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“Zirin’s hope is in his intention, and in the intention of many others, to understand and remember that left unchecked, the greedy and hypocritical initiatives connected to these grand events threaten to destroy not only the lives of the poorest residents of the cities involved, but the sports themselves.”
—Boston Globe

“Dave Zirin is not just the radical brilliant sports critic but along with Naomi Klein the investigative journalist of our neoliberal era. He has figured out that sports operates at the nexus of capitalism, race, class, sexuality, privatization, and of course spectacle. That’s why his work is so important to so many of us.”
—Robin D. G. Kelley, author, Africa Speaks, America Answers

“Brazil is a special country and Dave Zirin honors its people and history while mercilessly going after those who would undermine its people. This book is a remarkable mix of investigative sports journalism and insightful social history.”
—Glenn Greenwald, author, No Place to Hide

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Suffering in Private

Seth Freed Wessler’s article “A Plague of Private-Prison Deaths” [July 4/11] selectively presents information and lacks critical context that would have given readers a more balanced, informed understanding of the relationship between private contractors and the Federal Bureau of Prisons (BOP). The writer first fails to account for the unique challenges of delivering health care to prison populations. As the Pew Charitable Trusts has highlighted, prison populations are aging and have greater prevalence of infection, chronic disease, mental illness, and substance abuse. Many inmates—often with little or no prior access to the health-care system—enter prison with these serious health issues, where they benefit significantly from regular health-care access. It’s important to understand those challenges, because they’re not exclusive to private prisons.

In fact, recent mainstream-media coverage details some of the federal government’s own challenges with staffing for medical services, none of which the writer includes in his piece. The writer didn’t approach this story with journalistic integrity, objectivity, or balance. He stated his biased, uninformed premise on a crowd-funding page in February before even writing the story, and then tailored it to fit that premise.

No corrections system—public or private—is immune to the challenges of safely and securely housing inmate populations. However, it’s important to view those challenges in an appropriate, reasonable context, which the writer doesn’t provide. Corrections Corporation of America, GEO Group, and Management & Training Corporation have partnered with the bureau for decades. Federal, state, and local agencies find great value in our flexible, cost-effective partnerships, and our independently accredited facilities comply with all of the government’s contractual requirements and standards for safety, security, and health care. Without companies like ours, federal agencies would have to make extremely difficult decisions about how to manage populations and provide capacity.

STEVE OWEN, CCA
PABLO PAEZ, GEO GROUP
MIKE MURPHY, MTC
Advisers,
The Public-Private Partnership Alliance

Seth Freed Wessler Replies

My investigation of privately operated federal prisons is based on a detailed review of 30,000 pages of internal federal records, obtained through FOIA requests, and interviews with current and former BOP officials and private-prison medical staff. The first story, “Separate, Unequal, and Deadly” [Feb. 15] began with thousands of pages of prison medical files pertaining to 103 inmates who died while held in privately managed facilities. Independent medical doctors reviewed each file. They documented systemic inadequacies and found evidence that at least two dozen men likely died prematurely as a result of seriously substandard care. The companies do not dispute these findings.

The second story, which elicited the above letter—sent only after the companies declined to fully answer detailed written questions in advance of publication—revealed that the federal government’s own monitors had for years flagged the same systemic lapses in privatized prisons. Twenty thousand pages of internal BOP reports document private operators violating state nursing laws, prisons operating without doctors, and prisons failing

letters@thenation.com

(continued on page 32)
Against Neo-McCarthyism

In their zeal to prevent Donald Trump from becoming president—a goal we share—representative voices of the liberal establishment have joined with the forces of neoconservatism to engage in what can only be described as McCarthyist rhetoric. This magazine, which has a long and proud history of standing up to the worst excesses of McCarthyism, repudiates this unwelcome echo of the past. Let us recall that McCarthyism impugned the loyalty of American citizens by accusing them of allegiance to the Soviet Union. This political defamation—often a joint undertaking of Congress and the media—suppressed democratic debate over alternative policies and ideas, and in the process destroyed lives by stigmatizing those whose views were deemed insufficiently loyal to Cold War orthodoxies. The overall effect was to poison, chill, and censor the political discourse of the nation.

While Trump himself has hardly been damaged by today’s revival of McCarthyism, the same cannot be said for our national debate. Over the past month alone, establishment voices like Franklin Foer, Paul Krugman, Jeffrey Goldberg, Josh Marshall, and Jonathan Chait, among others, have Kremlin-baited Trump in lieu of reasoned argument and factual critique. On July 21, The Atlantic’s Goldberg informed readers that “The Republican nominee for president, Donald J. Trump, has chosen this week to unmask himself as a de facto agent of Russian President Vladimir Putin.” Krugman followed this up on July 22 by asking in The New York Times: “If elected, would Donald Trump be Vladimir Putin’s man in the White House?” Krugman then answered his own baseless question: “Mr. Trump would, in office, actually follow a pro-Putin foreign policy, at the expense of America’s allies and her own self-interest.”

The idea that Trump is some kind of Manchurian candidate first took root thanks to a mistranslation of a remark by Putin, which was misconstrued as high praise for Trump by the media—and by Trump himself. “To be sure,” the GOP candidate has suggested that he may pursue a policy of détente with Russia. He also, in our view wisely, threw out a reckless plank in the Republican platform that pledged to further arm Kiev. But Trump is only following the lead of the current administration. Should we assert seditious links between President Obama’s policy and the Kremlin?

This neo-McCarthyism now threatens to derail a vital debate over the substance of the 20,000-plus e-mails, made public by WikiLeaks on July 22, that reveal the purportedly neutral Democratic National Committee’s derision and contempt for Senator Bernie Sanders’s campaign—as well as several aborted attempts to tip the scales against him. While the FBI has launched an investigation, as of press time, nobody has conclusively proven who hacked into the DNC’s network, much less demonstrated what their motives were. But that didn’t stop Clinton campaign manager Robby Mook from appearing on CNN on July 24 to allege that Russia was behind the hack. “Sources are saying the Russians are releasing these e-mails for the purpose of actually helping Donald Trump,” said Mook. To no one’s great surprise, he neglected to tell CNN who his sources were. Nevertheless, liberal-media elites have joined with the Clinton campaign in promoting the narrative of a devious Russian cyber-attack, which Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting’s Adam Johnson correctly points out “is being used to outweigh the damning substance of the leak itself.”

Yes, DNC chair Debbie Wasserman Schultz resigned over the scandal, but a fuller accounting is required—and so is reforming the rules governing the party’s primary elections. The Nation calls on liberals to focus on these issues, to undertake a serious conversation about US-Russia relations, and to reject the cheap neo-McCarthyism that undermines these efforts. No one wishes to defeat Donald Trump more than The Nation. But to adopt the pernicious language of McCarthyism is to turn our backs on the best traditions of our country in favor of the worst.
Hillary Makes History

And black women were the key to her momentous win.

Claims to making history collided in 2008, when Hillary Clinton lost the Democratic presidential nomination to Barack Obama. The potential first woman came up short against the first African American—who ultimately became our first black president. There was an energizing tension in Denver eight years ago, a hangover from a long and often bitter campaign, until the Democratic women’s advocacy group Emily’s List brought Clinton and Michelle Obama together for a celebration.

There, the two women celebrated each other. “Over her career she has offered me, my daughters, and all of our daughters a different vision for what they could become, and for that we are forever grateful for her work,” Obama said of Clinton, though she had at times been furious with the campaign’s racially tinged maneuvers. Clinton confided: “I know a little bit about the way the White House works. If the president is not exactly on our side, call the first lady. And with Michelle Obama, we’re going to have someone to answer that phone.”

Eight years later, Democrats needed healing again, and Michelle Obama brought it, giving unhappy Bernie Sanders supporters gracious advice about how to carry on in defeat. “When she didn’t win the nomination eight years ago, she didn’t get angry, or disillusioned. Hillary did not pack up and go home. Because as a true public servant, Hillary knows that this is so much bigger than her own desires or disappointments.” Amazingly, she echoed Clinton’s own concession speech to her husband, which Clinton delivered to bitter, grieving supporters eight years ago, praising her as someone “who has the guts and the grace to keep coming back and putting those cracks in that highest and hardest glass ceiling.” Obama herself seemed moved by the idea that her husband’s top rival could come back at the same goal eight years later, and succeed this time.

Whether you supported Clinton, as I did, or Sanders, as many Nation readers and the editorial leadership of the magazine did, it’s worth taking a moment to savor, as Michelle Obama did, the nature of Clinton’s historic achievement. “Hillary Clinton has never quit on anything in her life,” the first lady told the crowd. “When I think about the kind of president that I want for my girls, and all our children, that’s what I want.”

Looking at the way these two women, once at odds, became allies provides insight into why Clinton ultimately emerged as the Democratic nominee: She built a career on winning over former rivals, critics, even enemies. Stories abound (and sometimes confound the left) of how Clinton befriended Republicans once she got to the Senate, even those who had backed her hus-

band’s impeachment. In Michelle Obama, Clinton won over a former critic who would turn out to be the best character witness in a week designed to showcase what her political backbone is made of.

Bernie Sanders, too, counted himself among the converted: “I have known Hillary Clinton for 25 years,” he told the crowd in Philadelphia. “I served with her in the United States Senate and know her as a fierce advocate for the rights of children. Hillary Clinton will make an outstanding president, and I am proud to stand with her.” Even Sanders seemed to appreciate that the first woman president couldn’t be a cheerfully gruff, Brooklyn-born ideological firebrand—say, Bernie Sanders.

Michelle Obama’s convention speech also reminded us of the great debt Clinton owes to African-American women for her primary victory. A lifetime ago, in early June, Clinton claimed that victory with a moving video that paid homage to Shirley Chisholm, the first Democratic woman to run for president, back in 1972. At the 1984 convention, I covered a protest by black women leaders, led by now-Congresswoman Maxine Waters, because the party hadn’t bothered to consider Chisholm—or any black women—when they vetted and chose the first female vice-presidential nominee, Geraldine Ferraro. Sadly, this year again, no black woman was a serious VP contender.

Yet black women have assumed roles of enormous power in the party: Donna Brazile took over as acting chair of the Democratic National Committee from the embattled Debbie Wasserman Schultz, and Representative Marcia Fudge assumed Schultz’s role as convention chair. Clinton confidante Minyon Moore served as the convention’s “doorkeeper.” Since black women gave Clinton almost 85 percent of their votes in the primary, they turned out to be the doorkeepers to this nomination. This is their party now, and Shirley Chisholm would be proud.

Joan Walsh is The Nation’s national-affairs correspondent and an MSNBC political analyst.

Un-American Activities

The real danger is the normalization of Trump’s style.

A few hours before Donald Trump took the stage in Cleveland to accept the Republican nomination for president of the United States, I paid a fraternal call on the comrades in the Commentary press box. As Nation readers will know, Commentary is the house organ of American neoconservatism—a reliably trunculent foe of most of the values we hold dear. But as you may not know if you haven’t been reading it lately, the magazine has also been a clear, consistent, and at times corrosively effective critic of the Trump crusade. I found editor John Podhoretz and, after identifying myself, compli-

(continued on page 8)
As the economy continues to struggle, the debate over guaranteed basic income is back in the headlines. The idea is both simple and basic: Give people enough cash to eliminate poverty. A guaranteed check for, say, $12,000 a year per person would accomplish this. It could be arranged relatively easily through the tax code, without a large, stigmatizing welfare apparatus to go with it.

Yet this debate stalls because it directly challenges how we think about work and money. Won't people simply sit around and play video games? Do we want to endorse the right to be lazy? A basic-income referendum was rejected overwhelmingly by Swiss voters in June, in part over such concerns. But proponents argue that a lot of labor—care work in the home, community work—is currently unpaid, and that the increasing mechanization of work might leave us with still fewer jobs. Experiments in Canada have shown that the fear that a guaranteed basic income would destroy all incentive to work is unwarranted.

You probably don't think 3-year-olds should survive only on the wages they can earn.

Such a program is clearly workable. Other countries, like Canada and England, have child allowances, and they're very effective. Estimates from the Century Foundation argue that a $2,500-a-year child allowance would lift 5.5 million children out of poverty. That allowance would cost $100 billion a year—a hefty sum, but still less than 20 percent of the military's budget, and about as much as it costs us to subsidize the wealthy by allowing them to pay lower taxes on capital income.

There are more programs we could add to this basic-income starter kit. Policies that encourage high wages and innovation will lead to further automation that could create the conditions for a “post-work” economy. This should be combined with the fight for fewer hours (paid at higher wages) for more people, thus avoiding conflicts and resentment between workers and nonworkers while shifting toward less work for all. President Obama's changes to overtime regulations took a step in this direction: Rather than raising wages directly, they limited the number of hours that people work by requiring employers to pay extra for certain salaried workers after about 40 hours a week.

The arguments for a guaranteed basic income tend toward theoretical debates about the work ethic, even though the stakes are very high in practical ways. By enacting a basic-income starter kit, we can benefit from the most important elements of the concept while also making the broader case for why such policies would work in the future.
as Eric Alterman discusses at right, Roger Ailes, formerly of Fox News, has long been a powerful—and slimy—media operator. Here are a few of his career “highlights.”

1968 As executive producer of The Mike Douglas Show (where he started as a prop boy after college), Ailes gives special guest Richard Nixon a warning: Taking TV lightly will cost him the election, Nixon hires him as a media consultant soon after.

1969 Nixon fires Ailes when the budding media guru provides disparaging quotes for a book about the campaign. Ailes, Nixon writes in a memo, is not among “the first-rate men that we could have in this field.”

1972 Ailes’s post-Nixon forays into theater and film include producing an environmentally themed musical, Mother Earth, and a TV documentary with famed Italian director Federico Fellini a year later. He also briefly heads the far-right propaganda machine Television News Incorporated before it crumbles.

1970s and ’80s Ailes works as a consultant for several Republicans, including Ronald Reagan and George H.W. Bush, producing the latter’s infamous “revolving door” ad, which successfully paints Democratic presidential candidate Michael Dukakis as being soft on crime.

1990s As head of CNBC, Ailes nearly triples the network’s revenue. He leaves to start Fox News, an idea he’s been developing since working for Nixon, which outlines in a memo titled “A Plan for Putting the GOP on the News.”

2014 New York writer Gabriel Sherman publishes a damning unauthorized biography of Ailes that quotes four women accusing Ailes of sexually harassing them, —Samantha Schuyler

Eric Alterman

Exit Ailes

Will the Fox News CEO’s downfall signal a sea change in cable-news reporting?

You’ve got to hand it to Gretchen Carlson: She’s a brave woman. Anyone willing to risk a public showdown with Roger Ailes, Rupert Murdoch, and Fox News over sexual-harassment charges would have to be. Carlson no doubt has her own reasons for suing Ailes after having worked for him for 11 years. The longtime Fox News host was fired in June, ostensibly for a ratings slump. She argues, however, that Ailes terminated her contract after she complained about unwanted advances he’d made toward her.

From a merely human standpoint, one can’t help but wish her well. But the broader question is whether her complaint, filed July 6 in the New Jersey Superior Court, will transform the malignant virus that is Fox News into something less damaging to our democratic discourse and journalistic self-respect. Early signs leave room for hope: The network launched an internal investigation and, on July 21, cut Ailes loose. Rupert Murdoch and his sons—James and Lachlan, CEO and executive chairman of 21st Century Fox, respectively—reportedly secured Ailes a $40 million golden parachute to help him go quietly.

As Gabriel Sherman’s energetic reporting in New York makes clear, Ailes has long been the protagonist of stories in which a powerful man attempts to demand sexual favors from women who work for him. A total of six such women spoke to Sherman, two of them on the record. One told a particularly gruesome story in which Ailes allegedly removed his penis from his tuxedo pants and instructed her to kiss it. She was 16 at the time. Another alleged that Ailes pipped her out to friends and work associates, a humiliation that led to her suicide attempt. This is in addition to the three former Fox News anchors Sherman quoted in his 2014 biography of Ailes, The Loudest Voice in the Room. Similar allegations have been piling up since Carlson filed suit, and Smith Mullin, the firm representing her, claims to have binders full of women ready to talk. Ailes, through his lawyers, denies everything.

The stories are consistent with what we know about Ailes. There is no hint of attempted seduction or charm in any of them. Prejudice and sexism are two different phenomena, but it’s not surprising that a man who left CNBC after allegedly calling an adversary a “little fucking Jew prick” would term a woman who refused his sexual overtures to be a “man hater” who needed to “learn to ‘get along with the boys.’” Nor is it surprising that the station he ran is apparently filled with such offensive behavior. (Remember Bill O’Reilly’s falafel fetish?) And finally, it is hardly a shock that Donald Trump is just fine with all of this. “Totally unfounded,” he’s said of Carlson’s allegations.

Carlson has signed an arbitration agreement with Fox that could keep any further information from coming to light during the discovery process. Her contract holds that “all filings, evidence and testimony connected with the arbitration, and all relevant allegations and events leading up to the arbitration, shall be held in strict confidence.” It’s almost as if that clause had been written explicitly to enable the kind of gross behavior for which Ailes is being sued. The legal question is whether it applies to a suit against Ailes, who is not a party to Carlson’s contract with Fox.

