

ROGET'S ALMANAC
of
GENERAL
KNOWLEDGE
&
ANNUAL REPORT
for the YEAR 2011



*Roget's Almanac of
General Knowledge
&
Annual Report for the year
2011*



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Macchina Parola has made every effort to provide accurate and truthful information in this compendium. However, the very real probability exists that there may be errors, misprints and entire untruths, lies and fictions. Information contained in this book should be considered as a general guide and only approximately veridical.

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From Your Publisher

“I have spent this year in various stages of retreat and advance. Two steps forward, one step back. Some days I was withdrawing from society, while on other days I was dancing into the maw of a public crowd. In any event, you cannot hide from life. It finds you, and if you are very lucky, you find it.”

This was what Pere Roget wrote after yet another extended attempt at sobriety. Roget would eventually emerge victorious over his predilections and re-establish both his publishing and beverage concerns as vital and successful businesses. One turning point was the year he and Philippe Comptoir sat down together and with an unusual clearheadedness, planned, wrote and edited a largely original Almanac. Gone were the tactics of stuffing the manuscript with test sheets, biblical passages, birth registries, death notices, shopping lists, café inventories, weather records, shipping waybills and racing forums merely to pad out the book. Stolen content was still an important part of Almanac but these were now thoughtfully chosen to reflect aspects of some theme or because they contained bawdy lithographs popular at the time. Roget even composed a letter in regard to requesting permission to reprint selected articles (though he neglected to mail it).

“We will mirror the zeitgeist of our time by inclusion in this document.” Roget was heard to repeat, often while looking in a mirror while holding a copy of the critical periodical “Zeitgeist”. Comptoir preferred the term “Spirit of our Age” as the War had put him off the use of German for anything other than cursing at Germans. So it was then that they set upon reworking much of their unpublished writings and set out to frame issues of their time in their own philosophical élan. The result was a bestselling edition of the Almanac. Despite owing much of its success to the inclusion of “bawdy lithographs popular at the time”, Roget and Comptoir knew they had created something that would be an important instrument to distribute their ideas and agendas as well as a handy way to press flowers or prop open doors.

Following this success, a committee was formed from members of the Société du Bella Macchina to oversee the almanac’s production and the creation of a legal defense fund. The legacy of that edition are still seen in the current issue. Sections on Food, Health, and Film originated from that year and have become a significant portion of the almanac. Rather than having no original content, the almanac is now more than seventy percent original, with the other thirty percent being simply letters that are coincidentally arranged to form words and sentences that bear only a passing resemblance to articles published

elsewhere and is not in any way indicative of any pre-formed intent to plagiarize.*

Our goal has been and remains, to paraphrase Roget's words**, not to hide from Life but to actively find it. If this publication aids as a guide to that discovery then we have done our job***.

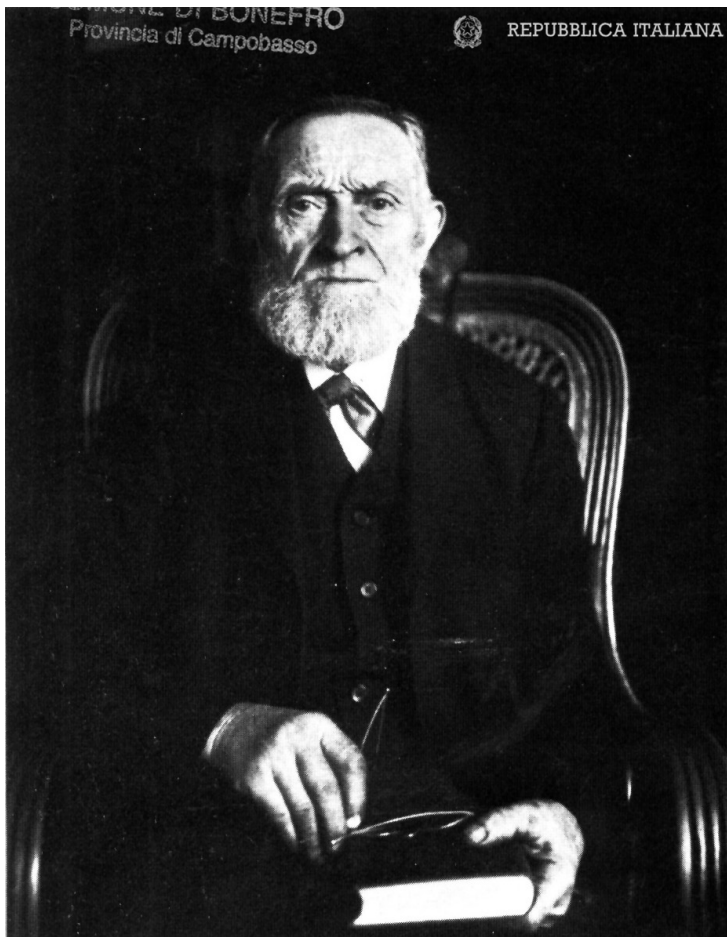
Serge Report,
Secretary General, Société de Bella Macchina,
December, 2011



*By advice of the Society of Bella Macchina Annual Almanac of General Knowledge Legal Defense Fund Committee

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***...and we expect restitution for completion of this labour to be paid by money order or registered bank statement to the Office of the Society of Bella Macchina Annual Almanac of General Knowledge Legal Defense Fund Committee. All personal cheques declined.



Philippe Comptoir, said to be largely responsible for the Almanac's first mostly original edition has often been quoted as "greatly regretting" ever meeting Pere Roget.

Image via Archivi, Italian State Archives

FOOD

101 Head Starts on the Day

By MARK BITTMAN

For cooks, most Thanksgiving problems are brought about by the sheer number of dishes competing for the stove: It's not easy to roast a turkey and sweet potatoes for 20 at the same time. The best solution is to make food in advance, like one of the dishes that follow.

Unlike my earlier 101 compendiums, this one has some recipes that take an hour or more. Still, most are pretty quick. Almost all can be served at room temperature, although the soups should be reheated. Salting to taste is always a given. And if I don't specify a temperature, "roast" or "bake" means a 375-degree oven.

RELISHES, CHUTNEYS AND JAMS

1. Onion-Pumpkinseed Relish: Roast thick slices of red onion with olive oil until softened and nicely browned. Chop, then toss with minced chives, toasted pumpkinseeds and a little more olive oil.

2. Apricot-Tomato Chutney: Combine chunks of dried apricot and fresh tomato, a splash of apple cider, brown sugar, ginger, cloves and a touch of curry powder; bring to a boil, reduce the

heat and cook for about 20 minutes.

3. Red Onion Jam with Red Wine and Rosemary: Thinly slice red onions and cook them in olive oil until very soft. Add chopped rosemary and red wine, and cook until the jam thickens.

4. Onion Jam with Bacon and Bourbon: Thinly slice red onions and cook in olive oil with chopped bacon until soft. Add a little bourbon and brown sugar to taste and cook until the jam thickens.

5. Apple Chutney: Cook big chunks of peeled, cored apple with a little apple cider, Dijon or whole-grain mustard and chopped sage until the chutney thickens. Don't cook it until it becomes apple sauce unless you want to.

6. Cranberry-Corn Sauce: Cook a bag of fresh cranberries with about a cup of corn kernels, some chopped scallions, 1/4 cup brown sugar (or to taste) and a splash of water, just until thick.

7. Cranberry-Orange Sauce: Cook a bag of fresh cranberries with orange and lemon zest, cut up (peeled) orange segments, 1/4 cup sugar (or to taste) and a bit of minced jalapeño or chipotle.

8. Cranberry-Beet Sauce: Put equal amounts shredded beets and fresh cranberries in a saucepan with a small splash of orange juice, orange zest and honey or maple syrup to taste. Cook until thick.

9. Prune Relish: Put pitted prunes, fresh mango, a little cider vinegar and sugar to taste in a saucepan. Cook for 30 minutes, adding chopped fresh ginger to taste about halfway through.

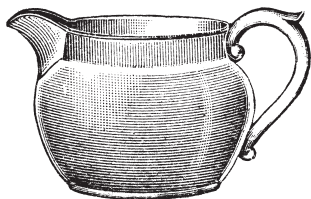
10. Ginger-Apricot Chutney: Put dried apricots in a saucepan, cover with water and bring to a boil. Add lemon juice, minced fresh chili, grated ginger, a couple of cloves and a pinch of

cayenne. Cook until thick.

11. Tomato-Corn Jam: In a saucepan, cook roughly chopped Roma or cherry tomatoes with fresh or frozen corn kernels, a minced chili and some sugar and lime juice to taste, until the jam thickens.

12. Garlic-Rosemary Figs: Soak dried figs, stems removed, in warm water until plump; drain and halve. Heat rosemary and lightly smashed (and peeled) garlic with olive oil on medium-low heat, until softened. Add figs, along with some fresh orange juice. Cook until saucy.





SOUPS

13. Sauté sliced shallots in olive oil, then add chunks of butternut squash, some rosemary and chicken stock or water to cover. As the soup simmers, bake strips of prosciutto until crisp. Purée the soup, swirl in some cream if you like and serve topped with crumbled prosciutto.

14. Steam or poach 2 cups of pumpkin cubes until tender. Meanwhile, sauté 1 cup sliced shiitake mushroom caps in vegetable oil with a few drops of sesame oil. Boil 4 cups water and whisk some of it with $\frac{1}{3}$ to $\frac{1}{2}$ cup of miso. Stir miso mixture, pumpkin and mushrooms into water and heat everything through, then serve, drizzled with more sesame oil.

15. Thai Squash Soup: Simmer cubed winter squash, minced garlic, chili and ginger in coconut milk, plus stock or water to cover, until soft. Purée if you like. Just before serving, add chopped cilantro, lime juice and zest, and toasted chopped peanuts.

16. Sauté equal amounts chopped, peeled apples and onions in butter until soft. Add stock or water to cover, then simmer for 10 minutes. Cool and purée. Serve sprinkled with Stilton or other blue cheese.

17. Sauté chopped onion in butter, then chunks of sweet potato and stock or water to cover. Simmer until the sweet potatoes can be pierced with a knife, then add chopped kale and cook until wilted.

18. Hot and Sour Vegetable Soup: Sauté chopped onions and garlic in vegetable oil until soft. Add chopped or shredded carrots, cabbage, and daikon or turnip, frozen corn, chopped boxed tomatoes with their juice and stock to cover; bring to a boil. Simmer for 15 minutes, then finish with about a tablespoon of rice wine vinegar per 2 cups of soup and loads of black pepper.

19. Sauté chopped onions, garlic, celery and carrots in olive oil, then add chopped tomatoes (boxed are fine) with their juice, lentils and stock or water to cover. When everything is soft, add a squeeze of lemon juice or a splash of red wine vinegar. Garnish with parsley.

20. Sauté ground or chopped lamb in a little oil, until it begins to brown, then add chopped onion, carrot and garlic and cook until the lamb is crisp. Add split peas, a bay leaf and stock or water to cover. Cook until the peas fall apart.

21. Brown a little crumbled or sliced sausage in olive oil; a sprinkle of fennel seeds is good, too. Add chopped escarole, cooked white beans with their juice, and stock or water to cover. Simmer until the greens are tender and the beans are warmed through. Garnish with olive oil or Parmesan.

22. Trim and halve brussels sprouts (if very large, quarter them) and roast with sliced onion, lots of peeled garlic cloves, chopped fresh sage and enough olive oil to coat. When sprouts are tender, transfer to a pot, add stock or water to cover, bring to a boil and simmer for 10 minutes. You can purée this or not. In any case, serve with grated Parmesan and more chopped sage.

23. Sauté leeks in butter until soft but not browned, then add cubed waxy potatoes, a little sage and stock or water to cover. Simmer until tender, purée and finish with about a cup of cream for each 6 cups of soup. Serve hot or cold, garnished with chives (if cold, call it vichyssoise).

STUFFINGS AND GRAINS

24. Combine a little cooked wild rice with much more cooked quinoa; sauté crumbled sweet Italian sausage with onion and fresh rosemary. Toss together. Bake in an oiled dish or use as stuffing.

25. Dice fennel bulb and onions and sauté in butter or olive oil (or both) until softened. Add dried cranberries, with a hit of not-too-dry white wine or water. Stir in cooked rice, along with more butter or oil if necessary. Bake in an oiled dish or use as stuffing.

26. Chop corn bread into cubes. Sauté cherry tomatoes, scallions and corn kernels in butter or oil. Deglaze the pan with beer, then empty the pan over the corn bread. Bake in an oiled dish or use as stuffing.

27. Cranberry Polenta Cakes: Make polenta with half milk, half water; stir in chopped fresh or dried cranberries. When thick, pour onto a sheet tray and let cool. Cut into squares and sauté or broil until slightly crisp. Drizzle with honey.

28. Toss cooked Israeli couscous with toasted pecans, orange zest and juice, chopped mint, cider vinegar and honey. Bake in an oiled dish or use as stuffing.

29. Toss cooked black rice with grated sweet potatoes (raw or sautéed in butter or oil), chopped dried apricots and a vinaigrette with honey and grated ginger.

30. Cook brown rice until just shy of done. Drain and mix with an equal amount of ground turkey and a little chopped fresh sage and chopped dried cherries. Form into patties and sauté or bake, turning once, until crisp and cooked all the way through.
31. Combine cooked wild rice with caramelized onions (nearly burnt onions are almost as good, and faster), chopped figs and fresh rosemary. Bake in an oiled dish or use as stuffing.
32. Cook couscous in stock or water. With a fork, stir in cinnamon, chopped mint, lightly sautéed pine nuts and melted butter. Bake in an oiled dish or use as stuffing.
33. Cook Israeli couscous in stock or water. With a fork, stir in chopped, pitted Kalamata or other olives, chopped green onions and diced, poached or roasted sweet potatoes. Dress with a vinaigrette.
34. Combine cooked bulgur with chopped or grated apple, minced orange rind, grated ginger and chopped parsley. Bake in an oiled dish, use as stuffing or serve as a salad.
35. Pumpkin-Noodle Kugel: Cook a half-pound of egg noodles in salted water until not quite done; drain and put them into a buttered baking dish. Whisk together 4 cups milk, 4 eggs, 1 cup puréed cooked pumpkin (canned is fine), 1/4 cup melted butter and a pinch each of cinnamon and salt. Pour over the noodles and sprinkle with bread crumbs (or, for added kitsch, corn flake crumbs). Bake 45 minutes to an hour, or until a knife inserted into the middle comes out clean.
36. Boil peeled sweet potatoes and purée in a food processor, thinning with cooking water or cream until saucy. Add chopped garlic and unsweetened pure peanut butter and purée until smooth. Boil soba noodles until just done and toss with the purée until the noodles are lightly coated; garnish with

chopped scallions. Serve at room temperature or cold.

37. Sauté crumbled sweet Italian sausage with cubes of butternut squash in a bit of oil. Toss in cooked farro and dress with more oil and lemon juice. Serve as a salad or toss with grated Parmesan and use as a stuffing.



VEGETABLE SIDE DISHES

38. Trim cremini or portobello mushrooms and chop stems. Sauté stems in butter or olive oil with chopped prosciutto, onions, chopped fresh herbs (rosemary, sage, parsley, etc.) and coarse fresh bread crumbs. Stuff spoonfuls of the mixture into mushroom caps; roast until tender.

39. Trim cremini or portobello mushrooms and chop stems. Cook crumbled sausage in olive oil until it begins to brown, then add stems and chopped onion and garlic. Mix with cooked rice, an egg for every 2 cups of mushrooms and enough bread crumbs and grated Parmesan to bind slightly. Spoon the stuffing into the mushroom caps and bake until tender.

40. Peel and trim pearl onions and toss them with a mixture of minced ginger, garlic, chilies and peanut oil. (A little sesame oil is good, too.) Roast until nicely caramelized, then drizzle with soy sauce.

41. Toss chunks of sweet potato and 2-inch lengths of scallion with neutral or peanut oil. (Again, a little sesame oil helps.) Roast, turning as necessary, until nicely caramelized; drizzle with soy.

42. Brussels Sprout Sliders: Trim and halve large brussels sprouts, toss with olive oil and roast at 400 degrees until tender but not mushy. Using the brussels sprout halves as you would hamburger buns, sandwich them around a piece of crispy bacon or ham, maybe a little caramelized onion, and a dab of whole grain mustard. Keep everything in place with toothpicks.

43. Toss chunks of butternut squash with butter and curry powder. Roast until half-tender, then stir in chunks of apple and some maple syrup. Cook, shaking the pan occasionally, until everything is nicely browned and tender.

44. Autumn Rolls: Shred sweet potatoes or carrots and brussels sprouts or cabbage. Roll them up with fresh sage or mint and some sprouts in rice paper. (Add sliced shrimp if you like.) Make a dipping sauce of soy, garlic, grated or minced ginger and honey.

45. Render some chopped bacon in a bit of oil, then add apple chunks; cook until nearly soft. Meanwhile, bake halved and seeded acorn, butternut or delicata squash until they start to soften. Fill squash with apple mixture and finish baking.

46. Chop and toss together equal amounts of beets and carrots; add chopped shiitakes, sesame oil and hot pepper flakes (preferably Korean). Roast until tender and sprinkle with sesame seeds and soy sauce.

47. Vegetable Torta: Roast sliced eggplant, zucchini, tomatoes and onions. Stack in layers with fresh basil in a well-oiled springform or roasting pan and top with bread crumbs or Parmesan (or both); bake for 20 minutes or so.

48. Cut sweet potatoes into wedges; boil until tender. Drain and toss with olive oil. Wrap each with a prosciutto slice and a sage leaf, then roast until browned.

49. Halve and seed acorn, butternut or delicata squash and roast until squash begins to soften. Meanwhile, cook bulgur, drain and toss with coarsely chopped pine nuts and currants. Add a bit of the stuffing to each squash half and sprinkle with cinnamon. Bake until squash is tender.

50. Cook chopped onions in olive oil until soft. Add chopped spinach and a handful of raisins — maybe a little port, too — and cook until wilted and almost dry. Roasted pine nuts are good on top.

51. Poach broccoli rabe or stemmed greens like collard leaves,

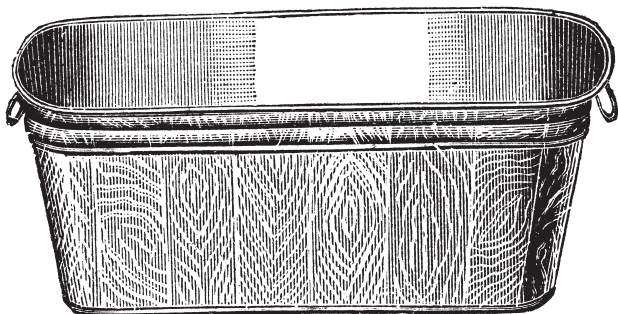
then drain and chop. Combine with chopped water chestnuts and diced mushrooms in a skillet with sesame or peanut oil, minced garlic and hot pepper flakes. Cook until vegetables soften and dry a bit.

52. Pickled Collards: Boil 4 cups water and 1/2 cup vinegar with a tablespoon of sugar, a teaspoon of salt and a pinch of red chili flakes. Stem and chop or shred collard greens, pack them into a glass canning jar and pour hot liquid over the greens. Cover, cool and refrigerate at least three days.

53. Steam cauliflower florets and toss with olive oil. Roast with peeled whole garlic cloves and chopped bacon at 400 degrees for 20 minutes. Chopped parsley is a worthwhile addition.

54. Cook onion, curry powder and chopped ginger in oil until onion is soft; meanwhile, steam cauliflower florets until nearly tender. Add cauliflower to onion mixture, along with raisins; cover and cook until the cauliflower softens.

55. Steam and salt edamame. Whisk soy and honey together in a small saucepan over low heat. Add grated ginger and a bit of cornstarch, stir until slightly thickened and pour over edamame.



56. Cook lentils, thyme sprigs and chopped carrots in a pot with water to cover until tender; drain and remove thyme. Cook chopped onions in oil until soft; add chopped kale and allow to wilt. Add lentils, stir to combine and cook until kale is tender. Add chopped parsley.

57. Zucchini and Potato Pancakes: Grate zucchini and potatoes; squeeze to drain. Combine with grated Parmesan, one beaten egg for every 2 cups of the vegetables, a little oregano and flour or fine bread crumbs until the mixture is sturdy. Shape into patties and shallow-fry until browned on both sides.

58. Pour a mixture of cooked white beans (with a little cooking or canning liquid) and grated, sautéed winter squash into an oiled baking dish. Mix together fresh bread crumbs, dots of butter and chopped fresh sage and spread over the top; broil until golden brown.

59. Blanch thinly sliced potato and leeks until tender but not mushy; drain well. Layer the vegetables in an oiled or buttered baking dish, then top with a mixture of bread crumbs and lightly sautéed chopped bacon (some cheese mixed in is pretty good, too). Broil until golden brown.

60. Marshmallow topping for adults: Roast or boil chunks of sweet potato, put them in an oiled baking dish, top with dots of cream cheese, and sprinkle with a mixture of brown sugar, chopped pecans and chopped fresh sage. Broil until lightly browned.

61. Cook a lot of chopped fennel in a skillet with butter until pretty much tender. Transfer to a baking pan and add milk, half-and-half or cream to about halfway up the fennel. Sprinkle with thyme and shaved pecorino, then bake at 400 degrees for about 20 minutes, until bubbly and thickened.

62. Spinach-Cheese Pie: Sauté chopped garlic and 2 pounds of chopped spinach in plenty of olive oil until wilted and tender. Remove from the heat and stir in 1/2 to 3/4 cup crumbled feta or firm goat cheese, and a tablespoon chopped dill or mint. Layer 5 sheets phyllo dough in a greased baking dish, brushing each one with olive oil before adding the next. Spread the spinach over the phyllo, then top with 5 more phyllo sheets, each brushed with olive oil. Tuck in the edges if they extend over the ends of the pan, slash the top of the pie diagonally in a few places and bake until golden brown, 30 to 40 minutes.

63. Slice potatoes thin and layer them in a nonstick skillet. Dot with butter and add enough half-and-half or milk to come three-quarters of the way to the top of the potatoes. Bring to a boil and simmer until liquid reduces a bit, about 10 minutes. Transfer to a 400-degree oven for 10 minutes until just brown, reduce to 300 degrees and cook until tender, 10 to 20 minutes more.

64. Mushroom Bread Pudding: Put 6 cups of good bread (day-old is best) cut into 1-inch chunks into a buttered baking dish. Beat 4 eggs with 2 cups of milk and 1/2 cup grated Parmesan and pour over the bread. Sauté 4 cups of sliced mushrooms until tender with a teaspoon or two fresh thyme leaves and mix into the bread. Bake until just set, about 40 minutes.

65. Sauté garlic and pine nuts in olive oil until the garlic softens; add trimmed, blanched, chopped broccoli rabe (or broccoli). Put into a buttered baking dish, top with Parmesan and bread crumbs and bake until the topping browns.

SALADS

66. In a blender, whip olive oil, lime juice, a little red onion and a stemmed and seeded jalapeño. Toss with lots of shredded raw sweet potato, diced red bell pepper and chopped cilantro.



67. Sprinkle shelled pumpkin or squash seeds with a little chili powder; roast, shaking occasionally, until lightly browned. Combine with grated sweet potatoes (raw or lightly sautéed in butter or oil), raisins and a vinaigrette made with red wine vinegar, olive oil, Dijon mustard, a touch of honey and maybe a little more chili powder.

68. Peel sweet potatoes and boil until tender, drain and cool; dice. Treat carrots the same way. Make sauce of Dijon mustard, olive oil, cider vinegar and chopped scallions. Toss all together.

69. Shred carrots and cabbage (red, savoy or Napa). In a blender, whip olive oil, lemon or lime juice, a stemmed and seeded jalapeño, garlic and cilantro or parsley. Toss with the vegetables.

70. Blanch, shock in cold water, then julienne green beans, daikon and carrots; chill. Whisk soy sauce with honey and lemon to taste; pour over vegetables.

71. Add chopped scallions and chopped kalamata or other good black olives to cooked and drained white beans. Dress with white wine vinegar, olive oil and fresh thyme, marjoram or oregano.

72. Trim and shred raw brussels sprouts (the slicer on a food

processor works well). Toss with lemon vinaigrette and shaved or grated Parmesan. Crumbled bacon, as usual, is a welcome visitor here.

73. Roast beets until tender, then peel and cut into chunks. Toss with olive oil, sherry vinegar, toasted chopped hazelnuts and crumbled blue cheese.

74. Trim and chop kale; salt and squeeze and knead until wilted and reduced in volume, about 5 minutes. Rinse, dry and toss with olive oil, lemon juice, chopped dried apples and toasted pine nuts.

75. Wild Rice Greek Salad: Toss cooked wild rice (or mix wild and white) with chopped tomatoes, cucumber, red onion, kalamata olives and crumbled feta. Dress with olive oil, lemon juice, parsley and mint.

76. Grate apples (red are nice; leave skin on), radish and celery. Roast pistachios and chop. Dress all with olive oil, shallots, grainy mustard, red wine vinegar and a pinch of sugar.

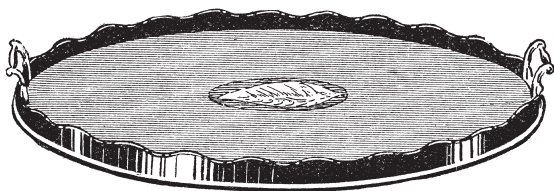
77. Trim and dice fresh tomatillos; peel and julienne jicama (or daikon or kohlrabi). For dressing, combine lemon and lime juices, olive oil and chopped cilantro. Pour over salad, top with toasted sesame seeds.

78. Slowly render cubed pork rind or turkey skin until crisp (for skin, start with a bit of oil or turkey fat). Thin sour cream with buttermilk and stir in minced parsley and garlic, black pepper and a little white wine vinegar. Arrange frisée on platter; top with dressing and cracklings.

79. Cook chopped pears in a covered saucepan with a tiny bit of water until soft. Purée, but not too fine. In your smallest pan, boil a few tablespoons of balsamic vinegar with a little brown sugar; lower heat and reduce by half. Spoon the pear sauce over endive leaves and finish with toasted sliced almonds and

the balsamic reduction.

80. Trim and coarsely chop chard (rainbow makes for a gorgeous salad) and combine with white beans and chopped scallions. Dressing is minced ginger, a suspicion of garlic, olive oil and cider vinegar.



BREADS AND CRACKERS

81. Tomato Pinwheels: Soak 1 cup dried tomatoes in hot water, drain and pulse in a food processor with 1 tablespoon olive oil and 1 tablespoon chopped fresh thyme (add water or oil if necessary). Combine 2 cups flour, 1 teaspoon salt, 3 teaspoons baking powder and 1 teaspoon baking soda with 4 tablespoons cold butter (use food processor or fingers). Stir in $\frac{3}{4}$ cup yogurt or buttermilk and gather the dough into a ball. Roll into a large rectangle on a floured surface, spread the tomatoes all over the dough and roll it up lengthwise. Cut the log crosswise into 1-inch slices, put them on a baking sheet and bake at 400 degrees until puffed and golden, 7 to 10 minutes.

82. Cornmeal Flatbread with Onion and Sage: Mix 1 cup cornmeal with 1 teaspoon salt; slowly whisk in 1 $\frac{1}{2}$ cups water. Cover and let sit for an hour (or up to 12 hours in the refrigerator). Put $\frac{1}{4}$ cup olive oil in a 12-inch ovenproof skillet along with a thinly sliced red onion; stir. Heat the skillet in a 400-degree oven for a few minutes, then stir and pour in the batter. Bake at 375 degrees until the flatbread is crisp at the edges and releases easily from the pan, about 45 minutes.

83. Onion-Rosemary Skillet Bread: In a 12-inch cast iron pan, sauté half a large, thinly sliced red onion in about 1/4 cup olive oil until soft and beginning to color. Combine a cup of whole wheat flour with 1 teaspoon salt and 1 tablespoon rosemary leaves; add 1 1/2 cups water and whisk until smooth. Pour the batter into the hot skillet and bake in a 450-degree oven until the flatbread is crisp on the edges and releases easily from the pan, about 30 to 40 minutes.

84. Sage Crackers: Pulse 1 cup flour, 1 teaspoon salt, 1/2 cup Parmesan and 4 tablespoons cold butter in a food processor. Add 1/4 cup cream and 1 tablespoon finely chopped sage. When just combined, roll as thinly as possible, score into squares, sprinkle with salt and bake at 400 degrees until golden. Let cool, then break into pieces.

85. Herbed Buttermilk Biscuits: Combine 3 cups flour, 2 tablespoons sugar, 4 teaspoons baking powder, 1 teaspoon salt, 1 teaspoon baking soda and 1 tablespoon fresh thyme leaves. Use your fingers to rub in 1 1/2 sticks of butter until the mixture resembles small peas. Add 1 cup buttermilk and stir until just combined. Drop large spoonfuls onto a baking sheet and bake at 425 degrees until golden, about 15 minutes.

