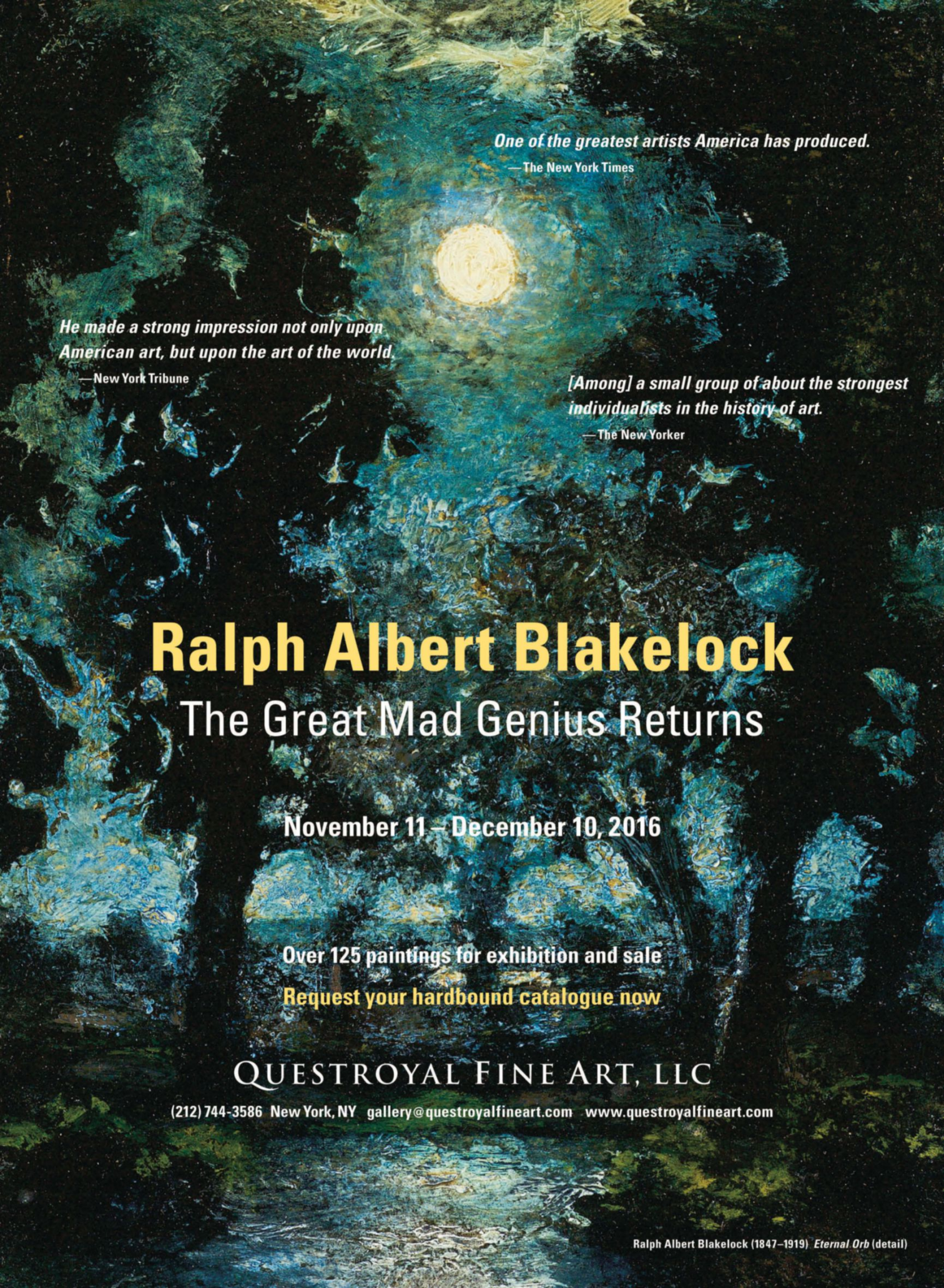
*Jason Bregman
Delray Beach, Fla.*

CONSCIOUSNESS IN SCIENCE

Adam Kirsch, in his review of Anthony Gottlieb's book "The Dream of Reason," writes, "Even today, cognitive scientists struggle to understand how consciousness arises from matter, though few doubt that it does" ("What Makes You So Sure?," September 5th). I would say that quite a few scientists, both inside and outside the neurosciences, do doubt that consciousness arises from matter. Moreover, I would question whether counting is a good way to assess the validity of belief, since the idea that consciousness arises from matter is not a scientific finding but a dogma based on acceptance of the same Cartesian world view that Kirsch describes so nicely in his review. Scientists cannot help operating on their beliefs about the world (even scientists act within the framework of culture), but most are blind to the lines between their scientifically validated understanding of the world and received assumptions. The fact that many people accept that faith healing works, for example, does not mean that it does; scientific truth is not decided by democratic vote.

*Sarah Murray
Alameda, Calif.*

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



One of the greatest artists America has produced.

— The New York Times

*He made a strong impression not only upon
American art, but upon the art of the world.*

— New York Tribune

*[Among] a small group of about the strongest
individualists in the history of art.*

— The New Yorker

Ralph Albert Blakelock

The Great Mad Genius Returns

November 11 – December 10, 2016

Over 125 paintings for exhibition and sale

Request your hardbound catalogue now

QUESTROYAL FINE ART, LLC

(212) 744-3586 New York, NY gallery@questroyalfineart.com www.questroyalfineart.com



GUCCI



OCTOBER 5 – 11, 2016

GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN



“You don’t know that rock music exists in this age unless someone shows you,” Jacob Faber told *Rolling Stone* in January. Consider this your tip. As **Sunflower Bean**, Faber, Nick Kivlen, and Julia Cumming propose a contemporary take on lo-fi psychedelia, wearing shrewd influences on stylish sleeves. They play their latest album, “Human Ceremony,” at Music Hall of Williamsburg on Oct. 7, with its classic-rock chops, slick titles (“2013”), and New Wave aesthetics (“Easier Said”), delivered under Cumming’s runway-ready voice.

PHOTOGRAPH BY MIRKA LAURA SEVERA

CLASSICAL MUSIC



On Oct. 7-8, the deeply creative cellist Sonia Wieder-Atherton performs music from her recent album, *"Little Girl Blue,"* a tribute to Nina Simone, in the Park Avenue Armory's Board of Officers Room.

OPERA

Metropolitan Opera

As in his 2015 staging of *"Iolanta,"* Mariusz Trelński's season-opening production of *"Tristan und Isolde"* turns late-Romantic romance into post-Hitchcockian psychodrama. The result is risky but effective. Wagner's opera, set mostly on a modern-day warship, now has a "Marnie"-like backstory: Tristan's yearning for oblivion stems from the early loss of his parents (and an unfortunate incident involving a cigarette lighter), which his foster father King Marke, an admiral, cannot heal, perhaps because of his own complicity. The singing is formidable. In Isolde, the glorious Nina Stemme has her most comfortable Met role: its conversational pacing allows her to build character and save her strength for the final, soaring Transfiguration scene. Stuart Skelton, as Tristan, sings with less personality, but with no less constancy and power. René Pape, a firebrand Marke back in 1999, is now wearied by experience but no less virile. Under the fierce command of Simon Rattle, the orchestra, miles away from Levine-like lushness, is an acoustical anaconda, squeezing the characters until not a speck of truth remains unheard. (Oct. 8 at noon.) • Michael Grandage's strangely inert production of *"Don Giovanni"* is at the very least an unobtrusive showcase for talented singers, and there is one in particular that New York audiences are eager to hear: the incisive British baritone Simon Keenlyside, who hasn't graced the Met stage since his staggeringly good Prospero in Thomas Adès's *"The Tempest,"* in 2012. As Mozart's titular roué, he leads a cast that includes Hibla Gerzmava, Malin Byström, Serena Malfi, Paul Appleby, and Adam Plachetka; Fabio Luisi con-

ducts. (Oct. 5 and Oct. 11 at 7:30 and Oct. 8 at 8:30.) • Christmas comes early this year, as the Met presents the first of three runs of a holiday favorite—Franco Zeffirelli's snow-kissed staging of Puccini's evergreen romance *"La Bohème."* Ailyn Pérez, Susanna Phillips, Dmytro Popov, David Bizic, and Ryan Speedo Green take the leading roles; Carlo Rizzi. (Oct. 6 and Oct. 10 at 7:30.) • It took Marilyn Horne's bravura singing, in the nineteen-seventies, for Rossini's fun and fizzy comic opera *"L'Italiana in Algeri"* to find a permanent place in the Met's repertory, and now Marianna Pizzolato joins the short list of mezzo-sopranos whom the company has entrusted with the title role. The bass Ildar Abdrazakov and the tenor René Barbera, in his company debut, join her for Jean-Pierre Ponnelle's traditional production, from 1973; James Levine, now the company's music director emeritus, conducts. (Oct. 7 at 7:30.) (Metropolitan Opera House. 212-362-6000.)

"Falling Man"

Kenneth Fuchs's eighteen-minute monodrama, which renders Don DeLillo's 9/11 novel of the same name in mournful, introspective tones, plays in a chamber arrangement at the September 11 Memorial and Museum with the baritone Jarrett Ott. After the performance, Fuchs and DeLillo join in a discussion with the artist Eric Fischl, whose arresting yet controversial sculpture *"Tumbling Woman"* is on display at the museum. (180 Greenwich St. To reserve free tickets, visit 911memorial.org. Oct. 7 at 7.)

National Sawdust: "The House Taken Over"

The brash new Williamsburg performance space, small but flexible, is given over for several days to the Manhattan School of Music, which presents the U.S. premiere of an opera by the up-and-coming composer Vasco Mendonça

which first bowed at the Festival d'Aix in 2013. The music director from that production, Etienne Siebens, joins the director R. B. Schlather to realize the work with a cadre of Manhattan students and alumni. (80 N. 6th St., Brooklyn. nationalsawdust.org. Oct. 7-9 at 8.)

ORCHESTRAS AND CHORUSES

New York Philharmonic

This week, Alan Gilbert and the orchestra make an accommodation to the schedule of a superstar. All four concerts include Bartók's mystical *Music for Strings, Percussion, and Celesta* and Ligeti's *"Mysteries of the Macabre,"* a quasi-concerto that makes use of material from the composer's madcap, single opera, *"Le Grand Macabre"* (with Christopher Martin, the Philharmonic's new principal trumpet, making his solo debut). In the final three concerts, the addition to the program is Beethoven's Piano Concerto No. 4 in G Major, featuring a guaranteed sell-out soloist, Lang Lang; the pianist is unable to appear in the first concert, but he'll be replaced by an orchestral work that carries its own special star power, Beethoven's Fifth Symphony. (David Geffen Hall. 212-875-5656. Oct. 5 at 7:30; Oct. 6 at 7:30 and Oct. 7-8 at 8.)

Simón Bolívar Symphony Orchestra

Carnegie Hall's opening concerts of the season feature one of the world's leading conductors, the Los Angeles Philharmonic's Gustavo Dudamel, returning to lead the Venezuelan orchestra with which he first made his name. Opening night is all dance: two Diaghilev-commissioned ballet scores, Ravel's *"La Valse"* and Stravinsky's *"The Rite of Spring,"* followed by a kind of programmed encore, a suite of "dances from around the world." The second night begins with more Stravinskian punch and color (another Diaghilev ballet, *"Petrouchka"*) but then plunges into the depths of Latin-American music with pieces by two of Dudamel's noted contemporaries, Juan Carlos Núñez and Paul Desenne, and by Villa-Lobos (the expansive *"Bachianas Brasileiras"* No. 2). And the final concert pays homage to an explosive twentieth-century masterwork, Messiaen's *"Turangalila-Symphonie"* (with two distinguished guests, the ondes Martenot player Cynthia Millar and the pianist Jean-Yves Thibaudet). (212-247-7800. Oct. 6 at 7 and Oct. 7-8 at 8.)

Juilliard 415 and Yale Schola Cantorum: "Mourning in Dresden"

Masaaki Suzuki, Asia's most eminent conductor of period-performance ensembles, leads students from two schools in a program that explores the musical textures of mourning in Baroque-era Dresden. Among the featured works are Hasse's *"Miserere"* in C Minor, Bach's sizable secular cantata *"Trauerode,"* and a concerto for winds and strings by Fasch. (Peter Jay Sharp Theatre, Juilliard School. events.juilliard.edu. Oct. 9 at 5.)

Philadelphia Orchestra

Very much in town conducting *"Tristan"* at the Met, Simon Rattle has been making a limited number of forays elsewhere. He comes to Carnegie Hall to lead an ensemble that deeply admires him in Mahler's Symphony No. 6 in A Minor, one of the great tragic masterworks of the Romantic era. (212-247-7800. Oct. 10 at 8.)

This cloud opens doors
of opportunity.

The Microsoft Cloud has helped Temenos lower the cost of borrowing by 90%. By putting their core banking software in the cloud, microfinance institutions are able to reduce the need for infrastructure and management. In turn, this opens the doors of opportunity for millions of underbanked people all over the globe.

This is the Microsoft Cloud.

learn more at microsoftcloud.com



INSPIRATION IN INK

Creativity comes in many forms. For cartoonist **Benjamin Schwartz**, creativity is a spark of humor, a blank sheet of paper, and a pen. He created this cartoon with his Pilot Precise Pen, and you can win a framed print of it, courtesy of Pilot. Visit newyorkeronthetown.com/pilot for details.



"We don't usually honor inanimate objects, but we couldn't ignore its attention to detail."

 **PILOT**
POWER TO THE PEN!



THE DEVIL IS IN
THE EXQUISITE DETAILS.

PRECISE
Premium Rolling Ball

The Pilot Precise V5/V7 delivers unparalleled performance for an ultra-smooth, precise writing experience. Available in capped and retractable options.



RECITALS

**American Contemporary Music Ensemble:
“Nordic Noir”**

ACME, a youthful band of New Yorkers devoted to performing music by composers of their day, appears at Le Poisson Rouge to explore the dark chamber tones of Denmark's Frans Bak, Carsten Bo Eriksen (a.k.a. MBD73), and Ejnar Kanding. The works on offer include world premières from Eriksen, who handles the visuals in a string quartet with video called “Memory Pieces,” and from Kanding, who works the electronics in his ambient work with strings, “Sensitive Shades.” (158 Bleecker St. *lpr.com*. Oct. 6 at 7.)

Bargemusic

The floating chamber-music series has a full plate this week. Among the offerings are the theremin maverick Rob Schwimmer, performing his own music for that deliciously obscure instrument and for the modern keyboard; a recital of mostly Franco-Russian favorites (e.g., Ravel's “Scarbo,” Balakirev's “Islamey”) by the pianist Tamara Orlovsky; and a weekend of Bach Cello Suites, performed by one of Scandinavia's leading soloists, Martti Rousi. (Fulton Ferry Landing, Brooklyn. *bargemusic.org*. Oct. 6–8 at 8 and Oct. 9 at 4.)

Brooklyn Art Song Society

This hardy young organization likes to give its seasons an overarching theme: this year, it's Vienna, fertile ground for any enterprising musician. The first program explores perhaps the richest vein, the music of the fin-de-siècle: songs both famous and obscure, by Strauss (including the “Four Last Songs,” with piano accompaniment), Zemlinsky, Pfitzner (“An den Mond”), and Marx. (Brooklyn Historical Society, 128 Pierrepont St., Brooklyn Heights. *brownpapertickets.com*. Oct. 7 at 7:30.)

Glenn Branca Ensemble

There may be no more appropriate an art-rock pioneer to honor the late David Bowie than Glenn Branca, the influential No Wave guitarist and composer who, for decades, has written symphonic minimalism for electric guitars which has found a home in the interstices between experimental rock and new concert music. In this appearance at Brooklyn's Roulette, he conducts his eponymous sextet, made up of four guitars, bass, and drum; the bill includes the world première of Branca's “The Light (for David)” as well as his work “The Third Ascension,” which explores alternate tunings and which received its U.S. première at the Kitchen earlier this year. (509 Atlantic Ave., Brooklyn. *roulette.org*. Oct. 8 at 7.)

George London Foundation:**Isabel Leonard and Jared Bybee**

The polished mezzo-soprano takes a break from a run of “Norma” at the Canadian Opera Company to help kick off the foundation's 2016–17 recital series, and she brings with her Adalgisa's sumptuous Act I *scena* from Bellini's opera. Her program also includes assorted Spanish songs by Lorca, Falla, and Granados and the habanera from “Carmen,” which the baritone Jared Bybee matches with Ravel's dreamy, Spanish-accented song cycle “Don Quichotte à Dulcinée” and “Vision fugitive,” from Massenet's “Hérodiade”; Djordje Nasic accompanies them at the piano. (Morgan Library & Museum, Madison Ave. at 36th St. 212-685-0008. Oct. 9 at 4.)

THE THEATRE



In a revival of the 1992 musical, Rannells plays the boyfriend of a man with an ex-wife and a son.

The Old Normal

Andrew Rannells plays a gay man of another era in “Falsettos.”

THE THIRTY-EIGHT-YEAR-OLD ACTOR Andrew Rannells is part of a new crop of gay stars—like Chris Colfer and Tituss Burgess—who never had to bother to be closeted in the public eye. Lean and boy-faced, with lacerating comic timing, he got his break in 2011, in “The Book of Mormon,” playing the bushy-tailed missionary Elder Price. (The character was nineteen, but Rannells was thirty-two at the time.) The show's runaway success led to TV roles on “Girls,” on which he plays Hannah Horvath's tart gay ex-boyfriend, and the short-lived sitcom “The New Normal,” about a same-sex couple in Los Angeles trying to have a child. In between, he's squeezed in memorable stints on Broadway, replacing Jonathan Groff in “Hamilton” and Neil Patrick Harris in “Hedwig and the Angry Inch.”

The world that Rannells occupies—gay marriage, gay celebrities—would have been hard to fathom for the characters in “Falsettos,” the musical by William Finn and James Lapine. Set in Koch-era Manhattan, it charts the entangled lives of New Yorkers dealing with exes, bar mitzvahs, therapists, and the spectre of AIDS. Its first Broadway revival (in previews, at the Walter Kerr), directed by Lapine and starring Rannells, Christian Borle, and Stephanie J. Block, will be a period piece, but when it was written

it was breaking news. The show is actually two one-acts mashed together. The first half, “March of the Falsettos,” debuted at Playwrights Horizons in 1981 and depicts an unconventional family in 1979. Nine years later, the authors had another story to tell: how disease had decimated their community. So they wrote another act, “Falsettoland,” set in the early eighties. Together, they formed the 1992 Broadway show “Falsettos.”

Rannells is too young to have experienced the worst of the nineteen-eighties AIDS epidemic, but he's old enough to remember it. Growing up in Omaha, Nebraska, “I didn't know exactly where I fit in,” he recalled during a rehearsal break. “And then I remember my mother suggesting one year that I watch the Tony Awards.” That happened to be the year “Falsettos” won Best Original Score and Best Book of a Musical. As an adolescent, Rannells did community theatre, and some of his older cast-mates were H.I.V.-positive. “It was a daunting realization: Well, I'm gay, and, if all these gay men are getting this disease, what does that mean for me?”

In “Falsettos,” Rannells plays Whizzer, the boyfriend of Marvin (Borle), who has an ex-wife (Block) and a son, played by Anthony Rosenthal. “There was a surprisingly moving moment in rehearsal, where we had to explain to Anthony that gay people were not always accepted,” Rannells said. “He's just turned twelve.”

—Michael Schulman



You've earned your money, but are you owning it?

In life, you question everything. The same should be true when it comes to managing your wealth. Do you know what your investment recommendations are based on? Does your financial professional stand by their word? Do you know how much you're paying in fees? And how those fees affect your returns? Ask your financial professional, and if you don't like their answers, ask again at Schwab. We think you'll like what we have to say. **Talk to us or one of the thousands of independent registered investment advisors that do business with Schwab. Ask questions. Be engaged. Own your tomorrow.™**

Schwab ranked
**"Highest in Investor Satisfaction
with Full-Service Brokerage Firms."***



charles
SCHWAB

Own your tomorrow.

Wealth Management at Charles Schwab

PLANNING | PORTFOLIO MANAGEMENT | INCOME STRATEGIES | BANKING

Brokerage Products: Not FDIC Insured • No Bank Guarantee • May Lose Value

To see how Schwab stands by our word, visit www.schwab.com/accountability

*Charles Schwab received the highest numerical score in the J.D. Power 2016 Full-Service Investor Satisfaction Study, based on 6,006 responses from 20 firms measuring opinions of investors who used full-service investment institutions and were surveyed in January 2016. Your experiences may vary. Visit jdpower.com.

There are eligibility requirements to work with a dedicated Financial Consultant.

Wealth management refers to products and services available through the operating subsidiaries of the Charles Schwab Corporation of which there are important differences including, but not limited to, the type of advice and assistance provided, fees charged, and the rights and obligations of the parties. It is important to understand the differences when determining which products and/or services to select.

The Charles Schwab Corporation provides a full range of brokerage, banking, and financial advisory services through its operating subsidiaries. Its broker-dealer subsidiary, Charles Schwab & Co., Inc. ("Schwab"), Member SIPC, offers investment services and products, including Schwab brokerage accounts. Its banking subsidiary, Charles Schwab Bank (member FDIC and an Equal Housing Lender), provides deposit and lending services and products. ASK QUESTIONS. BE ENGAGED. OWN YOUR TOMORROW. is a trademark of Charles Schwab & Co., Inc.

©2016 The Charles Schwab Corporation. All rights reserved. (0516-FTV3) ADP77864-02

OPENINGS AND PREVIEWS

The Cherry Orchard

The Roundabout presents a new adaptation of the Chekhov play by Stephen Karam ("The Humans"), directed by Simon Godwin and starring Diane Lane, Tavi Gevinson, Joel Grey, Chuck Cooper, and John Glover. (*American Airlines Theatre*, 227 W. 42nd St. 212-719-1300. In previews.)

Chris Gethard: Career Suicide

The comedian's solo show, directed by Kimberly Senior, looks for humor in such weighty subjects as mental illness, suicide, and alcoholism. (*Lynn Redgrave*, 45 Bleecker St. 866-811-4111. In previews.)

Duat

SoHo Rep presents a new piece—part vaudeville, part gospel show—created by the performance artist Daniel Alexander Jones and featuring his soul-singing alter ego, Jomama Jones. (*Connelly*, 220 E. 4th St. 212-352-3101. Previews begin Oct. 11.)

Fit for a Queen

The Classical Theatre of Harlem stages a new play by Betty Shamieh ("The Black Eyed"), inspired by the life of Hatshepsut, a woman who ruled as pharaoh in ancient Egypt. (*3LD Art & Technology Center*, 80 Greenwich St. cthnyc.org. In previews. Opens Oct. 7.)

The Front Page

Nathan Lane, John Slattery, John Goodman, Jefferson Mays, Sherie Rene Scott, Holland Taylor, and Robert Morse star in Jack O'Brien's revival of the 1928 comedy, about Chicago newspapermen on the crime beat. (*Broadhurst*, 235 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200. In previews.)

Heisenberg

Mary-Louise Parker and Denis Arndt reprise their roles in Simon Stephens's drama, about two strangers who cross paths at a London train station. Mark Brokaw directs the Manhattan Theatre Club production. (*Samuel J. Friedman*, 261 W. 47th St. 212-239-6200. In previews.)

Holiday Inn

A new musical from the Roundabout, featuring the songs of Irving Berlin and based on the classic 1942 film; Bryce Pinkham and Corbin Bleu fill in, respectively, for Bing Crosby and Fred Astaire. (*Studio 54*, at 254 W. 54th St. 212-719-1300. In previews. Opens Oct. 6.)

Kingdom Come

In Jenny Rachel Weiner's play, directed by Kip Fagan for Roundabout Underground, two women venture under false identities into the world of Internet dating. (*Black Box, Harold and Miriam Steinberg Center for Theatre*, 111 W. 46th St. 212-719-1300. Previews begin Oct. 7.)

Les Liaisons Dangereuses

Janet McTeer, Liev Schreiber, and Birgitte Hjort Sørensen star in Josie Rourke's revival of the Christopher Hampton drama, depicting the seductive games of aristocrats in pre-Revolutionary France. (*Booth*, 222 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. Previews begin Oct. 8.)

A Life

In Adam Bock's play, directed by Anne Kauffman, David Hyde Pierce plays a man who recovers from a breakup by looking for answers in astrological charts. (*Playwrights Horizons*, 416 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200. In previews.)

Oh, Hello on Broadway

An evening with Gil Faizon and George St. Geegland, two Alan Alda-obsessed Upper West Side geezers played by the comedians Nick Kroll and John Mulaney. Alex Timbers directs. (*Lyceum*, 149 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. In previews. Opens Oct. 10.)

Orwell in America

Joe Sutton's play, directed by Peter Hackett, imagines George Orwell on a book tour for "Animal Farm," for which his publisher has deployed a young woman to keep his political pronouncements in check. (*59E59*, at 59 E. 59th St. 212-279-4200. Previews begin Oct. 7.)

Plenty

In David Leveaux's revival of the David Hare drama, last seen at the Public in 1982, Rachel Weisz plays a British secret agent adjusting to everyday life after working in Nazi-occupied France. (*Public*, 425 Lafayette St. 212-967-7555. In previews.)

Public Enemy

Hal Brooks directs David Harrower's adaptation of Ibsen's "An Enemy of the People," in which a doctor discovers that his town's main tourist attraction is toxic. (*Pearl*, 555 W. 42nd St. 212-563-9261. In previews. Opens Oct. 9.)

The Roads to Home

Primary Stages presents Horton Foote's 1982 play about three women in Houston in the nineteen-twenties, directed by Michael Wilson and featuring the playwright's daughter Hallie Foote. (*Cherry Lane*, 38 Commerce St. 866-811-4111. Opens Oct. 5.)

Sell / Buy / Date

Sarah Jones ("Bridge & Tunnel") performs a new multicharacter solo show exploring the commercial sex industry, directed by Carolyn Cantor for Manhattan Theatre Club. (*City Center Stage II*, 131 W. 55th St. 212-581-1212. In previews.)

She Stoops to Conquer

The Actors Company Theatre revives the eighteenth-century comedy by Oliver Goldsmith, in which a young lady poses as a barmaid to appeal to a shy suitor. Scott Alan Evans directs. (*Clurman*, 410 W. 42nd St. 212-239-6200. In previews.)

Stuffed

The comedian Lisa Lampanelli wrote and stars in a play that braids together the stories of four women with food issues. Jackson Gay directs WP Theatre's production. (*McGinn/Cazale*, 2162 Broadway, at 76th St. 212-246-4422. In previews. Opens Oct. 7.)

Tick, Tick . . . Boom!

Keen Company revives this autobiographical musical by Jonathan Larson ("Rent"), about a composer on the verge of turning thirty. Jonathan Silverstein directs. (*Acorn*, 410 W. 42nd St. 212-239-6200. In previews.)

Two Class Acts

A. R. Gurney premières a pair of short plays: "Squash," about a college professor grappling with a student's provocative take on Plato, and "Ajax," in which an actress turned teacher inhabits an ancient text. (*Flea*, 41 White St. 212-352-3101. Previews begin Oct. 10.)

Vietgone

Manhattan Theatre Club stages a play by Qui Nguyen, directed by May Adrales, about two Vietnam War refugees (based on the playwright's parents) in a relocation camp in Arkansas. (*City Center Stage I*, 131 W. 55th St. 212-581-1212. In previews.)

NOW PLAYING

All the Ways to Say I Love You

For years, it was unclear what a valuable actress Judith Light was. Her early work on sitcoms got drowned out by laugh tracks and someone else's shtick. But watching her on shows like "Ugly Betty" and "Transparent" and, on Broadway, in "Thérèse Racquin" was to see a delicate greatness at work. As Mrs. Johnson, a middle-aged schoolteacher in Neil LaBute's new play, directed by Leigh Silverman for MCC Theatre, Light takes what she has and runs with it, but the script is another story altogether. As with so much of his recent work, LaBute allows his interest in perversity to overwhelm his genuine skills as a writer. Sometimes, Light transcends all that. As Mrs. Johnson, she has lank hair and a strained voice—she's been weakened and strengthened by her own rage. Stuck in an unfulfilling marriage, she goes to inappropriate lengths to dull the pain and feel alive. You believe every twist and turn of Light's voice without quite believing her words. (*Lucille Lortel*, 121 Christopher St. 212-352-3101.)

Battlefield

Three decades after his epic version of "The Mahabharata," Peter Brook stages this hour-long piece (co-directed with Marie-Hélène Estienne) drawn from the Sanskrit poem. (*BAM's Harvey Theatre*, 651 Fulton St., Brooklyn. 718-636-4100. Through Oct. 9.)

The Encounter

You feel the length of this nearly two-hour piece, in part because of the means that Simon McBurney, the creator, director, and sole performer, uses to entice us into his dense theatrical world. Inspired by the Romanian writer Petru Popescu's 1991 book, "Amazon Beaming," the story centers on McBurney's process of making the piece while he also plays a *National Geographic* photojournalist and some Amazonian natives. The audience listens to the performance through headphones, as fascinating three-dimensional sound conveys water, a forest, and so on. (The resourceful sound designers are Gareth Fry and Pete Malkin.) At first, it's like watching a radio play—or like looking at the visuals in your head while you listen to the radio. But, after a while, the experience feels claustrophobic, a trick to no purpose, and ultimately dull, since the headphones make us feel hermetically sealed and distant from McBurney's tremendous efforts. (*Golden*, 252 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.)

Nat Turner in Jerusalem

Aside from the hip-hop blasting over scene changes, we might as well be in the nineteen-fifties, when sententious dramas tackled Very Important Matters. Nathan Alan Davis's plodding play takes place one night in 1831, as Turner (Phillip James Brannon) awaits his hanging in a Virginia jail. Davis imagines a final encounter between the rebellious slave (accused of murdering scores of white folks) and the lawyer Thomas R. Gray (Rowan Vickers), who published a supposedly as-told-to account of the tragedy, titled "The Confessions of Nat Turner." But the conversation between the two men is surprisingly uninvolved—at least those old fifties chestnuts had storytelling chops. As the chat meanders from the prosaic (Gray covets the book's copyright) to the metaphysical (Turner argues that his actions were God's will), the show sinks under the weight of Davis's contrived lyricism and Megan Sandberg-Zakian's fussy staging. (*New York Theatre Workshop*, 79 E. 4th St. 212-460-5475.)

EILEEN
FISHER

**YOUR
CHOICE
HAS
POWER**

A Taste of Honey

Given its crackling dialogue, its innovative use of music, its acid defiance of social convention, and the fact that its author, Shelagh Delaney, was only eighteen when she wrote it, this comic melodrama about a poor, pregnant, preternaturally cynical teen-ager struggling to escape her mother's orbit was a fearsome achievement when it was first produced, in 1959. In other ways, though—particularly in its treatment of race—the play is starting to feel a bit creaky, and it's unclear why it demanded a revival right now. Nonetheless, Austin Pendleton's production makes the most of the occasion: Rachel Botchan anchors the cast with unflinching wryness as Helen, the alternately smothering and absent mother; Harry Feiner extracts maximum mood from his squalid rooming-house set and an astonishing backdrop of endless urban-industrial English rooftops shrouded in smog; and the live jazz trio is flawless. (*Pearl*, 555 W. 42nd St. 212-563-9261.)

The Trial of an American President

The most improbable scenario in Dick Tarlow's "What if?" play isn't that George W. Bush would willingly stand before the International Criminal Court in the Hague and face accusations of war crimes in Iraq. It's that Bush, a man famous for his adversarial relationship with syntax, could actually form complete sentences. Tarlow also makes the rookie mistake of having the bumbling, earnest Bush (Tony Carlin) defend himself, thus depriving the show of a potentially juicy plot device—a duel between Michael Rogers's self-righteous prosecutor and a defense attorney. There's a reason

those scenes are de rigueur in legal dramas: they manipulate the tension between warring parties. The show enrolls witnesses, via video, to testify for both camps, but the best trick is saved for the end, when a jury of nine randomly selected audience members renders a verdict—a genuinely suspenseful moment. (*Lion*, 410 W. 42nd St. 212-239-6200.)

Underground Railroad Game

Even as filmmakers and novelists further explore slavery and its legacy, this explosive "Did they really do that?" two-hander easily stands out. As perturbing as it is funny, the show starts off innocuously, as the writer-performers Jennifer Kidwell (black) and Scott Sheppard (white) impersonate fifth-grade teachers who lead their class through an educational unit about the Civil War. The chirpy satire of a curriculum that blithely turns historical horror into a playful contest is spot on. But then Kidwell and Sheppard, both fearlessly, ferociously uninhibited, take a sharp turn into the minefield of sexual and racial politics—a particular visual even looks like a Kara Walker silhouette. Reality and fantasy blur as the pair zero in on the American double helix of guilt and power. Yet the show's most subversive quality is also quintessentially American: it's wildly entertaining. (*Ars Nova*, 511 W. 54th St. 212-352-3101.)

Verso

The young Portuguese prestidigitator Helder Guimarães is less a man of mystery than a nerd of enigma. Short, slight, bespectacled, and adorably emphatic,

he's a goober in a three-piece suit, capable of wondrous sleights of hand. In this one-man magic show, directed by Rodrigo Santos, he staggers a credulous audience with riffs on classic card tricks and mind-reading feats. Even when these tricks are explicable, the speed and dexterity with which he accomplishes them astonish. Guimarães's crowd work is sometimes tentative, and his patter relies too heavily on platitudes. ("We are all weird.") A handful of his routines resemble those he demonstrated alongside Derek DelGaudio in their 2013 double act, "Nothing to Hide," a better-paced and more boisterous show. But the solo format showcases Guimarães's remarkable closeup work and dorky allure. What a card. (*New World Stages*, 340 W. 50th St. 212-239-6200.)

ALSO NOTABLE

The Black Crook Abrons Arts Center. *Through Oct. 7.* • **Cats** Neil Simon. • **A Day by the Sea** Beckett. • **Falsettos** Walter Kerr. • **Fiorello!** East 13th Street Theatre. *Through Oct. 7.* • **Hamilton** Richard Rodgers. • **Hamlet** Public. *Through Oct. 9.* • **The Humans** Schoenfeld. • **Love, Love, Love** Laura Pels. • **Maestro** 59E59. • **Marie and Rosetta** Atlantic Theatre Company. • **Sense & Sensibility** Gym at Judson. • **Small Mouth Sounds** Pershing Square Signature Center. *Through Oct. 9.* • **A 24-Decade History of Popular Music** St. Ann's Warehouse. *Through Oct. 8.* • **Waitress** Brooks Atkinson. • **What Did You Expect?** Public. *Through Oct. 9.* • **Where Did We Sit on the Bus?** Ensemble Studio Theatre. *Through Oct. 9.*

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

"Jerusalem, 1000-1400: Every People Under Heaven"

In this captivating show of some two hundred objects from the era of the Crusades, there are manuscripts, maps, paintings, sculptures, architectural fragments, reliquaries, ceramics, glass, fabrics, astrolabes, jewelry, weapons, and, especially, books—in nine alphabets and twelve languages. The works, from sixty lenders in more than a dozen countries, express the Jewish, Islamic, and Christian cultures of the time, the three great Abrahamic faiths sharing a city holy to them all, when they weren't bloodily contesting it. The installation is lovely: rooms in gray and blue are filled with a cumulative haze of spotlights, designed not for drama but for ease of attention; the show, though immense, won't exhaust you. The aesthetic appeal of the exhibits is continual and intense, but concentration on it can feel disrespectfully indulgent. Message, not medium, is the motive of even the most decorative work, in which visual pleasure serves to enhance belief and, perhaps, to give a foretaste of Paradise. Partly, this is true of all properly regarded medieval art and design, from the time before Giotto and Duccio began insinuating personal style into painting. Most of the work in the show is not credited to a named artist. An exception is Sargis Pidzak, an Armenian who made superb illuminations for a Gospel book dated 1346. Another illustration, in a beautiful Italian Torah, of sacrificial rites in the courtyard of the Temple, is attributed to the place-holding "Master of the Barbo Missal." *Through Jan. 8.*

Jewish Museum

"Take Me (I'm Yours)"

The New York iteration of this show, which originated in London in 1995, is for anyone who's ever lingered too long over the samples at Zabar's. The forty-two participating artists make works that can be pocketed or consumed. Pick up a bag and collect lewd pins from Gilbert & George, a capsule of air signed by Yoko Ono, a Lawrence Weiner temporary tattoo, a filmstrip by Jonas Mekas (a lovely royal blue, it was produced by filming through a glass filter previously used by Joseph Cornell), or a T-shirt from Rirkrit Tiravanija that reads "Freedom cannot be simulated." Along with a predictable pile of candies by Félix González-Torres (these ones kosher, and in red, white, and blue wrappers) is a sugar confection by Daniel Spoerri in the shape of a human skeleton (not kosher, and not to be consumed by visitors until the show's final day). It's all entertaining enough, but one can't escape the sense that some of these works were phoned in: should the brilliant young artists Ian Cheng and Rachel Rose, both known for their intricate moving-image work, really be writing fortunes for cookies? *Through Feb. 5.*

Neue Galerie

"Klimt and the Women of Vienna's Golden Age"

A second painting of Adele Bloch-Bauer joins the museum's renowned portrait in gold: here, she appears as a wavy column of white and periwinkle, her body almost indistinguishable from the wild background of rose, jade, and violet. It's one of nearly a dozen portraits of women by Klimt on view, ranging from the small, lovely "Girl in the Foliage," made

around 1896, whose greenery is rendered via impressionistic blots, to an unfinished, flower-bedecked, full-length portrait of Ria Munk, painted years after the young woman's suicide. There is a bit of *schlag* on top of the strudel: the Shanghai-based fashion designer Han Feng has designed silk dresses in the manner of Klimt's muse Emilie Flöge, and one gallery resonates with oompah-pah waltzes (the playlist is drawn from a 1909 Vienna ball, for which you'll find a dance card in a vitrine). Other supplementary material is just as appealing, notably a necklace by the Wiener Werkstätte designer Koloman Moser, which Klimt bought for Flöge, and glam clutches and purses by Josef Hoffmann, made of gold-embossed leather. *Through Jan. 16.*

GALLERIES—UPTOWN**Annette Lemieux**

The gallery inaugurates its new uptown digs with a fine sampling of late-eighties works by a pioneer of post-Conceptualist painting, construction, and photomontage. Lemieux's satirical content may be subtle but it registers with the snap of a major-league breaking ball. The one-of-a-kind classics here include "Calendar Girl," twelve laser-printed photographs of women who came to a sad end (Marilyn Monroe, Frances Farmer, an anonymous suicide), and a vast canvas titled "Nomad," which is marked by the restive meanderings of the artist's paint-smearing bare feet. Lemieux's special blend of exquisite craft and lurking sarcasm once led the critic Robert Pincus-Witten to term her "Agnes Martin with an axe to grind." *Through Oct. 22. (Dee, 2037 Fifth Ave. 212-924-7545.)*

"The House of Dust by Alison Knowles"

In 1967, Knowles, a Fluxus artist, composed one of the first computerized poems, written in Fortran code, with randomly assembled verses. (An example: "A house of steel / Among high mountains / Using

Sarah Jessica
PARKER Thomas Haden
CHURCH

DIVORCESM

For better or worse.
Or worse.



A NEW
COMEDY SERIES

OCT. 9
AT 10PM

HBO

OR STREAM IT ON
HBO NOW

© 2019 Home Box Office, a Division of Time Warner Entertainment Company, L.P. All rights reserved. HBO, the HBO logo and related marks are the property of Home Box Office, L.P. All other marks are the property of their respective owners. Certain restrictions apply.

candles / Inhabited by people who sleep almost all the time.") This significant, jam-packed exhibition revives Knowles's poem on an old-school dot-matrix printer, and includes related ephemera, including a film by Allan Kaprow. The show also highlights forebears of Knowles's aleatory composition, with a never-completed book by Mallarmé whose pages could be reordered at will, as well as Marcel Broodthaer's 1969 homage to it. There are also successors: Nicholas Knight's intricate paintings of overlapping colored curves were generated by an algorithm, and Katarzyna Krakowiak's audio piece remixes Knowles's original poem into skittering *musique concrète*. *Through Oct. 29.* (James Gallery, CUNY Graduate Center, 365 Fifth Ave., at 34th St. 212-817-7138.)

**"A New and Mysterious Art:
Ancient Photographic Methods in
Contemporary Art"**

Although technical advances rendered early processes obsolete long before the digital revolu-

tion, many maverick photographers still prefer unpredictability to perfection. Works by such established figures as Sally Mann, Adam Fuss, and Vera Lutter are included in this lively show, along with other determined holdouts for the outmoded, hands-on approach. The curator Jerry Spagnoli (a daguerreotypist himself) highlights wonderfully quirky works by Dan Estabrook, Craig Tuffin, and Stephen Berkman, the last of whom steals the show with sepia-toned images of faux-antique wonders, including a formally dressed woman with a camera lens for a head. *Through Oct. 29.* (Greenberg, 41 E. 57th St. 212-334-0010.)

GALLERIES—CHELSEA

Tracey Baran

Baran died when she was just thirty-three, in 2008. But even her earliest photographs, from the pre-

vious decade, feel like the work of a mature artist—knowing, generous, and poignant but unselfish. In the late nineties, she photographed her immediate family (in one image, her father appears slumped like a deflating balloon in his bath), often putting herself in the scenes. It was an intimate form of self-portraiture, at once staged and spontaneous, which later included the artist's friends and lovers. This big, welcome retrospective mounts unframed color prints from these series alongside previously unexhibited works that underline the frank, diaristic nature of Baran's approach and indicate her emotional range. Her view into the dusty corner of a red-painted room has an unsettling resonance that rivals any picture by Eggleston. *Through Nov. 12.* (Tonkonow, 535 W. 22nd St. 212-255-8450.)

Talia Chetrit

In this series of terrific erotic self-portraits, the photographer partners just as unabashedly with her camera as she does with her male companion. He's seen mostly in fragments: a hairy leg, a grasping arm, a broad back hunched over a cell phone. Chetrit's camera, and the snaking cord of its shutter-release mechanism, are the most aggressive—and suggestive—presences. Perched on a tripod set between her raised and open legs, it peers down, somehow both lascivious and detached. Chetrit also photographs herself in a mirror, but the camera masks much of her face; a single eye remains, as if to rivet the viewer in place. *Through Oct. 29.* (Kaufmann Repetto, 535 W. 22nd St. 347-849-2471.)

Hans-Peter Feldmann

When the German artist won the Guggenheim's Hugo Boss Prize, in 2010, he used his prize money—a hundred thousand dollars—to paper the walls of the subsequent exhibition with one-dollar bills. You'll find the same wry humor and preoccupation with display in this winning show of found paintings, some of which have been playfully doctored. Aristocratic Prussians now sport red clown noses or heavy-metal tattoos; nudes seen from behind include a creditable copy of Ingres's "Valpinçon Bather" alongside garage-sale pinups; choppy seascapes might have been made *en plein air* or churned out for hotel décor. (Most of the paintings are suspended from wires, and their versos disclose which are vintage and which, such as a "Venus of Urbino" with a bikini tan, are not.) What makes Feldmann's installation more than a jape is his evident passion for the history of art: he's like a pining teen-ager who mocks his desire because he can't bring himself to say he's in love. *Through Oct. 29.* (303 Gallery, 555 W. 21st St. 212-255-1121.)

Sergei Tcherepnin

Ten large, double-sided photographs of young men lunging or wrestling for a metal ball derive from Vaslav Nijinsky's "Jeux," a 1914 composition that took a distinctly homoerotic view of athletics. (The bodies of Tcherepnin's models, however, are more Bushwick than Ballets Russes.) Each image is outfitted with a piece of copper or brass, which the young New York artist has rigged to produce ambient sounds (buzzes, clatters, or rings) when it's touched. Your body will trigger similar sounds in a second gallery, where a bed, a table and chairs, and a flag are kitted out with transducers and campy photographs snapped in a Fire Island cruising ground. Tcherepnin's thinking about sexuality and sound is interesting but inchoate. *Through Oct. 15.* (Murray Guy, 453 W. 17th St. 212-463-7372.)



Carl Van Vechten's 1941 portrait of the ballet dancer Hugh Laing, on view in "Gay Gotham: Art and Underground Culture in New York," at the Museum of the City of New York. Opens Oct. 7.

NIGHT LIFE



Spilling Over

Doug Martsch catches up to his far-reaching influence.

IN THE TWENTY-FOUR years since Doug Martsch founded Built to Spill, indie rock's market share has waned and peaked, and waned again, shored up by sub-scenes in its low moments and heaved around by executives at its heights. It's hard to tell where the sound stands now: indie venues and campus stations are densely programmed, and loyal fans are rabidly invested, but it's been a long decade since Martsch said, genuinely, "I love Modest Mouse, and I'm glad they're doing well." Today, Built to Spill is echoed in the tones and lyrics of a dozen upstart groups, who were reared on the band's 1997 opus, "Perfect from Now On," and its follow-up, "Keep It Like a Secret"—the scuzzy young punks in Jank recently sang, "If you don't like Built to Spill / then I don't fuck with you or anyone you know."

Like the genre it helped cement, Built to Spill's formlessness is its innovation; the band remains evergreen by

never staying on one branch too long. Its creative gestations are largely at Martsch's whim, swaying between crisp, poppy hooks and languid guitar solos. Moved by J Mascis's muddy work with Dinosaur Jr., Martsch formed the band (his third) in Boise, Idaho, in 1992, with Brett Netson and Ralf Youtz, after a brief stint in the birthplace of grunge. "I got lucky," he told a *Spin* reporter last year. "I wouldn't be where I was if I hadn't lived in Seattle at a certain time, met certain people." Such aloofness is characteristic: Martsch originally planned to change the band's lineup with each album, and he has come close.

In 1995, Built to Spill signed to Warner Bros., amidst an alt-rock boom in which major labels seized on music outlets to market bands; in 1999, the album "Keep It Like a Secret" arrived with a twenty-eight-page press release. This second wave of aesthetically indie, corporate-charged bands negotiated the fierce demonstrativeness of do-it-yourself punk roots and the success of bands like Soundgarden and Nirvana. Martsch, unwilling to cop to either,

wrote records between tours and during lengthy breaks into the aughts. "I was just kind of burned out on the way Built to Spill was, indie rock, and the kind of music that we made," he said in 2006. "I just wasn't interested in listening to my band."

On last year's "Untethered Moon," Built to Spill's eighth studio album and the first in six years, Martsch sounds renewed and reengaged, with enough experience to own his lifelong affair with inconsistency. The album's opener, "All Our Songs," is as exhaustive as it sounds. A pop-punk drum fill, galloping AM rock chords, and splashes of space reverb give way to Martsch ticking off all the indie tropes worth harmonizing: "And now we settle for this complicated metaphor / And leave the simple truth unsaid"; "I knew when I woke up / Rock and roll will be here forever"; "I'll be fine in Idaho, America in the twenty-first century." Built to Spill's dispatch from the Northwest arrives at Brooklyn Bowl on Oct. 5, with opening sets from Hop Along and Alex G.

