

THE PRESS



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Letter From The Editor

Listen, I respect the hustle, but doesn't grinding every day just get a little bit exhausting to you? It's draining to follow the same schedule, interact with the same cohort of people and kill yourself to make deadlines on seemingly impossible assignments.

I decided that I wanted to create my own happiness here. I really couldn't continue to mope around corners and aimlessly drift in this crowd when I'm supposed to be a "fully formed adult."

Whatever that means.

Is anyone ever "fully formed"? We're constantly forced to pursue a self, but I really couldn't tell you who am I yet.

I'm still searching.

I'm a patchwork quilt and I couldn't even begin to tell you where all the fabric is from. All I have is my dogged pen to page where I can slowly trip my way back to myself. Sometimes, it's weird for me to think of all the experiences I've had and that I've made it to being a junior. AND I'M HALFWAY DONE. I don't think of my age until I see a new face walk through the doors of room 307K.

There's instantly a little spark of magic.

I suddenly remember who I was before I let myself fall into a fully formed group. There's a fear that you'll easily be forgotten and that you're not even that much of a person to be contributing to their circle.

At that moment, I felt like a child again. Who's gonna pick me to be on their kickball team? I wasn't athletic, but I knew what I had. I knew that it would get me into college.

I secured my voice.

"There are times when the world is rearranging itself and the right voice in the right place can move the world," said Orson Scott Card in "Ender's Game."

Whenever I see someone new and they decide to introduce themselves with their unique thoughts and emotions, I'm immediately drawn to them. I really like their brain, in a strictly non-zombie kind of way.

I know you all have it. Yes, you. The you who's reading this. I know when a thought is stuck in the middle of your throat and the more you keep coughing it up, the harder it is to come out.

Take a deep breath though. I implore you to take the leap. It'll be the best thing you'll ever do here (just kidding, do you boo, but know that there's a group of people who are excited to hear your ideas).

We craft our content very carefully, 'cause you know what?

First imPRESSions are very important.

I hope this zine leaves you with a little something more than you had yesterday.

Have fun kids :)

-Nirv



FEATURES

THE HOUSE OF LORDS

BY CONOR ROONEY

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Photo credit: ReporterNews.net

I haven't been awake for more than ten minutes. I'm sitting at the small wooden table in the kitchen, watching a rerun of "Friends" as I sip some Maxwell House coffee. It's just past 11 o'clock on a cool morning in January. I'm in Georgia, visiting my step grandmother Peggy at her house just northwest of Atlanta. It's the first time that I've visited her, and the second time that I'm meeting her husband, Larry Lord. Peggy and Larry had re-entered each other's lives several years ago. Having both experienced incredible careers and shared their lives with amazing spouses, they were reconnected through a blend of old friends and serendipity. They married in 2016, and Peggy moved in here with Larry just about a year later. I'm looking at the wedding picture poised perfectly on the counter. My coffee has cooled by now.

I'm thinking about my arrival that previous afternoon. As Larry was driving me from the airport, we turned off the main road and towards the house. Set back from the road, down in a tiny valley they dubbed the "baby Grand Canyon," sits the residence. Larry designed the property together with his late wife Shannon shortly before their first son, Hunter, was born. The house is surrounded by dense woodlands, but blends in beautifully with the area — its old wooden exterior and gravel driveway seem to have aged with the forest.

The home greets its visitors like an old friend. It's densely decorated with old lamps, vintage furniture and various paintings. Among those decorations are family portraits, photo albums and children's art. The home wastes no time revealing its character, and it's clear that this is a family home in every sense of the word. Shannon, Larry and their two sons Hunter and Ashby were lucky to have started their family here.

I continue watching "Friends," eating breakfast with Hunter.

Hunter Lord is tall, about six feet like his father. In his early 40s, he sports a long brown beard that he's been growing for several years. He's got short brown hair and he's wearing a blue polo shirt with tan cargo pants. Hunter also has a condition known myotonic dystrophy, a genetic disorder that causes progressive muscle weakness. Hunter has progressively worsened, which makes tasks such as speaking and walking especially difficult. Because of this, someone drives him to and from his job in the office of a local summer camp. He's sitting at the chair adjacent to mine, getting ready to leave for work. He jokes about some of the commercials on television: "How does football have anything to do with doing your taxes?!" he remarks, referencing an ad on TV. He should be at work by noon, so he'll need to leave soon. Picking up his hiking stick ("It's cooler than a cane!" he told me) Hunter makes

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his way towards the door.

Prior to my visit, I had no working knowledge of myotonic dystrophy, of Hunter's condition, nor of the family's long struggle with the diagnosis.

When Hunter was born, both Shannon and Larry noticed some peculiarities. "He did not sit up, crawl, or walk at the normal times mentioned in early childhood books... he pulled himself on his belly like a marine in the jungle," Shannon wrote in "Family Roots," her book describing her family's story. Larry had given me a copy, and I began to read reading Hunter's story. He had difficulty in school, both in learning and behavior. Shannon noted, "We knew he was smart, but he had all these odd behavioral problems and difficulty reading." When Hunter was 13, Shannon and Larry turned to a pediatric neurologist for answers, determined to get a concrete explanation to Hunter's learning and behavioral speedbumps. Ashby, their second child, was now in the picture and exhibiting symptoms, as well.

"Mr. and Mrs. Lord, is there any history of muscle disease in your family?" Shannon recalled the impact of the doctor's question, writing, "The doctor's words... were nothing more than staccato syllables, meaningless, empty, nothing, nada."

While it wasn't identified, various members of Shannon's family exhibited odd and quirky symptoms. The mysterious ailments affected some cousins - and were marked by "an odd assortment of symptoms that afflicted several relatives who tended to lead somewhat isolated, sedentary, sometimes rather sickly lives." Within the family, it was dubbed "The Hunter Disease".

The diagnosis blindsided both Larry and Shannon. "She went through a lot of difficult times, psychologically, because she brought this disease into the family," Larry told me at the kitchen table one morning; he's sitting across from me, sipping some tea. In "Family Roots" (Shannon's own book, chronicling her struggle with this disease), she admitted: "I was filled with sadness. There were no magic bullets. The boys would have to live with this disease for the rest of their lives."

In the summer of 2013, Shannon passed away from endometrial cancer. Before she passed, Shannon would get involved with numerous groups to advance the research and study of myotonic dystrophy, travelling around the world to deliver speeches on her experiences with the disorder. In 2005, she was integral in the formation of the Myotonic Dystrophy Foundation where she served as Chair of the Board for five years.



"It's a southern thing!" Hunter tells me, referring to pot liquor. We're inside a local restaurant just off the highway. It's around 5 p.m. on a Wednesday, and the dinner rush is coming in. We'd go out to eat at a local favorite of theirs several times during my stay. "You won't find it up north." Tonight, it's the OK Cafe, one of Larry's favorites. Peggy orders the catfish and Hunter begins telling me about his work history.

"I started at Lord Aeck Sargent — worked there for 15 and a half years."

Larry is an architect, and founded his own firm (Lord Aeck Sargent) while the boys were still very young. As Hunter grew, he would occasionally work in his father's office, making some extra money on the side while in school. He enjoyed it, and took a job there shortly after graduating high school. Years later, he would leave the firm for a position at his old summer camp.

The camp is local, based just about an hour northeast out of Atlanta. What sets the camp apart from the multiple other summer day camps [in the area?] is that it specializes in providing opportunities to children and young adults with special needs. He's wearing the "only Camp Twin Lakes jacket in existence" as he passionately describes his volunteer years there. "In '94 I washed pots, pans. In '95, '96 I washed dishes — the plates and stuff that the kids ate on."

Camp Twin Lakes offered Hunter a position in the offices of the camp, so he gladly took it.

"They said, 'If you wanna come work here, you can.'"

And I decided in about.... ten minutes.”

That was in 2012, and he’s been with them ever since. Hunter can only work for four hours a day, four days a week. “I fatigue easily, so I can’t do much more than that.” This doesn’t affect how Hunter views his job, of course. As he describes an old Halloween costume party at his old job, he proudly remarks, “I won in all three categories: best overall, most creative, and scariest.” He was Dracula, and a convincing one at that.

The three of us had now come back from the restaurant. Hunter and I sit in the foyer chatting. Peggy calls in, suggests that we come talk at the kitchen table. We continue the conversation as we walk towards the kitchen.

“Who wants milk? Who wants hot tea? Who wants pokum?” Peggy offered both of us. The tick-tock of the toaster oven continues as a small pecan pie heats up. Pokum is a twangy grape drink, tinged with elements of lime - over ice. In a word: refreshing. In two: very refreshing.

Pokum is a homemade recipe, straight from Peggy’s mother’s cookbook. Its origins can be traced to her upbringing in rural Alabama. “There is no set recipe, I’ve changed it so many times,” Peggy keeps telling me whenever I ask for the ingredients.

“Yes,” Hunter quips.

As Hunter and I talk, the conversation moves to his brother, Ashby. “It progresses; gets worse over time,” Hunter says. Myotonic dystrophy has two types, the first being the most severe. Its severity is defined by the amount of “repeats” of a specific gene, both are different depending on the type. Hunter has type 1, whereas Ashby had type two.

“We already knew that I had it — 99 percent sure that I had it,” Hunter tells me as he scrapes the pecan pie into tiny bits. “Ashby was five years younger than me, so he wasn’t really showing any symptoms that we knew about.”

Years later, when Ashby finally asked about the tests and whether or not he had it, Shannon was honest. “They told him, said that he had it... and uh, he just couldn’t handle it.” Ashby turned to drugs. “He starts smoking pot with some guys, thinks ‘ell, if we all smoke pot, we’re all messed up.’ So he didn’t feel left out.” Ashby battled drug addiction, using substances as a way to cope with what he was most afraid of: the disease. Ashby spent years in and out of rehab centers, but on the morning of April 9, 2017, Jonathan Ashby Lord passed away at home. He was doing well, by all accounts. He had just moved back home after a successful rehab stay, and spent his last night dining with the family: Larry, Hunter and Peggy. The next morning, Peggy found Ashby unresponsive in his room. He was 35.

Larry asked Hunter the following night, “What’s one

thing you would say about Ashby?” Hunter’s response was simple yet powerful: “He loved protecting me.”

As I reached the end of my stay in the Lord household, I couldn’t help but think about how much life has been lived between those walls. The kitchen table is, as anyone would expect it to be, ordinary. Its high chairs and carefully placed utensils look just as they would on any other family table. The more I learned about the the family’s battle with the disease, and their incredible durability in the face of it, the more of the house’s history was apparent. How many times did they sit at that same kitchen table, talking about how their days went? How many times did Shannon read Ashby to sleep in the very same bedroom that I was staying in? How many times had they sat down as a family to watch a movie, or TV, or to play a board game in that very same living room that I stood in?