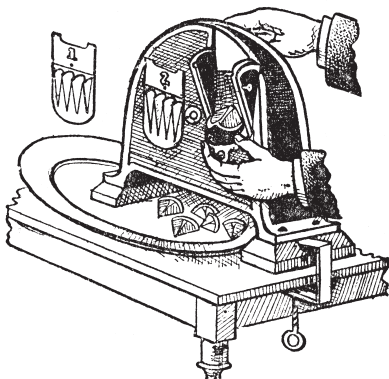
86. Spiced Muffins: Mix 2 cups flour, 1/4 cup sugar, 1/2 teaspoon salt, 1 tablespoon baking powder, 1 teaspoon ground cinnamon, 1/2 teaspoon each allspice and ground ginger, and a pinch of cloves. In another bowl, combine 1 egg, 1 cup milk and 3 tablespoons melted butter. Stir the wet ingredients into the dry until just combined, adding milk if the batter seems too dry. Spoon into greased muffin tins and bake for 20 to 25 minutes at 375 degrees or until done.

87. Combine 2 cups whole wheat with 2 cups white flour and 1 teaspoon each baking powder, baking soda and salt in a food processor. Pour in 1 1/2 cups buttermilk or thin yogurt, and pulse until a ball is formed. Knead for a minute (fold in 1/2 cup

raisins or currants at this point if you like), shape into a round loaf, slash the top in a few places and bake on a greased sheet for about 45 minutes, or until the bottom sounds hollow when you thump it.

88. Dill-Cheddar Puffs: Combine 1 cup water with 1/2 stick of butter and 1/2 teaspoon of salt in a saucepan over medium heat and bring to a boil. When the butter melts add 1 1/2 cups flour and cook, stirring, until the dough forms a ball, about 5 minutes. Turn off the heat, then add 3 eggs, one at a time, beating well until the mixture is glossy. Stir in 2 cups grated Cheddar and 2 tablespoon freshly chopped dill. Drop teaspoons of the batter on greased baking sheets and bake at 425 degrees until lightly browned, about 10 to 15 minutes.

89. Vegetable Crackers: Slice beets, sweet potatoes, plantains or parsnips or all of the above into 1/8-inch disks (a mandoline is helpful) and toss lightly in olive oil. Spread the slices on baking sheets, sprinkle with salt, pepper and, if you like, other seasonings and bake at 400 degrees for 10 to 12 minutes. When browned, flip the chips over and bake for another 10 minutes or so.



DESSERTS

90. Baked Apples: Combine chopped pecans and chopped dried fruit (raisins, dates, figs, cranberries all work) and toss with maple syrup and a sprinkle of cinnamon, allspice or nutmeg or all three. Fill the cavities of cored apples with the fruits and nuts, dot each with butter, put into a baking dish and roast about 30 minutes, until tender. Better with vanilla ice cream.

91. Pears in Red Wine: Simmer 2 cups red wine with 1/2 cup sugar, 2 cloves, a cinnamon stick and a few slices of ginger in a pot for a few minutes, then gently poach peeled and cored pears (use a spoon to hollow them from bottom), until soft. Cool or chill, and serve with a bit of the poaching liquid.

92. Cranberry Truffles: Heat 1/2 cup simple syrup and 1/2 cup bourbon or water; add 2 cups dried cranberries and steep until soft, 10 to 15 minutes. Drain, reserving the liquid. Pulse the fruit in a food processor, adding just enough liquid so the mixture comes together. Roll spoonfuls of the cranberry filling into balls, then roll them in cocoa, mixed with pulverized nuts if you like.

93. Pumpkin-Raisin-Ginger Turnovers: Mix puréed cooked pumpkin, raisins, chopped crystallized ginger and sugar. Brush a sheet of phyllo with melted butter and cut lengthwise into thirds. Put a spoonful of the filling at the top of each strip. Fold down to make a triangle and repeat, like folding a flag. Repeat with remaining filling. Brush the tops with butter and bake 20 to 30 minutes. Dust with powdered sugar.

94. Pumpkin-Tofu Pudding: Purée a package of silken tofu, 2 cups of cooked or canned pumpkin, simple syrup to taste, a splash of brandy and a pinch each of nutmeg and salt. Refrigerate until chilled.

95. Indian Pudding: Combine 3 cups of milk and 1/3 cup of cornmeal in a saucepan over medium heat. Bring to a simmer; stir in 1/3 cup of molasses, 1 tablespoon sugar, 1/4 teaspoon salt, 1 teaspoon ginger and 1/2 teaspoon cinnamon and simmer, stirring occasionally, until thick. Add 1 tablespoon of butter and stir until melted. Pour pudding into a buttered baking dish and bake at 300 degrees for about 2 hours, uncovered, until golden brown and set in the middle. Serve with ice cream or whipped cream.

96. Sweet Autumn Gratin: Combine cubed pumpkin or sweet potato with cranberries and hazelnuts in a buttered baking dish. Sprinkle with brown sugar and toss. Drizzle cream over all, dot with butter and bake until soft, bubbly and browned, 50 to 60 minutes. Re-warm before serving if you like.

97. Prunes With Hazelnuts: Simmer prunes in port with cloves and cinnamon until soft; remove prunes and reduce syrup. Strain over the prunes. Top them with whipped cream, and the cream with chopped toasted hazelnuts.

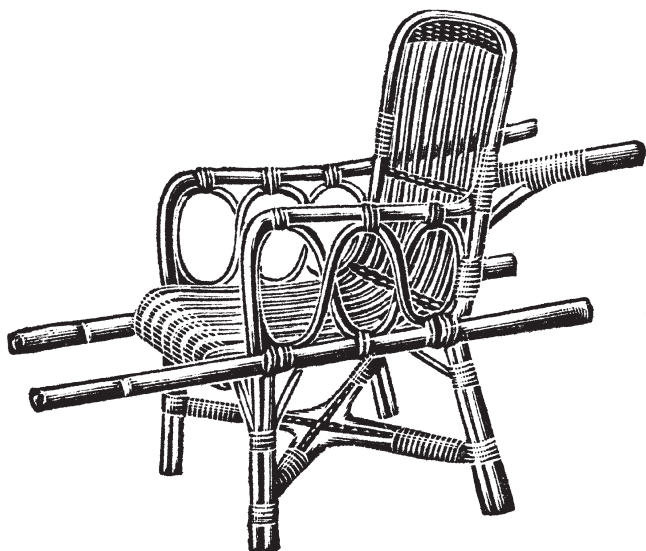
98. Chipotle Brittle: Cook 2 cups sugar and 2 tablespoons water in a deep saucepan over medium heat, stirring once in a while until golden. Off heat, stir in 2 cups peanuts or pumpkin-seeds and 1 or 2 mashed canned chipotle chilies with a bit of their adobo (more if you like things fiery). Quickly spread the mixture out on a buttered rimmed baking sheet and let cool before breaking into pieces.

99. Apple-Cranberry Crumble: Peel and slice 4 large tart apples. Toss with a cup of cranberries, the juice and zest of a lemon and 1/4 cup brandy, apple cider or water and put into a buttered baking dish. Pulse 1/2 cup cold butter, 1/2 cup oats, 1/2 cup walnuts or pecans, 1/2 cup flour, 3/4 cup brown sugar, 1 tablespoon cinnamon and 1/2 teaspoon ginger in a food processor until crumbly — not fine. Top the fruit with this and bake until bubbly, about 45 minutes.

100. Spiced Macaroons: Mix 3 cups shredded unsweetened coconut, 1 cup sugar, 1/2 teaspoon ground cardamom and a pinch of salt in a bowl. Stir in 3 lightly beaten egg whites and a teaspoon almond extract. Drop in small spoonfuls on baking sheet and bake at 350 degrees for about 15 minutes, or until golden on the edges.

101. Buy some cheese. Unwrap it and put it on a plate with some walnuts and fruit; let come to room temperature. Serve with good bread.

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Flourless Cheese Soufflé

2 tbsp Butter

7 Lg. Eggs separated

Pinch Cayenne Pepper

1/4 tsp Nutmeg

Salt and Pepper

5 oz. Cream Cheese

1 1/2 Cups of finely grated Gruyere or Swiss Cheese or cheddar

2 - 3 tbsp freshly grated Parmesan Cheese

Preheat the oven to 425F. Coat a 6 cup souffle dish with the butter, and sprinkle with the Parmesan cheese. Beat yolks and seasoning till fluffy. Add the cream cheese and beat until smooth and well combined. Add grated cheese.

In a clean bowl, beat egg whites to stiff peak stage, pour into whites – fold.

Spoon into prepared souffle dish and bake at 425 F for ten minutes. Reduce heat to 400 F and bake another 15 minutes.

For 2 qt souffle dish: 1 1/2 recipe.

Bake about 35 minutes(very loose middle) to 40 minutes.

Gluten-Free Rice and Millet Flour Crackers

I've been wanting to offer some gluten-free baked goods for some time, and crackers are a good place to start. I used a bit of butter to get a better texture, because when I used only olive oil, the resulting crackers were too dry.

1 3/4 cups rice flour (preferably brown rice flour)
3/4 cup plus 2 tablespoons millet flour (I make mine by grinding millet in a spice mill)
3/4 teaspoon salt
1 teaspoon sugar
1/4 cup water
2 large eggs
2 tablespoons unsalted butter, cut into 1/4-inch pieces
2 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil (or omit the butter and use 1/4 cup olive oil)
2 tablespoons seeds, like as sesame, charnushka (nigella) or poppy seeds

1. Preheat the oven to 375 degrees. Line two baking sheets with parchment. Combine the flours, salt and sugar in the bowl of a food processor fitted with a steel blade. Pulse a few times to combine. Add the butter, and pulse until the flour mixture is crumbly. Combine the water, eggs and olive oil in a measuring

cup. Turn on the processor. Add the liquids with the machine running, and process until the dough comes together. The dough will be soft. If it seems wet, add another tablespoon or two of rice flour.

2. Remove from the food processor. Divide into two portions, and roll out each portion into thin sheets. Sprinkle on the seeds. Using the rolling pin, gently press the topping into the surface of the dough. Cut the dough into squares or rectangles, and transfer to the baking sheets.

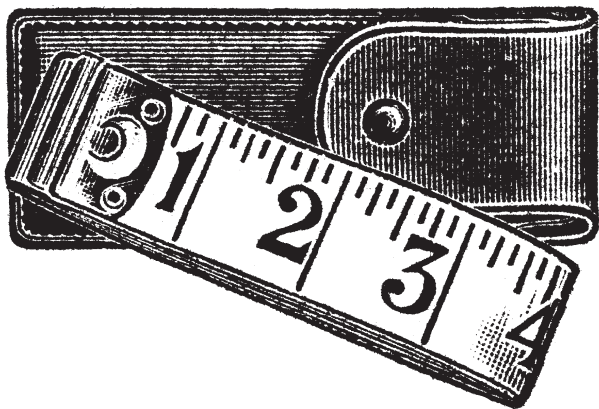
3. Bake 15 minutes or until lightly browned and crisp.

Yield: Eighty to 90 crackers.

Advance preparation: These crackers will keep for about a week in an airtight container.

Nutritional information per cracker: 26 calories; 0 grams saturated fat; 1 gram polyunsaturated fat; 1 gram monounsaturated fat; 0 milligrams cholesterol; 2 grams carbohydrates; 1 gram dietary fiber; 25 milligrams sodium; 1 gram protein

Martha Rose Shulman is the author of "The Very Best of Recipes for Health."



***“Unquiet meals make ill digestions,
Thereof the raging fire of fever bred,
And what’s a fever but a fit of madness?”***

Comedy of Errors. Act V
William Shakespeare

***“Allow me a moment’s silence Mr Hearst, sir,
I’m having a digestive crisis and must focus on
repressing it’s expression”***

E. B. Farnum

Les biscuits de Nonna

2 cups flour

1/2 tsp. salt

1/2 tsp. pepper

2 tsp. baking powder

1/3 cup shortening

1 cup cheddar cheese

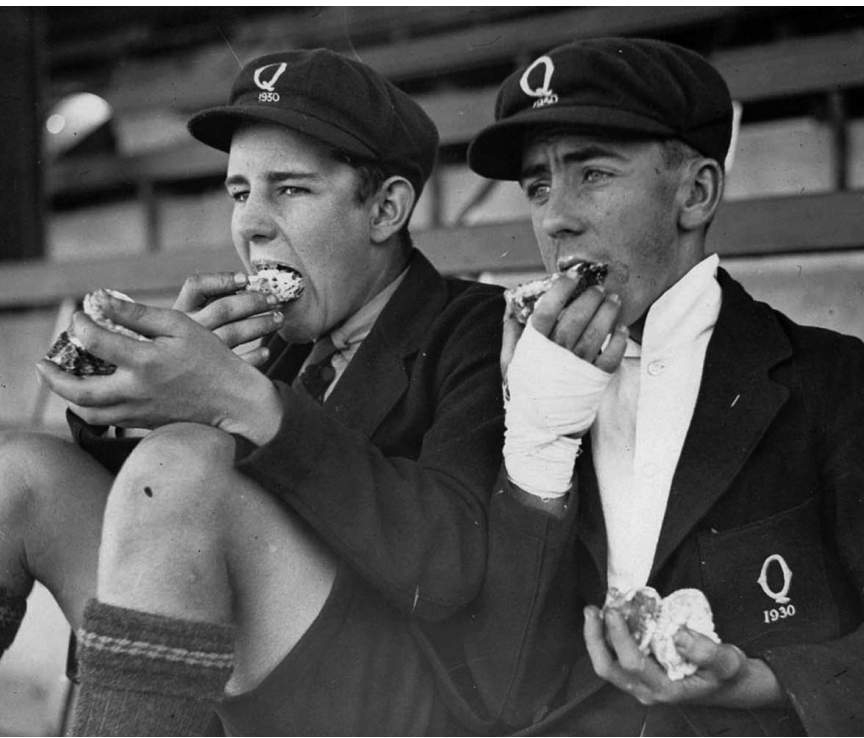
1 tbsp mixed dried herbs (whatever is on hand) or chopped
green onions

2/3 cup milk

Cut shortening into flour with baking power and salt/pepper.
Add herbs and cheese. Mix in milk and stir until blended.

Drop mixture with tablespoon onto an ungreased cookie sheet.

Bake at 425 F for about 25 minutes or until browned.





Sunday, Aug. 28, 2011

“Scary Gary” Roberts becomes diet guru for young NHLers

From the Globe and Mail
James Mirtle

Philadelphia Flyers prospect Brayden Schenn was standing in his local grocery store recently, uncertain of what he could buy to fit in with his radical new training regimen this off-season. So he snapped a picture of a questionable deli meat with his smart phone, sent it off to a Toronto-area number and added a brief message: “Can I eat this?”

Which is when Gary Roberts, hockey’s diet guru, leapt into action.

“I spend half my time on the phone – that’s the kind of texts I receive,” Mr. Roberts said. “Can I eat these cold cuts? Can I eat these beans? It’s pretty funny.”

Since his retirement from the NHL two years ago, the 45-year-old Mr. Roberts has become almost legendary for his ability to train and pump up young prospects. His first disciple, Tampa Bay Lightning star Steven Stamkos, is the perfect example: He added 15 pounds of muscle after his rookie season and led the league in goals with 51 as a sophomore.

Ever since, players have been lining up at Mr. Roberts’s door – 42 pro-level players are training with him this summer – but few realize that the most extreme part of his strategy involves the kitchen instead of the gym.

Players are assigned a diet that has no wheat, no sugar, no soy and no processed or packaged foods. Everything must be organic, from deli meats on up, and the 26-item list of what players should eat includes goat’s milk, sunflower sprouts, mung beans, salba, chia and hemp.

While their workouts at Mr. Roberts’s High Performance Centre gym north of Toronto get most of the outside attention, players find that it’s what they eat that’s the most important part of the program.

“It’s nutrition, then body maintenance – treatment or yoga – and then it’s the training. If you don’t do the first two, the third one’s not going to work out that well,” says Mr. Roberts. The diet has earned a few grumbles from NHL players, with some saying it’s bland or hard to follow – never mind the cost for those not yet making millions. But those concerns never reach the ears of the man who became known as “Scary Gary” throughout his career.

Most players buy in simply because it’s Mr. Roberts giving the advice, and they all know the story of how he resurrected his career using the radical diet and exercise plan after chronic

neck pain had forced him to retire at age 30. Mr. Roberts went on to play 11 more seasons for five NHL teams, carrying his various organic trail mixes and snacks with him everywhere he went – and getting curious looks from teammates for it – before he finally retired on his own terms as one of the oldest players in the league.

“The only way I was going to be able to come back and play was through a change in lifestyle,” he said, crediting trainers and nutritionists he knew at the time for pointing him in the right direction. “I didn’t change anything about the way I played. I just had to change my body to be able to take the pounding I took every night.

“Through guys like Lorne Goldenberg, Charles Poliquin and Sam Bock, they changed the way I looked at nutrition. And I feel better today at 45 than I did at 30 when I retired.”

Fifteen years later, Mr. Goldenberg chuckles when asked about Mr. Roberts’s fanatical level of commitment to the diet. He’s quick to point out, however, that the average person can take away a lot from what Mr. Roberts is preaching.

“He’s on another planet with this stuff,” said Mr. Goldenberg, who still trains NHL players out of the Athletic Conditioning Centre in Ottawa. “It is a high-performance diet more than anything, but many of the principles we use at the training centre involve nutrition that everyone should be following. “People need to eat the right fruits and vegetables, the right balance of protein. It’s very easy during the day to just grab a granola bar, which is just packed with sugar and additives. ... A more optimal snack might be some raw almonds with organic cranberries, for example.”

For Mr. Roberts, passing along what he learned about nutrition to a new generation of players has become his personal passion, one he will continue during the season by beginning to work with minor hockey teams in addition to the 16 junior

players he already has under his wing.

So many pros are now turning to him, meanwhile, that Mr. Roberts has had to turn players away. A considerable portion of the league's young players will be on the diet this season, with potentially as many as 10 per cent of NHL regulars 25 and under eating the Gary way.

In addition to Mr. Schenn and Mr. Stamkos, Jeff Skinner, James Neal, Jordan Staal and Cody Hodgson are among the more high-profile players who have bought in.

"I've learned a lot from him," Mr. Schenn said. "I've always tried to pay attention to nutrition the past three or four years, but this is another level.

"I thought if it was working for the other guys, I would try it out as well. You see what they do and you push yourself to their level. That's what I wanted."

THE DIET

In conjunction with Nature's Emporium health-food store, NHLer-turned-fitness-guru Gary Roberts has come up with a menu plan and shopping list for young players . Here's what he tells followers of his plan to incorporate into their diet:

- Full-fat yogurt, pressed cottage cheese, goat's milk (3.5% MF), organic cream cheese, raw or cured parmigiano
- Organic steak, natural sausage, organic chicken, wild-caught canned tuna, wild salmon
- Kale, baby greens (Asian mix, root mix, mache), sprouts (sunflower, pea, arugula), avocado, chickpeas, mung beans, lentils
- Quinoa, brown rice, brown-rice pasta, salba, chia, hemp, sunflower seeds
- Brazil nuts, walnuts, almonds, coconut
- Extra-virgin olive oil (and coconut oil)
- Variety of other fresh fruits (including goji berries) and vegetables
- Stay away from processed and unhealthy packaged foods

Below are four of his many recipes, as well as what he tells players to buy at the grocery store:

CHICKEN CACCIATORE

Place naturally raised chicken breast and thigh in baking dish. Add fresh oregano or basil, two chopped tomatoes, a chopped onion, a chopped garlic clove and 1/4 cup black or green olives. Bake uncovered for 45 minutes or until done.

Serve with spelt pasta or brown rice or roasted Italian vegetables (zucchini, pepper, onion, garlic).

ROASTED RED PEPPER MAYONNAISE

4 red, yellow or orange peppers, a garlic clove, 4 tablespoons olive oil, sea salt

Bake peppers in half the olive oil at 400F until soft. Remove burnt skin. Place all ingredients in blender or food processor and blend until chunky or smooth (depending on preference). Use to marinate meats, as a vegetable dip, with pasta or as mayonnaise for sandwiches and wraps.

GARY ROBERTS'S MOLTEN CHOCOLATE MOUSSE

1/4 cup of cacao powder, four bananas and a little water. Blend until extremely well mixed.

Steve Stamkos's Mango Mousse

1 large mango, 1 tablespoon salba or chia seeds, 1 tablespoon agave nectar or maple syrup, 1 tablespoon coconut oil (optional).

Blend until extremely well mixed

November 21, 2011

Turkeys and Thanksgiving in America

The New Yorker
by Adam Gopnik

Good, or at least voguish, eating these days is often shaped by constraints of the seasonal and the local, so let us consider, this season, the turkey, surely the most local of American birds. *Meleagris gallopavo* is the wild turkey native to North America, the distant parent of the forty-six million turkeys that will be eaten across the country next week. Many of those turkeys will be dry, and most, truth be told, would be disappointing without a bolster of stuffing and cranberries and creamy gravy. Fighting the bird's natural tendency to not taste very good, American cooks have tried a thousand ways to make it better. The laboriously basted turkey, which was never quite moist, gave way to the long-brined turkey, which was always too salty, and has, in turn, given way to the deep-fried turkey, which is excellent but demands a large, scary vat of boiling oil. Turkeys, for their part, now have their own pressure groups, which protest the often horrific conditions in which industrialized birds are raised and "dressed"—i.e., killed, plucked, and made ready for the oven. In this gloomy national moment, it is even possible to see in the Thanksgiving turkey—with its artificially swelled breast, its easily distracted mind, and its undignified end—a symbol of the supposed-to-be-declining country that it feeds.

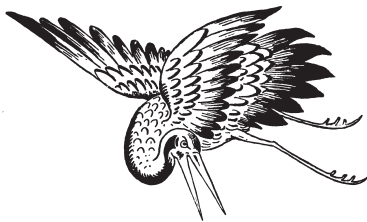
Yet the turkey has, like its country, known more glorious moments. Benjamin Franklin disliked the choice of the bald eagle as the national bird, and it was in a letter to his daughter, in 1784, that he proposed putting the turkey in its place. The eagle, Franklin points out, is "a bird of bad moral character. He does not get his living honestly. . . . He watches the labor of the fishing hawk; and when that diligent bird has at length taken a fish, and is bearing it to his nest for the support of his mate and young ones, the bald eagle pursues him, and takes it from him." Truly, a one-per-cent kind of bird. The turkey, however, represented to Franklin the best of bourgeois Philadelphia values. The turkey is not only a native; "He is besides, though a little vain and silly, a bird of courage, and would not hesitate to attack a grenadier of the British guards who should presume to invade his farm yard with a red coat on."

That was not a finger-on-the-nose bit of Old Ben playfulness. Earlier in the turkey letter, Franklin is arguing hard about whether there ought to be hereditary legacies in American life, and he makes the keen point that there are two kinds of honor in the world: the Old World's "descending honor," in which people pass on their goods and their status to their children, and the New World's "ascending honor," in which children strive to impress their parents by moving up in society on their own. For Franklin, ascending honor—what we would now call meritocratic advancement—is the American goal, and descending honor the American danger. The eagle is to him an avian example of descending honor in action: looking classy but swooping down to feed on the helpless. The turkey is the bird of ascending honor: silly and vain, pluming itself too much on the small stuff but sharing the feed with the other birds in the yard and ready to give hell to anyone who tries to make trouble.

Franklin's two-bird theory seems to fit the nation even better today than it did in 1784: in a country supposedly devoted to ascending honor, a lot of people have suddenly decided that descending honor, the thieving eagle, seems to be running the show, or yard. (Eagle-lovers claim that this libels eagles, but then they would say that.) When there's a permanent confiscatory class of eagles, the turkey can't find a spot on the national seal. Maybe it's no wonder that on this Thanksgiving more radical eaters will be putting on their tables "heritage" turkeys—free in range, trim of breast, and revolutionary in resonance. You are what you eat, and if we eat our heritage perhaps we can return to it.

The national-bird question was not, in those symbol-building days of the eighteenth century, the only instance in which issues of food touched on issues of freedom. The phrase that Franklin, John Adams, and Thomas Jefferson chose for the motto on the national seal, "E Pluribus Unum"—one out of many—was familiar to the founders from a popular British magazine of the day, but it likely derived from a recipe found in

a once famous poem often attributed to Virgil, “Moretum.” The poem describes a farmer making something rather like pesto: he pestles together cheese and garlic and herbs and oil, and sees that, though the whole is something quite new, each little green or cheesy bit doesn’t completely blend in but keeps its own character. Out of many, one—without betraying the many. So the Thanksgiving meal should really be turkey with pesto—homegrown vanity and courage served with a pluralist topping. And perhaps that’s the deeper holiday truth, known to the generations of immigrants who have embraced Thanksgiving: ascending honor depends on ever-widening circles of taste. There is surely some Franklinian comfort to be found in the thought that the best way to make the turkey tastier is not to look backward to the old ways but to look forward and outward—to hybridize, even to globalize, the bird, to unite the turkey with tastes a little alien to it (as we do every day with the great American sandwich the turkey club). Turkey tacos and turkey curry and a turkey sandwich with a poetic Italian sauce are the flavors of ascending honor, of cooks striving to make the world new. In the story of the turkey’s metamorphosis—and in the metaphoric idea that began with Ben Franklin’s letter—there may even be a hope that a seeming decline will turn out to be a prelude to better times. After all, as every Thanksgiving lover knows, it’s the leftovers, in the days that follow the wearying blast, that provide the most delicious meals.



HEALTH





Christopher Furlong/Getty Images

Sunday, may 01, 2011

55 Hours Later

Peter Rogers

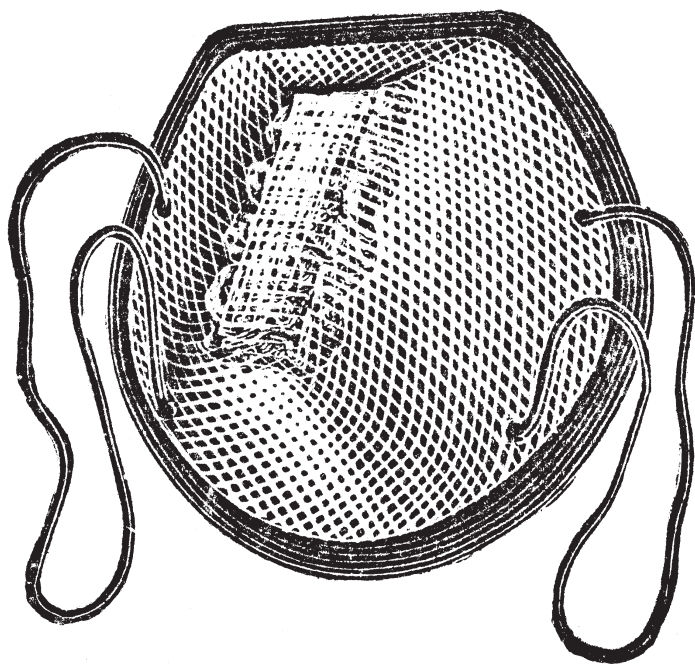
On a wet Friday morning, while two billion people watched two privileged fops marry at Westminster Abbey, I was getting my blood pressure taken (125/75 - a little on the high side for me), being weighed, measured, poked and occasionally prodded. Then, to cheers of millions, I laid down and don't even remember being asked to count backward.

Usually, they give you some scented oxygen (horrible synthetic bubble gum smell) to bring you down, even you out a bit. Then the anesthetist stabs you in the hand which starts a flood of cold hard pain up your arm. By the time that sensation gets to your shoulder, you're down and out. This time, there was no oxygen. The intravenous in my hand was a miss ("you've got small veins here." Exactly what veins are they looking at? I can see plenty.) so he put it in my wrist instead. I heard someone say, "You should start to feel something." I remember feeling

the swoon and thinking “here it comes” as I watched the ceiling rotate counter-clockwise above me. It’s in the strange flutter of eye blinks when you go from the operating room to the recovery area. Usually I’m awakened by staff telling me to breath, then asking about my pain. Again this time it was a little different. I awoke to a group of people talking and immediately moving the stretcher out into the hallway, to an elevator then to another recovery room.

It was weirdly quiet in the hospital. There seemed to be fewer nurses and fewer patients. The nurses chattered on about the Royal Wedding which was being shown on every screen (and there are a lot of TV screens in a modern hospital) while most of the other patients (who were markedly older) were having trouble knowing what day it was. It just seemed uneventful all in all. As soon as I got home, I crashed on the couch. I woke up at one point, not knowing who or where I was and then allowed myself to not worry about it and closed my eyes again. At some point, I watched some television and drifted again back to sleep. By the time I went to bed I’d was all slept out.

