

PRICE \$7.99

THE NEW YORKER

JAN. 12, 2015



jorge colombo

BOSE
Better sound through research

When I won my first major, I listened to the same song every day on my way to the course. It played in my head over and over all the way around the course. So whenever I want to remember that winning feeling,

all I need
to hear is
that song.

Rory McIlroy
Professional Golfer

Our first in-ear noise cancelling headphones – for better sound every day, everywhere you go. Try them risk-free for 30 days with free shipping.* Ask how you can make easy payments with no interest charges from Bose.† And lose yourself in your music.

Bose®
QuietComfort®20
Acoustic Noise Cancelling® headphones

1-800-699-BOSE • Bose.com/Rory

*Risk-free refers to 30-day trial only, requires product purchase and does not include return shipping.

†Bose payment plan available on orders of \$299-\$1500 paid by major credit card. Down payment is 1/6 the product price plus applicable tax and shipping charges, charged when your order is shipped. Then, your credit card will be billed for 5 equal monthly installments beginning approximately one month from the date your order is shipped, with 0% APR and no interest charges from Bose. Credit card terms and interest may apply. U.S. residents only. Limit one active financing program per customer.

Financing and free shipping offer not to be combined with other offers or applied to previous purchases, and subject to change without notice. Delivery is subject to product availability. ©2015 Bose Corporation. The distinctive design of the two-tone swirl headphone cord is a trademark of Bose Corporation. Delivery is subject to product availability. CC015695

TAKE THE
NEW YEAR LESS
SERIOUSLY

NEW
CARTOONS!

NEW
FEATURES!!

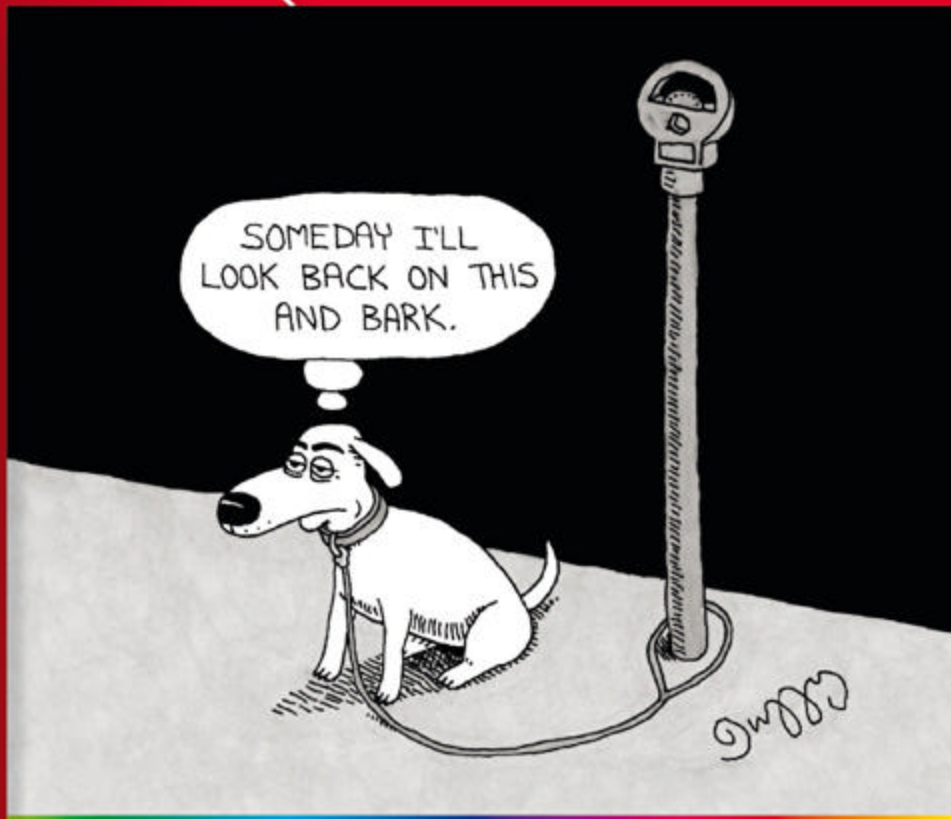
NEW
EXCLAMATION
POINTS!!!

OVER
250
CARTOONS

THE
NEW
YORKER

CARTOONS OF THE YEAR 2014

PLUS: THE TEN BEST CAPTION CONTESTS BY YOU



THE
DIRTY LITTLE
SECRET OF
COMIC BOOKS
SHANNON WHEELER

ROZ CHAST
WHAT
DOES GOD
REALLY
LOOK LIKE?

WHAT DO THE
CARTOONISTS
REALLY
LOOK LIKE?
PHOTO PORTFOLIO

DISPLAY UNTIL FEBRUARY 16, 2015



A CONDE NAST SPECIAL EDITION

**AVAILABLE ON
NEWSSTANDS NOW**
AND ON TABLETS AND SMARTPHONES



SPONSORED BY

Prudential
Bring Your Challenges[®]

THE NEW YORKER

JANUARY 12, 2015

	7	GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN
	19	THE TALK OF THE TOWN <i>David Remnick on the Mayor and the police; Renzo Piano rethinks Rome; Eddie Huang's hoop dreams; music-school try-ons; James Surowiecki on America's housing addiction.</i>
ADAM GOPNIK	26	THE OUTSIDE GAME <i>An American sociologist in Paris.</i>
YONI BRENNER	32	THE EIGHT SERIOUS RELATIONSHIPS OF HERCULES
JONATHAN KALB	34	GIVE ME A SMILE <i>Living with facial paralysis.</i>
MARGARET TALBOT	38	THE TALKING CURE <i>An urban experiment to give babies a better life.</i>
JULIA IOFFE	48	REMOTE CONTROL <i>Can an exile persuade Russians to topple Putin?</i>
		FICTION
ROBERT COOVER	58	"THE CRABAPPLE TREE"
		THE CRITICS
		POP MUSIC
SASHA FRERE-JONES	62	<i>D'Angelo's "Black Messiah."</i>
		BOOKS
MALCOLM GLADWELL	65	<i>Steven Brill's "America's Bitter Pill."</i>
	71	<i>Briefly Noted</i>
		THE CURRENT CINEMA
DAVID DENBY	72	<i>"A Most Violent Year."</i>
		POEMS
ELIZABETH WILLIS	30	<i>"About the Author"</i>
JOSH BELL	44	<i>"Sci-Fi Violence"</i>
		COVER
JORGE COLOMBO		<i>"Limited Visibility"</i>

DRAWINGS Benjamin Schwartz, Julia Suits, Corey Pandolph, Michael Maslin, Lee Lorenz, Frank Cotham, William Haefeli, David Sipress, Michael Crawford, Liam Francis Walsh, Tom Cheney, P.C. Vey, Edward Steed **SPOTS** Christoph Abbrederis



MOMS DON'T TAKE SICK DAYS.



MOMS TAKE



THE NON-DROWSY, COUGHING, ACHING, FEVER, SORE THROAT, STUFFY HEAD, **POWER THROUGH YOUR DAY, WITH A COLD, MEDICINE.**

THE NIGHTTIME, SNIFFLING, SNEEZING, COUGHING, ACHING, FEVER, **BEST SLEEP WITH A COLD, MEDICINE.**



Use as directed. Read each label. Keep out of reach of children.
© Procter & Gamble, Inc. 2014

WorldMags.net



CURRENCY

STORIES AND ANALYSIS OF WALL STREET
AND THE WORLD OF BUSINESS

"At this point, a tech company having a C.E.O. who opposes gay marriage is not all that different from a company in 1973 having a C.E.O. who donated money to fight interracial marriage. The C.E.O. would still have been on the wrong side of history."

—"How Mozilla Lost Its C.E.O.,"
James Surowiecki

www.newyorker.com/business/currency



NEWYORKER.COM
PUBLISHES MORE THAN FIFTEEN
ORIGINAL STORIES A DAY

CONDÉ NAST

CONTRIBUTORS

JULIA IOFFE ("REMOTE CONTROL," P. 48) has written about Russia for many publications, including *The New Yorker*, where she published a profile of Alexey Navalny; *Tablet*, where she wrote about Mikhail Khodorkovsky when he was still in jail; and *The New Republic*, where she was a senior editor until last month.

MARGARET TALBOT ("THE TALKING CURE," P. 38) is a staff writer and the author of "The Entertainer: Movies, Magic, and My Father's Twentieth Century."

JONATHAN KALB ("GIVE ME A SMILE," P. 34) teaches theatre at Hunter College. His most recent book is "Great Lengths: Seven Works of Marathon Theater."

ADAM GOPNIK ("THE OUTSIDE GAME," P. 26), a staff writer since 1987, is the author of eight books, including "Paris to the Moon" and "The Table Comes First."

YONI BRENNER (SHOUTS & MURMURS, P. 32) writes for film and television, and has contributed humor pieces to the magazine since 2007.

JIAYANG FAN (THE TALK OF THE TOWN, P. 22) is on the editorial staff of *The New Yorker*.

ROBERT COOVER (FICTION, P. 58), who has published more than twenty books of fiction, is the author of, most recently, "The Brunist Day of Wrath," a sequel to his first book, "The Origin of the Brunists."

JOSH BELL (POEM, P. 44) is Briggs Copeland Lecturer at Harvard University. He is the author of a collection of poems, "No Planets Strike."

MALCOLM GLADWELL (BOOKS, P. 65) has published five books, including "David and Goliath: Underdogs, Misfits, and the Art of Battling Giants."

DAVID DENBY (THE CURRENT CINEMA, P. 72) is a staff writer. He is working on a book about reading literature in high school.

JORGE COLOMBO (COVER) is an illustrator, photographer, and graphic designer, and the author of "New York: Finger Paintings by Jorge Colombo."

NEWYORKER.COM

**EVERYTHING IN THE MAGAZINE, AND MORE
THAN FIFTEEN ORIGINAL STORIES A DAY.**

ALSO:

DAILY COMMENT / CULTURAL COMMENT: Analysis of what's new by *George Packer*, *Sarah Larson*, and others.

ARCHIVE: Every magazine story since 2007, in easy-to-read text.

AMY DAVIDSON: Coverage of war, sports, and everything in between.

ELEMENTS: Dispatches from the worlds of science and technology.

PODCASTS: Weekly episodes of *Out Loud* and the *Political Scene*, featuring *New Yorker* writers and editors. Plus, the monthly fiction and poetry podcasts.

VIDEO: New and original videos each week, at newyorker.com/video.

HUMOR: A daily *Shouts & Murmurs*, plus a new cartoon every day and *Andy Borowitz's* blog.

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

THE MAIL

THE BLOOD-TEST BUSINESS

The utility of the Theranos blood-testing technology that Ken Auletta writes about is limited to convenience and reduced cost (“Blood, Simpler,” December 15th). These benefits are important, but Elizabeth Holmes appears to believe that her company also empowers people to make decisions about their health based on lab results. This would be true if the clinical significance of a lab test were self-evident, but this is not the case. Accurate interpretation of a lab test is based on much more information than simply the normal value that is supplied next to the result; such judgment requires an understanding of, among other things, biochemistry, anatomy, and pharmacology in the context of someone’s known medical conditions. Most people have trouble getting beyond the vague nomenclature of “bad cholesterol” versus “good cholesterol,” so how will they interpret a sodium level of 139, a fasting glucose level of 105, or a TSH of 6.1? Holmes may be changing the way that blood samples are drawn and processed, but her offer of self-directed medicine through lab-test results confuses raw information with clinical wisdom.

*Josh Johnson, M.D.
Lake Oswego, Ore.*

Auletta’s article notes that Theranos has submitted its lab-developed tests for F.D.A. approval. That’s all well and good, but many academic and community-based clinical laboratories question the F.D.A.’s authority to regulate clinical-laboratory services provided by physicians and allied health personnel. The F.D.A.’s new proposals for oversight may not address expressed concerns about the secrecy behind Theranos testing; it would, however, likely slow advances in peer-reviewed clinical diagnostics and substantially increase the cost to taxpayers of clinical-laboratory services. The American Medical Association, along with fifty other institutions—including the De-

partment of Laboratory Medicine at the University of Washington, where I work—sent a letter last month requesting that the F.D.A. reconsider its guidelines for regulating clinical-laboratory services and engage in a public process to create new rules that will address legitimate concerns about diagnostic tests offered directly to the public, without stifling innovation driven by clinical laboratories that practice medicine.

*Brian H. Shirts, M.D.
Seattle, Wash.*

HOCKEY’S STARS

As a Canadian, I was pleasantly surprised by Ben McGrath’s article about P. K. Subban and his impact on my country’s premier sport (“The Ice Breaker,” December 15th). McGrath mentions Josh Ho-Sang, who has much in common with Subban. As a season-ticket holder to the Windsor Spitfires, in the Ontario Hockey League, I had the privilege of watching Ho-Sang, the “human highlight reel” until he was inexplicably traded away, this fall. There were rumors of locker-room unrest, but he certainly could entertain with his end-to-end rushes—though they weren’t always successful, the fans always rose to their feet. I also appreciated the reference to the death of Jean Béliveau, the iconic face of the Montreal Canadiens for many years and for many Stanley Cups. His funeral Mass, in December, which was televised for hours, resembled a state funeral. It was held in the massive Mary Queen of the World Cathedral, in Montreal, and attended by not only members of the hockey world elite but also the Prime Minister and other national leaders.

*Fred Mitchell
Kingsville, Ont.*

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.

THE MARIINSKY AT BAM

MARIINSKY THEATRE, ST. PETERSBURG
MUSICAL DIRECTION BY VALERY GERGIEV

BAM AND THE MARIINSKY PRESENT

OPERA
THE ENCHANTED WANDERER
JAN 14

DANCE
SWAN LAKE
JAN 15, 16
& 21—23

DANCE
CINDERELLA
JAN 17, 18 & 20

DANCE
CHOPIN:
DANCES FOR PIANO
JAN 24 & 25

BAM.org / 718.636.4100
Tickets start at \$30

BAM engagement made possible by
MARIINSKY THEATRE OF ST. PETERSBURG

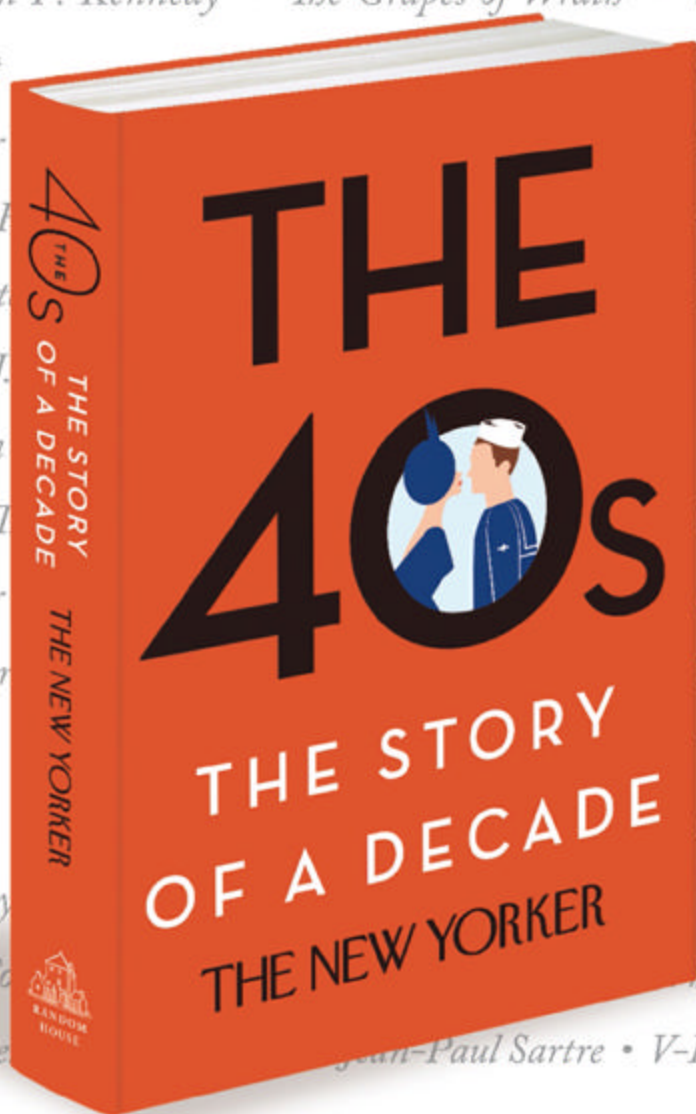
Philippine Partners of the Mariinsky Theatre
SHERBANK VTB
Yuko Cosmetics

Leadership support for Mariinsky Residency at BAM provided by Facebook Verizon

Major support for the Mariinsky Residency at BAM provided by

HISTORY IN REAL TIME AS TOLD BY THE NEW YORKER

D Day • Albert Einstein • Truman Defeats Dewey • Hiroshima • Death of a Salesman • Miss America • The Berlin Airlift • Works Progress Administration • The Bicycle Thief • T. S. Eliot • The Red Scare Lieutenant John F. Kennedy • The Grapes of Wrath • Walter Winchell Nazi Art Theft • Jim Crow • Cold War • Eleanor Roosevelt • Lassie • The Blitz • W. I. Auden • HUAC Rockefeller Center • Casablanca • Le Corbusier • J. Edgar Hoover Duke Ellington • John Cheever Walt Disney • T. United Nations Ready-to-Wear • Elizabeth Bishop Norman Mailer • Truman Doctrine The Lottery • Nuremberg Trials E. B. White • Leonard Bernstein His Girl Friday • George Orwell Edith Piaf • From the Bell Tolls Langston Hughes • Jean-Paul Sartre • V-E Day • NATO



WITH NEW PERSPECTIVES FROM

Jill Lepore, George Packer, David Remnick, Zadie Smith, and many more.

A RANDOM  HOUSE HARDCOVER AND eBook

WorldMags.net



GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN

JANUARY 2015 WEDNESDAY 7TH THURSDAY 8TH FRIDAY 9TH SATURDAY 10TH SUNDAY 11TH MONDAY 12TH TUESDAY 13TH

IN 2009, ANTHONY MCGILL, then a principal clarinetist with the Metropolitan Opera Orchestra, garnered international attention for his performance at the inauguration of President Barack Obama; the young conductor Alan Gilbert also received a big boost that year, beginning his tenure as the New York Philharmonic's music director. This week, McGill, who was recently named the principal clarinetist of the Philharmonic, makes his debut as a soloist with the orchestra in the visionary Clarinet Concerto by the Danish composer Carl Nielsen, whose music Gilbert conducts with expressive fervor and technical aplomb.

DANCE | MOVIES
ART | NIGHT LIFE
ABOVE & BEYOND
CLASSICAL MUSIC
THE THEATRE
FOOD & DRINK



Instead of setting movement physically on his dancers, Charlip sent them drawings of poses.

PUSHING THE ENVELOPE

Remy Charlip's "Air Mail Dances," restaged.

REMY CHARLIP (1929-2012) was a bright flame, morally and artistically, in the conflagration that was American modern dance in the nineteen-sixties. He was a founding member of the Merce Cunningham Dance Company, and he eventually ran a company of his own. But Charlip's fame as a dance-maker rests on his invention of "Air Mail Dances," in which, instead of setting movement physically on his dancers, he sent them drawings of poses—the high points, as it were—and let them fill in the rest. Once, in an interview, he recalled the first of these dances. He was in Paris, he said, sleeping off jet lag, when someone he knew called him and asked him to make a piece for her. Sure, he said, and went back to sleep. A while later, a fellow-choreographer said to him how nice it was that they were going to have dances on the same program. "Yeah?" he said:

Then I remembered. So I sent her a postcard of an André Kertész photograph of an eccentric dancer who was lying on a couch with arms and legs akimbo, and I wrote, "This is the first position of the dance. If you want more call me collect in Paris and I'll send you the rest of it." I got a whole bunch of French postcards and took drawings from them.... I did a whole set of positions, of movements, signs, like of a rainbow, which is a complicated one, where the fingers move delicately down on a diagonal, that's the sign for "rain," and then the fingers spread up wide, making a large curve, and that's the "bow." So I gave her gestures that I thought were very beautiful and between the gestures I said do a turn. And I left it up to her.

He gave her the dots; she connected them. Or, to use his metaphor, "I'm like a traffic cop, making sure that people don't bump into each other. Unless they want to." The figures in the drawings, though they look a little like Michelin Men, are lovely. More important, the "Air Mail Dances" are anti-authoritarian, minimalist, tender, and fun: pure sixties. At a noon concert on Friday, Jan. 23, Charlip's old friends will restage his "Towel Dance," "Contra Dance," "Falling Dance," and others, at the 92nd Street Y.

—Joan Acocella



DANCE

BODYTRAFFIC / Doug Elkins Choreography, etc.

The two companies alternate nights at the Joyce. BODYTRAFFIC's tripartite program includes a new work, "Dust," by Hofesh Shechter, a militaristic, dystopian vision of conformism and the dehumanizing effects of power. In contrast, Doug Elkins crafts sly, sophisticated riffs on a variety of dance styles, from voguing to Scottish dance and hip-hop. His excellent ensemble will perform a double bill consisting of a new piece, "Hapless Bizarre," that draws on the physical comedy of vaudeville, and his signature work, "Mo(or)town/Redux," a smooth retelling of "Othello" that is also an homage to José Limón's classic "Moor's Pavane." (175 Eighth Ave., at 19th St. 212-242-0800. Jan. 6-11.)

COIL 2015 / Molly Lieber and Eleanor Smith

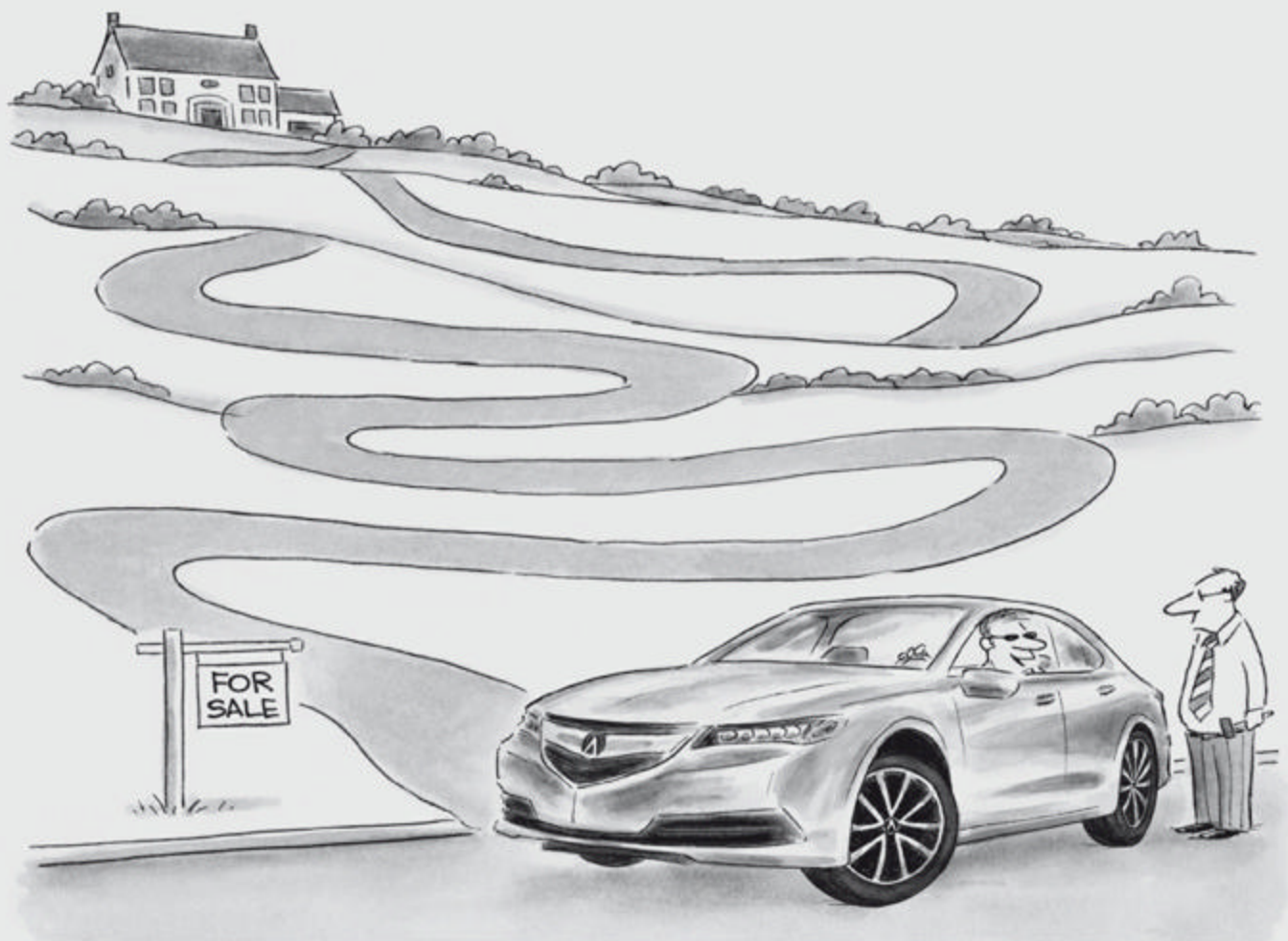
Strikingly articulate dancers as individuals, these two young women make an even more striking duo. Unusually attuned to each other, they make dances that suggest a tumultuous relationship underneath a mostly formal surface. Their new piece, "Rude World," is the final installment in a triptych of duets that started with "Beautiful Bone," in 2012. (The Chocolate Factory, 5-49 49th Ave., Long Island City. 866-811-4111. Jan. 7-12.)

16th Contemporary Dance Showcase: Japan • East Asia

This program offers an annual portal to the East Asian contemporary-dance scene. The selections, routinely eclectic, have become increasingly high-tech. That trend holds for Nobuyuki Hanabusa's "Newton," a body-coordinated light show, though other entries, such as Kaori Seki's "Marmont" and Shang-Chi Sun's "Traverse," concentrate on corporeal sculpture or whiplash speed. Mikiko Kawamura's "Alphard" explores the continuing prevalence of street-dance vocabulary. (Japan Society, 333 E. 47th St. 212-832-1155. Jan. 9-10.)

New York Theatre Ballet

The chamber-sized ensemble offers several small-scale ballets, old and

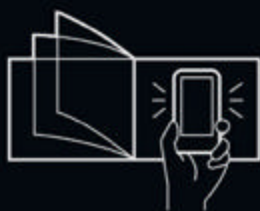


"HOW MUCH FOR JUST THE DRIVEWAY?"

Introducing the All-New 2015 Acura TLX

Experience the 2015 Acura TLX's available Super Handling All-Wheel Drive™ right now. Download the free Drive the TLX app and take a Thrill Ride by scanning the cartoon above.

acura.com/TLX



Download on the
App Store

ANDROID APP ON
Google play

ACURA

TLX IT'S THAT KIND OF THRILL

new. "Short Memory," in which the choreographer Pam Tanowitz twists and pokes at the precisions of ballet—with help from the piano music of Lou Harrison and Henry Cowell—is one of the company's finest and funniest new commissions. "Rugged Flourish," a septet for a man and six women, set to Aaron Copland, was made by the British modern choreographer Richard Alston. The program also includes works by Jerome Robbins, Matthew Neenan, and Sallie Wilson. (92nd Street Y, Lexington Ave. at 92nd St. 212-415-5500. Jan. 9-11.)

American Realness Festival

Often insular and cliquish, this festival has nevertheless become New York's

preëminent sampler of boundary-pushing performance bordering on dance. Among this year's notable premières are the wild man Keith Hennessy's riffs on appropriation, with his take on "Le Sacre du Printemps"; Tere O'Connor's examination of the formal repercussions of repressed sexuality, in "Undersweet," a duet for Michael Ingle and Silas Riener; and the second part of Miguel Gutierrez's mid-career meditation "Age & Beauty." See americanrealness.com for a full schedule. (Abrons Arts Center, 466 Grand St. 212-352-3101. Jan. 8-13. Through Jan. 18.)

Alison Chase / Performance

Pilobolus, the popular troupe of

dancer-acrobats, was born in a Dartmouth College dance class in the nineteen-seventies. Alison Chase was the teacher. She also founded Momix, in 1980, and this latest company, in 2009. For its New York debut, she brings "Drowned," a multimedia primitivist fable about what happens to an innocent man found on a beach by village girls, and "Devil Got My Woman," in which another naïve man is seduced all over some scaffolding. (Miller Theatre, Broadway at 116th St. 212-854-7799. Jan. 9-11.)

Nrityagram / Metropolitan Museum of Art

The Indian classical-dance ensemble Nrityagram presents an evening of

devotional dance at the Temple of Dendur. After more than two decades of dancing together in the Odissi style, Surupa Sen and Bijayini Satpathy have achieved complete aesthetic harmony—at times they can appear to be two sides of the same dancer, or even to merge into a single being. Accompanied by their musical ensemble, they will perform solos and duets, choreographed by Sen, in front of the Egyptian temple from 15 B.C. The two performances, co-presented by the World Music Institute, are free with admission to the museum. (Metropolitan Museum, Fifth Ave. at 82nd St. 212-570-3949. Jan. 10.)



OPENING

BELOVED SISTERS

A historical drama about the romantic relationship between the dramatist Friedrich Schiller and the sisters Caroline and Charlotte von Lengefeld. Directed by Dominik Graf. In German. Opening Jan. 9. (In limited release.)

PREDESTINATION

The Spierig Brothers directed this science-fiction thriller, about a secret agent (Ethan Hawke) who travels through time in pursuit of a criminal. Opening Jan. 9. (In limited release.)

THE WORLD MADE STRAIGHT

A coming-of-age story, based on a novel by Ron Rash, about an Appalachian teen-ager who becomes fascinated with Civil War lore. Directed by David Burris; starring Noah Wyle. Opening Jan. 9. (In limited release.)

REVIVALS AND FESTIVALS

Titles in bold are reviewed.

ANTHOLOGY FILM ARCHIVES

"Robert Herridge: TV's Forgotten Auteur." Jan. 8 at 7:30 and Jan. 11 at 5:15. "All the King's Men" (1958, Sidney Lumet). • Jan. 10 at 6:15 and Jan. 12 at 7:30. "Three Plays by Tennessee Williams" (1958, Lumet). • The films of Richard Sarafian. Jan. 11 at 8: "Andy" (1965). • Jan. 13 at 6:45 and Jan. 14 at 9:15. "Vanishing

NOW PLAYING

American Sniper

Clint Eastwood's new film is a devastating pro-war movie and a devastating antiwar movie, a sombre celebration of a warrior's happiness and a sorrowful lament over a warrior's alienation and misery. Eastwood, working with the screenwriter Jason Hall, has adapted the 2012 best-seller by the Navy SEAL sharpshooter Chris Kyle, who is played here by Bradley Cooper. The film is devoted to Kyle's life as a son, husband, father, and, most of all, righteous assassin—a man always sure he is defending his country in Iraq against what he calls "savages." Perched on a rooftop in Ramadi or Sadr City, he's methodical and imperturbable, and he hardly ever misses. For the role of Kyle, Cooper got all beefed up—from the looks of it, by beer as much as by iron (it's intentionally not a movie-star body). With his brothers in the field, Kyle is convivial, profane, and funny; at home with his loving wife (played by Sienna Miller, who's excellent), he's increasingly withdrawn, dead-eyed, enraptured only by the cinema of war that's playing in his mind. As Kyle and his men rampage through the rubble of Iraqi cities, the camera records exactly what's needed to dramatize a given event and nothing more. There's no waste, never a moment's loss of concentration, definition, or speed; the atmosphere of the cities, and life on the streets, gets packed into the purposeful action shots. Cinematography by Tom Stern. —*David Denby* (Reviewed in our issue of 12/22 & 29/14.) (In wide release.)

Annie

Quvenzhané Wallis, playing the plucky young heroine, fills the screen with poised energy and rarely oversmiles in the director Will Gluck's updating of the musical. The script (by Gluck and Aline Brosh McKenna) transposes the original Depression-era story to current-day New York, where Will Stacks (Jamie Foxx), a telecom

mogul, is running for mayor but can't overcome his public image as an out-of-touch plutocrat. When he chances to rescue the headstrong Annie from speeding traffic, his popularity soars; when her story, as a foster child in a group home, becomes known, his campaign managers (Rose Byrne and Bobby Cannavale) urge Will to take her in—until the race is won. The sentimental story of their growing bond and the obstacles posed to it by backroom dealings is familiar turf, but it plays out on unusual ground: real-life New York locations. Though Gluck's musical numbers lack high style, they capture the spice of urban sights, uptown and downtown alike, and offer a droll paean to the power of social media. The vigorous display of good feelings and comforting resolutions has an unusually effervescent sincerity, even if the rags-to-riches wish fulfillment leaps over all the hard knocks. As the frustrated foster mother, Cameron Diaz tears into the song "Little Girls" with memorable abandon. —*Richard Brody* (In wide release.)

Inherent Vice

The hero of the new Paul Thomas Anderson film is Doc Sportello (Joaquin Phoenix), a hairy-cheeked, dope-wreathed private investigator who lives near a beach. The period, unsurprisingly, is 1970. Doc's latest task is to trace a batch of missing persons: Mickey Wolfmann (Eric Roberts), a property developer; Mickey's squeeze, Shasta Fay Hepworth (Katherine Waterston), who used to go out with Doc; and a wandering stoner, Coy Harlingen (Owen Wilson), who couldn't find himself in a mirror. Somehow, everything is connected, although, since the movie is adapted from a novel by Thomas Pynchon, there is a strong chance that the connections will never be explained, let alone straightened out. Subplots overwhelm plots, and one gaudily named character after another—Sauncho Smilax (Benicio del Toro), Dr. Blatnoy (Martin Short), Japonica Fenway (Sasha

Pieterse), and Petunia Leeway (Maya Rudolph)—stops by and adds to the mix. Even as the story caves in, though, what binds the movie together is Anderson's feel for the drifting, smokelike sadness in Pynchon, and the sudden shafts of bright comedy; the least inhibited performance is that of Josh Brolin, playing not a hippie but a dirty cop called Bigfoot, who sucks on chocolate-coated bananas. With Reese Witherspoon, as a deputy D.A.; armed with a business suit and coiffed hair, she's a dead ringer for Tippi Hedren. —*Anthony Lane* (12/15/14) (In wide release.)

Let There Be Light

John Huston's documentary about traumatized Second World War veterans recovering at a U.S. War Department psychiatric hospital sensitizes viewers to the anguish of combat far more profoundly than do battle films that wallow in gore and mayhem. It's a masterpiece of unmediated emotion. Using three cameras mostly locked in place, Huston recorded the patients as they went through hypnosis, narco-synthesis, and individual and group therapies. With images of a soldier who can't help darting his eyes and wagging his head to catch a glimpse of enemy bombers, even though he knows he's in a U.S. hospital, not a foxhole in Normandy, Huston captures the full horror of war. The patients never play to the lens, even as a few sketch out complete life stories. The film becomes a moving document of the social and psychological tensions that reach the surface of American life in war. Completed in 1946, it was denied release until 1981. —*Michael Sragow* (Film Society of Lincoln Center; Jan. 7.)

