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# THE NEW YORKER







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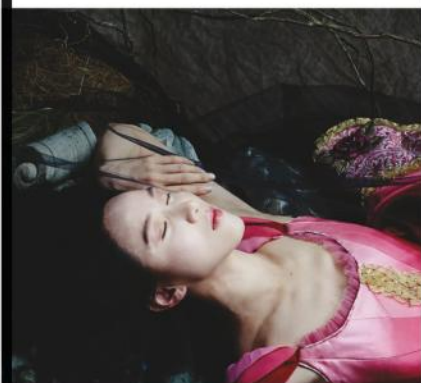
JULY 4, 2016

- 4 **GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN**
- 15 **THE TALK OF THE TOWN**  
*Jelani Cobb on the congressional battle over guns; the Brexit shock; make your own water; watching TV with Norman Lear.*
- AMERICAN CHRONICLES**
- Jill Lepore** 20 How to Steal an Election  
*When political conventions go rogue.*
- SHOUTS & MURMURS**
- Jack Handey** 25 My Favorite Fireworks
- ONWARD AND UPWARD WITH THE ARTS**
- Hilton Als** 26 Dark Rooms  
*Revisiting Nan Goldin's pictures of the eighties.*
- LETTER FROM KABUL**
- George Packer** 32 The Theorist in the Palace  
*Can Afghanistan's President save his nation?*
- PROFILES**
- Rebecca Mead** 42 Swimming with Sharks  
*The adventurer of the art-auction world.*
- SKETCHBOOK**
- R. O. Blechman** 49 "The New Rulers"
- FICTION**
- T. Coraghessan Boyle** 52 "The Fugitive"
- THE CRITICS**
- BOOKS**
- Thomas Mallon** 60 *Jean Edward Smith's life of George W. Bush.*  
 62 Briefly Noted
- A CRITIC AT LARGE**
- Alex Ross** 65 *Music as a weapon.*
- POP MUSIC**
- Hua Hsu** 70 *Blood Orange's "Freetown Sound."*
- ON TELEVISION**
- Emily Nussbaum** 72 *"Game of Thrones."*
- THE CURRENT CINEMA**
- Anthony Lane** 74 *"Independence Day: Resurgence,"*  
*"Our Kind of Traitor."*
- POEMS**
- Nicky Beer** 47 "Juveniles"  
**Stephen Dunn** 56 "Emergings"
- COVER**
- Barry Blitt** "Silly Walk off a Cliff"

**DRAWINGS** Barbara Smaller, Avi Steinberg, William Haefeli, Pat Byrnes, Bruce Eric Kaplan, Alex Gregory, Tom Chitty, Paul Noth, Tom Toro, Jack Ziegler, Seth Fleishman, Roz Chast, Charlie Hankin **SPOTS** Christian Roux

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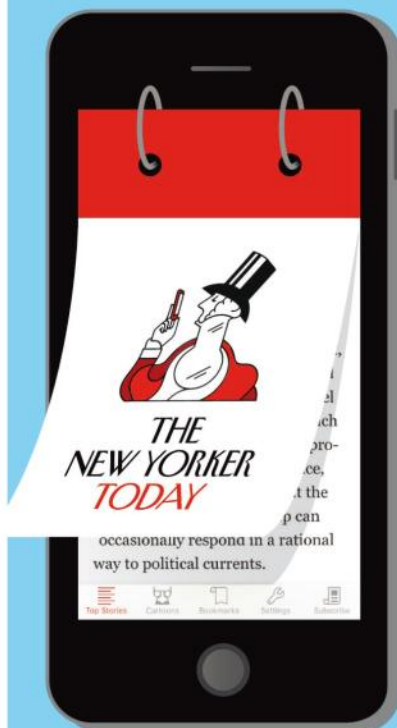
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## CONTRIBUTORS

**George Packer** (*"The Theorist in the Palace,"* p. 32) is the author of seven books, including *"The Unwinding,"* for which he won a National Book Award.

**Jelani Cobb** (*Comment,* p. 15) received the 2015 Hillman Prize for Opinion and Analysis Journalism for his *New Yorker* columns.

**Jill Lepore** (*"How to Steal an Election,"* p. 20), a professor of history at Harvard, is writing a history of the United States.

**Lauren Collins** (*The Talk of the Town,* p. 17) reports from Europe for the magazine. Her book, *"When in French,"* will be published in September.

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**Barry Blitt** (*Cover*) has contributed to the magazine since 1992. His illustrations are featured in the children's book *"You Never Heard of Casey Stengel?!"*, which came out in March.

**Rebecca Mead** (*"Swimming with Sharks,"* p. 42) is a staff writer and the author of *"My Life in Middlemarch."*

**Nicky Beer** (*Poem,* p. 47) teaches at the University of Colorado Denver. *"The Octopus Game"* is her second book of poems.

**T. Coraghessan Boyle** (*Fiction,* p. 52) has published ten books of stories and fifteen novels, including *"The Harder They Come."* His next novel, *"The Ter-ranauts,"* is due out in October.

**Thomas Mallon** (*Books,* p. 60) is a novelist, an essayist, and a critic. *"Finale: A Novel of the Reagan Years"* is his latest book.

**Alex Ross** (*A Critic at Large,* p. 65) has been *The New Yorker's* music critic since 1996. He is working on a book entitled *"Wagnerism: Art in the Shadow of Music."*

**Emily Nussbaum** (*On Television,* p. 74), the magazine's television critic, won the 2016 Pulitzer Prize in criticism.

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# THE MAIL

## THE WAY WE LIVE NOW

I wish that Lizzie Widdicombe's article on co-living spaces—shared housing that functions like a dormitory for affluent grownups—had focused more on the issue of gentrification ("Happy Together," May 16th). Brad Hargreaves, the founder of one of these startups, Common, says that his company was able to find "a wholly vacant multifamily building" in rapidly gentrifying Crown Heights, Brooklyn, that enabled Common to move into the neighborhood without evicting longtime residents. However, it's common practice for property flippers to evict a building's tenants, or to intimidate them into leaving, before putting it up for sale, thereby making the property more attractive to landlords intent on charging higher rents. This is one of the most troubling myths about areas undergoing gentrification: that they are "up-and-coming" neighborhoods of vast, unoccupied space, ready and waiting to be developed. In reality, they are vibrant communities where people, often people of color, have lived for generations.

*Amelia Schonbek  
Brooklyn, N.Y.*

One of the co-living tenants in Widdicombe's piece compares his living situation to another form of co-operative housing. In the nineteen-thirties, universities like Berkeley, Michigan, and Toronto formed student co-ops that provided access to education and lodging for members who would not otherwise have been able to attend college. The difference between these types of housing is immense. Through shared decision-making and co-ownership, housing co-operatives empower disadvantaged and underprivileged groups. Over the years, these co-ops have been among the first dormitories to offer mixed-gender and mixed-race housing, and have been the sites of important protests against war and inequality. In contrast, co-living startups

like the ones that Widdicombe profiles in her article profit from young gentrifiers and do little to confront economic, class, or identity politics. In whatever ways co-living is a revolutionary idea, there isn't very much revolution in it.

*Alex Green  
President, North American Students  
of Cooperation  
South Orange, N.J.*

I am twenty-six and had to leave San Francisco because of rising rents. And yet it's still unclear to me why anyone would want to live in these post-college "dorms." For one thing, when did loneliness become something we should fight? Sometimes it's great to be alone and experience true, unadulterated solitude. And how do you play hooky when you're surrounded by co-workers? Or walk around naked with your weird butt pimple? What happens when you have a particularly severe period and want to listen to the same side of a Neil Young record for four hours? Or when you pull the Nine of Swords from your tarot deck and decide to cry about it for no reason? Or what about when you want to have sex with a random person three nights in a row? I refuse to believe that "growing up" involves someone paying your bills, buying and arranging your furniture, and framing your Taylor Swift posters. I want to try to fix my clogged sink before calling the landlord. I want to offer a joint to the cable guy in exchange for free HBO. I want to find my headboard in the trash outside a fancy building. Sometimes I want to have a beer at 6 A.M., and, most important, I don't want to feel obligated to go bowling.

*Kate Santos  
Los Angeles, Calif.*

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JUNE 29 – JULY 5, 2016

# GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN



**“Meridian (Gold)”** is a new project by the New York artist Mika Tajima, produced by SculptureCenter, at Hunter’s Point South Park, in Long Island City. Visitors can sit in the sculpture—it looks like a hot tub, from which a geyser of vapor is rising. The mist changes color based on the fluctuating value of gold; computerized lights are fed data, in real time, from global markets. Maybe this is what Marx and Engels envisioned when they wrote, about capitalism, “All that is solid melts into air.”

PHOTOGRAPH BY TOBIAS HUTZLER



# MOVIES

## OPENING

**The BFG** Reviewed in Now Playing. *Opening July 1. (In wide release.)* • **The Legend of Tarzan** Alexander Skarsgård stars in this adventure film, based on the novels by Edgar Rice Burroughs, about a conspiracy in the Belgian Congo that ensnares a trade adviser who was raised by gorillas. Directed by David Yates; co-starring Samuel L. Jackson, Margot Robbie, and Djimon Hounsou. *Opening July 1. (In wide release.)* • **Our Kind of Traitor** Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. *Opening July 1. (In limited release.)* • **The Shallows** Blake Lively stars in this thriller, as a surfer who is attacked by a shark. Directed by Jaume Collet-Serra. *Opening June 29. (In wide release.)*

## NOW PLAYING

### The BFG

Steven Spielberg lavishes extraordinary care and skill on this live-action adaptation of a story by Roald Dahl, about an orphan named Sophie (Ruby Barnhill) who is plucked from a London orphanage by a giant named Runt (Mark Rylance) and brought to his home in Giant Country, somewhere to the north of north. There, Runt is bullied by nine even bigger giants, child-eating cannibals who mock him for being a vegetarian and try to hunt Sophie, whom he valiantly defends. Meanwhile, Runt plies his gentle trade as the world's dream-catcher and dream-brewer. The early scenes offer a sort of magic realism in which Runt struggles with the practical details of the modern city with a cleverly grounded whimsy that the movie's far more fanciful later conceits can't match for simple astonishment. Rylance brings an arch literary rusticity to Runt's brilliantly bungled language, and the gifted Barnhill isn't given much with the role of Sophie, who's written to be spunky, endearing, and blank. The film's technical achievements may be complex, but its emotions are facile. With Penelope Wilton as the Queen, who summons the British Army and keeps the American President, Ronald Reagan, informed.—*Richard Brody (In wide release.)*

### Blood Simple

This splatter-movie art film was directed by Joel Coen, who wrote the screenplay with his brother Ethan; they made the film independently, but it's a Hollywood-by-product. A Texas roadhouse owner (Dan Hedaya) wants to have his young wife (Frances McDormand) and her lover (John Getz) murdered; he hires a killer, a good-ol'-boy private detective (M. Emmet Walsh) who takes his money and double-crosses him. The one real novelty in the conception is that the audience has a God's-eye view of who is doing what to whom, while the characters have a blinkered view and, misinterpreting what they see, sometimes take totally inexpedient action. Joel Coen doesn't know what to do with the actors, but he knows how to frame the characters and the props in a way that makes the audience feel knowing and in on the joke. His style is deadpan and klutzy, and he uses the klutziness as his trump card. It's how he gets his laughs—the audience enjoys not having to take things seriously. The film provides a visually sophisticated form of gross-out humor; the material is thin, though, and there isn't

enough suspense until about the last ten minutes, when the action is so grisly that it has a kick. Released in 1984.—*Pauline Kael (Film Forum; July 1-14.)*

### Central Intelligence

Twenty years out of high school, the formerly fat and bullied Robby Wierdich (Dwayne Johnson), now known as Bob Stone, is a body-sculpted martial artist and a C.I.A. agent, and Calvin Joyner (Kevin Hart), the class president, voted most likely to succeed, is miserable as a mid-level accountant. On the eve of the class reunion, Bob recruits Calvin for a high-risk mission to recover stolen top-secret files. Meanwhile, Calvin is struggling to save his marriage to his high-school sweetheart, Maggie (Danielle Nicolet), a successful lawyer, and Bob has to face up to the enduring trauma of his adolescence. This action comedy, directed by Rawson Marshall Thurber, builds a sentimental strain into its violent stunts; the window-smashing and car-crashing offer some giddy surprises, but the ridiculous yet bland gunplay is as generic as the setup. Nonetheless, Johnson commands the screen with his odd hesitations and deadpan line readings, and the script gives him some wildly eccentric situations in which to shine; against all odds, he lends real emotion to the flimsy artifice. With Amy Ryan, as another C.I.A. agent in grimly antic pursuit.—*R.B. (In wide release.)*

### The Conjuring 2

In the unremarkable London suburb of Enfield, a girl named Janet (Madison Wolfe), her three siblings, and their weary mother (Frances O'Connor) are plagued by visiting spirits. The intrusion, at first, is low-grade; the fact that the TV remote won't stay put is not, one feels, the stuff of nightmares. By the end, however, Janet is being sucked through the ceiling, knives are on the loose, and only a fool would risk a tour of the cellar. That fool is Ed Warren (Patrick Wilson), who, with his wife, Lorraine (Vera Farmiga), travels to England to investigate the haunting, and it seems odd that the director, James Wan, should take almost half the movie to get them to the scene of the crime. If it really is a crime; the film is based on a true story, and what happened in Enfield in 1977 has often been diagnosed as a case of pranks and jinks. The whole saga bears definite traces of domestic comedy, but Wan is at pains to ignore them, preferring an old-school parade of creaking doors, sputtering lights, and demonic jolts. Still, his framing of the scares is artfully managed, and it is the accomplished Wolfe, rather than any monster, who takes true possession of the tale.—*Anthony Lane (In wide release.)*

### Finding Dory

Pixar's sequel to its animated 2003 smash "Finding Nemo" repeats that film's plot: a challenging under-the-sea trek that ends with the reuniting of a family. This time, it's the memory-challenged Dory, the scene-stealer from the previous film (voiced, with impeccable timing, by Ellen DeGeneres) who's out to find her long-lost parents. The action includes a trip through an ocean filled with wisecracking fish, a raucous adventure in a marine facility where life lessons are learned, and, of course, a happy ending. While not as visually dazzling as its predecessor, the film is still colorful and immersive; the script, while predictable, puts an engaging spin on the issues of home and identity. The filmmakers Andrew Stanton and Angus MacLane play it safe with the tried-and-true formula to create a lighthearted diversion that should

play like comfort food for viewers who are fond of the original. Ed O'Neill, Albert Brooks, Diane Keaton, Idris Elba, and many others provide the eager-to-please voice work.—*Bruce Diones (In wide release.)*

### Free State of Jones

The director and screenwriter Gary Ross illuminates immense historical spans with the true story of one man's revolt during the Civil War. Newton Knight (Matthew McConaughey), a Mississippi medic in the Confederate Army, is infuriated by draft exemptions extended to slave owners and angered by taxation of small farmers. He deserts and takes refuge in a swampland among a group of runaway slaves which includes the fiercely principled Moses (Mahershala Ali) and the medically gifted Rachel (Gugu Mbatha-Raw). Their ranks swell, and they become a fighting force, declare independence, and hold out until the end of the war. Meanwhile, Newton and Rachel marry. Ross carries the action through to Reconstruction and the bloody rise of the K.K.K.; an amazing sidebar, set in the nineteen-forties, involves Davis Knight (Brian Lee Franklin), a great-grandson of Newton and Rachel, whose marriage to a white woman is challenged in a Mississippi court. Ross's sense of drama is second to his sense of irony; his powerful assemblage of information offers little psychology, symbolic resonance, or practical politics. Remarkably, Ross links the pursuit of economic and racial justice to a cautionary reminder that the Civil War and the freeing of slaves were followed by a century of violent racism that remains unredressed.—*R.B. (In wide release.)*

### Genius

This thin and staid drama is based on the true story of Maxwell Perkins (Colin Firth), a Scribner's editor, and his relationship with the young novelist Thomas Wolfe (Jude Law). Arriving at Perkins's Fifth Avenue office one day in 1929, the volatile Southerner is delighted to learn that his novel will be published, but then confronts the editor's plan to reshape the lengthy text. Meanwhile, Perkins, living in Connecticut with his wife, Louise (Laura Linney), a former actress whose talent he belittles, and their five daughters, lets his work with Wolfe interfere with his home life. When the book finally comes out, Wolfe's success goes to his head, leading to a break with his lover, Aline Bernstein (Nicole Kidman), a wealthy older woman who supported him in the lean years. Soon, Perkins's own time of reckoning comes. F. Scott Fitzgerald (Guy Pearce), Zelda Fitzgerald (Vanessa Kirby), and Ernest Hemingway (Dominic West) make appearances, and—with the exception of Linney—all the actors are miscast. John Logan's script is a jigsaw puzzle of clichés, and Michael Grandage's direction is antiseptic, but a few scenes of family life in Connecticut, though brief and undeveloped, suggest the core of a fine movie unrealized here.—*R.B. (In wide release.)*

### The King of Comedy

Rupert Pupkin (Robert De Niro) can't get started. He's a thirty-four-year-old who dreams of a standup slot on the late-night talk show hosted by Jerry Langford (Jerry Lewis). Living and practicing in the basement of his mother's New Jersey house, Rupert works as a messenger and boasts of his future glory to anyone who'll listen. When his efforts to get Jerry's attention fail, he teams up with the ferocious Masha (Sandra Bernhard), another of Jerry's stalkers, and they take matters into their own hands. This plot sparks Martin Scorsese's cruelly lucid, agonizingly sympathetic riff, from 1982, on the immature idiot and the public artist whose lives are equally warped by fame. The isolated Rupert is as much of a slick glad-hander as any Las Vegas headliner, and Jerry,

oppressed by a media machine of his own making, is forced into pristine isolation. Scorsese infuses this tale with the passionate energy of New York street life and an outsider's wonder at the powerful workings of show business and studio craft. A lingering closeup on a photo of Langford (i.e., of Lewis) as a preternaturally wise youth evokes his force of character and touch of genius, which underlies it all.—*R.B. (Film Forum; June 24–30.)*

### The Neon Demon

In the wake of "Drive" (2011) and "Only God Forgives" (2013), here is another lush adventure in style from Nicolas Winding Refn. We follow the fortunes of Jesse (Elle Fanning), age sixteen and all alone in Los Angeles: angelic to behold, and therefore easy prey for the devilry promised by the title. An aspiring model, she is taken up, rather than befriended, by a makeup artist named Ruby (Jena Malone) and a couple of other girls—lofty human mannequins who resent the intrusion of a new face. Indeed, aside from a young photographer (Karl Glusman) who drives Jesse up to the hills to survey the city, nobody—not a modelling agent (Christina Hendricks) nor a fashion designer (Alessandro Nivola), and least of all a scuzzy landlord (Keanu Reeves)—has the heroine's interests at heart. What Refn delights in, above all, is the clash of this moral squalor with the decorative allure of his images; there is little, including the consumption of human flesh, that he does not hunger to beautify. Meanwhile, the bustle and buzz of regular life is shut out; the tale may be flamboyantly extreme, but, in such a vacuum, nothing burns for long.—*A.L. (Reviewed in our issue of 6/27/16.) (In limited release.)*

### Now You See Me 2

The Horsemen from the 2013 film return to right unredressed wrongs, thwart evildoers, and put on a good show, but this sequel, directed by Jon M. Chu, lacks even the deftness of the average party entertainer. Eluding an F.B.I. agent (Mark Ruffalo) on their trail, three world-class vigilante magicians (Jesse Eisenberg, Dave Franco, and Woody Harrelson) come out of hiding, joined by a newly arrived Horsewoman (Lizzy Caplan), in an effort to prevent the launch of a data-stealing smartphone. Chaos ensues, and the agent turns to an imprisoned "magic debunker" (Morgan Freeman) to help chase the magicians across the globe to Macau, where they are in even more dangerous pursuit of even more dastardly villains. Hypnotizing, prestidigitating, or masquerading their way out of tight spots, they perform tricks that seem like C.G.I. simulations and stage hugely complex false-front operations with a wave of the hand. The movie offers neither the astonishment of the magicians' artistry nor a dramatic view of how they do it. One brief romantic scene between two pickpockets winks at the classic comedy "Trouble in Paradise," with none of its breathless eroticism or dramatic stakes.—*R.B. (In wide release.)*

### Nuts!

The astonishments of this documentary are as much in the telling as in the story told. The filmmaker Penny Lane latches on to an oddball of history—Dr. John Romulus Brinkley, who, in Kansas in 1917, successfully treated impotence with goat-testicle implants—and follows his career through deep and distant strains of modern society. Soon famous, and with his treatment greatly in demand, Brinkley spread his surgical gospel—and built and operated the country's most powerful radio station to do so. The medical establishment's skepticism, the judicial consequences, and Brinkley's audacious foray into electoral politics

come into play as well; Lane builds a grandly picaresque tale about the power of celebrity in the age of modern media, and she tells it with diabolical glee. Her extraordinary archival research—yielding newsreel footage that she allows to play at length and photographs that she handles on-screen—restores the past to a vital immediacy. Reinvigorating the familiar technique of animated reenactments by employing many animators to generate many styles, Lane revels in the story's playfully nostalgic wonders without stinting on its implications or its passions.—*R.B. (In limited release.)*

### Right Now, Wrong Then

The South Korean director Hong Sang-soo doubles the emotional stakes of this cinema-centric romance by doubling the drama itself. It's the story of a well-known art-house filmmaker, Ham Chunsu (Jeong Jae-yeong), who has a day to kill before introducing his new movie at a festival in the town of Suwon. Visiting a shrine, he meets Heejung (Kim Min-hee), a young artist, who—awed by his renown—invites him to her studio. There, he expresses an interest in her work; then, in the course of a shambling evening of drinking, he admits his attraction to her. For an hour, Hong follows the ups and downs of this incipient relationship, and then he does it again, starting the story over from scratch and showing what Ham and Heejung could have done differently. Either hour alone would be a wry, incisive, painful drama at the intersection of art and life, which strain under the burden of personal history. Together, the two parts form a radical fiction about the crucial role of imagination and audacity in intimate experience and filmmaking alike. Hong's narrative gamesmanship blends artistic bravado with metaphysical wonder and agonized regret. In Korean.—*R.B. (In limited release.)*

### Swiss Army Man

This excruciatingly cute fantasy, identified since its Sundance premiere as "the farting-corpse movie," lives up to that epithet. Paul Dano plays the shipwrecked Hank, alone and unrescued on an isolated beach, who's about to hang himself when he spies a body washed up on shore. Daniel Radcliffe plays that body, which is both dead and eerily flutent; Hank drags the body onto dry land and into a forest. The body soon speaks, calling itself Manny and posing naïve questions that force Hank to explain the basics of societal organization, manners, and romance, and to re-create, by way of illustration, urban spaces out of branches and stones. Meanwhile, Manny also spews water from his mouth, and Hank harnesses both ends of Manny's energy—hydraulic from the top and pneumatic from the bottom—to aid in his survival in the wild. Along the way, Hank divulges his own sad story of solitude and thwarted love. The directors and writers, Daniel Kwan and Daniel Scheinert, offer a hint of an idea in Hank's display of a vision of responsible masculinity and the frustrations that it entails, yet they smother that idea in bland images, wheedling and sentimental performances, and banal emotions.—*R.B. (In limited release.)*

### Warcraft

Orcs are vast and rapacious hulks; of their many weapons, none are more lethal than their protruding underbites. In short, the last thing you need, if you inhabit the world of men, is an orc passing through a mysterious portal and trashing your peace of mind. Needless to say, that's

just what happens in Duncan Jones's new movie, which is based on a video game. Azeroth, ruled by a valiant king (Dominic Cooper), is besieged by an army of invading orcs, among them the vicious Gul'dan (Daniel Wu) and the more reasonable Durotan (Toby Kebbell). Other names include Varian, Medivh, and Halforcen; one of the rare charms of this fantastical world is that most of the characters sound like medications, to be taken twice daily after meals. Jones's film is crowded and scattershot. We hang out with a young magician (Ben Schnetzer), an older magician (Ben Foster), and a resourceful warrior (Travis Fimmel), but neither their gifts nor their destinies detain us for long. Even acts of sacrifice, in the grand finale, feel morally weightless, designed largely to pave the way for a sequel. With Paula Patton, as a half-orc, risking a romantic smooch despite her disconcerting fangs.—*A.L. (In wide release.)*

### Wiener-Dog

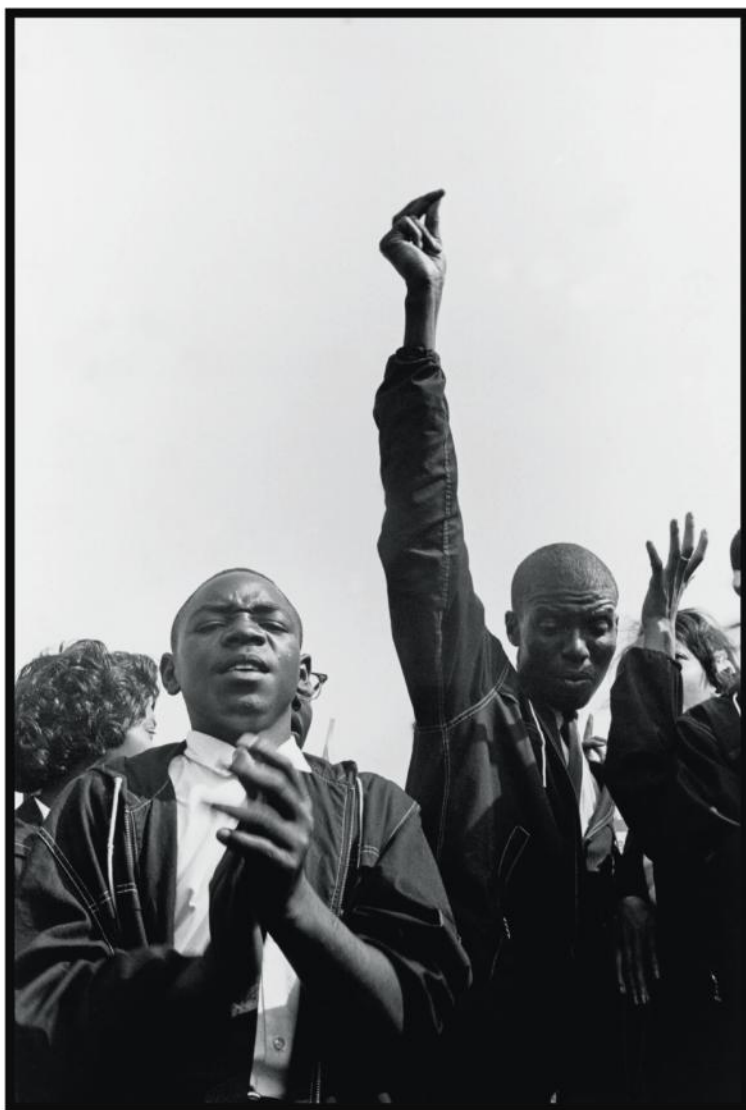
The new Todd Solondz movie takes its name, its cue, and its trotting pace from a dachshund. The same animal appears in four loosely linked stories, as a pet to a variety of owners. The first of these is a lonely young boy called Remi (Keaton Nigel Cooke), who dotes on the new arrival, only to have it taken away after a gastric mishap. (Solondz, so mature in his visual manner, retains a childish joy in ordure and other easy shocks.) The second is Dawn Weiner—once the heroine of Solondz's "Welcome to the Dollhouse" (1995), now a hapless veterinary assistant, played by Greta Gerwig. From her care, or lack of it, the dachshund passes to the scowling Dave Schmerz (Danny DeVito), who teaches film in New York, and whose appreciation of life seems sullied beyond redemption. He, however, is a fountain of joy compared to Nana (Ellen Burstyn), the last and bitterest custodian of the pooch. If anything binds the tales together, in fact, it is not the central beast but the persistence of the director's misanthropy and the disarming elegance with which he lends it dramatic form. With Julie Delpy and Tracy Letts as Remi's unsavory parents.—*A.L. (6/27/16) (In limited release.)*

### The Witness

This extraordinary documentary reconsiders one of the most infamous of all modern crime stories—the 1964 murder, in Queens, of Kitty Genovese, while her screams were reportedly ignored by dozens of neighbors. Though its nominal director is James Solomon, its main character and virtual auteur is Bill Genovese, one of Kitty's three younger brothers, who was sixteen at the time of her murder. His on-camera investigation brings him back to the murder site in Kew Gardens, where he visits apartments, calculates sight lines, and interviews current and former residents about the crime. He also consults trial transcripts and police records and does meta-journalistic research involving reporters, editors, and producers responsible for the original accounts of the murder and later revisions of that story. What he discovers turns out to be at odds with the headlines. The film raises questions of present-day import regarding the penal system, police procedure, domestic violence, and journalistic ethics; it also offers a moving, complex vision of gay life in New York half a century ago. The movie's one reenactment—an ingenious experiment in forensics and social science—unites drama, journalism, and firsthand experience in a masterstroke of pure cinema.—*R.B. (In limited release.)*



# ART



## Outside Edge

*A documentary photographer with a social conscience, at the Whitney.*

DANNY LYON'S CAREER would make a great bio-pic. The New York City photographer, who, at seventy-four, is the subject of the Whitney's terrific survey "Message to the Future," has led an improbably adventurous life, beginning with his involvement in the civil-rights movement. In 1963, when he was twenty-one, he became the staff photographer for the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee. The year before, on his first trip to

the South, Lyon ended up in a Georgia jail, with Martin Luther King, Jr., in a nearby cell. Over the next few years, he documented marches, sit-ins, arrests, and the aftermaths of bombings.

Lyon's 1963 picture of a boy shouting while confined in a choke hold by an Atlanta policeman became an icon of the civil-rights movement and a breakthrough for the photographer. "I had fallen into one of the great stories of our times," he later wrote, and he continued to find them. After his work with the S.N.C.C., Lyon, already a biker himself, joined the Outlaws, a Chicago motorcy-

cle club, whose members he photographed at their homes and on the road. The series provided an insider's view of the outsider life: the camaraderie and competition, the alcohol-fueled oblivion, and the glamour of life on the edge.

In 1967, Lyon talked his way into the Texas prison system, where he spent fourteen months taking pictures in six different prisons. At the Whitney, the selections from that project (accompanied by two brief silent videos) are shockingly matter-of-fact studies of institutional inhumanity and the men who endure it. At the time, the work confirmed Lyon's position as a concerned photographer in the classic mold of W. Eugene Smith and Gordon Parks. But he has remained a maverick throughout his long career—an irritant to the system and an ally to the outcast. Lyon made lifelong friends of some of the Texas inmates. Their mug shots, an F.B.I. wanted poster, and their illustrated letters fill one of several vitrines at the museum.

Among the photographer's later subjects were undocumented workers in the United States, street children in Colombia, and coal miners in one of China's most polluted provinces. Lyon is just as passionate and persuasive when working in his home town. He was in New York City in 1966, when demolition began on the sixty acres below Canal Street that would include the World Trade Center; he spent the next year recording some of the city's oldest buildings before and after they fell to the wrecking ball. Lyon fills the empty streets and abandoned buildings with an intense awareness of the people who lived and died there. He also pays homage to the construction workers and demolition men. The restraint of these images, which were published in the 1969 book "The Destruction of Lower Manhattan," is unexpectedly moving; at the Whitney, they're the heart of the show. Once his downtown series was done, Lyon, ever restless, threw himself back into the great, troubled world, and he has continued to empathize with the displaced and the dispossessed, insuring that their struggles don't go unseen.

—Vince Aletti

*A photograph taken by Danny Lyon on August 28, 1963, during the March on Washington.*

## MUSEUMS AND LIBRARIES

**Guggenheim Museum**

"But a Storm Is Blowing from Paradise: Contemporary Art from the Middle East and North Africa"

The third—and the shakiest—in a series of shows highlighting the museum's recent acquisitions from beyond the traditional West features artists from the Arab world, Turkey, Israel, Iran, and their diasporas. A hazy curatorial theme of "geometry" (drawn from Islamic decorative arts) shoehorns some strong projects (including an anamorphic projection by Ergin Çavuşoğlu) with the sort of homogenized, foreign but not too foreign declarations of identity and history already familiar from art fairs. One dispiriting example: Kader Attia has built an Algerian town out of couscous. The dimensions of Nadia Kaabi-Linke's hanging stainless-steel grille, bluntly titled "Flying Carpets," are based on tourist wares sold by undocumented migrants on Venice's Grand Canal. The constricted regional focus does have an upside: ten of the artists have petitioned the Guggenheim to reopen talks with Gulf Labor, the artists' group advocating for workers' rights in Abu Dhabi, where the museum plans to build a new branch. *Through Oct. 5.*

## GALLERIES—UPTOWN

**"Another North: Landscape Reimagined"**

The Icelandic sagas and the Norse myths have their visual heirs in the vivid, camera-based works of these six Nordic artists. Thanks to long exposures, colorful kites flying above a snow-covered Norwegian wilderness dissolve like dye in water in pictures by Ole Brodersen. In Pentti Sammallahti's intimate black-and-white photographs, the Finnish countryside becomes a fairy-tale backdrop for characters including a frog and a white rabbit. The show's startling centerpiece is Eija-Liisa Ahtila's video of a giant spruce tree, projected sideways across six wall-filling panels and gently swaying to a soundtrack of birdsong and wind rushing through branches. *Through Aug. 6. (Scandinavia House, 58 Park Ave., at 38th St. 212-779-3587.)*

## OPENINGS AND PREVIEWS

**The Golden Bride**

The National Yiddish Theatre Folksbiene mounts an encore run of this 1923 operetta, about a young woman raised in a Russian shtetl who journeys to America to find her mother. (*Museum of Jewish Heritage, 36 Battery Pl. 646-437-4200. Opens July 4.*)

**Ice Factory 2016**

The festival of new work returns with seven plays over seven weeks, beginning with "Icons/Idols," Helen Banner and Grace Oberhofer's choral play about the Byzantine empress Irene of Athens, and John Kaplan's "Are We Human," set in a post-apocalyptic future in which a toxic cloud covers the planet. (*New Ohio, 154 Christopher St. 866-811-4111. Opens June 29.*)

## GALLERIES—CHELSEA

**"The Scarlet Muse"**

Prostitutes have a long history with photographers. A century or more ago, this was because they made wonderful models, posing with a freedom and directness that trumped sitters who had more propriety. The early-twentieth-century portraits of women by Eugène Atget, E. J. Bellocq, and Brassai in this exhibition establish that historical perspective, but they're also as frank and audacious as any of the contemporary works they accompany. The show has its share of voyeuristic perspectives, peeking into an erotic underground, but the best works are empathetic, even fond. Christer Strömholm is clearly smitten with the trans beauties he photographed in Paris in the nineteen-sixties, while Larry Clark, George Awde, and Anthony Friedkin look at street hustlers' hardscrabble lives. *Through July 22. (Cooney, 508 W. 26th St. 212-255-8158.)*

**"Who I Am"**

Singarum Jeevaruthnam Moodley, who was known as Kitty, turned his Johannesburg garage into a photography studio but he was never in the same league as the Malian greats Seydou Keita and Malick Sidibe. Still, his straightforward style had its charms. This show of posthumous prints made from scans of negatives dating between 1972 and 1984 (he died in 1987) offers a view of life under apartheid. All of Kitty's subjects were black or "colored"; some posed in Zulu ceremonial dress, but many more wore Western-style suits and dresses. One young dandy appears cross-legged in a rattan chair in white jeans, dark glasses, and a beret. Kitty's studio doubled as a hub for anti-apartheid activists, which makes his sitters more than merely stylish—they're icons of freedom and strength. *Through Sept. 3. (Walther Collection, 526 W. 26th St. 212-352-0683.)*

## GALLERIES—DOWNTOWN

**Sam Lewitt**

This nonprofit has had an excellent run in the last three years, under its ebullient young director, Simon Castets. Alas, it will lose its SoHo home later this summer. For its last major show in the lo-

cation, the New York-based Lewitt has replaced the gallery's lighting with slender, custom-designed copper heaters, of the sort used to regulate the temperature of cameras or satellites. "More heat than light" is usually a pejorative phrase, but Lewitt's literal rechannelling of the gallery's energy converts the one resource every art space needs into something ambient and ungraspable. (Still, think of the Con Ed bill.) On one recent visit, by midday the heaters had already reached a hundred and forty degrees Fahrenheit. If you visit at the end of the day, prepare to shvitz. *Through July 24. (Swiss Institute, 18 Wooster St. 212-925-2035.)*

**Judy Ledgerwood**

The veteran Chicago painter storms back into New York with effervescent, large-scale paintings that split the difference between the meticulous and the seditious. Interlocking diamonds, with woozy edges, impinge on triangles of deep black or robin's-egg blue; polka dots are fashioned from chartreuse paint squeezed straight out of the tube; magenta is twirled like the batter in a crêpe pan. Edges droop on the top and drip at the bottom, implying textiles or quilts. That's not Ledgerwood's only evocation of the feminine principle: her titles include "All the Pretty Ladies," "Women in a Park," and, most audaciously, "Pussy Poppin' Power." (*Williams, 55 Hester St. 212-229-2757.*)

**"Make Painting Great Again"**

Is the ironic title meant to set up these seventeen painters as degenerate artists of a new century, or merely as opponents of a candidate whose taste for gold and marble makes Saddam Hussein seem minimalist? Hard to say what else unites the low-contrast, rough-edged fields of Joe Bradley, Sarah Brame, and Katherine Bradford with Lily Ludlow's dark rehash of Cubist portraiture, Tyson Reeder's calm and etiolated representation of a bike rack, and Katherine Bernhardt's hell-for-leather composition (done with hot-pink spray paint) of plantains, cigarette butts, and Lisa Simpson. "Greatness," in contemporary art, is a suspect word, and can smack of exclusion; much painting today, and many paintings here, lampoon the very idea of seriousness. But ideals need defending, in the face of both cynics and Trumpists. *Through July 15. (Canada, 333 Broome St. 212-925-4631.)*

## THE THEATRE

**Oslo**

Bartlett Sher directs J. T. Rogers's play, which recounts how a Norwegian diplomat (Jennifer Ehle) and her husband (Jefferson Mays) orchestrated the secret talks that led to the Oslo Accords, in the nineteen-nineties. (*Mitzi E. Newhouse, 150 W. 65th St. 212-239-6200. In previews.*)

**PTP/NYC**

Potomac Theatre Project presents two plays in repertory, both from 1981: Howard Barker's "No End of Blame: Scenes of Overcoming," about a Hungarian political cartoonist sparring with government censors, and C. P. Taylor's "Good," in which a professor studies a German man succumbing to madness. (*Atlantic Stage 2, at 330 W. 16th St. 866-811-4111. Previews begin July 5.*)

**Small Mouth Sounds**

A return engagement of Bess Wohl's comedy, directed by Rachel Chavkin, in which six urbanites attend a silent retreat in upstate New York. (*Pershing Square Signature Center, 480 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200. Previews begin July 3.*)

## NOW PLAYING

**The Healing**

After a young woman commits suicide, four of her longtime companions gather in her home to mourn and help pack up her life. As they slowly disassemble the intimate set—removing ornaments from the walls, sorting trinkets into boxes—an affecting conversation on misguided religiosity and the determinants of happiness unfolds. The company Theatre Breaking Through Barriers, which advances the



work of artists with disabilities, eschews sentimentality, and its treatment of disability is precise and often funny. ("How was the flight?" "Awful . . . the woman beside me kept telling me how inspiring I was.") Without preaching, the play quietly reveals itself to be a mature morality tale about forgiveness and letting go. Timely injections of dark levity—"I'm really sorry, I shouldn't take Vicodin and interact with people"—rescue Samuel D. Hunter's poignant script from tipping over into melodrama. (*Clurman*, 410 W. 42nd St. 212-239-6200.)

### On the Verge; or, The Geography of Yearning

"The Antipodes are not the sort of place one should bring a man," an intrepid female explorer wearing ankle-length skirts declares—an appealing provocation voiced early in Eric Overmyer's high-concept comedy. The 1985 play follows three female Victorian adventurers into jungles and across icy wastelands; then, in its second half, through the twentieth century, as the women bravely bushwhack through time. There are numerous delights: encounters with cannibals and yetis, the discovery of Jacuzzi and Cool Whip, and exuberantly free-associative language throughout. Ultimately, though, Overmyer's play is more idea than action, meditating on colonialism, sexism, and the ways that words shape experience. A director must do some bushwhacking herself to find the play's emotional core, and Attic Theatre Company's Laura Braza doesn't quite manage it. For all the feminist derring-do, there's a lot of talking here, and very little doing. (*Walkerspace*, 46 Walker St. 212-868-4444.)

### Out of the Mouths of Babes

From the winking condescension of its title to the mindless convenience of its ending, Israel Horowitz's comedy, about a quartet of women temporarily sharing a chic Paris loft, is an imaginative flub. Various wives and mistresses of an unnamed author and intellectual have gathered to mourn his passing. As they await the funeral, they trade less than happy memories of their former beau, blaming each other for his many and varied infidelities. Under Barnett Kellman's direction, the characters are sketched as thinly as a coat of mascara. But at least they're played by a lively and practiced foursome, particularly Estelle Parsons, as Evelyn, and Judith Ivey, as Evvie. Their scenes together have a specificity and tartness otherwise lacking among the oo-la-la reminiscences, Everly Brothers songs, and supernatural interventions. "You're a funny old lady," observes Evvie. "Yeah, well, fuck you, too," Evelyn brightly responds. (*Cherry Lane*, 38 Commerce St. 866-811-4111.)

