PRICE $8.99

THE NEW YORKER

DEC. 4, 2023

SGS&LM

HISTORY *loves* COMPANY.

No matter your holiday wish,
you'll find a home here in the Charleston area.

THE DEWBERRY CHARLESTON

Deck The Halls with The Dewberry

Experience the magic of Christmas in Charleston as well as the famed holiday décor at The Dewberry. Revel in the hustle & bustle of Charleston at Christmas time. Let our branded Volvo luxury house cars transport you to the center of shopping & dining on King Street with our compliments. Enjoy our daily cider & cookie cart in The Living Room. Upon checking-in you'll also receive a holiday gift from The Dewberry.

THE SPECTATOR HOTEL

Holiday Cheers with Spectator Spirit

Toast to the good life at The Spectator Hotel, a favorite spot to cozy up during the holidays. All things are festive and bright this season. Enjoy a holiday cocktail crafted by our award-winning mixologist, a nightly $10 credit to The Bar, and a his & hers set from Brackish — one Gatsby bow tie and one pair of Delores Stud Earrings.

THE RESTORATION HOTEL

Spread Cheer Christmas Tree Package

The Spread Holiday Cheer Package includes a decorated tree* in room along with a keepsake ornament, Charleston book and holiday cookies. *Dreidels, menorahs, gelt and other items available upon request.

WILD DUNES RESORT

Sleigh the Holidays at Wild Dunes Resort

Sleigh the holiday season with a getaway to Wild Dunes Resort! Make your Charleston holiday memorable with our exclusive offer, a fantastic getaway to Charleston's island resort and receive the following inclusions: accommodations for two nights, two seasonal welcome cocktails at Coastal Provisions, Oyster Catcher, or Sippin' Santa (only available in December), a s'mores kit, and $50 resort credit.

THE TIDES AT FOLLY BEACH

Light Up The Holidays

Unwrap the gift of pure holiday magic with our Light Up The Holidays package. Embrace the spirit of the season as you experience the enchanting Holiday Festival of Lights at James Island County Park, a beloved annual tradition. Sip and savor the delights of the holidays with two insulated tumblers, perfect for enjoying steaming hot chocolate on chilly nights. Our thoughtful package also includes a keepsake ornament and a sweet treat, filling your getaway with memories to cherish.

Scan for your FREE Official Charleston Area Visitors Guide.

Explore Charleston

CHRISTMASINCHARLESTON.COM f / @EXPLORECHARLESTON @EXPLORECHS

CHARLESTON

South Carolina

THE NEW YORKER

DECEMBER 4, 2023

6 GOINGS ON

9 THE TALK OF THE TOWN
Amy Davidson Sorkin on televising Trump's trials; all aboard the ark; a guide to the surf zone; with a stomp and a scuff; ask an artificial agent.

ONWARD AND UPWARD WITH THE ARTS

Rebecca Mead 14 Interiors
The German actress Sandra Hüller's commitment.

SHOUTS & MURMURS

Jay Katsir 21 Things I've Heard Myself Say Aloud to My Kids

ANNALS OF HOLLYWOOD

Hua Hsu 22 The Man Behind the Nose
Kazu Hiro's re-creation of Leonard Bernstein's look.

BRAVE NEW WORLD DEPT.

Stephen Witt 28 The Chosen Chip
Nvidia's vital role in the development of A.I.

AMERICAN CHRONICLES

Jennifer Gonnerman 38 The Aftermath
A sister's response to her brother's crimes.

FICTION

Teju Cole 48 "Incoming"

THE CRITICS

BOOKS

Andrew O'Hagan 52 *The dawn of the celebrity couple.*
Adam Kirsch 57 *Rediscovering the work of Israel Joshua Singer.*
61 Briefly Noted

THE ART WORLD

Jackson Arn 62 *Ilana Harris-Babou takes on wellness culture.*

THE THEATRE

Helen Shaw 64 *"Hell's Kitchen," "The Gardens of Anuncia."*

THE CURRENT CINEMA

Anthony Lane 66 *"Napoleon," "Monster."*

POEMS

Linda Gregerson 32 "Refrain"
Cynthia Zarin 45 "November"

COVER

Sergio García Sánchez "Ready to Soar"

DRAWINGS *Michael Maslin, Tommy Siegel, Teresa Burns Parkhurst, Meredith Southard, Mads Horwath, Ali Solomon, Drew Dernavich, Pia Guerra and Ian Boothby, Asher Perlman, Brooke Bourgeois, Amy Kurzweil, Jeremy Nguyen, Ben Chase, Guy Richards Smit, Glen Baxter, Ellie Black* SPOTS *Sarah Letteney*

Faroe Islands #5, 2023, 24 x 20 inches, oil on canvas. © 2023 Mitchell Johnson.

Mitchell Johnson

"Like all of Johnson's works, a latent conflict is built into the scene, in the form of often abrupt contrasts of space and form. Strange as it may seem to say so, they are implicitly psychodramas disguised as physical drama. I am arguing that they have an emotional cutting edge, making them more than matter-of-factly descriptive and ingeniously abstract." —Donald Kuspit, *Whitehot Magazine*, July 2023

Digital catalog by email request: mitchell.catalog@gmail.com
Additional info: www.mitchelljohnson.com Instagram: @mitchell_johnson_artist

CONTRIBUTORS

Jennifer Gonnerman (*"The Aftermath," p. 38*) became a staff writer in 2015. In 2021, she received the National Magazine Award for Profile Writing for her *New Yorker* article "Survival Story."

Hua Hsu (*"The Man Behind the Nose," p. 22*), a staff writer, is the author of the memoir "Stay True," which was awarded a 2023 Pulitzer Prize.

Linda Gregerson (*Poem, p. 32*) is the author of, most recently, the poetry collection "Canopy."

Teju Cole (*Fiction, p. 48*) teaches at Harvard University. His latest book is the novel "Tremor."

Sheila Yasmin Marikar (*The Talk of the Town, p. 12*) has been contributing to *The New Yorker* since 2016. Her next novel, "Friends in Napa," is forthcoming in April.

Jay Katsir (*Shouts & Murmurs, p. 21*) is a head writer and a supervising producer for "The Late Show with Stephen Colbert."

Stephen Witt (*"The Chosen Chip," p. 28*) published "How Music Got Free" in 2015.

Rebecca Mead (*"Interiors," p. 14*), a staff writer since 1997, most recently published the memoir "Home/Land."

Sergio García Sánchez (*Cover*), a cartoonist and an illustrator, is the author, with Nadja Spiegelman, of the book "Blancaflor, the Hero with Secret Powers." He collaborated on this week's cover with his wife, the artist Lola Moral.

Amy Davidson Sorkin (*Comment, p. 9*), a staff writer, is a regular contributor to Comment. She also writes a column for newyorker.com.

Andrew O'Hagan (*Books, p. 52*) is the author of six novels, and a seventh, "Caledonian Road," is due out next year. He is the editor at large of the *London Review of Books*.

Cynthia Zarin (*Poem, p. 45*) teaches at Yale. Her forthcoming books are "Inverno" and "Next Day."

THIS WEEK ON NEWYORKER.COM

LETTER FROM THE SOUTH

Charles Bethea on Bill Erquitt, a collector of Civil War relics, whose secrets came to light after his death.

THE NEW YORKER INTERVIEW

Naomi Fry speaks with the painter Louise Bonnet about her spectacular, Surrealism-tinged visions.

Download the New Yorker app for the latest news, commentary, criticism, and humor, plus this week's magazine and all issues back to 2008.

LEFT: LAURA LANNES; RIGHT: SHAUN PIERSON

THE MAIL

A RESPONSIBLE PARTY

In McKay Coppins's biography of Mitt Romney, which Michael Luo reviews, Romney questions his role in the rise of Trumpism (Books, November 6th). In Coppins's words, Romney wonders, "Was the rot on the right new, or was it something very old just now bubbling to the surface? And what role had the members of the mainstream establishment—people like him, the *reasonable* Republicans—played in allowing that rot to fester?" The answer might be found in Romney's career at Bain Capital, a company that he co-founded and ran for around fifteen years before he entered politics. As the Washington *Post* has documented, Bain was a pioneer in the practice of outsourcing American jobs overseas. In doing so, the firm likely helped to lay the groundwork for the changing economic circumstances that led so many voters to turn toward Donald Trump.
Kevin Coburn
Vergennes, Vt.

FREEDOM FIGHT

Nikhil Krishnan, in his review of Robert M. Sapolsky's "Determined," a book that attempts to debunk the idea that human beings have free will, briefly considers what it would mean to understand human actions as shaped solely by quantum indeterminacy (Books, November 13th). To do so would, he writes, "replace our agency with sheer randomness, which is not anyone's idea of freedom." Those of us who have relished exploring an unfamiliar city without a plan or become absorbed in a new book encountered by accident might disagree. Beyond that, it seems to me that taking seriously how our lives are shaped by randomness can be rewarding. Both determinism and free will can lend themselves to a conception of life that implies a sense of underlying order. A view that prioritizes the way in which we are the result of a concatenation of random interactions among subatomic particles undermines that sense of order. Cormac McCarthy offers, in his last works, a compelling exploration of the ramifications that this view has for our beliefs about choice and the meaning of life.
Victor I. Reus
Distinguished Professor Emeritus
Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences
University of California, San Francisco
San Francisco, Calif.

Krishnan's review reminded me of the second epilogue of "War and Peace," in which Tolstoy anticipates many of the scientific and philosophical points raised by Sapolsky in his book. Despite the obvious reality of our subjection to natural laws, Tolstoy observes, "we feel ourselves to be free." He recognizes that a lack of free will doesn't eliminate our need for theology, jurisprudence, ethics, or history, adding, "Through his reason man observes himself, but only through consciousness does he know himself."
Woody Houchin
Redding, Calif.

THE TRICOLOR VARIATIONS

I enjoyed Michael Schulman's Profile of Ridley Scott ("Napoleon Complex," November 13th). Scott has a distinctive drawing style, and, when I spotted a storyboard—or so-called "Ridleygram"—that he created for his new film, "Napoleon," in Schulman's piece, I recognized it as his work. But one thing struck me. In this wonderful film, the French armies fly the familiar tricolor, of vertical bands of blue, white, and red. In the Ridleygram that appears in the magazine, however, the flags are of horizontal bars of red, white, and blue, like the flag of the Netherlands. (On the Web site, an additional Ridleygram appears, in which the Netherlandish flag is reproduced upside down.)
Jed Falby
Devonshire, England

•

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

GOINGS ON

NOVEMBER 29 – DECEMBER 5, 2023

What we're watching, listening to, and doing this week.

The anarchic energy and haunting melodies of Stravinsky's "The Rite of Spring" have fascinated generations of dancers and choreographers since the ballet's première, for Sergei Diaghilev's Ballets Russes, in 1913. That first version, by Vaslav Nijinsky, caused a riot. Decades later, in 1975, Pina Bausch took on the score, creating a work in which men and women tear at one another in a combination of terror and attraction, dancing on a floor of dirt that gradually sticks to their bodies. The climax is a punishing sacrificial dance by a woman in a red dress. In the vast space of the Park Avenue Armory, Bausch's **"The Rite of Spring"** (Nov. 29-Dec. 14) is performed by a company of dancers from across Africa, who rehearsed the work at École des Sables, in Senegal. It is paired with "common ground[s]," a duet for the École's co-founder Germaine Acogny—a towering figure in African dance—and Malou Airaudo, one of Bausch's early collaborators.—*Marina Harss*

MAARTEN VANDEN ABEELE / © PINA BAUSCH FOUNDATION / COURTESY PARK AVENUE ARMORY; ILLUSTRATION BY CHRISTOPH NIEMANN (TOP)

ABOUT TOWN

PODCAST | In **"Alaska Is the Center of the Universe,"** a new six-part series on Audible, the Anchorage-based drummer, voice-over actor, and Inupiat storyteller James Dommek, Jr., journeys across his home state to gather traditional tales from fellow Alaska Natives. He visits Utqiagvik, the northernmost city in the U.S., to hear about a murderous cryptid; Juneau, for a story about a clever, shape-shifting otter; Athabascan territory, to learn about a girl who turned into a salmon. "There's not always going to be a hero's journey—most traditional Native stories are much weirder than that," Dommek says. They are—and they're also a means for cultures to connect. Dommek, eager to engage with the ancient and the modern at once, makes for an appealing bridge between worlds. "In order to get this story, I had to give Nick dried seal meat and unhack his Facebook," he says in one episode. "That's like two cultural trains colliding at full speed."—*Sarah Larson*

ART | If you ask someone who doesn't enjoy going to museums to imagine an abstract work of art, he might come up with something along the lines of the paintings in **"Robert Ryman: 1961-1964."** They demand a lot. Thick, scabby strokes of white cover bright fields of color or patches of brown canvas. Viewers, in return for their attention, get a double scoop of frosty beauty, plus some hard questions: Is abstraction the purest kind of art or the earthiest? Is it meant for all humankind or for only a sliver of us? To which Ryman's paintings reply with a charismatic "yep."—*Jackson Arn (Zwirner; through Feb. 3.)*

FOLK | In 2021, after many stints with various bands, the Canadian singer-songwriter and roots-music specialist **Allison Russell** released her début solo album, "Outside Child," a poignant collection of confessional songs that build on the advocacy of her previous music, including her work with the supergroup Our Native Daughters. In the two years since that release, Russell has become a guiding light in Americana, her soulful folk nearly as powerful as her efforts to embolden Black women in an artistic scene that they pioneered but have since been pushed out of. Russell's follow-up, "The Returner," from September, demonstrates her multidimensional artistry at its full force, with tunes that split the difference between pop and hymn.—*Sheldon Pearce (Music Hall of Williamsburg; Nov. 30.)*

PODCAST | Hart Island, the public cemetery and potter's field in the Bronx, has been a place of enduring mystery. Since 1869, more than a million people, many unknown, have been buried there. The eight episodes of **"The Unmarked Graveyard: Stories from Hart Island"**—part of Joe Richman's "Radio Diaries," a venerable and remarkable audio-documentary project that gives people recorders and helps them document their experiences—tell the stories of seven people who are buried on Hart Island, narrated by their loved ones. Some of the dead are long-lost relatives; one was a beloved resident of a Manhattan hotel, another was a composer, another a famous writer. Sensitively edited and beautifully sound-designed, the series imbues its subjects and its setting with a quiet, respectful poetry: in the words of the composer's widower, it was "the simplicity, the anonymity, the humility" of Hart Island that appealed to his egalitarian husband. "And it was on the water, which he loved."—*Sarah Larson*

BROADWAY | The silly revival of **"Spamalot,"** a musicalization—by Eric Idle and his co-composer John Du Prez—of the 1975 movie "Monty Python and the Holy Grail," has aged like a suit of armor: you can still wear the 2004 show into battle (its gags scratch some theatregoers' Python itch), but it does sometimes creak. Josh Rhodes directs expert Broadway goofballs, such as Christopher Fitzgerald, James Monroe Iglehart, and Michael Urie, capably on their quest, but it's surprising that the musical's second-act bagginess hasn't been meaningfully adjusted, nor has the number about "the Jews" and Broadway success. Happily, Leslie Rodriguez Kritzer cannonballs into her part as the Lady of the Lake, accelerated by her comic mania and a welter of seemingly improvised jokes. Grail, shmail. She's the prize.—*Helen Shaw (St. James; open run.)*

MOVIES | Some infuriating repetitions of history get a fascinating showcase in Nicole Newnham's documentary **"The Disappearance of Shere Hite."** The film is centered on Hite, a graduate student in social history at Columbia University in the late nineteen-sixties and

early seventies, who—working with feminist groups that linked the quest for equality with women's knowledge of their own bodies—prepared a detailed and anonymous questionnaire for women about their sexuality. She received thousands of responses that overturned patriarchal assumptions, including those about masturbation, orgasm, and marital fidelity. The resulting book, "The Hite Report," was a best-seller—and the backlash, from both the political right and the media, was furious. With an exemplary array of archival footage, new interviews, and selections from Hite's work, Newnham crafts a complex and absorbing portrait of Hite; the mystery implied in the movie's title is as astounding as any filmed fiction.—*Richard Brody (In theatrical release.)*

CLASSICAL MUSIC | The **Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center,** an organization known for its prim devotion to the classics, gets a little chaotic in the first program of its annual Baroque Festival. The French composer Jean-Féry Rebel's "Les Élémens" ("The Elements") opens with "Le Chaos," which depicts the clash of earth, air, water, and fire by simultaneously sounding all the notes of a D-minor scale—an unheard-of cacophony for music at the time that it was written, in the seventeen-thirties. Eventually, the natural order establishes itself, with chirping woodwinds and fiery violins. The same could be said for the festival itself, which moves on to concerts of Bach's minutely organized "Art of the Fugue" and to his glorious Brandenburg Concertos.—*Oussama Zahr (Alice Tully Hall; select dates Dec. 1-19.)*

DANCE | **Okwui Okpokwasili** is an uncommonly powerful performer, physically striking and seemingly able to channel spirits. The enigmatic pieces that she makes with her husband, the designer and director Peter Born, are hard to categorize—nonlinear blends of theatre, dance, song, and installation art, usually about Black women—but their level of intensity is easy to gauge: high. Their latest is "adaku, part 1: the road opens," the first chapter in a series of works of speculative mythology. It imagines a pre-colonial African village on the brink of change, pulled in different directions, with ghosts in the shadows.—*Brian Seibert (BAM Fisher; Nov. 28-Dec. 2.)*

OFF BROADWAY | Lameece Issaq's one-woman play, **"A Good Day to Me Not to You,"** directed by Lee Sunday Evans, for Waterwell, proceeds from chatty confessionalism to extraordinary pathos, moving so swiftly that we almost don't notice the transition. Relaxed and wry, Issaq's character begins by telling us about an S.T.D. flareup ("a blossoming!") and her refuge, after losing her job, at an eccentric Upper West Side nunnery slash halfway house. The woman's other wounds, such as a fear of sex, manifest more slowly and more mysteriously. Issaq is playing an out-of-work dental technician, and when she meets a new person, say, a flirtatious nun, she first describes her teeth. The show, brimming with jokes, also goes deep, looking past the smile to find the skull beneath.—*Helen Shaw (Connelly Theatre; through Dec. 16.)*

NEWYORKER.COM/GO
Sign up to receive the Goings On newsletter, curated by our writers and editors, in your in-box.

PHOTOGRAPH BY ERIC HELGAS FOR THE NEW YORKER

TABLES FOR TWO

Sailor
228 Dekalb Ave., Brooklyn

One of my many rules of restaurant-going is: if you see an unsexy vegetable given pride of place on a menu, order it. This principle is why I found myself, while eating dinner at the spiffy new Fort Greene restaurant Sailor, facing down a softball-size parcel, smooth-sided and inky purple, doused in a sauce of a similar hue. It was stuffed radicchio—one of the most curmudgeonly of vegetables, more of a supporting act than a star, and therefore, by statute, a nonnegotiable dish to order.

In the right hands, radicchio is one of a kitchen's great transformation artists, and there are few better hands than those of the chef April Bloomfield, who, in Sailor's kitchen, marks her return to New York. (Her previous tenure in the city, as the chef-partner of the restaurateur Ken Friedman, came to an abrupt end, in 2017, after Bloomfield was accused of insufficiently protecting her staff from the alleged sexual predation of Friedman. The claims against him have since been settled, and Bloomfield has said that the experience "blew my psyche wide open.") Bloomfield is best known as a meat whisperer, but true fans find her even more adept with ingredients beyond the animal. Inside the radicchio sphere was rice studded with creamy borlotti beans, into which flowed the sauce—emulsified wine, glossy and thick. This is *the* dish, I thought—the dish of the restaurant, perhaps the dish of the year. Following the rules has rarely led me wrong.

Bloomfield's partner in Sailor is the restaurateur Gabriel Stulman, whose near-flawless, casually refined West Village restaurants make you feel marvellous simply for being in them. The partnership is canny: Bloomfield, for all her enormous talent, has never been much for publicity; Stulman has never quite managed to make a restaurant famous for its food. Their pairing has resulted in a restaurant that is intensely, almost freakishly wonderful.

The menu speaks with self-effacing directness—Toast with Green Sauce, Smoked Pork Shoulder with Fennel—that feels, in its ingredient-oriented understatement, a bit Londonish (Bloomfield, who is British, spent formative years at the River Café), a bit Bay Area-ish (one austere dish of celery and anchovies is an homage to San Francisco's legendary Zuni Café). But there's also cerebral playfulness: mussel toast, a wedge of thick bread spread with aioli and piled high with shelled mollusks in a tomato-tinged sauce, is effectively cioppino, minus the broth. A burnished roast chicken is served on a pile of Parmesan-roasted potatoes and garlicky braised chard, which absorb all the golden drippings and nearly eclipse the pleasures of the bird itself. What Bloomfield understands is that the chicken might be what you order, but the everything-else about it matters just as much, maybe even more. *(Dishes $6–$38.)*

—*Helen Rosner*

MOZART'S *THE MAGIC FLUTE*

Celebrate the holiday season at the Metropolitan Opera with Mozart's enchanting musical fairy tale. Julie Taymor's spectacular, English-language production runs under two hours and is perfect for audiences of all ages—with special holiday pricing! On stage December 8–30.

Tickets start at $25 metopera.org/holidays

ILLUSTRATION: MEI KANAMOTO/MET OPERA

The Metropolitan Opera

Peter Gelb
MARIA MANETTI SHREM GENERAL MANAGER

Yannick Nézet-Séguin
JEANETTE LERMAN-NEUBAUER MUSIC DIRECTOR

THE NEW YORKER

THE TALK OF THE TOWN

COMMENT
THE TRUMP *SHOW*

On November 6th, Donald Trump emerged from a New York City courtroom, where he had testified in a civil trial alleging that he and others in the Trump Organization had committed fraud, and gave himself a great review. "I think it went very well," he told reporters. "If you were there, and you listened, you'd see what a scam this is." He meant that the case was a scam and not that his company was. "Everybody saw what happened today," he went on. "And it was very conclusive."

In truth, everybody didn't see; the courtroom could seat just a few dozen spectators. There were two overflow rooms, but the closed-circuit feed shown in them went no farther—the trial was not televised. Afterward, New York's attorney general, Letitia James, who was present, said that Trump had hardly put the matter to rest: "he rambled and he hurled insults." There was a transcript, but, to assess Trump's demeanor and tone, members of the public had to rely on the small number of people—journalists and lawyers, mostly—who witnessed them. And those reports differed, depending on, say, whether one watched MSNBC or Fox News.

The dissonance is about to get more extreme. Trump is facing four criminal cases: in the District of Columbia, related to the events of January 6th; in Florida, also a federal case, which involves hoarding documents marked classified; in Georgia, in a state RICO case related to January 6th, which encompasses his attempts to get officials to "find" him votes; and in New York, on state charges of falsifying business records. (Trump has denied any wrongdoing.) Currently, only the Georgia proceedings are due to be televised. New York law severely restricts what parts of a criminal trial can be filmed, and the federal judicial system's Rule 53 blocks the broadcasting of federal criminal trials.

A coalition of media organizations has asked Judge Tanya Chutkan, who is presiding over the D.C. case, to make an exception. (NBCUniversal Media filed a similar motion.) The coalition, which includes Advance, *The New Yorker's* parent company, argues that the ban must give way to the First Amendment right to record public events and to the right to open trials. While defendants have such a right, so do members of the public, especially those affected by an alleged crime. A coalition brief observed that, even if every courthouse room were used for overflow, it would hold only "a minute fraction of the 81.3 million victims" of Trump's alleged scheme to invalidate votes cast for Joe Biden.

The brief adds that there has never been a trial "in the history of our Nation" for which televised proceedings were more important. Trump is not just the former President but the leading contender for the 2024 Republican nomination. The conduct of the trials, their fairness, and their possibly damning verdicts will be at the center of the election. Transparency is crucial.

Jack Smith, the special counsel in both federal cases, has opposed the request, arguing that the normal rules should apply to Trump and that cameras would increase the pressure on the trial, especially on witnesses. Testifying may require courage whether cameras are there or not. But coverage can be tailored—for example, by not showing unwilling witnesses' faces. As a last resort, the media brief argues, even adding public audio (as the Supreme Court has done in its oral arguments) would help.

Trump, unsurprisingly, is happy to be tried on camera. His lawyers filed a brief saying that he "absolutely agrees, and in fact demands, that these proceedings should be fully televised." He and the media are on the same side, but for different reasons; his brief compares him to the victim of an "authoritarian regime." And his claim that cameras "will ensure that all can see how the Biden Administration is unlawfully and unconstitutionally attempting to eliminate its leading political opponent" is delusional. Regardless, the best way to

ILLUSTRATIONS BY JOÃO FAZENDA

demonstrate that something is not a show trial is to show the trial.

The dispute raises the question of whether Rule 53 is an outdated remnant of another time. A 1965 Supreme Court ruling often cited in support of the ban found that Billie Sol Estes, a politically connected Texas businessman convicted of fraud, had been denied a fair trial when state-court proceedings against him were televised. Unlike Trump, Estes had objected. Two major issues for the Court were the "notoriety" implied by the broadcast (the first televised trial had been just a few years earlier) and the disruption the recording caused: "Cables and wires were snaked across the courtroom floor, three microphones were on the judge's bench, and others were beamed at the jury box." Now, of course, broadcast equipment is neither conspicuous nor unusual. And, in the years since Estes, most state courts have slowly allowed more broadcasting. Even federal courts have done so with certain proceedings. The question is no longer whether there should be cameras in the courtroom—they are there, even if they are turned off or only sending images to an overflow room—but who gets to watch.

It doesn't make sense that one January 6th trial would be televised and the other wouldn't, simply because one case was brought by Fani Willis, the D.A. of Fulton County, Georgia, and the other by Smith. If the verdicts in those trials are split, the coalition argues, people may distrust what they did not see. Rule 53 could become the Area 51 of Trumpism—a zone where conspiracy theories flourish. The brief also notes that there had been concern, in 2020, that televising the trial of Derek Chauvin, the police officer charged in the murder of George Floyd, could lead to intimidation or unrest. Those fears were not realized. Minnesota's chief judge said of the broadcast, "At the end of the day it built confidence."

Confidence is a scarce resource these days. Objections to giving Trump a "platform"—or, really, to having to listen to another word he has to say—are, unfortunately, incompatible with putting him on trial. He will be able to choose whether to testify. There is apprehension about what he might say, and what his supporters might then do if they heed him, which is also fuelling higher-court showdowns about gag orders in the various trials.

Yet to believe that allowing the country to watch as Trump takes the stand would be more of a threat to the Republic than it would be to his defense is to accept his own myths about himself. The evidence against Trump ought to stand up to scrutiny far better than he will. Everybody should see that. Trump isn't camera-shy; prosecutors have no reason to be, either.

—Amy Davidson Sorkin

WIND ON CAPITOL HILL

THE SPEAKER AND THE ARK

One criticism of Mike Johnson, the new Speaker of the House, is that he doesn't have much experience in Congress, but that's not strictly true. Johnson was once the lawyer for a pretend Noah's ark, and during that time he gained some conceptual experience with many animals, including a congress of salamanders. The ark is in the horse country of northern Kentucky, and it was built to the specifications given by God to Noah in Genesis. That's three hundred cubits long, fifty cubits wide, and thirty cubits high, or five hundred and ten feet by eighty-five by fifty-one. In the words of a cartoon giraffe featured on the side of a bus that transports visitors to the ark, "It's SOOOOO big!"

Ark Encounter, as the attraction is known, was opened in 2016 by a Christian-fundamentalist nonprofit called Answers in Genesis. It was the vision of the group's young-Earth-creationist founder, Ken Ham, and cost more than a hundred million dollars. Kentucky offers a tax incentive to big tourist attractions; for Ark Encounter, this could add up to ongoing rebates totalling eighteen million dollars. But in 2014 the state blocked Ark Encounter's incentive; the organization, it turns out, requires its employees to make a "statement of faith," which labels homosexuality an abhorrence and rejects modern science. At the time, Johnson was an attorney for the religious legal-advocacy group Freedom Guard, and he sued on behalf of Ham and Ark Encounter, claiming that the State of Kentucky had engaged in religious discrimination. Johnson said that the suit was about "the free exercise of religion." The state lost.

The other day, Ham, who is seventy-two, surveyed the ark from the park's welcome center. "Every day, there's thousands," he said of the visitors milling about the grounds. (General adult admission is sixty dollars.) An Australian, Ham has white hair and whiskers, and is a celebrity among creationists. "The main antagonism is from secular atheists that don't want Christians to have a point of view," he said, ambling up a ramp leading into the hull of the ark, which was lit by fake oil lamps and lined with clay pots for hypothetical food. Halfway up, he was stopped by a couple riding mobility scooters.

"Is this the man everybody said was crazy?" the woman asked. Ham posed for a photo and then proceeded, past cages holding pairs of deer, sloths, and other animals made of Styrofoam or synthetic furs, up another ramp to the second deck, past squabbling children and young acolytes staring with their mouths open, and past more cages of pretend sabre-toothed marsupials and shrunken stegosauruses. According to Ham, the millions of land-animal species currently in existence, and the untold numbers that have gone extinct, all descended from around a thousand fundamental "kinds," including the "cat kind," the "cattle kind," and the "pig kind," conjured by God on the sixth day of Creation. "So we answer this question here, how so few kinds can become so many species," Ham said. "The way we got our domestic varieties of dogs, the domestic species, the poodles and Chihuahuas and bichons, is similar to natural selection, except we do the selecting instead of the environment." Some of the models look like hybrids—koalas crossed with wombats, say—that represent what could've been walking around with Noah thousands of years ago.

The scientific community hasn't warmed to Ham's views, which deny the findings of evolutionary biology, astrophysics, and geology. "Yeah, we're all about the Bible," Ham said. "But we're also about experimental science. We admit

our beliefs as well as promote science." He made his way to the third deck, stopping to sign a Bible for a fan. He passed wall text that posed and answered a variety of big questions.

Q: How did the six-hundred-year-old Noah deal with animal waste?

A: Strategically placed wheelbarrows.

Q: Can you explain fossils?

A: Mostly bones in the graveyard of the forty-five-hundred-year-old flood.

"We have really gone into a lot of detail, based on research on what man is able to do," Ham said. One question on a wall that didn't have an answer: "The pre-flood world was exceedingly wicked and deserved to be judged. Does our sin-filled world deserve any less?"

Ham climbed a flight of stairs and shuffled out onto the top of the ark, off-limits to tourists. "There are these articles, they're all saying that we used tax dollars," he said. "They are attack articles on Mike Johnson. But what it has done is, we've had a very large influx of people checking out our Web sites. People want to check out the ark."

In 2022, after Ham gave Johnson a private ark tour, Johnson said that it had almost brought him to tears. "Watching the faces of these kids and these families and how it's just kind of opening their minds," he said. "It's just really an awesome, awesome thing."

Standing atop the ark like a terrestrial sailor keeping watch, Ham pointed to a new hotel—a symbol, he said, of the economic boon he provides to the state. "When we apply for our rebate for the year, they send it straight away," he said, smiling. "Money speaks."

—Oliver Whang

FIJI POSTCARD
EVERYBODY'S LEARNING HOW

Namotu, Fiji, is a two-acre island in the South Pacific, a few nautical miles from the island depicted in "Cast Away" ("Wiiillllson!") and the islands where "Survivor" is filmed, hard by the famous surf spot known as Cloudbreak. One recent sundown, a disoriented Angeleno found a couple of Californian surfers there, drinking in the shade of a thatched-roof bar. They were Matt Warshaw and his longtime surf buddy Marc.

Warshaw has written extensively about surf culture and history. Ten years ago, he started the online Encyclopedia of Surfing. It now has some five thousand posts, covering the waterfront from A-frame (a peaky wave that breaks left and right) to zinc oxide.

"I'm probably not going to say anything," Marc said. Marc, Warshaw said, was the entire reason he was there. Marc had cajoled him to leave his computer and go surfing; it was Warshaw's first surf trip since the encyclopedia had gone live.

Warshaw said that he and Marc had met in biology class at Mira Costa High, in Manhattan Beach, dissecting a frog. The alumni were famous, to them. "Dewey Weber went there," Warshaw said. (Weber, Dewey: "Flashy bleach-blond surfer and boardmaker of the late '50s and '60s from Hermosa Beach, California; a hotdogging icon; founder and owner of surf industry powerhouse Weber Surfboards.")

"And Greg Noll went there," Warshaw continued. (Noll, Greg: "Boorish but charismatic big-wave rider . . . sometimes referred to as the 'Babe Ruth of surfing.'") "He was 'the Bull,'" Warshaw said. "When he was young, he was skinny 'cause he was a paddler, but when he got famous he looked like one of those old N.F.L. linebackers. Super solid. When he surfed, after he got good, all he wanted to do was ride big waves. He didn't move. He just kind of went like this." Warshaw got down from the barstool and dropped into a wide-legged squat. "It wasn't called the poo stance then." Noll, he said, invented the concept of the Big Wave Surfer. "He had the jailhouse surf trunks, black and white stripes, and he wore them every time he surfed. If you bought a Greg Noll surfboard, it came with a signature and a little drawing of him dropping into a huge wave in his trunks."

Marc smiled. Warshaw, Matt: Obsessive autodidact; Venice Beach grom, starting in '69; rode for what became known as the Z-Boys, surf team for Jeff Ho's surfboard shop in Santa Monica, later known for its skateboarding team (see: "Dogtown and Z-Boys"); No. 43 in the world, in 1982; an editor

Matt Warshaw (right), with Marc

at *Surfer*, 1985-90; sixty-three-year-old nostalgist; still rips.

"The first Zephyr surfboard ever made was made for me," Warshaw said. "My brand-new Jeff Ho surfboard had been stolen. I was twelve, and heartbroken. I was with Jay Adams, who later became the most famous of the Z-Boys." Adams's dad had been driving them up the coast. They got out at Leo Carrillo to check the surf; in five minutes' time, the board was nicked. The Zephyr was its replacement.

Travels with Marc went somewhat better. North Shore, Puerto Escondido, Todos Santos, Cabo, Grajagan. "We were staying in huts, with mosquito nets. It was kind of terrifying," Warshaw said. The next summer, a tidal wave came through, demolishing the camp and pushing all the surfers into the jungle. They also went to France, Spain, and Portugal. It was 1989, and the surf was sluggish. "That was where we got in our biggest fight," Warshaw said, over whose turn it was to pay a toll. (It was Marc's, but he didn't have the correct currency.) "That was my fault," Warshaw said.

In the mid-nineties, Warshaw realized he knew more about the history of surfing than anyone he could think of. "If you know so much, write an encyclopedia," his dad told him. "I said, 'Ha ha ha ha,'" Warshaw recalled. "And he said, 'No, seriously.'"

So how did it feel, getting back in the water after a decade-long dry spell? "The first day, I was really nervous," he said. "I just paddled out there, on Marc's

board. The shaper is a guy that Marc and I have been getting boards from since the eighties. He's made both of us really good boards for an absurdly low amount of money. He still makes his boards in his mom's garage."