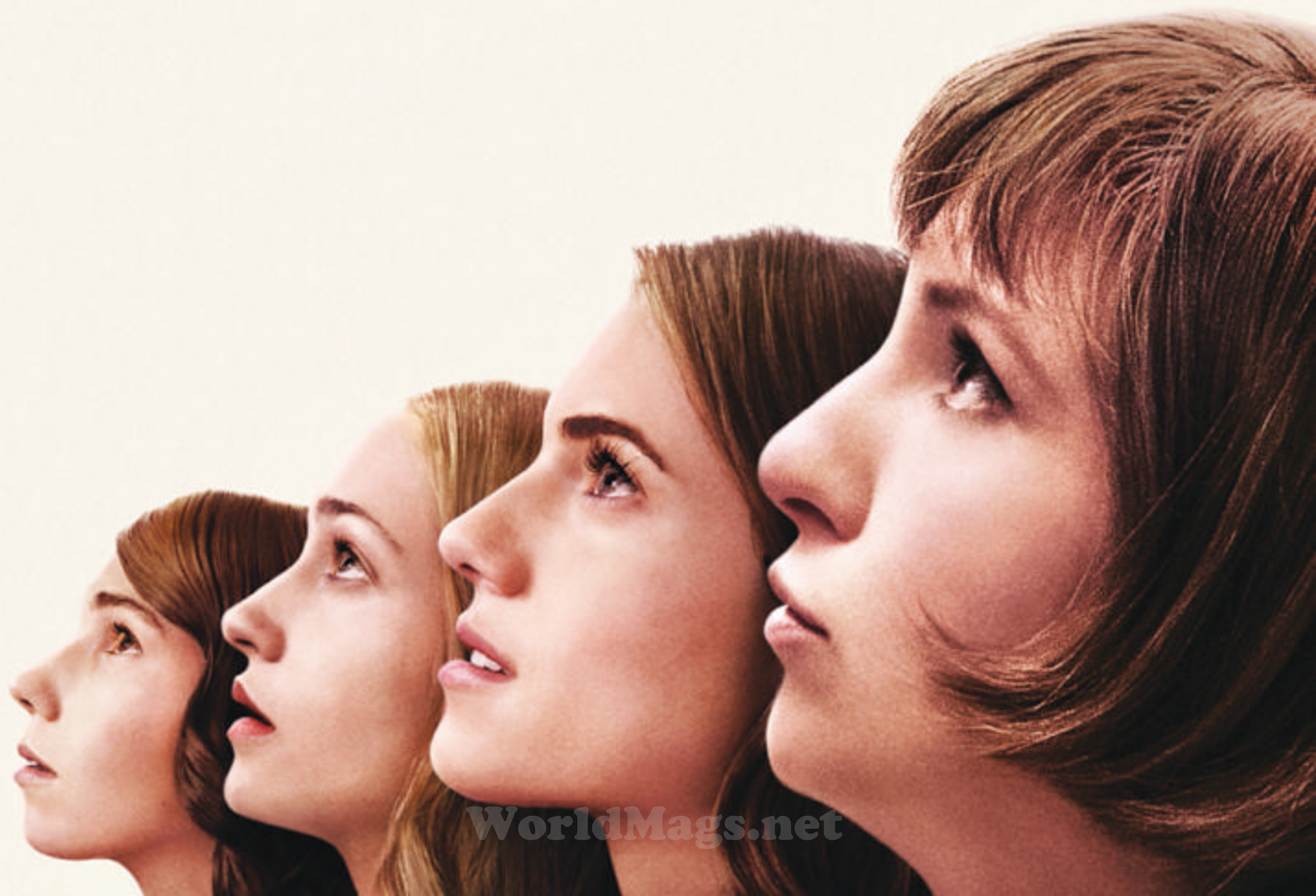
Leviathan

The new film from Andrey Zvyagintsev stars Aleksey Serebryakov as Kolya, who dwells by the sea on the Kola Peninsula, in northwest Russia. The climate is curiously temperate, but the land is spare, unforgiving, and wild:

GIRLS

SUN JAN 11 9PM **HBO**
OR WATCH IT ON **HBO GO**

Nowhere to grow but up



HBO GO is only accessible in the US and certain US territories. ©2011 Home Box Office, Inc. All Rights Reserved. HBO® and related marks and service marks are the property of Home Box Office, Inc.

WorldMags.net

Point" (1971). • Jan. 13 at 9:15 and Jan. 14 at 6:45: "The Man Who Loved Cat Dancing" (1973).

BAM CINÉMATEK

Special screening. Jan. 12 at 7: "Z" (1969, Costa-Gavras), introduced by the director William Friedkin.

FILM FORUM

The films of Orson Welles. Jan. 9-10 at 9:45, Jan. 11 at 1, 4:25, and 7:50, and Jan. 12 at 12:30, 3, 6:30, and 10: "The Stranger" (1946). • Jan. 9-10 at 12:30, 2:20, 4:10, 6, and 7:50: "The Magnificent Ambersons."

FILM SOCIETY OF LINCOLN CENTER

The films of John Huston. Jan. 7 at 3:30 and 8:45: "Let There Be Light." • Jan. 9 at 1:30 and Jan. 10 at 8:45: "Under the Volcano" (1984). • Jan. 9 at 4 and Jan. 10 at 6:45: "Sinful Davey" (1969). • Jan. 9 at 6:15: "Reflections in a Golden Eye" (1967).

FRENCH INSTITUTE ALLIANCE FRANÇAISE

"Eccentrics of French Comedy," Jan. 13 at 4 and 7:30: "Poison."

IFC CENTER

In revival. Jan. 9-11 at 11 A.M.: "The Major and the Minor" (1942, Billy Wilder).

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

The films of Robert Altman. Jan. 8 at 4: "Kansas City" (1996). • Jan. 8 and Jan. 13 at 7: "Dr. T & the Women" (2000). • Jan. 9 at 4: "The Gingerbread Man" (1998). • Jan. 10 at 4: "M*A*S*H" (1970). • Jan. 10 and Jan. 14 at 7: "The Company" (2003).

MUSEUM OF THE MOVING IMAGE

"First Look 2015," Jan. 10 at 2: "The Guests" (2013, Ken Jacobs). • Jan. 10 at 2 and Jan. 11 at 5:30: "Toronto Filmmakers: MFFF and Sofia Bohdanowicz," screenings followed by a discussion with the filmmakers Bohdanowicz, Antoine Bourges, and Kazik Radwanski, moderated by the critic Adam Nayman. • Jan. 11 at 2: "Charlie's Country" (2013, Rolf de Heer). • Jan. 11 at 5: "Before We Go" (2014, Jorge León). • Jan. 11 at 7:30: "Hard to Be a God" (2014, Aleksei German).



MOVIE OF THE WEEK

A video discussion of Michelangelo Antonioni's "The Eclipse," from 1962, in our digital edition and online.

a good match for the roughness of our hero. He is a hard drinker, but no one here drinks softly—not the cops, not the visiting lawyer from Moscow (Vladimir Vdovichenkov), and least of all the local mayor (Roman Madyanov), who tries to bully Kolya into giving up his home for redevelopment. In amassing these small parochial lives, Zvyagintsev hints at something rotten in the body politic—scaly with corruption, pickled in alcohol, and inflamed by the rhetoric of the Church. Yet the movie is neither spiteful nor disorderly; the camera stays unshakably calm. Not since Zvyagintsev's debut feature, "The Return," has his litany of images struck home with such persistent power. One relieving grace note: if there is equilibrium here, or a sense of natural justice, it belongs to women. Would the nation not be safer in their hands? In Russian.—A.L. (1/5/15) (In limited release.)

Li'l Quinquin

The title of Bruno Dumont's new film—first shown as a three-hour-plus television miniseries—is the nickname of a taciturn fireplug of a boy in a farm village on the northern coast of France. On the first day of summer vacation, he takes his girlfriend, Eve, and another pair of friends on a bicycle excursion in pursuit of a helicopter, which airlifts the corpse of a cow from an abandoned Second World War bunker. This surrealistic vision gives rise to a moment of horror—the corpse is stuffed with human body parts—but the police investigation that results is a quiet uproar of comic bumbling. Dumont thrusts two rustic Keystone Kops into a quasi-documentary contemplation of his own home turf; he looks longingly and lovingly at the craggy landscape, which the children roam for pleasure and the officers scour for business. The nearly anthropological view of local customs—the Bastille Day festivities are extraordinarily detailed and teeming set pieces—doesn't spare the ugliness, from endemic and unchallenged racism to a heritage of violence. Yet the murder plot is of a piece with the bumptious comedy; the action seems to rise organically from the locale, and Dumont's grand yet intimate fiction fuses his inner world with the historical moment. In French.—R.B. (In limited release.)

The Magnificent Ambersons

Orson Welles's second film, from 1942, has greater depth than "Citizen Kane," though it doesn't have the driving force that might have held it together. Working from the Booth Tarkington novel, Welles achieved some great sequences of family life—intense, harrowing squabbles. Tim Holt plays the arrogant, mother-fixated son who falls from the American aristocracy to the working class; Dolores Costello, the fragile blond beauty of the silent era, is his soft, yielding mother; and, as

the nervous, bitter hysterical-spinster aunt, Agnes Moorehead is uncannily powerful, in a hyperrealistic way. (It's a classic performance.) With the amazing old Richard Bennett as the family patriarch, Joseph Cotten, Anne Baxter, and Ray Collins. The film wasn't completed in the form that Welles originally intended, and there are pictorial effects that seem scaled for a much fuller work, but even in this truncated form it's amazing and memorable. Cinematography by Stanley Cortez; editing by Robert Wise.—Pauline Kael (Film Forum; Jan. 9-10.)

Poison

The astonishing five-minute opening credit sequence of this 1951 comedy shows the writer and director Sacha Guitry behind the scenes and on the set, visiting his cast and crew and paying tribute to them in a series of epigrams and aphorisms, reflexive references and sight gags that make it a miniature masterwork in itself. The sequence sets the tone for the action that follows, a giddily cynical tale of a farmer—played by the sly and earthy Michel Simon—who wants to be rid of his wife of thirty years. She wants rid of him as well, though, and plans to do something about it. Meanwhile, when France's leading defense lawyer goes on the radio to boast of his prowess in freeing killers, the farmer gets an idea and pays him a visit. Guitry, a legendary theatrical wit, rapidly swings his cast of provincial characters between delicious cunning and delightful obliviousness, with only a passing glance at virtue. Guitry's profuse and incisive dialogue seems embossed on the screen, but he reserves a special glee for the comedy of odd juxtapositions: an elaborate scene of the bitter couple dining to the strains of a romantic ballad is exquisite in its humor and its pain alike.—R.B. (French Institute Alliance Française; Jan. 13.)

Selma

Like "Lincoln," Ava DuVernay's stirring movie avoids the lifetime-highlights strategy of standard biopics and concentrates instead on a convulsive political process—the events leading to the Voting Rights Act of 1965. President Lyndon Johnson (Tom Wilkinson), eager to move on to the War on Poverty, is pressured to change direction by Martin Luther King, Jr. (David Oyelowo), who is fighting for voting rights in the Oval Office and on the streets of Alabama. DuVernay captures King's canny and dominating resourcefulness in strategy meetings as well as the grand rhetoric of his public speeches, and Oyelowo adds a sexiness and an altered rhythm to King's speech patterns; his King is aggressive, barbed. A sequence set on the Edmund Pettus Bridge, as hundreds of protesters advance across the span and the Alabama state troopers

terrorize them with tear gas, recalls the magnificent crowd scenes from Soviet silent classics by Eisenstein and Pudovkin. With Carmen Ejogo, as Coretta Scott King; Colman Domingo, as the Reverend Ralph Abernathy; Tim Roth, as Governor George Wallace; and Oprah Winfrey, as the civil-rights activist Annie Lee Cooper. The script was written by Paul Webb and DuVernay (who is uncredited); the cinematography is by Bradford Young.—D.D. (12/22 & 29/14.) (In wide release.)

Two Days, One Night

There has been a vote in the Belgian factory where Sandra (Marion Cotillard) works. Her colleagues have accepted a bonus, on the condition that she is laid off. Now she has a single weekend in which she must convince, or beg, them to change their minds: in effect, to lay down their money for her sake. The scale of the drama may be minimal, and the action repetitive (Sandra has to go around town, ringing one doorbell after the next), but, in the hands of the Dardenne brothers, the movie somehow tautens with suspense. It is also the first time that the writer-directors have used an international star, and Cotillard rises to the occasion—or, rather, sickens, dwindles, collapses, and weeps. She is bold enough to leave us with awkward doubts about Sandra, whose mental state feels rickety, and who can seem as plaintive as she is persevering. Yet her cause is just, and once again the stripped-down style of the Dardennes conjures an air of moral persuasion denied to more sumptuous films. In French.—A.L. (1/5/15) (In limited release.)

Unbroken

An interminable, redundant, unnecessary epic devoted to suffering, suffering, suffering. The great young Irish actor Jack O'Connell stars as the American Olympic runner Louis Zamperini, who survives forty-seven days in the Pacific, on a raft, after his B-24 ditches, in 1942. Zamperini then spends three years in Japanese prison camps, where he is beaten again and again, and endures one grotesque punishment in which the entire population of prisoners, one after another, must punch him in the face. You feel like yelling "Cut!" to the director, Angelina Jolie, who confuses long scenes of sadism with truth-telling. O'Connell's tormenter is a repressed homosexual (Miyavi, the smooth-faced Japanese pop star) who loves Zamperini and can't stop attacking him—a tired trope from the Freudian Hollywood of the forties. In large set pieces, Jolie is more than competent, but the movie feels derivative and short of ideas other than the notion that endurance makes a man great. With Domhnall Gleeson and Garrett Hedlund, as fellow-prisoners.—D.D. (In wide release.)



MUSEUMS SHORT LIST
METROPOLITAN MUSEUM
"Cubism: The Leonard A. Lauder Collection."
Through Feb. 16.

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART
"Robert Gober: The Heart Is Not a Metaphor."
Through Jan. 18.

MOMA PS1
"Zero Tolerance."
Through March 8.

GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM
"Wang Jianwei: Time Temple."
Through Feb. 16.

AMERICAN MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY
"The Butterfly Conservatory."
Through May 25.

FRICK COLLECTION
"Masterpieces from the Scottish National Gallery."
Through Feb. 1.

NEW MUSEUM
"Chris Ofili: Night and Day."
Through Feb. 1.

NEW-YORK HISTORICAL SOCIETY
"Annie Leibovitz: Pilgrimage."
Through Feb. 22.

MUSEUMS AND LIBRARIES
Museum of Modern Art
"The Forever Now: Contemporary Painting in an Atemporal World"

Don't attend this strong and timely show seeking easy joys. Few are on offer in the paintings of thirteen Americans, three Germans, and one Colombian—nine women and eight men—and those to be found come freighted with rankling self-consciousness or, here and there, a nonchalance that verges on contempt. The ruling insight that the thoughtful curator Laura Hoptman proposes and the artists confirm is that anything attempted in painting now can't help but be a do-over of something from the past, unless it's so nugatory that nobody before thought to bother with it. The show broadcasts the news that substantial newness in painting is obsolete. If one modern master haunts the show, it is Sigmar Polke, who, from the early nineteen-sixties until his death, in 2010, ran painting through wringers of caustic irony and

giddy burlesque. He hovers at the shoulders of the two most impressive painters here, the German Charline von Heyl and Laura Owens, from Los Angeles, both fifty-four. Be sure to spend time with Owens's large abstraction hanging in the museum's ground-floor lobby: gestural glyphs and splotches in white, black, green, and orange on a ground imprinted with a blown-up page of newspaper want ads. Almost offhandedly majestic and preternaturally charming, it suggests Polke mistaking himself for Joan Miró. Through April 5.

GALLERIES—CHELSEA

Yasumasa Morimura
The Japanese photographer's most ambitious series to date takes on Velázquez's painting "Las Meninas" and the room in which it's installed, at the Prado museum. As usual, Morimura appears in his pictures, both undisguised and costumed as the work's familiar subjects—including the Infanta Margaret Theresa, her handmaidens, and the Master himself. In a show that is part homage and part satire, Morimura handles complex issues of gender, identity, and originality with a light touch that's as shrewd as it is entertaining. Through Jan. 24. (Luhring Augustine, 531 W. 24th St. 212-206-9100.)

"Spain & 42 St."
A William Burroughs cut-up poem supplies the title for this witty show of photography that flirts with fashion while still keeping it at a distance. The clothing in Paul Mpagi Sepuya's pictures has been left draped on a chair or sprawled across his studio floor. Laurie Simmons shot Cindy Sherman underwater in an Issey Miyake swimsuit, and Peter Hujar's portrait of David Wojnarowicz slicing an apple was commissioned by a boutique, but the outfits in both works seem beside the point. Only Deborah Turbeville deals with fashion head-on, presenting it as performance, which seems to be the real subject of the show. Through Jan. 31. (Foxy Production, 623 W. 27th St. 212-239-2758.)

GALLERIES—DOWNTOWN

Sam Lewitt
For his new works, collectively titled "Casual Encounters," the cerebral

New Yorker used an architectural-rendering program to map out myriad rambling routes around the gallery's floor plan. The results are depicted on sheets of copper-clad plastic used in the production of electronic circuits; their near-inscrutable forms and high-tech backstory do little to vitalize Lewitt's abstruse premise. More successful are the totemic sculptures in the gallery's other space on 36 Orchard St., made of credit cards and components of computer hard drives, which scramble the data on the cards' strips. Instead of enabling the flow of capital, the digital medium is forced to corrupt it. Through Jan. 11. (Abreu, 88 Eldridge St. 212-995-1774.)

David Weiss
In collaboration with Peter Fischli, Weiss, who died in 2012, produced sly, unpretentious art works whose humor disguised their critical bite. (You may know the pair's crowd-pleasing Rube Goldberg machine of a movie, "The Way Things Work.") Before the two Swiss artists joined forces, in 1979, Weiss made cartoonish drawings and abstract paintings of connected lines, which this significant exhibition showcases for the first time in the U.S. Dozens of works on paper, some finished and others mere sketches, include witty views of Giacometti-like figures puffing on cigarettes. In 1975, Weiss published a book of delicate drawings of storm-soaked Zurich. He then offered a special edition—copies that had been left outside in the rain. Through Feb. 22. (Swiss Institute, 18 Wooster St. 212-925-2035.)

"The Contract"
In the European Union, artists receive a royalty each time their works are resold. The U.S. has no such *droit de suite*, but in 1971 the curator-dealer Seth Siegelraub drafted a rarely used contract to guarantee artists fifteen per cent of profits from future sales. The conceit of this show is that all the works in it—by Hans Haacke, Wade Guyton, R. H. Quaytman, and others—are subject to the agreement. Is this premise better suited to an article or a symposium than it is to an exhibition? Probably, but in this turbo-charged art market the show has the rare virtue of subordinating speculators' profits to artists' welfare. Through Jan. 11. (Essex Street, 114 Eldridge St. 917-263-1001.)



Minimalists banished the ornamental from art, but the American painter Robert Rauschenberg rebelled and helped to found the Pattern and Decoration Movement, in the mid-seventies. A show of his big new works on floral themes—his subject for forty years—opens at the DC Moore gallery, on Jan. 8.



NIGHT LIFE

ROCK AND POP

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

Bright Light Bright Light

Rod Thomas, a Welsh singer-songwriter, producer, and d.j., who goes by this name, creates electro-pop that, though slick with house beats and sexy with disco grooves, is melodic and heartwarming. Among his good friends and biggest fans is Elton John, who, in an effort to give Thomas more exposure, had him open on a series of recent and upcoming dates. "Life Is Easy," Thomas's second studio album, is a trove of sweet, sad, and danceable love songs. (Mercury Lounge, 217 E. Houston St. 212-260-4700. Jan. 13-14.)

Neneh Cherry

Few artists have as rich a biography to draw on as Cherry, who was born in Stockholm and raised by her mother, a visual artist, and her stepfather, the renowned free-jazz trumpeter Don Cherry. The family split their time between a remote, converted schoolhouse in southern Sweden and a loft complex in Long Island City, where she met neighbors who included Arthur Russell and members of the Talking Heads and the Modern Lovers. When she was sixteen, her stepfather toured the U.K. with the Slits, the legendary all-female British punk trio, and he took young Neneh along, a decision that greatly affected her musical path. Soon afterward, she moved to London and joined the post-punk group Rip Rig + Panic, and later collaborated with members of Massive Attack on her 1989 breakout solo album, "Raw Like Sushi," which helped pave the way for trip-hop. For this performance, her New York debut, she will present material from "Blank Project," her first solo album in sixteen years. Inspired by the recent deaths of her mother and her mother-in-law, the songs are an affecting mix of spoken-word ruminations, spare grooves, and blues-inflected vocals. (Highline Ballroom, 431 W. 16th Street. 212-414-5994. Jan. 9.)

Shawn Colvin

It's been twenty-five years since the excellent singer-songwriter released her first album, "Steady On," and she has indeed proved to be a steady source of quality music. During a

three-night stand at City Winery, she's collaborating with a trio of swell performers. On Jan. 12, Colvin teams up with **Steve Earle**, the country rocker whose debut album, "Guitar Town," was a smash in 1986, and who is now a patriarchal presence on the local music and political scenes. (Earle is in the midst of his own Monday-night residency here this month.) The following night, Jan. 13, she shares the stage with the Princeton native **Mary Chapin Carpenter**, who came up at about the same time as Colvin, won a Grammy for her cover of Lucinda Williams's "Passionate Kisses," in 1993, and has written and sung a passel of big hits of her own. On Wednesday, Jan. 14, the Southern California folk-rock legend **Jackson Browne** makes a rare club appearance as Colvin's musical partner. **Kate Davis**, the singer and multi-instrumentalist, will open the proceedings each night with a touch of jazz. (155 Varick St. 212-608-0555.)

Dr. Dog

The Philadelphia act is in town to celebrate a new collection, "Live at a Flamingo Hotel," which comes out on Jan. 13. In the course of seven albums, starting with "Toothbrush," from 2001, the band has honed a trippy folk-rock sound, delivering jangly tunes that traffic in funky riffs and crooning choruses with a tendency to stick. The live album has been praised

for the way it captures the band's irrepressible concert performances. Dr. Dog is playing eight shows at two different venues. (Jan. 9-12, at the Music Hall of Williamsburg, 66 N. 6th St., Brooklyn, 718-486-5400; Jan. 14-17, at the Bowery Ballroom, 6 Delancey St. 212-533-2111. ticketmaster.com.)

JAZZ AND STANDARDS

"Birth of the American Orchestra"

The ever-mindful **Jazz at Lincoln Center Orchestra** with **Wynton Marsalis** salutes giants of the big-band tradition, from the illustrious—Duke Ellington, Fletcher Henderson, Benny Carter—to those deserving of greater recognition, such as the pre-swing-era arranger Bill Challis, the bebop pioneer Gil Fuller, and the Afro-Cuban jazz avatar Chico O'Farrill. (Rose Theatre, Broadway at 60th St. 212-721-6500. Jan. 9-10.)

"Celebrating Charlie Haden"

The death of the bassist, bandleader, educator, and activist last July was a stinging loss for the jazz community. Versions of two of Haden's most prominent ensembles—the Liberation Music Orchestra and Quartet West—will honor him, as will a host of his longtime musical associates, including the saxophonist **Lee Konitz**, the guitarist **Pat Metheny**, the pianist **Geri Allen**, the saxophonist **Joshua Redman**, and

the pianist **Brad Mehldau**. (Town Hall, 123 W. 43rd St. thetownhall.org. No tickets necessary. Jan. 13.)

Marcus Roberts

While raising money on Kickstarter for his latest project—recording a suite of music that he wrote some twenty years ago, called "Romance, Swing, and the Blues"—the pianist and composer declared that "all great jazz is modern jazz—whatever the age of the piece, we make it 'modern' (relevant to our own time in history) when we play it." This multi-stylistic dictum informs his work with his new twelve-member band, the **Modern Jazz Generation**, which recently released a double album of the material. (Dizzy's Club Coca-Cola, Broadway at 60th St. 212-258-9595. Jan. 7-11.)

Winter Jazzfest

Intrepid listeners who face the weather and crowds at this annual gathering's multiple venues are rewarded—forward-thinking artists always take part. Among the hundred or so performers at this year's edition, which also includes esteemed veterans, are the pianist **Amina Claudine Myers**, the long-running Dutch ensemble the **ICP Orchestra**, the guitarist **Anthony Pirog**, the saxophonist and clarinetist **Ken Vandermark**, the **SF Jazz Collective**, the saxophonist **Mark Turner**, and the eclectically minded outfit **Kneebody**. (winterjazzfest.com. Jan. 8-10.)

ABOVE & BEYOND

NYC PodFest

With the success of WBEZ's "Serial," it can feel like the medium is taking center stage, which is actually the case at the third annual NYC PodFest. Founded by Jeremy Wein, a podcast enthusiast and the host of "ThisMyShow," the three-night-long talking party takes place first at Brooklyn's Bell House and on the final two evenings at Fontana's, on the Lower East Side. It features tapings of such programs as "The Daily Show Podcast Without Jon Stewart," which is exactly what it sounds like, and "Gilbert Gottfried's Amazing Colossal Podcast," with the guest Susie Essman, of "Curb Your Enthusiasm." The comedian Todd Barry is sitting down with the indie rockers Yo La Tengo and other guests for "The Todd Barry Podcast," and New York's party-scene duo Andrew Andrew, who always dress identically and often review restaurants and theatre, is hosting "The Andrew / Andrew Show" and then d.j.-ing the final night away. (nycpodfest.com. Jan. 9-11.)

The No Pants Subway Ride

People's pockets tend to be empty in January, once holiday credit-card bills come due, but that problem isn't apparent on the one day this month when people ride the subway without any pants at all. It started in New York, in 2002, with six people who boarded the same train car at consecutive stations, wearing winter coats, winter hats, and underwear, but no pants. Last year, tens of thousands of people in sixty cities and twenty-five countries surprised commuters and tourists with their underpants. As it turns out, it's all an act, organized by Improv Everywhere, a group whose tagline is "We Cause Scenes." Charlie Todd, whose mission is to interrupt daily life with random acts of organized fun, started the troupe, and this event is open to all. (For information on how to participate, visit improveverywhere.com. Jan. 11.)

READINGS AND TALKS

Barnes & Noble

Pamela Katz, the author of the recent "The Partnership: Brecht, Weill, Three Women, and Germany on the Brink," talks about the book with its editor, Gerald Howard, in an event that also includes performances of favorites from the Brecht-Weill songbook by the singer Amy Burton and the pianist John Musto. (150 E. 86th St. Jan. 9 at 7.)

Pen Parentis Literary Salon

Pen Parentis, an organization devoted to supporting writers who are also parents, kicks off its thirteenth season with its annual Winter Poetry Night, featuring Diana Whitney, Adam Penna, Sarah Gutowski, Jared Harel, and Jennifer Michael Hecht. The poets will read from their work and discuss balancing creativity with domestic responsibilities. Wine will be served. (Andaz Wall Street, 75 Wall St. penparentis.org. Jan. 13 at 7.)



"Toxic Psalms," one of several shows presented by the Prototype festival, runs Jan. 8-11 at St. Ann's Warehouse.

AGAINST TYPE

A festival showcasing the variety of "indie opera" returns.

COMMISSIONS FROM MAJOR OPERA HOUSES continue to allow some of America's most formidable lyric composers (Mark Adamo, Jake Heggie, Carlisle Floyd, and others) to use the stage as a melting pot, synthesizing the tradition of Puccini, Britten, and Berg with hardy American influences—the Broadway stage, the enduring post-minimalist wave. But today's indie-opera movement, which is still establishing its own economic base, narrows and sharpens stylistic parameters. This trend is exemplified in the Prototype festival—a successful collaboration between Beth Morrison Projects and the HERE Arts Center—which returns this week, for a third year (Jan. 8-17). The flagship production, "The Scarlet Ibis" (with a quasi-minimalist score by Stefan Weisman), is designed for audiences young and old; it views the subject of physical disability through the lens of a Southern writer's anguished childhood. Bora Yoon's "Sunken Cathedral" (at La Mama) is a multicultural one-woman show on the classic big themes (life, death, the universe), featuring an expansive video element. And "Kansas City Choir Boy," a "theatricalized concept album" about love, fate, and small-town America, written by Todd Almond and performed by Almond and Courtney Love, seems aimed at a rock-friendly crowd.

If any show transcends these categories, it might be "Toxic Psalms," a co-production with St. Ann's Warehouse and presented by Carmina Slovenica, a thirty-strong women's chorus under the command of Karmina Šilec. It uses music and texts (medieval, minimalist, and otherwise) by Veljo Tormis, Jacob Cooper, Karin Rehnquist, Rachmaninoff, and Hafiz, among others, to create a searing, richly physicalized collective entertainment set in the context of current events in Africa, Russia, and the Middle East. Some listeners will recall the raw feminine energy of "Le Mystère des Voix Bulgares," while others will see parallels with the work of Heiner Goebbels and David Lang. All will be moved by the show's condemnation of "men killing for the glory of their psalms."

—Russell Platt



CLASSICAL MUSIC

OPERA

Metropolitan Opera

Bartlett Sher's production of "**Les Contes d'Hoffmann**," which debuted in 2009, may be a little overstuffed with ideas and a little too dependent on visual razzle-dazzle, but it is nonetheless a vigorous and inventive attempt to grapple with Offenbach's eternally problematic opera, an admixture of divine genius and mere professionalism. Its premiere offered a golden opportunity for the Maltese tenor Joseph Calleja to reach a new level of artistry; now the excellent and ambitious Vittorio Grigolo takes over the title role, with Kate Lindsey as Nicklausse, Thomas Hampson as the Four Villains, and Erin Morley, Hibla Gerzmava, and Christine Rice as the objects of Hoffmann's doomed affections; Yves Abel conducts. (Jan. 12 at 7:30.) • **Also playing:** Willy Decker's bracing modern-style Salzburg Festival production of "**La Traviata**"—visually dominated by a massive clock and by the lurid red dress of the title character—made waves when it arrived at the Met, in 2010. Now a known quantity, it can serve as a vehicle for rising stars. This revival features Marina Rebeka and Francesco Demuro as Violetta and Alfredo, with Quinn Kelsey in the role of Germont; Marco Armiliato. (Jan. 7 at 7:30 and Jan. 10 at 8:30.) • Richard Jones's production of "**Hansel and Gretel**," gaudy and dark and fun for all ages, is this year's family presentation, performed in English and offered at special matinee times. Humperdinck's gently post-Wagnerian score will be intoned by Jennifer Johnson Cano and Andriana Chuchman in the title roles, with Michaela Martens, as Gertrude (the mother), and Robert Brubaker, as the Witch, one of the juiciest travesty roles in the repertoire; Andrew Davis. (Jan. 8 at 7:30. This is the final performance.) • Franz Lehár's "**The Merry Widow**" travelled the world in triumph for nearly a century before it arrived at the Met. Tim Albery's inaugural production, in 2000, leavened the operetta's sumptuous Viennese traditions with tart but entertaining irony. Now, in her Met debut, Susan Stroman, a choreographer and director who's as American as apple pie, brings her considerable talents to a new staging

(sung in English) starring not only Renée Fleming and Nathan Gunn, as Hanna and Danilo, but also the Broadway star Kelli O'Hara (another debut) and the tenor Alek Shrader, as the second amorous couple, to whom Lehár also gave some delightful music. The glorious Thomas Allen, himself a fine Danilo in his prime, takes the buffo role of Baron Zeta; Andrew Davis. (Jan. 9 and Jan. 13 at 7:30.) (Metropolitan Opera House. 212-362-6000.)

ORCHESTRAS AND CHORUSES New York Philharmonic

Alan Gilbert, who has bravely picked up the baton from Leonard Bernstein to advance the cause of the Danish maverick Carl Nielsen, finishes his multiyear "Nielsen Project" by leading the visionary Clarinet Concerto; the soloist is the Philharmonic's new principal, Anthony McGill. The program opens with Ravel's splashy "Valse Nobles et Sentimentales" and

concludes, grandly, with selections from Tchaikovsky's "Swan Lake." (Avery Fisher Hall. 212-875-5656. Jan. 8 and Jan. 13 at 7:30 and Jan. 9-10 at 8.)

Tenet: Charpentier's "Vespers"

Jolle Greenleaf and Scott Metcalfe's top-drawer ensemble of singers and players made its reputation with its frequent (and assured) performances of Monteverdi's "Vespers." Now it advocates for the French Baroque *maitre* Marc-Antoine Charpentier's lesser-known masterwork on similar sacred texts, in a concert at the Church of St. Joseph. (371 Sixth Ave. tenetnyc.com. Jan. 9 at 7:30. Note: A performance of the Monteverdi follows on Jan. 10 at the Church of St. Jean Baptiste.)

RECITALS

Bargemusic:

Johnny Gandelsman

Any time that this incandescent violinist—no longer with the Knights

chamber orchestra but still part of the post-classical string quartet Brooklyn Rider—takes up Bach's solo Sonatas and Partitas is a notable occasion. He headlines the floating chamber-music series this weekend, performing all six of the works. (Fulton Ferry Landing, Brooklyn. bargemusic.org. Jan. 10 at 8 and Jan. 11 at 4.)

Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center

Benjamin Beilman, a breakout star of the violin world, is a featured player in the Society's next concert, an evening of music for strings by Beethoven (the String Trio in C Minor, Op. 9, Op. 3), Kodály, and Dvořák (the "American" Quintet), in which he'll be joined by such eminences as the violinist Ani Kavafian and the cellist David Finckel. (Alice Tully Hall. 212-875-5788. Jan. 11 at 5.)

Del Sol Quartet

The vibrant young string ensemble's two forty-five-minute sets at the

Cornelia Street Café will include not only American works by Pierre Jalbert and the great Lou Harrison ("QuartetSet") but also music by the Australian composers Elena Kats-Chernin and the late Peter Sculthorpe (his String Quartet No. 14, which features an exotic obbligato instrument, the aboriginal didgeridoo). (29 Cornelia St. 212-989-9319. Jan. 12 at 9 and 10.)

"The Song Continues": John Brancy

As part of Marilyn Horne's annual round of concerts and master classes at Carnegie Hall, the up-and-coming baritone (with the admired pianist Ken Noda) offers a sensitively arranged recital of music that evokes the era of the First World War, including works by Butterworth ("Six Songs from 'A Shropshire Lad,'" his masterpiece), Orff, Poulenc ("Bleuet"), Debussy, Ravel, and Ives ("Tom Sails Away"). (Weill Recital Hall. 212-247-7800. Jan. 13 at 5:30.)

THE THEATRE



OPENINGS AND PREVIEWS

Ancient Lives

At the Kitchen, Tina Satter, with her company, Half Straddle, performs a coming-of-age story that explores the meaning of family and friendship. Opens Jan. 7. (512 W. 19th St. 212-255-5793.)

Constellations

Jake Gyllenhaal and Ruth Wilson star in a new play by Nick Payne, which imagines the possibilities of the relationship between a man and the physicist he falls in love with. Michael Longhurst directs. In previews. Opens Jan. 13. (Samuel J. Friedman, 261 W. 47th St. 212-239-6200.)

Dying for It

Atlantic Theatre Company presents the American premiere of a play by Moira Buffini, adapted from "The Suicide," by Nikolai Erdman. Neil Pepe directs. In previews. Opens Jan. 8. (336 W. 20th St. 866-811-4111.)

Honeymoon in Vegas

Tony Danza, Rob McClure, and Brynn O'Malley star in Andrew Bergman and Jason Robert Brown's new musical, based on the 1992 movie. Gary Griffin directs. In previews. (Nederlander, 208 W. 41st St. 866-870-2717.)

Into the Woods

Roundabout Theatre Company presents Fiasco Theatre's unplugged version of the 1987 musical by Stephen Sondheim, with a book

by James Lapine, featuring eleven actors and one piano. Directed by Noah Brody and Ben Steinfeld. In previews. (Laura Pels, 111 W. 46th St. 212-719-1300.)

I'm Gonna Pray for You So Hard

Trip Cullman directs the world premiere of a play by Halley Feiffer, about a young actress seeking the approval of her father, a famous playwright. In previews. (Atlantic Stage 2, at 330 W. 16th St. 866-811-4111.)

A Month in the Country

Taylor Schilling, Peter Dinklage, Anthony Edwards, Annabella Sciorra, and Elizabeth Franz star in Ivan Turgenev's comedy from 1855, in which a woman falls in love with the tutor she has hired for her son. Erica Schmidt directs. Previews begin Jan. 9. (Classic Stage Company, 136 E. 13th St. 866-811-4111.)

Toxic Psalms

As part of the Prototype Festival, Beth Morrison Projects and HERE present the Slovenian vocal theatre company Carmina Slovenica, which tells stories with choral singing. Karmina Šilec directs a piece about victimization and abuse. Jan. 8-11. (St. Ann's Warehouse, 29 Jay St., Brooklyn. 718-254-8779.)

Under the Radar Festival

The annual survey of work from up-and-comers around the world includes pieces by Reggie Watts, Taylor Mac,

Iran's Mehr Theatre Group, and Stan's Cafe, from the U.K. Opens Jan. 7. (Public, 425 Lafayette St. 212-967-7555.)

The Woodsman

Created by James Ortiz and Strangemen & Co., this play tells a story about the Tin Man from "The Wizard of Oz," the woman he loves, and the witch who tries to keep them apart. The production, which premiered last year, has music by Edward W. Hardy and lyrics by Jennifer Loring. Ortiz and Claire Karpen direct. Previews begin Jan. 13. (59E59, at 59 E. 59th St. 212-279-4200.)

NOW PLAYING

Disgraced

In this ninety-minute work about cultures clashing, the excellent, humorous Karen Pittman plays Jory, a sleek lawyer at a high-powered firm where her co-worker Amir (the handsome Hari Dhillon) is slowly unravelling: he wants to be a partner but is coming undone by all the racism he feels he must combat in order to be seen as a valued colleague. Amir, a Pakistani married to a white painter named Emily (played with no energy and no imagination by Gretchen Mol), whose biggest artistic influence is Islamic art, may just be a creep—perceived racial slights and his internalized racially influenced self-hatred can't excuse his poor, self-indulgent behavior. Akhtar's writing, while lively and clear, is journalism onstage: we're made very aware of the "issues."

The only time they get blurred and achieve some depth is when Pittman is circling her friends and adversaries, never quite certain when they're one or the other. (Lyceum, 149 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.)

The Elephant Man

Bernard Pomerance's 1977 play is based on the true story of Joseph Merrick, some twenty years after his birth, in Leicester, in 1862. Merrick's body began its amazing transformation early on: his head was covered in growths and his right arm was a useless club. After years as a touring exhibit, Merrick (Bradley Cooper, who does a bang-up job physically and aurally) is brought to London Hospital by Frederick Treves (Alessandro Nivola, a study in charisma). Treves introduces Mrs. Kendal (Patricia Clarkson) to Merrick, believing that because she's trained in the art of illusion she'll be able to hide her response to Merrick's deformities, and thus make the Elephant Man feel more like a man. The director, Scott Ellis, hasn't decided whether the story should be played for its narrative pathos or as something more stylized. Treves, our de-facto narrator, represents both approaches, and Ellis has given Nivola little help in making them cohere. Cooper, as that brilliant misfit, is all pathos. Clarkson, with her signature warm and vibrating voice, is commanding and true. (Reviewed in our issue of 12/22 & 29/14.) (Booth, 222 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.)