### War

Roberta's stroke brings her son and daughter to a hospital room in Washington, D.C., where two strangers confuse—and threaten, gradually, to enlarge—their already wobbly sense of family. Brandon Jacobs-Jenkins's play, under the direction of Lileana Blain-Cruz, is often hilarious (long, angry diatribes are played for sly laughs), always tense, and nicely limber in its flits between the real world—the world of the hospital, and, later, Roberta's apartment—and a coma-induced dreamscape of hyperintelligent, strangely heartsick apes. (The transitions are helped along by Matt Frey's beautiful lighting scheme: in his hands, the hospital room looks like an installation by James Turrell.) Despite a few clunky, idea-sodden speeches, "War" is a touching, almost excruciating exploration of what a secret can mean when it's kept from kin. (*Claire Tow*, 150 W. 65th St. 212-239-6200. *Through July 3.*)

## NIGHT LIFE



*King Missile revives its whimsically biting prose and experimental folk at Union Hall.*

### Way Cool

*After twenty years, a punk poet rediscovers what's been missing.*

IT'S BEST TO DEAL with King Missile's irreverent 1992 smash, "Detachable Penis," the way the band does in its sets: quickly, loosely, and early. The New York quartet shot from a buzzy anti-folk project popular on college radio to an MTV mainstay on the strength of the proto-viral single, in which the singer and poet John S. Hall recounts losing his prized member at a party, waking up the next morning, and wandering between the Kiev and St. Mark's trying to find it—"This happens all the time," he explains, wilted. "It's detachable."

Both endearing and crude, the song was exemplary of Hall's literary gifts and sneering wit. At a small basement show on Ludlow Street last May, Hall updated some lyrics: "People say, 'Well, that's a nice little story, but isn't it about time you get it permanently attached?' I say no, because then my gender identity would be fixed."

In 1985, Hall, a Stuyvesant High School graduate, started attending open poetry readings downtown and soon assembled a rolling band of musicians to help fill out his sets. The avant-garde style that King Missile developed bridged Patti Smith and Weird Al: vivid spoken-word narratives delivered with smirking derision, rattled over jaunty organ and spiky guitar. Hall would grab at an idea, bludgeon it with deadpan puns, and land a coda that delightfully skewered its dimensions. In the

1990 song "Cheesecake Truck," in which he devours more than twenty cheesecakes instead of delivering them and then skips town, he confesses, "I miss everybody a lot, but I'm not really sorry." After proposing office-supply theft as labor revolt on "Take Stuff from Work" (1987), he notes, "I wrote this at work—they're paying me to write about stuff I steal from them. Life is good."

By 1994, infighting and a hit-hungry, unsupportive label had soured the musicians, so Hall assembled a new lineup, dubbed King Missile III, and in 1998 released the brooding album "Failure," spurred by the chance to detangle and re-tangle a new subject. "Failure is your only friend," he says on its title track. "Believe in it with all your might." He soon enrolled in law school, graduated cum laude, and started a practice. Today, he reads contracts for a living.

An absurdist rocker turned corporate analyst: Hall seems to have traced the fitful arcs of his verses. The fifty-five-year-old is casually prolific—his work includes four band incarnations, ten albums, and hundreds of poems—and when asked about writing such deftly compelling songs he has more than once remarked that he is lucky. Hall is gigging around the city again, including an evening at Union Hall, on July 1. He's brought back a few original bandmates at recent shows, testing new material and reviving cherished gags. "Why the fuck not?" he writes on his blog, a fresh medium for old disaffection.

—Matthew Trammell

## ROCK AND POP

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

**Roy Ayers**

Acid-jazz pioneer, precursor to all the swirling fusions of jazz, R. & B., and funk, the man that brought the vibraphone to pop radio: the seventy-five-year-old Ayers has no contemporaries, which may be why he's enjoying a healthy touring schedule fifty years into his career. We still want to hear his rounded chords up close, whether on the timeless "Everybody Loves the Sunshine," the winding "Mystic Voyage," or the oft-referenced standard "Liquid Love." A young lowrider-soul revivalist named Kali Uchis sampled that last cut recently—it speaks to the potency of Ayers's arrangements that they've drawn at least three generations of young musicians back to them. Ayers returns to this three-level rooftop for an appealing summer Friday. (*Output, 74 Wythe Ave., Brooklyn. outputclub.com. July 1 at 5.*)

**The Beach Boys**

There are very few albums that cap an entire musical era while ushering in the next. This year marks the fiftieth anniversary of "Pet Sounds," Brian Wilson's impassioned attempt to demonstrate that rock music could indeed function as art—a profound statement that opened up the doors for countless idioms and groups. Those who have seen the music performed live can attest to the semireligious fervor it can create in an audience; last month, when Wilson performed the album in its entirety in Williamsburg, audience members were seen dancing, jumping, laughing with joy, and weeping. Though Wilson won't be joining the remaining living members of this American institution, we may not have many more chances to see the boys, especially not on the beach, so cancel your holiday plans and snag a ticket. (*The Amphitheater at Coney Island Boardwalk, 3052 W. 21st St., Brooklyn. coneyislandlive.com. July 4.*)

**Paul de Jong**

This inventive, Dutch-born cellist gained indie renown for his group, the collage-pop duo the Books, which he co-founded in 1999 with the guitarist and singer Nick Zammuto. Since the Books broke up, five years ago, de Jong has been busy adding to an idiosyncratic, ever-growing electronic library of sound samples he calls the "Mall of Found." This indexed archive now contains more than fifty thousand items—spoken-word snippets from old LPs, field recordings, assorted sounds from obscure films—that de Jong draws upon brilliantly in his debut solo record, "IF." These pieces, which he will be performing for this show, interweave an array of sounds, such as the bark of an auctioneer, crickets chirping, and haunting Appalachian fiddle, with de Jong's spare, melancholy cello and piano lines, to transporting effect. De Jong accompanies the music with video fragments of footage from his equally personalized collection of five thousand digitized VHS tapes. (*National Sawdust, 80 N. 6th St., Brooklyn. 646-779-8455. June 30.*)

**Mexrrissey**

"When you see American society, they care about comedy. British, they care about dark

humor. And in Mexico, we care about melodrama," explained Camilo Lara, the multi-instrumentalist and Morrissey enthusiast who fronts and centers this sprawling tribute band, in a recent documentary. It's that achy malaise (and fifties pomaded punk style) that has earned the Smiths' front man a devout following among Mexican and Mexican-American youths up and down the West Coast. Mexrrissey finds new resonance in Morrissey standards like "The Boy with the Thorn in His Side" and "Ask," performing lyrics translated into Spanish while tapping some of Mexico's most ambitious experimentalists to fuse Latin rhythms with Morrissey's pop, rock, and New Wave forms: the squalid tales of postwar Manchester strained through the sticky haze of East Los Angeles, all for free in North Brooklyn. (*Rough Trade, 64 N. 9th St., Brooklyn. July 5.*)

**Neon Indian**

On their debut album, "Psychic Chasms," from 2009, this Texas electronic band laid pastel outlines for the lo-fi, sample-driven twist on pop, rock, and psychedelia which would dominate blog posts and rooftops in the summers to come. The singer and composer Alan Palomo, born in Monterrey, Mexico, distilled the chill-wave sound down to potent concentrations: every drum soft and clipping, every synth modulated into shivers, and vocals sneaking acid-dream motifs in through the fuzz: "Everything comes apart if you find the strand," he sings, "all it takes is a hand." Neon Indian released two more acclaimed records that extended their grasp on downbeat dance music, with last year's "Vega Intl. Night School" glowing under funk black lights. House of Vans hosts the gig, with opening sets from **Factory Floor** and **Kim Ann Foxman**, and it's free if you R.S.V.P. (*25 Franklin St., Brooklyn. vans.com/house-of-vans. June 29.*)

**Pere Ubu**

This venerable art-rock group formed in Cleveland in 1975 and within months released a terrifying, intense single made up of two songs, "30 Seconds Over Tokyo" and "Heart of Darkness," with no clear antecedents. In 1978, the group followed that effort with two landmark full-length albums, "The Modern Dance" and "Dub Housing," which continued the band's aural trench war on rock convention, by incorporating elements of musique concrète, harsh industrial sounds, and unusual, ever-shifting grooves. Despite endless lineup changes (the only constant member is the group's singer-provocateur David Thomas), Pere Ubu has never stopped performing and recording compelling new music. For this tour, however, it focusses exclusively on music made during its classic period of 1975 to 1982. (*Bowery Ballroom, 6 Delancey St. 212-260-4700. June 29.*)

**The Stone Roses**

On a cool morning in May, the residents of Manchester, England, discovered cryptic screen prints of lemons plastered around town. For the average Mancunian, these strange citrusus probably didn't mean much, but for fans of the city's historic Madchester music scene (which included heavy hitters like the Happy Mondays and Inspiral Carpets), it was a clear message that something was cooking with the Stone Roses. Yellow lemons feature heavily on the cover of their 1989 self-titled debut, which instantly became a classic of British indie rock,

owing in no small part to its stunning opener, "I Wanna Be Adored," a dour, glowering ode to teen-age longing that makes for karaoke gold within the right circles. Marred by legal battles and internal discord, they were never able to re-create the success of their initial offering, but this year the band released their first new material in more than two decades. (*Madison Square Garden, Seventh Ave. at 33rd St. 800-745-3000. June 30.*)

## JAZZ AND STANDARDS

**Anthony Coleman**

You could certainly try pigeonholing Coleman, but you might as well attempt to stuff glue back into a tube. The musically omnivorous pianist and composer is surrounded at this residency by such equally far-reaching players as the drummers **Matt Wilson**, **Tyshawn Sorey**, and **Billy Martin**, and, on Saturday night, the saxophonist and resident artistic guru, **John Zorn** (*The Stone, Avenue C at 2nd St. thestonenyc.com. June 28-July 3.*)

**Ravi Coltrane**

Coltrane may never fully escape the shadow of his iconic father—he's currently instrumental in the restoration of the Coltrane home in Dix Hills, Long Island—but his skill as a canny tenor- and soprano-saxophone stylist has carried him far beyond the glory of his name. Augmenting his quartet (on the final three nights) will be the trumpeter **Ralph Alessi**, the trombonist **Robin Eubanks**, and **Brandee Younger**, who, in the manner of Ravi's mother, Alice, weaves inspired improvisations from the harp. (*Birdland, 315 W. 44th St. 212-581-3080. July 28-June 2.*)

**Joshua Redman Quartet**

Have twenty-five years really passed since Redman took first place at the Thelonious Monk International Jazz Saxophone Competition? Now a forty-seven-year-old jazz mainstay, Redman remains connected to fresh musical currents. Putting his recent James Farm collective and trio projects on hold, he reanimates a quartet that includes his longtime associates **Aaron Goldberg** on piano and **Gregory Hutchinson** on drums. (*Blue Note, 131 W. 3rd St. 212-475-8592. June 28-July 3.*)

**Renee Rosnes Quartet**

As demonstrated on her current "Written in the Rocks" recording, composition has assumed equal importance with instrumental prowess for Rosnes, a gifted pianist, who, after paying her dues with such titanic modernists as Wayne Shorter and Joe Henderson, has stepped firmly into the role of assured bandleader. She's joined by such key collaborators as the vibraphonist **Steve Nelson** and the bassist **Peter Washington**. (*Dizzy's Club Coca-Cola, Broadway at 60th St. 212-258-9595. July 3.*)

**Rudy Royston 303**

Witnessing the drummer Royston's fertile work with such contemporary giants as Bill Frisell and Dave Douglas, it's little wonder that he's already proven himself as a bandleader and composer worth keeping strict tabs on. His 303 septet is a hefty unit, making keen use of two horns, piano, guitar, and a pair of basses. (*Village Vanguard, 178 Seventh Ave. S., at 11th St. 212-255-4037. June 28-July 3.*)



# CLASSICAL MUSIC

## CONCERTS IN TOWN

### Austrian Cultural Forum:

#### Aleph Guitar Quartet

The Forum, which sits serenely in a sliver of a midtown building, smartly programs concerts that promote its national composers while acknowledging the achievements of like-minded Americans. Two works by Cage, a herald of homegrown modernism, are part of a program that also features Georg Friedrich Haas's Quartet for Four Guitars—a piece that manages to be at once abstruse and entertaining—and U.S. premières of works by Alberto Horticgüela and Bernhard Lang (Part I of “The Cold Trip,” an electronic transformation of Schubert’s “Winterreise,” featuring the vocalist Daisy Press). (11 E. 52nd St. June 29 at 7:30. To reserve free tickets, which are required, visit [acfn.org](http://acfn.org).)

### Imani Winds Chamber Music Festival

This leading American wind quintet has from its inception celebrated diversity, both in the makeup of its members and in its wholehearted embrace of new music. The final concert of its workshop festival with students, held at the New School’s Mannes School of Music, includes masterworks for winds by Pizzolla and Françaix as well as recent pieces by Valerie Coleman (one of the group’s members) and several student composers. (Arnhold Hall, 55 W. 13th St. June 30 at 7. A donation is suggested.)

### Bargemusic

The floating chamber-music series abounds with unexpected programming these days, but the holiday weekend brings forward a cavalcade of classics. On Friday, the violist Andrew Gonzalez and the pianist Ji perform a concert of works by Schumann (the Adagio and Allegro, Op. 70) and Brahms (both of the Sonatas for Viola and Piano), along with a piece by the contemporary composer Joel Friedman. On Saturday evening, the distinguished violinist James Buswell teams up with the cellist Carol Ou and the pianist Edith Kraft in music by Fauré (the Piano Trio in D Minor, Op. 120) and Schubert (the Adagio, D. 897, and the towering Piano Trio No. 1 in B-Flat Major). The cellist Jeffrey Solow has the stage to himself on Sunday afternoon, offering one of his occasional traversals of the Bach Suites for Solo Cello, with commentaries; this concert features the popular Suites 1-3. (Fulton Ferry Landing, Brooklyn. [bargemusic.org](http://bargemusic.org). July 1-2 at 8 and July 3 at 4.)

### Le Poisson Rouge: Aki Takahashi

The admired Japanese pianist, a veteran advocate for avant-garde luminaries, comes to the laid-back music club for a concert centered on John Cage, with Erik Satie, the composer’s enigmatic predecessor, lurking in the background. It features Cage’s “Cheap Imitation”—a phrase-by-phrase doppelgänger of Satie’s cantata “Socrate”—both in its original solo version and in Morton Feldman’s transcription for three performers, in addition to several Cage miniatures made in tribute to Satie (such as the recently rediscovered musical koan, “All Sides of

the Small Stone”). With the flutist Margaret Lancaster and the percussionist David Shively. (158 Bleecker St. [lpr.com](http://lpr.com). July 5 at 7.)

## OUT OF TOWN

### Caramoor

The long Independence Day weekend begins early at the gracious Westchester festival with a concert of chamber music at the Spanish Courtyard: works by Beethoven (the Violin Sonata No. 8 in G Major), Brahms, and Mozart (an arrangement of the “Kegelstatt” Trio), performed by three stellar young musicians, the violinist Paul Huang, the violist Matthew Lipman, and the pianist Michael Brown. Then the action moves to the much larger Venetian Theatre for a holiday pops concert with the Westchester Symphonic Winds. (Katonah, N.Y. [caramoor.org](http://caramoor.org). June 30 at 7 and July 2 at 8.)

### Opera Saratoga

The most notable event at the three-week upstate festival is the American première of Philip Glass’s opera-ballet “The Witches of Venice,” an adaptation of a fairy tale written by the production designer and children’s book illustrator Beni Montresor. The production (performed in Italian) uses Glass’s six-piece chamber orchestration, which draws on the peculiar and otherworldly sounds of two synthesizers to tell the story of a lonely boy who sprouts from a plant, and, spurned by the king and queen of Venice, seeks friendship in a city of magic, witches, and water. Karole Armitage directs and choreographs the piece, and

Viswa Subbaraman conducts. (Spa Little Theatre, Saratoga Springs, N.Y. [operasaratoga.org](http://operasaratoga.org). July 2 at 7:30. Through July 17.)

### Music Mountain

Cantata Profana, an audacious ensemble recently out of Yale, is heard in New York doing just about every kind of classical music you might imagine. Its members remove to the Berkshire foothills this weekend, however, where they’ll offer a pleasant summer program of chestnuts: Beethoven’s Septet in E-Flat Major and Schubert’s more expansive tribute to that work, the Octet in F Major. (Falls Village, Conn. [musicmountain.org](http://musicmountain.org). July 3 at 3.)

### Maverick Concerts

The Jupiter String Quartet, an ensemble of eloquent intensity, has matured into one of the mainstays of the American chamber-music scene. Its upcoming program at the idyllic Catskills series balances German and Eastern European music by Beethoven, Ligeti (the ardent Quartet No. 1, “Metamorphoses Nocturnes”), Schubert (the “Quartettssatz”), and Shostakovich (the Piano Quintet, with Ilya Yakushev). (Woodstock, N.Y. [maverickconcerts.org](http://maverickconcerts.org). July 3 at 4.)

### Tanglewood

The conductor Seiji Ozawa, fighting challenges to his health, will not be able to come to Tanglewood this summer. But the excellent young players of his Seiji Ozawa International Academy Switzerland will perform in Lenox nonetheless. They team up with members of Tanglewood’s prestigious fellowship program in a concert that offers music by Mendelssohn, Grieg (the “Holberg Suite”), and Osvaldo Golijov (“Ausencia,” with the cellist Norman Fischer); Christian Reif conducts. (Lenox, Mass. July 5 at 8. To reserve free tickets, which are required, visit [bso.org](http://bso.org).)



After kicking off the season with “The Marriage of Figaro,” Opera Saratoga continues with Philip Glass’s “The Witches of Venice,” an opera-ballet based on a children’s book by Beni Montresor.

# DANCE

## American Ballet Theatre

The season ends with a week devoted to “The Sleeping Beauty,” a ballet considered by many to be the summit of the nineteenth-century Russian ballet tradition. This production, new last year, was conceived by the Russian choreographer Alexei Ratmansky, with an eye toward period style. In order to recapture the choreography’s delicate musicality, which had been distorted by decades of additions and displays of bravura, he went back to period notations. These revealed the original steps—smaller, quicker, more lilting—that fit the music beautifully, illuminating the story from within. The sets and costumes, inspired by the fanciful aesthetic of the early-twentieth-century stage designer Léon Bakst, are by Richard Hudson. The young American ballerina Isabella Boylston, who had a breakthrough in the role of Princess Aurora last year, returns on June 27 and for the matinee of July 2. The very promising soloist Cassandra Trenary débuts at the June 29 matinee. • June 27-28, June 30, and July 1 at 7:30; June 29 at 2 and 7:30; and July 2 at 2 and 8. (*Metropolitan Opera House, Lincoln Center. 212-362-6000.*)

## Astrid Bas

In “Let My People Go,” the French actress, dancer, and director looks at the life and work of two women who died young. The English poet and playwright Sarah Kane was twenty-eight when she killed herself; the German Jewish painter Charlotte Salomon was gassed at Auschwitz at age twenty-six. From Kane’s raw words and Salomon’s images, bright against a bleak present, Bas creates a blend of movement, spoken text, and video that honors courage in the face of death. (*New York Live Arts, 219 W. 19th St. 212-924-0077. June 28-29.*)

## Ronald K. Brown/Evidence, a Dance Company

A visit from Brown’s group is always welcome, but a revival of his 1998 piece “Better Days,” on the second of two programs, feels especially timely after the Orlando shooting. Named for a now defunct gay club, the dance draws upon the words of gay black poets and rides the joy and spiritual lift of house music. The first program features “She Is Here,” a new celebration of self-determination for the company’s extraordinary women; a guest appearance by the former Alvin Ailey principal Kirven Douthit-Boyd; and Brown himself, still a singular dancer, in “Torch.” (*Joyce Theatre, 175 Eighth Ave., at 19th St. 212-242-0800. June 28-July 3.*)

## Jack Ferver

Ferver already made a good parody of “Black Swan” five years ago, but the ballet-horror genre must be irresistible to his camp sensibility and love for hysterics, because he is returning to it with “I Want You to Want Me.” The final entry in the American Dance Institute’s season at the Kitchen, Ferver’s dance-play follows an American ballerina who unwisely takes a job with a French ballet troupe directed by a maniac, played by Ferver in drag. (*512 W. 19th St. 212-255-5793. June 30-July 2.*)

## SummerStage / Maimouna Keita Dance Company

Maimouna Keita is a New York-based company and school specializing in dances from West Africa, Mali, and Senegal. The school’s co-founder, Marie Basse-Wiles, was born in Senegal and performed

with the Ballet National of Senegal; her Malian grandmother, also a dancer and singer, is the company’s namesake. During the first hour, company members will introduce the audience to dances like the Djembe and the Sabar. Then they will give an hour-long performance that includes stilt dancers and live drumming. (*Herbert Von King Park, 670 Lafayette Ave., Brooklyn. 212-360-1399. July 1.*)

## OUT OF TOWN

### Jacob’s Pillow Dance Festival

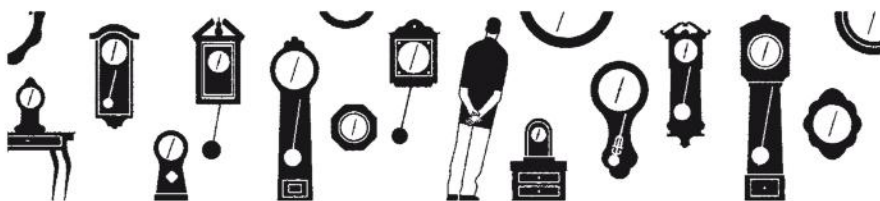
From Argentina comes Che Malambo (at the Ted Shawn), an all-male troupe that updates the drumming and percussive dancing traditions of South American cowboys. The modernizing involves an awful lot of sexing up—slicked hair, tight pants, sometimes bare chests—but the swivelling foot-

work has force and the whirling of stones on the ends of lassos stirs a mighty wind. More intriguing is Bereishit Dance Company (at the Doris Duke), a South Korean troupe with a Hebrew name. The choreographer Soon-ho Park mixes East and West, martial arts and contact improv; the look is contemporary, but the music can be traditional Korean drums or the gruff vocalizations of *pansori*. (*Becket, Mass. 413-243-0745. June 29-July 3.*)

### Bard SummerScape / “Fantasque”

The theme of this year’s festival at Bard is the music of Puccini and his contemporaries. One of these, Ottorino Respighi, composed “Boutique Fantasque,” a ballet, in 1919. That work is the inspiration for John Heginbotham’s latest dance, “Fantasque,” made in collaboration with the veteran puppeteer Amy Trompeter. Dancers from Heginbotham’s company interact with Trompeter’s life-size puppets; together they tell a zany, surrealist story about the creation of the world. “Children, even young children, should get it,” Heginbotham says. (*Richard B. Fisher Center for the Performing Arts, Bard College, Annandale-on-Hudson, N.Y. 845-758-7900. July 1-3.*)

# ABOVE & BEYOND



## Festival of Independence

The South Street Seaport is humming back to life. East River walkways tucked under the F.D.R. are again rife with bikers, skaters, and stroller shovers routing a bit of waterfront sun into their evening commutes and weekend romps, not to mention adventurous fishermen casting lines over the rail. There are few better spots to view the annual Macy’s Fourth of July fireworks, now in their fortieth year—two barges will be set up just off Pier 17—and this two-day festival of concerts, food, and family activities provides a picturesque backdrop. Noisy, VICE’s music and culture channel, has picked a stacked lineup of independent artists to perform on Peck Slip across the long weekend, including indie acts like Wild Nothing, Porches, and Public Access T.V. and soul-stirrers like D.R.A.M., Phony Ppl, and MeLo-X. Seaport Smorgasburg will serve food from a spread of vendors, and kids can enjoy juggling acts and sing-alongs before the main events. The Seaport Culture District, an arts initiative new to South Street, has invited cultural partners, such as the Parsons School of Design’s IMPACT!, to exhibit creative and design-related demonstrations in the fields of architecture, design, media, and film. (*South Street Seaport, One Seaport Plaza, 19 Fulton St. southstreetseaport.com. July 3-4.*)

## READINGS AND TALKS

### Brooklyn Historical Society

The Heritage Film Series screens and discusses “Taboo . . . Yardies,” a 2011 documentary

by the Queens filmmaker Selena Blake, which examines the entrenched culture of homophobia in Jamaica, and investigates how economic and sociopolitical conditions have allowed the climate to persist. “When we put ourselves in other people’s shoes and are genuine about it,” Blake said of her decision to make the film, “compassion will kick in.” (*128 Pierrepont St., Brooklyn. brooklynhistory.org. June 29 at 6:30.*)

### New York Public Library

As “Weiner” screens in theatres and a reality-show star roils the American electoral scene, we may heave a sigh of relief at the reassurance that politics had been dense with blustering scandals long before smartphones and social media magnified their impact. The author Daniel Czitrom confirms as much in “New York Exposed: The Gilded Age Police Scandal That Launched the Progressive Era,” which excavates the undercover campaign of Reverend Dr. Charles H. Parkhurst. In 1892, Parkhurst toured the saloons, brothels, and drug dens of the city’s underbelly in disguise, bent on revealing how entrenched the governing class was in the very illicit activity it was employed to curb. Czitrom gives an illustrated lecture on Parkhurst and his transformative work, which introduced the concepts of police accountability and organized crime to the city’s lexicon. (*Mid-Manhattan Library, 455 Fifth Ave. 212-340-0863. July 5 at 6:30.*)



# FOOD & DRINK



## TABLES FOR TWO

### Le Garage

157 Suydam St., Brooklyn (347-295-1700)

"TRÈS BROOKLYN" is the highest praise you can get in Paris, a former editor of this magazine recently reported. Last fall, the Bon Marché department store, a temple of retail immortalized by Zola, mounted a sprawling Brooklyn Rive Gauche "installation," a display of Mason jars, succulents, and exposed brick; "*le kale*" was cited as inspiration. Now Brooklyn reciprocates the compliment with Le Garage, a standout new French place in postindustrial Bushwick.

Catherine Allswang, who has infused her other restaurants, in Paris and San Francisco, with Norman flavors, opened the joint last winter with her daughter Rachel, an interior architect, who slapped together brash yellow paint and Art Deco detail to create an unlikely ease in the former garage. Their femme-focussed cocktail offerings include the Simone de Beauvoir (Byrrh, Dolin dry vermouth, orange bitters, and tonic—summer's answer to Campari) and the Jeanne Hachette (an admixture of cinnamon tincture, Bénédictine, and Rittenhouse rye), named for the peasant girl who threw an invading Burgundian duke into a moat.

The food is French fancy-casual, with an airiness befitting Bushwick; that is, there is space between tables. ("I feel like I'm out of town," chirped a recent patron,

having arrived from distant Williamsburg.) The chicken for two is an ode to bird and butter. Presented before it's carved, the dish is a sculpture to behold under the massive skylight—you might pause a moment before digging in. But chicken this crispy and juicy, served alongside lemongrass-sweet-potato purée, has a way of disappearing fast. The foie gras and steak satisfy, but it's the sea bass that surprises, its skin like lattice, heaped with lightly charred ramps. Try it after the fried panisse: falafel batons of ineffable daintiness. The *confit charlotte* potatoes, stuffed with hazelnuts and snails, show the kitchen's skill at keeping classic French ingredients on the delicate side of robust. Dessert's a mille-feuille deconstructed, because who can bother with fussy layers when fluffy lemon custard's involved? But nothing beats the simple chocolate cake: the menu's exquisite last word.

The other night, as Isaac Hayes and Edith Piaf played and the haddock rillettes came complimentary, a bartender took leave of his station—a wooden bar reclaimed from an up-Hudson bowling alley—to ask an Alps-raised server if he was free to play basketball the following Wednesday. He stopped at a table to talk heavy-metal venues, then offered a drink. "You guys like Fernet?" Members of the waitstaff smoked cigarettes by the awning next door, under graffiti that read "Lowbrow." It's still Brooklyn, after all. (Entrées \$17–\$27.)

—Emily Greenhouse

## BAR TAB



### The Blond

11 Howard St. (212-235-1111)

The other night, at this dimly lit hotel bar, an impossibly skinny d.j. faded into "You're So Vain," and two impossibly skinny patrons—she in a black romper, he in sailor stripes—burst from a banquette for a boogie. The Blond, created by the restaurant-and-property baron Aby Rosen, is apparently the season's new "it" bar for the in crowd. The entrance smells aggressively of cologne; the path to the bathroom is lined with vaguely suggestive art work hung Petersburg-style; the coasters are bedecked with images of famous pouting blonds. At the beginning of the night, dancers coalesce around a disco ball, lit blood red, at one end of the room, and progressively spread until most of the joint is hopping. All down the length of the long bar, balding men can be spotted draping themselves across an ever-shifting array of sylphs. "Serious mismatch," a patron recently remarked as she peered over at one such pairing. "That's New York, though, you know." A conversation ensued about how easily models get H-1B visas. But the façade of high-cheekboned chic is mitigated by a whiff of friendly humor. Perhaps it's the smiles of the waitresses, swishing about in chiffon, as they offer a whiskey Negroni (the liquor mellows the bitterness of the original) and say, "Thank you, baby," with a wink; perhaps it's the excellent soundtrack of Paul Simon and British New Romantics. The icing on the cake, the other night, had to be the Frenchman explaining an American name to a compatriot: "It's like *la mort*," he said dramatically. They were talking about a guy named Mort.—Nicolas Niarchos

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## THE TALK OF THE TOWN

### COMMENT RANDOM SHOTS

ON JUNE 14TH, Reggina Jefferies, a seventeen-year-old high-school student, attended a vigil in downtown Oakland for two friends who had drowned in a reservoir. As she stood with mourners outside the service, gunfire broke out among a group of men who had been arguing nearby. Four people were wounded; Jefferies was shot dead. The next day, Luis Villot, a twenty-nine-year-old father of four, attempted to defuse a neighborhood dispute at the Farragut Houses, in Brooklyn, and usher some children out of harm's way. When a woman he was trying to calm fired a gun, a bullet struck him in the forehead, and he died three days later. The same day that Villot was shot, Antonio Perkins, a twenty-eight-year-old Chicagoan, was broadcasting a Facebook Live feed of himself talking with people on the street. A car could be seen passing by and returning a few minutes later. Then the screen went black, but the feed captured the sound of gunfire and people screaming. Perkins was shot in the neck and the head, and was pronounced dead that evening.

Last Wednesday, in the same week that Jefferies, Villot, and Perkins were laid to rest, some fifteen Democratic members of the House of Representatives, led by John Lewis, of Georgia, began a sit-in to demand that Congress enact gun-control legislation. (The sit-in lasted nearly twenty-six hours and, eventually, involved a hundred and sixty-eight members.) Barbara Lee, who represents the part of Oakland where Reggina Jefferies was shot, held up a picture of the young woman and said that she had photographs of many more victims of gun violence in her district.

By engaging in a sit-in, a form of protest pioneered during the civil-rights movement, and by having Lewis lead the effort, the Democrats were implying that congressional inaction

on gun legislation was, like the federal foot-dragging on segregation fifty years ago, shameful. The sit-in also implied that the people responsible for this state of affairs are as unambiguously wrong as those whom Lewis faced down on the Edmund Pettus Bridge, in Selma, in 1965. Reaction to the sit-in broke along partisan lines. Democratic Senators Chris Murphy, of Connecticut, who had staged a fifteen-hour filibuster to demand action on gun control; Cory Booker, of New Jersey; and Elizabeth Warren, of Massachusetts, walked over to the House chamber to offer their support. (Despite Murphy's efforts, last Monday the Senate blocked several gun measures.) Paul Ryan, the Speaker of the House, denounced the sit-in as "a publicity stunt." It was more substantial than a stunt, though publicity and, more specifically, public pressure were precisely the point of it.

But, from a civil-rights perspective, there were also reasons to be cautious about the proceedings. The Democrats sought to use the example of the shooting of forty-nine people in the Pulse night club, in Orlando, to spur the House to take up legislation that would strengthen background checks and help prevent individuals on the terrorist watch list from purchasing firearms. The argument was that a person deemed

too dangerous to fly should be thought of as too dangerous to buy a gun. The American Civil Liberties Union, however, announced its opposition to that measure, stating that the list is "error-prone and unreliable, because it uses vague and overbroad criteria and secret evidence to place individuals on black-lists without a meaningful process to correct government error and clear their names." In the current political climate, there is concern that the burden of suspicion will fall disproportionately on Muslim Americans. Beyond that, the proposals wouldn't necessarily have changed the circumstances under which Jefferies, Villot,



and Perkins died. Background checks, though important, won't reduce black-market gun sales, the source of the majority of illegal firearms in Oakland, New York, and Chicago.

For the most part, the debate is not about gun violence in America; rather, it's about a narrow variety of spectacular gun violence. The 2012 shooting at the Sandy Hook Elementary School, in Newtown, Connecticut, renewed focus on the availability of assault weapons and their capacity to kill large numbers of people quickly. No significant legislation has passed as a result; by many measures, gun laws have grown looser. The massacres in San Bernardino and Orlando have ignited a push to deny firearms to those who are suspected of terrorist sympathies. Nothing has been done with regard to that, either. But the fact is that mass shootings constitute just two per cent of gun homicides in the United States, and assault weapons are not the weapons most commonly used by Americans to kill one another.

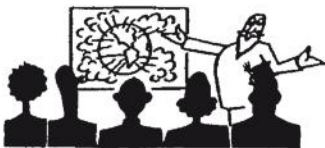
Last year, the Chicago Police Department seized sixty-five hundred and twenty-one illegal firearms. When the Trace, a nonprofit news organization that focusses on guns in America, analyzed the C.P.D.'s data, it found that assault weapons were not among the top twenty most frequently used guns. According to the F.B.I., in 2014 rifles were used in only three per cent of all homicides committed with firearms in the United States. The larger problem, quite simply, is the superabundance of handguns.

The 1994 federal assault-weapons ban, signed by President Bill Clinton, lapsed twelve years ago, and since then the legislation has taken on the aura of a grand achievement, of the sort hardly obtainable in these degraded days. This obscures the fact that it was initially seen as just a first step in gun reform. It prohibited nineteen types of assault weapon but exempted more than six hundred other types of firearm. Current debates about gun reform include proposals for a three-day waiting period; in 1994, advocates pushed for a seven-day waiting period. A ban on cheap handguns that was promoted in 1994 doesn't even enter the discussion now. Our concept of "common sense" gun reform—not to be mistaken for politically viable gun reform—has atrophied even as spectacular violence has become a more constant feature of our lives. "Give us the right to vote on these two bills," Steny Hoyer, the Democratic Whip, implored, from the House floor. "Make America safer!" That statement might more properly be amended to "Make America feel safer."

Compromise legislation, like the bill proposed by Senator Susan Collins, of Maine, which calls for prohibiting people on some watch lists from buying guns, with fail-safes to make the prohibition less random, may yet pass. But it will take much more to diminish the kind of gun violence that claims the greatest number of American lives each year—the kind that killed Reggina Jefferies, Luis Villot, and Antonio Perkins.

—Jelani Cobb

## BREAKUP DEPT. E.U. LATER



THE UNITED KINGDOM is an oxymoron. That much is clear from the crazed events that unfolded in Britain last week. On June 23rd, a referendum was held, asking U.K. citizens whether the country should remain in the European Union. The reply, to global amazement, was "No." Almost fifty-two per cent of voters expressed a desire to leave the E.U. In effect, the country has turned to Europe, with a brave smile, and declared, "We're sorry, but it's over. To be frank, we never loved you anyway. All we can do now is try to make the split as painless as possible. Who knows, you may be happier without us. Oh, and, by the way, we're keeping the cat."

Reaction to the result was swift. The pound fell out of a window. The Prime Minister, David Cameron, announced that he would resign, thus

setting in motion a leadership contest in the Conservative Party. Boris Johnson, a likely successor, hailed the day as "a glorious opportunity." Spluttering was reported from Berlin, where Angela Merkel had choked on her morning muesli. There is a genuine dread, in the echelons of Brussels and Strasbourg, that the United Kingdom may prove to be the rule rather than the exception, and that other nations, emboldened by the British break for freedom, could follow suit. Discontent with the ruling élites of Europe—for that is how they are frequently perceived—is not confined to Britain. According to the Pew Research Center, based in Washington, D.C., the number of French people who express a favorable view of the E.U. has dwindled from sixty-nine per cent, in 2004, to a mere thirty-eight per cent. In Spain, that figure has shrunk from eighty to forty-seven per cent in the past nine years. "A kind of United States of Europe," as mooted by Winston Churchill, in 1946, was always more of a dream than a scheme. On current evidence, it will probably stay that way.

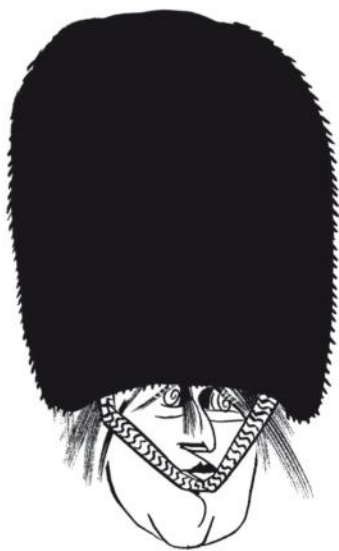
Anybody seeking a further cause for alarm should inspect the voting patterns of June 23rd. The older you were, the more skeptical you were of the European project. The working-class vote in the North of England, traditionally loyal to the left, swung unmistakably away from the E.U.: an ominous blow to the parliamentary Labour Party, which had, on the whole, campaigned for Britain to remain. Londoners leaned heavily toward the E.U., whereas, along the east coast (the stretch that faces Europe), fears about immigration engendered a vehement vote against. Rural folk, visiting London, have been known to complain that it feels like a foreign city—a Babel of competing tongues, where your latte is brewed by an Estonian and served by a Pole. That is precisely what Babel-dwellers love about the place; the hubbub, to a Londoner as to a New Yorker, is a mark of the cosmopolitan experience—ideal background noise, for the beat of a tolerant heart. If you don't like the soundtrack of otherness, go back to the land.

Analysts of the American political scene will not be surprised by such



divisions. Donald Trump, too, has melded his mockery of the establishment with an appeal to patriotic zest, raising the prospect that someone, somewhere, might sneak over a border and steal your job as if it were an unlocked car. The presumptive Republican Presidential nominee blew into Britain on June 24th to bestow his blessing on a renovated golf course, declared the vote to be “fantastic,” and linked it explicitly with his own mystical quest. He tweeted, “Just arrived in Scotland. Place is going wild over the vote. They took their country back, just like we will take America back.” Unfortunately, Scotland is one chunk of the kingdom which did *not* vote to get out of the E.U.; but, then, Trump was never one to get stuck in a bunker of facts.

Not so long ago, in an ill-advised flourish of complacency, liberal opinion suggested that nationalism, like religious fundamentalism, was on the



*Boris Johnson*

wane. A nice idea. Although it is easy to read too much into the British vote (disconnection from the E.U. will be a lengthy process), there is little doubt that national amour propre, misty with old glories and smarting from old wounds, is back in vogue. It is conceivable that, by the summer of 2017, President Putin, of Russia, could be joined on the world stage by President Trump, of the United States, Prime Minister Boris Johnson, of Great Britain, and President Marine Le Pen, of France. Applications for

residence on the International Space Station, orbiting more than two hundred miles above Earth, are now closed.

—Anthony Lane

## LONDON POSTCARD COMING AND GOING



“YOU CAN’T FALL in love with the single market,” Jacques Delors, an ardent Europhile and the eighth president of the European Commission, once said. But there was a lot to be attached to, even to swoon over, before last week’s Brexit vote. There was the Eurostar, rendering London and Paris and Brussels a sort of ravishing North-east Corridor. There was Erasmus, Easy-jet, love affairs, bilingual babies, four weeks of paid vacation, unchlorinated chicken, and cheap Bordeaux. Was the European dream, which supported three and a half million British jobs, bought half of British exports, and insured equal pay for men and women, an élitist metropolitan fantasy, as its critics insisted? Nigel Farage and Boris Johnson and all the other ventriloquists demanded, “Let the people speak.”

So here are the people speaking, from the Eurostar hall at St. Pancras station on Friday morning, as they remained and left.

Dan, thirty-one, Shropshire: “A lot of my cousins are French.”

“Breakfast?” (Simon, forties, Southampton.) “I’ve already had breakfast.”

It had likely been several beers; he was on his way to France for the Euro Cup football with a gang of friends.

Football fan No. 1: “Split opinion in this group.”

Football fan No. 2: “Obama’s had his five eggs in there, hasn’t he?”

Football fan No. 3: “What we botherin’ having our own Parliament for when we’re dictated to by Brussels?”

Football fan No. 4: “I don’t think anything’ll change, so why mend something when it ain’t broken?”

Football fan No. 3: “It is broken, though!”

The youth of Britain were supposed

to have been united in their desire to stay, but Conor, Alfie, and Shawn—all eighteen and from Surrey—were, respectively, two leavers and a remainder. They had spent weeks debating the issue with friends in a group chat on WhatsApp:

Alfie: If we leave the first years will be tough as in a lot of the countries would jack up prices for tariffs but that’s short term. If you look at long term it will be for the best. . . . And Ahmed that’s fucked 🤔

Ahmed: Alfie did you need extra time for that

Kit: All blue-eyed blond people must vote leave

Femi: 🤔🤔🤔

A man walked by wearing a sandwich board that read, “Congrats, We Won.”

“Fuck off,” a woman in the boarding line grumbled.

“Someone will hit him before the day’s out.”

Charles and Diana—their actual middle names—were sitting on a bench, taking a break after their train ride in from the East Midlands. They are seventy and seventy-two, and were jubilant.

“It was the correct answer,” Charles said. “And the disturbing thing is that anybody who thinks so is termed a racist.”

“They’ve misinterpreted our reasons,” Diana added.

“It was about sovereignty.”

“We haven’t had good integration.”

“We’re former school head teachers here in England, and, if we could go back into the schools and do one thing, it would be to get rid of all the technology. The train ride here was a bloody mess—mobile phones, Wi-Fi, hi-fi.”

They were in London to go to the theatre.

“There’s a lot of money here, and we haven’t got that,” Charles said. “We’re going to the West End tonight, paid for by Diana’s son. A hundred and fifty quid just to see ‘Les Mis!’”