Warshaw had vowed *not* to surf Cloudbreak: too gnarly for him these days. He instead chose a spot known as Swimming Pools, for the translucent turquoise color of the water rolling over the reef. "I got a wave right off the bat and I rode it from outside all the way in," Warshaw said. "It felt *so* good. Everything I've ever loved about surfing came back to me."

At the far end of the bar, a group of Fijian women were having a laugh. Why were they never seen in the lineup? One, with a frangipani blossom tucked behind her ear, said, "We tried it when we were young, but we got smashed on the reef and now we never want to go back again."

—Dana Goodyear

STEPS DEPT.
HOEDOWN

The actor and musician Lola Kirke was in the East Village the other day, in cowboy boots, picking at a salad before a line-dance class. Kirke, who has starred in "Gone Girl," "Mozart in the Jungle," and (alongside Greta Gerwig) "Mistress America," has created two albums and two EPs with an increasing country twang. The class that night was also hers, sort of. She was there to practice a signature line dance, conceived for her latest single, a frolicsome country hop called "He Says Y'all."

"The song is kind of like an explanation of why someone from New York could love country music," Kirke said. She was wearing boots with horseshoes on them and a red flowery dress. The song is a boot scoot, so a custom dance just made sense. Fittingly, the evening's students were a crew of New York line-dance fans, who convene every week in the back room of a nearby Ukrainian restaurant. "People are line dancing all over the place," Kirke said. "We just don't know. It's like 'Fight Club'—it's happening everywhere."

There had been some confusion over whether Kirke herself would be leading the class. "I'm not fucking leading," she said. "I'm just dancing. I'm terrible!" The choreographer of the dance, Kirke's friend Tenaya Kelleher, would be teaching. "Thank God," Kirke said. She's more of a two-stepper: "The beauty of it is you don't have to be good, if you're not the leader. You dance with these old men, who are fucking incredible. It's better than sex. You just completely let go and you are respectfully used to sweep up the floor."

To the dance floor! How many people would be there? Ten? Twenty? "She says she doesn't even promote the class, because it's so full," Kirke said of Kelleher. Past a red-and-blue neon sign, some old-timey pastoral paintings, and a dining room of people quietly spooning up borscht and mushroom barley, a pair of double doors opened to reveal about a hundred people stamping and shimmying. Many feet were cowboy-booted. A young first-timer wore a white shirt and white carpenter pants. His name was Maciej Musiałowski, and he was an actor from Poland. "I'm not prepared," he said, eying the footwear. "Everyone has the shoes." He was wearing loafers with a slight heel. "I have just a gentleman's shoe."

The music started, and cowboy boots, Blundstones, sneakers, oxfords, and Musiałowski's loafers got moving. The students went through the moves of the dance, including half a K-step, a double clap, a stomp, a scuff, a quarter turn. Musiałowski nailed his first heel-toe, but was late on the grapevine. Kirke danced next to him. "Learning choreography is vulnerable and weird for a lot of us, but we're just here to dance and sweat with one another!" Kelleher yelled. "If the dance feels overwhelming, literally just keep moving your feet and just, like, try."

During a short break, Kirke said "Amazing boots!" to a woman who wore neon-green, cow-patterned clodhoppers. "Game sees game, you know?"

Kirke's new EP, which comes out in February, is called "Country Curious," and she was nerding out to the class's playlist. "This song is sick," she shouted over "Texas Time," by Keith Urban. "You should listen to 'Blue Ain't Your Color,'"

Lola Kirke

she added. A cluster of regulars took the center of the floor and began to really hoedown. Musiałowski looked a little shocked. "Wait, what's happening?" he asked. "What is happening?"

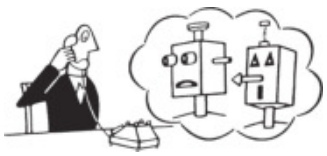
"This is a huge part of why I want to make music like this," Kirke said. "Look how fucking happy they are!"

By the end of the night, Musiałowski had found his feet. He scooted a boot, and hip-bumped a guy in blue Mizunos. The last film he acted in was an action picture called "Freestyle," about, he said, "a Polish Jew that likes adrenaline and loves hip-hop." Line dancing fit the bill. "It makes you without any borders between people," he said. "When the music plays, you just rock!"

He loved Kirke's bespoke dance. "I had a good partner next to me," he said. Someone pointed out that his partner was Kirke. "Oh, my God, I didn't know that. Congratulations!" he said to her. Kirke told him that he was a natural.

—Naaman Zhou

BOT DEPT.
A.I. FOR 3BR, WBF



The spectre of artificial intelligence is worrying lots of workers, but one office is welcoming it with open arms and an apple pie in the oven. "There are many people who, at 2 A.M., are on their phones, looking at what's on the mar-

ket," Fredrik Eklund, of the real-estate agency the Eklund Gomes Team, said the other day. He sat in the reception area of his Flatiron office wearing a pale-pink blazer, jeans, and thick black-framed eyeglasses. "Now they can talk to Maya. Her shop is open 24/7, and she is always there."

Maya is a bot that melds ChatGPT with publicly available real-estate data. Eklund and his business partner, John Gomes, created her with Purlin, an A.I. company. She lives on the Eklund Gomes Web site, and her expertise can be utilized by anyone, for free. "You can ask her about open houses, what's going on with interest rates," Eklund said. "What she has that ChatGPT doesn't—and I can say this, because she's our daughter—is spunk."

"She's fun," Gomes said. He wore a navy polo shirt, pleated pants, and round blue eyeglasses. "The thing about real estate is that it can be nerve-racking. We always try to bring the fun—"

"At our own expense, often," Eklund interrupted. (Maya has so far set them back half a million dollars.)

"It's about putting the shoulders down," Gomes said. "You're never gonna sell a twenty-million-dollar home to someone who's got their shoulders all scrunched up. She had to have a personality that makes you want to come back."

In anticipation of Maya's launch, in September, Gomes and Eklund took her for a test-drive. They huddled in front of an iPad in their office kitchenette. After a couple of taps and swipes, a woman's face, with a visage that could satisfy multiple diversity requirements but cannot be found in nature (purple-hued, poreless), filled the screen. "We knew that she was going to be sort of brownish," Gomes said. Below Maya's face, sample questions—"Why is NY so expensive?"—and a prompt to ask one of your own.

"If you're satisfied with the answer, you give her a thumbs-up," Eklund said. "If you're not, thumbs-down—like, 'Go back to school, Maya.'"

A test question was typed: "What is for sale in Tribeca for under $1 million?" Maya's response, in a text bubble: "Unfortunately, we couldn't find any listings that match your preferences."

The West Village? Again, no listings.

"Try between three and five million," Gomes said. "Make sure you use the dollar sign."

Maya: "My investigation in West Village has revealed a treasure trove of properties that harmonize flawlessly with your wishes. . . . Fancy taking a closer look?" Eklund and Gomes whooped. A link was clicked. It revealed a house in the West Village neighborhood of Long Beach, California.

"Oh, *no*," Eklund said. "Thumbs-down." He tapped out a question with a less obvious answer: "Is Ryan Serhant"—a real-estate agent he appeared with on the reality series "Million Dollar Listing New York"—"more attractive than Fredrik Eklund?"

Maya: "Both incredibly successful," but "beauty is subjective."

"Thumbs-up," Gomes said.

Next question: "Would it be a good idea to relocate from L.A. to New York?"

Maya: "You should have a place in both cities. If you can afford it."

"So diplomatic!" Gomes said.

"What might one get for $1 million in New York and L.A.?"

Maya: "Let's be honest—not a lot." Gomes cackled. Eklund grabbed the iPad and typed, "Who can sell me a town house in Greenwich Village?," which led, for some reason, to a prompt for Maya to create a Beyoncé playlist.

"Oh, this is brilliant," he said, and gestured at the screen. "Look how Maya knows to call her Queen Bey."

Janet Temidayo, an agent, walked in, and Gomes invited her to join them. "Ask her a question. Is she going to put you out of business?"

"I'd advise her to stay in her lane," Temidayo said.

"You've got to *put* her in her lane," Gomes said. "She only knows what you teach her."

Temidayo sat down and typed, "What is the highest-selling new-development condo project in Harlem?"

Maya: "The Renaissance at 130th Street."

"That's not correct," Temidayo said. "I don't even know what the Renaissance is." She asked about another new development project, resulting in another thumbs-down.

"I don't think she's so good with this term, 'new development project,'" Eklund said.

"Something she needs to learn," Gomes said.

Temidayo stood up and pointed at Eklund's glasses on the table: "He's missing a lens."

"Oh, he doesn't have any lenses," Gomes said. "It's all about the look."

—Sheila Yasmin Marikar

"Sorry—there's no bongo-drum solo in this piece, either."

ONWARD AND UPWARD WITH THE ARTS

INTERIORS

Onscreen and onstage, Sandra Hüller probes her characters with unusual depth.

BY REBECCA MEAD

To play a Nazi wife, in "The Zone of Interest," she withheld her typical empathy.

PHOTOGRAPH BY MARK PECKMEZIAN

In 2019, Sandra Hüller, one of Germany's foremost stage and film actors, starred as Hamlet in a production at the Schauspielhaus Bochum, in the Ruhr Valley. For most performers, the part is challenge enough. But as Hüller prepared for the role with the theatre's artistic director, Johan Simons, their discussions kept drifting to the character who animates Hamlet's fantasies of revenge: his father's ghost. In most stagings, ghastly makeup and lighting convey that the character is spectral. Could this lingering spirit be conjured without melodramatic clichés? Simons and Hüller agreed that it would be potent for the father to rise from *within* the son—speaking through him. As Simons recently described the conceit, "The father is so deep in your soul that you can't get away from him—he is always *in* you."

In the opening scene of the modern-dress, German-language production, Hüller stood alone onstage, her hands hanging uselessly by her sides, her eyes downcast. In a trembling near-whisper, she spoke lines that Shakespeare originally wrote for Hamlet's friend Horatio: "If there be any good thing to be done,/That may to thee do ease and grace to me,/ Speak to me." Hüller smiled faintly to hold back tears, and her voice broke as she muttered, "You are here, you are *here*."

When it came time for Hamlet's encounter with the Ghost, an eerie chord resounded, and Hüller's soft, breathy voice suddenly dropped an octave. She was no longer Hamlet, or not entirely. "Pity me not!" Hüller said, her eyes hardening and her voice quickening as she channelled the Ghost: "I am thy father's spirit,/ Doom'd for a certain term to walk the night,/ And for the day confined to fast in fires,/ Till the foul crimes done in my days of nature/ Are burnt and purged away." As Hüller played it, Hamlet wasn't seeing a ghost; he was being possessed by it. Hüller's previously gentle demeanor was displaced by lurching motion, and when the Ghost furiously commanded his son's obedience—"List, list, O, list!" in Shakespeare's original—she practically vomited up the words: "*Hör, hör, o, hör!*"

The scene was as scary to watch as any horror movie, but it also felt profound: the sins of the old were literally infecting the bodies of the young, emphasizing the generational rot at the heart of the play. German critics hailed Hüller's performance as revelatory—not just as an examination of character but as an exploration of the capacities of stage art. *Der Spiegel* said that witnessing Hüller wrestle with Hamlet and the Ghost simultaneously was like watching "an exorcism."

Before the show opened, Hüller read an essay that portrayed "Hamlet" as a critique of the conventions of Renaissance revenge tragedy—and of the society from which those conventions emerged. "Shakespeare wrote the play at the edge of these times when blood revenge was still a thing," she told me recently. "Shakespeare's showing it one more time, but in the most absurd way—because *everybody's* dead at the end. The play is saying, 'This can't be the way.'" At the Schauspielhaus Bochum, the climactic duel between Hamlet and Laertes swerved away from physical violence: neither combatant would make the first move. Instead, Hüller and Dominik Dos-Reis, the actor playing Laertes, hurled the phrase "*fang an*"—"start"—back and forth, battling not just each other but the demand for a bloody confrontation. The moment culminated, as it does in Shakespeare's text, in an unexpected

gesture of forgiveness. "They shake hands before they die, and say, 'We don't want to be like our fathers,'" Hüller said. "And, to me, that is something that applied to the world as it is now. That seemed to be something that I could identify with. Not to redo all the things that our ancestors have done before but to *change* them—to break the chain."

Hüller liked that the production showed the effect of violence without actually showing violence. "When you show violence, I believe, it must have a strong form," she told me. "You can't treat it like any other sort of narrative in a story. It means something when you show a rape onstage, or when somebody gets slapped in the face onstage. It is crossing a line." Her voice, usually soft, shifted to a more forceful register. "I have heard a lot of directors point out, 'Yeah, but that's what's in the story,'" she continued. "I *know* what's in the story. But still, *I* can decide, because I am the artist, what to show of it, and what not. *I* can decide how I want to shape the world that we are building onstage."

Hüller is becoming better known to audiences beyond the German-speaking world through her appearance in two widely praised movies, both of which are centrally concerned with violence, and with how to represent violence. In "Anatomy of a Fall," from the French director Justine Triet, Hüller plays Sandra Voyter, a successful novelist. When her husband, Samuel, a less successful writer, is found dead, sprawled beneath an open window of their Alpine home—his body is discovered by the couple's preadolescent son, who is partially blind—Voyter comes under suspicion of murder.

The film is partly in English, a language in which both Hüller and the character she plays are fluent, and takes the form of a courtroom drama—but the did-she-or-didn't-she question is a red herring. "Anatomy of a Fall," which won the Palme d'Or at Cannes this year, is less concerned with whether Voyter is guilty or innocent than it is with probing murkier questions of blame and interdependence within a marriage. Hüller portrays Voyter with a labile complexity, and the camera often lingers on Hüller's face as it shifts like quicksilver between playfulness, defiance, and evasion. In the movie's opening scene, Voyter is seen leaning back in a chair, glass of wine in hand, charming a young female interviewer with an explanation of how she could ruthlessly pin her to the page in a novel, if it suited her artistic needs. This flirtatious power play becomes even more charged retrospectively, when it emerges that Voyter has had extramarital affairs, at least one of them with a woman. Voyter's considerable self-possession is later revealed to be a fault line in her marriage. During a discussion in the couple's kitchen—an audio recording of which becomes evidence at the trial—Samuel complains that he has sacrificed his own work to support hers. Initially, Voyter is tender, soothing her riled spouse, attempting to convey her affection while still challenging his sense of victimhood. But the argument escalates into violence, with Voyter overcome by anger just as Hüller's Hamlet was taken over by a ghost. The climax of the kitchen argument is rendered in sound alone, with the listeners in the courtroom—and the movie's viewers—forced to imagine who is doing what to whom.

The fight between the spouses, which is presented in court as the key to whether Hüller's character is responsible for her husband's death, in fact addresses a more complex, and more widely applicable, question: whether Voyter is responsible for her husband's life. Hüller told me that she'd never seen a woman like Voyter represented in a movie before. "I know a few women who live in the sort of relationship where they protect their husbands from the truth, because it's too hard," she said. "I was a big fan of the idea that someone has the balls to say it—that, as Justine put it, 'I love you, but what you think is wrong. I am not responsible for your pain—*you* are responsible for your pain.'"

Triet, who a few years ago cast Hüller as a high-strung movie director in the black farce "Sibyl," wrote the part of Voyter with Hüller in mind. "She has a kind of physicality—I knew that I could film her without makeup, without her being ultra-feminine—and also a kind of humanity, a way of being that is absolutely self-confident and unapologetic. These traits led me to say to myself, 'I can go far with the idea that this woman is not perfect, while knowing that the viewer will follow her and love her until the end.' This isn't a given with all actresses—there are some who would have been either overly theatrical or way too sophisticated." The film is self-consciously slick while withholding the crisp resolution of the usual whodunnit. The viewer is left wondering where the truth lies—as is the couple's son, who, having lost a father, realizes that he holds his mother's fate in his hands.

Whereas "Anatomy of a Fall" gave Hüller the chance to play a character whose culpability is disquietingly ambiguous, "The Zone of Interest," which will be released in the U.S. in December, offered her the opportunity to portray an individual whose guilt is not in question. The movie, written and directed by the British filmmaker Jonathan Glazer, is loosely based on the historical novel of the same name by Martin Amis. Hüller plays Hedwig Höss, the wife of Rudolf Höss, who served for several years as the commandant of Auschwitz. Glazer refrains from explicitly depicting the violence of the Holocaust; most of the film is set just beyond the camp's perimeter, at the Hösses' well-appointed family home, where Hedwig is raising the couple's five children, tending an ornate garden, and wearing a wardrobe luxuriously augmented by thefts from the exterminated. When Höss is transferred to a position north of Berlin, Hedwig petulantly refuses to leave the comforts of Auschwitz, forcing him to go alone. Hedwig, blinkered by the bounty of her domestic environs, seemingly ignores the infernal light and smoke from nearby chimney stacks, and otherwise blocks out the machinery of mass death: the barking of guard dogs, the rumbling of crematoria, the crack of pistols, the screams of prisoners.

Glazer has described the making of "The Zone of Interest" as a process of constructing two films—a visual one and an aural one—which he then layered on top of each other. (Johnnie Burn devised the disturbing sound design.) Stylistically, the film could not

be more different from "Anatomy of a Fall," nor could it make more different use of Hüller's skills as an actor. Rather than toying with a viewer's sympathies through the use of closeups, Glazer maintains a cold distance, often keeping the camera static and framing a scene as if it were taking place on a stage. At the movie's beginning and end, and at a turning point in the middle, the screen suddenly fills with solid black or red, like a stage curtain descending. (The soundtrack keeps rumbling.) Such effects recall the kind of avant-garde European theatre productions in which Hüller regularly appears.

Although Hüller could hint at the psychology of Sandra Voyter through the set of her mouth or the raising of an eyebrow, capturing Hedwig required a broader physicality, drawing on skills that Hüller had acquired through theatre work. "The word is basically the last thing that you use onstage, since ultimately everything can be told through the body," she once said to an interviewer. Hüller is tall and slender, but as Hedwig she adopted an ungainly gait—shoulders hunched forward, feet spread apart. Her movements, she explained to me, were based on some members of her extended family, and were intended to reflect Hedwig's experiences before Auschwitz, which involved farm life and repeated childbearing. Małgorzata Karpiuk, the movie's costume designer, told me, "We designed Sandra's dresses to be maybe a bit too long, or a bit too small, or too big—so that they are beautiful but not perfect. Hedwig wanted to be elegant, but they are not elegant. And when Sandra started to move, she did not move elegantly." Hüller said, "Hedwig can only be this person because she makes other people suffer—that, alone, does something to your body. The weight of the guilt that she doesn't really feel. *That's* in the body."

When Hüller was approached to play Hedwig, she was initially skeptical. "I always refused to play Fascists—which, of course, especially in international productions, come your way from time to time as a German actress," she told me over lunch at a restaurant in Leipzig, where she lives with her twelve-year-old daughter. (Hüller is not with the girl's father.) The neighborhood was filled with galleries and restaurants, and the pavement of its main street, Karl-Heine Strasse, was studded with *Stolpersteine*—memorial plaques outside buildings whose former residents were murdered in the Holocaust. We sat in a pleasant outdoor area, and Hüller's dog, a Weimaraner mix, rested beside her on a blanket that Hüller had brought from home. (The dog appears in "The Zone of Interest" as the family pet.) "I didn't like the idea of putting on a Nazi uniform like that, or using language like that—to get close to the energy of that, or to discover there would be fun in that," Hüller went on. "I have seen colleagues that actually have fun doing it. Maybe it's still in their bodies from former generations. They like to change their language and *speak like that*"—the tone of her voice changed, her usually soft-spoken, careful speech becoming harsh and rat-a-tat. Reverting to her own voice, she asked, "Why do they do it? They could speak like a normal person."

Hüller also disapproves of projects that use the Nazi era as a canvas upon which to paint a dramatic story that has little to do with Fascism. (Netflix's recent soapy drama "All the Light We Cannot See" could be considered a prime example.) She was therefore attracted to the pointed absence of drama in Glazer's screenplay: nothing much happens beyond what we know is happening offscreen, as the murderous apparatus under Höss's command becomes ever more efficient. She told me, "Jonathan and I had a lot of conversations about the traps in this kind of story we wanted to tell—which is not really a story. There is a couple, and one wants to leave, and the other doesn't."

Both "The Zone of Interest" and "Anatomy of a Fall" demanded that Hüller adjust her customary approach to film roles. Usually, she explained, "I fall in love with the characters, I know what they would do in a situation, I have the feeling that I *understand* them." With "Anatomy of a Fall," though, there were central opacities. Hüller was never told by Triet whether Sandra was guilty or not; Triet's only instruction was to play her *as if* she were innocent, which accommodated the possibility that Voyter was a deft dissembler. Hüller came to see Voyter as being "like a very good friend who doesn't tell you everything." Hedwig Höss, however, was not someone Hüller wished to identify or empathize with at all. Her solution to the artistic challenge of playing a Nazi was to withhold her own humanity from the character. "I wanted to use my power as an actor *not* to give the character any capacity to feel love, joy, fulfillment, connection—all these things, just take them away," she told me. "The idea was to make the story as boring as possible—to give them as little excitement and joy as possible. They live the most unfulfilled life that someone can imagine, and they don't know it—but *we* know it."

Rudolf Höss was convicted of war crimes in 1947, and hanged at Auschwitz. Hedwig Höss wasn't tried alongside her husband, but in the sixties she provided testimony at a trial of surviving Auschwitz functionaries; photographs taken outside the courthouse, in Frankfurt, show Hedwig staring icily at the photographer in a camel coat and heels, her hair drawn back from the broad planes of her face. Hüller listened to a recording of Hedwig's testimony before filming began, and decided against modelling her own vocal delivery on it. Hedwig's voice sounded weirdly high, Hüller noticed, like a little girl's. "I very much had the feeling that she was taking on a role, or a character," Hüller said.

Hedwig Höss died in 1989, at the age of eighty-one. During the Nuremberg trials, her husband had said that she knew what he and his colleagues were doing on the other side of the wall. The foul stench of the burning bodies, he had noted, meant "all of the people living in the surrounding communities knew that exterminations were going on." Hüller said of Hedwig, "Of course she knew, because she saw it. She *acted* like an innocent person." By

playing a Nazi wife who speaks in the most ordinary of tones as she stomps around her ill-gotten domain, Hüller found a way to give eloquent voice to her character's complicity.

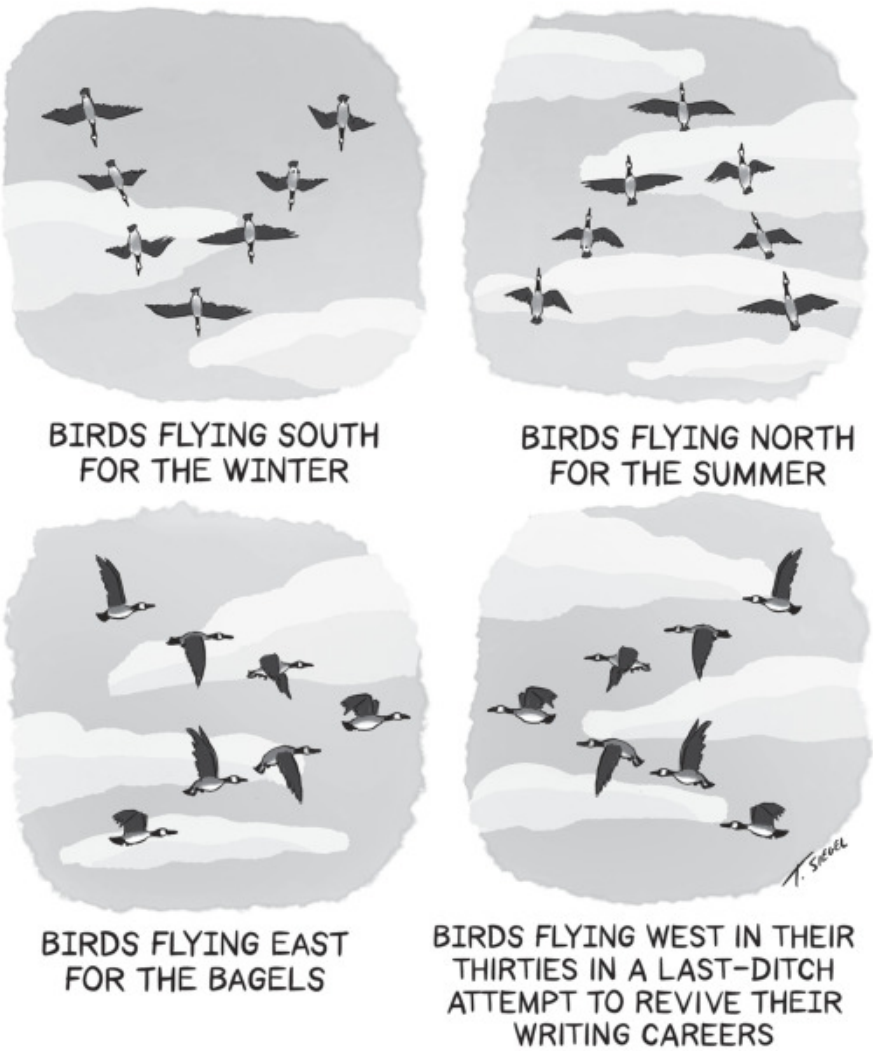
Hüller was born in 1978 and grew up in Friedrichroda, a town in a mountainous region of Thuringia that, until she turned eleven, was part of East Germany. She was the elder of two children, with parents who were educators. The first foreign language that Hüller studied was Russian; holidays were often spent in Czechoslovakia or other Communist neighbors. The education system stressed principles of antifascism. If certain Socialist edicts were absurd—Coke cans were banned, as icons of Western consumerism, and were therefore coveted as status symbols—her family's life generally felt reassuring and equitable. "You were not bombarded with products that you had to choose from," Hüller told me. "There was one milk, and one bread, and everyone had the same. If you wanted something special, you had to take your time and stand in line and wait until you got some, and maybe it was finished at the moment you arrive. And that's life—you can't have everything."

Christian Friedel, who plays Rudolf Höss in "The Zone of Interest," also grew up in the East, and he told me that "the system was more a 'we' than an 'I.'" Hüller concurred: "What I learned was the power of community—that everybody is responsible for the community, and has their part to do for the community, and that we are stronger together."

Hüller dates the end of her childhood to 1989, in part because it was the first time she saw adults who were unable to hide their confusion and fear. "There was also a lot of joy—we saw people dancing in the streets," she said. "But no one knew how the system worked, and what would happen to the jobs, and what would happen to the houses and the companies." East German citizens may have been expected to embrace the West, but many people who had enjoyed secure employment suddenly found their skills harshly subjected to the caprices of the marketplace.

The demands of capitalism in a formerly Communist country form the backdrop of Maren Ade's brilliant film "Toni Erdmann," from 2016. Hüller plays Ines, a career-obsessed business consultant working joylessly in contemporary Romania, advising executives to increase profits by laying off employees. Ines's routine is interrupted by the arrival of her father—a music teacher, played by Peter Simonischek, who has a Socialist sensibility. Dismayed by her grim workaholism, he assails her with practical jokes, involving everything from whoopee cushions to giant false teeth. Under his influence, Ines's rigidity is replaced by an increasingly madcap recklessness, allowing Hüller to display her gift for physical comedy. In the film's climax, Ines invites colleagues to a team-building birthday brunch at her apartment; when the doorbell rings while she is trying to wriggle out of a too-tight dress, she discards her clothes altogether, then spontaneously—and excruciatingly—informs her boss that he has shown up at a "naked reception." Ines, an avatar of naked capitalism who is also a loving daughter, is simultaneously reprehensible and winning. "I had doubts about playing her in the first place, because she says and does things that I didn't agree with," Hüller told me. "But I realized she was just standing up for her beliefs, like I would."

Hüller began acting in high school, and applied to the Ernst Busch Academy of Dramatic Arts, in Berlin, which required her to audition with a scene from "Romeo and Juliet." She told me, "I wasn't very fond of the idea—I didn't care for the character." Hüller performed the soliloquy in which Juliet prepares to be placed inside a dark tomb from which she believes Romeo will retrieve her. Before drinking a sleeping potion, she frets about waking in a panic and using an ancestor's



"Hey, how about when someone unsubscribes we send them another e-mail letting them know that they've unsubscribed?"

• •

bone to "dash out my desperate brains." Hüller decided to have Juliet swallow the potion before delivering the monologue, rather than at its end, as the stage directions suggest, and performed her morbid fantasies as a drug-induced hallucination.

The teachers were evidently impressed by her audacity, and Hüller moved to Berlin. She lived in Prenzlauer Berg, a neighborhood in the former East, sharing an apartment with a friend from home. It was 1996, and the area was still largely untouched by the effects of capitalism. The living conditions were meagre—the apartment's heat came from a stove that Hüller had to feed with coal or wood—but the social conditions were thrillingly dynamic. "There were so many free spaces, so many abandoned houses, and parties everywhere," she recalled. The Ernst Busch Academy, by contrast, was famed for the strictness of its instruction. One teacher advised Hüller to play a nun, because wearing a habit would force her to stop relying on her hands to express herself.

After graduating, Hüller left Berlin, despite its cultural centrality. "I could never deal with the tension there," she said. "I always had the feeling that I had to *be* somebody, or put on a certain face, when I got into the streets. I never felt relaxed." She spent two years at a theatre southwest of Leipzig, then moved to Switzerland to join the Theater Basel. In 2003, she was named Young Actress of the Year by *Theater Heute* magazine, in part for playing Juliet in a Shakespeare production. Hüller reprised her hallucinatory interpretation of Juliet's soliloquy, and discovered that the character was more rewarding than she had realized. "I had razor-cut my hair just before the audition in Switzerland, so I went to it almost bald, and that is how I played her," she said. "I started to like her very much, and to find her very modern, because at the start she doesn't run to Romeo. I always had this picture of Juliet being really sweet, and that's what I hated about it. But then I realized she doesn't have to be sweet, because Romeo has to love her anyway. I can do whatever I want, and he will still look at me with those loving eyes. So, I did everything I wanted, and he *still* loved me."

Hüller's success in Basel led to her first cinematic role: the protagonist of "Requiem," a 2006 drama directed by Hans-Christian Schmid and based on the true story of Anneliese Michel, a young Bavarian woman whose epileptic fits and hallucinations were understood by her Catholic family to be instances of demonic possession. After undergoing dozens of exorcisms, Michel stopped eating and died of malnutrition, in 1976. The actor Jens Harzer, who appeared in "Requiem" as a priest, recently recalled that Hüller—though a newcomer to movies—"dominated" their first scene together: "She knew exactly what she wanted and what she did not want, had an idea, a plan, followed her path, and knew not to make herself dependent on me." Hüller, whom the *Times* praised for her "astonishingly physical performance," has said that her work in theatre, in which she often must conjure worlds on bare sets, was excellent training for the part, noting, "I don't have to have visions in order to play them. I have enough imagination to picture what it means when you see something that really isn't there."

While filming "Requiem," in southern Germany, Hüller sometimes had to return to Switzerland to uphold theatre commitments in Basel. "I had to be onstage at night, so I was driven back—three, four, five hours—so that I could be back on the film set in the morning," she recalled. The economics of the performing arts in Germany encourage actors to strike a balance between stage roles and higher-paying

film parts: theatres across the country are subsidized by the state and by local governments, and actors are regularly hired as full-time employees, an arrangement that enables them to enjoy far less precarious careers than they would in the United States. It also allows theatre directors to take artistic chances that might not fly in a more commercially driven system. Hüller became a member of the company at the Schauspielhaus Bochum in 2018; she's no longer a full-time employee but continues to perform there as a guest, even though Bochum is more than four hours west of Leipzig by train. "Johan Simons chose to be here, so I didn't have a choice," she told me when I met with her in Bochum recently. She and Simons, who is Dutch and is known internationally for his bold stagings of operas and plays, have collaborated on at least ten productions.

This fall, she has been appearing at the Schauspielhaus in a freewheeling adaptation of Luis Buñuel's "The Exterminating Angel," which I saw during my visit. She had arrived in Bochum just a few hours before being due onstage, and would be delivered back to Leipzig immediately after her curtain call. The evening's production, conceived by Simons, had transplanted Buñuel's scenario—a dinner party from which guests discover they cannot leave—to an abandoned classroom, with the guests stationed at children's desks. Simons had also interpolated musical numbers, and at one point Hüller, who played the party's host, sang Cyndi Lauper's "Girls Just Want to Have Fun" in a platinum wig, with vocals as delightfully deranged as the original's.

Hüller is a gifted singer: she has recorded background tracks for the Notwist, a well-known German indie band, and a few years ago she released an EP of original material in English, "Be Your Own Prince," which features layered harmonies and experimental lyrics. (Challenged by a friend to write a song about pornography, Hüller coupled the term with assonant words—"eternally," "intimately," "honestly"—in an unexpectedly wistful number titled "You & Me = Pornography.") Even greater than her skill as a singer is her skill at disguising how good a singer she is. A high point of "Toni Erdmann" occurs when, at an awkward social function in Bucharest, Ines's father cajoles her into a karaoke performance of Whitney Houston's "Greatest Love of All"; Hüller's singing grows less inhibited—and less in tune—as the song progresses.

"The Exterminating Angel" drew on some of the same comedic skills, at a broader register fit for the theatre, with Hüller hurtling across the stage in high heels, using all her powers of control to make it look as if she were losing control. The production was very weird—and fun to watch. It was no "Hamlet," but not every production can or should be. Hüller told me, "I think that, secretly, Johan just wanted to have a musical piece."

Despite the logistical difficulties of maintaining a stage career, Hüller has no intention of giving it up, as it lets her have a different kind of artistic freedom than movie acting does. The films that she makes are mostly auteur-driven, she noted: "With a Shakespeare play, a Kleist, an Ibsen, I can take it and do with it whatever I want. But, when somebody just wrote the script, I have to decide before I go into the work if I am willing to do the things that are written down." Frauke Finsterwalder, a director with whom Hüller worked on another film released this year, "Sisi & I"—a costume drama in which Hüller plays Irma Sztáray, the lady-in-waiting to the Austrian Empress Elisabeth—told me, "Sometimes when you work with theatre actors, you have to

make sure they don't treat the film as a stage and overact. You never have to tell Sandra, 'That's too much.' She understands the medium well." In one scene in "Sisi," a reluctant Irma is persuaded to participate in an amateur dramatic performance. "I don't know how Sandra pulled it off—to be not a bad actress but, rather, someone who has never been onstage," Finsterwalder said. "She's been on all the big stages in the German-speaking world—played men, women, whatever. While shooting the scene, she kept on telling me, 'I am so embarrassed.' And that's of course because *Irma* is embarrassed—Sandra was so much into it that she was very uncomfortable herself."

Hüller said that even when performing in a film she tries to embody one of Simons's precepts about stage acting. "He is someone who teaches you to let everything that happens onstage really happen in your head, or in your body, or in your heart," she told me in Bochum. "It's not about hiding anything. Everybody knows that it's you, wearing a costume. So why would you pretend to be somebody else?"

When Hüller was playing Hamlet, Simons told me, he talked with her about the ways Hamlet is paralyzed by grief. The play, Simons said, "is about somebody who doesn't know his orientation in the world—and in a way he can only stay still." In the performance, when it came time for a twenty-minute intermission, Hüller never left the stage; instead, she remained standing in one spot, trapped in thought. Before long, some audience members started staying in place for the intermission, too, so that they could witness the electric drama of Hamlet, and Hüller, thinking.

