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THE NEW YORKER

MAY 15, 2023


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MAY 15, 2023

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THIS WEEK ON NEWYORKER.COM

THE NEW YORKER INTERVIEW
Rachel Syme talks with the actor Bill Hader about the end of "Barry" and what comes next.

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Algorithms have made life less and less random. Dalton Conley asks whether that's what we really want.

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LEFT: MAX GUTHER; RIGHT: KWAKU ALSTON

THE MAIL

BENEATH THE SURFACE

As Rachel Syme's appreciation of Preston Sturges shows, great art can often be enjoyed on a superficial level (Books, April 10th). But, by scolding those of us who get more than surface pleasure out of Sturges's "rat-a-tat scripts," she misses out on half the fun.

Syme gives short shrift, for example, to the key scene in her favorite Sturges flick, "Sullivan's Travels," which follows the misadventures of a Sturges-like director of screwball comedies who ends up in what Syme calls "a work camp full of downtrodden men." In fact, it's not just a work camp but a brutal Southern chain gang. As a Sunday treat, the prisoners, who are almost all white, are compassionately hosted by an all-Black church for its movie night. In 1941, it was still a Hollywood taboo to call out racial injustice; for segregated American audiences, the irony of the Black church's congregants praying for the white manacled prisoners' freedom would have been hard to miss. In this scene, Sturges delivers one of the most powerful, deftly subversive anti-Jim Crow messages of any film from that era. By noticing his message as well as his snappy dialogue, critics do not "embalm" Sturges, as Syme suggests, but help to bring all of his mischievous genius back to life.

Ward Johnson
Atherton, Calif.

PROMISCUOUS USAGE

Charles Bethea's entertaining piece on Slutty Vegan shows the burger chain's use of the word "slutty" to be a savvy bit of branding, capable of capturing the paradoxical associations of cute promiscuity, chic vulgarity, and naughtily virtuous veganism ("Special Sauce," April 17th). The history of the word "slut" reinforces its good-bad connotations. The word might be connected to the Old English "slyt" (sleet) and seems related to words meaning "muddy" and "slushy." Since its earliest appearance, in the fifteenth century, "slut" has often, but not always, had a negative meaning: a dirty or slatternly woman, a licentious woman or man, a scullery maid, or simply a girl. In the past half century, some speakers have reclaimed "slut" and used it proudly, as in SlutWalks, marches against stigmatizing victims of sexual assault. Other modern uses trade jokingly on its implications of promiscuity, as in "I'm a TV slut. I'll watch anything." Who knows how it will evolve in the future—perhaps into a common food term?

Judith Tschann
Redlands, Calif.

RADICAL ROOTS

Kathryn Schulz's piece on Jeanne Manford might give the impression that she was a mild-mannered Queens schoolteacher, whose visionary founding of Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays was primarily rooted in love for her son Morty Manford, a gay leader ("Family Values," April 17th). However, Bettina Aptheker reveals in her recent book, "Communists in Closets: Queering the History 1930s-1990s," that Jeanne was also a labor organizer who held office in the New York City Teachers Union, the left-wing alternative to the United Federation of Teachers. In the Communist Party archives, Aptheker found a letter from Morty, asking the Party chairman, Henry Winston, to testify on behalf of gay people ahead of a 1971 New York City Council hearing; Winston, who upheld the Party's ban on homosexuals, never responded. Aptheker wonders if there was a connection between Morty's interest in the Communist Party and Jeanne's organizing. Regardless, it seems clear that radical commitments and left-wing analysis, as much as affection for our queer family members, can help lead someone to the obvious conclusion that every person deserves basic human rights.

Sarah Schulman
New York City

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MAY 10 – 16, 2023

GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN

Eboni Booth's drama "Paris," from 2020, was a masterpiece of absurd menace, so anticipation is high for her **"Primary Trust,"** at the Roundabout's Laura Pels. William Jackson Harper, the quicksilver "Good Place" star who recently ascended into Marvel filmdom, plays an upstate New York bookstore employee who reassesses life after a layoff; the always otherworldly April Matthis ("The Piano Lesson"), who deliciously destabilizes every show she touches, plays a horizon-expanding waitress at his local tiki bar.

PHOTOGRAPH BY MARK ELZEY

As ever, it's advisable to check in advance to confirm engagements.

ART

Arthur Dove

Celebrated for his lambent biomorphic forms, Dove is widely considered the first American painter to have developed a completely nonobjective strain of abstraction. He was associated with the early-twentieth-century modernist avant-garde in the orbit of Alfred Stieglitz's gallery 291, along with John Marin, Marsden Hartley, and, perhaps most significantly, Georgia O'Keefe, who, like Dove, chased the ineffable qualities of organisms and landscapes. This concise survey, titled "Sensations of Light," fortuitously coincides with the wonderful O'Keeffe show at MOMA, bringing the two artists into conversation once again. Organized to celebrate a newly published catalogue raisonné on the artist by Debra Bricker Balken, the exhibition underscores the passion for nature that suffuses Dove's sui-generis compositions, which tend to be oblique riffs on (or synesthetic translations of) the observable world. Among the most breathtaking pictures on view is "Dawn I," from 1932. Concentric rings of pink, cream, yellow, and white fill the square canvas, suggesting something both cellular and meteoric. Dove went on to explore a less allusive, more porous geometry, as seen in the wavy scaffolding of "Green and Brown," from 1945.—*Johanna Fateman (Alexandre; through May 25.)*

"Georgia O'Keeffe: To See Takes Time"

O'Keeffe devoted most of her ninety-eight years to grand, sometimes grandiose oil paintings, despite the ample evidence, on view in this new show of her works on paper, that she was spectacular with charcoal and watercolor. She may be the only famous painter whose greatest hits, in oil, look better in reproduction; to find one in a museum and see what all the glossy posters are hiding is a bit of a bummer. Textures stumble over each other. Shading tries, fretfully, to look 3-D. O'Keeffe's works on paper, however, are so dense with detail that the poster treatment would ruin them. "No. 12 Special," from 1916, is like a glossary of charcoal's capabilities: thin, slashing lines; plump, leisurely ones; smears pressed into the grain of the page with a rag or a fingertip. (Most of the pieces here were completed by 1917, the year the artist turned thirty.) Every generation of Americans has invented a different O'Keeffe, to match the moment's predilections. In the fifties, she was hailed as the first color-field painter; by the sixties, she'd been reimagined as a proto-hippie, dropping out of civilization to find herself in the desert; and in the seventies and eighties a new wave of feminists fell hard for her. Who's the O'Keeffe of the twenty-twenties? Generalizing about your own era is a mug's game, but, if this exhibition is any indication, ours is a jittery, in-between culture, enthralled by aesthetic forms once thought minor. To O'Keeffe, these charcoals and watercolors were experiments, rehearsals for all the major art she'd make later on. That's why they're so good.—*Jackson Arn (Museum of Modern Art; through Aug. 12.)*

Sylvia Plimack Mangold

Since the nineteen-sixties, this American painter's conceptual, meditative approach has illuminated the splendor of mundanity—early in her career, Plimack Mangold was acclaimed for capturing the pattern and the grain of parquet floors. For the past decade, her sole subject has been a maple tree that's growing outside her studio window, in upstate New York. Her new exhibition—at 125 Newbury, a Tribeca enterprise helmed by the founder of Pace and named for the gallery's original Boston address—includes a suite of ten canvases, each titled "Leaves in the Wind," whose cropped, disorienting views of pale sunlight and rustling greenery are painted with an exhilarating looseness in a palette of creamy lemon-lime. The pictures have much in common, but close inspection reveals the artist's careful observation of nature's endless, moment-to-moment variations. Installed in a separate room is a stark counterpart: the series "Winter Maple," featuring cold blue skies veined with dark, leafless branches. Like Plimack Mangold's studies in lushness, these scenes are eventless—reflecting not on trees so much as on perception itself.—*J.F. (125 Newbury; through June 3.)*

MUSIC

Gil Evans Project

JAZZ The arranger Gil Evans spent his career hidden in plain sight; his most conspicuous achievements were the titanic albums that he made in collaboration with Miles Davis, including the record-collection perennial "Sketches of Spain." Yet Evans was an inspired and questing musician in his own right, and an orchestrator who left his fingerprint on any piece of music that he chose to interpret. The arranger and bandleader Ryan Truesdell has made it his mission to keep Evans's work alive by way of the Gil Evans Project, a vibrant ensemble that digs deep into its namesake's œuvre—often unearthing obscure charts that display the Master's singular genius.—*Steve Futterman (Birdland; May 10-13.)*

The Hold Steady

ROCK The Brooklyn sextet the Hold Steady, who are celebrating their twentieth anniversary this year, made their name as

AT THE GALLERIES

The lady, or the tiger? That question was first posed, in a nineteenth-century American fairy tale, to a princess whose dilemma could never be solved. But the irresistible pictures of **Ellen Berkenblit,** on view at the Anton Kern gallery through May 26, are a potent reminder that, within the fantastical space of a painting (such as the almost eight-foot-tall "Circa," above), every risk is worth taking. The artist has been working at the crossroads of expressive abstraction and oneiric figuration in New York City for forty years, parlaying her signature cast of characters (a witchy woman, always in profile, attended by a menagerie) into some of the most quietly ambitious works on the scene.—*Andrea K. Scott*

rock traditionalists, heartland representatives in the midst of the modish scene of New York's early two-thousands. But the band's ninth album, "The Price of Progress," nudges their sound outward while remaining instantly recognizable. Tad Kubler and Steve Selvidge's guitar heroics and Craig Finn's detail-rich storytelling remain the Hold Steady's indelible markers. A commanding live act from the start, they've become a fervently beloved draw in rock—"The Gospel of the Hold Steady: How a Resurrection Really Feels," a forthcoming oral history, is heavy on fan testimonials. At National Sawdust, the band performs and joins Seth Meyers in a conversation; the next night, they play WFUV's High Line Bash.—*Michaelangelo Matos (National Sawdust, May 11; City Winery, May 12.)*

Joanne Robertson

FOLK The dream-pop impressionism of Joanne Robertson evokes morning light diffused through a lace curtain. The Glasgow-based singer and guitarist tempers her beaming melodies with a rich atmosphere of tape hiss and the tactility of fingers reverberating on strings. The result is like lonesome folk by way of the ambient-noise artist Grouper, its patent materiality enhanced by the pleasures found in understated pop phrasings. Robertson may be recognized most for her collaborations with the London iconoclast Dean Blunt; her iridescent voice emerges clearly through the thick haze of his compositions. Her fifth solo collection, "Blue Car," shares Blunt's beguiling mystique. The improvising multi-instrumentalist Alex Zhang Hungtai, formerly known as Dirty Beaches, and the experimental electronic composer Embaci, respectively, open for Robertson over two nights in Brooklyn.—*Jenn Pelly (Union Pool; May 12 and May 14.)*

"Il Tabarro"

OPERA On Site Opera, which specializes in location-specific stagings around the city, is in the middle of a multiyear rollout of Puccini's "Il Trittico," a collection of three one-act operas that swings from chest-beating melodrama on the banks of the Seine to light-as-air comedy in thirteenth-century Florence. Last year, the company started at the end with a sweetly homespun "Gianni Schicchi." For this season's production of "Il Tabarro," it found an actual lightship, at South Street Seaport, to stand in for the barge described in the libretto—a setting that may bring to life the suffocating claustrophobia that Giorgetta (Ashley Milanese) feels around a husband she no longer loves (Eric McKeever). Laine Rettmer directs, and Geoffrey McDonald conducts.—*Oussama Zahr (Lightship Ambrose at South Street Seaport Museum; May 14-17.)*

Rufus Wainwright: "Wainwright Does Weill"

CABARET An army of ancestors, often fuelled by competing musical instincts, march through Rufus Wainwright's work. Some are familial: the singer's emotionally forthright croon belongs to the folkie world of his mother, Kate McGarrigle, whereas his twinkle of sardonic empathy comes from that of his father, Loudon Wainwright III. Other touchstones are relations of the soul, including Judy Garland, Harry Nilsson, and a constellation of opera luminaries—a disparate bunch that he processes with an unblinking panache. The weeks ahead bring a pair of dissimilar tribute projects. On his forthcoming LP, "Folkocracy," Wainwright leads a Rolodex of duet partners through Appalachian ballads, lullabies, and other traditional works. But for his run at this temple of cosmopolitan suavity the musician turns to one of urbanity's high priests, the composer Kurt Weill. Like Wainwright, Weill compresses a world of contradictions—combining, as the singer notes, "pop music with an operatic sensibility, the profane with the divine."—*Jay Ruttenberg (Café Carlyle; May 16-20.)*

ROCK

Last month, **Feist** returned from a six-year recording hiatus with a precious new LP, "Multitudes." The record, inspired by the loss of her father but also by new motherhood, draws on material that the singer tinkered with throughout a concert residency, in 2021. Known to some as a member of Broken Social Scene and to many as the voice of an iPod commercial, Feist has subtly evolved across a catalogue that began with cut-and-dried indie pop and came to include primordial folk and blue-eyed blues. "Multitudes" is imbued with the softness of her nylon-string guitar; Feist's approach here is more intimate and lyrically open. Such is the payoff of the residency, which was held in small spaces. She brings that rapport to Brooklyn Steel, May 13-14, in an immersive production developed with a team of artists.—*Sheldon Pearce*

DANCE

New York City Ballet

With the exception of a single program (on May 10), all the ballets being performed May 9-16 were created in the past six years. The company's youthful Zeitgeist—a jittery searching, a yearning for connection—is the guiding principle of Justin Peck's most recent work, "Copland Dance Episodes," which, to the sounds of Aaron Copland, explores the shifting dynamics within a group of young people. Similarly, Kyle Abraham's "Love Letter (on shuffle)" navigates the space between coolness and vulnerability through the songs of the balladeer James Blake. In "Play Time," which has witty costumes by Alejandro Gómez Palomo, a suite of short, jazzy pieces by Solange Knowles is met with playful, jazzy choreography by Gianna Reisen.—*Marina Harss (David H. Koch Theatre; through May 29.)*

"Impacto with Herman Cornejo"

Catalyst Quartet plays a program of pieces by lesser-known Latin American figures, including the late-nineteenth-century Venezuelan soprano, conductor, and composer Teresa Carreño and the early-twentieth-century Mexican composer Miguel Bernal Jiménez. The final work of the evening, Astor Piazzolla's "Suite de Ángel," is accompanied by a dance choreographed and performed by the great Argentinean ballet virtuoso Herman Cornejo, a longtime member of American Ballet Theatre.—*M.H. (Metropolitan Museum of Art; May 10.)*

Kazunori Kumagai

The Japanese tap dancer Kazunori Kumagai is an improviser of great sensitivity, technical sophistication, and eruptive force. He's also a gentle soul. For "Tap Into the Light," his first New York performance in a while, he channels some of the children's-book defiance of Maya Angelou's poem "Life Doesn't Frighten Me" while in musical conversation with the bassist Alex Blake, the vocalist Sabrina Clery, and his accomplished fellow-hoofers Max Pollak and Joseph Webb.—*Brian Seibert (Gibney: Agnes Varis Performing Arts Center; May 11-13.)*

Juliana F. May/MAYDANCE

In works such as "Adult Documentary" and "Folk Incest," May has pursued a formal interest in coiling postmodern movement with speech or song alongside a thematic interest in cycles of abuse, trying to get at trauma through various kinds of theatrical transgression. All of this continues in her latest work, "Family Happiness," which folds in nineteen-eighties pop-culture references and the challenges of being an artist and a parent.—*B.S. (Abrons Arts Center; through May 13.)*

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PODCAST DEPT.

In 2007, Jennifer Romolini launched a column for *Lucky* magazine called "eBay Obsessed," for which she trawled the resale site for obscure gems. During one of her virtual spelunking missions, Romolini came across a back issue of the erotic magazine *Viva*, from 1974, sparking what would become a years-long fascination with the publication, which ran from 1973 to 1980. Though *Viva*, which was billed as "The International Magazine for Women," was conceived by a man (Bob Guccione, the founder of *Penthouse*), it was also an aggressively feminist project: it featured Betty Friedan and Maya Angelou, ran forward-thinking stories about abortion and birth control, and printed full-frontal male nudes intended for the female gaze. And yet it could also seem backward and sexist; a recurring feature called "Crotch Watching," for instance, which featured closeup photographs of manly bulges, felt more like parody than pleasure. Romolini explores all of these contrasts in her new Crooked Media podcast, **"Stiffed,"** which examines *Viva* in a cultural and political context. The show has the format of a propulsive narrative documentary, but it also takes thoughtful side trips through media history and the feminist-writing pantheon while discussing what, exactly, pornography for women can and should look like. It's a sweaty, steamy, and sophisticated summer listen.—*Rachel Syme*

Nrityagram

For years, Nrityagram was synonymous with the dancing of its two star performers, Surupa Sen, a choreographer-dancer, and Bijayini Satpathy, her most perfect subject. But Satpathy has moved on, and Sen does not dance in the company's latest piece, "Āhuti." By transcending her own dancing body, Sen has liberated her imagination. The dancers for the piece are trained in two contrasting South Asian dance forms, Odissi, from eastern India, and Kandyan dance, from the Central Highlands region of Sri Lanka. Their vocabularies have certain similarities but also stark differences. Sen combines them into a dialogue of energies, shapes, and rhythms, like a danced conversation, supported by the *mardala* drum, flute, violin, and voice.—*M.H. (Joyce Theatre; May 9-14.)*

PODCASTS

Blank Check

This podcast, hosted, since 2015, by the actor-comedian Griffin Newman and the *Atlantic* film critic David Sims, dissects the filmographies of notable directors—Elaine May, the Wachowskis, Hayao Miyazaki, M. Night Shyamalan—who, having achieved early success, are given "blank checks to make whatever crazy passion projects they want," as Newman says in the show's introduction. Tracking film history through its greatest auteurs could be a recipe for hagiography, but Newman and Sims reveal themselves as connoisseurs of context in engaging, discursive conversations; guests have included the columnists Jamelle Bouie and Richard Lawson, the director Nia DaCosta, and the multi-hyphenate Lin-Manuel Miranda. Punctuated by insights from the show's producer Ben Hosley—who, charmingly, cried his way through a breakdown of "Kiki's Delivery Service"—the thoroughly researched episodes tackle "Ishtar" with the same gusto as "Eyes Wide Shut," making "Blank Check" a positive, authoritative voice in the film-podcasting landscape.—*Luis A. Gómez*

THE THEATRE

Prima Facie

Suzie Miller's latest one-woman play—which comes to Broadway, directed by Justin Martin, after a widely ballyhooed première in London—runs on rhythm toward its harrowing end. Jodie Comer plays Tessa, a tenacious, win-obsessed lawyer who has developed something of a specialty in defending men accused of rape and sexual assault. Beneath her prolix monologues, full of praise for the logic of the law, even under squeamish circumstances, a bass-heavy stream of music often plays. This insistent element of production design makes it seem all the more inevitable—even fated—when Tessa has a personal encounter that shakes and, in due time, breaks her faith in how the world doles out justice. Comer's performance is virtuosic: Martin's direction often helps her achieve moments of tense ecstasy. But the play's important subject matter isn't served, really, by the closed-off nature of the one-person show. The problem, after all, is other people.—*Vinson Cunningham (Golden; through July 2.)*

Summer, 1976

This play by David Auburn, commissioned and presented by Manhattan Theatre Club, recounts a fleeting but unforgettable friendship between two Midwestern mothers in America's bicentennial year. Diana (Laura Linney) is a single, uptight artist; Alice (Jessica Hecht) is a free-spirited, pot-smoking housewife. In the hands of a lesser playwright, their personalities might have been reversed, but Auburn—who also wrote the Tony- and Pulitzer Prize-winning "Proof"—knows that "people aren't just one thing," as Alice puts it. This truth, coupled with the setting, speaks to today's liberal-conservative polarization, but Auburn's concern is people, not politics. He has ideal vessels in Linney and Hecht, whose characters' verisimilitude is weirdly enhanced by breaches of the fourth wall, and, in Daniel Sullivan, a director who knows how to make all the stage a world.—*Dan Stahl (Samuel J. Friedman; through June 18.)*

MOVIES

Big George Foreman

This bio-pic about the former heavyweight champion and the longtime preacher and pitchman is, in its first half—which shows

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the origin story of the boxer's rage, and of his athletic channelling of it—a terrifically detailed and fervent film. In 1960, the eleven-year-old George (Kei Rawlins) is growing up in Houston, where his mother (Sonja Sohn) works hard to put a roof over the family's head. George has no money for school lunch and wears tattered clothing; when he's teased for being poor, he fights back ferociously. The teen-age George (Austin David Jones), a petty criminal, narrowly averts arrest and joins the Job Corps. There, too, he gets into fights, but, now full-grown (played by Khris Davis), he's trained by a program officer, Doc Broadus (Forest Whitaker), a former boxer who guides him to rapid success in the 1968 Olympics and beyond. The director, George Tillman, Jr., pays ardent attention to the young man's tribulations and his physical and mental discipline. But the movie's second half—showing George's rise to the championship, his defeat by Muhammad Ali (Sullivan Jones), and his turn to the ministry—is rushed and superficial, like an unreflective official autobiography.—*Richard Brody (In theatrical release.)*

Computer Chess

This instant dramatic classic of historical reconstruction, from 2013, is set around 1980 and centers on a group of quietly visionary programmers from around the country, who wheel their jerry-rigged PCs to a nondescript hotel for a weekend-long tournament that pits their chess programs against one another. The director, Andrew Bujalski, brings the designs and fashions of the time—and, even better, its moods and ideas—cleverly and joyfully back to life. He uses a period video camera to conjure the feel of archival footage (mainly washed-out black-and-white) and features onscreen videographers who document the event, from the opening panel discussion, which sets out the intellectual stakes of the tournament, to its poignant anticlimax. The drama arises from tensions between and within the programming teams (Bujalski sketches the involuted, awkward characters in brisk, subtle strokes), and, especially, from one computer that exhibits a puckishly domineering philosophical temperament. An encounter group that's also staying at the hotel poses the mind-body problem in practical terms; allusions to Nikola Tesla's theories, religious revivalism, and paranoid fantasies of military involvement capture the virtual realm in its fragile early stages and expose its still unresolved peculiarities.—*R.B. (Playing May 12 at Museum of the Moving Image and streaming on the Criterion Channel.)*

Muriel's Wedding

The Australian director P. J. Hogan's début, from 1994, was a big hit in his native country. Toni Collette plays Muriel, the shyest member of a bored and bulbous family living in Porpoise Spit. Her only resource is old ABBA tapes, her only dream to marry; the identity of the bridegroom is immaterial. Muriel's quest for contentment includes vacationing in the sun, sharing an apartment with her best friend (Rachel Griffiths), and trying on wedding dresses under false pretenses. The movie was sold as a feel-good picture, but it doesn't feel good for long. The loud and lurid comedy, verging on caricature, soon grows bleak with bad news—divorce, cancer, suicide—none of which deepens the film; it just turns it into a downer. But the two fine, edgy performances by Collette and Griffiths keep things afloat. When they squeeze into shining satin and actually impersonate ABBA, you experience both the sadness of delusion and the bliss of high camp.—*Anthony Lane (Reviewed in our issue of 5/27/95.) (Streaming on Paramount+, Prime Video, and other services.)*

Yeelen

The Malian director Souleymane Cissé's historical drama, from 1987, is a masterwork of metaphysical realism. It's based on a thirteenth-century legend about a sorcerer, Nianankoro, whose jealous father, Soma, also a magician, is plotting to kill him. Nianankoro's journey of escape turns out to be a classic voyage of initiation: he uses his powers to help a suspicious king, he takes a wife, and he has a son, but he can't elude his father's deadly wrath. Cissé's grandly imaginative visual artistry renders the magical world concrete; he films the story from the perspective of its characters, for whom the supernatural realm—the domain of divine powers embodied on Earth—is tangible and indisputably real. The title means "brightness," and it's ultimately the cosmic power of light itself that comes to the fore, by way of a terrifying conflagration. The filmmaker's point of view, however, is steadfastly terrestrial and political: he dramatizes patriarchal abuses and the high price of resistance, however legitimate.—*R.B. (Playing May 13 at Film at Lincoln Center and streaming on Kanopy.)*

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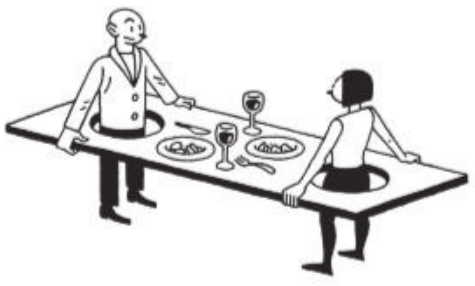
ON THE BIG *SCREEN*

COURTESY THE FILM DESK

Film Forum's series "The City: Real and Imagined" (May 12-June 8) offers a thrilling variety of movies set in New York—whether shot on location or crafted in studios, widely released star vehicles or such low-budget productions as Michael Roemer's 1969 crime comedy, **"The Plot Against Harry,"** which nearly didn't come out at all. Potential distributors deemed it unfunny; the film's producers suppressed it for a tax writeoff. In fact, the movie is a classic of Jewish humor, albeit of a particular sort: its looming forebear is Kafka, but its existential absurdity is coated with calculatedly rancid schmaltz. When Harry Plotnick (Martin Priest), a minor racketeer, gets out of prison, he discovers that his underlings have gone independent; to get them back, he connects with a bigger Mob boss and quickly finds himself out of his depth. Every aspect of Harry's life, whether gleefully sordid or sloppily sentimental—parole check-ins, family reunions, medical issues, shady deals, sexual encounters, religious celebrations, even a car accident—leads to jack-in-the-box coincidences and a dizzying swarm of complications. Above all, Roemer depicts New York as a media center, where even a small-timer like Harry risks being thrust into the blinding glare of celebrity.—*Richard Brody*



TABLES FOR TWO

Zhego
38-4 61st St., Queens

On my first visit to Zhego, a new Bhutanese restaurant in Woodside, the tiny dining room was full, so I took a seat on the front porch and asked if there was anything hot to drink, to offset the lingering spring chill. Cups of butter tea, cloudy, warm, and as salty as the sea, arrived quickly.

The butter in the tea was made from cow's milk, as opposed to yak's milk, as it would be in Bhutan, a small landlocked country in the eastern Himalayas. As Sonam Tshering Singye, a co-owner and the restaurant's sole server, explained, it's too expensive to import most fresh ingredients, though many of the kitchen's drygoods do come from Bhutan. Bovine origin aside, the tea was an excellent introduction to the role of dairy products in Bhutanese cuisine, and at Zhego. "We love butter," Singye said, delivering a small dish in which it starred, mixed with puffed rice and sugar for a crunchy, slightly fudgy palate-whetting snack meant to be scooped up with fingers.

The Bhutanese condiment known as *azay* can take many forms. As interpreted by the restaurant's chef, Tobden Jamphel, it includes fresh green chili, cilantro, tamarillo (also known as tree tomato, which is grown in Bhutan), and feta cheese, which Singye and Jamphel—both immigrants who met in Bhutan and reconnected in a local basketball league—decided was the closest they could get to the farmer's-style cheese ubiquitous in Bhutan. Feta anchors most of the menu's extensive vegetarian options: melted into a creamy sauce to be slicked onto spears of tender fresh green chili, for *ema datsi*, the national dish of Bhutan; or onto thin slices of potato, for *kewa datsi*; or onto thick, slippery oyster mushrooms, for *shamu datsi*. In a dish called *gongdo datsi*, the feta remains a bit firmer, becoming pleasingly chewy and caramelized after being hard-scrambled with eggs, butter, and dried red chili. Mozzarella, with cabbage and cilantro, makes for a supple filling in the thick-skinned Himalayan dumplings known as *momos*, served with a rust-colored chili paste.

To temper the heat from all these chilies, there are cups of cool, tangy buttermilk in the warmer months, and of *jaju*, a milk-based soup flecked with silky spinach, when it's colder. To temper the surplus of dairy, there's beautifully mottled steamed red rice, and plenty of cheese-free dishes. Beef *momos*, stuffed with ground meat that's seasoned simply but generously with ginger and cilantro, release a fragrant, flavorful broth. For *puta*, a dish from central Bhutan, buckwheat noodles are tossed with scrambled egg, chives, onions, and Sichuan peppercorn—which is also used to season waffled, chewy sheets of tripe, braised with ginger, dried red chili, and spring onions for a wonderful dish called *goep paa*. Air-dried preserved beef (*shakum*) or pork (*sikum*) is stir-fried with green beans, dried red chili, ginger, and tomato, although you can also get each of these in a feta-based broth.

To end the meal, in lieu of sweets, there's a single, off-menu option called *doma pani*. It arrives as a plastic baggie of fresh betel leaves; a tiny packet of slaked lime (calcium hydroxide), dyed neon orange with turmeric; a few coconut chips; and half of a rock-hard "betel nut," so called for the ritual, practiced all over Asia, of wrapping a piece of the nut with a smear of the lime in a betel leaf to chew. (The "nut" is actually the seed of the areca palm tree.) Taking a bite, with the full force of my molars, and churning the nut into papery dust was one of the wildest sensations I've experienced in my life, the flavor changing radically as I chewed: from bitter to peppery to funky to tannic and back around again. When I swallowed it (optional, according to Singye), a hard lump caught in my throat. I can't recommend it, exactly—betel nuts are a proven carcinogen, I learned later, and a stimulant with addictive properties. And yet it's part of the reason that I recommend Zhego, wholeheartedly, as a portal to another way of life. *(Dishes $9.50–$16.99.)*

—Hannah Goldfield

PHOTOGRAPH BY JOE LINGEMAN FOR THE NEW YORKER; ILLUSTRATION BY JOOST SWARTE

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THE NEW YORKER

THE TALK OF THE TOWN

COMMENT
MOVING ON

The COVID-19 Public Health Emergency, which has been maintained for more than three years, across two Presidential Administrations, will lapse on May 11th, bringing a symbolic and a regulatory end to a crisis that has claimed more than 1.1 million lives in the United States and disrupted nearly every aspect of American society. The expiration takes effect several weeks after President Joe Biden signed a Republican-led bill, supported by no small number of Senate Democrats, to end a separate COVID-related national emergency, which had granted the government additional crisis powers, and several months after he casually remarked at the Detroit Auto Show that the "pandemic is over." The message is clear: it's time to move on from the plague years.

Our understanding of COVID often suffers from a linguistic determinism. The words we use encourage a binary conception of viral threat: we are in an acute state of emergency—a pandemic—or we have entered a long-awaited, tractable endemic phase. But, of course, an endemic pathogen can be all kinds of bad. Tuberculosis has infected humans since at least the Stone Age and is the thirteenth leading cause of death in the world, killing a million and a half people a year. COVID seems to have settled into its own punishing form of endemicity. Even without a major surge this past winter, it has killed some forty thousand people in this country so far in 2023 and is on track to have taken tens of thousands more lives by the end of it. Last week, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention announced that COVID was the fourth leading cause of death in the U.S. in 2022. This year, it will likely remain a top-ten killer. But, because the toll is concentrated among older and medically vulnerable people, it quickly recedes from the public consciousness. Last summer, when average daily COVID deaths were more than double what they are today, Americans, according to one survey, were nonetheless three times as likely to think that car crashes killed more people than the coronavirus did. (COVID was, and is, far deadlier.) In a poll conducted after the new Congress was sworn in this year, people were asked about their top priorities for lawmakers. Of twenty-one options, COVID ranked last.

The end of the Public Health Emergency also carries practical ramifications. Many people will no longer have access to free coronavirus tests; hospitals will no longer receive extra payments when they care for COVID patients; private insurers will no longer have to reimburse out-of-network vaccinations; the federal government will no longer be able to compel labs to share test results with the C.D.C. Uninsured people should, for a time, still have access to free vaccines through a new Biden Administration program that buys and distributes them to pharmacies and local health centers. (After the government's stockpile runs out, the uninsured will largely have to pay full price—probably a hundred and thirty dollars a dose.) Some changes are overdue: the end of the emergency also means the end of Title 42, a provision used by both the Trump and the Biden Administrations to expel migrants and asylum seekers coming from countries where a serious contagion is present, which could mean anywhere and everywhere.

The early-pandemic idea that a crisis that threatens everyone could unify the nation now appears quaint. The virus proved destructive for our health and our politics: by most accounts, the U.S. suffered the highest COVID death rate among wealthy nations, and Americans are especially likely to believe that their country is more divided now than it was before the pandemic. And yet pandemic policy also contained flashes of what is possible: real achievements in making life easier for millions of people came as a result of the choices we made. A reversal of those achievements will come from choices we're making now.

In March, 2020, as the coronavirus began to spread, Congress authorized enhanced benefits through the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program,

ILLUSTRATIONS BY JOÃO FAZENDA

which provides support to some forty million people. The following year, the share of households with kids who were food insecure fell to twelve per cent—a shockingly high number, perhaps, in the world's richest country, but the lowest since we started keeping track, more than two decades ago. This year, states began rolling back the extra benefits, and SNAP recipients are expected to lose, on average, around a third of their monthly allotments. Similarly, between the pre-pandemic period and the emergence of Omicron, in late 2021, the child poverty rate fell by nearly half—from around ten per cent to five per cent—with especially large declines among Black and Hispanic children, owing in part to child tax credits made available through the American Rescue Plan. Nearly all low-income families used the extra money to cover basic expenses: food, clothing, rent, utilities. When the tax credits expired, at the end of 2021, families immediately reported more difficulty in paying for such necessities.

Another reversal is just beginning. During the pandemic, states received additional federal funds for their Medicaid programs, and were generally prohibited from disenrolling people once they became eligible. As a result, millions secured stable health coverage, and the country's over-all uninsured rate fell to eight per cent. (Medicaid and the Children's Health Insurance Program now cover ninety-three million people—more than one in four Americans.) But last month states were permitted to again start purging the rolls, launching what has been called the Great Unwinding. According to government estimates, up to fifteen million people could lose health coverage in the coming months. Moreover, in the byzantine world of America's social safety net, some seven million people who are still eligible could lose Medicaid coverage owing to "administrative churn": paperwork problems. Nearly three-quarters of children who lose Medicaid will do so not because they no longer qualify but, basically, because bureaucracies can't confirm that they do, on account of a defunct phone number, a new address, a missed appointment, or a delayed or incomplete form.

We often view the pandemic's turmoil as a failure of American governance and society. We couldn't agree on masks, vaccines, social distancing, school closures, abstract goals, or concrete facts. These failures cost lives and livelihoods. Flip the lens, however, and another reality comes into focus: this was also a time when many people had access to food, shelter, and medical care with a consistency they'd never had before. After three years of COVID life, it's natural to welcome a return to normal. But, for many, normal is a precarious place.

—Dhruv Khullar

RED CARPET DEPT.

THE DEBT GALA

Among the meticulously styled celebrities at last week's Met Gala, the annual fifty-thousand-dollar-per-plate museum fund-raiser, no one turned heads quite like a crasher sent by Mother Nature: a water bug that scampered across the red carpet, seizing paparazzi's attention before meeting a sole-crushing demise. Thirty hours earlier, Molly Gaebe, a comedian and actor, wrestled with some ceremonial variables of her own. She lugged a rolled-up red carpet that had been stitched together from scraps into the Bell House, a performance space in Gowanus. "Here she is!" she announced. "She's beautiful."

The occasion was the inaugural Debt Gala, a benefit for the charity R.I.P. Medical Debt, which buys people's medical debt in order to cancel it. Outdoor red-carpet plans were foiled by rain. Puddles were forming indoors, too. Volunteers mopped and placed buckets beneath ceiling drips. "We'll make it work!" Gaebe declared.

She founded the event with Amanda Corday and Tom Costello, two industry friends. Around the time of last year's Met Gala, they were at a bar discussing their shared appreciation for its over-the-top pageantry, and floated the notion of a version that was more accessible and benefitted the public good. First came the name: the Debt Gala—"Gotta have a good pun," Gaebe said—then the cause. The producer Adam Gold joined to book performers. For a theme, they considered playing off the Met's homage to Karl Lagerfeld (Karl Marx? Brooklyn Lager-feld?) before settling on "Garbage X Glamour." Sustainability was key. "It's cool," Corday said. "And it saves the earth." Tickets started at twenty-five dollars.

The red carpet was unfurled: three segments of varying shades and textures, connected to a bigger red carpet purchased on Amazon. On one wall hung a re-creation of "Washington Crossing the Delaware"—a Met stalwart—constructed from old history textbooks. Opposite was a custom backdrop for a step-and-repeat. Volunteers marched by with cases of the canned water Liquid Death. Two helpers taped the Amazon carpet to a small stair that connected the bar to the "ballroom." "It's the Met steps!" Corday said. "I can see Blake Lively right there."

The hosts changed into their gala looks. For Gaebe: a miniskirt made of old head shots. Corday's skirt was recycled from century-old girdles; perched on her head was a bird-shaped fascinator made from magazines. Trailing behind Costello was a train constructed of wooden toy-train tracks, which he had scored off Facebook Marketplace the night before, from a wistful mother on 110th Street. "She was, like, 'Do you have a kid that loves trains?'" he said.

