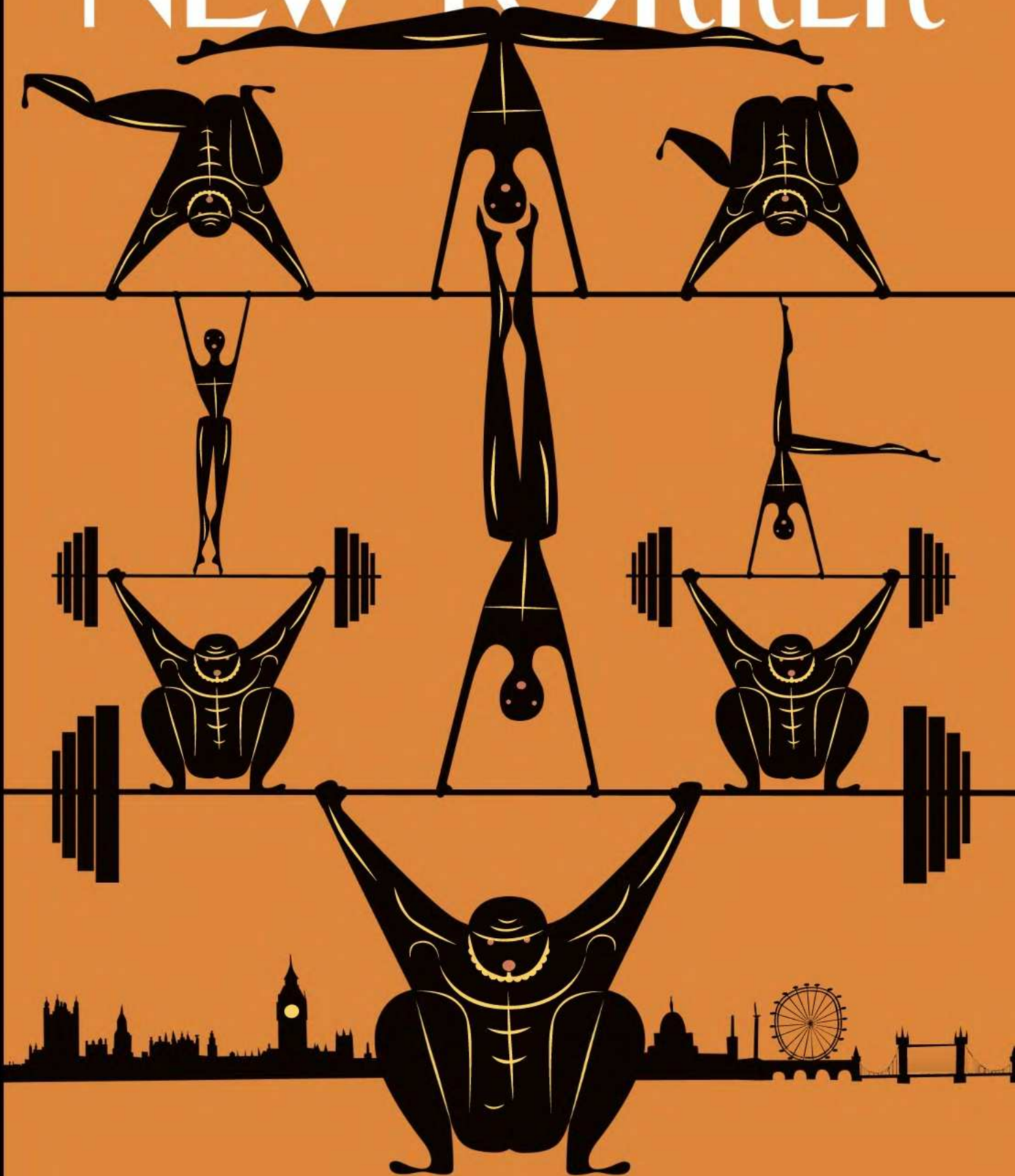


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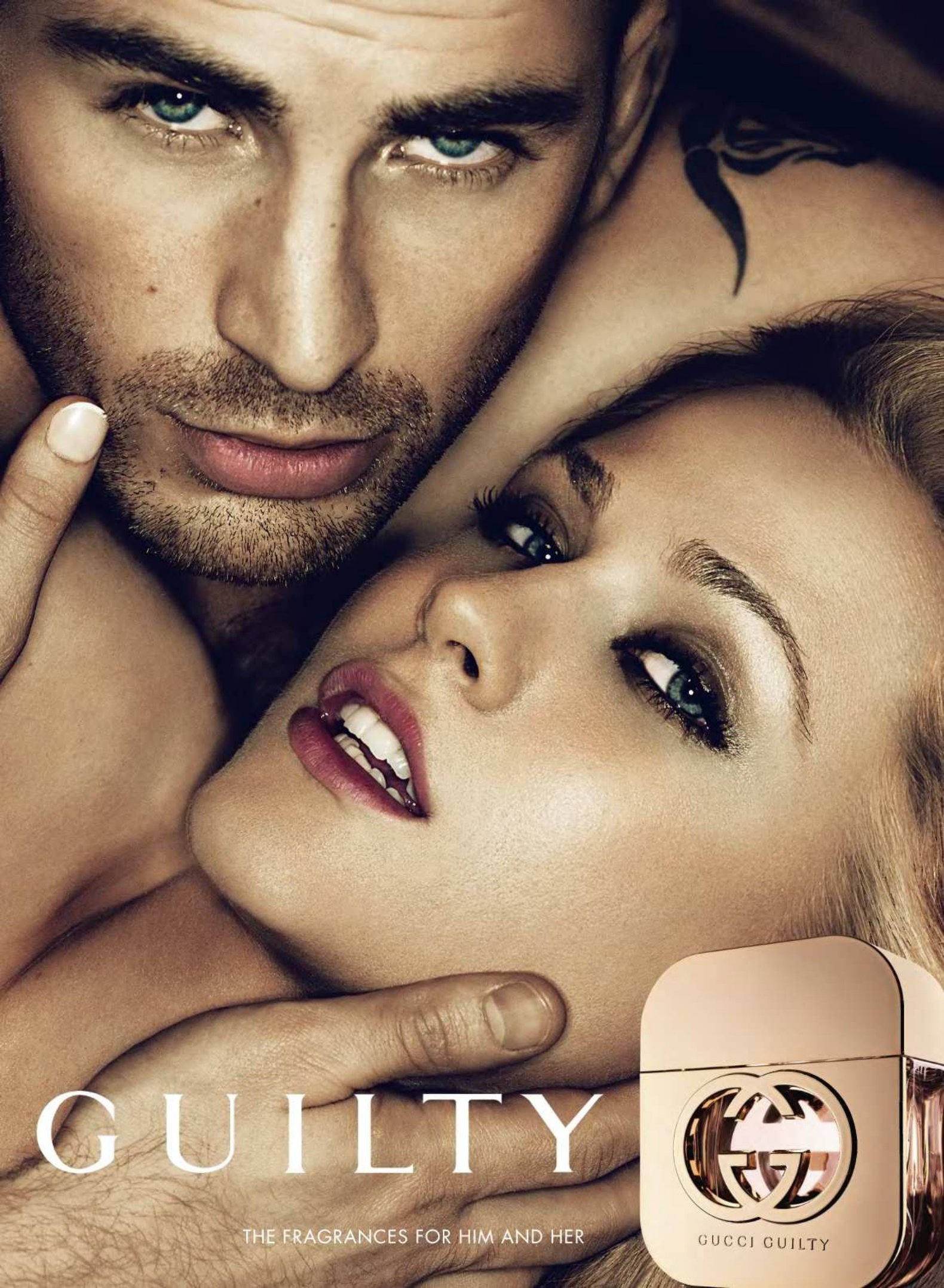
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**F. Scott Fitzgerald** (Fiction, p. 62) was first published in *The New Yorker* in 1929. This story, written in 1936, was recently found among his papers.

**Louis Menand** (A Critic at Large, p. 64) is a professor of English at Harvard. His books include "The Metaphysical Club" and "The Marketplace of Ideas: Reform and Resistance in the American University."

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### THIS WEEK ON NEWYORKER.COM

The New Yorker Out Loud: *Mark Singer* and *David Grann* on the art of writing about mysterious characters, and *Deborah Treisman* on discovering a previously unpublished story by F. Scott Fitzgerald. / The Political Scene podcast, hosted by *Dorothy Wickenden*. Plus analysis, cartoons, video, and more about the 2012 campaign, at [newyorker.com/politics](http://newyorker.com/politics). / Blogs: *John Cassidy* on politics; *Ben McGrath* and *Lauren Collins* in London; the Borowitz Report; Daily Shouts; Page-Turner; and more. / Animated cartoons, the caption contest, and cover jigsaw puzzles. / Our complete archive, back to 1925.



# THE MAIL

## WAR'S LEGACY

It was with profound sadness that I read Dexter Filkins's article about the state of Afghanistan today ("After America," July 9th & 16th). I served in the Peace Corps between 1965 and 1967, teaching English at the high school in Khanabad, one of the places that Filkins reports from. During my stay, the village and the country were at peace, and Afghanistan was in the process of modernizing its economy and political institutions. But the Daud coup, the Afghan Communist rule, and the Soviet invasion set in motion a downward spiral characterized by war, destruction, and ethnic conflict which has lasted for four decades, with no end in sight. American efforts face serious obstacles in Afghanistan because of the negative history of foreign involvement in the country, as well as the near-impossibility of outsiders taking responsibility for nation building. Filkins's reporting underscores the lack of a clear path to end the fighting. For me, the tragedy of Afghanistan is the loss of life and the vast destruction that have occurred over the years. I often think about the Afghans I knew and worked with, and continue to wonder what has become of them.

*Martin Dicker*  
*Seattle, Wash.*

## ON THE NEWS

Louis Menand, in his piece on the life of Walter Cronkite, writes, "When people talk about the corporatization of network news, they mean that something that was once run in the service of truth and the public interest is now being run according to the principles of the marketplace" (A Critic at Large, July 9th & 16th). Perhaps, but what is of greater concern is the conglomeration of the news business in the face of decreasing governmental oversight. Title 3 of the 1996 Telecommunications Act permits media cross-ownership. Critics understand that deregulation facilitates the concentration of media ownership, which reduces the quality and diversity of information. This results in the censorship of a range of critical thought. The news business

has always been corporate, but it is fast becoming a single corporation.

*Charlene LaVoie*  
*Winsted, Conn.*

Louis Menand's discussion of why President Johnson announced that he would not run for reelection mentions his reaction to Cronkite's CBS News special "Report from Vietnam," and Robert Kennedy's entry into the Presidential primaries, but includes no mention of what, I believe, was the most probable cause of Johnson's decision. An anti-Vietnam War platform, especially one opposing a sitting President, was not considered a viable pursuit. In stepped Senator Eugene McCarthy, whose campaign attracted the enthusiasm of countless young "Clean for Gene" volunteers. He made an astounding showing in the New Hampshire primary. The polls in the next primary state, Wisconsin, showed McCarthy far ahead of Johnson. Thus, as *Newsweek* put it, in September, 1968, occurred "the great McCarthy youthquake that shook Mr. Johnson out of the Presidency."

*Jere B. Stern*  
*Baltimore, Md.*

Menand errs when he says of my grandfather's coverage of the liberation of Europe that "he was not near the front lines." Menand acknowledges that my grandfather flew on a bombing raid over Germany, but does not mention that during that flight, which took place in 1943, he manned a .50-calibre machine gun against German fighter planes. In September of the following year, he crash-landed in a glider behind enemy lines with the 101st Airborne on the first day of Operation Market Garden, and was under heavy artillery fire and bombs near Eindhoven for days afterward. You can't get much closer to the front lines than that.

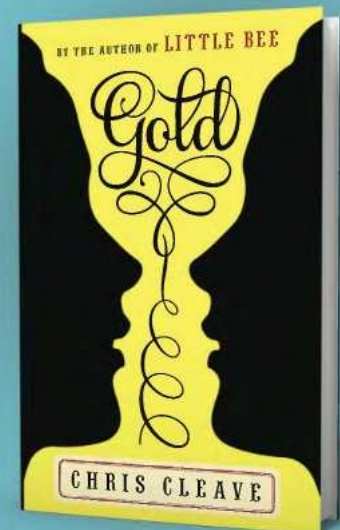
*Walter Cronkite IV*  
*Washington, D.C.*

•  
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## GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN

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### THIS WEEK

#### THE THEATRE DARK MATTER

Sam Shepard's latest play, "Heartless," has its world premiere at Signature Theatre Company's Irene Diamond Stage. The cast includes Julianne Nicholson, Lois Smith, and Gary Cole. Daniel Aukin directs. (See page 8.)

#### NIGHT LIFE SAY DO RE MI

Olivia B. Merilahti, a Finnish vocalist who sings in English, and Dan Levy, a French composer and multi-instrumentalist,

perform as the Dø, and together they make propulsive and jagged pop music that's cinematic in scope. The two, who rarely appear in New York City, play a pair of concerts at the Knitting Factory and the Mercury Lounge. (See page 9.)

#### ART FEAR FACTOR

The Canadian artists Janet Cardiff and George Bures Miller, who currently live and work in Berlin, bring their new sound piece, "The Murder of Crows," to the Drill Hall at the Park Avenue Armory. In the work, ninety-eight speakers

plunge visitors into an intricate aural environment that borrows its structure from a trio of nightmares Cardiff had while the pair were living in Kathmandu. (See page 11.)

#### CLASSICAL MUSIC FOUR GUV'NORS

The "Rite of Summer" arts festival, at Governors Island, presents the dashing gentlemen of the New York-based JACK Quartet, who will perform pieces both medieval (by Guillaume de Machaut) and modern (by Ives, Ken Thomson, and others) in a relaxed outdoor setting. (See page 12.)

#### MOVIES SAUTET AND SIZZLE

The French director Claude Sautet, a former music critic, made an acclaimed drama about classical musicians, "Un Coeur en Hiver," featuring performances of Ravel's chamber music. Film Society of Lincoln Center presents a nearly complete retrospective of Sautet's films, including the gangster film "Classe Tous Risques," starring Lino Ventura, from 1960. (See page 16.)

*"The Music Man," at the Glimmerglass Festival, in Cooperstown. Photograph by Landon Nordeman.*

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## CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK PLAY ACTOR

In his wonderful preface to David Greenspan's "The Myopia and Other Plays," Marc Robinson writes that it may be perverse to approach Greenspan as a "mannerist actor and often baroque writer." That's certainly how I approached



the fifty-six-year-old's acting, without knowing much about his plays. A ubiquitous presence on the New York stage for more than thirty years now, Greenspan has sometimes seemed more interested in calling attention to himself than in being part of anyone's ensemble. But after reading his writing, I can see that those performances were attempts to curve his imagination toward someone else's, the better to learn about where language and the body connect. In his plays, Greenspan leaves air between the lines so that actors can find their way through the thicket of his sadness and whimsy. In September, Greenspan will play the knowing Sheep in David Adjmi's "Marie Antoinette," at the A.R.T., in Cambridge. I wouldn't call it typecasting so much as Greenspan the playwright's understanding of what Greenspan the actor can do.

—Hilton Als

## THE THEATRE OPENINGS AND PREVIEWS

Please call the phone number listed with the theatre for timetables and ticket information.

### BRING IT ON: THE MUSICAL

Lin-Manuel Miranda, Tom Kitt, Jeff Whitty, and Amanda Green wrote this musical inspired by the 2000 film, set in the world of competitive cheerleading. Directed and choreographed by Andy Blankenbuehler. Opens Aug. 1. (St. James, 246 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200.)

### BULLET FOR ADOLF

A budding friendship between two Midwesterners and a slick New Yorker is complicated by the disappearance of a Second World War artifact, in this comedy written by Woody Harrelson and Frankie Hyman. Harrelson directs. In previews. (New World Stages, 340 W. 50th St. 212-239-6200.)

### FORBIDDEN BROADWAY: ALIVE AND KICKING

The Broadway shows spoofed in the latest installment of this musical satire include "Porgy and Bess," "Evita," "Death of a Salesman," and "Book of Mormon." Created and written by Gerard Alessandrini, who co-directs with Phillip George. In previews. (47th Street Theatre, 304 W. 47th St. 212-239-6200.)

### HARRISON, TX: THREE PLAYS BY HORTON FOOTE

Primary Stages begins its season with a trio of short plays that depict the residents of one Texas town. Pam MacKinnon directs. In previews. (59E59, at 59 E. 59th St. 212-279-4200.)

### HEARTLESS

Signature Theatre Company presents the world premiere of a new play by Sam Shepard, about the dark secrets of a Los Angeles woman. Daniel Aukin directs a cast that includes Julianne Nicholson, Jenny Bacon, Gary Cole, Betty Gilpin, and Lois Smith. Previews begin Aug. 7. (Pershing Square Signature Center, 480 W. 42nd St. 212-244-7529.)

### IN PARIS

Mikhail Barshnikov and Anna Sinyakina star in a Dmitry Krymov Laboratory production. Dmitry Krymov, who directs, adapted the 1940 story by Ivan Bunin, in which two Russian immigrants fall in love in Paris during the nineteen-thirties. Part of the Lincoln Center Festival. Aug. 1-5. (Gerald W. Lynch Theatre, John Jay College, 524 W. 59th St. 212-721-6500.)

### INTO THE WOODS

The Public's Shakespeare in the Park season concludes with Stephen Sondheim and James Lapine's dark fairy-tale musical, starring Donna Murphy, Amy Adams, and Denis O'Hare. Directed by Timothy Sheeder, with co-direction by Liam Steel. In previews. (Delacorte, Central Park. Enter at 81st St. at Central Park W. 212-539-8750.)

### THE LAST SMOKER IN AMERICA

A new musical comedy by Bill Russell and Peter Melnick, about a family trying to cope in a world where smoking is illegal. Andy Sandberg directs. In previews. Opens Aug. 2. (Westside, 407 W. 43rd St. 212-239-6200.)

### MY MIND IS LIKE AN OPEN MEADOW

Erin Leddy wrote and performs in this play, based on interviews with her grandmother about her life as a theatre actress. Jonathan Walters directs. In previews. Opens Aug. 7. (59E59, at 59 E. 59th St. 212-279-4200.)

### RICHARD III

Amanda Dehnert directs this show, which kicks off the Public Theatre's Mobile Shakespeare Unit. Previews begin Aug. 6. (Public, 425 Lafayette St. 212-967-7555.)

## NOW PLAYING

### BLACK MILK

In Vassily Sigarev's dark comedy, Poppet (Liba Vaynberg) and Iyovchik (Josh Marcantel), two angry young grifters, find the existence of "the bump"—

Poppet's pregnancy—less than convenient; for the foulmouthed husband and wife, who spend their days schlepping around rural Russia with several bags of toasters, a baby is as appealing as an anvil. If the pair aren't bickering, they're fending off poor country folk who've been conned into taking free toasters, only to find themselves overcharged for "shipping." There's not much to this play besides a lot of snide and vulgar dialogue, but there's a particularly nice performance: under Michel Hausmann's direction, Anna Wilson plays her role, as a railroad-station clerk who moonlights as a bootlegger, with fun, easy humor. (East 13th Street Theatre, 136 E. 13th St. 212-352-3101. Through Aug. 4.)

### ICE FACTORY 2012

The festival of experimental works concludes with "The Girl of the Golden West," presented by Rady&Bloom (Aug. 1-4). (New Ohio Theatre, 154 Christopher St. 212-868-4444. Through Aug. 4.)

### THE MATERIAL WORLD

Dan Fishback wrote the music, lyrics, and book for this musical, about a group of Jewish revolutionaries who live in a boarding house with Madonna in 1921. Stephen Brackett directs. Part of the HOT! Festival. (Dixon Place, 161A Chrystie St. 866-811-4111. Through Aug. 2.)

### MIKE TYSON: UNDISPUTED TRUTH

Spike Lee directs this biographical one-man show, starring Iron Mike himself. (Longacre, 220 W. 48th St. 212-239-6200.)

### NEW GIRL IN TOWN

Irish Rep presents Bob Merrill and George Abbott's 1957 musical, based on Eugene O'Neill's "Anna Christie," directed by Charlotte Moore. (132 W. 22nd St. 212-727-2737.)

### SUMMER SHORTS 2012

A festival of short plays includes works by Paul Rudnick, Wendy Kesselman, and Neil LaBute. (59E59, at 59 E. 59th St. 212-279-4200.)

### WARRIOR CLASS

A campaign adviser (David Rasche) seeks out the college girlfriend (Katharine Powell) of an assemblyman running for Congress (Louis Ozawa Changchien) and offers her a house, a law degree, and a great job after graduation if she will keep quiet about the relationship. In Kenneth Lin's drama, presented by Second Stage Uptown, while the playwright lays out the gritty details of an old, failed romance, he's really making a statement about the vile and amoral nature of the political machine: it preys on everyone, including its own. Under the direction of Evan Cabnet, the acting is fine, but the characters are clichés: good, bad, and bitchy. It's hard to care, by the time the ending rolls around, that it's not what you might have expected. (McGinn/Cazale, 2162 Broadway, at 76th St. 212-246-4422.)

## OUT OF TOWN

### HUDSON VALLEY SHAKESPEARE FESTIVAL

The summer's offerings include "Love's Labour's Lost," "Romeo and Juliet," and the Hitchcock parody "The 39 Steps." For more information, visit hvshakespeare.org. (Garrison, N.Y. 845-265-9575.)

### SHAKESPEARE & COMPANY

Olympia Dukakis plays Prospero in "The Tempest," directed by Tony Simotes. For more information, visit shakespeare.org. (70 Kemble St., Lenox, Mass. 413-637-3353.)

### WILLIAMSTOWN THEATRE FESTIVAL

Scott Ellis directs Bradley Cooper, Patricia Clarkson, Shuler Hensley, and Alessandro Nivola in Bernard Pomerance's "The Elephant Man," through Aug. 5. Beginning Aug. 1, Richard Nelson directs Ivan Turgenev's "A Month in the Country." For more information, visit wtfestival.org. (Williamstown, Mass. 413-597-3400.)

## Also Playing

**CLOSER THAN EVER:** York Theatre at St. Peter's, Lexington Ave. at 54th St. 212-935-5820. **CLYBOURNE PARK:** Walter Kerr, 219 W. 48th St. 212-239-6200. **COCK:** The Duke on 42nd Street, 229 W. 42nd St. 646-223-3010. **EMPIRE:** Spiegelworld, 265 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **END OF THE RAIN-**

**BOW:** Belasco, 111 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200. **FELA!** Hirschfeld, 302 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. Through Aug. 4. **THE GERSHWINS' PORGY AND BESS:** Richard Rodgers, 226 W. 46th St. 800-745-3000. **GORE VIDAL'S THE BEST MAN:** Schoenfeld, 236 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **HARVEY:** Studio 54, at 254 W. 54th St. 212-719-1300. Through Aug. 5. **NEWSIES:** Nederlander, 208 W. 41st St. 866-870-2717. **ONCE:** Jacobs, 242 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **ONE MAN, TWO GUVNORS:** Music Box, 239 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **PETER AND THE STARCATCHER:** Brooks Atkinson, 256 W. 47th St. 877-250-2929. **SLOWGIRL:** Claire Tow, 150 W. 65th St. 212-239-6200. Through Aug. 5. **UNCLE VANYA:** SoHo Rep, 46 Walker St. 212-352-3101.

## NIGHT LIFE ROCK AND POP

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

### B. B. KING BLUES CLUB & GRILL

237 W. 42nd St. (212-997-4144)—Aug. 7-8: George Thorogood was a semi-pro ballplayer in his native Delaware before deciding to trade in his glove for a guitar strap. Since 1977, he and his band, the Destroyers, have been throwin' that speedball by ya on a consistent basis, pretty much ignoring the curve and the change-up altogether. His arsenal of blues scorchers includes his own "Bad to the Bone," Hank Williams's "Move It On Over," and John Lee Hooker's "One Bourbon, One Scotch, One Beer."

### BEACON THEATRE

Broadway at 74th St. (212-465-6500)—Aug. 3-4: Since the beginning of his career, in the sixties, Jackson Browne has been recognized for his songwriting abilities, with acts like the Byrds, Nico, Joan Baez, and Linda Ronstadt recording his early material. Ultimately, though, Browne's own distinctive voice established him as an American soft-rock icon.

### BROOKLYN BOWL

61 Wythe Ave., Williamsburg (718-963-3369)—Aug. 2: Sponge, Detroit's self-proclaimed "hardest working band," hit it big in 1994 with the single "Plowed," on which the singer Vinnie Dombrowski intoned "in a world of human wreckage" over a revved-up sonic assault. The track was as good an anthem as any radio hit of its time; nearly twenty years later, Sponge continues to tour and release records. Dombrowski is the only original member, but the band's recent releases still pack a punch.

### CELEBRATE BROOKLYN!

Prospect Park Bandshell, Prospect Park W. at 9th St. (718-683-5600)—Aug. 3: Wild Flag, Mission of Burma, and Ted Leo, seasoned indie rockers all. Wild Flag's fuzzy sound is crafted by ex-members of the nineties favorites Sleater-Kinney and Helium. Mission of Burma was formed in 1979, took a long hiatus from 1983 to 2002, and is back with a new LP, "Unsound." Their guitar rock is every bit as energetic and unconventional as when they first appeared. With more than twenty years of experience as an indie-rock recording and touring machine, Ted Leo is ubiquitous in N.Y.C.'s outdoor-festival circuit and a solid pop songwriter with hardcore roots.

### FULTON STALL MARKET

Fulton Market Building, South Street Seaport (212-732-7678)—Aug. 5: Habibi, an all-female garage-rock quartet that's been making waves on the Brooklyn loft-party circuit, performing at South Street Seaport's weekend food market. (For more information, visit [fultonstallmarket.com](http://fultonstallmarket.com).)

### HIGHLINE BALLROOM

431 W. 16th St. (212-414-5994)—Aug. 5-6: The Zombies and the Left Banke are a dream pairing of two of the sixties' most compositionally sophisticated bands, each of which still boasts two original members. Led, then and now, by the ethereal vocalist Colin Blunstone and the nimble keyboardist Rod Argent, the Zombies scored back-to-back

hits with "She's Not There" and "Tell Her No," then cemented their reputation with the brilliant album "Odyssey and Oracle," which included "Time of the Season." Tom Finn and George Cameron, founding members of Left Banke ("Walk Away Renee," "Pretty Ballerina"), have put together a great baroque-and-roll band, featuring one of the city's most precise and entertaining pop singers: Mike Formatale. His solo rendition of Sonny and Cher's "I Got You Babe" at a recent "Loser's Lounge" show was impeccable and hilarious.

### HOUSE OF VANS

25 Franklin St., Brooklyn (No phone)—Aug. 2: Ernest Greene's lo-fi act Washed Out was on the van-

and moving American debut, "Sahel Folk," which was comprised of duets with other Malian musicians and recorded at his sister's house, "Koima" was tracked in a studio in Bamako, the capital, and orchestrated with *sokou* (one-stringed violin), bass, electric guitar, and calabash. Despite the plusher sound, the new record, highlighted by Touré's unhurried and gentle voice, still retains the engrossing intimacy that made his last album so appealing.

### JONES BEACH THEATRE

Wantagh, N.Y. (866-558-8468)—Aug. 2: A summery celebration of young hip-hop stars featuring the Pittsburgh m.c. Wiz Khalifa, who, after years of honing his rap skills, has broken through to the

## DANCE NOTES WHAT A GLORIOUS FEELING



Anniversaries are boxed-set occasions, and though a sixtieth birthday seems an unimpressive milestone, it may be that in 2002, on the fiftieth birthday of "Singin' in the Rain," Warner Home Videos wasn't yet able to do a "4k scan of the Technicolor 3-strip negatives and a new DTS-MASTER (uncompressed audio)," as the press release describes the Blu-ray version of that widely beloved movie. The company's just-released Ultimate Collector's Edition contains three disks—the Blu-ray, a regular DVD, and a special-features disk (they include commentary by Stanley Donen, the co-director; the stars Debbie Reynolds, Donald O'Connor, Cyd Charisse; and others)—and a substantial book on the making of the movie and an umbrella printed with raindrops.

It is good to see the film again. Donald O'Connor, with his rubber face and vaudeville virtuosity, is heaven. Debbie Reynolds, in the potentially annoying role of the pert virgin, is actually charming. (She was nineteen and very pretty. She had been Miss Burbank of 1948.) Gene Kelly, as always, seems fake—he can't stop selling—and, as in "An American in Paris," he gives us a big, bloated, pretentious dance number—"The Broadway Melody," thirteen and half minutes long—that makes you want to cry. But as a tapper he is simply astonishing, and he covers more space, and, it seems, lays

down more weight, than most of the other splendid tappers of the period. Finally, the movie's story, of how Hollywood's transition from silents to talkies ruined some careers, is sophisticated—good enough to have been appropriated last year by "The Artist," which also borrows, for its star, Kelly's frozen grin.

Those who like the movie will also like the book's backstage stories. In the role of Lina, the screechy-voiced dumb blonde whom the Debbie Reynolds character, Kathy, has to dub, M-G-M. wanted Judy Holliday, but after her success in "Born Yesterday," she was not to be had, and the studio cast Jean Hagen instead. Ironically, the higher-ups eventually decided that the voice Reynolds gave Hagen in the movie-within-the-movie wasn't good enough, and so they had it dubbed. Her singing was replaced by that of a professional, Betty Noyes, and her talking voice was replaced by...Hagen's.

As with other anniversary sets, the company doesn't expect all of us to buy the Ultimate Collector's Edition, at \$84.99. There is also a single-disk Blu-ray for \$19.98 and a two-disk DVD edition for \$14.96. In the latter, you get the documentary, but not the book or the umbrella.

—Joan Acocella

guard of the chill-wave movement in 2009, coating hazy, eighties-inspired pop in layers of tape hiss and reverb. He has since moved on, though his 2009 hit single, "Feel It All Around," has been featured as the theme for "Portlandia." Fred Armisen and Carrie Brownstein's hipster-baiting television sitcom, and remains a nostalgic paean to the heady days of the summer of 2010. Washed Out performs here with Chairlift, an atmospheric synth-pop duo. (For more information, visit [vans.com](http://vans.com).)

### IRVING PLAZA

17 Irving Pl. (212-777-6800)—Aug. 3: The raspy-voiced San Francisco underground hip-hop virtuoso Aesop Rock returns to the city in support of his sixth studio album, "Skelethon." Double and triple entendres are the order of the day in his compositions, where a noteworthy vocabulary defies mainstream rap's current trend of lazily crafted rhymes. The Bronx m.c. Rob Sonic lends his own powerful lyrics to the fold, along with the turntablist DJ Big Wiz and the Monome master Edison.

### JOE'S PUB

425 Lafayette St. (212-539-8778)—Aug. 4: The Malian guitarist and singer Sidi Touré celebrates the release of "Koima," his second full-length album for the Chicago post-rock label Thrill Jockey. The fifty-two-year-old Touré, who hails from Gao, an ancient city some two hundred miles southeast of Timbuktu, won several prestigious Malian music awards before garnering international notice. Unlike his spare

mainstream. He'll be performing material from his forthcoming second LP, "O.N.I.F.C." (Only Nigga in First Class), whose lead single, "Work Hard, Play Hard," showcases Khalifa's confident flow. The Compton rapper Kendrick Lamar has often been compared to Tupac Shakur in both cadence and subject matter—his powerful vocal sound-offs deal with ladies, marijuana, and a general love of California. With Schoolboy Q.

### KNITTING FACTORY

361 Metropolitan Ave., Brooklyn (347-529-6696)—July 31: The French and Finnish guy-girl duo the Dø serve up delicious pop with orchestral arrangements and esoteric instruments. "Slippery Slope," the lead single off the band's sophomore album, "Both Ways Open Jaws," is driven by tribal drums and a hypnotic chorus that sounds like a forbidden make-out session between Feist and M.I.A.

### LINCOLN CENTER OUT OF DOORS

Aug. 1: A triple bill of international grooves kicks off with the U.S. debut of uKanDanZ, an "Ethiopian crunch" band that mixes the beat of Addis Ababa with jazz, noise, and even a hint of French rock. Next up is the Malian singer Oumar Konate, followed by Yemen Blues, a nonet incorporating Middle Eastern and North African rhythms that's led by the Israeli-Yemeni singer Ravid Kahalani and the bassist Omer Avital. (For more information, visit [lcoutofdoors.org](http://lcoutofdoors.org). Through Aug. 12.)

#### MERCURY LOUNGE

217 E. Houston St. (212-260-4700)—Aug. 1: The French and Finnish guy-girl duo the Dø. (See the Knitting Factory.)

#### (LE) POISSON ROUGE

158 Bleecker St. (212-505-3474)—Aug. 4: The house producer John Talabot, perhaps Barcelona's most exciting export of late, is an alter ego of the Spanish d.j. and producer Oriol Riverola. Talabot's debut long-player, "Fin," finds progressive dance music in a highly modern form: seemingly disparate genres like disco, Midwestern techno and house, and Afrobeat all find their way into the hazy, mid-tempo mix. Riverola is in the Village this week for a d.j. set, alongside Jamie xx, a British producer and remix artist best known as a member of the xx.

#### SIWALK CAFÉ

94 Avenue A (212-473-7373)—Aug. 5: An acoustic performance by the Brooklyn musician and lo-fi recording artist Lance Romānce and his band the Federal Roosters, known for quirky pop songwriting and goofy performances that border on the shambolic. There's more to this band than meets the eye; their keen melodies are often veiled by sloppy guitar lines but are ever-present and engaging. Lucky

#### WEBSTER HALL

125 E. 11th St. (212-353-1600)—Aug. 6: The Boston act the Mighty Mighty Bosstones have been around since the early eighties, and during the ska-punk revival of the mid-nineties the band hit mainstream glory. Still skanking strong, the brass-boasting ensemble released its ninth album, "The Magic of Youth," late last year.

## JAZZ AND STANDARDS

#### BIRDLAND

315 W. 44th St. (212-581-3080)—July 31-Aug. 4: The Masters Quartet. Truth in advertising, as the pianist Steve Kuhn, the electric bassist Steve Swallow, the saxophonist Dave Liebman, and the drummer Billy Drummond, each an unquestioned champion on his instrument, unite.

#### BLUE NOTE

131 W. 3rd St. (212-475-8592)—July 31-Aug. 5: Jane Monheit. A decade after her initial appearance on the jazz scene, and an ensuing tsunami of hype and critical controversy, the singer has rid-

homegrown and international. He gains even more propulsive assurance from the great drummer Lewis Nash.

#### 54 BELOW

254 W. 54th St. (646-476-3551)—Mondays through Aug. 6: Lea DeLaria may be about as subtle as a thunderstorm, but behind the bluster lies a skilled performer.

#### IRIDIUM

1650 Broadway, at 51st St. (212-582-2121)—Aug. 5-6: The guitarist Larry Coryell, an authentic pioneer of jazz-rock, shares the stage with another guitarist, his son, Murali.

#### RUBIN MUSEUM OF ART

150 W. 17th St. (212-620-5000)—Aug. 3: Brian Lynch, a formidable trumpeter long associated with both Phil Woods and Eddie Palmieri, fronts his own quartet in the museum's splendidly unamplified performance space.

#### S.O.B.'S

204 Varick St., at W. Houston St. (212-243-4940)—Aug. 3: Eddie Palmieri. The pianist, composer, bandleader, and patriarch of contemporary Latin jazz, who recently won a Jazz Masters award from the National Endowment for the Arts, brings his seasoned unit to town.

#### VILLAGE VANGUARD

178 Seventh Ave. S., at 11th St. (212-255-4037)—July 31-Aug. 5: Brian Blade, an in-demand, genre-crossing drummer, may be the best known member of the Fellowship Band, but his role never overshadows his bandmates, who include the pianist Jon Cowherd and the saxophonists Myron Walden and Melvin Butler, vividly atmospheric players all.

## TABLES FOR TWO SUPER LINDA



109 W. Broadway (212-227-8998)—If you like humiliation and habañeros, then Super Linda, in Tribeca, is for you. It is not enough to merely secure a reservation at Matt Abramcyk's newest establishment. (His other clubby spots include Warren 77, Smith & Mills, and Tiny's, and he ran the Beatrice Inn before it closed, in 2009.) One must arrive ready for abasement, which is served with considerable creativity. There is, of course, an intimidating bouncer stationed outside the front door, and a beautiful young hostess inside who manages to make the question "May I help you?" sound truly cruel. But that's nothing new. One Friday night, a pair of diners found themselves staring longingly at an open two-top for thirty minutes after the appointed hour of their reservation when a chic host with tiny dreadlocks approached the couple, not to offer consolation or a round of drinks but to remark, "You really should check that," pointing to their insufficiently glamorous gym bag.

Diners are rewarded for their fortitude with food and beverages of a pan-Latin bent, a fusion of Argentine and Uruguayan from Abramcyk's partners, Serge Becker and Richard Ampudia, of La Esquina. A forty-dollar rib eye accompanied by braised kale and roasted fingerling potatoes was nothing special; ditto for prawns served with smoked tomato, avocado, and rice. The best of Super Linda's offerings are the bar-snack-style starters, like the perky *tostada de esquites*, a lit-

tle pile of corn and cotija cheese topped with lime-spiked house-made mayonnaise on tiny crunchy tortillas, and the shrimp balls, with *chile de árbol* and cilantro. Inexplicably, an Italian entrée—chicken Milanese—has migrated onto the menu, and many of the vegetable sides seem similarly not quite South American. Regardless of their origin, the sweet and nicely crisp fried Brussels sprouts with toasted almonds and chile peppers are an excellent and unexpected addition.

But food is not really the point here. Super Linda is a place to watch rich men flirt with young women and buy them tasty drinks with funny names, like the Alex Comfort (rum, sloe gin, orange juice, and bitters) and Blue Skies, No Candy (tequila, gin, apricot liqueur, and Cocchi Americano). The space is fetching, with glowing lanterns illuminating a diner-like décor of gleaming green tiles and comfortable maroon booths. Once you are finally seated, the place offers a certain preposterous charm. Just don't arrive hungry, and leave any frumpy totes—or friends—behind, and you may enjoy the novelty of a Savage Detective (a mezcal Old Fashioned with sherry, maple syrup, and charred pineapple) amidst the buzzy blend of flirting, texting, and social climbing that is Abramcyk's signature dish. (Open Mondays through Fridays for lunch and dinner and weekends for brunch and dinner. Entrées \$18-\$40.)

—Ariel Levy

show-goers may be treated to songs from Lance's self-released second album from 2000, "Titty Titty Yum Yum."

#### TERMINAL 5

610 W. 56th St. (212-582-6600)—Aug. 2: The xx, a beguiling British band that specializes in hushed, fragile pop songs that are as emotionally confessional as they are sonically understated, is playing six dates in North America this summer. They'll be back shortly with a new album ("Coexist," their second release, is due Sept. 11) and a more elaborate fall tour. Aug. 7-8: After a brief hiatus, the British rockers Bloc Party are set to release their fourth album, "Four," later this month. The first single, "Octopus," suggests a strong return for these indie disco darlings.

den out the storm. On her current album, "Home," she displays a ripening voice and a refined taste in standards.

#### CORNELIA STREET CAFÉ

29 Cornelia St. (212-989-9319)—Aug. 2-4: Irabagon Fest. Jon Irabagon, a rampaging saxophonist who releases torrents of sound at the drop of a hat, gets three nights to flaunt his stamina and imagination. Opening night finds him with two stalwarts of new jazz: the bassist Mark Helias and the drummer Barry Altschul.

#### DIZZY'S CLUB COCA-COLA

Broadway at 60th St. (212-258-9595)—Aug. 1-5: Randy Weston's African Rhythms. The celebrated pianist and composer is driven by rhythms, both

## ART

### MUSEUMS AND LIBRARIES

#### METROPOLITAN MUSEUM

Fifth Ave. at 82nd St. (212-535-7710)—"Tomás Saraceno: Cloud City." Through Nov. 4. ♦ "Schia-parelli and Prada: Impossible Conversation." Through Aug. 19. ♦ "Bellini, Titian, and Lotto: North Italian Paintings from the Accademia Carrara, Bergamo." Through Sept. 3. ♦ "The Dawn of Egyptian Art." Through Aug. 5. ♦ "Naked Before the Camera." Through Sept. 9. ♦ "Ellsworth Kelly: Plants." Through Sept. 3. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 9:30 to 5:30, and Friday and Saturday evenings until 9.)

#### MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

11 W. 53rd St. (212-708-9400)—"Alighiero Boetti: Game Plan." Through Oct. 1. ♦ "Ecstatic Alphabets/Heaps of Language." Through Aug. 27. ♦ "Taryn Simon: A Living Man Declared Dead and Other Chapters." Through Sept. 3. ♦ "Century of the Child: Growing by Design, 1900-2000." Through Nov. 5. (Open Wednesdays through Mondays, 10:30 to 5:30, and Friday evenings until 8.)

#### MOMA PS1

22-25 Jackson Ave., Queens (718-784-2084)—"Lara Favaretto: Just Knocked Out." Through Sept. 10. ♦ "Esther Kläs—Better Energy." Through Sept. 17. ♦ "Solo Projects by Rey Akdogan, Edgardo Aragón, Ilja Karilampi, and Caitlin Keogh." Through Sept. 17. (Open Thursdays through Mondays, noon to 6.)

#### GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM

Fifth Ave. at 89th St. (212-423-3587)—"Rineke Dijkstra: A Retrospective." Through Oct. 3. ♦ "Art of Another Kind: International Abstraction and the Guggenheim, 1949-1960." Through Sept. 12. (Open Fridays through Wednesdays, 10 to 5:45, and Saturday evenings until 7:45.)

#### WHITNEY MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART

Madison Ave. at 75th St. (212-570-3600)—"Yayoi Kusama." Through Sept. 30. ♦ "Sharon Hayes: There's So Much I Want to Say to You." Through Sept. 9. ♦ "Oskar Fischinger: Space Light Art—A Film Environment." Through Oct. 28. (Open Wednesdays, Thursdays, and weekends, 11 to 6, and Fridays, 1 to 9.)

#### BROOKLYN MUSEUM

200 Eastern Parkway (718-638-5000)—"Rachel Kneebone: Regarding Rodin." Through Aug. 12. ♦

"Playing House." Through Aug. 26. ♦ "Ulrike Müller: Herstory Inventory." Through Sept. 9. (Open Wednesdays through Sundays, 11 to 6, and Thursday evenings until 10.)

**AMERICAN MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY**  
Central Park W. at 79th St. (212-769-5100)—"Beyond Planet Earth: The Future of Space Exploration." Through Aug. 12. ♦ "Creatures of Light: Nature's Bioluminescence." Through Jan. 6. ♦ "Spiders Alive!" Through Dec. 2. (Open daily, 10 to 5:45.)

**BRONX MUSEUM OF THE ARTS**  
1040 Grand Concourse (718-681-6000)—"Urban Archives: The Rituals of Chaos." Through Jan. 6. ♦ "Revolution Not Televised." Through Oct. 17. (Open Thursdays through Sundays, 11 to 6, and Friday evenings until 8.)

**FRICK COLLECTION**  
1 E. 70th St. (212-288-0700)—"Gold, Jasper, and Carnelian: Johann Christian Neuber at the Saxon Court." Through Aug. 19. (Open Tuesdays through Saturdays, 10 to 6, and Sundays, 11 to 5.)

**JEWISH MUSEUM**  
Fifth Ave. at 92nd St. (212-423-3200)—"Édouard Vuillard: A Painter and His Muses, 1890-1940." Through Sept. 23. ♦ "Sanford Biggers and Jennifer Zackin: A Small World." Through Oct. 14. (Open Saturdays through Tuesdays, 11 to 5:45, Thursdays, 11 to 8, and Fridays, 11 to 4.)

**MORGAN LIBRARY & MUSEUM**  
225 Madison Ave., at 36th St. (212-685-0008)—"Renaissance Venice: Drawings from the Morgan." Through Sept. 23. ♦ "Ellsworth Kelly: Sculpture." Through Sept. 9. ♦ "Robert Wilson/Philip Glass: Einstein on the Beach." Through Nov. 4. ♦ "Josef Albers in America: Painting on Paper." Through Oct. 14. (Open Tuesdays through Thursdays, 10:30 to 5, Fridays, 10:30 to 9, Saturdays, 10 to 6, and Sundays, 11 to 6.)

**MUSEO DEL BARRIO**  
Fifth Ave. at 104th St. (212-831-7272)—"Caribbean: Crossroads of the World." In a valiant effort to convey the cultural diversity of a region that encompasses more than seven thousand islands and at least six languages, the museum errs on the side of over-inclusion in a crowded salon-style installation that ranges across four hundred years and allows very few works to stand out. Those that do run the gamut from the modernist (a hazy landscape from 1940 by the Venezuelan painter Armando Reverón) to the conceptual (a print-out of Magellan's itinerary by Paul Ramirez Jonas, an American artist who was born in Honduras) and from sculpture (an upholstered bench that suggests a contortionist by the Nicaraguan Patricia Belli) to performance (a riveting photograph of the collaborative Venezuelans Yeni y Nan posing nude on salt crystals in the surf). The exhibition continues at the Queens Museum and the Studio Museum in Harlem. Through Jan. 6. (Open Tuesdays through Saturdays, 11 to 6, and Sundays, 1 to 5.)