There is no cure for myotonic dystrophy. Those affected by the disorder will generally have to live with and manage the symptoms for their entire lives. Treatments for the disorder generally focus on improving the quality of life for the individual involved. While there have been several clinical trials for drugs intended to help patients manage their symptoms, none have made it through clinical trials.

In the postscript of Shannon’s book “Family Roots”, Larry shares a quote from one of his and Shannon’s favorite authors: Viktor Frankl. “... choose one’s attitude in a given set of circumstances... the last of the human freedoms.” ■

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Will News Media Become a Casualty of the Culture Wars?

BY LOUIS MARRONE



The latter part of the 2010s has proven to be nothing short of a hellscape of scandal, opinions and angry mobs. With the sound-off of each new Twitter notification/trending hashtag, a comedian-of-the-week’s career is canceled or put on hold, and with each “Breaking News” flash, a Watergate gets its wings. It’s a cultural phenomenon called “The Culture Wars”, and the deeper into it we get, the more divided we seem to become, with the left calling for the right to be punched and harassed, the right calling for the left to be “owned” and “triggered,” and both calling for the shutting-up of those damn centrist “fence-sitters” who have committed the unearthly sins of being politically open-minded and legitimately hearing both sides out.

Though many things have transpired throughout the past three and a half years, one of the most glaring is a noticeable change in the media. I’m not talking about “fake news” or any of that junk. I’m referring to what can honestly be considered a golden age for internet publications. We all know the ones: FOX News, VICE, BuzzFeed, Breitbart, VOX, etc. (an honorable mention to Gawker, who would not live to see this day fully realized). As social media’s influence grows and rises, chances are that when you log into your Twitter or Facebook, you’re setting yourself up to be bombarded with a slew of op-eds and investigative features — all dripping with hot takes and “dire,”

“breaking” information. But with the greater influx of information, as well as the current political/social climate, is it possible that the media is beginning to cheapen and break down? Have standards been sacrificed for the sake of clicks and incestual pats on the back from ideological cliques?

I bring this up because recently, BuzzFeed published what may have been one of the biggest news scoops of the decade. Reporters Jason Leopold and Anthony Cormier issued a detailed report that President Trump had instructed his former lawyer Michael Cohen to lie to Congress regarding the subject of discussions with the Russians during the 2016 presidential election. For a moment, it seemed foolproof. It was the end of the line. It was long, and the number of sources was vast and telling.

It just sucks that none of it was truly verified.

Hours after the story broke, Robert Mueller, who’s currently heading the investigation into Trump’s potential collusion with the Russian government, released a statement stating that it was false. Given that Mueller is a high-ranking FBI official who has immersed himself in more Trump-related affairs than Stormy Daniels, most have been inclined to believe him. And though, considering the ongoing investigation, a media circus could prove to be a

burden, the likelihood of this being a lie is fairly slim—his ranking and agenda overshadowing most doubts. After all, a media circus with reporters nosing around, there is a potential risk posed to the investigation. So with that said, it's not necessarily out of line to question BuzzFeed here. In spite of this, the site and their colleagues have stood their ground. Editor-in-chief Ben Smith released a statement stating that they stand by their reporting. Anthony Cormier went on CNN and, when asked of the possibility that his sources were just simply wrong, he confidently replied: "No, they aren't."

Granted, it is not like other publications of its kind haven't had similar situations. But BuzzFeed seems to be suffering on the largest scale with the largest stories. Their greatest time in the spotlight would occur in 2017 when they published a top-secret dossier regarding Trump's collusion with Russia; which included information regarding everything from Michael Cohen paying Russian officials in Prague, to Trump meeting with prostitutes and paying them to urinate on him on video. Much like this situation, it seemed as though they had got him. But quickly, holes began to get poked — such as records showing no indication of Cohen traveling to Prague, or even the fact that the dossier was unverified from the get-go. This is also not to mention a situation that occurred soon thereafter, in which they published an article featuring the gratuitous doxxing of three innocent journalists (costing one, Mitchell Sunderland, his senior position at VICE) simply due to their own private humorings in an "alt-right" group chat (after all, making off-the-clock fat-jokes in private is 100% grounds for unemployment).

Throughout this ordeal, the journalistic community has understandably gone to great lengths to defend what is likely nothing short of misinformation. After all, it's their work that's under attack. Some have claimed that BuzzFeed is the victim of bias due to its rather playful nature and origins as a "time waster" website. Others have said that this is a direct result of a bias towards co-author Jason Leopold's past drug addiction. BuzzFeed also claimed that Mueller should be more specific of what he's disputing.

All of these prove to be moot points when:

A) BuzzFeed's own past actions and practices, such as the ones mentioned above are TRULY what has prevented it from earning the public's trust. Nobody would question them if they had fool-proof sources.

B) Weaponizing Leopold's addiction is nothing short of a desperate attempt at gaslighting.

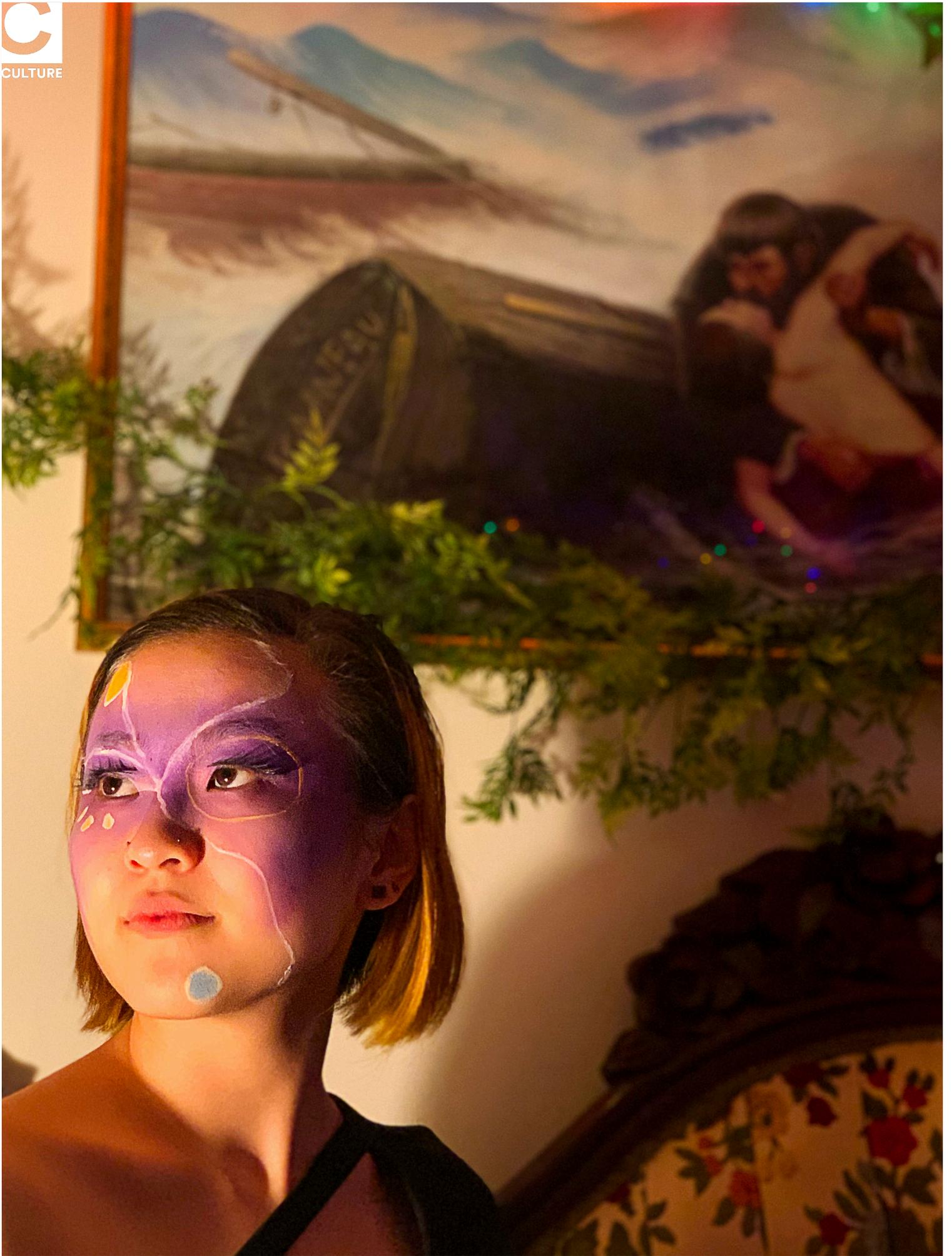
C) It's pretty clear what Mueller was refuting: the claim of Trump's supposed instructions.

But seeing such resilience towards broken reporting is nothing short of unsettling and disturbing. It

highlights the greater problem that journalism is currently facing: a wave of radical solidarity that has led to an acceptance of false information. It's through the current political divide that journalists have begun to choose to overlook or stand by bad work, simply for the reasons of not letting the other guys win in the delusional phenomenon that is the culture wars. The age of civil discussion and straight forward bipartisan reporting is rapidly dissipating at the expense of ideological reassurance. Media personalities like Joe Rogan can't even have conservative or wealthier guests on their podcasts without some sort of controversy sparking over their presence or being derogatory (and often inaccurately) labeled as alt-right propaganda.

BuzzFeed isn't even the only one at fault here. And it doesn't even limit itself to the left. Right-wing news corporations are just as much — if not almost more-so — responsible for the peddling of outrage culture and sensationalism in media. For example, FOX News published an article stating that a controversy surrounding "Charlie Brown Thanksgiving" had taken Twitter by storm. However, the article consists almost entirely of tweets, shares postings by users of little to no influence and fails to show any real impact or ground the story has. And yet the corporation sees this as potential news. A similar situation was brought about by an article claiming that the left was outraged at the gendering of gingerbread men. Again, no real evidence of the significant ground or influence the controversy has is shown. On top of this, how many times have you seen an episode of Tucker Carlson where, during a debate, while using flimsy arguments as a defense, stumbles and flops around like a fish on a hot Summer sidewalk—interrupting and deflecting to save himself from defeat?

