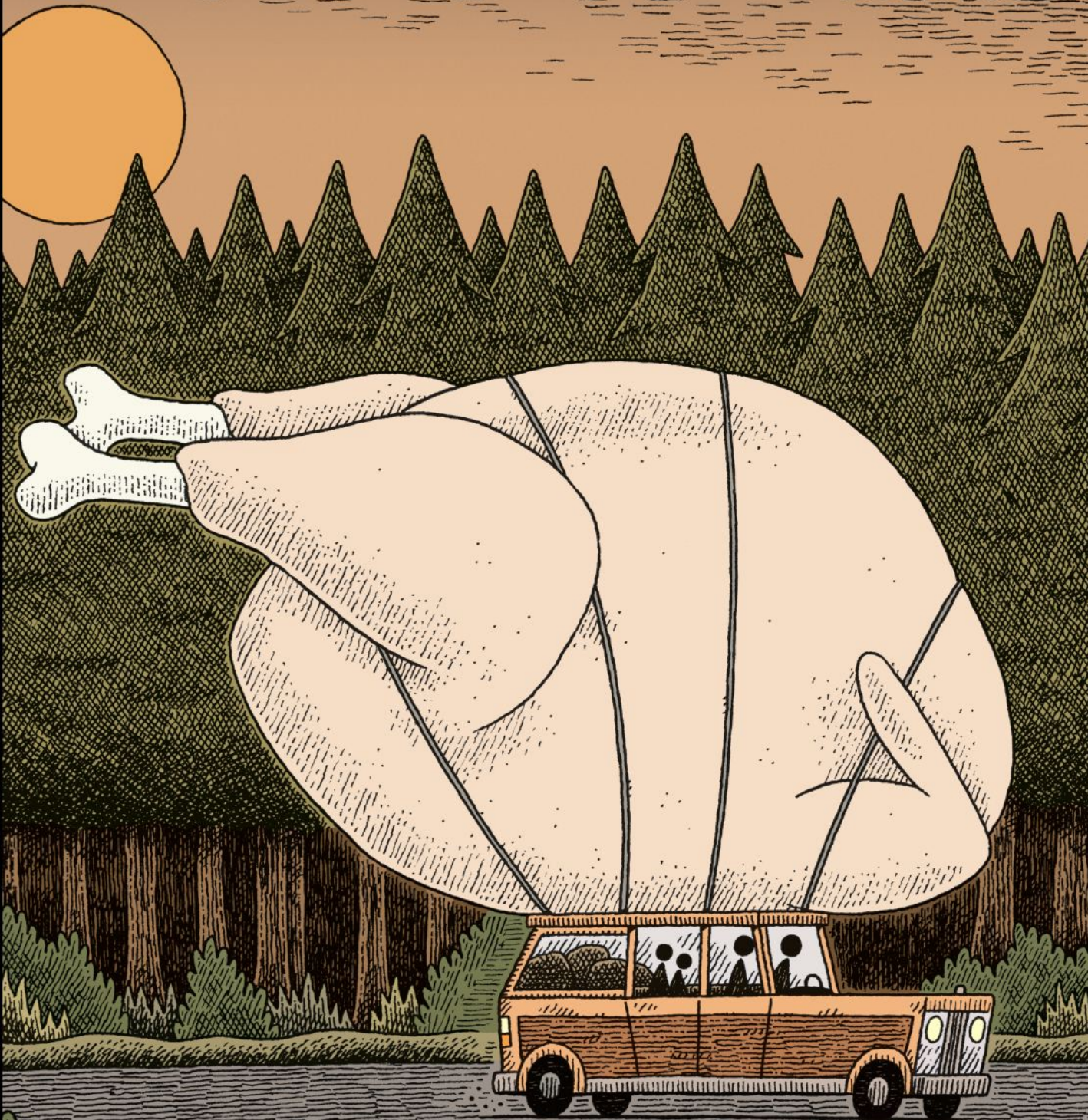


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NEW YORKER



TOM GAULD



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THE MAIL

MOCK THE VOTE

George Packer, in his analysis of the poor participation rates in the November elections, writes that voters are increasingly cynical (Comment, November 18th). I am one of those disillusioned voters. The municipal election here in Norman, Oklahoma, involved a single question, a yes-or-no vote to, yet again, pass a utility rate increase. I am sure that the city council debated the issue, and that the city planner's office had input, along with local bankers, bond underwriters, real-estate developers, and the Chamber of Commerce. The argument in favor of an increase was that much of the change would be geared toward usage and was therefore fair. But usage is not strictly correlated to income: a wealthy person living alone in a mansion may end up paying proportionately less than a working family of four living in a small tract home. I was so frustrated by the lack of choice on the ballot that I went to my polling place, signed the register, received my ballot, wadded it up, and walked out. When I got home, I threw it away. I think the public recognizes that by the time an election is held there is little or no choice. That is one reason a majority of eligible voters do not go to the polls. Others go out of some sense of duty, as I do. Usually, they scratch their heads, then hold their noses, and vote. I think that if more people really cared about democracy and acted out their frustration, lots of ballots would get wadded up and tossed. Maybe the political class would begin to worry a little more about its ability to manipulate elections and the masses if more people would "occupy" the vote.

Larry Bierman
Norman, Okla.

Packer, citing the *Times* columnist Joe Nocera, presents some options for raising voting rates. These include moving Election Day to the weekend; allowing all voters to cast ballots in primaries; matching small campaign donations with public funds; having nonpartisan commissions draw up congressional

districts; and making voting mandatory, as it is in Australia. But, since saving time and money seems to be the most important incentive in the twenty-first century, carrots, rather than sticks, would probably be more successful. How about online voting from home? A "pay me to vote" tax credit of a hundred dollars on the following April's tax return could even be dressed up by politicians as a tax cut. I would be surprised if the two together did not dramatically increase voter-participation rates.

Ira Sohn
New York City

FAT OF THE LAND

John Colapinto, in his reporting on the lucrative market in used cooking oil, doesn't mention some of the other cargo hauled by rendering company trucks ("Hot Grease," November 18th). In Kentucky, a few years ago, Griffin Industries trucks, known as "dead wagons," roamed the countryside in search of carcasses of livestock, horses, and mules. On a particularly hot and humid August morning, the smell of death keeping us inside, my father telephoned to have someone pick up a bloated steer lying close to the road, in perfect "hooking" position. Griffin's driver, seemingly oblivious of the smell, hoisted the slimy, maggot-infested mass inside the two-ton truck. When he jumped back in the cab, I asked him, "Sir, what in the world do y'all do with that rot?" "Hon," he said, grinning, "it's boiled down. The flesh goes into cat and dog food, but the fine skim on top goes into ladies' cosmetics!" Today, farmers deliver dead livestock directly to the processing plant in Russelville.

Emily Marshall
Trenton, Ky.

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

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NOV/DEC 2013 WEDNESDAY 27TH THURSDAY 28TH FRIDAY 29TH SATURDAY 30TH SUNDAY 1ST MONDAY 2ND TUESDAY 3RD

THE STUDIO MUSEUM in Harlem's new exhibition, "The Shadows Took Shape," borrows its title from a poem by the jazz musician Sun Ra, whose visionary aesthetic—part sci-fi, part sorcery—was named Afrofuturism after his death. Twenty-six artists testify to the movement's ongoing relevance and its global reach, from Nairobi, where Cyrus Kabiru made fantastical hybrids of eyewear and masks out of scrap metal, glass beads, and bottle caps, to Brooklyn, where Saya Woolfalk (pictured above, in the second row from the top, with other artists in the show) directed an inspired video, with music by D.J. Spooky, that seems to capture the color-splashed rituals of outer-planetary mystics who have landed on Earth.

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 THE THEATRE | NIGHT LIFE
 THE HOLIDAYS

PHOTOGRAPH BY CHRISTAAN FELBER

ART



MUSEUMS SHORT LIST

METROPOLITAN MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 82nd St.
(212-535-7710)—“Jewels by JAR.”
Through March 9.

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART
11 W. 53rd St. (212-708-9400)—“Isa
Genzken.” Through March 10.

HOMA PSI
22-25 Jackson Ave., Queens (718-784-
2084)—“Mike Kelley.” Through Feb. 2.

GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 89th St.
(212-423-3500)—“Christopher Wool.”
Through Jan. 22.

WHITNEY MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART
Madison Ave. at 75th St. (212-570-3600)—
“Rituals of Rented Island: Object
Theater, Loft Performance, and the New
Psychodrama—Manhattan, 1970-1980.”
Through Feb. 2.

BROOKLYN MUSEUM
200 Eastern Parkway (718-638-5000)—
“War/Photography: Images of Armed
Conflict and Its Aftermath.” Through
Jan. 19.

**AMERICAN MUSEUM OF
NATURAL HISTORY**
Central Park W. at 79th St. (212-769-
5100)—“The Power of Poison.” Through
Aug. 10.

JEWISH MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 92nd St.
(212-423-3200)—“Chagall: Love, War, and
Exile.” Through Feb. 2.

MORGAN LIBRARY & MUSEUM
225 Madison Ave., at 36th St.
(212-685-0008)—“Beethoven’s Ninth: A
Masterpiece Reunited.” Through Dec. 1.

NEW MUSEUM
235 Bowery, at Prince St. (212-219-1222)—
“Chris Burden: Extreme Measures.”
Through Jan. 12.

NEW-YORK HISTORICAL SOCIETY
170 Central Park W., at 77th St. (212-
873-3400)—“The Armory Show at 100:
Modern Art and Revolution.” Through
Feb. 23.

STUDIO MUSEUM IN HARLEM
144 W. 125th St. (212-864-4500)—“The
Shadows Took Shape.” Through
March 9.

OF NOTE MORGAN LIBRARY & MUSEUM “LEONARDO DA VINCI: TREASURES FROM THE BIBLIOTECA REALE”

The best reason to see this small show is the “Codex on the Flight of Birds,” written between 1505 and 1506, and never before seen in New York. In the margins of the treatise on avian motion and the possibility of human flight, birds climb, dive, and speed ahead, trailed by vaporous dashes. The eighteen folios blow Leonardo’s artistic efforts, exhibited alongside works by other Italian masters, out of the water. His metalpoint sketch for the “Virgin of the Rocks,” done circa 1480, is a fine drawing of a young woman, head turned and eyes gazing over her shoulder. But it pales in comparison to his designs for a machine that would enable soldiers to scale a tower during a naval siege, or his thrillingly precise depictions of dragonflies. Through Feb. 2.

MUSEUMS AND LIBRARIES

Metropolitan Museum “Silla: Korea’s Golden Kingdom”

This surprising and, at times, ravishing show follows the dynasty that ruled most of the Korean peninsula in the first millennium A.D. Stone cups and drinking horns evoke the material culture of early Silla, when the kingdom’s rulers adorned themselves with exquisite ornaments in life as in death—one elaborate necklace, excavated from a tomb in Gyeongju, features a jade pendant and hundreds of tiny leaflike gold adornments, each one meticulously stippled. (Like many objects here, the necklace is a “national treasure” of South Korea; the show has been co-organized by the Met and two Korean museums.) After the official adoption of Buddhism, in 527, precious metals were increasingly used for liturgical purposes. One gilded bronze bodhisattva, from around 600 and in spectacular condition, sits in repose, blissfully grinning, adrift between this world and another. Through Feb. 23.

Jewish Museum “Art Spiegelman’s Co-Mix: A Retrospective”

In 2006, when the exhibition “Masters of American Comics” arrived on the East Coast from L.A., one star was notably absent. Spiegelman, who had initiated the idea for the show, was so unhappy about the distance between its two venues—the Newark Museum, for early material, and the Jewish Museum, for later comics, including his own—that he refused to participate. (As his many memorable covers for this magazine attest, Spiegelman is not one to shy away from

a controversy.) Clearly, there are no hard feelings, judging by this absorbing retrospective, which ranges from Spiegelman’s early *MAD*-influenced strips to the legendary eighties underground magazine *RAW* to more recent work, made in response to 9/11. Lurking amid all the puns and the raunch is anxiety, anger, and dread, most notably in his masterpiece, “Maus,” completed in 1991. But even the work’s most ardent admirers may find the widespread array of drafts, panels, and cover iterations a bit overwhelming. Through March 23.

GALLERIES—UPTOWN

Vivian Maier

The discovery of this prolific photographer’s work—an abandoned trove of negatives and prints that surfaced shortly before her death, in Chicago, in 2009—has already generated several fine books and shows. This exhibition of posthumously printed pictures gathers self-portraits, all of which involve a teasing indirection. Maier remained behind the camera, photographing her shadow and her reflection. The woman she confronts in mirrors, shopwindows, hubcaps, and a silver tray appears alternately anxious and self-possessed, even nerdy. But as a shadow cast into the world, she hesitates between being and invisibility. Through Dec. 14. (Greenberg, 41 E. 57th St. 212-334-0010.)

Gabriel Orozco

This big, handsome show puts to fine uses a geometric motif of networked circles and dots, which Orozco also deploys in some puzzlingly dull paintings. The logo-like design animates graphic formats, watercolors, carved stones, and, especially, standing panes of glass that suggest bus shelters in Utopia. Orozco has proved himself a master of playing real space against conceptual space and, thus, of playing looking against thinking. The trouble with the paintings is that the opposites seem stalemated, leaving only gratuitously luxurious surfaces to engage our attention. His intelligence is never in doubt. What’s nice is when he shares it. Through Dec. 21. (Marian Goodman, 24 W. 57th St. 212-977-7160.)

GALLERIES—CHELSEA

Simen Johan

Big photographs of exotic birds and animals mess with ideas of nature and artifice. At once believable and incredible, Johan’s images are digitally manipulated fictions that shuffle animals, habitats, and atmospheres from zoos and natural environments on several continents. Giraffes poke their heads into a dense smog; a monkey slumps unhappily under a banyan tree; and a flock of yellow-headed blackbirds perches among blackened stumps in an industrial tar pit. The largest photograph, nearly

eight feet tall, is of a mist-covered mountainside that looks like a memory fading before our eyes. Through Dec. 7. (Milo, 245 Tenth Ave., at 24th St. 212-414-0370.)

Yamini Nayar

The Brooklyn-based photographer of tabletop constructions pushes further into abstraction with a show of large and small, framed and unframed pictures that are less about fabricating spaces than about destroying them. Shattered interiors and skeletal architecture remain as elements in images of collagelike compositions that are flattened out and fragmented. When pictures of real objects—a raw floorboard, a turned-wood banister—crop up amid the ruins, they suggest surreal juxtapositions left in the aftermath of tornadoes. But things don’t just fall apart here, they come together in a jumble of materials and textures that feels agitated, invigorated, and resolved. Through Dec. 21. (Erben, 526 W. 26th St. 212-645-8701.)

Raqib Shaw

The Calcutta-born, London-based artist fills three galleries with painted bronze sculptures and enamel, glitter, and rhinestone paintings on panels of birch, including one that is sixty feet long and took more than a decade to complete. The inspiration is Milton’s “Paradise Lost” and, like the poem’s angels waging their war in Heaven, Shaw’s chimeras and human-animal hybrids fight their violent battles mostly in the clouds. Piranesian cathedrals crumble and marble floors collapse, leaving herds of hyena-headed zebras and spear-wielding monkey men in free fall. Weighted with obvious political metaphors and overlapping Eastern and Western references, Shaw’s fussy epics dazzle as luxury goods—a conspicuous consumer’s dream. Through Jan. 11. (Pace, 508, 510, and 534 W. 25th St. 212-929-7000.)

Rosemarie Trockel

For those baffled by Trockel’s recent New Museum exhibition—an anti-retrospective that included found objects and paintings made by an orangutan—this excellent show may offer a clearer introduction to one of Germany’s slipperiest artists. A salon-style installation of wool “paintings”—skeins of yarn attached to flat surfaces—inverts the pieties of abstraction by dismantling barriers between fine art and craft. Among the show’s sculptures are wall-mounted acrylic casts of cuts of meat and an extra-long, worn-looking sofa, which is actually two pieces in one: part found and part replicated. Don’t bother guessing which half is original and which is the copy; for an artist who so forcefully disrupts conventions of representation, such distinctions are beside the point. Through Dec. 21. (Gladstone, 515 W. 24th St. 212-206-9300.)



KOREA'S GOLDEN KINGDOM

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Silla

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It was organized by The Metropolitan Museum of Art, the National Museum of Korea, and Gyeongju National Museum, Korea.

Bodhisattva in pensive pose (detail), probably Maitreya (Korean: Mireuk), Silla kingdom, late 6th–early 7th century, gilt bronze, National Museum of Korea, National Treasure No. 83.

CLASSICAL MUSIC & DANCE



OPERA

Metropolitan Opera

Michael Mayer's effective (if shallow) Las Vegas-themed production of "**Rigoletto**" returns with an impressive cast. In the title role, the winning baritone Dmitri Hvorostovsky (with the help of the company's makeup department) succeeds in transforming himself into a remarkably skeezy jester, putting a menacing spin on his suave Russian stage presence; the up-and-coming soprano Sonya Yoncheva takes the role of his daughter, Gilda. Matthew Polenzani, as the Duke, sings with immaculate style, and the gifted scene-stealer Stefan Kocán reprises his reliable Sparafucile; Pablo Heras-Casado conducts. (Nov. 27 and Nov. 30 at 8.) • At its debut, in September, the new Deborah Warner production of Tchaikovsky's "**Eugene Onegin**" was criticized as stodgy, but its revival features two new cast members known for their volatile performances: Marina Poplavskaya and Rolando Villazón, taking the roles of Tatiana and Onegin. They're supported by Elena Maximova, as Olga, and a great house favorite, Peter Mattei,

A physically transformed Dmitri Hvorostovsky takes the title role in the Met's revival of Verdi's "Rigoletto."



as Lenski; Alexander Vedernikov. (Nov. 29 and Dec. 2 at 7:30.) • The house revives its majestic production of "**Der Rosenkavalier**" in honor of the centenary of the opera's U.S. premiere. Martina Serafin, Alice Coote, and Erin Morley take the leading roles; Edward Gardner. (Daniela Sindram replaces Coote in the second performance.) (Nov. 30 at 12:30 and Dec. 3 at 7.) (Metropolitan Opera House. 212-362-6000.)

ORCHESTRAS AND CHORUSES

New York Philharmonic

For this week's evening concerts, Alan Gilbert picks a program that, while unflashy, reveals a conductor's core strengths—the last three symphonies of Mozart, Nos. 39, 40, and 41 ("Jupiter"). The Saturday matinee program features the "Jupiter" by itself, preceded by two delightful chamber works by a great Mozart admirer, Poulenc (the Sextet for Piano and Winds and the Trio for Piano, Oboe, and Bassoon), with the pianist Jeffrey Kahane joining the orchestra's principal winds. (Avery Fisher Hall. 212-875-5656. Nov. 29-30 at 8 and Nov. 30 at 2.)

"Sacred Music in a Sacred Space"

K. Scott Warren's excellent Choir of St. Ignatius Loyola offers perhaps the first concert of the Christmas season: the Catholic parish's interpretation of the beloved Anglican tradition of Lessons and Carols, a gentle service in which readings from the Nativity story are interspersed with appropriately meditative music. (Park Ave. at 84th St. Dec. 1 at 4. No tickets required.)

RECITALS

Bargemusic

Nov. 30 at 7: The Brooklyn music barge hosts a concert by the vocal group Western Wind (with the violinist Patricia Davis) that marks this year's coincidence of Thanksgiving and the first day of Hanukkah—a simultaneity that hasn't occurred in well over a century. "Blessings and Miracles" features music for both holidays, a selection that ranges over works by William Billings, Salamone Rossi, and Heinrich Schütz, in addition to a group of Hanukkah songs in English, Yiddish, and Ladino. • Dec. 1 at 4: Steven Beck, one of the series' favorite pianists, anchors a piano-trio concert, with the violinist Benjamin Bowman and the cellist Joel Noyes joining him in a program of works by Haydn, Ravel (the coruscating Sonata for

Violin and Cello), and Tchaikovsky (the sweeping Trio in A Minor, Op. 50). (Fulton Ferry Landing, Brooklyn. bargemusic.org.)

SubCulture: Xuefei Yang

The first Chinese guitarist to forge an international career takes the stage at the recently opened venue, ideal for relaxed classical concerts. Her program (presented in alliance with the 92nd Street Y), based in British music by Britten (including the "Nocturnal") and Walton, also features works by Ginastera and Chen Yi (the U.S. premiere of "Shuo Chang"). (45 Bleecker St. 212-415-5500. Dec. 3 at 7:30.)

Juilliard Songfest:

Benjamin Britten

Brian Zeger curates and accompanies the school's tribute to the great composer's centenary, a concert in which a host of talented Juilliard students will sing two serious cycles rarely heard—"Canticle II: Abraham and Isaac" and the "Songs and Proverbs of William Blake"—along with a group of lighter selections. (Alice Tully Hall. Dec. 3 at 8. Free tickets are available at the Juilliard box office.)

American Modern Ensemble: "Winter Songs"

Robert Paterson's industrious new-music group ranges decisively into art song this season, with his new cycle (set to poems by Wallace Stevens and Billy Collins, among others) providing the theme for a concert that also includes songs by Aaron Jay Kernis ("Pieces of Winter Sky"), Tania León, and Steven Burke; the fine musicians include the soprano Nancy Allen Lundy, the baritone Jesse Blumberg, and the pianist Blair McMillen. (DiMenna Center, 450 W. 37th St. Dec. 3 at 8. Tickets at the door.)

DANCE

Noche Flamenca

What distinguishes performances by this exemplary flamenco troupe isn't novelty. This year's program, titled "Sombras Sagradas" ("Sacred Dreams"), proposes a theme connecting group numbers, solos, and duets, and includes a premiere based on Chekhov's "The Huntsman." And a mixed-gender quartet of singers should offer a slightly new sound. But the draw, as ever, is the high musicianship, the lack of frills, and the searing soul-baring of the company's star, Soledad Barrio. (Joyce Theatre, 175 Eighth Ave., at 19th St. 212-242-0800. Dec. 3 at 7:30. Through Dec. 15.)



MOVIES



A STAR IS REBORN

Max Linder at French Institute Alliance Française.

SHORT AND MUSCULAR, elegant and acrobatic, the French silent-comedy star Max Linder was one of the cinema's great prodigies. Hired by a major producer in Paris in 1905—at the age of twenty-one—and quickly tapped to write, direct, and star in his own films, the conservatory-trained actor soon became the new medium's biggest international celebrity. After he was wounded in the First World War, Linder came to the United States, where he directed his three features, jewels of the silent era. After his death, in 1925, he was largely forgotten, and most of his five hundred films were lost. The retrospective of his work at French Institute Alliance Française (Dec. 3-17) is a welcome reminder of his place in the pantheon.

The series offers six of Linder's prewar short films, which introduced his nimble antics, his suave charm, and his derring-do. But they are no mere showcases for his acting; they're also a compendium of the devices of cinematic modernism, starting with reflexivity, the breaking of the boundary between art and life. Linder established his onscreen persona—a dapper and contented member of the bourgeoisie bearing his own name—and transposed his actual experiences into comedy: his vacations and travels, his *début* in movies and his occasional stage appearances, and even his convalescence from appendicitis at the family home in Saint-Loubès, near Bordeaux (featuring his parents playing

themselves). Much of his comedy was shot on location, documentary style, including scenes of “Max” going sailing, piloting a pontoon plane, and entering a Barcelona bullring during an actual *corrida* and killing a bull. Yet Linder was also a technically audacious filmmaker, interweaving his naturalistic comedy with surreal special effects, animated sequences, and ingenious scenographic tricks (such as a roomful of furniture that dances with revellers).

As his daughter, Maud, recounts in her atmospheric and insightful documentary portrait of Linder, “The Man in the Silk Hat,” from 1983 (screening Dec. 17), he was credited as the “auteur” of these

films—likely, she says, the first application of that term to a filmmaker. His Hollywood features, from the early nineteen-twenties, which are screened in the series, reflect his growing personal troubles; as he came to doubt his comic abilities and struggled with depression, his artistry both deepened and darkened. Though still high-spirited, Linder's eponymous hero was no longer light-hearted; at ease with wealth, comfort, and privilege, he now upbraided his servants and recoiled from the city's criminal rabble. Yet even as Linder laced his stories with jealousy, betrayal, and cruelty, his inspiration ran riot. “Seven Years Bad Luck” (Dec. 10) includes a virtuosic scene of mirror mimicry that anticipates the Marx Brothers' famous routine from “Duck Soup.” Linder's masterwork, “Be My Wife” (Dec. 3), from 1921, is a string of dazzling set pieces, including a fight scene that pits Linder against himself, a hectic dance sequence instigated by a white rat, and a wondrous contraption that, at the press of a button, turns a dress shop into a speakeasy and back.

At the time of Linder's death (he and his wife fulfilled a suicide pact), his caustic tone seemed like a cynical vestige of the age of Maupassant. Still, it's easy to imagine that Linder, with his stage background and his technical mastery, would have become a major innovator in the era of talking pictures.

—Richard Brody

OPENING

BLACK NATIVITY

Kasi Lemmons directed this musical version of a play by Langston Hughes, an adaptation of the story of the Nativity, with an all-black cast, set in Baltimore. Starring Jacob Latimore, Forest Whitaker, Angela Bassett, and Jennifer Hudson. Opening Nov. 27. (In wide release.)

FROZEN

An animated fantasy about a magical princess who freezes her kingdom in permanent winter. Directed by Chris Buck and Jennifer Lee; with the voices of Kristen Bell, Josh Gad, and Idina Menzel. Opening Nov. 27. (In wide release.)

MANDELA: LONG WALK TO FREEDOM

A bio-pic about the leader of the South African civil-rights struggle, starring Idris Elba, as Nelson Mandela, and Naomie Harris, as Winnie Mandela. Directed by Justin Chadwick. Opening Nov. 29. (In wide release.)

OLDBOY

Spike Lee directed this remake of the 2003 Korean thriller, about a businessman (Josh Brolin) who is kidnapped and sequestered for twenty years while being framed for the rape and murder of his ex-wife. Opening Nov. 27. (In wide release.)

ALSO PLAYING

Faust: In limited release.

Weekend of a Champion: In limited release.

REVIVALS AND FESTIVALS

Titles in bold are reviewed.

ANTHOLOGY FILM ARCHIVES

32 Second Ave., at 2nd St. (212-505-5181)—“The Middle Ages on Film: Shakespeare.” Nov. 27 at 6:30: “King Lear” (1971, Grigori Kozintsev; in Russian). • Nov. 30 at 8:30: “Macbeth” (1971, Roman Polanski). • Dec. 1 at 3:45: “Macbeth” (1982, Béla Tarr; in Hungarian).

BAM CINÉMATEK

30 Lafayette Ave., Brooklyn (718-636-4100)—“Kid Stuff.” Nov. 30 at 2, 4:30, 7, and 9:30: “The River” (1951, Jean Renoir). • Dec. 1 at 3: “Fanny and Alexander” (1982, Ingmar Bergman).

FILM FORUM

W. Houston St. west of Sixth Ave. (212-727-8110)—In revival. Nov. 27-Dec. 10 at 1, 2:50, 4:40, 6:30, 8:20, and 10:10: “Cousin Jules.” • Nov. 29-Dec. 5 at 1, 3:10, 5:20, 7:30, and 9:40: “Bad Blood (Mauvais Sang).”

FILM SOCIETY OF LINCOLN CENTER

Walter Reade Theatre, Lincoln Center (212-875-5610)—Films from Romania. Nov. 30 at 6: Short films by Corneliu Porumboiu, including “Liviu’s Dream.” • Dec. 1 at 7:45: “Three Exercises of Interpretation” (2013, Cristi Puiu). • Dec. 2 at 1: “12:08 East of Bucharest” (2006, Porumboiu). • Dec. 2 at 3: “Police, Adjective” (2009, Porumboiu). • Dec. 3 at 6: “When Evening Falls on Bucharest or Metabolism” (2013, Porumboiu).

FRENCH INSTITUTE ALLIANCE FRANÇAISE

55 E. 59th St. (212-355-6160)—Through Dec. 17: “Mad About Max: The Films of Max Linder.” Dec. 3 at 12:30 and 4: “Be My Wife” (1921) and three short films. • Dec. 3 at 7:30: “Be My Wife” (1921) and “The Three Must-Get-Theres” (1922).

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

Roy and Niuta Titus Theatres, 11 W. 53rd St. (212-708-9480)—“The Berlin School.” Nov. 29 at 4: “Orly” (2010, Angela Schanelec). • Nov. 30 at 1:30: “The Forest for the Trees” (2003, Maren Ade).

MUSEUM OF THE MOVING IMAGE

35th Ave. at 36th St., Astoria (718-784-0077)—The films of Julianne Moore. Nov. 29 at 7: “The Big Lebowski” (1998, Joel and Ethan Coen). • Nov. 30 at 4: “Far from Heaven” (2002, Todd Haynes). • Nov. 30 at 7: “Boogie Nights” (1997, Paul Thomas Anderson). • Dec. 1 at 4: “Safe” (1995, Haynes), introduced by the producer, Christine Vachon.

NOW PLAYING

All the Light in the Sky

The director Joe Swanberg draws magic from a magical location—an oceanfront enclave of homes perched alluringly above the lapping waters and doomed by erosion. There, Marie (Jane Adams), a forty-five-year-old actress, serenely floats on the passing time as she does, in a wetsuit, on the shimmering sea below. Awaiting roles that have more or less stopped coming, dreaming of love that never clicks, she hosts her niece from New York—Faye (Sophia Takal), a young actress. In flowing days and evenings of lunches and parties with friends and neighbors, Marie and Faye talk out and play out shudderingly big questions—the prospect of marriage and children, the artistic calling, the weight of family history. Adams (one of the secret heroines of the recent cinema) and Takal—aided by nimble cohorts, including Larry Fessenden, Kent Osborne, Lindsay Burdge, and Ti West—bring a calm, focussed urgency to every chat and tussle. With his solar measurements and celestial allusions, the real-life environmental entrepreneur David Siskind gives the drama a cosmic context, and Swanberg—who is also the cinematographer—makes luminous images to match.—*Richard Brody* (In limited release and video on demand.)

Bad Blood (Mauvais Sang)

A masterpiece of ecstatic cinema from 1986, by the twenty-five-year-old Leos Carax. The neo-noir plot concerns Marc (Michel Piccoli), an older gangster who lures Alex (Denis Lavant), the son of his slain cohort, into a plot to break into a laboratory and steal an AIDS-like virus. Along the way, Marc’s mistress, Anna (Juliette Binoche), falls for Alex, whose tender romance with his blond teen-age girlfriend (Julie Delpy) is threatened by his rhapsodic obsession with the dark-haired gamine. Carax sends Alex and Anna airborne in a parachute-jump sequence that is one of the movie’s many anthology pieces. (The feral Lavant’s self-punishing exultation to the strains of David Bowie’s “Modern Love” is another.) With an emotional world akin to that of Godard’s early films, a visual vocabulary that pays tribute to his later ones, and a visionary sensibility that owes much to Jean Cocteau, Carax suggests the burden of young genius in a world of mighty patriarchs who aren’t budging. In French and English.—*R.B.* (Film Forum; Nov. 29-Dec. 5.)

The Book Thief

Markus Zusak’s enormously successful young-adult novel seems to have been adapted as a movie for middle-aged children. The brute facts of the Second World War in Germany—Nazi oppression, hunger, people hiding in basements—have been turned into a pleasantly meaningless tale of good-heartedness, complete with soft lyrical touches and a whimsical appearance, as a narrator, by Death, who should have laid this movie to rest. The picture was shot at the Babelsberg Studio in Berlin. The set reveals a small German city (which is mysteriously bombed by the Allies) where it always seems to be softly snowing, as in the inside of an old snowglobe. Sophie Nélisse plays the young Liesel, an abandoned child; Geoffrey Rush and Emily Watson are her kindly adoptive parents; Oliver Stokowski plays a handsome young Jew in hiding who encourages Liesel to write. Directed by Brian Percival.—*David Denby* (In wide release.)

Charlie Countryman

This preposterous mashup of magical realism and romantic thriller is a fever dream of a

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movie, directed without a net by Fredrik Bond. Shia LaBeouf stars as a grieving son whose dead mother tells him to go to Bucharest (for no apparent reason). Once there, he falls in love with a punky concert cellist (Evan Rachel Wood) and uncovers some dirty doings by her thug of a husband (a mad Mads Mikkelsen). The script, by Matt Drake, is an overstuffed disaster—a clichéd stranger-in-a-strange-land scenario filled with drugs and violence—but the evocative and memorable images (by the cinematographer, Roman Vasyanov) provide a tawdry high. LaBeouf, who throws himself wholeheartedly into every role regardless of its worth, is a fearless and fascinating actor, and his sincerity holds the entire sleazy mess together.—*Bruce Diones* (In wide release.)

Cousin Jules

Dominique Benicheti's tender and accomplished documentary, from 1973, about his real-life cousin, Jules Guiteaux, a blacksmith in rural Burgundy, is, above all, a record of premodern industrial and domestic crafts—a cinematographic Colonial Williamsburg. Jules fans a furnace with a groaning leather bellows, ringingly hammers a red-glowing tip of iron, drills holes with a huge flywheel-driven contraption. To make his cup of coffee, Jules's wife, Félicie (who died midway through the five-year shoot), draws water from a well with a hand-cranked bucket; he hand-rolls a cigarette to enjoy with it. Shooting in color and widescreen, Benicheti makes images that are as poised and attentive as are his subjects. Each new activity that he reveals offers surprises that are fraught with the passing of time and the burden of labor; the wear on every handle and surface seems to embody a vast history in silence. Yet that silence is also an artifice; Benicheti's observations don't offer much depth or insight—what happened there during the war? How do they make their money? What's in that newspaper that Jules reads at lunch? The movie is resolutely non-analytical, but it may leave a viewer hyper-alert to his own routine gestures and sounds. In French.—*R.B.* (Film Forum; Nov. 27-Dec. 10.)

Delivery Man

A golden comic premise, directed to dross by Ken Scott, who also made the Canadian original ("Starbuck," from 2011) on which this Vince Vaughn vehicle is based. Vaughn plays David Wozniak, an overgrown man-child who is thrown for a loop by a lawsuit. In the early nineties, he sold sperm to a clinic nearly seven hundred times; it turns out that he is the biological father of five hundred and thirty-three children, a hundred and forty-two of whom are suing to overturn the confidentiality agreement. David goes on a strange spree: without identifying himself, he enters the lives of some of these youths and becomes, in his own words, their "guardian angel"—and then the story makes the headlines. At its best, this juridical fairy tale—with its peeps into the lives of others—offers the promise of naturalistic magic. The promise is not fulfilled, not even close: mucky subplots involving loan sharks, family history, and a countersuit smother the material from the outset and spoil liling, low-key performances by Cobie Smulders, as David's girlfriend, a New York City police officer; Chris Pratt, as his best friend, a floundering lawyer; and Andrzej Blumenfeld, as David's father.—*R.B.* (In wide release.)

The Great Beauty

The "beauty" of the title refers to many things, but, above all, to Rome. That is where Jep Gambardella (Toni Servillo), a writer known for producing a single book and attending innumerable parties,

has lived for decades. Clearly, he never tires of the place; the happiest moments in this long and indulgent film, directed by Paolo Sorrentino, consist of his lounging in his apartment opposite the Colosseum, or strolling without haste through the city and savoring its deluge of impressions. (Servillo, in addition to his long, quizzical, and easily saddened face, has a wonderful walk.) The story, or what exists of it, is touched off first by the death of an old girlfriend, which summons Jep, via occasional flashbacks, into the past; and second, by the advent of a new girlfriend, Ramona (Sabrina Ferilli), whom he takes as his date to a funeral. If the antics of the beau monde disgust or exhaust you, stay away from Sorrentino's film; look no further, on the other hand, if you wish to know whether, where, and in what guise the spirit of Fellini remains at work—and, better still, at play. In Italian.—*Anthony Lane* (11/25/13) (In limited release.)

Liviu's Dream

This featurette by the Romanian director Corneliu Porumboiu, from 2004, is a sharp-edged romantic novella set against a backdrop of degradation. The protagonist, Liviu (Dragos Bucur), an unemployed twenty-four-year-old man who lives with his unemployed parents, fences stolen goods, dissipates his days with other idle youths, and sleeps with his best friend's girlfriend, Mariana (Luiza Cocora), a dental technician who loves him and finds herself pregnant. Porumboiu sets up the drama with archival clips of an anti-abortion speech by the Communist-era dictator Nicolae Ceausescu and related memories from his childhood. In a pair of brisk and caustic shots, he reveals a history of

covert hostility and resistance to that regime—and finds enduring bitterness from the country's lost decades still corroding morale. With epigrammatic precision and incisively analytical images, voice-overs and dream sequences, grim comedy and implicit violence, the filmmaker sketches a bright-eyed and self-conscious slide into despair: the capable and energetic Liviu takes his future into his own hands with a brilliantly ironic, quietly tragic decisiveness. In Romanian.—*R.B.* (Film Society of Lincoln Center; Nov. 30.)

Philomena

An out-of-work journalist (Steve Coogan), seeking a story, meets Philomena Lee (Judi Dench), an elderly Irish woman, and decides to follow the trail of her predicament. Half a century ago, as a pregnant teen-ager, she was sent to live with nuns in a convent; there her son was born, and from there he was taken to be adopted by an American couple. Now Philomena needs to find him. There are all kinds of ways in which Stephen Frears's film could have turned out mushy or merely splenetic, yet it keeps its poise and draws you into its moral quandaries, thanks to the controlled performances as well as to the screenplay, by Coogan and Jeff Pope. Some of the early jokes feel a little cheap and superior, but you become grateful for the leavening wit, and there aren't many films that can throw in a T. S. Eliot gag at the climax. Moreover, just as the movie girds itself for an indignant blast, it finds a surprising peace; unlike most tales of crusading reporters, it suggests that their outrage, however fruitful, matters less than the feelings—sometimes more delicate—of the victims for whom they speak.—*A.L.* (11/25/13) (In wide release.)

Life runs fast and mean
in this town.

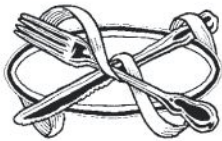
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FOOD & DRINK

BAR TAB THE LEADBELLY

14 Orchard St. (646-596-9142)

This cocktail-and-oyster bar on the Lower East Side has an enviable pedigree: it shares owners (and a block) with the “seasonal British” fashion-crowd favorite the Fat Radish and a set designer with Wes Anderson. Order a hummus plate, and an elegant array of creamy dip, crispy flatbread, and delicate crudités (radish, cauliflower, top-on carrot) is delivered swiftly from across the street, in a waxed-cardboard box. There are also crab-avocado toasts, burrata, and four types of oysters, shucked on the premises. The room is a cave of carefully chosen curiosities, from the curved brass bar to the collection of vintage suitcases to the terrariums dangling in the bathrooms. The crowd, a young, stylish, international mix, might as well be extras. But the cocktails are unfussy and topnotch, classier versions of classics, like the Whiskey Ginger—made with the root, plus the right proportions of Jameson, lemon, and honey—and the East Pole Manhattan, which is actually more like the lesser-known Brooklyn, made with Bulleit rye, amaro, cherry Heering, and bitters. Depending on the evening, you can sip them to the dulcet tones of a live bossa-nova trio or the punchy arrangements of a ragtime pianist. After ten, a dj. spins funk and soul on a pair of turntables that pops out of a retrofitted armoire.

—Hannah Goldfield



TABLES FOR TWO

CHARLIE BIRD

5 King St. (212-235-7133)

“WE JUST WANT TO BE your favorite neighborhood joint.” So says Charlie Bird, a new Italian-American restaurant off Sixth Avenue in SoHo, in a lengthy manifesto on its Web site. It also says that “Charlie Bird means New York,” and “Just like you, we dream of ditching work to sip rosé in the park and of hot summer nights all year long.” (Do New Yorkers, in fact, dream of hot summer nights all year long? Maybe the ones who don’t live in fourth-floor walkups do.)