TABLES FOR TWO

GREENPOINT FISH & LOBSTER CO.

114 Nassau Ave., Brooklyn (718-349-0400)

A BREAKFAST TACO IS NOT necessarily where you'd expect to find superlative scrambled eggs, and a fish shop is not necessarily where you'd expect to find a breakfast taco, superlative or otherwise. But, in addition to those scrambled eggs—fat, delicate, custard-like curds—the breakfast taco at Greenpoint Fish & Lobster Co. contains crispy fried oysters and shaved bottarga (plus pickled jalapeños and chipotle mayo), and suddenly it all makes sense. Even the fiercest brunch hater will have a hard time arguing with the weekend midday menu at Greenpoint Fish, which changes with the season and the catch. On a recent Sunday, the tacos shared billing with a hearty, house-smoked-bluefish hash topped with arugula and poached eggs; thick folds of arctic-char gravlax, strewn with capers and dill and served with a Black Seed bagel; and sweet, slippery lobes of sea urchin nestled in its spiny vessel.

Dinner on a Tuesday brought a shift in tone but not tenor, beginning with slices of a firm, buttery scallop, presented in its luminescent shell like Botticelli's Venus. Plump, juicy Cape Cod mussels were ladled with a thrillingly rich green coconut curry, flecked with tiny warning signs of bright-red Thai bird chili, and served with a hunk of craggy sourdough to sop up the valuable refuse. There were dishes containing little or nothing from the sea, like an unusually generous portion of fried Brussels sprouts in buttermilk ranch and a bowl of blistered shishito peppers with bonito flakes, but why bother when you could have the peppers stuffed into the cavity of a freshly caught, crisp-skinned and sweet-fleshed whole whiting?

In their mission to introduce high-quality seafood to a neighborhood redolent of pierogies and kielbasa, the shop's proprietors, Adam Geringer-Dunn and Vinny Milburn, have covered all angles. Geringer-Dunn, a pescatarian who lives in the neighborhood and likes to cook, wanted easy access to the stuff; Milburn, his friend and former music-business associate, knew how best to procure it, as the great-great-grandson of the founder of the thriving Boston fish wholesaler John Nagle Co. There can be a wait for the twenty-odd seats along the galley kitchen, but up front, at the counter, service is speedy and the options on ice are plentiful: glistening fillets of rainbow trout and Alaskan salmon, clusters of littlenecks and oysters, quarts of fish stock. For the home cook, it's a one-stop shop, chockablock with tools and accessories, from shrimp deveiners and soup socks to lemons, panko, dried seaweed sheets, and mango-lassi-flavored saltwater taffy. There's even a shelf of cookbooks: "The River Cottage Fish Book," "A Boat, a Whale, & a Walrus," "For Cod and Country." Amen.

—Hannah Goldfield

Open daily for lunch and dinner. Kitchen dishes \$6-\$28.

ILLUSTRATION BY MATTHEW HOLLISTER



FOOD & DRINK

BAR TAB SIXTYFIVE

30 Rockefeller Plaza (212-632-5065)
The Rainbow Room is back—landmarked, refurbished, and gleaming, after a five-year post-recession hiatus—and along with it comes SixtyFive, a new sky-high cocktail lounge. On a recent Monday evening, as protesters and holiday tourists thronged the streets outside, the escalator to the coat check was a parade of fur, Burberry, and houndstooth. (Mondays are the only nights that the Rainbow Room, mostly an event space, is open for dinner.) The sixty-fifth floor feels a bit like a dream: wraparound terrace, gorgeous views in all directions, a silvery geometric ceiling that looks like Gehry, or Georges Braque. You can stare at the ceiling—Is it stone? Is it velvet?—if you've chivalrously taken the non-view side of the table, or at the Empire State Building if you haven't. Two cocktail lists, classic (a Sazerac, a Rose's Dirty Gibson) and contemporary (a Room with a View, with rum, Cointreau, sparkling apple cider, and nutmeg; a Renaissance, with bourbon, vermouth, port, and Grand Marnier mist), are mildly amusing and wildly expensive. That night, the drinks arrived with delicious rosemary-dusted nuts and a remix of "Sexual Healing." As the room filled with boisterous revellers with platinum hair and gold jewelry, conversation turned from the N.Y.P.D. and Serpico to "Saturday Night Live." "That sketch happened in this building!" a man said. "Makes the drink taste better."

—Sarah Larson



HE'S
NOT
INIT
FOR
THE
LIKES.

REAL TIME
WITH
BILL MAHER

LIVE! JANUARY 9TH **HBO**
FRIDAYS AT 10PM

OR WATCH IT ON **HBO GO**

HBO GO is only accessible in the US and certain US territories. Call 1-800-345-0000 for more information. © 2011 Home Box Office, Inc. All rights reserved. HBO, the HBO logo and the HBO name are trademarks of Home Box Office, Inc.

WorldMagazine.net



THE TALK OF THE TOWN

COMMENT

THE FIRE THIS TIME

In 1960, James Baldwin, the American Orwell, wrote “Fifth Avenue, Uptown: A Letter from Harlem,” an essay that portrayed the ugly dynamic between white police officers and young black men in the neighborhood where he grew up:

Rare, indeed, is the Harlem citizen, from the most circumspect church member to the most shiftless adolescent, who does not have a long tale to tell of police incompetence, injustice, or brutality. I myself have witnessed and endured it more than once. . . . It is hard, on the other hand, to blame the policeman, blank, good-natured, thoughtless, and insuperably innocent, for being such a perfect representative of the people he serves. He, too, believes in good intentions and is astounded and offended when they are not taken for the deed. He has never, himself, done anything for which to be hated—which of us has?—and yet he is facing, daily and nightly, people who would gladly see him dead, and he knows it. There is no way for him not to know it: there are few things under heaven more unnerving than the silent, accumulating contempt and hatred of a people.

To contemporary readers, such a passage may seem a relic of a harsh past. Baldwin’s essay predates so many advances, including the Civil Rights and Voting Rights Acts. The New York Police Department’s rank and file is no longer majority white. Crime rates are lower than they have been in decades. An African-American was elected President in 2008 and appointed an African-American to be the chief law-enforcement official in the land. American audiences go to see “Selma,” get teary-eyed, and think how far we’ve come. The temptation is to suppose that Baldwin has long since lost all relevance. Why, then, does the President gently remind us that if he had a son he’d look like Trayvon Martin? And why does the Attorney General say we are a “nation of cowards” when it comes to the discussion of race?

On December 3rd, a Staten Island grand jury declined to indict Daniel Pantaleo, an N.Y.P.D. officer, on any charge related to the homicide-by-

asphyxiation, in July, of an African-American man named Eric Garner. New York’s mayor, Bill de Blasio, commented on the grand jury’s decision. He spoke with unapologetic honesty about the failure of the judicial system. He anticipated, and tacitly endorsed, peaceful protest, “the only thing that has ever worked” to advance social justice in America. And he spoke personally, saying that he and his wife, Chirlane, have had “the talk” with their son, Dante, about “the dangers he may face” on the street as a young man of color:

I’ve had to worry over the years, Chirlane’s had to worry. Is Dante safe each night? There are so many families in this city who feel that each and every night. Is my child safe? And not just from some of the painful realities—crime and violence in some of our neighborhoods—but are they safe from the very people they want to have faith in as their protectors?

De Blasio then echoed one of the most resonant lines heard since the protests began last summer in Ferguson, Missouri. “It’s a phrase that should never have to be said,” he insisted. “It should be self-evident. But our history, sadly, requires us to say that black lives matter.”

The demonstrations that followed were almost entirely peaceful. There were instances of protesters shouting despicable slogans, but those instances were isolated and rare. Most police officers showed no more disrespect to de Blasio and the protesters than de Blasio and the protesters had shown to them. The truth is that both protest and argument, conducted peacefully and with decency, can have the effect of easing the long-running tension between the police and the policed and bringing about the kind of change that is needed. The “techniques” that killed Eric Garner demand reform, and so does a system in which it is nearly impossible to bring a police officer to trial.

And yet some police groups, including the leadership of the Patrolmen’s



Benevolent Association, charged that the Mayor was fanning anti-police sentiment. Then came the assassination, in Bedford-Stuyvesant, of two N.Y.P.D. officers, Rafael Ramos and Wenjian Liu, by a young man who had just shot his ex-girlfriend. That horrendous event devastated New Yorkers, particularly police officers, who daily put their lives at risk in the name of public safety. It also brought the simmering resentment among some police leaders to a boil of accusatory rhetoric. Patrick Lynch, the head of the P.B.A., who has waged battles over contracts and other issues with previous mayors, used the killings as a political cudgel. The Mayor, he said, had blood on his hands. Michael Goodwin, a columnist for the *Post*, was among those who had amplified the case for blaming de Blasio; the Mayor, he wrote, had thrown “gasoline on the fire by painting the entire force as a bunch of white racist brutes.”

As a way to cool tensions, de Blasio asked that there be a halt to protests, at least until after the officers’ funerals. The most flagrant refusal to do so came at the funeral of Rafael Ramos, when hundreds of police officers in attendance, following Lynch’s lead, turned their backs as the Mayor delivered a eulogy. An occasion of mourning had been hijacked.

The police commissioner, William Bratton, was diplomatic, calling the gesture “inappropriate.” It was worse than that. It was an act of profound disrespect not only to de Blasio but also to the Ramos family members, who were there to grieve, not to witness a petulant display of resentment.

At his press conference, de Blasio had referred to a history that preceded the death of Eric Garner and charged it with meaning. The story of civil rights is not an event that ends with a triumphal arrival at a Southern statehouse. Two generations after Selma, the Supreme Court has started to roll back voting rights. Two generations after Selma, one out of three black males born in America today will, if present trends continue, see the inside of a prison cell.

“One day, to everyone’s astonishment, someone drops a match in the powder keg and everything blows up,” Baldwin wrote. “Before the dust has settled or the blood congealed, editorials, speeches, and civil-rights commissions are loud in the land, demanding to know what happened. What happened is that Negroes want to be treated like men.” Some of the language is of its time, but the demand is just and everlasting.

—David Remnick

POSTCARD FROM ROME CIVIC DUTY



The architect Renzo Piano has offices in Genoa, where he grew up; in Paris, where he currently lives; and in New York, where he is perhaps best known for having designed the Times Building, on Eighth Avenue. Piano spends a lot of time in New York—among his current projects is the new Columbia University campus that’s going up in West Harlem—and he was in the city when he got a call, a year and a half ago, from Italy’s President, Giorgio Napolitano. Napolitano wanted to appoint Piano a “senator for life.” The job comes with a salary and a vote in the Italian Senate, and since it’s “for life” there are no pesky reelection campaigns. Was Piano interested? He was taken aback.

“For some funny reason, you don’t understand that you are aging,” Piano said the other day, in Rome. “So when President Napolitano called me, I said, ‘But I’m too young!’ And he laughed over the phone, and he said, ‘No, you are not too young.’”

Piano, who is seventy-seven, was sitting in his Senate office in the Palazzo

Giustiniani, around the corner from the Pantheon. The room is almost entirely taken up by a large round table, and its walls are covered with drawings and plans. As soon as Piano became a senator, he handed over the office, along with his government salary, to six much younger architects and asked them to come up with ways to improve the *periferie*—the often run-down neighborhoods that ring Rome and Italy’s other major cities. The six were about to present their first year’s worth of work to the public, which was why Piano was in the capital.

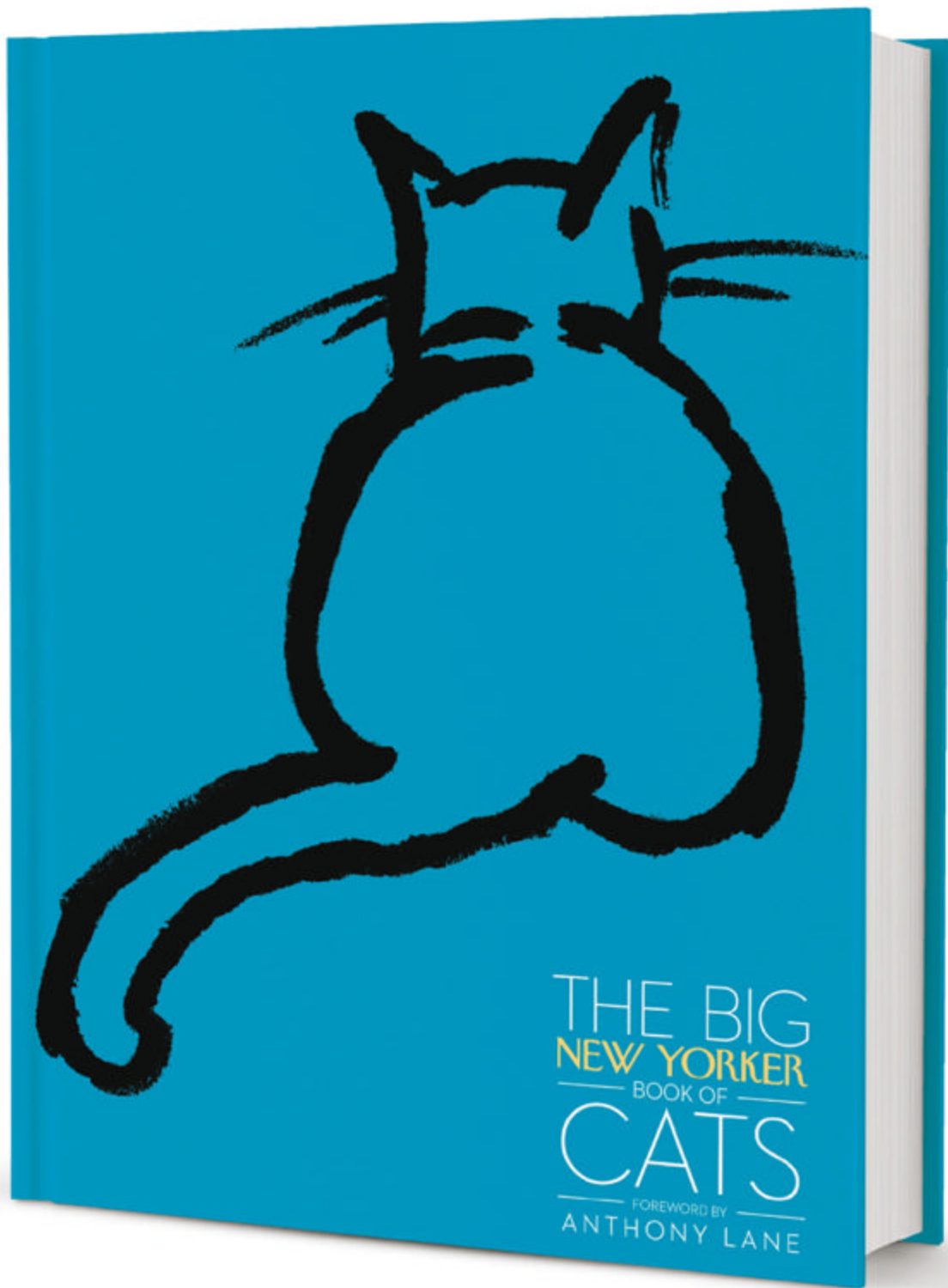
“In the nineteen-sixties and seventies, the big challenge—in Europe certainly, but everywhere—was to establish as a principle that historic centers have to be preserved,” he went on. “But in the two-thousands—probably for the next three, four, five decades—the real challenge is to transform the periphery. If we fail in doing this, it will be a real tragedy.”

Much as recent immigrants in France are shunted to the *banlieues*, in Italy they are pushed into the *periferie*. As immigration to Europe has soared, so, too, have tensions; in November, riot police were dispatched to Tor Sapienza, a neighborhood on the eastern edge of Rome, after residents attacked an immigrant center there. “The periphery is always accompanied by an adjective that is negative,”

Piano said. “But the truth is the energy is there; the desire for change is there. There is always, even in the most difficult periphery, something good, and that is what you have to find, to bring up.”

In the early nineteen-seventies, Piano and his partner at the time, Richard Rogers, designed the Centre Georges Pompidou, in Paris. The building, with its inside-out construction, has been called “one of the most radical” of the twentieth century, and it transformed ideas about what a museum could be. Piano believes in the power of museums and libraries and concert halls. “They become places where people share values, where they stay together,” he said. “And this is what I call the civic role of architecture.”

Rome is full of what might be called un-civic architecture: projects that were started but not completed, like a half-finished sports complex that resembles a giant spinnaker; or completed and then abandoned, like the bicycle-sharing stations that dot the sidewalks but have no bikes. One of the projects Piano’s team came up with would use the space under an empty viaduct. The viaduct was supposed to improve tram service to the northeastern rim of the city, but the trams never arrived. Piano shrugged: “Typical.” Two of his young architects had drawn up plans to convert the viaduct into a sort of upside-down High Line, with a



HERE, KITTY KITTY

At last, an owner's manual worthy of its subject: "The Big New Yorker Book of Cats," featuring cartoons, cover art, poetry, essays, and yarns from contributors such as **MARGARET ATWOOD, T. C. BOYLE, ROALD DAHL, HARUKI MURAKAMI, SUSAN ORLEAN, JOHN UPDIKE**, and many others, with a foreword by **ANTHONY LANE**.

Curl up with a copy today.

ALSO AVAILABLE



park running beneath. Only a tiny part of the project had been completed, but “in one year it’s not bad,” Piano said. He recalled his own years studying architecture, in the early-nineteen-sixties in Milan. He and his fellow-students were occupying the university, “so that was my job in the night,” he said. “And in the day I was working in a nice office.”

“The real point for students like me was to change the world,” he said. “It was a kind of mad, insane, but great utopia. And I think it’s good to grow up like this, because you grow with this idea that never leaves you, so when you are seventy-seven you still feel like a kid and this is what you want to do.”

—Elizabeth Kolbert

UP LIFE'S LADDER HOOP DREAMS



Eddie Huang was ten years old when, he says, he glimpsed his “hopes and dreams in a box.” They were white with red trim and a silver tongue, and they sat in the display window of City Sports at the Belz Outlet Mall, in Orlando, Florida. The Jordan V sneakers cost a hun-

dred dollars, but Eddie encouraged his parents, frugal Taiwanese immigrants who owned a steak restaurant, to consider them an investment in his future career in the N.B.A. His father expressed skepticism. “No shoe is going to make you jump higher when you’re this fat,” he said. Later, when Eddie revised his dream—he wanted to be a sportscaster—he father spotted an even more insurmountable hurdle: “They’ll never let someone with a face like you on television.”

Huang did not end up playing for the N.B.A., but he made it to television. His path was circuitous: he moved to New York and, after stints as a corporate lawyer and a marijuana dealer, opened Baohaus, a Taiwanese street-food joint in the East Village, which paired pork buns with hip-hop music. That led to his own online show, a food-themed travel program for Vice, called “Huang’s World,” and a book deal. Now Huang’s memoir, a coming-of-age story titled “Fresh Off the Boat,” has been adapted into a sitcom, which will premiere next month on ABC.

“My dad’s first reaction was ‘I’m so sorry I brought you to this country!’” Huang said the other day. “He was coming here as an adult and didn’t really know what it was like for an ABC”—that is, an American-born Chinese. Huang was at the basketball courts at Chelsea Piers,

warming up for a game of one-on-one with his younger brother Evan. Dressed in a black T-shirt, red Nike shorts, and magenta LeBron Xs, he dribbled a ball to the free-throw line, stopped, and did squats. “I’m thirty-two this year,” he said, “and this is the first year I feel old.”

Evan (six years younger, two inches taller) stood nearby, in matching LeBrons. He recently completed a degree in global studies at the New School, having taken four years off to help his brother open Baohaus. The brothers wore matching jade Buddhas on thick gold chains, a gift from their mother to each of her three sons. Eddie doesn’t take his off: “Something shitty happened to me the one time I did.” (He wrecked his Jeep Grand Cherokee. Then his condom broke.)

Growing up in a predominantly white neighborhood in Orlando (the family restaurant has since become a Hooters), the Huang boys didn’t need to be told they were different. “Ching-Chong Eddie Huang” was a frequent refrain from classmates, Eddie said. To fit in, he immersed himself in basketball, a sport his father loved, too. In a scene from the pilot episode of “Fresh Off the Boat,” the young Eddie (played by the cherubic Hudson Yang) begs his mother to buy him “white-people food” for lunch, then lays out his three-step plan for world domination: first, get a seat at the table; second, meet Shaquille O’Neal; third, change the game.

The sitcom doesn’t preserve much of Huang’s archness. “There’s definitely an issue with accuracy,” he said. He provided the voice-over but was not allowed to write the script. “That’s the great irony and metaphor for network television: even if they have a real story, they need to cook it into a version that mass Americans can digest.” This is particularly true of his father’s character. “I love Randall,” Huang said, referring to Randall Park, the actor who plays Huang senior. “But they’ve made my dad into a neutered tourist in a fanny pack and stonewashed khakis.”

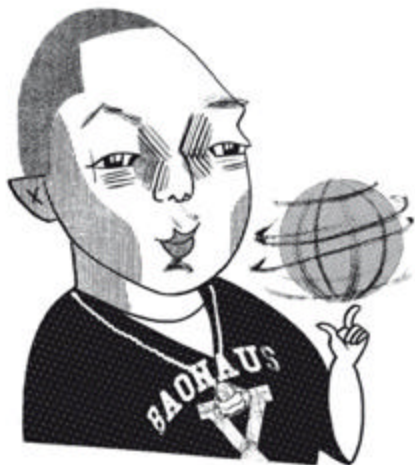
Ten minutes into the basketball game, Eddie had run up the score to 11–4. The brothers were playing to twenty-one. “Um, it’s not gonna be a long game,” Evan said, lifting his shirt to mop sweat from his forehead.

“I’m naturally very competitive,” Eddie explained. “But I’m less aggressive when



I play with him. Just 'cause it's family, you know?" Final score: 21–10. They high-fived instead of shaking hands.

In a nearby café, the brothers gulped water and discussed their plans for the next few hours: Evan had a "day party" to attend, and Eddie was meeting friends for dinner. The conversation returned to shoes. "The two shoes I really like but don't have are the Union 180s and the



Eddie Huang

Galaxy Foams," Eddie said. Last year, he presented his father with a birthday gift: a pair of LeBron Xs. And? Huang shook his head. "My dad has had shitty shoes his whole life," he said. "When he saw these dope kicks, he just put them back into the box. 'Too expensive!' He wore them maybe once. And now they are sitting in a box, way back on the top shelf of his closet."

—Jiayang Fan

WARDROBE DEPT. NEW THREADS



Several years back, when Joan Taub Ades, who with her husband is a benefactor of the Manhattan School of Music, attended the student vocal competition that she oversees, she noticed that some of the female singers were dressed inappropriately. "They didn't look good when they came on the stage," Ades recalled recently. "They were wearing pleated things and dresses that didn't fit them right,

or they were too buxom and showing too much. I just saw a need that I could fill."

The result was Joan's Closet, a project that matches the conservatory's young musicians with recital-worthy clothes, free of charge. That first year, Ades asked her friends to donate items; as a donor to the Metropolitan Opera and a former board member of the American Ballet Theatre, she knew the right people. Valentinos, Oscar de la Rentas, and Carolina Herreras poured in, though Ades cut out the labels: "I don't want the girls to come in and say, 'Oh, I just got an Oscar de la Renta!' I want them to say, 'Doesn't this look good on me?'" The next year, she began scouring the racks at Bloomingdale's ("They treated us dreadfully") and Lord & Taylor, keeping in mind the needs of various disciplines: long A-line gowns or pants are ideal for cellists, strapless dresses work best for violinists, and singers require flexible bodices for better intake of breath.

On a recent Thursday morning, Ades arrived at the school, in Morningside Heights, for the sixth annual try-on. Her look was patron-of-the-arts crisp: red lipstick, pointy heels, and an ivory Escada suit adorned with a gold brooch. A multipurpose room—the Alan M. and Joan Taub Ades Performance Space—had been converted into a showroom, with racks of more than four hundred outfits, both new and donated, a couple of well-dressed mannequins, and a three-way mirror borrowed from the opera department. "We're like Loehmann's," Ades observed. A cowbell signalled the eleven-thirty shift, followed by a rush of students. Ades, whose services include hands-on fashion advice, was soon approached by Melody Yun Xie, a first-year vocalist in the master's-degree program. She had just put on a red-and-green taffeta gown and she looked ecstatic. "It can be for my Musetta!" she said.

"Beautiful," Ades told her. "The length is right." She leaned in and added, "Make sure you steam this well."

"Thank you so much, Mrs. Joan!"

Nearby, Esther Lim, a slender pianist in her third year of graduate study, had on a size-14 floor-length purple

dress with a floral strap, which she was hoping to have taken in. (A seamstress down the street provides basic tailoring, for free.) Ades frowned. "This needs too much alteration," she said, lifting the skirt.

Lim came back minutes later in a size-7 blue dress with a bejewelled waist. "Much better," Ades said. She looked down and added, "Not with that pocketbook."

The bell rang again, and an administrator yelled, "Twelve-o'clock shift! Go for it!" Ever since a couple of crashers got in, a few years ago, the girls have been required to show student I.D.s. "People heard there were free clothes being given out at the Manhattan School of Music," Ades said. "It's sort of like a compliment in reverse." She is hoping to expand into men's clothes, having already given a young bassist some bow ties belonging to her husband, who "wasn't happy about it." She scanned the accessories table, which had a selection of heels, gloves, bags, and pins. "See, this should be opened and put on a mannequin," she said, pulling a jangly resin necklace from a plastic bag. "It happens to be mine, so I know it well."

Elena Pinderhughes, a sophomore flutist, emerged from the changing area in a black-and-white lace cocktail dress. "Look at that!" Ades said, and twirled her finger. "Turn, turn, turn. You like it?"

Pinderhughes hedged. "I like it, but I don't think it's perfect for what I'm looking for in terms of performance. Because I'm in the jazz program, I'm looking for something a little bit more—"

"Jazzy?"

"Yeah." Moments later, she returned, beaming, in a slinky gold-beaded mesh dress. "What do you think of this one?"

"Honey bun, you look good in everything," Ades said, before suggesting a metal chain to cinch the waist. Carnegie Hall's opening-night gala had taken place the night before; Ades had run an ad in the program, seeking donations. She planned to call everyone she knew who'd attended and ask, "What were you wearing? Because I want it."

—Michael Schulman

THE FINANCIAL PAGE THE MORTGAGE MISTAKE

In 2002, President George W. Bush, trumpeting “the ownership society,” proclaimed, “We want everybody in America to own their home.” Never mind the bursting of the housing bubble; it’s still the Washington creed. That’s why Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac, the government agencies that now guarantee most home loans in the U.S., just announced that they will guarantee mortgages for first-time home buyers who make down payments of just three per cent. Advocates argue that this will make it easier for low-income families to buy homes, and will give a boost to the sluggish housing market.

It’s an easy sale to make. Since the nineteen-thirties, the U.S. government has been committed to the idea that homeownership is an unalloyed good. The list of things the government does to support the housing industry is long. The Federal Housing Administration offers low-interest mortgages. Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac, by repurchasing and guaranteeing mortgages, help hold down interest rates. Homeowners get a variety of tax breaks, including a mortgage-interest deduction and a property-tax write-off, which add up to more than two hundred billion dollars a year in lost tax revenue.

Yet it’s far from clear that these programs actually do much to increase the over-all number of homeowners. Other Western countries don’t have anything like our range of pro-housing enticements, and their rates of homeownership aren’t much different from ours. The main impact of the mortgage-interest deduction and other subsidies is not that they get people to buy houses. It’s that they get people to buy bigger, costlier houses than they otherwise would. The bigger your mortgage, the larger the tax deduction you get. This is why real-estate agents, during the housing boom, advised their clients to buy as big a house as possible, since the government was helping them pay for it. The result is that almost all the economic benefits of the mortgage deduction go to people earning more than a hundred thousand dollars a year. The average middle-class homeowner saves little or no money. As Dennis Ventry, a tax expert and law professor at U.C. Davis, told me, “It’s a classic upside-down subsidy: it goes to all the wrong people. If you really want to help people buy homes who otherwise wouldn’t, we’ve chosen exactly the wrong tool.”

All these tax breaks do inflate housing prices, but are expensive homes really better for society? A major reason for the low-down-payment program is that homes, even

after the crash, are priced beyond the means of many Americans. And though that program may turn more low-income people into homeowners, it also means that more lower-income homeowners will default. According to estimates from Dean Baker, a left-leaning economist at the Center for Economic and Policy Research, the default rate for mortgages with down payments of three to ten per cent is almost fifty per cent higher than the default rate for mortgages with down payments above ten per cent. There’s another problem: transaction costs mean that you need to stay in a home for at least five years, on average, for ownership to make financial sense, but, as Baker told me, “low- and moderate-income households have less stable jobs, less stable family situations, and are more likely to have to move, which means that many of them are not going to own a home long enough to be able to recover their original investment.” The real winners are the banks, which can make these loans without worrying about risk; the government—the taxpayer—has them covered.

If the social benefits of all these subsidies are questionable, the costs are plain. They lead Americans to overinvest in housing and underinvest in other kinds of assets. Most Americans have nearly all their wealth tied up in their homes. That’s risky for them and for the economy as a whole, as we saw during the financial crisis. Housing doesn’t have the kind of spillover benefit that you get from investments in other areas, like research and development, or even infrastructure, and it’s an inherently unstable business, being at once cyclical and illiquid. When the economy is doing well, people pour more and more money into housing; when

the economy is doing poorly, they stop. So, as a number of studies have found, the housing industry tends to amplify the economy’s ups and downs. Consider the housing bubble of recent memory: while it was inflating, the economy grew much faster than it otherwise would have. But, when the bubble burst, the downturn was incredibly severe. The government has been subsidizing a notoriously manic-depressive sector of the economy.

Unfortunately, the housing industry is a powerful lobby. Homeowners are wary of anything that might threaten their most valuable investment. And, because the government uses subsidies and tax breaks to boost the housing market, it’s easy to underestimate just how expensive these policies really are. It’s only when you think of all the other things that we could be spending that money on—education, say, or technological or medical research—that the real cost of our addiction to housing becomes clear. A big house may be great for the people who live in it. But should taxpayers really help foot the bill for their mortgage?

—James Surowiecki





Introducing the Amerinvest Fee Rebate Offer.

Honest and fair. Like Lincoln caring for your Benjamins.

Now when you invest in a managed portfolio from Amerinvest, if that model portfolio experiences two consecutive quarters of negative performance (before advisory fees), the advisory fees for both quarters will be automatically refunded. We think ol' Abe would approve.

Open a new account or fund an existing one with at least \$25,000 in new assets.

Take advantage today.
Call TD Ameritrade at **800-454-9272** or
go to tdameritrade.com/rebate for details.



Amerinvest is a registered investment advisor and an affiliate of TD Ameritrade. For more information, please see the Amerinvest Disclosure Brochure (ADV Part 2) <http://www.tdameritrade.com/forms/TDA4855.pdf>. Advisory services provided by Amerinvest Investment Management, LLC. Offer requires deposit of net new assets of at least **\$25,000** during the offer period, Oct 1, 2014-Sep 30, 2015. Model portfolio performance measured before advisory fees. See www.tdameritrade.com/rebate for complete offer details.

All investments involve risk, and successful results are not guaranteed. This is not an offer or solicitation in any jurisdiction where we are not authorized to do business. TD Ameritrade, Inc., member FINRA/SIPC. TD Ameritrade is a trademark jointly owned by TD Ameritrade IP Company, Inc. and The Toronto-Dominion Bank. © 2015 TD Ameritrade IP Company, Inc. All rights reserved. Used with permission.

THE OUTSIDE GAME

How the sociologist Howard Becker studies the conventions of the unconventional.

BY ADAM GOPNIK



Americans have often had strange and serendipitous careers in Paris, from Thomas Evans, the Philadelphia dentist who cured Emperor Louis-Napoleon of a toothache and became an indispensable ornament of the Imperial court, to those African-American jazzmen, like the great soprano-sax player Sidney Bechet, whose careers were revived, and reputations nurtured, in France in ways they never could have been in America. But few have known an odder trajectory than Howie—“Only my mother ever called me Howard”—Becker. Howard S. Becker, to give him his full, honorary-degree name—he has six—has

been a major figure in American sociology for more than sixty years. Now a brisk eighty-six, he remains most famous for the studies collected in his book “Outsiders,” of 1963, which transformed sociologists’ ideas of what it means to be a “deviant.” In America’s academic precincts, he is often seen as a sort of Richard Feynman of the social sciences, notable for his street smarts, his informal manner, and his breezy, pungent prose style—a Northwestern professor who was just as at home playing piano in saloons. (Indeed, the observations that put him on the path to academic fame, on the subculture of marijuana smokers, began

while he was playing jazz piano in Chicago strip joints. “Not burlesque houses,” he says. “These were strip joints.”)

Yet it is his position in France that is truly astonishing. Two critical biographies of Becker have been published in French in the past decade, and “Beckerisme” has become an ideology to conjure with. YouTube videos capture him speaking heavily accented Chicago French to student audiences, and he now spends a good part of every year in Paris, giving seminars and holding court. His work is required reading in many French universities, even though it seems to be a model of American pragmatism, preferring narrow-seeming “How?” and “Who, exactly?” questions to the deeper “Why?” and “What?” supposedly favored by French theory. That may be exactly its appeal, though: for the French, Becker seems to combine three highly American elements—jazz, Chicago, and the exotic beauties of empiricism.

This summer, Becker published a summing up of his life’s method and beliefs, called “What About Mozart? What About Murder?” (The title refers to the two caveats or complaints most often directed against his kind of sociology’s equable “relativism”: how can you study music as a mere social artifact—what about Mozart? How can you consider criminal justice a mutable convention—what about Murder?) The book is both a jocular personal testament of faith and a window into Becker’s beliefs. His accomplishment is hard to summarize in a sentence or catchphrase, since he’s resolutely anti-theoretical and suspicious of “models” that are too neat. He wants a sociology that observes the way people act around each other as they really do, without expectations about how they ought to. Over the decades, this has led him to do close, almost novelistic studies of jazz musicians, medical students, painters, and photographers.

Among sociologists, he’s most famous for having made sociology’s previous theories of “deviance” look deviant: studying obscure or out groups, he has shown that the way their members act together follows the same kinds of rules that everyone else follows.

Celebrated in France, the piano-playing scholar changed how we think about “deviance.”

Some people may march to a different drummer—but, when they do, they're usually all marching in rhythm, too. As one of his students has written, "Rather than asking the less than fruitful question of why people break rules, Becker came to focus on how people go through an identifiable process to *choose* to break rules." A Beckerian analysis of a social "world" asks how, in any culture or subculture, someone comes to be called an insider while someone else gets pushed outside. Simple as it is, this approach has proved immensely influential in the study of everything from drug addiction to queer theory. Basically, Becker believes that Yogi Berra was right: you really can observe the most by watching. Heather Love, a professor of English at Penn who specializes in gender and sexuality studies, points out that it shares "many of the same concerns, about institutions, power, the dynamics of social relations" as contemporary post-structuralist research, "but all in this kind of homegrown, ordinary language, a 'just the facts, ma'am' style that has the appeal of American noir and hardboiled fiction."

Not long ago, in an apartment that he and his wife, Dianne Hagaman, had taken for the fall in the Fifth Arrondissement—the neighborhood of Paris that clusters around the old Sorbonne—he sat and talked about his life's work and its apotheosis in Paris, almost as a spectator of his own surprising career. As long-faced and dry-eyed as a stoical silent comedian, Becker is game to talk about anything. A conversation with him becomes an inimitable spool of bebop piano tips, Chicago history, sociological minutiae, and meditations on French intellectual life, with helpful detours into strip-club culture in the forties and the reasons that French professors think of themselves as civil servants while American ones imagine themselves as entrepreneurs.

"I always really wanted to be a piano player," he begins. "When I was about twelve, I heard boogie-woogie for the first time and fell in love with it. My folks had bought a piano for show, and I bought a book of boogie-woogie and taught myself to play it, more or less. And then I met some kids in the neigh-

borhood—you see, I went to Austin High." Austin High was the citadel of Chicago jazz, where, in the twenties, Bud Freeman had helped create a form of excited, driven white-folks jazz that remained influential through the swing era. "I got jobs for people who couldn't afford real musicians—thirteen-year-old kids playing for other thirteen-year-old kids." Then he got into a better band, which was racially mixed. "That was a big thing," he says. "Because we were racially mixed, we played only black dances. The kids who were at the black dances, if you didn't play those pieces exactly the way they were on the record, you were in trouble. So I took lessons from Lennie Tristano. When I met him, he was in his late twenties and had already stopped playing in public—he wouldn't put up with anything other than perfect playing conditions, with the result that he almost never played."