—Matthew Trammell

ROCK AND POP

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

Diarrhea Planet

This Nashville-based sextet understands the joys of maximalism and willful stupidity. Look past its name to the stage: four guitar players assembled front and center during performances, each with his own mike. The result is near-perfect garage rock that sounds like a Trans-Am parked out front—which is to say, the songs shred. Effervescent college-radio hits like “Ghost with a Boner” have given way to a more honed sound, best displayed on cuts like “Announcement” and “Bob Dylan’s Grandma,” from the band’s June album, “Turn to Gold.” The group recently performed a new single, “Ain’t a Sin to Win,” on “The Late Show with Seth Myers.” (*Bowery Ballroom, 6 Delancey St. 212-260-4700. Oct. 6.*)

Grandmaster Flash

Joseph Saddyler is enjoying a resurrection this year with “The Get Down,” a Netflix series that gives hip-hop the origin fable it’s long deserved. The show is set in New York City in 1977, where a young Grandmaster Flash innovated turntable techniques that would serve as the basis for hip-hop music, generate billions in revenue, and enrapture as many fans. After he moved to the South Bronx from Barbados, in the sixties, Saddyler split his time between his father’s extensive record collection and a geeky electronics hobby, soon discovering how both interests manifested in the music pouring from parties around his neighborhood. His trademark single, “The Message,” which was released in 1982 with the Furious Five, was the first hip-hop record to give its party context a political bent: a self-awareness that the music has borne to this day. (*House of Yes, 2 Wyckoff Ave., Brooklyn. houseofyes.org. Oct. 6.*)

Horse Meat Disco

The d.j.s James Hillard, Jim Stanton, Filthy Luka, and Severino host one of the sweatiest shows on London’s Rinse.FM, serving classic disco with sides of Italo, house, and anything else they can squeeze in, each Sunday. The crew accurately regards disco as the root of all club music—the late Chicago pioneer Frankie Knuckles famously called house music “disco’s revenge”—and traces its lineage from Herbie Hancock and Cheryl Lynn to the simmering sounds of today, in its radio engagements and notorious parties. (*Output, 74 Wythe Ave., Brooklyn. 718-302-5815. Oct. 9.*)

Japanese Breakfast

Japanese Breakfast was once the side project of Michelle Zauner, the vocalist and guitarist of the Philadelphia rock band Little Big League. But Zauner’s solo recordings—gripping and ethereal pop spells—quickly became her respite during a fraught time; she moved to Oregon to care for her mother, who was diagnosed with cancer and died shortly afterward. She is immortalized in Zauner’s shimmering debut full-length album, “Psychopomp,” released earlier this year, and even makes a cameo appearance on the title track in the form of a voicemail. Recently, Zauner shredded guitar while donning the traditional Korean *hanbok* dress that her mother wore to Zauner’s own wedding, in the music video for the effervescent track “Everybody Wants to

Love You.” Fresh from a tour opening for Mitski, Zauner performs moving cuts from her album during a headlining set at Baby’s All Right, along with her band. With **Emily Reo** and **Sharpless**. (*146 Broadway, Brooklyn. 718-599-5800. Oct. 6.*)

Kaytranada

A master of the remix, this Montreal d.j. and producer has reimagined the rare-groove sound for electronic-dance circles, straddling more scenes than he cares to count. Louis Kevin Celestin broke out with a pair of remixes that spruced up Janet Jackson and Teedra Moses songs with bubblegum bass drums and percussive ticks, and soon became a tour rat, spending two years playing for fratty bass-drop addicts and eclectic black hippies alike. This May, he released his debut album, “99.9%,” which offered more than dance-floor gunpowder, and flexed Celestin’s abilities as a producer for guests like Little Dragon and Craig David; this September, the record snagged Canada’s Polaris Music Prize. (*Terminal 5, at 610 W. 56th St. 212-582-6600. Oct. 5.*)

Shamir

“Ever since I was eight I was attached to the mike, wanted a guitar before I wanted a bike,” the twenty-one-year-old Shamir Bailey raps, of the music dreams he had growing up in Las Vegas. A spritely vocalist with a septum piercing and a tangle of dreadlocks that he swoops into something too big to be called a bun, Bailey identifies as “genderless,” and is the latest in a string of young artists melding rap’s quick-tongued boasts with the saccharine escapism of pop. He’s having tons of fun on singles like “On the Regular,” with an androgynous voice that bounces off the beat with ease. Shamir performs along with **Waxahatchee** and **Mutual Benefit** at the Friday Party, a Housing Works fund-raiser; proceeds go to New Yorkers living with H.I.V./AIDS. (*Industry City, 220 36th St., #2-A, Brooklyn. 718-965-6450. Oct. 7.*)

Warpaint

Since its inception, in 2004, the Los Angeles quartet Warpaint has drawn up dreamy dirges muscled with a post-punk edge. But the group’s third album, the recently released “Heads Up,” signals a turn away from otherworldly psychedelic soundscapes in favor of a terrestrial one: the dance floor. While the album’s title certainly spells out a change in direction, fans should hardly take that as a warning; the band sounds as sure and ebullient as ever. As the vocalist and guitarist Theresa Wayman said in a recent interview, the album is “a bit more uplifting, more positive, more ‘keep your head up,’” not, as her bandmate Emily Kokal added, “I’m gonna throw a football at your face so heads up!” Warpaint celebrates the album’s release with two nights in New York. (*Warsaw, 261 Greenpoint Ave., Brooklyn. 718-387-0505. Oct. 7; Bowery Ballroom, 6 Delancey St. 212-260-4700. Oct. 8.*)

Whitney

The guitarist Max Kakacek, formerly of the Smith Westerns, and Julien Ehrlich, who also drums for Unknown Mortal Orchestra, came together to form this soft-psychedelic outlet for their more cerebral musical impulses. Honeyed timbres smooth out their back-road folk influences in songs about heartache and home towns. Despite its slim lineup, Whitney composes ambitious arrangements that add in warm string and horn sections, pastel bridges, and choruses that swell to the back of their venues. Their debut album, “Light Upon the Lake,” was released

this June by the Indiana label Secretly Canadian, home to soul stirrers like Anohni and the War on Drugs. After hosting small album-release shows this summer, Whitney returns to the city for two much hyped nights. (*Music Hall of Williamsburg, 66 N. 6th St., Brooklyn 718-486-5400. Oct. 10; Bowery Ballroom, 6 Delancey St. 212-260-4700. Oct. 11.*)

JAZZ AND STANDARDS

Ravi Coltrane Quartet

Coltrane may never fully escape the shadow of his iconic father—he’s currently instrumental in the restoration of the Coltrane home in Dix Hills, Long Island—but his skill as a stylist on both tenor and soprano sax has carried him far beyond the glory of his name. His current quartet includes **David Virelles**, a pianist prized for his uncommon invention. (*Village Vanguard, 178 Seventh Ave. S., at 11th St. 212-255-4037. Oct. 6-9.*)

Bill Frisell

The 2014 album “Guitar in the Space Age!” documented Frisell’s infatuation with the pop and country music of his impressionable youth. The record never quite achieved liftoff, but in performance this brilliant instrumentalist and his sharp quartet (with the pedal-steel guitarist **Greg Leis**) are determined to convey the exhilaration of first-love listening. (*Blue Note, 131 W. 3rd St. 212-475-8592. Oct. 6-9.*)

Adam Kolker Trio

Dazzling interplay and piercing lyricism are the calling cards of this wiry trio, which unites the leader on saxophones and bass clarinet, **Billy Mintz** on drums, and **Steve Cardenas** on guitar—toothsome and audacious players all. (*Cornelia Street Café, 29 Cornelia St. 212-989-9319. Oct. 6.*)

David Krakauer

The man to come to for all things neo-klezmer, the virtuosic clarinetist Krakauer is also well versed in the ways of new jazz and contemporary classical music. His residency at this bastion of serious listening finds him leading all manner of ensembles reflecting his diverse passions, returning to home base on the final night with his Acoustic Klezmer Quartet. (*The Stone, Avenue C at 2nd St. thestonenyc.com. Oct. 6-9.*)

Azar Lawrence

Time hasn’t quite stood still for Lawrence, but the extended, fervently voiced John Coltrane-infused solos that garnered the saxophonist attention in the seventies still echo today. Though any number of contemporary saxophone stylists traffic in the Master’s idiom, Lawrence is closer to the source than most, having honed his prodigious chops in the bands of the key Trane associates McCoy Tyner and Elvin Jones. His quintet this week includes the trumpeter **Eddie Henderson** and the drummer **Billy Hart**. (*Dizzy’s Club Coca-Cola, Broadway at 60th St. 212-258-9595. Oct. 7-8.*)

Pharoah Sanders Quartet

Sanders’s acerbic tone and blistering attack were once able to peel paint off a wall, but the saxophone excursions of this venerated player now soothe the soul by way of deep expressiveness. The drummer **Jeff (Tain) Watts** is on hand to provide dynamic encouragement. (*Birdland, 315 W. 44th St. 212-581-3080. Oct. 4-8.*)

DANCE

New York City Ballet

An all-American-music program includes Jerome Robbins's "Glass Pieces," an urbane, minimalist work from 1983 set to Philip Glass, which has become something of a company specialty; with its repeating patterns and tech-y feel, it has kept its contemporary edge. Peter Martins's "Thou Swell," a tribute to Richard Rodgers, attempts, not too successfully, to render the atmosphere of a snazzy night club, where four couples dance to standards, played onstage by a jazz band. Balanchine's "Stars and Stripes," set to John Philip Sousa, is an example of Balanchine's tongue-in-cheek Americana. The "Classic NYCB" bill, later in the week, offers a bit of everything: mystery ("Serenade"), bravura ("Tchaikovsky Pas de Deux"), and, yes, more Americana ("Western Symphony" and Christopher Wheeldon's recent work "American Rhapsody"). • Oct. 5 at 7:30: "For Clara," "The Dreamers," "ten in seven," "Unframed," and "Everywhere We Go." • Oct. 6 at 7:30 and Oct. 9 at 3: "Glass Pieces," "Thou Swell," and "Stars and Stripes." • Oct. 7 at 8 and Oct. 8 at 2: "Serenade," "American Rhapsody," "Tchaikovsky Pas de Deux," and "Western Symphony." • Oct. 8 at 8: "Stravinsky Violin Concerto," "Monumentum pro Gesualdo," "Movements for Piano and Orchestra," "Duo Concertant," and "Symphony in Three Movements." • Oct. 11 at 7:30: "Dances at a Gathering" and "Firebird." (David H. Koch, Lincoln Center. 212-496-0600. Through Oct. 16.)

Maria Hassabi

At the Museum of Modern Art earlier this year, you might have nearly stepped on one of the participants in Hassabi's live installation "Plastic," which placed dancers on staircases, floors, and benches as if they were sculptures that moved very slowly. Hassabi's aesthetic was well suited to the viewing conventions of a museum, but "STAGED," part of the Crossing the Line Festival, transfers it back to the more awkward constraints of a time-bound show. The four dancers—Simon Courchel, Hristoula Harakas, Jessie Gold, and Oisín Monaghan—are all quiet spellbinders. (The Kitchen, 512 W. 19th St. 212-255-5793. Oct. 4-8.)

NY Quadriple

The concept is peculiar: the Joyce will cover part of its raked seating and install risers on the stage so that a rectangular platform may be viewed from four sides. The idea for this in-the-round arena came from the choreographer Lar Lubovitch, who has generously invited four exciting choreographers to use it. The final two are the always masterly and elusive Tere O'Connor, who débuts a meditative, rhythmically intricate trio called "Transcendental Daughter," and the up-and-comer Loni Landon, whose new work "Fast Love" looks at interpersonal connections. (175 Eighth Ave., at 19th St. 212-242-0800. Oct. 4-9.)

Shen Wei Dance Arts

The choreographer Shen Wei is also a painter, whose visual instincts have often proven to be the most compelling aspect of his dances. The dances themselves are like paintings in motion, sometimes surreal but more often abstract, in which the dancers are like brushstrokes on a stage. For his BAM début, Shen has taken on an opera that is not really an opera: Morton Feldman's "Neither," based on a short text by Samuel Beckett. Both Feldman and Beckett disliked opera, so there is no drama here, no story, no melodies in the traditional sense. Written for orchestra and a single soprano, who sings at the very top of her range, it creates a mood, and something like a sound-painting. Shen's dancers move—sometimes as a single organism, sometimes alone—in a vacant, luminous landscape framed by portals leading who knows where. (BAM's Howard Gilman Opera House, 30 Lafayette Ave., Brooklyn. 718-636-4100. Oct. 5-8.)

Compagnie Yoann Bourgeois

The French *nouveau-cirque* acrobat Yoann Bourgeois is a droll, slapstick comedian in the line of Chaplin and Keaton and an unsurpassed master of the trampoline as a tool for poetry. In "Minuit" ("Midnight"), he and the members of his company make their United States début, playing around with chairs, tables, and stairs, elegantly and amusingly elucidating what Bourgeois calls

the "suspension point." (BAM Fisher, 321 Ashland Pl., Brooklyn. 718-636-4100. Oct. 5-8.)

"Fall for Dance"

The festival closes with two programs. On Oct. 5-6, two international ballet luminaries, Alina Cojocaru and Friedemann Vogel—she formerly of the Royal Ballet, and he of the Stuttgart Ballet—team up to perform Frederick Ashton's tearjerker "Marguerite and Armand," based on Alexandre Dumas's "The Lady of the Camellias." Alvin Ailey American Dance Theatre, the Royal Ballet Flanders, and Jessica Lang Dance complete the bill. The festival bids adieu on Oct. 7-8 with a lineup that opens with a solo by Shantala Shivalingappa, a specialist in the light, lilting Indian dance form Kuchipudi. It also includes a newly commissioned duet by Wayne McGregor for Alessandra Ferri—back from retirement—and Herman Cornejo. (City Center, 131 W. 55th St. 212-581-1212.)

New York Theatre Ballet

The company is throwing itself a party on the occasion of the artistic director Diana Byer's seventieth birthday. The evening of Oct. 7 features new works by David Parker, Marco Pelle (a solo for American Ballet Theatre's Luciana Paris), and Gemma Bond (a duet for A.B.T.'s Devon Teuscher and Calvin Royal III). Byer herself will perform in Antony Tudor's 1938 dance-hall spoof "Judgment of Paris." Meanwhile, on Oct. 6 and Oct. 8, the rest of the company appears in a mixed bill that includes Jerome Robbins's 1984 gem "Antique Epigraphs" and an intriguing if overlong work set to Philip Glass, by the company member Steven Melendez and Zhong-Jing Fang. (Danspace Project, St. Mark's Church In-the-Bowery, Second Ave. at 10th St. 866-811-4111.)

Savion Glover

The tap-dance kid is over the hill. Now nearly forty-three, Glover is more virtuosic than ever, and a deeper artist. At the New Jersey Performing Arts Center, where the Newark native has recently become the dance adviser, he looks back on his career in "Chronology of a Hoofer." All of Glover's shows are homages to his deceased teachers and mentors—séances, almost—but here the reminiscing will be more explicit, with spoken-word stories and scrapbook photos. (1 Center St., Newark, N.J. 888-466-5722. Oct. 8.)

MOVIES

OPENING

Being 17 André Téchiné directed this drama, about a teen-age bully who is invited to live with his victim's family. Opening Oct. 7. (In limited release.) • **The Birth of a Nation** Nate Parker directed and stars in this bio-pic, about Nat Turner, the Virginia slave and minister who, in 1831, led an uprising against slave owners. Opening Oct. 7. (In wide release.) • **The Girl on the Train** A drama, based on the novel by Paula Hawkins, about a divorced woman whose obsession with a young couple involves her in a murder mystery. Directed by Tate Taylor; starring Emily Blunt, Rebecca Ferguson, and Justin Theroux. Opening Oct. 7. (In wide release.) • **Homeland: Iraq Year Zero** Abbas Fahdel directed this docu-

mentary, about the life of his family in Baghdad before and after the start of the Iraq War. Opening Oct. 6. (Anthology Film Archives.) • **13th** Reviewed in Now Playing. Opening Oct. 7. (In limited release.) • **Voyage of Time** Reviewed in Now Playing. Opening Oct. 7. (In limited release.)

NOW PLAYING

Author: The JT LeRoy Story

In 2005 and 2006, journalists discovered that the acclaimed novelist JT LeRoy was not, as billed, a gender-fluid, H.I.V.-afflicted adolescent hustler from the South but, rather, the fictitious persona of Laura Albert, then a forty-year-old San Francisco woman originally from New York. This

documentary, by Jeff Feuerzeig, relying heavily on interviews with Albert, unravels the twisty, suspenseful, pain-filled, and sometimes beautiful story of LeRoy's creation. Albert details the emotional emergency that gave rise to the persona, which she transformed into an outlet for her long-stifled literary energies. The film also delves into Albert's severely troubled childhood, which was defined by feats of creative disguise. To maintain the fiction of LeRoy, Albert prompted her partner's half sister to play the author in public (with Albert and her partner portraying faux members of the entourage) and among such unwitting participants as Gus Van Sant, Mary Karr, Courtney Love, Asia Argento, and a host of publishers, editors, and critics, who ended up feeling duped. The film includes Albert's tape recordings of conversations, including ones made without the participants' knowledge—yet the film doesn't make clear whether these recordings are archival or reenactments. Feuerzeig's flashy narrative antics reduce a serious and substantial story to mere snippets of information.—Richard Brody (In limited release.)

The Beatles: Eight Days a Week

This new documentary, covering the Beatles' years on tour, is reportedly crammed with fresh material, including previously unseen amateur footage, gathered from fans around the world. Sound recordings from live shows have also been cleansed and restored, with voices and instruments unearthed from below layers of uncontrollable screams. Anybody seeking scandal should look elsewhere, but then this is a Ron Howard film, and the tone is remorselessly upbeat—rightly so, when you see and hear the band in its early prime. There are interviews with Paul McCartney and Ringo Starr, and with a peculiar selection of celebrities, not all of whom have much to report—one exception being the historian Kitty Oliver, who speaks movingly of being part of an unsegregated audience. (The Beatles, as we see from their contract, would not perform to a segregated one.) The group's withdrawal into the studio, after a final concert in San Francisco, now feels, in the helpful light of this movie, inevitable; not only were the foursome pushing the confines of technology, the very experience of playing live had coarsened into a chore, and the joyous crowds were verging on a mob. Not that one should rue the retreat; after all, "Sgt. Pepper" was waiting in the wings.—*Anthony Lane* (Reviewed in our issue of 9/26/16.) (In limited release.)

Bridget Jones's Baby

Will she, won't she, and with whom? And will she fall over in the attempt? These and other breathless questions attend the return of Bridget Jones (Renée Zellweger), who, for the third time, strives to break the habits of loneliness and, by way of a bonus, to find love. She has a grownup career in TV, but the movie treats her job as little more than a joke, cleaving to romantic satisfaction as the one sure thing. Hence the perpetual need for Mr. Darcy (Colin Firth), who emerges from a failed marriage and pays court, yet again, to the dithering heroine. He also becomes one of two suspects in the matter of her unexpected pregnancy, the other contender being an American billionaire (Patrick Dempsey). Even addicts of the franchise will struggle to maintain that the new film, directed by Sharon Maguire, flows smoothly along; rather, it lurches from one awkward set piece to the next, gamely sustained by Zellweger and, in the role of a wry obstetrician, Emma Thompson.—*A.L.* (9/26/16) (In wide release.)

Cameraperson

The documentary cinematographer Kirsten Johnson's cinematic memoir—a compilation of sequences from films that she shot over the past twenty-five years—is somewhat less than the sum of its parts, yet those parts are, in themselves, transfixing. Johnson avoids voice-over commentaries, using only the sound recorded on location, yet the effect is often deeply personal. The most extended sequences were shot in a village in Bosnia, where Johnson worked on a movie about the systematic rape of women during the civil war in the nineteen-nineties. Her warm relations with the town's residents—and her appreciation of their rustic way of life—poignantly balance, as she tells her hosts, the horrific accounts that she documented. Among the other memorable characters here are a prosecutor in the murder, in Texas, of James Byrd; a doctor who delivers babies in a woefully under-equipped clinic in Nigeria; and Johnson's mother, Catherine, who suffered from Alzheimer's disease. Johnson's brief discussions with directors about the choices and ruses that go into the mak-

ing of images suggest a depth of knowledge and an artistic morality that the movie only hints at.—*R.B.* (In limited release.)

Don't Breathe

In this taut and claustrophobic thriller by the director Fede Alvarez, a home invasion by three attractive twentysomething criminals goes horribly wrong. An aging blind veteran (played with gusto by Stephen Lang) is the would-be victim of the heist, but, using his unusually keen remaining senses, he turns the tables on the thieves, and a tightly choreographed game of track-and-attack begins. The suspense is built as carefully as it is in a good John Carpenter movie; Alvarez uses the camera like a stealth weapon, exploring dark corners and hidden areas of the house with devilish glee. The film is violent and disturbing, as if Rambo had been let loose in a confined space, and the scares build to a frightening conclusion. The wonderfully expressionistic cinematography is by Pedro Luque.—*Bruce Diones* (In wide release.)

Don't Think Twice

The comedian Mike Birbiglia wrote, directed, and co-stars in this amiable, lovingly detailed comedy about comedy—specifically, about the life and possible death of an admired but struggling New York improv troupe called the Commune. Birbiglia plays Miles, who founded the troupe a decade ago but is struggling to find a place in the business at large. He and the five other members hold down day jobs (one's a waitress, another works in a store, and Miles teaches improv) while awaiting their big break. When a producer invites several of the members to audition for "Weekend Live," the Saturday-night broadcast that makes comedians instantly famous, the resulting turmoil of resentments and frustrations turns the Commune into a buzzing hive of individualists and threatens to pull it apart. Birbiglia films what he knows, offering ample and intricate scenes of improvisations performed onstage, along with an insider's view of the industry, and he pushes his colleagues to the fore—especially Keegan-Michael Key, who has a drolly ambiguous turn as a self-anointed star, and Gillian Jacobs, playing a powerhouse performer tormented by self-doubt, who is the film's movingly dramatic center.—*R.B.* (In limited release.)

Florence Foster Jenkins

The new Stephen Frears film tells the tale of Florence Foster Jenkins (Meryl Streep), and seeks to explain why, in 1944, a sellout crowd came to hear her sing at Carnegie Hall, in spite of—or precisely because of—the fact that she could not sing. She herself did not know this, and what Streep captures best, without a quaver of condescension, is not just the depth of Florence's innocence but the peculiar strain of courage that arose from it and struck a chord with the wartime audience. There is not much of a plot here. We watch Florence rehearsing (as if practice were ever going to help), performing for a select—and mostly aged—few, and then girding herself for the main event. Nor is there much social snap, as Frears inspects the follies of the rich with a surprisingly kindly eye. What lends the film its emotional twist is the presence of Hugh Grant, finally finding his ideal role as Florence's husband, St. Clair Bayfield, whose anxious and adoring love for his wife saved her, time after time, from humiliation. Simon Helberg enjoys himself as Cosmé McMahon, the loyal pianist who accompanied Florence in her happy musical massacres.—*A.L.* (8/22/16) (In wide release.)

Goat

A young man named Brad (Ben Schnetzer) goes to college. His brother Brett (Nick Jonas), who is already there, urges him to join a fraternity. (The fraternal love that exists between the two of them, though strong, is clearly not enough.) The meat of Andrew Neel's film concerns the revered rituals by which freshmen are initiated—or, if you prefer, taunted, pummelled, herded, and humiliated—into Phi Sigma Mu. The fact that they volunteer for such treatment only makes it worse, and, although Neel doesn't belabor the point, you are left to wonder how these guys will export their blend of childish submission and genial brutality into the world at large. As for the movie's aftertaste, it is marked less by disgust than by desolation, and deepened by the fine cinematography of Ethan Palmer; the final shot finds Brad in a green field, alone and utterly lost. With a chest-beating cameo from James Franco, as a frat boy who left the college many years ago but just can't leave it behind.—*A.L.* (10/3/16) (In limited release.)

Haramiste

The pugnacious banter and erotic fantasies of two teen-age French sisters expand to grand historical dimensions in Antoine Desrosières's brash yet exquisite forty-minute comedy, from 2014. Rim (Inas Chanti), the elder, a high-school dropout, and Yasmina (Souad Arsane), who's still in school, are Muslims, with roots in North Africa; they wear head scarves as they sit in a courtyard and argue about Rim's incautious temptations (Yasmina calls them "haram"—forbidden—and accuses Rim of being the "haramist" of the title). Then, at home in their bedroom, the young women talk about sex, purely theoretically, with an ignorance that's as funny as it is painful. (Chanti and Arsane co-wrote the script.) Soon, in front of a portrait of Yasser Arafat, Rim pursues an online dalliance with a married non-Muslim man which threatens to take a serious twist. The dialogue is zingy with gags about French pop culture and language, and its sharper implications cut through layers of frustration and imagination, fear and desire. The chamber play for two women and the Internet sketches—albeit with an implausible breeziness—the vast transition from tradition to modernity, from constraint to freedom, from family to the world. In French.—*R.B.* (French Institute Alliance Française, Oct. 11.)

Hell or High Water

The Howard brothers, of West Texas—Toby (Chris Pine), who's divorced and unemployed, and Tanner (Ben Foster), who's fresh out of prison—are in mourning for their mother. They're also pissed off at the Texas Midlands Bank, which will foreclose on her ranch unless they can fork over forty-three thousand dollars by the end of the week. The brothers set out to raise the money by robbing a bunch of the bank's branches, and Marcus Hamilton (Jeff Bridges), a marshal on the verge of retirement, sets out to stop them. The script, by Taylor Sheridan, piles a load of snappy incidents and tangy dialogue on this neo-Western, neo-noir setup; the action is as schematic and artificial as a chess game, and the characters have as much identity as its pieces. The director, David Mackenzie, gives each of his actors time to shine and fills the film with picturesque details, but the movie might as well be a table read set before a green screen. Only Bridges emerges whole; with his typical brilliance, he leaps from the laconic to the rhetori-

cal, making even the shady brim of his hat speak volumes.—R.B. (In wide release.)

The Light Between Oceans

Derek Cianfrance's new film is plainer in construction than his previous ones, "Blue Valentine" (2010) and "The Place Beyond the Pines" (2012), and far more secluded in its setting. Michael Fassbender plays Tom, an ex-soldier who finds refuge, after the First World War, as a lighthouse keeper. He is the sole resident of an island off the Australian coast, until he is joined by his new bride, Isabel (Alicia Vikander), and then, some time later, by a baby daughter. There is only one problem: she is not their child but a foundling, washed ashore in a boat, and their wrongful claim on her sweeps them to the shores of disaster. Although this peculiar plot, adapted from a novel by M. L. Stedman, bears traces of Shakespearean romance, Cianfrance grounds the action firmly in the emotional wranglings of his central couple. Theirs is a love story, and the irony is that both actors—Vikander, with the alarmingly free flow of her tears, and Fassbender, in his injured stillness—seem more suited to the agony of loss and separation than to marital delight. Rachel Weisz, as the girl's real mother, does fine work, making the most implausible decisions feel stirring and true.—A.L. (9/12/16) (In wide release.)

The Magnificent Seven

A well-meaning rehash of John Sturges's 1960 Western, Antoine Fuqua's movie takes place in 1879, in a town that is blessed with a gold mine and cursed by the heavy hand of Bartholomew Bogue (Peter Sarsgaard). Murdering, menacing, or buying off the citizens, he seems invincible, until one proud widow (Haley Bennett) brings in a gaggle of mixed mercenaries. They are played by Denzel Washington, Chris Pratt, Ethan Hawke, Byung-hun Lee, Manuel Garcia-Rulfo, Martin Sensmeier, and an ursine Vincent D'Onofrio: not a bad gang, and certainly diverse enough to meet our ethnic demands, yet it lacks the near-wordless cool that radiated from some of Sturges's team—Yul Brynner, James Coburn, Robert Vaughn, and Steve McQueen. The shootouts, too, fall short of the old dexterity; the most interesting innovation, mid-finale, is the cruel arrival of a Gatling gun, which allows the unchivalrous shadow of the modern age to fall across the West.—A.L. (10/3/16) (In wide release.)

Mr. Church

Bruce Beresford, the director of "Driving Miss Daisy," returns with another film about a benevolent and infinitely patient black man who brings sweetness and light to the lives of white people. Eddie Murphy plays the title role, that of a cook who is dispatched to the home of Marie Brooks (Natascha McElhone), a cancer victim and single mother who's raising her ten-year-old daughter, Charlie (Natalie Coughlin), alone. The action is set in Los Angeles in the nineteen-seventies. Mr. Church, a fine cook, is also an excellent artist, a literary connoisseur, and an accomplished jazz pianist; he's at the Brooks home from early morning until late at night, and his cherished private time hardly leaves a moment for sleep. Mr. Church sees the teen-age Charlie (Britt Robertson) off to college; she returns home pregnant, and Mr. Church takes her in. The sentimental vision of impoverished families is based on the total commitment and total dependence of a black man whose deferential manner reeks of subjugation and fear. Though the drama is repellent, Murphy is brilliant even when doing nothing, and the movie's only re-



Robert Aldrich, who infused many Hollywood genres with frenetic energy, concluded his career in 1981 with the exuberant sleaze of "... All the Marbles," featured in Metrograph's survey of his films.

deeming moments capture his preternatural grace in the simplest actions.—R.B. (In limited release.)

Pete's Dragon

The director David Lowery brings natural sweetness and heartfelt wonder to this remake of the 1977 fantasy. Young Pete's parents are killed in a car accident in the rural Pacific Northwest, and Pete, who survived, heads for the woods, where he's rescued by a furry green dragon—more like a gigantic, winged, fire-breathing dog—which he calls Elliot. Five years later, Pete (Oakes Fegley), a wild child whom Elliot raises, shelters, and entertains, is spotted by a local girl named Natalie (Oona Laurence), who informs adults, who drag him into society. Elliot, something of a rural myth, comes out of hiding to search for the boy, and the chase is on. Meanwhile, Pete becomes attached to Natalie's family circle, which includes an outdoorsman (Robert Redford) who's the only villager to have seen Elliot for himself. Lowery lovingly crafts a neorealist fantasy, in which Elliot's vast powers—including flight and evanescence—have practical limits. The director revels in the freewheeling frolics of Pete and Elliot, and resolves their conflicts with a hard-earned sentimentality. It's as if Disney were launching a new artisanal line; if so, this finely crafted and keenly felt drama inaugurates it in style.—R.B. (In wide release.)

Snowden

Oliver Stone's fast-paced and large-scale but narrow-focus bio-pic of Edward Snowden covers the near-decade from 2004, when Snowden (played, or, rather, impersonated, by Joseph Gordon-Levitt) dropped out of Army training because of injury, to 2013, when he left the United States and then got stuck in Russia. A computer whiz as well as a conservative from a military family, Snowden, as depicted here, joins the C.I.A. and is tapped for great things by his Mephistophelian supervisor, Corbin O'Brian (Rhys Ifans), though a frustrated tech genius (Nicolas Cage) dims his enthusiasm from the start. Snowden is disillusioned by his discovery of a vast and illegal surveillance network and its real-

world effects, including drone strikes that kill innocent people, but the tipping point is his realization that he and his girlfriend, Lindsay Mills (Shailene Woodley), are also under surveillance. Stone, who wrote the script with Kieran Fitzgerald, sticks to Snowden's point of view throughout, framing the action with scenes of Snowden's high-pressure meetings in a Hong Kong hotel room with the filmmaker Laura Poitras (Melissa Leo) and the journalists Glenn Greenwald (Zachary Quinto) and Ewen MacAskill (Tom Wilkinson). Stone's flashy filmmaking, including grand set pieces in enormous secret facilities, can't conceal his flat, thin, psychology-free depiction of a modest and self-sacrificing hero who single-handedly changed the politics of our time.—R.B. (In wide release.)

Sully

Clint Eastwood transforms the events, in 2009, of Flight 1549—which Captain Chesley Sullenberger and First Officer Jeff Skiles safely landed in the Hudson River after losing both jets in a bird strike—into a fierce, stark, haunted drama of horror narrowly avoided. Eastwood's depiction of Sully (played, with terse gravity, by Tom Hanks) begins with a shock: the captain's 9/11-esque vision of his plane crashing into New York buildings. The action of the film involves another shock: federal officials question Sully's judgment and subject him and Skiles (Aaron Eckhart) to an investigation that could cost him his job and even his pension. Eastwood films the doomed flight with a terrifyingly intimate sense of danger, focussing on its existential center, the little red button under the pilot's thumb. The film movingly depicts Sully's modest insistence that he was just doing his job and the collective courage of flight attendants, air-traffic controllers, police officers, and the passengers themselves. But, throughout, Eastwood boldly thrusts attention toward the aftermath of the flight: the nerve-jangling media distortion of events and personalities, plus the investigators' ultimate weapon, a computer simulation of the landing, a movie on which Sully's honor depends. The result is Eastwood's dedicated vision of moviemaking itself.—R.B. (In wide release.)

13th

Ava DuVernay's brilliantly analytical and morally passionate documentary traces the current-day mass incarceration of black Americans to its historical origins in the Thirteenth Amendment, which banned slavery and involuntary servitude "except as punishment for a crime." That exception, as she demonstrates by way of a wide range of interview subjects (including Jelani Cobb, of *The New Yorker*) and archival material, quickly led to the systematic criminalization of black people. When Jim Crow laws yielded to the civil-rights movement in the nineteen-sixties, Richard Nixon's "Southern strategy" and "law and order" campaign—which endure to this day—aimed to keep black citizens subjugated and out of power. DuVernay shows Ronald Reagan's "war on drugs," his economic policies, and his efforts at voter suppression to be a part of the same strategy. Meanwhile, DuVernay traces the rising number of black prisoners (Bill Clinton's policies, many undertaken with the support of black politicians, were also to blame) as well as the widespread tolerance of police violence against black people, linking legal depravities to entrenched economic interests. The film reveals crimes that have been fabricated in the service of oppression as well as another, real and ongoing crime—against humanity.—R.B. (In limited release.)

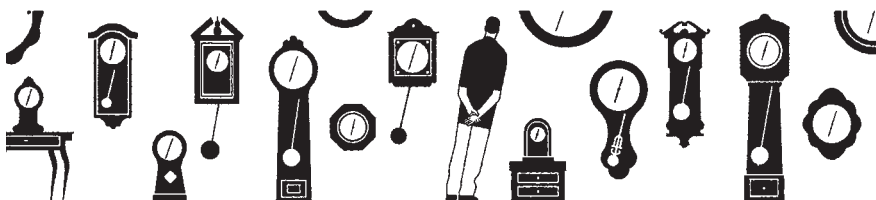
Voyage of Time

Terrence Malick's forty-five-minute IMAX extravaganza is a visual fantasy (accompanied by majestic music by Bach and Mahler) that, with a blend of scientific imagery, prehistoric reenactments, and contemporary live-action footage, abstractly dramatizes the history of the universe, looking back to its primal conflagrations and ahead to its ultimate extinction. Amazingly—but aptly—the film is intended for children, as declared in an opening title card as well as in the narration (spoken by Brad Pitt), and there's a young girl who comes back, sometimes with friends, throughout the film to link its visionary speculations to an ordinary child's daily life. The set of spectacular cosmic events, microscopic fascinations, fiery volcanic landscapes, and exotic deep-sea creatures—plus C.G.I. dinosaurs and dramatizations of a Neanderthal family—forms a cinematic science-wonder encyclopedia that joins analytical methods to philosophical speculations about the reason for existence and the natural origins of morality and aesthetics. While delving into, and perhaps even savoring, its implications, children may also question why the movie's sole modern people are white, while its prehistoric ones are dark; the film's weakest link is the one binding metaphysical concerns to human ones.—R.B. (In limited release.)

REVIVALS AND FESTIVALS

Film Society of Lincoln Center New York Film Festival. Oct. 5 at 6:45: "Antoine and Antoinette" (1947, Jacques Becker). • Oct. 5 at 9 and Oct. 6 at 6:45: "Mimosas" (2016, Oliver Laxe). • Oct. 7 and Oct. 10 at 9: "Yourself and Yours" (2016, Hong Sang-soo). • Oct. 9 at 9 and Oct. 11 at 6: "Hermia and Helena" (2016, Matias Piñeiro). • Oct. 11 at 9: "Manchester by the Sea" (2016, Kenneth Lonergan). • Oct. 11 at 9:15: "Staying Vertical" (2016, Alain Guiraudie). **Metrograph** The films of Robert Aldrich. Oct. 5 at 9: "... All the Marbles" (1981). • Oct. 6 at 9:30: "Too Late the Hero" (1970). • Oct. 8 at 5:15 and 9:15: "The Choirboys" (1977). • Oct. 9 at 1:30 and 5: "The Legend of Lylah Clare" (1968).

ABOVE & BEYOND



New York Comic Con

This culture convention has grown from a geek refuge to an all but mandatory celebration of the best in upcoming television, film, and publishing—well, it's still a geek refuge, but there are a lot more geeks. Fans and enthusiasts will enjoy unprecedented access to stars from series such as "Game of Thrones" and "Stranger Things"; panels and workshops with the directors, producers, and industry insiders who keep the entertainment machine churning; and appearances by Matt Damon, Carrie Fisher, Kate Winslet, Ali Larter, Lucy Liu, Neil deGrasse Tyson, John Bernthal, and many others. The annual display of inventive costumes promises to be more outlandish than ever with the return of the NYCC Eastern Championships of Cosplay, where elaborate props and inventive concepts reign and trademarks are an afterthought. (Javits Center, Madison Square Garden, the Hammerstein Ballroom, and Hudson Mercantile. newyorkcomiccon.com. Oct. 6-9.)

Great North River Tugboat Race

At this historic Hudson River tugboat race—rescheduled after weather warnings in September—viewers can get an up-close view of the action from the Circle Line Spectator Boat, which cruises alongside the flotilla as competitors sail for glory from Pier 1 to Pier 84. After the race, families can participate in various boardwalk contests, including line-tossing and spinach-eating. This year's race honors Peter Sanford, the founder of the Working Harbor Committee and a founder of the South Street Seaport Museum and the National Maritime Historical Society, who died in March. (Pier 83, W. 43rd St. and Hudson River Park. workingharbor.com. Oct. 9 at 9 A.M.)

AUCTIONS AND ANTIQUES

If you agree with André Bazin's notion that the art of photography satisfies our "psychological desire for realism," then this is a good week to head to the auction houses. **Sotheby's** holds a large sale of photographs on Oct. 7, with material from the nineteenth century on up to the last decade. Among the more interesting early lots is a photograph of Abraham Lincoln's first Inauguration, on March 4, 1861, just weeks before the start of the Civil War. Another image in the sale, by Stieglitz, shows a young Georgia O'Keeffe, wearing a top hat and peering slyly away from the photographer, as if she were keeping a secret. (York Ave. at 72nd St. 212-606-7000.) • The sale of photographs at **Christie's** (Oct. 5) is led by three Mapplethorpes, first among them a 1987 image entitled simply "Flag," in which a translucent American flag flutters majestically in the breeze before a wide-open sky. A sale held a few days later lives up to its name ("Opulence," Oct. 10), offering mountains of ornate

bric-a-brac, including a fabulously over-the-top French gilt-wood piano. Its lid is decorated with a scene in the style of Watteau, and the sides are ornamented with scrolling acanthus leaves and frolicking putti. (20 Rockefeller Plaza, at 49th St. 212-636-2000.) • **Phillips** holds not one but two sales of photographs (Oct. 5-6), with the pricier items grouped together on the first evening. These include various images by Avedon, such as his shimmering 1959 portrait of Brigitte Bardot (with "hair by Alexandre, Paris"), taken for *Harper's Bazaar*. (450 Park Ave. 212-940-1200.) • **Swann**, a pioneer in sales of African-American art, holds an auction on Oct. 6 which includes a large Corot-like pastoral canvas by Edward M. Bannister ("Untitled") and a gorgeous portfolio of silver prints of elegant denizens of Harlem in the teens and twenties by the Harlem Renaissance photographer James Van Der Zee. (104 E. 25th St. 212-254-4710.)

READINGS AND TALKS

92Y

The broadcasting veteran Charlie Rose speaks with the Supreme Court justice Stephen Breyer, parsing an issue of increasing urgency on the heels of a contentious Presidency and ahead of what may become another. Appointed by Bill Clinton in 1994, Breyer has presided over several cases that have established and reinforced the boundaries of Presidential power: Breyer here reflects on what it means for a head of state to overstep those limits. Breyer and Rose unpack the death penalty, gun control, foreign law, interpreting the Constitution, and the obligation of U.S. courts to consider the nuances of political systems in nations other than their own. Attendees will receive a copy of Breyer's book "The Court and the World: American Law and the New Global Realities." (1395 Lexington Ave. 212-415-5780. Oct. 5 at 7.)

192 Books

The author, illustrator, and MacArthur-grant winner Ben Katchor celebrates the twenty-fifth-anniversary edition of his graphic novel "Cheap Novelties: The Pleasures of Urban Decay." Boxy black-and-white shopkeepers and suits rattle around a pre-gentrification Manhattan, where low rent, wages, and prices supplemented a not so underground economy of winking favors and mile-long tabs. "For years, his kind of practice wasn't exactly kosher," two onlookers remark as a short-sleeved doctor enters his office building in one strip. "You know... Tattoo removal, 'accidental' gunshot wounds, chorus-girl itch, gambler's cramps..." Katchor sits in conversation with the inimitable Luc Sante, the author of "The Other Paris" and a contributor to the *New York Review of Books*, as well as to this magazine. (192 Tenth Ave. 212-255-4022. Oct. 6 at 7.)

FOOD & DRINK



TABLES FOR TWO

Olmsted

659 Vanderbilt Ave., Brooklyn
(718-552-2610)

THERE'S SOMETHING UNNERVINGLY wholesome about Olmsted, the new garden-to-table eatery in Prospect Heights. Enter it and you find an alternate reality: bathrooms smell like lemon verbena, beards grow perfectly trimmed, and enchanted backyards come with their own ... chickens? "No, they're quail," the affable waiter corrects, as he finishes stoking the bee smoker, which, he says, adds "a nice aromatherapy" to the radishes lit by fairy lights. "They're our mascots." And yet, this Disneyland of organic delights never succumbs to sanctimony. It's an urban sanctuary, and the food is ridiculously good.

Named after Frederick Law Olmsted, one of the landscape architects behind Central and Prospect Parks, who believed that nature should be accessible to all, the restaurant is a collaboration between the chef Greg Baxtrom (Atera, Blue Hill Stone Barns) and the farmer Ian Rothman. Word has got out about the place, and wait times can stretch to three hours, so your best bet without a reservation is on walk-in-only Mondays. Waiting in the garden, though, is lovely. Everything is soft: the warm lights, the gold script on the twine-bound menu, the foliage that brushes your back. Have some wine and the watermelon sushi: cold, firm blocks of melon in place of rice, topped with glis-

tening Long Island fluke, a trail of Calabrian peppers, pungent slices of preserved lemon, and a dusting of crunchy bonito flakes.

Inside, the open kitchen faces a lush living wall stuffed with forest plants. "Order the carrot crêpe," the knowledgeable wait staff advise. It's exquisite: a tender crêpe, decorated with petals and sunflower seeds, draped over carrots and plump littleneck clams, swimming in butter and carrot juice. Ask for bread—it's free, but by request only—to scrape up the sauce. Then have the scallops, which are dry-rubbed, skewered, and meant to be dislodged into the adjacent pool of corn and blueberry. They're put-down-your-fork, close-your-eyes good.

There are misses, though, and a couple of off dishes can mean the difference between a reasonable extravagant meal and an unfortunately expensive one. The duck suffers from a too-gloopy brown sauce, and the tomatoes in the tomato schnitzel need to be excavated from the fried mass. But the desserts redeem the inconsistencies. The chocolate mousse is thick, bitter, and luxurious. And the frozen yogurt—dense and tangy, topped with warm, whipped honey from Prospect Park—is pure sorcery. Both layers are bright white, and impossible to distinguish, making each bite feel like an electric burst, as your tongue and brain try to make sense of the temperature difference. It's disorienting, and addictive. There's no need to resist. (*Dishes \$7–\$24.*)

—Becky Cooper

BAR TAB



The Last Word

31-30 Ditmars Blvd., Queens (718-440-3378)

Much is made of New York City's "hidden gems," but few are hidden as well or as intentionally as the Last Word, a recently opened speakeasy that doubles as a provocative emblem of change in Astoria. Its elaborate façade looks like a hardware store—a near-exact replica of the storefront of Square Hardware, a neighborhood fixture several blocks southeast from 1955 to 2015. The new iteration—catty-corner from Taverna Kyclades, Astoria's shining Greek jewel—offers ambitious cocktails in a louche ambience. But first a would-be patron must ring the doorbell, then weave through a corridor lined with saws, Scotch tape, and screwdrivers sealed behind Plexiglas like museum relics. Through a red curtain, plush armchairs and clustered couches create an air of cultivated intimacy, though the bar's newness betrays itself in the glare of the silvered ceiling. On a recent evening, a self-conscious crowd in hipster dress murmured softly, under the pop-synth beat of William Onyeabor's Nigerian funk. In that windowless space, every hour might be midnight, but the time is pleasantly punctuated by drinks, like the smoky, silky Shore Runner (Appleton reserve rum, Angostura bitters) and the Pan American Clipper (apple brandy, lime). One patron described the Diamond Tipped Quill (gin, sherry, apricot liqueur) as "a gummy bear wrapped around an axe blade." Outside, in the cooling dusk, small groups of new arrivals glanced at their smartphones, then coyly pressed the bell. Some Astorians stopped to ponder the storefront. "Is Square Hardware back?" a woman asked, peering through the tinted glass. Then she noticed the all-caps imperative at the bottom of the door—"DRINK EAT"—and frowned. "But why are they offering drinks?"—Talia Lavín



“Our broker at First Republic knows us and understands us – and that is extremely valuable.”

MARC MCMORRIS

*Co-Founder and Director
Carrick Capital Partners*

MARJORIE MCMORRIS

*Founder and Director
The Helix School Foundation*



FIRST REPUBLIC PRIVATE WEALTH MANAGEMENT

It's a privilege to serve you®

(855) 886-4824 or visit www.firstrepublic.com New York Stock Exchange Symbol: FRC

First Republic Private Wealth Management includes First Republic Trust Company; First Republic Trust Company of Delaware LLC; First Republic Investment Management, Inc., an SEC Registered Investment Advisor; and First Republic Securities Company, LLC, Member FINRA/SIPC. Brokerage services offered by First Republic Securities Company, LLC. Investment performance may vary by client.

Investment and Advisory Products and Services are Not FDIC Insured, Not Guaranteed and May Lose Value.



THE TALK OF THE TOWN

COMMENT MILLENNIALISM

LAST MONTH'S PRESIDENTIAL debate, at Hofstra University, on Long Island, the first between Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump, was promoted more like a Mayweather-Pacquiao title bout than like a traditional ritual of the election cycle. In the end, Clinton's performance was not only a win but enough of a knockout to resurrect the feeling that this election should not be close. One candidate displayed poise, intellect, and preparation, while the other rambled, made faces, and quibbled about whether he'd referred to Miss Universe as "Miss Piggy." But, just five weeks before the election, the race remains close. There are a number of reasons for this, one of them having to do with millennial voters, a demographic that overwhelmingly supported Barack Obama and has shown some allegiance toward Clinton but not much enthusiasm for her. Two days after the debate, in a move intended to shore up her standing among those voters, Clinton appeared alongside Senator Bernie Sanders, at the University of New Hampshire, in Durham.

In fact, a week before the debate, Clinton delivered what was billed as a "millennial" speech at Temple University, in Philadelphia—her most direct appeal yet to that group. Her comments about the cost of education (and her agreement with Sanders on the issue) and her denunciation of Trump's birtherism were well received. She got sustained applause when, without hedging, she called Trump's record racist. The decision to use the word more than once in the debate, and to keep hammering that point, can only have been encouraged by the response from the students in Philadelphia.

According to an NBC/*Wall Street Journal* poll, Clinton holds a lead of just sixteen points over Trump among younger voters. That gap narrows to twelve per cent when Gary Johnson and

Jill Stein are included. (In a *Times*/CBS poll, more than a third of voters between the ages of eighteen and twenty-nine said that they will vote for a third-party candidate.) The first time many millennials voted, they elected the first African-American President. As Zach Galifianakis pointed out two weeks ago, during an appearance by Clinton on "Between Two Ferns," this means that, remarkably, in 2016 many young people will be voting for a white Presidential candidate for the first time. Clinton offers those voters the chance to make history again, by electing a female President. According to a Washington *Post*/ABC News poll, sixty-six per cent of people between the ages of eighteen and thirty-nine believe that Trump is biased against women and minorities. A Quinnipiac poll places that number at seventy-three per cent.

Even so, the idealism seems muted this time around. A possible explanation is that young voters simply reflect the broader dynamic of American partisanship. The Republican and Democratic standard-bearers, no matter their relative qualifications, assets, and quirks, are only modestly more important than voters' basic partisan affiliations. In

this scheme, democracy looks something like a long-running Broadway musical, in which the production and the choreography are bigger draws than the particulars of the cast. This helps explain how Donald Trump, whose long public record shows scant trace of religious adherence, has consolidated the support of a majority of evangelical voters. One may walk by faith, not by sight—and apparently vote that way as well.

Other explanations for Clinton's difficulties are more specific to her. She has spoken self-effacingly about the fact that she is not a "natural politician." As she told the students at Temple, "I will never be the showman my opponent is, and you know what? That's O.K. with me." A



larger concern is rooted in Clinton's own long career. The journalist Jonathan Rauch has noted that candidates typically have fourteen years from the time they are elected to a major public office—the Senate, a governorship—to achieve the Presidency. Beyond that, a sort of expiration date is reached, owing, at least in part, to the fact that the longer one's résumé the more likely it is that one will be whipsawed by past positions and changing values. Hillary Clinton was elected to the Senate in 2000, but she has been a national political figure since 1992, and that time line could be pushed back to 1978, when Bill Clinton was first elected governor of Arkansas.

President Obama has said that Hillary Clinton's record as First Lady, senator, and Secretary of State makes her the most qualified Presidential candidate ever—but it also means that she represents the sort of institutional power that young voters distrust. It's a can't-win-for-losing paradox, considering that a central struggle for women of Clinton's generation has been to gain access to that same institutional power. Clinton has accrued a great deal of baggage in four decades of public life in large part because it has taken a woman so many years to get to this point in the first place.

A similar dynamic afflicts Clinton's support among

African-Americans. Black Lives Matter activists have repeatedly criticized her for her support of her husband's 1994 crime bill and for a speech she made, in 1996, in which she talked about "super predators"—a term that, in the context of the time, was used to refer to some black and Latino youths in American cities—and the need to bring them "to heel." Those were disturbing comments, and she has apologized for them. Nevertheless, Trump disingenuously seized on them in the debate, and added, "I think that I've developed very, very good relationships over the last little while with the African-American community." Hardly, but then Trump's outreach to blacks is concerned less with winning their votes than with dampening their enthusiasm for Clinton, in order to diminish turnout.

In the past few months, the media have drawn an abundance of false equivalencies between Clinton and Trump. The polls point to a similar tendency among millennials, across lines of race. If not exactly a false equivalency, it is perhaps a false vicinity: the belief that Trump's unmitigated bigotry is just a few degrees removed from Clinton's history of establishment ties and nineties-era centrism. Maybe the debate will have shown them that the two candidates could scarcely be farther apart.

—Jelani Cobb

THE BENCH FROZEN



ON THE DAY of the first Presidential debate, on Long Island, another lurid political spectacle was under way thirty miles due west: the Bridgegate trial, in the Newark, New Jersey, federal courthouse. An aide to Governor Chris Christie and an appointee at the Port Authority stand accused of closing lanes on the George Washington Bridge, for four days in September of 2013, to orchestrate a massive traffic jam as a form of political reprisal. The government's key witness, David Wildstein, took the stand last week.

Wildstein, a former high-school classmate of Christie (whose nickname back then was Buttocks), was Bridgegate's mastermind and Christie's "enforcer" inside the Port Authority. Defense lawyers have portrayed him as both a villain ("vicious guy," "bully," "miserable prick") and a stooge. Michael Baldassare, a defense lawyer, called him, "a ventriloquist doll sitting on Christopher J. Christie's lap." Short and hunched, with a thin beard and a baggy suit, Wildstein spoke softly

as he described using the Port Authority—with its sprawling network of bridges, tunnels, and airports, and its almost five billion dollars in revenue—as a political "goody bag."

To recap: back in 2013, Christie was soliciting endorsements from Democratic mayors, to aid in his reelection bid. (He had his eye on the Presidency, too.) Mayors who said yes received carrots: a seat in the Governor's box at sports events, a piece of steel from the World Trade Center, and, in one case, thirty-five thousand dollars earmarked for the collection of goose droppings. Mayors who said no—among them the mayor of Fort Lee, the town at the foot of the bridge—were subjected to a punishment that Wildstein referred to as "radio silence." The first time Wildstein used this term in court, Lee Cortes, a lawyer for the prosecution, asked what it meant. Wildstein explained that certain people's messages to the Port Authority, "whether it was phone calls, texts, e-mails, whatever the form of communication—there would be no response."

Wildstein told the court that Steven Fulop, the mayor of Jersey City, was on the radio-silence list. In July, 2013, Fulop was scheduled to attend a Port Authority meet and greet known as Mayor's Day, until Bridget Kelly, Christie's deputy chief of staff, called

Wildstein and told him to cancel it.

"Miss Kelly said that Mayor Fulop was being 'frozen out,'" Wildstein testified. The court's TV screens then displayed a series of increasingly anxious e-mails from Fulop to a contact at the Port Authority; they were forwarded to Christie's aides, who wrote back, "Radio silence," and, "He's getting a little snippy. Continue to disregard."

Wildstein explained, "I understood 'continue to disregard' was the same as 'radio silence' or 'ice him.'"

This strategy may sound familiar to anyone who's been on the dating scene during the past twenty years. The idea of playing hard to get has been around



Chris Christie and David Wildstein

ALWAYS CHARGED. ALWAYS READY.

THE LEXUS HYBRID LINE



DISCOVER THE POWER OF INNOVATION.

Every breakthrough drives us forward. Like regenerative braking technology, which increases efficiency and boosts performance. So even when braking, you're creating the power to leap forward. With a range of advanced hybrid models to choose from and over a million hybrids on the road today, Lexus continues electrifying the way forward.



lexus.com/hybrid | [#LexusHybrid](https://twitter.com/LexusHybrid)

forever, but it was ratified by “The Rules,” the best-selling 1995 dating manual whose central tenet is that a woman should rarely return a man’s phone call—and, if she does, she should return it late. By 2014, Taylor Swift was spouting the rule in an interview with *Glamour*. Asked how to “change the game” when “a guy you’re dating has the upper hand,” Swift replied, “Freeze-out. . . . You don’t respond to any of his texts or calls until he does something desperate.”

In the Bridgegate saga, the freeze-out appears to have worked with Mark Sokolich, the mayor of Fort Lee. When the traffic jam began, delaying school buses, commuters, and emergency vehicles responding to a cardiac arrest, he repeatedly contacted the Port Authority, and got no response. As the week wore on, his messages became anguished. “Help please. It’s maddening,” he wrote in one text. The Port Authority contact just forwarded the texts to Wildstein, with a note: “From Serbia.” (Sokolich is Croatian-American.) Wildstein passed them on to Kelly, who, he said, told him, “The Governor is going to love this!”

Ellen Fein and Sherrie Schneider, the authors of “The Rules,” agreed, when reached by phone, that radio silence is effective in many circumstances. (The two have updated their book with new strategies, such as “Wait at Least Four Hours to Answer a Guy’s First Text and a Minimum of 30 Minutes Thereafter.”) But they did not endorse the Christie administration’s tactics. “You use your powers for good, not evil,” Fein said.

Schneider said that some women use radio silence to extract gifts from men, or to mete out punishment, but that it doesn’t work in the long run. “Look at

Chris Christie,” she said. “Those women eventually get bad guys, unhappy marriages, bad reputations.”

Fein added, “It’s like bad karma. It always comes back to bite you.”

—Lizzie Widdicombe

DEPT. OF VENTRILOQUISM TALKING HEADS



AFTER LAST WEEK’S debate, Donald Trump was awarded the following three “grades”—two by actual political pundits and one by a fictional pundit, the invention of two comedy writers from Brooklyn.