**MUSEUM OF ARTS AND DESIGN**  
2 Columbus Circle (212-299-7777)—"Swept Away: Dust, Ashes, and Dirt in Contemporary Art and Design." Through Aug. 12. ♦ "Changing Hands: Art Without Reservation, Contemporary Native North American Art from the Northeast and Southeast." Through Oct. 21. ♦ "Space-Light-Structure: The Jewelry of Margaret De Patta." Through Sept. 23. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 11 to 6, and Thursday and Friday evenings until 9.)

**MUSEUM OF THE CITY OF NEW YORK**  
Fifth Ave. at 103rd St. (212-534-1672)—"Capital of Capital: New York's Banks and the Creation of a Global Economy." Through Oct. 21. ♦

"Activist New York." Through Dec. 31. (Open daily, 10 to 6, and Saturday evenings until 8:30.)

**NEW MUSEUM**  
235 Bowery, at Prince St. (212-219-1222)—"Ghosts in the Machine." Through Sept. 20. ♦ "Pictures from the Moon: Artists' Holograms 1969-2008." Through Sept. 30. (Open Wednesdays through Sundays, 11 to 6, and Thursday evenings until 9.)

**NEW YORK BOTANICAL GARDEN**  
Bronx River Parkway at Fordham Rd., the Bronx (718-817-8700)—"Monet's Garden." Through May 18. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 10 to 6.)

**QUEENS MUSEUM OF ART**  
Flushing Meadows-Corona Park (718-592-9700)—"Caribbean: Crossroads of the World."

backdrops. Roe Etheridge might have shot the Ikebana-style flower arrangement with a partly eaten foil-wrapped candy bar left at its base. But Kingsley's off on her own wonderfully weird trip with much of this work, including a picture of a forest floor with little stacks of coins among the pine needles. Through Aug. 3. (Castelli, 18 E. 77th St. 212-249-4470.)

### Short List

**JAMES LEE BYARS:** Werner, 4 E. 77th St. 212-988-1623. Through Aug. 31. **MARK FLOOD:** Luxembourg & Dayan, 64 E. 77th St. 212-452-4646. Through Sept. 29. **ANNETTE MESSAGER:** Marian Goodman, 24 W. 57th St. 212-977-7160. Through Aug. 24. **BRUCE NAUMAN / ROBERT RYMAN:** Gagolian, 980 Madison Ave., at 76th St. 212-744-2313. Through Aug. 24. **"JANET CARDIFF AND GEORGE BURES MILLER: THE MURDER OF CROWS":** Park Avenue Armory, Park Ave. at 66th St. 212-933-5812. Opens Aug. 3.

## GALLERIES—CHELSEA

### JIM MARSHALL

It takes a combination of access and audacity to be a great rock-and-roll photographer, and Marshall has them both. This sprawling exhibition focusses on his photographs of the Rolling Stones on their 1972 American tour but backs that up with a slew of work with other musicians, including Jimi Hendrix, Howlin' Wolf, Bob Dylan, and John Coltrane. Marshall has a broad range of subjects and approaches, but his strength is intimate photojournalism—the position of a very lucky fly on the wall. Onstage and off, the Stones might look like the ultimate rock gods, but other pictures here hint at the dark side of success, and one of Janis Joplin backstage, cradling a bottle of Southern Comfort, is heartbreaking. Through Sept. 8. (Kasher, 521 W. 23rd St. 212-966-3978.)

### "MARXISM"

The best thing about this show is the design of its brochure, a spoof on the influential, Marxist-leaning art journal *October*. But the Marx in question here isn't Karl, it's the brothers Groucho, Chico, Harpo, Gummo, and Zeppo, and "the socio-political impact" of their subversive humor. Is it a stretch to connect Duchamp's iconic image of the Mona Lisa defaced by a mustache

(first conceived in 1919 and seen here in a later print) to the trademark greasypaint on Groucho's upper lip? Probably, but it's still the best piece of art in the show. Other works, variously slapstick and deadpan, by Jack Goldstein, Rodney Graham, Tim Lee, and Richard Prince, pale in comparison with the excerpts of Marx Brothers films projected onto one wall. To paraphrase Groucho, you may leave feeling as if you've seen a perfectly wonderful show. But this wasn't it. Through Aug. 3. (303 Gallery, 547 W. 21st St. 212-255-1121.)

### "REQUIEM FOR THE SUN: THE ART OF MONO-HA"

If you thought minimalism was a Western phenomenon, meet Mono-ha, which roughly translates as "the school of things." The short-lived Japanese art movement, which flourished in the late sixties and early seventies, championed industrial materials, often in site-specific installations. In a stunning 1970 piece (re-created in 1994) by Nobuo Sekine, stretched canvas is gathered into a ball and held in place by a stone. Light and shadow manifest as form in works by



*The xx bring their hushed and whispery songs to Terminal 5.*

Through Jan. 6. (Open Wednesdays through Fridays, 10 to 5, and weekends, noon to 5.)

**SCHOMBURG CENTER**  
Malcolm X Blvd. at 135th St. (212-491-2200)—"The Works of Gordon Parks." Through Dec. 31. (Open Mondays through Saturdays, 10 to 6, and Sundays, 1 to 5.)

**STUDIO MUSEUM IN HARLEM**  
144 W. 125th St. (212-864-4500)—"Caribbean: Crossroads of the World." Through Oct. 21. (Open Thursdays and Fridays, noon to 9, Saturdays, 10 to 6, and Sundays, noon to 6.)

## GALLERIES—UPTOWN

### DIANA KINGSLEY

It's hard to know what Kingsley is up to with this new group of photographs, but she's obviously having fun. Some of her still-life images look like parodies of Elad Lassry's, with similarly oddball arrangements of tomatoes, cheese wedges, and melons and balloons on brightly colored

Jiro Takamatsu and Koji Enokura. Lee Ufan—Mono-ha's best-known member and the subject of a recent Guggenheim retrospective—wraps electrical cords around boulders and wooden boards in visual koans reflecting on contrasts between the man-made and the natural, the impermanent and the enduring. Through Aug. 3. (Gladstone, 530 W. 21st St. 212-206-7606.)

#### "STRETCHING PAINTING"

Forgive the show's bad pun of a title and admire the experimental range of the ten painters here. Standouts include Alex Kwartler's pale acrylic-and-plaster brushwork on large plywood boards that lean casually against the wall; Sarah Cain's witty paean to surface and void in a painting embellished with circles cut out of its canvas; Gabriel Pionkowski's painstakingly dismantled textiles, from which individual strands droop in elegant catenaries; James Hyde's wall-mounted porcelains incorporating photographic images of vegetation; and Hilary Harnischfeger's mixed-media reliefs, which suggest hybrids of the geological and the confectionary. Through Aug. 3. (Galerie Lelong, 528 W. 26th St. 212-315-0470.)

#### "TÊTE-À-TÊTE"

Mickalene Thomas organized this exhibition of African and African-American photographers who, like her, treat issues of race, gender, and identity with wit, nerve, and a minimum of academic attitude. Although South Africa's Zanele Muholi stands out with her frank portraits of black lesbians, Deana Lawson, Clifford Owens, and LaToya Ruby Frazier contribute equally striking images of sexual ambiguity and erotic display. Photographs by the reliable standbys Hank Willis Thomas and Malick Sidibe look a bit tame next to more challenging and idiosyncratic work by Owens, Derrick Adams, and Xaviera Simmons, but the only disappointment is Thomas herself, who contributes eight repetitive grids of tiny Polaroid studies for larger works when one knockout piece would have satisfied. Through Aug. 24. (Richardson, 535 W. 22nd St. 646-230-9610.)

#### Short List

**ALWAR BALASUBRAMANIAM:** Talwar, 108 E. 16th St. 212-673-3096. Through Aug. 31. **"B-OUT":** Edlin, 134 Tenth Ave., at 18th St. 212-206-9723. Through Aug. 18. **"BEASTS OF REVELATION":** DC Moore, 535 W. 22nd St. 212-247-2111. Through Aug. 3. **"CLAXONS":** Haunch of Venison, 550 W. 21st St. 212-259-0000. Through Aug. 17. **"IN PLAIN SIGHT":** Mitchell-Innes & Nash, 534 W. 26th St. 212-744-7400. Through Aug. 17.

### GALLERIES—DOWNTOWN

#### SCOTT B. DAVIS / TARA BOGART

Davis's black-and-white photographs were made at night in San Diego, where he lives, and in neighboring towns, but his sites are deliberately anonymous: a wooden shed, a water tank, a row of shuttered shops. The better part of these pictures remains in darkness, leaving us to peer into dimly lit streetscapes like a lost and anxious traveller. Have we stumbled onto a film-noir crime scene? If so, it's a perversely gorgeous one: Davis's platinum-palladium prints look like vintage velvet. Bogart's lovely, oval-shaped photographs of pale young women seen from behind recall classic anthropological studies, only here the subjects were chosen for their distinctive hair styles and their very contemporary take on feminine beauty. Through Aug. 31. (Hous Projects, 31 Howard St. 212-941-5801.)

#### Short List

**DAVID KORTY:** Kimmerich, 50 White St. 212-226-0070. Through Aug. 23. **DOUGLAS MELINI:** Feature, 131 Allen St. 212-675-7772. Through Aug. 11. **STAN VANDERBEEK:** American Contemporary, 4 E. 2nd St. 347-789-7072. Through Aug. 17. **"BUY**

**MY BANANAS":** Werble, 83 Vandam St. 212-352-9700. Through Aug. 10. **"INSIDE THE BANANA":** Albus Greenspon, 71 Morton St. 212-255-7872. Through Sept. 22.

### DANCE

#### LINCOLN CENTER OUT OF DOORS

Instead of the YouTube mash-up that the title might suggest, "Accordion Wrestling" is a revival of a defunct Finnish tradition. The punkish Kimmo Pohjonen stars, playing electronically enhanced accordion and even entering the fray as wrestlers stretch and grapple in an unusual multimedia event. On Saturday, dancers with hyper-extended joints or crooked or missing limbs challenge conventional notions of dancery beauty in Heidi Latsky's ongoing "Gimp" project. And on Sunday afternoon Haiti comes to Hearst Plaza, as the Feet of Rhythm Afro-Haitian Dance Company, La Troupe Makandal, and Peniel Guerrier summon voodoo gods and carnival spirits. (Lincoln Center, 70 Lincoln Center Plaza. 212-721-6500. "Accordion Wrestling": Aug. 3-4 at 8:30. "Gimp": Aug. 4 at 7. "Ayiti Rasanble!": Aug. 5 at 1.)

#### "HIP HOP GENERATION NEXT 2012"

A free block party in the South Bronx celebrates the local roots of hip-hop as well as the genre's African and Latin origins. The star-packed lineup includes Emilio (Buddha Stretch) Austin, Jr., Gabriel (Kwikstep) Dionisio, Ana (Rokafella) Garcia, and Valeria (Ms. Vee) Ho. Brandon (Peace) Albright and the venerable Jorge (Popmaster Fabel) Pabon host. (Simpson St. between 163rd St. and Baretto St., the Bronx. 718-589-2230. Aug. 4 at 2.)

#### "BALLET IN CINEMA" / "LA BAYADÈRE"

As a bonus after the recent American tour, fans of the Paris Opera Ballet can further explore the company's style in this rebroadcast of a March, 2012, performance of its sumptuous "La Bayadère," filmed at the Opéra Bastille. This 1877 ballet, staged for P.O.B. by Nureyev shortly before his death, is an epic tale of love and betrayal set in India, as imagined by a nineteenth-century Frenchman (Marius Petipa) living in Imperial Russia. At this performance, the heroine, Nikiya, is danced by the regal Aurélie Dupont; her swain, by the young Josua Hoffalt, a model of Gallic restraint. (Big Cinemas, 239 E. 59th St. 212-371-6682. Aug. 5 at 11 A.M.)

### OUT OF TOWN

#### JACOB'S PILLOW

The Royal Winnipeg Ballet takes up residence at the Ted Shawn Theatre, with a mixed bill of contemporary ballet. Mauricio Wainrot's "Carmina Burana"—a sleek, large-scale production set to Carl Orff's clamorous song cycle—has become something of a company calling card. The choreography, highly charged and churning, like choppy seas, leaves little space for stillness. The look is urbane, with an industrial backdrop and voluminous skirts for both men and women, later replaced by corsets and briefs. "Carmina" shares the program with a pas de deux (by Mark Godden) set to Beethoven's "Moonlight Sonata" and Peter Quanz's quietly sophisticated "In Tandem," an intimate work set to Steve Reich's "Double Sextet." ♦ Because of an injury, a work that was meant to be a duet for the former Cunningham dancer Jonah Bokaer and David Hallberg, of American Ballet Theatre, has now become a solo for Bokaer, entitled "Curtain." He will work around site-specific stage installations created by the imaginative young sculptor Daniel Arsham. The evening, which features music by Chris Garneau and Bernhard Günter (integrating a 1984 lecture by John Cage), will also include a trio for Bokaer and two frequent collaborators, the dancers James McGinn and Adam H. Weinert. (Doris Duke). (Becket, Mass. 413-243-0745. Aug. 1-5.)

#### MT. TREMPER ARTS

The Catskills festival combines barns, barbecues, and campfires with photography exhibitions and

some of the most sophisticated voices in contemporary dance. This week, the idiosyncratic and peripatetic choreographer Kota Yamazaki brings "Iruka," a slinky snake-charmer solo from 2007 with disconcerting bursts of speed. For his work-in-progress duet, "July 13, 1987," he assigns violent tasks to two men. The title commemorates the date of the choreographer's first visit to New York. (647 South Plank Rd., Mt. Tremper, N.Y. 845-688-9893. Aug. 4 at 8.)

### CLASSICAL MUSIC CONCERTS IN TOWN

#### MOSTLY MOZART FESTIVAL

The annual series, as we've come to expect, blends the Salzburg wonder's music with a broad range of works by both historical and contemporary composers of note. July 31 and Aug. 1 at 8: Louis Langrée, the festival's music director, and the Mostly Mozart Festival Orchestra start things off with an all-Mozart program (including the Piano Concerto No. 20 in D Minor, "Un'aura amorosa," from "Così fan tutte," and the "Prague" Symphony) that features both a lauded veteran artist, the pianist Nelson Freire, and a relative newcomer, the young Met tenor Lawrence Brownlee. (Avery Fisher Hall.) ♦ Aug. 2 at 7:30 and Aug. 5 at 3: Yannick Nézet-Séguin, the Canadian phenom who takes over the music directorship of the Philadelphia Orchestra this fall, made his New York debut at Mostly Mozart. Returning in triumph, he offers three concerts this time; two are given with the exciting violinist Lisa Batiashvili and the impeccable Chamber Orchestra of Europe. The first program offers Beethoven's Violin Concerto and Symphony No. 3, "Eroica"; the second features music by Mozart, Bach (the Concerto in C Minor for Violin and Oboe), and Mendelssohn (the "Scotch" Symphony). (Alice Tully Hall.) ♦ Aug. 3-4 at 8: Nézet-Séguin's third concert finds him getting reacquainted with the festival orchestra in a program that highlights one of his areas of expertise—choral music. With the soloists Christiane Karg, Julie Boulianne, Toby Spence, and Andrew Foster-Williams and the Concert Chorus of New York onstage, he leads Haydn's "Lord Nelson Mass," with Beethoven's Symphony No. 2 in D Major as a prelude. (Avery Fisher Hall.) ♦ Aug. 5 at 5: The magic of birdsong is a central theme in this year's festival; helping to illuminate it is the International Contemporary Ensemble, which in a short time has become a vital force for musical modernism. Its first concert, with the conductor Susanna Mälkki and the pianist Nicolas Hodges as guests, offers music by Luca Francesconi ("Islands"), Jukka Tiensuu, the Columbia University doyen Tristan Murail, and by the twentieth century's great lover of birdsong Messiaen (including "Oiseaux Exotiques"). (Rose Theatre, Broadway at 60th St.) (For tickets and full schedule, see [mostlymozart.org](http://mostlymozart.org).)

#### RITE OF SUMMER MUSIC FESTIVAL

The laid-back vibe of downtown contemporary music performance now extends to Governors Island, where this enterprising outfit, co-directed by Blair McMillen and Pam Goldberg, presents free, high-quality concerts in a relaxed outdoor setting. The accomplished gentlemen of the JACK Quartet, who excel at the fringes of the string-quartet repertory, offer a concert that combines the medieval world of Guillaume de Machaut with the modern sounds of such composers as Ken Thomson (selections from "Thaw"), David Crowell, and Charles Ives. (Colonels Row. Aug. 4 at 1 and 3. No tickets required. For a schedule of free ferry service, see [govisland.com](http://govisland.com).)

### OUT OF TOWN

#### BARD SUMMERSCAPE

Chabrier's "Le Roi Malgré Lui" ("The King in Spite of Himself") is not only a masterpiece of comic opera but also one of the most stylistically influential pieces of late-nineteenth-century France—

as one of his successors, Maurice Ravel, admitted. Liam Bonner takes the title role, singing Henri de Valois, in a production by Thaddeus Strassberger that also features Michele Angelini and Andriana Chuchman; Leon Botstein conducts. (Richard B. Fisher Center, Annandale-on-Hudson, N.Y. 845-758-7900. Aug. 1 and Aug. 5 at 3 and Aug. 3 at 7. These are the final performances.)

#### GLIMMERGLASS FESTIVAL

Aug. 2 at 7:30 and Aug. 4 and Aug. 6 at 1:30: Francesca Zambello, the adventuresome director of the Northeast's paramount summer opera festival, has made it her mission to stage great American musicals in the Alice Busch Theatre, heard in their original, unamplified sonic ambience. "The Music Man" is her current project, a production directed and choreographed by Marcia Milgrom Dodge, with a cast headed by Dwayne Croft and Elizabeth Futral (as Marian, the librarian); John DeMain conducts. ♦ Aug. 3 at 7:30 and Aug. 7 at 1:30: Kurt Weill, working with the Broadway playwright Maxwell Anderson, devoted great care to his last completed show, "Lost in the Stars" (1949), a "musical tragedy" inspired by Alan Paton's novel "Cry, the Beloved Country," a vivid protest against the racist structure of South African society. Eric Owens heads the cast, joined by the tenor Sean Panikkar and the actor Wynn Harmon; DeMain. ♦ Aug. 5 at 1:30: The festival makes its first plunge into the French Baroque in a big way, with a lavish production of Lully's "Armide," a supernatural *tragédie en musique* (suggested to the composer by Louis XIV, of course) set against the backdrop of Christian-Muslim conflict in the Holy Land. Marshall Pynkoski's staging, a collaboration with Toronto's Opera Atelier, features the singers Peggy Kriha Dye, Colin Ainsworth, João Fernandes, and Curtis Sullivan, along with a full corps de ballet; David Fallis. (Cooperstown, N.Y. 607-547-2255.)

#### TANGLEWOOD

Aug. 2 at 8: Gerald Finley, the thoughtful yet potent Met baritone, teams up with the pianist Julius Drake to give what should be a persuasive evening of songs and lieder by Loewe, Schubert, Britten, and Ravel. ♦ Aug. 3 at 8:30: Finley returns as the guest star in the first of two concerts given by Lorin Maazel and the Boston Symphony Orchestra, with a program combining music by Mozart (the "Prague" Symphony and arias from the three Da Ponte operas) and Ravel ("Alborada del Gracioso," the orchestral song cycle "Don Quichotte à Dulcinée," and the Suite No. 2 from "Daphnis et Chloé"). ♦ Aug. 4 at 8:30: At the center of a week of blockbuster concerts is an ultra-Germanic program courtesy of the venerable Christoph von Dohnányi—Schumann's Fourth Symphony and Brahms's Second Piano Concerto (with the formidable Yefim Bronfman). ♦ Aug. 5 at 2:30: Lorin Maazel returns to the podium to lead the B.S.O. in another concert featuring the colorful repertory he favors—Saint-Saëns's Piano Concerto No. 5, "Egyptian" (with the graceful Jean-Yves Thibaudet), Berlioz's "Symphonie Fantastique," and a première by Michael Gandolfini, "Night Train to Perugia." (Lenox, Mass. For tickets and full schedule, see bso.org.)

#### MARLBORO MUSIC

Every summer, a gathering of the world's finest classical musicians—and their very talented protégés—takes place in Vermont at a chamber-music festival and school founded six decades ago by (among others) the great pianist Rudolf Serkin. Now under the guidance of Mitsuko Uchida and Richard Goode, Marlboro continues its scheme of study and concerts; programs are announced a week in advance at marlboromusic.org. (Marlboro, Vt. 802-254-2394. Aug. 3-4 at 8:30 and Aug. 5 at 2:30.)

#### BRIDGEHAMPTON CHAMBER MUSIC FESTIVAL

The flutist Marya Martin maintains this longtime festival, which combines an easygoing spirit with an ethic of polished professionalism. The second of three concerts this week at Bridgehampton Presbyterian Church is a "Baroque Banquet" that features music by Bach and Vivaldi; the musicians include the violist Cynthia Phelps and the

harpsichordist Paolo Bordignon. (Aug. 4 at 6:30. For tickets and full schedule, see bcrmf.org.)

#### NORFOLK CHAMBER MUSIC FESTIVAL

The Tokyo String Quartet, which has taught and concertized at Norfolk for decades, offers its final concert of the season—Beethoven's Quartet in A Minor, Op. 132, and Brahms's Clarinet Quintet (with David Shifrin). (Norfolk, Conn. Aug. 4 at 8. For tickets and full schedule, see norfolkmusic.org.)

#### MUSIC MOUNTAIN

Northwest Connecticut's string-quartet shrine welcomes the up-and-coming Hausmann Quartet to the fold; it appears with the pianist Lydia Artymiw, a seasoned and lyrically insistent chamber-music player, in a concert offering music by Haydn, Beethoven (the "Razumovsky" Quartet No. 2 in E Minor), and Schumann (the Piano Quartet). (Falls Village, Conn. Aug. 5 at 3. For tickets and full schedule, see musicmountain.org.)

#### MAVERICK CONCERTS

The Amernet String Quartet has been bringing its hearty sound and robust expressivity, well-tuned to late-Romantic repertory, to the Maverick's serene music chapel for several years. The group collaborates with the soprano Nancy Allen Lundy, the violist Yizhak Schotten, and the cellist Robert deMaine in a concert featuring music by Debussy, Russell Platt ("Transport to Summer," a song cycle for soprano and string sextet), and Tchaikovsky (the vibrant sextet "Souvenir de Florence"). (Woodstock, N.Y. maverickconcerts.org. Aug. 5 at 4.)

## MOVIES OPENINGS

#### THE BABYMAKERS

In this comedy, a man who fears that he's sterile (Paul Schneider) robs a sperm bank. Directed by Jay Chandrasekhar; co-starring Olivia Munn. Opening Aug. 3. (In limited release.)

#### CELESTE AND JESSE FOREVER

A romantic comedy, starring Rashida Jones (who co-wrote the script with Will McCormack) and Andy Samberg as lovers who attempt to stay friends after divorcing. Directed by Lee Toland Krieger; co-starring Chris Messina and Emma Roberts. Opening Aug. 3. (In limited release.)

#### DREAMS OF A LIFE

In this documentary, the director Carol Morley portrays, through interviews and staged scenes, a woman whose body was found in her London apartment three years after her death. Opening Aug. 3. (IFC Center.)

#### FREE RADICALS

A documentary, directed by Pip Chodorov, about the history of experimental film and its makers. Opening Aug. 3. (Anthology Film Archives.)

#### 360

Fernando Meirelles directed this adaptation of Arthur Schnitzler's play "La Ronde," about a linked series of erotic encounters. Starring Rachel Weisz, Anthony Hopkins, Jude Law, Ben Foster, Jamel Debbouze, and Moritz Bleibtreu. Opening Aug. 3. (In limited release.)

#### TOTAL RECALL

Another take on Philip K. Dick's science-fiction story "I Can Remember It for You Wholesale," about a laborer (Colin Farrell) whose dreams of being a spy are turned into memories and get him into real trouble. Directed by Len Wiseman; co-starring Kate Beckinsale and Bill Nighy. Opening Aug. 3. (In wide release.)

#### YOU'VE BEEN TRUMPED

Anthony Baxter directed this documentary, about local opposition to Donald Trump's plans to construct a golf course in Scotland. Opening Aug. 3. (In limited release.)

## NOW PLAYING

#### THE AMAZING SPIDER-MAN

Does film criticism become redundant when a movie reviews itself in its own title? Or should we take

## CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK SCREEN FRIGHT

Deanna Durbin was one of Hollywood's most popular actresses before she retired, in 1949, at the age of twenty-eight. Her apparent unease with performance folds poignantly into her starring role in "Christmas Holiday," Robert Siodmak's



film noir of romantic degradation, from 1944 (playing at Film Forum Aug. 2). She plays a singer/prostitute in a sleazy New Orleans dance hall who takes the stage with her arms pinned limply to her sides and her eyes asking in despair, "What am I doing here?" The rest of the movie, told largely in flashbacks, provides the reason: fallout from her marriage to a fast-talking, glad-handing heel (played with unctuous charm by Gene Kelly). Siodmak makes performance his subject, with scenes of an orchestra playing Wagner (her ecstasy) and Beethoven (her fate), lovers singing at a piano in a parlor, and a society band at a swank café, where, in a cunning crane shot of a saunter down a staircase—with Kelly's leonine grace and Durbin's homely footfalls—he condenses the drama to a thwarted dance.

—Richard Brody

that preemptive assessment as a challenge? Certainly, there are things that amaze in Marc Webb's addition to the comic-book franchise: the scene, for instance, where Peter Parker (Andrew Garfield), freshly enhanced with arachnid powers, destroys the inside of a subway car without even trying, and with no hint of malice. Garfield looks charmingly helpless at such times, and audiences will swoon accordingly; far more uncomfortable, though, are his moments of mush, when the whole business of becoming web-based seems to prey upon his soul. The film recycles a lot of material from previous projects: Peter still has vanished parents, and he still lives with his Uncle Ben and Aunt May, now played by Martin Sheen and Sally Field, respectively. New to the game are Gwen Stacy (Emma Stone), a schoolmate with whom he falls in love, and Dr. Curt Connors (Rhys Ifans), a one-armed scientist who, in an effort to while away those dull days, turns himself into a lizard the size of a plow horse. His battle with our hero, tracked by a cop (Denis Leary) who also happens to be Gwen's father, is noisy and extensive, yet little seems to be at stake beyond a slight worsening of New York traffic conditions, and the whole enterprise grows ominously heavy on its feet. Spider-Man is at his best, his happiest, and his most entertaining when he follows the example of Sinatra: Swing easy. (Reviewed in our issue of 7/9 & 16/12.)—*Anthony Lane* (In wide release.)

#### BEASTS OF THE SOUTHERN WILD

Startlingly fresh and powerful. In the Gulf of Mexico, on the "wrong side of the levee," an ethnically mixed community of raffish survivors live in rubbishy shacks and cling to a damp bit of turf that they affectionately call the Bathtub. The six-year-old heroine, Hushpuppy, played by an astonishing local schoolchild, Quvenzhané Wallis, has an exuberant, vertical thatch of hair and a small mouth that expresses both amusement and the fiercest determination. Hushpuppy's father, Wink, played by Dwight Henry, another local non-actor—a baker, with an acetylene voice—is drinking hard, fighting against illness. The two regard each other warily, furiously, like characters in a Faulkner novel trapped in each other's compulsions and needs. As eco-disaster threatens, Hushpuppy sees ice fields melting; she has a vision of frozen prehistoric beasts breaking free and menacing her mucky habitat. The young director, Benh Zeitlin, launches the fantastic from an initial mode of crowded poetic realism; from the middle of the movie to the end, reality and fantasy flow into each other seamlessly. The moods hang together, and much of the picture is savagely happy and wild. Based on a play by Lucy Alibar, who wrote the screenplay with Zeitlin. The cinematography is by Ben Richardson. (7/23/12)—*David Denby* (In wide release.)

#### THE DARK KNIGHT RISES

After the events of July 20 in Aurora, Colorado, Christopher Nolan's new film can never be seen in quite the same way. Unjustly or otherwise, its fictional mayhem will always be tinged, or tainted, with thoughts of the genuine suffering that was borne that night. In the face of impassioned arguments—over gun control, the effect of screen violence, and the possible mimicking of comic-book villains—any idea of simple fun has been drained away. But how much fun was the movie in the first place? The story is dense, overlong, and studded with references that will make sense only to those intimate with Nolan's previous excursions into Batmanhood. This time, Bruce Wayne (Christian Bale), dragged from a wasteful retirement, takes on a brute named Bane (Tom Hardy), who is masked and barely comprehensible. Running alongside this battle is the tale of Selina Kyle (Anne Hathaway), a jewel thief with feline overtones, and the emergence of Blake (Joseph Gordon-Levitt), a youthful cop, as a fresh force for unswayable good in Gotham. Fans will hail the return of Gary Oldman, Michael Caine, and Morgan Freeman to the fray, together with the trusty Bat-pod, which gives perhaps the sleekest performance of all. Whether Bale has done enough with our hero to make him interesting, as opposed to joyless and reclusive, over the course of three films is open to debate; whether Bane, however, is a match for Heath Ledger's Joker, in "The Dark Knight," is

a comparative exercise that should now be laid quietly aside. (7/30/12)—*A.L.* (In wide release.)

#### MAGIC MIKE

As Dallas, the master of revels at a male strip club in Tampa, Matthew McConaughey, now in his early forties, looks like a muscular Peking duck—his flesh still has that golden-orange glow. Yet McConaughey is as much the essence of show-business sleaze as Joel Grey was as master of ceremonies in "Cabaret," forty years ago. He's wonderful; the rest of the movie is a pleasant, tawdry, undistinguished fable about easy times in the strange world of stripping. Channing Tatum, who worked as a stripper when he was eighteen, stars as the club's star performer; he needs

a buildup of operatic passion that never bursts into song and endows everyday gestures and inflections with grandeur and nobility.—*Richard Brody* (Film Forum; Aug. 4.)

#### MIKEY AND NICKY

Nicky (John Cassavetes), a small-time gangster, is holed up in a Philadelphia flophouse, hiding from a contract hit. His lifelong friend and Mob companion, Mikey (Peter Falk), shows up to help him out—or to sell him out. In the course of their apocalyptic overnight ramble, the two men act out a lifetime of unresolved passions, from the death of parents to tense and blundering relations with wives and lovers to their own petty grievances and bur-



Spike Lee directs the one-man show "Mike Tyson: Undisputed Truth," at the Longacre.

to be redeemed by a virtuous woman (Cody Horn) who disapproves of his life. The movie turns into a morality tale and a conventional romance. Directed by Steven Soderbergh.—*D.D.* (In wide release.)

#### MAGNIFICENT OBSESSION

This implausible, extravagant, coincidence-riddled romantic drama, from 1954, made Rock Hudson a star and Douglas Sirk a specialist in "women's pictures," a mawkish genre that he infused with a philosophical import all his own. The plot, familiar from a 1935 version, astonishes: Bob Merrick (Hudson) is an arrogant playboy in a small town in upstate New York, whose mischief contributes to the death of a beloved doctor, Wayne Phillips. Merrick meets and falls for Phillips's widow (Jane Wyman), gets her into an accident that blinds her, and becomes a brain surgeon who will ultimately attempt to restore her sight. Phillips turns out to have been something of a religious philosopher, whose metaphysics of charity unlocked the talent of his best friend (Otto Kruger), an artist, who, in turn, imparts the wisdom to Merrick—and Sirk, who immigrated from Germany in 1937, locates the source of this New World gospel in the lovingly depicted American landscape. Besides treating the ridiculous story with the utmost dramatic precision and visual coherence, the director lends it surprising thematic depth. Every step depends on stifled emotions and closely guarded secrets, resulting in

aggressions. Amazingly, this genre masterpiece, from 1976, was written and directed by the doyenne of loopy comedy, Elaine May, who makes what is in effect a Cassavetes film, with its scarily intense and spontaneous performances, the better to lay bare the cruelty of Cassavetes-style male bravado. Cassavetes's Nicky, with his perpetual sneering smile, spends the whole film trying to flee his fate in frantic terror and comic wrath, and Falk's Mikey suffers savagely from his conflicting loyalties. The film's wildly lurching emotional extravagance and unpredictability render the inevitable conclusion all the more shattering, as the film lays bare the price of friendship and the gall of betrayal, what men do to women and what women take from men. A real man, in May's view, is one who stops being one of the guys.—*R.B.* (Museum of Modern Art; Aug. 3.)

#### MOONRISE KINGDOM

The new Wes Anderson film takes place in 1965, on a fictional island off New England. At Camp Ivanhoe, Scout Master Ward (Edward Norton) runs a disciplined troop—at least, until one member, Sam Shakusky (Jared Gilman), goes missing. Sam meets up with his beloved, the twelve-year-old Suzy Bishop (Kara Hayward), and together they flee into the wild, as matching outcasts; he has no parents, and she feels estranged from hers, who in turn seem estranged from one another. Such is the leitmotif that courses through the tale, echoing worries from earlier An-



Gwen Jorgensen  
Olympic Triathlete

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derson films: a sharp sense of orphanhood, affecting young and old alike, and redeemed only by the chance to belong—to a choir, to a clan, or to the heart of a fellow-loner. Fine use is made of Benjamin Britten, whose music so often conjoins the voices of children in a common effort; it sets the tone for the movie's gusto, crisp and quirky, while its sadness belongs to those who feel marooned and beyond the reach of harmony—the honors going to Bill Murray, as Suzy's despairing father, and Bruce Willis, in the role of the island's police chief. The result is as bookish and as brightly hued as you might expect, but there is a new strain of tenderness here, and, more surprising still, a touch of old-fashioned mad-cap in the climax. With Tilda Swinton, resplendently costumed, as a busybody by the name of Social Services. (6/4/12)—A.L. (In wide release.)

#### THE QUEEN OF VERSAILLES

In the meltdown, both financial and personal, of David and Jacqueline Siegel—a Florida-based time-share baron and his wife, who started building a house that would have been the country's largest, and which, following the 2008 financial crisis, they couldn't complete—the documentary filmmaker Lauren Greenfield found a perfect storm of over-leveraging and its vulgar excrescences. David's company, Westgate, mastered the hard sell (a process that Greenfield records), getting middle-class people to buy what they could often ill afford; the company packaged its mortgages to banks, and when the music stopped it was left without cash flow. At the film's outset, Jacqueline, thirty years younger than her husband and his third wife, is living large, hosting charity events and filling a house with children (seven of them), nannies, servants, pets, and the excesses of her relentless luxury shopping—and, when her husband's business runs into trouble, her life style suddenly shifts to home cooking and Kmart. In the downward economic spiral, David admits that his wife is more like "another child"; she is kept in the dark about his finances and tells Greenfield that, with the film, she will finally learn about her true situation. The paradox of wealth without refinement remains unexamined but emerges as a metaphor for the American Dream itself. Indeed, the movie's bombshell revelation is political: David asserts that he "personally" engineered George W. Bush's victory in Florida in 2000 through means that "may not necessarily have been legal."—R.B. (In limited release.)

#### SAVAGES

If you're in the right mood, you can luxuriate in the cruddiness of the new Oliver Stone film—the sex and drugs and extravagant cruelty, the sunny indulgence, the scummy ethos in which everyone but a few beautiful people betrays everyone else. The "good" people include Ben (Aaron Johnson), a young botanist who grows terrific pot; his pal and business partner, Chon (Taylor Kitsch), a former Navy SEAL; and O (Blake Lively), a wealthy, sweet-tempered blonde who hangs with the two men in Laguna Beach. They run afoul of Mexican thugs, headed by Elena (Salma Hayek), a tiny, deep-cleaved cartellista who reigns over her empire from a sumptuous hacienda, and Lado (Benicio del Toro), her sadistic and lascivious henchman. Most of the scenes of negotiating and intimidation are teleconferenced to someone else—often someone meant to be frightened by what he sees. Stone devotes considerable ingenuity to making atrocity appear as a terrifying kind of home movie, but "Savages" is no more than a summertime debauch. With an energetic performance by John Travolta, as a joyously crooked federal agent.—D.D. (In wide release.)

#### TAKE THIS WALTZ

Sarah Polley's new film stars Michelle Williams as Margot, who lives in Toronto with her husband, Lou (Seth Rogen). Both are writers; he produces books of chicken recipes, a small but crispy field of human endeavor, and she produces almost nothing. Nonetheless, their home is an upmarket haven of warm colors and delicious smells, which Polley conveys with such heady expertise that some viewers may experience involuntary drooling. Needless to say, other lives cut in. Lou has a sister (Sarah Silverman) with a drinking problem, and Margot meets a neighbor, Daniel (Luke Kirby), who rides a rickshaw and sweet-talks her into half-reluctant

desires. That sweetness is well caught, and Polley has few peers in the devout attention that she pays to body language and the tales it can tell. Her dialogue, by contrast, lets her down, often dragging into the open what the camera can show in a glance. The movie's highlight, somewhat unexpectedly, consists of two heartbreaking scenes set to "Video Killed the Radio Star," by the Buggles. Is nothing beyond redemption? (7/9/12)—A.L. (In limited release.)

#### TED

The debut feature by Seth MacFarlane ("Family Guy") stars Mark Wahlberg as John, a Boston man who has spent his life coping with a wish come true. As a lonely eight-year-old boy, he dreamed that his Teddy bear would come to life and be his friend; by some miracle, it did so, and became famous—and now, at thirty-five, John is still living with the consequences. The formerly sweet and cuddly bear (voiced by MacFarlane) has matured into a perpetually adolescent, loutish party animal and dragged the sharp-witted and capable man into a dissolute adulthood of bong hits and bad TV. John has a girlfriend nonetheless—Lori (Mila Kunis), a successful young executive whose patience with his behavior and Ted's antics is wearing thin—and, to keep her, he needs to help his dependent find his own place in the world. The best thing in the movie is MacFarlane's clever underpinning of the talking plush toy's snarky-motormouth personality: with a shrewd and encyclopedic outpouring of pop-culture references, he renders the absurd conceit reasonable and funnels Ted's story into the universal drama of a Hollywood has-been. It's the comedy that never comes to life—the heavy-handed gags all but invite a laugh track—and a sentimental dénouement at Fenway Park is done by number. The movie's stuffing of creative smarts is still lifeless.—R.B. (In wide release.)

#### TO ROME WITH LOVE

Woody Allen's new movie, a Roman idyll, gently but surely moves back and forth between romantic comedy and satirical farce. We're in the realm of miraculous transformation—transformation through sex, through ambition, through chance, through illusion, through fame suddenly and unaccountably falling on someone's shoulders like a ton of baked lasagna. There are thirteen major characters and several minor ones—Americans and Italians mixing it up on the streets and in hotel beds. The stories never overlap, nor are they set in the same time frame. But the movie is held together visually by the many shades, indoors and out, of the glorious Roman gold ochre and thematically by the idea of seizing the moment—the magic you make for yourself by not being afraid. With Ellen Page, as a memorably dishonest actress; Allen, as a retired opera director who seizes a chance for entrepreneurial glory; Judy Davis, as his skeptical but loving wife; Fabio Armiliato, as the mortician with a genius for singing Puccini in the shower; Penélope Cruz, as a knowing call girl; and Alec Baldwin, Jesse Eisenberg, Alessandro Tiberi, and Alessandra Mastrorandi. The cinematography is by Darius Khondji. (7/2/12)—D.D. (In limited release.)

#### TWO-LANE BLACKTOP

An "On the Road" with drag racers, starring James Taylor and the Beach Boys' Dennis Wilson as a laconic team known only as, respectively, "the Driver" and "the Mechanic." Laurie Bird is a rambling gal known only as "the Girl" and Warren Oates is the enigmatic "G.T.O.," who, of course, drives a GTO. He's on a quest to gain some existential traction after a crackup in his life. When G.T.O. crosses paths once too often with Taylor and Wilson's customized 1955 Chevy, his paranoia and competitiveness lead him to race the Taylor-Wilson team from New Mexico to D.C., with the winner getting the losing car. The director, Monte Hellman, shot this 1971 movie in bracing natural light in wide-open Techniscope. It's essentially a mood piece, about men in the grip of a narrow obsession that allows them to pass unscathed through a small-town, pre-mall America, which Hellman catches with an eye and an ear for sloth, distrust, and parochial allegiances. Oates's performance is what lifts the film above just being a lyric ramble: his Beat and beat-up aura is perfect for the character, and no one could stumble

along or pass out better than he.—Michael Sragow (Film Forum; Aug. 7.)

#### THE VIRGIN SUICIDES

For her first feature, from 1999, Sofia Coppola adapted Jeffrey Eugenides's novel, about the desperate escape of five teen-age girls from their repressive family, as a surprisingly intricate struggle with absence, grief, and memory. The story (set in suburban Michigan in 1974 and told mainly in flashbacks) is anchored by the charismatic Lux (Kirsten Dunst), the most daring of the Lisbon sisters, whose golden dreams appear fleetingly onscreen. But she, like the other girls, remains alluringly elusive as Coppola evokes, with poised and precise images, the dream-like frustration of the boys—now men—who are still trying to read the pages that were torn from their lives. She joins a deliciously evocative batch of period Top Forty tunes to flashes of backlit cinematography to summon the characters' lost world, with its stifled experience and receding fantasies. For Coppola, what remains, for the girls—as for the boys who have lost them—tantalizingly out of reach is ordinary life. Already, with her first film, she was a master at rendering inner depths startlingly, straightforwardly visual. With James Woods and Kathleen Turner, as the parents.—R.B. (Museum of Modern Art; Aug. 3.)

#### Also Playing

**AI WEIWEI: NEVER SORRY:** IFC Center and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas. **RUBY SPARKS:** In limited release. **SEARCHING FOR SUGAR MAN:** In limited release. **THE WATCH:** In wide release.

#### REVIVALS, CLASSICS, ETC.

*Titles with a dagger are reviewed above.*

#### ANTHOLOGY FILM ARCHIVES

32 Second Ave., at 2nd St. (212-505-5181)—The films of Milton Moses Ginsberg. Aug. 2 at 7:15: "Kron Along the Avenue of Time" (2012) and "Dark Matter" (2012). ♦ Aug. 2 at 9:15: "Coming Apart" (1969).

#### BAM CINÉMATEK

30 Lafayette Ave., Brooklyn (718-636-4100)—"Do the Reggae." Aug. 2 at 4:30, 6:50, and 9:15: "Rockers" (1978, Ted Bafaloukos). ♦ Aug. 3 at 2 and 6:50: "Land of Look Behind" (1982, Alan Greenberg). ♦ Aug. 3 at 4:30 and 9:15: "The Harder They Come" (1972, Perry Henzell). ♦ Aug. 4 at 2: "Buck and the Preacher" (1972, Sidney Poitier). ♦ Aug. 4 at 4:30: "Reggae" (1971, Horace Ové). ♦ Aug. 5 at 6:50: "Roots Rock Reggae" (1977, Jeremy Marre). ♦ Aug. 5 at 9:30: "Heartland Reggae" (1980, James Lewis). ♦ Aug. 6 at 7 and 9:15: "OnePeople" (2012, Justine Henzell).

#### FILM FORUM

W. Houston St. west of Sixth Ave. (212-727-8110)—"Universal 100." Aug. 1 at 1, 4:50, and 9: "Puzzle of a Downfall Child" (1970, Jerry Schatzberg). ♦ Aug. 1 at 3 and 6:50: "Taking Off" (1971, Milos Forman). ♦ Aug. 2 at 1, 4:25, and 8: "Christmas Holiday" (1944, Robert Siodmak). ♦ Aug. 2 at 2:45, 6:15, and 9:45: "The Dark Mirror" (1946, Siodmak). ♦ Aug. 3 at 1:30, 5:10, and 8:50: "The Sleeping City" (1950, George Sherman). ♦ Aug. 3 at 3:20 and 7: "The Naked City" (1948, Jules Dassin). ♦ Aug. 3 at 10:30: "Son of Dracula" (1943, Siodmak). ♦ Aug. 4 at 1 and 5:10: "Magnificent Obsession" (†). ♦ Aug. 4 at 3:10 and 7:20: "Written on the Wind" (1956, Douglas Sirk). ♦ Aug. 4 at 9:30: "Jurassic Park" (1993, Steven Spielberg). ♦ Aug. 5 at 1: "Babe" (1995, Chris Noonan). ♦ Aug. 5 at 3 and 7:10: "Charade" (1963, Stanley Donen). ♦ Aug. 5 at 5:10 and 9:20: "Pillow Talk" (1959, Michael Gordon). ♦ Aug. 6 at 1:30, 4:40, and 8:15: "Ladies Must Love" (1933, E. A. Dupont). ♦ Aug. 6 at 2:55 and 9:40: "Little Man, What Now?" (1934, Frank Borzage). ♦ Aug. 7 at 1, 4:45, and 8:30: "Two-Lane Blacktop" (†). ♦ Aug. 7 at 2:55, 6:40, and 10:25: "Duel" (1971, Spielberg).