If the court rules in favor of arbitration, we will be left with a “he said/she said” public record, together with testimony from the likes of Fox News hosts Jeanine Pirro, Greta Van Susteren, and Maria Bartiromo, who profess shock (shock!) at Carlson’s accusations. The Daily Beast’s Lloyd Grove deserves special mention here for his smarmy reporting on the scandal, in which he passed along an anonymously sourced character assassination of Fox News host Megyn Kelly and questioned why she hadn’t come to Ailes’s defense. When Sherman reported on July 19 that Kelly has alleged harassment by Ailes too, Grove and his unnamed “Fox News insiders” got their answer. Kelly, in turn, was followed by a whole slew of former Fox employees alleging mistreatment at the hands of Ailes and other Fox executives.
THE ONLY THING MORE TERRIFYING THAN THE LEADER OF THE SS WAS THE OPERATION TO TAKE HIM OUT

CILLIAN MURPHY

JAMIE DORNAN

A FILM BY SEAN ELLIS

ANTHROPOID

RESISTANCE HAS A CODE NAME

STARTS FRIDAY, AUGUST 12
Will the reporting of widespread sexual harassment, apparently winked at by top management, lead to a thorough reconsideration of the network's ethos? It certainly should. If the Murdochs do choose to remake Fox News for the post-Ailes era, then Carlson's lawsuit will have turned out to be a world-historical event. For the problem with Fox is not just the vulgar, dishonest crap with which its anchors and guests pollute the world of cable news—it's that other networks are so desperate to imitate it in pursuit of the billion-plus dollars that Fox earns each year. In a world without Fox News, would former Trump campaign adviser Corey Lewandowski enjoy a highly remunerative gig at CNN while remaining Trump's pay, making only positive comments about the candidate on the air while secretly advising him on strategy? Would MSNBC pay the ridiculous radio huckster Hugh Hewitt to publicize a wide range of right-wing conspiracy theories?

Fox's fantastic profits have blinded the rest of the cable-news universe to the fact that its actual job is journalism.

(continued from page 4)

menced him on the trenchancy of his coverage. He was poring over the text of Trump's speech, which had just been leaked.

I pointed to the passage in the center of his screen and made a lame joke: “Maybe it sounded better in the original German.” This was the section where Trump said: “I have visited the laid-off factory workers, and the communities crushed by our horrible and unfair trade deals. These are the forgotten men and women of our country. People who work hard but no longer have a voice. I AM YOUR VOICE.”

Shaking his head, Podhoretz replied: “Actually, I think the original was in Italian.”

He had a point. Trump's bombastic manner, the theatrical pauses in his delivery, his sideways poses and disapproving little pouts all owe more to Mussolini than to Hitler. There's also the absence of overt racism—the Nazis didn’t invite Jews to speak at their rallies—or any “master race” mythology.

But whether you think the political roots of Trumpism lie in Italy, Germany, or the rank seam of American nativism that stretches from the anti-Catholic Know-Nothings of the 1850s through to the “America First” movement in the 1940s seems to me less important than the recognition of the obvious danger that Trump represents. Not just because he would set back the progressive movement by a decade, forcing us to play defense on union rights, economic equity, racial justice, and climate change. Or because his picks for the Supreme Court would haunt us for a generation.

In a normal election, those would all be good reasons to vote for the other side. But as every day of the Republican National Convention made glaringly obvious, this is not a normal election. From the very first night—which saw personal tragedies not just cynically exploited, but weaponized to focus blame and hatred—this was less a convention than an insurrection designed to depict the Democrats not as political adversaries, but as usurpers, criminals, and callous accomplices to the murder of innocent Americans. Trump has already made clear his contempt for democratic norms like freedom of the press and an independent judiciary. He has shown his eagerness to scapegoat Mexicans, Muslims, and immigrants. He and his vice-presidential candidate, Mike Pence, might rail against big government, but their election would mean an overwhelming state that is at constant war with enemies external and internal, deciding which citizens are loyal and which are not.

I ndividually, the Republicans I met were kind, often charming. Apart from a woman who told me that immigration “endangers the herd” and needs to be shut down, and a man with a Socialism Sucks button who shouted “Who made your clothes, then?” when I told him I was a socialist, the delegates were neither threatening nor grotesque. (And though they were, as a rule, white, there were other kinds of diversity beneath the surface. There was a sizable contingent of Jewish Republicans who refused to let any reporter—not even a columnist from London’s Jewish Chronicle—into their meeting. And if the New York Post is to be believed, Cleveland’s male-escort services enjoyed record-breaking business during the proceedings.)

But for all of the outrage and anger on the floor over the manipulation of the rules (to inflate Trump’s margin of victory) and the treatment of Ted Cruz, I met just two Republicans who were considering voting against the nominee: a Cruz delegate from Washington State and a Kasich supporter from Connecticut. Everyone else I met echoed the Utah delegate who, when asked whom he’d be voting for, responded: “Trump... [profound sigh]. Hillary will take positions I strongly disagree with.”

Trump’s policies—on abortion, immigration, climate change—are indeed repellant. But the real danger comes from the normalization of his political style, a ready acceptance of menace and ridicule as substitutes for political debate, and a disdain for argument, or facts, or evidence.

As Bernie Sanders says, for the safety of our country, Trump needs to be “defeated and defeated badly.” That won’t happen so long as the Democrats remain unable to speak up for workers (including white male workers) instead of preaching down at them—because when Trump pivots, he pivots left. And if Cleveland is any indication, it won’t happen by relying on the conscience of moderate Republicans—or Republican women, either.

The morning after his humiliation on the convention floor, Ted Cruz told the Texas delegation: “If we can’t convince the American people that our candidate can be trusted to defend the Constitution, then we will lose and we will deserve to lose.” I’ve always thought of Cruz as Trump without the charm. Maybe, though, he’s just a cock-eyed optimist.

D.D. GUTTENPLAN

D.D. Guttenplan is editor at large of The Nation.
Who is HILLARY CLINTON?
Two Decades of Answers From the Left

Introduction by Katha Pollitt
Edited by Richard Kreitner

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Labour’s Witch-Dunk

Corbyn can’t win with party elites, not least because his victory was the problem.

Following the Brexit referendum, one would have thought that Britain’s political class would be wary of launching unnecessary battles in which there’s no certainty of victory and divisiveness is a foregone conclusion. But apparently Labour’s parliamentarians didn’t get the memo.

So the day after Britain voted to leave the European Union, with Prime Minister David Cameron having announced his resignation and the Conservative Party in chaos, two senior Labour Party figures resolved not to attack their opponents when they were weak, but rather to turn their fire on their own leader. They submitted a vote of no confidence in Jeremy Corbyn, the left-winger who was elected with a thumping majority less than a year ago. But because they mistook their long-standing grievance for a plan and their own echo chamber for the clarion call of insurrection, their strategy pretty much stopped there.

Corbyn had stood on an anti-austerity and pro-peace platform, against a bland range of managerial nonentities who stood for little beyond office. Among the party’s grandees, his victory was not understood as a signal that Labour had to make a left turn in order to hang on to its base. Instead, it was received as a huge collective brain fart by a disgruntled media. Given the fierce opposition he’s facing, there are genuine reasons why some Labour supporters are disappointed in Corbyn. His performance in Parliament has been lackluster, and his own party’s establishment is more likely to attack Corbyn than anyone else.

Meanwhile, it soon became clear there was little likelihood the general election would be brought forward. Since the coup’s plotters didn’t have a candidate, there was no saying whether the party would stand a worse chance under Corbyn than anyone else.

Labour succeeded in effectively humiliating its own leader, but the party establishment is a long way from deposing him.
deemed to be a witch and executed. Corbyn really can’t win with the party’s elites, not least because his victory was the problem.

The MPs who launched the coup described him as selfish. Corbyn’s insistence on his democratic mandate was evidence of his indifference to the fate of the party. To stand and win the first time was an act of provocation; to be deposed, stand again, and maybe win again was plain bad manners.

Just a few days after Brexit, Corbyn’s shadow cabinet started jumping ship. The resignations were coordinated—on the hour, every hour; you could set your watch by them. More than 20 people resigned within the span of a few days. When Labour MPs held their vote of no confidence, 172 voted for Corbyn to go; just 40 backed him. Weeks later, a candidate was chosen: Owen Smith, an uninspiring man who was simply not in Parliament when the worst of the Blairites’ crimes against social democracy were committed (he was a lobbyist for a pharmaceutical company). So Labour has effectively succeeded in humiliating its own leader, but the party establishment is a long way from deposing him.

Labour’s leader is elected by the unions, the membership, and the parliamentary party. At the time of this writing, Corbyn has 54 percent of the membership’s vote, Smith just 22 percent. When the party elites launched this coup, they were so convinced of their own genius that they didn’t bother to check if anyone shared their lack of vision.

There is nothing to celebrate in any of this. While the Tories get on with the business of ruining working peoples’ lives, Labour has spent the last month waging an utterly futile war against its own base. Concentrating on Corbyn while refusing to address the root causes of his appeal, they have effectively assembled a circular firing squad and then shot themselves in the feet.
RIO ON THE BRINK
Budget failures, displacement, the Zika virus—welcome to the Summer Olympics.
by DAVE ZIRIN
Here’s an old expression in Brazil: “It is for the English to see.” This means the country’s elites will construct, when necessary, a veneer for Global North outsiders. This veneer displays a more attractive version of Brazilian society than what actually exists. Northern tourists and investors have long been happy to enjoy the fantasy on display as long as they could extract their pleasures or profits, and the 2016 Summer Olympics in Rio de Janeiro could have been another chapter in this long history of facades for foreign consumption.

But with a dramatic set of crises breaking out across the country, the multibillion-dollar Olympic mirage that has been erected “for the English to see” is at risk of complete collapse. As we go to press, the acting governor of the state of Rio de Janeiro, Francisco Dornelles, has declared “a state of public calamity” over budget shortfalls that could cause a “total collapse in public security, health, education, transport, and environmental management.” Dornelles warned that without immediate aid, the ability simply to execute the Olympics will be in jeopardy. This is not something that can be brushed under the carpet, no matter how embroidered the rug may be with parrots and tropical colors.

It’s easy to rattle off bullet points about the problems besetting Rio: the 77,000 people displaced and counting; the 85,000 members of the security forces patrolling the streets (double the number for the 2012 London Olympics); the estimated $11.9 billion being spent while the Brazilian economy is in a state of violent contraction, which has led to crippling budget cuts in education, health care, and community services. It is also easy to list the political conflicts: There’s the May impeachment—what many are calling a coup—of President Dilma Rousseff of the left-leaning Workers’ Party (her presidency has been suspended while the trial proceeds in the Senate). And there’s the shocking level of graft, with a Congress in which 318 of 594 members are under investigation or facing corruption charges.

And then we have what seems to be the No. 1 global concern, what sportswriter Kostya Kennedy calls “the mosquito in the room”: the Zika virus. Zika infection numbers in the state of Rio are the highest in the country, with infection rates at 157 per 100,000 inhabitants. Couple this with an economic crisis that has seen the state of Rio’s public-health office reduce its budget by 30 percent since the beginning of 2015, and the athletic and tourist communities are in a state of panic. Star athletes like golfers Jason Day and Dustin Johnson and tennis players Milos Raonic and Simona Halep are saying they will not compete in the Olympics because of Zika fears. More than 150 doctors and professors signed a letter saying the games should be postponed or moved out of Rio to prevent the Olympics from transforming Zika into a global pandemic.

Identifying the myriad problems is easy, more difficult—and more important—is to resist seeing them as “general chaos.” We need to avoid the facile explanation provided to me by Rio Mayor Eduardo Paes: “These things happen when you host an Olympics in the developing world.” Instead, we need to understand that Rio’s “state of public calamity” is an extreme version of what happens when the International Olympic Committee (IOC) comes a-calling. We have seen this corruption in city after city that has hosted the games, particularly since 9/11, as spiraling security costs and out-of-control budgets have...
have resigned due to corruption scandals in his first two months in office.) Instead the Olympics will be welcomed by Paes, the comfortably bilingual wheeler-dealer who counts former New York City mayor Michael Bloomberg as a close friend and who will be spending next year teaching at Columbia University.

When I sat with Paes, he hit me with a 35-minute charm offensive. An ashtray filled with cigarette butts in the nonsmoking government building belied his cool exterior. His aide said to me, “The mayor is the only one allowed to smoke… it’s been a long day.”

His stress is understandable. These games, if pulled off successfully, could provide an ambitious politician with a halo at a time when all politicians in Brazil are distrusted and despised. I asked Paes if he believed that Rio is ready for the Olympics and whether it will be a more livable city for workers and the poor afterward. He said, with Truman-esque confidence, “The Olympics are on time, on schedule, and we’re very excited about it.” As for Rio being a livable city? “I have no doubt about it. It’s [already] a much better city.” Reality is posing a challenge to his bluster. Everywhere there is evidence that the Olympics are being used to make the city more unaffordable and more unlivable for the poor.

In May, I visited one of the central “Olympic Legacy” projects: the redevelopment surrounding Rio’s port, with a price tag of 8 billion reals. The aim is to create another tourist center for luxury hotels and condos. Several buildings, to be emblazoned with the word “Trump,” are already under construction. It looks very flashy, very much “for the English to see.” This urban investment has taken an ethnically mixed, cobblestone-paved neighborhood and turned it into what is being called “Little Manhattan.” It brings to mind the friendship between Bloomberg and Paes, as well as Bloomberg’s much-criticized contention that living in a modern city should be akin to having possession of a “luxury product.”

“Little Manhattan” will be anchored by an architecturally breathtaking tourist attraction called the Museum of Tomorrow, which is rich in symbolism of...
the morbid variety: The port-redevelopment project is being built on Brazil's most trafficked 19th-century slave harbor, which is adjacent to a mass unmarked grave for Africans who died during the Middle Passage. Business and political leaders have basically built a Museum of Tomorrow on top of a burial ground of enslaved Africans. This is architecture as historical erasure. A small, privately funded nearby museum is all that marks this history of the enslavement that built Brazil's economy, with parts of the museum's floor covered in glass so you can see the bones of those buried in the grave.

The Museum of Tomorrow is also dedicated in part to a future built on sound environmental principles, and yet it overlooks the Guanabara Bay, a body of water so polluted that the odor offends the nose. Olympic events such as sailing and open-water swimming are due to take place in this putrid slush. It became an international scandal this spring when the Associated Press analyzed its contents and found waterborne virus levels “up to 1.7 million times the level of what would be considered hazardous on a Southern California beach.”

Austrian sailors who practiced briefly in Rio’s waters experienced vomiting, fever, and diarrhea, and had to have IVs—and they were on boats. Imagine the health repercussions for those athletes foolhardy enough to compete in “marathon swimming,” a 10-kilometer open-water race.

Eduardo Paes and Brazil’s elites truly believe that if they make enough cosmetic changes, they can win the foreign press over to a narrative that insists that Rio can still host a successful Olympics, even if the country is experiencing some troubles. But there’s at least one fly in the ointment, one ace in this house of cards, that can expose the fiction. That is a community of 24 families sitting just yards from the Olympic Park, where most of the events will take place: a community called Vila Autódromo.

I’ve been traveling back and forth to Vila Autódromo for four years and have seen it transformed rapidly from a thriving, tightly knit community to a ghost town of Olympics-driven displacement. There were 900 families living here when I first arrived in 2012. Elderly couples sat together in the shade. Stray dogs and cats were cared for collectively with small bowls of food and water. People invited us into their homes, showing off with pride what they had done through their own labors, eager to assert that they did not live in a “slum” and wanted to stay. Now there are only 24 families left, and the entire area looks like a rubble-strewn war zone, with dogs and cats chased out by possum-sized rats. Anti-Paes graffiti, not surprisingly, is everywhere.

Towering over the heads of these remaining residents is a stainless-steel skyscraper that looks like one of those monstrosities recently erected in Miami Beach. The Olympic media center will be located on one of the top floors. The media, then, will be literally right on top of this story. Will they deign to look down and notice?

Vila Autódromo is a critical issue not just because it’s a glaring example of displacement, but because its residents’ struggle to stay has threatened to blow the lid off the Olympic storyline that Paes is selling: that the games are good for the working people of Rio. I ask Paes about Vila Autódromo, and he says bluntly that “it’s a lie” to write that anyone was forced out.

He pauses our interview for five minutes to find a binder filled with petitions signed by people he claimed were Vila residents asking to have their homes demolished so they could be moved to government housing. He says, “I must show you these petitions. It’s even fun. Six hundred families [from Vila Autódromo] came here and said, ‘We want to go to the [government] apartments. We think it’s better.’ So they made this petition saying ‘International NGOs do not represent us, BBC of London does not represent us. We want to leave.’”

Paes then told me that the people fighting for Vila Autódromo “live in [wealthy] places like Ipanema”—that a middle-class left and foreign media have imagined the displacement, and that the overwhelming majority of families are only too happy to take a payout and depart...
for newly built government housing.