The carpet came alive. The comedian Joyelle Nicole Johnson showed off a necklace of wrapped condoms and tubes of contraceptive jelly. "Your girl just had a hysterectomy," she said, smiling. "So I don't need these things anymore, and I'm in medical debt because of it." Mary Canter, a lawyer for Spotify, paired a scarlet halter gown with a stole made of her Labradoodle's pinned-together chew toys. ("It was a very confusing afternoon for her," Canter said.) She was flanked by Alexandra Chen, in a strapless black gown and scarf made from four XtraTuff trash bags, and Mariah Lee, who evoked Grace Kelly with a headband, a shawl of bubble-gum-pink bubble wrap, and her own bubble carpet. It popped with each step she took.

Common threads emerged: thrift buys, local upcyclers, leftovers from costume parties. "No one cares, but my suit used to belong to an astronaut," the comedian Michael Bevan, who served as a red-carpet correspondent, announced. Meredith Metcalf, who works in TV and film production, had crafted epaulets from tissue boxes and Mardi Gras beads, to accent a tutu-like dress from the set of the drag drama "Pose." A physical therapist named Allison Gould tried to tabulate how many cereal boxes (forty?) had gone into fabricating her skirt and her boyfriend's vest. She appreciated the night's cause. "If I look myself up on Zocdoc, it tells me I can't afford myself, based on my insurance," she said. The Amazon carpet was soaked. A partygoer pointed to the puddle and muttered, "Climate change."

After twenty minutes, and two acts, things got worse: the venue was shutting down because of safety concerns over the water. The crowd shuffled out. The d.j. blared Céline Dion's "My Heart Will Go On." In the hall, a thirty-piece brass band that had been scheduled to perform lifted spirits with an impromptu concert.

Corday's mother gave Costello her condolences. "It's O.K.," he said. "We made it happen." More than fifteen thousand dollars had been raised, and this was to be the first of many Debt Galas. The stitched-together red carpet was rolled up for reuse. The Amazon one was headed to the trash.

—Dan Greene

RECYCLING DEPT.

PAPER TRAIL

The poet Reginald Dwayne Betts was in Brooklyn the other day, standing over a five-gallon plastic bucket filled with fibre slop. He was in town from New Haven, at his friend Ruth Lingen's printmaking studio, helping to make a batch of handmade paper to be used in the printing of his next book. A Ping-Pong table was piled high with socks, blankets, T-shirts, long underwear, and stacks of letters, all of which had recently arrived from people incarcerated throughout the U.S. "This is our liquid slurry!" Lingen said, giving the bucket a whiff. She offered tasting notes: "Overtones of Brooklyn water and filtered sediment." Betts, who was dressed in raw Japanese denim, a whiskey-brown fedora, and a "RUSSIA IS A TERRORIST STATE" T-shirt, tied on a black apron and poured the slurry into an eleven-by-fourteen-inch wooden deckle box—a papermaking mold. He jiggled it as if panning for gold, then pressed the resulting pulp sheet onto a piece of felt. "That's called *couching*," he said. (It's pronounced "*coo*-ching.") Lingen let the sheet rest for a few hours before placing it in a platen press; in a few days, the slop would dry into a soft, semi-smooth piece of paper.

Betts's interest in papermaking began a few years after he graduated from Yale Law School. In 2018, he was clerking for a federal appellate judge in Philadelphia. By day, he evaluated habeas-corpus petitions and drafted bench memos; at night, he'd write poems, and letters to friends who were locked up. "I was living in two different worlds," he said. "I could've easily been them." In 2005, eight months before his twenty-fifth birthday, he was released from the Coffeewood Correctional Center, in Virginia, after spending eight years in prison for a carjacking. With his papermaking project, he was attempting to create meaning from his friends' incarceration in a way that his poetry and his law practice had not. "The paper became a kind of bridge—the art was to remember that they were still going through something," he said.

In 2019, Betts collaborated with the artist Titus Kaphar on an exhibit at MOMA PS1, focussed on abuses in the criminal-legal system. (Both men are recipients of MacArthur "genius" grants.) Etched portraits of incarcerated people, by Kaphar, were accompanied by "redacted" poems, by Betts, which turned legal documents into verse. The duo commissioned a designer to create a typeface based on elements from Times New Roman and Century Schoolbook, which is used by the Supreme Court in legal opinions. The idea was to make the letter of the law their own. "That's, like, nerd layer," Betts said. "You gotta know typeface to even get it."

Betts and Kaphar wanted their paper to be as expressive as the words and images printed on it. "I was telling my man at the printer, 'I want to use handmade paper,'" Betts said. "And he was, like, 'You don't want to use handmade paper unless the materials have *meaning* in it.' And I was, like, 'Oh, shit! I'm going to get my friends in prison to send me their clothes, and then we'll make paper out of them.'" Christopher Tunstall mailed his sweatpants. Rojai Fentress sent T-shirts and socks. Kevin Williams and Terell Kelly offered sweatshirts and thermal pants. "All of it had the smell of time, but also just the *wear* of time," Betts said. "Some of the dudes might've had these clothes for a decade."

Betts poured himself a single-malt Scotch and sat down at the table to cut up some garments for the project. "This is the tedious part," he said, picking up a pair of scissors. He cut a sweatshirt into small squares, which Lingen would later add to a boiling pot. (Recipe: "Seventy-five per cent water, twenty-four per cent sweatshirts or socks, half a per cent soda ash, and half a per cent of an additive called sizing," Lingen said.) *Snip*, *snip*, *snip*. "I ended up getting that whole group out of prison," Betts said. *Snip*, *snip*. Williams came home in 2019, after spending twenty-six years inside. Fentress left prison on

July 1, 2020, following a twenty-four-year stint. Tunstall died that year, "about six months after he came home," Betts said. *Snip*, *snip*, *snip*. "At least he got to be out." Betts put down his scissors. "This thing has become kind of like a memorial," he added.

At around five, Betts headed to Manhattan for a book signing with Kaphar for a volume, "Redaction," that was inspired by the PS1 show. In Betts's bag were a few letters from friends who were still locked up. "They called a letter a 'kite' in prison," he said. "I always thought it was beautiful—the freedom that a kite seems to have, and that it gives you." He added, "And it's just made of paper!"

—Adam Iscoe

SECOND START DEPT.

BLUE FLASH

"Wild Tales," Graham Nash's 2013 memoir, concludes with him swaddled in domestic comfort in Hawaii, long married, with three children and a newborn grandchild. The island sun seemed to be setting on a life in music that began with the Hollies and the British Invasion and continued through Laurel Canyon, Joni Mitchell, C.S.N.Y., and six solo records.

The opening lines of Nash's new album, "Now," suggest that he has another wild tale to tell:

> I used to think that I would never love again
> I used to think I'd be all on my own
> I really thought that it was coming to an end
> And just the thought of it chilled me to the bone
> But not now.

To his children's dismay, Nash, who is eighty-one, left their mother for a woman half his age, a New York-based artist named Amy Grantham, whom he met nine years ago and married in 2019. They live together in a two-bedroom apartment on Second Avenue overlooking St. Mark's Church.

"I've always walked into my life," Nash explained recently, over a late breakfast at Veselka, the East Village Ukrainian joint. "I planned very little of it." For example, he recalled the day in 1968 when he met Stephen Stills and David Crosby, in Joni Mitchell's Laurel Canyon house, the place with "two cats in the yard" that inspired Nash's C.S.N.Y. song "Our House."

"I wanted to spend some time with Joan"—Joni, with whom he was in love. "But when I pulled into the parking lot I heard voices." Crosby had recently been fired from the Byrds, and Stills's band, Buffalo Springfield, had broken up; the two men were working on material as a duo. They sang Nash a new tune, "You Don't Have to Cry," and after listening to it twice he added his voice to theirs. "Forty-five seconds in, we had to stop." The vocal blend stunned them. "It was ridiculous," Nash said. "Once I heard that, I knew what I had to do." He quit the Hollies, left his native England, and moved to California.

The same thing happened when Nash met Grantham (who bears a resemblance to a young Mitchell), at a C.S.N. show at the Beacon Theatre. "I said, 'Holy shit. There's that feeling again.'" He walked into a new life. With the new album, he said, "I wanted to wear my heart on my sleeve. I wanted people to know that it doesn't matter how fucking old you are. If you've got the passion, you can still do it."

Nash was shaken by Crosby's death, in January: "Like an earthquake, with aftershocks whenever I see his face on Instagram." He added, "He was my best friend." Nash's unsparing account of Crosby's addiction in "Wild Tales" ruptured their friendship; they hadn't spoken in a decade. Shortly before Crosby died, "he left a voice mail saying, 'I really need to talk,'" Nash said. "So I set a time, and I waited and waited. He never called. And then he was gone."

He has remained close to Mitchell. "You can't be in love with Joni Mitchell and then lose it," he said. "All these years, every birthday I send her a dozen roses—usually eleven white ones and one red one, or eleven red ones and one white one. I don't know why."

Nash likes to read depressing books: drug-resistant strains of bacteria, the next pandemic, social decay. "My wife calls my side of the bed the 'bummer pile.'" His work has always been political, and one of his new songs references "when the MAGA tourists took the Hill." "I kind of feel like the American empire is crumbling," he said.

Nevertheless, Nash is upbeat. He's had COVID twice, but his high tenor is intact. And even though he stood between Stills and Neil Young "playing full fucking blast for forty years," he can still hear, with the help of hearing aids. He has four tours planned this year.

After breakfast, he strolled east. "Whitman, Poe—they walked these streets," he said. "And Tesla. He thought that every single thing has a vibration. Tesla had this pure-white pigeon, who would fly into his window. In his biography, he says that one day this incredible blue flash came out of its eyes, and that's how he knew he was done."

Graham Nash

As Nash walked, he snapped pictures with his iPhone. He passed a silver birch on East Third: "They could have knocked it down. But look at it." Snap. A young man balanced on one leg atop a concrete barrier—snap—on which someone had scrawled "Love Is the Law." "Graham Bond wrote that song," Nash said. In Tompkins Square Park, someone was screaming, "Man is an artist! Feed the artist!"

"Crazy people, brilliant people, all of them right here," Nash observed. A flock of pigeons blocked his path. He walked right into it. "I'm waiting for that blue flash," he said.

—John Seabrook

POSTSCRIPT

BRUCE McCALL

Bruce McCall, who died last week, was, as those of us who knew and loved him recognized, very nearly unique among artists and writers of his quality. Many creative people of original gifts live at right angles to their talent, the difference between who they are and what they make being astounding, but no one was ever more right-angled—transcendent talent to human type—than Bruce. With a paintbrush in his hand, or with his fingers on a laptop, he was the most inspired of satirists. In what used to be called a "biting" vein, he blended a wild surrealist sensibility—founded on an impeccable illustrator's technique, always manifesting visions, dreams, impossibilities in scrupulous hyper-realism—with a sharp, sometimes caustic tone, beautifully underlit by melancholia. No one who has seen his countless covers for this magazine will forget them: the disgruntled giant apes waiting for a casting call for "King Kong"; or the Francophile New York bodega specializing in caviar and champagne; or the "quiet car" on the New York subway, library-stilled; or the wall of Egyptian hieroglyphs startlingly revealed by our endless midtown demolition; or the exotic forties night club hiding beneath a manhole . . . and so many others.

But in life Bruce was, despite a sometimes gruff exterior, the most sympathetic and least abrasive of men: a perfect Canadian, raised in Simcoe and then Toronto, in a vast, intense, and varyingly unhappy family, whose fate he documented in his masterpiece, the memoir "Thin Ice." A tale of gray-good Scots-Presbyterian Canada and its dowager-queen city, Toronto, at a period when it was at its grayest and goodest, the book describes the indignities of being a young Canadian yearning for the south. Yet Bruce remained, even in New York, the most compleat Canadian, with all the key Canadian traits: self-deprecating to an often hilarious degree, polite to an almost ferocious fault, and in equal parts appalled and attracted by the crazy circus energies of his adopted country. (With one fellow-Canadian he maintained a clandestine traffic in Coffee Crisp, a strange-tasting but weirdly addictive Canadian snack, once unfindable in America.)

Utterly devoted to his wonderful wife, Polly, and his brilliant daughter, Amanda, he was the sweetest man at any Thanksgiving table, reliably showing up with a bit of doggerel sure to include a teasing mention of each guest, and then listening quietly to the jokes and absurdities racing around the turkey. He was a matchless listener to all tales of personal pains and pleasures, with his stolid, almost grouchy normal demeanor suddenly lit up by a beautiful smile of sympathy and friendship—always earned, in the northern manner, but not, in the southern way, given promiscuously to all. His Canadianness extended even to being the only New Yorker many of us knew who drove *everywhere*—around the block, six streets over for lunch—and then insisted on driving you home, across the Park, after lunch. Somehow, he always found a parking space. (Bruce kept them in his pocket, we used to say.)

Yet the spell of his art transcended the sweetness of his presence. His muse was tireless and inventive. Like any first-class artist of any kind, he was an incomparably hard worker. When we collaborated on the children's fantasy "The Steps Across the Water," he astonished me by putting sober, precise imagery to my own slightly nebulous imaginative scenes. He was worried that he was not drawing the ten-year-old protagonist—a New York girl in a violet overcoat—correctly, and he suffered over it. He struggled manfully to realize each detail of every scene he ever drew, no matter how fantastical, to a degree that seemed unnecessary, given the wit and the beauty of what he made so readily.

But for Bruce the business of getting it down right was not merely professional, much less artisanal. It was of preternatural importance, the key to his life, the form of self-salvation which he had worked out for himself when, as a lonely kid with bad ankles (an unimaginable curse in hockey-playing Ontario) who shared a crowded room with siblings, he escaped unhappiness by drawing. First, he made his own imaginary world of comic strips, and then moved to illustration. (He eventually was so precocious that he was almost waylaid from *The New Yorker* by becoming an advertising illustrator, drawing the outrageously elongated and attenuated cars of the fifties—a high automotive style that he would mordantly dissect, with the cars' proportions stretched ever further, like taffy.) Drawing was a way of demystifying the world, of getting it down right—a way of asserting yourself, of finding your own cosmos, of controlling your own fate. It put your destiny in your own drawing hand. Messiness in emotional relations he could tolerate, even empathize with, and he adored ambivalences of meaning in art. It was sloppiness in design and execution which was the only anathema.

Inspired though his images are, it is not perverse to say that his greatest contribution was the way the images meshed with his writing—in his many Shouts & Murmurs, but also in "Thin Ice" and in his other touching memoir, "How Did I Get Here?" Writing the preface for the latter, I referred, accurately, to his genius, and he guffawed and snorted upon reading it, in his best Simcoe-Scots manner. But he didn't want it deleted. He knew his worth.

Nor was *The New Yorker* an accidental or instrumental vehicle for him. His parents—intelligent, discontented people—loved the magazine, and it had served for him as a beacon of style and sophistication and sheer fun in an otherwise gray world. I once wrote, in a catalogue of Bruce's work, that, of all the artists who have graced this magazine, Saul Steinberg and Bruce McCall were the ones whose work seemed likely to live longest and echo loudest. Not having Bruce here to shock and appall (and, secretly, to delight) with such praise is part of the grief of losing him. All we can do is continue to look at his utterly inimitable visions—at the lonely polar explorers sharing an abandoned Antarctic opera house with a pair of disconsolate penguins—and be grateful that he came south to astonish us.

—Adam Gopnik

PERSONAL HISTORY

THE GHOSTWRITER

Prince Harry's collaborator on life in the margins.

BY J. R. MOEHRINGER

I was exasperated with Prince Harry. My head was pounding, my jaw was clenched, and I was starting to raise my voice. And yet some part of me was still able to step outside the situation and think, This is so *weird*. I'm shouting at Prince Harry. Then, as Harry started going back at me, as his cheeks flushed and his eyes narrowed, a more pressing thought occurred: Whoa, it could all end right here.

This was the summer of 2022. For two years, I'd been the ghostwriter on Harry's memoir, "Spare," and now, reviewing his latest edits in a middle-of-the-night Zoom session, we'd come to a difficult passage. Harry, at the close of gruelling military exercises in rural England, gets captured by pretend terrorists. It's a simulation, but the tortures inflicted upon Harry are very real. He's hooded, dragged to an underground bunker, beaten, frozen, starved, stripped, forced into excruciating stress positions by captors wearing black balaclavas. The idea is to find out if Harry has the toughness to survive an actual capture on the battlefield. (Two of his fellow-soldiers don't; they crack.) At last, Harry's captors throw him against a wall, choke him, and scream insults into his face, culminating in a vile dig at—Princess Diana?

Even the fake terrorists engrossed in their parts, even the hard-core British soldiers observing from a remote location, seem to recognize that an inviolate rule has been broken. Clawing that specific wound, the memory of Harry's dead mother, is out of bounds. When the simulation is over, one of the participants extends an apology.

Harry always wanted to end this scene with a thing he said to his captors, a comeback that struck me as unnecessary, and somewhat inane. Good for Harry that he had the nerve, but ending with what he said would dilute the scene's meaning: that even at the most bizarre and peripheral moments of his life, his central tragedy intrudes. For months, I'd been crossing out the comeback, and for months Harry had been pleading for it to go back in. Now he wasn't pleading, he was insisting, and it was 2 A.M., and I was starting to lose it. I said, "Dude, we've been over this."

Why was this one line so important? Why couldn't he accept my advice? We were leaving out a thousand other things—that's half the art of memoir, leaving stuff out—so what made this different? Please, I said, trust me. Trust the book.

Although this wasn't the first time that Harry and I had argued, it felt different; it felt as if we were hurtling toward some kind of decisive rupture, in part because Harry was no longer saying anything. He was just glaring into the camera. Finally, he exhaled and calmly explained that, all his life, people had belittled his intellectual capabilities, and this flash of cleverness proved that, even after being kicked and punched and deprived of sleep and food, he had his wits about him.

"Oh," I said. "O.K." It made sense now. But I still refused.

"Why?"

Because, I told him, everything you just said is about you. You want the world to know that *you* did a good job, that *you* were smart. But, strange as it may seem, memoir isn't about you. It's not even the story of your life. It's a story carved from your life, a particular series of events chosen because they have the greatest resonance for the widest range of people, and at this point in the story those people don't need to know anything more than that your captors said a cruel thing about your mom.

Harry looked down. A long time. Was he thinking? Seething? Should I have been more diplomatic? Should I have just given in? I imagined I'd be thrown off the book soon after sunup. I could almost hear the awkward phone call with Harry's agent, and I was sad. Never mind the financial hit—I was focussed on the emotional shock. All the time, the ef-

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fort, the intangibles I'd invested in Harry's memoir, in Harry, would be gone just like that.

After what seemed like an hour, Harry looked up, and we locked eyes. "O.K.," he said.

"O.K.?"

"Yes. I get it."

"Thank you, Harry," I said, relieved.

He shot me a mischievous grin. "I really enjoy getting you worked up like that."

I burst into laughter and shook my head, and we moved on to his next set of edits.

Later that morning, after a few hours of sleep, I sat outside worrying. (Mornings are my worry time, along with afternoons and evenings.) I didn't worry so much about the propriety of arguing with princes, or even the risks. One of a ghostwriter's main jobs is having a big mouth. You win some, you lose most, but you have to keep pushing, not unlike a demanding parent or a tyrannical coach. Otherwise, you're nothing but a glorified stenographer, and that's disloyalty to the author, to the book—to books. Opposition is true Friendship, William Blake wrote, and if I had to choose a ghostwriting credo, that would be it.

No, rather than the rightness of going after Harry, I was questioning the heat with which I'd done so. I scolded myself: It's not your comeback. It's not your mother. For the thousandth time in my ghostwriting career, I reminded myself: It's not your effing book.

Some days, the phone doesn't stop. Ghostwriters in distress. They ask for ten minutes, half an hour. A coffee date.

"My author can't remember squat."

"My author and I have come to despise each other."

"I can't get my author to call me back—is it normal for a ghost to get ghosted?"

At the outset, I do what ghostwriters do. I listen. And eventually, after the callers talk themselves out, I ask a few gentle questions. The first (aside from "How did you get this number?") is always: How bad do you want it? Because things can go sideways in a hurry. An author might know nothing about writing, which is why he hired a ghost. But he may also have the literary self-confidence of Saul Bellow, and good luck telling Saul Bellow that he absolutely may not describe an interesting bowel movement he experienced years ago, as I once had to tell an author. So fight like crazy, I say, but always remember that if push comes to shove no one will have your back. Within the text and without, no one wants to hear from the dumb ghostwriter.

I try not to sound didactic. A lot of what I've read about ghostwriting, much of it from accomplished ghostwriters, doesn't square with my experience. Recording the author? Terrible idea—it makes many authors feel as if they're being deposed. Dressing like the author? It's a memoir, not a masquerade party. The ghostwriter for Julian Assange wrote twenty-five thousand words about his methodology, and it sounded to me like Elon Musk on mushrooms—on Mars. That same ghost, however, published a review of "Spare" describing Harry as "off his royal tits" and me as going "all Sartre or Faulkner," so what do I know? Who am I to offer rules? Maybe the alchemy of each ghost-author pairing is unique.

Therefore, I simply remind the callers that ghostwriting is an art and urge them not to let those who cast it as hacky, shady, or faddish (it's been around for thousands of years) dim their pride. I also tell them that they're providing a vital public service, helping to shore up the publishing industry, since most of the titles on this week's best-seller list were written by someone besides the named author.

Signing off, the callers usually sigh and say thanks and grumble something like "Well, whatever happens, I'm never doing this again." And I tell them yes, they will, and wish them luck.

How does a person even become a ghostwriter? What's the path into a profession for which there is no school or certification, and to which no one actually aspires? You never hear a kid say, "One day, I want to write other people's books." And yet I think I can detect some hints, some foreshadowing in my origins.

When I was growing up in Manhasset, New York, people would ask: Where's your dad? My typical answer was an embarrassed shrug. *Beats me.* My old man wasn't around, that's all I knew, all any grownup had the heart to tell me. And yet he was also everywhere. My father was a well-known rock-and-roll d.j., so his Sam Elliott basso profundo was like the Long Island Rail Road, rumbling in the distance at maddeningly regular intervals.

Every time I caught his show, I'd feel confused, empty, sad, but also amazed at how much he had to say. The words, the jokes, the patter—it didn't stop. Was it my Oedipal counterstrike to fantasize an opposite existence, one in which I just STFU? Less talking, more listening, that was my basic life plan at age ten. In Manhasset, an Irish-Italian enclave, I was surrounded by professional listeners: bartenders and priests. Neither of those careers appealed to me, so I waited, and one afternoon found myself sitting with a cousin at the Squire theatre, in Great Neck, watching a matinée of "All the President's Men." Reporters seemed to do nothing but listen. Then they got to turn what they heard into stories, which other people read—no talking required. Sign me up.

My first job out of college was at the New York *Times*. When I wasn't fetching coffee and corned beef, I was doing "legwork," which meant running to a fire, a trial, a murder scene, then filing a memo back to the newsroom. The next morning, I'd open the paper and see my facts, maybe my exact words, under someone else's name. I didn't mind; I hated my name. I was born John Joseph Moehringer, Jr., and Senior was M.I.A. Not seeing my name, his name, wasn't a problem. It was a perk.

Many days at the *Times*, I'd look around the newsroom, with its orange carpet and pipe-puffing lifers and chattering telex machines, and think, I wouldn't want to be anywhere else. And then the editors suggested I go somewhere else.

I went west. I got a job at the *Rocky Mountain News*, a tabloid founded in 1859. Its first readers were the gold miners panning the rivers and creeks of the Rockies, and though I arrived a hundred and thirty-one years later, the paper still read as if it were written for madmen living alone in them thar hills. The articles were thumb-length, the fact checking iffy, and the newsroom mood, many days, bedlam. Some oldsters were volubly grumpy about being on the back slopes of middling careers, others were blessed with unjustified swagger, and a few were dangerously loose cannons. (I'll never forget the Sunday morning our religion writer, in his weekly column,

referred to St. Joseph as "Christ's stepdad." The phones exploded.) The general lack of quality control made the paper a playground for me. I was able to go slow, learn from mistakes without being defined by them, and build up rudimentary skills, like writing fast.

What I did best, I discovered, was write for others. The gossip columnist spent most nights in downtown saloons, hunting for scoops, and some mornings he'd shuffle into the newsroom looking rough. One morning, he fixed his red eyes on me, gestured toward his notes, and rasped, "Would you?" I sat at his desk and dashed off his column in twenty minutes. What a rush. Writing under no name was safe; writing under someone else's name (and picture) was hedonic—a kind of hiding and seeking. Words had never come easy for me, but, when I wrote as someone else, the words, the jokes, the patter—it didn't stop.

In the fall of 2006, my phone rang. Unknown number. But I instantly recognized the famously soft voice: for two decades, he'd loomed over the tennis world. Now, on the verge of retiring, he told me that he was decompressing from the emotions of the moment by reading my memoir, "The Tender Bar," which had recently been published. It had him thinking about writing his own. He wondered if I'd come talk to him about it. A few weeks later, we met at a restaurant in his home town, Las Vegas.

Andre Agassi and I were very different, but our connection was instant. He had an eighth-grade education but a profound respect for people who read and write books. I had a regrettably short sporting résumé (my Little League fastball was unhittable) but deep reverence for athletes. Especially the solitaries: tennis players, prizefighters, matadors, who possess that luminous charisma which comes from besting opponents singlehandedly. But Andre didn't want to talk about that. He hated tennis, he said. He wanted to talk about memoir. He had a list of questions. He asked why my memoir was so confessional. I told him that's how you know you can trust an author—if he's willing to get raw.

He asked why I'd organized my memoir around other people, rather than myself. I told him that was the kind of memoir I admired. There's so much power to be gained, and honesty to be achieved, from taking an ostensibly navel-gazing genre and turning the gaze outward. Frank McCourt had a lot of feelings about his brutal Irish childhood, but he kept most of them to himself, focussing instead on his Dad, his Mam, his beloved siblings, the neighbors down the lane.

"I am a part of all that I have met." It might've been that first night, or another, but at some point I shared that line from Tennyson, and Andre loved it. The same almost painful gratitude that I felt toward my mother, and toward my bartender uncle and his barfly friends, who helped her raise me, Andre felt for his trainer and his coach, and for his wife, Stefanie Graf.

But how, he asked, do you write about other people without invading their privacy? That's the ultimate challenge, I said. I sought permission from nearly everyone I wrote about, and shared early drafts, but sometimes people aren't speaking to you, and sometimes they're dead. Sometimes, in order to tell the truth, you simply can't avoid hurting someone's feelings. It goes down easier, I said, if you're equally unsparing about yourself.

He asked if I'd help him do it. I gave him a soft no. I liked his enthusiasm, his boldness—him. But I'd never imagined myself writing someone else's book, and I already had a job. By now, I'd left the *Rocky Mountain News* and joined the Los Angeles *Times*. I was a national correspondent, doing long-form journalism, which I loved. Alas, the *Times* was about to change. A new gang of editors had come in, and not long after my dinner with Andre they let it be known that the paper would no longer prioritize long-form journalism.

Apart from a beef with my bosses, and apart from the money (Andre was offering a sizable bump from my reporter salary), what finally made me change my no to a yes, put my stuff into storage, and move to Vegas was the sense that Andre was suffering an intense and specific ache that I might be able to cure. He wanted to tell his story and didn't know how; I'd been there. I'd struggled for years to tell my story.

Every attempt failed, and every failure took a heavy psychic toll. Some days, it felt like a physical blockage, and to this day I believe my story would've remained stuck inside me forever if not for one editor at the *Times*, who on a Sunday afternoon imparted some thunderbolt advice about memoir that steered me onto the right path. I wanted to give Andre that same grace.

Shortly before I moved to Vegas, a friend invited me to a fancy restaurant in the Phoenix suburbs for a gathering of sportswriters covering the 2008 Super Bowl. As the menus were being handed around, my friend clinked a knife against his glass and announced, "O.K., listen up! Moehringer here has been asked by Agassi to ghostwrite his—"

Groans.

"Exactly. We've all done our share of these fucking things—"

Louder groans.

"Right! Our mission is not to leave this table until we've convinced this idiot to tell Agassi not just no but hell no."

At once, the meal turned into a raucous meeting of Ghostwriters Anonymous. Everyone had a hard-luck story about being disrespected, dismissed, shouted at, shoved aside, abused in a hilarious variety of ways by an astonishing array of celebrities, though I mostly remember the jocks. The legendary basketball player who wouldn't come to the door for his first appointment with his ghost, then appeared for the second buck naked. The hockey great with the personality of a hockey stick, who had so few thoughts about his time on this planet, so little interest in his own book, that he gave his ghost an epic case of writer's block. The notorious linebacker who, days before his memoir was due to the publisher, informed his ghost that the co-writing credit would go to his psychotherapist.

Between gasping and laughing, I asked the table, "Why do they do it? Why do they treat ghostwriters so badly?" I was bombarded with theories.

Authors feel ashamed about needing someone to write their story, and that shame makes them behave in shameful ways.

Authors think they could write the book themselves, if only they had time,

so they resent having to pay you to do it.

Authors spend their lives safeguarding their secrets, and now you come along with your little notebook and pesky questions and suddenly they have to rip back the curtain? Boo.

But if all authors treat all ghosts badly, I wondered, and if it's not your book in the first place, why not cash the check and move on? Why does it hurt so much? I don't recall anyone having a good answer for that.

"Please," I said to Andre, "don't give me a story to tell at future Super Bowls." He grinned and said he'd do his best. He did better than that. In two years of working together, we never exchanged a harsh word, not even when he felt my first draft needed work.

Maybe the Germans have a term for it, the particular facial expression of someone reading something about his life that's even the tiniest bit wrong. *Schaudergesicht*? I saw that look on Andre's face, and it made me want to lie down on the floor. But, unlike me, he didn't overreact. He knew that putting a first serve into the net is no big deal. He made countless fixes, and I made fixes to his fixes, and together we made ten thousand more, and in time we arrived at a draft that satisfied us both. The collaboration was so close, so synchronous, you'd have to call the eventual voice of the memoir a hybrid—though it's all Andre. That's the mystic paradox of ghostwriting: you're inherent and nowhere; vital and invisible. To borrow an image from William Gass, you're the air in someone else's trumpet.

"Open," by Andre Agassi, was published on November 9, 2009. Andre was pleased, reviewers were complimentary, and I soon had offers to ghost other people's memoirs. Before deciding what to do next, I needed to get away, clear my head. I went to the Green Mountains. For two days, I drove around, stopped at wayside meadows, sat under trees and watched the clouds—until one late afternoon I began feeling unwell. I bought some cold medicine, pulled into the first bed-and-breakfast I saw, and climbed into bed. Hand-sewn quilt under my chin, I switched on the TV. There was Andre, on a late-night talk show.

The host was praising "Open," and Agassi was being his typical charming, humble self. Now the host was praising the writing. Agassi continued to be humble. Thank you, thank you. But I dared to hope he might mention . . . me? An indefensible, illogical hope: Andre had asked me to put my name on the cover, and I'd declined. Nevertheless, right before zonking out, I started muttering at the TV, "Say my name." I got a bit louder. "Say my name!" I got pretty rowdy. "Say my fucking name!"

Seven hours later, I stumbled downstairs to the breakfast room and caught a weird vibe. Guests stared. Several peered over my shoulder to see who was with me. What the? I sat alone, eating some pancakes, until I got it. The bed-and-breakfast had to be three hundred years old, with walls made of pre-Revolutionary cardboard—clearly every guest had heard me. *Say my name!*

I took it as a lesson. NyQuil was to blame, but also creeping narcissism. The gods were admonishing me: You can't be Mister Rogers while ghosting the book and John McEnroe when it's done. I drove away from Vermont with newfound clarity. I'm not cut out for this ghostwriting thing. I needed to get back to my first love, journalism, and to writing my own books.

During the next year or so, I freelanced for magazines while making notes for a novel. Then once more to the wilderness. I rented a tiny cabin in the far corner of nowhere and, for a full winter, rarely left. No TV, no radio, no Wi-Fi. For entertainment, I listened to the silver foxes screaming at night in a nearby forest, and I read dozens of books. But mostly I sat before the woodstove and tried to inhabit the minds of my characters. The novel was historical fiction, based on the decades-long crime spree of America's most prolific bank robber, but also based on my disgust with the bankers who had recently devastated the global financial system. In real life, my bank-robbing protagonist wrote a memoir, with a ghostwriter, which was full of lies or delusions. I thought it might be fascinating to override that memoir with solid research, overwrite the ghostwriter, and become, in effect, the ghostwriter of the ghostwriter of a ghost.

I gave everything I had to that novel, but when it was published, in 2012, it got mauled by an influential critic. The

"Keep practicing, and someday you'll be able to play the two songs you remember, at houses that also have pianos."

review was then instantly tweeted by countless humanitarians, often with side-splitting commentary like "Ouch." I was on book tour at the time and read the review in a pitch-dark hotel room knowing full well what it meant: the book was stillborn. I couldn't breathe, couldn't stand. Part of me wanted to never leave that room. Part of me never did.

I barely slept or ate for months. My savings ran down. Occasionally, I'd take on a freelance assignment, profile an athlete for a magazine, but mostly I was in hibernation. Then one day the phone rang. A soft voice, vaguely familiar. Andre, asking if I was up for working with someone on a memoir.

Who?

Phil Knight.

Who?

Andre sighed. Founder of Nike?

A business book didn't seem like my thing. But I needed to do something, and writing my own stuff was out. I went to the initial meeting thinking, It's only an hour of my life. It wound up being three years.

Luckily, Phil had no interest in doing the typical C.E.O. auto-hagiography. He'd sought writing advice from Tobias Wolff, he was pals with a Pulitzer-winning novelist. He wanted to write a literary memoir, unfolding his mistakes, his anxieties—his quest. He viewed entrepreneurship, and sports, as a spiritual search. (He'd read deeply in Taoism and Zen.) Since I, too, was in search of meaning, I thought his book might be just the thing I needed.

It was. It was also, in every sense of that overused phrase, a labor of love. (I married the book's editor.) When "Shoe Dog" was published, in April, 2016, I reflected on the dire warnings I'd heard at Super Bowl XLII and thought, What were they talking about? I felt like a guy, warned off by a bunch of wizened gamblers, who hits the jackpot twice with the first two nickels he sticks into a slot machine. Then again, I figured, better quit while I'm ahead.

Back to magazine writing. I also dared to start another novel. More personal, more difficult than the last, it absorbed me totally and I was tunnelling toward a draft while also starting a family. There was no time for anything else, no desire. And yet some days I'd hear that siren call. An actor, an activist, a billionaire, a soldier, a politician, another billionaire, a lunatic would phone, seeking help with a memoir.

Twice I said yes. Not for the money. I've never taken a ghosting gig for the money. But twice I felt that I had no choice, that the story was too cool, the author just too compelling, and twice the author freaked out at my first draft. Twice I explained that first drafts are always flawed, that error is the mother of truth, but it wasn't just the errors. It was the confessions, the revelations, the cold-blooded honesty that memoir requires. Everyone says they want to get raw until they see how raw feels.

Twice the author killed the book. Twice I sat before a stack of pages into which I'd poured my soul and years of my life, knowing they were good, and knowing that they were about to go into a drawer forever. Twice I said to my wife, Never again.

And then, in the summer of 2020, I got a text. The familiar query. Would you be interested in speaking with someone about ghosting a memoir? I shook my head no. I covered my eyes. I picked up the phone and heard myself blurting, Who?

Prince Harry.

I agreed to a Zoom. I was curious, of course. Who wouldn't be? I wondered what the real story was. I wondered if we'd have any chemistry. We did, and there was, I think, a surprising reason. Princess Diana had died twenty-three years before our first conversation, and my mother, Dorothy Moehringer, had just died, and our griefs felt equally fresh.

Still, I hesitated. Harry wasn't sure how much he wanted to say in his memoir, and that concerned me. I'd heard similar reservations, early on, from both authors who'd ultimately killed their memoirs. Also, I knew that whatever Harry said, whenever he said it, would set off a storm. I am not, by nature, a storm chaser. And there were logistical considerations. In the early stages of a global pandemic, it was impossible to predict when I'd be able to sit down with Harry in the same room. How do you write about someone you can't meet?

Harry had no deadline, however, and that enticed me. Many authors are in a hot hurry, and some ghosts are happy to oblige. They churn and burn, producing three or four books a year. I go

"I swear to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth—unless you ask me how I am, in which case I will say, 'I'm fine,' even though I'm not fine."

painfully slow; I don't know any other way. Also, I just liked the dude. I called him dude right away; it made him chuckle. I found his story, as he outlined it in broad strokes, relatable and infuriating. The way he'd been treated, by both strangers and intimates, was grotesque. In retrospect, though, I think I selfishly welcomed the idea of being able to speak with someone, an expert, about that never-ending feeling of wishing you could call your mom.