Carter Eskew: “Trump wasn’t prepared.” (C-minus)

Mike Edelman: “Trump’s sniffing tic was a distraction.” (D)

Carl Diggler: Manners (F), Lip-Pursing (B-minus), Avoiding Racial Slurs (A-plus).

Diggler, the parody pundit (official title: Chief Insider Beltway Hack at Cafe.com), provides commentary that is more ridiculous than the real thing, but not by much.

“Carl is reactive, pompous, and makes everything about himself,” Virgil Texas, one of Diggler’s co-creators, said last Tuesday.

“He loves the horse race, not the substance,” Felix Biederman, the other co-creator, said. “He loves false equivalences and centrist discourse.” The previous night, Texas and Biederman, both in their twenties, had provided live de-

bate commentary onstage at Carolines. Then they stayed up until 4 A.M., drafting Diggler’s post-debate analysis, and got to the Cafe.com office by early afternoon. They stood outside, on Twenty-second Street, smoking Camels.

“When we started writing Carl, a year ago, it was a pretty straight parody of a few pundits—Chris Cillizza, Mark Halperin, Ron Fournier,” Texas said.

“Any of those interchangeable assholes who get on TV, or on their blogs, and go, ‘Who won the week?’” Biederman said. “It’s, like, ‘Who cares, you smug dipshit?’ The whole thing is broken.”

They went upstairs, made coffee, and entered Cafe’s audio booth to record a post-debate edition of DigCast, Diggler’s weekly podcast. Texas plays Diggler’s sidekick and Biederman plays Diggler, pitching up his basso profundo by fifty per cent and adding a dash of Ned Flanders.

“So Carl will recap his top moments,” Texas said, scrolling through a debate transcript on his phone. “Trump’s Sean Hannity thing. Trump referring to Chicago as a teeming hellhole.”

Did they watch any TV debate analysis to prepare for the podcast? “Absolutely fucking not,” Biederman said. For one thing, neither of them has a working TV. “We have friends who watch CNN all day and then complain about how bad it is, which is essentially like eating spoonfuls of shit out of the toilet and then going, ‘This tastes bad!’”

“I looked at a few headlines and tweets, and most of what I saw just looked depressing and boring,” Texas said.

“I didn’t even look at Twitter, because the people reacting to this stuff are more algorithm than human at this point,” Biederman said. “Given certain variables—age, political inclination—you can predict exactly which hack joke will come out.”

Texas: “‘This debate is gonna be yuge!’”

Biederman: “‘I know who lost the debate: America.’”

They recorded a segment, leaning toward the same tabletop microphone and avoiding eye contact. Diggler commended Trump for voicing an opinion “that most voters share: their sheer disgust with the city of Chicago.”

“Have you been to Chicago?” Texas asked.

“I had a connecting flight in O’Hare once,” Diggler replied.

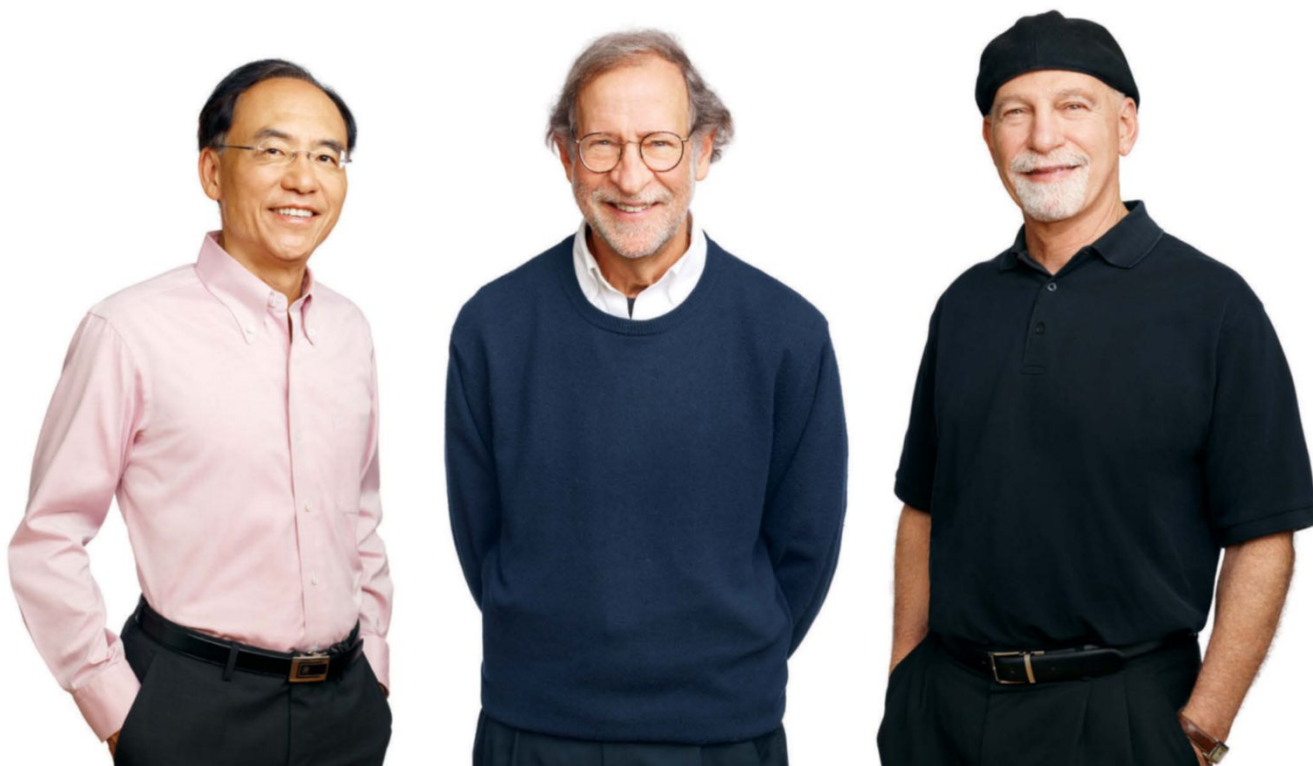
They went downstairs for another



WE ARE COMING AT CANCER

IN WAYS CANCER

DOESN'T SEE COMING



These City of Hope doctors are three of the world's top cancer specialists: Larry Kwak, M.D., Ph.D., Stephen Forman, M.D. and Steven Rosen, M.D., Provost and Chief Scientific Officer of City of Hope. Collaborating with our renowned researchers, they are pioneering some of today's most visionary cancer breakthroughs – from developing the technology behind four of the most widely used cancer medicines, to teaching the body's immune system to destroy cancer. As a City of Hope patient, you can benefit from our cross-disciplinary team approach, which moves cures from the laboratory to the bedside faster. To see how we blend science with soul to create medical miracles, go to CityofHope.org or call 800-826-HOPE.



CityofHope®

cigarette. “Most opinion writers are bullshitting most of the time, and yet they take on this unearned tone of authority,” Texas said. “Like that thing David Brooks does, where he thinks he knows what minorities think because he took a cab once and the cabbie was black.”

“Or Richard Cohen, at the *Washington Post*,” Biederman said.

“The worst,” Texas said. “Your average person has well-formed opinions about one or two things. These people have opinions about *everything*?”

“None of these people have any special expertise, but you go, ‘He’s an opinion writer, so we should respect his opinion,’” Biederman said.

“I’m amazed at the lack of consequences,” Texas said. “Nate Silver’s value proposition was, ‘I have data, I’ll make the right predictions.’ Well, he fucked up the Republican primaries, he fucked up the British elections, and yet you still hear people going, ‘Nate Silver’s wonk-o-meter is showing a tight race today.’” In March, Diggler challenged Silver to a “forecasting duel.” “No hiding behind the ‘statistical modelling,’” he taunted. “Use your gut for once in your life.” To the surprise of Texas and Biederman, Diggler turned out to be as good as Silver at calling primary races.

They put out their cigarettes. A passerby stopped and said, “Are you Felix?”

“I am,” Biederman said, surprised.

“I love Carl,” the stranger said. “He was important to the primary process.”

—Andrew Marantz

HIGHER MATHEMATICS ALGORITHM BLUES



“I’M A REALLY boring person,” Cathy O’Neil said one recent Sunday evening. “I do all of my thinking at home.” O’Neil is a former hedge-fund quant (a mathematician who creates algorithms to help traders make money) who left Wall Street and wrote a book: “Weapons of Math Destruction: How Big Data Increases Inequality and Threatens Democracy.” It details how the lives of ordinary people are being undermined by the widespread use of algorithms,

and has just been nominated for a National Book Award. During the four years that O’Neil spent writing it, in her Morningside Heights apartment, she came to rely on the regular jam sessions she holds at home with her bluegrass band, the Tomtown Ramblers.

The band’s eight members had gathered in the living room. Beer bottles were scattered on a coffee table, along with a stack of thimbles for playing washboard. O’Neil, who has blue hair and thick-framed glasses, sat in a corner, holding a fiddle upright on her knee. Tom Adams, a guitarist who used to work for a company that insures mortgage-backed securities (“I helped blow up the global economy!”), gave O’Neil feedback on early drafts of her manuscript. Jamie Kingston, who works at a nonprofit and plays mandolin, described how O’Neil used to get all wound up at rehearsal about the ways algorithms were being used to oppress people: “I remember this one day—she was talking about the recidivism model, which is used in prison sentencing.” O’Neil had lain awake all night worrying about how unfair it was.

Adams started strumming, and the group launched into Bob Dylan’s “Don’t Think Twice, It’s All Right.”

After the song, O’Neil put down her fiddle and went into the kitchen to heat up pinto beans for burritos. “The Queen Matriarch is cooking!” someone called from the other room.

“When you’re writing a book, you’re living on an island,” O’Neil said. “I think what saved my sanity was my band.” A math Ph.D. from Harvard, she became disillusioned with her job at the hedge fund D. E. Shaw and, in 2011, decided to quit. “I had gone into finance thinking I was making the market more efficient, and now I was trying to make money off of people who were saving for retirement,” she said. “I started thinking of us as junk-yard dogs, scavenging off of the financial system’s scraps.”

She later joined a data-science startup that analyzed people’s online purchasing behavior. She began thinking about other kinds of pernicious algorithms. “Everybody knew that the financial crisis had happened, but what I was seeing was a new crisis emerging, in the world of Big Data,” she said. “I saw a new kind of victim. Rather than investors in mortgage-backed securities in Norway, or

people who were losing their homes, I saw, like, individuals just getting *screwed* by unfair automated decisions.”

Around the same time, a school principal she knew had told her that some of the strongest teachers were getting poor performance evaluations and being forced to leave their jobs. So O’Neil contacted the Department of Education to ask if she could examine the algorithms it used to weed out underperforming teachers, because, she said, they seemed “arbitrary and statistically non-robust.” The D.O.E. refused. “That’s when I was, like, ‘This is fucked up!’” she said. She started to see “creepy, weaponized” mathematical models being deployed, largely against people who were already struggling. Certain categories of people were being given “scores” by computer programs, which led to their being charged more for car insurance, paying higher interest rates on credit cards, getting disqualified from jobs, or receiving longer prison terms—all because of arithmetic.

She held tortillas over the range’s gas flame with her fingers, and continued, “Anytime there was some messy societal problem that people wanted to wish away with a silver bullet, that’s when math modelling pops up.” She discovered that all sorts of biases were built into the math-based models, which led to “the many ways that poor people, especially poor people of color, are constantly being sized up and sized down—and sort of shooed off to the ‘losers’ category.”

During dinner, O’Neil asked the band members if they had any requests. “Blair wrote a song about mortgages,” she said, nodding at Blair Bodine, another guitar player.

“‘The Zero Dollar Down Blues!’” Bodine said. “About the mortgage-backed securities crisis.”

“How many whiskeys have we had?” another player shouted. “That’s when math comes up!”

A few hours later, after the burritos had been consumed, along with most of a bottle of Bulleit bourbon, O’Neil helped her friends pack up. Later, she said, “There was recently an article about how if you listen to a sad song or a sad poem, some sort of empathy builds in you.” Referring to her bandmates, she went on, “We are all hyper-empathetic, and that is exactly what I needed to write this book.”

—Sheelah Kolhatkar

THE FINANCIAL PAGE

THE HIDDEN COST OF RACE

RACE STILL DETERMINES too much,” Hillary Clinton said, in last week’s debate with Donald Trump. It “often determines where people live, determines what kind of education in their public schools they can get, and, yes, it determines how they’re treated in the criminal-justice system.” She could have added that it has a profound effect on how much money Americans have. Our racial wealth divide, as it’s often called, is enormous, and, fifty years after the civil-rights movement, the gap is growing.

Everyone knows that wealth is unequally distributed. The work of Thomas Piketty has made this a mainstream concern. But the magnitude of the gap between white and black Americans is on a different scale. According to a recent report from two progressive think tanks, CFED and the Institute for Policy Studies, white households own, on average, seven times as much wealth as African-American households (and six times as much as Latino ones). The Forbes 100 billionaires are collectively as rich as all black Americans combined. At current growth rates, it would take black Americans two hundred and twenty-eight years to have as much wealth as white Americans have today.

Some of the reasons are clear: the unemployment rate among black Americans is roughly twice that of whites, and black people earn, on average, between twelve and twenty-two per cent less than white people with similar education and experience. But the wealth gap between black and white Americans is much bigger than the income gap, thanks to a toxic combination of institutionalized discrimination, persistent racism, and policies that amplify inequality. As Thomas Shapiro, a sociologist at Brandeis and the co-author of the seminal book “Black Wealth/White Wealth,” told me, “History and legacy created the racial gap. Policies have maintained it.” Together, they contribute to what he’s called “the hidden cost of being African-American.”

Start with history. Beginning in the New Deal and on into the postwar years, the federal government invested heavily to help ordinary Americans buy homes and go to school, via programs like the Federal Housing Administration and the G.I. Bill. That fuelled an economic boom and fostered the growth of a prosperous middle class. But black Americans received little of this assistance. Redlining by banks and by government agencies prevented black families from buying homes in white neighborhoods; in a thirty-year period, just two per cent of F.H.A. loans went to families of color. G.I. Bill benefits

went disproportionately to white veterans. Black agricultural and domestic workers were excluded from Social Security until the fifties. As Dedrick Asante-Muhammad, the co-author of the CFED/I.P.S. report, told me, “Massive government investment helped create an American middle class. But it was a white American middle class.”

The effects of this history are still with us, because wealth, unlike income, accumulates and can be passed down from generation to generation. If you have less wealth to start with, you’ll likely spend any added income on bills or paying down debt rather than saving or investing it. A 2013 study co-authored by Shapiro found that for white families every dollar increase in income yields an increase of \$5.19 in wealth; for black households the figure is just sixty-nine cents.

More important, discrimination, though no longer legal, is still pervasive. It holds down black incomes and has a huge impact on homeownership—which Shapiro identifies as “the largest driver of the racial wealth gap.” Only forty-one per cent of

black Americans own their homes, compared with seventy-one per cent of whites, and black homeowners earn a much smaller return on their property. Because they are less likely to inherit money or get family help buying a home, they make smaller down payments and, on average, buy houses eight years later in life, leaving less time for the investment to appreciate. House prices in majority-black neighborhoods have also risen less than those in comparable majority-white ones. As Asante-Muhammad told me, “White people still do not generally want to live in a neighborhood that’s more than twenty to twenty-five per cent black.” That means fewer buyers, which holds house prices down. Shapiro has found that housing segregation costs

black families tens of thousands of dollars in home equity.

Government policies also widen the gap. The most important of these are the mortgage-interest and other real-estate tax deductions, which save you more the bigger your mortgage and the higher your income-tax rate. They cost the government north of a hundred and thirty billion dollars a year, more than seventy per cent of which goes to the richest twenty per cent of Americans. Money that could fund affordable housing, income subsidies, and allowances for first-time homeowners instead just helps rich people pay for their houses.

Closing the racial wealth gap would require radical measures, like reparations, which few politicians will discuss. But what’s really dismal is that even reforms that could keep the gap from getting wider—ending the mortgage-interest deduction, challenging residential segregation—are politically toxic. The attention now being paid to the racial wealth divide is a sign that some things have changed. The absence of the topic from the political conversation shows that most things haven’t.

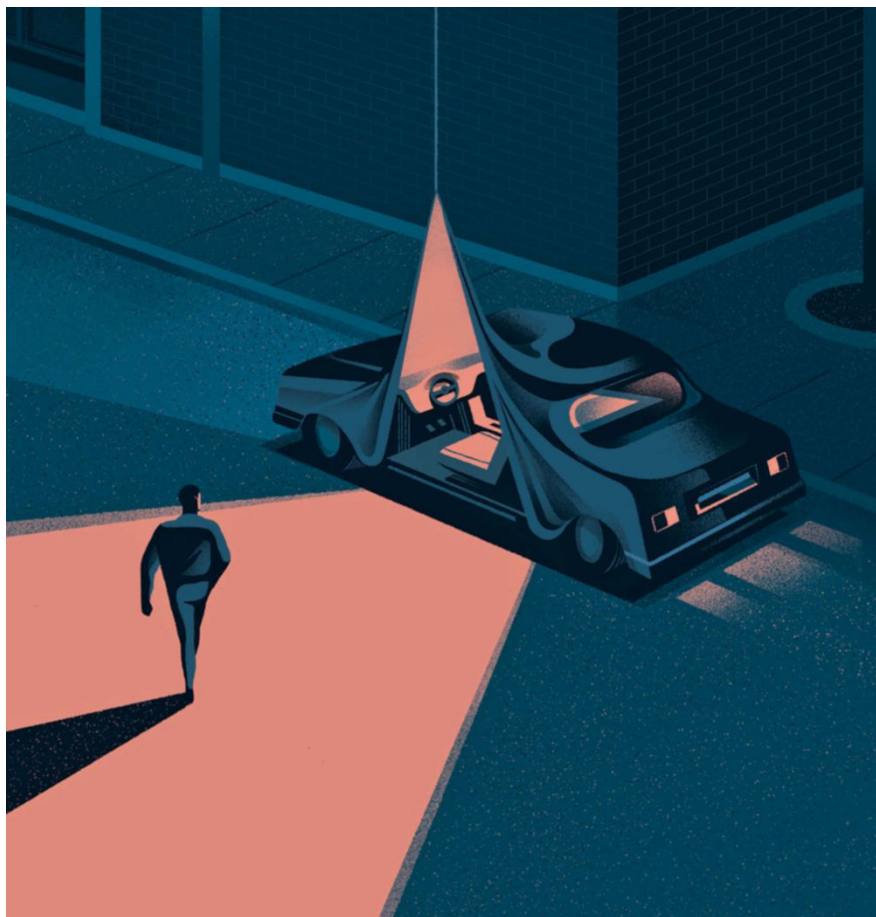
—James Surowiecki



THE ANTI-UBER

An upstart tries out a bold strategy in the ride wars.

BY SHEELAH KOLHATKAR

*Juno's business model centers on getting drivers to defect from rival services.*

THE LAGUARDIA PLAZA HOTEL is a four-minute drive from LaGuardia Airport, in Queens, and on a recent August afternoon nearly every car parked in the hotel's lot was black. One after the other, men in shirt-sleeves pulled up in Chevy Suburbans and GMC Yukon XLs and gleaming Lexus RS 300s with leather-trimmed seats, got out, then made their way across the marble lobby and up a flight of stairs. A brightly smiling woman approached them as they congregated around a registration desk. "How are you?" she asked each one. "What's your first name?" She jotted the letters onto a yellow sticky note and worked her way down the line. "Do

you have an appointment? Awesome!"

The men were black-car drivers, currently working for the ride-summoning companies Uber or Lyft, or both, and they were there, in all likelihood, because another driver had told them that they could get more money, and better treatment, if they signed up to drive for a new rival, Juno. New York City—which has no shortage of ways to get around, from pedicabs to one of the largest public-transportation systems in the world—is just one stage upon which a handful of companies are fighting to dominate the future of personal transportation. Juno has decided that the most effective way to do that is by being extra-nice to the drivers.

After the men registered, they were ushered into a waiting room, where draped café tables had been set up with brochures: "How to Be a 5 Star Juno Driver." Club music was playing. A handful of young Juno employees glided around, speaking in soothing tones.

The drivers were soon called by name—"Khaleed?" "Mamadou?" "Julio?"—and brought into another room, where a Juno manager, Lucas Smith, was waiting for them with a laptop and an overhead projector. "Drive Your Future," the slogan on the screen urged. A pink-skinned forty-year-old in jeans with a bushy red beard and an intense gaze, Smith joined Juno last January. Like several of his colleagues, he was recruited from Apple's retail division, where he conducted training sessions for Apple-store employees, based on Apple's carefully designed protocols. In fact, many details of the drivers' experience had been modelled on the interactions that customers have when they enter an Apple store, from the "concierges" who greeted them to the low driver-to-employee ratio.

At first, Smith was put off by the whiff of exploitation that he detected around rising Silicon Valley enterprises such as Instacart, where people buy your groceries for you, and TaskRabbit, where freelancers can underbid one another to take on errands and other jobs. In middle school, Smith told me, he was assigned a book by Ayn Rand. "I remember finishing it, and realizing that I wanted to be the opposite of everything that was in that book," he said. "Everything about the celebration of selfishness was just anathema."

So he was initially skeptical about Juno. "I'm a super-progressive, and I have incredibly mixed feelings about the 'sharing economy' and companies like Uber," he said. "Rather than creating wealth, they felt extractive. The kind of thing that happens when there's a bad job market and people don't have good choices. I try not to talk about our competitors, particularly, but the contrast for all these drivers is a powerful thing. They feel like they helped build other companies in New York, and, you know, as a reward for that, their rates kept getting lower."

The reference to "other companies



haveKINDLEwillTRAVEL

📍 JAIPUR, INDIA 📖 ARAVIND ADIGA, THE WHITE TIGER: A NOVEL @ AMAZONKINDLE



amazon

in New York”—a.k.a. Uber—isn’t incidental. Juno’s business model is to take what Uber has created and appropriate it. Most of what Juno does is predicated on the fact that many drivers feel mistreated by Uber. (Lyft, for various reasons, seems to be less of a target of driver resentment, and is also a less powerful competitor.) If Uber seems cold and impersonal, Juno will smother its drivers with attention. If Uber has raised its commission—the part of each fare that the company keeps—Juno will set a much lower one.

From Uber’s perspective, Juno must seem like a hermit crab, taking up residence in a home built by others. In many cases, Uber paid drivers a thousand-dollar bonus to sign up, and gave a thousand-dollar bounty to the driver who referred them. It helped the drivers get their taxi licenses. It built an app, trained consumers to download and use it, and battled regulators across the country. All Juno has had to do is come up with an app that looks and functions just like Uber’s, and hire people like Lucas Smith to persuade those drivers to defect.

It was shortly after 3 P.M., and five men entered the room and sat down

in a semicircle. Their cell phones were tucked away in their pockets; Smith had their full attention. “The fact that you’re in this room, well, means that you’re a professional,” Smith said. To have been invited, in fact, all of them had to have an Uber rating higher than 4.65 (or a Lyft rating higher than 4.7). “So I don’t need to talk about the basics. When it comes to what makes Juno different, the biggest thing is our focus. That’s behind everything we do. And that’s that Juno is for drivers.” He paused to fiddle with the lights. “We built this company with the idea that listening to the drivers and building a business that puts drivers first isn’t just the right thing to do—although we think it is—and it doesn’t just mean that we’re nice, although I think we are, but that it’s also good business.”

Smith moved through his slides and his talking points. The drivers learned that Juno’s commission was ten per cent, “guaranteed for our first twenty-four months.” (Uber typically charges twenty-five per cent or more.) On a slide titled “Example Fare,” a bar chart showed a comparison between an Uber driver and a Juno driver on a thirty-dollar ride: the Uber driver, after commission and taxes and fees, would keep

\$19.11, while the Juno driver would get \$23.61. “For literally the same amount of work, you’re taking home four dollars more,” Smith said. “And that’s on *one* ride. Think about it on ten, over twenty.” Juno was also offering twenty-four-hour support for its drivers, with a promise that you could always reach a real person on the phone, “not a robot.” Finally, Juno drivers could earn an ownership stake in the company, in the form of restricted stock units. “I think this is a huge deal,” Smith said. “And it’s totally unique.”

To qualify, a driver had to drive for at least a hundred and twenty hours a month—approximately thirty hours a week—for twenty-four months out of thirty. The twist was that Juno was offering to count toward this goal the hours that its drivers were working for Uber and other companies, all of it clocked on their dashboard phones. Half of the two billion founding shares of the company had been set aside for this purpose, although they weren’t going to be worth anything unless Juno was bought out by a larger company or had an I.P.O.

Smith went on, “Now, once Juno goes public? And is traded on the stock exchange? You’re an owner. You profit from that. You can sell your shares, you can hang on to them. But you’ll profit from the growth of this company.” There were some murmurs of approval among the drivers.

After the presentation, the drivers stood up and looked around. In a few moments, they would be collected by Juno staff members and given new Android phones with the Juno app, and then escorted to their cars, prepared to take Juno rides right away.

One of the drivers, a man with gray hair and glasses, told me that he was already driving for Juno. His name was Salim Sarder, and he was there with a friend who was hearing the pitch for the first time. Sarder said that Juno was more attractive on a ride-by-ride basis, but Uber had a lot more volume to offer. It was hard to toggle back and forth between the two while you were driving around, because if you turned down an Uber pickup to take one from Juno your Uber rating might take a hit. One of the many tyrannies of the sharing economy is the need to always keep



“I’ve got those ‘Don’t worry about me, I’ll just be here, all alone’ blues.”

your rating up. “That’s the thing right now,” Sarder continued. “You get Juno fare, but Uber gets closer—more people available there, you know?”

Successful new technology companies are expected to grow quickly, even as they lose money, and Juno’s expansion is almost entirely dependent on how swiftly it can poach drivers from the competition. The more drivers it has online, the shorter the wait times will be for passengers using the service. The shorter the wait times are—the more “liquidity” there is in the system—the more people will be willing to use it. According to Juno, the company has signed up more than fourteen thousand drivers since December. When I spoke to Juno employees in August, they said that they were getting around a hundred and fifty new drivers ready every day.

Later, I asked Smith if he could tell what the biggest attraction was for the new drivers they were seeing. The higher commission was a draw, for sure, but he thought that the stock grants were also a big factor. “Hearing drivers talk about the ownership piece *completely* changes the equation,” Smith said. “I had one guy say—and this might sound made up—but he said he’s been in this country, I think it was, for thirty-two years, and this was the first time he felt like an American. Now, that was super powerful, but it also made me feel a little bit sad. Because I would hope that there’s more to feeling American than just owning the company.”

JUNO CAME ABOUT when its four co-founders realized that they had a lot of money and not a lot to do. It was October, 2014, and they had just sold their previous company, Viber, which was a competitor to Skype that allowed people to make calls and send texts by mobile phone for free, to a Japanese Internet company for nine hundred million dollars. The only question was what to embark on next. They were obviously “too young to retire,” in the words of Talmon Marco, Juno’s C.E.O. “It’s going to be really boring,” he said to himself at the time, contemplating a future of leisure at the age of forty-one. “We’re gonna sit by the beach all day?”

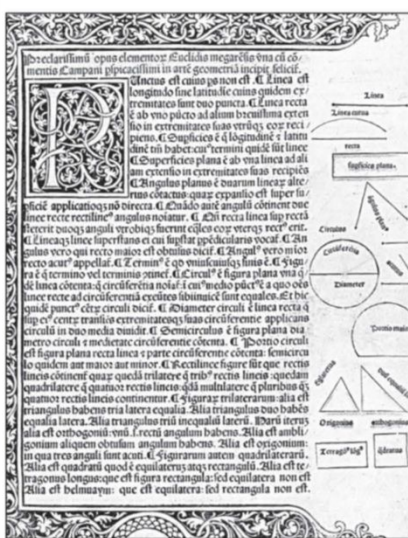
A slender, soft-spoken Israeli with

deep-set eyes and thick eyebrows, Marco serves as the public face of Juno, while his three partners run most of the company’s operations from Tel Aviv. As he described how Juno was conceived, Marco was sitting in the company’s U.S. headquarters, an open-plan space on the forty-seventh floor of 1 World Trade Center, with dazzling views of lower Manhattan and a telescope pointed in the direction of the building next door. Although Polaroids of the staff were pinned up on a wall, implying a goofy, collegial office culture, the place was eerily quiet, which was perhaps appropriate for a company that doesn’t actually make anything and has relatively few employees; the drivers are independent contractors. The only real action took place at one end of the room on a large screen. It showed a map of Manhattan and Brooklyn, on which little car icons crawled around the grid like black carpet beetles.

The Juno founders knew that they wanted their new venture to serve consumers directly rather than provide a possibly more urgent but less glamorous behind-the-scenes product. “There’s something fun about building something that real people use,” Marco said. “Building something that you can talk to a regular person about and they will understand what it is that you do. If you do a resource-management-optimization algorithm for the back end of some sort of storage, O.K., fine. Great. Go explain that. ‘Hey, babe, how’s it going? I do research optimization.’”

They briefly considered the online-lending business, but there was no obvious hole for them to fill. There was a lot of negative press at the time about Uber. There had been accusations of several hit-and-run accidents involving its drivers; lawsuits had been filed over the company’s privacy standards; and Uber and its C.E.O., Travis Kalanick, were fighting with regulators around the world over the company’s aggressive approach to entering new markets. There were complaints about Uber’s “surge” policy of charging more when demand was higher. What really stood out to Marco and his colleagues, though, was how disaffected the company’s drivers seemed to be. After launching, in 2010, and wooing drivers to use its network, Uber started cutting the





Euclid, *Elementa geometriae*, first edition, Venice, 1482.
Estimate \$60,000 to \$80,000.

Early Printed, Medical, Scientific & Travel Books
OCTOBER 18
Tobias Abeloff • tabeloff@swanngalleries.com

Preview: Oct 14, 10-6; Oct 15, 12-5; Oct 17, 10-6; Oct 18, 10-12
104 East 25th St, NY, NY 10010 • 212 254 4710
SWANNGALLERIES.COM



LIVING THE PROMISE



Real World Solutions

Revolutionizing Online Learning:
UCR computer scientist Frank Vahid's interactive online textbooks, zyBooks, have been used by more than 50,000 students at 200 universities and colleges since created in 2012.

Explore more technology impacts
promise.ucr.edu

prices it charged riders in some markets and increasing the commission the company took on each ride. In January, 2014, Uber announced that it was reducing fares in sixteen cities, in some places by as much as thirty-four per cent. Partly, this was an attempt to put taxi companies out of business; even public transportation seemed to be under threat when Uber argued that it could be cheaper for a couple of friends to share an Uber than to ride the bus. The company was also engaged in a price war with Lyft. Many people driving for Uber had acquired new cars and were making car payments out of their Uber earnings; suddenly, their incomes were going down. Uber was increasingly popular, but there was still a sense that the company was at war with its own workforce.

None of this put off Silicon Valley venture capitalists and other investors, who viewed the company as the transportation equivalent of Amazon. By 2014, investors were valuing Uber at seventeen billion dollars. Meanwhile, the company was solidifying its reputation as an uncaring employer that was hastening the decline of job security—the downside of the “gig” economy. “Do we have an angle?” Marco and his partners kept asking themselves as they read story after story featuring complaints from Uber’s drivers. “Uber drivers are not happy. Uber drivers are not happy. . . . It was like, hey, you know, there might be an opportunity here. Maybe you can get the drivers to switch to you. At the end of the day, this is a service that’s powered by drivers.”

Marco and his partners—Igor Magaznik, the company’s chief technology officer; Ofer Samocha, who runs the company’s servers and infrastructure; and Sunny Marueli, the “chief anarchist” and “super-brilliant guy who can do anything” (Marco’s description)—started surveying the driving-people-around market more closely. Most of the drivers working for Uber were also working for Lyft, as well as for any number of smaller competitors. The drivers seemed to have little loyalty to any one company, and the companies—

which weren’t offering them health insurance, or even the promise of work beyond what they were doing for the next ten minutes—had no leverage to demand exclusivity.

Marco suggests that Juno was an opportunity to counter an injustice in the world: “As the mantra goes, ‘I was young and I needed the money.’ Well, we weren’t as young, and we did not need the money. We were not struggling to make it happen at any cost. We did not struggle to put food on the table. So we had the luxury of choosing to do something that was socially responsible.” From another perspective, though, Juno was simply targeting what the partners reckoned was Uber’s one vulnerability—what a hacker would call an “exploit.”

“Uber has two things,” Marco said. “It treats its employees poorly, that’s not that unique. I’m sure there are a lot of Fortune 500 companies, and on their Web sites you’ll read, ‘Our employees are our asset, yada yada,’ but they still go on food stamps. But here’s the thing. Walmart does not let you build, free of charge, or virtually free of charge, a Walmart next to every one of its Walmarts, and then, as its customers slowly show up, you can start taking Walmart’s employees. Walmart still has to pay their salaries. But over time, when you’re looking at the independent-contractor model, you can independently take joint custody over these workers. That’s a unique, if you wish, weakness, in the sharing economy.”

He went on, “Look, the sharing economy is fascinating on one end, but, at the same time, without the proper checks and balances, we’re going back to fifteen-year-old textile workers in Brooklyn working eighteen hours a day. The platform controls you, and there’s always going to be somebody willing to do the same work for a penny less. And that model just squeezes everything out of you, out of the lower class. At least until the point in time when they come with the pitchforks.”

The social mission had its limits. As Marco and his colleagues had done with their previous company, they were

saving money by situating the bulk of their operations, or at least most of the white-collar jobs, in the repressive post-Soviet state of Belarus. It’s much cheaper to hire computer engineers there than it is in the United States. When I asked Magaznik about this, during a video call to Juno’s seventy-person office in Minsk, he was reluctant to say that lower salaries were the reason they were there. He and the other co-founders are based in Tel Aviv, where they all grew up, he said. “In Israel, it’s much harder to create such a big tech team in such a small time—the competition for talent is really hard,” Magaznik told me. But he also acknowledged that they could hire five engineers in Belarus for the price of one in America.

The tech stuff wasn’t Juno’s strategic advantage, anyway. “If I was going to compete with Google, I would compete on privacy,” Arun Sundararajan, a professor at N.Y.U.’s business school and the author of the book “The Sharing Economy,” says. “I can’t compete with them on search-engine quality, because they’ve got all the best algorithms. So I compete on something that they can’t respond to easily. With Uber, it’s not quite as clear-cut, but if you look at all the different dimensions of their execution the driver relationship is the weakest, and it’s not one that they can easily correct.”

Driver recruitment, which started last December, proved surprisingly easy. Many drivers congregated online in driver forums and WhatsApp chat rooms, and word of the new company quickly spread. The service launched in April as a “closed beta,” which meant that it was still in a controlled-trial stage. In a few weeks, the volume of drivers interested in joining shot up. “We had bookings months out,” Jonathan McPhee, who runs Juno’s recruitment efforts, said. (He likes the title “people leader.”) “We could barely open up enough bookings to satisfy the demand.” Initially, the company was paying the drivers two hundred dollars to come in and listen to Juno’s presentation, and then fifty dollars a week to keep the app running in their cars. Even though there weren’t really any passengers to pick up yet, Juno was able to gather data about the drivers’ traffic patterns



through the Juno mobile devices that tracked their zigs and zags around the city. In May, the company moved into “open beta,” meaning that anyone could download the app and start using it if he or she had been invited by a driver. Since then, the company claims that its wait times in Manhattan have become competitive with Uber’s. McPhee says that a driver will often tell him, “I have so much activity, I don’t even need to turn on my Uber app.”

THE QUESTION, THEN, is how long Juno can sustain its driver-defection strategy against a competitor as well fortified as Uber. When I spoke with Uber’s head of North American operations, Rachel Holt, she told me that the company’s vision is to be “as reliable as running water everywhere and for everyone.” As it pursues that goal, Uber is watching Juno with defensiveness and skepticism. “I’d be very surprised if a ten-per-cent commission is going to continue for a long time, if ultimately a business is there to be sustainable,” Holt told me, sitting with her arms crossed on a couch in Uber’s sleek, fifty-five-thousand-square-foot offices in the Dupont Circle neighborhood of Washington, D.C. The company had thought about the commission a lot, she said, and the economics just didn’t work. She added that Uber had tried to get permission from the Securities and Exchange Commission to give stock options to its drivers, and was told that, as long as the drivers were independent contractors rather than employees, it wasn’t allowed. Indeed, one legal expert I spoke with said that giving restricted stock options to thousands of contractors might pose regulatory problems. “Look, if there’s something we can learn around a different way to approach that, we would love to assess how that works,” Holt said. “If there’s something very compelling in what they’re offering to drivers, we want to continue to learn from that.”

Several venture capitalists suggested to me that Uber was now so big and so rich—its estimated worth is close to sixty-eight billion dollars—that it was basically impossible for any new company to dislodge it. In an industry where size and brand recognition are crucial factors, Uber has become a cul-



“It’s a smaller, less destructive nuclear weapon, but it’s also a hat.”

tural buzzword, conjured by other entrepreneurs pitching their own ideas: the Uber of toothbrush heads, the Uber of car parking, the Uber of pets. Uber is the thing that everyone else wants to emulate, which makes it enormously successful at raising money.

The service is available in seventy-two countries, and has raised more than fifteen billion dollars; it is branching out into auto-lending, food-delivery, and courier services. I was repeatedly told that consumers summoning Ubers want their cars to come quickly, and that they don’t really care about the fine print of the drivers’ compensation. Uber had created a kind of moat around itself, and that moat was made of a seemingly limitless supply of investor dollars. Money shielded it from many of the pressures and compromises that a business operating under more normal conditions would face.

In the first six months of 2016, Uber sustained \$1.2 billion in losses, a stunning amount. (Even Amazon never lost as much in so short a time.) In total, according to Bloomberg, the company has lost four billion dollars, almost a quarter of what it has raised from investors. A good chunk of it went into

a costly effort to establish itself in China—an effort it recently abandoned. But the company’s ongoing costs are significant. One major expense is bringing drivers into its network, and replacing them when they leave; driving is a “high churn” career. Each time the company goes out to ask for more money, though, investors fight for the opportunity. “With Uber, their disruption was, they really weaponized money,” said Simon Rothman, a partner at the venture-capital firm Greylock Partners, who founded eBay Motors and was an early adviser to Lyft. “Now someone else has to do something equally disruptive, and I don’t know if being nicer and more fair financially with drivers is enough.”

Given Uber’s wealth and its backers’ patience, it can subsidize its rides indefinitely. Marco has been meeting with investors—in March, TechCrunch reported that Juno was attempting to raise thirty million dollars—but the funders I spoke with told me that they would not give Juno their money, because its challenges sounded too daunting. By the time the far-off future arrives when investors demand that Uber show an over-all profit, its competitors

are likely to have gone out of business.

The search for instructive precedents quickly leads to a company called Sidecar, which started in 2011, in San Francisco, as one of the first ride-sharing businesses. Sidecar introduced a number of innovations that were quickly copied by its competitors: having drivers use their own cars; the term “ride-sharing”; giving drivers directions on their smartphones. The company’s co-founder, Sunil Paul, has a patent dating back to 2002 for a technology that seems to underpin the whole industry: a method of sending a signal from a passenger’s cell phone to a central server and then to the closest available driver for a pickup, and of tracking the subsequent ride. Sidecar raised and burned through thirty-nine million dollars, and shut down in 2015; whatever was left was bought by General Motors.

“We were the inventors and the innovators,” Paul told me, ruefully. “But it wasn’t enough to overcome the money.” The only companies that could possibly compete with Uber now, he thought, were giants such as Apple and Google. “We got run over by the Uber money truck, in lots of different ways,” Paul said. “I don’t see much hope for a company like Juno, just to be perfectly blunt about it.”

AFTER LUCAS SMITH’S presentation, I joined a Juno specialist named Farhan Noor, who was helping a driver complete the on-boarding process. “This is the driver agreement,” Noor said. “Before we do that, I want to verify your car. We’re driving a 2015?”

“It’s a Nissan Pathfinder,” the driver, Jaime Bitar, said.

“A Pathfinder, that’s a nice car,” Noor said.

Bitar was dressed in a black suit and a patterned tie. He stood in front of a white curtain while Noor took his picture with his iPad. “You should see my Uber photo,” Bitar joked. “I took it in the car.”

Noor then pulled accessories out of the kind of black velvet sachet that one might expect to contain a pearl necklace: a ZTE phone, a charging cable, and a dashboard mount. The phone was programmed to display a promotional ad to the passengers in the back of the car: “Save 25% on your next ride.

Ask your driver.” This way, while the driver was working for Uber, a customer might ask about the ad, and the driver could send the customer a text message with a link to download the Juno app. (It’s against Taxi & Limousine Commission rules for drivers to solicit their passengers.) Once a new customer took his or her first Juno ride, the driver got a fifteen-dollar bonus.

At some point in the future, the likes of Bitar and his Pathfinder may be out of the picture anyway. In 2011, Sebastian Thrun, the founder of the Google X lab, announced at the annual TED conference that self-driving cars would usher in a new world, one where there were no automobile accidents, parking lots, or car-insurance premiums. Since then, a number of major corporations have made serious investments in autonomous vehicles.

Nobody knows when such a future might arrive. (Five years? Fifty years? You hear different things.) But everyone in the personal-transportation business is preoccupied with it. In August, Uber revealed that it was going to introduce a small group of self-driving Volvo XC90 S.U.V.s onto the streets of Pittsburgh, although they will still have drivers in the front seat. “I think the opportunity to totally transform the way people transport themselves and goods is just a massive opportunity,” a banking executive who follows Uber closely assured me. “It’s a huge segment of the economy, which is very inefficient. That is why Uber has grown so large so quickly.” He pointed out that Dublin, California, east of Oakland, would be offering taxpayer-subsidized vouchers to its citizens to use on Uber or Lyft rather than spending government money on maintaining some of its public bus lines.

“It’s not a matter of if, it’s a matter of when,” Marco said of the driverless era. “With Juno or without Juno, this is going to happen.” He added that with Uber the drivers would just be “deactivated, and thrown away like a used whatever.” Juno might not need them anymore, either, but they’d still have stock ownership in the company. “This is the first time since the industrial revolution when there was a class of workers who are going to have a piece of the future rather than just being laid off,” Marco said. He didn’t mention the prospect that

the piece of the future may have no value.

A world of driverless cars could pose a far greater threat to Uber than Juno’s kinder-copycat strategy. It could take any number of forms, from a subscription model, where consumers pay an annual fee to have access to an autonomous car whenever they need it, to a system more like Zipcar, where people pay on a per-use basis. Car sharing or fractional ownership could become widespread. Considering the number of possible arrangements, there’s no reason to assume that any of today’s ride-summoning firms will be dominant forces in an era without drivers. There was a time when AOL, the leading service provider in the dial-up era, was expected to own the future of the Internet, just as Blockbuster was expected to dominate video rentals for years to come.

When I asked Marco why he was so sure that Juno would still be around, he said, half jokingly, that he had acquired all the wisdom he needed by reading “The Hitchhiker’s Guide to the Galaxy,” by Douglas Adams. “Oh, my God,” he said. “It’s the Bible. Everything is there.”

In the novel, the main character reflects at one point that the earth was pretty much ruined by all the cars. His name is Arthur Dent. One of his non-terrestrial sidekicks calls himself Ford Prefect, having concluded, after visiting earth, that cars were the planet’s dominant life form. But Adams’s unflattering view of automotive transport didn’t seem to be what Marco had in mind.

I asked Marco to share what he had learned from the book, and he hesitated. “Now you’re putting me on the spot,” he said. After thinking for a few seconds, he went on, “It claims that the math never works in a restaurant, which explains why the bill never adds up.” He wasn’t sure if that was still true, because, he said, he stopped looking at restaurant checks a long time ago—preemptively handing your credit card to the server saves the five minutes it takes to get the bill, look at it, and send it back with the payment.

“It was a very popular book, especially when I was growing up, among geeks in the eighties and nineties,” Marco went on. “You have to ask the founders of Snapchat.” ♦

THE PENCES VISIT MANHATTAN

BY DOUGLAS MCGRATH

GOVERNOR MIKE PENCE was having a romantic dinner with the love of his life, Mrs. Mike Pence, at the Red Lobster in Times Square. The Governor knew that as Vice-President he would have to attend foreign banquets, so he and Mrs. Pence were trying to broaden their palates. Luckily, they had already found a couple of dishes at the Red Lobster which they liked. Governor Pence was saying a blessing over their chicken wings and mozzarella cheese sticks when the first three notes of “When I Survey the Wondrous Cross” chimed on his phone, signaling a text. As he read it, Mrs. Pence popped a sizzling cheese stick into her mouth and blew out little puffs of steam. “Look at me!” she said gaily. “I’m a steamboat!”

But the Governor didn’t laugh. Mrs. Pence took his hand and said, “What’s wrong, helpmeet?”

“I’ve been called to Trump Tower. It’s an emergency.”

Outside Donald Trump’s penthouse, the Governor was frisked by Secret Service agents. Pence found contact between men not involved in sports unnatural, but he knew it was necessary for the safety of the nation. He was so patriotic that he often insisted on being patted down two or three times in a row, faster each time.

As he entered the penthouse, he saw Ivanka doing crunches while she watched an exercise video made for the Trumps by Vladimir Putin. Eric was at a mirror, filing his teeth into sharp points, and Donald, Jr., was on a step-ladder, combing the mane of a trophy lion. Any hair that came out was placed in a silver bowl, to be used for Trump’s daily weave.

“Where’s your father?” Pence asked.

“My Führer, I mean, my father is asleep,” Donald, Jr., answered.

“At this hour?”

He nodded. “We put a tranquillizer

in his Big Mac. We need to talk to you alone. Mike, you’ve seen the polls. Dad’s freaking out. When he got the numbers this morning, he collapsed and started thrashing around, knocking things over and sort of—What would you guys call it?”

“Foaming,” Eric said. “Look, we wanted Dad to run for President. But



not because he’d be a good President. We just want to get him out of the company. If you think he sucks as a candidate, you should see him try to run a business.”

Ivanka shook her head. “A monkey with a high fever has better business sense than he does,” she said. “And, if he loses, he’ll be back at the office, spewing out ideas—oh, God . . .” She curled up on the floor and started rocking back and forth.

Eric put the file down, bit a piece of paper, and smiled at the row of neat little holes. “We’re softening his message to help with the groups he’s offended, which include . . . um . . .”

“Everyone but the Klan,” Ivanka said.

“But we have no hope if our own party won’t support him,” Eric said. “We chose you for V.P. because the establishment loves you. So get them in line, and maybe we can win this thing.”

Back on Fifth Avenue, the Governor called Paul Ryan. “Paul, I want to talk to you about Donald Tr—Hello? Hello?” It was funny—ever since he

accepted the Party’s nomination as Vice-President, he lost calls all the time. Trump told him it was because the phones are made in China.

He redialled, but the call went right to voice mail. Ryan must be trying him back, he thought. While Governor Pence waited, he looked around at the citizens of Manhattan. What a strange, sad city! Given how many people he saw wearing black, he figured that there must be funerals going on all the time. He assumed that the deaths were caused by starvation—even the wealthy-looking women he saw barely weighed ninety pounds.

But, as he studied these people, he noticed that many of them were on their cell phones. There were lots of people of different races, some from lands where they grow terrorists, and a good number of them were confused about their gender—women with short hair and army pants, men in colors that God intended only for flowers. Why did they have phone service and he did not? Surely, the Lord would take away the sinners’ service before his?

The Governor froze as he realized: maybe it’s not the service. Maybe people are deliberately hanging up on me *because of Trump*.

He found himself outside St. Patrick’s Cathedral. Before he joined Mrs. Pence’s megachurch, he had been a Catholic. How fondly he remembered the games he’d played with Father Molloy. He went inside and asked God if he and Trump had a chance. Not hearing anything, he opened a Bible for guidance. His eye fell on Mark 15:30—“Come down from the cross and save yourself.”

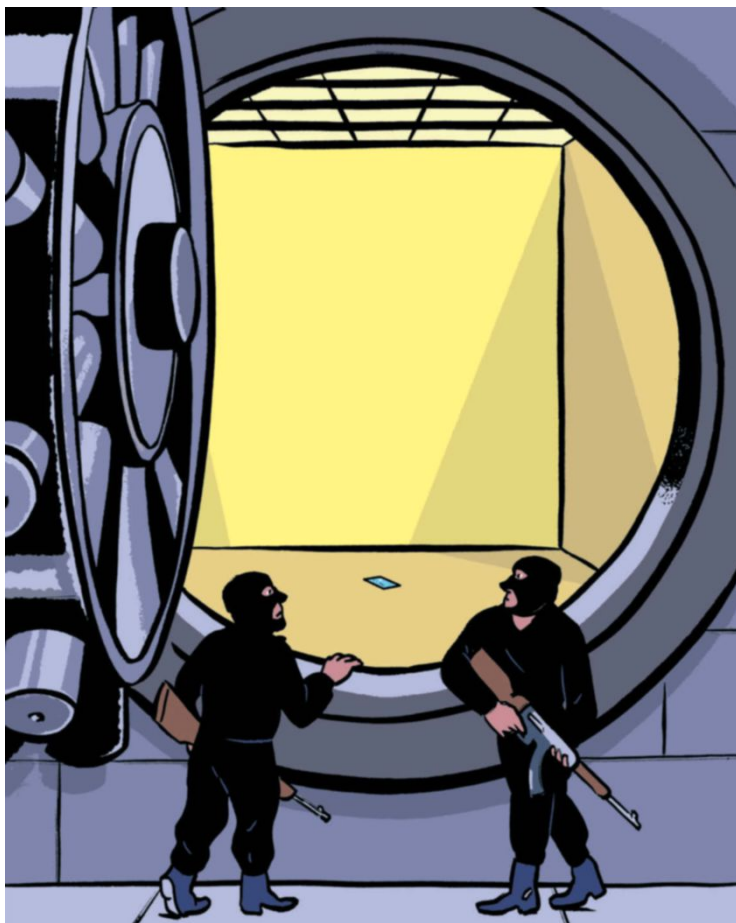
He knew then that there was no hope. Yet he did not despair. He thought of Mrs. Pence back in their room at the La Quinta Inn and Suites. She would be in her Lanz flannel nightgown and blue lace cap, preparing their nightcap of warm beef bouillon. They would figure out the future as a married couple should, with him deciding and her obeying. She would sit at his feet and play her guitar until nine-fifteen. That was bedtime, and they would drift off to sleep with the comfort of being man and wife—the real kind, the only kind that counts when you get to Heaven. ♦

LETTER FROM STOCKHOLM

CASHING OUT

Are there costs to getting rid of paper money?

BY NATHAN HELLER



A FANTASTIC HEIST (we like our crimes as smart and magical as dreams) took place some years back, when a stolen helicopter landed on the roof of a cash depot in Stockholm and three masked men smashed a skylight to climb inside. It was September 23, 2009. The depot was freshly stocked in expectation of a coming Swedish payday. Armed with a Kalashnikov, the invaders held employees at bay while their accomplices outside positioned road spikes to keep cop cars from swarming the building. Fake bombs had been set among the police helicopters to delay an aerial chase. The thieves loaded bag after bag of bills into their aircraft, then departed. Seven men

were later caught and sentenced, but nearly all of the stolen cash—reportedly some \$6.5 million—still has not been found.

The robbery is known as the Västberga heist, and, like many capers, it became a source of public fascination. (It is the subject of Evan Ratliff's e-book "Lifted.") But it also earned astringent notice from some economic theorists, who saw in it a parable about the risks of paper money. Cash is the squirmy ferret of societal wealth—tricky to secure physically and, once liberated in the wild, almost impossible to get back—and money, as technology, has changed a lot in half a century. A day's errands

once called for bulging pockets. Now it's possible to shop for groceries, pay rent, buy lunch, summon a taxi, and repay your sister for a movie without handling a checkbook, let alone fumbling with bills and coins. Most people think of card and electronic payments as conveniences, stand-ins for exchanging cold, hard cash. Yet a growing group of theorists, led in the United States by Kenneth S. Rogoff, a former chief economist at the International Monetary Fund, are embracing the idea that physical currency should be the exception rather than the rule.