That’s pretty much how these procedures go. You get home feeling hung over which kind of catches you off guard the next day too, the same way jet lag does. Then you wait. Usually I feel the impact within 48 hours, but these last two treatments haven’t had much impact, thus not much pain, thus, not much of a difference. It’s strange that they say you need eight weeks to see the effect of this treatment but I can usually tell within 48 hours and at hour 55, my guess is this one won’t do much. I guess I’ll know for sure eight weeks from now.





Tuesday, April 05, 2011

Of Sound Mind & Body

Peter Rogers

How would you like to improve your memory, linguistic ability, executive brain function (tasks that allow you to focus, multi-task and switching tasks quickly), reduce your chances of dementia by 30%, offset the aging of your brain by 10 to 15 years, and have a bigger brain? Who wouldn't? What's the answer? Ginko Bilboa? Kiwi? Seaweed wraps? Fish oil? Nope. Exercise; and not even a lot. Mild exercise, just enough to break a sweat, for about 30 minutes, three or four times a week is all that's needed.

Saturday's Quirks & Quarks (April 02, 2011) on CBC had a fairly in depth segment called Exercise and the Aging Brain. I'd read on the New York Times that exercise aids new brain cell growth but this CBC radio program is more detailed and nicely concise.

Exercise helps the brain with three major areas:

1. Blood flow: exercise increases blood flow, oxygen & nutrient supply to the brain.
2. Glucose Metabolism: exercise improves the efficiency of glucose use, metabolizes and transports glucose to brain tissue.
3. Growth Factors: exercise increases the production of growth factors to the brain which stimulates neurogenesis (production of new brain cells).

If you can withstand Bob Macdonald's goofiness you may hear something that will help you for the rest of your life. Listen to the segment from the CBC podcast.

Mens sana in corpore sano (a healthy mind in a healthy body).

*“This New Yorker
cartoon is an accurate
depiction of my
current state of mind
and body.”*

Peter Rogers
Monday, august 08, 2011

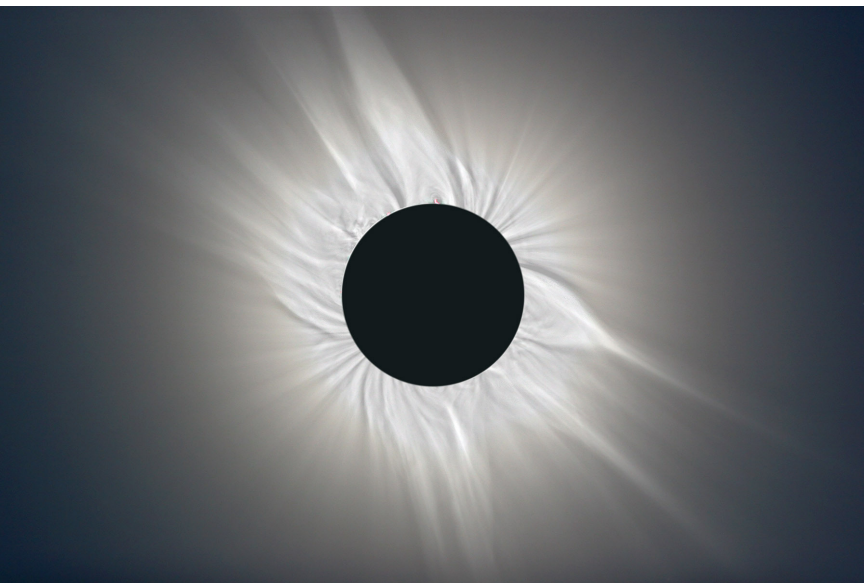


"I wish I had that kind of energy"

Friday, June 24, 2011

Compartmental

Peter Rogers



Something that I've either read, heard or seen a lot about lately is compartmentalization. A Radiolab podcast called Me, Myself, and Muse talks about how some authors have dealt with their writer blocks. One way, that seems surprisingly common has been for the artist to make deals with their creativity. Put another way, their creativity isn't a personal trait or a talent, or even another part of themselves but another person entirely. This idea, of course, goes back to the ancient Greeks and the goddess Muse (those Greeks, is there anything they didn't think up?) The modern version of this probably has a fancy schman-cy psychological term that I'll call compartmentalization.

It doesn't seem that different from cognitive dissonance. That thing we do when we think cows have cute dewy eyes, but eat a slab of steak. We disconnect the steak from the animal. One minute it's a cow, then it's meat. Can we disconnect ourselves? The Radiolab podcast makes that suggestion. One part of you is fine, another is that weak jerk that can't quit smoking or the brilliant artist who shows up only at the worst times (striking in the middle of the night or when you're stuck in traffic).

There's definitely a state of mind when creativity is ripest. Usually when you're most relaxed and engaged in a simple mindless activity such as during a shower or when doing the dishes. When I worked from home, I enjoyed the luxury of being able to lie down if I wanted a nap. Many times if I was stuck on a problem or just defunct of ideas, I would sit on the sofa in

the studio, flip through a stack of books or magazines with no real intention. Then I would lie back and drift off. Sometimes I would fall asleep. Other times I would just close my eyes. Inevitably I would get up with a handful of ideas and quickly sketch them out. So many times I've heard the way to work through a mental block is to just keep working until something clicks. Personal experience has been the opposite. There. Now you know my secret. All my good ideas come from naps or simply idle day dreaming. If you can trigger that mind set then you'll always have ideas.

That's not really the crux of these interviews and articles. They suggest that you can have a healthy and professional creative career by sort of "outsourcing" your creativity. In a way, objectifying it and making a deal with it. You also should pair that with the notion of dealing with the part of your personality that nullifies creativity. The negative fear of failure. Therapists Barry Michaels and Phil Stutz treat writers and actors to visualize the worst possible outcome. One exercise asks the participant to visualize being completely destroyed by falling into the sun and being shot back out as a powerful beam of light.

Sounds a little loopy to me, but others think that by preparing yourself for the worst possible outcome you will lessen the effects of any perceived failings. Then the artist can move on, their creativity by their side, to their next project. I think it's David Rakoff, a pessimist who thinks positive thinking is a load of crap, who talked about the idea of negative thinking being very detailed oriented so it's useful and not something to rid yourself of. In the New Yorker article about Michaels' and Stutz's therapy seems to suggest that. You have to address possibly bad outcomes so as not to be floored by them. You also have to make peace with your creative self in order to get the most out of it. This is very similar to the Radiolab piece and reinforced by Elizabeth Gilbert in her TedTalk. As the author of *Eat, Pray, Love* she figured that book was the pinnacle of her success, and that it was unlikely to ever have that kind of success in terms of sales, readership, etc ever again. That can be

devastating or you can come to terms with it, make a deal with your creative self and move on. Gilbert tells the story of Tom Waits being stuck in horrendous traffic one afternoon when a song came to him. He had no way of recording it or writing it down and he was miles away from home or the studio. Apparently, he looked skyward and said something like, “Look, you could have given me this when I was at the piano, or at my desk but you do it now. Screw off. I can’t deal with this right now. If you want to do this, do it when I’m working, not just whenever you want.” He was yelling at his Muse. Deal making with his creativity.

Me. I’ll stick with the occasional nap and a bit of day dreaming.

Mentioned in this piece:

New Yorker article by Dana Goodyear “Hollywood Shadows”

KCRW podcast interview with Barry Michaels and Phil Stutz:
Hollywood’s Unconventional therapists

Radiolab podcast, *Me, Myself and Muse*

Elizabeth Gilbert’s TedTalk

Jian Ghomeshi’s interview with David Rakoff, who is fed up with positive thinking.

Wednesday, September 07, 2011

Just Be It

Peter Rogers



As a naive non-scientist I can say the more we learn about the brain, the more it appears like the magic is leaving the world. Do you know what I mean? Primitive man thought almost everything had a spirit or every phenomenon was magical thus spiritual (did we invent religion or are we hard wired for it etc?) Things that we may have pointed to in the past as proof of the Soul, for instance, are being whittled away and re-imagined as evolutionary science. Charity and altruism aren't part of our humanity but simply ways we have been configured to preserve our species thus continue our genes. We have empathy and can read each other's emotions as a form of communication. Communication helps us form communities where we thrive and when we thrive our species has success and can continue. I know there have been some explanations of why we are able to make music or why we create art, I just can't think of them at the moment. We know why the sunset is orange and now we're figuring out why we think sunsets are pretty. Personally, I still think there is too much "magic" in the world to completely explain away the existence of "the Other" out there which is why I can't describe myself as an atheist (though I still wouldn't describe myself as very spiritual. A nice guy, sure, but not someone who depends on spirituality).

Dan Gilbert's TED talk, "Why are we happy?" claims our "psychological immune system" lets us feel truly happy even when things don't go as planned. Oddly, even as this TED talk seems to be another scientific nail in our spiritual coffins it is also resonant of a comment I often think of from the Dalai Lama. I'm not Buddhist but at some point you have to respect a guy who thinks a lot about these things. When asked the meaning of life, his answer was direct, (I'm paraphrasing), "The meaning of life is simple. Be happy and be useful". I'm still working on both, but recently I definitely think happiness is something you "make" not something you "find" which is reflected nicely by Dan Gilbert's talk and the Dalai Lama's instruction to just "be happy". Don't look for happiness, just be it.

July 14, 2010

The Men Who Stare at Screens

By GRETCHEN REYNOLDS

In 1982, researchers affiliated with the Cooper Institute in Dallas surveyed a large group of well-educated, affluent men. The researchers were interested in the men's exercise habits, but they also asked, almost incidentally, about their indolence. Specifically, they inquired about how many hours each day the men spent watching television or sitting in a car. (This was before you could do both at once.) Over the years, the survey's main results were used to reinforce a growing body of science about the health benefits of regular exercise.

But the information about the amount of time the men spent being inactive remained largely unexplored. Recently, however, scientists from the University of South Carolina and the Pennington Biomedical Research Center in Baton Rouge, La., parsed the full data. In a study published in May in the journal *Medicine and Science in Sports and Exercise*, they reported that, to no one's surprise, the men who sat the most had the greatest risk of heart problems. Men who spent more than 23 hours a week watching TV and sitting in their cars (as passengers or as drivers) had a 64 percent greater chance of dying from heart disease than those who sat for 11 hours a week or less. What was unexpected was that many of the men who sat long hours and developed heart problems also exercised.

Quite a few of them said they did so regularly and led active lifestyles. The men worked out, then sat in cars and in front of televisions for hours, and their risk of heart disease soared, despite the exercise. Their workouts did not counteract the ill effects of sitting.

Most of us have heard that sitting is unhealthy. But many of us also have discounted the warnings, since we spend our lunch hours conscientiously visiting the gym. We consider ourselves sufficiently active. But then we drive back to the office, settle at our desks and sit for the rest of the day. We are, in a phrase adopted by physiologists, “active couch potatoes.”

The amount of time that most Americans spend being inactive has risen steadily in recent decades. A 2009 editorial in the *British Journal of Sports Medicine* reported that, on average, adults spend more than nine hours a day in oxymoronic “sedentary activities.” For studies like these, scientists categorize activities by the number of METs they demand. A MET, or metabolic equivalent of task, is a measure of energy, with one MET being the amount of energy you burn lying down for one minute. Sedentary behaviors demand one to one and a half METs, or very little exertion.

Decades ago, before the advent of computers, plasma TVs and Roombas, people spent more time completing “light-intensity activities,” which require between one and a half and three METs. Most “home activities,” like mopping, cooking and changing light bulbs, demand between two and three METs. (One exception is “butchering animals,” a six-MET activity, according to a bogglingly comprehensive compilation from 2000 of the METs associated with different activities.) Nowadays, few of us accumulate much light-intensity activity. We’ve replaced those hours with sitting.

The physiological consequences are only slowly being untangled. In a number of recent animal studies, when rats or mice were not allowed to amble normally around in their cages, they

rapidly developed unhealthy cellular changes in their muscles. The animals showed signs of insulin resistance and had higher levels of fatty acids in their blood. Scientists believe the changes are caused by a lack of muscular contractions. If you sit for long hours, you experience no “isometric contraction of the antigravity (postural) muscles,” according to an overview of the consequences of inactivity published this month in *Exercise and Sports Sciences Reviews*. Your muscles, unused for hours at a time, change in subtle fashion, and as a result, your risk for heart disease, diabetes and other diseases can rise.

Regular workout sessions do not appear to fully undo the effects of prolonged sitting. “There seem to be different pathways” involved in the beneficial physiological effects of exercising and the deleterious impacts of sitting, says Tatiana Warren, a graduate student in exercise science at the University of South Carolina and the lead author of the study of men who sat too much. “One does not undo the other,” she says.

You can, however, ameliorate the dangers of inactivity with several easy steps — actual steps. “Look for ways to decrease physical inactivity,” Ms. Warren says, beyond 30-minute bouts of jogging or structured exercise. Stand up. Pace around your office. Get off the couch and grab a mop or change a light bulb the next time you watch “Dancing With the Stars.”

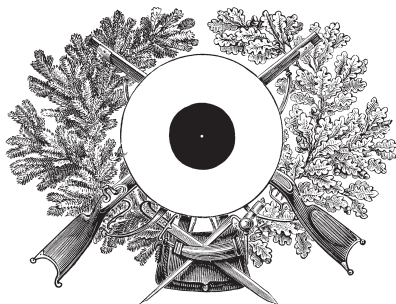




fig. 1 Contemplative Sportsman

Thursday, may 26, 2011

Take a Seat and a Breath

Peter Rogers

All this talk that sitting too much is killing you or is bad for you or was the cause of the fall of the Roman Empire or whatever is pretty much balderdash. There. I called it. Maybe sitting too much can wreck havoc on your back or more strangely cause a sort of waking apnea (a slowness of breathing to the point where you stop entirely and momentarily). Maybe it doesn't help you metabolize or worsens circulation in your lower extremities, but death? I highly doubt any coroner will ever declare death by sitting (minus those unfortunate folks who suffered strokes after very long immobile periods on trans-Atlantic flights). A New York Times article claims you increase your chance of a heart or stroke by 65% if you sit more than 22 hours a week. One insane graphic seems to say your chance of



This man demonstrates how to commit suicide very slowly.

DEATH increases by 40% and that people who sit more than 9.3 hours a day, will die 15 YEARS earlier than those of us who don't sit that much.

That is im-expletive-possible. The New York Times article claims very specifically that the study it refers to speaks directly about heart disease in men, who have desk jobs and thus sit at least 22 hours a week; this effect is surprisingly not offset by as much as three hours a week of cardiovascular exercise.

Men. Heart disease. Are we clear? Not everyone. Not imminent death.

I reason that even if my risk of heart disease (about 4% according to my health profile compared to millions of men in a GE health database) increases even as much as 65%, that still only means I have less than a 7% chance of heart disease or stroke. It doesn't suddenly mean I have a 65% chance of dying (whatever such a statistic would mean). I have a low risk because of genetic luck, statistics, diet and exercise. I really don't know where this idea that sitting kills came about other than idiocy. Figures don't lie, but liars do figure and they are bad at math.

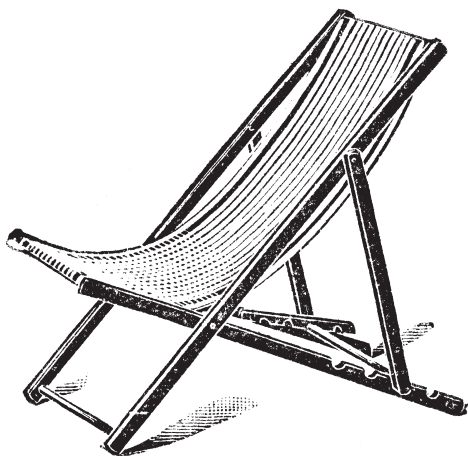
Another reason this is utter bullocks (weird punnery aside, "udder bullocks"?), is that if it were true, the average lifespan of men, particularly in Western societies (read, "advanced, technocratic sitting" ones) would either have declined with increasing office employment and decreasing manufacturing jobs or have stayed the same rather than increased. Why has the average lifespan increased? Probably a combination of diet (even high caloric excessive ones), medical science (New heart? Don't mind if I do!), and safety and security (I'll let American drones do my fightin' and Japanese robots do my weldin').

I'm no expert, but I no longer trust cartoons calling themselves infographics, and since the formation of the Canadian Conservative Party, I no longer trust another person's accounting, math or pseudo number crunching. That and I refuse to admit all my God damn jogging, riding and swimming adds up to nothing. I've never been stronger or fitter and I don't even look in shape (I've seen melted candles with better abs). Last night I did a short 4.5 KM run at my fastest pace yet (fastest mile at 8 mins, fastest pace at 5' 45"/KM and fastest 5 KM at 28 minutes). My resting heart rate this morning was 60 BPM. The last time I had my blood pressure checked it was something like 120 / 70. I have no idea of my cholesterol or percentage of body fat, but at 152 pounds for 5'-8", my BMI is well within normal ranges (no matter how you calculate it).

Sure, my back gets sore from sitting too much. Sure, I occasionally stand at my desk. Do I sit uninterrupted for long peri-

ods? Yes. For longer than an hour at time? Rarely. It's unlikely I'm ever in one position for that long. Try measuring it one day and you'll see the same thing.

What triggered this? Partly my own alarm at the inference. Partly, that after reasoning it was all a bit unbelievable I continued to see the thing repeated. Mostly, it was because someone decided to create a cartoon and widely distribute it as an infographic. There are far too many bad graphics in this world, why we need these "infauxgraphics" is beyond me. I think you can tell I'm as mad as hell and that I am not going to stand for it anymore. I'll sit instead.





STEVE JOBS
1955-2011

“Here’s to the crazy ones, the misfits, the rebels, the trouble-makers, the round pegs in the square holes... the ones who see things differently – they’re not fond of rules... You can quote them, disagree with them, glorify or vilify them, but the only thing you can’t do is ignore them because they change things... they push the human race forward, and while some may see them as the crazy ones, we see genius, because the ones who are crazy enough to think that they can change the world, are the ones who do.”

SPORT





Jack Haley in 1939's The Wizard of Oz

I am the Tin Man

Peter Rogers

Saturday was an absolutely gorgeous October day. The sort of days that we are running out of. If I was going to do it, this was my last chance. I'm talking about my semi-annual triumph of "umph" where I combine three activities into one protracted consumption of calories. The Tin Man. Not an Iron Man, but that's fine. I know The Tin Man, as I call it, is a real event normally called a Sprint Triathlon but I still feel what I do isn't really the same. Swimming in a pool isn't the same as swimming in a crowd in open water. Stopping to change your shoes isn't the same as jumping off your bike and breaking into a sprint (which is painful I imagine). No, I swim 750 metres in my own lane in a comfy pool, then I bike 20 kilometres, then I change my kit and finish with a 5 kilometre run. This is the format of many charitable or introductory triathlons. The first time I tried, it took me about 110 minutes. The second time I was closer to 105 minutes. The time I wanted to match or beat was 1 hour, 45 minutes. I haven't been swimming much lately so I thought it might be tough. Turns out, all of my times were bad individually, but it's not about individual times.

The swim did not start well. After 2 laps I had so much water in my goggles I had to stop to fix it, but I didn't stop the clock.

After 36 laps (about 810 metres; only later did I realize I only had to do 34 laps) my time was 16 minutes. Almost a minute slower than my best time (which, to be honest was for only 34 laps).

Then I rode the 3 km home to switch bikes (I know, it's complicated). The ride went as well as could be expected in stop-and-go traffic. At an average speed of about 25 km/hr, I was done the 20 km in 48 minutes, but I still had another 2 km to get home (so to be clear, 3 km to the pool, 3 km back then an accidental 2 km just to get home, I've really ridden about 28 km). Once home I switched shoes and as I started the run I figured, hey, even a 30 minute run would give me a better time.

As I started jogging I felt like I probably looked like a stroke victim at a physio session rather than a finely tuned athlete but after a minute or so I was in a comfortable stride. Not the tempo I usually run but at this point all I'm thinking is "take it easy, settle in". By the time I was on the home stretch I was feeling fine. My time? 28 minutes. All in, I was done in 1 hour and 32 minutes. More than 10 minutes faster than I had done before.

Do I think I'd ever be able to do an Olympic duration triathlon (1 km swim, 40 km bike, 10 km run)? I doubt it. I've done days where I've swam 1200 m and run 5km or just a couple of weeks ago I biked 50 km and run 6 km but I was done for days afterward and after 1000 m swim, I'm usually ready for a nap, not a ride and a run. This time around, I took Sunday off, and ran 7 km on Monday and felt fine. But one after the other? Maybe I could do it if I ran 10 km more often but it won't happen this year.

The funny thing is, 90 minutes of what sounds like a rough workout, really isn't that hard at all. My experience is that riding solo for 4-5 hours to do 100 km on the bike is a lot harder. Physically and especially mentally. After riding 100 km on my own, I'm almost in tears, not from pain, but I guess the combination of exhaustion, pain and loneliness. I can't describe it

but I get a kind of despair at 80 km knowing there's another 20 km (or 50 minutes or so in the saddle). I'm sore, I'm tired and there's no one to help me, so you just have to buck up and hammer down. My goal on the bike is to do a proper "century", a 100-mile ride which is 160 km but I haven't been on the bike enough for that this year (or any year).

Saturday, as I approached home, I looked at my watch to see my sub-30-minute time; I actually raised my arms and whooped. I don't think anyone saw or heard me and if they had they might have thought I was just another runner who had stepped in something. I know I should test my mettle in a real event, but the idea of doing the same thing in a crowd, being passed by older, more sun-wrinkled men and women, and not having anyone see my yelp – well, it makes an accomplishment that should be celebratory seem a little sad. Plus that's not why I do it.

Resting heart rate: 64 BPM

Blood Pressure: 106/80

That's why I do it.



Wednesday, June 22, 2011

And I Ran...

Peter Rogers

I listen to music when I run and the last time I ran something funny happened. I checked my watch/Nike+ thingy (running computer?) and I was just hitting 7 KM when a song started (“Does Not Suffice” by Joanna Newsom). I happen to know this song is about 6 minutes. I also average about 5:30 to 6:00 mins/KM. I thought, “When this song finishes, you’ll be at 8 KM.” and like clockwork my personal odometer clicked over to 8.00 KM right on cue.

Looking at the playlist again I notice that a 5 KM run will usually land me between “Fields” and “California Stars” (Wilco) which is about 30 minutes from the start (my fastest 5 KM is about 27:30). I could almost tell you my distance by the song at this point. A longer run puts me into “The Wild Hunt” and I would have to guess a 10 KM run (which I have yet to do) would finish in the middle of “Go Do” by Jonsi.

Sometimes, because I don’t always start the playlist in the same spot, I’ll finish on “Move On Up” by Curtis Mayfield and no matter what state I’m in, I’ll uncontrollably sprint to the end. It’s almost a 9 minute song. The drum break alone must be a minute. That is definitely a song for champions.

There’s no doubt that running is about rhythm and music can act as your running metronome and coach. You can create playlists based on BPM (beats per minute) so that you always have the right pace for a work out. I like it to be more organic



and I've found some slower songs can have enough emotional weight to propel me forward. Another trick I've found is mind-
ing where you look. Watching your feet is sort of a good way to slow you down. You feel like you're working but not getting anywhere, but looking at the horizon or skyward, makes you forget about your timing, or distance and you can just focus on your stride. Once you hit your stride, it's almost like coasting in cruise control mode.

So that's my running advice. Run with your head up and a song in your heart.

UPDATE: Friday June 24, 2011, I completed a 10.6 KM run, completing 10 KM in 55:29. On schedule, Jonsi's "Go" started at around the 9.7 KM mark.



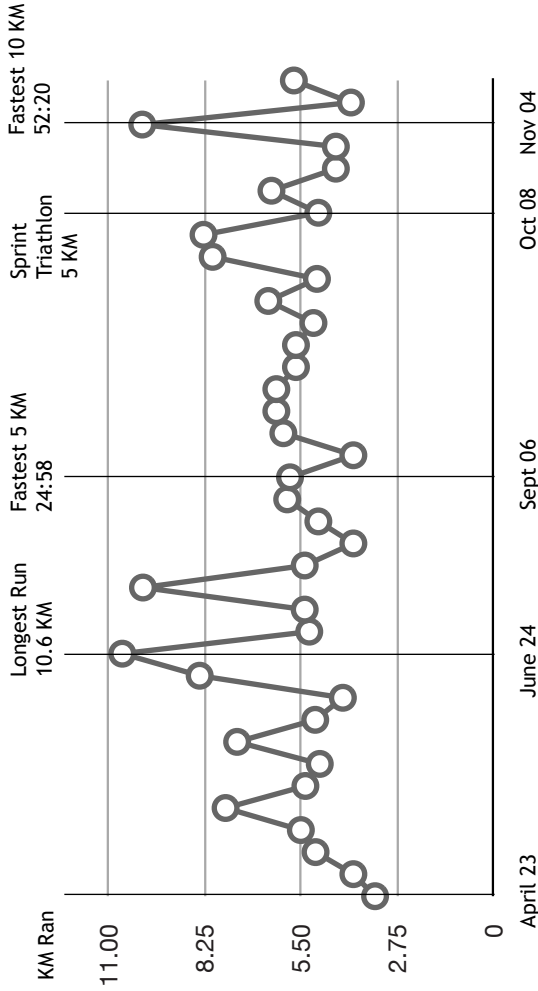
By The Numbers

Peter Rogers

I've seen the numbers, and the numbers aren't good. You can see I generally ran about once a week, swam 1.5 times a week and biked every other week. In truth, I cram most of my exercise between the months of May to October. My goal this year will be to a) track my work outs better and b) do more of them. I can see by these graphs times that I was either injured or sick, or just couldn't care, but I can also see when I was trying very hard (the frequency of all the short rides I squeezed in October or all the runs in September.

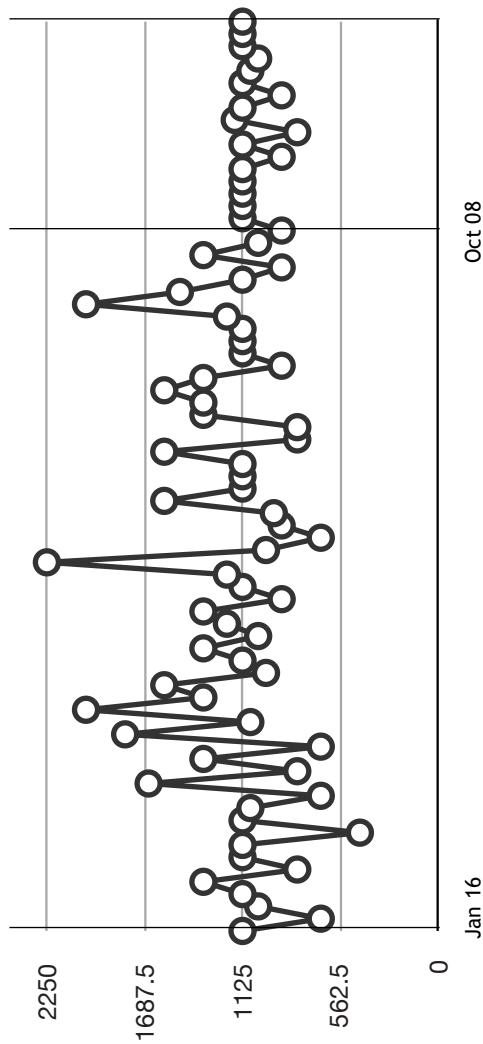
Also, these graphs only capture distance, not time, pace or intensity. I haven't really figured out how to capture that for swimming or biking but I'll try some new software that will probably give more meaningful data in the new year. All I really know is I travelled about a quarter the way across Canada so at least that's something.

RAN



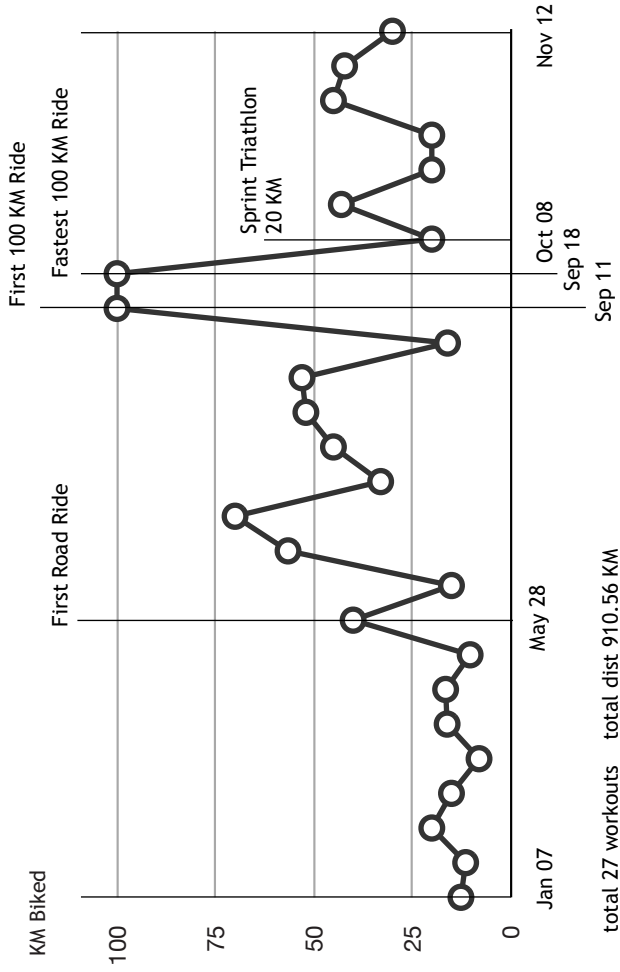
SWAM

M Swam

Sprint Triathlon
750 M

total 75 workouts total dist 87,255 M

BIKED





January 13, 2010

Why Do So Many Winter Olympians Have Asthma?

