

Athenaeum Review

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Harry W. Bass Jr. School of Arts, Humanities, and Technology
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and THE EDITH O'DONNELL INSTITUTE OF ART HISTORY
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Rosalyn Bodycomb's paintings stand as both a respite from and a space in which to contemplate the chaotic world around us. Her work captures the deep intricacies of the natural world and beckons us to imagine our way in. She received a Joan Mitchell Foundation Painters and Sculptors Award in 2005, a John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation Fellowship in 2007, and a Pollock-Krasner Grant in 2009. Her work is in the Permanent Collection of the Dallas Museum of Art and many private collections across the United States. She was born in Honolulu, Hawaii, studied Printmaking

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Sean Cairns typically portrays romantic and tranquil scenes of nature juxtaposed against the animated pulse of human activity. His vibrantly colored and rustic landscapes, which are inspired by color field painting and German expressionist painters, often reference or pay homage to his upbringing in the Midwest. Flat, rolling hills, sprawling farmland and vast prairies frequently dominate his canvases. Cairns typically utilizes sand, collage, pointillist, flat or impasto painting techniques to convey objects, surfaces, or landscapes. Through these techniques, he is able to blur the lines between the painted and the perceived, inviting viewers to traverse the realm where art and reality intertwine.

David Carrier is a philosopher who writes art criticism. He has published books on Nicolas Poussin's paintings, on the art writing of Charles Baudelaire, on the abstractions of Sean Scully, on the art museum and on the prospects for a world art history. And with Joachim Pissarro, he has co-authored two books on what they call wild art, art outside the art world system. Currently his writing appears in *Brooklyn Rail* and *Hyperallergic*. His *Philosophical Skepticism as the Subject of Art: Maria Bussmann's Drawings* (Bloomsbury), *Art Writing On Line: The State of the Art World* (Cambridge Scholars) and *In Caravaggio's Shadow: Naples as a Work of Art* (Thames & Hudson) are forthcoming.

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Dallas-based artist **Susie Phillips** draws, paints and embroiders with a sentiment toward the “un-still life,” choosing not to render her objects with placid and calm imagery, but with a bold and skewed perspective reminiscent of the later still lifes of Cézanne and Matisse. Vessels, flowers, and the patterned tablecloths on which they inhabit are applied in a variety of bold styles, washed in watercolor or blocked in opaque oil paint. Susie Phillips's flattened pictures, with neither foreground nor background, but simply the surface of the work, indulge in romantic energy. Phillips has been exhibiting her work in Dallas since 1978. She was an early member of D.W. Gallery, a female-led artist co-op in Dallas in the mid-'70s and '80s, and has been a regular exhibitor at Conduit Gallery since 1988.

Diane Purkiss is Professor of English Literature at Oxford University and William F. Pollard Fellow and Tutor at Keble College Oxford. Her most recent book is *English Food: A People's History* (William Collins, November 2022). She is now working on a history of the English at sea from the sinking of the *Mary Rose* to the Battle of Trafalgar.

Lydia Pyne is the author of *Endlings: Fables for the Anthropocene* (University of Minnesota Press, 2022). Her previous books include *Bookshelf*; *Seven Skeletons: The Evolution of the World's Most Famous Human Fossils*; *Genuine Fakes: What Phony Things Can Teach Us About Real Stuff*; and *Postcards: The Rise and Fall of the World's First Social Network*. Her writing has appeared in *The Atlantic*, *Nautilus*, *Slate*, *History Today*, *Hyperallergic*, and *TIME*, as well as *Archaeology*. She lives in Austin, Texas, where she is an avid rock climber and mountain biker.

Robert J. Stern is Professor of Geosciences and has been a UT Dallas faculty member since 1982. Most of his scientific career was spent studying modern and ancient plate tectonic processes and products, especially the active Mariana arc system in the Western Pacific and ancient (800-550 million-year-old) crust exposed in the Arabian-Nubian Shield of Egypt, Sudan, Ethiopia, Saudi Arabia, Jordan and Israel. He has made important contributions to the geology of Iran, the Caribbean, and the Gulf of Mexico. Geodynamic contributions include ideas about how new subduction zones form and the evolution of Plate Tectonics. He and his co-authors have published more than 250 peer-reviewed scientific papers; more information can be found on his Google Scholar profile. He is director of the Global Magmatic and Tectonic Laboratory and Geoscience Studios and is co-director of the Micro-imaging Laboratory and of the Permian Basin Research Lab. He is a Fellow of the Geological Society of America and the American Geophysical Union and has been Editor-in-Chief of *International Geology Review* since 2013. More information can be found on his Wikipedia page.

Carroll Swenson-Roberts is a narrative artist who has always been most comfortable in the art room. One of six children, she was born and raised in Dallas, Texas. Her family's travels included the Jersey shore, her grandparents' house in Florida, and their 100-year-old family ranch in West Texas. Graduating with a BFA in painting from the University of Texas at Austin in 1980, she has spent the last 40 years drawing the stories of her life and painting the landscapes of her travels to Dallas, Austin, Philadelphia, California and all the spaces in between.

Lorraine Tady is an artist living and working in Dallas, represented by Barry Whistler Gallery, Dallas. Recent exhibits and publications include *On Screen/Off Screen: Contemporary Painting and Technology*, Barry Whistler Gallery; *Texas Women: A New History of Abstract Art*, San Antonio Museum of Art; and *MULTILAYER Vision 20/20*, Stiftung Konzeptuelle Kunst, Germany. Tady is an Associate Professor of Instruction at UT Dallas. Her website is lorrainetady.com.

Keer Tanchak sources her imagery from historical sources that she translates into delicate, brushy,

feminine portraits. Primarily taking inspiration from 18th century French Rococo painting, Tanchak has found a similar romanticism in more modern depictions of current-day film icons and fashion models. While Tanchak works on paper and canvas, she also uniquely paints on slices of hand-cut aluminum that are reminiscent of Ex Voto, or retablo, paintings, a traditional folk art that was popularized in 19th century Mexico. These paintings, which lived outside chapels and were nailed casually to the wall in clusters, were a vehicle to quickly distribute images of idols to the masses. In addition to the democratization of this material, the artist cites the powerful and heartbreaking urgency of a painting that lives so precariously that inspires her practice.

Frederick Turner's science fiction epic poems led to his being a consultant for NASA's long-range futures group, through which he met Carl Sagan and other space scientists. He received Hungary's highest literary honor for his translations of Hungarian poetry with the distinguished scholar and Holocaust survivor Zsuzsanna Ozsváth, won Poetry's Levinson Prize, and has often been nominated for the Nobel Prize in literature. Born in England, raised in Africa by his anthropologist parents Victor and Edie Turner, and educated at Oxford University, he is also known as a Shakespearean scholar, a leading theorist of environmentalism, an authority on the philosophy of Time, and the poet laureate of traditional Karate. He is the author of about 40 books, ranging from literary monographs through cultural criticism and science commentary to poetry and translations. He has taught at UC Santa Barbara and Kenyon College, edited the *Kenyon Review*, and is presently Founders Professor of Arts and Humanities at the University of Texas at Dallas. Recent publications include *Light Within the Shade: 800 Years of Hungarian Poetry*, translated and edited by Frederick Turner and Zsuzsanna Ozsváth, Syracuse University Press, 2014; *Apocalypse: An Epic Poem*, Baen Books (ebook) and Ilium Press (hardback and paperback), 2016; *More Light: Selected Poems, 2004-2016*, Mundus Artium Press, 2017; and *The Golden Goblet: Selected Poems of Goethe*, translated and edited by Frederick Turner and Zsuzsanna Ozsváth, Deep Vellum Press, 2019.

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1

**SCIENCES
AND ARTS**

A Brief History of Emergence

Frederick Turner, Robert Stern, and Roger F. Malina

THE CASCADING CRISES OF OUR times—climate change, pandemic, mass extinctions, a major war, political chaos, ideological conflict, a profound questioning of truth itself, the descent of the social media into rival righteous mobs, to name a few—require a better framework of understanding. Things have not just changed: change has *accelerated* on all fronts. Are all these crises just a coincidence, or are they actually symptoms, or byproducts, of some deeper process? In many academic disciplines, new models of how things happen are offered, that share a crucial insight into the nature of change. Disciplinary boundaries have often hindered researchers and analysts in different fields from seeing parallel developments in the new ideas cooked up next door. All of these changes and crises are best understood as due to a process often called “emergence,” though other terms have been proposed. We suggest that constant change, resulting in periodic crisis, is a feature, not a bug, of the world’s operating system; that emergence is that system; and that relief from rapid change is impossible unless or until civilization completely collapses. We have to live with it. But to live with it, we must know what emergence is, and its history in the evolution of the world.

Emergence is the propensity for any high energy, far-from-equilibrium system to self-organize in ways that cannot be predicted from knowing its individual components.¹ Emergence is closely related to self-organization and complexity, and is synonymous with evolution. Spiral galaxies, hydrothermal systems, animals, ecosystems, oceanic currents and tides, hurricanes, civilizations, political systems, economies, and war are some of the many examples of emergent phenomena, in which low-level rules give rise to higher-level complexity. Entirely new properties and behaviors “emerge,” without direction and with characteristics that cannot be predicted from knowledge of their constituents alone. The whole is truly greater than the sum of its parts. In a book-length survey, H. L. Morowitz outlines the emergence of 28 phenomena, beginning with the Big Bang and ending with civilization.² There is no theory of emergence; our conceptualization of it is itself emergent.

1 See R. Ablowitz, “The Theory of Emergence,” *Philosophy of Science* 6 (1939), 1-16; and D. Pines, “Emergence: A unifying theme for 21st Century Science,” *Foundations and Frontiers of Complexity* 28:2 (2014), medium.com/sfi-30-foundations-frontiers/emergence-a-unifying-theme-for-21st-century-science-4324ac0f951e.

2 H. L. Morowitz, *How the World Became Complex: The Emergence of Everything* (Oxford University Press, 2002).

Reductionist logical positivism conflicts with the very nature of emergent phenomena.

The biggest emergence is the universe itself, as which and from which everything emerged and is emerging. Within the universe, three emergences in particular stand out: first is the emergence of matter, stars, galaxies, and the elements. Second is the emergence of life and the evolution of ecosystems. Third is the emergence of human civilization, culture, and science. Let's follow this river of emergence from the beginning.

Out of nothing, about 13.8 billion years ago, emerged pure energy, which combined into charged particles shortly afterwards. This was the "Big Bang." Charged particles in turn combined to make the lightest atoms, hydrogen and helium; this gas collapsed into molecular clouds. Mass concentrated increasingly and at fractal scales, leading to galaxies filled with stars of hydrogen and helium. No Earth-like planet could exist at this time, because the heavier elements like silicon and oxygen and magnesium needed for rocks and water didn't yet exist; they were yet to be made. The great pressures in star cores forged heavier and heavier elements up to element 56, iron. Elements heavier than iron were created during supernovae, when the more massive stars collapsed, jamming more neutrons into atomic nuclei. Collapsing stars spectacularly exploded, each time creating a new molecular cloud, each cloud collapsing into new stars and new planetary system with more heavy atoms than before. Molecular clouds formed, coalesced, collapsed into stars and planets; star bellies created heavier atoms and large stars exploded, repeating the cycle again and again. About 4.5 billion years ago, one of these clouds formed from the ashes of a supernova in an outer arm of the Milky

Way galaxy. It was our solar nebula, which began spinning like a flattened top around a new star, our sun.³

Out of this spinning cloud of gas and dust condensed the earth, the planets, their moons, and all of the materials we use today. Incredibly, we have samples of this primitive concentrate in the form of meteorites, which land on earth every so often. This meteorite-stuff made all the planets and moons. The planets closest to the sun were rocky, unbelievably hot, and inhospitable, and the ones farther away were gassy or icy giants; all were constantly being bombarded by meteorites large and small. One of these rocky planets—our Earth—was a "Goldilocks planet"—far enough away from the sun that liquid water could persist on its surface, and big enough that its gravity could hold on to its water and atmosphere. We might add some other constraints of the same kind: the right axial tilt of the planet, the right period and kind of meteorite bombardment, a big moon to stir things up and create a range of conditions, the right mix of elements in the crust and mantle, et cetera.

Earth's surface water—its oceans—fostered the second great emergence—life. Life started early in earth's history—maybe 4 billion years ago—and started simply. Somehow a microscopic self-enclosed capsule began to take energy from chemicals in seawater to keep itself going—the first metabolism—and a short strand of

³ This history ignores the 95% of the universe that did not participate (except for its mass) in the emergent process of physical evolution: the dark energy and dark matter that remained behind as the 5% went on to its extraordinary destiny. Perhaps we can learn from what dark energy and dark mass do not do, and thus what it is about the light-emitting minority that leads to emergence.

RNA that could replicate itself came into being. Simple bacteria and other single celled organisms called archea were the only life forms on the planet for three billion years. One of these single-celled organisms figured out how to use sunlight to turn water and carbon dioxide into food plus a dangerous waste gas: oxygen. Oxygen was poison to the organisms that existed then, but there wasn't much of it at first. With time, lifeforms that could use the extraordinary chemical power of oxygen came into being. Individual cells evolved to cooperate in multi-cellular organisms. From this point on, the distinction between lifeforms that use sunlight to create food—plants—and those that eat them—animals—became greater and greater. Animals evolved to eat and avoid being eaten and plants evolved to better capture sunlight, nutrients, and water and to avoid being eaten.

Single-celled organisms got bigger and more complicated, but it wasn't until about 800 million years ago that multicellular organisms with specialized functions and advanced sensory organs appeared. These animals proliferated in the sea and on the shallow seafloor, diversifying into the thirteen basic body-plans that persist today, from sponges to chordates. One of these chordates—a primitive worm—evolved into fish, some of which crawled out of the sea after a few hundred million years and began to live on land: first amphibians, then reptiles, and mammals. One group of reptiles began to fly and became birds. Other earth systems were co-emerging with life, most importantly the way the hot earth interior convected. Plate tectonics emerged, affecting the distribution of land and sea as well as climate like nothing before.

Species evolved to exploit the new niches that were being opened by the continued pressure to increase and multiply, built into the multiplicative habit of the DNA molecule.

Ecosystems emerged from interactions between plants, animals, Earth's watery skin and climate. Plants and animals colonized land, making soil.

While individual species slowly adapted, their interactions with myriad other, also-changing species changed and ecosystems co-emerged. Periodic extinctions wiped out many species, creating opportunities for new species to evolve. After about 350 million years of evolving on the land, a remarkable animal—human beings—came into being, leading to the third great emergence: civilization.

What triggered the third great emergence was the combined result of the human species' uniquely powerful communication and tool-making skills. Maybe our civilization needed several other rare “Goldilocks” conditions to happen, plate tectonics being one, to have just the right mixture of stability, gradual change, and sudden change.

It was as if the planet had provided a niche for an efficient biped with a good temperature control system, spare forelimbs suitable for climbing and then manipulating, a large brain adapted to respond to ecological constraints but also for complex social interaction, excellent binocular vision, enhanced longevity, long infancy, transformative adolescence, and an otolaryngeal system capable of a wide waveband of expression and communication. This was a basin of attraction into which one group of ape lineages eventually found its way.⁴ A threshold of emergence had been

4 The distinction between a basin of attraction and a niche is between a broad term and a narrow one. A basin of attraction is a phenomenon that is characteristic of any field of varying probabilities, ranging from math and physics through biology and economics. A niche is a basin of attraction in a living landscape. In both cases, the general and the specific, the terms imply an assumption that there can be a mutual forcing between the basin and its occupants, between the ecosystemic niche and its dwellers.

gradually approached, and then crossed with enormous and instant consequences.

In what geologists would call a blink of an eye, the surface and biosphere of the planet were transformed. Language for knowing and communicating came to dominate the physical world it named. Agriculture led to extra food, which allowed for larger families and concentrations of people in villages, then towns. Townspeople began to develop special skills. Cities emerged in river valleys where agriculture was especially productive, often with a characteristic social hierarchy that reconciled in one way or another the conflicting pulls of group and individual interests, the efficiency of authority versus the creativity of freedom, the regulation of the law against the productivity of the market. That dynamism had its characteristic architectural expression in the pyramid or raised platform, its slope and relative mass nicely expressing the degree of specialization, power, consent, and coercion in each society. Religions emerged as these talented apes tried to explain where all this came from, what was expected of people, and what happens to us when we die.

We learned how to find new energy sources: fire, slaves, animals, and wind at first; then coal, oil, and electricity. Technology, mathematics, and scientific knowledge flourished. We began refining metals and making new materials. Money was invented, first bits of gold and silver, then paper, then plastic, and eventually zeroes and ones on a computer. The night sky was scrutinized for what it could tell us about time and direction. Markets and forms of ownership required laws to regulate them, and specialists to enforce and interpret the law. Writing was invented to record transactions, rituals, stories, heritage, law, and history. Every civilization created or was created by a grand story,

an epic, that would include in its narrative the characteristic conflicts and various group interests of its constituent clans and tribes. Those epics often became the basis of the region's religion. Trade between city-states also resulted in sharing of new plants, tools, materials, and techniques. Regions with different languages and cultures unified into nations and empires. War became increasingly deadly. We began to explore other lands, then the oceans, then space.

This summary implies that the density of significant changes (as opposed to mere stasis, cyclic repetition, or chaotic violence) increases with time. More new stuff gets packed into each millennium, century, year and day, partly because all previous forms of change don't cease, even as they are subsumed into new forms of change such as ecosystems, sociobiological evolution, economics, sociopolitical interaction, and culture. So brief summaries get harder and harder, the closer we get to today.

But human culture and its crystallization as civilization were certainly aware of the processes of emergence that surrounded and included them. They named those very forces. The small ones they called spirits (literally, "breaths"), and the big ones they called gods—or deities, from an Indo-European root sounding like "dewos" (literally, "shining"). An ecosystem such as a river, a self-organizing weather phenomenon such as a storm or hurricane, an animal species, an autocatalytic human system such as language, the marketplace, the system of motherhood, the system of political power—even a great hero or heroine, if their actions were sufficiently original—each of these could be a god.

Paradoxically, if we discard any vocabulary for talking about such emergent entities, and dispense with the respect, poetry, mysticism and communal celebration that recognizes them, we also

dispense with most of the “non-western” culture that, for both political and moral reasons, we need to include in our worldview. The inspiration that built and is restoring Notre Dame de Paris, the fertile divine stories that generated the Taj Mahal and Mozart’s Requiem, and the Balinese temple culture that points the way to a sustainable ecological future, are examples of the “shining,” “breathing” forces that we recognize in our experience of the world’s continuing evolution. Poets find it hard not to celebrate those larger systems, systems that we cannot fully embrace because they embrace us.

Virtually all religious art, especially that of creation myths, depicts emergence as imagined by peoples with a pre-rationalist (not pre-rational) vocabulary. We enlightened Westerners are actually *rediscovering* emergence after three centuries of rationalist determinism, the thermodynamic idea of the clockwork universe running down through the increase of disorder. Our culture’s present yearning for other religious ideas, rituals, meditative practices, etc, is an implicit rejection of the Platonized religion of the Enlightenment. But our artists and poets—Sandro Botticelli, William Blake, Goethe, and Gauguin are good examples—never bought into the clockwork.

Browsing through the multifarious visual imagery of the world’s religions, one notices many forms of emergence: the emergence of consciousness or personality out of an inanimate object; the emergence of a cosmos out of an explosive center; the transformation of an adept’s mind in a state of contemplation; the emergence of meaning out of a script or glyph or ikon; the integrity of an object in which the whole is greater than the sum of its parts; the mandala, which presents a diminishing or increasing series of figure-ground reversals; fractal self-similarity or scaling, implying a

kind of recursive process of emergence now clarified by Benoit Mandelbrot; transformation, as in the theriomorphic images of divinities or human ritual practitioners; branched candelabra resembling Darwin’s early drawing of the branching tree of species; the World Tree as is found in many cultures—Yggdrasil, the Tree of Life, the Mayan Ceiba, the Hindu Ashvattha and Buddhist Bodhi—symbolizing the emergence of the new from the old, of the many from the one. In the parable-poem of Jesus of Nazareth, the kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, whose very principle is emergence. (Sad how these dynamic playful images of emergence often gave rise over time to ossified institutions and systems of compulsory theology!)

Postmodern science, with its interest in systems, emergence, and wholes that are greater than the sum of their parts, is finally beginning to put some solid foundations under the intuitive recognitions that constituted humanity’s ancient lore of spirits. One key concept, auto-poesis, is well summarized by R. Rogowski:

Autopoiesis describes the capacity of an entity to reproduce itself. As a concept it was first introduced in theoretical biology to explain cognition and the essence of life (see Maturana and Varela 1980, 1987) and was then further developed in general systems theory (for example, von Förster 1984). It has been widely applied in mathematics, in the study of cognition, and in studies of the nervous system as well as in information systems, cognitive science, and artificial intelligence (see Mingers 1995).⁵

One key feature of auto-poesis is that it arises from interactions between small elements of a system and is rarely part of

⁵ International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences, 2001; www.sciencedirect.com/referencework/9780080430768/international-encyclopedia-of-the-social-and-behavioral-sciences.

any top-down strategic planning process. In human and animal communities, individual agency, the possession of control over actions and their consequences, is essential. Without a sense of agency at the lower levels of a social system, it is unlikely that desirable phenomena will emerge. In this sense, an auto-poetic system is more like a market or an ecology than a dictatorship or a monoculture.

Before the emergence of the science of complex systems, cybernetics—the science of control and communications in animals and machines—laid out a number of fundamental premises. A triad of essential principles may be a useful starting point. They are purpose, context, and feedback. These work something like a musical trio. For instance, in an ecosystem or an orchestra, the purpose of a species is to reproduce itself, while the purpose of a performer is to help create a musical piece. The context of an ecosystem is its geology and climate; the context of an orchestra is the aesthetic and economic world of musical performance. The feedback of an ecosystem is its survival, flourishing, or decline in abundance. The feedback of an orchestra is the attention, applause, and return of its audience.

Once a reflective observer enters a cybernetic system, a “fourth order” emerges. Summarizing its principles, fourth order cybernetics considers what happens when a system redefines itself. It focuses on the integration of a system within its larger, co-defining context. Ultimately, fourth order cybernetics is difficult or, perhaps, impossible to conceive—it unavoidably defies certain principles that make sense at the “lower” orders. Fourth order cybernetics acknowledges the complex system’s emergent properties of a greater complexity, properties that reduce knowability and predictability. It also implies that a system will “immerge” into

its environment, of which it is part. Immergence means “submergence” or “disappearance in, or as if in, a liquid.”

The new understandings of the world as emergent demand deep philosophical changes in how we do science, scholarship, and philosophy. For example:

One of the underlying problems in existing academic disciplines has been the tendency of we humans to over-simplify in attempts to make sense of “things” or “phenomena.” For instance, to an astronomer, the statement “Is it day or is it night?” oversimplifies the orbital mechanics that lead to gradual changes in light levels and that demand the further question of which time zone the question is asked in. Oversimplification can result from reductionism, formalized as the logical positivism that insists that existing things or states of affairs are definable in terms of directly observable objects, or sense-data.⁶

Reductionist logical positivism conflicts with the very nature of emergent phenomena. In the last century the science of complex systems, and the mathematics of complexity, have also complexified the very notion of “causality.” New concepts of sensitive dependence on initial conditions that are by their very nature indeterminate (as popularly imaged in the “butterfly effect”) force us to imagine cause not as a single train of events but as a branching tree of possible outcomes, several of which can take place at once and some of which will not happen to be realized though they are as possible as the ones that are. Cause is only fully ascribable after the fact. Auto-poesis sometimes happens with no precursor causalities; very rarely does “A cause B.” More often, A causes B, but B is causing C, and C causes A, or A may cause B, if C happened before and D happens

⁶ “Reductionism,” Britannica.com, online at www.britannica.com/topic/reductionism.

somewhere else. The reason why lab experiments are strictly isolated according to scientific protocols is in order to eliminate as many of the causal branches as possible—but the procedure itself makes the result less and less applicable to the messy real world.

This urge to over-simplification is combined with the untheoretical search for “symmetries,” when in fact fractality is more common in the world. The success of Newton’s theory of gravity has often misled our understanding of causalities that occur in complex systems. Statistical mechanics and quantum mechanics, as early as the 19th century, should have made us aware that focusing on individual atoms, or elements, could lead to false conclusions than those derived by analyzing the collective thermodynamic behaviors of the individual agents. The simplification of complex information into binary zeroes and ones, that frames the way digital computers operate, means that the error is built into the operating system of our current economy and technological infrastructure. Emergent phenomena are rarely symmetric or right/wrong, left/right.

The postmodern arts, especially those with an environmental concern, are beginning to reflect this correction to the fundamental “operating system” of the world, transcending and partly replacing the Newtonian positivism of our former

view. Our understanding of human organizations is being illuminated by agent-based models in game theory with its applications in modeling genetic competition, ecosystems, manufacturing, democratic lawmaking, and markets. In computer science, evolutionary algorithms, where programs compete or cooperate or share code to solve intractable problems, show similar advantages.

Such efficiencies are a nice pragmatic argument for the value of individual freedom, especially in this era, when adherence to collective identities is preferred to the open interaction (competitive/cooperative) of free persons. As universities and colleges begin to absorb the discipline-transcending implications of this succeeding grand narrative, the educational system will have the opportunity to begin a new phase of emergence.⁷

We live in an extraordinarily emergent world, with fundamental changes happening all around us. Is it possible to know what is emerging now, what will emerge next, and how to “steer” some of these emergences? If so, what is the role of the university in sensing, anticipating, and steering emergences? How do we foster the kind of top-down/bottom-up feedback and distributed agency that leads to the emergence of new ideas? A

7 Having provided a theoretical framing on emergence, we are working on observing our university, the University of Texas at Dallas. We are observing and noticing, but not meddling. But the nature of auto-poiesis is that there is a quantum mechanical observer effect where the act of observations meddles without premeditation. The occasion of this essay by three scholars in widely different fields is a good example of how university administrators can foster the kind of interdisciplinary research that leads to emergence. We would like to thank Nils Roemer, Dean of the Harry W. Bass, Jr. School of Arts, Humanities, and Technology, for his provision of a venue and lunches for the group that composed this piece.

Book of Earth

An Interview With Heidi Gustafson

Lydia Pyne

Ochre has been with humankind since our beginning.

PART IRON, PART OXYGEN, PART CLAY AND SOIL, OCHRE IS an earth pigment. It is both color and material. Crush it up, add liquid, and the pigment becomes a fluid color material—paint. For some 500,000 years, ochres and peoples have coevolved. But ochre, like the earth itself, is much, much more than simply how people have chosen to use it, be that for art or technology or any space in between.