#### FILM SOCIETY OF LINCOLN CENTER

Walter Reade Theatre, Lincoln Center (212-875-5610)—"Indie Night." Aug. 1 at 8: "Francine"

(2012, Brian M. Cassidy and Melanie Shatzky). ♦ “50 Years of the New York Film Festival.” Aug. 7 at 6: “Topsy Turvy” (1999, Mike Leigh). ♦ The films of Claude Sautet. All films are in French unless otherwise noted. Aug. 1 at 6:15 and Aug. 7 at 9: “The Things of Life” (1970). ♦ Aug. 2 at 8:45: “Classe Tous Risques” (1960). ♦ Aug. 3 at 6:15 and Aug. 4 at 3:45: “César and Rosalie” (1972). ♦ Aug. 3 at 8:30 and Aug. 4 at 1:30: “The Dictator’s Guns” (1965; in English, French, and Spanish). ♦ Aug. 4 at 6: “Vincent, François, Paul and the Others” (1974). ♦ Aug. 4 at 8:30: “A Simple Story” (1978). ♦ Aug. 5 at 1:45: “Un Coeur en Hiver” (1992). ♦ Aug. 5 at 4: “Nelly and Monsieur Arnaud” (1995). ♦ Aug. 5 at 6:15: “The Bad Son” (1980). ♦ Aug. 5 at 8:30: “Mado” (1976).

#### IFC CENTER

323 Sixth Ave., at W. 3rd St. (212-924-7771)—“Staff Picks.” Aug. 3-4 at midnight: “Paris Is Burning” (1990, Jennie Livingston).

#### MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

Roy and Niuta Titus Theatres, 11 W. 53rd St. (212-708-9480)—“An Auteurist History of Film.” Aug. 1-3 at 1:30: “To Catch a Thief” (1955, Alfred Hitchcock). ♦ “A View from the Vaults, 2012: Recent Acquisitions.” Aug. 1 at 7 and Aug. 5 at 2: “Meek’s Cutoff” (2010, Kelly Reichardt). ♦ Aug. 2 at 7 and Aug. 6 at 4: “Sugar Cane Alley” (1983, Euzhan Palcy; in French). ♦ Aug. 3 at 4: “Mikey and Nicky” (†). ♦ Aug. 3 at 7: “Moving Midway” (2007, Godfrey Cheshire). ♦ Aug. 4 at 4: “Kansas City Princess” (1934, William Keighley). ♦ Aug. 4 at 7:30: “Alice’s House” (2007, Chico Teixeira; in Portuguese). ♦ Aug. 7 at 7: “Black Swan” (2010, Darren Aronofsky). “Unaccompanied Minors.” Aug. 1 at 8: “The 400 Blows” (1959, François Truffaut; in French) ♦

Aug. 2 at 4:30: “The Little Girl Who Sold the Sun” (1998, Djibril Diop Mambéty; in Wolof and French). ♦ Aug. 2 at 8 and Aug. 6 at 4:30: “Sons, Mothers, and a General” (1955, Laslo Benedek; in German) ♦ Aug. 3 at 8: “The Virgin Suicides” (†). ♦ Aug. 4 at 5: “Walkabout” (1971, Nicolas Roeg). ♦ Aug. 4 at 8: “Palindromes” (2004, Todd Solondz). ♦ Aug. 5 at 5:30: “Les Mistons” (1957, Truffaut; in French) and “The Quiet One” (1949, Sidney Meyers).

#### MUSEUM OF THE MOVING IMAGE

35th Ave. at 36th St., Astoria (718-784-0077)—“See It Big!” Aug. 4-5 at 3: “Rio Bravo” (1959, Howard Hawks). ♦ Aug. 4-5 at 6: “The Wild Bunch” (1969, Sam Peckinpah).

#### 92Y TRIBECA

200 Hudson St. (212-601-1000)—“Bastards of Hitch.” Aug. 3 at 7: “Last Embrace” (1979, Jonathan Demme). ♦ Aug. 3 at 9: “Magic” (1978, Richard Attenborough). ♦ Aug. 7 at 7:30: “Don’t Look Now” (1973, Nicolas Roeg).

## READINGS AND TALKS

#### UPSTAIRS AT THE SQUARE

The journalist Katherine Lanpher interviews Cheryl Strayed about her new book, “Tiny Beautiful Things: Advice on Love and Life from Dear Sugar.” The singer and composer Theo Bleckmann will also be on hand to perform selections from his latest CD, “Hello Earth! The Music of Kate Bush.” (Barnes & Noble, 33 E. 17th St. 212-253-0810. Aug. 2 at 7.)

#### “BOOKS BENEATH THE BRIDGE”

The alfresco Monday-night reading series in Brooklyn Bridge Park continues with Patti Smith. (Pier 1’s Granite Prospect, Old Fulton and Fur-

man Sts. For more information, visit [brooklyn-bridgepark.org](http://brooklyn-bridgepark.org). Aug. 6 at 7.)

#### WORD

The novelist Katie Kitamura reads from and discusses her new book, “Gone to the Forest,” with Sarah Weinman, the news editor for the Web site Publishers Marketplace. (126 Franklin St., Brooklyn. 718-383-0096. Aug. 7 at 7.)

## ABOVE AND BEYOND

#### “COLLEGEHUMOR OFFLINE”

The mega-popular, long-running Web site CollegeHumor.com presents a night of comedy in real time on a real stage. This might be a disappointment for those who prefer to enjoy CollegeHumor.com while in their underpants eating ice cream, but fear not, everyone in the audience will be provided with a Choco Taco—ice cream in a taco-shaped shell covered in chocolate. (Pants are required, however.) Streeter Seidell, the site’s editor-in-chief, who also happens to be a comedian, is the host, and the troupe, which includes *Variety*’s 2012 Comics to Watch Jake & Amir, performs standup, sketch comedy, and musical routines. There will also be special guests and the première live performance of Elaine Carroll’s “Very Mary-Kate.” (Gramercy Theatre, 127 E. 23rd St. 800-745-3000. Aug. 2; doors open at 7, and the show starts at 8.)

## GOINGS ON DIGITAL

Download the Goings On app for Apple and Android, visit our blog ([newyorker.com/go/goingson](http://newyorker.com/go/goingson)), and follow us on Twitter (@nygoingson).

## ON THE HORIZON

### CLASSICAL MUSIC VOYAGE À PARIS

Aug. 18-19

The Ébène Quartet, a stylish French ensemble, is so welcome at Woodstock’s Maverick Hall that it’s been given carte blanche for a whole weekend. Its first concert celebrates *le jazz hot*; the second offers string quartets by Mozart, Fauré, and Tchaikovsky. ([maverickconcerts.org](http://maverickconcerts.org))

### NIGHT LIFE EVIL URGES

Aug. 19

My Morning Jacket, a rock band from Louisville, Kentucky, brings its

arena-tested sound to the Williamsburg Waterfront, with the adventurous hip-hop group Shabazz Palaces—led by Palaceer Lazaro, formerly of the Dignable Planets—in tow. ([ticketmaster.com](http://ticketmaster.com).)

### THE THEATRE LOST AND FOUND

Aug. 24

Jake Gyllenhaal makes his New York stage debut in “If There Is I Haven’t Found It Yet,” by the British playwright Nick Payne. The drama follows an overweight fifteen-year-old girl as she transfers to the school where her mother

teaches and forms a relationship with her estranged uncle. Michael Longhurst directs, at the Laura Pels. (212-719-1300.)

### MOVIES A NOVEL PURSUIT

Sept. 6-18

The latest installment of Anthology Film Archives’ series “From the Pen of . . .” looks at movies scripted by well-known novelists, including a pair by Joan Didion and John Gregory Dunne (“The Panic in Needle Park,” based on a book by James Mills, and an adaptation of her own “Play It as It Lays”) and two by Elmore Leonard

(“Joe Kidd,” from 1972, and “Mr. Majestyk,” from 1974). (212-505-5181.)

### ART FACTORY FRESH

Sept. 18-Dec. 31

“Regarding Warhol: Sixty Artists, Fifty Years,” at the Met, juxtaposes several dozen works by Andy Warhol with some hundred others by artists influenced by him over the years, ranging from the late German painter Sigmar Polke to the young American video artist Ryan Trecartin. (212-535-7710.)

“Regarding Warhol,” at the Met.





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## THE TALK OF THE TOWN

### COMMENT AN AMERICAN ABROAD



The humid lull between the party primaries and the party conventions is the traditional moment for a Presidential challenger to peacock abroad as a prospective Commander-in-Chief. Four years ago, Barack Obama cruised the Iraqi war zone in a helicopter, dazzled throngs in Europe with his then fresh rhetoric of change, and charmed American soldiers in a Kuwaiti gymnasium, where, with preternatural nonchalance, he lofted a three-point shot toward a distant rim. He drained the three, the soldiers roared, and, somewhere back home, John McCain slumped deeper into gloom.

In 2008, Obama's itinerary was as effective as his performance. He visited Europe to signal a renewed relationship with traditional allies and the Middle East to signal his intense disagreements with George W. Bush and McCain. Obama had promised to end the war in Iraq—a war that Bush had initiated and McCain had championed—and the tour made clear that he, a lightly credentialed senator, fully intended to bring the troops home, but also that he would lead when necessary at the front lines. In facing McCain, a former P.O.W., Obama established both difference and resolve.

Mitt Romney, the Republican Party's presumptive nominee, lacks a defining foreign-policy disagreement with the President, which makes an overseas campaign trip more problematic. Romney has criticized Obama's approach to missile-defense negotiations with Russia and the timing of troop withdrawals from Afghanistan, but those dissents are very nuanced. More pointedly, Romney has criticized Obama for failing to speak out quickly and ardently enough when pro-democracy demonstrators in Iran took to the streets three years ago; similarly, he has accused the President of timidity in the face of Syria's popular uprising against President Bashar al-Assad.

These critiques suggested exotic pos-

sibilities: Romney might have visited wounded Syrian refugees in Turkey; he might have gone to southern Tunisia, where the fruit seller Mohamed Bouazizi set himself ablaze two years ago this December, initiating the Arab Spring.

But such boldness does not seem to be part of Romney's makeup. Last week, he embarked on a far more conventional tour, visiting some of America's most reliable allies: Great Britain, Israel, and Poland. From the start, there were signs of his tin ear. Throughout the campaign, Romney has alluded with pride to his leadership of the 2002 Winter Olympics, which had been mired in corruption and chaos before he arrived in Salt Lake City to sort out the mess. He unsettled his British hosts by suggesting that their preparations for the Games were, in certain ways, lacking. David Cameron, the Prime Minister, and a fellow-conservative, responded to Romney's remarks by noting, Britishly, that running the Olympic Games is a great deal easier if they are held "in the middle of nowhere."

Still in London, Romney attended a campaign fund-raiser in Mayfair, one of the city's posher precincts. Presidential candidates are allowed to raise money overseas, as long as the donors are American citizens; Obama and McCain both held fund-raisers abroad four years ago. Tickets to the Mayfair event went for fifty thousand dollars or more. The original host, Bob Diamond, the former chief executive of Barclays, had to step aside after resigning from the bank,



which was under investigation for manipulating international interest rates to boost its profits. Other Barclays executives, however, reportedly wrote checks to Romney. If Romney is elected President, the regulators he appoints will oversee the examination of Barclays' role in the interest-rate scandal.

The candidate's next scheduled stop was Israel. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has been blunt about his lack of enthusiasm for the current Administration, in general, and President Obama, personally. Netanyahu has arguably poked around in American domestic politics more conspicuously than any foreign leader in memory, using his influence in Washington to bolster lobbying and campaign-finance groups that mainly support Republican candidates. Romney has dutifully accused Obama of meting out "shabby treatment" to Israel.

The nature of America's alliance with Israel has generated emotional debate in the United States for decades, and there is nothing wrong with a Presidential challenger airing provocative opinions. But Romney's statements about Obama and Israel have verged on demagoguery. Obama has been staunchly supportive of Israel, providing robust military aid and intelligence cooperation, particularly on the vexed and dangerous issue of Iran's nuclear program. Romney is intent on ignoring those facts and trashing the President.

Romney's rhetoric is aligned with

that of Sheldon Adelson, the billionaire casino magnate and one of the Republican Party's leading financial backers. During the Republican primary season, Adelson gave copiously to Newt Gingrich, and he has since donated ten million dollars to Restore Our Future, the Super PAC committed to Romney's defeat of Obama. Adelson is a fierce supporter of Israel, and particularly of its most right-wing politicians. He has adamantly opposed the creation of a Palestinian state as part of a comprehensive peace with Israel, a goal that has been a mainstay of American Presidents, Republican and Democratic, dating back to George H. W. Bush. Adelson reportedly once referred to Salam Fayyad, a former I.M.F. economist who has won international respect while serving as Prime Minister of the Palestinian Authority, as a "terrorist."

Romney's approach to Israel so far indicates a willingness to make common cause with such partners. Even at John McCain's lowest moments in 2008, it was hard to imagine him tailoring his views on the Middle East to curry favor with a well-heeled contributor.

In any event, Romney is likely to have some trouble undermining the President's record on national-security issues and foreign policy. Last week, in Colorado, Admiral William McRaven, a Navy SEAL who oversees all American Special Forces, and who supervised the raid that killed Osama bin Laden, was asked to evaluate Obama as a

Commander-in-Chief. "I'm not a political guy," McRaven stipulated. Still, he offered a crisp judgment of Obama's performance: "Fantastic." He went on to say that the President and his advisers value facts, take professional advice, and make careful judgments, adding, "I'm very impressed."

Romney may yet win the White House. Not surprisingly, he has centered his campaign almost solely on the economy and the high unemployment rate. Still, there is a growing perception, even among some of Romney's own supporters, that, although the slack economy favors his prospects, the character he projects—unfocused and unmoored to any developed principles—undermines him. By November, the particulars of his summer tour may have faded from voters' memories, but the questions he has presented about his constancy and independence of mind could persist and defeat him.

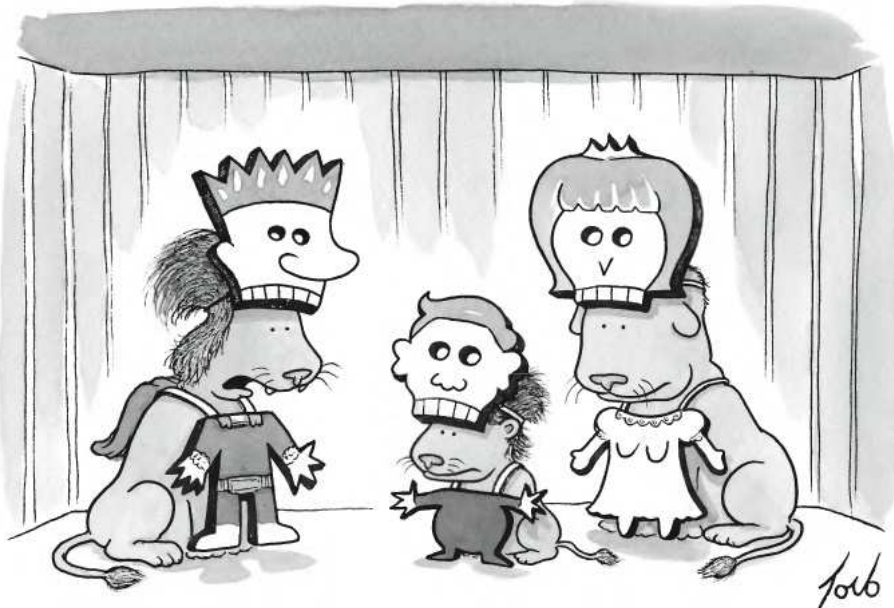
—Steve Coll

## WAIT FOR IT DEPT. TICK-TOCK



New York used to be a city of queues—movies, concert tickets, the Department of Motor Vehicles. Now technology sorts you out. A good line is hard to find. Even some nice old-fashioned lines, such as the one for Shakespeare in the Park, have been corrupted by the practice of people paying other people to wait in their place. That's not a line. That's a caste system.

The best honest line in town, these past few weeks, has been the one for gaining entry to "The Clock," Christian Marclay's video installation at Lincoln Center. "The Clock" is a twenty-four-hour montage of movie scenes containing references to the time of day. Last Wednesday, at 11:07 A.M., sixty-four people were waiting to get in to see it. The line doubled back on itself, along Broadway, just north of Sixty-second Street. A sign near its tail estimated that the wait, from that point, would be an hour and a half, but you could never predict when space would open up inside. The average viewing time was an



"To be honest, I'm getting tired of staging 'Hamlet.'"

hour, but, if you wanted to, you could sit in there all day, watching the time go by.

11:14 A.M.

A woman stepped out of the line. This was her second visit to “The Clock.” The first time, she waited forty-five minutes, and watched for an hour and a half. “I’ve been waiting thirty minutes,” she said. “If they’re accurate in their predictions—and I know they’re not, because



they underestimated it the week before last and then they overestimated it last week—but, anyway, if they’re accurate, then I’d end up getting in at the same time I did last week, and so would see the same part of the piece again. How stupid is that?” She’d spent fifteen minutes making this calculation and had decided to bail. Her name was Robin Lynn. She teaches English to immigrants. While waiting, she’d thought about how the students in her 4 P.M. class, who had fled troubled places like Burma and Ivory Coast, might react to “The Clock.” “My time does not have the seriousness of intent that theirs has,” she said. “I consider myself lucky to be able to waste my time waiting in line.

“Here’s the most interesting thing about me,” she went on. When the Beatles made their first appearance on “The Ed Sullivan Show,” in 1964, the first closeup of an audience member was of her. “They held the camera on my face for four or five seconds. You’d have thought that the show was about me.”

11:36 A.M.

“We’re waiting for my mother.”

“She’s the catalyst.”

Josh and Annie Gosfield, brother and sister, had been in line for fifteen min-

utes, and estimated that they faced another seventy-five. They were picking at a corn muffin. Their mother, en route from Philadelphia, was stuck in traffic on Tenth Avenue. The plan had been for her to arrive as they reached the front of the line. (They’d arranged to have her wheelchaired in.) Annie, a composer, said, “I’m up against a deadline, and I’m having a breakthrough. If not for my mother, I would have only *intended* to come here.” Her piece, featuring violins and jammed radio signals, is supposed to premiere next month, in Utrecht. Still, she expected to watch “The Clock” for at least two hours. Her brother estimated that he’d last no more than an hour. “I’ve got cultural A.D.D.,” he said. He is a writer and an artist. He and his wife, Camille, who was also in line, had just finished a book, “The Art of Doing: How Superachievers Do What They Do and How They Do It So Well,” featuring interviews with Alec Baldwin, Yogi Berra, Philippe Petit, George Clinton, and others. “We did a meta-analysis,” he said. “If there’s any commonality, it’s self-awareness.” Another commonality, you’d think, would be an intolerance of long lines.

12:17 P.M.

A few places behind them, Kevin, a twenty-one-year-old student at Brown, was reading a library copy of “The Myth of Sisyphus.” It was his day off from an internship. His to-do list for the day, which he’d written on a Post-it and stuck to his Mac, had read, “Breakfast. Coffee. The Clock.” He’d skipped the coffee.

12:38 P.M.

A man wearing a mustard-colored sports coat joined the queue. “Mark De Palma, like Brian De Palma,” he said, introducing himself. This was his fourth time in the “Clock” line. “I don’t plan. I live two blocks away. When I’m on my way by, if I have time, I get in line. I gamble on it. If it doesn’t go fast enough, I leave. I’ve gotten in twice, and quit once. My schedule’s flexible.” He is a research scientist and an engineer, and part of a group that has invented something, he said, “that could be bigger than the Internet.” He also said, “Talking, thinking, and writing can be destructive.” Hard to argue. The clock at Columbus Circle read 12:41.

—Nick Paumgarten

## LONDON POSTCARD BUSTED



Of all the improvements made in London in anticipation of the 2012 Games—talking trash cans, a ten-billion-dollar overhaul of the transit system—perhaps the one that best embodies the original Olympic ideal of amateurism is a one-man crusade to rid the city’s sidewalks of dog excrement. The Roger Bannister of the game is Paul Goodlad, an accountant from South Kensington, who has been plastering lampposts with signs made on his home computer. “Tired of this?” they ask. The question is superimposed on a picture of a rubber-soled hiking boot hovering millimetres from disaster. The sign advises you to take out your cell phone, use its video-camera function to record the misdeeds of dog-owning scofflaws, and upload the footage to a Web site that Goodlad has set up called NoDogDo.com. (Motto: “Reporting Foul Play.”) A sort of canine Crime Stoppers, NoDogDo.com combines the surveillance aspect of the community watch with the immediacy of social media. It aspires to be what Twitter might be, if Twitter had a sense of smell and a brand-new pair of white sneakers.

A few weeks ago, Goodlad interrupted his afternoon postering for coffee at a local café. He said that he had been moved to action after walking his daughter, who is seven, to school. “One morning, we must have passed about eight turds, and it’s a short walk,” he said. “I’m not a dog-hater—we have a springer spaniel, Inca. She’s mental! But we always pick up after her. You wouldn’t want to change someone else’s child’s nappy, would you?”

Around the same time that Goodlad started noticing the mess in London, forty-five-year-old Mary Bale, from Coventry, threw another resident’s tabby cat into a dumpster. She became the subject of an investigation by an animal-rights group after the cat’s owners posted a closed-circuit tape of the incident on Facebook, inspiring such comments as “I

think we should spray her with BBQ sauce and throw her into a den of lions.” Goodlad, inspired, asked the designer of his accounting firm’s Web site to set up NoDogDo.com. “I thought, Well, we all know each other around here. So when one Kensington lady asks another, ‘How’s Wolfie?’, suddenly Maude will say, ‘Well, Wolfie’s on *that site*.’”

Outside the café, a car was being parked. Goodlad, squinting, suggested that the town council hadn’t painted the yellow lines the correct distance from the curb. “I’m a bit of a jobsworth,” he said. “About seven years ago, I wrote another site, called Ticketbusters, about the ins and outs of parking restrictions.” (Motto: “The Parking Ticket Appeal Site.”)

NoDogDo.com is a strictly not-for-profit service. Only five videos—blurry and tree-dominated, they are not exactly “Trainspotting”—have been posted so far. “Mostly by me,” Goodlad admitted. For a vigilante, he is pretty relaxed. “I did a little bit of postering near where Hugh Grant lives,” he said. “Anyway, if people were submitting, like, hours of film, I couldn’t be bothered to watch it. Huge aircraft hangars of people in Morocco having to look at stuff before we put it online—I don’t want it to get to that level.” He is, perhaps, the Jamaican bobsledding team of community activism.

“But if kids get dog poo in their eyes it can cause blindness!” he said. (Dog feces can carry a parasite that, if ingested, can lead to a loss of vision.) “O.K., that’s probably never happened,” he added.

Still, Goodlad remains convinced that “society needs to do something more about dog poo.” Michael Brandow, the author of “New York’s Poop Scoop Law: Dogs, the Dirt, and Due Process,” wrote, in an e-mail, “I have Google send me updates on all matters poop-related, and so I follow these crazy goings on with much interest and disbelief. So far, apart from the recent DNA testing schemes, this is about the most elaborate (and I imagine controversial) effort I’ve seen.” He said that “the English are famous for their politeness,” but he cautioned that, in New York, if you started “following innocent citizens around to make sure they followed a law that has nearly perfect compliance anyway, you’d be asking for a black eye.”

After coffee, Goodlad, walking with the slow intensity of a detective, surveyed the sidewalks.

“Look,” he said, pointing to a bulging maroon plastic bag that someone had stashed near a mailbox. “This is obviously a hot spot.”

Nearby, one of his signs was hanging from a lamppost, its letters smeared. “So much bloody rain.” He rounded a corner, and suddenly bolted down the street.

The call reverberated through the neighborhood: “Turd!”

—Lauren Collins

## NEVER TOO YOUNG WORK!



Last summer, Lucianna Amato, who turns twelve this month and lives in Sayville, on Long Island, went to a science camp, where she spent a lot of time outside, looking at plants and birds. This summer, Lucianna wanted to try something different, which is why one recent afternoon she was on the deck of a photography studio in Chelsea wearing a pair of black lace shorts and a short-sleeved blue poncho, leaning against a wall with one ankle crossed artfully over the other, a lovely if slightly nervous smile on her pink-glossed lips. She was one of forty-nine campers attending Modeling Camp NYC, a four-day course that instructs girls aged twelve to eighteen in the arts of runway walking, makeup application, and camera engagement. Fierceness is commended. Laneyards are not involved.

Lucianna was the youngest camper, and the shortest. “I’m five-four,” she said, then reconsidered. “I mean, four-five. I always get that mixed up.” There are no height or weight restrictions for campers, although a disproportionate number of them might have fit in equally well at basketball camp or volleyball camp. “It’s modelling camp, not modelling school,” Heather Cole, the camp’s founder, a former model from Surrey, England, explained. “To me, this camp is about life skills, and just walking away with confidence.”

Warnings about the darker side of modelling—eating disorders, drug abuse, photographers who urge girls to take their clothes off—are not included in the curriculum. In one session, a nutritionist gave advice on healthy eating. “We learned about the four parts of the plate: a protein, dairy from a drink, vegetables and fruits, and grain,” a camper named Amanda Anderson (fourteen; five-seven) explained. Anderson had come all the way from South Burlington, Vermont, to attend. “There’s not anything in Vermont for modelling,” she said, feelingly. Like many of the campers, Anderson said that she had acquired useful knowledge, such as how to make an entrance on a fashion-show runway. “You’ve got to go *bam!* when you come out,” she explained, planting a hand on one hip and jutting it out dramatically.

Sashaying, strutting, and twirling techniques were taught in a conference



room at the New York Helmsley Hotel, which was where most of the camp’s activities took place, including visits from agency scouts and editors from *Seventeen*. (The girls did get outside every day; they walked a block to get lunch at a pizzeria on Second Avenue.) Runway instruction was provided by Dean Modah, a young man in ultra-skinny jeans and a topknot, who stood at the foot of the runway as girls descended to thumping dance music, calling out exhortations like “Eye contact!” and “Do your thing!” and “Work!” During a water-and-bathroom break, Modah said, “It’s my responsibility to take girls like this, to build their confidence. Practice makes perfect.”

Several of the campers already had modelling experience. Sixteen-year-old Ellexia Hill's résumé included a commercial for a car dealership in Columbia, South Carolina, where she lives, and she had mastered the ambulatory art of leading with both her pelvis and her chin. Brigit Ferry, a fourteen-year-old camper from Deerfield, Massachusetts, was working on developing a signature runway style: as she made her entrance, she popped the collar of the sleeveless naval jacket that she was wearing over a floral romper; when she turned at the runway's end, she placed a hand behind her hair, which was adorned with a fake flower. "I like to think of myself as one of the bolder and more daring of my friends," Ferry explained.

At the photo shoot, expressions of boldness and daring (wearing a skintight, gold-sequined dress from Baby Phat, in the case of fifteen-year-old Maribel Martinez, from White Plains) were interspersed with moments of self-consciousness and caution (folding one's arms defensively across the front of said dress, while tugging its plunging neckline upward). Margaret Rix, sixteen, from Rye, New York, looked ready for Milan, with honey-colored hair tumbling over sharp shoulder blades, an eggplant-colored minidress, and heels that put her well over six feet. She showed off how Modah had taught her to extend her legs—which were the same tan color as the stripes on the extremely abbreviated skirt of her dress. "I feel like my walk has improved tenfold," she said.

—Rebecca Mead

## D.I.Y. DEPT. NIGHT SCHOOL



On a Tuesday evening not long ago, Ajay Singh Chaudhary, the founder of the Brooklyn Institute for Social Research, and Abby Kluchin, who teaches Freud at the institute, were in the back room of Building on Bond, a bistro in Boerum Hill. The space, which has a recycled-wood décor, had been reimagined as a classroom, with a whiteboard on the wall and chairs arranged in a semi-

circle. Kluchin, who recently completed her Ph.D. at Columbia, and Chaudhary, who is still working on his, unpacked boxes from Amazon ("The Interpretation of Dreams," complimentary with tuition) and passed out books to fourteen students—of whom half were bespectacled and most were under forty. "Welcome to 'Dreams and Hysteria: An Introduction to Freud,'" Kluchin said. "'The Interpretation of Dreams' is this cultural touchstone, but we don't read it all that often, perhaps because it's seven hundred pages long and pretty repetitive." She took a sip of her bitters-and-soda. "Now, this is not a therapy session. I want to be so very clear about that." This caveat was printed on the syllabus, but she repeated it for anyone who had repressed it.

American students took out approximately a hundred and twelve billion dollars in loans in 2010-11, and the *Chronicle of Higher Education* recently reported that in the past few years "the percentage of graduate-degree holders who receive food stamps or some other aid more than doubled."

"This is sometimes called the crisis in the academy—so many fantastic scholars without really any good job prospects," Chaudhary said. Last year, at Columbia, Chaudhary taught a survey course in Western humanities. "I'd tell people around here"—he lives in Boerum Hill—"what I was teaching, and they'd say, 'I wish I could take that class!' And I thought, Well, I've read Adam Smith." The people demanded inquiries into human understanding, and Chaudhary was trained to supply them. So last December he founded the Brooklyn Institute for Social Research, a locavore pedagogy shop. So far, the institute has offered courses in political philosophy, Walter Benjamin, and the history of communication, "from the telegraph to Twitter." Courses cost a few hundred dollars and consist of six weekly discussions, held at night. The institute does not grant degrees, and faculty members earn eighty per cent of tuition, which usually works out to more than they would make at a major university.

Kluchin called for introductions: "Your name, why you're interested in Freud, and maybe a cultural object you have recently consumed."

One student, who works in publishing, said, "I'm interested in Freud be-

cause I've been in therapy a long time. I love therapy."

"I'll one-up her," a designer said. "I started in psychoanalysis when I was three."

"I've been watching 'Mad Men' recently, which has psychology in it," another student, who is a filmmaker, said.

Kluchin began to lecture, but she was interrupted by a waiter delivering a chorizo burger and two carafes of wine. "Sorry, this is one of the hazards of the space," she said. Discussion turned to the case of Anna O. A student who works at "a sort of transdisciplinary architecture studio" said, "Can I ask, at the risk of jumping the gun, about sublimation and perversion?"

"I think I'd rather stick to the text for now," Kluchin said.

Christine Smallwood, a faculty member who was sitting in on the class, said, "My first question is about abreaction; my second question is about catharsis; my third question is about cathexis."

Kluchin, attempting to answer the third question, said, "Later in Freud, it will become clear that there is a spectrum from neurotic to normal, and we're all kind of on it. But here Anna O.'s creativity and her extreme intelligence make her more likely to be hysterical. People are more likely to be hysterical when they have to do boring shit, especially the shit women had to do at the time, like needlework—"

"Needlework is not boring!" Smallwood protested.

After two hours, Kluchin said, "This concludes the official class portion. But we usually just stay here, order more drinks, and hang out." Some students left; others continued discussing Anna O.

Kluchin ordered a glass of wine. "Can you live in New York, be an adjunct, be a faculty member here, and make it work?" she asked. "The hope is that this is a sustainable model. And it's exciting, because this is a truly shared intellectual project, and that's something you can't get in any other—" She interrupted herself, acting as her own superego. "I was going to say 'arena,' but that sounds too 'Thunderdome'-ish."

"Two men enter. One man leaves," Chaudhary quoted.

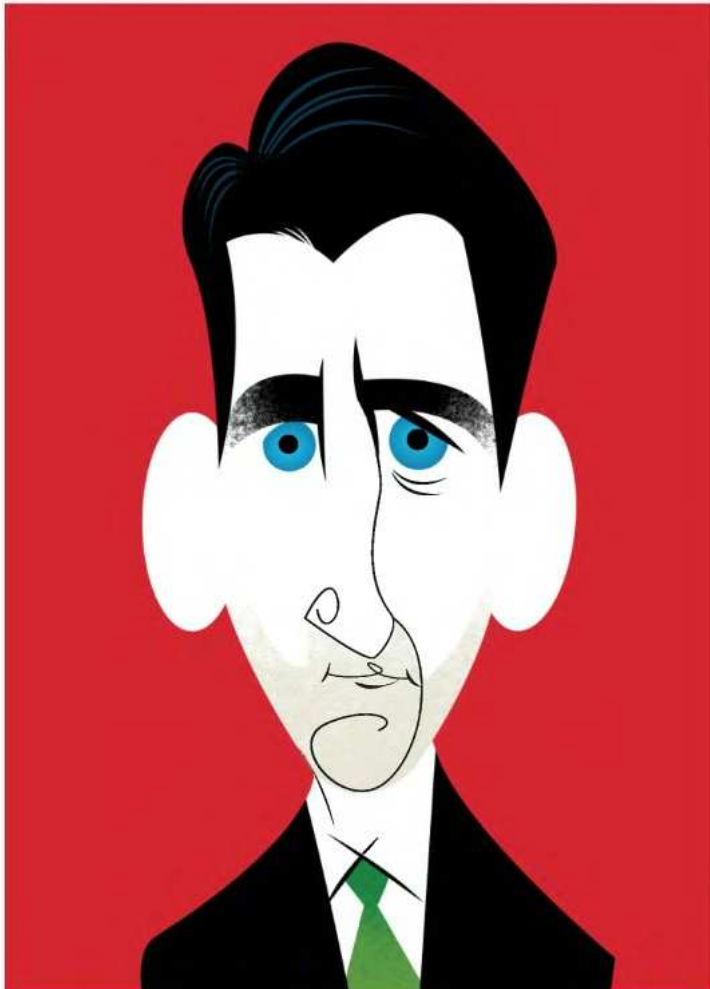
"Here," Kluchin said, "we all get to leave."

—Andrew Marantz

## FUSSBUDGET

*How Paul Ryan captured the G.O.P.*

BY RYAN LIZZA



One day in March, 2009, two months after the Inauguration of President Obama, Representative Paul Ryan, of Wisconsin, sat behind a small table in a cramped meeting space in his Capitol Hill office. Hunched forward in his chair, he rattled off well-rehearsed critiques of the new President's policies and America's lurch toward a "European" style of government. Ryan's father, grandfather, and great-grandfather all died before their sixtieth birthdays, so Ryan, who is now forty-two, could be forgiven if he seemed like a man in a hurry. Tall and wiry, with a puff of wavy dark hair, he is nearly as well known in Washington for

his punishing early-morning workouts as he is for his mastery of the federal budget. Asked to explain his opposition to Obama's newly released budget, he replied, "I don't have that much time."

Ryan won his seat in 1998, at the age of twenty-eight. Like many young conservatives, he is embarrassed by the Bush years. At the time, as a junior member with little clout, Ryan was a reliable Republican vote for policies that were key in causing enormous federal budget deficits: sweeping tax cuts, a costly prescription-drug entitlement for Medicare, two wars, the multibillion-dollar bank-bailout legislation known as TARP. In all, five trillion

dollars was added to the national debt. In 2006 and 2008, many of Ryan's older Republican colleagues were thrown out of office as a result of lobbying scandals and overspending. Ryan told me recently that, as a fiscal conservative, he was "miserable during the last majority" and is determined "to do everything I can to make sure I don't feel that misery again."

In 2009, Ryan was striving to reintroduce himself as someone true to his ideological roots and capable of reversing his party's reputation for fiscal profligacy. A generation of Republican leaders was gone. Ryan had already jumped ahead of more senior colleagues to become the top Republican on the House Budget Committee, and it was his job to pick apart Obama's tax and spending plans. At the table in his office, Ryan pointed out the gimmicks that Presidents use to hide costs and conceal policy details. He deconstructed Obama's early health-care proposal and attacked his climate-change plan. Obama's budget "makes our tax code much less competitive," he said, as if reading from a script. "It makes it harder for businesses to survive in the global economy, for people to save for their own retirement, and it grows our debt tremendously." He added, "It just takes the poor trajectory our country's fiscal state is on and exacerbates it."

As much as he relished the battle against Obama—"European," he repeated, with some gusto—his real fight was for the ideological identity of the Republican Party, and with colleagues who were content to simply criticize the White House. "If you're going to criticize, then you should propose," he told me. A fault line divided the older and more cautious Republican leaders from the younger, more ideological members. Ryan was, and remains, the leader of the attack-and-propose faction.

"I think you're obligated to do that," he said. "People like me who are reform-minded ignore the people who say, 'Just criticize and don't do anything and let's win by default.' That's ridiculous." He said he was "moving ahead without them. They don't want to produce alternatives? That's not going to stop me from producing an alternative."

Ryan's long-range plan was straightforward: to create a detailed alternative to Obama's budget and persuade his party

*"If you're going to criticize, you should propose," Ryan says of his budget plan.*

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# Where's Your Opportunity Hiding?

Uncovering the Investment Opportunities—and Hidden Risks—that Others Miss

A portfolio that's not thoughtfully managed is like a neglected old house. Without the right vision and experience you may not realize its full potential—or sidestep its hidden risks.

## Looking Beyond the Obvious

It's impossible to answer the knock of opportunity when you don't know where the door is. Positioning your portfolio for success in today's landscape requires not only vision, but the ability to see beyond the obvious.

For example, the current low rates and yields of traditional fixed income sources are prompting a move toward non-traditional income generators, such as certain emerging markets that offer greater stability and income at better values, as well as dividend-paying stocks.

Meanwhile, the fundamental strengths of select domestic companies in sectors such as industrials, energy and healthcare are being overlooked, as well as undervalued. Additionally, some emerging markets hold more promise than international developed markets challenged by political and growth pressures.

New opportunities are also being generated by today's low interest rates and relatively low asset valuations, particularly for wealth transfer. In addition, today's tax rules are creating favorable circumstances for retirement planning, total return strategies, intrafamily loans and gifting.

The catch? You need to act now. Because every opportunity has an expiration date.

## Understanding the Risks of "Safety"

In a market rife with unpredictability, investors naturally choose wealth preservation over investment growth. Why willingly assume risk when you are already involuntarily exposed to the hazards of market volatility?

Yet, there is a downside to this "safe" approach, particularly over the long term. It's not unlike clinging to a piece of driftwood in the middle of a shifting sea. The strategy is initially effective, but sooner or later, a wave is bound to render it useless. In short, what was safe yesterday may not be safe today.

When crowds rush toward safe investments, the value increases, sometimes to a price level that makes it virtually impossible to receive adequate compensation over time. Additionally, the desire for security may lead to a portfolio overweighted with "safe" investments, creating a harmful lack of diversification. In each case, the result is unintended risk, which defeats the original purpose.

## Adopting a Level-Headed Mindset

Opportunities are more likely to be spotted by those who maintain a balance of optimism and realism. It is important

to separate the truth from the chatter, particularly when the word on The Street is often full of doom and gloom.

For some investors, it's fashionable to be pessimistic—bleak is the new black. For many others, volatile, unpredictable markets have left them paralyzed, exposing them to the significant risks of standing still. Still others are somewhat optimistic, but not about today.

In fact, in a recent survey of investors by BNY Mellon Wealth Management, 59% said they are waiting for conditions to improve before taking action. Equally telling, 48% are worried that they will run out of money over the course of their lifetime.

Clearly, many investors are still grappling with a crisis of confidence. Yet, those who remain inactive or wallow in gloom are missing out on opportunities—and will continue to do so.

## Navigating the Decade Successfully

The first step toward success in this critical decade is understanding what you need to do. The second is having the fortitude to do it.

Start by implementing an investment approach based on knowledge, not information overload. Be certain it combines flexibility with ongoing discipline. Keep your diversification strategy nimble to act on short-term market swings and disconnects. Your plan should also seamlessly integrate investments, tax strategies and estate concerns. And you should plan to keep planning, because the facts in this decade and emerging opportunities and risks, will keep changing. Most important of all, believe in your strategy and stick with it.

## What Are You Not Seeing?

Mark Twain said, "I was seldom able to see an opportunity until it had ceased to be one." Find out if you've been missing opportunities or inadvertently creating risk. Contact BNY Mellon Wealth Management today for our complimentary, confidential 2020 Risk Audit<sup>SM</sup>.

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to embrace it. He would start in 2009 and 2010 with House Republicans, the most conservative bloc in the Party. Then, in the months before the Presidential primaries, he would focus on the G.O.P. candidates. If the plan worked, by the fall of 2012 Obama's opponent would be running on Paul Ryan's ideas, and in 2013 a new Republican President would be signing them into law.

Sitting in his office more than three years ago, Ryan could not have foreseen how successful his crusade to reinvent the Republican Party would be. Nearly every important conservative opinion-maker and think tank has rallied around his policies. Nearly every Republican in the House and the Senate has voted in favor of some version of his budget plan. Earlier this year, the G.O.P. Presidential candidates lavished praise on Ryan and his ideas. "I'm very supportive of the Ryan budget plan," Mitt Romney said on March 20th, in Chicago. The following week, while campaigning in Wisconsin, he added, "I think it'd be marvellous if the Senate were to pick up Paul Ryan's budget and adopt it and pass it along to the President."

To envisage what Republicans would do if they win in November, the person to understand is not necessarily Romney, who has been a policy cipher all his public life. The person to understand is Paul Ryan.

Janesville, Wisconsin, where Ryan was born and still lives, is a riverfront city of sixty-four thousand people in the southeast corner of the state, between Madison and Chicago. Three families, the Ryans, the Fitzgeralds, and the Cullens, sometimes called the Irish Mafia, helped develop the town, especially in the post-war era. The Ryans were major road builders, and today Ryan, Inc., started in 1884 by Paul's great-grandfather, is a national construction firm. The historic Courthouse section of Janesville is still thick with members of the Ryan clan. At last count, there were eight other Ryan households within a six-block radius of his house, a large Georgian Revival with six bedrooms and eight bathrooms that is on the National Register of Historic Places.

"I grew up on the block I now live on," Ryan told me recently. We were sitting in his new, more spacious Capitol Hill office, one of the spoils of being in the

majority after the 2010 elections. "My aunt and uncle live across the street from me," he said. "My cousin is next door, my brother is a block away." Ryan's line of the family strayed from the construction business, which is now run by his cousin Adam. His grandfather and father became lawyers instead.

Unlike most members of Congress these days, Ryan is relatively accessible to reporters. "The key to understanding me is really simple," he said. "I am not trying to be anybody other than who I actually am." Even his ideological foes comment on his friendliness and good nature. After his sophomore year in high school, back in 1986, he worked the grill at McDonald's. "The manager didn't think I had the social skills to work the counter," he said. "And now I'm in Congress!"

But the summer of 1986 brought a life-changing event. One night in August, he came home from work well past midnight, and he slept late the following morning. His mother was in Colorado visiting his sister, and his brother, who had a summer job with the Janesville parks department, had left early. Paul answered a frantic phone call from his father's secretary. "Your dad's got clients in here," she said. "Where is he?" Paul walked into his parents' bedroom and thought his father was sleeping. "I went to wake him up," he told me, "and he was dead."

"It was just a big punch in the gut," Ryan said. "I concluded I've got to either sink or swim in life." His mother went back to school, in Madison, and studied interior design; his grandmother, who suffered from Alzheimer's, moved into their home, and Ryan helped care for her. "I grew up really fast," he said.

He took both schoolwork and extracurricular activities more seriously, he told me. In his junior year, he was elected class president, which made him prom king and gave him a seat representing the high school on Janesville's school board, his first political position. He played soccer and was on the ski team. He joined nearly every school club: Latin Club, History Club, the Letterman's Club, for varsity athletes, and the International Geographic Society, which was open to students who received an A in geography,

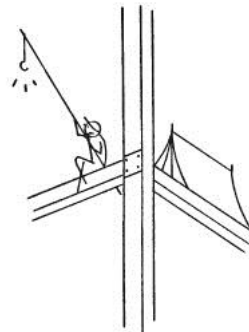
and which met monthly to learn about a different country. At the end of his senior year, he was elected Biggest Brown-Noser. ("At least I didn't have a mullet," he said.)

His father's death also provoked the kind of existential soul-searching that most kids don't undertake until college. "I was, like, 'What is the meaning?'" he said. "I just did lots of reading, lots of introspection. I read everything I could get my hands on." Like many conservatives, he claims to have been profoundly affected by Ayn Rand. After reading "Atlas Shrugged," he told me, "I said, 'Wow, I've got to check out this economics thing.' What I liked about her novels was their devastating indictment of the fatal conceit of socialism, of too much government." He dived into Friedrich Hayek, Ludwig von Mises, and Milton Friedman.

In a 2005 speech to a group of Rand devotees called the Atlas Society, Ryan said that Rand was required reading for his office staff and interns. "The reason I got involved in public service, by and large, if I had to credit one thinker, one person, it would be Ayn Rand," he told the group. "The fight we are in here, make no mistake about it, is a fight of individualism versus collectivism." To me he was careful to point out that he rejects Rand's atheism.