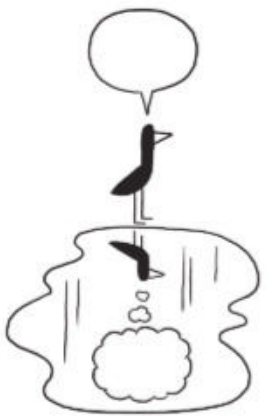
Harry and I made steady progress in the course of 2020, largely because the world didn't know what we were up to. We could revel in the privacy of our Zoom bubble. As Harry grew to trust me, he brought other people into the bubble, connecting me with his inner circle, a vital phase in every ghosting job. There is always someone who knows your author's life better than he does, and your task is to find that person fast and interview his socks off.

As the pandemic waned, I was finally able to travel to Montecito. I went once with my wife and children. (Harry won the heart of my daughter, Gracie, with his vast "Moana" scholarship; his favorite scene, he told her, is when Heihei, the silly chicken, finds himself lost at sea.) I also went twice by myself. Harry put me up in his guesthouse, where Meghan and Archie would visit me on their afternoon walks. Meghan, knowing I was missing my family, was forever bringing trays of food and sweets.

Little by little, Harry and I amassed hundreds of thousands of words. When we weren't Zooming or phoning, we were texting around the clock. In due time, no subject was off the table. I felt honored by his candor, and I could tell that he felt astonished by it. And energized. While I always emphasized storytelling and scenes, Harry couldn't escape the wish that "Spare" might be a rebuttal to every lie ever published about him. As Borges dreamed of endless libraries, Harry dreams of endless retractions, which meant no end of revelations. He knew, of course, that some people would be aghast at first. "Why on earth would Harry talk about that?" But he had faith that they would soon see: because someone else already talked about it, and got it wrong.

He was joyful at this prospect; everything in our bubble was good. Then someone leaked news of the book.

Whoever it was, their callousness toward Harry extended to me. I had a clause in my contract giving me the right to remain unidentified, a clause I always insist on, but the leaker blew that up by divulging my name to the press. Along with pretty much anyone who has had anything to do with Harry, I woke one morning to find myself squinting into a gigantic searchlight. Every hour, another piece would drop, each one wrong. My fee was wrong, my bio was wrong, even my name.



One royal expert cautioned that, because of my involvement in the book, Harry's father should be "looking for a pile of coats to hide under." When I mentioned this to Harry, he stared. "Why?"

"Because I have daddy issues." We laughed and got back to discussing our mothers.

The genesis of my relationship with Harry was constantly misreported. Harry and I were introduced by George Clooney, the British newspapers proclaimed, even though I've never met George Clooney. Yes, he was directing a film based on my memoir, but I've never been in the man's presence, never communicated with him in any way. I wanted to correct the record, write an op-ed or something, tweet some *facts*. But no. I reminded myself: ghosts don't speak. One day, though, I did share my frustration with Harry. I bemoaned that these fictions about me were spreading and hardening into orthodoxy. He tilted his head: Welcome to my world, dude. By now, Harry was calling me dude.

A week before its pub date, "Spare" was leaked. A Madrid bookshop reportedly put embargoed copies of the Spanish version on its shelves, "by accident," and reporters descended. In no time, Fleet Street had assembled crews of translators to reverse-engineer the book from Spanish to English, and with so many translators working on tight deadline the results read like bad Borat. One example among many was the passage about Harry losing his virginity. Per the British press, Harry recounts, "I mounted her quickly . . ." But of course he doesn't. I can assert with one-hundred-per-cent confidence that no one gets "mounted," quickly or otherwise, in "Spare."

I didn't have time to be horrified. When the book was officially released, the bad translations didn't stop. They multiplied. The British press now converted the book into their native tongue, that jabberwocky of bonkers hot takes and classist snark. Facts were wrenched out of context, complex emotions were reduced to cartoonish idiocy, innocent passages were hyped into outrages—and there were so many falsehoods. One British newspaper chased down Harry's flight instructor. Headline: "Prince Harry's army instructor says story in Spare book is 'complete fantasy.'" Hours later, the instructor posted a lengthy comment beneath the article, swearing that those words, "complete fantasy," never came out of his mouth. Indeed, they were nowhere in the piece, only in the bogus headline, which had gone viral. The newspaper had made it up, the instructor said, stressing that Harry was one of his finest students.

The only other time I'd witnessed this sort of frenzied mob was with LeBron James, whom I'd interviewed before and after his decision to leave the Cleveland Cavaliers and join the Miami Heat. I couldn't fathom the toxic cloud of hatred that trailed him. Fans, particularly Cavs loyalists, didn't just decry James. They wished him dead. They burned his jersey, threw rocks at his image. And the media egged them on. In those first days of "Spare," I found myself wondering what the ecstatic contempt for Prince Harry and King James had in common. Racism, surely. Also, each man had committed the sin of publicly spurning his homeland. But the biggest factor, I came to believe, was money. In times of great economic distress, many people are triggered by someone who has so much doing anything to try to improve his lot.

Within days, the amorphous campaign against "Spare" seemed to narrow to a single point of attack: that Harry's memoir, rigorously fact-checked, was rife with errors. I can't think of anything that rankles quite like being called sloppy by

people who routinely trample facts in pursuit of their royal prey, and this now happened every few minutes to Harry and, by extension, to me. In one section of the book, for instance, Harry reveals that he used to live for the yearly sales at TK Maxx, the discount clothing chain. Not so fast, said the monarchists at TK Maxx corporate, who rushed out a statement declaring that TK Maxx never has sales, just great savings all the time! Oh, snap! Gotcha, Prince George Santos! Except that people around the world immediately posted screenshots of TK Maxx touting sales on its official Twitter account. (Surely TK Maxx's effort to discredit Harry's memoir was unrelated to the company's long-standing partnership with Prince Charles and his charitable trust.)

Ghostwriters don't speak, I reminded myself over and over. But I had to do something. So I ventured one small gesture. I retweeted a few quotes from Mary Karr about inadvertent error in memories and memoir, plus seemingly innocuous quotes from "Spare" about the way Harry's memory works. (He can't recall much from the years right after his mother died, and for the most part remembers places better than people—possibly because places didn't let him down the way people did.) Smooth move, ghostwriter. My tweets were seized upon, deliberately misinterpreted by trolls, and turned into headlines by real news outlets. *Harry's ghostwriter admits the book is all lies.*

One of Harry's friends gave a book party. My wife and I attended.

We were feeling fragile as we arrived, and it had nothing to do with Twitter. Days earlier, we'd been stalked, followed in our car as we drove our son to preschool. When I lifted him out of his seat, a paparazzo leaped from his car and stood in the middle of the road, taking aim with his enormous lens and scaring the hell out of everyone at dropoff. Then, not one hour later, as I sat at my desk, trying to calm myself, I looked up to see a woman's face at my window. As if in a dream, I walked to the window and asked, "Who are you?" Through the glass, she whispered, "I'm from the *Mail on Sunday*."

I lowered the shade, phoned an old friend—the same friend whose columns I used to ghostwrite in Colorado. He listened but didn't get it. How could he get it? So I called the only friend who might.

It was like telling Taylor Swift about a bad breakup. It was like singing "Hallelujah" to Leonard Cohen. Harry was all heart. He asked if my family was O.K., asked for physical descriptions of the people harassing us, promised to make some calls, see if anything could be done. We both knew nothing could be done, but still. I felt gratitude, and some regret. I'd worked hard to understand the ordeals of Harry Windsor, and now I saw that I understood nothing. Empathy is thin gruel compared with the marrow of experience. One morning of what Harry had endured since birth made me desperate to take another crack at the pages in "Spare" that talk about the media.

Too late. The book was out, the party in full swing. As we walked into the house, I looked around, nervous, unsure of what state we'd find the author in. Was he, too, feeling fragile? Was he as keen as I was to organize a global boycott of TK Maxx?

He appeared, marching toward us, looking flushed. Uh-oh, I thought, before registering that it was a good flush. His smile was wide as he embraced us both. He was overjoyed by many things. The numbers, naturally. Guinness World Records had just certified his memoir as the fastest-selling nonfiction book in the history of the world. But, more than that, readers were *reading*, at last, the actual book, not Murdoched chunks laced with poison, and their online reviews were overwhelmingly effusive. Many said Harry's candor about family dysfunction, about losing a parent, had given them solace.

The guests were summoned into the living room. There were several lovely toasts to Harry, then the Prince stepped forward. I'd never seen him so self-possessed and expansive. He thanked his publishing team, his editor, me. He mentioned my advice, to "trust the book," and said he was glad that he did, because it felt incredible to have the truth out there, to feel—his voice caught—"free." There were tears in his eyes. Mine, too.

And yet once a ghost, always a ghost. I couldn't help obsessing about that word "free." If he'd used that in one of our Zoom sessions, I'd have pushed back. Harry first felt liberated when he fell in love with Meghan, and again when they fled Britain, and what he felt now, for the first time in his life, was heard. That imperious Windsor motto, "Never complain, never explain," is really just a prettified *omertà*, which my wife suggests might have prolonged Harry's grief. His family actively discourages talking, a stoicism for which they're widely lauded, but if you don't speak your emotions you serve them, and if you don't tell your story you lose it—or, what might be worse, you get lost inside it. Telling is how we cement details, preserve continuity, stay sane. We say ourselves into being every day, or else. Heard, Harry, heard—I could hear myself making the case to him late at night, and I could see Harry's nose wrinkle as he argued for his word, and I reproached myself once more: Not your effing book.

But, after we hugged Harry goodbye, after we thanked Meghan for toys she'd sent our children, I had a second thought about silence. Ghosts don't speak—says who? Maybe they can. Maybe sometimes they should.

Several weeks later, I was having breakfast with my family. The children were eating and my wife and I were talking about ghostwriting. Someone had just called, seeking help with their memoir. Intriguing person, but the answer was going to be no. I wanted to resume work on my novel. Our five-year-old daughter looked up from her cinnamon toast and asked, "What is ghostwriting?"

My wife and I gazed at each other as if she'd asked, What is God?

"Well," I said, drawing a blank. "O.K., you know how you love art?"

She nodded. She loves few things more. An artist is what she hopes to be.

"Imagine if one of your classmates wanted to say something, express something, but they couldn't draw. Imagine if they asked you to draw a picture for them."

"I would *do* it," she said.

"That's ghostwriting."

It occurred to me that this might be the closest I'd ever come to a workable definition. It certainly landed with our daughter. You could see it in her eyes. She got off her chair and leaned against me. "Daddy, I will be your ghostwriter."

My wife laughed. I laughed. "Thank you, sweetheart," I said.

But that wasn't what I wanted to say. What I wanted to say was "No, Gracie. Nope. Keep doing your own pictures." ♦

IS NOT DRINKING A PROBLEM FOR YOU?

BY CORA FRAZIER

A week ago, I never would've told you that I had a problem with not drinking. I wasn't one of those people who got messy, cracking open another LaCroix and failing to hide their burps behind a hand. My sobriety had never caused me to commit a social faux pas, like asking friends if I could contribute less to a bill since I'd ordered only a mint tea.

As many revelations do, mine began with an online quiz. I was sitting on the couch, listening to the fizz of my kombucha on the coffee table. *Do you look forward to your first nonalcoholic drink of the day?* I kept scrolling, trying not to think about last Friday at 4 P.M., when a "quick turnaround" e-mail appeared in my in-box and I longed for the instant release of my first sip of tarragon-infused sparkling water. I scrolled back up. *Does not drinking interfere with your relationships?* I couldn't help but remember my sister asking on Saturday night if she could open a beer, her toddler propped on her hip, or the friends who I now hang out with only in the context of movie-watching, so that we don't have to make sober conversation.

"Whatever," I told myself. "If my friends and family don't want to not drink with me, that's on them." But then I swiped to the next question: *Do you feel comfortable only when spending time with people who aren't drinking?* And I had to admit to feeling "seen," which, honestly, really made me want a Shirley Temple.

Does not drinking make you feel more attractive, hopeful, and alive? I didn't see what was so wrong with that. I work hard all week (and weekend, too), and I have so few other vices. What's a couple of weekend N.A. beers and the absolute confidence that the people you are talking to won't remember your jokes anyway? What's a few virgin mojitos and glances at yourself in the mirror above the bar, knowing that you're not worsening the circles under your gorgeous eyes? Don't you deserve to sip a mocktail, giddy with the realization that you're making better choices than everyone else in the room?

With every gulp of my bitters-and-soda, I know that tomorrow I will stroll through a flea market with a light head and a clearer conscience. With every whiff of my ginger-and-juice, I grow more confident in the future of our planet and in my abilities, especially those of my liver. With every water refill, I feel more whole.

Does not drinking give your life purpose? "Shit," I thought, remembering white-knuckling my way through a bread basket and drinking a Diet Coke on ice as family members enjoyed their wine and conversation. In the rideshare home, bleary with exhaustion, another night gone—and for what?—I reminded myself, "Well, at least I can not drink," as I ignored the driver's stare in the rearview mirror and tipped my Hydro Flask to my lips, sipping water that I couldn't even taste anymore.

I darkened the screen of my phone, comments from loved ones ringing through my mind. "You were more fun when you didn't not-drink." "Remember when you got an adult skateboard as a gift and spent Christmas Eve skateboarding back and forth on our street, refusing to give anyone else a turn?" "Remember when we held hands as we leaned over the railing of the B.Q.E. and threw up onto cars below, promising each other that we would always be roommates?" "Think of all the downsides to not drinking: the money you put into retirement, when you won't be able to enjoy it; the weekend mornings when you wake up at seven, refreshed but alone." "Is not drinking more important than *us*?" And I dropped my phone and leaned back against the couch, my eyes filling with tears as I realized just how sick I had become.

I reached for my kombucha on the coffee table—but no, I thought, stopping my hand halfway. I was done with all that. I was done! I would pour all my non-drinks down the sink! Well, maybe not *all* of them. They were expensive, and I'd want to keep a few around in case any not-drinking guests came over. I wouldn't judge. God knows, I wasn't one to criticize anyone for not drinking.

"Am I making up excuses?" I wondered as I stood, the cool jar of kombucha in my hand, smelling of lightly fermented raspberry, beckoning me. The quiz might say that I was.

But how reliable were online quizzes, really? I raised the jar to my lips and took just one sip. And then another, revelling in the refreshment of sobriety—yes, for the last time. Or maybe I was being too extreme. I shouldn't rush into anything. Maybe I should start with a Drinking January.

But, for now, it was May. I took another sip. ♦

LUCI GUTIÉRREZ

GUT FEELINGS

The filmmakers trying to capture experience—from inside the body.

BY ALEXANDRA SCHWARTZ

In "De Humani Corporis Fabrica," a small intestine can seem like an entire world.

The hand, gloved in nitrile, was inserting a notched metal rod into something that took a moment to identify as the tip of a penis. "It's on the machine-gun setting," a woman's voice said, in French, and it was true that the rat-a-tat sound that filled the cinema, as the rod began to plunge in and out of the orifice, was exactly like that of a Kalashnikov. It was October, the first Sunday night of the New York Film Festival, and the Walter Reade Theatre, at Lincoln Center, was packed. More than two hundred and fifty people had come to watch the American début of "De Humani Corporis Fabrica," the latest documentary by the directing duo Véréna Paravel and Lucien Castaing-Taylor, though some of them were clearly now regretting it. Introducing the film, Paravel had warned that it might be discomforting. "Rather than leaving, you can also use your hand to go like that," she suggested, covering her eyes. So far, viewers had followed her advice, clutching their faces as they watched a metal bolt being screwed into the skull of a man who lay awake, or moaning—*Oh my God, oh my God*—as an eye, pried open by a speculum, was sliced with a small blade. But the sight of the violated urethra was too much. In the middle of the theatre, a man stood up and fled his row.

"It happens all the time to people watching our films," Paravel had told me the day before. "They puke or they faint." In Milan, in 2017, she and Castaing-Taylor were walking to a post-screening Q. & A. for their movie "Caniba" when an ambulance peeled by, heading to the same place. Last May, when "De Humani Corporis Fabrica" had its première at Cannes, a member of the audience collapsed and had to be hospitalized.

Depicting reality is the goal of documentary films, but depiction alone doesn't satisfy Paravel and Castaing-Taylor. They want to force viewers into a visceral confrontation with the real; if they could find a way to record smell, they would. Their training is in anthropology, and while they like to joke that they are "recovering" anthropologists, estranged from the field, their method of making films is indebted to that discipline's practice of total immersion. Audiences are dropped into their movies like lobsters into a pot: no score to cue a mood, no voice-overs to establish facts—in fact, hardly any facts at all. "I like very much that they don't explain things," the documentarist Frederick Wiseman told me. "I hate didacticism, and I impute the same thing to them." Sometimes, while they are editing a film, they will discover that they have inadvertently made it too legible, foreclosing the viewer's imagination where they had hoped to activate it, so they will scrap that cut and start again.

Their first collaboration, "Leviathan," from 2012, announced their distaste for storytelling. They shot it on a commercial fishing boat off the coast of Massachusetts, but to say that the vertiginous, sea-sloshed result is about the fishing industry would be like saying that "Finnegans Wake" is about a wake. After watching it, a friend of Castaing-Taylor's begged him to make a talking-head documentary, something that wouldn't require Dramamine to sit through. Eventually, he and Paravel did. In "Caniba," the talking head in question belongs to Issei Sagawa, a Japanese man who murdered and ate a classmate while studying abroad in Paris, in 1981. Paravel and Castaing-Taylor didn't try to make sense of his act; instead, its incomprehensible horror seems to seep into the camera, which rests in extreme closeup on Sagawa's clammy, impassive face. A critic called it one of "the most unpleasant movies ever made," and that was a positive review. At Ven-

ILLUSTRATION BY TOMA VAGNER

ice, the film won a special jury prize.

Paravel, who is French, is fifty-two, with dark, laughing eyes and a hummingbird energy. Castaing-Taylor is fifty-seven and English, and has the beard and hair of an aging Jesus. Because their films are challenging to watch, they tend to attract ardent cinephiles rather than the viewers who might, say, queue up for a documentary about a rock climber or an octopus. But at Lincoln Center it quickly became apparent that "De Humani Corporis Fabrica" was the duo's most accessible work, and also their most ambitious.

The film, which is in theatres this month, is set in five hospitals in Paris, and what emerges, in the course of its two hours, is an extraordinarily intimate portrait of both the human body and the people who care for it. Paravel and Castaing-Taylor take us into operating rooms, intensive-care units, psychogeriatric wards, and mortuaries, and also into cafeterias and parking lots and dingy corridors—all the uncelebrated places that make up the hospital's own corpus. They even thrust us inside the body itself, by way of medical footage that they incorporate with their own. The effect is awesome, distressing, surprising, moving, and, sometimes, darkly funny. In one scene, we see a nurse dressing a man who is lying on a gurney in a brightly lit room. A radio is playing upbeat music and, as she and a colleague pull a pair of briefs over the man's hips, it comes as a shock to realize that they are handling a corpse.

In another scene, we observe a laparoscopic surgery to remove a cancerous prostate, watching the same feed that the doctors consult as they maneuver around the organ. The prostate is unusually big, and the surgeons seem bumbling and uncertain as the cavity fills with blood. "Why are you irrigating?" one snaps. "I don't know," another responds. "Where is the suction tube?" "It fell on the floor!" In other operating rooms, doctors chat about soaring rents and grumble about their long hours. It's alarming to realize that their minds might be elsewhere—but they, too, are only human.

"I never give interviews," Castaing-Taylor told me, when I interviewed him last September. It was a bright, mild morning, and we were sitting near his office at the Carpenter Center for the Visual Arts, at Harvard, where he teaches. Some might find the international film circuit glamorous. To Castaing-Taylor, it is intolerable. A few weeks earlier, I had watched an interview that he and Paravel gave at Cannes to a British journalist. They were perched on a sofa, Paravel summery in a printed spaghetti-strap dress, Castaing-Taylor piratical in a black blouse unbuttoned nearly to the navel. Paravel sucked contemplatively on an e-cigarette as Castaing-Taylor tore into topics including the people featured in conventional documentaries ("They're lying through their teeth") and Cannes itself ("one of the most obscene spaces on the face of the earth"). Even the softest of softballs were ritually impaled. What, the journalist wanted to know, could viewers expect from "De Humani Corporis Fabrica"? "If we could tell them what to expect with words," Castaing-Taylor replied, "we wouldn't have made the film."

In a world flooded with turgid artist statements, Castaing-Taylor believes that his work should stand on its own terms. "I put my all into it," he told me. "Whatever I or the film or the world is trying to express through the film, I have really nothing to add." Before my visit, he asked if I had seen any of his and Paravel's work in a movie theatre. Only at home, I admitted. "That's like reading a novel where you read one word out of two," he said. In the Carpenter's basement cinema, he had arranged a film festival for one, with screenings of movies that he and Paravel had made together, as well as others that had come out of the Sensory Ethnography Lab, the cinematic incubator that he founded at Harvard nearly twenty years ago. The Lab acts as a producer, lending equipment, funds, and feedback to filmmakers whose projects, in the words of its mission statement, seek "to explore the aesthetics and ontology of the natural and unnatural world." That description is purposefully abstract. The mission is simply to make work of a kind that has never been seen before.

The SEL is housed in the Vanserg Building, a former radar laboratory, near the edge of campus, that has no truck with the Ivy splendor of its surroundings. This suits Castaing-Taylor. "One of the profligate things Harvard does is delight in tearing buildings down without any particular reason and putting up other buildings that look like Hilton hotels, with fake wainscoting everywhere," he said, as we made our way to the second floor. We stopped at a door set into a blood-red wall, which bore a plaque with the words "*Arrête Ton Cinéma*"—"Enough drama," in French idiom, although the literal meaning, "Stop your cinema," might be more germane.

Stepping through was like passing from Kansas into Oz. Outside were fluorescent-lit classrooms equipped with whiteboards. Within was a loft painted the color of mango and cherry, appointed with a long wooden dining table and crowded with art work. A cold-water-survival suit hung on one wall, a coyote pelt on another. A third was given over to a massive blackboard, which was covered in scribblings.

Taking off his shoes, Castaing-Taylor opened the fridge to pour himself a drink. "It's Beyoncé's master cleanse," he said. "Lemon juice and cayenne." In the adjoining room, a futon was tucked by a window. For years, Castaing-Taylor lived in a small house in the South of France, but he recently moved to another, in Catalonia, overlooking the Mediterranean. "I hope to die there," he said. During the six or so months that he spends in Cambridge, he often pulls all-nighters at the SEL, showering at the gym. It isn't home, but, filled with the remnants of homes past, it's close enough.

Castaing-Taylor was born in 1966 in Liverpool. His father worked at a company that built ships; his mother stayed home to raise Lucien and his younger brother. "I was a happy kid," Castaing-Taylor said. "But I didn't thrive at anything, particularly. I had no hobbies." At thirteen, he decided to be baptized into the Church of England, a small act of rebellion against his secular parents. He applied to read theology at Cambridge, but had lost his faith by the time he arrived, so he switched to philosophy. When that disappointed, he switched again, to anthropology.

Growing up in Liverpool had made Castaing-Taylor feel "very provincial." He sensed that anthropology could open the world to him, and it did. After his second year at university, he got a grant to travel to Africa, and spent a summer hitchhiking across the continent. "I hadn't really travelled much outside of England, so it was just completely amazing to be this sort of rinky-dink country-bumpkin-from-Liverpool

white guy in Zaire," he said. He thought of staying at Cambridge to pursue a Ph.D., but he longed to flee both England, with its obsession with class, and academia, with its obsession with words. He heard about a master's program in visual anthropology at the University of Southern California. Los Angeles seemed about as far from Britain as he could get, so he decided to apply.

At Cambridge, Castaing-Taylor had begun to work with a 35-mm. Nikon camera, photographing classic anthropological subjects like the Dogon people of West Africa. "I was still thinking like a self-taught 101 photographer, just wanting to compose shots," he said. At U.S.C., though, the focus was on moving images.

Anthropology is not much older than cinema itself. People have always looked at other groups of people and drawn conclusions about them, but the modern basis for the field—the idea that humans might be studied scientifically, in relation to their environment, and that doing so might tell us something about the species as a whole—emerged from Darwin's theory of evolution. Observation was the method, objectivity the goal, and the motion-picture camera seemed to satisfy both. Anthropologists embraced the camera as a device that could expand the scope of their work, and films like "Nanook of the North," Robert J. Flaherty's 1922 landmark portrait of an Inuit family in Quebec, in turn expanded the possibilities of cinema.

Over time, anthropologists began to wonder whether the camera was truly neutral. In 1976, the former collaborators—and former spouses—Margaret Mead and Gregory Bateson sat down for a conversation on the subject. In the thirties, they had spent two years in Bali and returned with some twenty-two thousand feet of 16-mm. film. They had since reached opposite conclusions about the medium's purpose. Mead felt that film should be used as a data-gathering tool; she dreamed of a three-hundred-and-sixty-degree camera that could capture an environment in its totality. For Bateson, this was a fool's game.

BATESON: By the way, I don't like cameras on tripods, just grinding. . . .

MEAD: And you don't like that?

BATESON: Disastrous.

MEAD: Why?

BATESON: Because I think the photographic record should be an art form.

MEAD: Oh why? Why shouldn't you have some records that aren't an art form? Because if it's an art form, it has been altered.

BATESON: It's undoubtedly been altered. I don't think it exists unaltered.

MEAD: I think it's very important, if you're going to be scientific about behavior, to give other people access to the material, as comparable as possible to the access you had. You don't, then, alter the material. There's a bunch of filmmakers now that are saying, "It should be art," and wrecking everything that we're trying to do. Why the hell should it be art?

On they go, arguing like the married couple they once were. Castaing-Taylor is on Team Bateson. "He wanted editing, he wanted subjectivity, he wanted embodied experience," he told me. A piece of writing could tell you what an anthropologist had learned; a still photograph could show you what the photographer had seen. But film, as Castaing-Taylor later wrote, "can offer its audience a *sensory experience* that reflects and reflects on the actual experiences of others (including the filmmakers themselves)." Why the hell should that be art? How could it not be?

At U.S.C., Castaing-Taylor met another visual-anthropology student, Ilisa Barbash. They became a couple, and began to make films together. "Made in USA" (1990) dealt with sweatshops and child labor in the L.A. garment industry; "In and Out of Africa" (1992) explored the cultural and racial politics of the trade in African art. That movie won a number of awards, though Castaing-Taylor disavows its style now—"very talking-heavy." It wasn't until their third collaboration that he felt they had made something that might be considered art. "Sweetgrass" was released in 2009, but it had been shot at the beginning of the decade, while Barbash and Castaing-Taylor were teaching at the University of Colorado, Boulder. They had heard about a family of sheep ranchers in Montana, second-generation Norwegian Americans who were the last people in the area to practice transhumance, the act of moving a flock from the lowlands, in winter, to the mountains for summer grazing. "I just went up there one spring by myself," he said. He was immediately entranced by the beauty of the landscape, and by the cyclical rhythm of the work: the shearing in the cold, early spring, followed by the lambing, and then the arduous, ten-day trip into the mountains, where a handful of men cared for three thousand sheep.

The bulk of "Sweetgrass" was filmed during two summers. Barbash stayed with the ranchers and the couple's two young children; Castaing-Taylor went up with the herders and the flock. They lived a lonely, difficult life: sleeping in tents, trying to keep bears and wolverines at bay. Castaing-Taylor, too, was doing physical work. He kept his shoulder-mounted, forty-pound Sony DVCAM strapped to his body with a steel-spined harness that he wore whenever he wasn't sleeping, and sometimes even then. "It was so that it could become part of my identity," he said.

Castaing-Taylor loved making "Sweetgrass," and you can feel that love in the film. Much of it is shot in long, unbroken takes, the kind that Margaret Mead would have approved of, but they are not neutral. A sense of melancholy creeps in. At the end, it is revealed that the sheep ranch was sold in 2004; transhumance, a practice as old as humankind itself, has, here, come to an end. "There's this whole genre of anthropology called salvage ethnography," Castaing-Taylor told me. "The idea was to save disappearing cultures, to come up with a record before they disappeared in the face of colonialism and modernity and everything else." By the time "Sweetgrass" was made, the genre had fallen out of favor. "Anthropologists were, like, 'We're not going to lament worlds on the wane. Everything's emergent. Everything's syncretic. We can't even talk about discrete cultures, because cultures are constantly in flux.' I wasn't contesting that, necessarily, but I thought, actually, there *are* still cultures. And it's not that one has to romanticize them, or be uncritically nostalgic about them, but there are ways of being in the world that are disappearing at a rate that is basically without historical precedent."

He paused. "But I also liked the fact that it was retro," he said. "Especially sheep. I mean, who the hell would study sheepherders, you know?"

While Castaing-Taylor was contemplating livestock, Paravel was living in New York, pursuing a postdoc in sociology. "I was never a cinephile," she told me. "I never watched films. But I knew that I wanted to make one." It

was 2004, and she was having trouble concentrating. In France, she had studied the *sciences humaines;* her mentor was the renowned philosopher-anthropologist Bruno Latour, and she had assumed that she, too, would be an academic. But she was sick of teaching, and writing felt like torture. "If I hated you, I'd say, 'You know, you should read my thesis,'" she said. She wanted to look at the world, not analyze it.

Paravel was an anthropologist in fact long before she became one in name. She was born in Switzerland, to French parents, but her father was in oil, and the family followed his work to Algeria, Togo, Ivory Coast, and Russia. Paravel was left to decrypt her surroundings on her own. Why, in Ufa, was she followed by men who sorted through the trash when she threw something away? What was the meaning of the voodoo ceremony that her parents took her to in Togo, where people gave her water to drink and spit on her?

At Columbia, she asked a sociology professor with filmmaking experience if he could lend her a camera. She wanted to trace the route of the 7 train on foot, beginning in Flushing and ending at Times Square, recording the people she met along the way. The professor told her that she would never get any money for a project like that. To be taken seriously in the discipline, you were supposed to plant yourself in one place for years, not wander around having fleeting encounters during a single day. She kept mentioning her idea to people anyway, and one, then another, then a third, said that she should meet someone at Harvard named Lucien Castaing-Taylor.

A year or two went by. Paravel's husband got a job at M.I.T., and the couple moved to Cambridge. One day, she found herself at a brunch. "I'm speaking to this guy, and as soon as we start talking it feels totally natural," she said. "We talked and talked and talked. He had a little house in Ariège. I thought, How does this guy have a house in Ariège? He asked me a ton of questions. It was fantastic. And then I realized all of a sudden that I was talking to the famous Lucien Castaing-Taylor."

Castaing-Taylor had arrived at Harvard in 2002, recruited by the anthropologist Robert Gardner to direct the university's Film Study Center. In the world of ethnographic filmmaking, Gardner, then in his seventies, was a titan, best known for "Dead Birds," his 1963 documentary about the ritual warfare practiced by the Dani people of New Guinea. The grandson of Isabella Stewart Gardner, he was a Boston Brahmin—"very patrician, very debonair, six foot two, very New England, just capital-'H' handsome," Castaing-Taylor recalled.

Gardner had founded the Film Study Center in 1957 and run it for decades. It quickly became apparent to Castaing-Taylor that he had walked into a trap. Gardner wasn't looking for someone to take over; he was looking for someone to control.

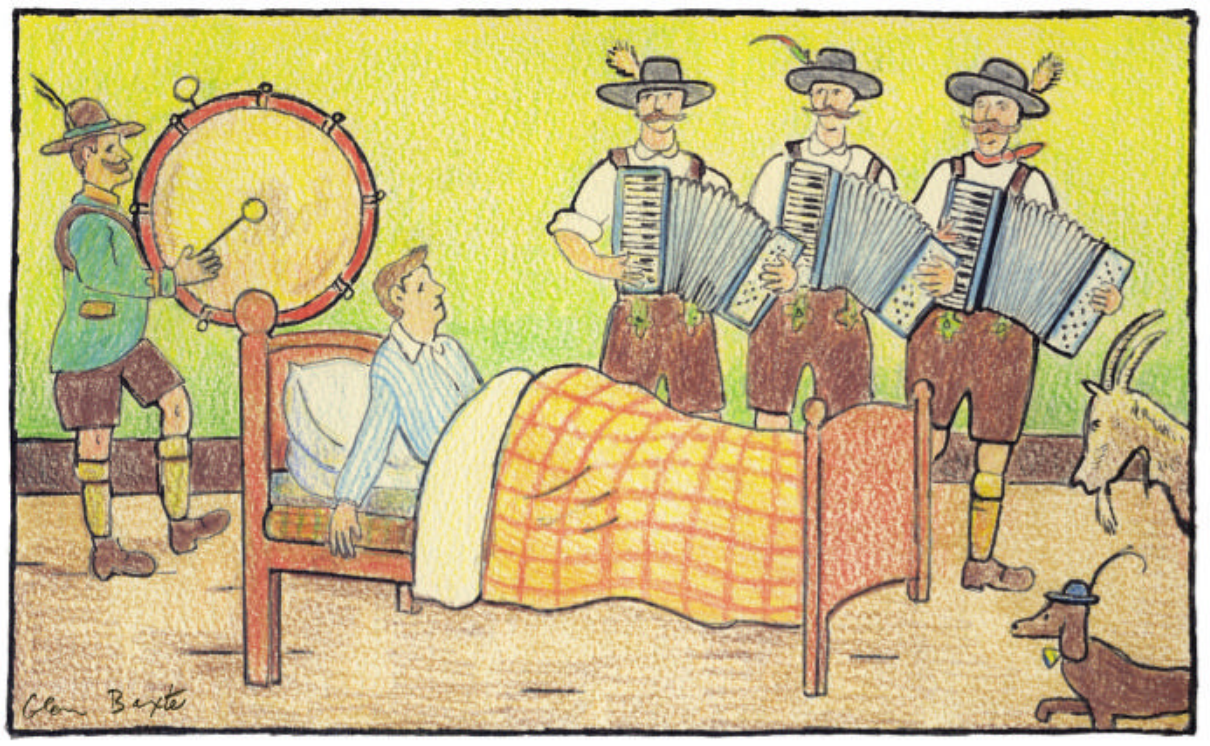
Castaing-Taylor decided to branch out. Along with two professors in the anthropology department, he applied for a grant to start what would become the SEL. Soon afterward, he began teaching a yearlong course in sensory ethnography that drew students from all disciplines, graduate and undergrad—summers were for shooting. "There was something special there when it was getting started—a hunger to make work," the filmmaker Stephanie Spray told me. She was a doctoral student, studying Buddhism and Hinduism after spending years living among musicians in Nepal, but she had never picked up a camera before. Castaing-Taylor accepted her, anyway. He styled himself as the anti-Gardner, non-hierarchical, open to any idea as long as it was pursued with seriousness. "Lucien was always insistent and very vocal about 'I'm learning from you all,'" J. P. Sniadecki, another early alum, said. "He created a climate of wonder, of radical experimentation. Of course, there's always competition, and grad-school bullshit. But, for the most part, I think people felt galvanized. It became the most meaningful thing that we were engaged in."

"Work coming out of the Lab felt very different than what we think of as American documentary," Dennis Lim, the artistic director of the New York Film Festival, told me. Over time, the form had "calcified into this very informational, didactic genre," partly because of the influence of television. The films that emerged from the SEL unearthed new aesthetic possibilities. Spray's "Manakamana" (2013), which she directed with Pacho Velez, takes viewers into the cable cars used by pilgrims to travel to a temple in Nepal. In "Dry Ground Burning," which is in theatres now, Joana Pimenta and Adirley Queirós cast residents of a favela near Brasília to create a work that is part documentary, part speculative fiction. "Expedition Content" (2020), by Veronika Kusumaryati and Ernst Karel, is hardly a film at all. It includes only one minute of footage, an outtake from Gardner's "Dead Birds"; the rest is audio recording, deployed to explosive effect.

This was the world that Paravel had been looking for. She began auditing Castaing-Taylor's class, which she now co-teaches, and made "7 Queens," her film about the subway line. Along the way, she discovered Willets Point, a neighborhood of junkyards and chop shops, near Citi Field, that was threatened by gentrification. She asked Castaing-Taylor if he would film it with her, but he was busy finishing "Sweetgrass," and suggested Sniadecki instead. Their feature, "Foreign Parts" (2010), was an education in an intrepid, gonzo style of collaboration: little money, no crew. "We just let the camera flow between us," Sniadecki recalled—not least because one camera was all they had.

In the meantime, "Sweetgrass" had become an art-house hit; Manohla Dargis, of the *Times*, declared it the year's "first essential movie," and another critic compared it to a Beethoven symphony. Castaing-Taylor began to look for a new project. He was interested in New Bedford, the old Massachusetts whaling town where Ishmael starts his journey in "Moby-Dick." "It's the biggest fishing port in the country," he told me—and one of the poorest places in the state. He began to hang out by the docks alone. It was winter, and he was told that if he fell into the water he'd have thirty seconds, sixty at most, to get out. "I was lonely and weak and cold and miserable," he said. He asked Paravel if she wanted to join him.