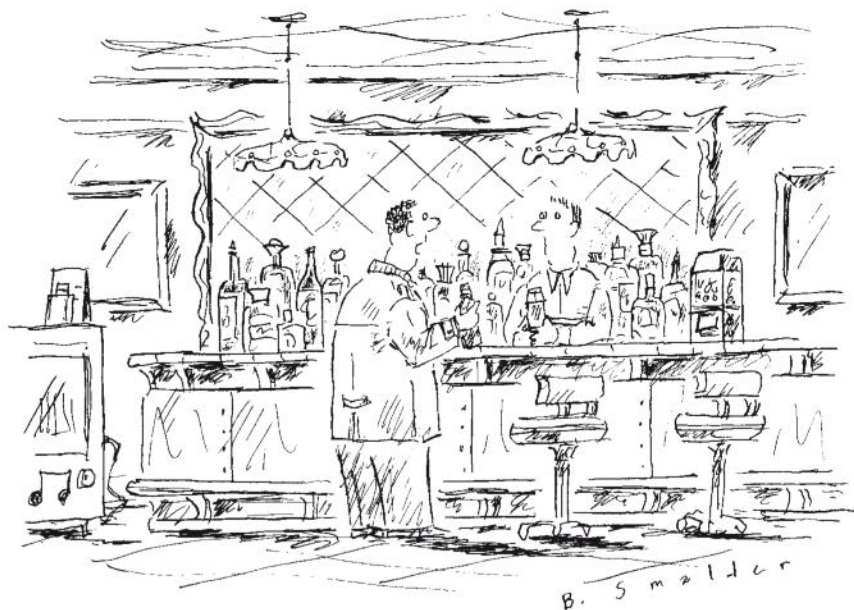
“That would last us a month.”

“To be brutally honest, I do feel the Christian community is discriminated against a lot of the time.”

“My sixteen-year-old grandchild called me a racist.”

“They stopped listening to us a long time ago.”

That evening would be the sixteenth



*"The great thing about self-medicating is there is a low co-pay."*

time the couple had seen "Les Mis."

"We don't need drugs, we just need a fix of 'Les Mis,'" Charles said. "Because it's about revolution, it's about having a say, about holding hands and singing. And that is Britain this morning."

They were humming, the song of angry men. Diana's health was bad, and, they said, it would probably be their last trip to London.

—Lauren Collins

## CALIFORNIA POSTCARD OASIS



THE L.A. ARCHITECT and environmentalist David Hertz has a knack for repurposing stuff: planks of wood into skateboards, the wings of a Boeing 747 into the roof of a house, crushed LPs (smashed by teens in a gang intervention program) into flooring for a record label's headquarters. But when a former client told him, last year, that he knew a guy who had invented a way to turn air into water, Hertz was incredulous.

"I was, like, sure, let's try it," Hertz

said. "It sounds like alchemy. And it sounds too good to be true, but let's try it."

Hertz connected with Richard Groden, a general contractor in Florida and one of the inventors of the machine (called the Skywater). Last year, Groden flew to meet Hertz at his Venice office. It was four years into the California drought, and many fountains and showers near the beach, key sources of water for the local homeless population, had been shut off. Groden and Hertz hatched a plan: Groden would donate a Skywater 150 to Hertz—one of about twenty currently in use—and Hertz would demo it to prospective clients while helping to alleviate his neighborhood's water shortage. Hertz installed it in his office last September.

The machine, which costs eighteen thousand dollars, looks like a large air-conditioner and sounds like a jet engine. It condenses moisture from the atmosphere into a tank and dispenses filtered, distilled water. Hertz does not need all the water his unit produces (as much as a hundred and fifty gallons a day), so he directs the excess into large drums that water more than eighty vegetable boxes throughout his Venice neighborhood, which, though gentrifying, is still gritty.

Hertz pointed one out the other day in front of Gjusta, a high-end deli, where he met Nicole Landers, a founder of the urban-garden initiative, for lunch. All the produce in the boxes is free for the taking. Hertz and Landers ordered fava-bean and charred-broccolini salads and two glass bottles of water ("From Arkansas," Hertz noted, with a sigh).

"People think about water scarcity and they think about Africa—they think about the Third World," Hertz said. "But now we think about Flint, these urban water issues."

He said that at his house tap water smells like sulfur: "I can't even brush my teeth with it."

Back on the sidewalk, Landers and Hertz assessed a planter of rainbow chard. A gang sign had been spray-painted on it. "All the boxes are soon going to say 'Watered by Skywater,' to help the community understand that these boxes are not watered with tap water," said Hertz, who earns a commission for every machine he persuades someone to purchase. He hopped on an electric bike (he has a Prius, but he rents it to a woman from Finland) and pedaled back to his office, which is near the beach. It's decorated with photos of past building projects, like a "Balinese Modern" mansion made famous by the Showtime series "Californication."

There's a smaller Skywater unit in the office kitchen; it looks like a regular office water cooler, minus the plastic jug.

"Water's available," Hertz said. "There's thirty-nine-per-cent relative humidity today, so it's good weather to make water."

The hundred-and-fifty-gallon unit shares an outdoor storage space with surfboards. It funnels water into a fountain that Hertz installed in an adjacent alley for homeless people to use.

"If they were going to buy water, it's two dollars for a litre," Hertz said.

Other neighbors have taken note. The studios of artists and filmmakers used to line Hertz's block; now Snapchat has moved in, and Evan Spiegel, one of the company's co-founders, just bought a three-hundred-gallon Skywater for his personal use. "It's survival

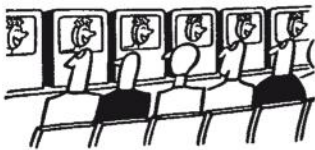


water—an emergency water supply,” Hertz said. He and Spiegel have talked about throwing a block party one day this summer and distributing donated canteens to the community. “We already have water mavens that are telling people, ‘Hey, there’s water at this location.’”

Hertz looked up at a new mural in the alley: hulking gold figures hold pots of water aloft. “Traditionally, you would have a community well,” he said. “You’d have an oasis, and people would come from miles around.”

—Sheila Marikar

## PRIME-TIME DEPT. CHANNEL SURFER



NORMAN LEAR HAS fathered six children, aged twenty-one to sixty-eight, but the modern TV show remains the unruliest of his offspring. One recent morning, Lear, who created such groundbreaking sitcoms as “All in the Family,” “The Jeffersons,” and “Maude,” and who once had six of the top ten shows on the air, remarked, “Friends keep saying, ‘You’re not watching ‘Game of Thrones,’ or ‘Empire,’ or ‘That one with a robot?’ There’s a hundred of them!” He bent eagerly to the home-theatre module in his living room, high in Mandeville Canyon, overlooking Santa Monica Bay. The producer’s face is seamed with wrinkles—he is ninety-three—but he still exudes a rescue dog’s pep and gratitude. He recently published a memoir, and a documentary about his career, “Norman Lear: Just Another Version of You,” opens this month.

The latest episode of “Family Guy” began playing. After a silent few minutes, Lear remarked, of the show’s creator, Seth MacFarlane, “Seth’s a friend.” Have the boundaries moved since he battled CBS’s censors, in the seventies? “We could have done the bit about getting the guy to poop because he swallowed a diamond ring,” he said. What about showing a woman’s fingers swollen from vigorous masturbation?

Lear waggled his hand, considering, and said, “I wouldn’t have elected to.”

After calling Edward at the estate’s I.T. desk for help accessing his recorded shows, Lear hit another of his phone’s thirty-six speed-dial buttons to remind another assistant that before Francisco drove him to the optometrist Kiyomi should call to expedite his appointment so that he could make an afternoon flight. Then he clicked on “The Carmichael Show,” a Lear-style sitcom that has explored such topics as whether it’s still possible, after all the rape allegations against Bill Cosby, to enjoy his comedy. “I love him,” Lear said of Jerrod Carmichael, the show’s co-creator and star. “I went to the set to see how he does it, because I love what he has on his mind—and I love that he cares about doing it the way I do, with a live audience.

“I always think of a scene in ‘Maude,’ in which Maude and Walter go to Vivian’s house, and she, thinking it’s her husband, opens the front door nude—then screams and slams the door. The camera stays on their backs, and the laugh goes on and on and on. Maude shifts her weight, touches her neck, and each time the laugh increases.” He phoned a female assistant named Michal to see if she’d ever clocked the laugh, but she hadn’t. (It continues for forty-nine seconds.) “You can’t get that anywhere else—the actors ride the audience. It was a rolling laugh, a living laugh.”

Nonetheless, the next show he checked in on was “South Park.” He laughed when a mob clamored to free a serial child murderer named Hat McCullough. “Wonderful observation about our culture,” he said. “Donald Trump is a Hat.” He noted that the show’s creators, Matt Stone and Trey Parker, “always wanted to do Archie Bunker. Nobody calls Cartman”—the show’s racist, anti-Semitic, misanthropic fourth grader—“Archie, but that’s who he is.”

As Lear climbed to the second floor, he mentioned that he was producing a Latino version of his show “One Day at a Time,” for Netflix. “I always saw every day as a production,” he said. “When something is over, it is *fuckin’ over*, and you are on to *next*. The hammock between them is living in

the moment. That’s why I never really worry that I’m missing something on TV, because my time is otherwise filled.”

He threw open the doors to his office and said, “The greatest study in America!” His third wife, Lyn, had had it lined with cherrywood, like a humidior, to honor Lear’s love of cigars. The vast nook holds stacks of books and scripts and photographs, the producer’s four Emmys, and Richard Nixon’s resignation letter to Henry



Norman Lear

Kissinger, framed in the bathroom beside the toilet.

Lear put on his signature white boating hat and fished out “Guess Who Died?,” a sitcom pilot he wrote in 2010. “It’s about a retirement village in Palm Springs where people are running around in golf carts and dating,” he said. “My generation does not exist on television, in a world of eighteen-to-thirty-nine. One Betty White—the nonagenarian star of the bygone “Hot in Cleveland”—“does not a demographic make. But we’re the fastest-growing group, with the most expendable income—and suddenly, with my book, and the documentary, and the Netflix show, the script is hot. I love it!”

He picked up the phone to ask more questions about his afternoon schedule. “What could be more life-giving than the amount of laughter I’ve enjoyed?” he remarked as he waited, receiver to his ear, for answers. “Holy shit—moving from one room to another, just to laugh?”

—Tad Friend

# HOW TO STEAL AN ELECTION

*The crazy history of nominating Conventions.*

BY JILL LEPORE

AT SUNRISE ON the day before the Republican National Convention begins, in Cleveland, a hundred women will take off their clothes and pose for the photographer Spencer Tunick outside the convention hall. Naked, they'll be holding up big, round mirrors to the sky, to catch the light. "Women will decide the outcome of this election," Tunick says. He insists that his installation

incumbent, Calvin Coolidge, was the all but assured nominee. "Some dreadful mountebank in a long-tailed coat will open . . . with a windy speech; then another mountebank will repeat the same rubbish in other words." And, while that really is what happens, lately more than ever (since 1952, no Convention has gone past the first ballot) the Conventions are never boring, if only because of the high

by letter if he would be willing to be nominated by the short-lived National Republicans, at their one and only Convention, Clay wrote back to say yes but that it was impossible for him to attend the Convention "without incurring the imputation of presumptuousness or indelicacy." When Grover Cleveland received a telegram at the White House informing him that he had been renominated by a Democratic Convention meeting in St. Louis, he said, "Heavens, I had forgotten all about it." Many a journalist might not have minded if the candidates had maintained the tradition of keeping away. "Interviewing a candidate is about as intimate as catching him on television," Norman Mailer wrote from the Republican Convention in Miami in 1968, to which some G.O.P. genius



*Delegates on the floor at the Democratic National Convention at Boardwalk Hall in Atlantic City, August 26, 1964.*

is not a political protest. "This is a work Republican women can participate in," he says, bipartisanship.

This year's Conventions will be held back to back, like a doubleheader, or two root canals in a row. The week after the Republicans meet in Cleveland, the Democrats will meet in Philadelphia. First Trump, then Clinton. But, what with the anti-Trumpers and the pro-Sandersers, some people are worried that all hell might break loose, which is unusual, since people more commonly worry that the Conventions will be boring. "At first blush, the Republican National Convention at Cleveland next week promises to be a very dull show," H. L. Mencken wrote in 1924, when the

jinks, not to mention the low jinks. In Chicago in 1864, the Democrats installed a giant sign made of coiled gas pipe. It was supposed to read "McClellan, Our Only Hope," but the gas jets broke and the thing just flickered and died, hopelessly. Roscoe Conkling was so sure he'd get the nod in 1876 that he picked his Vice-President and a motto—"Conkling and Hayes / Is the ticket that pays"—only to be defeated by his erstwhile running mate, ever after known as Rutherfraud B. Hayes.

Until 1932, when F.D.R. decided to show up to accept his nomination, the candidates themselves skipped the Conventions, citing modesty, a precedent set a century before by Henry Clay. Asked

had flown in a pachyderm. "Therefore the reporter went to cover the elephant."

It's not all a bamboozle, especially not this election. The White House is at stake, and more, too: the state of the union. The worry, this time around, isn't that the Conventions will be boring; it's that they'll be interesting, frightfully.

THE PRESIDENTIAL-NOMINATING Convention is an American invention. It is the product of a failure of the Constitution. Kings are born; Presidents are elected. How? This is a math problem and it's a political problem, and it's been solved but never resolved. The first nominating Convention was held in 1831. It was an attempt to wrest power away



from something known as the legislative caucus, which was itself an attempt to wrest power away from the Electoral College. The first primary was held in 1901. It was an attempt to wrest power away from the nominating Convention. This year, there's been a lot of talk about how the system is "rigged" by "the establishment." It was exactly that kind of talk that got us the caucus, the Convention, and the primary, institutions built in the name of making American democracy more representative and more deliberative. But the more representative the body the less well it is able to deliberate: more democracy is very often less.

How to elect a President was vexed from the start. At the constitutional convention in Philadelphia in 1787, the men who framed the federal government made a great many compromises, but "the Convention were perplexed with no part of this plan so much as with the mode of choosing the President," as the Pennsylvania delegate James Wilson later explained. Some delegates believed that Congress should elect the President. This allowed for popular participation in government while avoiding what Hamilton called the "excess of democracy." But having Congress elect the President violated the principle of the separation of powers. Wilson proposed that the people elect the President directly, but Madison pointed out that the Southern states "could have no influence in the election on the score of the Negroes." That is, the South had a lot of people, but a third of them were slaves; in a direct election, the North, which had a lot of people but very few slaves, would have had more votes. Wilson therefore suggested the Electoral College, a proposal that built on a mathematical compromise that had taken the delegates most of the summer to devise. Under the terms of the three-fifths compromise, each state was granted one representative in Congress for every thirty thousand people, except that slaves, who could not vote, counted as three-fifths of a person. Wilson's proposal applied this formula to the election of the President: the number of each state's electors in the Electoral College is the sum of its congressional delegation, its two senators plus its number of representatives. Substituting electors for voters conferred on the slave states a huge elec-

toral advantage, once the first census was taken, in 1790. Virginia and Pennsylvania had roughly equivalent free populations, for instance, but Virginia, because of its slave population, had six more seats in the House than did Pennsylvania, and therefore six more electors in the Electoral College. This bargain helps to explain why the office of the President of the United States was, for thirty-two of the first thirty-six years of its existence, occupied by a slave-owning Virginian.

In the first two Presidential elections, George Washington ran unopposed. But by 1796, when Washington announced that he would not run for a third term, the polity had divided into parties, a development that the Electoral College was not designed to accommodate. One Federalist complained that he hadn't chosen his elector "to determine for me whether John Adams or Thomas Jefferson is the fittest man for President. . . . No, I choose him to act, not to think." To better delegate their electors, Federalists and Republicans in Congress began meeting in a caucus where they decided their party's Presidential nominee.

Early American Presidential elections were not popular elections, not only because the vote was mainly restricted to white male property owners but also because delegates to the Electoral College were elected by state legislatures. The legislative caucus worked only as long as voters didn't mind that they had virtually no role in electing the President, a situation that lasted for a while since, after all, most people living in the United States at the time were used to having a king. But a new generation of Americans objected to this arrangement, dubbing it "King Caucus." "Under what authority did these men pretend to dictate their nominations?" one citizen asked in 1803. "Do we send members of Congress to cabal once every four years for president?" New states entering the union held conventions to draft state constitutions, in which they adopted more democratic arrangements. This put pressure on old states to revise their own constitutions. By 1824, eighteen out of twenty-four states were holding popular elections for delegates to the Electoral College. Between 1824 and 1828, the electorate grew from fewer than four hundred thousand people to 1.1 million. Men who had attended the constitutional convention in

1787 shook their gray-haired heads and warned that Americans had crowned a new monarch: "King Numbers."

That king still sits on his throne. "The first principle of our system," Andrew Jackson, of Tennessee, insisted, is "that the majority is to govern." The Electoral College couldn't be undone except by a constitutional amendment. But the legislative caucus could be. The first call for the beheading of King Caucus came in 1822, in the pages of the New York *American*. Two years later, after the press learned about a caucus meeting to be held in the House, only sixty-six out of two hundred and forty legislators were willing to appear before a disgruntled public, which flooded the galleries shouting, "Adjourn! Adjourn!" And so it did.

The Anti-Masonic Party, formed to end the reign of secret cabals, held the first Presidential-nominating Convention, in September, 1831. Unfortunately, the man chosen as the Party's nominee turned out to be... a Mason. The Anti-Masons left two legacies: the practice of granting to each state delegation a number of votes equal to the size of its delegation in the Electoral College, and the rule by which a nomination requires a three-quarters vote. Other practices have not endured. Two months after the Anti-Masons met, the National Republican Party held a Convention of its own, in which it called on the states not in alphabetical order but in "geographical order," beginning with Maine, and working down the coast, causing no small amount of consternation among the gentlemen from Alabama. The practice of holding a national Convention might not have endured if Jackson hadn't decided that the Democratic Party ought to hold one, too. Jackson wanted to boot out his Vice-President, John C. Calhoun, who believed that states had a right to nullify federal laws, a position that Jackson opposed. Jackson and his advisers realized that if they left the nomination to the state legislatures, where Calhoun had a lot of support, they'd be stuck with him again. Jackson contrived to have the New Hampshire legislature call for a national Convention. In 1835, Jackson issued the call for a nominating Convention himself, in an extraordinary letter to the American people:

I consider the true policy of the friends of republican principles to send delegates, fresh from

the people, to a general convention, for the purpose of selecting candidates for the presidency and vice-presidency; and, that to impeach that selection before it is made, or to resist it when it is fairly made, as an emanation of executive power, is to assail the virtue of the people, and, in effect, to oppose their right to govern.

The point of this Convention was to assure the nomination of Jackson's hand-picked successor, Martin Van Buren, and to allow Van Buren to contrive for his choice, Richard Johnson, to win the Vice-Presidential nomination. But Tennessee, whose support for Jackson had begun to waver, refused to send a delegation to the Convention, held in Baltimore. With fifteen electors, Tennessee had fifteen votes at the Convention. Unwilling to lose those votes, Van Buren's convention manager went to a tavern, found a Tennessean named Edward Rucker, who just happened to be in Baltimore, and made him a one-man, fifteen-vote delegation. "Rucker" became a verb.

Populism is very often a very clever swindle. But since 1831, with only one exception—the Whigs in 1836—every major party has nominated its Presidential candidate at a Convention.

THERE IS NO end to the ruckery in the annals of American history. "Absolutely rigged," Trump said about the nomination process in April. "I wouldn't use the word 'rigged,'" Bernie Sanders said in May. "I think it's just a dumb process."

The first party "platform" was adopted at a Convention in 1840, during an elec-

tion that also introduced more rough-hewn lumber in the form of log cabins. (Whigs paraded them around the country, on wheels.) Platform-committee meetings are chest-thumping contests between warring clans within the parties; in exchange for conceding, defeated candidates tend to have a lot of influence over the platform. Even without having conceded, Sanders won from the D.N.C. additional seats on the platform committee; he then named as his delegates celebrity progressives like Cornel West and Bill McKibben. R.N.C. platform-committee delegates include the conservatives Tony Perkins, the head of the Family Research Council, and David Barton, a Texas evangelical and amateur historian who has lectured for Glenn Beck's online university; both were supporters of Ted Cruz. This year, the G.O.P. is also crowd-sourcing the committee's work at platform.gop, asking anyone who visits the site to rank issues about, for instance, the Constitution: Which is more important to you, human life or the Second Amendment?

In 1844, when the incumbent President, John Tyler, found himself without a party, he called for a third-party Convention to nominate him, in order to persuade the Democrats to nominate him at their own Convention. (These and other escapades are recounted by Stan Haynes, the most exhaustive chronicler of the Conventions, in a series of invaluable books.) Tyler campaigned on a promise to annex Texas. Two weeks before the Democratic Convention was to begin, in

Baltimore, Jackson called a meeting. Jackson said he wanted "an annexation man, and from the Southwest." James K. Polk, who was unknown outside Tennessee, became that man. ("I wish I could slay a Mexican," Henry Clay said four years later, when the names on the ballot were mainly those of generals who had fought in the Mexican-American War.)

One lesson of American Presidential history: You can't beat somebody with nobody. Desperate, late-in-the-day attempts to draft into the race, say, Mitt Romney are unusual at this point in American history. But running a dark horse was a minor American art form well into the twentieth century. George Bancroft finagled Polk's nomination by making sure that Polk's name wasn't mentioned until the third day of the Convention. "My name must in no event be used until all efforts to harmonize upon one of the candidates already before the public shall have failed," Franklin Pierce warned when he was the dark horse of the Democratic Convention in 1852. James Garfield, a Republican delegate, made such a good speech, nominating his fellow-Ohioan the uninspiring John Sherman, that Conkling, a New York delegate, handed Garfield a note that read, "New York requests that Ohio's real candidate and dark horse come forward." Garfield's nomination was masterminded by a Philadelphia banker, who seated Garfield supporters at strategic sites around the hall so that, from his seat on the stage, he could cue them to greet Garfield with perfectly timed ovations.

"Every attempt to abridge the privilege of becoming citizens . . . ought to be resisted," the Democratic Party pledged, in 1856, countering the Know-Nothings, whose motto was "Americans Must Rule America," and whose platform consisted of a resolution discouraging the election of anyone not born in the United States to any office, of any kind. That wave of nativism passed, only to be replaced by efforts to prohibit Chinese immigration. "It is the immediate duty of congress fully to investigate the effects of the immigration and importation of Mongolians on the moral and material interests of the country," the Republican National Convention resolved in 1876.

Much skulduggery concerns the credentials of delegates. "Why didn't you nominate Rufus Choate?" began a joke





told about the old men who'd been rounded up to serve as delegates at a Convention. (Yes, Choate was dead, but so recently!) Then there's more ordinary betrayal. In 1876, when the Democrats met in St. Louis—the first time that a Convention was held west of the Mississippi—a delegation opposed to the nomination of the New Yorker Samuel Tilden hung a giant banner from the balcony of the Lindell Hotel. It read “The City of New York, the Largest Democratic City in the Union, Uncompromisingly Opposed to the Nomination of Samuel J. Tilden for the Presidency Because He Cannot Carry the State of New York.” So much for the favorite son.

“We are united,” Henry Clay said, halfheartedly, at one of the Conventions in which he failed to win the nomination. In 1860, at a Democratic Convention held in Baltimore—the second Democratic gathering held that year, since the Southern delegates bolted from the first one—an American flag was adorned with the motto “We Will Support the Nominee.” That Convention required delegates to take a loyalty pledge: “Every person occupying a seat in this convention is bound in good honor and good faith to abide by the action of this convention, and support its nominee.” This happened again in 1948, when Southerners bolted from the Democratic Convention over civil rights, and held their own Convention, as the Dixiecrat Party, whose platform included this statement: “We stand for the segregation of the races and the racial integrity of each race.” After that, Democrats called for delegates to take a loyalty pledge. The Dixiecrat defection also contributed to the Democrats' adoption, in 1956, of a bonus system, awarding extra votes to delegates from states that had voted for the Party nominee in the previous election.

These traditions are why Trump was asked, at the first G.O.P. debate of this primary season, whether he would support the eventual Republican nominee. They're also why so many Democrats lost patience with Sanders for remaining in the race. (Trump says that Sanders is waiting for “the F.B.I. Convention,” which is Trump's way of suggesting that Clinton will be indicted before the Democrats meet in Philadelphia.) Second-placers often hanker for an old-fashioned, contested Convention. For a while, Trump

wanted one, too, but, when Cruz stepped down, Trump changed his mind: no one wants to contest what's already won. At that point, the Indiana attorney Joshua Claybourn gave up his seat as a G.O.P. delegate. “Party rules would require I vote for Donald Trump,” Claybourn explained. “I choose not to let that happen.”

**T**HE RISE of the primary was a triumph for Progressive reformers, who believed that primaries would make elections more accountable to the will of the people. That didn't quite come to pass. Instead, primaries became part of the Jim Crow-era disenfranchisement of newer members of the electorate. Frederick Douglass addressed Republicans at a Convention in Cincinnati in 1876, asking, “The question now is, Do you mean to make good to us the promises in your constitution?” Sarah Spencer, of the National Woman Suffrage Association, was less well received at that Convention, which marked the centennial of the Declaration of Independence. “In this bright new century, let me ask you to win to your side the women of the United States,” Spencer said. She was hissed. In 1880, Blanche K. Bruce—a former slave, a delegate from Mississippi, and a U.S. senator—served as an honorary vice-president of the Republican Convention, and wielded the gavel.

The end of Reconstruction saw the rise of the secret ballot, which, by effectively introducing a literacy requirement, disenfranchised black men. If the Emancipation Proclamation ended the electoral advantage granted to Southern whites by the three-fifths clause, the secret ballot restored it. In Louisiana, black-voter registration dropped from 130,000 in 1898 to 5,300 in 1908 to 730 in 1910. But the real racial recount came with the rise of the primaries; the reform began to gain strength in 1905. The election of 1912 was the first in which a significant number of delegates to the nominating Conventions were elected in state primaries, as Geoffrey Cowan writes in “Let the People Rule,” a book that takes its title from Theodore Roosevelt's campaign slogan. Roosevelt wanted to wrest the Republican nomination from the incumbent President, William Taft, and

saw the primaries as his only chance. “The great fundamental issue now before the Republican Party and before our people can be stated briefly,” he said. “It is: Are the American people fit to govern themselves, to rule themselves, to control themselves? I believe they are. My opponents do not.”

Thirteen states held primaries; Roosevelt won nine. Still, winning the Convention was another matter, since the primaries weren't binding. By 1912, blacks had been so wholly disenfranchised in the

South, and the South was so wholly Democratic, that most of the Southern delegates to the Republican Convention were black men who had been appointed to Party offices by the Taft Administration. Roosevelt needed their votes and tried to court them. “I like the Negro race,” he said in a

speech at an A.M.E. church, the day before the Convention. But the next day the *New York Times* reported on affidavits alleging that Roosevelt's campaign had attempted to bribe black delegates. Roosevelt lost the nomination to Taft. He then formed the Progressive Party, whose Convention refused to seat black delegates. “This is strictly a white man's party,” said one of Roosevelt's supporters, a leader of what became known as the Lily Whites. In the general election, Roosevelt and Taft split the Republican vote, allowing Woodrow Wilson to gain the Oval Office, where, as W. E. B. Du Bois remarked, he introduced “the greatest flood of bills proposing discriminatory legislation against Negroes that has ever been introduced into an American Congress.”

**P**ARTY LEADERS IGNORED primaries for as long as they could. Beginning in the nineteen-thirties, they instead used public-opinion polls to gauge the prospects of their candidates. Candidates who sought out primaries tended to be weak ones. In 1952, Estes Kefauver entered and won twelve of fifteen primaries; it didn't matter. At the Democratic Convention, he lost on the third ballot, to Adlai Stevenson, who hadn't run in a single primary. That same year, Robert Taft won six primaries to Dwight Eisenhower's five. It didn't matter; at the Republican Convention, the Party went for Eisenhower,



who was leading in the polls. John F. Kennedy needed to win primaries to demonstrate to the Party that voters didn't mind that he was Catholic. Barry Goldwater bypassed the primaries but won the nomination because the delegates to the 1964 Convention fell for him. "This Nation and its people are freedom's model in a searching world," he said, accepting the nomination. Another lesson of American Presidential history: Beware of candidates who flatter the people.

Nominating Conventions are extra-legal, and attempted reforms have often been deemed unconstitutional. The rules set by each Convention are essentially peace treaties negotiated between the parties and the voters. It falls to both sides to accept the terms of the peace.

"The invitation to violence arises because partisanship in its most intense forms contests the very basis of a political community," the political scientist Russell Muirhead has observed. The basis of that community, he argues, is a trio of political settlements, each achieved by violence: the rejection of monarchic rule through the acceptance of the idea of the consent of the governed; the rejection of religious intolerance through the acceptance of freedom of conscience; and the rejection of slavery through the acceptance of political equality. This election season, all three of those fundamental settlements have become, to varying degrees, unsettled. "The will of the people is crap," the influential conservative Erick Erickson wrote, about Trump's primary victories. Trump has called for a religious test for immigrants, in order to ban Muslims. And the argument of the Black Lives Matter movement is that political equality was never settled in the first place.

The protests at the Democratic Convention in Chicago in 1968 resulted in a change in the balance of power between the primaries and the Conventions: before 1968, primaries hardly mattered; since 1968, the Conventions have hardly mattered. A report issued in 1968 predicted that "instantaneous polls of the entire electorate" conducted by "central computers from every home" would make nominating Conventions obsolete, which has, in fact, happened. That's the de-facto change, but the de-jure change is that the primaries became binding.

After the chaos of 1968, political reformers called for the abolition of the

nominating Convention, to be replaced by a national primary, and the American Bar Association called for the abolition of the Electoral College, to be replaced by direct, popular election. These proposals, which had been made before and have been made since, have a ready appeal. The nominating Convention is a messy and often ugly accident of history. "No American political institution is more visible than the convention, or more often visibly shoddy," the constitutional scholar Alexander Bickel admitted. But changing the structure of government carries its own dangers, Bickel insisted: "The sudden abandonment of institutions is an act that reverberates in ways no one can predict, and many come to regret. There may be a time when societies can digest radical structural change, when they are young and pliant, relatively small, containable, and readily understandable; when men can watch the scenery shift without losing their sense of direction. We are not such a society."

The loss of direction that Bickel warned of has come to pass, even without radical change. Instead, there's been incremental change. The rules have changed, and changed, and changed. The parties change the rules when they lose, with an eye toward winning the next time around. There's no grand plan; there's a plan to win in four years' time. The rule changes since 1968 have made the primaries more binding, notwithstanding the argument that they violate the 1965 Voting Rights Act (since the course of events is disproportionately determined by the very nearly all-white states of New Hampshire and Iowa). The system, as it stands, rewards political extremism, exacerbates the influence of money in elections, amplifies the distorting effects of polls, and contributes to political polarization. Debatable, but often asserted, is that it also produces poor candidates and ineffective Presidents.

Since 1968, no one in either party has successfully defeated at the Convention the candidate who won a plurality of the primaries and the caucuses. In 1972, George McGovern, who'd chaired the Democratic commission that rewrote the Party's delegate-selection rules, won its nomination despite an "Anybody but McGovern" challenge at the Convention, in Miami. McGovern lost to Nixon in a landslide: he carried just one state. In 1976, at the

G.O.P. Convention, in Kansas City, Ronald Reagan challenged Gerald Ford and, very narrowly, lost. Jimmy Carter, who'd won a lot of primaries, won the Democratic nomination and even the election, but after his failed Presidency many Democrats regretted binding their delegates to the primaries. In 1980, at the Democratic National Convention, in New York City, Ted Kennedy tried to challenge Carter but was defeated by the rules. That's why, in 1984, the D.N.C. invented superdelegates, high-status Party officials who are pledged to no one candidate. This year, a lot of Republicans are regretting binding their delegates to the primaries. The rules committee meets the week before the Convention. Hundreds of anti-Trump Republicans have formed an organization called Free the Delegates and begun plotting a strategy to block his nomination by adding a "conscience clause" to the rules, unbinding the delegates. Paul Ryan said that he wouldn't object: "It's not my job to tell delegates what to do." This tactic has been tried before. A savvy souvenir collector could even hawk on the streets of Cleveland the buttons that Kennedy supporters wore in 1980, which read "FREE THE DELEGATES."

Mencken said that going to a Convention was something between attending a revival and watching a hanging. Going to this year's Conventions could feel more like getting trapped in a forest fire. The Cleveland Police Department has stocked up on riot gear. Protesters are expected at both Conventions, in droves, if, generally, in clothes. Much of the sense of foreboding is a production of the press, and especially of Twitter, each Tweet another match lit on the pyre of the republic. But part of the foreboding is founded. Trump renounced violence only after inciting it. "It goes without saying that I condemn any and all forms of violence," Sanders said in a statement that included a lot of "but"s.

No nomination is ever entirely uncontested; the only question is what form the contest will take—sound or fury. The gavel used at the 1880 Republican Convention had a handle made of cane grown at Mount Vernon and a head made of wood taken from the doorway of Abraham Lincoln's house in Springfield. American elections are makeshift. Another gavel will rap in Cleveland, on July 18th, calling the Convention to order. The people remain as unruly as ever. ♦



# MY FAVORITE FIREWORKS

BY JACK HANDEY

## The Fearless Teen-ager

This firework is a life-size teen-ager made out of cardboard. Teen-ager is holding a beer can in one hand and a cherry bomb in the other. Light teen-ager. Beer-colored sparks fly from can into teen-ager's open mouth. Cherry bomb explodes, blowing off teen-ager's fingers. Red sparks shoot from finger holes.

## Porno Rockets

First rocket bursts high in the air, spelling out a warning that no one under eighteen should look at the next rocket, which explodes into a closeup of throbbing genitalia.

## Treasure Chest of Gold

When treasure chest is opened, a chemical "burn" causes the inside to light up with a brightness equal to that of the surface of the sun. Comes with a pair of cardboard safety glasses.

## Sparklers for Babies

Wire handle is wrapped in terry cloth, to help baby's grip.

## The Hanged Cowboy

Hang cowboy by noose from tree branch. Light fuses in feet. Propelled

by sparks, cowboy's arms and legs thrash about, then go limp. Mechanical sheriff comes out from behind tree, prerecorded voice says, "The man you just hanged was the wrong man. We caught the real outlaw over in Laramie." Sheriff flies up into the air and explodes into hundreds of sheriff's badges.

## Micro-Crackers

Strings of tiny firecrackers with pops so high-pitched they can be heard only by dogs.

## Viking Helmet of Death

Strap helmet to head. Light fuse in each horn. Sparks shoot out of horns, followed by colorful fireballs, then smoke. Gets attention at parties and bars but also starts fights.

## Boom-R-Rang

Light and throw, then run away from where you are standing.

## Lawnmower of Death

This is one of my favorites from the popular "Of Death" series of fireworks. Looks like an actual riding lawnmower. Sit on it, light fuse. Powerful rockets propel it around lawn at high speed, shooting out green sparks.

## Aroma King

Scholars are divided about whether a stink bomb is an actual firework, but this is one of the best.

## Biting Mummy

Miniature mummy whose mouth makes a biting motion as it flies around at head level.

## Far-Out Fountain

A small cone-shaped fountain that shoots colored sparks a few feet into the air. Comes with hallucinatory drug that makes it seem much more profound.

## Enemy Sub

Place in swimming pool. Once activated, shoots little torpedoes that explode when they strike pool walls. Onlookers can toss miniature depth charges at sub. Sub explodes, leaving oil slick and realistic burning debris.

## Unstoppable Lava Flow

Requires two acres of land.

## Exploding Cockroaches

Open little refrigerator, and lifelike cockroaches come swarming out. Each cockroach explodes independently.

## Super Three-Stage Rocket

Says "SUPER THREE-STAGE ROCKET!" in large letters on package, but actually has only two stages. Evokes extreme disappointment from onlookers. Second stage ends with a sad *phbht*. Comes with extra rocket, also labelled "SUPER THREE-STAGE!," that is only one stage. ♦



ONWARD AND UPWARD WITH THE ARTS

## DARK ROOMS

*Revisiting Nan Goldin's "The Ballad of Sexual Dependency."*

BY HILTON ALS



JUST AS CERTAIN works of literature can radically alter our understanding of language and form, there are a select number of books that can transform our sense of what makes a photograph, and why. Between 1972 and 1992, the Aperture Foundation published three seminal photography books, all by women. "Diane Arbus" (1972), published a year after the photographer's death, documented a world of hitherto unrecorded people—carnival figures and everyday folk—who lived, it seemed, somewhere between the natural world and the supernatural. Sally Mann's "Immediate Family" (1992), a collection of carefully

composed images of Mann's three young children being children—wetting the bed, swimming, squinting through an eyelid swollen by a bug bite—came out when the controversy surrounding Robert Mapplethorpe's "The Perfect Moment" exhibition was still fresh, and it reopened the question of what the limits should be when it comes to making art that can be considered emotionally pornographic.

Nestled between these two projects was Nan Goldin's "The Ballad of Sexual Dependency" (1986). (An exhibition of the slide show and photographs from which the book was drawn opened this month, at the Museum of Modern Art,

in New York.) "The Ballad" was Goldin's first book and remains her best known, a benchmark for photographers who believe, as she does, in the narrative of the self, the private and public exhibition we call "being." In the hundred and twenty-seven images that make up the volume proper, we watch as relationships between men and women, men and men, women and women, and women and themselves play out in bedrooms, bars, pensiones, bordellos, automobiles, and beaches in Provincetown, Boston, New York, Berlin, and Mexico—the places where Goldin, who left home at fourteen, lived as she recorded her life and the lives of her friends. The images are not explorations of the world in black-and-white, like Arbus's, or artfully composed shots, like Mann's. What interests Goldin is the random gestures and colors of the universe of sex and dreams, longing and breakups—the electric reds and pinks, deep blacks and blues that are integral to "The Ballad"'s operatic sweep. In a 1996 interview, Goldin said of snapshots, "People take them out of love, and they take them to remember—people, places, and times. They're about creating a history by recording a history. And that's exactly what my work is about."

What also distinguishes Goldin from Arbus and Mann is her "I." Although Arbus was brilliantly attuned to her subjects, she lived in a world that was very different from theirs. "I don't mean I wish my children looked like that," she said. "I don't mean in my private life I want to kiss you." Goldin lived with her subjects. And whereas Mann was related to her subjects by blood—which both intensified and beautifully hobbled her ability to stand apart from them—Goldin's family was chosen. Which didn't mean that it lacked drama: part of the pathos of her work is her awareness of how, even after we leave, we keep replicating the hopes and disappointments and fraught or absent love we knew at home with those other beings sometimes known as parents.

GOLDIN'S PARENTS, HYMAN and Lilian, grew up poor. They "were intellectual Jews, so they didn't care about money," she told me. "Most of all, my father cared about Harvard. He attended the university at a time when there was a kind of quota on Jews. It was a very



small quota. Going to Harvard was the biggest thing in his life.” Hyman and Lillian met in Boston and married on September 1, 1939, the day Germany invaded Poland. Hyman went to work in the economics division of the Federal Communications Commission. Nancy was born, the youngest of four children, in 1953, and grew up, first, in the suburb of Silver Spring, Maryland, a quiet, orderly place, where, Goldin has said, the main goal was not to reveal too much or pry into the well-manicured lives of your neighbors. As a girl, she longed to know what was behind those closed doors. She also longed to escape that world of convention, she told me, in her high-ceilinged, top-floor apartment in a Brooklyn brownstone—which she moved into, in part, because it’s O.K. to smoke there, an eighties vice that she has carried into the new millennium. (Goldin also lives in Berlin; she left the U.S. in 2000, when George W. Bush was elected.)

It was a warm spring day, and the windows were partly open to let out the smoke and let in the tree-green air. While Goldin’s current décor is more upscale than the busted-looking furnishings you see in “The Ballad,” various pieces in her apartment evoke that world and its sometimes menacing playroom atmosphere. In a corner of the furniture-filled space sat a snarling stuffed coyote named Larry. On one wall, there was an early Arbus photograph of a fat lady in the circus cuddling a tiny dog, and, on another, a movie still of Renée Jeanne Falconetti emoting the exquisite anguish of Joan of Arc. The red-haired and red-lipsticked Goldin, in black slacks and a black shirt—the photographer’s customary uniform, because it allows one to recede into the background—alternately smoked and nibbled cheese or chocolate, or seemed to do both at once, as she talked about her childhood.

Her older brother Stephen, a psychiatrist who now lives in Sweden, was one of her first protectors, she said, but it was her older sister, Barbara, who claimed her emotional attention. Barbara confided in her and played music for her and had all the makings of an artist herself. “My father, who was not always great with my mother, was critical,” Goldin said. “There was a lot of bickering going on, and I wished they’d get divorced most of my childhood.” Her mother, she ex-

plained, was very possessive of her father, who was more interested in his sons. That left the vibrant, creative Barbara feeling lost and unrecognized, desperate for approval. (Goldin dedicated the book version of “The Ballad of Sexual Dependency,” as well as the catalogue for her 1996 Whitney Museum retrospective, “Nan Goldin: I’ll Be Your Mirror,” to Barbara.) Barbara acted out and could not be controlled—she was, according to Stephen, often violent at home, breaking windows and throwing knives—and her parents had her committed to mental hospitals, on and off, for six years. Goldin, in her 2005 book, “*Soeurs, Saintes et Sibylles*,” published in France, documents the institutions in which her sister was confined and quotes one hospital record that read, “The mother would like us to simply tell the patient that she is not well enough to be outside the hospital, when actually there is much evidence to suggest that Mrs. Goldin is too sick for Barbara to come out of the hospital.” Goldin told me, “Barbara said, ‘All I want to do is go home.’ She was fifteen. And my mother said, ‘If she comes home, I’m leaving.’ And my father just sat there with his head down. That is to me the most tragic scene in a person’s life.” Goldin, as a child, either sidestepped or cast off the parental approval that Barbara sought. That distance, she feels, saved her life. “The one good shrink I’ve had says I survived because, by the age of four, my friends were more important to me than my family,” she told me, shaking her red curls.