By GRETCHEN REYNOLDS
Nytimes.com

Every four years, exercise-induced asthma draws special attention among scientists and the media, in lock step with the Winter Olympics. That's because when the world's premier cold-weather sports athletes convene in Vancouver for the 2010 Winter Olympics next month, they will share, as a group, not only exceptional fitness but also a disproportionate tendency to wheeze.

Exercise-induced asthma has been diagnosed in as many as half of all elite cross-country skiers and almost as many world-class ice skaters and hockey players. It's far more common in winter athletes than in those who compete in the summer, although nearly 17 percent of Olympic-level distance runners have been given the same diagnosis.

Even among the unexalted ranks of recreational athletes, it's a condition that strikes far more often in the winter and also among the most committed. "In my experience, recreational athletes" who have symptoms of exercise-induced asthma but no asthma symptoms otherwise, "tend to be the ones who train" for the most hours, says Dr. Christopher Randolph, a clinical professor at Yale University who sees patients at the Center for Allergy, Asthma and Immunology.

All of which raises the intriguing issue, especially pertinent with the Olympics so close, of whether training strenuously outside in the cold for hour after hour might somehow be bad for your respiratory system. It's an area of "active study," Dr. Randolph adds.

Exercise-induced asthma is not quite the same condition as asthma. And in fact, these days, according to Dr. Randolph, the "preferred term" in the scientific community for exercise-induced asthma is exercise-induced bronchoconstriction, or E.I.B. "It's a reversible, obstructive airway disease" that typically begins about five minutes after you stop exercising — particularly if your exercise was intense, "at between 85 and 95 percent of maximum heart rate," Dr. Randolph says.

About 90 percent of people with asthma also suffer from E.I.B. and, in children, wheezing after exercise is often the first clue that they have asthma. But people can also suffer from E.I.B. without underlying asthma.

Not so long ago, most researchers held that exposure to cold air was what triggered the bronchial narrowing, with blood

vessels in the throat constricting to conserve warmth, just as they do in ungloved fingers; when the vessels later reinflated, they were thought to ignite spasms in the bronchial tubes, like tingling in warming fingers. “And that probably does happen,” Dr. Randolph says.

But most researchers no longer consider it to be the primary cause. Instead, says Dr. Randolph, most experts think that the problem is not with the coldness of the air but with the “dryness.” Lungs need water-saturated air. If the air entering your bronchial tubes is dry, as it usually is in winter, the cells lining your airway release their own moisture to humidify it.

“Think of a sponge being squeezed,” Dr. Randolph says. The squeezing and loss of moisture prompt certain cells within the bronchial tube to release allergic chemicals that initiate an inflammatory process, slowly closing your throat. Thankfully, the process is “self-limiting,” Dr. Randolph says. “No one dies” of exercise-induced bronchoconstriction. (Although some athletes have died from uncontrolled asthma attacks, a different issue.)

A recent study of sweat rates in people with exercise-induced respiratory problems has bolstered this dehydrated-bronchial-tubes theory. The work was inspired by genetic studies in mice whose genes for aquaporin had been turned off. Aquaporin is a protein in cell membranes that moves water in and out of the cells. Mice engineered without this cellular plumbing system developed a multitude of moisture-related problems. They didn’t sweat. They didn’t salivate much. And they had the mouse equivalent of asthma after running on a wheel.

It was this last effect that interested Dr. Warren Lockette, a medical officer at the Naval Medical Center in San Diego. He recruited 22 Marines with laboratory-confirmed exercise-induced asthma and 34 control subjects, then tested how much the various Marines sweated, salivated and grew teary (which even Marines will do, with the right provocation).

What he found was that those who perspired, spit and cried the least were also the most prone to exercise-induced asthma. "There was obviously a common thread here," Dr. Lockette told me, "and it involved moisture." His expectation is that further studies will show that aquaporin genes play some role in people's vulnerability to E.I.B.

But pinpointing genetic susceptibilities to E.I.B. doesn't answer the question of why it strikes so disproportionately among the world's best athletes, especially those in winter sports. "That's one of those really intriguing questions," Dr. Randolph says, and it may, if a new theory gaining currency is borne out, change how some Olympians and even more-every-day athletes train.

This theory posits that E.I.B. is, in some fashion, a sports injury. "What we think is happening," Dr. Randolph says, is that elite endurance athletes, especially those training more than 20 hours a week, actually "injure their airways" by breathing so much and so hard. "They take in up to 200 liters of air per minute," he says, in comparison to perhaps five or six liters per minute at rest, all of which must be humidified.

The resulting inflammation within their bronchial tubes becomes chronic over time, and each subsequent workout more easily triggers a new E.I.B. episode. Cross-country skiers, runners, cyclists and other athletes who train in the wintertime may not have been born with breathing problems, but their repeated episodes of hyperventilating in cold air induce the malady.

What can be done? At the moment, most asthmatic Olympians rely on a short list of allowable drugs to get them through their training and competitions. But in the long term, "we think they may need to back off from some training," Dr. Randolph says. He instructs serious athletes who suffer from E.I.B. "to drop below 20 hours a week of training in their primary sport and

cross-train at a lower intensity the rest of the time,” he says. “They don’t want to hear that, though.”

The few studies of retired elite athletes with E.I.B. suggest that their breathing problems lessen or disappear when their training slackens; but so, of course, does any chance of competing. “We don’t know yet how to balance the need to train to win” with the need to reduce E.I.B., Dr. Randolph says.

In the meantime, and especially for non-Olympians, if you wheeze after exercising outside in the winter, visit a doctor. Gasping and tightness in your chest after exercise can be caused by other conditions besides E.I.B., Dr. Lockette says, including cardiac disease. A lung-function test is part of a formal diagnosis of E.I.B. If you do have the condition, drug treatments are available, Dr. Randolph says. But start with easier fixes.

“Breathe through your nose,” he says. The mucus there is far moister than that in your mouth. Wear a face mask, which recirculates the moisture you exhale into the air you draw in. Drinking more water, while generally wise, hasn’t been shown to combat E.I.B. But warming up gradually before exercising in earnest does seem to help, Dr. Randolph says.

A warm-up of least 5 to 15 minutes, at an intensity of 60 percent or less of your maximum heart rate, seems to fool the inflammation-stimulating cells in your bronchial tube, leading to a “refractory period” of an hour or so, during which you can usually complete a workout without setting off bronchospasms. And if none of that works, “indoor gyms can be a good option,” Dr. Randolph says, “as long as they don’t dehumidify the air.”



Friday, September 09, 2011

Eddy Merckx Will Eat You Alive

Peter Rogers

On a recent Saturday morning I did something I rarely do. I woke up before 8 AM. I was on the bike by 8:30. Not early by most standards but early for me and it did mean I would be done this ride before I usually begin one. It was a strange morning weather wise. I should say I originally woke around 6:30, looked out to see the city shrouded in a thick fog, so I returned to my repose. When I awoke again, the sun was shining thus my change of heart.

As I rode along the Lakeshore I would occasionally pass through immense fog banks that, rather than blot out the sun, seemed to enhance it like some kind of gigantic lighting diffuser as though some unseen hand had just switched on a second sun. When I wasn't riding through a glowing mist, I was in the bright sunlight, with occasional tufts of fog drifting across my path. It was a little like something from a film, slightly unreal, slightly unbelievable.

Despite how good I felt at some point I still had to turn around and call it a day. I had errands to run and things to do. Oddly,



just as I was reaching a time when I would have to turn around to be back in time for an appointment, a sign appeared on the road. A construction sign. The road was closed and I had to turn around anyway. As I made my turn, an old Elton John tune started on my iPhone. Benny and the Jets. Sometimes you need protein and carbohydrates to fuel a ride and sometimes you need a song. I started singing along, loud as I could muster. I'm sure I was wearing an Andy Schleck smirk as wide as the Aubisque is high. A dour young women passed me in a sleek Mercedes. I believe she was slightly repelled by this maniacal cyclist. I don't blame her. Then I started thinking about Jack Layton whose memorial service was about to begin at that moment. As a high profile cyclist I'm sure he would have got a kick out of the sight of me. I also thought about Eddy Merckx who, no doubt wouldn't have even noticed me, and would've gobbled me up and spat me out. That would be something. To be devoured by the Cannibal*.

*I also realized, I'll never be so good at something to get such a fantastic nick name as "the Cannibal".

The Pain Principle

BY RICHARD POPLAK

It's an overcast spring day in the middle of Basque Country, Spain, and a thirty-year-old British Columbian named Ryder Hesjedal is near the head of a convoy. Behind him: forty European station wagons, three ambulances, two helicopters, eight cop cars, twelve sedans, nine motorcycles, and 125 bicycles. Of particular concern to my companion in one of the station wagons — a Belgian former cycling champion named Eric Van Lancker, once bigger in his home country than weissbier — is the fact that there are twenty-six bicycles, nineteen sweep motorcycles, and a pace car ahead of Ryder Hesjedal.

On the station wagon's dash, Van Lancker has tacked two sheets of paper. They differ in content, but are linked thematically. The first is the list of the day's teams and riders, a compendium of professional cycling's elite: Leipheimer, Horner, Vinokourov, Klöden, Sánchez, and the Schleck brothers, Andy and Fränk. The second is an expressionist representation of human trauma, which is in fact a herky-jerky profile of the day's 150-kilometre course. The biggest topographical spike, rising at a 25 percent gradient, is the one Ryder Hesjedal happens to be negotiating right now.

Hesjedal is on the verge of becoming one of cycling's Brahmins. In 2009, he won a stage of a Grand Tour, the Vuelta a España, something no Canadian has managed for more than twenty years. In 2010, he came second in the Amstel Gold one-day classic, and finished an unexpected (and astonishing)

seventh in the Tour de France. Much is expected of him here in Basque Country, or Euskadi, as the local terrorist group calls it.

He is now at the climax of the first stage of the six-day 2011 Vuelta al País Vasco. It is a major event, and a prelude to July's big show in France. Van Lancker, piloting the station wagon with one hand, watches the race broadcast on a GPS unit mounted on the dash. Hesjedal decides to make a statement: Twenty-fifth place. Then, magically, tenth. Then eighth. Then fifth. He slithers like a tasered garter snake through the knot of cyclists at the top of the hill, hurls himself over the lip, flings his handlebars forward. It's a minor act of heroism that nevertheless leaves Van Lancker baffled: "Yes," he says, "but why not start the hill fifth?"

Moments later, we pull up to the mess of the finish line, in the medieval town of Zumárraga. Somewhere amid a gaggle of cyclists, I catch sight of Hesjedal. He lifts his leg over his bike, hands the machine over to an assistant — and shrugs.

The gesture startles me, because I've seen it before. I'm almost physically yanked into a Grand Guignol memory from my childhood, in which I walk into my parents' sun-dappled bedroom, brought there by screaming. My father lies on a bloody sheet, so badly ripped up that bone glistens white through his skin. Leaning over him, my mother vainly tries to patch the wounds with gauze. Earlier, during a bike race, he had reached for a water bottle. He had misjudged the move, lost control at speed, and slid along the tarmac, tearing up his left flank. For one brilliant moment, he stops wailing, looks over at me, and hitches his shoulders in a ridiculous, inscrutable shrug.

A circle closes. Everything about cycling is contained in that gesture, including its reigning truism: to race bicycles is to drink greedily from a bottomless chalice of agony. The sport and its heroes are only knowable, and then just barely, once you come to understand that suffering is cycling's currency. And what that currency buys is the occasional — the very, very

occasional — moment of exquisite glory. Mostly, it purchases tough breaks and tougher questions. Much like the one Eric Van Lancker asks of the rider before him. And by “Why not start the hill fifth?” he is really asking, “Is Ryder Hesjedal willing to suffer completely?”

A man from British Columbia finishes top ten in the Tour de France, he should automatically be in the running for Canadian athlete of the year and all the other “best of” accolades handed out to bobsledders and ice dancers and Sidney Crosby. Currently, maddeningly, Ryder Hesjedal is not a star. Cycling, when it isn’t about doping, is SportsCentre filler, something to show right before the Frisbee-catching seal, or the lawn bowling carp. Canada has had bicycling royalty before (Steve Bauer, who finished fourth in the 1988 Tour de France), and we have a stable of excellent riders now: Svein Tuft, Michael Barry, and Andrew Randell. And yet Canucks Zamboni drivers enjoy greater name recognition.

I first properly meet Hesjedal on the day after his hill-climbing caper, at the start of stage two in Zumárraga. He is leaving a camper belonging to Garmin-Cervélo, the American race team managed by former Lance Armstrong teammate and anti-doping crusader Jonathan Vaughters. Ordinarily, Garmin would be travelling with a decal-covered tour bus, the likes of which the nineteen other teams have parked pell-mell across Zumárraga’s tight centrum. The bus, however, is in the shop, and the camper gives Garmin an aw-shucks, underdog mien — misleading, considering the team’s status as one of cycling’s most successful outfits.

If you didn’t know that Ryder Hesjedal’s name was Ryder Hesjedal, you’d call him something similarly Nordic, like Sven Järgvesson or Bjorn Flüghorn. It’s easy to imagine him with braids, wearing elk fur. If you didn’t know he was from British Columbia, you’d probably assume he was from the West Coast. Even in cycling cleats, he lopes, surfer-style. In his racing kit, he is lean and tall and comes to a point at his extremities, like

Jack Kirby's early illustrations of Mr. Fantastic. His torso is absurdly long, and a lifetime spent on bicycles has warped his body to the point that he is no longer capable of standing upright. In profile, his body forms a subtle, curving S, while his shoulders look wide and mock strong. (Cyclists, like velociraptors, are unburdened by upper body strength.)

I ask how he's doing. "I'm feeling good," he says. "The sun is shining in Basque Country." He swirls a dark liquid around in a small plastic cup: "Just a little caffeine. And then a bike race."

The first thing you notice about professional cyclists is that, with few exceptions, they appear to live their internal lives in a heavily padlocked tomb of mental anguish. They are at once astonishingly young and improbably ancient, a result of the fact that they are paid for their agony. They are modern-day ascetics, working in the open-air monastery of the mountains of Europe, with helmets as tonsures, spandex as robes.

There is thus a detachment in their manner that suggests the real world — our world — exists to them only as storybook legend, trapped as they are in another realm, with no corollaries, no points of contact, no common ground. They experience their lives through the tiny aperture of cycling; the aperture is so small because the light is so fierce. They have felt and done things on the farthest shore of the possible.

Professional cycling is the toughest sport legally practised in the developed world — and by a long shot. It's tempting to bevel that statement by acknowledging the very real hardships of the NHL, the NFL, or the UFC, but that just seems pointless, especially after observing a routine Grand Tour crash, in which an athlete wearing little more than a leotard hits asphalt at sixty kilometres an hour, leaving a slick of epidermis in his wake. (As I write this, the cycling world is mourning the young Belgian Wouter Weylandt, who died in a crash on May 9 during the third stage of the 2011 Giro d'Italia.) Concussions, paralysis, lower back pain, saddle sores, mouth dryness, chaf-

ing — all of the above. And while this puts cycling at least on par with contact sports in terms of violent physical duress, it is resolutely not what makes cycling exponentially more difficult.

No other sport demands the same time, pain, and work ethic. You cannot race a Grand Tour without being in supreme physical shape, so fit that you are actually eating yourself, and must consume the same amount of food and liquid as nearly three grown men — which amounts to about 6,000 calories a day — to stay alive. During a warm weather race, a cyclist will lose three kilograms, and must chug five litres of restorative liquid, or it's game over. (Try that twenty-one days in a row.) Cycling doesn't have a bench. It doesn't have time outs. The boys don't celebrate a good day's racing at a Hennessy-sponsored nightclub.

Page 2 of 4 A cycling team's hotel floor looks like a geriatric ward: men lie prostrate on beds, pink feet pointing skyward. The hallway smells like baby shit, the eau de cologne of the endurance athlete — a day's worth of fluid, food, and endorphins rinsed noisomely through the system. A cyclist gets up, eats, goes to the race, eats, races, eats while racing, eats once finished, returns to the hotel, eats, gets a massage, eats a lot, sleeps. There's no outward sign that he is one of the best athletes on earth. If you came across him shopping for a Billy bookcase at IKEA, you'd assume he had just returned from an island survival challenge, which he lost. Badly.

The one thing all the statistics and studies and scientific assessments can't deliver is cycling's great intangible. By this I mean the transformation of agony into fuel, an alchemic process that is supernatural in its properties. For instance, to climb a fifteen-kilometre mountain pass at an average grade of 10 percent and a mean speed of twenty-five kilometres an hour is to sustain almost forty minutes of screaming pain without a second's respite. The reward for being the best isn't that one takes less pain; rather that one is able to absorb more. The nature of this process is revealed at the precise instant that we

come to know ourselves completely: we learn how far we can push ourselves, and the true mettle of our character. But that knowledge isn't properly intelligible, nor is it transferable. To mangle Laurie Anderson's aphorism, writing about cycling's meta-state is like dancing about architecture. It is a private knowledge, forged in pain's stables, and belongs to men who are not served by articulating it.

All of which might explain the gravitas that blurs the edges of Ryder Hesjedal's obviously sunny nature. It might explain why he can, at times, seem like a husk. Outside the Garmin camper, he takes a slow sip of his coffee, swirls the cup a bit more, tosses it into the garbage. I ask if he's feeling yesterday in his legs.

"Nah, yesterday was fine. Had a good rest." He slowly swings a leg up and over the frame's top tube and clicks into his machine. "Be seeing you." He rides off, and finishes fifth.

A day later, I sit across from Hesjedal in my hotel room. He has just enjoyed a massage — which is to say his body has been viciously tenderized — and is on his way to dinner. (Watching food disappear into a cyclist's maw is hilarious and awe inspiring and slightly nauseating.) I'm looking for something in his features — some flicker of the human. But his face is just sunburn over ashen skin, cold cuts on top of bone. On the third day of a Grand Tour in the Biscayne mountains, a cyclist's face is not a face. The gentle frissons, those little signs we rely on to navigate our social relationships, are entirely absent.

"We grew up the real way," Hesjedal says, telling me of life in the Highlands, outside Victoria, in the recession-plagued '80s. "My dad didn't have it so good at first; he cut and sold firewood. We got by." When he and his sister were of school age, his father got a job with the municipality, and his mother followed. But those first years were hard: "My dad taught me that work ethic is important. It's everything."

Professional cycling has always been a working-class sport. Or, to put it the way the lefties used to, professional cycling has always exploited the working class: the French Red press in the '20s famously described racers as *forçats de la route* — forced labourers of the road. Hesjedal very much falls into this working man archetype. (Its opposite, the aristocratic tradition, is exemplified by five-time Tour de France winner Jacques Anquetil, who, despite a humble upbringing, mimicked debauched eighteenth-century courtiers by, among other things, sleeping with his stepdaughter.) Hesjedal is defined by work. By focus. “I remember being in my basement, playing ball sports,” he says. “We had this half-wood, half-concrete wall. I’d take a lacrosse set and just whip the ball against the wall for hours on end. Until it was perfect.”

In the Highlands, everyone rode bicycles. Not like little Ryder Hesjedal did, though. On a heavy Norco Bushpilot, he rode the trails behind his house again and again and again, until he was sure no one in the world could ride them any faster. At thirteen years old, he understood that fun could morph into a vocation: mountain biking was booming; trails and legends were both being carved into the countryside. “That was my ticket,” he says.

“I remember telling my dad, ‘Listen, I need to focus on this.’” He was in grade eight at the time, and his father was understandably lukewarm. It didn’t help that his son was displaying some very real aptitude for baseball, a sport that typically pays a rookie second baseman about five times what a mountain biker can expect over the course of his career. Nonetheless Hesjedal and “Team Family” would strap his bike to the car, pack the camping gear, and screech out of the lot after school to make races in Kelowna, in Whistler, all over BC. And then, farther afield. “After World Champs [in Australia], I’d come back to class, and I’d explain what I’d done over the summer,” he says. “Kids were, like, ‘Huh?’ I felt like it was the best thing. As far as I was concerned, by that time I was probably one of the best in the world. It’s important to have that confidence

and identity when you're that young."

Backed by a local enthusiast named David Smith, Hesjedal landed his first sponsorship deal with Marin bicycles when he was fifteen, and experienced the following decade through the fog of mountain bike racing. No late-night spliffs with the boys. No chasing girls. When two airliners slammed into the Twin Towers, he was at the world championships in Vail, Colorado. He was a fixture on the international circuit by the time he was seventeen, one of the best in the world by the time he was twenty — and burning out by the time he was twenty-three.

Imagine, for a moment, that you're at the start line of the cross-country race in Athens, for the 2004 Olympics. You're supremely fit, your entire being focused on this race for months, years. Five minutes in, just as the adrenalin is settling and your legs have started to sing, you feel telltale wheel drag. Flat tire, race over: "I didn't finish, dropped out of Worlds two weeks later, and I haven't raced a mountain bike since. For that to become your reality, it was pretty frustrating."

In 2002, he signed with the road biking team Rabobank as a stagiaire (we'd say "rookie") for the off-season. Most off-road racers spend a large portion of their time on the road, to build up overall endurance. Only a small few end up making the transition to road racing. Europe, home of the Grand Tours, was now in his blood. The physical demands were so enormous, the commitment so utter, that road racing became a magnet for his unshakable focus. He had suffered on the mountain bike, but he hadn't suffered ecstatically. It was time to be swallowed whole.

When his Rabobank contract ended, in 2003, he signed with the world's foremost racing team, US Postal Service. Postal was Lance Armstrong's outfit, and it basically existed to deliver him a sixth straight Tour de France victory. Hesjedal rode as a domestique, the teammate who must sacrifice himself, race after race, so that the lead rider may win. Prime cannon fodder, the

domestique limits the lead rider's exposure to headwinds; he goes back to the car for bottles or food; he jostles with rivals in the tightly packed field to protect his leader. Hesjedal was now bottom dog on a team jammed with elite cyclists, all of whom had the podium in their crosshairs.

Like every domestique, he'd get late calls after a long day on the bike to race the following day on the other side of Europe. The work was unrelenting, soul breaking, and meanwhile cycling was being rocked by doping scandal after doping scandal, of which Lance Armstrong's teams were often the fulcrum. Hesjedal's vaunted focus was meaningless. He was not in control; he was floundering.

There is no proper way to watch a bike race. Not as a spectator along the side of the road, not in a follow car, and certainly not on TV, thrilling as all these may be. Perhaps one day we'll invent a medium that will do the job, a 4-D mind-melding tech that marries the cyclist's experience with that of the support team. Until then, it helps to keep in mind that the hundreds of vehicles behind the peloton (the main, regimented bunch of racers) form a shadow peloton, an obbligator that builds, over the course of the race, to its own Wagnerian crescendo. In a major race like the País Vasco, the peloton's average speed seems only mildly insane — forty-five kilometres an hour or so — but the cyclists descend at speeds in excess of ninety kilometres, down mountain passes that were scraped out in the Dark Ages for mule trains. A professional cyclist will take a switch-back at almost seventy kilometres an hour, which is nearly impossible for a car, unless that car happens to be piloted by a former pro cyclist, or a rally driver. Once you've sat in one of the hundred or so vehicles descending picturesque European mountain roads in convoy at highway speeds, you begin to grasp the vast, interlocking machinery of a bike race.

Page 3 of 4 On the País Vasco's fourth day, I hop inside Garmin-Cervélo's first follow car, driven by the team's directeur sportif, Bingen Fernández. Long of nose, high of forehead,

Fernández looks as if he was designed in a wind tunnel. He is a Basque ex-pro from a hamlet outside Gernika. “At the Tour de France, they always say their food is the best,” he tells me. “Pah! Their pasta is like soup.”

Garmin-Cervélo, with Europe as its theatre, commands eleven Skoda station wagons, two eighteen-wheeler mobile mechanic shops, two tour buses, dozens of *soigneurs* (assistants) and mechanics, and hundreds of premium Cervélo cycling machines. According to Fernández, their team budget is around eight million euros a year; Team Radioshack peaks out at around fifteen million. (“It is, like, one football player,” he says with a shrug.) On the morning of the fourth stage, in a team meeting similar to nineteen other concurrent team meetings, he laid out the day’s strategy to his racers, all of whom would be working to get Hesjedal to the finish line first. The poor souls have to do what Hesjedal did at the start of his career for Postal: minimize the amount of unnecessary work he does on the road so he can concentrate on attacking or fending off an attack, and either win the race or enhance his place in the overall standings — or both.

Three hours into the race, Fernández and I tear down a broad boulevard alongside a wall of rotting industry, and the peloton looks like a Miró mural, should you pass by one in an F-18. The cars roll into the bikes roll into the helicopters roll into one hysterically coloured, mechanized mash-up. Fernández steers the car with one hand, and spits a polyglot stream of instructions into a CB. Each cyclist carries a two-way radio that enables him to communicate with both the car and the other riders — an innovation the International Cycling Union (or UCI, which runs the professional circuit) has banned in several races this season. The race started shortly after one p.m.; it will last upwards of four hours, and on this day cover 179 kilometres of monstrously hilly terrain.

Ahead of us, I spot Hesjedal. He possesses a liquid quality: the curvature of his body moves with the road; Garmin’s chiro-

practor calls this “hypermobility.” His back arcs up in a gentle, aerodynamic curve; his long neck juts out; and his head drops twelve centimetres or so below the peak of the arc. He doesn’t fight the atmosphere like the incomparable Eddy Merckx, who cut through mountains like a uranium-tipped buzz saw. Hessedal has souplesse — suppleness. It’s heroism with no outward sign of the heroic. It’s taking a bayonet jab in the spleen and apologizing for the damage done to the uniform.

Fernández, meanwhile, is like an orchestra conductor. He has the sheet music in front of him, in the form of that topographic profile of pain, but he is waiting for a sonic moment he knows in his bones will make the correct tone. He has been holding Garmin back for the first half of the race, building the tension, until it hits a particular ascending line on the profile. “You need to be in front here,” he says into the radio. “Allez, guys. Move up. Go, go, go!”

The peloton blows through a broad two-lane stretch of highway that precedes the final climb. Vehicles round one another to deliver the final few water bottles of the day. A Garmin domestique named Dan drops back and pulls level with the car. A soigneur in the back seat hands bottles to Fernández, who now places each one firmly in Dan’s hand, who in turn stuffs them into his shirt. In front of us, a rider on the Movistar team slams into the tarmac, bone and carbon fibre making a hollow, basso thunk. Dan hits his brakes, pushes off from the car, rounds the crash, and pulls back up to the window. “Two more,” says Fernández. “Okay, allez!” Dan is catapulted back into the peloton.

“Dan with service,” says Fernández into the radio, as if he’s sending up a tray of canapés. “Now the stress starts.”

The final climb winds up along a harsh slice of hill face. The race chopper drifts in the mist above a patchwork of farmland that stretches before a rumpled massif. On one side of the road, pines in deep shadow, sending wafts of moist, cool air

onto the tarmac. On the other, a steep drop to a faraway gorge. Birches cling to the embankment, strung with ivy. The valley, lit up in the early gloaming, is flaked with a miraculous pollen squall.

The peloton shatters on the climb. The hill is lined four deep with spectators, un-sober and undressed, some wearing only the Euskadi flag. The Garmin domestiques, along with those from other teams, have dropped back — hara-kiri duly performed. Riders are smeared along the length of the hill. Fernández roars around them and closes in on Hesjedal in the breakaway group of eight. We spin around a hairpin turn, and we're suddenly high above the valley floor. We rocket down, entering the town under the imposing concrete arch of a new highway. Then more highways, until we reach Eibar, its buildings on stilts, like a parched Venice.

"C'mon, Ryder, eh, Ryder. C'mon. Allez, allez!" says Fernández into the radio. Hesjedal is now in the middle of the group on a small breakaway. He inches forward. "Allez!" says Fernández. "We have to be aggressive here — we have to be first into the turn!" But the other racers claw back the tarmac. Hesjedal stretches like a Hollywood special effect, bridges the gap, and then is overtaken. "C'mon, allez!" But Fernández's voice has lost its urgency. It's another fifth-place finish.