What does it mean these days to be a neighborhood joint in downtown Manhattan, where on a recent Friday night a twenty-something waiting at the bar held a slate-colored Kelly bag, and the preponderance of four-inch heels suggests a general lack of familiarity with the subway? At Charlie Bird, it can mean some good things. For a start, there’s a real commitment to service: more places need to hand you a menu in return for your coat. There is a modest list of classic cocktails, not often seen (the Hemingway, the Blood and Sand). The food is comforting, with some ingenious additions, like uni in a creamy duck-egg spaghetti, and mint and pistachios in a lemony farro salad.

But Charlie Bird is expensive—paying less than a hundred dollars a person is difficult—and there are still more opportunities to spend money that feel ostentatious, like having truffles shaved on your pasta, for fifty dollars, or ordering a twenty-eight-dollar glass of wine. (Perhaps the prices are one reason that so many pairs of young women seem to be sharing a single piece of fish as their entrée.) On a weekend evening, you’ll need to lean in awfully close over the chicken-liver pâté appetizer, topped with walnuts and capers and radishes, or the pounded veal chop, which is golden and glistening with a crunch like K.F.C. That’s because it’s difficult to be heard above the newest Justin Timberlake album and also because of the jostling in the narrow bar area—a hazard of the extremely cool neighborhood joint welcoming walk-ins.

It’s not Charlie Bird’s fault that it is so popular with a moneyed crowd. There is a roast-chicken dish that encourages repeat visits: four or five pieces of chicken breast, sliced round, daubed with more of that chicken-liver pâté and charred-leek ricotta and served with “crispy bits,” which a waiter described as “dipping agents.” It sounds like something dreamt up at the Nabisco food labs but actually amounts to old-school fried croutons tossed in chicken jus. There’s also a veal-ragu rigatoni—crunchy, chewy, with more meat than tomato—that is warming and hearty. The question of how one place becomes a scene while another languishes, though, remains a mystery. Does Charlie Bird mean New York? Maybe, amid the truffle shavings and the suits with sneakers, it does.

—Amelia Lester

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THE THEATRE



OPENINGS AND PREVIEWS

Love, Linda: The Life of Mrs. Cole Porter

York Theatre Company presents a musical starring Stevie Holland, about the woman who was married to Cole Porter, who was gay, for thirty-five years. Richard Maltby, Jr., directs. Previews begin Dec. 3. (York Theatre at St. Peter's, Lexington Ave. at 54th St. 212-935-5820.)

The Night Alive

Atlantic Theatre Company brings a new play by Conor McPherson from the Donmar Warehouse in London, about some unlucky fellows in Dublin who try to better themselves. Jim Norton and Ciarán Hinds star; McPherson directs. Previews begin Nov. 30. (336 W. 20th St. 866-811-4111.)

NOW PLAYING

A Christmas Carol

Patrick Barlow ("The 39 Steps") adapted the Dickens classic, in which

five actors play all the characters, using simple props. Joe Calarco directs. (Theatre at St. Clement's, 423 W. 46th St. 212-352-3101.)

The Commons of Pensacola

Sarah Jessica Parker stars in this play, by the actress Amanda Peet (in her Off Broadway playwriting debut, for Manhattan Theatre Club), as Becca, the younger and less successful daughter of Judith (Blythe Danner), a sort of Ruth Madoff figure whose husband was caught in a disastrous financial crime. It's the day before Thanksgiving, and Becca and her much younger boyfriend, Gabe (Michael Stahl-David), arrive at Judith's nondescript Florida condo with an idea for a "docu-series" (not a reality TV show, they insist) about Judith, at the same time that Becca's gorgeous teen-age niece, Lizzy (Zoe Levin), shows up for the holiday. As directed by Lynne Meadow, Parker is convincing as a failed actress who has become a nervous, depressed wreck, and Dan-

ner brings a relaxed saltiness to the role of the proud, wounded woman who values self-preservation above all. But the humor often falls flat, and the focus on the redemption of these lost souls feels misguided. (City Center Stage I, 131 W. 55th St. 212-581-1212.)

The Junket

This hour-long monologue by the novelist, playwright, and wonderful performer Mike Albo is not just about getting fired as a style reporter (he wrote a column about shopping) by a publication that he calls the New York *Tomes*—for "legal reasons," he says, trying not to roll his eyes. It's also about poverty in twenty-first-century New York, and the feelings one has when one wants to belong to a prosperous class but can't. Dressed in white, Albo takes us on a verbal and visual tour of a junket that not only precipitated the loss of a steady paycheck but also generated funny stories about journalistic ethics. Like many good

comic monologists, Albo makes serious points that land like clouds in our consciousness as we giggle along, hoping that life doesn't trip him up too much—because what would we do without Albo's self-proclaimed compulsion to express himself? (Sunday nights.) (Dixon Place, 161A Chrystie St. 866-811-4111.)

Little Miss Sunshine

James Lapine and William Finn's musical version of the 2006 family-road-trip movie dutifully re-creates the details of the original—crotchety, hedonistic grandfather ("You can pick a shampoo / You can pick who you screw / But you can't pick your family"); depressed Proust-scholar uncle; and, of course, history's most appealing child-beauty-pageant hopeful, Olive Hoover (Hannah Nordberg). What's new: Finn's songs, a VW bus made of rolling kitchen-table chairs, a chorus of beauty-pageant mean girls who pop out of a trapdoor. Nordberg

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Acorn, 410 W. 42nd St. 212-239-6200.

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Shubert, 225 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200.

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Lyceum, 149 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.

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does a good job with Olive's nerdy brio, but there's little else that feels essential, and you might find yourself looking forward to the finale—although knowing that it's a crazy little-kid striptease number might make you feel like a bit of a creep. When it arrives, Finn's song, about shaking your badonkadonk and your Vesuvius, will make you wistful for the more innocent joys of "Super Freak." (Second Stage, 305 W. 43rd St. 212-246-4422.)

Macbeth

In his epic productions of "Henry IV" and "The Coast of Utopia," the director Jack O'Brien used the Vivian Beaumont like a towering canvas. His "Macbeth," starring Ethan Hawke, is no less eye-catching: a series of chilling stage pictures, composed in obsidian and blood red. (Scott Pask and Japhy Weideman designed the sets and lights, respectively.) O'Brien wants to unlock the play's talismanic power with imagery—and he might have succeeded, if the performances were as searing. Hawke, all jangled nerves and hoarse fury, roars through the play like a steam locomotive. He's an odd match for Anne-Marie Duff, whose icy-chic Lady Macbeth looks as if she's wandered in from the Met Ball. Neither reaches the fever pitch of O'Brien's visions. (Vivian Beaumont, 150 W. 65th St. 212-239-6200.)

A Midsummer Night's Dream

In her first production since her controversy-generating work on "Spider-Man: Turn Off the Dark," Julie Taymor places the emphasis less on her hardworking performers than on her own formidable visual skills. She ably draws out the three plots occasioned by the impending wedding of Duke Theseus (Roger Clark) and Queen Hippolyta (Okwui Okpokwasili). Employing a large cast that includes children in a fairy chorus, Taymor handles the staging like a master—not a hair is out of place—but she evinces no intellectual

originality. (Reviewed in our issue of 11/25/13.) (Polonsky Shakespeare Center, 262 Ashland Pl., Brooklyn. 866-811-4111.)

A Mind-Bending Evening of Beckett

"Play," Samuel Beckett's 1963 piece for three actors, is so good that its intensity eclipses some of his more famous work for the stage, such as "Krapp's Last Tape." Two women and a man are encased in urns; they're the children of Winnie, from Beckett's "Happy Days." But instead of being buried up to their necks in earth, the characters in "Play" are monuments to recrimination: Man (Paul Radki) has been cheating on Woman 1 (Rachel Pickup) with Woman 2 (Sameerah Luqmaan-Harris). While the dialogue sometimes overlaps, we understand every word of the trio's hate, desire, and interdependency. "Act Without Words" and "Breath," the two pieces that precede "Play" in this Irish Rep production, directed by Bob Flanagan, are very well done, too. But it's "Play" that makes the short evening great, not least because of Pickup, Harris, and Radki's performances: all deeply felt, and topnotch. (132 W. 22nd St. 212-727-2737. Through Dec. 1.)

Small Engine Repair

It's clear that something's eating Frank (John Pollono, who also wrote the play), an auto mechanic who has raised his teen-age daughter on his own, when he asks his two estranged childhood buddies—a couple of Neanderthal clowns (James Ransone and James Badge Dale)—to meet him at his shop one night. He gets them drunk, and then, inexplicably, invites a smarmy, privileged college kid (Keegan Allen) to join them. At first this unusual visit seems innocuous, but Frank has plans, and they're not friendly. Pollono's small, tight, well-written, wonderfully acted drama is disquieting: the distasteful jokes that run through the play are funny, and the misogynist characters, under the stellar direction of Jo Bonney, are sympathetic. (Lucille Lortel, 121 Christopher St. 212-352-3101.)

Sunset Baby

The fact that her parents were famous black revolutionaries in the nineteen-seventies and eighties does not impress Nina (DeWanda Wise), who grew up "robbing niggas" for a living while her father (John Earl Jelks) was in prison and her mother was on crack. So when her long-lost dad arrives at her apartment looking for unsent love letters her late mother wrote him, Nina is furious; he wants to connect, but she's inclined to hustle him at gunpoint. The tone of Dominique Morisseau's drama—about what kind of change the revolution really wrought—oscillates between romantic and angry, and the writing is more

didactic than dramatic. But, under the direction of Kamilah Forbes, for Labyrinth Theatre Company, Wise is brutal and riveting, and Jelks is totally convincing as a big dreamer worn down by time. (Bank Street Theatre, 155 Bank St. 212-513-1080.)

Taking Care of Baby

This shrewd and vicious 2007 drama by Dennis Kelly, who wrote the book for the musical adaptation of "Matilda," concerns Donna McAuliffe (Kristen Bush), a mother accused of suffocating her two infants. As in a verbatim piece, the actors are seated in a row of chairs, and the play, directed by Erica Schmidt for Manhattan Theatre Club, begins with the sober announcement, "The following has been taken word for word from interviews and correspondence." Monologues give way to scenes as the unseen interviewer interrogates Donna, family members (with Margaret Colin as Donna's calculating mother), and experts (the superb Reed Birney plays her smug psychiatrist). Some argue for Donna's innocence; others try to mitigate her guilt. With his clever invention of a tragic case that sounds all too real, Kelly lampoons and excoriates documentary drama, presenting less a search for the truth than a troubling exploration of whether truth—treacherous, tortuous, mutable—can ever be found. (City Center Stage II, 131 W. 55th St. 212-581-1212.)

Twelfth Night / Richard III

In the director Tim Carroll's grand and unsurpassable version of "Twelfth Night" (in repertory with "Richard III," presented by Shakespeare's Globe), Orsino, the Duke of Illyria (the fantastic and sexy Liam Brennan), is shipwrecked on the shoals of his unrequited love for Countess Olivia (Mark Rylance). Orsino sends Cesario (the lovely Samuel Barnett), his page, to plead his case; Cesario is really a woman, Viola, shipwrecked on Illyria with her twin brother, Sebastian (Joseph Timms), who she assumes is dead. Rylance is an actor of remarkable gifts, and his work with Carroll adds layers of unspoken narrative to the text. Paul Chahidi, as Olivia's lady-in-waiting, Maria, with near-Kabuki-like control over his face and body, adds his own mysteries—about the art of performance—to Shakespeare's. As the star of "Richard III," Rylance doesn't hit quite the same heights. Although he adds to Richard's ghoulish sense of humor by cracking jokes to the audience as he displays his twisted arm—he has no pronounced hunchback—and licks his lips or the enamelled, prepossessing face of Lady Anne (Timms), his effects are all on the outside; he won't let himself be foul within. (11/25/13) (Belasco, 111 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200.)

OF NOTE A GENTLEMAN'S GUIDE TO LOVE AND MURDER

A musical entertainment with panache and precision, by Robert L. Freedman and Steven Lutvak. Set in Edwardian England, the story concerns one Monty Navarro (the suave Bryce Pinkham), who discovers that he is a disinherited member of the noble D'Ysquith family and eighth in line to be Earl of Highhurst. Bliothely homicidal, he goes about dispatching the intervening D'Ysquiths, who are all played, with buffoonish alacrity, by the masterly Jefferson Mays. (His costume changes alone are Tony-worthy.) Like "The Mystery of Edwin Drood," the musical sets its arch humor to a tuneful score, served up elegantly in Darko Tresnjak's production. With winsome performances by Lisa O'Hare and Lauren Worsham, as Monty's rival love interests, and a plush fun-house set by Alexander Dodge. (Walter Kerr, 219 W. 48th St. 212-239-6200.)



BRITISH INVASION

A legendary record store arrives in Brooklyn.

ROUGH TRADE is best known as the seminal British punk and post-punk label that released singles and albums by such artists as Scritti Politti, the Fall, the Smiths, and Young Marble Giants. But before it was a label, it was a store, a modest and beloved establishment that opened in West London in 1976. Now, the stores—which have been decoupled from the label since 1982—are coming to America. The company has converted a former film-prop warehouse in Williamsburg into a fifteen-thousand-square-foot retail space.

Over the years, Rough Trade has opened and closed shops in San Francisco, Paris, and Tokyo, and the risks seem higher than ever before. Album sales have been falling for years, and one is as likely to find a giant record store in a major city as one is to find a working fax machine in an office. The huge retailer Tower Records is long defunct, and the Virgin Megastores closed their doors here in 2009. The small independents haven't fared much better. Bleecker Bob's, a West Village staple since the late sixties, sold its last record this spring, as did Sound Fix, a Williamsburg favorite.

The Internet helped kill those stores, but technology isn't necessarily the only or the best way to get music. Record stores have long been forums for like-minded people. Stephen Godfroy, a co-owner of Rough Trade, said that they present an opportunity to discover music in "a non-algorithmic fashion." The company opened a London flagship store on Brick Lane in 2007 that turns this idea up to eleven, by frequently featuring free in-store performances by up-and-coming acts,

as well as by bigger bands such as Blur and Radiohead, though the latter's show in 2008 was moved to a nearby club after so many fans showed up that the police became concerned about overcrowding.

The Williamsburg location is taking the same approach, but because it is three times the size of its London counterpart, the company presumably won't have the trouble it had with Radiohead. There will be a small café operated by the team behind the Greenpoint restaurant Five Leaves, and ticketed concerts, programmed in conjunction with The Bowery Presents, a successful local promoter. The performance room has a balcony with seating, a bar, and a high-quality sound system. "It's integrated with the main store area, so the two spaces can operate as one," Godfroy said. "We're taking what was an informal element of in-store performance and extending that into a more formal venue format for late evenings."

The upcoming lineup includes the Australian indie-rock trio Jagwar Ma, the soulful roots-rocker Langhorne Slim, and the avant-dance combo JD Samson & MEN. None of those acts are on Rough Trade, but all share a guiding principle: they make good music and deliver on it when they play live. "We love our country music as much as our metal, our shoegaze as much as our soul," Godfroy said. "We've no genre exclusions, just a quality control." (64 N. 9th St. roughtrade.com. Opening Nov. 25.)

—Ben Greenman



DVD OF THE WEEK

A video discussion of Budd Boetticher's "The Killer Is Loose," from 1956, in our digital edition.



FRONT ROW

Richard Brody discusses the art and life of the silent-comedy pioneer Max Linder.



TABLES FOR TWO

A new interactive map, with links to our latest reviews of restaurants across the city.



MULTIMEDIA EXTRA

See our digital edition for images of the German sculptor Isa Genzken's retrospective at MOMA, reviewed in this issue.

ROCK AND POP

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

Flatbush Zombies

The past few years have seen an improvement in the quality of New York hip-hop, and the gritty and psychedelic Flatbush Zombies are one of the most flamboyant new groups. The trio of rappers has an aesthetic that is as influenced by "Night of the Living Dead" as it is by the boom-bap production style of early Wu-Tang Clan albums. With **Bodega Bamz**, a half-Dominican, half-Puerto Rican rapper who has delivered a handful of releases spotlighting his pointed commentary on growing up in Spanish Harlem. (Irving Plaza, 17 Irving Pl. 212-777-6800. Dec. 3.)

Guster

Formed at a Tufts University wilderness-orientation trip in 1991, this trio (two guitars and bongos) started out campfire-portable, and it made music perfect for zipping up an REI fleece to while reaching for a Hacky Sack. A little bit jammy and a whole lot nineties, the group expanded and produced gem after gem of satisfying pop songs rich in harmony, with the softest edge of nasal-voiced attitude and no fear of being dorky. This week, it's doing a few shows in town. The first, on Nov. 30 at the Beacon Theatre, celebrates the tenth anniversary of its album "Keep It Together." It'll be joined by the alt-folk songwriter **Ben Kweller**, who was profiled in this magazine in 1997 when he was sixteen and his band Radish had secured a multimillion-dollar recording contract. Radish never caught on, but Kweller mounted a comeback when he was twenty, in 2002, with the solo album "Sha Sha." (Broadway at 74th St. 212-465-6500.) Guster is also at the Brooklyn Bowl, performing two all-ages shows the afternoon of Dec. 1, in honor of the twentieth anniversary of its album "Parachute." (61 Wythe Ave., Williamsburg. 718-963-3369.)

OF NOTE LOS LOBOS

In 1973, David Hidalgo and Louis Pérez, two kids at Garfield High, in East L.A., surprised each other with their weird tastes in music. They started playing together, and after some homemade forays into composing and recording, they enlisted Cesar Rosas, Conrad Lozano, and Steve Berlin, who remain the core of the band today. By mixing traditional Mexican sounds into whatever was happening in the Top Forty, Los Lobos became local favorites before hitting it big nationwide, with their cover of "La Bamba," in 1987. They are touring to celebrate their fortieth anniversary as well as the recent release of "Disconnected in New York," an album they recorded at City Winery last year. They return to the venue Nov. 30-Dec. 2. (155 Varick St. 212-608-0555.)

Hunters

Nirvana's final studio record, "In Utero," was released twenty years ago, but nineties grunge is alive and well in North Brooklyn; this band is the borough's latest offering to the gods of alt. The group quietly rose to underground prominence in the sub-legal lofts and basements of Bushwick, with early endorsements from the Smashing Pumpkins' James Iha and the Yeah Yeah Yeahs' Nick Zinner cementing its place as an act to contend with. At the center of the band is a rock-and-roll couple straight out of central casting—the pink-haired Brazilian singer Izzy Almeida and the suitably scruffy guitarist and vocalist Derek Watson. (Glasslands, 289 Kent Ave., between S. 1st and S. 2nd Sts., Brooklyn. No phone. Nov. 30.)

Dean Wareham

The man at the wheel of Galaxie 500 in the eighties went on to form Luna, a New York quartet that crafted a dreamy kind of music so unabashedly derivative that it was both disposable and eternal. Like many before him and many since, Wareham was inspired by the Velvet Underground. Luna opened for V.U. on its reunion tour, in 1993, and it's likely that Wareham will play a few of the legendary band's tunes here, with his new group, which includes Britta Phillips, Anthony LaMarca, and Jason Quever. Quever produced Wareham's latest EP, "Emancipated Hearts," and will open the evening leading his own outfit, **Papercuts**, in an acoustic set. (The Bell House, 149 7th St., Brooklyn. 718-643-6510. Nov. 29.)

Scott Weiland

It's been an especially tumultuous year for the alternative rocker, who is no stranger to drama. In February, he was fired from the Stone Temple Pilots, the band he had fronted and co-founded, and shortly after that, the group sued him, accusing him of misusing its name to further his solo career. The suit cited his well-publicized addiction problems and poor performances as detrimental to the band's livelihood. Claiming that he was unjustly fired and requesting that S.T.P. be dissolved, Weiland countersued for \$7 million. He is now on the "Purple at the Core" tour, performing with the backing ensemble the Wildabouts, and playing material from Stone Temple Pilots' first two albums, "Core," from 1992, and "Purple," from 1994, in addition to covers and solo work. (City Winery, 155 Varick St. 212-608-0555. Dec. 3.)

JAZZ AND STANDARDS

Fred Hersch-Julian Lage

The duo is one of the superb pianist Hersch's favorite musical settings, and here he's going head to head with a formidable partner less than half his age, the guitar virtuoso Lage, who has

been heard to great effect with Gary Burton's quartet. As documented on their new live recording, "Free Flying," Hersch and Lage are in-synch associates who know how to keep each other on their toes. (Blue Note, 131 W. 3rd St. 212-475-8592. Nov. 25-27.)

Dave Holland

"Prism" is the name of both this super bassist's new quartet and of its recent debut album. With the pianist **Craig Taborn**, the guitarist **Kevin Eubanks**, and the drummer **Eric Harland** in tow, Holland has all the firepower he needs to produce the surprisingly fusion-esque music he's seeking. The results are enormously fun, in a hyperkinetic mid-seventies manner, and in the sixty-seven-year-old Holland sounds like he's thoroughly enjoying himself. (Birdland, 315 W. 44th St. 212-581-3080. Nov. 26-30.)

Jason Moran and the Bandwagon

The pianist, the recipient of a 2010 MacArthur "genius" grant, isn't known for extended lyricism and warmth, but he always delivers drama, satisfying tension and release, and postmodern inventiveness. Generating creative friction with the drummer **Nasheet Waits** and the bassist **Tarus Matteen**, Moran fashions a group sound that finds epoch-spanning inspiration in Duke Ellington, Cecil Taylor, and hip-hop, among other sources. (Village Vanguard, 178 Seventh Ave. S., at 11th St. 212-255-4037. Nov. 26-Dec. 1.)

Maria Schneider Orchestra

For New York jazz fans, Thanksgiving means one thing: the annual return of Schneider's Orchestra to the Jazz Standard, a club that has been her home base for the past decade. Stocked with impressive players (including the pianist **Frank Kimbrough** and the saxophonists **Rich Perry** and **Scott Robinson**) whose longtime loyalty is rewarded with plentiful moments in the spotlight, Schneider's ensemble lends dramatic heft to the leader's atmospheric and texturally rich—if melodically thrifty—music. (116 E. 27th St. 212-576-2232. Nov. 26-Dec. 1.)

Randy Weston-Billy Harper

Weston, the venerated eighty-seven-year-old pianist and composer, and Harper, the seventy-year-old tenor saxophonist, have been playing together, on and off, since the early seventies, but their first duo album, "The Roots of the Blues," which they recently recorded, has only now been released. To no one's surprise, the veterans sound ideal together, their shared history and love of blues-inflected jazz making for rousing and deeply expressive interaction. (Iridium, 1650 Broadway, at 51st St. 212-582-2121. Nov. 26-27.)



CELEBRATING THE HOLIDAYS

Handel's "Messiah"

The elegant presentation at St. Thomas Church is done in glorious Anglican style with its choir of men and boys, conducted by John Scott; the New York Philharmonic's more robust performances are conducted this year by Andrew Manze and feature the Westminster Symphonic Choir. (Fifth Ave. at 53rd St. saintthomaschurch.org. Dec. 10 and Dec. 12. • Avery Fisher Hall. 212-875-5656. Dec. 17-21.)

A German Christmas

A Christmas program in the North German style, offering Lutheran music by Praetorius and Schütz, is provided by the chamber chorus Tenet and its frequent collaborators in the brass group Dark Horse Consort, with its friends in the Bach Collegium San Diego helping out. (Park Avenue Christian Church, Park Ave. at 85th St. tenetnyc.com. Dec. 14.)

The Brandenburg Concertos

The Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center at Alice Tully Hall provides two committed performances of Bach's masterworks, the only pieces of secular music that enjoy sacred status at Christmastime. (212-875-5788. Dec. 15 and Dec. 17.)

"The Nutcracker"

New York City Ballet's version by George Balanchine is the mother of all "Nutcrackers," filled with fantasy, princes, and sweets. Alexei Ratmansky's re-imagined rendition for the American Ballet Theatre is suffused with danger. As in life, the children are not always well behaved, and love does not always grant eternal happiness. (David H. Koch Theatre, Lincoln Center. 212-870-5570. Nov. 29-Jan. 4. • Brooklyn Academy of Music, 30 Lafayette Ave. 718-636-4100. Dec. 13-22.)

"A Christmas Story: The Musical"

John Rando directs this surprisingly substantial musical, based on the 1983 movie and set in the nineteen-forties, with music and lyrics by Benj Pasek and Justin Paul and a book by Joseph Robinette, which returns for a limited holiday run. Starring Dan Lauria. (The Theatre at Madison Square Garden. 866-858-0008. Dec. 11-29.)

"Radio City Christmas Spectacular"

The unabashedly glittery spectacle combines a video tour through Rockefeller Center and Central Park with the Nativity story, live camels and sheep, and Santa Claus. The stars of the show are those cheerful and athletic Rockettes. (Radio City Music Hall, Sixth Ave. at 50th St. 866-858-0007. Through Dec. 30.)

"Peter and the Wolf"

This annual performance of Prokofiev's tale has become a popular holiday outing. Isaac Mizrahi is the knowing and avuncular narrator, and choreography is by the witty young John Heginbotham. (Guggenheim Museum, Fifth Ave. at 89th St. 212-423-3587. Dec. 7-15.)

"Bring Home the Sun: Winter Solstice"

Performers in Paul Winter's annual solstice concert at the Cathedral of St. John the Divine include the

vocalist Theresa Thomason, the twenty-five-member-strong Forces of Nature Dance Theatre, and the Brazilian musicians Renato Braz and Ivan Lins. (solsticeconcert.com. Dec. 19-21.)

Holiday Train Show

Some hundred and forty landmarks, including the original Yankee Stadium, the Statue of Liberty, and the Brooklyn Bridge, are constructed out of bark, twigs, stems, fruits, seeds, pine cones, and other natural materials inside the Enid A. Haupt Conservatory at the New York Botanical Garden, and a quarter mile of track stretches between them. An added incentive for grownups: Bar Car Nights on certain Fridays and Saturdays in December, when cocktails are served. (nybg.org. Through Jan. 12.)

Louis Armstrong House Museum Tours

In 1943, the great jazz trumpeter moved into a modest home in Corona, Queens. He lived there until his death, in 1971, and every year he decorated it for the holidays. From Dec. 3 to Dec. 29, tours feature rare audio clips from Armstrong's personal collection, including his reading of "The Night Before Christmas," the last recording he ever made. (34-56 107th St., Queens. louisarmstronghouse.org. Dec. 3-29.)

Great Solstice Market

The New Amsterdam Market celebrates its eighth anniversary at the Old Fulton Fish Market on Dec. 15. Holiday specialty items will be offered by some seventy vendors based in New York State and the Northeast. There will also be latkes, a winter stew, and handcrafted wreaths and ornaments. The market will close with a communal bell ringing at 5 P.M., marking the end of the 2013 season. (newamsterdammarket.org.)

"Ellington at Christmas"

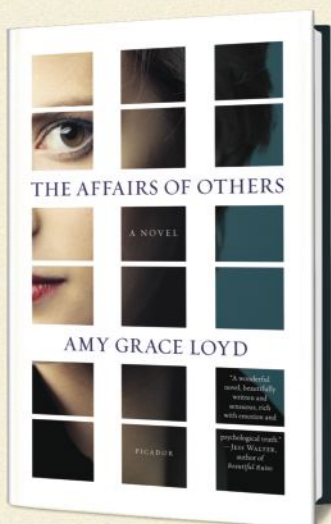
The actor Keith David narrates a swinging holiday celebration at the Apollo Theatre, featuring the tap dancer Savion Glover, the sixteen-piece David Berger Jazz Orchestra, the Abyssinian Baptist Church Choir, and others performing excerpts from "Ellington's Nutcracker Suite" and his acclaimed "Sacred Music" concerts. (apollotheater.org. Dec. 7.)

"A Christmas Carol"

Starting Dec. 3, the Morgan Library & Museum displays the original, red-leather-bound manuscript of Charles Dickens's holiday ghost story. On Dec. 8, the museum offers a guided tour of the exhibition to visitors, on a first-come, first-served basis. (225 Madison Ave., at 36th St. 212-685-0008.)

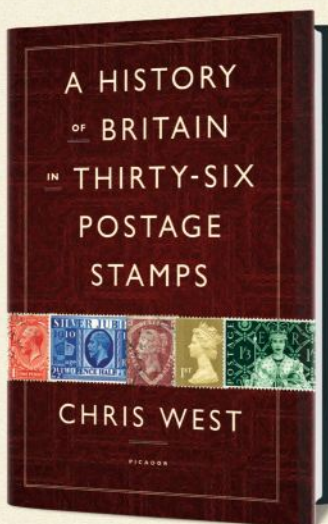
Origami Holiday Tree

Volunteers began folding paper in August to make the ornaments for the American Museum of Natural History's annual tree. This year's theme is inspired by the current exhibition "The Power of Poison," and the decorations represent toxic creatures such as scorpions and fire ants. Through Jan. 12. (Central Park W., at 79th St. 212-769-5100.)



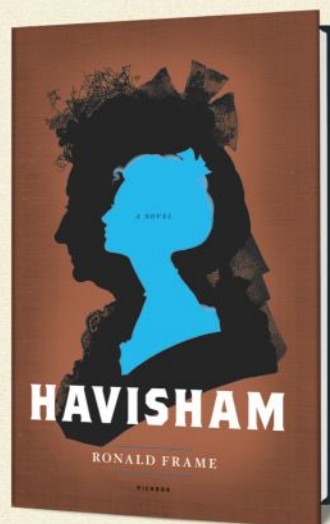
“A wonderful novel, beautifully written and sensuous, rich with emotion and psychological truth. . . . Hums with desire.”

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Masterpiece and author of
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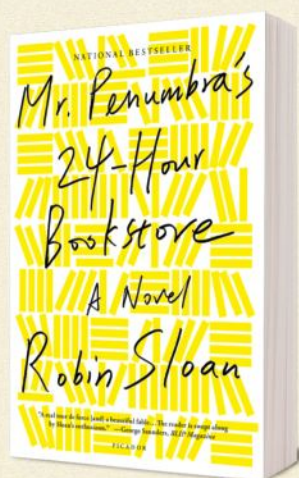
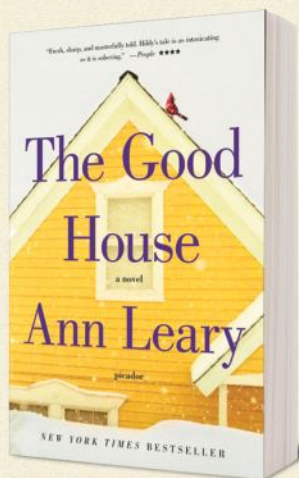


“From a young, unassuming heiress to the unhinged spinster so familiar to fans of Dickens’s novel . . . Frame has brought a clean, modern sensibility to his rendering of the tale. . . . A moody, intensely entrancing plot.”

—**Entertainment Weekly**

“Leary writes with humor and insight. . . . The result is a layered and complex portrait of a woman . . . in a town where no secret stays secret for long.”

—**J. Courtney Sullivan**,
The New York Times
Book Review

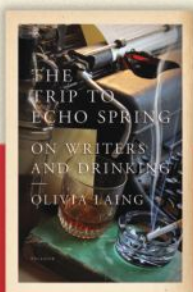
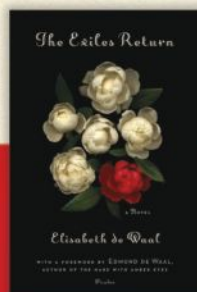


“A real tour de force [and] a beautiful fable . . . The reader is swept along by Sloan’s enthusiasm.”

—**George Saunders**,
BLIP Magazine

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THE TALK OF THE TOWN

COMMENT HEAL THYSELF

Last Tuesday, at a forum put together by the *Wall Street Journal*, President Barack Obama told a group of C.E.O.s that he was relatively sure that healthcare.gov would be “functioning for the majority of people who are using it” by November 30th, two months after its disastrous launch. He acknowledged that the process had been “rough, to say the least,” and added that, once the site does work, “we’re going to have to obviously re-market and re-brand.”

That’s not all he’ll have to do. In a CBS News poll released the next day, the President’s approval rating fell to thirty-seven per cent, the lowest it has ever been. The flawed roll-out has put the rest of his policy agenda at risk and, with it, progressive ideas about what government can attempt and what a President can achieve—at a moment when an unprecedented expansion of health-care coverage could validate them. According to a new Gallup poll, only forty-two per cent of Americans now agree that the government should guarantee access to health care. In 2006, the number was sixty-nine per cent. The technical inadequacies of healthcare.gov may prove less of a burden than the political damage that has been done.

By November 2nd, fewer than twenty-seven thousand people had managed to sign up for plans through the federal exchange, while seventy-nine thousand had done so in the fourteen states that set up their own sites with federal funds. A week ago, at a press conference at the White House, reporters asked Obama if he had been less than honest with the American people about the readiness of the program. Even in the face of hostility, the President seemed to think, as he often does, that his intelligence vouchsafes his integrity. He replied, “You know, I’m accused of a lot of things, but I don’t think I’m

stupid enough to go around saying, ‘This is going to be like shopping on Amazon or Travelocity,’ a week before the Web site opens, if I thought that it wasn’t going to work.”

But there were also the cancellation notices, sent out by insurance companies to hundreds of thousands of people who had heard the President repeatedly tell them, “If you like your plan, you can keep it.” His defense was that companies drop people every year; that the cancelled plans were shabby; and that, once people saw the great deals on healthcare.gov, they wouldn’t want their old ones anyway. That just seemed to make people angrier, though he was no doubt right about the plans. He came as close as he ever has to losing the wholesale support of congressional Democrats, and was forced to devise something between a fix and an alibi, giving state insurance commissioners the power to choose whether people can hold on to existing plans for another year.

The problems with the rollout are alternately maddening and tragic. America’s health-care system has long been profoundly broken. It has shortened lives, distorted the economy, left families bankrupt after illnesses. The hundreds of bugs on the site—slapped-together code that has to draw on multiple agencies’ databases, some decades old, built by doz-

ens of contractors—have obscured a pretty good law, one that finally protects people with preexisting conditions and those who could never afford insurance. There are other benefits, too, such as cost controls and coverage for reproductive health. Obama doesn’t have to run for office again, but other Democrats do, and the big question for the 2014 midterms may be how each party handles Obamacare.

Not for the first time, Obama has been slow to realize the effect, at every stage, of his knockdown fight with the Republican Party over



policy. The passage of the Affordable Care Act, in 2010, was followed by court challenges, dozens of votes to repeal or defund it, and a systematic state-by-state effort to impair it, using every tool in the political system and some outside of it. In 2012, when the Supreme Court upheld most of the law, it also allowed states to opt out of the Medicaid expansion. The federal government would have paid almost the entire cost. Who wouldn't like such a plan? Republicans, as it happens: only four states with both a Republican governor and a Republican-led legislature took the money. (In all, twenty-five states did.) In Texas alone, this will leave a million people in a "coverage gap." In a concerted effort facilitated by conservative interest groups—such as Generation Opportunity, funded by the Koch brothers—Republican-led states have undermined the law in ways that range from making it harder to enroll to declining to enforce rules when insurance companies break them.

Healthcare.gov has been getting better; visitors are now generally able to log on and start an application. And by last week enrollment had more than doubled on the state-run Web sites, which continue to work reasonably well, notably in California and Kentucky. Where Obamacare is broadly available and unobstructed, it appears to be bearing out its promise. But there isn't a lot of time: the deadline to sign up

for plans that go into effect on January 1st is December 23rd, just three weeks after the November 30th target date to have the system repaired. Then money starts changing hands, in the form of premiums and subsidies. Henry Chao, the deputy chief information officer of the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, testified last week that parts of the site that will be needed for that—"the back-office systems, the accounting systems, the payment systems"—have not even been built.

Since the rollout, Obama has treated it as a given that the Web site will be fixed, and that everyone will remember how bad the present system has been and how much better the new one is. "I am confident that, by the time we look back on this next year, that people are going to say this is working well, and it's helping a lot of people," he said at last week's press conference. After five years in the White House, Obama still believes that he can go into a corner, tinker with something until it's better, and win on the merits. The long view can serve him well, but it can also leave him unprepared when the other side won't give up on an all-out battle. Health-care reform is the President's signature legislative achievement, and a historic one. To preserve it, he needs to fight for it politically, state by state. This time, the Obama brand alone isn't enough.

—Amy Davidson

UP LIFE'S LADDER ACTION



Late last month, Jerome Bettis, a former Pittsburgh Steeler, race-walked into a meeting room above the cafeteria at ESPN headquarters. "They got me doing the shuffle," he said, removing his suit jacket, loosening a purple polka-dot tie, and guzzling from a glass of water, as if rehydrating at half-time. Bettis had just taped a segment on "SportsCenter," his second appearance of the day, and was now preparing for an hour-long film session with Barry Nash, an on-air performance coach employed by ESPN to help retired athletes become more proficient talking heads. Fans remember Bettis as "the Bus," because he wasn't much smaller than a Greyhound. Nash, who wore a plaid shirt and red tortoiseshell glasses, was slight enough to squeeze into half a seat. He cued up a clip from one of Bettis's recent appearances and began speaking in broadcasting koans: "People want to know—how is this Jerome different from all the other Jeromes I know?"

ESPN, the Megalodon of sports broadcasting, has no shortage of retired millionaires sending job applications: both the N.F.L. and the N.B.A. host annual seminars for players interested in broadcasting, and a current Pittsburgh Steeler recently asked if he could work as an unpaid intern. But finding linebackers who understand the difference between B-roll and a boom mike can be difficult. "They go from a job where you're trained to say as little as possible to a job where you need to say as much as possible," Gerry Matalon, a senior producer who helps run ESPN's on-air talent development, said recently.

In 2008, to remedy the problem, ESPN created a talent department staffed with several performance coaches like Nash. When the network hired Ray Lewis, a voluble former Baltimore Raven known for his enthusiasm and his incoherence, in equal measure, it asked him to undergo training with Arthur Joseph, a vocal coach who often works with opera singers. "We wanted him to focus on delivering that same intensity, but to put it in a proper sentence structure," Tim Scanlan, a vice-president in the talent department, said. Joseph met Lewis at his home, and put him through a series of exercises that he calls "vocal yoga." Football fans can thus

thank Joseph for the following images: Ray Lewis extending his arm and staring into the middle distance, to "trace the arc of sound"; Ray Lewis loosening up his jaw with a "yawn-sigh"; Ray Lewis pulling on his tongue with two fingers and saying the word "hat."

Bettis had joined ESPN in September, and was treating this opportunity like a rookie given one more chance to make the team; he had previously worked for NBC as a studio analyst, but the network eventually let him go, a decision that was lauded on the Web site



Jerome Bettis

Awful Announcing, which catalogues what its name describes. Nash and Joseph both say that athletes, having been coached all their lives, tend to be responsive students. Once, when Lewis averted his gaze while answering a question, Joseph said, “Ray, please look me in the eye,” and Lewis never glanced away again.

In their sessions, Nash had been encouraging Bettis to accentuate his size on camera—ESPN has not asked the Bus to lose any weight for TV—and to be more expressive with his hands. (Bettis had also been working to limit his dependence on “umm”s and “like”s.) Nash pulled up a clip on his laptop in which Bettis had been asked to stand and use a touch screen. “Did you see what happened when you opened yourself up to the camera?” he said. “All of a sudden, you’re the king of the room—kind of like a weatherman.”

“You’re holding court,” Bettis said.

“It’s like football players when they play at home—that attitude of ‘This is my house,’” Nash said. “It becomes ‘The Jerome Bettis Show.’”

“It’s my moment,” Bettis said, before thanking Nash and rushing off to his final appearance of the day, an hour-long N.F.L. show alongside Jeff Saturday, a former offensive lineman who had also recently joined ESPN, and received coaching from the talent department. Trey Wingo, a longtime ESPN anchor, was the show’s veteran, and tried to put the new talent at ease. Watching a pre-taped interview in which he flubbed a line, Wingo said, “Me speak for living . . . like football . . . yay!”

Throughout the show, Bettis sat with his arms spread wide on the desk, as Nash had instructed, and occasionally darted off-set to the research desk during commercial breaks. “I’ve got to find a stat they’re not using,” he said. The producers complimented him on a fantasy-football segment—“Good information, Jerome”—while Saturday, a thirteen-year N.F.L. veteran, asked Wingo, sixteen years with ESPN, for pointers.