Heidi Gustafson knows ochre. Her work with ochres has been featured in *American Craft*, where she was called the “ochre whisperer”, and *The New York Times*, in which she was described as “the woman archiving the world’s ochre.”¹ In her new book, *Book of Earth: A Guide To Ochre, Pigment, and Raw Color*, Gustafson takes readers through ochre as she knows it.² *Book of Earth* is part philosophy, part color theory, and part art and craft; it features several of her own stunning ochre art works. “I imagine ochre (iron earth, iron oxides) as a shared creative portal between the cosmos, Earth’s heart, and my tiny life,” she writes.

Book of Earth is comprised of eight sections in addition to a preface and introduction. It is organized around each color of ochre—red, yellow, green, blue, black, and white—and opens with a discussion of biogenic ochre and the role that origins play in the ochre and earth pigment worlds. “Ochre and earth pigment are situated at the nexus of huge elemental cycles,” Gustafson writes, “a gazillion years of outer space galaxy creation, a few billion years of geological and biological growth on (and of) Earth, and several hundred thousand recent years

¹“The Ochre Whisperer,” American Craft Council, accessed November 4, 2022, www.craftcouncil.org/magazine/article/ochre-whisperer; Alex Ronan, “The Woman Archiving the World’s Ochres,” *The New York Times*, October 24, 2019, sec. T Magazine, www.nytimes.com/2019/10/24/t-magazine/ocher-heidi-gustafson.html; “Early Futures,” March 13, 2016, earlyfutures.com.

² Harry N. Abrams, 2023, 224 pages hardcover.



Ochres in a stream. Photo courtesy Heidi Gustafson.

of human evolution.” This organization explores the plethora of ways that different ochre earths synchronously hold color and place.

I met Gustafson through my own research and writing about ochre. We spent a day on Whidbey Island, Washington, where she introduced me to the island’s ochres and ochrescape. She also shared her work with her Ochre Sanctuary, a collection of over 600 earth pigments. How I think and write about ochre and earth has been shaped by Gustafson’s mentorship—she has encouraged me to think more deeply and more purposefully about ochre and its existence.



Yellow ochres. Photo courtesy Heidi Gustafson.

I am excited to share our conversation about her work, *Book of Earth*. This interview has been condensed and edited for clarity.

Lydia Pyne (LP): In the introduction to *Book of Earth*, you write about the impetus for the project and how your ochre journey has unfolded over the last 10 years. Tell me about how you became interested in writing about ochres, pigments, and colors.

Heidi Gustafson (HG): I feel that *Book of Earth* is a project that came out of an earlier idea I had for a book where rocks spoke for themselves. I had originally wanted a book with ochre on every page—sort of almost like color swatches—but with an energetic communication quality. So *Book of Earth* has essays, photographs, and ochre artworks. I see *Book of Earth* as a book that translates the voices of ochre, the voices of rocks.

LP: *Book of Earth* lets ochre do the talking.

HG: Exactly.

LP: I think one of the incredible strengths of *Book of Earth* is how you so seamlessly blend together art, history, anthropology, poetry, and a plethora of other disciplines. In the book's introduction, you talk about feeling a responsibility to move between "lenses, scales, places, and kinds of knowledge, often without much forewarning." For you, as an author, that's a lot of different ways of thinking about ochre to hold at the same time.

HG: Yes, it can be challenging! I want to show people, to show readers, a way into ochre—to show what ochre is up to. I don't want people to assume that only archeologists are interested in ochre, or only artists are interested in ochre, or one specific group of people who have historically studied or used ochre. There are so many degrees of ochre's existence. *Book of Earth* is way to think about the full spectrum of ochre.

LP: Speaking of spectrums, this feels like a good point to talk about the book's organization, which reads like a color spectrum. The book begins with biogenic ochres—ochres that are microbial, ochres that are living—and then moves on to red ochre, yellow ochre, green earth, blue ochre, black ochre, and finishes with white earth.

HG: I followed ochre's lead, starting by looking across deep time. Microbial ochre is the origin of a lot of other ochres, so I wanted to start where the ochre starts. I feel like red ochre is a child of the

microbial ochre, so that comes next, and then I follow with other ochres. As you get to black ochre and even white ochre, you're just getting a lot closer to human industry.

LP: I love how each ochre section has an essay and discussion about each type of earth. Guiding readers through ochre this way has an organic and natural narrative flow to it.

HG: Yes, exactly. And it also follows how long certain ochres have been around. For example, you don't see a lot of vivianite, the blue ochre, in a deep time context. There isn't any 3-billion-year-old vivianite that we know about, unlike red ochre or yellow ochre.

LP: I'll be honest: Learning about "blue ochre" has fundamentally changed how I think about ochre and how color and material combine to form earth.

HG: Vivianite is a really special ochre.

LP: I know better than to ask you about a "favorite" ochre. How could you possibly pick one? But I'm curious if there's an ochre that has resonated with you throughout this project, or one that really piques your curiosity?

HG: As an ochre person, I feel like I haven't heard enough stories about yellow ochres—they seem to be overshadowed by the red ochre. It's as if yellow ochre is only talked about when and how it can be changed into red ochre.

LP: Right. Heating yellow ochre transforms it into red ochre.

HG: In *Book of Earth*, I write about the iron part of goethite and the shadow part of the Iron Age in our industrial culture. I'm fascinated by a lot of these yellow ochres that were once microbial ochres that became really hard bog irons, or like goethite where you can still see biogenic ochre sheaths.

LP: In *Book of Earth*, you describe bog iron (in the yellow ochre spectrum) as biogenic ochre's "eldest child, usually the first to form solid mineral chunks out of sludge."

HG: It feels like yellow ochre holds so many important stories. There's so much important knowledge. There are so many contemporary secrets about our culture hidden in that material.

LP: There's such a visual element to ochre. Some of the trays in your



Bearded vulture in biogenic ochre.
Photo courtesy Klaus Robin/Foundation for the Bearded Vulture.

curated ochre pieces really make me think of the historical *Wunderkammer* or cabinets of curiosities. I am curious if you could tell me a bit about how you've conceptualized the display of the ochre with images you've included?

HG: I actually was inspired by a cabinet of curiosities! In particular, a specific 18th century Dutch cabinet in Rijksmuseum's furniture collection. It is a big apothecary chest, a medicine chest, and it has all these hidden trays. The mineral medicine was hidden away; each drawer had its own set of shapes that were built around the materials that were in that tray.

LP: The interplay between what's visible and what's not—it's stunning.

HG: I wanted to have an honest nod to the European-American cultures that I'm coming from, referencing both pharmaceutical elements of ochre as well as the display of the materials. My very good friend Henry Ancheta (who is ochre and pigment expert Melonie Ancheta's husband) built those trays in collaboration with me from old IKEA bed slats.

LP (laughing): That's a great detail: To take something from IKEA and make it into something beautiful.

HG: So it's almost also like doubling this kind of joke on a European cultural context. He was like, oh yeah, I'm gonna make these beautiful trays out of like old badly made Swedish furniture.

LP: *Book of Earth* is beautiful, complex, and incredibly timely, here in the Anthropocene. What would you want readers to come away thinking more deeply about?

HG: I'm very interested in earth empathy. Earth empathy lets you relate to microbial ochre as the living lineage of ancestors that created other beings out of which we've come. You realize that gods are right in front of your face. That you're in a series of origin stories still alive right now. Ochres point us back to teachings about how to connect to ancestral memory, cultural memory. Ochres have deep meanings to me in their ability to both physically remediate landscapes, and also to spiritually remediate our relationship with the earth. ♫

The Quiet Dr. Einstein and the Forgotten Moral Heroes of World War I

Alberto Martinez and Thomas Palaima

WHAT GOOD IS A TRUE WAR story? How do we tell that it's true? What is truth, in times of war and of social and political unrest? How should citizens behave when their countries are fighting unjustifiable wars? How do they reconcile their inaction with their consciences? Here we will tell a true war story, about Albert Einstein and his close associates during World War I, that may shed light on these questions.

Much has been written about Einstein's pacifism during World War I.¹ It is well-known that he refused to sign the Manifesto of the 93 prominent German intellectuals who supported the war in 1914, including Fritz Haber and Max Planck.² Instead, Einstein soon afterward signed a counter-Manifesto against the war, drafted by Georg Nicolai, a cardiologist in Berlin. Nearly nobody else signed the counter-Manifesto, and it was not even published in Germany.

Years later, when reflecting on his enormous fame, Einstein complained that much of it truly arose from a kind of mass psychosis, and that historians should study

mass psychology in order to understand how one man, such as himself, may become seized by society, almost randomly, and misrepresented as a paragon of genius or virtue.³ Yet Einstein's fans did not believe him, of course, and neither did historians of science. Instead they thought he was just being modest. Not only did they portray Einstein as one of the greatest geniuses in physics, they also portrayed him as a great pacifist. To be sure, from an early age Einstein despised militarism, and German militarism in particular. But, as we shall see, he was not a great pacifist during World War I. In many ways Einstein's behavior serves as a parable for what intelligent individuals of good conscience go through in times of war.

Einstein complained that the public's admiration of his scientific achievements was very excessive and "simply grotesque."⁴ Similarly, decades after World War I, his fame as a pacifist obscured the labors of other individuals, in Germanic lands, who, unlike Einstein, carried out dangerously brave actions to oppose the war. In particular, two of Einstein's friends,

1 See, e.g., Virginia Iris Holmes, *Einstein's Pacifism and World War I* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2017).

2 Roy MacLeod, "The Mobilisation of Minds and the Crisis in International Science: *The Krieg der Geister and the Manifesto of the 93*," *Journal of War & Culture Studies* 11, no. 1 (2018): 58–78.

3 Einstein, quoted in "Einstein Fears Reception in U.S.; Dislikes Crowds," *Bluefield Daily Telegraph* (West Virginia), November 23, 1930, p. 4.

4 Albert Einstein, "Some Notes on My American Impressions," 1921, in Einstein, *The World as I See It*, trans. Alan Harris (London: John Lane, 1935), 37.

Fritz Adler and Georg Nicolai, risked their lives trying to disrupt the imperial military hierarchies of Austria and Germany. The contrasting behaviors of these three men illuminate how our own behaviors in contemporary crises may range from inaction to radical reactions.

Fritz Adler had been Einstein's friend since the 1890s in Zurich. As Adler wrote, they had "parallel lives."⁵ Both born in 1879, they were both Jewish by descent and ethnicity, but had both abandoned Judaism. Both of their fathers wanted them to become engineers, but they both refused. Instead, they both studied physics in Zurich: Einstein at the Polytechnic and Adler nearby at the University. They took some physics classes together. In Zurich, they both met and fell in love with foreign women. They both married in 1903. They both had three children, though Einstein did not meet or raise his daughter. They both did their physics dissertations under Professor Alfred Kleiner.

Adler became an instructor of physics first, at Zurich, while Einstein published physics papers as an amateur. Einstein remained underemployed at the Swiss patent office from 1902 until 1909, when Adler was offered a professorship at the University of Zurich. Surprisingly, Adler turned it down despite his family's dire financial needs, because, he argued, the job should go to Einstein. Thus, Einstein's first true academic job reached him thanks to Adler's principled and selfless kindness. As if that weren't enough, Adler then found a place for Einstein's family to live: in the apartment right above Adler's. So they were friends, neighbors, and instructors in the same physics department for two years.

⁵ Fritz Adler, quoted in Ronald Florence, *Fritz: The Story of a Political Assassin* (New York: Dial Press, 1971), 44.

Einstein was roughly apolitical, while Adler was a dedicated member of a socialist party. Adler also enabled Einstein to get his second job in physics, by convincing Einstein to lie: to write that he believed in Judaism when applying for an academic post at the German University in Prague. ("Religionless" persons could not be employed in government jobs.) Thus, Einstein departed to Prague in 1911 to work as a physicist. Adler, however, departed to Vienna, where he was no longer a physics instructor, but instead became an editor of socialist newspapers, and worked for the Social Democratic Workers' Party of Austria.

In 1914, Einstein moved to Berlin. Then the war began. From 1914 to 1917, Einstein's office was at Fritz Haber's institute of chemistry, which was placed under the oversight of Germany's Ministry of War. His good friend, Captain Haber, was developing poison gases for the German army. Despite Einstein's disgust for the war, in 1915 he wrote to his friend Heinrich Zangger, expressing his comfortable and "conscious detachment" from his surroundings: "why shouldn't one live happily as the service staff of the madhouse?"⁶ At the time, half of his salary came from a Prussian industry that held military contracts. In 1916 he again wrote to Zangger: "Against the insane bustle of the world at large, I shut my eyes when possible, having fully lost my social feeling."⁷

The war frightened many people, including Sigmund Freud, especially because his three sons became soldiers.

⁶ Albert Einstein to Heinrich Zangger, ca. 10 April 1915, Robert Schulmann et al., eds. *The Collected Papers of Albert Einstein*, Vol. 8A (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), 116; einsteinpapers.press.princeton.edu/vol8a-doc/188

⁷ Einstein to Zangger, 11 July 1916, Diana Kormos Buchwald et al., eds., *Collected Papers of Albert Einstein*, Vol. 10 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 43; einsteinpapers.press.princeton.edu/vol10-doc/113



Dead German soldiers, Western Front, during World War I. The most shocking thing about this photograph is not the image of four dead German soldiers crumpled in the mud at the bottom of their trench, but the rather triumphant note of the caption written by the British photographer, which reads: 'A coomn [common] scene in a German trench after our men had been over.' In contrast, the memoirs and reflections of the ordinary soldiers far more often show empathy, a pity for the dead, regardless of their nationality.

In 1915 Freud wrote his now-classic essays on "Thoughts for the Times on War and Death," arguing that war deformed civilization as it converted death into something that was no longer a matter of chance.

The empires converted young men into soldiers, or cannon fodder, including men from distant colonies and countries. They were subjected to unimaginable barrages of new industrial weapons: machine guns, Stokes mortar shells, projectiles, tanks, grenades, underground explosives, poison

gases, and countless bombs from dirigibles and airplanes. In Belgium and France, the German, French, and British armies clashed in seemingly endless, virtually stalemated battles. Consider the 141-day Battle of the Somme, which lasted from July 1st to November 18, 1916.⁸ There the British army was commanded by Field Marshal Douglas Haig, overseeing an unimaginable butchery of men. The first day alone had 57,470

⁸"What was the Battle of the Somme?" Imperial War Museums, www.iwm.org.uk/history/key-facts-about-the-battle-of-the-somme

British casualties, including 19,240 who were killed. When we now read Haig's report, in tranquility, it seems surreal in its alien indifference: "Very successful attack this morning ... All went like clockwork ... The battle is going very well for us ... Our troops are in wonderful spirits and full of confidence."⁹ In this single prolonged pointless battle, the deaths included 23,000 soldiers from faraway Australia, who were killed for nothing.

The record-breaking horrors can best be grasped by reading soldiers' own accounts, so consider the words of one of them. In the midst of the gruesome ordeal, an Australian soldier, Lieutenant "Alec" Raws, wrote loving but graphic letters to his

family. On August 4, 1916, Raws described the battlefield of "the Great Push" in France, where countless bombshells flew overhead and exploded nearby, as he stood among "thousands of unburied dead around me," a hellscape far worse than the horrors of Gallipoli and Verdun. He explained: "We are lousy, stinking, ragged, unshaven, sleepless. Even when we're back a bit we can't sleep for our own guns. I have one puttee, a dead man's helmet, another dead man's gas protector, a dead man's bayonet. My tunic is rotten with other men's blood and partly splattered with a comrade's brains. It is horrible, but why should you people at home not know? Several of my friends are raving mad."¹⁰

⁹ Duff Cooper, *Haig*, Vol. 1 (London: Faber and Faber, 1935), xxx. ["some accounts say "men" instead of "troops," but we haven't found the original.]

German trenches demolished by artillery (Battle of Mount Sorrel, Belgium), showing German dead. June, 1916. Wikimedia Commons.

¹⁰ John Alexander Raws to Norman Bayles, 4 August 1916, in Australian War Memorial, Photostat copies of letters, p. 140, in www.awm.gov.au/collection/C2080597?image=140. For contextualization of Raws' letters, see: Thomas G. Palaima, "War Stories Told, Untold and Retold from Troy to Tinian to Fort Campbell," *Arion* 23, no. 3 (2016) 1-33, esp. 6-8 (www.bu.edu/arion/files/2016/03/Palaima1.pdf) and "The First Casualty," *Times Higher Education* (December 20/27, 2012): 32-37.



Lieutenant Raws wrote that traditional soldierly virtues like personal courage counted for nothing there; instead, “It is all nerve. Once that goes one becomes a gibbering maniac.” The shelling and gunfire noise were unbearable; villages, buildings, trees, and bodies were all “pounded to nothing.”¹¹ In just three days, Raws lost his brother Goldy, his two best friends, and six of his seven fellow officers. Raws was “buried” repeatedly by explosions, under dirt and shrapnel, under rotting corpses and the dying, yet he crawled out. He endured innumerable bombs: “millions of shells, shells all day and all night, high explosives,” bursting almost constantly, as scores of soldiers became insane and fled from the hellscape of craters and muddy trenches. In anxiety and horror, Raws complained about the tear gas, the sulfur, the putrid smells: “The stench, and the horridness of it can but be mentioned. I have sat on corpses, walked on corpses, and pillaged corpses,” yet later he lost everything he carried.¹² The carnage was horrific. Raws wrote that he never saw a body buried, as the land and the trenches were saturated with dead men, rotting, “the limbs, the mangled bodies, and stray heads.” On August 19, Raws wrote to his brother Lennon about their younger brother Goldy: “I want to tell you, so that it may be on record, that I honestly believe Goldy and many other officers were murdered on the night you know of, through the incompetence, callousness, and personal vanity of those high in authority.”¹³

Four days later, Alec Raws too was killed in combat. A fellow Australian soldier, Corporal Arthur G. Thomas, enduring the

same slaughter, begged in vain, “For Christ’s sake, write a book on the life of an infantryman and by doing so you will quickly prevent these shocking tragedies.”¹⁴

One of the chief murderers was Field Marshal Haig, of whom Britain’s Prime Minister David Lloyd George remarked, “Haig does not care how many men he loses. He just squanders the lives of these boys.”¹⁵

Meanwhile, hundreds of miles away, in the comfortable imperial capitals of Berlin and Vienna, what did people do to oppose this senseless war? Most people did nothing. In Berlin, Albert Einstein had finished his theory of gravity right before 1916. So, strangely for a man later renowned for his pacifism, he then started to design airplane wings for the L.V.G. aircraft company. L.V.G. was a military contractor, so potentially Einstein’s calculations and designs could have helped the German Air Force.¹⁶ Meanwhile, his friend Fritz Adler, thoroughly frustrated, was in Vienna, writing political news articles against the war, shocked that none of the political parties dared to oppose it. And Austria’s minister president had suspended meetings of parliament.

Vienna had the shadowy atmosphere of moral ambiguity and immoral business-as-usual depravity evident in the bombastic pretense of its central *Ringstrasse*. At the time, Vienna reeked with strains of anti-Semitism, xenophobia, and anti-immigrant discrimination. Vienna was the slow-cooking cultural crockpot of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, and yet human beings with eastern

11 Ibid., 141, in www.awm.gov.au/collection/C2o8o597?image=141

12 Raws, 8 December 1916, in *ibid.*, 153, in www.awm.gov.au/collection/C2o8o597?image=153

13 John Alexander Raws to William Lennon Raws, 19 August 1916, in *ibid.*, 160, in www.awm.gov.au/collection/C2o8o597?image=160

14 Peter Charlton, *Australians on the Somme: Pozieres 1916* (London: Lee Cooper, 1986), 263.

15 A.J.P. Taylor, ed., *Lloyd George: A Diary by Frances Stephenson* (London: Hutchinson 1971), 139.

16 Alberto A. Martinez, “The Questionable Inventions of the Clever Dr. Einstein,” *Metascience* 23 (2014): 52–54.

European and Balkan names (Slovenian, Serbian, Croatian, Bosnian, Bohemian, Moravian, Czech, and Polish) were viewed there as undesirable foreigners somehow corrupting Germanic Austrian purity.

On October 21, 1916, the “parallel lives” of Einstein and Adler diverged radically. That day, Adler skipped lunch with his mother. Instead he went to eat lunch alone at the luxurious upper dining room of the Meissl & Schadn Hotel. There, having finished his dessert, Adler walked up to the table where Count Karl von Stürgkh, the Minister President of Austria, was sitting. Adler took out a gun and shot the President three times, killing him. Waiters, imperial officers with swords, and other men lunged at Adler. He fired two more shots, injuring a waiter and Baron Aehrenthal. Officers piled on top of him; he surrendered. Adler used a Browning gun, the same American brand that had been used by the student Gavrilo Princip to assassinate the heir to the Austro-Hungarian Empire, two years earlier.

Some people on the streets of Austria cheered and celebrated the assassination. Yet in Berlin, the newspapers lied, saying that nobody was on the streets in Vienna. Quickly, the newspaper articles claimed that Adler’s crime was a private act with no consequences. Back then, already, the structures of power and propaganda propagated the lie that individuals are powerless to change society. They portrayed the war as something that no man could stop, an inevitable, irrevocable conflict which would continue regardless of the fact that Adler alone had decapitated one of the heads of the hydra, the Austro-Hungarian Empire.

Adler’s motives in killing von Stürgkh prove that he knew what was what in late 1916 Vienna. Adler hoped that by removing the President from office, “with extreme prejudice,” he might get the long-stalled

machinery of government unblocked and heading toward reversing or remedying Austria’s bloody crime of starting the horrific war. Yet the well-educated and cultured bourgeoisie decried Adler’s action as an aberration, a grossly unacceptable breakdown of civility. Those in power and the presumably sophisticated upper middle class passively accepted that Stürgkh’s bureaucracy had terminated Austrian democracy and prolonged the killings of millions of men and women in a futile war. Yet they denounced poor Fritz Adler for being uncivil because he could no longer accept the murderous status quo.

Was it terrorism? No. We may contrast Adler’s action with that of Émile Henry, years earlier, in Paris. From spring 1892 to spring 1894, eleven explosions in Paris killed ten people. There were other such acts and failed attempts.¹⁷ Before the tail end of this series the twenty-one-year-old French anarchist Émile Henry, who had earned his *baccalauréat* in science from the Sorbonne in 1888, concluded by ineluctable moral reasoning that French high society was utterly corrupted and criminally so, since they persisted in accepting the poverty and homelessness into which tens of thousands of working-class Parisians were driven by government-sponsored projects for building lavish structures for entertaining the rich, such as the Opéra Garnier. Émile Henry therefore decided to jolt the bourgeoisie into awareness by bombing them while they dined finely. On the evening of February 12, 1894, at 9:01 PM, Henry threw a dynamite bomb into the crowded Café Terminus in Paris, feeling impelled to do this “propaganda by the deed,” but, unlike Adler, without targeting a government figure.

17 Gregory Shaya, “How to Make an Anarchist-Terrorist: an Essay on the Political Imaginary in Fin-de-Siècle France,” *Journal of Social History* 44, no. 2 (2010): 523-526.

Henry had decided that killing and maiming some French civilians might frighten smug members of the French bourgeoisie out of their habitual willful ignorance “about the economic exploitation and intolerable social conditions that made their comfortable lives possible.” At his trial, the highly educated Henry declared, “The bourgeois are never innocent.”¹⁸ He also sought to “shake downtrodden members of the working class out of their political apathy.” In his classic book, *The Dynamite Club*, John Merriman calculated that in Paris in the 1890s, “a typical working-class family of four, with all four members working, could earn about 760 francs per year, but required 860 francs for poor clothes, poor food and tiny apartments without heat or running water.” As Merriman put it, “The belle époque was not belle for most French men and women. ... Millions still lived in abject poverty.”¹⁹ Similar conditions prevailed in Vienna in the 1910s. The conspicuous contrast between uncaring rich and uncared for poor made an indelible imprint on Adolf Hitler.²⁰

But what about Adler—why did he do it?

Immediately afterward, the Austrian government lied, stating that Adler was insane. Newspapers in Austria and Germany lied too: they said he was insane. Adler’s father, Victor Adler, was the longtime chairman of the Social

Democratic Workers’ Party and he was well aware of how the war was being fought. Yet he too lied, claiming that his son was insane; and so did his defense lawyers for the trial.²¹ Likewise, Einstein lied when he wrote to the Emperor of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, Karl I, claiming that Fritz’s action was not a crime but “a tragic accident” caused by mental illness.²²

Yet Fritz Adler himself explained that he was not insane at all. And experts on mental health, the court’s psychiatrists, examined Adler and concluded that he was not insane.²³ In his trial, Adler explained that his action was the premeditated logical consequence of the criminal actions by the government and by President Stürgkh. Adler explained that the President had personally ended Austrian democracy by suspending Parliament, by stopping them from democratically deliberating about the war, and thus disfiguring Austria into an absolutist state. He argued that the President had violated constitutional law, in particular by enacting the mass murders of war, without the consent of the Austrian people. Stürgkh’s government had stolen the people’s constitutional right to self-government, so Adler claimed to have the legal right and the moral obligation to remove the President. Contrary to those who tried to hide Fritz Adler’s rationale under the lie of insanity, Adler himself testified that the moral justification of his action was “perfect.” Moreover, Adler dared to say that since other ministers of the government also had reneged on their legal duties, they too should be killed.

¹⁸ Ibid., 525.

¹⁹ See Palaima’s review essay on *The Dynamite Club* in *The Texas Observer* (January 9, 2009): www.texasobserver.org/bombs-away.

²⁰ See Brigitte Hamann, *Hitler’s Vienna: A Dictator’s Apprenticeship* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999) 135 and 137: “Ultimately, [Hitler] said in a monologue in 1941, his suffering in Vienna had turned into the greatest blessing for the German people.” Hitler’s friend August Kubizek reports that on February 26, 1908, the future Führer observed in front of Parliament a spontaneous demonstration by a mob of destitute urban poor as it was broken up by mounted police with drawn sabers, and Hitler went into a fit of anger against political figures who exploited the miserable poor for their own advancement.

²¹ Florence, *Fritz: The Story of a Political Assassin*, 185, 233, 258.

²² Einstein to Emperor Karl I, spring 1917, in Diana Kormos Buchwald et al., eds., *The Collected Papers of Albert Einstein*, Vol. 10 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 73; in <https://einsteinpapers.press.princeton.edu/vol10-doc/143>

²³ Florence, *Fritz: The Story of a Political Assassin*, 253–54.

Wien: 5 Heller.
Wien: Monatlich K 1.50
mit Zustellung ins Haus.

Illustrierte

Provinz: 6 Heller.