"I'm getting frustrated with fifth," Hesjedal tells me that night.

Consider, for a moment, the viciousness of evolution. Hesjedal and I are picturing the changes to his body, between, say, 2002 and 2010. Years of riding and training see his physique squeeze, bend, warp. We watch the saddle rise on his Cervélo R3 racing machine; we see his handlebar stem extend, so he drops lower, becomes more streamlined. He is leaner, he is longer — a road racer's posture, not a trail rider's. He is not comfortable in any meaningful sense of the term, but rather optimally positioned, working the centimetres down to millimetres with different mechanics over successive years. Bones

rearrange themselves, cartilage melts away, organs scurry for space.

His body changed; so did his mind. “With Postal, I was thrown into the deep end,” he says. He doesn’t say so, but that team, which became Discovery, was mired nose deep in the poisonous culture that has come to define cycling. Indeed, the history of the sport doubles as a history of illegal performance enhancement. From cocaine to poppers to steroids to erythropoietin; as medical science delivered wonder drug after miracle cure, cyclists jacked them into their bodies to gain even the slightest advantage. Barry Bonds juices, and he hits a baseball farther, with greater ease. A cyclist dopes, and it allows him to race faster, which means harder, which means a few extra slices of agony on his already unpalatable pain sandwich. He suffers more, and he suffers better. Doping is a porthole into greater pain, which is both the sport’s essence and its undoing. Most tragic of all, cycling’s dopers weren’t the weak-kneed wannabes and under-talented hopefuls. They were the toughest men in sport, and the best athletes in the world.

For the past three cycling generations, doping has been equated with masculinity, with cojones. It culminated (but did not stop) with Operación Puerto, a massive Spanish doping investigation begun in 2006 that pulled in dozens of cyclists, several of them once affiliated with US Postal/Discovery. Hesselbarger was not implicated, yet in some ways his situation would only worsen. In 2006, he joined Phonak, a team that made the rest of the field look clean by comparison.

He downplays the Phonak disgrace as “the stuff that happens in this sport,” but Phonak was not merely rotten; it was corrupt to the core. Most of the team’s marquee names were banned and stripped of their titles and medals. Tyler Hamilton’s 2004 Olympic gold will forever be rubbished in light of test results that suggested blood doping. Santi Pérez was nailed during testing at UCI headquarters in Lausanne; 1998 world champ Oscar Camenzind was busted just before the Athens Games.

And Floyd Landis's victory in the 2006 Tour de France — the result of an inhuman feat of physicality in which he broke away on the race's toughest mountain stage and finished an impossible six minutes ahead of the field — was reversed when tests revealed a heightened level of testosterone.

Page 4 of 4 Phonak exemplified the “asterisks era,” when Bonds and Roger Clemens and Landis and god after human god were knocked from pedestals and podiums, their wins annulled and their records granted speculative status. Andy Rihs, owner of the Swiss hearing aid firm Phonak had this to say when the men he was paying to win races turned out to be cheats: “Think hard before you get involved in cycling, because there are never any guarantees ... where there's money, there's doping.”

In the wake of the Phonak collapse, Hesjedal left Europe for the States. “It was like going to the minors,” he says. He signed with an American team called Health Net. But Christian Vande Velde, an American superstar who is Garmin-Cervélo's stalwart veteran presence, points out something critical about that time: “When Ryder went back, he never gave up his apartment in Spain. That takes balls, man. It was a statement.” Hesjedal meant to return to the big leagues, on his own terms. “I just worked hard,” he tells me, “and created the right opportunities for myself. I didn't sit somewhere cold and rainy in winter and say, ‘I gotta start training soon.’ ”

The right opportunity presented itself in Team Garmin, an outfit started by Jonathan Vaughters, who rode through the worst of the doping crisis; has contorted like a preteen Chinese gymnast around his own compromised record; and was determined to start a clean team — consequences, and potentially poor results, be damned. He gathered a group of untainted and semi-tainted pros, offered them contracts, and built the most stringent anti-doping test program anywhere in professional sport. While every UCI pro cyclist submits to baseline testing, and has a bio-passport with which his frequent test results

must be consistent (that is, no bump-up in hemoglobin, which would suggest blood doping, or testosterone levels, which would mean juicing), Garmin riders are subject to an Orwellian program called Adam's Whereabouts. Like lawyers, they have to account for, and explain, every minute of their existence. Three strikes and you're out. If a tester shows up at your home and you're not there to give blood, you're done.

"I joined Garmin partway through '08," Hesjedal says, "and I knew I was part of this team that wanted to make a place for itself. I was up there in races I wasn't even finishing in other years." Two thousand nine was a watershed for Vaughters and his Brady Bunch. Perhaps just as significantly for Hesjedal, after the world championships he finally got a chance to spend a spell of time with a woman from Missouri he had met in Boulder, Colorado, the previous year. "I had a great off-season with her," he tells me of his fiancée, Ashley Hofer. "I proposed to her in spring 2010 — and that was the first highlight of the year."

Hofer moved into the apartment in Girona, Spain, that Hesjedal symbolically refused to give up, while he began cashing in on fifteen years of unimaginably hard toil. "Ryder wants to prove that you can work in cycling, do your job in an honest way, and still win," Hofer tells me. "He wants to show that there are other ways to make yourself win. Your strength, your health, your happiness — all these things can get you to the finish line."

It's stage six, the País Vasco's curtain call. Ryder Hesjedal, dripping sweat, is done. He snaps out of his time trial bike, and gives me the shrug. My father's shrug. Cycling's tart aperçu.

Most major races end with a time trial. (The Tour de France climaxes with the sprint on the Champs-Élysées, but the race is really decided on the time trial the day before.) There is something antithetical, almost anti-epic, in this format. It pits the rider, alone, against the clock. Conventional time is

meaningless in a bike race, because the pain twists seconds into minutes and minutes into infinite loop-de-loops of nothingness. The objective is just to go faster than the other guy; there is no clock to beat. In this, the time trial is the element of the Grand Tour that most distances spectator from cyclist. The former is watching the clock of the conventional universe. The latter — although bound to that convention if he hopes to mount the podium — leaves convention behind the moment he rolls onto the tarmac.

Hesjedal leaves fifth from last. A one-minute interval separates the departing cyclists. The course takes a false flat up to a nasty climb, down a technical descent, followed by a long, serpentine piece of road up to a downhill, and then two windblown straightaways. It is twenty-four kilometres long. It must be ridden in the sweet spot between consistently moderated effort and puking up your guts.

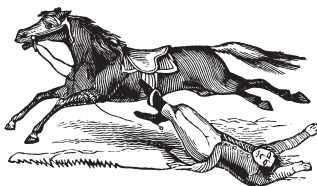
They are so small out there, with no peloton. Just the rider, crouched over his time trial bike, pace motorcycle in front of him, follow car behind. The cyclist wears a tight onesie with a teardrop helmet that looks poured from pure speed; his butt is high on the saddle, his face betraying everything.

Hesjedal leads out strong. On the first turn, he hops his bike into the elbow bend, a mountain biker's move that shaves off seconds. He races quickly into the first time check, but just as suddenly he is off the leader's pace. He's down a minute, and then another thirty seconds. This bumps him back in the overall rankings, but not out of the top ten. He is ninth overall in the País Vasco. With each top ten finish, he makes further claim to a place among the elite. He'll earn his gilded helmet. But will he win?

Cycling, after all, is the toughest sport in the world. A rider must give up his body to the agonies of pedalling for days and months on end. He must give up other things: his youth, a part of his essential character, the broadness of a lived life, all

for the focused brilliance of his sport. But in these certainties, questions remain. If one is “frustrated with fifth,” does this mean one is unwilling to go as far as it is necessary to go, into the grey areas where Adam’s Whereabouts doesn’t peek? One can be forgiven, also, for wondering if winning morally beats winning by any means necessary. In a sport that demands giving everything away, must not one give everything away?

Ryder Hesjedal doesn’t think so. He thinks he can win on his terms, and he is riding to do so. “You have to not be able to do it a hundred times to be able to do it a few times,” he told me the night before, sitting in my room, his face scrubbed with exhaustion. “I’m at the point where I’m riding the best I ever have, and I know it.” He was telling me that he is methodical, not explosive. He is the man who was the boy who whipped a lacrosse ball against a basement wall for hours on end, “until it was perfect.” Process, focus. And an unshakable belief that cycling’s suffering is a form of metaphysical purity, that it must be free from taint. If he’s lucky enough to last, he will come fifth a hundred times. Then, maybe, he’ll come first.







A trio of Olympic swimmers in their jersey-knitwear swim suits. I find it hard to believe the guy on the left is an "Olympian" but it's easy to see the patriotism of the chap in the middle. "How can I call more attention to my crotch? Ah, yes, this should do."

Thursday, July 21, 2011

Maillot Jaune

Peter Rogers

I finally looked up the phrase Phil Liggett keeps using during the Tour de France instead of Yellow Jersey; “Maillot Jaune”. Turns out, “maillot” is really just another word for shirt or jersey.

The word is also used for “maillot de bain” or swim suit or even “tank tops” or any kind of shirt made from stretchy “jersey-like” fabric.

I guess the word “Jersey” doesn’t translate because it’s the place name where the fabric was first made. Its first uses being underwear then later for athletic and swimming garments.

Apparently CoCo Chanel outraged fashionistas by using the fabric for items other than underwear and is credited/blamed with it’s acceptance.

Another bit of trivia: I always assumed the term “Tank Top” came from the military, being a sleeveless undershirt worn inside a tank due to the heat. It actually comes from swimming as it described the sleeveless top you’d wear when swimming in a “tank” or pool (early above ground pools were referred to as “swimming tanks”). This is all starting to sound like an Abraham Simpson story, “I wore an onion on my belt, as was the fashion at the time...”

Of course, this trivia comes from Wikipedia so it could just be absolute crap.

*There’s also a Paris subway stop called Porte Maillot but it seems to derive its name as a version of the place name, Maille (confirmation required), like the French mustard company, “Maille”, which has no connection whatsoever to the Tour de France.



The Dutch Way: Bicycles and Fresh Bread

Russell Shorto

AS an American who has been living here for several years, I am struck, every time I go home, by the way American cities remain manacled to the car. While Europe is dealing with congestion and greenhouse gas buildup by turning urban centers into pedestrian zones and finding innovative ways to combine driving with public transportation, many American cities are carving out more parking spaces. It's all the more bewildering because America's collapsing infrastructure would seem to cry out for new solutions.

Geography partly explains the difference: America is spread out, while European cities predate the car. But Boston and Philadelphia have old centers too, while the peripheral sprawl in London and Barcelona mirrors that of American cities. More important, I think, is mind-set. Take bicycles. The advent of bike lanes in some American cities may seem like a big step, but merely marking a strip of the road for recreational cycling spectacularly misses the point. In Amsterdam, nearly everyone cycles, and cars, bikes and trams coexist in a complex flow, with dedicated bicycle lanes, traffic lights and parking garages. But this is thanks to a different way of thinking about transportation.

To give a small but telling example, pointed out to me by my friend Ruth Oldenziel, an expert on the history of technology at Eindhoven University, Dutch drivers are taught that when you are about to get out of the car, you reach for the door handle with your right hand — bringing your arm across your body to the door. This forces a driver to swivel shoulders and head, so that before opening the door you can see if there is a bike coming from behind. Likewise, every Dutch child has to pass a bicycle safety exam at school. The coexistence of different modes of travel is hard-wired into the culture.

This in turn relates to lots of other things — such as bread. How? Cyclists can't carry six bags of groceries; bulk buying is almost nonexistent. Instead of shopping for a week, people stop at the market daily. So the need for processed loaves that will last for days is gone. A result: good bread.

There are also in the United States certain perceptions associated with both cycling and public transportation that are

not the case here. In Holland, public buses aren't considered last-resort forms of transportation. And cycling isn't seen as eco-friendly exercise; it's a way to get around. C.E.O.'s cycle to work, and kids cycle to school.

It's true that public policy reinforces the egalitarianism. With mandatory lessons and other fees, getting a driver's license costs more than \$1,000. And taxi fares are kept deliberately high: a trip from the airport may cost \$80, while a 20-minute bus ride sets you back about \$3.50. But the egalitarianism — or maybe better said a preference for simplicity — is also rooted in the culture. A 17th-century French naval commander was shocked to see a Dutch captain sweeping out his own quarters. Likewise, I used to run into the mayor of Amsterdam at the supermarket, and he wasn't engaged in a populist stunt (mayors aren't elected here but are government appointees); he was shopping.

For American cities to think outside the car would seem to require a mental sea change. Then again, Americans, too, are practical, no-nonsense people. And Zef Hemel, the chief planner for the city of Amsterdam, reminded me that sea changes do happen. "Back in the 1960s, we were doing the same thing as America, making cities car-friendly," he said. Funnily enough, it was an American, Jane Jacobs, who changed the minds of European urban designers. Her book "The Death and Life of Great American Cities" got European planners to shift their focus from car-friendliness to overall livability.

When I noted that Manhattan's bike lanes seem to be used more for recreation than transport — cyclists in Amsterdam are dressed in everything from jeans to cocktail dresses, while those in Manhattan often look like spandex cyborgs — Mr. Hemel told me to give it time. "Those are the pioneers," he said. "You have to start somewhere."

What he meant was, "You start with bike lanes" — that is, with the conviction that urban planning can bring about beneficial cultural changes. But that points up another mental difference: the willingness of Europeans to follow top-down social planning. America's famed individualism breeds an often healthy distrust of the elite. I'm as quick as any other red-blooded

American to bristle at European technocrats telling me how to live. (Try buying a light bulb or a magazine after 6 p.m. in Amsterdam, where the political elite have decreed that workers' well-being requires that shops be open only during standard office hours, precisely when most people can't shop.)

But while many Americans see their cars as an extension of their individual freedom, to some of us owning a car is a burden, and in a city a double burden. I find the recrafting of the city in order to lessen — or eliminate — the need for cars to be not just grudgingly acceptable, but, yes, an expansion of my individual freedom. So I say (in this case, at least): Go, social-planning technocrats! If only America's cities could be so free.

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Taming the Bicycle

Mark Twain

“Get a bicycle. You will not regret it, if you live.”

I thought the matter over, and concluded I could do it. So I went down and bought a barrel of Pond’s Extract and a bicycle. The Expert came home with me to instruct me. We chose the back yard, for the sake of privacy, and went to work.

Mine was not a full-grown bicycle, but only a colt—a fifty-inch, with the pedals shortened up to forty-eight—and skittish, like any other colt. The Expert explained the thing’s points briefly, then he got on its back and rode around a little, to show me how easy it was to do. He said that the dismounting was perhaps the hardest thing to learn, and so we would leave that to the last. But he was in error there. He found, to his surprise and joy, that all that he needed to do was to get me on to the machine and stand out of the way; I could get off, myself. Although I was wholly inexperienced, I dismounted in the best time on record. He was on that side, shoving up the machine; we all came down with a crash, he at the bottom, I next, and the machine on top.

We examined the machine, but it was not in the least injured.

This was hardly believable. Yet the Expert assured me that it was true; in fact, the examination proved it. I was partly to realize, then, how admirably these things are constructed. We applied some Pond's Extract, and resumed. The Expert got on the OTHER side to shove up this time, but I dismounted on that side; so the result was as before.

The machine was not hurt. We oiled ourselves again, and resumed. This time the Expert took up a sheltered position behind, but somehow or other we landed on him again.

He was full of admiration; said it was abnormal. She was all right, not a scratch on her, not a timber started anywhere. I said it was wonderful, while we were greasing up, but he said that when I came to know these steel spider-webs I would realize that nothing but dynamite could cripple them. Then he limped out to position, and we resumed once more. This time the Expert took up the position of short-stop, and got a man to shove up behind. We got up a handsome speed, and presently traversed a brick, and I went out over the top of the tiller and landed, head down, on the instructor's back, and saw the machine fluttering in the air between me and the sun. It was well it came down on us, for that broke the fall, and it was not injured.

Five days later I got out and was carried down to the hospital, and found the Expert doing pretty fairly. In a few more days I was quite sound. I attribute this to my prudence in always dismounting on something soft. Some recommend a feather bed, but I think an Expert is better.

The Expert got out at last, brought four assistants with him. It was a good idea. These four held the graceful cobweb upright while I climbed into the saddle; then they formed in column and marched on either side of me while the Expert pushed behind; all hands assisted at the dismount.

The bicycle had what is called the "wabbles," and had them very badly. In order to keep my position, a good many things

were required of me, and in every instance the thing required was against nature. That is to say, that whatever the needed thing might be, my nature, habit, and breeding moved me to attempt it in one way, while some immutable and unsuspected law of physics required that it be done in just the other way. I perceived by this how radically and grotesquely wrong had been the life-long education of my body and members. They were steeped in ignorance; they knew nothing—nothing which it could profit them to know. For instance, if I found myself falling to the right, I put the tiller hard down the other way, by a quite natural impulse, and so violated a law, and kept on going down. The law required the opposite thing—the big wheel must be turned in the direction in which you are falling. It is hard to believe this, when you are told it. And not merely hard to believe it, but impossible; it is opposed to all your notions. And it is just as hard to do it, after you do come to believe it. Believing it, and knowing by the most convincing proof that it is true, does not help it: you can't any more DO it than you could before; you can neither force nor persuade yourself to do it at first. The intellect has to come to the front, now. It has to teach the limbs to discard their old education and adopt the new.

The steps of one's progress are distinctly marked. At the end of each lesson he knows he has acquired something, and he also knows what that something is, and likewise that it will stay with him. It is not like studying German, where you mull along, in a groping, uncertain way, for thirty years; and at last, just as you think you've got it, they spring the subjunctive on you, and there you are. No—and I see now, plainly enough, that the great pity about the German language is, that you can't fall off it and hurt yourself. There is nothing like that feature to make you attend strictly to business. But I also see, by what I have learned of bicycling, that the right and only sure way to learn German is by the bicycling method. That is to say, take a grip on one villainy of it at a time, leaving that one half learned.

When you have reached the point in bicycling where you can

balance the machine tolerably fairly and propel it and steer it, then comes your next task—how to mount it. You do it in this way: you hop along behind it on your right foot, resting the other on the mounting-peg, and grasping the tiller with your hands. At the word, you rise on the peg, stiffen your left leg, hang your other one around in the air in a general indefinite way, lean your stomach against the rear of the saddle, and then fall off, maybe on one side, maybe on the other; but you fall off. You get up and do it again; and once more; and then several times.

By this time you have learned to keep your balance; and also to steer without wrenching the tiller out by the roots (I say tiller because it IS a tiller; “handle-bar” is a lamely descriptive phrase). So you steer along, straight ahead, a little while, then you rise forward, with a steady strain, bringing your right leg, and then your body, into the saddle, catch your breath, fetch a violent hitch this way and then that, and down you go again.

But you have ceased to mind the going down by this time; you are getting to light on one foot or the other with considerable certainty. Six more attempts and six more falls make you perfect. You land in the saddle comfortably, next time, and stay there—that is, if you can be content to let your legs dangle, and leave the pedals alone a while; but if you grab at once for the pedals, you are gone again. You soon learn to wait a little and perfect your balance before reaching for the pedals; then the mounting-art is acquired, is complete, and a little practice will make it simple and easy to you, though spectators ought to keep off a rod or two to one side, along at first, if you have nothing against them.

And now you come to the voluntary dismount; you learned the other kind first of all. It is quite easy to tell one how to do the voluntary dismount; the words are few, the requirement simple, and apparently undifficult; let your left pedal go down till your left leg is nearly straight, turn your wheel to the left, and get off as you would from a horse. It certainly does sound exceedingly easy; but it isn't. I don't know why it isn't but it





isn't. Try as you may, you don't get down as you would from a horse, you get down as you would from a house afire. You make a spectacle of yourself every time.

During the eight days I took a daily lesson an hour and a half. At the end of this twelve working-hours' apprenticeship I was graduated—in the rough. I was pronounced competent to paddle my own bicycle without outside help. It seems incredible, this celerity of acquirement. It takes considerably longer than that to learn horseback-riding in the rough.

Now it is true that I could have learned without a teacher, but it would have been risky for me, because of my natural clumsiness. The self-taught man seldom knows anything accurately, and he does not know a tenth as much as he could have known if he had worked under teachers; and, besides, he brags, and is the means of fooling other thoughtless people into going and doing as he himself has done. There are those who imagine that the unlucky accidents of life—life's "experiences"—are in some way useful to us. I wish I could find out how. I never knew one of them to happen twice. They always change off and swap around and catch you on your inexperienced side. If personal experience can be worth anything as an education, it wouldn't seem likely that you could trip Methuselah; and yet if that old person could come back here it is more that likely that one of the first things he would do would be to take hold of one of these electric wires and tie himself all up in a knot. Now the surer thing and the wiser thing would be for him to ask somebody whether it was a good thing to take hold of. But that would not suit him; he would be one of the self-taught kind that go by experience; he would want to examine for himself. And he would find, for his instruction, that the coiled patriarch shuns the electric wire; and it would be useful to him, too, and would leave his education in quite a complete and rounded-out condition, till he should come again, some day, and go to bouncing a dynamite-can around to find out what was in it.

But we wander from the point. However, get a teacher; it saves much time and Pond's Extract.

Before taking final leave of me, my instructor inquired concerning my physical strength, and I was able to inform him that I hadn't any. He said that was a defect which would make up-hill wheeling pretty difficult for me at first; but he also said the bicycle would soon remove it. The contrast between his muscles and mine was quite marked. He wanted to test mine, so I offered my biceps—which was my best. It almost made him smile. He said, "It is pulpy, and soft, and yielding, and rounded; it evades pressure, and glides from under the fingers; in the dark a body might think it was an oyster in a rag." Perhaps this made me look grieved, for he added, briskly: "Oh, that's all right, you needn't worry about that; in a little while you can't tell it from a petrified kidney. Just go right along with your practice; you're all right."

Then he left me, and I started out alone to seek adventures. You don't really have to seek them—that is nothing but a phrase—they come to you.

I chose a reposeful Sabbath-day sort of a back street which was about thirty yards wide between the curbstones. I knew it was not wide enough; still, I thought that by keeping strict watch and wasting no space unnecessarily I could crowd through.

Of course I had trouble mounting the machine, entirely on my own responsibility, with no encouraging moral support from the outside, no sympathetic instructor to say, "Good! now you're doing well—good again—don't hurry—there, now, you're all right—brace up, go ahead." In place of this I had some other support. This was a boy, who was perched on a gate-post munching a hunk of maple sugar.

He was full of interest and comment. The first time I failed and went down he said that if he was me he would dress up in pillows, that's what he would do. The next time I went down

he advised me to go and learn to ride a tricycle first. The third time I collapsed he said he didn't believe I could stay on a horse-car. But the next time I succeeded, and got clumsily under way in a weaving, tottering, uncertain fashion, and occupying pretty much all of the street. My slow and lumbering gait filled the boy to the chin with scorn, and he sung out, "My, but don't he rip along!" Then he got down from his post and loafed along the sidewalk, still observing and occasionally commenting. Presently he dropped into my wake and followed along behind. A little girl passed by, balancing a wash-board on her head, and giggled, and seemed about to make a remark, but the boy said, rebukingly, "Let him alone, he's going to a funeral."

I have been familiar with that street for years, and had always supposed it was a dead level; but it was not, as the bicycle now informed me, to my surprise. The bicycle, in the hands of a novice, is as alert and acute as a spirit-level in the detecting the delicate and vanishing shades of difference in these matters. It notices a rise where your untrained eye would not observe that one existed; it notices any decline which water will run down. I was toiling up a slight rise, but was not aware of it. It made me tug and pant and perspire; and still, labor as I might, the machine came almost to a standstill every little while. At such times the boy would say: "That's it! take a rest—there ain't no hurry. They can't hold the funeral without YOU."

Stones were a bother to me. Even the smallest ones gave me a panic when I went over them. I could hit any kind of a stone, no matter how small, if I tried to miss it; and of course at first I couldn't help trying to do that. It is but natural. It is part of the ass that is put in us all, for some inscrutable reason.

It was at the end of my course, at last, and it was necessary for me to round to. This is not a pleasant thing, when you undertake it for the first time on your own responsibility, and neither is it likely to succeed. Your confidence oozes away, you fill steadily up with nameless apprehensions, every fiber of you is tense with a watchful strain, you start a cautious and gradual

curve, but your squirmy nerves are all full of electric anxieties, so the curve is quickly demoralized into a jerky and perilous zigzag; then suddenly the nickel-clad horse takes the bit in its mouth and goes slanting for the curbstone, defying all prayers and all your powers to change its mind—your heart stands still, your breath hangs fire, your legs forget to work, straight on you go, and there are but a couple of feet between you and the curb now. And now is the desperate moment, the last chance to save yourself; of course all your instructions fly out of your head, and you whirl your wheel AWAY from the curb instead of TOWARD it, and so you go sprawling on that granite-bound inhospitable shore. That was my luck; that was my experience. I dragged myself out from under the indestructible bicycle and sat down on the curb to examine.

I started on the return trip. It was now that I saw a farmer's wagon poking along down toward me, loaded with cabbages. If I needed anything to perfect the precariousness of my steering, it was just that. The farmer was occupying the middle of the road with his wagon, leaving barely fourteen or fifteen yards of space on either side. I couldn't shout at him—a beginner can't shout; if he opens his mouth he is gone; he must keep all his attention on his business. But in this grisly emergency, the boy came to the rescue, and for once I had to be grateful to him. He kept a sharp lookout on the swiftly varying impulses and inspirations of my bicycle, and shouted to the man accordingly:

“To the left! Turn to the left, or this jackass'll run over you!” The man started to do it. “No, to the right, to the right! Hold on! THAT won't do!—to the left!—to the right!—to the LEFT—right! left—ri—Stay where you ARE, or you're a goner!”

And just then I caught the off horse in the starboard and went down in a pile. I said, “Hang it! Couldn't you SEE I was coming?”

“Yes, I see you was coming, but I couldn't tell which WAY you was coming. Nobody could — now, COULD they? You couldn't

yourself — now, COULD you? So what could I do?“

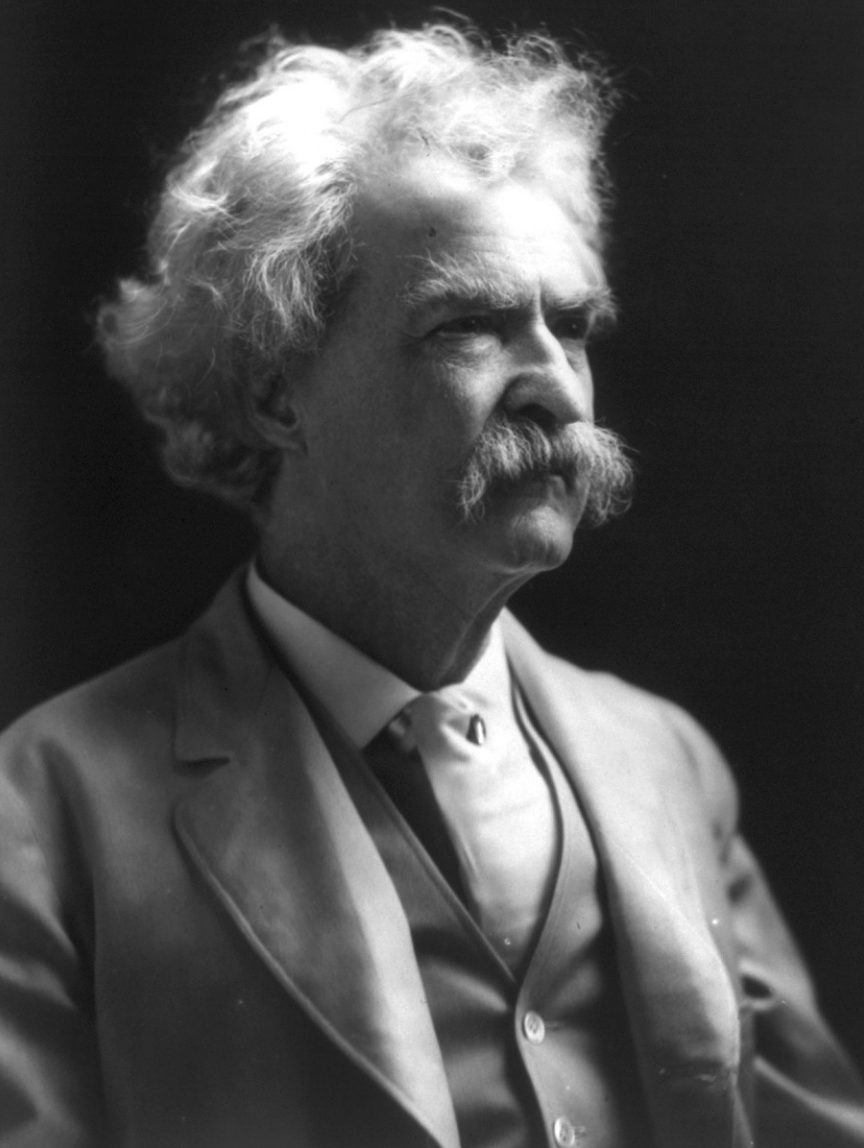
There was something in that, and so I had the magnanimity to say so. I said I was no doubt as much to blame as he was.