“I was eleven when my sister committed suicide,” she writes in the extraordinary introduction to “The Ballad of Sexual Dependency.” She goes on:

This was in 1965, when teenage suicide was a taboo subject. I was very close to my sister and aware of some of the forces that led her to choose suicide. I saw the role that her sexuality and its repression played in her destruction. Because of the times, the early sixties, women who were angry and sexual were frightening, outside the range of acceptable behavior, beyond control. By the time she was eighteen, she saw that her only way to get out was to lie down on the tracks of the commuter train outside of Washington, D.C. It was an act of immense will.

In the week of mourning that followed, I was seduced by an older man. During this period of greatest pain and loss, I was simultaneously awakened to intense sexual excitement. In spite of the guilt I suffered, I was obsessed by my desire.

Her seducer, Goldin told me, was an older relative who promised to marry

her; later, he said that he’d really been in love with her sister. By the time Goldin was thirteen, she was reading *The East Village Other*, listening to the Velvet Underground, and aspiring to become a junkie, a “slum goddess,” a bad girl free of the limiting roles with which so many women define their social self—daughter, wife, mother. At fourteen, after being kicked out of a number of boarding schools “for smoking pot or some bullshit,” Goldin left home. For a time, she lived in communes and foster homes; one couple who put her up were interested in her primarily, she told me, because she had a black boyfriend—they gave a “miscegenation party,” where they served black-and-white cake to black-and-white couples. Goldin doesn’t have any photographs of that strange event; she had yet to pick up a camera.

“I met Nan when she was fourteen,” the performer Suzanne Fletcher told me. “She was in a foster home in Massachusetts. I was aware of her because she was so cool.” The two became close friends the following year, when Goldin enrolled in the Satya Community School, where Fletcher was a student. “*Satya* means, in Sanskrit, the existence of the knowledge of truth—it wasn’t pretentious at all,” Goldin told me, laughing. Satya was based on the British school Summerhill, which believed that the school should fit the child, rather than the other way around. There Goldin met David Armstrong, a gay fellow-student who eventually became a photographer, too, and was Goldin’s closest male friend for decades. (He died, of liver cancer, in 2014.) It was Armstrong who rechristened Nancy “Nan.” The two were involved, from the first, in a kind of *mariage blanc*. They went to movies all the time, were fascinated by the women of Andy Warhol’s Factory, and in love with thirties stars like Joan Crawford and Bette Davis. “We were really radical little kids, and we did cling to our friendships as an alternative family,” Fletcher told me. “Even at the time, we could have articulated that.”

The American existential psychologist Rollo May had a daughter who worked at Satya. She applied for a grant from Polaroid, and the company sent the school a shipment of cameras and film. Goldin became the school photographer and found her voice, both through the camera, she says now, and through Armstrong, who taught her

that humor could be a survival mechanism. She became able to joke and laugh; before that, she said, she barely spoke above a whisper. (Goldin also told me that, for her, the camera was a seductive tool, a way of becoming socialized.) Fletcher remembers Goldin's "passion to document": "She kept journals, then the photography became a visual journal," recording the lives of her friends. (Fletcher is one of the most memorable subjects in "The Ballad." Thin, with large eyes, she cries, fools around with a guy, and searches for the meaning of her own reflection in a number of mirrors; the images are a tender evocation of a young woman who shows the camera as much of her real self as she can.)

Perhaps Goldin's desire to document her life and the lives around her, to hold on to these moments forever, was a way of offsetting what had happened to her sister. "I don't really remember my sister," she writes in the introduction to "The Ballad." "In the process of leaving my family, in re-creating myself, I lost the real memory of my sister. I remember my version of her, of the things she said, of the things she meant to me. But I don't remember the tangible sense of who she was . . . what her eyes looked like, what her voice sounded like. . . . I don't ever want to lose the real memory of anyone again." That need is as much the subject of Goldin's photographs as the person being shot; taking pictures is, for her, an exchange that's filled with longing, even as the moment disappears in real time.

**B**Y THE TIME Goldin was eighteen, she was living in Boston with a much older man. (One of the best pictures in "The Ballad," "Nan and Dickie in the York Motel, New Jersey" (1980), shows a pantyless Goldin being embraced from behind by a fully clothed, balding man. The image feels like a terrible, tunnel-visioned, and dangerous secret.) Eventually, she fell in with a group of drag queens, who hung out in a bar called the Other Side, and began to photograph them. She wanted to memorialize the queens, get them on the cover of *Vogue*. She had no interest in trying to show who they were under the feathers and the fantasy: she



was in love with the bravery of their self-creation, their otherness. Goldin was re-creating herself, too. A 1971 picture taken by Armstrong shows her with her curly Bette Midler hair hanging loose and frizzy, her eyebrows heavily pencilled, striking a pose—a young woman imagining herself as a drag queen. Illusions on top of illusions, in a photograph, that most realistic of artistic mediums. Goldin never had any real truck with camera culture—the predominantly straight-male world of photography in the sixties and seventies, when dudes stood around talking about apertures and stroking their tripods, in an effort to butch up that sissy job, otherwise known as "making art." She took a few

courses at the New England School of Photography, but was less engaged by the technical instruction than by a class taught by the photographer Henry Horenstein, who recognized the originality of her work. He turned her on to Larry Clark, who had photographed teen-agers having sex and shooting up in sixties Tulsa. The intimacy of Clark's pictures—you can almost smell the musk—inspired Goldin. Here were noncommercial images that promoted not glamour but lawless bohemianism, or just lawlessness. She has always been drawn to bad-boy posturing. ("Even when I was living in a lesbian community in Provincetown, I was sneaking off to sleep with men," she told me with a guffaw.)

In 1974, she enrolled at the School of the Museum of Fine Arts, in Boston, where she studied alongside Armstrong, Philip-Lorca diCorcia, and Mark Morrisroe—photographers driven by their color fantasies of relationship drama and alienated youth. There Goldin began working with a Pentax, wide-angle lenses, and a flash. This opened up her vista and her palette; as Elisabeth Sussman, who co-curated the "I'll Be Your Mirror" retrospective, pointed out in her important catalogue essay, Goldin "discovered her color in flashes of electricity. Even when photographing in natural light, she often unconsciously replicated the effect of artificial lighting."

In the summer of 1976, Goldin rented a house with Armstrong and his lover in Provincetown, where she met the writer and actress Cookie Mueller, who

appeared in a number of John Waters's films, and whom she photographed extensively. In her 1991 book, "Cookie Mueller," Goldin writes:

She was a cross between Tobacco Road and a Hollywood B-Girl, the most fabulous woman I'd ever seen. . . . That summer I kept meeting her at the bars, at parties and at barbecues with her family—her girlfriend Sharon, her son Max, and her dog Beauty. Part of how we got close was through me photographing her—the photos were intimate and then we were.

Goldin and Mueller weren't involved romantically, but the pictures are filled with romance; in them, Mueller emerges as the star of her own movie, as she cuddles her son or holds Goldin protectively. Goldin knew a fellow-conspirator—a master of self-creation—when she saw one. Looking at the warm, playful, and wrenching photographs of Mueller in "The Ballad" is like seeing a ghost—the woman Barbara Goldin never got to be. Mueller survived girlhood in postwar Maryland and became herself. Barbara didn't. (Mueller died, of AIDS, in 1989.)

At the end of that Provincetown summer, Goldin had image after image of her friends in the dunes, partying, living their lives as if they had all the time in the world. Because there was no dark-room nearby, she used slide film, which she had processed at the drugstore.

**I**N 1978, GOLDIN moved to New York and rented a loft on the Bowery, which Darryl Pinckney recalled in an essay that he wrote for the "I'll Be Your Mirror" catalogue:

Nan's Bowery loft had no windows or else they were covered and this made her parties long, hilarious, dangerous events. You had no idea what time it was or how light the sky was getting out there. Her guests departed when they could ingest no more and some didn't leave even then. . . . Things started to swing lightly after a blender of lethal banana concoctions had been emptied a few times. Suddenly, out of nowhere, as if a bell had gone off . . . people were running all over the place, braying at the refrigerator, standing up with straws or dollar bills still in their nostrils, trying to shove their best friends over the hall banister. Sometimes we went on to clubs . . . and Nan would fill a purse with mysterious women's necessities as she stepped over the sleeping and bestowed upon the copulating a privacy they did not give her and that she didn't often ask for. I remember the first telephone conversation I ever had with Nan. "I'm among the missing today," she said, and hung up.

The curator Marvin Heiferman was working in New York then, at Castelli



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Graphics, a business run by the art dealer Leo Castelli's wife, Antoinette. While Leo dealt with artists like Andy Warhol, Jasper Johns, and Robert Rauschenberg in then funky SoHo, Antoinette helped push graphics and photographs—which weren't always considered "real" art—in a stuffy Upper East Side town house. One day, Heiferman got a call from a young woman who said that the photographer Joel Meyerowitz had referred her. Heiferman told her that he wasn't looking at new work, but the voice on the phone was insistent. "Then this person shows up in a blue polka-dot dress with a whole lot of crinolines and wacky hair and a box under her arm," Heiferman recalled. "She shows me this box of pictures, and they're really weird and curiously made, with a very strange color sense about them, and they were of everything from people smoking cigarettes to fucking. There were probably twenty to twenty-five pictures. And I had never seen anything like that, in terms of their density and their connection with the people in them." Heiferman told Goldin to bring more work the next time she came. A few months later, she arrived with a wooden crate full of photographs. "Again, I'm thinking, This is extraordinary work, right? I loved them and wanted to show them, but Mrs. Castelli thought they were too raw. She worried that they would upset people, that Ellsworth Kelly wouldn't like them."

Although Heiferman eventually included Goldin in a group show, it was almost a decade before she got her due as an artist. There's an unspoken rule in photography, not to mention in art in general, that women are not supposed to be, technically speaking, voyeurs—they're supposed to be what voyeurs look at. "Woman has been symbolized almost out of existence," Katherine Anne Porter wrote, in 1950. "To man, the myth maker, her true nature appears unfathomable, a dubious mystery at best. . . . Therefore she was the earth, the moon, the sea, the planet Venus, certain stars, wells, lakes, mines, caves." Goldin didn't photograph the so-called natural world. She photographed life business as show business, a world in which difference began on the surface. You could be a woman if

you dressed like one. Or you could dress like some idea of yourself, a tarted-up badass woman, say, who struggles to break free from social decorum by doing all the things she's not supposed to do: crying in public, showing her ectopic-pregnancy scars, pissing and maybe missing the toilet, coming apart, and then pasting herself back together again. Although Goldin's images are rooted in time and place, like all vital works of art, they show us, as Arbus once said, how "the more specific you are, the more general it'll be."

"The Ballad" was developing. Goldin became involved with a musician, who matched music to her slides for the 1980 "Times Square Show," a now legendary group exhibition of downtown art. After a while, Goldin started making her own soundtrack for the slides, a kind of counterpoint to all those lives moving forward and backward, dancing, cooking dope, experiencing. In small venues around town, Goldin would hold the projector as she manually clicked through images; if the bulb on the machine burned out, she'd run home and get another one. Audiences waited.

"'The Ballad' was a brilliant solution for someone who shoots like her," Heiferman said. "It showed life as it was happening, and she wound up with something that was an amalgam of diaristic and family pictures and fashion photography and anthropology and celebrity photography and news photography and photojournalism. And nobody had done that before. To music, too!" By 1981, Heiferman had left Castelli Graphics and established a business of his own. One of his interests was helping to produce "The Ballad" in a variety of spaces, including at the Berlin Film Festival, where it was shown in 1986.

Goldin was tending bar at Tin Pan Alley, an "Iceman Cometh" type of watering hole on West Forty-ninth Street, when she met an office worker and ex-marine named Brian, a lonesome Manhattan cowboy with a crooked-toothed smile, who eventually fell into acting. Goldin ended their first date by asking him to cop heroin for her in Harlem. He did. Drugs consumed them, as did their physical attraction to each other. In "The Ballad," we see

Brian sitting on the edge of Goldin's bed, smoking a cigarette, or staring at the camera with lust, certainly, but wariness, too, his hairy chest a sort of costume of masculinity. Pinckney, in his essay, describes Goldin's lover as "tall but uncertain." He adds, "His only asset seemed to be that he was a man, but it was his physical advantage as a man that allowed him to convert into a weapon his sense of entitlement and injury, his resentment at being the backstage husband." In 1984, the couple were in Berlin, and, Goldin told me, "Brian was dope-sick. We were staying at a pensione, and he started beating me, and he went for my eyes, and later they had to stitch my eye back up, because it was about to fall out of the socket. He burned my journals, and the sick thing was that there were people around who knew us and who wouldn't help me. He wrote 'Jewish-American Princess' in lipstick on the mirror."

Goldin made it back to the U.S., where Fletcher helped get her to a hospital so that her eye could be saved. While recovering, she made a self-portrait, "Nan one month after being battered" (1984), which is, perhaps, the most harrowing image in "The Ballad." We see Goldin's blackened eyes and swollen nose and, in a stroke of pure genius, her red-lipsticked lips. It's the tender femininity of those lips that brings the horror into focus.

Goldin was physically afraid of men for a long time after the beating, and her drug use became less and less controlled. (One of the reasons some of the "Ballad" slides are scratched—a hallmark of the MOMA exhibition—she told me, is that she was handling them while doing drugs.)

MARK HOLBORN, AN editor at the Aperture Foundation, first saw "The Ballad" in 1985, at the Whitney Biennial. He went back to his office thinking that it was among the most powerful visual experiences he'd ever had. "It was not something that would have happened at that point within the Museum of Modern Art," he told me. "And I welcomed that. I felt that, as much as I respected this great lineage that was being established at MOMA—Walker Evans, Robert Frank, Garry



Winogrand, Lee Friedlander—in a sense, it was coming to its conclusion.” Goldin, he said, was not making work that responded to other photographers’ work: “She had her own visual language, and this was unusual.” Holborn, Heiferman, and Goldin decided to make a book out of “The Ballad.” Many images were considered, discarded, picked up again. (Fletcher was very involved with the selection.) As the project progressed, so did Holborn’s relationship with Goldin, which became emotionally intense, though Holborn was married and a father.

The book came out in 1986. Reviewing it in the *New York Times*, Andy Grundberg wrote, “What Robert Frank’s ‘The Americans’ was to the 1950’s, Nan Goldin’s ‘The Ballad of Sexual Dependency’ is to the 1980’s.” Goldin was not unaware of the contradiction involved in her iconic work’s, so wild in spirit, becoming, to a certain extent, institutionalized. For me, “The Ballad” is poised at the threshold of doom; it’s a last dance before AIDS swallowed that world. (Goldin also recorded the AIDS era, in her 2003 book, “The Devil’s Playground.”) “We’re survivors,” she told me. “There’s all this survivor’s guilt. I felt so guilty in ’91, when I tested negative. I was disappointed that I was negative, and most people don’t understand that.”

As life went on, it changed. Goldin’s drug use increased to such a degree that she rarely left her loft, except at night. When she bottomed out and went to rehab, in 1989, she had to adapt to seeing daylight again. The natural world opened up to her, and she reconnected with a former lover, a sculptor named Siobhan Liddell. Her portraits of that new, sober love are among the most beautiful that she took in the late eighties and early nineties, and they lack none of the intensity of “The Ballad.”

After getting out of rehab, Goldin set “The Ballad” to a permanent soundtrack, and subsequently sold it to several museums, including the Whitney and MOMA. An image of Goldin’s from this period fetches fifteen thousand dollars or more.

She recently put out a new book, “Diving for Pearls,” a series of photographs of art works linked to her own



*“I’m sure your parents won’t mind us using white flour. We’re making paste.”*

work from the past. In the introduction, she explains the title:

Since David Armstrong and I were young he always referred to photography as “diving for pearls.” If you took a million pictures you were lucky to come out with one or two gems. . . . I never learned control over my machines. I made every mistake in the book. But the technical mistakes allowed for magic. . . . Random psychological subtexts that I never would have thought to intentionally create. The subconscious made visible—though whether mine or the camera’s I don’t know. . . . In the early ’80s I traveled with Cookie, her lover Sharon, and her son Max to New Orleans by train. . . . We stayed in New Orleans for a few full weeks: the break-up of the relationship, the gospel tents at the jazz festival, days on a fishing boat full of contraband. . . . This and much more I photographed. I returned to New York with 30 rolls of shot film. They were my sack of gold. But all came out black. For no discernible reason. But in the middle of one roll, from all the 1,050 frames, was a single photo: Cookie looking in a mirror with the word “Angel” written on the wall next to her. My pearl. Can digital photography be susceptible to voodoo?

If photographs show us what a photographer is interested in, they also show what she’s not interested in. “The Ballad” is about a mostly white bohemia, which was what I grew up in, too, to some extent. In those years, when I showed my mother photographs of my downtown friends—loving snapshots

from all those East Village bars and basement dance parties full of drugs and possibility, and then AIDS—she said, “You belong to these people,” and I was filled with shame. Couldn’t she see that I belonged to her, too? Looking at “The Ballad” in the nineteen-nineties, I felt a little of my mother’s alienation. I was distanced from Goldin’s characters not so much by age—I am seven or eight years younger than her—as by class. Many of her subjects came from “nice” families and, presumably, could afford to fall apart; someone with resources or knowledge would be there to help put them together again. Now, thirty years after the book came out, that alienation has dissipated, and one of the many images that haunt me, in addition to those of Goldin’s chosen family, is a snapshot of a member of her biological family: Barbara. Color-dense and taken from far away, it shows Barbara by the front door of the family house, looking off into a distance we cannot see. In that photograph of Goldin’s absent sister, there is death, and also hope—hope that the voodoo of love can make a difference. ♦

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A selection of Nan Goldin’s images.

# THE THEORIST IN THE PALACE

*Ashraf Ghani, Afghanistan's leader, is an expert on failed states. Can he save his country from collapse?*

BY GEORGE PACKER

ASHRAF GHANI, THE President of Afghanistan, wakes up before five every morning and reads for two or three hours. He makes his way daily through an inch-thick stack of official documents. He reads proposals by applicants competing for the job of mayor of Herat and chooses the winner. He reads presentations by forty-four city engineers for improvements to Greater Kabul. He has been known to write his own talking points and do his own research on upcoming visitors. Before meeting the Australian foreign minister, he read the Australian government's white paper on foreign aid. He read four hundred pages of the Senate Intelligence Committee's torture report on the day of its release, and the next day he apologized to General John Campbell, the American commander in Afghanistan, for having not quite finished it. He reads books on the transition from socialism to capitalism in Eastern Europe, on the Central Asian enlightenment of a thousand years ago, on modern warfare, on the history of Afghanistan's rivers. He lives and works in the Arg—a complex of palaces inside a nineteenth-century fortress in central Kabul—where books, marked up in pencil, lie open on desks and tables.

Two decades ago, Ghani lost most of his stomach to cancer. He has to eat small portions of food, such as packets of dates, half a dozen times a day. He sometimes takes digestive breaks, resting—and reading—on a narrow bed in an alcove behind his office in Gul Khana Palace. Or he sits with a book in his favorite spot, under a chinara tree in the garden of Haram Sarai Palace, where the library of the late King Zahir is preserved. During the Presidency of Ghani's predecessor, Hamid Karzai, the library was a dusty pile of antique volumes. After Ghani took office, in September, 2014, he organized the royal collection. Whereas Karzai filled the palace with visitors and received petitioners

during meals, Ghani often eats alone. After twelve years in power, Karzai and his family walked away with hundreds of millions of dollars from Afghan and international coffers. Ghani's net worth, according to his declaration of assets, is about four million dollars. It consists largely of his house, on four acres in western Kabul, and his collection of seven thousand books.

A trained anthropologist who spent years doing field work for the World Bank, Ghani has been in and out of the Afghan government ever since the overthrow of the Taliban, in 2001. His abiding concern has been how to create viable institutions in poor countries overrun with violence, focussing on states that can't enforce laws, create fair markets, collect taxes, provide services, or keep citizens safe. In 2006, Ghani and his long-time collaborator, a British human-rights lawyer named Clare Lockhart, started a consultancy, the Institute for State Effectiveness, in Washington, D.C. Two years later, they published "Fixing Failed States: A Framework for Rebuilding a Fractured World." It describes the core functions of a state and suggests such measures as tapping the expertise of citizens in building institutions. By then, the theme was no longer a technical subject. The chaos in Somalia, Iraq, Pakistan, and Afghanistan threatened global security.

Theorists are rarely given such a dramatic chance to put their ideas into practice. Afghanistan has been at war ever since the Soviet invasion of 1979, when Ghani was a thirty-year-old doctoral candidate at Columbia University. Most of the country, including several provincial capitals, is threatened by the Taliban, even as the insurgency devolves into a network of narco-criminal enterprises. In sixty per cent of Afghanistan's three hundred and ninety-eight districts, state control doesn't exist beyond a lonely government building and a market. Al Qaeda and the

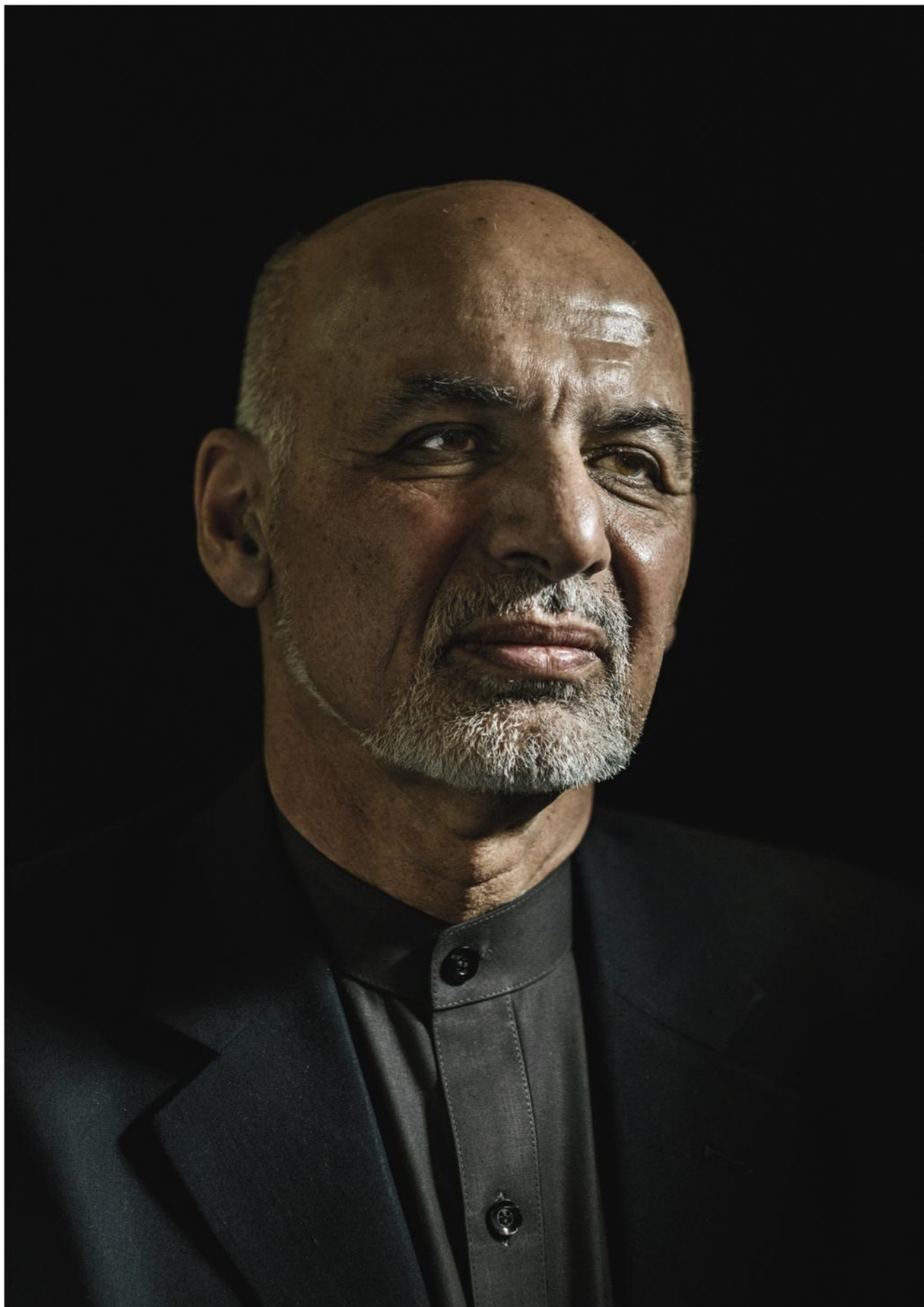
Islamic State have established a presence in the east. Afghanistan can't police its borders, and its neighbors give sanctuary and assistance to insurgents. (In May, Mullah Mansour, the Taliban leader, was killed by an American drone strike while driving from Zahedan, Iran, where he reportedly consulted with Iranian officials, to his base, in Quetta, Pakistan, with a fraudulent Pakistani passport.) Afghanistan's finances depend on foreign aid and opium. Corruption is endemic. After the departure of a hundred and twenty-seven thousand foreign troops, in 2014, the economy collapsed, unemployment soared, and hundreds of thousands of Afghans abandoned the country. Ghani is the elected President of a failed state.

A slight man with a short gray beard and deep-set eyes under a bald dome, Ghani bears a resemblance to Gandhi, except that he does not seem like a man at peace. He hunches over and winces, head tilted, and when he gestures he keeps his elbows pinned to his sides. He laughs at odd moments, and he can't control his temper. Young loyalists surround him, but he has alienated powerful allies. Isolated in the Arg, Ghani works killingly long hours and buries himself in projects that should be left to subordinates. "Because he's been an academic for a very long time, he just can't help a mode of working that requires him to study and analyze every problem," a senior Afghan official said. "If he asked for a file on garbage collection in Kabul, and he received a binder of five hundred pages, he would finish it that night—and then take copious notes."

Whereas Karzai talked warmly with guests for hours, leaving everyone happy, Ghani disdains small talk, and visitors come away feeling intimidated or slighted. Once, in Kabul, the President scheduled fifteen minutes for Ismail Khan, a powerful warlord from western Afghanistan. Jelani Popal, one of Ghani's

*Ghani is Afghanistan's Jimmy Carter—a visionary technocrat who has alienated potential allies and has no feel for politics.*





closest advisers, told him, “See him for as long as he wants or don’t see him at all—but you can’t spend just fifteen minutes.” Ghani stood firm: the corrupt and brutal emir of Herat was worth exactly a quarter of an hour.

Ghani is a visionary technocrat who thinks twenty years ahead, with a deep understanding of what has destroyed his country and what might yet save it. “He’s incorruptible,” the senior official said. “He wants to transform the country. And he can do it. But it seems as if everything is arrayed against him.” Ghani is the kind of reformer that the American government desperately needed as a partner during the erratic later years of Karzai’s rule. Yet he has few admirers in the State Department, and in Kabul the élite don’t hide their contempt. They call Ghani an arrogant micromanager and say that he has no close friends, no feel for politics—that he is the leader of a country that exists only in his own mind. Ghani is Afghanistan’s Jimmy Carter.

Many observers don’t expect Ghani to complete his term, which ends in 2019, and 2016 is described as a year of national survival. “This is the year of living dangerously,” Scott Guggenheim, an American economic adviser to Ghani, said. “He’ll either make it or he won’t.”

The stone walls of the Arg are fortified with concrete blast walls and checkpoints manned by armed guards. Outside, barricades and razor wire divide Kabul’s streets into the private armed encampments where Afghan élites and foreign

diplomats live. The public must steer clear, and the city is choked with traffic. When it rains, the rutted streets flood; when fighting in the north cuts power lines, the streets go dark. Periodically, a suicide bomber detonates a murderous payload. American officials no longer risk driving—from dawn to dark, helicopters clatter over the U.S. Embassy compound. Smelling weakness, Afghan politicians scheme in lavish compounds built with stolen money, each convinced that he should be inside the Arg. In the mountains around Kabul, the Taliban are just a few miles away.

“MY FATHER’S MOTHER really had a profound influence on me,” Ghani said. “She literally began her day with an hour of reading. But the most fundamental impact was education.” We were seated in facing chairs, in a ceremonial room on the second floor of Gul Khana Palace. The soaring walls and pillars were of green onyx, the doors of inlaid walnut. Ghani, by contrast, looked like a well-off shopkeeper, in a traditional dark-gray shalwar kameez and a black coat, conveying that he is a native son and drawing a firm line between his current life and the decades he spent in American universities and with global institutions.

In 2011, Ghani and his daughter, Mariam—an artist who lives in Brooklyn—published a pamphlet titled “Afghanistan: A Lexicon,” a mini-encyclopedia that chronicles cycles of reform, reaction, and chaos that have recurred in the country. The opening entry is on

Amanullah, Afghanistan’s king from 1919 to 1929. Amanullah was the first great modernizer: he oversaw the writing of a constitution, improved education, encouraged freedoms for women, and planned an expansion of the capital. He also fought to make Afghanistan’s foreign policy independent of Britain. But Amanullah offended key elements of society, including the mullahs, and he was overthrown by tribal leaders. Although Amanullah “accomplished a remarkable amount,” Ashraf and Mariam Ghani wrote, he “did not succeed in permanently changing Afghanistan, since his ultimate failure to forge a broad political consensus for his reforms left him vulnerable to rural rebellion.” Rapid modernization undone by conservative revolt became both template and warning for Afghan progressives, “who have returned again and again to his unfinished project, only to succumb to their own blind spots.”

Ghani comes from a prominent Pash-tun family. His paternal grandfather, a military commander, helped install King Nadir, who assumed power shortly after Amanullah’s overthrow, in 1929. Ghani’s father was a senior transport official under Nadir’s son, King Zahir, who reigned for forty years. Ghani was born in 1949. He grew up in Kabul’s old city, spending weekends and vacations riding horses and hunting on the ancestral farm, forty miles south. He was teased at school—he was undersized, and sometimes bent over like an old man—but he impressed classmates with his seriousness. In 1966, his junior year of high school, he travelled to America as an exchange student. At his new school, in Oregon, Ghani won a student-council seat reserved for a foreigner. “The first council meeting, we made some simple decisions,” he said. “Lo and behold, the next week they were implemented, because the council had access to money.” The experience shaped his thinking about development: “You can get together, you can talk as much as you want, but if there’s not a decision-making process—that’s where democracy really matters.”

In 1973, Ghani received a political-science degree from the American University of Beirut, where he fell in love with Rula Saade, a Lebanese Christian. They got engaged, and in 1974, after Ghani returned to Kabul to teach, his



*“I identify with shorter lines.”*



prospective father-in-law paid him a visit. “You’re going to end up in politics and you’re going to ruin my daughter’s life,” Rula’s father said. Ghani replied, not quite truthfully, “I’m totally committed to being an academic.” (The couple married in 1975, and, in addition to Mariam, they have a son, Tarek.)

In July, 1973, the monarchy was overthrown by the King’s cousin Daoud, who became Afghanistan’s first President. Daoud initially aligned himself with the Communists and, according to the Ghani “Lexicon,” he “reiterated the flawed model of modernization imposed from above.” In 1978, Communist troops shot Daoud to death as he tried to hide behind a pillar in Gul Khana Palace. Assassination followed assassination until the end of 1979, when the Soviets invaded and the jihad began. The Arg is haunted by its murdered occupants.

In 1977, Ghani and his family left Afghanistan, and he didn’t live there again for a quarter century. At Columbia, he completed a dissertation in cultural anthropology. “Production and Domination: Afghanistan, 1747-1901” analyzes the nation’s difficulty in building a centralized state in terms of its economic backwardness. The writing is almost impenetrable: “By focusing on movements of concomitant structures, I have attempted to isolate the systemic relations among the changing or non-changing elements that combine to form a structure.” The author moves between clouds of abstraction and mounds of data—nineteenth-century irrigation methods in Herat, kinship networks in Pashtun financial systems—without readily discernible priorities.

In the eighties, Ghani taught at Berkeley and at Johns Hopkins, and in 1991 he became an anthropologist for the World Bank, based in Washington, D.C. Travelling half the year, he became an expert on finance in Russia, China, and India. “He really had a moral purpose—solving poverty for real people,” Clare Lockhart said. “When he arrived in capital cities, he’d go to the markets to see what people were buying and selling, then he’d go out to the provinces and villages. He’d interview groups of miners.” Such field work was unusual for a World Bank official. James Wolfensohn, who became president of the bank in 1995, shifted its emphasis from simply lending money to

poor countries to attempting to reduce poverty. He wanted to know why African and Latin American countries that followed the bank’s liberalization policies remained poor. The answer had to do with corruption, weak institutions, and ill-conceived practices by donors. Wolfensohn ordered a review of the bank’s programs, and Ghani submitted many blistering critiques, which made him unpopular with his colleagues.

Meanwhile, he was preparing for a future in Afghanistan. In 1997, with the Taliban controlling most of the country, a Columbia graduate student interviewed Ghani at the World Bank. “When we get peace in Afghanistan, we’ll go to New Zealand to learn best practices for raising sheep,” Ghani said. “We’ll go to Switzerland and study hydroelectric projects.” Afghanistan—mountains, deserts, ungoverned spaces—has always seemed to offer a blank slate for utopian dreamers: British imperialists, hippie travellers, Communists, Islamists, international do-gooders. Alex Thier, who worked for the U.N. in Afghanistan in the nineties and, later, with Ghani in Kabul, described him as an “N.G.O.-style revolutionary, as if he grew up in a cadre of the World Bank rather than in the Communist Party.” To be a visionary is, in some ways, to be depersonalized, to refuse to see what’s in front of one’s face.

On September 11, 2001, Ghani was at his desk in Washington, and he knew immediately that everything was about to change for Afghanistan. He drafted a five-step plan for a political transition to a broad-based Afghan government that could be held accountable for rebuilding the country; he warned against funding and arming the warlords who had brought Afghanistan to ruin and the Taliban to power. During the American-led war against the Taliban, a small group of experts—including Lockhart, the Afghanistan scholar Barnett Rubin, and the Algerian diplomat Lakhdar Brahimi, then the U.N. special envoy for Afghanistan—met at Ghani’s house outside Washington. That December, the group’s work influenced the Bonn Agreement, which mapped steps toward representative rule, while leaving unresolved

the conflict between Ghani’s vision of a modern state and the interests of regional power brokers.

Six months later, Karzai became Afghanistan’s leader. Ghani’s first job in the new administration was to coordinate and track foreign aid. He believed that Afghans needed to set their own priorities for development rather than be at the mercy of the conflicting agendas of foreign countries and international agencies. Some Afghans and Westerners saw Ghani, after decades in the U.S., as a foreigner in his own land. But he is a prickly nationalist who would have been an egghead anywhere. He had a particular animus toward Western aid officials who had plenty of money

and power but scant knowledge or humility. He once dressed down a contingent from the U.S. Agency for International Development for their incompetence. Ghani was among the first to foresee that a flood of foreign aid could enrich foreign contractors and turn officials corrupt while doing little for ordinary Afghans.

With Hanif Atmar, the Minister of Rural Development, Ghani created the National Solidarity Program—grants in amounts of twenty thousand to sixty thousand dollars for twenty-three thousand Afghan villages, largely funded by the World Bank. (The idea came from similar World Bank programs that Ghani had studied in Indonesia and India.) Afghan villagers were required to elect a council of men and women, devise their own goals—such as clean water or a new school—and make public their accounting figures. In one case, thirty-seven villages pooled their money to build a maternity hospital. Clare Lockhart met families just returned from exile in Iran, living in animal-skin shelters. One woman, describing the importance of the grant, told her, “It’s not about the money.”

“Don’t tell her that,” another villager said. “She’ll take the money away.”

“I don’t have that authority,” Lockhart explained.

The first woman finished her thought: “It’s that *we’re* trusted to do this.”

The N.S.P. was one of Afghanistan’s most successful and least corrupt programs. A new school cost a sixth of one built with a U.S.A.I.D. contract. Paul



O'Brien, an Irishman who served as an adviser to Ghani, said Ghani understood that "the key to development is strong domestic institutions that can regulate all the actors around them, *including* international do-gooders." When Ghani challenged foreigners to tell him what accountability measures they wanted in return for giving Afghan institutions control of the money and the agenda, "they wouldn't do it," O'Brien said. Donors had brought their "development army in all its glory, and that meant outputs and contracts and boxes checked."

Instead of sending money to local communities through Afghan channels, donors like U.S.A.I.D. bid out contracts to large international companies, which in turn hired subcontractors and private security companies, none of which had a long-term stake in Afghanistan. In a 2005 TED talk on failed states, Ghani called such programs "the ugly face of the developed world to the developing countries," adding, "Tens of billions of dollars are supposedly spent on building capacity with people who are paid up to fifteen hundred dollars a day, who are incapable of thinking creatively or organically."

The National Solidarity Program didn't get to write Afghanistan's future. Some estimate that during the peak years of foreign spending on Afghanistan only ten to twenty cents of every aid dollar reached the intended beneficiaries. Waste on a scale of several hundred billion dollars is the work of many authors, but the U.S. government was among the chief ones.

In the summer of 2002, Karzai named Ghani Minister of Finance. The Ministries of Interior, Defense, and Foreign Affairs were more obvious bases for building personal power, but Ghani put in twenty-hour days, holding staff meetings at 7 A.M., in a building with shattered windows and no heat. He introduced anti-corruption measures, established a centralized revenue system, and created a new currency, supporting it with the traditional *hawala* network of money trading. He urged his staff to take on the drug and land mafias that were infiltrating the state, saying, "We need to hit them everywhere, so they won't have the space to establish networks." This was the blank-slate phase of post-Taliban Afghanistan, and Ghani became the most effective figure in the new government. "The golden

period of the Karzai rule was when Ashraf Ghani was Finance Minister," Jelani Popal, a deputy in the Finance Ministry, said. "Karzai was a people person and kept the integrity of the state and society, but Ghani was the de-facto Prime Minister and the main engine of reform."

Ghani's temper, perhaps inflamed by the effects of his stomach cancer, became notorious. He shouted at Afghan staff and Western advisers alike. Zalmay Khalilzad, then the U.S. Ambassador to Afghanistan, had known him for decades—they were in college together in Beirut—and he challenged Ghani: "Why do you have such a bad temper?" Ghani denied it, Khalilzad repeated stories he'd heard, and they went back and forth until Ghani slammed his fist on a table and exploded: "*I don't have a temper!*"

Ghani's combination of probity and arrogance antagonized the entire Karzai cabinet. When he discovered that the Minister of Defense, the Tajik warlord Mohammed Fahim, was padding his payroll with tens of thousands of "ghost" troops, Ghani slashed Fahim's budget. Ghani later heard that Fahim went to the Arg and told Karzai that he wanted to murder Ghani—to which Karzai replied, "There's a very long line for killing Ashraf."

In 2004, after being elected President, Karzai made noises about dismissing Ghani. Lakhdar Brahimi asked Karzai, "Do you have anybody better than him?" Karzai said no. Brahimi encouraged him



to try to work with Ghani, even though he knew that nobody in the cabinet supported Ghani, either. Brahimi asked Ghani, "You've been here three years and you don't have a friend in this country?" Ali Jalali, then the Minister of Interior, said that Ghani had clashed with cabinet members from the Northern Alliance, such as Fahim, in his campaign to take power away from the warlords. Several people also told me that Khalilzad had been competing with Ghani since

their university days and leveraged American influence over Karzai to undermine Ghani. (Khalilzad said that he had tried to get Karzai to change his mind, but failed.) By 2005, Ghani was gone. He later insisted that he had resigned because the government was descending into narco-corruption.

The government lost its brightest light. "If he had stayed, Afghanistan would be completely different today," Popal said. Karzai, a master at keeping his various constituencies in the tent, had no interest in the ideas that consumed Ghani. With the American troop presence too small to secure the country, Karzai used foreign largesse to empower local strongmen, whose behavior led to the return of the Taliban.

GHANI BRIEFLY BECAME chancellor of Kabul University. A former student there remembers that he was always either yelling at groups of undergraduates or promising things that he couldn't deliver—a state-of-the-art library, for example. Karzai tried repeatedly to bring Ghani back. Once, in 2008, he summoned Ghani and Popal to the Arg. "I made a mistake," Karzai said. "I'll give you more power than before." He offered Ghani the Ministry of Interior. Ghani refused, saying, "You are a very suspicious man. You listened to people and fired me." Privately, Ghani confided to Popal that he planned to run for President against Karzai the next year. By then, Popal was in charge of the powerful department of local governance. "I know all the districts," he told Ghani. "You don't have a chance." Ghani insisted that he could give speeches that would mobilize millions of Afghans. "It doesn't work that way," Popal told him. "You need to establish relationships."

I met Ghani in Kabul in the spring of 2009, as the campaign was about to begin. He had given up his American citizenship in order to run. He described a "double failure" in Afghanistan: a failure of imagination by the international community and a failure by Afghan elites "to be the founding fathers—and mothers, because there are some—of a new state." He received a group of university students in his home, a beautiful post-and-beam structure in traditional Nuristani style. Ghani listened to the students complain about NATO firepower



killing civilians, about Afghan corruption, about American manipulation of the election in Karzai's favor. They didn't know that American officials, disillusioned with Karzai, had encouraged Ghani to run against him. Before I left, Ghani gave me a *chapan*, the intricately woven coat of northern Afghanistan, and a copy of "Fixing Failed States." I saw no sign of a volatile character—he was confident of his prospects.

But Popal was right: Ghani had no following, and he received a humiliating three per cent of the vote. Karzai was reelected amid charges of rampant voter fraud that embittered his closest challenger, Abdullah Abdullah, and fatally damaged his relationship with the United States. Karzai, who could not run for a third term, withdrew into the Arg and steeped himself in conspiracy theories about the West. A billion-dollar Ponzi scheme was exposed at the country's largest bank. Karzai's final years in office were a political death agony.

During this period, Ghani was in charge of preparing Afghanistan for the withdrawal of NATO forces and the hand-over of military authority to the Afghan Army by the end of 2014. The job, which was pro bono, allowed him to travel around the country, visiting provincial governors, corps commanders, and district police chiefs. It was a kind of listening tour, convincing him of the people's desire for reform.