In 1988, Ryan went to Miami University, in Ohio, where he got to know an economics professor named William R. Hart, a fierce and outspoken libertarian in a faculty dominated by liberals. The two quickly discovered their shared fascination with Rand and Hayek. Ryan got his first introduction to movement conservatism when Hart handed him an issue of *National Review*. "Take this magazine—I think you'll like it," he said.

In 1991, Hart recommended Ryan for an internship in the office of Senator Bob Kasten, a Wisconsin Republican. Two years later, Ryan went to work as a speechwriter and policy analyst for Jack Kemp, who led Empower America, an organization then in the vanguard of making policy for supply-side conservatives who were pushing Republicans rightward in their views on taxes and the size of government. "Jack



Kemp is what sucked me into public policy, public service, and politics,” Ryan said. “He called it the battle of ideas, and I just really got into it.”

Hart told me, “He thought the world of Jack Kemp. I got the impression that Jack Kemp became something of a second father.”

In 1997, Mark Neumann, the congressman from Ryan’s district in Wisconsin, who was running for the Senate, called Ryan, who was just twenty-seven, and suggested that he run for the House seat. Neumann knew that the popular Ryan name couldn’t hurt. Ryan went back to Wisconsin, worked briefly for the family business as a “marketing consultant”—a bit of résumé padding that gave him his only private-sector experience—and decided to run. One ad showed him walking through a Janesville cemetery among the gravestones of his ancestors. He won the election, becoming the second-youngest member of the House, and he has been reelected easily ever since.

Ryan’s first significant policy fight came in 2004. As President George W. Bush campaigned for a second term, largely emphasizing counter-terrorism and national-security policies, Ryan laid the groundwork for the Republican agenda should Bush be elected. For the first time, Ryan had the chance to pursue some of the more daring libertarian ideas that had captivated him. As a thirty-four-year-old representative, he set out to privatize Social Security.

For decades, policy wonks on the Republican fringes had talked about turning Social Security, the government safety-net program for retirees, into a system of private investment accounts. The architect of the movement was Peter Ferrara, a former Harvard Law School student, who, calling it “the craziest idea in the world,” sold it, in 1979, to the small-government fundamentalists at the Cato Institute. (Ferrara is now at the Heartland Institute, best known for its denial of climate change.) They evangelized on behalf of the idea for more than two decades, before pushing it into mainstream Republican politics. Bush was the first Republican Presidential nominee to embrace the idea, but it wasn’t a priority in his first term, which was dominated by the response to 9/11 and the war in Iraq.

Ryan and other conservative leaders, among them Senator John Sununu, of New Hampshire, wanted to be sure that Bush returned to the plan in 2005. Under Ryan’s initial version, American workers would be able to invest about half of their payroll taxes, which fund Social Security, in private accounts. As a plan to reduce government debt, it made no sense. It simply took money from one part of the budget and spent it on private accounts, at a cost of two trillion dollars in transition expenses. But, as an ideological statement about the proper relationship between individuals and the federal government, Ryan’s plan was clear.

The release of the Social Security proposal was a turning point in Ryan’s career. Bush could have chosen to push a bipartisan idea, such as immigration reform, as the first domestic proposal of his second term. But, during the 2004 campaign, Ryan, with such allies as Kemp and Ferrara, kept up pressure from the right to force the White House to make a decision on Social Security. Many Republicans were still wary. Two weeks after Bush’s Inauguration, Ryan gave a speech at Cato asserting that Social Security was no longer the third rail of American politics. He toured his district with a PowerPoint presentation and invited news crews to document how Republicans could challenge Democrats on a sacrosanct policy issue and live to tell about it.

Conservative editorialists and activists cheered him on. “What Ryan and Sununu have proposed is historic,” Newt Gingrich wrote in an op-ed piece. “They have fashioned a plan that makes the idea of a personal-account option for Social Security not only politically viable but, indeed, politically irresistible.” Jack Kemp lauded his former aide: “It will be proven the most efficacious of all the reforms.” For the first time, Ryan enjoyed a round of worshipful media coverage. “THAT HAIR, THOSE EYES, THAT PLAN,” proclaimed the headline of a long home-state magazine profile in 2005.

But Ryan’s assurances proved to be wildly optimistic. Bush, urged by Karl Rove to keep his distance from Ryan’s plan, released a far more cautious proposal, with smaller accounts and less expensive transition costs. He spent months on a national tour promoting it, as Ryan had in Wisconsin. Democrats savaged the plan. Bush’s poll numbers sank, and

the plan was effectively dead by the fall. The following year, the Republicans lost thirty House seats and the Democrats took over Congress. Other factors contributed to Bush’s failures in 2005 and 2006—Hurricane Katrina, escalating violence in Iraq—but his push for a version of the Ryan Social Security plan marked the start of the decline. Bush, in his memoir, writes that he regretted pursuing the issue when he did.

What some might interpret as the failure of an unpopular idea Ryan insisted was mostly a communications problem. “The Administration did a bad job of selling it,” he told me. Bush had campaigned on national-security issues, only to pitch Social Security reform after reelection. “And . . . *thud*,” Ryan said. “You’ve got to prepare the country for these things. You can’t just spring it on them after you win.” The lesson: “Don’t let the engineers run the marketing department.”

Although the ranks of House Republicans were thinner after the 2006 elections, Ryan was sent back to Washington and won the top Republican spot on the Budget Committee. Now he had a large staff of economists working for him and access to the resources of the Congressional Budget Office, which could provide detailed analyses of his proposals. Once again, he set about testing the bounds of conservative ideology within the Party. It was his job to draft an alternative to the new Democratic majority’s budget. Even for the smaller, more conservative G.O.P. caucus of 2007, Ryan’s draft was so extreme that forty out of two hundred and two Republicans voted against it.

He returned the following year with something more polished and more ambitious. In May, 2008, working with two other young Republicans, Kevin McCarthy, of California, and Eric Cantor, of Virginia, who had watched the immolation of the congressional wing of their party during the Bush years, Ryan remade his budget into something he called the Roadmap for America’s Future. Rather than just build support inside Congress, he promoted the Roadmap through the rich network of conservative media and think tanks that helped influence Republican members. “I thought fiscal policy was on the wrong path,” he told me.

Ryan had witnessed three periods

when conservatism was ascendant: during the Reagan revolution of the nineteen-eighties; after the 1994 Republican takeover of Congress; and after Bush's election in 2000. Notably, the federal government's size and responsibilities grew through all three political epochs. Ryan's Roadmap soon came to define a fourth conservative surge. Unlike the 1994 Contract with America, which in substance was not nearly as ideological as people thought, and unlike Bush's compassionate conservatism, which was sold as a rejection of anti-government philosophy, the Roadmap was a comprehensive plan to reduce the welfare state and radically curtail the government's role in protecting citizens from life's misfortunes.

Ryan recommended ending Medicare, the government health-insurance program for retirees, and replacing it with a system of direct payments to seniors, who could then buy private insurance. (The change would not affect current beneficiaries or the next decade of new ones.) He proposed ending Medicaid, the health-care program for the poor, and replacing it with a lump sum for states to use as they saw fit. Ryan also called for an end to the special tax break given to employers who provide insurance; instead, that money would pay for twenty-five-hundred-dollar credits for uninsured taxpayers to buy their own plans. As for Social Security, Ryan modestly scaled back his original proposal by reducing the amount invested in private accounts, from one-half to one-third of payroll taxes. Ryan's Roadmap also promised to cut other government spending, though it didn't specify how. Likewise, it promised to lower income-tax rates and simplify the tax code, but it didn't detail which popular deductions—mortgage interest? retirement contributions?—it would eliminate.

Conservative intellectuals at *National Review* and the Heritage Foundation loved the Roadmap, and Ryan became an icon within the insular world of right-wing pundits. In Congress, things were different. In 2008, with midterm and Presidential elections looming, the Roadmap attracted just eight co-sponsors. Only the most astute observers of G.O.P. internal politics noticed what was happening. In a celebratory column about the Ryan plan in the Washington

*Post*, titled "Fiscal Medicine Man," Robert Novak, the late conservative writer, predicted, "After what is expected to be another bad G.O.P. defeat in the 2008 congressional elections, Ryan, McCarthy, and Cantor could constitute the party's new House leadership."

By early 2009, when I first met Ryan in his office, he was caught between the demands of the Republican leaders, who wanted nothing to do with his Roadmap, and his own belief that the Party had to offer a sweeping alternative vision to Obama's. Ryan soon had an unlikely ally, in Obama himself. Throughout that year, the Administration struggled to defend its ambitious agenda, in part because there was no Republican alternative for the President to attack. Ryan, deferring to the Party leadership, didn't aggressively push his plan again. But in late January of 2010, a week after the victory of the Republican Scott Brown in the contest for Ted Kennedy's Senate seat in Massachusetts—the first election fuelled by the new Tea Party movement—Ryan offered the Roadmap as an alternative to Obama's budget.

He presented it not as a dry policy plan, with just numbers and actuarial tables, but as a manifesto that drew on the canon of Western political philosophy as interpreted by conservative intellectuals. The document's introduction referred to the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, the Federalist Papers, Hayek, Friedman, Adam Smith, Max Weber, Émile Durkheim, John Locke, Alexis de Tocqueville, Georges-Eugène Sorel, Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, Charles Murray, and Niall Ferguson. Ryan himself seemed intent on entering the canon. "Only by taking responsibility for oneself, to the greatest extent possible, can one ever be free," he wrote, "and only a free person can make responsible choices—between right and wrong, saving and spending, giving or taking."

Obama saw an opening. Invited to speak before the House Republicans at their retreat in Baltimore, on January 29th, he seemed to extend an olive branch to Ryan. "I think Paul, for example, the head of the Budget Committee, has looked at the budget and has made a serious proposal," Obama said. "I've read it. I can tell you what's in it. And there's some ideas in there that I would agree with, but there's some ideas that we should have a healthy debate about,



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because I don't agree with them." Afterward, Obama made a point of shaking Ryan's hand and signing an autograph for his seven-year-old daughter, Liza. There was talk in Washington that the two young, wonky Midwesterners might be able to build a working relationship.

Three days later, the White House started a livelier debate with Ryan. In a press briefing, Peter Orszag, the budget director at the time, dismantled Ryan's plan, point by point. Ryan's proposal would turn Medicare "into a voucher program, so that individuals are on their own in the health-care market," he said. Over time, the program wouldn't keep pace with rising medical costs, so seniors would have to pay thousands of dollars more a year for health care. The Roadmap would revive Bush's plan to privatize Social Security and "provide large tax benefits to upper-income households . . . while shifting the burden onto middle- and lower-income households. It is a dramatically different approach in which much more risk is loaded onto individuals." Ryan, who had always had a good relationship with Orszag, later described the briefing as the moment when "the budget director took that olive branch and hit me in the face with it."

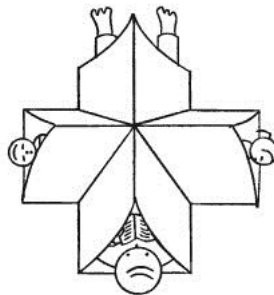
But the confrontation enhanced Ryan's credibility among conservatives. He became the face of the opposition, someone who could attack the President's policies with facts and figures. Indeed, at the retreat, Obama had mischaracterized Ryan's Medicare plan, and Ryan politely corrected him. The two men sparred again the next month, at a summit at Blair House, over the President's health-care plan. The details of Ryan's proposals and his critiques of Obama's mattered less than the fact that he was taking on the President. House Speaker John Boehner and other Republican leaders started to feel pressure to take a position on the Ryan budget.

In July, Boehner distanced himself from the plan. But Ryan's outside-in strategy, of building support among conservatives who would pressure Republican leaders to embrace his ideas, started to pay off. An editorial in the *Weekly Standard* stated that "Republicans should embrace Ryan's Road Map." Dick Armey, the former congressional leader, who had become a Tea Party organizer, demanded that Republicans

have the "courage" to back Ryan's plan. Boehner's position insured that most Republican candidates didn't listen to Armey's advice, and in 2010 they campaigned against Obama's alleged cuts to Medicare rather than for Ryan's plan to end the program.

Still, after the election, with the Republican Party racing rightward, Ryan provided an intellectual blueprint: there were eighty-seven Republican freshmen who wanted to starve the government but had no clear idea how to do so. In December, in a *Wall Street Journal* op-ed piece, Sarah Palin endorsed the Roadmap, and every potential Republican Presidential candidate knew that he or she, too, would have to take a position on it. In January, 2011, Ryan was chosen to give the official Republican response to the President's State of the Union speech. "We hold to a couple of simple convictions," he said. "Endless borrowing is not a strategy; spending cuts have to come first."

During the next four months, Ryan and McCarthy, the third-ranking Republican in the House, convened a series of listening sessions for their colleagues, placing special emphasis on the Republican freshmen. Wielding a PowerPoint presentation that included photographs of chaos in Greece, which was sliding into its debt crisis, the two led the new members of Congress through the perils of the government's fiscal trajectory, and patiently explained how Ryan's plan was both the only solution and a political winner. In April, after months of this educa-



tion campaign, Ryan formally unveiled a third version of the Roadmap, renamed the Path to Prosperity.

After the listening sessions, Ryan had removed some of the most controversial ideas, including the manifesto-like introduction, and even the Social Security privatization plan. The credit for taxpayers to buy health insurance was scrapped

as well, but Ryan added a new plank: to repeal Obama's health-care law and to effectively cut Medicaid by a third. (Under the plan, Medicaid would no longer keep up with rising medical costs.) Ryan conceded that he couldn't get his colleagues to go along with everything in the old plan. "I had to pass a bill—I had to get two hundred and eighteen people," he told me. His original Roadmap "was just me, unplugged," he said. "But when you're writing a budget you're representing an entire conference, and so you have to get consensus."

Conservative opinion-writers again celebrated his bravery. But there was one note of caution. The ornery Charles Krauthammer doubted that Ryan's ideas could survive a Democratic onslaught in the 2012 campaign. "House Budget Committee Chairman Paul Ryan has just released a recklessly bold, 73-page, 10-year budget plan," he wrote. "At 37 footnotes, it might be the most annotated suicide note in history."

In mid-April of 2011, in a speech at George Washington University, Obama once again decided to make an example of Ryan. Republicans were finally about to vote on the Path to Prosperity, and the President was eager to offer his opinion. Obama, for nearly the first time in his Presidency, emphasized the ideological divide between the two parties rather than offering bromides about what they shared. The White House invited Ryan to the speech and reserved a V.I.P. seat for him. Obama had personally called Ryan after Republicans won the majority in the House the previous November, and Ryan thought the two might have a rapport. They both liked sports and, because Ryan's district runs along the Illinois border close to Chicago, knew many of the same people. "He's a cerebral guy who likes policy, and he's from my part of the country," Ryan said. "At the beginning, I did have some hope."

Ryan sat in the front row as the President shredded his plan. "I believe it paints a vision of our future that's deeply pessimistic," Obama said. "There's nothing serious about a plan that claims to reduce the deficit by spending a trillion dollars on tax cuts for millionaires and billionaires. And I don't think there's anything courageous about asking for

sacrifice from those who can least afford it and don't have any clout on Capitol Hill."

Ryan seemed genuinely shocked. During a radio interview later in the day, he complained that Obama had called him "un-American," and he objected to the charge that he was "pitting children with autism or Down syndrome against millionaires and billionaires" and "ending America as we know it." Ryan told me, "I was expecting some counteroffer of some kind. What we got was the gauntlet of demagoguery."

Two days after the speech, despite some desperate appeals by Republican pollsters, Ryan's plan passed the House of Representatives, 235 to 193. Only four Republicans voted against it. Ryan told me that the class of Republicans elected in 2010 was transformational. "Usually, you get local career politicians who want to be national career politicians," he said. "They're more cautious. They're more risk-averse. They're more focussed on just reelection." He went on, "This crop of people who came up are doctors and dentists and small-business people and roofers and D.A.s. They're not here for careers—they're here for causes."

Whatever benefit the White House had seen in raising Ryan's profile, his increasing power, and his credibility as the leading authority on conservative fiscal policy, soon made his imprimatur essential for any Republican trying to reach a compromise with Democrats. Ryan helped scuttle three deals on the budget. He had served on the Simpson-Bowles deficit commission but refused to endorse its final proposal, in December, 2010. When deficit negotiations moved from the failed commission to Congress, Ryan stuck with the extreme faction of the G.O.P. caucus, which withheld support from any of the leading bipartisan plans. In the summer of 2011, when a group of Democratic and Republican senators, known as the Gang of Six, produced their own agreement, Ryan's detailed criticism helped sink it. And, also that summer, during high-level talks between the White House and Republican leaders, Cantor and Ryan reportedly pressured Boehner to reject a potential deal with President Obama.

Ryan had aligned himself with Cantor and the self-proclaimed Young Guns, who made life miserable for Boehner,



*"I think I'd look better without you."*

their nominal leader. They were the most enthusiastic supporters of the Ryan plan, while Boehner had publicly criticized it. Cantor's aides quietly promoted stories about Boehner's alleged squishiness on issues dear to conservatives, and encouraged Capitol Hill newspapers to consider the idea that Cantor would one day replace Boehner. As the Republican negotiations with the White House fizzled in the summer of 2011, Barry Jackson, Boehner's chief of staff and a veteran of the Bush White House and Republican politics, blamed not just Cantor, who in media accounts of the failed deal often plays the role of villain, but Ryan as well.

"That's what Cantor and Ryan want," Jackson told a group of Republican congressmen, according to Robert Draper's recent book, "Do Not Ask What Good We Do." "They see a world where it's Mitch McConnell"—as Senate Majority Leader—"Speaker Cantor, a Republican President, and then Paul Ryan can do whatever he wants to do. It's not about this year. It's about getting us to 2012, defeating the President, and Boehner being disgraced."

One afternoon in mid-July, John Beckord, a Ryan supporter and the head of Forward Janesville, a pro-business economic-development group, took me on a tour of Ryan's home town.

As the years went by, the successful small businesses of the old Irish Mafia came to be overshadowed by one employer, General Motors; at its peak, in 1978, the automaker employed seventy-one hundred people and later produced more than a thousand sport-utility vehicles a day. Janesville has often served as a backdrop for Presidents and Presidential candidates. During a campaign stop there in 2008, Obama said, "The promise of Janesville has been the promise of America." Later that year, the plant announced that it would close, causing the loss of some five thousand jobs in the area. Mitt Romney gave his standard stump speech in Janesville recently, with Ryan at his side.

Beckord drove along the perimeter of the abandoned plant, which stretched across more than two hundred acres. He pointed out a wide plain of asphalt, now sprouting weeds, that had once served as a parking lot for thousands of cars. Through 2007, Ryan regularly requested government money for special projects back home. Earmarks grew out of control during the Bush years, but most of what Ryan asked for, and got, was defensible: four hundred thousand dollars for a water-treatment plant; three hundred thousand for a technical college where G.M. workers could be retrained; seven hundred and thirty-five thousand for

Janesville's bus system; and \$3.3 million for highway projects throughout Wisconsin. In 2008, however, Ryan vowed not to request earmarks anymore; he later helped push through an outright ban. I asked Beckord whether Ryan's libertarianism ever clashed with the needs of his constituents. He hesitated, then said, finally, "I suppose there could have been a full-court press to just cobble together as much federal money as possible on our behalf to make it irresistible for G.M. to keep this plant open."

When we got beyond the auto plant, Beckord pointed out some of the promising initiatives in town. "We're finding a new identity," he said. Since the plant closed, Janesville, which sits almost at the center of a ring of major cities, including Milwaukee, Chicago, St. Louis, Des Moines, and Minneapolis, has partly reinvented itself as a distribution hub for major companies. "They don't make anything here," Beckord explained. "But they distribute their products from here." We passed a John Deere facility where hundreds of lawn tractors and mowers were stacked on pallets. Janesville is a major distribution center for John Deere lawn-care products. Several other national companies, including Grainger, which sells various industrial products, and LeMans, which sells parts for motocross and snowmobiling equipment, use Janesville for the same purpose.

As Janesville increasingly becomes a base for the business of distribution logistics, its single most pressing economic concern is good roads. Beckord pointed toward Interstate 90, which runs southeast a hundred miles to Chicago. "From an economic-vitality and economic-development perspective, transportation infrastructure is huge," he said. Next year, I-90 around Janesville will begin expansion from four lanes to eight. The project, the top issue for the local business community since the G.M. plant closed, will be financed as part of a billion-dollar federal and state highway project. "Paul has been as helpful as he can be to encourage that development," Beckord said. "But, as you know, he also has a philosophical disconnect with the idea of earmarks."

We passed a warehouse-like building under construction where several men in hard hats were at work. Beckord explained that it would soon house the

Janesville Innovation Center, providing entrepreneurs with commercial space in which to launch their ideas. The money came from a \$1.2-million government grant through the Economic Development Administration, one of Obama's major stimulus programs.

There was one more success story that Beckord wanted to share. A few years ago, he had a melanoma that was treated with a radioactive isotope; this isotope is administered to fifty-five thousand patients a day but has a half-life of sixty-six hours after manufacture, so it must be delivered quickly. The isotope, known as a medical tracer, is made outside the United States by a complicated process requiring highly enriched uranium from nuclear reactors. The government offered twenty-five-million-dollar matching grants to companies that could devise a way to produce the material domestically, without using enriched uranium. "Two of the four companies that won that competition, incredibly, are going to build plants in our county, and one of them is going to be in Janesville," Beckord said. In May, the federal government announced that it would contribute more than ten million dollars to the new facility, which could employ some hundred and fifty people.

The current Presidential campaign centers on the debate about the government's role in the economy. Ryan, by forcing Republicans to embrace his budget plan, has helped shape this debate. Obama, on July 13th, told a crowd in Virginia, "If you were successful, somebody along the line gave you some help. There was a great teacher somewhere in your life. Somebody helped to create this unbelievable American system that we have that allowed you to thrive. Somebody invested in roads and bridges. If you've got a business, you didn't build that. Somebody else made that happen." He added, "When we succeed, we succeed because of our individual initiative, but also because we do things together."

To Ryan, Obama's words were anathema. In a conversation three days later with James Pethokoukis, a conservative blogger for the American Enterprise Institute, he had harsh criticisms for the President. "His comments seem to derive from a naïve vision," Ryan said, that is based on "an idea that the nucleus of so-

ciety and the economy is government, not the people." Obama's "big-government spending programs fail to restore jobs and growth," he said, and amount to "a statist attack on free communities."

When I pointed out to Ryan that government spending programs were at the heart of his home town's recovery, he didn't disagree. But he insisted that he has been misunderstood. "Obama is trying to paint us as a caricature," he said. "As if we're some bizarre individualists who are hardcore libertarians. It's a false dichotomy and intellectually lazy." He added, "Of course we believe in government. We think government should do what it does really well, but that it has limits, and obviously within those limits are things like infrastructure, interstate highways, and airports." But independent assessments make clear that Ryan's budget plan, in order to achieve its goals, would drastically reduce the parts of the budget that fund exactly the kinds of projects and research now helping Janesville.

As in 2009, Republicans are divided between those who think they can win by pointing out Obama's failures and those who want to run on a Ryan-like set of ideas. Romney seems to want to be in the first camp, but during the primaries he championed the ideas in Ryan's budget. Ryan is frequently talked about as a future leader of the House Republicans and even as a long shot to be Romney's running mate. He surely would take either job, but he seems better suited to continuing what he's been doing since 2008: remaking the Republican Party in his image. You can't "run on vague platitudes and generalities," he told me earlier this month. He was speaking about Bush in 2004 and Obama four years ago. But he clearly believes that the same holds true for Romney in November.

"He's already endorsed these things," Ryan said. "I want a full-throated defense for an alternative agenda that fixes the country's problems. I want to show the country that we have a solution to get us out of the ditch we're in, and to be proud about it."

Ryan seemed unconcerned that pushing his policy agenda on Romney might damage the candidate. "I think life is short," Ryan said at the end of our final conversation. "You'd better take advantage of it while you have it." ♦

## DEARLY BELOVED

BY SUSANNA WOLFF

Mr. and Mrs. Prescott invite you to travel an uncomfortable distance to drink alcohol they have paid for in honor of their daughter Willoughby Ashleigh Sarah Prescott's marriage to Jared Elliot Weiner on the One Summer Weekend You Didn't Think You Had a Wedding to Attend This Year, Spelled Out Instead of Written Numerically Like a Human Would Write a Year.

Please join an array of strangers, uncles in ill-fitting suits, and high-school friends you never see for a reason to celebrate the subtle wealth competition between the parents of the groom and the parents of the bride. (They hope you enjoy the yarmulkes embroidered with a fictional family crest and the authentic Japanese pour-over-coffee bar.)

The ceremony will be held at a non-religious venue but will be officiated by a damp-nostrilled minister and a plump female rabbi, whom the bride's grandfather will call a lesbian in a bad try at a whisper. The bride and groom are writing their own vows and will make them even more generic than the traditional marriage vows. The ceremony will start late, last at least forty-five minutes, and be completely inaudible to anyone beyond the first row.

Afterward, please help us welcome Mr. Weiner and Ms. Prescott to their new life of wedded bliss, which will be made possible by the fact that Ms. Prescott is not taking the name Weiner. The senior Prescotts and Weiners will address this point of contention while making humorless, borderline insulting toasts about each other's children. Insufficiently shrouded synonyms for "settling" will be used, before a slide show of the couple that features significantly more baby pictures of the bride, played out of synch with a Beatles song.

By the grace of whoever's God, and

with the help of not-actually-Champagne champagne, attempts at dancing will follow, as the best man—who, he assured the bride via MySpace link, is a d.j.—uses his 2006 PowerBook G4 to blast a barely mashed mashup of "At Last" and "Single Ladies" at least four times before the open bar runs out. There will be a brief intermission, dur-



ing which the sweating groom will reunite with his college a-cappella group for a rendition of half of "The Lion Sleeps Tonight" and some stabs at light break dancing.

Barely discounted accommodations have been arranged for guests at the DoubleTree, which is a thirty-dollar cab ride from both the nearest train station and the location of the wedding. However, an insufficient number of rooms have been reserved, so, if you agree to attend, you will probably have to stay at the "rustic" B. and B. where the groom's incontinent great-aunt is also staying. There, you may breakfast on a complimentary bowl of cereal in the presence of middle-aged couples trying to rekindle their marriages and an extensive col-

lection of water-damaged issues of *Fast-Company*.

The bride and groom have registered at Crate & Barrel for an outrageous number of useless items, including corn holders, egg cups, those little stirrers that are used only for mint juleps, a pizza stone, and thirty-eight slightly different spatulas, even though the bride and groom have lived together with a perfectly satisfactory number of spatulas for more than three years. Every item on the registry will either be too inexpensive to be a sufficient gift in itself or cost more than two hundred dollars, for a goddam pizza stone.

R.S.V.P. using the tiny card that is wedged somewhere between the fourth and seventh layers of tissue paper on this invitation.

Please indicate your choice of wet fish, wet chicken, or dry eggplant. The bride's parents wanted to serve scallops, but let's not get into it. After the ceremony, the mother of the bride will freely talk about the limitations of a "Jewish-ish" reception while having another glass of Chardonnay.

You have not been given permission to bring a plus-one because this wedding will be for just an affordable number of family members and close friends. You have been invited because the groom has more close friends than the bride, and the Prescotts aren't paying to throw a reunion party for Jared's bunkmates from Camp Haggai. It would be one thing if the Weiners wanted to chip in for some of the bar tab, but it's fine. The Prescotts can manage, so we needn't discuss it any further.

If you attend, you will be seated with the bride's in-the-closet cousin and various fifth-tier friends, including a grad-school roommate—it is unclear whose—and someone who won't remember having met you at the bride's sixteenth-birthday party. She threw up at that, and she'll throw up at this.

The entire affair will cost you no less than three hundred and fifty dollars and make it so that there is really no way that before the summer is over you can manage that trip to IKEA which would revolutionize your home storage system.

You, the bride, and her parents all know that it will be preferable for everyone involved if you say that you "regretfully cannot attend," and just send the pizza stone instead. ♦

# THE QUESTION ARTIST

*Tino Sehgal's provocative encounters.*

BY LAUREN COLLINS



Tino Sehgal makes what he calls “constructed situations.” He uses the raw materials of voice, language, and movement to build pieces of art. For “This Progress” (2010), he filled the rotunda of the Guggenheim with a corps of “interpreters”—children, teen-agers, baby boomers, octogenarians—who, according to a set of rules devised by Sehgal, engaged each visitor in a conversation, delivering him to progressively older interlocutors as he spiralled up the museum’s ramp. The piece, which made intimates of strangers, was exhilarating. Visitors shared such confidences as “The smaller the diamond, the better the marriage” and “Mr. Hitler ruined my childhood.” Some

of them left in tears. (The critic Jerry Saltz pointed out that it was the only work of art he’d ever encountered that could cry back.) “This Progress” reflected Sehgal’s desire to redefine art as the transformation of actions rather than of things. “What my work is about is, Can something that is not an inanimate object be considered valuable?” Sehgal said recently. He is, in a sense, an architect of interaction. His works are collaborations, new builds on human turf.

Before going further, I should acknowledge that there’s a very good chance that Sehgal would quarrel with everything I’ve just said. Talking to him can be like trying to work out a proof. One day, he

mentioned that he’d like to know more about novels, which he normally is “not that interested in.” “Summer reading list?” I said, just trying to fill the beat. “No,” he replied. “That’s not what I meant.” Interestingness is the categorical imperative of Sehgal’s world. I sometimes pictured him as a Roman emperor, sitting in a box at the Colosseum and pronouncing a bloodied idea “interesting” (it lives!) or “not interesting” (it dies!). The word “thorough” is interesting to Sehgal, as is soccer and telling the truth; less so acting, cell phones, the discourse of reification, and talking about one’s children too much.

Sehgal, who is thirty-six, lives in Berlin with the art historian Dorothea von Hantelmann and their two young sons. The family shuttles between von Hantelmann’s apartment and a shared house that Sehgal has lived in for seventeen years. “I need a little bit of noise around,” he said. “I don’t like this kind of apartment shoebox feeling. It makes me nervous.” His finickiness partly derives from his personality—deliberate, cerebral, goofy yet aloof—but it is also a consequence of the nature of his practice. Like many artists, he is sensitive about the way he is represented in the press; unlike many artists, he is heavily dependent upon the press to represent him. First of all, his art is ephemeral. Moreover, he forbids the creation of any of the by-products—photographs, videos, catalogues, wall text—that normally derive from a work. His pieces leave no physical residue. To see one, you have to either visit the museum or consult a tertiary report. In 2010, the *Times* ran an illicit iPhone photo of “The Kiss,” in which a couple lay entwined on the floor of the Guggenheim, reenacting romantic postures from the works of such artists as Rodin and Koons. Sehgal accused the paper of being “ungentlemanly, very crass.”

This elusiveness of Sehgal’s work has raised suspicion in some quarters. Members of the art world wonder if they are the dupes of a marketing ploy, while members of the public worry that they are the butts of a complicated joke. At the Venice Biennale in 2005, when Sehgal showed “This Is So Contemporary,” in which a group of guards chant, “Ooooh. This is so contemporary!” the Harvard art historian Benjamin H. D. Buchloh called bullshit. “Sehgal is the kind of artist who—had he encountered Duchamp’s urinal in 1917—would have proposed to

*Sehgal outside Tate Modern, in London. Photograph by Gareth McConnell.*

exhibit a kitchen sink the next year, fully convinced that he had become a radical artist overnight," he wrote. But Sehgal explains his insistence on making art without artifact convincingly, as a "cleaner" iteration of the efforts of such forebears as Yves Klein (who sold empty space for gold), Joseph Kosuth (who reproduced entries from a dictionary), and Robert Barry (who released krypton and xenon into the atmosphere, and once claimed to have transmitted a piece telepathically). He believes that mementos of his work would threaten its purity, which could weaken its effect. "There's something deeply optimistic in his work," Hans Ulrich Obrist, the co-director of the Serpentine Gallery, in London, and a close friend of Sehgal's, said recently. "It believes in change, in the production of reality, and that engagement produces consequences."

Although he is often mistaken for an ironist, Sehgal is an idealist, who has wedded the anti-materialist impulses of environmentalism to the immaterialist ones of conceptual art. He thinks there is too much stuff in the world. In keeping with his principles, he declines to travel by air. (When he visits America, he takes a boat.) This is akin, in the hyper-peripatetic art world, to a professional skier refusing to use a lift. "I think it's obvious why, in the twenty-first century," he said, when I asked him why he avoided planes. He is not against the market—rather, he wants to work within it, to explore the notion of whether it might be able to traffic in something other than material goods. How can we continue to make things, he is asking, once we've reached the limits of growth?

Sehgal is trained in political economy (Technical University of Berlin, University of Essen) and dance (Folkwang University of the Arts, in Essen), a biographical Googlewhack that has yielded a freakish career. "DANCING ECONOMIST SEHGAL EMPTIES GUGGENHEIM WITH WEIRD NEW SHOW," a 2010 Bloomberg headline read. His ambitions are more multinational than mom-and-pop. "He's the biggest ego I've ever seen," his long-time friend Jens Hoffmann, the director of the Wattis Institute for Contemporary Arts, in San Francisco, told me. "He doesn't want to be famous, he doesn't want to make money. I think Tino's real goal is to be known as someone who has changed the course of art, or maybe something beyond that."

Sehgal redeems his pretensions by exceeding his ambitions. He was the youngest artist ever to be granted a solo show in the Guggenheim's rotunda. Last week, "These Associations," his most complex piece to date, opened at Tate Modern, in London. At any given moment, the piece requires seventy interpreters—some civilians, some professional dancers—who will engage, over the next three months, each of the museum's estimated million visitors who take them up on the offer. Perhaps it is best thought of as interrogative art, a series of stylized dialogues that cut through the niceties of social interaction, prompting a concentrated exchange of thoughts. It is the thirteenth commission in the Unilever Series, which has allowed such artists as Olafur Eliasson and Ai Weiwei to realize some of their grandest schemes in the museum's Turbine Hall. "It is one of the most radical works we have ever showed at Tate," Chris Dercon, the museum's director, said.

Meanwhile, Sehgal is showing an oceanic new work called "This Variation" at Documenta (13), which runs until September 16th in Kassel, Germany. Bootlegs of the piece, which amounts to a sort of sensory fun house, have been popping up on YouTube. Sehgal seemed uncowed by the prospect of following, in the Turbine Hall, a blockbuster exhibition of Damien Hirst. When I asked him what he thought of that show, he mentioned a Hirst-designed cup-and-saucer set that was available in the Tate Modern gift shop. He said, "I was more interested in the mug."

**T**he quality of Sehgal's pieces depends on vast amounts of invisible labor. A year before the Tate opening, Asad Raza, Sehgal's producer, had moved to London; Sehgal was commuting from Berlin. For months, Raza had prospected amid the film clubs and docent groups and faculty lounges of London, trying to find potential interpreters. "The hardest thing is getting a cross-section of society," Jessica Morgan, the curator of the Tate show, said. "The idea is that the piece has a sense of the city. It's supposed to have this texture, so that you don't feel, if you're in your fifties, 'Oh, this is just a bunch of hipsters mucking about in the Turbine Hall.'"

By early May, they had enlisted around fifty candidates who fulfilled the criterion of being "profound and measured"—

"You want depth, but you don't want the person to become a spectacle," Sehgal explained. They were overwhelmingly well educated, and well off. (A truer picture of London might include some under-achievers and convenience-store clerks.) One afternoon, a group of them convened in a gray, concrete room at Tate Modern for a rehearsal. People sat in rapt pairs at a series of white tables with low benches. It could have been a speed-dating mixer.

"O.K., you guys. Talkers stand up," Sehgal said, speaking over the din. He stood like a pregnant woman, back arched, with his hands on his haunches. At his command, the group members who had been designated to practice speaking switched partners. After several rounds, Sehgal summoned the group together. They had been working with four "prompts," which were meant to call forth anecdotes that they would deploy in the conversational part of the piece. The prompts required the talkers to discuss moments when they had experienced either a sense of arrival, a sense of belonging, a sense of satisfaction, or a sense of dissatisfaction with themselves.

"'Satisfied,' that's probably the most difficult, yes?" Sehgal began.

A woman replied that she had found "dissatisfaction" problematic, because "you feel like you're lumbering someone with this issue you're struggling with."

"The more detailed it is, the better," Sehgal said.

Another woman chimed in. "Conversations with people you don't know are like a little present that you proffer," she said. "'Dissatisfaction' is a gift I don't want to give."

Sehgal met the mutiny with patience. Rather than asserting his authority as the artist, he just kept making his argument.

"It's harder now than it will be when we're really doing it," he told the woman. "For instance, I know who you are, so there are social consequences."

Another interpreter wanted to know whether the stories had to be strictly true.

"There's no way I can control if you're going to put in something false, but it's kind of like this classic thing, that something empirical is always more interesting," Sehgal said.

Next, the group prepared to practice a module of the piece that would require them to sing in unison. "Do you remember it?" Sehgal said, as the interpreters

began tuning up a strange, mechanical ditty. It went, "Even if the old, the old, rootedness, rootedness, is being lost." There was something mesmerizing about the chorus. It had the feel of ritual—a post-industrial psalm. Sehgal inquired, "Who are the more confident singers?"

A woman with bicycles on her blouse replied, "Not me, when it's Heidegger."

The rehearsal was surprisingly improvisational. Sehgal doesn't transcribe the texts, lyrics, and steps that make up his pieces, so it is up to him and his interpreters to remember how to do them. "I have this belief that if you have an idea, and you have to write it down to remember it, then it can't be a great idea," he said. As nit-picky as he can be, he is open to serendipity. He is aware that the mutations his work undergoes endow it with a sort of sedimentary thickness. "The loss of control is a psychological necessity for me, as an artist," Sehgal said. I asked Louise Höjer, who is managing the piece in Kassel, whether Sehgal's Socratic approach risked authorlessness. "That's the reason I'm here," she said. "When I install a work, I often talk about it in terms of a culture. We have to interpret the rules that Tino gives us and be human within them."

Because it draws from many disciplines, Sehgal's work is difficult to define. His term "constructed situations" comes from the French theorist Guy Debord's 1957 manifesto "Report on the Construction of Situations," which called for the artist to generate moments that would jolt the spectator out of passivity, rendering him the co-creator of a less mediocre life. Hans Ulrich Obrist, borrowing from the artists Gilbert & George, offered the term "living sculpture." When I spoke to Chris Dercon, he referred to Sehgal as a "question artist." He said, "Tino's asking very precise questions, and if you ask precise questions you get precise answers. That's the reason you cannot escape his art." Sehgal's work is a proposition, not a polemic. "The thing about Tino's work is the way it continues to echo afterward," Jessica Morgan said. "You kind of think to yourself, Should I have said thank you?" Sehgal's art demands engagement. Whatever it is, it is art during which you can't check your e-mail.

Sehgal is insistent that his work—even though it is as often heard and felt as it is seen—be categorized as visual art. It riles

him when his pieces are referred to as performance; he argues that, unlike traditional theatre and dance, they are shown in a museum, throughout opening hours, and they rely upon the participation of the individual, rather than the passive attention of a crowd. "The concert, the church, the theatre don't really seem to me to be adequate to contemporary society," he said. "In the theatre, you do something one time for eight hundred people, but we might do something eight hundred times for one person."

With their regional accents and bad breath, Sehgal's pieces defy the vogue for monumentalism. "His work brings life back to more human proportion," Marian Goodman, his gallerist, told me. "This is a work by Tino Sehgal," the child who greets a visitor in "This Progress" begins. "May I ask you a question? What is progress?" Sehgal's art resides in the second person. You choose your own adventure.

Sehgal is also aware that the performing arts command less prestige than those which we consider visual art. His abandonment of the theatre has caused, according to the performance critic Claudia La Rocco, "some eye-rolling" in the world of contemporary dance and performance. "I think it's a little disingenuous, if you're relying often on trained dancers and choreographers, to distance yourself from that," La Rocco said. When I mentioned such criticisms to Sehgal, he affirmed without apology his strategic desire to benefit from the clout of the museum. "You send your children to the museum, and that's the official version of who we are, as a society," he said. "It has that power." He continued, "Lady Gaga, she's the most visible human being on the planet, but she wants to be an artist. She asked Klaus"—Klaus Biesenbach, the director of MOMA PS1—"Is this art, what I'm doing? And he was like, 'No.' Putting my work in the museum, it's also a political move. Because of this high status of the object in our culture, something has to be a thing. Live efforts are almost marginal. I think dance, for example, is just as much a thing, and I want for it to have the same status. I don't want it to be the thing that comes in the evening and is, like, the happy music."

The group at the Tate proceeded into the Turbine Hall, where Sehgal instructed them to assemble against the far wall. Over the course of twenty-five minutes,

they were to walk back and forth from one end of the room to the other, as an accelerating mass. "The Turbine Hall was a place for turning fossil fuel into electricity, a place that epitomizes industrialization," Sehgal said. "I'm hoping for the piece to be a kind of meditation on the changes this process has brought about in terms of interpersonal relations." Sehgal's mode of thought is relentlessly teleological. He is a fiend for tectonic shifts in human behavior, sweeping theories that explain the world in several-hundred-year chunks, Ages of. He gave the signal. For almost half an hour, the group moved through the hall, zombielike. Afterward, Sehgal recalled them to the wall, mocking the theatrical stiffness in their movement.

"Nobody ever said you had to be like a total eighties dancer from France or something," he said. He continued, "The ultimate ambition is to make our group grow. *That* is the piece."

In 1987, when Sehgal was eleven, he cancelled Christmas. "I wrote my parents a letter and said, I don't want to be a part of this Christmas thing," he recalled. "I rejected my presents. This whole kind of Christian colonizing of what was a collective, pagan ritual—I've mellowed out a bit, but I was enraged, somehow, by that."

Sehgal was born in London, where his father, Surin, a native of what is now Pakistan, worked for I.B.M. His mother, Therese, who is German, stayed home with Tino and his younger sister, Melanie. After a stint in Paris, the family moved to Düsseldorf, and then to Böblingen, a comfortable suburb of Stuttgart. In addition to having a large I.B.M. plant, Böblingen was home to Hewlett-Packard, Mercedes, and Philips. It was a landscape of concrete. Any threat from nature had been subdued. Sehgal found the scrubbed industriousness of his surroundings oppressive; his upbringing, he says, was "totally uncultural." He recalled, "My father came out of India, where he had a tough childhood in Partition." Having lost his material wealth, Sehgal says, his father applied himself to acquiring the trappings of a middle-class life. "I knew that just wasn't going to work, psychologically, as a life, or sustainably, as a society."

Like all adolescents nurturing a sense of injustice, Sehgal searched for a source of power. He became a skateboarder—Airwalks and baggy pants. The landscape

began to morph. "I think a lot of Tino's stuff comes from skateboarders looking at railings and concrete, and thinking, How can I use that in a different way?" Asad Raza, Sehgal's producer, said. At sixteen, Sehgal spoke in favor of a public-transportation project at a city-council meeting in Stuttgart. "I remember seeing the minister of transportation dive and dodge," he told Arthur Lubow, of the *Times Magazine*. "All he could do was administer what the public opinion was, or else he would be voted out in the next election." Sehgal recalls this moment as an epiphany. He would register his rebuke through culture rather than politics.

Sehgal is fluent in any number of esoteric disciplines. Charlotte Higgins, a *Guardian* reporter who was sent to interview him on the eve of the Tate show, wrote that Sehgal, upon hearing that she had studied classics, held forth on the politics of prostration in Procopius. Still, what doesn't interest him doesn't interest him: "There are huge blank areas in his history of art," Jessica Morgan said. It is a wonder that Sehgal did not become a professor, like his sister, who teaches philosophy and literature in Frankfurt. "This idea of an embodied knowledge, versus writing things down, somehow to me seemed more of a challenge than maintaining this kind of critical distance," Sehgal explained, of his choice to pursue dance. When he was nineteen, he saw a performance by the experimental choreographer Xavier Le Roy. Soon afterward, he showed up on Le Roy's doorstep. I asked Le Roy what Sehgal was like as a dancer. "Wild and intelligent," he said.

Sehgal met Dorothea von Hantelmann when he was twenty-three, at a party after a dance performance. After thirteen years together, their life and work have become deeply enmeshed. When I asked von Hantelmann how they had influenced each other, she replied, "Oh, God." Sehgal said, "Especially when we first met, Dorothea was formative. As somebody who was not from a sophisticated cultural background—even just her books and stuff, it was all there. I profited from that a lot." Sehgal lives modestly, but the conditions that govern his domestic life are less rigid than those he imposes on his art. His boys have a Christmas. One day, I asked Sehgal what the last thing he bought was. "My work comes out of a deep psychological place, so it's not like

I'm Object Man at home. Theoretically, I'm not against objects, but, personally, I'm not comfortable attaching myself to them—I don't seek them out. What you can say about my home is that it's not very ambitious. The last time we went into a department store—Dorothea wanted to have some curtains—that was already a year ago."