Within the next five days I achieved so much progress that the boy couldn't keep up with me. He had to go back to his gate-post, and content himself with watching me fall at long range.

There was a row of low stepping-stones across one end of the street, a measured yard apart. Even after I got so I could steer pretty fairly I was so afraid of those stones that I always hit them. They gave me the worst falls I ever got in that street, except those which I got from dogs. I have seen it stated that no expert is quick enough to run over a dog; that a dog is always able to skip out of his way. I think that that may be true: but I think that the reason he couldn't run over the dog was because he was trying to. I did not try to run over any dog. But I ran over every dog that came along. I think it makes a great deal of difference. If you try to run over the dog he knows how to calculate, but if you are trying to miss him he does not know how to calculate, and is liable to jump the wrong way every time. It was always so in my experience. Even when I could not hit a wagon I could hit a dog that came to see me practice. They all liked to see me practice, and they all came, for there was very little going on in our neighborhood to entertain a dog. It took time to learn to miss a dog, but I achieved even that.

I can steer as well as I want to, now, and I will catch that boy one of these days and run over HIM if he doesn't reform.

Get a bicycle. You will not regret it, if you live.



If Mark Twain were around today, he'd be an advocate for safe cycling & road conditions and would simply destroy "Movember".



Tuesday, August 09, 2011

*Have a Swim.
Feel Better.*

Peter Rogers

I've been thinking a lot about swimming lately, particularly as I've been too busy to go this week (I usually swim two to three times a week). Not swimming, especially in the summer is rough for an enthusiast such as myself. As an enthusiast, I'm prone to mentally collect lists of films that touch on my chosen diversion. You know what I mean. I cycle a lot, so I note any movie where bikes play a part of the story (think of *Breaking Away*, or of the cycling montage in *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid* or even *The 40-year-old Virgin* — where Steve Carrell is caricatured by his use of a bike). If you love hockey, you might list *Slapshot* or *Mystery Alaska* in your cerebral library of hockey movies (you'll probably try to forget Rob Lowe's *Youngblood*). I've started to do that same with swimming, not just the obvious ones like *Swimfan*, *Big River Man* or *The Swimmer* but ones where a character is shown doing laps in lieu of a "long thoughtful walk on a beach" or something. I guess the idea is we can "see" a character thinking while a voice-over or inspirational music plays. The two scenes that come to mind are decades apart but similar (because they are in a pool — that's about it really).

In season 4 of *Mad Men*, after Don Draper has his lost weekend-style nadir we see him making a journal entry as a sort of proto-twelve step program. He wants to regain control of his life, cutting back on his alcoholic crutch and getting healthier, of course, he doesn't mention cutting back on cigarettes. As he writes to himself about his regrets, goals and questions we see him swimming laps and barely making it (the cut to him, exhausted on the locker room bench says it all). Some critics didn't care for the voice-over technique but I thought it contrasted Don's approach to journal writing as self exploration as opposed to Roger Sterling's self aggrandizing memoir spoken into a dictaphone. Then there's the clip later in the episode when Don, revived by his new regimen, won't let a younger man pass him despite the fact they are in separate lanes (Jon Hamm gives a great "Not in my house, Be-atch" glare to his imagined competitor). This reminds me of something David Sedaris wrote in *When You Are Engulfed in Flames* about

when he started swimming for his own health, he couldn't help but try to pass people in the next lane and how he gloated after beating them, even if they were "that 50-year-old lady with Down's Syndrome". I definitely do that. I win the gold every time I beat someone to the wall, even it is an 80-year-old man who just happens to be floating by.

The other scene I'm thinking of, is from *The Paper Chase* where Timothy Bottoms, as a first year Harvard law student, tells an over stressed classmate to "Relax. Have a swim. Feel better." Throughout the film, when he isn't schtupping Lindsay Wagner, we see our protagonist escaping from the stresses of studies by swimming laps.

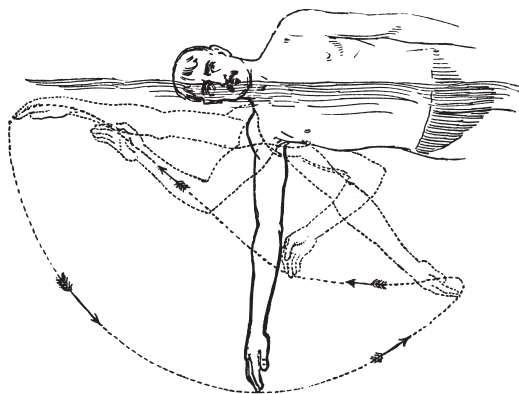
Lindsay Wagner...

...sorry. I lost my train of thought there for a second.

Swimming is the only exercise I can think of that is simultaneously relaxing and exhausting (mind you, I've never tried Yoga). Running is so damned hard, and biking is treacherous, particularly in Toronto, not to mention the countless broken bones of le Tour de France. There's nothing like swimming on a sunny day in the Autumn. The late afternoon sun streams through the water to create dappled light patterns across the tiles of the pool walls. When dusk comes, the sky turns inky purple and the water begins to glow from the pool lights. Drawing yourself up out of the water, every muscle feels loose and limber and you feel as if you've just finished a massage. It really is that good.

Yet, if you haven't always swam, then getting started is tough. There's the public display of nudity which in my Protestant mind can seem unusually uncomfortable. Showering with others is another indignity. The water itself is highly chemical and usually a touch above freezing. I'm surprised I don't have to break ice to get in sometimes (I can see the sign made by the pool staff, "Swimmers must return ice axe to attendant after

use.”) Finally, there’s the matter of breathing, which of course, you can’t do underwater. All things said, there’s no reason to like it. Whether there’s something deeply Freudian about returning to the embryonic fluid or simply because it’s just great exercise, I’m still drawn to it. I seek it out and look to go for a swim where ever I am. In St. John’s, I swam twice at the Aquarena, one of the only pools in the city to offer lane swimming. It was strange swimming there. The place feels like a bunker and isn’t exactly charming. The lane swimming is at the deep end (really deep) and it was disconcerting. The water is so clear it’s like your fear of heights kicks in while you’re swimming. Plus the lanes were very narrow so you are really close to anyone else in your lane. But I got my laps in and had fun. The first time I went with Morgan, after considerable haranguing, the staff let her do laps despite being underage. There were a lot slower swimmers there so it wasn’t really a problem. What happened to that famous Newfie hospitality? Dried up in the prune of a woman exerting her authority, no doubt. Every gymnasium has it’s dour *fräulein*, I guess. Despite all that, I’m glad I went. When you’ve had a swim, everything else just doesn’t matter. Not even the greasy, high caloric and suspect lunch we had afterwards at Scampers.



FILM & TELEVISION



Alain Delon in Le Samouraï (1967)

The American

A taciturn George Clooney turns in a precise performance as a professional killer looking over his shoulder at every turn. The film is precise in its own way - which makes one light touch about some butterfly/farfale analogy seem oddly heavy handed. I still enjoyed it though and in many ways it reminded me of Stephen Frears' *The Hit*. I don't quite understand why some people including critics hated it so much. I would say its biggest drawback was it was too slow and even making it a little dull.

The Shipping News

The adaptation of Annie Proulx's book gets the full Hollywood treatment. Director Lasse Halstrom gets the big greyness of Newfoundland right but I can't say the film would lure people to the island the way the book did. It is extremely painful watching big name American actors make a complete hash of the Newfoundland accent. Really, really painful. Gordon Pinsent shines. At times I think we slightly glorify Mr. Pinsent because he's one of us but seeing him amongst the likes of Kevin Spacey, Judi Dench, Pete Postlethwaite and Rhys Ifans you see just how great, easy and natural an actor he is. Plus, he reminds me a little of my dad. Overall the film is dreary and sluggish and Spacey's voice over at the end induced an eye-roll that lasted well over a minute. I can't understand how the movie lacked a single calorie of energy. One note: someone should tell Julianne Moore to never, ever try doing an accent on film again. She could be tried for murder for what she's done to Newfoundland & Boston accents respectively.

Starting Out in the Evening

A quiet little film with sort of low rumble beneath the surface. Frank Langella plays an aging writer who despite success early in his career has floundered and now is having trouble getting what he believes will be his last book published. He's stuck in a rut and he feels he's running out of time. Lilly Taylor plays his daughter who is in a bit of a rut herself, replaying her own self-defeating patterns. Then one day a beautiful young Phd



The American

candidate played by Lauren Ambrose shows up to hound the author for an in-depth interview for her thesis about which he is the topic. Is she a stalker, a superfan, an ardent, respectful admirer or is she scheming for something else? It doesn't matter. She is the agent of change who causes an old man to re-examine what has made his latter years "stuck on repeat". At the same time, Taylor's character sees her father's frailty as a moment when she has to find her own strength. The film is like a stage play, in a good way, with an intimacy that feels as though you are really present with the characters. A simple story, finely crafted.

Winter's Bone

An American Gothic. The story of Ree, a 17-year-old girl taking care of her mother and two young siblings while trying to find the whereabouts of her drug dealing dad. He's gone AWOL on a bond against his family's house and losing the house means splitting up the family and losing everything. Set in the Ozarks the houses and trucks are hardscrabble but the film isn't dis-

respectful - it just is what it is. It's a unadorned story that is at times frightening, saddening and a little uplifting.

The Other Guys

Well intentioned parody with funny jokes and good actors but just really poorly executed. Very uneven pacing and terrible editing of action sequences. It also had a pretty awful soundtrack. Good for about two laughs but they couldn't decide whether to be *Naked Gun* or *Hot Fuzz*. Shame.

Tron Legacy

Entertaining if unsurprising sequel to the original *Tron* film. It reminded me of an anim   film with a simple premise convoluted with many minor plot points and ideas that were generally unnecessary. Michael Sheen steals the show with his Ziggy Stardust-esque character. Visually stunning but some of the action sequences were a little confusing. Another uneven use of 3D despite being the perfect subject. Hot babes in skin tight outfits abound but the overall feeling was of sterility. The score by Daft Punk was fitting if unexceptional and unfairly criticized but I found the sound design did as much to create the digital world as the visuals. A fun night out that requires little thought to enjoy. Like a sugary meringue - sweet and pretty but not long lasting.

HBO's 24/7

Revealing inside look on professional hockey. Probably nothing of interest here for long suffering hockey widows, but for the curious and the devoted hockey fan will find it an attractive and intelligent look at professional hockey. It's the kind of myth-making treatment the NFL, NBA and MLB get weekly on American broadcasters but is a first for the NHL. The CBC, the national broadcaster that worships at the altar of hockey could learn a thing or two from HBO's approach. Number 1, restraint is often more powerful than hype.

Louis C.K.: Chewed Up

This was probably the best thing I've seen on Netflix thus far.

One of the best American comedians working today, Louis CK is in top form in his eponymous hour-long showcase.

True Grit

What's to say? Great script, great acting, great directing and beautifully filmed. The Coen bros. have updated a pretty tired and flat original to create an American classic Western cut from the same cloth as say *Unforgiven*, or *Deadwood*. The Coen's ability to make a macabre joke at just the right time is on display here and the main players Jeff Bridges and Matt Damon are in top form. The young protagonist, Mattie Ross, is played perfectly by Hailee Steinfeld, which makes a huge difference in the film. In the original, the young girl was an annoying "Disneyfied" precocious thorn in your side. Here she is determined, willful but becomes fearful and respectful. Of course, the smaller roles are filled with excellent actors such as Barry Pepper in the Robert Duvall role of Lucky Ned and Josh Brolin as hunted Tom Chaney. Some may not care for the ending but it fits with a common Coen brothers framing device of having the film begin and end with a narrator's voice (think of *Raising Arizona*, *Hudsucker Proxy*, *The Big Lebowski* and *The Man Who Wasn't There*).

True Grit



The Town

Ben Affleck returns to directing in this crime thriller set in Charlestown, Boston. He also stars as the “Townie” bank robber who inadvertently falls for a bank manager of one of their bank managers. Lots of great actors in brief performances like Pete Postlethwaite, Blake Lively and Chris Cooper. Jeremy Renner is great as Affleck’s frightening volatile friend while Jon Hamm is the FBI agent hot on his trail. The stakes are high, the action is tight. The basic conceit of a good hearted criminal who wants to go straight because he’s met a lovely woman is rife with cliché (Affleck’s character is also a failed pro hockey draft who lost his dream and his mother to crime) yet the film negates all of that. Like Paul Rand once said, don’t try to be original, just try to be good, and that’s exactly what this film does.

The Rocker

This rockstar wannabe only gets 2 stars from me. I don’t know if I’ll ever understand the Calculus of a weak movie. Everything was in place - good cast, nice concept, simple plot but... I don’t know, you can just see the script go awry in spots (the video that makes the band famous sort of disappears without explanation, the band splits over a terrible premise etc). Rainn Wilson does his thing and Jason Sudekis has perfected the music rep douche so well that he could have slept walked through the thing. Not a terrible way to fritter away 90 mins. If you have 90 mins to fritter away.

Soul Kitchen

A fun light surprise of a film from the guy who made the more substantial film Edge of Heaven. “Madcap goings-ons” are kept in check mostly by the likable main character Zinos. There’s no black and white moral distinctions here with the exception of a villainous real estate speculator but it’s all good fun. I was hoping for a better blending of music + food but still good.



The Limits of Control

The Limits of Control

Hypnotic, mesmerizing, impressionistic and meditative are words you might use if you liked this film. If you didn't you'd just call it dull or stupid. Fair enough. This obtuse film of a courier/smuggler of illicit something (diamonds? Instruments?) eventually exacting revenge reminds me an Antonioni movie - *L'avventura* or *The Passenger*. It's probably just superficial. The main character does little other than wait while others talk briefly of music, film, art, science etc. It's a riddle wrapped in a stylish enigma but I can't say what or even "Go see it". On a side note there is a frequently nude actress whose main body of work to date seems to be mostly her own body. PS If you liked *The American* with George Clooney, you might like this, otherwise avoid it.

Leon The Professional

I know this is a popular movie but it seemed kind of clunky to me. There were so many places where the story could have been tightened up. Not as stylish or as cohesive as you'd expect from Luc Bresson. I also have to say it's a little creepy with Natalie Portman's coquettish performance. Not because she's not playing the mature 12-year-old well, of course she is and she gained attention for the performance. But the direction (think shot selection and costume choices) and script create more than a few uncomfortable and um, inappropriate moments. Maybe this film is the prototype of the cold hearted professional assassin who turns out to have a heart after all, but I wouldn't cut it any slack because of it.

My Dinner With Andre

"People just start living their life by habit." A film about awareness and being truly human rather than merely a phantom acting your perceived societal role. Or something. I'm not really sure but I couldn't stop watching. Two "theatre people" having a long conversation in a restaurant is strangely compelling. I kept thinking "How much longer can I watch this?" but I just found myself drawn in even deeper. You kind of have to see it to believe it. I still agree more with Wallace and sort of thought Andre was a hippy wanker. I'd like to see a remake from the waiter and bartender's point of view waiting for these two nerds to shut up so they could go home.

A Town Called Panic

A surreal madcap story animated from what look like dollar store spare parts. Its manic energy is at times hilarious and equal parts maddening. Still, many of the scenes and settings are like tiny magical dioramas. The story is of 3 friends, horse, cowboy and Indian who live together on a bucolic farm. When Cowboy and Indian plan to build a BBQ for horse's birthday but accidentally order 50 million bricks the insanely chaotic fable begins. The three friends begin an adventure that takes them to the centre of the Earth, the arctic (?), and to the bottom of the sea. I'm failing at describing this weird movie but

imagine Michel Gondry and Wes Anderson directed a stop motion movie using toys they'd found and filmed it on colorful papier-mâché sets and the story was 1 part Monty Python, 1 part Mr. Bean and 1 part schizophrenic dementia. Yes, I think that describes it. I think little kids would enjoy watching this and making up their own stories as they went along. Of course, it's Belgian.

Justified

Television series from Graham Yost starring Timothy Olyphant as a federal lawman who's been bumped from his Miami assignment to Kentucky where he grew up. Based on an Elmore Leonard story. That sounds waaaay too TV Guide - it's better than it sounds. The pilot threw a little too much exposition in every sentence but it ends with our protagonist discovering he's got a lot of anger issues which is not a great demeanor for a U.S. Marshall with an itchy trigger finger.

Hausu (House, 1977)

You pretty much have to see it to believe it. I admit that I only wanted to see this film because the poster art was so incredible. Describing it as a Japanese art-horror film doesn't really do it justice. It's campy, surreal, funny, and completely unique. The story is simple. 7 high school girls go to a summer house on a holiday but of course, the house is haunted by a demon spirit that devours young girls for kicks. Yet it's like a crazy mix of H.R. Pufnstuf meets The Shining. It makes me think that maybe Japanese pop culture isn't so strange just heavily influenced by Hausu director, Obayashi who also directed some incredibly whacky cologne commercials starring Charles Bronson (search YouTube for "Mandom"), which also have to be seen to be believed.

High Life

Little seen and under appreciated comedic crime film starring Timothy Olyphant. Set in the early 80s a "smart addict" played by Olyphant has a bright idea. Knock over newly popular ATMs (ABMs to Canadians) during low security maintenance calls.

When you meet the idiotic crew he assembles you know it's all going to go wrong. Not a bad film but it just has this weird problem of pace that so many Canadian films seem to share. Enjoyable enough but just had this sort of "Canadianness" to it that is sort of like flat Ginger ale. I can never put my finger on it.

Tron Legacy in IMAX 3D

Still full of pointless plot points but the IMAX version has a lot more impact than 3D which really doesn't compare to IMAX. And Michael Sheen continues to entertain.

The Legend of 1900

Born aboard a luxury liner and raised in the engine room by a ship worker, a piano prodigy named 1900 becomes a Jazz Age virtuoso. 1900 delights and amazes cross-Atlantic passengers and in one climatic scene, duels with Jelly Roll Morton. Unfortunately, that is the best part of the film. It's a wonderful fable but there's only two acts - the third is like 1900 himself - lost at sea.

The Legend of 1900



Leatherheads

Charming but not charming enough. It's almost worth it for the art direction alone. Almost. To be honest, the real fly in the ointment of this 20s era football comedy is Renée Zellweger who can't really keep up with George Clooney's Clark Gable-esque slyness or Jim Krasinski's Rockwellian All-American. Angela suggested Elizabeth Banks as a substitute who may have been a little young for the part but would have probably made the difference in this Rom-com which was actually a little light in both "Rom" and "com".

Salt

This Angelie Jolie action flick was hyped as a sort of chick version of the Bourne series which would be great if it were true. Jolie is easy to believe as a Russian born spy but the physicality of the role is out of her scope. What makes Jason Bourne believable is he improvises and gets pretty banged up doing it and it affects him - he doesn't kill someone lightly. Salt jumps from moving trains, blows up rooms she's still standing in but never even winks or breaks her 1000-mile stare. Jolie has star power but just isn't believable as a truck jumping, ass-whooping stick-bug glamour-puss who never gets a hair out of place. Enjoy this one more for the kitsch than the kicks.

Cyrus

The tale of loner John (John C. Reilly) who, seven years after his divorce, surprisingly meets the lively and spirited Molly (Marisa Tomei). Only problem, her 22 year old son Cyrus (Jonah Hill) is weirdly attached to mom and doesn't care for any new father figures. This film is funny, creepy, awkward but most of all really honest which makes it worth watching.

Dancer in the Dark

Let me just say that Lars Von Trier is a heartbreaking son of a bitch. Björk plays Selma, an immigrant single mother working for the money for an operation to save her son from the same affliction that is causing her own blindness. Whenever something saddens her, she daydreams of being in a musical, and

there's plenty to be sad about. The musical scenes, choreographed to songs by Björk are an opportunity for Von Trier to play and let loose a little. As Selma's situation worsens the musical numbers become more elaborate. This is a devastatingly sad film and Björk is remarkable in it (as is Catherine Deneuve). If I ever meet Von Trier in person I might be tempted to punch him in the throat, but I'm guessing he would enjoy such a pathetic expression of humanity.

Incendies

Amazing film from Denis Villeneuve about a brother and sister's discovery of who their recently deceased mother really was and the journey to find their previously unknown brother and a father they believed to be dead. It's a trip that takes them from a hate-filled war to a place of immensely, deeply affecting love. Probably one of the best Canadian films I've seen in over a decade.

Sita Sings the Blues

Charming, witty, inventive animated telling of one of those insanely complicated Indian myths that are of the highly soap-operatic type. This great love epic is related by a humorous trio of Indian silhouette puppets (whatever those things are) and re-enacted by a cast of gods, monkey-gods, beauties & villains backed by a score of 1920s jazz tunes. The myth is intertwined with the contemporary and autobiographical story of the director's trials of her own long distance relationship coming to an end. By the way, the three aspects of the film are each assigned a unique style of animation resulting in a wild mix of graphical vernaculars. The primary visual connector is the absolute riot of colours that is so prevalent of Indian artwork. Let me put it this way, this film is so colourful it would make a Bollywood musical seem like it's in black & white. The film was extremely well reviewed which set up high expectations that were not met. Where the film lags is when there are one or two unnecessary musical moments that don't move the story along but otherwise it was refreshing change from the now ubiquitous computer generated imagery typical of contemporary animated films.

The Thorn in the Heart

This is Michel Gondry's documentary about his family, namely his Aunt Suzette who taught generations of kids in her small French town. It becomes obvious how Suzette's sense of whimsy and play influenced Gondry and just how important his family vacations of his youth are to his work as an adult. The title refers to the strained relationship Suzette has with her adult son which is often contrasted by how fondly she is remembered by her past students. Curiously though, near the end of the film she meets two women who were in her last class and they recall that she was pretty mean - punishments included smacks to the head or thrown chalk erasers - but also very "avante garde" and progressive. I wonder if she was equally mean to other classes and time had smoothed out the harsher memories? The other thing you'll wonder while watching this is why should I care. The mother-son tension isn't enough to keep the film from just being a personal family portrait. We never even meet the other family members on the periphery. Occasionally, Gondry breaks the documentary form by revealing re-enactments or showing shot set-ups but this is really just one famous director away from being a family vacation video. Despite some praise it received I wouldn't recommend it.

The Perverts Guide to Cinema

Parts 1-3

Based on a series of lectures by philosopher and psychoanalyst Slavoj Zizek, this is his explanation of cinema as the most perverted art. Not only does cinema show your desires but it tells you what to desire. How does Zizek make this so compelling? His intelligence? His humour? Or his showmanship? Probably all three as he guides us through a history of film as seen through the philosopher's eyes even sometimes appearing within the very films he's discussing. Great stuff that feels like a master class in film and philosophy.

The Illusionist

What did Paul Rand say? A great work of art occurs when Form & Content are in balance. When content dominates, interest lags. When form dominates, meaning is blunted - looks great but what does it mean? I think the end result is the same. If something is beautiful but meaningless who cares? That's what I thought while watching Sylvain Chomet's *The Illusionist*. It's one of the most strikingly beautiful animated films I've ever seen but it's slow moving and dull. I can't really express just how stunning this film is. It's a fantastic and seamless meshing of traditional animation and digital effects. The backgrounds are stunning inky lines and subtle water colours. It's like a dream. So much like a dream you may feel like taking a nap. Part of the problem is the script is adapted from a Jacques Tati story and recreates Tati's Monsieur Hulot character. Tati's films as Mr. Hulot, (*Traffic*, *Mon Oncle*, *Playtime*) are stylish but sluggish and pretty dull and that is, malheurusement, recreated faithfully.

Before Sunrise

A young American man and a young French woman meet aboard a train in Europe and decide to spend their short time together touring Vienna. Ethan Hawke and Julie Delpy's chemistry seems like the unknown secret sauce that pushes this film beyond the well crafted script. Every woman I know that has seen this film thinks of it as very romantic. I don't really know any men that talk about this film. Slavoj Zizek (see *Pervert's Guide to Cinema*) says that for men, the sex act is all there is — everything builds up to it — so much so that the “act” is more important than the person they are having sex with and the woman becomes an “obligatory masturbatory object” (yowzers, he's a Freudian...). Women also ignore the sex partner, in fact, the sex itself is secondary, according to Zizek, what is more important is the narrative — the story. He claims that the woman is “narrativizing” during sex. This is why men enjoy pornography and women don't, because of course porn is all about the act and the story is crap. Which reminds me of an episode of *30 Rock* when Jack creates a channel of Porn for Women

which is just an attractive man “listening” and nodding. That’s what this is, pornography for women. Perhaps this is a stereotype realized in celluloid, not that the film is a cliché but more like a test you should take to determine your own level of romantic DNA. I enjoyed the film but Ethan Hawke’s character, Jesse, is an incredible ass. Julie Delpy’s Celine is lovely and open while Jesse is a smart ass wanker. Here’s the thing, if you read viewer reviews of the movie you’ll see exactly what I just wrote. Women love the characters’ connection and want Jesse to sweep Celine up and male reviewers think Jesse is a poser asshole. I think it goes back to what Žižek says. Women are fetishizing the narrative and men want to see a resolution in a sex act — thus see Jesse as a rival to be eliminated.

Before Sunset

“In the sequel to *Before Sunrise* (1995), Jesse and Celine reunite nine years after their initial encounter. While strolling through the streets of Paris, in real time, these two reacquainted strangers continue the conversation that bonded them years earlier. Written by Richard Linklater, Ethan Hawke and Julie Delpy, the script was nominated for an Academy Award.” Like the first film, this one is beautifully filmed in a beautiful city, but interestingly it takes place in real time and is full of single take scenes (without cuts). Again it’s a philosophical discussion and again a Freudian could have a field day (Celine admits to feeling like an old soul and fears getting older while Jesse admits to feeling like he’s only 13 and fears that he’ll never grow up). Of course, they’re still in love — probably because they’ve only spent less than 30 hours together.

Le Samourai

Jean-Pierre Melville’s story of a professional assassin who, having been spotted completing a job, has become a liability for his employers. In the history of film, has there ever been a more patient director than Melville? Everything unfolds at such a natural pace you think you’d have time to order a pizza but you’d be wrong to miss the details that make his films so memorable. When the assassin Costello is wounded we see

him attend to his injury, lay down then upon waking, change the dressing. It just reflects an odd attention to detail that most films ignore. Later in the movie, Costello arrives back to his apartment and when he removes his jacket we see a blood stain from the earlier wound. Alain Delon is great as the ever cool killer, who is stylish, clever and alone but not immune to mistakes. In the DVD extras Melville constantly refers to “mes métier” which is translated simply as “my work” but I think it carries more meaning than that — more akin to “craft” or art than just a “job” which is what we see so much of in every beautifully composed shot. It made me wonder if *Ghost Dog*, is Jim Jarmusch’s homage to Melville’s *Le Samourai*. For me, it was also a double dose of Paris (I’d just seen *Before Sunset* which is lovingly filmed in Paris). There’s a great scene on a pedestrian bridge — le Chemin de Fer à Orleans, which looks just like the bridge in *Jules et Jim*. Then again there might be a hundred bridges like that one in Paris. We’ll always have Paris especially the Paris of the movies.

Gentlemen Broncos

I rented this film so now it’s a stain on my permanent record. Horrible, horrible, horrible.

Micmacs

This charming French fable of a merry band of eccentric kooks is, well, unfortunately kinda dull. It’s the story of a man whose life has been irrevocably altered by the product of two arms dealers. With the help of some newfound friends he hopes to teach these military industrialists a lesson. The film from the makers of *Delicatessen* & *Amelie* looks great and is full of Rube Goldberg-esque creations and imaginative set pieces but the story seems to be full of pointless machinations to showcase its own quirkiness. I nodded off a couple of times and rewound to see what I had missed and then I promptly fell asleep again. It’s a shame. If it had explained itself better from the outset and cut about 20 minutes from the run time it would have been so much better.

Justified Season 1

This series about a trigger happy federal marshal, Raylin Givens, played with aplomb by Timothy Olyphant sent back to his home state of Kentucky, is a wild ride and the season finale has the body count of a Coen Brothers' movie. Raylin Givens. Men want to be him and ladies want to be with him... but some men want to kill him — as do some ladies.

Homicide (1991)

“Policeman Bob Gold has to capture a murder that not even the FBI has been able to find. But before he can even start he is re-assigned to the murder of an old lady in a black area. The evidence points at a Jewish group and he discovers connections between them and his previous case.” - IMDB.