17. Jahrgang. Nr. 6040.

Kronen Zeitung

Verantw. Red.: H. Gienmeyer. Buchdruckerei und Verlagsanstalt G. Davis & Co., Wien, IX, Praterstraße 28. Verantwortl.: H. Gienmeyer.

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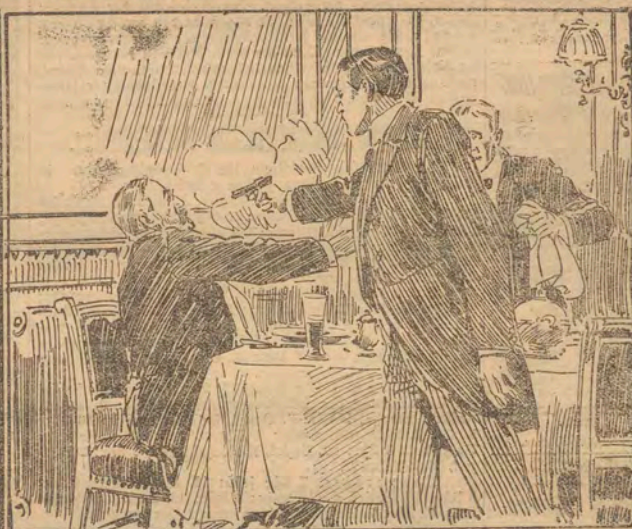
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Wien, Sonntag den 22. Oktober 1916.

Redaktion: Wien, IX, Praterstraße 28.
Tel.-Nr. 12003. Tele.-Nr. 14334. Abonnements werden nicht zurückgenommen.

Provinz-Abonnement
vierteljährlich 5 Kronen.
Bestellungen für weniger als drei
Monate werden nicht angenommen.

Siegreiche Kämpfe in der Dobrukscha. — Unsere Verbündeten in die feindliche Hauptstellung eingedrungen. — 3000 Russen gefangen.



Ermordung des Minister- präsidenten Grafen Stürgkh.

Beim Mittagessen im Hotel „Meißl & Schaudt“
erschossen.

Der Attentäter — Dr. Friedr. Adler.

"Assassination of Minister-President Count Stürgkh." Illustrierte
Kronen Zeitung (Vienna), October 22, 1916.

Wien: 5 Heller.
Wien: Monatlich K 1.50
mit Zustellung ins Haus.

Illustrierte

Provinz: 6 Heller.

17. Jahrgang. Nr. 6041.

Kronen Zeitung

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Wien, Montag den 23. Oktober 1916.
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Provinz-Abonnement
vierteljährlich 5 Kronen.
Bestellungen für weniger als drei
Monate werden nicht angenommen.

**Die Russen und Rumänen auf der ganzen Dobrukschafont
geworfen.**



*Oberkellner Herr Prusmann
der den Täter festnahm*

*Dr. Friedrich Adler
nach seiner Verhaftung.*

Der Mord an dem Ministerpräsidenten Grafen Stürgkh.
Die Mordrit „Aus unserer Feldpostmappe“ befindet sich auf den Seiten 2 bis 6.

"Dr. Friedrich Adler after his arrest." Illustrierte Kronen Zeitung
(Vienna), October 23, 1916.

44. Jahrgang

Contrasted with the daring actions of Adler and Nicolai, Einstein's early pacifism seems very appealing because it is similar to the low-level pacifist behaviors that many of us exhibit.

Needless to say, the judge in the military tribunal condemned Fritz Adler to be executed. Popular culture tells us what will happen, *what must happen*, to any individual who dares to assassinate a country's president, especially during wartime. Obviously, the assassin trades his own life: he too will be killed, whether immediately by the president's bodyguards or soon, by a military process and execution.

While Adler's saga was developing, in distant Berlin doctor Georg Nicolai was becoming one of the most prominent German opponents of the war. After drafting the pacifist Manifesto at the start of the war, which Einstein too signed, Nicolai co-founded a pacifist group, the New Fatherland Association, and he managed to convince Einstein to join. But by late March 1915, the army removed Nicolai from Berlin by requiring that he serve as a doctor at the army garrison in Graudenz in West Prussia (now Poland). The government also abolished his Fatherland group. When Nicolai criticized the German government for military incompetence (for sinking the *Lusitania*), he was accused of treason. By 1916, he was transferred to the military base at Danzig, where he got in trouble again because he refused to swear an oath to the army.²⁴ He drafted an anti-war book manuscript, denouncing Germany's actions and lies. But officers found it, so they imprisoned him. He was also fired from the Charité

Hospital. Major General von Pfuël ordered Nicolai not to publish his anti-war book, yet Nicolai refused to order his Zurich publisher not to proceed. When his book, *The Biology of War*, was finally published, it became an international sensation.²⁵

A pacifist in warmongering Berlin had dared to write against the war!

Nicolai was demoted to the role of a low-level medical orderly, required every day to use a microscope to inspect the phlegm, spit, and shit of sick soldiers. That disgusting work was easy for him, so Nicolai read philosophy in his spare time. Soon, he was imprisoned again. Next, he was transferred to another military base, at Eilenburg.

Meanwhile, by late 1917, Einstein was disabled by abdominal pains. He could no longer work at Haber's institute of chemistry, so he stayed in the apartment of his cousin, Elsa Einstein. Since the German establishment never gave Einstein the physics institute they had promised him, by early 1918, he set up his own "Institute of Physics" in Elsa's drab attic, where he worked alone, with only some help from Elsa's daughter Ilse, whom he hired as Secretary of the disembodied Institute. Sometimes Ilse traveled to the military base at Eilenburg in order to visit Nicolai. There, Nicolai was no longer a doctor; he was now merely an infantry rifleman, required to train to kill.

²⁴ Wolf Zuelzer, *The Nicolai Case* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1982), 40, 272-73.

²⁵ English edition: Georg F. Nicolai, *The Biology of War*, trans. Constance Grande and Julian Grande (New York: Century Company, 1918).

Thoroughly insubordinate, Nicolai refused to practice killing. Instead, he escaped from the base, fled to Berlin, and sought shelter in the apartment of Elsa, her two daughters (Ilse and Margot), and Einstein. From there, Nicolai and Ilse wrote to Germany's Minister of War, hoping to be freed from military service. Finally, Ilse helped Nicolai get help from rebel elements in the military, members of the Spartacus League. Three airmen defectors, with Nicolai, stole two warplanes from the German Air Force base in Neuruppin. And they flew out of Germany.²⁶

It is unclear why Einstein worked on airplane wings, and only ever during World War I. To the journalist Alexander Moszkowski, Einstein voiced indifference about the applications of scientific research, remarking, to Moszkowski's unease, that "As long as I am moving along lines of research, the *praxis*, or any practical outcome that presently or in the future can possibly arise from it, is completely indifferent to me."²⁷ In contrast, Nicolai helped to steal two German warplanes because, he said, he wanted to restore the flying invention to its noble origins: a vessel that would fly over countries' frontiers, showing that frontiers are fictions. When Nicolai landed near Copenhagen, Danish authorities arrested him and interrogated him. When they finally realized that he was the famous pacifist doctor, Nicolai was celebrated in the international news as a hero.

For years, Nicolai had beseeched the German people, intellectuals, government officials, and military officers to stop the invasion of Belgium and France. Did it help? Culture teaches us, again, that an individual cannot make a difference, that one person

cannot stop an avalanche. Nicolai was constantly shocked and crushed that intellectuals and politicians did not oppose the war. They kept their mouths shut.

Reality, however, is a surprising place, and history is rich with lessons. Less than a year after Fritz Adler killed President Stürgkh, Emperor Karl I commuted Adler's condemnation, so he *was not* executed. Moreover, on the last day of October 1918, the Emperor granted amnesty to all political prisoners—so Adler was immediately freed. In other words, merely two years after having assassinated the President of warmongering Austria, Fritz Adler was again a free man on the streets of Vienna, as a hero. He had not repented his actions or modified his anti-war reasoning. He then lived a very long life; he even lived longer than his good friend, Einstein.

Adler and Nicolai are mostly forgotten, while Einstein is admired everywhere. Contrasted with their daring actions, Einstein's early pacifism seems very appealing because it is similar to the low-level pacifist behaviors that many of us exhibit. We complain about wars privately, on the comfy living room sofa, reading or watching the news with disgust. We may even quietly sign a petition, but without making a spectacle, without publicly denouncing warmongers by their names or in our names.

Here then is the perennial question or, if you will, the moral of our war story: should academics work "for the benefit of life," as the Nobel Prize medallion in literature suggests? Or, should we labor to lengthen our résumés, to increase profits for corporations, and to entertain elitist social groups? Or what should we do as the humanities are devalued and capitalist pursuit of profits becomes a dominant ethos taught at institutions of higher education as they focus on business and technologies?

²⁶ Zuelzer, *The Nicolai Case*, 230–31.

²⁷ Alexander Moszkowski, *Einstein: Einblicke in seine Gedankenwelt* (Hamburg: Hoffmann und Campe, 1921), 173.

As Einstein put it on April 26, 1918, “one of the strongest motives that leads to art and science is the need to escape from daily life, from its painful harshness and desolate dreariness, to escape from the shackles of one’s own ever-shifting desires.”²⁸ That is, should we act like intellectual ostriches? Reflecting on the formula for success, Einstein said that it is the sum $X + Y + Z$: work, plus play, plus keeping your mouth shut. The quiet Albert Einstein is a useful hero because he resembles many academics. He validates passivity. In May 1918, Einstein admitted to Nicolai: “If I am to be censured, it is only thus, because I am sitting here. But I myself do not know whether I should blame myself for my passivity.”²⁹

In recent history, however, the Vietnam War period stands out as a time when many Americans did not settle for passivity. In the 1960s, singer Joan Baez rightly argued:

*If everybody really listened to his own conscience and really acted upon what he thought was right and wrong, rather than being so hopelessly passive, which I think just about everybody is. I think it's probably the main disease: the passivity, where we will listen to whatever anybody else says. It's daddy, and mommy, and schoolteacher, and Sunday school teacher, and President.*³⁰

In this connection, we may well compare Einstein to Bob Dylan. Einstein was brought to Germany by three very bald men: Max Planck, Fritz Haber, Walther Nernst, all three of whom were committed

to Germany’s imperial nationalism. They all signed the Manifesto of the 93. Similarly, in the 1960s the young Bob Dylan complained that old “bald men,” were insensitive, retrograde, or perhaps war-mongering, or immoral.³¹ Yet Dylan admitted that he himself was not a protest leader. He was an inspirational songwriter, yet very much “an outsider,” who was misrepresented as an insider of the anti-war protest movement. Joan Baez played shows with Dylan, but she wanted more from him; she wanted him to become a protester, as if his songs weren’t enough. Dylan wanted to do Carnegie Hall, Baez wanted him to do protests.

Similarly, Nicolai pestered Einstein again and again, but failed to convert him into a protester. Nicolai discovered that people’s relentless silence, plus their savage propensity to go to war, not only against foreigners but against subgroups of one’s own citizenry, reveals that “only legalism” can save us: a system of enforced laws.

Our story has concerned Vienna, Berlin and the Great War, “the war to end all wars,” except that it didn’t, and from the look of things, no war ever will. The American corporate news media has normalized wars. Wars last for many years, and they overlap, as if wartime is perpetual, as predicted by Orwell, part of the permanent distant landscape.

We feel sympathy for Alec Raws, and for Freud, in his concern for his sons at the war; we feel sympathy for Adler in his desperately sane act of murder in trying to push the Austrian government to work again, towards democracy and peace. We feel sympathy for Georg Nicolai, for hoping that his lectures, plus a manifesto,

28 Albert Einstein, “Motive des Forschens,” Michel Janssen et al., eds., *The Collected Papers of Albert Einstein*, Vol. 7 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), 55; in einsteinpapers.press.princeton.edu/vol7-doc/103.

29 Einstein to Georg Nicolai, 12 May 1918, in Robert Schulmann et al., eds., *The Collected Papers of Albert Einstein*, Vol. 8B (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), 759; also in einsteinpapers.press.princeton.edu/vol8b-doc/199.

30 Interview segment in the documentary film *No Direction Home: Bob Dylan* (2005), also available at: www.youtube.com/watch?v=8M7usL2BXgQ.

31 Consider especially Dylan’s famous speech upon receiving the Tom Paine Award of the Emergency Civil Liberties Committee on December 13, 1963, and his follow-up letter. See www.corliss-lamont.org/dylan.htm.

plus his book, plus a book of essays on philosophers, including one by Einstein, might diminish the war; and later, Nicolai's hope that a book of essays on internationalism might do the trick.

We may add the English soldier Siegfried Sassoon, who in 1917 wrote his "*Non Serviam*" declaration: that "having seen and endured the sufferings of the troops" in protracted combat for no good reason, he would no longer participate in prolonging the evil goals of lying politicians. Printed in the London *Times*, Sassoon's protest shocked the British because they had not imagined the enormous scope of the butchery. His words risked his life. He could have been court-martialed for treason. But Sassoon was a member of a rich English family, so,

they hid the truth by declaring him temporarily insane: shell shock, they put him in a mental institution.³² In dealing with both Sassoon and Adler, the ruling classes denied logic.

History illuminates forgotten times, enabling the dead to talk with us about senseless injustices. They also speak about how circumstances compel educated moral persons to move, to do something. Not all assassins are Lee Harvey Oswalds or Byron De La Beckwiths. And some mass murderers are called Stürgbk, Haig, and Hindenberg. And even bright professors like Einstein wrongly learn to lay low and shut up. We invite readers to use this true war story to think and think again about how war stories, like parables, should guide us to say more and do more. A

³²"An Officer and Nerve Shock," *The Times* (London), 31 July 1917, p. 24, also in www.bl.uk/collection-items/siegfried-sassoons-statement-of-protest-against-the-war-and-related-letters. Sassoon was interned at the Craiglockhart Hospital in Edinburgh, which was established to treat psychological traumas during World War I, following the staggering numbers of casualties in the battle of the Somme in 1916. There he met and encouraged working-class soldier poet Wilfred Owen, arguably the greatest and most honest, direct and graphic of World War I poets. For context read Pat Barker, *Regeneration* (New York: Plume, 1991).

2

**ART
WORLDS**

Time-Traveling with Line

Lorraine Tady

Jessica Baldivieso: "Here, and on my way."

Pencil on Paper Gallery, Dallas.
May 6 to June 16, 2023.

JESSICA BALDIVIESO'S LINE DRIVEN, GRADIENT PAINTINGS veer from spatially receding grids to distinct staircases. Specific vibrating color palettes hang next to all-white relief constructions. To manifest her bold, implicit line imagery, Baldivieso moves between the use of tape and paint augmented with X-Acto blade cuts (to transfer planned drawings), laser cutter and computer-generated line (for distinct rigidity of line), freehand sketchbook drawings (often of her landscapes), and freehand drawing with tape directly on surfaces.

The importance of line drawings for Baldivieso began with those that underlay her early landscape paintings. Her love of line led her to architecture school, while her need for expression led her to an art career. The installation at Pencil on Paper enabled us to study her paintings and seek out questions that drive her decision-making in the studio. Important aspects of work include: activating visual ambiguity within carefully drawn spatial perspectives; repeated symbolic imagery that moves through various materials, and painting as a hybrid object.

Baldivieso limits her work's architectural line to a certain width. Yet, taped lines and up to forty gradient layers of acrylic paint in each painting (and clay mixed with gesso in her relief objects) allow for a considerable topographical depth to be seen across the surface of her artworks. The lines in her painting *Eternal Organized Chaos* reveal a brilliant yellow-orange ground against a thicker gradient of blue—Baldivieso's self-described "Texas sky blue". Her intense color pairings and color choices often reflect personal stories.

The question of line depth and how it changes the viewer's perception play out especially in the exhibition's white gesso and clay reliefs. Her found frames have proportional shifts between their decorative edges, and include various line weights and depth as they add repeating rectangles to her own taped ones, creating window-like views.



Jessica Baldivieso, *Eternal organized chaos*, 2023. Acrylic mixed with gesso on stretched canvas, 76 x 54 in. Courtesy of Shauna Benoit and Pencil on Paper Gallery.



Jessica Baldivieso, *Por ahora (for now)*, 2022. Acrylic, self-drying clay on laser-cut wood panel, 16 x 8 in.
Courtesy of Shauna Benoit and Pencil on Paper Gallery.



Jessica Baldivieso, *Intension vs Impulse*, 2022. Gesso and acrylic on framed wood panel, 28 x 24 in.
Courtesy of Shauna Benoit and Pencil on Paper Gallery.

In *Intention vs. impulse*, line depth variation softens the drawing in the upper right-hand portion of the image. As with atmospheric perspective, her decision to sand the surface shifts the space and adds light to the cathedral-like arches. In the absence of a frame, spatial ambiguity is magnified in *Katy Trail*. Diagonal forces push against one another, and the viewer may have trouble reckoning the perspective needed to enter the path suggested in the title.

All-white surfaces work well for the light and shadow play inherent in Baldivieso's relief lines, yet white is also an architecture school reference (Baldivieso has a degree from the prestigious Fay Jones School of Architecture at the University of Arkansas). School assignments there limited the use of color, allowing only black and white drawings (and self-drying clay for projects). Economy of line is important in architecture, especially for those following the Bauhaus "less is more" manifesto.

Not all the painted relief objects are white. *Por ahora* (For now) is a delightful and mysterious rounded rectangle covered in a finger-smoothed clay. Its rich and complex greenish-yellowish-grayish color gradually moves to a full lavender towards the object's fourth edge, a surprising undulating sculptural line. Baldivieso's often-used image of a hard-edged grid tunnel (that moves equivocally both outward and inward) appears in the upper half of the work. Its rigid glyph-like stamp provides a strong contrast to the hand-petted surface elsewhere. Of note, the painting *Not there yet* repeats this tunnel motif, but now illuminated, greenish lines float in a stellar specter against a background of yellow and purple hues. The motif has changed from noun to verb—from a logo-like symbol to an activated and radiant portal.

The staircase (as well as the passageways illustrated in other works) resonates as a signifier for Baldivieso's constant moves back and

forth, from one space to the next. She describes these transitional boomerangs as traveling between her home country, Bolivia, and the U.S.; switching from her native Spanish tongue to English; existing between her day job and working in the studio; and coinciding past experiences with new realities. Her color gradient backgrounds suggest changing light or time passing.

Two staircases in the exhibit show Baldivieso's drawing skills at play with abstraction, ambiguity, and perceptual observation. The staircase in *Eternal Organized Chaos* is located at the artist's Shamrock Studio in Dallas and has been drawn plein air, pencil to sketchbook, multiple times, then distilled to a strong, architectural graphic using the computer. The accuracy in the point of view is dynamic. In contrast, *Liminal Gate* is a computer-manipulated drawing intentionally re-adjusted to veer towards abstraction. While the source of *Liminal Gate* is the interior staircase in Shamrock Studios, Baldivieso's agile drawing abilities purposefully hinder accurate perspective. Steps appear to move forward or backward and, at the same time, upwards or downwards. There are subtle and refreshing disconnections in the taped and painted line to allow viewers to question the arc between a familiar and unfamiliar interior.

Baldivieso has a continued interest in paintings (or drawings) as objects. These objects create sensations that echo her interest in liminal spaces that mix past and present (or, more specifically, hint to her powerful encounters with Gothic, Brutalist and Contemporary architecture.) The white objects and color tablets allude to relics of archaeology, yet some of the line drawings on them echo present-day computer graphics. Her paintings portray usable staircases as well as vibrating sci-fi portals. I look forward to what Baldivieso makes in her studio as she continues to time-travel with line. A

A Trans-Atlantic Migration

David Carrier

Yve-Alain Bois, *An Oblique Autobiography*.
No place press. 376pp., \$20 paper.

WITH THE PUBLIC ACCEPTANCE OF ABSTRACT EXPRESSIONISM in the 1950s and then the rise of minimalism, Pop Art and the other innovative developments of the 1960s, it became obvious that the center of the contemporary art world had shifted from Paris to New York. American art had triumphed. As many commentators observed, this was a new, entirely unexpected development. Pablo Picasso continued to paint, and there were still a number of ambitious artists working in France—Simon Hantaï and Pierre Soulages, to name two. But it was simply no longer the case that the center of the art world was in Paris, as had been true in the early twentieth century.

The question then became how to theorize this novel American-centric art. The academic discussion of contemporary art was a new development, and so it wasn't obvious what models were suitable. The most famous American critic, Clement Greenberg, provided an immensely suggestive account of Abstract Expressionism, but his taste in more recent work was unreliable. And certainly his laconic commentaries did not provide a real model for academic art history. The two most influential academic theorists, Michael Fried and Rosalind Krauss, after beginning their careers as followers of Greenberg, soon rebelled against him and moved in their own directions. While Fried focused much of his attention on historical issues, Krauss engaged in highly original academic study of both modernism and contemporary art. In this process, the importation of French theorizing played an essential role. Soon enough, references to the writings of Roland Barthes, Jacques Derrida and Michel Foucault became almost mandatory in American art

writing, at least in discussions of twentieth-century art. And the journal *October*, co-founded by Krauss, where Bois is a longtime editor, became highly influential. In short, although art made in France was no longer especially important, French theory dominated our art world.

In this process of trans-Atlantic migration, Yve-Alain Bois played an essential role. “The French art world was completely oblivious to what was happening on the other side of the Atlantic — American art was almost entirely absent from the walls of galleries and museums.” Frustrated by the weak, conservative French art history establishment, and by the Parisian museums’ failure to collect the best American or French modernism, Bois found in this country a hospitable home for his activity as a scholar and curator, beginning with an invitation from Fried to teach at Johns Hopkins. “Going back to France . . . I wanted to know why Paris, the birthplace of so many of this century’s important works of art, had no museum that could compare with either MoMA or the Guggenheim.” This collection of his reviews and personal reminiscences tells his personal story, but it doesn’t explain why France didn’t have a great museum of modern art. We learn about his research on Piet Mondrian, Lygia Clark, and Ellsworth Kelly. And we get memoirs of Robert Klein, Jean Clay, Derrida and (of course) Krauss. As Bois observes, he himself had no formal training in art history. But thanks to his grounding in French theorizing, he became a formidable, justly influential scholar in America.

The format of *An Oblique Autobiography* doesn’t really encourage the development of a sustained historical analysis. Bois doesn’t offer a developed explanation of why, for example, the French museums were so belated in collecting Henri Matisse, Pablo Picasso or Piet Mondrian. Nor does it tell why the concerns of the Parisian post-structuralists, who enchanted so many Americans, did not also transform French art history writing. Long ago, I confess, I tried to read the French-journal *Macula*, which Bois founded in 1980. And I studied, in English, the survey histories of modernism by Clay as well as Klein’s collected essays. But, I must admit, it was only when I reviewed Krauss’s *Passages in Modern Sculpture* and, then, rather belatedly, discussed Foucault’s famous account of Diego Velázquez’s *Las Meninas* in *The Order of Things. An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (1973) in my “Painting and Its Spectators,” that I became aware of the importance of this French tradition of theory.¹ When I did understand this, what always seemed difficult was employing the French theorists as sources for discussion of art writing, when neither Barthes nor Derrida or Foucault had a very central concern with, or indeed much knowledge of, visual art.

¹ See *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 36:4 (1978), pp. 510-12, and 45:1 (1986), pp. 5-17.

Bois notes briefly several ideas that deserve further discussion. Abstract art, he says, is “*living in a different historical time* from the art that traditional art history has chosen as its domain of choice — i.e., that of the Renaissance up to the break created by Cubism.” Here he takes issue with Greenberg. But unfortunately, he doesn’t develop this claim. And, taking issue with the scholars who claim that art history originates in the eighteenth-century with Johann Joachim Winckelmann or in the sixteenth century with Giorgio Vasari, he claims that the first art historian proper was . . . Alois Riegl, in the late nineteenth century. Perhaps here he links the birth of both modernism and art history to larger cultural changes, as chronicled by Foucault.

Bois and his colleagues at *October* changed, for a few decades, the way that art historians dealing with modernism in America worked. And they had a real effect on the practice of art criticism. But in the past few years, the concerns of our art world have changed again, in dramatic and unexpected ways. In the same way, as Roger Fry was scarcely relevant in 1950, it would be difficult today to argue for *Art Since 1900*, in which Bois plays a major role, as a relevant class textbook today. After long ignoring African-American artists, not to mention Asian, African, and Australian artists, American art historians are starting to pay serious attention to them. And American museums are displaying a great deal of contemporary from outside the United States and Western Europe. Our art world now looks at works from everywhere, in ways that make the concerns of *October* appear parochial. The revisionist critique of Greenberg by Bois certainly changed the way we understood Surrealism and late modernist French art American painting and sculpture. But in the end the contemporary art world has moved. This beautiful book reads as the story of how the author became history. A

Picturing a Phenomenon

Brian Allen

HOW DO YOU WRITE A BIOGRAPHY? A good question if, like me, you're writing one for the first time.

I've known many extraordinary people, but I have to say the art dealer and collector Allan Stone (1934-2006) was a phenomenon. His taste and acquisitions were close to flawless and robustly catholic. He bought, sold, and kept for himself the best in contemporary art, African tribal art, folk art, and let's not forget his forty-four Bugatti cars and Gaudi furniture. Among many, many artists Allan represented was Joseph Cornell. When Allan first met Cornell at his home in Utopia Parkway, Queens, Cornell sat in one room but insisted that Allan sit in an adjacent room. He said Allan's karma was too strong for the two to be any closer. Cornell was on to something.

A few years ago, I took on a project that, for me, was a phenomenon. I agreed to research and write Allan's biography.

I was a curator at the Clark Art Institute for years, and then the director of the Addison Gallery at Phillips Academy in Andover, Massachusetts. My scholarship has been in the form of exhibition catalogues, which are thematic. My day job now, since 2017, has been to write art criticism for *National Review*. My five hundred or so pieces of criticism, at 1500 or so words each, spring from a skill set that, while not unsuited to a biography, is not

entirely germane either. A biography has one subject, while my criticism has had five hundred. Museum directors don't treat one subject for an entire day (other than money); rather, on a given day, they move like gazelles from project to project, ruling on bits and pieces. No director focuses on one scholarly thing for long.

I'm deep in research and have started writing. This isn't a "how to write a biography" story since I haven't written it yet or published it. Two years or so into the project, it's a précis of the topic, an account of the decisions I've made in developing the book, and a few discoveries I have made in the process of doing so.

I think the first question, before much research or even concept-development could happen, is to define the scope of the project. A biography of a colorful and consequential dealer like Allan could be an overview, or even a coffee table book, with half a dozen short essays and plenty of illustrations. Some of his signature artists—Wayne Thiebaud, Arshile Gorky, Franz Kline, Willem de Kooning, and Richard Estes among them—have what I call page power. They command a book page through color, texture, or, in Thiebaud's and Estes's work, what became iconic subjects. That's one end of the spectrum. It can be done attractively and speedily, but do these books ever do much for scholarship?