Facts and civility shouldn't be given up at the cost of self-righteous political agendas. Websites have become more interested in presenting clickbait and fabricating outrage than informing the everyday people, and individual journalists have become more interested in indulging their own biases than reporting the facts and putting honesty over individual leanings. It's a shame because the American people deserve better. We deserve a break from political spin. We deserve to be allowed to make up our own minds on situations. Opinions journalism undoubtedly has a place in journalistic media—after all, the exchange of opinions is what fosters dialogue in the first place. But it shouldn't be the only thing we get and it shouldn't be prioritized for the sake of the narrative. Unless journalism begins to move more towards a middle ground—a middle ground based on ethics and integrity—then news media will simply become a casualty of the culture wars, and we'll all be dumber, angrier and worse off because of it. ■



abstract art is for you

by sarah kimura

art by tess bergman

This January, my mom gave me a few LIRR tickets that were going to expire soon, so I decided to go to the Guggenheim for the first time. There was an exhibit that I was really excited to see, the Hilma af Klint retrospective. I had never been to an art museum alone, and I felt serendipitous conviction to have chosen to see the af Klint exhibit first. If you have ever seen pictures of the Guggenheim, you know that its main hallmark is the architecture — that slowly sloping spiral platform upwards. Museumgoers walk up the spiral and follow the main exhibit this way. Along the spiral, through April 23, is where the af Klint exhibit, titled “Paintings for the Future,” hangs.

I ran six cold blocks from the subway station, and my glasses fogged up so much from the sudden warmth of the building. I bought my ticket, checked my coat and made my way up the spiral, stopping first to look at “The Ten Largest,” a group of ten paintings named after periods of human development. I was not yet over being alone, and looking alone, so I took a minute to sit and look. I slowed my breathing, chose one painting to focus my energy on (titled “Adulthood”) and took it on. I sat there for a good ten minutes. When I was ready, I walked up the spiral a little more. I took what I had gotten from the ten minutes with that painting and could not yet move on from it. I fixated myself on that tempera on canvas, the field of pastel purple, the cryptic looping letters, that solid yellow ring, trying my best to burn it into my brain, and I could not move on. I sat next to the bathrooms and began a spitting tirade into my journal, writing until I no longer felt self-conscious about being alone and how much of a fraud I must look like.

By the time I had finished looking up the spiral of paintings and was met with the next exhibit, I felt renewed. I felt like I had just eaten a light lunch and drank a cold glass of water. The exhibit had given me the energy for next week amid a pretty lonely winter. This feeling and my subsequent love of abstract art and art history was not possible until learned how to stop, look and pay attention to how I felt about what I was looking at.

When you first start to look at abstract art, it can feel absolutely futile to break down. I mean, I’d be lying if I said I didn’t combust internally when I first saw Malevich’s “Black Square.”¹ A lot of people believe that

they have to have academic knowledge when it comes to any art, and while you can look at it in a historical approach, the truth is that there is another way to look — and it’s all about you.

Mark Rothko, infamous for his color field paintings, said, “Painting is not a picture of an experience, but is the experience.” When it comes to looking at abstract art for leisure, every thought, however vapid, dumb or unintelligent, deserves validity, because there is some degree of truth in every thought you have when it comes to looking at abstract art. Every thought together composes the experience, which is ultimately your individual experience. Ever since I took art history more seriously, I’ve come to realize that studying, talking and writing about art cannot come easy unless I stop governing my thoughts through palatable filters. I’m really not that dumb for thinking that Jackson Pollock paintings resemble some — ahem — crude bodily functions.



Hilma af Klint - *Adulthood*, 1907

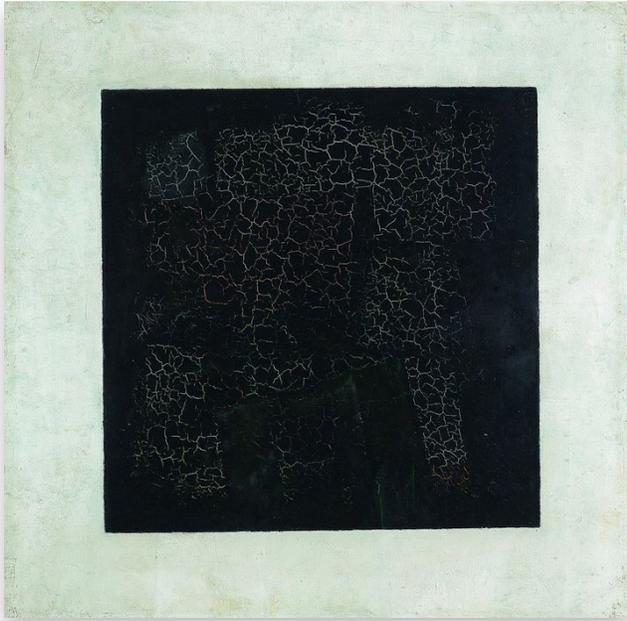


When you stop trying to contort your gut reactions, the rest follows more easily. I now tend to think of looking at art for my leisure as therapy because whatever I'm looking at, looks back at me in equal measure. These canvases are mirrors into something I might not know about myself, and it feels exciting. This can also happen for you too if you bring that honesty to the painting, because you will truly get out as much as you put in. Finding out something about yourself through looking at art comes after you establish your connection to what you're looking at, and that comes when you bridge your gut reactions to what you're looking at in clinical, purely descriptive terms, or vice versa. For example, my gut reaction to Mary Heilmann's painting "Heaven"² has me thinking about the first time I saw the color of Mountain Dew Baja Blast, which led me to think about the hues of that green, seemingly shimmering behind those purple accents. It reminds me of peering into the green inside my cup, the carbonation creating bubbles that accented how divinely unnatural that color was. That green on canvas feels like it illuminates itself, the shimmering given by the obvious strokes. And the other way around: the clumped rainbow strokes of Joan Mitchell's "City Landscape"³ had me thinking of every plane ride home to New York and every drive through Manhattan. Anything that draws your eye, anything that reminds you of something, is a road to lead you somewhere. Like cultivating a fire or a new friendship, it takes time, patience and a high degree of listening enough to cultivate mutual respect.

Cultivating a relationship with art has led me to a lot of revelations about myself alongside my academic work, especially concerning my mental health and spirituality. Mark Rothko, again, said, "You've got sadness in you, I've got sadness in me — and my works of art are places where the two sadnesses can meet, and therefore both of us need to feel less sad." Art is here for you. Art will not judge you.

But it's completely fine to not take it that seriously. Sometimes life has you wanting just enough to make you laugh. Some of the most fun I've had was walking through the MoMA with a friend and tossing "this reminds me of the Muppets" and "this reminds me of 'Mad Max: Fury Road'" back and forth. Sometimes all you need is a friend to try to do an impression of a painting, or do a ridiculous interpretive dance in front of sculpture, or to say "those three splotches of paint look like a smiley face."

And when I return to how I treated art when I was a high school "art hoe" reblogging pictures of people standing in front of paintings, I feel a kinship with her. She's feeling a lot of feelings for the first time, she knows she loves "The Dance" by Matisse, and has yet to discover why. That promise of discovery feels exciting. ■



1: Kazimir Malevich
Black Square, 1915



2: Mary Heilmann
Heaven, 2004



3: Joan Mitchell
City Landscape, 1955

How the Congo Can Fix Their Economy Using the Power of Water

by Pamela Wong

Prince Emmanuel de Merode, conservationist and anthropologist, made the journey from the Democratic Republic of Congo to Stony Brook University to present the 2014 documentary “Virunga,” on Nov. 28.

Merode spoke of the conservation efforts toward Virunga National Park, which is a UNESCO World Heritage site, and the need to help Congo economically and environmentally. He plans to create thousands of jobs to help the wellbeing of both Virunga and the people who live surrounding the park by harnessing the power of hydroelectricity from the park’s rivers. The State University of New York bestowed upon him the Honorary Degree Doctor of Humane Letters for his environmentalist efforts as the director and chief warden of Virunga National Park located in Congo.

“Conservation is no longer about working with protecting wildlife,” he said. “It’s about the relationship between conflict dynamics, the nature of violence, which really is a problem of our generation and the way we treat natural resources. It’s something that we need to come to expect and deal with.”

There are more internally displaced people today in Congo than there have ever been, according to Merode. There has been a civil war every four years, disrupting the lives of the Congolese people. He said the conflicts are due to Virunga National Park’s “stunning beauty, extraordinary diversity, incredibly charismatic species, and those amazing landscapes.”

Virunga is about 200 million acres of land, located in the Albertine Rift Valley in eastern Congo. This park is one of the biggest on Earth with a large population of people living around the perimeter. Despite its

immense resources, people live in poverty and are growing in numbers. There’s not enough land available for living. “We have to move very fast to find solutions to build cities and industrialization, so the energy helps that,” Merode said.

He also mentioned his efforts for tourism to attract more business into the economy and to help the conservation efforts of the park, since tourism slowed down this past year due to a hostage situation. According to the Telegraph article, two British tourists were kidnapped while on a trip to go mountain gorilla trekking in the park in May 2018. Mountain gorilla trekking was a popular tourist attraction to the park. The kidnappers asked for a ransom of originally 200,000 USD going down to 30,000 USD. Merode personally oversaw the handover of the two hostages. The two acquired minor injuries but were other than that unharmed.

The park’s oil resources caused the problems Congo faced when the documentary was filmed during the M23 Rebellion from 2012 to 2014.

The documentary showed SOCO Inc., a British-owned oil company that wanted to drill for oil in the park. They threatened the already endangered 200 mountain gorillas that reside in Virunga. Their motive for killing the gorillas, and other poached animals like the elephant, was portrayed in the documentary to get rid of the reason for protecting the park. If there were no animals to save, the park would be theirs.

The end credits of the film stated, “In April 2014 Emmanuel filed a report on SOCO’s activities to the Congolese Legal Authorities. As he returned to the park he was ambushed by unknown gunmen and shot

several times. He survived.”

Patricia Wright, Distinguished Service Professor of Anthropology at Stony Brook and the creator of the Centre ValBio at Stony Brook said the film showed the incredible sacrifices everyone involved made.

“These people who persevered to protect the park eventually won, and that’s amazing that the oil companies left.”

The Center ValBio at Stony Brook’s mission, as stated on their website, “to help both indigenous people and the international community better understand the value of conservation in Madagascar and around the world.”

Another audience member, Hodan Hassan, chief development strategist for the Global Health Institute at Stony Brook’s Centre ValBio provided her comments about the film. “I think it really conveyed the issues rendered in the park,” she said. “It was specifically very engaging to me because it touched a lot of the issues I care about: the property, the ongoing war in Congo, the exploitation for companies getting to the resources, so it touched a lot of important topics that people have to be aware of.”

The documentary, which de Merode said was never meant to be a film but footage of their conservation efforts in Congo, discusses the issues between the park and the poor economic state of the Congo, which is the moving agenda in the film.

“The relationship between natural resource extraction and conflict [can be seen] in Eastern Congo which is a country that has suffered 25 years of very violent war. It’s the longest-lasting armed conflict on Earth at the moment.”

Due to this conflict, he said that 6 to 7 million Congolese people have died, which leads back to illegal resource extraction like oil and charcoal.