“Which camera do I look at?” Saturday asked.

“Whichever camera you want, big boy,” Wingo said. “You’re Jeff Fucking Saturday. The camera will find you.”

—Reeves Wiedeman

LONDON POSTCARD FIXER-UPPER



Sigmund Freud spent the last year of his life at 20 Maresfield Gardens, a handsome red brick house in the North London neighborhood of Hampstead. He installed himself there in September of 1938, after fleeing the Nazi occupation of Vienna, and he died there the following September. Suffering from cancer of the jaw, he took a fatal dose of morphine administered by a doctor at his request. Freud had found the house a comfortable refuge. “We have it incomparably better than at Berggasse,” he wrote to a friend, although he complained that “British deficiencies in overcoming the heating problem are clearly evident.” Freud had managed to bring with him most of his household belongings, including his analytical couch, a Victorian chaise longue that was given to him by a satisfied patient. His analysand H.D. (the poet Hilda Doolittle) described lying on it—“the old-fashioned horsehair sofa that has heard more secrets than the confession box of any popular Roman Catholic father-confessor in his heyday. This was the homely historical instrument of the original scheme of psychotherapy, of psychoanalysis, the science of the unraveling of the tangled skeins of the unconscious mind”—while Freud beat the head cushion with a fist.

Freud’s youngest child, Anna, lived at Maresfield Gardens until 1982, when she died, and the property, in keeping with her wishes, was converted into the Freud Museum. In May, its trustees launched an appeal for funds to restore the couch, which had fallen into disrepair. Donors provided eight thousand pounds (has there ever been a better philanthropic bargain?), and, now, mounted on a wooden platform in what used to be Freud’s dining room, the couch is being treated by a pair of textile conservators. Denuded of its Persian rug—a Qashqa’i piece that Freud’s cousin Moritz gave him as an engagement gift in 1883—and jewel-colored chenille pillows, it recalled not so much

“the epitome of Oriental hedonism,” as the mythographer Marina Warner has written, as something you might find on Craigslist. The front rail sagged, and a spring had escaped from the undercarriage. The linen was the color of old newspapers. The head cushion resembled a nautilus shell nibbled by crabs. Still, the couch emanated power. Looming over it (but not sitting on it; this was a restoration, after all) was like being able to bite into Newton’s apple. If walls could talk, at Freud’s house they might defer to the upholstered furniture.

Poppy Singer, one of the conservators, wore white gloves and socks with hearts on them. She was examining an amoeba-shaped stain. “It’s definitely waterborne,” she said. “You can tell by the way it wicks out. You get this hard line. Whether it was a ceiling leak, spilt cups of tea—it’s impossible to say.”

Singer was not particularly swoony at having been asked to tend to what the museum’s director had referred to, during the fund-raising drive, as “possibly the most famous piece of furniture in the world.”

“We’ve worked, in the past, on a lot of large-scale seats of varying age and decrepitude,” Singer said. “It’s quite a plain piece, with no exotic pretensions whatsoever.”

Singer and her colleague, Kate Gill, had twelve days to improve the couch’s condition. Their first task was to document its structure. To that end, Gill stood in a corner, sketching cross-sections on a legal pad. Singer was on her knees. She held a sponge wedge—the kind that makeup artists use to blend foundation—with which she carefully wiped the front left corner of the sofa. Next, she would vacuum its surface with a tiny hose, to remove any crumbs that the sponge might have left. Then she would stitch up failed seams, tack drooping corners, and patch frays and gashes with fabric dyed to match. Gill would reinsert the spring. Finally, Singer would apply a protective overlay of fine mesh.

“We try to preserve what has survived, not re-create what’s been lost,” Gill said.

The dining room looked onto a garden, where Freud celebrated his final



"I heard they mate for life."

birthday. As the afternoon faded, Singer kept working with the sponge wedge. Eventually, she stopped to examine the sponge. A century's worth of dirt, dust, and dreams had turned it almost black.

—Lauren Collins

GREENHOUSE GAS DEPT. DRILL, BABY, DRILL



In Warsaw, the other week, a Filipino diplomat sobbed while addressing the U.N. climate summit; he had family in the typhoon-ravaged country. "We may have ratified our own doom," he said, alluding to the slow pace of negotiations for curbing international emissions. He announced that he was starting a hunger strike, for the duration of the summit, and was given a standing ovation.

But climate science is not all gloom

and glaciers. Consider carbon capture and storage, sometimes known as "sequestration": the prospect of burying our energy emissions in reservoirs of rock, so that we might continue to provide heat and air-conditioning for our cars without hastening the demise of island nations. It's almost like a get-out-of-jail-free card for gratuitous trips to the mall. "It's amoral," the geophysicist Dennis Kent said recently.

"It's enabling," his colleague David Goldberg said.

"You could do it tomorrow," Kent added.

"The technology exists," Goldberg said, and added that simply reducing consumption probably won't be enough to offset the quantities of carbon that have already been released into the atmosphere, waiting to evaporate.

One question, among many, is where to do the burying. Goldberg and Kent were standing on the campus of Columbia's Lamont-Doherty Earth Observatory, twenty miles upriver from the college's Manhattan campus, sur-

veying boxes full of core samples from the Newark Basin, beneath the Palisades. "So we've been looking at these rocks for several weeks," Goldberg said. He was dressed like a prospector, in jeans and a plaid shirt, and had just removed his hard hat after stepping away from a rig that was boring noisily into the earth at a rate of ten feet an hour.

The rock samples were cylindrical, and resembled sausages or giant pencil erasers, depending on the depths from which they were extracted. Though they all looked hard enough to crack a skull, Goldberg spoke of their characteristics in terms of porosity. "Think of it like a sponge," he said, and identified some mottled pinkish-gray sandstone from eleven hundred and fifty feet below ground as a prime candidate for sequestration. "You can even see pockmarks and pitting," he said—all the better for collecting liquid CO₂ pumped back into the ground by power plants.

A few hundred feet deeper, the rock samples turned reddish and increased in density: less good for storage. "Mudstone," Goldberg said. "This is typical of what's west of here. It's what you see on the road cuts on the thruway, for example." The drilling rig was only a day or two away from reaching what Goldberg called "the basement," or the transition from Triassic to Paleozoic rock, at a depth of some seventeen hundred and twelve feet. The virtue of the Palisades site, for rock-mapping purposes, is that the basin below it is shallow enough to enable one to bore through hundreds of millions of years within a matter of weeks. The downside? It's too shallow to be of any practical use for storing excess carbon in volume. Plus, the human population is dense—too many neighbors to contend with. "It would basically be a giant oil-industry operation, in terms of the scale of it," Goldberg said, describing the amount of capture and storage necessary to make a meaningful difference.

Goldberg and Kent turned to some boxes of gray rocks: heavy basalts from the six- to seven-hundred-foot range of the Palisades' sill—formed two hundred and one million years ago, during a period of heavy volcanism, when New York was near the equator. Their solidity would make for a nice cap on a potential CO₂ reservoir, but they have

other virtues, too. "When these rocks are filled with water, and you inject CO₂, it reacts chemically with the basalt to make chalk," Goldberg said, looking hopeful. "You know, simplified, of course."

"Not too simplified!" Kent said. "That's what happens. That's the ultimate repository of CO₂: limestone."

"It's benign, it's solid, it's not moving," Goldberg said.

"We have countertops made of it!" Kent said.

"The other idea Dennis and I are working on is that the basalts themselves might be good reservoirs for CO₂," Goldberg said. "All the ocean floors are basalt. You could put all these pieces together. The dream world would be the Newark Basin-type rocks"—like the pinkish strain beneath the Palisades—"offshore, with a buried basalt layer, and capped with nice fine-grain extra-bonus sediment."

"And no one's backyard to deal with," Kent said.

"That's called my own Atlantis," Goldberg said.

—Ben McGrath

THE PICTURES LIFTOFF



In every job that must be done, there is an element of fun. The words belong to Mary Poppins, coaxing the Banks children into tidying their nursery, but they are equally true of film promotion. So it was with Emma Thompson, who was in town recently to talk about her new movie, "Saving Mr. Banks." Thompson plays P. L. Travers, the persnickety author of the "Mary Poppins" books. ("Mary Poppins never explains anything," Travers told this magazine, in 1962. "I don't think explaining helps anything.") Tom Hanks plays Walt Disney, who must persuade her to hand over the book rights for the sake of movie magic. "It took years for Walt Disney to get this character from her," Thompson said. "She felt that he was going to make her sweet and sentimental."

Thompson, who is more easilyajoled than Travers, had set aside part of

the afternoon to go fly a kite. It was one of the last autumn days suitable for kite flying: bright sun, robust winds. Thompson and her husband had tried when they lived in Scotland. "We'd take a kite up to the hills, and it would invariably get tangled up in the Scottish pines," she recalled, heading toward Central Park. She wore a cream-colored overcoat, a checkered scarf, and leather gloves. "The whole thing would be a disaster, and we'd decide to go and drink beer in the pub instead."

With a rainbow-colored kite under her arm, she expounded on Travers: "She followed Gurdjieff. She followed Krishnamurti. She was interested in many different philosophers, and she was constantly searching. She suffered from all sorts of ailments all her life. She was never really comfortable, I don't think, physically. She loved poetry. Wanted to be a poet. And indeed wrote poetry, commended by W. B. Yeats himself. She was Australian. Left home and toured with a theatre company in Australia. There are some wonderful pictures of her from that era—probably had a whale of a time."

At the Great Lawn, Thompson laid the kite on the grass and crouched over the instructions. "Insert the cross struts into nylon pockets," she read, and fixed the kite into its diamond shape. Next: "'Attach the flying line to the bridle loop.'" She tied the string with a reef knot ("the first knot we were taught at school"), looking pleased. "You see, it's going to go off like a rocket."

The instructions continued: "Have a friend stand about seventy-five feet downwind from you and hold the kite with its nose pointed towards the sky." Thompson approached three young women, who sat on the grass drinking paper cups of coffee. "Excuse me," she said. "Could one of you happen to give us a hand with our kite?" A girl in a leopard-print jacket, who introduced herself as Denisse Reyna, volunteered. "What you do, my darling girl, is you're going to take that"—Thompson handed her the kite—"and run over there. When you feel that the wind is catching, you push it up in the air. O.K.?"

Reyna ran north. "Just chuck it up into the air," Thompson called out. Reyna hurled the kite, which wafted momentarily before diving to the ground. "Nearly!"

Thompson said. Reyna launched it again: *Plop.*

"Let's try it one more time!" Thompson yelled. "O.K., babe? Go for it!" This time, the kite held the wind, and Thompson sprinted back, pulling the line taut. "Please don't drop!" she said, reeling the string above her head. "I feel like Charlie Brown."

The kite swooped indecisively. "Come on!" Thompson pleaded. "Take it." The kite dipped, and she squealed, "No, no, no! Oh, bugger." She tugged the line: "Come on, darling. Stay up, love." The kite hovered above her, like a curious bird. "It acquires a character after a while," she said. It looked sleepy. "Wait! No! Go on! Hey! No, no, no, no, *no, no, no.*"

Thompson collected the kite and sat on a bench. She didn't grow up with nan-



Emma Thompson

nies, she said. "My parents were sort of penniless actors. We did have what were known as au pairs, which, as my mother said, ended up being almost more work for her. They were all eighteen and didn't know their arse from their elbows." Her daughter, Gaia, had a nanny until she was five. "Her nanny is now my nanny. She became my P.A." Her own Mary Poppins? "No, no. Quite apart from the unfortunate lack of actual bona-fide magic, she was not at all baleful. Viv's a very gentle and loving person. I think that if you were to have a Mary Poppins without the magic you might have to fire her. She's quite mean, you know."

—Michael Schulman

OUR LOCAL CORRESPONDENTS

MOZZARELLA STORY

A cheese ritual.

BY CALVIN TRILLIN



Francisco Campanelli taking a break outside the family store in 2008.

You could say that Joe's Dairy and I go way back. I was a regular when there was still a Joe on the premises. I can't picture Joe now; he went back to Italy in 1977. But I can picture the mozzarella he made fresh every day in that tiny store—across Sullivan Street from St. Anthony of Padua, which has looked after the spiritual needs of the Italian South Village since the late nineteenth century. Joe's mozzarella was a bit smaller than a softball, with one end twisted into a sort of knob. I remember wondering, in desperate moments, if, using the knob as a handhold, I could stand right there at the counter and devour one of those balls of mozzarella, as if chomping away at a large and exceedingly juicy apple. The person who gradually grew accustomed to being called Joe after 1977 is named Anthony Campanelli. From birth until well into adult-

hood, he lived in a walkup apartment above the store. When Joe decided to return to the Old Country, Anthony, then a high-school senior, was his part-time helper. Anthony—with the help of his parents, who saw Joe's Dairy as a solid lifetime calling for a boy who showed more interest in cheese and baseball than in his studies—bought the business. Although he was a few weeks shy of his eighteenth birthday, he knew how to make mozzarella the way Joe made it.

Naturally, I remained a regular. When I took visitors on walks from my house, in Greenwich Village, to Chinatown—perambulations that could be characterized as nosing strolls—we always stopped at Joe's to get a salted mozzarella, pulled from the cold water that was the final step in its production and sliced for easy (if sloppy) sidewalk

eating. In the unlikely event that we had some left over, I'd keep it out of the fridge—refrigeration is to fresh mozzarella what wooden crosses are to vampires—and look forward to a mild and juicy pre-breakfast snack the next morning. In later years, I had an easy solution for provisions if people were coming by for a drink: I'd stop at the Blue Ribbon Bakery Market, on Bedford, for the Frisbee-size flat bread called "savory matzo crackers," which I have always described to my guests by saying that if matzo tasted like that the Jews would never have left Egypt. ("Where did you get that matzo?" "Well, there's this little place near the biggest pyramid . . ." "So let's go back and I'll just run in." "But the Egyptian Army . . ." "We've got time, we've got time.") Then I'd go to Joe's Dairy for a smoked mozzarella that—still soft and milky, unlike most smoked mozzarella—always came up from the basement late in the afternoon. "One smokie," Ro, the woman who took care of the counter in recent years, would say, as she went over to a tray to pick one out. While I waited for my bill to be totted up—in earlier years by Anthony's mother, Gracie, who worked the counter before Ro—I'd wave at Anthony, who could be seen in what was a certified New York State dairy even though it was a room even tinier than the store. Ordinarily, he could only nod back: his hands were in a huge pot of mozzarella.

In 1982, Anthony—standing, as usual, in front of the huge pot—was interviewed for an educational film that used Sullivan Street to illustrate how to approach writing about changes in the South Village. My wife was involved in the film's production, and for years after that we'd recall our favorite scene: Anthony, who had been a promising catcher in high school, is talking about how, just after he took ownership of the store, his mother intercepted a letter from the Mets inviting him to a tryout camp and hid it. While he's telling the story, he's forming some mozzarella, almost as if he were rubbing down a new ball before throwing it back to the pitcher. He's saying that he long ago forgave his mother, because he knew that she was just acting in what she saw as his best interest.

It was certainly in the best interest of

those of us who live nearby. Year after year, we waved to Anthony—who eventually grew a bit too heavy to make a quick leap from behind the plate to snatch up a well-placed bunt—as he hand-made about a thousand pounds of mozzarella a day. Then, not long ago, I rode my bike to Sullivan Street to pick up a smoked mozzarella, having collected the savory matzo crackers on the way over. The gates were locked in front of Joe's Dairy. Had I absent-mindedly come on a Sunday or Monday, when Joe's was closed? No, it was definitely Thursday. Then I saw a typed notice on the door, visible through the gate. It was headed, ominously, "Dear Loyal Customers." It said that, although Joe's Dairy would continue to provide mozzarella to restaurants and stores, the Sullivan Street retail store was, after thirty-five years, closed for good.

What went through my head, I might as well admit, was not "Well, we have to be grateful for all those years." It was "Hey! What about us?"

Joe's Dairy had always sold some other items—salamis, for instance, and olive oil and sun-dried tomatoes and a variety of cheeses—but I thought of it as my mozzarella store. At the time Anthony took over, that's how people in the area tended to think of the places they shopped in—specialists in one thing or another. Most of the purveyors were in tiny storefronts. Sullivan Street itself had two Genovese butcher shops. Raffetto's pasta store was nearby, on Houston. There were two Italian fishmongers on Bleeker. Our bread came from Zito's, also on Bleeker. Around the corner from Zito's, on Cornelia, there was a bakery that I thought of as my breadstick store; around another corner was a tiny bakery where I bought only prosciutto bread that was the shape of a Vespa tire. There were two pork stores—Faicco's, on Bleeker, and a store on Carmine that I remember mainly for its hot cooked salami and for a counterman who liked to horrify new customers by casually popping a little ball of raw ground pork into his mouth. When Joe's Dairy was crowded—meaning that four or five people had managed to squeeze in between the counter and the door and the boxes of mozzarella set to be delivered to whole-

sale customers and the folding chair sometimes occupied by Anthony's father, Francisco, who for some years specialized in hydrating and marinating the sun-dried tomatoes—the market baskets of my fellow-customers showed evidence of what I thought of as convenient ten-stop shopping.

Raffetto's is still turning out fresh pasta, as it has done for a hundred and seven years. Faicco's, a half-dozen years older and still in the same family, remains what some in the neighborhood think of as their soppressata store. There are still two or three old-fashioned butcher shops in the neighborhood, including, across the street from Joe's Dairy, Pino's, which has been in the same family for seventy years. Otherwise, the stores whose goods used to be in those market baskets I'd see at Joe's are no more. One-stop shopping gradually took over, even in lower Manhattan. When Balducci's, which began as a produce store, moved to larger quarters, in the early seventies, it began stocking everything a Villager might need for dinner, even if one of the neighbors who showed up was James Beard or Mimi Sheraton. When Balducci's left, a similarly broad inventory was maintained in the same space by Citarella, which was once simply a fishmonger and now has as its motto "The Ultimate Gourmet Market." In the words of Lou DiPalo, the third-generation (or maybe fourth, depending on how you count) proprietor of DiPalo's, a distinguished dairy, or *latteria*, on Grand Street in Little Italy, "Everybody started to do everything."

Many of the women from the tenements who treasured ten-stop shopping—not just for the quality of the goods but for the companionship and the ritual—are no longer alive, and many of their children long ago moved out of the neighborhood. A lot of people who now live within walking distance of Joe's Dairy favor one-stop shopping, because they don't have time for the nine other stops; unlike the Italian women from the tenements, they're in an office all day. The block Joe's Dairy is on happens to be where the encroachment of SoHo on the South Village is particularly dramatic. A couple of doors down from Joe's, just past the rectory for the Franciscans who preside

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over St. Anthony's, is a place called 'Snice ("edibles and potables"). There's still a laundromat, but there is also a pricey baby-clothing store called Le Petit Chapelais and the SoHo Gallery for Digital Art and a café-bakery called Once Upon a Tart and a couple of chic little stores selling women's purses or men's clothing and the Dutch, which has main courses like duck with Cayuga Farm polenta, red currants, and salted foie gras. The co-proprietor of the Dutch is Andrew Carmellini, a chef who has cooked at restaurants like Le Cirque and Café Boulud. He is of Italian origin but does not live in a walkup above the store. Carmellini's duck entrée costs thirty-two dollars, which is no longer an unusual price for an entrée in the neighborhood. At an ice-cream store near where Zito's used to be—a gelato store, really, since "ice cream" is pretty much a phrase from the past in the Village—one of my daughters bought her children cones not long ago and was presented with a check so large that she caught herself a few minutes later about to utter what would have probably been a first in parental admonitions: "You finish that ice cream!"

High prices for children's clothing or duck entrées or gelato normally reflect high rents, and when Joe's Dairy closed some customers immediately invoked

the Manhattan variation on *cherchez la femme*: look for the real-estate angle. The building Joe's is in, 156 Sullivan, has several apartments that are covered by New York's old rent-control laws—one of them is occupied by Francisco Campanelli—but the apartments that are no longer rent-controlled, one-bedroom walkups advertised as being in SoHo rather than in the South Village, go for around four thousand dollars a month. A year or so ago, the building was bought by Jared Kushner. Although he is best known to New York gossip-column devotees for having been admitted to Harvard suspiciously close to a two-and-a-half-million-dollar pledge to the university by his father, for having bought the *New York Observer* at the age of twenty-five, and for having married Donald Trump's daughter, Kushner is also in the real-estate business. Some Sullivan Street analysts assume that any new owner of 156 would not think of a South Village mom-and-pop mozzarella operation as an ideal tenant for the ground floor of a building aspiring to SoHo chic.

All of that may be true, Vincent Campanelli, Anthony's older brother, told me, shortly after Joe's Dairy closed, but he insisted that the decision to close was not driven by real-estate considerations. It was made, he said, at a time when Joe's

still had several years left on its lease. Vincent is the Campanelli brother who did enjoy his studies: after ten years in Franciscan seminaries, he taught math and then religion for eighteen years at La Salle Academy, the Catholic high school that both Campanellis attended, before going to work at the store full time. Our conversation took place at the closed Sullivan Street store, where Vincent had come to meet a wholesale customer who was picking up mozzarella to sell in eastern Long Island. "Our clientele disappeared," Vincent said. "The yuppies eat out or they go to Gourmet Garage or Whole Foods or Trader Joe's." Vincent said that the handwriting was on the wall once Anthony decided to move his mozzarella-making operation from Joe's tiny back room to a larger space in New Jersey, toward the end of 2011. Delivering mozzarella daily to the Sullivan Street store, as if it were a wholesale customer, he effectively separated the wholesale business from the retail business. It soon became clear, Vincent said, that the retail business was a losing proposition. According to Vincent, Anthony arrived one Wednesday from New Jersey—until he was able to establish a smoking operation there, he was coming to Sullivan Street on Wednesdays and Saturdays to do the smoking in the basement—and said, "We close this Saturday."

There's no secret formula for making mozzarella. Murray's Cheese, on Bleeker Street, the elaborate successor to a tiny storefront operation that a man named Murray started around the corner, sells a home mozzarella-making kit, along with the milk and the rennet to make the curd—the part of fresh milk that separates from the liquid when milk is heated and rennet or another enzyme is added. Fairway, a grocery chain prized by the New York food-obsessed, has a demonstration of mozzarella-making on the Internet. Having been given instructions by Anthony Campanelli, Fairway now buys curd from Joe's Dairy and makes mozzarella fresh every day in all but one of its stores. At Eataly, the Italian-food extravaganza on Twenty-third Street, someone makes fresh mozzarella all day at a stand near the cheese counter, with the steps in the process printed on a large sign behind him: The curd is broken up by forcing it through

a stringed implement known as a *chitarra*, or guitar. After that, it's just a matter of treating the curd with applications of hot water, stirring it, stretching it as you might stretch taffy (the final stretching is sometimes compared to wrestling with a thirty- or forty-pound snake), forming it into balls or loaves, and shocking it with cold water. A mozzarella-maker of talent and experience has a feel for the curd, which varies from batch to batch. He knows when, say, more stirring is required or when the water has to be hotter. "It's very, very easy to make mozzarella," Lou DiPalo says. "It's very hard to make it good."

Turning fresh mozzarella into smoked mozzarella is also considerably simpler than I had assumed. I suppose I'd had visions all those years of somebody standing for hours in front of a fire built of wood that is found only in some remote part of Basilicata—the way a barbecue perfectionist tends the fire of hand-hewn hickory which is gradually bringing his brisket to perfection. Vincent, who some years ago used to do the smoking at Joe's Dairy, told me that, once the fresh balls of mozzarella had been given a coating of salt, he'd take them down to some fifty-five-gallon barrels in the basement and smoke them for three or four minutes under gunny-sacks. When I asked Vincent what he used to build a fire, he said wood chips, cardboard, and newspapers. For reasons of size rather than of editorial content, he preferred the tabloids. A documentary that Piero Iberti and Jeremy Zalben have recently completed on Joe's Dairy unearthed a local television news feature from the early eighties in which the reporter interviews a man who stood quietly near the corner of Sullivan and Houston at the same time every afternoon. His name, he tells the interviewer, is Frank Costello. (No, not Frank Costello the Mob boss. Another Frank Costello.) This Frank Costello tells the reporter that he's stood on that corner for ten years. He is there because enough smoke leaks out of the basement of 156 Sullivan late in the afternoon to send passersby to the nearest fire-alarm box—where they are informed by Frank Costello that it is just mozzarella-smoking time at Joe's Dairy. Eventually, a proper smoker with a chimney was installed, removing the

false-alarm problem and presumably causing Frank Costello to look elsewhere for an equally helpful pastime.

A week after my first conversation with Vincent, he was at the store again for the Long Island pickup, and I went over for another chat. Something had occurred to me.

"So for the past year and a half," I said, "if I was waving to Anthony in the back, as I've assumed I was doing, he couldn't see me, because he was in New Jersey."

"Well, he has good eyesight," Vincent said, in the soothing tone he may have learned in the seminary.

"But he couldn't have still been nodding back to me, with his hands in the pot, because he wasn't there."

Vincent said that I was correct.

When I asked him if there was any difference between the mozzarella made in New Jersey and the mozzarella that had been made on Sullivan Street, he said the only slight difference he could think of—one that most people wouldn't notice—was that a New Jersey operation wouldn't have access to New York water, which is perfect for making mozzarella. (Is it just a coincidence that New York City, which has a lot of Italians and a lot of Jews, is said to have perfect water for making both mozzarella and bagels?)

I was one of the people who couldn't detect the absence of New York water—I'm sure that the fresh mozzarella we ate while strolling down Sullivan tasted the



same—but I had in recent months occasionally come across a smoked mozzarella from Joe's that wasn't quite as soft or milky as what I was accustomed to. I'd figured that even a catcher good enough to rate a big-league tryout could have an off day once in a while. But now I realized that, if Anthony had been coming in to smoke only on Wednesdays and Saturdays, I might have arrived on a Tuesday afternoon—timing my visit to be there right after I assumed the just-smoked mozza-

rella had emerged from the basement—and purchased something that had been around since Saturday, much of that time in (shudder!) the refrigerator. Even so, of course, I'd still looked forward to finishing off the leftovers before breakfast.

So what about us? Well, we adapt. So on walks to Chinatown, it isn't that difficult to rearrange the sustenance stops, so that we wait to get our fresh mozzarella at DiPalo's or Alleva, another old-fashioned *latteria* on the same block of Grand Street. Shortly after Joe's closed, I discovered that a panini specialist a couple of hundred yards from my house makes fresh mozzarella every morning for its sandwiches and is willing to part with a ball of it for someone who is expecting people for drinks and is planning to pick up some savory matzo crackers. I take some comfort in the fact that refrigerated mozzarella—which, because of health-department regulations, is the only sort of mozzarella you can buy in one-stop-shopping places—regains some of its softness and milkiness if it's left on the kitchen counter for a while.

Not long after Joe's closed, I watched a DVD of that 1982 educational film and discovered that the scene of Anthony talking about the intercepted letter from the Mets wasn't in it. Maybe I'd seen a rough cut; maybe my wife had described the scene to me so vividly that I incorporated it into the film. The memory plays tricks. The more I think about it, the less certain I am that the mozzarella the original Joe used to make had a knob on the end. I'm still finding it hard to believe that in the final year and a half of Joe's Dairy I couldn't have been exchanging greetings with Anthony when I stopped in for mozzarella. Joe's Dairy had become so much of a ritual for me that in my mind Anthony was planted in that tiny room and I was eating smoked mozzarella that had emerged from the basement that very afternoon. Finding out that my assumptions weren't exactly correct didn't make me miss Joe's Dairy less. I suppose I agree with what Lou DiPalo said after Joe's closed: "The sad thing is not the fact that you're not going to be able to find fresh mozzarella. The sad thing is that you're not going to be able to go in and see Anthony or Vincent and say, 'Good morning. Oh, the mozzarella is done now? I'll take one.'" ♦

NO, TEAM, NO!

BY TOM O'DONNELL



All right, gather around, everybody. Now, before we get out there and play, management has asked me to go over a few things with you. As you all know, this team has been receiving a lot of negative media attention lately as a result of recent events. The powers that be think that the warrior culture of our great American sport needs to be wussified. Believe me, I don't like it any more than you do. But the front office is breathing down my neck, so a few things are going to have to change around this locker room.

First off, no more offensive racial epithets. I know, I know. You're thinking, Coach, what are we going to talk about if we can't use racial epithets? Honestly, I have no idea. This is new territory for me, too, guys. Maybe the weather? Squats? Anyway, if you want to get somebody's attention, you can't just yell

out "Hey, [racial epithet]!" anymore. And, before anybody asks, no, calling someone a "half-[racial epithet]" is not half as bad. In fact, it's actually kind of worse.

Towel fights are still allowed. But, please, do not dip your towels in glue and then thumbtacks before commencing a towel fight. Similarly, electrified towels are no longer permitted. Also, a handful of live snakes is not a towel. I'm looking at you, Jeff.

IcyHot on the jockstrap is no longer allowed. Look, I know it's a harmless prank, but the problem is that too many of you were using the IcyHot-coated jockstraps to choke one another to the point of unconsciousness or to start fires.

Starting fires is no longer allowed.

Threatening to murder your teammates is still allowed, provided every

threat is followed by the phrase "Ha ha, just kidding." Anybody who fails to offer a joking disclaimer after a death threat will have to run a hundred wind sprints. I'm serious about this, guys.

Furthermore, you may still tell a teammate that you plan to defecate into his helmet as long as you don't actually defecate into his helmet. If you do end up somehow defecating into a teammate's helmet, you need to apologize. Again, I'm looking at you, Jeff.

The front office is also saying that dogfighting, counterfeiting, rat-baiting, impersonating a U.S. customs officer, mail fraud, and moonshining are now forbidden in the locker room. I know. This brings up the obvious question: if mail fraud is banned, what about wire fraud? The e-mail I got from management doesn't say, so I'll have to get back to you. Bottom line: if you want to do any of this stuff on your own time, that's fine, but please keep it out of the clubhouse. I want those stills gone by Tuesday.

Human sacrifice will hereby be banned from the locker room—

Whoa! Calm down, everybody! Put those fires out! Jeff, stop choking Tim with your jockstrap! You didn't let me finish. Human sacrifice will be banned except on December 21st and June 21st of each year. You're lucky. The Players Association really went to bat for you guys to let you keep the solstices. Between you and me, I don't care what the "P.C. police" say; some traditions in this sport are just too damn important to give up, and honoring Mictlantecuhtli, the Aztec god of the underworld, is one of them. Hail Mictlantecuhtli!

Anyway, I know this is a lot to take in. To us old soldiers of the gridiron, the locker room means the wafting smell of sour mash and jockstrap fires. The sound of a crazed, racially charged voice mail is sweet music to our ears. To us, "horseplay" means bringing a live horse into the clubhouse and making it kick a rookie in the face. But the winds of change are blowing, guys. And management wants me to make it absolutely clear that "we are a hundred per cent committed to a total shift in the toxic, macho culture that has taken hold of this organization."

Now let's go out there and murder the other team and then defecate into their helmets! ♦

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LETTER FROM HANDAN

IN THE AIR

Discontent grows in China's most polluted cities.

BY IAN JOHNSON



A vegetable plot in Sihoupo, near a coke plant owned by China's largest steel producer.

In traditional Chinese architecture, a small wall stands a few feet in front of the entrance to a home. According to the principles of feng shui, this wall shields the occupants from malign energy forces. But in the city of Handan such walls have acquired another significance: as protection against acrid smoke billowing from the city's factories. One summer evening in Sihoupo, a western suburb of Handan with three hundred residents, the glowing yellow flames of a coking plant erupted into the sky. Clouds swirled up around the factory, saturating the air with the smell of rotten eggs. Coking concentrates soft bituminous coal into hard briquettes that are used to smelt iron into steel, but it also produces carcinogenic emissions. "We can't open our

windows at night," Hu Xuhui, a man in his late sixties who lives across from the factory, told me. "The days are bad, but the nights are worse."

Handan, which is two hundred and fifty miles southwest of Beijing, has an urban core of 1.4 million inhabitants and a sprawling rural region of eight million more. It abuts the Taihang Mountains, a range of rugged, sharp peaks that runs from the western outskirts of Beijing in the north down toward the river basins of the country's fertile south. For millennia, these mountains have been a crossroads of legend and history. In Chinese mythology, they are home to the goddess Nüwa, the creator of human beings, while their narrow passes were greatly prized by military strategists. Today,

thanks to rich deposits of coal and iron ore, the mountains are one of the world's great centers of steel production. One of the provinces that border the Taihang range—Hebei, where Handan is situated—accounts for ten per cent of the world's output.

Although pollution in Beijing has attracted global attention in recent years—and has sometimes caused expats and tourists to flee—environmental damage is much worse in smaller industrial cities. According to government figures, of the ten most polluted cities in China, seven are in Hebei Province, and Handan is one of them. On bad days, you cannot see to the other side of a four-lane road. Earlier this year, a factory leaked a toxic chemical into the Zhuozhang River, which feeds the city's reservoir. The river turned brown, dead fish were found floating on the surface, and the city's water was cut off overnight. Supplies had to be trucked in, and there was a run on bottled water.

For decades, activists and economists have warned that China's economic boom is ruining the environment and posing serious health hazards. A recent study reported that in 2010 outdoor air pollution contributed to 1.2 million premature deaths in China, nearly double the number of deaths worldwide from malaria. Another study noted that pollution from coal reduces average life expectancy in northern China by five and a half years. Although government restrictions on civil society make it hard for informed citizens to organize into pressure groups, people in Handan and its surrounding villages are speaking more freely. Mothers say that their children have chronic respiratory illnesses. Old people complain of digestive troubles that they attribute to locally grown food. And many people talk about neighbors dying of cancer. Even the government has acknowledged the existence of "cancer villages," which activists have identified in hundreds of places around the country, including Handan.

"This factory definitely hurt us," a Sihoupo resident named Song Lingdi told me. She was sitting in her living room, holding a plastic-wrapped picture of her husband, a burly man of forty-four with a brush cut, who died three years ago of lung cancer. She said that she has petitioned the government for compensation

but has been denied benefits. The more affluent residents protect their yards from the fallout with zinc-plated roofs. Children are supposed to stay underneath these shelters, and their mothers sweep up dustpans of gray soot each day. In late summer, the green fields surrounding the city are full of corn, but parents know better than to let their children play there.

Handan has been a center of industry since the third century, when sulfur was first mined there. Even earlier, it was the capital of the State of Zhao, and its position at the intersection of two major trading routes made it a cultural center, too. It is celebrated as the source of hundreds of idiomatic expressions—four-character phrases rooted in Chinese folktales and history. One of the best known is “*Handan xue bu*” (“learning to walk in Handan”), which refers to the story of a young man from the provinces who hears that the people of Handan are so sophisticated that they walk in a special way. He goes to Handan to learn, but, years later, he still hasn’t mastered the gait. Dejected, he heads home. He finds that he can’t remember his own way of walking, and has to crawl. The moral: don’t copy others, or you’ll lose yourself.

The modern origins of Handan’s industrial power go back to the nineteenth century, when Li Hongzhang, one of the country’s ablest administrators, opened a coal mine near the city. When the Communist Party took power, in 1949, it saw heavy industry—steel in particular—as the way to modernize China. The government founded the Hansteel works, in Handan, in 1958. The next year, during the Great Leap Forward, Chairman Mao came to the city and proclaimed, “Handan should revive! It has an unlimited treasure in iron, and there’s a great hope for it to become a great steel city.” Soldiers and civilians worked non-stop shifts, hauling bricks to the building sites on bicycles and in hand-drawn carts.

At first, the mill produced only low-quality iron. Then, finally, in 1965, it was able to generate the temperatures necessary for steel. Even so, production remained small-scale. In 1978, Hansteel was producing fewer than two hundred thousand tons of steel a year. But that year Deng Xiaoping came to power and began to initiate economic reforms. Pri-

vate enterprise, largely banned under Mao, was allowed. In 1979, China produced just 34.5 million tons of steel; by 1996, it was producing more than a hundred million tons.

As Hansteel expanded, it swallowed up neighboring villages or left them almost uninhabitable, because of the heavy pollution. Residents still speak about demonstrations in the nineteen-eighties and nineties, when people lay down across railroad tracks to keep the coal cars from entering, in protest against the factory’s encroachment and its pollution. Hansteel began paying residents in the adjacent communities a “pollution fee,” typically several hundred dollars a year. Residents say that they still receive this fee.

Further liberalization of the economy in the nineties accelerated growth, creating an almost insatiable demand for steel. Manufacturers bought decommissioned steel mills from the West at minimal cost and reassembled them in China. Last year, China produced seven hundred and sixteen million tons of steel, nearly half the world’s output. Hebei Steel, the conglomerate of which Hansteel is now a part, is the country’s biggest producer.

But steel production follows a beggar-thy-neighbor pattern common throughout China’s economy: successful ventures attract imitators, but inefficient producers are only rarely weeded out. Instead, they continue to operate. Supported by local protectionism, they grimly pursue market share, even when profits are negligible. Enforcement of pollution controls is another problem. The Ministry of Environmental Protection has more power than in the past, but local officials often ignore it. Their priority is economic growth, which for years has been the second most important factor in an official’s chance of promotion. (Avoiding unrest is the first.) Handan’s surging steel industry has made the city a valuable posting for ambitious politicians, who are quickly promoted, and then move on.

When I tried to arrange a visit to Hansteel, local officials told me that it was forbidden to report on pollution in the city. If I lingered near a factory, a Party functionary would shoo me away and warn people not to talk to me. But an acquaintance at the plant agreed to give me a tour. I drove there with another

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steelworker I had got to know, a wiry thirty-nine-year-old named Han Zhigang. As we drove, he told me that he was a second-generation employee. His parents were originally farmers in a nearby village in Hebei Province, who had moved to Handan during Hansteel's Maoist-era expansion. They had what was known as an "iron rice bowl"—a job for life, with all the perks of a big state-owned enterprise in a Communist system. There was free day care, schooling, and health care, and subsidized housing and food. They even got free shampoo, which was just as well, because the part of Handan they lived in was covered with soot. "I grew up in that system," Han said. "We had everything, and all the workers lived together. It was like a family."

As we drove, we passed a new theatre, large public parks, and pleasant downtown streets canopied by ginkgo trees. There is an impressive museum containing artifacts that chronicle two thousand years of the city's history. But as we approached Hansteel the road became pitted from the steady pounding of trucks that transfer coal to coal-washing plants. One such plant, on our left, was temporarily closed, following a government anti-pollution initiative. We passed under a railway line, which brings fifty-car freight trains loaded with coal to Hansteel.

Twenty years ago, when Han was in trade school, he found a job selling maps for a company in southern China. New, private-sector jobs abounded at the time, paying far more than traditional positions in state-owned companies. But Han's parents couldn't imagine anything safer than a job at the mill and urged him to return. He also worried that his generation had grown soft. "I didn't think I could eat bitterness," he said. "So I asked for a job in front of the blast furnace. I wanted to see how tough life could be in a steel factory." After four years of pouring molten iron, he got a desk job, in the logistics department.

The Hansteel complex covers some fifteen hundred acres, and makes up essentially the entire western third of Handan's urban center. We drove along the southern perimeter of the site, on a road lined with boarded-up restaurants and other broken-down buildings. Behind them, Hansteel's towers and chimneys rose like a city skyline. The road was

WHAT BRINGS ME HERE?

Here I am again and what brings me here
to the same wooden bench
preaching to the city of Lambertville
surrounded by mayapples?

For who in the hell is going to lie down with whom in the hell,
either inside or outside? And you know it's amazing
to watch flies lie down with feces
or mosquitoes lie down with blue bloods
and over there is a double house you call a twin
and when the one on the right burned down in under a minute
the one on the left refused to budge, not even an inch.

I'm not saying a French horn with a trombone
or a fleabane with a fleabane

or in one case
wood as fuel with wood as a god.

And I'm not saying it doesn't matter,
grinding the faces of the poor,
or whether it's a song or not.