In 2014, he ran again for President. He published a three-hundred-page campaign manifesto, "Continuity and Change." It was a classic Ghani production. "It is very smart in diagnosing all these problems," Alex Thier said. "He's an idea factory with all these proposals—but you don't read it with a sense that they will all be accomplished." When you cut through the language, the manifesto is a call for the empowerment of the Afghan people against corrupt élites: "Outstanding individuals, intellectuals, women, young people, producers of culture, workers, and other parts of society wish for change, and we want to respond to this wish."

Ghani stopped wearing Western suits and started using his tribal name, Ahmadzai. He hired young campaign aides who were savvy about social media, and he gave rousing speeches declaring that "every Afghan is equal" and that "our mas-



ters will be the people of Afghanistan." There were rumors that he was taking anger-management classes.

During the campaign, Farkhunda Naderi, a female member of parliament, suggested in a TV debate that the next President should name a woman—the first—to Afghanistan's high court, which has the power to nullify laws deemed contrary to Islamic law. "Unless you get a woman on the Supreme Court, all the rights women get are on the surface and symbolic," she told me. Naderi had suggested the idea to Karzai, only to be told that no woman was qualified. Karzai's wife, a doctor, was rarely seen in public during his years in the Arg, but Rula Ghani was a prominent surrogate for her husband during the campaign, to the delight of some Afghans and to the chagrin of others. During a campaign speech at a Kabul high school, Ghani announced his intention to select a woman for the Supreme Court. Naderi, who was in attendance, listened in disbelief. "I was like, 'Wow!' He was brave to do that."

In a naked attempt to win the votes of minority Uzbeks, Ghani selected Abdul Rashid Dostum, the Uzbek warlord, as a candidate for Vice-President. Dostum is accused of so many killings that he's barred from entering the United States. Ghani once called him "a known killer." Naderi was forced to defend Ghani to friends who supported human rights. "It means he's a politician," she told them. "If you're going to do something in Afghanistan,

you can't import other people. You have to do something with the people who are here." This had been the dilemma for Afghan reformers ever since King Amanullah: how, when, and whether to compromise. Ghani was showing that he, too, could play politics the old, dirty way.

In the first round of voting, on April 5th, Ghani came in second among eight candidates, with thirty-one per cent. Abdullah Abdullah, who had lost to Karzai in 2009, led, with forty-five per cent. Elegant and diplomatic, Abdullah was a familiar figure in Afghan politics. Of Pashtun and Tajik parentage, he was identified politically with the Tajiks. Abdullah and Ghani had served together in the first Karzai cabinet, with Abdullah as Foreign Minister, and they shared pro-Western, pro-reform, anti-corruption views. "I've known Abdullah since 1995 and Ghani since 2002," Thier said. "These guys really care. They are not cynical, they're not trying to turn the affairs of state to their own benefit." Three-quarters of the nearly seven million voters chose one of these two candidates—evidence that, despite years of war, foreign interference, and disappointed hopes, Afghans still wanted a modern country.

Inevitably, the runoff between Ghani and Abdullah, in June, played out along ethnic lines, with Pashtuns—the country's largest group—consolidating around Ghani. When early official results showed Ghani leading, Abdullah claimed a fraud on the scale of the 2009 election. An

adviser to Abdullah blamed Karzai and his handpicked election commissioners, saying that they wanted power to revert to agreements among élites, with Karzai as kingmaker, if not king.

Fifteen thousand Abdullah supporters marched on the Arg to protest the election. Ghani's circle was equally adamant. His campaign coordinator at the time, Hamdullah Mohib, recalls a meeting in which Ghani advisers discussed bringing a hundred thousand people into the streets. Ghani told them, in his didactic way, "A civil war lasts on average ten or fifteen years, and even then they're very hard to end—ours is still going on. I can guarantee that tomorrow, if you march on Kabul, the first bullet will be fired. If anyone can guarantee when the last bullet will be fired, *then* I'll allow the march."

The U.N. mission in Kabul supervised an audit. James Cunningham, the American Ambassador at the time, recalls, "The U.N. and E.U. people really worked their asses off, being accused every day of malfeasance by one side or the other. There were fistfights inside hot warehouses, and lots of yelling." The audit showed fraud on both sides, more of it favoring Ghani than Abdullah. American officials feared that the dispute could cause Afghanistan to fracture along ethnic lines. In July, 2014, a document circulated in the State Department:

We should be modest about the audit mechanism—given the apparent closeness of the election and the involvement of the chief electoral officer in fraud, it is almost impossible that we

will ever know who won . . . with sufficient clarity to persuade his disappointed opponent. The audits are a way to buy time for political accommodations and eventually to certify and add some credibility to a result.

American officials spent the summer negotiating a deal between Ghani and Abdullah. The loser would have to accept the other as President, without conceding the final vote, and in return would be named Chief Executive Officer—a Prime Ministerial position that doesn't exist in the Afghan constitution. (The suggestion came from Ghani.) The results of the audit would not be released, to spare the defeated candidate a loss of face. Both Ghani's and Abdullah's camps resisted the arrangement, each certain that it had won outright. According to a U.S. intelligence assessment that September, there was a strong chance that, for lack of an agreement, Karzai would stay in office or that Abdullah and the Northern Alliance would declare a parallel government. Daniel Feldman, the U.S. Special Representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan, who was involved in the negotiations, said, "If Karzai had stayed in, or if there had been a parallel government, that would have been the end of our presence in Afghanistan, and probably the end of Afghanistan—civil war on top of the Taliban."

By mid-September, the audit had been finished: Ghani was judged the winner. But Abdullah wasn't ready to concede. Secretary of State John Kerry called Ghani from Paris; citing the audit, he said that if fraudulent votes were discounted the gap closed significantly in

Abdullah's favor. Ghani took this to mean that the U.S. believed he had lost an election he'd tried to steal. If he was taking anger-management classes, they didn't work. He summoned Feldman to his house for a chewing-out that lasted several hours. Grudgingly, Ghani and Abdullah accepted a compromise. On September 21st, they signed a document creating a National Unity Government. On the crucial issue of the distribution of political appointments, Abdullah had wanted the language to read "equal" and Ghani "fair." They compromised on "equitable." Since there was no word for it in Dari, one had to be invented: *bara barguna*, or "equalish." The N.U.G. was an act of statesmanship on both sides, but no one was happy with it. To the public, it suggested that Afghan democracy was a back-room deal brokered by élites and foreigners.

Ghani was inaugurated on September 29, 2014. It was the first peaceful transfer of power in Afghanistan since 1901, but Ghani and his aides felt that he had been forced to become something less than Afghanistan's legitimate President.

WHEN GHANI TOOK office, his approval rating was above eighty per cent. Eighteen months later, in March, when I met him in Kabul, it was twenty-three per cent.

In our interview, I asked how "Fixing Failed States" had guided him as President. "It's a road map for where do you begin, when you arrive, and what you do as a leader," Ghani answered. "One of the first things I did was to ask my colleagues in the cabinet to prepare hundred-day action plans." He went on, "Organizations are accumulations of historical debris. They are not consciously thought. So when you ask the Education Ministry 'What's your core function and who's your client?' they laugh at you. When I say that the client is the Afghan child—and the Ministry is an instrument, not the goal—it's greeted with shock. It's a new idea."

This thought led Ghani to expound on Mount Stuart Elphinstone, a nineteenth-century Scottish envoy and the author of "An Account of the Kingdom of Caubul," which described the egalitarian nature of Afghan society. From there, Ghani's mind jumped to the Iron Emir, Abdur Rahman, Amanullah's



*"I'm sorry—when you said 'bad' cop, I assumed you meant incompetent."*



grandfather, who imported the authoritarian idea of hierarchy from his years in exile in Russia. Then, as an example of the “inherited élitism” that distorts Afghan politics, Ghani told the story of a young man he had named Deputy Interior Minister, who had ordered a policeman beaten for stopping his vehicle because of a violation, and was then made to apologize on national television. Finally, Ghani arrived at the reign of Amanullah: “I call it the unfinished reform. A section of the élite was reformist, and then they met popular resistance. Today, the public is unbelievably aware of the constitution, of the world, and of its aspirations. The public is reformist.”

Seated across from Ghani, I found it hard to follow this two-hundred-year history of Afghan élitism. In retrospect, I can see its brilliance. But it still doesn't seem like a road map for governing.

It was as if, after decades of thinking and reading and writing, he had to solve all Afghanistan's problems at once. He assumed that he had a mandate from “society.” The élites were finished—“they're out of touch,” he said. He began to impose his vision on every corner of government. He retired more than a hundred generals who had been skimming money from troop contracts. He demanded the resignations of all governors and cabinet ministers, and announced that nobody who had served in those capacities could do so again, thereby alienating fifty or so political veterans in one blow. He fired forty high-level prosecutors who had falsified their résumés. From an American-built command center in the basement of one of his palaces, Ghani held regular videoconference calls with his military commanders. He reviewed the portfolios of every international donor agency. Every Saturday, he sat at a long table in a wood-paneled room in Gul Khana Palace and chaired a committee on procurements, spending several hours reviewing contracts to make sure that they represented clean government. Ghani believed that doing such chores was the only way to solve Afghanistan's core problems.

He trusted so few people that he could find nobody to hire as his spokesman, nobody to be mayor of Kabul. During cabinet meetings, some ministers felt so intimidated by Ghani that they busied themselves taking notes to impress him.

Amrullah Saleh, a respected former intelligence chief, who was left out of the administration, said, “There is a silence in his cabinet, and it's a treacherous silence. Ghani is not physically alone—he is intellectually alone.”

The public began hearing about ambitious projects. Ghani had become an authority on Afghanistan's water resources, and he announced plans for twenty-nine dams, leaving the impression that they would be finished in two years. After a conversation with Narendra Modi, the Indian Prime Minister, Ghani told aides that India's private sector would soon be investing twenty billion dollars in Afghanistan—a figure that seemed to come out of nowhere. Daniel Feldman, the American Special Representative, found Ghani's ideas equally inspiring and implausible: “We'd walk out of meetings and say, I'm not sure what country he's talking about. It's not Afghanistan. It sounds like a canton in Switzerland.”

One morning in Char Chenar Palace, Ghani met with forty-four civil servants—forty men and four women—in charge of planning a new municipality northeast of Kabul, a variation on a project that has enticed Afghan reformers since Amanullah. As the engineers stated their pedigrees and their areas of expertise, Ghani jotted down notes while snacking on nuts, taking particular pleasure in introducing aides who had gone to Harvard or who had been named Silicon Valley's engineer of the year. “I've read all the documents of the proposals you've submitted,” he said. “Let's have a discussion of them.” One by one, the engineers and city planners presented slide shows about recycling, parking garages, solar-powered buses, electronic databases for title deeds. Ghani seemed perfectly happy spending a morning hearing ideas from young technocrats. Outside the Arg, mayorless Kabul was inundated with rainwater and uncollected garbage.

**I**N “FIXING FAILED STATES,” the chapter on politics is titled “Failed Politics”—Ghani's book supposes that politics is destructive. He doesn't think in terms of interests and bargains. He believes that people will act correctly once the reasonable course is shown to them (or imposed on them). After becoming President, Ghani all but ignored the traditional politics of Afghanistan—tribal

networks, patronage systems, strongmen.

Under Karzai, politicians came to the palace with requests for money or for favors, and he heard them out. By one estimate, members of parliament stole a billion to a billion and a half dollars a year. During Ghani's first year in office, he refused to meet with favor seekers. His chief of staff, Abdul Salam Rahimi, made himself so inaccessible that the joke around Kabul was that you had to call the President to see the chief of staff. Karzai used to pay the family of a power broker named Pir Sayed Ahmed Gailani more than a hundred thousand dollars a month in “expense money” to keep its support. (Karzai denies this.) Ghani cut off the family, and Gailani's sons became Ghani's enemies. Something similar happened with Abdul Rassul Sayyaf, a former mujahid and one of the most powerful men in Afghanistan. “His initial request was for key ministries and provinces, so he could give them away,” one of Ghani's advisers told me. “He didn't get them. He was upset. What was more upsetting was he was no longer seen as close to power—he could no longer buy people's loyalty.”

In Afghanistan, politics is the only path to status and power, which is why the scramble for government jobs is so fierce. Anwar ul-Haq Ahady, a banker and former Finance Minister, supported Ghani during the election. According to Ahady, Ghani promised him the Foreign Ministry, but when the time came Ghani hedged. Ahady became an opponent as well. “I've not promised any portfolio to anyone,” Ghani told me. “Mr. Ahady, if his sense of commitment to this nation is by portfolio, then he should judge himself.”

Last year, the notorious police commander of Uruzgan Province, Matiullah Khan, was killed, and tribal elders came to Kabul to discuss his replacement. Ghani initially wouldn't see them, but his advisers insisted. The elders wanted the job to go to Matiullah Khan's brother. Ghani said that he would seek the best candidate, and later rejected their choice. In the following months, nearly two hundred security posts in the province fell to the Taliban as policemen changed their flags and switched sides.

Ghani was capable of giving in to political reality. He allowed two strongmen to stay on—Atta Mohamed Noor, the governor of Balkh Province, in the north,

and Abdul Razziq, the police chief of Kandahar—even though they were known for corruption and human-rights violations. They were essential partners in the fight against the Taliban, and under American pressure Ghani yielded.

One of Ghani's young aides told him, "People say you're not doing politics."

"What kind of politics?" Ghani asked.

"You're not meeting leaders, members of parliament, mujahideen."

"It's by choice that I don't."

"Why?" the aide asked. "These political élites are attacking you, and you're losing political capital you need for reforms."

"If I meet them, they will be all over me," Ghani replied. "First, they'll ask for my fingers, then my hands, then my legs. We will engage only if the discourse changes. When the time comes, you will see me meeting with them."

Ghani's intransigence aroused so much resentment that he couldn't get parliament to approve some of his key appointments. Until recent weeks, he had no intelligence chief and no confirmed Defense Minister. When he named a candidate to be the first female Supreme Court justice, parliament narrowly voted her down. Predictably, the National Unity Government failed to work. The signed agreement included no specifics on the distribution of appointments, and Abdullah and Ghani vetoed each other's choices, or one of them held the process hostage until the other gave in. Ghani's candidate for Attorney General was blocked while Abdullah's camp tried to get one of its own hired for Minister of Interior. One of Abdullah's top aides, a diplomat named Omar Samad, was appointed Ambassador to Belgium, the E.U., and NATO. In April, Samad was about to travel to Brussels when the President's office sent him a letter withdrawing NATO from the portfolio. Samad rejected the deal and left Kabul to be with his family in Washington. "Tiny power struggles are going on," Samad told me. "It's a game of domination."

The paralysis in Kabul so concerned Washington that President Barack Obama chided both leaders in a video-conference call in March, telling Abdul-

lah, "The political agreement that you signed with President Ghani, as far as we know, did not give you veto power." The Attorney General-Interior Minister swap finally went through. But Ghani's advisers remained frustrated, blaming the N.U.G. for their inability to carry out their agenda. It's a view that commands little sympathy in Washington.

Ghani retains the loyalty of a few protégés, among them a man in his early thirties named Hamdullah Mohib. His parents had sent him to Britain in 2000, at the age of sixteen, in order to avoid conscription by the Taliban. Arriving at Heathrow without papers or money, he was taken on by a social-services agency as an unaccompanied minor. Alone in London, Mohib worked his way through college and graduate school, studying computer engineering. In 2008, he heard about a lecture at the London School of Economics by an Afghan politician who had written a book called "Fixing Failed States." Mohib arranged to have the author speak to an Afghan student association in London. As Mohib and his friends waited for their guest to arrive, they went outside to hold parking places for the twenty-five-car entourage they expected. "I saw a man carrying his laptop bag, walking up the sidewalk," Mohib recalls. "I was impressed. And then when he started talking—I'd never heard an Afghan politician talk like this. The others—it was all a show. And here was a man, it was all substance. He didn't talk about himself.

It was about Afghanistan and what we could do to fix it."

Mohib worked on Ghani's unsuccessful 2009 campaign, and in 2014 he became a top adviser. After the election, Ghani made Mohib his deputy chief of staff, then named him Afghanistan's Ambassador to the United States. The appointment rankled senior politicians, as if Ghani had given the post to an errand boy. Ghani was signalling the eclipse of the generation of Afghans who had made their names fighting the Soviets and one another.

"This is the critical time in our country's history—my generation understands that," Mohib said. "We either build sys-

tems and institutions that will protect my family and other people's families, and good people will rise to the top—or we will lose, and the corrupt mafia win. If they win, it will be fiefdoms and the same families passing power from one generation to the next."

ONE NIGHT, I had dinner in Kot-e-Baghcha Palace with Scott Guggenheim, the American economic adviser to Ghani. He worked with Ghani at the World Bank and, in 2002, helped create the National Solidarity Program. Guggenheim, a gregarious sixty-year-old who favors Indonesian shirts, was now living virtually alone, amid servants, in the palace. Heads of state had been invited to use it as a guest house, but almost none of them would stay overnight in Kabul. Guggenheim was given the room where, in 1979, a Communist leader was said to have been smothered in his bed.

Over dinner, Guggenheim said, "Ashraf's biggest problem is not that he's a bad politician but that he has a twenty-five-year vision and everyone thinks it means next year. He throws out completely unrealistic dates as placeholders." Guggenheim described the terrible hand that had been dealt to Ghani, who took office amid the withdrawal of nearly all foreign troops. Afghanistan's legal economy depended on U.S. bases and contracts, and after the withdrawal unemployment reached forty per cent—a disaster that the World Bank underestimated so drastically that donors hadn't earmarked money for an emergency jobs program. American spending in Afghanistan went from about a hundred billion dollars in 2012 to half that last year. At the same time, the Afghan Army had to assume full responsibility for fighting a resurgent Taliban, with fewer weapons. Guggenheim compared the start of Ghani's Presidency with Obama's in 2009—"but with John Boehner as his Vice-President." Hopelessness returned among Afghans, and a hundred and fifty-four thousand of them emigrated to Germany last year. Ghani chastised citizens for fleeing their country.

The Americans, Guggenheim went on, wanted Ghani to pursue incompatible paths: to fight corruption while keeping the corrupt Old Guard in the fold. Few people in Kabul could say what America's policy in Afghanistan was. "Ask





any senior U.S. statesman: Is there any strategy at all, besides withdrawal?" Guggenheim said. "They were so focussed on that unity government, getting it to hold together, they forgot about having an effective government."

Around Kabul, people were waiting to see if the government would fall. Peace talks that Ghani had initiated with Pakistan were going nowhere. Afghanistan's double-dealing neighbor had been unable, or unwilling, to bring the Taliban to the table. Why would Pakistan negotiate an end to the war when it was close to securing its goal—an Afghanistan so weakened by the Taliban that it would become a client state? The fighting season was expected to be worse than ever. A Western diplomat took out a map and showed me Taliban positions north of Kabul, along a strategic highway in Baghlan Province. "If Baghlan falls to the Taliban, they're very quickly on their way to Kabul," the diplomat said. The Afghan Army would concentrate its forces on defending provincial capitals while ceding rural areas, but this meant that the government would keep losing ground. At the American Embassy, officials were said to be reading cables sent from the Embassy in Saigon in 1975, just before the American evacuation of South Vietnam.

The Afghan Army is constantly on the defensive, suffering heavy casualties. Without the continued presence of American troops in the country, it would very likely collapse. In a return to "the Great Game" of the nineteenth century, Afghanistan would be exploited by its neighbors—Russia, Iran, Pakistan, China, and India. "We need what's called a 'hurting stalemate,'" another Western official told me. "Because there are élites in Kabul and Islamabad and Rawalpindi who shop in the same malls in Dubai and are happy for the war to grind on." He added, "Over ten years, we've gone from trying to bring good governance and security and development and rule of law to survival. . . . There's still a lot of ways the government could fall." He mentioned the possibility of widespread public unrest. Last November, after the Islamic State decapitated seven Hazara civilians in southern Afghanistan, thousands of citizens nearly overran the Arg, and some palace officials imagined themselves going the way of their predecessors.



"Oh, you do it *that* way, do you?"

The other path for Ghani's fall is political. Recently, he has been more willing to play by the old rules—for example, he named Gailani to the sinecure position of chairman of the High Peace Council. But the powerful men Ghani has angered are plotting their way back into power. The agreement signed nearly two years ago by Ghani and Abdullah called for electoral reforms, local elections, and a constitutional assembly to be completed by September of this year, in order to enshrine Abdullah's job in the constitution. None of this has happened, or will anytime soon, because of political infighting and the war—giving Ghani's enemies an opening to denounce the government's legitimacy. Karzai, who meets regularly with the opposition, is said to advocate the convening of a *loya jirga*, a traditional assembly, which could lead to Ghani's ouster and the naming of a new President. Umer Daudzai, Karzai's former chief of staff—who had been the point man for handling cash from the Iranian regime, with a bill-counting machine in his office—told me, "Ghani has made everybody around him an enemy. There's nobody left. One day, I was watching his wife on TV, and my wife said, 'Why are you watching her so closely?' I said, 'I'm waiting for her to explode—*Rescue me!*'" Daudzai has formed a political coalition to take over the Arg when the chance comes. "If there is going to be change, there is only one way," he said. "Ghani resigns." A Western official with long ex-

perience in Afghanistan told me that the notion of a junta installed by a military coup was not far-fetched.

In Kabul, there is strikingly little evidence of the long and costly American effort. I asked Amrullah Saleh, the former head of intelligence, what had been achieved in Afghanistan in the past fifteen years. "From the American point of view, very little," he said. "From the Afghan point of view, very much. I may have a lot of personal grievances, but, if you look at the picture from a bird's eye, things have changed enormously." Saleh didn't mean roads or dams. He meant the transformation of Afghan society, of public discourse, among activists and intellectuals, women and youth. "Prior to 9/11, the biggest theme of our discussion was: How do you form a state? Today, it's not that. The biggest discourse today is how the state can deliver, how the state can survive, how Afghanistan's diversity can remain intact, and how it can be a partner with the world community."

Those themes have engaged Ghani throughout his life. Although Saleh is one of his critics, he believed that Ghani could still do important things, and he did not want to see him go the way of other reformers in Afghan history. "For me, the pain is that as people see very little being delivered by this government, by this President, it will not only mean the failure of Ashraf Ghani," Saleh said. "It will also mean the failure of technocracy in Afghan politics." ♦

# SWIMMING WITH SHARKS

*Loïc Gouzer has made millions for Christie's by subjecting it to greater risk.*

BY REBECCA MEAD

CHRISTIE'S, THE AUCTION house, celebrates its two-hundred-and-fiftieth anniversary this year, and over time the origins of certain company traditions have become obscure. Nobody is certain, for example, why the examination that art works undergo upon arrival is called a "hilling session," though one theory is that it derives from the necessity of rolling paintings and sculptures up a slope to reach the company's first warehouse, in West London. On an afternoon in March, Loïc Gouzer, a specialist in contemporary art at Christie's New York, attended a hilling session to survey several works that had been secured for an upcoming auction. A team of cataloguers and fellow-specialists was present when Gouzer arrived at the Christie's office in Rockefeller Center. He was dressed with cultivated dishevelment—well-cut blue suit, crisp white shirt, open at the neck, red Adidas sneakers, a scruff of beard—and carried an e-cigarette and a bag of chocolate Easter eggs.

Propped against a wall was a large wooden panel bearing the image of a lurid Devil with a distended scrotum: "Castrati Satan," a 1995 work by Mike Kelley. Gouzer peered at the acrylic paint to judge its condition. "When I spoke with the designer, he said, 'What do you think the estimate should be?'" Gouzer remarked. "I said, 'I don't know.' And I asked him, and he said, 'I don't know.' So we just decided to wing it." He moved on to "Throwing Up a Brick," by David Hammons, which the artist had made by repeatedly bouncing on white paper a basketball covered in graphite and dirt, creating a cloud-like field of imprints. "It's almost like a Pollockian gesture," Gouzer said.

On a table, a small wooden box, lined with orange felt, contained a blown-glass vessel reminiscent of a Christmas ornament. It was a 1964 work by Marcel Duchamp, titled "50 cc of Paris Air."

Gouzer picked it up with nonchalance; his associates flinched as he examined it from various angles, until it was safely returned to the box. For the auction, it was given a high estimate of four hundred thousand dollars. Also on the table was a drawing, by Jim Shaw, of a woman's face with distorted features and a gaping mouth. "At auction, Shaw's market is terrible," Gouzer said. He hoped that if he presented Shaw's work amid more coveted objects people would "look at him with a fresh eye." He joked that the Shaw had been "as difficult to get as 'Les Femmes d'Alger'"—a Picasso painting that sold in May, 2015, for just over a hundred and seventy-nine million dollars, in a sale that Gouzer organized for Christie's. It was the highest price ever paid for a painting at auction.

Gouzer, who is thirty-six and Swiss, has worked at Christie's for five years, and is a pioneer of the themed sale, a stand-alone auction separate from the traditional engagements on the house's calendar. The Picasso was the highlight of a themed sale called "Looking Forward to the Past," which combined pieces by contemporary artists such as Jean-Michel Basquiat and John Currin with works by Picasso, Dubuffet, and Monet. "If you start putting works around another work, they give each other meaning," Gouzer says. "Each of the works are in dialogue, and they help each other."

In the past decade, the prices for postwar works have sometimes exceeded those for early-twentieth-century masterpieces. "We would always say, 'Warhol is the Picasso of our time,' and then at some point you realized that Warhol was more expensive than Picasso," Gouzer told me. "In French, we have this expression—'You have to put the church back in the middle of the town.' In our world, everything articulates somehow around Picasso, so I started thinking we should bring Pi-

casso back into the middle of the town."

"Looking Forward to the Past" brought in more than seven hundred million dollars. In addition to the Picasso triumph, it established seven other records, including that for the most expensive sculpture sold at auction: Giacometti's "Pointing Man," for a hundred and forty-one million dollars. After the sale's success, Gouzer was promoted to deputy chairman of postwar and contemporary art.

Traditionally, employees at auction houses court collectors for years, waiting for them to divorce, run into debt, or die—the so-called "three 'D's.'" Gouzer is less patient. He dislodges works from collections through dogged persuasion, sometimes with substantial guaranteed prices backed by Christie's or by a third party. Promising a minimum price at auction can coax an owner into selling, but it leaves the auction house vulnerable. If the house guarantees a work and it fails to sell, the house is obliged to buy it, and then attempt to sell it privately. Meanwhile, if a third party guarantees a work and it sells to a different bidder, the guarantor may get a share of the upside.

Gouzer enjoys taking such gambles. Amy Cappellazzo, who was formerly the chairman of contemporary art at Christie's and is now the chairman of the fine-art division at Sotheby's, says of Gouzer, "He has a very good appetite for risk." Gouzer combines a mannerly European smoothness with a get-it-done, American-style bro-ishness. Christophe van de Weghe, a dealer and a friend, says of him, "He has the ability to talk about millions of dollars like it's not that big of a deal."

Gouzer's boss, Brett Gorvy, the international head of contemporary art at Christie's, told me, "Loïc has a tendency to be emotional and petulant, like a child. You want to slap him across the face, in a way. It's part of his charm." Sandy

*Gouzer (shown with a Jeff Koons sculpture) combines a mannerly European smoothness with an American-style bro-ishness.*





Heller, an art adviser who works with the hedge-fund manager Steven Cohen, among other clients, says, “He’s very pushy. He says, ‘I want that piece of art,’ and I say, ‘It’s on my client’s wall, and it’s not going anywhere.’” Gouzer acknowledges, “I am not a good courter. I am more of a torturer. I will make your life miserable until you give up.”

GOUZER IS NOT the first specialist to curate themed sales—Philippe Ségalot, formerly of Christie’s and now a private dealer, adopted a similar approach before Gouzer came along. Nor did Gouzer invent the practice of offering wary consigners guaranteed minimum prices. Auction houses have done so for decades, more sparingly. But he has been unusually aggressive in challenging industry conventions, and has emerged at a moment when the sums being spent on art have become absurdly high.

A generation ago, the wealthiest art buyers sought to build collections of canonical works, many of them decorative. (The Impressionists were popular among the investment-banker class of the nineteen-eighties.) But today’s collectors of contemporary art, having made their fortunes in the tech industry or in hedge funds, are more entrepreneurial. They are less beholden to art history, and often less cognizant of it. Gouzer is their peer, generationally and culturally. A tech billionaire might say that adventurousness is Gouzer’s personal brand. He surfs off Montauk, where he has a house. (He also rents a penthouse in Chelsea.) He flies to remote islands to go spearfishing with a gang of guy friends. Gouzer is an adept user of Instagram—his bio reads “Art, sharks and stupid stuff”—and his account could be curated by Anthony Bourdain: Gouzer in a wetsuit, underwater, well within snapping range of some sharks; Gouzer on a tropical beach, holding a dead dog-tooth tuna up to his shoulder, as if it were a rifle. As a fashion spread that he recently did for *L’Uomo Vogue* confirmed, Gouzer, who is unmarried, has the looks of a movie star, even when he’s mugging for the camera with Adrien Brody on a late-night bender in Hong Kong.

Gouzer is friends with people who, it is safe to assume, have enough friends already. Paris Hilton comes to his auctions, and she and Gouzer exchange cute com-

ments on social media. (“Look who is turning into an art expert!” Gouzer wrote on her Instagram, after she posted an image of a Takashi Murakami painting while at Art Basel Hong Kong, in March.) Leonardo DiCaprio is one of Gouzer’s close friends, and in 2013 they organized a benefit auction that raised thirty-nine million dollars on behalf of wildlife and the environment. Gouzer is on the board of Oceana, the conservation nonprofit, and has extracted millions of dollars from sometimes reluctant donors. “There is not that much cross-pollination between contemporary collectors and nature—if they give, they give to museums,” he told me, with frustration. “You can’t put your name on the ocean, or the Sumatran rain forest.” A few years ago, he organized an auction of an Yves Klein painting, the owner of which had agreed to donate some of the proceeds to Oceana. Before the auction, the actress January Jones hosted a screening of a movie about Klein, and Gouzer introduced her to the audience, saying, “I promised myself I wouldn’t propose tonight.” The painting sold for thirty-six million dollars.

Buying art offers an ordinary rich person the means of becoming a member of an exclusive club. “If you made six billion dollars selling chicken wings in Southeast Asia, you are just another billionaire,” Gouzer told me. “It is not even cool to be a billionaire anymore—there are, like, two hundred of them. But, if that same guy buys a painting, suddenly it puts you in a whole circle. You have an oligarch who could buy that building, or that soccer team. Then one day they buy a painting and they enter a whole circuit. You are going to meet artists, you are going to meet tech guys. It is the fastest way to become an international name.”

With contemporary art having become an important investment vehicle for the superwealthy—a profitable and fun place for the rich to park their money—collectors are no longer necessarily connoisseurs. Gouzer is disdainful of the novice client who shows no interest in an artist’s catalogue raisonné, and who wants to know only if the piece he is buying is considered to be in the top ten of the artist’s works. “It’s very much an Instagram way of buying,” he grumbled to me this spring. “You see an image, and you make a decision.” Yet his approach could not be better calcu-

lated to appeal to such consumers. Last November, a colleague at Christie’s brought to auction a Modigliani painting of a voluptuous woman, “Reclining Nude,” which had a presale estimate of a hundred million dollars. Gouzer posted an image of the painting on Instagram and offered this unscholarly observation: “Difficult to say which you would want more, the painting for a lifetime or the model for a night?”

The Modigliani was the highlight of the fall auction season in New York: it sold for a hundred and seventy million dollars to Liu Yiquan, a Chinese financier who got his start as a taxi-driver. But this success took place amid a contracting market. Global art sales declined seven per cent last year, from \$68.2 billion to \$63.8 billion, according to the European Fine Art Foundation. It was the first downturn since 2011, and was caused, in part, by economic uncertainty in China. Christie’s is privately owned, by François Pinault, the French businessman, and the company is not obliged to disclose its balance sheet, but not long ago it announced that its sales declined by five per cent in 2015. (Sotheby’s, which is publicly traded, reported losses of eleven million dollars for the fourth quarter of 2015.)

By early 2016, when Gouzer was beginning to conceptualize his next themed sale, he wanted to strike a different note from that of “Looking Forward to the Past.” He decided to explore failure. In an e-mail to senior colleagues, he explained, “The main idea behind this auction is that it is not a good idea, which is actually why we believe it’s a good idea. The art market is in a particularly weird place right now, between the doomsday scenario of the art bubble exploding in our face, the stock market collapsing, the interest rate shooting up, and the emerging economies being annihilated on the one hand, and on the other hand the reports of collectors splashing record amounts of money on Pollocks and de Koonings.”

The sale’s title, “Bound to Fail,” was borrowed from a work by Bruce Nauman, “Henry Moore: Bound to Fail”: a cast-iron rendering of Nauman’s back, wrapped in ropes. Failure, Gouzer wrote in his e-mail, “is creation’s best friend.” He went on, “All artists dread it, but at the same time that dread is necessary, and many artists made failure one of the central tenets of their work.” Gouzer

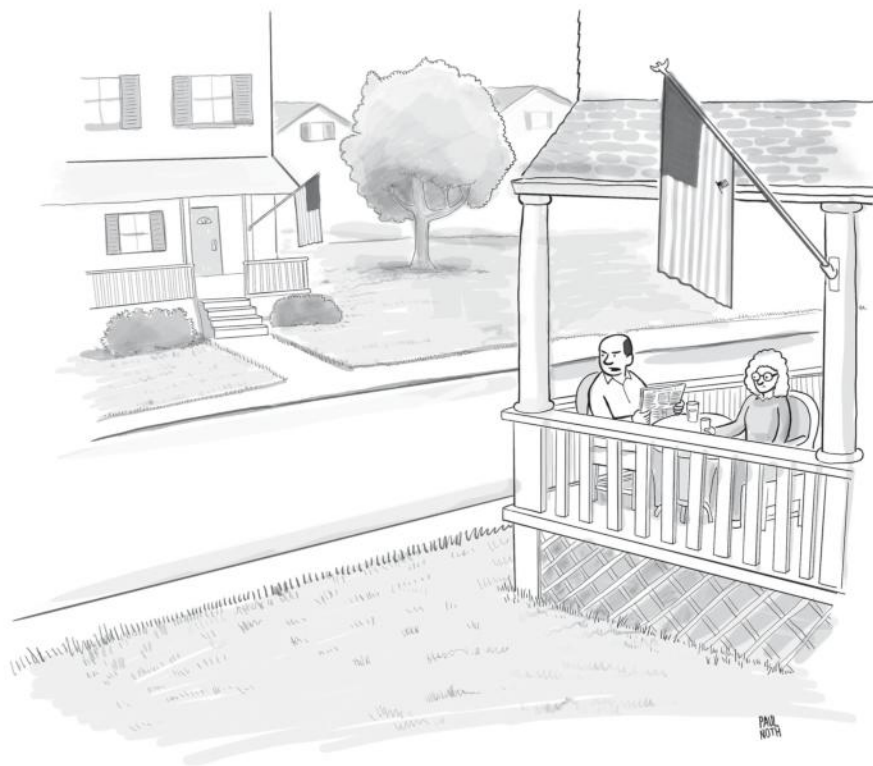


proposed facing the uncertainty in the art market head on: “Let’s have fun making fun of the situation (and money as well).”

Christie’s did not entirely share this daredevil spirit, and for “Bound to Fail” Gouzer had far less leeway to offer guarantees than when he had organized “Looking Forward to the Past”; for that sale, about half the lots carried a guarantee either granted by Christie’s or offset to third parties. Being able to offer guarantees as inducements to sell was an important element in securing the first consignments, which inspired other collectors to offer marquee works for auction. Before approaching the owner of “Les Femmes d’Alger”—reportedly, a Saudi collector—Gouzer and Brett Gorvy, the contemporary-art head, secured another Picasso, a portrait of Dora Maar that was owned by Steve Wynn, the casino mogul. They offered Wynn a guarantee from a collector who had never seen the actual work. This agreement positioned them to offer “Les Femmes d’Alger” at auction with a low estimate of a hundred and forty million dollars. “I relate it a lot to my spearfishing—you don’t know why, but you know that if you dive *now* the big fish is going to come,” Gouzer once told me. “When you’re at the surface, you don’t see anything, but you just have this instinct that it is going to happen. In art, it is the same thing—this instinct sometimes that I know a painting is going to move.”

One morning in early April, Gouzer explained that for “Bound to Fail” he had to find paintings through strategies other than guarantees. We were in his office, a smallish space with a high window. (Gorvy, who works in the adjacent office, told me, “There’s a glass panel above the door, so when my door is closed I will see this guy pogoing, this head popping up, to get my attention.”) A red upholstered couch, which Gouzer purchased from Christie’s downstairs, was set under the window. “They wouldn’t let me have a couch in my office, so I bought one here, so they couldn’t take it away,” he said.

Against a bookshelf leaned a pinboard covered with postage-stamp-size images of art: pieces that Gouzer had either obtained or hoped to obtain for “Bound to Fail.” He uses the board to determine the sequence of the auction, which is carefully choreographed. The idea is to build momentum gradually in the first few lots, so that buyers get in the mood



*“I can’t believe their flag isn’t even wearing a flag pin.”*

but don’t feel manipulated by hype. Given the importance of the Chinese market, it’s also important to remember, say, that a Beijing billionaire considers eight to be a lucky number. “Reclining Nude” and “Les Femmes d’Alger” were both Lot 8.

“Bound to Fail” would not contain Picasso blockbusters. Rather, it would feature artists whom Gouzer admired but whose work had not been doing well at auction; or artists who drew on failure as a theme; or works that were prone to degrade, because they contained non-traditional materials. One image on the pinboard depicted a Richard Prince sculpture: a cast of the hood of a sports car. Prince had made dozens of such pieces, and Gouzer, thinking that they were undervalued, had obtained one for the sale. He had also acquired a wooden frame covered with steel nails, by Sigmar Polke; to complete the piece, fresh potatoes would be skewered on the nails.

Also pinned to the board was an image of a Martin Kippenberger sculpture. Depicting a figure standing with his head bowed and his hands held behind his back, it was called “Martin, Into the Corner, You Should Be Ashamed of Your-

self.” The sculpture existed in an edition of six, with an artist’s proof. “I have been trying desperately to get one, and I have failed,” Gouzer said. “I could not get them to sell. I look at the board and I see only the mistakes and the holes. I feel a bit like the Kippenberger right now.” There was one strategy left: he posted an image of the work to Instagram. “Would kill 🍷 to have in #boundtofail auction and ready to offer significant 💰💰💰 for it,” his description said. “Any ideas?”

**G**OUZER GREW UP in Geneva, the eldest of four children. “He was a troublesome young man,” his mother, Elka Gouzer, a lawyer of Viennese Jewish descent, told me. “He was very turbulent as a child, and as a teen-ager, and had trouble accepting authority and regulations.” He hoped to become an artist, but in his teens he gave up painting, having realized that he would never be as good as the artists he most admired, such as Jean-Michel Basquiat. He first encountered Basquiat’s work on an advertising poster for a local play, which used a reproduction of the 1982 painting “Untitled (Head of a

Madman),” a scrawled, skeletal portrait in vivid blue and orange. A few years ago, Gouzer brought the real “Madman” to auction, where it sold for more than twelve million dollars, establishing a record for a work on paper by the artist.

Gouzer’s father was a shipping executive who came from an oyster-farming family in Brittany. Gouzer’s great-great-uncle was a doctor in the town of Pont-Aven, and one of his patients was Paul Gauguin. At that point, Gouzer said, “no one was even listening to Gauguin’s theories about art, but his doctor would listen to him.” A friendship grew, and the doctor came to own one of Gauguin’s Tahitian paintings. Gouzer’s grandfather inherited it, but he sold it in the nineteen-fifties, after a starfish attack laid waste to the family oyster harvest. The painting is now owned by the Metropolitan Museum. “That was always in the background—that there was a painting that was worth so much money from an artist that no one cared about,” Gouzer told me.

Gouzer went to his first art fair, in Basel, while still in high school. He had many questions for the dealers, he said, but “no one would pay any attention.” When he went again the following year, he pretended to be a scion of the Sonnabend family—important dealers of twentieth-century art. “I think any pro dealer would have said, ‘There is no Sonnabend kid with a French accent,’ but other younger ones would say, ‘We might as well answer his questions,’” Gouzer says. He was a feckless student, and transferred from private school to public school, where he was expelled for misbehavior. After completing his *baccalauréat* at a crammer in France, he evaded national military service by exaggerating a back injury.

In the summer of 2001, he began a road trip through Asia with a close friend, Guillaume Barazzone, who is now the mayor of Geneva. In China, Gouzer got to know a number of emerging artists, including Ai Weiwei and Fang Lijun. Gouzer recalls being a figure of interest because he had seen “Sensation,” the 1997 show in London that featured works by Damien Hirst, Tracey Emin, and others classified as the Young British Artists. “That show was their bible,” Gouzer said of the Chinese artists. “All those guys wanted to meet me and hear me explain how this exhibition was.” At one point

during the trip, he and Barazzone went to Ulaanbaatar, with plans to travel around Mongolia. Barazzone recalls that Gouzer noticed two women in a bakery. “In ten minutes, he had convinced these two Norwegian girls to come with us,” Barazzone told me. “He decides he wants something, and in five minutes he got these two girls, in the middle of nowhere. So that completely changed the face of the trip.”

When Gouzer returned to Geneva, he organized a sale of Chinese works of art at a local gallery, encouraging family and friends to buy pieces. Gouzer told me, “My dad said, ‘Who do you think you are? We can’t just buy the first artist you like—this is a lot of money!’” A few years later, a painting that Gouzer had recommended came to auction and sold for eight million dollars. “I remember taking the catalogue and showing it to my parents and saying, ‘See, you should have bought the entire studio instead of yelling at me,’” he says. In the fall of 2001, Gouzer left Geneva for England, where he studied art history at University College London. He hung out at galleries and started attending auctions, occasionally buying and selling works on paper. “I fell into it,” he says.