As I prepare to leave, Paes reminds me again to tell the world about his “binders of signatures” rebuking “BBC of London” for reporting a “fiction.” His need to reinforce the idea that the former residents of Vila Autódromo were not displaced, but in fact won a golden ticket to government housing, was palpable. Critical to his narrative about the benefits of the Olympics is that the removal be seen not as an injustice but as a civic good. It’s a fight against any evidence that threatens to expose how Olympic projects have actually made the city more unequal and more inhospitable to the poor.

While we say our goodbyes, Paes offers to go with me to speak with the displaced residents to see that they were in fact satisfied with their new life in government housing. I say that was my plan for tomorrow and would love to have his company. His scheduler immediately intervenes and says he is busy. This is probably for the best.

The following day, I go to a recently developed public-housing project called Colônia Juliano Moreira. The land upon which it was built was once a slave plantation, then a mental institution. The people I speak to are furtive, concerned about who might overhear their complaints, but they are clear about what they’d lost in the move from Vila Autódromo. One resident says, “Some months, light and water cost 900 reals total. When you are done paying, what are you going to eat? I’d rather live in worse conditions, without pressures. I’ve seen a person rob another person. But I’ve never seen a country rob someone.” Beyond the financial aspect, the residents talk about losing their sense of community.

We hear more about that lost community when we meet with Jane Nascimento. Formerly a community leader in Vila Autódromo, Nascimento was also relocated to Juliano Moreira after her home was bulldozed last year. The last time I’d seen her was in Vila Autódromo during the 2014 World Cup. At that time, the community had suffered a substantial number of evictions but was still mostly intact, having recently won several legal victories against the city. Residents felt they would be able to stay, and hopes were high. Those residents are now scattered to the wind, and Nascimento doesn’t know where most of them had been relocated.

Nascimento doesn’t think that she now has a home to truly call her own in Juliano Moreira. In fact, she insists on not using her apartment for our interview. During the fight to save the community, she became such a high-profile opponent of city government that she now worries about who might be listening in on her conversations. She doesn’t feel safe, and since losing her home and relocating, she has also struggled with depression. “I don’t trust the city because of what happened,” she says. “And because the city runs the housing development, I don’t really trust anyone here.”

Nascimento only speaks at greater length when we get in a cab en route to what remains of Vila Autódromo. As we drive, she tells me more of her story: that the city offered 200,000 reals (about $61,000) if she would move out of her house. “That’s not enough to buy a decent flat anywhere near Vila Autódromo,” she says. She then entered a months-long negotiation with the city for a better settlement, but the process required legal representation, which she had to pay for out of pocket. As a result, she racked up thousands of dollars in legal debt. The final settlement was unfavorable, and she ended up with an apartment in Juliano Moreira. Others saw how hard this community leader had fought and figured that if Nascimento couldn’t get a decent settlement, they couldn’t either. “It’s really revolting,” she says. “So much
money was spent by the government getting people to leave the community.”

Later we meet some of the holdouts in Vila Autódromo, the 24 families fierce in their desire not to give the local government the satisfaction of leaving, no matter how sweet the carrot, no matter how brutal the stick. I speak to Sandra, who says she is staying because “it’s important to have a place for working people to live in Rio.” She then pauses and says, “They should give out Olympic medals for taking people from their homes.”

We also meet Dalva, an elderly woman who stands straight, one hand on her hip, with a government pamphlet in her other hand about the warning signs for Zika infection. Dalva says to me, “They don’t know how to govern for the people. They govern for the benefit of capitalism. It’s not that we don’t want the Olympics, but they need to respect us. When the famous athletes arrive, they should know the history of where they are going to be. As long as the 20 families stay, the history of Vila Autódromo will live. We fought with our blood.”

Then Dalva pauses and says, “I wish the Olympics had never come.” I ask her if she had ever been able to say that to Paes. She says, “I’ve already told him.... I also told him that I detest him.”

These are the voices of the poorest, least empowered people in the city. They are not from the “BBC of London” or Ipanema, but they have the power to overturn $11.9 billion apple cart by exposing as a lie the idea that the Olympics are a social good.

Vila Autódromo’s story of displacement punctures the official Olympic narrative, but it’s not the only story that accomplishes this. As difficult as it is to inhabit a favela being bulldozed all around you, it can be deadly to live in one under police occupation. This is common for cities hosting the Olympic Games: Militarized police make a staggering show of force in the poorest communities to send the message that the poor had better know their place when the foreigners come to party. In Rio, as budget cuts cripple community patrols, police violence in the favelas is on the rise. According to Amnesty International, “In the city of Rio alone, at least 307 people were killed by the police last year, accounting for one in every five homicides in the city”—a spike of 26 percent over the previous year. And May of this year saw a 135 percent increase in killings by police compared to May of 2015.

This is a dramatic uptick even for communities that are besieged in the most placid of times. The recent spate of killings also undermines one of the central “for the English to see” projects: the “pacification” of the favelas, and efforts by the city to transform them into tourist attractions where Global Northerners can go on “poverty tours” of the unique, largely self-sustaining, but dangerous communities that have developed in Rio over the last century. The message has been “Look at our favelas—they’re so cute and peaceful, you can even bring tourists here!” But it was only a matter of time before policing regressed to the usual ruthless and bloody methods, especially amid budget cuts. The Olympics are just more gasoline on this fire.

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May 2016 saw a 135 percent increase in killings by police compared with May 2015.

Home wreckers: Security guards watch as a house in Vila Autódromo is demolished to make room for Rio’s Olympic Park.

I speak with 17-year-old Brenda Paia and at an antiracist demonstration that I happen upon in front of the city-government building. Paia and others public high school and lives in Realengo, near the Deodoro Olympic complex. She has seen the increased police forces already, along with the abandonment of any pretense at community policing. She says she is anxious about the Summer Games because “they will want to show everyone who is here from abroad for the Olympics: ‘Look, we have security.’ But this is a lie. They want to show that Brazil can protect them—but for us, the population, there will be more violence, more deaths.”

One thing is certain: The efforts by Brazil’s elites to turn the Olympics into a nationalist celebration amid so much injustice won’t go unanswered. I speak with Mario Campagni, an activist with the group Comité Popular da Copa e das Olimpíadas, which has been organizing for five years against the damages wrought by hosting the World Cup and Olympics. Campagni says, “Definitely, definitely, we will have protests.... We are definitely going to the streets. The truth is, it is a battle for the narrative. What is the narrative for the financiers, for the IOC, for Paes, and then what is the narrative for the people of Rio?”

That narrative will have real repercussions for the future of Rio. As City Councilman Jefferson Moura, who is crusading against Olympic corruption, tells me: “Rio is a divided city. The greatest achievement the Olympics could have brought would be if it had made the city less unequal. But, unfortunately, that has not happened. The Olympics have left Rio more divided, more unequal.”

So what will the English see this August in Rio? Today, the Brazilian elite and politicians are in a state of chaos, trying to put a lid on the scandals that are exposing their astounding corruption, while attempting to deal a deathblow to the one national political party—the Workers’ Party—that, however flawed, might still represent some form of popular power. They want to use the Olympics to show the world that all is right (in both senses of that word) in Brazil—nothing to see here but a big party. They can’t deny the crisis, but they hope “the English” will be more on the lookout for mosquitoes (not to mention outstanding athletic feats) than displaced homes. And while articles about Zika, sewage, and government dysfunction flood the sports pages, the infamously corrupt International Olympic Committee will slink off, count its billions, and lick its chops waiting for the next games and the next round of debt, displacement, and despair.

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‘M the ‘Papa Mike’—Military Police,” says the motorcycle cop astride his BMW. He is poised to escort the new Light Rail Vehicle (VLT) tram on its trial run, back and forth from the revamped Marvelous Port with its gleaming, Santiago Calatrava–designed Museum of Tomorrow, through the old center of Rio de Janeiro and into the likely soon-to-be-privatized Santos Dumont Airport. “My orders are to stop people being run over,” he explains as the tram pulls away, past a warning sign that reads: “Watch out! The VLT makes no noise.”

Who could question Mayor Eduardo Paes’s concern for the well-being of the Olympic host city’s pedestrians? Yet those packed into the tram, just as they are jammed every day into buses for the interminable commutes from Rio’s vast working-class periphery, must wonder why such precautions were not taken to avoid the real danger: the bankruptcy of the state of Rio, which has suspended the salaries and pensions of tens of thousands of public-sector workers. Draconian cuts have been made to schools, hospitals, and mass transit while 39 billion reals (some $10 billion) is spent on the Olympics. Two in three Brazilians interviewed this week by Folha de São Paulo said the Olympics have brought more problems than advantages.

Others aboard the escorted tram might wonder why similar protections aren’t afforded to the 3 million workers who have lost their jobs since 2013. The recession, Brazil’s worst ever, has undone decades of progress in poverty reduction in a country whose income inequality shocked the world, back when inequality could still shock. By the end of 2016, the recession will have wiped out roughly 9 percent of the country’s GDP in two years. The economy looks set to contract further, with a full-blown austerity program now officially enshrined in Brasilia under the right-wing caretaker government of Michel Temer, who assumed power in May after what many call a legal coup d’etat.

In many ways, Temer is taking up where the impeached Workers’ Party president, Dilma Rousseff, left off after her conversion to austerity in a disastrous second term. Now, however, the spending cuts are coinciding with a radical privatization program. “They’re applying many of the same policies as Dilma, but unabashedly and with a neoliberal hat on,” says Luiz Eduardo Melin, an economic adviser, in happier times, to Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva’s second government (2007–11). “They will drive the economy into a downward
spiral, but they don’t care because they are not up for reelection.”

Usually in Rio, the depression comes after Carnival, but even before the Olympics’ opening ceremony, “we have the hangover right now,” muses Joel Birman, a psychotherapist who is hard at work in the upscale Gávea district, as Rio’s terrified and neurotic middle classes seek help. For the impoverished masses, the evangelical macro-temples perform a similar function. Here, Brazil’s burgeoning Christian conservatism—a key element of the movement that toppled Rousseff—stealthily builds its base among more than a fifth of the population.

“I found freedom; now I worry only about the afterlife,” says Luis, who is seated in the back row of the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God in the neighborhood of Botafogo. Luis works for 1,500 reais ($500) a month as an assistant cook at a nearby restaurant and spends 200 reals a month on transportation to and from his residence, which is 90 minutes away in the outlying Duque de Caxias. The oil crisis has hit hard there, decimating employment at the local refinery and throughout the industrial hinterland, and wiping out the assets of the stricken, state-owned oil company Petrobras.

Once the jewel in the workers’ party crown, Petrobras was torn asunder by the collapse of the price of oil and a massive, ongoing anticorruption probe. It may now be in the first stage of privatization. In the subterranean meeting rooms under Oscar Niemeyer’s futuristic Congress building in Brasilia, a bill that would open up the exploration of Petrobras’s Atlantic pre-salt reserves to foreign multinationals is making the rounds. The company’s assets in Argentina and Chile are also up for sale. The enormous state-owned development bank BNDES, whose headquarters stands next to the Petrobras skyscraper in downtown Rio, has been forced to sell its stake in companies like Petrobras and the mining conglomerate Vale. In a monumental downsizing, an institution that once lent more money than the World Bank “will be left penniless and will call in loans to Brazilian corporate lenders already in trouble due to the recession,” says Melin. “Once they’re on the edge of bankruptcy, they will be sold to somebody at excellent prices.”

That somebody might be found on Wall Street or in Houston. The Temer government is “trying to create the conditions” for the privatization of Petrobras and of the public banks, Lula warned last week. Petrobras’s new CEO denied the charge, stating that “I don’t believe Brazilian society is mature enough” for a full-blown sell-off of the most valuable state assets in Latin America. International investors, meanwhile, are maturely preparing for this fire sale. “Because the recession has affected company profits, assets can be acquired at prices that are more attractive for buyers,” advised a new report by the Atlantic Council in Washington, cheerfully titled “Oil and Gas in Brazil: A New Silver Lining.”

The sell-offs—which also include airports and the postal service—will cosmically lower Brazil’s budget deficit, which at 10 percent is driving up public debt. Yet as University of São Paulo economist Laura Carvalho has warned, fire-sale privatization will worsen public finances in the long run as dividends to the state disappear: “This is a trick of fiscal illusionism; even the IMF knows that,” Carvalho says.

The irony is rarely acknowledged in the Brazilian me-

dia, but Rousseff’s impeachment was allegedly brought on by her administration’s use of the pedalada, a common and innocuous accounting technique, to temporarily reduce the deficit. (The term refers to the intricate fast-stepping used by Brazilian soccer players to deceive an opponent.) Last month, a special impeachment committee in the Brazilian Senate ruled that using the pedalada was not, in fact, an impeachable offense. Yet there is little chance that the Senate will reverse itself in its second impeachment vote in August. “The committee’s decision makes no difference at all—this is a soft, parliamentary coup, and the pedalada was just a pretext,” says Vladimir Safatle, a philosopher at the University of São Paulo.

Under pressure from the once-powerful industrial confederation FIESP, which bankrolled the impeachment movement, Finance Minister Henrique Meirelles has backed off his promises to raise taxes and will instead place the burden of the austerity program on further cuts to public spending and investment. This would threaten the very foundation of the Workers’ Party’s antipoverty program. One proposal would condition the funding of already beleaguered state and local governments on their ability to reduce the number of poor families receiving the antipoverty subsidy. Worse, a new proposed bill would set constitutional limits on spending, locking in austerity ad infinitum and eliminating the minimum allocation for education and health.

The financial markets are delighted by all of this. The most profitable investments in the world for the past six months have been the BM&F IBOVESPA share index in São Paulo and the real, which has appreciated about 20 percent since its low in 2015. Mainstream forecasters like the IMF trust that the economy has bottomed out and will begin to recover next year. Bank profits—led by the pro-impeachment bank Itau, the largest in Latin America—have soared as Brazil’s stratospheric interest rates offer lucrative opportunities for speculation (dubbed “proprietary trading”) in the government-debt market. “Dilma’s downfall was sealed when she tried to use public banks… to force banks to cut their interest rates,” says an economist at BNDES.

The left is now divided between those who think Lula—still the most popular politician in Brazil—can drag the corpse of the Workers’ Party to electoral victory in 2018, and those who favor building an alternative. “Lula could still do it, if they don’t put him in prison,” says the BNDES economist, referring to the Petrobras corruption probe. Even if the former president avoids going to trial, Lula needs a party to lead, and the Workers’ Party’s existence may not be a given after the upcoming municipal elections in October, which will include 20 million voters in the megalopolises of Rio and São Paulo. “Their only argument is to create fear of what the right will do; they have no alternative program,” says Safatle.

For some, the best hope for the left may be for Marcelo Freixo, the young socialist candidate, to succeed Paes as mayor of Rio. “Freixo should be the priority now,” says Tânia, a Workers’ Party voter in Rio who was brought up in exile in Paris during the country’s years of military dictatorship. “There’s no point in wasting time on Dilma and Lula.”
Slow Food Nation

How Brazil challenged the junk-food industry and became a global leader in the battle against obesity.

by BRIDGET HUBER
CARLOS MONTEIRO GOTT HIS START IN MEDICINE IN THE 1970S AS A PEDIATRICIAN WORKING IN POOR VILLAGES and slums in the state of São Paulo, Brazil. His patients were hungry, and it was written on their bodies: Many were anemic, underweight, and stunted. Today, Monteiro is a professor of nutrition at the University of São Paulo's School of Public Health, a stately building surrounded by lush gardens. It's a long way—figuratively, at least—from the shantytowns where he trained. His career has done a 180, too. Monteiro's early research focused on malnutrition, but now he's mostly occupied with the opposite problem: Brazilians, like most of their neighbors in the Americas, have gotten fat.

Over the course of his career, Monteiro, a lanky man with salt-and-pepper curls, has seen a public-health crisis emerge. In the mid-1970s, less than 3 percent of men and 8 percent of women in Brazil were obese. Today, almost 18 percent of adults are obese and more than half are overweight, according to the Ministry of Health, and the rates of chronic, diet-related diseases like diabetes and some cancers have grown. Monteiro has spent years parsing the data on what Brazilians eat; the most salient change he's seen is the shift from eating foods you can prepare in an ordinary kitchen to what he calls “ultraprocessed products”—highly palatable admixtures of synthetic flavorings and cheap commodity ingredients that require little, if any, cooking. In other words, instant noodles, soda, and processed meats are edging out staples like beans and rice, cassava, and fresh produce.

“The local food system is being replaced by a food system that is controlled by transnational corporations,” Monteiro says. Monteiro, who takes a broad view of nutrition, says this dietary deterioration doesn’t just harm bodily health but also the environment, local economies, and Brazil’s rich food traditions. “We are seeing a battle for the consumer,” he adds.

Over the last 30 years, big transnational food companies have aggressively expanded into Latin America. Taking advantage of economic reforms that opened markets, they’ve courted a consumer class that has grown in size due to generally increasing prosperity and to antipoverty efforts like minimum-wage increases and cash transfers for poor families. And as sales of highly processed foods and drinks have plateaued (and even fallen, in the case of soda) in the United States and other rich countries, Latin America has become a key market. Between 2000 and 2013, soda sales in the region doubled. At the same time, the sales of ultraprocessed foods increased by nearly 50 percent, even as they rose just 2.3 percent in the United States and Canada.