Even if someone got carried away
and swam across the East River to Little Poland;

even if someone called himself a remnant
and lay there for sale cheap in the cheapo bin

whose grandfather had a trumpet for an ear
and raged against the heartless
then lost his polished head lying down with the sycamores.

—Gerald Stern

dark with ground-in coal dust. We parked by the factory gates, and I got out of Han's car and into the car of my contact, whom I'll call Teng. We drove past two checkpoints and entered Hansteel.

The roads inside the complex were lined with newly planted poplars and bushes sprouting red, purple, and yellow blossoms. There were mowed lawns and perfectly trimmed hedges. Sprinklers watered the gardens, and teams of women in straw hats tended to the plants. A large banner read, "Spread the Hansteel Spirit. Together Forge the China Dream."

"We're under pressure about the environment," Teng explained as we cruised down the broad, empty streets. He said that the factory had installed new dust-collection equipment on the blast fur-

naces and had fenced in the iron-ore storage depot, which had been open to the sky, allowing the wind to blow dust over the city. Trucks patrolled the streets, sucking up dirt and ash and hosing the streets clean. Locals used to say that you'd lose thirty years off your life the moment you passed through Hansteel's gates; now it was the cleanest part of the city. Hansteel was what any government official would want to see on an inspection tour; unseen would be heavily polluted districts like Sihoupo, where the neighboring coke plant was owned by Hansteel.

But even if the main Hansteel coke facility was cleaner, it smelled intensely of sulfur. A few men pushed carts filled with equipment and trash. Others sat on

the curb, looking exhausted and smoking cigarettes. Teng told me that this section had opened in 2008. It was up-to-date and highly profitable, but had just four thousand employees. Twenty thousand people worked in an older section, next door, which he said had antiquated equipment, with fewer pollution controls, and operated at a loss. If Hansteel, by far the biggest local employer, were to close that section down, it would be greener and even more profitable, but it would have to lay off thousands of workers. "I don't think that you could do that in any country, could you?" Teng said. Large-scale production and employment were part of the company's social responsibility, he added.

After leaving the factory, I walked around the perimeter. In a neighborhood called Mengwu, I talked to Yang Xiuying, a woman in her fifties who is employed a few hours every morning sweeping the coal dust off Hansteel West Road. Like many locals, she was still bitter about the land that Hansteel had appropriated during its various expansions. She described the pollution of the worst years. "It used to rain black rain," she said. "You couldn't wear white clothes. The cabbage was all black, so we had to peel off the outer layer."

Although black soot no longer falls inside Handan's urban area, the houses in Mengwu and other neighborhoods are jolted every few minutes by the coal trains. Some of the houses have cracks in the walls, and many of the upper floors can no longer be lived in. Residents have petitioned the government for compensation, in vain. Like most of the people I talked to who live near factories, Yang had no expectation of change. "Chinese journalists never report anything—it's pointless talking about it," she told me, turning away. "You can't fight Hansteel. Hansteel is Handan."

For decades, the Chinese government ignored evidence of pollution, or tried to cover it up. In 2007, fearing social unrest, the government pressured the World Bank to censor a report about pollution deaths in China. After a leak of aniline at a chemical factory in Jilin, twelve hundred people experienced convulsions, nausea, breathing difficulties, and temporary paralysis. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency describes

aniline as a probable carcinogen; it has been connected to cancer outbreaks in industrial cities along the Rhine as early as the nineteenth century. Health officials from Beijing, though, attributed the symptoms to "mass hysteria" and walked around the hospital where the afflicted were being treated telling them to pull themselves together. In 2009, after the U.S. Embassy in Beijing started using Twitter to distribute readings from a pollution monitor on its roof, a Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs official complained that the United States was meddling in China's internal matters.

But at the start of this year the Chinese government began disclosing extensive air-pollution data from seventy-four Chinese cities. It collected hourly readings from monitoring stations in each city—Handan has four—and used a scale known as the Air Quality Index. The scale includes a measurement known as PM_{2.5}, which quantifies the concentration of particles smaller than 2.5 micrometres. When inhaled, these tiny specks can increase the risk of heart attacks, cancer, and acute respiratory infections, especially in children and the elderly.

Environmental activists in China believe that the release of more data may represent a tactic by the Ministry of Environmental Protection to create public pressure that will force pro-industry wings of the government to accept stricter pollution controls. There have been other signs of change in official attitudes. In May, Xi Jinping, China's new leader, announced that environmental protection would be one of the factors used to assess the performance of public officials up for promotion. In July, the government said that it would spend two hundred and seventy billion dollars over the next five years to improve air quality, much of the money earmarked for the region around Handan. And after the Communist Party plenum earlier this month the government announced a bold series of economic reforms that promised to remake the functions of local governments, emphasizing services, such as environmental protection, instead of the blind pursuit of growth. While I was in Handan, senior officials at the local office of the Ministry of Environmental Protection held a series of meetings, and within a few days signs were posted

around town and in the industrial suburbs saying that government controls on unfiltered pollution would be enforced, and that factories operating illegally would be shut down.

The government's actions reflect concern that pollution is one of the few issues that can arouse public discontent across class and ethnic lines. The Party has made rising standards of living its benchmark for success, so a bad environment and attendant health problems damage its credibility. In Beijing, I met Li Bo, a veteran of the Chinese environmental movement, who told me that pollution "challenges the Party's legitimacy, and the Party knows this." He went on, "This is why it has announced all these measures this year. It is also why there is now more space to discuss this."

Li, who is forty-three, has spent twenty years working on environmental causes, and is now a board member of China's oldest environmental N.G.O., Friends of Nature. Chinese law makes it difficult for N.G.O.s to organize nationally, but Friends of Nature, which is based in Beijing, has affiliates across China. Since the late nineteen-nineties, it has stopped a power-plant project on the Yangtze River and the felling of virgin forest in Yunnan, and it has helped protect the Tibetan antelope. Its most high-profile campaign at the moment concerns a cancer village in Yunnan, where for years a chemical factory had been dumping toxic waste that seeped into the water supply. Friends of Nature has helped the villagers file a lawsuit demanding compensation from the chemical company. This is the first time that an environmental organization has taken a chemical company to court.

Li told me that the new freedoms come with clear limits. "Everyone talks about pollution, but, if you follow a specific pollution to a specific polluter, you might get into trouble," he said. "The local officials might say you're hindering development." Last year, he travelled to southern Hunan Province to defend Chen Fengying, a prominent activist who had been jailed by local authorities for protesting against a chemical company. After initially being denied access to her in jail, Li helped organize a legal team that secured her temporary release, while she awaits sentencing.

In Beijing, I also met Wang Jun and

Zhang Bin, software engineers who have developed a smartphone app called the China Air Quality Index. They told me the app had been so successful that they were considering renting an office rather than working out of their apartments, as they do now. The app can pinpoint air-pollution levels down to the neighborhood, with hourly updates and data going back months. You can spend hours following the trail of pollution, as clouds of bad air moving across cities and provinces cause the indices to rise and fall. Sometimes, a station's reading jumps from one or two hundred (already ten to twenty times as high as the World Health Organization's target level) to eight hundred. The exact reason for these fluctuations isn't clear: are they errors or does a blast of smoke from a neighboring factory inundate the measuring equipment? No one seems to know. More significant than these momentary fluctuations are the daily and monthly data, which reflect long-term effects on people's health. Handan's average PM_{2.5} for the first half of this year was 130.5. By comparison, Beijing's was 101.3 and Manhattan's was 8.3. The W.H.O.'s guidelines say that any particulate matter is potentially harmful, but it sets a PM_{2.5} target of 10. In other words, the concentration in Handan was thirteen times worse than the W.H.O.'s target.

Zhang and Wang told me that they had stumbled into their role as environmentalists. "We hadn't really paid attention to pollution, but in 2011 there was a period of very bad air," Zhang told me. "We wondered if there was a more convenient way of following it." In the beginning, the app had information only from U.S. Embassy and U.S. consulate Twitter feeds, but earlier this year the developers upgraded it to include the new government data, historical information, comparisons among cities, and the ability to pinpoint any monitoring station on a map. The app has been downloaded two and a half million times—including fifty-eight thousand times after one infamous day in January, when a cloud of smog in Beijing caused flights to be cancelled and led foreign companies to distribute face masks to their workers. Zhang and Wang now average four thousand downloads a day, and have been looking to expand to other coun-

tries. They said that although the government had mostly left them alone, officials were unnerved by the strong public response. "They've never had a third party broadcasting their numbers," Wang said. "They don't oppose it, but it's strange for them."

One Saturday morning, on a quiet ridge of the Taihang Mountains, I met up with the Handan Sunshine Outdoor Activity Club. The club was founded by Han, the steelworker who drove me to the factory. In the late nineteen-nineties, wanting to escape the city's pollution, he started organizing trips into the mountains with friends. "I didn't have a goal—I just wanted to go into the mountains," he told me. "Maybe subconsciously it was because I'd been at the steel mill and needed nature." A few years later, after he married and had a daughter, he took her into the mountains with him, to expose her to the clean outdoors. By 2008, the Handan Sunshine Outdoor Activity Club had taken shape. Through it, Han got to know people outside steelworking—government officials, professionals, and entrepreneurs. He found that there was widespread unease among ordinary people about how China had put economic growth above all other considerations.

A few years ago, Han leased a twenty-five-acre plot in the mountains, where club members could grow organic vegetables. With the help of local farmers, he



hopes eventually to start an organic restaurant there and gardens where people can pay to pick their own vegetables. "People don't trust the vegetables they buy in the city," he said as we tramped through freshly plowed fields. "They feel that they're poisoned."

Han was dressed in a T-shirt, hiking trousers, and a rumpled bush hat, and he led our group up the mountain to pick wild celery that was growing on a plot of fallow land. The day was clear, as

Handan days go, which is to say that the air was about five times as polluted as Manhattan's. An occasional patch of blue sky could be seen. The adults stuffed plastic bags with wild celery, while the children ran to an abandoned farmhouse and clambered onto the roof. Han had hopes of renovating the building and turning it into a clubhouse. "People can sit around, eat, and drink beer," he said.

Eventually, our bags were bulging with green shoots; we were going to make dumplings for lunch. One of Han's friends, a former steelworker with a shaved head who goes by the name Monkey, picked us up in a purple Jeep Cherokee, which he had souped up with enormous tires, roof lights, and a throaty diesel motor taken from a bus. We zig-zagged down the hills, stopping at a village to buy pork. Suddenly, we were enveloped in a cloud of dust. Han yelled "Windows!" and Monkey quickly toggled them up.

Over the next few hours, at the home of another of Han's friends, we stuffed dumplings with celery and pork and chatted about life in Handan. I learned that women had started to wear cotton face masks with scarves attached that protect the throat and chest from grime. A few weeks later, I noticed them in Beijing, too. The club members also told me that real-estate prices were higher in the eastern part of town—Hansteel is in the west.

One of the guests was a young woman who worked at a Communist Party school that trains people for work in natural-resource industries. One might have expected the rising young official to be defensive about the government's environmental record, but she was forthright. "Everyone is aware of pollution, and there's a desire to improve it," she said. "We're even training managers in pollution control. It can't continue like this." She had joined Han's club because she worried about the health of her daughter.

Working-class people and white-collar government officials don't normally socialize together, and Han kept the conversation going with lighthearted banter. "There's a joke that a Handan person went to Switzerland and the air was so good that he began to feel sick from all the oxygen," Han said. "So they

quickly hooked a tube up to a car's exhaust pipe and he sucked on that for a while until he felt better."

Toward the end of my stay in Handan, I went to a branch of the Zhuozhang River with Wang Xiaohong, a former civil servant who is the head of Handan's Winter Swim Club, a group of enthusiasts not unlike the members of Han's outdoors club. Wang, who now runs a tea shop with his wife, organized the group several years ago, as a kind of polar-bear club that meets at swimming holes on the river. After the chemical spill this year, Wang's club filed suit against the factory, but it dropped the case, apparently under pressure from the government. Still, members were determined to continue their daily swims.

Wang is an adherent of Taoism, China's indigenous religion, which places a high value on closeness to nature. For much of the past two millennia, Taoism was politically eclipsed by Confucianism, with its more worldly concern for family and society. Mark Elvin, a professor emeritus of Chinese history at the Australian National University, has argued persuasively that China's disregard for the environment has roots in this heritage. The ideal Confucian ruler saw the mastery of nature as part of humanity's triumph over barbarism. Taoist philosophers were in the minority. Han, from the limited time I'd spent with him, had seemed more Confucian than Taoist. His mountain retreat was a refuge from Handan's pollution, but it was also a useful way for a steelworker to advance in society. Wang's interest in the environment was of a piece with his other activities—meditating, practicing calligraphy, and distributing copies of the classic text the "Tao Te Ching."

As we stood on the banks of the river, Wang asked if I minded swimming nude. Twenty or so men had turned up that day and were undressing energetically. I did the same, thinking that my trunks would be spared the water's toxicity. I wore my goggles, though. The water was cool and refreshing. Wang dove in. He is forty-six, with broad shoulders, a crewcut, and a triangular beard set off by thin sideburns.

We started out at a brisk pace. I flipped onto my back. Someone swam by doing a choppy breast stroke. I got a mouthful of

water. It tasted sour, like a dirty swimming pool recently bombed with chlorine.

"How clean is this?" I asked.

"It's not drinkable," Wang said. "But a bit in your stomach won't kill you."

"Why is it a men-only swimming area?"

"A few years ago, the water quality was so bad that our female association members wouldn't swim with us," he said. "We men didn't mind, so, after a while, since there weren't any women, we decided we might as well strip down and swim without our suits."

The chemical that leaked into the Zhuozhang River turned out to be aniline. If that was the only spill, we were in no danger—it had been six months, and the chemical breaks down in water—but, given the number of factories that line the river, it was hard to tell what was in it. "Let's go back," I called out, and the current speeded us to shore.

We drove to Wang's tea shop, a narrow store with bricks of *pu'er* tea and Yixing teapots stacked on steel shelves, and rooms upstairs for meditating and sipping tea. Wang told me that among the swim-club members were a lot of company bosses. "G.D.P."—he used the English term—"doesn't mean anything if you don't have your life."

We said goodbye, and I walked out to buy dinner at a night market. I checked the Air Quality Index app, and my smartphone showed that at that moment Handan was the most polluted city in China. I could see and smell the smog. According to government guidelines, on days like this people should wear masks and stay indoors. I passed through a park where elderly people were dancing to music emanating from loudspeakers. In the yellow haze, they seemed to float across the ground. I met a retired dancer who was playing a kind of reed pipe made from a gourd and three bamboo shafts. She said she believed that there was more oxygen in the park, near the plants, than if you stayed at home. I found a kebab stall with a small table and chairs next to a former canal, now dried up and strewn with garbage. Across a bridge was a statue immortalizing the story of the man trying to imitate the locals. His body was off-kilter and his knees were buckling as he tried to make his way forward. He still hadn't mastered the Handan walk. ♦

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DEALER'S HAND

Why are so many people paying so much money for art? Ask David Zwirner.

BY NICK PAUMGARTEN

Very important people line up differently from you and me. They don't want to stand behind anyone else, or to acknowledge wanting something that can't immediately be had. If there's a door they're eager to pass through, and hundreds of equally or even more important people are there, too, they get as close to the door as they can, claim a patch of available space as though it had been reserved for them, and maintain enough distance to pretend that they are not in a line.

Prior to the official opening of Art Basel, the annual fair in Switzerland, there is a two-day V.I.P. preview. In many respects, the preview is the fair. It's when the collectors who can afford the good stuff are allowed in to buy it. After those two days, there isn't much left for sale, and it becomes less a fair than a kind of pop-up museum, as the V.I.P.s, many of whom have come to Basel from the Biennale in Venice, continue on, perhaps to London for the auctions there. The international art circuit can be gruelling, which is why pretty much everyone who participates in it takes off the month of August, to recuperate.

The Basel preview began at 11 A.M. on a Tuesday in June. The meat of the fair was in a gigantic convention center on the east side of the Rhine. The dealers' booths were arrayed along two vast rectangular grids, which enclosed a circular courtyard that resembled a panopticon. The fair occupied two floors. The bottom one featured blue-chip art, offered by the powerhouse dealers; Picassos and Warhols could be seen among more contemporary work. Upstairs, for the most part, was younger work, exhibited by smaller galleries.

On the morning of the preview, after a champagne breakfast in the panopticon, the V.I.P.s gathered at the doors, under the watchful eye of guards in berets and dark crewneck sweaters. Through a window in the door, you could see, down the hall, the dealer David Zwirner, with his

sales staff huddled around him, as though for a pep talk. The Zwirner booth was just past the Fondation Beyeler's. (The Swiss dealer Ernst Beyeler, who died in 2010, was one of Art Basel's founders and its presiding spirit.) Zwirner comes in force: he had about a dozen salespeople with him, a mixture of partners, directors, and associates, as well as a platoon of assistants and art handlers. A few minutes before the doors opened, they took up positions in a sales-floor spread defense. Bellatrix Hubert, a Zwirner partner, pantomimed a gesture of being slammed by an incoming flood. The doors parted, and the buyers poured in.

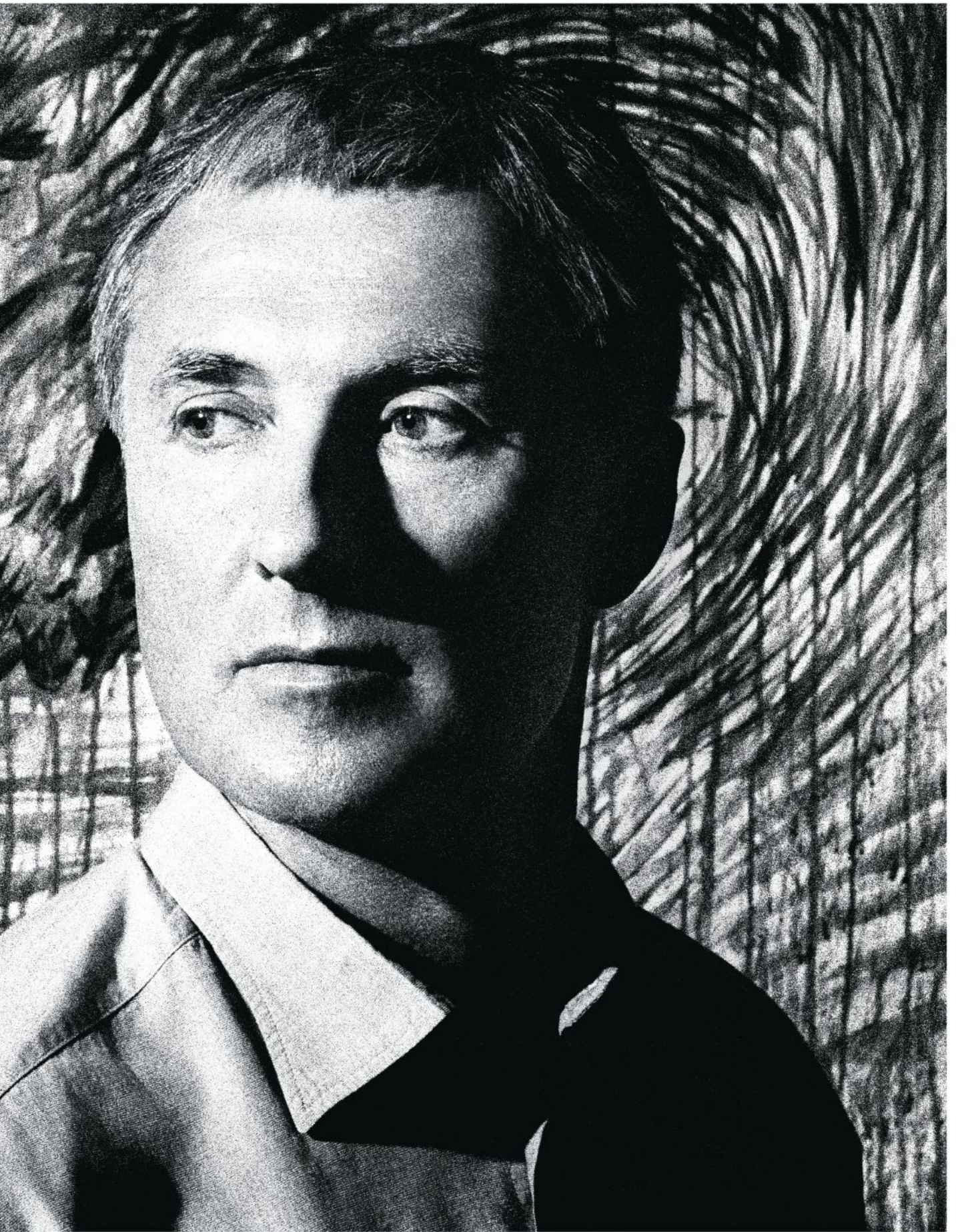
Within moments, most of the Zwirner directors had paired off with collectors, as at an officers'-club dance. Some strolled over to this or that work of art. The Zwirner booth was about the size of a couple of shipping containers, with work mounted on both sides of various walls. There were paintings by Elizabeth Peyton, Neo Rauch, Martin Kippenberger, On Kawara, Yayoi Kusama, Luc Tuymans, and Lisa Yuskavage, among others, and sculpture by John McCracken and Donald Judd.

A trustee of the Art Institute of Chicago was interested in a Twombly drawing, and a curator from the museum was there to advise her (the museum could not afford to buy it), so Zwirner led them into a side room to view it. The directors were expecting visits from clients with whom they had previously discussed specific works, sharing high-resolution images and market intelligence. Many pieces were already on reserve, meaning that clients had indicated an intention to buy them, without having seen them in person.

Zwirner tended to collectors and checked in with his staff at a corner table, where an assistant collated sales and inventory information, which directors could track on their iPads. One director, a dapper Spaniard named Ales Ortuzar,



Zwirner at home, with a painting by Raymond



Pettibon. "Nobody's selling expensive stuff like we do with the frequency we do," Zwirner said. "This is an industry in its golden age."

PHOTOGRAPH BY PARI DUKOVIC

sidled up to the table. “The second Kusama is sold,” he said. The price was four hundred and twenty thousand dollars. Zwirner dropped by and reported the sale, to an undisclosed buyer at an undisclosed price, of a Blinky Palermo painting, a last-minute addition to the fair, after a Georg Baselitz picture had got delayed in French customs. Important people stopped by the booth: the commodities trader Marc Rich, looking frail in a wheelchair (he died soon afterward); the Russian billionaire Roman Abramovich and his girlfriend, Dasha Zhukova; Leonardo DiCaprio, whom Zwirner greeted with the exclamation “Movie star!,” as though saying aloud what he’d meant only to think.

Zwirner is forty-nine, tall and fit, with a Caesar haircut and a brisk, forthright manner. He wore, as he usually does, unfaded bluejeans, a blue button-down shirt, and a navy sports coat. He has a slight German accent—he was born in Cologne—and a particular way of not pronouncing his “r”s and “l”s. The word “gallery,” which he uses a lot, has traces of Elmer Fudd and Colonel Klink. His cheeks and neck tend to flush when he is angry or stressed, but he generally cultivates an affable, regular-guy air, and listens with a tilted head, genuinely curious. When he has decided that a conversation has reached its logical end, he punctuates it with a quick sideways nod. He has what seems to be a guileless way of asserting art-world pedigree while acting as though he stood outside it all—he’s of it and yet not.

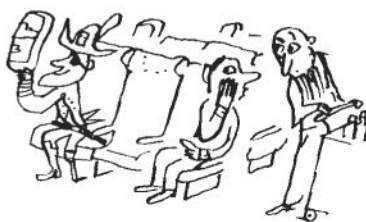
Zwirner, the son of a famous German dealer, opened his first gallery in 1993, in SoHo. Since then, he has risen to be one of the most prominent dealers in the world. He is not really a pioneer, in terms of the art he has championed, or the style in which he has presented it, or the people he has sold it to. He is, in many respects, one more boat on a rising tide. Still, the brightwork gleams. People often say that he’s angling to be his generation’s Larry Gagosian—every era has its dealer-king—but his approach is really nothing like Gagosian’s, or anyone else’s. He brings the calculating eye of an efficiency expert to the historically improvised hustle of buying and selling art objects. “He’s the new dynasty,” Gavin Brown, the New York gallerist, told me. “It’s the Norman conquest.”

“The action is on!” Zwirner whispered,

in a mock-dramatic voice. “Can you smell the money?” Selling at fairs, immensely profitable as it may be, is perhaps his least favorite element of art dealing. “This is the most commercial part of what we do,” he said. “It’s almost perverse.”

On one wall was a Gerhard Richter painting from 1971, an abstract swirl of color that looked to my untutored eye a little like a screen-saver pattern. Zwirner was selling it, on consignment, for a European collector. The sale prices for Richter are higher than for any other living painter, but this one, an early work, was priced low, at \$3.5 million. (A later work of its size might sell for five times that.) It had attracted the interest of an American collector in black hiking pants and a black short-sleeved shirt, with a jacket folded over one arm. He kept moving to new vantages, perhaps to test his enthusiasm. At one point, Zwirner’s art handlers took the painting down from the wall, and the collector asked for the condition report. Then he abruptly left, saying that he’d be back. Zwirner told him that he’d give him until one-thirty. After that, he’d have to take it off reserve.

Another man stood studying the painting, from a distance of thirty feet. He had the build of a Rolling Stone, long frizzy gray-flecked hair, and a brown front tooth. “I’m trying to buy a painting,” he told me. It was Ivor Braka, a private dealer from London, known for his early collecting of—and lucrative trade in—the work of Francis Bacon and Lucian Freud.



He was in Basel as an adviser to another collector, but he coveted the Richter for himself. He was, at present, the backup reserve buyer. If the American collector dithered, it would be his. Zwirner gestured toward Braka and said, “He’s seeing what I’m seeing, an undervalued work.”

Braka had been coming to Basel since 1977. “You used to be able to look around in a leisurely way, but now it’s a scrum,” he said. He had decided to wait and see if the collector would come back. Perhaps his

lurking presence would compel Zwirner to enforce the one-thirty deadline.

“It’s tricky,” Zwirner said. “My ultimate responsibility here is to the consignee.” That is, his job was to sell the Richter—it didn’t really matter to whom—yet he also had to treat the American collector with the consideration due a client of importance. The situation was complicated by the fact that one of Zwirner’s partners (Hanna Schouwink) was working with the American and a director (Ales Ortuzar) was handling Braka. Each client belongs to a salesperson. The sales staff are paid on commission, so technically they were competing with each other, although at Zwirner’s gallery, to stave off conflict, they are bound by a written code of conduct, which Zwirner guards as a trade secret. He kept an eye on the progress of the Richter.

By one-thirty, there was no sign of the American collector. Braka and Ortuzar huddled, and Ortuzar said, “I’m on it.” At one-fifty-two, the American appeared and resumed scrutinizing the painting. “Look at him sweating,” Zwirner whispered. After a while, he gave the collector a now-or-never gesture. The man borrowed a chair, sat down, and stared at the Richter for a while, chin in hand. Braka stood ten feet behind him. Soon the American got into what appeared to be a heated discussion with Schouwink. Ortuzar approached Braka, and Braka, with a pained smile, nodded and walked away. Zwirner joined the collector and Schouwink. He spoke emphatically to each of them, slapping the knuckles of one hand against the palm of the other. Everything is negotiable. At two-fourteen, the collector shook Zwirner’s hand and bent to kiss Schouwink’s. The Richter was his, and Zwirner had earned three hundred thousand dollars, enough to cover more than half the cost of the gallery’s booth in Basel.

“One of the reasons there’s so much talk about money is that it’s so much easier to talk about than the art,” Zwirner told me one day. You meet a lot of people in the art world who are exhausted and dismayed by the focus on money, and by its dominance. It distracts from the work, they say. It distorts curatorial instincts, critical appraisals, and young artists’ careers. It scares away civilians, who begin to lump art in with other symptoms of excess and dismiss it

as another garish plaything of the rich. Of course, many of those who complain—dealers, artists, curators—are complicit. The culture industry, which supports them in one way or another, and which hardly existed a generation ago, subsists on all that money—mostly on the largesse and folly of wealthy art lovers, whether their motivations are lofty or base.

Since the doldrums of the early nineties, the market for contemporary art, which has various definitions (work created after the Second World War, or during “our” lifetime, or post-1960, or post-1970), has rocketed up, year after year, flattening out briefly amid the financial crisis and global recession of 2008-09, before resuming its climb. Big annual returns have attracted more people to buying art, which has raised prices further. It is no coincidence that this steep rise, in recent decades, coincides with the increasing financialization of the world economy. The accumulation of greater wealth in the hands of a smaller percentage of the world’s population has created immense fortunes with a limitless capacity to pursue a limited supply of art work. The globalization of the art market—the interest in contemporary art among newly wealthy Asians, Latin Americans, Arabs, and Russians—has furnished it with scores of new buyers, and perhaps fresh supplies of greater fools. Once you have hundreds of millions of dollars, it’s hard to know where to put it all. Art is transportable, unregulated, glamorous, arcane, beautiful, difficult. It is easier to store than oil, more esoteric than diamonds, more durable than political influence. Its elusive valuation makes it conducive to extremely creative tax accounting.

“These are the highest-luxury goods man has ever known,” a dealer told me. “If you’re in the business of selling art, you’re an idiot if you don’t respond to that.”

“Nobody’s selling expensive stuff like we do with the frequency we do,” Zwirner said. “This is an industry in its golden age. When I opened, in 1993, we had a couple of hundred galleries and a few hundred collectors. And now we have, what, a couple of thousand galleries and a couple of thousand collectors. You want to grow a viable business in this climate. The wind is at your back.”

Zwirner often refers to “our industry,” as though he were talking about copper



“We tried a vegan Thanksgiving this year, but our family still showed up.”

mining. For the most part, though, the art world comes off less as business than as bazaar. The social life that has sprung up around contemporary art, the year-round hajj to improbable meccas for fairs and openings and installations—this life of Documenta, Marfa, MOCA, and *Kunst*—this, too, has proved seductive to a certain kind of aspirational, cosmopolitan entrepreneur or heir. “It’s a super-cool club,” Zwirner said. “In 2009, everything fell apart, values came down, and I thought, Shit, this is going to be rough, this is going to last years. But the structures of the art world were absolutely intact. We all flew to the fairs, showed up for the dinners. Collectors weren’t buying, but they were there, they were in our net. When I saw the mechanisms in place, and I saw the pull that what we do has on people’s lives, they don’t want to miss out. It’s the greatest couples therapy. You see the most wonderful marriages.”

The art world is small. Everyone throws around first names. Larry, Paula, Marian, Massimiliano. Last names are for

artists. At Basel, you see the same people over and over, as though on a wedding weekend. But there are many habitats, each with its own array of flora and fauna. Larry Gagosian, the world’s biggest dealer, occupies an ecosystem of his own. He’s the key link in a food chain of buyers, sellers, speculators, and hangers-on.

When the migrations pass through Basel, they water up at the Hotel Les Trois Rois. After the second V.I.P. day, the V.I.P.s converged on the bar there. Golden solstice sunlight glinted off watches and jewels. Outside, the Rhine was surging, nearly cresting its banks. (Elsewhere in Europe, cities were inundated by record floods.) To sit in the bar on a couch facing the entrance was to be on art-world safari; here were the big predators and ungulates lapping at their kirs and *kleine Ueli Biers* under gilded ceilings and arched doorways. They came in ones or twos, pausing at the entrance, perhaps to plot their way into the rarefied corners or else to allow an invisible valet to whisper their names. Nicolas

Berggruen, Tico Mugarbi, Tony Shafrazi, Stellan Holm in purple slippers, Peter Brant in double-breasted blazer. Larry himself, eyes darting around the room. People arrived with anxious, sour expressions but once inside got caught up in the post-transactional thrum. "There's a chemical reaction when you buy something—it's intoxicating," Kenny Schachter, a private dealer and curator who lives in London, told me. "I bought a painting at 1 A.M. the other night on the elevator in my hotel."

The market regularly furnishes new symbols of extravagance, with record-breaking auction prices, and the provocations of artists like Damien Hirst, whose work dares you to conclude that the whole thing is a scam. But even ordinary commerce astounds. You see paintings by dozens of artists you've hardly heard of selling for more than a million, or hear about billionaires who've otherwise been discreet during their decades of wealth accumulation opening museums. There's a lot you don't hear about, too: it is possible to make a very fine living speculating in contemporary art, if you know what to buy when, and have some ability to control supply.

In recent years, the big galleries have expanded aggressively, opening outposts around the world. Gagosian alone has a dozen galleries. (Zwirner has three.) This expansion has put tremendous pressure on medium-size operations: artists gravitate toward the scale, pricing power, and full-service treatment of the top gallerists, and buyers, perhaps insecure in their tastes and susceptible to the lure of the familiar, herd along. It's hard for smaller galleries to afford the overhead or the relentless circuit of international fairs, the hubs nowadays of transactional activity. Meanwhile, many of the most established and esteemed gallerists (Marian Goodman, Barbara Gladstone, Paula Cooper) are over seventy. Gagosian is sixty-eight. These people control many of the world's best, or best-selling, artists, and someone will eventually inherit them. Very few galleries have thrived into a second generation. Pace is trying, Marlborough is fading, and Knoedler & Company went under, after it sold multimillion-dollar pieces that turned out to be forgeries painted by a Chinese immigrant in Queens. Zwirner's "industry" has really never been much more than an assembly of improvised and

ALL THROUGH THE NIGHT

The rotational earth, the resting for seconds:
hemisphere one meets hemisphere two,
thoughts twist apart at the center seam.

Everything inside is.

Cyndi Lauper and I both fall into pure emptiness.

That's one way to think: I think I am right now.

We have no past we won't reach back—

The clock ticks like the nails of a foiled dog
chasing a faster rabbit across a glass expanse.

A wheel of fortune spins on its side,

stops and starts. The stopped time

is no longer time, only an illusion that says,

I can have this, and this, and this.

Cyndi says nothing works like that.

There is no all-purpose plastic totem

that acts like a bouncer holding back the fact

that at least once a day you look up:

it's the self you kept in a suitcase holding the key,

coming to meet you, every cell a node

in a network of ongoing doubling. Cyndi says

the world expands but always keeps us in it.

For every you, there's a riot grrrl in prison

ultimately ephemeral ventures. Dealers come and go, their names and enterprises soon forgotten. All that survives is the detritus of their influence and taste—what they sold and whom they sold it to. The biggest dealers are like Ice Age mega-glaciers, leaving behind vast moraines of art work they'd borne aloft and finally deposited in mansions and museums before melting away.

Last month, *ArtReview* published its annual list of the most powerful people in the art world. Zwirner was No. 2, after the sheikha who runs the Qatar Museums Authority, which reportedly spends a billion dollars a year on art. Gagosian, who was No. 2 last year, dropped to No. 4. Zwirner's recent prominence is a product of many things: new gallery spaces, an expanding program (as a gallery's stable of artists is called), canny brand management, and a latent void in the marketplace. Earlier this year, three Gagosian artists appeared in Zwirner's exhibitions, which occasioned suggestions that Zwirner was poised to challenge Gagosian's place at the top. In this scenario, there was both signal and noise. The volume of Gagosian's business dwarfs that of any and all comers. He doesn't lie awake at night fretting about David Zwirner.

And the threesome was circumstantial. One was Richard Serra, who merely cooperated with Zwirner on an exhibition of his early work. Another was Yayoi Kusama, the Japanese painter, who had been looking for new representation. The third was Jeff Koons, peerlessly lucrative and famous and therefore empowered to be as free an agent as he'd like. Koons wanted to do a show of new sculpture, and Zwirner was happy to fund it. (Koons's production costs are notoriously high.) That Zwirner's Koons show coincided with another show of predominantly older work, at Gagosian—well, it was hard for either man to maintain that this was a coincidence.

"The narrative became a battle of the bands," Zwirner told me. "It almost looked as if it was planned. They're running a very strong gallery, I have a lot of respect for what they're doing. It's not like I wake up in the morning thinking, I've gotta bring this empire down. . . . I want to be No. 1 or No. 2, right? Isn't that natural? No. 1!"

The first international contemporary-art fair, the model for Basel, was the Kölner Kunstmarkt, in Cologne, in 1967. It was co-founded by Rudolf Zwirner, David's father, who

in Putin's Russia. You know the self dissolves
 and when it does—no figure, all ground,
 like a surface seen microscopically—
 you fill the frame and explode,
 a rubber-wound inside unravelling and becoming
 a measurement of whatever exits. It's like sleep,
 if sleep were a film that didn't include you, but no,
 whatever is happening, you are always in it,
 the indispensable point of view.
 Proof of that is that a lift force brings you back
 and you wake, back to your face, hands, mirror
 image in the bed next to you, Ketamine moment
 where kinesthesia is secondary to everything
 is possible: you and you and you and now and
 you and yes and you with the night-self singing
 backup. Onstage, the fractured future of a world
 which is the world with the scaffolding folded
 and laid on top of this night. All through it.
 Until it ends or else begins again. Meanwhile,
 that indefatigable wavering between
 what you want and what you get for wanting.

—*Mary Jo Bang*

had moved to Cologne in 1963 and opened a gallery with his wife, Ursula, David's mother. Rudolf, a tall, dashing figure, was for decades one of the most prominent art dealers in Europe, and among the first wave of them to find a market there—or anywhere, really—for a generation of American artists who were eventually grouped under the headings of Minimalism and Pop. The Zwirners lived in a house with the gallery on the ground floor. In the dining room, there was a stack of about forty Warhol Brillo boxes, which Rudolf had a hard time selling and which David used as a hiding place in games of hide-and-seek.

Zwirner remembers his father explaining things to him. His father does not. "We never discussed art," Rudolf Zwirner told me. "David was interested in music only." He studied jazz and played drums.

When Zwirner was ten, his parents got a divorce, and his father remarried (another Ursula). Four years later, amid a global recession and an art-market slump, his father took the family to New York for a year. They lived in a loft in SoHo. At the suggestion of the art dealer Harold Diamond (the father of Mike D,

from the Beastie Boys), Rudolf sent David and his sister to the Walden School, on the Upper West Side, which David recalls as "ultraliberal, super-Jewish." He became the school's soccer star. "You could take the ball from anywhere and score, because no one knew how to play the game," he said.

Back in Germany, David, at sixteen, got an apartment of his own. "I had a car, and drove myself to school. I had all kinds of interesting businesses going—we won't talk about that." There were no openings in the music program at the university in Cologne, so he sent an audition tape to New York University of him playing the melody of Charlie Parker's "Ornithology" on the drums. He got in.