Selections from the Allan Stone Collection, Christie's New York, 2007. © 2007 Christie's Images Limited.

At the other end of the spectrum is the biography of the art dealer Julien Levy by Beth Gates Warren and Marie Difilippantonio, which is many years in the making with more to go, or to stray into the realm of collectors, *Double Vision*, the biography of John and Dominique de Menil by William Middleton. At 700 pages, *Double Vision* is packed with detail about the couple's comings and goings, the family's oil business, and, of course, their collecting. It's also done and published.

These books are scholarly foundations but, like house foundations, how many people ever see them? They're for specialists.

I initially thought of this project, rightly or wrongly, as I thought years ago about my dissertation. I'm right in conceiving the project as something that can be finished

not necessarily with dispatch but within a reasonable period of time. Dissertations used to have deadlines that, more or less, graduate students met, and I met mine. Finishing, of course, is the necessary step to the next thing.

Where I was wrong was in thinking of the project as equivalent to half a dozen meaty seminar papers strung together, followed by, at page 300 or so (a respectable average), writing a quick conclusion and typing "El Fin." Actually, it's not so simple.

I'm still working on defining a middle-ground scope and a focus that's not the biographical standard. First, the focus. Allan's biography—his day in, day out doings and relationships—isn't the stuff of shock and awe. No string of affairs, no gangsters in tow. There was a movie-star

client here and there, but celebrity wasn't his business. His stormy relationship with his father in the 1950s and early 1960s, when Allan switched from the practice of law to selling art, is good stuff.

Allan was a pioneer in the New York contemporary art market, which was still nascent when he opened his gallery in 1960. There were riskier things—defusing bombs, maybe—but that art market was an edgy one, as was the cultural milieu. Allan needs to be put in this context. He's a historic figure for his outsized role in starting the contemporary art auction market in the 1980s. He had remarkably close and long relationships with his artists and collectors. His wife, Clare, was the not-so-secret sauce making his success. These biographical points need to be plumbed.

My focus is Allan's exceptional focus, specifically his extraordinary eye. My book is developing into an aesthetic biography, or a journey through art like no other. Allan didn't go with the flow, and he didn't make supernova art movements. Pop Art, for instance, didn't move him, and neither did Minimalism or Conceptual Art.

Jasper Johns, Robert Rauschenberg, Andy Warhol, Donald Judd, and Cy Twombly were all in Leo Castelli's orbit, while in terms of taste, Allan was the anti-Castelli. His likes and dislikes came from the gut. They weren't calculated and weren't infected by buzz. Allan hated hype machines. He didn't manipulate his clients, either, by creating waiting lists and egregiously ranking clients by importance. He never opened branches and hated the concept of a mega-gallery. His artists thrived on quality and their art's merit.

In interviewing dealers who worked in the 1980s and 1990s, even those who specialized in fields like Minimalism and Conceptual Art, which Allan didn't sell, they said his gallery shows were must-see events. "So eclectic," "a quirky but perceptive eye,"

"always surprising, and deliciously so," and variations are views that I've heard over and over.

I'm organizing the book around connoisseurship and artists and mostly chronologically. I'll begin with Allan's work with Thiebaud and Chamberlain, because they joined the gallery early and tell us a lot about his eye. Both were muscular artists who used bold colors and, in Chamberlain's case, unorthodox materials. The work of both has wall power, or floor power in Chamberlain's case. There's something visceral, even feral, about each. Chamberlain's work is abstract while Thiebaud's isn't. Allan was not into aesthetic boxes. Allan, like nearly all American men of his day, was obsessed with cars. His collection of Bugatti cars was world-class.

Allan is probably best known for selling Abstract Expressionist art. Willem de Kooning, Franz Kline, and Alfred Leslie were among his Ab-Ex passions. He'd become hooked on de Kooning early, which he was a student at Phillips Academy in Andover, making plenty of visits to the school's Addison Gallery. There he saw his first de Kooning, Hans Hofmann, Jackson Pollock, and Franz Kline. He never thought much of Pollock, but these and other New York School artists would become staples in his buying, selling, and collecting art.

Joseph Cornell and John Graham were more idiosyncratic favorites. Graham wasn't a marquee name, but Allan described Graham's *Marya*, from 1941, probably his favorite work of art, as "pivotal and catalytic." Graham died in 1961. Allan had never met him. He represented Cornell for only four years, but hundreds of Cornell boxes passed through the Allan Stone Gallery. I'm still divining what part of Allan's brain and gut pushed him to love Cornell's work.

Allan discovered Richard Estes, and in hard times in the art market like the

mid-1970s and the early 1990s, Estes as well as Thiebaud were among the only artists who sold well, anywhere. I'm planning a chapter on Estes that I might combine with other topics. There's not enough *Sturm und Drang* in Estes, his work, and his relationship with Allan, to fill a whole chapter.

Allan had a period in the mid-1980s I call the "Great Disillusionment." In the 1960s and 1970s, most dealers lived month to month, money-wise. The goal was paying the bills. Allan had many lean years, but by the mid-1980s the art market was both booming and deeply distorted. A new class of buyers viewed art as an investment rather than a love affair. The contemporary art auction market, which Allan worked to establish, became what he felt was a casino.

Allan and Thiebaud were by then close friends, and Thiebaud both taught at the University of California at Davis and intimately knew the San Francisco art scene. Three of Allan's six daughters were, off and on, based in San Francisco. Allan more or less decamped to the City by the Bay, developing a cadre of Bay Area artists like David Beck, who built intricate miniature sculptures of opera houses, band shells, and museums. Allan loved their spirit of independence and their refusal to worship on the altar of the New York art scene.

Allan never moved to San Francisco, but was there often enough to be transformed. He developed dozens of new clients, in part because of the karma Cornell recognized but also because his openness appealed to Westerners and his knowledge of the art world was peerless. For Allan, the experience was the raw material of his final years and, for me, the last chapters of the book.

Allan continued to show work by Thiebaud, de Kooning, Kline, and other

greats, but now focused increasingly on artists who weren't fringe but were both offbeat and not fodder for critics and salon chatterers. Kurt Trampedach was a contemporary Swiss Symbolist. Lorraine Shemesh is an optical illusionist who paints people in swimming pools. James Grashow makes big cardboard sculpture. Emily Eveleth paints luscious still lifes of jelly donuts. Richard Hickam paints visceral, angular figures living among stripes and patterns. His last big gallery shows on Leslie, Graham, and de Kooning are the most scholarly he did but also very personal. They feel like valedictories.

I haven't dived into Allan's collection of African fetish sculptures, probably the world's best. Made of wood, copper, shells, cloth, hide, horn, beads, and nails, they're of a piece with his de Koonings, Klines, and Chamberlains. They're visceral and emotive.

Allan was always a collector. Robert Arneson, who he discovered and represented in the 60s, adored him but Arneson said Allan bought all his work for himself, which didn't advance his career. Arneson said collecting was his true calling. Over forty years, Allan's home in Purchase developed into a museum and a showplace for the things he kept for himself. He was a compulsive collector, a subject considered in a documentary his daughter, Olympia, produced in 2006, the year Allan died. In the living room, Allan packed hundreds of objects, among them his African nail fetish sculpture, folk art, shrunken heads, paintings on the wall by his favorite artists, and, in the middle of it all, his Baby Bugatti.

It was a place like no other on Earth.

Olympia Stone's research for her documentary includes twenty pages in interviews with her father. Allan sometimes gave interviews to critics, but those with his daughter are the most revealing and incisive. In early 2020, the Stone family gave the Allan Stone Gallery's archives—and this



Selections from the Allan Stone Collection, Christie's New York, 2007. © 2007 Christie's Images Limited.



Selections from the Allan Stone Collection, Christie's New York, 2007. © 2007 Christie's Images Limited.



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Selections from the Allan Stone Collection, Christie's New York, 2007. © 2007 Christie's Images Limited.

starts with files—to the Archives of American Art, part of the Smithsonian Institution and based in Washington. I've done archival research but never of this magnitude, and never among never-been-touched, virgin archives. They're in one hundred and fifty boxes, each around forty pounds, and each packed to the gills almost entirely with paper in folders.

I've finished the artist boxes. There are about one hundred of them, alphabetically arranged. Allan worked with around four hundred artists. Many have a single file with a few pieces of paper. They came and went, possibly making a single appearance in one of Allan's signature, yearly New Talent exhibitions. About one hundred and fifty showed with Allan for a substantial period. Lorraine Shemesh, Dan Falt, and Sue Miller

were with Allan for years, enjoying good careers, steady sales, and no fuss, no muss relationships. That's the case with most of his artists. Working with Allan wasn't operatic, unless the artist was a diva. There were more than a few of those. Only one artist—George Deem—told Allan he thought he was guilty of financial irregularity in the form of keeping money which Deem felt he should have gotten.

It's a trove, to say the least. In the 1960s, Allan often typed his own letters, and many are long and conversational. Most communication occurred via letter if the artist lived outside New York since, as those over, say, sixty, will know, long distance phone calls were expensive. Allan's letters on the state-of-the-art market and developing artist careers are important. The challenge

for me is not only the number of documents. Each artist communicated in his or her own idiosyncratic way. Some were succinct. Some communicated through pictures. Some saw Allan as their psychiatrist. Some wrote letters that are really manifestos.

Thiebaud and Allan worked together for forty years. Allan famously discovered him in 1962 when the artist, in town from California, peddled his wares starting at the galleries on East 57th Street and working his way north, his paintings of pies and cakes scorned at each stop until he hit Allan's gallery—the northernmost on the Upper East Side. Allan loved Thiebaud's work at first sight. He loved what I call *zaftig* painting: lush, textured, juicy surfaces. Allan loved sweets, not an irrelevant factor as lots of his artists, starting with Thiebaud, did food art.

Allan died suddenly in 2006, a few days after I'd seen him at the Miami Basel art fair. His booth was heavy on de Kooning, good stuff from the 1950s and 1960s rather than what Allan called "senile de Koonings." While in Miami, Allan toured the

powerhouse contemporary art collection of Carlos and Rosa de la Cruz. He told *The Art Newspaper* he thought it was "a lot of shit." Allan was very good at diplomatically declining to show an artist's work. Over time, he'd made thousands of studio visits. "It's not for us" was about as blunt as he got.

Allan sold lots of de Koonings, was the great go-to de Kooning connoisseur, but never represented de Kooning. The two talked about it in the early 1960s. Allan asked de Kooning who he thought should arrange a hypothetical de Kooning at his gallery. De Kooning replied immediately, "Well, I should, of course." Allan smelled discord on the horizon. In the 1980s, when de Kooning was producing schlock and suffering with dementia, Allan was publicly critical of both the work and the dealers selling it.

"It's a high, and the closest thing I'll ever have to a religious experience," Allan said in describing how he connected with art. "It's a kind of madness." Condensing his life and eye into a 300-page book is on the horizon for me.

Wish me luck! A



3

**LITERARY
LIVES**

Four Sour and Stringent Proposals for the Novel; or, The Unambitious Contemporary Novel

James Elkins

LONG BEFORE WRITING FICTION BEGAN TO ABSORB MY TIME, to the point that I ended up arranging my teaching and my career so I could accommodate longer hours in coffee shops, I was an art historian. Back in graduate school, before I had any notion that the challenges and pleasures of fiction might someday loom so large that they could actually displace my career, I was struck by a book on the subject of linear perspective written by a French art historian, Hubert Damisch. Instead of thanking people who had helped him, or talking about the art he loved, he opened with the line, “This book was born of impatience.”¹

Even though I have set aside much of my professional career in order to make time for writing and studying novels, my motivation, like Damisch’s, is often negative. I’m occasionally energized and inspired by authors I love, but mainly my imagination works differently. When I’m reading, I find it helpful to think about what I would have done if I were the author. After I’ve finished a novel, I often spend a day trying to understand why I wouldn’t have written the book I just read. I make notes, which tend to turn the novels I’ve read into case studies. They have themes, like “What is genuine weirdness?” “How do you know when to stop reading an author?” and “When the author clearly knows things the narrator doesn’t.”² These short essays have worked as warning signs for me, like **KEEP OFF THE GRASS OR NO SWIMMING: DANGEROUS CURRENTS**. They reminded me where I didn’t

¹ Damisch, *Origin of Perspective*, trans. John Goodman (MIT Press, 1994), xiii.

² The reading diary is mainly posted on Goodreads (tinyurl.com/elkinsreviews).

A novel can be like the most interesting person at a party, the one who sits at the bar looking glamorous and ignoring everyone.

want my own fictions to go. There were certainly some authors I loved, but that only made them more dangerous in my eyes. I'd learned from art history how treacherous it can be for an artist to emulate another artist. As any artist knows, when you're working you don't want to stop to theorize, and for years, it was enough to keep the writing diary. It showed me with increasing clarity what I did not like, what I wanted to avoid. Now that my own novel is finally finished, I've been able to look back at the hundreds of short essays I wrote and gather recurrent themes.³ The result is this list of four things I think contemporary novels can try to do.

This sort of essay, in which a writer proposes a manifesto of sorts, or tries to sum up the entire unruly and diverse scene of contemporary fiction, is itself a recurring trait of the literary world. Some years ago, Tim Parks started a productive controversy by claiming that some novelists—he named Haruki Murakami, among others—wrote an intentionally simple form of their language so they their novels could be quickly translated into English and compete on international markets. He called the result “the dull new global novel.”⁴ A few years earlier, Zadie Smith had proposed “Two Paths for the Novel,” complaining that “a new breed of lyrical Realism” had held sway, and needed to be avoided in favor of another sense of the self: more discontinuous, and less available to confessions and epiphanies.⁵ More recently the novelist David Shields wrote *Reality Hunger*, a manifesto for collage realism that undercut itself by including a number of contradictory claims—half of them written by other people.⁶ A quality shared by these and other manifestos and declarations is dissatisfaction, impatience, with the current state of affairs. This essay is no different in that regard, although my contribution comes from a little farther outside the literary

3 My novel is divided into three freestanding volumes. One (actually it's volume 3) will appear as *Weak in Comparison to Dreams* (Unnamed Press, LA) in November 2023.

4 Parks, “The Dull New Global Novel,” *New York Review of Books*, February 9, 2010.

5 Smith, “Two Paths for the Novel,” *New York Review of Books*, November 20, 2008; and see David Haglund, “The Long Shadow of ‘Two Paths for the Novel,’” *The New Yorker*, February 7, 2015. The idea of casting doubt on the conventional novel's capacity to capture discontinuities of consciousness is really only a call for a return to modern and postmodern strategies of discontinuity, which have been practiced since Woolf, Stein, and Joyce, and which are pursued by many contemporary novelists, from Eimear McBride and Mike McCormack to Ali Smith and Lucy Ellmann. Marcie Frank, in “The Novel in Two Parts,” *The Rambling*, May 17, 2019, suggests that the two strains have come together.

6 Shields, *Reality Hunger: A Manifesto*, Knopf, 2010.

community: I have a longer historical range in mind here, and I am less engaged by current interests in ethnic and other representations. It matters, too, that I am socially distant from the world of literary social media, which tends to both propose and dispose the terms of its arguments. What I have to say here is, I suppose necessarily, sometimes distant from current conversations about the novel.

A note before I start: these points are peppered with quotations from the literary critic Steve Mitchelmore, whose site, “This Place of Writing,” is a source for unrepentantly radical criteria for writing. Thanks to a correspondence from around 2016 to around 2018, which ended in the only possible way, with his silence to my last rejoinder, my own novel changed fundamentally.⁷

1. Novels aren't about real life. One of the commonplaces of criticism is that novels can be the best places to learn about the world, because they offer imaginative access, empathy, and a sense of lived experience. This is true in anti-realist positions such as conceptual writing and realist projects like Shields's. Novels are said to open our eyes to other identities, show us the world from the perspectives of people we've never known. From novels we learn what it's like to walk out of Sudan to save yourself, to live in a conflicted Hindu-Muslim community, to be queer in a conservative Laotian family in Minnesota, or to be a woman of color and suffer from the daily thoughtless prejudices of white Americans.

I don't want to dispute any of that. The world needs more imaginative empathy, and novels are one of the best ways to get it, along with film and travel. Enlarging the world is something novels do, but I don't think it's what they are best at. Here is the strongest, simplest way to think differently about this topic. It's a line from the Australian novelist Gerald Murnane: “I cannot recall having believed, even as a child, that the purpose of reading fiction was to learn about the place commonly called the real world.”⁸

An amazing thought. Think of Rembrandt: he had exceptional skill at rendering dusky interiors, furs, ruffles, and jewelry, light falling obliquely across skin. But he had another skill, which is the reason he's in museums: the capacity to represent inwardness, what German critics call *Innerlichkeit*. The people in his paintings are

7 Mitchelmore, “This Space of Writing” (this-space.blogspot.com, 2000-present), which is also excerpted in a book (tinyurl.com/mitchelmorebook). The quotations here are with his permission; they're mainly from our correspondence.

8 He says this in many ways in many texts, over and over like a mantra, and he worries about it. In “Landscape with Freckled Woman,” he first says “I was privileged to see what no one else could see: all that I had to do as a writer was to describe the far-reaching vistas and the intricate topography continually before my eyes... I need not be curious about what were called real people...” and on the next page he lists the sorts of things writers concerned with “real people” might describe, but then he wonders whether he has used his sense of writing “to console myself for failing to see what others saw quite clearly.” “Landscape with Freckled Woman,” *Landscape with Landscape* (Sydney University Press, 1985), 2-3.

pensive, they're working out some problem, remembering something from their past. Some scholars doubt that, and wonder whether Rembrandt put on a show of profundity for his clients. In this context it doesn't matter. What counts is that Rembrandt's skill at making us think about thoughtfulness is more important than his ability to paint naturalistic portraits.

Or think of Murnane's idea this way. It's easy to teach a dog to fetch or sit, but tricks are only one of its behaviors. A dog is a complex social animal, capable of what we call loyalty but might as well call love. Valuing novels for the social information they contribute, as many literary prizes do, is like judging dogs for fetching. It's true that "novelists can provide insights about society that pundits and experts miss," as the critic Adam Kirsch said of Michel Houellebecq, and when those insights include social violence, then reading novelists can be "more urgent than ever."⁹ But if Houellebecq has done interesting things with the novel, providing insights about European society is not one of them.

American fiction in particular is often thought to be about bringing "news from a distinct corner of American" life, as Dwight Garner once said of Tommy Orange. From fall 2018 to fall 2019, I read the fiction installment in *The New Yorker* each month for twelve months. All but one of the selections taught readers about some corner of American life they may not have known: conservative Korean immigrants to California, Turkish families, Armenian immigrants, an East Asian couple dating by Skype. Literary prizes and best-seller lists show that novels are often places people go to learn about people they don't know: Orhan Pamuk illuminates Turkish urban and rural society, Smith tells us about social configurations in the U.K., Jonathan Franzen reports on the North American middle class. As Parks has said, magic realism gave many North Americans and Europeans their ideas about South America, even though it represented that continent in a peculiarly textureless fashion, without allowing readers to see differences between Colombia, say, and Peru.

Ottessa Moshfegh's *My Year of Rest and Relaxation* was generally reviewed as a story about a privileged New Yorker, and critics praised it as a narrative of depression that can be applied to many social contexts. But in a 2021 *Bookforum* survey Moshfegh wrote, "I wish that future novelists would reject the pressure to write for the betterment of society. Art is not media... We need novels that live in an amoral universe, past the political agenda described on social media. We have imaginations for a reason."¹⁰ That was a nicely contrarian opinion in the context of the *Bookforum* survey, which was titled

9 Kirsch's subject was Houellebecq's misogyny and its connection to incels. *New York Times Book Review*, July 5, 2018, p. 17.

10 *Bookforum*, June/July/August 2021; tinyurl.com/moshfeghbookforum.

A complex novel is one that keeps you wondering, keeps you working to understand what the author thinks they're doing, and does not ever answer your questions.

"What forms of art, activism, and literature can speak authentically today?" but it is still a long way from Murnane. It's one thing to cast doubt on the use of novels to argue ethical positions. It's another to refuse the temptation to report on the world.

As much as I'm interested in learning about the world by reading novels, I'm more intrigued by what novels can do other than reporting. Murnane's an extreme case, but he is fundamentally correct: novels do many irreplaceable things, but the most important, the capacity that isn't shared by any other medium, is the ability to weave imagination with logic, memory with reasoning, producing a sort of complexity I'll try to define in the last heading. It's a pity to keep asking such a complex medium to perform simple tricks, or to behave like a newspaper or a diary. I agree with Mitchelmore when he says fiction is most challenging when it's doing something other than "engaging readers with... information." If you're a writer, and you want to tell people about your life, your culture, or your identity, by all means do, but keep in mind that novels have a different capacity.

2. A novel should not be "careful, cautious and professional"

as Mitchelmore also says. In the wake of McSweeney's and the collection *MFA vs NYC*, there is a fair consensus about what "professional" literary fiction is.¹¹ The "MFA style" is capacious: it can accommodate the full range of new subjects and settings, but it's typically well crafted, with unimprovable word choices, polished turns of phrase, carelessly skillful descriptions, well-managed elisions and ellipses, knowingly tweaked narrative lines, and sharp, pared-down dialogue. It does whatever it does with full assurance, protected by a hard veneer of competence. Workshop stories are "nice, cautious, [and] boring," as David Foster Wallace put it back in 1988. They're "as tough to find technical fault with as they are to remember after putting them down."¹² Erik Hoel notes the minimalist quality of much current fiction:

¹¹ *MFA vs NYC: Two Cultures of American Fiction*, edited by Chad Harbach (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2014).

¹² Wallace, "The Fictional Future," reprinted in *MFA vs NYC: The Two Cultures of American Fiction*, edited by Chad Harbach, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2014; and see Andrew Martin, "'MFA vs NYC': Both, Probably," *The New Yorker*, March 28, 2014.

Workshop-trained writers are often, not always, but often, intrinsically defensive. This single fact explains almost all defining features of contemporary literature. What you're looking at on the shelf are not so much books as battlements. Consider the minimalism of many current novels, their brevity—all to shrink the attack surface. Oh, the prose is always well-polished, with the occasional pleasing turn of phrase, but never distinctive, never flowery nor reaching.¹³

This minimalism is very different from the one I teach in art history. Those artists—Donald Judd, Robert Morris, Dan Flavin—produced large, unexpected, often awkward and intrusive objects. Hoel is right that the anonymized surfaces and generic content of the new prose minimalism, as well as the masks of autofiction, can be understood as defenses: in autofiction, the author isn't accountable, because they can't ever quite be found.

The “professional” style isn't a matter of who has an MFA and who doesn't; that notion was nicely disproven in a study by Richard Jean So and Andrew Piper.¹⁴ But it can be clearly felt in a reading of literary journals, especially those associated with universities. During the last ten years I've read, and often subscribed, to 153 different journals that publish fiction. That list is probably about half the number of English-language literary journals that aren't exclusively poetry. It's a daunting ocean of writing. Here's just the letter P, from my spreadsheet: *Pank*, *Paperbag*, *Paris Review*, *Penn Review*, *Place*, *Ploughshares*, *Poets and Writers*, *Popula*, *Porter House Review*, *Prairie Fire*, *Psychopomp*, *A Public Place*, *The Puritan*. Pretty much an impossible reading assignment, especially because the spreadsheet needs constant revision as small journals come and go.¹⁵ My ten years of reading didn't give me a sense of uniformity. Some journals focus on regional literature, others nourish older styles and voices or are nostalgic or sentimental, and a few are determinedly experimental. But there is a style that comes through the haze of voices. It's writing that's smooth, assured, untroubled by awkwardness, with a minimum of technical faults, off-kilter phrases, or unaccountable lapses in tone. In short: it's workshopped, professionalized.

¹³ Hoel, “How the MFA Swallowed Literature,” 2021, tinyurl.com/erikhoel. Hoel adds: “Even the use of first-person, so ubiquitous now, is defensive, for it protects you from getting the inner life of someone unlike yourself wrong.”

¹⁴ So and Piper, “How Has the MFA Changed the Contemporary Novel?,” *The Atlantic*, March 6, 2016, online.

¹⁵ There are online services such as semrush.com that show the number of visitors on different websites, and that can be helpful to distinguish very small magazines from mid-range ones. During one month, *The Paris Review* had over 750,000 visitors, *Ploughshares* had 90,000, and *Prairie Fires* less than 3,000. The services I've tried have thresholds beneath which numbers aren't collected.

In part I'm describing the kind of form-filling that Shields polemicalized against in *Reality Hunger*, but it is also the professionalism of several generations of writers who have come out of MFA programs and been shaped by residencies, workshops, and conferences. It's a difficult tide to swim against. Anti-professionalism, well-judged lapses, deliberate awkwardness, odd and quirky plotlines, and surrealist fantasies are not enough to escape the prison house of workshoping. In my own field of academic writing, there's a similar interest in rule-breaking and innovation, and a similar despondency about the mills of higher education and their increasing fidelity to just a few universities. There isn't an easy answer, and it's been said that academic uniformity is the air our age has chosen to breathe. But it's always possible to keep an eye on your imaginary reader for signs of unease. If they can read what you write without being upset or seriously confused, or if they keep nodding their head and smiling, then what you write might be more careful and cautious than you think.

3. A novel need not provide good companionship.

For many millions of readers, novels are company, solace, escape, entertainment. You might be afraid to have a life like a character in a novel, but you can understand enough of what they experience to feel things along with them. Even bad characters become companions. A novel can keep you company like nobody's business.

Sometimes, though, novels can do something stranger. They can ignore you. It's like the difference between a public lecture where the speaker is attentive to the audience, eliciting laughs, making eye contact, and a lecture where the speaker is wrapped up in what they're saying, and you just have to follow along. Each kind has its strengths. It's always good to be in the company of a speaker who wants to involve you, but there are also times when the speaker has to concentrate on what they have to say. And it's seldom a pleasure to listen to someone who panders too much, who's desperate for your attention and approval. (I'm thinking of some over-produced TED talks.)

Most novelists think of their readers a lot. You can feel their eyes on you as you read. If you squirm or fidget, they ratchet up the drama, put in some sex, or lure you with a new mystery. But a novel can be something other than an opportunity for "engaging readers with company." That's another of Mitchelmore's maxims. A novel can be like the most interesting person at a party, the one who sits at the bar looking glamorous and ignoring everyone.