Tristano, who was a saxophonist as well as a pianist, was the Glenn Gould of bebop: difficult, hypersensitive, reclusive, and hugely gifted. "Instead of teaching 'freedom,' or creativity, Tristano taught me a set of practices that create the feeling of what an improvisation ought to sound like," Becker says. Tristano taught simple ways of solving puzzles that come up in improvising—for instance, ways of adding flattened fifths and minor ninths to otherwise too familiar chord sequences. "He showed how to create an essentially unlimited set of possibilities to work with as I played through an evening in a bar," Becker recalls. Jazz solos, he learned from his models, were concocted almost entirely "from a small collection of 'crips,' short phrases that can be combined in a million ways, subjected to all possible variations." The lesson that social performance, even of the highest kind, was more a string of crips than an outpouring of confessions remained at the root of Becker's understanding of the way the world works.

Knowing that his father, a first-generation Jewish immigrant, would "have a kitten" at the thought of his son spending his life playing piano in saloons, Becker enrolled in the University of Chicago—then at the height of its Robert Hutchins-era reputation as a cita-

del of great books and no sports—so that he could be seen to study all day in order to be free to play jazz all night. "I started working strip joints on Clark Street—all the grownups were in the Army. We played the one independent, non-Mob-owned joint. Guys would come in from the hybrid-seed-corn convention and spend three or four thousand dollars buying drinks for the girls. Then they'd go away happy."

He planned to get a graduate degree in English while continuing his jazz life, and then one day he stumbled on a new book, "Black Metropolis: A Study of Negro Life in a Northern City"—the northern city being Chicago—by St. Clair Drake and Horace Cayton. It was one of the first in-depth studies of contemporary urban life. "It was wonderful, the whole idea of being an urban anthropologist!" Becker says. "You could be an anthropologist, a very romantic thing, but you didn't have to go away to do it. Some of the anthropologists I knew lost half their teeth. Not nice. I thought, Wow! If I just wrote down what I was doing at night, just what everyone said and what I observed, then those were field notes."

Those "field notes" gathered at the strip clubs and night spots helped inspire a seminal paper of 1953, "Becoming a Marihuana User," in the *American Journal of Sociology*. (Asked if he knew so much because he was smoking weed himself, he says, "Yeah. Obviously." And does he still smoke it? "Yeah. Obviously.") Becker insists that his accomplishment in the paper was no more than the elimination of a single needless syllable: "Instead of talking about drug abuse, I talked about drug *use*." "Deviance" had long been a preoccupation of sociology and its mother field, anthropology. Most "deviance theory" took it for granted that if you did weird things you were a weird person. Normal people made rules—we'll crap over here, worship over here, have sex like so—which a few deviants in every society couldn't keep. They clung together in small bands of misbehavior.

Becker's work set out to show that out-groups weren't made up of people who couldn't keep the rules; they

were made up of people who kept other kinds of rules. Marijuana smoking, too, was a set of crips, a learned activity and a social game. At a time when the general assumption was that drug use was private and compulsive, Becker argued that you had to *learn* how to get high. Smoking weed, he showed, was most often strange or unpleasant at first. One of his informants (a fellow band member) reported, "I walked around the room, walking around the room trying to get off, you know; it just scared me at first, you know. I wasn't used to that kind of feeling." Another musician explained, "You have to just talk them out of being afraid. Keep talking to them, reassuring, telling them it's all right. And come on with your own story, you know: 'The same thing happened to me. You'll get to like that after a while.'" In the sociologese that Becker had not yet entirely discarded, he wrote, "Given these typically frightening and unpleasant first experiences, the beginner will not continue use unless he learns to redefine the sensations as pleasurable." He went on, "This redefinition occurs, typically, in interaction with more experienced users, who, in a number of ways, teach the novice to find pleasure in this experience, which is at first so frightening." What looked like a deviant act by an escape-seeking individual was simply a communal practice shaped by a com-

mon enterprise: it takes a strip club to smoke a reefer.

The lessons learned in the night clubs remain present even today. In his new *Mozart/Murder* book, Becker points out the continuities between the middle-class housewives of the early twentieth century who became addicted to the opium products then sold over the counter for "women's troubles" and black youths who now take essentially the same kinds of drug, in a different world: "When middle-class women could buy opium, they did, and they got addicted. When they couldn't, they didn't. When poor black boys could buy it, they did, and they got addicted, too." In Becker's work, a small realism of social scenes replaces the melodrama of personal pathology.

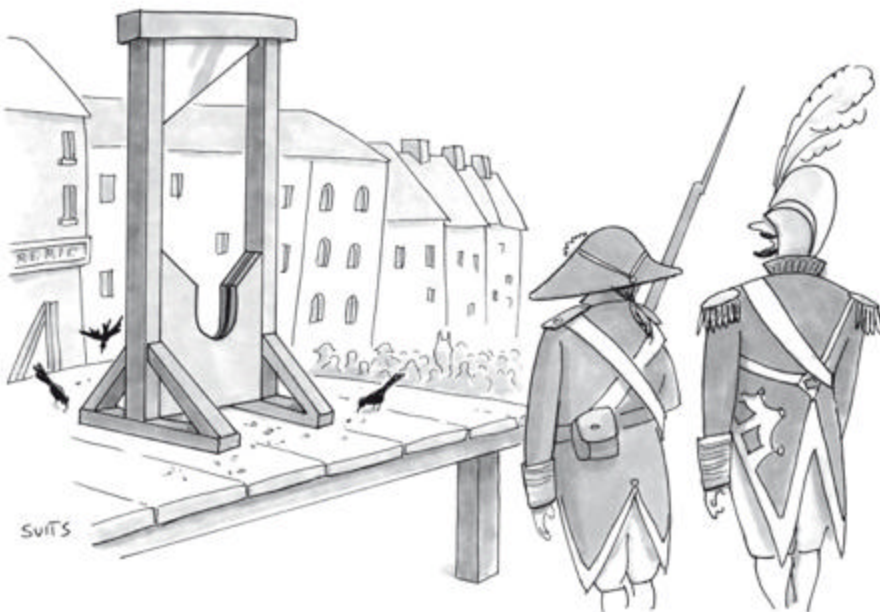
Becker also points out that any social group, insider or outsider, ends by divorcing itself from the group it's supposed to be serving. "Everyone has an ideal student or audience in mind, and we never get them," he points out. This makes teachers impatient with students, and jazz musicians suspicious of audiences. Jazz musicians smoked weed to get high, but one of the effects was to set them off from the night-club-going customers they despised. "This insight looks original only now," Becker says. "If you were playing, that was all you heard: 'Fucking squares, now look what they want!' I remember learning

to leave the stand quickly, before any one could ask me to play 'Melancholy Baby.' That was the stuff of every minute of what you were doing." He adds, "The originality—I shouldn't even call it that—was to pay attention to it as something worth talking about."

This insight turned out to apply to a lot more than marijuana smokers. "My dissertation supervisor, Everett Hughes, loved the idea that anything you see in the lowly kind of work is there in privileged work, too, only they don't talk about it," he says. "Later on, he went to the American nurses' association and they hired him as a consultant, and he said, 'Let's do some real research: why don't you talk about how nurses hate patients?'" There was a shocked silence and then someone said, "How did you know that?"

The influence of Becker's early work remains profound. A presidential lecture he gave in 1966 at the annual meeting of the Society for the Study of Social Problems, entitled "Whose Side Are We On?," is still a clarion in the field. Gayle Rubin, a professor of anthropology at Michigan and a leading scholar of L.G.B.T. studies, praises it as a pioneering attempt at "moral levelling," where the old prudish act of exposing deviants and curing them of deviance changed to the project of finding out what deviants did, and why it was, on inspection, usually no more deviant than what the rest of us did. "That stuff at Chicago in the fifties really lit the way for so much of what came after," Rubin says. "There's a real renaissance of it now."

Becker insists that he never entirely intended to stay in academia: "It was only after I finished the Ph.D. that I more or less realized that my choice now was to be the most educated piano player on Sixty-third Street or start taking sociology more seriously." Suspicious of the administrative details of academic life, he lived on research grants, passing from college campus to institutional setting—"For fourteen or fifteen years, I was what was called a 'research bum.'" Following the lead of his first wife, Nan Harris, who was a ceramic sculptor, he decided to write about the visual arts. "But I had this disability—I couldn't draw!" he says. Living in San Francisco for a while, he



"The bagels—they just keep getting bigger, no?"

took up photography instead, and was lucky enough to have as the “lab monitor,” who mixed chemicals and helped students, a young woman named Annie Leibovitz. His experiences as a working photographer, like his earlier ones as a working jazzman, illuminated what eventually became his second important book, “Art Worlds” (1982), which advanced a collaborative view of picture-making. Like reefer-smoking among jazz musicians, artmaking was not the business of solitary artists, inspired by visions, but a social enterprise in which a huge range of people played equally essential roles in order to produce an artifact that a social group decided to dignify as art. Art, like weed, exists only within a world.

It was a quarter-century ago, with the publication of “Art Worlds” and “Outsiders” in France, that the strange second act of Becker’s career began. His books became a magnetic pole around which dissident French sociologists could gather. A group of social scientists calling themselves L’École de Chicago de Paris translated “Outsiders,” and saw it become a campus best-seller. (Becker: “I think because it worked well as a textbook, being sort of leftish—really, just unconventional about things like deviance—and easy to read, which was a great combination to give to undergraduates.”) But the book also provided a means to combat the man who, for a generation, had been the dominant figure in French social science, Pierre Bourdieu.

Becker’s role as the American not-Bourdieu is so essential to his reputation in France that, in talking about Becker, one invariably also talks about his other. Bourdieu, who died in 2002, was a sociologist whose work—brilliantly disenthralled or grimly determinist, depending on your perspective—explained all social relations as power relations, even in a seemingly open world of “free expression” like the visual arts. For Bourdieu, whose book “Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste” (1979) remains a classic text on the sociology of culture, a dominant class reproduces itself by enforcing firm rules about what is and is not acceptable, and creates a closed, exclusive language to describe it: those

who have power decide what counts as art, and to enter that field at all is possible for outsiders only if they learn to repeat the words that construct its values.

One of the most agitated debates in French social science today is between Bourdieu’s and Becker’s conceptions of the realm in which our lives take place. Bourdieu believed that all social life takes place in a “field” and Becker insists that it takes place within a “world”—an opposition that irresistibly brings to mind Woody Allen’s remark that while Democritus called the indivisible units of the universe “atoms” Leibniz called them “monads,” and that fortunately the two men never met or there would have been an extremely dull argument. The argument about fields and worlds, as Becker freely admits, is a bit like that one—both are generalized metaphors—but he also thinks it can be saved from a mere dispute over nomenclature.

“Bourdieu’s big idea was the *champs*, field, and mine was *monde*, world—what’s the difference?” Becker asks rhetorically. “Bourdieu’s idea of field is kind of mystical. It’s a metaphor from physics. I always imagined it as a zero-sum game being played in a box. The box is full of little things that zing around. And he doesn’t speak about people. He just speaks about forces. There aren’t any people doing anything.” People in Bourdieu’s field are merely atom-like entities. (It was Bourdieu’s vision that helped inspire Michel Houellebecq’s nihilistic novel of the meaningless collisions of modern life, “The Elementary Particles.”)

“Mine is a view that—well, it takes a village to write a symphony and get it performed,” Becker goes on. “It’s not just the composer. The great case for me is in film, because nobody ever figured out who the real artist is: the screenwriter or the director or who? Or, rather, *everybody* figured it out, but never figured out the same thing. Early on when I was reading about art, I read a book by Aljean Harmetz on the making of ‘The Wizard of Oz.’ She was the daughter of someone in the wardrobe department of M-G-M, and she explains that there were four directors of that film, and the guys who thought of the crucial thing, the change from



HIGHLIGHTS INCLUDE:

ALL BALANCHINE I

— JAN 20, 24 Eve, 25, 31 Mat

Featuring three uncontested masterworks

HEAR THE DANCE: RUSSIA

— JAN 21, 23, 27, 30, FEB 1

With Robbins’ *The Cage*

NEW COMBINATIONS

— FEB 4, 8, 10, 11

Highlighted by a Justin Peck World Premiere

ROMEO + JULIET

— FEB 13-15, 20-22

Just in time for Valentine’s Day

ALL BALANCHINE III

— FEB 18, 24, 25, 28 Mat, MAR 1

With the return of *Harlequinade*

Go inside the Season
nycballet.com/explorewinter

\$29 SEATS INCLUDING BROCH | nycballet.com
 (212) 496-0500

NEW YORK CITY BALLET

black-and-white to color when the characters enter Oz, were the composer and the lyricist! In an important way, I took the list of credits at the end of a Hollywood film as my model of how artistic creation really happens.”

As Becker has written elsewhere, enlarging the end-credits metaphor, “A ‘world’ as I understand it consists of real people who are trying to get things done, largely by getting other people to do things that will assist them in their project. . . . The resulting collective activity is something that perhaps no one wanted, but is the best everyone could get out of this situation and therefore what they all, in effect, agreed to.” In a Beckerian world, we act the way we do because of a certain logic of events—jazz musicians are supposed to smoke dope, graduate students learn how to please their supervisors—but there are lots of different roles within the world, and we can choose which one to play, and how to play it. We’re all actors, not angels or completely free agents. But we are looking for applause, so we put on the best show we can. This view of the world has something in common with that of Becker’s longtime friend and colleague Erving Goffman. “But Goffman got more interested in the micro-dramatics of things,” Becker points out, meaning, for instance, his studies of how people look when they lie. “I was always more interested in the big picture.”

After a morning’s talk, Becker makes his way, steadily if slowly, around the corner to his favorite lunchtime bistro, where he is well known, and, seated at a corner table by the glass façade, orders a *steak frites*. His fingers tap on the tabletop: he still plays the piano, and plays it well. Just last year, he issued a new CD of himself working over some standards. “Many years after studying with Lennie,” he recalls, “I was in New York and on a whim called him up at his home, somewhere on Long Island. We schmoozed for a while and he congratulated me on my success as a sociologist and then said, ‘You know? I always liked the way you played. Why don’t you quit your job and move to New York and study with me again?’ I had a momentary feeling

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

About her: the air, warm as fact.

An imaginary boat heading off to hell, her foot pushing it offshore.

The sunlit bank, a mirage of the perfect past.

She was barking at the waves, thinking they barked first.

But this was not a river. It was Thursday, a word cast in lead.

Her eye had turned the water into sky.

The poet is a trespasser.

The poet is the king of Rome, New York, with one foot in a boat and one against the snowy shore of reason.

Wondering if, like a boy, she could go there for a season.

—Elizabeth Willis

that, yes, that’s what I should do! But I overcame it.”

Becker is aware of the irony that, while he remains on the “left” of American sociology, as a moral leveller, he is on the right of the French kind, as an apostle of agency and action. He is more than willing to apply detached Beckerian analysis to his role in France. “In France, people say about another professor, I would cross the street to avoid him! But in America we wouldn’t be on the same street. A lot of what happens involves the difference in the size of the country and the centralization of the universities. People can have hegemony of a sort in an American school, but not really. You’re going to take over the departments at Berkeley and Stanford and Harvard and Yale and at all the smaller places where the real energies are simmering anyway? Doesn’t happen.” He thinks it over for a minute, between bites of *onglet* and courteous chat with the bistro’s owner. “You know what the real problem with Bourdieu was? The real problem with Bourdieu was that he was a schmuck,” he says at last. “Power-hungry and mean in spirit and obsessed with career.”

Becker tries to observe his own ascendancy in France with the same de-

tachment with which he observes other people, but his appeal to the French goes beyond his simply not being Bourdieu. The French myth of America is as robust as the American myth of France, and one important element in it is the idea that Americans can arrive intuitively at results that the French can get to only by thinking a lot. Like the Hollywood moviemakers whom the French New Wave critics adopted in the fifties and sixties, Becker is beloved in Paris in part because he doesn’t seem overencumbered with theory or undue abstraction. As Heather Love also points out, “U.S. deviance studies has the international allure of American crime fiction, and with a cool narrator like Becker, all the better.”

But, to his French admirers, this doesn’t disprove the need for theory; it just means that sometimes the best theories are left mysteriously unspoken. That Howard Hawks made so many good movies without actually having a theory of moviemaking was a strong sign that he must really have a fantastic theory of the movies, if he would only tell you. Becker’s reputation is a bit like that: if you can say so many interesting things just by watching the world, then you must really have a

fantastic set of prescription spectacles, even if no one ever gets to see you wear them.

Over lunch, Becker discusses a question that rises above personality clashes and institutional leanings. The project of moral levelling also has within it the problem of moral levelling. What is the point of sociology if it can't tell us that murder is bad or Mozart is great? Surely we don't want to expand our equanimity about out-groups to, say, the Gambino family, whose rules include whacking people they don't like, or the Manson family, who had rules and rituals, too? For Becker, though, these objections involve a "category mistake." Yes, murder is wrong, but why is it the job of social sciences to remind us of that fact?

"How does it really happen isn't the only question, sure," he says. "It's just the one with the biggest chance of having an interesting answer rather than a predictable, safe one. I'm interested in how power happens, not just saying, 'Oh, the exercise of power.'" One of his favorite instances of how power works involves the role of the invisible middlemen who create places for themselves in the muddled center of any bureaucracy—in Brazil, where he lived for a while, they're called *despachantes*, but a student of Becker's has found close equivalents in Chicago laundromats, where they ease the burden of the welfare system. "They get power by knowing the rules on the box in greater detail than anyone else," Becker says. "They're the people you turn to to break the code of the system. That kind of 'how' of power interests me more than the fact of power.

"What does sociology bring to the table? Well, I'd expand the definition of sociology. Calvino, in 'Invisible Cities,' is a sociologist. Robert Frank, in 'The Americans'—that's sociology. There's a thing that I'm sure David Mamet said once, though I've never been able to track it to its source. He was talking about the theatre, and he said that everyone is in a scene for a reason. Everyone has something he wants. Everyone has some plan he's trying to pull off. 'What's the reason?' is the real question. So that's what you do. It's like you're watching a play and you—you're the guy who knows that everyone is there for a reason." ♦

SWANN
AUCTION GALLERIES



Rockwell Kent, pen and ink frontispiece from the Lakeside Press edition of *Moby Dick*, 1930. Estimate \$4,000 to \$6,000.

Illustration Art

JANUARY 22

Specialist: Christine von der Linn • cv@swanngalleries.com

Preview: January 17, 12-5; January 20 & 21, 10-6; January 22, 10-12

104 East 25th St, New York, NY 10010 • tel 212 254 4710

SWANNGALLERIES.COM

IAA

Advertisement

ADD AN ORIGINAL CARTOON TO YOUR COLLECTION



Charlie Hankin, April 7, 2014

Own one-of-a-kind drawings of the most recent cartoons featured in *The New Yorker*. Each drawing is hand captioned and signed by the artist.

call 212.286.7133 or email originalart@newyorkerstore.com

WorldMags.net

THE EIGHT SERIOUS RELATIONSHIPS OF HERCULES

BY YONI BRENNER

PENELOPE

In his eighteenth year, Hercules, son of Zeus, went forth from Thebes to seek fame and glory. He was welcomed by the King of Thespieae, who had heard of Hercules' great strength, and hoped that the youthful hero would ignite the fancy of his eldest daughter, who had exclusively been dating jagoffs. And Hercules saw that Penelope was quite attractive, and, to the King's delight, a great passion was born. But, as the months passed and the King continued to hover, Hercules started to grasp the inky depths of Penelope's daddy issues, and at times he could not tell if he was her boyfriend or some kind of peculiar erotic proxy. And so Hercules was distressed but not altogether surprised when he returned one day from the hunt only to find that Penelope was gone—fled to Ithaca with one of the aforementioned jagoffs.

HERMIONE

She was tall and shapely, with soft, shoulder-length hair and plump ruby lips that were rife with sensual possibilities. When Hercules saw her, he felt a stirring in his loins and was seized with an extraordinary desire to possess her, and introduce her to his nana. And indeed their chemistry was intense, and many a theatregoer was made acutely uncomfortable by their marathon make-out sessions, their heavy and relentless petting. But, after a time, cracks began to appear, for Hermione was remarkably ignorant of the ways of the gods, and Hercules knew little of physical therapy; and when, on a cool, moonlit night, Hercules found himself upon the rocks of Piraeus, hooking up with Hermione's roommate, Stacy, he knew that it was over.

AGATHA

In the days following the breakup with Hermione, Hercules attended

many parties, where he drank deeply of mead and dominated many games of wine pong, and it was through these that he came to know Agatha. Now, Hercules was still young, and susceptible to flattery and general reinforcement; for although he was immortal, his parents had withheld praise, and he was profoundly insecure. And so,



even though he was not attracted to Agatha, her enthusiasm was a balm to his ego, and she plied him with wine and compliments and numerous hand jobs. But as time passed the guilt grew hard within Hercules' breast, like an unripe fig, and after weeks of dithering he finally mustered the courage to break it off—although he deftly managed to keep the door open for future hand jobs.

ALLISON

They fought in temples, they fought in fields. They fought in the agora, and in the baths; they fought at that new tapas place, right there, in front of ev-

erone. And when it was over he and Allison would weep bitter tears, and cling to each other like frightened children, and Hercules would say that he loved her. But did he really love her? Or was what he felt a milky cocktail of codependence and guilt, spiked with the overwhelming fear that he would never find anyone better? (And, if so, he reasoned, was that not in itself a kind of love?) Whatever the case, a resolution was not close at hand, and the relationship dragged on for three and a half years.

LARA

That he was on the rebound was manifest, and from the first time they hooked up, on the shoals of Mykonos, Hercules kept warning her that it wasn't going anywhere. Lara kept replying that it was not an issue, for she was a free spirit, and was in the process of opening her own gallery. And, in truth, it was Hercules who was making things weird: it was he who struggled not to say "I love you" the first time they had sex; it was he who would tiptoe to the bathroom late at night and quietly cry for reasons that he could not fathom. And when, years later, Hercules heard through mutual friends that Lara had become a lesbian, he was exceedingly relieved, and he flirted with the idea of sending her a card—though in the end he never did, because where do you buy a card for that?

EVA

From the start, Hercules worried that the relationship would blow up in his face: Eva was Allison's best friend. But, on the other hand, why, after two years, should Allison continue to define the parameters of his social life—especially since they were no longer speaking? Indeed, Eva's friendship with Allison bestowed a special intimacy upon the proceedings, for she was already acquainted with his flaws and failings and accepted him for who he was. But Hercules had forgotten that Eva was substantially psychotic, and when Allison got wind of the affair Eva turned on him and made it sound like Hercules had seduced *her*, which, of course, was totally not what happened. But it didn't matter, and ultimately the thing did

blow up in his face, just as the Oracle foretold.

OPHELIA

She was bright—brilliant, even—with sapphire eyes and long golden hair that she wore in a braid over her left shoulder. But, while blessed with beauty and wisdom, Ophelia was cursed with a wonky metabolism and a panoply of food allergies—and not just to normal things like nuts or shellfish but to crazy things like tahini and grape skins and broccoli rabe. And though by now Hercules had slain the Hydra and vanquished the Nemean lion, facing a lifetime of oat milk and unrefined spelt was a task that even he could not bear. And so the day came that they talked it out, and the tears flowed like rivers, and their noses dripped like rain, and the relationship was dissolved by mutual agreement—although Hercules deftly managed to keep the door open for future hand jobs.

ALLISON (AGAIN)

Couples therapy had been her idea, but in truth Hercules was receptive, for he was older now, with some money in his pocket, and no longer susceptible to the cycles of bickering and guilt that had sunk the relationship the first time around. At their engagement party, Hercules was struck by how right it felt; and although perhaps he consumed one stoup of wine too many, and perhaps he hugged Allison's half sister a touch too ardently, he believed in their future. So Hercules was not merely blindsided but thunderstruck when, the day after the party, Allison threw his belongings out the window and smashed his new chariot with a wooden club, and cast him from their apartment, even though Hercules' name was on the lease.

And it came to pass that Hercules took a step back and did a little soul-searching, and in time he realized that he had been using his relationships as a crutch to compensate for his lack of self-worth. So, resolving to be single for a while, Hercules got to know Hercules, and he did not date, and he did not play wine pong—although he did remain open to certain fixups, provided that the girl was “normal” and objectively attractive. ♦

Promotion

FIND MORE FROM YOUR FAVORITE WRITERS AT

THE NEW NEWYORKER.COM



HILTON ALS



ADAM GOPNIK



EMILY NUSSBAUM



DANA GOODYEAR



AMY DAVIDSON



GEORGE PACKER



JEFFREY TOOBIN



REBECCA MEAD



JELANI COBB



KELEFA SANNEH



ANDY BOROWITZ



JOHN CASSIDY

NEWYORKER.COM is better than ever, and full access is part of your subscription. You'll find everything from the magazine, plus more than fifteen original stories a day from writers including those above, plus **MICHAEL SPECTER, ALEX ROSS, JILL LEPORE, PHILIP GOUREVITCH, WILLIAM FINNEGAN, MARGARET TALBOT, PETER SCHJELDAHL, RICHARD BRODY, VAUHINI VARA**, and more. Subscribers also get exclusive access to our online archive, dating back to 1925.

**THERE ARE TWO EASY WAYS
TO CONFIRM ACCESS:**

To link your
subscription, go to
WWW.NEWYORKER.COM/GO/LINK

OR

If you have already linked your
subscription, you can sign in at
WWW.NEWYORKER.COM/GO/SIGNIN

**TO CHECK YOUR ACCESS LEVEL OR UPGRADE YOUR ACCOUNT,
GO TO WWW.NEWYORKER.COM/GO/CUSTOMERCARE.
PLEASE NOTE THAT NEW "PRINT ONLY" SUBSCRIBERS
HAVE LIMITED ACCESS TO NEWYORKER.COM**

GIVE ME A SMILE

Trying to laugh when your face won't move.

BY JONATHAN KALB

*In 1862, G. B. Duchenne de Boulogne catalogued how muscles correspond to emotions.*

The last time anyone saw my smile was the night of February 1, 2002. I'd been out for Korean barbecue with old friends, and had been complaining about a headache that I'd had for five days. I'd likened it to a spike driven through the top of my head and down to the back of my throat. "We'll send you heavy-duty pliers," someone joked as we said good night.

When I woke up the next morning, my face felt slack; I thought I'd slept too long in one position. Then I looked in the bathroom mirror. There were no creases on the left side of my forehead, and the laugh fold to the left of my nose had almost disappeared. I could raise the right eyebrow but not the left. The right eye blinked; the other was frozen open. I couldn't pucker or retract my lips. My head was still throbbing.

At the emergency room, the doctor was unimpressed. "It's Bell's palsy," she said, as if describing a case of flu. She told me that it was a common, temporary paralysis brought on by the inflammation of the seventh cranial nerve, which activates the facial muscles. The condition is named for the Scottish physician Charles Bell, who called it by its

then familiar name, "blight," in cranial-nerve studies that he conducted in the eighteen-twenties. (Bell also considered the problem "not formidable.") Bell's palsy afflicts about one in sixty-five people at some point in their lifetime; most recuperate within three weeks, but about fifteen per cent never recover fully. The exact cause is unknown.

That was Saturday. I was sent home with a prescription for a strong pain reliever for the headache and an eye patch to protect my cornea until I could blink again. By Monday, I couldn't keep food or water down; I returned to the hospital and was told that my kidneys had failed. By Tuesday, I was constantly dizzy, even while lying in bed. The inflammation had disturbed the eighth cranial nerve, which regulates the inner ear. It and the seventh cranial nerve pass through a pair of tiny canals, one on each side of the skull. The nerves had likely been squeezed up against the ragged internal walls of the left canal and damaged.

After several days, my kidneys started working again. (Their failure turned out to have been a side effect of the pain medication; my headache dissipated on

its own during the following week.) Six months of physical therapy restored my sense of balance. The eighth cranial nerve didn't heal, but with effort the eyes can be trained to take over the work of the inner ear, providing information about balance to the brain. The seventh cranial nerve was able to heal, but only in part. Like a utility trunk line, it is a bundle of thin strands that attach to an array of facial muscles. When the strands are "insulted," as my doctor put it, the ones leading to the upper face often heal first and best; those serving the lower face can take longer and sometimes reattach sloppily to the wrong neuronal partners.

And so I regained the ability to blink and wink on both sides, to frown, and to look absorbed. But the nerve that once connected to my left zygomaticus major, the muscle that traverses the cheek and pulls it up for a smile, had attached itself to my left platysma, the muscle that extends into the neck and pulls down the mouth and chin. Doctors call this condition synkinesis. For the past thirteen years, my smile has been an incoherent tug-of-war between a grin on one side and a frown on the other: an expression of joy spliced to an expression of horror.

Smiles are our most important form of nonverbal communication. They express warmth and familiarity; they signal receptiveness, openness, alliance, approval, arousal, mirth, and pleasure. They're also pleas for attention; tools of ingratiation, seduction, appeasement; flags of disapproval, contempt, embarrassment. Some people wield them parsimoniously; others dole them out willy-nilly. The spontaneously joyful smile is the facial expression most easily recognized from a distance—as far as a hundred metres, researchers say.

If a stranger approaches me smiling and I try to return the greeting, I watch the person's face fade into apprehension and wariness. I teach theatre at Hunter College, and, when I first enter the classroom each semester, new students have no idea what to make of me, because my face doesn't corroborate my claim of being accessible and eager to work with them. A confusing message is the last thing I want to send, so I try to produce the most normal-looking

expression possible, which in my case is usually a flat, tight-lipped half smile that comes off as ungenerous, patronizing, or insincere. If something tickles or pleases me, I try to smile, and my left cheek is yanked down as if by a rubber band.

I have a photograph in my office of Bill Clinton and me, taken about ten years ago, when he visited campus. Clinton, the old pro, is beaming. The camera has caught me leaning slightly away, trying to show pleasure with my eyes while holding my mouth flat to avoid looking deformed. Most people who see the photo chuckle and assume that I couldn't stand Clinton. Actually, I have always rather liked him and am sorry the record seems to show otherwise.

The scientist who first explained the separate actions and effects of the human facial muscles was an eccentric nineteenth-century Frenchman named G. B. Duchenne de Boulogne. His 1862 compendium, "The Mechanism of Human Facial Expression," established the "orthography" of humanity's "language of the emotions," which Duchenne presumed to be "universal and immutable." (Charles Darwin, Paul Ekman, and others later provided evidence for the claim of universality.) Duchenne's was the first scientific work to illustrate its findings with photographs. The book contains more than a hundred remarkable plates, some as misshapen as anything a Bell's-palsy patient is likely to see in the mirror.

Duchenne cast aside the pseudoscientific literature on physiognomy—reading character and morality in people's faces—that had been piling up since the seventeenth century. Using an apparatus he'd invented, Duchenne stimulated volunteers' facial nerves at the points where the nerves entered each facial muscle. He then photographed the resulting contractions, compiling a catalogue of discrete muscle actions that correspond to particular emotions.

Among the experimental subjects were a mustachioed young actor with the rare ability to move many of his facial muscles independently; an attractive, nearly blind young woman; and a prematurely wizened middle-aged man so "stupefied by the abuse of alcohol"

that he died of the D.T.s ten days after being photographed. I found my own condition in photo No. 58. One of the regular subjects, a toothless old man with nerve damage so severe that he could not feel the electrodes, is having his left platysma muscle "electrized." His neck is grotesquely strained on the left, and his lower lip is drawn sharply down and sideways. He looks irritated, baffled, and attentive all at once. Duchenne called the platysma "the muscle of fright."

Duchenne was the first to observe that a spontaneously joyful smile cannot be faked, because it results from the simultaneous contraction of two muscles, only one of which is ordinarily under conscious control. Most people can voluntarily lift the corners of the mouth, but authentic joy lives in the eyes. It requires contractions of the orbicularis oculi, the sphincter muscle surrounding the eye socket, which, Duchenne wrote, "is only put in play by the sweet emotions of the soul." The effect of this muscle is unmistakable: it subtly lifts the lower eyelids and pushes the skin around the eyes inward, and the eyes seem to sparkle.

Certain people, it turns out, do have the ability to activate this muscle voluntarily. Method actors, for instance, can produce radiant smiles by force of imagination, just as they produce hot tears, shrieks of terror, gusts of indignation, and blasts of rage. Watch Meryl Streep laughing in "The Bridges of Madison County"; she later told Oprah Winfrey that she was able to do so convincingly by thinking about the times that Clint Eastwood forgot his lines. In general, the presence or absence of these eye-muscle contractions makes all the difference between a real smile and a forced one—an observation that social scientists today consider to be so fundamental that they refer to the smile of spontaneous joy as the "Duchenne smile."

About three years after the onset of my Bell's palsy, I started trying to recover something of my old smile. I realized that, to avoid prompting puzzled double takes and averted eyes when I met people for the first time, I'd begun suppressing facial expression altogether, holding my face impassive and emotionless. I had decided against correc-

tive neurosurgery after hearing that it sometimes worsens the condition. But my son, Sam, inspired me to get creative. One day when he was eight, he was sitting across from me on the floor holding a camera, and I happened to lean my weak cheek against my knuckles. "Hey, look—you just smiled!" he said, and snapped my picture. Sure enough, the lifting action of my hand had produced a tolerable facsimile of a smile in the photo. Improvements soon followed. My wife, Julie, pointed out that even better photos resulted when I pressed close to her and used her right cheek to hold up my left.

The first step in my recovery program was to explain a mystery: often, and in all sincerity, my friends say that they see nothing wrong with my smile. Reading Duchenne, I figured out why. He described a phenomenon that contemporary scientists call "holistic processing," in which a facial expression that is formed by a single muscle seems to involve movement of the entire face. For instance, doubt can be expressed by the knitted brow alone, but studies show that viewers often think that the expression enlists other muscles as well, such as those controlling the upper lip. In my case, thankfully, because the nerves of my upper face have healed, the orbicularis-oculi muscles around my eyes contract when I'm happy or amused. My friends overlook the outlandish appearance of my cheeks and mouth because they see the smiling in my eyes and project it onto the rest of my face.

Studies done in the past ten years have shown that people prefer mates who have symmetrical faces, associating them with health and fertility, and that the brain computes whether a face is attractive or threatening before processing whom it belongs to. The assessment, made in milliseconds, is strongly influenced by abnormal features such as scars, blotches, or conspicuous asymmetry. My main social challenge, as I saw it, was to figure out how to postpone this assessment until I could provide a new acquaintance with more information. I couldn't escape the reaction to my deformity, but I could delay its recognition.

The most useful tactic I've developed was inspired by watching stutterers,

who, when they start to say something and fail to get the words out, often settle for an alternative statement. Some stutterers, however, go to work on their mistakes, gradually correcting whatever misunderstandings may have arisen and eventually returning to their original points. Misunderstood facial expressions, I've found, can be "worked" in the same way.

At a small gathering in my home a few years ago, a guest brought up the charged subject of the new bicycle lanes proliferating throughout New York City. The mother of one of my son's friends said, heatedly, "I just hate them. The whole thing's gone way too far." I launched into a careful defense. "I like them," I said, keeping my tone cheerful while squeezing my face into the friendliest smile I could manage. "I wonder if it isn't possible to share a little bit."

"There's no need to be sarcastic," the woman said.

"No, that's not . . . I'm not . . . I understand what you're saying." I then embarked on an appeasement campaign, using words to do the work that my face couldn't. At some point in the deluge, the woman noticed my eyes. My smile was absurdly crooked, but my eyes triggered a whole-face illusion that didn't convey antagonism, and she immediately turned convivial.

Sometimes more elaborate stratagems are required. One of them is the "pick play." In sports, a pick is a blocking move in which the player with the ball uses a stationary teammate as an obstruction, freeing up the player to pass or shoot. In my variation, my wife or an agreeable friend stays on my left as I move about or stand in a group. The idea came to me one evening at a dinner party. Old friends happened to be seated on my left, and people I'd just met were on my right. Toward the end of the meal, I noticed that I hadn't needed to resort to my stutterer strategy. No quizzical looks had come my way. The new acquaintances had seen only my good side, while my understanding friends on the left had fielded most of my distortions.

I first tried out my strategy at a cast party for a new production that had opened Off Broadway. I was eager to talk to one particular actor. I waited for an opening, introduced myself, smiled—and absorbed his perplexed reaction. I said I'd be back in a moment, and returned with my wife, whom I planted on my left so that the actor, on my right, faced her directly and me in profile. "We saw your Hamlet—did Jonathan tell you?" Julie said. "We went to a *matinée* and then talked about it the entire night afterward." I saw the actor glance at me as I looked at my wife; I could now plausibly continue the three-way conversation without turning to face him directly. Within minutes, I was asking him questions about his working relationship with the actress playing Gertrude, who was known to be intimidating, and he looked me in the eyes and tracked my emotions. He seemed not to notice that I'd shown him only my profile before, and from then on it didn't matter.

I have developed two shortcuts to the "whole-face illusion." One is the "Clark Gable." If I'm walking toward someone from a distance—the host at a restaurant, say, or an acquaintance on a subway platform—I start a smile with my head tilted down, staring along my brows. Using the pressure of my chin to keep my mouth immobile, I'm able to raise the right side of my mouth without allowing the left side to droop. As I approach, I gradually lift my head,

slowly release my mouth and cheeks, and add an amiable raised brow at the last second. The rolling action tends to keep attention focussed high and allow my smile, such as it is, to function as a kindly greeting.