Gouzer wrote a senior thesis on Maurizio Cattelan, the Italian artist, arguing, “Cattelan’s tactics are those of the traditional court jester, who uses humour and the fool’s license to convey truths which, otherwise, could not be expressed.” After graduating, he was hired at the London office of Sotheby’s, where he started out



in the basement, cataloguing information about works that were arriving for evaluation. “You were covered with dust, but you still had to wear a suit,” Gouzer recalls. The work was not a good fit for him: “I am completely dyslexic and disorganized, and suddenly there was this world where everything has to be precise, and the right orientation.” Nonetheless, it was instructive. “When you have so many works that go through your hands, you develop some kind of in-

stinct,” he told me. “You know if something is right or not right, if it is going to do well or not do well, if it is repainted or the colors are not correct.”

Two years ago, to promote a themed sale called “If I Live I’ll See You Tuesday”—the phrase comes from a work by Richard Prince—Gouzer produced a video that paid tribute to the hidden industry inside an auction house. It featured Chris Martin, a professional skateboarder, gliding through the dark, cluttered basement of Christie’s, kicking up his board as he skimmed by a Warhol, high-fiving an art handler as he passed a Rudolf Stingel, and tumbling from his board after executing a boardslide near a Kippenberger self-portrait. Gouzer had a cameo role. Wearing a suit and sneakers, he sat in the decorative-arts section of the warehouse, leafing through a catalogue, unperturbed, as Martin propelled his board over a nearby stack of folded carpets. The self-conscious coolness of the video met with some derision—“If I stop eye-rolling, I’ll see you Tuesday,” one art critic wrote—but the sale was a success, with the Kippenberger selling for \$18.6 million, six million more than its high estimate.

Gouzer escaped from the Sotheby’s basement after he persuaded a superior, Francis Outred, to include a number of Chinese works in a 2006 auction; they did well. Outred told me, “He was very in tune with the market, and people’s taste, and always looking out for what the next big thing could be.” Gouzer was given more responsibility, and the next season he secured his first in-house guarantee, of about \$1.6 million, for a portrait of Pope Innocent X by Yue Minjun, which was owned by a Dutch collector of Gouzer’s acquaintance. The painting, an homage to a Francis Bacon homage to a famed Velázquez portrait, showed a smiling, seated Pope with his underpants exposed. “Although at first I thought that it was slightly crass to see a Chinese artist copying a historic Western artist, it was actually a very good painting,” Outred says. The value of Yue’s work was rising, and Bacon’s work was setting record prices. “It felt like a painting for the moment,” Outred told me. It sold for more than four million dollars.

By the time of the Yue sale, Gouzer had transferred to Sotheby’s New York office, in part at the urging of a girlfriend, who wanted to live in the city, and in part



## JUVENILES

At dawn, the birds storm  
the back yard like a country  
they are astonished to have  
won without a single shot  
fired. There is no end  
to its richness, every seed  
tasting like a year.  
They have no superstitions.  
They celebrate in  
monosyllables.  
They cannot feel the god  
who lives in the wires  
strung over our houses  
no matter how tightly  
they grasp him with their feet.  
The sky is one long drink.  
They will never know the quiet  
hands with which we hold them  
when we find them  
under the hedge at dusk.

—Nicky Beer

to be “closer to the central nervous system of the art world.” At Sotheby’s New York, Gouzer became a junior specialist in the contemporary department, which was then headed by Alex Rotter, an Austrian whom Gouzer knew from London. Rotter told me, “He was my guy, in terms of driving me crazy, challenging me, and coming up with the most infuriating, ingenious ideas. A lot of the big art thinkers stand for the intellectual aspect of art. Loïc was always very clear: *We sell art.*” Gouzer began proposing deals that were structured with several contingent steps, involving multiple parties. “He was definitely the one saying, ‘How can this be done, and how can it be paid for?’” Rotter says. “Like, ‘He can’t pay now, but he’s paying with another art work, so let’s try to structure a deal.’” Such arrangements made intuitive sense in an era when many Wall Street fortunes were made by leveraging an array of arcane financial instruments.

Gouzer began to establish a roster of reliable guarantors, including Abdallah Chatila, a Swiss businessman with whom he had fallen into conversation while waiting for a transatlantic flight. Chatila had only a cursory interest in art, but he was persuaded by the economics of collecting. “He started telling me there

is this artist called Kippenberger—I didn’t know who Kippenberger was,” Chatila told me. “He said, ‘Look, it’s four million dollars, I think you will make money.’” Chatila guaranteed the piece, which sold to another buyer, for \$4.1 million. In 2010, Gouzer urged Chatila to guarantee a work by Gerhard Richter for five million dollars; it sold for \$11.3 million, and Chatila shared in the profits. “I was convinced because *he* was convinced,” Chatila said.

Gouzer was highly entrepreneurial in his attempts to develop new collectors. In 2006, when Russia’s new wealthy class was emerging, Gouzer and Rotter took to Moscow a dozen works that were soon to be auctioned in New York. They rented out a space in a luxury mall. “Loïc was, like, ‘Let’s make it into a party,’” Rotter said. “It was a big space, and it was very valuable art—Richard Prince, Jeff Koons—worth tens of millions of dollars. We had disco lighting, strobe lighting. One of the pieces was a Richard Prince ‘nurse painting’”—a series of works inspired by the covers of pulp novels. “Loïc had the idea ‘Let’s hire some nurses to stand next to the painting.’ So he found some ladies who dressed up as nurses for him.” Gouzer acknowledges,

“I earmarked a tiny part of the budget for nurse waitresses.” But, he added, “it definitely didn’t go under that title on the financial debrief of the exhibition.”

Gouzer also befriended many powerful American collectors. Adam Lindemann, who owns the Venus Over Manhattan gallery, recalls, “I wouldn’t talk to him, because he was an underling at Sotheby’s. But I was looking for someone to ski with in Alaska, and he was the only person in the art world who would go.” By day, Lindemann and Gouzer skied on the Tordrillo glacier—“The game was to ski as fast as you can, and to crash into the other guy, and knock the other guy over,” Lindemann told me—and by night they talked about art. Not long afterward, Lindemann was planning a surfing trip to the Maldives with a hedge-fund friend who collected art. “I asked him if I could bring along a sidekick,” Lindemann recalled. “I asked Loïc if he wanted to fly to the other side of the world and surf, and he said, ‘Sure, no problem.’ There was only one small detail—that he had never surfed before.” Gouzer braved the waves, and has since become a creditable surfer. (His Instagram recently showed him catching a wave at Nihiwatu, an exclusive Indonesian resort.) “Loïc always has business in mind,” Lindemann said. “He knew that if he met me at a cocktail party and then spent the week with me skiing in Alaska that he would get my business.” Since then, Lindemann said, Gouzer had sold “plenty” of pieces for him.

Some colleagues at the auction house criticized Gouzer’s lack of regard for long-established relationships. On one occasion, he was pursuing a painting, and identified its owner as a plastic surgeon, in Manhattan, who already had a relationship with someone at Sotheby’s. Gouzer called the surgeon’s office and made an appointment to have a mole removed. In the consulting room, he turned the conversation to art.

Others objected to the exemptions he seemed to be granted from the conventions of corporate life. The workday began at 9 A.M.; Gouzer rolled in at ten, often in rumpled clothes. Rotter notes, “At Sotheby’s, you wear a suit and a tie. Sometimes he didn’t shave for days.” Gouzer clashed with Tobias Meyer, an elegant German, seventeen years Gouzer’s senior, who was then Sotheby’s worldwide head of contemporary art. “Tobias is super-talented, but

a lot of that is theatre,” Sandy Heller, the art adviser, told me. “Loïc is not theatre. Loïc is, like, bombs going off everywhere.” By the fall of 2010, it had become clear that Meyer considered Gouzer’s position in the contemporary-art department to be untenable.

Before things at Sotheby’s reached a crisis point, Gouzer had been quietly talking to Steven Murphy, at that time the C.E.O. of Christie’s, who had heard of Gouzer’s prowess and called him up. “We had a series of meetings at my town house, on East Eighty-fifth Street,” Murphy told me. “When he arrived at the door for the first meeting, it was opened by my now twenty-nine-year-old daughter, who stepped back at the sight of this young Belmondo with a cigarette.” Murphy was impressed for different reasons: “The conversation immediately moved into philosophy about the art world, and art, and how creativity ran up against the teeth of bureaucracy.”

While at Sotheby’s, Gouzer had made another useful contact: François Pinault. He had cold-called him one day, and they had hit it off. Like Gouzer’s father, Pinault is from Brittany, which has a proud regional identity. “Loïc has a solid will and determination, he is hardworking, he is imaginative and nonconformist,” Pinault told me, by e-mail. “Like every Breton, his personality is a mixture of toughness and melancholy.”

When Pinault heard of Gouzer’s departure from Sotheby’s, he called him. Gouzer, who had been celebrating Christmas in Brittany and was en route to a skiing vacation in the Alps, stopped in Paris to meet with Pinault. He arrived bearing a gift of oysters from his uncle’s farm. (“The quality of his uncle’s oysters is unique,” Pinault testified.) A few days later, Brett Gorvy sought out Gouzer. “He was skiing in Verbier, and I took three or four trains to get there,” Gorvy told me. Over lunch, they agreed on terms. As Gouzer recalls it, “They said, ‘Loïc, we don’t care.’ They didn’t care that I wasn’t there on time, that I wasn’t shaved. They said, ‘You can come in pajamas, so long as you deliver.’”

ONE AFTERNOON IN mid-April, Gouzer was in an upstairs showroom at Christie’s, waiting for Jeff Koons to arrive to shoot a video promoting “One Ball Total Equilibrium Tank,” one of the

prizes of the “Bound to Fail” sale. The work, created in 1985, consists of a water-filled glass tank, at the center of which is a Spalding basketball, in apparent defiance of gravity and buoyancy. The effect depends on a carefully titrated combination of distilled and saline water; a technician from the Koons studio had spent the morning making the aqueous recipe. “For me, it is Koons’s most important work,” Gouzer said. After a few months, the distilled and saline layers of water intermingle, and the tank must be filled anew. “It is bound to fail because when it is at the collector’s house the ball will sink to the bottom,” he added.

When Koons arrived, Gouzer greeted him and said, “It’s my favorite work of art, practically since I grew up.” Koons smiled graciously. Gouzer pulled out his iPhone to show Koons the inspiration for another promotional video for the sale, which had been shot that morning: the first few seconds of “2001: A Space Odyssey,” in which a distant sun rises behind Earth to the strains of “Also Sprach Zarathustra.” In the promotional video, the basketball would stand in for Earth. Koons did not seem displeased by the irreverence.

Koons sat for an on-camera interview, and said of the immersed basketball, “You’re in the womb. It’s pre-birth, but at the same time it’s after death.” Gouzer had sought to include “One Ball Total Equilibrium Tank” in every themed sale he had curated. But its owner, Peter Brant, the collector and industrialist, had declined his overtures until a few weeks earlier. “He basically squeezed—he just didn’t let go,” Brant told me. “He tried very hard, and kept calling me back.”

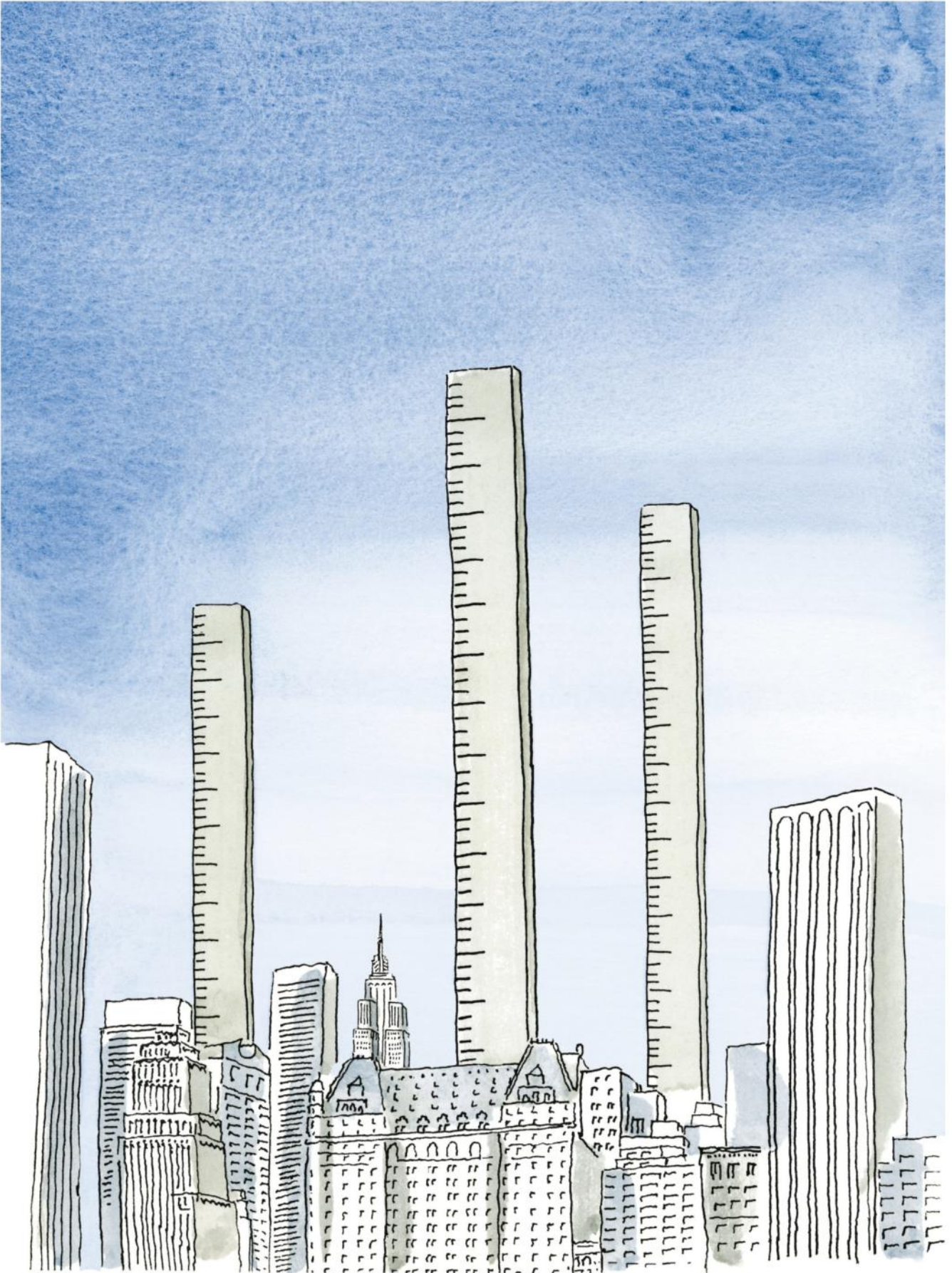
Brant had not surrendered out of the goodness of his heart: Gouzer had secured for him a third-party guarantee. The estimate for the work would be in the region of twelve million dollars—far higher than the auction price of any of Koons’s comparable works. (A tank containing two balls had been in the “If I Live I’ll See You Tuesday” sale; it had sold for nearly \$6.9 million, a little above its high estimate of six million.) “The offer I did is very aggressive,” Gouzer said. “The correct estimate for the work is eight to twelve million, if you go by Artnet”—the database that many industry professionals use to generate comparison prices

for works. “When I do those aggressive deals, for a while you have yelling and screaming. And then people start digesting. So, ideally, by the time of the presale view, people just talk about the work.” Gouzer said that he had tried to get the work at a lower guarantee price, but had been unable to make the deal. “I told the guarantor, ‘I am possibly wrong by one to two million dollars, but in one to two years this is going to be worth what you paid, or even twenty million.’ I think this is going to be worth a *hundred* million one day.”

Gouzer’s admirers point to his impressive track record in predicting markets. “He has a safecracker’s touch for what the atmosphere is like for the buying audience,” Steven Murphy, the former Christie’s C.E.O., told me. But not every painting sold by Gouzer has held on to its value. Earlier this year, Basquiat’s “Head of a Madman” came back on the market, and sold at Sotheby’s in London for nine million dollars—three million less than its record-breaking price. It was sold by Jho Low, a young Malaysian businessman who appeared in the art world a few years ago and started spending astronomical sums; according to the *Wall Street Journal*, he has been linked to an ongoing financial scandal in Malaysia. Gouzer stands by his valuation: “If I had to bet on ten works of art today in the ten-million-dollar range that are going to be worth at least fifty million, that is definitely one of them.”

Gouzer’s themed sales offer collectors something beyond the chance to buy a painting; they promise access to his apparently charmed world. His association with DiCaprio, especially, has been a powerful allure. “It gives it an aura of momentum and celebrity and party—gives it a sex appeal,” Adam Lindemann told me. At the same time, some observers suggest that Gouzer’s sales are flimsy marketing exercises, bestowing an insubstantial veneer of coherence on a gathering of works that might just as easily appear in Christie’s traditional evening sales. Gouzer’s events are sometimes dismissed as fake drama, since in many cases the works have been effectively sold in advance, either with a guarantee or with an informal understanding between collector and auction house. “It is weakly opportunistic,” Todd Levin, an art adviser in New York, told





me. "If one is assembling a sale of post-war and contemporary art, or Impressionist art, or Chinese porcelain, one is limited to accessing consigned art works that fit within that specific category, while in competition with the other auction houses. With a 'curated' sale, anything goes. In essence, it's just a garage sale of art works that are largely presold."

Gouzer argues that his detractors and competitors have adopted his methods. Last year, Sotheby's promoted a charity auction with a video that baldly appropriated Gouzer's skateboarding stunt: it showed John Farnworth, the freestyle-soccer champion, dribbling and heading a ball through the lobby of Sotheby's London headquarters and into showrooms hung with works by Yan Pei-Ming and Damien Hirst. Gouzer told me, "A guy like McEnroe changed tennis forever. Federer changed it in another way. They didn't break rules, but they looked at tennis *differently*. Or take polo—this very gentlemanly sport. Players would play; the horse would get tired; the player would get down and have someone help him get on another horse. Adolfo Cambiaso was the first guy who jumped from one horse to another. At the beginning, everyone was saying, 'That is not how we play polo! That is an out-

rage.' But now everyone plays polo like that. So that is what I try to do."

Two weeks before the "Bound to Fail" sale, Gouzer flew to Geneva for twenty-four hours, for Passover. ("I love to be around my family, hang out there, open the fridge and see what's in there, eat, lie around, bug everyone.") He then went to the Bahamas for a few days of spearfishing and diving with sharks. "The sharks are pretty aggressive, and you really have to show them you are the alpha person in the water," he told me, over a lunch of crudo at the Sea Grill, in Rockefeller Center. The Bahamas experience was exhilarating but also calming, he said. "At some point, you become so comfortable that you almost want to hug them—but you can't mess it up, because you will lose an arm." Being underwater with sharks requires incredible focus. "It's like some yoga thing—you have to completely empty your brain. There is no other place that you are so in the moment. You can't be thinking about the day, about your e-mail. I don't know how many problems were happening at work, but a lot of them fix themselves by themselves. Sometimes the best thing to do is to not be there, and let other people deal with the problem."

In Gouzer's absence, Gorvy and the

rest of the team began installing the "Bound to Fail" works in Christie's showrooms, where they were to be displayed the week before the sale. When Gouzer returned, they puzzled over how best to display "Him," a 2001 sculpture by Maurizio Cattelan, which was to be the final lot of the sale. Approached from behind, the work appears to be a life-size, hyperrealistic figure of a kneeling child dressed in old-fashioned schoolboy clothes: tweed jacket, britches, leather ankle boots. When the viewer circles around it, the face is revealed to be that of an adult Adolf Hitler, with glittering eyes and a waxy complexion. "From behind, it's innocence, and from the front it's the guiltiest man in the world," Gouzer said. It was to be the sole occupant of a small gallery. Lighting technicians experimented to achieve the best effect: too bright, and the atmosphere became less menacing; too dim, and the details of the clothing were obscured. When Gouzer inspected the gallery, he thought that the position of the sculpture needed adjustment, and he grasped the figure almost tenderly around its slender ankles. "If you don't notice his shoes, you lose part of the effect," he explained.

The work belonged to a Manhattan collector named David Ganek, who made his fortune running a hedge fund. Ganek had consigned the Cattelan only days before the auction catalogue was printed. He had owned the piece since the early aughts, but largely had kept it in storage. "People have for a long time tried to get me to sell, either privately or through auction," he told me. He decided to sell this time because Gouzer was knowledgeable about Cattelan's work, and because Ganek liked the concept of "Bound to Fail." "It is more about an idea, or a point of view, or an attitude, and then filling up the metaphorical canvas with pieces that reflect that," he said. "What Loïc has done is provide collectors with some sort of consistent narrative." He went on, "If you were somebody who was a newer collector, and just getting your feet wet, it's a pretty cool way to connect the dots." Gouzer did not have a guarantor for "Him," which was being sold with an estimate of ten to fifteen



"Who wants to help me with the fireworks this year?"



million dollars. “It’s one thing to sell Hitler,” he told me. “It’s another to guarantee him.”

**T**WO NIGHTS BEFORE the sale, Gouzer threw a party. In previous years, he’s hosted gatherings at his apartment, which has spectacular floor-to-ceiling windows in its double-height living room, and a splendid deck with trees in planters and views uptown. This year, he rented Socialista, a bar above Cipriani Downtown, in SoHo, up a perilously steep staircase. A Cuban jazz band occupied one corner, and there was an open bar at the back of the room, which had ornate chandeliers and velvet couches. The party started at 11 p.m., and by midnight the room was filled with bearded young men in dark sweaters and willowy young women in heels. DiCaprio slouched in an armchair, a newsboy cap pulled down over his forehead. Paris Hilton, long-limbed in a short, bedazzled white dress, looked like a swan sponsored by Swarovski. Tobias Meyer, in a jacket and a polka-dot scarf, was also in attendance—business is business, and he and Gouzer have reconciled. Gouzer, who had apparently switched from e-cigarettes to real cigarettes, moved among the guests with a nervous energy. He told friends that he still didn’t have a buyer lined up for “Him.” “You know as much as I do at this point,” he said, coyly.

The sale was held at the nontraditional hour of 5 p.m., on a Sunday in early May. Not every seat in the auction room was filled—it was Mother’s Day, and it was the last day of the Frieze Art Fair, on Randall’s Island. Gouzer took his place on a raised platform at the front of the room, along with a dozen colleagues who would be taking bids from clients by telephone. The auction started strongly, with Jim Shaw’s drawing of a distorted face selling for fifty-two thousand dollars, twelve thousand above its high estimate, and the Mike Kelley “Castrati Satan” going for six hundred and twenty-nine thousand dollars—exceeding its high estimate by almost a hundred and eighty thousand. Bidding on the Koons sculpture started at five million dollars, and rose to just over fifteen million, comfortably above its guarantee.

Throughout the event, Lot 39, Cattelán’s “Him,” stood on a platform to

the right of the auctioneer, Jussi Pylkanen. As the sale drew to a close, Gouzer and Gorvy, both on the phone with clients, bid against each other for the sculpture, raising the price from nine million dollars to twelve million. Then a third bidder, on the phone with another Christie’s operative, entered the fray. Gouzer bid fourteen million, then fifteen—“Loïc going in for the kill,” someone shouted, to laughter—before the third bidder offered a winning number: \$15.2 million. After the standard buyer’s premium, the final cost was nearly \$17.2 million.

The sale brought in just over seventy-eight million dollars, well beyond the low estimate of fifty-nine million, and within respectable range of the high estimate of eighty-one million. Seven new world records for individual artists had been set, if in some cases with rather limited criteria. (Christie’s secured the highest price ever paid for a Richard Prince sculpture—the car hood, for \$2.7 million.) At a press conference afterward, Gouzer said, “We knew this was a challenging sale.” And yet it could be called a success: he had managed to create a context in which disparate works informed one another, enhancing their value. Just as significantly, Gouzer had fashioned a story line in which a decline of more than six hundred million dollars from the height of last year’s “Looking Forward to the Past” sale could be cast as a triumph for Christie’s. Only one work had failed to sell: the Sigmar Polke. “The potatoes—if you want, feel free to get the potatoes for free,” Gouzer told reporters, offhandedly. “I’ll give them to you after the press conference.”

Two nights later, Christie’s held its regular contemporary-art sale. The trophy piece was an untitled Basquiat painting, consigned by Adam Lindemann; it sold for fifty-seven million dollars, to Yusaku Maezawa, a Japanese online-sales entrepreneur. Between purchases at Sotheby’s and at Christie’s, Maezawa spent almost a hundred million dollars on art in a week—he was the year’s hot new collector. Gouzer was frustrated: he had been expecting to bid on the Basquiat on behalf of a client in

Europe, but hadn’t been able to reach him on the phone at the critical hour, because the client had fallen asleep.

Though Gouzer was exhausted, he took an Uber car downtown to his apartment, where he changed into baggy shorts, shin guards, and a black shirt. Gouzer belongs to a soccer team that plays in a league at Chelsea Piers. Kickoff was at 11 p.m., and Gouzer, who hadn’t

had time for dinner, scanned the contents of his refrigerator—bottles of green juice, cartons of blueberries—and grabbed a shrink-wrapped package of prosciutto. He wolfed down a few slices before heading out to meet his team members: Max Falkenstein, a partner at the Barbara Glad-

stone gallery and one of Gouzer’s best friends; David Dynof, a surgeon and a spearfishing buddy; and several colleagues from Christie’s.

The game took place on an indoor field surrounded by a waist-high barrier. The atmosphere was pungent with the odor of stale sweat. Gouzer scored the first goal, but he wasn’t happy with the team’s performance, or his own. “Our two best players are out,” he complained. “It’s not fun when we lose.” He’d barely slept for days, and felt out of shape, but played fiercely. After being switched out for a few minutes to allow another player onto the field, he observed, “Earlier, I’m trying to wake up a guy to get him to spend forty million dollars on a painting. And now I’m here, trying to foul a guy.”

The transfer of players on and off the field happened swiftly, and the state of play was not always clear. On one occasion when Gouzer returned to the game, the ball was rolling in his vicinity, and he quickly stepped to claim it, dribbling and driving to the goal. A cry of outrage went up from the opposing team. Gouzer raised his hands, palms upward, as if to show that he had done nothing wrong. “What’s up?” he said, widening his eyes with affected innocence, and grinning. A few minutes later, when he was on the sidelines again, I asked whether the ball had been in play. Gouzer was leaning forward on the barrier, stretching his calves. He glanced over his shoulder and flashed a smile at me. “It’s borderline,” he said. “In case of doubt, it’s better to touch it.” ♦



The Fugitive  
*T. Coraghessan Boyle*





THEY TOLD HIM he had to wear a mask in public. Which was ridiculous. It made him feel like he had a target painted on his back—or his face, actually, right in the middle of his face. But if he wanted to walk out the door of the clinic he was going to walk out with that mask on—either that or go to jail. Outside, it was raining, which made everything that much harder, because what were you going to do with a wet mask? How could you even breathe? Here, inside the office, with the doctor and his caseworker from Health Services, there was no sound of the rain, or if there was he couldn't hear it—all he could hear was the rasp and wheeze of his own compromised breathing as he sucked air through the fibres of the mask.

The doctor was saying something to him now, and Marciano watched him frame the words with his hands before they both looked to the caseworker, a short slim woman with a big bust and liquid eyes, whom he would have liked to fuck if he weren't so sick. She was named Rosa Hinojosa, and he kept saying her name in his head, because of the way it rhymed, which somehow made him feel better.

"You understand what the doctor is telling you?" she asked in her clipped north-of-the-border Spanish, which he could have listened to all day under other circumstances. But these were the circumstances, and until he got better he would have to play their game, Dr. Rosen's game and Rosa Hinojosa's, too.

He nodded.

"No more lapses, you understand that? You will report here at eight each morning, when the clinic opens, for your intravenous medication, and"—she held up two plastic pill containers—"you will take your oral medication, *without fail*, every night at dinner. And you must wear your mask at all times."

"Even when I'm alone?"

She looked to the doctor, said something to him in English, nodded, then turned back to Marciano, her breasts straining at the fabric of her blouse, a pink blouse that made her look even younger than she was, which, he guessed, was maybe twenty-four or five. "You have your own room in this house"—she glanced down at the clip-

board in her lap—"at 519 West Haley Street? Is that right?"

"Yes."

"There are other roomers there?"

"Yes."

"All right. When you're alone in your room, you can remove the mask, but only then, and never if you're in the common area. You're highly contagious, and if you were to cough without the mask on, the bacteria could get into the air and infect your roommates, and you wouldn't want that, would you?"

No, he agreed, he wouldn't, but now the doctor was saying something more, his tone harsh and hectoring, and though Marciano didn't register what he was saying, or not exactly, he got the gist of it: this was his warning, his final warning, and now there could be no appeal. He watched the doctor's eyes, which looked at him as if he were less than human, something to step on in the street and crush, angry eyes, hateful, and what had he done to deserve this? He'd got sick, that was all—and couldn't anybody get sick?

Rosa Hinojosa (her lips were fascinating—plump and adhesive—and he wanted desperately in that moment to get well, if for no other reason than to maybe be able to kiss them) told him what she'd already told him, that because he'd stopped taking his medication a year ago, his case of tuberculosis had mutated into the multi-drug-resistant form, and his life was at risk, because after this there were no more drugs. That was it. They didn't exist. But there was more, and worse: if he did not comply fully—no lapses—Dr. Rosen would get a court order and incarcerate him to be sure he got the full round of treatment. And why? Not out of charity, entertain no illusions about that, but to protect society, and at a cost—did he even have any idea of the cost?—of as much as two hundred thousand dollars for him alone. She paused. Compressed her lips. Looked to the doctor. Then, as if she were tracking the drift of the very microbes hanging invisibly in the air, she brought her eyes back to him. "You agree?" she demanded.

He wanted to say yes, of course he did—he wanted to be cured—but he honestly didn't know if he could go

through with it, and wasn't that the problem last time? He'd taken the medicine, which was no easy thing, because it made him sick to his stomach and made him itch, as if there were something under his skin clawing its way out. They'd told him he'd have to stay on the regimen anywhere from six to thirty months, but within three months he'd felt fine, his cough nearly gone and his arms and chest filling out again, so he'd started selling the pills, because he didn't need them anymore, and then he'd stopped coming to the clinic altogether, until the disease returned to shake him like a rat in a cage and he spat up blood and came back here to their contempt and their antiseptic smells and their masks and their dictates and their ultimatums. He wanted to say yes, and he tried to, but at that moment the cough came up on him, the long dredging cough that was like the sea drawing back over the stones at low tide, and the inside of the mask was suddenly crimson and he couldn't seem to stop coughing.

When finally he looked up, both the doctor and Rosa Hinojosa were wearing masks of their own, and Rosa Hinojosa was pushing a box of disposable surgical masks across the desk to him. He couldn't see her lips now, only her eyes, and her eyes—as rich and brown as two chocolates in the dark wrappers of her lashes—didn't have an ounce of sympathy left in them.

BEFORE HE GOT sick the second time, he'd been working as part of a crew that did landscaping and gardening for the big estates strung out along the beach and carved out of the hills, a good job, steady, and with a *patrón* who didn't try to cheat you. One of his tasks was to trap and dispose of the animals that infested these places—rats, gophers, possums, raccoons, and whatever else tore up the lawns or raided the orchards. His *patrón* wouldn't allow the use of poison of any kind—the owners didn't like it, and it worked its way up the food chain and killed everything out there, which Marciano didn't think was such a bad proposition, but it wasn't his job to think. His job was to do as he was told. The gophers weren't a problem—they died underground,



transfixed on the spikes of the Macabee traps he set in the dark cool dirt of their runs—but the possums and the raccoons and even the rats had to be captured alive in Havahart traps of varying sizes, depending on the species. Which raised the question of what to do with them once you'd caught them.

The first time he did actually catch something—a raccoon—it was on a big thirty-acre estate with its own avocado grove and a fishpond stocked with Japanese koi that cost a thousand dollars each. It was early, misty yet, and when he went to check the cage he'd baited with a dab of peanut butter and half a sardine it was a shock to find the robber itself, with its black mask and tense fingers grasping the mesh as if it were a monkey and not a *mapache* at all. In the next moment, he was running down the slope to where the *patrón* was assembling a sprinkler system for a new flower bed, crying out, "I got one, I got one!"

The *patrón*, big-bellied but tough, a man who must have been as old as Marciano's father yet could work alongside his men on the hottest day without even breathing hard, glanced up from what he was doing. "One what?"

"A raccoon."

"O.K., good. Is it a female?"

A female? What was he talking about? It was a raccoon. What did he expect him to do? Flip it over and inspect its equipment?

"Because if it's a female there'll be more. Get rid of it and reset the trap."

Breathless, excited, the microbes working in him, though he didn't yet know it, Marciano just stood there, puzzled. "Get rid of it how?"

A steady look. A sigh. "O.K., listen, because I'm only going to tell you once. Take one of those plastic trash cans lined up there behind the garage and fill it with water, right to the top, you understand? Then just drop the cage in, and it'll be over in three minutes."

"You mean drown it, just like that?"

"What are you going to do, take it home and train it to walk on a leash?"

The *patrón* was grinning now, pleased with his own joke, but there was work to do, and already he was turning back to it. "And do me a favor," he added, glancing over his shoulder. "Bury it out in the weeds, where Mrs. Lewis won't have to see it."

WHY HE WAS thinking of that he couldn't say, except that he missed the job—and the money—and as he walked to the bus in the rain, the box of face masks tucked under

one arm, he wanted to be back there again, under the sun, working, just that, working. They'd scared him at the clinic, they always scared him, and he was feeling light-headed on top of it. The blood was bad, he knew that—he could see it in their eyes. But he was twenty-three years old, and thirty months was like a lifetime sentence, and even then there were no guarantees—Rosa Hinojosa had made that clear. He was sick from the intravenous. His arm was sore. His throat ached. Even his feet didn't seem to want to cooperate, zigging and zagging, so that he was walking like a drunk.

The sidewalk before him was strewn with the worms that were coming up out of the earth because if they stayed down there they'd drown, whereas up here, in the rain, they'd have a chance at life before somebody stepped on them or the birds got to them. He liked worms, nature's recyclers, and he was playing a little game with himself, trying to avoid them and hold in the next cough at the same time, watching his feet and the pattern the worms made on the pavement, and when he looked up he was right in front of the bar—Herlihy's—he'd seen from the bus stop but had never been inside of. It was just past ten in the morning and he wasn't working today—his new job, strictly gardening, was with an old white-haired *campesino*, Rudy, who booked the clients and then sat in his beater truck and read spy novels while Marciano did all the work—so he really had nothing to do but sit in front of the television in his room all day. That had something to do with it. That and the fact that Rudy had just paid him the day before.

He didn't go directly in, but walked by the place as if he were on an errand elsewhere, then stripped off the mask and stuffed it in his pocket, doubled back, and pushed open the door. Inside were all the usual things, neon signs for Budweiser and Coors, a jukebox that might once have worked, honey-colored bottles lined up behind the bar, and the head of a deer—or, no, an elk—jammed into one wall as if this were Alaska and somebody had just shot it. There were three customers,



all white, strung together on three adjoining barstools, and the bartender, also white, and fat, with big buttery arms in a short-sleeved shirt. They all turned to look at him as he came in, and that made him nervous, so he chose a stool at the far end of the bar, rehearsing in his head the phrase he was going to give the bartender—"Please, a beer"—which made use of his favorite word in English, and the word wasn't "please."

The bartender heaved himself up off his own stool and came down the bar to him, put two thick white hands on the counter, and asked him something, which must have been "What do you want?," and Marciano uttered his phrase. There was a moment of ambiguity, the man poised there still, instead of bending to the cooler, and then there was a further question, which he didn't grasp until the man began rattling off the names of the beers he stocked, pointing as he did so to a line of bottles on the top row, ten or twelve different brands. "Corona," Marciano said, unfolding a five-dollar bill on the bar, and all at once he was coughing and he put his hand up to cover his mouth, but he couldn't seem to stop until he had the bottle to his lips, draining it in three swallows, as if he were a nomad who'd just come in off the desert.

One of the men at the end of the bar said something then, and the other two looked at Marciano and broke out laughing, and whether it was good-natured or not, a little joke at his expense, it made him feel tight in his chest and the cough came up again, so severe this time he thought he was going to pass out. But here was the bartender, saying something more, and what it was he couldn't imagine, because it wasn't illegal to cough, was it? But, no, that wasn't it. The bartender was pointing at the empty bottle, and so Marciano repeated his phrase, "Please, a beer," and the heavy man bent to the cooler, extracted a fresh Corona, snapped off the cap, and set it before him.

He sipped the second beer and watched the rain spatter the dirty windows and run off in streaks. At some point, he saw his bus pull up at the stop across the street, a vivid panel of

color that made him think of what was waiting for him at home—nothing, zero, exactly zero—and he watched it pull away again as he tried to fight down the scratch in his throat. He was scared. He was angry. And he sat there, staring out into the gloom, drinking one beer after another, and when he coughed, really coughed, they all looked at him and at the wet cardboard box of face masks, then looked away again. Nobody said another word to him, which was all right with him—he just focussed on the television behind the bar, some news channel, and tried to interpret the words the people were saying there while the backdrop shifted from warplanes and explosions to some sort of pageant with models on a runway, looking raccoon-eyed and haughty and not half as good as Rosa Hinojosa. The bloody mask remained in his pocket, and the box of masks, the new ones, stayed right where it was, on the stool beside him.

ALL THAT WEEK, he went into the clinic at eight, as instructed, and all that week he felt nauseated and skipped breakfast and went to work with Rudy anyway, and the only good thing there was that Rudy didn't like to start early—and he didn't ask questions, either. Still, Marciano was lagging and he knew it, and knew that it was only a matter of time before Rudy said something. Which he did, that Friday, T.G.I.F., end of the week, the first week with this new cocktail of antibiotics running through his veins, one week down and how many more to go? He did a quick calculation in his head: fifty-two weeks in a year, double that and then add twenty-six more. It was like climbing a mountain backward—no matter how many steps you took you never got to see the peak.

They were on their third or fourth house of the day, everything gray and wet with the fog off the ocean and the sun nowhere in sight. His chest felt sore. He was hungry, but the idea of food—of a taco or a burger or anything—made his stomach turn. "Jesus," Rudy said, startling him out of a daydream, "you're like one of the walking dead. I mean, at that last place I

couldn't tell whether you were pushing the mower or the mower was pushing you." The best Marciano could do was give him a tired grin. "What?" Rudy said, staring now. "Late night last night?"

Rudy was helping him lift the mower down from the back of the truck, so he couldn't avoid his eyes. He just nodded.

"Youth," Rudy said, shaking his head as they set the mower down in the driveway of a little mustard-colored house with a patch of lawn in front and back and a towering hedge all the way around that had to be clipped every other week, and this was that week, which meant hauling out the ladder, too. "I used to be like that, burn the candle at both ends, drink till they closed the bars and get up for work three hours later." Rudy sighed. "But no more. Now I'm in bed before the ten-o'clock news—and Norma's already snoring."

Marciano had heard all this before, twenty times already, and he didn't say anything, just leaned into the mower to push it up the driveway, but the mower didn't seem to want to budge, and he felt weak all of a sudden, weak and sick, and here came the cough, right on cue. He really hacked this time, hacked till he doubled over and tears came to his eyes. When he straightened up, Rudy was watching him, and his smile was gone.

"That doesn't sound too good," he said. "You ever go to the clinic like I told you?"

"Yes," he said. "Or, no, not really—"

"What do you mean, *not really*? You sound like your lungs are shot."

He paused to catch his breath, because he couldn't really cough and talk at the same time, could he? He lifted one hand and let it drop. "It's just a cold," he said, then turned and pushed the mower up the drive.

THEY WERE WAITING for him when he got home, a cop in uniform and Rosa Hinojosa, who looked so fierce and grim she might have been wearing somebody else's face. He'd run into her at the clinic the day before, and she'd asked him if he was sticking to the regimen, and he told her he was, and she flashed a smile

so luminous it made him feel unmoored. “Good,” she said. “Good. Do it for me, O.K.?” But now here she was. He saw her before he saw the cop, the crisp line her skirt cut just above her knees, her pretty legs, the heels she wore to work, and for the briefest flash of a second he wondered what she was doing there, and then he saw the cop and he knew. Rudy had just dropped him off, was already pulling away from the curb, and Marciano wanted desperately to climb back into the pickup and go wherever Rudy would take him, but everything was in slow motion now, like in the outer-space movies where the astronauts are just floating there on their tethers and the ship slides away from them in a long smear of light and shadow.

He pulled a mask from his pocket—a dirty one, to show it had been used—looped it over his ears, and snapped it in place, as if that would make him look better in Rosa Hinojosa’s eyes, but her face showed only disappointment and something else, too: anger. He’d let her down. He’d had his warning, his final warning, and he’d been caught out, but how had she known? Had somebody informed on him? Some enemy he didn’t even know he had?

The cop, he could see at a glance, wasn’t a real cop, more some sort of Health Services mule, and he was old and slow and his head was like a big *calabaza* propped up on his shoulders, and Rosa Hinojosa, for all her youth, was no runner, not in those shoes. So he ran. Not like in the track meets at school when he was a boy, because his lungs were like wet clay, but still he put one foot in front of the other, hustling down the alley between his house and the one next door, to where the fence out back opened onto the dry streambed and the path through the weeds he sometimes used as a shortcut to the corner store. He got as far as the fence before he gave out, and, he had to admit, both Rosa Hinojosa and the *calabaza* head were quicker than he would have thought. He was just lying there, pathetic, humiliated in front of this woman he wanted to prove himself to, and he watched them

## EMERGINGS

Let’s say men and women begin  
as slime, and some of us crawl  
out of the sea, and fall into circumstance  
fraught with danger, and cannot survive,  
but do, slithering into a cave  
where the stories evolve, first as pictures  
on the walls, then as grunts that turn  
into something like words. For years,  
though, biology reigns. Our bodies go  
this way or that. Our culinary wisdom  
is to eat more than get eaten.  
Our good sense is to follow a guess.  
Let’s say sometimes the accidental  
is the beginning of possibility.  
We discover that when we’re most afraid,  
when catastrophe looms, opportunities abound.  
We learn the power of slings and stones.  
And the best storyteller emerges  
from all of those wishing to explain.  
Let’s say he knows we need someone  
to admire, and says a hero is a person  
who blunders into an open cave,  
and that it takes courage to blunder.  
Let’s say he also says something about  
the beauty of slime. His story lives  
for a while because of its memorable turns,  
its strange moral fervor, while the others’—  
merely accurate and true—disappear.