Monteiro is part of a cadre of leaders who, in the face of this onslaught, are turning Latin America into a sort of food-policy laboratory. Some of the reforms they’ve enacted have also been proposed in the United States, but have been thwarted by the food industry and its political allies. Mexico, for example, enacted a tax on sugary beverages and junk food in 2014. Chile also taxes soda, and, like Ecuador, requires warning labels on unhealthy foods. Chile and Peru have also passed laws designed to strictly curtail the advertising of unhealthy foods.

Brazil, for its part, is a bit of a two-headed monster. On the one hand, its government has invested heavily in industrial agriculture, helping Brazil become one of the world’s largest exporters of soy and beef (as well as the top user of pesticides on the planet). But over the last dozen or so years, Brazil has also made huge progress against poverty and food insecurity while supporting the family farmers who produce 70 percent of the food that Brazilians eat. In 2014, the United Nations removed Brazil from its Hunger Map. It gave much of the credit to the zero-hunger policies of President Luiz Inácio “Lula” da Silva, who put ending hunger and poverty at the center of his agenda, building on strong social movements that had coalesced around nutrition issues and agrarian reform.

In recent years, Brazil has inscribed the right to food in its Constitution and reformed its federal school-lunch program to broaden its reach while bolstering local farms. And in 2014, the Ministry of Health released new dietary guidelines that made healthy-food advocates across the world swoon. Monteiro helped lead the team that wrote them; the guidelines transcend a traditional nutrition-science frame to consider the social, cultural, and ecological dimensions of what people eat. They also focus on the pleasure that comes from cooking and sharing meals and frankly address the connections between what we eat and the environment.

This is precisely the kind of holistic, unambiguous advice that US food reformers hoped to see in our new dietary guidelines, which were released in January. But for the most part, the latest version—which influences billions of dollars in government spending, the $5 trillion food industry, and the diets of millions of Americans—remains vague and narrowly focused, ensuring that no corporate ox was gored.

Nutrition advocates across the world are watching to see how these efforts play out in Brazil and elsewhere in Latin America. But there are strong headwinds. In Brazil, where some on the left have called the removal of President Dilma Rousseff “a coup against the poor,” there are worries that the country’s progress on hunger and food policy may unravel. Even before Rousseff’s suspension, the food movement was calling for more regulations and stronger action on land reform. It also called for stronger action to address the stubborn pockets of hunger in indigenous and other marginalized communities, says Maria Emília Pacheco, the head of the National Food Security and Nutrition Council (CONSEA), an influential group involved in making and monitoring policy that includes members of civil society and the government. Now, Pacheco warns, the neoliberal proclivities and austerity agenda of acting President Michel Temer could make it harder for the poor to afford healthy food, harm family farmers, or even put Brazil back on the Hunger Map.

Temer has already made some troubling moves. He sparked outrage when he eliminated the Ministry of Agrarian Development, which was dedicated to land reform and promoting family farming, distributing its duties among other agencies. His appointee for the Ministry of Agriculture is a soybean baron who has proposed weakening the legal definition of working conditions that constitute modern-day slavery.

Still, despite worries, there have been no big cuts to
Bolsa Família—the welfare program that gives cash to some 14 million poor households monthly—though a Cabinet member has said the rolls will be closely examined for fraud and could shrink by as much as 10 percent. And in July, Temer announced an increase in families’ payments that actually surpasses the one Rousseff promised last spring. At the same time, while Temer’s antitax stance makes it unlikely that Brazil will get a Mexico-style soda tax on his watch, the interim health minister did recently announce that the ministry is banning the sale of unhealthy ultraprocessed products in its offices and in the hospitals it administers, which include Brazil’s National Cancer Institute.

As many people I spoke with pointedly reminded me, Rousseff’s fate is not yet decided. But at least one thing is clear: Whatever the political outcome, Latin America’s food industry isn’t backing down. In recent years, in fact, it has been increasingly organized, fighting regulations in an ever more coordinated way. Trade groups from several countries have banded together as the Latin American Food and Beverage Alliance, and have been joined by the powerful US-based Grocery Manufacturers Association, which has fought efforts to ban soda sales at schools and restrict food advertising that targets children. The alliance opposes taxes and marketing restrictions that authorities like the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) recommend, instead advocating voluntary measures that health experts say are often inadequate and impossible to enforce.

“We are in a very intense time, in terms of food and nutrition in Latin America,” says Enrique Jacoby, a physician who served as Peru’s vice minister of health and also worked on food policy for years at PAHO. Jacoby says that reform efforts have been generally popular, particularly when framed as protecting children. But the industry has had some big wins, successfully weakening proposed rules or stalling them with legal challenges. “The food industry is fighting fiercely to prevail,” Jacoby says.

On a hot afternoon in the industrial city of Guarulhos, Maria de Lourdes Coelho huffs a little as she pushes her cart up a steep grade. Coelho is a door-to-door saleswoman for Nestlé, one of about 6,000 nationwide. Nestlé began deploying these sellers 10 years ago as a way to get its products—things like yogurt, candy bars, and instant noodles—into the hands of lower-income consumers. At the top of the hill, Coelho’s customers, a young couple with a toddler, are waiting. They ordered two variety packs of sweetened yogurts and puddings; the man says his daughter asks for the yogurt by name.

“Say, ’Na-no-ni-no,’” he coaches the little girl. “Na-no-ni-no...” He’s trying to get her to say “Dannon,” which is actually the name of a product sold by Nestlé’s competitor Dannon, but the word has become shorthand for a thick, sweet yogurt that comes in tiny cups and is adored by little kids. The baby, alas, has stage fright, so the father gives up and pays Coelho.

Heading downhill, Coelho says, “That was a good sale.” Customers don’t have to pay right when they get the product; the retail model caters to poorer customers by giving them two weeks to pay. (Unfortunately for Coelho, it’s the sellers who eat the loss if customers default.) The model is particularly popular on the urban periphery, where there are few supermarkets. Nestlé entices customers with gifts like cell-phone minutes and Frozen-themed backpacks.

As the door-to-door sales helped Nestlé reach new customers in the city, the company turned in 2010 to the Amazon region, where it launched a floating supermarket. The boat—christened the “junk-food barge” by detractors—docks in riverside communities and sells a range of Nestlé products, often in smaller, cheaper packages than are typically found in grocery stores. Nestlé representatives would not provide me with any information about the boat’s location, saying only that the program is “currently being revised.” They did, however, say that its door-to-door sales and floating supermarket—emblazoned with the words “Nestlé comes to you!”—help meet consumer demand and create jobs, many of them for women.

The image of Nestlé’s big blue boat steaming along the Amazon River is an apt, if unsubtle, illustration of the way that Brazilian diets have changed during Monteiro’s career. As he has watched manufactured food products displace cooked foods, he’s come to believe that nutritionists need to overhaul the way they think and talk about healthy diets.

Comparing data on grocery spending by households in 1987 and 2003, Monteiro noticed something curious. Sales of table sugar and soy oil, which had accounted for much of the fat andadded sugar in people’s diets, were down. That fit nicely with the diet advice nutritionists were giving at the time. But the rates at which Brazilians were being measured as obese or overweight were still on the rise. The data also showed that people were consuming less beans, rice, milk, eggs, flour, and produce.

So what were they eating? Foods that came ready to eat or nearly so. Households consumed more than twice as much processed meat and dairy—such as sausages and sweet milky drinks—in 2003 as they did in 1987. Soda consumption doubled, and purchases of “cereal products” like bread and cookies had also increased.

Monteiro came to believe that nutritionists’ traditional focus on food groups and nutrients like fat, sugar, and protein had become obsolete. The more meaningful distinction, he started to argue, is in how the food is made. Monteiro is most concerned with the “ultraprocessed products”—those that are manufactured largely from industrial ingredients like palm oil, corn syrup, and artificial flavorings and typically replace foods that are eaten fresh or cooked. Even by traditional nutritionists’ criteria, these sorts of products are considered unhealthy—they tend to be high in fat, sugar, and salt. But Monteiro argues that ultraprocessed foods have other things in common: They encourage overeating, both because they are engineered by food scientists to induce cravings and because manufacturers spend lavishly on marketing.

The focus on processing also widens to include issues like social norms and the environment, which have typically fallen outside the purview of nutrition science. Many processed foods are made to be eaten on the run or as snacks, which erodes the tradition of family meals. And the manufacture of these products is tied to the industrial farming of staples like corn and soy instead of the produce of family farmers, says Fabio Gomes, a nutritional adviser at PAHO who has collaborated with Monteiro.

Since defining the term “ultraprocessed products,” Monteiro and his colleagues have published papers sug-
gesting that people whose diets contain a larger proportion of them are more likely to be overweight or obese, though studies like these can’t determine causality. A recent PAHO report looked at data from 14 countries and found that, as a country’s per-capita sales of ultraprocessed products rose, so did its obesity rates.

But even if the data suggest that ultraprocessed products are driving the increased obesity rates, where does that leave the average consumer? Many families can’t afford to return to a time when one person stayed home and cooked for everyone, even if they wanted to.

But Monteiro says the demands of modern life don’t have to mean abandoning real food. He points to Brazil’s ubiquitous per-kilo restaurants, which serve fresh home-style dishes to diners who pay by weight. There are also opportunities to bring more fresh food into institutional settings like schools, hospitals, and the military.

Lorena Rodriguez, who leads the food-and-nutrition department in Chile’s Health Ministry, says she’s been deeply influenced by Monteiro’s work. Like him, she promotes cooking, but says no one is trying to return to a time when women had no choice but to serve as the family’s cook. Nutrition educators have been working with communities to start a dialogue not just about how people should eat, but how they should share the responsibility. “This is the work of everyone,” she says. “It is not that we women are going to return to the kitchen. We are all going back to the kitchen together.”

Monteiro spends a lot of time looking at what’s wrong with the Brazilian diet, but says some things are headed in the right direction. Brazil’s school-lunch policy, which has become central to addressing hunger and poverty, is “an example for the world,” he says: Students get healthy meals, while family farmers, who are often at risk of poverty themselves, get access to a huge and consistent market.

To see for myself, I visit a public school in São Paulo’s Perus district. In one of the school’s two kitchens, a pressure cooker hisses steam while four cooks crack eggs and chop sweet potatoes and zucchini. The day’s menu: vegetable frittata with beans and rice.

As she washes bunches of parsley, Sonia Silvia dos Santos tells me the cooks make almost everything from scratch. They cut up big slabs of meat and whole chickens and use very few ultraprocessed ingredients. Even bouillon cubes are verboten: “Just onion, garlic, salt, and parsley,” she says. “Natural things.”

Brazilian law guarantees each public-school student—from nursery school to adult education—at least one free meal each day and also stipulates that 70 percent of federal school-lunch funds must go to basic foodstuffs that are natural or not highly processed. Lula’s administration improved the nutritional quality of meals and, in 2009, passed a law requiring that 30 percent of federal school-lunch funds be spent on food produced by family farmers, with preference given to indigenous farmers, descendants of slaves, and beneficiaries of agrarian reform. The support of the food movement, which has become broader and stronger over the last decade, was crucial in getting the law passed. And today, public participation remains central: the law requires that councils made up of parents, students, and government representatives monitor school-lunch programs to make sure they’re providing safe, healthy meals and spending the money properly.

Once lunch is served, a group of students sits at a table with their teacher, Shirley Suarez do Carmo. She cajoles a few kids into trying the frittata. “Sometimes kids don’t want to try things,” she says. “But when they see their teacher eating it, they want to try it, too.”

The scene in this lunchroom is pretty idyllic, but not all students are so lucky. Some schools aren’t buying as much from small farmers as the law requires (though other districts are surpassing the minimum). And Brazil’s school-lunch program hasn’t been immune to corruption—in fact, Temer’s current transportation minister was convicted in 2014 of improperly diverting school-lunch funds. A “school-lunch mafia” is under investigation in São Paulo state for allegedly running a kickback scheme in which a farm cooperative would overcharge the state and some municipalities, then pay “tips” to officials.

Still, the school-lunch law has been “a revolution” for family farmers, says Serge Dominguez de Ramos. Dominguez works for a cooperative that has been supplying the school district with bananas for the last year and a half. The co-op’s 1,500 families have seen their income more than double, and there’s new hope that the family-farm sector, after struggling for years, may be viable after all. “Before, farmers were going to the cities, and they were earning the minimum of the minimum because they didn’t have an education,” Dominguez says. “Now, they’re coming back to the countryside.”

Many of the principles that underlie Brazil’s school-lunch program—the focus on real food, the cultural importance of meals, and the support for family farmers—formed the bedrock of Brazil’s nutritional guide, released in 2014. The resulting document went far beyond typical dietary advice, prompting gushing headlines like this one from Vox: “Brazil has the best nutritional guidelines in the world.”

Having worked closely with Monteiro on nutrition issues for years, the Health Ministry contracted him and a
group of his colleagues and graduate students to write the guide. Early on, the group decided to address the public, not just nutritionists. “People don’t need to understand the difference between saturated fats and unsaturated fats,” Monteiro says. “We don’t think normal people will decide what to eat based on nutrients.”

The guide recommends avoiding ultraprocessed foods and gives a detailed description of how these products harm physical health, social life, and the environment. Given the food industry’s power, it was a “courageous” move, says CONSEA’s Pacheco, who gave feedback on the guidelines, which were also open to public comment. While she would have liked to have seen more attention paid to regional food differences and the way food choices can affect biodiversity, Pacheco considers the guide “an important step forward.”

I pleasure is an essential part of the new guide, which frames cooking as a time to enjoy with family and friends, not a burden. And instead of sterile prescriptions for the number of grams of fat and fiber to eat each day, the guide focuses on meals. Sample meals were created by looking at the food habits of Brazilians who eat the lowest amount of ultraprocessed foods. One dinner option is a vegetable soup followed by a bowl of acai pulp with cassava flour, as one might eat in the Amazon region. Another plate, more typical of São Paulo, is spaghetti, chicken, and salad. If these seem like ordinary meals, that would be the point, one of the researchers said: They wanted to counteract the idea that a “healthy” diet is one full of unfamiliar and even unpleasant foods.

A big difference between the Brazilian and US guidelines is the way they handle the question of sustainability. The Brazilian guide defines healthy diets as those that “derive from socially and environmentally sustainable food systems,” and it warns that family farms—one such sustainable system—are being displaced by industrialized farms reliant on mechanization and monoculture. The guide also addresses the environmental impact of one of Brazil’s main exports: beef. While it doesn’t criticize the meat industry as strongly as it does ultraprocessed foods, the guide encourages a diet based mainly on plants, stating that limiting foods derived from animals will reduce greenhouse-gas emissions, deforestation, and water use.

The US guidelines, on the other hand, make no mention of sustainability. The expert panel that advised the Departments of Agriculture and Health and Human Services, which formulated the guidelines, recommended that sustainability be addressed, particularly in relation to meat consumption. But the powerful meat industry launched a lobbying campaign that ultimately kept sustainability concerns out of the guidelines.

Barry Popkin, a nutrition researcher at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, and a longtime collaborator of Monteiro’s, says Brazil’s guidelines are “very interesting and very ambitious,” but he doesn’t think they’ll cause much change on their own, since people all over the world are eating more ultraprocessed foods, not less. “Can you just stop it with guidelines like Carlos’s?” he asks. “No, you have to do serious things.”

Among the “serious things” Popkin wants to see are higher taxes on sugary drinks and restrictions on kid-targeted advertising—measures that Monteiro also favors. But even if the guidelines don’t have legal weight themselves, PAHÓ’s Gomes says they lay the groundwork for policymaking that will have the force of law.

In the past, Brazil has tried to enact more ambitious policy changes, like a 2006 proposal that would have limited food advertising directed at children and required warnings on ads for unhealthy foods. A weakened version was adopted in 2010, only to be stalled by industry opposition. The industry has also managed to weaken or forestall regulations in other countries, says Jacoby, although this opposition was fairly uncoordinated at the regional level until about three years ago, when the Latin American Food and Beverage Alliance was formed.

Mary Sophos, the senior vice president of government affairs at the Grocery Manufacturers Association, says that she can’t speak for the other alliance members. But she does describe her own group’s approach to regulations, which is echoed in alliance documents: “We think the most important thing is that the rules and regulations or guidelines be science-based. The obesity crisis is real and it needs a solution, so if we could stick to science- and evidence-based policies, we are more likely to make progress.”

Sophos declined to give examples of specific healthy-eating policies that are not based in science, saying the question is “too much of a hypothetical.” Asked to respond to this critique, Monteiro’s irritation is clear. After reiterating his credentials as a physician, a nutritionist, and a researcher with 40 years’ experience and some 200 scientific papers published, he says: “I know what science is. They are not the ones that should be questioning whether our research is science-based or not. They simply don’t have the authority.”