"The initial idea was that you would never see the sea," Castaing-Taylor told me. He had planned to focus on various



I AWOKE TO FIND MYSELF IN WHAT I BELIEVE IS REFERRED TO AS "THE WORST-CASE SCENARIO"

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industries in town: people making or repairing nets, stevedores loading and unloading cargo. Paravel's presence changed the project. "She's a woman—a French woman," Castaing-Taylor said. "She doesn't look like everyone else on the port." Fishermen began to invite the duo out in their boats, and they decided to go along, just once, to shoot for their private records. "It was just so extraordinary and so powerful," Castaing-Taylor said. "Just completely bamboozling and overwhelming metaphysically, existentially, cosmologically, in a purely corporeal kind of banal way as well, that we wanted to go out again and again and again."

Making "Leviathan," Paravel told me, "was an amniotic experience." The New Bedford boats went trawling in Georges Bank, whose shoals run up to Nova Scotia; the voyages could last for weeks at a time. "The captain said, 'We don't know where the fish are or how long it will be. I'll take you out on the condition that no matter what happens to you, if you die or whatever, I'm not coming back,'" Castaing-Taylor recalled. On their first voyage, a storm hit. "Véréna was filming me in my berth vomiting into a ziplock bag," he said. When he finally emerged, the captain asked if he wanted a gun. "He said, 'If you don't want to kill yourself, you don't even know what seasick is.' 'Sweetgrass' was macho, but this blew it away."

Commercial fishing has one of the highest fatality rates of any industry in the United States. The work attracts tough types; Paravel was the lone woman in their world, and made to feel it. "I showered once, maybe twice," she said. "Lucien was always in front of the door." Everyone has a different way of managing fear, and Paravel tends to fall back on superstition. She won't leave home without a white stone in her pocket for luck. Whenever she takes a plane, she dresses up so that her body, if found after a crash, will at least be presentable. When she films, though, she doesn't think that she needs protection. The camera makes her feel invincible, as if she were in a trance.

It quickly became clear that the cameras they had been using on land weren't fit for sea. In "Sweetgrass," Castaing-Taylor had experimented with attaching lav mikes to sheep, capturing sound right at its source. Now he and Paravel tried GoPros, affixing the tiny cameras to the wrists and heads of the fishermen. "We were bowled over by it," Castaing-Taylor said. The cameras captured a consciousness independent of intentionality, a perspective unique to the sea itself. Paravel and Castaing-Taylor placed the cameras in waterproof boxes, which they taped to fifteen-foot-long poles, submerging them deep into the water then raising them as a flock of gulls circled—a literal bird's-eye point of view.

"Leviathan" is a film with many subjects. There's the labor that takes place on the boat, the brutal work of shucking hundreds of shellfish, or of thrusting skate after skate onto a grappling hook to slash off the edible wings, the savaged body thrown back into the sea. That sense of plunder, of the degradation of the environment, is a theme, too. Above all, there is the ocean, seductive and illegible, nightmarish and exalted, with no land in sight.

"When you spend time at sea for weeks and weeks, in storms and everything, obviously you need to have a relationship that is much more interesting than a couple's relationship," Paravel told me. It was the day before the New York screening of "De Humani Corporis Fabrica," and we were strolling through Riverside Park. Paravel, who had warned me that she walked very fast, was staying nearby, in an apartment occupied by her husband. Both she and Castaing-Taylor have separated from their spouses. Naturally, people wonder if they are romantic. Paravel blew air through her lips in the dismissive French way: *pfft*. "The magnitude of our relationship is beyond all that," she said. "It's very mysterious, and actually mysterious to us, too."

In the world of American documentary, "Sweetgrass" opened a door. "Leviathan" blew it off its hinges. But some people acted as if Castaing-Taylor had made it alone. "I remember the world première, at Locarno," Paravel told me. "Lucien didn't come, because he wanted to see a soccer game. He went to Liverpool with his son." After the screening, a journalist tapped her on the shoulder. "He said, 'You have to tell Lucien congratulations on this film.' I could give you fifty examples like that." In the credits of their subsequent films, Paravel's name is given first, at Castaing-Taylor's insistence. "It's not like one does more than the other," she told me. "It's a pure collaboration." She has the ideas—"a million ideas a minute," Castaing-Taylor said, "I have one idea a year"—and he has the follow-through. Often, when they edit, they will argue over whether to include one shot or another. An hour later, they will discover that they were each convinced by the other's case, and will have to hash it

out again, from opposite points of view.

Usually, though, debate isn't required. A few years ago, Paravel read about a medical student who discovered that one of the corpses her class was supposed to be dissecting was that of her great-aunt. The story both horrified and fascinated her. What did it mean to donate your body to science—to let it be violated for the sake of the species? What, for that matter, did it mean to have a body at all? This was the question that all their work had been circling, but they had never gone at it directly. "At the same time, we said, 'Oh, we should make a film about that,'" Paravel told me. "You know, when you have to do the thing with the pinkie? Jinx."

Spending time in a hospital seemed a good way to start. They wanted to shoot in Boston, but American hospitals are squeamish about cameras; in the event of a lawsuit, film could be used as evidence. Through mutual acquaintances, they met a Parisian hospital administrator—a cinephile, as it happened. He gave them carte blanche to shoot whatever they liked.

It was gruelling to make "Leviathan," but "De Humani Corporis Fabrica" was, in some ways, their most demanding project yet. One year of filming became two, then three, until half a decade had gone by. Early on, they named their project for the Renaissance physician Andreas Vesalius's book "De Humani Corporis Fabrica," the first accurate work of human anatomy in Western medicine. Published in 1543, it featured descriptions of the body's parts alongside richly detailed woodcut illustrations, which allowed readers to peer beneath the flesh for themselves. Paravel and Castaing-Taylor, too, wanted to depict the body in a new way. The film's imagery is exquisite, uncanny. A lump of flesh, as charred as a well-done steak, is suddenly revealed to be a cancerous breast; a curved spine is hammered into shape like so much length of railroad track. Filming took on a logic of its own. "We were trying to understand something about what it is to be fragile, to be vulnerable," Paravel said. "There's a very beautiful term in medicine, 'incidentalomas.' They're fortuitous discoveries. As in, when you're looking for one illness and find another." The more they looked, the more they saw.

In all, they produced more than three hundred hours of footage—much of it taken with cameras, the size of lipstick tubes, that were fashioned by the Swiss cinematographer Patrick Lindenmaier, who has collaborated with Castaing-Taylor since "Sweetgrass." They wanted their equipment to be as unobtrusive as possible, but doctors liked having them around. (One liver specialist called whenever he had a particularly "beautiful" surgery to show off.) Like "Leviathan" and "Sweetgrass," "De Humani Corporis Fabrica" is a work about labor and its toll. The penis scene, for instance. You might be able to glean that the procedure is a kidney-stone removal, or you might not; it doesn't much matter. But listen. The doctor in charge is complaining. The pace of operations at the hospital is too slow; he wants more porters, more efficient nurses. "This shit is so tiring," he says. "I see a hundred patients a week . . . I'm a robot." He's being eaten alive by anxiety. "I shouldn't feel this constant pit in my stomach. It isn't normal. I haven't even had an erection today. That's even less normal." He is sacrificing his own body in order to heal someone else's.

All the while, we see nothing of the patient except his exposed genitals. Is this how the doctor sees him, too? "It's really hard to transgress every day," Paravel said: to handle someone else's insensate body, to cut it open, to gaze inside. This is what the audience at Walter Reade was reacting to so vehemently—the act of looking. Before Paravel and Castaing-Taylor started shooting, they had wondered whether patients might feel uncomfortable with having some of the most fearful and private moments of their lives recorded, but the opposite turned out to be true. Some even asked them to come film when they knew they would be under anesthetic. The camera wasn't some alien, invasive presence, but it wasn't neutral, either. It turned out to be a guardian, a substitute for consciousness.

At Lincoln Center, the lights came up, to enthusiastic applause. The walk-outs, in the end, had been few. Paravel and Castaing-Taylor took the stage for a Q. & A. led by Dennis Lim. Castaing-Taylor was in one of his terse, conscientious-objector moods, and for a long time said nothing, leaving his microphone on the floor. "Lucien!" Paravel chided.

A young woman stood to ask a question. "I was wondering if there was a singular moment or insight that you experienced while you were making this film that was the most disturbing or surprising or enlightening," she said. She volunteered her own: the corpses being dressed in the morgue.

"Curiously, the morgue is the funniest place," Paravel said. "Funniest, in the way that it's the most joyous. All the people working there are there because they're fed up with suffering."

She grew thoughtful. "It's actually a very sensitive question," she said. During the shoot, she had faced a medical ordeal of her own—a few of them, actually. She had learned what it was to become a patient as she was documenting other people's pain. "I think the idea we had was just, like, how about we make a film where at the end people feel differently about themselves?" she said. "Where they feel we are inhabiting this thing that is so fragile, so resilient, so full of vital forces. . . ."

She trailed off. Language was failing her. "We're making films that exhaust the possibility of words," Paravel had told me. "Do you really want a Q. & A.? Let's go drink a whiskey or something. Or lie down and dream. Or touch your body. Or do—something!"

For all their suspicion of narrative, Castaing-Taylor and Paravel did give "De Humani Corporis Fabrica" a structure of sorts. The film begins in Stygian darkness, watchmen making the night rounds with their dogs. It ends in darkness of a totally different kind. The doctors are having a party in their private cafeteria, honoring a departing colleague. The overhead lights have been turned off; the camera pans slowly to show bodies dancing, bodies smoking, bodies drinking and laughing and playing foosball, before drifting away to focus on the room's walls, which are covered in a mural of elaborate pornographic cartoons: smiling, priapic men and huge-breasted women engaged in the most flagrante of delictos. New Order blares in the background; beneath the figures lie a bed of skulls. Talk about transgression. Paravel and Castaing-Taylor had been to the land of the interior and returned. Where could they go that would be deeper than that? "We'll find it," Paravel said. "We have to." ♦

A REPORTER AT LARGE

THE PLANNED PARENTHOOD PROBLEM

Is the group too cautious and corporate, forcing independent abortion providers to take the biggest risks?

BY EYAL PRESS

Like many places in America where abortions are performed, the Blue Mountain Clinic, in Missoula, Montana, has faced a litany of threats. Protesters have routinely harassed patients since the facility opened, in the late seventies. In 1993, a firebomb gutted the premises. The clinic eventually reopened at a new location, in a building fortified with bulletproof windows and thick concrete walls. On June 24th of last year, staff members gathered there to console one another following a different sort of attack: the Supreme Court had just issued a final ruling in Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization, overturning Roe v. Wade and eliminating the constitutional right to abortion. Working at an abortion clinic requires stoicism and resolve, yet the employees felt overcome. "We all just had a good cry," Nicole Smith, Blue Mountain's executive director, recalled.

As disheartened as Smith and her co-workers were, they also had reason to feel fortunate, at least compared with peers elsewhere. Soon after Dobbs was announced, fourteen states began enforcing sweeping new bans on abortion. Had the matter been left to the Republican Party in Montana—which holds a super-majority in the state legislature and in 2022 adopted a platform calling for a prohibition on abortion—the Blue Mountain Clinic would have encountered similar restrictions. But in 1999 the Montana Supreme Court had ruled that the right to privacy inscribed in the state constitution applied to medical judgments affecting bodily integrity, including the decision to terminate a pregnancy. This legal backstop insured that clinics like Smith's could continue operating even if the state legislature passed regressive new laws.

Smith was also determined to serve patients from states without protections, among them Montana's neighbors Idaho and South Dakota, where laws soon went into effect criminalizing abortion at any stage of pregnancy. In the months before the Dobbs ruling, Smith discussed post-Roe scenarios with counterparts at two peer institutions: All Families Healthcare, a reproductive-health clinic in Whitefish, Montana, and Planned Parenthood, whose facilities in Billings, Great Falls, and Helena offered abortion care. Now she assumed that they would all work together to accommodate the patients who might inundate the state.

A week or so later, Smith informed Helen Weems, the director of the Whitefish clinic, about an e-mail that Martha Fuller, the C.E.O. of Planned Parenthood of Montana, had written to her staff. In the e-mail, which had been leaked online, Fuller announced that Planned Parenthood, which offers an array of sexual-health services, had decided not to provide medication abortions—now the most common way to terminate a pregnancy—to out-of-state patients, in order to avoid legal hazards. "As a healthcare provider, we must identify and mitigate risks constantly," the e-mail stated. "The risks around cross-state provision of services are currently less than clear, with the potential for both civil and criminal action for providing abortions in states with bans."

Smith and Weems felt blindsided. Smith was particularly dismayed that Planned Parenthood had not consulted them before making the decision. Her consternation deepened after various media reports suggested that *all* abortion providers in Montana had adopted this policy. On NPR, the director of a pro-choice group in South Dakota said, with disappointment, that Montana had been "a state that we were hoping was going to be available" for patients seeking services. Smith was appalled; at the same time, Planned Parenthood's decision made her wonder whether treating out-of-state patients might indeed be reckless or unwise. Fuller's e-mail indicated that the group had arrived at its position after consulting with legal counsel, and that the decision had been "based on protecting our providers and patients." Smith, worried about jeopardizing her colleagues at Blue Mountain, consulted some lawyers herself. They reassured her that, according to the Montana state constitution, the clinic was not in violation of the law. Smith summoned the clinicians on her staff to a conference room, to see if anyone had qualms about treating out-of-state patients. "What do you all want to do?" Smith asked. One by one, they said that they were willing to accept the risks.

Fuller's leaked e-mail went viral on Twitter, and, in the weeks that followed, Smith and Weems repeatedly conveyed how upset they were. "We are failing our patients, the ones that need us the most," Weems wrote in an e-mail urging Fuller to reconsider the policy. After a month or so, Fuller gave a television interview announcing that Planned Parenthood of Montana had reassessed the legal landscape and was reversing its decision: it would offer medication abortion to patients from other states.

Smith was happy about the change, but told me that Planned Parenthood has not gone as far as other providers have to accommodate out-of-state patients who lack the resources to travel to a clinic in Montana. To enable such patients to access care, both she and Weems have begun mailing abortion pills anywhere in the state, including to motels and FedEx offices near the borders of Idaho, Wyoming, and the Dakotas. Planned Parenthood also has a meds-by-mail program, but it is reserved for Montana residents, who can have pills sent to their home address. Out-of-state patients have to drive to one of its clinics, complete an intake process, and take their first abortion pill on site. In theory, this approach protects Planned Parenthood from legal risks, but Smith feels that it imposes burdens on patients. And

The Blue Mountain Clinic, an independent facility in Montana, keeps on display a phone that melted in an arson attack.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY DINA LITOVSKY

shouldn't pro-choice organizations trust patients to decide for themselves when and where to take the medication? Determining this for them, Smith said, is "about control—making sure it's done within the parameters of what they think is risk-tolerant." As she sees it, Planned Parenthood has been running scared.

Long before Roe was overturned, providers' desire to avoid risk—from professional ostracization to picketing to shootings—shadowed abortion care. This is why medical schools often refrained from offering training in terminating pregnancies, and why abortion procedures were not regularly performed in the vast majority of public hospitals. Since Dobbs, some medical institutions have gone further, hesitating to provide care to women such as Christina Zielke, who was rushed to a hospital in Painesville, Ohio, last September after experiencing heavy bleeding from a miscarriage. Instead of performing a dilation-and-curettage procedure to remove the pregnancy tissue from her uterus, the hospital staff discharged Zielke, apparently in response to a six-week abortion ban that had been passed by the Ohio state legislature. Zielke was soon lying in a bathtub in a pool of blood, wondering if she would die. After she lost consciousness, her family called 911, and paramedics eventually took her back to the hospital, where a doctor performed the procedure.

Such horror stories are a predictable consequence of the fear that criminalizing abortion has spread through the medical community. For fifty years, Roe protected providers from legal risks like the ones taken on by the Jane Collective, an underground network of women in Chicago. Collective members arranged more than eleven thousand illegal abortions in the late nineteen-sixties and early seventies, until a team of detectives raided their makeshift clinic and charged them with multiple counts of "conspiracy to commit abortion." (Just before their cases went to trial, the Supreme Court legalized abortion.) Arguably, providers face greater legal dangers now than they did before Roe. Carole Joffe, a sociologist who has written about the history of abortion, told me that doctors who performed illegal procedures in the past "typically received sentences of a few years," whereas physicians today face "an aggressive anti-abortion movement that, in some states, is calling for life imprisonment." Abortion opponents have also targeted organizations such as Planned Parenthood with spurious lawsuits and violent attacks, in an effort to shut them down.

Planned Parenthood's motto is "Care. No matter what." These words suggest an uncompromising commitment to serving patients. Yet some pro-choice advocates feel that the group, along with other large organizations that have shaped the modern abortion-rights movement, has lately seemed more focussed on self-preservation than on taking bold risks. Tracy Weitz, a reproductive-rights scholar who directs the Center on Health, Risk, and Society, at American University, told me she is worried that these groups are being guided too strongly by attorneys whose priority is to shield them from lawsuits. The mission of Planned Parenthood is not "institutional survival," Weitz said. "Their entire goal, their mission, is to serve patients." If caution supersedes this goal, she warns, not only will patients suffer but the pro-choice movement will fall into a familiar trap. "One of the critiques of the abortion-rights movement is that we put too *much* faith in the law, believing that it would protect the right to abortion," she said. "I think it's ironic that all of a sudden we have turned over this movement to a whole new group of lawyers—not constitutional lawyers but risk managers."

In the fall of 2021, a preview of how these dynamics could play out in a post-Roe era unfolded in Texas, after Governor Greg Abbott signed the Texas "heartbeat" bill. Better known as S.B. 8, the law banned abortion after six weeks of pregnancy, and it offered a ten-thousand-dollar bounty to any private citizen who successfully sued someone involved in such a procedure. In the view of some analysts, S.B. 8 was plainly unconstitutional—Roe v. Wade was then still federal law—and designed to intimidate both patients and providers. (Indeed, Planned Parenthood joined the A.C.L.U. and other groups in a lawsuit to block S.B. 8.) One might imagine that Planned Parenthood and other large pro-choice organizations, including the National Abortion Federation, which funds and supports many independent clinics, would have responded to this threat by urging providers to continue offering care and by pledging to defend anyone named in a lawsuit. Vicki Saporta, who served as the N.A.F.'s president until 2018, believes that such a strategy would have been both feasible and effective. "There could have been a legal-defense fund set up to pay out various ten-thousand-dollar suits while S.B. 8 was being challenged, and, in the meantime, care could have continued to be provided," she said. Planned Parenthood and its affiliates, whose net assets exceed two billion dollars, have "the wherewithal to raise the legal-defense money," she added.

Instead, Planned Parenthood's South Texas affiliate instructed its providers to stop performing *all* abortions, even before six weeks. The affiliate's apparent anxiety about lawsuits was shared by Planned Parenthood's leaders and by its attorneys in Washington, who warned that Republicans in Texas could weaponize S.B. 8 to try to bankrupt the organization. Meanwhile, the N.A.F. announced that it would stop funding any providers and patients who didn't comply with S.B. 8—and even pressed clinics to perform a second ultrasound after patients had endured Texas's mandatory twenty-four-hour waiting period, in case a heartbeat could be detected then. Many Texas doctors refused to adhere to the N.A.F. directive. In fact, some physicians had the impulse to publicly flout S.B. 8. Shortly after the law took effect, Alan Braid, a provider in San Antonio, published an op-ed in the Washington *Post* in which he acknowledged having performed an abortion after the six-week limit. He explained that in the early seventies, while completing his ob-gyn residency, he had seen several women die from illegal abortions. "I understand that by providing an abortion beyond the new legal limit, I am taking a personal risk, but it's something I believe in strongly," he wrote. Braid told me recently that, at the time, he'd talked to several physicians who shared his feelings and who, like him, were willing to defy S.B. 8. If doc-

tors were willing to fight, he wondered, why were institutions designed to protect women's rights capitulating?

Planned Parenthood has forty-nine affiliates, which have broad discretion to set their own policies, and some of them have long been run by staunch advocates of abortion rights. For much of its history, however, the organization has hedged its commitment to these rights. Margaret Sanger, who founded the group, in 1916, decried abortion, maintaining that it wouldn't be necessary if all women could access birth control. In the first two decades after Roe v. Wade, a strain of opposition to abortion remained within the group. In 1978, Faye Wattleton became the first Black president of the Planned Parenthood Federation of America. Congress had recently passed legislation barring Medicaid from covering abortion at the federal level, and Wattleton soon announced that one of her priorities would be restoring abortion access for poor women. Her agenda sparked such an uproar, she said, that a faction within Planned Parenthood tried to organize a vote of no-confidence in her leadership. Wattleton told me that, during this period, most of the group's affiliates didn't provide abortion services. Her own commitment to abortion rights had been cemented when she did clinical training in Harlem while getting a master's in maternal and infant health; a teen-ager admitted to the hospital where she was working died after trying to end a pregnancy with bleach and Lysol. Even after Roe, the lingering stigma around abortion meant that it was never fully integrated into the broader constellation of reproductive-health services—a development for which Planned Parenthood shares some blame, Wattleton told me. "We contributed to that," she said.

By the time Wattleton left Planned Parenthood, in 1992, attitudes within the organization had shifted, thanks in part to the launch, a few years earlier, of the Consortium of Abortion Providers, which offered technical assistance, consulting services, and funding to affiliates. Lynne Randall, who directed the consortium from 1999 to 2011, told me that, at the start of her tenure, some affiliates still feared that providing abortion services would strain relations with their communities. Most were in conservative areas. By the time she left, Randall said, such resistance was rare, in part because in 2000 the Food and Drug Administration had approved mifepristone—one of two drugs normally taken during a medication abortion. Affiliates were much more willing to dispense medication than they were to expend the resources necessary to do surgical procedures. Also helpful was a surge of support from the Susan Thompson Buffett Foundation, named after the late wife of the investor Warren Buffett, which has given billions of dollars to pro-choice groups.

Saporta, the former president of the National Abortion Federation, worked closely with Planned Parenthood during these years, training providers to do medication abortions and, later, dispensing "justice funds"—financial assistance for abortion care. At the time, she said, Planned Parenthood "couldn't have been a better partner," even though its activism made it a prime target of the right, fuelling attacks on affiliates and leading Republicans to try to cut off funding to the organization.

Planned Parenthood's mission and identity is now synonymous with abortion—including to the many pro-choice donors who write it checks. But the group did not always stand out for its daring. Abortion advocates were often irked by the organization's messaging, which emphasized that abortion constituted "just three per cent" of the services Planned Parenthood offered, and evasively referred to "comprehensive women's care." Such coyness also rankled clinicians. From 2003 to 2013, Marc Heller served as the medical director of Planned Parenthood Mohawk Hudson, which oversaw facilities in thirteen mostly rural counties in New York. He described this period as "the highlight of my career," but told me that he bristled at the meek language his employer used to describe abortion, particularly as conservative opponents seized the moral high ground by calling themselves "pro-life" (while making the lives of his staff miserable). "I and the staff faced daily harassment and fear because of our commitment to abortion," he said. "I felt, 'Own it and back us up!'" Randall, the former Consortium of Abortion Providers director, recalled other Planned Parenthood medical directors voicing

"Maxwell, you idiot! You mailed copies of your last letter to our entire contact list."

similar complaints: "The people who were involved in abortion care would say, 'This is near and dear to our hearts, and we're just not feeling that you're representing that in the messaging.' And, yeah, that was true."

Peg Johnston, the former executive director of Southern Tier Women's Health Services, an independent reproductive-health clinic in Vestal, New York, told me that Planned Parenthood's timid rhetoric was a vestige of Sanger's negative attitude toward abortion. "Independent providers got into abortion work *because* it was abortion work," Johnston said. "It seemed to me that people from Planned Parenthood saw abortion as a failure because they hadn't prevented it. It's sort of baked into who they are."

Johnston was among the founders of the Abortion Care Network, an association of independent clinics. Such clinics provided most of the abortion services in America, as they still do, but over time, because of the violence they faced, fewer and fewer doctors were willing to work at them or to integrate abortion into their practices. Between 1982 and 2000, the number of clinics declined by more than thirty per cent. By the early aughts, there were vast swaths of the country with no abortion providers, creating insurmountable barriers for women who lacked the means to travel long distances. Planned Parenthood had the resources to broaden access by offering services in remote, underserved communities. But this is not, by and large, what the group's affiliates chose to do. Instead, many moved into places that independent clinics already served. In any given area, Planned Parenthood maintained, having more providers offered patients greater options and made it more likely that they would seek abortion care—a view that some reproductive-rights advocates I spoke to shared. And some large metropolitan areas clearly needed more providers. Nonetheless, independent providers sometimes felt that Planned Parenthood treated them as competition, rather than working collaboratively to expand access to abortion. As the pattern played out, few providers complained publicly about it—not least because they knew that any tensions would likely be exploited by opponents of abortion. Privately, though, some providers came to feel that Planned Parenthood operated less like a mission-driven nonprofit than like an aggressive franchiser indifferent to the fate of smaller operations.

Southern Tier Women's Health Services, the center Johnston ran, was among the facilities that felt outmaneuvered by their ostensible ally. Southern Tier served an area that stretched across New York into parts of Pennsylvania. For many years, it was the only facility between Buffalo and New York City providing abortion care, which made it both a crucial destination for patients and a target for protesters, who picketed its landlord and drove around town in a truck bearing a sign that called it a place to "kill a baby." The center offered both medication abortions and surgical procedures. (Mifepristone and the drug used in tandem with it, misoprostol, can be dispensed only in the first eleven weeks of pregnancy.)

In 2012, Johnston learned that a Planned Parenthood health center in Binghamton, ten miles from her facility, was looking into providing abortions. Southern Tier served thousands of women every year, but, like many independent clinics, it operated on a narrow margin, in part because insurance-reimbursement rates for abortion were low. Additionally, money had to be spent on security measures, such as bulletproof sheetrock and glass, and a call bell for the police. If women in the area started going to Planned Parenthood for medication abortions—which were comparatively inexpensive to provide—Johnston's center might be forced to close.

Some Planned Parenthood officials were sympathetic to Johnston's concern. Debra Marcus, then the C.E.O. of Planned Parenthood of South Central New York, which oversaw the center in Binghamton, reached out to her. Marcus didn't want her organization's actions to decrease over-all access to care, especially since her facility lacked the capacity to serve anywhere near the volume of patients that Johnston's clinic did. But, by this point, abortion had become a "core service" that every Planned Parenthood affiliate (though not every location) was required to offer. Marcus consulted her affiliate's board and then requested a waiver for this requirement from the national office, explaining on an internal form that proceeding with medication abortions "could have the truly unfortunate effect of decreasing the existing high-quality provider's business enough to cause her to leave the community." Marcus submitted the request on September 25, 2012. The same day, a recommendation was made to deny the waiver. Marcus was disappointed but not surprised: before sending it, she'd spoken to peers at other Planned Parenthood affiliates who'd wanted to avoid encroaching on clinics in their communities. Some of them had also asked for waivers; all the requests had been denied.

Marcus concluded that she had no choice but to disaffiliate from Planned Parenthood—a decision she described to me as "wrenching." She recalled that, as a young girl, she used to send her allowance money to the organization, which she'd learned about from her mother, who taught family studies at SUNY Oneonta and once pulled down the shades in her classroom to teach her students comprehensive sex education, in violation of a "chastity" law on the books since the nineteenth century. "It was painful because we thought of ourselves *as* Planned Parenthood, and we thought our values were *their* values," Marcus said. Not everyone on her affiliate's board supported Marcus's decision, but her anguish was shared by one member, Melinda Hardin. In a letter to Cecile Richards, then the national office's president, Hardin cited the group's mission statement, affirming that "the heart of Planned Parenthood is in the local community." In Binghamton, she felt, it had behaved as ruthlessly as Walmart. "To believe in—to revere—an organization for decades, only to watch it turn into a top-down, rigid corporate bully is devastating," she wrote. "I am saddened by P.P.F.A.'s decision and hope that you and your board will reconsider." Hardin told me that she sent copies of her letter to several other Planned Parenthood officials. She says that she never received a response.

As Marcus sees it, one reason Har-

ATTENTION

is a single white marble, translucent with a turquoise wave
breaking within it, attention is that marble bouncing wildly down the alley
and reaching the top of the steps by the bar I met you at in Monti,
Martino, to sit out the evenings drinking on those steps, where all the treads
are bowed in the middle by millennia of pilgrims heading up
to San Pietro in Vincoli, to seek forgiveness, to bow their heads, to ask
some questions of themselves in a place attention is a single block
of white Carrara marble carved by Michelangelo into the statue of Moses
we stood before, stoned, wondering why he'd horns, and attention
to the style of things is a quality worn, Martino, by you around Hoxton
or Testaccio like a purple boiler suit, which you also wore,
and attention is that single white marble now descending the stone steps
by the bar, rolling along the depth of one tread and dropping, then
rolling the depth of another, and dropping, and the next, dropping and
rolling, dropping and rolling, not silently, until the single white
marble, translucent with a turquoise wave, hits the pavement and skitters
onto the cobbles to wedge, pearl-like, beneath the tyre of a Vespa.
Martino, it is evening and raining in London, and I am making tea and we
don't say that we both know it's the last time we will meet. Your face
is swollen from the treatment and your head fantastically stitched together
as you sit on the edge of the sofa, all attention, all wrapped in chains
of attention. *I vincoli* can be translated as constraints, bonds, ties, links. Or
limits, obligations. The chains of St. Peter, the rock of the church, sit
in a mother-of-pearl box Freud walked past to stand before the Moses statue
he writes is *seated; his body faces forward, his head with its mighty beard looks to the left, his right foot rests on the ground, and his left leg is raised so that only the toes touch the ground*. What the statue says to me
is that Moses can barely stop himself, that he almost cannot bear it,
is on the verge of rising and allowing something overwhelming—rage,
I think—free reign, and impatiently he stares down tourists traipsing past,
outfacing them as he outfaced Freud, who came every afternoon for weeks
to try to disentangle the piece's emotional effect. Attention, from the Latin
ad tendere, to stretch toward, to try to meet, and, Tino, in your brain
the tumour spread so fast it has taken the shape in the scan of a finch, a finch
in flight, and has pecked away your mind to such an extent you can write
still but not read, and as you sit in the kitchen attending, attending, all bound
up in these chains of attention, all charged with a terrible, helpless
attention, I want to tell you Michelangelo is reputed to have loved the statue
so much he hurled his hammer at it and cried that it would not speak.

—Nick Laird

din's appeal was ignored was that Planned Parenthood had steadily grown more centralized, merging affiliates and becoming less attuned to small communities. Another possibility is that, when the interests of Planned Parenthood and the needs of patients diverged, the former sometimes took precedence.

In 2008, a physician named Susan Wicklund published a memoir about her career as an abortion provider, which had involved travelling to clinics across the Midwest, from St. Paul to Fargo. She eventually settled in Montana, and began working at Planned Parenthood facilities in Billings, Helena, and Kalispell. Some patients in rural areas, she discovered, had to drive several hundred miles to attend their appointments. Wicklund decided that a clinic should be opened in Livingston—a small town in southwestern Montana, not far from where she was living. She told me that when she proposed this idea at a meeting, Stacy Cross, then the C.E.O. of Planned Parenthood of Montana, reacted coldly, informing her that it was not in Planned Parenthood's financial interest to take such a step. Wicklund responded by saying that she would open a clinic in Livingston on her own. According to Wicklund, Cross said that she would "do everything possible to shut me down, because I was taking patients away from Planned Parenthood." (Cross, who now presides over

a Planned Parenthood affiliate headquartered in California, said, "The assertion that we would try to shut her down is patently false.") Deborah Erdman, a doctor and a Planned Parenthood donor who attended the meeting, told Cross that she would never give the organization another dime. "She was so angry," Wicklund recalled. (Erdman died recently, but a close friend of hers confirmed this account.)

In Wicklund's memoir, she writes of working at a clinic in Minnesota and trying to help an indigent woman who spoke no English and did not know how far along her pregnancy was. Wicklund wanted to perform an ultrasound, which would pinpoint how advanced the fetus was, but another staffer stopped her, because the woman couldn't pay the fee. Wicklund slammed the door and went ahead with a pelvic exam instead, which she conducted for free. The next Monday, an administrator informed her that her contract had been terminated, "effective immediately." Although Wicklund doesn't say so in the book, it was a Planned Parenthood clinic. "I never turned a patient away," she said.

Wicklund opened a clinic in Livingston in 2009. Some of her patients there told her that they'd first gone to Planned Parenthood but were unable to get care because they couldn't afford it. This happened often enough that Wicklund began keeping a file of such cases. "Was given a hard time by Billings PP," she wrote about a nineteen-year-old patient who said she'd been asked, "Do you think you should get free abortion?" Another patient told Wicklund that she'd heard about the Livingston clinic from Planned Parenthood because she "couldn't afford $1,000."

In 2013, Wicklund, facing significant health complications, was forced to close the Livingston clinic. Not long afterward, local activists created the Susan Wicklund Fund—a nonprofit that helps poor Montanans access abortion care—in her honor. In recent years, she has received fund-raising letters from Planned Parenthood featuring the "Care. No matter what" slogan. The first time she saw this, she told me, "I just came unglued—I was so livid." She went on, "When I was a very young woman and would go to Planned Parenthood, it was a feminist organization. At some point, it changed into a business."

Providing services to patients isn't the only way that Planned Parenthood defends abortion rights. The group has arms devoted to advocacy and political organizing which push for pro-choice laws and policies; every election cycle, they perform an array of functions—including mobilizing and educating voters—that most abortion providers cannot undertake but from which they benefit. Last year, Planned Parenthood helped defeat anti-abortion ballot initiatives in numerous states, including Kansas and Kentucky. The organization's national office, meanwhile, files lawsuits across the country to challenge restrictions. With Roe gone, the stakes of such battles have never been higher, which explains why so many people who care about abortion rights have donated to Planned Parenthood since the Dobbs decision—and why some providers I spoke to didn't want to air their grievances about the group, saying that it was now more important than ever to band together.

Not everyone feels this way, however. In March, I had coffee with Katharine Morrison, the medical director of Buffalo Women Services, an abortion facility and birthing center in western New York. In October, 1998, a physician working there, Barnett Slepian, was murdered in his home, by an assassin who then fled. Afterward, Morrison told me, the police stopped by her house and advised her and her family to leave immediately. (The police also visited my parents' house, because my father, Shalom Press, was working as an abortion provider in the area.) Morrison, who had three young children, quit her job, but she returned a few months later, intent on keeping a low profile. One day, a complication required her to transfer a woman to a local hospital, where a nurse who opposed abortion spotted her. A few weeks later, a bridge near Buffalo Women Services was spray-painted with the words "Morrison Murders Babies!" She relocated her family to Brooklyn and started flying to Buffalo once a week to keep the clinic open. Five years after Slepian's killer, an anti-abortion zealot named James Charles Kopp, was arrested, she moved back to Buffalo with her family.

Until 2003, Planned Parenthood did not offer abortion care in Buffalo. That year, it began providing medication abortions in Buffalo and Niagara Falls, half an hour to the north. Today, medication abortions are available at Planned Parenthoods throughout western New York; surgical procedures are also done two days a week. Michelle Casey, the C.E.O. of Planned Parenthood of Central and Western New York, told me that this wasn't enough to meet demand. "We need more access than we have in Buffalo," she said, explaining that there was a two-week waiting list for surgical procedures now that patients were coming from Ohio and even Texas. Casey said that her organization viewed independent providers in the area as "collaborators with the same mission of having people have access to the care they need."

Indeed, in some communities, Planned Parenthood affiliates have fostered solidarity with other providers. One independent clinic owner in Florida told me that two decades ago, after her facility suffered an arson attack, Planned Parenthood invited her counsellors to use the phones in its office to schedule appointments. But, she noted, the organization's generosity did not last; it eventually started offering abortion services right down the road, imperilling her operation.

Morrison, the Buffalo provider, told me that her clinic, which now focusses on surgical procedures, may not remain open much longer, owing to a steady decline in the number of patients coming in. There were multiple reasons for this, including broader access to contraception, which has led to an over-all decline in the demand for abortion, including at Planned Parenthood centers. But the biggest factor, she told me, was Planned Parenthood. To illustrate the problem, she Googled "Buffalo abortion clinic" on her phone. The top two search results were for Planned Parenthood facilities. Google did not tell users, she noted with dismay, that those facilities did not offer comprehensive second-trimester care, and that Buffalo Women Services was the only local provider these patients could rely on. Morrison explained that although some second-trimester abortions were done in Buffalo hospitals, a medical board had to approve the procedures, and they required a justification, such as clear evidence of fetal anoma-

lies. The vast majority of second-trimester patients went to Morrison's clinic.