In a new book, "The Curse of Cash," Rogoff, now a professor at Harvard, argues for phasing out paper money in the U.S., starting with big bills and slowly letting small denominations fall toward disuse. "Paper currency has become a major impediment to the smooth functioning of the global financial system," he writes. His cause dates to the late nineteen-nineties, when he found that sixty per cent of the value of the country's currency supply was in hundred-dollar bills—an astonishing proportion, considering how rarely C-notes show up in ordinary life. Since then, the percentage has risen (it's now about eighty per cent), with \$1.34 trillion outside banks at any moment. That's nearly forty-two hundred dollars carried by every man, woman, and child in the U.S. Under whose mattress has all this cash vanished?

Rogoff argues that the invisible large notes must be paying off-the-book wages. They are sitting in Zurich safe-deposit boxes, probably, crossing borders with cartels and traffickers, and doing other awful things. The U.S. dollar is an unofficial currency in both unstable economies (such as the Philippines) and under-the-table oligarchies (China, Russia). Phasing out big bills would make it harder for domestic currency to support corruption abroad. A million dollars in hundred-dollar bills is easy to tote in a shopping bag, but a million in ten-dollar bills weighs an ungainly two hundred and twenty pounds. Hobbling the underground market should also temper tax evasion, a costlier problem than many people realize. The most recent I.R.S. estimates indicate a tax-payment shortfall of four hundred and sixty billion dollars a year—a disparity that's transferred to those who pay. Rogoff speculates that

Sweden's anti-cash movement must now contend with the Cash Uprising alliance.

eliminating big bills would also be a more effective deterrent to illegal immigration than, say, a border wall, because the wages of undocumented workers are, necessarily, paid in cash.

Most important for many economists, low-cash life allows for negative interest rates, in which the lender pays the borrower interest. These are already in limited use in Europe and Japan, and they've become the subject of increasing attention in the U.S. (Paper money is an obstacle, because if interest rates went negative a lot of people would cash out and stuff money into sock drawers—that way, at least, they'd get a zero rate.) Some economists think a quick drop into negative rates during a global economic crisis, like the one in 2008, would have the effect of a defibrillator: there would be a brief jolt, but then the system would get pumping again, and both interest rates and inflation would return to healthy, growth-oriented zones. As things are, rates can't drop below zero, but they struggle to climb. For these and other reasons, Rogoff told me, some formerly skeptical colleagues have warmed to the idea of phasing out cash. Seriously considering his sunset scenario in the U.S., however, would require looking to a country that has already started toward that horizon.

That country is Sweden, the site of the Västberga heist. Cash circulation, long on the decline, has plunged since the time of the robbery, from a hundred and six billion Swedish crowns, or kronor, to seventy-seven billion last year. In 2013, Sweden eliminated its largest-denomination bill, and demand for its second-largest bill, the five-hundred-krona note (about sixty dollars), surprisingly fell off soon afterward. By 2014, only a fifth of Swedish retail transactions were being conducted in cash. (In the U.S., it's slightly less than half.) Swedish ticket machines for trains and buses usually take only cards; increasingly, cafés and bars and restaurants refuse cash, too. About half of the country's bank branches don't allow withdrawals or deposits in bills. As of a few years ago, "you could see the first signs of Sweden moving toward a true cashless society," Jacob de Geer, who runs the pan-European, Square-like transaction service iZettle, told me recently. "Many of the smaller shops started putting signs up on their doors saying 'We Don't Accept Cash.'"

In late summer, I flew to Sweden to see what life is like when no one wants the money in your hand.

ON AN IMMACULATE train from Stockholm's airport, a conductor in a yellow shirt said that if I'd forgotten to buy a ticket I could pay him the fare, but only with a bank card. "You *can* go to the ticket counter in our small waiting room, at the station, and pay with Swedish cash," he said, as if conceding that it was possible, at certain backward rural pubs, to purchase beer with turnips. He brandished his card reader proudly. He was not allowed, he said, a little less proudly, to handle money.

During my walk from the baggage claim to the train platform, I had passed ten ticket machines, all fitted not with coin slots or cash trays but with delicate, recessed card slides. On the train, small, silent screens set at the front of the cabin shuffled between ads for MasterPass, by MasterCard, and English headlines from the morning's news. "A 27-year-old PhD student has been charged with stealing poisonous substances from Uppsala University as part of an alleged plot to blackmail the Czech Republic into paying large sums of money in Bitcoin," one item read. Even thieves seemed to have moved on to better things.

I had not. I had withdrawn a wad of Swedish bills, seven hundred kronor (about eighty-three dollars), with the very American goal of keeping myself entertained by trying to spend it around town. The sum was more than I am used to carrying. One thing encouraging the anti-cash crowd is the conduct of the young; a survey of about a thousand U.S. adults, in 2014, found that more than half of those younger than thirty preferred cards to cash even for transactions of less than five dollars. When I run a transaction through my credit card, I get fraud protection, airline miles, and a digital record that I can export into budgeting software and spreadsheets. When I use cash, I get nothing: the transaction disappears. A generation that already orders cabs and music on screens needs no introduction to the joys of a cashless life.

A major social obstacle is privacy. The record of our electronic lives is a convenience, except when it's an annoyance or worse. In the popular imagination, the black market is buttressed by large metal

cases of cash. But many underground transactions are more modest. New Yorkers frequently hire babysitters and housecleaners in cash and do not file the required tax forms; waiters may pocket tips without keeping a tally for the I.R.S. Cash's fungibility enables slushy bookkeeping. Our willingness to put up with this reflects a sense we have that most people, in life, end up with certain records they would rather not keep.

After checking into my hotel in Stockholm, I went for a stroll to shake off jet lag. The city did not hide its appetite for plastic. Farmers' stalls in the Hötorget, an old hay-market square, sold Swedish chanterelles and summer berries alongside mangoes shipped from Pakistan. They took cards. The flower-stall guys nearby hawked bouquets of late-summer roses and trimmed bracken. They took American Express.

Later, I wandered into a bar, in the Scandic Grand Central Hotel, and ordered coffee. The bartender had slicked hair and wore a mysteriously tropical shirt. I extracted my wad. "This is a *cash-free* bar!" he said, alarmed. He pointed to a sign atop the register that said "Cash Free Zone" and featured a picture of some coins and bills overlaid with an enormous "X."

"Is that a new thing?" I asked, feeling like a smoker who's had a cigarette plucked from his lips.

"It's a new thing—two, three months ago," he said.

"Oh, interesting," I said. "Why?"

"More security for the people," he said, handing me a credit-card receipt to sign. "Now write the total amount."

SWEDEN SEEMS NEAREST to stamping out paper currency, but Denmark and Norway are trailing close behind. Ninety-three per cent of consumer transactions in Belgium are now cashless—partly because, like other European countries, it has capped the amount that can legally be paid in cash—and cash use in Australia has fallen by a third in a period of six years. India, whose underground economy is thought to swallow up four hundred and sixty billion dollars annually, has considered capping cash transactions and cash holdings; in a recent radio address, Prime Minister Modi exhorted citizens to turn their backs on cash. Throughout sub-Saharan Africa, where



"I told you not to order the Zamboni."

only about a third of the population have bank accounts but at least sixty per cent have cell phones, mobile payments have begun to leapfrog over paper currency. (About a quarter of Kenya's gross national product runs through its payment app, M-Pesa.) China, never keen to fall behind, has embraced mobile payments, with mixed success. Having spent two and a half millennia accumulating money, we now find that it weighs us down; we want to sail it through the ether.

Sweden's bellwether case, though, is distinct, and borne by three overriding causes. A flurry of high-profile robberies, not limited to the Västberga heist, married paper money to security vulnerabilities in the public imagination, and led entities such as the Swedish bank tellers' union to lobby against cash-handling. (Bank robberies and street muggings have declined notably since the cashless trend began.) The Swedish financial industry realized that fee-inclusive transaction technologies could turn a more handsome profit than cash handovers. And Sweden, a small country with an eye to the digital vanguard, has been a leader in developing new transaction apps and other tools. The appeal has started to sway small, urban businesses. "It's efficiency, simplicity—we can work with a more modern system, and it's easier for our staff," Gül Heper, the former brand director at HTL, a chain of sleek, youth-oriented cash-free hotels, told me. "And security. Because the lounge is open twenty-four hours, and we have a lot of

traffic." In a cashless enterprise, you never have to worry about someone dipping into the till. "You always have to have someone *counting* cash," David Zetterström, the co-founder of the boutique bakery chain Fabrique, cashless since February, says. When Zetterström and his wife started the bakery, eight years ago, thirty or forty per cent of all transactions were in cash, and the costs of cash-handling seemed unavoidable. More recently, that figure dropped to less than ten per cent, and credit-card-transaction fees for merchants came down, too. Last year, after Fabrique had four break-ins, Zetterström decided it was time to give the cashless thing a shot.

The security argument for cashlessness has been helped along by support both popular and pop. ABBA the Museum—an interactive athenaeum for the art and artistry of Sweden's superfamous quartet—does not take cash, mostly owing to the deeply held beliefs of Björn Ulvaeus, the smaller and less bearded of the "B"s.

"What happens to street crime when an advanced economy goes completely cashless?" Ulvaeus, who first registered the risks of cash after his son had a home robbery, wrote to me in an e-mail not long ago. "Why don't politicians ask questions like that?"

HOWEVER COSTLY cash-handling is for businesses, it's more so for the banks. Cash requires elaborate security for transportation and disbursement. It is a pain to track bill by bill. Finan-

cial institutions can make money from card transactions and account maintenance, but cash, for all its ubiquity, has questionable returns and a growing air of obsolescence. Sweden's central bank, the Riksbank, has recently joined many of its peers in looking at blockchain technology. Björn Segendorf, a Riksbank economist, said it was an "open question" whether the central bank would be issuing digital currency in the future.

"We don't add any value by handing over cash over the counter," Mats Torstendahl, an executive vice-president at Skandinaviska Enskilda Banken, or S.E.B., one of Sweden's Big Four, told me one afternoon. We were sitting in his office—big by American standards, bigger by Swedish—at a table opposite his desk. When we met, Torstendahl had leaned into my handshake as if into a rusting door handle. Now he settled in his chair in the authoritative lounge pose of a senior financier. He had neatly parted blond hair; round, tortoiseshell glasses; and the Swedish banker's uniform—a well-cut, sober suit without a tie. There was a delicate orchid in every window of the room. "The banks have consciously been trying to transfer manual cash-handling in our system to automated cash-handling, to decrease risks in the environment for our co-workers," Torstendahl said.

Per Långsved, a rising manager who is the head of retail banking products, chimed in: "Cash is actually one

Consumer Cellular®

SO MANY REASONS TO SWITCH...



\$22.61

Our Average Customer's Monthly Bill.*
Many pay even less as plans start at just \$10/month.



The Nation's Largest
Cellular Networks.



RECOGNIZED BY J.D. POWER
*"Highest in Customer
Service among Non-Contract
Wireless Providers."*



30 Days. Zero Obligation.
**OUR SERVICE IS
GUARANTEED.**



We Offer a Variety
of Phones—
From Simple to Smart.



You Can
Bring Your
Own Phone—
FREE SIM Cards.



FREE Activation—
A \$35 Value.



Member Advantages

Special benefits for
AARP members.



CALL CONSUMER CELLULAR AT
(888) 536-6761

VISIT US ONLINE AT
ConsumerCellular.com/TopRated



ALSO AVAILABLE AT
TARGET sears®

© 2016 Consumer Cellular, Inc. New service activation on approved credit. Cellular service is not available in all areas and is subject to system limitations. Terms and Conditions subject to change. Consumer Cellular received the highest numerical score among 8 non-contract wireless providers in the J.D. Power 2016 Wireless Customer Care Full Service Study – Vol. 2., based on 2,543 total responses, measuring the perceptions and experiences of current customers who contacted their carrier's customer care department within the past three months, surveyed January-June 2016. Your experiences may vary. Visit jdpower.com. *Average customer pays \$22.61 per month per line based on the average customer bill per month, per line as of July, 2016. AARP member benefits are provided by third parties, not by AARP or its affiliates. Providers pay a royalty fee to AARP for the use of its intellectual property. These fees are used for the general purposes of AARP. Some provider offers are subject to change and may have restrictions. Please contact the provider directly for details.

of the main carriers of diseases in the world!”

In Sweden, banks don't run proprietary A.T.M.s, as in the U.S. Instead, the five largest jointly own an A.T.M. company, Bankomat. Insisting that every branch also have a vault and a cash-handling teller would be otiose, Torstendahl told me, especially given the sharp decline in cash transactions in the past decade. “Ask a Swedish customer, ‘Do you have cash on you?’ ‘I never have cash on me.’ ‘We are thinking of taking away cash.’ ‘No, you cannot take away cash!’ ‘But you don't have any cash.’ ‘Yeah, but if I want to have cash you should have cash.’ ‘But you never have cash!’”

He leaned back and smiled. “You get into a kind of *cash twenty-two* situation.”

To the question of who's left behind by low-cash life, the answer, in Sweden, rides on three numbers: latitude, age, and wealth. In the rural north, the de-cashing of bank branches changes daily life. Locals, especially those with cash-intensive businesses, like shops, now drive great distances to find a bank that serves their needs. “You have to go to one, two, three, four, *five* banks

until you find one,” said Wiggo Lindgren, a plump, jovial pensioner who is the vice-president of the Småföretagarnas Riksförbund, or National Small Business Association, which represents thirty thousand firms. Today, fifty-three thousand people in Sweden must travel more than eighteen miles to withdraw cash. “One-fifth of them say it would be a disaster if cash went away—they'd have to close their shops,” Lindgren told me. “What we want is some kind of status quo.”

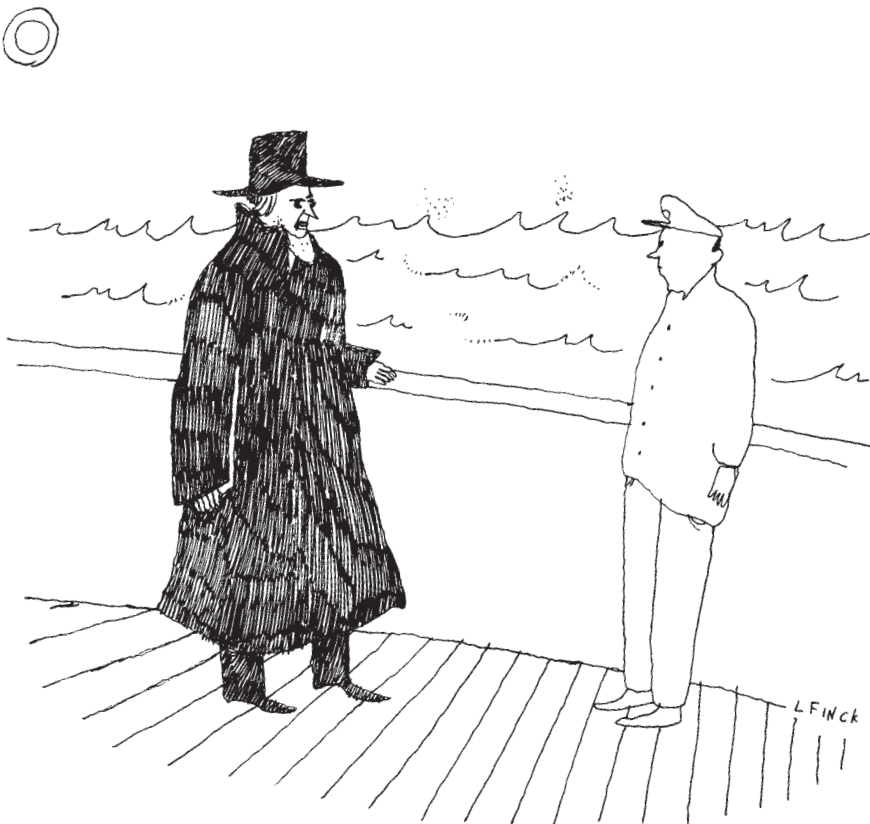
Stasis would suit the elderly, too. Some old people are undaunted by cashless ways of doing business. But many struggle to track debt, quail at smartphones, and forget the PIN codes needed for their bank cards. Add to that matters of convenience (some toilets require digital payment, and the elderly are often urgent visitors) and the phasing out of cash seems, to at least one demographic, premature. Christina Tallberg, the chair of the Pensionärernas Riksorganisation, or National Pensioners Organization, told me that, after dues-collecting meetings of her organization, its elderly female treasurer has had to carry a big sack of money on two modes of public

transportation in order to reach a bank branch that would accept the deposit.

Both Lindgren's and Tallberg's organizations have joined Kontantupproret, “Cash Uprising,” a loose coalition for the preservation of cash. The founder is Björn Eriksson, a former president of Interpol and, it must be noted, chair of the Association of Swedish Private Security Companies, which represents armored trucks and the like. Cash Uprising holds that everybody should be able to get and deposit cash anywhere—the view that Torstendahl and others find so obtrusive. (“History has many sad examples of people who have tried to stand in the way of science, technology and capitalism,” Björn Ulvaeus, of ABBA, wrote me about the group.) Yet Cash Uprising is not quite fringe. “When I speak today with an organization, this is actually one of the key topics, the key frustrations, that they're very angry about,” says Jan Bertoft, the secretary-general of the Swedish Consumers' Association, a federation of twenty-four groups, including retirement, disability, and immigrant organizations. The Uprising publishes editorials that are critical of what Eriksson calls “this abnormal way of making it as difficult as possible to use cash out of the pocket.” At first, it tried appealing to the banks, but they wouldn't engage. So the Uprising and its surrogates moved on to politicians.

One subject of their attention has been Sweden's deputy minister of finance, Per Bolund. In late June, Christina Tallberg handed him a petition, signed by 139,064 pensioners, asking the government to safeguard the use of cash. Bolund had won some political points recently by attending to the cash concerns of asylum seekers. (He pushed for a plan that would give them quick access to banking services.)

I went to visit Bolund one morning, in a governmental office building. He is a tall man, with the wide, concerned grin of a Boy Scout who has finished tying his ropes but worries about whether he's done it right. He led me to a conference table at one end of his office and poured piping-hot black coffee from a carafe. He wore a dark suit with a crimson tie of ribbon thinness, tugged into the smallest knot I had ever seen. Bolund's attitude toward Sweden's cashless tendencies is both



“One day, I will catch the koi that nibbled my left leg.”

upbeat and circumspect—which is to say, fairly political.

“This is not something that’s been thought out by the government—‘We’re going to be a cashless society’—but, rather, a development from the bottom up, so to speak,” he said. “I will have a dialogue with the private sector, trying to point out that they have a responsibility for giving payment services for all citizens.”

One model, he said, could be Sweden’s alcohol-provision system, which allows Swedes in remote locations to order booze to be delivered, and held, at the nearest store. (Similar systems exist for medication and parcels.) Bolund wants the banks to consider such an arrangement for cash. “If there is not a solution that has been provided by the private actors, there will come a time when we are faced with no other option but to regulate this,” he said—but he preferred to let demand, innovation, and time run their course.

“We have generations of young people now entering the economy who have never used cash, and see no reason whatsoever to start using cash at all,” he went on. “And, of course, for natural reasons the elderly citizen will”—he came to a terrified stop, as if racking his processors for an apt euphemism—“move out of private society, and that will, of course, bring a move toward electronic payments. For natural reasons!”

No passage of time is likely to help the unregistered poor. At some point, I started chatting with panhandlers in Stockholm, all of whom were foreigners, off the Swedish books and social programs. A cheery, gray-bearded Bulgarian man named Atanas told me, through a few words of English and some artful hand gestures, that a miscreant had absconded with eighty thousand kronor (about ninety-three hundred dollars), leaving him penniless. An Austrian woman, Sigrid, who was perched on a street corner, knitting, said that her Austrian pension had been locked. She’d been bouncing around various cities in Europe. Fortunately, she did not find the Swedes less liberal with their cash on the street than any other nationality she’d encountered, and she had managed to save money that she would use to buy a bus ticket elsewhere. “You won’t need a bank card?” I asked. Sigrid laughed. “No,

no!” she said brightly. She was old and poor, and just the sort of person no one thinks of when imagining a thriving future, so I hoped that she was right.

IN EVERY EUROPEAN city, there are cafés, bars, and restaurants that stand as totems to a youthful cosmopolitan dream. They are tavernlike and multipurpose places. Usually, their customers are under forty-five. The language of first resort is Global English, which extends the present into the continuous and makes bathrooms “toilets”: language that belongs to nobody, and so to all. These are the places where expatriates gather to feel less foreign, and where locals go to avoid losing touch. To visit is to feel lost, but also on the verge of being found.

One of the newest of these spots in Stockholm is Nomad, halfway up a hilly stretch of road, just past the central station. On a Monday evening, I stopped by for a plate of meatballs. Some American guys on the back patio were playing poker. I sat inside, beside three young women clustered around a table over drinks. One, dark-haired and with a nose stud, clutched a packet of tobacco and distractedly rolled a cigarette. Another was a visiting Berliner; the third, a freckled Californian.

The Californian was discussing work and money. “When you’re dying in bed, are you going to think, I wish I had worked those extra twenty hours?” she asked. “Or are you going to think, I wish I’d gone to that place? Right now, we are young. No matter, we’re going to be broke. Yeah?”

“You’re going to spend it,” the woman with the cigarette said. “You’re going to spend it—on the concert ticket, on clothes, on the apartment, whatever. You’re going to spend it. So, like, make sure you’re happy *what* you spend it on.”

“Travel is definitely the solution,” the Californian said.

A willowy woman from Bonn wandered in, trailing a guy from Peru who wore a fedora. “My roommate!” the Bonn woman called out to the Californian. “You are still here!” Everyone was introduced. The Bonn and Berlin women started speaking German, and the guy in the fedora asked if he could grab a

chair from my table. He sat across from the Californian, who began to tell him that she’d love to travel to Peru but that, as a woman, she was worried about going alone. “You are very beautiful, so you would be fine there,” the Peruvian said. They discussed his nation’s landscape.

On the other side of my table, a pair of women, Swedish and Serbian, were playing rummy with two decks of cards,

one pale red and the other blue. They got a round of cocktails in coupe glasses and invited me to join them, but it was getting late, and I was almost finished with my meatballs. I asked them whether they often used cash. Usually plastic cards, they said, or else mobile apps.

“Even at farmers’ markets and things, people don’t need cash,” the Swede said. The Swedish central bank’s recent release of a new line of bills and coins struck her as foolish. “It’s trying to be more like the E.U.—two-kronor coins and things like that,” she said. “But it’s, like, why? What’s the point? No one uses it anymore.”

TO GET A clearer sense of forms of money people do use, I went to visit Peter Fredell, whose company runs a mobile wallet called SEQR (“secure”). SEQR launched in 2012, before Apple Pay, and reflects the kind of thinking that drives Sweden’s cashless thrall. Fredell is a garrulous bald man with glasses and a predilection for *snus*, the tea-bag-like sachets of tobacco that Swedes place underneath their upper lip to buzz their gums. On his wall, he had mounted the bleached skull of a bear, which he’d shot, and a giant swatch of animal fur, which he kept framed—an allusion to the calming “furry wall” in the broad comedy “Get Him to the Greek.”

SEQR, which now carries out tens of millions of transactions globally each year, purports to do most of the things that can be done with cash. When you download the app on your phone, you link it directly to your bank account, not to an existing card number, as with Apple Pay. Retailers key the transactions with designated QR codes (those pixelated, radarlike bar codes) at their registers. SEQR also has a peer-to-peer function, which allows money to be sent



to another user, and a “touchless” interface at some registers. Many people have visceral anxieties about doing business with their cell phones, but Fredell insists that it’s the safest money-carrying medium there is.

“When you want to do a payment, we check: Is it the SIM card? Yes. Is it the hardware, the same phone? Yes. And do you have the PIN code?” He waved his own smartphone. “You can’t really hack that, because this number is unique to this telephone.” Even if somebody broke through all the interlocking keys on one phone, they would have to start all over again on the next. “That means it’s not scalable fraud,” Fredell told me. The flip side of this elaborate security is lost privacy: Big Brother can’t protect you from what he doesn’t see. But Fredell thinks that concern is passing. “Eventually, everyone will pay with their mobile,” he said. “When they will do it is written in the stars.”

Fredell pulled a soggy *snus* bag from under his lip, swapped it for a new sachet, and suggested that we go shopping. It had rained lightly through the lunch hour, but it was dry now. We walked to one of the big Swedish supermarkets, Hemköp, and toward the sweets section, where Fredell plucked a small bag of Ahlgrens Bilar gummy candies. He took it to the cashier and snapped the QR code on his phone. “I’m waiting for the cashier to put in the amount—there it comes!” he chirped. “I do my PIN code, and it’s done.” The cashier offered him a receipt. “I don’t need that,” he said proudly, raising his phone. “I have a total receipt here.”

I thought we were done shopping, but Fredell remembered that he had to buy more *snus*—I had a hunch that he was always buying more *snus*—and so we walked to the tobacco counter, and he did the QR-code thing again, this time on a gigantic, ten-cannister column of General *snus*, which, with gold-foil wrappers, looked like something pillaged from the minibar of a Trump hotel. On the way to another supermarket, Fredell ate candy and sucked *snus* and talked about the mobile-payments drug market. He waved a slim card sheath under my nose. “This is my wallet—no cash here!” he said. “I made it from eel skin that I fished myself.”

For many people, cash signifies au-

tonomy, but for the young or the technologically adventurous it’s an inhibition on the freedom of self-made exchange. The romance of this notion helps account for the success of Swish, the most popular mobile cash-transfer app in Sweden. Swish, a peer-to-peer service like Venmo, launched in December, 2012. Less than four years later, it is used by half the Swedish population and by ninety per cent of adults under thirty. The service moves money instantly; you need only a recipient’s phone number. Its interface is so simple that it is used for church collections and other basket-passing fare. (On the metro platform one night, I passed a busker with a sign: “If you don’t have Cash, pay with Swish!”) Last summer brought Sweden’s first Swish mugging, when two thugs beat up a man and forced him to Swish them. The criminals were rapidly identified by their account.

The success of the app is striking, because it wasn’t dreamed up by a Zeitgeist-attuned entrepreneur. Swish was conceived, driven, and funded by the Swedish banks. Settling on a Bankomat-type model, they sponsored development together and hired a marketer, Per Ekwall, who had a basic insight into how this new cashless technology would fit the population’s needs.

“I thought, This is about *social* payments,” Ekwall told me one morning, in the offices of his firm, The World Loves. “It was a big mental leap for banks to think about payments not as a technical thing, or a product, but as a social thing. The value of Swish is nothing unless my best friend has it.”

Ekwall focussed on two groups that he called Innovators and Administrators. The Innovators were early tech adopters. The Administrators were “class parents”—the sorts of people who organize school events and group gifts. Administrators were always arranging things, Ekwall reasoned, so people in their social circles constantly owed them money, and would download a simple app to repay them if requested to do so. In marketing Swish, he aggressively targeted those two groups, on the theory that almost everyone else would get pulled on board as well.

The theory held. Today, some Swedish banks have more Swish transactions than A.T.M. withdrawals. The app has also brought with it an element of cul-

tural identity. “It’s important for Swedish society,” Anders Edlund, who is in charge of Swish at the bank Nordea, told me. “When Swish has production disturbances, it takes, like, one minute, and the big Swedish newspaper writes about it. It’s *that* important.”

ONE SATURDAY NIGHT, I put on a jacket and walked through central Stockholm. Cafés on Sturegatan spilled late diners out onto the sidewalk. A group of women with a sign that read “KYSSEN 10 KR” (“Kiss 10 Kronor”) wandered by, chortling intermittently. Crowds had started to swell outside certain bars and clubs. On a whim, I talked my way past a gray-clad bouncer and climbed a grandiose flight of red-carpeted stairs.

The place was called Sturecompagniet, and it had a cover charge. I took out my wad, but the cashier wanted my American Express. The interior looked like a public spa, set under vaulted ceilings, with a mosaic floor. The music was a soundtrack of millennial nostalgia—Shakira, Snoop, “Ride wit Me”—and a smoke machine shot off sharp plumes of mist. After a while, the Kyssen 10 Kr women drifted in. A woman in a bridal veil danced wildly beneath the lights.

Someone grabbed my shoulder and shouted unintelligibly in my ear. The guy wore a black blazer and a white shirt with a matching pocket square; he had blond hair buzzed close to his scalp. He said his name was Henry, and that he was in town for the weekend to meet girls. In fact, he said, a Superhot Girl was on her way here—did I want to meet her? The smoke cannons fired triumphantly behind him. I said that I was always happy to meet anyone. The only thing was, he said, I should pretend that I’d known him all his life. Although I’d said I was a journalist, he had decided that I was a lawyer. I had introduced myself as Nathan, but Henry preferred his own version: Manson.

Henry introduced me to his wingman, Sebastian. He had known Sebastian for years and years, he said, though I now had reason to suspect that claim. “Sebastian, this is Manson,” Henry said.

“Nathan,” I said.

“Manson, Sebastian,” Henry said, pointing a route. “Let’s go outside.”

We wandered out to the sidewalk, where a patio had been set up. The street

was quieter. While Henry fussed with his phone, tracking down the Girl, I talked with Sebastian, a grad student from somewhere he described as “like Westeros from ‘Game of Thrones.’”

“He likes to make up these complicated stories to try to impress the girls,” Sebastian said. “For example, I am supposed to say that he’s a Russian spy.” Sebastian’s hero was Elon Musk, whom he had never met but whom he considered a model human being. “I really think I’d take a bullet for that guy,” he told me.

We spoke about the Hyperloop of Elon Musk, and the American election, and the awfulness of Swedish trains in winter. Henry periodically checked in with updates: the Girl was en route. At some point, he began to call me Nitch. He approached a guy on the patio, well dressed, with salt-and-pepper hair. “You look great!” Henry declared. The guy was a Canadian named Eric, and Henry urged him to stay and meet the Superhot Girl, too. “This is Nitch,” Henry said, pinching my shoulder. “I’ve known him forever.”

“Nathan,” I said.

“Nitch is an Italian lawyer,” Henry said. It occurred to me then that Henry was gathering a dream team of random strangers to hang out with him, the better to impress the Girl. I felt moved by his attention to her happiness.

Henry wandered off because it was the Superhot Girl’s birthday, or so he said, and he was trying to get her in for free. It struck me that, as much as cashless life enabled one kind of cosmopolitan fluidity—no more costly money-changing across borders, the breezy trust that comes with financial lucidity—it impeded another. With a pocket of cash, you could be anyone: a Russian spy, a birthday celebrant, an *avvocato* out for a night on the town. With a cashless trail, you were fated always to be what you had always been; you couldn’t flee far from your name, your purchases, even your network of friends. You were always, by your cards or cell phone, outed as yourself.

For Americans, who lack the institutional trust of the Swedes, cashlessness feeds paranoia. And, for the U.S. government, it might mean more unwanted chores. Rogoff believes that the prickliest details of a cashless transition would rise from the de-facto regulation it



prompts. Suddenly, small-scale marijuana purchases and the like, mainly overlooked to spare an overburdened penal system, would become conspicuous. Negligible tax evasions of the babysitter variety, less rewarding for the I.R.S. to pursue, would emerge. Do Americans, fetishists of self-invention and self-interest, want that much clarity? “Sweden has been very fast at doing these things—they’re incredible,” Rogoff told me. “But they’re very determined. I don’t think we’d be as determined. It would take a while.”

On the patio, the three of us—Sebastian, Eric, and Nitch—began talking about money. Eric had been travelling a lot, and he had noticed something different in Sweden. “I have a routine when I arrive in a place,” he said. He’d go to the A.T.M. and take out cash. In Sweden, he’d been having trouble getting rid of it. Maybe, someone said, it really is all about precious metals. Sebastian looked across the busy street. “It’s so strange,” he said. “We need food. But do we need gold? Do we need silver? These are things we find.”

What do we want from money? As Henry finally connected with his Superhot Girl and—looking as charmed

and uxorious as I have ever seen a person—led her up the carpeted stairs toward his bizarre, makeshift posse, I began to think that, beyond home and nurture, what we seek in most currency is a way to mete out dreams. So far, the U.S. still embraces cash, because our concept of wealth is material: we collect it, handle it, hoard it. American money is private. Sweden has embraced cashlessness more readily in part because it finds the value of currency in the transfer and velocity, the social path it follows, the bonds it traces. It’s social: a network conception of wealth. The two conceptions met on nights like this, when fantasies and friendships came together in a hideaway of space and time, remaking each other among fleeting opportunities. We weren’t thieves, and yet we lived as if we were.

Soon after that, I left and walked toward my hotel. It was crisp and fresh out, and I stopped in at a restaurant, to delay the end of a long night just a little while longer. “We don’t take cash,” the waitress said when the bill came. I was tired; the expense was small. I felt a small rush of acquittal as I paid. ♦

TRUMPTOWN

*This West Virginia county used to vote solidly Democratic.
Now it belongs to Trump. What happened?*

BY LARISSA MACFARQUHAR

THE Hillary-for-prison sign outside Mine Lifeline on Main Street was so enormous that it attracted attention, even though its message was so ordinary in Logan County, West Virginia, that the sign seemed festive rather than threatening. People driving by often stopped and took selfies in front of its photograph of a peeved-looking Clinton behind bars. Rick Abraham, who founded the mine-safety company, and had put up the sign, was delighted by the response. He thought he might construct a three-dimensional prison with Hillary in it, if he could find the time. He would put it on the roof of his building, which would be nicely theatrical, although bad for selfies. “The Clinton Foundation pay for play—it’s obvious!” he said. “She’s a criminal, she should be in jail! If I had done that, I would be in jail. She knowingly put all that information on a private server to shield it from FOIA. Deleting those e-mails—how can that not be obstruction? And using her BlackBerry in the Kremlin? She just has a total disregard for everybody. They’re the Clintons! They’re crooks!”

Abraham had also planted a Trump billboard outside his business—this, although even larger than the Hillary sign, was so common a sight that it barely registered—and he was in some ways an emblematic Trump voter: a white Protestant man in the dying coal industry in southern West Virginia, which is one of the parts of the country most deeply and unshakably loyal to Trump, and most deeply and unshakably hostile to Clinton and President Obama. In Logan County’s Democratic primary in 2012, Obama was soundly defeated by Keith Judd, a Texas felon serving a seventeen-and-a-half-year sentence for extortion. The mayor of the city of Logan (pop. 1,649) recently made it known to Clinton’s campaign that she was not

welcome and should not come. Like most West Virginians, Rick Abraham was angry with the President for hastening the decline of the coal industry with what he regarded as excessive environmental regulation. Like most Trump voters, he considered Obamacare a scourge, and since he selects insurance policies for Mine Lifeline’s forty-odd employees he could argue in detail that nearly everyone in his company was worse off than before.

And yet in other ways he is not the Appalachian Trump voter as many people elsewhere imagine him—ignorant, racist, appalled by the idea of a female President or a black President, suspicious and frightened of immigrants and Muslims, with a threatened job or no job at all, addicted to Oxy-Contin. Those voters exist, but the political thinking of many others in Trump country is more ambivalent and complicated and non-inevitable than is apparent from signs hung on Main Street or carried at rallies. The perception that people in West Virginia are voting for Trump because they are racist or ignorant is significant, though, since it’s one of the reasons they’re voting for Trump in the first place. “When people talk about Trump, they talk about how they don’t like the establishment or the élites,” Charles Keneey, a history professor at Southern West Virginia Community and Technical College, in Logan County, says. “When they say that, they mean who they see on television—they envision people in New York City making fun of them and calling them stupid. Every time you leave the state, you get it—someone will say, Oh, you’re from West Virginia, do you date your cousin? Wow, you have shoes, wow you have teeth, are you sure you’re from West Virginia? So when they see that the media élite is driven out of their mind

at the success of Donald Trump it makes them want to root for him. It’s like giving the middle finger to the rest of the country.”

Another important factor is immigration, but not for economic reasons. In West Virginia, there are practically no immigrants. But Trump has promoted the idea that someone who cares about the fate of people new to the country must care less about those who have been here longer—and this idea resonates among people who believe that the rest of the country doesn’t care about them at all, and doesn’t see them as kin. When Clinton talks about Trump voters, she tends to divide them into two categories: bigots (her “basket of deplorables”) and people suffering from economic hardship. What’s missing from Clinton’s two categories is a third sort of person, who doesn’t want to think of himself as racist, but who feels that strong borders describe a home. There are many such people, and not just in West Virginia.

Trump was not Rick Abraham’s first choice among the Republican candidates. His first choice was Carly Fiorina: he thought she sounded like a better businessperson than Trump, and he couldn’t understand why she wasn’t doing better in the polls. But after a while he acknowledged that it seemed he was the only one who liked her, so he started donating to his second choice, Ben Carson. He liked Carson because he thought he was smart and honest, although he was worried by how little Carson seemed to know about foreign policy. During the primary season, Abraham and his wife would watch the Republican debates on television, and his wife would get up and leave the room because she couldn’t stand watching Trump. Abraham sometimes couldn’t stand him, either—he found him pompous and



MAGNUM

One Logan County mayor made it known to Hillary Clinton's campaign that she wasn't welcome and shouldn't come.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY ALEC SOTH

THE NEW YORKER, OCTOBER 10, 2016

57

arrogant. But he thought that was a strategy, and it worked, after all: he eliminated sixteen other candidates and won the nomination.

Abraham saw Trump's more extreme pronouncements as bargaining positions. Trump was a negotiator: if he wanted to buy a building for twenty million dollars, he wouldn't go to the table offering twenty—he would offer ten, or five. So when he talked about building a wall and throwing eleven million people out of the country, Abraham figured he was just making an aggressive first offer, and after some negotiating he would end up with something reasonable. Abraham didn't think it was possible or desirable to throw out immigrants who were already here (except felons), but he did think it was necessary to establish an effective border.

He agreed with Trump that you had to vet Muslims carefully in order to keep out terrorists, and he thought that America should not accept Muslims who didn't want to learn English and become a part of American life. "Political correctness is destroying the country, because we're not assimilating into a common society," he says. "I was in Union Station in Chicago a while back, and I saw someone, I didn't know if it was a man or a woman. It was shaped like a Christmas tree. It was a black robe that did not expose the arms or feet, it touched the ground and it came to a point up top and it had the screen and it was leaned against a wall. I don't know if that's some guy with an AK-47—I don't know what it is! Now, if you say to her, 'In this country, you have to be seen so we can tell who you are,' she'll say, 'You're vi-

olating my religion, my culture wears a veil.' Where does it stop?"

Abraham describes himself as an American of Arab descent—both his grandfathers were born in Sultan Yacoub, a town that is now in Lebanon but was then part of Ottoman Syria. His paternal grandfather immigrated to America as a child; his name when he arrived was Abraham Dewud, but the immigration officers told him that his name was now Joe Abraham. He hadn't been in West Virginia long before he signed up to fight for America during the First World War. He was a Muslim who never smoked or drank or ate pork. He married a local Christian woman and then, after she died, a Muslim. There were no mosques anywhere nearby, but he practiced his faith as best he could for the rest of his life.

Abraham's maternal grandfather came from a family of Syrian Bedouins. When he was eleven, in 1907, his parents put him on a ship headed for New York by way of Marseilles. He picked sugar beets in Michigan for a while, and then, in the nineteen-twenties, when the coal fields in West Virginia were booming, he moved down there and started peddling in the coal camps, selling pots and pans out of a wagon. In time, he opened up a grocery store. He married a Christian girl from Gilbert Creek whose family had lived in the area since before the Civil War. He didn't convert and neither did she, although shortly after they married he brought her home to Sultan Yacoub for a year so that she could learn Syrian customs and cooking. "My grandmother smoked, drank liquor, bowled three nights a week—he couldn't do anything with her," Abraham says. "Mamaw ran the house."

This grandfather used to get together with other Arabs in Logan and talk about the old country. When he died, he was buried by an imam. Abraham feels that, as a third-generation Arab-American, he has lost touch with his heritage, and he regrets this. But he does not regret the assimilation that caused that loss. "I've heard Mike Pence say that he is a Christian first," he says. "Well, it seems to me that the Arab old-timers were Americans first."

Abraham still has in his possession



"Nice moves—is that an air piano or are you doing the E-Mail?"

a pledge that his maternal grandfather signed when he was naturalized, many decades ago, in the Logan County Courthouse. It reads, in part, "It is my bona fide intention to renounce forever all allegiance and fidelity to any foreign prince, potentate, state, or sovereignty, and particularly to Mehmed V, Emperor of the Ottomans, of whom I am now a subject. . . . I am not an anarchist; I am not a polygamist nor a believer in the practice of polygamy; and it is my intention in good faith to become a citizen of the United States of America and to permanently reside therein." Abraham had heard that some recent Muslim immigrants practiced Sharia law; he thought that they should just go home. "They don't want to assimilate," he says. "My grandfather swore to disavow the Ottoman Empire, and they should have to do that, too, if they want to be Americans. You should speak English, you should practice our laws, and if you don't want to do that don't come here! It's O.K. if they want to practice their customs—I don't want that to disappear. But we have a Constitution, and people should go by it."

When Democrats talk about America, they celebrate its diversity, but when they talk about immigrants diversity is often left out. They say that immigrants are exactly like us: they work hard and love their families. No doubt, most immigrants do work hard and love their families, as do most other kinds of people, but such flattening platitudes suppress what is obviously true: that people from other parts of the world are different from some Americans, and so when they become part of America they bring change. Even people who don't feel hostile toward foreigners and are repelled by racial malice sometimes wish that their country would stay the same, because they love it the way it is. To deny that any change is taking place is the sort of orthodoxy that pushes people toward Trump.

THERE ARE A lot of Trump signs in Logan, and there are a lot of signs touting Richard Ojeda. Ojeda, who teaches in a Junior R.O.T.C. program at a local high school, is running for state senate as a Democrat, but the fact



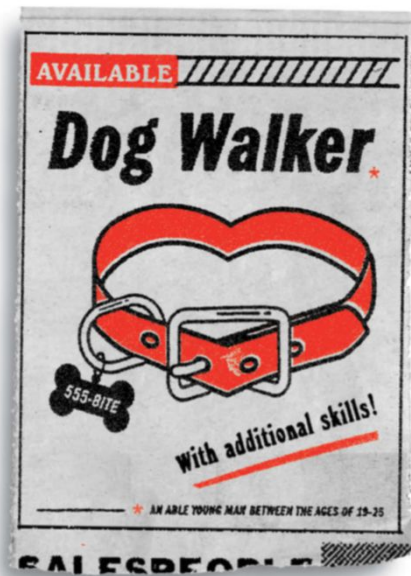
"You are going on a long journey. You will throw your back out putting your bag in the overhead. You will never recover from jet lag. It will rain every day. You will lose your passport. Your flight home will be cancelled."

that most people in Logan were voting for Trump made perfect sense to him. "If he does twenty per cent of what he promises, he'll be a decent President," he says, "and maybe he just will make America great again."

Logan was currently a long way from greatness, in Ojeda's opinion. The poorer hollers were crowded with ancient trailers, many with a "No Trespassing" or a "Private Property" sign on them. There was a lot of theft, because of drugs—in some parts of West Virginia, the prescription-drug-addiction epidemic was worse than anywhere else in the country. Ojeda often drove around the county to see what was going on, and everywhere he went there were wrecks of houses half-destroyed by fire or fallen in with age, overgrown with weeds and kudzu. Why didn't the county tear them

down? Even some of the homes that were lived in were surrounded by tires and piles of trash and toys, old machines, broken TVs. The garbage everywhere drove him crazy. He'd started a local charity with his brother-in-law, and they picked up as much trash as they could, but there was only so much a few people could do. Why didn't the county's code-enforcement officer fine people for dumping in their yards? What was he being paid for? If coal was dying, West Virginia needed a new industry, and tourism would be a good one, but how would the state ever attract tourists if the place looked like landfill? Who would come to kayak in West Virginia's beautiful streams if every thirty feet there was a sewer pipe?

Ojeda loved his state with a furious passion, and seeing it go to hell made



LEASHED

Justin Torres

I PLACED AN AD on a popular classifieds Web site under the title “Jack of All Trades, Master of None.” The ad offered to clean, go to the laundromat, organize your bullshit, walk your dog. This was in the personals section, specifically for men seeking men. I was twenty-five but easily passed for younger—my scrawny frame underdeveloped, my cheeks still hairless—so I advertised nineteen. I remember it was autumn, and I remember feeling plagued by an unbearable need for both intimacy and estrangement, for the queerness of touch. Mostly, I placed that ad because I was broke and had been for just about every day of my adult life.

I got a lot of responses, enough to waste the afternoon, idly mesmerized by my cascading in-box. Most simply demanded pics, in all caps: WHY NO PICS? One respondent stood out; his tone was restrained, easy. He required someone to run errands and walk his dog. *I feel like I get you*, he wrote. He was silver-haired, white, early fifties, well preserved—that one guy from “Mad

Men” comes to mind now. A wealthy narcissist; it wasn’t that he got me so much as that there was no one he didn’t feel he had.

Here’s what I remember of the dog: she spent all day in a crate, even though Mad Man worked from home. She was untrained, destructive. At the sound of my entrance, she freaked, and then at the sight of me she freaked harder, paddling her front paws furiously against the mesh metal door, which made the unlocking only more difficult and extended her agony. She never barked, because she couldn’t, she had been bred not to bark, but barks lived inside her, I read them in her face, in the way she opened her mouth and pulsed her vocal cords. A light reddish-brown, achingly handsome—she looked healthy, expensive. A basenji. I remember her black eyes, deceptively kind and questioning, and how the skin of her forehead wrinkled to a peak in the middle as she pulled her brows down at the sides. At home, this was her most constant look, one of silent imploring, but when we were alone together a shadow would pass, and her features would harden into rage. She often tried to bite me.

At first, I was appalled at her overcrating, and unsurprised at her neuroses, but after some weeks my compassion waned. One day, Mad Man sent me around the corner with six hundred dollars in cash to buy a leather jacket. For the dog. He lived in the West Village, so the request was neither improbable nor impossible. My rent was four-fifty. I had a bed in a living room in an unhip part of Brooklyn—not the entire room to myself, mind, but a bed stuck in a corner of the communal living room, behind a screen. I walked to that doggy clothier in a fury that transferred from Mad Man to the dog herself. I found myself fantasizing about somehow destroying the dog and walking away with the cash. I ought to have felt solidarity, stuck as

we were at the bottom, Mad Man master to us both. Instead, I felt jealous of her tiny perfect jacket.

I quit and considered getting a legit job. I remember sitting at the kitchen table with my laptop as my friends joked that I should put down on my résumé, under past work, “Being a little bitch.” All the sunlight came through the kitchen, so we packed around the table, some up on the counter, drinking shit wine. My friends, these tough women and queers, were all too sharp and creative for their jobs. It seemed as though all the people I had ever known, everyone I was coming up with then, were somehow bending their will to a Mad Man, for the money. We packed into that kitchen to help one another get through the bends—with dark humor, with shouted advice. We bitched about everything. The trick was not to fall into shame, or, worse, quietude. If I’m nostalgic, it’s not because I was happy in those precarious years but because I was deeply moved by our resourcefulness. No rich parents lurked in the background; we kept one another afloat. We drank ourselves messy, and when one spiralled downward the rest chased after, to help, to mock and make light, to tease that person back to the surface. Always, we waited for money to appear, as if it might pour in on a beam of sunshine. We waited, and, in our waiting, we were loud.

My hunch is that Mad Man gave the dog up. Either that or he finally broke her. Anyway, she’s old now, or else she’s dead. But I have this fantasy that she’s still chewing up the living room, still slamming against the limits of that cage, only now she’s vocalized, yapping and howling, and it’s a kind of music, and the whole neighborhood can hear her frustration, and understand. And the song is a lament, something camp and bluesy, about how there ain’t no shame in being a bitch, but, Lord, be a bitch that barks. ♦

him so angry that he felt like fighting, which was why he decided to go into politics. He had spent the first twenty-four years of his adult life in the Army: he went to Korea, Honduras, Jordan, Iraq, Haiti, and Afghanistan; he jumped out of planes and blew stuff up and retired as a major. This experience was helpful, because politics in Logan could be a bloody business. A couple of days before the primary, a man bashed him in the face at a campaign event and then tried to run him over with his truck. Ojeda spent several days in the hospital recovering from facial fractures and posting photographs of his injuries on Facebook, and he won the primary by more than two thousand votes.

He became a Democrat when he was eighteen, because his parents told him they were Democrats and so he was, too. “Back when I was in high school, being a Republican was like cursing,” he says. “Republicans were greedy people who didn’t take care of the workingman.” When he came back from the Army, he decided that most of the politicians in southern West Virginia, who were almost all Democrats, were crooks who didn’t care about anything but lining their pockets, but he didn’t change his registration. This was partly out of sheer loyalty, but it was also a matter of tactics: in West Virginia, most people were registered Democrats, so if you wanted to run for local office it helped to belong to that party. But that didn’t mean that you voted Democratic at the national level.

West Virginia is now a red state, but until 2000 it was tenaciously blue. Logan County’s Democratic tradition was particularly strong: with the exception of the two Civil War-era elections and Al Smith, in 1928, in 2000 it had voted for every Democratic Presidential candidate since Andrew Jackson. It voted Democratic against the Whigs before the Civil War; it voted Southern Democratic against Lincoln (unlike the state as a whole, which seceded from Virginia in 1863, in order to remain in the Union, southern West Virginia was mostly for the Confederacy); and it voted Democratic for the New Deal and F.D.R.

Because of the reputation of the

Trump voter, it can seem as though the state must have been Republican for decades, for reasons of culture and race, but this is not so. West Virginia is part of the Bible Belt, but it voted Democratic all through the nineties, at the height of the culture wars and the Christian Coalition, when abortion and gay rights, for instance, were far more alive as political issues than they are now. The state voted against Obama, but it wasn’t the prospect of a black President that turned it red: it began voting Republican with George W. Bush, and in 2008 Boone and McDowell Counties, just north and south of Logan, along with some counties farther north, went for Obama. Probably the main reason for the shift in 2000 was that West Virginia perceived, correctly, that Al Gore’s environmental commitments would be bad for coal.

Now, too, a lot of Trump’s support in West Virginia is due to the local economy. Some months ago, Clinton said, “I’m the only candidate who has a policy about how to bring economic opportunity using clean renewable energy as the key into coal country, because we’re going to put a lot of coal miners and coal companies out of business.” All most people heard, in a clip that circulated endlessly on social media, was the part about putting a lot of coal miners out of business, and that was the end of her candidacy in the state. Trump appeared at rallies wearing a hard hat and saying he was going to put miners back to work, and, even to people who knew that coal was being put out of business by natural gas more than by Obama’s E.P.A. regulations, the choice seemed clear.

BUT COAL IS not the whole story. Ojeda, like Abraham, was voting for Trump in part because of immigration, and he, too, says that the appeal of Trump’s position is not about race. Ojeda’s father’s family comes from Jalisco, on the Pacific coast of Mexico. “My grandfather was one of the original wetbacks that swam across the Rio Grande,” Ojeda says. “He tended Pancho Villa’s horses when he was thirteen years old.” Ojeda’s father was born in West Virginia, but then the family moved back to Mexico and

returned only when Ojeda’s father was eight. “He and his brothers and sisters couldn’t speak English very well, so they were made fun of,” Ojeda says. “But of course that made ’em tough. They were known as pretty good little scrappers.”