The battle over food policy in Latin America is likely to continue—and it could have repercussions worldwide. Health advocates in many countries have been watching Mexico’s soda tax closely, and Jacoby says he expects to see similar taxes proposed elsewhere in Latin America. When Berkeley, California, became the first US city to institute a soda tax, in 2014, campaigners drew heavily on the Mexican experience. In June of this year, Philadelphia became the second city to adopt a soda tax.

But Popkin says that it is lower- and middle-income countries that will continue to lead on food-policy reform, and he cites new efforts in Chile, Thailand, India, and South Africa as particularly promising. “There’s no high-income country in the world that’s doing much,” he says, adding that economics is a big part of the reason. While the United States has managed to largely ignore the huge costs of diet-related diseases, lower- and middle-income countries don’t have that luxury.

There are social reasons, too, Monteiro points out. Brazil’s dietary guidelines had strong support in the healthy-food movement, in part because it was involved in their creation. When the food industry tried to block the guide’s release, this support saved it. “Without this, it would have been impossible,” he says.

And even though traditional diets are threatened by the rapid rise of junk food, no Latin American country has lost its food traditions altogether. “In Latin America, we still cook. We love our culinary traditions,” says Jacoby, whose own country, Peru, has a food culture that’s deep and beloved. Even so, he emphasizes, this culture has to be defended. “It took us probably 500 or 600 years to create these food traditions. But the food industry could come and destroy this all in 10 years.”
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The Future of Philanthropy

Is a new gospel of giving on the rise?

Foreword by
Leah Hunt-Hendrix of Solidaire
and
Jee Kim of the Ford Foundation

Philanthropy, in its current institutional form, is only about a century old. Since its inception, both donors and the larger public have debated how individuals can deploy their accumulated wealth to serve the greater good. In fact, the discussion of institutional philanthropy’s role in society, and its relationship to government and markets, was much more heated during the early 20th century. In 1910, when John D. Rockefeller attempted to obtain a federal charter to establish his foundation, Congress turned him down. (He had more success with the New York State Legislature, which granted him a state charter in 1913.) In 1912, the Commission on Industrial Relations recommended that the Rockefeller Foundation be regulated or shut down entirely, arguing that “the domination by the men in whose hands the final control of a large part of American industry rests is not limited to their employees, but is being rapidly extended to control the education and ‘social service’ of the Nation.”

Over 100 years later, the field of philanthropy still wrestles with these important questions, debating the legal frameworks and tax regimes that govern foundations; the diversity of their boards and staff; their democracy in decision-making; and the alignment of their endowments with their program values and goals. In our current Gilded Age, marked by the accumulation of vast fortunes and a new generation of donors who occupy increasingly significant positions in civil society, it’s no coincidence that the big questions about philanthropy’s appropriate role are being rekindled. As Gara LaMarche asks in his online journal De-
There were disagreements at the time about the best way to combat the persecution of... — Author
most philanthropic organizations focused on accumulating more wealth for their endowments rather than on putting themselves out of business in the name of ending wealth inequality.

Philanthropy was originally created as a mechanism to keep control in the hands of the wealthy, and it has largely stayed that way: Up until 1969, the wealthy could put their money in a foundation—making it exempt from taxes—but were not required to give any of it away. Even though foundations are now mandated to spend or disburse a minimum of 5 percent of their total assets each year, the small minority of trustees and board members controls where all that wealth goes.

While a small but growing number of foundations practice social-justice philanthropy, most philanthropists are simply not in the business of confronting the economic inequality that undergirds their power. The vast majority of foundation giving serves as a tax write-off for the wealthy, and it's often directed at shoring up an individual's or family's influence culturally, professionally, and politically—not creating deep systemic change. According to the National Committee for Responsive Philanthropy, a mere 14 percent of annual foundation funding goes to “social change,” which it defines broadly as “work for structural change in order to increase the opportunity of those who are the least well off politically, economically and socially.”

The fundamental problem, though, is that philanthropy is voluntary. It is not a long-term solution to society’s ills to rely on the benevolence of the wealthy, even those who are focused on social-justice philanthropy and ending economic inequality.

Instead, we must organize to confront and change the cultural and economic systems that perpetuate economic inequality. By “we,” I mean those of us with wealth and existing foundations. Our long-term goal should be to put ourselves out of business. This means organizing to confront systemic oppression, such as racially segregated and policed communities, and addressing the 1 percent of the world’s population that now has over 50 percent of the world’s wealth. Grassroots groups are building power every day for this purpose. If philanthropy doesn’t join them, we will be on the wrong side of history.

What to do? While the government is far from perfect, the resources currently being accumulated by the wealthy few should be redirected into public coffers to build a robust social infrastructure for all. Higher taxes on financial transactions and capital gains, and the closing of loopholes like those currently used for carried interest and offshore accounts, would go a long way toward redistributing wealth from one class to the broader public. So would other mandates like raising the minimum wage and requiring an annual payout higher than 5 percent for foundations. Such changes wouldn’t be unprecedented: A few decades ago, the requirement was 7 percent, which meant millions of more dollars being circulated, though it still wasn’t enough. We could even consider legislation requiring foundations to share the power and decision-making over where and how their philanthropic dollars are spent with the people who are directly affected by economic injustice. Many social-
justice funders already do this, but legally requiring the presence of nonwealthy people on foundation boards would produce a real sea change.

In the end, the real issue is that the wealth in foundations shouldn’t all be theirs to begin with. This country was founded on the genocide of Native Americans and the forced labor of enslaved Africans. The stolen land, stolen labor, and stolen lives served to amass resources for mostly white European men. That is the history of wealth accumulation in the United States, and we need to face it squarely.

And yet our culture reinforces the myth that wealth is accumulated through the hard work of extraordinary individuals (again, disproportionately white men) who deserve every penny, when the reality is anything but. Wealth is generated from the hard work of ordinary individuals, who labor and produce or grant access to their land—or have it taken from them. It’s not that those who are accumulating wealth don’t work hard to get it or maintain it. It’s that, if the myth of meritocracy were true, there would not be millions of working poor people who struggle through multiple jobs or work over 40 hours a week just to scrape by.

Calling into question the very myths that uphold wealth accumulation and class privilege allows us to reckon with the ways that wealthy people are given unfair boosts in our society. Without recognizing that philanthropy is one of those boosts, we’ll be hard-pressed to actually address wealth inequality as we know it.

The Policy Maker
Philanthropic dollars must change public policy.

STEVE PHILLIPS,
COFOUNDER OF POWERPAC+

The introduction to this forum notes that Andrew Carnegie, in his essay “The Gospel of Wealth,” described massive inequality “as the unavoidable consequence of a free-market system.” But Carnegie was quite wrong about inequality being “unavoidable.” Progressives should proceed with caution in heeding his treatise, which argued that the economy was operating just fine and that philanthropists merely needed to give charity to those at the bottom. Carnegie offered an implicit justification for a history of racial injustice, while ignoring the fact that inequality in America—especially the profound inequality between racial groups—is a direct result of deliberate public-policy decisions.

The violent and bloody seizure of this land from its indigenous inhabitants, the creation and enforcement of chattel slavery to generate wealth for a few, the abandonment of Reconstruction-era reforms designed to compensate the victims of slavery, the intentional exclusion of agricultural and domestic workers from the Social Security Act, the practice of racially restricting access to the billions of dollars’ worth of benefits provided by the GI Bill and federal home-loan guarantees of the mid-20th century, and the legal tolerance of racial discrimination in private-sector employment and hiring until the passage of the Civil Rights Act in 1964—all of these were official policies and actions of the US government. Those policies created the inequality that is plaguing America today.

Thus, the most effective way to eliminate inequality is by changing public policy. From a leverage standpoint, far more money can be moved by changing policies than by making individual grants.

Consider one simple policy change that could end poverty in America: implementing a wealth tax on the richest 1 percent of Americans. The collective assets of the top 1 percent—those whose net worth exceeds $18 million—is $23 trillion. Requiring this small cohort of the population to pay a 2 percent tax on their assets would generate about $500 billion per year—six times the total net worth of billionaire philanthropist Bill Gates. Given that the average stock-market return since 1928 has been 11 percent, a 2 percent tax shouldn’t diminish anyone’s net worth; we’d merely be asking them to get even richer a little more slowly. The think tank Demos has calculated that bringing every person in America above the poverty line would cost $193 billion.

Philanthropists can advance such a policy revolution in three significant ways. First, they can influence public opinion by lending their prestige and credibility to the concept. If the nation’s wealthiest people publicly supported a tax on themselves and their peers, it would generate considerable political will for the passage of such a policy.

Second, philanthropists can encourage their grantees to take full advantage of the existing tax-code provisions that allow 501(c)(3) organizations to engage in limited lobbying. The 501(h) provision of the tax code allows nonprofits to use 20 percent of their funds for advocacy. America’s nonprofits collectively spend more than $300 billion per year, and 20 percent of that total could move billions into improving public policy. (Over the medium term, philanthropists should pursue eliminating all restrictions on lobbying by nonprofits: Why can’t charities communicate with their elected representatives in the first place?)

The third strategic step that philanthropists can take to advance public-policy reform is to support efforts to change the makeup of the voting population so that it reflects the true demographics of this country. The electorate is still significantly whiter than the population as a whole, and this stems from immigration policy as well as antidemocratic obstacles to electoral participation. Democratic reforms like online and automatic voter registration can eliminate such hurdles. And while we wait and work for comprehensive immigration reform, there are 9 million immigrants (mainly people of color) who could become voting citizens simply through naturalization. One of the major barriers to becoming naturalized is the prohibitive cost of the $680 application fee; a philanthropic fund of $10 million per year could help bring millions of people of color into the process of electing our policy makers.
Andrew Carnegie made a significant contribution in his day by challenging his contemporaries to become philanthropic rather than hoarding their money to spend on private consumption. Today’s philanthropists can bring about changes that Carnegie never dreamed of by focusing their time, talent, and resources on emending our nation’s public policies to redress and abolish the inequality that they have caused and maintained over the past 400 years.

The Advocate
A bright new generation battles inequality.

DARREN WALKER,
President of the Ford Foundation

When I first shared the foundation’s statement “Toward a New Gospel of Wealth” in October 2015, I had hoped we might kindle a larger conversation (like this one) about the complex relationship between philanthropy and inequality. What I didn’t entirely anticipate—and have been deeply gratified to see—are the numerous ways that our colleagues across philanthropy are not just preaching but practicing this new gospel of giving.

We see it in the work of new philanthropists like Cari Tuna and Dustin Moskovitz. We see it in Leonardo DiCaprio’s bold commitment to those most vulnerable in the face of climate change. We see it in the inspiring commitments of Priscilla Chan and Mark Zuckerberg. Indeed, we see it in an entire generation of philanthropists—visionaries committed to driving social justice by putting grantees and beneficiaries behind the wheel.

This is an extremely exciting moment for philanthropy. The injection of new ideas, new institutions, new money, and new technology all contribute to my own optimism that our sector will continue to build on the progress of the last several decades.

Moreover, this is a pivotal time in our national (and global) conversation about—and our evolving consciousness of—inequality. During this presidential season alone, we’ve seen the rise of populism on both the left and the right—a clear reaction to the unprecedented levels of inequality afflicting both our country and the world. We’ve also seen polls showing that dissatisfaction with the capitalist system is on the rise, particularly among young people—a reminder that these frustrations will only continue, if not increase, in the coming years. This discontent will inevitably (and necessarily) raise hard questions that all of us must be prepared to answer.

At the same time, as more people—particularly in positions of power—become more comfortable addressing this crisis of inequality in all its forms, our chances of disrupting this pervasive imbalance improve.

For institutions like the Ford Foundation, which have accumulated large amounts of capital since their founding, we must find new ways to leverage that capital for positive social and financial outcomes. Right now, the foundation is investigating how we might make our endowment strategy align with our program strategy.

For the new generation of donors, this is a tremendous opportunity to get in front of questions about how philanthropy and our economic system intertwine, and to find new ways forward.

Ultimately, the “New Gospel of Wealth” calls on all of us to think differently about how philanthropy operates in the 21st century. New and established institutional donors alike must take this opportunity to evolve our philanthropic enterprise to grapple with the many challenges that we see in our sector, and our world. I could not be more thrilled by—or more hopeful for—the work we’ll do together in the years ahead, or to see this “New Gospel” increasingly preached and practiced across philanthropy.

The Nerd
You don’t need to make a killing to make a difference.

CRAIG NEWMARK,
Founder of Craigslist

The current models of big philanthropy focus on accumulating massive wealth, followed by the charitable contribution of a very small percentage of that wealth. I’ve practiced a different model, one that’s focused on a commitment to fairness and doing right by others. My philosophy has two basic tenets: First, stay focused on making a difference rather than making a killing. Second, if you’re lucky enough to do well, keep sending the elevator back down.

In 1997, my hobby—something called Craigslist—was doing well enough that folks representing Microsoft Sidewalk offered me significant cash to run banner ads. I figured that I was already doing well enough as a contract software developer and reflected on what I used to call my “nerd values”—namely, that one should make enough to care for family, friends, and oneself (with the occasional luxury thrown in), and that one should do something to make a difference.

I declined Microsoft’s offer.

In early 1999, venture capitalists and bankers suggested a conventional monetization strategy for Craigslist. If I had accepted one, they promised to invest lavishly in my company. But since I’d already done very well, I figured enough was enough. Most likely, the people posting ads on Craigslist could spend their money better than I could. They were better off keeping it to support their families rather than starting to pay me for a service that had been free, thereby increasing my profits, and then hoping I’d give back by making charitable contributions.

The minimal monetization of our site meant no huge windfall profits. And it’s been just fine. That no-making-a-killing approach evolved into a business model that you might call “doing well by doing good.” The good was a free, accessible marketplace that
helped people buy a table, put food on that table, and find a roof to put the table under.

And even as I was doing well for family, friends, and myself, I was sending the elevator back down. With my philanthropic initiative, Craigconnects.org, I can find good people accomplishing good things and then help them by offering ongoing social-media support and my personal involvement. Cash and photo ops are easy (and important), but the ongoing involvement is more serious. I’m currently involved in working with veterans and military families, boosting women in tech, supporting voting rights where they’re at risk, increasing peer-to-peer funding, and backing worthwhile journalism, since as I’ve argued in the past, a trustworthy press is “the immune system of democracy.”

This combination of ethical business practices (treating people the way I’d like to be treated on the way up) and philanthropic contributions (sending that elevator back down) is my effort to reflect the simple sense of fairness I learned as a kid. I think it’s a pretty good model for a new philanthropy, and I hope that others in Silicon Valley join me.

**The Tactical Investors**

*Put your money where your mouth is.*

**NEVA GOODWIN,**
 Codirector of the Global Development and Environment Institute at Tufts University

**AND**

**ROSEMARY CORBETT,**
 Author and board member at the Center for Constitutional Rights

_**The two of us exist within the Rockefeller family legacy.**_ One (Neva) was born into it, but—after reckoning with the economic and environmental consequences of the decisions made by previous generations—decided to forge an alternative path to philanthropic giving and social change. The other (Rosemary) came from very different social and economic circumstances and married into the family after prolonged deliberation about whether her political commitments would make that possible. What we share is a commitment to a new economic paradigm in which all resources (from material assets to social and political power) are distributed more equitably. We sometimes pursue these goals through different strategies, but we’re united in seeing our current economic system—including the many philanthropic institutions that rely on it—as unsustainable, environmentally and socially.

As an economist, Neva is dedicated to developing a comprehensive economic theory that will better serve human needs and respond to changing ecological realities. Among other things, she has led the way in pushing oil companies to become better corporate citizens and environmental stewards. After years of shareholder activism failed to yield these results, Neva not only publicly divested her portfolio of stock in these companies and encouraged others to do likewise, she also donated the money to fight climate change directly. The recipient of those proceeds, the Rockefeller Family Fund (chaired by David Kaiser, Neva’s son and Rosemary’s husband), like the Rockefeller Brothers Fund, has not only engaged in decades of climate-change activism, but is also divesting itself of all of its fossil-fuel holdings.

These developments point to an underlying strategy that we both believe is necessary to change the economic system and the power dynamics in which philanthropic institutions operate: a strategy of divestment and reinvestment that directs funds away from fossil-fuel companies and businesses operating in apartheid countries, to take just two examples, and reallocates them to enterprises that embody sustainability, good-governance practices (including racial, ethnic, gender, and sexual diversity in staff and leadership), and socially just behavior. Such measures are crucial for bringing philanthropic foundations in line with their professed aim: the promotion of social good.

Yet even with such realigned investing, foundations often contribute to inequitable power dynamics while promoting social change. (For an overview of this process, read Gara LaMarche’s 2014 piece in *The Atlantic,* which discusses how the foundation boards that oversee vast sums of untaxed money are bastions of unaccountable decision-making dominated by older straight white men—and how even the best of these foundations devote merely a quarter of their grant-making to social-justice initiatives.) We thus must ask ourselves: Are there ways to make philanthropy more radical? Can we use this imperfect tool to dismantle, rather than exacerbate, the hierarchies producing the social and material inequality that foundations profess to alleviate?