This Mamet script suffers from all the same things other Mamet scripts suffer from. Cartoonish masculine dialogue that is too formalistically theatrical to sound appropriate for a film. Plus, there were enough plot holes to fill all the holes in Blackburn, Lancashire.

Louie

American comedian Louis CK's brilliant cinema verité take on his own life and stand-up act is really just all Louie all the time and it is brilliant.

The Girl Who Kicked the Hornet's Nest

The last and dullest of this series based on the character of Lisbeth Salander (the girl of the title). These films all seem to suffer from far too much exposition and overly convoluted plotting and this last installment is probably the worst offender. Maybe I've steeled myself to dull movies lately but this one didn't seem as bad as reported. The saga of abuse of Lisbeth Salander reaches its conclusion as all those that done her wrong get their comeuppance. The movie is somewhere between a court room drama and a journalist-working-with-sleeves-rolled-up like All the President's men (or something). What's strange about the series is how it seems to have created a super-feminist vigilante hero while simultaneously revel-

ing in the sexual violence it reviles. Convincing details and semi-reasonable computer hacking (they seem to plant Trojan software with a little too much ease) tend to set these films apart from contenders but at the end of the day the story is what we're after.

Cassandra's Dream

Woody Allen's morality fable/thriller with Ewan MacGregor and Collin Farrell is a bit of a let down. Most of the blame goes to Allen's script which seems to skip things like motivation or believable dialogue. Whenever Allen isn't acting in a film we can still hear which of the characters is his stand-in by the oddly phrased or halting lines. Dear Mr. Allen, having characters repeat "we have no choice" doesn't make us believe it. In the story, two brothers with desperate money problems are given an option by their wealthy scheming uncle — kill a troublesome colleague and all of your money troubles will be solved. We find out it's one thing to kill a person but it's another thing to live with it. The really strange thing is that the film unfurls at a slow pace but all of the important decision points happen very (and unbelievably) quickly. The other strange thing is how MacGregor seems sort of at sea in this material while Farrell excels.

The Warriors

Take one part *Escape From New York*, one part *After Hours*, and one part *Fame* (stir in elements of *Clockwork Orange*) and that might explain *The Warriors*. This film from 1979 of a large meet-up of New York city gangs in the Bronx which goes badly, stars... well, no one you'd remember. A gang leader is killed and a small Coney Island gang, *The Warriors* is wrongly pinned for the shooting. They spend the rest of the film trying to get back to their home turf while being chased by police and every gang in NYC. The odd part is how many of the gangs are rather theatrically themed and costumed. We see mime-gangs, baseball team-gangs, Kung Fu gangs, a lesbian themed gang (acting the part of the Sirens here) and even a gang of orphans called *The Orphans*. The fight scenes are badly dated and the

geography of New York seems a little confusing as the Warriors have to make their way from the Bronx back to Coney Island (via Central Park?) The movie winds up like a psycho-geographic tour of New York through various neighbourhoods, subway stations and even subway lines, right out to the boardwalk of Coney Island. It is definitely reminiscent of *After Hours* which followed a few years later, especially in depicting an epically violent and surreal night in New York City. A bonus is how Massimo Vignelli's NYC Subway features in the opening sequence ("No one can understand those maps anyway"). Oh and the fact that the largest gang called the Riffs are an all black gang armed with street hockey sticks.

Centurion

Set in Roman occupied Briton, this is an invented telling of the missing legendary Ninth Legion. The myth is something like the Ninth Legion marches North into what is now Scotland and — hushed silence — disappear. In truth there are all kinds of theories about what became of the Ninth, mostly disputed. The funny thing is that this film, despite the epic landscape, lore and gore is really similar to *The Warriors*. It's the tale of 8 guys behind enemy lines on the run trying to get home. It got mixed reviews but it's not a bad bit of fun, including sexy barbarian ladies, balls of fire and loads of sword fights and if that's not fun then I don't know what is. I will say this however, worst title sequence and sub-title typography ever. It's one of those things you should never notice.

Chloe

When a successful couple, Catherine and David, start to drift apart, she suspects him of having an affair. By chance, Catherine meets a young prostitute, Chloe, and decides to test her husband by having Chloe seduce him. If that's not strange enough, Catherine seems to be having feelings for Chloe and vice versa or something. It's all very awkward, creepy and weird. I guess that's what an Atom Egoyan thriller is like. Unfortunately, this film lacks "juice". It does have a great score and actually makes Toronto look like a sexy and vibrant city

which is a twist in itself. Also, Amanda Seyfried, who plays Chole, is so pretty she appears almost alien. For all its virtues there is an unsatisfying ending and some confusion about what really happened versus what Chole tells Catherine. It did remind me a little of *Damage* and *I Am Love* if only for the complicated cross generational relationships.

Saved

This is one Mary who didn't have a virgin birth. We follow a group of teens who are students at a "Born Again" high school. It's a little like a check list of teen misfits; the over achiever, the kid in the wheelchair, the closeted gay, the only Jewish kid in the school and the little pregnant teen who tries to hide her sin throughout the school year. It's an enjoyable "lite" comedy that says I'm alright, you're alright, let's live, love, and learn that some Conservative Christian values aren't very Christian after all. I would say this is the kind of movie you'd see on a plane but I understand inflight movie choices have greatly improved.

The Fall

Imagine it's your birthday and someone brings you an amazing looking cake with multi-coloured icing braided into an intricate lacy ribbon wrapped around a helix of marzipan, gold leaf and shavings of chocolate. You're given a knife and cut yourself a slice but there's only icing and no cake at all. That's what this film is like — all image and no real substance. However it does have one of the most incredibly beautiful opening title sequences I've ever seen.

Louie Season 1

Comedian Louis CK's sharp and smart humour is becoming increasingly less autobiographical and more absurd as the season continues.

Portlandia

The dream of the nineties is alive in Portland. Fred Armisen and Carrie Brownstein create hilarious and insightful vignettes of characters that inhabit this rainy Northwest city. The most

pointed jabs are really reserved for, as Elvis Costello might say, the “tragically hip”, who move amongst us on fixed-gear bikes, espousing known provenance of their organic chicken and sporting neck tattoos, ridiculous earrings and over-sized, nerdy eyewear.

Let Me In

Well considered and expert re-staging American adaptation of the Swedish thriller-horror *Let the Right One In*, which tells of an isolated, bullied and lonely 12-year-old boy who meets an isolated and lonely 12-ish-year-old girl vampire. Take that “*Twilight*”.



Let Me In



Persepolis

Persepolis

Marjane Strapani's personal telling of her and her family's experience of the tumultuous times before, during and after the Iranian revolution. The outstanding design and animation are true to the source material and becomes one of the few animated films for adults. Not fun for kids & parents, or family friendly. Like *Waltz With Bashir*, this is a movie for grown-ups both in the depiction of violence, language and in emotional depth.

The Yes Men

Humorous documentary of a merry band of artists who intend to subvert media by portraying themselves as representatives of the WTO. Surprisingly few people question either their credentials, identity or even their absurd speeches given at accredited conferences. Tellingly, the only place one of their stunts really gets the reaction they expect (anger, outrage and argument) is at a university. The future may have a future after all.

The Inside Job

Most. Depressing. Film. Ever. Well, not ever — but close. This film explores and explains the largest global financial crisis since the Depression and leaves you feeling that all the people

and reasons for the Great Recession are still in place. The rich get incredibly richer and the poor, basically everyone else, is just grist for the mill. Sometimes even unpopular rich people are grist for the mill. Like Eliot Spitzer, who, after his success as a prosecutor charging bankers for fraud became New York Governor. It is implied that Wall Street orchestrated his downfall. They're busy right now orchestrating everyone else's downfall.

The Fighter

Oscar winning true story of half brothers Micky Ward and Dicky Eklund and Micky's rise as a pro fighter. The film highlights how family can be both toxic and inspiring. Great story, well written, well directed with some exceptional performances from pros and amateurs alike. Mark Walberg was overshadowed by award winning Bale and Leo but he turns in one of his most understated performances. No one else could have played Micky Ward. This film aims to be Rocky but goes beyond by hitting touchstones such as *On the Waterfront* and *Raging Bull* as well. Probably the best staged fights put to film.

Client 9: The Rise and Fall of Eliot Spitzer

One of the people who went after Wall Street bankers for derivatives fraud, insurance fraud and executive over compensation and tried make changes was Eliot Spitzer. I'm not a subscriber to conspiracy theories but here is a carefully told case of how powerfully placed businessmen and Republicans within the FBI used considerable federal resources to uncover Eliot Spitzer's use of high end prostitutes. Strangely, two senior Republican representatives were confirmed to also have used the same prostitution ring have not resigned, yet a Democratic Governor was forced to. This is a story of Private Investigators, misuse of power, the compartmentalization of identity, and misdeeds of men that just makes you shake your head in disbelief. An incredibly wealthy trio of businessmen seemingly pulled the strings to avenge a politician who chipped their armor of hubris, namely Dick Grasso (former CEO of the SEC who made hundreds of millions of dollars as head of what was

then a not for profit organization), Ken Langone (billionaire co-founder of Home Depot who approved Grasso's compensation at the SEC), and Hank Greenberg (billionaire former CEO of AIG whose oversight and practices at AIG led to its collapse and claimed his AIG stock was worthless at \$100 million). The lesson? Don't piss off the Monied because they have means to bring you down. It was a little like watching a season of *Damages* except this happened. No wonder Americans are so disillusioned with democracy. They get to see its demolition play out right before their eyes. As a side note, this movie could play well with *The Inside Job* and the BBC drama *The Last Days of Lehman Brothers*.

The Last Waltz

I was inspired to watch this after a really great tribute performance on the Junos (I know, weird right?) The remarkable and epic concert of The Band was filmed on a 1976 Thanksgiving weekend in San Francisco. The all-star guests combine to create "the" concert film and highlight The Band as the proto-rock band. In many ways it would have been nice if they could all just have ridden off into the sunset — the closing crane shot by Scorsese suggests as much, rather than stuttering along into old age with partial reunions, infighting, losing members to a suicide and drug-use weakened bodies but that's not the way the story is written. In the end, the surviving members continue to work (both Helm and Robertson have released well regarded albums recently and Hudson has collaborated with younger artists) and their influence can still be heard.

Exit Through the Gift Shop

What seemed at first as a straight up documentary about the phenomenon of street art becoming part of the art establishment spirals into what seems like an elaborate hoax. Or is it? Ostensibly, an inept filmmaker with great footage of street and graffiti artists doing their thing has given his video to British street artist extraordinaire Banksy who has re-edited the footage into something useful while the original filmmaker, Terry, a Frenchman living in LA re-invents himself into a street artist.

Terry's art is crap, mere knock-offs of more accomplished artists, but is actually successful. The rumor is that Banksy himself created Terry and the junk knock-offs (or he and some friends; there's just too many pieces for one person to have made) for the film, making the statement that the art world is full of gullible idiots who can't tell their arse from their elbow. Right or wrong, real or fake, Banksy gets his cake and eats it too as the film gives exposure to the varied underground world of street art while poking fun at the establishment of galleries and auction houses who speculate and profit from a form of art that is meant to exist outside of galleries (really "outside").

Black Swan

Fight Club for chicks.

It's been said you either love or hate this film. I can't say I hated it but just not for me. I think I laughed in all the wrong places and I don't think they were any places for laughing. Too melodramatic and there was no subtext - the metaphors weren't metaphoric, they just happen. I did have a strange craving for wings afterward.

The Last Three Days

Tautly written and directed thriller from Paul Haggis starring Russell Crowe who plays a desperate husband whose wife, played by Elizabeth Banks, is serving 20 years for a murder she didn't commit (at least that's what John, Crowe's character, has to believe). John, a community college instructor by day, becomes an impromptu prison escape planner by night when the last of his wife's appeals is rejected. A few salient points: John finds a famous escapee/author played by Liam Neeson, who tells him all he needs to know; breaking out isn't the hard part — staying out is harder; you'll need money and lots of it; you'll need fake passports and ID; an escape plan that gets you out of the state in 35 minutes; always fly out of the country from an out of state airport. This essentially becomes the blueprint for the film. What makes the story believable is Crowe as a guy who is as smart as he is naive and who screws up only slightly less often than he succeeds.

The Spirit

This stunning Frank Miller adaptation... ough I can't do it — it sucked. Looked great in still images but damn it was duller than watching a computer render simulated paint drying. You'd think a sexy action pic based on a beloved comic book full of buxom babes like Eva Mendes, Scarlett Johansen and Paz Vega would at the very least keep you awake. You might think that but you'd be wrong.

The Company

After seeing *Black Swan* I thought I'd fill up the dance card and check out some more dance flicks like this one directed by Robert Altman starring Neve Campbell, James Franco and Malcolm Macdowell. Only problem, it is barely a movie and more like a concert film with no real focus. Altman's overlapping narratives and naturalism do give it an almost documentary film but the movie can't be saved from some terrible music and overall boredom. One interesting scene has Campbell dancing a pas de deux during an Autumnal storm on Chicago's outdoor stage in what is now a Frank Gehry designed Pritzker Park. Not even the filling every frame with beautiful dancer bodies could save this sleeper.

Terribly Happy

Sort of like a modern day Danish version of *White Ribbon*. Which I guess means the title is sarcastic. A Copenhagen cop is sent to a small rural Danish town as punishment for his past misdeeds but instead of quietly passing the time he becomes embroiled in the small town drama with tragic results. That's right, it's a bummer. Also it appears as if that ye olde Norse tradition of throwing things or people you don't care for into the bog is alive and well. It's nice to see traditions being carried on.

Animal Kingdom

Joshua is a 17-year-old who is orphaned when his mother O.D.'s on heroin. He turns to his grandmother and uncles who,

it turns out, are a gang of criminals, wanted for a string of armed robberies. The eldest uncle, Pope, is a menacing force of stupidity, thuggery and violence over the family. Guy Pearce plays a detective who tries to save Joshua from his family but can't even trust his own officers. This Australian crime film is all about finding your place in the natural order as well as that time in a boy's life when his conviction and courage begin to match his changing physique.

The King's Speech

Guy Pearce appears as the abdicating King Edward in a roll so different from Animal Kingdom that you might forget it's the same actor. The abdication is his brother's worst fear come to life. Played by Colin Firth, Bertie, as he was known to family, must overcome his life long stammer and fear of public speaking to become King George VI. This highly regarded Oscar winning film is good and enjoyable in all the right places but has just a smidge too much sentiment and melodrama for my taste. Geoffrey Rush is predictably reliable as Lionel Loque, the innovative speech therapist and Helena Bonham-Carter is perfect as the Queen Mum and gives some lightness to what could have been a stiff portrayal.

Californication Season 1

It's hard to believe this much debauchery could happen anywhere never mind in L.A. I'm not sure if I want to be Hank Moody, played to perfect distraction by David Duchovny, or kill him for being an incredible douchebag. I guess that's the dichotomy and tension of the show and why I'll keep watching (for now).

All About My Mother

Almovodar's film about motherhood refers to the film All About Eve and the play A Street Car Named Desire which also has a central role. Maneula sees her son die in a car accident on his 17th birthday just before she's planned to tell him about the father he's never known. She's also never told the father, who lives in Barcelona and is a transvestite named Lola, that

he had a son. The rest of the story is Manuela's journey to find Lola and to bring some resolution and acceptance of her own grief and guilt.

Bill Cunningham New York

Bill Cunningham's columns for the New York Times have made him an icon for fashionistas and at The Times. For over 40 years his weekly "On The Street" photo essay has captured every trend and curiosity to be found on the streets of Manhattan. Who is this unassuming fellow who dresses in a nondescript work shirt and rides his Schwinn 3-speed all over New York? He's a gentleman not unlike a Jimmy Stewart or Fred Astaire floating through Gotham, camera in hand catching whatever attracts his eye. What makes the documentary so enjoyable is Cunningham himself, who could approach a queen or a pauper alike with the same joyful smile and openness. His particular talent isn't photography but the ability to spot a trend or a pattern emerging from what New Yorkers are wearing. It would be interesting to watch this with The September Issue to show how the fashion industry works both ways, from the street to the runway and back again.

Source Code

Directed by Duncan Jones who did one of my favorite films, Moon, this sci-fi flick is like 12 Monkeys (or La Jeté) meets The Matrix. An army pilot's mind is transported into the last 8 minutes of another man's life in order to discover the bomber in a disaster that's already happened. I think. The science is the end run to the question "what would you do if you only had a minute to live?" Star Jake Gyllenhall saves millions, resolves his relationship with his father and falls in love in 8 minutes. I might easily fall in love with Michelle Monaghan in 8 minutes or less. I wonder if she tires of constantly being cast as the gal next door with whom we all fall in love? By "we" I mean us Man-folk.

Hanna

Another story of a highly trained assassin who happens to be

a pretty young girl (like “Kick Ass” and “Let Me In” — both played by Chlöe Morentz) but this is a strange film. Was the director trying to make fun of the Bourne films and their editing style or did he just get it wrong? Sometimes it was campy as an old Batman TV episode while other times the movie seemed like there was a slick ironic wink and a nod to the audience. Either way, it was all over the place, literally jumping the viewer from Finland to Morocco to Spain and Germany, all with confusing speed and cuts. Add to that, one scene set in a secret location in Morocco is filmed in a beautiful abandoned testing facility in Berlin. I know this because it was the same location used to spectacular effect in *Aeon Flux*.

The Adjustment Bureau

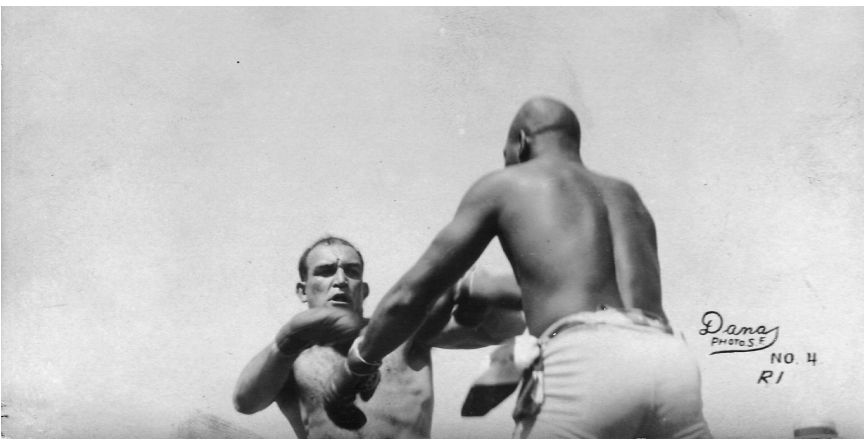
Another film of questionable reality like *Inception* or *Dark City* where mysterious agents have the ability to enter one door and exit in an entirely different location re-imagining the shape of the city (and re-defining the Flaneur). In that respect it reminded of the Hernandez brothers comic book series *Mr. X*. Matt Damon plays David, an up and coming congressman who upsets destiny and discovers the other worldly adjusters (Heavenly Agents?) who affect fate when he meets a beautiful woman, Elise, played by Emily Blunt, who inspires, intrigues and beguiles him. The same is true of Elise but she doesn't have the knowledge of those conspiring to keep them apart. The film is all about the mysterious power of love (or creepy fatalistic Christianity). It moved me but I'm particularly vulnerable to such emotional manipulations and as such you may want to discount anything I've written here.

Unforgivable Blackness: the Rise & Fall of Jack Johnson

The story of Jack Johnson, the first African American Heavy-weight boxing champion. The incredible ubiquity of American racism of the early 20th century seems absurd, shocking, maddening and hard to understand. The fact that Jack Johnson smiled and laughed at those who would jeer and taunt him not to appease them but because he knew they feared him makes

him seem mythical. Well read, stylish, a lady's man, and a patent holder Johnson seems like a prototypical American athletic hero. Yet the bigger the star the bigger the fall. Drinking, sex scandals, and the excess of his lifestyle caught up with him as white legislators sought to prosecute him for his relationships with white women. Many parallels can be seen with Muhammed Ali and contemporary athletes.

The Unforgiveable Blackness of Jack Johnson



Harry Brown

Harry Brown kicks Gran Torino's ass. Michael Caine is a widower living in the "estates" — the UK version of North America's projects. Violent, bored, drug-using and drug selling youth terrorize locals. A good friend of Harry's is killed by members of a local gang. After being attacked himself, Harry, a former marine who served in Northern Ireland decides to take matters in his own hands. The havoc he wreaks is the physical manifestation of the frustration we all feel when we are made helpless by the world around us.

Old Joy

Sorrow is just worn out joy. Two friends reconnect on an overnight camping trip. One is married and his wife is about to have their child while the other, seemingly alone, moves aimlessly from one place or thing to another. This story is kind of like *My Dinner with Andre* as a road movie or a minimalist *Brokeback Mountain* (though the homosexuality is more of a suggested subtext rather than portrayed). Kelly Reichardt, the director, makes these minimal, quiet films that raise more questions than they answer and are generally open ended. Her film *Wendy and Lucy* is equally simple yet equally profound. The director's dog, Lucy appears both in this film and is the "Lucy" in *Wendy and Lucy*.

The Trip

A six-part BBC series with Steve Coogan and Rob Brydon playing fictionalized versions of themselves as they tour six high-end restaurants in the North of England. Expertly directed by Michael Winterbottom and beautifully filmed, the series is a classically British mix of comedy and pathos. Their improvised dialogue and competitive impersonations provide the humour while Coogan's insecurities provide the pathos. Apparently the series has been recut and packaged as a feature film for international distribution. Highly recommended, in any format.

The Tracey Fragments

Fragmented. Like the exact opposite if Atom Egoyan's *Chloe*. I see what Bruce MacDonald was doing... kind of, but I just didn't get it.

I Love You Philip Morris

Jim Carey plays Steve Russell, a born liar/con man/grifter who falls in love with Philip Morris played by Ewan MacGregor when the two meet in prison. As soon as Steve is out he impersonates a lawyer to get Philip out. Then Steve conspires to go legit by faking his resume to become the CFO of an insurance company where he quickly finds a way to steal hundreds of thousands of dollars from insurance pay-outs. It turns out,

being gay is really expensive. What's more ingenious are all the ways Steve Russell worms and squirms out of prison once caught — including faking AIDS to be transferred to a private care facility; a stunt that took 10 months to carry out. How do I know this? Because the film is based on a real person. Steve Russell is so incredibly adept at conning his way out of jail that he currently is serving a life sentence, in lock down. Clever guy but I'm guessing Jim Carey is funnier.

Joan Rivers: A Piece Of Work

She really is a piece of work and she will challenge and change your opinion of her. Great documentary that follows Rivers in her 75th year.

Talking Funny

A particularly special HBO special. From Ricky Gervais, who has made a habit of talking to some of America's best comedians and funny people (look up his conversations with Larry David and Gary Shandling on YouTube). Gervais sits down with Jerry Seinfeld, Chris Rock and Louis CK. Do I have to say more? It's like having Bruce Springsteen, Prince, Dave Grohl and David Bowie jamming and swapping stories but maybe more awesome than that.

State of Play

Washington scandal and conspiracy thriller starring Russell Crowe, Ben Affleck and a cavalcade of stars (Rachel McAdams, Helen Mirren, Jason Bateman, Robin Wright Penn, Jeff Daniels). The film moves along at a nice clip and builds a (mostly) believable quilt work of intrigue around the machinations of a fictionalized version of private security contractor Blackwater or Haliburton and the lengths they will go to protect their interests. Oh but there is so much more at play here. Not quite Three Days of the Condor but maybe more entertaining.

Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows Part 1

Only undiscovered tribes of aboriginals living in the Amazon rain forest are blissfully unaware of Harry Potter. The films

about magic are often wonderfully magical themselves evoking juvenile fantasies of powerful spells and incantations. I enjoy the series because the films remind me of the movies I loved as a kid, namely the Sinbad adventures or anything Ray Harryhausen was involved in. But this film is more dark, violent and surly — like the teens the stars and fans have become. The films are also decidedly British in flavour, from the A-list British actors to the marvelous art direction. I know this film is “part one” but the ending is far too inconclusive and the movie is much slower than the others. Yet that is probably a decision by the veteran director David Yates to build more emotional impact for the finale.

Sarah Silverman: Jesus is Magic

It’s hard to explain Sarah Silverman to someone who just doesn’t like her. This film is an adaptation of her stage show cut together with some extra bits (which are awkward and less successful than the stand-up bits). She manipulates the audience’s perception of what an attractive Jewish woman should be. She plays with politically incorrect language and ideas like rape and racism with such charm and irony so deftly and with such subtlety that you are inevitably drawn in for a sucker punch.

The Comedians of Comedy

A documentary that follows a comedy tour Patton Oswalt organized with fellow comedians and friends Brian Posehn, Maria Bamford and Zach Galifianakis. The film mixes concert footage, interviews and conversations about comedy and doing stand-up and gigs. I’m not sure why it’s so enjoyable but watching great comedians just making each other laugh is like watching great musicians jamming. This film is a bit hit and miss with poor quality filming but it’s all worth it for some priceless funny moments.

Midnight in Paris

Woody Allen’s latest film about a nostalgic American writer on a trip to Paris with his fiancé and future in-laws is a return to

lighter and frothier fare. The writer, Gil, played with puppy-like curiosity by Owen Wilson, wanders from both his superficial fiancé, Rachel McAdams, and reality when he stumbles into his version of what a Golden Age of Paris was of the 1920's complete with Hemingway, Scott and Zelda Fitzgerald, Cole Porter, Gertude Stein and countless other luminaries of the time. For some reason the movie feels full of set-ups but few punch lines (such as when Gil strides into another legendary Paris era, "This town! I have to write a letter to the chamber of commerce!"). Enjoyable and revelatory for Allen fans but probably too uneventful and slow for anyone else.

A Woman, A Gun and a Noodle Shop

A re-make of the Coen brothers' "Blood Simple" set in 19th century China. Oddly, it works. In fact, the plot of betrayal and deception set as a period piece make the story, originally adapted from a Dashiell Hammett novel, "Red Harvest", feel more like a Shakespearean play than film noir. This "Sino-noir" is lusciously and stylistically filmed in an incredible desert locale but pays homage to the original Coen brothers' film both visually and in its measured pace — so it may seem too slow to some but it saves a lot of energy for the finale. The one downside is the campy, comedic/operatic acting. Maybe the Chinese don't get subtle comic timing? Is that a Western thing?

Lemmy

Meet a 63-year-old diabetic who downs his blood pressure meds with a tumbler of Jack & Coke and happens to be the godfather and instigator of heavy metal. For almost 40 years, Lemmy Kilmister has been the grizzled voice and striking front man for hard rock veterans Motörhead. Yup, they were the first to add an unnecessary umlaut to their name. Oddly, this documentary reveals the direct line of rock and roll history from the Beatles to Metallica runs through Lemmy. He turns out to be a gentleman living modestly in L.A. with a penchant for wearing handmade boots and SS uniforms, a knowledgeable collector of WWII memorabilia, a memorable songsmith, an innovative bassist and a survivor of the Rock 'n Roll lifestyle. When they

made Lemmy, they broke the mold... thankfully.

How to Train Your Dragon

Beautifully animated. Full of incredible special effects and fireballs ...and genuinely funny and well acted. Set in a Viking village beset by dragons who, we find out, are highly trainable and make lovely pets and companions.

My Neighbour Totoro

Hayao Miyazaki's classic animated story of two sisters and their adventures as their ill mother recuperates in hospital. The two sisters meet a friendly forest spirit Totoro whose friendship helps them cope with the fears and trials of waiting for their mother's return. There has never been a finer observer of children than Miyazaki and this film shows his masterful hand at every moment of wonder and sublime quirkiness.

Barney's Version

"You did good, boychick"

Until you absolutely screw it up which Mordecai Richler's Barney is a natural at. A faithful interpretation of the book makes for fairly standard fare but the makers of this film seemed to be doing a victory lap before the game even started. It's packed chock-a-block full of Canadian cameos (Robert Lantos, Atom Egoyan, David Cronenberg, Paul Gross and Denis Arcand) but the main players, Paul Giametti, (a surprisingly good) Scott Speedman and Dustin Hoffman carry enough water for everyone else.

Extras - Season 2

From Ricky Gervais, creator of The Office, comes a series about a nobody actor trying to make it as an actor. Despite some terrible experiences as an extra he pushes on until he gets his own series. Sometimes though, you should watch what you wish for.

The Housemaid

A Korean thriller remake of a 1960 film. A young woman begins working as a nanny for a very wealthy family and draws

the eye of the husband. Sexual goings-ons ensue as does an unwanted pregnancy — let the thrills begin. Not a typical thriller. It's a slow burn to a very sudden immolation.

Green Lantern

Ryan Reynolds seems like a white Wil Smith to me in that, sometimes his charm alone can save a picture. This one takes awhile to start up and delivers enormous special effects but the script didn't give Reynolds the opportunity to shine the way Robert Downey Jr. does in *Iron Man*. Still a bit of fun and nowhere as bad as critics have said.