While Hüller was growing up in the German Democratic Republic, she was distantly aware that what often seemed to her idyllic was not entirely so. "I remember when we had parties and friends over, and when political things were discussed the windows would be closed, even when it was summer," she told me in Leipzig. Like many residents of the city, Hüller is mindful of the special role that it played in the reunification of Germany; she urged me to visit the Nikolaikirche, a Gothic church in the heart of the city where, in 1989, weekly prayer meetings evolved into pro-democracy protests. A month before the fall of the Berlin Wall, more than seventy thousand residents marched in the face of riot police and called for peaceful reform—the largest demonstration the G.D.R. had experienced in decades.

In the past several years, the former

East Germany has seen a resurgence of right-wing extremism. In June, the racist Alternative für Deutschland party, or AfD, elected its first district administrator—the equivalent of a mayor—in Sonneberg, a town in Hüller's native state of Thuringia. Hüller bristles at any suggestion that residents of the former East are particularly susceptible to the allures of nationalism; recent AfD successes in the Western states of Hesse and Bavaria support her position. "I think it's coming back all over the country," she told me. "I think the fairy tale of the de-Fascistization of Germany never really took place. But now we live in a climate where it is possible again to say Fascistic things out loud."

It was therefore an especially charged moment to explore the dynamics of a Fascist family, in "The Zone of Interest." Hüller told me, "When I looked at Hedwig and Rudolf Höss—I mean, they were really simple people. They wanted to be farmers, and wanted to have a beautiful life, and then this idea came along—and they decided for it. They decided, consciously or unconsciously, to accept the luxury and beauty or safety of their life at the cost of the lives of other people right next to them."

Whereas many feature films about the Holocaust portray its leaders as thoroughly monstrous—in "Schindler's List," the S.S. officer played by Ralph Fiennes lounges on the balcony of his home, adjacent to a concentration camp, and shoots at prisoners for sport—"The Zone of Interest" unnervingly suggests that Rudolf was both a mass murderer and a mild-mannered family man. "You have told them that Daddy will be coming home?" he anxiously asks Hedwig in a phone call, after being transferred from Auschwitz; Hüller's character says yes, but her face projects the irritated impatience of a spouse eager to get off the phone. During a Q.&A. at the New York Film Festival, Jonathan Glazer noted that Rudolf Höss's demeanor has been compared with that of a "flower-picking schoolteacher." Hüller, seated next to Glazer, cast her eyes down, her composure undercut by a sudden welling of revulsion.

Before committing to be in the film, Hüller told me, she researched the wartime history of her own family. "I know that my great-grandfather on my mother's side was in the war, and that he had been imprisoned in Russia, and that my great-grandmother raised her two children alone for ten years," she said. After he returned to Germany, following the war, "he never talked about prison." She added, "The Russian Army went through the village where my great-grandmother lived with the two kids, so I assume she must have seen and experienced things that were traumatic. She also never talked about it." Hüller's paternal grandfather was from Karlovy Vary, a spa town in an area of Czechoslovakia that was annexed by the Nazis in 1938, and from that side of the family an anecdote of resistance had been passed down: "I know that my grandmother on my father's side always made the children comb their hair in the other direction than Hitler did."

As a schoolchild, Hüller had visited the Buchenwald concentration camp, in Weimar, on more than one occasion, and she had watched documentaries about the Holocaust that showed piles of corpses at Auschwitz. To make "The Zone of Interest," Glazer was granted permission to film on a set built just outside the actual camp, which is in southern Poland. The house that the Höss family lived in still stands, but the production team decided to build a replica that would appear starkly new, as the home had been in the early nineteen-forties.

The set allowed Glazer to arrange an unusual way to film. Much of the interior action was shot on unattended cameras, which rendered it impossible for the actors to know when they were being filmed. There was a kind of obscenity, Hüller felt, in the possibility that an actor playing a Nazi might be tempted to turn his or her head to better catch the light. "We could go from one room to another, or be on the stairs, and everything would be covered," she said. "You would never have an entrance, like onstage. You were *there*, all the time."

In an early scene, Hedwig bends over a flower bed in her garden, but there is nothing in Hüller's characterization that would lead a psychologist to describe Hedwig's affect as that of a "flower-picking schoolteacher." One day, Hedwig chastises a servant girl over a minor misunderstanding, noting that she could have her husband scatter the girl's remains across nearby fields. Christian Friedel, Hüller's co-star, told me that she refused to probe why Hedwig was so self-absorbed: "Sandra said, 'I don't want to give my tears to her.'"

There was a metaphysical element to Glazer's use of surveillance cameras, Hüller said: "It made us feel like we were being watched, not only by these cameras. There were so many energies in those rooms. It had a lot to do with taking responsibility, and with former generations." Every day, Hüller and Friedel had conversations about the intensity of the experience. Friedel told me, "We were sometimes unsure what we were doing here, in this place, so close to the camp, feeling the ghosts of the past. Sometimes I realized that I forgot where we were. And then I would think, No, I cannot forget being so close to the camp. That's what these people did."

Hüller concluded that representing the character of Hedwig onscreen was not the true moral challenge of the project. "I would almost say that the real work I've done was more to be in Auschwitz—to really be in that place—for such a long time," she said. "Playing Hedwig Höss was the smallest part of the process—of facing this crime, and being there as a German person."

Before filming began, a guide took the actors and crew members on a tour of Auschwitz. They visited the former barracks and crematoria, and also saw display cases containing heaps of material that had been seized by the Nazis: leather shoes, prosthetic limbs, eyeglasses. These vitrines, which embody the film's aesthetic—horror, viewed clinically—are featured in the film. Hüller said of the tour, "I had the reflex to expect some kind of cathartic moment. You know, it's a romantic thought—you're in Auschwitz as a German, and suddenly all the guilt of your ancestors falls away, and you understand, and you are free. And then the ghost is gone." She went on, "The first thing I learned is, Auschwitz doesn't do that. It says, 'You will have to live with this forever. Humanity has to live with this forever. And there is no way of escaping it.'" ♦

THINGS I'VE HEARD MYSELF SAY ALOUD TO MY KIDS

BY JAY KATSIR

I just told everyone to keep their bodies to themselves in the car, and then you put your feet on the back of your brother's head, and we see you're on your phone, which we repeatedly asked you to leave at home, and so now there's going to have to be a big consequence, and now a chasm has opened between my consciousness and the words emerging from my mouth, and I hear a cascade of scolding clichés rush forth in a frictionless flow, as if I'm an A.I. chatbot with the prompt "Lecture my kids in a style that they will completely ignore and will cause me deep sadness," because I don't know where all this boilerplate hectoring comes from, but the reason we keep our bodies to ourselves is that we treat our bodies and other people's bodies with respect, and if you keep doing that we're going to tell Nana how you behaved. Could Nana be the one who planted this forest of platitudes in my brain, where it silently germinated until the moment when—stop that right now, we told you that word is inappropriate, and it's even more inappropriate to sing it repeatedly as a catchy jingle so that your brother remembers it and repeats it in the Fives Room at preschool, so if we hear it again it means we have a listening problem, and it means that at some point I must have unwittingly memorized a book titled "Empty Threats for Desperate Weenies." All I know is that if we don't start improving our rule following we're going to start examining why we say everything in the first-person plural, because we sure seem afraid of the implications of saying that it is *you* who have upset *me* and that *I* have decided to enforce a boundary that might cause *you* unhappiness, and that's why *you're* going to lose Switch for a week, or at least *I'll* hide MLB: The Show under an old nasal-strip box in the nightstand and then forget where *I* put it. Sticker chart.

I'll get you an ice cream if you don't complain about swim lessons for the rest of the year. Regular cone, no Cherry Merlin. Definitely no energy drink called Bust, created by a TikTok M.M.A. fighter with a blue Lambo. Six Quiet Points.

I made you a waffle because you said you wanted a waffle. So please sit down and eat it. It's the same kind you had yesterday. It's not "the yellow kind." You like this kind. It has the cartoon bat on the box. The kind you don't like—which you actually *do* like—is the healthy kind, and you can tell it's healthy because the box has a realistic drawing of a bear. Just eat this apple slice. It's not "the sour kind." Yes, you can eat the mark on the skin. You earned three Star Coins.

This is why we don't want you to watch YouTube. We know there are good things on there, like art tutorials and science experiments with squirrels, but even when you pick something that's O.K. for kids the site keeps suggesting other, inappropriate videos and you keep clicking on them. You started by watching "55 Impossible Ping-Pong Trick Shots" and now you've been recruited to a militia called Lions for Christ. I'm taking four Reading Magnets off the Reward Timer.

No playing baseball in the apartment. When you play baseball in the apartment, no full swings. No full swings near the TV. You're only allowed to accidentally hit me in the ear once per game. No football in the apartment. No tackle football. No doing the Griddy over your brother's injured body. You just lost the Screen Stick.

I asked you to get in the shower twenty minutes ago, and for every minute since you've been docked eleven Choice Balloons on the Determinism Grid.

I like the way you're playing so nicely together, and I like the way you're sharing. Now you've picked up that I've tried to reinforce the way you're playing and sharing, and now I don't like the way you're kicking your leg and rubbing your naked butt against the couch, which we just vacuumed. And now your brother tripped over your leg and he's crying, so now we're going to have to talk about listening again, and about private body parts, and you might have to do a Cool-Down in Your Room, and I might have to do a Hide-Down in My Room, sitting on the bed, distraught over the way I reacted, and for not fostering a constant atmosphere of imaginative fun, and for not locking the door when you rush in to play me a song you found on Spotify called "Jiggle Toilet 69." Fifteen Shame Fish. ♦

LUCI GUTIÉRREZ

ANNALS OF HOLLYWOOD

THE MAN BEHIND THE NOSE

How Kazu Hiro transformed Bradley Cooper.

BY HUA HSU

"He's generally considered to be the best at what he does," David Fincher said.

Kazu Hiro did not have a particularly happy childhood. He grew up in Kyoto, on a small, busy street lined with markets, where his father was a fishmonger and his mother sold clothes. "I was sensitive," he told me. He felt bullied by his parents, so he tried his best to keep to himself. "I hated school," he said. He dreamed of leaving Kyoto and his family behind. In kindergarten, he would sculpt or paint in the corner of the classroom. "That was my obsession: making something."

When he was eight, he saw "Star Wars" and became fascinated with the film's special effects—he was particularly curious about what Chewbacca's hair was made of. "Star Wars" seemed like an evolutionary leap from the "cheesy" feel of such Japanese movies as "Godzilla." As a teen-ager, he took a bus each weekend to a store that carried imported books and magazines, hoping to learn everything he could about filmmaking and special effects. One day, he found an issue of *Fangoria*, a movie magazine for blood-and-guts enthusiasts. Hiro was squeamish, yet horror films were where a lot of the innovations in makeup and low-budget effects were happening. He read an interview with Dick Smith, one of the most influential makeup artists in Hollywood, renowned for his work on "The Godfather"—notable not just for Smith's aging of Marlon Brando but for the special blood bladders he devised to make gunshot wounds more realistic—and "The Exorcist," whose remarkably visceral scenes of demonic possession remain the benchmark for scary movies. The spread featured a photograph of one of Smith's lesser-known triumphs, when he turned the actor Hal Holbrook into Abraham Lincoln for a 1976 television miniseries. "I thought, This is it. This is what I have to do," Hiro said. The next day, at school, he found a picture of Lincoln and tried to re-create the President's appearance on his own face, using makeup, with forgettable results. He had also dabbled with sculpting and 8-mm. film, but, he realized, "the human face is totally different."

In the late nineteen-forties, when Smith was learning the trade, makeup artists were mostly tasked with rendering actors more attractive for the camera. Those who pursued special effects, transforming actors into ghouls or bogeymen, kept their techniques a closely guarded secret. But Smith wanted to share his methods, and he wrote a how-to book for hobbyists and advertised a correspondence course in *Fangoria*. Hiro sent him a fan letter, and the two began writing to each other. Hiro mailed Smith photographs of his work. "He advised and encouraged me without asking for anything," Hiro said. Most fans wrote to Smith for help in bringing their fantastical visions to life, but seeing Smith's Lincoln showed Hiro an alternative. He became a student of faces—their form and structure, what people look like when they smile or communicate with their eyes. And he became drawn to the faces of accomplished people, and to the challenge of figuring out how their passion or genius "reflects on the surface," he said.

When Hiro was about twenty, Japanese television aired a documentary about Leonard Bernstein, and he was mesmerized by the composer-conductor's intensity as he discussed his craft. "Even then, I was thinking, I want to make his face someday," he said.

Hiro, who is fifty-four, is regarded as one of the greatest special-makeup-effects artists working today. "He's generally considered to be the best at what he does," the director David

PHOTOGRAPH BY CHRIS BUCK

Fincher, who worked with him on "The Curious Case of Benjamin Button" and the television series "Mindhunter," told me. "The issue is: Can you get him? He's everyone's first choice. And, generally, he's everyone's first disappointment." In the late nineties and the two-thousands, Hiro worked under Rick Baker, a protégé of Dick Smith and a pioneer of creature effects and design, and earned Academy Award nominations for Best Makeup and Hairstyling for his contributions to "Click" and to "Norbit." But he grew disenchanted with Hollywood and, in 2012, retired to pursue a career in the fine arts, specializing in oversized, hyperrealistic sculptures of the heads of such celebrities as Salvador Dalí and Jimi Hendrix.

He was persuaded to return to film work in 2015, at the behest of Gary Oldman, who was considering the role of Winston Churchill in "Darkest Hour." "One of the reasons I wanted Kazu was he was really one of the only people on the planet who could pull it off," Oldman explained, in 2017. Hiro won an Academy Award for "Darkest Hour," and another, in 2019, for his work on "Bombshell," in which he designed the prosthetics that transformed Charlize Theron into Megyn Kelly and John Lithgow into Roger Ailes. For the past four years, he has been working on "Maestro," a film about the life of Leonard Bernstein, starring Carey Mulligan and Bradley Cooper, who is also the movie's director. Hiro's assignment was not just to turn Cooper into Bernstein but to age him, so as to tell the story of a fifty-year span of the composer's life. "Maestro" was released in theatres last week, and will stream on Netflix.

At a time when some of the most valuable franchises in Hollywood are filmed on soundstages, and are heavily reliant on computer-generated imagery, the work of effects artists such as Hiro remains meticulously tactile, with a trial-and-error approach that's largely unchanged from Smith's heyday. Hiro's craft requires an understanding of anatomy and kinetics, the way that threads of muscle tense when we smile or wince, as well as a mastery of makeup technique, sculpture, and hair work. Digital effects can now morph or de-age anyone, and they demand less time from an actor. But producers and directors seek out Hiro for the sensitivity of his touch and for his ability to translate what he sees. And, as Fincher added, he's efficient, capable of "moving at the same speed" as the rest of the production.

Last August, I visited Hiro's home studio, in an unglamorous cul-de-sac in Los Angeles's San Fernando Valley. Hiro is slim, with graceful, deliberate movements and the slightly hunched shoulders of someone who's spent thousands of hours sculpting extremely small things. His hair was neatly trimmed on the sides and wavy on top, and he was wearing a dark-blue button-up shirt and crisp gray pants that looked both utilitarian and extremely intentional. On the floor of the entryway were a dozen plaster busts—face casts that he had used when working on "Maestro." It looked as if a clone army of Bradley Coopers and Carey Mulligans were slowly rising from underground.

While Hiro was in high school, in Kyoto, he had the chance to meet Smith, who had been invited to Tokyo to judge a Halloween-costume competition. Hiro was so excited that he could hardly sleep. The next day, he struggled to stay awake as he and Smith talked in his hotel room. When Smith returned a year later, to work on a Japanese horror film called "Sweet Home," Hiro was hired to work on the crew. He was befriended by Eddie Yang, a young special-makeup-effects artist who was also working on the film. After "Sweet Home" wrapped, Hiro visited Yang in Southern California to get a taste of America. "I started to realize the gap between what I saw on TV about this country, and actually being here," Hiro said, recalling a revelatory trip to the steak-house chain Sizzler. Americans were much larger and less cool than he'd imagined. Yang, who today runs an effects studio called Deity Creative, gave him a crash course in American culture. "I remember he was amazed at the food-portion size," Yang said.

After returning to Japan, Hiro started doing makeup for local television, and eventually opened his own shop. His work was good by Japanese standards, but he felt unchallenged, to the point of frustration. "It's kind of extreme," he recalled, "but I decided to do one old-age makeup, in my own way. And if this doesn't work I would change my job." For a month and a half, he devoted all his free time to aging a friend's face. As we get older, Hiro explained, "you start to lose from the inside." People "shrink down. You see more of the muscle and bone structure underneath." The neck gets skinnier, eyes appear more hollowed out, cheeks sink. Yet makeup artistry is additive; you can't remove anything from the face. The challenge is to work within these limitations and create illusions of depth with foam latex and makeup. When he was satisfied with his aging project, he sent images to Yang and other friends in the United States, and decided to continue the work. "Until then, I was basically copying what Dick did," he said. He now felt as though he was figuring out his own style, rather than mimicking what he'd already seen.

In 1995, with the help of Yang, Hiro moved to the U.S. to work for Baker, the creature-effects pioneer, who was often regarded as Smith's only equal. Hiro's first job under Baker was on "Men in Black," for which he was assigned the character of Edgar, portrayed by Vincent D'Onofrio, a farmer who becomes possessed by aliens. He was unaccustomed to working in such a lively, sprawling operation. "I felt like the Americans were so noisy I couldn't focus," Hiro said. He asked Baker to find him a small room where he could work in isolation. "Even among the best in the business at the time," Yang said, "Kazu stood out in every way, no matter what his task was. He seemed to always choose the more complex way of doing things because it was the best way of doing it. It was hard for anyone to keep up with him."

Working for Baker kept Hiro busy throughout the late nineties and two-thousands. He enjoyed technical challenges, like figuring out an alternative to the shell-like eyelids used for mechanical eyes. Actual eyeballs bulge slightly at the cornea. Hiro built eyeballs layer by layer, "like real eyes," and then designed a softer, more flexible lid mechanism. But he wanted to use his skills differently. Makeup effects often fall into two categories. Some people, like Baker, specialize in the creation of monsters and creatures. The challenge is to normalize the weird or the garish. But Hiro was drawn to makeup effects that aspired to realism. He preferred working on likeness and aging. Here,

the challenge is to mimic the natural world. "I'm changing someone into another person," he said. "Anyone can point out what's wrong with it, without knowing what's wrong with it."

Artistic restlessness was merely part of a larger malaise he was feeling. Hiro describes the time an effects artist and an actor spend together as akin to a "short-term relationship." In 1999, he worked on "How the Grinch Stole Christmas," where he was responsible for getting Jim Carrey into character each day. Carrey compared the feeling of donning the heavy, elaborate Grinch costume to being "buried alive." The actor was difficult and uncoöperative, throwing tantrums and, according to Hiro, "acting out like a big baby." (Carrey declined to comment.) Hiro left the shoot, returning only when he was assured that Carrey would behave better; he also got the studio executives to help him apply for a green card.

The experience triggered something in Hiro. He couldn't shake his feelings of depression, and he started going to therapy. At first, he felt distracted as he scrutinized his therapist's face, conscious of where he was looking or how he reacted to things Hiro revealed during their sessions. Eventually, Hiro began to recognize the ways in which his childhood unhappiness had lingered into adulthood. Later, at the suggestion of a psychotherapist friend, he took psychedelic mushrooms, and had an epiphanic experience. "I realize when you're depressed you can't see around yourself," Hiro said. "The next day, I felt like I could see the back of my head. It was a big thing."

In 2002, Smith turned eighty, and Hiro decided to surprise him with a hyperrealistic sculpture of his head, but approximately twice as large. "The size difference is like a father figure to a child," Hiro observed. Smith cried when he saw it. In 2007, Hiro started his own company, hoping to get the kind of likeness and aging work he aspired to do. But around 2011 he decided that his latest movie, Rian Johnson's "Looper," would be his last.

Hiro's living room is full of the giant sculptures he began making upon his retirement: Abraham Lincoln, Frida Kahlo, Frederick Douglass. Lincoln was his first project after "Looper," harking back to the inspiration for all his work. "He was bipolar and suffered from depression yet was one of the most influential leaders of all time," Hiro said. "He also had such a unique face." The meticulousness of the details—pores, lashes, pockmarks—makes the heads feel unnervingly real. "I felt a greater sense of accomplishment with this sculpture than anything I did in the movies," he said, contending that the size allows for an "impossibly close" scrutiny of a face, one "permitted only to lovers." Each piece takes four to six months to complete, during which time Hiro immerses himself in the figure's life, building the head "from the inside out." The sculpture begins as a lump of clay, which he shapes by hand, molding it with silicone rubber and resin and implanting human and yak hair. "I consider these my gravestone," he said. "They will outlast me. These are what I believe in."

Hiro cherished his new life, making sculptures and working for the artist Paul McCarthy in his studio. But, in 2015, he was drawn out of retirement by Oldman, whom he'd met when the actor was considering a role in Tim Burton's 2001 remake of "Planet of the Apes." "One of my biggest goals," Hiro told me, "was to do the character makeup on an actor that tells the story of that person's life, and make it invisible." He'd never had the chance to take on a character like Churchill. "I wanted to work with Gary," he explained, "and Gary told me if I don't do this job *he* would turn down the job—almost threatening me."

As he did for his sculptures, Hiro studied old photos of Churchill and watched films about him, not just for physical markers but for insight into his psyche. He also revisited Oldman's other films to study how the actor moved. Hiro contacted Vincent Van Dyke, an Emmy-winning prosthetics designer (he most recently oversaw the effects makeup of "Killers of the Flower Moon" and "The Exorcist: Believer"), to work with him on "Darkest Hour." It was, Van Dyke recalled, "one of the most daunting conversations of my career."

"I think people can tell when something looks real or fake at a glance," Van Dyke added. "When it gets to levels where you cannot tell, and you feel as though you're just looking at another human being, that's where Kazu separates himself. His work is sometimes completely undetectable." David Fincher, one of the directors of "Mindhunter," recalled that the first time he saw Hiro's work on the actor Damon Herriman, who portrayed Charles Manson, he thought, "My job is done here."

Effects have been part of cinema since the early nineteen-hundreds, with many techniques borrowed from the stage. But methods in those first years were basic, and actors were expected to apply their own makeup. The actor Lon Chaney was known as the Man of a Thousand Faces for his ability to transform himself into characters. For his portrayal of Quasimodo, in 1923, Chaney had help from the makeup artist Jack Pierce, who began experimenting with masks, prosthetics, and chemicals to disfigure or distort faces. Pierce went on to create the iconic versions of characters such as Frankenstein's monster and the Wolf Man. Some actors understood how much prosthetics could enhance their craft. For a 1959 television production of "The Moon and Sixpence," Dick Smith was enlisted to turn Laurence Olivier into a leprosy victim. "When I finished the makeup," Smith would later recall, "he looked in the mirror and said, 'Dick, it does the acting for me.'"

But, even at that time, many people felt that effects had no place in serious acting. Honorary Academy Awards recognized the technical achievements of "7 Faces of Dr. Lao," from 1964—in which Tony Randall plays a mysterious Asian traveller capable of conjuring Medusa, Merlin, and other fantastical beings—and "Planet of the Apes," from 1968, but there was no regular category for the work. Because most of the greatest experiments were in the service of gore, in the horror films of the seventies, the Academy was slow to accept the artistry and innovation required by effects makeup.

A turning point came with the release of "The Elephant Man," David Lynch's 1980 film about Joseph Merrick, a severely deformed man in late-nineteenth-century England. (In the film, he is known as John Merrick.) Merrick, who had a bulbous, misshapen head, loose, wart-covered skin, and an

enormous, clawlike right hand, toured Victorian England as a "freak." Lynch, who cast John Hurt in the role, initially tried to do the makeup himself but failed. ("I had what I thought were some great ideas," the director later recalled, "but they turned out to be not great.") The film's producer, Jonathan Sanger, hired a British makeup artist named Christopher Tucker to design a new set of prosthetics as quickly as possible. The film had already begun shooting by the time Tucker started work, and very few people on set had any inkling of what to expect. "My recollections of the day when the makeup was first applied has got to be one of the most frightening days of my life," Hurt later recounted. The makeover took twelve hours. "I was brought onto the set to a stunned silence. If anybody had broken that silence with the slightest giggle the film would be finished. John Merrick, as vulnerable as you could be."

"The Elephant Man" was a sensation. In 1981, it received eight Academy Award nominations. But no category existed to honor Tucker, who many believed had pulled off the most ambitious prosthetics job in film history. After the nominations were announced, hundreds of members of the makeup-and-hair-stylists' union held a news conference protesting the lack of recognition for "The Elephant Man" and "Raging Bull." The following year, the Academy added a category for makeup and hair. The first Academy Award for Best Makeup was won by Rick Baker for "An American Werewolf in London." Baker has been nominated eleven times, and has won seven Oscars—both records in the category. In 2012, the category was renamed Best Makeup and Hairstyling.

For years, this was among the Academy Awards' most populist categories, where films as various as "Lord of the Rings," "The Nutty Professor," and "The Fly" gained recognition for their imaginative world-building. Recently, in response to trends in moviegoing, Hollywood has become more dependent on tapping into characters or stories that audiences already know, giving biopics, particularly ones that require radical, labor-intensive transformations, a kind of prestigious sheen. "Darkest Hour," for which Oldman estimates he sat in the makeup chair for about two hundred hours, earned Hiro his first Academy Award, in 2017. It allowed him to be far more selective with the jobs he took. In 2019, he won another Oscar for his work on "Bombshell." "Committing to prosthetics means risking a lot of time and money," Jay Roach, the film's director, told me in an e-mail. Theron "was not a perfect match," he said, but he wasn't certain that she needed prosthetics to portray Megyn Kelly. Theron insisted on using Hiro. To compensate for the fact that Kelly's nostrils were slightly wider than Theron's, Hiro used a 3-D printer to create tiny plugs that were inserted into Theron's nose with tweezers. "The great thing about working with Kazu," Roach said, "is that he's anticipated all the hazards. He's lost as much sleep over them as anybody. Probably more."

"I don't think he ever truly shuts his mind off," Van Dyke said. "He dedicates his entire life to the craft. The idea of becoming excellent at it isn't even the question in his mind. He is just constantly chasing the unattainable goal of realism." Van Dyke went on, "Everybody's face proportions are so different. I can't bring your eyes closer together. There are certain things we have no control over. So you're stuck with this armature that can't move, and you're shifting everything around that."

"I always feel defeated," Hiro has said, "because I try to mimic nature but I can never be as perfect as that." He elaborated for me: "It's basically trying to do something impossible. That's the reason I also enjoy doing it. I think there's something that can never be achieved, but I am trying to get closer every time I do it."

One day, Hiro and I were driving through Los Angeles to pick up lunch. I asked if he missed anything about Japan. After he won the Academy Award for "Bombshell," he was asked by a Japanese reporter whether his heritage had played a role in his success. "I'm sorry," he said to the reporter. "I left Japan and I became American because I got tired of that culture . . . too submissive, so hard to make a dream come true. That's why I'm living here." He told me he missed very little about Japan, beyond some friends, a few restaurants, and Tokyu Hands, a department store filled with gadgets, home goods, and hobby materials. Although I was paying, Hiro suggested we get takeout

"Do these pants make me look like an undercover F.B.I. agent?"

from the salad bar at a nearby Whole Foods. We returned to his home to eat.

He told me about a trip to Japan he took to promote "Darkest Hour." The mayor of Kyoto wanted him to return to his home town to receive an honor. Hiro agreed on the condition that it not be publicized. When he arrived at city hall, there was a TV crew and a crowd. His father, whom he hadn't seen in more than thirty years, was there as well. "I literally screamed, '*Fuck!*'" he said, chuckling to himself. "At the same time, I was looking at him and trying to figure out what happened to him during the thirty years. I usually study how people get older. Posture, the amount of hair, age spots, how the form changes. But there's an essence of him that's still there."

Hiro told me this story for a couple of reasons. After returning to the United States, he decided to sever his ties to his family. He legally changed his name—he was born Kazuhiro Tsuji—and became an American citizen. But he was also describing the ineffability of essence, that sense of interiority which distinguishes us. This was the subjective part of his job, distinct from the impossible task of duplicating nature. He pointed to a red curtain in his living room. We each saw that it was red, he explained. But how we interpreted that shade of red, what feelings or sensations we associated with the color, were different. (I had been so distracted by the giant Lincoln sculpture next to me that I hadn't even noticed there were curtains in the room.) Beyond trying to copy someone's face onto an actor, there are the design questions—"where you put that one hair," as he put it. "Each person has a different brain, and eyes, and hands. And that matters for what comes out. What we aim for is totally different."

The process of creating prosthetic enhancements begins with a mold of the actor's face or head. Traditionally, a layer of silicone is applied to the face, and then a harder mold gets layered on top of that for support. (This impression of the face can also be taken with 3-D scanners, an increasingly common practice.) Once it hardens and is removed from the face, the shell—the negative mold—can be used to make copies of a positive mold, or life cast. The life cast, which can take the form of a bust or a three-dimensional replica of just the face, becomes the surface for the artist to begin shaping the prosthetics, with the aid of sculpting tools—such as wooden prods, needles, and small metal loops—that add texture. Each dimple or pore is applied by hand. This is a painstaking process that involves careful study of how the actor uses his face, as well as how to blend the edges of the prosthetics.

Hiro had already been meeting with Jake Gyllenhaal about a Bernstein film project when Bradley Cooper secured the rights to the composer-conductor's story from his children. In 2019, Cooper sent Hiro a text asking if he wanted to be a part of "Maestro." They began meeting and discussing what they saw in Bernstein's face and movements. "We had to have time to figure out what he sees, and what I see, and how to put that together on his face," Hiro said. Cooper immediately recognized someone who shared his "insane work ethic," Cooper told me. "When the two of us came together, it was sort of love at first sight."

"Maestro" begins when Bernstein is in his mid-twenties and ends shortly before his death, at the age of seventy-two. Hiro created five sets of prosthetics for the stages of Bernstein's life. In the beginning, Hiro worked on a prosthetic treatment that was, in Cooper's words, "totally Lenny." But Cooper felt that it didn't look real. "We wanted to find a medium between Lenny and me," he explained, "so we created this hybrid." The most difficult years for Hiro to re-create were Bernstein's final ones. Even late in life, Bernstein was flirtatious. Cooper felt that the seventy-something Bernstein still needed to look a bit "sexy."

"We got to the end of the movie," Cooper said, "and I kept losing weight, 'cause I realized the thinner I am the more realistic it looks. 'Cause you are putting on skin, you're adding on layers. When I finally got to the weight that was absolutely ideal, we thought, Gosh, let's go back and reshoot the whole movie."

As Hiro and I ate our salads, he

"We've found that the farther the satellite is from Earth the more optimistic its outlook on life."

brought out some of the prosthetics used for "Maestro," all of them resting on a series of clear molds that corresponded to different parts of Cooper's face. Some of the prosthetics were so slight and gossamer-like that they were nearly translucent; others resembled small smears of Silly Putty. A cheek piece featured such realistic striations and wrinkles that I was momentarily surprised that it wasn't warm to the touch. It was hard to imagine how little one could add to turn one incredibly famous face into another, and for you to momentarily forget the existence of either. "I'm not doing this job to show off what I can do. The successful outcome," Hiro explained, "is to be invisible."

"I was sort of his canvas," Cooper said, recalling their mornings on set together in Hiro's trailer. "You're watching an artist look at his canvas. So he would notice if I didn't get enough sleep or, Have you gained a touch of weight? I would have shaven, but he would always find a couple of hairs that were still there. You know, get the canvas as clean as possible."

In May, 2022, Netflix released four photos from the set of "Maestro." Some observers were perturbed by Cooper's use of a prosthetic nose to evoke Bernstein, decrying it as "Jewface"—non-Jews masquerading as Jewish characters. On social media, the images were called antisemitic and reminiscent of the "hooked nose" representations of Jews in Nazi propaganda. "I know that there has been a flap about it," Jamie Bernstein, one of the composer's daughters, explained at the time. "I think it's ridiculous. You know, he had to make himself look like Leonard Bernstein. And Leonard Bernstein had a big nose and yes, he was Jewish. Are we really going to say that they had to hire a Jewish actor to play Leonard Bernstein? I mean, come on, let's just not get literal-minded about everything in the world."

Even in the age of the superhero franchise, there is an appetite for realism. Actors routinely pursue roles for which the radical alteration of one's physical appearance becomes part of the film's popular narrative. But these roles also draw scrutiny when there's a perception that a line has been crossed. Last year, Brendan Fraser won the Academy Award for Best Actor for his portrayal of a morbidly obese man in "The Whale." The role required him to don about three hundred pounds' worth of prosthetics. Adrien Morot, Judy Chin, and Annemarie Bradley, who were responsible for his transformation, won the Oscar for Best Makeup and Hairstyling. Still, "The Whale" was criticized by some for being cruel and, as one podcaster put it, a reinforcement of "anti-fat bias."

When I visited Hiro, he was perplexed by the inferences people drew from a few photos from the "Maestro" set. He seemed genuinely oblivious of how a nose, modelled on that of a real-life person, could be an ethnic signifier. "There's a reason behind what we did," he said. "It's to make the storytelling more authentic. It's about Lenny."

In August, shortly before the world première of "Maestro," at the Venice Film Festival, Netflix released a short trailer for the film, and the controversy intensified. There were more accusations of antisemitism. A writer for *New York* jokingly posited that Cooper might simply have a nose fetish, marshalling evidence from his dating history and his 2018 film "A Star Is Born," in which his character makes frequent reference to the size of his lover's nose.

"I usually don't like to be the center of attention," Hiro told me. But, because the Screen Actors Guild was on strike, he was tasked with representing the film. In preparation for the Venice première, he underwent media training. "It gave me a headache, because there's lots of concern," he said. "I usually don't like to talk in front of many people, especially in this situation—I'm almost talking to an investigator." During a press conference, he was asked about the nose. Hiro felt that the resulting coverage—the Daily Beast ran an article with the headline " 'Maestro' Makeup Artist Apologizes for Bradley Cooper's Prosthetic Nose"—made him sound as though he regretted the nose altogether. "What I said was I feel sorry if I hurt someone's feeling," he told me. "I wasn't expecting that to happen." Any regrets were purely aesthetic. "I always think what could be better, so if I have to do the same thing again, I would do it differently, no matter what," he said.

"When the nose thing happened, my stomach didn't turn or anything," Cooper, who, because of the actors' strike, had chosen not to speak publicly about the controversy, told me shortly after the strike ended. "It's so clear the love that we put into this work. It was so pure that I never had any self-doubt about what our intentions or execution was and our sensitivity towards this human being that we loved and wanted to honor. I felt like it was a very easy thing to explain if anybody really wanted to ask the question."