One could rightly quote Audre Lorde questioning the feasibility of using the master’s tools to dismantle his house. (And the lobbying by both right-wing and progressive foundations will keep that house standing for some time.) One could also think, meanwhile, about ways to redistribute resources from the master’s house to underrepresented communities, which could then erect edifices of their own. Diversifying the makeup of foundation boards is one way to accomplish this. Such a move would require the education of the “old guard” in understanding the language of the new—rather than assuming that the new members will, chameleon-like, adopt older mores. Less restrictive giving to community organizations led by women (cis- and transgendered), queer activists, immigrants, and people of color is another way.

As an academic and activist, Rosemary is committed to increasing the social, political, and economic power of underrepresented communities. Among other things, she sits on the board of the Center for Constitutional Rights (a grantee of the David Rockefeller Fund, of which we are both trustees). The CCR is a legal-advocacy and social-justice organization that works to build power among such communities—partnering with community organizations and representatives, allowing them to lead in identifying salient problems and solutions, recruiting board members who are deeply embedded in community issues, and all the while fighting the powers that repress them. In a country where foundation leaders often come from the nonprofit sector, such intentional engagement and opportunity is necessary for effective social change— as well as for transforming the foundations that claim to support it.
An Ounce of Prevention

Re: Sonia Shah’s “Attack of the Superbugs” [July 4/11]: Please note that the White House’s Cancer Moonshot Initiative has always prioritized prevention; it is the first charge mentioned in President Obama’s memorandum on the task force. Our prevention focus is not in response to the letter from university public-health departments; they were pushing on an open door.

Sonia Shah Replies

Perhaps so—but even a casual reading of the memorandum outlining the Cancer Moonshot Initiative would suggest otherwise. The stated mission of the task force is to create “medical products and medical care related to cancer”; there is no mention of preventing cancer by regulating cancer-causing industries. Nor does the expertise assembled on the task force point it toward pursuing such preventive strategies. More than half of its members are leaders of the biomedically-established—from the National Science Foundation and the National Institutes of Health to the Food and Drug Administration—whose job is to churn out biomedically-breakthroughs and license new drugs and vaccines. They are not the experts we need to rein in the fast-food, tobacco, and liquor industries, whose products are implicated in two-thirds of cancers in the United States.

It’s true that the memorandum mentions the word “prevention” in passing twice. But even in terms of language, the bias toward industry-friendly cancer treatments rather than prevention is clear. The word “treatment” appears five times, “care” four times, and “cure” twice.

Sonia Shah
Baltimore

Pulsing With Love

The July 4/11 edition of The Nation is one of your best! Everything about it was informative and tender. My heart was especially touched by the cover—wow! I am keeping that list of the congressional recipients of NRA money. I will call all of them! I have written a basic script to recite to each one that incorporates your words “blood on your hands.” Thank you for another truth-to-power moment. To paraphrase Jimi Hendrix: When the power of love overcomes the love of power, then we will be at peace.

Diana Black
Roanoke, Va.

Correction

In the “Abortion vs. Social Spending” sidebar [June 20/27], the Swedish flag was mistakenly identified as the Danish flag. We regret the error.
permutations on the literary endeavor to stand in some meaningful relationship to life. Either literature distills life and concentrates it in a purer, more vital form (“Nothing is more human than a book,” Marilynne Robinson remarked in an interview with The Paris Review); or literature mirrors life and thereby illuminates it; or literature teaches us, by way of example, how to live. The point is that literature enlivens. If not, why write? Why read? Why bother?

In two recent essay collections, the British literary critic, novelist, and translator Tim Parks suggests that perhaps we shouldn’t bother. “It’s time to rethink everything,” he stresses in the introduction to Where I’m Reading From, a series of short reflections published by New York Review Books last spring. “Most book talk is formulaic and has been for decades,” he continues. “Your average review offers a quick value judgment summed up in one-to-five stars at the top of the column. Why read on?” This is a good question—and the answer, I think, is that the best criticism is literature in its own right. (And like any good narrative architect, the best reviewers know to withhold their evaluative conclusions in hopes of prolonging suspense.) In Parks’s case, we read on because his is a worthy and important project. It is refreshing to see a critic attempt to systematically clarify his foundational values, rather than reinventing his commitments anew with each review.

With Life and Work, we have a chance to see Parks’s much-flaunted principles in action. The book unites essays first published in this magazine, The New York Review of Books, and the London Review of Books, and it treats authors spanning centuries and continents: Parks begins locally, with his countrymen Charles Dickens and Thomas Hardy, and ends globally, with the unlikely likes of E.L. James and Stieg Larsson. He arrives at this destination by way of Geoff Dyer, Haruki Murakami, J.M. Coetzee, Philip Roth, and sundry others.

Diverse as his subjects may be, Parks’s quirks and quibbles are consistent to the point of redundancy. He is abidingly obsessed with the pernicious effects of globalization on local literary traditions, and abidingly critical of ho-

Fifty Shades of Parks

BY BECCA ROTHFELD

Why are we doing this—any of this? Reading books, writing books, reading books about books, writing books about books, and here, now, writing and reading reviews of books about books? Presumably, we write and read (and read about writing, and write about reading) because we take these various
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Learn more and get your tickets at www.campkinderland.org/festival

Discussed in This Essay

Life and Work
Writers, Readers, and the Conversations Between Them.
By Tim Parks.
Yale. 308 pp. $35.

Where I’m Reading From
The Changing World of Books.
By Tim Parks.

mogeneous, stylistically neutered “world literature.” “What seems doomed to disappear,” he frets, “is the kind of work that revels in the subtle nuances of its own language and literary culture.” How odd, then, that he read seven of the 20 authors surveyed in Life and Work in translation, and that four of the remaining English-speaking authors hail from awowledly non-British contexts. It is difficult to think of an author more quintessentially American than Roth, or more staunchly South African than Coetzee, yet Parks assesses both authors in haughtily authoritative tones.

Another of Parks’s pet themes is the importance of biography. He appeals time and again to the Italian “positioning theorist” Valeria Urago, arguing that early encounters with family members induce us to think of ourselves in terms of “semantic polarities” that in turn determine our literary affinities. These jargon-heavy contortions are meant to justify a series of truisms that Parks positions as revolutionary and that no sensible reader is likely to challenge. “What I’m suggesting then is that much of our response to novels may have to do with the kind of ‘system’ or ‘conversation’ we grew up in and within which we had to find a position and establish an identity,” he writes—a simple pronouncement that is preceded by several pages of labored pontification about how “each developing family member…will be looking to find a stable position within the polarized values the family is most concerned with.” All this verbiage, just to show that our milieu might influence our tastes!

Of his own approach to reading—from his own pop-psychologism he is not exempt—Parks writes that “there is a subtle tension in my reading between the desire to free myself from the immediate community with its received ideas, and the desire to share what I read with those around me.” This is a flattering self-assessment, and some of his essays are indeed insightful and welcome attacks on popular assumptions. In “E-books Are for Grown-ups,” for instance, he presents a compelling defense of electronic reading, observing that “once the sequence of words is over and the book closed, what actually remains in our possession is very difficult, wonderfully difficult to pin down, a richness (or sometimes irritation) that has nothing to do with the heavy block of paper on our shelves.” He has a sharp eye and a low tolerance for posturing, and he is relentlessly funny in his deadpan dissections of sloppy plotting. In his discussion of Murakami’s Colorless Tsukuru Tazaki and His Years of Pilgrimage, he dismisses the protagonist’s passion for a girl he has seen “only four or five times,” snidely noting that “some counseling is in order.”

But the dominant note in Life and Work and Where I’m Reading From is Parks’s unbridled disdain for the literary establishment, for literature’s producers and consumers, and perhaps even for literature itself. His urge to “free [himself] from the immediate community with its received ideas” too often manifests as facile contrarianism, and in his haste to differentiate himself from the Kool-Aid-guzzling herd, he makes a series of controversial but lazily argued claims: that we shouldn’t finish the books we read (“it’s only the young, still attached to that sense of achievement inculcated by anxious parents, who hang on doggedly when there is no enjoyment”); that literary events and panels are useless exercises incapable of honoring the complexity of the books they ostensibly celebrate; and that literature is less vibrant than that fabled element, “life,” which eludes cloistered critics and novelists alike.

Parks ridicules everyone but himself for being base, mercenary, and blindly subservient to our era’s safest, trendiest über-villain: capital. (He perceives no tension between his emphasis on individual psychological motivation, on the one hand, and his invocation of a depersonalized, ubiquitous, and all-consuming economic system on the other.) “It’s interesting,” Parks records himself saying to one of the directors of the Edinburgh Book Festival, “that this belief in the universal appeal of fine literature exactly coincides with commercial convenience.” He doesn’t so much as entertain the possibility that his combative might earnestly believe that literature can transcend its place of origin, or even that she might be doing her best under imperfect circumstances. To everyone he encounters, he ascribes an ulterior and self-interested motive. In “Writing to Win,” he suggests that the writer is driven solely by a “fierce ambition” for prizes and acclaim; in “Fear and Courage,” he maintains that readers use literature...
as an escape mechanism but hastens to frame their efforts as acts of confrontation, yielding rhetoric that “tends to flatter literature, with everybody overeager to insist on its liveliness and import.” He has no faith in books and even less in criticism: “traditional critical analysis, however brilliant, however much it may help us to understand a novel, rarely alters the color of our initial response.”

Parks is perverse. He demands that we devote ourselves to an endeavor he not only rejects but insults, and the end result is a tract that strives, masochistically, to negate its own conditions of possibility. (Whereof one should not speak, thereof one must complain.) What must Parks think of himself, to keep writing such futilities? What must he think of us, whom he expects to read them? Where I’m Reading From is not without some element of palpable self-loathing, and one gets the sense that Parks takes pleasure in subjecting us bovine readers, so thoughtlessly taken in by the lure of literature, to its utter pointlessness. His joyless writing is our punishment for daring to love what he so venomously hates. He is the Scrooge to our literary Christmas.

But on one count, at least, Parks is right. He predicts that “someone writing somewhere else will castigate me for my cynicism and irresponsibility, since we all know that literature...must always be praised to high heaven.”

Cynicism aside, Life and Work and Where I’m Reading From are philosophically overwhelming. Even the more elegantly argued essays stick to the surface, neglecting to tackle questions of form and content that lurk just below. In “E-books Are for Grown-Ups,” Parks writes that literature consists in “the movement of the mind through a sequence of words from beginning to end…. It is pure mental material, as close as one can get to thinking” and says his joyless writing is our punishment for daring to love what he so venomously hates. He is the Scrooge to our literary Christmas.

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Parks is ostensibly antipolitics and para-aesthetics, and he approvingly paraphrases Borges on this point several times. He would like to believe that he follows the Argentine master in thinking that “aesthetics are difficult and require a special sensibility and long reflection while political affiliations are easier and quickly grasped.” But his commitment to aesthetics isn’t borne out in his own essays, which focus more on the grubby architecture of the publishing industry—the emergence of a global market, the skewed workings of prize committees—than they do on questions of pure aesthetic merit. His best insights apply to the systems surrounding the production of literature, rarely if ever to literature itself.

By far the best essay in either collection is about E.L. James and the perplexing appeal of her trashy opus, Fifty Shades of Grey. “This impression of a constant reshuffling of the same limited repertoire is particularly strong in the sex scenes, where Christian finds ‘his release’ on 8 orgasmic occasions and we are reminded of Anastasia’s ‘panties’ on 38,” Parks observes. James’s unerotic prose is like “pornography and indeed sports journalism, or any text that substitutes mere assertion for evocation.” But these clever remarks do not concern the book so much as its undue popularity, which Parks admits frankly: “This is a novel whose extraordinary sales figures are far more interesting than anything to be found between the covers.”

Perhaps Parks’s aversion to the stuff of actual literature explains his mania for broader contextualization—and he is indeed adept at ferreting out thematic continuities across large swaths of material. For him, life and work are one contiguous text with a uniform symbolism. The three brothers in The Brothers Karamazov, for instance, are taken to map tidily onto the three possible routes that Dostoevsky is said to have laid out for himself at a crucial juncture in his career (“to go east, to Constantinople or Jerusalem and remain there for ever, to go abroad for roulette and...
give himself up entirely to gambling; or to seek happiness in a second marriage”). But Parks is wont to gloss over specificities in his quest for commonalities. The only categories that can be applied to all of the works under scrutiny are often so vague as to verge on the meaningless. For example, Parks characterizes the more than 500 stories in Chekhov’s oeuvre as fascinated with “the tension between involvement and withdrawal.” Well, what isn’t?

Parks’s philosophical weaknesses could be forgiven were it not for his lack of compassion. In both collections he proves willfully unsympathetic, especially when it comes to financial matters. In “Does Copyright Matter?”, he rightly observes that copyright law incentivizes authors to pander to the lowest common denominator, but fails to recognize that few writers have the financial resources to produce work without compensation. In “The Writer’s Job,” he deplores the transformation of the literary vocation into a career, lamenting a development that he describes thus:

Since enormous prestige was afforded to writers, and since it was now accepted that nobody needed to be tied to dull careers by such accidents of birth as class, color, sex, or even IQ, large numbers of people (myself included) began to write.

The self-deprecating parenthetical inclusion doesn’t absolve Parks of his ugly insensitivity. In a handful of abnormally successful cases, writing may prove prestigious, but it can be a notoriously thankless and precarious “career.” Within a highly insular circle, writers of literary fiction are renowned, but they don’t enjoy a great deal of cultural capital within society at large. “Career writers” may be motivated to some degree by a desire for acclaim, but I think it’s safe to suppose that they accept their healthy helping of insecurity at least in part because they love their subject.

Parks’s denunciations of world literature are similarly callous. Of Swiss novelist Peter Stamm, he wryly remarks: “If you didn’t know Stamm was Swiss, nothing in the English translation would betray this blendish. Certainly he never tells you anything about Switzerland, or the other countries where his books are set”—as if there were no possible noncommercial justification for this choice. Perhaps Stamm hopes that his work will accurately reflect the increasingly globalized world he lives in. Or perhaps he has any number of aesthetic motivations that Parks, with his narrow fixation on literary systems, stubbornly overlooks.

Parks’s dissatisfaction with many of literature’s accoutrements—its tired social rituals, its endlessly masturbatory conferences, its overreliance on theory-ese—is warranted, but his writing is too passionless to animate his complaints, or even justify his engagement. What’s the point of deflating something that’s already so airless? Where I’m Reading From is mean-spirited seemingly just for the sake of it, the kind of spiteful outburst we might expect from the neighborhood crank who calls the police to complain about block parties.

In an essay that’s brutally dismissive of literary academia, Parks writes that his students, “often in each other’s arms,” are “too busy with life to be bothered with literature. The only musty smells are in the library stacks.” But later, assessing the capers that abound in Geoff Dyer’s writing, he expresses trepidation: “So, carpe diem. But how exactly? Raves? Ecstasy? Is ‘to make the most of life’ sufficient prescription?” What exactly is this “life” with which literature is so unfavorably contrasted?

Parks criticizes Dyer for romanticizing life, apparently without realizing that he’s fallen into the same trap. But the literature/life dichotomy that he appeals to throughout both collections is naive and, uncharacteristically, flabbily sentimental, conjuring up patronizing images of “life” as some primal animal phenomenon accessible only to peasants tending their gardens, or Hemingway types running with the bulls. (Parks is predictably fond of the farming passages in Hardy’s The Return of the Native, with their “flesh, blood, and insect flirtation.”) If anything, the banal bureaucracies—the interminable panels and prize committees and professional rivalries that Parks so bitterly describes—serve to prove just how much closer to life literature draws than life ever draws to itself. At their best, books are Borgesian maps, overlapping with and ultimately absorbing the objects they once weekly sought to represent.

Along with prophets of New Age dogma, Parks eagerly assumes it’s possible to access the pure, vital throb of “life” without passing through any diluting meditations. But it is not altogether clear how we might achieve this, despite our varied attempts. Maybe sometimes, but certainly rarely, we come into direct contact with “life” via those precarious surges: the shudders of sex, the immediate physical raptures of running or dancing, a big, bracing hit of something you hope is MDMA. But in general, it’s art that affords us access to the swelling, urgent stratum of “life” that I can only assume Parks hungers for. “Life” is whatever makes the dreary furniture of the world vital again. If Parks finds his students’ fumbling caresses better suited to the task than literature, then the fault lies with him, not the books.
When it opened in 2010, the second-floor lounge at the Trump SoHo New York was decorated with a lavish collection of books bespeaking serious style credentials. Cocktail tables groaned with weighty monographs devoted to leading architects and designers. On the shelves, though, was something more rare: a complete run of *Playboy*, bound in luxe leather.

If Donald Trump has a maestro in matters of taste, it's surely his fellow teetotaler and sex fan Hugh Hefner, the pajama-clad, Pepsi-swilling progenitor of the lifestyle that so intoxicated boys of The Donald’s generation. Did creased editions of the magazine reside under the young Trump’s military-school mattress, as they did under those of every lad of conventional boomer proclivities? Even more important: Were the most distressed pages the centerfold, or J. Paul Getty’s 1961 column “How I Made My First Billion”?