A variation is the "Jack MacGowran," named for Samuel Beckett's favorite Irish actor, who concluded his silent performance as the philandering title character in Beckett's first television play, "Eh Joe," with a smile made of twitches and cheek flutters. Like many Bell's-palsy veterans, I get occasional facial twitches, which make me squint on the left side, and this in turn calls attention to my twitching eye. But if this happens at

just the right moment I can use the fluttery squint, along with a few voluntary brow and forehead movements on the other side, to make me look as if I were about to say something fascinating.

My case of Bell's palsy is by some measures a lucky one. In the waiting room of my neurologist, I saw a few patients who had recovered almost no facial movement, even years after their injuries. Their cheeks hung slack, their eyelids drooped, and their mouths sagged to the side as if perpetually reaching for a straw. In some of these cases, surgeons sew tiny gold weights into the paralyzed eyelids to help them close.

My paralysis is moderate enough to allow me to pass. But my tricks are only partial compensation. The worst effect of my damaged smile is that it can dampen my experience of joy. Scientists have long been aware that emotions are the product of a collaboration between the mind and the body. Happiness, we know, results in smiling, but the converse is also true: the act of smiling can create feelings of happiness. "Thus the sovereign voluntary path to cheerfulness, if our spontaneous cheerfulness be lost, is to sit up cheerfully, to look round cheerfully, and to act and speak as if cheerfulness were already there," the psychologist William James wrote in 1892.

James's theory has been understood by actors (to say nothing of wise aunts and uncles) since ancient times. Clowns have always known that mimicking expressions and gestures can induce corresponding emotions. Modern experiments have charted the underlying biochemistry, bolstering what has become a widely accepted idea: emotions aren't intangible phenomena traceable to an abstraction called the mind; rather, they are responses rooted in physiology. As the neuroscientist Antonio Damasio wrote in his 1994 book, "Descartes' Error," our minds have no meaningful existence apart from the organism that they evolved to serve: "The mind had to be first about the body, or it could not have been."

The trouble is, my brain doesn't receive the same feedback messages that normal people receive from their smiles,



which reinforce their happy feelings as well as relaying them. I've been devastated by the loss. When I make an extended effort to smile, my initial pleasure is extinguished, first by the squinting of my left eye, which distorts my vision, and then by a concatenation of distracting thoughts, emotions, and mental images. I'm bombarded with arbitrary and discordant sensations, as though at the edge of sleep. I feel viscerally distressed, and the distress makes me woozy.

For a long time, I despaired of ever again feeling happy in this way, until a year ago, when I read Angus Trumble's "A Brief History of the Smile." Trumble chronicles many therapeutic uses of laughter, including Norman Cousins's legendary claim to have laughed off heart disease and arthritis, Japanese studies showing that laughter alleviates allergies, and yogalike clinics in India that offer "laughter therapy" for stress reduction. I wondered if laughter could be a therapy for me. I had read that a laughing face doesn't necessarily require the zygomaticus major to contract; perhaps a work-around was possible. Could I find a way to laugh without smiling?

Almost all laughs begin as expansions of a smile, but everyone laughs differently. Snickerers and snorters keep their mouths closed, titterers and grunters pulse through parted teeth, wailers and barkers yawp through gaping mouths and throats. My old laugh was an open-mouthed guffaw that raised my brow a bit and formed a dimple. Lately, through trial and error, I've adjusted this expression, finding a slightly different muscle position—my mouth more O-shaped, my lips pulled into a sort of half pucker—that accommodates my laugh reasonably well and asks little of my zygomaticus major. As long as I don't let my cheek slip in a way that awakens that killjoy platysma muscle, I don't feel any discomfort.

My face cooperates well on second or third laughs. First ones are trickier. It seems to take at least one tug of the platysma to remind my muscle memory of its self-improvement program. I also have the problem that laughter sometimes brings on yawning. And during long, amusing stories I've no-



PANDOLPH

"Why do we live in New York if we never do New York things?"

ticed a danger zone between laughs, when my face tries to settle into a smile. At such times, I lean my head back and let my jaw hang slack, which encourages expostulations like "ha-ha" and "ho ho."

I received an early dose of therapeutic laughter in 2002, during one of my first ventures out of the house after my attack of Bell's palsy. I'd been asked to interview Steve Martin for the *Times*, and though I could still barely walk, I accepted the assignment, partly because I wanted to meet him and partly to assure myself that I was on the mend. I expected to speak to him at the rehearsal hall (he had adapted a ninety-year-old German farce called "The Un-

derpants"), but he suggested lunch, and made me laugh unself-consciously for an hour and a half. He told me that he had known several people with Bell's palsy, including a movie star. I'm pretty sure he knew how hard it was for my weakened lips to hold food in my mouth, but he didn't let on, and we methodically picked over the old German comedy.

The spirit of that conversation has some relation to what I'm trying to do now—to forget vanity, calculation, other people's reactions. Martin, in a famous rant from "Planes, Trains, and Automobiles," said, "You can start by wiping that fucking dumb-ass smile off your rosy, fucking cheeks." To which I would respond, "I'm trying! I'm trying!" ♦

THE TALKING CURE

The poorer parents are, the less they talk with their children. The mayor of Providence is trying to close the “word gap.”

BY MARGARET TALBOT

One morning in September, Lissette Castrillón, a caseworker in Providence, Rhode Island, drove to an apartment on the western edge of town to visit Annie Rodriguez, a young mother, and her two-year-old daughter, Eilen. Castrillón and Rodriguez sat down on a worn rug and spoke about the importance of talking to very young children. They discussed ways to cajole a toddler into an extended conversation, and identified moments in the day when Rodriguez could be chatting more with Eilen, an ebullient little girl who was wearing polka-dot leggings.

“Whenever she’s saying a few new words, it’s important to tell her yes, and add to it,” Castrillón told Rodriguez. “So if she sees a car you can say, ‘Yes, that’s a car. It’s a big car. It’s a blue car.’”

Eilen suddenly said, “Boo ca!”

Castrillón looked at her and said, “Right! Blue car! Good job!”

Rodriguez noted that Eilen had recently become so enthralled by an animated show, “Bubble Guppies,” that she had become “stuck on that word ‘guppy.’” She went on, “Everything’s ‘guppy, guppy, guppy.’ So when she refers to something as ‘guppy’ I try to correct it—like, ‘No, that’s not a guppy. That’s a doll.’”

“Guppy?” Eilen said, hopefully.

Castrillón said, “Well, I think right now the important thing won’t be so much telling her no but just adding words and repeating them, so she’ll start repeating them on her own.”

Rodriguez is enrolled in a program called Providence Talks, the most ingenious of several new programs across the country that encourage low-income parents to talk more frequently with their kids. Once a month, Eilen wears a small recording device for the day, and the recording is then analyzed. An algorithm tallies all the words spoken by adults in her vicinity, all the vocalizations Eilen makes, and all the “conversational turns”—exchanges in which Eilen says something

and an adult replies, or vice versa. The caseworker who visits Rodriguez’s home gives her a progress report, which shows in graph form how many words Eilen has been hearing, and how they peak and dip throughout the day.

Castrillón presented Rodriguez with the month’s report. She leaned over her shoulder and said, “See, this shows the percentage of adult words. There were over fifteen thousand words spoken in that day.”

“Wow!” Rodriguez said.

Castrillón noted that significantly more conversation took place when the TV was off, and that it had been off more that month than the previous one. “There was pretty high electronic sound last time,” she said. “This time, there was very little.” Rodriguez nodded, studying the printout.

In the nineteen-eighties, two child psychologists at the University of Kansas, Betty Hart and Todd Risley, began comparing, in detail, how parents of different social classes talked with their children. Hart and Risley had both worked in preschool programs designed to boost the language skills of low-income kids, but they had been dissatisfied with the results of such efforts: the achievement gap between rich and poor had continued to widen. They decided to look beyond the classroom and examine what went on inside the home. Hart and Risley recruited forty-two families: thirteen upper, or “professional,” class, ten middle class, thirteen working class, and six on welfare. Each family had a baby who was between seven and twelve months old. During the next two and a half years, observers visited each home for an hour every month, and taped the encounters. They were like dinner guests who never said much but kept coming back.

In all, Hart and Risley reported, they analyzed “more than 1,300 hours of casual interactions between parents and their language-learning children.” The re-

searchers noticed many similarities among the families: “They all disciplined their children and taught them good manners and how to dress and toilet themselves.” They all showed their children affection and said things like “Don’t jump on the couch” and “Use your spoon” and “Do you have to go potty?” But the researchers also found that the wealthier parents consistently talked more with their kids. Among the professional families, the average number of words that children heard in an hour was twenty-one hundred and fifty; among the working-class families, it was twelve hundred and fifty; among the welfare families, it was six hundred and twenty. Over time, these daily differences had major consequences, Hart and Risley concluded: “With few exceptions, the more parents talked to their children, the faster the children’s vocabularies were growing and the higher the children’s I.Q. test scores at age 3 and later.”

Hart and Risley’s research has grown in prominence, in part because large-scale educational reforms like No Child Left Behind have proved disappointing. Addressing the word gap by coaching new parents sounds like a simpler intervention. Last year, Hillary Clinton announced a new initiative, Too Small to Fail, that emphasizes the importance of talking to infants and young children; in the fall, President Barack Obama convened a White House conference whose goal was to “bridge the word gap and put more young people on the path to success.” Other cities, including Cambridge, Massachusetts, have initiated programs similar to the one in Providence, and still others have begun public-awareness campaigns with radio spots and bus-shelter signs reminding parents to talk frequently to their kids. The notion of the word gap even turned up on “Orange Is the New Black,” when one of the inmates urged her boyfriend to talk with their new daughter, because “there’s all these studies that say that if you don’t talk to the



Kids in Providence's program wear a device that records adult words, child vocalizations, and conversational turns.

baby they end up, like, fucked by the time they're five."

The way you converse with your child is one of the most intimate aspects of parenting, shaped both by your personality and by cultural habits so deep that they can feel automatic. Changing how low-income parents interact with their children is a delicate matter, and not especially easy. Lissette Castrillón was sensitive to the challenge, and she had an appealing informality: she listened carefully to Rodriguez, praised her efforts, and said admiring things about Eilen, all while sitting cross-legged on the floor. But, perhaps inevitably, there was an awkward moment.

Castrillón had brought an iPad with her, and she played for Rodriguez a video of a mother shopping at the grocery store while her toddler sat in the cart—just to show, Castrillón explained, that you could “talk aloud when you're pretty much doing anything.” The mother onscreen was blond and fit, and wore white jeans; she looked like a character in a Nancy Meyers movie, and her patter was so constant that it became wearying. “Here's our crunchy peanut butter, sweetheart!” she trilled, scanning an aisle filled with organic food. “Here's the Wild Oats one. Roasted almond butter. Crunchy. Let's get crunchy, Bubba.” The cart was piled high, and the items looked expensive.

“Bubba, we're running out of room. What are we going to do? Did Mommy buy too many groceries today? I think we should get the creamy, too, because Murphy does *not* like when I get that crunchy. And we like to have the peanut butter because peanut butter's good for *you*. It's got protein.”

Rodriguez watched the video with a serious expression. It was hard to imagine her holding forth with such preening gusto in the organics aisle. Castrillón said, “Well, you know, just—whatever the food is you're buying, you can talk about color, shape, and texture.”

In 2012, the mayor of Providence, Angel Taveras, heard about the Mayors Challenge, a new competition being offered to cities that proposed a bold idea for making urban life better. The prize was to be given by Bloomberg Philanthropies, the foundation started by Michael Bloomberg, the former New York mayor, on the premise that cities are “the new laboratories of democracy.” The city that won the grand prize would receive five million dollars to realize its project, and four other cities would be given a million each. As Taveras recalled, “They announced that challenge on Twitter, and right away I said, ‘We're going to go for it.’ And I didn't know exactly what it would be at the time,

but I knew it was going to be on early-childhood education.”

Taveras's focus was not unusual: these days, everyone from preschool teachers to politicians talks about infant brain development, and toy companies tap into parental anxiety about it. But Taveras had a personal investment in the subject. He is the son of immigrants from the Dominican Republic, neither of whom went beyond the eighth grade. He grew up in Providence, and his mother, Amparo, who raised him largely on her own, worked factory jobs to support him and his two siblings. When he was four, Amparo enrolled him in a local Head Start program, and he felt that it had made a decisive difference in his life. He went on to Providence public schools, and then attended Harvard University and Georgetown law school. Taveras calls himself the “Head Start to Harvard” mayor, and he still has his graduation picture from the program. “I wore a cap and gown, and it was so special for me,” he recalled.

In 2010, at the age of forty, Taveras became the first Latino mayor of Providence, a city that is nineteen per cent Latino, mostly Dominican. Tall and skinny, with rimless eyeglasses, Taveras is nerdier and nicer than you might expect of a Providence mayor. One of his predecessors, Buddy Cianci, was twice convicted of felonies while in office: once for racketeering, and once for assaulting a man—using a lit cigarette and a fireplace log—who was dating his ex-wife. Taveras, by contrast, wrote a children's book called “How to Do Well in School” and seems genuinely to enjoy mayoral duties like dropping in for “story time” at a local library.

One day, while Taveras was mulling over what to propose for the Bloomberg competition, his policy director, Toby Shepherd, told him about Hart and Risley's research—including their calculation that a poor four-year-old has heard thirty million fewer words from his parents than a wealthy one has.

That number had attracted a lot of attention in the press—to the point that Hart and Risley's study was sometimes faulted for an overemphasis on the sheer quantity of words. But Taveras learned that Hart, who died in 2012, and Risley, who died in 2007, had also identified important differences in *kinds* of talk. In the recordings of the professional



“No need to come to order. The Honorable Justice Perkins is just tenderizing his porterhouse.”

families, they found a “greater richness of nouns, modifiers, and past-tense verbs,” and more conversations on subjects that children had initiated. Catherine Snow, a professor at Harvard’s Graduate School of Education, who studies children’s language development, told me that these findings made sense, since quantity was often a proxy for quality. “Families that talk a lot also talk about more different things,” Snow said. “They use more grammatical variety in their sentences and more sophisticated vocabulary, and produce more utterances in connected chains.” Such parents, she noted, “don’t just say, ‘That’s a teapot.’ They say, ‘Oh, *look*, a teapot! Let’s have a tea party! There’s Raggedy Ann—do you think she wants to come to our tea party? Does she like sugar in her tea?’” Parents who talk a lot with their young children ask them many questions, including ones to which they know the answer. (“Is that a ducky on your shirt?”) They reply to those devilish “Why?” questions toddlers love with elaborate explanations. Erika Hoff, a developmental psychologist at Florida Atlantic University, has published studies about early language development whose results are similar to those of Hart and Risley. She recalled marvelling at “the young professor mothers” at a university childcare center: “*Everything* was a topic of conversation. If they had to get out of the building in case of a fire, they’d be so busy discussing the pros and cons with their toddlers that I kind of wondered if they’d make it.”

Among the more affluent families studied by Hart and Risley, a higher proportion of the talk directed at children was affirming, which was defined to include not just compliments like “Good job!” but also responses in which parents repeat and build on a child’s comments: “Yes, it is a bunny! It’s a bunny eating a carrot!” In those families, the average child heard thirty-two affirmations and five prohibitions (“Stop that”; “That’s the wrong way!”) per hour—a ratio of six to one. For the kids in the working-class families, the ratio was twelve affirmatives to seven prohibitions, and in the welfare families it was five affirmatives to eleven prohibitions. Hart and Risley included one extended description of a mother from the poorest group, at home with

her twenty-three-month-old daughter, Inge:

The mother returns; Inge sits on the couch beside her to watch TV and says something incomprehensible. Mother responds, “Quit copying off of me. You a copycat.” Inge says something incomprehensible, and her mother does not respond. Inge picks up her sister’s purse from the couch. Her mother initiates, “You better get out of her purse.” Inge continues to explore the purse and her mother initiates, “Get out of her purse.” Inge does not answer; she begins to take coins out of the purse and put them on the coffee table. Her mother initiates, “Give me that purse.” Inge continues to put coins on the table. Her mother initiates, “And the money.” Inge does not answer but gives her mother the purse.

Hart and Risley noted that the mother was “concerned” and “affectionate” toward her child. Inge was dressed in nice clothes and fed consistently, and she was toilet trained; at one point, the mother picked her up and kissed her. But she made “few efforts to engage the child in conversation,” and did not “re-direct” Inge when she wanted her to stop doing something, or treat exploratory misbehavior as a sign of curiosity rather than defiance. Most of what the mother said to Inge was “corrective or critical.”

Hart and Risley also provided examples of various kinds of conversation—mostly, but not exclusively, among the professional families—in which parents prompted and encouraged children to talk:

The mother initiates, asking Calvin (24 months), “What did we do on Halloween? What did you put on your head and on your body? What did you look like?” When Calvin does not answer, she tells him, “You were a kitty cat.” Calvin says, “Wanna get. Where go?” His mother says, “What are you looking for? I know what you’re looking for. What used to be on the door handle?” Calvin says, “Where?” His mother says, “The trick-or-treat bag. We ate up all the candy already.” Calvin says, “Where the candy go?” His mother says, “It’s all gone in your tummy.” Calvin says, “Want some.”

Mayor Taveras thought that such conversational strategies could be taught to new parents, and decided to address the word-gap problem with the Mayors Challenge. “Head Start is awesome,” he told me. “But we’ve gotta do something even *before* Head Start.” At the time, his wife was pregnant with their first child, and he “was reading and talking to my daughter in utero. I decided it can’t hurt. I’d come home and say, ‘It’s Daddy,’ and ‘How are you?’ and everything else.”



Even though the Hart and Risley study had encompassed just a few dozen families, the transcribing and coding of all those tapes had been laborious. New technology, Shepherd told him, could make counting words much easier. In 2005, a research foundation named LENA (for Language Environment Analysis) had developed a small digital device that could record for sixteen hours and recognize

adult words, child vocalizations, and conversational turns. Such distinctions were important, because researchers had determined that merely overheard speech—a mother holding a child on her lap but talking on the phone, for instance—contributed less to language development. The LENA recorder could also distinguish between

actual people speaking in a child’s earshot and sounds from TVs and other electronic devices; children under the age of two appear to learn language only from other humans. The device was about the size of an iPod, and it fit into the pocket of a specially designed vest or pair of overalls. (Children soon forgot about the devices, though they occasionally ended up in the toilet or in the dog’s bed.)

LENA’s device had been used in academic research on language development and in interventions for hard-of-hearing, autistic, and developmentally delayed children. In 2009, a Chicago surgeon named Dana Suskind, who specializes in cochlear-implant surgery for deaf children, began using LENA’s technology in a program called the Thirty Million Words Initiative, which includes a study on the effects of encouraging low-income parents to talk more with their children. Suskind had come across Hart and Risley’s research after noticing divergent outcomes for her young patients. “Cochlear implants are truly a modern medical miracle,” she said. “But, after the implantation surgery, some of the kids we saw were reading and speaking on grade level, and others were much slower to communicate. The difference almost always had to do with socioeconomic status.”

Taveras named his proposed project Providence Talks, and decided that technology would be supported with counselling. During home visits with low-income parents, caseworkers would

discuss the science of early brain development. They'd advise parents to try to understand better what their kids were feeling, instead of simply saying no. Parents would be told that, even when they were bathing a child or cooking dinner, they could be narrating what was going on, as well as singing, counting, and asking questions. The caseworkers would bring books and demonstrate how to read them: asking children questions about what was going to happen next and livening up the dialogue with funny, high-pitched voices and enthusiastic mooing and woofing.

For the mayor, it was important that Providence Talks did not seem exclusive. "I love it that you can do this in Spanish or any other language," he said. "I love it that you can do it even if you're not literate. Even if you can't read them a book. You can still talk to them about what an apple is: 'This is a red apple, this is a green apple, this is how you cut it.' Just talking and engaging and having a conversation."

In March of 2013, Taveras learned that Providence Talks had won the Mayors Challenge grand prize. The Bloomberg committee praised the city for its "direct, simple, and revolutionary approach." Taveras wanted to jump up and down and scream, but, fearing that this wasn't mayoral, he contented himself with fist-bumping Toby Shepherd and the rest of his staff.

A big part of the program's appeal lay in its technology. Using LENA devices, caseworkers could show parents how much they'd been talking at various times of the day. Crucially, parents found the gadgets fun: they were like Fitbits for conversation. Andrea Riquetti, the director of Providence Talks, told me, "The fact that we have this report, in a graph form, makes it nonjudgmental." Parents were likely to resist, she felt, if the program seemed scolding. "We can say, look, here's the data. Look how much you were talking at eleven o'clock! How can we do this for another half hour? As opposed to a home visitor telling a parent, 'You're not talking to your child enough.'"

Providence Talks had its critics, some of whom thought that the program seemed too intrusive. The A.C.L.U. raised questions about what would happen to the recordings, and one of the organization's Rhode Island associates, Hillary Davis, told *National Journal*, "There's al-

ways a concern when we walk in with technology into lower-income families, immigrant populations, minority populations, and we say, 'This will help you.'" She continued, "We don't necessarily recognize the threat to their own safety or liberty that can accidentally come along with that."

Others charged that Providence Talks was imposing middle-class cultural values on poorer parents who had their own valid approaches to raising children, and argued that the program risked faulting parents for their children's academic shortcomings while letting schools off the hook. Nobody contested the fact that, on average, low-income children entered kindergarten with fewer scholastic skills than kids who were better off, but there were many reasons for the disparity, ranging from poor nutrition to chaotic living conditions to the absence of a preschool education. In a caustic essay titled "Selling the Language Gap," which was published in *Anthropology News*, Susan Blum, of Notre Dame, and Kathleen Riley, of Fordham, called Providence Talks an example of "silver-bullet thinking," the latest in a long history of "blame-the-victim approaches to language and poverty."

To some scholars, the program's emphasis on boosting numbers made it seem as though the quality of conversation didn't matter much. As James Morgan, a developmental psycholinguist at Brown University, put it, obsessive word counting might lead parents to conclude that "saying 'doggy, doggy, doggy, doggy' is more meaningful than saying 'doggy.'" Kathy Hirsh-Pasek, a psychologist at Temple University, told me that Hart and Risley had "done a very important piece of work that pointed to a central problem"; nevertheless, their findings had often been interpreted glibly, as if the solution were to let words "just wash over a child, like the background noise of a TV." Her own research, including a recent paper written with Lauren Adamson and other psychologists, points to the importance of interactions between parents and children in which they are both paying attention to the same thing—a cement mixer on the street, a picture in a book—and in which the ensuing conversation (some of which might be conducted in gestures) is fluid and happens over days, even weeks. "It's not just serve and return," Hirsh-Pasek said. "It's serve

and return—and return and return."

The original Hart and Risley research, whose data set had only six families in the poorest category, was also called into question. Mark Liberman, a linguist at the University of Pennsylvania, said, "Do low-income people talk with their kids less? Well, that's a question about *millions* of people. Think of people in the survey business, trying to predict elections or develop a marketing campaign. They would find it laughable to draw conclusions without a large randomized sample." Encouraging adults to talk more to children was all to the good, Liberman said, but it was important to remember that "there are some wealthy people who don't talk to their children much and some poor people who talk a lot."

Indeed, recent research that supports Hart and Risley's work has found a great deal of variability *within* classes. In 2006, researchers at the LENA Foundation recorded the conversations of three hundred and twenty-nine families, who were divided into groups by the mothers' education level, a reasonable proxy for social class. Like Hart and Risley, the LENA researchers determined that, on average, parents who had earned at least a B.A. spoke more around their children than other parents: 14,926 words per day versus 12,024. (They attributed Hart and Risley's bigger gap to the fact that they had recorded families only during the late afternoon and the evening—when families talk most—and extrapolated.) But the LENA team also found that some of the less educated parents spoke a lot more than some of the highly educated parents.

Anne Fernald, a psychologist at Stanford, has published several papers examining the influence of socioeconomic status on children's language development. In one recent study, Fernald, with a colleague, Adriana Weisleder, and others, identified "large disparities" among socioeconomic groups in "infants' language processing, speech production, and vocabulary." But they also found big differences among working-class families, both in terms of "the children's language proficiency and the parents' verbal engagement with the child." Fernald, who sits on the scientific advisory board for Providence Talks, told me, "Some of the wealthiest families in our research had low word counts, possibly because they were on their gadgets all day. So

you can see an intermingling at the extremes of rich and poor. Socioeconomic status is *not* destiny.”

In response to the privacy concerns, Mayor Taveras and his team volunteered their own households to be the first ones recorded. They also guaranteed that the LENA Foundation’s software would erase the recordings after the algorithm analyzed the data. Though this probably reassured some families, it also disappointed some scholars. “That’s a huge amount of data being thrown out!” James Morgan, of Brown, told me. “There were real concerns whether families would participate otherwise. But as a scientist it breaks my heart.”

To those who argued that Providence Talks embodied cultural imperialism, staff members responded that, on the contrary, they were “empowering” parents with knowledge. Andrea Riquetti, the Providence Talks director, told me, “It really is our responsibility to let families know what it takes to succeed in the culture they live in. Which may not necessarily be the same as the culture they have. But it’s their choice whether they decide to. It’s not a case of our saying, ‘You *have* to do this.’” Riquetti grew up in Quito, Ecuador, came to America at the age of seventeen, and worked for many years as a kindergarten teacher in Providence schools. In Latino culture, she said, “the school is seen as being in charge of teaching children their letters and all that, while parents are in charge of discipline—making sure they listen and they’re good and they sit still. Parents don’t tend, overall, to give children a lot of choices and options. It’s kind of like ‘I rule the roost so that you can behave and learn at school.’” The Providence Talks approach “is a little more like ‘No, your child and what they have to say is really important.’ And having them feel really good about themselves as opposed to passive about their learning is important, because that’s what’s going to help them succeed in this culture.”

Riquetti and the Providence Talks team didn’t seem troubled by the concerns that Hart and Risley’s data set wasn’t robust enough. Although no subsequent study has found a word gap as large as thirty million, several of them have found that children in low-income households have smaller vocabularies than kids in higher-income ones. This deficit



correlates with the quantity *and* the quality of talk elicited by the adults at home, and becomes evident quite early—in one study, when some kids were eighteen months old. Lack of conversation wasn't the only reason that low-income kids started out behind in school, but it was certainly a problem.

The biggest question was whether Providence Talks could really change something as personal, casual, and fundamental as how people talk to their babies. Erika Hoff, of Florida Atlantic University, told me, "In some ways, parenting behavior clearly can change. I have a daughter who has a baby now and she does everything differently from how I did it—putting babies to sleep on their backs, not giving them milk till they're a year old. But patterns of *interacting* are different. You're trying to get people to change something that seems natural to them and comes from a fairly deep place. I don't know how malleable that is."

After decades of failed educational reforms, few policymakers are naïve enough to believe that a single social intervention could fully transform disadvantaged children's lives. The growing economic inequality in America is too entrenched, too structural. But that's hardly an argument for doing nothing. Although improvements in test scores associated with preschool programs fade as students proceed through elementary school, broader benefits can be seen many years later. A few oft-cited studies have shown that low-income kids who attended high-quality preschool programs were more likely to graduate from high school and less likely to become pregnant as teen-agers or to be incarcerated; they also earned more money, on average, than peers who were not in such programs. Such data suggest that a full assessment of Providence Talks will take decades to complete.

On a cool, rainy morning in April, I went on a home visit with a young caseworker named Stephanie Taveras (no relation to the mayor), who had been assigned to Providence Talks. Two months earlier, the program had begun with fifty-

SCI-FI VIOLENCE

Would a true prophet use an electric salamander as a tongue?
That's what I thought. Last rainfall
in the new city, held here
until we ship the wounded home,
the enemy collecting like aberrant
cells across the river.
Like me, they are afraid
a rainbow will notice
and destroy them. Like me,
they were born believing
their body parts weren't
fucked together right. Is it fate
we name? Is it countries? One enemy
in whom I planted sixteen seeds.
One enemy who attempted
to tongue-kiss my eyeholes, two cakes
of arsenic tucked
beneath his armpits. Look

eight families; the plan was to start adding many more families in the fall, with a projected, if optimistic, enrollment of two thousand families. The monthly recording and coaching visits would go on for two years. On earlier visits, Taveras had discussed a baby's cognitive development by bringing a little wax model of a brain with her.

The family lived in an apartment in Southside, on a block of small, scrubby lawns, chain-link fences, and two-story wooden houses. It was a predominantly Latino neighborhood, where a third of the families have incomes below the poverty line. On a nearby street, there was a corner shop, Perla del Caribe, and a meat market, El Vecinos, but there was no one out on the street that morning, and it felt a little desolate.

Inside, Taveras greeted a seven-month-old girl, Skylah, who was smiling and gurgling while propped up in an ExerSaucer. Skylah's parents, Maranda Raposo and Nicholas Mailloux, were seated on a couch in a gray-carpeted living room whose walls were mostly bare. In one corner, a cat was curled up. In another, a TV was showing an episode of "Law & Order: Special Victims Unit."

Raposo, who was twenty-one, had long, magenta-tinted hair pulled back in a ponytail. She smiled sweetly but was soft-spoken and reticent with her guests. She had dropped out of high school when she was a freshman, after she got pregnant with her first child, Isabella, who was now five. Raposo was hoping to get her G.E.D., but in the meantime she was working two part-time jobs as a cashier, at Party City and at Sears. Mailloux, who was twenty-five and had a five-year-old son by a former girlfriend, was staying home with the kids. Raposo told me later that she had been willing to try Providence Talks because "it was something we could experience with Skylah—it could bring us closer as a family." Just as she and Mailloux wanted to help Skylah stand out by giving her a name with an unusual spelling, they wanted to feel that the time they spent with her was special. "Some people don't even bother talking to their kids," Raposo said. "We talk to her." Nevertheless, before enrolling in the program she hadn't known "exactly how important that is."

Taveras plopped down on the floor and, like Mary Poppins with her carpet bag, started pulling items out of her satchel. She handed Mailloux a board book, "Peek-a Who?," and he put Skylah on his lap and started reading it to her: "Who do you think it's gonna be?"



carefully around you. As with a small percentage of my countrymen, I die if I fall asleep in a horizontal position, sucky little prostitute of muscle in the chest. Pinned down by guerrilla holdouts in a rooftop dumpster, I think of my imperial home, of walking the orchard rows with my childhood friends, some of whom I own, some of whom have names. Every night, they'd tape me upright to the wall, so that I could dream safely in the vertical, as God intended me to do. An elegy is someone left alone, for hours, with a dead body. And there have always been rules against that sort of thing.

—Josh Bell

Skylah patted the book and giggled.

Taveras showed them graphs generated by the previous month's recording, noting that their words and conversational turns had gone down a bit. "I went to the nail salon that day," Raposo recalled. "Everybody was talking to her, but she was just, like, staring."

"She wasn't in a talking mood that day," Mailloux added.

"That happens," Taveras reassured them. "What's important is that you challenge yourself to do better the next time." At one point, she asked, "Are there particular times of the day when you read to her? How many times a day, would you say?"

Both parents seemed a little vague on this point. After a moment, Raposo said, "We try to do it more than once."

Taveras asked them what they thought Skylah was learning when they read to her.

"Colors, shapes, animals," Raposo said.

"Yes, and also she's learning about relationships," Taveras said. "You're teaching her that she's important to you. You're making her feel good about herself." Both parents nodded. "And educational skills, too. When she gets to school, she's gonna already be used to sitting still and paying attention."

Taveras told them, "Babies at this age like books with large photos, bright

pictures, simple drawings, and familiar things." She recommended board books, noting, "Paper books she's gonna want to tear and chew."

Taveras then offered some thoughts on how to read a book to a baby: "It's a four-part interaction. Get your book, point to something in the book—'Look, Skylah, a ball!'—ask a labelling question—'What's that? That's a cow! Moo! Can you say moo?'—and acknowledge her response. Like, if she babbles or makes a noise, make it back to her, so she knows you heard her. And, if you correct, do it positively. If you say, 'What's that?,' and she says, 'A dog,' you could say, 'It looks like a dog,' or 'It's brown like the dog, but it's a monkey!' That makes her feel good. Not just 'No,' or 'No, that's a monkey.'"

Raposo nodded again, but she seemed most comfortable quietly watching Taveras, who remained on the floor, singing and clapping with Skylah.

Though cultural factors may well explain why some low-income parents talk relatively little with their toddlers, the most obvious explanation is poverty itself. When daily life is stressful and uncertain and dispiriting, it can be difficult to summon up the patience and the playfulness for an open-ended conversation with a small, persistent, possibly whiny child. In 2007, Richard Weissbourd, a se-

nior lecturer at the Harvard Graduate School of Education, helped establish a campaign in Boston that urged parents to talk to their kids, and he organized focus groups with low-income parents. "You had some people working three jobs or dealing with the steady drizzle of helplessness and hopelessness," he recalled. "That makes it hard to have vibrant conversations with a baby. They'd say, 'Look, when I get home I have to clean and cook and do the laundry.' They're exhausted. They'd say, 'Sometimes we have to put our kids in front of the TV.'" Weissbourd said of interventions like Providence Talks, "Maybe we have the model wrong. Maybe what we need to do is come in and bring dinner and help with laundry and free up a parent to engage in more play with their child."

Patricia Kuhl, a co-director of the Institute for Learning and Brain Science at the University of Washington, has studied "motherese," the brightly inflected talk that mothers, whatever their native language, direct at their babies, and that babies love. (Fathers and other adults, of course, are equally capable of saying "Sooooo big!" in a singsong voice.) Kuhl told me, "Motherese, when you combine that with being one on one with a baby, is dynamite for language development." Parents are paying full attention, speaking in that high, lilting voice for maximum reaction, giving babies a chance to babble and coo back. But, Kuhl added, "Motherese is, by nature, happy talk. If you're stressed or depressed, it can be hard to get into that mode."

Then, too, some parents may not see the point of talking to babies, who can't yet speak, or even of talking much to toddlers, who do, but sometimes unintelligibly. Andrea Riquetti told me, "I think educated people are more aware of the importance of communication and interaction and language." In some families, she said, "if a baby's really 'good' they get to spend a lot of time alone in their crib."

When I asked myself why I had talked a lot with my babies—and had read aloud favorite picture books to the point that I could recite them from memory—I realized that I hadn't been driven mainly by knowledge of brain development or by pedagogical intent. It was just that talking made the daily labor of mothering more interesting. Long stretches of time with toddlers can be boring, and

the unavoidable moments when you admonished and corrected them were, to me, the dullest. It was more fun if you satisfied your own intellectual curiosity along with theirs: reading books about African animals or Chinese New Year celebrations; trying to remember why the sky is blue; honing age-appropriate arguments for eating your carrots.

When a family places a very high value on discipline and respect for parental authority, there is often disapproval of talking back, which can inhibit conversation in general. To some extent, this attitude tracks with class, perhaps because many working-class parents, consciously or not, are preparing children for jobs and lives in which they will not have a lot of power or autonomy. The sociologist Annette Lareau, in her classic 2003 study, "Unequal Childhoods," interviewed the parents of eighty-eight nine- and ten-year-old children, then closely followed twelve of these families in order to compare the child-rearing styles of middle-class parents with those of poor and working-class parents. The middle-class families she observed practiced what she called "concerted cultivation": enrolling kids in various organized activities led by adults, but also engaging even young kids in a lot of back-and-forth conversation with adults. Working-class and poor families favored an "accomplishment of natural growth" approach. Their children's lives were less customized to their preferences or to their parents' notions of how to develop their particular talents; discipline came in the form of directives and, sometimes, threats of physical punishment; talk was less ex-

tensive and less geared toward drawing out a child's opinions.

When I asked Lareau, who teaches at the University of Pennsylvania, about the language aspect of her research, she said, "The class differences in the amount of speech inside the families really surprised me." She recalled that a white working-class girl in her study once brought up a weighty spiritual matter with her parents: "We were sitting in their completely comfortable, pleasant living room. The girl was all excited. She said, 'Do you know what a mortal sin is?' The parents said, 'You tell us.' They listened to her answer, said nothing in reply, and went back to watching TV."

In middle-class families, Lareau frequently witnessed the kind of verbal jousting between parents and children that gives kids a certain intellectual confidence. One upper-middle-class African-American family she spent time with—Terry, a trial lawyer; his wife, Christina, a corporate executive; and their nine-year-old son, Alexander—was especially fond of these kinds of debate. In one conversation, Terry playfully challenged his son to defend his list of favorite cars: "Last time, you said the Miata, the Mercedes, and the Bugatti. Which one is it?" Alex replied, "This is America. It's my prerogative to change my mind if I want to."

Lareau did not see the middle-class approach as inherently superior. "The amount of talk in those households is exhausting," she said. "It involves a lot of labor on the parents' part, and sometimes parents are really not enjoying it. Some-

times kids use their verbal acuity to be really mean to each other." She often found the kids in poor and working-class families to be more polite to their elders, less whiny, more competent, and more independent than their middle-class counterparts. Still, Lareau concluded, the kind of talk that prevailed in middle-class households offered better preparation for success in school and in professional careers. It taught children to debate, extemporize, and advocate for themselves, and it helped them develop the vocabulary that tends to reap academic rewards.