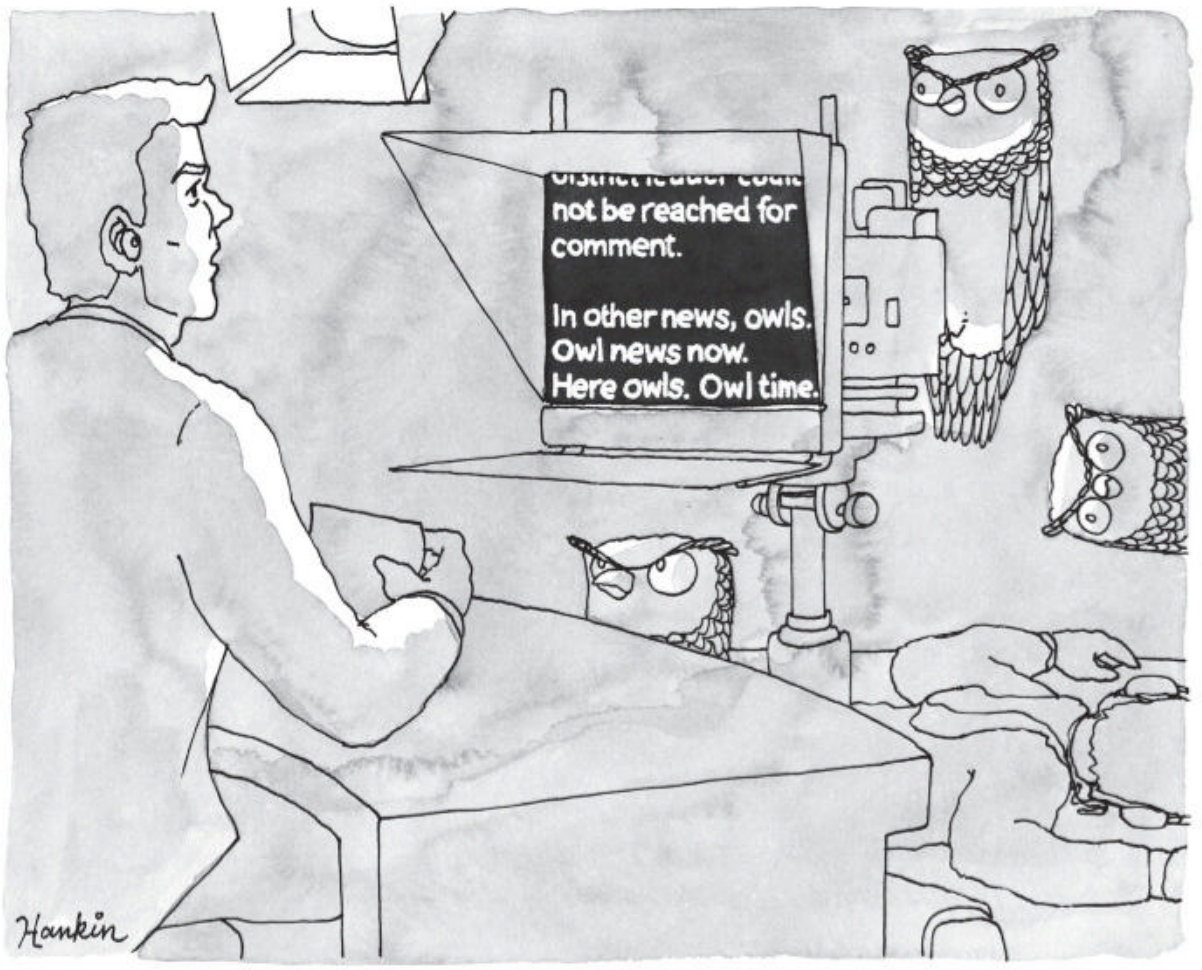
Michelle Casey had told me that Planned Parenthood did not offer care after the fourteenth week of pregnancy because "such a small number of people" needed it. Morrison disputes that the number is small. During our conversation, she randomly selected dates in her clinic's log book: on February 28th, ten patients had come in for second-trimester procedures; on another recent day, six had done so. The real reason the local Planned Parenthood facilities don't offer such care, Morrison told me, is that it is far more difficult and expensive, and involves potential complications. "You have to have staff, an ultrasound-sonographer, equipment, an R.N.," she said. Medication abortion, by contrast, mainly involves dispensing pills. "It's a great business model," she said.

I asked Morrison if, given her clinic's role in the abortion fight and the ordeals she'd been through, anybody at Planned Parenthood had ever reached out to discuss how its operations might affect the broader ecosystem of abortion care in Buffalo. "Nope," she said. We were sitting in a café in Brooklyn, and Morrison, who is sixty-six, with short brown hair flecked with gray and a wry sense of humor, told me that, to keep Buffalo Women Services afloat, she'd started working at a clinic in New York City. She was now commuting every week to the city from Buffalo—the opposite of her old trek. "I'm doing it in reverse," she said, with a smile. When I asked her if she could imagine a time when the patients she served would also have to travel to New York City, because her Buffalo clinic had closed, the smile vanished. "Definitely," she said. She noted that some second-trimester patients wouldn't be able to make the trip—a six-hour drive—because most of her clients were poor. "The younger you are and the poorer you are, the greater your gestational stage," she said. "Because you were afraid to tell your mom, or because you were hoping you weren't pregnant, or because you thought you *were* pregnant but if you don't show up at work you're gonna lose your job, and if you lose your job you're gonna get evicted." Such patients were also disproportionately people of color, Morrison added. She'd recently

Julie Burkhart, at an independent clinic she recently opened in Casper, Wyoming.

treated an undocumented immigrant with no medical insurance, and a thirteen-year-old Black girl who she suspected had been raped. Although various funds now exist to help patients in need cover travel and lodging, "people are living a paycheck away from disaster," she went on. "Even if you say it will be covered, they can't take off a day to travel, spend two or three days in New York, then take another day to come back."

Since the Dobbs decision, the media has taken note of a dramatic increase in the number of medication abortions, which now constitute a little more than half of all pregnancy terminations. It stands to reason that this figure will continue to rise, because pills make it easier to evade barriers to care. But, as these barriers proliferate, causing more patients to encounter delays, the demand for procedural abortions later in gestation is also likely to grow. Buffalo is hardly the only place where independent clinics provide such care. According to the Abortion Care Network, sixty-two per cent of the clinics in the U.S. that perform abortions after thirteen weeks are independent. For procedures after twenty-two weeks, the figure is seventy-nine per cent. Nikki Madsen, the network's co-executive director, told me, "When people need abortion care after the first trimester, they rely on independent clinics. This is the most expensive abortion care to provide, and it's done at clinics that lack the institutional support, visibility, name recognition, and fund-raising capacity of national health centers and hospitals, making it especially difficult to secure the resources to keep the doors open." Independent



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providers, she added, also deliver a disproportionate amount of care "in the most hostile states."

In March, I drove to Casper, Wyoming, with Julie Burkhart, the founder of an abortion-care nonprofit named Wellspring Health Access, to visit a clinic that she was planning to open there. Burkhart lives in Colorado and co-owns a clinic in southern Illinois, but in 2021 two abortion-rights advocates from Wyoming had urged her to expand her operation, and she'd agreed to take on the challenge. Originally, the facility was scheduled to begin seeing patients last June, but shortly before opening day an assailant broke in, poured gasoline onto the newly refinished floors, and torched the place. After the Dobbs decision, the Wyoming legislature banned abortion in virtually all cases. The law has been temporarily suspended, because Wellspring Health Access filed an injunction claiming that it violated the state constitution's protections for matters of bodily integrity.

These developments could have led Burkhart to rethink her plans. She told me why she'd decided to persist on the way to Casper—a nearly four-hour drive from the town in Colorado where she picked me up. Burkhart, who is plainspoken and was wearing bluejeans and leather boots, said that she was still motivated by what had happened to George Tiller, an abortion provider in Wichita whose clinic she had joined in 2001. She'd worked for him until 2009, when an anti-abortion extremist murdered him in the foyer of his church. When a friend called Burkhart to deliver the news, she thought that he was joking. After the reality sank in, she started to think about who could provide care to the women who'd relied on Tiller's clinic. There was a Planned Parenthood in Wichita, but it didn't offer abortion services. Burkhart decided to reopen Tiller's clinic herself, even though pro-choice allies warned her that it would only bring more violence to the community. Abortion opponents waged a fierce campaign to stop her. She received death threats. More than once, Burkhart told me, she contemplated abandoning the project, but on April 3, 2013—nearly four years after Tiller's murder—the new clinic began seeing patients. In the first week, just three women showed up. Eventually, the facility was seeing nearly two thousand patients a year. Burkhart had formed a nonprofit, Trust Women Foundation, that aimed to improve access to abortion in underserved communities. Its next project was in Oklahoma City, where it took two and a half years to open a clinic.

As Burkhart spoke, we continued driving through a windswept landscape dusted with snow. We passed cattle herds and a Budweiser factory. At one point, she pulled over at a truck stop to get coffee. Before she stepped out of the car, her phone rang: it was the chief operating officer of the Illinois clinic, calling to tell her that the facility had just been invaded by anti-abortion protesters. The woman's voice was trembling, and I overheard her tell a police officer who arrived on the scene, "We're all scared! These are actual terrorists and they want to hurt us, and they forced their way inside of our building."

"How many of them got in?" Burkhart asked calmly, as though nothing could be more routine. She spent several minutes explaining to her colleague how to download the clinic's security-camera footage onto a flash drive. Then she hopped out to get her coffee.

We got back on the road, and Burkhart's phone rang again. This time, it was the contractor who was finishing up the repair work at the clinic in Wyoming. He agreed to meet us there, along with another worker. An hour later, we pulled up to a tan stucco building next to a gas station. The newly built white fence around the clinic swayed whenever the wind kicked up, and Burkhart wondered if the person who'd installed it had intentionally done a shoddy job. She wondered the same thing about a generator in the basement, which, the other worker told her, had been wired so haphazardly that it could have exploded if someone had turned it on.

Piles of wood molding were stacked on the floors. In one room, a half-melted window screen—a remnant of the arson attack—was propped against a wall. The clinic was supposed to open in six weeks, but staffing the project had been challenging, which the contractor attributed to the fact that no one in Casper wanted to be associated with the place. "I'll be honest—they just don't want to do the building," he told Burkhart. I asked him if this was for political reasons. He nodded. "See that knucklehead out there?" he asked, pointing to a man in a green parka on a bench outside. It was a protester who'd been coming every day. "When the weather is nice, there'll be three hundred people out there," he said. He then confided that he'd refrained

from hanging a sign out front indicating that he was the contractor, as he usually did on projects. "It's a small town," he explained.

Afterward, Burkhart told me that the contractor was an avid Trump supporter, but that they got along regardless. She'd grown up on a farm in Oklahoma, she said, and it troubled her that the pro-choice movement seemed to be giving up on places like her home state, as if the country were permanently split into camps: urban versus rural, blue versus red. So many people were overlooked by this divide—Burkhart had lots of friends in Oklahoma who lived on farms and were passionately pro-choice. More important, people in conservative rural areas needed access to abortion just as much as the residents of New York or San Francisco did. "People who get pregnant unintentionally—they're not thinking, 'I'm a Democrat,' or 'I'm a Republican,'" she said. "They just either want to be pregnant or they don't."

Lynne Randall, the former Consortium of Abortion Providers director, told me that some Planned Parenthood affiliates had made efforts to reach patients in remote rural areas, only to be stymied by political opposition within the community or by an inability to retain qualified staff. "The obstacles are so great," she said. But others told me that such efforts did not seem like a priority at the affiliates where they worked. Susan Wicklund, the retired abortion provider in Montana, said that in the nineties, when she was working at a Planned Parenthood in eastern Wisconsin, it became obvious to her that the organization should open a clinic in the northern part of the state, which was an abortion desert. As she recalled it, "Administration told me it wasn't going to happen"—not only because the counties up north were deeply conservative but because too few people lived in them to make it financially viable. Burkhart found this reasoning self-defeating. "I feel like that's one of the reasons we're losing," she said. She also believed that it was unethical. "It's not right for us to say that we are champions of social justice but yet we are not going to go the full stretch for folks in places where it is less hospitable," she said. "It feels disingenuous to say, 'Well, it's kind of tough here, so we're not going to throw our hats into the ring.'"

In conservative states, attorneys general are moving swiftly to ban the sale and marketing of abortion pills. (In March, Wyoming became the first state to do so.) Some pro-choice advocates believe that, in the near future, the only way to provide abortion care to people in such states will be to mail or smuggle pills to them. As abortion bans spread, some of the most daring risks will be taken not by clinic employees but by people in networks like Just the Pill, which uses innovative methods, such as pop-up clinics, to deliver abortion medication to patients in remote areas. But pills are not a panacea, not least because they sometimes fail; when they do, patients may need to see a doctor in a hospital or a clinic. Moreover, in April a federal judge in Texas invalidated the F.D.A.'s decades-old approval of mifepristone. Although the Supreme Court subsequently decided to temporarily preserve access to the drug, the matter is far from settled, and an unfavorable ruling in the Texas case could force providers across America to rely solely on misoprostol, a method that is less effective.

Such obstacles have only made Burkhart more committed. She told me that she understood why a large organization like Planned Parenthood might be more cautious than she is. It hadn't escaped her notice, though, that the group sometimes relied on the most vulnerable providers to take the greatest risks. On April 20th, Burkhart's clinic in Casper finally

opened. She texted me triumphantly, "We are beginning to schedule patients now!!" But she still had plenty of concerns—including a fear that, if the clinic was successful, Planned Parenthood might see that it was serving a viable market and begin offering abortion services there, too. Burkhart had witnessed this dynamic firsthand. A few years after she reopened Tiller's clinic in Wichita, she learned that Planned Parenthood had started offering abortion services at its health center in the city. Nobody from the group had consulted her, she said. Not long after she opened the clinic in Oklahoma City, the same thing happened there. (Last year, both her clinic and Planned Parenthood stopped offering abortion services in Oklahoma, because of new bans.)

Burkhart preferred to do her work quietly, to avoid attracting more menacing attention. In Wichita, she told me, protesters often gathered outside her home, holding up signs that read "Prepare to Meet Thy God" and—in a sinister reference to George Tiller's murder—"Where Is *Your* Church?" Yet she sometimes wished that she got more acknowledgment from donors. "I don't have the same name recognition as Planned Parenthood," she said. "The way it works out is 'We're gonna give them a hundred thousand dollars, and we'll give *you* a thousand.'"

A representative for Planned Parenthood recently told me that it is the sole health-care provider for many patients, and cannot therefore endanger its entire operation just to protect abortion. Nonetheless, the organization has taken numerous steps to help patients in states where abortion has been banned or is under threat. Some of this work has been carried out by its pool of "patient navigators," who coördinate with partner organizations to help people travel to appointments. Since June, navigators at Planned Parenthood North Central States—which oversees the group's operations in Minnesota, Iowa, Nebraska, North Dakota, and South Dakota—have enabled more than a thousand patients to get care. A fifth of them were from outside the region. Planned Parenthood has also provided its affiliates with grants that encourage them to expand care in areas with restricted access, and it has supported AbortionFinder, a Web site that allows patients anywhere in the country to find an up-to-date list of the closest providers.

In a phone interview, Alexis McGill Johnson, the C.E.O. and president of Planned Parenthood, told me, "We've been making investments to open and expand access." She noted that in southern Illinois—where the demand for abortion has surged, owing to bans that went into effect in neighboring states—Planned

Parenthood recently launched a mobile clinic that can travel along the border. The organization, she said, has redoubled its commitment to "stand with our front-line staff" in the face of unprecedented physical and legal intimidation. "Planned Parenthood has long been targeted by security threats," she said. "In addition to these threats, I think that we are now seeing the ways in which the opposition is just methodically continuing to enact laws that target providers and patients."

The organization's new initiatives are welcome, but they represent only a fraction of the combined annual budgets of Planned Parenthood's national and global offices and its affiliates, which is $1.7 billion. The Abortion Care Network has launched a fund-raising drive to support independent providers: it has raised just five million dollars in the past year. An abortion provider in Missoula named Joey Banks told me that after Dobbs she and her peers hoped that, because Planned Parenthood had the largest budget, it would be "the first to stand up and say, 'Well, we have to close these three clinics that are redundant—we are going to find the biggest wasteland of abortion access and we're gonna put some clinics there.'" Instead, she said, all the new brick-and-mortar clinics she knew of were independently run by people who, despite their more limited resources, were willing to act in a time of crisis.

The irony of this was not lost on Nicole Smith, the Blue Mountain Clinic executive director, whom I visited one morning in Missoula. At the entrance to the clinic, a cluster of signs had been placed: "Abortion Is Healthcare," "We Support Your Choice." Inside, the walls were decorated with art and memorabilia. I spotted a cover of "Our Bodies, Ourselves" that had been framed in glass. The book's edges were visibly blackened; it had been salvaged after the 1993 firebombing.

Smith, a river-rafting enthusiast with clear blue eyes and a forthright manner, was born in Helena. She began serving as Blue Mountain's executive director in 2021—only a year before Roe was struck down. She is thankful that Planned Parenthood of Montana reversed its decision not to provide medication abortions for out-of-state patients, but she said that the controversy has had lingering effects. Some of Blue Mountain's donors, believing that the clinic had similarly decided to stop serving out-of-state patients, had threatened to pull their support. "It was weeks and weeks of damage control," she said. "And, to this day, when I am interacting with people who want to donate, I say, 'Please know, we continue to serve *any* patient, including those who travel in from other states.'" Losing a few donors might not have been a big deal for Planned Parenthood—as Smith noted, the national office and twenty-one affiliates received a two-hundred-and-seventy-five-million-dollar donation from MacKenzie Scott last year. But the negative press was potentially devastating to her clinic, a family-medicine practice that struggles financially. "I have to fund-raise a gap of about three hundred thousand dollars a year to keep my doors open," she said.

Smith acknowledged that an out-of-state patient who received abortion pills from her clinic could theoretically be prosecuted, with Blue Mountain exposed as the source. She was not cowed. "I'm not going to be afraid of some hypothetical," she said. "For us, we have been trying to find a balance—how do we take on more of the risk as providers versus putting that risk on the patients? There is this level of risk that either gets placed on the patient or on the provider. As much as possible, I think we're trying to take on that risk."

She hopes that Planned Parenthood of Montana will adopt her clinic's policy about mailing pills. When providers are timid, Smith told me, it makes patients afraid of coming to the state to get an abortion. I spoke to one such patient, a woman from Idaho who drove nearly five hours to Missoula with her husband and two kids. She made the trip because she was too poor to raise another child and because she was ill, suffering from lupus and sharp pain in her pelvic area. Before she found out that she was pregnant, she was so lethargic that she could barely get out of bed. Then she had a seizure. "I felt like I was going to die," she told me. After the procedure, the pain stopped. She felt relieved and energized. But, when she returned to Idaho, she was terrified that the authorities might come after her. "Are they going to send somebody who will ask me, 'Are you still pregnant?'" she asked. "The legality is haunting me."

Montana has not yet seen the flood of out-of-state patients that some activists expected Dobbs to unleash. Meanwhile, Republicans are passing a flurry of state legislation, from a ban on public funding for abortion to a measure that

"How about, instead of a lucky rabbit's foot, four lucky rabbit's feet, attached to a live rabbit's body?"

removes abortion from the state constitution's privacy protections. "They're coming at us from all angles," Smith said. Montana's politics kept pushing rightward, which made it all the more essential for abortion providers to "be united." She added, "We care so much about being in good partnership with Planned Parenthood." Despite the flare-up over serving out-of-state patients, Smith viewed the organization as an ally and spoke often with Martha Fuller; still, there were some tensions that she found perplexing. Planned Parenthood, she said, was sometimes unwilling to refer patients to independent clinics even when it was obviously in their interest—by reducing travel times, for example, or enabling them to get seen faster. "They can have a two-week wait list," Smith explained. "We see patients five days a week and can get them in the next day." One case that particularly bothered Smith involved a woman she'd spoken to while volunteering at the Susan Wicklund Fund. The woman was thirteen weeks pregnant and said that she'd tried to get an appointment at Planned Parenthood, only to be told she'd have to wait three weeks. Smith asked her if anyone had told her about the Blue Mountain Clinic, given that she lived close to Missoula. No, the woman said. "Would you like to be seen sooner?" Smith asked. Absolutely, she replied. The patient got an appointment the next day. Afterward, Smith told me, she called Fuller and said, "Martha, this is not patient-centered care."

Fuller told me that Planned Parenthood often refers patients to other clinics. Its scheduling teams even meet with counterparts at All Families Healthcare and Blue Mountain. Fuller described the decision not to provide medication abortions for out-of-state patients as a temporary precaution taken because Montana had an "extremely hostile" political environment: its governor, Greg Gianforte, is an evangelical Christian, and its attorney general, Austin Knudsen, is rabidly anti-choice. When I asked Fuller whether the decision had been made by doctors or by lawyers, she said that it had been a "collaborative conversation." Fuller noted that Planned Parenthood had filed several lawsuits challenging restrictions in Montana, including a bill virtually banning abortion after fifteen weeks. The organization had also joined forces with pro-choice allies on various advocacy initiatives, including a campaign that led to the defeat of a Montana ballot measure that would have given a fetus the legal status of a person.

As Smith acknowledged, such political battles could be unwinnable without the involvement of Planned Parenthood, whose support she valued more than ever. She told me that she admired the way the organization's new medical director in Montana, a doctor named Samuel Dickman, prioritized patient needs. But many reproductive-rights advocates still believe that Planned Parenthood's agenda is too narrow and too cautious. Why hadn't the group used its enormous muscle to announce that it would be opening clinics in abortion deserts and along the borders of states with bans—and then clamored for donors to help fund them?

In recent years, activists in Minnesota have spearheaded a more aggressive agenda. In 2018, Megan Peterson, the executive director of an organization called Gender Justice, began strategizing about ways to shore up abortion rights in the state. She told me that she was particularly intent on removing various restrictions—a mandatory twenty-four-hour waiting period, a parental-notification law—that "created barriers for people to get care, especially young people, low-income people, people of color, and immigrants."

Gender Justice, in conjunction with the Lawyering Project, filed a lawsuit opposing these restrictions. It also launched UnRestrict Minnesota, a grassroots campaign that sought to galvanize support for overturning them. Elianne Farhat, the executive director of TakeAction Minnesota, a multi-issue advocacy group, told me that, at the time, the "Democratic Party gospel in Minnesota was that you can't talk about abortion," because the issue would alienate some centrist voters. The UnRestrict campaign, which Farhat decided to join, challenged this perception. An array of organizations that view abortion as part of a broader struggle for reproductive justice—such as Our Justice, a Black-led group that raises funds for patients who cannot afford abortion care—also joined the lawsuit.

Planned Parenthood North Central States did not. The reason, various sources informed me, is that it feared the lawsuit would backfire, distracting attention from the more important goals of electing a pro-choice governor and defeating President Donald Trump. Tim Stanley, a Planned Parenthood executive who oversees its advocacy work in Minnesota, told me that the group's strategy was complementary to the UnRestrict campaign, explaining that pro-choice lawsuits cannot succeed if liberal governors aren't in place to appoint sympathetic judges. Planned Parenthood had helped secure what Stanley called "a pro-choice trifecta": Minnesota's governor, Tim Walz, and both chambers of the state legislature are all supportive of abortion rights. These victories have enabled aligned groups to pursue different tactics.

But Planned Parenthood didn't just refrain from participating in the lawsuit that Gender Justice filed, I was told: it tried to sabotage it. Kelli Clement, a minister at the First Unitarian Society of Minneapolis, which became a plaintiff in the lawsuit, told me that her organization received a call from Planned Parenthood North Central States discouraging it from being involved. The call shocked her, she said, because it came from an institution she respected. "It did not feel appropriate," she added. Other groups were also pressured not to join. "It was bad," Peterson, of Gender Justice, told me. "I felt completely under attack by my own side." (Planned Parenthood denies that the calls were coercive.)

Though Planned Parenthood was absent from the UnRestrict campaign, Clement told me, "this remarkable coalition, which is now more than thirty grassroots groups, came together to create change." In July, 2022, seventeen days after the Supreme Court issued the Dobbs decision, a ruling was announced striking down abortion restrictions in Minnesota and turning the state into a beacon of access in the Midwest. Thomas Gilligan, a district-court judge, declared, "The right to choose to have an abortion . . . would be meaningless without the right to access abortion care." ♦

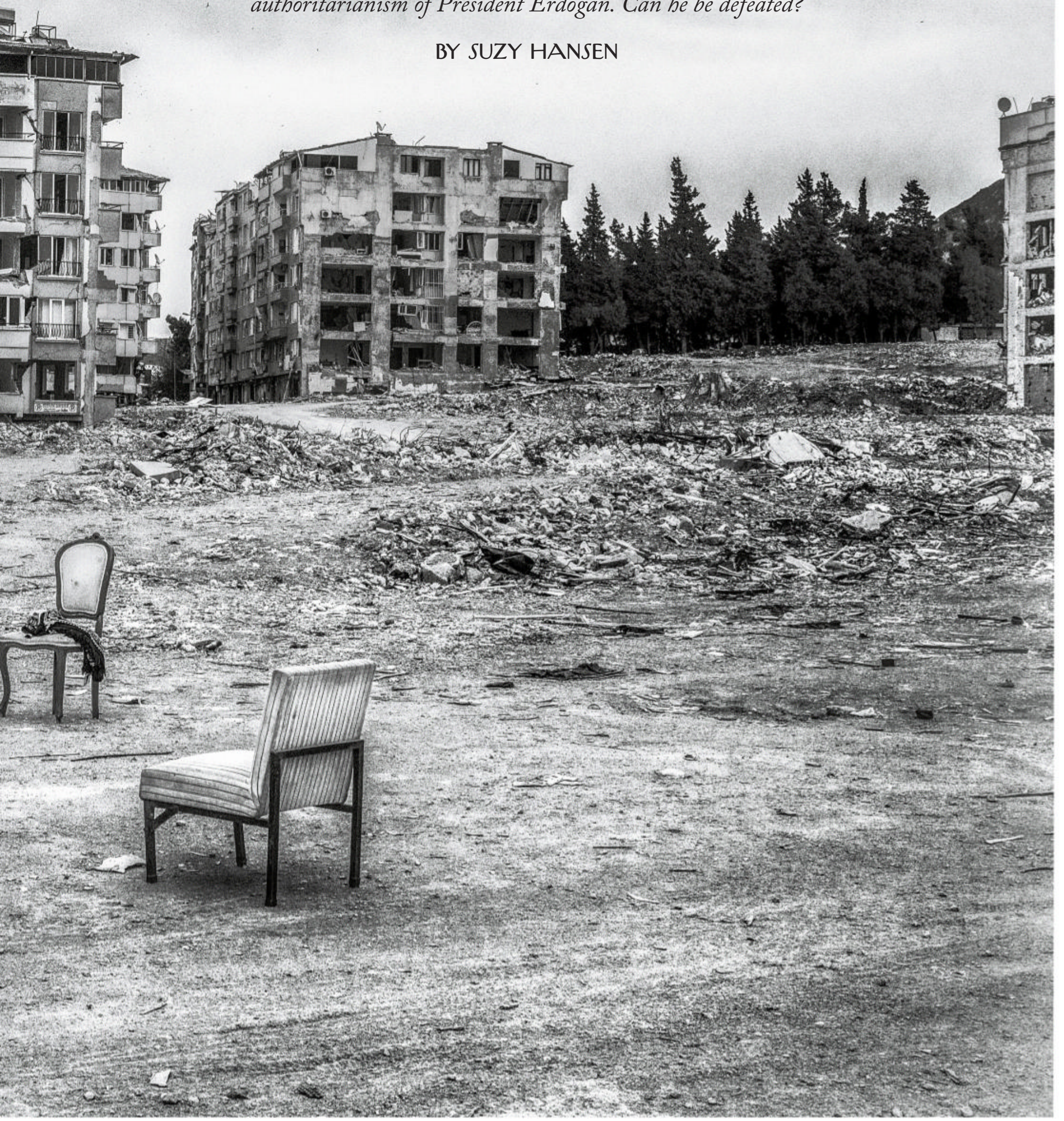
More than fifty thousand people have been pronounced dead in Turkey, but few believe that number is accurate. In Hatay

LETTER FROM İSKENDERUN

FRACTURED LAND

The earthquakes in Turkey highlighted the corruption and authoritarianism of President Erdoğan. Can he be defeated?

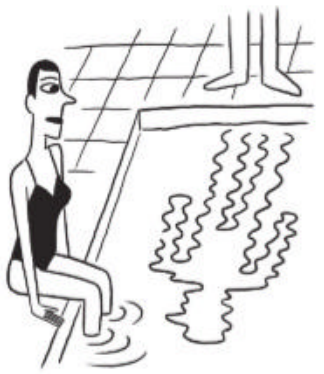
BY SUZY HANSEN



Province, hospitals, police stations, hotels, churches, and mosques collapsed. The İskenderun port was on fire for four days.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY DEVIN OKTAR YALKIN

In the early two-thousands, Turkey's Ministry of Transportation began construction on an airport in Hatay Province, in southern Turkey. The new Prime Minister, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, had run on a platform of religious freedom, social services for the poor, and housing and development; he had promised to put an airport in every region. The plans had caught the attention of a local architect named Ercüment Kimyon. Kimyon's family had grown wheat on one of the many small farms near the drained bed of Lake Amik, the proposed site of the airport. When Kimyon was a child, his parents moved to İskenderun, the second-largest city in Hatay. In the mid-eighties, he opened an architecture firm, designing small apartment buildings in middle-class neighborhoods. Kimyon became a board member of the local Chamber of Architects, one of the many associations in Turkey—there are chambers of engineers, of geologists, of urban planners—that serve as citizen advocates: they monitor public-infrastructure projects, campaign for the protection of the environment and of cultural-heritage sites, and insure that buildings follow earthquake-safety codes.



In time, this advocacy work consumed Kimyon. He studied zoning laws, looking for signs of *rant*, money made from illegal construction schemes and kicked back to politicians. He took the municipality to court for everything—for employing thuggish private-security companies, for raising the price of water, for overcharging for photocopies. He joined the C.H.P., the party of modern Turkey's founder, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, and he talked to the press incessantly. The main issue was "the integrity of the city," he said. He knew that many buildings were dangerously tall, or built on soft soil, making them vulnerable to collapse. "My father used to tell us about the swampy ground in İskenderun," he told me. Then "the swamp areas were being opened for housing construction."

Many people in the city thought that Kimyon was a nuisance. The mayor, Mete Aslan, made it clear that no one should work with him. His architecture business struggled and then, around 2000, stopped entirely. "After that point, I said that as an individual living in this city, as a citizen, I have constitutional rights," Kimyon said. He continued to file suits against projects that he thought were unwise, confirming his reputation as a gadfly.

In the case of the Hatay airport, Kimyon said, he found himself "explaining the disadvantages of building on what was a deteriorating former lake bed." The ground was prone to flooding, and nearby mountains made it hard for planes to land. In addition, the area was a corridor for migrating birds. The Chamber of Geological Engineers told officials that an active fault ran nearby. "It was on an earthquake line," Kimyon said. "We knew the hot springs there came from the active fault." But the project was a priority for Erdoğan's Justice and Development Party (known in English as the A.K. Party), and it was impossible to stop. "When we saw the implementations after the A.K. Party came, we lost hope," Hasan Turunç, a former mayor of Tavla, a village near the airport, said. "They acted of their own accord, based entirely on self-interest, with no scientific input." In 2007, Erdoğan attended the grand opening of the airport. For years afterward, the runway and the terminals would flood periodically.

Between 1999 and 2022, Turkey, which sits at a crossroads of several tectonic plates, saw five significant earthquakes, including two in Elazığ, which straddles the same fault as Hatay. On December 18, 2022, during the World Cup final, between Argentina and France, residents of Hatay felt a tremor. Kimyon thought that it was "a sign, a harbinger of a bigger earthquake," he said. On January 22nd, Kimyon posted on Facebook, "Shouldn't experts and responsible public officials focus on the earthquakes being felt in Hatay?"

Fifteen days later, at 4:17 A.M., Kimyon, a stocky sixty-five-year-old man with a full head of curly black hair and a mustache, was asleep at his summer house, a half hour from İskenderun. He awoke because he thought the wind was blowing through his curtains. Then he heard the jangling of liquor bottles on the mantel, and the room began to shake, as if it were being violently churned in a bowl. Kimyon ran out to his garden.

The earthquake, 7.8 magnitude, affected more than fifteen million people in Turkey and Syria. In Turkey, the rupture stretched for hundreds of miles, from the seaside village of Samandağ, on the southernmost tip of Hatay, through the cities of Kahramanmaraş, Gaziantep, Malatya, Adana, Elazığ, and Adıyaman, in Turkey's Anatolian heartland, to Urfa and Diyarbakır, in the Kurdish southeast. Kimyon's daughters, Derya, in Istanbul, and Deniz, in Paris, had been trying to reach him. Finally, Deniz got through and heard only a few words: "Don't be afraid, my daughter, I'm O.K."

Six of Kimyon's relatives died that day. Some fifty thousand people have been pronounced dead in Turkey, but few believe that number is accurate. More than a hundred and sixty thousand buildings, containing some five hundred and twenty thousand households, collapsed; people think that the death toll could be as high as two hundred thousand.

Some buildings toppled like trees, right off their foundations. Others pancaked straight down. Hospitals, police stations, hotels, churches, and mosques collapsed, roads broke, tunnels cracked. The İskenderun port was on fire for four days. Survivors ran out into the pitch dark, into torrential rains, in the south, and snowfall, in the north. The phone lines were down, their world was gone. There was nothing to do but start digging.

Nine hours later, at 1:24 P.M., a second earthquake struck, almost as strong as the first. Much of what hadn't fallen now fell; many who hadn't died now died. People stood in the rain before the broken buildings where their family members were trapped, crying out from within. In the forty-eight hours after the earthquakes, hardly any search-and-rescue teams came to Hatay. The Turkish disaster- and emergency-management organization AFAD, the centuries-old aid organization the Red Crescent, and many foreign rescue teams—which volunteer in major emergencies—largely

failed to reach people. Turunç, the former village mayor, told me, "For three days, four days, five days, people could not find a pickaxe, not even a shovel, and they could not be reached." Even the Turkish military was absent. Civilians and local officials took to Twitter:

"IT'S VERY URGENT WE NEED A CRANE PLEASE"

"One family, three children, 7 people in total been under the rubble for 15 hours please #HELP"

"WHERE IS THE STATE??"

One reason no help came was that the region was not accessible by plane: the Hatay airport's lone runway had split in two.

The day after the earthquakes, Erdoğan declared a state of emergency in southern Turkey. In a televised broadcast, he was clearly angry, but he directed his anger not at the ineffectual response but at the people who had expressed disappointment in the response. "Our prosecutors will identify those who attempt to cause social chaos through inhumane methods and take necessary actions," Erdoğan said. "We will follow those who intend to set our people against one another with fake news and distortions. . . . When the day comes, we will open the notebook we keep." The next day, the government shut down Twitter for twelve hours.

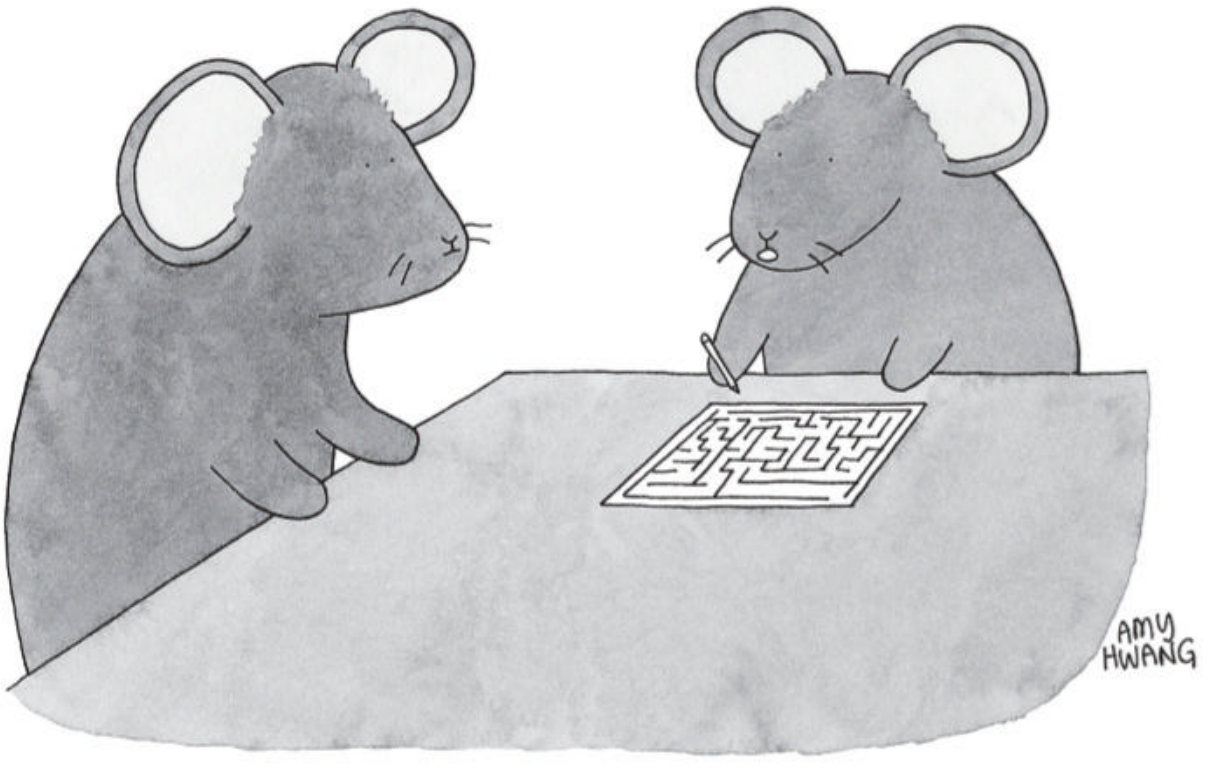
The force of the two earthquakes—plus a third, which struck Hatay two weeks later—would have incapacitated any country, and most governments would have had trouble responding to a calamity of such scale. But the incompetence and, at times, the inhumanity of Erdoğan's regime came as a surprise even to hardened critics. "Erdoğan is right when he says a lot of the buildings that collapsed were built before him," Tuna Kuyucu, a sociologist at Boğaziçi University, in Istanbul, who studies urban development, said. "But then the right question to ask Erdoğan is: What were you doing for the past twenty years, when the old buildings were very likely to collapse?"