During his twenties, Sehgal steeped himself in the European avant-garde. For a time, he worked as a choreographer with Les Ballets C de la B, a dance company in Ghent. (A recent performance was inspired by a transvestite cabaret.) Eventually, in the early nineties, he began making pieces for himself. The first of these was "Twenty Minutes for the Twentieth Century," in which Sehgal, naked, danced a series of movements in twenty different styles, including those of Isadora Duncan and George Balanchine. Jens Hoffmann, the curator, suggested to Sehgal that he show the piece in museums, as it amounted to something like a "museum of dance." Hoffmann recalled, "We were probably twenty-three, at that point, and we were like, 'Yeah, let's just do it.' It worked because we knew it would work and there was absolutely no doubt in our minds."

Some observers were skeptical, because of the hype, and the audacity of Sehgal's maneuver. "It felt a little glib," Jessica Morgan recalled, of seeing Sehgal's "This Is So Contemporary" for the first time. But, as the work evolved, Sehgal made converts of his critics. Each piece solved the problems of the last. "The interesting thing with Tino's work is it's

completely hermetic," Hoffmann said. "There's no way of finding any loopholes—it's completely thought through."

On the morning of June 22nd, I met Sehgal aboard the 7:01 A.M. Eurostar from London's St. Pancras Station to the Gare du Nord, in Paris. Tall and mussed, he had materialized just before the train pulled out. He was wearing a gray wool cardigan and a white T-shirt that sagged around the neck, giving it a little frill. His black jeans puddled around white sneakers that looked like they were cut from blocks of foam. I don't remember much of a hello.

ARTIST: It happens at a table—it's a work for a couple, and they've invited some friends over for dinner. The first course starts, and one of the partners stands up and leaves the table. Then, forty-five seconds later, the other person of the couple also leaves the table. . . . The hosts stay away four or five minutes, and then they come back and they sit down at each other's place. They eat the other's food. So then, if the guests ask what's up, they say, "This is a work by Tino Sehgal entitled 'Those Thoughts.'" The work is actually the thoughts, and the prejudices, of the guests. And I've never seen it, but I've heard about it.

REPORTER: You've never seen it?

ARTIST: Well, I've rehearsed it, in a restaurant in Venice, but I've never seen it.

REPORTER: Why don't you just orchestrate one?

ARTIST: It would seem a bit self-centered, somehow.

REPORTER: If I were to do it tonight, why would it not be a work by Tino Sehgal?

ARTIST: It probably would be, actually. But that's a more theoretical question. Because, for example, if you build a mirrored cube, which you could, why would it not be a work by Robert Morris?

Sehgal was travelling to Paris to sell some art. Nothing concrete would actually change



hands. Instead, Sehgal and Vincent Worms, who had agreed to buy two pieces for his Kadist Art Foundation, would discuss the terms of sale. When a person buys one of Sehgal's works, that person acquires the right to have people enact it in the future. There would be no contract, no certificate of authenticity. To complete the transaction, a notary would orally validate the agreement, circumventing the paper trail.

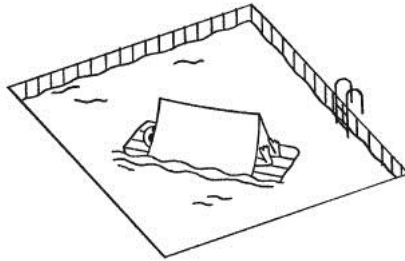
Sehgal hadn't figured out how to get from the train station to the notary's office. Since all we had was the address, he assented to my suggestion that we take a cab. There was a wait, which made him antsy. He had some crumbs on his face, from a croissant he'd just eaten. That made me think to ask why, as someone who believes the world is overstuffed, he had decided to have children. Sehgal didn't seem to mind my rudeness. He said that von Hantelmann is seven years older than he, and that it was time. "I'm an artist, and I have a big ego, but I hope I can at least sometimes pull back a little bit—or, at least, I can think that thought," he said. Soon, though, the artist resurfaced. "I never stand in such a queue," he said. "That's not a 'me' thing to do."

We reached the notary's offices. Sehgal, Worms, and the notary took seats around a long wooden table. I was to serve as the witness. Sehgal began by describing the pieces. In "This Is About" (2003), a museum employee gives a tour of the collection to a group of visitors and then asks, "What do you think this is about?" In "kWh" (2002), which also takes place in a museum, someone turns off the electricity, and a group of employees, moving around in the darkness, sing how many kilowatt-hours of energy are being conserved. The latter struck me as a little obvious. Some of Sehgal's more interactive work runs the risk of playing too ingratiatingly to the crowd—a little too much pizzazz and his interpreters are Jellicle hoofers, pawing the family in the third row at the Winter Garden theatre. But, as playful as Sehgal's pieces are, they are pocked with danger zones and dark spots. Sehgal is refreshingly explicit, for an artist, about his political motivations, but his work is too mysterious to be relegated to the ghetto of "eco-art."

Next, the notary went over some stipulations regarding opening hours (the pieces had to go on as long as the venue showing them was open), installation (by

Sehgal or a designated representative), photography (none), and resale (only by oral contract). At least, this is what I think he said, as Sehgal didn't allow me, or anyone else, to take notes. "One day, if we have a conflict with Vincent, we'll call you and say, 'You were there,'" he said.

Nearly a hundred thousand dollars was at stake, but owning a Sehgal piece is a notional concept. "Somehow it exists in my mind, in my body, and in the bodies of the people who know how to do it, and



it also exists in their memories, and of those of the people who saw it," Sehgal has said of his work. The Guggenheim, for instance, bought one of four editions of "This Progress." I asked Sehgal where the others had gone. "They didn't sell," he said. "That often happens." In 2008, the Walker Art Center, in Minneapolis, bought a Sehgal piece called "This Objective of That Object" (2004). Yasmil Raymond, a former curator at the Walker, told the *Times Magazine* that it was the most contentious acquisition during her five years there. "It was the only time someone on the acquisitions committee voted against an acquisition," she said. "There was a small insurrection."

The sale continued in a pro-forma manner until the notary touched on the fifth point of the agreement, which covered the wages the guards would be paid. Sehgal was adamant that they be remunerated above their usual salaries. This wasn't a humanitarian intervention. Increased pay was necessary for "psychological reasons," he said, so that the guards would treat the project as real work. Eventually, Sehgal and Worms agreed on a bonus of twenty per cent. Sehgal said later, "I wanted to reiterate, for my sake, that they don't just tell the guards, 'Oh, you can do this in addition to your regular duties.'" Sehgal said that once, in Japan, some employees had not been properly trained, and "the work totally disintegrated." (The piece was "This Is New," in which they quoted headlines from the day's newspapers; they

chickened out and just stopped talking.)

People agree to appear in Sehgal's works for various reasons. For some of them, especially those who are performers by trade, it's a decent job. (Tate Modern is paying the interpreters in "These Associations" a little more than the London Living Wage, which is about thirteen dollars an hour.) Others are too intrigued to say no, or they hope to glean something personally or professionally enlightening from the experience. One day during a break, two interpreters, Tim Wright and Matthew Engelke, were standing around, eating oranges.

"I work on the Internet and don't really talk to anyone, so that's largely what appeals to me," Wright, a digital writer, said. "There's some therapy going on."

"I see it as, like, my yoga," Engelke, who lectures at the London School of Economics, replied. "Also, as an anthropologist, I kind of want to do mini-experiments and target English people."

One of the thrilling things about Sehgal's work is that it can go rogue. In a time when the airplane-seat meet cute strains credulity, Sehgal's pieces are the rare public events that can yield unscripted possibilities. This makes them seem new, even in comparison with earlier performance art, whose creators tended to perform it themselves, insuring fidelity to their vision. Sehgal's pieces are like urban legends. They can change, become embellished, acquire patina. Imagine if paint could rearrange itself into smudges and whorls the painter hadn't considered. At the Guggenheim, the museum's ramp, stocked with several dozen of the tristate area's most interesting, articulate citizens, turned into something of a pickup spot. "Tino Sehgal performer. Pink yellow blue striped sweater," a notice on Craigslist, in the Missed Connections section, read. "I know this is really insane but I thought you were really cute."

An irony of Sehgal's collaborative approach is that he has created a sort of art factory—an enterprise that at times provides work for several hundred people and pays by the hour. Sehgal is the overseer, not the artisan, deriving his livelihood from the labors of others. "There's a sense in which you think, at first, Well, what does he do?" Alexander Nehamas, the Princeton philosopher, who was an interpreter in "This Progress," told me. "He tells people a few things, he leaves

them to themselves, to improvise. But, at the same time, the instructions, the suggestions, the hints that he gives are not only very subtle but very particular." Faulting Sehgal for not physically making his art would be like blaming Steve Jobs for not assembling iPods. The sorts of encounters that occurred at the Guggenheim are his innovation. They wouldn't happen over a couple of beers.

In July, I travelled to Kassel to see "This Variation." My first reaction was one of intense physical panic. My heart pounded; instinctively, I held my arms in front of me, as though to fend off an attack. The room, which I had entered seconds earlier, was pitch-dark. "Bump," someone was saying, faster and faster. "Bump. Bump, bump, bump ba da." More voices joined in. My eyes started to adjust. Fifteen or so people were dancing manically, thrusting up and down like pistons to the beat of the chant. Near me, an interpreter beckoned a man with a backpack into the center of the room. People nudged and slalomed like bumper cars. At some point, a light flashed. The syllables cohered into melody, and sound enveloped the room. One part of the group sang, "Thug it out till we get it right, I like you just the way you are," while another kept the rhythmic undertone alive: "Bump, bump, bump." The song was Timbaland's "The Way I Are"—electronic music rendered, in a sort of reverse Auto-Tune, by purely human instruments. I stayed for hours. When the day was over, the interpreters formed an undulating conga line. Its tail whipped around to herd any stragglers toward the doorway. "Sha-wow-wow," people were singing. As I walked back into the light, I could feel someone's breath on my earlobe.

Two weeks before "These Associations" was set to open at Tate Modern, Sehgal held another series of rehearsals. The atmosphere was intense. In a corner of the Turbine Hall, he imparted last-minute tips to a group of interpreters on "rhetorical strategies"—how to approach strangers, tell them a personal story, and not bore them. (When a conversation goes awry, Sehgal refers to it as "getting lost.") "What's important on a basic level is that you don't segue in," Sehgal said. He was sitting cross-legged on the floor, revealing a large hole in the crotch of his pants. "Even though it may seem like an everyday situation, it's not. You're here in

the main hall of one of the biggest museums in the country, and people have come here to experience something."

"O.K., can we come together?" Sehgal said, after his group had talked for a while. Fragments of lives had wafted through the hall: emigrating from Senegal, gambling, bus stops, the Great Wall of China. Others would speak of the satisfaction of having a mantra, and the sense of belonging elicited by being offered the cheeks of a roasted goat.

The aim of the exercise was not memorization but conversational dexterity. Sehgal didn't want the interpreters to sound like audio guides. "There's this theory of ethics that it comes from this encounter with the face of the other," Asad Raza explained. "You say something to this person that comes from them, rather than something you repeat and polish." The conceit is capacious, but Sehgal objected to one gambit—a woman's confession that she had wanted to be an actress. "The directness of it is good, but there's a slight problem with anything that veers into self-reflexiveness," he said. "The one thing you cannot talk about is visual art. There's a self-referential play which can produce some static."

Sehgal was worried that the people who were supposed to be talking had been too quick to cede the floor, out of politeness, to interlocutors who had not proved themselves deserving. "You just have to, like, quality-control what the visitors say," he said. "If they're saying something great and going for it on the same level you are, then that's fine, but if they move into chitchat you have to beware, because they are co-creating the work." A dull or recalcitrant visitor could ruin the piece. "The visitor has power—like in the Spinozan sense!" he said. "They are the same kind of entity as you. If they start talking about the next bar, it goes flat. If they start asking about the toilets, then you know your approach was either too strong or too weak."

"At the end of the day," he concluded, "even if they produce more banal moments than we do, they will still judge that as the banality of the work!"

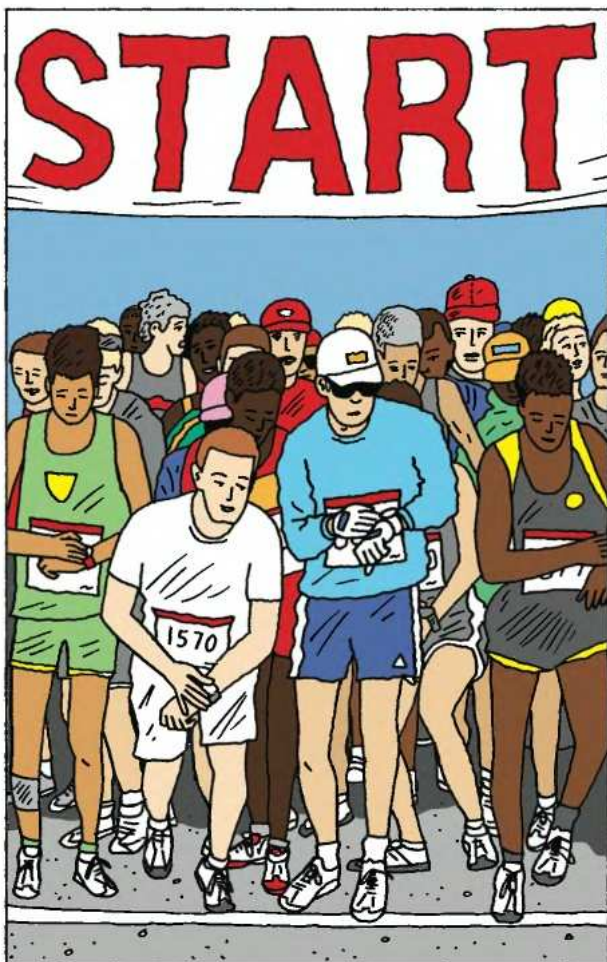
On the morning of July 23rd, "These Associations" opened, without fanfare. Visitors walked in. There was nothing for them to read. They received no instructions. Depending on the mo-

ment at which they entered the Turbine Hall, they encountered silence, singing, running, humming, walking, or a chatty new friend. London was jubilating in a rare blast of sunshine, so the museum was not mobbed. A few tourists, tugging rolling bags behind them, seemed not to realize—even as a corps of seventy interpreters sprinted up the ramp—that anything was going on. But the incidental flourishes that animate a Sehgal piece had already begun transforming "These Associations" from an idea into a thing. A little girl sat on the chilly concrete floor with her sundress, pink and pleated, spread out like a parasol. The interpreters were sweaty, breathing hard. "The other, uh, day, uh, I lent some money to a friend," one, gasping for breath, said to a visitor. "I was, uhhhhhh, disappointed in myself."

Sehgal, who looked freshly scrubbed, was striding the floor, an incognito inspector in a gray sweater. For him, watching the piece evoked a strange mixture of pride and puzzlement. He was a pyromaniac, standing unnoticed on the margins of the fire he'd set. "I'm happy," he said. "You kind of forget your vision, and it comes back to you as this, this thing you encounter."

A pedestrian bridge bisects the width of the Turbine Hall. It was proving to be a popular place for onlookers to gather. Half a story above mortification or enlightenment, they gawked, and recorded the proceedings below with their phones and cameras. (Sehgal has acknowledged the impossibility, at this point, of preventing people from taking pictures.)

Just after noon, the crowd below began to move as a swarm. Like birds on the wind, the interpreters cut vectors across the museum's floor. Once in a while, as though the flock had hit a patch of turbulence, someone would veer off and coast on a different current. From the bridge, I watched a middle-aged man in a blue short-sleeved shirt and his companion, a sensible-looking woman with a leopard-print carry-all, trying to pick their way through the scrum. They bobbed and hesitated, progressed a few steps and pulled back. They were rickshaws, trying to cross the world's most bewildering intersection. Finally, they gave up. The man took the woman's hand, touched it to his shoulder, and led her in a waltz. ♦



A REPORTER AT LARGE

## MARATHON MAN

*A Michigan dentist's improbable transformation.*

BY MARK SINGER

In July, 2010, Kyle Strode, a forty-six-year-old chemistry professor from Helena, Montana, ran the Missoula Marathon. Completing the 26.2-mile distance in two hours and forty-seven minutes, he placed fourth out of thirteen hundred and twenty-two finishers, and won the masters division, for entrants forty and older. Strode is among the most accomplished masters marathoners in Montana, with a personal best of two hours and thirty-two minutes. When he toes a starting line in his home state, he knows who is among the class of the field, and he's particularly aware of other masters competitors. The Missoula course, which is mostly flat, passes through rangeland and forest, crosses two rivers, and in its final miles offers a tour of the

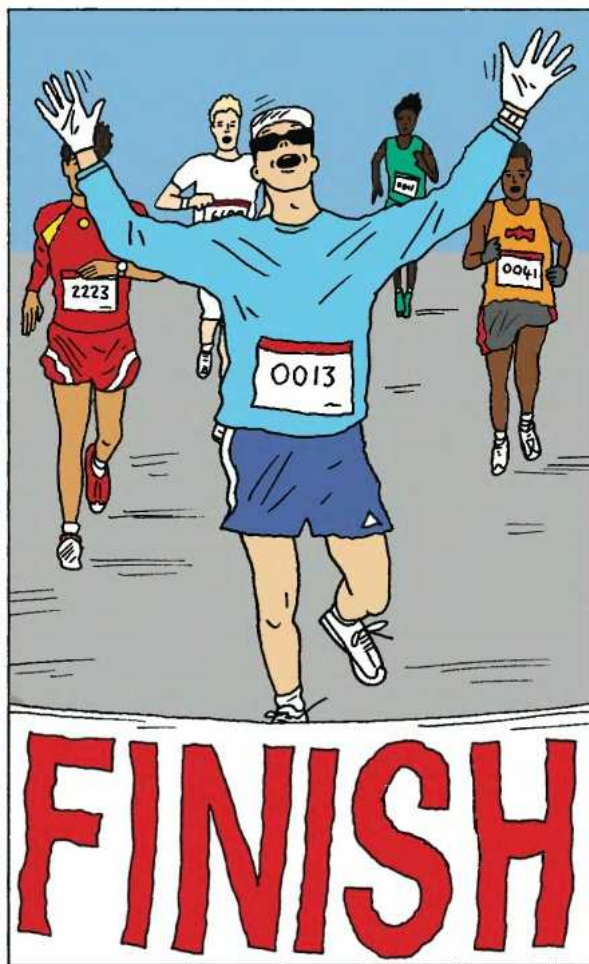
city's tree-lined neighborhoods. Early in the race, Strode broke ahead of his usual rivals, and never saw them again. The second masters runner to cross the finish line, Mike Telling, from Dillon, Montana, trailed Strode by nearly four minutes. At the awards ceremony, however, they learned that Telling had actually placed third. The official runner-up was Kip Litton, age forty-eight, of Clarkston, Michigan. Litton, who had been at the back of the pack when the race started, began his run two minutes after the gun was fired. He had apparently made up for lost time.

Since the early nineties, technology has made it possible to clock runners with precision and to track them at measured intervals, yielding point-to-point "split" times. Runners attach to their shoelace or racing

bib a transponder tag that marks how much time has elapsed when a checkpoint is reached. Often, sensor-equipped checkpoint mats span the running lanes. USA Track & Field, the governing body for major running competitions, mandates that "gun," rather than "chip," times determine the official results in sanctioned races. But, as a practical matter, this rule generally applies solely to elite lead runners. In a field of thousands, it might take an entrant several minutes just to reach the starting line, so it seems only fair that the diligent middle- or back-of-the-packers' order of finish is adjusted to reflect the chip time. In Missoula, the marathon's organizers made this allowance.

Strode didn't have to teach that summer, and so he had time to scrutinize the

PETER ARKLE



race results. Because Litton came from out of state, he hadn't been on Strode's radar, and Litton hadn't stuck around to claim his award. Strode learned from Telling that he hadn't paid Litton any mind as he passed him in the home stretch, and that he had no memory of being passed by Litton earlier in the race.

A wealth of online data about competitive running makes post-race analyses relatively easy. Several days after the marathon, Strode visited a Web site that displayed photographs of runners along the Missoula route. Most participants appeared in several shots, each of which indicated, down to the second, when it was snapped. Strode noticed something curious: although Litton had posted a half-marathon split time, and there were four images of him taken at or near the finish line, Strode couldn't locate him anywhere in the preceding twenty-six miles.

**I**n the Missoula photographs, Litton wore sunglasses and a black baseball cap, so Strode had only a general sense of what he looked like: white, clean-shaven, and about five feet ten, with an athletic

build but not the classic lean and loose-limbed runner's physique. Athlinks, a popular online database for endurance races, sharpened the picture somewhat: in 2000, shortly before turning forty, Litton ran his first race, a five-kilometre event in Flint, half an hour from his home. His average pace was seven and a half minutes per mile: a good novice result. He ran the same race a year later and improved his pace by almost forty seconds per mile, and a year after that he whittled off fourteen more seconds, to a respectable six minutes and thirty-five seconds per mile. In 2003, he finished eleven races, including his first marathon, in Jacksonville, Florida.

In all, during the previous decade Litton had run in more than a hundred races, including twenty-five marathons. His time in Jacksonville, 3:19:57, qualified him for the Boston Marathon, the following April, where he covered the course in 3:25:06—a 7:50-per-mile pace. He returned to Jacksonville in 2006 and, for the first time, recorded a sub-three-hour marathon, winning in his age group. Four months later, he broke

the three-hour barrier again, in Boston.

For a man or a woman of any age, a marathon performance of under three hours is considered a mark of distinction. (Typically, about six per cent of the field at the Boston Marathon runs this fast.) In the year before Missoula, Litton had averaged a marathon a month, with sub-three-hour clockings in each. He'd travelled to New Mexico, Idaho, New Hampshire, Arizona, Florida, Virginia, Missouri, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Delaware, Vermont, and South Dakota. Eight times, he'd come in first in his age group, and in the West Wyoming Marathon, a week before Missoula, he was the over-all winner.

**E**xploring the Web sites for each of Litton's marathons occupied Strode for several days. Not every race was as well documented as Missoula's, but wherever professional race photographers had been present he hunted for shots of Litton among other runners. He found images of him at the end of a course, only twice at the beginning, and never in between. And there was the chip-gun differential:



*"Pass me another gray."*

with rare exceptions, Litton started two to five minutes behind the leaders. In a crowded field, wouldn't a swift runner want to avoid weaving through clusters of slower runners?

A Google search led Strobe to a Web site for the dental practice of Kip Litton, D.D.S., in Davison, Michigan. It also led to Worldrecordrun, a site, conceived and maintained by Litton, that chronicled his peripatetic habits. "World record" apparently referred to his goal of running sub-three-hour marathons in all fifty states. The quest had formally begun at a marathon in Traverse City, Michigan, in May, 2009, and Montana was his fourteenth destination. On the site, Litton had posted his finishing times and a recap of each race. He explained that his training regimen and diet, along with nutritional supplements, had "allowed me to maintain my rigorous schedule and even improve my recent performances." His tone was alternately hortatory ("Imagine Inspire Impact!") and emotional ("I have been blessed with the greatest wife and kids a guy could ever ask for").

"Who is Kip Litton?" he asked. "I am a lifelong resident of Michigan and an alumnus of both The University of Michigan and UM Dental School. Currently I live in the town of Clarkston and have

an office in Davison. I began running in the year 2000 to lose weight. I am an ordinary guy with an extraordinary desire to make a difference. At the onset of this mission I had run 11 marathons, all in the range of 3:35 down to 2:55.... After superficially committing to this mission, I soon discovered the devil was in the details.... Was I born to do this? Hardly. As a high schooler, I did play tennis, but HATED to run. My teammates and I never ran as far as the coach told us to or thought we had."

There was another, poignant motivation behind "the mission." Litton and his wife, Lisa, an attorney, were the parents of two boys and a girl. The youngest, Michael, was born, in 2001, with cystic fibrosis. A congenital illness, it most commonly clogs airways in the lungs, making breathing difficult. The average life expectancy for cystic-fibrosis patients is about thirty-eight years. Litton wrote, "The goal is to raise a QUARTERMILLION DOLLARS for CF during the course of the mission." His site featured the logo of the Cystic Fibrosis Foundation, and people were invited to make donations by clicking on a link to the organization's Web site, by writing a personal check to Worldrecordrun, or by sending money to a PayPal account.

"My hope is that I can inspire others to take inventory of their talents, find their passion and pursue it relentlessly to effect a cause or impact their community," Litton wrote. "This is MY mission. It is the only thing I feel passionately about enough to ask you to PLEASE consider a donation to this worthy cause. I will also be bold enough to ask you to please alert others to this site or send a link to your e-mail list. When all is said and done, no one will care about the endless hours of training, my detailed work-out logs or fancy awards."

The compassion that Strobe naturally felt upon learning of a child's illness, along with admiration for Litton's readiness to put his body on the line to raise funds for Michael's future and for medical research, was tempered, he told me, by his belief that Litton "had cheated in almost all of his 2010 marathons."

On July 24, 2010, Strobe received an unexpected inquiry from Jennifer Straughan, the Missoula race director, who asked him to look at a photograph of a runner wearing bib No. 759. It was Litton. "There is some question as to whether he was seen along the course," Straughan wrote. "He finished in a time similar to you so theoretically you would have noticed him."

While Strobe had been immersed in what he'd assumed was his own private Kip Litton obsession, the official timer at Missoula had been contacted by his counterpart at the Deadwood Mickelson Trail Marathon, in Deadwood, South Dakota, where Litton had turned up the previous month. Photographs taken in Deadwood showed him crossing the starting line fifth from last and finishing in 2:55:50, putting him first in his age group and in third place over all. The fourth-place finisher protested: he'd been running third at the halfway mark and said that no one had passed him after that, an assertion bolstered by the fact that most of the remaining course was a trail only six feet wide. Litton had registered a half-marathon split, and the Deadwood timer was skeptical of the protest against him—"I was trying to prove Litton was legit," he told me—but he changed his mind after determining that Litton had, improbably, run the second half eleven minutes faster than the first. In addition, he found photographs

of Litton only at the start and the end of the course. Deadwood disqualified Litton, and Straughan followed suit in Missoula.

Strode, who in a later Web post described his mind-set as “sucked in, fascinated and pissed off,” broadened his investigation. He sent an e-mail to Richard Rodriguez, who on the Web site of the West Wyoming Marathon was identified as its race director; Litton had a listed winning time there of 2:56:12.

“I’m writing to ask about the winner of your marathon a few weeks ago, Kip Litton,” Strode wrote. “He was recently disqualified from the Deadwood Mickelson Trail Marathon for cheating (not running the whole course)... I don’t know the guy—I just hate cheating in running. I wonder whether he may have had a legitimate performance at your race or whether he may also have cheated in Wyoming.”

Two days later, Strode received a response: “Wow, that’s quite a scenario! It would have been very unlikely for the same thing to have happened at our race, as there were only 30 participants and the lead 2 runners ran almost the entire race together. I have not received any complaints. I will keep my ears open though. If there is an update, send it my way. Take care, Richard.”

Strode began to wonder if his suspicions were misplaced, but he kept investigating. At the Providence Marathon, in Rhode Island, where Litton had finished first in his age group, photographs showed him wearing shoes and shorts at the end of the course that were different from those he was wearing at the beginning. (A costume change at Deadwood had involved shoes, a hat, and a T-shirt.) In the Delaware Marathon, Litton had finished first in his age group. After being prompted by Strode, the race’s director, Wayne Kursh, found that, among the finishers, Litton alone had failed to register split times. On an out-and-back portion of the course, Kursh had taken photographs of the top runners at the turnaround point—but Litton was not among them. He also failed to find images of Litton elsewhere on the course.

Kursh had a blog, and on August 6, 2010, he posted a blind item about Litton titled “Another Rosie Ruiz?”—a ref-

erence to the scammer who was briefly heralded as the winner of the women’s division of the 1980 Boston Marathon, before it was determined that she’d jumped onto the course less than a mile from the finish. Kursh wrote in a follow-up that he had been exchanging concerns with other race directors, adding, “I smell a rat.”

In an e-mail exchange initiated by Kursh, Litton claimed that photographs of him would be hard to find, because his shirt had covered his racing bib. He added, “Wasn’t there a timing mat at the turnaround?” Kursh ultimately decided to disqualify him, explaining, “From your comment here it is pretty obvious that you have NO idea where the timing mats were on route. They definitely were not at this turn-around point.”

On occasions when Litton responded to such pointed challenges, he never did so in a hostile or nakedly defensive manner. After a disqualification, he simply deleted the result and the recap from his Web site, as if he had never registered for the race. His default demeanor was equable mystification.

Clarkston, Michigan, is an exurban town within commuting distance of both Detroit and Flint, which ranked first and fourth, respectively, in the latest *Forbes* survey of America’s most dangerous cities. Those grim statistics don’t seem to impinge on Clarkston. The sub-



division where Kip and Lisa Litton live with their three children—large brick and stone houses on oversized lots, with expansive lawns and S.U.V.s parked in circular driveways—is threaded with undeveloped woodlands and streams. In Davison, twenty-two miles north, Litton’s dental practice occupies a one-story brown brick building on a commercial strip, tucked behind an auto-repair shop, next door to a drive-through bank, and a short sprint from the requisite conve-

niences (McDonald’s, Jiffy Lube, Taco Bell). A few miles south of Flint is the comfortable suburb of Grand Blanc, where Litton grew up. In 1979, he graduated from Grand Blanc High School. A strong tennis player—as a junior, he won a state championship—he is remembered as bright and charismatic, with smart-aleck tendencies. “The first party I had after I bought a house, I invited him,” a high-school friend told me. “Part of his way of getting attention at the party was to eat all the food. Kip does odd, silly things for attention. But they’re harmless.”

In 1990, two years after graduating from dental school, Litton started working in Davison with a dentist who was nearing retirement, and in 2001 he acquired the practice. Today, Litton’s office has a Web site, which notes that, “when the General Motors Company cut benefits for retirees, Dr. Litton devised a cost-sharing plan that allowed patients without benefits to continue receiving quality dental care.” One day a year, Litton says, he provides free dental care to underprivileged children; each Halloween, he offers to buy back patients’ candy for a dollar a pound, then has it “shipped overseas to the troops, along with toothbrushes.” A Google review of Litton’s practice, posted earlier this year, said, “After trying several other dentists in the area, I was so delighted to find Dr. Litton... Great friendly staff, painless, lowest costs, no interest payment plans and Dr. Litton is SO funny! I finally have my fantastic Hollywood smile. I have already convinced several of my friends and relatives to come to this office, despite almost an hour drive. My search is now YOUR gain.”

Litton had attracted local media attention for his running achievements. After the 2010 Boston Marathon, the Davison *Index* noted that Litton was “the first finisher from mid-Michigan and the first over 40 from Michigan.” Around the same time, the Flint *Journal* ran a story with the headline “DAVISON DENTIST HAS TRANSFORMED HIMSELF FROM SEDENTARY MIDDLE-AGER TO SUCCESSFUL MARATHONER.” The article traced a stirring trajectory: One day, about a decade earlier, Litton, fifty pounds overweight, got on a treadmill, hoping to run three miles. “I made it a little over a third of a mile before I got so

dizzy that I started to fall off the treadmill,” he told the reporter, Bill Khan. “I was completely out of shape. It was just ridiculous.” Fast-forward: “Litton now regularly races marathons, not content to merely finish 26.2 miles but to post times that few runners his age can match.” (Khan learned of Litton, he told me, when a stranger sent him an e-mail saying that “this guy has gotten himself in shape and is trying to raise money for charity.”)

Litton told Khan, “I’m starting to know every crack and pot hole on that route from Hopkinton to Boston. Once you go to Boston, there’s something special about it. Having all 26 miles with people lined up on both sides of the road, screaming their lungs out for six hours, is such an unusual experience and super cool.”

Wayne Kursh’s “I smell a rat” blog post drew the attention of Michael McGrath, a former assistant track and cross-country coach at Haverford College. McGrath had competed at Boston nine times—including the year Rosie Ruiz cheated—and his best finish was 2:49:19. Although Kursh hadn’t mentioned Litton by name, McGrath

soon identified him, by comparing the lists of finishers at Missoula and Delaware. Like Strode, he found Litton a more compelling impostor than Ruiz, in no small part because his methodology was so tantalizingly elusive. Somehow, he had exploited the running community’s faith in the very systems—transponders, chip times—that had been adopted to prevent cheating.

“I am like a dog who cannot let go of a bone,” McGrath wrote to Kursh. He spent days anatomizing Litton’s races, dissecting first his 2010 showing at Boston. Litton had hit all the splits, at five-kilometre intervals. This suggested that running a sub-three-hour marathon was theoretically within his capacity. Unless, McGrath argued, the microscope was brought into tighter focus.

The Boston course has a reputation for toughness: the Newton hills, which runners encounter between miles sixteen and twenty-one, owe their notoriety to the fact that they must be climbed when the energy reserves of runners are greatly depleted. How was it, McGrath asked, that on the most leisurely stretch—just before the halfway mark, near Wellesley College—Litton’s pace was a full minute slower than it was in the hills? Lit-

ton’s Boston race in 2009 had the same incongruities.

McGrath learned that, in February, 2009, Litton had run a fifteen-kilometre race in Florida. According to the split times, his pace during the second half—five minutes and twenty-four seconds per mile—was almost two minutes faster than during the first half. Such a divergence is called a “negative split,” and a variance of that magnitude is as common as snow in Miami. Nor did Litton’s past performances indicate an ability to run a five-and-a-half-minute pace. The official timer of the Deadwood Mickelson Trail Marathon, reflecting upon Litton’s purported acceleration, told me, “I don’t know any *Kenyan*s who could do that.”

Not long after McGrath began his research, he decided to go public, sort of. His medium was LetsRun, a Web site devoted to news about elite track and distance running. One of LetsRun’s salient features is its “World Famous Message Boards,” where most participants use pseudonyms, and the content quality runs the expected gamut (factual, analytical, sophomoric, inane combative). McGrath, using the handle Anonymous.4, posted an item under the heading “Kip Litton,” referred to Litton’s disqualification at Missoula, and solicited feedback from anyone who might have more information.

One responder was Scott Hubbard, a former collegiate runner and high-school coach who was a familiar figure on the central Michigan running scene. Hubbard measured and certified courses, often worked as a race announcer, and wrote for running publications. His awareness of Litton dated to October, 2009, when Litton’s five-member relay team was disqualified from winning the Detroit Free Press Marathon Relay. Litton had recruited four topnotch masters runners, only two of whom he’d known previously, paid everyone’s entry fee, and assigned himself the second leg of the relay. The members of the second-place team were stunned by the race result—especially their second-leg runner, who had received his baton in first place, knew that no one had passed him, yet learned after handing off to his third-leg teammate that they no longer held the lead. With encouragement from Litton’s mortified teammates, who felt poten-



“But I thought once you were in you were in!”

tially implicated, the second-place team protested, leading to the disqualification. Afterward, Hubbard told me, he initiated a correspondence with Litton, trying to “pin him down on how he cut the course.”

Litton was initially evasive. But after about a week of questioning he offered an explanation: “Finally, he came down to ‘Yeah, I must have cut it short somewhere to come in with that time.’ I asked him where that might have happened. I knew the course, because I’d measured it. He named the place and said, ‘I must have followed someone.’ And I said, ‘No, you didn’t follow anyone. You cheated.’”

A few weeks later, Hubbard came across the following item in the online newsletter of *Michigan Runner*, a bi-monthly publication:

Reader Brian Smith passes along several great performances by Kip Litton:

“I wanted to relay some info about a couple of recent performances that I would consider great. I see a dentist in Davison who’s name is Dr. Kip Litton. We often talk running when I am there. Recently he had told me about a couple of marathons he was planning to run. When I asked about them afterwards, he just said things like, ‘I was just glad to finish’ and ‘Well, I didn’t injure myself!’ I know that he is a good runner, so I looked up the race results. Now I also know how humble he is.

“It turns out that he finished 3 marathons in less than 2 months, all under 3 hours. He placed 2nd overall & 1st master in The New Mexico Marathon Sept 6 in 2:57:54, 5th overall & 1st master in The City of Trees Marathon Oct 4 in 2:55:45 and 14th overall and 1st in the division in The Manchester City Marathon Nov 1 in 2:54:06.

“I think that could be considered worthy of a mention. I didn’t see them listed in your newsletter so I thought I would pass them along.”

Hubbard sent another e-mail to Litton, on the pretext that he wanted to get in touch with Brian Smith. When Litton responded that he couldn’t recall all his patients, Hubbard pressed harder. “The question was posed to him pointedly: ‘Who’s Brian Smith?’” Hubbard later wrote on LetsRun. “He didn’t say he was a patient of his. He didn’t put up much of a fight when told it was felt he wrote the note.”

**D**uring the fall of 2010, Litton entered marathons in Rochester, New York; Portland, Maine; Huntington, West Virginia; and Charlotte, North Carolina. In Rochester, he posted a chip



*“Lazy? I’ve been social-networking my ass off.”*

time under two hours and fifty-eight minutes, winning the masters division. Photographs at Rochester showed him wearing a gray-green sweatshirt, a cap with a bright-yellow logo, and no visible racing bib. At the finish, he wore a different shirt and hat. This proved too much for Hubbard, who issued an ultimatum to Litton: take down the World-recordrun site or risk an exposé in *Michigan Runner*, for which Hubbard wrote a column.

Worldrecordrun was gone within days. (According to Litton, the site had become more trouble than it was worth, and Hubbard’s threat wasn’t a factor.) Cathy Zell, who at the time was the executive director of the local chapter of the Cystic Fibrosis Foundation, told me that she didn’t know of any donations that had been obtained through the link on Litton’s Web page. “We started getting phone calls saying, ‘I don’t know if he’s legit,’” she said. “I never had proof one way or the other.” Litton, she added, “basically is the one who said, ‘This isn’t giving you guys a good name.’” Laurie Fink, a spokesperson for the Cystic Fibrosis Foundation, says that since 2004 the Litton household has contributed twenty dollars to the organization.

Even after Litton dismantled the site, he continued to enter races. On December 11, 2010, at the Thunder Road Marathon, in Charlotte, his split times suggested to the race director that he had cut the course and not been overly clever about it; within forty-eight hours, he’d been provisionally disqualified. Just as swiftly, Litton responded with a pious defense, portraying himself as the victim of “a witch hunt” and “a smear campaign... ridiculous things which are ALL completely un-true.” He confessed only to a failure to be remarkable: “I have legally practiced dentistry for over 20 years and have 3 kids. I have never been arrested. I have never even been sued. I have never cheated in a race. I am not perfect, but probably the worst thing I have ever done is get a parking ticket. I know, boring.”

Meanwhile, the mockery on LetsRun’s message boards, as Litton pointed out, was “taking on a life of its own.” In late December, he wrote to Weldon Johnson, one of the founders of LetsRun, complaining about his treatment. He acknowledged his disqualifications at Detroit, Missoula, and Delaware, and floated fuzzy explanations for each. (“I inadvertently turned too soon & cut part

of the course. . . . I was dq'd as I should have been, but only accidentally.") He added, "I have served on my Dental Ethics Board"—in fact, he had not—"so I realize that people should take cheating seriously." But the situation had got out of control. "If these accusations held any water, it would have certainly forced me to stop racing. As you know, I have not. I have nothing to hide."

The connoisseurs of Litton's audacity were galvanized. They stared at course maps: *He could have cut it there—or there.* Rich Heller, a former collegiate runner, collated findings on an ancillary site, Study of Kip Litton Running, including links to videos, such as one of Litton walking across the finish line at the P. F. Chang's Rock'n'Roll Arizona Marathon, in January, 2010. (Chip time: 2:51:21.) "For some races the evidence is circumstantial," Heller wrote. "For others it's [a] SLAMDUNK." For the conspiracy-minded, it was a juicy peach, and LetsRun contributors adopted handles like Lone Gunman and Zapruder. The paramount question was "How?" Did he have an accomplice? Did he drive from point to point? Ride a bicycle? Devise digital subversions?

Jennifer Straughan, the Missoula race director, was as mystified as anyone. "It's expensive," she told me. "He flies all over the country, rents cars, plans in advance, has to figure out how many chip mats there are, how you deal with those. Think about how hard you have to work to *not* run a race."

The debunkers zeroed in on the West Wyoming Marathon, the one race that Litton had supposedly won outright. One of them came across a Web cache of the race's defunct home page, which included this caveat: "With a low entry fee, there will be no goodie bags, no shirts, no photographer and no finishers medals."

On January 11, 2011, a poster called Liptodakip wrote, "Still curious about the west Wyoming marathon. 29 runners total. And he won it. Anyone know anything about it? Is it a real race? The main page is down and now the results are gone. (was up last week). did he make up an entire race? That would be bold!"

Yes, it would. And, yes, he did. LetsRun exploded: West Wyoming was Litton's pièce de résistance, and even his

most indignant accusers had to concede their perverse admiration. In this race, the key to winning was ingeniously uncomplicated: *Make the whole thing up!* For his fabricated marathon, Litton had assembled not only a Web site but also a list of finishers and their times (plus name, age, gender, and home town), and created a phantom race director, who responded to e-mail queries. It occurred to Kyle Strode that six months earlier, when he had raised questions about Litton to "Richard Rodriguez," the reply ("Wow, that's quite a scenario!") had omitted a crucial detail. When Richard Rodriguez looked in the mirror, Litton looked back.

In concocting the fantasy, someone had gone so far as to create a post-race testimonial for the Web site Marathon Guide. "Small race, with only a couple dozen runners," a post there said. "Bring your own gels; only water is available on course. Out-and-back route. No spectators to speak of. Sounds like a downer, but the view and the town are so worth it! Cross Wyoming off of your list and visit one of the most beautiful towns in the US at the same time."

This was attributed to "G.S. from Nebraska," which matched one listed entrant, Greg Sanchez, of Lincoln, age fifty-four. "Cross Wyoming off of your list" referred to running marathons in all fifty states. More people summit Mt. Everest each year than celebrate running a marathon in a fiftieth state. LetsRun's forensic beavers established that it made no sense for Sanchez to refer to crossing states off a list, because, according to a database at Marathon Guide, this was his one and only marathon. The same was true of the other finishers besides Litton: twenty-eight men and women, from twelve states, with tellingly unimaginative names (Joseph Smith, Kevin Scott, Sue Johnson, Karen Nelson). This lapse notwithstanding, someone had invested considerable time and effort to create Athlinks profiles for several of the fictional runners.

The next day, two more imaginary races, in Orlando and Atlanta, were identified among Litton's Athlinks performances. Inspection of the race Web sites revealed that they were hosted by the same Internet server as the sites for the West Wyoming race, for World-recordrun, and for Litton's dental practice.

Along with outrage and stupefaction, the LetsRun community expressed gratitude: "This is the craziest thing I have ever read in my life. Ever. . . . WOW. . . . Better than porn. . . . Is it possible that Kip Litton doesn't actually exist, and it is all an incredible ruse?"

Litton certainly existed, but his bizarre story posed a conundrum: Was he just a guy with Olympic-calibre chutzpah, or did he suffer the certitude of self-delusion? After his provisional disqualification at the Charlotte marathon, in December, 2010, his appeal to the race director, Tim Rhodes, brimmed with wounded resentment. He invoked the tragedy of his son's illness. ("I have a 9-year old son with terminal Cystic Fibrosis. I run to raise funds to help cure this vicious disease.") As Rhodes explained to Scott Hubbard, without definitive proof of a deception "our hands are tied." In the absence of witnesses who had seen Litton leave and reënter the course, Rhodes reversed the disqualification.

Once Litton had insinuated a few dubious times into the top running databases, he must have convinced himself that he could celebrate his sham successes on his Web site without attracting hostile scrutiny. But the close call at Charlotte seemed to change his game. For the time being, it would be Litton's final race appearance. Pressed via e-mail by Hubbard and others, he denied that he had cheated or had intended to deceive—and offered justifications that left one in awe of his gift for just making shit up. He provided this account of what happened at West Wyoming:

The West Wyoming Marathon did actually exist. It was set up to accommodate our family trip to that area. In planning our vacation, I launched the website for the race, which was set up with race day registration. Over a dozen people indicated that they would likely come & run. I had a local resident lined up to help out. Race morning I got quite a surprise when no one showed up. I ran anyway. As the only entrant I placed both first and last. The first issue of the results contained only my name. A tech savvy friend convinced me this would look ridiculous & he could add some additional names. After thinking that this would in no way harm any other actual person, I agreed. So yes I am absolutely responsible for that. I regret making this snap decision and I realize I should not have ruined something that was meant to be legitimate.

Ben Millefoglio, a Web designer in Michigan, set up Litton's various sites

and entered all updates to them. He told me that Litton had misled him into thinking that the West Wyoming Marathon was legitimate, adding that the racing data had been provided to him, via e-mail, by “Richard Rodriguez.”

In January, 2011, Litton was disqualified from yet another race: the 2009 City of Trees Marathon, in Idaho. The following month, Hubbard extracted from Litton a promise to disclose in advance any races he entered, so that he could be monitored.