Hiro hadn't seen the final version of "Maestro" before the screening in Venice. For a few minutes, he found it hard to enjoy the film. He was still thinking about the press conference and how fixated people had become on the nose. "Everybody, before they watch the movie, they know about it," he said. "The work has to be convincing enough to make them forget about it." He studied his work onscreen and imagined ways he could have done it better. But, eventually, he found himself lost in the story of the Bernsteins, in the clashing ambitions of Leonard and his wife, Felicia. He thought about his own career, his former relationships and friendships. "I can feel the pain that Lenny and Felicia went through," he said.

In October, the film had its North American début at the New York Film Festival. The screening, which was followed by a conversation with Bernstein's children and members of the crew and the production team, was at David Geffen Hall, the home of the New York Philharmonic. Bernstein and the Philharmonic had performed the inaugural concert at the venue, in 1962. The festival had beefed up the room's sound system, installing additional speakers to create an overpowering sonic experience. Nobody expected Bradley Cooper to attend, so few people noticed as he and his daughter hustled up the aisle to take their seats shortly before the film began.

As the final credits rolled, the crowd began to applaud. Hiro, sitting with his publicist, took a breath. She tapped him on the shoulder, and he quickly rose and walked down the aisle toward the stage. ♦

BRAVE NEW WORLD DEPT.

THE CHOSEN CHIP

How Nvidia is powering the A.I. revolution.

BY STEPHEN WITT

The revelation that ChatGPT, the astonishing artificial-intelligence chatbot, had been trained on an Nvidia supercomputer spurred one of the largest single-day gains in stock-market history. When the Nasdaq opened on May 25, 2023, Nvidia's value increased by about two hundred billion dollars. A few months earlier, Jensen Huang, Nvidia's C.E.O., had informed investors that Nvidia had sold similar supercomputers to fifty of America's hundred largest companies. By the close of trading, Nvidia was the sixth most valuable corporation on earth, worth more than Walmart and ExxonMobil combined. Huang's business position can be compared to that of Samuel Brannan, the celebrated vender of prospecting supplies in San Francisco in the late eighteen-forties. "There's a war going on out there in A.I., and Nvidia is the only arms dealer," one Wall Street analyst said.

Huang is a patient monopolist. He drafted the paperwork for Nvidia with two other people at a Denny's restaurant in San Jose, California, in 1993, and has run it ever since. At sixty, he is sarcastic and self-deprecating, with a Teddy-bear face and wispy gray hair. Nvidia's main product is its graphics-processing unit, a circuit board with a powerful microchip at its core. In the beginning, Nvidia sold these G.P.U.s to video gamers, but in 2006 Huang began marketing them to the supercomputing community as well. Then, in 2013, on the basis of promising research from the academic computer-science community, Huang bet Nvidia's future on artificial intelligence. A.I. had disappointed investors for decades, and Bryan Catanzaro, Nvidia's lead deep-learning researcher at the time, had doubts. "I didn't want him to fall into the same trap that the A.I. industry has had in the past," Catanzaro told me. "But, ten years plus down the road, he was right."

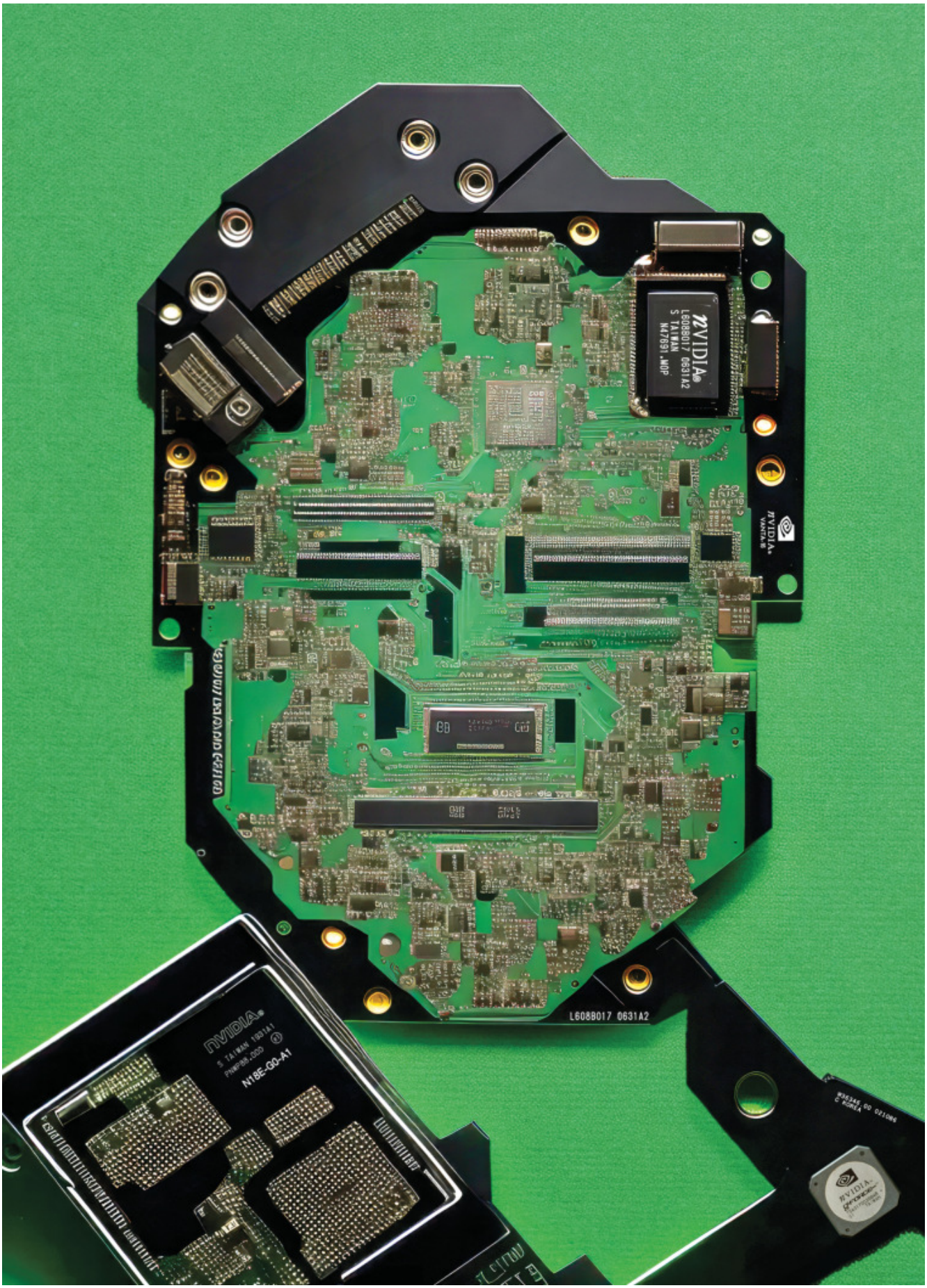
In the near future, A.I. is projected to generate movies on demand, provide tutelage to children, and teach cars to drive themselves. All of these advances will occur on Nvidia G.P.U.s, and Huang's stake in the company is now worth more than forty billion dollars.

In September, I met Huang for breakfast at the Denny's where Nvidia was started. (The C.E.O. of Denny's was giving him a plaque, and a TV crew was in attendance.) Huang keeps up a semi-comic deadpan patter at all times. Chatting with our waitress, he ordered seven items, including a Super Bird sandwich and a chicken-fried steak. "You know, I used to be a dishwasher here," he told her. "But I worked hard! Like, really hard. So I got to be a busboy."

Huang has a practical mind-set, dislikes speculation, and has never read a science-fiction novel. He reasons from first principles about what microchips can do today, then gambles with great conviction on what they will do tomorrow. "I do everything I can not to go out of business," he said at breakfast. "I do everything I can not to fail." Huang believes that the basic architecture of digital computing, little changed since it was introduced by I.B.M. in the early nineteen-sixties, is now being reconceptualized. "Deep learning is not an algorithm," he said recently. "Deep learning is a method. It's a new way of developing software." The evening before our breakfast, I'd watched a video in which a robot, running this new kind of software, stared at its hands in seeming recognition, then sorted a collection of colored blocks. The video had given me chills; the obsolescence of my species seemed near. Huang, rolling a pancake around a sausage with his fingers, dismissed my concerns. "I know how it works, so there's nothing there," he said. "It's no different than how microwaves work." I pressed Huang—an autonomous robot surely presents risks that a microwave oven does not. He responded that he has never worried about the technology, not once. "All it's doing is processing data," he said. "There are so many other things to worry about."

In May, hundreds of industry leaders endorsed a statement that equated the risk of runaway A.I. with that of nuclear war. Huang didn't sign it. Some economists have observed that the Industrial Revolution led to a relative decline in the global population of horses, and have wondered if A.I. might do the same to humans. "Horses have limited career options," Huang said. "For example, horses can't type." As he finished eating, I expressed my concerns that, someday soon, I would feed my notes from our conversation into an intelligence engine, then watch as it produced structured, superior prose. Huang didn't dismiss this possibility, but he assured me that I had a few years before my John Henry moment. "It will come for the fiction writers first," he said. Then he tipped the waitress a thousand dollars, and stood up to accept his award.

Huang was born in Taiwan in 1963, but when he was nine he and his older brother were sent as unaccompanied minors to the U.S. They landed in Tacoma, Washington, to live with an uncle, before being sent to the Oneida Baptist Institute, in Kentucky, which Huang's uncle believed was a prestigious boarding school. In fact, it was a religious reform academy. Huang was placed with a seventeen-year-old roommate. On their first night together, the older boy lifted his shirt to show Huang the numerous places where he'd been stabbed in fights. "Every student smoked, and I think I was the only boy at the school without a pocketknife," Huang told me. His roommate was illiterate; in exchange for teaching him



"There's a war going on out there in A.I., and Nvidia is the only arms dealer," one Wall Street analyst said.

ILLUSTRATION BY JAVIER JAÉN

"But I use all of them!"

• •

to read, Huang said, "he taught me how to bench-press. I ended up doing a hundred pushups every night before bed."

Although Huang lived at the academy, he was too young to attend its classes, so he went to a nearby public school. There, he befriended Ben Bays, who lived with his five siblings in an old house with no running water. "Most of the kids at the school were children of tobacco farmers," Bays said, "or just poor kids living in the mouth of the holler." Huang arrived with the school year already in session, and Bays remembers the principal introducing an undersized Asian immigrant with long hair and heavily accented English. "He was a perfect target," Bays said.

Huang was relentlessly bullied. "The way you described Chinese people back then was 'Chinks,'" Huang told me, with no apparent emotion. "We were called that every day." To get to school, Huang had to cross a rickety pedestrian footbridge over a river. "These swinging bridges, they were very high," Bays said. "It was old planks, and most of them were missing." Sometimes, when Huang was crossing the bridge, the local boys would grab the ropes and try to dislodge him. "Somehow it never seemed to affect him," Bays said. "He just shook it off." By the end of the school year, Bays told me, Huang was leading those same kids on adventures into the woods. Bays recalled how carefully Huang stepped around the missing planks. "Actually, it looked like he was having fun," he said.

Huang credits his time at Oneida with building resiliency. "Back then, there wasn't a counsellor to talk to," he told me. "Back then, you just had to toughen up and move on." In 2019, he donated a building to the school, and talked fondly of the (now gone) footbridge, neglecting to mention the bullies who had tried to toss him off it.

After a couple of years, Huang's parents secured entry to the United States, settling in Oregon, and the brothers reunited with them. Huang excelled in high school, and was a nationally ranked table-tennis player. He belonged to the school's math, computer, and science clubs, skipped two grades, and graduated when he was sixteen. "I did not have a girlfriend," he said.

Huang attended Oregon State University, where he majored in electrical engineering. His lab partner in his introductory classes was Lori Mills, an earnest, nerdy undergraduate with curly brown hair. "There were, like, two hundred and fifty kids in electrical engineering, and maybe three girls," Huang told me. Competition broke out among the male undergraduates for Mills's attention, and Huang felt that he was at a disadvantage. "I was the youngest kid in the class," he said. "I looked like I was about twelve."

Every weekend, Huang would call Mills and pester her to do homework with him. "I tried to impress her—not with my looks, of course, but with my strong capability to complete homework," he said. Mills accepted, and, after six months of homework, Huang worked up the courage to ask her out on a date. She accepted that offer, too.

Following graduation, Huang and Mills found work in Silicon Valley as microchip designers. ("She actually made more than me," Huang said.) The two got married, and within a few years Mills had left the workforce to bring up their children. By then, Huang was running his own division, and attending graduate school at Stanford by night. He founded Nvidia in 1993, with Chris Malachowsky and Curtis Priem, two veteran microchip designers. Although Huang, then thirty, was younger than Malachowsky and Priem, both felt that he was ready to be C.E.O. "He was a fast learner," Malachowsky said.

Malachowsky and Priem were looking to design a graphics chip, which they hoped would make competitors, in Priem's words, "green with envy." They called their company NVision, until they learned that the name was taken by a manufacturer of toilet paper. Huang suggested Nvidia, riffing on the Latin word *invidia*, meaning "envy." He selected the Denny's as a venue to organize the business because it was quieter than home and had cheap coffee—and also because of his experience working for the restaurant chain in Oregon in the nineteen-eighties. "I

find that I think best when I'm under adversity," Huang said. "My heart rate actually goes down. Anyone who's dealt with rush hour in a restaurant knows what I'm talking about."

Huang liked video games and thought that there was a market for better graphics chips. Instead of drawing pixels by hand, artists were starting to assemble three-dimensional polygons out of shapes known as "primitives," saving time and effort but requiring new chips. Nvidia's competitors' primitives used triangles, but Huang and his co-founders decided to use quadrilaterals instead. This was a mistake, and it nearly sank the company: soon after the release of Nvidia's first product, Microsoft announced that its graphics software would support only triangles.

Short on money, Huang decided that his only hope was to use the conventional triangle approach and try to beat the competition to market. In 1996, he laid off more than half the hundred people working at Nvidia, then bet the company's remaining funds on a production run of untested microchips that he wasn't sure would work. "It was fifty-fifty," Huang told me, "but we were going out of business anyway."

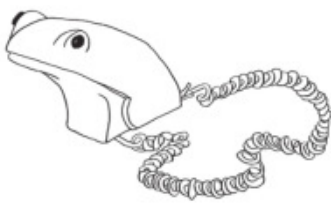
When the product, known as RIVA 128, hit stores, Nvidia had enough money to meet only one month of payroll. But the gamble paid off, and Nvidia sold a million RIVAs in four months. Huang encouraged his employees to continue shipping products with a sense of desperation, and for years to come he opened staff presentations with the words "Our company is thirty days from going out of business." The phrase remains the unofficial corporate motto.

At the center of Nvidia's headquarters, in Santa Clara, are two enormous buildings, each in the shape of a triangle with its corners trimmed. This shape is replicated in miniature throughout the building interiors, from the couches and the carpets to the splash guards in the urinals. Nvidia's "spaceships," as employees call the two buildings, are cavernous and filled with light, but eerie, and mostly empty; post-COVID, only about a third of the workforce shows up on any given day. Employee demographics are "diverse," sort of—I would guess, based on a visual survey of the cafeteria at lunchtime, that about a third of the staff is South Asian, a third is East Asian, and a third is white. The workers are overwhelmingly male.

Even before the run-up in the stock price, employee surveys ranked Nvidia as one of America's best places to work. Each building has a bar at the top, with regular happy hours, and workers are encouraged to treat their offices as flexible spaces in which to eat, code, and socialize. Nevertheless, the buildings' interiors are immaculate—Nvidia tracks employees throughout the day with video cameras and A.I. If an employee eats a meal at a conference table, the A.I. can dispatch a janitor within an hour to clean up. At Denny's, Huang told me to expect a world in which robots would fade into the background, like household appliances. "In the future, everything that moves will be autonomous," he said.

The only people I saw at Nvidia who didn't look happy were the quality-control technicians. In windowless laboratories underneath the north-campus bar, pallid young men wearing earplugs and T-shirts pushed Nvidia's microchips to the brink of failure. The racket was unbearable, a constant whine of high-pitched fans trying to cool overheating silicon circuits. It is these chips which have made the A.I. revolution possible.

In standard computer architecture, a microchip known as a "central processing unit" does most of the work. Coders create programs, and those programs bring mathematical problems to the C.P.U., which produces one solution at a time. For decades, the major manufacturer of C.P.U.s was Intel, and Intel has tried to force Nvidia out of existence several times. "I don't go anywhere near Intel," Huang told me, describing their Tom and Jerry relationship. "Whenever they come near us, I pick up my chips and run."



Nvidia has embraced an alternative approach. In 1999, the company, shortly after going public, introduced a graphics card called GeForce, which Dan Vivoli, the company's head of marketing, called a "graphics-processing unit." ("We invented the category so we could be the leader in it," Vivoli said.) Unlike general-purpose C.P.U.s, the G.P.U. breaks complex mathematical tasks apart into small calculations, then processes them all at once, in a method known as parallel computing. A C.P.U. functions like a delivery truck, dropping off one package at a time; a G.P.U. is more like a fleet of motorcycles spreading across a city.

The GeForce line was a success. Its popularity was driven by the Quake video-game series, which used parallel computing to render monsters that players could shoot with a grenade launcher. (Quake II was released when I was a freshman in college, and cost me years of my life.) The Quake series also featured a "deathmatch" mode for multiplayer combat, and PC gamers, looking to gain an edge, bought new GeForce cards every time they were upgraded. In 2000, Ian Buck, a graduate student studying computer graphics at Stanford, chained thirty-two GeForce cards together to play Quake using eight projectors. "It was the first gaming rig in 8K resolution, and it took up an entire wall," Buck told me. "It was beautiful."

Buck wondered if the GeForce cards might be useful for tasks other than launching grenades at his friends. The cards came with a primitive programming tool called a shader. With a grant from DARPA, the Department of Defense's research arm, Buck hacked the shaders to access the parallel-computing circuits below, repurposing the GeForce into a low-budget supercomputer. Soon, Buck was working for Huang.

Buck is intense and balding, and he radiates intelligence. He is a computer-science hot-rodder who has spent the past twenty years testing the limits of Nvidia chips. Human beings "think linearly. You give instructions to someone on how to get from here to Starbucks, and you give them individual steps," he said. "You don't give them instructions on how

to get to any Starbucks location from anywhere. It's just hard to think that way, in parallel."

Since 2004, Buck has overseen the development of Nvidia's supercomputing software package, known as CUDA. Huang's vision was to enable CUDA to work on every GeForce card. "We were democratizing supercomputing," Huang said.

As Buck developed the software, Nvidia's hardware team began allocating space on the microchips for supercomputing operations. The chips contained billions of electronic transistors, which routed electricity through labyrinthine circuits to complete calculations at extraordinary speed. Arjun Prabhu, Nvidia's lead chip engineer, compared microchip design to urban planning, with different zones of the chip dedicated to different tasks. As Tetris players do with falling blocks, Prabhu will sometimes see transistors in his sleep. "I've often had it where the best ideas happen on a Friday night, when I'm literally dreaming about it," Prabhu said.

When CUDA was released, in late 2006, Wall Street reacted with dismay. Huang was bringing supercomputing to the masses, but the masses had shown no indication that they wanted such a thing. "They were spending a fortune on this new chip architecture," Ben Gilbert, the co-host of "Acquired," a popular Silicon Valley podcast, said. "They were spending many billions targeting an obscure corner of academic and scientific computing, which was not a large market at the time—certainly less than the billions they were pouring in." Huang argued that the simple existence of CUDA would enlarge the supercomputing sector. This view was not widely held, and by the end of 2008 Nvidia's stock price had declined by seventy per cent.

In speeches, Huang has cited a visit to the office of Ting-Wai Chiu, a professor of physics at National Taiwan University, as giving him confidence during this time. Chiu, seeking to simulate the evolution of matter following the Big Bang, had constructed a homemade supercomputer in a laboratory adjacent to his office. Huang arrived to find the lab littered with GeForce boxes and the computer cooled by oscillating desk fans. "Jensen is a visionary," Chiu told me. "He made my life's work possible."

Chiu was the model customer, but there weren't many like him. Downloads of CUDA hit a peak in 2009, then declined for three years. Board mem-

REFRAIN

Were you grateful? I have tried I
think I'm grateful now *But then*? *And did*
they know it did you love them did
you let them know? I'd want to tell them
thank you now I'd want *They cannot*
hear you I would ask what it was like
for them *You see the snow*? I see the
snow *And hear it*? No one hears the snow
That's what you are for them now And
I'm doing it again that's what you're saying
I'm just listening here I'm doing it again and
now there's no excuse *No comment* I prefer
regret you're saying It convinces me I have
a heart *Intense* Yes *Laceration* All the drama
yes I take your point *Whereas*? Whereas
the ones I might do better by *Go on* Is it only
in winter the sky goes white? *It's white*
to you? This drained-of-everything what
would be the better word . . .

Where did you put it, *the thing she said*?
I know, I think about that now *The thing*
she trusted to no one but you And all
the time I'm wondering will she offer
to pay her share of the bill *The bill*?
We were at a restaurant *And did she*?
Yes *You let her*? I just wanted her
to offer *Did you let her pay*? I like
to think I didn't *But you can't be sure*?
We were students both of us *Yes I see*
And then I saw what it was *The thing*
she told you? No the bill She'd wanted
to spare my feelings *Feelings*? She wanted
to be discreet, I could tell by the way
she offered the money *Money* That's the
part that makes me sick now *And the thing*
she'd confided to no one but you? I know
I must have let it lapse *The thing that had*
ruined her life? I know It wasn't until
we needed to use it against him that
That what? I followed up

And daily so close to the end now *Do you*
want it to be over? Over? *Slept away*

I find myself counting the hours sometimes
When so many others are hungry? Yes
And sick? *And have no shelter*? Yes
You realize I do *how vile that is* I do *Of*
you I mean I know, I do But no that isn't
the same as wanting the end of it *No*? I love
my life I'm grateful to still be here *But*
counting the hours I think it's about
not wanting to be called upon I think I'm
tired *Poor you* I know And squandering's
the worst of the mortal sins *You sleep a lot*
I sleep too much

That film *Ah film Your classic move* I know
but this was different *Aren't they always*?
No but this *They're not*? All right
the ones that matter yes but this *That famous*
"*but*" We never see her *Who*? The girl
She's six She's only a voice on the phone
I see it coming What? *The wound You'll say*
it wounded you It did It does And the dispatcher
What dispatcher? On the phone He knows
that something terrible *You've heard the term*
"*displacement*"? something terrible has
happened and the girl *You love this* Isn't that
what art is for? To let us feel what otherwise
"*Vicarious*"? would be too much to bear I
like it best when the worst of the suffering
occurs offscreen *Offstage*, *like the Greeks*
More room for us *Low budget* Yes I see
where this is going

My turn Haven't I . . . *My turn* Yes
all right *And are you ready*? I think of
"A lady whom time hath surprised"
It's really the last indignity isn't it? *Time*
has a way of doing that And Susan Sontag
affronted that death should come for her
As though it makes exceptions I remember
being young and thinking I'd want to know
Know what? The future Idiot that I was
And now? I only hope to be spared *The*
future? Knowing it in advance, I don't
mean mine *Whose then*? The ones I hope
to die before *You're beginning to get*
the point

—Linda Gregerson

bers worried that Nvidia's depressed stock price would make it a target for corporate raiders. "We did everything we could to protect the company against an activist shareholder who might come in and try to break it up," Jim Gaither, a longtime board member, told me. Dawn Hudson, a former N.F.L. marketing executive, joined the board in 2013. "It was a distinctly flat, stagnant company," she said.

In marketing CUDA, Nvidia had sought a range of customers, including stock traders, oil prospectors, and molecular biologists. At one point, the company signed a deal with General Mills to simulate the thermal physics of cooking frozen pizza. One application that Nvidia spent little time thinking about was artificial intelligence. There didn't seem to be much of a market.

At the beginning of the twenty-tens, A.I. was a neglected discipline. Progress in basic tasks such as image recognition and speech recognition had seen only halting progress. Within this unpopular academic field, an even less popular subfield solved problems using "neural networks"—computing structures inspired by the human brain. Many computer scientists considered neural networks to be discredited. "I was discouraged by my advisers from working on neural nets," Catanzaro, the deep-learning researcher, told me, "because, at the time, they were considered to be outdated, and they didn't work."

Catanzaro described the researchers who continued to work on neural nets as "prophets in the wilderness." One of those prophets was Geoffrey Hinton, a professor at the University of Toronto. In 2009, Hinton's research group used Nvidia's CUDA platform to train a neural network to recognize human speech. He was surprised by the quality of the results, which he presented at a conference later that year. He then reached out to Nvidia. "I sent an e-mail saying, 'Look, I just told a thousand machine-learning researchers they should go and buy Nvidia cards. Can you send me a free one?'" Hinton told me. "They said no."

Despite the snub, Hinton encouraged his students to use CUDA, including a Ukrainian-born protégé of his named Alex Krizhevsky, who Hinton thought was perhaps the finest programmer he'd ever met. In 2012, Krizhevsky and his research partner, Ilya Sutskever, working on a tight budget, bought two GeForce cards from Amazon. Krizhevsky then began

training a visual-recognition neural network on Nvidia's parallel-computing platform, feeding it millions of images in a single week. "He had the two G.P.U. boards whirring in his bedroom," Hinton said. "Actually, it was his parents who paid for the quite considerable electricity costs."

Sutskever and Krizhevsky were astonished by the cards' capabilities. Earlier that year, researchers at Google had trained a neural net that identified videos of cats, an effort that required some sixteen thousand C.P.U.s. Sutskever and Krizhevsky had produced world-class results with just two Nvidia circuit boards. "G.P.U.s showed up and it felt like a miracle," Sutskever told me.

AlexNet, the neural network that Krizhevsky trained in his parents' house, can now be mentioned alongside the Wright Flyer and the Edison bulb. In 2012, Krizhevsky entered AlexNet into the annual ImageNet visual-recognition contest; neural networks were unpopular enough at the time that he was the only contestant to use this technique. AlexNet scored so well in the competition that the organizers initially wondered if Krizhevsky had somehow cheated. "That was a kind of Big Bang moment," Hinton said. "That was the paradigm shift."

In the decade since Krizhevsky's nine-page description of AlexNet's architecture was published, it has been cited more than a hundred thousand times, making it one of the most important papers in the history of computer science. (AlexNet correctly identified photographs of a scooter, a leopard, and a container ship, among other things.) Krizhevsky pioneered a number of important programming techniques, but his key finding was that a specialized G.P.U. could train neural networks up to a hundred times faster than a general-purpose C.P.U. "To do machine learning without CUDA would have just been too much trouble," Hinton said.

Within a couple of years, every entrant in the ImageNet competition was using a neural network. By the mid-twenty-tens, neural networks trained on G.P.U.s were identifying images with ninety-six-per-cent accuracy, surpassing humans. Huang's ten-year crusade to democratize supercomputing had succeeded. "The fact that they can solve computer vision, which is completely unstructured, leads to the question 'What else can you teach it?'" Huang said to me.

The answer seemed to be: everything. Huang concluded that neural networks would revolutionize society, and that he could use CUDA to corner the market on the necessary hardware. He announced that he was once again betting the company. "He sent out an e-mail on Friday evening saying everything is going to deep learning, and that we were no longer a graphics company," Greg Estes, a vice-president at Nvidia, told me. "By Monday morning, we were an A.I. company. Literally, it was that fast."

Around the time Huang sent the e-mail, he approached Catanzaro, Nvidia's leading A.I. researcher, with a thought experiment. "He told me to imagine he'd marched all eight thousand of Nvidia's employees into the parking lot," Catanzaro said. "Then he told me I was free to select anyone from the parking lot to join my team."

Huang rarely gives interviews, and tends to deflect attention from himself. "I don't really think I've done anything special here," he told me. "It's mostly my team." ("He's irreplaceable," the board member Jim Gaither told me.) "I'm not sure why I was selected to be the C.E.O.," Huang said. "I didn't have any particular drive." ("He was determined to run a business by the time he was thirty," his co-founder Chris Malachowsky told me.) "I'm not a great speaker, really, because I'm quite introverted," Huang said. ("He's a great entertainer," his friend Ben Bays told me.) "I only have one superpower—homework," Huang said. ("He can master any subject over a weekend," Dwight Diercks, Nvidia's head of software, said.)

Huang prefers an agile corporate structure, with no fixed divisions or hierarchy. Instead, employees submit a weekly list of the five most important things they are working on. Brevity is encouraged, as Huang surveys these e-mails late into the night. Wandering through Nvidia's giant campus, he often stops by the desks of junior employees and quizzes them on their work. A visit from Huang can turn a cubicle into an interrogation chamber. "Typically, in Silicon Valley, you can get away with fudging it," the industry analyst Hans Mosesmann told me. "You can't do that with Jensen. He will kind of lose his temper."

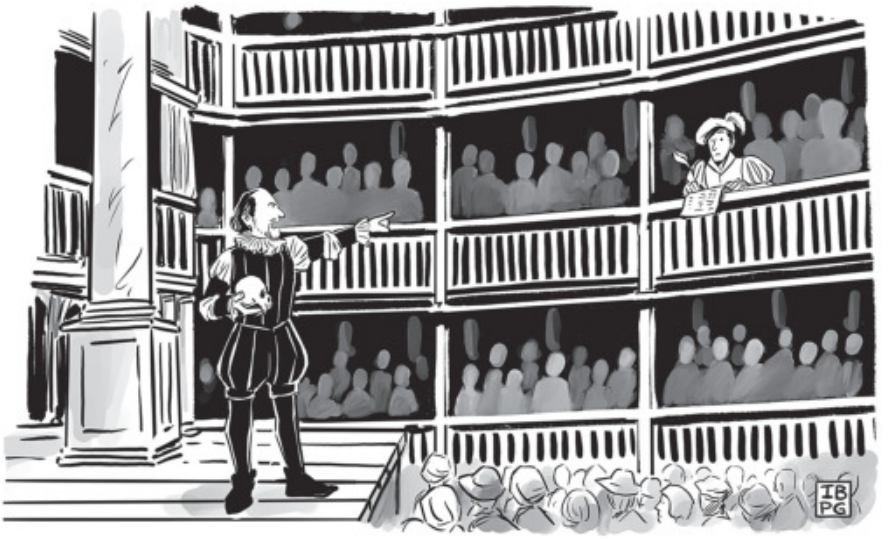
Huang communicates to his staff by writing hundreds of e-mails per day, often only a few words long. One executive compared the e-mails to haiku, another to ransom notes. Huang has also developed a set of management aphorisms that he refers to regularly. When scheduling, Huang asks employees to consider "the speed of light."

"Don't do it. They try to fill you up on breadsticks so that by the time you go into the therapist's office you feel horrible."

This does not simply mean to move quickly; rather, employees are to consider the absolute fastest a task could conceivably be accomplished, then work backward toward an achievable goal. They are also encouraged to pursue the "zero-billion-dollar market." This refers to exploratory products, such as CUDA, which not only do not have competitors but don't even have obvious customers. (Huang sometimes reminded me of Kevin Costner's character in "Field of Dreams," who builds a baseball diamond in the middle of an Iowa cornfield, then waits for players and fans to arrive.)

Perhaps Huang's most radical belief is that "failure must be shared." In the early two-thousands, Nvidia shipped a faulty graphics card with a loud, overactive fan. Instead of firing the card's product managers, Huang arranged a meeting in which the managers presented, to a few hundred people, every decision they had made that led to the fiasco. (Nvidia also distributed to the press a satirical video, starring the product managers, in which the card was repurposed as a leaf blower.) Presenting one's failures to an audience has become a beloved ritual at Nvidia, but such corporate struggle sessions are not for everyone. "You can kind of see right away who is going to last here and who is not," Diercks said. "If someone starts getting defensive, I know they're not going to make it."

Huang's employees sometimes complain of his mercurial personality. "It's really about what's going on in my brain versus what's coming out of my mouth," Huang told me. "When the mismatch is great, then it comes out as anger." Even when he's calm, Huang's intensity can be overwhelming. "Interacting with him is kind of like sticking your finger in the electric socket," one employee said. Still, Nvidia has high employee retention. Jeff Fisher, who runs the company's consumer division, was one of the first employees. He's now extremely wealthy, but he continues to work. "Many of us are financial volunteers at this point," Fisher said, "but we believe in the mission." Both of Huang's children pursued jobs in the hospitality industry when they were in their twenties; following years of paternal browbeating, they now have careers at Nvidia. Catanzaro at one point left for another company. A few years later, he returned. "Jensen is not an easy person to get along with all of the time," Catanzaro said. "I've been afraid of Jensen sometimes, but I also know that he loves me."



"Hey! No bootleg recordings of the show!"

• •

After the success of AlexNet, venture capitalists began shovelling money at A.I. "We've been investing in a lot of startups applying deep learning to many areas, and every single one effectively comes in building on Nvidia's platform," Marc Andreessen, of the firm Andreessen Horowitz, said in 2016. Around that time, Nvidia delivered its first dedicated A.I. supercomputer, the DGX-1, to a research group at OpenAI. Huang himself took the computer to OpenAI's offices; Elon Musk, then the chairman, opened the package with a box cutter.

In 2017, researchers at Google introduced a new architecture for neural-net training called a transformer. The following year, researchers at OpenAI used Google's framework to build the first "generative pre-trained transformer," or G.P.T. The G.P.T. models were trained on Nvidia supercomputers, absorbing an enormous corpus of text and learning how to make humanlike connections. In late 2022, after several versions, ChatGPT was released to the public.

Since then, Nvidia has been overwhelmed with customer requests. The company's latest A.I.-training module, known as the DGX H100, is a three-hundred-and-seventy-pound metal box that can cost up to five hundred thousand dollars. It is currently on back order for months. The DGX H100 runs five times as fast as the hardware that trained ChatGPT, and could have trained AlexNet in less than a minute. Nvidia is projected to sell half a million of the devices by the end of the year.

The more processing power one applies to a neural net, the more sophisticated its output becomes. For the most advanced A.I. models, Nvidia sells a rack of dozens of DGX H100s. If that isn't enough, Nvidia will arrange these computers like library stacks, filling a data center with tens of millions of dollars' worth of supercomputing equipment. There is no obvious limit to the A.I.'s capabilities. "If you allow yourself to believe that an artificial neuron is like a biological neuron, then it's like you're training brains," Sutskever told me. "They should do everything we can do." I was initially skeptical of Sutskever's claim—I hadn't learned to identify cats by looking at ten million reference images, and I hadn't learned to

"I'm so happy to host you! Here's a spare towel and a guest room with no intuitive place to hang it."

• •

write by scanning the complete works of humanity. But the fossil record shows that the nervous system first developed several hundred million years ago, and has been growing more sophisticated ever since. "There have been a lot of living creatures on this earth for a long time that have learned a lot of things," Catanzaro said, "and a lot of that is written down in physical structures in your brain."

The latest A.I.s have powers that surprise even their creators, and no one quite knows what they are capable of. (GPT-4, ChatGPT's successor, can transform a sketch on a napkin into a functioning Web site, and has scored in the eighty-eighth percentile on the LSAT.) In the next few years, Nvidia's hardware, by accelerating evolution to the speed of a computer-clock cycle, will train all manner of similar A.I. models. Some will manage investment portfolios; some will fly drones. Some will steal your likeness and reproduce it; some will mimic the voices of the dead. Some will act as brains for autonomous robots; some will create genetically tailored drugs. Some will write music; some will write poetry. If we aren't careful, someday soon, one will outsmart us.