I hadn't realized how continuously authors seek my attention, how desperately they want me to keep reading, until I discovered some writers who don't think that way. Joyce is like that in *Finnegans Wake*. Was he thinking of an actual human reader at all when he wrote that book? It's not clear. He pictured ideal readers, who would basically dedicate their lives to reading (and he got them, in the

Novels do many irreplaceable things, but the most important is the ability to weave imagination with logic, memory with reasoning.

form of academics), but there's nothing in the book to indicate he spent time imagining or accommodating any plausible, real-life readers. When you read *Finnegans Wake* you're teased with puzzles and amused by jokes, but the person telling them isn't looking at you. His eyes are somewhere out on the horizon.

This sense of being ignored by the author is one of the reasons I like Arno Schmidt, a postwar German novelist who's as famous in German-speaking countries as Joyce. For the last year I've moderated an online group reading Schmidt's monstrous novel *Bottom's Dream*. Every Saturday we work through another five or ten pages, dense with references to hundreds of forgotten European writers, poets, and critics. Most of the time the author doesn't help us at all: he quotes a line and names the author, and it's up to us to find the source and read enough of it to understand why he's mentioned it. His characters have no discernible inner lives, so there's nothing to empathize with. There isn't much of a plot, and only intermittent descriptions of the surroundings. Schmidt once said he wrote for four hundred people, but our group has wondered if there have even been more than a few dozen. Still, I love the feeling that Schmidt never felt he had to add a detail or a bit of dialogue to keep my attention. You can go for a hundred pages in *Bottom's Dream* without encountering a hint that the author cares about you, wants your attention, or notices when you're bored. Schmidt just wrote what he wanted, without even looking up to see if anyone might be there.

There are many novels like this. It's sink or swim with Musil, Bernhard, Stein, Pynchon, Beckett, Gaddis, or, for that matter, Spenser's *Faerie Queene*. After reading Schmidt or Joyce, a writer like Karl-Ove Knausgaard comes across as compulsively, pathetically addicted to my attention. I can feel how much he wants me to keep reading, and what he'll do to ensure that I don't close the book. Most authors fill their novels with helpful cues, tempting hints, friendly reminders, entrancing set pieces, accumulating tension. But if you're a writer, consider this alternative. You can say to yourself: I won't be a dependable source of pleasure, I'm not a guide, I'm not there to reassure the reader. I'm here to write what I want, what I feel needs to be said, and it will only be a distraction to continuously try to picture what my reader might want.

I think interesting contemporary novels should mainly fail to

give dependable pleasure. They shouldn't console, guide, or reassure. The reader should be on their own, repeatedly, even continuously. There's an often-quoted passage in Kafka that puts this question of companionship very well. In fact, it says it so powerfully that I suspect some people who quote it can only hope to live up to it:

I think we ought to read only the kind of books that wound and stab us. If the book we're reading doesn't wake us up with a blow on the head, what are we reading it for? So that it will make us happy? Good Lord, we would be happy precisely if we had no books, and the kind of books that make us happy are the kind we could write ourselves if we had to. But we need the books that affect us like a disaster, that grieve us deeply, like the death of someone we loved more than ourselves, like being banished into forests far from everyone, like a suicide. A book must be the ax for the frozen sea inside us. That is my belief.¹⁶

Not every novel needs to hack its readers to pieces or exile them into the wilderness. But perhaps we could use more of that, and less of the nurturing, healing, hugging, and handshaking of contemporary fiction.

4. A novel is complex. This is the most complex problem. Complexity itself is tarnished by its association with privileged, over-educated white male writers, from Joyce and Proust to David Foster Wallace. And it's ideologically ruined by its association with the Frankfurt School of modernist criticism, according to which serious, ambitious modern art has to be complex. I have a different, and simpler idea of complexity, which I find helpful in thinking about why I'm attracted to complex novels. The sort of complexity that interests me comes naturally when a book is long enough. That's because as Montaigne knew, despite our best intentions, thought wanders off wherever it wants, and so do moods and feelings. Any novel that gives itself the space to wander will eventually go off-topic. *War and Peace* has twenty-four philosophical essays in it. *The Man without Qualities* begins as essays, gets lost, and stays lost. Complexity isn't easy to define. I've tried a couple of times, and I think it helps to distinguish real complexity from simple complexity. A high-rise building is complex in an uninteresting way (it may have special elevators, a rooftop water tank, or a tuned mass damper). Those might be of interest to engineers, but they are repeated in many buildings, and most people don't care much about them. I'd like to call things like jets, atomic clocks, particle accelerators, and high-rise buildings "intricate," and reserve "complex" for things that don't follow patterns or formulas,

¹⁶ As quoted in tinyurl.com/kafkaquote.

things that are unique, or only partly known, or unclassifiable. That's why I don't count murder mysteries as complex: they often have intricate plots, but in the end everything's tied up. A complex murder mystery, in this sense, would be Alain Robbe-Grillet's *The Voyeur*, because nothing's resolved (and nothing may have taken place). A complex novel will undermine a reader's expectations as it goes. Is this a murder mystery at all? Maybe it's a memoir, or an autofiction, or a romance... or possibly nothing that's identifiable. Complexity isn't easy to define in positive terms, but it has a specifiable effect on the reader: it's puzzling. A complex novel is one that keeps you wondering, keeps you working to understand what the author thinks they're doing, and does not ever answer your questions. When you finish a genuinely complex novel, all the guesses you had while you were reading will be wrong, and the novel will only be like itself, and not like any other novel.

I hope these four proposals can suggest ways to write novels that are less conventional and more challenging. I wrote them mainly for myself, to help articulate some ideas that drive my novel, *Weak in Comparison to Dreams*. I was determined to do each of the things on this list: not report about the world, not be careful or cautious, fail to be a reliable companion, and create real complexity. I wanted to avoid intricacy and open the door to difficulty. I had ideas and themes—lots of them, since I'm the sort of writer who uses cards, spreadsheets, graphs, summaries, and outlines—but the novel wasn't guided by them. Instead it was steered past a succession of achievable goals that I wanted to avoid. I knew I didn't want the pleasure of the book to come from its intricacy, from its appeal to the reader, or from the unusual subjects I describe. I didn't want to contribute a memoir, an entertainment, an intellectual puzzle, a political fiction, a historical fiction, a speculative fiction, an allegory, a satire, a comedy, a tragedy, a romance, an autofiction or a metafiction.

All this may sound negative and not very realistic, but it's the way I have always thought about art: if you read enough, you're likely to start seeing formulas everywhere, and then comes the question: what isn't a formula?

There is a book's worth more to write on this subject, but manifestos are personal. You have to make your own. You might reject a couple of these points, and add others of your own. What I'd like to communicate here is that most novels written these days are too easy. Too professionalized, too much concerned with reporting the "real world," too simple in their structure, too familiar and friendly and entertaining and consoling, too hypnotized by fame, reviews, and imagined readers. Those are what the philosopher Gilbert Ryle called category mistakes.

We don't love dogs because they fetch. A

Three ballades by Christine de Pizan

Translated by Maryann Corbett

Christine de Pizan (1364—c. 1430) was the first woman in France, and possibly in Europe, known to have supported herself and her family by means of her writing. She took up the pen after the death of her husband and produced several collections of poems, although she is best known now for her prose works on the role of women, such as *The City of Ladies*. She was the initiator of the feminist side of two important literary discussions: the exchange known as the “debate (querelle) on the Romance of the Rose” and the four-hundred-year-long “debate on women (querelle des femmes).” She can be considered the West’s first protofeminist and the first woman humanist, in the Renaissance sense of that term.

Both the themed collection *Cent Balades d’Amant et de Dame* (One Hundred Ballades of a Lover and a Lady) and the miscellany *Autres Balades* (Other Ballades) were written while Christine was very much involved in the defense of women’s roles. These translations are a loose and irreverent take on her position.

**Ballade 2, from
One Hundred Ballades of a Lover and a Lady**

The lady responds to the lover's first sally.

Love is unknown to me. The least desire to learn
is absent from my thought. My mind's on other things,
so your hope's vain. Take off your wild imaginings:

I don't return
such love; it is not proper for a lady who
esteems her reputation. I regret your pains,
but love's not in my plans—not yours, not any man's.

Against a love like that I mean to be on guard.
I thank God that I won't be taken in the nets
that snare so many, to their great unhappiness.

For my own good,
I've passed them by so far and will pass by again
sweet spoken words and billets-doux in graceful hands.
Love isn't in my plans. Not yours, not any man's.

I don't know how to give you any other answer.
Don't talk about it further. I'm already weary
of listening. Go declare your passion to some other
lady, because such pleas as yours will get no hearing.

Whoever tries
is spending effort in a foolish enterprise.
Love isn't in my plans. Not yours, not any man's.

Dismiss these notions, please. I tire of your demands.
Love isn't in my plans. Not yours, not any man's.

Balade II, Cent Balades d'Amant et de Dame: original

Oncques ne sceu qu'est amer, ne aprendre
Encore n'y vueil, alieurs suis apensee,
Par quoy en vain vous pourriez atendre ;
Je vous le dy, ostés en vos pensee,
Car ne m'en tient
Ne telle amour a dame n'appartient
Qui ayme honneur, si ne vous en soit grief,
Car vous ne autre je ne vueil amer brief.

Et me quid bien de telle amour deffendre,
La Dieu mercy, ne seray enlasee
Es las d'amour dont aux autres mal prendre
Communement je voy et ja passee
—Bien m'en avient—
M'en suis long temps, encores ne m'en tient,
Qui que m'en parle, escripte lettre ou brief,
Car vous ne autre je ne vueil amer brief.

Si ne vous sçay autre response rendre,
Plus n'en parlez, et desja suis lasee
De l'escouter ; aillieurs vous alez redre
Car cy n'iert ja vo requeste passee.
Et qui y vient
Fait grant folour, car point ne me revient
Si faicte amour, nul n'en vecdroit a chief,
Car vous ne autre je ne vueil amer brief.

N'y pensez plus, le vous dy derechief,
Car vous ne autre je ne vueil amer brief.

Ballade 17, from *Other Ballades*

Back when Circe the sorceress
changed into pigs the warrior Greeks,
Ulysses yanked them from that mess
by dint of certain canny tricks.
But for some men I'm furious with,
that wouldn't be a just outcome
since they're more vile than pigs in filth.
No insult's bad enough for them.

They're braggarts, short on battle-fame,
with gear that's good for looking at,
proud of their noble family names
although their bodies run to fat,
and yet they're not ashamed of that.
One hardly dares to say such stuff:
they've little fondness for the right.
Is there a libel cruel enough?

There is no lady, right or wrong,
of high or humble situation,
who's safe from wounding by the tongues
they wag about her reputation.
Calmly twisting rumor's knife,
smearing, they make themselves unclean,
more pleased with murder than with life.
For that, no insult is too mean.

I'm not a fan of insults, but
for worse-than-Judases, it's tough
as they're so fond of lies and smut.
For them, no insult's bad enough.

Balade XVII from *Autres Balades*: original

Jadis Circes l'enchanteresse
Fist chevaliers devenir porcs;
Mais Ulixes par sa sagece
De ce meschief les gitta hors.
Mais je ne sçay se c'est droit sors
D'aucunes gens, dont j'ay grant yre,
Qui sont plus que pors vilz et ors,
N'on n'en pourroit assez mesdire.

Grans vanteurs sont et sanz proece,
Mais très bien parez par dehors,
Orgueilleux pour leur gentillece,
Et tiennent bien aise leurs corps;
Mais en eulx a maint mal remors,
Et combien qu'on ne l'ose dire
A bien faire n'ont pas amors,
N'on n'en pourroit assez mesdire.

Il n'est nulle si grant maistrece,
Ne femme autre, soit droit ou tors,
Que leur fausse langue ne blece
Leur bon renom; aise sont lors
Quant ilz en font mauvais rapors,
Qui s'i voudra mirer s'y mire,
Mais mieulx que vifs vaulsissent mors,
N'on n'en pourroit assez mesdire.

Je ne mesdi de nullui, fors
D'aucuns qui sont de Judas pire
Et sont de tous mauvais accors,
N'on n'en pourroit assez mesdire.

Ballade 7, from *Other Ballades*

*Juno is the goddess of marriage,
and Christine the widow bemoans the lack of her help.
She prefers a goddess of wisdom and independence.*

If I could get to know Pallas Athena,
Then I'd be set, because I'd never lack
good things; I might begin to feel some comfort.
Perhaps I'd learn how to endure the fact
that Fortune's charged me with too great a burden,
one I'm too weak to carry unless she—
Pallas—will help and grasp the other handle
with her great strength. God help me not to stumble,
since Juno's been no help at all to me.

Pallas, Venus, and Juno long ago
went before Paris: each one pled the case
that her own powers outshone the other two
as did the fine perfections of her face.
Paris, who saw his chance, knew what to do
and made his mind up that he ought to rule
for Venus as the worthiest of the three,
saying: Lady, I grant the prize to you
since Juno is no help at all to me.

The golden apple clinched it; Venus solved
his Helen problem. Evil and defeat
came after, though I needn't speak of those,
except that my own heart would find it sweet
had Pallas won her suit. She puts away
misdeeds; she gives with generosity.
If she would have me, I would be her slave,
and then I wouldn't have to beg the favors
I lack since Juno's been no help to me.

Their discord in this fable notwithstanding,
their work holds up the world, these mighty three.
But let the gods remember me to Pallas,
since Juno's been no help at all to me.

Ballade VII, from *Autres Ballades*: original

Se de Pallas me peüsse accointier
Joye et tout bien ne me fauldroit jamais;
Car par elle je seroie ou sentier
De reconfort, et de porter le fais
Que Fortune a pour moy trop chargier fais;
Mais foible suis pour soustenir
Si grant faissel, s'elle ne vient tenir
De l'autre part, par son poissant effort
Pour moy aidier, Dieu m'i doint avenir,
Car de Juno n'ay je nul reconfort.

Pallas, Juno, Venus voudrent plaidier
Devant Paris jadis de leurs tors fais,
Dont chascune disoit qu'a son cuidier
Plus belle estoit, et plus estoit parfaits
Ses grans pouvoirs que de l'autre en tous fais;
Sus Paris s'en voudrent tenir,
Qui lors jugia que l'en devoit tenir
A plus belle Venus et a plus fort,
Si dist: «Dame, vous vueil je detenir,
Car de Juno n'ay je nul reconfort.»

Pour la pomme d'or lui vint puis aidier
Vers Heleine Venus, mors et deffais
En fu après; si n'ay d'elle mestier,
Mais de joye seroit mon cuer reffais,
Se la vaillant Pallas, par qui meffais
Sont delaissié et retenir
Fait tous les biens, me daignoit retenir
Pour sa serve: plus ne devroie au fort
Ja desirer pour a grant bien venir,
Car de Juno n'ay je nul reconfort.

Ces trois poissans deesses maintenir
Font le monde, non obstant leur descort;
Mais de Pallas me doint Dieux sovenir,
Car de Juno n'ay je nul reconfort.

4

FOLIO



Keer Tanchak, *CD Kate*, 2022. Acrylic ink on paper, 30 x 22 in.
Photo by Kevin Todora, courtesy 12.26



Carroll Swenson-Roberts, *As a Child*, 2016. Pencil on paper, 37 x 52 in.
Photo Courtesy Roz Art Gallery.



Sean Cairns, *jam*, 2023. Distemper, oil, colored pencil and sand on canvas, 14 x 18 in.
Photo by Evan Sheldon, courtesy 12.26.



William Atkinson, *Texas Series 1*, 2023. Mixed media on raw canvas, 65 x 91 x 5 in.
Photo by Kevin Todora Photography. Courtesy of the Artist and Erin Cluley Gallery.



Rosalyn Bodyscomb *NM Roadside II*, 2022, Oil on panel, 35 x 60 in.
Courtesy of the artist and Conduit Gallery.



Susie Phillips, *Red Poppies*, 2022, Oil on paper, 19 x 19 in.
Photo: Carol Hensley. Courtesy of the artist and Conduit Gallery.

5

**MUSICAL
SPHERES**

Retelling the Story of American Music

Nathan Jones

Joseph Horowitz, Dvořák's Prophecy and the Vexed Fate of Black Classical Music. Foreword by George Shirley. W. W. Norton, 256pp., \$30 cloth.

Dvořák's Prophecy: A New Narrative for American Classical Music. Six-film series on DVD, 7 1/2 hours total running time. Written and produced by Joseph Horowitz, visual presentation by Peter Bogdanoff. Naxos Educational.

WHEN ANTONÍN DVOŘÁK ARRIVED in America in 1892, he believed he was entering “The New World.” He was no Christopher Columbus, in geo-navigational terms at least, but he was certainly a geo-musical explorer. Jeannette Thurber, then president of the National Conservatory of Music in America, had offered the Bohemian an astonishing salary (equivalent to half a million dollars today) to work in New York City. Dvořák embraced the opportunity, and quickly realized he had a treasure trove of opportunities for compositional exploitation: the songs of American black folk, the so-called “Negro Spirituals” that had often begun in the cotton fields but, by 1892, had made their way far beyond those fields. What kind of music might be written using these lyrical, passionate, distinctively American songs? What might a “classically trained” European offer to them? Could there be new music for

“The New World” based on the “old music” of American slaves? Could racial representatives of those who had been enslaved contribute to the project? Such questions animated Dvořák’s work in America, and eventually he believed that “negro melodies” should be (and would be) the foundation of America’s classical music. As he put it: “In the negro melodies of America I discover all that is needed for a great and noble school of music.”

Dvořák was wrong in his predictions, but Joseph Horowitz wants to vindicate the composer against the charge of misjudgment. In *Dvořák's Prophecy and the Vexed Fate of Black Classical Music*, Horowitz tells us a “new story” about American classical music that renders Dvořák’s prophetic failure as virtuous. For Horowitz, Dvořák’s prophecy didn’t fail because he was *prescriptively* wrong; he was only *descriptively* wrong. Dvořák didn’t understand how deeply engrained racism still was in early twentieth-century America, and how difficult it would be to convince elite white Americans to appreciate the music of nineteenth-century black American musicians.

Horowitz details the nature of this problem by comparing early twentieth-century approaches to previous American literature and music. The primary culprits, Horowitz argues, are also some of the most celebrated American musicians, the “deans of American classical music,” if you will:

Virgil Thomson, Aaron Copland, and Leonard Bernstein. Together, they shaped the standard narrative of American classical music, which asserted (in Horowitz's words) that "there was no American music of consequence before 1910." While the deans of American literature had extolled the works of Emerson, Thoreau, and Whitman as a rich and "usable past," American composers had decided they completely lacked the corollary musical literature. Notice that, according to these figures, even Dvořák himself (already an established master of European classical music) had not written consequential American music by 1910. The deans of American classical music did not only ignore Negro spirituals and other folk music; they also ignored someone who had fused European high culture with American low culture. According to them, even Dvořák-the-European was unusable? Or was he somehow non-American? Regardless of the "artistic usability" of Negro spirituals, why would Dvořák's "New World Symphony" not be considered a "usable American past"?

The truly fascinating thing about this book, then, is not that Horowitz is claiming that nineteenth-century black Americans (here Horowitz explores the work of figures such as Samuel Coleridge Taylor, William Levi Dawson, Florence Price, and Nathaniel Dett) were denied their artistic dues by twentieth-century white Americans; such claims are nothing new today, and Horowitz explains expertly how jazz, as "American classical music," fits into such a narrative. What's perhaps new, at least to some audiences, is the idea that even Dvořák, a *European* master, was denied his American artistic dues. Part of Horowitz's agenda here is the idea that early twentieth-century American classical musical culture was unjustifiably nationalistic, to the extent that even a

Horowitz presents us with an accurate image of a Bostonian elite whose sense of "elite culture" was basically coterminous with "white Protestant culture."

European master using black American songs could be excluded from the ideal of a "usable American past." Perhaps Virgil Thomson subconsciously thought of Dvořák as the very opposite of an "Uncle Tom," a white traitor to his own musical culture. No serious musician, Thomson must have thought, would use Negro spirituals to write a *symphony*. Well, Dvořák did, and Horowitz extols his example. Dvořák's 1893 *Symphony No. 9*, "From the New World," is a magnificent work of American classical music.

Horowitz does well to foreground this symphony in his account, in at least two key ways: first, it is clearly Dvořák's most popular work, often performed by the Dallas Symphony Orchestra and similar orchestras. But second, and most importantly, the very content of the symphony *performs* an aspect of Horowitz's overarching argument: the "Negro melodies" that black musicians created and cultivated could serve as rich source material for American classical music. For Dvořák did not just come to America, "appropriate" the melodies of black folks, and write his own work. No, his "New World" symphony was written while he worked closely with Harry Burleigh, a black American musician who Dvořák first met while Burleigh was a custodian at the

New York Conservatory of Music. Burleigh would sing Negro spirituals while he cleaned the building, and Dvořák would hear the melodies he wanted to base his symphony on. Dvořák would eventually quote Burleigh's own melodies in the symphony, and the melody from movement two, the famously gorgeous "Goin' Home" melody, was Dvořák's (and his student William Arms Fisher's) attempt to write something in that style. Dvořák's prophecy was false, Horowitz admits, because American classical music was eventually bifurcated into "white classical" and "black jazz." But Dvořák practiced what he preached, and the result was (in the view of many) the finest work of American classical music ever written.

As convincing as Horowitz's account may be, however, one might reasonably ask him some pressing questions: Are there any clear artistic or aesthetic criteria for distinguishing between various works of art, whether sung in the black slave fields or written in the halls of white academia? Horowitz names and details many examples of nineteenth-century black musicians who were allegedly underappreciated, but how are we to know the truly talented ones from the untalented, rightly neglected ones? Is it just that some have accidentally survived, and others haven't? Are there certain criteria that ought to apply across the board? To press the matter even further, is it possible that Dvořák was just plain *wrong*, and that much of nineteenth-century black American music is "unusable" because black Americans were denied the trappings of musical culture, things that Dvořák himself took for granted? Is it possible that the only element of "classical music" that Negro spirituals could supply were pretty tunes, and that such tunes could hardly form the basis of a true national musical culture?

Horowitz operates mainly as a historian in this book, so his answers to such questions would require a much longer project. However, Horowitz's book could also be taken in a fruitful philosophical or theological direction if one notices the interplay of the ideas of "the old world" and "the new world" in Dvořák's life and work. Consider the fact that Dvořák entered America as a *Catholic immigrant in 1892*, seeking out "The New World." Accordingly, he was an outsider, and had he ended up in white Boston rather than multicultural New York, Horowitz rightly mentions, his intercultural project would have had little chance of success. It was only the melting pot of New York City that made such an audacious intercultural attempt possible. Dvořák was a white European, but in 1890s America, he was only "the right kind" of white European in certain areas.

This outsider status, one might argue, enabled him to appreciate songs *from* "The New World" *about* "a new world." Negro spirituals almost universally have one common component: a yearning for a new world, better than this one, where all troubles will soon be done. These are the songs of those who feel dislocated, whether dragged into slavery in a foreign land or rejected as a Papist Bohemian hardly worthy of being considered an "American composer" at all. Unfortunately, Horowitz presents us with an accurate image of a Bostonian elite whose sense of "elite culture" was basically coterminous with "white Protestant culture." Horowitz, it seems, is unafraid of dealing with the most interesting and uncomfortable racial elements in Dvořák's American story.

Indeed, it took some measure of socio-political courage for Horowitz to write this book, because certain readers would immediately question the identity-matrix involved in its production. Horowitz,

a white male, is really trying to tell the story of American slave songs while using the music of yet another white male who himself had allegedly already appropriated those very same songs? Is this not one act of cultural appropriation built upon another?

Horowitz does well to deflect this sort of criticism, both explicitly in later chapters and implicitly in his chosen foreword, in which George Shirley, the first black tenor to perform a leading role at the Metropolitan Opera, reflects on the subject matter of the book. By having Shirley write the foreword, Horowitz does something rather ingenious: he kills his potential critics with pre-emptive magnanimity. Shirley is precisely someone whose singing career was profoundly (often negatively) affected by the occlusion of black classical music, evidenced by the fact that he only sung *Sporting Life*, the lead tenor role in *Porgy and Bess*, in his late sixties (Shirley had sung most of the major operatic tenor roles in most of the major opera houses of the world by then, so it was not due to lack of personal ability). When Shirley was off in Europe singing Mozart, he was not rejecting *Porgy* offers in the US, much less performing the works of the black classical composers Horowitz referenced. Such performances simply didn't happen. Thus, Shirley is *exactly* the sort of person who might have good reason for being bitter about "the vexed fate of classical music." If anyone could criticize Horowitz's reading of black American musical history, Shirley would surely be the man.

Yet Shirley does no such thing, and opens up a wonderfully hospitable space for thinking about how race relations and artistic activity can intersect. Shirley seems rather unimpressed by the recent uptick in concerns over "cultural appropriation." He's happy to admit that, in the terms of

"appropriation," black musicians have "appropriated" Western instruments, European musical forms, and the like. But he couches all this cultural exchange within the overarching context of "cultural appreciation," describing it thus: "If I am going to sing the Duke in *Rigoletto* with respect for the language and the style, then I can sing the Duke in *Rigoletto*. You don't have to be Ethiopian to sing *Aida*, or Japanese to sing *Madama Butterfly*. We see or hear something for which we have an affinity and we are drawn to it, no matter its origin. If it speaks to us as a way of life, we have no reason not to pursue it. Music is like that; it belongs to no one person or ethnic entity." In an age of apparently increasing racial animus, such words and thoughts should be greeted as a healing salve.

In this vein, it should be also mentioned that in addition to the book, and in collaboration with Naxos, Horowitz offers a series of six companion DVD films (also, thankfully, available online), replete with musical scores, performances, images, and the like. When he says, for example, that Dvořák wove "Swing Low, Sweet Chariot" into *Symphony No. 9*, you can see the score and hear a version (sung by the excellent bass-baritone Kevin Deas), all while Horowitz narrates and explicates. Such a multimedia encounter with such multisensory music enriches the book, and given the working relationship between Dvořák and Burleigh, it is only fitting that the white Horowitz would collaborate with the black Deas to produce such an impressive set of documentary films.

Horowitz, Shirley, and Deas are urging us to imagine what American classical music would have sounded like if Dvořák's prophecy had come true. Although we still can't hear much of it today, they encourage us to make it more audible. ♪

How the Musical Mind “Sees”

The Music of Jacob Druckman, Stephen Albert, and Ronald Perera

Daniel Asia

THE PRESENT NEW CLASSICAL music scene has a problem with the past. Pierre Boulez said that one was “irrelevant” after WWII if one did not write serial music. Although this approach has now been largely abandoned, it would still seem that those composers who wrote “in the tradition” have been forgotten, neglected, or just considered irrelevant. Most of the trendy music of today is post-minimalist, totalist, neo-folk/classical, or neo-pop/classical. It is attempting to find an audience among the general population who now have no knowledge of, and no interest in, the classical tradition. As a result, it is very much dumbed down providing now more an experience of entertainment rather than art. This music now borders on kitsch, a superficial and rather dumb experience, one that confirms a listener’s smug understanding of the world rather than one that seeks to elevate, inform, and even reveal a new understanding of the self and the universe. Even Susan Sontag, in her later years, rejected her youthful leveling of

all artistic creation and experience for a realization of the existence and beauty of high art and its lasting power.