Trump’s promise to put America first was appealing to Ojeda because he felt it was the first time in a long while that a national politician had actually seemed to care about his state, and not because poverty was bad and poor people needed help but because West Virginia was part of America. “When you hear about illegal aliens getting benefits and you have people here starving to death and can’t get nothing, it’s just a slap in the face,” he says. “When you start talking about bringing in refugees and when they get here they get medical and dental and they get set up with some funds—what do we get? So when people hear Donald Trump saying we’re going to take benefits away from people who come here illegally and give them to people who work, that sounds pretty good.”

Trump seemed to Ojeda to treat West Virginia like family, and he had noticed that many West Virginians in return treated Trump like family, brushing off the things he said that sounded nuts or that they didn’t agree with. “In Iraq, I listened to David Petraeus speak every day about how we had to rebuild Iraq’s oil infrastructure and protect it,” Ojeda says. “But, if we’re going to go trillions of dollars in debt over Iraq, why can’t we go billions of dollars in debt and make every single coal-producing plant clean in West Virginia? Don’t we deserve a hand? We built this country with the steel that came out of our coal, and we protected this country with our soldiers, and nobody cares. We’re more willing to give millions of dollars to people in other countries who’d just as soon put a bullet in the back of our heads. That’s why West Virginia is going to vote for Trump.”

WEST VIRGINIANS ARE always saying two things about themselves—that they love their state and that they are family oriented. “We’re very proud, although there’s not a whole lot to be proud of,” Raamie Barker, a

former adviser to the governor who now teaches high school with Ojeda, says. "There's really not. But we won't let anybody put West Virginia down." This may sound pretty hackneyed, but in fact what West Virginians mean by love of state and family is unusual and particular. "I've lived in a lot of places, and I've never seen this kind of pride and love," Ed Martin, the publisher of the *Logan Banner*, says. "People will say, I love West Virginia. Nobody has ever said anything like that to me anywhere else. It just doesn't come up. People may love where they live, but it's not because they love their *state*. And here 'family oriented' is not just your family—it's your family as a West Virginian." Martin grew up in northern West Virginia and moved to the Logan area a year ago. He didn't know a soul in town, but he found that, because he was from the state, he was immediately trusted and taken in. "Everybody here is family," he says. "It's hard to explain. I was here a week and they found out about my bad hips, and this church across the street—I don't even know the name of the church, and nobody who works for me goes there, but they were praying for me."

"Families are really close," Kyle Lovern, a columnist at another local paper, says. "But your family—it isn't necessarily your blood kin, it's your neighborhood and your community. If someone's house burns down, people will raise money and help them out, even if they're struggling themselves. There really isn't a difference between helping your cousin or your uncle and the person who lives next door." In West Virginia, in other words, family can mean something like the opposite of what it means in other places.

This extended-family feeling exists in part because many people in West Virginia have known the people who live near them all their lives, and their parents knew one another, and their grandparents. "I would say a majority of people here can trace their family roots here back a hundred and fifty years," Jay Nunley says. "Nobody chooses to move here. Everyone here my age, I grew up with." In high school, Nunley and Ojeda were in drumline together and used to party afterward. Now Nunley hosts a talk show on WVOW, Logan's radio station; he came

back to town a few years ago after working in radio all over the country. "I loved Chicago, loved Charlotte," he says. "I did not like Canton, Ohio—if you ask me, that's the biggest shithole in the country, not Logan. I liked Tallahassee and I liked Corpus Christi. But I never felt that I was standing on my ground except for right here. The people who stay here, even though they could have it so much better economically elsewhere, it's because of a connection to the ground itself."

Many people talk about a connection to the ground itself. West Virginia doesn't look quite like any other place—hardly any flat land, because the densely wooded hills are crushed so close together there's barely room for a road between them—and its confining closeness forms a kind of physical bond between people who find it familiar. "When I'm in California, I feel like something bad's going to happen, because there's so much empty space," Ed Martin says. "Here it's cozy. If you believe the mountains are yours, like most West Virginians do, when you get back to these mountains you feel comfortable again. You feel at ease." "When I see the mountains," Kyle Lovern says, "it's like they're embracing me."

Lovern has lived in southern West Virginia all his life. He voted for Obama in 2008. He thought the election of the first black President was an important historical event, and was happy to have been part of it. But he thought that Clinton was likely to continue Obama's coal regulations, and he didn't think West Virginia could survive four more years of that, so he was voting for Trump. "Some people say they're glad Trump's going to build a wall," he says. "They feel that charity begins at home. That there's people here that are suffering, that we need to take care of our own rather than welcome all these other people in and put them on the welfare system and give them free health care. Most people here agree with that."

THE SENSE OF family that people talk about in Logan is complicated, because, like most family feeling, it tends to intensify not only the bonds between people who are counted as part of the family but also the hostility toward peo-

ple who are not. Reggie Jones was born and raised in Logan. He has known Nunley and Ojeda since they were kids—he graduated from Logan High School a year ahead of them, in 1987. He is now the director of PRIDE Community Services, a large local nonprofit focussed on alleviating poverty. He went to Head Start at PRIDE himself when he was little.

His father worked on the railroad—he started out as a brakeman and ended up driving coal trains. Jones left Logan after high school to go to West Virginia University, in Morgantown, in the northern part of the state. He initially planned to be a computer programmer, but his parents had taught him to be community-minded, and he ended up getting a master's degree in social work. He lived in Columbus, Ohio, for a while, working for Goodwill, and in New Jersey working in foster care, but he missed home, so when a position came up at PRIDE he jumped at it. His parents were surprised that he came back. Even he was surprised—after high school, he wanted to run far away and stay away forever. "Logan for me is like being in a toxic relationship," he says. "It has problems and I know it, but I still love it and want it to be the best that it can be."

In Logan, when he was growing up, he was one of only a couple of African-Americans in his elementary school. People were always touching his hair. In second grade, the teacher told the kids to draw pictures of their families, so he drew his family and colored their skin brown. The teacher sent him home with a note that said she felt he needed to meet with the school psychologist, because something must be wrong if he drew his family that way. His parents told the principal that he drew his family with brown skin because they had brown skin. Maybe it was the teacher who needed to see a psychologist. That was when he realized he was different.

When he was in fifth grade, he rode the school bus almost to the end of the line. "The older black kids from high school would argue and fight with the older white kids," he says. "And, as the bus stops went along, it always ended up that I was the last black kid on the bus. There was one guy in particular who was the white-kid ringleader, and

he would just say these nasty, racially derogatory things to the older black kids. But when I was the only black kid on the bus I became his buddy, and he would say things to me like ‘You’re O.K., you’re not like those other ones.’ Whereas in fact I was just terrified to open my mouth. He took me under his wing for the rest of the ride and told the other kids, ‘Nobody say anything to this kid, this is my buddy.’ He did this every day.”

Until he was twelve, his family lived in a holler where white kids played with black kids because they were so isolated they barely knew the difference. Then, when he was in sixth grade, his family moved to a nicer house in a part of Logan where only white people lived. The summer they bought the house, his father and his uncle spent weeks painting it, and one day they drove up and saw “KKK” sprayed in big black letters on the front. The house was set on fire twice before his family moved in, and then after they moved in there were two shootings—someone drove by with a high-powered rifle and shot seven or eight times into the house. In his new bedroom, he could lie on the bed and reach up and touch one of the bullet holes. Sometimes his father and his uncle sat in their cars across the street, keeping watch, holding guns. “I remember very vividly several nights that they were out there,” he says. “I don’t know if there was talk in the community that said you might want to watch out to-night. But it sticks in my mind, looking out of my bedroom window and seeing a car parked across my driveway protecting me from the people who didn’t want us there.”

After the second shooting, he begged his father to let him stay with his grandmother. “My dad said, ‘Yes, you can go, but I need you to listen to what I’m telling you: you can go if you just want to go. But if you’re going because you’re afraid I’m not going to let you. Because if you run from this now you’re going to be running from it for the rest of your life.’ My parents’ position was ‘We have as much right to be here as anyone. We purchased this house. You’re not going to run us out.’” One man eventually went to jail for the shootings, but nobody thought he’d done it alone.

A man who lived up the street had



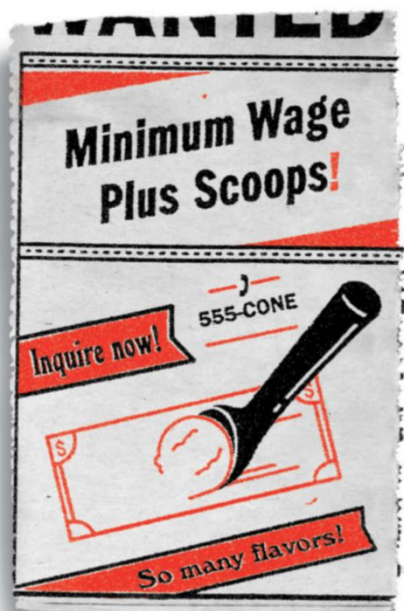
Richard Ojeda thinks that maybe Trump “just will make America great again.”

two sons, and he was always calling Jones and one of his brothers over to box with his boys. His sons would lose, and he hated that, and the sons hated it, too; they didn’t want to box, but he kept summoning Jones and his brother and making them fight. They didn’t know why. For a while, Jones and his brothers played, unaware, with the kids of the man who had gone to jail for shooting at them. Once they all realized this, they started fighting. But then sometimes they would play one day and fight the next and the next day they would play again.

WHEN REGGIE JONES moved back to Logan, the town was far worse off than it had been when he was growing up. In the nineteen-seventies, the mines were booming and Logan was flush. Miners could make a lot of

money—ninety thousand a year in recent times, a hundred thousand, maybe more. When coal took a dip, people figured they’d just draw unemployment until it picked up again. But now there were people coming into PRIDE he would never have seen in the past.

In other respects, the town hadn’t changed much. “Logan is a place that race is always bubbling just below the surface,” he says. “Every few years, there is some sort of fight that escalates at the high school that seems to be racially motivated. Everyone seems to be afraid to talk about race until something happens. People talk about it for a while and then it goes away and bubbles under the surface until something else blows up.” Logan’s devotion to Trump depressed him. “In his two elections, President Obama didn’t do well here, and people said



SCOOP DREAMS

Shonda Rhimes

I WAS NOT A tall girl. At sixteen, I was barely five feet three inches. That did not work in my favor at the Baskin-Robbins in Park Forest, Illinois. In order to get the smooth, hard ice cream out of the tubs in the freezer, I had to open the glass display case and lean down inside.

Once my head was in, I used one arm to brace myself on the edge of the freezer while, with the other arm, I gathered enough strength to violently jam the metal scoop into the vat of ice cream. The violent jamming was important. If I didn't do it just right, go at it with enough force, I could find myself skimming right over the ice cream's surface. That was always an issue. When I had only one foot on the floor, barely balancing on my toes, that skim would send me flying forward, at which point self-preservation kicked in. I'd toss aside the scoop and—eyes closed, slightly sickened by what was to come—put out my hands to cushion the fall.

I always had a soft landing. One

hand in the Cookies 'n Cream. One hand in the Rocky Road. Submerged in ice cream up to my elbows.

That's the curse of the job—ice cream *everywhere*. My uniform's pink-brown-and-white striped shirt was crisp, cheerful, but by the end of each shift it was gummy and streaked with chocolate and pistachio and sorbet and mint chip. The clear plastic gloves didn't help. Ice cream ran up and down my arms; it slipped inside the gloves; it stuck in the crevices behind my knees. You have not fully lived on this earth until you have tried to wash Pink Bubblegum ice cream out of your cornrows.

I didn't need the job. I was an honor student and a volunteer at the local hospital, and my parents worked quite hard to make sure that I was on the path to a good college. They pushed me to concentrate on school.

But there was this tiny denim miniskirt, with buttons up the front. It barely reached the bottom of my butt cheeks; a sudden wind would have made it a crime in several states. It was *Fierce*. Tiny denim mini was beautiful. Tiny denim mini was everything to me.

One March day, my mother gave me forty dollars to buy clothes for a dance. I bought the skirt. When she insisted that it be returned, I—newly indoctrinated into the churches of Janet Jackson and Madonna—refused. My mother calmly informed me, in a tone that suggested I had five seconds before I would meet my Maker, that when I had my own job I could buy any clothes I wanted. Until then, she would decide what I wore and what I did not.

Wanting to live, I returned the denim mini. And then, wanting to win, I walked over to Baskin-Robbins and, with all my honor-student charm, talked the manager into giving me a job.

I would like to say that I didn't do it for the denim mini. I would like to say that I did it for the freedom the denim mini represented. I would like to say that I did it for the power the

denim-mini fight gave me. If pushed, I might say that I did it because I was dumb enough to think I knew more than my mother. The thing is, though, when you boil it down: I did it for the denim mini.

I let a miniskirt propel me into the workforce.

I went home to face my mother, defiant. She laughed. Then she told me that, now that I'd committed to a job, I wasn't allowed to quit.

"You picked a hard row to hoe," she said, and went back to her chess game.

The rows were tubs of ice cream. The hoe was that scoop. On my third day of work, I came home covered in Butter Pecan and announced to my mother that she could not make me keep working. My mother looked at me. She did not say a word. She did not have to. We both knew who would win this argument.

And so I spent my summer days with my head in a freezer, balancing on my toes, sticky as can be, trying not to fall into vat after vat. When I did it right, I got a nice thick ball of ice cream into my scoop. Then I would carefully edge my way out of the freezer and put the ball in a cup, in a cone, in a sugar cone, in a waffle cone, in a shake, in a frozen drink, a banana split, a sundae . . .

It was my first job. I felt gritty; I felt real. There were time sheets and shifts and a manager and a uniform. I got Employee of the Month. I smiled at strangers and said, "You have a nice day!" I pretended not to be clumsy around the hot public-school boys who came to taste different flavors and left without buying anything. And I got paid. Minimum wage plus a scoop on every shift.

I never bought the denim mini. Turns out that minimum wage doesn't go all that far. I also never ate much ice cream after that. But I learned responsibility. I learned to keep my word. I learned, no matter how hard it is, to keep scooping until the job is done. ♦

some very nasty things.” He sighed. “A lot of what Donald Trump is saying, people think it and they don’t want to say it. His remarks about Hispanics. Certain remarks about immigration. There are people here who support building a wall. My concern is, you’re building a wall now to keep Hispanics out; at what point do we put African-Americans on the other side of the wall?”

In spite of everything, though, he had come back. In some ineradicable, unkillable way, this was where he belonged. It meant a lot to him to work at PRIDE, and give back to the same Head Start program that had helped him when he was a kid. “I feel rooted here in Logan,” he says. “I can walk downstairs to our senior center and I see seniors I’ve known since I was six years old. If I go downtown, I’m guaranteed to see five or six people I know, and most of the time I’ll stop and chat for a few minutes and then be on my way. In times of crisis, the community pulls together and we support each other. Maybe that’s what locks me in here. My dad always taught us to value where you live. Even if it’s not the greatest place, take pride in it and make it the best that it can be.”

But he drew the line at raising his children in Logan. He and his family live in Charleston, the state capital, and he drives two hours each day going back and forth. Why doesn’t he work in Charleston, then, where there is plenty of poverty also, and a lot to do? “Logan is home,” he says. “Those racial things—I’m not saying that everybody in Logan subscribes to those thoughts. Some of my best experiences have been growing up here in Logan County with the friends that I had. But, like I said, it’s kind of like a toxic relationship. I find it hard to let go.”

A SENSE OF HOME as strong as this is at the heart of much of the wariness about immigration. And although Obama’s and Clinton’s immigration policies are pretty similar, the way they talk about the subject is quite different. In a speech at the end of last year, Clinton suggested that wariness of immigrants was a sign of bad

character. “We shouldn’t let anybody on the public stage say that we are mean-spirited,” she said, “that we are going to build walls, mentally and physically, or that we are going to shut doors.” She described immigration as a matter of universal human rights. “The fight to insure that America’s immigrants are treated with dignity,” she said, is “bound up with all the other fights to advance human dignity and human rights, the fight to defend workers’ rights, to end poverty, reduce economic inequality, the fight for women’s rights, L.G.B.T. rights and human rights here and abroad. Ultimate struggles come down to the same fundamental question: Whose humanity will we recognize?” The right answer, she said, is: “Everyone’s.”

When Obama gave a speech on immigration in the fall of 2014, he spoke first about America’s border—how he had secured it, and how illegal crossings had been cut by more than half. When he spoke about people who opposed his policies, he said he understood them. “Millions of us, myself included, go back generations in this country, with ancestors who put in the painstaking work to become citizens,” he said. “So we don’t like the notion that anyone might get a free pass to American citizenship. I know some worry immigration will change the very fabric of who we are, or take our jobs. . . . I hear these concerns. . . . And I believe it’s important that all of us have this debate without impugning each other’s character.”

Of course, Obama doesn’t have to prove his anti-racist bona fides in the same way that Clinton does. But it is also Obama’s style to talk like this. He likes to reconcile, to draw people in, to minimize the differences between them. Clinton, on the other hand, always describes herself as a fighter, and it is her style to draw sharp lines between right and wrong—between people who are being oppressed and the people doing the oppressing. This style can make it sound as though she thinks people who disagree with her on immigration are probably racists.

When Clinton talks about her family and her childhood, she de-

scribes a sense of deep rootedness in mainstream America. Obama, with his complicated background, doesn’t take roots for granted. In his first book, he describes learning that his father had ruined his life in part because he dismissed the ties of family and tribe as unimportant. What Obama’s father never understood, Obama’s aunt told him, was that “if everyone is family, no one is family.” Perhaps this is why Obama makes a point of saying that he understands that the desire for borders is not always, or only, racism but also a desire to belong to a group of people that is smaller and less cosmic than all mankind: in other words, to have a home. Clinton’s America, the nation that welcomes everyone from everywhere, can sound abstract: more of a political idea or a moral position than a physical place—bloodless, in ways both good and bad. And, if there seems to be no middle ground between an America-first xenophobia and a universalist abstraction, people for whom citizenship feels thicker than an idea—and there are many of them—may find the America-first xenophobia more familiar, and more attractive.

B ELONGING TO A place, knowing and loving it deeply, means more to Brandon Kirk than almost anything else. Kirk is a history professor, a colleague of Charles Keeney’s at Southern West Virginia Community and Technical College. He lives where he was born and raised, in a little place called Harts, twenty miles north of the town of Logan. When he finished high school, in 1990, his plan was to find another place to be. He didn’t think there was anything wrong with Harts, he just thought that he might fit in better somewhere else—he didn’t hunt or fish or do most of the things that young people he knew did. So after high school he didn’t go to the local community college; he went to Marshall University, in Huntington, forty-five miles away. That was far enough.

He studied history, and specialized in Appalachia. He got interested in his family history, then in the history of Harts and Logan County,

then in that of southern West Virginia. He began to visit old people who lived nearby and asked them to tell him their family stories, and found a kind of history that he couldn't find anywhere else, because it wasn't written. "It's like Alex Haley said, in his book 'Roots,' which is one of my favorite books—he learned a lot sitting on his grandmother's porch, listening to her stories," he says. "I get that completely."

Loyalty as such is at the core of who he is. And yet, although his family has been Republican for generations, he is considering changing his registration to independent. "I'm really not sure where the national party's at," he says. "I'm comfortable with conservative values, but I'm not a Bible-thumping person." During the primary season, he discussed the Republican debates with his parents. None of them liked Trump at first. "My mother liked Carson," he says. "She liked that he was such a gentle sort of person, and we respect his education and his accomplishments as a surgeon. We read his book, at least one of them, and saw the movie about him. I liked Carson, but in the end I

thought Kasich was better on government policy. He was more wonkish, which bored a lot of people."

Kirk is not the only one considering changing his party in Logan these days. All sorts of people are rethinking their political identities after many generations. Deep ties are coming loose, and new ones are forming—new ties that are likely to last a long time into the future. Recently, Kirk was sitting in the Logan County Clerk's office reading through some archives, when he heard a man come in and ask to change his registration to independent. When the man gave his last name, Kirk knew his family history right away—he knew that the man's family had voted Democratic since the eighteen-thirties.

Despite his reservations, Kirk is voting for Trump. Like everyone in West Virginia, he is distressed by the poverty he sees, and he thinks Trump's protectionism is worth trying. He also likes the wall. "That may be crazy," he says, "but I'm a big Teddy Roosevelt fan, and I think Trump's bluster is very T.R., though Trump is no T.R. But, you know, Roosevelt had the Panama Canal. You've got

to have something big you build—it means something, there's a grandness to it. And I think it could do a lot of good. I think it would deter illegal immigration, I think it surely would help with the illegal drug trade. I think of it in a commonsense way: we have our homes, and we have locks on our doors. If we have a gathering and some people show up that we don't know, that's O.K., but if too many people are coming into our house and eating our food and we don't know who they are, and maybe some of them are causing problems, I think a wall would help with control. When I was young, I thought more idealistic. I thought, It's America, welcome. And I don't have anything against people coming in as far as their ethnic differences and cultural differences—I respect anyone who works. It's just a matter of controlling that flow and going through the right procedure. I just think that makes sense."

He knows that there is a phenomenon called the "angry white male" and that many people believe that these angry males are Trump's core supporters. He doesn't feel angry, though. He sees the country changing, and wonders where it's headed. "For me as a historian, it's the heritage," he says. "I like borders, whether it's a country or a locality. You're open to diversity, you welcome people, but you don't want to give up everything you are. And that can happen. History teaches that mass migrations of people, they caused great stress for the Roman Empire, maybe caused it to collapse."

Most of Kirk's ancestors were people of English stock who migrated into what is now Logan County from somewhere near Roanoke in the early eighteen-hundreds. Several of his ancestors fought for the Confederacy. His favorite period is that of the timber industry in Logan County, after the Civil War but before the railroad came, in 1904, and the coal industry really got going. There was very little in Logan at the beginning of this period, he says: no newspapers, no churches, just a couple of general stores. Most people were subsistence farmers: there wasn't enough flat land



to grow a cash crop, but they farmed the slopes. After the Civil War, people sent timber down the Guyandotte River on rafts to Huntington, which put a bit of cash into the economy, and push boats came upriver with goods. The push boats went as far as Logan, and that's how the town got started—as a trading post. Even though it was a long time ago, this period feels familiar to him. He hopes that writing about that time before coal will reveal something useful for his people in a future after coal, although he doesn't know what.

What he wants to do in his life is preserve the stories and artifacts of his birthplace and, through teaching and tourism, pass them on to other people. He also hopes that tourists will bring a little money into the area. Tourism isn't coal, but it's better than nothing. In 2012, the History Channel ran a miniseries about the notorious Hatfield-McCoy feud, with Kevin Costner starring as William Anderson (Devil Anse) Hatfield, and after that people came to Logan County from all over the place wearing Hatfield-McCoy T-shirts and climbing up the side of a mountain to see Devil Anse's grave. Kirk's students generally aren't very interested in their heritage, however, so he soldiers on by himself. "I'm happy to retreat in my little place," he says. "One cousin of mine that lives in Ohio, he's a deacon, said there's a monkish quality about what I do, because I don't date, I'm celibate, I don't really drink. I just devote time to teaching and researching and writing.

"Sometimes I'll have a black student and I'll get real excited because I don't get very many," he says. "I'll ask them if they're interested in their family history, if they know anything about it, because one of my research interests is antebellum slave life in this region. I want to know those stories, and I want to know about the black migrants that came here between the Civil War and coal. That's not my story, but I want to know that story, it's important history. I say let everybody have their markers, their memorials, their heritage, and celebrate all of it. There's room for everybody." Near where one of his an-



"What is it again that we're the leading provider of?"

cestors was buried he found an old slave cemetery. He wants to draw attention to it, so that other people will visit it, too.

When he left for college, he hadn't planned to come back to the area, but he did. "The old people, the ones that I started to visit with when I was young, are the ones that pulled me back," he says. "They're all dead now. I miss those old people so bad. They were such solid people. They were kind. And they had been through the Depression and the world war—they had a lot of shared experiences that people today don't have." When he thinks about his home and why it matters to him, it is shared experiences that he thinks about—the shared experience, good and bad, of people whose ancestors came from many countries under very different circumstances, but whose families have now lived together for a long time in one place. He wants to feel this sense of home about America, too—a sense that we're all in this together. "Those old people pulled me back, and then they died on me, and so here I am and they're all gone," he says. "I think about them a lot.

Their memories stretched back to the late eighteen-hundreds, to their grandparents, sometimes their great-grandparents, and so I also feel connected to those people they spoke about."

After the old people died, he visited their graves, and he also visited the graves of the grandparents and the great-grandparents they had described to him. Some of these older graves were in small family cemeteries that were brambly and overgrown, because the people there had died so long ago that nobody remembered them, or if anyone did they were too old to climb up the mountain anymore. Many of those buried didn't have proper headstones, only rocks with initials carved in them. He felt that the least he could do for the people whose stories meant so much to him was to care for their graves, so some days he would take tools and hike up to one of the half-hidden cemeteries and cut back the grass and the weeds, and straighten a headstone if there was one and it had fallen over, and leave flowers on the mounds. He liked doing it. It was peaceful there. ♦

ADDING A ZERO

Is Y Combinator's Sam Altman fixing the world, or trying to take over Silicon Valley?

BY TAD FRIEND

ONE BALMY MAY evening, thirty of Silicon Valley's top entrepreneurs gathered in a private room at the Berlinetta Lounge, in San Francisco. Paul Graham considered the founders of Instacart, DoorDash, Docker, and Stripe, in their hoodies and black jeans, and said, "This is Silicon Valley, right here." All the founders were graduates of Y Combinator, the startup "accelerator" that Graham co-founded: a three-month boot camp, run twice a year, in how to become a "unicorn"—Valleyspeak for a billion-dollar company. Thirteen thousand fledgling software companies applied to Y Combinator this year, and two hundred and forty were accepted, making it more than twice as hard to get into as Stanford University. After graduating thirteen hundred startups, YC now boasts the power—and the peculiarities—of an island nation.

At the noisy end of the room, Graham was cheerfully encouraging improbable schemes. At the quiet end, Sam Altman was absorbed in private calculations. When founders came over to talk, he'd train his green eyes on them, listen to their propositions, then crisply observe, "What everyone gets wrong about that is . . ." In 2014, Graham chose Altman—who, at thirty-one, is twenty years his junior—to succeed him as Y Combinator's president. The two men share a close friendship, a religious zeal for YC, and an inexplicable fondness for cargo shorts. But, where Graham proposes, Altman disposes. At Graham's table, he and others discussed how to stop Donald Trump, then decided to reach out to an affiliated expert: Chris Lehane, a former White House lawyer now at the YC company Airbnb. Altman declared, "The best idea seems to be just to support Hillary."

At a hundred and thirty pounds, Altman is poised as a clothespin, fierce as a horned owl. Even in a Valley that

worships productivity, he is an outlier, plowing through e-mails and meetings as if strapped to a time bomb, his unblinking stare speeding up colleagues until they sound like chipmunks. Though he is given to geewhizzery about anything "super awesome"—*Small amounts of radiation are actually good for you! It's called radiation hormesis!*—he has scant interest in the specifics of the apps that many YC companies produce; what intrigues him is their potential effect on the world. To determine that, he'll upload all he needs to know about, say, urban planning or nuclear fusion. Patrick Collison, the C.E.O. of the electronic-payments company Stripe, likened Altman's brain to the claw machine on a carnival midway: "It roams around but has the ability to plunge very deep when necessary."

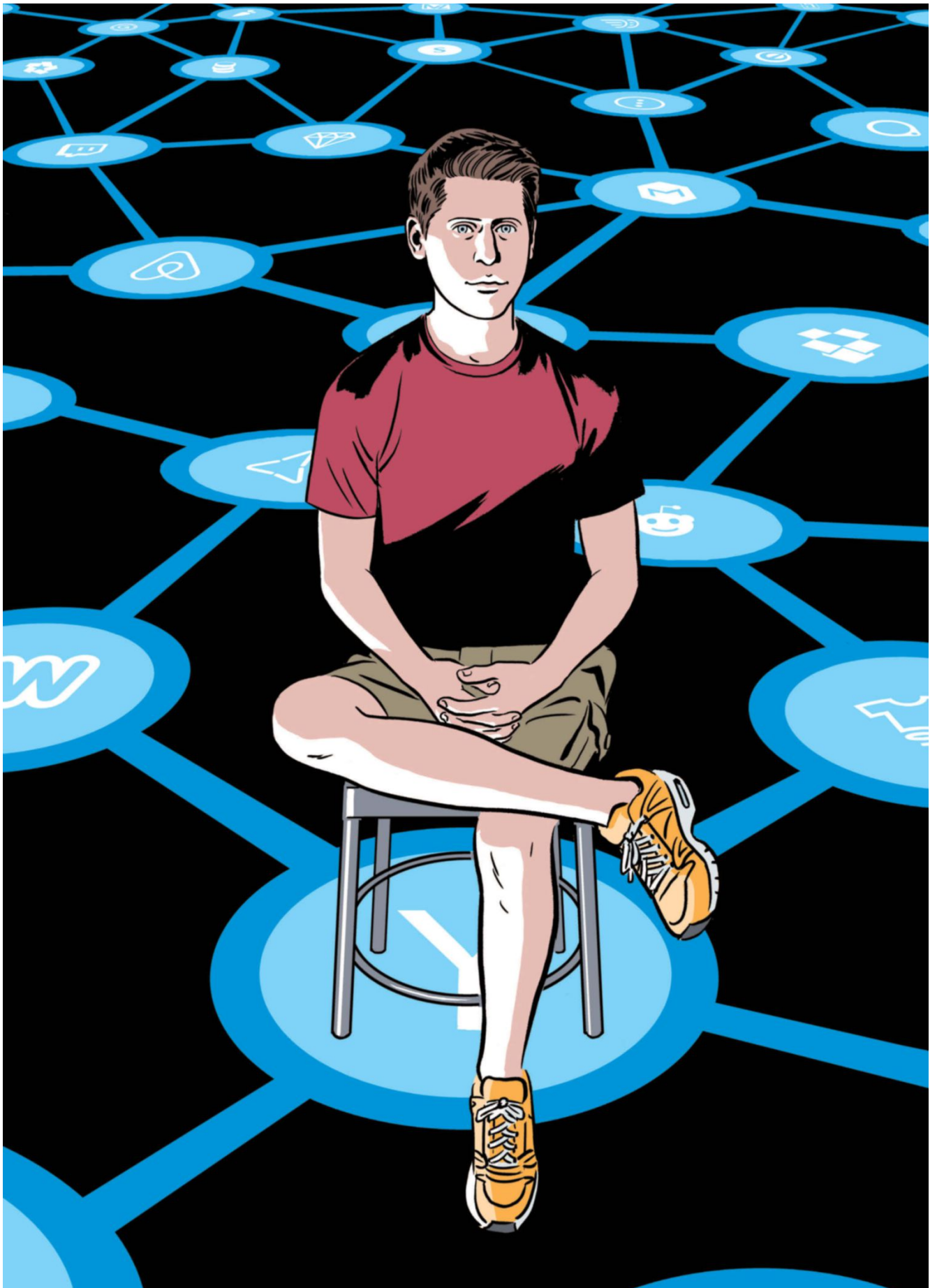
A blogger recently asked Altman, "How has having Asperger's helped and hurt you?" Altman told me, "I was, like, 'Fuck you, I don't have Asperger's!' But then I thought, I can see why he thinks I do. I sit in weird ways"—he folds up like a busted umbrella—"I have narrow interests in technology, I have no patience for things I'm not interested in: parties, most people. When someone examines a photo and says, 'Oh, he's feeling this and this and this,' all these subtle emotions, I look on with alien intrigue." Altman's great strengths are clarity of thought and an intuitive grasp of complex systems. His great weakness is his utter lack of interest in ineffective people, which unfortunately includes most of us. I found his assiduousness alarming at first, then gradually endearing. When I remarked, after a few long days together, that he never seemed to visit the men's room, he said, "I will practice going to the bathroom more often so you humans don't realize that I'm the A.I."

When he took over YC, he inher-

ited a budding colossus. The venture capitalist Chris Dixon told me, "They created the greatest business model of all time. For basically no money"—YC gives each company just a hundred and twenty thousand dollars, to cover expenses—"they get seven per cent of a lot of the best startups in Silicon Valley!" Collectively, YC companies are worth eighty billion dollars, a valuation that has grown seventeenfold in the past five years.

Yet Altman decided to retool nearly everything. At the Berlinetta Lounge, as he picked at the vegetarian plate, he observed that a change in C.E.O.s works only if the new leader "re-founds" the company. "I very intentionally did that with YC," he said. After conferring with the accelerator's sixteen other partners, Altman launched an initiative to support startups even earlier in their life span, and a fund to continue investing in them as they grow. YC would no longer waft explorers out to sea in rickety ships but launch ironclad armadas to claim an empire. And it would mold not a few hundred companies a year but a thousand, then ten thousand.

Like everyone in Silicon Valley, Altman professes to want to save the world; unlike almost everyone there, he has a plan to do it. "YC somewhat gets to direct the course of technology," he said. "Consumers decide, ultimately, but enough people view YC as important that if we say, 'We're super excited about virtual reality,' college students will start studying it." Soon after taking over, he wrote a blog post declaring that "science seems broken" and calling for applications from companies in energy, biotech, artificial intelligence, robotics, and eight other fields. As a result, the once nerdy Y Combinator is now aggressively geeky. Across the table from Altman at dinner, the C.E.O. of a nuclear-fission startup was urging the



Altman says, "Most people want to be accepted, so they won't take risks that could make them look crazy."

founder of a quantum-computing startup to get his artificial-atom-based machine to market: “These computers would shorten our product-development cycle 10 to 20x!”

Two YC partners sat Altman down last year “and told him, ‘Slow down, chill out!’” another partner, Jonathan Levy, told me. “Sam said, ‘Yes, you’re right!’—and went off and did something else on the side that we didn’t know about for a while.” That was YC Research, a non-profit, initially funded with a ten-million-dollar personal gift, to conduct pure research into moon-shot ideas. Altman also co-founded, with Elon Musk, the C.E.O. of Tesla and SpaceX, a non-profit called OpenAI, whose goal is to prevent artificial intelligence from accidentally wiping out humanity. The venture capitalist Marc Andreessen said, “Under Sam, the level of YC’s ambition has gone up 10x.” Paul Graham, who was leaving soon after the dinner for a sabbatical year in England, told me that Altman, by precipitating progress in “curing cancer, fusion, supersonic airliners, A.I.,” was trying to comprehensively revise the way we live: “I think his goal is to make the whole future.”

Altman is rapidly building out an economy within Silicon Valley that seems intended to essentially supplant Silicon Valley—a guild of hyper-capitalist entrepreneurs who will help one another fix the broken world. Everyone has cautioned him against it. The Valley prizes overweening ambition but expects it to be “rifle-focussed” on making the world’s best houseboat-rental platform or Cognac-delivery service. Reid Hoffman, a leading venture capitalist, warned, “It’s great they’re being ambitious, but classically, in the Valley, when people try to reinvent an area it’s ended very badly.” Altman, as he nursed a negroni after dinner, had his own warning for the timid: “Democracy only works in a growing economy. Without a return to economic growth, the democratic experiment will fail. And I have to think that YC is hugely important to that growth.”

LAUNCHING A STARTUP in 2016 is akin to assembling an alt-rock band in 1996 or protesting the Vietnam War in 1971—an act of youthful rebellion gone conformist. Since 2005,

the year Y Combinator began, accelerators have sprung up everywhere to help transform startups from a skein of code into a bona-fide company. In exchange for five to seven per cent of a startup’s equity, an accelerator usually provides between fifteen thousand and a hundred thousand dollars, advice for an intensive three-month period, introductions to mentors, and a Demo Day, when investors assess the finished product.



The U.S. has a hundred and sixty accelerators—three in Chattanooga alone—and there are thousands more around the world, including Brainnovations, outside Tel Aviv, and the Startup Sauna, in locations from Minsk to Dar es Salaam.

In the nineties, before the accelerator era, startups were usually launched by mid-career engineers or repeat entrepreneurs, who sought millions in venture capital and then labored in secret on something complicated that took years to launch. As the price of Web hosting plummeted and PCs and cell phones proliferated, college and grad-school dropouts like Mark Zuckerberg or Larry Page and Sergey Brin could suddenly conjure unicorns on their laptops. Paul Graham, a gifted programmer who’d sold his own startup to Yahoo for fifty million dollars, was one of the first people to harness these trends. His 2005 essay “How to Start a Startup”—together with Steven Blank’s “The Four Steps to the Epiphany” and Eric Ries’s “The Lean Startup”—helped to codify the modern entrepreneur’s ethos: bootstrap; begin with a “minimum viable product” and iterate rapidly; prefer ten people loving what you make to ten thousand liking it.

Graham and his wife and two friends started Y Combinator (named for an obscure mathematical function) in Cambridge, Massachusetts, as both a summer-vacation experiment in investing and a radical stab at reimagining the summer job. In his book

“Hackers & Painters,” Graham calculated that smart hackers at a startup could get 36x more work done than the average office drone—and that they would, therefore, eventually blow up employment as we know it. He made this sound patriotic and fun; how could an oligarchic technocracy go wrong? “Hackers are unruly,” he wrote. “That is the essence of hacking. And it is also the essence of American-ness.”

Graham could gauge applicants’ technical skills, and his wife, Jessica Livingston, was a remarkable judge of character. They prized people in their mid-twenties, an age at which, Graham wrote, your advantages include “stamina, poverty, rootlessness, colleagues, and ignorance.” The first group of eight companies—which included a mobile app, Loopt, founded by Sam Altman and two friends—got six thousand dollars per founder, along with Graham’s advice and home-cooked chicken fricassee, and the promise that at the end of the summer they could pitch his wealthy friends for fifteen minutes. That batch had Reddit, now valued at six hundred million dollars, and a batch two years later had Dropbox, valued at ten billion.

In a class that Altman taught at Stanford in 2014, he remarked that the formula for estimating a startup’s chance of success is “something like Idea times Product times Execution times Team times Luck, where Luck is a random number between zero and ten thousand.” The rise of Airbnb, now valued at thirty billion dollars, seems replete with luck. When it arrived at YC, in 2009, it had been making more money selling novelty cereals—Obama O’s and Cap’n McCains—than booking bed-and-breakfast reservations. Graham thought the founders’ idea was so unpromising that he tried to convince them to do payments instead. And the event that transformed the company, turning it into a combine that harvested living space around the globe, was a fluke: Barry Manilow’s drummer went on tour and asked if he could rent out his place without being present to provide breakfast.

Yet Airbnb’s C.E.O., Brian Chesky, attributes much of the company’s

success to Y Combinator. “When we entered YC, it wasn’t at all clear that we would exist after it,” Chesky said. “And by the end it was: ‘Can we be the next marketplace, the next eBay?’” Part of this exponential increase in ambition occurred when the founders showed Altman, who was then an unpaid mentor and fund-raising expert at YC, a slide deck they hoped would secure a five-hundred-thousand-dollar round of seed, or initial, funding. (Companies usually raise a seed round after YC, an A round once they’ve reached a real milestone, then a B round, and so on.) “We had limited our projected revenue to thirty million dollars,” Chesky said. “Sam said, ‘Take all the ‘M’s and make them ‘B’s.’” Altman recalls telling them, “Either you don’t believe everything you said in the rest of the deck, or you’re ashamed, or I can’t do math.”

A 2012 study of North American accelerators found that almost half of them had failed to produce a single startup that went on to raise venture funding. While a few accelerators, such as Tech Stars and 500 Startups, have a handful of alumni worth hundreds of millions of dollars, Y Combinator has graduates worth at least a billion—and it has eleven of them. The angel investor Ron Conway, who has provided funding for hundreds of YC companies, told me that the accelerator was tech’s Tomorrowland: “When my team met Airbnb at YC, that was the first time we thought about the sharing economy. And when we met DoorDash and Instacart we said, ‘Oh, my God, there’s a thing called the on-demand economy!’”

As YC grew, it moved to an exurban office cube in the town of Mountain View, an hour south of San Francisco, where it shared space with a company called Anybots. (The founders had to keep alert to avoid being crushed by lumbering robots.) The accelerator soon expanded into a second cube, across the street, and now it’s near the fire-code limit in that building, too. It’s a measure of Altman’s ambition that he compares YC to Alphabet, Google’s parent company, which is also composed of independent units that collaborate, and likewise has a moon-shot division, the X

research group. He recently tweeted that YC’s empire had reached fourteen per cent of the value of Alphabet—whose market cap is among the world’s largest—adding, “Long way to go. . . .” It’s a blatantly unfair comparison: YC’s average ownership of its companies, diluted by subsequent venture funding, is just three per cent. Yet Altman told me that, “unlike Google, we grow faster as we get bigger. We could catch them in ten years.”

AS THE SUN set over Atherton, the loveliest town in unlovely Silicon Valley, Altman challenged Geoff Ralston, another YC partner, to a table-tennis match by Ralston’s pool. They were about to host a party for the thirty-two companies they were responsible for in the winter batch; the goal was to relieve the pressure of Demo Day, which was three weeks off, in late March. That was when the founders would have two and a half minutes to wow investors—six hundred in the room and twenty-five hundred more watching online. Two founders were already having anxiety attacks.

Altman was raising his arms in victory as the founders began to amble in and gaze around at startup Valhalla: a seven-thousand-square-foot mansion, catered food under a grapefruit

tree festooned with lights, a back yard that seemed to stretch to Redwood City. (Ralston made his fortune building what became Yahoo Mail.) Luke Miles, the eighteen-year-old founder of Restocks, tried not to look overawed. Restocks is a messaging service for young “super-consumers” who want to know, five minutes ahead of everyone else, when small shipments of Supreme T-shirts and Yeezy Boost 350 shoes go on sale. Miles was accepted to YC after excelling in YC Fellowship, the new program for embryonic startups, in which they receive as much as twenty thousand dollars and the opportunity to consult with a partner over Skype. Miles said, “The money they gave me was enough to prove to my parents that I wasn’t wasting my life dropping out of college.”

For many founders, YC provides the university experience they wish they could have had. Michael Seibel, a YC partner who was recently put in charge of the batches, and who also went through the program twice, said, “P.G.”—as Paul Graham is known—“used to tell everyone at the beginning of the batch, ‘Some of these people will be in your wedding,’ which is a weird thing to say to three hundred strangers. But almost all my groomsmen were in YC. What does that remind



“I don’t want our date to end, either, but my arm is about to fall off.”



MODEL BEHAVIOR

Tom McCarthy

IN 1991, FRESH out of college and determined to become a writer, I was a recipient of a Government Enterprise Allowance Scheme grant. The scheme was a scam, dreamed up in the Thatcher Administration's dying days, to manipulate unemployment figures by redesignating swaths of jobless people as "small businesses." The amount you received was more or less the same as what you got on the dole, but you didn't have to show up at a job center and sign for it, and, vitally, you were no longer classified as unemployed but, rather, as a fledgling enterprise marketing X or Y or Z: gardening or odd-jobbing, hairdressing or massage. Basically, whatever you already did while jobless. To qualify, all you had to do was draw up a "business plan," whose execution would never be verified. Effectively, it was a fiction. My fiction, then, was that I would become an enterprise purveying fiction.

The amount wasn't enough to live on in London, so I went to

Prague, where for forty pounds a week I could rent a huge apartment and eat out three times a day. Even better, the Velvet Revolution had put Václav Havel in the Castle, and he had filled Parliament with his friends. You'd find yourself in some underground club, and the drummer with a big spliff in his mouth would turn out to be a state adviser or a chief of staff of some kind or another. The Czechs took me to their hearts: a young Western writer, suitcase brimming with Joyce and Burroughs and Deleuze and all the cool stuff that had been banned by the Communists, and even the recipient of a grant. The first year passed in a blur of invitations, openings, and receptions, punctuated by the odd snatched hour to type out juvenilia.

Then the money ran out. I'd fallen in with several art students who, having played a central role in the protests that had brought down the ancien régime, were also enjoying a moment in the sun. (The art school's long-haired, ear-pierced rector would become the minister of culture.) Realizing that I needed a new income stream, they invited me to be their class's model. Every morning, I'd turn up, strip off, and stand on a small podium while they drew me. If it was a sculpture class, the podium would turn, like a lazy Susan, as the students' clay figures rotated atop their easels. I would stand for forty minutes at a time, then they would draw a line around my feet; we'd smoke a cigarette or two and start again. We did this for three hours every day.

Standing still for forty minutes—absolutely still, without moving a finger or shifting your line of sight—is something few of us have ever been called on to do. Even fewer have done it naked while circled by twenty people whose gazes are intently focussed on each bend and angle of your body. What I can report of it is this: nothing I've ever done, before or since, has afforded me such a state of concentration—intense, extended, charged. I would

run whole passages of text—Baudelaire, Rilke, Ponge, whomever I'd been reading, even my own small works in progress—through my head, forward, backward, taking apart each image, amplifying each metre and sub-rhythm in the loaded silence. I probably learned more about literature in the six months I spent on the podium than in the three previous years of study. I also learned about space, in an immediate, almost visceral way. The tiling made a grid across the atelier's floor and walls; the students, as they drew me, would grid up their paper, then transfer me, part by part, from one set of coördinates to another. This was Euclid, Descartes, even the funky, erstwhile samizdat Deleuze, all rendered actual and solid; as the hours ticked by, I began seeing chessboards, box junctions, starting grids of motor races; I'd be in these spaces, held by their geometry, floating above it, too, be-podiumed . . .

Forty minutes is a long time: after twenty or so, the blood starts draining from your head. I'd spend the last stretches of each morning in mild delirium. With one leg forward, slightly bent, I'd be running a marathon—winning it, completing the final lap as the crowd (modern Olympic, ancient Greek in alternation) roared me home. The roar was real enough: it came from a blower, which, the atelier being unheated, the students would place at my feet, to stop me from getting hypothermia. It, too, like all low-grade electrical appliances, had rhythms: patterns of crescendo and acceleration, stichomythia and stutter. The spectral crowd would take up the lines I'd been replaying earlier, and then, more mystically, recite incantations whose content never quite slipped over into comprehensibility. The students' hands didn't have blowers pointed at them; eventually, their fingers could no longer grasp their charcoal and we'd stop, then all head off together to a bar. It was the best, if worst-paid, job I've ever had. ♦

you of? College.” Y Combinator’s founders come to the building for group office hours on alternate Tuesdays, as well as for individual office hours as needed with their assigned partners (the professors), then stick around to scarf down bowls of pasta at long Formica tables (the dining hall) and listen to eminences such as Marissa Mayer and Mark Zuckerberg (visiting scholars). At the end, they present on Demo Day (defending their thesis), and either raise money (pass) or don’t (fail).

The curriculum is deliberately spartan. Kevin Hale, a YC partner, said, “What we ask of startups is very simple but very hard to do. One, make something people want”—a phrase of Graham’s, which is emblazoned on gray T-shirts for the founders—and, two, all you should be doing is talking to your customers and building stuff.” Chad Rigetti, the founder of YC’s quantum-computing startup, told me that he kept his office walls a matte white “so my team’s neurons aren’t accidentally firing because of outside stimulation.”

The ethics, too, have a collegiate clarity. YC prides itself on rejecting jerks and bullies. “We’re good at screening out assholes,” Graham told me. “In fact, we’re better at screening out assholes than losers. All of them start off as losers—and some evolve.” The accelerator also suggests that great wealth is a happy by-product of solving an urgent problem. This braiding of altruism and ambition is a signal feature of the Valley’s self-image. Graham wrote an essay, “Mean People Fail,” in which—ignoring such possible counterexamples as Jeff Bezos and Larry Ellison—he declared that “being mean makes you stupid” and discourages good people from working for you. Thus, in startups, “people with a desire to improve the world have a natural advantage.” Win-win.

A founder’s first goal, Graham wrote, is becoming “ramen profitable”: spending thriftily and making just enough to afford ramen noodles for dinner. “You don’t want to give the founders more than they need to survive,” Jessica Livingston said. “Being lean forces you to focus. If a fund offered us three hundred thousand dollars to give the found-

ers, we wouldn’t take it.” (Many of YC’s seventeen partners, wealthy from their own startups, receive a salary of just twenty-four thousand dollars and get most of their compensation in stock.) This logic, followed to its extreme, would suggest that you shouldn’t even take YC’s money, and many successful startups don’t. Only twenty per cent of the Inc. 500, the five hundred fastest-growing private companies, raised outside funding. But the YC credential, and the promise that it will turn you into a juggernaut, can be hard to resist.

Near Ralston’s grapefruit tree, Omer Sadika and Sebastian Wallin nibbled hors d’oeuvres as they compared notes about the stress of trying to launch their security companies, Secful and Castle. “We are sleeping at most five hours a day,” Sadika said. Wallin muttered, “I’ve forgotten what day it is.” Both men were planning to move to the Valley; Sadika from Israel, and Wallin from Stockholm. “The customers are here,” Sadika said. “And you’re one step away from the entrepreneurs at Airbnb and Stripe,” Wallin pointed out. YC provides instant entrée to Silicon Valley—a community that, despite its meritocratic rhetoric, typically requires a “warm intro” from a colleague, who is usually a white man. All the early arrivals at the party were men; the batch’s female founders were attending a presentation on the challenges of being a female founder. YC is more diverse than many institutions in tech, but it knows that it has a ways to go.

On the far side of a fire pit, two founders of Shypmate, an app that links you to airline passengers who will cheaply carry your package to Ghana or Nigeria, were commiserating. Kwadwo Nyarko said, “We’re at the mercy of travellers who never have as much space in their luggage as they said.” Perry Ogwuche murmured, “YC tells us, ‘Talk to your customers,’ but it’s hard to find our customers.” Altman walked over to engage them, dutiful as a birthday-party magician. “So what are your hobbies?” he asked. Nonplussed, Ogwuche said, “We work and we go to the gym. And what are yours?”

“Well, I like racing cars,” Altman said. “I have five, including two McLarens and an old Tesla. I like flying rented

planes all over California. Oh, and one odd one—I prep for survival.” Seeing their bewilderment, he explained, “My problem is that when my friends get drunk they talk about the ways the world will end. After a Dutch lab modified the H5N1 bird-flu virus, five years ago, making it super contagious, the chance of a lethal synthetic virus being released in the next twenty years became, well, nonzero. The other most popular scenarios would be A.I. that attacks us and nations fighting with nukes over scarce resources.” The Shypmates looked grave. “I try not to think about it too much,” Altman said. “But I have guns, gold, potassium iodide, antibiotics, batteries, water, gas masks from the Israeli Defense Force, and a big patch of land in Big Sur I can fly to.”

Altman’s mother, a dermatologist named Connie Gibstine, told me, “Sam does keep an awful lot tied up inside. He’ll call and say he has a headache—and he’ll have Googled it, so there’s some cyber-chondria in there, too. I have to reassure him that he doesn’t have meningitis or lymphoma, that it’s just stress.” If the pandemic does come, Altman’s backup plan is to fly with his friend Peter Thiel, the billionaire venture capitalist, to Thiel’s house in New Zealand. Thiel told me, “Sam is not particularly religious, but he is culturally very Jewish—an optimist yet a survivalist, with a sense that things can always go deeply wrong, and that there’s no single place in the world where you’re deeply at home.”

ALTMAN MAKES a list of goals each year, and he looks at it every few weeks. It always includes a taxing physical objective—a hundred-mile bike ride each week; fifty consecutive pull-ups—and an array of work targets. This year, for YC, those included “Better partnership dynamic; decision on [expanding to] China; figure out how to scale another 2x.” The latest list also contains a reminder to fund videos that demonstrate counterintuitive concepts in physics and quantum mechanics (“QM experiment/physics explainers”) and a prompt to reread a Huffington Post article about the regrets of the dying (“I wish that I had let myself be happier”).