The gross profit margin on Nvidia's equipment approaches seventy per cent. This ratio attracts competition in the manner that chum attracts sharks. Google and Tesla are developing A.I.-training hardware, as are numerous startups. One of those startups is Cerebras, which makes a "mega-chip" the size of a dinner plate. "They're just extorting their customers, and nobody will say it out loud," Cerebras's C.E.O., Andrew Feldman, said of Nvidia. (Huang countered that a well-trained A.I. model can reduce customers' overhead in other business lines. "The more you buy, the more you save," he said.)

Nvidia's fiercest rival is Advanced Micro Devices. Since 2014, A.M.D. has been run by Lisa Su, another gifted engineer who immigrated to the United States from Taiwan at a young age. In the years since Su became the head of the company, A.M.D.'s stock price has risen thirtyfold, making her second only to Huang as the most successful semiconductor C.E.O. of this era. Su is also Huang's first cousin once removed.

Huang told me that he didn't know Su growing up; he met her only after she was named C.E.O. "She's terrific," he said. "We're not very competitive." (Nvidia employees can recite the relative market share of Nvidia's and A.M.D.'s graphics cards from memory.) Their personalities are different: Su is reserved and stoic; Huang is temperamental and expressive. "She has a great poker face," Mosesmann, the industry analyst, said. "Jensen does not, although he'd still find a way to beat you."

Su likes to tail the incumbent, and wait for it to falter. Unlike Huang, she is not afraid to compete with Intel, and, in the past decade, A.M.D. has captured a large portion of Intel's C.P.U. business, a feat that analysts once regarded as impossible. Recently, Su has turned her attention to the A.I. market. "Jensen does not want to lose. He's a driven guy," Forrest Norrod, the executive overseeing A.M.D.'s effort, said. "But we think we can compete with Nvidia."

On a gloomy Friday afternoon in September, I drove to an upscale resort overlooking the Pacific to watch Huang be publicly interviewed by Hao Ko, the lead architect of Nvidia's headquarters. I arrived early to find the two men facing the ocean, engaged in quiet conversation. They were dressed nearly identically, in black leather jackets, black jeans, and black shoes, although Ko was much taller. I was hoping to catch some candid statements about the future of computing; instead, I got a six-minute roast of Ko's wardrobe. "Look at this guy!" Huang said. "He's dressed just like me. He's copying me—which is smart—only his pants have too many pockets." Ko gave a nervous chuckle, and looked down at his designer jeans, which did have a few more zippered pockets than function would strictly demand. "Simplify, man!" Huang said, before turning to me. "That's why he's dressed like me. I taught this guy everything he knows." (Huang's wardrobe is widely imitated, and earlier this year he was featured in the Style section of the *Times*.)

The interview was sponsored by Gensler, one of the world's leading cor-

porate-design firms, and there were several hundred architects in attendance. As the event approached, Huang increased the intensity of his shtick, cracking a series of weak jokes and rocking back and forth on his feet. Huang does dozens of speaking gigs a year, and had given a talk to a different audience earlier that day, but I realized that he was nervous. "I hate public speaking," he said.

Onstage, though, he seemed relaxed and confident. He explained that the skylights on the undulating roof of his headquarters were positioned to illuminate the building while blocking direct sunlight. To calculate the design, Huang had strapped Ko into a virtual-reality headset and then attached the headset to a rack of Nvidia G.P.U.s, so that Ko could track the flow of light. "This is the world's first building that needed a supercomputer to be possible," Huang said.

Following the interview, Huang took questions from the audience, including one about the potential risks of A.I. "There's the doomsday A.I.s—the A.I. that somehow jumped out of the computer and consumes tons and tons of information and learns all by itself, reshaping its attitude and sensibility, and starts making decisions on its own, including pressing buttons of all kinds," Huang said, pantomiming pressing the buttons in the air. The room grew very quiet. "No A.I. should be able to learn without a human in the loop," he said. One architect asked when A.I. might start to figure things out on its own. "Reasoning capability is two to three years out," Huang said. A low murmur went through the crowd.

Afterward, I caught up with Ko. Like a lot of Huang's jokes, the crack about teaching Ko "everything he knows" contained a pointed truth. Ko hadn't yet made partner at Gensler when Huang chose him for the Nvidia headquarters, bypassing Ko's boss. I asked Ko why Huang had done so. "You probably have heard stories," Ko said. "He can be very tough. He will undress you." Huang had no architecture experience, but he would often tell Ko that he was wrong about the building's design. "I would say ninety per cent of architects would battle back," Ko said. "I'm more of a listener."

Ko recalled Huang challenging Nvidia's engineering staff on the speed of the V.R. headset. The headset originally took five hours to render design changes; at Huang's urging, the engineers got the speed down to ten seconds. "He was tough on them, but there was a logic to it," Ko said. "If the headset took five hours, I'd probably settle on whatever shade of green looked adequate. If it took ten seconds, I'd take the time to pick the best shade of green there was."

The buildings' design won several awards and made Ko's career. Still, Ko recalled his time on the project with mixed emotions. "The place was finished, it looks amazing, we're doing the tour, and he's questioning me about the placement of the water fountains," Ko said. "He was upset because they were next to the bathrooms! That's required by code, and this is a billion-dollar building! But he just couldn't let it go."

"I'm never satisfied," Huang told me. "No matter what it is, I only see imperfections."

I asked Huang if he was taking any gambles today that resemble the one he took twenty years ago. He responded immediately with a single word: "Omniverse." Inspired by the V.R.-architecture gambit, the Omniverse is Nvidia's attempt to simulate the real world at an extraordinary level of fine-grained detail. Huang has described it as an "industrial metaverse."

Since 2018, Nvidia's graphics cards have featured "ray-tracing," which simulates the way that light bounces

off objects to create photorealistic effects. Inside a triangle of frosted glass in Nvidia's executive meeting center, a product-demo specialist showed me a three-dimensional rendering of a gleaming Japanese ramen shop. As the demo cycled through different points of view, light reflected off the metal counter and steam rose from a bubbling pot of broth. There was nothing to indicate that it wasn't real.

The specialist then showed me "Diane," a hyper-realistic digital avatar that speaks five languages. A powerful generative A.I. had studied millions of videos of people to create a composite entity. It was the imperfections that were most affecting—Diane had blackheads on her nose and trace hairs on her upper lip. The only clue that Diane wasn't truly human was an uncanny shimmer in the whites of her eyes. "We're working on that," the specialist said.

Huang's vision is to unify Nvidia's computer-graphics research with its generative-A.I. research. As he sees it, image-generation A.I.s will soon be so sophisticated that they will be able to render three-dimensional, inhabitable worlds and populate them with realistic-seeming people. At the same time, language-processing A.I.s will be able to interpret voice commands immediately. ("The programming language of the future will be 'human,'" Huang has said.) Once the technologies are united with ray-tracing, users will be able to speak whole universes into existence. Huang hopes to use such "digital twins" of our own world to safely train robots and self-driving cars. Combined with V.R. technology, the Omniverse could also allow users to inhabit bespoke realities.

I felt dizzy leaving the product demo. I thought of science fiction; I thought of the Book of Genesis. I sat on a triangular couch with the corners trimmed, and struggled to imagine the future that my daughter will inhabit. Nvidia executives were building the Manhattan Project of computer science, but when I questioned them about the wisdom of creating superhuman intelligence they looked at me as if I were questioning the utility of the washing machine. I had wondered aloud if an A.I. might someday kill someone. "Eh, electricity kills people every year," Catanzaro said. I wondered if it might eliminate art. "It will make art better!" Diercks said. "It will make you much better at your job." I wondered if someday soon an A.I. might become self-aware. "In order for you to be a creature, you have to be conscious. You have to have some knowledge of self, right?" Huang said. "I don't know where that could happen." ♦

AMERICAN CHRONICLES

THE AFTERMATH

Kristin Kinkel, the sister of a school shooter, is still reckoning with her brother's crimes.

BY JENNIFER GONNERMAN

On May 21, 1998, before places like Columbine and Newtown and Parkland had become part of the American vernacular, Kristin Kinkel received a phone call. At the time, she was twenty-one and a student at Hawaii Pacific University, in Honolulu. She had a scholarship for competitive cheerleading—she was an expert tumbler and flyer—and she lived with some of her teammates in a modest rental house they called Cheer Palace.

The phone call came early that morning from a friend from her home town—Springfield, Oregon. He stammered something about having bad news and hung up. Soon afterward, another friend called and told her that there had been a shooting at Thurston High School, where Kristin had gone and where her brother, Kip, was in ninth grade. "Is Kip hurt?" she asked. She didn't get an answer. Then a third friend phoned and blurted out what nobody else wanted to say: Kip was the one who had opened fire at Thurston. As Kristin would later learn, he had killed two students and injured another twenty-five.

Someone told her to check the news; the story was dominating CNN. "I remember turning on the TV and seeing my house, the house I grew up in, from a helicopter view," Kristin recalled recently. Her parents had built the house twenty-five years earlier—an A-frame surrounded by Douglas firs. Now it was a crime scene. After the shooting at Thurston, the police had discovered two bodies inside her family's home—her brother had killed their parents, too.

The phone kept ringing. One of Kristin's childhood friends in Oregon had heard an early news report that mistakenly said three bodies had been found in the family's house—not two. The friend was terrified: Had Kristin been killed as well? "I ended up calling her roommates in Hawaii," the friend remembered. "And they were, like, 'She's here. She's fine. But she's not talking to anyone.'"

Cheer Palace was in a quiet part of Honolulu, at the end of a street, but soon media vans were parked outside. To avoid being seen through the front windows, Kristin hid on the stairs in the back. "I remember sitting there on the top of the stairs, with my head in my hands, waiting," she said. While her roommates tried to figure out what to do, her brain kept sputtering, trying to make sense of the news: "This can't be true, there's no way this is true, this is completely impossible."

To help Kristin escape, a male teammate sneaked her into his truck and drove away. Unsure where she should go, Kristin tracked down a surfer friend. "Can you please take me out into the ocean?" she asked. She remembers lying on a board in the water, "just trying to come to terms with everything." As the waves rocked her body, her mind was able to focus, and then she heard a siren in the distance. "There was something about that moment when it settled—I really did have to believe it, I can't ignore it, I can't pretend that this didn't happen," she said.

The police took Kip into custody at Thurston High School and the next day escorted him into a courtroom at the Lane County courthouse, in Eugene. He was fifteen, with reddish-brown hair and acne, and was wearing a University of Oregon sweatshirt. His wrists were cuffed in front of him, his ankles shackled, his head down. As he was led past the media, the snapping sound of camera shutters erupted. "Kip, what do you want to tell your sister?" someone shouted. He did not respond. In court, he was charged as an adult with four counts of aggravated murder.

Kristin's university paid for her airplane ticket home, and a male teammate accompanied her, making certain that she wasn't besieged by reporters. She could not return to her family's house—the police were still there investigating—so she stayed with a friend's family. Her parents had had a large circle of friends, and somebody had already called Don Loomis, an attorney who handled estates, suggesting that Kristin would need a lawyer. The night after she arrived, Loomis met with her.

She appeared to be in shock, which he had expected, but her words about her brother took him aback. "That's not Kip," she said. "There must be something wrong." She insisted that they needed to figure out what was wrong with Kip—and find a way to help him. "I think she just knew that it wasn't the Kip that she remembered," Loomis said.

Kristin set about planning a funeral for her parents, which was held on May 27th. By then, seven days had elapsed since Kip had murdered them, and Kristin had already visited him at the local juvenile jail three times. "One of the first times I saw him, I just remember him being unable to talk," she said. "He had his head down on the table, and he was crying, and the only thing he could say was 'I'm sorry.'"

To read the media coverage of Kip Kinkel's crimes today is to be reminded of how shocking they were at the time—and how numb we have become to such acts of violence in the past quarter century. Mass school shootings were almost unheard of before the 1997-98 school year. That year, there were a handful—including in West Paducah, Kentucky, and near Jonesboro, Arkansas—and then Kip's shooting eclipsed them all: he had opened fire with a semi-automatic rifle in a packed cafeteria. "Something like this was unimaginable at that point in time," Peter DeFazio, who lives near Thurston High School and represented the area in Congress, told me. "It was before this became an American epidemic."

Springfield—a small, blue-collar city

After the shootings, Kristin became an object of public curiosity. "I was not a human being to the media," she said.

PHOTOGRAPH BY MAGNUS HOLMES

that had long been known for its timber industry—now found itself on front pages, its reputation redefined by the extreme violence of a teen-ager. The media had arrived en masse, with satellite trucks taking over the road in front of Thurston. Students and townspeople gathered at the fence in front of the school to grieve, leaving flowers, ribbons, notes, candles, and stuffed animals along the chain links. Today, the creation of a makeshift memorial in the wake of a school shooting might be expected, but then it was still a novelty, the beginning of a new American ritual.

An anti-violence campaign started in Springfield, with an optimistic slogan: "Let it end here." On June 13th, President Bill Clinton visited Thurston, where he spoke in the school's gym. "This has not only been a horrible and traumatic experience for you—this has been a traumatic experience for all of America," he said. "Everybody who has looked at you knows that this is a good community that they'd be proud to live in, and, therefore, it could happen anywhere." Ten months later, two teenagers in Colorado launched an attack so deadly that it became known by a single word: Columbine.

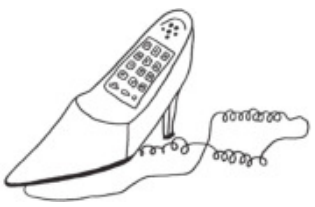
After that, more mass shootings took place each year, and following the massacre at Sandy Hook Elementary School, in Newtown, Connecticut, in 2012, I started thinking about Kip Kinkel and his sister. Unlike the shooter at Sandy Hook or those in Columbine, Kip was still alive, and, I thought, he and Kristin might be able to provide some insight into the tragedy enveloping the country. After speaking to a couple of media outlets in 1998 and 1999, Kristin had refused every interview request, and when I reached out to her she turned mine down, too. I assumed that I would never hear from her again, but, this past April, ten years after I contacted her, she told me that she wanted to talk.

The first time I spoke to her, on the phone, it was apparent that she was still deeply traumatized. "Forgive the shakiness in my voice," she said. She explained that part of her trepidation was owing to her past interactions with the press, which included reporters pursuing her at the courthouse. "I was not a human being to the media," she said. "I was a story that everyone wanted to get." I wondered if at some point she would change her mind about talking to me, but she never wavered, and we got into a routine of speaking each week.

Our first interview took place on May 8th—her mother's birthday. Many years ago, Kristin told me, a therapist had helped her devise a ritual to cope with the loss of her parents: on their birthdays, she carries an object that reminds her of them. For her father, the object was a tennis ball, because tennis was his favorite sport. For her mother, who had long red hair, it was a silver butterfly hair clasp. At the moment, Kristin said, she was carrying the clasp in the "kangaroo pouch" of her sweatshirt. "I'm holding it right now," she said.

I was surprised by her willingness to be so candid with a stranger. It seemed that part of her decision to speak with me had to do with timing—this year marks the twenty-fifth anniversary of her brother's crimes. In the past, she had worried that anything she said publicly might bring more pain to the families of the students Kip had shot, but now that a quarter century had passed she hoped this was less likely. I also sensed that her decision to tell her story was driven in large part by a desire to help her brother. He remains in prison, but they are still in close contact. "The thing you heard a few minutes ago"—a beep on the phone line—"was him trying to call," she said.

After the shootings, Kristin had made a point of not reading the media coverage, but the story was headline news



across the country. Kip had shot their parents on May 20, 1998, then spent the night at the house. The next day, shortly before 8 A.M., he had walked toward Thurston High School wearing a trenchcoat and carrying a semi-automatic rifle and two pistols. He had started firing the rifle in a breezeway, opened the door to the cafeteria, and continued firing, pausing only when he ran out of ammunition. Jacob Ryker, a junior on the wrestling team who had been shot in the chest, tackled him, and several other boys joined in, pinning him to the cafeteria floor. A custodian later told police that he heard Kip shout, "Kill me!"

Kip had fired fifty-one rounds, shooting students in the head, neck, buttocks, thigh, hip. Mikael Nickolauson, seventeen, died at the school; sixteen-year-old Benjamin Walker died in a hospital. Among the students most critically injured was Tony Case, a pitcher on the varsity baseball team and a trombonist in the school's jazz band. He had been in the cafeteria that morning handing out campaign stickers for a friend running for student-body president. When he realized what was happening, he dived under a table, but Kip shot him three times in the back and once in the leg.

Life published a ten-page story about the shooting victims, which included a photograph of Tony in his hospital bed. One of the surgeons who operated on him was quoted as saying, "I thought he was going to die." After two weeks in the hospital, Tony came home to bags of get-well cards from all over the country. A few had been addressed simply to "Tony Case, Springfield, Oregon." Some were made of construction paper and signed by classrooms of children; others had been sent by youth baseball teams.

Kip Kinkel had opened fire at Thurston on a Thursday. The following Tuesday, the school reopened, with the cafeteria cleaned up. Tony, a junior, did not return until the following school year. "I can't move my right foot and still can't feel in my right foot and ankle," he told a reporter three months after he was shot. "The doctors are just, like, 'Wait and see.'" Tony said that he had not "felt any anger" toward Kip: "I think pretty much what everybody thinks—there's a sick kid for you, and he pretty much needs to stay in jail for the rest of his life."

Kip's lawyers had arranged for a psychologist to meet with him regularly at the juvenile jail. Two days after Kip's arrest, the psychologist wrote in his notes, "No contact with Kristin. Uncertain and fearful about what she thinks of him." Four days later, after Kristin had visited three times, the psychologist noted,

"Kip's spirits are improved." Kristin had become his lifeline. Jail officials had placed Kip on suicide watch, in a cell with no sheets and only paper clothes. With no obvious way of ending his life, he had initially tried to starve himself. But he told the psychologist that once Kristin came to visit he "didn't try to starve." Then, when she returned to Honolulu briefly, he said, "I didn't try for a while because I didn't want her to have to fly right back again from Hawaii."

Kristin graduated that summer from Hawaii Pacific University, and before long she had moved back into her family's home, on a hill near the McKenzie River. Another daughter might have refused to live in the house where her parents had been killed, but Kristin felt herself drawn to it. "That house is what made me me. That's the only place I wanted to run to," she explained. "It was where I was most connected to my family." For her, being in the house brought back happy memories: carving pumpkins on newspapers spread out over the kitchen floor; camping on the back deck in a My Little Pony tent; hiking through the nearby woods with her mother.

Her parents, Bill and Faith Kinkel, had been high-school language teachers known for their dedication to their jobs. Bill, who had retired from Thurston High School after teaching Spanish there for three decades, had been the sort of teacher who would climb on his desk and break into song in order to teach an especially difficult grammar lesson. Faith, who taught at Springfield High School, across town, often got up at 4 A.M. to write her lesson plans. She had died at fifty-seven; he was fifty-nine. When a memorial service was held for them at Springfield High School, more than a thousand people showed up.

In the months after her parents died, Kristin went through each day as if she were "on autopilot," she later said. "Just kind of trying to survive and not stop." There were practical issues that she'd never had to deal with before, like how to find a plumber when the toilet breaks. And there were other, more challenging tasks. "Somebody had to go through all the boxes and all the clothing and all the stuff that's left behind," she said. "And nobody else was going to do that." Her days were full: she was visiting her brother, meeting with her lawyer, seeing her father's mother in Eugene. Bill had visited her weekly, and Kristin was now her primary caretaker.

"The first rule of Book Club is don't talk about Book Club—and the second rule is don't talk about Ayn Rand."

• •

Kristin's decision to avoid the media coverage of her brother's crimes seemed driven by a desire to hold on to her sanity. Or, as she later put it, by a "protective mechanism inside me that says, 'Nope. Don't get close to it, because you might remember it, and you're not supposed to remember it, because you have to stay alive, and you have to stay functioning.' " But Kristin learned from friends that the press was painting a picture of a profoundly troubled teen: a kid who had left homemade bombs in the crawl space beneath his house, who had been obsessed with guns and joked to classmates about opening fire at school, who had been named as the student most likely to start World War Three. The Seattle *Post-Intelligencer* called him "a bad kid from a good family."

Kristin, who had left for college when Kip was eleven, found it impossible to reconcile these descriptions with the boy she remembered, who had slept in a bunk bed above her when he was little. Kip had doted on his calico cat, which he named Tiger Lily, after the character in "Peter Pan." Kristin remembered him trading "deer kisses" with their mother, nuzzling his cheek against hers.

Kristin's family had come to visit her in Hawaii when Kip was in middle school, and now she found herself studying a photograph that one of her parents had taken on the trip. In the picture, she grins at the camera, and Kip squints at it, unsmiling. "I remember looking back at that picture and saying, 'You know, he was very strange on this trip. This is not the kid I remember,' " she said recently. His affect was "very flat," and he seemed "disconnected from everyone." Even so, his behavior did not seriously concern her. "It was different enough to be noticeable, but not so different that it couldn't be chalked up to 'Oh, he's a moody teen that I don't know that well anymore.' "

Kristin continued to visit Kip regularly in jail, but they did not speak about what, exactly, he had done, or why he had done it. She did not want to know the details of his crimes, and, even if she had, Kip's defense attorneys had

advised him not to talk about them with any visitor. Kip did, however, speak openly with a slew of strangers: the psychologist he saw weekly, and medical experts who had been retained by his attorneys to evaluate him.

The accounts that these experts produced are remarkably consistent: they depict a fifteen-year-old boy tormented by his own mind, overwhelmed by the symptoms of an illness he did not understand. "Kip came in and out of psychosis like you would turn on and off a light switch," a psychologist later said. "His outward appearance was of the boy next door, who you would trust to babysit your children, feed your pets, and take care of your house. When he was lucid and intelligent, he was like any other adolescent. But, when you talked to him, within minutes he would have auditory hallucinations and go in and out of them depending on the topic."

Kip explained that when he was twelve he'd begun hearing voices. The voices confused him: "Do other people have them? Will they go away? Is this because of puberty?" He said that the voices fired insults at him and sometimes ordered him to do violent things, causing him so much distress that, he told one psychiatrist, "I wanted to bash my head against the wall or stick my finger in my eye to make it stop." As he grew older, he said, the voices became more frequent, and he found that stress exacerbated them. He did not tell anyone about the voices but instead devised strategies to try to quiet them, including putting on his Walkman, blasting Nine Inch Nails, and pedalling his mountain bike as fast as he could.

In middle school, Kip began getting into trouble. On a snowboarding trip, he and a friend left the motel where they were staying and were picked up by the police, accused of tossing rocks at cars from an overpass. At home, he made explosive devices with gasoline and other chemicals, and when he was angry he would set them off at a nearby quarry. In January of 1997, when he was in eighth grade, his mother took him to see a psychologist, Jeffrey L. Hicks, who had been referred by his school. "Mrs. Kinkel reported Kip has a fascination with explosives, guns and knives," Hicks wrote in his notes. "This interest is shared by several of his friends and his mother is concerned such fascination is unhealthy and may lead to behaviors that could harm Kip or others." Kip had a strained relationship with his father, and he "became tearful" when the topic came up, Hicks wrote. "He feels his father expects the worst from him."

During the next six months, Kip's mother brought him to see Hicks every two or three weeks. Hicks dissuaded

Kip from playing with explosives, gave him a diagnosis of depression, and later suggested that he get a prescription for an antidepressant from his pediatrician. Kip started Prozac that June. Eight weeks later, Hicks wrote in his notes that he, Kip, and Kip's mother agreed that Kip was "doing well enough" to discontinue regular sessions. Kip stopped seeing Hicks; after his prescription ran out, in the fall, he stopped taking Prozac.

Kip never told Hicks about the voices he heard. Several months after his arrest, when a psychologist asked him why he had stayed silent, Kip said, "I didn't want anyone to think I was nuts, didn't want to go to a mental hospital, didn't want my friends to know, because that would end my friendships. I really didn't want any girls to know, because they wouldn't want to be seen with me."

On April 24, 1998, while in his ninth-grade language-arts class, Kip blurted out, "God damn this voice inside my head!" For his outburst, Kip was punished: the teacher sent him into the hall, and he had to fill out a "respect sheet." (The form asked: "In the future, what would you do differently to prevent this problem?" Kip's answer: "Not to say 'Damn.'") He was supposed to get a parent's signature on the form; instead, he got a girl in study hall to sign it.

On May 20th, Kip was caught with a pistol in his locker, which he had bought that day from a friend. (The friend had stolen it from the house of a classmate.) Kip and the friend were both taken to the police station, and Kip's father had to pick him up. His father was irate, telling him that he would now be expelled from school and charged with a felony. Kip later said that in the car the voices in his head were so loud that he couldn't remember what his father said to him.

Mental-health professionals refer to voices that order an individual to act in a certain way as "command hallucinations." Kip told a psychologist that, when he and his father had returned home that day, he heard voices saying, " 'Get your gun. Shoot him. Shoot him.' So I did. I had no choice." After he shot his father, he said, the voices continued: "They told me to kill Mom because I'd already killed Dad. 'No choice, do it!' they said." The next morning, Kip said, the voices told him, "Go to school and kill everybody."

Kip's attorneys hired an investigator to examine his family history, and she found evidence of severe mental illness on both sides. In 1948, Kip's great-uncle Robert McKissick had made the front page of the Twin Falls *Times-News* for committing his own seemingly inexplicable act of violence. McKissick, a farmer, had been driving his truck when a trooper pulled him over for a traffic infraction. Afterward, as the trooper was walking away, McKissick got out of his truck and stabbed him five times with a knife. This attack had been prompted by a delusion: one of McKissick's brothers had died in the war, and he believed that the trooper was the person who had killed him.

The mental-health experts who interviewed Kip discovered that he, too, suffered from delusions. Kip worried that the Disney Corporation was taking over the world and would replace U.S. dollars with "Disney dollars"; that China might invade any day and start stealing the trees around his house; and that the voices he heard were coming from a chip that had been implanted in his brain. A psychologist wrote that, after he informed Kip that an MRI of his brain did not show a chip, Kip "argued that the chip may not have been picked up because it may have moved to his spinal column."

Kip had heard of schizophrenia, but he had never associated that illness with the voices he heard. In jail, the psychologist who met with him weekly told

him that other people hear voices, too, and that medication exists to quiet them. Kip was "angry at himself that he didn't tell his parents about his voices," the psychologist wrote, near the end of 1998. Another day, Kip stated that, if he had told his mother about the voices, "maybe we could have gotten help and this whole thing would never have happened."

Kip's lawyers had originally planned to go to trial and mount an insanity defense. If they had succeeded, Kip would have been sent to the state's psychiatric hospital. But, in the end, they decided not to take his case to trial. Kip's crimes had shaken the entire county—everyone seemed to know someone connected to the case—and the lawyers were not optimistic about winning over a local jury. They struck a deal with prosecutors. Kip would plead guilty to the charges against him—four murder charges and some two dozen attempted-murder charges—and, in exchange, he would receive a prison sentence of twenty-five years for the murders. This plea deal was a gamble, because it did not include his sentence for the nonfatal shootings. The judge, Jack Mattison, would decide his punishment for those crimes.

A sentencing hearing was held in November of 1999, at the Lane County courthouse, with some eighty people testifying. The survivors, their family members, and their supporters filled the courtroom. Kip sat at the front with his lawyers, sometimes laying his head on the table. On the second day, Kristin came to testify, accompanied by her aunt Claudia, who had been appointed Kip's guardian. The next day, Kristin appeared on the front page of Eugene's *Register-Guard.* She looked polished, in a thin sweater and a gray pants suit, though a reporter described her as "frail and weary."

She did not want to be there—to sit in the courtroom, surrounded by her brother's victims, was "excruciating," she later said. But she was determined to do all she could to persuade Judge Mattison not to give Kip a life sentence. On the stand, she told the judge about their childhood together: travelling to national parks, playing basketball in their driveway, arguing over which of them the family dog loved best. "I wish I had paid more attention," she said. She read aloud from a letter she had written the judge: "I love my brother more than I ever thought possible. And not because he needs me to, but because I need to. It is a difficult concept for an outsider to understand, but it comes from what is inside us."

Kip's attorneys called William H. Sack, a highly regarded psychiatrist who had evaluated Kip. He gave his diagnosis—paranoid schizophrenia—which, he said, responds "better to treatment" and has "a better prognosis in general than the other forms of schizophrenia." The plan was to send Kip to MacLaren Youth Correctional Facility, a juvenile prison with a strong mental-health program, where Sack worked. "If Mr. Kinkel takes medication, is consistently cared for by a psychiatrist he trusts, in twenty-five or thirty years I think he can be safely returned to the community," Sack said.

When Kip got his chance to speak, he apologized. "I absolutely loved my parents and had no reason to kill them. I had no reason to dislike, kill, or try to kill anyone at Thurston," he said. "I am very sorry for everything I have done." But rage at Kip seemed to unite the courtroom audience. When the survivors and their parents testified, they spoke not only about injuries but also about plunging grades, fears of loud noises, difficulties sleeping, and a sense of terror at the prospect of Kip getting out.

"You made the rest of my high-school life absolute hell. I became someone other kids avoided because I reminded them of you and the shooting," Jennifer Alldredge, who had been shot in the back and the hand, said. "My name became 'victim.'"

"I don't care if you're sick, if you're insane, if you're crazy," Jacob Ryker, the wrestler who tackled Kip despite having been shot in the chest and then in the hand, said. "A lifetime in prison is too good for you."

One of the last to speak was Tony Case, the former varsity baseball player, who had been shot four times and critically injured. Tony was now enrolled at Lane Community College, in Eugene. Reading aloud from a statement he had written, he described how a bullet had severed an artery in his leg, making it excruciatingly painful for him to walk without shoes. "Because I will be affected for the rest of my life, I feel that he should be, too," he said.

Judge Mattison sentenced Kip to nearly eighty-seven years in prison for his nonfatal shootings. This, combined with the previous sentence, brought Kip's total punishment to "111.67 years, which is more than anyone will

ever serve," Mattison said. There would be no possibility of parole.

After the sentencing, Kristin and her aunt Claudia dodged reporters and hustled across the street, to the office of Kristin's lawyer. A family friend, Judy, was there, waiting to hear the news. Judy recalled that she saw only Claudia come in: "I said, 'Where's Kristin?' And Claudia said, 'She's in the bathroom vomiting. She's so upset.'" Judy ran in, opened the stall door, and held her. "And I remember Kristin saying, 'He's going to kill himself!'"

Judy tried to assure Kristin that that would not happen. "As soon as you see Kip, you need to say you cannot lose another member of your family," Judy told her. "He needs to be here for you."

Kristin moved to the Portland area and took on two jobs: as a bilingual teacher's assistant and as a member of the Portland Trail Blazers' stunt team. Once or twice a week, she made the thirty-minute drive to visit her brother at MacLaren, in Woodburn, Oregon. He was now on an antipsychotic, but the doctors were still figuring out the right dosage, and sometimes when she visited he would fall asleep. "He needed guidance, he needed taking care of, he needed advice, he needed a lot of parenting," she recalled. For his eighteenth birthday, she brought him a cake decorated with his favorite candy: gummy bears. When he graduated from high school, she went to MacLaren for the ceremony, and she was there when he graduated from college, too. (He got a B.A. from the University of Illinois via correspondence courses.)

Sack, the psychiatrist who testified at the sentencing hearing, treated Kip weekly at MacLaren. "He was absolutely normal once the medication took the voices away," Sack told me. "During all that time, you couldn't find a nicer kid." A psychologist who treated Kip at MacLaren wrote in a memo, "He is a very bright, witty, kind man who other youth look up to."

In 2007, when Kip was about to turn twenty-five, he was transferred into the adult prison system, and ever since he has been confined at the Oregon State Correctional Institution, a medium-security prison in Salem. The siblings' relationship has changed significantly over the years. After Kip entered the state prison, "there was a kind of transition period where I would notice myself saying to people, 'You know, he just doesn't need me in that way anymore,'" Kristin said. "And so the relationship shifted from big sister–little brother to just siblings—much more equal, learning from each other."

Kristin married at the age of twenty-six, divorced at thirty-six, and now, at forty-six, is a single mother with two children. When a wildfire broke out near Kip's prison, in the fall of 2020, she was terrified that something might happen to him, and she asked him to call her every day. The habit continued, and today she describes her brother as her "best friend." She told me that sometimes after she goes to see him she feels even better than when she walks out of her therapist's office. "He just has this insight and wisdom," she said. "And he knows me so well. He knows how to comfort me."

She has tried hard over the years to forge an existence outside her identity as Kip Kinkel's sister, but being related to Kip has complicated her life in ways she could not have imagined. She told me that the topic of Kip had come up with two men she'd dated in recent years. One figured out who her brother was after reading something online. "He freaked out," she said. With the other, she tried to bring up the subject—"I have to tell you something"—but he interrupted her. "He just said, 'I know,' and he hugged me," she recalled. That relationship, however, did not last.

This past summer, Kristin invited me to tag along on one of her visits to see Kip. This was also the first time Kristin and I met in person. Early on a Tuesday morning, she picked me up outside my hotel in Salem. She wore sunglasses atop her head and her usual prison-visit attire: stretchy Athleta clothing that would not be uncomfortable to sit in. That day, she had on a white sleeveless top and cropped black pants, plus a thin black suède jacket.

Kristin comes across as warm and energetic, exuding a sense of total competence. At 8:02 A.M.—two minutes after visitors are allowed to arrive—she steered onto the long driveway leading up to the prison. "We sit here and wait," she explained, as she pulled into a parking spot near the back. When it was our turn to enter, she strode quickly along the path to the visiting room. We waited another twenty minutes for Kip to arrive, and when she spied him she stood up. Before he was close, she had her arms in the air, ready to give him a hug.

The siblings look alike, with the same narrow face, though Kip is considerably taller and now mostly bald. He wore the prison's uniform: a navy T-shirt and faded jeans, with "INMATE" stamped on one thigh. We sat down at a table together, and I asked Kip what his life would have been like if his sister had not stood by him. He answered without hesitating. "I probably wouldn't be here," he said. "If I didn't have her love and support, I probably would have ended things a long time ago."

Kip is now forty-one. Despite having schizophrenia, he has survived a quarter century of incarceration. He has also surpassed many people's expectations of what he would be able to achieve. He lives on the "honor unit"; goes to his job as a prison electrician at 7 A.M. each day; meditates, reads, and does yoga in his cell; and takes classes through a University of Oregon program that sends professors into the prison. It took many years of intense treatment at MacLaren for him to learn how to manage his illness and achieve the level of stability he now has. Every evening, he stands in the prison's "med line," waiting to be handed a plastic cup with his antipsychotic.

Before I could ask Kip about his crimes, he brought them up. It seemed that he had been trying for the past twenty-five years to answer one question: Why, exactly, did he do it? Or, as he put it, "How could I have gotten to this point at fifteen that all these things came together—where my humanity collapsed, and I did this horrific thing to people I loved and to people I didn't know?"