Erdoğan, during his time in office, has instituted a relentless program of building—apartment towers, malls, bridges, and airports—aimed at improving the lives of a large swath of voters. He brags about having designed a Turkish state that runs on technological prowess and expertise. In fact, he created a party machinery, a wealthy business class, and a dependent poor whose loyalty made his repression of civil society relatively easy. Then he centralized power around his person, rendering Turkey a country that no longer works. The earthquakes highlighted a two-pronged failure—the failure to prepare and the failure to respond—that was rooted in the A.K. Party's decades-long reign. Erdoğan is up for reëlection for President on May 14th, in the year of the hundredth anniversary of the Turkish Republic. It is a chance to cement his legacy as the replacement of the secularist hero Atatürk. But many Turks feel that another Erdoğan term will mean not only dictatorship but death.

Erdoğan grew up in a religious family, in a poor neighborhood in Istanbul, the son of a ferry captain who had migrated from the Black Sea region. As a teen-ager, he sold lemonade and *simit*, a Turkish bagel, in the streets. He rose through local politics as a member of the Islamist Welfare Party, and, in 1994, at the age of forty, he was elected mayor of Istanbul. At the time, the city was derelict, with unreliable electricity and running water, and mounds of trash everywhere. Erdoğan gained a reputation for cleaning up the city and improving its services. He formed ties with religious businesspeople, distributing public money through their networks. One of Erdoğan's first actions as mayor was to fire unionized municipal workers and hire private companies, which employed members of the poor, to provide city services. "Let's say he contracted a private company for the city cleaning crew," Berk Esen, a professor of political science at Sabancı University, on the outskirts of Istanbul, said. "That company is owned by a conservative person affiliated with the Party, so it's killing two birds with one stone." Erdoğan made a new class of businessmen wealthy and provided jobs to the poor. In turn, both groups loved him—a tall, charismatic man who gave rousing speeches and walked like a *kabadayı*, a street fighter.

In 1998, the secularist judiciary, wary of Erdoğan's popularity, managed to prosecute him for giving a speech in which he recited a poem that, it claimed, had inflammatory religious undertones. He spent four months in jail and emerged a hero with a new political strategy: to form a party that was not explicitly Islamist but, rather, pro-accession to the European Union, pro-business, pro-democracy, pro-human rights. In 2002, the A.K. Party won almost two-thirds of the seats in parliament.

Two major crises played a role in the Party's sudden success. One was an earthquake, in 1999, that killed seventeen thousand people, causing disillusionment with the existing political



"I can't finish these without a cheese reward."

parties. Afterward, the government passed a special tax, to repair the damage and to renovate buildings that were still vulnerable to earthquakes. The tax was supposed to be temporary, but the A.K. Party made it permanent, accumulating billions of dollars. Erdoğan also used the money to fund the construction of highways, bridges, and other infrastructure projects which, the Party argued, would make Turkey into a modern country.

The second crisis was financial, the result of decades of corruption and dysfunction. In return for a nineteen-billion-dollar bailout, Turkey agreed to follow a program of privatization and anti-corruption laws outlined by the I.M.F. Erdoğan embraced the privatization of state companies but eschewed the anti-corruption initiatives. His party made more than a hundred amendments to public-procurement laws, allowing it to award construction contracts to allies, especially to a group of companies that became known as the Gang of Five. (In reality, it's more like a gang of twenty.) Between 1986 and 2002, the government made eight billion dollars from privatization; between 2004 and 2014, it made fifty-six billion dollars. "I can confidently say that the seeds of this corrupt regime were there from early on," Kuyucu, the professor of sociology, told me. Like many liberals, Kuyucu had had some sympathy for the A.K. Party's initial platform of democratic reforms and religious freedom. Working on his Ph.D. thesis, on urban renewal, had changed his perspective, he said—it helped him see "the amount of corruption in privatization deals, in construction, and in urban renewal." Projects launched under the auspices of earthquake safety and urban renewal often ended with the replacement of lower-class housing by luxury condos.

In Turkey, a substantial amount of vacant land is owned by government ministries. When a party comes to power, it has access to this free land. "So they take over public land—let's say a green space, a park—and they construct a shopping mall, and they make enormous amounts of money," Esen told me. "That money is passed around to civil servants, local politicians, state employees, and members of the Party. Basically, you make money out of nothing. It's like finding oil." In the early two-thousands, for instance, the Turkish Highway Authority sold a plot of land to a developer, who built the Zorlu Center—an enormous complex that included a shopping mall, an office park, apartments, and a Raffles hotel. When the complex was completed, in 2013, it had much more square footage than had been authorized. Later that year, leaked details of a corruption probe alleged that the developer had been able to bypass zoning requirements in exchange for bribes.

Homeownership was part of Erdoğan's vision for a modern, consumer-driven middle class. To accelerate the construction of more housing, the A.K. Party continued to have developers use private companies to inspect their projects. Istanbul's greatest natural and historical assets—its silhouette, its lush forests, its Bosporus, its ancient streets—became Erdoğan's personal surplus. The skyline filled with huge cranes and towers, and the streets rattled from jackhammers at all hours. The Istanbul municipality had a master plan, created under the leadership of Hüseyin Kaptan, an urban-planning professor. It included the establishment of ecozones to protect northern forests and water reserves. But in 2011, during his reëlection campaign, Erdoğan started talking about what he called his "crazy project," Kanal Istanbul—essentially, a second waterway that would be built toward the west of the city, between the Black Sea and the Sea of Marmara, cutting European Istanbul in two. He also announced plans for a third airport, in northern Istanbul, which meant constructing runways in an area of high

MID-CENTURY MODERN

The big pine sags,
heavy with cones,
in the slightly
smoky air.

•

The mid-century
"pretzel chair,"
with its slender,
twisted legs,
is once more
popular.

•

An off rhyme
goes a long way
if you aren't going
anywhere.

•

The marshmallow sofa
is starting to look
almost familiar.

•

What supports us
is flimsy. We've
come back around
to that idea.

—Rae Armantrout

winds and migrating birds. All this expansion required more highways, more metros, more malls, more apartment buildings, more roads, and another bridge over the Bosporus. The contracts for much of this development went to the Gang of Five. Kaptan resigned in protest.

Turkey's construction boom was, in many ways, effective. In the first decade of Erdoğan's rule, the country's G.D.P. per capita tripled. *The Economist* touted the "Turkish model," writing that the A.K. Party had "boosted the country's standing and shown that the coming to power of pious people need not mean a dramatic rupture in ties with the West." The Brookings Institution called Turkey "arguably the most dynamic experiment with political Islam among the fifty-seven nations of the Muslim world."

In 2012, Erdoğan announced another mega project: a shopping mall in the style of old Ottoman military barracks, in Gezi Park, a patch of green space in Taksim Square, the crowded center of Istanbul and the heart of its boozy night life. On May 28, 2013, a group of young environmental activists sat in the park to protest the project. After police tried to clear the area, the protest grew into an uprising of hundreds of thousands of people in more than seventy cities. Erdoğan was furious, and he responded with a police crackdown that resulted in eleven deaths and thousands of injuries and arrests. The protests were a genuine threat to him: they involved not only the youth but also middle-class families who had grown sick of overdevelopment and were outraged by the government's use of violence against peaceful protesters.

Then, that December, a series of audio recordings were released on social media by former allies of Erdoğan's, followers of the Islamic scholar Fethullah Gülen, who occupied key positions in the judicial system, state ministries, the national media, the education system, and the national police. (Gülen denies involvement in the release of the audio.) Erdoğan and the Gülenists had begun falling out over a range of political issues. The recordings—of Erdoğan, one of his sons, and his ministers—revealed to the public that Erdoğan was granting private construction permits on public land in exchange for bribes. On one tape, Erdoğan, after learning of an unsatisfactory bribe, tells his son Bilal, "Don't take it. Whatever he has promised us, he should deliver it. . . . What do they think this business is? But don't worry, they will fall into our lap." (Erdoğan has said that the audio is fake.)

"The spell was broken with the Gezi protests," Osman Can, a former judge on the Constitutional Court and a member of the A.K. Party's central executive committee between 2012 and 2015, recalled. "With the corruption revelations, an era of anxiety began. There had been an ambience of 'Everything will be fine, everything is under control.' Now they began to fear. The fear was existential." Thousands of Gülenists were fired from their posts, beginning a hollowing out of state institutions. Mücella Yapıcı, a member of the Chamber of Architects in Istanbul, who had participated in the Gezi protests, received an eighteen-year prison sentence for aiding an attempt to overthrow the government. Tayfun Kahraman, the executive-board chairman of the Chamber of Urban Planners and the head of the Department of Earthquake Risk Management and Urban Renewal in Istanbul, who had also spoken out during Gezi, received a similar sentence. In 2013, a pro-Erdoğan newspaper published the headline "The Authority of Architects and Engineers Is Over."

When I first visited İskenderun, three weeks after the earthquakes, the city still had no running water. Mountains of rubble had replaced streets, and the buildings that still stood were badly damaged. İskenderun was completely dark at night. Everywhere, people were leaving, heaping pickup trucks with stoves, mattresses, mops, and buckets—even front doors torn off their hinges. People slept in tents in parks and on roadsides.

Near the site of a collapsed primary school and church, I met three engineers, one American and two Turkish. They told me that pinpointing the specific reason each structure had collapsed would require a thorough investigation. An expert would have to assess the quality of concrete and rebar; whether the support columns on the bottom floors of the building had been removed to make more commercial space, as is common in Turkey; and if the foundation had been laid deeply enough.

Yet authorities had begun detaining hundreds of people involved in construction all over the region. On a plane, I met a judge who told me he thought that every one of them was guilty.

But Turunç, the former village mayor, didn't think the workers alone were to blame. "The municipal governments that were allied with the government did not receive any supervision," he said. "The bids were made entirely on the basis of personal connections." He went on, "The zoning plan determines the floor area, and the town council determines the zoning plan. The real crime takes place before the contractor goes to work. Why didn't this study take place? Why didn't the ministry warn people, why didn't the municipalities ask experts? Something was wrong from the beginning. The state officials are responsible for this. And, instead of resigning or taking action, they are arresting a lot of men."

Kimyon spent the weeks after the earthquakes tending to his beloved, broken city. İbrahim Akın, a friend and a political ally, told me, "When you go into the street with him, and people say, 'Ercüment, brother, we need this,' he responds immediately." Kimyon and Akın surveyed the wreckage. "This is the result of the construction sector's desire to build on every empty space it finds downtown," Kimyon said. "But we were somewhat luckier than Antakya"—an hour away—which was now "a dead city." Kimyon's aunt, who is ninety-four, lived in an apartment above a hotel in İskenderun which had collapsed. She was presumed dead after the earthquakes, but three days later, when rescue teams sent in dogs, she was pulled out alive. Kimyon's brother, who was in a wheelchair, lived in a building complex, called İnci Kent, that Kimyon had worked on almost thirty years before. İnci Kent was damaged in the earthquakes, and Kimyon arranged for his brother's care in a nursing home. And Kimyon, as always, talked to the local press, went on TV, and gave interviews to online publications. "We ignored the existence of the seismic fault,"

he told one Web site. "Society's value judgments have disappeared—rent seeks profit. They have destroyed the concept of public interest."

He called for accountability. "Why does the earthquake not bring destruction to Japan but to Turkey?" he asked. "If this happened in Japan, the authorities would resign. Why did no one resign in Turkey?"

I had an appointment to meet Kimyon, but when I called to tell him I was in the area his phone had been shut off, which was weird. In Turkey, no one turns off his phone in the middle of the day. I Googled his address and saw a newspaper headline: "Ercüment Kimyon Has Been Arrested."

It wasn't the first time that people had tried to silence Kimyon. In March, 2002, after filing a suit to stop a paving project, he was driving home with his sixteen-year-old daughter, Deniz, when they stopped at a red light and the passenger door was pulled open. A man fired into the car. Kimyon threw his left leg over Deniz, and two bullets grazed him. In 2006, Kimyon's car was set on fire in front of his house. In 2008, as he left the office, three men jumped him, breaking his jaw so badly that he needed a metal plate put in. That same year, a man shot him in the arm, leaving it filled with shrapnel. Most of the attacks took place in the early evening, in İskenderun's pretty, palm-tree-lined downtown, and they all occurred after Kimyon brought cases against what he believed were corrupt activities. After one attack, the deputy chairman of an opposition political party issued a written statement implicating Mete Aslan in the violence: "All İskenderun residents know that the mayor of İskenderun is the hidden power behind this incident." (Aslan denies that he was involved.)

Now the newspapers reported that a prosecutor had found evidence that, in 1996, Kimyon had worked on two buildings that collapsed in the earthquakes, killing forty-three people. The buildings were part of a complex called Özinci Kent, next door to İnci Kent, where Kimyon's brother had lived. The prosecutor claimed to have documents proving that Kimyon had signed off on the construction of the buildings. There were likely additional relevant records in İskenderun's tax office and title-deed office, but both had collapsed.

I went to Özinci Kent that night. The apartment complexes, rows of six- and seven-story buildings, were empty and dark; the windows were like a thousand black holes in the sky. In the green patches between buildings, families had pitched tents, where they brewed tea and watched over their abandoned homes. Military police in blue caps played with children nearby. Men broke chunks of concrete off their own homes with their bare hands. "Look at this!" they cried. The buildings had been made from trash and sand. I asked a young man who lived in İnci Kent if he knew anything about the two buildings that had pancaked. He pointed at two giant piles of broken concrete and curtains and couches and refrigerator doors. He showed me his phone. A picture of Kimyon, wearing a suit and a red tie, had been posted on Instagram. "This is one of the contractors," he said.

"The system brought out this capability in me," Ercüment Kimyon said of his long, lonely fight against corruption.

İskenderun's most passionate advocate for proper construction rules had become one of its most vilified men, a *müteahhit*—a contractor.

On July 15, 2016, soldiers, some allegedly allied with the Gülenist movement, occupied the Bosporus Bridge; they bombed the parliament building in Ankara, and tried to capture Erdoğan, who was on vacation. But Erdoğan summoned his supporters to the streets with a special call to prayer, broadcast from mosques throughout the country, and he survived the attempted coup.

The insurrection was followed by a terrifying era of repression. Though Gülenists were the primary target, Kurds, liberals, and secularists suffered, too. Seventy-seven thousand people were arrested, and six thousand academics, four thousand judges and prosecutors, twenty-four thousand policemen and interior-ministry officials, seven thousand military personnel, and hundreds of governors and their staff members were fired. The government enacted a series of emergency-decree laws that increased Erdoğan's power over the courts, effectively eviscerating them. The Party appointed inexperienced judges, prosecutors, and bureaucrats, whose only qualification was their loyalty. In 2017, through a referendum process, Erdoğan changed the country's parliamentary system to one in which power was concentrated under the President. And, in 2018, he won the Presidency.

"The state is now such that there are ministries, there are committees, there are offices, and in the center is the President," Can, the former judge, said. "The President says something, and the others turn it into policy. That's why ministers don't have the initiative—there's no such thing as ministers as we know them in the context of parliamentary democracies. Everything is carried out through interactions with the advisers of the palace and through purely personal connections within the palace." (Spokespeople from Erdoğan's office declined to comment.)

Erdoğan, even after consolidating so much power, still placed tremendous importance on elections. "Erdoğan can elevate himself above other leaders of his regime on the basis of his popularity," Esen, the professor of political science, told me. "Otherwise, he'd be an aging, out-of-touch authoritarian compared with other, younger candidates." Before the 2018 Presidential election, Erdoğan passed a "zoning amnesty" law that exempted millions of homes from adhering to earthquake codes, in exchange for a fee. The H.D.P., a leftist party with Kurdish roots, opposed the amnesty. Garo Paylan, an H.D.P. member, nearly lost it on the parliament floor. "Imagine that you forgave a ten-story building," he said. "A hundred of our citizens live in that ten-story building. There is an earthquake, God forbid, and those citizens are inside that building. Who will have this on their conscience?"

The zoning amnesty took effect in advance of the 2019 mayoral elections. Running against Erdoğan's handpicked candidate for mayor of Istanbul was Ekrem İmamoğlu, a likable man who could pray at a mosque, go to a rock concert, and give a political speech on

After buildings in the Özinci Kent complex collapsed, Kimyon was arrested for having designed them.

the same day. Turkish elections are not fair. Erdoğan controls almost every state institution, most of the media, and extensive charity networks. Yet Turks love to vote. Throughout the country's history of military coups, they have always showed up for elections; today, Turkey has about an eighty-per-cent participation rate. Election Day is like a jubilee. Anyone can go watch the party heads, sitting in classrooms in local schools, count the slips of paper—observers even call out if the officials miss a vote. In 2019, Erdoğan lost Istanbul, his paradise of plunder, the city he'd ruled for twenty-five years.

I lived in Istanbul for twelve years, beginning in 2007, the year of Erdoğan's second election. It was my home, and I still have many loved ones there. The earthquakes have haunted everyone. There was the doctor who broke down crying during our appointment, saying, "This is mass murder"; the lawyer struggling to understand Istanbul's complex earthquake rules for her apartment, who said, "Can you imagine, this is where my son sleeps?"; the impoverished taxi-driver who flew south to help with search-and-rescue operations, and whose memory of bodies piled on the pavement silenced him mid-sentence. My landlord is from Hatay, my therapist is from İskenderun, a friend I had lunch with is from Gaziantep, the owner of my favorite kebab place is from Antakya. One morning at a café, my friends laughed a little loudly over breakfast, and the waiter stopped them. "I am from Adıyaman," he said.

It was clear to many people that Erdoğan's weakening of the state had culminated in the disastrous response to the earthquakes. Erdoğan had eroded the military's independence, hampering its ability to mobilize quickly in response to disasters. He had crippled the powers of civil-society groups and municipalities. Even the Red Crescent had been tainted: after the earthquakes, it was revealed that the organization had sold two thousand and fifty tents to another nonprofit for a reported $2.4 million. (The Red Crescent said that any profits are reinvested in its humanitarian mandate.)

AFAD, the emergency-management organization, was headed by loyalists with little or no aid experience and run by a graduate of the Faculty of Theology at a religious school. After the earthquakes, many search-and-rescue teams were stranded at regional airports or separated from their equipment. And, in the crucial first hours, it was unlikely that the state organs could do anything until receiving orders from Erdoğan. "In such a system, all minds are disabled—there is only one mind," Can, the former judge, said. "When someone acts, he puts himself at risk, he becomes responsible. Therefore, he waits for instruction from above. This is not a state, this is a non-state." He went on, "There is just one logic here, and it is psychological—the logic is the person of Erdoğan."

A few weeks after the earthquakes, I visited Ekrem İmamoğlu at his office, in Miniaturk, on the Golden Horn, a miniature theme-park model of the city of Istanbul, with a tiny Blue Mosque and a cute Bosporus Bridge. İmamoğlu looked grave; his office was a rush of activity. After his election, he had found his employees suffering from a lack of initiative. "The whole team looked at the political will and awaited instructions from it, as if the Presidential system had already been reflected here," İmamoğlu told me. "No one was trying to contribute to the process with their own talent." He thought that, in his three years in power, he had begun to revive the spirits of the city. But after the earthquakes the people of Istanbul

were panicking. They believe that if a major earthquake strikes Istanbul, as geologists have predicted, they will die.

On Twitter, people were posting aerial shots of crowded middle- and lower-class neighborhoods in Istanbul which were devoid of green space, making the point that, in the event of an earthquake, there would be no escape. When experts overlaid an earthquake-risk map on a map of neighborhoods that had seen urban renewal in the past twenty years, they didn't line up. "Most of the neighborhoods that are the most dangerous never got designated as in need of urban renewal," Kuyucu, the sociology professor, said. "The places that were designated as urban-renewal areas—what connects them? They are profitable, higher-end areas."

There were also concerns about the Istanbul New Airport, which had been completed in 2018; at the time, Erdoğan called it "the biggest airport in the world." "The public does not know, for example, who the architects of the airport are," Tezcan Karakuş Candan, the head of the Chamber of Architects in Ankara, told me. "The architect is the President, because he is the last to decide." Celâl Şengör, a geologist, said that, in the case of a major earthquake, the New Airport would probably sustain damage. "They were going to build the runways to a certain height—they lowered that," Yörük Işık, a geopolitical analyst at the Middle East Institute, told me. "They were going to build angled runways, which are the most optimal runways in a city with Istanbul's winds. They promised another terminal building. None of this has happened."

The airport had been built by members of the Gang of Five: Kolin, Cengiz, Limak, and Kalyon. Many of these companies are now in trouble, unable to pay their debts. Even before the earthquakes, Turkey was experiencing a devastating financial crisis. Many people can barely afford to eat, and at the end of 2022 the annual inflation rate was more than eighty per cent. Erdoğan refuses to raise interest rates, which would curb inflation but cripple Turkey's construction magnates.

Işık told me that, owing to pressure from the government, banks have delayed calling in their loans. "During COVID, the banks got a special amnesty from Erdoğan," he said. "They did not pay the central bank. Like, if I were a normal guy and I bought a car and didn't pay what I owed, they would come and get my car. What's the bank going to do—take the airport?"

For many years, Erdoğan's giant projects were a source of pride among his supporters. I spent four years reporting in a pro-A.K. Party neighborhood, and by 2019 many of the Party's supporters there were disenchanted.

Where did all the money go? one of them wondered, then said, "They buried all the money in stone."

Last December, Ekrem İmamoğlu was sentenced to nearly three years in prison for insulting the Turkish state. He has appealed the case, and remains in his role as mayor, but the sentence seemingly quashed any hope that he might run for President, as many members of the opposition had desired.

Instead, the opposition Presidential candidate will be Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu, the longtime leader of the C.H.P., Atatürk's party. He is a soft-spoken Alevi (a minority Muslim sect) who has emerged as an appealingly gentle alternative to Erdoğan. Six of Turkey's opposition parties—and İmamoğlu—have pledged to support Kılıçdaroğlu, in order to counter the A.K. Party and its alliance with the National Action Party, which is known for its nationalism, its mafia connections, and its anti-Kurdish sentiment.

In recent weeks, polls have suggested that Erdoğan is losing support. "He's been in power twenty years," Işık said. "An entire religious generation has passed since Erdoğan has been around. The old story is actually unsellable—they didn't grow up with head-scarf issues or not getting jobs. They also see that the system is corrupt."

Erdoğan's recent history, however, suggests another possible election outcome. "What makes me scared about Erdoğan is that, if you don't break him, he hits you back harder," Esen said. "Yes, the earthquakes bruised him. But this kind of crisis does not always destroy authoritarians. It's like being in a ship that hits a rock. Who distributes the life jackets? The captain."

Ercüment Kimyon spent fifteen days in prison. His daughters, Derya, who trained as an architect, and Deniz, an urban planner, returned to work on his case. They had learned of their father's arrest after he hadn't texted them "*Günaydın*," or "Good morning," as he did every day. The prosecutor claimed that Kimyon was the *fenni mesul* on the Özinci Kent project, a kind of scientific engineer or inspector. But their father had worked on the complex only as an architect, and only in its initial years. Kimyon had been dismissed from the project after members of the building coöperative began to fear that the mayor, Mete Aslan, would penalize them for working with Kimyon. Derya, Deniz, and Kimyon's lawyer petitioned the prosecutor to see Kimyon's case file, and ten days into his jail term they found municipality documents that proved what they already knew: Kimyon had left before the construction of the two crushed buildings. He was released from jail. "Our father is home," Derya texted me, with a celebration emoji.

In April, Kimyon decided to run for parliament, as a member of the Yeşil Sol (Green Left) Party, which had sprung up after the H.D.P. was threatened with a ban. It is people like him—journalists, lawyers, Kurds, architects, engineers, city planners, academics, doctors, activists, Tweeters—who have made up an archipelago of resistance for the past twenty years. An authoritarian leader may be able to prevent people from marching in the streets, but it's harder to prevent them from filing legal cases, publishing academic papers, or providing proof of wrongdoing on Twitter. In a country of eighty-five million, there are thousands of Ercüment Kimyons—people who have continued to do their jobs at significant peril. "I am not a man of great talents," Kimyon told me. "The system brought out this capability in me, it brought me to this place."

In late April, Kimyon was still posting accusations of wrongdoing on Facebook. He shared a photograph of a building damaged in the earthquakes. He had pursued various lawsuits against the building, delaying its construction multiple times. It was also the home of Mete Aslan.

After Kimyon was released from jail, he seemed calm. I asked if he ever got angry. He smiled. That week, he said, he had attended a meeting with the mayor of İskenderun, Fatih Tosyalı. Tosyalı is an A.K. Party official and a son of the founder of Tosyalı Holding, an Erdoğan ally whose company specializes in making steel used in construction. In İskenderun, the name Tosyalı appears on everything from factories to mosques. Tosyalı told Kimyon that he and a local A.K. member of parliament wanted to work with Kimyon to gain insight on how to rebuild the city. "We're going to sit together, talk about urban planning," he said. Then he mentioned that they would also work with two former mayors: one from the A.K. Party and Mete Aslan, who had resisted so many of Kimyon's warnings.

"What are we going to talk about with them?" Kimyon yelled. "They are the murderers of this city!" ♦

"You never worried about whether or not to tuck in your shirt when we were first married."

ILLUSTRATION BY OWEN GENT

It wasn't my first baby, but it was my first night in the hospital at Hvidovre.

I'm talking about it now because my husband doesn't believe me and our two other children don't, either. None of them were there at the start.

I'd bled heavily and we'd been put under observation. I was sweating that colossal sweat which comes washing out of you postpartum, the sweat of childbirth.

I was all on my own in the room. It was so small and scribbly, like a cracked casing.

The child was sleeping in the cot. I'd fed her formula from a cup. My milk hadn't come in yet. Apart from the bleeding, the birth had gone well, but I couldn't sleep.

Through the window I could see a maze of low-cut hedges, and behind them in the semidarkness a hospital building identical to the one I was in.

No, there was no tone in me. There was no call. A gray and foggy light descended upon me. It was the early morning. I was thirsty. I remembered an old folktale in which a woman cuts off her breasts. Then I thought about Mutter Pappenheimer, a beggar woman in Germany, who had her breasts torn off with a pair of tongs in 1600. The hospital was still. The hospital gown was unfathomably long; it hung down between my legs. My strange, distant feet walked. The child lay like a shadow in the cot as I opened the door. The door made a sweeping sound. Farther along the corridor I could see another woman in a hospital gown like mine; she dragged her feet, too. She had messed-up hair and a wild, inward look in her eyes. She clutched her phone.

It hurt to walk, but it wasn't as if I'd never been there before. I could feel how the warm blood slid out of me like liquid from a test tube. In the patients' kitchen I gulped from the juice carton.

"That's my juice." It was the woman from the corridor.

"No, actually it's the whole ward's juice," I replied, and gulped some more.

She studied me.

"Did you see my kid?" she asked.

"No, I don't think so," I answered. "Is he asleep?"

"I think so."

I nodded and wiped my mouth on my sleeve. Out in the corridor under the strip lighting a second woman in a hospital gown, bandy-legged after giving birth, came slowly toward us. Her face was completely blank.

"Did you see my kid?" she asked, staring, and opened her mouth strangely, as if she were about to be swabbed.

I smiled. I felt an afterpain, and bled again. The sanitary towel grew thick between my legs, like a pair of rolled-up tennis socks.

"Did you see her?" she asked again.

I backed into my room and closed the door cautiously. There was a dusklike murk, silence. The child's fragrance filled the room. I went over to her cot. We'd brought our own duvet and a little baby hat, but they say baby hats aren't necessary, that's only in movies. The cot was empty. I snatched up the duvet; it was still warm, but there was no child.

I ran out into the corridor. My stitches pulled.

"My baby's gone!" I yelled.

A sleepy nurse was eating sponge cake in the duty room. She turned toward me, unalarmed.

"She was lying in her cot only a moment ago!" I said.

"Let's go and have a look, shall we?" She got to her feet, brushed some crumbs from her uniform.

"Come on," she said, and took my arm. "You look pale. Have you remembered your liquids?"

"I drank some juice," I said, and let myself be led.

In the corridor, three women in hospital gowns wandered, bandy-legged.

"Are they always up at this time, the women?" I asked.

"Yes, it can be quite lively between three and four," the nurse said. The uniform gave her a uniboob, and she wore a badge with a four-leaf clover in red and gold.

Stepping into the room, I broke out in a sweat again, shaking.

"You see, he was here all along," the nurse said, and lifted the child from the cot. She had her by the armpits, as if she'd just pulled her out of a birth canal.

"She looks different," I said.

"He's fine."

"It's a girl," I said.

"No, I think not," she replied, and undid the nappy so that I could see my daughter's penis and scrotum.

"I've already got two boys," I said.

"You'll have your hands full," she said, now on her way out. "Use the call bell if you need anything. Try to get some sleep. And don't forget your liquids."

The room was blue. Yet the long white curtains seemed to glow with a sinister light, like two cylinders of glass filled with bleach. Gradually, the morning emerged outside the window. It was May. Birds began to sing, so I knew it was around 4 A.M. The child stirred, sniffing the room like a small animal. She'd soaked her diaper and as I changed her I tried to avoid looking at her strange little girl-penis.

"There's a nub, you see," the midwife had said during the ultrasound scan when I was pregnant with my first son. I put the baby to my breast. My milk still hadn't come in. She sucked eagerly, a few drops of colostrum. It hurt. It was a dry pain. Like sex when you're not wet. She fell asleep at the breast and I sat with her like that. The white curtains poured more and more of their bleach onto us. Outside, the trimmed hedges looked like a stupid poster. Once she was sleeping soundly enough I put her back in the cot. As I straightened up, the blood ran again; I felt it trickle down my leg. With some difficulty I cleaned myself up, using the handheld showerhead, and changed my sanitary towel. My hospital clothes were stained. I felt thirsty again.

In the kitchen I drained the carton of juice in a single gulp. A woman appeared in the doorway.

"Did you see my kid?"

"No, I told you," I said.

She went back out into the corridor. I went after her.

Now I counted four women in

hospital clothes, all with the same ponderous postnatal gait.

I didn't want to go in and see to my child. The strangeness of what the diaper hid frightened me. I decided I'd go along to the duty room and say hi. With meticulous steps I approached. But there was no one there. I looked back down the corridor. It was quite a way to my room. Then the door opener buzzed at the entrance to the ward. I turned to see the door sweep open and one of the messy-haired women pass through it as if in slow motion.

"Hey!" I said. "You're not supposed to go out!"

I set off after her. I wanted to catch up with her. As I reached the door, another woman in a hospital gown appeared, bewildered-looking.

"Did you see where she went?" I asked.

She shook her head.

"She's not allowed out there—we must go after her."

She came with me.

We were in a big corridor now. There was no one else around. But we could see her in the distance. At strange zombie speed, with strange zombie steps, we went in pursuit. I could feel myself bleeding again. I was thirsty. There was such a strange light. The light of windowless hospital corridors.

When I was taken upstairs from the delivery room back to my own room, the porter had told me that I'd given birth in a part of the hospital that was built during the Cold War. I hadn't known that I'd given birth underground. But there were several floors down there that had been constructed to withstand a nuclear blast.

The woman we were chasing threw open a door and went through it. We kept going after her. My sidekick groaned softly. We entered another long corridor. It, too, was empty, though narrow and winding. The paint was flaking off the walls like skin. We came to another door, this one held ajar by a bucket. My fellow-pursuer slipped through the crack, and I followed, taking the bucket with me so that the door could close. We were out among the weird shrubs now. The messy-haired woman was still ahead of us. Between the low hedges I saw several other women, bandy-legged, in the same hospital gowns, their laborious way of walking revealing that they, too, had just given birth. We followed.

We came to a tall gable end of the hospital where the others had gathered. The bucket was heavy and the thin metal handle dug into my fingers. I realized now that the bucket was filled with a dull, white liquid, and I put it down. Other buckets also containing milk of lime had been put down all around us. The other women had already started, so we picked up brushes, some of which had long handles, others short, and began whitewashing the wall.

The gable end we were working on was enormous, with a single window high up the wall. Scrupulously we worked, the milk of lime splashing our faces. We bent over our buckets and huffed. Blood ran down our legs, soaking our saggy hospital socks and mingling with the white liquid on the ground. The red and the white couldn't agree, wouldn't mix, but wove together in long marbly rivulets. A strange fog came down around the gable end, whose maintenance was our responsibility.

The work made me dizzy. More than once I staggered, wiped the sweat from my brow. I fell, and was covered in the slimy milk of lime and blood. My face got wet.

One of the others reached out to help.

"Did you see my kid?" It was the woman from the kitchen.

All of a sudden I thought about my husband at home, the boys. I saw in my mind the unholy mess of their untidied rooms. A monstrous clutter of primary colors.

"Come with me," I said, grasping the woman's hand. I was tired. The alkaline milk of lime stung my skin. It occurred to me that whatever I did I mustn't lick my lips. We went back to the maternity ward without speaking. I showed her into my room.

"Here he is," I said, rolling the cot forward.

She was so remarkably clean. Not a single splash on her, of lime or blood. The child in the cot opened its dark eyes and looked at us. The woman picked him up and kissed him softly.

"He's lovely, but he's not mine. Mine's a girl."

"Mine, too," I said.

We looked at the boy. He sneezed.

Smiling, the woman placed him in the dirty-laundry bag.

We sat down. She on the bed. Me on a chair.

Time passed. Sunlight spilled in. We were waiting for him to start crying. It struck me that his skin required lotion. That he was surely dry on the outside, and inside, too.

The door opened and a porter came in. He emptied the waste bin, gathered up the laundry bag, and took it away.

The woman beamed from the bed.

"I'm very tired," I said. We fell asleep.

"You've lost a lot more blood than we're happy with," the doctor said, but released us nevertheless. The corridor was empty as we left. My husband drove the car. When we got to the house, I went straight upstairs for something to drink. The kitchen looked unchanged. My husband came in, carrying the child in the car seat, and I looked at him in fright. But he hadn't noticed anything, he didn't know the child and couldn't see it was the wrong one.

There was a strange sound, a gasp as I searched myself for the right feeling, but it was like clutching running water, and I realized then that I was laughing.

Every year, when May comes around, I wake up at about 4 A.M., confused by the light of the sky, as if the spring night concealed a day. The trees blossom in the street and I look at them through the window. I am an implement, a sweeping brush, who remembers the other child. It's like happiness. ♦

(Translated, from the Danish, by Martin Aitken.)

NEWYORKER.COM
Olga Ravn on the eerie side of childbirth.

AP

BOOKS

THE VOICE

Martin Luther King, Jr., and the perilous power of respectability.

BY KELEFA SANNEH

Not long ago, a Tennessee state representative named Justin J. Pearson delivered a familiar-sounding speech at a meeting of the Shelby County Board of Commissioners. Pearson had recently taken part in a gun-control protest on the floor of the state's House, in violation of legislative rules. He and a fellow-representative were expelled, but the commissioners in Shelby voted to reinstate him. Pearson is only twenty-eight, but his Afro evokes the Black Power era of the late nineteen-sixties, and the preacherly cadence he sometimes uses reaches back even further than that. "We look forward to continuing to fight, continuing to advocate, until justice rolls down like water, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream," he said at the meeting, thrusting his index finger for emphasis. He was quoting the Old Testament (Amos 5:24: "Let judgment run down as waters, and righteousness as a mighty stream"), but really he was quoting Martin Luther King, Jr., who put a version of that phrase at the center

Jonathan Eig's new biography captures King's enormously canny sense of theatre, his exacting attention to appearances.

of his speech at the 1963 March on Washington.

When King was assassinated, in 1968, he was generally viewed as a leader with a mixed record. President Lyndon B. Johnson had grown frustrated with him, and he was beset by detractors who found him either too much or not enough of a troublemaker; the year before, an article in *The New York Review of Books* had referred to his "irrelevancy." But in the years after his death the skeptics grew quieter and scarcer. In 1983, Ronald Reagan signed legislation creating Martin Luther King, Jr., Day, over the objection of twenty-two senators. And now, as national heroes of all sorts are being reassessed, the question is usually not whether King was great but, rather, which King was the greatest. The 2014 film "Selma" reverently dramatized his voting-rights activism; some people these days focus on his anti-poverty campaign and his opposition to the Vietnam War; others emphasize his advocacy of integration, and his vision of a time when Black children "will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character." The proof, and the price, of King's success is that everyone wants a piece of him.