—Stephen Dunn

pause to snap on their own masks before the cop bent to him and encircled his wrists with the handcuffs.

THE NEXT THING he saw was the hospital, a big clean white stucco box of a building that had secondary boxes attached to it, a succession of them lined up like children’s blocks all the way out into the parking lot in back. He’d been here once before, to the emergency room, when he’d nearly severed the little finger of his left hand with the blade of the hedge trimmer, and they’d spoken Spanish to him, sewed and bandaged the wound and sent him on his way. That wasn’t how it was this time. This time he was wearing a mask, and so was Rosa Hinojosa and so was the mule, who kept guiding him down the corridors with a stiff forefinger till they went through a door and briefly out into the sun-

light before entering an outbuilding that looked like one of the temporary classrooms you saw when you went by the high school. What was funny about it, or not so funny, was the way people made room for them in the corridors, shrinking into the walls as they passed by in their masks.

When he’d had a chance to take in the barred windows and the heavy steel door that pulled shut behind them with a whoosh of compression, Rosa Hinojosa, cold as a fish, explained to him that he was being remanded to custody as a threat to public safety under the provisions of the statutory code of the State of California, and that he would be confined here temporarily before he could be moved to the Men’s Colony, in the next county, which was equipped with a special ward for prisoners with medical conditions. He felt sick, sicker than ever,



and what made it worse was that there was no smell to that room, which might as well have been on the moon. He saw a sterile white counter and a man in thick-framed glasses and some sort of hospital scrubs stationed behind it. Rosa Hinojosa was doing all the talking. She had a sheaf of papers in one hand and she turned away from him to lay them on the counter. There was a U.S. flag in the corner. A drinking fountain. Black and white tiles on the floor. "I didn't do anything," Marciano protested.

Rosa Hinojosa, who was conferring with the man behind the counter, gave him a sharp glance. "You were warned."

"What do you mean? I took my medicine. You saw me—"

"Don't even give me that. We have you on the feed from the security camera at the 7-Eleven making a purchase without your mask on—and there was testimony from the bartender at Herlihy's that you were in there without a mask, *drinking*, on the very first day you walked out of the clinic."

"I'm an American citizen."

She shrugged.

"Look it up." This was true. He'd been born in San Diego, two years old when his parents were deported, so he'd never had a chance to learn English or go to school here or anything else, but he had his rights, he knew that—they couldn't just lock him up. That was against the Constitution.

Rosa Hinojosa had turned back to the counter, riffling through the stack of forms, but now she swung angrily around to him, a crease of irritation between her eyes. She wasn't pretty anymore, not even remotely, and all he felt for her was hate, because, no matter what she said, when it came down to it she was part of the system, and the system was against him. "I don't care if you're the President," she snapped. "We bent over backward, and now you've left us no choice. Don't you understand? The order's been signed."

"I want a lawyer."

He saw that she had a little dollop of flesh under her chin—she was already going to fat—and he realized that she was nothing to him, and, worse, that he was nothing to her but one more charity case, and what he did

next was born of the sadness of that realization. He wasn't a violent person, just the opposite—he was shy and he went out of his way to avoid confrontation. But they were the ones confronting him—Rosa Hinojosa and the whole Health Services Department, the big stupid-looking mule who'd clamped the handcuffs on him and made the mistake of removing them after they stepped through the door, and the man behind the desk, too. Marciano took as deep a breath as he could manage and felt the mucus rattling in his throat, the bad stuff he kept dredging up all day and spitting into a handkerchief until the handkerchief was stiff with it. What he was about to do was wrong, he knew that, and he regretted it the instant he saw it before him, but he wasn't going to any prison, no way. That just wasn't in the cards.

SO NOW HE was running again, only this time they weren't chasing him, or not yet, because, mask or no mask, they were all three of them frantically trying to wipe his living death off their

faces—and good, good, see how they like it, see how they like being condemned and ostracized and locked up without a trial or a lawyer or anything—and he didn't stop spitting till he had the door open and was back out in the sunlight, dodging around the cars in the lot and heading for the street and the cover of the trees there. His heart was pounding and his lungs felt as if they'd been turned inside out, but he kept going, slowing to a stiff-kneed walk now, down one street, then another, the windshields of the parked cars pooling in the light like puddles after a storm, birds chattering in the trees, the smell of the earth and the grass so intense it was intoxicating. He patted down his pockets: wallet, house key, the little vial of pills. And where was he going? What was he doing? He didn't have any money—no more than maybe ten or fifteen dollars in his wallet—and there was nobody he could turn to, not really. There was Sergio, the only one of his housemates he was close to, and Sergio would loan him money, he was



sure of it, but Sergio probably didn't have much more than he did. The only thing for certain was that he couldn't stay here anymore.

He hadn't seen his mother in two years, hadn't really given her a thought, but he thought of her now, saw her face as vividly as if she were that woman right there slipping into the front seat of her car. She'd nursed him through the measles, whooping cough, the flu, and whatever else had come along to disrupt his childhood, and why couldn't she nurse him through this, too? She could, if he was careful and took his pills and wore the mask every single minute of every day, because he wouldn't want to infect her—that would be the worst thing a son could do. No matter what the doctors said, his mother would save him, protect him, do anything for him. But how was he going to get to her? They'd be watching for him at the bus station and at the train depot and at the airport, too, even if he could scrape up enough for a ticket, which he couldn't. . . . But what about Rudy? Maybe he could get Rudy to drive him as far as Tijuana—or, no, he'd tell Rudy

he needed to borrow the truck to help one of his roommates move a refrigerator or a couch, and then he'd do the driving himself and get somebody to bring the truck back, pay somebody, make promises, whatever it took. That was a plan, wasn't it? He had to have a plan. Without a plan he was lost.

He kept moving, breathing hard now, the sidewalk like a treadmill rolling under him, but he had to fight it, had to be quick because they'd have the cops after him in their patrol cars, an all-points bulletin like on TV, and they weren't going to be gentle with him, either. Up ahead, at the end of the street, was a park he'd gone to once or twice with Sergio to drink beer and throw horseshoes, and there were bushes there, weren't there, along the streambed. Pushing through the park gate—kids, mothers, swings, a couple of bums laid out on the grass as if they'd been installed there along with the green wooden benches—he tried to look casual, even as the sirens began to scream in the distance and he told himself it was only just ambulances bringing people to the emergency room. He went straight across the lawn,

looking at nobody, and then he was in the bushes and out of sight and he dropped to the ground and just lay there until his heart stopped hammering and the burning in his lungs began to subside. It would be dark soon, and then he could make his way back to the house, borrow somebody's phone, call Rudy, pack a few things, and be gone before anybody could do anything about it.

**P**ARANOIA WAS WHEN you felt that everybody was after you even if they weren't, but what would you call this? Common sense? They'd come to his house and handcuffed him and put him in that white room, and he hadn't done anything. Now they'd charge him with escaping or resisting arrest or whatever they wanted to call it—and assault, too, assault with the deadly weapon that was his own spit. It didn't matter. The result would be the same—thirty months in a sterile room with the fans sucking in and the warders wearing masks and gloves and pushing a tray of what passed for food through a slot in the door and coming in twice a day to stick the intravenous in him. He'd rather be dead. Rather be in Mexico. Rather take his chances with his mother and the clinic in Ensenada, where at least they spoke his language and wouldn't look at him like he was a cockroach.

He was thirsty, crazy thirsty, but he forced himself to stay where he was till it was dark, then slipped back into the park to get a drink at the faucet in the rest room. Only problem was the door was locked. He stood there a long moment, rattling the doorknob, feeling disoriented. There was the steady hiss of cars from the freeway that was somewhere behind him in the intermediate distance. The trees were shrouds. The sky was black overhead and painted with stars, and it had never seemed so close. He could almost feel the weight of it, all the weight of the sky that went on and on to infinity, outer space, the planets, the stars, pressing down on him till he could barely breathe. Desperate, he knelt in the grass and felt around till he located a sprinkler head. At first it wouldn't budge, but he kept at it till the seal gave and he was able to





unscrew it and put his mouth to the warm gurgling flow there, and that made him feel better and pushed the vagueness into another corner of his mind. After a while, he got to his feet, eased himself down into the stream-bed, and began working his way back in the direction of the house.

It wasn't easy. What would have taken him ten minutes out on the street took an hour at least, his feet unsteady in a slurry of mud and trash, stiff dead reeds knifing at him, dogs barking, the drift of people's voices freezing him in place. He was sweating, and shivering, too, and his shirt was torn at the right elbow, where he'd snagged it on something in the strange half-light of the gully.

He didn't really know how far he'd gone or where he was when he emerged, scrambling up a steep incline and into the yard of a house that was mercifully dark. There were lights on in the houses on both sides of it, though, and the black humped shape of an automobile parked in the driveway. He moved toward the car and then past it, and if he was startled by a voice calling out behind him, a single syllable he would have recognized in any language—*Hey!*—he didn't hesitate or turn around or even look over his shoulder but just kept going, down the driveway and straight across the street to the sidewalk on the far side, where he was only another pedestrian out for a stroll on a cool night in a quiet city.

When he got to his own street, he made himself slow down and scan the cars parked on both sides of the road, looking for anything suspicious, the police or the Health Services, Rosa Hinojosa, though that *was* being paranoid—Rosa Hinojosa would be at home with her parents at this hour, or her husband, if she had one, absorbed in her own life, not his. He took his time, though he was feeling worse by the minute, shivering so hard he had to wrap his arms around himself, his shirt soaked and too thin against the night and the temperature, which must have dropped into the mid-fifties by now. And then, steeling himself, he slipped across the street and into the dark yard of the rooming house, where they'd come for him once and would come for him again.

He ducked in the back door, tentative, all the blood in his brain now, screaming at him, but there was nobody in the hall, and in the next moment he was in his room, the familiar scent of his things—unwashed laundry, soap, shampoo, the foil-wrapped burrito he'd set aside to microwave for dinner—rising to his nostrils in the ordinary way, as if nothing had happened. The cough was right there waiting to erupt, but he fought it down, afraid even to make the slightest sound, and though he was tempted to turn the light on, he knew better—if anyone was out there, this was what they'd be watching for. He found his jacket thrown over the back of the chair where he'd left it that morning and wrapped himself in it, then went to the window and opened the blinds, so that six thin stripes of illumination fell across the bed. That was when he remembered his pills—he had to take his pills no matter where he was or what happened, that was the truth of his life, whether he ever saw Rosa Hinojosa again or not.

He went to the sink for a glass of water, shook out two of the little white pills and swallowed them. Then—and he couldn't help himself—he lay down on the bed and closed his eyes, just for a minute.

THE KNOCK STARTLED him out of a dreamless sleep, the knock at the front door that thundered through the house as if the wrecking ball had come to reduce it all to splinters. But who would knock? Everybody who lived here had a key, so there was no need for knocking, not unless you were immigration or the police. Or Health Services. For one fluttering instant, he pictured Rosa Hinojosa in police blues with a cap cocked over her eye, a nightstick in one hand and a can of Mace in the other, and then he was pulling his door softly shut and fastening the latch, as if that would save him—but what was he going to do, hide under the bed? He didn't know much, but he knew they'd be at the back door, too, just like in the movies when they nailed the gangsters and the pimps

and the drug lords and the whole audience stood up and cheered.

No time for his backpack, no time for clothes, his toothbrush, for the change he kept in a pickle jar in the top drawer, no time for anything but to jerk up the window in its creaking frame while the knocking at the front door rose to a relentless pounding and the voices started up, Sergio's and somebody else's and a dog barking, and then he was down in the grass and scrambling, hunched over, for the next yard and then the next one after that. It took everything he had. Twice, he tripped in the dark, going down hard on somebody's patio, all the little sounds of the



neighborhood amplified now, every TV turned up full blast, motorcycles blaring like gunfire out on the street, even the crickets shrieking at him, and that dog, the ratcheting bark of that dog back at the house, a police dog, the kind of dog that never gave up, that could sniff you out even if you sprouted wings and flew up into the sky.

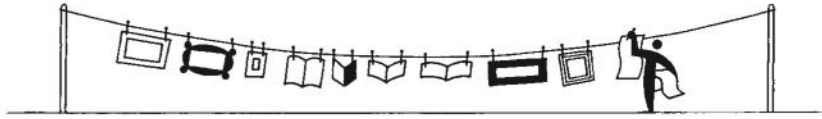
Where was he? Some dark place. Some citizen's back yard with its jade plants and flower bed and patch of lawn. A cold hand was inside him, yanking at his lungs, squeezing and bunching and pulling the meat there up into his throat, so that he couldn't breathe. He went down on his hands and knees, and there was no plan now but to find the darkest corner of the yard, the place where nobody had bothered to cut the grass or trim the shrubs, where the earth was real and present and he could let the blood come up and forget about the pills and Rosa Hinojosa and his mother and Rudy and everybody else.

Time leaped ahead. He was stretched out in the dirt. What was on his shirt was hot and secret and wet. He closed his eyes. And when he opened them again all he could see was the glint of a metal trap, bubbles rising in the clear cold water, and the hands of the animal fighting to get out. ♦

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T. Coraghessan Boyle on the ethics of disease.

# THE CRITICS



BOOKS

## W IS FOR WHY

*A President finds and loses his way.*

BY THOMAS MALLON

JEAN EDWARD SMITH's biography of George W. Bush goes on sale a day before the former President's seventieth birthday, and it's safe to say that no one will be bringing it as a present to the ranch outside Crawford. Smith, a well-regarded practitioner of military history and Presidential-life writing, comes straight to the point in the first sentence of his preface: "Rarely in the history of the United States has the nation been so ill-served as during the presidency of George W. Bush." By the book's last sentence, Smith is predicting a long debate over whether Bush "was the worst president in American history," and while the biographer doesn't vote on the question himself, the unhappy shade of James Buchanan will feel strongly encouraged by his more than six hundred pages.

And yet, for all the overheated denunciations—a rhetorical comparison gets made between Bush and Hitler—"Bush" (Simon & Schuster) doesn't feel like a hatchet job. Like Bush himself, it is susceptible to sudden changes of heart and tone, and it never quite gets over a sense of loss for aspects of the pre-9/11 figure that Smith seems to enjoy imagining, however sketchily, in the book's early stages.

The writer certainly doesn't revile the compassionately conservative candidate of 2000. Bush may have permitted some brutal staff maneuvers against John McCain, but the campaign that Smith re-creates is mostly distinguished for eschewing "Nixon's classic formula of running to the right in the primaries and then moving back to the center for the general election." Making plans to govern "as the nation's C.E.O.," Bush disavowed nation-building abroad and put forward

an agenda almost entirely focussed on what no one yet called the homeland. By Smith's reckoning, Bush ran a better campaign, and then a better recount, than his opponent. If the author favors the dissent in Bush v. Gore, he never questions Bush's legitimacy or lets up on the unappetizing aspects of his opponent, from Gore's inclination toward "résumé enhancement" to his pompous debating demeanor. (Four years later, in his first duel with John Kerry, a charmless, impatient Bush seemed almost fatefully infected with a variant of Gore's earlier boorishness.)

Smith points out that Bush attended no meetings of the National Security Council in the seven months prior to September 11, 2001. In her reports on these gatherings, Condoleezza Rice—Bush's national-security adviser, work-out partner, and something of an alter ego—tended to synthesize disagreements among the participants, leaving Bush with a false feeling of consensus. The President's own focus was chiefly on matters like stem-cell-research regulation and the sort of educational reforms he had pushed through a Democratic legislature as governor of Texas. On the morning of 9/11, Laura Bush was in Ted Kennedy's Senate office, having come to testify for the No Child Left Behind Act; the White House she returned to later that day was a wholly different place, a domestic cruise ship that had become an aircraft carrier.

In Smith's view, the military and moral calamities began right then. If he is moderately critical of the President for being "asleep at the switch" in the period before the terrorist attacks—Bush felt no particular alarm when an August 6th C.I.A. briefing indicated

that Osama bin Laden was up to at least *something*—the biographer is simply aghast once Bush seizes the controls. Within three days of September 11th, he says, the President had acquired a "boundless" confidence that put the country on a "permanent war footing" and the White House into a "hothouse climate of the president's certitude."

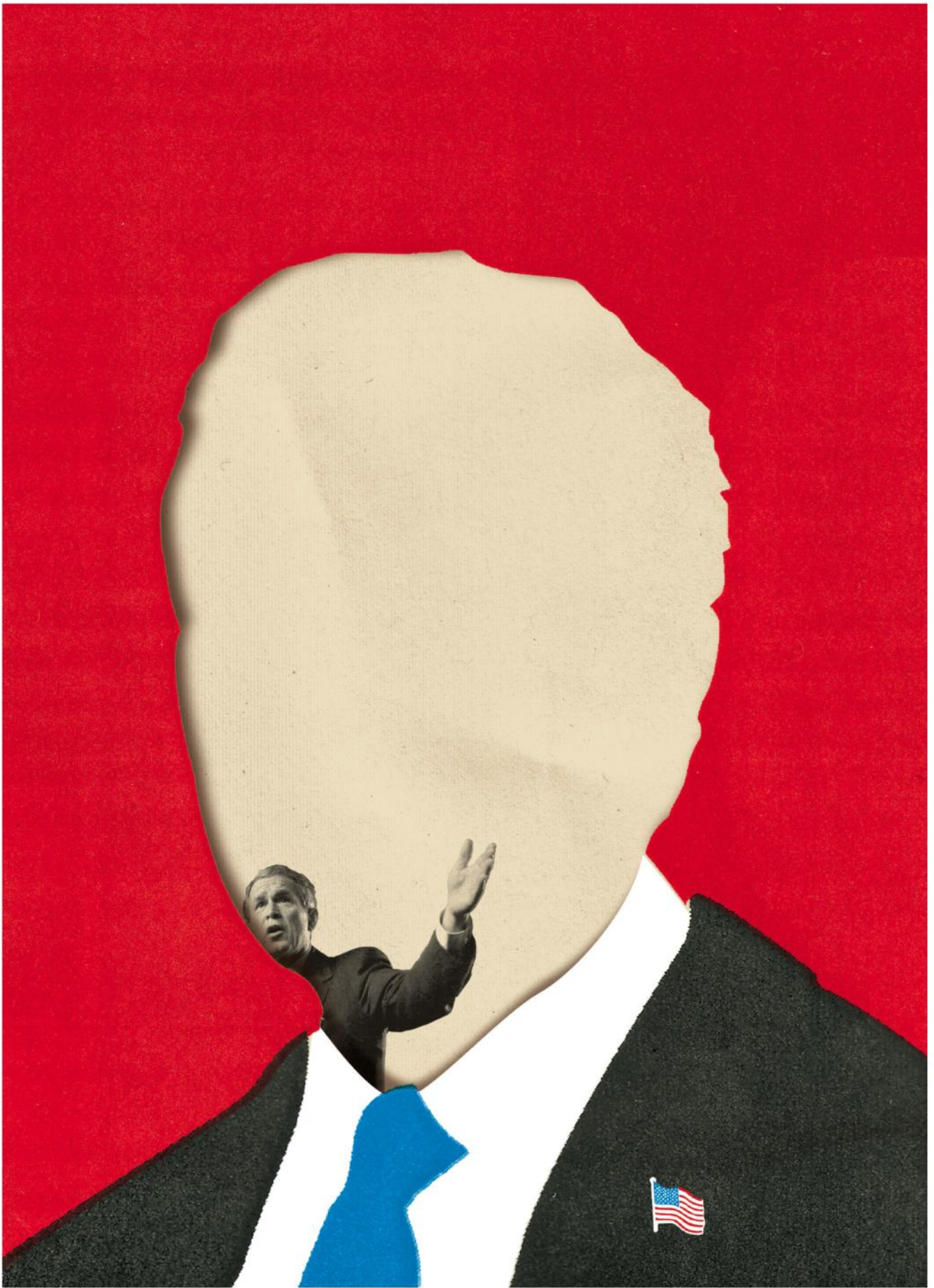
The war in Afghanistan, whose necessity Barack Obama insisted on in 2008 and beyond, is deemed by Smith to be scarcely more justifiable than the later one in Iraq; both are "disastrous wars of aggression." In an earlier book, Smith found the Gulf War fought under George H. W. Bush to be uncalled for as well, and here he seems comfortable making a distinction that holds the September 11th attacks to have been "tragic, but scarcely catastrophic." The younger Bush's with-us-or-against-us assertion in his September 20, 2001, speech to Congress ("Any nation that continues to harbor or support terrorism will be regarded by the United States as a hostile regime") was in some respects only an amplification of what Bill Clinton had stated three years before ("Countries that persistently host terrorists have no right to be safe havens"), but Smith reads it as "a serious overstatement." Maybe so, but his chapter "Toppling the Taliban" might have more revisionist force if it weren't deployed with so many overstatements of its own: "Within a month [of September 11th], the United States had lost world sympathy."

In another anti-superlative, Smith suspects that the invasion of Iraq will "likely go down in history as the worst foreign policy decision ever made by an American president." The thirteen-year

ABOVE: MIGUEL PORLAN



SOURCE: LUKE FRAZZA/AFP/GETTY (PHOTOGRAPH)



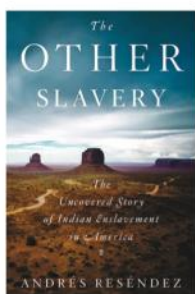
*Jean Edward Smith's biography presents a headstrong, doubt-free, and curiously opaque George W. Bush.*

ILLUSTRATION BY OLIVER MUNDAY

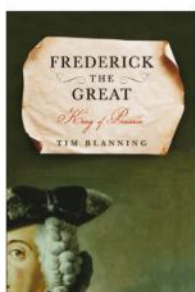
THE NEW YORKER, JULY 4, 2016

61

## BRIEFLY NOTED



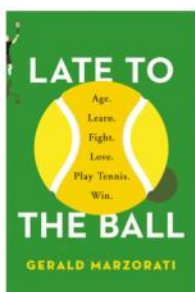
**The Other Slavery**, by Andrés Reséndez (*Houghton Mifflin Harcourt*). The author estimates that from the time of Columbus through the nineteenth century up to five million Native Americans were subjected to captivity, trafficking, and servitude. Largely illegal, this slavery took many forms: convict leasing, debt peonage, compulsory “apprenticeships.” One slaver rationalized, “We do not consider that we buy and sell them; we consider that we transfer the debt, and the man goes with the debt.” Chronicling the stories of indigenous people who labored on plantations and in mines, Reséndez corrects a blind spot in our understanding of North American history and illuminates mechanisms by which present-day versions of the practice endure.



**Frederick the Great**, by Tim Blanning (*Random House*). To his dazzled subjects, Frederick I, who led Prussia in the mid-eighteenth century, was Frederick the Unique, a near-mythical figure whose combination of military prowess, religious tolerance, artistic talent, and love of the common man was unprecedented. In this richly sourced biography, Blanning uncovers a complex, often contradictory character: a Francophone who despised the German language but whose rule coincided with a flowering of German literature; a misogynist and probable homosexual who detested the values of Christianity but whose kingdom was a model of enlightened pluralism. The Enlightenment ideas, Blanning writes, undeniably shaped Frederick’s policies, but “other motives were at work.” Pursuing these with depth and vigor, Blanning achieves a fresh and nuanced portrait.



**We Were Feminists Once**, by Andi Zeisler (*Public Affairs*). “There is a very fine line between celebrating feminism and co-opting it,” Zeisler, the co-founder of Bitch Media, writes, in this critique of pop feminism. Zeisler characterizes modern “marketplace feminism” as celebrating the individual at the expense of the larger feminist movement, replacing a “collective goal” with a “consumer brand.” She calls out Beyoncé and Taylor Swift, saying that their feminism is more focussed on marketability than on change: “It’s a feminism that trades on themes of sisterhood and support—you-go-girl tweets and Instagram photos, cheery magazine editorials about dressing to please yourself.” Sharp and witty, the book is filled with astute, if sometimes narrow, analysis.



**Late to the Ball**, by Gerald Marzorati (*Scribner*). The author, a former editor of the *Times Magazine*, details his quest to become a serious amateur tennis player in what he calls “young old age”—his sixties—just years after picking up a racquet for the first time. He trains with a coach more than twenty years his junior, exchanges e-mails with a tennis-loving Jungian psychotherapist, and attends tennis camps. While rigorous practice lends itself to improved stamina and a better backhand, “tennis being tennis, you learn mostly about yourself,” he writes. Marzorati’s prose is conversational, and the book encompasses more than insightful sportswriting—it is an intimate and captivating look at athleticism, competition, and aging.

legacy of “preemption” makes this a hard prophecy to counter, and Smith’s well-ordered scenes on the subject—Paul Wolfowitz pushing for war against Saddam on September 12th, just as he’d been pushing for it in April—do dismaying work. James Baker and Brent Scowcroft, the wise men of his father’s Administration, tell Bush to go slowly or not at all, but George Tenet, the holdover C.I.A. director from the Clinton years, assures him that convincing the public of the need to invade Iraq over W.M.D.s will be a “slam dunk.” As persuasively as anyone before him, Smith presents a strong story of how a successful military mission quickly unaccomplished itself; turned into quite something else (“the United States was going to bring democracy to the country”); and then festered into what Donald Rumsfeld himself, in his memoirs, judged to be “a long and heavy-handed occupation.”

The dark thread of Smith’s book is what he calls the “torture trail” of rendition and enhanced interrogation and prisoner abuse, a pathway perhaps made inevitable when Bush, after 9/11, “elevated the terrorists to the status of belligerents” but not combatants. Smith pays devastating attention to how the military figures around the President argued strenuously against behaviors that could be construed as violations of the Geneva Conventions. Generals Tommy Franks and Richard Myers, along with Secretary of State and retired General Colin Powell, insisted that, regardless of the casuistic memos coming out of the Justice Department’s Office of Legal Counsel, any skirting of international law put American fighters at a retaliatory risk of the same treatment. In 2005, John McCain, who had been brutalized by his North Vietnamese captors four decades earlier, shepherded an “anti-torture amendment” through Congress over the Administration’s energetic opposition; after an apparent reconciliation, Bush insulted McCain not with a veto but with a signing statement that made clear he would interpret the amendment however he liked. Military men—Grant, Eisenhower, General Lucius Clay—have often served as Smith’s subjects, and his scorn for the modern-day civilian “chicken hawks” is so strong that he chooses this quotation from



General H. Norman Schwarzkopf for a chapter epigraph: "After Vietnam we had a whole cottage industry develop, centered in Washington, D.C., that consisted of a bunch of military fairies that had never been shot at in anger."

It may have been Vice-President Dick Cheney who first advocated military commissions instead of civilian trials for captured terrorists, and it may have been the N.S.A. director Michael Hayden who urged going to "the edge," but each step through this dank basement resulted not from "decisions made by Cheney, Tenet, Rumsfeld, or the military. They were direct decisions of the president." Bush relished the speed with which he made them, and gave himself the title of the Decider. Smith's post-9/11 Bush is both doubt-free and indubitable, a man who effected the "personalization of the war on terror" and of Presidential power in general.

**B**UT WHERE IS the personality of this personalizer? How does a man whom Smith scarcely describes come to work such a mighty will over appointee after appointee and agency after agency? Where, in short, is the Bush in "Bush"?

Smith may have the Carlylean sense that history is shaped more by the decisions of individuals than by the large movements of social forces, but he is fundamentally more a historian than he is a biographer, and much more comfortable when his current subject is holding a meeting in the Roosevelt Room than when he is riding his off-road Trek bicycle. The author's disinclination toward the private and the psychological leaves a reader of "Bush" wondering exactly when and how an "unnerving level of certitude" took hold of the title figure. If no President "since Woodrow Wilson has...so firmly believed that he was the instrument of God's will," just how did the messianic annunciation take place? Smith says that, shortly after 9/11, James Merritt, once president of the Southern Baptist Convention, told Bush, "God knew that you would be sitting in that chair before the world was ever created." But lots of pastors tell lots of Presidents lots of things, and most devout Christians believe what Merritt said about whatever chair they sit in.

After covering the failure to find W.M.D.s in Iraq, Smith compares the

President to Captain Queeg for displaying "a willfulness that borders on psychosis." If Bush is going to earn the comparison, his biographer needs to do a better job of demonstrating how he travelled what would have been a long road from the mind-set of his days at Harvard Business School: there, Smith says, he was merely "energetic, but ill-informed, untutored, and unread." Both of these purported Bushes are observed by Smith from an abstract and considerable distance, the biographical equivalent of Bush's aerial assessment of Hurricane Katrina, and Smith approaches the earliest parts of the life with no more sustained attention than Bush himself approached Yale. The future President has reached the age of thirty-one—back in his childhood home of Midland, Texas, ready to make a losing run for Congress—by page 29.

Smith is not the first student of Bush to realize that he is more his mother's son than his father's, but readers of "Bush" don't get to see the forging of the bond. Robin Bush, George W.'s younger sister, who died of leukemia at the age of three, comes and goes in a phrase. One has to turn to something like Pamela Kilian's modest biography of Barbara Bush, from 1992, to learn that not long after her daughter's death Mrs. Bush "overheard George tell a friend, 'I can't play today because I have to be with my mother—she's so unhappy.'" He was learning to be not an overachiever but entertaining. There are still people around who can flesh out such events, but it seems that awfully few original interviews have gone into "Bush"; the book is widely but secondarily sourced, and in places could more rigorously attribute direct quotations. Bush himself did not sit down with the author.

At the bottom of Smith's pages, one finds a great many extended, conversational footnotes. Often they are historical asides, interesting if somewhat tangential, but so numerous as to form a kind of retreat, a typographical Camp David where author and reader keep avoiding the heart of the biographical matter. One is left wondering about so many things. What Bush gained by giving up drinking—a fast, if late, career start; the chance to be a more responsible husband and father—is indisputable; but did he lose anything? Some antic part of himself, the one that once cheered

a grief-stricken mother? Most important, if Bush's faith gave him certainties that became overweening and dangerous during his Presidency, why did they not so manifest themselves while he was on the road to Damascus fifteen years earlier, or when he was inveighing against nation-building in 2000? Smith gives us a few interesting details about upstairs life in the White House during the weeks after 9/11 (the President and Laura Bush both began taking Cipro after the anthrax letters arrived at the Capitol), but it remains the work of another biography to show whatever inner transformation Smith believes occurred during that "tragic, but scarcely catastrophic" period.

Bush himself was a consumer of biography, from Marquis James's "The Raven," a study of the redeemed alcoholic Sam Houston, to the fourteen lives of Lincoln that he read during his eight years in the White House. Smith is aware of all this, but seems not to believe that point of view belongs to biography and not just the novel. In episode after episode of this volume, one wishes for a sustained attempt—however qualified and speculative—to imagine what Bush himself might really have been thinking, beyond the face-value quotations from his own and others' memoirs. During the recount, was his sense of mental well-being intact or hanging like a chad? What about that walloping facial boil he developed? It was an eruption famous enough to inspire an episode of "Veep," but it goes unmentioned in "Bush." Smith's book ultimately has less intimacy than such as-it-happened histories of the Administration as Peter Baker's "Days of Fire."

Smith's prior works, to which he frequently refers, supply odd, handy moments of precedent and perspective. When we hear Bush arguing that John Roberts's sunny, consensus-building temperament is an important qualification for a Chief Justice, Smith, the author of "John Marshall: Definer of a Nation," reminds the reader that the "charm and easy manner" of Roberts's distant predecessor may have been even more important than his intellect. In pointing out that Bush served as head cheerleader at his prep school, he notes that this "was something of a leadership position at Andover"—phrasing that the reader takes

for sarcasm until Smith goes on to explain, in earnest, that Eisenhower and Reagan held the same post at West Point and Eureka College, respectively.

But history doesn't supply psychology, and perspective is not the same as perspicacity. Smith quotes, without disagreement, Barack Obama's courteous but manifestly untrue remark that Bush is "comfortable in his own skin." Those who observed the President's sudden shifts from the guy "you wanted to have a beer with" to stinging scold have realized that they were experiencing not so much changes in mood as moment-by-moment veerings between different selves, each authentic but neither integrated to any normal extent with the other. Bush's fanatical insistence on punctuality and his ever more exacting physical-fitness routines seem less a matter of self-discipline than of self-control, which is something different and more desperate. His habitually early bedtime may have derived from how exhausting he found it to be himself.

THE YEARS 2005 and 2006 were Bush's anni horribiles, the period that included the worst of the insurgency in Iraq, Hurricane Katrina, and an off-year electoral "thumping"—Bush's word—that turned both houses of Congress over to the Democrats. (Full, defensive disclosure: I served during some of this period as deputy chairman of the National Endowment for the Humanities, where, "Brownie" aside, we did a heckuva job getting small emergency grants to cultural institutions on the Gulf Coast.) But the second term began with Bush playing offense on all fronts: his Inaugural Address on January 20, 2005, proclaimed it to be "the policy of the United States to seek and support the growth of democratic movements and institutions in every nation and culture, with the ultimate goal of ending tyranny in our world." Two weeks later, he gave a State of the Union address that returned the emphasis to domestic initiatives that he had had to defer since September, 2001: he intended to transform Social Security through private retirement accounts, and he would liberalize immigration policy. "Family values don't stop at the Rio Grande," he had liked saying in 2000, the sentiment an oratorical forerunner to his brother

Jeb's characterization of the "act of love" that motivates people to cross the border.

"Bush was reaching for the stars," Smith writes. "His foreign policy aim was to spread democracy throughout the world, his domestic goal was to enshrine individual choice. The common denominator was personal liberty." Having won the second term his father lost, he had the "vision thing" that his father didn't, and Smith is aware of it. The author could have made Bush's international AIDS initiative, which ultimately directed tens of billions of dollars abroad, into a grudging footnote, but he instead gives a full chapter to what he calls "an amazing achievement," perhaps the most lasting one of the Bush Presidency.

Immigration and Social Security, however, came to naught, in large measure because of Hurricane Katrina. "Politically, [Bush] could never recover" from his slowness off the mark, Smith says; his perceived indifference hurt him more in the second term than the perception of illegitimacy had hobbled him in the first. He could not have been unaware that his Presidency was floating away, and that Iraq appeared ready to end not in a muddle but in a rout. Smith quotes Karen Hughes, one of the "Iron Triangle" of aides Bush brought with him from Texas to the White House in 2001: "He felt really strongly that it was his sheer force of will that was holding the line between winning and losing the war. That everybody else was ready to abandon it." Bush had to persuade Rice, who had become the Secretary of State, to overcome her doubts about the five-brigade "surge" that eventually reversed the slide. In ordering the change, he told the skeptical Joint Chiefs of Staff, "I am the president"—a reminder that they had been out of the chain of command since 1986. The surge seems to be the only military decision by Bush that Smith half approves of, via a kind of mathematical paradox: "The fact that the surge was not solely responsible for the decline in violence in Iraq in no way diminishes its importance. By coinciding with the decline it provided Bush with a rationale for beginning the draw-down of American forces."

Iraq's greater stability probably allowed Bush to get through the 2008 financial crisis as well as he did. Smith faults him for a slow, Katrina-style response to the subprime-mortgage col-

lapse, but sees him taking command in time to push the TARP bill through Congress on its second try: "If we're really looking at another Great Depression," he said, "you can be damn sure I'm going to be Roosevelt, not Hoover." He was by now "very much alone" in a White House devoid of stalwarts and familiar faces; the relationship with Cheney, even before their falling out over the President's refusal to pardon I. Lewis (Scooter) Libby for his part in the Valerie Plame affair, wasn't what it used to be. Smith, offering a supreme irony, or maybe just a supreme concession, says that Bush, albeit ferociously unpopular, was at last, in 2008, "growing into the job."

GEORGE W. BUSH was absent from the 2008 Republican Convention, to the pleasure of his would-be successor, John McCain, who experienced a moment of luck in the form of Gustav, another hurricane. The Republicans cancelled the Convention session for which Bush's and Cheney's in-person appearances were scheduled; the assemblage in St. Paul, Minnesota, was hardly threatened by the storm, but McCain took the opportunity to show the voters how quickly he could get down to the Gulf Coast.

Three weeks from now, Bush will once more be absent, as the Republicans convene in Cleveland to nominate the man who steamrolled the former President's "low-energy" brother. One strength of Smith's biography is the way it makes the reader continually consider whether the foreign overreachings of the forty-third President will prove more lastingly harmful to the country and to the world than the underreachings of the forty-fourth, but that is not a matter that will be on the Republicans' mind this July. They will be gathering for a political Jonestown, pledging to help elect as the next Commander-in-Chief a man who insists that a protester who rushed the platform from which he spoke last March had "ties to ISIS." (He knows because it was "on the Internet.") Bush will perhaps be at his Crawford ranch, maybe even painting one of his odd, Hockneyesque canvases. They glow not with faraway fires or any particular certitude, just a sort of opaque serenity, something that may at last have descended on a man no longer obligated to see past the fence. ♦



A CRITIC AT LARGE

# THE SOUND OF HATE

*When does music become torture?*

BY ALEX ROSS



*Music has the power to cloud reason, stir rage, cause pain, even kill.*

**I**N DECEMBER, 1989, the Panamanian dictator Manuel Noriega was expelled from power by American forces. To escape capture, he took refuge in the Papal Nunciatura in Panama City. When an American general arrived to confer with the papal nuncio, the U.S. Army blared music from loudspeakers to prevent journalists from eavesdropping. Members of a psychological-operations unit then decided that non-stop music might aggravate Noriega into surrendering. They made requests for songs on the local armed-forces radio station, and directed the din at Noriega's window. The dictator was thought to prefer opera, and so hard rock dominated the playlist. The songs conveyed threatening, sometimes mocking messages: Alice Cooper's "No

More Mr. Nice Guy," AC/DC's "You Shook Me All Night Long."

Although the media delighted in the spectacle, President George H. W. Bush and General Colin Powell, then the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, took a dim view of it. Bush called the campaign "irritating and petty," and Powell had it stopped. Noriega, who had received psyops training at Fort Bragg in the nineteen-sixties, is said to have slept soundly through the clamor. Nonetheless, military and law-enforcement officials became convinced that they had stumbled on a valuable tactic. "Since the Noriega incident, you've been seeing an increased use of loudspeakers," a psyops spokesman declared. During the siege of the Branch Davidian compound, in Waco,

Texas, in 1993, the F.B.I. blasted music and noise day and night. When Palestinian militants occupied the Church of the Nativity, in Bethlehem, in 2002, Israeli forces reportedly tried to eject them with heavy metal. And during the occupation of Iraq the C.I.A. added music to the torture regime known as "enhanced interrogation." At Guantánamo, detainees were stripped to their underwear, shackled to chairs, and blinded by strobe lights as heavy metal, rap, and children's tunes assaulted their ears. Music has accompanied acts of war since trumpets sounded at the walls of Jericho, but in recent decades it has been weaponized as never before—outfitted for the unreal landscape of modern battle.

The intersection of music and violence has inspired a spate of academic studies. On my desk is a bleak stack of books examining torture and harassment, the playlists of Iraq War soldiers and interrogators, musical tactics in American crime-prevention efforts, sonic cruelties inflicted in the Holocaust and other genocides, the musical preferences of Al Qaeda militants and neo-Nazi skinheads. There is also a new translation, by Matthew Amos and Fredrick Rönnbäck, of Pascal Quignard's 1996 book, "The Hatred of Music" (Yale), which explores age-old associations between music and barbarity.

When music is applied to warlike ends, we tend to believe that it has been turned against its innocent nature. To quote the standard platitudes, it has charms to soothe a savage breast; it is the food of love; it brings us together and sets us free. We resist evidence suggesting that music can cloud reason, stir rage, cause pain, even kill. Footnoted treatises on the dark side of music are unlikely to sell as well as the cheery pop-science books that tout music's ability to make us smarter, happier, and more productive. Yet they probably bring us closer to the true function of music in the evolution of human civilization.

**A** STRIKING PASSAGE IN J. Martin Daughtry's "Listening to War: Sound, Music, Trauma, and Survival in Wartime Iraq" (Oxford) evokes the sound of the battlefield in the most recent Iraq war:

The growl of the Humvee engine. The *thump-thump-thump* of the approaching helicopter. The drone of the generator. Human voices shouting,

crying, asking questions in a foreign tongue. “*Allahu akbar!*”: the call to prayer. “*Down on the ground!*”: the shouted command. The *dadadadadada* of automatic weapon fire. The *shhhhhhhhhhh* of the rocket in flight. The *fffft* of the bullet displacing air. The sharp *k-k-k-k-r-boom* of the mortar. The rolling *BOOM* of the I.E.D.

Daughtry underscores something crucial about the nature of sound and, by extension, of music: we listen not only with our ears but also with our body. We flinch against loud sounds before the conscious brain begins to try to understand them. It is therefore a mistake to place “music” and “violence” in separate categories; as Daughtry writes, sound itself can be a form of violence. Detonating shells set off supersonic blast waves that slow down and become sound waves; such waves have been linked to traumatic brain injury, once known as shell shock. Symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder are often triggered by sonic signals; New York residents experienced this after September 11th, when a popped tire would make everyone jump.

Sound is all the more potent because it is inescapable: it saturates a space and can pass through walls. Quignard—a novelist and essayist of

an oblique, aphoristic bent—writes:

All sound is the invisible in the form of a piercer of envelopes. Whether it be bodies, rooms, apartments, castles, fortified cities. Immaterial, it breaks all barriers. . . . Hearing is not like seeing. What is seen can be abolished by the eyelids, can be stopped by partitions or curtains, can be rendered immediately inaccessible by walls. What is heard knows neither eyelids, nor partitions, neither curtains, nor walls. . . . Sound rushes in. It violates.

The fact that ears have no lids—ear-plugs notwithstanding—explains why reactions to undesirable sounds can be extreme. We are confronting faceless intruders; we are being touched by invisible hands.