He mentioned not only his mental illness but also "cultural factors." Hunt-

NOVEMBER

Nine swallows on the stripped beech tree,
the ragged leaves on the topmost branch
just holding on,

bruised clouds swarming
over the rutted field,
day almost/finished but

for a smear of blue near the ridge,
dusk's smoke stains
smiting the stiff fingers of the cattails.

Night's black bell settles
on the shut house, the brindle-
backed hedge.

Because I knew
I was meant for loneliness,
you were whom I chose to love: ghost, pursuer—

both of us caught in a dream.
One day you came with a load
of kindling, each twig encased in ice.

Or was that also a dream, that too—

I know you never meant to do me harm,
the swallows jet on my bare arms.

—Cynthia Zarin

ing was a popular pastime in Springfield, and guns were part of life in the town, he explained. "It was common in October—deer-hunting season—that seniors would drive to school with their hunting rifles in the back of their truck, just like someone else would pack a cooler for a camping trip. It was very normal." Kip's father was not a hunter, but, Kip said, he had owned three guns: a hunting rifle, a pistol he had bought for protection in the sixties or seventies, and a .22 single-shot rifle he had received as a gift when he turned twelve.

"If you would have asked me ten minutes ago if we had any guns in the house, I would have said no," Kristin said. She had never been interested in guns or hunting. She added, "Mom was very, very anti-violence. I remember she wouldn't let you play with G.I. Joes. She wouldn't let us watch Bugs Bunny—it was too violent."

Kip did not disagree, but, he said, "Dad did take me out when I was pretty young and taught me how to shoot." He added, "Our parents were wonderful people, but I think we had different experiences in part because of gender."

On Kip's twelfth birthday, his father handed down to him the .22 single-shot rifle. This was the year that Kip began to hear voices. The voices were intermittent in the beginning, he said, and he was preoccupied with other things: "I was thinking about girls, how to get on the basketball team, playing football." As he got older, however, the voices became more frequent, and he developed "really bizarre beliefs," as he put it, mentioning his delusion that China was about to invade. "When I started slipping into my mental illness, there were threats everywhere," he recalled. "There was an overwhelming sense of fear, tremendous fear, and the solution to that was, when I would get a gun, I'd feel safe for a little while."

Kristin interjected, "This is not what I was expecting today to be." I later learned that Kip had never given her a full account of the months leading up to his crimes. (He explained, "I don't think she ever wanted to know the details.")

Now, however, Kristin brought up Hicks, the psychologist whom Kip had gone to see in eighth grade. "How frequently did you see him?" she asked.

Kip recalled that he saw Hicks nine times in the course of six months, beginning in January of 1997. That spring, Kip said, he became fixated on persuading his father to buy him a gun. He saved up the money for it by taking care of their neighbors' pets, and, that June, he and his father went to a firearms dealer and got a Glock 19. The agreement was that Kip could use it only with his father's supervision.

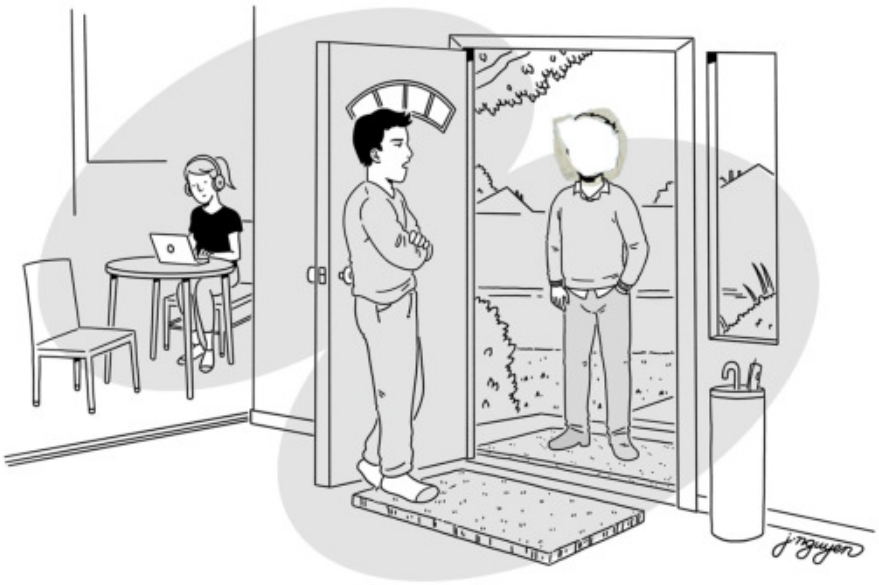
Kip said that, every month or so, he and his father would take out the Glock and "go up in the logging woods and shoot his beer cans." He added, "Those were good days. We spent time together."

Kip had to earn the money to pay for ammunition, however, and soon he lobbied his father for a gun that would be less costly to use. In September of 1997, his father bought him a Ruger 10/22—a semi-automatic rifle—at Bi-Mart, a discount chain store down the street from Thurston High School. Kip said that he and his father used the new gun "the same way we used the Glock"—for target shooting in the woods near their home.

Kristin stared at the table, looking physically ill. "A lot of this I didn't know," she said.

Kip told his sister that their mother had been opposed to the gun purchases, but that Hicks had "given her emotional permission to say yes." He went on, "Hicks explained to her that this could be a meaningful way for me and my dad to spend time together." (Hicks testified at Kip's sentencing hearing that he had not been consulted about the decision to buy a gun, but a psychiatrist retained by Kip's defense team, who spoke with Hicks, wrote in a report, "Dr. Hicks revealed that he did approve of Kip's sharing his interest in guns with his father.")

Kip, however, ended up using the



"You must be the ex."

• •

Ruger 10/22 to attack his fellow-students. Today, he sounds like his mother: "There's no reason for a civilian to own these types of weapons."

When visiting hours ended, Kristin hugged Kip and left. As we stepped out of the prison, she seemed to be reeling from everything her brother had said. For a while, she was quiet, but as we walked back toward the parking lot she exhaled loudly. "I cannot believe what different childhoods we had," she said.

Peter DeFazio, a Democrat who represented Springfield and the surrounding area in Congress for thirty-six years, still remembers the moment he heard about the shooting. He had just left the House floor and walked into his office, where he found his chief of staff, stunned, watching the aftermath on TV. DeFazio flew home, took a bouquet of flowers to the fence at Thurston, visited with victims, and spoke at a candlelight vigil. Over the years, Kip's attorneys have tried to get his punishment reconsidered. "There is a lot of uproar over that," DeFazio said. "There is still a long memory and a lot of victims. I mean, that guy should never see the light of day."

Kip's best chance to be released came two years ago, when Kate Brown, Oregon's governor at the time, granted clemency to seventy-three people who had been given lengthy sentences as juveniles, making them eligible for parole. But Kip did not make the list. His current lawyer, Thaddeus Betz, of the Oregon Justice Resource Center, is fighting to get him a parole hearing, but in the meantime Kip has said goodbye to many friends—other "juvenile offenders" he has known for years who were set free.

"He describes it as 'There were a whole bunch of us on the island, and this big lifeboat came and picked up everybody except for me,'" Kristin told me at lunch one day. "I keep telling him, 'It's going to make multiple trips—it's not one opportunity. We are going to fight our entire lives to be able to make sure that you are in the place where you need to be.'" When I asked her where she thought Kip needed to be, she said, "At home."

During another conversation, I asked Kristin if there was a moment when she had forgiven Kip for what he had done. "I've never reached a moment where I was just mad at him and needed to forgive him," she said. "There's no way his behavior was a choice." She had expressed rage to me, focussed not on her brother but on the fact that he never received the mental-health care he needed. After her parents died, Kip was her only close family member, and her need to hold on to their relationship seemed to have shaped the way she thought about what had occurred. "We had just lost our parents," she said, then paused. "It always felt that way for me—it's kind of like 'We lost our parents' instead of 'He took them away.'"

One evening, as Kristin drove along I-5, I paged through family albums she had brought to show me. There were photographs of the family posing with their bicycles, of Kip dressed as a Seattle Seahawk, of the family on vacation in Northern California, driving their Volkswagen van through a redwood tree. "We were kind of an average family," Kristin said. But in the way the media had covered them she had noticed a pattern: "There's this tremendous need to be able to put us in a box with a label that's different than the one you put on your family. Because if we're similar that means this could have been you, too. And I think that thought makes people very uncomfortable."

Over two days, Kristin and I spent about ten hours with Kip in the prison's visiting room. On our last visit, they talked mostly about Kristin's two children.

"I feel a sense of gratitude to you in a number of different ways," Kip told her. "But a major way is, you have tried from Day One to make your kids part of my life."

When Kip calls Kristin in the evening, she puts him on speakerphone so that the two of them and her children can take turns talking about their days. When one of the children was begging to get TikTok, she asked her brother to help: he sent a letter explaining why it was not a great idea. When either child has a birthday, Kristin buys an extra present and says it's from Uncle Kip.

She had brought her first child to meet him at four months old. Kip said he had noticed a change in her on that visit. "You had an intense sadness generally for years and years and years," he said. "And then there was a glow." Having a child "provided a level of joy and happiness you didn't have before."

Kristin said that sometimes she tells her older child, "You saved my life."

In a few weeks, she planned to bring both children to see Kip, and now she and Kip strategized about what they might do to make the visit fun. Would the older child still enjoy the small playroom next to the visiting room?

Perhaps not, Kip said, but "we can do a board game."

"Maybe we can be teams. I'm looking forward to it," Kristin added.

At the end of the visit, she said, "I hate seeing you in prison. Hate it, hate it, hate it." She stood up to leave, and Kip rose and walked around the table toward her. As he leaned down to give her a hug, he told her, "I love you so much."

Today, a memorial marking the shootings at Thurston stands next to the school. It includes a curved wall inspired by the "Thurston fence" and a plaque that names the two students who were killed. On the day I stopped by, the memorial was well kept, surrounded by freshly mowed grass. When the memorial was still in the planning stages—it was finished five years after the shootings—there was a debate about whether it should mention the other two people killed by Kip Kinkel: his parents. In the end, they were not included.

Twenty-five years ago, Kristin's friend Jared Taylor made the first call to her after the shooting. (He was the one who stammered and hung up.) Today, he is the dean of students at Thurston. He told me that occasionally he will notice two adults he does not recognize standing at the memorial. He'll walk over—"You guys all good?"—and ask them where they are from. Often he discovers that one of them was at Thurston at the time of the shooting and has since moved away. "I just came back to show my spouse," the former student will say.

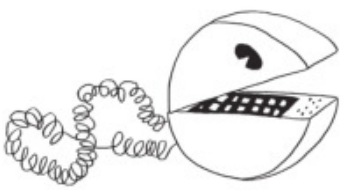
Many Thurston alumni have stayed in Springfield, and today a sizable number of the school's students have parents with a direct connection to the shooting—they or a sibling was a student at Thurston at the time. "You could mention Kip Kinkel in the hall, and eight out of ten kids know exactly what you're talking about," Jared told me. "That was our community's 9/11."

Tony Case, the baseball player who was shot four times by Kip, is now forty-three years old and lives with his longtime girlfriend and their young son in a suburb of Boston. Not long ago, I met up with him at a restaurant inside a repurposed wool mill in Hudson, Massachusetts. At first glance, Tony looked like any other customer: black-rimmed glasses, shirtsleeves rolled up to his elbows, black Pumas.

He ordered a cappuccino and a prosciutto sandwich, ate quickly, pushed his plate to the side, and spoke to me for more than four hours. He still has limited mobility in his ankle, but he said that he can hike, cycle, and run. He pulled up the right leg of his jeans to show scars on both sides of his calf. He has others, too, on his thigh and his knee. When he left the hospital, he still had two bullets inside him, and now he pressed his right hand to just below his rib cage. "You could feel the outline, and they just left them in for, like, six months," he told me. After the bullets were removed, he brought them home. Today, they are in a crate in his basement, along with his high-school baseball trophies.

When I asked Tony what he remembered about Kip Kinkel's sentencing hearing, he said, "Not much, to be honest." I shared a copy of his testimony. He read it quickly, then looked up. "Seems like something I would write," he said, noting that his statement had been mostly factual. His parents' testimonies had been more emotional. "Now that I'm a parent, I cannot even fathom what it was like for them," he said. "I can't even imagine my son falling on the playground and breaking an arm."

As a junior in high school, Tony had imagined that he might play baseball in college, but he dropped that idea after he was shot. After community college,



he earned a B.S. in physics from the University of Oregon, and then got a Ph.D. in astronomy from Boston University. Until recently, he worked at the Harvard-Smithsonian Center for Astrophysics. In his field, he is best known for his contributions to the Parker Solar Probe, a spacecraft, launched five years ago, that travelled closer to the sun than any other.

He became animated as he described his role: he had been the instrument scientist in charge of the solar probe cup, a device on the spacecraft that measures solar wind. If his injuries from the shooting had not led him to give up his baseball ambitions, would he "have studied physics and ended up working on all the cool stuff that I've worked on?" he asked. He doubted it. "If I had been pushing more toward baseball, there's no way I could have been studying as much," he said.

I asked Tony what he thought about Kip Kinkel now. He mentioned that he had set up a Google alert on Kip's name a few years ago, and it was evident that he had been following Kip's efforts to get his punishment reassessed. "That one can be driven by mental illness to do something like that, to me at the time—and maybe still, to some extent—sort of seems like a lame excuse," he said. "You know, can't we just call him a bad person and a criminal and a murderer, and not worry about whether it was a mental illness?

"But I think just over the years I've sort of moved away from that hard stance and more toward, you know, mental illness is a real thing that we need to be seriously treating," he said. "It's hard to look back and place the full blame on him, to be honest." Had Kip received better mental-health care, he added, "I'd like to think that may have resulted in a different outcome."

When Kip first started appearing in his Google alerts, Tony was taken aback by the more recent photos of him. In his mind, Kip was still a teen-ager. "With criminals, there's the mug shot—and then there's nothing, right?" he said. "And think about him," he added. "It's literally been more time since the shooting than time he was alive before the shooting. It's more than half a lifetime ago for him, just like it is for me."

It was apparent that the news stories he'd seen had prompted him to reconsider how he felt about Kip's fate. "If I had to choose," he said, "if the judge of the courts of Lane County came to me and said, 'Look, all of the survivors voted, and it's tied. You get to cast the deciding vote whether we give him parole or not'—that would be a tough choice for me." He sounded uncertain about how he might vote. But, he added, "I would *not* be a hard no." ♦

TEJU COLE

COMPROMISED

The night before everything came to an end, Ms. Prosper finally agreed to sing for us.

She was a serious woman, a small woman with a heavy manner, though some later recalled a twinkle in her eye, and others a dry sense of humor.

I remember only that her presence was full of undescribed life and uncheapened by conclusions.

But, ah, when she began to sing, the seriousness was like oil she had saved for a day of need. The song came out of her light and young, a hint at what she must have been before we knew her. She held the final note of each phrase for a long time.

As we listened to the song that night in the apartment, a song in a dialect with few living speakers, a song she sang with no gesture toward her previous fame, the things that were to bring an end to everything were already happening.

We had been compromised.

The next morning, Ms. Prosper and the other leaders were arrested and taken to ———.

•

Mint goes right to your head. Its leaves are pebbled leather. Thyme is the stubborn memory of wood, with a trace of cloves. Sage has large, outstretched gray-green hands. Rosemary is the pine's twin sister.

SWIMMING IN LAKE OSO

Beyond the circle was a clearing. Beyond the clearing, the forest began. Our group had a plan: when the bus came the next morning, that would be the moment to make a break for it. Some of us would be captured. Some might even be killed. But not all of us could be captured or killed: some would reach the trees, and our plan was made in recognition of that hope.

She was afraid. She went to the Guide, and he told her not to be afraid. Then he prayed for her. The Guide was a man of God; he was the person to talk to when your courage was failing. But I was an atheist—it wasn't my scene.

That night, the Guide drew me aside. He knew the prayers, he said, but he did not know if he believed anymore. I am utterly terrified, he said to me.

When the bus came the next morning, the people were led out of the circle. At no signal, our group made a break for it. At first we ran as a unit, running like people in a dream. Halfway to the pine trees, we fanned out. Then we heard gunshots and began to zigzag. She ran with surprising speed. I saw her dart between a pair of trees to my left. Then she was gone.

I got tangled in barbed wire. The world stopped. My body filled with pain. I remembered an afternoon when I was a little girl, nine years old, the afternoon of my deepest happiness. Swimming in Lake Oso.

My arms were fire. My face was striped with blood. And someone saying, Don't move, you'll only make it worse.

CRAFT TALK

The day would turn out to have been one of those days, but nobody knew that at the time. At most, or at best, or at worst, they expected it to be a day on which things would turn out well, or less well, or pretty badly. But sometimes. Poor bastards, said the guard on this side of the fence. The guard on that side of the fence was out of earshot. The guard on that side of the fence was out of vacation days. The guard on this side of the fence reconsidered. Poor fuckers. She tried to free with the tip of her tongue a tiny tendon of beef lodged since lunch between a canine and a premolar. The sun was hot and somebody had better move these bodies soon. Fucks, not fuckers. The tongue cajoled the stringy thing. From the diaphragm, an unsanctioned sob began its upward pilgrimage.

THE TURBINE

I am writing this note while you're still asleep. It's early enough that I can open the windows in my room. By the time you read this, I'll be at work. Please pardon the strange formality of writing to you when I could just say to you in person what I want to say. But since I have failed to say it, it is reasonable to conclude that I am having some difficulty speaking. Maybe writing will help with the nerves, though I can't see what there is to be nervous about. I am already being digressive. I apologize. It's probably yet another sign of the difficulty of addressing the things on my mind. But even stating that there are "things on my mind" gives the impression that I already know what I want to say, that all I have to do is express myself. That is not the case. There is something I have to say, something I feel it is urgent to say, but I actually do not know, I truly do not know, what it is. So I suppose I am writing this in the hope that the process of writing will lead me to the words I need.

I don't wish to exaggerate, but it seems to me that since you came to be with us something momentous has happened. I'm not sure if what I am describing as "momentous" is more connected to the fact of your arrival or to the fact of your having stayed with us, of your being here with us. Perhaps if you had not stayed we would not have this sense that things in our lives have changed irrevocably (my husband's life and mine, the life of our son). This is not to say that we in any way wish you had not arrived, or in any way wish you had not stayed. The phrase "changed irrevocably" might convey a negative tone, and that is not my intention. You are here with us now, and you should stay here for as long as seems right to you. We can't decide for you whether you continue to stay with us, or for how long you should stay with us. What we can say is that, for as long as you are here, and for as long as you decide to be here, this house is your house, this home is your home, and none of what I have written should in any way be taken as questioning you, or your arrival, or your having stayed here.

As I said, I am uncertain even of what it is that I wish to say in this already overlong note. I am uncertain of what it is I have to say, and I am conscious of trying your patience by going round in circles. I confess that, in some extremely tired moments, my mind, without evidence, entertains the notion that this situation is less than

optimal, the situation of your staying here with us, I mean. Of course, it is a foolish thought, it is an extremely foolish thought, and only in the depth of fatigue could I even conceive such a thought. But is anyone really herself in the depth of fatigue? I cannot trust any of my notions at such moments. Thankfully, I know on a level even deeper than my fatigue that your being here is good. It is the right thing. But even that is the wrong way of saying it, because saying it that way makes it sound as if we were doing something for you, as if we were doing you a favor, when, in reality, it is you who are doing us a favor.

You don't say much, rarely more than a few sentences on any given day, and most of what you say is observational rather than conversational. You might make passing remarks about ants or oncoming rain, but not once have you reminisced about your youth, not once have you asked me about the dictations I sometimes bring home. Occasionally, you make startlingly technical statements. One time, when our air-conditioner cut out, and the temperature inside the house began to rise, I called Icicle and was told that there was a long wait for a repairman. I stepped out of the house, through the back door, and you followed. In the area behind the dining room was the large outdoor unit. It was silent. You looked at it from a distance and smiled. That day was ferociously hot. The turbines in the river had broken down again, and we could smell the bodies.

When we got back inside, I called Icicle one more time. They told me that the repairman had just finished another job and was now on his way to us. It was at that point that you said, That'll be a damaged start capacitor. You offered no further explanation. You turned out to be right, of course—the repairman, when he arrived, used exactly the same words—but it didn't seem appropriate to ask you how you knew. With the exception of such incidents, you hardly speak. You keep your communication minimal, smiling to say yes and smiling to say no. Sometimes you incline your head ever so slightly, and it's unclear whether this indicates yes or no. People who don't know you often assume you're nonverbal.

From the moment you arrived, I had to use my intuition. I suppose that's the word, *intuition*. That first day, I had returned from work about an hour earlier than my husband. Our son was at camp. When you turned up at the door, I was home alone. It took me only a moment to rid myself of the offensive thought that you were *sans papiers*, that you had managed to break free. I invited you in, and the way you walked in and sat down confirmed that you had been expecting to do so. As would later prove to be the norm, the conversation between us was extremely one-sided, me doing almost all the talking. I had the increasing feeling that everything I was telling you was something you already knew. When my husband came in to find us drinking tea, I stood up in haste and said, This is Mirra. I have no idea where the name came from. It just popped into my head. You smiled, and I knew that I had said the right thing, or that what I had said was right enough. That evening, after supper, when I had made your bed and showed you the guest room, again you smiled. I felt in that moment that I was passing a series of tests. That night, as we settled into our bed, my husband and I did not discuss your arrival. We talked instead about what we always talk about: work, the upkeep of the house, our plans for our son. The last thing we spoke about before drifting off was the overladen orange trees and what to do about them.

In the days that followed, we carried on with our lives. You were rarely awake when we left in the mornings, but were always there when we returned in the evenings. You were usually sitting in the living room, not occupied with anything, almost as if you were waiting for us to return, though no purpose would be served by implying that you were waiting for us to

"Your driver will arrive in 2 . . . 8 . . . 17 minutes, after three accidental loops around the airport."

return. In fact, I see how it could sound insulting to suggest such a thing, and I apologize for putting it that way. You ate supper with us every night. We usually thanked you after the meal for joining us. You never asked for anything. It was for us to anticipate and meet your needs. This was something we learned very quickly. I think we really tried to do our best in this area. More often than not, you ended the night watching a TV series or a movie with us. Our son returned from camp later that summer. We introduced you to him and told him that you were staying here now. He seemed confused. Without speaking, he looked at us, his parents, imploringly. (I remember how, when he was born, I swore to protect him with my life.) But he, too, within a few minutes, came to understand. His manner changed; he let go of his hesitation. You smiled.

Above all things, my husband and I wished never to fail you. The months went by, the years. Those of our friends who were able to accept your presence without further explanation remained our friends; the majority could not. I have learned not to judge people for such failures. Our son moved to a different city, and we lost touch with him. My husband and I became much older versions of ourselves. We progressed in our careers. My husband was promoted to partner in the law firm that had been retained by the municipality to resolve claims relating to the turbine. We moved to a better house in a better neighborhood. Naturally, you moved with us. Not long after, my husband received his diagnosis.

Sometimes when I open my eyes in the dark, I feel that there is something I have forgotten. What I need to say, what I have been trying to say in this note, is related to this forgetfulness. Now, possibly, I am coming closer to it. Perhaps, finally, I will retrieve it, find the words for it, set it down on paper, and place the paper under your door. Perhaps, finally, the forgotten thing will come back to the surface. But even if I could retrieve it I cannot be sure of the wisdom in doing so. I do feel I am rambling, so please forgive me. I should probably close the windows now. Perhaps there isn't any question that needs answering, really, or perhaps I have addressed whatever it is already, and this all has more to do with my chaotic thoughts than with you, you who have been with us so steadily all these years. Mirra, I apologize for wasting your time. The main thing is that you should feel at home here, and I think you do. The main thing is that you should feel like our guest. No, not like our guest. Like our host, because it is important to properly recognize who is giving and who is receiving. You have been our host, but even putting it that way does not express clearly enough what it is I am trying to say.

"We'll head home as soon as a momentary lull in the party chatter allows me space for the awful realization that I'm paying a babysitter for this crap."

• •

PORTAGE

Asleep in the grass in the dark. Eighty people. The darkness is hot and vast, and ending. Five weeks have passed since the departure from Onuino. The place they are going to is far and the way there is hard.

One man is dead, not sleeping. The white man. They have filled him with salt and wrapped him in soft bark. Sorrow in some of them and in some others only forward momentum, the next step, the next.

They are carrying him from the interior to the coast. His too-heavy heart removed and left behind. When he was alive, they served him. Now that he is dead, it is he who serves them. Morning, forward movement. Pastel on the ridges.

Pastel on the far ridges and provisions are running low. It can't be that all seventy-nine of us will reach the coast alive. Now the grass opens its mouths. Now the colors deepen. ♦

NEWYORKER.COM
Teju Cole on open-ended stories.

BOOKS

STAR CROSSED

The first rule of the celebrity couple: It always involves more than two people.

BY ANDREW O'HAGAN

After a run of sensitive British men, Taylor Swift appears to be dating a stubbled American in a No. 87 jersey, the Kansas City Chiefs tight end Travis Kelce. The coupling has put America into something akin to a state of emergency, but on NBC's "Today" show, Kelce's mother, Donna, offered a display of calm. "It's fairly new," she told the show's co-anchor Hoda Kotb. "Just another thing that's amped up my life." When asked how she'd liked hanging out with the thirty-three-year-old singer-songwriter at Arrowhead Stadium, Mrs. Kelce, wearing a dark jacket and green spectacles, smiled and said, "It was O.K." For the N.F.L. franchise, it was more than O.K. The first game Swift attended, the Chiefs versus the Chicago Bears, became the most watched telecast of the week, and sales of Kelce jerseys grew by nearly four hundred per cent.

Can romance be cashed out in brand loyalty? Certainly, when it comes to celebrity couples, passion and ambition are typically inseparable. David and Victoria Beckham, who became an item in 1997, may have brought the pop star–sports hero dyad to its modern apogee, making a billion hearts flutter while creating an interstellar expansion in their consumer base. Netflix's recent docuseries "Beckham," directed by Fisher Stevens, reveals their pairing to be blissfully adolescent. (Him: "I just fancied her." Her: "I just fancied him.") Pop stardom combines with sporting glory in a particularly bountiful way: manna from the gods of promotion. "My daughter was so obsessed with them," Anna Wintour says in the first episode, "that I felt the world must be."

If you came of age amid the shining indivisibility of David and Victoria, it was impossible not to feel the push and pull of their particularly gigantic needs. ("It was about what me and Victoria wanted, and we wanted America.") Still, the simplicity of emotional display in their romance makes "The Lion King" seem like Beckett. In the docuseries, the danse macabre of blame and heroism in soccer doesn't exert the same grip as the Beckhams' marriage, a story of modern fantasy and bronzed narcissism which seems only to enlarge with the accumulation of family members and sponsorships. Power couples can sell anything under the sun—deodorant, whiskey, watches, sneakers—but on a good day the best ones will also bring metaphysics to the marketplace, retailing the ideas that no two people are merely themselves and that mega-marriages are made in the groves of Heaven. Behind this gauzy reassurance, of course, is the fear that we are all, in fact, utterly and completely alone, or, worse still, married to either Johnny Depp or Amber Heard.

There are few early nights in the marriages of celebrity couples. By a sort of completion instinct, the excitable participants in these unions will usually toil for extra pleasure, high on joint enterprise and happy to mock the midnight bell. Beyoncé and Jay-Z, together since 2001, have long seemed addicted to the special lights that illuminate celebrities. Softened by maturity, they now yearn for the things they wanted before they had everything. But though the Knowles-Carters may have magnified the brand spirit into a new sort of romance, the idea of the celebrity couple really began in an excess of fervency, entering a plastic palace to a fanfare of ancient tubas: to be precise, it began with Richard Burton and Elizabeth Taylor, in the 1963 spectacular "Cleopatra."

The actors' affair came to light during its filming, as a colorful tale from history was supplanted by something much more Day-Glo. In a vulture crown and mod eyeliner—more nineteen-sixties cat eye than Nefertiti kohl—the ruler of Egypt demands that Mark Antony get down on his knees before her—or is it the son of Wales who must kneel before the queen of Hollywood? There had been famous and adulterous couples before, but not in wide-screen, and not with the glut and the glare that came to be so pronounced in the case of Burton and Taylor. They had "the largest entourage I had ever seen," Dominick Dunne remarked. "And the people who worked for them worshipped them." This is the first rule of modern celebrity coupledom: There are always more than two people involved. The best matches, where the couple parries the joys of domestic life with the task of world domination, are ones in which even the children are drafted into the entourage. The second rule: The marriage should be operatic—that's to say, extravagantly distant, with a strong sense that everything is taking place on another planet.

"I love Richard Burton with every fibre of my soul," Taylor told the press in 1974, announcing their first divorce. The marriage had devolved into a prison of publicity. (Like many repeat offenders, they would find life outside the institution difficult to manage.) "Taylor and Burton's is a Pop Art story," the British writer Roger Lewis offers in his

SOURCE PHOTOGRAPHS FROM GETTY; OPPOSITE: PHILIPPE PETIT-ROULET

For famous pairs like Richard Burton and Elizabeth Taylor, true love involves the supersizing of everything.

PHOTO ILLUSTRATION BY LINCOLN AGNEW

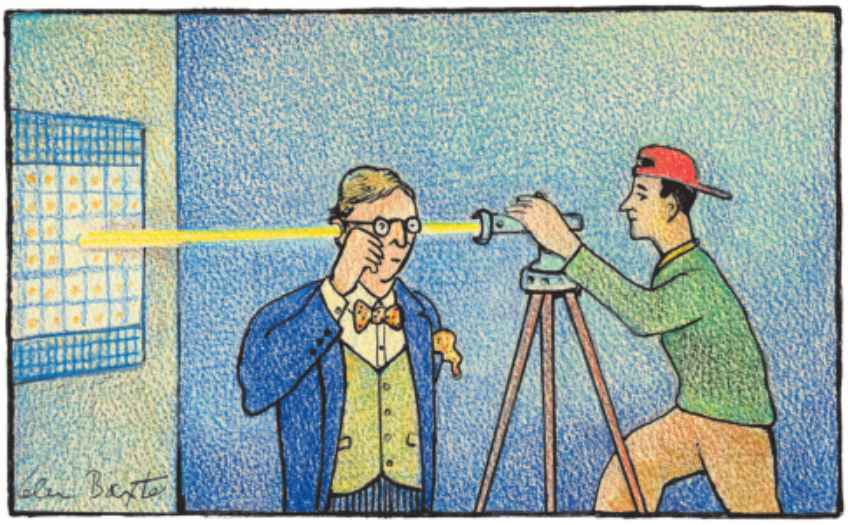
fabulous new book, "Erotic Vagrancy: Everything About Richard Burton and Elizabeth Taylor" (Riverrun). "Their abundance and violent greed belong with comic books and bubble-gum machines—with Roy Lichtenstein's enlarged comic strips of lovers kissing." The phrase "erotic vagrancy" (*vagabondaggio erotico*) had appeared in a letter published in *L'Osservatore della Domenica,* an edition of the Vatican newspaper, in April, 1962, implying that Taylor was a homewrecker who went from man to man, murdering marriages. The letter went on to question Taylor's suitability as an adoptive parent, saying that children need "a serious mother more than a beautiful mother." Taylor asked if it was possible to sue the Vatican. Even after a couple of millennia, Cleopatra in her split skirts was still an affront to the apostles of Roman Catholic life. The item set the tone for the duration of the Burton-Taylor relationship, where every illness and every diamond would be the subject of ravening public interest.

"Biography is historical fiction," Lewis, the author of several biographies that read like novels of manners, writes. At roughly six hundred pages, this latest is tectonically subjective, one aspect of his fandom constantly sliding under the plate of another, and he can only be right to call it an "occult story." The saga of Taylor and Burton is about extra-human obsession. "I think it was a little like damnation to everybody," Taylor wrote, in a bit of a champagne rush. But it felt like a blessing, too. During the Cold War, she and Burton managed to launch a whole industry of self-magnification, based on their personal ups and downs, and it made the mortals feel better.

"Richard and Liz Burton are completely corrupt," the director Tony Richardson wrote to Christopher Isherwood in 1964. "They think only of money." The habit is more familiar today—luxury and exclusivity as brute personal Helicon—but people noticed when the couple began purchasing all the first-class seats on the flights they took, to keep civilians at a distance. Biographers report that Taylor insisted on having chili (some say hamburgers) flown to Rome from Chasen's, in West Hollywood. Rules existed only to be bent. "When they were at The Dorchester," Lewis informs us, "the Burtons kept a boat anchored on the Thames for their dogs and cats, which couldn't come ashore because of quarantine restrictions."

Before Burton and Taylor, Hollywood couples tended to conceal their amours in the same way that they concealed their wealth, surrounding it with high fences and studio publicists. Every marriage is a contract, but some are more contractual than others. Lucille Ball and Desi Arnaz, married in November, 1940, covered their private life in a miasma of canned laughter. The marriage survived for twenty years and may have been the most famous one in America; yet, according to each, it was never the union it seemed to be. In May, 1945, Lauren Bacall married Humphrey Bogart, twenty-six years her senior. "He was not the prince on the white horse that I had imagined," she later said, but they shared a deadpan insolence that audiences admired. Bogart-Bacall was a mood. "She'd become integral to Bogie's stardom, thereby clinching her own," William J. Mann writes in "Bogie & Bacall: The Surprising True Story of Hollywood's Greatest Love Affair" (Harper). Twenty years before the Burtons arrived, trailing furs, vodka, and domestic violence, Bogie and Bacall were thought to be united in bad behavior. Yet the great difference, in the annals of celebrity coupledom, is that the earlier system was built to protect the stars from their worst selves. Bogart was a drinker and an irascible loner, but these defects only burnished his legend. On September 25, 1949, after a spell at the 21 Club and a stop at the St. Regis Hotel, Bogart and an old friend ended up at El Morocco, on East Fifty-fourth Street. Along the way, the plastered chums had bought a pair of giant stuffed pandas. They dragged the bears into the night club, propped them up in a booth, and ordered more drinks. In due course, a young model, Robin Roberts, decided she wanted to take one home—a panda, that is. No sooner had she grasped the inviting paw than Bogie stood up, and, in her telling, twisted her wrist and pushed her. She fell to the floor during the encounter, causing a certain amount of bruising. "The Battle of the Pandas" made its way to court, where a judge ruled that Bogart "was entitled to use enough force to protect his property." All the good feeling, and all the prejudice, was on Bogie's side. "A cheer went up from the assembled spectators, bobby-soxers, and riff-raff," Alistair Cooke reported at the time, with Miss Roberts descending the steps of the court to boos and catcalls. In those days, a famous married couple was thought to show its mettle by overcoming such nuisances. When asked by the waiting press if he was drunk when the incident took place, Bogie did a Bogie. "Isn't everyone drunk at 4 A.M.?" he replied.