“I look forward to being monitored,” he wrote, in an e-mail to Hubbard. “I realize that this isn’t absolute vindication, but it is certainly a good first step.... I am committed to continue my goal of running marathons in every state and raising funds for my charity. In time, I believe the questions will disappear. I welcome the questions and all that wish to join me.”

Later that month, he said, he would run the Cowtown Marathon, in Fort Worth. When the date arrived, he was missing. The afternoon before the race, he sent race officials this e-mail: “I was in a car accident and am unable to run the marathon. Could I please have my packet and shirt sent to me? Thanks.”

Whether or not a car accident occurred was of no consequence. For a few months, at least, Litton wouldn’t be going anywhere in the reality-based running community. The LetsRun message board continued to simmer with sarcasm about Litton’s exploits, though the ad-hominem attacks were occasionally counterbalanced by sympathetic posts. (“He is intelligent, selfless, witty, charitable, modest, caring, generous to a fault.... Loved by his patients and adored by his friends and family.”) One poster purported to be a runner as well as a nurse “at the hospital where Dr. Litton’s child has been given just a short time to live.” Another described a predawn encounter, in which Litton had put himself through a grueling speed workout at a high-school track. “Quite a Story” was the handle of someone claiming to be a journalist. After interviewing “dozens of people,” the journalist had “discovered a shocking new side to this tale”—the implication being that Litton was innocent—and welcomed information from all comers. An e-mail address was given, I wrote imme-

diately, and I’m still waiting for a reply.

Over a period of months, I did exchange many e-mails with Litton, but he refused to speak or meet in person. My questions were mainly biographical or running-related. His responses were verbose, well written, and cleverly obfuscatory in a way that left little room for doubt.

Last fall, a message, posted by someone using the handle *ActuallyThisIs-TheWayIts*, appeared on LetsRun:

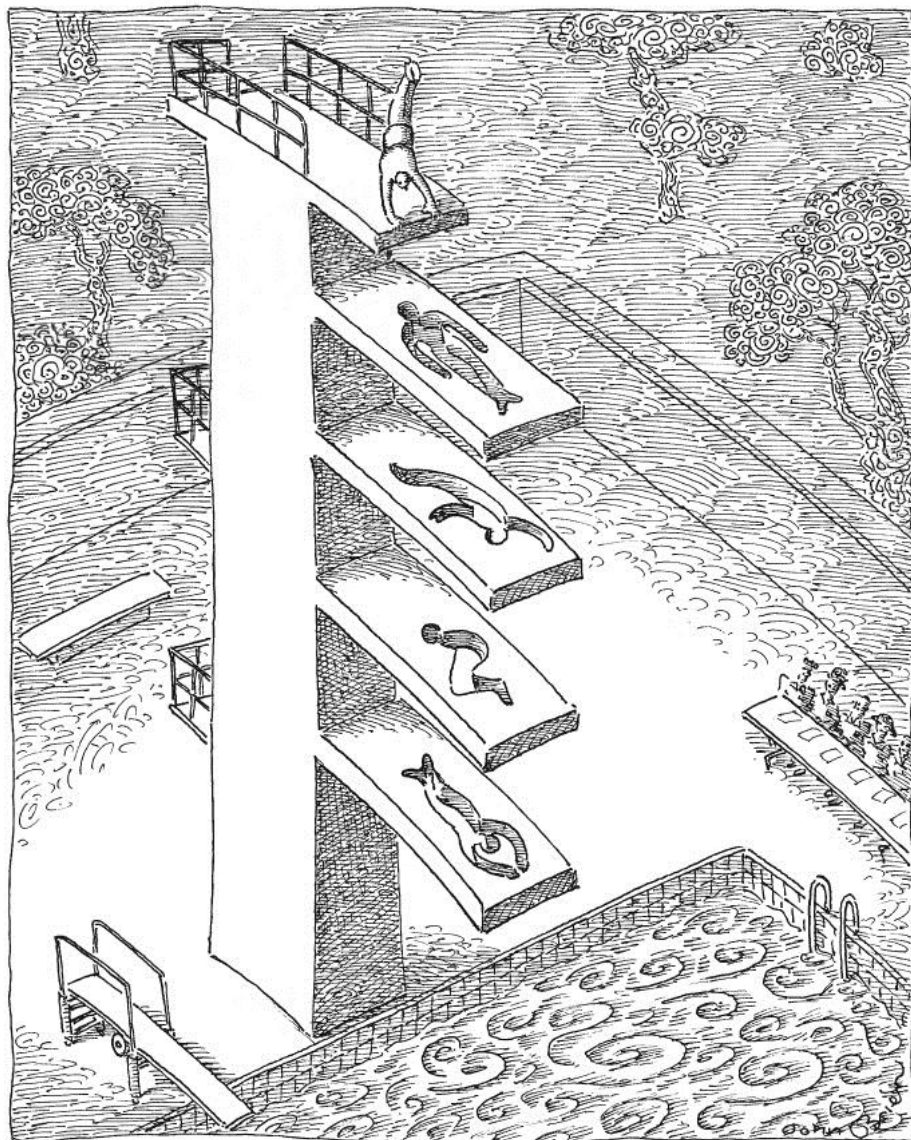
Some of us are runners, and we fully understand how races operate. Kip has been very open about addressing accusations with us. They have all been discussed and he has provided logical and credible explanations, in many cases backed by evidence and/or witnesses. He has shared with us email correspondences with reporters and race directors that contradict posts here that pass for gospel. We are quite satisfied. We don’t want to put words in his mouth but the chances are less than zero that he will personally respond on a forum where people are anonymous.

I wrote to Litton, asking whether he’d seen the post and suggesting that we “help each other.” I wanted to speak with this blogger, I said, and was eager to read excerpts from the correspondence cited in the post.

Litton replied:

No I didn’t see it. How long ago was it from? I actually don’t know who it is yet, but it certainly narrows it down—I’ll have to check around. I will not be able to disclose any names unless it is ok with them. I will say you have piqued my curiosity—but I will not make the mistake I made many months ago when I checked out LetsRun. Engaging in negative rhetorical sparring with anonymous strangers may be entertaining for some, but it is not where I choose to spend my time.

“I am running Boston,” Litton wrote to me, on March 7, 2012. “Training has been hit & miss. I have had nearly PR”—personal record—“runs mixed with times when I was unable to run at all.” I assumed that “unable to run” referred to the auto-



accident injury that had been his pretext for not running the Cowtown Marathon.

His only race within the 2012 Boston qualifying calendar had been the Charlotte marathon, in 2010, and attached to that performance was a bold asterisk. Nevertheless, the Boston Athletic Association, aware of Litton's problematic history, had checked with Tim Rhodes, the Charlotte race director, and been told that the result stood.

Two weeks before Boston, I asked Litton to give his expected finishing time. "If all goes well, 2:47," he wrote. "If not, a bit slower."

I planned to be in Boston, I said—two of my sons would be running—and suggested meeting. Given Litton's prior elusiveness, I was surprised when he said, "How about after, that way I can introduce you to a few people also." The odds of that happening, I suspected, were roughly zero. Still, I appreciated his gamesmanship.

Race day was Monday, April 16th. For weeks, the prevailing sentiment on LetsRun had been that Litton would not show up. Yet, at some point over the weekend, either he or someone authorized by him had picked up his racing bib at the marathon's headquarters. I gleaned this from LetsRun—a runner in Boston had volunteered the information—rather than from Litton, who for several days had ignored my e-mails.

As with most major marathons, the size of the Boston field—more than twenty-two thousand runners—required a staggered start. Some two hundred wheelchair and elite female runners were first out of the gate, with the rest of the participants organized in "waves" and "corrals," according to their qualifying times. There were three waves, each with nine corrals of roughly a thousand runners, and Litton had been seeded in wave one, corral two. By coincidence, so had my son Reid and a couple of other runners I knew.

Monday morning was cloudless and unseasonably hot, heading to the upper eighties. I found a seat in a shaded section of the grandstand at the finish line, and felt open to possibilities. I might be on the brink of my first live Kip Litton sighting; a flock of green flamingos might happen by. My anticipation lasted less than an hour into the men's race. I'd signed up for a mobile-phone service that offered text-messaged ten-kilometre, half-marathon, and thirty-kilometre split times. After receiving 10K

## THE CELLO

I met him in the courtyard at dusk, where they weave the tents at Sukkoth—a wanderer who had come into his own.

The olive tree had been hard-pruned along its central branch and only the tips were in leaf, gray fingers stretching to light, but you could see the new growth, a haze of turquoise rust. Roots had blistered the sea-pebble paving into a mound like a verruca. I thought of the black ceramic bird my mother notched in the center of her pies, whose yellow beak cracked the crust.

He had a cello in his hand. The grain glowed peat-swirl brown of a mountain tarn, but plum-maroon under the f-holes as if someone had been at it with mammoth blood.

The spike glittered between one round stone and the next. Take this, he said. I'm giving it to you.

results for my sons and another runner in Litton's corral, but nothing for Litton himself, I allowed a decent interval before concluding that he was most likely in Davison, Michigan, drilling teeth. A phone call to Litton's office confirmed this.

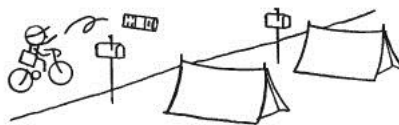
My oldest son, Jeb, who is thirty, somehow made friends with the heat and ran his best marathon: just under three hours and four minutes. Reid, the faster qualifier, finished a couple of minutes behind him. Post-race, I found them in a designated meeting area across the street from the John Hancock Tower. We hung out there for an hour or so, as runners in varying states of elation and walking-woundedness wandered past, wearing ribboned medallions. This was what Litton was missing: the bonhomie and collective uplift of one of the world's great athletic events, and the rewards that come to anyone who goes the

entrance, and as he turned a corner I introduced myself. "No, no!" he said, and moved past me into the building. I followed him, through a glass vestibule and past the reception desk. He went inside his office and closed the door. As I was about to knock, he opened it and said to his receptionist, "Call the police. It's a trespasser." I said that I was leaving, and retreated to the Flag City Diner, down the street, where I ordered scrambled eggs and began drafting an e-mail to Litton.

He was in a jam of his own devising, I wrote, and I wanted him to have the opportunity to explain how it had come about. He did not reply that day, but the next evening he offered to meet with me the following day, after work.

Litton chose a Wendy's a few miles from his home. Arriving before I did, he took a seat at a corner table, with his back to the wall. Hanging above the table was a framed photograph of Dave Thomas, the departed founder of Wendy's, bearing the caption "When it comes to VALUES, I've never been one to cut corners."

Litton wore a blue windbreaker over his work uniform: a black V-neck tunic, a red T-shirt, loose-fitting gray cotton pants. Tanned and clean-shaven, he had fluffy sandy-blond hair that fell across his forehead, brown eyes, and generically handsome Nordic features. Across the table, at last, was the man at the center of one of the strangest controversies in amateur sports history. Our common aspiration, I assumed, was that this conversation would yield a counter-narrative to the caricature of the heinously unscrupu-



full distance and crosses the finish line—never mind how long it takes.

Eventually, Jeb and Reid's perspiration dried sufficiently to allow for an exchange of manly hugs, and then I went to catch a plane.

Shortly before eight o'clock the next morning, Litton parked his metallic-blue GMC sport-utility vehicle (vanity license plate: DDLOVER) outside his dental office. I was standing at the building

I looked away, at marble grooves framing the half-dome niche where a tap hangs over the copper cup chained to the wall. I ran my finger down the neck and scroll.

I imagined lifting a handle stuck to the lip of a broken amphora face down under the tree, like history keeping a lid on rising roots. Every choice is a loss. The past is not where you left it. That corridor you didn't follow, the gate to unknown woods, shadow grin of a winding stair, the door you never found time to open—they whirl within, cracking the floor. I met him at twilight where they put up the tents at Sukkoth, a wanderer who had come into her own.

—Ruth Padel

lous Kip Litton suggested by the less genteel posters on LetsRun. In addition to “Why?,” the question I most hoped Litton would answer was “How?”

He told me that he was born in 1961, the third of four children, in Royal Oak, a Detroit suburb, and moved to Grand Blanc when he was seven. His father, an engineer, worked for General Motors, and his mother was a homemaker. They were frequent churchgoers, but not devout. Summer vacations were station-wagon excursions, typically to historic sites. His adolescent cohort had not been earnest strivers—“There were a lot of kids in my neighborhood that were delinquents, normal delinquents”—but that changed after his father introduced him to tennis. (“We went out and he said, ‘Hey, why don’t you try this?’ And he probably let me beat him, and that got me interested, like, ‘Hey, I’m good.’ . . . That took me away from the crowd I was with.”) Academically, he was “a decent student, but I really had no direction.” When a high-school guidance counsellor suggested dentistry, he responded that it was “the one occupation for sure that I can eliminate.”

Litton arrived at the University of Michigan in 1979, planning to major in engineering. His most enduring impression was of feeling daunted by the ambitions of his dorm neighbors. “Just hanging around those people, I felt like if I wasn’t going to be a neurosurgeon I would be a complete failure,” he said. “I would be the least successful person—I probably still *am* the least successful per-

son—who lived on my hall. So that inspired me to do something more with my life.” Engineering, he said, had too few women majoring in it, so at the end of his sophomore year he switched to pre-dental. (If other factors had guided this career turn, he didn’t mention them.)

In 1983, he matriculated at the University of Michigan Dental School, and five years later he completed his degree. At twenty-eight, he married Lisa Hosčila, whom he’d met on a blind date nine years earlier. She had a law degree and a job at a firm not far from Davison. After commuting for a few years to a dental office in Saginaw, Michigan, he joined the practice in Davison that he eventually took over. The older dentist who had started the practice supplemented his income by working as a salesman and distributor for Amway, the multi-level marketing company, and he recruited Litton. During the next several years, Litton said, his Amway income—from direct sales to consumers or to his own “thirty or forty” new recruits—at times reached into the six figures, surpassing his professional income.

Amway still generated a lot of income for him, he said: “I don’t want to say exactly, but in the thousands every month. And that’s way down from where it was.”

Throughout its existence, the company has defended itself against allegations that its marketing program is essentially a pyramid scheme; in 2010, it agreed to a fifty-six-million-dollar settlement in a class-action suit accusing it of exactly that, along with fraud and racke-

teering. When I asked Litton whether he’d ever been disillusioned with Amway, he said, “No. And I know a ton of people gave it a bad rap.” His wife had joined him in Amway, he said, and it made for “a nice diversion—something we could do together. She made friends in the business, I made friends in the business.”

Their first child, a son, was born in 1995, followed by a daughter in 1997. When their younger son, Michael, arrived, in 2001, he immediately received a diagnosis of cystic fibrosis and remained in the hospital for weeks.

“He knows exactly what’s going on with him,” Litton said. “But he can’t possibly understand the scope of it. . . . He has to take tons of pills every day. He won’t take pills in front of other people except family members. He has a feeding tube. There’s a lot of breathing apparatuses he uses. And he will not do what he is supposed to do if there are people other than our family members over at the house. He just desperately wants to fit in.”

To sidestep questions about various running performances, Litton often invoked his personal tribulations. Some of the indignities that he said he’d recently suffered seemed straight out of high school, circa 1977: his tires had been deflated on several occasions, his house and his mailbox had been egged, threatening and profane messages had been left in the mailbox. His family felt unsafe.

These stories reminded me of a series of messages that had been posted anonymously on LetsRun. One said:

My wife’s friend worked at Dr. Litton’s office and was recently let go. She was telling my wife about all the things that have been happening recently due to the cheating scandal. . . .

In addition to his business failing, Dr. Litton’s wife was so embarrassed and it caused so much strife that they have separated. His one kid got in a fight at school in response to the other kids taunting about the cheating and was suspended.

And another:

Perfect—we have him just where we want him.

Personal life destroyed—check. Business destroyed—check. Family destroyed—check. Kids—check. Just think what could happen if we keep the pressure on even more.

In fact, Litton and his wife were still together. And the dental practice was doing fine.

I asked Litton, “What happened in

your life to get you into this situation?"

"Can you be a little more specific?"

His credibility was being seriously questioned, and the underlying facts were troubling.

"I don't know what facts you're talking about," he replied. "But the facts I've heard and seen, most of them are inaccurate."

As Lady Gaga's "Poker Face" played on the Wendy's stereo system, he elaborated: he had never deliberately done anything wrong, never left a race course and reentered at a different point, never received money through Worldrecordrun, and never posted anything on LetsRun; had no idea who the anonymous people might be who posted in his defense, and no clue who might have posed as a nurse claiming that "Dr. Litton's child has been given just a short time to live." His delayed starts, he later added, were merely part of "a marketing gimmick," on his Web site, to entice potential donors, who could pledge a particular sum for every runner he passed in a race. It was "a friend" who had posed online as "Richard Rodriguez"—despite the fact that Litton had used that alias in a previous race. Regarding his mid-race shoe change at Deadwood: "I was doing my warmup, and I got too far away from the starting line. As I was running back toward the starting line . . . I still had on my trainers. I couldn't get back to where my shoes were, and then back to the start of the race, so I just started the race in those shoes. And, as I ran down the race course, when I passed my shoes I stopped and swapped them out."

Throughout our discussion, his tone remained steady and uninflected. He neither frowned nor smiled, and made no attempt to ingratiate. For a teller of tales, he was oddly unbeguiling.

He acknowledged that he had been disqualified from several races, but only for unintentional infractions. He conceded only to having "been careless, not paying attention." When it came to specific disqualifications—say, the 2009 Detroit Free Press Marathon Relay, where he had cut the course so maladroitly that he wound up in front of the pace car—he offered deflection, not explanation. In a follow-up e-mail, he said that he had taken a wrong turn, adding, "How mentally handicapped would someone have to be to think that cartoon-

like scenario would work? Did your research reveal this absurdity? It's an excellent anecdote that could be reenacted for a scene in a top Hollywood comedy film."

Usually, when you interview a fabulist, there comes a moment when you can visualize his or her mental gears churning. It took a long time with Litton, but he finally rose to the challenge, and began expanding his alternate universe on the fly. Early on, when Scott Hubbard had challenged Litton about the identity of "Brian Smith"—who had written to *Michigan Runner* to extoll his dentist's achievements—Litton had claimed ignorance. But when I pressed him about it he paused, then said, "Now I remember more about that! I think that guy turned out to be someone who owed me money, and was hoping I didn't pursue him, by buttering me up."

Litton told me that he had protested several disqualifications that he felt were unjust. And at Missoula in 2010, rather than being disqualified by race officials, he had disqualified himself at the finish line, informing a race official that a leg injury had forced him to take a shortcut.

"So there's no way you would have been in contention for an award at Missoula, right?" I asked.

"Right," he said. "O.K., what about it?"

I handed him copies of two e-mails. The first, from him to Jennifer Straughan, the race director, was sent six days after the marathon: "Hello, Very nice race. I enjoyed it immensely. I was wondering if there was any award that I missed? I had to catch a flight right after the race. Thanks. Kip Litton, M 45-49." The second was Straughan's reply, which said, in part, "In reviewing our records for the top finishers of the 2010 Missoula Marathon, we notice that you do not appear in photos along the course. . . . I regret that we had to remove you from the finishers listing."

All a misunderstanding, Litton said.

The e-mail had been sent to the director of the Missoula Marathon—what was the misunderstanding?

"O.K.," he said. "But I probably got it from an e-mail address that—I probably clicked on the wrong one or something. I don't know. Because I disqualified myself. I told them at the race that I did not run the whole race."

"Why would someone who disqualified himself ask about an award?"

"It was probably another race."

"But this was the week after Missoula."

"There were other, smaller races that I ran."

(In subsequent e-mails, Litton told me that he had witnesses to his self-disqualification—but none, unfortunately, who weren't members of his family, and he couldn't provide the name of a race official who would confirm his finish-line story.)

Litton never removed his jacket. At first, this made me apprehensive, as it seemed that he might at any time stand up and bolt for the exit. As the conversation dragged on, though, I became the interlocutor eager to be on his way. Litton's story could have been a small but admirable one: an out-of-shape Midwestern dentist who, on the cusp of middle age, had transformed himself into a competitive marathoner. But he had insisted on transforming himself further, inventing a heroic avatar, "Kip Litton," that couldn't be sustained. The ruse, quite possibly, had begun with a noble intention: a father's desire to be an inspiration to his youngest child, or perhaps to his entire family. (Litton's friends told me that he was a devoted husband and father.) But whatever glory he felt was surely short-lived. Not only had he become a consuming object of contempt in one of the blogosphere's more obsessive neighborhoods; his family and neighbors had learned that the online tribunal had judged him a fraud. A scenario that once might have been explained away, with self-deprecating contrition, as a foolish prank had become something much darker: the story of a man running away from himself.

One of the LetsRun sleuths' most impressive unearthings was a photograph taken near the thirty-kilometre checkpoint of the 2010 Boston Marathon. It depicted six runners wearing singlets or short-sleeved shirts, their racing bibs attached, on pace for sub-three-hour performances. At the left edge of the frame, slightly cropped, was Litton. The others were clearly in brisk mid-stride. Litton appeared to be walking, or slowly jogging, along the shoulder of the road, and he wore a long-sleeved black shirt,

black sweatpants, a black baseball cap, and shades. He had no racing bib showing. He was credited that year with a time of 2:52:12.

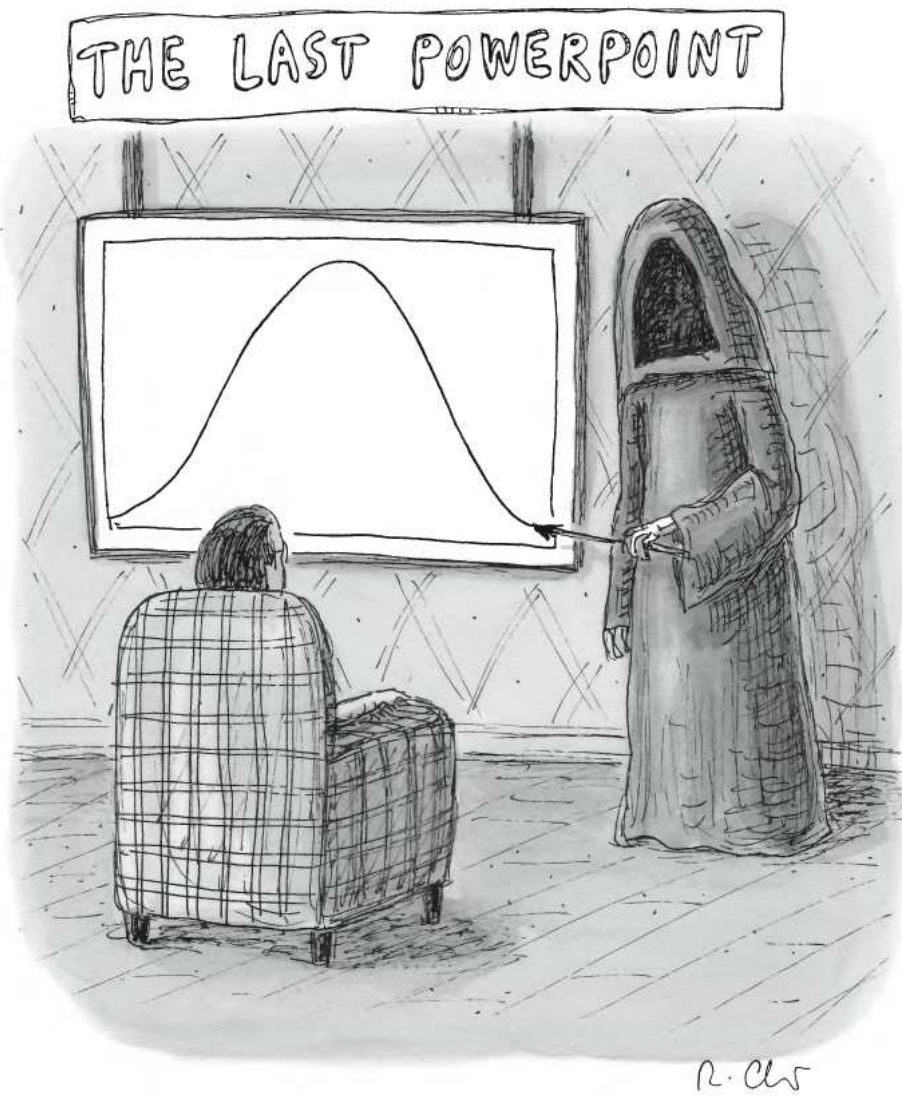
At Wendy's, we did not discuss the photograph. But, a few weeks later, I attached it to an e-mail and told him, in so many words, "Gotcha." No non-élite runner in his late forties could run a 2:52:12 marathon—an average pace of 6:34 per mile—in mild weather wearing that kind of clothing. (Before the finish line, the long-sleeved shirt and sweatpants had been swapped for a T-shirt, shorts, and a different hat.) By not showing a bib mid-race, Litton was counting on not being photographed, or at least not being recognized as a race entrant. Sticking to the shoulder allowed him to get close enough for his chip to register at the thirty-kilometre checkpoint.

Based upon his own track record and my interviews with Michigan runners who had competed against him, I told him, it seemed unlikely that he'd ever run a marathon in under three hours, with the possible exception of a 2:58:08 at Jacksonville in 2006. His other probably kosher performances, I figured, were Jacksonville in 2003 (3:19:57), Richmond in 2004 (3:08:14), and Boston in 2004 (3:25:06) and 2005 (3:23:23)—all entirely creditable.

My smoking gun turned out to be no such thing. In his response, Litton directed me to photographs that I'd overlooked: images of him at the fifteen-kilometre split.

"The bib is still underneath but I am in the middle of the road," he wrote, triumphantly and accurately. "If I was trying to 'avoid photos' or 'not be recognized as a race entrant' why would I be in the middle of the road this time between other runners?"

The online accumulation of still photographs and video footage of Litton—walking up to starting lines when the field has already taken off, his racing bib obscured, or crossing finish lines differently attired—documented the bookends of an elaborate deception. Undocumented was what happened in between. For a year and a half, Litton's scourges on LetsRun had struggled to pinpoint the specifics of his methodology. If he travelled between checkpoints by car, he must have had an accomplice—perhaps more than one. But how



did they negotiate the inevitable street closings that kept traffic far from the race course? Had Litton figured out how to hack the timing system? According to professional race timers, this was impossible. Moreover, whatever category of abnormal psychology Litton might belong to, it didn't seem to be "evil genius."

Litton's profile on Athlinks listed several completed duathlons: races that combined running and biking. While Worldrecordrun was still extant, it had a page where he reported his annual mileage totals for both running and biking. (He owned a Felt bike.) So a bicycle it surely was. But where were *those* photographs? No matter what Litton's connection might have been to the anonymous posters who defended him online, his pursuers were confounded and exasperated most by what remained unsaid. It came down to this: at the Boston Marathon, the oldest, most prestigious, and most professionally managed

event on the American racing calendar, Litton had hit every split, changed his clothes along the way, and broken three hours. No one but Litton could say how he did it.

The marathon, no matter where it takes place, remains, as ever, a solitary pursuit in which every runner ultimately competes against himself or herself. Whatever drove Kip Litton was an entirely different battle with himself, one that quite possibly escaped his understanding. One thing, though, he grasped perfectly. Like the most dazzling of magicians or the most artful of art forgers, by withholding the secret of how the illusion worked he retained a power uniquely his own: the spoils of his humiliation, perhaps, but a knowledge that no one was about to take away. ♦



LETTER FROM RANGOON

## THE BURMESE SPRING

*A brutal regime's shift toward democracy surprised nearly everyone. How did it happen?*

BY EVAN OSNOS

On the evening of January 12th, Chitmin Lay was in his cell, in Moulmein Prison, in the lush tropical hills of southern Burma, when guards informed him that he was a free man. He had reasons not to believe them. Burmese prisons are exceptionally isolated, and Chitmin Lay had picked up only scattered news, from a hidden radio that he shared with other inmates, about a rush of political changes that were beginning to unwind the world's longest-running military dictatorship. He

was thirty-eight, and had been arrested in 1998 for taking part in a campus demonstration at Rangoon University, where he was a literature major. Under interrogation, he was beaten and starved. Put in front of a judge in a mass trial, he was convicted of making pamphlets without approval, breaking the Emergency Provisions Act and the Unlawful Associations Act, and sentenced to thirty-one years. He had expected to resume his life in 2029.

Less than twenty-four hours later,

Chitmin Lay walked out of prison amid a clamorous crowd of fellow-inmates, released as part of the government's attempt to pull itself from the ranks of the world's most reviled regimes. There was nobody there to greet him. Chitmin Lay is not famous, and Burma had so many political prisoners that the inmate lists maintained by activists could not even agree on the English spelling of his name. He was healthy, though his left eye was failing after so many years of reading in half-

MAGNUM; OPPOSITE: ONOFF PICTURE



light. He had full cheeks around a broad smile that gave him an oddly childlike aspect, as if his body had paused the year he went away. He had no money to get to his mother's house in Rangoon, a daylong trip. Finally, some local opposition activists gave him the equivalent of about twelve dollars for the bus.

On the road, Chitmin Lay noticed that the traditional thatch-roofed bamboo villages were now dotted with concrete-block houses with metal roofs. "And cell phones, those were a surprise," he told me. "And the cars. We never used to see shiny cars." He was eager to try the Internet. "I'd only heard about it, how essential the Internet was, and I decided that I must learn about it as soon I'm out." Once he had greeted his

startled mother and begun to consider the tasks before him—"marriage, family, job"—he signed up for a Gmail account.

Wedged like an arrowhead between India and China, Burma has been ruled by dictators so ineptly and for so long that it can feel, these days, as if the country itself were stepping warily out of jail. Since taking office in March, 2011, the former generals who make up Burma's first civilian government in forty-nine years have released almost seven hundred activists and monks and artists, and taken more steps in the direction of democracy than Burma has seen in four decades. They have relaxed media censorship, legalized the right to unionize, and allowed members of the main opposition party to com-

pete for office; they have also distanced themselves from Burma's longtime patron, China.

In June, Australia took the symbolic step of abandoning the name Burma, which has been the choice of exiles and of Washington, in favor of the name preferred by the government: Myanmar. The United States and other nations suspended many of the economic sanctions that, for years, had sought to cripple the regime. The sudden access to a new market on China's southern border has inspired flights of extraordinary optimism. "If I could put all my money into Myanmar, I would," Jim Rogers, the Singapore-based American investor, declared recently.

Even by the standards of authoritarian

*When the regime finally released the Nobel laureate Aung San Suu Kyi, in November, 2010, she began a long-awaited entry into politics. This spring, she was cheered by crowds of supporters as she campaigned for the parliamentary elections, which seem to herald a new era in Burmese history. Opposite: photographs by Chien-Chi Chang. Above: photograph by Pietro Masturzo.*

regimes, Burma lives in an epoch unto itself, a relic of the prosperous country that was once the world's largest exporter of rice. Rangoon—or Yangon, as it is now known—which was so alive with diversity and immigration that it had a Jewish mayor in the nineteen-thirties, is today a place of deprivation and haunting beauty. The banyan trees reach out from the moldering remains of villas and colonial offices. Ancient buses, cast off by Japan, and now absurdly overloaded, wheeze through canyons on the broken macadam. Outside the law courts, men in crisp white shirts and longyis, Burma's traditional ankle-length sarong, hunch over ancient typewriters, feeding the maw of the bureaucracy. Gaping sinkholes in the sidewalk reveal the sewer beneath, exhaling into the tropical air. Book vendors, not far from where Pablo Neruda lived in the nineteen-twenties, display on their blankets books with such titles as "Essentials of Selling," "Radio and Line Transmission," and the I.M.F.'s "Seventh Annual Report Exchange Restrictions, 1956."

In the countryside, Burma lives by candlelight. Three-quarters of the population get no electricity, though the nation has abundant oil, gas, and hydropower resources. The number of cell phones per capita is the lowest in the world, behind North Korea. Less than one per cent of the population is connected to the Web. In eastern Shan state, where I chatted with a woman who had never heard the name of the sitting President, cars are vastly outnumbered by horse-drawn carts.

Burma's opening has so far defied the narrative logic we've come to associate with political transformation: there is, as yet, no crowd picking through a ruined palace, no dictator in the dock. The world has witnessed more than a hundred attempts to end authoritarianism in the past twenty-five years, but the top-down, bloodless variety is rare. More often, as Thomas Carothers, a specialist on democratization at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, said of dictators, "It has to be taken away from them, usually by angry citizens."

In Burma, unlike the street revolutions of Egypt and Tunisia or the civil wars in Libya or Syria, many members of the former dictatorship have retained power. When top generals retired their commissions a year ago, they removed their uniforms, but one adviser told me that they

still salute one another in private. Many of the reforms can be reversed if the government declares a state of emergency, and hundreds of political prisoners remain behind bars. And in the countryside the regime is embroiled in a brutal war against ethnic rebels, which has gone on for decades. For all the transformations Burma is undergoing, its people still find themselves strangely captive to men who were, until recently, some of history's most dedicated enemies of democracy.

I arrived in Rangoon in March, on Armed Forces Day. Traditionally, this had been an opportunity for generals to speechify and goose-step their men through the city. (The opposition once renamed it Fascist Resistance Day.) The country was preparing for the first major test of the new era: a special election, on April 1st. Although less than seven per cent of the parliamentary seats were being contested, it was the first time that the dissident Aung San Suu Kyi had endorsed the legitimacy of an election since 1990, when her party's victory was ignored by the government, a signal event in Burma's descent into misery. In that election, Aung San Suu Kyi had already been placed under house arrest, where she remained for fifteen of the next twenty-one years, as she was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize (in absentia) and became one of the world's most famous political prisoners. When the regime finally released her, in November, 2010, she was met at her front gate by a frenzy of admirers, who seemed to be heralding not only her long-awaited entry into politics but also the prospect of a new era in Burmese history.

Activists abroad were dubious, but Suu Kyi declared that the country was "on the verge of a breakthrough to democracy." Suu Kyi was running for the seat in Parliament representing Kawhmu, a township with vast stretches of land that had no electricity or running water. She campaigned for weeks, waving from the open sunroof of an S.U.V., shaded from the tropical sun by a parasol, as guards kept at bay tens of thousands of her supporters who lined the roads, desperate and reaching, and shouting, "A'mae Suu"—Mother Suu.

The daughter of Aung San, the martyred national hero who negotiated independence from the British Empire, Suu Kyi left the country in 1960 as a teen-ager, graduated from Oxford, and worked at

the United Nations. Though she talked of starting public libraries in Burma, and of helping students to go abroad, in 1972 she married Michael Aris, a Tibet scholar, and settled fitfully into British suburbia with him and their two children. She didn't return to Burma until 1988, for a visit with her sick mother. Before long, she was swept up in politics, and emerged as the leader of the opposition. "It's very different from living in academia in Oxford," she once said of the turn in her fortunes. "We called someone vicious in a review for the *Times Literary Supplement*. We didn't know what vicious was."

A couple of days before the election this spring, Suu Kyi invited reporters over to the back yard of her house. It was a two-story colonial villa, stately but threadbare, and in the darkest days she had roamed listlessly from room to room. In the garden, she looked pale. "I'm feeling a little delicate," she said. The campaign had been gruelling, and her doctor had urged her to rest during the final days. "Any tough questions, I shall faint straight away," she said, and smiled. Over the years, the regime had tried to kill her at least once (in 2003), labelled her a "genocidal prostitute," and denied her husband's desperate requests to visit her before his death, from prostate cancer, in 1999. But she was taking a chance on this race, because, she said, "this is what our people want."

For years, Suu Kyi had called for a "revolution of the spirit," but, over the years, the poetry had been leeched from the phrase and, as one writer put it despairingly, it began to smack of "obscurantism and sheer metaphysics." In the garden that day, she reclaimed the idea. It must be "a revolution that will help our people to overcome fear, to overcome poverty, to overcome indifference, and to take the fate of their country into their own hands," she said. "An election alone is not going to change our country. It's the people, the change in the spirit of the people, which will change our nation."

To foreign reporters, who recalled Burma as a nation of whispers—where you never uttered a name on a phone line and, in some cases, carried a wig to help shake off the intelligence officers in a crowd—even a simple open-air meeting with Suu Kyi was bewildering. "Was it really only five years ago that soldiers were shooting protesters and beating monks?" Andrew R. C. Marshall, of Reuters, wrote after watch-

ing Suu Kyi in front of a crowd. For years, the country was so inaccessible that outsiders resorted to reading the aspirations of fifty-five million people through the struggle between Suu Kyi and the generals—between “Beauty” and “the Beast,” as headline writers often described it. Suddenly, the narrative seemed to have eclipsed the fable and spilled out into a raucous ensemble. At least thirty other former prisoners were running for office as well, giving themselves a crash course in politics.

The Burmese people have been subjected to the whims of despotic leaders for so long that “government” has been included in a traditional lament about the “five evils” in life, along with fire, water, thieves, and enemies. Their history has not been without glory: the first major Burmese kingdom, which flourished at Pagan, in the eleventh century, created spectacular Buddhist temples and pagodas more than a century before comparable cathedrals appeared in Europe. The Burmese went on to conquer present-day Laos and Thailand. But in 1885 a British general arrived with enough pith-helmeted troops to force the final king out of his palace on an oxcart, and declared Burma a minor province of India.

In 1942, when Japan invaded, the Burmese, including the fiercely single-minded young revolutionary Aung San, Suu Kyi’s father, joined in the fight against the Allies. Three years later, Aung San turned his troops against the Japanese and helped liberate the country alongside the British, signing an agreement to guarantee Burma’s independence within a year. The achievement made him a secular saint—the lone Burmese leader who had gained the trust of a range of ethnic groups. His face appeared on the currency, but he never lived to see it. On July 19, 1947, when Suu Kyi was two, he was assassinated by a disaffected Burmese politician. Suu Kyi’s mother was named Ambassador to India and Nepal, and Suu Kyi joined her in Delhi, where she acquired the diction of the Indian elite and the upright posture, still visible to this day, that came from never being permitted to lean against the back of a dining chair.

For the next decade, Burma enjoyed relative peace. But in Rangoon the civilian government was failing, and, after years of invasion and war, the military stepped into the vacuum. Vowing to prevent “chaos,”

General Ne Win led a coup in 1962, evicting students and aid workers and banning the teaching of English, while nationalizing timber companies, newspapers, and the Boy Scouts. As the economy began its half-century implosion, the General consoled himself at European spas and at the races at Ascot, and with a string of wives, despite a capacity for violence that drove one of his companions away after he threw an ashtray at her throat.

By 1992, power had migrated to the man who ruled Burma until 2010: Senior General Than Shwe, a postal clerk turned psy-ops specialist, who was described by those around him, in a biography by Benedict Rogers, with telling consistency—“Our leader is a very uneducated man” and “There were many intelligent soldiers, but he was not one of them.” The poverty of his people did nothing to curb Than Shwe’s ambitions. He once considered spending a billion dollars to buy Manchester United as a gift to his grandson, a soccer fan. In 2007, Burma was tied with Somalia as the most corrupt country in the world, according to Transparency International. In July, 2010, Than Shwe had been in power for eighteen years. He had a bullfrog frown and a chest covered with medals. *Foreign Policy* named him the world’s third-worst dictator,

behind Kim Jong Il and Robert Mugabe.

His aides shielded him from unwanted information, and the culture of isolation permeated his government. Nay Phone Latt, a blogger who was arrested in 2008 for coordinating anti-regime protests, discovered, during his trial, that the judge and the prosecutors had a tenuous grip on twenty-first-century technology: “They knew that I was a blogger, but they thought the word was ‘blocker,’ that I was creating economic ‘blocks’ against the country or something. I could see from their faces that they weren’t joking. They had never heard the word ‘blog.’” (He was sentenced to twenty years and six months in prison, but was released in January.) Self-righteous seclusion extended to the highest ranks. Hla Maung Shwe, a businessman whose brother is commandant of the National Defense University, told me, “In the Army for twenty-nine years, my brother had one chance at exposure—a trip to Thailand for three days.” Describing the nation’s elite, Hla Maung Shwe said, “Our mind-set is in the Stone Age.”

For years, the regime was able to overlook its people’s contempt, but that became impossible in September, 2007, when tens of thousands of monks streamed into Rangoon to lead protests that became known as the Saffron Revolution. The



*“And now Warren Kellogg, with the dystopian side of the news.”*



*"Whaddya want for nineteen mil?"*

Army opened fire, killing monks and civilians and arresting thousands.

As Than Shwe aged, he and his compatriots confronted growing worries about their future. By 2010, the U.N. had escalated its accusations to the level of suspected war crimes, and Than Shwe told visitors that he had what the U.S. Embassy, in a cable released by WikiLeaks, called a "strong desire not to appear before an international tribunal." Moreover, it was beginning to seem likely that if a prosecution materialized the top man would not be the only target; the U.N. had concluded that state violence originated in the "executive, military and judiciary at all levels." If change was going to happen, time was running out.

In January, 2011, Than Shwe, who was seventy-seven, anointed a successor, General Thein Sein, who had all the makings of a Burmese Medvedev. Generally regarded as a nonentity, Thein Sein had been the acting Prime Minister when the government opened fire on the monks, in 2007. If he showed any evident virtue, it was that, in a kleptocratic regime, he was relatively uncorrupt. "He carried out the orders like everybody else," a prominent Burmese entrepreneur told me. "But every businessman in the country knows he's clean—and that's why he was never that powerful." The dictator may have had another reason for choos-

ing a cipher as his successor. When Burma's last king took the throne, he ordered his advisers to kill seventy rivals and their families in three days. Once a king lost his palace, as a Burmese saying held, "he is left with nothing but his umbrella." Than Shwe was acquainted with the tradition, because he had helped insure that his predecessor died under house arrest, with three grandsons and a son-in-law on death row. Choosing the pallid heir was "the best insurance policy," the businessman said, adding, "And, sure enough, he announced, right after his inauguration, that we are not interested in pursuing the past. Translation: amnesty."

And yet, in ways that are only now becoming clear, Thein Sein was not entirely who he appeared to be. As Prime Minister to a dictator, he had few duties, and had used his trips abroad to slip out and walk around in foreign cities. In May, 2008, as Cyclone Nargis devastated the Irrawaddy Delta, where he'd grown up, he found himself in charge of the state's breathtakingly inept response. (Among other failures, the generals initially turned down foreign aid, fearing an invasion.) More than a hundred and thirty-eight thousand people died.

Thein Sein was hardly the only one in the military who was awakening to the magnitude of the nation's failure. The ferocity of the assault on the monks—an unprecedented use of violence against the

country's most revered institution—had drawn lines within the military. A source close to the military told the U.S. Embassy that "Than Shwe and Maung Aye"—his second-in-command—"gave the orders to crack down on the monks, including shooting them if necessary," according to a November, 2007, cable. As a result, the source said, there was "growing daylight between the top two leaders and the regime's second-tier commanders." The following summer, the Embassy noted, "Some of the regional commanders are reform-minded and aware of the need for political and economic reform."

On March 31, 2011, in Thein Sein's inauguration speech, he called for workers' rights and for an end to corruption; he welcomed international expertise; and, most startling, he said that Burma's numerous ethnic groups had been subjected to a "hell of untold miseries," suggesting his intention to end the conflicts that have made Burma host to the world's longest-running civil war.

"When Burmese listened to that speech," the entrepreneur told me, "they said, 'This is so unusual, so alien to what we have been hearing for the past four decades!'" The Burmese merchant class had been pushing for political change that could boost trade, but, to many, it was impossible to imagine the old strongman allowing this. Than Shwe's imprint on government was fading faster than people had predicted, and his step back had emboldened younger generals. "They were in a position where they could start fighting for reform," Priscilla Clapp, a former Chief of Mission of the American Embassy, said. "If they had done this during the earlier years, they would have been purged." What's more, if they needed any added incentive to forge ahead on reforms, the Arab Spring was toppling dictators one after another, and as the Presidential adviser Nay Zin Latt told a reporter, "We do not want an Arab Spring here."

A group of Burmese businessmen, journalists, and academics who had developed ties to the military were eager to exploit the growing desire for a path out of Burma's isolation. They'd formed an N.G.O. called Myanmar Egress—a way out—and though it attracted considerable suspicion from activists abroad, who feared that the group was more interested in controlling reform than in unleashing it, the businessmen were pushing the younger generals to

confront how little they truly understood. To provide a glimpse of a functioning executive branch, the group gave the new President DVDs of "The West Wing." Thant Myint-U, a historian and an author who advises President Thein Sein, also urged top leaders to consider reform. "Abstract moral arguments weren't going to cut much ice," he told me. "And they were deeply cynical of Western rhetoric on human rights. The argument we made that got the most traction was: 'We're falling so far behind our neighbors economically—China and India—that, unless we change, politically as well as economically, it's going to be disastrous.'" Thomas Carothers calls it the "neighborhood effect," and explained, "When Laos overtakes you in per-capita G.D.P., it's time to rethink your basic national strategy."