In New York, he studied music, played some gigs, and lived on St. Mark's Place with an eccentric Austrian architect. One day on the street, he bumped into Monica Seeman, whom he'd known at Walden and who was working as a stylist for the designer Patricia Field. He moved in with her, and four years later they were married. (She is a designer and co-owner of MZ Wallace, a handbag-and-accessories company. They have three children, aged twenty-

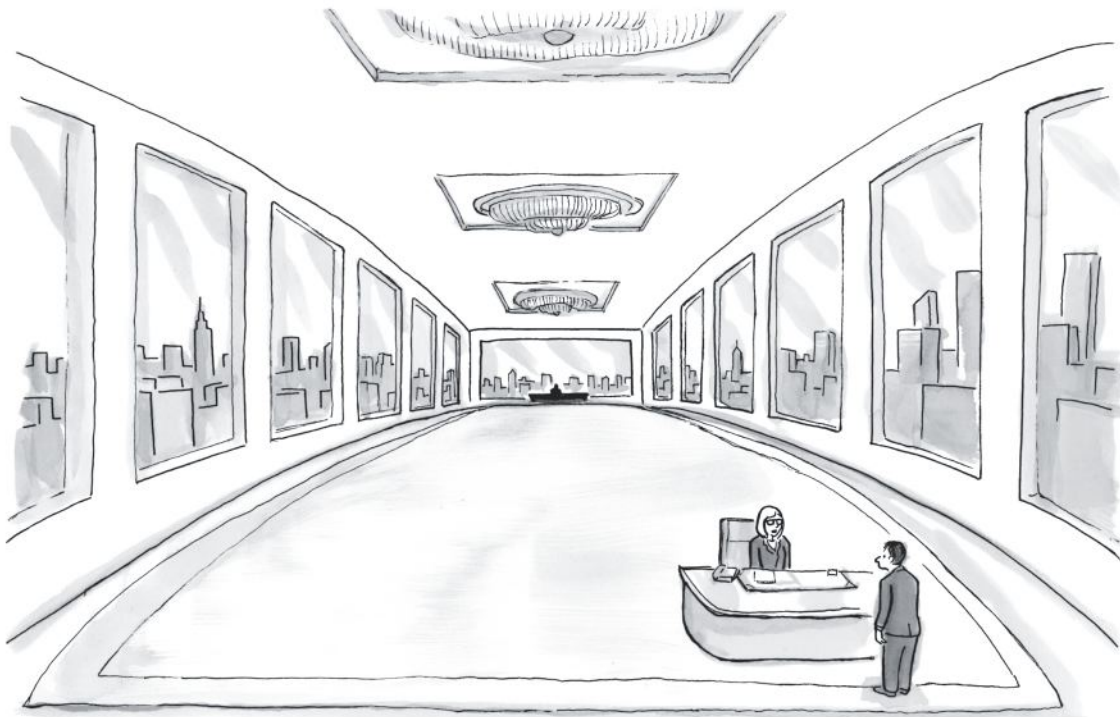
two, twenty-one, and sixteen.) After he graduated, he tried to make it as a musician but found himself outclassed. His father connected him with a client in Hamburg, a collector named Siegfried Loch, who had started a record company. Zwirner went to work for him as a gofer and A. & R. man. Loch was a tyrant, the label was struggling, and Zwirner was miserable. "If you had success, the band would sue the label to get a better deal," he said. "If you had no success, the label would try to get rid of the band." Zwirner quit.

Meanwhile, he'd been poking around the art galleries in Hamburg. He began buying art, mainly photographs. "I was alarmed," Rudolf told me. "He came to talk to me. I asked him, 'What do you want?' He said, 'I can't become a dealer, because you are one already.'" The father told the son that he could venture into the art business as long as he went about it his own way. "The moment he started, I quit," Rudolf told me. "I had a feeling, I don't want any competition with my son. I'd be the loser, this was quite clear." Rudolf put David in touch with a friend in New York, the dealer Brooke Alexander, who took him on as an apprentice.

Zwirner was thrilled to be back in New York. It was the fall of 1991. The art market had collapsed again—another recession. Alexander had two galleries, one just for prints. Zwirner, observing that the only clients left were museums, rented a minivan and began driving around the Northeast and the Midwest to sell them prints. He got to know the curators and learned how to talk about the work. Rudolf recalled, "These curators, mostly ladies, liked him, because he had a European education."

By "education," he meant that David had absorbed Rudolf's world. "From the age of one to ten, he rode on my shoulder going to galleries and museums, looking at art," Rudolf said. "His visual memory was enormous. Unconsciously, he understood what contemporary art should be. He doesn't like to hear this—he likes to think he invented the wheel. Nobody wants to hear that the father was something."

"Look, that's an advantage that was unbeatable," Zwirner said. "The analogy would be, you're a musician and your mom's in the church choir and your dad



“He’s not seeing anyone right now, due to the curvature of the earth.”

is a jazz musician and you hit the clubs on weekends and by fourteen you’re sitting in with Miles Davis. When I was trying to be a musician, I felt the disadvantage. These guys were not only better, but they were steeped in it.”

Some of Zwirner’s art-world contemporaries grouse about the advantages of his patrimony. The name alone was a boon. When Zwirner opened his gallery, on Greene Street, Barbara Gladstone, an established dealer, trusted him with a Richter painting to sell on consignment. (Gladstone says that she sold it to him.) He had a buyer for it, a young collector named Iwan Wirth. The sale helped finance some of his early attempts to sell work by his own artists. Zwirner’s first show was of sculptures by the Austrian Franz West, who at the time was an obscure name in the United States. (Zwirner sold only one piece, to the collectors Susan and Michael Hort, who went on to buy at nearly all of Zwirner’s shows in the nineties.)

People speculate, as they will, that Zwirner’s ambition arises out of a compulsion to surpass his father. Rudolf concedes that his son has already done so, at least in some respects. “Really, it was a totally different business when I

did it,” he said. “What we did was sell sausage to whoever was hungry. We had twelve collectors, maybe. I was very prominent, but my turnover was ten to twelve million a year. David’s is, what, two hundred million?” *Forbes* last year estimated two hundred and twenty-five million dollars in revenue. Zwirner told me only that that estimate is low. *Forbes* credited Gagosian with nine hundred and twenty-five million.

In the beginning, Zwirner’s program was fairly radical and rigorous, with a roster of under-recognized, experimental artists, such as the film and video artists Stan Douglas and Diana Thater and the installation artist Jason Rhoades. His gallery was a lean operation, with an emphasis on work from Europe and the West Coast. He and Monica lived nearby. Sometimes he skateboarded to work.

As he grew, he took on artists from other galleries and brought in some rising stars from Europe, like Neo Rauch. He lost only one—Franz West, to Gagosian, in 2001. In 2002, he followed the art world’s migration up to Chelsea. “His approach seemed to shift when Franz West went to Gagosian,” another dealer told me. “That sparked

something competitive in him. He fell in love with selling. And what’s easiest to sell? Paintings.” He poached big sellers like Lisa Yuskavage and Marlene Dumas.

Since the late eighties, Dumas, a South African painter who lives in Holland, had been represented by the prominent New York dealer Jack Tilton. Zwirner began courting her in the early two-thousands. A methodology of a kind came to light when Craig Robins, a Miami real-estate developer, sued Zwirner in federal court, in 2010. Robins was fond of Dumas’s work and had collected dozens of her paintings. He also occasionally sold pieces that he’d bought on the secondary market—that is, not directly from the artist or her dealer but on resale from a third party. In 2004, he wanted to sell a Dumas painting, supposedly to pay for a divorce, and he and Tilton approached Zwirner, who had a buyer. Robins asked that the deal be kept confidential; he didn’t want Dumas to find out. Dumas and her studio manager maintained a so-called “blacklist” of collectors to whom they would not sell her work, owing to these collectors’ supposed habit of flipping the work

for profit. (An artist, or her dealer, likes to control where the work ends up, to cultivate prestige and manage price. Speculation is frowned upon and profited upon equally.) The lawsuit alleged that, in spite of this confidentiality agreement, Zwirner told Dumas about the sale, in order to curry favor with her. Zwirner countered that there had been no agreement to keep the deal confidential after the sale was completed.

In 2008, Dumas defected to Zwirner. During her first show with him, in 2010, Robins couldn't get the paintings he wanted, since Zwirner had allocated them to other collectors. Robins alleged that Zwirner had promised him first choice, after museums. (Zwirner said that he'd made no such promise.) Art, like love, can't always be had just for money. This was a question of status, or the perception of it. The affront, and the yearning, can get the blood boiling. As Kenny Schachter, the London dealer, told me, "When people want an artist, they'll kill for it." Or they'll sue.

Ultimately, the suit was dismissed, owing, in part, to an absence of written evidence. Art dealing, for better and worse, remains very much a handshake business. Still, Zwirner got a lesson in the American way of tactical litigation and the billable hour, and the public got a glimpse into the opaque, cliquish workings of art allocation—"a realm of self-proclaimed royalty full of 'blacklists,' 'graylists,' and astonishing chicanery," the presiding judge declared. Auctions, in theory anyway, determine price and possession in accordance with the laws of supply and demand, and adhere, again in theory, to some measure of transparency: if you want something, you just pay more for it than anyone else will, and the price—but not the purchaser—will be a matter of public record. Gallerists, by contrast, unilaterally determine a sale price, and then anoint a buyer, based on their own arcane calculations of what's best for their artists, their clients, or themselves. They rarely reveal the buyer or the sale price, making that information almost as valuable as the work itself. There are few industries with information as asymmetrical as that of the art business.

Tilton had been one of Zwirner's first buyers when he opened on Greene

Street. After the lawsuit, they continued to do business together, even with work by Dumas. "The art world is too small to exclude enemies," Schachter said. "You get stabbed in the front, not the back, and then you go to dinner."

The difference between a gallerist and a dealer is that a gallerist has a space and shows primary work, and a dealer just sells art, be it primary or secondary, old or new, hard-won or ill-gotten, out of an office, a closet, or a cell phone. Zwirner is both. He has gallery space where he shows only his artists' new work, and he also traffics in the secondary market, selling objects he's either bought himself or been given on consignment.

In many respects, the job, either way, is to find and control supply. You don't need so much to sell as to have things to sell. There are two ways to do this. One is to hire people (artists) to make these things. When it's time for a show, you set prices, allot works to buyers, and take a portion of each sale—typically, fifty per cent. At Zwirner, the staff will discuss pricing at the gallery's weekly sales meeting. Often, everyone puts a number on a piece of paper. And then they use these numbers to get to a price.

"It's crazy," Zwirner said. "You have fifteen different numbers, and you know it's good when they're in a twelve-to-fifteen-per-cent range of each other. This is where an art dealer's talent comes to bear."

You act as a kind of manager to the artist. This can involve bookkeeping, archiving, publishing, marketing, shipping, storage, framing, financing, and all-around hand-holding. Sometimes the gallerist is agent, editor, publisher, store, and shrink, rolled into one.

Last year, Zwirner hired a London gallerist named Rodolphe von Hofmannsthal to help run his new gallery in Mayfair. When Zwirner was in London in March, Hofmannsthal took him to see the work of the twenty-seven-year-old Oscar Murillo. Zwirner was looking for a young artist "who wasn't easy," Hofmannsthal said. Murillo's parents had worked in a candy factory and a sugarcane mill in Colombia, and moved to East London when he was eleven, to join a network of relatives who clean office buildings and private homes. His art—paintings, installations, happenings—often incorporates dozens of these relatives.

Murillo met Zwirner and Hofmannsthal at a small gallery in the East End. It

Mobiles for Adults

Five pictures of Walter Cronkite.



Five gluten-free cookies.



Five cell phones from the '90s.



R. C. S.

was bitter cold, and the place wasn't heated. Zwirner, his breath steaming, felt intrepid, authentic. After looking at the work, they all stood around to talk.

Murillo had become the hottest young artist in London. Not long afterward, a painting of his sold at auction for almost four hundred thousand dollars, more than eight times the high estimate. An installation at the Art Unlimited exhibition, in Basel, was a hit, and word had gone around that the bigger galleries were trying to court him. In July, Zwirner asked Murillo to join the gallery. The intention, for now anyway, is to allow him to show some work with his gallery in London. "We didn't want to come across as a gallery that just pinches younger artists," Hofmannsthal said.

Hofmannsthal included two paintings of Murillo's in a group show he curated this summer in New York, at Zwirner's Nineteenth Street gallery. Murillo came to town for the opening and went to dinner at Zwirner's house, with most of the directors from the gallery, to celebrate. "It sounds like a cliché, but it did feel like a family," Murillo told me. "One of the first things I saw was that he has the work of the gallery's artists in his house. It was like going to a Chinese restaurant and seeing Chinese people there."

A few months before, Murillo had been to dinner at the home of Susan and Michael Hort, Zwirner's longtime supporters. They'd been wanting to buy Murillo's work for more than a year. At the opening, the Horts stood with Mu-

rillo. He was playing it cool. "David's too expensive for us," Michael Hort told me. "We try to get things before David does!"

The Horts wound up buying the two Murillos at the show. Zwirner explained, "They've been priced out of my gallery. I had twenty people who wanted these paintings. But I wanted Rodolphe to have a connection to Susan and Michael. So I let him sell the pieces to them. I jumped the protocol here." The pieces went for seventy-five thousand each. They were consigned works. Zwirner wasn't sure yet how his gallery was going to price new work of Murillo's. Sometimes an artist's prices can go up too fast.

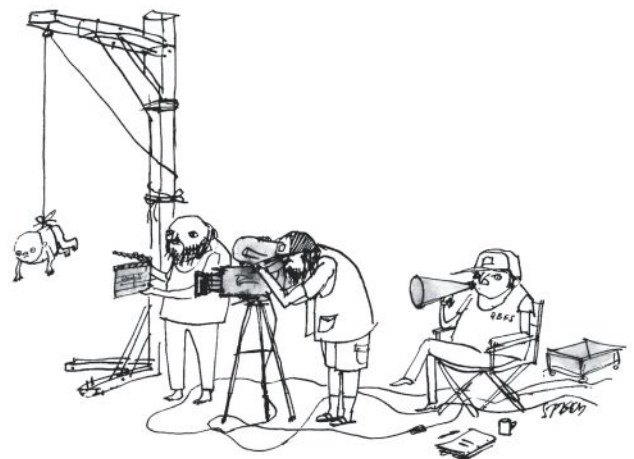
"Hopefully, the gallery can drain some of that speculative thing out of it," Hofmannsthal said.

The other source of supply is the secondary market. You find art work on resale, and you seek a buyer for it, and take a percentage. The consignor is the client. Or else you have a buyer who covets something, and you track it down and pry it loose. One prominent collector referred to Zwirner as his top "go-get guy." To go and get, you have to know who owns what, how he or his heirs feel about it, how desperately they may need money. Dealers, like auction houses, thrive on the Three "Ds": debt, death, and divorce. Serious collectors often spend seven or eight years pursuing a single work of art.

From the outset, Zwirner was dabbling in the secondary market, but in 1999 he and the Swiss dealer Iwan

Wirth opened a gallery together, Zwirner & Wirth, on the Upper East Side, in a town house that in the sixties was the home of the avant-garde Martha Jackson Gallery, and later belonged to the boxing promoter Don King. It became a staging ground for the exhibition and sale of secondary-market work, and for both men's rapid rise to prominence. In the beginning, in Zwirner's telling, Wirth—whose wife, Manuela, is the daughter of a Swiss retail magnate and collector named Ursula Hauser—provided the money and the rich buyers, while Zwirner developed the supply chain, particularly American work for European collectors. (Wirth disputes this: "We both did all of it.") One of their biggest clients, in those years, was Friedrich Christian Flick, a German industrial heir. Known as Mick Flick, he was a flamboyant collector of Old Masters who in the eighties began to amass a collection of Minimalist and conceptual art. Wirth and Zwirner were among his principal go-getters. Over time, Zwirner got to know where the treasures were. Zwirner and Wirth sold Flick work by their own artists as well. "Just selling is one thing," Zwirner told me. "But strategically building a collection is completely different. It's great when you're one of the biggest buyers. Great work finds you."

Once Flick had established his collection, he sought to build a museum to house it, but various proposals fell through before he settled, controversially, on loaning it to the Hamburger Bahnhof, in Berlin. His grandfather Friedrich Flick was a Nazi war criminal,



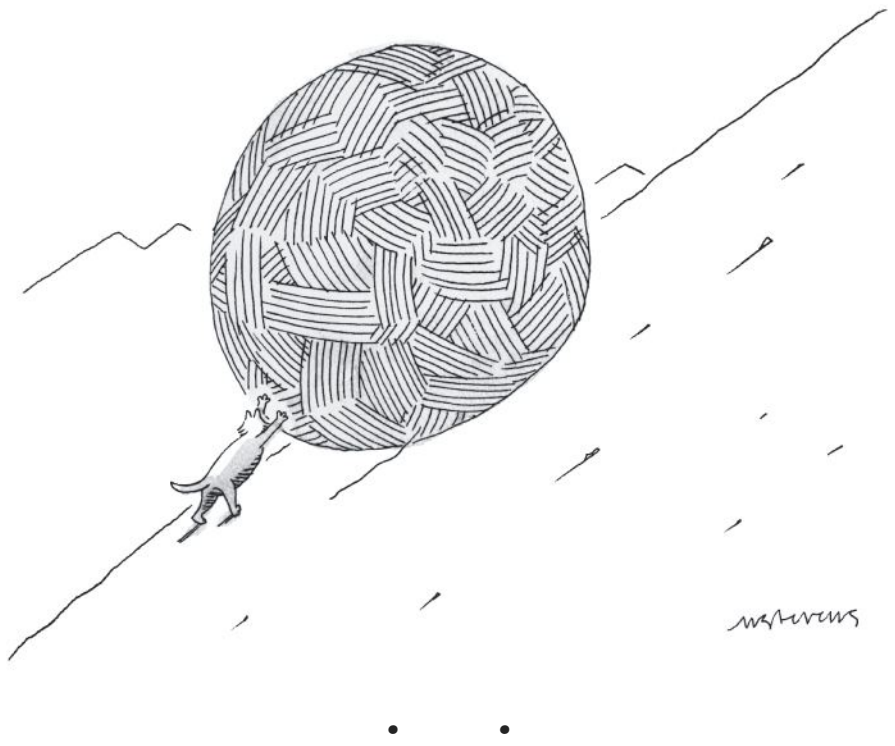
"O.K. 'The Giant Baby from Space.' Take 1."

convicted at Nuremberg of, among other things, employing slave labor in the manufacture of munitions. After three years in prison, he rebuilt his industrial conglomerate and became the richest man in Germany. Critics complained that the Flick Collection was the product of “blood money.” Zwirner felt that all this was irrelevant and unfair. “Mick was born in 1944,” he said. “It’s just guilt by association.”

Zwirner and Wirth also made out well when they secured the rights to handle a big piece of the Helga and Walther Lauffs Collection, one of Europe’s finest assemblages of contemporary art. Over several years, they reportedly sold about eighty million dollars’ worth of the Lauffs Collection. (Sotheby’s got the rest.) This was a boon to one of Zwirner’s biggest clients, Mitch Rales, a billionaire conglomerator who, with his wife, Emily, an art historian and curator, has been amassing a contemporary collection that is the basis for a sprawling new museum in suburban Maryland, called Glenstone. Other big clients are Eli Broad, the Los Angeles philanthropist, and Steven A. Cohen, the hedge-fund manager, whose firm recently agreed to plead guilty to insider-trading charges, and who in mid-November sold more than eighty million dollars’ worth of art at auction. Cohen had bought one of the works for sale, a Judd, from Zwirner. “I think that guy is great,” Zwirner told me. “I really do.”

In 2009, Zwirner and Wirth parted ways, apparently without rancor, as Wirth decided, with his wife and his mother-in-law, to bring Hauser & Wirth, their primary-market gallery, to New York. They opened a new branch in a giant Chelsea space that once housed the Roxy roller rink. He and Zwirner were now competitors.

Zwirner began to plan a secondary-market gallery of his own. It made sense to do it in a space separate from the primary work. He said that he didn’t want to divert the attention of his clients away from his artists. In 2009, he bought an old parking garage on West Twentieth Street, a block north of his gallery. He cleared the lot and spent two years building a new exhibition space: five floors, thirty thousand square feet, built to LEED specs, with an expanse of



skylights and half a dozen exhibition areas, both large and small. It opened this February, presenting a well-windowed wall of poured-in-place concrete to a street of old brick and rusting steel. The architect, Annabelle Selldorf, a childhood acquaintance of Zwirner’s, has done eighteen projects for him. (The expansion to his East Village town house inspired a disgruntled neighbor to set up an anonymous Web site, Dear David Zwirner, with a photograph of him and the tagline “Isn’t being an art dealer evil enough?”)

The new gallery, though widely praised, was a proclamation of clout and, therefore, a provocation to colleagues who have grown increasingly uneasy over the art-world arms race. Some faulted it on aesthetic grounds, for its incongruous spiffiness in a district of old warehouses. “Zwirner’s new space feels like a hotel,” Richard Prince, an artist who shows with Gagosian, wrote on his blog. “The door to get in feels like something out of a high-end health spa.”

Others felt a kind of ideological unease in the presence of a collaboration between the art world and the real-estate industry. “That building is a real sign of the times,” the gallerist Gavin Brown said. “Galleries are like hermit crabs. This purpose-driven architecture violates the spirit of the thing. It’s an industry that

isn’t supposed to have a *place*. David built a physical symptom of this bizarre late-capitalist moment.”

The art world is full of pirates, rogues, eccentrics, bullies, and snobs, or, if you prefer, passionate aesthetes. It is, infamously, the last big unregulated industry, full of shady dealings and questionable practices, unwritten and often broken agreements, forgeries and price manipulations, wild tales of fortunes made and lost. The most successful dealers have often had a touch of drama about them, a swashbuckling idiosyncratic style. Zwirner, by design and by temperament, strives to quell drama. He has set out to systematize art dealing, to give the endeavor a measure of efficiency, transparency, and order. “He has all the integrity he can afford to have,” Richard Armstrong, the director of the Guggenheim, said. Some competitors see a wolf beneath the fleece. They call him Larry Nice—a mercenary camouflaged by good manners and a European pedigree—or, somewhat contradictorily, a “frat boy,” for his enthusiasm and bonhomie. Or else, Dionysian at heart, they resent the Apollonian incursion. “By the laws of physics, the more systemization there is in the business, the more boring the art,” Gavin Brown declared.

Some of this, of course, is just resent-



ment of success, masquerading as aesthetic discernment, or aesthetic discernment blown up into moral alarm. If it's hard to dislike the man, you criticize the program, or his position as an avatar of big-money art. The art world, as Armstrong said, is "the most opinionated group of people short of the Vatican."

"He's like a big dog walking by—he doesn't even notice," the painter Lisa Yuskavage said. "He has this presumption of collegiality. He doesn't get caught up in little skirmishes. I think it's worth taking note: why is he doing such a good job?"

A 2008 *Flash Art* poll found Zwirner's gallery to be the most popular gallery with artists. His own artists speak admiringly about what he does for them. He is not the type of dealer who regularly bids up his own artists at auction. (He says it's more important to him where his artists' work ends up than at what price.) He also has a frugal streak. A couple of other dealers used to refer to him behind his back as Deli Dave, for his attention to nickels and dimes. Collectors, advisers, fellow-dealers, and curators praise the "user experience" at Zwirner, the atmosphere of competence and credibility. They often cite the structure of his business. He enlisted the expertise of a man-

agement consultant named Suki Larson, who worked in mergers and acquisitions at Goldman Sachs and then, after getting a Stanford M.B.A., as a consultant at McKinsey & Company. Larson helped Zwirner restructure the organization and served as consigliere. When she worked on her first project with Zwirner, in 2006, there were twenty employees. Now there are a hundred and twenty.

Leo Castelli, whose original gallery, as one dealer told me, would have fit inside Zwirner's office, wouldn't recognize the business. "This doesn't come easy to this industry," Zwirner said. "The mom-and-pop mentality is such that a very senior colleague of mine still opens her mail every day."

He went on, "At other galleries, there is often an intense dislike between colleagues—backstabbing and client stealing." Gagosian favors the trading-desk model, encouraging his salespeople to compete with each other—it's a gallerina-eat-gallerina world. (During the financial crisis, in 2008, *Flash Art* reported that Gagosian had told his staff, "If you would like to continue working for Gagosian, I suggest you start to sell some art.") Zwirner is intent on cultivating a congenial atmosphere, so much so that it can occasionally seem eerie. "Ob-

viously, I've done something right, if you keep in mind all these people who've stayed," Zwirner said.

When one speaks of Zwirner the gallerist, one is speaking as much of a handful of women in their forties who have been with the gallery fifteen or more years. Zwirner has made them partners, meaning, he says, that they "will participate in profits as the gallery does well." They are Angela Choon, who runs the London gallery; Hanna Schouwink, from Holland; Bellatrix Hubert, from France; and Kristine Bell, from outside Buffalo. Seeing them all together, at an opening or a dinner, brings to mind David Carradine's gang of glamorous assassins in "Kill Bill." Last winter, Zwirner added a man to the partner ranks, Chris D'Amelio, who had his own gallery for fifteen years and had been struggling to keep pace with the bigger ones. His capitulation was taken as a bad omen for midsize galleries.

Zwirner spent part of the summer brainstorming with Suki Larson to figure out how best to restructure the way his top people get paid. "I've reached this magic moment where everything has lined up really nicely, and I want to make sure I don't fuck it up," he said. "For example, compensation and recruiting tools are crucial, and our industry isn't set up like that. The banking industry, other industries, you have a gazillion titles. What do we have? We have the title of 'director.'" This is the stuff that occupies Zwirner's mind during the dead weeks of August, when his peers are in Majorca and Antibes.

Five years ago, Julia Joern, a P.R. and marketing consultant who had worked at Phaidon, came to run Zwirner's media office. Art-world cynics express amazement that he has a dozen employees dedicated to public relations, and attribute Zwirner's media ubiquity to this. But Joern's group also maintains the artists' archives (both analogue and digital), publishes catalogues and books, handles art-work photography, conducts research, plans events, and produces video segments about the gallery's exhibitions.

Zwirner's in-house secondary-market research department, a museum-calibre band of Ph.D.s, ferrets out the particulars (provenance, context, the whereabouts of other editions or analogues,

and so on) of each work that passes through the gallery. “The research we do is better than Christie’s and Sotheby’s,” Zwirner told me. “It’s so the best in the business it’s not even funny. Yes, it costs money, but, for every dollar you put in there, you get a return.”

It all falls under “marketing,” a term that the gallery’s staff had trouble swallowing at first. As Schouwink recalled, “Marketing? We all looked at each other and said, ‘What are you talking about?’”

“You had to watch your words, in the context of art,” Larson said. She had to explain to the staff that when they put together an exhibition of work that did not yield as many dollars per square foot as another might, or that consisted of hardly any salable objects, they were, in business terms, and regardless of their passion for the work, burnishing the Zwirner name. “That’s all brand building,” she said. “That’s what it is.”

It can make a gallerist wince. “When art dealers do these brave shows, we’re *dreaming*,” D’Amelio said. “It’s not marketing.”

One way that deep research, fancy catalogues, and exhibitions without much for sale have paid off has been in attracting artists’ estates. Zwirner represents a number of prominent dead artists, most notably the American Minimalists Donald Judd, Fred Sandbeck, Dan Flavin, Ad Reinhardt, and John McCracken (a Zwirner artist before his death, in 2011). Often this means there’s inventory for Zwirner to sell, or it simply provides him with an informational advantage—a prime seat in air-traffic control. The Twentieth Street gallery, in many respects, is a temple to Minimalism—“Effectively, he built this building for Judd and Flavin,” Selldorf told me—and an architectural pitch to living Minimalists as well. The reclusive light artist Doug Wheeler, who, at seventy-two, had never had a solo show with a gallery in New York, has joined the Zwirner gallery and has a second show coming up in January. Zwirner said of Minimalism, “It was the last really great newness. These were true giants, true modernists. I found it strange that Judd and Flavin were selling for a fraction of Lichtenstein and Warhol. In absolute terms, I can’t imagine a museum director saying, ‘I don’t need a Flavin or a Judd.’”

This, too, has rankled some of his colleagues who were contemporaries, and often representatives, of the artists Zwirner now controls. “It’s a little annoying when you’ve had a personal relationship with the artists,” Paula Cooper told me one afternoon, when I dropped by her gallery, a block away. A crew from the Sol LeWitt estate was installing a show of one of his wall drawings downstairs. “At first, you feel possessive of these artists whom you’ve known your whole life, but I’m getting over that. I can get disdainful toward someone who doesn’t know the work, didn’t have experience with it, didn’t know the artists. David’s trying to do it in a good, big, professional way. But it’s not anywhere near my idea of things.” She felt that he sometimes presented the work inappropriately: “Too crowded. Just wrong. Wrong works next to the wrong works.”

Zwirner and Cooper have tangled over Flavin, who created abstract sculptures out of fluorescent light tubes. In 2008, Zwirner and Kristine Bell arranged an exhibition at Zwirner & Wirth to commemorate a famous 1964 Flavin exhibition at the Green Gallery, on Fifty-seventh Street. (At Green, none of the works, priced at a thousand dollars each, sold. Now they would go for one to two million each.) There was nothing for sale at the tribute show, either. Works were loaned by the Dia Art Foundation, the Lannan Foundation, the Flavin estate,



and a collector or two. The gallery produced a beautiful catalogue—come-hither plumage. After the show, Flavin’s son, Stephen, the estate’s executor, decided to join forces with Zwirner.

Flavin had planned to make multiple versions of various works, generally in editions of three or five, but in many cases he fabricated only one or two. When he died, in 1996, there remained numerous unrealized editions. The artist’s intentions for what would become of

these, after his death, were unclear. The estate had the right, by law and by custom, to complete those editions. So far, it has sold about two dozen such works, all through Zwirner.

This development came as an unpleasant surprise to some collectors who’d bought Flavins believing that theirs were one of a set of, say, two, as well as to the dealers who’d sold them these works, under the same understanding. Cooper, who was a friend of Flavin’s, and who exhibited his work, was one. “Now all the things we sold as unique won’t be unique but will be one of five,” she said. Cooper had been on a panel of experts convened to assess the Flavin estate’s value shortly after his death, and it had been her understanding that the estate would not produce additional works. The Pace gallery, which had exhibited Flavin at the end of his life, had the same impression. Douglas Baxter, the president of Pace, who was also on the panel of experts, said, “Absolutely, it was our understanding that there would be no posthumous work.”

Apparently, the estate changed its mind. It may seem that there is no real reason to make more, except to make money. “David talked Stephen into it, because Stephen needed money, I guess,” Cooper said. The estate says that it had reached the decision before it began working with Zwirner. “But it would have behooved David to at least make it public,” Cooper said. “We only just found out, when something was sold that was thought to be unique.” Zwirner and the estate insist that none of this was a secret. And Zwirner says that, above all, when it comes to completing the editions, the more, the merrier, for the sake of art history. Works are now accessible to many institutions that would not otherwise have access. “You can’t tell me it’s not better that there are more,” he said.

A Flavin isn’t a Flavin unless a certificate affirming its provenance comes with it. If you have a Flavin and no certificate, it is no longer a Flavin. It is a fluorescent light. Monetarily, there is little difference in value, at present, between those which come with certificates signed by Flavin and those signed by the estate. “Most new collectors don’t care or know any better,” Cooper said.

Sometimes the fluorescent tubes burn out and need to be replaced. As it

happens, to get new ones, you have to order them through David Zwirner, who orders them in bulk from the same manufacturer that made them during Flavin's lifetime. "A lot of us who worked with Flavin still have the *old* bulbs," Cooper said, with a sly smile. You got the feeling that someone would soon be making a market in those, too.

In the fall, the frenzied pace picked up again. Around two dozen Zwirner artists and estates had exhibitions in his galleries or at museums: a whirl of openings and dinners, logistical crises and thoughtful remarks. Zwirner delegated the details. After trips to Houston, London, Antwerp, Ghent, and Qatar, he returned to New York for the gallery's first show of work by Kusama, on Nineteenth Street, and its first of Ad Reinhardt, on Twentieth Street. Earlier in the year, he had wrested the Reinhardt estate away from the Pace gallery. Reinhardt, a member of the New York School and a proto-Minimalist, had a show of his so-called "black paintings" at the Jewish Museum in 1967, the year he died, at the age of fifty-three; his widow and his daughter had for years dreamed of doing one again, but the paintings were dispersed among museums and collectors disinclined to lend them out. "The black paintings are famously fragile," Zwirner said. "Reinhardt sucked most of the oil out of the

pigment to give it this dry quality. They don't reflect—they absorb. That makes them difficult to restore, and so people are reluctant to let them go." Still, through guile, pull, and persistence, Zwirner and Bell, in conjunction with the estate and the curator Robert Storr, managed to round up thirteen of them, from twelve lenders, to create the kind of blockbuster museum-calibre exhibition for which the Twentieth Street gallery was conceived and designed. None of the works are for sale. "People will walk in here and say, 'How the hell did he do this?'" Zwirner said. "This is as extraordinary a room as you'll find in New York right now." It had taken gallery staff almost a week to get the lighting right and five tries to settle on the right color for the varnish on the benches in the middle of the room. "It's one thing to bring the paintings all together, and it's another to make them look really good, to create perfect viewing conditions," Zwirner said. "And all of this is for free, for the benefit of the public. So much for all the complaining, you know?"

The paintings aren't merely black. They contain squares suffused with such subtle shadings of blue or red that it can take a few moments for the eye to notice. "What Reinhardt wanted to do was slow you down," Zwirner said. He stood in front of a painting on the gallery's east wall. "This is one of the dark-

est ones. You can see there's some red in there, but you have to really, really strain until the shapes come." He stared awhile. "So mysterious."

The contemporary auctions were the following week. Christie's was holding one on a Tuesday evening, at the company's headquarters, in Rockefeller Center. Among the lots for sale was one of five editions of Jeff Koons's "Balloon Dog," the orange one, owned by Peter Brant. It was installed near the entrance to Christie's, a big shiny thumb-of-the-nose to its dour environs. Zwirner arrived late, just as the auction was about to begin, and made his way to a seat in front of the auctioneer, about ten rows back. To the auctioneer's right was a kind of fore-castle jammed with Christie's representatives conveying bids from clients on the phone, facing in a variety of directions, like flowers in a vase.

The first lot was an ink-jet painting by the forty-one-year-old art star Wade Guyton. It went for \$2.4 million (including the buyer's premium), several times the high estimate. Soon afterward, there was a painting by Christopher Wool, called "Apocalypse Now," a black-on-white stencil of a line from the film: "Sell the house, sell the car, sell the kids." In this setting, it seemed a cleansing rebuke, of a kind that entices rather than offends art collectors. It sold for \$26.5 million, a record for Wool. The next lot was a triptych by Francis Bacon, of portraits of his contemporary Lucian Freud. They hung on the wall to the auctioneer's left, over a dock of other buyers' proxies from around the world. The bidding opened at eighty million dollars. The numbers rose fast at first, with the auctioneer, Jussi Pylkkänen, pointing gently to left and right and coaxing commitments. "Lady on the aisle. . . . Sure, sir. . . . At a hundred million for the triptych. Would you like to come back in here, sir? . . . Beautiful thing. Not yours, I'm afraid." The bidders fell away, and the pace slowed. This was no cattle auction, with its torrent of syllables. The room was hushed, reverential. Pylkkänen seemed to transmute all the longing, envy, and wonder coursing through it into a gentle and orderly serenade. "A hundred twenty-six million: a surprise, but a welcome one," he said. He waited patiently for the bidders to decide, or, rather, for



"What do you mean you know someone's been here?"

their proxies, in the room, to relay these decisions. (The actual bidders were anonymous. Price transparency does little to clear the murk of ownership, or to dispel the whiff of manipulation. “Very conspicuous consumption, very private gratification,” Zwirner said afterward.) When the hammer fell, the sale price for the Bacon, with fees, was \$142.4 million, higher than that of any art work ever sold at auction.

Zwirner hadn’t bid on anything yet, but soon “Balloon Dog (Orange)” came up, and he had an eager client. The price climbed in increments of three million dollars, then two. Zwirner, a cell phone to his right ear, bid thirty-nine million dollars, then forty-one, forty-three, forty-five, and forty-nine. The only other bidder, across the room, went to fifty. “What about fifty-two, sir?” the auctioneer asked Zwirner. “It might work.” He waited as Zwirner, or his client, agonized. Zwirner was shaking his head, his neck reddening. The auctioneer asked, “Is that a definite no or a maybe no?” Zwirner kept shaking his head. The gavel rose. Zwirner’s left hand shot up. He was in at fifty-one. His opponent went to fifty-two. The process repeated itself, Zwirner on the phone, his head bowed, as if receiving sad family news, while Pylkkänen stalled, eager, it seemed, to give him the time and consideration due to the art world’s second most powerful man. This time, Zwirner’s left hand did not come up. Sold. Beautiful thing. Not his. It was the most ever paid for a work by a living artist.

One day, I went to see Zwirner in Montauk, where he spends the month of August. He’d just returned from a hiking trip in Corsica. During the financial crisis in 2009, he bought the Montauk house from Bruce Ratner, the developer of the Atlantic Yards project, in Brooklyn. “Fortune favors the brave,” he said.

The house is one of about only a dozen on the cliffs between the village and the point, a wild, moorish stretch colonized a generation ago by entertainers and artists. Zwirner’s neighbor to the west is the financial trader David (Tiger) Williams and to the east is Adam Lindemann, an art collector who ran afoul of his neighbors when he in-



stalled on his front lawn a gigantic pink phallic sculpture by Franz West. “I own ultra sculpture, too, but this isn’t the place for it,” Zwirner told me. The house is spare. There’s hardly any art—a Marlene Dumas painting of an olive tree in his bedroom, a Raymond Pettibon mural of a surfer in one daughter’s room—or even furniture. “I don’t like furniture that much,” he said. He was wearing cargo shorts, Reef sandals, and a blue T-shirt. He has the same thing for breakfast every day: granola and fruit and Monica’s homemade yogurt. When they’re in Montauk, they do yoga together. He swims. He surfs. He reads. He drives around in a Prius. He doesn’t socialize much.

On our way to buy a striped bass for lunch, he pulled into a lot at the beach to get a look at the surf, and ran into another gallery owner who’d just finished surfing, and whom he talked about af-

terward as a member of a clique of cool art people and surfers whom he doesn’t really hang out with in Montauk. He has the air of a family man who is resigned to being a square—let ’em laugh. He complained about hipsters taking over the town and took me to Gosman’s, a fish market, where a fleet of commercial trawlers were docked. “This is real, and that’s what’s good about Montauk,” he said. He had a romantic attraction to the rusting, gear-strewn vessels and to the idea, at least, of good hard labor at sea—and he rued the trawlers’ eventual obsolescence. “You just know we’ll all be eating farm fish soon,” he said. He went inside and stood in line to buy a wild striper. ♦

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A conversation with Nick Paumgarten and Peter Schjeldahl.

WHERE IS YOUR MOTHER?

A woman's fight to keep her child.

BY RACHEL AVIV

On December 5, 2005, a three-year-old boy named Adam spent the morning in his crib, playing a handheld Spider-Man computer game and snacking on crackers. He began calling, "Mama help!" a phrase he used when he couldn't get his games to work. He repeated the phrase at least ten times, but his mother never came. He had been alone for ninety minutes when police officers arrived at the home, an oceanfront condominium in Huntington Beach, California. A fireman climbed a ladder to the second floor, where Adam's cries could be heard, and pushed open the window. Adam was standing in his crib, his blond hair falling just below his shoulders. A policeman on the ground shouted up to him, asking him where his mother was. "Shopping," he replied.

After being lifted out of his crib, Adam (a pseudonym) repeatedly said, "Find Mama," and tried to leave the apartment. When he patted his mother's bed, "a plume of dust came off the sheets," an officer observed. The officer wandered through the rooms, noting that some parts of the apartment were immaculate and others in disarray. The medicine cabinet contained bars of soap arranged by color, but there were rings of "black sludge" in the sink and the toilet. In the kitchen, there were eggs in a skillet, live flies on the ceiling, and dead ones on the floor. The refrigerator contained an egg carton that held mostly eggshells.

Adam was taken to Orangewood Children's Home, an emergency center for abused and neglected children. A social worker and a nurse found no signs of injury or mental impairment. He could recite his ABCs and count to a hundred. He was friendly and polite; when a nurse checked his diaper and found that it was wet, he said, "I'm sorry."

Adam's mother, Niveen Ismail, a computer consultant, returned at around 6 P.M. When she saw a police officer's card taped to her door, she assumed that her

apartment had been burglarized. A petite, striking thirty-nine-year-old with long dark-brown hair and a slight Arabic accent, she called the department and begged them to return her son. She was told to discuss the matter with the Orange County Social Services Agency, which removes roughly twelve hundred children from their homes every year, the majority for issues relating to neglect.

When a social worker came to investigate, Niveen was so shy that she seemed shifty. Although she was intellectually confident, she spoke softly, deflecting attention away from herself. She admitted that she was exhausted: she was single, overworked, and had few friends and no family in the United States. When asked about her family, she told the social worker, "I was born overseas." She wouldn't elaborate, saying that her past was her "secret."

At a hearing in juvenile court, a social worker testified that "there seems to be a great deal of mystery about the mother's circumstances." Niveen told a convoluted story about how she hadn't known that Adam would be home alone, because his father was supposed to babysit. She added that she was overwhelmed, having just returned to work full time. "The car broke down twice," she said. "The washing machine broke and flooded. . . . And he was sick. He had a cough forever, and he got two colds, and he was throwing up." The judge found her explanations implausible and insufficient. Until the reasons for her negligence were better understood, he said, "nothing less than twenty-four-hour surveillance would protect this child."