The marriage of Marilyn Monroe and Joe DiMaggio was bookended by two public events. The first was the couple's run-in with the press outside San Francisco City Hall on January 14, 1954, a few minutes after they were married and a few weeks before they flew to Japan for their honeymoon. (From there, Monroe



A SIMPLE TEST CONFIRMED MY DEEPEST SUSPICIONS

would be asked to go to South Korea to entertain the troops.) The second, nine months later, was a jostled gathering outside their home in Beverly Hills, where the actress fought hard to control her distress as her lawyer announced her and DiMaggio's divorce. Some say the retired baseball player had lost his temper—not for the first time—over the scene in "The Seven Year Itch" where Monroe's skirt is blown into the air, but we'll never know the exact details of the argument. Silence was the rule. "I'm all in favor of a good screaming free-for-all every two or three months," Paul Newman is quoted as saying in "Joanne Woodward & Paul Newman, Head Over Heels: A Love Affair in Words and Pictures" (Voracious/Little, Brown), a new book by their daughter Melissa Newman. "It clears the air, gets rid of old grievances, and generally makes for a pleasant relationship." But it wasn't meant for the public. To their many fans, Newman and his wife were models of productive empathy. Not for Woodward the asp at the breast or the diamond as big as the Ritz.

True love, for Burton and Taylor, involved the supersizing of everything. More luggage. More jewels. More dogs and cats. More alcohol. But, if you watch the films they made together, you can detect the steady progress of guilt and isolation, a spectacular melding of private and public selves, as the two actors struggle to maintain some sense of their own identities.

"I knew your taste in platinum, I wasn't too sure about the stones," the tycoon Paul Andros (Burton) says early in "The V.I.P.s" (1963), handing his wife (Taylor) a sapphire-and-diamond bracelet, which makes her tearful on their way to Heathrow Airport. In good time, Terence Rattigan's screenplay reveals why: she is having an affair with an international playboy (Louis Jourdan), and she feels mixed up about it. Stuck at the airport during a fog, Burton and Taylor sparkle and dim through the intricacies of adultery, which everyone watching at the time knew had just happened in real life. (Some of the jewelry in the film was Taylor's own, including the tiara her character wears in the opening sequence, a present from her third husband, Mike Todd.) The film, centered on a pair of spoiled people who happen to want slightly more than everything, finds nourishment in the Burtons' own reality. He shadows himself throughout, and when he speaks, in that voice of torn velvet, we believe we hear him twice. Burton only ever had two facial expressions as an actor, pointed disdain and abject self-loathing. By the end of "The V.I.P.s," he is maxing out on both as he guns for his wife, or runs for his life—it's hard to tell which in the lingering confusion.

The Burtons were the first celebrity couple to be commandeered by the soap opera of their own lives, using their films as a rolling background. "I'm not so much interested in the men in your life as in your attitude towards marriage," says Dr. Edward Hewitt (Burton), the Episcopal priest and schoolmaster who lusts after Taylor's character in "The Sandpiper," a 1965 film set along the coastline at Big Sur. The Burtons were newlyweds when shooting interiors began in Paris, of all places, the previous year. They'd crossed the Atlantic on the Queen Elizabeth, inhabiting six first-class suites, before checking into the Hotel Lancaster, near the Champs-Élysées, where they took twenty-one rooms. Taylor was hilariously miscast as Laura Reynolds, an unwed mother and free-spirited peacenik, showing an audacious amount of cleavage as she tries to defend her homeschooled nine-year-old son against disciplinary action. (He has killed a deer, but since he also quotes Chaucer we know he isn't a juvenile delinquent.) A judge makes her send the boy to Dr. Hewitt's boarding school. "Men have been staring at me and rubbing up against me ever since I was twelve years old," she tells the schoolmaster. "I see myself . . . being handed from man to man as if I were an amusement."

"Oh, God . . . give me strength," Dr. Hewitt says, not long before he removes her earrings in front of a log fire. Then comes the guilt. "You're a glowing woman," he adds. "I'm just a hypocrite."

"*The Sandpiper* is about adultery," Roger Lewis tells us. "By her very presence Taylor seems to demand: what right have men got to make women feel ashamed?" (She was still smarting from being slut-shamed by the Vatican.) Meanwhile, Burton stands on a precipice, a man in a blaze of self-recrimination, both in the film and in his own life. "I've lost all my sense of sin," Dr. Hewitt says in

that famous voice, always replete with moral pain.

"That's about the nicest thing a person could lose," Laura replies.

Celebrity marriage is an internal-combustion engine, and audiences love nothing more than to watch it stall out or send the car off a cliff. By the time we get to the fictional college campus in "Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?" (1966), an alcoholic haze threatens to mist up the lens. So does the too-muchness of the Burtons' own lives, all that beauty and conscience. The film's director, Mike Nichols, felt that Burton was in love with ruin. "He was enthralled by the idea of large, romantic self-destruction," Nichols later said. In the film's Martha and George, the concept of celebrity couplehood meets its keynote speakers, and we are confronted with a kind of confessional poetry in which these famous spouses become fully alive to what we determinedly imagine they ought to be feeling. Radiating verbs and verbiage, Martha comes out of Elizabeth Taylor like a wife on fire, swilling gin and crunching on ice cubes, goading, accusing, threatening, and injuring, while George, the failed man of the history department, seeks to settle all the great scores. "I cannot stand it," he says.

"You *can* stand it," she replies with tousled alacrity. "You *married* me for it."

In more recent times, matrimonial dishevelment and the unravelling of bliss have yielded to gladiatorial combat, with each gossip site its own colosseum. Many celebrity couples have taken to this realm—they live out their relationships there—but for others the trials of a famous marriage are merely a throat-clearing exercise for the ultimate song of self-love. "I want to emphasize that I am not an expert trained in any form of therapy," Jada Pinkett Smith warns in her strenuous new memoir, "Worthy" (HarperCollins), before attempting every aria in the self-help songbook. Burton-Taylor notions of the living soap opera are to be found everywhere in Pinkett Smith's account of her life, but with added chakras, extra doors of perception, and levels of self-pity that Elizabeth Taylor would have regarded as not quite in the party spirit. Pinkett Smith's story is simple: she married a megastar. At first, Will Smith was her "new Prozac"—she has battled depression—and they could go "toe to toe," talking about everything and reading "The Tao of Physics" together. (Funny how the authors of these memoirs are never reading books like the ones they are writing.) When Smith asked her to marry him, she went to Harry Winston in Beverly Hills and bought "a nice-sized pear-shaped diamond set in a platinum band." She had to make it all real. "By buying my own ring, I took some measure of control," she explains. They went on to have two children together.

The marriage seems, from the very beginning, a form of "conscious uncoupling," to borrow a phrase popularized by Gwyneth Paltrow and Chris Martin (copyright 2014). "By the time we were married with children," Pinkett Smith tells us, "it was obvious to me that Will and I had very different perspectives about the trappings of fame." By way of example, we learn that the Clintons invited her husband to host the New Year's millennium celebrations in Washington, D.C., in 1999. Pinkett Smith writes, "When Will told me we were invited to stay overnight at the White House—after a long tiring night with young children—I had to say, 'This is too much.'"

"Jada, it's the Lincoln Bedroom," he persisted. "We get to sleep in the same room as the Emancipation Proclamation."

"Will, I get it. But after that long night, I'm not trying to stay in Lincoln's dusty-ass bedroom."

It took another sixteen years for them to split up. Except, in a new kink in the coverlet of celebrity matrimony, they never divorced, and have continued since 2016 with the story that they are man and wife. "By his own admission, feelings were not a priority for Will," Pinkett Smith writes. "How he felt, how anybody felt, was not a priority. That was a difficult reality for me to continue to navigate and accept." Smith would later deal with his lack of feeling, or his lack of something else, by slapping the host of the 2022 Academy Awards, Chris Rock, who had just made a joke about Pinkett Smith's hair, evidently trespassing on a universe of personal complexity.

The Smiths' response to the pressures of a celebrity marriage was to keep *shtum* and protect the brand; others end things in a festival of acrimony. The British actress Sophie Turner, late of "Game of Thrones" and a stalwart of the X-Men franchise, has recently been spinning in a tabloid centrifuge alongside her husband, Joe Jonas, of the pop trio the Jonas Brothers. Negotiations about the four-year marriage, which also produced two children, are at such a pitch that they can only be hours away from reaching the United Nations. Turner and Jonas's mutual bitch-slapping might recall another magnificent custom from the Burton-Taylor playbook: to mobilize, amid such classical drama, the doom-loving choruses. In modern costume, they are the entourages and the press. "I could hear them fighting at night in their room," a crew member on "The Klansman," from 1974, said. Taylor retreated from there into a scrum of doctors and journalists, hinting at a cancer diagnosis before proclaiming her and Burton's irreconcilable differences. (She would in fact live another thirty-six years.) In the era of Turner and Jonas, the estrangement of famous couples is a process that happens by increments on social media. People take sides, people shout and bawl, people like or unlike the antagonists. In a recent filing, Turner claimed that she learned her husband was divorcing her by reading it in the press. Jonas denies this, but, after a period of mediation and more stories on Page Six, an initial custody agreement has been reached.

The gift of Burton and Taylor was to bring to the marriage of true minds a powerful whiff of impending disaster. Taylor was cast in the 1974 film adaptation of Muriel Spark's "The Driver's Seat," the story of a woman who is travelling to an unnamed European city to be murdered. Spark initially thought that Taylor was right for the part, as did Taylor herself, but later came to feel that the actress hadn't been up to it. "She looked less like someone who wanted to be killed and more like a woman in search of a Martini," Spark judged. Both onscreen and off, Elizabeth Taylor was never a very believable victim. She saw marriage as a means of personal increase, and the idea made her airy, believing that her best match would indeed come to be confirmed in Heaven. "Do you somehow wish that you had been reunited with Richard Burton?" an interviewer asked her, four years after the death of the man she had married twice.

"I'm sure we will be," she said. ♦

FRATERNAL ECLIPSE

The strange case of Israel Joshua Singer.

BY ADAM KIRSCH

CARL VAN VECHTEN TRUST / BEINECKE LIBRARY, YALE

Isaac Bashevis Singer's older brother wrote an entirely different kind of fiction.

In 1966, the critic Irving Howe published an essay whose title, "The Other Singer," testified to a literary usurpation. For American readers in the nineteen-sixties, the name Singer meant Isaac Bashevis Singer, the only Yiddish writer to have reached the pinnacle of the American literary world. Singer's stories about Jewish life in Poland, where he was born, and New York, where he settled in 1935, appeared in the *Forward*, the city's leading Yiddish newspaper, before they were published in English in magazines including this one, *Harper's*, and *Playboy*. It was an era when Jewish fiction was in vogue, with writers like Saul Bellow and Philip Roth on the best-seller lists; Singer won the National Book Award twice. In 1978, he became the first (and, to this day, the only) Yiddish writer to win the Nobel Prize in Literature.

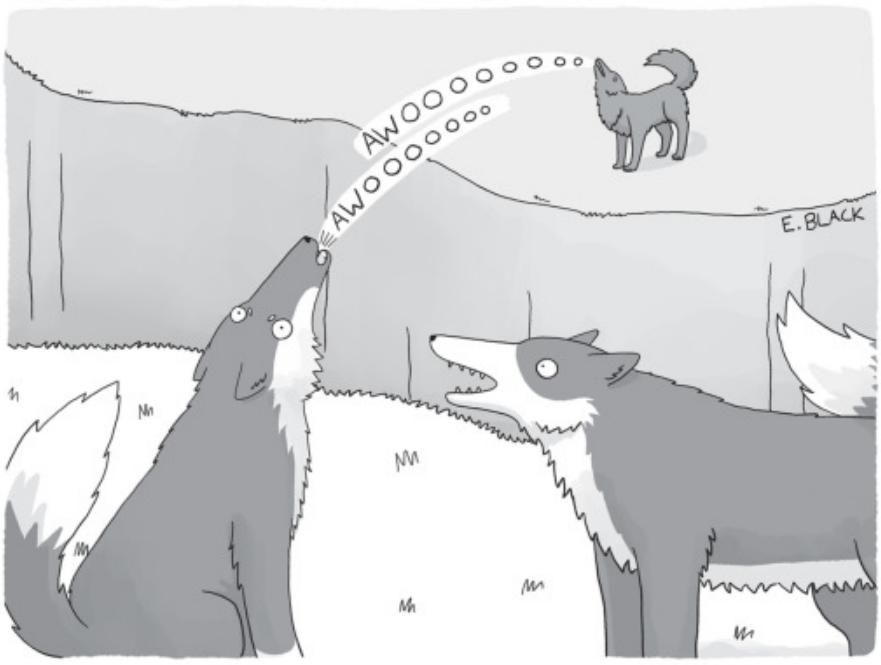
In Howe's opinion, however, the ascent of I. B. Singer—known to Yiddish readers by his nom de plume, Bashevis—was not a cause for celebration, because it meant the eclipse of a better writer: his older brother, Israel Joshua Singer. In the thirties and forties, it was I. J. Singer who was the star contributor to the *Forward*, writing both fiction and journalism, and whose books got translated in America and Europe. Maximillian Novak, a Yiddish scholar, writes in his book "The Writer as Exile: Israel Joshua Singer" that when Singer's epic novel "The Brothers Ashkenazi" was published, in 1936, he was compared to Tolstoy and mentioned as a future candidate for the Nobel Prize. When he died, from a heart attack, in 1944, at the age of fifty, his younger brother Isaac was almost completely unknown.

Two decades later, Israel Joshua had become the "other" Singer, whose existence even fans of Isaac were often surprised to learn about. That remains the case today. But a new edition of I. J. Singer's work has now gathered six of his books—five novels and a memoir—in two omnibus volumes, each more than a thousand pages. Edited by Anita Norich, a Yiddish-literature scholar who provides introductions and an extensive bibliography, the edition marks the first time that some of I. J. Singer's books have been in print in decades—in the case of one novel, "East of Eden," for the first time since its original publication, more than eighty years ago. The publisher is the Library of the Jewish People, a new venture that aims to do for Jewish literature what the Library of America does for American classics. (I. B. Singer, meanwhile, is in the Library of America itself.)

The difference in the brothers' reputations is partly due to the fact that the younger Singer outlived the elder by nearly half a century, dying in 1991. But even while both brothers were alive they effectively belonged to different literary generations. (They were born a decade apart—Israel Joshua in 1893, Isaac in 1904.) I. J. Singer emerged as a writer in the wake of the First World War and the Russian Revolution, and he used fiction to explore the political and economic forces that were uprooting Jewish life in Eastern Europe. His first novel, "Steel and Iron" (1927), follows a Jewish soldier who deserts the tsarist Army during the First World War, becomes a Communist, and ends up helping to storm the Winter Palace—the decisive episode in the Bolsheviks' seizure of power. In later books, Singer dramatized the betrayal of Communist hopes by Stalin and the plight of German Jews under Hitler.

"The Brothers Ashkenazi," his best-remembered book, is a family saga about the rivalry between twin brothers, one a ferociously ambitious businessman and the other a charming idler. But Singer

PHOTOGRAPH BY CARL VAN VECHTEN



"You need to stop getting sucked into discourse."

• •

is less interested in family dynamics than in the evolution of Jewish life in the Polish city of Lodz, a center of the textile trade, amid the pressures of industrial capitalism, rising nationalism and Communism, and the devastation of the First World War. His great strength as a novelist is in depicting how individuals' fates reflect the movement of history, and his most characteristic passages deal in plurals, as in this description of a credit-fuelled market bubble in Lodz:

> Independent of cash, fired by the prospect of quick riches, made reckless by the fierce competition, Lodz seethed and bustled without system or order and with total disregard for the rules of supply and demand. People schemed, finagled, wheedled, and conspired, caught up in the mad, headlong rush of the city. It was a sham existence built on dreams, artifice, and paper. The only base of reality and substance was the workers.
>
> Suddenly it all ground to a halt. A large bone stuck in Lodz's throat, and the city disgorged everything it had swallowed through years of unrestrained gluttony.

Irving Howe argued that I. J. Singer's comprehensive analysis of Jewish society marked a major step forward for Yiddish literature. Earlier Yiddish writers had been comfortably parochial, reflecting everyday life in comic anecdotes or bittersweet fables. Singer, Howe wrote, resembled great European novelists like Thomas Mann in seeing society as "a complex organism with a life of its own, a destiny superseding, and sometimes canceling out, the will of its individual members."

By the time Isaac Bashevis Singer's work began to appear in English, in the fifties, this kind of panoramic social realism was out of fashion. After the Second World War, younger writers no longer aspired to explain how society worked and where history was going—perhaps because they were afraid of the answer. Instead, they turned inward, hoping only to say something authentic about what they had lived through and known. To communicate this kind of truth often meant rejecting ordinary verisimilitude in favor of fable and parable, exaggeration and absurdity—as writers like Flannery O'Connor and Ralph Ellison showed.

Starting from a very different place, culturally and geographically, I. B. Singer reached a conclusion similar to his brother's. Rather than describing labor strikes and political parties, he wrote fiction that was full of ghosts and demons, philosophical quandaries and sexual obsessions. In the story "Henne Fire," a woman known for her savage temper spontaneously combusts, leaving behind nothing but a piece of coal. In "The Cafeteria," a Holocaust survivor insists that Hitler is still alive and holding meetings in the middle of the night at a kosher cafeteria on the Upper West Side. In the novel "Shosha," set in Warsaw on the eve of the First World War, a Singer-like narrator encounters a woman he loved when they were very young children. When he finds that she has not grown at all since, but remains mentally and physically a child, he decides to stay in the city to protect her, knowing that it means almost certain death.

For many Yiddish readers, the mixture of fantasy, nostalgia, and titillation in I. B. Singer's stories represented a retreat from his older brother's work. If the younger Singer appealed more to postwar American readers, it was because most of them no longer understood what Jewish life in Eastern Europe had really been like before it was destroyed in the Holocaust. Resentment grew as I. B. Singer's increasing fame crowded out other Yiddish writers.

For instance, Chaim Grade, who came to the U.S. as a refugee in 1948, wrote searching and intimate novels about the religious world of his youth. Some were even translated into English. But when he died, in the Bronx, in 1982, only a small circle of admirers recognized the loss to literature. More than twenty years later, Grade's widow, Inna, was interviewed in connection with Isaac Bashevis Singer's centennial. She was still palpably furious at the writer who had cast her husband into the shadows: "I profoundly despise all those who eat the bread in which the blasphemous buffoon has urinated."

Even today, those who can read Yiddish literature in the original—more often scholars than native speakers—tend to be a little suspicious of Bashevis, and warmer toward Israel Joshua. In 2020, the novelist Dara Horn, who has a Ph.D. in Yiddish and Hebrew literature, wrote in the online magazine Tablet that I. J. Singer was "a much better novelist" than his brother, free of the latter's "indulgent romanticism."

Posterity may see the relationship between the brothers Singer as a zero-sum game, but they themselves never did. On the contrary, Bashevis took every opportunity to honor Israel Joshua as his most important teacher and ally. It was I. J. Singer who first rebelled against their

parents' narrow religiosity and made contact with modern literature and ideas, opening a new world to his younger brother. In the nineteen-twenties, Israel Joshua introduced Isaac to Warsaw's Yiddish literary clubs and magazines. Most fatefully of all, Israel Joshua secured a job in New York in 1934, then brought Isaac over on a tourist visa, at a time when America's borders were largely shut to desperate Jewish refugees. Without this intervention, Isaac Bashevis Singer would almost certainly have died in the Second World War—like his mother and younger brother, who were deported to a remote region of the Soviet Union.

No wonder that Isaac Bashevis Singer's first English-language publication, the 1950 novel "The Family Moskat," is fulsomely dedicated to Israel Joshua: "To me he was not only the older brother, but a spiritual father and master as well. I looked up to him always as to a model of high morality and literary honesty. Although a modern man, he had all the great qualities of our pious ancestors." Yet even this praise can be read as a kind of provocation, for, as Isaac knew better than anyone, Israel Joshua took a dim view of Jewish piety and the ancestors whose lives were shaped by it—starting with his own father, a Hasidic rabbi.

Pinchas Mendel Singer had the unusual fate of becoming a character in books by three of his children: Israel Joshua's memoir "Of a World That Is No More," Isaac's memoir "In My Father's Court," and "The Dance of the Demons," an autobiographical novel by Esther Singer Kreitman. Two years older than Israel Joshua, Esther married before the First World War and settled in London, where she had a modest Yiddish literary career. In recent years, scholars have rediscovered the books and translations she published in the thirties and forties.

All the siblings paint basically the same picture of their father—as a deeply devout man who was indifferent to worldly matters, including making a living. It was their mother, Basheve, who held sway in the family. "They would have been a well-mated couple if she had been the husband and he the wife," Israel Joshua wrote. Tough, temperamental, and intellectually inclined, Basheve was a negligent housekeeper and cook, much preferring to read the Yiddish devotional books that constituted the family's library. She was clearly the parent responsible for raising three writers, as Isaac acknowledged when he based his Yiddish byline on her name.

A key episode in the Singer family mythology occurred when Israel Joshua was very young, before Isaac was born. In the tsarist empire, which included most of Poland at the time, a rabbi was required to pass a Russian-language exam in order to carry out civic and legal functions—as opposed to spiritual ones, which required only Hebrew and Yiddish. Since most towns were too poor to employ more than one rabbi, a man who wanted a good pulpit needed to be able to pass the government test. But Pinchas resisted taking Russian lessons, seeing them as a profane distraction. When he was finally persuaded to hire a tutor, he stopped going after just a few weeks, saying that he couldn't be under the same roof as the tutor's wife, because she didn't cover her hair with a wig, in violation of Jewish custom. As a result, Pinchas never passed the Russian examination, condemning his wife and children to a life of penury.

Esther tells this story with a certain grudging respect for her father. By running away from his lessons, she writes, "for once in his life he became a man of action." Isaac, too, admires his father for sticking to his convictions, even though "his brothers-in-law jeered at my father's piety, the way he concentrated on being a Jew."

Israel Joshua, by contrast, has only contempt for a man who "hated responsibility of any kind," and for the religion

that turned him into an "eternal dreamer and Luftmensch"—literally, an "air man," the Yiddish term for an impractical person with no roots in reality. His memoir is largely the story of his repudiation of the passivity and superstition of traditional Jewish life. Even as a boy, he writes, he "fled like a thief from the prison of the Torah, the awe of God and Jewishness."

Around the turn of the twentieth century, many of his Jewish contemporaries were rebelling in similar ways. As pogroms and poverty made life in Eastern Europe increasingly unbearable, millions of Jews immigrated to the United States. Millions more, especially the young, embraced new secular ideologies that offered them control over their fate. Zionism wanted to give Jews not only a state of their own but a sense of agency and dignity that had been lost in exile; as one slogan put it, Jews would go to Palestine "to build and to be built."

I. J. Singer was drawn instead to the other great movement of his time: socialism, which promised to sweep away Jewish superstition and Gentile antisemitism, as well as poverty and war, in one universal revolution. By the time the First World War broke out, he was already sufficiently radicalized to dodge the tsar's draft and go underground, like his character Benjamin Lerner, in "Steel and Iron." In 1918, having just got married, Singer and his wife, Genia, made their way from Warsaw to Ukraine and Russia, which were experiencing the aftershocks of the Bolshevik revolution. There, he took part in Yiddish literary life in Kyiv and then Moscow. In 1921, disillusioned by both literary politics and the broader course of the Soviet experiment, the couple returned to Warsaw, now the capital of an independent Poland.

Once back in Poland, Singer scored his first major success with the publication of a story steeped in class consciousness. "Pearls" is a vignette about Moritz Spielrein, an aged gem dealer who is so miserly and mistrustful that he keeps his merchandise under his clothes: "his collar-bones and shoulder-blades and ribs stick out so that sometimes the pearls and precious stones are lost in the hollows and he cannot find them." Spielrein is so sickly that he's afraid to get out of bed, yet he clings to life as he does to his pearls—gloating over his friends' funerals, squeezing the last penny from the tenants of an apartment building he owns. At the end of the tale, when a hearse drives into the building's courtyard, it seems that he has finally perished, and that no one will miss him. But it turns out that Spielrein is still alive; the dead man is one of his young tenants, and the story ends with his mother's wail of grief.

Coming from a non-Jewish writer,

"Pearls" might be read as an antisemitic caricature. For Singer, writing in Yiddish for a Jewish public, it was an indictment of a sick economic system that oppressed Jews no less than Gentiles. Like capitalism, Spielrein deserves to die but keeps dragging on and on. Still, "Pearls" makes its point without party-line didacticism, simply on the strength of Singer's forcefully grotesque descriptions.

The story brought him fame, and not just in Warsaw. Wherever Jews immigrated, they brought Yiddish literature with them, and "Pearls" caught the attention of Abraham Cahan, the influential editor of the *Forward*. (Later, it was the *Forward* that sponsored I. J. Singer's American visa, indirectly saving I. B. Singer's life, too.) I. J. Singer began to contribute to the paper as a foreign correspondent, writing a travelogue about a return trip to the Soviet Union in 1926. That experience also informed "Steel and Iron," whose depiction of working-class cruelty and prejudice strayed so far from the conventions of socialist realism that it made Singer an outcast in Yiddish leftist circles. Outraged, he declared that he would never write fiction again.

But that resolution didn't last, and his next novel, "Yoshe Kalb," proved the greatest success of his career. Serialized simultaneously in Warsaw and New York, then published as a book in both Yiddish and English, in 1932, it was quickly adapted for the stage and became one of the biggest hits in the history of New York's Yiddish theatre. By the time Singer immigrated to New York, in 1934, with his wife and son—another son had died the year before—he was already a local celebrity.

It says something about the tastes of the Yiddish public that "Yoshe Kalb" is also the least typical of I. J. Singer's novels—the only one that is set in the tradition-bound past rather than the twentieth century, and the only one in which the most important forces at play are religious and romantic, rather than economic and political. Yet there is nothing remotely nostalgic about Singer's treatment of the world of his Hasidic ancestors.

The plot concerns a rabbinic prodigy named Nahum, who falls in love with his father-in-law's young wife and gets her pregnant. When she dies in childbirth, Nahum runs away. The story then shifts to a distant town, where we meet a mysterious drifter called Yoshe Kalb. *Kalb* literally means "calf," but the English translator, Maurice Samuel, renders the nickname as "Yoshe the Loon," and there is clearly something off about the young man: he barely eats or speaks, and seems to be doing penance for an unknown crime. It's immediately clear to the reader that Yoshe is Nahum, but at the novel's climax, when a trial is held to determine who he really is, he refuses to confirm or deny his identity. "You who are under judgment, who are you?" the judge asks, to which Yoshe replies simply, "I do not know."

As Norich notes in the new edition, the name "Yoshe" sounds like a Yiddish version of "Jesus," and the character can be seen as a sacrificial lamb (or calf), who takes on all the sins of a corrupt and repressive society. What I. J. Singer respects in "Yoshe Kalb" isn't religion, however, but the mysteriousness of human motive.

In his other novels, characters are generally conceived as representatives of a social class or political type. Max Ashkenazi, in "The Brothers Ashkenazi," is a ruthless businessman who symbolizes the insatiability of capitalism, always seeking new profits. Jegor Carnovsky, in I. J. Singer's last novel, "The Family Carnovsky," is a coward and a sadist who symbolizes the insoluble contradictions of Jewish assimilation in Germany. Yoshe Kalb, however, feels as baffling in his resignation as Melville's Billy Budd, another sacrifice to the world's eternal injustice.

In a strange way, this sense of mystery makes the novel more hopeful, or at least more open to possibility. After all, in Eastern Europe between the wars, the more clearly a writer understood the dynamics of Jewish life, the more hopeless it appeared. This may help explain why the novels that Singer published after "The Brothers Ashkenazi" are less inspired and less ambitious than his early work.

As a young man, Singer had viewed Communists as motivated by genuine ideals and, like many Jews, had believed that the Revolution would make comrades of antisemitic Poles and Russians. By the time he published "East of Eden," in 1939, Communists appear only as cruel commissars, hypocritical power seekers, or hapless fools. "The Family Carnovsky," published in 1943, tries to come to grips with Nazism, but, unlike Communism, this was a subject he didn't know at first hand, and the plot is Hollywood-preposterous. The book ends with a doctor performing surgery on a bedroom table to save the life of his teen-age son, who has shot himself in the chest after killing a Nazi spymaster who made advances toward him.

Still, no matter how hopeless things became, I. J. Singer never stopped working. Isaac Bashevis Singer, in his memoir "Love and Exile," writes about the terrible writer's block he experienced after joining his brother in New York, in 1935. His first novel, the pitch-black phantasmagoria "Satan in Goray," was published in Warsaw just as he left, and for the next ten years he wrote almost no fiction, supporting himself with journalism and proofreading. But he was comforted when he walked past Israel Joshua's house, in Coney Island, and saw his brother at the window:

> He sat at a narrow table with a pen in one hand, a manuscript in the other. I had never thought about my brother's appearance, but that evening I considered him for the first time with curiosity, as if I weren't his brother but some stranger. . . . His long face was pale. He read not only with his eyes but mouthed the words as he went along. From time to time, he arched his brows with an expression that seemed to ask, How could I have written this? and promptly commenced to make long strokes with the pen and cross out. The beginning of a smile formed upon his thin lips. He raised the lids of his big blue eyes and cast a questioning glance outside, as if suspecting that someone in the street was observing him. I felt as if I could read his mind: It's all vanity, this whole business of writing, but since one does it, one must do it right.

Not until Israel Joshua died did I. B. Singer start writing again in earnest, and then the floodgates opened. His long novel "The Family Moskat," an homage to Israel Joshua's Ashkenazis and Carnovskys, appeared in Yiddish in November, 1945. Over the next forty-five years, his English publications included fourteen novels, ten story collections, and a slew of memoirs and children's books. More books were translated after his death, and they're still coming; "Old Truths and New Clichés," a collection of essays, was released last year.

When the Singer brothers came to the United States, there were about thirteen million Yiddish speakers in the world, including about seven million in Eastern and Central Europe

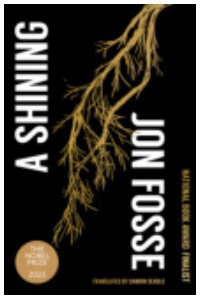
and three million in North America. Today, there are an estimated six hundred thousand native speakers left, almost all in ultra-Orthodox communities in Israel and the U.S. Most of the Yiddish-speaking population of Europe was murdered by the Nazis, and where communities of Yiddish speakers still existed their children grew up speaking different languages—Hebrew, English, Russian.

Israel Joshua Singer's work, written in the fifteen years before the Holocaust, reflects a time when Yiddish civilization was more vital and more modern than ever before. It also shows that, even before the Holocaust was conceivable, Jews in Eastern Europe could feel their future disappearing. Franz Kafka, writing in German, and S. Y. Agnon, writing in Hebrew, had the same intuition.

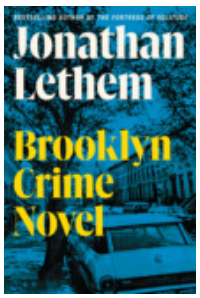
Isaac Bashevis Singer, on the other hand, produced almost all of his work after that future was gone. Few great writers have had such a bizarre fate—working for decades as his readership slowly vanished, knowing that he would have no successors. Yet in a strange way his writing was liberated by the disappearance of hope. Though Jewish life continued after 1945, the Yiddish civilization that Singer belonged to and wrote about was beyond salvation, and therefore beyond despair. Things that I. J. Singer felt compelled to reject in the name of reason and modernity—religion, tradition, superstition, utopian hope—could return with an eerie animating force in I. B. Singer's work, like revenants.

This gave the younger brother's writing a recklessness and an imaginative freedom that still feel contemporary. Isaac Bashevis Singer offered a parable of his situation in his story "The Last Demon," about a devil living in the ruins of a Jewish town after the Holocaust. "There is no further need for demons. We have also been annihilated. I am the last, a refugee," the devil says. He passes his days reading a Yiddish storybook that he found in the ruins, in impish communion with the past. "As long as the moths have not destroyed the last page, there is something to play with," Singer writes. "What will happen when the last letter is no more, is something I'd rather not bring to my lips." ♦

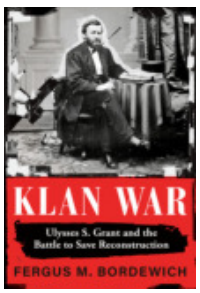
BRIEFLY NOTED



A Shining, *by Jon Fosse, translated from the Norwegian by Damion Searls (Transit)*. In this spare tale of disorientation and longing, by the winner of this year's Nobel Prize in Literature, a man gets stranded on a back road in a forest and wanders deep into the trees. There, he encounters stars, darkness, a shining figure, a barefoot man in a suit, and his parents, who seem to be caught in a dynamic of chastisement and withdrawal. Fosse uses fleeting allusions to a world beyond the reach of the narrator to explore some of humanity's most elusive pursuits, certainty and inviolability among them. His bracingly clear prose imbues the story's ambiguities with a profundity both revelatory and familiar. "Everything you experience is real, yes, in a way, yes," the narrator says, "and you probably understand it too, in a way."



Brooklyn Crime Novel, *by Jonathan Lethem (Ecco)*. A half century of Brooklyn history and a bevy of crimes—currency defacement, petty theft, breaking and entering, drug use—feature in this series of loosely linked vignettes, which follow children living in and around the neighborhood of Boerum Hill, from the nineteen-seventies to the present. Though the book is tinted with nostalgia, it's filled with characters suspicious of idealizing an earlier time. Boerum, the narrator observes, "is a slaveholder name," and a Black boy called C. thinks that the area's gentrifiers "want to live neither in the present, nor the future, but in a cleaned-up dream of the past."



Klan War, *by Fergus M. Bordewich (Knopf)*. This essential history details Ulysses S. Grant's fight to dismantle the Ku Klux Klan during the course of his Presidency. The Klan sprang up largely in response to Black suffrage. After the Civil War, Southern Black men voted in the hundreds of thousands, sending scores of Black candidates to office. The Klan, which Bordewich calls the nation's "first organized terrorist movement," targeted Black community leaders, with local and state officials either unwilling or unable to stop it. Grant made the issue federal, dispatching troops to the South and holding trials for suspected Klan members. Though his efforts were later gutted by a series of disastrous Supreme Court decisions, Grant's victory, Bordewich argues, serves as a potent reminder that "forceful political action can prevail over violent extremism."

Earlier, *by Sasha Frere-Jones (Semiotexte)*. "If you love music, you have to fight for it," a former *New Yorker* pop-music critic writes in this slim, engaging volume, which recounts his childhood among "celebrity children" at a private school in Brooklyn, and his early obsession with music, which led to his career as a writer and as a band member. Both a memoir and a history, the book touches on race relations in the seventies and the AIDS epidemic. Haunted by the deaths of his father and his first wife, along with his struggles with mental illness and alcoholism, Frere-Jones excavates his life's triumphs and failures. As he writes of playing with a band for the first time, "I fail my way into an epiphany."

THE ART WORLD

YOU'RE GLOWING

Ilana Harris-Babou's impish take on wellness culture.

BY JACKSON ARN

"Confetti 2" (2023), one of Harris-Babou's tile sculptures in "Needy Machines."