One of the generals the businessmen spoke to was a former intelligence officer named Aung Min. He'd been the railway minister since 2003, and though he retains the title, he now has sweeping responsibilities for brokering peace with ethnic rebels and shaping the reform agenda. When Aung Min travelled to Bangkok to deliver a talk, Egress took the opportunity to show him around a modern city. "We took him to the food court, and on the Skytrain," one of the men on the tour told me. "On the car ride, he observed how the farms worked, how the roads worked, how the tolls worked." Routine details of government responsiveness seemed to impress him. When he flew to Europe, he commented on the fact that Westerners scheduled fewer flights at night in order to reduce the noise for people who live near the airport.

When I met Aung Min this spring in Rangoon, he had about him a Brylcreem crispness that evoked an Asian Robert McNamara. He and the President had been young officers together, and I asked him why Thein Sein was making these changes. "He understands that he can't run the government the way it used to be run by the previous government, that this government is elected by the people," he said, adding, "If you don't do what the people want, you won't survive."

Talking with Aung Min was a peculiar experience, not only because approaching a Burmese minister could have got a journalist deported a year ago but also because I couldn't figure out how much of what he said was pabulum, for international con-

sumption, or how a man who had spent eight years in the Cabinet of one of the world's most vicious dictators could think that his people had forgotten. "This is only the beginning," he said. "There will be many things to do in this country. But step by step, one at a time."

That tension—between vowing change and calling for patience—reflects the fact that, among former generals, the idea of reform remains so intensely polarizing that even some of its standard-bearers flinch at the term. When I met the industry minister, Soe Thane, a small, hyper-alert former Navy man, and one of the few members of the Cabinet who speak English, he was in a buoyant mood. "We feel good. We have to move," he said. I asked if he knew when the remaining political prisoners would be released, and a pained expression creased his face. "My duty is apart from that," he said. When an Australian reporter approached with a question that described the minister as part of the "reform group," Soe Thane let out a nervous bark of a laugh and said, "No, no, no, no, no." A moment later, he announced, "Time's up!" and marched off. When I encountered him again, he explained that he worries about inflaming his conservative peers. "We must be patient, and give favor to the other party," he said.

But no amount of rhetoric would earn the government credibility in Burma or abroad unless it could secure the blessing of Suu Kyi. Less obvious was just how much Suu Kyi stood to gain from an alliance. After more than two decades of dis-



sent, she was internationally renowned but not yet an active participant in the proposed reforms. In boycotting the 2010 election, her party, the National League for Democracy, had frustrated young activists, and she was at risk of becoming sainted but peripheral. For the first time in decades, all sides had a reason to find a way out of the impasse. After an exchange of secret messages, the President met Suu Kyi for dinner last August, and when she returned home she told Tin Oo, the dep-

uty leader of the N.L.D., "I have the feeling that I can work with him." Her endorsement was a turning point. The world took notice, and the President cleared the way for Suu Kyi's supporters to register as a political party and for former political prisoners to run for office.

One of the first things the new President did was hire an assortment of academics and former officers as advisers. Among those whose aid he enlisted was Nay Zin Latt, a businessman who, since retiring from the Army, had become a political commentator. "I was asked to prepare a report for the government about the next fifty years for the United States and the next fifty years for China," he told me, as he chain-smoked in his office. His conclusion? "Let's put it this way: In the long run, the United States is still strong!"

For two decades, American policy was designed to choke the regime into submission. After Burma's crackdown in 1988, the United States had reduced its presence there to a low-key embassy, with no ambassador, and in Washington, apart from a small community of activists and lawmakers, the country was ignored. Americans had been barred from investing since 1997, and, among additional measures, in 2007 and 2008 Washington moved against individuals—leaders and well-connected tycoons—by freezing assets and issuing travel bans. But by the summer of 2009 diplomats from Malaysia, Indonesia, and others in the region were funnelling signals that Burma wanted to talk.

President Obama came into office vowing to seek engagement with hostile regimes, and several people in Burma quoted to me a phrase from his Inauguration speech: "We will extend a hand if you are willing to unclench your fist." The Administration saw the prospect of growing dissatisfaction within the military as powerful leverage. An Embassy source close to the military "recommended the U.S. exploit the emerging differences within the top levels of the regime by tightening our sanctions against the senior generals." Leslie Hayden, the Embassy's political officer at the time, cabled Washington that "the generals despise the sanctions and want them removed because they challenge the regime's legitimacy. If we really want to see the generals make progress, we need to show them what they will get in return." What could the United States offer? Larry

Dinger, another diplomat, signed a cable that laid out options, including “dangle World Bank and I.M.F. technical assistance” or “consider accepting the country name ‘Myanmar.’”

The Administration decided to keep sanctions in place but also to open negotiations. Kurt Campbell, the Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs, met U Thaung, then Burma’s minister for science and technology, at the Waldorf-Astoria in Manhattan, but left largely baffled by the Burmese negotiator’s long digressions about the toll of imperialism and war. “We had to figure out, How were these people communicating?” Campbell told me. “What we would tend to think of as basically killing the clock, they would interpret as an essential expression of their historical legacy and trajectory.” At one point, Campbell flew to Burma to press for elections, the release of prisoners, and talks with ethnic groups. He met with Suu Kyi, but he made “absolutely no progress whatsoever” with the government, he said. A second trip was even less productive, and the Administration returned to a hostile posture, declaring support for establishing a U.N. commission of inquiry to investigate war crimes in Burma.

But last November, encouraged by Suu Kyi’s meeting with Thein Sein, President Obama phoned her to discuss the next steps. “If she’s supportive of this, then we’re going to go,” he told aides, and the following day he announced that Hillary Clinton would visit Burma—the first Secretary of State to do so since John Foster Dulles, in 1955. The visit was highly choreographed even by diplomatic standards: to underscore American support for the opposition, Clinton and Suu Kyi were photographed in matching white jackets. Over dinner, according to an Administration official, Suu Kyi told Clinton, “I don’t want to be an icon, I want to be a politician,” and Clinton replied, “Get ready to get attacked.” As a gift to Suu Kyi, Clinton brought books on Eisenhower and George Marshall, to help her understand the mind-set of soldiers who go into politics.

Nobody was more baffled by the turn of events in Burma than the Chinese. For years, Beijing had been Burma’s most ardent defender in the U.N. Security Council, the supplier of arms and loans, and a customer for timber, gold, and other resources. But last September Thein Sein, citing “the will of the peo-

ple,” suspended construction of the \$3.6-billion Myitsone dam, which had been financed by China to provide electricity across the border in Yunnan Province. Chinese analysts hinted at a conspiracy—they noted WikiLeaks cables that indicate that the U.S. Embassy had given grants to anti-dam groups—and debated whether the opposition would spread to North Korea or elsewhere.

In Burma, however, people talk about how their country had felt subsumed and taken for granted. The dam was designed to flood an area four times the size of Manhattan, but when Burma asked for a more thorough environmental-impact assessment “the Chinese completely shut them off, saying, We’ve already done it and see no reason to repeat the process,” Yun Sun, a China analyst based in Washington, told me. On another occasion, a delegation visited Beijing to discuss debt obligations at the Export-Import Bank of China, only to discover that the debt had been sold. The representatives were shunted aside and diverted to officials at a state-owned insurance company. Perhaps most damaging, Burmese senior military leaders concluded that Chinese military hardware wasn’t worth the billion or so dollars that had been spent. “Army officers are saying to me, ‘The Chinese cheated us. They’ve given us all this crap and taken our resources,’” Maung Zarni, a visiting Burmese academic at the London School of Economics, said.

As the parliamentary election approached, it was unclear whether the old generals could stomach an honest-to-goodness vote, and whether ordinary Burmese trusted them enough to show up at the polls.

On Election Day, I rode the ferry across the brown waters of the Irrawaddy and then took a rattletrap taxi to the river-delta township of Kawhmu, to watch Suu Kyi visit polling booths in her district. The heat shimmered above a pan-flat landscape of meandering rivers and thatch-roofed homes. Farmers drove ox-drawn plows through rice paddies. A few minutes after nine, Suu Kyi arrived at a high school in the village of Nat Sin Kong, striding gingerly across the yard, “arms swinging like a soldier,” as her biographer, Peter Popham, had put it in his recently published book “The Lady and the Peacock.”

In a tenth-grade classroom, with “Dis-

cipline, Education, Attitude” stencilled on the wall, she surveyed a lineup of plastic boxes, waved to the crowd, and was on to the next stop, trailed by a swarm of students and reporters. I stayed behind to have tea with some of the voters, and met Khin Ma Ma Chit, a farmer and a mother of two, who was still giddy with the experience of voting for the opposition. “Our parents and grandparents waited for this, but never saw it,” she said.

A former diplomat told me that, if the opposition could win half the votes, it would be “a howling success.” But it swiftly became clear that something far more decisive was under way. “We had so many feelings, so much hatred, but we kept it all inside,” another mother whom I spoke with said. “The government always oppressed us. Every rainy season, when we finally had a crop, they would take it for half the price on the market, and say, ‘It’s for the government.’”

The ruling party had held out the promise of new schools and roads to those who fell in line, and the people had smiled and handed them a humiliation. The opposition took forty-three of the forty-five contested seats, even winning neighborhoods in the capital that are home to civil servants. In Rangoon that night, thousands of supporters swarmed the ramshackle headquarters of Suu Kyi’s National League for Democracy, a building that is a cross between a storefront and a garage, wallpapered in yellowed news clippings and littered with the megaphones, speakers, and other flotsam of perpetual opposition. They danced and sang and mocked the generals. For years, the dilapidated office had symbolized how long Burma’s democrats toiled in vain; that night, it struck me as a symbol, as well, of how unprepared they were for the sudden arrival of success.

When I stopped by the local headquarters the next morning, Aung Thein Linn, a military man and former mayor of Rangoon with a thick black comb-over, veered between indignation and victimhood as he hailed the process that his party vowed would be fair while fulminating over the outcome. He accused his opponents of “intimidation” for sending many people to watch the counting of ballots. “There may be some kind of psychological pressure,” he said, “some mistakes as a result.” Despite the vitriol, Aung Thein Linn knew that he had lost. He

gestured toward his torso and declared, "I have so many scars on my body from fighting for the good of my country."

Three days after the election, Secretary of State Clinton announced that the United States was suspending sanctions against Burma and would be appointing an ambassador to the country for the first time in twenty-two years. Human-rights groups urged the State Department to relax restrictions sector by sector, to prevent the military from exploiting a rush into the energy business. Suu Kyi warned against the "reckless optimism" of allowing firms to deal with a state-owned energy company that lacks "transparency and accountability." But American oil companies, among others, said that they were losing business to international competitors, and in July the Obama Administration suspended sanctions across all sectors. Activists assailed the decision for going too far. Even though the Administration has expanded asset freezes and travel bans on individuals, and will require companies to report on their Burma investments, suspending sanctions, critics contend, "looks like it caved to industry pressure and undercut Aung San Suu Kyi," Arvind Ganesan, the director of the human-rights division of Human Rights Watch, told me.

Burma has added a new dimension to the debate about the handling of rogues: Did the sanctions work? Does Burma tell us anything about how we should approach Syria or Iran? Inside the country, the consensus has not changed. "It didn't hurt the ruling junta one iota," Serge Pun, a prominent Burmese businessman, told me. "It actually hurt all the normal people, the poor people. Thousands of factories had to close down, because their products could not be sold to the West. Honestly, when you have China and India on both sides, who did not participate in the sanctions, and you had nine other ASEAN countries who also didn't participate, the sanctions, in effect, couldn't work."

Curiously, that was also the consensus in Washington for many years. Tom Malinowski, a Burma expert and an advocate of sanctions who worked in the Clinton White House when the first round of sanctions were imposed, said, "They imposed sanctions not because they genuinely believed that they would work but because they wanted to do *something*." As the generals endured and enriched them-

selves, the measures were declared a failure. "They were only strong enough to weaken the country, not strong enough to remove the leaders," Nay Zin Latt, the Burmese Presidential adviser, told me.

But that verdict may have been premature. For all the suffering they produced, sanctions and scorn did narrow the junta's options. Sanctions drove the leaders deeper into China's embrace than they could tolerate and piqued their fears of falling behind their neighbors. The generals were denied access to the World Bank and other facilities that they believed had been indispensable to the rise of China and Vietnam. "They realized they had no choice but to bring Aung San Suu Kyi on board," Maung Zarni said. "That is not a values shift, where they say we need to treat our people like human beings. It's a technical, strategic move."

The struggle to bring democracy to Burma has been so tortuous that it's easy to overlook the uncomfortable fact that the greatest challenge confronting the country's future now lies hundreds of miles from Rangoon, in borderlands where eth-

nic minorities are demanding their share of power. Burma is blessed with and bedeviled by diversity—home to an estimated hundred and thirty-five ethnic groups—and, in the year since reforms began, government negotiators have succeeded in striking agreements with ten out of eleven main ethnic groups. But the conflicts that persist are bitter. In a remote expanse of emerald hills and jagged ridges in Burma's northern reaches, a seventeen-year ceasefire collapsed a year ago, pitting government forces against the Kachin Independence Army, a rebel insurgency that has demanded greater political autonomy and control over the country's natural resources. The Kachin war had proved especially difficult to resolve, because the land is rich with gold and gems and other things worth fighting about. Each side blamed the other for the resumption of hostilities. In December, the President ordered the commander-in-chief to halt attacks and fire only in self-defense, but the war raged on—suggesting that the President lacked the power or the resolve to make his commanders carry out his orders.

By spring, when I reached the site of



"I bought him some underwear that should help reduce drag."



*"No, no, the way you're shifting your papers—it's all wrong."*

the Kachin conflict, the fighting had uprooted seventy-five thousand people, according to a report by Human Rights Watch, which accused the Burmese military, since last June, of having "threatened and tortured civilians during interrogations for information about KIA insurgents, and raped women." The Army also, according to the report, "used antipersonnel landmines and conscripted forced labor." It accused the K.I.A. of "using child soldiers and antipersonnel landmines."

I arrived a few days ahead of the monsoon, and the fighting had intensified. The rebels, who augment their supply train with the use of pack elephants, had steadily lost ground in recent months and were regrouping in the remote town of Laiza, beside the Chinese border. The town was awash in soldiers on motorbikes and in pickup trucks, and people were arriving from villages already gripped by fighting. "This is the most intense period in our revolutionary journey," Kumhtat La Nan, the Joint General Secretary of the political wing of the rebel army, told me, when I stopped by the headquarters, a small hotel that had been fortified with gun positions and adorned with a banner that read, "God Is Our Victory." China had reportedly turned refugees away at the border, but the rebel commanders expected an exodus in the event of an attack, because people had nowhere else to go.

Recently, President Thein Sein had announced a renewed commitment to negotiations, but nobody I met in Kachin

expected a swift conclusion: not the father of seven, entrenched in an outpost of tunnels and foxholes, who was fighting because "the Burmese Army took everything (land, fields, prosperity)"; not the Baptist pastor who feared that violence was radicalizing a new generation of youths; and not the farmer who had been burned out of his house, and was now in a bamboo shelter for displaced persons, and told me, "The new government talks about peace, but if it doesn't give us our rights, then the war will take a long time."

The risk that withdrawing the military from Burma's politics could lead to flashes of unrest became vivid in June, when sectarian clashes exploded near the border with Bangladesh, between a Muslim ethnic group, the Rohingya, and local Buddhists. The President declared a state of emergency in the region—his first exercise of that power since taking office—and by the time calm had been restored more than two dozen people were dead and thirty thousand had been displaced. This did not bode well for ethnic harmony. On Burma's newly uncensored Internet forums, bloggers poured rage on the Rohingya—a stateless people who are persecuted in Asia, much like the Roma in Europe—calling them terrorists, bandits, and dogs.

Even at the epicenter of Burma's transformation—Rangoon, the city that stands to benefit most from the deluge of new ideas and investment—the changes have been so disorienting that the domi-

nant sensation in the teahouses and the moldering office blocks is not so much joy as vertigo. For Khin Maung Swe, who spent sixteen years in prison, the reforms ceased to be abstract when he looked out his front door one morning in January. "The man from military intelligence who had been waiting there every day was no longer there," he told me. "I have no idea where he went."

Things are no less unsettled for the spooks and minders who have spent their lives eavesdropping on the nation. At a campaign rally, Swe Win, a local journalist, was taking notes when a young plainclothes officer from the secret police, known as the Special Branch, mistook him for a fellow-agent and sidled up to him. "He said, 'We're like fish out of water here. Who knows what we're supposed to do?' Under the old law, he should have detained anyone holding a meeting that consisted of more than five people. I told him to go and take a seat. He obeyed my order and went and took a seat, and waited for his colleagues." Telling the story, Swe Win, who spent six years in prison, shook his head and said, "I almost felt sorry for him." Clapp, the former diplomat, compares the disorder of the security apparatus to "a creature that has lost its central nervous system. The legs are flailing, and it doesn't know which way to turn," she said.

One afternoon in May, when I met Chitmin Lay, the newly released prisoner with an interest in the Internet, he'd been out of jail for four months. By then, the thrill had ebbed to reveal an acute awareness of loss. "Fourteen years," he said, and flashed a large bitter smile. We were in a booth at a candy-colored café called J'donuts, in an air-conditioned mall; a young couple were canoodling in a corner booth. Chitmin Lay wanted to be a teacher, but he was over the age limit for entry-level positions. "Right now, I'll take anything I can find," he said. Burma's prison culture had been designed to promote maximum feelings of futility—at one jail, a new arrival was given a shard of a clay pot and ordered to "polish the mud outside until it shines like a mirror."

One afternoon, I visited leaders of the '88 Generation, the activists who have been in and out of jail since the uprising that took place that year. They now work from a two-story house previously occupied by a brothel. When I arrived, they were in the back yard, in a concrete shed, crowded around a Power-Point presentation on the environment, as

they tried to make sense of SO<sub>2</sub> and NO<sub>x</sub> and heavy metals. The shack held a pantheon of Burmese heroes—the charismatic poet Min Ko Naing, the strategist Ko Ko Gyi—all comically wedged into school chairs with plastic desks on the arms. Jailed as college students, they are now pushing fifty, and they pose an uncertain new political force: not in the street, and not in Parliament.

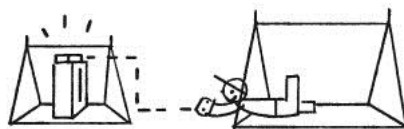
After the presentation broke up, Ko Ko Gyi said, “We’re ready to cooperate with the new government.” He thought for a moment, and revised his sentence: “cooperate and *compete*.” Former prisoners drifted back into the house to smoke and eat in a kitchen cluttered with sacks of rice and shallots. After eighteen years of being away, Ko Ko Gyi is gaunt but healthy, with a receding wave of black curls. “I don’t count the years of prison life, so I’m twenty-eight years old,” he said with a smile. When he was released, on January 13th, he was in solitary confinement, in a cell that measured seven paces across, serving a sixty-five-year sentence. He left behind everything except a few books: two volumes by Barack Obama, one by Nelson Mandela, and a textbook called “Learn French in Three Months.”

Ko Ko Gyi is considered one of the former prisoners who have the greatest potential in politics, but for him, and for many others in Burma, the path from dissident to politician is fraught; for every Nelson Mandela, there is a Lech Walesa, whose fiery persistence, the very quality that allowed him to survive, failed him in government. But Ko Ko Gyi thinks that the focus on individuals is precisely the problem: “People here don’t know they can stand up themselves. Again and again, we must say it: Politics is your job; it’s not only for the politicians.” He went on, “For such a long time under dictatorship, each and every citizen lost a role in society. Trust disappeared. They tried to escape the crisis, to find their own way. They couldn’t care who suffers or who loses. They had to focus only on themselves.” If Burma is to recover, he said, people will need to begin to trust the system again. “The most important thing is institutionalization,” he said. “We cannot depend on any one person.”

By early summer, the Burmese people were becoming acclimated to radically altered roles both at home and in the world. Suu Kyi, after winning her seat in Parliament, travelled abroad for the first

time in more than two decades, including a seventeen-day European tour fit for a head of state. On a stop in Thailand, she drew such frantic crowds that President Thein Sein cancelled his own visit there a few days later, apparently to avoid being upstaged—an episode that indicated how hard it may be for the regime to accommodate the freshman lawmaker from Kawhmu, who happens to be a Nobel laureate. She used her first short speech in Parliament to call for “equal rights” for ethnic minorities, beyond simply protecting their languages and culture. “The flames of war are not completely extinguished,” she said.

On the street, ordinary Burmese tested their new political freedoms. In May, in the airless pre-monsoon days, a wave of power outages left people stewing without fans or water pumps for their toilets, and more than a thousand protesters took to the streets of Mandalay, raging about the shortage of electricity. It was the nation’s largest demonstration in five years, and when I drove into Mandalay on the night after the protests, through a countryside as black as the sea, police officers occupied every corner downtown. It was becoming clear that the issue had far less to do with electricity than with the dawning realization that so much of the nation’s wealth had been salted away over the years by so few. A man in his twenties, showing me around a darkened neighborhood in the sidecar of his bicycle, pointed to a private clinic, whose lights had been provided by a generator, and said, bitterly, “The rich man’s hospital.” The streets were tense but, so far, peaceful. The police held their fire.

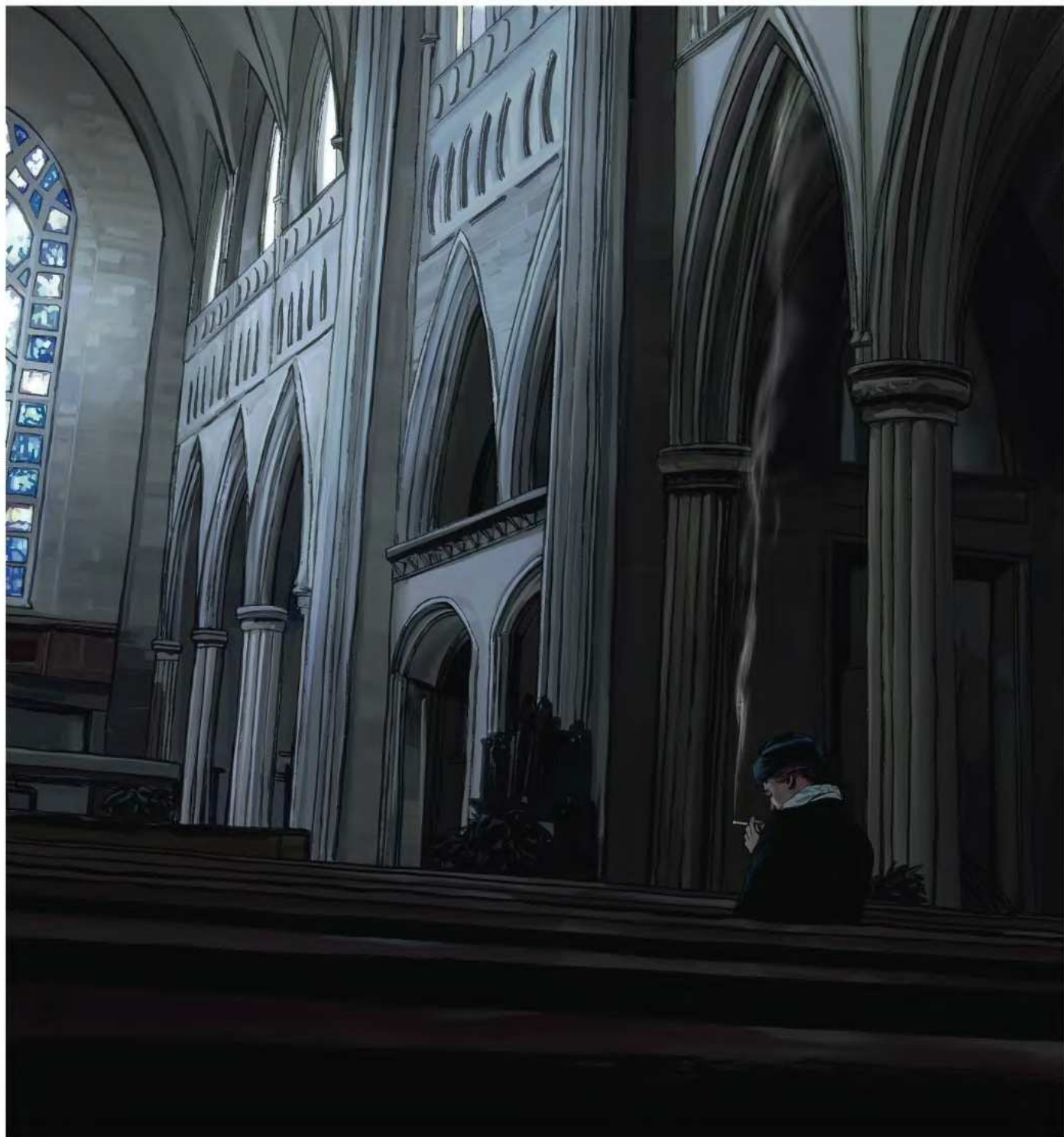


In the West, Burma’s efforts toward openness and democratization had touched off that rare thing in diplomacy: a race to declare not who had lost a country but who had won it. In the Administration, there was a sense that Burma is a risky source of pride: a successful test of President Obama’s commitment to engagement, and a vast new market for American business, but also a high-profile bet on men of immense moral flexibility. “A lot of the

stuff that Thein Sein has done is smart, wise, and bold,” an Administration official said. “The question is about the local official ten levels below—will he follow through? The local commander, will he follow through? And that’s going to need to be a systemic change over years, not months.”

For all the uncertainty about Burma’s future, the facts of the present are astounding: a nation roundly described as irredeemable has stepped back from the brink. The former generals are not without vanity, and, after decades of being mocked and scorned, they are savoring the trappings of statesmanship. Moreover, the opposition is, at last, free enough to make an impact, and it is loath to squander its freedom on infighting. But the real test of the two sides’ ability to forge an open society together may not come until Burma’s next general election, in 2015.

The Burmese people today would not tolerate a return to the eccentric seclusion of the past, and, month by month, reforms become more difficult to undo. But if it was cynical to assume that Burma could not change, it is naïve to predict a smooth and peaceful future. Forty-nine years of brutality and suspicion have distorted the body and soul of the nation, and the greatest threat may rise from within. Freedom, circumscribed, is an unstable state of nature, and the generals may not be able to control the forces they have unleashed. That fact—the volatility of rising expectations—reminded me of a story that Swe Win, the journalist, once mentioned in connection with his six years in prison. “For a long time, they didn’t let us have anything to read or write,” he said. “And then, one day, they gave us religious books. After a while, we said, ‘Since you gave us religious books, you must allow us to have non-religious books.’ And they said no. But we persisted, and eventually they said O.K. Then we said, ‘Now that we have non-religious books, you must let us read state newspapers, because you control them anyway.’ And they said no. But we persisted.” By the time he left prison, the inmates had nudged and negotiated their way to obtaining not only state newspapers but also local journals and, at last, foreign publications. “It took three years,” Swe Win said. “But we got them.” ♦



FICTION

# THANK YOU FOR THE LIGHT

BY F. SCOTT FITZGERALD

Mrs. Hanson was a pretty, somewhat faded woman of forty, who sold corsets and girdles, travelling out of Chicago. For many years her territory had swung around through Toledo, Lima, Springfield, Columbus, Indianapolis, and Fort Wayne, and her transfer to the Iowa-Kansas-Missouri district was a promotion, for her firm was more strongly entrenched west of the Ohio.

Eastward, she had known her clientele chattily and had often been offered a drink or a cigarette in the buyer's office after business was concluded. But she soon found that in her new district things were different. Not only was she never asked if she would like to smoke but several times her own inquiry as to whether anyone would mind was answered half apologetically with "It's not that I mind, but it has a bad influence on the employees."

"Oh, of course, I understand."

Smoking meant a lot to her sometimes. She worked very hard and it had some ability to rest and relax her psychologically. She was a widow and she had no close relatives to write to in the evenings, and more than one moving picture a week hurt her eyes, so smoking had come to be an important punctuation mark in the long sentence of a day on the road.

The last week of her first trip on the new circuit found her in Kansas City. It was mid-August and she felt somewhat lonely among all her new contacts, so she was delighted to find at the outer desk of one firm a woman she had known in Chicago. She sat down before having herself announced and in the course of the conversation found out a little about the man she was going to see.

"Will he mind if I smoke?"

"What? My God, yes!" her friend said. "He's given money to support the law against it."

"Oh. Well, I'm grateful for the advice—more than grateful."

"You better watch it everywhere around here," her friend said. "Especially with the men over fifty. The ones who weren't in the war. A man told me that nobody who was in the war would ever object to anyone smoking."

But at her very next stop Mrs. Hanson ran into the exception. He seemed a pleasant young man but his eyes fixed with so much fascination on the ciga-

rette that she was tapping on her thumbnail that she put it away. She was rewarded when he asked her to lunch and during the hour she obtained a considerable order.

Afterward, he insisted on driving her to her next appointment, though she had intended to spot a hotel in the vicinity and take a few puffs in the washroom.

It was one of those days full of waiting—everyone was busy, was late, and it seemed that when the clients did appear they were the sort of hatchet-faced men who did not like other people's self-indulgence, or they were women willingly or unwillingly committed to the ideas of these men.

She hadn't smoked since breakfast and she suddenly realized that that was why she felt a vague dissatisfaction at the end of each call, no matter how successful it had been in a business way.

She would say, "We think we cover a different field. It's all rubber and canvas, of course, but we do manage to put them together in a different way. A thirty-percent increase in national advertising in one year tells its own story."

And to herself she was thinking, If I could just get three puffs I could sell old-fashioned whalebone.

She had one more store to visit now but her appointment was not for half an hour. That was just time to go to her hotel but, as there was no taxi in sight, she walked along the street, thinking, Perhaps I ought to give up cigarettes. I'm getting to be a drug fiend.

Before her, she saw the Catholic cathedral. It seemed very tall, and suddenly she had an inspiration: if so much incense had gone up in the spires to God, a little smoke in the vestibule would make no difference. How could the Good Lord care if a tired woman took a few puffs in the vestibule?

Nevertheless, though she was not a Catholic, the thought offended her. Was it so important that she have her cigarette, when it might offend a lot of other people, too?

Still. He wouldn't mind, she thought persistently. In His days, they hadn't even discovered tobacco....

She went into the church; the vestibule was dark, and she felt for a match in the bag she carried but there weren't any.

I'll go and get a light from one of their candles, she thought.

The darkness of the nave was broken only by a splash of light in one corner. She walked up the aisle toward the white blur, and found that it was not made by candles and, in any case, it was about to go out—an old man was on the point of extinguishing a last oil lamp.

"These are votive offerings," he said. "We put them out at night. We think it means more to the people who give them to save them for next day than it would to keep them burning all night."

"I see."

He struck out the last one. There was no light left in the cathedral now, save an electric chandelier high overhead and the ever-burning lamp in front of the Sacrament.

"Good night," the sexton said.

"Good night."

"I guess you came here to pray."

"Yes, I did."

He went out into the sacristy. Mrs. Hanson knelt down and prayed.

It had been a long time since she had prayed. She scarcely knew what to pray for, so she prayed for her employer, and for the clients in Des Moines and Kansas City. When she had finished praying, she knelt up. An image of the Madonna gazed down upon her from a niche, six feet above her head.

Vaguely she regarded it. Then she got up from her knees and sank back wearily in the corner of the pew. In her imagination, the Virgin came down, like in the play "The Miracle," and took her place and sold corsets and girdles for her and was tired, just as she was. Then for a few minutes Mrs. Hanson must have slept.

She awoke at the realization that something had changed, and gradually she perceived that there was a familiar scent that was not incense in the air and that her fingers smarted. Then she realized that the cigarette she held in her hand was alight—was burning.

Still too drowsy to think, she took a puff to keep the flame alive. Then she looked up at the Madonna's vague niche in the half-darkness.

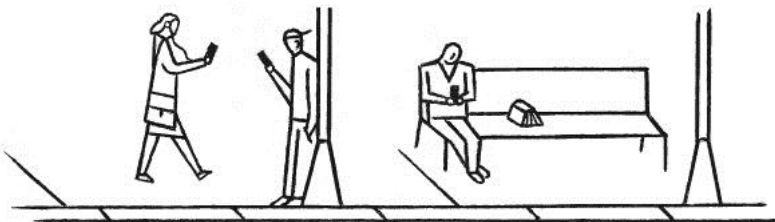
"Thank you for the light," she said.

That didn't seem quite enough, so she got down on her knees, the smoke twisting up from the cigarette between her fingers.

"Thank you very much for the light," she said. ♦

—1936

# THE CRITICS



A CRITIC AT LARGE

## GLORY DAYS

*What we watch when we watch the Olympics.*

BY LOUIS MENAND

I had a grandfather who played the horses. That was about as close as anyone in my family got to competitive sports, unless you count mixed doubles. Sports, or, as my relatives used to put it, “that damn fool athletic stuff,” were not among our household enthusiasms. In general, we did not genuflect much before the temple of the body. Just the concept of exercise, the notion that a person should “work out” in order to “stay in shape,” would have been greeted with incomprehension. In shape to do what? Health we understood. We knew what made a person healthy: sleeping with the windows open and drinking three glasses of whole milk a day. It was pretty simple.

A more principled reason for this indifference was an aversion to the belief, popular when I was growing up, that the ability to run faster or throw farther than other people is a contribution to the common good, and that we ought to honor the athlete in the same way that we honor the artist and the statesman. Games, in my house, were O.K., because games are fun. Sports are games taken much too seriously. Organized sports are an attempt, through regimentation (uniforms and trophies) and rhetoric (rah-rah boosterism and coach talk), to give an inherently pointless activity some kind of point, to inject a purpose into play.

In this flock, I was the unlikely black sheep. I didn’t play Little League, which,

along with the Boy Scouts, my father regarded as a paramilitary organization. But I didn’t think that sports were silly, or for blockheads and Neanderthals. I thought that sports were sublime, and I set my boyish heart on playing a part in what “ABC’s Wide World of Sports” called “the human drama of athletic competition.” To be worthy of those words someday, I was prepared to endure a great deal of sarcasm.

These hopes were cruelly shattered. It turns out—something they don’t tell you when they’re urging you to go for the gold, follow your dream, etc.—that, in most sports, size and strength are kind of important. I had imagined that all I needed was brains and the will to win. Though a strapping five-nine today—closer to five-nine and a half, really—in the prepubescent days of my love affair with sports I was a shrimp. One of my idols was Bob Cousy, the playmaking guard of the Boston Celtics, regularly described as undersized for his sport. As I diligently heaved basketballs in the general direction of distant rims, I pictured myself a future Houdini of the Hollywood (one of Cousy’s nicknames), swift and savvy, executing the behind-the-back pass or finishing off the fast break with a supercool underhand layup. One day when I was in junior high, the Cooz, now retired, came to town to direct a clinic at the local high school, and our gym class was invited to watch. It was an experience I’ll never forget. Cousy walked

onto the court, and my heart sank. Bob Cousy was tall.

A lot of kids get hooked on sports by television. Television—another altar we didn’t worship at in my house. But I did get to watch “Wide World of Sports.” The show, which was on the air for thirty-seven years, was created and produced by Edgar Scherick and Roone Arledge, telecommunications visionaries who grasped a basic ingredient of male psychology, which is that, no matter what kind of contest you put on the screen, men will say, “Wait a second. I just want to see how this comes out.”

“Wide World of Sports” was significant for two reasons. First, it lived up to its promise of “spanning the globe to bring you the constant variety of sport” (a classy touch, the singular noun). It was the first program to broadcast Wimbledon in the U.S., and to cover exotic and far-flung sports like surfing, curling, and jai alai. The producers were right: people who knew little and cared nothing about curling still wanted to see how it came out.

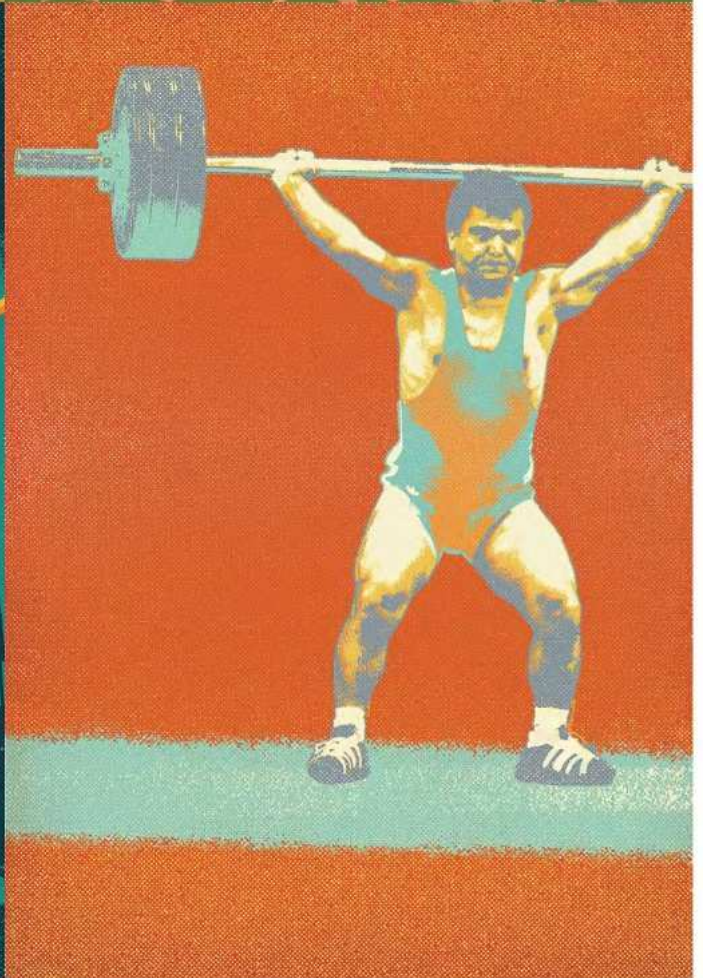
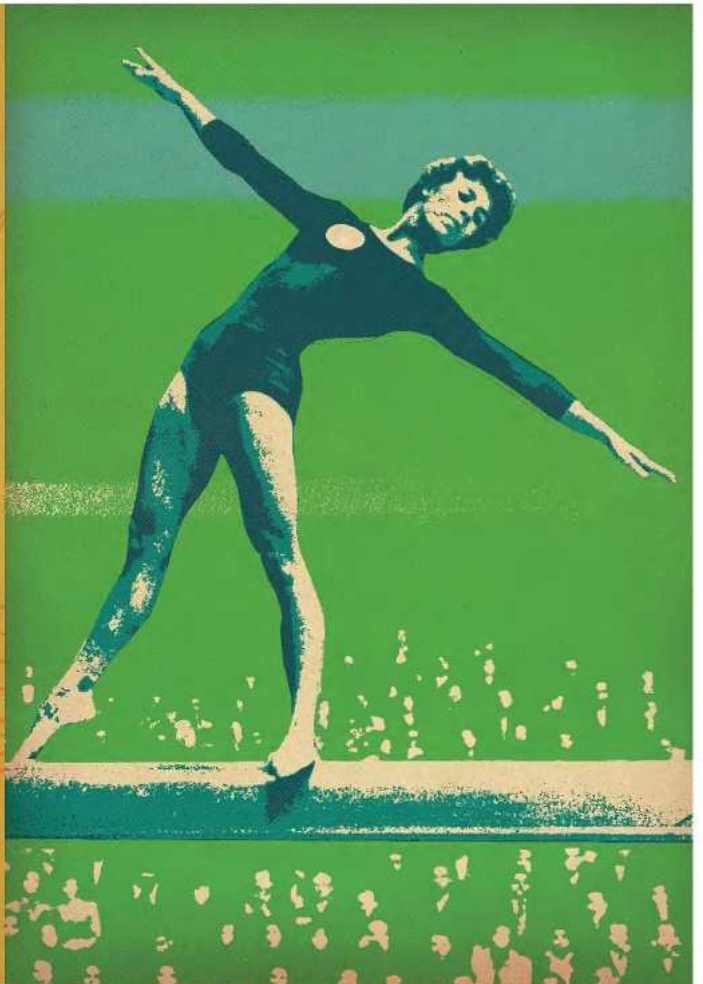
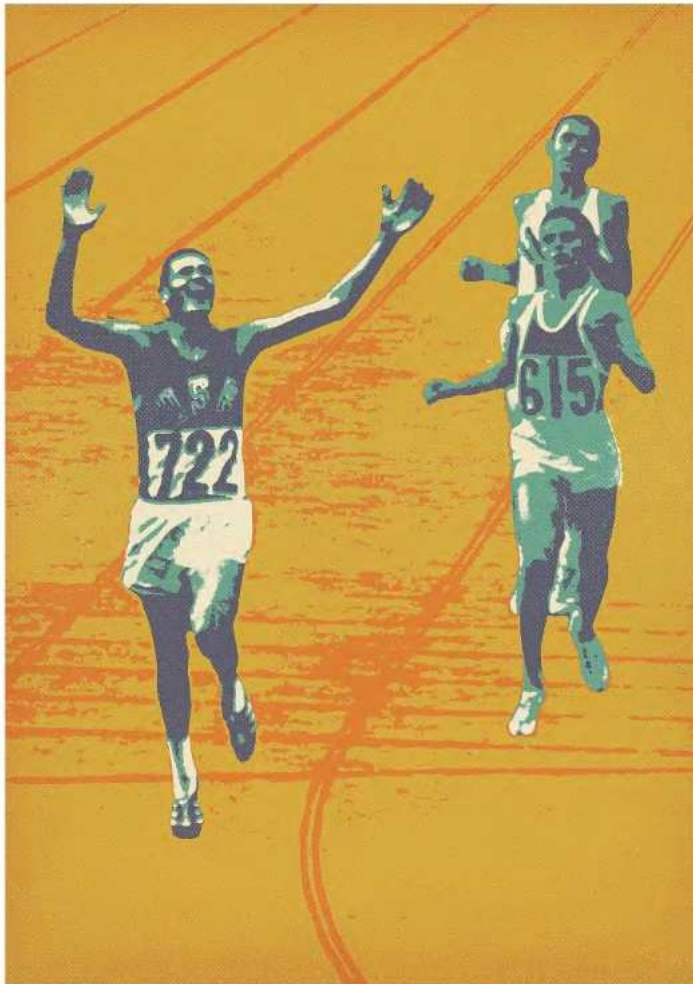
Second, and more important, the show established an intonation, a cadence, a discourse for high-level athletic competition. This was not the hopped-up staccato of ordinary play-by-play. It was weightier, more momentous, more world-historical. “The thrill . . . the agony . . .” It was Churchillian.

That voice is the voice of the Olympics, a competition where contestants pursue not “victory” but “glory.” The London Summer Games are being broadcast from July 25th to August 12th, and although one can complain about the commercialization (Visa, which has a longtime association with the Olympics, has an app that Facebook users can deploy to cheer on athletes who are sponsored by Visa) and the cost (upward of fourteen billion dollars, in a country undergoing drastic cutbacks in social services and with an unemployment rate above eight per cent) and the draconian security precautions (anti-aircraft missiles have been mounted on the rooftops of apartment buildings near the sports venues, over the owners’ objections), the Games will be good to have.

And probably better to have in your own house, rather than over there, because showing people performing

*The runner Billy Mills; the gymnast Larysa Latynina; the weight lifter Naim Süleymanoğlu; the high jumper Dick Fosbury.*

ILLUSTRATION BY JIMMY TURRELL. PHOTOGRAPHS CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: BETTMANN/CORBIS; AP/GETTY; MIKE KING/CORBIS; BETTMANN/CORBIS; OPPOSITE: PHILIPPE WEISBECKER



amazing feats with their bodies is one thing that television does really well. Yes, television organizes the perceptual field—it “tells” you what to look at—but, unless you know the sport and the competitors pretty well beforehand, you are not going to make much sense of what you’re looking at otherwise. The Olympics present themselves as pure spectacle—as Auden said of poetry, the Games appear to make nothing happen—and television loves a spectacle. Even more, television loves a spectacle that has a script, a live event for which every camera angle can be plotted—that is, a ritual.

If someone described to you an ancient civilization in which, every four years, at great expense, citizens convened to watch a carefully selected group perform a series of meticulously preset routines, and in which the watching was thought of not as a duty but as a hugely anticipated and unambiguously pleasurable experience, you would guess that, socially, this ritual was doing a lot of work. You would assume that it was instilling, or reinforcing, or rebooting attitudes and beliefs that this hypothetical civilization regarded—maybe correctly, maybe just superstitiously—as vital to its functioning. You would say that the spectacle had a content. Do these Summer Games have a content? What are we really watching when we watch the Olympics?

A little history is always useful. The Games have a history, but so does every event. Topping the list of helpful companions to this year’s Games is David Wallechinsky’s “Complete Book of the Olympics: 2012 Edition” (Aurum), prepared with Jaime Loucky, a 1,334-page record of every event—results plus, in most cases, detailed highlights—at every Summer Olympics since the first modern Games were held, in Athens, in 1896.