Adam was placed in the home of an elderly foster mother, who was caring for five other children. Niveen called the house at least once a day, but Adam was too young to say much more than "Love you, Mama, miss you, Mama, bye-bye," before dropping the phone. The so-

cial worker assigned to the case, Mary, observed that Adam was quiet and withdrawn in the presence of his foster family and became teary when anyone mentioned his mother.

Niveen was allowed to see Adam twice a week. They met for an hour and a half at the office of the Social Services Agency, which has a large visiting room with linoleum floors and cubbies of toys. Adam ran up to Niveen, smiling and shouting, "Mama!" Mary noted that "the mother was very affectionate toward the child giving him kisses, even when he told her to stop." They sang nursery rhymes, played hide-and-seek, and drew letters and shapes. Once, when Adam fell asleep on her lap, Niveen held him and cried silently. She told Mary that her workload was too heavy, and that on the day she left Adam alone she had reached a "breaking point."

A psychologist hired by the court concluded that Niveen's neglectful behavior was caused not by a mental illness but by "certain problematic personality characteristics." She repressed her emotions; she was defensive and isolated. On a lengthy personality test, she circled "True" after reading the statement "When I have a choice, I prefer to do things alone." The evaluator said that she needed to embrace her "softer emotions" and overcome the belief that "sympathy and tender feelings only distract and divert people from being correct and successful."

Niveen said that at visits she was forbidden from speaking Arabic with Adam, because the social workers needed to understand and document what she was saying. Her progress would be formally reviewed at hearings scheduled roughly every six months, and Mary's notes would be crucial evidence. If Niveen did not comply with her case plan and prove, within a year, that she was a responsible mother—she was required to attend therapy and parenting classes and to clean her



Once Social Services started watching Niveen Ismail, the bar seemed to rise. She said, "You start questioning your own reality."



"When portions are this huge, I eat half now and the rest in a few minutes."

house—the court would begin the process of terminating her parental rights in order to free her son for adoption.

The director of the Orange County Social Services Agency, Michael L. Riley, said that most parents who become involved in the system "absolutely love their children." He describes the problem as a "three-headed monster: domestic violence, mental illness, and substance abuse," all exacerbated by poverty. Caseworkers, who are usually overworked and underpaid, must distinguish between mistreatment and parenting that is "good enough"—a subjective determination that is inevitably shaped by their own values and world view. Neglect is broadly defined, and its signs can be confused with poverty or a different culture's approach to child-rearing. The removal rates of counties around the country vary widely and tend to be swayed by the memory (or fear) of worst-case scenarios: social-service agencies most typically make the news because a child dies after being left with his birth family.

An Orange County elected supervisor, Todd Spitzer, said that the county's Social Services Agency, like many child-welfare

agencies, has made a choice to err "on the side of overreaction, because the alternative could be devastating." Social workers recognize that if they recommend returning a child to a deadly home "it will be a career ender," he said. "It will sully their reputations forever." They may choose a knowable tragedy, the separation of a parent and child, in order to prevent an unknowable one.

At visits, Adam repeatedly expressed confusion, asking, "Are you O.K., Mama?" Sometimes he told her he loved her and curled up next to her, or tried to follow her out of the office, refusing to let go of her hand; other times, when she asked for a kiss, he would turn his face away and say, "No!" Mary noted that Niveen did not "know how to handle the child's ambivalence."

After a couple of months, Adam developed a habit of hitting himself in the forehead. "Don't do that!" Niveen said, grabbing his hand. "Where do you learn these things?" Mary pulled Niveen aside and told her that she should "redirect" Adam to another activity, like coloring. Niveen listened with a "sigh and scowl." Mary described Niveen as forgetful and

depressed and noted that there is a "dynamic of the child bossing his mother around. He would tell his mother what to do and she would do it." "Prognosis for return is poor at this point," she wrote. She referred to another social worker who had been monitoring the case and stated that "she cannot put her finger on it, but that there is something different about the mother."

To comply with her case plan, Niveen enrolled in a parenting class offered by the county called "Living Success," where she studied selections from "The Parent's Handbook," which encourages a "democratic style" of parenting that "balances freedom, or rights, and limits, or responsibilities." Niveen tried to learn to "parent American style," she said. She worked to master three concepts: "boundaries, limits, and structure."

An only child, Niveen grew up in Kuwait City with Egyptian Muslim parents who rarely disciplined her. She felt that the best way to honor her father, a professor of psychology, was to get good grades. A childhood friend, Sarah Badran, described her as a "hardworking, shy, introverted person who minds her own business." She came to America to get a master's degree in computer engineering at Manhattan College, a school that initially appealed to her because of its name. Her father encouraged her to get a Ph.D., in part because her personality wasn't well suited to office life: her patience was limited when taking orders from people she found "fatheaded or sexist," she said. She enrolled at Southern Methodist University, in Dallas, but the direction of her studies (in visual modeling) felt increasingly obscure, and she dropped out of the program. She moved to California in 1994 and got a second master's degree, at Pepperdine, in international business.

Niveen didn't feel as comfortable there as she had in New York City, which she said embodied "real freedom": eccentricity was better tolerated, and it was easy to be anonymous. She tried to meet men in bars but found that she wasn't their type. She was mystified by the way other women "seem to have it all planned out." At thirty-five, after a brief relationship with a blond cameraman, she found she was pregnant. He urged her to get an abortion, explaining that he wasn't financially prepared to be

a father. But Niveen had always wanted a child, and she didn't know if she'd have another chance.

After giving birth, in July, 2002, Niveen extended her maternity leave three times and then decided to quit her job and live off her savings. She took Adam to Egypt for several weeks to visit her parents, who had retired to Sharm el-Sheikh. They doted on Adam, playing him all the songs that their daughter had loved as a child. They tried to persuade her to stay in Egypt, but Niveen had begun to crave the stimulation of work again. "My mind needed nourishment," she said. She returned to California in 2004, and spent a year looking for a new job, but few employers offered flexible hours. It wasn't until Adam turned three and entered a Montessori preschool that she returned to an office full time, working as a computer consultant for a garment company.

She was leading a small financial-operations team, and consultants were flying in every week from Connecticut to prepare for the launch of the company's software systems. She was so busy that she skipped one or two meals a day and her weight dropped below a hundred pounds. In the evenings, she didn't have time to do anything but feed Adam, bathe him, and prepare for the next day. Then she lay in bed, unable to sleep, rehearsing all the tasks that needed to be accomplished. She didn't have the energy to take out the trash, so she let it accumulate on the kitchen floor beside the garbage can.

In early December, Adam fell at school and his tooth came loose, making it painful to chew. She kept him home from school for several days so that she could feed him herself. On December 5th, the day that Adam was taken away, Niveen was about to call her boss and tell him she couldn't come to work, but she began to worry that she was sabotaging her career. She had already missed several days, and her boss had said, "With you it's always something." She played with Adam for half an hour that morning, teaching him how to use his new Spider-Man game. Then she imagined the way her boss would look at her the next time she came in, and felt suddenly ashamed. She got up, brushed her teeth, put some snacks in a ziplock bag, gave them to Adam, and left the house. "It was mechanical—I wasn't

thinking anymore," she said. "Things were upside down, but I kept everything to myself. I was just trying to survive."

Two months after Adam entered foster care, he fell and cut his face. A doctor examined the wound and spotted four small bruises on Adam's neck that looked like finger marks. The Social Services Agency suspected that his foster home was chaotic. They began looking for a new home for Adam, who was described as a "cute, talkative pleasant little boy," who was "sweet and mellow," "has a good memory," "attaches easily," and was "very adoptable."

At the end of March, 2006, Adam moved in with a "fost-adopt" family, which was prepared to adopt him if Niveen's rights were terminated. The couple, whom I'll call Rebecca and Steve Miller, had requested that their identities not be disclosed to Adam's birth mother. Three days passed before Niveen learned that Adam had been placed with new foster parents. The social workers seemed pleased with Adam's new placement. They noted how much better he looked with his new haircut and how "much nicer his lips appeared since they were not as chapped." He had his own room, stocked with toys and photographs, which he proudly showed the social worker, Mary. As she inspected his bedroom, Adam lay on the floor, "giggling excitedly."

Two weeks after moving in with the Millers, Adam showed up at a visit sobbing, refused to greet his mother, and threw himself on the floor. Niveen told Mary that he had never acted that way before. "He is changing," she said. At the end of the visit, he ran out of the visiting room, shouting "Mom!" as he collided with Rebecca. When Mary introduced the two women, they were silent. Eventually, Niveen said that she didn't feel comfortable that Adam was calling another woman Mom. Instead, she suggested "Auntie." Mary said that she understood the concern, but she wanted Adam to feel that he belonged in his new home.

At a visit a week later, Niveen read a picture book to Adam as he knelt on the floor beside her. He began hitting her legs and feet. "I'm mad at you," he said. Niveen asked him what he wanted, and he didn't respond. She continued reading to him, but he told her, "No, I don't want a book. . . . I'm mad at you." When she

grasped his hands and kissed him, he pulled away, hitting her legs. "I'm mad at you," he said again.

For most of the twentieth century, the primary task of the child-welfare system was to keep families intact. Policymakers assumed that parents' failures were due to social disadvantages, like poverty or lack of support, so agencies provided them with day care, counselling, and income assistance. Child abuse was rarely discussed by politicians or scholars. Then, in 1962, Henry Kempe, a pediatrician, and several colleagues published "The Battered-Child Syndrome," a paper that revealed, through the analysis of X-rays, that many young children had mysterious bone fractures and cranial injuries. The doctors wrote that "the bones tell a story the child is too young or too frightened to tell," and described the parents of these children as suffering from "some defect in character structure." The "battered child" became the subject of numerous news articles, and within a decade every state passed laws that required medical professionals to report children who showed possible signs of mistreatment.

In her history "Making an Issue of Child Abuse," Barbara Nelson, formerly the dean of the School of Public Affairs at U.C.L.A., wrote that politicians were far more willing to fund child-welfare legislation once mistreatment was seen as "a problem knowing no barriers of class, race, or culture." In the seventies, child abuse was reframed as an "all-American affliction": "individually rooted, described as an illness, and solvable by occasional doses of therapeutic conversation." The responsibility to look into all allegations of mistreatment soon overwhelmed the resources of child-welfare agencies. They largely cast aside their mission of easing child poverty and eventually began investigating the dysfunctions surrounding more than two million children a year. The interests of children were often pitted against those of their parents, who were treated as potential suspects.

During the crack and AIDS epidemics of the eighties and nineties, around half a million children (nearly half of them black) were put in foster care, and many spent years being shuttled from one temporary home to the next. In an attempt to shorten the time they spent in limbo, the Adoption and Safe Families Act, passed

in 1997, placed strict limits on the time given to parents to prove their competence. The goal was to swiftly find new, permanent families for children whose parents were unable or unwilling to assume responsibility. The act gave financial rewards to states that raised their number of adoptions—up to six thousand dollars for every adoption that exceeded numbers from earlier years. By 2002, adoptions had increased by forty-two per cent.

In “Nobody’s Children” (1999), Elizabeth Bartholet, the director of the Child Advocacy Program at Harvard Law School, urged policymakers to “stop romanticizing ‘heritage.’” She wrote, “True parenting is defined more by social bonds than by blood.” Children who are severely neglected may experience cognitive delays and language deficits, disruptions in their body’s stress responses, and problems in their ability to interact with authorities and peers. Even the next generation may be damaged, since patterns of abuse and neglect often recur. She advocated expanding the use of adoption, even as she acknowledged that the most effective way to “stop the vicious cycle” would be social and economic reform. The role of race and class in child-welfare legislation, she wrote, is “rarely addressed honestly in a way that illuminates for onlookers their power.”

A formal review of Niveen’s case took place in a courtroom at the Lamoreaux Justice Center, in Orange, nine months after Adam had been taken away. In California, it is illegal for child-welfare agencies and attorneys to discuss individual cases, and the agency and the lawyers involved in Niveen’s case declined to speak about it on the record. The field of family law is treated as a kind of legal backwater lacking in prestige: the cases can be judged by commissioners (civil servants who have not been elected or appointed, as judges would be), and the hearings are brief and, in many states, sealed from the public. The cases are argued by attorneys representing at least three sides: the child, the parent, and the county. Since many children are too young to articulate their wishes, their lawyers, also called guardians *ad litem*, can advocate for whatever objective they believe represents the “best interests of the child,” a phrase that all the lawyers use to advance their positions.

The county’s attorney said that Niveen did not understand the needs of her child, struggled with time management, and had an unrealistic plan for their evenings—she wished to take Adam out for dinner, rather than cooking. “That may be what she wants to do but it may not be what a four-year-old child needs to do in the evening,” the attorney said. She also complained that Niveen “talks in vagaries rather than specifics, and I think with a child



you need to be able to understand specifics.”

Niveen’s lawyer acknowledged that she had come to the attention of social services for “very legitimate reasons,” but since then it had become “a case about clashing personalities, about odd clients, about different expectations, about different views of reality.”

On the witness stand, Niveen admitted that she hadn’t been up-front at the first hearing. It was she, not Adam’s father, who had left Adam alone. She was nervous, stumbling over her words, and she still struggled to articulate why she had “put work ahead of his safety.” “I was in a state of desperation,” she said.

To determine what Niveen had learned in parenting class, the county’s lawyer asked her to describe Adam’s developmental needs.

“He needs a mother,” Niveen said.

“I’m talking about during the visits. What does he need during the visits?”

“Well, it’s the same thing. That’s how I feel. That that’s what he needs, plus somebody to play with.”

The commissioner, Gary Vincent, didn’t think she was ready for custody. “The responsibility that she articulates is so tepid in relation to the gravity of what she did,” he said. He would allow her to have visits outside the offices of the Social Services Agency, but told her, “We’ve got to start scraping away this fog that’s around you.” He explained, “Your prob-

lem is you see but you don’t see clearly. You understand but you don’t really understand in depth.”

Niveen began seeing two psychologists. The first, who was paid for by the county, reported that during therapy sessions Niveen was argumentative and resistant. The second, whom Niveen hired, was an expert in the field of child custody, and she urged Niveen to be more open to feedback. “The way to ‘lose’ your case here is to complain and complain about how unfair the system is,” the psychologist, Leslie Drozd, wrote Niveen in an e-mail. “‘Winning’ is getting your child back and to do that, the formula is simple: Comply. Comply. Comply.”

Niveen was required to provide the agency with receipts for the antidepressants she had recently begun taking, verification of her attendance at Parents Anonymous, and pay stubs proving that she could afford the new apartment she was renting, in Newport Beach. When she couldn’t find recent pay stubs, a new social worker, named Rhea, expressed concern that Niveen had a “secretive nature.” Rhea acknowledged that Niveen’s new home was spotless, but she noted that Adam’s toys were “displayed in a very ‘staged’ manner,” and that Niveen did not “utilize any of the furniture herself.” The refrigerator contained only yogurt and pudding.

Once Niveen was under increased scrutiny of Social Services, the bar for being a “good enough” parent seemed to rise. The social workers took turns monitoring Niveen’s visits, compiling lengthy accounts of blunders: Niveen offered Adam too many toys to play with; she fed him a tuna sandwich while he was bowling; she let him sit on a slippery stool without noticing that he might fall off; and she failed to assemble a telescope before presenting it to him as a gift. She didn’t carry a purse, her pants were wrinkled, her hair was uncombed, and her sweater had rust-colored stains. Another social worker, who instructed Niveen to carry a “supermom bag,” containing water bottles and sunblock, wrote that Adam “pushes limits with her constantly. . . . It’s as if he literally is screaming at her to set some boundaries for him.” She chided Niveen for allowing Adam to swing a golf club in a park where other people were too close. “I have yet to observe Niveen talk to [Adam] in any way that helps him see the

big picture and raise his level of awareness.”

Niveen’s neighbor offered to videotape Adam’s visits so that the judge could witness the strength of their bond. In one long video, Niveen and Adam sat on the floor together, playing with a train set. Adam was affectionate and engrossed, occasionally shrieking with excitement. When they took a break for a snack, Niveen, who had been reading books on children’s nutrition, encouraged Adam to eat his cheese. “It’s good for your bones,” she said, brushing a strand of hair off his face. “It’s full of calcium.”

“Nah,” he said, picking up a hard-boiled egg. She offered to help him crack it, and he looked at her smiling. “I missed you,” he told her. “And Rebecca, too. I like both of you.”

After visits with Niveen, Rebecca reported, Adam was rude and defiant. He seemed like a “different child.” The Social Services Agency provided him with play therapy, behavioral coaching, dual therapy with Rebecca, and a new social worker, who concluded that he needed more predictability and structure. He was given the diagnosis “unspecified disturbance of childhood.”

Niveen began berating herself for her lack of judgment. “You start questioning your own reality,” she told me. Her lawyer waived the second review of her case, in February, 2007, so that she would have more time to demonstrate improvement in her parenting skills. She had recently hired a parenting coach, Valorie Christopherson, a former deputy sheriff, who shadowed her on visits. In reports submitted to the court, Christopherson discussed many of the same issues as the social workers—Niveen was too passive, deferential, and indulgent with her son—but these problems were presented as ordinary failings that could be overcome. Christopherson wrote that Adam was always excited to see Niveen and appeared to “thrive on the attention she gives him.”

When Niveen returned to court, eight months later, a new judge, James Marion, had been assigned to the case, and Adam had already been in foster care for more than eighteen months. Adam’s attorney and the county’s lawyer recommended that reunification services be discontinued, because Niveen had benefitted only minimally, and because too much time had passed—a reason commonly given as

grounds for termination of services. Three social workers said that Niveen had yet to learn to enforce limits with Adam. “The child tends to take over and wants to become the adult,” one said.

“What’s the detriment of that, besides becoming a narcissistic person?” Marion asked.

“He won’t have a concept of, of how to contain himself, how to—there’ll be poor impulse control.”

“And then?”

“Which will lead to more aggressive-type behaviors.”

“So what is going—what’s going to happen?”

“So he could become more agitated.”

Niveen, who cried through parts of the hearing, testified that she had spent months learning a more “authoritarian” method of parenting. “In the past, I used to be more of a permissive style, because, maybe, of the way I was brought up,” she said. She described her father as “very kind and gentle” and reluctant to take punitive measures. “You grow into your parents sometimes,” she said in a soft voice.

Marion acknowledged that in custody cases parents often feel as if the child-welfare agency were indiscriminately “piling on” criticisms. But he added that in this case all the social workers agreed that Niveen showed a “lack of judgment,”

which he illustrated with three incidents they had documented. First, she had allowed Adam to go alone into the men’s room of a restaurant. Second, when Adam was playing in a pool, he drifted into the deep end, and Niveen, who was sitting next to the pool fully dressed, had to ask another person to lead him to shallower water. Third, she had left him on the balcony of her apartment, which had a chair near the ledge, while she went inside to change her shoes. Although a social worker was on the balcony at the time, Niveen had failed to inform her that she was in charge of supervising Adam.

Marion said that the agency had proved that Niveen posed a risk to her son. “I’ve got to think about the little boy,” he told Niveen. “I don’t think it’s because of your lack of love. I don’t think it’s for a lack of trying. I just don’t think you can do it.”

For two years, Niveen had avoided conversations about her ethnic origins, but once her reunification services ended she petitioned the court to place Adam with a Muslim, Arabic-speaking family. Her request was supported with letters from the consulate general of Egypt in San Francisco and the civil-rights coordinator of the Council on American-Islamic Relations, who wrote that Adam’s current placement did not respect his “religion and



“Statins. I got statins. Who needs statins?”

cultural needs.” At a hearing, her lawyer acknowledged that it would have been better if she had raised the issue earlier—the agency tries to make culturally sensitive placements when parents request it—but “she was concerned, I think, of some prejudice.” “Imagine if we, as someone who might be Christian or Jewish, having to go to a Muslim country and then putting that out,” he said. “I think we would all be afraid of some type of negative impact in a court proceeding.”

The Judge denied the request, because, he said, it was not in Adam’s best interests to sever his bond with the Milers. A few months later, in a long statement submitted to the court, Niveen wrote that because of her “cultural background” and “lack of likeability” she had alienated the social workers, who had expended their energy on “trying to find something strange about my behavior and lifestyle [rather] than on appreciat-

ing all the changes and progress I have made.” She asked the Judge to imagine that he was Adam: “Having seen your mother’s good intent, her extreme regret for what she had done, her tremendous hard work to get you back and prevent the past from repeating itself, would you want to be put up for adoption and never see your mother or feel her love again?”

To be separated from a primary caregiver, however flawed, is a new trauma for an already vulnerable child. A study in *Development and Psychopathology*, after controlling for the effects of mistreatment, found that children in foster care have a weakened ability to regulate their emotions and impulses and to persevere when confronted with intellectual challenges; these behavioral problems were exacerbated when they were placed in a foster home with strangers rather than relatives. The adverse effects appeared to extend beyond childhood. An analysis in

the *American Economic Review* found that, when there was no significant difference in the level of neglect or abuse, children who had been placed in protective custody were more likely, later in life, to be arrested or unemployed than those who had received services in their homes.

Sacha Coupet, a professor of law at Loyola University Chicago, who used to work as a guardian *ad litem* and as a psychologist, worries that the Adoption and Safe Families Act, by promoting “adoption as the normative ideal,” has made it easier to avoid “dealing with the enormously complex root causes of child neglect and abuse,” which may have little to do with parenting skills. “There’s this very American notion that mothers should be self-reliant, capable of taking care of their kids without any support, when that’s just not the world we live in,” she said. She finds that child-welfare agencies often “rush to get to the end of the story,” creating a middle-class fairy tale: “a poor kid is rescued by the state, given a new mom and dad, and the slate is wiped clean.”

Martin Guggenheim, a professor at New York University of Law, who represented children in court for more than a decade, believes that before long we will look back at the policy of “banishing children from their birth families” as a tragic social experiment. In a paper in the *Harvard Law Review*, he argued that “the use of coercive state power to redistribute children from their biological parents to others deemed by the state to be superior caregivers” should be restricted to rare and extreme cases, and resorted to only when less drastic measures had failed. The rights of Americans to “keep custody of children, and to control the details of raising them, are not accidentally or carelessly selected freedoms,” he wrote. He said that the courts perpetuate a “legal fiction”: the idea that “people in the courtroom can tell a young child, usually one of color, who he is related to and what community he belongs to.”

At Niveen’s final custody hearing, in July, 2008, her parental rights would be terminated unless she could meet the requirements for a “parental benefit exception”: she had to prove that her bond with Adam was so strong that the advantages of continuing their relationship outweighed the benefits of his settling into a permanent home with an adoptive family.



“Sorry, angel—showtime!”

Niveen's psychologist, Leslie Drozd, submitted a letter to the Judge explaining that Niveen's social workers were suffering from a "confirmatory bias." She wrote, "The only data that has been collected and assimilated by the system has been that which confirms that a mother who could possibly abandon her child . . . is and shall permanently remain a 'bad' mother."

Jane Mak, a court-hired psychologist, performed a "bonding study" that assessed the strength of Adam's attachments. Her report drew on theories popularized by a 1973 psychoanalytic text, "Beyond the Best Interests of the Child," which, despite its narrow focus, has provided a conceptual framework for modern child-welfare legislation. The authors write that children's development is thwarted by "loyalty conflicts" and extended stretches of uncertainty. Once a child attaches to a foster caretaker, who becomes the "psychological parent," the state should be reluctant to dissolve that bond. After observing Adam in her office with both sets of parents, Mak concluded that Adam was in a "distressful limbo state." She wrote that Rebecca was his "primary psychological parent," and that their relationship was strong and healthy, but added that he was also attached to Niveen, with whom he felt the "shadow of a shared past." Mak warned that until Adam had a permanent family he would not be able to "attend to the tasks of being a child."

For the first time, Adam came to a hearing. He had just turned six and was missing a front tooth. His hair was nearly white from the sun. He spoke clearly and cheerfully, especially when describing field trips he took with his kindergarten class. His lawyer, Yana Kennedy, asked him, "If you could live anywhere in the whole wide world, where would you want to live?"

Adam cringed and ducked his head.

"What are you doing down there?" Kennedy asked.

"I need to put my shoes on."

"O.K. You said you like where you live, right?"

"Yeah."

"If you could live anywhere else in the whole wide world, where would you want to live?"

"I would live somewhere else."

"Somewhere else?"

"Yeah."

"Where?"

"I don't know."

The lawyer for the county tried a different tactic. "I think I read somewhere you wanted to live in Texas, is that right?" she asked Adam.

"Yeah."

"What's in Texas?"

"There's, like—I seriously want to live there."

"You seriously want to live there?"

"There's golfing, and I want to play golfing every day I go to Texas."

"I knew there was a good reason you wanted to live in Texas."

Niveen's lawyer tried to steer Adam closer to the question at hand.

"You said you wanted to live somewhere else. Would you want to live with Mama Niveen?"

"No."

"O.K. Now, do you want to continue to see Mama Niveen?"

"Yes, yes, yes."

"And so why do you want to keep seeing Mama Niveen?"

"Because."

"Because why?"

"Just because."

After Adam's testimony, Judge Marion commended Niveen for raising a son who appeared to be a "good kid." He told her, "I think that's a reflection on you, too, Ms. Ismail. So that's a good thing. So take that with you." He went on to say that "the clock has run out on Ms. Ismail, unfortunately." Using the language in the bonding study, he said that Adam's attachment to two families with different parenting styles was damaging to his "psychological integrity." He ordered that parental rights be terminated and that Adam be placed for adoption. He told Niveen, "We're freeing him to live as a child."

The next day, Niveen was granted a thirty-minute "goodbye visit." A social worker took photographs as Adam and Niveen, standing under a tree, hugged and kissed. Adam had been told in advance that it was their final visit. When Niveen began to talk about what had happened, he looked as if he were going to cry, and she dropped the subject. "He's not confrontational—he holds things in," Niveen said later. "I think it's genetics. He gets that from my side of the family."

Niveen had no more legal right to Adam than a stranger would have, and her requests for visitation were denied. The Millers had become hostile toward

Niveen after she walked to their beach house on Balboa Island, a vacation town less than a mile from her home, and interrogated a man who worked on their boat. She was looking for incriminating anecdotes, something that might derail the adoption. Later, when the Millers saw Niveen driving on their street, they filed a restraining order, which stipulated that she could not be within a hundred yards of their family.

Niveen reached out to other mothers whose children had become wards of the state, hoping to create some sort of advocacy organization. Some of them she met through Shawn McMillan, a lawyer who had recently won a \$4.9 million verdict against the Orange County Social Services Agency after two social workers were found to have fabricated allegations against a mother and suppressed exculpatory evidence. McMillan is attempting to file a class-action suit on behalf of parents whose children have been taken away without a warrant. He said that he frequently sees cases where the mother "jumps through all the hoops," but, in the meantime, the "child bonds with the new caregiver, and the agency says it's no longer in the child's best interest to go back to Mom."

Niveen began following other custody cases, reading hundreds of appeals decisions. She recognized that her education and financial stability set her apart from most single mothers who became involved in the child-welfare system, and felt emboldened as she learned about parents who had been scrutinized as much as she had. A recent unpublished decision by a California Court of Appeals admonished the Orange County Social Services Agency for a pattern of frivolous allegations. The court wrote that this causes "parents to suspect the system is prejudiced against them, and social workers will use any excuse they can think of—whether credible or not—to deprive them of the custody of their children. *It has to stop.*"

When Niveen had exhausted her legal remedies in California, she petitioned the United States Supreme Court, asserting that the low burden of proof at California custody hearings—a preponderance of evidence—allowed "subjectivity to infest the proceedings." Her petition was denied. A month later, she met with Robert Young, a private investigator, to

request help with her “backup plan.” According to Young, she was contemplating two courses of action: Plan A was to find “dirt” on the Millers, so that Adam could be placed with a new family, one that she hoped would grant her visitation. Plan B was to abduct her son. (Niveen said that she only discussed the notion of kidnapping abstractly, to express her frustration, and that it was never a plan.)

Young informed the Newport Beach Police Department that he had met with a mother who appeared to be on the verge of criminal activity. An officer contacted an Orange County social worker who knew Niveen and predicted that she would do anything to be reunited with Adam.

On December 4, 2009, Young met with Niveen a second time, in a small conference room in her apartment complex. He brought along a man he called his partner, Neal Schuster, actually a detective from the Newport Beach Police Department. Schuster, who secretly recorded the conversation, told Niveen that one of the reasons he wanted to help her was that “I’m not a fan of Social Services,” and it “sounds like you got a raw deal.” “I know that you guys discussed in the past two options,” he continued. “Which option do you want us to go with right now?”

Niveen, who was wearing flip-flops and yoga pants, said, “I mean, I’m torn—I think I’d like to try the first one.” She added, “I don’t want to lose track of him.”

Schuster warned her that it might be hard to catch the Millers doing anything illicit. “People that are foster parents are pretty cut and dry—they have to go through a series of background checks.”

“Well, I know there is nothing,” Niveen said.

“Um, so are you ready to move with Plan B, then?”

“I was hoping for A.” She suggested that maybe they could catch Adam’s adoptive father having an extramarital affair.

Young pointed out that men cheat on their wives every day, and “nobody cares.”

Niveen said that she liked the idea of taking Adam to another country, possibly somewhere in the Middle East, but she worried that she’d set off an AMBER Alert, which informs the public of missing children.

“The F.B.I. has far bigger problems right now than going after one mother

who took her biological son overseas,” Schuster assured her. He explained that if she had a current picture of Adam he could create a fake passport that would allow them to slip past customs.

“Well, if you think you can do it, that would be great,” Niveen said. She took him into the computer lab and e-mailed him a photograph of Adam posing for the camera with a sleepy smile. As they continued to discuss the details, she changed her mind, explaining that there was still a possibility that the Supreme Court would grant her petition for a rehearing. “Try to be creative about how we are going to do A,” she repeated. “I really would like to stay in this country.”

There were six officers surrounding the apartment complex. When Niveen walked out of the meeting, she was arrested and charged with solicitation to kidnap. She was taken to the Newport Beach Police Department, where she was interviewed by an officer named Helen Freeman, who told Niveen that she was a mother, too. “I can’t even imagine what it would be like to have my child taken away from me,” Freeman said. “It would be horrible, absolutely horrible. Is that kind of how you’re feeling now? Like, desperate?”

Niveen began crying, burrowing her face in a jail blanket that was wrapped around her shoulders. “I had bad news when they denied my petition,” Niveen said. “I had hopes.”

Freeman asked her if she thought that



her appeals would be successful, and Niveen, barely able to speak, said, “Just don’t remind me.”

Niveen spent three months in the Orange County Jail, in a unit for women charged with endangering children. Niveen said that one woman was having a drink at a bar when her five-year-old ran into the street, calling for her. Others had been arrested for exposing their children to drugs or for beating

them. Niveen spent much of her time reading “The Count of Monte Cristo,” which her new criminal lawyer, Ann Cunningham, sends to all of her imprisoned clients. When Cunningham met Niveen at the jail, she was struck by her intelligence and despair. Niveen reminded her of “a little injured bird.” Then she reviewed hundreds of photographs of Niveen and Adam and saw a different woman. “She was beaming and holding that baby with a look of pride that I never saw again,” Cunningham said.

By the time of Niveen’s criminal trial, in December, 2011, Adam had been with the Millers for almost twice as long as he had lived with his birth mother. On the witness stand, Rebecca Miller described Adam as an inquisitive and articulate nine-year-old. She said that she had grown afraid of Niveen, because of the “history that we have through the whole family-court system and beyond.”

The social worker who had assisted with the adoption, Julie Fulkerson, said that over time Niveen had become “more threatening in her tone and more urgent.” Until the adoption was finalized, Fulkerson had given Niveen updates on Adam, usually brief summaries of the sports he was playing. “Whenever I made a statement to the fact that he’s happy, he’s well cared for, to try and reassure her of the situation, she would become agitated and feel insulted or have an angry comment related to the adoptive family,” Fulkerson said.

The Newport Beach Police Department had done a forensic examination of Niveen’s computer, which showed that she had searched for cheap flights to Cairo, for an application for reissuing an Egyptian passport, and for instructions on “how to hack a Facebook account.” She had also taken notes on the Millers’ Facebook friends, dates of birth, and driving directions to their house. The prosecutor, Beth Costello, described her as a “busy little bee on the computers,” and said that the Internet search history revealed how the “defendant is unravelling.” She reminded the jury that the victim in the case was not Niveen—it was her son and his new family, who had “provided him the home that he deserves.”

Cunningham acknowledged that the Millers were “lovely people” who “wanted to do a wonderful thing.” Pointing to a poster-size photograph of Adam displayed

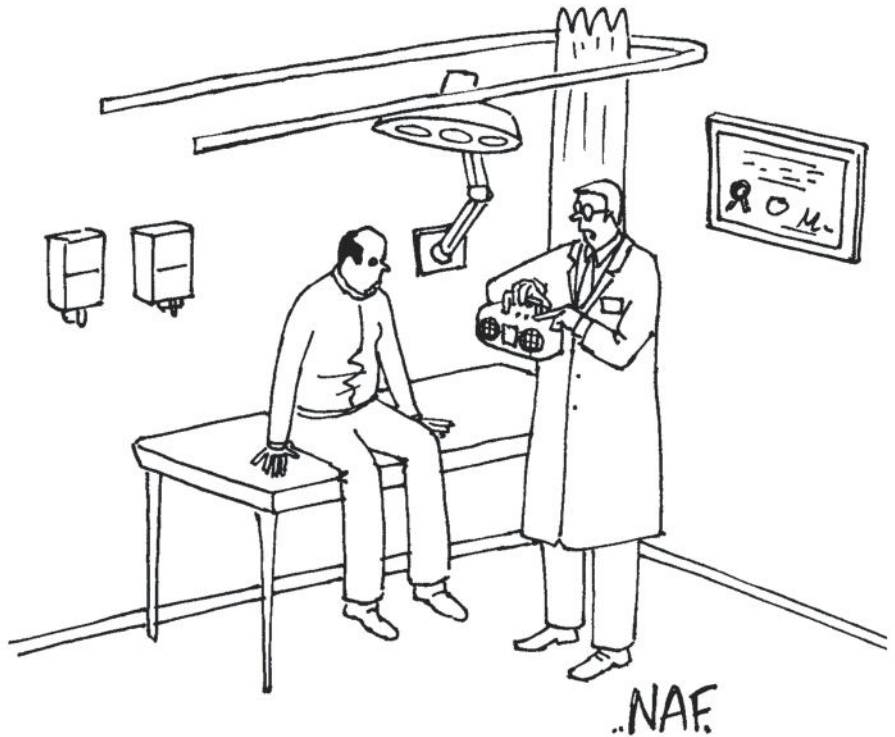
behind the witness stand, she drew attention to the manner in which the agency had determined that Adam and the Millers were a “match,” a term used frequently by the Social Services Agency. “Why was he a perfect ‘match?’” Cunningham said. “His hair matches [Rebecca Miller’s] hair. He looks very much like he could be her son.”

She told the jurors that the Newport Beach Police Department had entrapped Niveen by turning her fantasy into an actual plan. “You have a mother missing her child and these people are saying, no problem. We won’t be detected. We guarantee it. We’ll get him a passport. Clockwork. We do it all the time.” She reminded the jurors that this was Niveen’s first opportunity to have a trial with a high burden of proof. After spending six years in a court system with no jury, she said, “Niveen Ismail was tired of having the government make the decisions in her life.”

The jury found Niveen innocent. Niveen sold all her furniture and Adam’s toys and moved into an apartment near her office, where she designed software, a job she found shortly after being released from jail. The Social Services Agency asked Niveen to sign a form that would authorize the release of her contact information on Adam’s eighteenth birthday, but she refused, because she felt that it signalled acceptance. She was still working on a civil-rights suit against the agency, which asserted that a mother should have the “right to implement her own parenting style without undue influence or pressure by the government.” In an unsuccessful writ of habeas corpus, she quoted a 1996 California court decision that said, “The idea that . . . a parent who has faithfully attended required counseling and therapy sessions must still relinquish her child because she has not quite ‘internalized’ what she has been exposed to has an offensive, Orwellian odor.”

The last time Niveen saw Adam was three years ago. She was walking down an aisle at a grocery store near her house and heard her son’s voice. When she turned the corner, she saw him sitting in a shopping cart pushed by a woman she didn’t know. They were picking out refrigerated flowers. Niveen was still under a restraining order, so she quickly left the store.

A few months before, she’d had another unexpected encounter. She was standing on the boardwalk on Balboa Is-



“Before I give you your results, I’m going to put on some very sad music.”

land, looking out at the water, when she saw Rebecca Miller and Adam approaching. They had just got off a ferry and were coming down the boardwalk, holding hands. Niveen stood still and smiled at Adam, who appeared to be in the middle of telling a story. He was so close that she could have touched him. He looked in her direction but showed no sign of recognition. He and Rebecca kept walking, passing Niveen on their way home.

Almost five years after losing her parental rights, Niveen, who was forty-six, gave birth to a baby girl. She had been trying to get pregnant for more than a year. The child was smaller than Adam, kicked harder, and was more prone to tears. A hospital social worker came to Niveen’s bedside after being notified that she was a single mother and might need support. Niveen reluctantly answered all her questions, even those she found intrusive. She worried that she’d lose this child, too, but the social worker proved friendly and kind.

On a cool, overcast afternoon in March, a few weeks after giving birth, Niveen wrapped the baby in a blanket and took me on a tour of Balboa Island. Since moving

out of her old apartment, she rarely came back to the island. We walked around the Fun Zone, a children’s park with an arcade where she and Adam had spent hours playing video games that the social workers deemed too violent. Niveen paused periodically to tuck the blanket around her daughter’s feet or to kiss her forehead. When strangers exclaimed about the baby, Niveen, never one for small talk, smiled and kept walking.

She hadn’t spoken to Adam for almost five years. After their final visit, Adam had told his social worker that the next time he would see her was in Heaven. She pointed to the part of the beach where, years before, she had seen Adam swimming with friends. At the time, she’d informed Social Services that she saw him in the water without adult supervision. Niveen quoted the line “Coincidences are God’s way of remaining anonymous.” I asked her if it wouldn’t be easier to live somewhere else. Recently, her neighbor had suggested that she go back to Egypt to be with family. Niveen had never felt that she belonged in Orange County, but she said that she couldn’t move away now. “My life is here,” she said. “I’m not going to abandon my son.” ♦



The first night I stayed in Kilinochchi I was a little apprehensive. Most of us living in the south of Sri Lanka had come to think of this town as the nerve center of terror. As Mr. Wahid, my first Malaysian client, said, in English even the name sounded brutal—like the kind of town where you could imagine a Clint Eastwood character striding in and notching the stock of his rifle with yet another senseless killing. In reality, Kilinochchi had been the capital of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam for years. Here the Tigers had had their civic center, their secretariat, their press conferences. This was the place where Tiger stamps, L.T.T.E. travel passes, G.C.E. school-exam papers, land mines, and black-stripe grenades were issued. The Eelam bank was here, Swiss style, before it came to a swift end in the final stages of the civil war. This was the place the Tigers had then destroyed, toppling the water tower and blowing up the municipal buildings, before evacuating into the ever diminishing jungle as the Sri Lankan Army marched in, guns blazing, for the showdown of January, 2009.

But now, two years later, I turned off the highway, teeming with road hogs and pot rodents, into the brand-new forecourt of the Spice Garden Inn, and it could have been the latest incarnation of the Colombo Hotel Corporation in full flutter: a northern cousin dolled up with colored flags, ribbons, and streamers. A glass-walled cafeteria shone, and the reception desk overflowed with coconut flowers and bougainvillea. The scent of wax polish, disinfectant, and karapincha leaves fried in sesame oil masked the lingering spoor of the vanished big cats. This hotel signalled the new era of the old town.