Trump’s politics are, like Hefner’s “Playboy Philosophy,” an impossible combination of liberalism, hedonism, bloviation, and misogyny. Both men have made world-class contributions to the objectification of women, whether via centerfolds; the Miss Universe, Miss USA, and Miss Teen USA pageants; sleazy remarks; or the slimy prurience of their lecherous gazes. (My daughter is hot! Melania’s a 10!) But Trump does more: He objectifies—brands—everyone. Professional wrestling does for bulked-up guys what beauty pageants do for gals with the proverbial hourglass figure. And what could possibly be more objectifying than his ownership of jocks, whether Herschel Walker and Doug Flutie (who played for Trump’s New Jersey Generals in the short-lived United States Football League) or his erstwhile supporter, the rapist, ear-biting brute Mike Tyson?

Is it simply an inadvertent influence of the countercultural ’60s that his logo is tonsorial and his persona political? Much like Hitler’s mustache, Trump’s helmet of hair is his metonym. I don’t make this comparison lightly: While *The Art of the Deal* is no *Mein Kampf*, the media fixation, the facility for propaganda, and the grandiosity make for uncanny parallels. As Hitler (who also wanted to make his beleaguered country great again) put it, “The correct use of propaganda

**Burden of Gilt**

*by MICHAEL SORKIN*
is a true art.” The Donald is even more un-abashed: “I have always gotten much more publicity than anybody else.”

Because Trump’s main field of play is real estate, hence architecture, the coincidence of his rise and architecture’s own theoretical and practical fascination with branding is telling. For several decades, the intercourse between modern architecture and the mass media has been lively, and architecture’s own status as a form of media solidified. Playboy’s role here has been much marked. From the first, the magazine was thick with articles and images of modernist buildings and interiors: no end of Eames, Bertoia, Knoll, Wright, Mies, Bucky, Lautner, Safdie, Ant Farm, and many more. Beatriz (now Paul) Preciado points out in the marvelous Pornotopia that “in the late 1950s and ’60s, only one other article…managed to match the popularity of the Playmate nudes: the foldout of the second feature on the Playboy penthouse published in 1959.” Bachelor-pad pictorials were a staple throughout the 1960s, including such gems as an “Airy Eyrie in Malibu,” “A Baronial Bi-level for a Busy Bachelor,” “Exotica in Exurbia,” and “A New Haven Haven.”

Preciado—expanding on the work of Barbara Ehrenreich, Bill Osgerby, and Beatriz Colomina—describes Hefner’s fascination with architectural space both as an enlargement of his claims on hip modernity and as leverage for the co-optation of the domestic for his ideal subject, the heterosexual bachelor playboy. In wresting domesticity (and its designer swag) from suburban imprisonment—Hefner as a misogynistic inversion of Betty Friedan!—it was crucial that Playboy be disassociated not only from the stereotypical “women’s magazine” like Better Homes and Gardens, but also from any taint of the gay. In the words of Arnold Gingrich, the first editor of Esquire (Playboy’s obvious model), it was crucial to include elements “substantial enough to deodorize the lavender whiff coming from the mere presence of fashion pages.” Per Ehrenreich, “the breasts and bottoms were necessary not just to sell the magazine, but to protect it.” Cheesecake—and those serious articles—guaranteed that Playboy was giving it to you straight, and it placed women in an architectural environment as objects of desire who also unfailingly knew their place. How like the way in which the buffoon Trump (who claims it was he who actually broke the glass ceiling!) deploys the distaff at his events, that inevitable chorus line of beautiful white women—his wife and daughter front and center—both to insulate himself from appearing a chauvinist bachelor and to assert his timeless attraction to, and ability to breed, hotties.

Like Hefner and Trump, Hitler also worked hard to situate himself in the context of “female” space. In her fascinating book Hitler at Home, Despina Stratigakos recounts the assiduous rebranding of the Führer, from violent agitator to pacific country squire, after his assumption of the chancellorship in 1933. This was frequently accomplished by circulating images of Hitler in sites of domesticity, especially at the Berghof, his Alpine aerie, meticulously decorated by Gerdy Troost (whose dialectical relationship to Leni Riefenstahl—the one focused on signifiers of individuality, the other on those of the mass—is a rife story, still incompletely told). The sobriety and elegance of the structure, as well as its relationship to those mythic mountains—viewed through a picture window the size of a movie screen—served as a corroborating background for an elevated, feelingful Hitler.

This calculated indoor/outdoor contrast marks all three of the specimens before us. Hitler, increasingly confined to a series of bunkers (a word staffers apparently used to describe the Playboy offices), was formed by his doss-house life in Vienna, his failure to get into the Academy of Fine Art, and his years sheltering in the trenches of World War I. Reactively, he sought to order exterior space with grandiose urban schemes and, perhaps most dramatically, with the Nuremberg rallies, where every object and person was situated with unyielding precision. Hefner was more completely interior still, never leaving his bedroom, even traveling inside it in his customized DC-9 with its flying boudoir. Hef’s Los Angeles estate was indoors out, a high-walled Neverland he could traverse in robe and slippers. The germ- and insect-phobic Donald is likewise no outdoorsman: His preferred open-air setting is the golf course, nature in its most tortured, subordinated, and disciplined state.

All three worked overtime to establish and defend their brands in the areas of mass media and retail goods. Disseminated through best-selling books like The Hitler Nobody Knows as well as a rash of souvenir objects, from postcards to dollhouses, the fascist marketing project spiraled out of control, until even Goebbels grew concerned about the proliferation of “tasteless” Nazi-themed merchandise, leading to the passage, in 1933, of the Law for the Protection of National Symbols. As Stratigakos explains, the law was meant to counter such excesses as “Stormtrooper gingerbread, wine bottles and ashtrays ornamented with swastikas, women’s brooches with ‘Heil Hitler’ in imitation diamonds, and
alarm clocks that played the Nazi anthem, “The Flag on High.” This was no patch on The Donald, who once filed a lawsuit—partially successful—against two brothers named Jules and Eddie Trump for using their own names for their real-estate company, the Trump Group.

Hitler, Hefner, and Trump—the real rat pack—share a logo fetish (the swastika, the bunny, and the big T are among the most ubiquitous signifiers of their times) and a powerful fascination with building and design. Hefner in the Playboy Mansion, Hitler in the Berghof, and The Donald in his Trump Tower triplex are obsessed with self-corporation by decorative context and the dramatic possibilities involved in the public marketing of a “private” lifestyle. Playboy’s masculinization of interiority is nowhere more clearly stated than in Hefner’s editorial in the magazine’s maiden issue: “We don’t mind telling you in advance—we plan on spending most of our time inside. We like our apartment. We enjoy mixing cocktails and an hors d’oeuvre or two, putting a little mood music on the phonograph, and inviting in a female acquaintance for a quiet discussion on Picasso, Nietzsche, jazz, sex.”

The Donald likewise inhabits interiors in lieu of an interior life and shows them off with hyperbolic self-celebration. The tour of the penthouse with its 53 rooms, African-blue-onyx lavatory, ivory friezes, and chandelier “from a castle in Austria” always seems to culminate in a view of Central Park and the skyline outside the glass walls, Trump’s own Alps. Excess is irresistible. Trump himself recalls an early meeting with the architect Der Scutt at his first Manhattan apartment, in which Scutt opined that there was simply too much furniture and proceeded to move half of it into the hall. However, while Trump’s architectural taste isn’t exactly refined, it does have a certain middle-of-the-road precision, as seen in his eye for branded talent and pedigree. Trump’s “portfolio” adumbrates grandiosity without actual risk-taking: The architecture is far more Ralph Lauren than John Galliano—product, not provocation. Indeed, like his father before him (who had Morris Lapidus do a few lively lobbies in his otherwise generic Brooklyn apartment houses), The Donald has fundamentally conservative taste. His buildings break no artistic ground but are accessorized like crazy with shiny signifiers of the sumptuous. The architects he employs are, if never avant-garde, often from the upper commercial echelon. Adrian Smith—designer of the world’s tallest building, the Burj Khalifa in Dubai—authored Trump’s tower in Chicago. That beloved old Nazi Philip Johnson did the new skin at Columbus Circle; at age 86 (Freudians take note: the same age as Trump’s dad Fred), he was invited to tart up Trump’s Taj, and, at 93, to add his brand to Riverside South. Der Scutt, the designer of Trump Tower (who weirdly changed his name from Don to the German definite article, perhaps in homage to the Donald, although Trump himself, not yet birther in chief, was claiming at the time that the family moniker was Swedish), once worked for Philip Johnson, who also loved all things German. Gilt by association!

Trump’s breakthrough into the big time was the Grand Hyatt Hotel, designed by Scutt in 1974, an admitted feat of financial legerdemain and, in its transformation from brick opacity to mirror-clad reflectivity, an apposite symbol of the meister’s narcissism, repeated in the global acreage of pure shininess that so embodies Trumpsterism. There is a method here that joins the self-celebration of an office suite lined with hundreds of magazine-cover pictures of its occupant with a mirror’s ability to enlarge, dazzle, and deceive. In a 1997 profile in The New Yorker, The Donald articulated his aesthetic succinctly: “I have glitzy casinos because people expect it…. Glitz works in Atlantic City…. And in my residential buildings I sometimes use flash, which is a level below glitz.” This capacity to make distinctions that are always exaggerated is surely at the core of the man’s charm, as well as an obvious register of a certain, er, anxiety that Trump is now working through at our expense.

Strikingly, although the small-handed Trump has been involved with some very tall buildings, including the fairly high 58-story Trump Tower, he has had to settle, in the end, for having his name on multiple runners-up, including such second-tier superlatives as the Empire State Building (as part owner), the tallest residential tower in Canada, the tallest completed residential building in the world (a title that will lapse in about 10 minutes), the formerly tallest residential tower in New York, and the tallest building in New Rochelle.

Trump’s one actual go at the world’s tallest building was the Television City project of 1985 on the huge West Side railyards site, which featured a proposal for a 150-story, 1,910-foot-high (with spire) shaft as part of a complex that also included seven smaller skyscrapers, each taller than the Trump Tower and designed by Helmut
Jahn in his manliest neo-ICBM style. The community and critical pushback was immediate, and Trump soon dumped Jahn for Alexander Cooper, the planner for “traditionalist” Battery Park City—an amiable architect whom Gwenda Blair aptly described as the “anti-Jahn.”

This quick recognition of the limits of his power to manipulate a complex situation led, by turns, to a series of somewhat more “urbane” proposals (adding streets and smaller buildings to the mix, chopping down towers, plazas). Finally, when strong community opposition serendipitously coincided with Trump’s own parlous financial position, an entirely new approach emerged in the form of Riverside South, designed by Alan Ritchie and Costas Kondylis and branded by Philip Johnson. This was a dumbed-down take on a scheme independently commissioned from architect Paul Willen by a consortium of civic groups—proposed in opposition to Trump’s initial grandiosities—many of whom were aghast when Trump himself seized the initiative and became the new plan’s leading exponent.

The now-completed outcome is simultaneously a monument to heightened sensitivity and diminished expectations. The key public benefits in the community scheme were to have been the relocation of the elevated West Side Highway to ground level at the inboard edge of the site and the creation of a major park in the liberated space. Not only have neither of these materialized, but the executed project is architecturally bleak, a monochrome reach of vaguely variegated apartment houses that reproduce the cookie-cutter ethos of his father’s buildings, but with bigger rooms, better finishes, and higher prices. And each, of course, is emblazoned with a giant TRUMP above its entrance.

As architectural patron, Trump does better with acquired imprimatur, and a number of his holdings—or brandings—have been purchases of distinguished historic properties, such as the Barbizon, the Plaza, 40 Wall Street, and, of course, Mar-a-Lago, which offer old-money cachet to new-money tenants. (Writing about Trump Tower in The Art of the Deal, The Donald declares: “The one market we didn’t go after was old-money New Yorkers, who generally want to live in older buildings anyway.”) His eclectic collection also includes glitzy renovations of well-located dogs (the transformation of the hideous Gulf & Western building into the differently hideous Trump International Hotel, and the sow’s ear to slick purse of the Grand Hyatt) as well as the creation of new structures, including his eponymous tower and the contemporaneous Trump Plaza, not to mention his participation in a plethora of projects around the city and, indeed, the planet under the sign of “the world’s only global luxury real estate super-brand.”

But it isn’t the architecture that makes the man dangerous. Trump and Hefner, his virtual twin, are apostles for “models of masculine consumption,” which Bill Osgery argues “elaborated a form of sexual politics that was, to a large part, reactionary and exploitative…. The masculine consumer is better seen as part of wider developments in the fabric of American capitalism that saw the rise of a new middle-class faction whose habitus and value system was oriented around an ethos of youthful hedonism and leisure-oriented consumption.” Like Hefner—Kraft durch Freude notwithstanding, Hitler gets a pass here!—Trump is a man whose fortunes derive precisely from hedonism and leisure-oriented consumption (are these the jobs he plans to bring back to America?). And both men rose as vulgarian embodiments of their playboy “philosophies,” preening objects of venal desire. (I am trying to imagine Trump diluting on the will to power to Miss Teen USA over Diet Cokes.)

Trump’s fortunes also derive from his mastery of the con. As he skipped around his creditors during the bankruptcy of his casinos, the courts put him on a personal budget: $450,000 a month, affirming the success of his fuck-you/gimme-gimme attitude toward the system. Trump’s career, like that of his father before him, has been built on playing us for suckers, enjoying house odds, and collecting every available “legal” advantage, from greasing political palms to screwing his shareholders via bankruptcy protection, to an array of tax subsidies, zoning bonuses, and other forms of public largesse. The billionaire tribune of the working class is a welfare queen.

An ironic staple of current cocktail chatter: Was it like this in Berlin in 1932? That fool will never become chancellor. The bombast, the racism, the mustache—impossible. Of course, the comparison goes too far, doesn’t it? Demonizing Muslims is very different from demonizing Jews. And the plan is to keep them out, not throw them out, right? It’s the 11 million Mexicans we actually want to deport, and they’re all criminals. And we’re going to build great things: walls as wide as a country and as long as the autobahn. That sound we hear is the glass ceiling shattering, not Kristallnacht.

Isn’t it?
The original Ghostbusters was neither the most lucrative film released in 1984 nor the year’s biggest social breakthrough. Those titles went to Beverly Hills Cop, the first movie starring a black actor to conquer the US box office. I feel safe in saying that Ghostbusters also wasn’t the funniest movie of 1984 (the year of This Is Spinal Tap), the greatest generator of pop mythology (The Terminator, A Nightmare on Elm Street), the hippest (Stranger Than Paradise), the cleverest (The Company of Wolves), the most ambitious (Once Upon a Time in America), the most melodious (Purple Rain), or the one farthest out on the edge of defiant weirdness (let’s hear it for Straub–Huillet and Class Relations, their deadpan rendition of Kafka’s Amerika). Yet despite its second-place finish in any number of categories, Ghostbusters stood out. It was arguably the best-liked movie of 1984 and remains so to this day.

With the release of the not-quite-new Ghostbusters, this distinction suddenly looks like a puzzle to be solved. Thinking back, I wonder if the original belonged to its time at all.

In June 1984, when Ghostbusters came out, Jesse Jackson was shocking the political class with his run for the presidency, Walter Mondale was preparing to put a woman on a national party’s ticket for the first time, and Ronald Reagan’s flacks were describing the long economic and cultural twilight he instituted as “morning in America.” AIDS was raging, wars were raging, and the antinuclear movement was still in the streets. If you’re too young to recall those times—I’m told that a smattering of Nation readers are under 60—then I will assure you, the sense of crisis was no less acute than it is today; but the urgency, let alone its immediate motivations, did not figure even atmospherically in Ghostbusters.

You might say, at a stretch, that the film’s ghost-trapping proton beams were a goofy, more or less timely rebuke to the notion that nuclear devices were under safe, responsible
control. Like other projects that Dan Aykroyd had a hand in writing, *Ghostbusters* also gave a one-finger salute to the ascendency of the so-called young urban professionals, or “yuppies”—more simply, rich white kids—whose bland self-approval had recently made them the darlings of media trend-spotters. But slobs had been taking revenge on snobs long before *Ghostbusters* came along with its heroic band of the low-rent, rumpled, disrespected, and dubiously credentialed. And machines of an advanced but highly unlikely design were hardly new in film or literature. As for the prospect that all hell might break loose, it was neither more nor less pertinent in 1984, as envisioned by *Ghostbusters*, than it had been when John the Divine prophesied on Patmos.

Blame it on the green slime if you will, but *Ghostbusters* slips from the grasp of those of us seeking to fix movies into historical moments. If you’re not in that group—if you’re content to dump the film’s enduring popularity into the category of “escapism,” that flimsy and capacious catchall—then there’s no problem. But more needs to be done if you want to locate the current, explicitly feminist remake in relation to the original. You might also want to face up to the likelihood that a movie about ghosts will have something to do with forces that ought to be dead but aren’t.