It is in this context that I discuss the music of three composers: Jacob Druckman, Stephen Albert, and Ronald Perera. I do so to expose their depth of talent, and to demonstrate how musical ideas take shape and why they matter. Everything in the natural, literary, and man-made technological world is at their compositional disposal. The lives and examples of these artists represent an important reminder *not* to jettison innovative high art as a ruin or relic of an irrelevant era, but rather, to understand how such creativity sees everything in the world as the materials for an aesthetic engagement with life’s eclecticism predicated on the relevance of what we hear and how we can express it.

Jacob Druckman was born in 1928 and studied at Juilliard School with Bernard Wagenaar, Vincent Persichetti and Peter Mennin, and with Aaron Copland at Tanglewood. These composers are solidly in

the American classical tradition, and wrote a wide array of music, including chamber and symphonic. Druckman taught at the Juilliard School, Bard College, and Tanglewood; in addition he was director of the Electronic Music Studio and Professor of Composition at Brooklyn College. He was also associated with the Columbia-Princeton Electronic Music Center in New York City. In so doing, Druckman experienced certain revelations provided by electro-acoustic music. It must be remembered that in those days all sound, whether electronic or concrete, was recorded on magnetic tape, and that the composition of a work involved the splicing together of small pieces of tape. It demanded that a composer understand and acknowledge the morphology of a sound in a detailed manner. Thus, composers worked with the notions of attack, development/transformation, decay, and release. These experiences transformed Druckman's compositional approach from that of his teachers to a music that was primarily about the dramatic gesture (like a dancer moving her arm through space), attention to color, and the dramatic and theatrical nature of music. In the spring of 1982, he was Resident-In-Music at the American Academy in Rome. In April of that year, he was appointed composer-in-residence with the New York Philharmonic, where he served two two-year terms and was Artistic Director of the HORIZONS music festival. In the last years of his life, Druckman was Professor of Composition at the School of Music at Yale University. He died in 1992 of lung cancer.

After his youthful neo-Classical period, Druckman wrote many early pieces for what was then called tape and instrument(s), as he explored the electro-acoustic realm. These pieces of the 1960s were brazenly dramatic and virtuosic, exploring the electro-acoustic medium

itself and the extended capability of each instrument for which he wrote. The *Animus* series included works for tape and solo trombone, clarinet, and soprano and two percussion. In these works, according to Mark Swed, "the drama becomes a visceral experience through the exploration of such elemental human concerns as madness, violence, and sexuality. In one extreme example, the highly virtuosic, ironically titled *Valentine* for solo contrabass, Druckman requires the soloist to assault his instrument with near sadistic ferocity." In his next phase, like his mentor Luciano Berio, Druckman explored music of the past through the musical quotation of long-dead composers. In *Delizie contente che l'alme beate* (1976), for wind quintet and tape, fragments of an aria from Cavalli's opera *Il Giasone* glide in the background; and in *Prism* (1980), for orchestra, the three movements are based on quotes from three *Medea* operas by Charpentier, Cavalli, and Cherubini. (Druckman at this time was exploring the possibility of an opera based on the Medea theme.)

But the work *Incenters*, from 1968, has no perceivable quotes. The title refers to the center of the incircle of a triangle or other figure, and is moderately enigmatic in relationship to music. In this case, it means that the three brass instruments—trumpet, French horn, and trombone—drive the activity of the others, which include winds, percussion and keyboards, and strings. This 13-minute work bustles with activity and drama. It is dense in texture, has an unprepared climax where you would expect it (about two-thirds of the way into the piece), is all about gesture, and not at all about harmony or melody, or even motive. It employs spatial notation, which means that space is equal to time (noteheads or beams can be extended to show longer or shorter duration, which means that the durations played are often approximate,

and that vertical sonorities that appear are also only approximate, thus, the de-emphasis of harmony. The materials are also non-tonal, which means in this case there is no focus on a particular pitch or hierarchy of pitches, but at the same time, he uses certain sets (small groups of pitches) that have a particular sound and color, just as a major or minor chord do. The pitches are very freely chosen (which is to say, this is not a serial work, where pitches are ordered in a very organized fashion), so as to fit the gesture desired.

There is little to no beat or meter as the music moves through time, more like a river of fluctuating tension than the accumulation of discrete and related pieces of a puzzle. The listener is drawn to the element of color, and this is one of the primary characteristics of the piece. At its beginning, the trumpet plays the open and consonant interval of a perfect fifth. As this sound fades, we hear a timbral change as the oboe takes over the pitch, which is held for a fairly long time while other burbles and gurgles enter. The piece is off, and it is a kaleidoscope of vivid and lively textures, colors, and sonorities. It moves moment by moment, with each successive moment seemingly following from the previous. Each action suggests the next reaction. It alternates bursts of energy and quiescence. There is little repetition, and few moments that are retained in the memory. The motion is like virtuosic moves in a modern dance, or assorted flickers in an abstract piece of visual art. Forget about large-scale structure. Just hang on and enjoy the ride of this youthful, exuberant work that features the colors of the EA studio and the freedom and sounds of jazz combined with a sense of classical direction—an extended mystery tour.

The success of *Incenters*, and its recording, part of the seminal series of American music recorded by Arthur Weisberg and his

intrepid band, The Contemporary Ensemble, on the Nonesuch label, resulted in Druckman going mainstream, much to his surprise, with a commission from the Chicago Symphony Orchestra. The work, *Windows* (1972), is not my favorite, but you might wish to judge for yourself. The conceit of the work is that every now and then a “window” opens to music that is redolent of the past, heard from afar. As a close friend remarked, it is often difficult to know when these windows open and close, and the music is not particularly distinctive. Also, the orchestration is often too dense with its overwrought textures. *Prism*, of 1980, is more successful. It combines Druckman’s own language with real quotes that provide more inherent drama in the unfolding of the musical line, and the textures are now lean and clear; in fact, they glisten. (This kind of musical quoting was in vogue from Berio’s *Sinfonia* of the late Sixties, through the Eighties, and originated in the electro-acoustic studio, where any source material was considered fair game. You can check out other examples of this practice in the works of George Rochberg (*Music for the Magic Theatre*), Karlheinz Stockhausen (*Hymnen*), and George Crumb (*Makrokosmos Book I*.)

Some critics and listeners think quoting is for the birds, or even unethical. Yet, throughout history composers frequently borrowed or stole from each other, or even themselves. Handel was a master at this. Brahms wrote music on a theme by Haydn. It can be seen as honoring the past. However, with Druckman I find it problematic. I agree with the British critic Andrew Porter, a long-time music writer for *The New Yorker*, who said that quoting seemed like painting graffiti upon a classical work or putting a mustache on a Mona Lisa. For Porter, music of the old masters wins out in the end.

It may be that Druckman thought the same, because his reliance on quoting

others' music almost stopped at some point. If he continued it at all, it became rather more like subtle references to one particular element from another work. In the work *Aureole*, for example, dedicated to Leonard Bernstein and the New York Philharmonic, who performed the work in New York and then on a tour of Japan, Druckman makes reference to the rhythm of the Kaddish prayer, which Bernstein also uses in his Kaddish Symphony, and which he borrowed from the Jewish prayer tradition.

Finally, *Summer Lighting* is a late work from 1990. In its 8-minute duration, it summarizes all of the composer's strengths. It has color galore, marvelous climaxes, and fast music that truly bobs and weaves. It has a beautiful melody and moments of sensuous languor, leopard-like. Its pacing and structure are sure, and it has a wide emotional range from the mystical to the low-down. Maybe, just maybe, it is Druckman's finest little gem.

Stephen Albert was born in New York City in 1941, thirteen years after Druckman. His early musical endeavors involved playing both the piano, and the brass instruments, French horn and trumpet. He began compositional studies with Elie Siegmeister (a composer with a decidedly American vocabulary, who incorporated popular musical languages in his operas, symphonies, and his many choral, chamber, and solo works), and then continued a few years later at the Eastman School of Music, where he studied with Bernard Rogers, a composer of opera and symphonies solidly in the American-neo-classical tradition. Albert then concluded his studies with Joseph Castaldo at the Philadelphia Musical Academy, where he received his B.M. in 1962.

The following year, Albert worked with George Rochberg at the University of Pennsylvania. At this time, Rochberg was writing serial music of a lyrical nature, a language he was to abandon a year later, however, soon after the death of his son following a long illness. I suspect that Albert was very much influenced by the lyrical side of all these composers, and perhaps a seed of Rochberg's soon-to-come apostasy from serialism as well. For throughout his career, Albert railed against serialism—the totalitarianism of the European avant-garde—and, like Rochberg, called for a reconciliation with the past and its musical traditions. Indeed, Albert's musical language is rich and deep with associations to the tonal music tradition.

By the early Seventies, in *Cathedral Music*, Albert was already writing music that partakes of a romantic sensitivity, with engaging harmonies that are often quasi-tonal, and melodies with tonal implications. His slow music (Movement IV) creates mysterious, foggy, and allusive textures, with slow-moving and memorable melodies. The clearly etched fast music of Movement V, in contrast, can also be boisterous. Already in this work, he is not afraid of directness and simplicity. He presents clear motivic ideas, sometimes used with Varesian repetition, featuring brass. (Remember he was a brass player!) Sometimes his tonal fragments are overlapped to create sonorities of greater dissonance and complexity. He sometimes clears these complex decks with moments of tonal simplicity. The faster music is particularly good, with strong forward direction expressed in a clear structure; and it is intensely dramatic, with its quick changes of texture and dissonance and consonant levels. Like the man, it is strongly argued and always intensely passionate.

To Wake the Dead begins Albert's delight in, perhaps even infatuation with, the writings of James Joyce, with the texts of this work coming from that modernist author's novel *Finnegans Wake*. The work is scored for the same ensemble as Schoenberg's *Pierrot Lunaire*: soprano, flute, clarinet, piano, violin, cello, with the addition of a harmonium and a percussionist who plays on the strings of the piano (this last item I think is a quasi-borrowing of the inside-of-the-piano music found in George Crumb's *Makrokosmos Book I*). The work is in seven movements, six of which are songs and one just for instruments. Joyce held an interest for many composers during the middle to late 20th century, due to his frequent use of words for their musical or sonic nature, rather than for their meaning (e.g. Berio, Takemitsu, Cage, Barber, Del Tredici, Gideon, and Martino, among others). And as Albert says in his program note, it also "is informed by rich imagery, a mysterious atmosphere and an almost hypnotic rhythm. As the language of the novel is akin to the language of dreams, it seemed an intriguing prospect to translate this dream-state into something more palpable, less surreal." In the guise of making this language "more palpable, less surreal," the music is even more tonal than Albert's previous work. Tonal themes are lodged in larger non-tonal textures; good ol' dance music is to be heard; and Albert

even quotes one of Joyce's own tunes, a little folk ditty that, not surprisingly, goes awry. The singer, who in *Pierrot Lunaire* is actually a chanteuse, is here both a classical singer and one who must lift her heels—and voice— as if in a bar where Irish jigs are played and danced. The musical language used is wide, moving effortlessly from non-tonal to tonal realms, classical to old-time popular song, with and without interpenetration of these styles. It is a fine display of Albert's increasing compositional dexterity.

In Albert's relatively small output—he died tragically in an auto accident at age 52—there are numerous works for voice, often on Joycean texts. These include *Distant Hills*, *Treestone*, and vocal works employing other texts. Albert did not compose quickly or easily, but I suspect that texts helped him in the creation of musical material, in the genesis of musical ideas.

Having said this, one of his best works is his *RiverRun* symphony of 1983. And while there are no words in this composition, its title comes from Joyce's *Finnegans Wake*. The piece is in four movements: "Rain Music," "Leafy Speafing," "Beside the Rivering Waters," and "River's End." All are waters in movement.

The entire work might be thought of as a mash-up between Stravinsky of the Russian period with some delightful minimalist elements, but these are only basic references. Albert combines the non-tonal (while never serial) with the tonal, as Stravinsky does in *The Rite of Spring*, along with Stravinskian ostinati and walking bass figures. Albert's orchestration partakes of the glistening quality of some of John Adams's early scores, with twinkling flutes and piccolos combined with the pitched percussion of vibraphones, glockenspiel, and piano. Albert employs both recognizable and memorable tonal melodies, as well as impertinent, and

**We perceive in these
three composers' work
the important relationship
between language and
expression, both literary
and musical.**

registrally wide-ranging, quasi-improvisational flights of pure fancy. In so doing, Albert blends qualities of the past and the present.

The First movement, “Rain Music,” begins in the minor key, and is portentous and mysterious, heavy, and deep in register. This introduction precedes light and delicate music in the highest register, of woodwinds flickering, like nervous rain and mildly static. These two states are presented then in alternation. A third section of ostinatos in strings, much more lively and motoric, also presents melodic materials thrown back and forth between woodwinds and strings. The orchestration is finally detailed. Brass come to the fore to provide a climax before the music returns to its lighter rain theme. Albert mixes reiterations of low, covered brass and piano, with more portentous music in low brass. The music builds tension, and then waits and hovers before moving to another climax in the brass with piercing flutes up high. The music builds until the end with a massive crescendo.

“Leafy Speafing” is slow and mysterious, beginning with an improvisatory melody in the clarinet, taken up by the violin and then the flute. It moves slowly and episodically, with these three soloists playing either unaccompanied or over a bed of slow-moving mid-range strings. This opening gives way to a churning music that is turbulent and rather quick-paced. Its layering in the orchestration is lush and fantastical, with excited strings. This gives way to another section of two flutes delicately pairing with music from the improvisatory opening. The violin enters into the conversation. This is, again, ruminatory music, with splashes of color provided by the piano and vibraphone. The turbulent music interrupts, now with layers of ostinati that are right out of *The Rite of Spring*. But Albert’s melodies, *molto romantico*, are all his own;

they are big and bold, and mostly diatonic. The orchestral piano is prominent towards the conclusion, which heads towards a massive climax, but then peters out. It provides a nice corollary to the first, in that it suggests it will end in a similar fashion, and then surprises by not doing so.

“Beside the Rivering Waters” is kaleidoscopic and a bit of a pastiche. Albert quotes his own *To Wake the Dead*, the same Joycean tune, and alludes to a bit of Crumb’s aforementioned *Makrokosmos*. Different musics are quickly abutted against each other or layered on top of each other. Yet every motivic strand has a clear and strong profile. The thick textures are never opaque. Occasionally the presence of low reiterated pulses produce a Russian allusion, perhaps Mussorgsky or Shostakovich. Like the latter’s music, it is quite comical in a dark way. It too just stops, as if in mid- course, cut off.

“River’s End” begins with a lovely walking paced solo in the horn. The strings take over in a rich texture. A new section of stasis is followed again by the horn playing its fine melody, supported with a background of long-held notes in the strings. Ruminations in the brass lead to the contrabassoon, then to a flute partnering with violins. The overall texture is thick and in the lowest register. Does the river widen and deepen as it seeks its release? This longest movement, at ten minutes, is the most variegated in texture, with the presence of many solos, as in the first movement. The piano plays solo with music almost like a music box, followed by wandering string solos. It is often a bit murky, maybe obscured, and of mixed emotion. A huge climax, the biggest, occurs at the golden mean point, only to be stopped abruptly and overtaken by woodwind solos over strings. A churning, and brass interjections, turn into a massive build towards...a cutoff, with a return to

quiet woodwind solos punctuated by piano and glockenspiel strikes. Shimmering strings are held with quiet tinkles in the piano and glockenspiel as the music quietly fades out. Perhaps that river is blending gently into the waters of the ocean.

The entire work is over one-half hour in duration, but it passes quickly and effortlessly. Albert is a master of drama and pacing, and his materials are finely etched and memorable. If occasionally derivative of others, or even himself, this is a fine piece of music.

Ronald Perera was born in Boston in 1941. He studied composition with Leon Kirchner during his time at Harvard, which might account for the rigor and clear structure in his music. He also studied electronic music with Gottfried Michael Koenig at the University of Utrecht and with Mario Davidovsky (of the highly influential *Synchronism* series consisting of works for solo instruments and electronic sounds), and this had a strong influence on his music of the Seventies. He also worked independently with Randall Thompson in choral music. The approaches of these teachers represent wide aesthetic interests and different understandings of what music is, can, or should be. Kirchner, who studied with Arnold Schoenberg, was a strident atonalist, an expressionist at heart. His music is tough, wildly emotional, hard-edged, and always clearly structured. It is intellectual and rigorous, always purposeful, perhaps even confrontational. Davidovsky's music is always clean, sharp-edged, and glassy in its brilliant timbres. It verges on the antiseptic. Thompson is the author of approachable works for amateur and professional choruses. It is always approachable on first hearing, and it is tonal

in the old-fashioned sense of that word.

All these influences show up in Perera's individual voice. While eschewing Kirchner's hardness and confrontational stance, Perera's music is clear and clean in structure and purpose. His electronic works demonstrate Davidovsky's attention to detailed timbre and the unfolding of electronic sounds. The development of his language seems always to have been based on the movement of harmonies, predicated by a refusal to abandon a tonal orientation, even if the earlier music is not explicitly tonal. Also, Perera has a knack for coming up with beautiful melodic materials. Schuller, in revising his excitement and participation in the avant-garde of the 1950s and 1960s, decried the giving up of melody, and even suggested that many of the most famous avant-garde composers probably just couldn't write a good one. The result was, as Rochberg noted, the creation of much music that had no place in the memory, ultimately without individual profile, bland, and anodyne. This is *not* the case with Perera's music, which is assured, lyrical, approachable, and inventive.

One of Perera's early works of the Seventies is *Three Poems of Günter Grass*. The work, commissioned by the Goethe Institute of Boston for the new music ensemble Musica Viva, is scored for a chamber ensemble, including mezzo-soprano and flute (doubling piccolo, alto flute), clarinet (doubling bass clarinet, alto sax), violin, viola, cello, piano, and tape. This is an expanded ensemble of Schoenberg's *Pierrot Lunaire* forces, similar to that of Albert's *To Wake the Dead*. The additions are the inclusion of a solo part for viola, rather than the doubling that Schoenberg used in his work, and the crucial addition of an electro-acoustic element. It should be noted that this was a time when many composers, as we have seen with Druckman, and of course

Davidovsky, were writing for live instruments and tape, the conjunction of which created a critical issue. Because the sounds on tape are immovable, the musicians and conductor must follow the tape; however, this rigidity presented a problem, as most music does not just need—but demands—flexibility. This was also the time that minimalism and multi-tracking had swung into high gear, so that playing to a click-track or in the groove became, without any rubato then, more acceptable and widespread. However, this was not the norm in most classical music. Perera gets through this problem by having various tape parts starting and stopping at various points in the piece, thus involving a tape performer. The tape part is mostly *musique concrète*, the sounds being manipulated and altered recordings of real sounds of a “railroad train, a fragment of a Hitler rally, and so on,” as well as synthesized sounds.

The three poems that Perera set include *Gleisdreieck*, *Klappstühle*, and *Schlaflos*, written by Günter Grass, who is most famous for his book *The Tin Drum*, a magical realist novel about World War II and a young boy who refuses to grow. Grass was a novelist, poet, illustrator, sculptor, and won the Nobel Prize in 1999. Only in 2006 did he reveal that he had been drafted into the Waffen-SS in 1944 and served with them until his capture in April 1945. The three poems were written during the postwar years, when Germany was divided into East and West.

Gleisdreieck is inspired by the eponymous U-Bahn elevated train station in Berlin’s Kreuzberg neighborhood. It was the scene of a horrific accident in 1908, when two trains crashed causing multiple fatalities. Before the building of the Berlin Wall, the station was at the juncture of East and West. The poem alludes to washerwomen who pass back and forth between the

sectors to do their work. There is a spider who, from his glands, spins tracks. The mood is surreal and macabre, and questions the division of East and West.

The work begins with the sound of a train and people exiting. Perera then freely enters the text in the middle, spoken. Its numerous repetitions recall *She was a visitor* by Robert Ashley, as it is mesmerizing, and suggests a time that stands still—a hazy reflection of a past period. A drone and repeated motives with echo add to this sensation. The entrance of instruments with these same qualities continues this musical atmosphere. The motives suggest a train whistle and then transform into purely musical gestures, short and abrupt, but also with some sustain that suggests the echo of the train gestures. The vocalist now starts the poem from its beginning still in spoken tones, and then moves freely into singing. The piano then plays music with a jazz ostinato. And in fact, the music is ‘popular,’ what one might have heard in a Berlin cabaret. The music hovers in a middle ground as it again transforms back into a shady new music world of instrumental repetitions of descending short figures, alternating with lyrical vocal writing. The instruments provide a delicate accompaniment for the voice, which leads all of the action. The tape part then enters with a reappearance of the ostinato, which is joined by the piano in unison and the jazz music.

The music has a continuous sense of movement and has sections of transpositions. It fades on the repetition of the word *gleisdreieck*, and a repeated motive of the descent and then rise of a minor third back to the note of origination. The music is mostly tonal, jazzy, with moments or short sections of atonality, the latter providing sensations of dislocation. (By the way, this minor third figure is similar to that found in Albert’s *To Wake the Dead*,

wherein he repeats the same figure for the name ‘Timothy’, another word of three syllables.) Perhaps more importantly, both Perera and Albert were involved in the recovery of tonality. The movement fades out as it began, with an inchoate music in the instruments, a repeated phrase in the tape part—now male—and a final fading out of the ostinato in the piano. Perera repeats and subtly alters his materials in a way that is quirky and formally clear. At the beginning and end, there is a sound like that between stations on an old radio, an electro-acoustic noise with some dirt in it. The eerie quality of this sound takes us in and out of that earlier time.

Klappstuhle, or folding chairs, is about German emigration following the war. It suggests that whether one stays in, or leaves, Germany, one cannot escape the utter shame of the German people. It begins with many bell sounds, perhaps of doors opening and closing, church bells, subtly altered to sound a little out of kilter, and music, or snippets, of a distorted waltz: Johann Strauss’s *Künstlerleben* (“Artist’s Life”), which is heard on a distorted music box. It is rather gentle and serene, like looking at dancers at a ball through slightly drunken eyes. The instruments enter playing real waltz music, or again, brief snippets, that are interrupted or overlaid with other less tonal materials, as well as scalar, diatonic and chromatic fragments. The voice enters with instrumental accompaniment that is reminiscent—or has a whiff—of the second Viennese school, atonal Schoenberg, or Berg. The vocal material is tonal and lyrical, even playful in its evocation of high society life. As with del Tredici’s *Final Alice*, repetition of a phrase is used to suggest things gone askew. Thirds, particularly of the minor sort, pervade. The voice is allowed a completely triadic arpeggio pushing from low to the

highest range, as if quoting a song of the Romantic period. As in the first movement, the music fades, to be concluded by a single low piano note. The general tone is one of nostalgic melancholia.

Schlaflos, or Sleepless, is nightmarish poetry, with surreal scenes of desperation, remnants of war, as in “The bed leaves for a journey,” and the central point, “And everywhere/The Customs interpose: What’s in your baggage?” The baggage of the War and Holocaust loom large, but as images that cannot be revealed, acknowledged, or confronted. The music begins with a scrape inside the piano, the whispering of numbers by the ensemble members, then a desperate and vacant duet with piccolo and bass clarinet. The voice enters with a line almost sultry, and strings play *col legno battuto* (striking the strings with the wooden part of the bow), then pizzicato, then high harmonics. All is desiccated, fleshless. The music is episodic, proceeding fitfully. The voice then presents in *Sprechstimme* before a recorded voice appears with isolated words, almost in a stutter, and a recorded voice speaks accompanied by long-held uncomfortably grainy electronic tones. Then the live vocalist declaims texts in spoken voice accompanied by semi-tonal wanderings/glissandi in the strings, and then accompanied by a recorded man’s voice, presumably Hitler’s. Ever quickening, non-coordinated string glissandi lead to a stochastic climax; this is a musical collage of disparate materials. The climax fades with sputterings in the strings and a reminiscence of the minor third motive of the opening song. It is an unhappy and unresolved conclusion, appropriate for topics that allow no closure. Finally, the work altogether provides a melding of live and recorded music, musical languages, vocal techniques, and lyrical and memorable melodies that are perfectly

The eclecticism evidenced in these works speaks to the ability of the human mind to discern its place in society and the natural world.

suited to the texts. In its truthfulness to those words, this work is one of depth and transcendent meaning.

Like Druckman, Perera dropped out of the realm of electro-acoustic music later in his career; Druckman to write many works for orchestra, and Perera, to write more for voice, or voice and instruments. The former's gift is for color, which can be exploited with orchestral forces, and the latter's gift is for writing beautiful melodies for single voices or voices en masse.

Visions, written almost twenty years after *Three Poems of Gunter Grass* in 1992, for two sopranos and chamber ensemble, is in three movements looking at three different artistic visions: the painter, writer, and sculptor, and is based on the poetry of three different poets. The musical language used in each movement is chosen to reflect the individual character of each of the texts. The first movement, "Sky Above Clouds" (for Georgia O'Keefe), contains continuous eighth notes in the instrumental accompaniment that suggest a continuity of the ever-same yet changing sky. Sections of chordal material are rich in color. The two sopranos sing lines that are both declamatory and lyrical. They are, not surprisingly, like the clouds, often in the stratospheric part of their range. Their relationship is almost like clouds that blend as they pass each other, briefly merge, and then go their own ways. The music easily floats along with moments of punctuation, which builds to a climax at the end on the text "toward the vision/there is nowhere to go beyond."

The second movement, "The Writer," features sections of quick repeated sixteenth notes, suggesting the clicking and

clacking of typewriter keys. The alternating sections of internal introspection feature one voice in lyrical writing, with similar accompaniment by the instruments. The second voice finally enters. The voices represent the young writer and daughter of the poet. The daughter is working. A starling was stuck in the very same room as the one the writer is in now. After a long and bloody time, it finally finds its way out. The bird's fight for survival, for life or death, is just like the creative process in which the writer is now engaged. This internal, creative battle is represented in the friction between its tonal and serial materials, a jarring combination of perspectives. However, even at its most complex, the music is never harsh or fearsome, but rather always expressive.