Mrs. Arunachalam, who was seven months pregnant and spread across the middle seat of my taxi van, wanted to make the eleven-hour journey to Jaffna in small stages, like an ant on a sugar trail. She ought not to have been travelling at all, the way she sighed and swooned, but her husband was very keen to show her a property in Jaffna that he intended to buy and develop as their new family home, and so she had come.

“Vasantha, can’t you go slowly around the bend, please?” she kept saying, in an infuriating refrain, from the moment we left Rajagiriya on her journey of a lifetime.

“Yes, Madam,” I’d reply. Yes, yes, yes. I am already around the bleeding bend.

When she saw the flags and streamers, she was jubilant. “That’s the place. That’s the place we booked for the night, Kollu. Isn’t it pretty?”

Her husband leaned forward. “That’s right. You’ll be able to rest very quietly here.”

Within half an hour, they had tucked into the best part of a pot of chicken curry and gone to their room upstairs to gently burp and gurgle their prenatal intimacies. By the time I got to the cafeteria, it was empty, except for the creepy-crawlies on the wall and one sulky waiter massaging his neck.

“Dinner put.” He pointed at the curry pot and the basin of boiled rice. He was more suited to the job of a traffic policeman, one of the automaton types we used to have before we modernized into a mania for red-amber-green multispots.

I took a plate and helped myself to the last bits of scraggly chicken bone and a couple of spoonfuls of rice. I’ve had worse, but not much worse. One of the things you notice when you drive up and down the country is the variation that’s possible in something as simple as boiled rice. Sometimes it feels as if you were eating pebbles; other times it’s like cotton. At the Spice Garden Inn, the rice was definitely on the rocky side. But after the war and the wall-to-wall fighting in the town, it was hardly surprising that even rice would turn to rubble. The thought of what might have been done with bullets and mortars in this very spot chastened me. I needed a beer.

I asked the waiter for one, wondering idly what kind they’d have: imported Tiger beer?

He disappeared into the back. When he returned, he had a tall, dark bottle of Three Coins on a metal tray and a young woman in a gray trouser suit in tow. Halfway across the room, she overtook him, pushing a metal chair neatly out of the way and coming to a stop in front of my table.

“Welcome.” She parted her lips in a smile, but barely a muscle moved beyond her mouth. Her eyes seemed to be calculating the exact dimensions of my head, neck, and chest. She noted the position of my hands and the state of my fingernails. “From Colombo?”

I nodded. “Jaffna tour.”

“This is the place to break the journey, then.”

“That’s what they wanted. My party needs a lot of rest.” I patted my stomach as though I were the pregnant one.

“Drivers must rest, also. Driving all day is too much, no?”

I shrugged. Once you are in the driver’s seat, all that matters is keeping your eyes open. Maybe not all that matters, but the main thing. On these long empty roads going north, even the speed of your reflexes isn’t that important. We are no longer at war. “This is a nice place.”

She looked at me now as if she were trying to tell whether I was being truthful. As if it mattered. “I am the assistant manager. Miss Saraswati. My job is to make this hotel very welcoming so that it becomes the regular stop for all tours going up to Jaffna.” She paused. “For breakfast, lunch, dinner, or overnight. We can do everything.”

I had no doubt that she could. She seemed very capable, although she definitely needed a better cook.

“Are you from a hotel school, then? Catering and management?” People who have made more informed choices in their lives than I have always impress me.

“We had a lot of training.” She let the waiter put the tray down and pour half the bottle of beer into my glass. “We have to be able to cope with every situation. If we keep our focus, we can overcome problems. Any problem.” She had the severe look that some women have when they think their time is running out.

I waited for the froth to subside. “Starting something like this up here must be difficult. E.T.s are pouring into the south like cement from a pipe now, but here it is still only locals, no?”

“Cement?” She looked puzzled. “E.T.s?”

“You could say like beer or water, but I was thinking of the new hotels being built and all the European tourists, even the Nordics, now happily sunning themselves on the beach.” As I spoke, it occurred to me that the picture I was painting was probably impossible to imagine in this dumping ground of bombs. I gulped down some beer and poured the rest of the bottle into the glass, realizing too late that, out of courtesy, I should have offered her some. “Are you from Kilinochchi?”

“Nearby.” She tipped her head. “I

went to Jaffna and then came here.”

“College?” I asked admiringly.

“Something like that.”

“Because of the—”

“Yes.” The word was quick and oddly unerring. Not only did she have poise and determination but she seemed tightly strung, like one of those ballerinas performing with the Bolshoi on TV. Every look, every movement bound to a larger purpose. The Spice Garden Inn was lucky to have her: it surely would not fail with her in place.

The waiter, who had moved to the back of the room, started. “Rat,” he yelled.

Miss Saraswati spun around. A big brown rodent was scurrying across the floor toward the tallboy in the far corner. She hissed loudly and sharply, and it froze for a moment. As it began to edge forward again, she grasped my beer bottle by the neck and flung it. The bottle hit the rat with such force that the creature thudded against the wall. The bottle rolled along, unbroken. Its base had smashed the animal’s small skull.

“Burn it,” she instructed the waiter. “Use a plastic bag. Wash your hands afterward.” She turned to me. “Sorry about that. I’ll bring you another bottle.”

I stared at Miss Saraswati. “You learn to do that at Jaffna hotel school?”

While she went to get another beer, I sat and gazed at my plate of food. I don’t mind rats, or the killing of them; I was just a little stunned by her action. The accuracy with which she had thrown the bottle was extraordinary.

When she returned, her polite smile was back in place. “Sorry,” she said again and placed the new bottle in front of me. She sat down. “Please eat.”

I pushed my plate away.

“What? No appetite now? Don’t worry. It’s dead, no?”

“I ate.”

“They are all over the town, but we do not allow them here. I believe it is not good for guests to see.”

“Yes, true. Guests can get upset very easily.”

“Usually the dogs keep the rats away.”

“Dogs are good. Yes.” I had a dog once, a small terrier. It had belonged to a Danish man I worked for in Colombo. When he was posted to Laos, he decided that he couldn’t take the little fellow with him. I offered to look after the dog, and

when I told him that I lived in a house with a small garden he let me. But about a year later the dog died. It shot out of the gate one day and was hit by a minister’s sidekick in one of those high-speed V.I.P. cavalcades on the main road. This happened a long time ago—it was not the fault of the current government—and I wouldn’t have told her about it if she hadn’t asked.

She nodded, as though small killings were a natural part of politics as well as of hotel management. She pulled out one of the two paper serviettes from the chrome clip on the table and smoothed it like a mini funeral shroud. “You have to bury the dead and move on.”

“Bury or burn?”

“That doesn’t matter. What matters is what you carry inside.” Her mouth tightened with what I thought was a hint of hurt or anger. She wasn’t talking about rats or dogs.

I like to know about the world beyond our shores. About faraway countries where people behave differently. I like to hear about their food and customs. How they deal with the cold and the rain. What it’s like to drive on the other side of the road. I like to take foreign tourists around because it gives me a glimpse of a place that is different in touch, taste, smell, sound, and look from the place I am stuck in. I watch how they sit, how they walk, how they talk, and I try to see what they want to escape from and then return to. They are not all driven only by a desire for sex in new places. Some want to know about our history and our culture and what makes us live the way we do. So do I. Sometimes I don’t know how we manage. We know so little, and the little we do know we get so muddled. Miss Saraswati intrigued me. She seemed to come from some other place: not Kili-nochchi, not a Jaffna college, not anywhere nearby but somewhere dark and hungry and deep. Somewhere beyond the blackness at the end of the garden, where even the moonlight shrank back. Of course, I was not her guide; she was really mine, so the sock was on the wrong foot, if you know what I mean. But, still, I wanted to know about her.

“Your family? Are they here?” That might give me a place to start, I thought.

“Have you come to these parts before, Mr. Van Driver?”

“Vasantha,” I said, and added, “I have

driven up to Jaffna a few times now.”

“Then you must know that it is best not to ask about families. It is best not to ask about someone’s brother or father or mother or sister.”

“Why?”

She looked at me as if I were a lost cause. “After a war, it is best not to ask about the past.”

That is not true, I thought. After such a calamity, surely one should? How else will we know what really happened? And if we don’t know, will it not be repeated? At any rate, we should not let war or half-baked political decrees pervert our native habits of curiosity and easy engagement. But I didn’t say any of this. She did not seem in as conversational a mood as she had earlier, and even then she had hovered in some in-between place. Hospitality training, I imagine, helps you to mask your feelings with a smile and to polish that façade of pleasant well-being that Sri Lankans, our foreign visitors tell me, are so good at putting on. But in Miss Saraswati’s case the training was incomplete. She was not a natural. She could mask, but she couldn’t do the other thing. She had been named after the goddess of learning, but she seemed to believe that ignorance was bliss. When she turned toward the door, I noticed a thick scar where the skin had crumpled at the base of her neck. When she turned back, it slid under her collar and was hidden again.

In my room in the drivers’ quarters I sat with the door open. Some oil sticks had been lit along the veranda to ward off the mosquitoes. The only sound was the hum of the fluorescent tube farther along. Whenever I drive foreign visitors at night, out in the country, they always comment on how dark it is. I used to think, How could it be otherwise? But, having been told this so many times, I have begun to see things through their eyes, and for me, too, night outside Colombo now feels very dark. The blackness is like ink seeping through my eyes and into my head. What is happening inside me is no different from what is going on outside. That leads me to thoughts about death, which are pointless and help no one. The difficulty, then, is to think of something else. Sex, the antidote you grasp for in youth, is less engaging when you are cloistered in a driver’s room in the middle of nowhere; and politics, the other base im-

pulse, is a bit of a nightmare these days. Crime—I mean stories about crime, not crime itself—works best, and I especially like crime stories that come from England or America. Bollywood has the edge on musicals, but Pinewood and Hollywood have cornered the criminal stuff. So a pirated DVD is a good solution, if you have the right gadget. I've been thinking about getting one of those portable players; I just need a few big tips to get me into a spending position.

But that night, in the inky blackness in Kilinochchi, all these other things began to merge together: politics, history, even sex, in the form of Miss Saraswati, where it was bound up with mutilation and death. We all have a private past, a store of thoughts, feelings, sensations, disappointments that nobody else will ever unearth. That's just life. But in Miss Saraswati's case, it seemed to me, there was something more deliberately hidden. Areas cordoned off. I suppose it was only natural. So much is kept off limits these days. There are things we don't speak of, things we not only don't remember but carefully forget, places we do not stray into, memories we bury or reshape. That is the way we live nowadays: driving along a road between hallucination and amnesia. As long as you are moving, you are O.K.—you have negotiated safe passage, for the moment. It is only when you come to a stop like this, in a black night in the middle of nowhere, that things wobble a bit and you wonder about the purpose of roads. You sit in the dark, frightened at the life you've led and the things you've left undone. You can only hope that in the long run it won't matter, but that in itself is no consolation at all.

The staff quarters of the Spice Garden Inn, or at least the drivers' rooms, had been built by a benevolent but misguided despot. The essentials were there: bed, table, chair, window, coir mat, electric light. The walls were painted. Yellow in my room, green next door. And yet there was something prisonlike in the air. The rooms had been designed by a person who would never stay in them himself, or perhaps herself. Each element was inoffensive, so it was difficult to say what the flaws were. All I knew was the difference I could feel between comfort and discomf. The ideal and the disillusioning reality. From what I've heard, living in the U.S.S.R. before perestroika

was like that. You knew something was wrong, but you didn't know how to make it right.

I stepped outside for a cigarette. I'm not much of a smoker, but there are times when I have the urge to fill my lungs with poison. If the damage is there, I want to invite it in. Make it mine so that I can do something with it.

Everywhere the edges blurred. I walked along the veranda on a narrow path between light and dark, then out



into the garden, where I thought the darkness would consume me, but a tiny glimmer of light from the sky seemed to spread into a silvery web. And when I lit my cigarette there was more to contend with. After one or two drags, I put it out and waited. Then I saw her. She was on the main balcony of the hotel, a silhouette darker than the darkness, but unmistakably her. Looking out at the fields, like the guardian of an unquenchable dream. She slowly uncrossed her arms and bent down. When she straightened up again, she had something in her hand. It looked like a revolver, but when she clicked the catch a beam of light shot out. She ran it along the fence at the end of the garden and did a sweep around the pond. She caught the eyes of an animal and held the light on it for a few seconds, the beam as steady as a military searchlight. Then she switched it off, leaving the night darker than ever.

In the morning, I went and ate some bread and sambol, and waited for the Arunachalams to appear. I took a refill of tea that was a travesty, even by the standards of the previous night's dinner, and sat on one of the garden chairs, from which I could see the breakfast room. I wondered how long Miss Saraswati had kept watch from the balcony and when she would resume her office duties.

I heard Mrs. Arunachalam before I saw her. She was complaining about her

husband's snoring, although I would have guessed that the reality of the bedroom situation was the reverse. Mr. Arunachalam said nothing in return. I thought of alerting him to the virtues of the sound-blocking headphones that many of my recent foreign clients sported. They heard nothing that they had not programmed themselves to hear and managed to avoid any pollution of their inner world with the din of local color. It was an admirable survival technique in a noisy world. Pollution is, after all, the world's biggest problem. Even in Malaysia, people apparently suffer from it.

The couple took a table on the veranda.

"I would like ham and eggs and toast. You think they have ham here?" Mrs. Arunachalam scraped her chair forward.

"What about a thosai? Better, no?"

"But I have this craving. And no sleep even, not with you and your trumpeting."

Miss Saraswati appeared between them and said something I couldn't hear. She seemed to manage to placate Mrs. Arunachalam without recourse to pork. When they had finished breakfast and gone upstairs to pack their toothbrushes and tweezers, or whatever, Miss Saraswati came out to me.

"You are a peacemaker as well," I said.

"We do whatever it takes." She gave me a card. "Bring all your tours here. We can cater for everyone."

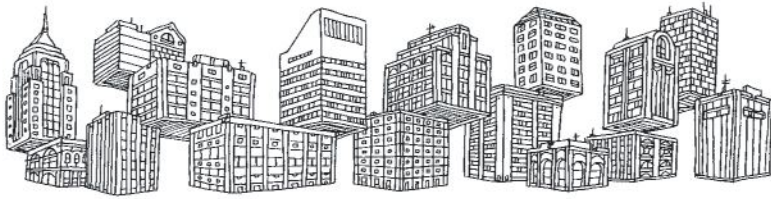
"I can see that," I said. "Terrific training, your catering college."

She put her hands together and lowered her head. This time, her collar was tightly buttoned and revealed nothing, but I noticed that the trigger finger of her right hand was callused and discolored at the edge.

Then Mrs. Arunachalam called me. "Driver, come here. Can you put this bag on the seat in there? I need it right next to me. And put the A.C. on before we get in, so it will be nice and cool for a change. I can't be getting hot again."

Miss Saraswati looked at me. I wanted her to smile, even that put-on smile, but her face was blank. Her black eyes gave nothing away. I wished for a moment that I knew what she was thinking, and then I was glad that I didn't. There comes a point when you don't want to know. ♦

THE CRITICS



THE CURRENT CINEMA

WINNERS AND LOSERS

“The Hunger Games: Catching Fire” and “The Armstrong Lie.”

BY DAVID DENBY

The basic premise of “The Hunger Games,” the first volume in Suzanne Collins’s trilogy of young-adult novels, never made much sense to me. How could a totalitarian government keep its people down while forcing some of their children to fight to the death in a yearly competition? What could be a greater goad to revolution than the anguish of seeing children die? There were other mysteries and not a few hypocrisies: the filmmakers who adapted the book shrugged off the gladiatorial issues implicit in the spectacle. They wanted to create indignation over the horror—children forced to hunt one another with arrows, swords, lances—while staging the violence in the most anodyne manner possible to achieve a PG-13 rating. The teens I know accepted the combat as a given, while their elders, bewildered, and looking for a little meaning, interpreted the story as a representation of how kids felt about the competitive traumas of high school; or as a metaphor for capitalism, with its terrifying job market and winner-take-all ethos; or, more simply, as a satiric exaggeration of talent-show ruthlessness. The premise of “The Hunger Games: Catching Fire,” an adaptation of Collins’s second volume, doesn’t make a lot of sense, either. Having survived the competition through daring and ingenuity, Katniss Everdeen (Jennifer Lawrence) and her admirer, Peeta Mellark (Josh Hutcherson), receive riches and acclaim from the vicious overlords in the Capitol. Yet rebellion is breaking out in the twelve districts of the

country, called Panem, and President Snow (Donald Sutherland) and his new head gamemaker, Plutarch Heavensbee (Philip Seymour Hoffman), cook up a fresh scheme: they will choose among the survivors of all the competitions, some of them now middle-aged or elderly, and throw them into a new struggle, which will somehow quell the rebellion. Distraction is supposed to work miracles. Along with this gang of heavies, Katniss and Peeta are pushed back into the woods to fight again.

Gary Ross’s direction of the first movie, with its wandering, jiggling camera and its fragmented, messy staging, was pretty much an embarrassment. Francis Lawrence (“I Am Legend”), working with a screenplay by Simon Beaufoy and Michael deBruyn, has taken over, and parts of “Catching Fire”—at least the first forty-five minutes or so—are impressive. The scenes in Katniss’s home turf, District 12, have the feel of life under totalitarian control. The mood is Eastern-bloc depression, a gray world drained of vitality. The images are large-scale and weighted: menacing military vehicles charge through the demoralized cities; faceless storm troopers in white plastic helmets clobber people with truncheons. For Katniss, the pleasure of victory never arrives. At the very beginning of the movie, we see her in silhouette, crouching at the edge of a pond, a huntress poised to uncoil. She hates being a celebrity, and she certainly has no desire to lead a revolution. Jennifer Lawrence’s gray-green eyes and her for-

midable concentration dominate the camera. She resembles a story-book Indian princess, and she projects the kind of strength that Katharine Hepburn had when she was young. Two guys vie for Katniss’s love—not just the doleful, fair-haired Peeta but the faithful, darkly handsome Gale (Liam Hemsworth). But happiness is not her fate. She’s tormented, and wary.

The film moves back to the Capitol for more of the extravagant decadence and purple-pink luxury that was so puzzling in the first movie. Why is everyone dressed in wigs, glitter, and eye shadow, as if outfitted for a drag ball that never ends? The crowds are nothing more than seething, bright-colored décor. Stanley Tucci returns as Caesar Flickerman, and again brilliantly parodies beauty-pageant and talent-show hosts. Unctuous and hostile at the same time, Tucci flashes enormous choppers that glisten in the light. Donald Sutherland, with his satanic eyebrows and rounded, insinuating voice, is an entertainingly threatening presence. And Woody Harrelson, as the hard-drinking realist Haymitch, who guides Katniss through every terror, is the core of intelligence in the movie; he is used more centrally here than in the first film, and his glare and his acid voice cut through the meaningless fashion show. Yet, despite the good acting, the middle section of the film, set at the Capitol, is attenuated and rhythmless—the filmmakers seem to be touching all the bases so that the trilogy’s readers won’t miss anything. In the woods, Francis Lawrence recovers his skills, at least for a while: some of the starts and frights—a bunch of snarling devil baboons, some enveloping poisonous smoke—work in a B-movie-ish way. But there are complications in the plot that the filmmakers can’t sort out. Characters we barely know go chasing through the brush, brandishing weapons. Who are Katniss and Peeta’s friends? Who are their enemies? Some of the confusion is intentional, some of it the result of ineptitude, and the grand climax, whose elements include a long piece of wire, a lightning bolt, and an electronic force field, is an incoherent, rapid blur that will send the audience scurrying back to the book to find out what’s supposed to be going on. Cinema can provide explosions of light and ter-



Jennifer Lawrence returns as Katniss Everdeen in the second installment of the trilogy, directed by Francis Lawrence.

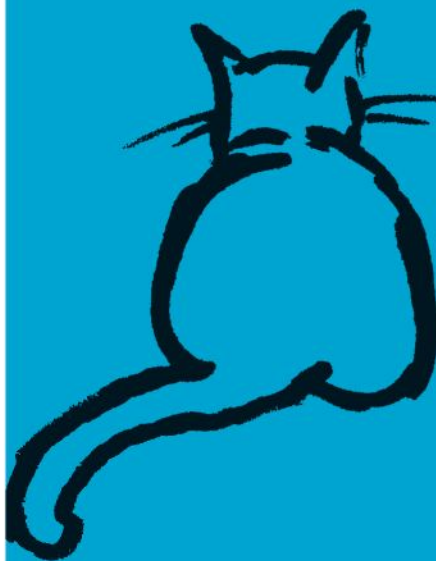
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**RANDOM
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rors bursting through the foliage, but when it comes to basic exposition of complicated physical events, literature—even a calculating young-adult novel—may have the movies beat.

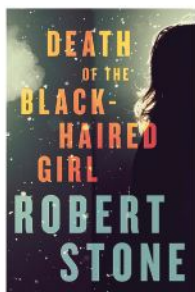
In some ways, Lance Armstrong is a familiar American type. A handsome man, he has strong, regular features, a ready smile, a finely honed, slender body; he also has an unblinking military gaze that would melt a steel girder. As he admits, in Alex Gibney's documentary "The Armstrong Lie," his life has been damaged by the need to win every encounter, be it personal or professional. Armstrong lied until it was impossible for him to lie anymore, and Gibney's movie unexpectedly hinges on that moment. Seven-time winner of the Tour de France, world-famous exemplar of physical courage (he survived testicular cancer in his twenties), Armstrong, having beaten back countless accusations that he was doping, retired in 2005. But in 2009 he attempted a comeback. The point was to prove that he was "clean," and to validate his earlier titles by winning another. Gibney, usually a skeptical liberal filmmaker ("Enron: The Smartest Guys in the Room" and "Taxi to the Dark Side"), was determined to make a positive movie about an American hero. During the 2009 Tour de France, he joined Armstrong's entourage with a camera crew. Armstrong, as it turned out, didn't win; he finished third. And in 2010 fresh accusations were made against him. Cornered, he finally confessed to Oprah Winfrey, last January, that he had been doping since the nineteen-nineties. Gibney then reshuffled his footage and put himself, as a self-confessed patsy, in the movie. "The Armstrong Lie" goes on forever, perhaps because Gibney can't believe that, like everyone else, he's been had. Again and again, he looks for elements of moral clarity (never mind remorse) in Armstrong, and the cyclist looks back at Gibney (and at us) as if he were a fool. His attitude is: Don't you get it?

What we don't get is how often winners will do whatever it takes to win. Gibney interviews Armstrong's former teammates, who say that, in the nineties, many cyclists were doping, and that they

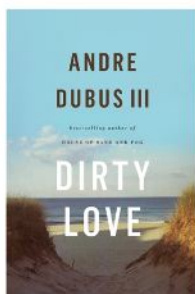
had no choice but to do the same if they were to maintain a competitive edge. An event like the Tour de France is mostly "suffering"—a three-week slog through the Alps and other difficult terrain. Doping increases the amount of oxygen in the blood, delaying the moment when the muscles become exhausted and quit. Armstrong, like many others, took testosterone and the drug EPO. He also refreshed his own blood now and then, transporting the elixir to various tournaments and transfusing it back into his depleted system. (Gibney speculates that he withdrew blood after cycling in the Rockies.) One of the greatest athletes in the world became a kind of ghoul, feeding on his own body.

For Armstrong, success creates its own benediction, absolution, and redemption; after all, as he reminds Gibney, his victories and his personal story brought extraordinary levels of attention and money to the cycling world—competitors, cycling associations, bike manufacturers, media coverage. Many people benefitted from his victories. From our point of view, however, it's hard to overstate his cynicism. The bitterest parts of Gibney's movie are the interviews with the former teammates who were caught doping, and whom Armstrong, when he was still officially clean, viciously turned on. These men took the fall. In competition, they literally covered for him—providing protection from wind resistance by riding around him until he could burst from the pack at the last minute to win. For most of his professional life, Armstrong lived in a safety zone created by others. Gibney doesn't get much out of him; his admissions are as brief, bald, and dismissive as his lies. What's most alive in him is his contempt for "dickheads"—anyone who has ever held him responsible for anything. The most determined person in the movie, apart from Armstrong, is Betsy Andreu, whose husband, the cyclist Frankie Andreu, was an Armstrong teammate and a victim. She told the truth about Armstrong under subpoena, and refused to be rattled when she was attacked by him and his supporters. In front of Gibney's camera, she's both defiant and regretful. Armstrong's fierce desire to predominate created fear and loyalty. In Betsy Andreu, he seems to have met his match. ♦

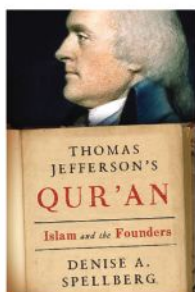
BRIEFLY NOTED



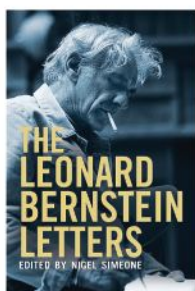
DEATH OF THE BLACK-HAIRED GIRL, by Robert Stone (*Houghton Mifflin Harcourt*). In this campus novel, the accidental death of a vivacious and impulsive student reverberates through the lives of those who knew her. The student is in love with her philandering adviser, and he attempts to break off their liaison before his pregnant wife arrives for the holidays. The student spirals out of control, much to the concern of her best friend, the school counsellor, and her father, an alcoholic widower. During the ensuing tragedy, these varying perspectives give Stone the means to examine thorny moral questions about love, fidelity, faith, fate, wasted opportunity, and “the temptation of oblivion.”



DIRTY LOVE, by Andre Dubus III (*Norton*). The four linked stories in this discomfiting collection are set in old mill towns north of Boston. Nobody does quiet desperation better than Dubus. A middle-aged project manager discovers his wife’s infidelity by hiring a detective who films her trysts. A bartender tells himself he’s a poet and self-destructs when he meets a woman who believes in him. The links between narratives enhance the tension of the whole: a lecherous neighbor glimpsed in the first story is the father of the troubled teen-age girl in the last. She is the victim of a traumatic online shaming and goes to live with her ninety-year-old great-uncle, a war-scarred believer in second chances, who points out that “the river shines under the sun,” even though “everyone knows how dirty it is.”



THOMAS JEFFERSON'S QUR'AN, by Denise A. Spellberg (*Knopf*). In January, 2007, the first Muslim ever elected to Congress swore the oath of office on a Qur'an once owned by Thomas Jefferson. There was an irony to the moment, according to Spellberg’s account of attitudes toward Islam in the early American republic. Anti-Muslim slurs were common, and Islam was beyond “the outer limit” of any acceptable creed. But for this very reason Jefferson saw it as a test of the country’s commitment to religious tolerance. Other founding fathers were “at once hopeful and cynical”: they considered giving full rights to Muslim citizens, but only because the prospect appeared purely hypothetical. Meanwhile, “America’s actual Muslim inhabitants”—West African slaves—remained “invisible” to these slave-owning statesmen.



THE LEONARD BERNSTEIN LETTERS, edited by Nigel Simeone (*Yale*). At 4 A.M. on June 9, 1968, Jacqueline Kennedy wrote to Leonard Bernstein to thank him for arranging the music at R.F.K.’s funeral. “I thought it the most beautiful music I had ever heard . . . this strange music of all the gods who were crying.” Her letter is the most touching in this collection of letters, both to and from Bernstein, which shows, among other things, that he almost abandoned “West Side Story” over a conflict with the librettist Arthur Laurents. The letters Bernstein received—“You are a homosexual and may never change,” his wife wrote, soon after their marriage—are often more revealing than the ones he wrote. Bernstein is too often performing, full of bravado, and sheds little light on his complexities.



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BLOCKBLUSTER

Who needs hits?

BY KELEFA SANNEH



In 1976, a music executive named Walter Yetnikoff launched a campaign that came to be known as Walter's War. He had recently become president of CBS Records, the parent company of Columbia Records, and resolved to rally his troops by providing them an enemy. It was not enough that CBS should succeed; Warner Bros., its hipper rival, should fail. In "Hit Men" (1990), an unsentimental book about the music business in its prime, Fredric Dannen explained that the campaign began with an expensive gambit. Yetnikoff lured James Taylor away from Warner Bros., paying him two and a half million dollars in advance, and a million dollars per album.

Two years later, Warner got its revenge, outbidding CBS for the services of Paul Simon, and offering Rod Stewart two million dollars for each of his next ten albums. From the perspective of the rock stars, Walter's War was an unusually munificent one: its combatants strafed innocent bystanders with seven-digit payments.

It would be wrong to imply that this scramble for stars was motivated purely by spite—greed played a role, too. By the nineteen-seventies, some record executives had concluded that it made more sense to pay for established hit-makers than to cultivate lots of so-called "baby acts" in the hopes that one of them would

eventually grow up. "The pop-music business had a golden principle," Dannen wrote. "There was an enormous amount of money to be made with a hit record, and no money to be made without one."

When Dannen published his book, the old business model still worked. The record companies' fat profits got fatter during the nineties, because of the compact-disk boom. Then, ten years after Dannen's book appeared, the golden principle failed. In 2001, album sales started a sharp decline; some years, it seemed as if none of the big companies were making any money at all. Executives from television, film, and publishing began to wonder whether this would be their fate, too. It seemed possible that America's long pop-culture boom, which spanned most of the twentieth century, was finally going bust.

This was a dominant refrain in the aughts; commentators mourned the disappearance of small record stores, big bookstores, broadly popular television programs. Chris Anderson, who was then the editor of *Wired*, had a more optimistic view: in 2006, he published "The Long Tail," which celebrated the coming demise of "the hit-driven mindset" and the growing importance of online distribution. Using Netflix, Amazon, or iTunes, you could browse what Anderson called "the infinite aisle," where vast inventories and smart suggestion software made it easy to shun blockbusters and follow your own passions, no matter how obscure. He argued that retailers, too, had been freed from the tyranny of the hit. Technology made it possible for businesses to profit by "selling less of more," catering to an explosion of niche markets that, taken together, rivaled the size of the mainstream. Consumers were travelling down the demand curve, away from the head, where the most popular products lived, and out onto the tail, home of the miscellany, which was growing longer (as variety increased) and fatter (as sales of non-hits increased). The new popular culture would be more interesting and more efficient, catering to the ever more diverse tastes of a general public that was outgrowing its reliance on old-fashioned hit men.

Anderson's book arrived with endorsements from new-economy moguls such as Eric Schmidt, of Google, who wrote, "Anderson's insights with *The Long Tail*

There are more choices than ever, but blockbusters still rule the entertainment industry.

influence Google's strategic thinking in a profound way." (Anderson, in turn, praised Google's innovative automated advertising program, which allowed small clients to create micro-targeted campaigns.) He also hailed a researcher named Anita Elberse, a professor of business administration at Harvard Business School, whose work on Netflix had been "very helpful." Now Elberse has published "Blockbusters: Hit-making, Risk-taking, and the Big Business of Entertainment" (Henry Holt), which is a response to Anderson's long-tail theory, and in many ways a refutation of it. In Elberse's telling, today's entertainment moguls, no less than Walter's Warriors, spend much of their time finding ways to pay big money for big stars to make big hits. Her book, like Anderson's, is full of congenial portraits of executives who think they have figured out this new economy. One of her most persuasive subjects is Schmidt, who revealed himself to be a long-tail apostate in 2008, scarcely two years after Anderson's book was published. "Although the tail is very interesting, and we enable it, the vast majority of the revenue remains in the head," he said. "In fact, it's probable that the Internet will lead to larger blockbusters, more concentration of brands."

Anderson's book often read like a manifesto, cheering for the triumph of the underdogs while also predicting it. Elberse wants to reassure her readers that a hit—"The Avengers," an N.F.L. game, a Taylor Swift album—still draws a crowd, showering profit on the corporations behind it. Her case studies are meant to demonstrate that popular culture remains big business, and that, in an increasingly complicated and unpredictable cultural marketplace, hits are more dominant than ever. The story she tells about the entertainment business resonates with a bigger story that people often tell about America, where Elberse sees "a winner-take-all dynamic" increasing the distance between the most economically productive citizens and everyone else. More efficient markets aren't necessarily more diverse or more egalitarian, and perhaps there's no reason that music or film or books should be immune from the forces of consolidation. Anderson assumed that consumers, once freed from the limitations of brick-and-mortar retail, would scatter into countless

niches. In Elberse's view, we would rather lump than split, and new technology—amplified by canny deal-making—is making us lumpier.

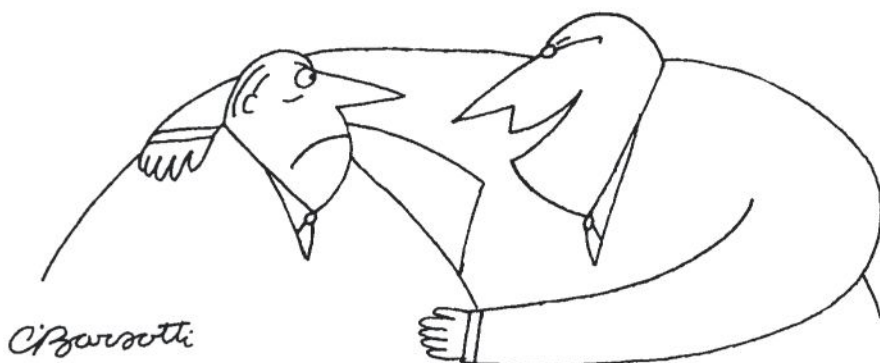
One of the executives central to "The Long Tail" was Reed Hastings, the C.E.O. of Netflix, the company that helped put video-rental stores out of business. Hastings told Anderson that while Blockbuster's brick-and-mortar stores derived about ninety per cent of their business from new releases, Netflix's business, built around mailing out DVDs, was only about thirty per cent new releases, partly because of its ability to offer individualized recommendations based on consumer data. Anderson called Netflix's granular approach "a remarkable democratizing force in a remarkably undemocratic industry." But, as Netflix expanded into streaming video, the company needed to secure licenses for its movies, rather than simply buying DVDs. And these licenses grew more expensive as film studios realized how lucrative streaming video could be. (If Netflix was making lots of money, that meant the studios were charging too little.) In response, Netflix did something that "The Long Tail" didn't predict: in 2011, it decided to become a studio itself, spending something like a hundred million dollars to create an American version of the British political drama "House of Cards," starring Kevin Spacey. Netflix has continued to produce expensive and attention-generating series, including "Hemlock Grove," by the horror-movie auteur Eli Roth, and a revival of the surreal sitcom "Arrested Development." Netflix, according to Elberse, is behaving "more like an old-school television network than the long-tail company it once seemed intent on becoming." Last month, the *Wall Street Journal* reported that Netflix was negotiating with cable providers, in hopes of finding a place on set-top boxes.

The bedrock of Elberse's "blockbuster strategy" is a willingness to invest in "premium" content, on the theory that a series of small ripples is no substitute for one big splash. She notes that YouTube, one of the Internet's most miscellaneous destinations, has increasingly devoted itself to promoting its "Original Channels," many of them tied to established stars or brands, like Jay Z or World

Wrestling Entertainment. Elberse extends her analysis to blockbusters of all sorts, arguing that a grand enough event can "break through the clutter," thereby justifying its cost. She tells the story of Real Madrid, the soccer team, which paid more than a hundred and thirty million dollars for the right to sign Cristiano Ronaldo, the Portuguese star; she explains how Lady Gaga's team arranged for her 2011 album, "Born This Way," to appear in twenty thousand shops, ranging from Starbucks to RadioShack. Elberse argues that the profusion of consumer choice only increases the pressure on big media companies to create grand spectacles that bring us together. Alan Horn, the chairman of Walt Disney Studios, tells her that he concentrates on "high production value" films precisely because people now go to so few movies per year: only a big event, he figures, will drag people out of their homes. "If entertainment businesses forgo making big bets on likely blockbusters," Elberse writes, "they will find their channel power waning over time."

Although Elberse's book is written in the upbeat, anecdotal, gently exhortative style of an airport best-seller, she struggles to turn her observations into useful advice. One passage describes the strategy of Harry Sloan, a Hollywood executive who in 2005 was appointed chairman and C.E.O. of M-G-M, a venerable studio that had fallen behind its rivals. Sloan brokered a deal that was, in itself, a blockbuster: he signed up perhaps the biggest and most reliable movie star in the world, Tom Cruise, by offering him an equity stake and sweeping creative freedom. But the Cruise experiment was, Elberse concedes, "widely regarded as a disappointment." Even Lady Gaga's ubiquitous album release turns out to have been only a qualified success: "Born This Way" sold 2.3 million copies, roughly half the sales of her first album, "The Fame." In Elberse's telling, blockbusterism often seems less like a strategy and more like a tendency.

Is it a growing tendency? Elberse links the phenomenon to "the public's ever-increasing fascination with celebrities," while providing no evidence that we are increasingly fascinated with celebrities. Certainly a scholar wishing to conduct a thorough study of Kim Kardashian will find no shortage of primary



"Now, now, it wasn't a lie—it was a one-eighty."

and secondary sources—but there's more available information about everything else, too. How, exactly, would we measure our interest in Kardashian against an earlier generation's interest in Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis? A related difficulty applies to any consideration of "hits" or "blockbusters": there's no easy way to make comparisons across decades or across media. Using data from Warner Bros. and Grand Central Publishing, Elberse shows that the most expensive titles—the potential blockbusters—generally consume a big chunk of a corporation's budget, while generating an even bigger chunk of its revenues. And yet, by many measures, earlier eras produced bigger hits. "Avatar" is generally considered the top-grossing film of all time, with worldwide earnings of more than \$2.7 billion. But nearly three-quarters of that was earned overseas. If you consider only American ticket sales and adjust for inflation, you will find that "Gone with the Wind" earned more than twice as much, at a time when the U.S. population was less than half as big.

Even seemingly simple comparisons are trickier than they first appear. To demonstrate that "hits are gaining in relevance," Elberse tells us that, from 2007 to 2011, a growing number of songs sold more than a million digital copies, accounting for a growing share of the digital-music market: thirty-six tracks, for seven per cent, in 2007; a hundred and two tracks, for fifteen per cent, in 2011. But the digital-music market, in general, was expanding during those years: more songs were released, more songs were bought, and

more songs crossed the million-sale threshold. Yes, hits are important—and they always have been.

On this point, at least, Anderson would agree. Although "The Long Tail" proclaimed a coming revolution, Anderson was careful never to predict the demise of blockbusters. "Hits, like it or not, are here to stay," he wrote. But he believed that the cultural power of hits was fading, and he presented his economic analysis as a moral crusade. "For too long," he wrote, "we've been suffering the tyranny of lowest-common-denominator fare, subjected to brain-dead summer blockbusters and manufactured pop." The language reflected his own tastes, which were self-consciously hip. (He was vexed by the popularity of boy bands and excited about a retro-futurist electronic genre known as "chip music," which achieved micro-success in the aughts.) He hoped that more of us would discover "smaller artists who speak more authentically to their audience," and that all of us might, at last, perceive "the true shape of demand in our culture." He was flattering his readers by inviting them to be part of his community of connoisseurs. Long-tail economics would make good on the promise of the Internet, turning more people into experts on topics fewer people had heard of. Elberse flatters her readers, too. In her book, the old ethos of the Internet has given way to the new ethos of social media; while Anderson predicted the end of the "watercooler era," Elberse sees the watercooler reborn, as fans track the progress of the latest cultural juggernaut across

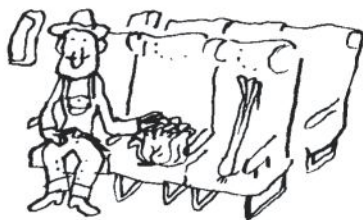
their Twitter timelines. "Because people are inherently social, they generally find value in reading the same books and watching the same television shows and movies that others do," she writes, recasting our taste for hits as proof of our common humanity. Lurking behind her blockbuster thesis is the suggestion that being sociable matters more than being hip.

Because Anderson and Elberse both focus on consumer choice, they make it easy to forget that the entertainment industry is partly a reflection of the political processes that created it. For instance, movie franchises might be much less valuable if copyright protections didn't last so long. In 1790, Congress enacted a law granting copyright protection for fourteen years, with an option for a fourteen-year extension; in the most recent revision, in 1998, Congress extended copyright protection to last a lifetime plus seventy years. (Works created by a corporation, instead of a person, may be protected for as long as a hundred and twenty years.) Similarly, the shape and the size of various online music-streaming services will be largely determined by the compulsory royalty rates set by the government, and by legal decisions about the relative value of different forms of digital musical consumption.