On top of the illegal resource extraction, the group M23 rebelled against the Congo to gain political control. They too were involved in intruding the park for resources that they could sell on the market for enormous amounts of cash from international buyers. They also were able to gain control of the land, which would in turn displace residents who lived around the park.

Prince de Merode said that during their conservation efforts for the park for the past 20 years, there was an extraordinary level of sacrifice. A total of 180 staff members have died in those 20 years protecting the landscape and species of the parks.

“There is no park on Earth — that is protected on Earth — that has suffered the number of service deaths than we’ve seen in Virunga and it’s something that is continuing,” he said.

The U.N. report from the Group of Experts on the Democratic Republic of the Congo addressed to



the Security Council dated May 20, 2018 reported that, “The security and humanitarian situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo did not improve.” Armed groups presented a threat to the Congo and to the natural resources and economy. Innocent civilians were caught in the middle of the conflicts and were killed or displaced in the country.

Shimelis Gulema, a professor of African studies at Stony Brook, jokingly called Congo the “problem child of Africa.”

“In a way the Congo is potentially the richest country in Africa from all of their resources, but at the same time there is so much poverty,” Merode said. “It shows the contrast and the irony of contemporary Africa. What Congo shows is the bigger picture of Africa of the resources and the image of so much misery and poverty. What I understand from the film, there is a big debate between how to reconcile the need for conserving nature, and at the same time there can be the quest for development to do that. How do you develop without endangering environment?”

Prince de Merode spoke about the duality of the park, and how Virunga is a blessing and its own undoing. Its beauty and resources attract people who want to



exploit it, affecting the civilians and animals who live there.

Elisabeth Hildebrand, associate professor of anthropology, mentioned how the features of the park are interconnected. “People in the west, we love gorillas; we love cute animals,” she said. “We want to save those animals but many people don’t realize how the wellbeing of the animals is critically tied to the people around them.”

Merode also mentioned that there are four million people who live around the park. He said, “This is where the idea of hydroelectricity has a way of enabling the Congolese people to gain control of their economy.”

Investors like Howie Buffet got involved, followed by the European Union. They were able to raise \$120 million in hydroelectric programs around the park to create the current.

“For every megawatt of electricity that you generate from the park’s rivers, you can create between 800 to 1,000 jobs,” de Merode said. “What’s even more interesting is that 9.6 percent of those jobs are ex-combatants, so there are people who have chosen to leave those armed militias that you’ve seen in the film... They have a choice that they didn’t have before.” These new workers can support their families and their communities with these new opportunities.

In regards to the creation of jobs from hydroelectricity, Jessica Zuniga, the international programs coordinator from the Study Abroad office at Stony Brook said, “It’s what they need because right now, bribes is what’s making them sacrifice their own environment, because they are so desperate for money; they’re so poor... I think that if people have jobs, and that’s how they make their money and not helping these companies, they can have work that is steady and consistent and not from helping somebody.”

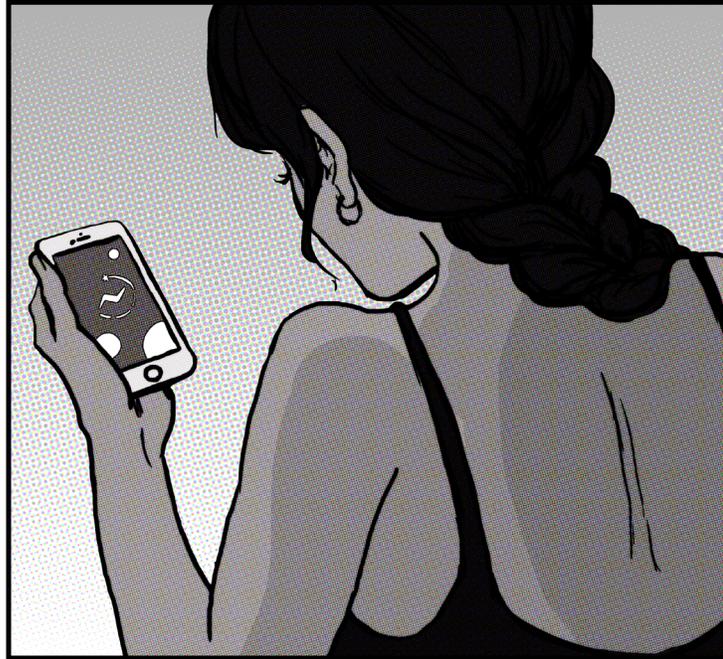
She added that this type of work from hydroelectricity could potentially bring more tourism to the country. She said: “Right now, paying people for bribes is not making it a nicer place to live... They can change their environment very easily. The environment is the same, but change what attracts people to visit there. When they have a steady income, there’s less crime and less poverty. I think they need some education to build pride in where they live and to understand that it’s more worth protecting than exploiting.”

Merode said that although his team lost an immense number of staff and friends, their deaths were not in vain. Their new goal is to generate up to 105 megawatts, which is a huge investment, not just for aid but also to normalize the economy. His goal is intended to create around 100,000 jobs.

“What’s even more amazing is that there has been a great movement because of that film — for Howie Buffet and some of the billionaires to actually contribute, to providing other ways to make a living in that region,” professor Patricia Wright said. “They’re talking about hydroelectric power that they are generating now from those beautiful streams, they’re creating enough of it to sell power back to other countries and make a living off of it,” she said. “They are creating jobs and creating lives for those extraordinary people who live around the park.”

Time can only tell what will happen to Virunga National Park and Emmanuel de Merode has an agenda to preserve it. ■

**THE GREAT
EXTRACTION**
**THE RISE
OF THE
DATA
ECONOMY**
*BY JOSEPH
AMENDOLA*



The story of the 21st century global industry could be told through the perspective of three firms: Google, Facebook and Amazon. Google acts as the gatekeeper to the vast reservoir of human knowledge, Facebook as the default (for better or worse) public square and Amazon as the retail behemoth slowly cannibalizing the industry. These actors make up three of the 10 most valuable firms in the world. Each of their particular powers is often compared to that of sovereign governments; Facebook and Google act as de facto Ministries of Information, wielding immense power over who and what is worthy of public display, while Amazon has effectively gained the power to assert regulatory control over the e-commerce industry. These three firms — along with other tech “disruptors” such as Uber and Airbnb — have market valuations in the billions. An Econ 101-educated extraterrestrial observing our world from afar would be surprised to learn what is perhaps the most “disruptive” aspect of our new platform overlords: They make little to no profit on their front-end use.

Many tech firms have almost broken the physics of economics. Instead of earlier modes of business practices, where a company would provide a product at a market price for consumption, for which it would make its profit, front-end services that many tech companies provide are entirely separate from their commercial use: the mass extraction of user data for sale to third-parties and private use to fine-tune their AI suggestion algorithms.

For instance, Google and Facebook offer their services for free, but they make their profit by

extracting data from their users for sale to advertisers, market research companies, shadowy political data firms and more. Our interests, desires and insecurities are mined and sacrificed at the ever-expanding altar of data accumulation. Similarly, Amazon and Uber — while indeed charging for their front end use — often operate at losses on those uses and instead focus on other aspects for their commercial purpose. Uber’s ride-sharing service is notoriously unprofitable and, in true Silicon Valley fashion, has stayed alive by way of stock speculation and venture capital. Rather, Uber’s extraction of city transportation information and logistics is the platform’s main source of profit. Amazon, a slightly different case, uses its highly profitable cloud-computing business to host other companies’ data on their servers, such as Netflix, even though they are technically competitors in terms of streaming services.

The development of such methods of extraction and accumulation represents a massive shift in the global economy. Such developments are critical to the rise of platform capitalism, or what PR-soaked Silicon Valley acolytes would call the “sharing economy.” The logic of platform capitalism works like this: A heavily leveraged tech startup such as Uber or Airbnb provides a platform to connect people to each other — Uber connects riders to drivers; Airbnb, prospective short-term tenants to renters, and so on — and sets the governance structure for how they can interact. Aside from the numerous problems that arise from particular business practices, such as Uber’s pernicious redefinition of the employee under the guise of “being

your own boss” and AirBnB’s contributions to rising rents in the cities in which it operates, the practice of the platform provides ample ground for the harvesting of data from its consumers. The fruits of such extraction are withheld from the cities in which they operate under a panoply of intellectual property protections and unequal bargaining power.

If any of this sounds relatively banal, it shouldn’t. The slow death of traditional notions of profitability and the rise of the data economy represents a rupture in the very foundation of our society; data provides a capital stream whose value is almost completely untethered from the labor (our activities on said platforms) required to manufacture and use it. This allows for almost infinite speculative activity for shareholders and investors, who are not known to shy away from new avenues of exploitation, and the subsequent returns on our activities are concentrated within their hands. The way this data is harvested — and the specific uses for which they are harvested — is purposely opaque, and is increasingly being used for oppressive purposes.

The practice of data extraction must insert its logic everywhere. When Facebook or Google make inroads into India and the Global South under the sunny pretense of “connecting” impoverished people to the internet, what they’re really doing is penetrating new markets, ones in which the intellectual activity of its citizens has not yet been subsumed and commodified as data. As the academic Jathan Sadowski noted in his recent paper, “When data is capital: Datafication, accumulation, and extraction,” such practices act as a form of data colonialism, wherein tech firms lock populations into their platforms and extract data according to their own internal rules, with little to no input from governments or citizens.

As long as the extraction of data remains outside the purview of legislators and democracy, it will be used to further contribute to the power imbalance already too prevalent in our society. This is perhaps most evident in targeted advertisement sales. In an excellent recent paper by Sam Adler-Bell and Michelle Miller of The Century Foundation, a progressive think tank, the implications of increasing datafication untethered from regulation are made apparent. A 2015 study from Carnegie Mellon University found that Google was more likely to show ads for high-paying jobs to men than women; predatory for-profit colleges had been shown to cater their ads to low-income students, and people who are “scored” as financially desperate are increasingly shown ads for payday loan services and a vast array of other targeted ads in which more affluent

users are not. Additionally, with Facebook, a recently patented technology helps credit lenders reject people for loans based on their income and social media activity. These methods, which, coupled with the profit motive apparent in the ceaseless accumulation of user data, do not appear to be slowing down anytime soon, and could lead to the emergence of redlining in the digital sphere. Such developments are what legal scholar Frank Pasquale deems “The Scored Society,” in which unevenly accessed and distributed data could further determine our social worthiness — of jobs, career and educational opportunities, loans and whatever else the logic of profit-generating data accumulation inserts itself into. Such sentiments should seem obvious: financial and technological innovations inevitably mirror the economic conditions and practices in which they arise. As long as our political economy becomes increasingly secretive, privatized and atomized under the totalizing logic of “efficiency” and consumer convenience, the technological innovations that emerge in it will benefit an increasingly small group, monopolizing progress.