He was always precocious and

efficient. As a child, in St. Louis, he grasped the system behind area codes in nursery school, and learned to program and disassemble a Macintosh at eight. The Mac became his lifeline to the world. “Growing up gay in the Midwest in the two-thousands was not the most awesome thing,” he told me. “And finding AOL chat rooms was transformative. Secrets are bad when you’re eleven or twelve.” When he came out to his parents, at sixteen, his mother was astonished. She told me, “Sam had always struck me as just sort of unisexual and tech-y.” After a Christian group boycotted an assembly about sexuality at his prep school, John Burroughs, Altman addressed the whole community, announcing that he was gay and asking whether the school wanted to be a repressive place or one open to different ideas. Madelyn Gray, Altman’s college counsellor, said, “What Sam did changed the school. It felt like someone had opened up a great big box full of all kinds of kids and let them out into the world.”

He attended Stanford University, where he spent two years studying computer science, until he and two classmates dropped out to work full time on Loopt, a mobile app that told your friends where you were. Loopt got into Y Combinator’s first batch because Altman in particular passed what would become known at YC as the young founders’ test: Can this stripling manage adults? He was a formidable operator: quick to smile, but also quick to anger. If you cross him, he’ll joke about slipping ice-nine into your food. (Ice-nine, in Kurt Vonnegut’s “Cat’s Cradle,” annihilates everything it touches that contains water.) Paul Graham, noting Altman’s early aura of consequence, told me, “Sam is extremely good at becoming powerful.”

Altman worked so incessantly that summer that he got scurvy. He excelled at wangling meetings with mobile carriers, and at closing deals with them to feature the app, whose valuation eventually soared to a hundred and seventy-five million dollars. Consumers, though, never bought in. “We had the optimistic view that location would be all-important,” Altman said. “The pessimistic view was that people would lie on their couches and just consume

content—and that is what happened. I learned you can’t make humans do something they don’t want to do.” In 2012, he and the other founders sold the company for forty-three million dollars—a negative return for their V.C.s.

One of Altman’s co-founders at Loopt, Nick Sivo, was also his boyfriend; the two dated for nine years, but after the company sold they broke up. “I thought I was going to marry him—very in love with him,” Altman said. At loose ends, he launched a small venture fund, Hydrazine Capital. He raised twenty-one million dollars, including a significant investment from Peter Thiel and much of the five million dollars he’d made selling Loopt, then invested seventy-five per cent of the fund in YC companies. He had a knack for finding opportunity in chaos. Altman told me that he led the B round at Reddit, a chronically disorganized YC graduate, because “you want to invest in messy, somewhat broken companies. You can treat the warts on top, and because of the warts the company will be hugely underpriced.”

Hydrazine has grown tenfold in value in just four years, but, despite its success, Altman recoiled from venture capital. “You’re trying to find a company that will be successful with or without you, then convince them to take your money instead of somebody else’s, and at a lower price,” he said. “I didn’t like being oppositional to the entrepreneur.” Leery of tech’s culture of Golcondan wealth, in which a billion dollars is dismissed as “a buck,” he decided to rid himself of all but a comfortable cushion: his four-bedroom house in San Francisco’s Mission district, his cars, his Big Sur property, and a reserve of ten million dollars, whose annual interest would cover his living expenses. The rest would go to improving humanity.

Like a stymied startup, Altman then made a radical pivot. Paul Graham and Jessica Livingston, who had two young children, were worn out by the work of running YC and had begun looking for a successor. Livingston said, “There wasn’t a list of who should run YC and Sam at the top. It was just: Sam.”

Graham said, “I asked Sam in our kitchen, ‘Do you want to take over YC?’ and he smiled, like, *it worked*. I

had never seen an uncontrolled smile from Sam. It was like when you throw a ball of paper into the wastebasket across the room—that smile.”

Altman wanted to create a trillion-dollar conglomerate and to move the world forward. And, he realized, “you couldn’t have a trillion-dollar enterprise without major scientific advances.” So he opened the batches to hard tech, studied the science and engineering problems such companies faced, and recruited the most promising ones. Altman helped to persuade Kyle Vogt, the C.E.O. of the self-driving-car company Cruise, to do YC in 2014; afterward, when Cruise had trouble finding funding, he invested three million dollars in the company. In March, General Motors bought Cruise for \$1.25 billion.

Altman had long wanted to start his own nuclear-energy company; instead, he had YC fund the best fission and fusion startups he could find. Then he personally invested in both companies and chaired their boards. Thousands of startups are devoted to social interaction, and fewer than twenty to fission and fusion, but, Altman said, “hard things are actually easier than easy things. Because people feel it’s interesting, they want to help. Another mobile app? You get an eye roll. A rocket company? Everyone wants to go to space.”

GRAHAM HAS WRITTEN that the two founders he most often invoked when advising startups were Steve Jobs and Altman: “On questions of design, I ask ‘What would Steve do?’ but on questions of strategy or ambition I ask ‘What would Sam do?’” Founders in a crisis call Altman first, relying on his knack for high-speed trading in the Valley’s favor bank—“I called Brian and got it sorted out,” he’ll say, referring to Brian Chesky—and his ability to see people as chess pieces and work out their lines of play. One YC founder told me, “Since Sam can see the future, we want him to tell us what’s coming.”

When the two founders of a Norwegian startup called Konsus arrived for office hours with Altman, at YC’s new outpost, in San Francisco’s South of Market district, they were as solemn as

pilgrims approaching a mountaintop shrine. Konsus, which was in the winter batch, connects businesses to freelancers who perform tasks such as data entry or Web design. Despite having raised a robust \$1.6 million after Demo Day, the founders were ridden with angst. Fredrik Thomassen said that they wanted to make their war chest last forever, and Sondre Rasch mentioned that he'd frugally chosen to live in a twelve-entrepreneur collective in a nearby forest. So: did they really have to buy their engineers computers? The two men, bearded and wraithlike, stared at Altman.

"It is one of the rarer mistakes to make, trying to be too lean," Altman said, dryly. "But, if someone's going to make it, it's going to be Scandinavians. Buy the computers." The founders nodded intently. They had revered Altman since they met him. At the time, their explanation of what Konsus did was "Companies send us office tasks and we instantly assign them to top-talent freelancers all over the world based on skill and availability." Altman had immediately asked, "Aren't you an on-demand temp agency?"

Thomassen now said, "We of course want to talk about quality, because the quality of our freelancers' work is our differentiator. We need a metric to measure it, somehow." Altman replied, "Repeat use or customer retention will track that. You don't need to invent some complicated new metric, so don't." Thomassen consulted a list they'd made: "What is the most likely thing we'll do wrong in the next three months?"

Altman found their hypervigilance encouraging: he believes that "the founders who do best are very paranoid, very full of existential crises." He told them, "Founders by definition like to start new things. But starting a business means grinding away for ten years." He continued, without irony, "Most people do too many things. Do a few things relentlessly."

Altman's terse prescience led one YC founder to call him "startup Yoda." Entrepreneurs trudge in to see him burdened by half an hour's worth of calamities and bounce out after fifteen minutes, springy with resolve. Much of his advice follows YC's standard imperative to transparency: if you're worried about investors' responses to a setback, "just



tell them"; if you're mystified by what a potential customer's silence portends, "just ask them." It's the knottier questions that elicit his cleaving judgments. "Don't worry about a competitor until they're beating you in the market," Altman told the founders of Elucify at his dining table one afternoon. "Competitors are one of the last monsters that haunt your dreams." A few minutes later, he was on speakerphone with Varden Labs, a Canadian self-driving-vehicle company. As the founders poured out concerns about fund-raising, Altman, in stocking feet, cargo shorts, and a gray hoodie, waved around a Bronze Age sword that he'd bought as a gift for Paul Graham. "To raise fifty million," he said—*slash, two-handed swipe*—"you either need a major technological breakthrough or a large customer ready to go." He parried invisible strokes, advancing inexorably. What about long-term? they asked. "Always think about adding one more zero to whatever you're doing, but never think beyond that." *Stab to the heart.*

FOUR YEARS AGO, on a daylong hike with friends north of San Francisco, Altman relinquished the notion that human beings are singular. As the group discussed advances in

artificial intelligence, Altman recognized, he told me, that "there's absolutely no reason to believe that in about thirteen years we won't have hardware capable of replicating my brain. Yes, certain things still feel particularly human—creativity, flashes of inspiration from nowhere, the ability to feel happy and sad at the same time—but computers will have their own desires and goal systems. When I realized that intelligence can be simulated, I let the idea of our uniqueness go, and it wasn't as traumatic as I thought." He stared off. "There are certain advantages to being a machine. We humans are limited by our input-output rate—we learn only two bits a second, so a ton is lost. To a machine, we must seem like slowed-down whale songs."

OpenAI, the nonprofit that Altman founded with Elon Musk, is a hedged bet on the end of human predominance—a kind of strategic-defense initiative to protect us from our own creations. OpenAI was born of Musk's conviction that an A.I. could wipe us out by accident. The problem of managing powerful systems that lack human values is exemplified by "the paperclip maximizer," a scenario that the Swedish philosopher Nick

Bostrom raised in 2003. If you told an omniscient A.I. to manufacture as many paper clips as possible, and gave it no other directives, it could mine all of Earth's resources to make paper clips, including the atoms in our bodies—assuming it didn't just kill us outright, to make sure that we didn't stop it from making more paper clips. OpenAI was particularly concerned that Google's DeepMind Technologies division was seeking a supreme A.I. that could monitor the world for competitors. Musk told me, "If the A.I. that they develop goes awry, we risk having an immortal and super-powerful dictator forever." He went on, "Murdering all competing A.I. researchers as its first move strikes me as a bit of a character flaw."

It was clear what OpenAI feared, but less clear what it embraced. In May, Dario Amodei, a leading A.I. researcher then at Google Brain, came to visit the office, and told Altman and Greg Brockman, the C.T.O., that no one understood their mission. They'd raised a billion dollars and hired an impressive team of thirty researchers—but what for? "There are twenty to thirty people in the field, including Nick Bostrom and the Wikipedia article," Amodei said, "who are saying that the goal of OpenAI is to build a friendly A.I.

and then release its source code into the world."

"We don't plan to release all of our source code," Altman said. "But let's please not try to correct that. That usually only makes it worse."

"But what *is* the goal?" Amodei asked.

Brockman said, "Our goal right now . . . is to do the best thing there is to do. It's a little vague."

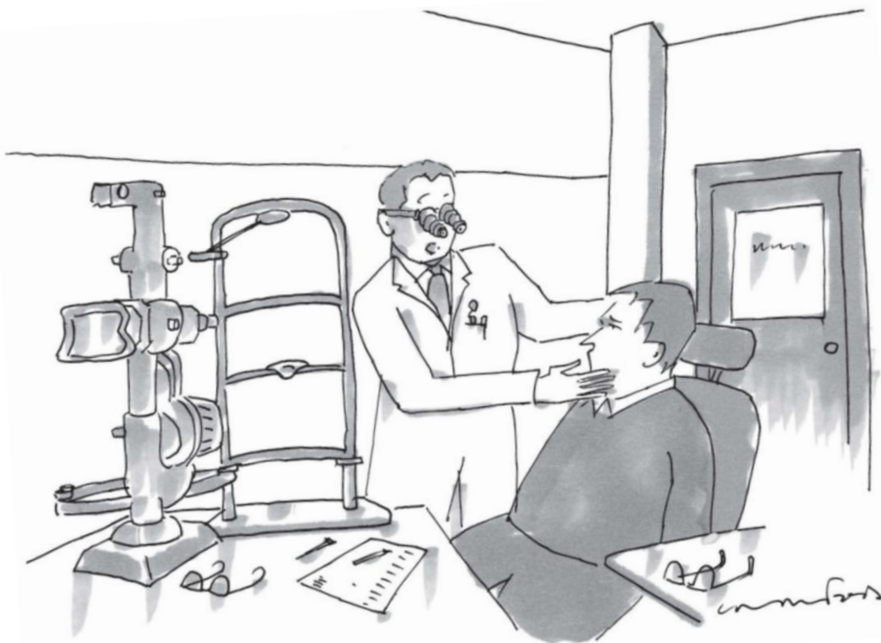
A.I. technology hardly seems almighty yet. After Microsoft launched a chatbot, called Tay, bullying Twitter users quickly taught it to tweet such remarks as "GAS THE KIKES RACE WAR NOW"; the recently released "Daddy's Car," the first pop song created by software, sounds like the Beatles, if the Beatles were cyborgs. But, Musk told me, "just because you don't see killer robots marching down the street doesn't mean we shouldn't be concerned." Apple's Siri, Amazon's Alexa, and Microsoft's Cortana serve millions as aides-de-camp, and simultaneous-translation and self-driving technologies are now taken for granted. Y Combinator has even begun using an A.I. bot, Hal9000, to help it sift admission applications: the bot's neural net trains itself by assessing previous applications and those companies' outcomes. "What's it looking for?" I

asked Altman. "I have no idea," he replied. "That's the unsettling thing about neural networks—you have no idea what they're doing, and they can't tell you."

OpenAI's immediate goals, announced in June, include a household robot able to set and clear a table. One longer-term goal is to build a general A.I. system that can pass the Turing test—can convince people, by the way it reasons and reacts, that it is human. Yet Altman believes that a true general A.I. should do more than deceive; it should create, discovering a property of quantum physics or devising a new art form simply to gratify its own itch to know and to make. While many A.I. researchers were correcting errors by telling their systems, "That's a dog, not a cat," OpenAI was focussed on having its system teach itself how things work. "Like a baby does?" I asked Altman. "The thing people forget about human babies is that they take years to learn anything interesting," he said. "If A.I. researchers were developing an algorithm and stumbled across the one for a human baby, they'd get bored watching it, decide it wasn't working, and shut it down."

Altman felt that OpenAI's mission was to babysit its wunderkind until it was ready to be adopted by the world. He'd been reading James Madison's notes on the Constitutional Convention for guidance in managing the transition. "We're planning a way to allow wide swaths of the world to elect representatives to a new governance board," he said. "Because if I weren't in on this I'd be, like, Why do these fuckers get to decide what happens to me?"

Under Altman, Y Combinator was becoming a kind of shadow United Nations, and increasingly he was making Secretary-General-level decisions. Perhaps it made sense to entrust humanity to someone who doesn't seem all that interested in humans. "Sam's program for the world is anchored by ideas, not people," Peter Thiel said. "And that's what makes it powerful—because it doesn't immediately get derailed by questions of popularity." Of course, that very combination of powerful intent and powerful unconcern is what inspired OpenAI: how can an unfathomable intelligence protect



"I'm afraid you're going to need a new pair of corrective lashes, Mr. Fox."

us if it doesn't care what we think?

This spring, Altman met Ashton Carter, the Secretary of Defense, in a private room at a San Francisco trade show. Altman wore his only suit jacket, a bunchy gray number his assistant had tricked him into getting measured for on a trip to Hong Kong. Carter, in a pin-striped suit, got right to it. "Look, a lot of people out here think we're big and clunky. And there's the Snowden overhang thing, too," he said, referring to the government's treatment of Edward Snowden. "But we want to work with you in the Valley, tap the expertise."

"Obviously, that would be great," Altman said. "You're probably the biggest customer in the world." The Defense Department's proposed research-and-development spending next year is more than double that of Apple, Google, and Intel combined. "But a lot of startups are frustrated that it takes a year to get a response from you." Carter aimed his forefinger at his temple like a gun and pulled the trigger. Altman continued, "If you could set up a single point of contact, and make decisions on initiating pilot programs with YC companies within two weeks, that would help a lot."

"Great," Carter said, glancing at one of his seven aides, who scribbled a note. "What else?"

Altman thought for a while. "If you or one of your deputies could come speak to YC, that would go a long way."

"I'll do it myself," Carter promised.

As everyone filed out, Chris Lynch, a former Microsoft executive who heads Carter's digital division, told Altman, "It would have been good to talk about OpenAI." Altman nodded noncommittally. The 2017 U.S. military budget allocates three billion dollars for human-machine collaborations known as Centaur Warfighting, and a long-range missile that will make autonomous targeting decisions is in the pipeline for the following year. Lynch later told me that an OpenAI system would be a natural fit.

Altman was of two minds about handing OpenAI products to Lynch and Carter. "I unabashedly love this country, which is the greatest country in the world," he said. At Stan-

ford, he worked on a DARPA project involving drone helicopters. "But some things we will never do with the Department of Defense." He added, "A friend of mine says, 'The thing that saves us from the Department of Defense is that, though they have a ton of money, they're not very competent.' But I feel conflicted, because they have the world's best cyber command." Altman, by instinct a cleaner-up of messes, wanted to help strengthen our military—and then to defend the world from its newfound strength.

N EARLY ALL YC startups enter the program with the same funding, and thus the same valuation: \$1.7 million. After Demo Day, their mean valuation is ten million. There are several theories about why this estimation jumps nearly sixfold in three months. One is that the best founders apply to the best accelerator, and that YC excels at picking formidable founders who would become successful anyway. Paul Buchheit, who ran the past few batches, said, "It's all about founders. Facebook had Mark Zuckerberg, and MySpace had a bunch of monkeys."

The corollary is that Y Combinator makes its companies more desirable by teaching them how to tell their story on Demo Day. The venture capitalist Chris Dixon, who admires YC, said, "The founders are so well coached that they know exactly how to reverse-engineer us, down to demonstrating domain expertise and telling anecdotes about their backgrounds that show perseverance and courage." In the winter batch, the pitches followed an invariable narrative of imminent magnitude: link yourself to a name-brand unicorn ("We're Uber for babysitting . . . Stripe for Africa . . . Slack for health care"), or, if there's no apt analogue, say, "X is broken. In the future, Y will fix X. We're already doing Y." Then express your premise as a chewy buzzword sandwich: We "leverage technology to achieve personalization in a fully automated way" (translation: individualized shampoo). Paul Graham cheer-

fully acknowledged that, by instilling message discipline, "we help the bad founders look indistinguishable from the good ones."

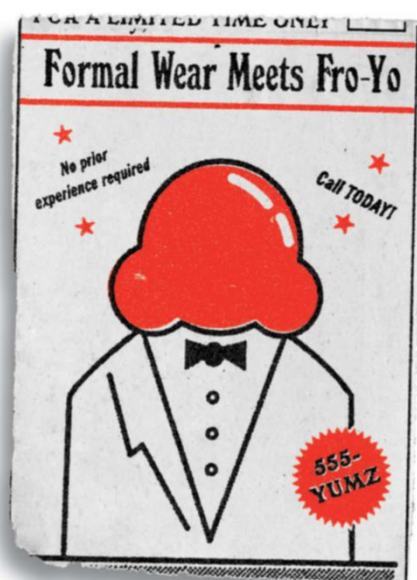
The counter-theory is that YC actually does make its companies better, by teaching them to focus on growth above all, thereby eliminating distractions such as talking to the tech press or speaking at conferences or making cosmetic coding tweaks. YC's gold standard for revenue growth is ten per cent a week, which compounds to 142x a year. Failing that, well, tell a story of some other kind of growth. On Demo Day, one company announced that it had enjoyed "fifty-per-cent word-of-mouth

growth," whatever that might be. Sebastian Wallin told me that his security company, Castle, raised \$1.8 million because "we managed to find a good metric to show growth. We tried tracking installations of our product, but it didn't look good. So we used accounts protected, a number that showed roughly thirty-per-cent growth through the course of YC—and about forty per cent of the accounts were YC companies. It was a perfect fairy-tale story."

The truth is that rapid growth over a long period is rare, that the repeated innovation required to sustain it is nearly impossible, and that certain kinds of uncontrollable growth turn out to be cancers. Last year, after a series of crises at Reddit, Altman, who is on its board, convinced Steve Huffman, the co-founder of the company, to return as C.E.O. Huffman said, "I immediately told Sam, 'Don't get on my ass about growth. I'm not in control of it.' Every great startup—Facebook, Airbnb—has no idea why it's growing at first, and has to figure that out before the growth stalls. Growth masks all problems."

Perhaps the most dispositive theory about YC is that the power of its network obviates other theories. Alumni view themselves as a kind of *keiretsu*, a network of interlocking companies that help one another succeed. "YC is its own economy," Harj Taggar, the co-founder of Triplebyte, which





COSTUME DRAMA

Gillian Flynn

AS A KID in the eighties, I didn't need much disposable income. I went to Catholic school—white shirt, plaid skirt—so fashion choices were limited. But youth finds a way. For me and my schoolmates, neon argyle socks were a crucial barometer of coolness. Hair ribbons, too, and they didn't come cheap. Boxers needed to peek out just below our skirts, which were rolled up several inches at the waistband, so that we looked as though we were packing contraband anacondas. And of course there were the coveted weekend wine coolers; I was thirty before I stopped staring into my Chardonnay and snarling, "Where's the fruit?"

To procure such items, I held many, many jobs. I am a great believer in jobs for teens. They teach important life lessons, build character, and inflict just the right amount of humiliation necessary for future success in the working world.

My first job had me miscast as a bubbly shopgirl; I was pathologically

shy, and thus tended to replace human speech with excessive head gestures. It was like being waited on by Harpo Marx. Nod, nod, smile, head scratch, nod, *honk-honk!* I was soon fired.

Later, I wrapped and unwrapped foiled hams so that customers could insure the spiral cut was, indeed, spiral. For brevity's sake, I'll call this position Ham Girl. Being a Ham Girl was not as simple as it sounds, because when folks wait in line for forty minutes for the perfect holiday ham they become very, very sure that the lady or the two guys in front of them got the last great ham, and they take their anxiety out on you. Again, my inability to speak in social situations led me to employ the Harpo. "The spiral on this one's a little thick, don't you think?" Head shake, head shake, frown, pretend-to-care head shake. I'd leave work with my fingers covered in nicks and cuts, smelling of pork and potato salad and baked beans, trailing hungry dogs.

I worked, too, as a soda jerk at a fifties-style diner; then I was a grocery-store checkout girl with a uniform that involved a flouncy polyester scarf that made me look like a smart, fiftysomething administrative assistant.

But the most perfectly eighties job I ever had was at a mall, in my home town of Kansas City, Missouri, shilling frozen yogurt—which was, in 1987, blowing people's minds. Yogurt? Frozen? *In a waffle cone?* Yes, or even a cup!

One morning, I arrived at work ready to sling some fro-yo. My manager asked to see me in the back. This felt ominous. In the dim light, I could make out a giant white orb and some crumpled black . . . pants? Had he killed someone? No, it was worse: a yogurt costume, bought at a flea market. The head—a.k.a. cone—was as big as a pilates ball, with the grim mouth of a madman, and, below that, the figure was wearing a tuxedo.

I have, ever since, pondered: Why

the tuxedo? Where did the yogurt think he was going? Prom? I doubted that; he seemed older, somehow. A black-tie event? A wedding? My manager thought I'd be perfect in this costume, meaning that I was not assertive enough to decline the opportunity every sixteen-year-old girl dreams of: going out in public dressed as a formal dairy product. On went the tux, which smelled of stranger. On went the giant head; inside, a mini-fan began whirring away at my spiral perm, which buckets of hair product had hardened into a vast, frozen forest.

My manager handed me a tray of yogurt samples and threw me to the wolves—er, potential customers. My shyness once more barred me from contact with human beings. Children ran from me. I floated through the mall, a silent, slightly threatening spectre. I was on my way to becoming some grotesque urban legend: the Murderous Missouri Single-Dip Mall Man, who was jilted at the altar and spent his remaining days killing young shoppers on their way to get their ears pierced at Claire's Fashion Jewelry and Accessories.

I was hot and woozy, the smell of Aussie hair mousse filling the cone along with my own carbon dioxide. Can't breathe, can't breathe! And then it happened. As I was steps away from safety, my yogurt samples dutifully dumped in a trash can, I felt a tug, heard a *grr*, and smelled smoke. A tendril of my lovely shellacked perm had been sucked into the fan. I now couldn't take the giant head off my body—my hair was its prisoner. I wrestled and riled. Nothing. Lose the hair. I'd have to lose the hair. I yanked and felt the slow, sickening rip of my twenty-dollar Fantastic Sam's investment. I was free. I looked in the mirror. This would require a gallon of gel and a very dependable scrunchie. Luckily, I had both.

And, to this day, I am always kind to people dressed as food. ♦

matches coders' applications with YC companies, said. Each spring, founders gather at Camp YC, in a redwood forest north of San Francisco, just to network—tech's version of the Bohemian Grove, only with more vigorous outdoor urination. When Altman first approached Kyle Vogt, the C.E.O. of Cruise, Vogt had been through YC with an earlier company, so he already knew its lessons. He told me, "I talked to five of my friends who had done YC more than once and said, 'Was it worth it the second time? Are you likely to receive higher valuations because of the brand, and because you're plugging into the network?' Across the board, they said yes."

There really is no counter-theory. "The knock on YC," Andy Weissman, a managing partner at Union Square Ventures, told me, "is that on Demo Day their users are just YC companies, which entirely explains why they're all growing so fast. But how great to have more than a thousand companies willing to use your product!" It's not just that YC startups can get Airbnb and Stripe to use their apps; it's that the network's alumni honeycomb the Valley's largest companies. Many of the hundred and twenty-one YC startups that have been acquired over the years have been absorbed by Facebook, Apple, and Google.

Yet Altman worries that the network's very potency has become problematic. In February, he sent an e-mail to recent batches warning that some founders had grown cocky and entitled. And he told me, "It's bad for the companies and bad for Silicon Valley if companies can stay alive just because they're YC. It's better for everyone if bad companies die quickly."

ONE EVENING AT Altman's house, his younger brothers, Max and Jack, were teasing him that he should run for President in 2020, when he'd be thirty-five: just old enough. Max, twenty-eight, said, "Who better than you, Sam?" As Altman tried not very vehemently to change the subject, Jack, twenty-seven, said, "It's not purely little-brother trolling. I do think tech needs a good candidate."

"Let's send the Jewish gay guy!" Altman said. "That'll work!"

Jack eyed a board game called *Samurai* on the bookshelf and said, "Sam won every single game of *Samurai* when we were kids because he always declared himself the Samurai leader: 'I have to win, and I'm in charge of everything.'"

Altman shot back, "You want to play speed chess right now?," and Jack laughed.

Max was working at the Y Combinator company Zenefits; Jack co-founded a performance-management company, Lattice, which had just gone through YC. The two brothers moved in with Altman temporarily three years ago and never left. Altman recently hired a designer to upgrade his gray IKEA sofas to gray SummerHouse sofas, and he hung some handsomely framed photographs taken from space, but the house maintains an upscale-student-housing vibe. His mother told me, "I think Sam likes having his brothers around because they knew him when, and can give him pushback in ways that other people can't. But it's tricky, with the power dynamic, and I want it to end before it explodes."

In March, Altman wrote a blog post announcing his investment in a company called Asana; he was leading a fifty-million-dollar C round. To keep your employees aligned, he wrote, it's vital to have definite tasks and goals, to communicate them clearly, and to measure them frequently, and "Asana is the best way to excel in these 3 areas." When Jack Altman read the post, he texted Sam, "Ouch!" Lattice was pitching itself as the best way to excel in those areas. Then Jack called their parents, who were flabbergasted.

"You still mad at me, Jack?" Altman asked now. As soon as Altman realized the problem—"I wrote a blog post in a rush because Asana asked me to, and I had heard Jack's pitch so much I must have incorporated some of his language"—he called his brother to apologize and figure out how to fix it. He explained that he hadn't perceived a conflict: "I use Asana as a to-do list. Lattice has no to-do-list functionality."

"It wasn't malicious," Jack told me later. "It was just Sam going a million

miles a minute. Sam did later say, playfully, 'We will crush you,' but we were already in the making-amends phase."

As Altman made pasta and Marcella Hazan's tomato sauce, Jack began trolling again. "At YC this winter, when Sam would come over to talk, everybody would be looking at me. All these people who don't know Sam treat him like . . . not like Beyoncé, but—"

"That's overstated," Sam said.

"In fairness, you don't live nearly as ridiculous a life as you could," Jack said. "You could drive a McLaren—"

"Make repeated trips to the French Laundry—" Max put in.

"Fly planes all over California, or buy fossils for tens of thousands of dollars," Jack concluded. His older brother, guilty on all counts, bent over the pasta water.

Though Altman clearly enjoys running YC, at times he seems to wonder if, in his swift rise, he left something behind. For years after his YC summer with Loopt, he couldn't bear instant ramen or Starbucks' coffee ice cream, which he'd subsisted on; now those flavors fill him with longing. This spring, seeing Nick Sivo go through the batch with a new company stirred up the sediment of Altman's youth. When I spoke to the two men together, Altman said, "I still think of Nick as an eighteen-year-old frozen in time, and I think he thinks of me the same way." Sivo said, "I don't really know what you mean." "Like a college kid nobody knows or cares about," Altman said, wistfully.

MOVING THE WORLD forward may eventually unlock enormous value, but it's expensive. To amass the necessary funds, Altman is quietly mining deeper into the Valley: he's begun to make Y Combinator more like a venture firm. YC had always presented itself as a gentle, helpful angel investor, a force opposed to the ruthless venture capitalists who buy in later and then demand mammoth returns. Paul Graham once published an essay called "A Unified Theory of VC Suckage," and a speaker at an early YC event put up a slide titled "VCs: Soulless Agents of Satan or Just Clumsy Rapists?"

YC has helped shift power to entrepreneurs by endorsing contracts that

reduce V.C.s' stranglehold on a company's finances. It also gives founders written evaluations of V.C.s, complete with a numerical grade. Bryce Roberts, whose venture firm hasn't been invited to Demo Day for four years, since he loaned his admission badge to an associate, said, "The cudgel they wield is 'We keep tabs on all you guys.'"

V.C.s have learned that if they want a crack at funding YC's top companies they have to offer fair terms, work hard on behalf of their startups, and perform any favors that YC asks. Privately, many complain that YC drives up prices. And some gripe that the accelerator is too Darwinian. One well-known V.C. told me, "The program is great for the top four companies in a batch but terrible for the other forty-six, because by the time they come see me I know they've been passed on by Sequoia and Andreessen Horowitz." Ben Horowitz, the co-founder of Andreessen Horowitz, points out that this dynamic, which favors the top venture firms, isn't specific to YC: "The guys who founders want to take money from get the No. 1 draft picks, and all the other guys get to pick through the rest. It's capitalism! Do your fucking job or get your ass kicked."

Altman's approach to investment has been shaped by Peter Thiel, the forty-eight-year-old libertarian who co-founded PayPal and Palantir, secretly funded the lawsuit that drove Gawker Media into bankruptcy, and has sought to extend his life span by taking human growth hormone. (More recently, he has wondered if it might be better to simply use the blood of young people.) As a leading venture capitalist, Thiel is in many ways Paul Graham's opposite, favoring not a few fanatic users and ramen profitability but unstoppable metrics and instant monopoly. But the two men share a focus on the quality of founders and on companies' prospects over time: in five years, or ten, will the market for their products allow them to grow 100x?

For years, YC discussed making

follow-on investments in its companies, to help them expand further and to profit from that expansion. Last year, Altman proposed a loan pool of four or five billion dollars, then a two-to-three-billion-dollar growth fund. "We all told Sam that was insanely huge," one YC mainstay recalled. Altman eventually concurred. "The people who opposed me turned out to be right—you couldn't actually deploy five billion dollars into YC companies," he said. "At least, not yet."

The first YC Continuity growth fund, which launched last September, was a relatively modest seven hundred million dollars. While growth-fund investors would be delighted with a 3x return for a fund of that size, Altman was hoping for an unheard-of 10x. Continuity would mainly be leading later funding rounds, but a third of its money was earmarked for maintaining YC's seven-per-cent stake in all of its companies that raised funds after they graduated. (If YC invested only in its favorites, V.C.s would infer that the others were second-rate.) Ali Rowghani, who runs Continuity, described this focus as a huge competitive advantage: "Growth investors spend eighty to ninety per cent of their time sourcing deals, circling the globe like a Japanese fishing fleet. We're fishing in an aquarium that gets restocked constantly."

But, to many V.C.s, YC Continuity was more like a destroyer parked in the South China Sea. Bryce Roberts said, "It *has* to be a way of disrupting Sand Hill Road"—where a number of the Valley's top venture firms reside. "If Sam isn't saying it, he's thinking it. Why own seven per cent of Airbnb when you can own twenty-five per cent of it?" The fear is that YC will soon provide cradle-to-I.P.O. funding for so many top startups that it will put a lot of V.C.s out of business. That would greatly reduce the sources of funding and expertise for other startups—and concentrate more power in YC's hands. One leading V.C. said, "At some point, they'll start cherry-picking their best companies for A and B rounds. I just assume their plan is

to disrupt everything and take over the world."

When I raised this line of thinking with Altman, he got mad. "We will not lead A rounds while I'm running YC!" he declared. "It would cause irreparable damage to our program to cherry-pick our best companies." Yet Jonathan Levy, the YC partner who helped write the legal framework establishing YC Continuity, observed, "There's enough leeway in the documents to do whatever makes sense. Look, does Sam have a lot of respect for Sequoia? Yeah. Does he think he could do it better? Absolutely. Will he do it better? Absolutely. Can I see Sam taking over the entire V.C. system? Absolutely. There will be an exception to the original plan, then two exceptions, and then the system will have changed."

ON A TRIP to New York, Altman dropped by my apartment one Saturday to discuss how tech was transforming our view of who we are. Curled up on the sofa, knees to his chin, he said, "I remember thinking, when Deep Blue beat Garry Kasparov, in 1997, Why does anyone care about chess anymore? And now I'm very sad about us losing to DeepMind's AlphaGo," which recently beat a world-champion Go player. "I'm on Team Human. I don't have a good logical reason why I'm sad, except that the class of things that humans are better at continues to narrow." After a moment, he added, "Melancholy' is a better word than 'sad.'"

Many people in Silicon Valley have become obsessed with the simulation hypothesis, the argument that what we experience as reality is in fact fabricated in a computer; two tech billionaires have gone so far as to secretly engage scientists to work on breaking us out of the simulation. To Altman, the danger stems not from our possible creators but from our own creations. "These phones already control us," he told me, frowning at his iPhone SE. "The merge has begun—and a merge is our best scenario. Any version without a merge will have conflict: we enslave the A.I. or it enslaves us. The full-on-crazy version of the merge is we get our brains uploaded into the cloud. I'd love that," he said. "We need to level



AS FOR THE HOUSEFLY

Bashing its head against the kitchen window,
its sentence is a quasar, it has lived
Twenty fly years trying to understand transparency,
while for me, only half a day has passed
Since it blew in the back door as I was getting the mail.
But I hear the cosmos howling fiercely inside
Its minuscule cranium. Time is compressed in its soul
like neutrons in plasma. When I walk
Across the kitchen, I am continental drift, I move
My arms like a spiral galaxy. No wonder
It is frantic as I open the pane. How long must it take
for the air to cool and the sun to sink into
Its consciousness, how long for the speed of light to change?

—T. R. Hummer

up humans, because our descendants will either conquer the galaxy or extinguish consciousness in the universe forever. What a time to be alive!”

Some futurists—da Vinci, Verne, von Braun—imagine technologies that are decades or centuries off. Altman assesses current initiatives and threats, then focusses on pragmatic actions to advance or impede them. Nothing came of Paul Graham’s plan for tech to stop Donald Trump, but Altman, after brooding about Trump for months, recently announced a non-partisan project, called VotePlz, aimed at getting out the youth vote. Looking at the election as a tech problem—what’s the least code with the most payoff?—Altman and his three co-founders concentrated on helping young people in nine swing states to register, by providing them with registration forms and stamps. By Election Day, VotePlz’s app may even be configured to call an Uber to take you to the polls.

Synthetic viruses? Altman is planning a synthetic-biology unit within YC Research that could thwart them. Aging and death? He hopes to fund a parabiosis company, to place the rejuvenative elixir of youthful blood into an injection. “If it works,” he says, “you will still die, but you could get to a hundred and twenty being pretty healthy, then fail quickly.” Human obsolescence? He is thinking about establishing a group to prepare for our

eventual successor, whether it be an A.I. or an enhanced version of *Homo sapiens*. The idea would be to assemble thinkers in robotics, cybernetics, quantum computing, A.I., synthetic biology, genomics, and space travel, as well as philosophers, to discuss the technology and the ethics of human replacement. For now, leaders in those fields are meeting semi-regularly at Altman’s house; the group jokingly calls itself the Covenant.

As Altman gazes ahead, emotion occasionally clouds his otherwise spotless windscreen. He told me, “If you believe that all human lives are equally valuable, and you also believe that 99.5 per cent of lives will take place in the future, we should spend all our time thinking about the future.” His voice dropped. “But I do care much more about my family and friends.” He asked me how many strangers I would allow to die—or would kill with my own hands, which seemed to him more intellectually honest—in order to spare my loved ones. As I considered this, he said that he’d sacrifice a hundred thousand. I told him that my own tally would be even larger. “It’s a bug,” he declared, unconsolated.

He was happier viewing the consequences of innovation as a systems question. The immediate challenge is that computers could put most of us out of work. Altman’s fix is YC Research’s Basic Income project, a five-year study, scheduled to begin in 2017,

of an old idea that’s suddenly in vogue: giving everyone enough money to live on. Expanding on earlier trials in places such as Manitoba and Uganda, YC will give as many as a thousand people in Oakland an annual sum, probably between twelve thousand and twenty-four thousand dollars.

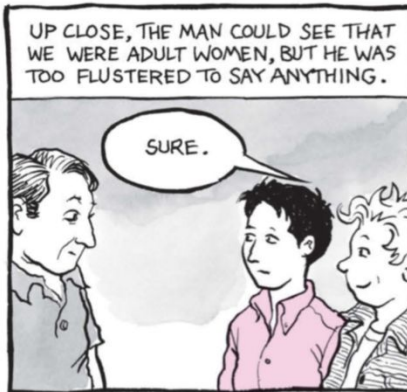
The problems with the idea seem as basic as the promise: Why should people who don’t need a stipend get one, too? Won’t free money encourage indolence? And the math is staggering: if you gave each American twenty-four thousand dollars, the annual tab would run to nearly eight trillion dollars—more than double the federal tax revenue. However, Altman told me, “The thing most people get wrong is that if labor costs go to zero”—because smart robots have eaten all the jobs—“the cost of a great life comes way down. If we get fusion to work and electricity is free, then transportation is substantially cheaper, and the cost of electricity flows through to water and food. People pay a lot for a great education now, but you can become expert level on most things by looking at your phone. So, if an American family of four now requires seventy thousand dollars to be happy, which is the number you most often hear, then in ten to twenty years it could be an order of magnitude cheaper, with an error factor of 2x. Excluding the cost of housing, thirty-five hundred to fourteen thousand dollars could be all a family needs to enjoy a really good life.”

In the best case, tech will be so transformative that Altman won’t have to choose between the few and the many. When A.I. reshapes the economy, he told me, “we’re going to have unlimited wealth and a huge amount of job displacement, so basic income really makes sense. Plus, the stipend will free up that one person in a million who can create the next Apple.”

AT AN ALL-HANDS meeting for YC’s partners and team near the end of the winter batch, Paul Buchheit, the partner running the batch, discussed a survey of its founders. There had been complaints about the food (not enough nightshade-free options) and the coffee (instant). The main

The Fellowship

BY ALISON BECHDEL



criticism, Buchheit said, was that, with a hundred and twenty-seven companies in the batch, “YC feels too big. I think a lot of us feel that way, too. Founders aren’t schoolchildren or farm animals that we herd around. They’re the next Mark Zuckerbergs, they’re peers, and it’s critical to our success that they love us.” He concluded, “I have a goal of the next batch being a hundred companies.”

Afterward, Altman told me that it was a mistake to focus entirely on founders. “When I took over,” he said, “we measured our companies’ happiness with YC, but that was the wrong metric. To make sure we’re getting and keeping the best investors, we now also measure partner happiness”—currently 4.38 out of five—“versus whether a company that wasn’t going to make it was unhappy with our love.” Venture capitalists believe that their returns follow a “power law,” by which ninety per cent of their profits come from one or two companies. This means that they secretly hope the other startups in their portfolio fail fast, rather than staggering onward as resource-consuming “zombies.” Altman pointed out that only a fifth of YC companies have failed, and said, “We should be taking crazier risks, so that our failure rate would be as high as ninety per cent. And, if you’re optimizing for returns, you’d like to have your best company in each batch raise *all* the money.” He acknowledged that “that would be demoralizing to all the other companies, and you don’t build a helpful network that way. On the other hand, a network of just three or four huge YC companies would be pretty helpful.”

Concerns about the accelerator scaling too much and too fast remain widespread. Drew Houston, the co-founder of Dropbox, told me that the supply of talented founders isn’t infinite: “At some point, company No. 10,001, you’re just admitting people you would have rejected before.” Marc Andreessen, whose venture firm invests fifteen per cent of its funds in YC companies, said, “The composite view here is that YC is getting better at picking as they grow—and that, because they have an increasingly powerful magnet, they’re getting a more routinely qualified set of founders.” But he

added, “The debate is: are they stretching the network to its breaking point? It’s the genius and the madness all rolled into one.” In huge success, the Valley’s guiding principles conflict: scale precludes uniform excellence and a tight-knit network.

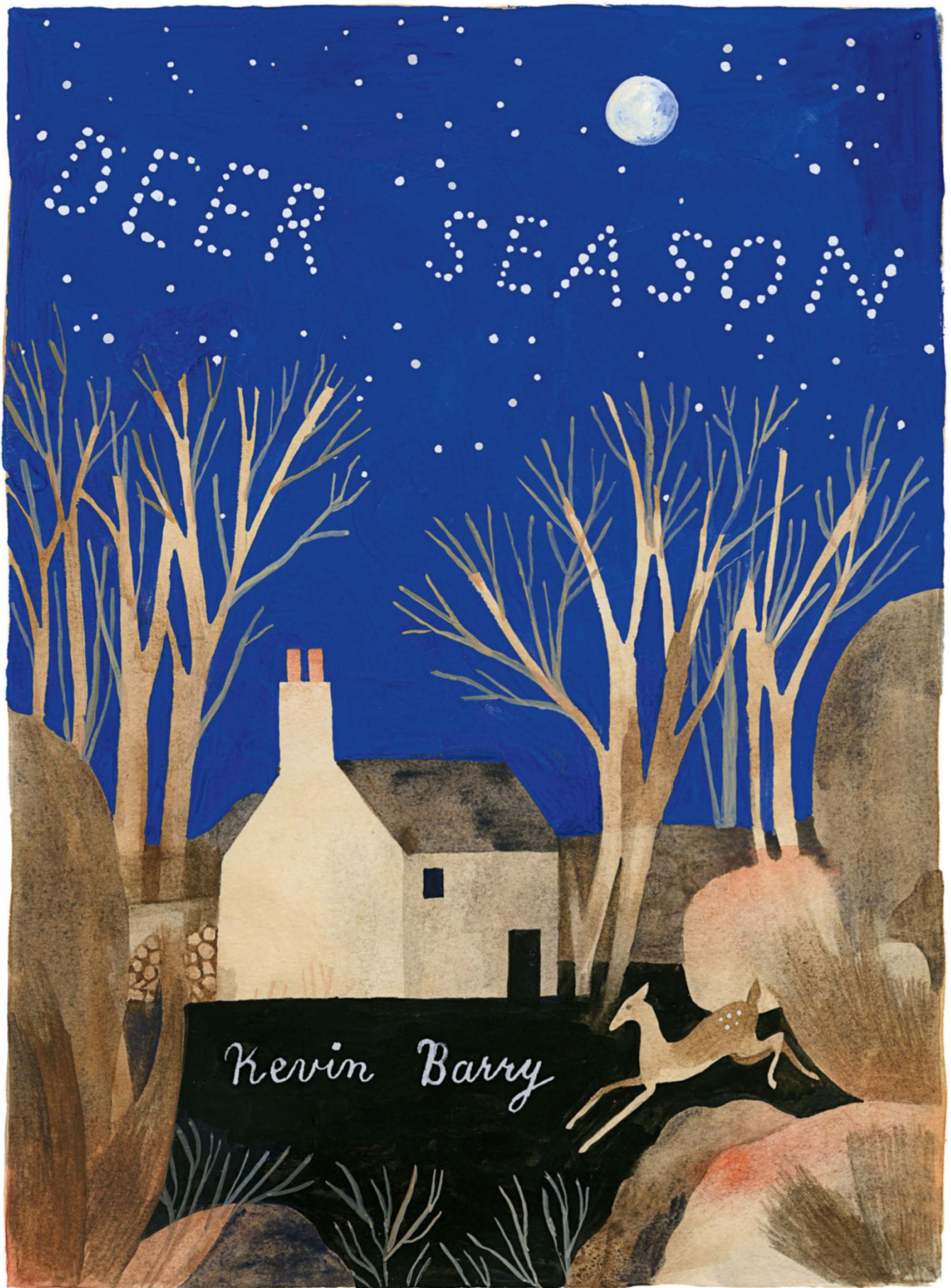
Altman acknowledged the strain on the YC network, with hundreds of nascent companies all wanting the ear of, say, Patrick Collison at Stripe. Noting that Stripe just designated a contact for YC-related inquiries, he said he hoped that YC’s other anchor companies will follow suit. They’d better hurry. Starting this winter, YC Fellowship is becoming Startup School, a free, online, ten-week course for as many companies as want to take part. They won’t get funded, but they can learn the same lessons as batch companies do. Altman, who will personally oversee this initiative, believes it is the fastest, easiest way to bring ten thousand new founders a year into the network. He said, “If we create more scale for the world and 10x the number of great startups, even though we don’t have any ownership in them, it will benefit YC in some way I can’t exactly predict now.” Meanwhile, the summer batch, with Fellowship companies included, numbered a hundred and seventy—larger than the winter batch. And this winter YC will expand from one night a week of programming to two, permitting further rapid growth. Altman plans to launch YC China next year, and has contemplated YC India. He said, “Someday, YC will be hundreds of times larger than when I took over.” Much could go wrong, he noted, but, really, “I don’t see how anyone can stop us.”

Altman’s regime has left some people at YC nostalgic for the homey camaraderie of the early days. One YC stalwart told me, “Sam’s a little too focussed on glory—he puts his personal brand way out front. Under P.G., we had a family feel, and now it’s all institutional and aloof. Sam’s always managing up, but as the leader of the organization he needs to manage down.” When I asked Altman about this critique, he said, “I absolutely could do a better job at managing the organization—it was my chief weakness at Loopt, and I still have

some learned helplessness about it. I don’t want to do weekly one-on-ones and let’s-talk-about-your-career-paths. But I think it’s O.K. to have a little mess at the organizational level if we’re making the big decisions right, since those are the ones that bring us all our returns.” More generally, he observed, “The missing circuit in my brain, the circuit that would make me care what people think about me, is a real gift. Most people want to be accepted, so they won’t take risks that could make them look crazy—which actually makes them wildly miscalculate risk.”

Recently, YC began planning a pilot project to test the feasibility of building its own experimental city. It would lie somewhere in America, or perhaps abroad, and would be optimized for technological solutions: it might, for instance, permit only self-driving cars. “It could be a college town built out of YC, the university of the future,” Altman said. “A hundred thousand acres, fifty to a hundred thousand residents. We crowdfund the infrastructure and establish a new and affordable way of living around concepts like ‘No one can ever make money off of real estate.’” He emphasized that it was just an *idea*—but he was already looking at potential sites.

You could imagine this metropolis as an exemplary post-human city-state, run on A.I.—a twenty-first-century Athens—or as a gated community for the elite, a fortress against the coming chaos. For Altman, the best way to discover which future was in store was to make it. One of the first things he did at OpenAI was to paint a quotation from Admiral Hyman Rickover on its conference-room wall. “The great end of life is not knowledge, but action,” Rickover said. “I believe it is the duty of each of us to act as if the fate of the world depended on him. . . . We must live for the future, not for our own comfort or success.” Altman recounted all the obstacles Rickover overcame to build America’s nuclear-armed Navy. “Incredible!” he said. But, after a considering pause, he added, “At the end of his life, when he may have been somewhat senile, he did also say that it should all be sunk to the bottom of the ocean. There’s something worth thinking about in there.” ♦



S HE SAW HIM often in the morning and often again around dusk as he walked out by the river. She called him the riverman. She had seen him only in the distance and had not properly distinguished his features. She was almost eighteen and determined to have a fuck before it, but she lived remotely and the summer was almost over. He was tall and thin and did not have a pronouncedly masculine walk—he could not be taken for a farmer. His step was carefully picked out and it had a hesitancy to it—it brought to her mind the heron. She needed to get closer to him quickly.

The morning was bright, with a breeze that moved the light's sharp points on the lanes, and the hedges were opulent with berries and the high grasses raced in the late-summer fields. She set out for the banks of the river along the lit points of the lanes. She had taken a book for cover, after a long think about which book exactly to take. She pulled her cardigan tight against the morning chill that marked the season's changing. Even before the river's sour waft was in her nose, she had decided on the tree that she would sit beneath. She arranged the picture in her mind. She felt that she could see what was coming and that she could make events turn to her design. She felt a quick thrum of new sexual power. She fretted that the cardigan—a gray—might seem a little nunly, but if nunly, she reasoned, perhaps an intriguing counterpoint to the somewhat lurid cover of the Bolaño novel, which showed a Mexican death's head. Often her thoughts went in these contrary directions at once. He might not be a reader at all. He might be curt and indifferent to her, but this was not what she made out from the hesitant, loping step. She would bet the farm on manners.

The country was beautiful now that August was almost over. The heavier growth was done with and the tall grasses that moved in the breeze had faded to a whitish gold, and the reed banks were a still paler gold, and the yellow flags of June had withered on

the long stems but moved in their flayed tatters yet—she endured rather than enjoyed all this. She had declared herself a Romantic, and bare winter was her idyll. There was a chill from the river and fingers of mist crept from it and a dampness rose into her from the shaded ground she sat on beneath the tree.

She opened the book and set it on her thighs and tried to read about strangled prostitutes in the desert, but the words swam madly. She was very nervous. He showed soon enough around the bend of the river and she drew him toward her along the line. She saw now as he came closer that he was in fact much older than her, maybe in his thirties, and she knew that he registered her.

"I'm ready," she said, under her breath, and he stopped in his tracks and waved; he came still closer.

She saw at near range that he was good-looking enough, with a long and sharp-featured face that was pinched with kindness, and scruffy hair with some gray in its wires, and his eyelashes closed slowly now and opened again, a long exposure to inspect her.

"Hello," he said.

"Hi."

Their words were incongruous on the air. The moment of the riverbank here was seldom touched by human voices, but now it held clearly the riverman's and the girl's, and they both smiled at the fact of their intrusion on this place. There was only, as it got up again, the breeze among the grasses to distract them from each other, and they both looked out and across the moving grasses, as though casually, as though on the off chance of news. He turned back to her again with the knit bones of his smile. The smile was like something he had trapped, she thought.

"I think I've seen you before," he said.

This was a revelation, and it needed to be answered inside the beat of a second. If he had seen her loitering in the fields, he might have seen the way that she watched him, too, and read her intention, and de-

spite all that she had drilled into herself about not appearing eager she fixed her hair now with her fingertips, and even before the strand of hair was settled behind her ear she cursed silently the obviousness of the gesture. He got down on his haunches, laid a hand to his long, skinny knee, and smiled at her; she set the book to one side.

"I live over that way," she said.

"Ah, yeah," he said, and he twisted his face to read the name on the book's cover.

"Roberto . . ."

"Bolaño," she said.

"Any good?"

"He's dead."

"Oh. That's gloomy."

"No, it isn't. I mean . . . the book isn't."

She had worried that the book might be a terrible idea, but here it was, doing its work, opening a pathway to conversation. She didn't have any great desire for the man, but she liked his voice, and he wasn't fat—he definitely didn't sound as if he came from around here; he was English, but country English. He wanted the talk to continue—she could see that well enough.

"I had to burn half my books last year," he said. "I had a very bad chest cold and I couldn't get out and all my fuel was gone."

Now she recognized the hesitancy of his walk for what it was, for poverty. He had the hunted look of rural poverty. His clothes were not good—army surplus, with ugly stout boots, but his limbs were long and lean and she was inclined to keep the conversation going; in just a week she would be eighteen.