James Morgan, the Brown University linguist, told me, "If you're mainly confined to 'Eat your food,' 'Chew every bite,' there are going to be fewer words heard at the dinner table. As opposed to starting a conversation with 'Hey, did you hear the blue whales are making a comeback off California?,' or 'Oh, they just discovered a huge new dinosaur.' And, after all, almost all little kids are interested in subjects like that."

Asking such questions often depends on having an education. But it's not just the topics—it's the mode of inquiry. Anne Fernald said, "As an educated mother, you have more experience with teacher talk, which is necessarily more abstract, because kids don't share common ground when they come to school. Education helps you learn how to make yourself clear to people who are outside your point of view."

Last summer, I returned to Providence to see how the campaign was working for the families I'd met in April. Andrea Riquetti, the program director, and Stephanie Taveras, the caseworker, took me back to the home of Maranda Raposo and Nicholas Mailloux. Skylah was now ten months old, and even more adorable, but the latest data were disappointing: the number of conversational turns and the over-all word count weren't as high as Taveras would have liked to see.

Mailloux told her, "As soon as that vest goes on, she quiets down."

"Are you onto us, Skylah?" Taveras asked, smiling.

Mailloux pointed to an uptick on the chart. "I sang to her at ten o'clock."

"Look at that!" Taveras said.

Raposo's older daughter, Isabella, was sitting on Mailloux's lap, watching the Disney Channel. Skylah crawled over to



"He's all business during the week, but on weekends he displays a playful humor."

her and bopped her gleefully with the remote control.

"Stop being so mean!" Raposo told her.

Riquetti stepped in to offer a benign interpretation of Skylah's behavior: "She's saying, 'Pay attention to me.'" Soon afterward, Skylah, grinning, dropped the remote control, and the batteries rolled under the couch. "This is the age where they're trying to see how gravity works," Riquetti explained. The remote was put back together and the TV was turned off. "It's cause and effect. She's trying to make you—"

"*Work*," Raposo said.

Riquetti laughed sympathetically, then asked her how much time they spent reading with Skylah. Raposo answered firmly: thirty minutes a day.

The TV was back on again. Riquetti had told me that asking families to leave the set off could seem intrusive and high-handed. The staff at Providence Talks had hoped that, once parents saw data showing how much less conversation took place when the TV was on, they would leave it off more often. But the habit wasn't so easy to break.

On this visit, both parents seemed more attuned to Skylah's efforts to express herself, and more confident in their efforts to guide her. It was hard to say if this was because Skylah was older and more vocal or because Providence Talks had taught them to interact with her in richer ways. When I asked them about the change, Mailloux gave the program credit. "It helps us learn more of how she understands things and reacts to them," he said. "And . . ." He paused, flustered. "I don't know how to put it into words. It's in my head, but it won't come out."

As part of the visit, Taveras was going through a developmental checklist for Skylah. One of the questions was "Does she express pleasure and displeasure?"

Both parents nodded vigorously. "If there's something she doesn't want, she screams and throws it," Raposo said. "It's so funny."

"Does she play with sounds, like vocal play?" Taveras asked. They nodded.

"What do you do when she does that?"

"Copy it," Mailloux said.

"Perfect."

Raposo picked up a board book that contained pictures of animals. "Where's the mouse?" She took Skylah's finger and gently placed it on the correct image.

"Right there!" she said, in motherese.

Mailloux pointed to a picture of a messy room in the book. "That looks like your brother and sister's room, doesn't it?" he joked.

Riquetti said, "You're pointing and labeling and talking to her constantly. It's great. It's so important that you do what you do. You're making her smart when you talk to her."

Mailloux looked a little sheepish. "It's out of respect," he told Riquetti. "You guys do your part, and we gotta do ours."

In Angel Taveras's proposal to Bloomberg Philanthropies, he promised that Providence Talks would have a research component. Its results would be monitored and studied by a Brown University professor of educational policy, Kenneth Wong. The results of that study won't be published for some time, since the interventions are supposed to last for two years, and Providence Talks is only now expanding from its original pilot study of fifty-eight families. But there had been some analysis of the data from the first families, and Rob Horowitz, a spokesman for Providence Talks, told me, "We are seeing early but promising preliminary results. More specifically, families that started with low word counts are showing increases of about fifty per cent in daily word counts and thirty per cent in conversational turns. The improvement is not as marked for families that began the program with above-average word counts."

Of course, the hard numbers are only part of what you'd want to know: to assess how successful an intervention like Providence Talks had been, you'd have to look at whether the kids in the program entered kindergarten readier to learn, with bigger vocabularies than those of children in a control group. Wong and his team are looking at these questions.

The caseworkers at Providence Talks had impressed me with their sunny, gentle directives, but I wasn't sure if they could effect sweeping changes in the children's lives. Many of the core aspects of a parent's conversational style would be hard to alter, from grammar to vocabulary. And it didn't seem easy to revise, say, a parent's relationship to books. Riquetti had told me about a mother in the program who came to her crying because she had never read a book to her toddler. Since the child couldn't read, she

hadn't seen the point of turning the pages together, looking at the pictures. Now she would try it, but she wouldn't be drawing on what the linguistic anthropologist Shirley Brice Heath had described to me as the "romantic memory, the nostalgia, of books being read to you when you were a child." Even if you succeeded in getting such parents to read books regularly, the effect of the intervention would be minimal compared with, say, helping somebody like Maranda Raposo go back and finish her education. The last time I spoke with Raposo, she told me that, with two jobs and her kids to care for, she didn't have time to study for her G.E.D. When I tried, on several occasions, to contact the family again, I couldn't reach them—their phones didn't seem to be working—and Stephanie Taveras thought that they might have moved.

Providence Talks had more obvious value if you saw it as the beginning of a series of sustained interventions. Some of the children will likely attend preschool programs that will help them build on any language gains. Providence Talks will also help identify kids who could benefit from speech therapy and other support. Mayor Taveras told me he hopes that this integrated approach will become a model for the rest of the country.

The word "empowering" is overused, but a clear strength of Providence Talks is that it seemed to instill confidence in parents. Those rising graphs promised that parents could make a demonstrable difference in their children's lives. The parents I met did not seem to feel chided by the data, and they liked the idea of competing with their partners or themselves to log higher word counts.

One night in Providence, I had dinner with Andrea Riquetti and Toby Shepherd, the official who had first told Mayor Taveras about the word-gap problem. "Providence Talks is not a panacea," Shepherd said. "These families face all kinds of challenges—unemployment or whatever it is. My hope is that it's a helpful tool."

Riquetti said, "It's a chance to talk with parents about how they can positively interact with their kids. Sometimes in their busy lives, their stressful lives, they miss out on that." The goal, she said, was to help parents "feel they can make a difference when everything else kind of sucks." ♦

REMOTE CONTROL

Can an exiled oligarch persuade Russia that Putin must go?

BY JULIA IOFFE

It has been a year since the guards at a prison camp just below the Arctic Circle told Mikhail Khodorkovsky, a former oil tycoon and once the richest man in Russia, to pack his things. They put him on a plane to St. Petersburg; there they handed him a parka and a passport and put him on a flight to Berlin. Since that day of release and exile, Khodorkovsky has been living outside Zurich and travelling to capitals throughout the West, making speeches, accepting awards, and hinting broadly at a return to Russia. He will tell anyone who asks that, after a decade in various prison camps, he would not mind displacing the man who sent him there—Vladimir Putin.

One warm, drizzly evening this past September, Khodorkovsky was in Paris, speaking to an audience at the Opéra, on the Place de la Bastille. He is fifty-one now; he's become stockier since his release, and his graying hair has grown out of the prison buzz cut. He was dressed casually, as always, in jeans and a sweater, and spoke in a quiet, well-mannered voice. Still, as he took questions onstage from a journalist from *Le Monde*, he displayed none of the modesty of his forebears in dissent. Andrei Sakharov would never have spoken of taking up residence in the Kremlin. "It wouldn't be interesting for me to be President of the country when the country is developing normally," Khodorkovsky said. "But if the issue becomes that the country needs to overcome a crisis and undergo constitutional reforms, the main aspect of which is the redistribution of Presidential power to the courts, parliament, and civil society, that part of the job I would be willing to do."

When it came to Putin, his remarks were sly, glancing. "It's hard for me to say that I'm thankful," he said of his release. "But I am glad." It was quite

the understatement from a man who, once estimated by *Forbes* to be worth more than fifteen billion dollars, had been reduced to a life of manual labor. In the camps, Khodorkovsky never knew if he would ever be released. And when he finally was, in December, 2013, it was as a public-relations gesture before the Sochi Olympics—when Putin still cared about the West's opinion of him.

That evening in Paris, the audience was thick with Russian émigrés. For more than a century, Paris has been home to waves of Russians in flight. At the end of the nineteenth century, Lenin lived there unhappily; he called the city a "foul hole." After 1917, he was replaced by the White Russians who had fled his Bolshevik regime. The Russian authorities estimate that nearly two hundred thousand people have left the country in the past year, a record for Putin's Russia. The figure does not include the unofficial émigrés escaping the increasingly authoritarian atmosphere of Moscow and the deepening economic crisis. They cluster in London, Paris, and New York, and in nearby capitals like Riga and Prague.

In 2011 and early 2012, while Putin was Prime Minister, pro-democracy forces in Moscow staged a series of mass demonstrations, but once he returned to the Presidency, in May, 2012, he cracked down on political opposition and independent media. He has made plain that there is not much room anymore for dissent—not from a former billionaire with political ambitions, like Khodorkovsky, and not from the urban middle class, which had dreamed of transforming Russia into a European-style democracy.

These days, many of those who still agitate for a freer Russia assemble abroad. The editor of Lenta.ru, once the most popular news site in Russia,

was pushed out because of the site's reporting on the war in Ukraine; most of the editorial staff resigned in protest. Part of the team moved to Riga, where it has established a new Web operation, called Meduza. Ilya Ponomarev, once a vaguely oppositional figure in the Russian parliament, is now living in San Jose, California. Anna Veduta, the press secretary of the opposition leader and anti-corruption campaigner Alexey Navalny, is studying at Columbia University. Navalny's lieutenant, a banker named Vladimir Ashurkov, is in London, having fled a set of trumped-up criminal charges. Leonid Bershidsky, one of Russia's most prominent columnists, is writing about Russia's ills from Berlin. Sergei Guriev, an economist who once advised both the Kremlin and Navalny, now teaches in Paris, at the Institut d'Études Politiques. Rustem Adagamov, one of Russia's leading bloggers, is in Prague. Khodorkovsky's Open Russia, a loose affiliation of journalists and activists, has its nerve center there, too.

There is a long history of opposition figures pondering and trying to influence the Russian condition from abroad. In the nineteenth century, Alexander Herzen, a liberal populist living in exile in London and Geneva, published essays in his journal, *Kolokol* (*The Bell*). (The tsar, Alexander II, was an ardent reader and eventually agreed to free the serfs.) Leon Trotsky edited *Pravda* while living in Vienna. Lenin, who, after Paris, lived in Zurich, not far from where Khodorkovsky lives now, began publishing his Communist newspaper, *Iskra* (*The Spark*), in Germany.

Today, according to one study, Russians spend more hours on social media than does any other nationality. Operations like Meduza and Open Russia can reach many millions, despite the Kremlin's attempt to shut down access to opposition sites. Khodorkovsky



VII

Mikhail Khodorkovsky, a former oil tycoon who got rich in the post-Soviet legal vacuum, makes an unlikely democracy activist.

PHOTOGRAPH BY DAVIDE MONTELEONE

THE NEW YORKER, JANUARY 12, 2015

49

believes that he is well positioned to affect the course of Russia, even from abroad. For one thing, he is rich. Of his original fortune, he is said to have about half a billion dollars left (he himself insists that it's a hundred million). And although he remains physically cut off from the ferment of Moscow, he has taken to Twitter and Facebook to rally Russians both inside and outside Russia's borders. The question is whether anyone is listening.

After Khodorkovsky's talk, I ran into Arina Ginzburg, the wife of the late Alexander Ginzburg, a Soviet-era dissident who, in 1979, was exchanged for two Soviet spies imprisoned in the U.S., and eventually settled in Paris. She had gone to the talk even though she was ill and had been housebound for months. She was surprised by Khodorkovsky's declaration of intent, but also pleased. "It's the opening of a second front," she said. "And I support it."

In an office near the Bastille, Khodorkovsky was making an attempt—a digital attempt—to lay the groundwork for his political return. Sitting at a desk, he tried to make effective use of a Microsoft tablet and a MacBook Air. He typed awkwardly and read aloud from the tablet, looking up occasionally into a camera that beamed his voice and image to activists in Moscow, Nizhny Novgorod, Yaroslavl, Yekaterinburg, Barnaul, and other Russian cities via Google Hangout. None of these technologies had been in wide use when he went to prison, in 2003.

The way forward, Khodorkovsky said, was to form a horizontal network among like-minded, Western-leaning Russians—Western "adaptants"—which the state could not easily destroy. He was counting on the ten or fifteen per cent of Russians who fit this category. In some cities, like Moscow and St. Petersburg, he believed, it could be as high as a third. This amounted to a "minority within a minority," he conceded, but in Russia a progressive, or radical, minority has always been the engine of political change. "It is this network movement for a law-based government, one that is open to its citizens, that I propose to call Open Russia," he said. He was arrested during a tour for the first iteration of Open Russia, in 2003. He

founded the organization, in 2001, as a way of fostering European values in Russia.

The first activist to speak on the Google Hangout was Sergei Aleksashenko, a former deputy finance minister and deputy head of the Russian Central Bank, who fled to Washington in 2013. He warned the virtual attendees that they needed to work toward the "political enlightenment of the population," not simply talk among themselves. Fyodor Krasheninnikov, the head of the Institute for the Development and Modernization of Public Relations, emphasized, from his office in Yekaterinburg, that it was "impossible to achieve this inside Russia. . . . It has to be done from the outside." He cited the unfortunate example of the post-Soviet nineteen-nineties, when almost none of those who had emigrated in the seventies and eighties returned home to share with their countrymen what they had learned abroad.

Dmitry Gudkov, a young opposition deputy in the Russian parliament, rattled off a list of the challenges that the activists were facing: Russia, after the annexation of Crimea, had become an international pariah; Western sanctions were stifling economic development; emigration was again bleeding the country of its most educated citizens. "We risk losing as many people in ten, fifteen years as we gained by annexing Crimea,"



he said, speaking from Nizhny Novgorod. Russia, he added, was moving toward "catastrophe."

Then the screen went dark. The connection had been severed—almost certainly by the authorities. Out of a national population of a hundred and forty-three million, about fifteen thousand people were watching the conference. Few were tweeting about the event or writing about it on Facebook. Khodorkovsky pressed on, but almost

every other city faced some sort of obstacle. In the second hour, the studio in Nizhny Novgorod was stormed by a few dozen pro-Kremlin activists who had been bused to the event by local police escorts.

The authorities' exertions made the conference seem far more threatening than what it was: a digital version of the traditional dissident kitchen table, with everyone asking the old familiar questions: *Kto vinovat?* *Chto dyelat?* Who is to blame? What is to be done? Other classics were reprised, too: Is Russia Europe or Asia? How do we enlighten the population? Can we blame Russians for wanting to emigrate? When will the regime collapse?

Activists in Moscow reacted to the Hangout with embarrassment. Maxim Katz, who had been the deputy chair of Navalny's 2013 mayoral campaign, sent in a question, which Khodorkovsky's co-host read out loud. "What I see now is a home video recorded on a Web camera with the participation of all the same people that I've been seeing for many years, who are saying all the same things," Katz said. "When are we going to stop whining about our difficult life and the impending collapse, and do something well—for example, a teleconference?"

Khodorkovsky later told me that if he'd seen the same level of chaos and technical incompetence at his old oil company he "would've fired everyone."

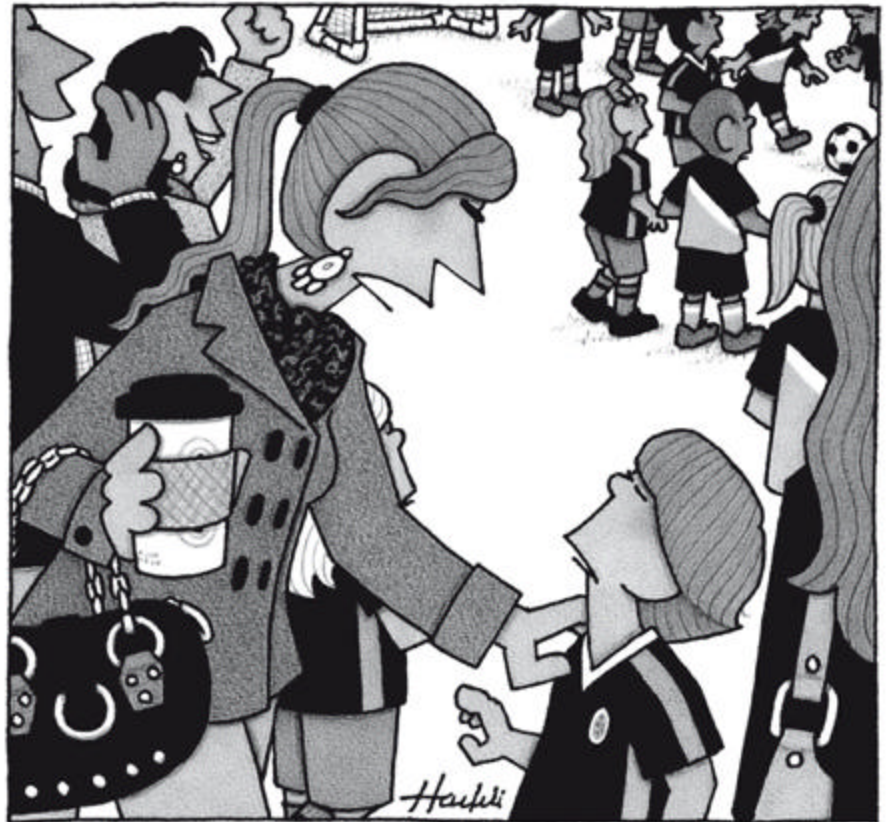
Over the past few years, the Russian opposition has grown accustomed to defeat and disarray. On May 6, 2012, a probable police provocation turned a peaceful pro-democracy protest in the center of Moscow into a violent confrontation between unarmed demonstrators and riot police. In two days, nearly a thousand people were arrested, some plucked from cafés and metro stations. Several dozen of those protesters are still in prison.

Putin has taken an aggressively revanchist course. At his direction, the Russian parliament passed anti-gay legislation, a law prohibiting Americans from adopting Russian children, and measures restricting protests and the ability of foreign-funded N.G.O.s to operate inside Russia. One law restricts

bloggers and has blocked many anti-Putin Web sites; these are now accessible inside Russia only through proxy servers. Another requires Western Internet companies to store their user data inside Russia—and to turn it over at the government’s request. Still other laws propose to keep critics out of Russia, and a recent measure restricted foreign ownership of media companies. Several editors-in-chief of publications that are critical of the government have been pushed out, and, last January, the Kremlin began what has become a war of attrition against TV Rain, Russia’s last independent national television channel. Putin continues to threaten the preëminent liberal radio station, Echo of Moscow. Navalny, the opposition movement’s de-facto leader, was sentenced to indefinite house arrest, largely banned from using the Internet, and swamped with trumped-up criminal charges. On December 30th, a court in Moscow sentenced Navalny and his brother Oleg to three and a half years in prison. However, it suspended Alexei’s sentence, a maneuver that most believed was intended to deny him the status of a martyr while sidelining him from politics and forcing him to suffer as he sees his brother go off to the camps.

After the Sochi Olympics came the Russian sallies into Ukraine and, with them, the increasingly jingoistic rhetoric from the Kremlin and from state broadcasters. This anti-Western tilt has met with widespread approval among average Russians, and has left Khodorkovsky’s Western “adaptants” feeling increasingly isolated. The state press—following Putin’s lead—refers to them as “national traitors” and as an unpatriotic “fifth column.”

It is unclear to what extent the current economic crisis in Russia will affect politics, Putin, and public opinion. Westernized, urban Russians are watching their high standard of living melt away. Slammed by low oil prices and Western sanctions, the ruble has plummeted to record lows, causing runs on stores. Food prices have spiked; the demand for foreign currency has increased as Russians turn in their rubles and spirit money out of the country. Many are using that cash to buy apartments in European countries that provide residence status for homeowners. The mood



“I will always cheer you on, but I will never ‘Woo-hoo!’ you.”

in Moscow is verging on desperate, particularly among the elderly and the poor and those who long for new leadership. Navalny certainly can’t lead a movement anymore, at least not for the time being. But can Khodorkovsky?

Now that he is out of prison, he no longer has martyr status or immunity from criticism. “The moment he disappeared from Russian life as a victim, interest in and attention to him waned,” Masha Lipman, an independent political analyst in Moscow, told me. Khodorkovsky hasn’t been a part of daily Russian life for more than a decade. His closest advisers are in exile, too. As Lipman put it, “He doesn’t live here—he doesn’t have a feel for what it’s like. It takes away from his ability to be an alternative authority.”

Still, Khodorkovsky is preparing for a revolution, convinced that Putin, despite his overwhelming popularity and his support inside the military and the security services, will soon fall from power. Khodorkovsky’s efforts may seem quixotic or irrelevant to almost everyone

in Russia who bothers to pay attention, and yet he persists. He has people inside Russia organizing activists and preparing them for the 2016 parliamentary elections, even though he doesn’t believe that they will have an effect on real politics in the country. He has launched a Web site where Russian journalists write about the government’s many sins. One of his allies is busy working on a post-Putin constitution. Less than a year out of prison, Khodorkovsky has grandly declared that he would guarantee Putin’s safety if he left power peacefully.

“When the moment comes, the leftists will be organized, the neo-Nazis will be organized, and Putin will have the special services at his disposal,” an Open Russia activist told me. “And, when it’s go time, we want to have our hundred thousand people in the mix, too.”

At a press conference held by Putin on December 18th, a day before the one-year anniversary of Khodorkovsky’s release, a journalist asked Putin if he regretted the decision. In a letter to Putin last year, Khodorkovsky asked for clemency,

and volunteered that he wouldn't get involved in politics should Putin let him out. Had Khodorkovsky violated the deal? "It is true, Mr. Khodorkovsky applied for clemency," Putin said. "And it seemed that he wasn't going to get involved in politics." But that wasn't why Putin released him. "I made the decision on humanitarian grounds. He wrote then that his mother was seriously ill," Putin went on. (Khodorkovsky's mother had been given a diagnosis of terminal cancer; she died in August.) "And, you know, a mother—that's sacred. And I say that without the least bit of sarcasm."

As for Khodorkovsky's political ambitions, well, "that's his choice," Putin said. "He has the right, just like any citizen of the Russian Federation." He added, "Godspeed. Let him work."

After a long day in Paris spent talking to Russian activists and discussing his Presidential ambitions, Khodorkovsky and a few members of his team made their way to Brasserie Lipp, the

French establishment's old standby across town, on Boulevard-Saint-Germain. Khodorkovsky skipped the Bordeaux and foie gras, ordering instead a large glass of vodka and herring with potatoes. He was happy and relaxed. His thoughts were turning to an upcoming trip to New York and Washington. Since he'd already declared his desire to run Russia, someone at the table asked him a question posed to all contemporary politicians: how did he feel about gay marriage? "You know, people are like lemmings," Khodorkovsky said, his eyes twinkling behind rimless glasses. "Whenever there get to be too many of them, they always find ways of limiting their reproduction."

Khodorkovsky offered opinions on a number of issues that evening. He thought Obama was too much of a lawyer. He told a couple of salty stories from *tyuryaga*, "the clink." He recalled with fondness an old acquaintance, the unfortunate Kenneth Lay, the late C.E.O. of Enron, who was, in Kho-

dorkovsky's estimation, a thumbs-up kind of guy. The whistle-blowers in that case outraged him: why did people glorify cowardly spies and traitors, and put them on magazine covers?

Maria Logan, one of Khodorkovsky's lawyers, who was in charge of dealing with foreign reporters, looked increasingly pained as her eyes darted from Khodorkovsky to me and back again. "Mikhail Borisovich," she said, with a strained laugh, "we need to talk—especially before your trip to America!"

For a prisoner of conscience, Khodorkovsky did not have an especially principled youth. Born in 1963, he grew up in a communal apartment in Moscow. He studied at the Mendeleev Institute of Chemistry and Technology, where, like nearly everyone else, he joined the Komsomol, the Communist Youth League. Many of his peers who are now in the opposition merely tolerated the Komsomol, mainly to keep from being expelled from university.



"I just wish I could loosen up like you."

Khodorkovsky saw it as a career opportunity and rose to become the deputy head of the Komsomol at the institute. "If I had met him in the eighties, I would've crossed the street," Natalia Gevorkyan, a well-regarded Russian journalist, told me. She got to know Khodorkovsky when she was covering the emerging class of oligarchs in the nineties. Khodorkovsky has since hired her as a consultant.

He didn't see the problem, and still doesn't. "I believed in the Party without cluttering my brain with 'ideologies,'" he says, in "Prison and Freedom," a memoir on which he collaborated with Gevorkyan while he was in prison. He compares political ideology to a computer's operating system—what's the difference, really?—and says that in his youth he "didn't know about the dissidents."

Khodorkovsky told the journalist Chrystia Freeland that all he ever wanted was to become a "red director," the manager of a large Soviet factory. His father is Jewish, so that career path was unrealistic, but Khodorkovsky learned how to exploit a loophole in the changing way that the Soviet Union financed itself, and that was how he made his fortune. The scheme was described by David Hoffman, then the Washington *Post's* Moscow bureau chief, in his book "The Oligarchs." In 1987, a year after graduating from the institute, Khodorkovsky used his Komsomol connections to get seed capital and open a small business. It took the largely useless virtual credits that the central planners issued to Soviet factories and converted them into highly valuable hard currency. By 1988, when the average salary in the Soviet Union was around a hundred rubles a month, Khodorkovsky's firm was raking in millions. With two and a half million rubles, he founded Menatep Bank.

By 1989, he had opened an offshore bank account in Switzerland, one of the first of the Russian oligarchs to do so. (Khodorkovsky denies this, saying that he didn't open his first personal account in the West until 1997.) Through Menatep, Freeland writes, in her book "Sale of the Century," Khodorkovsky and his business partners bought computers abroad and sold them at home for many times their original value. He also began to import other goods—fake

Napoleon cognac, stonewashed jeans—with which he laundered Soviet credits, transforming them into cash. He was exploiting the very system he had served as a Komsomol leader.

In 1992, just after the Soviet Union fell, Khodorkovsky and his partners published a manifesto called "Man with a Ruble," which declared, "Our compass is profit. Our idol is the financial majesty, capital." In an interview with the Miami *Herald*, he said that although



he had once been a fervent believer in Communism, he had undergone a "total rethink." He said, "If the old Mikhail had met the new one, he would have shot him."

Boris Yeltsin's post-Soviet government implemented radical market reforms but instituted almost no legal structure to control them. Khodorkovsky was perfectly positioned to take advantage. Menatep became an official bank for the Russian Ministry of Finance. Here, too, Khodorkovsky identified a lucrative loophole. One of his lieutenants at Menatep bragged about the scheme to Hoffman. The Ministry of Finance would deposit, say, six hundred million dollars in Menatep Bank, to be disbursed to pay salaries in the regions. Menatep would delay those payments and funnel the six hundred million into high-yield investments for three weeks. In that time, salaries in the regions went unpaid, but Menatep earned millions on the investment. (Khodorkovsky denied this, saying that three weeks was a normal amount of time for a transfer in those days.)

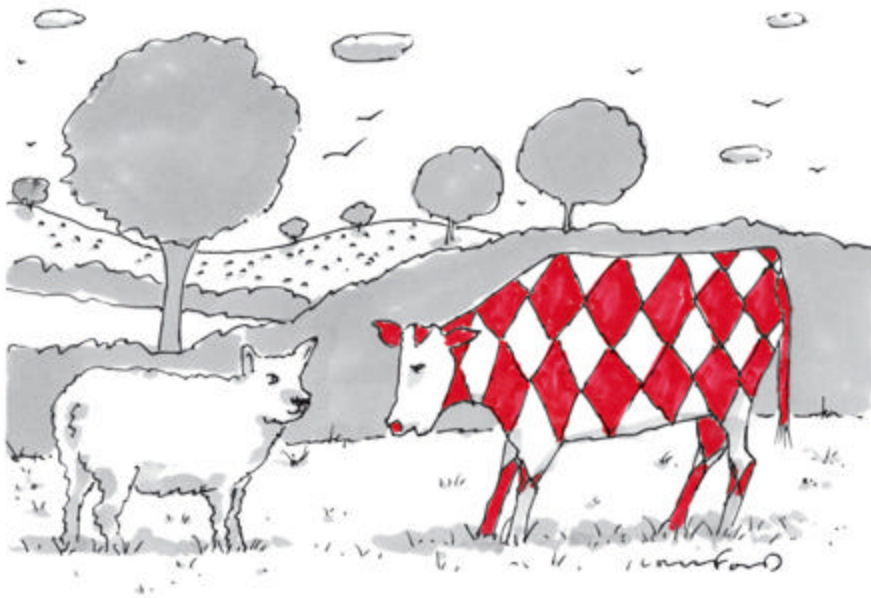
Khodorkovsky began to amass the bulk of his wealth in 1995, when the oligarchs devised a scheme by which their banks lent money to the Yeltsin government, which was desperate for cash. In exchange for the loan, the banks would hold shares of handpicked state enterprises as collateral. If the government defaulted on the loans, as every-

one involved knew it would, the banks would be allowed to sell off the collateral in order to recover their money. Khodorkovsky, who had set his sights on the oil enterprises that were unified under the name Yukos, lent the government \$159 million in exchange for forty-five per cent of Yukos. When the government inevitably defaulted, Menatep organized an auction to sell off the collateral—Yukos. With some maneuvering, Khodorkovsky was able to shut foreign investors out of an initial auction, and then disqualified a troika of domestic participants. When the auction was over, Hoffman writes, a Menatep affiliate was the owner of a controlling stake in Yukos that it had purchased at an extreme discount. Khodorkovsky disputes this account, claiming that he turned a rotting Soviet enterprise around: two years later, Yukos, a company that Menatep had effectively sold to itself, was valued at nine billion dollars.

Khodorkovsky was thirty-four. After acquiring Yukos, he sent his enforcers to establish control of the extraction companies. Then, according to an article published in *Foreign Affairs*, in 2000, by Lee Wolosky, who was at the time the deputy director of the Economic Task Force on Russia at the Council on Foreign Relations, Yukos began using a tactic called transfer pricing. Yukos would buy oil from the extraction companies at an artificially low price and sell it abroad at the much higher market price. In early 1999, Yukos bought two hundred and forty million barrels of oil from its subsidiaries for \$1.70 a barrel. It sold the oil abroad for fifteen dollars a barrel. In the first half of that year alone, according to Wolosky, Yukos made eight hundred million dollars. Khodorkovsky says that this was not illegal under Russian law at the time, and that these estimates don't take into account duties and other costs.

Very little of this wealth was making it back to the parts of the country that were producing it. Instead of paying taxes, which could have been used to repair the decaying Soviet infrastructure, Khodorkovsky and his colleagues were depositing the funds in an offshore network. "Whole regions of Russia are being impoverished" by such tactics, Wolosky wrote.

Vladimir Petukhov, the mayor of



“My mom was a Holstein-Friesian, and my dad was the King of Diamonds.”

• •

Neftuyugansk, where Yukos had its main production facility, appealed to the Kremlin to investigate Yukos’s practices. In May, 1998, he led a protest in Neftuyugansk that disrupted a Yukos shareholders’ meeting. Several weeks later, he was shot to death on the street. Police labelled the murder a contract killing. Khodorkovsky has consistently denied any role in Petukhov’s death and has never been charged with the murder. His former chief of security, however, is serving a life sentence for it, as well as for one other murder and two attempted murders. Leonid Nevzlin, a former business partner of Khodorkovsky’s, who moved to Israel in 2003, was convicted in absentia in 2008 for Petukhov’s murder, among others. Nevzlin dismisses the convictions as charades—a reasonable claim, given the political nature of the cases.

When, in 1998, the Russian government defaulted on its debt, provoking a severe economic crisis, Yukos barely survived. According to Hoffman, Khodorkovsky was deeply in debt to Western banks, and he dodged his creditors. One of his tactics involved the transfer of almost all Yukos’s assets to obscure shell companies, which left his American shareholders and his Western creditors holding only the company’s debt.

Another involved flooding the market with millions of new Yukos shares, diluting Western shareholders out of existence.

The 1998 financial crisis pushed Khodorkovsky to another “total rethink.” He realized that he had to insulate himself and insure that he would be able to keep his wealth. He decided to sell Yukos to one of the big Western oil companies. To do that, though, Yukos had to become the kind of outfit that a publicly traded company like Shell or BP could buy. Khodorkovsky began to peel back the layers of the company that he had designed to be inscrutable. He opened Yukos’s books, distributed dividends to his investors for the first time, and paid his taxes.

He also began to try to change the context in which Yukos existed, to make Russia more transparent and predictable to Western investors. While engaged in talks with Chevron, Khodorkovsky launched Open Russia. To this day, he is not shy about his motives. “Our position was that, in order for our capitalization to grow, we needed a more transparent political system,” he told me.

Although Putin came to power promising to rein in the oligarchs, he

disliked Khodorkovsky’s new direction, according to Natalia Gevorkyan, who helped conduct the interviews with Putin that make up his autobiography, “First Person.” After being elected to the Presidency, in 2000, Putin began to surround himself with K.G.B. alumni and friends from St. Petersburg, men who had fallen behind in the nineties. Now that they were in power, the imposition of legal structures and transparency was not in their interest; it would only prevent them from amassing the sort of wealth that Khodorkovsky had.

By 2002, Putin had driven two powerful oligarchs—Boris Berezovsky and Vladimir Gusinsky—out of the country and seized their media assets. According to Nevzlin, Khodorkovsky didn’t understand the signals the Kremlin was sending: show fealty or leave. On February 20, 2003, at a business roundtable with Putin, Khodorkovsky pointed to a questionable deal that had caught his attention as an oilman. He implied that Igor Sechin, an old friend of Putin’s who was also in the K.G.B., had enriched himself through the deal. When Khodorkovsky asked Putin to look into it, Putin snapped, “Yukos has excess reserves, and how did it get them?” The message was clear: you got yours, now stay out of the way as we get ours.

In the months that followed, Yukos’s offices were raided by the prosecutor general’s office. That summer, shortly after Khodorkovsky’s fortieth birthday, his lieutenant Platon Lebedev was arrested. Yukos employees fled the country, and Khodorkovsky’s friends and lawyers advised him to do the same. He refused. “Hiding, weaving conspiracies, sitting in the bushes, perhaps that was the right course of action,” he writes in his memoir, “but I don’t know how to live like that and I don’t want to.”

When secret-police commandos stormed his private jet at five in the morning during a refuelling stop in Siberia, Khodorkovsky told me, he felt “total relaxation.” He was charged with fraud and tax evasion that had allegedly cost the state billions of dollars, and was facing a possible ten-year prison sentence. Within a few years, the Kremlin dismantled Yukos and handed it over to Sechin, who became Russia’s new oil czar. At a hearing the day after Khodorkovsky’s arrest, the judge ordered him

held without bail. The eventual trial, everyone knew, would be stage-managed from the start by Putin. Khodorkovsky turned to his lawyer, handed him his watch and his wedding ring, and said, "It's O.K. This is an important experience, too."

Khodorkovsky was sentenced to nine years in prison, and was sent first to a labor camp near the Chinese border. The camp is situated on a blustery, dusty steppe where temperatures can drop to -30° centigrade. The Russian prison system has changed little since the days of the Gulag, an observation that Khodorkovsky made in "Prison and Freedom." "The prisoner is not quite a person," he writes. "Rather, he is chattel whose value to its 'owner' has increased markedly from the first half of the last century. That is, you shouldn't kill him, but you can and should beat him. You shouldn't starve him, but neither should you spend too much time thinking about the quality of the food."

Despite the dubious business dealings and the less than altruistic push to democratize Russia, Khodorkovsky became Russia's most famous political prisoner. For years, his lawyers smuggled to Russian and Western newspapers high-minded treatises that he had written. Khodorkovsky also funded an effective public-relations operation, with representatives all over the world. He exchanged letters with well-known liberal intellectuals such as the novelists Boris Akunin and Lyudmila Ulitskaya and the Polish dissident Adam Michnik. Whenever Khodorkovsky's lawyers had a hearing in Moscow, crowds of supporters showed up to rally at the courthouse. Suddenly, the man who nearly everyone believed had fleeced the country of billions had become for Russian liberals a symbol of Kremlin persecution.

In his memoir, Khodorkovsky describes how, even in prison, he was the master of his fate and his surroundings. When he arrived, the camp administrator addressed him using the informal *ty*. "I didn't say anything, and just looked at him, puzzled," Khodorkovsky writes. The administrator quickly switched to the formal *vy*. Khodorkovsky claims to have had good relationships

with every rank of prisoner—from the shadow "authorities" to the snitches. He fought camp administrators by making official complaints and going on hunger strikes.