The first biography of King was published in 1959, a few years after the Montgomery bus boycott, his first big victory. It was written by Lawrence D. Reddick, who was not a neutral observer—he had helped King write his first book, "Stride Toward Freedom." The historian David Levering Lewis published a thoughtful King biography in 1970, which captured the pessimistic mood that prevailed in the immediate aftermath of the assassination. Lewis portrayed King as a gifted preacher who "moralized the plight of the American black in simplistic and Manichaean terms" but "failed" in his broader effort to promote "economic and political reform." Between 1988 and 2006, Taylor Branch published the three-volume history "America in the King Years," which ran to nearly three thousand pages; in 1989, Branch was awarded a Pulitzer Prize. Rather than preëmpting future books about King, the trilogy seemed to inspire more of them. The latest is "King: A Life" (Farrar, Straus & Giroux), by Jonathan Eig, whose previous book was a biography of Muhammad Ali. Eig wants to give readers an alternative to the "defanged" version of King that endures in inspirational quotes. Eig's new sources include the latest batch of files released by the F.B.I., which was surveilling King even more closely than he suspected; notes from Reddick; and remembrances from King's widow, Coretta Scott King, who recorded her thoughts in the time after his killing. "The portrait that emerges here may trouble some people," Eig writes—the book recounts a number of King's affairs, as well as the allegation, from an F.B.I. report, that King was complicit in a sexual assault.

What Eig mostly provides, though, is a sober and intimate portrait of King's short life, and one that can't help but be admiring, given how much King accomplished, and how quickly he did so—he was thirty-nine was he was killed. Eig captures the ferocity of the forces that opposed King: dogs, bombs, Klansmen, and, above all, segregationists wielding legal and political authority. He also captures King's sense of theatre, his enormously canny ability to stage confrontations that heightened the contrast between the civil-rights movement and the people who wanted to stop it. King viewed nonviolent protest as both a moral imperative and a political winner, because it made protesters look good and segregationists look bad. This sense of how things would play on newspaper front pages and television screens, this exacting attention to appearances, marked King as a distinctly contemporary activist—a master of the viral moment. It also marked him as an unapologetic practitioner of what's now known as "respectability politics": the idea that a group is more likely to be treated with respect if its members behave respectably. Unlike King himself, respectability politics does not have a great reputation; the term is used primarily by critics of it who worry that this approach tends to "rationalize racism, sexism, bigotry, hate, and violence," in the words of one NPR report. This is the most paradoxical aspect of King's long, glorious afterlife: fifty-five years after his death, he is almost universally respected, but his lifelong devotion to the politics of respectability is not.

"Nepotism" would be an unduly censorious word for the family dynamic that shaped King's life, though not an inaccurate one. When he was born, in 1929, his maternal grandfather was the pastor of Ebenezer Baptist Church, an Atlanta institution. Two years later, his father took over, thereby becoming one of the most prominent Black leaders in the city. (At the time, King and his father were both named Michael; the father renamed them both a few years later, in honor of the German theologian.) King was born rich and famous, at least by the standards that prevailed in Atlanta's Black community. Eig writes that he and his siblings "were watched wherever they went and expected to behave." Accordingly, King was intent on living up to expectations. When he was eighteen, during the second of two summers that he spent in Connecticut picking tobacco, he and some friends were pulled over by the police during a night out. When he called home to tell his parents, he also told them, perhaps strategically, that he had decided to become a preacher, like his father.

He was clearly gifted, with a resonant voice and a knack for rhythm and repetition—Eig compares him to "a talented jazz musician," in part because he could make other people's riffs sound like his own. King collected an armful of college degrees, including a theology Ph.D. from Boston University which became a source of controversy in 1989, when researchers discovered that his dissertation was partially plagiarized. He could have accepted a position with his father at Ebenezer, but he chose instead to move to Montgomery, Alabama, where the Dexter Avenue Baptist Church was in search of a new leader.

King played no role in Rosa Parks's decision, in 1955, to refuse to relinquish her seat on a segregated bus, but shortly after she was arrested he joined local Black pastors who were organizing a bus boycott. He delivered his first real protest speech at a church meeting on December 5, 1955, employing those twin similes he later made famous. "We are determined here in Montgomery to work and fight until justice runs down like water, and righteousness like a mighty stream," he said. He was putting prophetic language in service of a proposal that was actually a compromise: a system of self-segregation, in which white and Black riders would have an equal chance to seat themselves, filling up the bus front to back and back to front, respectively. It was only after the compa-

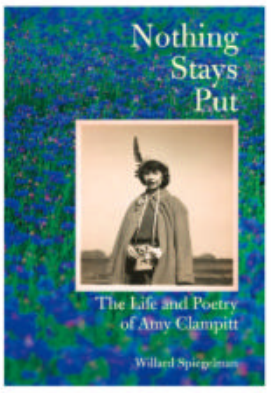
nies refused that King and his allies shifted to a demand—full integration—as bold and clear as his rhetoric.

The Montgomery boycott was impressive partly because of the efficiency with which King and other leaders mobilized to help boycotters get to and from work, and partly because of the astonishing abuse that they withstood, including a bombing at King's house. But the boycott may have been less consequential than the work of a team of lawyers, associated with the N.A.A.C.P., who sued the city on behalf of four Black bus riders who had been subject to segregation. The boycott put pressure on the city government, but it's unclear whether it influenced the two district-court judges who struck down the Montgomery ordinance requiring bus segregation, or the Supreme Court Justices who summarily affirmed that decision, ending the era of bus segregation. On December 20, 1956, King announced the Supreme Court's ruling by paraphrasing an old abolitionist preacher: he reassured his listeners, not for the last time, that "the arc of the moral universe, although long, is bending toward justice." The next morning, he became one of the first people to ride an integrated bus in Montgomery.

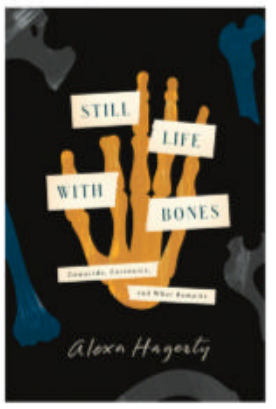
The triumph in Alabama transformed King from a local leader into a national figure, and in certain quarters a superhero—some of his allies turned the saga into a comic book, "Martin Luther King and the Montgomery Story," illustrated by Sy Barry, who went on to draw "The Phantom." Eig, in his biography, shows how King viewed Gandhi's ideas about nonviolence as an extension of the Christian ethic of sacrificial love. But there remains something mysterious and mesmerizing about King's calm certainty, which reproduced itself in the minds of his followers. In one of his most popular sermons, "Loving Your Enemies," King delivered a startling warning to anyone opposed to the liberation of Black people in America: "Be assured that we will wear you down by our capacity to suffer." Any ordinary leader can promise his followers deliverance; it takes an extraordinary one to promise them tribulation.

During a disappointing anti-segregation campaign in Albany, Georgia, in 1961, King encountered a wily chief of

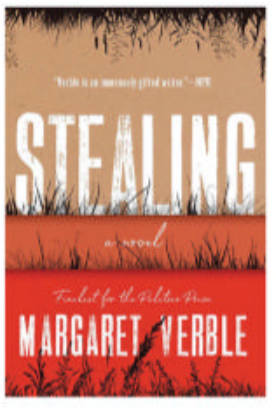
BRIEFLY NOTED



Nothing Stays Put, *by Willard Spiegelman (Knopf)*. America's preëminent late-bloomer poet, Amy Clampitt, published her first book in 1983, when she was sixty-three. This lucid biography tracks her path to eventual fame: her childhood as the bookish eldest daughter of Iowa Quakers; years of obscurity as a West Village bohemian, toiling under the mistaken belief that she was a novelist. Religious conversion (and, later, deconversion), activism, and finding love enriched Clampitt's life as she crept toward the erudite, lush poetry that dazzled readers. Spiegelman insists that much cannot be known about a poet so resolutely private, though he successfully evokes an artist with a will strong enough to endure decades of false starts.



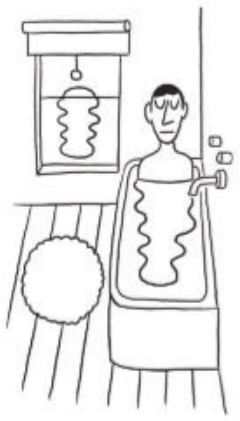
Still Life with Bones, *by Alexa Hagerty (Crown)*. In this meditative ethnography, a social anthropologist writes about conducting forensic work at mass graves in Guatemala and Argentina, and delicately explores the art, the science, and the sacredness of exhumation in the aftermath of genocide. In forensics, Hagerty writes, "bones shift between people and evidence" and "rattle like dice" as they gradually reveal an individual's story. She takes us through the histories of legendary forensics teams and resistance groups, relays testimony from family members of individuals who disappeared, and examines the prismatic nature of grief. Throughout the book, just as in forensics, "the ritual and the analytical buzz in electric proximity."



Stealing, *by Margaret Verble (Mariner)*. Set in the nineteen-fifties, this finely etched novel centers on Kit, who spent her early childhood living by the Arkansas River with her white father and Cherokee mother. After her mother died, of tuberculosis, things went awry, and Kit, now eleven, offers a written account "of this whole awful mess," which has led to her forced enrollment in a Christian boarding school. (Her relatives are "doing the fighting to get me out.") Kit's guileless narration betrays a precocious resolve and a dawning realization that lies can have the power of violence. "I am descended from people who survived the Trail of Tears," she says. "Those that gave up hope and stopped on the road died in the snow."

Hit Parade of Tears, *by Izumi Suzuki, translated from the Japanese by Sam Bett, David Boyd, Helen O'Horan, and Daniel Joseph (Verso)*. An icon of Japanese counterculture in the nineteen-seventies and eighties, Suzuki worked as an underground actor, posed for the erotic photographer Nobuyoshi Araki, and penned science-fiction stories, before killing herself at the age of thirty-six. This collection showcases her unique sensibility, which combined a punk aesthetic with a taste for the absurd. Her work—populated by misfits, loners, and femmes fatales alongside extraterrestrial boyfriends, intergalactic animal traffickers, and murderous teen-agers with E.S.P.—wryly blurs the boundary between earthly delinquency and otherworldly phenomena. As one character puts it, "Some wackjobs think they're living in a science-fiction world."

police, Laurie Pritchett, who understood his strategy; after King was arrested, Pritchett arranged to have someone pay his bail, so that he would be involuntarily released. "These fellows respond better when I am in jail," King said, years later, referring to the politicians he was trying to pressure. In Birmingham, he had a better—that is, worse—adversary: Bull Connor, the city's public-safety commissioner, who kept King imprisoned long enough to compose "Letter from Birmingham Jail," his most celebrated essay, and whose brutal tactics were captured in a widely circulated photograph of a police dog lunging at a fifteen-year-old boy. King and his allies recruited children to their protests, on the theory that they could go to jail without missing work. In "Eyes on the Prize," the indispensable public-television documentary from 1987, one of King's allies, the Reverend James Bevel, recalled borrowing a police bullhorn to calm rowdy demonstrators, because he wanted to avert a riot. "If you're not going to respect policemen, you're not going to be in the movement," he told them.



For King, the civil-rights movement consisted of almost nothing but difficult choices. (The strategy of keeping adults out of jail by sending kids in their stead was controversial then, and would probably be even more controversial now.) What's amazing is how, in the course of a decade, he got so many of them right, relying more on instinct than on any formal decision-making process within his organization, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference. In 1963, he pressed ahead with the March on Washington, even though President John F. Kennedy told him that it was "a great mistake," and the result was the most celebrated demonstration in American history. He was at the White House when President Johnson signed the 1964 Civil Rights Act, but still risked upsetting Johnson by protesting the disenfranchisement of Black voters in Selma, Alabama; the protests spurred the enactment of the 1965 Voting Rights Act. At one point, King wrote to a friend, half complaining, "People will be expecting me to pull rabbits out of my hat for the rest of my life."

Thirty years ago, a scholar named Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham published "Righteous Discontent," a great book about a different group of Black Baptist leaders. Higginbotham told the story of the Church's Women's Convention, which was founded in 1900 and became one of the most effective Black advocacy organizations in the country. Higginbotham noticed that the group's appeals combined "conservative" and "radical" rhetoric, and her book popularized a term for this approach: "the politics of respectability." It was a wide-ranging strategy, encompassing everything from legal work to children's toys—the Convention sold Black dolls, meant to "represent the intelligent and refined Negro of today," as opposed to the "disgraceful and humiliating type that we have been accustomed to seeing black dolls made of." The women who led this movement valued good behavior for its own sake. (One spoke about "the poison generated by jazz music and improper dancing.") But they also viewed it as a tool to use in their struggle for equality. Higginbotham quoted the minutes from a 1910 meeting, in which the leaders acknowledged that "a certain class of whites" was refusing to make space for Black passengers to sit down on streetcars, and urged Black passengers not to try and squeeze in. The advice took the form of a moral commandment: "Let us at all times and on all occasions, remember that the quiet, dignified individual who is respectful to others is after all the superior individual, be he black or white."

Often, Higginbotham noted, respectability politics meant encouraging "middle-class ideals and aspirations" among the broader Black public. If propriety was part of the solution to Black oppression, then perhaps impropriety was part of the problem. "Respectability's emphasis on individual behavior served inevitably to blame blacks for their victimization and, worse yet, to place an inordinate amount of blame on black women," Higginbotham wrote. (A Women's Convention report from 1913 declared that Black women who failed to run orderly households were "an enemy to the race.") But Higginbotham concluded that these tactics were effective, and probably indispensable. "The politics of respectability afforded black church women a powerful weapon of resistance to race and gender subordination," she wrote. The notion of respectability may have been entangled with these oppressions, too—but, then, so was everything else.

This is the Black Baptist world that King was born into: his mother, Alberta Williams King, was the organ player at Ebenezer and served for more than a decade as the president of the church's Women's Committee. (In 1974, she was playing the organ when a deranged worshipper shot and killed her.) Like the Black Baptist women who helped pave his way, King stressed the importance of "dignified" behavior; he knew that claims of Black incivility or criminality were often used to justify segregation. During the Montgomery boycott, organizers trained activists to be polite, to avoid confrontation, and not to respond in kind when they were cursed at, as they almost always were. And when King announced the boycott's end he urged his supporters to respond with "calm dignity and wise restraint," stressing that "if we become victimized with violent intents, we will have walked in vain." King was a towering political figure, but he was also a pastor, necessarily concerned with personal virtue as well as social change. In 1957, addressing a crowd of demonstrators in Washington, he delivered a rousing speech centered on a firm demand: "Give us the ballot." But, even then, he added a note of rebuke, warning of the danger of resentment. "If we will become bitter and indulge in hate campaigns," he said, "the new order which is emerging will be nothing but a duplication of the old order." This was political advice, calculated to keep the support of white moderates, but it was also spiritual advice: a way of urging the activists in the crowd to be guided by the force of agape, or Christian love, and to conduct themselves accordingly.

King knew that the appearance of propriety was especially important for someone in his position. According to some of his friends, including Harry Belafonte, the love of King's life was Betty

Moitz, a white woman whom he dated while at seminary, in Pennsylvania; King's father was one of many people who told him that an interracial marriage would fatally compromise his ability to be a leader, and the couple split before he graduated. He met Coretta in Boston, where she was a conservatory student. He was, of course, a great talker, and she did not recoil when he asked her if she thought that she could be a "good preacher's wife." This was an important church role, although not a coequal one, and Coretta later remembered that King once explained the difference in stark terms. "You see, I am called," he told her, "and you aren't." One of King's associates, Hosea Williams, reported that King could be cruel to Coretta—he recalled hearing him tell her to "shut up" on numerous occasions. And King's constant travel would have been difficult for her even if he had been faithful.

Some of King's associates knew about his affairs, and so did the F.B.I. During one of King's trips to New York, the Bureau recorded him speaking to women in four different cities. Among the women in King's life was Georgia Davis Powers, who later became the first woman and the first Black person elected to the Kentucky Senate, and who published a memoir in 1995 that detailed her relationship with King. She thought that they were merely friends and allies until the day King's brother, A.D., told her, "Martin has been thinking about you since you last met." Eig's book makes clear just how closely the F.B.I. was watching King, apparently in the hope of collecting enough damaging information to prosecute him, intimidate him, or drive him to suicide. (William C. Sullivan, the head of domestic intelligence, sent King audio recordings of him with women, along with a note that said, "There is but one way out for you.") The Bureau's vendetta against King inevitably affects the way we view its report that, one night in early 1964, a pastor friend of King's "forcibly raped" a woman during a hotel gathering; a handwritten addendum specifies that "King looked on, laughed, and offered advice." The report is based on audio recordings that are due to be made public in 2027, and which may help us better understand how wide the gap between the public and the private King really was.

The criticism of respectability politics goes beyond the inevitable accusations of hypocrisy. Ideas about who was and who wasn't respectable helped shape the leadership of King's movement, and sometimes constrained it. The activist and organizer Ella Baker served as the interim executive director of the S.C.L.C. in the late fifties, but said that she was never allowed to function as a true leader there, because "masculine and ministerial ego" prevented it. Bayard Rustin, one of the architects of the civil-rights movement, was widely known to be gay, and in 1960, after Representative Adam Clayton Powell, Jr., threatened to spread a false rumor that King and Rustin were lovers, King accepted Rustin's resignation from the S.C.L.C. This, perhaps, was respectability politics at its most coldly political and its least preacherlike. (King did not appear to have strong convictions about homosexuality.) King wanted to make sure that his movement commanded broad respect, so he had to pay close attention to what was considered respectable.

In the years after Higginbotham's book came out, the phrase "respectability politics" entered common usage, often as a way to describe Black luminaries and leaders who urged other

"You know what they say: if you can make it here, it doesn't really matter, because you'll never save enough to retire anyway."

Black people to behave better—to be worthy heirs of King's legacy. In "The Price of the Ticket: Barack Obama and the Rise and Decline of Black Politics" (2012), for example, the political scientist Fredrick C. Harris chastised Hampton University, a historically Black institution, for prohibiting its business-school students from wearing "braids, dreadlocks, and other unusual hairstyles"—a way of "policing the personal behavior of 'wayward' blacks." Harris and others also criticized Bill Cosby, who in a 2004 speech pronounced that "the lower-economic and lower-middle-economic people are not holding their end in this deal," and President Obama, who declared, during his 2008 campaign, that in Black communities "too many fathers" had "abandoned their responsibilities, acting like boys instead of men." Harris thought that this kind of focus on personal responsibility made it sound as if Black people no longer faced "social barriers," and so made it harder to dismantle those barriers.

Most politicians find it useful to deliver occasional admonitions amid all the promises. These leaders probably overestimate the effect of their moral exhortations. But critics of respectability politics probably do, too. Was Obama's Presidency really hobbled by his promotion of family values, or by his infrequent remarks about the problems he saw in a community that he regarded as his own? The Black legal scholar Randall Kennedy has written perceptively in defense of what he calls "progressive black respectability politics," insisting that Black people ought to have high hopes and high standards, for both themselves and their country. In the Black Lives Matter era, respectability politics has returned in a more upbeat and perhaps more patronizing form, with proliferating celebrations of "Black girl magic" and "Black excellence." (The idea, it sometimes seems, is to do what parents are nowadays taught to do: praise the good behavior and ignore the bad.) And platforms like Twitter have made it easy to call out people who fail to hold respectable opinions or to use respectable language. Eschewing respectability politics altogether would mean ceasing to have strong views about how other people should behave, which would require even more self-control than King asked of his followers.

Respectability is an enduring concept, but a shifting one: you can disapprove of King's infidelity and also lament the way Rustin was treated, just as you can find a ban on dreadlocks to be ill-judged without opposing dress codes altogether. In the years after the passage of the Voting Rights Act, King found that his lifelong devotion to respectability may have cost him the respect of a new generation of leaders and followers. In 1967, Kwame Ture and Charles V. Hamilton published "Black Power: The Politics of Liberation," which argued that the civil-rights movement was over, and deservedly so. "The traditional approaches failed," they wrote, adding that "black people must make demands without regard to their initial 'respectability,' precisely because 'respectable' demands have not been sufficient." This had become the conventional wisdom; the year before, the *Times* had announced, on its front page, that "the civil rights movement is falling into increasing disarray." Major riots in Los Angeles, in 1965, and in Detroit and Newark, in 1967, were doubly damaging to King, linking his movement to violence while also illustrating the limits of his control over it. For his part, King widened his campaign, publicly opposing the Vietnam War, which he had previously declined to criticize, and taking aim less at specific laws than at poverty and inequality more broadly. "Racism is genocide," King said at a press conference in Chicago, where he discovered that it was much easier to galvanize resistance to a cruel police chief than to a faceless landlord accused of neglecting his property. King's opposition to the Vietnam War, in particular, alienated President Johnson, and many of the moderates who had supported King's earlier campaigns. "I figure I was politically unwise but morally wise," King said, and the fact that he felt he had to choose between these two different kinds of wisdom was itself proof that his options were narrowing.

In Eig's book, King's death feels foreordained, and perhaps it felt that way to him, too. He had been not just threatened and bombed but also punched in the face (by a white man affiliated with the American Nazi Party) and stabbed in the chest (by a Black woman who was, in King's word, "demented"); as a teen-ager, he had attempted suicide, and as an adult he was hospitalized a number of times for what was usually described as "exhaustion," though many who knew him said that he struggled with depression. Despite these portents, it's still disquieting to read his death-haunted final speech, delivered in Memphis, where he was supporting striking sanitation workers. "Like anybody, I would like to live a long life," he said. "Longevity has its place. But I'm not concerned about that now." The next night, on his motel balcony, King was shot by James Earl Ray, a convicted felon and a committed segregationist. King was pronounced dead at a local hospital, about an hour later.

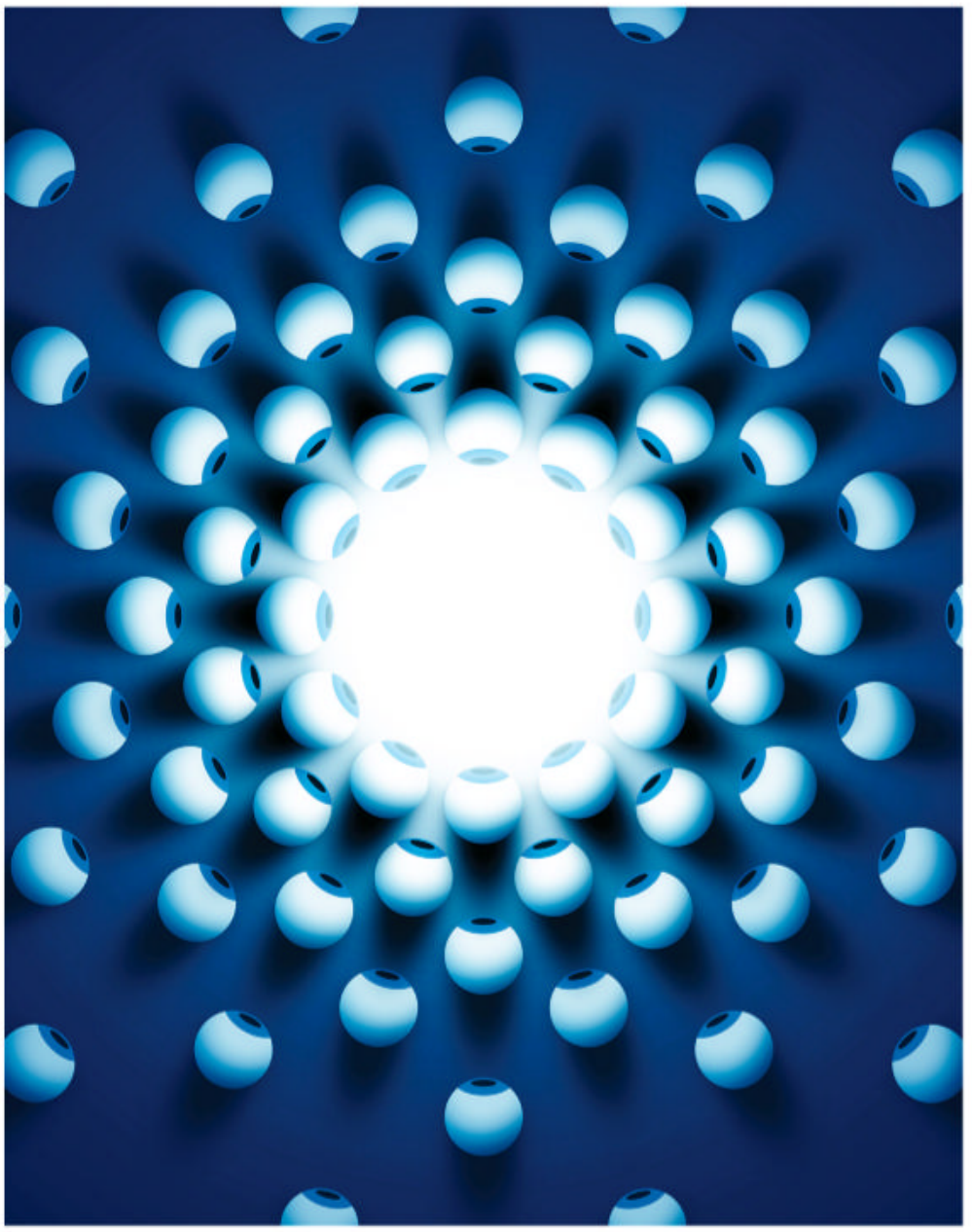
To many Black Power advocates, King's Christian faith in the curvature of the moral universe seemed naïve. What proof is there that stoic suffering and good behavior will bring justice closer? King's speeches often relied on anaphora, which could have hypnotic power. "How long? Not long," he said, over and over again, addressing a crowd in Selma, in 1965. "How long? Not long, because mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord." This was a rousing message of determination, and maybe also an acknowledgment that even an extraordinary leader can't ask his followers to suffer with dignity indefinitely. King's version of nonviolence really was radical: he persuaded people not only to forswear rioting or bad behavior but to forswear self-defense—and willingly allow themselves to be jailed, beaten, maybe even killed. This political strategy probably had an expiration date; King's early success created a sense of accelerating progress that was impossible to sustain.

Yet even now many political leaders find themselves inspired by King's language, and by his ability to frame political conflicts in a way that made it obvious which side was deserving of respect and which was not. The idea of King as a failure has not aged well: it is hard to argue that the civil-rights leaders who came after him were more effective. In the years since his assassination, we have found different ways to define "respectable," and different forms of respectability politics. But it's still not clear that we have learned to live without it. ♦

CLICK-WITTED

Ben Smith's adventures in Web traffic.

BY NATHAN HELLER



In the social-media age, the battle for attention became a free-for-all.

ILLUSTRATION BY MATT CHASE

Three hilarious things that made jaws drop in the twenty-tens:

1. John Travolta mounted the Oscars stage, looked into the camera, and introduced a performance by a singer whose name he invented on the spot.

2. Millions of people posted videos in which they doused themselves with ice-cold water to raise funds for motor-neuron disease.

3. According to a media report, there existed a video of the President-elect instructing well-hydrated strangers to urinate onto his hotel bed.

The so-called "pee tape" was said to show Donald Trump's berth being widdled on by sex workers at the Ritz-Carlton in Moscow, and its alleged existence had come to light in a thirty-five-page dossier compiled by Christopher Steele, a former M.I.6 officer, who suggested that the Kremlin held the tape as *kompromat* against the man with curious hair. The file referenced other points of purported Russian influence. Its publication, in January, 2017, planted the unsettling suggestion that the next President of the United States lived under the thumb of a foreign government.

The decision to publish the Steele dossier originated with the reporter Ben Smith, then the editor-in-chief of BuzzFeed News and now the author of an illuminating book, "Traffic" (Penguin Press), about the rise of online traffic-chasing as a twenty-first-century media norm. In Smith's telling, the laws of Web traffic, shaped by social media and their ability to disseminate material at exponential, "viral" rates, unseated old power structures. An old news outlet held its authority by retaining a fixed audience and standing on its record of success. A new one, such as BuzzFeed News, won largely by being linkable and first.

When it came to the Steele dossier, which a number of news organizations had in hand, Smith's concern that someone else would beat him to the link made him feel physically unwell. His site wanted the traffic. And, when the CNN anchor Jake Tapper summarized the contents on air one day, Smith knew that viewers would be Googling for the goods. He and his colleagues, snatching the keyboard back and forth, composed a brief introduction that noted the dossier's "specific, unverified, and potentially unverifiable allegations," then posted the document itself, in PDF form. In his book, Smith recalls meditating on "the viral power of an object . . . something that readers would fixate on and pass hand to hand."

That many of the dossier's lurid claims were indeed unconfirmable and, after a litigation storm that boosted Trump's position, got dismissed from serious discussion (if not from serious nightmares) only shows the high stakes of the transformation under way. Tapper, Smith notes, "was furious at me, but his decision to report on the existence of the Dossier made our choice both inevitable and easier to explain." In the twenty-first century, the laws of traffic make demands, and we just follow.

Smith's story grows from the rise of two figures, whom he presents as consummate outsiders eager to uncover traffic's social secrets. One is Jonah Peretti, a dyslexic kid with a "laughing California calm," who, studying advertising from an anti-consumerist perspective in grad school, at M.I.T., inadvertently went viral with a prank in protest of Nike's sweatshop policies. (It was 2001; his viral moment began with forwarded e-mails.) The experience gave him a taste for the power of "direct action" online. It also left him, Smith writes, fascinated by the

"tides of human attention." Peretti stumbled into a job building the nascent Huffington Post, a site founded as a liberal riposte to Matt Drudge's conservative news aggregator, the Drudge Report. When the Huffington Post had traffic troubles, Peretti set up a Skunk Works laboratory for the study of online viral behavior. In 2006, this side project mounted its own Web site, as a kind of showroom, and went on to produce a widget on the Huffington Post, under the name BuzzFeed.

The other figure is Nick Denton, the founder of the online Gawker Media network, which across the two-thousands grew to include the feminist site Jezebel, the Beltway site Wonkette, and the sports site Deadspin, among others. Denton, a deracinated Brit who had drifted from a foreign-correspondent posting to the first tech boom, had earned a reputation both as an editorial pioneer, who had brought witty writing to the young world of blogs, and as a venal misanthrope, a St. Aubyn character with an ethernet cable who pushed those blogs to cruel extremes of disclosure. He launched the Gawker Stalker feature, which revealed the whereabouts of well-known people. His sites publicly outed executives, including Peter Thiel, as gay, and published sex tapes, nude selfies, and other specimens of dubious news value. This was, Smith writes, in the name of knocking the rich and powerful off their steeds—a mission that Denton pursued with zeal long after he was rich and powerful himself. But it was also in the name of traffic. In 2007, Denton began paying his bloggers bonuses based on their posts' page views. "Traffic, after all, was basically money," Smith writes.

What made the Gawker Media sites influential was partly the distinctive register of their writing—which practically invented the funny, histrionically jaded brand of irony then known as snark—and partly the way they assembled scattered subcultures into cohesive worlds. Gawker was a media blog, and it covered the deskbound realm of editors and assistants the way tabloids covered the British Royal Family, in a preposterous yet aggrandizing narrative of batty choices and bad parties. Denton believed in the power of writing to create "community," and such engagement, he thought, showed in page views. Public attention settled questions of editorial quality: if it was good, you'd see it in the numbers. And, by the same calculus, anything that moved the numbers must be good.

Denton and Peretti rose concurrently on their sites' viral successes, even as, in Smith's telling, they had opposing understandings of what traffic meant. Denton sought consistent numbers over time: a sign of editorial quality and a community of readers. Peretti sought one-off successes, with no eye to "taste or quality or brand or consistency" but with a keen awareness of emotional response. You click to make yourself feel a certain way. You share to make yourself seem a particular way to others. Traffic was pushing buttons and pulling levers: a machine that could be mastered.

That was the principle behind BuzzFeed, which peeled off from the Huffington Post in 2008. It included lots of lists, ranging from "25 Ways to Tell You're a Kid of the '90s" (clicks for nostalgia, shares for identity) to "40 of the Most Powerful Photographs Ever Taken" (including images from prison camps). There were headlines designed to pique idle curiosity ("48 Things That Will Make You Feel Old") alongside plays for extreme emotion ("Hungry New York Families Dig Food Out of Dumpsters After Sandy"). Long after Peretti stopped posting prolifically under his own name, he contributed posts from alias accounts to experiment with new gambits or headline variations, trying to see what made the numbers run.

By the end of the decade, Peretti had come up with a bag of tricks: linking to authoritative sites, to raise a page's position in the Google rankings; keyword tagging, including common misspellings, to catch all searches; the inclusion of searchable proper nouns in headlines. He was becoming the toast of the tech world, and, more quietly, of publishing, which saw, in these manipulations, ways to bring its numbers up.

I was a junior employee at a Web magazine at that point, and I recall being summoned one morning to an editorial meeting where Peretti was to be our guest. Peretti, a tall, moist-haired young man, gave a spiel about optimizing pages for "viral lift," about trying many different wordings and running with whatever drove traffic the most. I remember having the powerful feeling that this was not what I'd got into the writing business to do. But I also remember that, after his visit, many things at our magazine changed. Keywords now had to be packaged with articles. Hyperlinking became antic, and headlines, the clever composition of which had been an intramural sport among editors (a storied favorite, for a dispatch from the Michael Jackson trial: "He Never Laid a Glove on Me!"), became things like "The Haunting, Unexpected Revelations from the Third Day of the Michael Jackson Trial (Video)." For a while, this Perettian tinkering was our special knowledge, our competitive advantage. Then it was everywhere.

Once, a magazine like this one was responsible for three tasks. It had to create original material to sustain its community of readers. It had to distribute itself, through marketing and deliveries. And it had to sell advertising on the basis of that audience's perceived nature and number. The tasks easily rested against one another, like three muskets by the fire. Publications were able to control their destiny as much as anyone in the dark woods.

Then came Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Pinterest—the social-media charge. These platforms allowed users to get into the distribution game themselves. Suddenly, all it took to reach an audience was pasting a link into a box. A story that went viral on social media often reached more people than a publication's distribution networks could. In the short term, that offered gains, but in the long run it created devastating advertising losses. Why stick your billboard at the end of Newsweek Lane when it could stand beside the exit on the Facebook highway that leads there and to many other places?

Now publications were obliged to lean the musket they still carried—producing original material—against distribution and advertising models run by

social media. People described those new distribution methods as democratization. Rather than relying on professional editors to pick what was worth your time, you could now spend hours reading prose or watching home movies by hobbyists across the world. But algorithms—which is to say, the platforms—still held control, and, except for a few influencer celebrities getting direct brand sponsorships, the money followed a corporate path, too. On the whole, these shifts in the cash flow turned out poorly for creative people.

That is the economic story of publishing in the age of Web traffic, but Smith's insights concern mostly the editorial story, about the way that traffic-chasing changed media coverage. He had come to BuzzFeed from Politico, a magazine that made its digital name with lively, first-rate, fire-hose reporting aimed at political junkies. He seems to have recognized earlier than his bosses that many of these junkies were drinking from his Twitter feed at least as much as from the magazine, and that knowledge changed his working methods: "My brain had been pretty well rewired. I spent my distracted days only half listening to the people I was talking to, or the politicians I was covering. What was happening on Twitter often felt more real than the person in front of me."

When Peretti courted Smith about a BuzzFeed job, they "parted in a state of mutual incomprehension." Smith understood the value of buzz-feeding, but not Peretti's fascination with the machine aspects of traffic. He declined the job. Everyone, including his wife, told him that this was a mistake. The opportunity, it was explained to him, was about "big stories, and scoops, spreading around the internet," using that site's tools. Smith backpedalled and pitched himself for the position he'd turned down.

"BuzzFeed has the structure and the tone of a website that could be central to people's lives," he wrote Peretti. "But it's built on sharing everything BUT the big stuff." Load the trailer with valuable cargo instead of chintzy toys and you could do real business. Their collaboration put media's editing and distribution operations together again.

When Smith created BuzzFeed News, he took the form from his Politico blog: "a mere repository for things I hoped would go viral on Twitter. The little scoops that insiders would share and the articles with more cultural resonance, all chewed up into Twitter-size, context-free fragments." He hired eager young whippersnappers and accelerated his news-gathering operations to a blur. When, during the election year of 2012, Smith called a reporter to tell her she was now on the Rick Santorum beat, she pulled her car over to the side of the road, visited Wikipedia to see who Santorum was, and changed direction. He explains:

> As older news organizations wrung their hands about whether they should allow journalists to waste their paid time and energy typing on someone else's platform, we dived into it gleefully. I told my reporters, a group of hungry kids excited at the opportunity to compete with their pompous elders, that I didn't want a story that didn't live on Twitter. One reporter, Zeke Miller, was simply the fastest tweeter on the draw, which was actually enough to get attention back then, copying and pasting a press release headline before anyone else.