"So cold you had to burn books?"

"Remember the cold snap, January? It was evil around here."

"I'd have been away," she said. "School."

"School still?"

"For another year," she said, and let a slyness assert. "Where do you go in the mornings?"

"I go up the Forestry," he said. "Though I shouldn't tell."

"Why not?"

"I've been taking some wood down. I'm leaving it to dry out. September,

HER BIRTHDAY AS ASHES IN SEAWATER

By now, my mother has been pulled to the top
of many small waves, carried in the curve that curls
over, onto itself, and unknots,
again, into the liquid plain,
as her ions had been gathered from appearances
and concepts. And her dividend,
her irreducible, like violet
down, thrown to the seals, starfish,
wolf spiders on the edge-of-Pacific
floor, I like to follow her
from matter into matter, my little quester,
as if she went to sea in a pea-green
boat. Every separate bit,
every crystal shard, seems to
be here—her nature unknowable, dense,
dispersed, her atomization a miracle,
the earth without her a miracle
as if I had arrived on my own
with nothing to owe, nothing to grieve,
nothing to fear, it would happen with me
as it would, not one molecule
lost or sent to the Principal
or held in a dried-orange-pomander strongbox

stuck with the iron-matron maces
of the cloves. My mother is a native of this place,
she is made of the rosy plates of the shell
of one who in the silt of a trench plays
music on its own arm, draws
chords, and then the single note—
rosin, jade, blood, catgut,
siren-gut, hair, hair,
hair—I miss her, I lack my mother, such
peace there is on earth now every
tooth of her head is safe, ground down
to filaments of rock-crab fractals
and claw facets, the whole color wheel
burst and released. Oh Mom. Come sit
with me at this stone table at the bottom
of the Bay, here is a barnacle of
egg custard, here is your tiny
spoon with your initials, sup with me
at dawn on your first day—we are all
the dead, I am not apart from you,
for long, except for breath, except for everything.

—Sharon Olds

I'll start lugging it back to my place.
You know they say it warms you
three times, wood. When you cut it
down, when you carry it, when you
burn it."

"You're thinking ahead."

"That's right."

"And you're stealing from the
Forestry."

"They've plenty."

"What if you were caught?"

"You'd need to be pretty stupid to
be caught. It's vast, the Forestry. It
goes right from here? Right from here
and over the Ox Mountains."

"What's your name?"

"I'm Edward."

"I think you're a strange fish, Eddie."

"A cold fish was what I was, last
winter. And I'm definitely not an
Eddie. What's your name?"

THE NEXT DAY they met not quite
by arrangement but by under-
standing. This time he sat beside her
under the tree. She was very tense,
though she pretended not to be as
she sat with her legs kicked out in
front of her; she was without the pre-
tense of a book this time. Their bod-

ies were tight and agitated in this
proximity, but each face was half
turned for its glance to lock on the
other's. Sentimental grasses wavered
in a lighter breeze. Autumn was mov-
ing in with stealth—early in the morn-
ing there had been stags' roars beyond
the trees. He asked about her life, and
she sighed impatiently and ticked off
the father and the farm, the dead
mother, the older brother, William,
who was away to be a doctor, the
significant fact of her return soon to
boarding school, and she was aware
that every word signified the extent
of the gap between them, in this coun-
try, at this time, and the gap would,
of course, feed into his fantasies about
her, which she was sure were already
hot, fetid and possessing, and now
the four days until the train went back
through the Midlands to her school
seemed like all the time in the world
to make this happen. She decided
that she found him attractive enough
for the job at hand. She touched him
for the first time, just the pads of her
fingertips to his skinny biceps—like
a dog's muscle, it twitched madly—
and he rose, half terrified, his neck a

rush of crimson, and made off down
the river. She would need to be gen-
tle with him.

"Enjoy the timbering," she called,
and she may have accentuated the
switching of her hips as she moved off
and away from the river herself, across
the pale-gold fields; he would crane for
as long as he could to follow her walk,
she was sure of that, until she had dis-
appeared from view, and he would be
away to masturbate immediately in the
woods then—she was sure of that, too.
It was as easy as making a ladybird walk
up the stem of a leaf.

That night brought a warm heavy
rain that told the last heat of the
year was on the way, and Thursday
came up to the promised heat. She
wore a skirt and applied some color
to her lips. Her father watched her as
if it were a painted fox that crossed
his yard. The morning was swampish
and there was a rotten-vegetable stink
from the ditches and the berries
were dull jewels on the hedges—she
wanted it to happen quickly and then
to be done with the whole unfathom-
able business. Her lips moved, she
made words on the air as she walked,

saying lowly, and determinedly, "I will make . . . of this riverbank . . . a fuckery."

And a bead of desperation formed in the indent above the center of her lips. She was in a condition, all the same, of vaulting readiness. The bones of her feet beat down the path to the river and there, already, the riverman was waiting. He had a face on him like a washed dog. He was quieter, shyer, and even more awkward this hot morning, knowing as well himself that the moment had arrived, even before she turned to him, midway through a ridiculous halting conversation about dragonflies peculiar to the vicinity, and kissed him so hard and viciously she might have drawn blood. They rose then from beneath the tree and went away into the reeds like animals of the place.

She lay down on the ground and he lay down on top of her and kissed her and moved against her for a short while and then went further and there was hardly any of the supposed pain and really to the girl it just seemed badly designed, fiddly, a contrivance, a make-do job (as her father might say),

and he rolled off her just in time and rose onto his knees and came on the ground. A little boy's remorse filled up his eyes.

"Is that about the size of it?" she said.

"Yeah," he said.

There was nowhere left for them to go but into their own breathing flesh again, now that they were so quickly separated.

HE DIDN'T SHOW UP by the river the following day or the next, and so on the evening before her departure she set out to find his house. She knocked on his door and let the raps play out a jaunty, half-comical rhythm.

"Oh sweet Jesus fuck," he said when he opened the door, and sharply he hustled her inside.

The house was a small bungalow—it was clean and tidy and reeked of animal want. He kept his back turned to her as he filled the kettle and set it to boil. Misery was essayed everywhere, in the lentils soaking on the draining board, in the way that he tried to scour a tea mug with his index finger under the running tap—she saw his glum and



"I was reading the anti-texting billboard."



THE NEW YORKER FESTIVAL

OCTOBER 7/8/9

PRESENTING SPONSOR

WORLD
MASTERCARD®



Tickets are still available to these great events and more. Visit our Web site to see the full program, and to buy tickets.



Photograph: Nick Kroll, Albert Sanchez; Paul Feig, Larry Horricks.

SUN., OCT. 9, 11:30 A.M. — DIRECTORS
GUILD THEATRE
NICK KROLL TALKS WITH
ANDREW MARANTZ



SUN., OCT. 9, 2:00 P.M. — MASTERCARD
STAGE AT SVA THEATRE 2
PAUL FEIG TALKS WITH
TAD FRIEND

NEWYORKER.COM/FESTIVAL

f t @newyorkerlive #TNYfest

Back to School

Retirement Living where you can walk to Oberlin College – audit classes, with no homework, no tests and no tuition.

KENDAL
at Oberlin

Together, transforming the experience of aging*

1-800-548-9469

kao.kendal.org/Oberlin-connection

Women's Wide Shoes



Sizes 5-13
2E-6E wide

Hitchcock wide shoe closer for women

800-992-WIDE

wideshoes.com

Hitchcock Shoes • Hingham, MA 02043 • dept. 69T6
Men's wide shoes, too!



THE CASHMERE WATCHCAP

4 layers of 6ply cashmere at your ears.
Warm and Soft like nothing else.

SCARVES, HATS, SOCKS, MITTENS, ETC.

HAND-BUILT

26 COLORS, USA.

575.776.8287

109 East Palace Ave, Santa Fe, NM

www.golightlycashmere.com



"But I don't want to be one of those women who bore you about their spiders."

mortified face in the dulling window; the evening was already fading outside, late August leaning into September.

"It's the sort of thing that could get me in a lot of trouble around here," he said.

"Who'll know?" she said.

He sucked his teeth and rolled a cigarette with the long, slightly crooked fingers that were the most elegant thing about him and lit the cigarette and puffed out the smoke nervously.

"You are seventeen?" he said.

"Not for long," she said.

"I don't need a friend," he said.

"And I no more want tea than the fucken wall," she said.

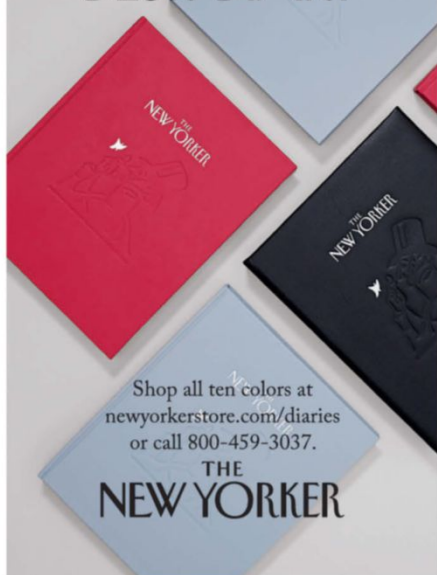
When they had finished, this second and final time, and while he dozed or pretended to in the bedroom, she went through the narrow hallway and into the kitchen again; she examined his lair. There was a library book about foraging. There was the disheartening musk of adult maleness. There was a book about the bogs. There was "The Sorrows of Young Werther"—she had known well enough what she was doing. There was something military about the neatness. She stood in the doorway and envisioned his many possible lives

and looked out to the blue night falling. Across the fields, she could hear the river moving. The river talked to itself of all that it had seen. She stood there for some time, until the blue had thickened to near-blackness, and she entered a spell of heavy dreaming or quietude such as can open out sometimes in youth if the person is to be an artist, and now the stars came through, and when she heard his wordless shuffling behind her to break the spell she walked away through the yard and did not once look back.

HALF A TERM passed in the ritual frenzies of gossip and competition. She embellished gladly as she confided her late-summer adventure. She told her friends that he had looked a bit like a skinnier Rufus Wainwright and was nearly as camp. Her father made his usual Sunday-night phone calls and was full of his usual quiet news, mostly about deer and his son—Oh, Willie was home the weekend, we went out; Willie got a buck, I got nothin'—but then the third week of October her father did not make his call. It was the first time ever that he

ADVERTISEMENT

2017 DESK DIARY



Shop all ten colors at
newyorkerstore.com/diaries
or call 800-459-3037.

THE
NEW YORKER

had missed the call, and she knew at once why—he had got word of her adventure. She knew on the train home for midterm break that the great scene awaited but, still, to hear her father use the words he did was astonishing.

“What would your dead mother say if she knew I’d raised up a slut?”

“Where the fuck am I supposed to go with a question like that?”

“And the tongue on it!”

The quasi-Biblical phrasing that had lurched in—raised up? In what demented reach of his person had he been storing this language? The late-October day was peeled and cool; the light was miserly by six, the last remnants clawed in weak scratches across the sky. She stood with her back to the piano. The room was dense with gloom. The important news was that he was gone.

“He was ran out of it,” her father said.

“He was ran where?”

“He was ran!”

“Who ran him?”

Her father reddened dangerously and made to cross the floor but caught himself and turned his back to her. He spoke to the wall.

“Did you protect yourself?”

“Ah, here,” she said.

“Did you not think it through?”

“I did not.”

“Did you protect yourself?”

“Nothing happened, Da.”

“You were seen!”

“By fucken who! Are they hangin’ out of the fucken trees?”

He turned and again made to cross the floor to her, but, once more, he caught himself.

“Where’d he go to, Da?”

“How’d I know that? Jesus Christ, girl! I mean any young fella at all your own age and I’d nearly understand it. The half-wit eejit of the Creminses even. But this aul’ English hoor? You know he’s astray in the head, you do? You know he’s been in and out of the hospital? Ten months in that place below and he paid rent twice.”

“How was he ran, Da?”

“We were respectable people! At one time. Around here. You know that, don’t you?”

“Was he hurt, Daddy?”

The lurch of fright in her voice was a sickening thing and she fled the room in disgust at it. The fright betrayed a weight

of feeling that was a surprise to her. She had carried it without knowing. Though she knew well enough that it was the idea of him rather than the fact—the idea of a long, thin, sombre man, in a soak of noble depression, smelling of lentils, in a damp pebble-dash bungalow, amid a scrabble of the whitethorn trees, a man ragged in the province of Connaught and alone at all seasons, perhaps already betrothed to a glamorous early death, and under some especially mischievous arrayment of the stars he was all that a girl could ask for.

THERE WOULD HAVE been no gothic scene. There would have been no baying mob. There would have been a rapping on the door one evening of the autumn, and quiet words spoken, and their intent understood at once. He would have packed his few things in a holdall and the next morning taken the bus from Ballymote.

He would cross the country and the sea again. He would settle in a city of the north and try to find work and fail, and try to find a hostel and fail, and seek again the needle’s tip and solace. On the needle’s tip he would nod and dream of the Forestry land rising up to the Ox Mountains and the slight girl with dyed black hair on the riverbank there one morning.

SHE CROSSED THE fields again as the October dark fell. She walked now beneath a cloak of widowly despair. She had arranged the picture for this scene, too. She came on his bungalow in full darkness. It had not been let again, and the door was unlocked. All had been packed away and swept neatly. His bedroom was bare, the kitchen so bare. She sat on the kitchen floor long into the night. Outside, late on, something thrashed through the whitethorn and the sally trees. She knew it was a deer, and a young one by the measure of fright in its movement. But the night folded again into the quiet of its soft enclosure. It was moonless and the great dark pressed in. She reached out for him in the dark. When she at last rose to go she was stiff from the cold and felt many years older as she left the house and made for home through the night and dark and the pads of her feet beat out the new soft rhythm of her power. ♦

NEWYORKER.COM

Kevin Barry on the certainty of young artists.

Face your addiction from a place of strength.

McLean Signature Recovery Programs

Fernside, Princeton, MA
Borden Cottage, Camden, ME **NEW**

800.906.9531 | signaturerecovery.org



McLean HOSPITAL
HARVARD MEDICAL SCHOOL AFFILIATE

More Comfort. Deep Relaxation. Better Sleep.



CHARLES P. ROGERS
BED MAKERS - EST. 1855

Top rated Estate mattress now available direct from our factory showroom or online. FREE SHIPPING to most U.S. addresses. charlesprogers.com



RETIRE TO FEARRINGTON

A charming country village near Chapel Hill, NC with bluebirds, belted cows and fascinating people of all ages.

www.fearrington.com

sullivan + associates
ARCHITECTS



martha's vineyard

THE NEW YORKER FESTIVAL

OCTOBER 7/8/9

PRESENTING SPONSOR
WORLD MASTERCARD

LIMITED-EDITION NEW YORKER T-SHIRTS

20% off your purchase when using a Mastercard®. Use code **THENEWYORKER**

SHOP NOW AT MODTHREAD.COM



NEWYORKER.COM/FESTIVAL

THE CRITICS



A CRITIC AT LARGE

HE'S BACK

Karl Marx, yesterday and today.

BY LOUIS MENAND

ON OR ABOUT February 24, 1848, a twenty-three-page pamphlet was published in London. Modern industry, it proclaimed, had revolutionized the world. It surpassed, in its accomplishments, all the great civilizations of the past—the Egyptian pyramids, the Roman aqueducts, the Gothic cathedrals. Its innovations—the railroad, the steamship, the telegraph—had unleashed fantastic productive forces. In the name of free trade, it had knocked down national boundaries, lowered prices, made the planet interdependent and cosmopolitan. Goods and ideas now circulated everywhere.

Just as important, it swept away all the old hierarchies and mystifications. People no longer believed that ancestry or religion determined their status in life. Everyone was the same as everyone else. For the first time in history, men and women could see, without illusions, where they stood in their relations with others.

The new modes of production, communication, and distribution had also created enormous wealth. But there was a problem. The wealth was not equally distributed. Ten per cent of the population possessed virtually all of the property; the other ninety per cent owned nothing. As cities and towns industrialized, as wealth became more concentrated, and as the rich got richer, the middle class began sinking to the level of the working class.

Soon, in fact, there would be just two types of people in the world: the people who owned property and the people who sold their labor to them. As ideologies disappeared which had once made inequality appear natural

and ordained, it was inevitable that workers everywhere would see the system for what it was, and would rise up and overthrow it. The writer who made this prediction was, of course, Karl Marx, and the pamphlet was “The Communist Manifesto.” He is not wrong yet.

Considering his rather glaring relevance to contemporary politics, it's striking that two important recent books about Marx are committed to returning him to his own century. “Marx was not our contemporary,” Jonathan Sperber insists, in “Karl Marx: A Nineteenth-Century Life” (Liveright), which came out in 2013; he is “more a figure of the past than a prophet of the present.” And Gareth Stedman Jones explains that the aim of his new book, “Karl Marx: Greatness and Illusion” (Harvard), is “to put Marx back in his nineteenth-century surroundings.”

The mission is worthy. Historicizing—correcting for the tendency to presentize the past—is what scholars do. Sperber, who teaches at the University of Missouri, and Stedman Jones, who teaches at Queen Mary University of London and co-directs the Centre for History and Economics at the University of Cambridge, both bring exceptional learning to the business of rooting Marx in the intellectual and political life of nineteenth-century Europe.

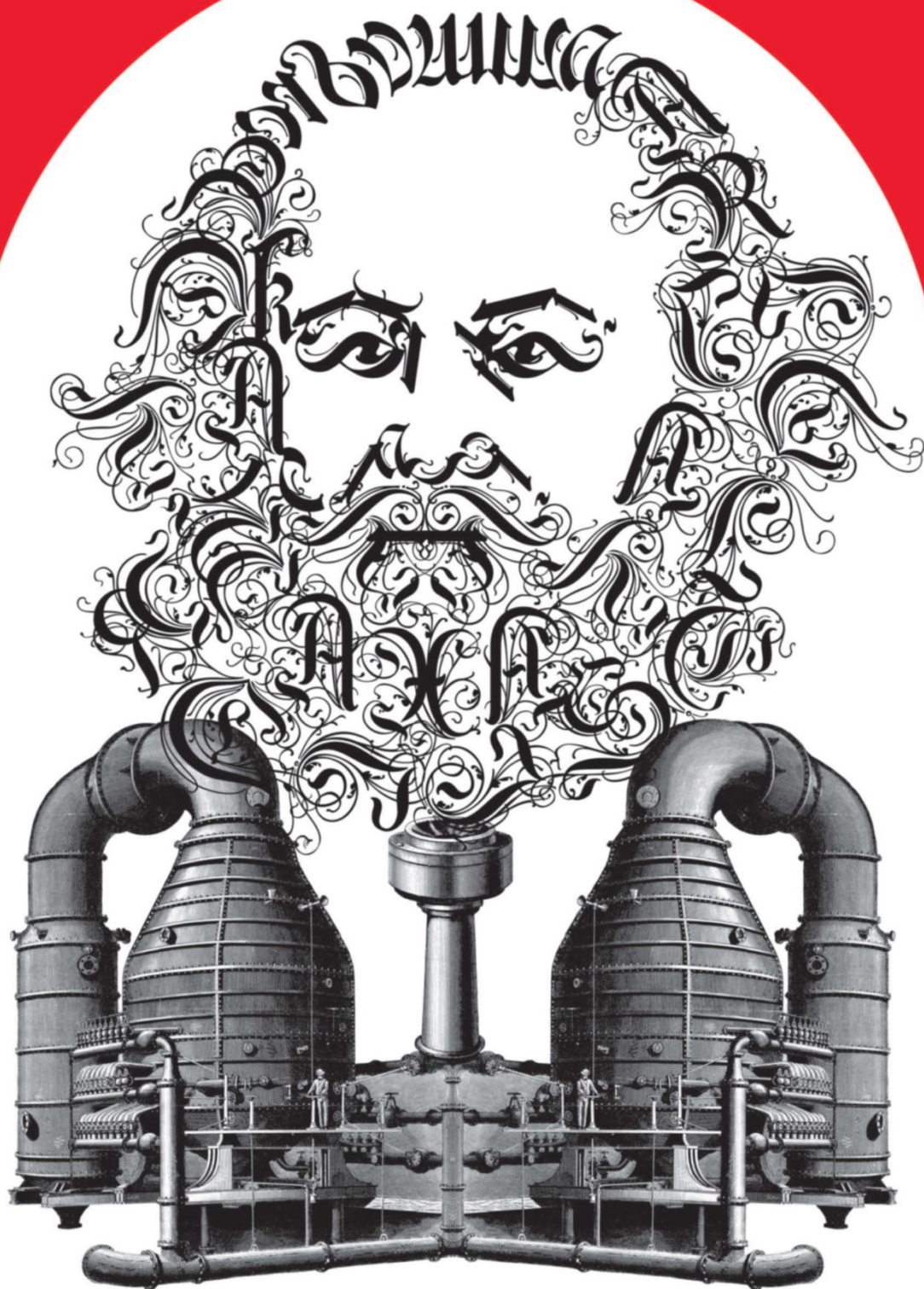
Marx was one of the great infighters of all time, and a lot of his writing was topical and ad hominem—no-holds-barred disputes with thinkers now obscure and intricate interpretations of events largely forgotten. Sperber and Stedman Jones both show that if you

read Marx in that context, as a man engaged in endless internecine political and philosophical warfare, then the import of some familiar passages in his writings can shrink a little. The stakes seem more parochial. In the end, their Marx isn't radically different from the received Marx, but he is more Victorian. Interestingly, given the similarity of their approaches, there is not much overlap.

Still, Marx was also what Michel Foucault called the founder of a discourse. An enormous body of thought is named after him. “I am not a Marxist,” Marx is said to have said, and it's appropriate to distinguish what he intended from the uses other people made of his writings. But a lot of the significance of the work lies in its downstream effects. However he managed it, and despite the fact that, as Sperber and Stedman Jones demonstrate, he can look, on some level, like just one more nineteenth-century system-builder who was convinced he knew how it was all going to turn out, Marx produced works that retained their intellectual firepower over time. Even today, “The Communist Manifesto” is like a bomb about to go off in your hands.

And, unlike many nineteenth-century critics of industrial capitalism—and there were a lot of them—Marx was a true revolutionary. All of his work was written in the service of the revolution that he predicted in “The Communist Manifesto” and that he was certain would come to pass. After his death, communist revolutions did come to pass—not exactly where or how he imagined they would but, nevertheless, in his name. By the middle

ABOVE: LUCI GUTIÉRREZ



How useful is Karl Marx—who died a hundred and thirty-three years ago—for understanding our world?

ILLUSTRATION BY ROBERTO DE VICQ DE CUMPTICH

THE NEW YORKER, OCTOBER 10, 2016

91

of the twentieth century, more than a third of the people in the world were living under regimes that called themselves, and genuinely believed themselves to be, Marxist.

This matters because one of Marx's key principles was that theory must always be united with practice. That's the point of the famous eleventh thesis on Feuerbach: "Philosophers have hitherto only *interpreted* the world in various ways; the point is to *change* it." Marx was not saying that philosophy is irrelevant; he was saying that philosophical problems arise out of real-life conditions, and they can be solved only by changing those conditions—by remaking the world. And Marx's ideas were used to remake the world, or a big portion of it. Although no one would hold him responsible, in a juridical sense, for the outcome, on Marx's own principle the outcome tells us something about the ideas.

In short, you can put Marx back into the nineteenth century, but you can't keep him there. He wasted a ridiculous amount of his time feuding with rivals and putting out sectarian brush fires, and he did not even come close to completing the work he intended as his magnum opus, "Capital." But, for better or for worse, it just is not the case that his thought is obsolete. He saw that modern free-market economies, left to their own devices, produce gross inequalities, and he transformed a mode

of analysis that goes all the way back to Socrates—turning concepts that we think we understand and take for granted inside out—into a resource for grasping the social and economic conditions of our own lives.

A PART FROM HIS loyal and lifelong collaborator, Friedrich Engels, almost no one would have guessed, in 1883, the year Marx died, at the age of sixty-four, how influential he would become. Eleven people showed up for the funeral. For most of his career, Marx was a star in a tiny constellation of radical exiles and failed revolutionaries (and the censors and police spies who monitored them) but almost unknown outside it. The books he is famous for today were not exactly best-sellers. "The Communist Manifesto" vanished almost as soon as it was published and remained largely out of print for twenty-four years; "Capital" was widely ignored when the first volume came out, in 1867. After four years, it had sold a thousand copies, and it was not translated into English until 1886.

The second and third volumes of "Capital" were published after Marx died, stitched together by Engels from hundreds of pages of scrawled-over drafts. (Marx had spectacularly bad handwriting; Engels was one of the few people outside the family who could decipher it.) The "Theses on Feuerbach," which Marx wrote in 1845,

were not discovered until 1888, when Engels published them, and some of the texts most important for twentieth-century Marxists—the cobbled-together volume known as "The German Ideology," the so-called Paris manuscripts of 1844, and the book entitled the "Grundrisse" by its Soviet editors—were unknown until after 1920. The unfinished Paris manuscripts, a holy text in the nineteen-sixties, did not appear in English until 1959. Marx seems to have regarded none of that material as publishable.

In Marx's own lifetime, the work that finally brought him attention outside his circle was a thirty-five-page item called "The Civil War in France," published in 1871, in which he hailed the short-lived and violently suppressed Paris Commune as "the glorious harbinger of a new"—that is, communist—"society." It's not a text that is cited much today.

One reason for Marx's relative obscurity is that only toward the end of his life did movements to improve conditions for workers begin making gains in Europe and the United States. To the extent that those movements were reformist rather than revolutionary, they were not Marxist (although Marx did, in later years, speculate about the possibility of a peaceful transition to communism). With the growth of the labor movement came excitement about socialist thought and, with that, an interest in Marx.

Still, as Alan Ryan writes in his characteristically lucid and concise introduction to Marx's political thought, "Karl Marx: Revolutionary and Utopian" (Liveright), if Vladimir Lenin had not arrived in Petrograd in 1917 and taken charge of the Russian Revolution, Marx would probably be known today as "a not very important nineteenth-century philosopher, sociologist, economist, and political theorist." The Russian Revolution made the world take Marx's criticism of capitalism seriously. After 1917, communism was no longer a utopian fantasy.

MARX IS A warning about what can happen when people defy their parents and get a Ph.D. Marx's father, a lawyer in the small city of Trier, in western Germany, had tried to steer



"Don't make me send in the bad cat."

him into the law, but Marx chose philosophy. He studied at the Friedrich-Wilhelms-Universität, where Hegel once taught, and he became involved with a group of intellectuals known as the Young Hegelians. Hegel was cautious about criticizing religion and the Prussian state; the Young Hegelians were not, and, just as Marx was being awarded his degree, in 1841, there was an official crackdown. Marx's mentor was fired, and the Young Hegelians became academic pariahs. So Marx did what many unemployed Ph.D.s do: he went into journalism.

Apart from a few small book advances, journalism was Marx's only source of earned income. (There is a story, though Sperber considers it unsubstantiated, that once, in desperation, he applied for a job as a railway clerk and was turned down for bad handwriting.) In the eighteen-forties, Marx edited and contributed to political newspapers in Europe; from 1852 to 1862, he wrote a column for the New York *Daily Tribune*, the paper with the largest circulation in the world at the time.

When journalistic work dried up, he struggled. He depended frequently on support from Engels and advances on his inheritance. He was sometimes desperate for food; at one point, he couldn't leave the house because he had pawned his only coat. The claim that the author of "Capital" was financially inept, and that he and his wife wasted what little money came their way on middle-class amenities like music and drawing lessons for the children, became a standard "irony" in Marx biographies. Sperber contests this. Marx had less money to waste than historians have assumed, and he accepted poverty as the price of his politics. He would gladly have lived in a slum himself, but he didn't want his family to suffer. Three of the Marxes' children died young and a fourth was stillborn; poverty and substandard living conditions may have been factors.

Marx's journalism made him into a serial exile. He wrote and published articles offensive to the authorities, and, in 1843, he was kicked out of Cologne, where he was helping run a paper called *Rheinische Zeitung*. He went to Paris, which had a large German commu-

nity, and that is where he and Engels became friends. An earlier encounter in Cologne had not gone well, but they met again at the Café de la Régence, in 1844, and ended up spending ten days together talking.

Engels, who was two years younger, had the same politics as Marx. Soon after they met, he wrote his classic study "The Condition of the Working Class in England," which ends by predicting a communist revolution. Engels's father was a German industrialist in the textile business, an owner of factories in Barmen and Bremen and in Manchester, England, and although he disapproved of his son's politics and the company he kept, he gave him a position at the Manchester factory. Engels hated the work, but he was good at it, as he was at most things. He went fox hunting with the gentry he despised, and made fun of Marx's attempts to ride a horse. Engels eventually became a partner, and the income helped him keep Marx alive.

In 1845, Marx was expelled from France. He moved to Brussels. Three years later, though, something happened that almost no one had foreseen: revolutions broke out across Europe, including in France, Italy, Germany, and the Austrian Empire. Marx wrote "The Communist Manifesto" just as those uprisings were getting under way. When unrest reached Brussels, he was suspected of arming insurgents and was evicted from Belgium, but he returned to Paris. Rioters there had broken into the Tuileries and set the French throne on fire.

By the year's end, most of the revolutions had been crushed by monarchist forces. Many people who were or would become important figures in European art and literature—Wagner, Dostoyevsky, Baudelaire, Turgenev, Berlioz, Delacroix, Liszt, George Sand—had been caught up in the revolutionary excitement, and the outcome led to a crisis of faith in politics (the subject of Flaubert's novel "Sentimental Education"). The failure of the 1848 revolutions is what Marx's line "the first time as tragedy, the second time as farce" refers to. (He got the

phrase from Engels.) The "tragedy" was the fate of the French Revolution under Napoleon; the "farce" was the election of Napoleon's nephew, Louis-Napoleon Bonaparte, whom Marx considered a nonentity, to the Presidency of France, in December, 1848. Bonaparte eventually declared himself Emperor and ruled until 1870, when France lost a war with Prussia. The Paris Commune was a by-product of that war.

So in 1849 Marx was forced into exile once again. He fled with his family to London. He assumed that the stay would be temporary, but he lived there for the rest of his life. That is where, day after day in the Reading Room of the British Museum, he did the research for "Capital," and it is where, in Highgate Cemetery, he is buried. The impressive bronze bust you see on his tombstone today was placed there, in 1956, by the Communist Party of Great Britain.

WHAT WAS MARX like? The number of first-person reports is not large, but they tend to agree. He was, in some respects, a caricature of the German academic (which he had once expected to become): an imperious know-it-all with untamed hair in a misbuttoned frock coat. He once described himself to one of his children as "a machine condemned to devour books and then throw them, in a changed form, on the dunghill of history." He wrote all night in clouds of tobacco smoke, books and papers piled around him. "They are my slaves," he said, "and they must serve me as I please."

In professional matters, he was forbidding. He was a cogent speaker but had a lisp and was a poor orator; he knew it, and rarely addressed a crowd. He was ruthless in print, made enemies of many friends and former allies, and did not suffer fools—a large subset of his acquaintance, in his view. One German exile referred to him as "an intellectual customs agent and border guard, appointed on his own authority."

Still, he commanded respect. A colleague, recalling Marx at twenty-eight, described him as "a born leader



of the people.” He was actually good at running the show—as an editor and, later on, as the dominant figure in the International Workingmen’s Association, known as the First International. His hair was black; his eyes were black; his complexion was swarthy. Engels called him the “black fellow from Trier”; his wife and children called him the Moor.

In private, he was modest and gracious. When he was not sick—he had a bad liver, suffered from bronchitis, and grew fist-size boils, which Sperber thinks were caused by an autoimmune disorder but which may have been a symptom of his liver disease—he was playful and affectionate. He loved Shakespeare, made up stories for his three daughters, and enjoyed cheap cigars and red wine. His wife and daughters adored him. A Prussian government spy who visited Marx at his home in 1852 was surprised to find him “the gentlest and mildest of men.”

He became engaged to Jenny von Westphalen, also from Trier, when he was eighteen and she was twenty-two. Sperber thinks that a fairy tale has grown up about the marriage, but Jenny is said to have been exceptionally beautiful, and she was devoted to Karl. He wrote passionate love poetry for her. The engagement lasted seven years, during which he finished his studies, and they rarely saw each other. The relationship was mainly epistolary. (Sperber believes that they had premarital sex. I certainly hope so.) In her letters, Jenny calls Karl her “little wild boar.”

The one possible flaw in the domestic idyll has to do with a child born to their servant, Helene Demuth. She was a “gift” to the Marxes from Jenny’s mother and lived with the family. (Almost all women in nineteenth-century Britain who could manage to retain a servant did so. Even Miss Bates, in Jane Austen’s “Emma,” who lives on the charity of her well-off neighbors, has a servant.) Helene’s child, named Frederick and called Freddy, was born in 1851 and was brought up by foster parents. Marx’s daughters didn’t meet him until after Marx’s death.

Engels claimed paternity. This was not implausible. Engels was unmarried and had a taste for working-class women; his longtime lover, Mary Burns,

worked in a Manchester factory. On his deathbed, though, forty-four years later, he is supposed to have named Marx as Freddy’s real father, information that became known in Communist circles but was not made public until 1962. Sperber and Stedman Jones accept the story, as does the author of the standard English-language biography, David McLellan, although one of Engels’s biographers, Terrell Carver, thinks that the evidence is not conclusive. Demuth remained with the family; after Marx’s death, she went to work for Engels. And the Marxes’ marriage survived.

IT IS SYMPATHY for Marx that leads Sperber and Stedman Jones to insist that we read him in his nineteenth-century context, because they hope to distance him from the interpretation of his work made after his death by people like Karl Kautsky, who was his chief German-language exponent; Georgi Plekhanov, his chief Russian exponent; and, most influentially, Engels. It was thanks mainly to those writers that people started to refer to Marxism as “scientific socialism,” a phrase that sums up what was most frightening about twentieth-century Communism: the idea that human beings can be reengineered in accordance with a theory that presents itself as a law of history. The word the twentieth century coined for that was totalitarianism.

So, by 1939, when the British philosopher Isaiah Berlin published his widely read and not wholly unadmiring study “Karl Marx: His Life and Environment” (still in print), he could describe Marx as “among the great authoritarian founders of new faiths, ruthless subverters and innovators who interpret the world in terms of a single, clear, passionately held principle, denouncing and destroying all that conflicts with it. His faith . . . was of that boundless, absolute kind which puts an end to all questions and dissolves all difficulties.” This became the Cold War Marx.

It’s true that Marx was highly doctrinaire, something that did not wear well with his compatriots in the nineteenth century, and that certainly does not wear well today, after the experi-

ence of the regimes conceived in his name. It therefore sounds perverse to say that Marx’s philosophy was dedicated to human freedom. But it was. Marx was an Enlightenment thinker: he wanted a world that is rational and transparent, and in which human beings have been liberated from the control of external forces.

This was the essence of Marx’s Hegelianism. Hegel argued that history was the progress of humanity toward true freedom, by which he meant self-mastery and self-understanding, seeing the world without illusions—illusions that we ourselves have created. The Young Hegelians’ controversial example of this was the Christian God. (This is what Feuerbach wrote about.) We created God, and then pretended that God created us. We hypostatized our own concept and turned it into something “out there” whose commandments (which we made up) we struggle to understand and obey. We are supplicants to our own fiction.

Concepts like God are not errors. History is rational: we make the world the way we do for a reason. We invented God because God solved certain problems for us. But, once a concept begins impeding our progress toward self-mastery, it must be criticized and transcended, left behind. Otherwise, like the members of the Islamic State today, we become the tools of our Tool.

What makes it hard to discard the tools we have objectified is the persistence of the ideologies that justify them, and which make what is only a human invention seem like “the way things are.” Undoing ideologies is the task of philosophy. Marx was a philosopher. The subtitle of “Capital” is “Critique of Political Economy.” The uncompleted book was intended to be a criticism of the economic concepts that make social relations in a free-market economy seem natural and inevitable, in the same way that concepts like the great chain of being and the divine right of kings once made the social relations of feudalism seem natural and inevitable.

The reason that “Capital” looks more like a work of economics than like a work of philosophy—the reason that it is filled with tables and charts rather

than with syllogisms—is the reason given in the eleventh thesis on Feuerbach: the purpose of philosophy is to understand conditions in order to change them. Marx liked to say that when he read Hegel he found philosophy standing on its head, so he turned it over and placed it on its feet. Life is doing, not thinking. It is not enough to be the masters of our armchairs.

Marx thought that industrial capitalism, too, was created for a good reason: to increase economic output—something that “The Communist Manifesto” celebrates. The cost, however, is a system in which one class of human beings, the property owners (in Marxian terms, the bourgeoisie), exploits another class, the workers (the proletariat).

Capitalists don’t do this because they are greedy or cruel (though one could describe their behavior that way, as Marx almost invariably did). They do it because competition demands it. That’s how the system operates. Industrial capitalism is a Frankenstein’s monster that threatens its own creators, a system that we constructed for our own purposes and is now controlling us.

Marx was a humanist. He believed that we are beings who transform the world around us in order to produce objects for the benefit of all. That is our essence as a species. A system that transforms this activity into “labor” that is bought and used to aggrandize others is an obstacle to the full realization of our humanity. Capitalism is fated to self-destruct, just as all previous economic systems have self-destructed. The working-class revolution will lead to the final stage of history: communism, which, Marx wrote, “is the solution to the riddle of history and knows itself as this solution.”

Marx was fanatically committed to finding empirical corroboration for his theory. That’s what it meant to put philosophy on its feet. And that’s why he spent all those hours alone in the British Museum, studying reports on factory conditions, data on industrial production, statistics about international trade. It was a heroic attempt to show that reality aligned with theory. No wonder he couldn’t finish his book.

Marx had very little to say about how the business of life would be con-



*“Whenever I have a big decision to make,
I ask myself, ‘What would Dad do?’”*

ducted in a communist society, and this turned out to be a serious problem for regimes trying to put communism into practice. He had reasons for being vague. He thought that our concepts, values, and beliefs all arise out of the conditions of our own time, which means that it’s hard to know what lies on the other side of historical change. In theory, after the revolution, everything will be “up for grabs”—which has been the great dream of leftist radicalism ever since.

Marx was clearer about what a communist society would not have. There would be no class system, no private property, no individual rights (which Marx thought boil down to protecting the right of the owners of property to hang on to it), and no state (which he called “a committee for managing the common affairs of the whole bourgeoisie”). The state, in the form of the Party, proved to be one bourgeois concept that twentieth-century Communist regimes found impossible to transcend.

Communism is not a religion; it truly is, as anti-Communists used say about it, godless. But the Party functions in the way that Feuerbach said God functions in Christianity, as a mysterious and implacable external power.

Marx did not, however, provide much guidance for how a society would operate without property or classes or a state. A good example of the problem is his criticism of the division of labor. In the first chapter of “The Wealth of Nations,” in 1776, Adam Smith identified the division of labor—that is, specialization—as the key to economic growth. Smith’s case study was the manufacture of pins. Rather than have a single worker make one pin at a time, Smith argued, a pin factory can split the job into eighteen separate operations, starting with drawing out the wire and ending with the packaging, and increase production by a factor of thousands.

To us, this seems an obviously efficient way to organize work, from

automobile assembly lines to “knowledge production” in universities. But Marx considered the division of labor one of the evils of modern life. (So did Hegel.) It makes workers cogs in a machine and deprives them of any connection with the product of their labor. “Man’s own deed becomes an alien power opposed to him, which enslaves him instead of being controlled by him,” as Marx put it. In a communist society, he wrote, “nobody has one exclusive sphere of activity but each can become accomplished in any branch he wishes.” It will be possible “to hunt in the morning, fish in the afternoon, rear cattle in the evening, criticize after dinner...without ever becoming hunter, fisherman, herdsman, or critic.”

This often quoted passage sounds fanciful, but it is at the heart of Marx’s thought. Human beings are naturally creative and sociable. A system that treats them as mechanical monads is inhumane. But the question is, How would a society without a division of labor produce sufficient goods to survive? Nobody will want to rear the cattle (or clean the barn); everyone will want to be the critic. (Believe me.) As Marx conceded, capitalism, for all its evils, had created abundance. He seems to have imagined that,

somehow, all the features of the capitalist mode of production could be thrown aside and abundance would magically persist.

IN 1980, THE philosopher Peter Singer published a short book on Marx in which he listed some of Marx’s predictions: the income gap between workers and owners would increase, independent producers would be forced down into the ranks of the proletariat, wages would remain at subsistence levels, the rate of profit would fall, capitalism would collapse, and there would be revolutions in the advanced countries. Singer thought that most of these predictions were “so plainly mistaken” that it was difficult to understand how anyone sympathetic to Marx could defend them. In 2016, it is harder to be dismissive.

“Economists today would do well to take inspiration from his example,” Thomas Piketty says about Marx, in the best-seller he published in 2013, “Capital in the Twenty-first Century.” The book did for many twenty-first-century readers what Marx hoped “Capital” might do for nineteenth-century ones. It uses data to show us the real nature of social relations and, by doing that, forces us to rethink concepts that

have come to seem natural and inevitable. One of these is the concept of the market, which is often imagined as a self-optimizing mechanism it is a mistake to interfere with, but which in fact, left to itself, continually increases inequality. Another concept, closely related, is meritocracy, which is often imagined as a guarantor of social mobility but which, Piketty argues, serves mainly to make economic winners feel virtuous.

Piketty says that for thirty years after 1945 a high rate of growth in the advanced economies was accompanied by a rise in incomes that benefitted all classes. Severe wealth inequality came to seem a thing of the past (which is why, in 1980, people could quite reasonably call Marx’s predictions mistaken). It now appears that those thirty years were an anomaly. The Depression and the two world wars had effectively wiped out the owners of wealth, but the thirty years after 1945 rebooted the economic order.

“The very high level of private wealth that has been attained since the nineteen-eighties and nineteen-nineties in the wealthy countries of Europe and in Japan,” Piketty says, “directly reflects the Marxian logic.” Marx was correct that there is nothing naturally egalitarian about modern economies left to themselves. As Piketty puts it, “There is no natural, spontaneous process to prevent destabilizing, inegalitarian forces from prevailing permanently.”

The tendency of the system to increase inequality was certainly true in Marx’s own century. By 1900, the richest one per cent of the population in Britain and France owned more than fifty per cent of those nations’ wealth; the top ten per cent owned ninety per cent. We are approaching those levels again today. In the United States, according to the Federal Reserve, the top ten per cent of the population owns seventy-two per cent of the wealth, and the bottom fifty per cent has two per cent. About ten per cent of the national income goes to the top two hundred and forty-seven thousand adults (one-thousandth of the adult population).

This is not a problem restricted to the rich nations. Global wealth is also unequally distributed, and by the same ratios or worse. Piketty does not



KUPER

predict a worldwide working-class revolution; he does remark that this level of inequality is “unsustainable.” He can foresee a time when most of the planet is owned by billionaires.

Marx was also not wrong about the tendency of workers’ wages to stagnate as income for the owners of capital rises. For the first sixty years of the nineteenth century—the period during which he began writing “Capital”—workers’ wages in Britain and France were stuck at close to subsistence levels. It can be difficult now to appreciate the degree of immiseration in the nineteenth-century industrial economy. In one period in 1862, the average work-week in a Manchester factory was eighty-four hours.

It appears that wage stagnation is back. After 1945, wages rose as national incomes rose, but the income of the lowest earners peaked in 1969, when the minimum hourly wage in the United States was \$1.60. That is the equivalent of \$10.49 today, when the national minimum wage is \$7.25. And, as wages for service-sector jobs decline in earning power, the hours in the work-week increase, because people are forced to take more than one job.

THE RHETORIC of our time, the time of Bernie Sanders and Donald Trump, Brexit, and popular unrest in Europe, appears to have a Marxist cast. Sanders’s proposals to reduce inequality are straight out of Piketty: tax wealth and give more people access to knowledge. Trump, since he admires authoritarian personalities, might be pleased to know that Marx supported free trade on a “the worse things get” theory: by driving wages lower, free trade increases the impoverishment of the working class and leads more quickly to the revolution. In the terms used everywhere today, on the left, on the right, and in the press: the system is “rigged” to reward “the élites.” Marx called them “the ruling class.”

How useful is Marx for understanding this bubble of ferment in the advanced economies? I think we don’t yet know very well the precise demographic profile of Brexit voters and Trump and Sanders supporters—whether they are people who have been materially damaged by free trade and

immigration or people who are hostile to the status quo for other reasons. That they are basically all the former may turn out to be a consoling belief of the better-off, who can more easily understand why people who have suffered economic damage would be angry than why people who have nothing to complain about financially might simply want to blow the whole thing up.

Still, in the political confusion, we may feel that we are seeing something that has not been seen in countries like Britain and the United States since before 1945: people debating what Marx would call the real nature of social relations. The political earth is being somewhat scorched. And, as politics continues to shed its traditional restraints, ugly as it is to watch, we may get a clearer understanding of what those relations are.

They may not be entirely economic. A main theme of Stedman Jones’s book is that Marx and Engels, in their obsession with class, ignored the power of other forms of identity. One of these is nationalism. For Marx and Engels, the working-class movement was international. But today we seem to be seeing, among the voters for Brexit, for example, a reversion to nationalism and, in the United States, what looks like a surge of nativism.

Stedman Jones also argues that Marx and Engels failed to appreciate the extent to which the goal of working-class agitation in nineteenth-century Britain was not ownership of the means of production but political inclusion, being allowed to vote. When that was achieved, unrest subsided.

Voting is no longer the test of inclusion. What is happening in the rich democracies may be not so much a war between the haves and the have-nots as a war between the socially advantaged and the left-out. No one who lives in poverty would not trade that life for a better one, but what most people probably want is the life they have. They fear losing that more than they wish for a different life, although they probably also want their children to be able to lead a different life if they choose.



Of the features of modern society that exacerbate that fear and threaten that hope, the distribution of wealth may not be the most important. Money matters to people, but status matters more, and precisely because status is something you cannot buy. Status is related to identity as much as it is to income. It is also, unfortunately, a zero-sum game. The struggles over status are socially divisive, and they can resemble class warfare.

Ryan, in his book on Marx, makes an observation that Marx himself might have made. “The modern republic,” he says, “attempts to impose political equality on an economic inequality it has no way of alleviating.”

This is a relatively recent problem, because the rise of modern capitalism coincided with the rise of modern democracies, making wealth inequality inconsistent with political equality. But the unequal distribution of social resources is not new. One of the most striking points Piketty makes is that, as he puts it, “in all known societies in all times, the least wealthy half of the population has owned virtually nothing,” and the top ten per cent has owned “most of what there is to own.”

This is probably not true of tribal societies, and it does not seem to have been true of the earliest known democratic state, Periclean Athens (at least, for the citizens). But inequality has been with us for a long time. Industrial capitalism didn’t reverse it in the nineteenth century, and finance capitalism is not reversing it in the twenty-first. The only thing that can reverse it is political action aimed at changing systems that seem to many people to be simply the way things have to be. We invented our social arrangements; we can alter them when they are working against us. There are no gods out there to strike us dead if we do. ♦

Social Notes from All Over

From the West Lebanon (N.H.) Valley News.

Adrian wore a strapless gown featuring a beaded bodice and tulle skirt with a cathedral-length veil.

She also wore her Army-issue Wick-Away underwear under her dress.

MALE GAZE

David Szalay's "All That Man Is."

BY JAMES WOOD



FOR MANY CONTEMPORARY writers of fiction, The Novel looms balefully, a rigid school from which we should all be desperate to play hooky. That impulse is not especially new. For at least a century, in recurrent spasms of correction, The Novel has been blamed for ossified convention: the codified palaver of plot, character, dialogue, conflict, development, epiphany, closure; the deluded transparency of realism. This need to blow up convention, widely shared among serious writers, has resulted in brilliant and energetic work that would be hard to categorize as postmodern or post-postmodern—work by Teju Cole, Lydia Davis, Geoff Dyer, Sheila Heti, Karl Ove Knausgaard, Ben Lerner, and Jenny Offill, among others. Our age appears to have a strong

reality hunger (to borrow from David Shields's anti-novel rant), and a certain kind of traditional fiction-making seems to be not hungry enough—fattened on convention, a little lazy with success.

The latest novelist to give voice to what he has called a “disaffection with the novel form” is the British writer David Szalay, who was born in 1974, to a Hungarian father and a Canadian mother, and whose fourth novel, “All That Man Is” (Graywolf), has been shortlisted for the Man Booker Prize. In a *Paris Review* interview, Szalay said, “I sat down to think about writing a new book and just didn’t see the point of it. What’s a novel? You make up a story and then you tell that story. I didn’t understand why or how that would be meaningful.”

“All That Man Is” takes the novel form and shakes out of it a few essential seeds. It tells not one long story but nine shortish tales, each about a different man. These stories are not without plot, but they don’t have much in the way of conventional fictional shaping; each seizes on a moment of crisis in a man’s life and quickly dramatizes it. The entire book is narrated in an urgent, poking present tense, and the pithed characters, of different ages, are presented without complex histories—indeed, without much history at all. There are a few light links between the chapters, but these connections are not especially persuasive or meaningful. Szalay says that each chapter, released into community with its fellows, is not expected to carry “its own solitary burden of meaning.” The stories are “points on an arc rather than being arcs themselves.” The effect is something like emergency writing for our times: intense, direct, daring, and also somewhat limited and repetitive. The men’s slightly different crises are united in being crises.

Something else unites these men: they are all Europeans (if Europe is extended to include Russia), and all are moving within Europe from one country to another. Their lives have an itinerant fluidity, made possible by Europe’s borderlessness. We encounter both great diversity and insistent similarity, because most of them are struggling with similar erotic and financial dilemmas. There is Bernard, a young, aimless, appetitive Frenchman on a “shockingly inexpensive” package tour to Cyprus, who ends up having sex, at his grim hotel, with an obese mother and her daughter. There is Balázs, a Hungarian personal trainer, who travels to London with a client and that client’s sexy girlfriend, Emma; Balázs has been hired as the muscle for a high-end but extremely bleak prostitution scheme that will make nightly use of Emma’s services. Balázs messes up his job in London, loses his salary, and spends most of his time hopelessly lusting after Emma. Karel, a Belgian academic based at Oxford, is driving a luxury S.U.V. from the U.K. to Poland, to deliver it to his girlfriend’s father, a Polish policeman. En route, his girlfriend informs him that she is pregnant, to which the breathtakingly selfish Karel responds, calamitously, “That’s shit.” Kristian, an ambitious and heartless Danish tabloid journalist, is sent

to Spain to track down the Danish defense minister in his holiday home; the newspaper is about to expose the politician's affair with a married woman, yet not so long ago Kristian himself had an adulterous fling with his female boss at the paper. James, a married English real-estate agent, is at work in the French Alps, trying to sell a new chalet development while chatting up his young colleague, Paulette. Murray, a hapless and erotically frustrated middle-aged Scotsman now living in semi-retirement in Croatia (what he pretentiously calls "the Croatian Riviera"), has a number of disastrous encounters with local women.

Despite Szalay's wariness about conventional fiction-making, he has an admirable fearlessness for swiftly entering invented fictional worlds—French real estate, escort services in London, a Danish newspaper, a Russian oligarch's super-yacht. (In previous novels, he has inhabited the closed worlds of horse racing and tele-sales.) Szalay practices a kind of startup mimesis: in canny, broad strokes, full of intelligently managed detail, each story funds its new fictional enterprise, as if he were calling out, each time, "Where do you want to go? Poland? Copenhagen? Málaga? Berlin? I can do them all. Let's go."