The pernicious uses of personal data — developed and fine-tuned by our aforementioned tech giants — are increasingly making their way into the workplace as well. Data is now being used to mine and extract value from individual workers, obtaining information about consumer habits, health conditions, socio-economic status and even browser activity. Such developments have massive implications for hiring, on-the-job monitoring and even exiting a job. For example, an increasingly concentrated and amply funded workplace data industry is able to determine who and who does not get hired according to a vague and possibly unfair set of criteria. Job applicants with default browsers have been found to stay at a job for shorter periods of time than those with, say, Google Chrome. This may lead to a workplace data company such as Cornerstone scoring them lower for employment opportunities for this arbitrary reason. Shadowy third-party firms conduct credit scores on potential applicants according to methods that are far from transparent, and workers are left with no recourse to dispute such claims. As long as such methods of data-use are not subject to civil rights laws, such problems will continue. On-the-job performance tracking is implemented with no input or understanding of the rules from workers. Such methods have their most obvious effects in the gig economy such as Uber and Instacart, which replace the traditional notion of a manager for data-driven algorithms.



In a perfect free market, this wouldn't be as much of a problem. But as Marshall Steinbaum of The Roosevelt Institute has shown, increasing market concentration, in which tech firms and other companies own an increasingly consolidated share of markets, drastically reduce worker power and choice. Once again, innovations mirror the societies in which they arise, and currently, the tremendous productive powers of data are only being felt by one side of the worker-employer relationship, with no downward distribution.

The process of data accumulation is not dangerous in the abstract. Rather, the question of who benefits from such an innovation deserves further examination. The very process of data extraction is only made possible by the consumers and workers it utilizes. Contrary to typical neo-feudal definitions of "innovation" and "capitalist vision," the tech behemoths have merely derived their data-fortunes from the intellectual activity of citizens, and have previously benefited from loopholes in laws and already-existing developments in technology, all of which were the product of human labor. This is without even mentioning the role that rent-seeking — merely the owning of productive, value-creating agents — plays in all this (this is the very essence of the aforementioned platform capitalism). It is thus worth asking exactly how data can be harvested in accordance with the public interest. The modern city may hold the answer.

European cities such as Barcelona and Amsterdam have joined the project DECODE, an initiative meant to reclaim a semblance of the "data commons," i.e. providing open-source software that is open to possible avenues of innovation for anyone to contribute to. The socialization of data by way of platform cooperatives and the like essentially turns the data that is generated in cities into a meta-utility. Providing open access to crucial information such as infrastructure, air quality, health and local business information could help municipalities develop innovative technologies with the public good at the forefront, rather than simply



the profit motive.

Perhaps the most dangerous component of the data economy is the extent to which access to data is withheld from the public by tech firms by way of intellectual property protections. Economists Dean Baker and Joseph Stiglitz have argued that these laws actively hurts innovation by shielding competitors and the public from entry into innovative endeavors. The socialization of data — with adequate funding from governments and proper privacy protections for citizens — could help buck this trend. This, along with proper regulation to ensure that firms act in accordance with the public interest, is the key to ensuring data extraction does not contribute to a second Gilded Age.

When evaluating the potential society-rupturing effects of new innovations and technological progress, one must always ask themselves the questions: "Innovation for who? Progress for who?" Silicon Valley billionaires and power-justifying Davos-Conference lackeys like Steven Pinker may evangelize about how wealth and progress isn't "zero-sum," but the above examples of power-imbalances within workplaces and access to data in general show that this worldview is necessarily incoherent, especially in a world where the wealth of billionaires has grown 12 percent while the world's poorest have seen theirs decrease by 11 percent, all while wages and standards of living continue to stagnate and decline throughout the West. This argument fails even according to its own superficial foundations. While the vast expansion of the productive powers of data, AI and platform behemoths provide superficial benefits to consumers in the form of convenience, it is up to us to ensure that the value extracted from users is not used in turn to contribute to an asymmetrical society, in which the mass faces increasing uncertainty while the few monopolize progress. ■



The Nine to Five and the hours after that

by Jennifer Corr

Long Island is known as one of the most densely populated areas of the United States. In fact, if Long Island was a state, it would be the thirteenth most populated and the first in terms of population density with 5,402 people per square mile, according to the World Population Review website.

The estimated 7.75 million people that reside on Long Island (as of 2013) are constantly going from place to place, whether it's picking up a cup of coffee on their way to work or taking their kids to soccer practice or, perhaps, horseback riding lessons. On the way to their destination, one may even pass a homeless shelter hiding in plain sight.

On this island, everyone has a story, whether it is the 7-Eleven manager, the homeless shelter volunteer or the horse farm owner.

The 7-Eleven Manager

Zahid Kahn spends his days managing two 7-Elevens — one in Lake Grove and one in Centereach. Not only does Kahn manage the employees, dealing with call-outs and other issues, but he also manages the floor. In one day he travels to both stores, which are approximately five minutes away from one another. After a long day of work, Kahn is exhausted, spending his night watching Netflix shows like “Supernatural” or Indian movies.

Until about the age of 27, Kahn lived in Pakistan. He was able to come to the United States almost twenty years ago, excited to see the America he saw in the movies and to take advantage of opportunities that were not available to him as a young man in Pakistan. “It’s like a dream that comes true,” Kahn said. “Even when I was in America sometimes I would dream that I was coming to America, and then I would wake up.”

As Kahn began working in the U.S., his father arranged a marriage for him. Kahn’s wife currently works part-time at the Smith Haven Mall in Lake Grove. Kahn said she makes “delicious” food, which he enjoys eating after work.

As 18 years passed, Kahn has seen the technology



and culture change at 7-Eleven. In the beginning of Kahn’s career, he used pen and paper to order food and drinks, today he uses a computer.

After the September 11 attacks, Kahn noticed an increase in discrimination towards Middle Eastern workers at the 7-Eleven stores. Kahn did not experience racism towards himself, but he certainly noticed his coworkers experiencing racism. Therefore, Kahn and the other employees hired a private security guard to stand in the stores. Kahn believes that the tension has alleviated over time, despite what the media portrays.

Throughout his years residing in the United States, Kahn has also noticed many differences between the culture in Pakistan and the United States.

For example, Kahn said that when a child does something bad or somebody steals, it is taken care of right there. Unlike in America, blame is often shifted away for the child.

Kahn outlined his observance in this story; One day a man walked into Kahn’s 7-Eleven and angrily accused the employees of selling cigarettes to his 17-year-old son. Kahn explained that in Pakistan, the parent would not go after the person who sold the cigarettes, they would go after the son. He asked the man, “Why are you so mad when you can’t control your own son?”

“If people are into bad habits [in Pakistan], nobody likes them,” Kahn explained. “There is no ID system, nothing like that.”

Stealing is also an issue at 7-Eleven. In Pakistani

society Kahn explained that there is street justice. If someone does something bad, according to Kahn, it's taken care of right there.

In America, however, many justify stealing from big corporations like 7-Eleven since it is such a big company. What many fail to realize is that when something is stolen from 7-Eleven, the stores come up short. The corporation blames the employees, not the customers.

Kahn explained that his culture is very honest and people don't often do bad things, and when he is accused of stealing, he takes it very personally.

"I know that the media may tell you something else, but I'm telling you because I lived there," Kahn said. "We are mostly honest people."

In Kahn's opinion, Americans know very little about the rest of the world, and he wishes that Americans would understand that people from other parts of the world come from different societies and cultures. It takes time to adjust to American culture, and those new to the country need to be dealt with gently.

When Kahn attended a tobacco class, a police officer told a story that two drunk men who walked into a 7-Eleven and made fun of the cashier working behind the counter, who was fresh from the Middle East. The cashier then proceeded to bash the men in the head with a beer bottle that they were buying.

"People don't do this type of thing [in Kahn's culture], they are not drunk, they are not under the influence of drugs," Kahn said. "So, this only happens if you are having a fight with someone. There's nobody that goes into a shop and starts making fun of you. So that's why that guy did not understand what to do, because he had nothing personal with them. So the only thing he thought to do was to hit them."

Kahn does return to his home in Pakistan from time to time, however at times he feels like a stranger there as years go by and relatives get older and children grow bigger.

"There is a picture in your brain, like this is how it was" Kahn said. "When you go back, you're like 'oh, this is something else.' That's the biggest shock you get when you leave your country."