On instructions from Moscow, Khodorkovsky was put to work in the sewing factory, making uniforms for Russian officialdom. The modern Gulag produces a billion dollars' worth of goods annually, using inmates as slave labor. The daily quotas are often too big to fill, even when prisoners work around the clock. (Unfilled quotas result in punishment, often corporal.) "I looked at the equipment and decided: it's a trap," Khodorkovsky writes. "You can't fill the quota on these machines, the quality of the stitch is crap. It's a setup." So he wrote an official complaint and purposely failed the sewing exam. He was transferred to a job on the loading docks, a position that he found acceptable.

Once, while Khodorkovsky was asleep, his cellmate stabbed him in the face. "Boy, was there a lot of blood," Khodorkovsky writes. This kind of stubborn persistence and nonchalance impressed his admirers. "The penal colony isn't scary," he observed. "It's full of

average people, and your place in that world depends on you, and more on will than on strength. You can't be scared. The result is a vile and filthy life that is worse than death. And death, well, what is death? The risk is low, just two or three per thousand inmates a year."

He began to observe the prison colony from the vantage point of an anthropologist. "I didn't have strong emotions, not for the prosecutors, not for Putin, not for Sechin," he writes. "It was all like autumn rain: an unpleasant phenomenon of nature, nothing more."

At one point, he notes that, while repatriation after five years in jail would be difficult, after ten it would be impossible: "In most cases, the human psyche is distorted irreversibly."

The day after his appearance at the Opéra, Khodorkovsky met with Vera Krichevskaya, the well-known Moscow television director and one of the founders of the independent TV Rain. Slowly squeezed out of the business for her oppositional views, Krichevskaya is effectively blacklisted in Moscow and now lives in London. She corresponded with Khodorkovsky while he was in



"To make it look like an accident."

had already polished off a can of Red Bull. He was lively, charming, and vague. What did he have in mind for Russia? He was looking for “points of consolidation.” He wanted to unite the ten or fifteen per cent of Russians who are Western “adaptants,” without alienating the other hundred and forty million people in Russia.

I asked Khodorkovsky if he was hatching a coup. The Russian people, he said, “are not ready for a coup.” He sounded both resigned and disappointed. He would try to help keep things from getting worse in Russia, but that was not the way to improve the lot of Russian liberals. “The only way to improve things is through violent methods,” he explained, smiling, as if he had reached the satisfying end of a mathematical proof. “You—we all—are not ready for these methods. So then let’s agree that we’re going to use the methods we can use in order not to worsen our situation.”

He went on, “The key question that the Kremlin is posing to society is: If not us, who? And society, spooked by the nineties, is afraid of not having an answer to this question.” He added, “It’s spooked by the fact that, because of the crisis of management, we got what we got.”

I asked him if he felt at all responsible for what happened in the nineties. “Oh, come on,” he said. “This theme of ‘feeling guilty’ or ‘you’re not feeling guilty.’ Let’s drop to our knees and start repenting. Look, I was not part of the system of management, for understandable reasons.”

If Khodorkovsky has a political future, it will depend both on the clarity of his vision and on whether people feel that he has been cleansed and changed by a decade in prison. Almost everyone in Russia associates him with the chaos and exploitation of the nineties; many blame him for degrading the idea of private enterprise and for helping to create a popular desire for a strong hand—a Putin. And yet he is unapologetic. “When people say, ‘It was impossible to live back then without violating the law,’ I say, ‘Come on, don’t make me out for a fool,’” he said, with a sneer. “When there are so few laws and they’re so imperfect, you have to be a total idiot not to be able to find a way



“I’m leaving early, before mission creep takes over.”

to do what you want without violating the existing laws.”

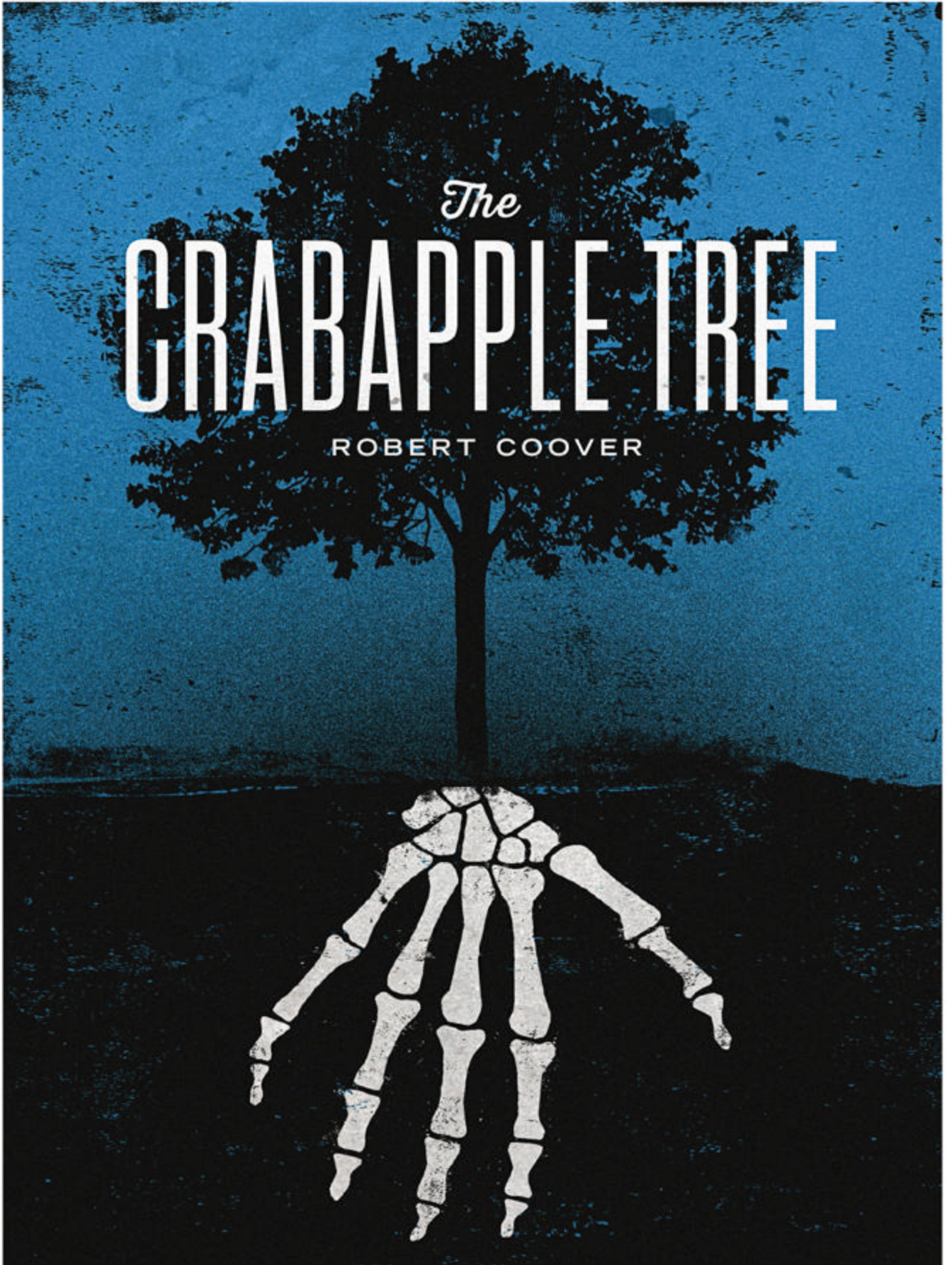
He had only taken colossal advantage of a nearly lawless landscape. “Back then, I didn’t grasp the fact that people of a slightly older generation than me simply couldn’t adequately assess the opportunities in front of them,” he said. “In this case, we are—or I was—also victims of the same problem. Because we got property but in a flawed way.”

He went on, “We weren’t the Rockefellers, but we weren’t modern Americans, either.”

As for his sins, he said, “My answer is very simple: ‘Guys, I’ve done my time. And other people’s time. And done time for all your notions of morality.’ And, to those who say I should’ve done more time, you try doing ten years. But I have the kind of experience that a lot of people don’t. I have managerial experience, I have the experience of managing in a crisis, I have the experience of surviving in a complicated situation, and look: success, success, success, success. Yes, in the confrontation with the machine of state, I lost. I apologize for that.” He looked at me, pleased with his answer, and crushed the empty Red Bull can.

When I asked him about Putin, he replied, “There were a couple of instances in prison when I said, ‘It’s better for you to not do this, because if you do this, you’d better kill me.’” As he spoke, his voice diminished nearly to a whisper. Employees of Yukos used to say that, when you can barely hear Khodorkovsky, that’s when he is at his angriest. “I just don’t like games without rules. Either you play by the rules or you play without rules. There’s no middle ground.”

Khodorkovsky believes that his life may be in peril. “I am the personal enemy of Putin, and he is the only one who can give that command,” he said as the train approached Penn Station. Khodorkovsky’s tough speech in Washington had been published, and there had been threats. The fact that Khodorkovsky felt danger so keenly himself removed any compunction about asking other Russians to risk something. His pattern of remaking himself was unchanged. He was ready for revolution, even if few others were ready to join. “O.K., I did ten years—it’s not the end of the world,” he said. “I’ve started from scratch several times. It’s not the end of the world.” ♦



The
CRABAPPLE TREE

ROBERT COOVER

WorldMags.net

This happened here in our town. A friend of mine—we were on the cheerleading team together—married a local farmer, and right away they wanted to have a baby, though the doctor said she shouldn't. She was a bleeder, he said, and if she started he might not be able to stop it. But she didn't listen. She went ahead and got pregnant, then bled to death during childbirth and was buried out by the farmhouse, under a crabapple tree. It was very sad. I cried for a week. But the baby survived, a pretty little boy; his dad called him Dickie-boy, but I don't know if that was his real name.

His dad was a hard worker and a nice guy—I went on a movie date with him once when we were young—but he sometimes drank too much and he was hopeless at ordinary household chores and raising babies. So pretty soon he found another wife, either through a dating service or else he picked her up in one of his bars somewhere, because none of us girls knew her. She was a tough, sexy lady, a hooker, maybe. She made no effort to be one of us or to make us like her. I guess she considered us beneath her. We called her the Vamp. She got around, and it was said that she'd taken half the men in town to bed, my own ex included. They all denied it, like cheating husbands do, but, when the subject came up, little shit-eating grins would appear on their faces and their eyes would glaze over as if they were remembering the wild time they'd had.

Maybe Dickie-boy's dad knew about all that, and maybe he didn't. He was mostly either drunk or out in the fields, and he left the raising of the kid to his new wife. He loved Dickie-boy to the extent that the child reminded him of his dead wife, but resented him for the same reason, just as he resented the boy's mother for selfishly dying on him. He had hoped for a sturdy fellow to help around the farm, but Dickie-boy was a sickly, fine-boned child who had trouble lifting a finger to pick his nose, forget pitchforks and shovels. Certainly he didn't get on with the Vamp, who had a mean temper and slapped him around, with or without an excuse.

The Vamp had a daughter from a previous relationship, a cute kid with big dreamy eyes, called Marleen. I never

knew what to make of her. Marleen seemed to live in a storybook land of her own. When she spoke, she spoke to the world, the way singers do, and what she said seldom made any sense. You probably had to be a kid to understand her at all. My little girl—she's a young woman now and has her own little girl—was the same age as Marleen, and sometimes the two of them played together, my daughter pedalling her bike out to the farm and back, or sometimes I took her and picked her up. My daughter had a lot of stories about Marleen, but I didn't always understand those, either.

Marleen settled right in with her new little stepbrother. They were as tight as crib siblings and had a way of talking to each other that didn't use words. My daughter said it might be bird talk, which Marleen had offered to teach her. Some people said that Dickie-boy wasn't all there, others that he had something almost magical about him. Once, for example, he somehow crawled up onto the barn roof, and they had to call the Fire Department to get him down. The fire marshal said he had no idea how the boy could have got up there, unless he flew. Marleen said he did it because the birds wanted him to. She told my daughter that the crabapple tree had helped him, though it was over near the house, not the barn. I had no idea what she meant. My daughter didn't know, either, and Marleen never announced it in her peculiar way of speaking.

My daughter and Marleen played dolls and house and nurse, just like all little girls do, and sometimes they used Dickie-boy in their games. In nice ways and maybe not-so-nice ways. Strange Marleen might get up to anything, and my own daughter had a mischievous and curious streak, so things probably happened. Kids are kids, after all. I figured it was best to mostly look the other way. Children have to be allowed to grow up on their own—I've always believed that.

Marleen wanted a doggy, for example, so she put a collar and a leash on Dickie-boy and walked him around on his hands and knees with his clothes off and did circus tricks with him. She even taught him to wee with his leg in the air. He never complained. When

he did bad things, like biting the mailman or pooping on his stepmother's bed, Marleen swatted his behind with a rolled-up newspaper just as you would a puppy. Then he'd whimper until she scratched between his ears and gave him a cookie. My daughter said that Dickie-boy seemed to do bad things on purpose so as to get swatted. I suppose he was just looking for attention, given the kind of parents he had. His dad was never around, and the Vamp hated him, so all he had was Marleen and her games.

Dickie-boy wasn't very healthy, but whenever he got sick Marleen made him well again. It was a gift she had. It sometimes worked on others, too. One time, my daughter had a bad case of tonsillitis, and I thought her tonsils would have to come out, but Marleen somehow brought her fever down and she hasn't had tonsillitis since. Marleen couldn't do anything for my ingrown toenail and canker sores, though.

Dickie-boy had gifts, too, and one of them was finding lost things. Once, I lost an earring, and my daughter brought Marleen and Dickie-boy over to the house to find it. He got down on all fours with his face near the floor, and Marleen showed him the matching earring and made a chirping noise that probably meant "Fetch!" because that's exactly what he did. It had fallen into one of my old sneakers in the closet. He also found a nail brush I didn't even know was lost. Hide-and-seek wasn't any fun at all, my daughter said, because Dickie-boy always went straight to where they were. Same with blindman's bluff—it was as if he could see right through the blindfold. And ghost-in-the-graveyard, if you played it at night, could be downright scary, because he could give you the feeling that he was there and not there at the same time.

Marleen could be scary, too. Whenever she was around, staring her wide-eyed stare and talking aloud to nobody in particular, I kept stumbling and dropping things. My daughter said the same thing happened to their schoolteacher, who sometimes sent Marleen out of the room so she could clear her head.

Marleen often played with Dickie-boy the way you'd play with a rag doll, tossing him floppily about, dangling

him by an arm or leg, he looking glassy-eyed and like he'd lost his bones. It was funny, really. They could have taken the act on television. Playing with Dickie-boy like a rag doll was my daughter's favorite game.

Then, one day, when Marleen was dragging him around by his soft ankles, his head broke off. That scared my daughter. She came home crying, though eventually she went back again. Marleen told her that her mother hated Dickie-boy and had cut his head off and then glued it back on without telling Marleen, so that the head would come off again while they were playing and she'd be blamed for it. But the police chief, who went to investigate the death, told me that, after talking with the boy's folks, he was convinced it was just a tragic household accident that the little girl was inventing wild stories about.

The boy was buried alongside his mother under the crabapple tree, and that was also sad, but the little boy had never quite seemed part of this world in the first place, so it wasn't as sad as when his mother died.

I'd been seeing the police chief on and off since my husband left me. Even before, if truth be told. He was sweet and was sometimes fun to be with, but mostly he wasn't, being something of a nail-chewing worrywart by nature. I could see why his wife had left him.

The fire marshal was more fun and never worried about anything, but he'd already had three wives and he said he didn't want any more. He preferred booze to broads now, as he put it, and—more than either—the weekly football on the box. The police chief had been a senior when I was just a freshman. We did some things together back then, but I was still very young and shy, and I guess, thinking back, he was, too. He was a Catholic and I was a Lutheran, so it wouldn't have worked out anyway. We were both still churchgoers, so nothing was going to work out now, either, but, at this time of life, that was no longer enough to keep two lonely people out of the same bed.

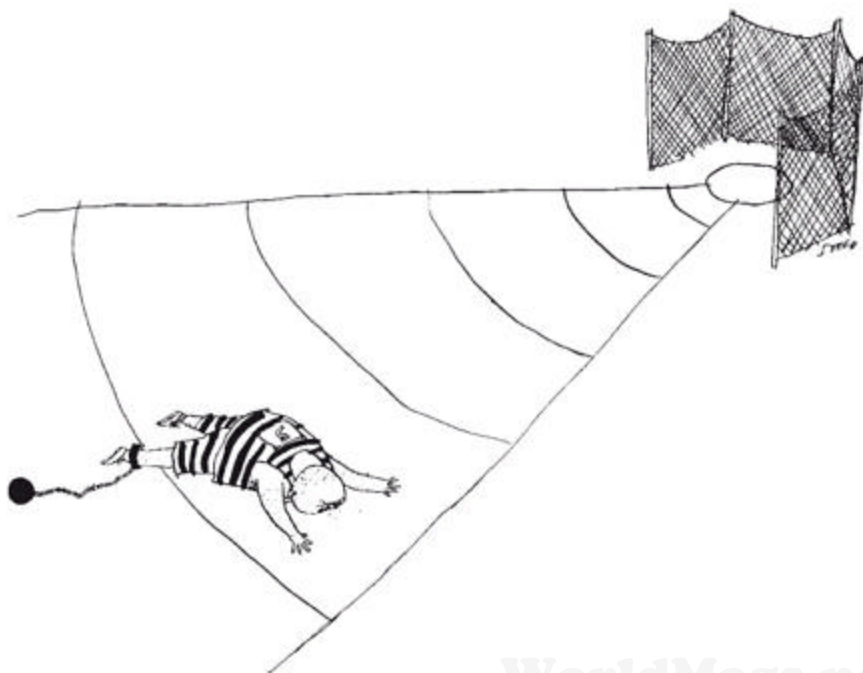
A few weeks after Dickie-boy died, my daughter went out to the farm one day and found Marleen sitting beside a hole in the ground under the crabapple tree, playing with a pile of bones. Marleen said that the bones were those of her stepbrother, whom her mother had cooked up in a black-beer stew, which her stepfather ate, gnawing all the little bones clean before burying them. Marleen had dug them up and was stringing together a kind of horrible life-size Halloween puppet. She was reciting a rhyme about singing bones, and then she warbled like a bird and held up the bone puppet and rattled it. That was when my daughter stopped playing with her.

There has to be a law against those

sorts of things, but when I told the police chief what my daughter had said he only bit his nails and said that it was weird how kids could dream up such crazy stories. I asked him if he didn't think it could be true, or at least partly true, and he said no, he knew the parents well, especially the girl's mother, and such a thing could not have happened. I realized then that, like half the town's heroes, the chief had probably been one of the Vamp's quickies, maybe still was. He wasn't interested in any further speculation about the girl he called "that cute little loony with the big eyes." He did promise to drop by the farm to see if the grave had been molested, but he never told me if he did.

The part of Marleen's story that I thought might be true was how Dickie-boy had died. The Vamp, who'd detested her stepson, was completely capable of doing him grievous bodily harm, as the chief would say, in his detective-movie way, and then making her daughter feel guilty for it. There was something monstrous about her—we all felt it. Of course, she'd messed up a lot of our marriages, so we weren't exactly unbiased. I didn't think that Dickie-boy's dad would have eaten him on purpose, but he was often so drunk that he didn't know what he was doing, and maybe the Vamp had tricked him into it. Stews are stews. Who knows what's in them?

The fire marshal told me that he'd been drinking one night with Dickie-boy's dad, who'd complained that people misunderstood his wife. She had her dark side, sure—who didn't? But mostly she was just frightened and needed protection, and he could provide that. Dickieboy's dad wasn't feeling well, ulcers or something, and he said he knew that whiskey wasn't a cure for it, but he was a farmer who did certain things every day by the clock. Drinking every night was part of that routine, and he couldn't change it now. But it meant that his wife was alone much of the time, and being alone scared her, which was why she was constantly shacking up with other men. *Everything* scared her, he said. The farm scared her, the birds did, the animals, even the damned crabapple tree. She wouldn't go near it. She kept glancing up over her head as if she



were afraid that something might be falling on her. Then the fire marshal made the mistake of bringing up the rumor about the black-beer stew and took a nose-breaking blow to the face, and that was the end of their drinking together.

Dickie-boy's dad died a year after Dickie-boy, almost to the day, and joined him and the boy's mother under the crabapple tree. The doctor said that he drank too much and ruined his liver, and that was maybe so, but he got sick and died awful fast. The Vamp didn't even stick around for the funeral, as though admitting what she'd done, but the police chief refused to order an autopsy on the farmer. He said that it wasn't in his jurisdiction, so we'll never know for certain. That the Vamp had killed her stepson, poisoned her husband, abandoned her daughter, and gone on the run was the general opinion, but my daughter said she wasn't so sure. She wondered if Marleen's mother wasn't also out there under the crabapple tree.

At the father's funeral, Marleen told my daughter that she was sorry she'd stopped coming to play with her, but it was all right, because her stepbrother had come back alive from the bones she'd joined up, and they were playing together just like before. The boy's grave was covered over by dirt and weeds and looked like it always did. Maybe Marleen was making up stories because she was lonely and wanted my daughter to be her friend again, but it didn't work. As far as my daughter was concerned, enough was enough. Anyway, she was too grown up by then to play Marleen's weird games. I've never seen any phantom boy, of course, though my daughter said she "sort of" saw him, "in a ghost-in-the-graveyard kind of way," when she was out riding past the farm one night with a boyfriend.

Eventually, Marleen inherited the farm, which wasn't exactly a farm anymore. She had started keeping birds and other animals out there, turning the place into something of a wildlife refuge. Maybe her imaginary Dickie-boy was part of the wildlife. Some of the animals lived in the house with her. In fact, there wasn't much difference between inside and outside.

There was no money in a wildlife refuge, of course, so, as she grew older, Marleen took up what we all supposed had been her mother's trade, but as if living in a story about herself, without awareness or consequence, a sort of ragdoll act of her own.

The fire marshal was getting fat eating carryout from fast-food joints, so he changed his mind about no more wives and agreed to marry me if I'd promise to cook him decent low-cal meals. I could do that, and it gave me a kind of future. His brief attempts at lovemaking were more like ballgame time-outs, always had been, but at least he hadn't abandoned the practice altogether. Marleen had aroused his curiosity, and he decided to try her out as his stags'-night treat before our wedding, and, a wag by nature, he joked about it with all our friends. I told him to be careful, because people had a way of disappearing around Marleen.

He didn't disappear. He came back and we got married. But he didn't say anything about what had happened that night, and, in fact, never said much of anything again. He still went nightly to the bars to sit over his beers, smiling in a nervous sort of way and muttering to himself as if he were running through something in his mind. He retired from the Fire Department. Stopped watching football. Said it wasn't "real," but agreed that probably nothing else was, either.

Over the years, we got used to thinking of Marleen as something eerie but mostly harmless at the edge of our lives. Children would sneak close to the crabapple tree, but, like the Vamp, they'd never go under it. They made up stories about the dead bodies buried beneath it, mostly to scare the younger ones. Once, somebody tried to set fire to the tree—it looked like a professional job, and the fire marshal hadn't had his heart attack yet, so maybe he was involved. To protect the tree, Marleen had an extension built onto the farmhouse, with a hole in the roof for the tree, or perhaps it moved in on its own. Its apples were said to be poisonous, but birds gathered in its laden branches like twittering harpies to eat them, and, if anything, they got louder and bigger, and there were more of them than ever. ♦

Extraordinary...

*Luxury Barge
Cruises*



FRENCH COUNTRY WATERWAYS, LTD.

P.O. Box 2195, Duxbury, MA 02331
800-222-1236 781-934-2454
www.fcwl.com

SILVER HILL HOSPITAL
RESTORING MENTAL HEALTH SINCE 1931

Renowned Psychiatric Care
in an Exceptional Setting

Psychiatric and Addiction Treatment
for Adolescents and Adults

www.silverhillhospital.org
New Canaan, CT • (866) 548-4455

ADVERTISEMENT

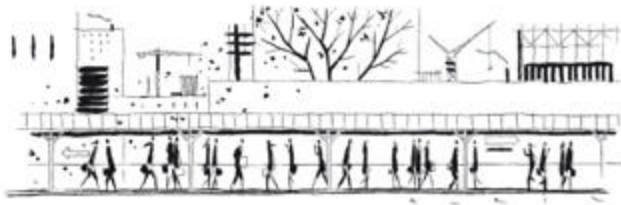
**NEW YORKER
COVER PRINTS**



Ana Juan, February 8, 2010

Find your favorite at
NEWYORKERSTORE.COM

THE CRITICS



POP MUSIC

SECOND COMING

D'Angelo's triumphant return.

BY SASHA FRERE-JONES

Almost three years ago, some friends gathered around a laptop in my apartment and watched footage apparently shot on a smartphone of a concert given a few days earlier, in Paris. The performer was D'Angelo, the R. & B. and soul singer, whom we hadn't seen since he appeared, looking disoriented, in a 2010 mug shot, having been arrested for allegedly soliciting a police officer. He had been in a near-fatal car accident, in 2005, so the fact that he had returned to performing, twelve years after his previous album, "Voodoo," was less surprising than nerve-racking: if you cared about D'Angelo, you couldn't stop thinking, How badly could this go?

D'Angelo, born Michael Eugene Archer, seemed to have gained weight but looked healthy in the footage, almost luminous, wearing a black bandanna and a tank top. He teased the crowd by playing thirty seconds of "Untitled (How Does It Feel)," the single from "Voodoo" that was promoted with a simple video of an extremely fit D'Angelo singing naked, shot from the waist up. "Untitled" owes more than a slight debt to Prince's "How Come U Don't Call Me Anymore," an elegant piano ballad shot through with almost timid loneliness. Though performed at the same stately pace as Prince's song, "Untitled" is pure erotic need, with lots of dips into near-silence. In Paris, D'Angelo stopped, rose, and smiled, leaning on the piano, fully clothed, while the crowd went nuts. Then he sat down and performed the

entire song, beginning with a long holler straight out of church, proceeding through falsetto, mumbling, throaty yells, and multisyllabic variations. His piano playing was strong and full of improvised runs, some resembling ragtime. For more than three minutes, my friends and I didn't move or say anything more profound than "Holy shit!" D'Angelo wasn't just back—he sounded magnificent, maybe as good as before. Was it possible?

When D'Angelo suddenly released "Black Messiah," three weeks ago, on a Monday at midnight, it happened again. Although he had been playing occasional live shows since 2012, his performances included only a few new compositions, including, most commonly, "Sugah Daddy," a syncopated, fluid number he had played in Paris, and "Really Love," a slow-burning song. He made a surprise appearance at Bonnaroo in June, 2012, but he did only a set of covers: songs by the Beatles, Funkadelic, the Ohio Players, Sly and the Family Stone—a sort of skeleton key to his influences. He had folded one of Prince's original sidemen, the guitarist Jesse Johnson, into his band, further verifying his debt to the tiny genius from Minneapolis. But, still, there was no new album, and D'Angelo's subsequent shows relied on covers, songs from "Voodoo," and numbers from his slightly more traditional debut, "Brown Sugar" (1995). Maybe getting back the performing fire was enough. He was playing guitar more

often, after years of being mostly a keyboard player, and his manner on that instrument was fierce and unshowy.

There have been musical comebacks as strong as "Black Messiah," but not many. Like a New York City radiator, the record is warming and intermittently noisy, too intense to hold tightly but powerful enough to change an entire apartment's atmosphere. Like "Voodoo," a hazy, unified piece of hovering funk, "Black Messiah" resembles one piece of music rather than a series of songs. It is so texturally inviting that I played it on loop for three straight days. I didn't want to get out of it.

As D'Angelo writes in a brief statement included with the album, its title was inspired by events in Ferguson and New York. He is not giving interviews yet, but in his statement he rejects the idea of his being an actual "black messiah." "For me, the title is about all of us," he writes. "It's not about praising one charismatic leader but celebrating thousands of them." That self-deprecation is the only false note on the record. D'Angelo is worthy of the arrogance of Isaac Hayes, who, in 1971, called an album "Black Moses," with no apparent metaphoric dodges, and the self-regard of Prince. Arrogance suits pop stars, as their swagger encourages our own, especially in a moment of social fracture. D'Angelo is entitled to brag.

The press reaction to the album has been ecstatic, a sweet antipode to the silence that D'Angelo is keeping. (The most concrete reporting on the album's making is a series of detailed tweets from its engineers, Ben Kane and Russell Elevado.) D'Angelo started working on new songs soon after "Voodoo." The comparisons with Prince and Sly Stone are apt, as D'Angelo openly imitates them and refers to them in interviews, but he earns his place at the table in his own way. D'Angelo has little of Prince's verbal dexterity, and he's happy to write a lyric like the opening of "Really Love": "When you call my name. When you love me gently. When you're walking near me. Doo doo wah, I'm in really love with you. I'm in really love with you." Prince would twist that five times before letting it out into the world. And D'Angelo may have some



Fifteen years after "Voodoo," it appeared that D'Angelo might never make another album. Now comes "Black Messiah."

of Sly Stone's rhythmic tics and off-kilter sense of swing, but his taste in horn and vocal arranging does not recall Stone's otherworldly, dissonant style.

Onstage, D'Angelo is a traditional funk-and-soul-revue taskmaster, wisely borrowing from the game plan followed by Prince and James Brown: assemble a varied band, keep it moving, and use only the best. (D'Angelo's long-time bassist, Pino Palladino, is probably the greatest living electric-bass player, unless you prefer rickety and showy. If you want rhythmic and melodic grace and a tone somewhere between a bassoon and a very responsive rubber band, Palladino is your man.)

But in the studio D'Angelo has mastered a style that his predecessors only approached. His sound is organically narcotic, short on language but long on texture. "Black Messiah" was recorded entirely in the analogue domain, with no digital interventions, and though such claims are usually best left for the promotional copy, here they are rele-

vant. Very few recordings from any era sound so clean and evanescent, as if you couldn't pin down exactly what's happening. D'Angelo works slowly, plays slowly, and waits until everything slips into a simple but shimmering whole. As songs repeated, I kept thinking they'd changed. The swirling guitars that open "Ain't That Easy" seemed to go both in reverse and forward, and the drum legend James Gadson's hambone routine on "Sugah Daddy"—slapping his legs as well as playing a full drum kit—felt as if it were in a different time signature every time I heard it.

"Voodoo" was universally and deservedly praised, but seen through the luxurious mesh of "Black Messiah" it sounds unexpectedly piecemeal. The earlier album has a hip-hop element that sits uneasily alongside its strongest parts, where nothing is particularly rowdy but even the calmest songs bubble and twist. As much as I loved DJ Premier's production on "Devil's Pie," D'Angelo is his own best back-

drop, much as he's his own best backup singer. (D'Angelo harmonizing with himself is one of the most acute pleasures available.) "Black Messiah" feels like an object that he held in his hands until it took on a certain physical shape. There seems to be little distance between the players and the music.

Though D'Angelo wrote one great couplet, on "The Charade," that has already been quoted too often—"All we wanted was a chance to talk, 'stead we only got outlined in chalk"—it is the timing of the release that will stand as the most political aspect of this album. While the most significant and sustained public protests of the past thirty years go on, in the wake of the killings of Michael Brown and Eric Garner, there has been an unsettling lack of response from musicians. How D'Angelo and his team can make voices and instruments so animate and radiant is as mysterious as the recording process gets. We know only that, like most significant change, it takes a long time. ♦

YALE WRITERS' CONFERENCE

June 6-16, 2015

FICTION • NONFICTION

Master Classes and craft talks with visiting faculty:

**AMY BLOOM, GISH JEN, RICHARD SELZER,
CHERYL STRAYED, COLM TOIBIN**

Workshops with resident faculty including:

**PHIL KLAY, JULIA GLASS, JOHN CROWLEY, EILEEN POLLACK, TEDDY WAYNE,
JEFF & ANN VANDERMEER, BEN WINTERS, DONALD MARGULIES**

Director: **TERENCE HAWKINS**

4 Day Genre Workshops

June 18-21, 2015

HISTORICAL FICTION • CRIME FICTION & THRILLERS • PLAYWRITING • SCREENWRITING
SCIENCE FICTION & FANTASY • POETRY • CHILDREN'S & YOUNG ADULT • MEMOIR

New Haven, CT

Panel discussions and pitch sessions with agents, editors, and independent publishers. Housing, dining, and full use of the Yale Campus.

Applications open. Space limited. For more information, visit our website: summer.yale.edu/ywc

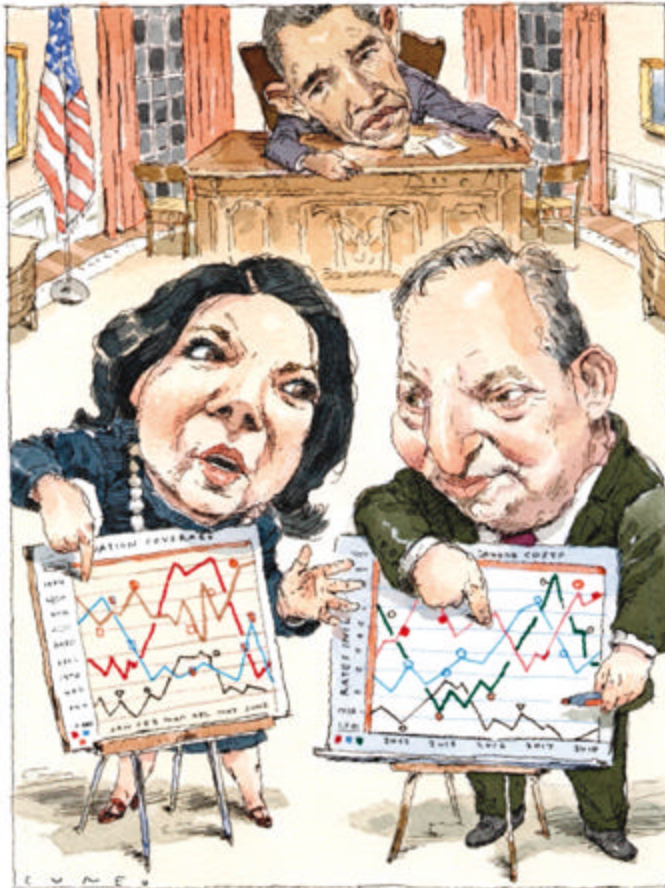
experience Yale

WorldMags.net

THE BILL

Steven Brill on how health-care reform went wrong.

BY MALCOLM GLADWELL



“Working in the White House on a Saturday afternoon had become routine for Zeke Emanuel and Bob Kocher,” Steven Brill tells us at the beginning of Chapter 9 of his ambitious new history of the Affordable Care Act, “America’s Bitter Pill” (Random House):

But they were usually able to leave at a decent hour. However, at 5 p.m. on Saturday, April 25, 2009, they were thrown into a state of near-panic. Emanuel, Kocher, and the rest of the staff from the Office of Management and Budget and the National Economic Council had been blindsided by the domestic policy crew.

At issue was a briefing paper written by the head of the White House health-care-reform effort, Nancy-Ann DeParle. It was early in the planning stages for

Obamacare, and DeParle’s memo was a three-thousand-word document, in which she made the political case for a broad expansion of coverage. Kocher and Emanuel were taken aback. They were worried about the cost of the bill. The memo was supposed to go to the President at eight o’clock that night, which gave them just three hours to respond. “Any hopes for an early departure that Saturday evening were gone,” Brill writes.

By this point in the narrative, the reader is well acquainted with the cast of characters. DeParle was “a Rhodes scholar and graduate of Harvard Law School . . . a seasoned manager and savvy infighter when she had to be,” with a background in private equity. Kocher, a

“Harvard-trained internist,” late of McKinsey, was “a walking encyclopedia of healthcare markets data who had an uncanny ability to turn it all into eye-opening PowerPoint presentations illustrating the dysfunction of the American system.” Emanuel was the “brashiest” and most “academically credentialed of the trio of brilliant Emanuel brothers,” took “edgy” positions, and had an “MD and a PhD (in political philosophy) from Harvard, a master’s from Oxford, and a position teaching oncology at the Dana-Farber Cancer Institute in Boston.” He had “brains, cunning and [a] biting persona,” and was “ready, willing and able to layer it with the self-righteousness of a guy who treated cancer patients.” The two worked with Lawrence Summers—the “celebrated Harvard economics professor” and former Harvard president—and Peter Orszag, the whiz kid out of the Congressional Budget Office by way of Princeton and the London School of Economics. Brill, a graduate of Yale and Yale Law School, tends to specify the Ivy League credentials of his protagonists up front, with the result that his book sometimes reads like the class-notes section of an alumni bulletin. Barack Obama, we are reminded, is “the former *Harvard Law Review* president.” Jonathan Gruber, who was a Ph.D. student of Larry Summers at Harvard, was “an outgoing guy who had the intellectual chops of an Ivy League academic without the withdrawn personality.” And so on.