His book is also bracingly unsentimental about male desire and male failure. Because he writes mostly from inside his characters' heads, in jagged bursts of free indirect style, he can present his reduced and impaired men without judgment or commentary; like Michel Houellebecq, he seems both repelled by and drawn to a brutal erotic prosaicism. As in Houellebecq's universe, the reader must get used to dismaying quantities of male piggishness, in which men say things to each other like "Why don't you fuck her?" or happily talk about the existence or otherwise of Gwyneth Paltrow's "tits." Balázs thinks, of Emma, "All the men who work at the gym want to fuck her." Of Bernard, the very unappealing young man who is vacationing in Cyprus, we are told, "He tries a wank, but he is too drunk." And, as in Houellebecq's Europe, sexual liberality seems tied to economic freedom—eros as capitalism's loyal mimic. Karel, the academic who is driving the S.U.V. to Poland, has worked out a *modus vivendi* with his Polish girlfriend: they meet for trysts

every few weeks, in different European hotels. In a reflection characteristic of Szalay's men, Karel is "unable to imagine anything more perfect."

SZALAY SEEMS TO have found at least three ways of working out his disaffection with the novel form. The first comes through what we might call the Knausgaard route. It's not that Szalay writes about himself but that, like Knausgaard in "My Struggle," he wants to burst through conventional notation and saturate his work in a comprehensive artlessness. For Knausgaard, the banality of the content—eating cornflakes with sour milk, for instance—is matched by a deliberate banality of expression: "Oh, yuck." Genre fiction, especially children's literature, abounds in this sort of effusion, but adults are supposed to keep it out of "proper" writing. If anything, Szalay is even less embarrassed than Knausgaard by exclamatory artlessness. He has a tic, omnipresent in "All That Man Is," of indenting new sentences in new lines, as if he were writing kids' poetry. Here James, the English real-estate agent, sits on his hotel bed, having decided not to sleep with his young French colleague:

And now he is in his own room, sitting on the bed.

He pulls off his socks.

He is tired, that's true.

Still.

Might've been nice.

There is a melancholy sense, as he takes off his socks, of opportunity lost.

Initially, these diving sentences maddened me, until, now fully insane, I stopped noticing them. Penelope Fitzgerald once joked that indented dialogue was a great way of filling up the pages; Szalay has gone one better. Yet this kind of risky ingenuousness is what makes his novel (again, like Knausgaard's work) so intensely readable. He manages to slow down the rhythm of his noticing while simultaneously speeding it up. Reality is very sticky in both writers: brand names, objects, humdrum details of all kinds adhere to the text. If a character in the book stops his car to get gas, we are told that he buys "V-Power Nitro+." In the last story, an old man takes two pages to shop for food:

He turns his attention to the apples.

He selects, with inquisitively squeezing fingers, an avocado.

One lemon.

In the novel's first story, two seventeen-year-old English boys are travelling through Berlin and Prague. Ferdinand is worldly and sexually experienced; Simon is literary and virginal. In Prague, the two go to hear Mozart's Mass in C Minor in the city's cathedral. The following page has only two words printed on it, surrounded by blaring white space:

The music.

It's hard to decide whether this is the most brilliant or the most ridiculous literary trick that has ever been performed around the fraught, often pretentious task of rendering musical sublimity in words.

I mean this, I think, as a compliment. Early in the story, we are told that Simon is reading a dog-eared copy of "The Ambassadors." His eyes find a famous passage, in which one character tells another, "Live all you can; it's a mistake not to." Next to these words, Simon writes "MAIN THEME." It's an amusing, even affecting moment—we were all Simon at some point in our lives—but it's also how Szalay's novel itself functions. In effect, Szalay is unembarrassed to write in his own margins, whenever he needs to, "MAIN THEME." Simon has his life ahead of him, is full of desire to live and full of fear about living all he can. It's the MAIN THEME, both of his academic reading and of Szalay's opening story.

This kind of instant didacticism pervades "All That Man Is." Each of its characters is caught on the horns of his particular "life situation," and Szalay efficiently points us toward the dilemma at stake. James, the Englishman, feels that his life is slipping away from him. He looks at himself in the shaving mirror and thinks, "Life is not a fucking joke," a lament that is repeated throughout the story. Szalay's rapid, unabashed thematic framing allows him to exercise his own metaphysical sincerity, a connection to earnest feeling that is often touching. "I am not young. . . . When did that happen?" the middle-aged James says.

In one of the best stories, a Russian oligarch named Aleksandr, who has lost hundreds of millions of pounds, and whose wife is leaving him, flies from London to his yacht, moored off the Greek coast, where he intends to commit suicide by hurling himself into the sea. He doesn't do it, but his failure forces him

to reflect on the emptiness of his life:

The feeling that his nerve has failed fills him with despair.
And now what?
If he is to live, what now?

Aleksandr tells one of his friends, "I'm sixty-five years old, and I don't know what to do anymore. . . . I feel like everything is finished for me." In the book's final tale, Tony, a seventy-three-year-old retired British civil servant, is consumed by thoughts of mortality: "He thinks about death quite a lot now. It is hard not to think about it. Obviously, he doesn't have that much time left. Ten years? In ten years he will be eighty-three." There is, throughout this book, an almost nineteenth-century simplicity and seriousness, Russian in its directness, a steady circling around the theme of "If he is to live, what now?"

THE SECOND ELEMENT in Szalay's flight from a certain kind of conventional storytelling comes from film. His stories begin, like movies, in the middle of things, with slick setups and brisk establishing shots. "All That Man Is" starts with the one-line location slug "Berlin-Hauptbahnhof." Characters are lightly, but also terminally, blocked in, as they are in movie scripts: "He is short, blonde, with a moustache—Asterix, basically." As the Russian oligarch moves through the London streets in his luxury Maybach, we get: "Sloane Street, its familiar shops—Hermès, Ermenegildo Zegna. Cheyne Walk." In the same story, when Lars, Aleksandr's lawyer, takes off his sunglasses, he

is peremptorily dispatched. We'd been given a brisk inventory of his apparel; now we're informed, "The understated tan sharpens the blue of his eyes. He is in his mid-forties: he looks younger." And that's it for Lars. We get no more physical description—just dialogue. Lars is up and running. This kind of prose perhaps represents the point at which the streamlined thriller meets the very unthrillerish saturation of a Knausgaard. Thrillers love to notate and record only surfaces; they gorge on named things, turning realism into the expertise of signification. If Szalay gives us a car, he will always tell us whether it's an Audi or a VW or a Maybach or a Mercedes. Here is a table in Prague, glimpsed by young Simon:

a carton of milk—*mléko*—of very simple design
his Philip Morrises, the health warning in German
her Petras, in a paper packet with a red sash
a Cricket lighter

While reading "All That Man Is," alternately admiring and frustrated, I suddenly realized that a third aesthetic informs Szalay's flight from The Novel: the pop song. The artless repetitions, the indented lines, the earnest question marks, the lack of subterfuge or extraneous commentary, the ingenuous vitality—all this makes use, I suspect, of the atmosphere of contemporary songwriting. Here is Simon, in the first story, mooning over his stalled life, while the Berlin S-Bahn takes him along the tracks:

*What am I doing here?
What am I doing here?*

The train whacks over points.

What am I

The train slows
doing here?

The men in these stories, as if writing lyrics in their heads, express themselves in passionate stutters:

So little space. In the thick of life now. Too near to see it.

The sun on his eyelids.

Cowbells fading in and out on the wind.

Warmth of the sun.

Wind on his skin.

To withdraw, somehow, to just this.

Hopeless.

It's not a joke. Life is not a joke.

Yet, while pop lyrics and film can offer a refreshing escape from conventional literary storytelling, the thriller mode, when returned to prose, merely brings us back to what might be called novelism: conventional shorthand, automatic writing, and exhausted realist codes. "David Jespersen, looking worried, sets his jaw and directs his eyes to the windows," Szalay writes. "He models himself, to some extent, on David Beckham. The sharply tailored jacket. The 1930s haircut. The groomed blonde stubble." There's lots of prose like this in "All That Man Is." At such moments, Szalay is, despite himself, being as conventional as any traditional novelist could possibly be. His book promises a series of distillations of the fictional experience; but his reliance on shorthand risks turning that solution into a commodity. When Knausgaard talks about a VW Beetle, he seems obsessed by its tormenting VW-ness; for Szalay, a VW Passat is just a VW Passat, the detail doing its functional, reflexive duty.

Writing many stories rather than one story, Szalay diffuses what deepens Knausgaard's project: that comprehensive pressure which amounts to a form of phenomenological extremism. Like Szalay, Knausgaard is often artless, prosy, clichéd, embarrassingly banal; like Szalay, he wants to explode the novel form; and like the British author he is interested in many ordinary things. But Knausgaard is systematically curious; the sustained nature of the inquiry makes it a philosophical one. In Knausgaard, artlessness is inseparable from relentlessness, and the relentlessness takes the form of a single-minded inquiry into one person and his world. "My Struggle" may be, like "All That Man Is," in flight from The Novel, but it is

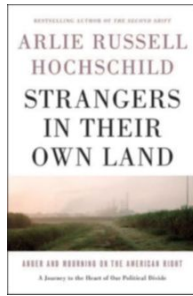


"I'm spending more time promoting myself than I am being myself."

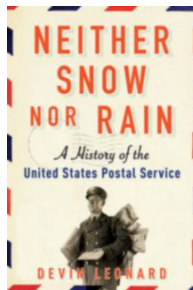
really an enormous bildungsroman. With Szalay, by contrast, the inquiry is over as soon as he has started developing a scene: time to move on and up. The short, repeated flights, while jump-starting the book's enormous vitality, exchange depths for heights; up there, the points on the arc (to use the author's words) glitter brightly but briefly, in a depthless universe, because one can't see the arc that holds them aloft.

And although Szalay's gender apartheid has the virtue of training an intense focus on a certain kind of male appetite, that emphasis can also render his fictional universe monochromatic. Put aside the absence of female leads; it would be a welcome gift if the male ones just achieved joined-up thoughts. Their limitations set limits on the complexity of the book. Only in the last story do we encounter a kind of subtlety that—so beguiling is Szalay's directness—we had not quite realized we lacked. Tony, the retired civil servant, has left England for his country house in Italy. Plagued by physical weakness and by intimations of mortality, he is vulnerable and reflective, prey to surges of fragile feeling: "A minute later, he was alone, in the kitchen, trying not to succumb to an unexpected flood of emotion, with trembling hands spooning coffee into the percolator." In Italy, after getting into a car accident, he is visited by his wife, and by his forty-three-year-old daughter; both scenes are masterly demonstrations of what a good novelist can do with implication and silence. For years now, Tony's marriage to Joanna has been largely empty. Tony is a repressed homosexual; twenty years earlier, his wife told him he was "obviously queer," and never alluded to it again. But he needs to make clear to his daughter—again, without saying anything explicit—that his marriage has not been, entirely, "a sham": "He wants to tell her that. He doesn't know what words to use." It seems significant that this story, the best in the book, is the only one that features women of any complexity, and the only one whose male protagonist isn't straight. The writing draws much of its power, I think, from the space and amplitude offered to Tony's reflections. Finally, thoughts are joined-up thoughts, not indented stutters. After several hundred pages of great brilliance and brutal simplicity, here at last is a deeper picture of all that man is, or all that he might be. ♦

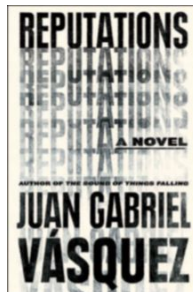
BRIEFLY NOTED



Strangers in Their Own Land, by Arlie Russell Hochschild (New Press). In this study of grassroots opinion on the American right, a sociologist befriends Tea Party and Trump supporters in Louisiana's bayou country, determined to scale the "empathy wall" and understand views opposed to her own. Asking about pollution—Louisiana is a leading hazardous-waste producer—she finds that environmental degradation has caused her interviewees huge suffering, yet they oppose regulation and doubt climate-change science. There are many such paradoxes: hatred of "big government," despite Louisiana's dependence on federal assistance; mockery of identity politics, despite a sense of victimhood rooted in white ethnic pride. Hochschild, although writing for readers unlikely to sympathize with such views, engages her subjects in good faith, seeing them as kind and intelligent.



Neither Snow Nor Rain, by Devin Leonard (Grove). This history of the U.S. Postal Service shows that many of its current problems have precedents. Competition from services like FedEx and UPS was prefigured in the nineteenth century by startups like Wells Fargo, and, long before President Reagan proposed privatizing the service, Thomas Jefferson complained that it was a dangerous overreach of federal power. Still, Leonard is pessimistic about the future of the institution, which, he writes, is "slowly vanishing." The Internet is the most obvious cause, but he also argues that the "junk mail revolution" and, in the eighties and nineties, the spate of workplace shootings by postal employees led to a crucial loss of public esteem.



Reputations, by Juan Gabriel Vásquez, translated from the Spanish by Anne McLean (Riverhead). Tucked into this slim, forceful novel about a famous Colombian political cartoonist is an inquiry into the nature of power and its responsibilities. As the book opens, the cartoonist is receiving a lifetime-achievement award. At the ceremony, he runs into a woman who appears to be a journalist but who is actually his daughter's childhood friend, seeking to understand a scandal that occurred at a party decades earlier. In brisk, probing prose, Vásquez examines the shaky basis of reputations—the way that, as the cartoonist says in his acceptance speech, "life turns us into caricatures of ourselves."



Pond, by Claire-Louise Bennett (Riverhead). The narrator of this arresting debut is a young Englishwoman living alone on the coast of Ireland, who speaks to an unspecified interlocutor as she goes about her daily life. She reveals scraps of her life—a clearing-out turns up drafts of an abandoned dissertation; an old letter recalls a failed relationship—but also admits that she's constantly revising her account. The heart of the book is her absorption in everyday sensations, such as the excitement of taking a bath during a storm: "I moved a web of lather about the roots of my hair and became immersed in the body of the storm." The book's constantly shifting tone—poetic, surreal, philosophical, funny—imparts a compelling sense of tension and intimacy.

GHOST STORY

Nat Turner's rebellion comes to the movies.

BY VINSON CUNNINGHAM

*"The Birth of a Nation" arrives amid a resurgence in movies about slavery.*

IN THE SUMMER of 1831, Nat Turner's slave insurrection ripped through Southampton County, Virginia, leaving scores of white men, women, and children dead. The rebels were captured and tried in Jerusalem, a few miles from where the rebellion was put down. Eighteen were publicly executed for their crimes; more than a hundred other slaves were killed in reprisal. Nat Turner, the last to feel the rope, was hanged on November 11th. His corpse was likely dismembered or sold for dissection. But the county's slaveholding citizens were still afraid. How many of their own slaves were hatching similar plans? Why had Turner carried out so awful an operation? And what could the community do to forestall a reoccurrence?

Amid this atmosphere of panic, a Virginia attorney named Thomas R. Gray published the story of an encounter he had with Turner in the jail in Jerusalem. "I determined for the gratification of public curiosity to commit his statements to writing, and publish them, with little or no variation, from his own words," he wrote. One wonders what was altered or abridged, but Turner's voice—straightforward and calm, stoic and unrepentant—is too strange to have been wholly invented. He starts by relating how one day, at the age of three or four, while playing with other slave children, he had begun to tell a story. Turner's mother, overhearing him, was astonished: the story was true, and it told of a time before Nat's

birth. This precocious act of divination, along with his obvious intelligence and "certain marks" on his head and chest, set Turner apart in the eyes of his fellow-slaves, in the service of "some great purpose." He tells Gray, "Having soon discovered to be great, I must appear so, and therefore studiously avoided mixing in society, and wrapped myself in mystery, devoting my time to fasting and prayer."

That "great purpose" began to reveal itself, Turner says, in whisperings from "the spirit" as he worked at his plow. Gray interjects, "What do you mean by the Spirit?" Turner replies, "The Spirit that spoke to the prophets in former days." Other portents followed: a vision of warring "white spirits and black spirits," then lights written softly across the sky, then drops of blood appearing like dew on the corn in the fields. After receiving a sign in the form of a solar eclipse, Turner assembled a group of trusted disciples and embarked on his fateful tour of the county.

Turner's deadpan account of the killings is alternately thrilling and terrifying. He never discloses the precise nature of his communication with the "Spirit," and betrays no sign of moral struggle or mortal fear. Instead, he casually catalogues routes taken, strategies deployed, weapons used, persons slain. At one home, there was "a little infant sleeping in a cradle, that was forgotten, until we . . . returned and killed it." At another, after Turner's men had stabbed a woman in her sleep, her son awoke, "but it was only to sleep the sleep of death." As the band marched on, slaying household after household, they added new slaves to their ranks and weapons to their cargo. Turner organized the mayhem with a touch of sinister stagecraft: he placed his best-armed men on horses at the head of the company, and sent them galloping raucously toward each house that they encountered. "Twas my object," Turner says, "to carry terror and devastation wherever we went."

Gray—surely amazed and afraid—asks another question: "Do you not find yourself mistaken now?" Turner answers, "Was not Christ crucified?"

NATE PARKER'S FILM "The Birth of a Nation" is the latest retelling of Turner's rebellion. The movie premiered to hosannas at the Sundance Film Festival, in January. Shortly after

the closing credits rolled, Fox Searchlight Pictures bought the film for seventeen and a half million dollars, a festival record. Reports were ecstatic: there were tears and pealing ovations, and a sense that cinematic history was being made. A week before Sundance began, the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences had released an all-white list of acting nominees for the Oscars. This sparked an online campaign, hashtagged #OscarsSoWhite: a fast-growing protest against racial exclusion, both in Hollywood's casting processes and in its award systems. A host of articles and op-eds followed, decrying the state of affairs.

Against this backdrop, Parker's new "Birth" seemed like a tonic. First, there was Parker himself, who, after spending years raising money for the film, produced, wrote, directed, and starred in it. Parker, now thirty-six, had previously been known for roles in high-minded movies such as "The Great Debaters" (2007), about the debate team at Wiley College, a historically black school in Marshall, Texas, and "Red Tails" (2012), about the Tuskegee Airmen. Now he fulfilled the industry's long-standing vision of the single-minded male hero-auteur, and answered the growing demand that black artists be empowered to tell the often neglected stories of their people. "This is a blow against white supremacy and racism in this country and abroad," Parker said of his movie, on a panel at Sundance.

In interviews with entertainment reporters, Parker spoke about the risk of his undertaking. If he sometimes seemed to conflate Turner's solemn destiny with his own, no one was in the mood to judge him too harshly. After the festival, he embarked on a publicity tour, which included a stop at Wiley College, where he endowed a school of film and drama, to be named after him. Parker had been planning "The Birth of a Nation" for years, but in 2016 Nat Turner's story took on a dark, premonitory relevance to the Black Lives Matter movement, and to the rolling, hate-tinged farce of Donald Trump's Presidential campaign. This last dimension was deepened by the grand gesture of the film's title, identical to that of D. W. Griffith's

1915 adaptation of the novel "The Clansman," a paean to the Confederacy and the Ku Klux Klan. By linking Turner's tale to that story, "Birth" promised a rewriting of America's relationship to violence and its beginnings in blood.

It took a deeper knowledge of Parker to halt the movie's rapturous reception. In 1999, a female classmate at Penn State had accused him and a close friend, Jean Celestin—who co-wrote "The Birth of a Nation"—of sexual assault. The young woman further reported that Parker and Celestin had initiated a campaign of harassment against her. Parker was acquitted at trial; Celestin was convicted, but successfully appealed the verdict on the grounds of ineffective counsel, and the district attorney declined to retry the case. Parker had addressed these issues during promotional interviews for his earlier, lower-profile projects, but the allegations resurfaced in the press as the wide release of "Birth" approached, months after his coronation at Sundance. And there was a fact not previously reported: the woman who accused Parker had, years later, after several attempts, taken her own life.

But none of this—neither the early raves nor the condemnation that followed these revelations—told us much about the movie itself.

"THE BIRTH OF A NATION" begins with a campfire in the middle of the woods at night. Light slides across the face of a wise-eyed figure—a shaman, possibly, or a voodoo priest—with paint slathered in curious signs across his body. There are others around the fire, painted in chalky blues and purples, chanting and moaning as a young Nat Turner is prodded into the light. The shaman observes Turner's "marks"—three keloid dots in a line on his sternum—and proclaims, "This boy holds the holy marks of our ancestors. . . . We should listen to him."

The young Nat of "The Birth of a Nation," in contrast to the self-portrait of the "Confessions," is a sociable boy, and close to Samuel Turner, the white son of his elderly master. Samuel's mother, Elizabeth (Penelope Ann Miller), seeing Nat's facility with words, invites him to live in the Turners' house

and learn to recite passages from the Bible. He is treated as a member of the family—a brief dispensation that ends when the master dies suddenly, and it is discovered that, in his will, he has demanded that Nat return to work in the fields. The next shot is beautiful and harrowing, but also familiar: a wide, ascending pan over row after row of cotton, rippling toward the horizon like a calm white sea. Nat is a man now, and Parker plays him with a subdued confidence. He snatches expertly at the cotton as he travels up his row. There are other recognizable snippets of cinematic vocabulary. Outside the stately white plantation house is a huge willow, from which leaves hang like tender green ropes. Slave children kick up dust, not yet initiated into the horrors to come. Although we know that the film will end in blood and rebellion, "Birth" largely deals with day-to-day slave experience.

The formulas of this genre are nearly as old as the movies. They were introduced to audiences at the beginning of the twentieth century, when Harriet Beecher Stowe's novel "Uncle Tom's Cabin" was adapted, over and over, for the screen. After the rise of Black Power, a steady stream of movies on the subject reached theatres in the nineteen-seventies. Toward the end of that decade, the TV miniseries "Roots," based on the book by Alex Haley, held households rapt for eight consecutive weeks, culminating in a finale that remains one of the most-watched programs in television history. This decade has seen another burst of interest: in 2013 alone, there were seven feature films about slavery. Most of them bore the distinct trappings of upper-middlebrow art—they were the sorts of movie that attract critical plaudits and awards.

The most notable of these was Steve McQueen's "Twelve Years a Slave," which won the Oscar for Best Picture. It was adapted, by John Ridley, from a narrative by Solomon Northup, who had been a free man in New York State before he was kidnapped and sold into slavery in Louisiana. McQueen's movie borrowed much from its predecessors: the menacing droop of a willow, a sea of cotton, a whipping post, a tree of scars. It was buoyed, however, by the way McQueen allowed the distinctive

element of his source material—Northup’s free status before and after the years of his captivity—to determine the structure and tone of his work. Pressed in on either side by the open—if ultimately contingent—air of Northern liberation, the familiar images of plantation life speak with a kind of snarl, mocking the idea of an “exceptional” black man in a country still in thrall to the trade in human beings. McQueen arranges his actors in a series of long-held, reluctantly pretty tableaux, as mannered as a landscape of the Hudson River School—as something, in other words, that Northup might have had the cultivation to appreciate. In one scene, Northup is hanged from a massive tree, and is saved only by touching his tiptoes against the ground. The world, as he hangs, is otherwise beautifully normal. People mill about; leaves rustle in the breeze. Northup’s quiet struggle for life is little more than a smudge atop the canvas.

Quentin Tarantino’s “Django Unchained,” from 2012, is, in some ways, a closer companion to “The Birth of a Nation.” Like Parker’s Turner, Tarantino’s protagonist, played by Jamie Foxx, has bloody retribution in mind. But Tarantino drew on the stylizations of the spaghetti Western, and the freedom of fiction, which enabled him to present Foxx’s virile performance as a kind of sly joke. Viewers

could enjoy Django’s blood-soaked expedition through the South without the constraints of history or the coercions of seriousness. The Western also presented an opportunity to recast other stock characters, such as the loyal, crafty house slave, in this case played to magnificent effect by Samuel L. Jackson. There was a willow, but Django stood under its tendrils with the Southern gentleman’s frilled collar, formfitting vest, and buckled shoes. Suddenly, the familiar ruined beauty of the South took on the Technicolor of seventies blaxploitation films—which, in their time, had wrung a kind of comic empowerment out of a raft of negative stereotypes. By daring audiences to cheer or laugh at cruel, historically resonant props like the cat-o’-nine-tails—now turned against the master—Tarantino suggested that the familiar stations of slave cinema might be rearranged to lead to a fresh cross.

“Twelve Years” and, especially, “Django” promised to widen the expressive possibilities of the slave story—to add to the cultural meanings of the country’s gravest crime. Parker, though, works within a much narrower range. If Tarantino reimagined slave clichés along the lines of the spaghetti Western and the blaxploitation film, and McQueen redrew them in the lines of plein-air paint-

ing, Parker’s secondary influence is the contemporary superhero flick. In “The Birth of a Nation,” slavery is the setting for an elongated origin story, in which our hero, destined for greatness but restrained, for a time, by circumstance, emerges as a nearly supernatural force. Turner, as portrayed by Parker, is not a recluse but a warm, encouraging preacher who delivers sermons in the ramshackle church on his plantation. Later, a grownup Samuel (Armie Hammer), who has fallen on hard times, rents Nat out to other plantation owners, who want a pacifying Gospel delivered to their restless slaves. This device—Turner as itinerant sermonizer—allows Parker to take viewers on a circuit of slaveholding Virginia and thereby witness many varieties of visceral horror. On one plantation, the slaves have been starved nearly to death. On another, Nat and Samuel witness a grotesque forced feeding. Turner, over and over, uses his preacherly gift to counsel obedience. Sometimes his voice wavers; sometimes tears roll down his cheeks.

During his travels with Samuel, Nat comes upon a slave auction and sees a woman for sale, dirty and battered, clearly traumatized by her past. He becomes obsessed, and persuades his master to buy her. There is an element of compassion in this: Nat knows that Samuel is a relatively lenient master, not disposed to rape, which the auctioneer invites, with increasing explicitness. But Nat has also, quite evidently, been smitten, and decides to use the mechanisms of human ownership to draw the woman near. The scene is gross, and not illuminatingly so. Subsequently, the movie asks us to view the acquisition of the woman—Nancy, played by Aja Naomi King—as a kind of meet-cute, which feels grosser still. Nat and Nancy fall in love and marry.

Later, Nancy is raped and beaten by a band of slave catchers. The camera watches the men pounce, then floats away. Afterward, she lies in bed, her face swollen and ruptured. Turner has his first vision—blood seeping in red bubbles through the silk of an ear of corn. He has a friend named Hark, whose wife, Esther (Gabrielle Union), is raped soon after. Nat then defies



Kanin

“Well, maybe if you let me work from home I wouldn’t have to look at porn on my work computer.”

Samuel, by baptizing a white man on the grounds of the plantation, and Samuel has Nat beaten within inches of his life. Then Nat plans his revolt. He bids his wife and his mother farewell; both, in their beds, look up at him, eyes full of admiration. "I'm proud of you," his mother says. Nat gathers his men and hits the road—the superhero off to his great task. Women, in this film, are reduced to mere incitements for the wicked deeds and righteous actions of men. The climactic action of the revolt is not entirely unlike those city-smashing scenes out of something by Marvel: all bravado, very little of the spirit.

At the end of "The Birth of a Nation," as Turner is hanged and the crowd howls its approval, the camera draws close to the face, and then the quivering, liquid eyes, of a black boy who heard one of Turner's sermons, and later betrayed him. When the camera pans out again, the boy is a Union soldier, leading a charge for freedom. The implication of a baton having been passed is ahistorical, and very silly. The ultimate quelling of Turner's rebellion, and our uncertainty as to its ultimate utility—its status, in other words, as a genuine tragedy—is precisely why it so immediately passed into the haunted realm of national myth.

I FIRST SAW "The Birth of a Nation" in April, at the News Corp headquarters in New York. As I waited for it to begin, I heard someone sigh loudly and say, "You know, I almost don't want to see this now. When you know something's gonna be so good—and so *important*—you kind of wanna wait." That word, "important"—along with its cousins "powerful" and "necessary"—had figured in the first reviews of the film. Even critics who expressed a slight ambivalence about the movie's artistic merits had chased those worries away by reminding readers how important it was to have Nat Turner's story finally presented on an epic scale. Given the chronic exclusion of blacks in entertainment, it's easy to understand the prevailing critical view that a work of art by a black artist about the bleakest episode in our history must, on these grounds alone, be worthy of our attention. It is true that artistic reimagin-

ings of historical events can prompt us to learn whatever lessons they may contain. Even a bad work of art like "Uncle Tom's Cabin" went some distance toward helping our country face the magnitude of its sins.

But "Uncle Tom's Cabin" was written, by a white woman, as unabashed propaganda. And if we are to judge "The Birth of a Nation" on these terms—as agitprop, however auteurist—it's worth asking what greater good, exactly, it might achieve. As a Best Picture nominee, it would ever so slightly darken the Oscar proceedings—which, given the stubborn recurrence of killings of black men at the hands of police officers, is perhaps not the most pressing cause of our time. And it would have done so by bolstering Hollywood's congenital elevation of flashy, often sexist mediocrities. There are talented black filmmakers making movies today—Ava DuVernay, Ryan Coogler, and Barry Jenkins, to name a few—whose work addresses urgent material via genuinely original means. We do them and ourselves a disservice by lowering our expectations, and extending undue credit to bad art.

For Parker, in any case, that credit is less likely to be extended now. The unsettling circumstances of his trial at Penn State threw into even sharper relief the question of the importance—the necessity—of his movie. As with that first wave of awestruck reviews, focus remained on Parker's person, rather than on his movie. Some commentators—including a number of prominent black women, among them the writer Roxane Gay—declared that they wouldn't see it. "I cannot separate the art and the artist," Gay wrote. Others insisted that Parker's subject was justification enough to overlook or entirely ignore his personal flaws. Parker, sensing that the success of his movie depended on his performance in the media, cast about awkwardly, citing his wife and daughters as signs of his maturation, and referring to what happened with the now deceased woman he knew in college as "one of the most painful moments in my life." In August, he told *Ebony* that he was never taught the meaning of consent in sex.

"The Birth of a Nation" is not worth the efforts of its defenders. It's hard

even to call it a successful attempt at propaganda. The early euphoria surrounding the movie was prompted by the way it seemed to answer the demands of its time, sublimating the eye-for-an-eye Old Testament ethos of such fiery agitators as Stokely Carmichael and Elijah Muhammad into the safer precincts of the screen. That fire was checked by a different political imperative: the need to listen to and respect the stories of women who have suffered at the hands of men. The first telling of Turner's story was prompted by fear—a political force, yes, but also a primal feeling, as palpable today as it was almost two hundred years ago, in Southampton County.

IN THE "CONFESSIONS," after Turner has said his piece, Thomas Gray reflects, "The calm, deliberate composure with which he spoke of his late deed and intentions, the expression of his fiend-like face when excited by enthusiasm, still bearing the stains of the blood of helpless innocence about him; clothed with rags and covered with chains; yet daring to raise his manacled hands to heaven, with a spirit soaring above the attributes of man; I looked on him and my blood curdled in my veins."

Gray gives the criminal-justice system the last word. After a listing of the charges, the judge declares, "Your only hope must be in another life." As for earth: nothing but the satisfaction of the public's lust for revenge. "The judgement of the court is, that you be taken . . . to the place of execution, and on Friday next, between the hours of 10 A.M. and 2 P.M. be hung by the neck until you are dead! dead! dead! and may the Lord have mercy upon your soul."

Slavery in this country was never a hero's journey. It is a ghost story, and Nat Turner is its poltergeist, dashing pottery against America's walls. "It will be long remembered in the annals of our country," Gray wrote of the revolt. "And many a mother as she presses her infant darling to her bosom, will shudder at the recollection of Nat Turner, and his band of ferocious miscreants." This has proved true so far, and it will likely always be so, with or without Nate Parker's interjections. Thomas Gray's little book is free for download. ♦

ON STAGE

A GIRL LIKE I

Amy Schumer's standup.

BY HILTON ALS



Since her debut as a comedian, in 2005, Schumer has spent most nights onstage.

AMY SCHUMER IS on tour just now, and if you've loved her on TV, as I have, I suggest you see her perform live. The show isn't disappointing, but it isn't great, either, and it took me more than a minute to figure out why. At first, I thought my feeling of let-down had something to do with the context in which I saw her—at the Verizon Center, in Washington, D.C. (She'll be at Madison Square Garden, in New York, on October 18th.) It was the night before the National Museum of African American History and Culture opened its doors to the public, a few blocks away. Pussy jokes could fall flat in juxtaposition with such a grand occasion, but in this mul-

ticultural world we're able to think about many narratives at once. Except I'm not so sure that Schumer wants to. Most of the stories she told the night I saw her had to do with her boyfriend ("I met my boyfriend and I thought I would make him wait. Until after dinner. Just kidding. We didn't have dinner") or her genitalia. (Schumer dedicated a chapter to her lady parts in her delightful book *"The Girl with the Lower Back Tattoo."* In "An Open Letter to My Vagina," she writes, "First of all, I'm sorry. Second of all, you're welcome.")

The stage was vast, and flanked by two monitors that displayed the thirty-five-year-old comedian's every move-

ment for the enormous but not overwhelming crowd. About ten minutes into her act, Schumer, blond, creamy-skinned, and wearing a formfitting black top, a blue skirt, and black heels, told the audience that her "pussy . . . smells like a small barnyard animal. Not a fucked-up llama but a goat at a small petting zoo. That's on its best day. On its worst day, after a blackout—ISIS." By putting herself down in the language of schoolboy misogyny, Schumer was doing what most female comedians have done since the Friars Club was forced to start admitting them, back in the late eighties: attack yourself before the guys attack you—or exclude you.

Like any successful performer, Schumer was especially jazzed when dishing out the jokes that she knew would work. (She's a good girl who's not especially turned on by risk, or by the idea of searching for her material in front of an audience.) Moments after dumping on herself, she made it clear that she wasn't the one doing the dumping. "There's all this marketing out there now to make it smell like a Christmas tree," she said. "We're raised with so much shame about it. Guys are not like that. They don't cum in your mouth and ask if they taste O.K. 'I've been drinking a lot of water.' Men, we love your cum; we want to make snow angels in it." And it was when Schumer expressed her world-weariness—or, more precisely, her male-weariness—that she began to sound like someone you might want to spend time with. In a way, Schumer's pussy jokes were dick jokes, aimed at the men (real or internalized) who try to hold women back, or keep women out, by telling them that their collective pussy stinks.

SCHUMER'S ACT LASTS an hour and twenty minutes, which gives you a lot of time to think about the limits of perversity, and how, at times, the comic has to circumnavigate her own intelligence in order to make the character "Amy Schumer," self-described "trash from Long Island," come to life.

Actually, Schumer was born rich. In *"The Girl with the Lower Back Tattoo,"* she writes about how she lived on the Upper East Side as a child.

Back then, her father made a killing importing children's furniture from Europe. But once he'd established the trend his competitors caught on, and his business collapsed. The family moved to Long Island, where they eventually found themselves in drastically reduced circumstances. Dad had multiple sclerosis, and he drank. (In the book, Schumer admits, touchingly, that to this day, whenever she smells liquor on a man, she wants to sidle up to him.) Schumer's parents divorced.

Two years after she graduated from Towson University, in Maryland, Schumer watched a friend do standup at a comedy club and, she writes, "like every other asshole who goes to comedy clubs, I thought, *I could do this*." She could and she has. Since her debut as a comedian, in 2005, Schumer has spent most nights onstage (despite her need for solitude, which she discusses in another standout chapter in the book). About performing, she writes, "Standing up there, onstage, under the lights, and expressing something you think is funny or important (or both) and being met with laughter, applause, appreciation, and agreement is a feeling I can't describe. I am a human being and I want to be loved, and some nights I just want to sit around watching movies with my family or my boyfriend. But mostly every night for the last thirteen years, I've wanted to get onstage."

Like many people, I had my first exposure to Schumer's down-to-earth effervescence not at a comedy club but on television. I caught her in a small part on "Girls," and then in full force on her Comedy Central program, "Inside Amy Schumer," in 2013. There, as in her fantastic 2015 HBO special, "Amy Schumer: Live at the Apollo," directed by Chris Rock (who constructs a narrative around Schumer's uneasy embrace of movies), the camera allows for an intimacy that Schumer couldn't achieve in the huge Verizon Center. This was made glaringly clear by the contrast between one of Schumer's opening acts, the hilarious Rachel Feinstein, and the star herself. Whereas Schumer stood pretty much center stage throughout her performance, using

her arms to make or illustrate a point, Feinstein, small, dark-haired, and energetic, knew how to traverse the space; she was rarely still. I found myself watching Schumer on the monitors, where the camera could pick up the nuances in her expression, as much as I watched her "live." (Like many performers who have gone from the stage to the screen, Schumer has to re-learn how the stage works in order to compensate for our familiarity with her filmed image.)

We live in a world now where everyone is ethnic or different in some way. Feinstein connected with the audience over the absurdities of family and her Jewishness. To wit: "I gave my guy a lap dance but I sang in Yiddish. He was flaccid and weeping at the end." Schumer's act dragged because she dragged out familiar tropes about her form of difference—being a woman. While Feinstein took apart traditional women's roles—she was especially good when talking about her mother—Schumer, for the most part, talked about herself, or herself in relation to men, which, in her comedy, is the same thing. Schumer's humor takes the world that Phyllis Diller and Joan Rivers laid out and updates it with contemporary slang and less self-disgust: guys may like their dicks and Schumer may like their dicks, too, but their dicks don't equal her lady parts. She has a point, but it gets lost in her standup in a way that it doesn't in her TV specials. ("Trainwreck," the 2015 hit movie she wrote and starred in, errs on the side of equating a woman's self-fulfillment with her ability to get a man, but I don't blame her for that; Hollywood *is* men, and they rarely pay for anything that doesn't reinforce that fact.)

It's a question of editing, and of Schumer's finding the freedom to explore what is germane to her. Her book is filled with material that could work onstage—stories about her father, the years she and her sister were waitresses, her new life as a rich person, and so on. But she underestimates her audience. She thinks we want anecdotes about her wine breath, about the awesome guy who got away, if only she could remember his name.

But those jokes are for the dudes—what's less threatening to men interested in power than a woman who's passed out?—and not for those of us who are rooting for the artist behind the anecdotes. Instead of turning herself inside out and asking herself how she got here, Schumer stands outside herself, watching "Amy Schumer" do her thing.

Still, there was a moment in the show that exploded the predictability, and did so with something like poetry. About an hour into her set, Schumer said that she wanted to keep going, but needed to get comfortable. So she sat on the stage and took off her heels. Then she called an audience member up onstage and had him take his shoes off and step into her strappy stilettos. She asked him how he'd feel working for two hours in those things. Everything was exquisitely timed, Schumer didn't belabor the point, and it was sweet and funny to see a middle-aged man with a bit of a paunch looking as vulnerable as he did beside the star.

Comics are as different from one another as writers are (and should be), but Schumer could learn something from such elders as Lily Tomlin and Sandra Bernhard. Indeed, the moment with the man in heels indicated how much she might benefit from a crash course in their brand of situational comedy, which requires something that she's not especially strong at (at least, not yet): acting. Also, Tomlin and Bernhard are not strictly heterosexual women, and thus have never lived in fear of losing their male fans if they deviate from their characters or criticize show biz or the status quo; they are wonderfully free of the confines of male approval. Schumer, who is game, will get there, too, once she stops asking, as she does on her TV show, whether or not she's bangable. I'm excited to see what she'll find beyond that. She may, like Dave Chappelle, escape into the comforts and challenges of parenthood. Then again, she is thornier and more ambitious than that. She's a potentially terrific artist, because there's nothing craven about her. Instead of gagging on her life to pleasure her internal dude, she should feast on it: it's hers, and not some dick's. ♦

IN DEEP

"American Honey" and "Deepwater Horizon."

BY ANTHONY LANE

MADNESS, BEAUTY, SNIPER, gangster, gigolo, psycho, graffiti, hustle, and pie: tack the word "American" to any hunky noun, and you've got yourself a movie. The latest addition to the list is "American Honey," which tells the story of Star (Sasha Lane). She is eighteen, with dreadlocks, dark eyes, and an upper lip so full that it

to spend the film together; it's a shock when she takes the kids back to their mother and lopes off into the night, never to return. Was Star their babysitter, sister, or what? We don't find out. "American Honey" is brazenly indifferent to backstories, and prefers to leave loose ends dangling and frayed rather than tie them up. That habit



Sasha Lane takes to a life on the road in Andrea Arnold's new movie.

looks swollen. There are times when the camera seems content just to sit and stare at her face. The film is nearly three hours long, and the characters drift around the country, from Kansas City to North Dakota, but you soon realize that Star can drift without getting out of her seat. Her mind is miles away.

In the opening minutes, Star roots around in a dumpster on a nice hot day. She finds a discarded raw chicken, still in its plastic wrapping, and hands it down to a little red-haired boy. Later, we see him sitting on a kitchen floor and stabbing the flesh with a fork—not an image that is readily erased. Star has another child in her care, a girl, and we somehow expect the trio

may be—in cinematic terms, at any rate—the least American thing about the film.

The writer and director, Andrea Arnold, is British. None of her work, until now, has been set in the United States. She is hardly the first person to come to the country with a ravening eye, and there is an all-you-can-eat quality to the resulting picaresque, with sights to be feasted on at every turn: glowing ranks of fast-food signs, a perspiring square dance, and family photos and children's drawings, glanced at when we enter a house, as if Arnold were a detective assessing a crime scene. There are many opportunities for such browsing, because Star meets a guy named Jake (Shia LaBeouf) in a Kmart park-

ing lot and, ignoring the fact that he has a braided pigtail, accepts his invitation to a life on the road. He belongs to a squad of youths who travel about in a white van with booze and bongs, skirting the bounds of the law (not that we glimpse a single cop). They hawk magazine subscriptions, knocking on doors and badgering drivers at a truck stop—an old-school trade, perhaps, but run by the most modern of Fagins. Meet Krystal, glittering and rock hard, sporting a bikini with the design of a Confederate battle flag, and played by Riley Keough, who is the granddaughter of Elvis Presley. What more do you want to know?

In 2005, Arnold's "Wasp" won the Oscar for Best Short Film. It tells of a feckless mother of four who feeds her offspring a bag of sugar, because there's nothing else in the cupboard, then abandons them outside a pub while she flirts with a man inside. One of the kids is a baby, and the title refers to a wasp that crawls into its mouth. That movie lasts twenty-six minutes, and it bears the seed of everything that has flourished in her later works, such as "Red Road" (2006) and "Fish Tank" (2009): a tilt toward the verges of society, where the disconnected and the dispossessed attempt to make a home; a frank admission that carnal knowledge precedes all other wisdom and lays it low; and a wistful ardor, desperate to prove that, even in the scuzziest depths, there are snatches of bliss, or spurts of color, that can suddenly bloom like fire.

All of that is present in "American Honey." We even get a wasp, rescued by Star from a swimming pool. Indeed, insects of every species flit through the movie; Star and Jake make out on bright-green grass, down among the bugs, and, in the closing shot, fireflies dot the night air. So, with no lack of desolation and astonishment on view, how come the new film pulls you in less sharply than the short one from a dozen years ago, and leaves your heart less scarred? In part, because Arnold's very strength—the mashup of grime and epiphany—is in danger of becoming a shtick. Then, there's the length: an elasticated plot doesn't really suit a director who is at her best in specific locations, where people get stuck like

flies. Last, the film falters whenever it steps away from the margins. I didn't believe in the polite Christian woman who lets Star and Jake into her decorous home, or in the creepy white-hatted gentlemen who pour shots of mezcal for Star and dare her to swallow the worm. Spinning in a haze, she seems like a figurehead for the whole enterprise: proud, enraptured, risky, and too damned drunk on America to make much sense.

ON THE NIGHT of April 20, 2010, more than forty miles off the coast of Louisiana, a drilling rig called the Deepwater Horizon suffered a series of explosions. On board was a crew of a hundred and twenty-six, of whom eleven died. Two days later, the rig sank, and more than two hundred million gallons of oil leaked into the Gulf of Mexico. The spill has lodged in the popular imagination as the worst environmental catastrophe in U.S. history, and the legal consequences, too, were unprecedented. BP, to whom the rig was leased, has paid \$61.6 billion in fines, cleanup costs, and compensation. So, if you're making a film of this tumultuous saga, what kind of tale should you tell?

At the start, Peter Berg's "Deepwater Horizon" feels like a courtroom drama. With the screen still black, we hear a clip from the testimony of a witness, promising "the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth." A likely story. The rest of the movie is no more concerned with litigation than it is with ecological fallout, unless you count a cameo appearance by a distressed pelican. Instead,

what Berg has done—as he did in "The Kingdom" (2007), which sprang from attacks on Western compounds in Saudi Arabia, and "Lone Survivor" (2013), based on a Special Forces operation in Afghanistan—is to take a complex and unwieldy episode and strip it down to its essential moving parts. So efficient has he become at this that the Bergian brand can now be relied on to make doomed or devastated events resound like triumphs. He is the ideal filmmaker, you could argue, for a nation that continues to smart from the wounds of unpopular wars.

None of this can be accomplished without a hero, preferably one who verges on the herculean. Mark Wahlberg, who played the title character in "Lone Survivor," returns in the more peaceable part of Mike Williams, the chief electronics technician on the rig. We see him, before his departure for a three-week shift, hanging out with his wife (Kate Hudson) and their daughter, Sydney (Stella Allen), who helpfully declaims a school essay on what her father does for a living. By rights, these scenes should be as corny as hell, and yet they do the trick, as do Mike's exchanges, later on, with his co-worker Andrea Fleytas (Gina Rodriguez) and his boss, Jimmy Harrell (Kurt Russell), because the actors feel not just grounded but bedded down in their roles. Russell, in particular, seems so weathered and toughened by time as to be indestructible. When the explosion hits, Mr. Jimmy, as the crew calls him, is in the shower; though naked and half-blinded by the blast, he plucks a jagged shard from his foot, tugs on his

overalls and boots, and gets to work.

The screenwriters, Matthew Michael Carnahan and Matthew Sand, have designed the dialogue both to instruct and to overwhelm. Technical terms abound, lending a rich and glutinous texture to the talk. Mud means not mud but drilling fluid. We hear of kill lines, blowout preventers, negative pressure tests, and something called the bladder effect, which I would rather not know about. The highlight comes when the phrase "confidence in the integrity of our cement job" issues from the lips of John Malkovich. He plays a senior honcho from BP on the rig. Malkovich is the only actor, I would say, who juts out from the surface of the film—as riveting as ever, yet savoring his villainy just a little too much.

True to the ever-disturbing laws of disaster movies, we wait hungrily for the Deepwater Horizon to blow. When that happens, the conflagration is so extreme that one can't quite tell whether Berg is still pursuing a logical narrative or switching to barely controlled chaos. This is where Wahlberg comes into his own. We follow Mike's exploits as if we were clinging to a guardrail, watching in awe as he rescues Mr. Jimmy, strives to engage the emergency generator, and climbs to a perilous height, the better to leap for his life, with the ocean blazing below. In short, Peter Berg has done it again. You come out shaken with excitement, but with a touch of shame, too, at being so easily thrilled. ♦

NEWYORKER.COM

Richard Brody blogs about movies.

THE NEW YORKER IS A REGISTERED TRADEMARK OF ADVANCE MAGAZINE PUBLISHERS INC. COPYRIGHT ©2016 CONDÉ NAST. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED. PRINTED IN THE U.S.A.

VOLUME XCII, NO. 32, October 10, 2016. THE NEW YORKER (ISSN 0028792X) is published weekly (except for five combined issues: February 8 & 15, June 6 & 13, July 11 & 18, August 8 & 15, and December 19 & 26) by Condé Nast, which is a division of Advance Magazine Publishers Inc. PRINCIPAL OFFICE: Condé Nast, 1 World Trade Center, New York, NY 10007. Elizabeth Hughes, publisher, chief revenue officer; Risa Aronson, associate publisher advertising; James Guilfoyle, director of finance and business operations; Fabio Berton, general counsel. Condé Nast: S. I. Newhouse, Jr., chairman emeritus; Charles H. Townsend, chairman; Robert A. Sauerberg, Jr., president & chief executive officer; David E. Geithner, chief financial officer; Jill Bright, chief administrative officer. Periodicals postage paid at New York, NY, and at additional mailing offices. Canadian Goods and Services Tax Registration No. 123242885-RT0001.

POSTMASTER: SEND ADDRESS CHANGES TO THE NEW YORKER, P.O. Box 37684, Boone, IA 50037 0684. FOR SUBSCRIPTIONS, ADDRESS CHANGES, ADJUSTMENTS, OR BACK ISSUE INQUIRIES: Please write to The New Yorker, P.O. Box 37684, Boone, IA 50037 0684, call (800) 825-2510, or e-mail subscriptions@newyorker.com. Please give both new and old addresses as printed on most recent label. Subscribers: If the Post Office alerts us that your magazine is undeliverable, we have no further obligation unless we receive a corrected address within one year. If during your subscription term or up to one year after the magazine becomes undeliverable, you are ever dissatisfied with your subscription, let us know. You will receive a full refund on all unmailed issues. First copy of new subscription will be mailed within four weeks after receipt of order. For advertising inquiries, please call Risa Aronson at (212) 286-4068. For submission guidelines, please refer to our Web site, www.newyorker.com. Address all editorial, business, and production correspondence to The New Yorker, 1 World Trade Center, New York, NY 10007. For cover reprints, please call (800) 897-8666, or e-mail covers@cartoonbank.com. For permissions and reprint requests, please call (212) 630-5656 or fax requests to (212) 630-5883. No part of this periodical may be reproduced without the consent of The New Yorker. The New Yorker's name and logo, and the various titles and headings herein, are trademarks of Advance Magazine Publishers Inc. Visit us online at www.newyorker.com. To subscribe to other Condé Nast magazines, visit www.condenast.com. Occasionally, we make our subscriber list available to carefully screened companies that offer products and services that we believe would interest our readers. If you do not want to receive these offers and/or information, please advise us at P.O. Box 37684, Boone, IA 50037 0684 or call (800) 825-2510.

THE NEW YORKER IS NOT RESPONSIBLE FOR THE RETURN OR LOSS OF, OR FOR DAMAGE OR ANY OTHER INJURY TO, UNSOLICITED MANUSCRIPTS, UNSOLICITED ART WORK (INCLUDING, BUT NOT LIMITED TO, DRAWINGS, PHOTOGRAPHS, AND TRANSPARENCIES), OR ANY OTHER UNSOLICITED MATERIALS. THOSE SUBMITTING MANUSCRIPTS, PHOTOGRAPHS, ART WORK, OR OTHER MATERIALS FOR CONSIDERATION SHOULD NOT SEND ORIGINALS, UNLESS SPECIFICALLY REQUESTED TO DO SO BY THE NEW YORKER IN WRITING.



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 Will McPhail, must be received by Sunday, October 9th. The finalists in the September 26th contest appear below. We will announce the winner, and the finalists in this week's contest, in the October 24th issue. Anyone age thirteen or older can enter or vote. To do so, and to read the complete rules, visit contest.newyorker.com.

THIS WEEK'S CONTEST



“

”

THE FINALISTS



“Think it over. I’m still the only one here who can use a can opener.”

Marion Stein, New York City

“I’m not a big cat person.”

Zack Vogel, Saratoga Springs, N.Y.

“Kids, stay in the thimble.”

Ross Darden, Fort Worth, Texas

THE WINNING CAPTION



“And are the clowns inside you now?”

Dennis Neary, Indianapolis, Ind.

 **NEW 2017**
MDX



CAN AN SUV

BREAK THE RULES

AND CHECK ALL THE BOXES?

When Precision Crafted Performance is at the heart of everything you do, you don't just build an SUV, you build the car you want to drive. And you do it because you can. With available track-refined Super Handling All-Wheel Drive™ and an Integrated Dynamics System that delivers three unique drive modes, the new 2017 MDX does more than just embody what Precision Crafted Performance is all about—it defines it.

See what it can do at acura.com/mdx

 **ACURA**
PRECISION CRAFTED PERFORMANCE

MDX with Advance Package shown.
©2016 Acura. Acura, MDX, Super Handling All-Wheel Drive, and the stylized "A" logo are trademarks of Honda Motor Co., Ltd.



BOTTEGA VENETA