Wallechinsky’s marvellous book reminds us that the issues that have surrounded the Games in our time have been present almost since the start—from politics (nations were banned from or boycotted the Olympics regularly starting in 1920, when Germany and its allies were not allowed to participate) to performance enhancement (long-distance runners once consumed brandy and strychnine as stimulants, sometimes with calamitous results) and prosthetic limbs. Oscar Pistorius, a.k.a. the Blade Runner, the South African sprinter who runs on two carbon-fibre lower legs, will compete this year in London; in the 1904 Games, the American gymnast George Eyser won six medals in one day, including a gold in the vault, with a wooden leg.

Also entertaining are the capsule stories of the athletes themselves. Some are paragons in sports history, legends from

a time before specialization, like Jim Thorpe, who, in the 1912 Stockholm Games, won, by huge margins, both the classic pentathlon and the decathlon, even though it was the first decathlon he had ever competed in; and Babe Didrikson, who was allowed to compete in only three events in the 1932 Games, in Los Angeles. She finished first in two, the javelin throw and the eighty-metre hurdles (a world record), and tied for first in the high jump (another world record). Thorpe was retroactively stripped of his amateur status and his medals when it was discovered, well after the official deadline for filing a challenge, that he had played minor-league professional baseball for two summers before the Olympics. Didrikson, after touring briefly as the only female member of the House of David baseball team, became one of the greatest professional golfers in history.

There are also, in Wallechinsky’s book, many profiles of huge stars in sports that the average American fan doesn’t follow. The Bulgarian-born Turkish weight lifter Naim Süleymanoğlu, for example, won gold medals in three Olympics, from 1988 to 1996. By the time of the 1996 Games, in Atlanta, he was one of the most famous men in Turkey, where he owned twenty-one houses. It was said that the Turkish government had promised to give him a twenty-second house plus ten kilograms of gold if he won again.

In Atlanta, Süleymanoğlu defeated the Greek lifter Valerios Leonidis for the gold medal in an intense final round, in which both athletes broke the world record, and with the spectators in a frenzy because of the long history of hatred between the two nations that the athletes represented. Süleymanoğlu was said to be, pound for pound, the strongest man in the world. To win the medal, he had to clean-and-jerk four hundred and thirteen pounds, almost three times his body weight. He was known as the Pocket Hercules, and lifted in the featherweight division. He was under five feet tall, and smoked fifty cigarettes a day.

“The Complete Book of the Olympics” is for fans, people who need to know who won the most consecutive gold medals in Olympic history (Aladár Gerevich, of Hungary, won a gold in team sabre in



*“Just so you know, I like flowers, too.”*

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six straight Games), or who was the oldest medalist (Oscar Swahn, of Sweden, was seventy-two when he won the silver in team double-shot running deer shooting—whatever that is, I'll have what he's having—in the 1920 Games). For grownups who have a life, "How to Watch the Olympics" (Penguin), by David Goldblatt and Johnny Acton, will suffice. The authors offer information from the ground up about every sport in the Summer Games—they explain why it's worth watching canoeing and field hockey—along with loads of facts about the rules, the scoring, and even the equipment specs.

The width of the women's balance beam, for example, is ten centimetres, a hair under four inches, a measurement thereby associated with more than one female athletic event. In the 2000 Games, women's beach-volleyball players were required to wear bikini suits with a maximum size for the bottom half. (The rule has since been modified.) The diameter of the table-tennis ball has been increased from thirty-eight millimetres to forty, so that spectators have a better chance to see it when it is in play. (A bigger ball also slows down the game.) The authors advise, when watching water polo, to look out for groin grabbing, which is illegal. And so on. Something to browse through during the Visa commercials, which will feature plenty of your favorite Visa-sponsored athletes.

John D. Barrow's "Mathletics: A Scientist Explains 100 Amazing Things About the World of Sports" (Norton) is about sports in general, not just Olympic sports, and may sometimes seem to fly far over the head of the ordinary math slob. We learn, for instance, that the maximum speed,  $V$ , possible for a racewalker is given by the formula  $V^2 = 1/2gL [3\sqrt{(4 - S^2/L^2)} - 4]$ , where  $g$  is the acceleration caused by gravity,  $L$  is the length of the walker's leg, and  $S$  is the length of the stride.

There is a payoff, though. First, the formula explains why racewalkers make that windup-toy hip movement: they're trying to increase  $V$  by effectively increasing  $L$ , the length of their legs. Second, it turns out that world-record speeds in racewalking are mathematically impossible, unless both feet are losing contact with the ground, which is a viola-

## EGGS

We turn out  
as tippy as  
eggs. Legs  
are an illusion.  
We are held  
as in a carton  
if someone  
loves us.  
It's a pity  
only loss  
proves this.

—Kay Ryan

tion of the rules of the sport. It's time to clean up racewalking!

Barrow's larger point is that achievement in sports must comply with the laws of physics. This was, minus the math, my own youthful realization. You can dedicate your life to the sport, but, if you are under six feet tall and weigh less than two hundred pounds, you are never going to throw the discus seventy metres. The motto of athletic competition should not be "Follow your dream." It should be "Follow your reality."

Innovative techniques are therefore basically efforts to tweak one of the coefficients in the equation governing speed, height, or distance in a sport. When you jump, you are exerting energy, by running and pushing off the ground, to raise as high as possible not simply your body but your center of gravity. If you curl into a U shape at the top of your leap, as high jumpers and pole vaulters do, you will be able to clear a bar while your center of gravity passes underneath it. The curvier you become, the greater the height you can achieve. In the 1968 Games, in Mexico City, the American high jumper Dick Fosbury won the gold medal by flipping himself over the bar head first and backward—a technique now known as the Fosbury Flop. He set an Olympic record, which made it a lot easier for people to forget that his leap looked like something out of the Ministry of Silly Jumps, and now every high jumper does it.

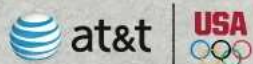
Innovations in equipment are somewhat less noble. Forty-three world records were broken at the 2009 World

Swimming Championships, in Rome. Barrow thinks that one reason for this was the use of seamless whole-body polyurethane swimsuits. He says that these suits not only reduce drag in the water; the fabric also traps tiny pockets of air, which raise the swimmer higher out of the water. Since the drag on a human body is approximately seven hundred and eighty times as great in water as in air, swimmers wearing the suits were able to post faster times. In the London Games, polyurethane swimsuits are banned. Michael Phelps, who has won more Olympic gold medals than anyone, in any sport, threatened, through his coach, to boycott competitions in which the suits were permitted.

Books can't adequately reproduce "the human drama of athletic competition," of course. You need to see it. There are the great races: the Czech runner Emil Zátopek, in Helsinki, in 1952, winning the men's five thousand and ten thousand metres, and then entering the marathon, which he had never competed in before, and breaking the Olympic record; the Ethiopian runner Abebe Bikila winning the marathon running barefoot through the streets of Rome, in 1960; Billy Mills breaking out of the pack and sprinting past Mohamed Gammoudi and Ron Clarke, the world-record holder, as though they were standing still, in the last twenty metres of the ten-thousand-metre race in Tokyo, in 1964; the stork-like Dave Wottle passing seven runners with less than a lap to go to win the eight



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 Author, *The Immigrant's Way*

hundred metres by three one-hundredths of a second in Munich, in 1972.

And the otherworldly gymnasts, who have a different relation to gravity from the rest of us: Larysa Latynina, who won eighteen medals, the most of any athlete ever; Nadia Comăneci, who scored the first perfect ten in gymnastics competition (under a scoring system that has, sadly, been abandoned); the charismatic seventeen-year-old Olga Korbut, whose backward somersaults on the balance beam and the uneven bars, in the 1972 Games, stunned the crowd; sixteen-year-old, four-foot-nine Mary Lou Retton, a human beach ball, who came from behind with two perfect scores to win the all-around in Los Angeles, in 1984, her first international competition; and Kerri Strug, who, despite a sprained ankle, stuck her landing in the vault in Atlanta, in 1996, where the United States won the team gold medal.

There are few more courageous Olympic performances than Strug's. The Japanese gymnast Shun Fujimoto, who, in the 1976 Games, in Montreal, stuck his dismount from the rings on a broken leg and helped his team win the all-around gold medal, gave another. Strug and Fujimoto never fully recovered from their injuries, and Wallechinsky says that, contrary to legend, the U.S. team did not even need Strug's score. It was virtually guaranteed the gold already.

The best resource for moments like these would be the documentary archive of Bud Greenspan, who filmed many Olympics, from the Los Angeles Games, in 1984, to Beijing (he died in 2010)—except that almost none of his work has been issued on DVD. Greenspan also produced compilations and Olympics histories using old footage, and you can get some of these, notably the eight-cassette “Olympiad: Greatest Moments,” in VHS format from online remainder stores.

Greenspan's work is the consummation of the old “Wide World” style. It's unashamedly monumental and oratorical, a combination of Leni Riefenstahl and Ted Baxter. The voice is not merely Churchillian; it's the voice of God. (Actually, up until 1992, it was the voice of David Perry, né Greenspan, brother of Bud.) The campy solemnity—there are a lot of “On this day's, and so forth—is just right for the old “thrill of victory”

sensation. The downside is that, since God already knows how everything turns out, He never gets too excited about any particular event. You miss the animation of live play-by-play. Still, for people who have seen these documentaries on television, where they often turn up, many Olympic moments are really Bud Greenspan moments.

Just about any contemporary sport has corollaries in competitions in the ancient world, or a pedigree in folk games or aristocratic recreations. Competition is natural and spontaneous. Once there were boats, people would race them. Given fists, people will box. Kids contrive all sorts of ad-hoc “sports” based on the shape of their garage roof or the length of the hallway in their apartment or the number of manhole covers on the street outside.

We call these ad-hoc contests games, and one of the ways games get turned into sports is standardization. A sport is a game that, no matter where it takes place, is always played by the same rules. This is not a prerequisite for competition. When someone says, “I'll race you to that tree,” the person who reaches the tree first is the winner. The loser does not complain that the race was not run at regulation distance. Regulation and standardization insure that, when competitors meet, everyone will have trained for the same event, and the results can be compared across competitions. Standardization is what makes it possible to have world records.

The place where most modern sports were standardized was nineteenth-century Britain. The Duke of Wellington probably did not really say, “The Battle of Waterloo was won on the playing fields of Eton” (for one thing, he hated Eton), but athletic competition was a prominent feature of British public-school life. Before the nineteenth century, school games were often idiosyncratic, because of local traditions and conditions. A classic case is the Eton Wall Game, which dates to the eighteenth century, and which can be played only at Eton, since that is where the eponymous wall is. But when schoolboys went on to university they wanted to play the same games they had enjoyed in school, and this was one of the things behind the movement to standardize. Soon,

men were not simply competing in games with their classmates according to whatever rules came to hand; they were training themselves in a sport that was transportable.

And the great means of transportation was the British Navy. Everywhere Englishmen went, they took their games along and taught them to the locals. The British brought modern tennis to the French. Table tennis, a sport now commonly associated with East Asia, is supposed to have started when British officials shaved the corks of their champagne bottles into balls and played the game on the dinner table. It is because of Britain that West Indians play cricket, South Africans play rugby, and Pakistanis play squash. It is because of Britain that the world plays soccer.

The other thing necessary for creating a sport out of a game is organization. Sports have bureaucratic structures: national and international associations, which have police powers to insure standardization, and which organize compe-

titions and tournaments in order to produce No. 1 teams and world champions. Britain was also the leader in this area.

Leagues and tournaments draw larger audiences to a sport, as athletes and teams start to be imagined as representing cities and, on a bigger stage, nations. The Olympics are the biggest stage, and have the largest audience of any sporting event in the world, including the World Cup. According to "How to Watch the Olympics," 4.7 billion people, or seventy per cent of humanity, watched some portion of the Beijing Games. That figure seems hyperbolic, but the Olympics do command a gigantic audience.

It was from Victorian Britain that the founder of the modern Olympics, Pierre de Coubertin, took his inspiration. Coubertin was a French aristocrat with a passionate interest in education. He wanted the French to be more manly, meaning more disciplined and self-reliant (he was reacting partly to the country's defeat, in 1870, in the Franco-Prussian War), and he believed that introducing sports into

education could be the basis for this transformation in the national character. In other words, he wanted the French to be more like the British. He made his first trip to England in 1883, when he was twenty, after reading about British public schools in Hippolyte Taine's "Notes on England" (1872), and he returned frequently.

Around 1890, he heard about an annual event in the town of Much Wenlock, in Shropshire, called the Wenlock Olympian Games. These had been established, in 1850, by a physician named William Penny Brookes, as a means of fortifying British manhood. Coubertin arranged a visit, and Brookes mounted a special Wenlock Games for his guest. They discussed Brookes's efforts to persuade the government of Greece to revive the ancient Games, which were held in Greece from 776 B.C.E. to 393 C.E. or thereabouts—something that Coubertin had also been contemplating.

When Coubertin returned to France, he published an article about the Wen-

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lock Games. If the Olympic idea still survives, he wrote, “it is due not to a Hellene but to Dr. W. P. Brookes.” Britain’s culture of sports, he explained, is the reason for its empire, and he quoted from a speech that Brookes had delivered: “If the time should ever come when the youth of this country once again abandons the fortifying exercises of the gymnasium, the manly games, the outdoor sports that give health and life, in favor of effeminate and pacific amusements, know that that will mean the end of freedom, influence, strength, and prosperity for the whole empire.”

Brookes died in 1895, at the age of eighty-six; less than a year later, Coubertin was finally able to launch, in Athens, the modern Games. He rarely referred to Brookes and his Olympian Games again, but the mascot for this year’s London Games is named Wenlock.

The modern Games could be international from the start because the British had spread standardized versions of most of the Olympic sports around the world. And the Olympics themselves became agents of standardization. In the first modern Olympiads, for example, the length of the marathon was inconsistent. Each marathon course was approximately twenty-five miles, believed to be the length of the route from Marathon to Athens run by Pheidippides in 490 B.C.E. As long as every competitor ran the same distance, it didn’t matter what the precise measurement was. Those first Olympic marathons were essentially “I’ll race you to that tree” events. But, at the 1908 Games, held in London, the course was designed to start at Queen Victoria’s statue at Windsor Castle and to finish in front of the Royal Box in the Olympic stadium. This turned out to be a distance of twenty-six miles three hundred and eighty-five yards. In 1921, that became the regulation length of the marathon.

Standardization was also a way of reprogramming life elsewhere in the default settings of the metropole. In 1896, the European imperial powers governed a large portion of the planet, and the Games were a tribute to their success in spreading their way of life—from the idea that life is essentially competition right down to the unit of measure-

ment—throughout the world. For the first sixty years of the modern Olympics, people from around the globe came to mostly European capitals (two Summer Games were held in the United States) to play European games. You can see residues of the imperial reprogramming in the anomalous-seeming distances in track. The four-hundred-metre race is a descendant of the 440—four hundred and forty yards, or two furlongs—which was run at almost every Olympics until 1952. Fifteen hundred metres is the “metric equivalent” of the mile.

Today, the agents of standardization are not empires but industries, like financial services and telecommunications, that need everyone everywhere to be on the same frequency, so that they can use their products. These businesses are happy to have the old nationalisms as a beard. That’s why we have Team U.S.A., and not Team Visa—even though, in certain respects, Team Visa is what it is.

Twenty-six sports will be played in London this summer, with medals awarded in three hundred and two events. The majority of those medals will be given in sports that originated, in their modern form, in Britain: archery, athletics (track and field), boxing, badminton, field hockey, football (soccer), rowing, sailing, swimming, water polo, table tennis, and tennis. Britain is also the birthplace of curling, cross-country, cricket, croquet, golf, squash, and rugby—which is scheduled to become an Olympic sport in 2016. No other country comes close. Three Olympic sports originated in the United States: basketball, volleyball, and the triathlon, which was invented in 1974. Two originated in Germany: handball and gymnastics.

**T**he modern Olympics are a model example of what the historians Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger have called invented traditions—ritualized official or quasi-official events, often presented as revivals of ancient practices or in other ways designed to imply continuity with the distant past. In the Wenlock Games, for example, the winners knelt and a wreath was placed on their head by a lady.

The late nineteenth century was an inventive time for tradition-making. That’s when many national holidays were created: Independence Day (1870),

Bastille Day (1880), May Day (1890), Columbus Day (1892), Labor Day (1894). Many annual sports championships date from that period, too. The British Open Championship in golf began in 1860, Association football championships in 1871, cricket championships in 1873. Lawn tennis was invented in 1873; Wimbledon started in 1877. The practice of commemorating the fiftieth and hundredth anniversaries of notable persons and events also dates from the late nineteenth century. The celebration throughout the Empire of Queen Victoria’s Golden Jubilee, in 1887, the fiftieth year of her reign, was so successful that it inspired similar anniversary celebrations in other monarchies, and led the British to celebrate, in 1897, her Diamond Jubilee.

Modern societies are still obsessed with these secular rituals, in part because almost all of them have become successfully commercialized. Maybe they offer an illusion of permanence and continuity in a world characterized mainly by mobility, change, and uncertainty. No matter what happens to us next year, there will be a Super Bowl. Or maybe they feed our tribal instincts, stimulate the irrational basis of loyalty to our community or our country. Even the most cosmopolitan American viewer of the Olympics has a hard time not rooting for the American. If you watch, you don’t just want to see how it comes out. You care who wins.

And, despite the virtuous talk about the honor of competing and the comity of sport—and the talk is virtuous, and fine as far as it goes—winning really is what the spectacle is all about. Athletes settle for silver; they win the gold. Is there a hope (though whose hope would it be, exactly?) that watching the Games will recharge our competitive energies, and that we will go back and “win” at our jobs? And are we meant to be reassured, by the closing ceremony, where the athletes commingle without regard to who won medals or what nations they represent, that those we have “defeated” in the Game of Life have no hard feelings? Are we supposed to believe that the reason we honor winners is that competition is the lifeblood of community? Probably. So what? We have the Games, however we got them, whatever they mean. Let them begin! ♦

## BRIEFLY NOTED

**True Believers**, by Kurt Andersen (*Random House*). Set in the very near future, this novel doubles as a social history of the nineteen-sixties. Its narrator, Karen Hollander, is a high-profile lawyer who recently removed her name from consideration for an open spot on the Supreme Court. She has a long-held secret—"the demented thing we did in 1968"—but for much of the book it is unclear whether this is real or imagined. In unravelling that mystery, Andersen spins out a diverting political thriller, which also serves as a vehicle for keen cultural criticism. We are invited to ponder how the rise of rebellious youth culture fed a generation's "adolescent monomania," and how even the era's weightiest moments—from the assassination of J.F.K. to the public outcry against the Vietnam War—have been absorbed into a "canon of slick universal media memories."

**The Age of Miracles**, by Karen Thompson Walker (*Random House*). In this debut novel, Julia, the eleven-year-old narrator, learns that the earth's rotation has begun to slow, with potentially catastrophic consequences. As days and nights lengthen, a contentious divide opens between those on government-mandated "clock time" and the "real-timers," who follow a new diurnal routine. Julia, of course, is just as concerned with the social politics of sixth grade and the inscrutable behavior of her parents as she is with the potential end of the world. Walker creates lovely, low-key scenes to dramatize her premise: a trip Julia takes to a whale-strewn beach with her big-time crush, Seth; an archetypal unsupervised party made uncanny by the presence of steel blackout shutters. The spirit of Ray Bradbury hovers in the mixture of the portentous and the quotidian,

and it just so happens that Julia is reading him in English class.

**America the Philosophical**, by Carlin Romano (*Knopf*). Does America take philosophy seriously? Romano, while conceding the apparent unlikeliness of his conclusion, hails contemporary America as the "most philosophical culture in the history of the world." He provides a comprehensive intellectual history from Emerson to Rawls, with particular emphasis on American pragmatism, but his claims at times seem whimsical: philosophy in America is likened to "a big-budget *Transformers*-type special effects movie"; the ancient Greek rhetorician Isocrates is judged to be the equal of his younger contemporary Socrates. The author presents a survey of the respective philosophical contributions of African-Americans, gays, and women (there is a chapter on each), but his highest compliment is reserved for our sitting President, or the "philosopher-in-chief." "Critics may mock Obama as 'professorial,'" Romano notes, "but they've got the wrong *p* word."

**City**, by P. D. Smith (*Bloomsbury*). This "guidebook for the urban age" ranges from the Mesopotamian cities of Eridu and Ur to the unbuilt cities of the future, which may or may not feature smart electricity grids, rent-by-the-hour "love hotels," and "skyscraper farms" housing chicken and fish that feed on the waste from hydroponic crops. Short chapters cover such subjects as parks, train stations, department stores, hotels, graffiti, gentrification, parking meters, street food, cemeteries, and ruins. Smith's enthusiasm for cities sometimes lapses into a generic boosterism that whitewashes their more pernicious aspects. But the book's hodgepodge structure excitingly mirrors the improvised order of cities themselves, and Smith encourages his readers to "wander and drift," a strategy liable to generate surprising juxtapositions—as between urban birds, which sing at a higher pitch than birds in the country, and the police drones that fly above the streets of Liverpool.

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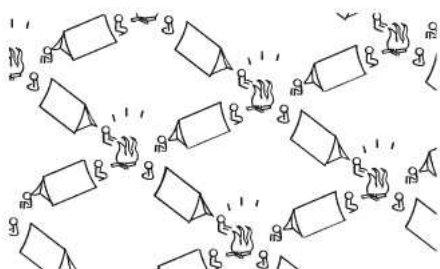
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## THE ART WORLD

# MACHINE DREAMS

*A cabinet of curiosities at the New Museum.*

BY PETER SCHJELDAHL

"Ghosts in the Machine," at the New Museum, is a big, busy historical show of wonky art, rummaging in old romances with the technological sublime. There are hundreds of works, ranging from early-twentieth-century drawings by asylum inmates who felt invaded by machinery to relics of utopian movements that flared and faded in the nineteen-fifties and sixties. Clusters of retina-jangling Op and motorized kinetic art revisit brief fashions of the sixties that somewhat reward second looks. Rube Goldberg drawings add populist garnish. Tours de force include an unattributed, handsomely nasty materialization of the lethal torture apparatus in Kafka's story "In the Penal Colony" (1919), with a rack of tattoo needles that are poised to riddle the condemned. (The piece was commissioned for a show in Switzerland in 1975.) Another reconstructs the filmmaker Stan VanDerBeek's "Movie-Drome" (1963-66), the top, domed part of a farm silo that has been outfitted as a chamber of flashing film and slide projections and recorded sounds and music—a labor-intensive, breakdown-prone generator of engulfing effects, of a kind that computers and video gear have since made a snap. Poignant tones of obsolete invention and naïve optimism suffuse the show. Nothing spoils faster than the future. But there's much to ponder, looking back from a present in which whiz-bang technology is no longer a wave but an ocean.

There should be more shows like this raid on the attic of modern culture. "Ghosts" bypasses canonical modernism, mostly ignoring the familiar machine-inspired stylings of Futurists, Dadaists, Russian Constructivists, and adherents of the Bauhaus. The curators, Massimiliano Gioni and Gary Carrion-Murayari, concentrate on things that were true to their moments but barely outlasted them, if at all. The result is a field of sputtering dreams. Gioni terms the show a *Wunderkammer*, or cabinet of curiosities—on a model, dating from the sixteenth cen-

tury, that prefigured museums of natural history. Collections of stunningly odd phenomena—a unicorn horn (actually, a narwhal tusk), say, or a two-headed fetus, along with stuffed exotic animals and rare plant and mineral specimens—beggared comprehension, pending the triumph of scientific study. "Ghosts" brings a similar spirit to unsorted art and artifacts of machinery-dizzied modernity, each item strange in its own way.

It's a wordy show, packed with lengthy wall texts that, exceptionally, are worth reading for the cumulative high of intellectual adventure they generate. The writers invoked, besides Kafka, include Raymond Roussel (1877-1933), the eccentric French author who devised quasi-mechanical methods for composing his outlandish tales; Fritz Kahn (1888-1968), a German gynecologist who, in words and elaborate drawings, conceived of the human body as a machine; the psychoanalyst Viktor Tausk, a student of Freud who wrote of "influencing machines" in the pathology of schizophrenics; and the icily brilliant J. G. Ballard, whose science fiction foresees no happy outcomes for hookups of technology with human nature. Alan Turing—a father of computer science, who died at the age of forty-one, in 1954, perhaps by suicide (he was persecuted for his homosexuality)—is the subject of a recent informative, graceful suite of collages about his life, achievements, and ordeals by a Danish artist, Henrik Olesen. The "Turing test," designed to gauge the capacity of computers to fake human intelligence, provides a pretty good over-all metaphor for the brainy poetics of "Ghosts in the Machine." "Can machines think?" Turing asked. It depends on what you mean by "think," he remarked.

Inevitably, the show's spectral doyen is Marcel Duchamp. A small re-creation of his "Large Glass" (1915-23)—also titled "The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even"—presides as an icon for renegade urges to complicate, if not to destroy,

conventional notions of what art is and is not. Duchamp never stops intoxicating young artists with his games of logic, which tantalize by falling just short of making ultimate sense. What the work means, in what way, seems within reach but safely beyond grasp, like a dangled cat toy. Your response depends on how much—for best results, obsessively—you

what survives from the movements is tedious gimmickry.

Another disappointment in “Ghosts” is the re-creation, which I had been eager to see, of a 1955 show, “Man, Machine and Motion,” by Richard Hamilton, a leading artist in the British Independent Group, a sociology-minded project that involved Ballard and the architecture

day of omnipresent technology, which operates invisibly and can be understood only in terms of what we do with it. The old analogies between machines and human bodies are defunct. Most of our new instruments feel bodiless, unless as compacted brain stuff. They don’t even seem quite real as manufactured devices, at least until they break. This disconnection



Richard Hamilton’s “Man, Machine and Motion,” of 1955, re-created for the exhibition. Photograph by Sylvia Plachy.

like to think. Duchamp is, as well, an avatar of ever-popular sex in the head. The assorted mechanical forms, the bachelors, at the bottom of the “Glass” supposedly yearn toward the more sinuous doodads of the bride, above. This arcane fiction has transfixed generations of followers who glory in feeling libidinous while proving themselves super-smart.

A couple of the show’s excavated avant-gardes demonstrate pitfalls, for art, of chasing technocratic chimeras. An Italian cohort called Arte Programmata, which was supplied with theory by the young Umberto Eco and sponsored by Olivetti, and an international group, Nouvelle Tendance, that exhibited in Zagreb, Yugoslavia, flung themselves into engineering kinetic and optical devices, meant to improve the world in ways that were never exactly clear. A few substantial artists grazed those force fields. One is François Morellet, the author of a mural, from 1963, that is the inspiration for a new work created for the museum’s ground floor: thousands of little red and blue squares, arranged according to the sequence of even and odd numbers in pi. It’s funny and gorgeous. Most of

critic Reyner Banham, and which coined the rubric “Pop art.” The Hamilton show is a dull maze of archival photographs documenting progress in the design of cars, planes, and whatnot. At the time, for an artist to care about such things had a certain frisson, but it soon fizzled out.

Aesthetic relief arrives with beautiful installations, in darkened rooms, by the German Otto Piene, whose arrangement of light-emitting sculptures suggests a disco for angels, and by the Italian Gianni Colombo. Colombo’s “Elastic Space” (1967-68) consists of a 3-D grid of white elastic cords, under ultraviolet light. Some of the cords are slowly pulled out of and back into plumb by an unseen motor. The work imposes an amazingly peaceable state of mind. You’ll want to linger with it. Colombo was a participant in Arte Programmata who anticipated the better kinds of installational art that would become standard fare of biennial exhibitions worldwide. Such work doesn’t particularly come from or go anywhere, in the unfolding history of art or of anything else. But so what? It’s nice.

The future has come a cropper in our

doesn’t end our deep desire to humanize things that relate us to the world. It just sets the desire to wandering, abstractly, amid images of images—seeking some that will stop and ground us, even unpleasantly. I found one in “Ghosts.” It is a circa-1952 black-and-white picture by the great stop-motion photographer Harold Edgerton: an atom-bomb test, in Nevada. Detonating atop a steel tower, the embryonic fireball is a livid, dimpled, fleshy shape, no bigger than a house. It is beautiful in a way that the artist Jack Goldstein—who, in the eighties, phlegmatically painted spectacles of war and storm, and who is also in the show—once described: “An explosive is beauty before its consequences.”

Every technological advance is violent, altering the world in a flash. “Ghosts” is about the pleasures and the dreads that artists, the most excitable of people, have taken in such onsets before their never predictable consequences. The show is a *Wunderkammer*, indeed, of inspired misapprehensions, which say little about machines and a lot about the foolish, now and then adorable creatures who make and use them. ♦

# FOOLS OF FORTUNE

*The prescient "Timon of Athens."*

BY JOHN LAHR



*Rich man, poor man: Simon Russell Beale as Shakespeare's ruined, rage-filled hero.*

In every strapped corner of Britain these days, when two or three people are gathered together, the talk is of banks, bailouts, and bonuses. Money is short; tales of greed are long. Nicholas Hytner's splendid, modern-dress production of "Timon of Athens" (at London's National Theatre until November 1st, and then shown, as part of the NT Live program, at more than a hundred movie theatres across the United States) is a ferocious fable about money and its corrupting power, which is as up-to-the-minute as the collapse of the mortgage markets. The cover of the program announces Hytner's mischievous game: look-alikes of Madonna, Tony Blair, David Beckham, and London's mayor, Boris Johnson, fawn over Timon (Simon

Russell Beale), a saturnine, white-haired, deep-pocketed sugar daddy, who stares straight ahead, unsmiling, amid the hubbub of flattery.

"Timon of Athens," which is rarely staged, was written around 1607 but never performed in Shakespeare's lifetime. (Thomas Middleton is credited as a co-author.) A curious, unfinished hybrid, it made its way into the 1623 Folio edition only after "Troilus and Cressida" was pulled for copyright reasons. It's not hard to see why Shakespeare put "Timon" in his trunk: the play, in which the well-heeled Timon gives away so much money to his so-called friends that he ruins himself, can't decide if it's a comedy or a tragedy; its characters have humors but lack depth; the plot is thin, with few dramatic

reversals, and Timon's trajectory from philanthropy to misanthropy is a precipitous straight line. Hate—the white heat of confounding disgust—is what thrills and liberates the audience, whose members feel as impotent and outraged as Timon at his economic meltdown.

Hytner's deft production begins not with Timon's "magic of bounty" but with what that bounty keeps at arm's length: the poor. As the audience arrives, onstage is a tent encampment of Occupy London protesters, who are symbolically erased from view at curtain rise, when the lights dim and the elegant, high-ceilinged "Timon Room" descends—a museum gallery dedicated to its benefactor, where waiters stand with canapés and champagne and the rich rub elbows beneath El Greco's enormous painting "Christ Driving the Money Changers from the Temple." (The cunning set is by Tim Hatley.) In this gala scrum, Timon skitters among clusters of grovelling glitterati like a lumpy water bug. While people vie for Timon's patronage, El Greco's image of rough justice hangs over them—and him—in silent comment. "Poor honest lord, brought low by his own heart," Flavia (Deborah Findlay), Timon's steward, says when his lavish spending finally ruins him. But is Timon bighearted, or even honest?

Timon is unique among Shakespeare's characters in having no origins—no parents, no wife, no children, but only his chosen family of friends, whom he binds to himself with the power of his extraordinary generosity. His compulsive giving can be explained by his lack of a past—and all the trauma and fragility that implies. Giving makes him feel strong; it also magnifies the distance between him and others. "I have often wished myself poorer, that I might come nearer to you," he says. Beale is one of the outstanding Shakespearean actors of his era; with his brilliant choices, he takes Timon well beyond the parameters of a "vivid cartoon," as Harold Bloom has called him. Beale's Timon is a wary bundle of sexless congeniality, lurching away from one gold-digger who tries to smooch him and wiping his hands fastidiously after another's excessive greeting. Even as the sea of big fish churns around him, he exists in a palpable, awful isolation. Money is his erotic connection. For all his palaver about "true friendship" and the heroics of largesse ("Tis not enough to help the feeble

up, / But to support him after"), the gifts that he hands out like nuts at Christmas are his way of seducing, possessing, and controlling the world.

Timon gives his servant Lucilius (Stavros Demetraki) a sort of matching grant that allows him to marry his better-off fiancée; he stands bail for the indebted Ventidius (the droll Tom Robertson); he buys art from the Painter (Penny Layden), and he even gives away his horse to a friend who admires it. If someone tries to give him a gift, however, he feels compelled to trump it. When Ventidius repays his generosity twice over with interest, for instance, Timon tears up the check. "There's none / Can truly say he gives, if he receives," he says. In fact, Timon can't receive; to feel gratitude would be to feel dependent, and to feel dependent would be to feel helpless, something that his whole pathological performance is set up to avoid. When Timon has a mortgage crisis of his own, and his beloved friends won't lend money back to him, his loss is an existential as well as a fiscal blow; true to form, he repays the humiliation in spades. He throws one last feast. As his servants wait to place the covered dishes before the seated guests, Timon ends a toast by saying, "For these my present friends, as they are to me nothing, so in nothing bless them, and to nothing are they welcome. Uncover, dogs, and lap." Timon serves up shit, daubing their faces with it and, as they run for cover, throwing filth, not filthy lucre, at them. It's a sensational, satisfying scene, full of Shakespearean music. "Live loathed and long, / Most smiling, smooth detested parasites," Timon bellows as they scarp. This is a social suicide that prefigures Timon's actual one.

Wealth allowed Timon to live the teenage fantasy of having everything all the time; he had "the world as my confectionary." Inevitably, when he loses everything, he still behaves like an adolescent. The violent innocence of Act I flips, in Act II, to innocent violence, and Timon's roaring, nearly insane rage against society and the rich is probably the longest sustained temper tantrum in theatrical history. "Bankrupts, hold fast; / Rather than render back, out with your knives / And cut your trusters' throats! Bound servants, steal: / Your solemn masters are large-handed robbers / And filch by law," he says, in the first of many intemperate curses. Al-

though Timon's tone and his circumstances change dramatically, his passion for ignorance remains the same. By Act II, he is a tramp sleeping on the London streets. "Destruction fang mankind!" he says, never once acknowledging his own part in his downfall. (The absence of nuance is what makes Timon a satiric, rather than a tragic, figure.) Shakespeare, the most paradoxical of playwrights, has created a character for whom everything is black or white, never straying into ambiguity's realm of gray. "The middle of humanity thou never knewest, but the extremity of both ends," the cynical philosopher Apemantus (the excellent Hilton McRae) tells him. Timon presents himself to Apemantus as the scourge of the hypocritical. "I am sick of this false world," he says, adding, to himself, "Then, Timon, presently prepare thy grave." Behind his suicidal wish, it seems to me, is the knowledge that on some level he, too, is counterfeit. Drawn to the purification of the sea, Timon, a man without an anchor to his past or to his present, drowns himself.

Before he dies, while scrounging amid garbage, Timon finds some treasure, which he now sees as an expression of anarchic magic that can turn "black white, foul fair, wrong right." When the dispossessed surface out of the darkness to shake him down for the money, he rains coins and prescriptive curses on them ("Do villainy," "Rob one another," "Cut throats," "Break open shops"). Even the rabble-rousing revolutionary Alcibiades (Ciarán McMenamin), who is leading the citizens against the government of Athens, gets his wedge from Timon to pay for soldiers and "make confusion." At the finale, the rebels, sitting across from the senators at a long desk—whose green baize surface makes it look like a craps table—make peace and join the establishment. "Now we go in content to Liberty," Alcibiades says, in the production's ironic last line, imported, by Hytner, from "As You Like It." Behind him, through a window, we can see Canary Wharf and the logo of HSBC, the bank that, just a few weeks ago, was caught laundering money for Middle Eastern terrorists and Mexican drug cartels. Hytner's limpid, exhilarating show about financial corruption hits a real and raw nerve. In its gaudy shadows, Timon's tale of collapse catches not only the fragility of the British economy but the unnerving immanence of the collapse of its ruling elite. ♦

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## HOME TURF

*"Killer Joe" and "Klown."*

BY ANTHONY LANE



Matthew McConaughey, Emile Hirsch, and Juno Temple in William Friedkin's film.

The new William Friedkin movie, "Killer Joe," starts with thunder and lightning, pelting rain, the yaps of a tethered dog, a down-at-heel Texas trailer park, and the static fuzz on a TV screen when there's nothing left to watch. All of which suggests that Friedkin, now seventy-six, has lost little of his gift for mild restraint. At an age when many men consider it a trial of strength to carry their own pitching wedge, he still devotes himself to finding the optimum angle at which a young man, sprawled in a vacant lot, can be filmed having his head kicked in by a couple of bikers. Whether this signals an enviable zest, on Friedkin's part, or whether it's just a bit sad, every viewer must decide.

The young man is Chris (Emile Hirsch), who is six thousand dollars in debt. He bangs on a trailer door, which opens to reveal his stepmother, Sharla (Gina Gershon)—or, to be precise, the unclothed lower half of his stepmother. For all I know, this may be Friedkin's idea of a formal introduction. Sharla is married

to Ansel (Thomas Haden Church), who is devoid of both energy and cunning. "I ain't had a thousand dollars in my whole life," he says. But Chris—a major contender, in an admittedly strong field, for the dumbest person in the film—has a plan. He will do away with his mother, whose life is insured, Chris believes, for fifty thousand bucks. This unusual course of action meets with general approval. Sharla thinks it's a good idea. Ansel thinks it's a good idea. So does Dottie (Juno Temple), Chris's younger sister. "I heard y'all talkin' about killin' Momma," she says. "I think it's a good idea." They might as well be discussing a mortgage.

The cleverest thing in "Killer Joe," which was adapted by Tracy Letts from his stage play, is that we never see the mother—except once, very briefly, when she is not looking her best. Nor do we catch more than a glimpse of her current beau, though both of them, like Hitchcock's Rebecca, loom large in the movie, and in the imagination of other folk. That narrative slyness is especially welcome in

Friedkin, acting as a palliative to the sensory overdose in which he habitually deals; such a contrast was nowhere to be seen in "Bug" (2006), a film that sent me straight from the cinema to the pharmacy in search of anti-itch cream, but we find it in the first half of "Killer Joe," thanks to the title character. Joe (Matthew McConaughey) is a police detective with, as Chris says, "a little business on the side." For a fee, Joe will commit murder. Chris can't pay him up front, but they come to an alternative agreement: Joe can have Dottie as a retainer.

All the performers nerve themselves for this gothic task. Juno Temple, doll-frail, allows Dottie to teeter between the ingenuous and the knowing, while Church shows us a big man rendered pliable and powerless. But this is McConaughey's movie. Texas-born, he is always at his best on home turf, whether as the hazy Wooderson, in "Dazed and Confused" (1993), or as the lawman in "Lone Star" (1996), whereas, when he wandered off into "Sahara" (2005), the whole world giggled behind his back. In the new film, he gives one fond and musing speech—"I grew up lookin' at Oklahoma, from the south bank of the Red River"—that may be the most placid interlude in any Friedkin film, and the cinematographer, Caleb Deschanel, backs it up with some tack-sharp images of busy pizza parlors and empty pool halls, where life clatters on or comes to a lonely halt.

What McConaughey is doing here, as he does in "Magic Mike," is clambering out of a rut. In the past dozen years, he has mostly got stuck in a loop of romantic comedies, deploying that low, indolent drawl of his as a tool of come-hither charm; it's no less effective in "Killer Joe," but the snares in his voice are now baited with money and lust. If only the film didn't let him down with such a thump. What Friedkin fails to realize is that McConaughey is most frightening when he is most polite; as he praises Dottie for her tuna casserole, or gets the family to hold hands for grace before dinner, the shimmer of threat beneath that courteous croon is so overpowering that you can feel the food sticking in their throats. Nothing more is required, but the movie, as it nears its spasmodic finale, insists on giving us everything we feared, and more: prolonged sexual indignity, gunshots to the stomach, and closeups of men and women

alike being punched so hard that their faces fracture. Why? What does this add to the brew of what went before? First we dreaded, and now we simply wince. Even if you like your movies sick and black, as many people do, it's hard to miss the irony: in the very act of trying to intensify his Southern tale, Friedkin dilutes the impact. Just because screen violence shows—or purports to show—the scarification of flesh does not tighten a film's clutch upon our feelings, let alone its claim to truthfulness. On the contrary; sticks and stones can break fake bones, but, as McConaughey proves, in his quieter moments, words can really hurt us.

**E**xcess of a different kind runs through “Klown.” The first thing to say about Mikkel Norgaard’s film is: Relax, nobody wears face paint and a red nose or rides a tricycle. The second thing is: If you thought Chris and Ansel were a confederacy of dunces, get a load of Frank (Frank Hvam) and his friend Casper (Casper Christensen), the least great Danes ever whelped. Just when you think that one is the more outstanding cretin, the other stakes his claim. Frank has a squashed face, with too much nose and chin, plus eyes that blink at the world through chunky spectacles; it’s been a while since I’ve witnessed anyone quite so expressively blank. Like most men over thirty, he looks even daffier with the addition of a baseball cap. Casper is more dapper, more suave, and more appealing to women, except that he’s not. He just thinks he is. In truth, these harassed, middle-class guys are a perfect match, perhaps because the movie is the culmination of “Klown,” a Danish TV show that ran from 2005 to

2009. Hvam and Christensen created it, and starred in all sixty episodes, and so they arrive at Norgaard’s film with their interplay—their effortless capacity to send each other on the wrong track—refined to a catastrophic T.

The plot makes “Borat” look like “L.A. Confidential.” Frank and Casper go on a canoeing trip through the Danish wilderness, although, given that they keep rounding a bend and finding a rock festival or a country house, where an orgy is in full swing, the human activity seems wilder than anything nature can supply. The pair were meant to go alone, but, in a burst of misguided inspiration, Frank—who is soon to have a child, with his girlfriend, Mia (Mia Lyhne), and needs to prove his worth—takes along his nephew, a glum and chubby thirteen-year-old named Bo (Marcuz Jess Petersen). If we were watching a Hollywood comedy, this would be a cue for careful bonding, with the kid gradually drawn out of himself and the feckless adult impelled to take responsibility. Norgaard does nudge things in that direction, with an arcadian sequence in which Bo is taught to swim and our weary adventurers, rescued by a motherly cottage dweller (Marie Mondrup), are given a stack of pancakes and a bed for the night. The idyll soon collapses, however, thanks to an unfortunate threesome, and from here pretty much anything is swept through the floodgates: stoner gags, muddy white underpants, drunken teenagers, armed holdups, a slew of penile-measuring jokes, a prison term, a near-drowning, and a vivid demonstration of what Casper calls “man-flirting,” complete with its logical conclusion.

Whether all the above reaches your

cinema is hard to say; I like the sound of a preview that took place at the Alamo Drafthouse, in Austin, Texas, where viewers were warned that they would shortly be seeing things that they could “never unsee.” Indeed, early reports suggested little more than a steaming gumbo of the gross and the embarrassing—two strains of comedy that have scored well everywhere, in recent years, and that leave me sadly unmoved. But “Klown” is something else; its closing scene may be a nod to “The Hangover,” and it’s sure to be targeted at the same audience, yet the impression that lingers is not merely of raunchiness, or shock tactics, or jovial humiliation. Rather, under cover of that chaos, the film inserts a coruscating portrait of men; their folly is all-consuming, whether they are passive fools, like Frank, or proactive fools, like Casper. The awful thing about an early mishap in the bedroom, involving Mia’s mother (don’t ask), is that Frank was urged in that direction by his peers at a local book club, including one older gentleman who should know better. But that’s the point; no man ever knows better. Even when the male of the species tries to *do* better, he does his worst; and the most merciless verdict in “Klown” is delivered not by the law, or by fate, but by the eyes of women. Now and then, the camera cuts away to Mia, or to Frank’s wife, and the look on their faces—steady, pragmatic, resigned, yet essentially disbelieving—tells you everything. You can read their silent prayer: Dear God, send away the clowns. ♦

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Richard Brody blogs about movies.

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## CARTOON CAPTION CONTEST

Each week, we provide a cartoon in need of a caption. You, the reader, submit a caption, we choose three finalists, and you vote for your favorite. Caption submissions for this week's cartoon, by Corey Pandolph, must be received by Sunday, August 5th. The finalists in the July 23rd contest appear below. We will announce the winner, and the finalists in this week's contest, in the August 27th issue. The winner receives a signed print of the cartoon. Any resident of the United States, Canada (except Quebec), Australia, the United Kingdom, or the Republic of Ireland age eighteen or over can enter or vote. To do so, and to read the complete rules, visit [newyorker.com/captioncontest](http://newyorker.com/captioncontest).

### THE WINNING CAPTION



*"Could you go back to the front desk? The receptionist has some forms for you to fill out."*  
Adam Hackbarth, O'Fallon, Mo.



### THE FINALISTS

*"The hairs on my chinny chin chin got caught in your damn escalator."*

Claudia McGoldrick, Cape May Court House, N.J.

*"Whenever I eat an apple, everyone assumes that I'm dead."*  
Bill Kessler, Los Angeles, Calif.

*"Stop sending me spam!"*  
Sean Lynch, Brooklyn, N.Y.

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