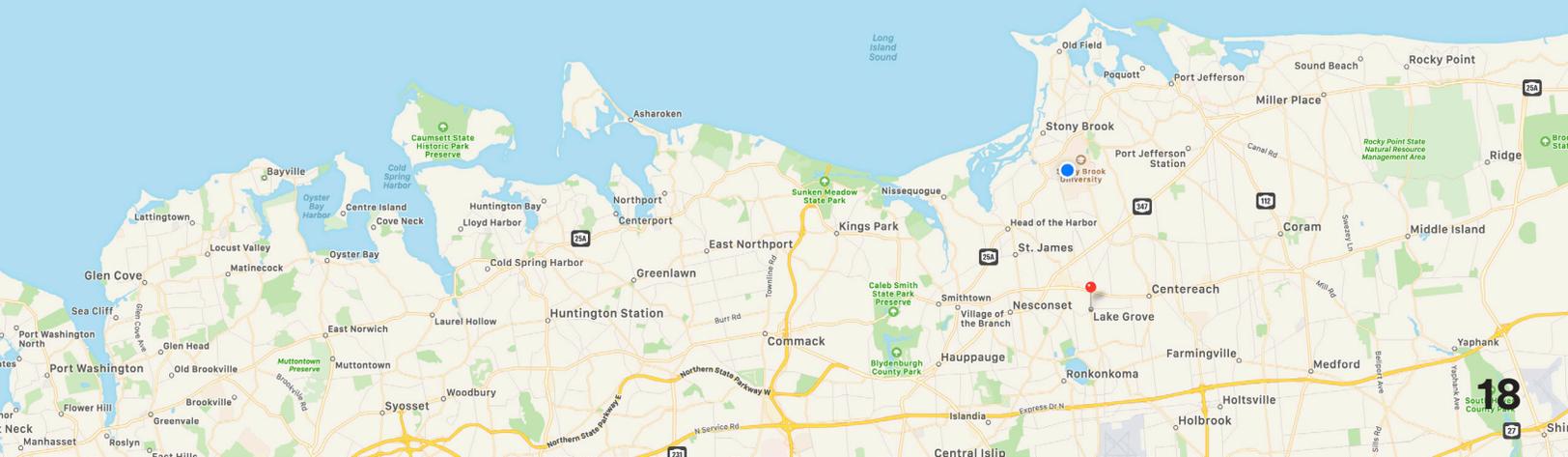
The Homeless Shelter Volunteer

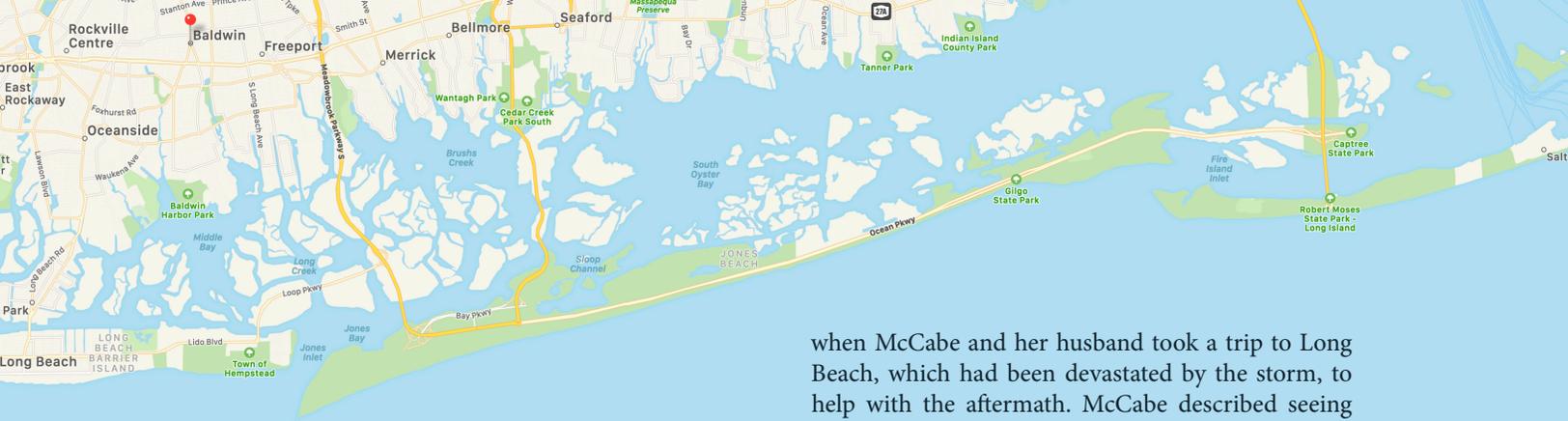
Jane McCabe once traveled the world as an editor for the Tea and Coffee Trade Journal. Now she drives to a house in the suburbs of Baldwin every Thursday at 4 p.m. Inside the home, women and children relax in the living room, watching television and playing with toys. An elderly rescue dog sits in the sun that shines through the window. McCabe does not leave the house until 10 p.m. Until then, she washes dishes, folds napkins and reminds children to put on slippers, among other duties.

This house is part of the nonprofit agency Bethany House, which calls itself a "place to come when there is no place to go." Women and their children who are faced with issues, such as poverty or domestic abuse, reside there until they can get back on their feet. Bethany House was founded in 1978 by the Dominican Sisters of Amityville. The nonprofit is comprised of three houses and multiple programs that help women learn skills to succeed. The shelter can care for up to 75 people a night and, usually, 25 to 35 guests are children.

"It's a great place to live," said Natalie Stone, a guest at the house. "They guide you and help you to better yourself. Not only for yourself, but for your kids. It's like starting over. They teach you how to clean, they teach you time management."

After being homeless, Stone stayed at Bethany House for some time. During her stay, she has made many accomplishments, including job interviews and





forgiveness of others.

“It could be anybody,” McCabe said. “You never know. I could get hit with a financial bill, a catastrophe could happen and I could be living in these homes. Thank God for these homes.”

When McCabe first walks through the door, she reads “the book,” which contains notes about what has happened at Bethany House over the week. She then makes a salad and sets the tables. Each napkin is evenly folded and everyone gets a fork, knife and a plate. If a guest eats at Bethany House, they must do their chores and attend a support group. Subjects such as domestic abuse, finance and health are discussed at the meeting. It’s McCabe’s job to make sure all the women attend. While the meeting is in progress, the children settle in the dining room. They make crafts with local volunteers from churches, synagogues and high schools.

Her car parked in front of the house contained boxes and boxes of donations that she got from friends and a former thrift shop where she worked.

McCabe was not always the local volunteer she is now. At one time, McCabe was a world traveler, organizing events and interviews for the Tea and Coffee Trade Journal, a magazine for which she was the co-publisher editor.

“I used to get CEOs of tea and coffee companies to come and speak,” McCabe said. “One of my greatest accomplishments was getting the president of Snapple Tea Company to come to Europe and talk about his product and how he evolved.”

McCabe did not dedicate herself to the tea and coffee business because of an interest in the trade, however. In 1978, Jane McCabe answered the job advertisement in the New York Times shortly after graduating from Queens College with a bachelor’s degree in English writing.

In 1979, it was rare to come across a women in the coffee and tea trade industry. According to McCabe, she would be the only woman found at a cocktail party.

“There was sexual harassment here and there,” McCabe said. “But I was respected and it was nice.”

Her career in the trade, which McCabe “fell in love with,” ended in 2009 when McCabe retired. As a retired woman, McCabe spent her days getting lunch with friends, doing house jobs and spending time with her children, who are in their twenties.

Her life changed in 2012 after Hurricane Sandy

when McCabe and her husband took a trip to Long Beach, which had been devastated by the storm, to help with the aftermath. McCabe described seeing cars filled with sand.

“After Sandy and seeing how it just decimated Long Beach, it kind of changed me and I wanted to help,” McCabe said. “I wanted to help women.”

When McCabe first began volunteering for Bethany House, she was given the responsibility of writing the newsletter, brochures and press releases. Later on, McCabe was upgraded to a position on the resource development committee, which was organized by Sister Aimee, the CEO and founder of Bethany House. With the resource development committee, McCabe helps organize events, such as fashion shows.

“[McCabe] definitely has a different outlook on life now than I remember growing up,” Katie McCabe, McCabe’s daughter said. “I just really think she has grown as a person.”

McCabe recalls one situation where a woman from Ohio was living at Bethany House after being abused by her partner. The woman was considering returning to her partner after not being able to hold down a job and support herself. Irish Beauty, a hair salon in Seaford, offered Bethany House a “day of beauty.” Ten women, including the woman from Ohio, were brought to the hair salon to get a haircut.

“This girl looked great and she got a job interview,” McCabe said. “She didn’t go home. I told the people at this hair salon, ‘You saved this girl’s life. You changed her life.’ Because maybe if she didn’t have that haircut, maybe she wouldn’t have gotten that job.”

As it gets later in the day, the guests must make it home by curfew, which is at 10 p.m. McCabe must make sure all the women have done their chores, which include tasks such as sweeping or cleaning the tables. If it doesn’t get done, McCabe completes the chore. McCabe washed the dishes and smiled.

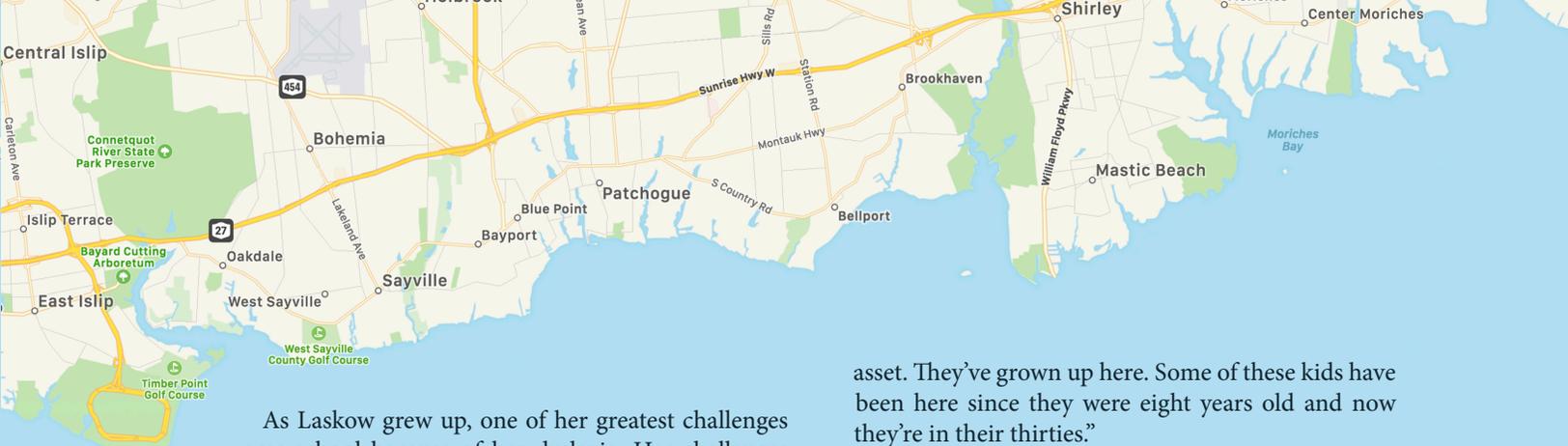
“The biggest thing I’ve learned here is how much you can fit into a tupperware bowl,” she said.

The Horse Farm Owner

All it took was a five dollar pony ride to ignite then-six-year-old Cindy Laskow’s love for horses.

From there, Laskow would spend much of her youth working at stables to work off riding time. Laskow bought her dream stable in 1995, naming it Crystal Brook and using her plot of land in Centereach to teach mostly kids how to ride and care for horses.

Her goal was to provide young people with a safe environment, the type of environment she grew up in.



As Laskow grew up, one of her greatest challenges was school because of her dyslexia. Her challenges with reading, writing and math influenced Laskow to decide not to attend college.

“I knew the one thing I was good at is horses,” Laskow said. “I understand horses. I can look at a horse and think, ‘Oh my God, this horse is just screaming for attention.’”

Laskow is able to run the business of the stable all by herself, learning the industry through people she knew and through past mistakes. Now she is well regarded in the horse community and at horse shows, as her riders and horses are always winning very impressive ribbons.

“You’re going against these top horses [at horse shows], top riders and big stables,” Laskow said. “This little tiny farm that’s in Centereach competes with these big farms.”

Unlike many horse farms that aim for profit, Laskow’s goal is to provide an opportunity for what is known as a “rich man’s sport” to girls (and boys) who may not have the means to pay for lessons. Most of her patrons work for lessons and ride time.

Work on the farm includes cleaning the stables, grooming the horses, feeding and watering the horses, etc. Laskow takes pride in the ranch’s cleanliness, as some of her neighbors are unaware of the farm being there, a far stretch from many farms that smell of manure and attract flies.

“A lot of the kids who can’t afford to do it [take horseback riding lessons] come,” Laskow said. “They’ll help out around the barn. They’ll take riding time and riding lessons. It teaches them responsibility.”