Although neither "Blockbusters" nor "The Long Tail" spends much time considering the power of legislation, that power is one of the main themes of "Hit Men." The book's true protagonist is a federal regulation, a 1960 amendment to the Communications Act, which banned secret payments to radio disk jockeys. In response, the big record companies began hiring middlemen known as independent radio promoters, who had a mysterious ability to transmit their musical passions to the program directors running radio. By the nineteen-eighties, during Yetnikoff's heyday at CBS Records, big labels were spending millions on independent promotion, a practice their smaller competitors couldn't copy. "The large record companies understood on some level that if radio airplay were not free, it would mean a major competitive edge," Dannen writes. This is not so different from the logic that drives big film studios to spend increasing amounts of money on special effects

and elaborate marketing campaigns, at a time when it's easier than ever to shoot and distribute a movie. Horn, the Disney chairman, told Elberse that blockbusters were important precisely because they cost so much money. And Disney would have much less money to spend if Congress hadn't extended its copyright protections. "Very few entities in this world can afford to spend \$200 million on a movie," he said. "That is our competitive advantage." The long tail is real—and executives like Horn will pay whatever they must to stay out of it.

For a book about the future of the entertainment industry, "Blockbusters" can seem strikingly old-fashioned. Elberse quotes an executive talking about the importance of securing a screen at a big Los Angeles movie theatre; she explains the continuing influence of radio airplay; she analyzes the art and science of getting a book onto a bookstore's most coveted shelves. Part of this is a necessary corrective to the idea that everything is digital: even in the atomized and de-atomized entertainment industry, an awful lot of business still gets done offline. Elberse sees the unreconstructed nature of the entertainment industry as proof that the blockbuster is here to stay. But it's also possible that the stubborn endurance of cardboard-and-paper books, eighties-era multiplexes, and laughably primitive compact disks is proof of how



much electronic transformation still lies ahead. In the seventies and eighties, the hit men worried mainly about each other, but the rise of digital delivery means that their modern-day successors must also contend with a more existential threat. After all, the endurance of blockbusters wasn't enough to save Blockbuster video, which announced the closure of its last remaining stores earlier this month. Horn's decision to focus on expensive movies might be

shrewd, but it is not likely to reverse a decades-long decline in moviegoing. Betting on blockbusters might be a defensive strategy: a way for established entertainment companies to stall the larger forces eroding their "channel power," at least for a while. Unlike the old hit men, Elberse's executives can't assume that their industries will be around forever.

You needn't be a mogul to share some version of this anxiety: it is common among cultural producers of all sorts and sizes. Where fans see a glorious profusion of options, some performers see a potentially dangerous imbalance: an ever greater supply, balanced by the kind of soft, digital-era demand that can more easily be measured in eyeballs than in dollars. In "How Music Works" (McSweeney's), a wide-ranging book of essays, David Byrne expresses a dismay shared by many of his peers. Byrne released his first album, with Talking Heads, in 1977, and he can't help but be nostalgic for the old industry. Like Elberse, though less happily, he sees labels chasing after "blockbuster hits," and he broods over the plight of musicians, especially the kind who, like him, once made a pretty good living in the margins of the major-label profit machine. Byrne's 2004 album, "Grown Backwards," was a modest success, selling nearly a hundred and fifty thousand copies, and he estimates that, after recording costs and other expenses, his net profit was about fifty-eight thousand dollars, not including royalties. Spread over a few years, that doesn't seem like much, especially since Byrne can't expect every album he makes to sell that well. He wonders, "How is a mid-level artist—someone who sells more than five thousand copies of a record but less than a million—supposed to live, given this scenario?"

The disappearance of the middle is the possibility that unites Anderson and Elberse, suggesting that the blockbuster era and the long-tail era are perfectly compatible. In financial terms, "mid-level" acts are by definition mediocre, and mediocrity is what a dynamic, low-friction marketplace is supposed to drive out. In "Average Is Over" (Dutton), the inventive economist Tyler Cowen sketches a vision of the future based on precisely this logic. He, like

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Anderson, is impressed by Netflix's ability to guide its subscribers toward films they might like. But he sees the exchange as an example of an increasingly common labor arrangement: a consumer with money to spend relies on a computer algorithm for advice on how to spend it, making everyone better off except, perhaps, the movie buff from Blockbuster or the local video store, who no longer has a job. Anderson, more interested in culture than in economics, spent lots of time considering the independent films that Netflix might help, and not much time considering the merchants that it might hurt. From this angle, his egalitarian pronouncements can seem darkly ironic. "By putting our commercial weight behind the big winners, we actually amplify the gap between them and everything else," Anderson wrote. "Economically, this is the same as saying, 'If there can only be a few rich, let them at least be super-rich.'"

Cowen is less troubled by the further enrichment of the already rich. He takes it for granted that America will be increasingly influenced by "labor-market polarization": productivity will continue to increase, but an ever larger proportion of the gains will go to "a relatively small cognitive elite"—human blockbusters, economically speaking. Meanwhile, more and more workers will find themselves in various service industries, assuming they can find full-time work at all. According to Cowen, future citizens will agree that "America is one of the nicest places in the world." He predicts that even those with stagnant or falling wages will have "a lot more opportunities for cheap fun and also cheap education." The formulation "cheap fun" explains much of what makes people so excited, and so anxious, about the future of popular culture.

In an earlier generation, anxiety about popular culture usually referred to something different: a fear that our entertainment industry was somehow corrupt, and corrupting us. We were being manipulated, it seemed, by nefarious executives like Dannen's hit men, who conspired with shady men in shiny cars to manipulate radio playlists. But popular culture isn't scary anymore. When ABC, NBC, and Fox created a streaming video site called Hulu, to

compete with YouTube, they announced it with a 2009 Super Bowl commercial starring Alec Baldwin as a friendly but evil alien, intent on turning viewers' brains to "mushy mush" by beaming television shows to their computers and phones. (The tagline was "Hulu: An evil plot to destroy the world. Enjoy.") Beneath the joke was a sly acknowledgment that now network television, not the human brain, looks to be in danger of maceration.

Cultural consumption has grown more self-conscious: after years of stories about entertainment-industry upheaval, consumers have grown intensely aware of what Anderson called the "commercial weight" of our purchases. Despite all the lumping and splitting, popular culture remains roughly democratic: every consumer has a vote, and the price of voting is low enough to allow just about everyone to participate. And the availability of free pirated content online has endowed other, legal, forms of cultural consumption with a faint aura of righteousness. Many connoisseurs have come to think of themselves as patrons, eager not just to consume culture but to support it—or, occasionally, to boycott it. Each paid-for download, each Kickstarter donation, each movie ticket, each HBO subscription is an affirmative act, and a social one: a contribution to the cause, a vote in favor of Katniss Everdeen or some rookies on Bandcamp, a strike against the demise of whatever part of the entertainment industry still entertains us. Even Elberse's blockbusting executives look vulnerable: they are producers in a consumers' paradise, forever scrambling to adjust to the public's changing whims. And so Elberse must reassure them, and reassure us, that big hits and big business aren't going away. Once upon a time, we worried about what popular culture was doing to us. Now, more and more, we worry about what we're doing to it. ♦

BLOCK THAT METAPHOR!

From the Providence Journal.

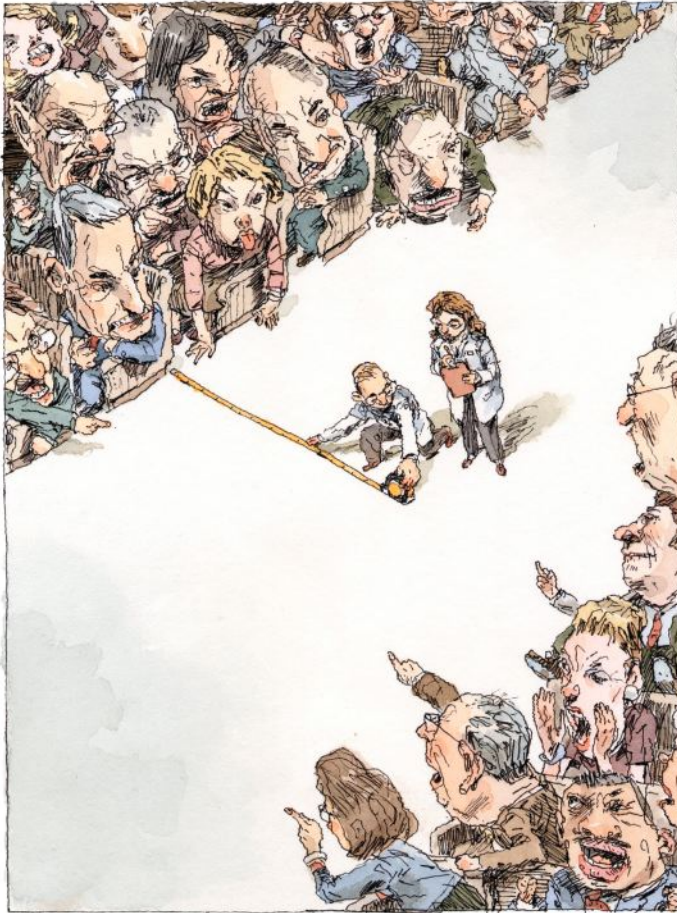
"We're going to just grow the number of people who aren't really completely part of the American fabric, who aren't pitching their tent, unless we get them off the sideline and into the game," said Eric Cohen, executive director of the Immigrant Legal Resource Center.

A CRITIC AT LARGE

LONG DIVISION

Measuring the polarization of American politics.

BY JILL LEPORE



The study of government, like the government itself, is in a tight spot. In 2009, during a vote on a House appropriations bill, Tom Coburn, a Republican senator from Oklahoma, tried to abolish the National Science Foundation's Political Science Program, which supports academic research in "citizenship, government, and politics." The motion was tabled after the American Political Science Association staged a same-day e-mail campaign to oppose it. Last year, the measure met with success in the House; House members who have few qualms about closing the Centers for Disease Control are not, generally speaking, daunted by the prospect of

stifling the pursuit of social science. And, earlier this year, when Coburn re-introduced his amendment in the Senate, it passed with no more quibbling than the addition of a proviso that *some* political science could be funded: research whose purpose is "promoting national security or the economic interests of the United States." The President signed the bill into law in March.

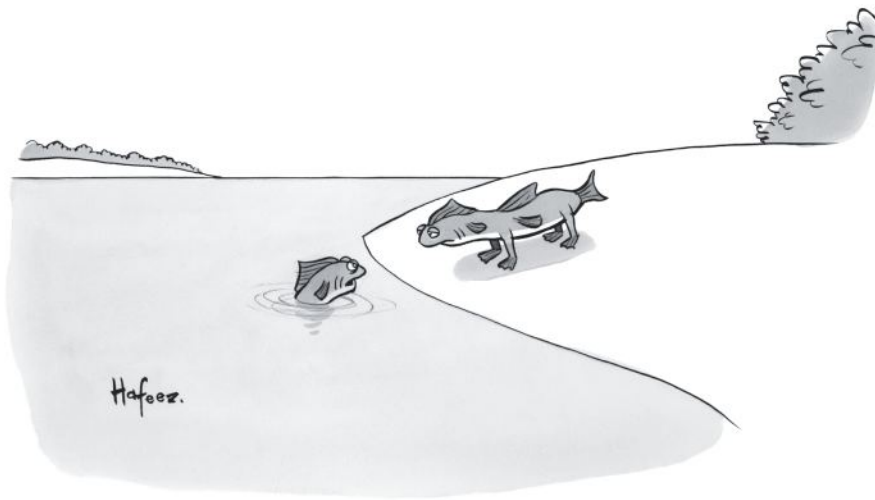
The movement to defund political science stems from the belief that the National Science Foundation has no business funding political science, because political science is all politics and no science—except when it advances national security or boosts the American

economy, in which case it is, naturally, apolitical and scientific. The political and unscientific stuff is the study of, for instance, gridlock. According to Coburn, one reason the federal government should not pay for political-science research is that "studies of presidential executive power and Americans' attitudes about the Senate filibuster hold little promise to save an American's life from a threatening condition or to advance America's competitiveness in the world"—a statement that is difficult to square with the damage done to the U.S. economy by the ongoing budgetary brinkmanship.

Shutting down the federal government is expensive; irony is cheap. The N.S.F.'s Political Science Program was inaugurated in 1966. In 1970, it began supporting the work of a political scientist from the University of Michigan named Warren E. Miller, who, for two decades, had been collecting election returns and conducting interviews with voters as part of what came to be called the American National Election Studies project. Since 1977, the largest grants awarded by the Political Science Program have gone to this project, which conducts surveys every two years and is widely regarded as the most important collection of information about voting ever assembled. Another vast study concerns congressional voting. Beginning in the nineteen-eighties, the political scientists Keith T. Poole and Howard Rosenthal, then at Carnegie Mellon, received a series of N.S.F. grants to compile a record of all roll-call votes held in Congress. Their data now include the records of every roll-call decision made between 1789 and 2004: 2,844,164 roll calls in the Senate and 11,493,013 in the House. Political scientists analyzing these three compilations of longitudinal data—election results, interviews with voters, and congressional roll-call records—claim that voters and legislators alike are more polarized today than they have been at any time since the Confederacy seceded.

What's really going on could be anything from party realignment to the unravelling of the Republic. It's hard to know, though, what with a polarized Congress keen to defund the very scholarship that might cast light on the matter. Coburn is untroubled. "The University of Michigan may have some

A conflict-crippled Congress has been keen to defund research into what ails it.



"I don't know who you are anymore."

interesting theories about recent elections," he allowed, "but Americans who have an interest in electoral politics can turn to CNN, Fox News, MSNBC, the print media, and a seemingly endless number of political commentators on the Internet." This is a little like saying, when your kitchen is on fire, that it's O.K. because, in a cupboard above the stove, you keep fifty boxes of matches.

Modern political science started in the late nineteenth century as a branch of history. (The department in which I teach used to be the Department of History and Government; it split in two in 1910.) Political scientists have been arguing for more than a century over whether the study of government is a science. On the whole, Woodrow Wilson and Charles Beard thought not. By the end of the Second World War, science-y political scientists had allied themselves with the behavioral sciences, and, not long afterward, with rational-choice theory. They used quantitative methods to test theories about the political behavior of individuals. At the University of Michigan, Miller and his colleagues Philip Converse, Angus Campbell, and Donald Stokes used their survey data to produce a study called "The American Voter," in 1960. Four years later, elaborating on its findings, Converse published a landmark essay, "The Nature of Belief Systems in Mass Publics." Converse argued that the

American electorate can be usefully divided into two groups: political élites, who are exceptionally well informed, follow politics closely, and adhere to a set of political beliefs so coherent as to constitute an ideology; and the mass public, whose specific knowledge of politics tends to be scant, resulting in a very loose and scattershot set of political beliefs. Political élites know "what-goes-with-what" (*laissez-faire* with free enterprise) and "what parties stand for" (Democrats favor labor, Republicans business), but much of the mass public does not.

In 1956 and 1960, the Michigan interviewers asked voters questions such as "Would you say that either one of the parties is *more conservative* or *more liberal* than the other?" Many voters could not answer that question. Others answered badly. There was a follow-up: "What do people have in mind when they say that the Republicans (Democrats) are more conservative than the Democrats (Republicans)?" This proved difficult to answer, too. Converse reported that the bottom thirty-seven per cent of respondents "could supply no meaning for the liberal-conservative distinction"; the top seventeen per cent gave what the interviewers deemed "best answers." Everyone else fell somewhere in between, but Converse and his colleagues were pretty sure that a lot of them were just guessing.

Converse reported as well on the relationship between what voters know and how they vote. Political élites vote in

a more partisan fashion than the mass public; this tendency, too, follows a curve. The more you know, the more likely you are to vote in an ideologically consistent way, not just following your party but following a set of constraints dictated by a political ideology. (The parties, at the time, were not as ideologically uniform as they have since become.) What makes a voter a moderate, Converse concluded, is not knowing very much about politics. In the nineteen-fifties, there were a lot of moderates. Converse thought that this might be because only about ten per cent of the American electorate had graduated from college.

A great deal has changed since 1964. Voters have got better sorted by party; parties have got better sorted by ideology; and parties have got more ideological. The Republican Party has moved to the right and, to a much lesser degree, the Democratic Party has moved to the left. In 1964, the ideological position advocated by Barry Goldwater was nearly beyond the realm of the G.O.P. imagination; by 1980, Goldwater Republicanism was Reagan Republicanism; Newt Gingrich's 1994 Contract with America was well to the right of Reagan; and, in 2012, Mitt Romney ran to the right of the breakdown lane.

The changes within the Democratic Party are of a different nature. Ideologically, Democrats have not moved to the left; to the contrary, today's Democrats are significantly to the economic and social-welfare right of the antitrust Democrats of the eighteen-nineties, the New Deal Democrats of the nineteen-thirties, and the Great Society Democrats of the nineteen-sixties. Instead, the composition of the Party has shifted. In the civil-rights era, white Southern Democrats, who were conservatives, abandoned the Party; the Democrats left behind tended to be liberals. Then the complexion of the Democratic Party changed. In 1960, more than a quarter of African-Americans voted for Nixon over Kennedy; in 1972—after the 1964 Civil Rights Act and the 1965 Voting Rights Act—only one in ten African-Americans voted for Nixon over McGovern. Between 1992 and 2008, the nonwhite percentage of the U.S. electorate doubled, and, as Alan Abramowitz pointed out in "The Disappearing Center" (2010), a growing racial

divide within the electorate tends to widen the ideological divide, because nonwhite voters favor government-supported social programs more than white voters do. The labels “conservative” and “liberal” did not formerly correspond especially well to the terms “Republican” and “Democratic.” They do now.

One of the most interesting explanations for the polarization of the electorate has to do with television. In “Post-Broadcast Democracy” (2007), Mark Prior observed that the period from the late nineteen-forties to the late nineteen-seventies—an era of remarkably low political polarization—was also the heyday of broadcast television. Prior thinks that during these decades a sizable number of Americans who had never cared much about politics got drawn into it because of television. At the time, television had essentially three channels, and, at six o’clock every night, the national news was broadcast on all of them. Nearly everyone watched it, even though a lot of people (Prior calls them “entertainment fans”) would have rather watched just about anything else. When Election Day came around, these entertainment fans decided to vote. Relative to voters who actually like watching the news (“news viewers”), the entertainment fans were poorly informed, so they were moderates. Once cable television became available, starting in the late nineteen-seventies, entertainment fans gradually stopped watching the news, turned to dozens and then hundreds of other channels instead, and stopped voting. In the cable-and-Internet era of the past decade and a half, news viewers have more and different news choices. News viewers have always been voters; lately, they’re more partisan, partly because the news is more partisan. The growth in polarization seen since 1980 is a result, according to Prior, of the failure of moderates to turn up at the polls and of the more partisan feeling of those people who do turn up.

This development may have reduced the quality of our political opinions. “Opinion quality” purports to measure the match between what we know and how we vote. If you know a lot about something and apply that information to a vote that matches your policy preferences, your opinion quality is high. In 2011, a team of political scientists led by

James N. Druckman, of Northwestern University, conducted a survey of more than six hundred party-affiliated voters about drilling for oil and gas, framing the issue, for some respondents, with polarized terms and, for others, without. They found that in a polarized environment voters make worse choices and have more confidence in them. Their conclusion: “intense party competition degenerates opinion quality.”

One element of voter behavior measured by the American National Election Studies project is the percentage of voters who do things like post yard signs in front of their houses or paste bumper stickers onto their cars. In 2004 and 2008, that percentage was higher than it had been at any time since the project began, in 1952. Nevertheless, there’s dispute about whether ordinary voters are more polarized than before. “Most Americans are somewhat like the unfortunate citizens of some third-world countries who try to stay out of the crossfire while left-wing guerrillas and right-wing death squads shoot at each other,” Morris Fiorina and his collaborators wrote in 2005, in “Culture War? The Myth of a Polarized America.” Fiorina thinks that it’s just party activists and party leaders who are polarized and that ordinary voters only *appear* polarized, because the candidates and party platforms we’re stuck choosing between are so polarized. It’s a subtle and illuminating argument. It doesn’t quite explain the yard signs, though.

No one seriously questions that members of Congress are more polarized than they used to be. This is borne out anecdotally, as social scientists like to say, by watching them on cable television, where you can see the spittle in HD. “We now live in an era where political elites literally hate each other,” Nolan McCarty, Keith Poole, and Howard Rosenthal wrote in “Polarized America,” in 2006. Poole and Rosenthal extended their earlier work on congressional roll-call votes by conducting another investigation funded by the National Science Foundation. They assembled a record of the ratings assigned to members of the U.S. Senate by thirty interest groups between 1959 and 1980. Interest groups rate members of Congress on a scale of zero to a hundred. The interest groups

that Poole and Rosenthal studied included Americans for Democratic Action and the U.S. Chamber of Commerce. In 1984, Poole and Rosenthal reported the beginning of a significant increase in congressional polarization, fuelled by a development then already discernible: “Moderate Republicans are vanishing nationally.” (This development tracks a trend charted by Warren Miller and M. Kent Jennings, who found that delegates to the Republican National Convention became increasingly conservative between 1972 and 1980.) The numbers have grown more dramatic since. In 1980, Americans for Democratic Action gave the North Carolina Republican Jesse Helms an 11 and the Pennsylvania Democrat John Heinz a 50. In 1998, the A.D.A. gave a perfect conservative score of zero to Helms and to the Republican who eventually won Heinz’s seat, Rick Santorum, while the Minnesota Democrat Paul Wellstone received a perfect liberal score of 100, and Ted Kennedy a 95.

This change is more notable when viewed across a longer stretch of time. Congressional polarization began to decline in the early twentieth century—chiefly because Republicans became more moderate—until the nineteen-seventies, when a surge began, chiefly because Republicans became more conservative. The migration of Southern Democrats to the G.O.P. explains only about a third of this shift.

Among the cable and Internet commentators upon whom Tom Coburn would like Americans to rely for the study of government, it is a commonplace that congressional polarization is being driven by gerrymandering, the re-drawing of congressional districts along party lines. This explanation is wrong. First, polarization has taken place in both chambers at about the same time and rate and, since redistricting does not affect the Senate, it cannot wholly explain what’s happened in the House. Second, much polarization in the House has taken place in districts that have not been redrawn by legislators. Third, much of the polarizing in gerrymandered districts preceded their redrawing. The best calculation is that redistricting accounts for no more than ten or twenty per cent of the polarization in the House. Gerrymandering is bad for all

kinds of reasons, but polarization isn't one of them.

There's lots more to count, if you like counting. In a paper published last year, a team of economists and a computer scientist tracked polarization by identifying "partisan phrases" in the *Congressional Record* and then searching, in Google Books, for those same phrases in more than two million books published in the United States in English since 1873. They identified partisan speech this way: "we impute both the partisanship (association with left- or right-wing ideology) and the polarization (distance from the ideological center) of phrases by correlating their frequency of use with the political party of the speaker." Using this metric, "protect American industry" was the most frequently used Republican phrase between 1893 and 1895; "men, women, and children" was the most frequently used Democratic phrase between 1929 and 1933. (Here's a finding you can test against your own impressions: between 2007 and 2009, during the 110th Congress, the most Republican phrases were "domestic energy product" and "*Wall Street Journal*" and the most Democratic were "education, health care" and "mental health service.") Next, the researchers compared their partisan-phrase data set with the roll-call vote records compiled by McCarty, Poole, and Rosenthal. Graphs on which partisan speech is plotted lined up very well with graphs on which polarization was plotted.

In this analysis, partisan speech in Google Books is better correlated with periods of legislative gridlock than partisan speech in the *Congressional Record*. It's not clear what, if anything, this explains. Both groups studied—members of Congress and authors of books about politics—are people whom Converse called "political élites," and what many political scientists would like to know is whether polarization is being driven by ordinary voters (few of whom write books) or by Congress. It's an important question. If polarization happens first among the electorate, and only later in Congress, then voters are driving it, in which case it might merit another, better name: "representation." If it happens first in Congress, and only later among voters, and especially if it's a consequence of legislators answering to spe-

cial interests and campaign contributors rather than to voters, polarization in some instances might be more aptly called "corruption."

Studies that rely on Google Books can be fishy. People who write books about politics include everyone from John Rawls to Ted Cruz, who, in 2009, supplied a very interesting foreword to "U.S. Constitution for Dummies." Also on Google Books: James Carville and Paul Begala's "Buck Up, Suck Up . . . and Come Back When You Foul Up" and Karl Rove's "Courage and Consequence." Maybe a graph charting a surge in partisan speech in Google Books as indexed by the phrases most used by partisans in Congress is measuring nothing so much as the triumph of political consulting over political science.

In 1950, when the distance between the parties was smaller than it had been before or has been since—and voters had a hard time figuring out which party was conservative and which liberal—the American Political Science Association's Committee on Political Parties issued a report called "Toward a More Responsible Two-Party System." The problem with American democracy, the committee argued, is that the parties are too alike, and too weak. It recommended strengthening every element of the party system, from national leadership committees to congressional caucuses, as well as establishing a starker



difference between party platforms. "If the two parties do not develop alternative programs that can be executed," the committee warned, "the voter's frustration and the mounting ambiguities of national policy might set in motion more extreme tendencies to the political left and the political right."

In the decades since, the parties have become both more coherent and more organized. In the House, the majority party controls both the schedule and the

rules: as Barbara Sinclair chronicled in "Party Wars" (2006), many of these changes, including new forms of control over the budgetary process, were instituted by House Democrats during their long years of majority. Party leadership controls the story that the party tells the press, Democrats through a Policy Committee and Republicans using a Theme Team. Congressional party leaders do their own counting: they assign a party-loyalty score to members, and hand out committee chairs to those with the highest scores.

Is polarization responsible for policy gridlock? You might think that a divided government, where one party controls the White House and the other Congress, is more likely to suffer from gridlock than a unified government. You might think, too, that a more polarized Congress will be more subject to gridlock. Both of these hypotheses have been tested. Working from sources like the end-of-session summaries printed in the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post*, David R. Mayhew generated a list of landmark laws passed in every Congress since the Second World War. (Mayhew once pointed out that political science began as a branch of history, became a species of sociology, and then turned into a kind of mathematics.) In "Divided We Govern" (1991), he reported that in the second half of the twentieth century a divided government did not produce fewer laws than a unified government.

In "Stalemate," published in 2003, Sarah Binder questioned Mayhew's findings. Mayhew had conceded that he used a numerator without a denominator: he counted how many laws were passed but not how many were urged. Binder devised a denominator. Using the unsigned editorials that appear every day in the *Times*, she reconstructed each party's national legislative agenda. Together, those issues added up to the number Binder placed in her denominator, allowing her to calculate a "gridlock score" for every Congress: the number of failed agenda items divided by the number of items on the agenda. The size of the agenda for unified and divided governments is roughly equal (an average of a hundred and seven for unified and a hundred and twenty-three for divided). Between 1947 and 2000, the most productive Congress was the Eighty-ninth,

the unified government under the Johnson Administration; its gridlock score is 35. The least productive, with a gridlock score of 65, was the 105th, in a divided government headed by Bill Clinton. Where Mayhew had argued that there was no difference in performance by unified and divided governments, Binder found that split-party governments are less productive.

She also calculated a “polarization score”: she divided the number of moderates in the House and the Senate by the distance between the ideological medians of each party, as measured by placing them on a numerical spectrum not unlike the interest-group ratings scale. The more polarized its members, and the fewer the moderates, the less productive the Congress. Binder also examined, as another measure of legislative efficacy, the number of days late that Congress reached a budget resolution, for every year from 1976 (the first session subject to the Congressional Budget Act of 1974). Budget resolutions were an average of eleven days late when government was unified and nearly two months late when government was divided. Polarization slows down the budgetary process, too. In Congress, moderates aren’t people who don’t know much about politics. Moderates are people who get laws passed.

Not everything can be lashed to a ruler. In an opinion essay in the *Times* this past summer, the political theorist Jacqueline Stevens argued that the discipline has failed to anticipate just about every important political development of recent history, from the end of the Cold War to the polarization of American politics. Stevens was dismayed by the American Political Science Association’s reaction to the movement to defund the N.S.F.’s Political Science Program: “Why are my colleagues kowtowing to Congress for research money that comes with ideological strings attached?”

To say that there are limits to what this research can explain is not to say that it lacks value. The collection of the data alone is invaluable, and the best work is formidable. The strength of any analysis, though, lies in its independence from the policy agendas of politicians. Accepting money from the federal government to

conduct research places academic inquiry in the service of national interests. In 1966, when the Political Science Program was founded, a year after the passage of the Voting Rights Act, equality of political participation was chief among what were then understood to be the nation’s interests. That’s the spirit in which the N.S.F. began funding the American National Election Studies project and, soon afterward, the study of congressional roll-call decisions. The 2013 proviso to the Coburn amendment, stipulating that the purpose of any political-science research funded by the N.S.F. must be to stimulate the American economy or improve national security, places an academic discipline in the service of a set of national interests different from those current in 1966, which had to do with democracy and equality. Easy money it is not.

Is the study of government a science? In more analytically luxuriant times, political scientists debated some of the very questions raised by Coburn in much the same way that, before the denial of climate change, certain philosophers of science argued that all science is interpretation. Other moves have been made since. But intellectuals, as Bruno Latour once pointed out, are nearly always one critique too late: “entire Ph.D. programs are still running to make sure that good American kids are learning the hard way that facts are made up, that there is no such thing as natural, unmediated, unbiased access to truth, that we are always prisoners of language, that we always speak from a particular standpoint, and so on, while dangerous extremists are using the very same argument of social construction to destroy hard-won evidence that could save our lives.”

Irony is cheap, not painless. One well-established fact is that polarization in Congress maps onto one measure better than any other: economic inequality. The smaller the gap between rich and poor, the more moderate our politicians; the greater the gap, the greater the disagreement between liberals and conservatives. The greater the disagreement between liberals and conservatives, the less Congress is able to get done; the less Congress gets done, the greater the gap between rich and poor. That’s not bad math. That’s what happens when the kitchen’s on fire and all you’ve got is matches. ♦

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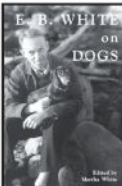
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VIEWS FROM THE EDGE

An Isa Genzken retrospective.

BY PETER SCHJELDAHL

Do you know the art of Isa Genzken, the subject of a dazzling retrospective at the Museum of Modern Art? Or have you, like me, been only spottily aware of the work of this mercurial German artist? Genzken, now sixty-five, is a sculptor whose sporadic output, abrupt stylistic changes, and personal vagaries have kept her at the margins of art-world notice, until now. The show finds coherence in works that range from minimalist sculpture, charged with cryptic emotions, from the nineteen-seventies, to recent hilarious assemblages, featuring plastic toys and gussied-up mannequins, which secrete a steely aesthetic discipline. Unifying it all is a brash spirit that is strangely both celebratory and bedevilled. Genzken takes on the ideals of modern art and architecture along with the joys and the anxieties of life in contemporary cities. The show rejiggers recent art history; in particular, Genzken emerges as the chief inceptor of a trend in sculpture that has been termed Unmonumental, from the title of the New Museum show that introduced it, in 2007. The work employs vernacular materials, pop-cultural allusions, and seemingly slapdash procedures to mock—while also exploiting—the passive-aggressive obduracy of classic minimalism.

Genzken's lack of fame owes much to a difficult life. *Der Spiegel* recently reported that she has struggled with alcoholism and other troubles, and she bears scars of German history. She was born in 1948 in a town near Hamburg, "the only child of two art freaks," she has said. Her father was a medical student who longed to be an opera singer; her mother trained to be an actress but became a technical assistant at a pharmaceutical company.

Genzken's childhood was culturally enriched but, as she has told it, far from happy. A photograph in the MOMA show, blown up to poster size, shows Genzken as a small girl, weeping in her mother's arms. In 1960, the family moved to West Berlin, where they lived in the villa of Isa's paternal grandfather, Karl Genzken. A doctor and a committed Nazi, he was the



Genzken's "X-Ray" (1991). The show rejiggers recent art history.

head of the medical office of the S.S. and oversaw experiments on concentration-camp inmates; he was convicted of crimes against humanity at Nuremberg, and died in 1957, three years after being released from prison. According to *Der Spiegel*, the artist "hinted to" a friend about a childhood visit to her grandfather in prison, where she saw an open umbrella in his cell. Whether that relates to the frequent use of umbrellas in her work seems moot. It's like Genzken to tantalize with inklings

of particular import, which slip away when you try to parse them.

Nevertheless, she was creative and gamely independent from early on. She studied film and acted in high school, and learned photography at a design college. The MOMA show includes many wonderfully fresh photographs of buildings and crowds in New York, a city Genzken has loved since her first visit, in 1960. In 1969, she took the entrance exam to the University of Fine Arts, in Hamburg, for which she was handed a sheet of paper, drawing tools, and scissors, to show what she could do. She crumpled the paper and threw it on the table. Her temerity either impressed or didn't dissuade the admissions committee, which accepted her.

Piquantly attractive, she took odd jobs as a fashion model, for money and the opportunity to travel. In 1972, her boyfriend, Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, who soon became a leading art historian and critic, encouraged her to apply to the Düsseldorf Art Academy, where his friend Gerhard Richter was teaching. There she absorbed influences of American minimalist and conceptual art, in particular the phenomenological aesthetics of Bruce Nauman. (She had an epiphany about the nature of space, she has said, while performing an exercise conceived by Nauman: lie on the floor for half an hour and imagine sinking into it.) She was also inspired by Russian Constructivism, especially the graphics and the architectural schemes of El Lissitzky. In 1982, she and Richter married.

Genzken knew Andreas Baader, of the Baader-Meinhof terrorist gang, who had been a schoolmate of Buchloh's. It seems that she influenced Richter to make his suite of paintings "October 18, 1977" (1988), about the deaths in prison of Baader, Ulrike Meinhof, and two other gang members. Genzken and Richter's marriage—they divorced in 1993—was marked by obsessive discussion of German political turmoil. During those years, she created a series of works by prevailing on "a very nice doctor," she

has said, who “was drinking, like me,” to take X-rays of her head as she drank, smoked, and laughed. Even in distress, she could muster a rigorous focus on her art.

Genzken’s first mature works, starting in 1974, are slender, gently curved forms in painted wood, oval in cross-section, and as long as twenty feet. Made with the help of a physics student, using a computer program, and a craftsman, they are paeans to precision, as is Genzken’s one readymade sculpture, from 1982, which is a touchstone in the show: a handsome multiband radio. Fascinated by high-tech audio gear, Genzken said that “sculpture must be at least as modern.” Later, she rendered radios in concrete, with metal antennae.

Throughout the eighties, she fashioned plaster and concrete sculptures resembling the walls and the recesses of ruined buildings, surely invoking memories of bomb devastation in Hamburg and Berlin. The pieces are little more than two or three feet high, but in the show, mounted at eye level on welded-steel tables, they loom. They are some of the most melancholy things I have ever seen. And yet, after prolonged viewing, every crack, dent, and crumbling texture seems specific and intended, as if destruction could be inflicted with finesse. The same sense of exactitude in disorder attends Genzken’s shift, in the nineties, to wild-look-ing assemblages.

Until 2005, when Genzken joined the David Zwirner gallery, her most substantial New York show was “Fuck the Bauhaus (New Buildings for New York),” at an artist-run space, AC Project Room,

in 2000. That exhibition, most of which has been reconfigured at MOMA, consisted of architectural models made of refuse—including pizza boxes and oyster shells—and of colored sheets of Plexiglas, swatches of fabric, and toy cars. Spiced by gossip about the artist’s fecklessness, which, on an earlier visit to the city, had caused her to be ousted from a series of hotels, starting at the Waldorf and ending in a youth hostel, the show is legendary; Laura Hoptman, a curator of the MOMA show, told me that art-world types who didn’t see it (including me) are tempted to pretend, or may even believe, that they did. At first glance, the work appears frivolous. A small, motorized, hula-dancing doll gyrates next to one pedestal. But, again, look long. The flimsy maquettes, barely held together with tape, conjure deep as well as farcical thoughts about architecture’s history and its potential. A red Plexiglas tower draped with a rainbow plastic Slinky suggests a skyscraper wearing its wiring on the outside. A propeller on top of another tower expresses its upward aspiration. What might we build if, at a whim, we could build anything? Getting to the point of taking Genzken seriously requires an effort of trust, but the payoff is exhilarating. It wasn’t lost on young New York artists, including Rachel Harrison, the current star of Unmonumental sculpture. “Fuck the Bauhaus” proved to be the starter’s gun for a movement.

Genzken’s inspirations since the eighties have swung between the technomusic scene in Berlin—as with dangling clusters of kitchen utensils, splashed with pink spray paint, entitled “Gay Babies”

(1997)—and traumatic world events. War comes and goes as a theme, most explicitly in “Empire/Vampire, Who Kills Death” (2003), a group of chaotic assemblages—toy soldiers, photographs, household objects, fabrics, foil, mirrors, splurges of paint—made in response both to 9/11, which she witnessed firsthand, on a visit to New York, and to the Iraq war. Unusually, for Genzken, it feels out of artistic control. I suspect a conflict between her antiwar sentiment and her long identification with the energies of American culture. The effect is less expressive than purgative, but “The American Room” (2003–04) is fully grounded. An executive desk, topped by a sculpture of Scrooge McDuck, is flanked with American eagles, artificial flowers, various bric-a-brac, and other signs of prideful complacency. The work’s critical bite is softened by unmistakable tones of amusement and relish. Also, it’s gorgeous.

Genzken reconsidered 9/11 in “Ground Zero” (2008), a fanciful non-entry in a contest for proposed building designs for the site. Jerry-built structures of shiny, cheap materials, on wheeled plinths—a memorial tower, a church, a hospital, a disco, a car park, and a fashion store, with a twisted metal tower of glowing light fixtures thrown in—suggest wreckage sprung to life. The spirit of the work is a kind of anguished buoyancy, optimistic against steep odds. Genzken erases the distinction that T. S. Eliot thought must be strictly maintained between “the man who suffers and the mind which creates.” It may be hard, at first, to believe that you are in good hands with this unquiet soul. But put it to a test. You’ll see. ♦

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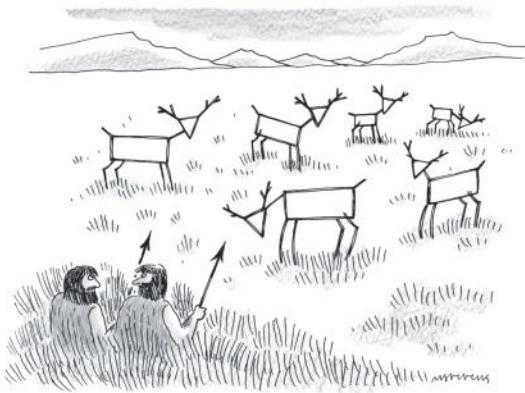
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CARTOON CAPTION CONTEST

Each week, we provide a cartoon in need of a caption. You, the reader, submit a caption, we choose three finalists, and you vote for your favorite. Caption submissions for this week's cartoon, by Michael Maslin, must be received by Sunday, December 1st. The finalists in the November 18th contest appear below. We will announce the winner, and the finalists in this week's contest, in the December 16th issue. The winner receives a signed print of the cartoon. Any resident of the United States, Canada (except Quebec), Australia, the United Kingdom, or the Republic of Ireland age eighteen or over can enter or vote. To do so, and to read the complete rules, visit newyorker.com/captioncontest.

THE WINNING CAPTION



"I'm really more of a painter-gatherer."
Greg Dobbins, Arlington, Va.



THE FINALISTS

"On second thought, let's skip the play."
Tom Tipton, St. Louis, Mo.

"I look like five bucks."
Douglas Hill, Los Angeles, Calif.

*"Oh, my God, it's finally happened. I've turned
into my forefather."*
Beth Levine, Stamford, Conn.

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