The third and final movement, "After Brancusi," is solidly planted, with a reiterated bass note, in B flat major, and the presence of tonal harmonies. The two voices sing in tandem, mostly note for note, while the accompaniment is luxuriant. The surfaces, like Brancusi's bronze sculptures, are shining. The melodic lines traverse a widely expressive space. They return to a middle range at the conclusion, which the instruments then finalize with a classical iteration of three repeated B flat major chords, as if to state that the wholeness of the sculpture has affirmed the wholeness of the world.

Finally, *The Saints* was written in 1990 with the subtitle "Three Pieces for Orchestra with Audience Participation." This is because it was commissioned by the New York Chamber Symphony of the 92nd Street Y in New York for its Sidney A. Wolff

School Music Series, a series involving children's participation. The entire work is decidedly tonal and welcoming. It could almost be a pops piece, which I do not mean in any demeaning way.

The first movement is wonderfully clear in structure and timbre, often featuring the sections of the orchestra playing by themselves. The opening features upward rising scales in the strings, with fanfare-like materials in the brass and timpani. The gestures and sound are quite Baroque. This is followed by chirping winds in a decidedly minimalist figure. Brass instruments interrupt these sounds with their own similar but different music, with clear phrase structure—the music breathes in clear parcels—ending with a chord borrowed from the lexicon of one of Stravinsky's Neo-classic works (it is a gorgeous chord very much worth stealing, and just right in this situation). At this point in the journey, it is finally the strings' turn to lead, and they take this music in a somewhat more Coplandesque direction of, say, *Appalachian Spring* or *Rodeo*. But the mood darkens with the entrance of the timpani, and a French horn that plays a lovely solo based on the peppy and rhythmic wind figure, soon to be partnered by a few of those winds. But it is now expressed with pathos. The strings finally enter as well, expressing a prairie moroseness; the brass intone some of their opening music, but now gentle and serene, and the movement just drifts away. The movement has clear shape and form, phrasing, and distinctions of timbre and register that make it easily glide through its 3 1/2-minute duration.

In the middle movement, the sounds of the orchestral instruments are expanded by some pre-recorded electronic sounds, and others made by the musicians in the orchestra, thus bringing Perera full circle, back to his music of the late Sixties and

Seventies. The work begins with glissandi in the timpani and strings, followed by finger snaps and vocalization by the orchestral members. A fugue starts and quickly goes awry. Then there is music almost of a hoedown quality. There are trumpet, then flute solos. The music is perky and alive. It starts and stops, moving quickly from one musical idea to another. The middle section is highly gestural, with the addition of vocal utterances, finger snaps, and finally the addition of electronic sounds. Unlike in the *Three Poems of Günter Grass*, this is light and frothy, but with a witty sense of humor (imagine, contemporary music with mirth!) This builds to a wicked climax with instrumental trills, leaving the electronics and strings alone, followed by piano, and then with a single stroke, the timpani softly finishes this music.

The last movement features the tuba at the start, and riffs from *When the Saints Go Marching In*, but all just a bit hidden. The brass and clarinet finally play a full version of the tune, then the strings come in doing the same. It plays with the conventions of how it might have been heard in the Twenties or Thirties. The entire orchestra then joins in, and the conclusion is now forte with the timpani providing a conclusive strike as well. This is a rousing finish to the entire three-movement work, which, if a little bit tongue-in-cheek (or very much tongue-in-cheek), is just the right length for this delightfully simple—but not simple-minded—joyful orchestral composition.

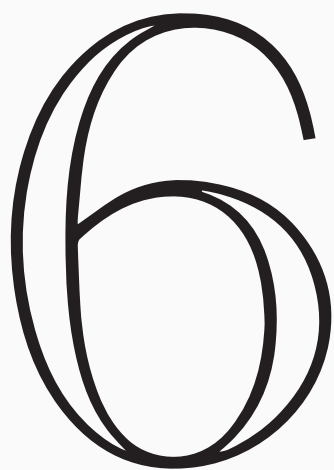
We perceive in these three composers' work the important relationship between language and expression, both literary and musical. Whether through the quoting of other compositions or the inspiration derived from one of music's sister arts, these

composers translate the world aesthetically through the language of music, filtered and molded by the creative act. The examples of Druckman, Albert, and Perera show just what a musical mind “sees” in making works of such quality.

What is at stake here? In some sense, everything. The eclecticism evidenced in these works speaks to the ability of the human mind to discern its place in society and the natural world. Every musical composition guides the listener’s soul, like a boat that carries one across the water, through the undulating waves of temporal experience. The composer is the captain of this ship for the duration of the artistic voyage, the musicians the crew, and the instruments the hull and frame.

The metaphor is apt, since the musical crossing is one that traverses time and space itself, which are mediums within which our souls are suspended, and onto which our consciousness grasps as we navigate the experience of life.

The language of the arts, as we have seen, is the best vehicle to advocate for such knowledge of the world. Its poesis is most poignant in the musical arts, which at its root places the human heart, mind, and voice in accord with the infinity of moments that constitute reality. The lives and music of Druckman, Albert, and Perera embody the important lesson that innovative high art should *not* be neglected, is not irrelevant, and should not be forgotten. A



6

**CURRENT
AFFAIRS**

In the Land of Dreams

Daniel Ross Goodman

Armageddon Time, 2022. Directed by James Gray, 115 minutes. Distributed by Focus Features.

DURING HIS OPENING MONOLOGUE WHILE HOSTING *Saturday Night Live* last November, comedian Dave Chappelle addressed the controversial remarks and reckless social media posts about Jews that Ye (formerly Kanye West) and Kyrie Irving had made earlier that fall. But instead of defusing the controversies, Chappelle's now widely commented-on monologue only inflamed tensions further, highlighting just how difficult it can often be for one group of people who have suffered from persecution to be equally sensitive to another people's historical trauma.

On the heels of Chappelle's dicey monologue comes James Gray's autobiographical movie *Armageddon Time*, which uses the medium of film—as Chappelle had attempted to do through the medium of comedy—to address the thorny intersection between racism and antisemitism in America. Whereas Chappelle, in the eyes of some, appeared to make light of the Holocaust and seemed to lack an understanding of the ways in which many American Jews are still scarred by what our families endured in Europe in the 20th century, *Armageddon Time* conveys some of the gravity of the Jewish situation in the early 20th century. It does so primarily through the character of Aaron Rabinowitz, played charmingly by an endearing, nickname-loving Anthony Hopkins. Rabinowitz, as he tells his grandson Paul Graff (Banks Repeta), is an English Jew of Ukrainian descent, whose parents fled from Eastern Europe due to the increasingly life-endangering persecutions of Jews that were taking place on the continent in the early 20th century. They were fortunate to make it to the United Kingdom, and later to the

United States; their relatives—like so many other millions of Jews—were far less lucky. But just because his family had managed to escape Europe, Rabinowitz explains to Paul, doesn't mean that they have escaped antisemitism. "They hated us then," he says to Paul one night as he's trying to get his grandson to go to bed while also telling him about a pogrom his parents endured in Ukraine. "And they still hate us." Good luck falling asleep after that bedtime story!

Rabinowitz's daughter Esther (Anne Hathaway), an active PTA board member who has aspirations of running for the district school board, had married Irving Graff (Jeremy Strong), a plumber's son who himself is a handyman. They have two sons, Ted (Ryan Sell) and Paul, and—along with other aunts, uncles, and grandparents—are a close-knit family in late-1970s Queens who frequently share large family dinners and Sunday bagel and lox brunches. Rabinowitz is the patriarch who holds the family together, but the family member who holds the movie together is Paul, a red-haired, starry-eyed sixth-grader who dreams of becoming a great artist and who has a knack for getting in trouble in school. Paul likes to sketch caricatures of his teacher in class, creates his own superheroes ("Captain United"—sounds like a plausible comic book character, does it not?), and is infatuated with the art of Kandinsky. Paul's hard-headed parents are worried about him. "His head is in the clouds," he overhears his father complaining to his mother. "He's not living in reality." But his fun-loving grandfather—who calls America "the land of dreams"—is not one to dissuade his grandson from aiming for the life he truly wants. "You can be an artist if you want to; nothing is gonna stop you."

The potentially bigger problem Paul poses for his parents is his friendship with his classmate Johnny Davis (Jaylin Webb). Johnny is Black, and when Gray was growing up many people of his parents' generation were still rather unenlightened (to put it politely) when it came to race and ethnicity. (They call Chinese food "Ching Chang Cho food.") When Paul's parents move him to a new school, Paul's privileged

classmates are openly hostile toward the idea of him having a Black friend, even using the N-word to make their point. Paul's ever-humane grandfather is the only one who doesn't mind; not only does it not bother him but he even tells Paul to stick up for his friend and to "be a mensch" to him when Johnny is inevitably affronted.

The kindling wood is cleanly and clearly laid out for us, and it is obvious that it will only take a small spark to ignite an ugly racial conflagration during the film's dénouement. But the mood of *Armageddon Time*—a reference to the nuclear conflagration Democrats and some liberals feared that then-presidential candidate Ronald Reagan would ignite across the globe—is quieter than its more explosive title would suggest. It has less quirkiness and humor than other filmmaker *Bildungsromans* like Noah Baumbach's *The Squid and the Whale* (2005) and fewer fireworks than other movies that have confronted racial conflict in New York, such as Spike Lee's *Do The Right Thing* (1989), notwithstanding that during one scene Paul and his grandfather launch a homemade rocket together. It makes its point about the endurance of prejudice in America in a much more subdued and arguably even more tragic way than Spike Lee's great movie does—though the legendary New York director may very well agree with *Armageddon Time*'s sad assessment of his city's (as well as American society's) troubled record on race.

Anne Hathaway, Banks Repeta, and Anthony Hopkins could (and probably should) all have been nominated for Oscars for their excellent work in this film. Especially impressive was Repeta, a child actor who carries the entire movie essentially by himself—and quite capably so. *Armageddon Time* was unfortunately entirely overlooked by the Academy during this year's Oscars, adding to the mysteries of the Academy's baffling choices. But we should make sure that this poignant, perceptive movie about the complexities of race and religion in America does not slip out of our cultural discourse around these topics anytime soon. A

Africa Rising

Meaghan Emery

Stephen Smith, *The Scramble for Europe: Young Africa on Its Way to the Old Continent*. Polity Press, \$23, 200pp. paperback.

DRAWING ON THE AUTHOR'S BACKGROUND AS A JOURNALIST for *Le Monde*, *Libération*, and RFI, *The Scramble for Europe* is marked by the same optimism about African development as a more recent article that concludes: "Far from encouraging it, one of the solutions to illicit migration flows lies in the implementation by [African] States of employment policies in favor of young people. Creating these opportunities will allow the emergence of young talent motivated by innovation and structural transformation in Africa."¹ Smith's book first appeared in English in 2019, a year prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, when irregular migration from sub-Saharan Africa to Europe was in decline due to increased border surveillance and lack of jobs needed to pay the cost of passage.² It is optimistic in its statement of confidence that increased economic opportunity in sub-Saharan Africa will not fuel more migration. Rather than giving young people the means to leave the continent, increased economic opportunity will incite them to stay.

¹ By contrast, migration from the Maghreb saw an uptick during the epidemic as seasonal workers crossed the Mediterranean in higher numbers and kept European economies afloat. See Steve Tametong and Martial Fabrice Eteme Ongono, "African Migration to Europe During The Covid-19 Pandemic." *On Policy Magazine*, March 17, 2021, onpolicy.org/african-migration-to-europe-during-the-covid-19-pandemic. By contrast, Smith writes that migration from the Maghreb is shrinking overall as family structure evolves.

² Ibid.

Smith, now a professor in African Studies at Duke University, delves deeply into the situation of young people in sub-Saharan Africa and advances the argument that it is time for the principle of seniority to cede to the demands for equality made by the young, writing that “The old are the gatekeepers of a supposedly stable but actually moribund world held in place by flagrant injustices. The young yearn for equality and—propelled by constant disappointment and mounting frustration—threaten to bring the old order down on the heads of their elders.” With these elders representing 5% of the population, ancestral cultures have been reduced primarily to internationally subsidized festivals; and in their place, since “the age pyramid has been essentially flattened,” globalization has taken hold. In 2015, the population south of the Sahara was more than one billion, with half of the continent’s population connected to 4G telephony or the internet, and it is predicted that by 2050 Africa’s population will nearly double, with two-thirds of Africans being less than thirty years old.

Currently, hundreds of millions of Africans, according to Smith, live in a continuing state of dependency on their parents or religious communities. The disenfranchisement of young women is even more acute. At the same time, Europe’s population is contracting and ageing, increasing migratory pressures on countries to the north, much greater than what the United States is experiencing. However, Smith maintains that future economic opportunity is to be found in Africa. Thus, although at first glance the “Africanization” of Europe appears the subject of this book, Smith quickly flips this paradigm on its head to show that the ingredients are in place for an emergent Africa.

After providing quantitative evidence on shrinking European demographics and migratory flow from Africa in the 21st century, Smith’s investigation begins by tracing several worrisome indicators that face sub-Saharan Africa back to their foundations in colonial history. He describes how Africa’s twentieth-century baby boom had resulted from colonial development in the 1930s, reversing centuries of slow population growth, due to not only lack of modernization in personal and public health initiatives but also to the lingering trauma of the centuries-long slave trade followed by disease which accompanied 19th-century colonial exploration. In the Cold War era, following independence, exponential growth continued because family planning or demographic control were political anathema within newly sovereign African states, particularly south of the Sahara. Even today, only 15% of sub-Saharan African women of childbearing age use modern forms of contraception for lack of family planning structures. From now until 2050, the population in sub-Saharan Africa is expected to grow annually by 2.5-3% and by 2100, Smith projects that the region will be home to the majority (60%) of people under the age of fifteen.

Food scarcity is a top concern, particularly in view of the worsening climate crisis. The figures are staggering, indicating the challenges that lie ahead in a world region dominated by small and mostly unmechanized, non-irrigated farms whose rates of food production are far below those of Western countries. By 2050, “Africa will need to have quintupled its agricultural production to guarantee its food security.” The other option will be expensive food imports, in an increasingly populous world with a struggling agricultural sector due to climate change and nutrient-depleted soils. Significantly, sub-Saharan Africa holds 60% of the world’s not yet cultivated arable land, and the proportion of city dwellers has not yet reached half of the overall population, which is expected to happen by 2030 (whereas the world crossed that threshold in 2008). Cities, however, are not oases of opportunity, and countries are still hobbled by low GDP and poverty. The numbers underpin some alarmist forecasts, which are also covered in the book, but also point to Africa’s potential. In addition to statistical analysis, Smith’s chapters are full of historical examples, which can provide either shining examples of success (e.g., Tunisia’s demographic policy, which began in the 1950s under Habib Bourguiba, and the exemplary story of Malian politician and businessman Modibo Diarra) or cautionary tales of racially and ethnically-inspired violence (e.g., the murder of white farm owners in Zimbabwe under Robert Mugabe’s presidency at the turn of the 21st century). The coveting of land and resources was of course built into tribal, herding culture, but intervention and more often exploitation at the hands of European colonists have created deep-seated resentments that some politicians have wielded to their advantage.

Rather than dwell on Africa’s autocratic rulers, their recriminations against the former colonizers, and the danger of violent factionalism, Smith looks to uncover the youth demographic, which is impossible to reduce to any pat description, given the numbers and sociocultural and religious complexity of their generation. With sub-Saharan Africa’s “failing states” as a backdrop, he specifically examines religious revivalism, and primarily the hold on the young of Evangelical Christianity and Islam, which respectively provide “medical care, education, and social security writ large” and the Salafist “tradition.” The former preaches “the charismatic revolution” to men and women eager to dethrone the elder class, composed of older men, in the pursuit of political influence and economic emancipation. Moved by a new personal discipline, or life ethic, built on capitalism and Protestantism, the faithful embrace change with no lingering resentment against the West. On the other hand, and notably under the Nigerian federation, the followers of Islam view Koranic law as “the last bulwark against Western corruption” as well as against rampant political and moral corruption within the state apparatus and its officials.

The desire for democracy is strong among the young both north and south of the Sahara, as manifest in the Arab Spring and in Sudan's fragile democratic coalition's calls for Western aid to quell the battling generals. Democracy requires economic stability, which makes the difficulties of the "youth bulge" even more challenging. However, authoritarian leaders satisfy the needs of the wealthy to the exclusion of the youthful masses aspiring to better their fortunes. Among the many rich illustrations woven into this book, Smith quotes political philosopher Thomas Hobbes in his analysis of Africa's democratic potential and its challenges. In *Leviathan*, Hobbes wrote that the state's primary purpose is to "rescue its people from the state of nature, 'the war of all against all.'" As described by political scientist Charles Tilley, also quoted, the required peace and staying power of democracy depend on "political relations between the state and its citizens [which] feature broad, equal, protected and mutually binding consultation." Because the "principle of seniority" stands in the way of adequate representation, Smith foresees that it will take two to three generations for the consolidation of democracy to occur.

Despite heated debates between "Afro-optimists" and Afro-pessimists," or Western fantasies of "Africanness," Smith argues that future African democracies will not be markedly different from what we know in the West. Africans use "standard benchmarks" and share our "universal aspirations." However, the institutional frameworks required to establish a tax base do not yet exist to support these states from within—through investments in public education, research and development, manufacturing production, energy grids, water infrastructure, and so on—which does not preclude official recognition by the international community of a state's "sovereignty," Smith wryly adds.³ His discussion of the coexistence of modern and antiquated technologies is rich for its evocation of what he calls "existential bricolage," with the young reimagining "new codes of conduct"; but it also underpins the "gatekeeper state," meaning that the state apparatus is primarily concerned with collecting fees for the transfer of imported goods, people, and outgoing natural resources through its borders. He notes that, whereas widespread poverty prevents the majority from looking beyond their circumstances, wealthy parents are able to send their children to study at Western universities, and families reunite in diasporic enclaves outside major

³ One example Smith gives of an area of underinvestment is public education. In fact, school-age children south of the Sahara are more likely to attend private school, either church-run or for-profit, the latter of which he characterizes as "factories." Energy is another example, and additionally a measure of the modern/antiquated dichotomy described in the book. It comes as no surprise to read that twenty million New Yorkers use as much electricity as almost a billion Africans living south of the Sahara. As Smith writes, "The continent is still waiting for both its green and its industrial revolution" (85). Because of the low rates of education and lack of investment in research and development, he expects that Africa will not be an active player in these revolutions.

world cities. Many of them do not return. Therefore, this “gatekeeper” system offers up the state’s human and natural resources to the outside, and the state, if not enriching its top officials and customs agents, is funded primarily through contracts with foreign companies who operate within its borders. With powerful adversaries often competing for access to raw materials, this system has led to instability and even spilled over into civil strife or war.

Within the context of intra-African migration, competition for limited resources has in some notable instances—Ivory Coast, Burkina Faso, and to some degree South Africa—led to the same outcome. The route of migration is rife with dangers for the young eager to achieve a high standard of living and fueled by the spirit of adventure. Young Africans often turn their sights on Europe, though fully aware that global economic power lies with the United States and China. Enticed to hazard the journey by illegal means, migrants have faced heightened risks since the turn of the century as Europe increasingly polices its borders. Sea crossings have become more dangerous due to unscrupulous international smugglers waging on humanitarian rescue; and retention centers in Libya are places of torture and extortion. For those who have run out of money, if their families cannot afford the ransom demanded for their release, they are auctioned off in an international slave market. Turkey, another partner in extra-European border control, provides more human rights protections. Alternative routes through Algeria are unspeakably worse. Ironically, financial aid given to African states to improve living conditions so that the young can imagine a future there provides them the means to chance an escape. “And yet, Africa is emerging!”, Smith asserts. War and victimization are not the African condition, and the pull of home is strong.

The central challenge that Smith addresses to close this ambitious, well-researched, wide-ranging reflection and sociological study is what he calls the coming “migratory encounter” between Africans and Europeans. Indeed, many of his recommendations appear geared toward Western policymakers. With the history of France’s continued influence in sub-Saharan Africa since independence, one would think that the ties remain strong. However, resentment of supposed underhanded meddling has torn them asunder, and migrants look more toward Germany, Europe’s economic locomotive, and toward the United Kingdom. Furthermore, young Africans’ religious sensibilities and Americanist modernity—more attuned to Black protest culture in the United States than to the cultures of their former colonizers—promise to make the encounter difficult. Finally, the cost of social programs for incoming families with young children, such as childcare, schools, and health care, will put further strain on their European hosts, i.e., taxpayers, whereas private employers will gain the

profits from the influx of labor. In short, the E.U.'s social democratic model will be put to the test.

Smith's frames of reference are mostly the Western countries in which he has lived and worked, particularly France and the United States in this last chapter. Tellingly, fewer immigrants become naturalized U.S. American citizens compared to those who settle in the European Union. This can be explained by the lack of a social safety net and the lack of a shared culture. There is less in the U.S. that binds people of disparate cultures together. Just as tellingly, he shares figures that show that, unless the retirement age is raised, Europe's pension systems will require a doubling of in-migration compared to numbers in the 1990s (and 400,000 higher than the numbers of 2015), resulting in three-quarters of the E.U. population being foreign-born or the children of immigrants by 2050. The story these numbers tell draws to mind France's new retirement law (enacted April 15, 2023), forcibly ushered through by President Emmanuel Macron's Prime Minister, Elisabeth Borne, using the contested constitutional right of the executive power, Article 49.3.⁴ In effect, it seems that European leaders, with France following behind other E.U. members, are acting to protect their countries' social cohesion, much in line with Smith's prescriptions, based in an unflinchingly clear cost-benefit analysis taking into account both monetary and social capital.

On the other hand, Smith asks, what does Africa stand to gain through this encounter? Monthly remittances sent from struggling family members living abroad cannot build thriving African economies or societies. He argues that the so-called "brain drain" is devastating to already meager healthcare systems, and what influence cross-continental communication might have on cultural and sexual mores that, if altered, might stem population growth and lead to the empowerment of young adults, cannot replace the loss of the educated class. The pains of exile are not compensated by the imagined benefits of a European "paradise" either. And so, he concludes with the plea, "The massive migration of Africans to Europe is in the interest of neither Young Africa nor the Old Continent." Since the scramble appears inescapable, Smith offers five different scenarios for how the future might look. Whether "Eurafrica," a new New World styled after the U.S., or a continuing "Fortress Europe," for which he offers qualified support, or the apocalyptic "Mafia Drift" of marauding human traffickers and warlords, or "The Return of the Protectorate," which extends the hinterland of the fortress to "co-operative" African countries, or "Bric-a-brac Politics," a combination of the four previous regimes, none of them compares in his eyes to a continent of truly sovereign states, in which all the youthful energies poured into scrambling for a better chance at success elsewhere were made more productive at home. A

4 However, rather than a retirement age of 64, set by this law, Smith cites the age of 69 as that which "could stabilize its dependency ratio at three working-age adults per dependent," as opposed to 4.3 in 1995.

The Thin Crust of Civilization

Diane Purkiss

Stephen Marche, *The Next Civil War: Dispatches from the American Future*. Avid Reader Press/Simon and Schuster, 256pp., \$18 paper.

Barbara Walter, *How Civil Wars Start: And How to Stop Them*. Crown, 320pp., \$19 paper.

Anne Applebaum, *Twilight of Democracy: The Seductive Lure of Authoritarianism*. Anchor, 224pp., \$16 paper.

Tara Isabella Burton, *Strange Rites: New Religions for a Godless World*. PublicAffairs, 320pp., \$18 paper.

Hannah Rose Woods, *Rule, Nostalgia: A Backwards History of Britain*. WH Allen, 400pp., £12 paper.

Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia*. Basic Books, 432pp., \$22 paper.

JUST HOW MUCH TROUBLE IS THE United States really in? And is the same degree of trouble common to the rest of Western democracy? A stream of editorials, essays, and full-length books suggests that things are very bad indeed. Of course, it's a fool's game to try to predict the future, but it's also what historians do, and it is part of our history to know that those who do not remember the past are condemned to repeat it. What we can see in the present is a very high level of anxiety about divisions and discordance on a national and international scale.

Yet are these arguments really worth considering seriously? Both Stephen Marche and Barbara Walter consider only recent civil wars: Walter focuses on the late twentieth century, uninterested even in the Spanish Civil War, and Marche restricts

himself to the nineteenth-century American war between the states as a precedent for what is in fact a work of fiction. But there have been very many civil wars, and I strongly suggest that it's well worth looking back a little further to the Civil War in the British Isles (which at least in part fathered the American polity, among other things), in order to think about how civil wars really start, and how we can tell whether one is imminent. This requires a much longer and deeper dive into history than a review of the past thirty years or so can provide.

The vast majority of prognostications of civil war in the United States are reliant on the idea that civil wars are caused by irreconcilable divisions within the polity, and the underlying thesis is that such divisions are abnormal. So most of the

prognostications are efforts to illustrate division. However, in actuality, such divisions are completely normal, and always have been. Most often, people have somehow lived alongside those fissures. Also completely normal in all known periods is a divisive leader. Franklin Roosevelt and Ronald Reagan divided the nation into zealots and haters: no civil war. Another very frequently noted sign of imminent conflict comes from Rachel Kleinfeld, who claims that a sign is that “ideas that were once confined to fringe groups now appear in the mainstream media. White-supremacist ideas, militia fashion, and conspiracy theories spread via gaming websites, YouTube channels, and blogs, while a slippery language of memes, slang, and jokes blurs the line between posturing and provoking violence, normalizing radical ideologies and activities.” Again, this is fairly normal, and usually a sign of a gap between generational norms. All across Europe in the sixteenth century, there were very frequent recourses to conspiracy theory, and also to magic, prophecy, crystal gazing, astrology, and a relentless demonisation of opponents through slang and satires. These phenomena spread rapidly through the press. Interestingly, in a period in which central government was far weaker than is the case at present, the result was not civil war, but a series of armed rebellions—until the Thirty Years’ War, which had separate causes, and the English Civil War, ditto: both of these were about which set of extremes should rule and suppress the other. We might therefore argue that when popular seething anxiety connects to simple fights for power among the ruling class, civil war is likely. By contrast with both of these, the Wars of the Roses had a ruling-class power struggle, but not a divided nation, and so the nation didn’t really get involved in the ruling-class conflict.