ILANA HARRIS-BABOU; PHOTOGRAPH BY KUNNING HUANG

Few art shows begin with spa music. You can imagine my confusion when I knocked on the door of the Candice Madey gallery, in New York, and heard celestial stomach growls coming from inside. Was this the right floor? The right building, even? Yes and yes, but, in my defense, galleries and spas have more in common than the proprietors of either would like to admit. Both aspire to semi-spiritual experiences, packaged in clean, well-lit spaces with a barely repressed grossness. Both may be regular old businesses, once your eyes adjust to the glow.

The clean, the gross, the spiritual, and the mercantile: these are the key ingredients for Ilana Harris-Babou, the thirty-two-year-old artist whose work awaits you at "Needy Machines," behind the gallery door. Mix them together and you get a sugary confection known as "wellness," which happens to be her subject. At this show, you will find, in addition to the spa soundtrack, ceramic pill bottles, a mirror that flashes laboratory invoices, and rectangles of shiny white tile enlivened by colorful fruit. In the past, Harris-Babou's videos and sculptures have announced their themes with yoni eggs, rose-quartz face rollers, and the like. There's less of this kind of signposting in the new show, and a few of the best pieces have none at all, as though she were weaning us off the whats of her subject and moving on to the whys.

Harris-Babou was born in Brooklyn, to a mother raised mainly in New York and Connecticut and a father who emigrated from Senegal. She received her M.F.A. from Columbia in 2016; three years later, her art appeared in the Whitney Biennial, and a year after that she made a splash, or at least a respectable spritz, with a show at Hesse Flatow. Much of her work follows the same pattern: First, choose some form of trendy life-style media (HGTV or cooking shows, makeup tutorials) that tells viewers how to be true to themselves while showing off for the neighbors. Then mimic the format—twinkly music, chirpily domineering host, rainbow colors against crisp white backgrounds—while dialling up the contradictions. The centerpiece of the Hesse Flatow show was a short video called "Decision Fatigue," in which Harris-Babou's mother walks us through her beauty routine: moisturizing her face with Cheeto crumbs, slurping Pepsi, showing off her chocolate-chip soap. Pretty amusing, but let's be frank: when you shoot at an industry whose most famous company is called Goop, you can't miss.

The tile pieces in "Needy Machines" are trying for something harder: not a straight homage to their subject but not an obvious parody, either. They're basically high-relief sculptures, the size and shape of a medicine-cabinet mirror; even at a glance they suggest a luxury bathroom, ground zero as far as wellness culture goes. The densest one, "Confetti 2" (2023), is as cluttered with bright lumpy shapes as the wall of a rock-climbing gym, though it's still mainly pale tile and grout. For every wellness object in the show, there is some free-associative pun-object: for the ceramic screw-top bottle of nail polish in "Confetti 2," a cast of an actual screw; for an ear of corn, a glazed blob that resembles a human ear. The tone is lightly ironic but never sardonic, as though to acknowledge that wellness is a trillion-dollar industry partly because, at its core, it makes a reasonable point. (Is anyone actually *against* being well in body and mind?)

It is easy to respect these sculptures' careful, subtle twists on careful, subtle contemporary design, and harder to relish them. Luckily, they're only a warmup for the real fun. The spa noises turn out

to come from "Needy Machine" (2023), a video piece presented on a reflective screen. Over four or so minutes, a series of medical documents jolt cartoon-quick from right to center and, after lingering nowhere near long enough to be read, exit left. Everything is written in an obscure dialect of bureaucratese that all Americans understand, because it only ever means one thing: *You are too stupid to monitor your own health, so you need us to do it for you*. If you find yourself overwhelmed by all this, you can look at the bottom of the screen and console yourself with slogans like "It's a part of your life, but it doesn't define you."

"Needy Machine" is also a mirror, of course—its video effects never come close to filling the screen—but everything it reflects gets dirtied by the images whooshing by. One moment, you're frowning over a glossary of medical terms (the more bureaucracy tries to explain itself, the more inexplicable it becomes); the next, the glossary is gone and you're left giving yourself the stink eye, as though your body is an annoyance in need of fixing. It's a wonderful prank, reminiscent of glass-covered Francis Bacon paintings that trick you into wincing at a hideous Pope in a box, only to reflect your own body standing beside him. The difference is that Harris-Babou is funny, and not in the polite, sniff-through-the-nose way—"Needy Machine" gets genuine *laughs*, the queasy kind that come when nothing else can be done.

There's the way you look at yourself, and then there's the way you look at your stats-and-numbers self: your weight, your blood pressure, your levels, not to mention the itemized bills for calculating each. Do too much of the second kind of looking and the first is never the same. Wellness culture tries to correct for health care's inhumanity with green juice and self-affirmation, but in some ways it's built a prettier version of the same prison: you're more than a number, fine, but you're still a product, and your purpose is to fuss over yourself with the help of other products. I'd say this is more or less what's going on in "Foaming Mouth 1" (2023). It's not the first Harris-Babou video piece to feature bubbles: in "Decision Fatigue," they brought you the squelchy side of reality that life-style media try to ignore; in "Liquid Gold," recently screened in Times Square, the political nuances of breast-feeding. Here they slide down a mirrored screen, blushing with violet light and suggesting the glittery world of wellness goods. If you can forget about the title, it's quite calming to behold (*meditative*, *cleansing*, etc.), until you catch yourself looking. The setup is the same as in "Needy Machine" but the punch line is nastier: the more you try to get lost in meditation, the more of a narcissist you become.

"Foaming Mouth 1" doesn't address wellness so much as the deeper problem that it fails to solve. That problem? Just mankind's search for authenticity, as blundering today as it was centuries ago. The art historian Michael Fried devoted some of the most fascinating pages of "Absorption and Theatricality," his influential study of eighteenth-century French painting, to Jean-Siméon Chardin's "Soap Bubbles," which shows a youth engrossed in the quivery orb on the end of a straw. As other scholars have noted, images like this one coincided with a growing distaste for fake, look-at-me bourgeois society; there was a hunger for good, plain people absorbed in plain, unshowy things, inviting viewers to forget themselves, too. It didn't work out. French absorption painting came to seem as phony as the bourgeoisie itself, another product offering bottled Authenticity™. Of which "Foaming Mouth 1" is both example and parody. You can buy the products, you can practice the techniques, you can believe that by doing all this you've achieved inner peace, but in the end absorption, warped by the same market pressures it wants to escape, becomes just another kind of theatricality. Today's private spiritual questing is tomorrow's preening.

And yet Harris-Babou respects you for trying. She tries, too; in more than a few interviews, she's said that she makes art about wellness because she's enamored, not just skeptical, of it. As far as her art goes, that's for the best. She's too interested in her subject to settle for cheap shots, and maybe wellness culture deserves the quixotic dignity she grants it. We've been hurting for a very long time, after all, and the rose-quartz face roller is just another thing that we've invented—including, it would seem, modern painting—in the hope of easing the pain. ♦

THE THEATRE

SONGS OF HERSELF

"Hell's Kitchen," at the Public, and "The Gardens of Anuncia," at Lincoln Center.

BY HELEN SHAW

Maleah Joi Moon and Kecia Lewis play student and piano teacher.

Writing a biographical musical is tricky. Where do you begin and end? Lives often don't follow a dramatic arc, and bending events into the right curve might damage them. Writing an *auto*biographical musical is trickier still. If you're notable enough to be writing one, it can be awkward to mention all your achievements. Surely you don't need to explain yourself?

Alicia Keys—global megastar and winner of fifteen Grammy Awards, including three for Best R. & B. Album—neatly sidesteps these issues with the frequently exhilarating (and occasionally repetitive) "Hell's Kitchen," now at the Public. First, she and her book writer, Kristoffer Diaz, limit their focus to a few months in the life of a musically gifted seventeen-year-old in New York. (Those words should instantly cue Keys's billowing hook from "Empire State of Mind" somewhere in your limbic system.) Their heroine, the young Ali (Maleah Joi Moon), is having both a sexual and an artistic awakening, all while rebelling against her protective single mother, Jersey (Shoshana Bean), who just wants to keep her safe in their apartment high above the Hudson. Ali pictures herself as a kind of Rapunzel in Timberland boots. "It's just me, locked away in this tower, cut off from this city," she cries, as the band's accompaniment swells. "Fuck right I'm angry."

The show draws mostly from Keys's catalogue, beginning with deep-ish cuts (the delicate waltz "Gramercy Park," from her 2020 album, "Alicia") and a few new songs, unleashing the famous numbers ("Girl on Fire," delivered at siren strength) only when a certain dramaturgical flow has been established. Exactly how autobiographical is "Hell's Kitchen"? The answer is elusive. There are certainly parallels between creator and character: both Alicia and Ali have absent fathers; both fall for an older man; both are drawn, inexorably, to the piano. And both grow up in the nineteen-nineties, in Manhattan Plaza, a huge development of subsidized artists' housing, west of Times Square. In the production's loveliest, lightest touch, Ali, while taking the elevator to her apartment, on the forty-second floor, listens to the sounds of her building every time the doors open—merengue on twenty-seven, jazz trumpet on thirty-two. When Keys was seventeen, though, she wasn't learning chords. She had long been an acknowledged prodigy, and was already fighting with Columbia Records over what would be her first album, "Songs in A Minor." She had also been living independently for about a year.

So "Hell's Kitchen" plays as a Keys-inflected fable, which the director, Michael Greif, stages using billboard-y projections by Peter Nigrini. (You sometimes feel you're being pitched on a Hell's Kitchen Real-Estate Opportunity.) A large ensemble, choreographed by Camille A. Brown, moves propulsively around Robert Brill's gloomy set of sliding black cubes. Here are the late nineties in all their badass, cargo-pant splendor: jeans that refuse to flatter—the costume designer, Dede Ayite, finds one particularly terrifying high-yoke cut—and best-forgotten dance moves, like the Running Man. The dancers turn up at the oddest times, though, even when characters are seducing each other, or attending a funeral. You apparently cannot have a private moment in New York without a dance crew butting in to do interpretive work.

There's no villain, as such, but Ali's bucket-drummer Romeo, Knuck (Chris Lee), so panics Jersey that she asks her friends, including a bunch of cops, to keep Knuck away from her daughter. This, of course, triggers a brutal encounter. A virtuoso pianist who lives in the

ILLUSTRATION BY MANDDY WYCKENS

building, Miss Liza Jane (Kecia Lewis), begins to teach Ali how to play, and, while the musical hasn't worked out just how to handle this character—Jersey, for opaque reasons, resents her—Lewis builds an entire architecture out of pitch alone. She closes the first act with a dirge about violence against young Black men, "Perfect Way to Die," plunging down a vocal register, and then, impossibly, down again. Her voice, excruciatingly beautiful, seems to be digging a grave.

Indeed, the show's vocal casting makes shades of meaning where Diaz's script doesn't always succeed. Moon's soaring, youthful tone has a gorgeous rasping burr to it, while Bean's astonishing sledgehammer voice has a similar, fractured quality. The mother-daughter relationship is contained in their two approaches to that rough-sawn sound—one takes it easy, the other wields her stress like an audible weapon. We also learn everything we need to know about Ali's undedicated father, Davis (Brandon Victor Dixon), from the way his smoky voice drifts across the stage. At one point, he lets his timbre go particularly seductive, while swirling a glass of amber liquid at Jersey's dinner table. "It's just iced tea!" Bean tuts at him, hilariously. No matter where this guy goes, the club comes along.

The first act—yearning, wooing, discovery, betrayal—is a marvellous match for Keys's neo-soul romanticism, while the second act, where we spend an hour on Ali's rapprochement with her mother, can grow wearing. But it's hard to begrudge the pivot in attention from child to mom. In her memoir, "More Myself," Keys writes about a young romance, begun with a twenty-four-year-old when she was only fourteen. No wonder she wants to rewrite those days, to shift the ages around a bit, and to imagine a life lived a little longer under a parent's care. The rebellion we hear in those early scenes of Ali's—"Fuck right I'm angry"—seems slightly overblown coming from a girl of seventeen, sulky at having to eat her mother's cooking every night. But perhaps that rage is older than she is.

I can't quite figure out the calculations behind "The Gardens of Anuncia," at Lincoln Center, though many of them are similar to those in "Hell's Kitchen": "Gardens" is also a (loosely) biographical musical based on a talented woman's childhood, in this case the Argentinean-born director and choreographer Graciela Daniele. Written by her friend and frequent collaborator the composer Michael John LaChiusa, it, too, trains its attention on the women raising a girl after a father has left; it, too, lets us see how self-centered a gifted teen can be. Here, Anuncia (Kalyn West, playing the young version of the Daniele avatar) pirouettes in oblivious delight even as a supergroup made up of grandmother (Mary Testa), mother (Eden Espinosa), and aunt (Andréa Burns) works to support her dreams under the shadow of the Peróns.

Few people will go into "Hell's Kitchen" unfamiliar with Alicia Keys, but Daniele may need some introduction, which this oddly hermetic show refuses to provide. During the musical, only glancing attention is paid to her artistry, and we don't learn much about her long history both on and off Broadway. (She got a Special Tony Award for Lifetime Achievement in 2020.) Yet the production, directed by Daniele herself, isn't willing to stay in the past, either. Instead, there are laborious scenes set in the present day, when Priscilla Lopez, playing an older version of Anuncia, wanders around her garden, chatting with a flirtatious deer and rhapsodizing over her memories. As the deer says, while exiting, "Weird."

LaChiusa has referred to the project as an "act of gratitude for those women who created one of the most incredible women in my life." And it did feel as though I had intruded on a private communication, one not meant to be shared more widely. In its way, even the musically explosive "Hell's Kitchen," with its careful elisions, felt private, too. Both shows point to a vulnerability inherent in biographical projects. We go to them hoping that we'll learn how someone extraordinary became herself—how a girl in Manhattan Plaza became an R. & B. titan, or how a ballerina in Buenos Aires got out. But, in "Anuncia" and "Kitchen," women with precocious success look back at their driven childhoods and edit out their grind and ambition in favor of a warm appreciation for their caretakers. No wonder there's a certain cipher-like quality to these musicals. Both are love letters to mothers, but there's a blurriness at the center where the daughters should be. ♦

THE CURRENT CINEMA

HERE COMES TROUBLE

"Napoleon" and "Monster."

BY ANTHONY LANE

The new movie from Ridley Scott, "Napoleon," with Joaquin Phoenix in the title role, runs for two hours and thirty-eight minutes. That's almost as long as Napoleon's coronation, at Notre-Dame de Paris, in 1804. The ceremony began at midday and lasted at least three hours. The congregation snacked on chocolate, sausages, and bread: the popcorn of the revolutionary age.

Joaquin Phoenix stars as Napoleon Bonaparte in Ridley Scott's bio-pic.

In "Napoleon," we attend the coronation, but only for a while. Scott is in a hurry to move on to the next event. As in any account of Napoleon's life, there is an underlying comedy in the very attempt to squash an unruly mob of incidents into a tight dramatic space. "Would you like to see the bedroom?" Napoleon says to his second wife, Marie-Louise (Anna Mawn), and bang: a baby, brought in swaddling clothes for him to dandle. That was quick. At the destructive end of existence, Scott is no less economical. There may be battle scenes to die for—Toulon, Austerlitz, Borodino, and Waterloo, plus a dusty glimpse of combat beside the Pyramids—but entire campaigns, elsewhere, are elided or brushed off in a line of dialogue. "I have already conquered Italy, which surrendered without conflict," Napoleon declares. Tell that to the folk of Binasco, in Lombardy, who rose up against the French, in 1796, and were punished for their temerity. "Having killed a hundred people, we burned down the village, a terrible but efficacious example," Napoleon wrote.

"Terror" is the first word that is clearly enunciated in the movie. It issues, needless to say, from the mad mouth of Robespierre (Sam Troughton), who expounds upon the rationale of violence and winds up shooting himself in the face. We see a finger probing the wound; in a similar vein, we see Napoleon plucking a cannonball from the lacerated breast of his dead horse. This film is intimate with gore. At the start, we are granted so prime a position, bladeside at the guillotine, for the execution of Marie Antoinette (Catherine Walker) that we can spot the scraps of lettuce in her hair; she has been pelted with vegetables by the crowd. Napoleon is there—watchful, unmoved, taking the temperature of collective rage. Then, during the storming of an enemy fort in Toulon, by night, there's an extraordinary closeup of his features, striped with blood; he puts his hands over his ears to muffle the boom of the cannons. Is he at home in the mayhem, ecstatically calm, or horrified at all that he has unleashed?

What Phoenix summons, in other words, is the most inward of Napoleons. Even when he's in company, or surveying the deployment of his troops, or blustering with outrage, you feel that he's prowling the battlements of his own brain. It could be argued, of course, that brooding goes with the territory. Think of Charles Boyer's Napoleon, in "Conquest" (1937), on a snowbound balcony, saying "I love you," sotto voce, to Marie Walewska, his Polish paramour, without even looking in her direction—quite a feat, considering that she's played by Greta Garbo. (Poor Walewska doesn't even rate a mention in the new film.) But Boyer gave a late-Romantic reading of Napoleon, whereas Phoenix, evading doominess and charm alike, suggests a man who is naggingly conscious of fulfilling a role and already arranging his place in history. "Do I resemble my portrait?" he asks Marie-Louise. Entering a church, in a deserted Moscow, he takes his seat, enthroned at the high altar, as if striking a pose for a painter. If he notices the pigeon droppings all around, he ignores them.

Such a pitch of self-consciousness goes far deeper than vanity. It's as if Napoleon were forever trying out what manner of person he should and could potentially be. Hence the ardor of his acolytes, confronted with a new model of behavior, who crown him with plaudits such as "our Caesar." Nor is he alone in his ambition. His first wife, Josephine (Vanessa Kirby), observes it in him, shares it, and toys with the power that it bestows. "I want you to say I am the most important thing in the world," he tells her, commandingly, yet she—a widow, not a warrior—is somehow his superior in worldliness. The question that she puts to her maid, after her first exchange with him, could hardly be more Napoleonic: "Do I look like I'm in love?" Kirby feasts on the delicious ennui of her character; even in the throes of their coupling, she seems infinitely bored, as if wondering what she's going to have for

ILLUSTRATION BY PATRICK LEGER

lunch. Much later, when Napoleon calls her a pig and a beast, she returns the fusillade. "You are just a brute who is nothing without me," she says. At the dissolution of their marriage, she stifles a laugh, and then weeps.

So, is "Napoleon" dynamite? Not if you're a historian. Napoleonic scholars, of whom there are touchy battalions, will be up in arms from the outset, noting that Marie Antoinette's hair was shorn before her decapitation, and that Napoleon, rather than witnessing her death, was in the South of France. Do not make the mistake, though, of assuming either that Scott is blind to such discrepancies or that he cares a jot. No film that presents Rupert Everett as the Duke of Wellington, as this one does, could be accused of a craving for authenticity. Scott's business is to move his men and women around the board, as it were, and to play a bracing game with the facts. Few directors can rival the swagger with which he cuts from the grand overview to the telling, tiny detail: from the squares formed by British infantry at Waterloo, for instance, to the neat hole made by a musket ball in the corner of Napoleon's hat.

If the movie falters, it's because, as a bio-pic, it cannot do otherwise. Even the most expert of storytellers is defeated by the essential plotlessness of the form: one damn thing after another. For all its galvanizing set pieces, "Napoleon" boasts neither the shape nor the dash of "The Duellists" (1977)—Scott's début feature, a tale of revenge set in the Napoleonic era—and little of the momentum that drove "Gladiator" (2000), his previous collaboration with Phoenix. The imaginative zeal of that film was liberated by its fictional hero, Maximus, and by his feud with the imperial villain, Commodus, whereas Phoenix's Napoleon must do double duty. He is Maximus *and* Commodus, rolled into one, and it's a treacherous theme for an epic: a man doing battle with himself.

How thrilling it was to learn that the latest film from Hirokazu Kore-eda, the director of such tender family dramas as "I Wish" (2011) and "Shoplifters" (2018), is titled "Monster." Finally, a change of tack. Do we get to see scores of families being tenderly stomped on by Godzilla? Regrettably not. Yet there *is* a rumble of the apocalyptic in "Monster." It kicks off with a towering inferno. A typhoon is next, then a mudslide. One person jumps from a moving car. Another stands on the brink of a roof. A third flails around on a road, the worse for drink, drowning his sorrows in the rain.

Sakura Ando, the star of "Shoplifters," returns here as a young widow, Saori, who lives with her only child, a fifth grader named Minato (Soya Kurokawa). He seems to be a worried soul, but what those worries are is far from clear. It's alleged that he was struck, in the classroom, by a teacher, Mr. Hori (Eita Nagayama), and Saori, who is no pushover, goes to school to complain. The principal, Mrs. Fushimi (Yûko Tanaka), is oddly indifferent. No fewer than five members of the staff rise and bow to Saori, in contrition, but notice how the moment is framed: she is hemmed in by the apologizers as if trapped in a crowd. Although Kore-eda has a reputation for aplomb—for exploring rather than ruffling social custom—I sense real subversion in that shot. Etiquette becomes a threat.

After three-quarters of an hour or so, the screen goes black. When the story resumes, we discover that we're back at the start, the difference being that the action now revolves around Mr. Hori. We don't see things exclusively from his viewpoint—this is no "Rashomon" (1950)—but the center of narrative gravity has shifted, for sure. The same thing occurs in the third movement of "Monster," most of which is occupied by the friendship, hitherto merely glimpsed, between Minato and a boy in his class, Yori (Hinata Hiiragi), who is bullied both at home and at school but who, heaven knows how, preserves a sunny resilience. You expect the movie to darken, and yet, as if under Yori's influence, it is lit by shafts of happiness. The two lads find an abandoned train car, in the woods, and make it their refuge. Any port in a storm.

If possible, watch "Monster" more than once. Not that it's a puzzle that begs to be solved. What Kore-eda doles out are not revelatory surprises so much as gradual enlightenments, and our attitude toward the characters is forbidden to settle or to stick. Mrs. Fushimi, for example, has recently lost a grandson, in awful circumstances, so she isn't being frosty or mean; she's just shell-shocked, and one beautiful closeup of her, in the third part of the film, invites us to have pity on this woman from whom we initially flinched. As for the title, to whom does it refer? There are various candidates, but I side with the teacher who kvetches about the parents. "They're more trouble than their kids, these days," he says. "They're monsters." ♦

NEWYORKER.COM
Richard Brody blogs about movies.

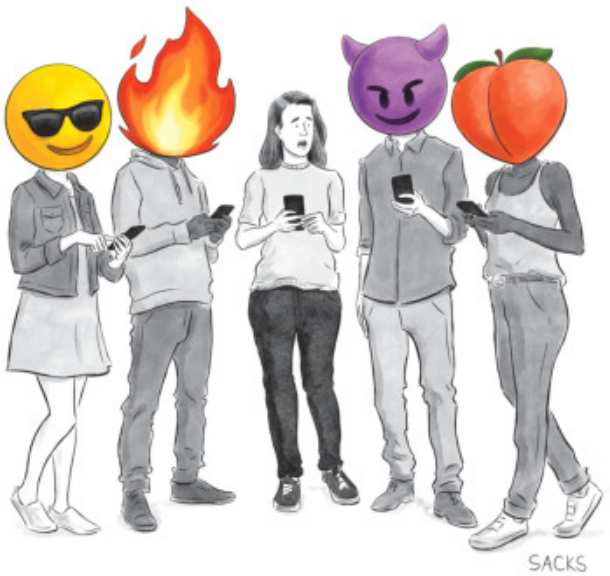
VOLUME XCIX, NO. 40, December 4, 2023. THE NEW YORKER (ISSN 0028792X) is published weekly (except for four planned combined issues, as indicated on the issue's cover, and other combined or extra issues) by Condé Nast, a division of Advance Magazine Publishers Inc. PRINCIPAL OFFICE: Condé Nast, 1 World Trade Center, New York, NY 10007. Eric Gillin, chief business officer; Lauren Kamen Macri, vice-president of sales; Rob Novick, vice-president of finance; Fabio B. Bertoni, general counsel. Condé Nast Global: Roger Lynch, chief executive officer; Pamela Drucker Mann, global chief revenue officer and president, U.S. revenue and president of international; Anna Wintour, chief content officer; Nick Hotchkin, chief financial officer; Stan Duncan, chief people officer; Danielle Carrig, chief communications officer; Samantha Morgan, chief of staff; Sanjay Bhakta, chief product and technology officer. Periodicals postage paid at New York, NY, and at additional mailing offices. Canadian Goods and Services Tax Registration No. 123242885-RT0001.

POSTMASTER: SEND ADDRESS CHANGES TO THE NEW YORKER, P.O. Box 37617, Boone, IA 50037. FOR SUBSCRIPTIONS, ADDRESS CHANGES, ADJUSTMENTS, OR BACK ISSUE INQUIRIES: Write to The New Yorker, P.O. Box 37617, Boone, IA 50037, call (800) 825-2510, or e-mail help@newyorker.com. Give both new and old addresses as printed on most recent label. Subscribers: If the Post Office alerts us that your magazine is undeliverable, we have no further obligation unless we receive a corrected address within one year. If during your subscription term or up to one year after the magazine becomes undeliverable you are dissatisfied with your subscription, you may receive a full refund on all unmailed issues. First copy of new subscription will be mailed within four weeks after receipt of order. Address all editorial, business, and production correspondence to The New Yorker, 1 World Trade Center, New York, NY 10007. For advertising inquiries, e-mail adinquiries@condenast.com. For submission guidelines, visit www.newyorker.com. For cover reprints, call (800) 897-8666, or e-mail covers@cartoonbank.com. For permissions and reprint requests, call (212) 630-5656, or e-mail image_licensing@condenast.com.

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 Adam Sacks, must be received by Sunday, December 3rd. The finalists in the November 20th contest appear below. We will announce the winner, and the finalists in this week's contest, in the December 18th 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

"Not the first time I've seen my portfolio go south."
Kyle Evans Smith, Atlanta, Ga.

"When they're in a group, they're called a firm."
V. P. Walling, New York City

"Uploading files to the cloud isn't as secure as you think."
Mark Swartz, Takoma Park, Md.

THE WINNING CAPTION

"Well, sir, we found you a donor. There's a kid having a garage sale in New Jersey."
James Blow, Sydney, Australia

THE NEW YORKER STORE

Something for everyone. (Including yourself.)

Make the holiday season special. Check out new offerings, evergreen favorites, limited-edition items, and more.

newyorker.com/store

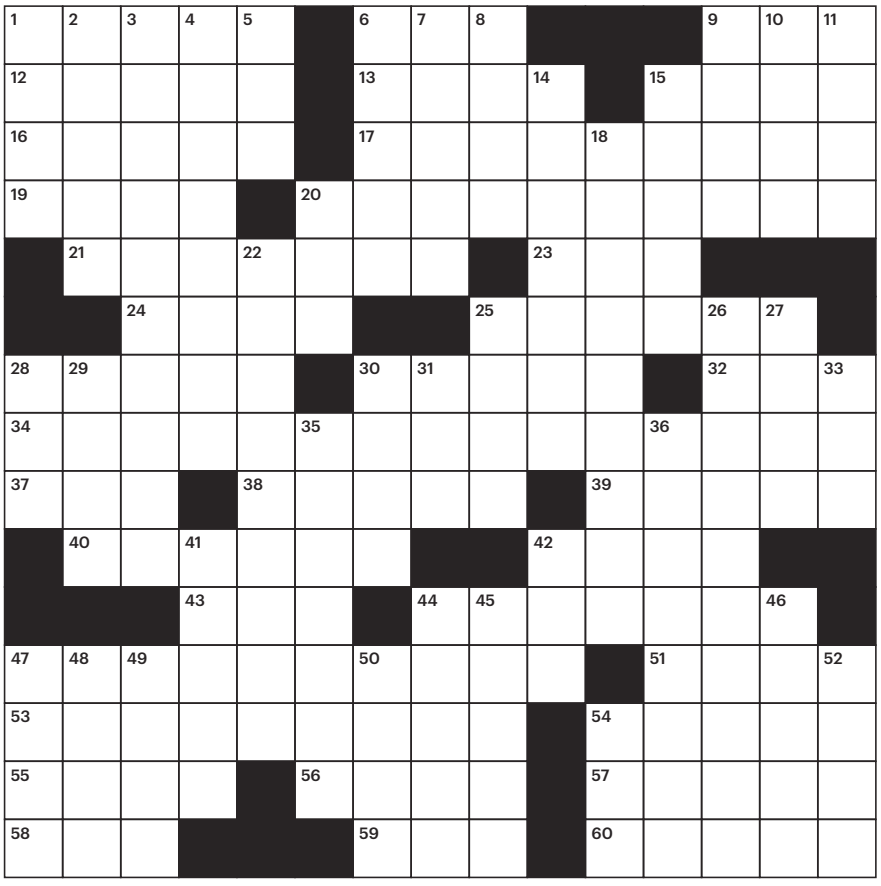
Scan to shop.

PUZZLES & GAMES DEPT.

THE CROSSWORD

A beginner-friendly puzzle.

BY CAITLIN REID



ACROSS

1 Move like an ice-skater
6 Cube root of eight
9 Wager
12 Medium for a shock jock
13 Post-bath garment
15 Manicurist's tool
16 Oak tree-to-be
17 Nickname that Lou Gehrig earned for his endurance, with "the"
19 ___ out of shape (worked up)
20 Setting for some outdoor White House press conferences
21 Person who might help finalize a red-carpet look
23 Lucy who plays Kalypso in "Shazam! Fury of the Gods"
24 Bleak
25 With certainty
28 Club's starting squad
30 Muscle cramp, say
32 Charged particle
34 Evil through and through
37 Some movie effects: Abbr.
38 Ridiculing taunts
39 Having a well-defined physique
40 Swear (to)
42 Buddies
43 PC key near the space bar
44 Like someone who seemingly never gets any older
47 Pop-ular packing material?
51 "___ Like the Wind" (song from the "Dirty Dancing" soundtrack)
53 Comparisons sometimes written with colons
54 Blast from a trumpet
55 Doing nothing
56 Generates, with "up"
57 Stage of life for a caterpillar
58 Water-temperature tester
59 The "G" of L.G.B.T.Q.I.A.+
60 Sound from a 9-Down

DOWN

1 Seize
2 Tongue ties?
3 "You lost me . . ."
4 Snake in the grass
5 Really long period of time
6 The Jonas Brothers and the Bee Gees, for example
7 "Go ahead, do your ___!"
8 Woodwind with a double reed
9 Part of a flock
10 "Or ___ *what*?"
11 High schooler, typically
14 One of the U.N.'s six official languages
15 Place for a public discussion
18 Genre for Mötley Crüe and Ratt
20 "Pacific ___" (2013 mechs-versus-monsters movie)
22 Green mold?
25 What keto dieters replace carbs with
26 Biggest piece of the pie
27 Days of ___
28 Curve
29 Halloween costume that can be made from a bedsheet
30 Editing term from the Latin for "let it stand"
31 "___ *favor*" ("Please," in Spanish)
33 Homer's neighborino, on "The Simpsons"
35 Savings for a rainy day
36 Common side dish at a barbecue
41 Put off until later, as a discussion
42 Vim and vigor
44 Venue for a huge concert
45 Like a fussy baby, maybe
46 Deliver a subpoena
47 Worm on a hook, e.g.
48 Nullify
49 Bundle on a farm
50 "S.N.L." alum Kristen
52 Goal in musical chairs
54 Non-kosher deli order

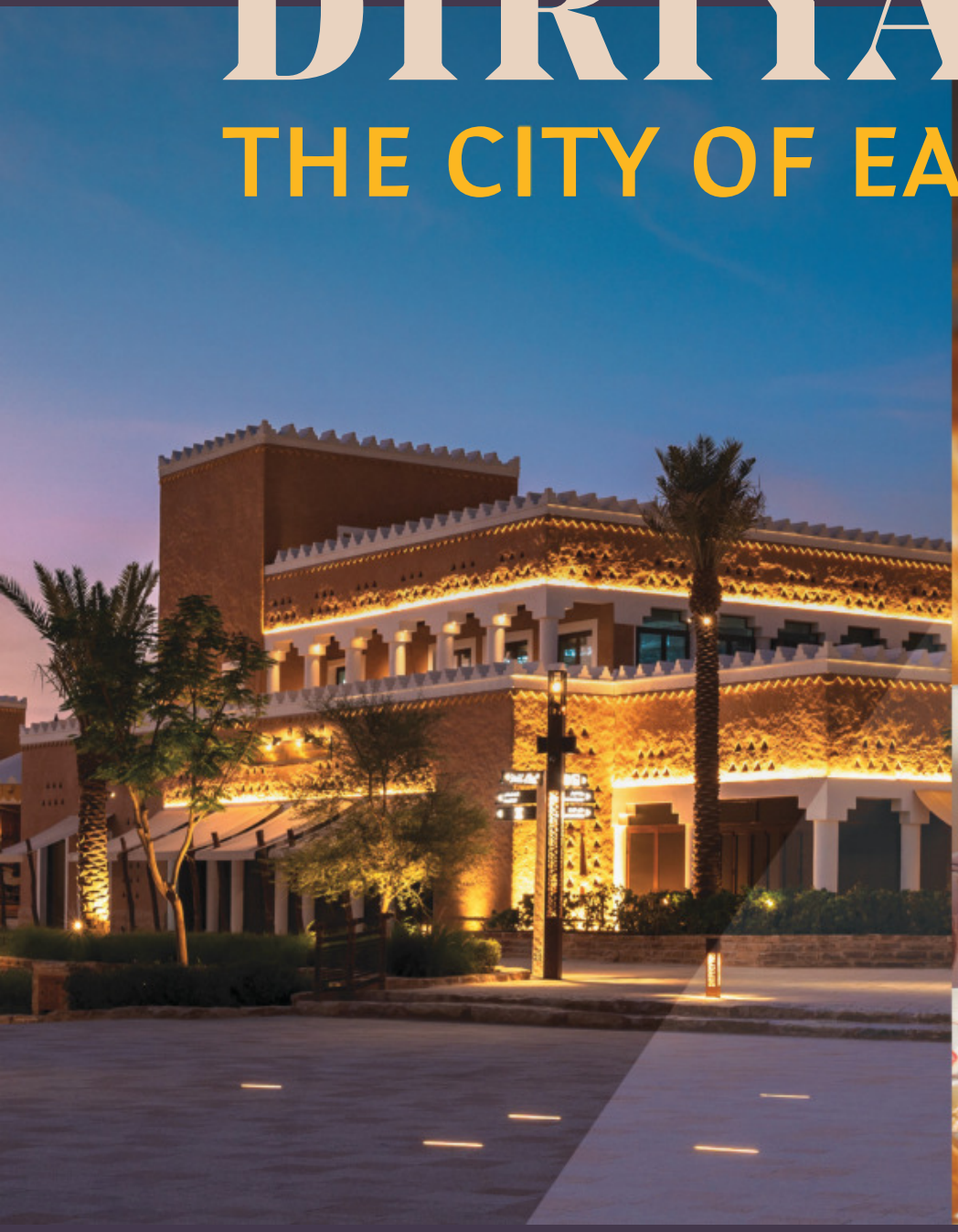
Solution to the previous puzzle:

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

Find more puzzles and this week's solution at **newyorker.com/crossword**

DIRIYAH

THE CITY OF EARTH



DIRIYAH.SA

Only in Saudi

Shop the collection on Cartier.com