So there they were, Kocher of Harvard and Emanuel of Harvard blindsided by DeParle of Harvard. The evening became a blur. The two men tried desperately to alter the language of the briefing paper. But they were blocked by DeParle and her colleague Jeanne Lambrew—the “highly respected policy wonk,” who, at one of the first major congressional health-care summits, had “pushed back on the notion that the private sector could always be the answer.” The best they could do was alter a few words and phrases. Round One to DeParle.

For six pages, Brill painstakingly carries the story forward. Key phrases of the memo are parsed, their implications interrogated. “These options have been presented to your senior staff, and we have developed a package that could plausibly offset the cost of reform,” DeParle wrote. But the pronoun “we,” Brill argues,

Nancy-Ann DeParle and Lawrence Summers held clashing views on medical markets.

was ambiguous: it included her team but not the economic team. And could one side of the White House policy staff formulate a “package” without the other side? The directive from the Oval Office was clear. “Don’t bring us your problems,” Valerie Jarrett, the President’s gatekeeper, was known to say. “Bring us your solutions.” From that Saturday evening through the following Thursday, the two sides battled. Then came the showdown:

On April 30, 2009, a large group gathered with the president in the Roosevelt Room to review a PowerPoint about health-care reform. This was the meeting that DeParle’s April 25 memo had been meant to prepare the president for. But this time, the PowerPoint had been prepared jointly by the economic team and DeParle’s healthcare policy people. Peter Orszag and Larry Summers had insisted on that. In fact, Kocher, who prided himself on his McKinsey-bred PowerPoint skills, controlled the document.

Kocher controlled the document.

Near-history, the journalistic reconstruction of contemporary events, has come to be dominated by two schools. The first is represented by Michael Lewis. Lewis wrote about the 1996 Presidential election through the story of a Republican candidate no one had ever heard of, the eccentric millionaire Morry Taylor. “The Big Short” was an account of the financial crisis told through the eyes of four obscure short-sellers. Lewis’s interest is psychological and moral. His books have won him many admirers (including me) because they offer deceptively simple narratives in the service of a grand canonical theme. “Liar’s Poker,” which recounts the young Lewis’s stint in the Wall Street of the nineteen-eighties, is Daniel in the lion’s den. “Money Ball,” about the strategies of small-market baseball teams, is David and Goliath. “The Blind Side” is the Good Samaritan. “The Big Short” is Noah’s Ark, and “Flash Boys” is Jesus casting the money changers out of the temple.

The second school is associated with the Washington *Post* reporter Bob Woodward. Woodwardian history is kaleidoscopic. The reporter makes many telephone calls and office visits, and reads many documents. All key players are represented and events detailed. The approach is sociological: the great theme of the Woodward school is the interaction of institutions and vested interests. In a Lewis, if you remove the titles of the

characters and simply identify them by their first names, nothing is lost: an individual’s character, not his position, is what matters. In a Woodward, the opposite is often true. Names may be irrelevant; titles tell you what you need to know. That is what makes Woodward and Carl Bernstein’s “All the President’s Men” a masterpiece: its great achievement was to show how the institutional power of the White House led to the President’s personal corruption. The



Lewis brings drama to what we thought was prosaic. But when the underlying subject is inherently dramatic, and when the heart of the story lies behind doors that only dogged reporting can unlock, the Woodward is what we need. You don’t want Michael Lewis on Watergate. He’d get distracted by Rose Mary Woods and would never make it into the Oval Office.

“America’s Bitter Pill” is Brill’s attempt at a Woodward. The book is wrapped in the presumption of controversy: reviewers who received early copies had to sign a nondisclosure agreement. The reporting is exhaustive. Brill tells us that he interviewed “243 people—many of them multiple times—over twenty-seven months.” When Brill informs us that Valerie Jarrett likes to use the common managerial adage “Don’t bring us your problems; bring us your solutions,” he states that his source for this fact is the testimony of “three senior members of Obama’s staff.” Next comes a footnote:

Although Jarrett declined comment, assistant press secretary Eric Schultz denied this account offered by these senior Obama advisers, saying, “Valerie doesn’t use this phrase and regularly reminds our staff that the president and our senior team don’t like surprises, to further encourage staff to bring to their attention both problems and solutions.”

Then, in an appendix, Brill presents the text of questions that he submitted to Obama, including:

I am told by five people who have served in senior capacities in the Administration

that Ms. Jarrett often told them that “the President wants you to bring us your solutions, not your problems.” . . . I feel compelled to ask you to comment on that.

Note how the three sources he interviewed in the text have now grown to five. Between the writing of the main text and the completion of the appendix, apparently in the belief that he had not fully explored the issue of Jarrett’s directive, Brill kept on going, enlisting one senior Administration official after another—up to and including the President—in his quest to resolve the Solutions vs. Solutions *and* Problems conundrum. Brill wants to take us behind the locked door.

“America’s Bitter Pill” consists of a series of parallel stories. Brill gives us case studies of Americans whose lives have been devastated by outrageous medical bills. He describes the launch of Obamacare in Kentucky; the early days of Oscar, a health-insurance startup in New York City; and his own terrifying experience with a life-threatening aortic aneurysm. Each of these stories orbits his central narrative, “the roller-coaster story of how Obamacare happened, what it means, what it will fix, what it won’t fix, and what it means to people.”

Brill’s intention is to point out how and why Obamacare fell short of true reform. It did heroic work in broadening coverage and redistributing wealth from the haves to the have-nots. But, Brill says, it didn’t really restrain costs. It left incentives fundamentally misaligned. We needed major surgery. What we got was a Band-Aid.

One of Brill’s examples is drug prices. While he was working on his book, he writes, “a drug called Sovaldi burst onto the scene.” Sovaldi is used for hepatitis C, and its manufacturer, Gilead Sciences, has priced it at a thousand dollars per pill—which comes out to eighty-four thousand dollars for a course of treatment. Brill quotes Sarah Kliff, who writes on health-care policy, pointing out that California might well end up spending more on Sovaldi for its Medicaid patients than it does on all K-12 and higher education. “The exact price Gilead chose for Sovaldi said something in and of itself about the nonexistent regulatory environment drug companies knew they faced in the United States,” he writes.



LET'S GO!

INTRODUCING THE COMPLETELY NEW
GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN APP

Featuring the very best of New York City's cultural happenings, as chosen by **NEW YORKER** editors—plus smarter navigation and improved functionality.



ALL NEW. STILL FREE.

Search events by location, send them to friends, save them to your calendar, and buy tickets. And, in a new section, **EXCURSIONS**, our critics reveal their favorite outings around town. Alex Ross and Emily Nussbaum lead audio tours, and Hilton Als and Sasha Frere-Jones share secrets of their neighborhoods.



Supported by
PRICELESS[®]
NEW YORK



newyorker.com/go/goingsonapp

WORKINGMAGS.NET



"It's mostly sweater weight."

"Rather than set the price at, say, \$989 or \$1,021—at least to create the impression that it was based on some calculation other than 'Let's charge whatever we want'—the company had chosen a simple round number, \$1,000."

How can we have a solution to the health-care crisis without making any attempt to curb runaway drug prices? Medicare isn't even allowed to negotiate directly with drug companies. *"Should we be embarrassed and maybe even enraged that the only way our country's leaders in Washington could reform healthcare was by making backroom deals with all the interests who wanted to make sure that reform didn't interfere with their profiteering?"* Brill writes, in a section structured around a series of italicized questions. "Of course. We'll be paying the bill for that forever."

Brill devotes fifty pages to another Obamacare shortcoming, the early malfunctioning of the Web site. He originally thought that the site would be a showcase for what government could do. But, on the train back from his initial round of interviews in Washington, he glanced at his notes and realized that he had been given seven different answers to the question of who was in charge of the launch of the federal exchange, including an "incomprehensible" organizational chart with

four diagonal lines crossing one another and forming a "lopsided" triangle:

Should we be amazed, and disappointed, at how Obama treated the nitty-gritty details of implementing the law as if actually governing was below the pay grade of Ivy League visionaries?

Absolutely. This failure to govern will stand as one of the great unforced disappointments of the Obama years.

At the end of "America's Bitter Pill," Brill offers his own solution to the health-care crisis. He wants the big regional health-care systems that dominate many metropolitan areas to expand their reach and to assume the function of insuring patients as well. He talks to Jeffrey Romoff, the C.E.O. of the University of Pittsburgh Medical Center, who is about to try this idea in the Pittsburgh area, and becomes convinced that the same model would work throughout the country. "The [hospital's] insurance company would not only have every incentive to control the doctors' and hospitals' costs, but also the means to do so," he writes. "It would be under the same roof, controlled by Romoff. Conversely, the hospitals and doctors would have no incentive to inflate costs or over-treat, because their ultimate boss, Romoff, would be getting the bill when those extra costs hit his insurance company."

Brill talks through his idea with several other prominent health-care-system C.E.O.s ("doctor-leaders," he calls them), whose résumés are helpfully elaborated: "Glenn Steele, Jr., a former cancer surgeon and professor at Harvard Medical School," and Gary Gottlieb, the head of a Boston group "formed by the merger of the area's two most highly reputed hospital brands, both of which were affiliated with Harvard Medical School." A system like this, Brill estimates, based on a few back-of-the-envelope calculations, could slice twenty per cent off the private-sector health-care bill.

It's at moments like this that Brill's book becomes problematic. The idea he is describing is called integrated managed care. It has been around for more than half a century—most notably in the form of the Kaiser Permanente Group. Almost ten million Americans are insured through Kaiser, treated by Kaiser doctors, and admitted to Kaiser hospitals. Yet Brill has almost nothing to say about Kaiser, aside from a brief, dismissive mention. It's as if someone were to write a book about how America really needs a high-end electric-car company that sells its products online without being the least curious about Tesla Motors.

In a Lewis, this wouldn't matter so much. "Flash Boys" was criticized by some on Wall Street for mischaracterizing the world of high-frequency trading. But "Flash Boys" explicitly set out to tell its story through the eyes of a renegade trader named Bradley Katsuyama, and the test of the book's success was whether it captured Katsuyama's view of high-frequency trading. In a Woodward, the goal is different. A book like Mark Bowden's "Black Hawk Down"—a Woodward that outdoes even Woodward—sets out to describe things as they actually happened, not things as filtered through one person's idiosyncratic perspective. The currency of the Lewis is empathy. The currency of the Woodward is mastery—and nothing is more corrosive to the form than the suspicion that the author doesn't grasp the full picture.

Does the botched launch of the Web site deserve fifty pages? Maybe so. This certainly was something that felt significant at the time. But what we want to know is how much it ultimately mattered, and there is little in Brill's reporting that sheds light on that question.

The Administration built a Web site in order to give Americans access to one of the most complex pieces of legislation in history. The site had lots of bugs, in the beginning, as complicated pieces of software often do. Then the Administration fixed the bugs quickly, and the response was such that the Affordable Car Act reached its enrollment targets. "I was, like, never worried," Brill quotes Mickey Dickerson, an expert from Google whom the Administration brought in to get the Web site on track, as saying. "It's just a website. We're not going to the moon." Brill wants the Web-site saga to stand for something larger, but in the end what it seems to stand for is the fact that Web sites, in the beginning, sometimes crash a lot.

The Sovaldi example is equally puzzling. A thousand dollars for a pill sounds like a lot of money. But hepatitis C is a costly disease. It's the leading reason for liver transplants, which are among the most expensive of all medical procedures. A 2013 study published in the journal *Hepatology* estimated the lifetime health-care costs of the average hepatitis-C patient (when medical inflation was factored in) at more than two hundred thousand dollars. The drug regimens that came before Sovaldi didn't work very well and had terrible side effects. Brill quotes Sarah Kliff on how much the drug will cost the state of California, but what he doesn't mention is that Kliff followed up on her initial analysis with another that was headlined, above a picture of Sovaldi capsules, "EACH OF THESE HEPATITIS C PILLS COSTS \$1,000. THAT'S ACTUALLY A GREAT DEAL."

The problem with the pharmaceutical industry is not that it makes too many drugs like Sovaldi. It's that it makes too many drugs that aren't like Sovaldi, drugs whose costs vastly outstrip their benefits: cancer treatments that cost tens of thousands of dollars and extend life only minimally, or expensive me-too drugs that perform no better than cheap generics. We certainly need to be smarter about the drugs we use, and Medicare should be relieved of the congressionally mandated restrictions that make it impossible to bargain directly with drug companies. But Sovaldi targets a painful and

costly disease with a substantially cheaper, safer, and more effective one-time cure. This is what we *want* drug companies to do. Of all the examples that Brill could have used to bolster his argument, why did he pick that one?

On May 2, 2009, Brill writes, the domestic-policy group at the White House blindsided the economic team with a second memo. It concerned something called the medical loss ratio, or M.L.R. The medical loss ratio compares what an insurer earns in premiums with what it pays out in benefits. An insurer who takes in a dollar and gives back eighty-five cents has a loss ratio of eighty-five per cent. Jeanne Lambrew wanted to place a floor on every insurer's loss ratio: if a company kept too much of that dollar—if its M.L.R. fell below eighty-five or eighty per cent, say—it should have to refund the difference to its customers.

"Lambrew was certainly on firm political ground," Brill writes. One senior White House aide called the proposal a "winner." The rule would make it impossible for one of the economy's least liked sectors to make excess profits. The feeling was, Brill says, that "it might end up being the single most politically appealing piece of healthcare reform."

The economic team, however, wasn't so sure:

Summers called it a "stupid idea," and told his people to try to kill it. It was "dumb for us to cap anyone's profits," he said, dismissing the idea much the way the legendarily blunt Summers might have taken down a freshman economics student at Harvard who said something in class that he thought was "dumb."

Summers's point was that an M.L.R. floor distorted the insurer's incentives. The argument goes like this: Suppose your doctor sends you to an imaging center to get a thousand-dollar MRI. But then your insurance company calls you and says that it's found an equivalent provider just down the street that charges two hundred dollars. This, presumably, is what we want insurers to do. The market for medical procedures lacks price transparency and competition, and it's scandalous that insurers routinely pay thousands of dollars for an MRI scan when the true



**BPD is a disorder,
not a destiny.**

Treatment for women with BPD at U.S.
News' Top Ranked Psychiatric Hospital
855.707.0520 mcleangunderson.org

Ohana Family Camp in Vermont



A spoken-word website
exploring open-faith ideas
through story and metaphor

www.listenwell.org

FREE
MALE AND FEMALE ENGLISH BULLDOG
TO A GOOD HOME.
Contact richardwilson893@hotmail.com
for more information.

Canoe Canada's Arctic

Fly-in canoe trips on the remote tundra rivers of North America's last great wilderness. Herds of caribou, muskoxen, white wolves, moose and grizzlies. Wildlife biologist guides. Operating since 1974.

CANOE ARCTIC INC.
Box 130, Fort Smith, NT X0E 0P0, Canada (867) 872-2308
www.canoeartctic.com



**WHAT'S THE
BIG IDEA?**

**Small space has
big rewards.**

To find out more, contact
Sara Nicholson at 877.843.6967.

cost of the procedure, by any metric, is a fraction of that. By taking steps like this, Summers thought, insurers could finally rein in, or even reduce, health-care premiums, which had been rising faster than inflation for years. But it is also highly likely that the insurer will keep a chunk of that eight-hundred-dollar savings for itself, in the form of higher profits. The prospect of higher profits is an insurer's incentive for going to the trouble of looking for a cheaper MRI. In other words, if insurers do what we want them to do—cut costs and rein in premiums—it is likely that their loss ratios will fall. Why, Summers wondered, would you want to penalize them for doing that?

The economic team felt that health care could use a good dose of market incentives. The Lambrew-DeParle view, on the other hand, was that health care is *different*: the complex nature of the relationship between patients and their health-care provider is so unlike ordinary economic transactions that it can be governed only through cost controls and complicated regulatory mechanisms. When the two sides argued, they weren't just reflecting a difference in tactics or emphasis. Their disagreement was philosophical: each held a distinct view about the nature of the transactions that take place around medical care.

Brill sides with the DeParle camp. His solution for the health-care problem is to treat the industry like a regulated oligopoly: he believes in price controls and profit limits and strict regulations for those who work within the health-care world, restrictions that he almost certainly thinks would be inappropriate for other sectors of the economy. A patient, he explains at the beginning of his book, is not a rational consumer. That was the lesson he took from his own heart surgery. "In that moment of terror," he writes, of blacking out after his surgery, "I was anything but the well-informed, tough customer with lots of options that a robust free market counts on. I was a puddle."

But Brill spends very little time examining why he thinks this means that the market can't have a big role in medicine, where most care is routine, not catastrophic. He just takes it for granted. And because he is not much engaged by the philosophical argument at the heart of the health-care debate, he can never

really explain why someone involved in health-care reform might be unhappy with the direction that the Affordable Care Act ended up taking. He tells us who controlled the PowerPoint. But he can't tell us why it mattered.

It is useful to read "America's Bitter Pill" alongside David Goldhill's "Catastrophic Care." Goldhill covers much of the same ground. But for him the philosophical question—is health care different, or is it ultimately like any other resource?—is central. The Medicare program, for example, has a spectacularly high loss ratio: it pays out something like ninety-seven cents in benefits for every dollar it takes in. For Brill, that's evidence of how well it works. He thinks Medicare is the most functional part of the health-care system. Goldhill is more skeptical. Perhaps the reason Medicare's loss ratio is so high, he says, is that Medicare never says no to anything. The program's annual spending has risen, in the past forty years, from eight billion to five hundred and eighty-five billion dollars. Maybe it ought to spend more money on administration so that it can promote competition among its suppliers and make disciplined decisions about what is and isn't worth covering. Goldhill writes:

Medicare is cheaper to run than private insurance. So what? Cheaper doesn't mean more efficient. It may be cheaper to run banks without security guards, hotels without housekeepers, and manufacturers without accountants, but that wouldn't make those businesses more efficient.

Many state Medicaid programs have, similarly, a rule that says health-care providers cannot charge Medicaid more than the lowest price they give to anyone else. If you run an MRI machine and allow a privately insured patient to get a scan for two hundred dollars instead of a thousand dollars, you have to give all your Medicaid patients MRI scans for two hundred dollars. That's a classic "health care is different" solution to the problem of excess health-care costs: pass a law guaranteeing the "sale price" to publicly funded patients. So what's the result? Goldhill asks. Health-care providers behave the way any market participant would under the circumstances. They don't have sales. What incentive would the Gap have for holding a Boxing Day blowout if, by law, it would have to offer those same

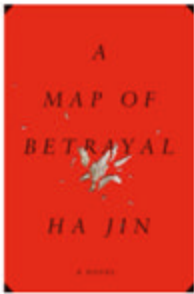
low prices every other day of the year?

Goldhill takes a far more radical position than the economic team at the White House does. He believes that most of our interactions concerning health care are actually no different from our transactions concerning anything else: if we trust people to buy cars and houses and food and clothing on their own, he doesn't see why they can't be trusted to do the same with checkups, tonsillectomies, deliveries, flu shots, and the management of their diabetes. He thinks that the insurance function—inserting a third party between patients and providers—distorts incentives and raises prices, and has such an adverse impact on quality that health insurance should be limited to unexpected, high-cost occurrences the way auto insurance and home insurance are. These ideas are unlikely to make their way into policy anytime soon. But, in elaborating the market critique of the health-care status quo, Goldhill helps us understand what the argument we're having right now is *about*. It is not just a political battle over Obama. It's a battle over whether health care deserves its privileged status within American economic life.

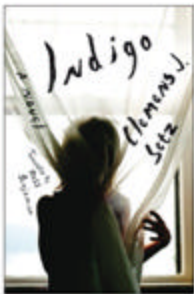
The frustrating thing about "America's Bitter Pill" is that Brill could have taken us one step further. He has introduced us to the policymakers, to Summers and DeParle, Kocher and Lambrew. He has taken us to the Roosevelt Room, where the two sides battle for the President's attention. But, just at the point where "America's Bitter Pill" could have become illuminating, exploring the conceptual gulf behind all the wrangling, Brill gets restless. He wants to get on to the next page in his notebook—to the next meeting that Obama had in the Roosevelt Room, to the briefing paper about such-and-such that was sent to So-and-So, and then, of course, to the debacle of the Web site, which had bugs until those bugs were fixed.

"Do you recall a memo that Peter Orszag wrote to you just after the law was passed urging you to put in charge someone with experience launching and running ventures as complicated as health-care.gov?" Brill asks the President. He's trying to be Woodward. It's not as easy as it looks. "What were your reasons for not doing so? If you do not recall the memo, do you recall Peter and Larry Summers advising you to do this? . . ." ♦

BRIEFLY NOTED



A MAP OF BETRAYAL, by *Ha Jin* (Pantheon). Gary Shang, the protagonist of Ha's seventh novel, is a Chinese spy in America. His story is narrated by his daughter Lillian, a college professor who travels to China in search of the Chinese family her father left behind. A modest, unobtrusive, and slightly dull man, Shang stumbles into his profession by happenstance, and spends four decades unable to feel fully Chinese or fully American. For a spy story, the narrative is short on momentum, but Ha, a former People's Liberation Army soldier who has spent his adult life as an academic in the U.S., deftly explores the parallels between an immigrant's experience and an informant's—the ambivalence, the delusion, the sense of warring loyalties.



INDIGO, by *Clemens J. Setz*, translated from the German by *Ross Benjamin* (Liveright). In this novel by an Austrian writer, children with a mysterious condition—Indigo syndrome—cause those who come near to suffer from nausea, dizziness, diarrhea. Some parents send their so-called “I-children” to an experimental boarding school, where they encounter a teacher and writer named Clemens J. Setz. The novel's irreverence—Batman is a frequent reference—undercuts its efforts to create an air of intrigue, but the questions it raises regarding empathy and loneliness are explored in moving and idiosyncratic ways. Setz's ostracized characters can empathize even with a fluorescent bulb: “It had waited so long for someone to finally stand under it, and now everything pent up in it burst out at once.”



THE MARQUIS, by *Laura Auricchio* (Knopf). When the Marquis de Lafayette returned to France following the American Revolution, to which he had lent military talent and considerable funds, he was a hero eager to lead his people in a revolution of their own. His failure in a second bid for glory is the focus of this astute and often thrilling reconsideration of his legacy. Auricchio paints Lafayette as a centrist in an increasingly polarized country. A proponent of constitutional monarchy, he tried to maintain peace between the royals and their opponents, but he remained blind to important obstacles. Today in France, he is remembered chiefly as an American figure, and Auricchio quotes the opinion of a recent French history: “The man has drawn few eulogies.”



SEVERED, by *Frances Larson* (Liveright). This idiosyncratic history of decapitation has chapters on executions, on severed heads in art, and on the dissection of heads. Larson jumps between historical and recent examples, from the invention of the guillotine in the French Revolution to Damien Hirst's self-portrait in a morgue. In discussing videos of beheadings uploaded to the Internet, she draws comparisons with public executions that drew crowds in America as recently as the nineteen-thirties. This morbid obsession, she argues, is common to all cultures—a realization that dawned on her when she worked at a museum that exhibited shrunken heads. Her book shares in this fascination—“dangerous but irresistible”—and makes some distinctions between the forms it takes.

NEW
YORKER
.COM

CULTURAL COMMENT

IDEAS AND DEBATES ABOUT CULTURE AND THE ARTS

“Kidspeak is a classic instance of compression in balance with concision. What sounds limited and repetitive to the outsider is, to the knowing listener, as nuanced as a Henry James passage.”

—“The Conscientiousness of Kidspeak,” Adam Gopnik

www.newyorker.com/culture/cultural-comment



NEWYORKER.COM
PUBLISHES MORE THAN FIFTEEN
ORIGINAL STORIES A DAY

CONDÉ NAST

DIRTY OIL

"A Most Violent Year."

BY DAVID DENBY



Jessica Chastain and Oscar Isaac in a new movie directed by J. C. Chandor.

Abel Morales (Oscar Isaac), the hero of J. C. Chandor's "A Most Violent Year," was born in Colombia, but when we meet him, in 1981, he's living in Westchester, a wealthy businessman in his late thirties, swathed in double-breasted suits and a camel-hair coat. Emerging from his Mercedes coupe, he speaks decisively but quietly, as if raising his voice would signal a loss of authority. Abel started out driving a truck for a heating-oil-delivery business in Greenpoint, Brooklyn. He has since taken over the company and enjoys the love of the people who work for him, but he wants more: more money, more power—and some respect from his rivals, Jews and Italians who have worked the trade for decades. He conducts himself like a suavely intelligent young gangster, and, for a while, you can imagine that he really is a gangster. It was a particularly lawless moment in New York City, and, as Chandor, who also wrote the screenplay, tells it, few people in the oil-delivery business could avoid moral compromise, if not outright fraud and violence. How do you rise in such a business without licensing mayhem or

becoming an ally of the Mob, which controls a good part of the playing field? The movie is an entrepreneurial fable, set in a specific time and place, but it's also a timeless portrait of a hard-charging immigrant American. Some of the menacing atmosphere, and even a few scenes, descend from the first two "Godfather" movies. But, in fact, Chandor has done something startling: he has made an anti-"Godfather."

His first feature, "Margin Call" (2011), was by far the best—the savviest and most emotionally resonant—of the films and TV dramas devoted to the financial crisis of 2008. Chandor, whose father worked in finance in New York, demonstrated a forceful and sensitive understanding of such things as the protocols of hierarchy in the financial world and the dramatic significance of decorum, diction, glances, silences. He seemed fascinated by power and, at the same time, ardently appreciative of decency and small acts of compassion. Set at a big investment bank on the day subprime-mortgage assets imploded, "Margin Call" has a pungent aura laced with melancholy. Chandor blended together strong per-

formances by Kevin Spacey, Paul Bettany, Jeremy Irons, Zachary Quinto, and even Demi Moore and Simon Baker, as the panic that begins at night gives way to a foul dawn of recrimination, disillusion, and desperate strategy.

That film followed a downward plunge; this one charts an upward surge. Abel, with his thick dark hair, his classic profile, and his refined manners, drives through derelict, graffiti-covered industrial buildings in Brooklyn, and sees money in the crumbling walls. He buys a loading and storage dock adjacent to his own property, but on the East River, which will allow him easy access to oil barges, and greatly expand his operation. The sellers, garment-district Orthodox Jews, accept a cash down payment and demand the rest of the money—a million and a half dollars, also in cash—within thirty days. They're puzzled: they don't want the dock, and they don't know why Abel does, but a deal is a deal. If they don't get the money, they can sell the property to one of his rivals and keep his down payment. (Those were the days! Making big off-the-books transactions without fear of being surveilled, or tracked by G.P.S.) The movie chronicles a frantic period in Abel's life, as he tries to raise the cash at the same time that an ambitious assistant district attorney (David Oyelowo) is looking to charge him with fraud (for rigging scales and underreporting income); rivals are attacking his fleet drivers and draining the oil from his trucks; and the head of a truckers' union (Peter Gerety) is pushing him to arm the drivers with revolvers. Abel is a true capitalist hero: as the pressures on him mount, he delves deeper into risk. According to entrepreneurial logic, he can't get ahead unless he courts disaster.

Seventy years ago, a story of ambition, temptation, and violence would have been made as a fast-paced noirish melodrama, starring John Garfield; sixty years ago, it would have been a psychological thriller, with Kirk Douglas; forty years ago, a furious anti-corruption rant, with Al Pacino. Chandor's way with the material is drier, subtler, more realistic and more morally nuanced than those earlier modes. He's actually interested in high-stakes business and what it can do to people. The fear never lets up—assaults arrive out of nowhere—but

much of the action consists of hooded banter, dealmaking, and sharp elbowing. Chandor begins many of these scenes with wide-angle shots that set the context—on warehouse-lined streets or inside spacious homes—before he moves to medium shots and closeups. Bradford Young's cinematography captures the yellowish early-morning light when the drivers set out, but, at times, the wide shots make the movie feel distant; it lacks both the visual excitement that Martin Scorsese or David Fincher would have built into it and the momentum and the rhythm that David O. Russell would have provided. When Abel finally loses his temper, there's a prolonged chase (car, foot, and subway) that's exciting enough, but the glory of "A Most Violent Year" lies in Chandor's sense of how a certain corner of the world (and, by implication, a much larger portion of it) works, for ill or for good. The movie is devoted to the scrappy side of fortune-building at the end of the industrial age. (Manhattan's towers beckon in the background of many shots.) As Abel makes his rounds, borrowing from everyone he can while trying to hold on to his pride, Chandor gives us bits of New York ethnic lore, including visits with a disarmingly mild, second-generation Mafia plutocrat (Alessandro Nivola), who has his own fleet of trucks and lives in a guarded fortress. The milieu is so thick with ambiguity that this charming man, who has been plotting against Abel, warns his rival not to borrow money from people like him.

Abel confides in only two people: his lawyer, Andrew Walsh (Albert Brooks),

who is the voice of caution, and his show-me-buster wife, Anna (Jessica Chastain), who keeps the books—in a fashion—and who is attracted to danger. Anna, from Brooklyn Mafia stock, is aspirational, with long nails, perfect blond hair, and figure-clinging Armani dresses; she also has a thing about guns. Chastain, sidling up to Isaac, makes Anna a cross between a forties-movie good-bad girl and Lady Macbeth, ready to taunt her husband the minute his boldness fails him. Some of Chandor's dialogue for her is slightly tinny and movieish. "You're not going to like it when I get involved," Anna says to Abel, by which she means that she will call on her gangster family for help. Chastain may be too serious an actress to give a line like that its full, campy lilt, but she's entertaining as a wife who would rather be a moll, and Anna and Abel, fighting, making love, defending their uncomfortable glass-and-steel suburban home, are a rare team in movies, a partnership sealed with sex and money-hunger.

In "Inside Llewyn Davis," Oscar Isaac's handsome looks were intentionally muted by surly narcissism. He gave a borderline dislikable performance, hewing almost too faithfully to the Coen brothers' idea of the character as a self-destructive second-level artist (a folksinger), a man incapable of receiving or expressing affection. Llewyn was a grouch of modest talent, and Isaac remained inflexibly angry and distant. But, in "A Most Violent Year," he does more than fill out a starring role. He gives a movie-star performance, drawing the audience to him. His dark features, his concentration, and his formal speech

recall (intentionally, I think) Pacino as Michael Corleone in "The Godfather: Part II." But he adds touches of his own—for instance, a slight pause before answering a direct question, which makes the exchange, however small, seem grave.

If you're a rising entrepreneur, you have to impress people, even a confused, impulsive young immigrant like Julian (Elyes Gabel), one of Abel's drivers, whom he tries to help. In Julian, Abel sees a version of his younger self, but the flip side to his success story, a nervous guy who can't take the pressure; the character is Chandor's way of reminding us that most immigrants don't wear camel hair. Michael Corleone doesn't help anyone outside the family, and it's the ways in which Abel differs from him that make the movie special. Chandor holds Abel back from operatic violence, which may be a commercial mistake, but it's the appropriate strategy for this story, since Abel's success as a gangster would lead to his destruction as a man. "You must take the path that is most right," he tells the assistant D.A. who tries to bring him down. Chandor suggests that there is no absolute right, except possibly in the fantasies of moralists and the deluded. But everyone has the chance to take the path that is most right. As a moral guide, the phrase is hardly a clarion call, but in a fallen world, ruled by money and compromise—our world—it's almost good enough to become a meme. ♦

NEWYORKER.COM

Richard Brody blogs about movies.

THE NEW YORKER IS A REGISTERED TRADEMARK OF ADVANCE MAGAZINE PUBLISHERS INC. COPYRIGHT ©2015 CONDÉ NAST. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED. PRINTED IN THE U.S.A.

VOLUME XC, NO. 43, January 12, 2015. THE NEW YORKER (ISSN 0028792X) is published weekly (except for five combined issues: February 23 & March 2, June 8 & 15, July 6 & 13, August 10 & 17, and December 21 & 28) by Condé Nast, which is a division of Advance Magazine Publishers Inc. PRINCIPAL OFFICE: The Condé Nast Building, 4 Times Square, New York, NY 10036. Elizabeth Hughes, vice-president and publisher; Beth Luskó, associate publisher advertising; James Guilfoyle, director of finance and business operations; Fabio Bertoni, general counsel. Condé Nast: S. I. Newhouse, Jr., chairman; Charles H. Townsend, chief executive officer; Robert A. Sauerberg, Jr., president; David E. Geithner, chief financial officer; Jill Bright, chief administrative officer. Periodicals postage paid at New York, NY, and at additional mailing offices. Canada Post Publications Mail Agreement No. 40644503. Canadian Goods and Services Tax Registration No. 123242885-RT0001. Canada Post: return undeliverable Canadian addresses to P.O. Box 874, Station Main, Markham, ON L3P 8L4.

POSTMASTER: SEND ADDRESS CHANGES TO THE NEW YORKER, P.O. Box 37684, Boone, IA 50037 0684. FOR SUBSCRIPTIONS, ADDRESS CHANGES, ADJUSTMENTS, OR BACK ISSUE INQUIRIES: Please write to The New Yorker, P.O. Box 37684, Boone, IA 50037 0684, call (800) 825-2510, or e-mail subscriptions@newyorker.com. Please give both new and old addresses as printed on most recent label. Subscribers: If the Post Office alerts us that your magazine is undeliverable, we have no further obligation unless we receive a corrected address within one year. If during your subscription term or up to one year after the magazine becomes undeliverable, you are ever dissatisfied with your subscription, let us know. You will receive a full refund on all unmailed issues. First copy of new subscription will be mailed within four weeks after receipt of order. For advertising inquiries, please call Beth Luskó at (212) 286-4454. For submission guidelines, please refer to our Web site, www.newyorker.com. Address all editorial, business, and production correspondence to The New Yorker, 4 Times Square, New York, NY 10036. For cover reprints, please call (800) 897-8666, or e-mail covers@cartoonbank.com. For permissions and reprint requests, please call (212) 630-5656 or fax requests to (212) 630-5883. No part of this periodical may be reproduced without the consent of The New Yorker. The New Yorker's name and logo, and the various titles and headings herein, are trademarks of Advance Magazine Publishers Inc. Visit us online at www.newyorker.com. To subscribe to other Condé Nast magazines, visit www.condenet.com. Occasionally, we make our subscriber list available to carefully screened companies that offer products and services that we believe would interest our readers. If you do not want to receive these offers and/or information, please advise us at P.O. Box 37684, Boone, IA 50037 0684 or call (800) 825-2510.

THE NEW YORKER IS NOT RESPONSIBLE FOR THE RETURN OR LOSS OF, OR FOR DAMAGE OR ANY OTHER INJURY TO, UNSOLICITED MANUSCRIPTS, UNSOLICITED ART WORK (INCLUDING, BUT NOT LIMITED TO, DRAWINGS, PHOTOGRAPHS, AND TRANSPARENCIES), OR ANY OTHER UNSOLICITED MATERIALS. THOSE SUBMITTING MANUSCRIPTS, PHOTOGRAPHS, ART WORK, OR OTHER MATERIALS FOR CONSIDERATION SHOULD NOT SEND ORIGINALS, UNLESS SPECIFICALLY REQUESTED TO DO SO BY THE NEW YORKER IN WRITING.

WorldMags.net



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 Paul Noth, must be received by Sunday, January 11th. The finalists in the December 22nd & 29th contest appear below. We will announce the winner, and the finalists in this week's contest, in the January 26th issue. The winner receives a signed print of the cartoon. Any resident of the United States, Canada (except Quebec), Australia, the United Kingdom, or the Republic of Ireland age eighteen or over can enter or vote. To do so, and to read the complete rules, visit contest.newyorker.com.

THE WINNING CAPTION



"You've been randomly selected for additional screening."
Daniel Bateman, New York City



THE FINALISTS

"I faked my applause."
Sandy Treadwell, Ojai, Calif.

"How are you going to spin this?"
Bezalel Stern, Washington, D.C.

"I'm not in favor of that position."
Miranda Pratt, Victoria, British Columbia

THIS WEEK'S CONTEST



Introducing the first ever
FOOD UTILITY



The **NEW**
epicurious
The Ultimate Food Resource

LAUNCHING 2.3.15



www.epicurious.com
WorldMags.net

**"WENDY WASSERSTEIN IS
THE VOICE OF HER GENERATION—**

EXPRESSING HOW SHE FEELS THROUGH
HER CELEBRATED SENSE OF HUMOR."

THE
NEW YORKER

GOLDEN GLOBE* WINNER
ELISABETH MOSS
"MAD MEN"

EMMY* NOMINEE
JASON BIGGS
"ORANGE IS
THE NEW BLACK"

TONY* NOMINEE
**BRYCE
PINKHAM**
A GENTLEMAN'S
GUIDE TO LOVE
AND MURDER

WINNER!*

PULITZER PRIZE • TONY AWARD • OUTER CRITICS CIRCLE AWARD
NEW YORK DRAMA CRITICS' CIRCLE AWARD • DRAMA DESK AWARD
HULL-WARRINER AWARD • SUSAN SMITH BLACKBURN PRIZE
*PRETTY MUCH EVERYTHING BUT THE HEISMAN TROPHY!

The HeidiChronicles

BY WENDY WASSERSTEIN
DIRECTED BY PAM MACKINNON

PREVIEWS BEGIN
FEBRUARY 23

TELECHARGE.COM • 212-239-6200 • MUSIC BOX THEATRE, 239 WEST 45TH STREET

TheHeidiChroniclesOnBroadway.com