Technological advances, especially in loudspeaker design, have increased sound’s invasive powers. Juliette Volcler, in “Extremely Loud: Sound As a Weapon” (New Press), details attempts to manufacture sonic devices that might debilitate enemy forces or disperse crowds. Long-range acoustic devices, nicknamed “sound cannons,” send out shrill, pulsating tones of up to a hundred and forty-nine decibels—enough to cause permanent hearing damage. Police units unleashed these devices at an Occupy Wall Street rally in 2011 and in Ferguson, Missouri, in 2014,

among other settings. A commercial device called the Mosquito discourages young people from loitering; it emits sounds in the 17.5-to-18.5-kilohertz range, which, in general, only those under the age of twenty-five can hear. Further Army research into low- and high-frequency weapons, which developers hoped would “liquefy the bowels,” apparently failed to yield results, although conspiracy theories proliferate on the Internet.

Humans react with particular revulsion to musical signals that are not of their choice or to their liking. Many neuroscientific theories about how music acts on the brain—such as Steven Pinker’s notion that music is “auditory cheesecake,” a biologically useless pleasure—ignore how personal tastes affect our processing of musical information. A genre that enrages one person may have a placebo effect on another. A 2006 study by the psychologist Laura Mitchell, testing how music-therapy sessions can alleviate pain, found that a suffering person was better served by his or her “preferred music” than by a piece that was assumed to have innately calming qualities. In other words, music therapy for a heavy-metal fan should involve heavy metal, not Enya.

Lily Hirsch’s “Music in American Crime Prevention and Punishment” (Michigan) explores how divergences in taste can be exploited for purposes of social control. In 1985, the managers of a number of 7-Eleven stores in British Columbia began playing classical and easy-listening music in their parking lots to drive away loitering teen-agers. The idea was that young people would find such a soundtrack insufferably uncool. The 7-Eleven company then applied this practice across North America, and it soon spread to other commercial spaces. To the chagrin of many classical-music fans, especially the lonely younger ones, it seems to work. This is an inversion of the concept of Muzak, which was invented to give a pleasant sonic veneer to public settings. Here instrumental music becomes a repellent.

To Hirsch, it’s no coincidence that 7-Eleven perfected its technique of musical cleansing while American forces were experimenting with musical harassment. Both reflect a strategy of



*“I’m a gigantic starfish endowed with the gift of speech, not a miracle worker.”*



“deterrence through music,” capitalizing on rage against the unwanted. The spread of portable digital technology, from CDs to the iPod and on to smartphones, means that it is easier than ever to impose music on a space and turn the psychological screws. The logical next step might be a Spotify algorithm that can discover what combination of songs is most likely to drive a given subject insane.

WHEN PRIMO LEVI arrived in Auschwitz, in 1944, he struggled to make sense not only of what he saw but of what he heard. As prisoners returned to the camp from a day of hard labor, they marched to bouncy popular music: in particular, the polka “Rosamunde,” which was an international hit at the time. (In America, it was called the “Beer Barrel Polka”; the Andrews Sisters, among others, sang it.) Levi’s first reaction was to laugh. He thought that he was witnessing a “colossal farce in Teutonic taste.” He later grasped that the grotesque juxtaposition of light music and horror was designed to destroy the spirit as surely as the crematoriums destroyed the body. The merry strains of “Rosamunde,” which also emanated from loudspeakers during mass shootings of Jews at Majdanek, mocked the suffering that the camps inflicted.

The Nazis were pioneers of musical sadism, although loudspeakers were apparently deployed more to drown out the screams of victims than to torture them. Jonathan Pieslak, in his 2009 book, “Sound Targets: American Soldiers and Music in the Iraq War,” finds a telling cinematic precedent in Alfred Hitchcock’s 1940 film “Foreign Correspondent,” where Nazi spies torment a diplomat with bright lights and swing music. To some extent, sonically enhanced interrogation may have been a Hollywood fantasy that migrated into reality—just as other aspects of the American torture regime took inspiration from TV shows like “24.” Similarly, in the 2004 battle of Fallujah, speakers mounted on Humvees bombarded the Iraqis with Metallica and AC/DC, mimicking the Wagner scene in “Apocalypse Now,” in which a helicopter squadron blasts “The Ride of the Valkyries” as it lays waste to a Vietnamese village.

Jane Mayer, a staff writer at this magazine, and other journalists have shown that the idea of punishing someone with music also emerged from Cold War-era research into the concept of “no-touch torture”—leaving no marks on victims’ bodies. Researchers of the period demonstrated that sensory deprivation and manipulation, including extended bouts of noise, could bring about the disintegration of a subject’s personality. Beginning in the nineteen-fifties, programs that trained American soldiers and intelligence operatives to withstand torture had a musical component; at one point, the playlist reportedly included the industrial band Throbbing Gristle and the avant-garde vocalist Diamanda Galás. The concept spread to military and police units in other countries, where it was applied not to trainees but to prisoners. In Israel, Palestinian detainees were tied to kindergarten chairs, cuffed, hooded, and immersed in modernist classical music. In Pinochet’s Chile, interrogators employed, among other selections, the soundtrack to “A Clockwork Orange,” whose notorious aversion-therapy sequence, scored to Beethoven, may have encouraged similar real-life experiments.

In America, musical torture received authorization in a September, 2003, memo by General Ricardo Sanchez. “Yelling, Loud Music, and Light Control” could be used “to create fear, disorient detainee and prolong capture shock,” provided that volume was “controlled to prevent injury.” Such practices had already been publicly exposed in a short article in *Newsweek* that May. The item noted that interrogations often featured the cloying theme of “Barney & Friends,” in which a purple dinosaur sings, “I love you / You love me / We’re a happy family.” The article’s author, Adam Piore, later recalled that his editors couched the item in joking terms, adding a sardonic kicker: “In search of comment from Barney’s people, Hit Entertainment, *Newsweek* endured five minutes of Barney while on hold. Yes, it broke us, too.” Repeating a pattern from the Noriega and Waco incidents, the media made a game of proposing ideal torture songs.

The hilarity subsided when the public learned more of what was going on

at Abu Ghraib, Bagram, Mosul, and Guantánamo. Here are some entries from the interrogation log of Mohammed al-Qahtani, the alleged “twentieth hijacker,” who was refused admittance to the United States in August, 2001:

1315: Corpsman checked vitals—O.K. Christina Aguilera music played. Interrogators ridiculed detainee by developing creative stories to fill in gaps in detainee’s cover story.

0400: Detainee was told to stand and loud music was played to keep detainee awake. Was told he can go to sleep when he tells the truth.

1115: Interrogation team entered the booth. Loud music was played that included songs in Arabic. Detainee complained that it was a violation of Islam to listen to Arabic music.

0345: Detainee offered food and water—refused. Detainee asked for music to be turned off. Detainee was asked if he can find the verse in the Koran that prohibits music.

1800: A variety of musical selections was played to agitate the detainee.

Aguilera seems to have been chosen because female singers were thought to offend Islamist detainees. Interrogation playlists also leaned on heavy-metal and rap numbers, which, as in the Noriega case, delivered messages of intimidation and destruction. Songs in regular rotation included Eminem’s “Kim” (“Sit down, bitch / If you move again I’ll beat the shit out of you”) and Drowning Pool’s “Bodies” (“Let the bodies hit the floor”).

Does such coerced listening qualify as torture? The N.Y.U.-based musicologist Suzanne Cusick, one of the first scholars to think deeply about music in the Iraq War, addressed the question in a 2008 paper for *The Journal of the Society for American Music*. During the Bush Administration, the U.S. government held that techniques inducing psychological rather than physical pain did not amount to torture, as international conventions have defined it. Cusick, however, makes clear that the loud-music tactic displays a chilling degree of casual sadism: the choice of songs seems designed to amuse the captors as much as to nauseate the captives. Few detainees probably understood the English lyrics aimed at them.

No official policy dictated the prison

playlists; interrogators improvised them on-site, making use of whatever music they had on hand. Pieslak, who interviewed a number of Iraq veterans, observes that soldiers played many of the same songs for their own benefit, particularly when they were psyching themselves up for a dangerous mission. They, too, favored the most anarchic corners of heavy metal and gangsta rap. Thus, certain songs served both to whip soldiers into a lethal frenzy and to annihilate the spirit of “enemy combatants.” You couldn’t ask for a clearer demonstration of the non-universality of music, of its capacity to sow discord.

The soldiers told Pieslak that they used music to strip themselves of empathy. One said that he and his comrades sought out a “predator kind of music.” Another, after admitting with some embarrassment that Eminem’s “Go to Sleep” (“Die, motherfucker, die”) was a “theme song” for his unit, said, “You’ve got to become inhuman to do inhuman things.” The most unsettling choice was Slayer’s “Angel of Death,” which imagines the inner world of Josef Mengele: “Auschwitz, the meaning of pain / The way that I want you to die.” Such songs are far removed from uplifting wartime propaganda like “Over There,” the patriotic 1917 tune by George M. Cohan. The image of soldiers prepping for a mission by listening to Metallica’s “One”—“Landmine has taken my sight . . . Left me with life in hell”—suggests the degree to which they, too, felt trapped in a malevolent machine.

AS HIRSCH AND other scholars point out, the idea of music as inherently good took hold only in the past few centuries. Philosophers of prior eras tended to view the art as an ambiguous, unreliable entity that had to be properly managed and channelled. In Plato’s Republic, Socrates scoffs at the idea that “music and poetry were only play and did no harm at all.” He distinguishes between musical modes that “suitably imitate the tone and rhythm of a courageous person who is active in battle” and those which strike him as soft, effeminate, lecherous, or melancholy. The Chinese “Book of Rites” differentiated between the joy-

ous sound of a well-ruled state and the resentful sound of a confused one. John Calvin believed that music “has an insidious and well-nigh incredible power to move us whither it will.” He went on, “We must be all the more diligent to control music in such a way that it will serve us for good and in no way harm us.”

German thinkers in the idealist and Romantic tradition—Hegel, E.T.A. Hoffmann, and Schopenhauer, among others—sparked a drastic revaluation of music’s significance. It became the doorway to the infinitude of the soul, and expressed humanity’s collective longing for freedom and brotherhood. With the canonization of Beethoven, music became the vehicle of genius. Sublime as Beethoven is, the claim of universality blended all too easily with a German bid for supremacy. The musicologist Richard Taruskin, whose rigorously unsentimental view of Western music history anchors much recent work in the field, likes to quote a phrase ironically articulated by the historian Stanley Hoffman, who died last year: “There are universal values, and they happen to be mine.”

Despite the cultural catastrophe of Nazi Germany, the Romantic idealization of music persists. Pop music in the American tradition is now held to be the all-encompassing, world-redeeming force. Many consumers prefer to see only the positive side of pop: they cherish it as a culturally and spiritually liberating influence, somehow free of the rapacity of capitalism even as it overwhelms the marketplace. Whenever it is suggested that music might arouse or incite violence—Eminem’s graphic fantasies of abuse and murder, or, more recently, the whiff of rape culture in Robin Thicke’s “Blurred Lines”—fans suddenly devalue music’s potency, portraying it as a vehicle for harmless play that cannot propel bodies into action. When Eminem proclaims that he is “just clownin’, dogg,” he is taken at his word.

Bruce Johnson and Martin Cloonan expose this inconsistency in “Dark Side of the Tune: Popular Music and Violence” (2008). They are not reactionaries in the Tipper Gore mode, trying to whip up a moral panic. Pioneers of pop-music studies, they ad-

dress their subject with deep respect. Nonetheless, if music can shape “our sense of the possible,” as they say, it must also be able to act destructively. Either music affects the world around it or it does not. Johnson and Cloonan avoid claims of direct causality, but they refuse to rule out links between violence in music—in terms both of lyrical content and of raw decibel impact—and violence in society. Furthermore, musical brutality need not involve a brutal act, for a “song of vilification is in itself an act of social violence.”

The pattern of sonic aggression that runs from the Noriega siege to the Iraq War poses these issues in the starkest terms. There was a nasty undertow of cultural triumphalism in the hard-hitting, hypermasculine music used to humiliate foreign prisoners. “The detainee’s subjectivity was to be lost in a flood of *American* sounds,” Johnson and Cloonan write. On a symbolic level, the rituals at Guantánamo present an extreme image of how American culture forces itself on an often unwilling world.

Although music has a tremendous ability to create communal feeling, no community can form without excluding outsiders. The sense of oneness that a song fosters in a human herd can seem either a beautiful or a repulsive thing—usually depending on whether you love or hate the song in question. Loudness heightens the tension: blaring music is a hegemonic move, a declaration of disdain for anyone who thinks differently. Whether we are marching or dancing or sitting silently in chairs, we are being molded into a single mass by sound. As Quignard notes in “The Hatred of Music,” the Latin word *obaudire*, to obey, contains *audire*, to hear. Music “hypnotizes and causes man to abandon the expressible,” he writes. “In hearing, man is held captive.”

QUIGNARD’S SLENDER, UNNERVING volume is quite different in tone from the sober academic books on the theme of music and violence. It hovers in a peculiarly French space between philosophy and fiction, and goes on mysterious lyrical flights, animating scenes from history and myth. One



astounding sequence evokes St. Peter's denial of Jesus before the third crowing of the cock. Quignard imagines that, ever after, Peter was traumatized by any high-pitched noise, and that he soundproofed his home to escape the cacophony of the street: "The palace was shrouded in silence, the windows blinded with drapes."

For years, Quignard was active on the French music scene, organizing concerts and working with the Catalan viol player Jordi Savall. Quignard co-wrote the screenplay for the music-drenched 1991 film "Tous les Matins du Monde." Soon afterward, he retreated from such projects and wrote "The Hatred of Music" as a *cri de cœur*. Although he does not explain this change of heart, he gestures toward the meaningless ubiquity of music in contemporary life—Mozart in the 7-Eleven. Quignard gives this familiar lament a savage edge. In a chapter on the infernal Muzak of Auschwitz, he quotes Tolstoy: "Where one wants to have slaves, one must have as much music as possible."

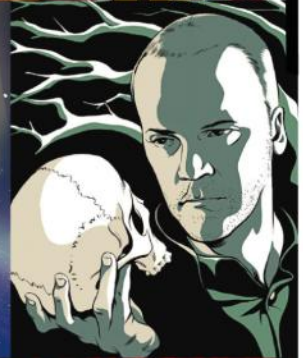
The book's most disquieting passages suggest that music has always had a violent heart—that it may be rooted in the urge to dominate and kill. He speculates that some of the earliest music was made by hunters luring their prey, and devotes a chapter to the myth of the Sirens, who, in his reading, beguiled men with song just as men once beguiled animals with music. Quignard muses that some early weapons doubled as instruments: a string stretched across a bow could be resonantly plucked or it could send an arrow through the air. Music relied conspicuously on the slaughter of animals: horsehair bows drawn over catgut, horns torn from the heads of big game.

What to do with these dire ruminations? Renouncing music is not an option—not even Quignard can bring himself to do that. Rather, we can renounce the fiction of music's innocence. To discard that illusion is not to diminish music's importance; rather, it lets us register the uncanny power of the medium. To admit that music can become an instrument of evil is to take it seriously as a form of human expression. ♦

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THE NEW YORKER, JULY 4, 2016

## VOICE FIELD

*Blood Orange lets in the varied sounds of identity.*

BY HUA HSU

*What is most striking about the album is that it is full of other people's voices.*

ONE OF THE first voices you hear on “Freetown Sound,” the third album from Blood Orange, is that of a young slam poet named Ashlee Haze. Last year, Haze performed a poem about the first time she heard the gleeful, futuristic hip-hop artist Missy Elliott, and the way this experience changed her. She had never before encountered a pop star, someone to be idolized, who looked like her. Seeing Elliott dancing exuberantly in a “black trash bag” opened Haze’s eyes to the power of representation and feminism, and to the possibility of demanding more from the world around her. “I did not grow up to be you,” she tells Elliott, “but I did grow to be me/and be in love with who this woman is.” Haze’s performance went viral, earning her a

visit from Elliott herself. Eventually, it transfixed Devonté Hynes, the man behind Blood Orange. He clipped an excerpt from it for “By Ourselves,” the first track on “Freetown Sound,” where Haze’s words, now resting atop a saxophone, sound like a hypothesis waiting to be tested.

Haze’s poem depicted an everyday kind of magic: the capacity of culture to help us imagine who we might become—not in terms of where to aim our libido but of how to walk the world with dignity and confidence. How “a fat black girl from Chicago / could dance until she felt pretty.” Being yourself shouldn’t be this hard. But popular culture, even as it prizes difference, rarely captures the variety that resides within identities such

as black, or queer, or immigrant. This is the challenge that animates “Freetown Sound,” a wondrous tapestry of eighties dance music and R. & B., embroidered with fragmentary questions about family and migration, Christianity, and the expectations that come with black masculinity. What’s most striking about the album is that it is full of other people’s voices. Sometimes, as in the case of Haze, they are there to model another way of being. At other times, these voices are reminders of the world that has shaped Hynes himself—quotes from De La Soul or Ta-Nehisi Coates that rewired his brain, alongside sampled dispatches from faraway conflicts.

Hynes, who is English, has had a somewhat promiscuous relationship with genre. In his late teens, he was a member of the London band Test Icicles, which approached the ubiquitous dance-punk formula with a bit of juvenile thrash. After the group broke up, Hynes moved to the United States, where he drifted toward the earnest, indie-rock Americana then associated with the band Bright Eyes and its label, Saddle Creek. He then briefly relocated to Omaha, where Saddle Creek is based, to record the first of two albums as Lightspeed Champion, a quirky, self-fashioned, country-tinged rock persona. In 2007, he moved to New York and changed course once again, bringing a newcomer’s devotion to the city’s rich dance-floor subcultures.

In 2011, Hynes released “Coastal Grooves,” his first album as Blood Orange. The songs, almost all of which seem to be written from the perspective of women, were built on sinuous guitar lines, moody synths, and his voice, a falsetto that became necessary after he had an operation on his throat. Two years later, he released the lush, euphoric “Cupid Deluxe.” In Blood Orange’s music, the past is more than just keyboards, drum machines, and slap bass, though the artist’s use of these certainly registers his fascination with the eighties. What Hynes is drawn to is the era’s range of possibilities, the fluid futurism that no longer seems imaginable: the radical coyness of Prince, the classy sheen of British funk, the cosmopolitanism of early hip-hop and electro, the cool composure of Sade and Janet Jackson. This was music that danced free of convention, from musical genre to how a man



or a woman was supposed to behave. And it was accomplished simply by being, or singing in a falsetto, or expressing desire, or by dreaming of liberation.

**I**N JULY OF 2014, Hynes played at the Lollapalooza festival in Chicago. He took the stage wearing a homemade shirt that listed the names of some of the young African-Americans whose deaths had helped galvanize the Black Lives Matter movement: Eric Garner, Trayvon Martin, Jordan Davis, Oscar Grant. After his performance—and for reasons that have never been fully revealed—Hynes and his girlfriend were assaulted by a security guard at the festival, resulting in his performing in a knee brace for the rest of the summer. Last year, the most striking music he released as a solo artist was a collage piece titled “Do You See My Skin Through the Flames?” and “Sandra’s Smile,” a mournful, slinky ode to Sandra Bland, the twenty-eight-year-old black woman who, after being arrested during a routine traffic stop, died in police custody.

When the release date for “Freetown Sound” was announced, Hynes posted a message on Instagram explaining that the album was intended for those who had been told they were “not BLACK enough, too BLACK, Too QUEER, not QUEER the right way.” It’s a tension at the heart of identity: how to identify with a community larger than yourself while remaining true to your own individual weirdness.

And so on “Freetown Sound” Hynes turns to those who have stood here before and wondered the same thing. “You chose to fade away with him/I chose to try and let you in,” he sings on “With Him”—a gorgeous melody and lyric that he revisits throughout the album. On this track, he relinquishes the microphone for an extended sample of dialogue from “Black Is . . . Black Ain’t,” Marlon Riggs’s 1994 documentary about the infinite permutations of experience that comprise blackness. The blissful disco joyride of “Desiree” is repeatedly interrupted by lines from “Paris Is Burning,” the 1990 documentary about New York’s queer and transgender ballroom subculture. “Freetown Sound” is about voices—whose get heard, whose have the capacity to guide or haunt you. Hynes bleeds into his duets with BEA1991,

Kelsey Lu, Nelly Furtado, and Debbie Harry until the boundaries between all of the voices become blurred.

“Freetown Sound” is named for the capital of Sierra Leone, where Hynes’s father was born. But the album links his parents’ migratory past to his own life in present-day Manhattan. On the majestic “Augustine,” addressed to the African saint who helped bring modern Christianity to the continent, Hynes ties his parents’ journey to his own. “My father was a young man/My mother off the boat/My eyes were fresh at twenty-one/Bruised but still afloat,” he sings softly above a thrusting, electro-inspired drum pattern and an off-kilter piano. “Love Ya” borrows both its tune and its lyrics from an old song by Eddy Grant, a British singer originally from Guyana, the birthplace of Hynes’s mother. As Hynes and the singer Zuri Marley chant Grant’s chorus over and over, the audio from a YouTube clip of a woman describing Sierra Leone’s civil war in Krio, Hynes’s father’s native language, plays in the background.

Hynes’s effervescent falsetto often obscures the painful stories that shadow the album’s overriding sense of joy. “Hands Up” comes across as bouncy and carefree. “Are you still sleeping with the lights on, baby?” he wonders, his words chasing after a snaking drum pattern. He’s met by a chorus that scans as fun: “Hands up/Get out.” But, as the drums stutter to a stop, an audio sample from a protest comes to the fore: “Hands up! Don’t shoot!”

Hynes’s music has always been deeply stylish. But these fragments give “Freetown Sound” a sense of space and a feeling of history. It is as much a mixtape as it is an essay, a collection of voices in service of an argument. Despite the strains of tragedy that run through the album, its mysteries offer hope. Maybe St. Augustine is paying attention, or maybe, as Hynes sings on “Thank You,” the promise of faith will allow us to break from “the higher state of doubt.” Hynes’s voice floats in and out of these songs, and when he steps up front his voice is often soft, somewhere between genders, echoing, reverberating into the future. Yet he sounds optimistic. It’s a reminder that, despite the sorrows and uncertainty, “while Trayvon falls asleep” and others fade away, you still have to live. ♦

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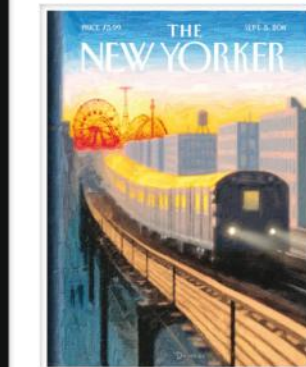
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ON TELEVISION

# THE WESTEROS WING

*The politics of "Game of Thrones."*

BY EMILY NUSSBAUM



THIS SEASON ON "Game of Thrones," Tyrion Lannister—a salty dwarf with a Wildean wit—cuts a deal with some powerful slave owners on behalf of his boss, the flame-resistant abolitionist desert queen Daenerys. If they agree to stop funding regime change, they will get seven years to phase out slavery. Tyrion's aides, former slaves, object. "Slavery is a horror that should be ended at once," Tyrion shoots back. "War is a horror that should be ended at once. I can't do both today."

In the colossal, bloody, flawed, exhausting, occasionally intoxicating phenomenon that is "Game of Thrones," the best bits are often moments like this: seduc-

tive mini-meditations on politics that wouldn't be out of place in "Wolf Hall," if "Wolf Hall" had ice zombies, or "Veep," if "Veep" featured babies getting eaten by dogs. Season 6, which ended on Sunday, to the usual celebration and fury, and with the usual viral memes, and with corpses mangled (I assume, since HBO didn't give me a screener), felt perversely relevant in this election year. It was dominated by debates about purity versus pragmatism; the struggles of female candidates in a male-run world; family dynasties with ugly histories; and assorted deals with various devils. George R. R. Martin surely didn't intend his blockbuster series of fan-

tasy books, set in feudal Westeros (which I haven't read and, let's face it, probably won't read), to be an allegorical text for U.S. voters in 2016. But that's what you get with modern water-cooler dramas, which so often work as an aesthetic Esperanto that lets us talk about politics without fighting about the news.

Certainly, TV spent many years helping viewers to imagine what it might be like to elect Barack Obama: on shows as varied as the ultra-liberal "The West Wing" and the neocon "24," we saw black or Latino male Presidents, often heroic and authoritative. (On "The West Wing," the cool upstart Santos was explicitly based on the young Obama.) Hillary Clinton hasn't had quite the same fictional fanfare. With a few exceptions, like "Madame Secretary," on CBS, the Hillary-inspired characters on modern dramas, from Mellie Grant to Alicia Florrick to Claire Underwood, might as well have been funded by the R.N.C.: they're scheming ice princesses at best, corrupt ice queens at worst. This season of "Game of Thrones"—the first to fully depart from the books—expands that palate, providing a weirdly fascinating array of female conquerors, enough to fit every attitude and ideology.

If you're one sort of person, you might see Hillary Clinton in Daenerys (Emilia Clarke)—a former First Lady who quite literally walks through flames, and whose hawkish (or, I guess, dragonish) résumé is tempered by her desire to make her kingdom less violent, through canny dealmaking. (For gun control, substitute fights to the death in Slaver's Bay; for Barney Frank, Tyrion Lannister.) In private, she's a progressive, not a liberal, arguing, about the cycle of monarchic struggle, "I'm not going to stop the wheel. I'm going to *break* the wheel."

If you're another kind of person, of course, you'll see Hillary as Cersei (Lena Headey), ethically rotten and sexually perverse, a born elitist, sympathetic only when she's been literally stripped, pelted with garbage, and given the kind of haircut a gal usually gets when drunk, after a bad breakup. (The Bada Bing aesthetics of "Game of Thrones" are so persistent that the nuns of King's Landing couldn't even bring themselves to shave Headey's head—instead, they shamed her with a Mia Farrow pixie cut.) Both queens are "bossy" and struggle with likability;

*Season 6, which ended Sunday, has felt perversely relevant in this election year.*



strangers have strong opinions about their hair. (You can't make any clear analogy to modern racial politics, but the less said about the colonial aesthetics of Daenerys's world—in which she has a black best friend and is the white liberator of dusky, rape-happy savages who know how to dance—the better.)

Daenerys and Cersei aren't the show's only rising female politicians. There's also the tormented princess Sansa Stark (the excellent Sophie Turner), a survivor of three lordly betrothals—two to psychotic sadists—who is driving an army led by her wet-eyed, newly reanimated half brother, Jon Snow. There's Yara Greyjoy, the pugnacious lesbian daughter of misogynist seafarers; there's Ellaria, a bisexual orgy-and-revenge buff from egalitarian Dorne, and her sultry army of daughter figures, the Sand Snakes.

Female “badasses” dominate the landscape, among them Sansa's sister, the avenger Arya, the refreshingly butch Brienne of Tarth, and, recently, the kiddie-queen Lady Mormont. The sexual politics of “Game of Thrones” have long been a model of cognitive dissonance, like an anti-misogyny pamphlet published in the form of a *Penthouse* letter. And the girl-power fantasies can often be one-note—Arya's training as a multifaceted assassin rivalled the torture of Theon Greyjoy for sheer tedium. But place a lot of one- or two-note heroines side by side and you gain a choral richness. For all its contradictions, the show has something to say about the psychic cost, for women, of achieving power, with plots like Sansa Stark's slow transformation from the worst-off “Bachelor” contestant to dry-eyed warrior queen, smirking as she watches her rapist get his face ripped off by hungry dogs.

There's a Bernie Sanders avatar, too, if you don't like Bernie Sanders: with shocking timeliness, given the bird that landed on Sanders's podium recently, his name is the High Sparrow. A revolutionary ideologue who is obsessed with purifying the elite of King's Landing—including Cersei—the High Sparrow is unwilling to compromise, sticking to his principles in a way that is both impressive and aggravating. Like Sanders, he could easily be mistaken for Larry David.

Even the more purely geeky aspects of “Game of Thrones” improve when

viewed through polarized spectacles; among these are the White Walkers, undead creatures invading Westeros from the north. I groaned when, in one of the show's undeniably breathtaking battle sequences, these blue-eyed skeleton-demons streamed over a steep cliff like so many black sequins spilling from an Oscar de la Renta ball gown. There were enough skimpily motivated characters, to my mind, without folding in soulless monsters defined by their unstoppable. Then somebody on Twitter argued that the White Walkers symbolized global warming—a radical existential threat that the Westerosi clans had failed to unite against, too busy squabbling over that hideous iron Barcalounger that serves as a throne. One solid metaphor and I was on board. Fine, bring on the zombies.

**E**LECTORAL POLITICS AREN'T the only politics, of course. There's also the show's broader philosophy, its strongman fetishization of survival at any cost. In Westeros, vulnerability is always a mistake: feel and you'll get flayed. It's the landscape's only truly democratic quality, whatever category you fit into—poor, a child, a woman, a man with an arm or a penis that might get chopped off, a parent, a lover, or really anyone with *anything* to lose, like a king. As Sansa Stark puts it, with regal disgust, after yet another empty promise of masculine chivalry, “No one can protect me. No one can protect *anyone*.”

Still, that doesn't quite explain the show's chop-licking relish at torturing its viewers. At the series's lowest moments (like the penectomy/enslavement plot that takes place in what I started to think of as Fast-Forward Dungeon), it can feel as airless and acrid as “The Walking Dead,” just another macho cable wallow in sadism. Being a fan means living in Westeros: go numb or go home. If you care too much, you'll stop watching—but if you care too little you'll also stop watching. (I did, for a while. My turning point was one of several terrible Westeros weddings—the one with the dwarf-torture, not the one with the throat-slitting, the dwarf-*shaming*, the pregnancy-stabbing, or the torture-rape. If you get an invitation to a wedding in Westeros, politely decline!) A regular viewer finds herself adopting a troll's detachment, in it for the lulz. I sneered at the sight of a house cat;

a baby made me shrug. With cool logic, I can justify nearly every scene of ultra-violence on the show—the child burned at the stake made sense; Sansa's torture-rape made sense—but making sense is not the same as having meaning.

Over drinks recently, a friend talked in distress about what felt to him like the Trumpish undercurrent to the series: as much as he enjoyed more complex characters (mostly Lannisters) and those brilliant battles, he felt repelled by the show's nihilistic insistence that only dominance mattered. Even an episode in which a hardened killer, the Hound, joins a kind of A.A. recovery group—where penitents embrace humble service—worked mostly to head-butt the entire notion of civic resistance to violence. “You don't cure a disease by spreading it to more people,” the preacher who leads the group insists. (He also resembles Bernie Sanders.) “You don't cure it by dying, either,” the Hound says. Five minutes later, that preacher is hanging from the rafters; finding him, the Hound pulls an axe from a log, beating plowshares back into swords.

I argued that the show was, if not necessarily deeper than that, then at least a bigger tent. An extended battle scene in a recent episode should have been about bloodlust, but instead it was about empathy: as horses heaved and arrows flew, the lens repeatedly flickered up from beneath a pile of bloody, muddy bodies, forcing us to feel a soldier's panic and his fear. It was an action sequence with a flexible humanity, and a thoughtfulness about war, that the larger plotlines too often lack.

Midway through this season, Arya Stark—a survivor of family trauma, like almost everyone on the series—watches a Punch-and-Judyish play about her clan's history. She sees her father beheaded, an act she had witnessed in real life. Then she laughs at the death of her enemy, the psychotic Joffrey, giggling amid a serious crowd. But, when the woman playing Cersei weeps over Joffrey's corpse, Arya's face goes still. The scene felt designed to let both audiences cry, the one inside the show and the one outside it. It was rare permission to acknowledge that, even when a villainess grieves a sadist, it's not really a joke. In a show that so often demands armor, it was a powerful reprieve: the chance to be more than just another hungry dog. ♦

## OLD ENEMIES

*"Independence Day: Resurgence" and "Our Kind of Traitor."*

BY ANTHONY LANE

*The aliens return in Roland Emmerich's sequel to his 1996 movie.*

TWENTY YEARS AGO, in “Independence Day,” an alien attack was repelled by David Levinson (Jeff Goldblum), a scientist so brilliant that he even knew how to send a virus from his laptop. Assistance was provided by his grumpy father (Judd Hirsch), a Marine Corps pilot (Will Smith), and Tom Whitmore (Bill Pullman), who was the leader of the free world *and* of the airborne defense. So noble was their effort, apparently, that it ushered in two decades of universal peace: armed conflict among nations has subsided, and the world, in line with John Lennon’s instructions, has lived as one.

Needless to say, this dreary state of affairs cannot be allowed to persist, and the bracing news brought by the sequel, “Independence Day: Resurgence,” is that the aliens have returned, to harvest Earth’s molten core. Who will stop them this time around? Whitmore is now a shaggy ruin with a walking stick and a supply of meds; the current President (Sela Ward) seems decisive, but the film confines her to the fringes of the action. Meanwhile, Smith’s character has died, either because Smith’s

agent considered the financial package insufficiently galactic or, more likely, because Smith read the script. The pilot’s son, Dylan Hiller (Jessie T. Usher), is now in the hot seat, though sadly he lacks the firepower of his father’s personality. Rivalry flares between Hiller and Jake Morrison (Liam Hemsworth), a fellow sky jockey, but it peters out after a single punch in the canteen.

In short, it’s up to Goldblum to save the film. (The world, by comparison, is easily saved. It always is.) I will watch him in anything; that stop-start delivery, all ums and hums, combines with his smile—so winning, yet so quick to die—and his buggy eyes to suggest a soul both hyper and hazed-over. You never know quite how he will respond to any predicament, nor, you sometimes feel, does he. The main reason for the success of “Independence Day” was the mashing together of Goldblum and Smith. They were a genuine odd couple—the wonkish ruminant sharing a cockpit with Mr. Congeniality, whose days flew by without a flutter of self-doubt. No surprise, then, that Goldblum seems a little

lonely and marooned in the latest venture, which suffers from a nagging case of Smithlessness. There’s nothing here to compare with the eruption of joy, back in 1996, when our heroes hurtled free of the enemy stronghold by the merest squeak, eliciting, from Smith, the triumphal roar “Elvis has *left* the building.”

The director, now as then, is Roland Emmerich, who, like a constant lover, refuses to tame his devotion; and what he loves is enormity. The incoming mother ship, this time, is round and flat and three thousand miles in diameter, as if the aliens’ deepest ambition were not to exterminate us but to make paella for everyone on the planet. And, if you dig the ship, check out the mother—the queen of the meanies, who rolls up late in the show, gambolling across salt flats toward a school bus full of innocent children. In a way, Emmerich is more fearless than any of his characters, boldly embracing clichés from which other directors would shrink and flee, and unabashed by his old-school craving to astound. Witness the gravitational field exerted by the ship, which can suck buses, cars, and bridges out of a city and whoosh them upward. As a spectacle, that is outdone only by the spooky sight of Judd Hirsch, who hasn’t aged a minute since the last film.

The first “Independence Day” had the gratifying slap of good pop cinema, harmless and weightless; the follow-up is twice as big and half as fun. Even the special effects begin to pale, and some of them, in the closing scenes, feel sketchy and unfinished. Either Fox ran out of time or cash or Emmerich, taking his cue from Schubert, simply threw up his hands and said, “Screw it. That’ll have to do.” In truth, the film doesn’t really end, let alone draw to a cathartic conclusion; it just stops. If you must see it, then at least try to do so, as I did, in IMAX and 3-D. This is known as immersive moviegoing, and what it means in practice is that, rather than watching London being destroyed before your very eyes, you are left with the distinct impression that London is being destroyed midway between your eyeballs. Everything quakes. For the price of a single ticket, I got to experience a two-hour sci-fi



extravaganza and had my sinuses drained at the same time. You can't argue with value like that.

NO ONE BUT John le Carré would write a novel called "Our Kind of Traitor." That unstable compound of clubbability and deceit belongs to him alone. The book, which appeared in 2010, has now become a film, directed by Susanna White. Its hero is Perry Makepeace (Ewan McGregor), who would rather not be a hero at all. He is married to Gail (Naomie Harris), a lawyer; he teaches English literature at a university in London; and his surname betrays a constitutional wish to stay out of trouble. But trouble comes to find him anyway.

It takes the portly shape of Dima (Stellan Skarsgård), an effusive Russian thug. (His naked body, glimpsed at a sports club, is so richly inked with tattoos that it's more like a treasure map than like a living form.) Dima works for the Mafia of his motherland, and his job is to launder money as efficiently, and no doubt as regularly, as the rest of us wash our shirts. He has fallen foul of his employers, however, who will soon exact vengeance, and his plan is to trade his wicked secrets—some involving British politicians—for a new life, plus a new identity, in England. But how can he communicate with the spymasters of London and not alert his predators, who presumably track his electronic spoor? If Dima asked me, I would say, "Write a letter and pop it in the mail," but I guess that might abbreviate the plot. Instead, he befriends Perry, who is on vacation at the same hotel, in Mar-

rakesh. The Englishman, wary of being impolite, accepts a glass of Château Pétrus, not a wine that you should ever spurn, and an invitation to a night of Bacchic misrule. Thus wooed, he agrees to transport a memory stick on Dima's behalf, only to find himself wading up to his chin in the slime of the intelligence game.

The novel was adapted by Hossein Amini, who clearly enjoys the challenge of tough texts. If you have conjured screenplays, as he has, from Thomas Hardy, Henry James, Elmore Leonard, and Patricia Highsmith, then le Carré is no cause for alarm, and some of Amini's alterations are well wrought. Where Perry and Gail, in the book, are on their trip because she has inherited a slab of money, the movie tells us—with a shot of her lying sadly in bed, reluctant to make love—that they are trying to repair a dented relationship. That suits the mood of sorrow (le Carré long ago persuaded us that a country can fray and fail as easily as a marriage), and it also suggests why Perry might accede to Dima's plea—not out of moral probity or patriotic duty but simply for the thrill. How better to rouse your sex life than by turning into a spy?

And yet there is a blank space in this film, where plausibility should dwell. Since the end of the Cold War, le Carré has increasingly drawn his players not from the corridors or smoky pubs of power but from the amateur ranks—the tyros and the patsies who are leaned upon to answer power's bidding. That is as true of Perry as it is of Jonathan Pine, in "The Night Man-

ager" (recently dramatized and shown on AMC), although, in the case of the bookish Perry, you are tempted to ask, Does the fun of the film—a shoot-out in a forest, a midair explosion, and so on—take place for real, or could it all be unfolding inside his brain? Maybe he did nothing more than sprawl on a Moroccan beach with a copy of Graham Greene, glance at Russian tourists, and feed them into his daydream of a plot.

A hint of that reverie hangs over the movie, thanks to the cinematography of Anthony Dod Mantle. He often works with Lars von Trier and Danny Boyle, and the images in "Our Kind of Traitor" feel woozy and submarine—hardly what we associate with this most clinical of genres. Indeed, the whole film is oddly poised between the pensive and the peevish, with a topdressing of high jinks. We get a cameo from le Carré himself, as we did in "The Night Manager," and a good sly performance from Damian Lewis as Hector, Perry's contact in London. (Hector's thick-rimmed glasses pay homage to Harry Palmer, the agent played by Michael Caine in the nineteen-sixties.) Slowly, though, it is Skarsgård who takes charge, positioning Dima—ruthless, jovial, and doomed—at the heart of this saturnine tale. Only in one respect is Dima a naïf. Preserving faith in what he calls "your famous fucking British fair play," he even describes Perry as "a gentleman." In the world of le Carré, that is like seeing a unicorn. ♦

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Richard Brody blogs about movies.

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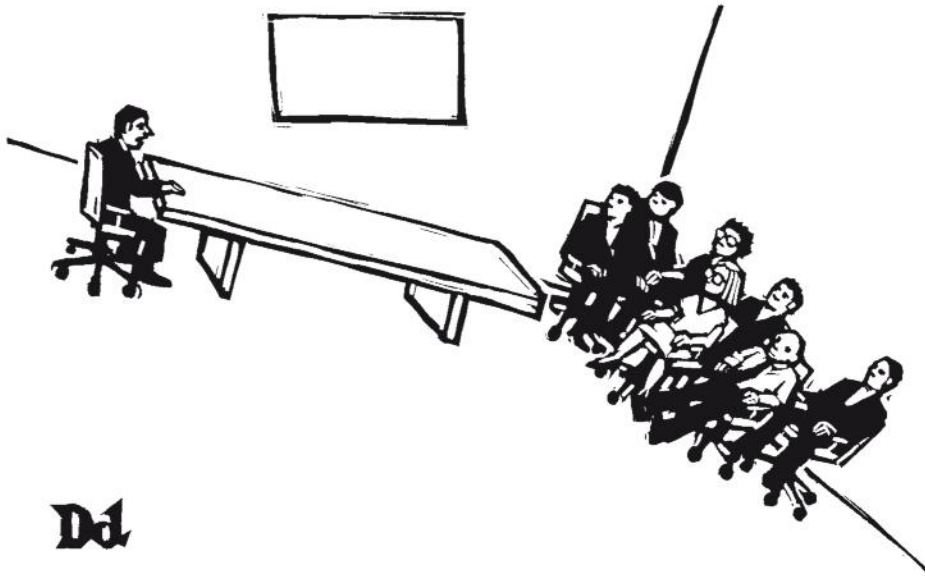
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*Each week, we provide a cartoon in need of a caption. You, the reader, submit a caption, we choose three finalists, and you vote for your favorite. Caption submissions for this week's cartoon, by Drew Dernavich, must be received by Sunday, July 3rd. The finalists in the June 20th contest appear below. We will announce the winner, and the finalists in this week's contest, in the July 25th issue. Anyone age thirteen or older can enter or vote. To do so, and to read the complete rules, visit [contest.newyorker.com](http://contest.newyorker.com).*

### THIS WEEK'S CONTEST



“ ..... ”

### THE FINALISTS



“I let my mother-in-law move in with us.”  
Steve Doty, Dallas, Texas

“Ironically, it's for being so humble.”  
Mike Gandolfi, Sherman Oaks, Calif.

“Good Samaritan? I was a great Samaritan.”  
Jarrod Harelik, The Colony, Texas

### THE WINNING CAPTION



“Take the picture, damn it, take the picture!”  
Larry Roberts, Pasadena, Calif.



# WHO IS EVAN HANSEN?

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