To be more precise about the question, as implicitly posed in the original *Ghostbusters*: About which inadequately buried aspects of the past is it ridiculous to feel afraid? Well, look at the ghosts. There’s a stern, elderly librarian, who might have burned the memory of scoldings into a generation of elementary-school students; a giant, childish, malevolent advertisement for marshmallows, a snack on which many of us can recall having gorged till the fun turned to nausea; and a demon-possessed Sigourney Weaver, behaving like a teenage boy’s porn-inspired fantasy of a sexually aroused woman. The original *Ghostbusters* calls up the ectoplasm of juvenile shames and humiliations, exposing their lingering presence in our souls and inspiring men in the audience to laugh them away. Women can let out knowing laughs about the men.

The subjects that haunted the first *Ghostbusters* were real enough. They just weren’t the topics of the day, leaving the film free to develop the enduring popularity that has shadowed the new version. If you follow movies at all, you’ll know that for months the Internet has been burning with outrage over the effrontery of anyone’s remaking a purported classic, and (what’s worse) casting it with women as the leads.

I’m here to tell you that I enjoyed the new *Ghostbusters*, but that in one sense the trolls were right. The jokes do change when the characters are women—especially when those women incite you to laugh through a graveyard not of youthful error, but of America’s bloody history.

I come to the moment when, if you want to sound smart, you’re supposed to quote Faulkner. My impression is that director Paul

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### Kill List

1. At a certain distance, it looks like a poem.
2. Transliterated, maybe, from the Arabic.
3. Short lined.
4. Short lived.
5. At a certain distance, it reads beautifully.
6. What its authors cultivate is anesthetic distance.
7. Don’t think wrecked, think Brecht.
8. Warfare is the theater of detachments.
9. At a certain distance, an angry emperor becomes a god.
10. Distances are more certain now, thanks to satellites.
11. From the desert here to the desert there: 7252.86 miles.
12. At a certain distance, wing lights look like stars.
13. Cars look like Hot Wheels.
14. A human body looks like the stick figure in a game of Hangman.
15. We guess and fill in the blank of each letter.
16. When we make mistakes, line by line we construct the hanged man.
17. The hanged man represents the guesser.
18. The word in question may remain unknown at the end of the game.
19. The word can be a thing or a place.
20. Or a name.
21. At a certain distance, a kill list could be any kind of list.
22. Grocery.
23. Things to Do.
24. Top Ten.
Feig and his co-screenwriter, Katie Dippold, are literate enough to mutter “never dead... not even past” with the best; but you don’t need me to vouch for them. Just listen to Leslie Jones, who as the movie’s working-class heroine cheerfully doubles as an amateur historian, teaching lessons to the others about way interesting slaughters going back to colonial times. The New York of this _Ghostbusters_ is dotted with the cemented-over sites of battles, massacres, and executions. The ghosts, when they emerge from their uneasy graves, include out-of-town visitors like a Massachusetts Bay Puritan (a witch-burner, no doubt) and Abraham Lincoln, who looks like he’s got malice toward all.

Not that any of this perturbs Jones—the team’s tower of strength—or her newfound friends and colleagues, who are too excited by measurements of spectral ionization to care that they emanate from revivified horrors. Ostensibly, scientific professionalism keeps Kristen Wiig, Melissa McCarthy, and Kate McKinnon happily enthused in the face of whatever. But maybe the deeper reason that these women don’t fear a centuries-long accumulation of supernatural rage, or succumb to its sorrow, is that they’ve never pretended injustice was dead. A man—a creepy, villainous man, determined to exploit historic miseries out of vainglory—may nourish a grudge about the humiliations he’s borne; but the ghostbusting women advise him to get over it and look on the bright side. As McCarthy explains to him, with dimpled good humor, “We’re pretty much dumped on all the time.”

Very true. Witness the disdain that drips from Wiig’s department head at Columbia, the frat-boy sexual insults flung at McCarthy at her technical college, the infuriating tag of “Ghost Girls” with which journalists belittle the whole group. None of it surprises these women or daunts them. What does torment them are the imperfectly forgotten betrayals they’ve committed against other women while striving to get along in a man’s world. At the start of _Ghostbusters_, a tightly buttoned Wiig is struggling to win the forbearance of a male professional establishment (approval, let alone respect, seems beyond reach) by tamping down all traces of her long-denied friendship with McCarthy and the interest they shared in the paranormal. As soon as this repressed past erupts into view, realizing Wiig’s greatest fear, the story can get moving, ghosts can be spotted, and Wiig can gradually be reunited with her best and only pal.

Part of the pleasure of _Ghostbusters_ comes from seeing Wiig light up her eyes and loosen her posture by degrees. An exceptionally sly comic actress who is sometimes funniest while seeming to gaze inward, Wiig makes emotional breakthrough seem like a matter of slipping from nuance to nuance, as she goes from a grudging initial relaxation of her defenses to full-tilt swagger. Curiosity does some of the work in drawing her character out, along with an awakened self-assertiveness, but much of the credit goes to the contact high that is Melissa McCarthy.

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25. Bucket.
26. When hanging a man, any distance between his body and the earth will suffice.
27. Just so long as he cannot touch the ground by extending his feet.
28. Like a thief on tiptoe stealing into airspace.
29. The list is a poetic device much favored by the American poet Whitman.
30. Whitman was the first to establish that a body can be sung electric.
31. American prisons promptly switched to the electric chair.
32. This gave way in some states to the lethal injection.
33. Apparently physicians wanted a piece of the execution business.
34. At a certain distance, it looked like vaccination.
35. In the same way two thousand volts looked like an orgasm.
36. Or a seizure.
37. Seizures, too, are of various kinds.
38. Drugs can be seized at the border.
39. Fugitives can be seized in motel rooms.
40. By the collar, or failing that, the throat.
41. Moments, too, can be seized.
42. I seized this one, for example, to prepare a kill list in the form of a poem.
43. A kill list, like a poem, bears the signature of its compiler at the bottom.
44. After its lines are revised away, that one name will remain.
45. Your eye, scanning from above, will focus on it.
46. You will make certain assumptions about my ethnicity, my religion, my politics.
47. At a certain distance, I admit, I do look like an Arab.
48. Your pupils will constrict, like a predator’s faced with a penlight.
49. I have been waiting here for you, on the floor of this room.
50. As-salamu alaykum.

AMIT MAJMUDAR
SPECIAL REPORT:

Mining and Resistance in Dinétah

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THE LAURA FLANDERS SHOW

FORWARD. THINKING. PEOPLE

Not just outgoing but brash (that’s with a hard Illinois “a”), McCarthy in *Ghostbusters* associates herself with everything that’s loose, from draping herself in cardigans to guzzling soup. She also errs on the side of relaxation when aiming the ghost-neutralizing weapons engineered by Kate McKinnon.

I confess that McKinnon’s charm had eluded me until now. I had to see her tromping around in overalls, a leather jacket, and welder’s goggles, with her wavy blond hair swept up and a perpetual grin on her mug, to understand that she’s Harpo Marx. How could I have been so obtuse? McKinnon is the otherworldly imp who greets everything she encounters as absurd, and wants to improve on its risibility by setting its pants on fire. Whatever hints you may find of complete insanity in *Ghostbusters* flash from her baby blues. Whatever evidence you may find of the ground of reality—without which nothing is funny—resounds from the firm tread of Leslie Jones’s feet. The comparison is unfair but unavoidable: She’s been given the Ernie Hudson role. But Hudson, though a fine actor, was consigned to the status of sidekick. There is nothing sidekicky about Jones, a presence so powerful that she conducts exorcisms with her fists.

As a black woman, Jones is also, as I’ve mentioned, the movie’s fitting conduit to American history. Now that I think again about that part of the history we enacted in 1984, I feel it’s a sign of merit that *Ghostbusters* stood apart from its time. With its New York values (as Ted Cruz would call them), underdog pride, and joy in community, *Ghostbusters* represented a better America than the one that reelected Reagan in a landslide. In a sense, the new *Ghostbusters* also stands outside its moment, even though it embeds itself in history and is emphatically a product of these times. It, too, represents a better America than the one that’s threatened to elect Donald Trump, and for good measure radiates a stronger sense of sisterhood than you might get from the glass-ceiling feminism of Hillary Clinton.

Need two hours of good spirits amid this mess? Who ya gonna call?

A coincidence of August release dates has yoked together two strikingly different French productions, making them seem like a pair—perhaps to the discomfort of their makers. And yet there’s some justice in thinking of *Disorder* and *Neither Heaven nor Earth* together. Although their methods are almost diametrically opposed, the subject matter is essentially the same: the disintegration brought about in men’s minds and bodies by unending war.

The fancier of the two, *Neither Heaven nor Earth* is a first feature directed by Clément Cogitore, who cowrote the screenplay with the very busy Thomas Bidegain. Set on the Afghan border with Pakistan in 2014, it’s the story of a squad led by Captain Bonassieu (the always excellent Jérémie Renier, looking muscular and grizzled) and the escalating tensions with the village it oversees. A mundane argument over the price of a dead sheep gives way to suspicions about the villagers’ nocturnal activities and then to an insoluble mystery, as members of Bonassieu’s unit start to vanish. Did they desert? Were they captured? When Bonassieu fails to discover any explanation—other than the one put forward by a local belief system that he can’t rationally credit—he starts to come apart. The performances are strong, the cinematography by Sylvain Verdet alternately harsh and spooky, and one or two of Cogitore’s images are almost good enough to have come from Claire Denis. The theme of mutual incomprehension across cultures is effective, too—assuming you don’t take the *Twilight Zone* stuff at face value.

*Disorder*, written and directed by Alice Winocour, is also a story about a wartime breakdown; but its method is intimate and almost physiological compared with Cogitore’s cerebral approach, and its setting is even more disturbing for being familiarly French. Hulking, intense Matthias Schoenaerts, with his sloping boxer’s shoulders and eyes set as close as two rifle sights, plays Vincent, a French soldier who has been so traumatized by his tours in Afghanistan that he can’t be sent back. Having no job skills that don’t involve guns, he self-medicates with bootleg pharmaceuticals and hires out with some army buddies as a security guard. The all-too-predictable trouble starts when he’s assigned alone to watch over the wife and young son of a wealthy, politically connected man who’s gone off on business. Vincent hears all sorts of things (even though his ears ring constantly), sees threats everywhere (some of which might even be real), and frightens the woman he’s meant to protect, because she’s played by Diane Kruger and looks good to him. It’s a relief that Vincent gets along well with the dog—because the rest of his experiences (which Winocour makes into yours) are a quickening drip, drip, drip of paranoid hallucination and real violence. We’re approaching the end of the 15th full year of the current war in Afghanistan. As we have sown, so shall we reap.
SHelf Life

by AARON THIER

MAIRTÍN Ó CADHAIN’S Cré na Cille, originally published in 1949, is often said to be the greatest Irish-language novel of the 20th century. It consists of a cacophonous dialogue between corpses in a graveyard. No surprise there: Joyce and Beckett and Flann O’Brien may have written in English and French, but Ulysses contains a protracted descent into the underworld, Beckett’s plays and novels take place in a kind of purgatorial wasteland, and the hero of O’Brien’s The Third Policeman is in hell. What happens when we die? We wake up in an Irish novel.

In other respects, however, Cré na Cille is a pragmatic and earthbound satire of small-village life. Its characters are obsessed with the petty details of comings and goings aboveground—who thatched whose roof, who gets the legacy from America, what happened to the colt, who stole the periwinkles. They run each other down, they boast, they get “culture” in the graveyard and put on airs. There’s a comic set piece in which two characters argue about who won a soccer match between Galway and Kerry. “How could Kerry win it, when Galway did?” asks one. The other responds, “But you were dead. And I was looking at the match.” Argument and miscommunication are the rule. Everyone clams to be heard; no one listens. Most of the corpses are parodically small-minded. Near the end of the novel, when they’re all trying to imagine what they’d have done if they’d had more time on earth, they say things like, “I’d have asked her to bury me in another graveyard.” The novel grows more complex as it establishes itself and then begins to repeat its various motifs, but it doesn’t build to a climax. It ends with a final clatter of discord, like a stack of plates falling off a table.

Cré na Cille wasn’t widely available in English until 2015, when Yale University Press published Alan Titley’s translation under the title The Dirty Dust (Paper; $16). This might be regarded as the satisfactory resolution of a 66-year-old problem, but Yale must have thought otherwise, because it has now, one year later, published a second and very different translation, this time called Graveyard Clay ($25), by Liam Mac Con Iomaire and Tim Robinson.

I enjoyed reading Cré na Cille. Both translations arrived at my door in the same envelope, and because neither seemed obviously preferable, I read them simultaneously, so “reading” Cré na Cille meant reading Graveyard Clay and The Dirty Dust and then trying to imagine what the real thing must be like. This wasn’t easy. Titley anglicizes character names but not place names; Mac Con Iomaire and Robinson anglicize place names but not character names. Thus each translation appears to involve a different set of characters talking about a different set of places. Titley loves obscurity, and his translation is a Rabelaisian cataract of inventive insults; Graveyard Clay is a modest rendering that returns again and again to the same insult—“streak of misery”—as if to a refrain. Often there’s confusion at a very basic level: Titley’s “It’s only what Hitler deserved” becomes the apparently antithetical “Hitler was worthy of that much” in Mac Con Iomaire and Robinson. Where Titley writes, “Make sure that Tom doesn’t get the large holding,” Mac Con Iomaire and Robinson have “Take care that Tom gets the big holding.”

Sometimes entirely different characters are named in what should be equivalent passages. What to make of this?

In any case, I did begin to sense the vast and shadowy landscape of the Gaelic original, and with this impression comes the powerful sense that we are not seeing these characters as they really must be. For this, the translators are not to be blamed: The novel is, as far as I can gather, full of untranslatable puns, idiomatic language, bits of traditional songs and stories, and dialect jokes, but the characters lack these deeper referents in English, so their speech seems odd or disjointed. Mac Con Iomaire and Robinson make recourse to footnotes: “What looks like a typing error is in fact a play on words,” or “The following passage in the text involves elaborate wordplay in Irish, French, and Breton.” Such complexity is no doubt present on every page, but most of it is inaccessible. Thus we’re likely to assume that a character’s mistakes and malapropisms are an effect of translation rather than what they must often be—a mark of his or her idiosyncrasy. More important, since so much of the novel is about the Irish language, the translations lack not just the complexity of the original but also much of its true content.

And yet a novel in dialogue consists of characters who exist in the nowhere place between what others say about them and what they say, no more credibly, about themselves; in an important sense, the way to see them whole is to see them multiplied. As if in a graveyard, the two translations of Cré na Cille lie together side by side beneath the sod, one literary remove from the story, and they chatter and argue. This is the way it should be. If, within the Mac Con Iomaire–Robinson translation, the character called “Road-End Man” should look like a different person when different people talk about him, why should he not become “Tim Top of the Road”—an even more different person—in the Titley version? I’m only half-joking when I say that the truest translation of this noise-and-discord novel is more than one translation, competing translations, too many translations. Yale should publish a new one every year.

Aaron Thier’s second novel, Mr. Eternity, has just been published by Bloomsbury.
Puzzle No. 3404

JOSHUA KOSMAN AND HENRI PICCIOTTO

ACROSS

1 Fall to pieces and perish, concealing transgression to get back at informer (12)
9 Leaders of Egypt might begin exporting refined coal (5)
10 Vicious rant about "stupid idiot"—that's what we get from our elders (9)
11 Move laboriously westward, greeting nation's first mammal (7)
12 Deduce number in conflagration (7)
13 Goodbye to partner, from the side (9)
15 Reflect, my boy—I'm an ancient king (5)
16 An overturned farmyard enclosure is gross (5)
18 Loud American composer gets recognized, like the Department of Defense's headquarters (4-5)
20 Holy person travels on horseback, or walks with determination (7)
22 Aimless, wandering woman (7)
24 Very happy, OJ drove recklessly around you once (9)

25 Officer repelled crowd with zero resistance (5)
26 Put in the ground, and ready to be taken out of the ground—it's endless (12)

DOWN

1 Fear poisonous adder (5)
2 Uncouth louts seizing oil company is not the main story (7)
3 Craft, then lorry, heading toward a pole (9)
4 John's heartfelt online content (5)
5 Vile, ratty, disgusting entertainment (7,2)
6 Criminal rush to separate true from false (5)
7 Lebanese-American writer and soldier introducing a type of muffin (6)
8 Came out for red-nosed revelry (8)
13 Pines in a sauna? That's not very likely (4,4)
14 Characteristic behavior: Elites fly all over the place (9)
15 Bodybuilder announced a mollusk-themed superhero? (9)
17 Show hide (6)
19 Office employment: storing dirty jokes in database (4,3)
21 Radio personality working outside one city in France (5)
22 Poem written in two meters—that's how some people communicate (5)
23 Edge of African lake where eagles live (5)

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Dr. Katrin Hansing
Dr. Hansing, former associate director of the Cuban Research Institute at Florida International University, is an associate professor of sociology & anthropology at Baruch College. She has spent the last 13 years conducting research in the Caribbean, especially in Cuba. She has authored many publications including the book *Rasta, Race, and Revolution: The Emergence and Development of the Rastafari Movement in Socialist Cuba*.

Charles Bittner
For almost two decades, Charles Bittner has served as The Nation’s academic liaison. He’s hosted seven previous Nation trips to Cuba and teaches in the sociology department at St. John’s University.

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