She later said, “We’ve had kids get scholarships, ‘cause we will write letters to colleges on how they’re an



Provided by Cindy Laskow

asset. They’ve grown up here. Some of these kids have been here since they were eight years old and now they’re in their thirties.”

As someone who has struggled with dyslexia, Laskow also aims to help kids who have disabilities.

Bonnie Maruchau, the founder of God’s Earth Angels Corporation 501(c)(3), a local organization that provides assistance for individuals and families in need, fell in love with Crystal Brook because of the impact it made on her son. Her son was very sick and was using a breathing machine when he wandered onto the stable with his older sister’s friend, who made a stop at the farm on the way to 7-Eleven to get the boy a Slurpee, one of the only snacks he could enjoy at the time.

Maruchau’s son knew that he should not have been there, since they thought he was allergic to horses. However, when he met Laskow, he was able to pet her horse. He became set on coming back after he did not have an allergic reaction.

Through her son, Maruchau and Laskow became really close friends and have “picked each other up by the bootstraps” when going through hard times.

Not only did the two begin a friendship, they began a professional relationship. The two hold fundraisers called “Saddle Up” which raise money for causes such as helping a cancer patient and paying for vet bills for a horse named Jack, who was found emaciated. A friend of Laskow’s who volunteers at a horse rescue adopted Jack, who was skin and bones and was always afraid. The friend brought the horse to Laskow for boarding. There, he began rehabilitation. According to Laskow, Jack was so neurotic that he was afraid to stay in a stall and get in a trailer.

Because of the fundraiser, which provided people a day of fun on the farm, Jack was able to receive the necessary health care he needed to become the healthy horse he is today.

“Jack is doing good,” Laskow said. Maruchau remarked that Laskow enjoys spoiling Jack.

“It’s [the stable] like walking onto a little piece of heaven when you walk through those gates,” Maruchau said. “Nobody really knows about it and people who do know about it appreciate it.”

One could say that horses are Laskow’s world. To unwind, Laskow enjoys grooming her horse and “making her horse look pretty.” Laskow calls it therapy.

The person who rings up your coffee or who drives past you on your way to your destination has a story. All you have to do is open your eyes, or perhaps, ask a question. ■

FUNK MUSIC

HOW REPRESSION
SHAPES ARTISTIC
OUTPUT



BY TUHIN
CHAKRABARTI

Before we delve into this topic, it's essential to lay out a framework, or at least demonstrate an understanding of a framework.

This is an article about music. Music and art is subjective; what makes "good" art is totally up to the subject. There are some universal truths about what makes art beautiful, like symmetry, harmony and composition, but the lines are often blurred.

After all, artists know that they must learn the rules, then break the rules. What's the point otherwise? Pushing boundaries is essential. This is demonstrated by the core philosophy of jazz music: to be a musical overload in a sense, to keep the listener on the edge of their seat while the music teeters on what is and isn't "listenable." The chords are voiced so oddly that they're almost dissonant — and the rhythms are in unusual time signatures that are nearly jarring, but somehow keep the head floating. This brings us closer to the meat of this piece. Jazz was created by black people. So were a lot of genres that are big today; they often started with the underdogs, by ethnic minorities, forced to gather with their kin because they weren't allowed to frequent "white only" establishments — allowing unique cultures to develop. Black people are still a systematically marginalized group that was certainly placed into the same separate, racially homogenous playpen. Do systematically marginalized groups tend to have a knack for ingenuity in terms of art and cultural development? Does this box of disenfranchisement act as a pressure cooker for ethnic groups, requiring artistic output? If so, why?

While there are many global examples of cultural repression, typically from colonization and imperialism, African-Americans are an easy example to conceive of marginalization and the cultural repression that is a product of it. It seems that music and art were their

methods of coping with this disenfranchisement. It began with their original purpose for existing here in America: slavery. Work songs were a way for African-Americans to deal with the tedium of field work, and a latent way of communicating contempt for their masters and overseers. This not only creates a unique sense of comradery that only music can accomplish (like playing in a band, it feels good to be a piece in the puzzle of a performance), but it allows Africans to hold onto an overarching cultural identity in a place where their identity was stripped away, by utilizing elements unique to their African dance and music. Work songs eventually developed into the "negro spiritual," then gospel, eventually branching into blues and soul and many other offspring. What unites work songs and their offspring is the sheer sense of pain and coping manifested in the music. A problem is presented in the music and essentially resolved by itself, the music being an outlet for this pain of disenfranchisement.

To hone in on the focus of this piece, we'll fast forward about a century. In the '60s and '70s, the soul genre had reached its height, and funk music materialized, which emerged from the spirit of soul, early disco and rhythmic blues (R&B) but with the sonic inspiration of jazz music and bebop jazz. What funk music did differently is it subsumed the party themes of disco, creating bass-driven, rhythm-centric tracks that were lyrically and melodically simple but with complex, ever-changing arrangements. This model was performance-centered, often with the intent of "letting go" in the most extreme sense, dancing and partying in such a hedonistic way that older generations, who embraced the soberer "letting go" of work songs and jazz clubs, looked down on it as morally inconsistent. In this sense, funk music had a niche audience within the black community, a subculture that focused on





the ghettoized, the hedonists, those that really gained little benefit from the civil rights movement. Soul of this time was also under the same scrutiny, as it often centered around love and romance, which implies sex. Funk and soul were the black versions of the “sex, drugs and rock and roll” dynamic, these two genres being the counterculture of the time, contradicting the wholesome themes of gospel, blues, early soul and jazz. What unites all of these genres, to which we can attribute cultural ownership to blacks, is the fact that it offers us a snapshot of their respective time period. It shows us their unique social perspective.

Funk and soul music represent the same sense of coping, but with a more mature elucidation. In a sense, they represent a dualism. Soul expresses the profound pain and suffering of marginalization, which was ever-so-strong in this post-era of the civil rights movement that was left with unsolved issues, while funk represents the unrelenting spirit of black folk in the face of that struggle. According to the Journal of Black Studies, funk music was the music of the “young, Black, poor and working-class community after the euphoria of the civil rights movement faded, a period defined as ‘the decade of the detached.’” Eccentric, drug-fueled, soul-loving brothers and sisters wanted to make their statements in a world that was under the illusion of change. The civil rights movement was successful in its explicit goals, and new music began to take on a sort of “color-blindness,” where whites could disco with Latinos and blacks. However, the unequal distribution of power between races was still prevalent. Many black people that attained government work and civil equity essentially abandoned their other black counterparts.

The ‘70s saw a dramatic downswing in social

activism; protesting was limited to Black power movements (like the Black Panthers) and other fringe groups. While the civil rights movement brought about notable change, it was very much illusory. Funk was seen as the music of the poor, the gangsters, the deadbeats that were not recognized as equal members of society by those in power. Funk music was too eclectic and too eccentric to be presented to a mass (mostly white) audience by record companies. So black “funksters” danced, the lyrics consisting of passionate adlibs like “c’mon, dance!” and “YEAH!” with the partying spirit of a people that were not only finding a sense of belonging in the genre, but discovering an exuberant youthfulness in it, while their status in America was still in flux. I think this is illustrated well by the lyrics of the song “Open Up Your Mind (Wide)” by the Gap Band, a group of funk pioneers led by lead singer Charlie Wilson. It reads:

*“You say you’re trying to handle the situation,
But your mind is filled with aggravation.
You say you can’t turn to your relations,
You say you can’t deal with world invasion...”*

What this section expresses is a deep dread for the current conditions of the world surrounding black people: the harsh mistreatment of their kind at home, and the tumultuous global implications of the cold war, threatening them with nuclear annihilation. The song goes on to say, with optimism:

*“Cause your mind is getting tighter,
Don’t think that the love’s gonna get any lighter!
Hoping that your world doesn’t get any wider...
Hoping that your life’s gonna get any brighter!*

*If you open up your mind,
Turn your head towards the sky,
(Every little thing’s gonna get a little better, yeah,
yeah)...”*

If you’re listening to the song while reading these lyrics, you can see how this music embodies the unrelenting spirit. It’s feel-good music. Now, Charlie Wilson is saying that the black condition and the global condition is harsh, but the way you react to it is controllable. If you focus on what the world isn’t, if your “mind is getting tighter” in this respect, you will be consumed by its terror. What Wilson wants is black folk to remember to focus on the positive and what we have, which is this music, the fact that the “love’s not gonna get any lighter,” and to forget about the worldly problems that we can’t do much about right now — he hopes that “their world doesn’t get any wider.” He wants his fellow African-Americans to understand



that there is beauty in their marginalized existence, that while we may not have any privilege in this social world, we have prestige among our own community, that there is something wonderful about the unique culture we've created. He wants his community to "open up their mind" to this possibility and "turn their heads towards the sky" in hope of better days. This is a specific and subjective interpretation of the lyrics, but the theme of persevering with optimism in the face of hardship is explicit.

The topic of African-American culture and its subcultures could leave one lecturing for hours. The unique culture they formed while essentially being prisoners in America is as intriguing as it is beautiful. What makes it most admirable, and what somewhat explains their artistic ingenuity is the fact that this all had to be done in secret. Black people had to be black in private and form their own culture based on what they knew and what they were subsuming into their culture from Americans. This is not an isolated phenomenon — it speaks to a trend. What colonization and oppression do is bring a culture to its knees. In treating groups as second-class citizens, it attempts to halt their cultural progress to be supplanted by the values of the oppressor. To deprive the other of its otherness. To deprive a group of itself is to take away its sense of meaning in the world — and most people do not want to lose this without a fight. Meaning is all we have in this world, without it we are nothing to ourselves.

Groups claw at the surface of repression internally, by escaping into a creative world where they reassert

their meaning. By creating this sense of fantasy and grandeur through expressive means, it acts as a catharsis for will repressed by the dominating force. Looking at funk, its wildly eclectic stage presence illustrates this. With eccentric costumes with aesthetic influences from cowboys, galactic themes, and samurais, it's easy to see how this art form was the epitome of escapism. Art tends to act like this representation of a human ideal, an ideal that conflicts with reality. This is represented in the genre of magical realism. It often describes seemingly normal plotlines and authentic human representations (hence the "realism" part) with a phantasmagoric aspect, like supernatural powers within characters. Having a strong origin and presence in Latin America, this contradiction between the real and the ideal is representative of its postcolonial struggle. A struggle for meaning when it has been partially stripped away. A clamor for the ideal and the magical that contradicts with its reality — the reality of an oppressed population that is dealing with the residual effects of this colonial barbarism. Repression doesn't have to result in good art, but it is undeniable that repression is an exaggeration of the human condition, of humans demanding meaning from a silent universe. The human condition results in art — so repression results in hyperbolized, over-the-top art. ■

SURVIVING BLACK CULTURE

BY
CARINE
GREEN

When I think of culture I think of pain — at least, for most of my life, I did. I felt this pain because the culture I was raised to appreciate, black culture, ended up being more oppressive and suppressive than understanding and progressive. It is because black culture I have spent most of my life feeling inadequate; feeling as if I had no place among my own people. While I do have great respect for my culture and those who have fought to allow us the ability to openly celebrate it, I cannot in good conscience ignore many of its shortcomings that have historically oppressed its own people as well as others. I can attest that the entire culture is not to blame; however, the many parts and practices that give way to the oppressive behaviors I, as well as many others, were and are subjected to are to blame.