Everything fast had to get faster. Value emerged only on Twitter. A person doing serious political coverage at an outlet known for which-Disney-character-are-you quizzes is presumably in the business of making distinctions, and Smith doesn't shy from reminding his readers how his fiefdom was different from Peretti's prankish domain. (When Smith published his first post, on January 1, 2012, the Web-page formatting went awry: BuzzFeed had never printed a full paragraph before.) But the marriage wasn't just one of convenience. BuzzFeed and BuzzFeed News shared a conviction that winning the attention game was a media company's first priority, and went to bat for each other. In 2015, when BuzzFeed posted what became its best-known viral feat—a photograph of a dress that looked blue and black to some viewers and gold and white to others—Smith abandoned his son mid-fairy tale "to frantically assign more stories to capture what I knew would be a flood of traffic."

The speed and volume made a lot of intersections dangerous. In October, 2012, one of Denton's sites posted a sex tape of the former professional wrestler known as Hulk Hogan, accompanied by a thousand-word rumination on the proceedings. (Smith, possibly typing in a fugue state, likens it to the work of Ernest Hemingway.) When Hogan sued, the litigation dragged on; at trial, in 2016, he was awarded a hundred and forty million dollars, driving Gawker Media into bankruptcy and forcing Denton to sell. Peter Thiel revealed himself as the funder of Hogan's suit. By then, the weather of the blogosphere had changed. "Peretti's craving for the

quick viral fix will not be satisfied by the nourishing fare," Denton had predicted of BuzzFeed News, but it was his approach that faltered first.

BuzzFeed's rise is the crucial turn in Smith's account of the traffic chase. It is also when, more than a third of the way into the book, our previously cool, omniscient narrator suddenly shows up as a character with his hands on the wheel. The effect is jarring, prompting questions about perspective in the narrative to that point, especially because Smith's storytelling is buffed and upbeat. Young outsiders here glow with ambition and set off in junky cars: Denton drives "his blue Mazda across the border to cover the violent Romanian revolution"; Drudge builds his empire while driving a "shitty little red Geo Metro"; Peretti, following a windfall, treats himself to "a new Honda Odyssey." The vehicles allude to a certain leadership canon—Jeff Bezos likes to talk about driving his Chevy Blazer across the country to found Amazon; much has been made of Mark Zuckerberg's Honda Fit—and are a genre giveaway. What Smith has written is a Builder Bio: a story of scrappy oddball heroes with one weird business idea who gather the gang, suffer the slings and midnight crises of entrepreneurship, and, to the chagrin of the stuffed shirts, emerge powerful and rich and mysteriously well groomed. (Drudge in full bloom is said to be "almost absurdly fit.") Chris Poole, who founded 4chan, a platform that has hosted bomb threats, child pornography, and snuff photography, is described in just one paragraph as "sweet," "handsome," "productive," and "hot." In Smith's telling, it is Denton's loss of the killer instinct—not his exercise of that instinct in the first place—that caused his empire to fall.

The villains are exactly where you'd expect to find them, and, when they show up, farty tuba music plays. Andrew Breitbart, the longtime Drudge Report deputy who simultaneously worked behind the scenes at the Huffington Post, is variously described as "fat and stressed," a "pudgy fire starter," "a frenetic, overweight fleabag of a man," "a hyperkinetic embodiment of attention deficit disorder," and a "hyperactive pigpen of a right-wing lunatic, whose belly hung out from underneath his ratty T-shirt." Breitbart died in 2012, before his eponymous Web site of conspiracy and defamation experienced its flytrap efflorescence, so he is not in a position to respond, but it is safe to say that most people, no matter where their pitchforks point, will find what they want here. A cynic could posit that Smith's approach to narrative—the cross-cutting chronological march, the relatability of the principals, the greasepaint on the easy villains—is prepackaged for a streaming-media series, as everything now seems to be. But I suspect a more organic route. Figuring out what gets people going, and providing more of it than they asked for, is at the heart of what successful journalism in the age of traffic is about.

Perhaps the keenest insight in this book concerns the way that traffic-chasing helped create the MAGA right. In Smith's telling, it is not coincidental that Andrew Breitbart spent three months working with Peretti at the Huffington Post, a publication that, in 2008, got behind Barack Obama rather than Hillary Clinton partly because Peretti had identified Obama as a traffic booster. The extraordinary digital success that Obama's campaign went on to enjoy, Smith suggests, rose in part from "the new way of thinking about people that came when you saw them as traffic—measuring interest and intent, and channeling it into action." Or, to put it more directly, traffic wasn't just business; it was politics.

The opportunity was not lost on Breitbart, and it was not lost on Steve Bannon, who "surveyed the left-wing media landscape for things to copy" and marked Peretti as "a genius." In 2012, Smith himself hired an ultraconservative writer named Benny Johnson because he represented "an untapped new well of traffic, a new identity to plumb." Johnson ("handsome, clean-shaven, and earnest") had distinguished himself with a post about a National Rifle Association convention which, in Smith's view, "took the BuzzFeed formula—a list of fun, emotionally resonant images—to gun culture." He was eventually fired for plagiarism, but not before settling into a proto-MAGA formula built around the idea that the media were dangerously liberal and couldn't be trusted.

When one of BuzzFeed's famous quizzes went buggy and complaints went viral, Facebook—now more BuzzFeedy than BuzzFeed—liked what it saw. "If we saw good-natured complaints on our Facebook page, Facebook saw something else: engagement," Smith writes. "It didn't really matter what people were saying. What mattered was that they were talking at all." The engagement doctrine, in his view, changed the political climate. "Trump wasn't *doing* anything to game Facebook," he writes. "He simply *was* what Facebook liked." In the midst of the 2016 campaign, Smith had a chat with Bannon:

> Breitbart hadn't just chosen Trump, he told me, based on the candidate's political views. Bannon and his crew had seen the energy Trump carried, the engagement he'd driven, and attached themselves to it. BuzzFeed, in Bannon's view, had failed to recognize that Bernie Sanders could generate the same energy, the same engagement. Why hadn't we gone all in for Bernie?

"I told you—some people are lost without the rehearsal."

Peretti asked him the same thing. Smith responded by invoking BuzzFeed News's "journalistic scruples."

Smith is a reporter of rare talent, but self-examination has not emerged as his superpower. In the case of Benny Johnson, Smith's error, in his eyes, was not hiring a guy who made "fun, emotionally resonant images" from a gun convention but letting his eyes "skate over" plainly racist Johnson posts, such as "Don't Miss the Connection: Obama 'Delivered' to Office by Black Panthers, Holder 'Owes Them Some Favors.'" As for the unverified Steele dossier, he suggests that he would publish it again. He has no patience with the idea that the responsible thing for a news organization to do with salacious information of unconfirmed veracity is frequently nothing. His great regret, he writes, is publishing the dossier as a PDF. That let it travel on its own, without BuzzFeed's caveats, and without bringing his site all the traffic it pulled in.

The long story that Smith traces, from the open Internet of Peretti's early high jinks to today's atomized and factionalized splinternet, was shaped by the demands of business strategy. At BuzzFeed's height, at the start of the twenty-tens, the traffic rush was a gold rush; Disney made an offer to buy the outlet for as much as six hundred and fifty million dollars, and was spurned. By the end of the decade, traffic had become most powerful as a tool to form political identity, knocking BuzzFeed's ideological hodgepodge of emotion-stirring posts from the Zeitgeist. In 2018, the site spent three hundred and eighty-six million dollars to earn revenue of three hundred and seven million dollars, and started laying off employees. To live in traffic is to live under the rules of the platforms that run traffic, and though this revelation seems to have come astonishingly late to Smith—"perhaps Jonah and I, thinking of ourselves as protagonists, had been passing through someone else's story," he remarks—it's the biggest moral of the tale that he tells. Two weeks ago, Peretti announced that he was shutting down BuzzFeed News, which by then had won a Pulitzer Prize and nurtured a generation of fine journalists, the luckiest of whom had begun, like Smith himself, to scatter to the *Times* and other places.

I say that these journalists were lucky, because the *Times* and an ever-shrinking number of other institutional outlets have flourished with a broad-church approach; their cooking and puzzle franchises, for example, help to subsidize costly foreign reporting. (Smith wrote an excellent media column for the *Times* for two years, before moving on again, in 2022, to co-found a new site, Semafor, which focusses on global news and audiences.) This has kept work and careers whole. Reading "Traffic," I experienced a lot of whatever-happened-to moments; many stars of the early blogosphere have yet to find a worthy home elsewhere.

At the online magazine where I worked, the measure of success in traffic-seeking kept changing. The goal was at first to maximize the number of unique page views by publishing more material. Then instructions came down that what mattered was not volume but authority (other reliable sites linking to us), and we were instructed to reach out to eminent bloggers to promote our wares. After some months of this, it was decided that, in fact, the most valuable measure of traffic was engagement (how long readers spent reading our articles); our brief was to do work that was longer, better, and nearer the headlines of the day. When that approach, too, generated insufficient revenue, volume was summoned as the solution once again.

The media business has since made at least one more complete turn on this traffic roundabout in the hope of stabilizing its future. (The line is usually that the last model "isn't how the Web works.") And the will to traffic is now everywhere: on your phone, in your ears, on your screen. In dreamy moods, I sometimes fantasize about journalism dropping out of the game—not chasing traffic, not following this year's wisdom, not offering audiences everything they could possibly want in hastiest form. Imagine producing as little as you could as best you could: it would be there Monday, when the week began, and there Friday, the tree standing after the storm. And imagine the audience's pleasure at finding it, tall and expansive and waiting for a sunny day. In an age of traffic, such deliberateness could be radical. It could be, I think, the next big thing. ♦

MUSICAL EVENTS

CAVE ART

The Louisville Orchestra goes underground with Yo-Yo Ma.

BY ALEX ROSS

The cellist has been performing at various national parks.

To understand why Louisville, Kentucky, has a lofty status in the world of contemporary classical composition—a status reaffirmed the other day, when Yo-Yo Ma and the Louisville Orchestra presented a première inside Mammoth Cave, Kentucky's chief natural wonder—you have to go back to 1948, when a singular character named Charles Farnsley became the city's mayor. Deceptively folksy in manner, Farnsley professed nostalgia for the Confederacy and sported a Southern gentleman's string tie. At the same time, he gravitated toward the progressive wing of the Democratic Party, dismantling aspects of segregation and promoting adult education. Most unusually, he adored modern classical music—the more dissonant the better. A writer for *High Fidelity* visited him in 1953 and found him demonstrating Ampex tape recorders at the public library. "Play me some Stravinsky and Villa-Lobos and some Edgard Varèse, boys," he hollered.

In 1948, the Louisville Orchestra, which had been founded eleven years earlier, was in financial crisis. Farnsley, who had audited classes with the émigré Jewish-German musicologist Gerhard Herz, at the University of Louisville, offered a radical suggestion: Why not use some of the money that had been slated for celebrity soloists to instead commission new works? Supporting composers, Farnsley said, would be "a much greater, more lasting service to music." More practically, he believed that such a policy would attract national press and boost the city's profile. He even spoke of establishing a record label, which, he thought, would drum up revenue. Robert Whitney, the orchestra's gifted and furiously hard-working young music director, endorsed the plan, although he wondered whether the audience would be able to keep up with Farnsley's enthusiasms. The mayor, one associate reported, "doesn't like any music that was written before 1920."

Thus began the Louisville revolution, which riveted the classical world in the nineteen-fifties. After a decade, the orchestra had commissioned a hundred and thirty-two scores and recorded about a hundred. No American ensemble had ever done anything comparable, and none has done so since. Illustrious international composers were featured: Villa-Lobos, Darius Milhaud, Carlos Chávez, Alberto Ginastera, Bohuslav Martinů. (Farnsley's dream of eliciting pieces from Stravinsky and Varèse went unfulfilled.) Leading Americans also came to town. In 1950, Louisville gave a triumphant account of William Schuman's "Judith," with dancing by Martha Graham. Schuman later commented, "The Louisville group never can sound as strong and full as some of the mightier Eastern orchestras. But I've never had my works better performed. . . . If you'll pardon the expression, they give more love to them."

The great experiment had its flaws. Farnsley's idea that the orchestra could sustain itself by selling records proved fantastical; instead, further funding came from the Rockefeller and Ford Foundations, which kept the commissioning series afloat but introduced bureaucratic and political complications. Many audience members, meanwhile, rebelled against the programming, particularly when it came to such strenuous fare as Elliott Carter's Variations for Orchestra. Most problematically, Farnsley and Whitney failed to institutionalize their philosophy; when they left the scene, energy ebbed away. In the early two-thousands, Louisville was hardly distinguishable from a dozen other

ILLUSTRATION BY LAUREN TAMAKI

struggling midsize orchestras. In 2010, the group filed for bankruptcy and seemed again on the verge of extinction.

Enter Teddy Abrams, an affable, curly-haired protégé of Michael Tilson Thomas, who became Louisville's music director in 2014, at the age of twenty-seven. In contrast to many on-the-rise conductors, Abrams took up full-time residence in his adopted city, and avoided rival commitments. He established a presence in Louisville culture, striking up friendships with local pop musicians (the singer-songwriter Jim James, the hip-hop artist Jecorey Arthur). A prolific composer, arranger, and improviser, he has an easy command of non-classical idioms. Sometimes he goes into busker mode, setting up a keyboard on the street and entertaining passersby.

Abrams's gifts as a conductor were evident at a gala concert in Louisville last month, at the Kentucky Center. He leads with a clear, fluid beat, somewhat in the Tilson Thomas manner. Aspects of the orchestra's Whitney-era sound remain—a straightforward, pungent, propulsive approach—but Abrams has fostered greater precision and vibrancy. Rhythmic zest lit up the final movement of Henk Badings's Seventh Symphony, a spiky Louisville commission from 1954. Ma took the stage for Shostakovich's First Cello Concerto, summoning its frenzied and desolate moods with equal conviction. The orchestra provided unfailingly alert accompaniment, resulting in an interpretation of real heft. Whenever I visit so-called regional orchestras, the story is the same: an influx of skilled younger players has raised technical standards to a startling degree.

Under Abrams's leadership, new music is again routine. The gala included Anjélica Negrón's "Fractal Isles," which had its première last year, at a festival of Latin American music. A study in perceptions of exoticism, Negrón's piece begins with an entrancing haze of insectlike instrumental activity and ends in an atmosphere of wistful retreat. Abrams also acknowledged the orchestra's vigorous educational arm by inviting a student hip-hop group, the Real Young Prodigys, to perform "CROWN," a celebration of natural hair styles. The Louisville Orchestra has joined with Hip-Hop N2 Learning, a local program, in launching Rap School, which encourages community activism. (The Real Young Prodigys have, in fact, successfully campaigned for a city ordinance that bans hair-based discrimination.) Abrams presided over this variegated feast with pep-rally gusto. When he dropped Farnsley's and Whitney's names, cheers rang out.

The venture into Mammoth Cave, which took place two days after the gala, is Abrams's most ambitious undertaking to date. Mammoth, the longest cave system ever discovered, is about seventy-five miles south of Louisville and is under the jurisdiction of the National Park Service. Abrams's idea of staging a work at and about Mammoth intersected neatly with Ma's current interests. In the past couple of years, the cellist has been participating in informal concerts and community events across the national-park system, under the banner of a project called Our Common Nature. Abrams won approval from park administrators and set about composing a ninety-minute oratorio that includes a series of instrumental soliloquies for Ma.

"Mammoth," as Abrams's piece is called, attempts to sum up the entire five-thousand-year history of human exploration of the cave: Native questers, enslaved Black miners, rival cave exploiters, and latter-day park rangers. The libretto includes poetic meditations from three writers associated with Kentucky—Robert Penn Warren, Wendell Berry, and Ada Limón. Abrams incorporates into his score preëxisting hymns, Appalachian folk songs, fiddle-band music, bugle calls, and a ballad in honor of the spelunker Floyd Collins, whose death at Mammoth, in 1925, caused a national-news sensation. Playing the part of Celebrant—essentially, a narrator with a singing role attached—was the nobly urgent bass-baritone Davóne Tines, who grew up on the eastern side of the Appalachian Mountains, in Virginia. Tines's longtime collaborator Zack Winokur directed the show, overcoming the logistical challenges of organizing a quasi-operatic event in an exceedingly unconventional space that allowed for only a few days of on-site rehearsal.

The beginning was intensely dramatic. Audience members, numbering five hundred, walked down the sixty-eight steps of the cave's Historic Entrance. Inside, voices floated out of the murk: members of the Louisville Chamber Choir and of the orchestra were singing a wordless, rising-and-falling chant that started out as a unison and then grew in polyphonic complexity. After walking a quarter mile or so, spectators took up positions on the sides of Rafinesque Hall, one of Mammoth's largest internal chambers. The orchestra was to one side; Tines and the choristers paced about; Ma sat at the center. The acoustics were, needless to say, reverberant, yet individual lines remained distinct. Despite the damp, cool surroundings, the sound had an unexpected warmth.

Beyond the introductory processional, "Mammoth" offered several striking musical inventions. We heard a semi-Wagnerian evocation of primal waters carving out the caves, a tumultuous Ivesian collage of nineteenth-century musical material, a percussive impression of the great earthquakes of 1811 and 1812. As the work approached the hour mark, though, diffuseness set in. Abrams is a deft tunesmith and craftsman, but he has a weakness for vamping ostinatos and soundtrack-ready swells. The narrative sagged under the weight of overlapping agendas. Two monologues by park rangers, without musical accompaniment, sapped momentum. Ma, at times, seemed lost in the melee. The score made relatively limited use of his immense powers as an interpreter, often confining him to spells of plaintive songfulness.

Still, I came away somewhat awed by the occasion, which showed a renewal of purpose at one of America's most resilient orchestras. The best thing about "Mammoth" was its intimate connection to the memories of its audience: all around me, I heard people recalling childhood visits to Mammoth and family ties to the communities above ground. Having never visited the cave before, I felt like an outsider at a local rite, which is as it should be. At moments, the piece achieved an uncanny timelessness, as when Tines, holding a flickering lantern, intoned lines from Berry's poem "To Know the Dark": "The dark, too, blooms and sings / and is traveled by dark feet and dark wings." He then extinguished the light, and Ma played a few searching phrases that shivered with fear and promise. ♦

THE CURRENT CINEMA

GET THE MESSAGE

"BlackBerry" and "Chile '76."

BY ANTHONY LANE

If you enjoyed Ben Affleck's "Air," currently in theatres, but felt that it was too puffed up, here comes a lesson in deflation. Matt Johnson's "BlackBerry" is a reminder that, in dramatic terms, rise and fall is almost always more gripping, and more morally provoking, than rise and rise. For those who were off-planet, or awaiting conception, at the dawn of the millennium, the title may need some explanation. A BlackBerry was a portable communication device, equipped with buttons so itty-bitty that they could not be comfortably deployed by anybody larger than Rumpelstiltskin. Nonetheless, for a while, owning a BlackBerry was all the rage. It could slot into a holster on your belt, allowing you to draw it like a Colt and fire off a lethal message to that guy with the goatee in Accounts.

In Matt Johnson's film, Johnson and Jay Baruchel play a pair of tech pioneers.

Johnson shows us how the rage began. Not content with directing the new film, and writing it with Matthew Miller, he also stars as Doug Fregin, one of the creators of the BlackBerry, and, if the movie is to be believed, the most committed wearer of a headband since John McEnroe. (Summoned to a business meeting, Doug keeps his headband on even while clad in a *suit*.) Doug and his thirtysomething pal Mike Lazaridis (Jay Baruchel)—whose hair is gray from the outset, as if sapped of color by the power of the adjacent brain—are the co-founders of a small Canadian outfit called Research in Motion. Has corporate nomenclature ever been more dazzlingly dull?

Much of the action, kicking off in 1996, takes place in the company offices; most of it, indeed, looks like an episode of "The Office." The camera appears to be caffeinated, refusing to settle, darting from one worried face to the next. That restlessness, though tiring to behold, works because it mimics the inquisitive energy of the characters. Near the start, while Mike is nerving himself to present a pitch, he gets so annoyed by the buzzy hiss of an intercom that he can't help taking it apart. He and Doug are seeking investors for their product, the PocketLink. (Another dead name.) It is, Doug says, "a pager, a cell phone, and an e-mail machine all in one." But he and his colleagues are computer folk, unschooled in the dark arts of peddling their big idea. What they need is a shark.

Enter Jim Balsillie (Glenn Howerton), a balding hammerhead who has lost his previous job for not obeying orders. Fired up by being fired, he arrives at Research in Motion and makes a modest proposal. "I want fifty per cent of the company, and I've got to be C.E.O.," he says, sounding like a kid pretending to be an important grownup. This subtle strain of childishness runs through the film. Witness Jim vandalizing a phone booth in a tantrum, as if he were wrecking a dying technology in his quest for the youthfully new. Or listen to Mike, when he learns that he won't be able to bring Doug to a meeting with Bell Atlantic: "He's my best friend!" Cue the sight of Doug, standing forlornly at a window. When one of them does reject the other, later on, you wince at the pain of the split.

What causes the fissure is, needless to say, success. Johnson is not so insolent as to sneer at commercial ambition, but unlike Affleck he doesn't burnish his movie into a hymn of praise. What appeals to him, I think, is the way in which striving toward triumph means, in practice, stumbling along with a mixture of haplessness and gall. En route to Bell Atlantic, Mike leaves his briefcase in a cab and hares off to retrieve it; Jim, all alone, has to convince the executives of the merits of the BlackBerry, despite not understanding how it hooks up to a network. ("You're selling self-reliance," he declares, falling back on Emersonian blah.) Somehow, as on a BlackBerry, everything clicks, and suddenly, with a series of forward leaps, we find ourselves in an atmosphere of private jets, of supergeeks being poached from the likes of Google for ten million dollars, and of Mike, now nervously suave, with his locks combed upward in a stiff quiff. BlackBerry has ripened into a phenomenon, and its employees no longer have time to smile.

Everything ends badly, or sadly, and one can imagine the film being screened for M.B.A. students as a cautionary tale—frequently very funny, but often disheartening, too. It's only natural that Mike and the gang should be rocked by Steve Jobs's launch of the iPhone, in 2007; what screws them is their response, the fol-

ILLUSTRATION BY TOMER HANUKA

lowing year, in the shape of the BlackBerry Storm, which sounds like the dessert you don't want on an experimental tasting menu. Once we hear lines such as "Is this legal?," and see agents from the S.E.C. prowling BlackBerry's headquarters, we know that the game is winding down. Not that we should feel *that* sorry for the major players. Each of them was left drenched in wealth.

"BlackBerry" turns out to be an oddly touching portrait of a nerdocratic society. Its resident bunch of bright, awkward souls are bothered by the tasks that confront them, yet they all find joy in the bothering—in having to build an overnight prototype, say, of their beloved device, with a soldering iron if necessary. (It's fitting that the final shot should be of Mike, lately dethroned but still obsessively tinkering with handsets.) Nothing is more wonkish about life at BlackBerry, at least in the early days, than the in-house custom of movie night, when everyone stops to watch films like "Raiders of the Lost Ark" or John Carpenter's "They Live." The latter is a perfect choice, because Carpenter tells of aliens who covertly persuade us, via messages secreted in mass media, to buy into capitalist conformity. So the question is: Did Mike, Doug, and their buddies break the mold, or were they, like the aliens, just molding us into ever more desperate consumers? And, if it's true that Jim had never seen "Star Wars," should they even have hired him to begin with?

The first place that we see in Manuela Martelli's new movie, "Chile '76," is Venice—a sleight of hand, since the whole film is set in Chile. A woman named Carmen (Aline Küppenheim), middle-aged and elegantly dressed, leafs through images of Venice in a book, picks out a peachy sunset, and asks a man in a hardware store to match the color. We watch the paint being stirred in a metal bucket, and then drops of it falling onto her shoe. Such is Martelli's method, brisk and oblique, for steering us into the story. Here is a member of the leisured class, we gather, with delicate tastes and time to spare; yet somehow that flesh-tinted splotch, trivial as it is, hints that all is not well. There will be more besmirchings to come.

As the title suggests, we are in the era of the military junta, which took power in 1973. Its reach is extensive, and in scene after scene we can't be sure whether a vexing detail—an odd noise on a phone line, a stranger taking a seat opposite Carmen in a café—is mere happenstance or proof of dictatorial intrusion. You might think that Carmen would be free of such fears. After all, she is married to a rich doctor, who is employed at a hospital in Santiago. From the city, she travels to their holiday home, near a beach; that's where the new paint is required, and where most of the tale unfolds. A couple who pay them a visit there, and take them sailing, certainly seem like fans of the regime; the wife talks airily of Chile's need for a strong leader. If they knew what Carmen has been up to, on the quiet, since she arrived on the coast, they would be struck dumb.

Years before, Carmen worked for the Red Cross. Now, at the request of a local priest, and unbeknownst to her loved ones, she finds herself caring for a young man, Elías (Nicolás Sepúlveda), who has a gunshot wound. Although the priest calls him "a starving Christ," she soon realizes that he's a political activist in hiding. What stirs her to help him, however, is not ideology, let alone any impulse to rebel, but the goodness of her palpitating heart. She is a born fretter, who takes too many pills and lights a cigarette upon waking. When a family friend describes her as "smart and gorgeous" and wonders what her secret is, Carmen replies, "Just neurosis."

It's a hell of a performance from Küppenheim as the heroine, precisely because she demonstrates how *hard* it is to be heroic. To an absurd degree, cinema has conditioned us to expect protagonists who take every challenge in their stride, and it's salutary to be reminded that, for the Carmens of this world (the majority of us, that is), the creeping approach of danger is anything but a thrill. Obliged to contact Elías's comrades, Carmen has to take buses to an unfamiliar town, to learn passwords, and even to acquire an alias—Cleopatra. Far from delighting in these novel risks, she quakes, and there's a fabulous sequence, filmed from Carmen's point of view, inside her car, at a police checkpoint. As the cop walks away to inspect her license, she waits, in the glow of the dashboard, whispering Hail Marys under her breath. Martelli's movie, finely controlled, and tense with the perpetual promise of violence, lasts little more than an hour and a half. Imagine that tension enduring, as it did in Chile, for seventeen years. ♦

NEWYORKER.COM
Richard Brody blogs about movies.

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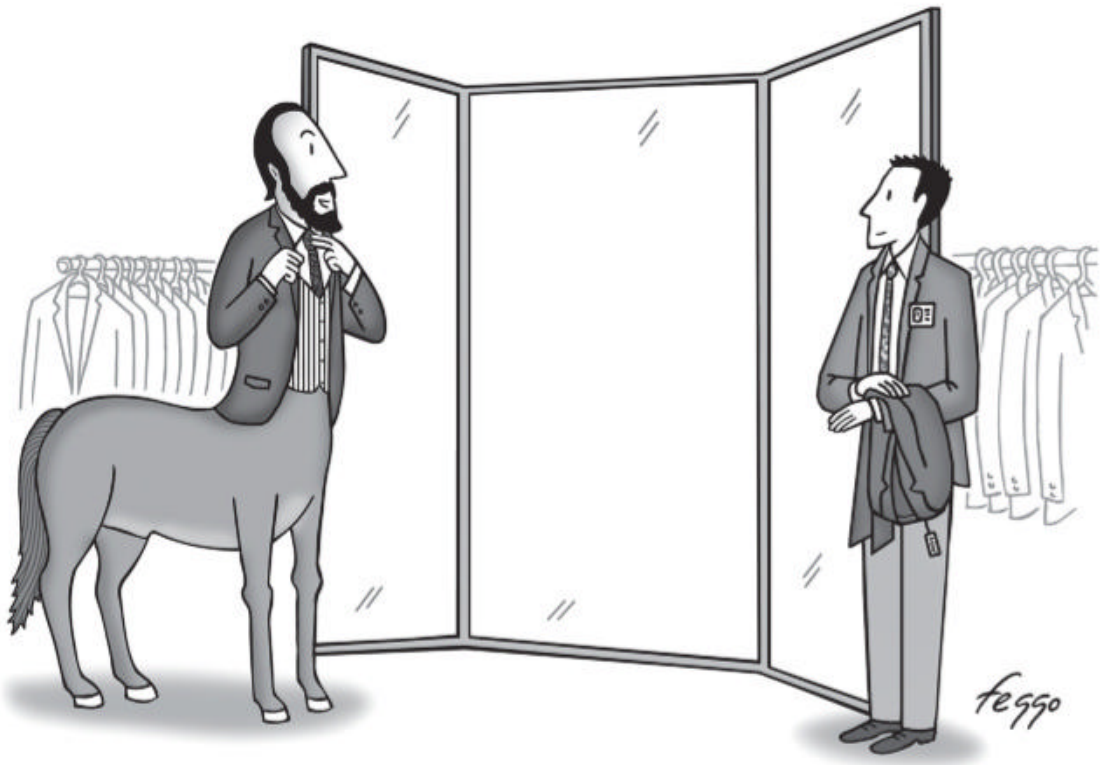
CARTOON CAPTION CONTEST

Each week, we provide a cartoon in need of a caption. You, the reader, submit a caption, we choose three finalists, and you vote for your favorite. Caption submissions for this week's cartoon, by Felipe Galindo, must be received by Sunday, May 14th. The finalists in the April 24th & May 1st contest appear below. We will announce the winner, and the finalists in this week's contest, in the May 29th issue. Anyone age thirteen or older can enter or vote. To do so, and to read the complete rules, visit contest.newyorker.com.

THIS WEEK'S CONTEST



“ ”

THE FINALISTS

"I couldn't help but notice you from across the room."
Devin Cortez, Phoenix, Ariz.

"So you think inflation is a good thing?"
Joel ben Izzy, Berkeley, Calif.

"Everyone's here. You can stop now."
Don Best, Idleyld Park, Ore.

THE WINNING CAPTION

"What did you expect a financial wizard to look like?"
Tom King, Nipomo, Calif.

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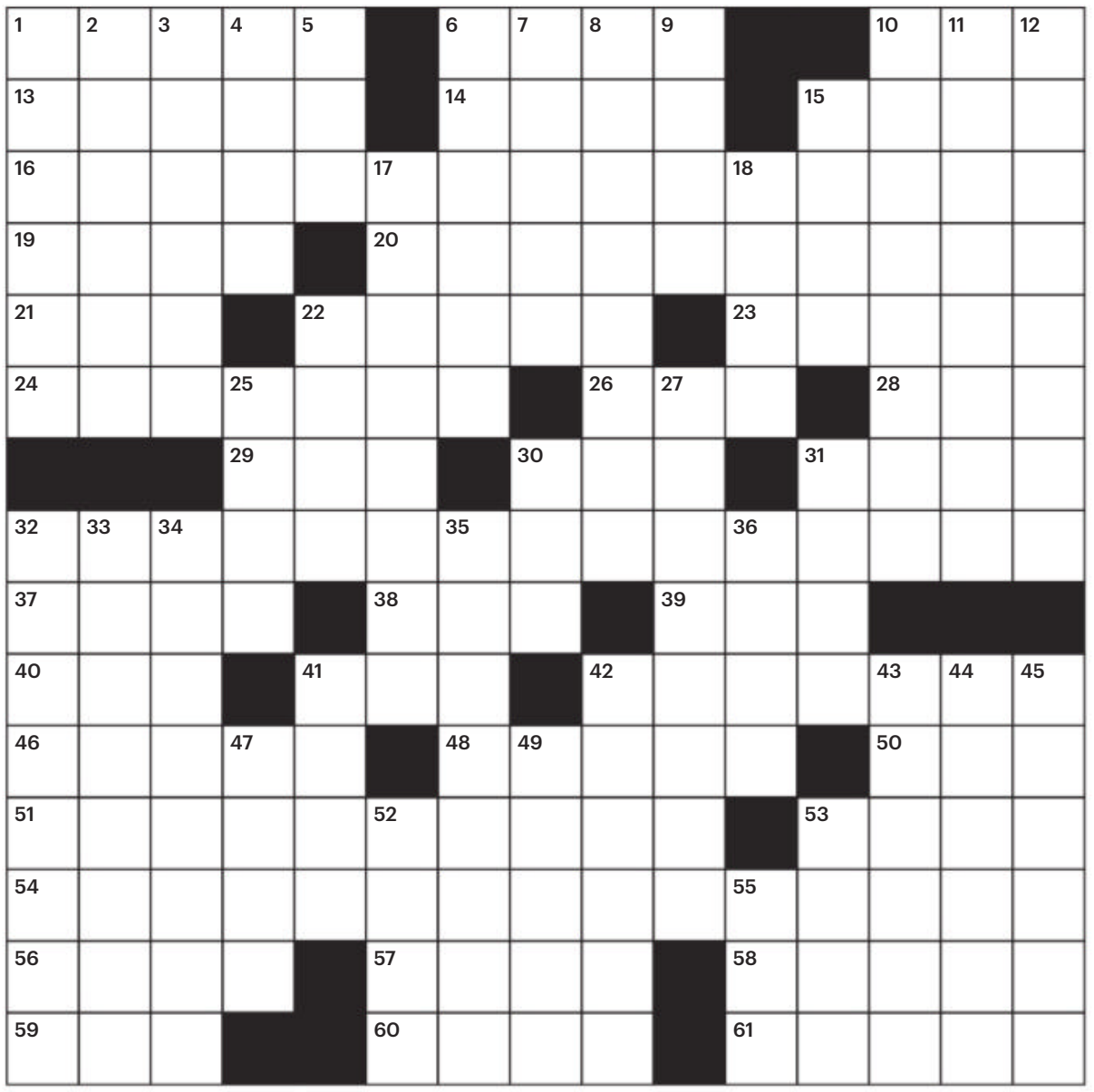
THE CROSSWORD

A challenging puzzle.

BY ELIZABETH C. GORSKI



ACROSS

1 Imaginative
6 Rubbish
10 ___-wren (Australian songbird)
13 Summer month in Chile
14 Sticky roll
15 "No ___!"
16 Protagonist of Toni Morrison's "The Bluest Eye"
19 Charters?
20 Author's addressee
21 Capital of the Tokugawa shogunate
22 Queen who first appears in "The Phantom Menace"
23 Cutting
24 Base exercise
26 Prefix with a double meaning?
28 It's long and soft . . . or long and scaly
29 U.S. Open winner in 1994 and 1997
30 ___ run
31 Excess
32 Jewelry that serves as a sorority symbol?
37 "Changes" singer Phil
38 Cartesian conclusion
39 Parrot of New Zealand
40 "Bamboozled" director
41 Initialism indicating an unknown
42 Complaint
46 "This is important to me"
48 They may be turned
50 Piccadilly privy
51 Wheel of Fortune and the like
53 Tuscan cathedral city
54 Non-relatives?
56 Through
57 Luncheon ender
58 "Doing Justice" author Bharara
59 Hosp. test
60 "Jimson ___/White Flower No. 1" (O'Keeffe painting sold in 2014 for $44.4 million)
61 Not in order

DOWN

1 Reunion attendee
2 Nation whose name means "People of the Standing Stone"
3 Missile's heading
4 Hellenophile's love
5 GIF reaction, perhaps
6 "Venerable" Eng. monk
7 Pro who plays home games at SoFi Stadium
8 "Candide," for one
9 Equal
10 Vulnerable to being washed away
11 Vacated the premises
12 App for at-home courses
15 Recipe
17 1949 Tracy/Hepburn classic
18 2021 Oscar-nominated role for Javier
22 Like some ales
25 Picks up
27 Least normal
30 Equip
31 Ritzy
32 "The profoundest fact of the human condition," per Octavio Paz
33 Winter transport
34 State-fair activity
35 Tackiness
36 Anguilliform fish
41 Head of Québec?
42 Punch-drunk
43 Inner-circle group
44 Grazes
45 Heated, say
47 Peregrinate
49 Heated
52 Beagle hands, e.g.
53 A hundred per cent
55 LP specification

Solution to the previous puzzle:

S	E	C	T	■	G	A	M	B	I	A	■	H	A	S
H	A	L	O	■	A	L	A	R	M	C	L	O	C	K
A	C	E	S	■	I	T	S	U	N	C	A	N	N	Y
W	H	A	T	S	N	O	T	T	O	L	I	K	E	■
■	■	R	A	V	E	S	■	■	F	A	R	■	■	■
R	A	I	D	E	D	■	C	L	O	I	S	T	E	R
A	N	N	A	N	■	B	L	O	O	M	■	U	M	A
C	I	G	S	■	R	A	O	U	L	■	C	R	A	B
E	M	U	■	D	O	N	U	T	■	S	O	N	I	A
R	E	P	L	A	C	E	D	■	M	O	D	E	L	T
■	■	■	A	S	H	■	■	C	A	N	E	D	■	■
■	D	O	T	H	E	D	I	R	T	Y	W	O	R	K
C	O	A	T	C	L	O	S	E	T	■	O	V	E	N
I	N	R	E	A	L	T	I	M	E	■	R	E	N	O
A	S	S	■	M	E	S	S	E	D	■	D	R	E	W

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