By contrast, and also neglected, the civil wars in Spain and Ireland (the latter ongoing for some) illustrate the way that a nation tends to divide over what is considered legitimate and what is considered legitimizing. In the case of Ireland, I do not refer only to the Civil War in the Irish Free State in 1922, which was essentially a battle between those who had been united in their wish to rid Ireland of British rule, but also to the ongoing effort to create an independent and united Ireland, an effort that has involved a significant body count during the last century, through terrorism from both sides. While it is evident that the majority of people who live in Ireland do not support extremism, it is also very evident indeed that they do not support “the Crown.” This was especially plain on the occasion of the death of Queen Elizabeth II, which was greeted by some Irish people with deliberately disrespectful cries of “Lizzie’s in a box.” This impertinence might seem more Derry Girl than IRA, but Irish humor has been fully incorporated into nationalist rhetoric; the comedic is a significant political weapon. As Stephen Millar notes in his study of Irish rebel songs, it was precisely because the public had overwhelmingly *rejected* a return to the violence of the Troubles that rebel songs flourished—they are not a sign of trouble to come, but a sign that the majority have tried to move on. Part of the settlement represented by the Good Friday Accord is a willingness to allow verbal dissent and the ballot box, in place of the Armalite. The country is still divided, and British rule in Ulster still unwelcome to what may even be a majority, but most people have nevertheless turned their backs on the idea of further violence as a way of resolving the issue. Continued divisions do not necessarily make for a shooting war.

In the light of these ideas about legitimacy, I suggest an entirely different checklist to allow any nation to determine the likelihood of weaponized civil conflict, based on a longer historical view than the one taken by Barbara Walter or Stephen Marche, or indeed Tara Burton or Anne Applebaum:

1. The two sides stop listening to one another
2. Atrocity stories circulate
3. The two sides begin to fear one another
4. The fear leads people to conspiracy theories
5. At this point, religion or some ideology external to the polity comes into it
6. The government loses automatic legitimacy
7. There are open displays of contempt for government authority, some of which come from within the government itself
8. The government is forced to try to legitimate itself
9. ...which is experienced as a power grab by its opponents
10. The fear escalates to the point where one or both sides begin to arm themselves
11. And repeat.

You can see that both the U.S. and Britain have hit the first of these points already, and arguably have reached the fourth too. However, it is unlikely at present that religion is going to play the decisive role that it did in the seventeenth century, although

some ideologies can seem just as powerful. To seem is not to be—the religions of the book have at their center a built-in incentive to sacrifice well-being in the present in the name of a taken-for-granted heavenly future. Marxism partakes of something of this, but the fantasies around us now are more dystopian than utopian, more hellish than heavenly. And then it's a question of how widespread the fear already is, and how widespread the religion, and how many people have started to take up arms.

The perpetual civil war

Perhaps the divisions that so alarm us today are normal, and rational debate the outlier. The British, after all, have always been nostalgic for a better past; even under Elizabeth I, people would remark that it was a good world under the old religion, when prices were low, while the Victorians longed for the chivalry of the Middle Ages. The American War of Independence was a civil war. The Mexican War, and the American Civil War were civil wars. The Jim Crow era divided the nation in exactly the way that Lincoln had fought the Civil War to avoid. The 1964 Civil Rights Act aimed to end that division, but in some respects failed in its object, and the result was at least in part the war on drugs and a war on African Americans, including the pseudo-lynchings of African Americans in police custody. Like many efforts to preserve legitimacy, it acted to call legitimacy into question, at least for those who opposed it. The Act, intended to dismantle racism, also meant that racial disparities persisted after the law was passed because discriminatory policies persisted under the pretense of colour blindness.¹

¹ Ibram X. Kendi, "The Civil Rights Act was a victory against racism. But racists also won." *Washington Post*, July 2, 2017, online at www.washingtonpost.com/news/made-by-history/wp/2017/07/02/the-civil-rights-act-was-a-victory-against-racism-but-racists-also-won.

Trigger? Roe states

Historically, a common trigger for the kind of rioting and rebellion that can become civil war is a decision taken at the center that does not represent a consensus of opinions in the governed. This is especially problematic when there are noticeable regional differences, of precisely the kind that characterize the United States at present. Arguably, such a decision was the Supreme Court's striking down of *Roe v. Wade*, and Stephen Marche openly argues that the ruling will lead to civil war, claiming that "the overturning of *Roe v. Wade* has provoked a legitimacy crisis no matter what your politics." There has certainly been significant dismay, and some public disturbance in the blue states, whose consensual acceptance of abortion has been sharply differentiated from those red states where no such consensus exists. Yet it seems highly unlikely at the time of writing that this decision will lead to civil conflict. The only way in which this is likely to change is if some kind of fugitive act is introduced to restrict women from red states from travelling to blue states for a termination. Such legislation would create numerous potential tipping points and flashpoints, just as the Fugitive Slave Act did. Linda Hirshman's dystopian fiction posits a federal Fugitive Woman Act, making it a crime to travel or abet travel in interstate commerce for the purpose of obtaining an abortion. Under a governance without abortion, women are, in reality, slaves, and can be treated as property. It has in the past been argued that the overlap between Confederate states and anti-abortion states is in part due to the idea of slave women as reproductively belonging to their owners.

If we step back from this particular issue, we might consider the extent to which the books under review evade thinking about

triggers and conflicts by focusing on what they take to be new dividing factors within democratic societies. As soon as a writer turns his or her glance on a single potential issue, there is always going to be a risk of blowing it out of proportion, best exemplified by Sarah Churchwell's study of *Gone with the Wind* under the title *The Wrath to Come*. There is no doubt that Mitchell's novel is racist, and little doubt that it was racist by the standards of the 1930s; book and film together combined to support the Lost Cause myth of the gallant, outnumbered South standing up to Northern aggression. However, devoting some 400 pages to expanding on these widely accepted readings seems at best useless, at worst grotesquely disproportionate to an extent where important factors—economics, for example—are pushed out of the way in favour of culture. *Gone with the Wind* was published during the Great Depression, which is what made its portrayal of poverty attractive to a wide readership. It seems very unlikely indeed that even an immensely popular book and film can have had the extraordinary effects on popular opinion that Churchwell suggests. We might also contemplate the possibility that a similar lack of proportion afflicts both Applebaum and Burton, and also afflicted Marche.

In discussing the future, Applebaum stakes a lot on cosmopolitan and urbane values, on a world "where we can say what we think with confidence, where rational debate is possible, where knowledge and expertise are respected, where borders can be crossed with ease." But this world was never open to everybody, and nor were the places she calls the cul-de-sacs of Habsburg Vienna or Weimar Berlin. It always cost money to travel, even from Galicia to Vienna as the Austrian-Jewish novelist Joseph Roth did, and it costs even more

money to have the idea of traveling, and even more money still to have the idea of traveling far, across national as well as state borders, and it costs yet more money to enjoy the difference found on arrival, rather than searching anxiously for the same things available before departure. There has never been equal respect for all kinds of knowledge, in the sense of equal pay or equal status. However much knowledge a plumber or fisherman has, s/he is not going to command the salary of a leading economist or barrister. The wager of the society Applebaum wants was always that its underclass wouldn't mind *too* much. It turns out that they did, and they do. They probably always did, which made it easy for people from the grotesquely anti-Semitic mayor of Vienna in its heyday to Adolf Hitler to weaponize that exclusion as an attack on the talkers and thinkers.

But that kind of knowledge is in many respects the opposite of the kind used by the liberal democratic elite. Marche is sure that technology is on the side of the liberals. This hope seems misplaced. In *Nothing Is True and Everything Is Possible*, Peter Pomerantsev illustrates the frightening neutrality of the internet, including a supreme lack of interest in truth and harm. Like the printing press before it, the internet is better at presenting extremes than it is in brokering compromises. As everyone knows, internet sites like Reddit and Twitter are great places for a brawl, but perfectly dreadful places for reasoned argument.

The difficulty actually lies with the diagnosis of causation. In any society, however organized, it is likely that a majority will feel themselves to be losers; how might they explain that to themselves? It is obviously profoundly uncomfortable, and also not optimal, for people to decide that it's their own fault, that they should have worked harder in school. It is always

more comfortable to think of large structural issues, and here the dispersal of conspiracy theories via the internet plays a role. It is not unusual for particular groups to be singled out as responsible, and one form of this in the West is the Great Replacement, a conspiracy theory disseminated by French author Renaud Camus. The idea is that white European populations are being demographically and culturally replaced with other peoples.

It's not an especially novel idea. The racial concern of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century anti-immigration movement was linked closely to the eugenics movement that was sweeping the United States during the same period. Led by Madison Grant's 1916 book, *The Passing of the Great Race*, nativists grew more concerned with racial purity. Grant argued that the American racial stock was being diluted by the influx of new immigrants from the Mediterranean, the Balkans, and the ghettos. *The Passing of the Great Race* reached wide popularity among Americans and influenced immigration policy in the 1920s. Then as now, this thinking was reassuring in a period when wages were falling in real terms and children were espousing cultural values different from those of their parents. These ideas speak to the transition of an economy from one basic type to another: from agriculture to industry in the nineteenth century, and from industry to knowledge and technology in the twenty-first century. A survey of Americans in July 2022 found that 41.2% agreed that "in America, native-born white people are being replaced by immigrants."²

The real threat of this ridiculous idea lies in its willingness to offer hope. Slavoj Žižek once said that the political right doesn't

²"Survey finds alarming trend toward political violence." UC Davis Health, July 20, 2022, online at health.ucdavis.edu/news/headlines/survey-finds-alarming-trend-toward-political-violence/2022/07.

redistribute wealth, but hope, promising that poverty and feeling unheard are just glitches that can be resolved by eliminating—delete whichever is least convincing in your area—false welfare claimants, immigrants, asylum seekers, the shiftless or work-shy, women taking men’s jobs, ex-slaves moving to the North, Jewish interests in banking, Catholics, aristocrats, extravagant queens, lepers, etc. etc. Among other things, it’s an alibi for the movement of wealth from the lower-middle-class to the rich.

The problem is that, cumulatively, the hope of living the life recommended by Applebaum has more or less been taken off the table even for the professional classes, and hasn’t been really on it for anybody else since the early years of the trade union movement. The disempowered people in former mining towns in Wales, or West Virginia, suffer the fate of knowing things are not going to get any better. The realization that hope will be endlessly deferred—hence the loss of hope—is the most likely trigger for violent action, whatever the hope package contains. Part of that is a loss of belief that your side can win, when winning means being able to deliver meaningful change. So—what’s the answer?

Argufying

Applebaum’s idea is probably cogent argumentation in newspapers or cafés. Unfortunately, a pack of busy psychologists have more or less proved that this can’t work. It’s hard to believe how easily humans polarize, but Ezra Klein lays out the scientific evidence clearly: on the slightest pretext, everyone from young children to adults will divide the world into Us and Them. And Us will happily harm Them even when *doing so* harms Us as well.

So how *does* any nation hold together? Klein’s answer is cross-cutting identities.

He defines identities broadly—ethnicity and gender, of course; economic and social class too, but also religion, politics, age, urban/rural, sports-team fandom, etc. It’s not a new idea; it’s quite close to the suggestion made by Edmund Burke about the salvific power of rural sports. The problem comes when these identities start merging into “mega-identities.” It’s happening now as conservatives, religious, older-white, and rural identities all align and merge into a single mega-identity, which then sees itself in opposition to another mega-identity: the left, secular, multi-ethnic, and urban. Klein adds: “The simplest way to activate someone’s identity is to threaten it, to tell them they don’t deserve what they have, to make them consider that it might be taken away. The experience of losing status—and being told your loss of status is part of society’s march to justice—is itself radicalizing.”³

Chris Bail set up committed Republicans with a steady flow of Democratic information and opinions, and also vice versa. On average, Republicans who followed the Democratic bot for one month expressed markedly *more* conservative views than they had at the beginning of the study. And the more attention they paid, the more conservative they became. The results were less dramatic for Democrats; they became slightly more liberal, though this effect was not statistically significant. Why didn’t taking Republican people outside their echo chamber make them more moderate? Bail explains: partisans do not carefully review new information about politics when they are exposed to opposing views on social media. Instead, they experience it as an attack upon their identity. Strong partisans felt that it was their duty to defend their

3 Norman J. Ornstein, “Why America’s Political Divisions Will Only Get Worse,” *The New York Times*, January 28, 2020, online at www.nytimes.com/2020/01/28/books/review/why-were-polarized-ezra-klein.html.

side. It also seemed to make them feel good. Many of the extremists delighted in getting other people worked up. The ability to influence others, however artificially or temporarily, is valuable to people who feel that they have very little control over their own lives. These people want to see the entire system suffer, a need arising from the experience of marginalization itself.

In a masterful ethnography of political conflict in the U.S. South, sociologist Arlie Hochschild argues that Democrats and Republicans not only dislike each other, but have also created “empathy walls” that prevent them from humanizing the other side. Republicans like Ford pickups, and Democrats prefer the Toyota Prius. Liberals like lattes, and conservatives prefer drip coffee. They now watch different television shows and prefer different music too. Experiences of marginalization have multiplied. And some sensationalist thinkers are keen to ensure that people who are not especially marginalized begin to fear that they might be.

But there's more

We have already seen one liberal response to the nation's division in dystopian fiction, and other examples could easily be found, including the recently televised *The Man in the High Castle* and *The Handmaid's Tale*. One significant example comes from the right wing. This is a book with a body count. The 1978 *Turner Diaries* envisages something called the System imposing un-American values (the outlawing of racist speech, for example). There is of course a completely successful, if genocidal, fight back. In 1983, the novel inspired Robert Mathews to create The Order, a white supremacist terrorist group; members murdered a well-known Jewish talk show host, Alan Berg, in Denver. When Timothy McVeigh was arrested after the

1995 Oklahoma City bombing, police found excerpts from *The Turner Diaries* in his car. It is difficult to predict when crazy people are likely to run amuck, but there is no question that people of this kind are still around, and still forming organisations with impressive-sounding names, names like Stormfront and Proud Boys and Oath Keepers and Grand Dragons. A narrative whereby something that has been taken away must be recaptured animates virtually all their rhetoric, which is invariably violent. In the *Atlantic* magazine, Tom Nichols argued in 2022 that the new Civil War is already happening:

We do not risk the creation of organized armies and militias in Virginia or Louisiana or Alabama marching on federal institutions. Instead, all of us face random threats and unpredictable dangers from people among us who spend too much time watching television and plunging down internet rabbit holes..., acting individually or in small groups... Occasionally, they will congeal into a mob, as they did on January 6, 2021.⁴

This redefines civil war to include what might ordinarily be termed terrorism or even revolt and rebellion. I think this redefinition should be resisted, because it carries an unusually high risk of bringing about the transformation it predicts. Indeed, if Klein is right to locate the problem in mega groups, and Nichols is correct to speak of smaller groups congealing into mobs, then holding off on a willingness to connect one group with another might be the best strategy.

I've been exploring the way that the ability to see patterns is predictive of a strong belief in them which can easily become a faith in the unseen workings of power. Once you begin to see the idea of

4 Tom Nichols, "The New Era of Political Violence is Here," *The Atlantic*, August 15, 2022.

the deep state, evidence is everywhere. Many do believe in the deep state, and also believe that it is a threat to them and their families. Decades of growing fear of Catholics eventually led to the English Civil War, and decades of resentment of minorities eventually leads to a “fight back”. But it isn’t always so. In his recent study of the 1549 Western Rising or Prayer Book Rebellion in Cornwall and Devon, Mark Stoyle analyzes a large rebellion that led to a fortnight of what might reasonably be described as civil war. It had a significant body count, and yet it ended, and it is still called a rising. The profound paranoia of the 1678-1681 Popish Plot, described in detail by Victor Stater under the appropriate title *Hoax*, killed a number of individuals, and led to riots, as well as helping to delegitimize the monarchy, but despite vast numbers accepting the nonsensical conspiracy theory, there was no war, or at least not then. Perhaps a valid definition of civil war is the point at which everybody *has* to choose a side, even if they would prefer to remain neutral. If it is still the case that few take action, then it is very likely that any rebellious energy can be repressed by state power.

Guns

However, there is a particular snag to putting down such rebellious energies in the United States. In the US, there are 393 million guns in private hands. That’s 120.5 guns per 100 people. The figure for England and Wales is 4.6. In Australia it’s 14.5.

Why is the US such an outlier? Here is Wayne LaPierre, executive vice president and CEO, National Rifle Association: “Our Second Amendment is freedom’s most valuable, most cherished, most irreplaceable idea. History proves it. When you ignore the right of good people to own firearms to protect their freedom, you become the

enablers of future tyrants whose regimes will destroy millions and millions of defenseless lives.”⁵

Notice how this statement connects with the conspiracy theories discussed above. Freedoms are in danger from tyrants, and can best be protected by violent and armed action. It’s a ludicrous hypothesis: in actuality, if the US government wanted to destroy you, it would send in drones and heavily-armed helicopters. It could do so at any time. It’s not really the government against which you are defending yourself with a rifle.

Since the time of Machiavelli, there have been debates about whether citizen militias or mercenaries make the best armies in defence of the liberty of citizens. The United States and most European states have gone in opposite directions. Very few Europeans own guns, and of those, few would correlate gun ownership with the defence of liberty as opposed to field sports. The idea that a gun is needed to protect political rights is almost completely alien, as is the idea that a gun is necessary for self-defence in urban situations. (I taught a former U.S. Ranger who had done a tour in Helmand province; he came to Oxford as a graduate student with his wife and children, and was horrified to realise that he was expected to walk around East Oxford unarmed. I pointed out that nobody else was armed either. He still didn’t like it.)

Most research suggests that gun ownership is rooted in fear. U.S. surveys dating back to the 1990s have revealed that the most frequent reason for gun ownership and more specifically handgun ownership is self-protection. The perceived risk of victimization and fears that the world is a dangerous place are both

5 Rukmani Bhatia, “Guns, Lies, and Fear: Exposing the NRA’s Messaging Playbook,” *Center for American Progress*, April 24, 2019, online at www.americanprogress.org/article/guns-lies-fear.

independent predictors of handgun ownership, with perceived risk of assault associated with having been or knowing a victim of violent crime and belief in a dangerous world associated with political conservatism. It has been argued that the NRA's "disinformation campaign reliant on fearmongering" is constructed around a narrative of "fear and identity politics" that exploits current xenophobic sentiments related to immigrants. Applications for licenses to carry concealed firearms in Texas exploded after President Obama was elected. In a nutshell, these are individuals who already see the government as illegitimate because it is not led by people who are like them.

A 2013 paper by a team of United Kingdom researchers found that a one-point jump in the scale they used to measure racism increased the odds of owning a gun by 50 percent. A 2016 study from the University of Illinois at Chicago found that racial resentment among whites fueled opposition to gun control.⁶

This is an especially uncomfortable truth given the constant presence in America of white men pushing angrily back at what they see as the unjust liberal empowerment of Black people, from the Jim Crow era to efforts to thwart or overturn the Civil Rights Act. This includes not only the murderous coup in Wilmington, North Carolina, in 1898, which returned white supremacy to a city that had successfully dispensed with it, but also lynchings. What, after all, is a lynching but a battle in a civil war against a single individual by a crowd? It is very evident that lynchings exist in part to deter other

Black men from taking actions that are deemed a threat to white masculinity, even simple and harmless actions. It would not therefore be entirely wrong to suggest that an American civil war has already started, and indeed has never really finished.

The Capitol riots of January 6, 2021, exemplify a probable response to disappointing election results when those results can be framed as illegitimate. Ordinarily, aggrieved minorities are highly unlikely to attempt any kind of coup, and even in the United States, the rioters were easily contained, with few casualties. However, nobody should count on this experience being repeated. The level of private gun ownership in America essentially reduces the legitimate U.S. government's power to the level enjoyed by the British central government under the early Stuarts—that is, relatively weak, although capable of annihilating its opponents very quickly indeed when it notices their existence. One of the unpleasant discoveries made by Charles I was that he wasn't able to impose his will on the country simply by raising his standard. He needed people to flock to it.

A critical part of legitimate government is the willingness of voters to accept defeat. It has come to seem natural to virtually everybody in the developed world constantly to question any authority, as soon as that authority figure says anything or does anything that cuts across what is taken to be unquestionable individual morality. Ironically, conspiracy theories that delegitimize governments have been an intrinsic part of democracy and a free press from the beginning. They are not new, and they are not the product of the internet; the printing press produced them just as rapidly and deftly, including the notorious forgery *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*. There are countless examples of conspiracy theories which

6 Jeremy Adam Smith, "Why Are White Men Stockpiling Guns?" *Scientific American*, March 24, 2018, online at blogs.scientificamerican.com/observations/why-are-white-men-stockpiling-guns.

have inspired violent actions, anything from riot through rebellion to civil war.

This is where we need to pause and think again about what a civil war is. I'm going to suggest that a civil war is a successful rebellion. That is, it is a rebellion that is too successful to be crushed as soon as it is noticed by the authorities. The Oxfordshire Rising of 1595 had ambitious aims with regard to the distribution of land and food, but was completely crushed. By contrast, the rebellion of Parliament in 1642 was simply too large, too well-armed, and too well-funded and resourced to be dismissed.

So, in Tara Isabella Burton's book, it does not follow from the fact that Jordan Peterson has many followers on YouTube and on Twitter, that he is of global significance. Exactly because the evidence that he exists is easy to track, there is a tendency to overemphasise his importance. There is every chance that a public poll taken in Oxford High Street would show a that majority of people do not recognize his name. Why might this change? As discussed above, polarization is not defeated by exposure to uncomfortable messages outside the scope of our own opinions, but can actually increase as a result of that same exposure. In short, Burton probably risks igniting the very effect she describes.

And yet the same criticism could be levelled at the far right. It has required some extraordinary twists and turns for it to present itself as the enemy of "cancel culture" while organisations in its ranks work to ban books. *Maus* is a graphic novel by Art Spiegelman in which he interviews his father about his experiences as a Polish Jew and Holocaust survivor. On January 10, 2022, the board of trustees of McMinn County Schools in Tennessee removed *Maus* from its schools' curriculum, expressing concern over its use in eighth grade English Language Arts classes. The board cited "tough language" and

"unnecessary" profanity (eight words, including "damn"), a small drawing of a (nude) cat representing a woman, and mentions of murder, violence, and suicide. Spiegelman himself said reading the minutes of the board meeting indicated the board was effectively asking "Why can't they teach a nicer Holocaust?" Board member Tony Allman said he was concerned about scenes in the book where mice were hung from trees and children were killed. The book also depicts suicide. "Why does the educational system promote this kind of stuff?" he said. "It is not wise or healthy."⁷

Note the slippage here. If suicide and child murder are *depicted*, this is for Allman the same as *promoting* them. In part, the logic rests on the idea that eighth graders are children, impressionable, and unable to distinguish between fiction and reality. The same thinking, however, lies behind far right efforts to ban sex education or books that are felt to depict same-sex relationships in a positive light. And yet it is those same right-wing individuals who typically express anti-liberal concerns about the cancel culture of others, so that each side depicts the other as a threat to freedom of speech. It helps Jordan Peterson's cause enormously when left-liberal newspapers like *The Guardian* describe him as terribly dangerous. By this the *Guardian* appears to mean his followers rather than Peterson himself.⁸ The ferocity on both sides is alarming, along with the mutual unwillingness to have a conversation instead of denouncing one another.

7 Francisco Guzman, "What we know about the removal of Holocaust book 'Maus' by a Tennessee school board," *The Tennessean*, January 27, 2022, online at tennessean.com/story/news/2022/01/27/why-did-tennessee-school-board-remove-maus-art-spiegelman/9244295002.

8 Dorian Lynskey, "How dangerous is Jordan B. Peterson, the rightwing professor who 'hit a hornets' nest'?", *The Guardian*, February 7, 2018, online at www.theguardian.com/science/2018/feb/07/how-dangerous-is-jordan-b-peterson-the-rightwing-professor-who-hit-a-hornets-nest.

Compromise seems impossible and concessions are a sign of weakness. If this is not yet a war, it is difficult to distinguish from one. Each side behaves as if each tiny battle is a titanic threat to everything it holds dear. Yet the same might be said, say, of the supporters and critics of J. K. Rowling, the supporters and critics of Meghan Markle, the supporters and critics of Richard Wagner and Mel Gibson and Jeremy Corbyn and Tucker Carlson. The world is full of tussles like this, shaped *exactly* like this. They are profoundly dreary and unenlightening. And yet this normalization of an us-versus-them mindset might, paradoxically, actually prevent the kind of serious armed conflict that would actually be a civil war. All of us are used to having our views and values angrily threatened (unless, of course, we never use social media). We are so used to it that most of us are probably on the verge of being inured to it.

So—what’s the answer? The question is always urgent because the thin crust of civilization is always fragile. My answer is simple and impossible: We need more history. We need the kind of history that acknowledges the good done by each nation *and* the price paid for it, and by whom that price was paid. To be sure, history itself is by no means simple or straightforward. Bitter debates over critical race theory, “patriotic education” and *The New York Times’s* 1619 Project reduce history to a tool for either venerating America or condemning it. In the U.K., *History Reclaimed* has sought vigorously to contest what it sees as the falsification of the nineteenth-century British Empire by politically motivated historians, while conversely the very histories critiqued by that group have argued ferociously that the Empire was always basically about robbery. None of this is the kind of history I mean. I mean the kind of history

exemplified by Ken Burns’s documentaries. In saying this, I nominate a series of interventions that have themselves been subject to a good deal of criticism. *The Civil War*, for example, prompted both venomous letters excoriating him for naming slavery as the root cause of the conflict, and criticism for all the time devoted to battles and biographies rather than larger social trends. But here’s the point, and it’s one that Burns makes himself: the clash of ideas is the point, an opportunity to stage “an argument with the intention of working something out, not with the intention of just having an argument.”⁹ In other words, the toxicity of the cultural wars is precisely the inability of both sides to see the value of engaging with someone who disagrees vehemently with you. Separate monologues, conducted above a million solitudes, are advertisements for tyranny, not for democracy. If we want to save the democratic state, we need to be brave enough to be bruised, to be criticised, and sometimes to lose a verbal fight. But we need to recognize the value of dialectic in the Socratic not the Marxist sense, as a way of working towards a truth that all of us can come to accept. In the end, and without falling prey to the politics of cultural despair, I venture to suggest that Western politics were built to withstand exactly what has ensued in the past two decades, including the rise of irrational extremists of various kinds and the proliferation and dissemination of conspiracy theories. What might be less easy to manage in even the medium term is exactly the nostalgia that drives most of the conspiracies. The Western world is in

⁹ Alyssa Rosenberg, “Ken Burns is an optimist. But he’s very worried about America.” *The Washington Post*, June 14, 2021, online at www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2021/06/24/ken-burns-is-an-optimist-hes-very-worried-about-america/.

transition from an industrial economic system to a technological capitalism, and it was precisely at the point when the world moved from agriculture to industry that the most vicious civil conflicts ensued. It may well be that parliamentary democracy was uniquely suited to an industrial economy and the idea of representation

workable only within that economy. In the more isolated and atomized world of global technology, we might need to be inventive—as inventive as the Founding Fathers were—about how best to create a governmental system that allows all its citizens life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. A

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