In order to assess and completely reflect on the impact of black culture, it is important to understand where these ideas and notions that lead to oppression come from. An important facet of these damaging parts of black culture, as is true for many other cultures, is its ability to be a social institution which often governs behavior and expectations of individuals. This means that people are expected to be, act, and live a certain way that would be “acceptable” to this culture, an idea almost uniform to most blacks. This type of controlling dynamic often translates to the hateful way many black people treat anyone who lives a different way, in this case, gays.

I, of course, can never know when this hateful relationship between blacks and gays began, but I can guess that it had something to do with the fight for civil rights, which is always a touchy subject among blacks and gays. Many blacks believed, and still believe, that it is not fair for black rights to be likened to gay rights. Many tend to agree with the words of Vernon Jarett, an influential black journalist and commentator, who stated: “it [is] offensively disrespectful of the recorded and unchronicled sufferings of millions of my people who were kidnapped, chained, shipped and sold like livestock.....gays were never declared three-fifths human by the Constitution.” And you know what, he’s right. Gays weren’t declared three-fifths human by the constitution; they weren’t kidnapped, chained, shipped or sold like livestock. However, they were told who they could marry, have sex with and who they could love; they are still facing the reality that there are 10 countries where being gay can still get you killed — Yemen, Iran, Mauritania, Nigeria, Qatar, Saudia Arabia, Afghanistan, United Arab Emirates, and Sudan— and to top it off, they are constantly in fear of discrimination for doing nothing but existing as who they are. Regardless of this truth, the mindset of many blacks is that gay rights “trivialize the black experience in America by likening the two groups’ histories.” (Lena Williams). But that in itself reveals a bigger issue within the black community of not being able to recognize other people’s struggles — essentially

a lack of empathy.

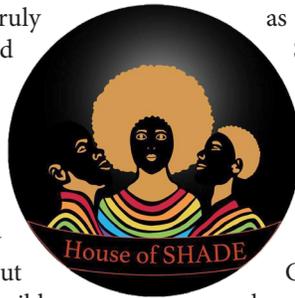
The problem with this is that at the end of the day, discrimination is still discrimination, and oppression has more faces than a twelve-sided die. Nevertheless, this history has laid the groundwork for the way blacks would continue to treat gays. It's a lesson I would learn at the age of 16, which was not so long ago. At that time I had already known that being gay was "wrong" and I didn't care, because as much as I had faced oppression I didn't know what hate looked like until I had stared it in the eyes. It was on a regular school day — I sat in the awkward large opening space adjacent to the library, one of my favorite hideout spots, when a group of boys walked up to me and looked at me with total and utter disgust. At the sight of me, they paused and began speaking in a language I didn't understand. And for the first time in my life, I felt truly afraid; the look I saw in their eyes alerted me to what it truly felt like to be hated. That experience helped me to realize the way in which toxic masculinity, especially in the way it has been amplified in the black community leads to oppression and suppression. I mean, I knew that in many countries being gay could get you killed, but I was oblivious and indifferent to how horrible it felt to be afraid of being yourself because of what others might do. And unfortunately for me, this would not be the last time I would experience such hate.

Another instance where I faced hate from my own community is when I set out to create a gay-straight alliance (GSA) in my school. Before I had worked up the nerve and support to create this GSA, I had brought up the idea to a group of friends and a guidance counselor I trusted, and the responses initially crippled me. My friends told me that if I created a GSA, I would be bullied even more than I already was. They suggested that if I went to school with different demographics, perhaps a "whiter" community of students, I'd have a better outcome. My guidance counselor's response broke my heart even more. She told me that it was "offensive and intrusive to the culture of other students," while also agreeing that this club would put a target on my back and the back of every openly gay student in my school. It was clear that they all saw the same issue I did, but instead

of sharing my vision of confronting this issue they opted to ignore this issue and allow others to be bullied and alienated because of who they were. Although I eventually created that GSA and changed the lives and perspectives of many students and faculty, I received the most hate that I had ever received in my life. But fear not — this story has a happy ending.

With the help of many positive LGBTQ and black role models, I was able to not just be a more confident and loving person. For the first time in my life, I was proud of my culture and what it had done. My expectations had been exceeded for my GSA and my outlook on many of the black students in my school. When I came to Stony Brook my expectations were exceeded once again when I found not only a group that recognized me as an LGBTQ student but also as a black student. This group was House of Shade. It is with this group that I plan to continue to fight for respect and love for all, from all.

Black people see gays as weak; they see them as a group they are better than. I often describe this relationship as a bullying victim who becomes a victimizer. Contrary to the framing of bullying by movies and television, the child who is constantly bullied doesn't just become kind-hearted and understanding as a result of their lived experiences. From what I've seen and learned, behind every bully is just a larger bully. People generally bully because they want to feel secure; they want to release the anger they feel and they want to ignore the hurt they feel. As I said before, I hold no reservations for my culture and I know blacks of today are no more to blame for resentment towards gays than the whites of today are to blame for racism towards blacks, because similarly this inherent inequality is built into the DNA of our cultures. That being said, we are all still accountable for the things we say and do. Furthermore, nothing I've said should suggest our culture has to be the agent that is tasked with bringing us all together, but it is our willingness to respect cultures we don't understand or believe in, especially since that is what we require from others. I know that this might be nothing short of a harsh truth for blacks, but gays aren't your punching bag. Sorry about it! ■



**A REVIEW OF THE 1975'S "A BRIEF INQUIRY INTO ONLINE RELATIONSHIPS"
BY DEANNA ALBOHN**



The 1975 never fail to amaze me. I first discovered them when I was a sad 15-year-old, and would listen to and cry along with their self-titled album. The combination of melancholy music and depressing lyrics perfectly summed up that period of time in my life.

“A Brief Inquiry Into Online Relationships,” the third studio album by the 1975, tells the millennial narrative of being cripplingly lonely, despite being constantly connected to others through phone screens. A postmodern society living amongst advanced technology that has ruined their lives. It reminds me of “Black Mirror,” but as an album.

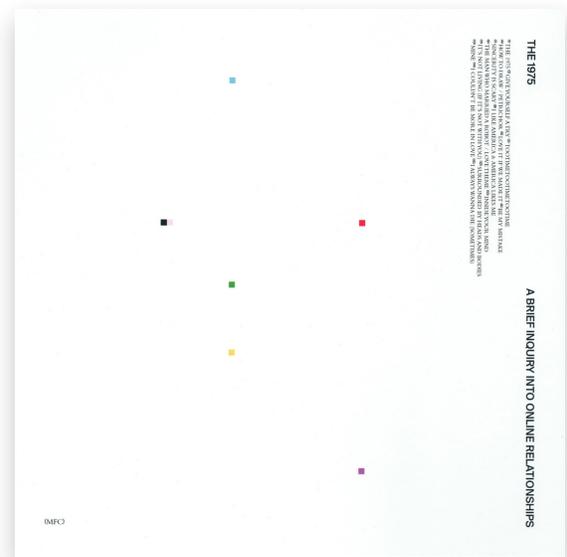
The quartet is led by Matty Healy, who wrote and produced this album through his trials and tribulations with rehab to knock his drug abuse, which he started to help cope with the effects of fame. He comes off as being unfazed by his stardom, yet somehow ashamed of it at the same time. He is not one to show off fame and fortune, and uses his large platform to educate fans on more serious topics like politics and mental health. He addresses this on “A Brief Inquiry.” Healy describes the modern technological age as almost an apocalypse waiting to happen.

The album opens with the same self-titled song that appeared as the first track on both their first and second albums. This time, however, it is remastered and synth is added over the vocals, which appears throughout the rest of the songs as well. Each manipulated version of the introductory track sets a theme for the rest of the record.

One of the first singles released, “Love It If We Made It,” captures the essence of the album into one song. Healy cries out “modernity has failed us” at the end of each verse, and includes a direct quote from Donald Trump, “I moved on her like a bitch,” and reminds us of one of the strangest moments of the year: “Thank you Kanye, very cool!”

“Sincerity Is Scary” describes the difficulties of being sincere on the internet. When breaking down the song, Healy said in an interview with Genius that, “It’s harder to be really sincere, because you have to be really human, and you have to be really sappy, and you have to be a bit soft, and it’s easier to be ironic in the face of those situations.” Forming and maintaining relationships online can be difficult, he said, but essentially make us feel even lonelier, since there is no human interaction. “My relationship with social media is kind of like, this is what I do. Whereas for a lot of people, young people especially, this is who I am,” said Healy.

The 1975 use a lot of references to political events, specifically in America, on “A Brief Inquiry.” “I Like America & America Likes Me,” named after the performance art by Joseph Beuys, pays homage to



a trend sweeping across America: SoundCloud rap. Healy’s heavily autotuned voice repeats the lyric “I’m scared of dying, no gun required,” as a way to show that across the world, we’re all the same and afraid of one thing. The most memorable line from the song, “Kids don’t want rifles, they want Supreme,” is a reference to a poster a teenager held during the March For Our Lives protest that read “It’s easier to buy a gun than buy Supreme.”

“The Man Who Married a Robot/Love Theme” tells the story of a lonely man named @SnowflakeSmasher86 who “lived in a lonely house. On a lonely street. In a lonely part of the world.” The spoken word story is narrated by Siri. The lonely man has fallen in love with the internet, who he says is his best friend. “The man shared everything with his friend: All of his fears and desires; All of his loves, past and present; All of the places he had been and was going, and pictures of his penis.” This song sounds like it tells the story of a dystopian future, which is what made me instantly think of “Black Mirror,” but is the reality we are currently living in.

As the album comes to a close the songs slow down. These are some of the least memorable songs from the album because of the extremely slow music. “Surrounded By Heads And Bodies,” “Mine,” and “I Couldn’t Be More In Love” all sound relatively the same and are honestly the songs that I always skip.

“I Always Wanna Die (Sometimes)” is a cinematic ending to “A Brief Inquiry” and sums up life in the digital age. Social media severely distorts our own self image, making us more self-conscious and depressed. These powerful emotions drive someone to feel like they have always felt that way, but Matty reminds himself that is all an illusion, that social media is fake and that we can log off anytime we want. ■



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