Horrible Bosses

Surprisingly funny. This movie delivers the laughs where expected but still entertains. I know people say you only need to see highly cinematic films in the theatre but the same is true of comedies. Funny movies are just that much funnier with a group of people. The broader comedic bits by the cameos (Kevin Spacey, Jamie Foxx, Colin Farrell, and Jennifer Aniston) are tempered by the easy humor of Jason Sedakis and the dryness of Jason Bateman (dryness that would make a soda cracker seem juicy).

The Last Station

Christopher Plummer and Helen Mirren show the kids how it's done by portraying Leo Tolstoy and his wife. In the last years Tolstoy apparently encouraged a new philosophy and approach to spirituality. His writings beget an organized movement of Tolstoyians. One of the main goals of the movement was to convince Tolstoy to deed his writings to the public domain. His wife fears such a thing, thus the main conflict that drives the action. Actually more interesting than it sounds.

Breaking Bad Season 4

What shenanigans are Jesse and Walt up to now? Cooking, killin' and conniving, that's what.



The House Maid

Nurse Jackie season 03

Oh Jackie. You break hearts and you're the world's greatest liar... even to yourself.

X-Men: First Class

This was a better addition to the franchise than Wolverine and somehow manages to have its cake and eat it too. The movie is at times kitsch and other times reverent and introspective. Much of the success is due to the well assembled cast of James McAvoy and Michael Fassbender.

Harry Potter & The Deathly Hallows, Part 2

HP7, as it was written on the marquee. HP7? HP? Like the sauce or the computer company? Plus, wasn't it really 7.2? Whatever. It concludes the series of books and films that a generation have grown up consuming. All's well that ends well, I suppose. And it does end satisfyingly (I hope George Lucas took notes). I had re-watched the previous two films just to be up on the twisting logic of the plot but that wasn't the real effect, which was more to emotionally re-connect with the hero-trio of Hermione, Ron and of course, Harry. If you're engaged in the story, like any good yarn, you care about their fates. Otherwise, it's all just a bit of movie magic rather than the Hogwarts variety. By the way, I only just now realized the joke of Hermione carrying a bottomless purse.

Captain America

Another summer fantasy blockbuster. I promise I'll see a "serious" film soon. Some critics have complained that this origin-story movie is just a set-up for a bigger movie, The Avengers but I always thought Captain America's back story WAS his only story of interest. Others have noted the film's wash of old time movie matinee sepia can't hide its unsavory racial-superiority-through-mad-scientist-genetics. Yet, the villainy of racist Nazis pales next to the jingoism of the stars and stripes forever. Despite mocking the over-the-top patriotism of liberty Bonds, the movie cuts much more insidiously by mixing those ingredients with sentimentality and nostalgia. In general

though this movie wears its heart on its sleeve and has as much fun as a, no doubt huge, budget will allow. Hugo Weaving gives another standout performance as the baddie, delivering a great Werner Herzog impression. Tommy Lee Jones has many of the best lines in a role that he's done many times and owns solely. Chris Evans does well as "Cap" using his impressive pecs for maximum hunkiness but also making Steve Rogers' grating earnestness believable & honest. That's what I always hated about Captain America; that earnest righteousness. The story is supposed to be the triumph of the good man given the right tools but he just seems to prove that nice guys finish last unless they have a square jaw a rockin' hairless bod!

Damages Season 4

I thought I was done with Patty Hewes and Ellen Parsons, but when season 4 appeared on Netflix I couldn't help myself and now I'm hooked. Like a meat hook in a side of beef.

*update: being halfway through the season I can report that this is NOT up to *Damages* par. Terrible expository dialogue mixed with mediocre performances (it looks like John Goodman's first read-through?) and some of the most ridiculous red herrings in any drama — a middle eastern man has a map with a giant "X" and delivers a duct taped box that contains — a medallion!? Who delivers a medallion in a shoebox taped closed with duct tape? WTF? Eye rolling ensued.

The Tree of Life

Seeing a critically acclaimed film by a critically acclaimed director in the official theatre of the Toronto International Film Festival feels very grown up. I can't explain this movie, so I won't try. I will say it is a meditative, contemplative, poetic and weirdly trippy movie. At times it is strangely moving and it is one of the few movies to accurately portray the fluid dynamics of brotherhood. Sean Penn plays a man at sea yet seems to be experiencing some kind insight on, what I assume, is the anniversary of his brother's death. This "insight" seems to encompass humanity's place in the cosmos (I think — this is all just a theory). Not so theoretical is Brad Pitt, who is convincing

as the menacing, bullying, self-doubting father.

Designers take note, there are two or three scenes set in a striking mid-century home full of museum piece furniture that is so beautiful it may distract you from the emotion of the moment.

The Apartment

Jack Lemmon & Shirley MacLaine classic. I have never got past the suicide attempt before and for some reason I'd completely forgotten this movie was set at Christmas. Some people are "takers" and some people "get took". What did Beck say about a "young Shirley MacLaine"? That he wished she would be his girlfriend? C. C. Baxter would agree.

Cowboys & Aliens

The joke is that the title of this movie was exactly its pitch in the boardroom and, simultaneously its script and title. I was sort of hoping it would be Wild West meets Independence Day but it never amounts to quite that much fun. All the Western clichés are present and accounted for but the filmmakers never have enough fun with it. Daniel Craig has been described as having a head chiseled from wood. The same could be said of his zero body-fat physique. His quiet performance looks as though he's trying his best to channel Clint Eastwood of yore. Olivia Wilde provides an alert eyed Western babe while Harrison Ford's taciturn Dolarhyde is pretty high on the "dialed-in-mode". The sound design of the alien craft is great, giving the effect of WWII spitfires. Likewise, the mothership is evocative of a crackling Apollo lift-off. Those details are important for a summer movie especially if it lacks in other ways.

Whatever Works

Larry David and Woody Allen sounds like a match made in heaven — or Brooklyn at least. Not so much.

Dinner for Schmucks

The mouse dioramas were nice. There are a couple of scenes that are so bad you feel embarrassed for everyone involved.



The Apartment

El Bulli: Cooking in Progress

A documentary that reveals the process of developing a new menu for the famously experimental 3 Michelin star Catalan restaurant of Ferran Adrià. The filmmaking itself is incredibly boring but as with most good documentaries the subject is fascinating. The strange, alien and futuristic techniques used at El Bulli include “vacuumizing”, “foaming”, freeze drying or flash freezing with liquid nitrogen. The results such as cocktails of water and hazelnut oil, sweet potato meringues, or ice chips in pine nut oil vinaigrette bewilder, become magical or seem merely like intellectual exercises. This isn’t about odd & eccentric food but the creative process and the iterative explorations necessary for true innovation. In general, I think most people other than hard core foodies would find this film dull but I think any creative professional will fall into the world that Adrià and his cohorts inhabit.

You Will Meet a Tall Dark Stranger

“It is a tale. Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury. Signifying nothing.”

That’s the quote from MacBeth that this Woody Allen film begins with and it pretty much sums it up. Especially, the “signifying nothing” part. It sort of reminds me of something Homer Simpson said while the other Simpsons tried to glean the moral of the episode they just experienced, “It didn’t mean anything. It was just a bunch of stuff that happened.” In a pinch, I’ll quote Homer rather than Shakespeare.

Curb Your Enthusiasm, Season 8

Larry David looks very comfortable as the unlucky asshole Larry David.

Treme, Season 2

Sometimes I’m not even sure what this series is about; the music, the people, the city, all of the above? Whatever it is, it can be funny, dramatic, moving, insightful and inspirational.

The Notorious Betty Page

Gretchen Mol bears a striking resemblance to Betty Page and actually is great portraying a God-fearing woman innocently posing in S&M photos which she sees as more game-play than role-play (if you know what I mean). The film, like Boogie Nights, depicts this tamer, softer porno as just some folks having fun and the authorities who aim to shut them down as fuddy-duddies. As tame or “classy” as these photos may appear to us now, it’s not hard to see the early “normalization” of pornography that has led to teen-agers sharing explicit web-cam or cell phone images over the Internet. Maybe we do need healthier and more tolerant attitudes towards different sexual identities and proclivities but most pornography isn’t about self empowerment and personal identity, it would seem to be about power over another and degradation. I guess the overall easy going feel of the film is intended to frame that time through Betty Page’s eyes though it does feel a little dismissive of some of the more serious issues such as Page’s sexual abuse

(did that really happen?) It's also interesting how the film shows the pornographers as making "lite-hearted" bondage and never really shows those that enjoyed those creepy images as anything other than harmless oddballs. By the end, you are sort of rooting for Betty to get out of the business if only to reconcile with her faith. Strangely, Page's early retirement only enhanced her status as pin-up because there are no photos of an old Betty Page wielding a horse whip. Praise be to God.

Win Win

This well reviewed movie didn't fare well at the box office but I have no idea why not? It delivers laughs, finely tuned performances, high and conflicting emotions all served up with modern complications. Paul Giamatti is a small town, put-upon estate lawyer and high school wrestling coach who makes a poor judgement call. Through circumstance of that decision, an all-state wrestler arrives on his door step. Actual All-state wrestler Alex Schaffer is excellent as fictional All-state wrestler Kyle Timmins, as is Amy Ryan who plays Giamatti's better half. The story is pretty good at placing this couple as a parental tag team which gives Ryan plenty to work with as Kyle's proxy Mom. No one is perfect in this story of second chances and that's crucial to finding the sweet spot that is sweet but never saccharine.



The Notorious Bettie Page

Sherlock

A contemporary update of the Sherlock Holmes stories from the BBC set in modern day London. Watson is a military doctor haunted by still fresh memories of a stint in Afghanistan when he meets the curiously brilliant Holmes. Watson has been instructed by his therapist to keep a journal (a blog) thus our record of this friendship. Holmes is a texting, Web savvy consultant to London's Metro Police. I feared the series would have the cardboard comic like look of Dr. Who but these episodes are sleekly efficient feature length movies. Which is yet another British oddity — a season is comprised of three 90-minute features? It could've easily have been six 45-minute shows or nine 30-minute ones? I guess they wanted to keep the Holmesian adventure in tact thus the odd format.

Senna

A great sport documentary about the life and death of Brazilian F1 racer, Ayrton Senna. Senna's ambition is matched by both his faith and ability. In an early race at Monaco he talks about how he felt he wasn't even trying, that the track was more like a tunnel he was following and that he felt closer to God. One of the striking aspects of the film is the openly arrogant and obstinate cadre of Europeans who run the F1 circuit. Their determination to have their way rather than concern themselves with fairness or safety is the kind of behaviour we've seen from the Olympics, FIFA, and even the UCI - the pattern? Arrogant Europeans who seem to believe they are the aristocracy and that everyone is lucky to be in their presence. Absolutely infuriating. What's worse, that hasn't changed much.

The Last Gladiators

The only TIFF film I saw was a documentary about hockey enforcers, namely Chris Nilan. The film tries not to glorify the fighting aspect of hockey but still manages to do it. Personally I think all that stuff about The Code is bullshit and there's plenty of video to prove it. It also only just touches on how fighting may contribute to these players off ice health suggesting that those that become enforcers may have already had issues.

Maybe they didn't intend for it to come out that way but they certainly skirt the issues of head injuries and depression.

Megamind

Fun. Will Ferrell sort of revives his character from Zoolander except as a blue large-headed villain with a thing for Tina Fey. Okay, that part I get.

Rise of the Planet of the Apes

It all comes together nicely in this the re-imagining of the Planet of the Apes back story. An idealist geneticist inadvertently creates a viral gene therapy that makes apes smart and simultaneously does a number on humans. The amazing breakthrough isn't the shaky science but the computer generated apes and chimps in particular, the main chimp, Caesar, acted by Andy Serkis.

Trouble the Water

A Katrina documentary with a difference — plenty of first person video footage and narrative. Kim Roberts and her husband, two ninth ward natives and small time street hustlers hunkered down during the storm and helped neighbours and strangers alike. Their story crosses every thread imaginable in the Katrina epic that continues even now, six years later. This film should required viewing.

Black Book

Dutch drama set during WWII that tells the story of a beautiful Jewish woman who goes from hiding from the Nazis to fighting them as part of the Dutch resistance to falling in love with a Nazi officer who wasn't such a bad Nazi because he collects stamps (what?) At times this flick feels like a zestful 1950s style war flick while at others it feels like a graphic exploitation movie. In the end all we know is that what our heroine did, she did for queen and country and the men she loved died as misunderstood or as traitors but it took a very unconvincing and overly long road to get there.

Limitless

There's some kind of subtext to this story of an unsuccessful writer who gets hooked on a drug that sort of makes you the best "you" that you can be. I have no idea what that subtext would be. The drug heightens and enhances the mind to allow you to 1) write a masterpiece in days 2) pick up languages and ladies with aplomb 3) fight like Bruce Lee 4) and make millions of dollars easily. More than a few plot points are ignored or forgotten but in general I liked this updated Faustian tale that seems to mix self-help dogma with an action thriller.

Sophie Scholl: The Final Days

This film based on actual events is set during the last days of WWII, and tells of Sophie Scholl, a young anti-Nazi activist who is arrested as a member of the White Rose group for writing and distributing treasonous leaflets. Her courage, intelligence and passion are evident throughout her Gestapo interrogation. The more they press her, the more resolute and assured she becomes — right through her trial & execution. I often wonder how I would've acted in Nazi Germany. Would I stand up for what was right or would I even have been smart enough to leave as so many did? Or, more likely I would've been done in by making a wise crack about Hitler's height. I hope I never have to find out.

Thor

The son of Odin is disgraced by his scheming trickster brother and ousted from Valhalla. He falls from that world/dimension to Earth and into the waiting arms of Natalie Portman. Well, that was a rotten bit of luck. From there on it's the story of an arrogant and entitled Thor learning to be a little bit human. When he learns to sacrifice himself for others his powers are restored and mankind saved etc. It's all played too large or importantly for my liking but if your keen on little mindless feux d'artifices then go right ahead. Some wasted parrotlets but what do you expect?



Sophie Scholl: The Final Days

CULTURES



1



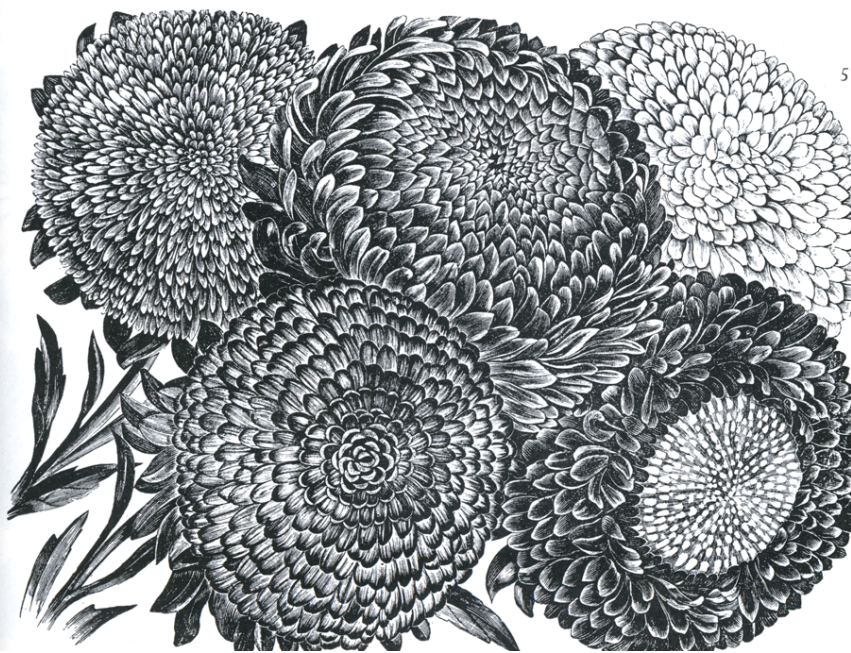
3



4



2



5

The New York Times

The 10 Best Books of 2011

From the New York Times

THE ART OF FIELDING

By Chad Harbach. Little, Brown & Company, \$25.99.

At a small college on the Wisconsin side of Lake Michigan, the baseball team sees its fortunes rise and then rise some more with the arrival of a supremely gifted shortstop. Harbach's expansive, allusive first novel combines the pleasures of an old-fashioned baseball story with a stately, self-reflective meditation on talent and the limits of ambition, played out on a field where every hesitation is amplified and every error judged by an exacting, bloodthirsty audience.

11/22/63

By Stephen King. Scribner, \$35.

Throughout his career, King has explored fresh ways to blend the ordinary and the supernatural. His new novel imagines a time portal in a Maine diner that lets an English teacher go back to 1958 in an effort to stop Lee Harvey Oswald and — rewardingly for readers — also allows King to reflect on questions of memory, fate and free will as he richly evokes midcentury America. The past guards its secrets, this novel reminds us, and the horror behind the quotidian is time itself.

SWAMPLANDIA!

By Karen Russell. Alfred A. Knopf, cloth, \$24.95; Vintage Contemporaries, paper, \$14.95.

An alligator theme park, a ghost lover, a Styx-like journey through an Everglades mangrove jungle: Russell's first novel, about a girl's bold effort to preserve her grieving family's way of life, is suffused with humor and gothic whimsy. But the real wonders here are the author's exuberantly inventive language and her vivid portrait of a heroine who is wise beyond her years.

TEN THOUSAND SAINTS

By Eleanor Henderson. Ecco/HarperCollins Publishers, \$26.99.

Henderson's fierce, elegiac novel, her first, follows a group of friends, lovers, parents and children through the straight-edge music scene and the early days of the AIDS epidemic. By delving deeply into the lives of her characters, tracing their long relationships not only to one another but also to various substances, Henderson catches something of the dark, apocalyptic quality of the '80s.

THE TIGER'S WIFE

By Téa Obreht. Random House, cloth, \$25; paper, \$15.

As war returns to the Balkans, a young doctor inflects her grandfather's folk tales with stories of her own coming of age, creating a vibrant collage of historical testimony that has neither date nor dateline. Obreht, who was born in Belgrade in 1985 but left at the age of 7, has recreated, with startling immediacy and presence, a conflict she herself did not experience.

Nonfiction

ARGUABLY

Essays.

By Christopher Hitchens. Twelve, \$30.

Our intellectual omnivore's latest collection could be his last (he's dying of esophageal cancer). The book is almost 800 pages, contains more than 100 essays and addresses a ridiculously wide range of topics, including Afghanistan, Harry Potter, Thomas Jefferson, waterboarding, Henry VIII, Saul Bellow and the Ten Commandments, which Hitchens helpfully revises.

THE BOY IN THE MOON

A Father's Journey to Understand His Extraordinary Son.

By Ian Brown. St. Martin's Press, \$24.99.

A feature writer at The Globe and Mail in Toronto, Brown combines a reporter's curiosity with a novelist's instinctive feel for the unknowable in this exquisite book, an account — at once tender, pained and unexpectedly funny — of his son, Walker, who was born with a rare genetic mutation that has deprived him of even the most rudimentary capacities.

MALCOLM X

A Life of Reinvention.

By Manning Marable. Viking, \$30.

From petty criminal to drug user to prisoner to minister to separatist to humanist to martyr. Marable, who worked for more than a decade on the book and died earlier this year, offers a more complete and unvarnished portrait of Malcolm X than the one found in his autobiography. The story remains inspiring.

THINKING, FAST AND SLOW

By Daniel Kahneman. Farrar, Straus & Giroux, \$30.

We overestimate the importance of whatever it is we're thinking about. We misremember the past and misjudge what will make us happy. In this comprehensive presentation of a life's work, the world's most influential psychologist demonstrates that irrationality is in our bones, and we are not necessarily the worse for it.

A WORLD ON FIRE

Britain's Crucial Role in the American Civil War.

By Amanda Foreman. Random House, \$35.

Which side would Great Britain support during the Civil War? Foreman gives us an enormous cast of characters and a wealth of vivid description in her lavish examination of a second battle between North and South, the trans-Atlantic one waged for British hearts and minds.



The Language of Art

by Paul Rand

A miscellany of archeology, history, biography, geography, political science, psychology, sociology, technology, entertainment, economics, marketing, and merchandising comprises the subject matter of most art talk. But this does not constitute the language of art.

Art is primarily a question of form, not of content. This explains Clive Bell's "significant form," often maligned and misunderstood by practitioners, philosophers, dabblers, and connoisseurs. Content is a passive and subordinate yet important partner in this relationship, which is fundamental to an understanding of the language of plastic art.

To discuss the appearance of things is to deal with matters of aesthetics. Aesthetics is the language of appearances -- of art, design, the beautiful, and the ugly. Without aesthetics, talk about art is not about art. To talk about, study, teach, or criticize a work of art focus must always be on problems of form in relation, of course, to a particular content.

An artifact is transformed into a work of art only when the conflict between form and content is resolved. The term art, has been bandied about so carelessly that it has almost lost its meaning. For example, it seems that one of the ways a painting earns its place in the pantheon of art is by being rendered in a particular medium: oil on canvas. The so called lesser arts -- prints, etchings, graphic design, photography, etc. -- are confined to this status by virtue of the mechanical means of their making. Consequently, the medium in which a work is rendered can become as important as its message or meaning. Symbolism has become the measure of value. The recent auction of Jacqueline Onassis's possessions is a prime example of the power of false values.

Form and content are assymetric. Formal values are very often independent of content. Time can, and does, erase meaning of once familiar artifacts, but time can never erase form. Spontaneity, fantasy, intuition, invention, and revelation also play an

important part in the language of art.

Among the many aspects of form, problems pertaining to the principles of proportion, for example, are significant. The rules of proportion apply equally well to the Parthenon or to a can of Campbells soup. The same is true for all formal relationships: contrast, scale, balance, rhythm, rhyme, texture, repetition, etc.

In spite of the fact that aesthetics is the only language of art, the subject has been greeted with indifference and sometimes irreverence. For example, Gwilt's *Encyclopedia of Architecture* (1842) describes aesthetics as "silly, pedantic term, and one of the useless additions to nomenclature in the arts." These and other unflattering references have caused this subject to be brushed aside. On the other hand, such definitions as "aesthetics is the philosophy or theory of taste," or "of the perception of the beautiful in nature and art" (*Oxford English Dictionary*) are too passive, to be really useful.

The Greeks considered all subjects a form of discourse, and therefore almost all education is a form of language education. Knowledge of a subject means knowledge of the language of that subject. Biology, after all, is not plants and animals, it is a special language employed to speak about plants and animals." Similarly aesthetics is not painting, design, or architecture; it is a special language designed to speak about these subjects, namely the language of interaction between form and content.

Confusion and misunderstanding is the result of the absence of a common language. In dealing with the subject of design, knowledge of the history of art and design is just as indispensable as the language of art. "Any subject," said William James, "becomes humanistic when seen from the stand point of history." Since both the history and language of art are not part of our common understanding, political, social and technological issues that may have only a remote connection to art are usually substituted for discussions about the real thing – aesthetics – the language of art.



Some of the work of Paul Rand

Monday, February 28, 2011

Black as Night

Peter Rogers

It's a funny old thing. I went to the AGO recently not to see their "blockbuster" Maharaja show but to see a comprehensive selection of David Blackwood prints. I don't think I've seen so many Blackwood prints in one place at one time. The effect was decidedly devastating. Blackwood's Newfoundland is a place of near permanent tragedy, frozen in winter and darkness. I get it. Those are the stories he's drawn to and wishes to tell and thus preserve. But shit, it's depressing. In fact, at one point I had to sit down and was overwhelmed with sadness, a very pointed and jarring sadness. Not remembering Blackwood was from Wesleyville, I didn't realize how much of his subject matter was set there. We have plenty of family from that Northern point of Bonavista Bay — though I'd be hard pressed to name any of them. I think just knowing that these depictions were so close to where my father grew up affected me in an unanticipated way. I had to fight back tears and I don't know why. The power of art or something.



Man Warning Two Boys, David Blackwood, 1982

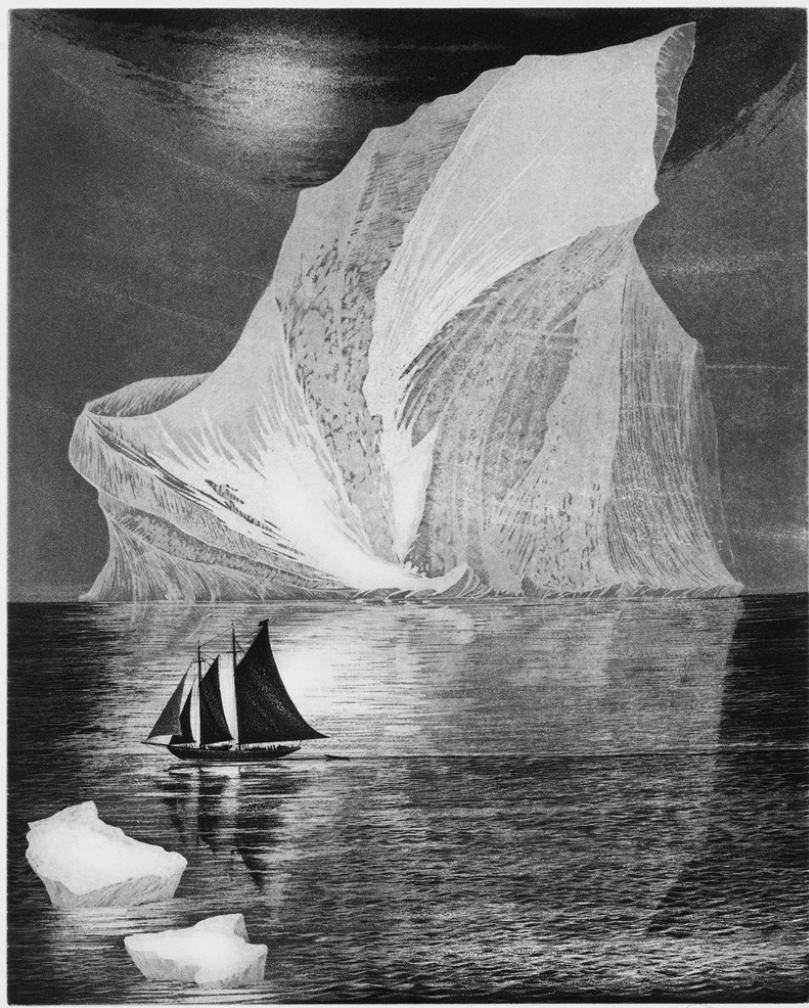
Maybe to deflect any ominous thoughts I was reminded how much Blackwood's figures remind me of Edward Gorey's Edwardian looking men in large overcoats. Blackwood works in etching. Gorey inked drawings that look like etchings. For some reason I doubt Gorey knew of Blackwood and while Blackwood may have known of Gorey I doubt he was an influence. One of revealing things of the AGO show are the sketches by David Blackwood where he shows that Picasso was a primary influence where you see not just powerful images of ghostly bulls but in the strength and sculptural figure drawings. Perhaps Picasso was Gorey's inspiration as well?

Another revelation were the number of artifacts (musket, ship name plates, maps, wooden doors) that Blackwood had contributed from his own collection. This is something else that these artists share. Collecting. Cartoonists Seth and Chris Ware both share a nostalgia for another time and are well known for collecting or recreating pieces that evoke that era. I think Blackwood's collection is probably something more organic, particularly that many of the artifacts are from his home town that seem as personal as they are professionally referential. Edward Gorey too, was a collector. Collector is too kind. He was without a doubt a hoarder.



Scene from 'The Doubtful Guest' by Edward Gorey

It occurred to me then at the AGO, I was in a building housing not just work from Ken Thomson's art collection but also Thomson's surprising collection of model ships. So there I was. Looking at an artist's work, which included his own collection, reminding me of artists who were also collectors, in a building full of a collector's collections. It made me wonder what was the difference between hoarding and collecting? I suppose hoarders can't distinguish between trash and art, between value and detritus, meaning and insignificance. I wonder if in the end anyone will be able to tell the difference between our piles of garbage and our piles of art. I think people give art its meaning, its intent. Without people looking at art, the work itself is no different than dust. Dust to dust.



Flora S. Nickerson Down on the Labrador, David Blackwood



Unsettled #01, Ireland's Eye, Trinity Bay (1998), Scott Waldon

“I remember there being something of a shit storm when these photos hit the street. ‘Why, dis buddy ain’t even from Newfoundland!’ ‘Dis here is our culture, and we don’t need no Yank takin’ pictures of it!’ Etcetera. While entropy has a long history in the larger art world, this was the first time Newfoundlanders saw it so close to home, presented in such stark, devastating detail.”

Craig Francis Power

from The Scope, Thu, Aug 13, 2009
thescope.ca



***“Youth is full of sport, age’s breath is short,
Youth is nimble, age is lame,
Youth is hot and bold, age is weak and cold,
Youth is wild, age is tame.”***

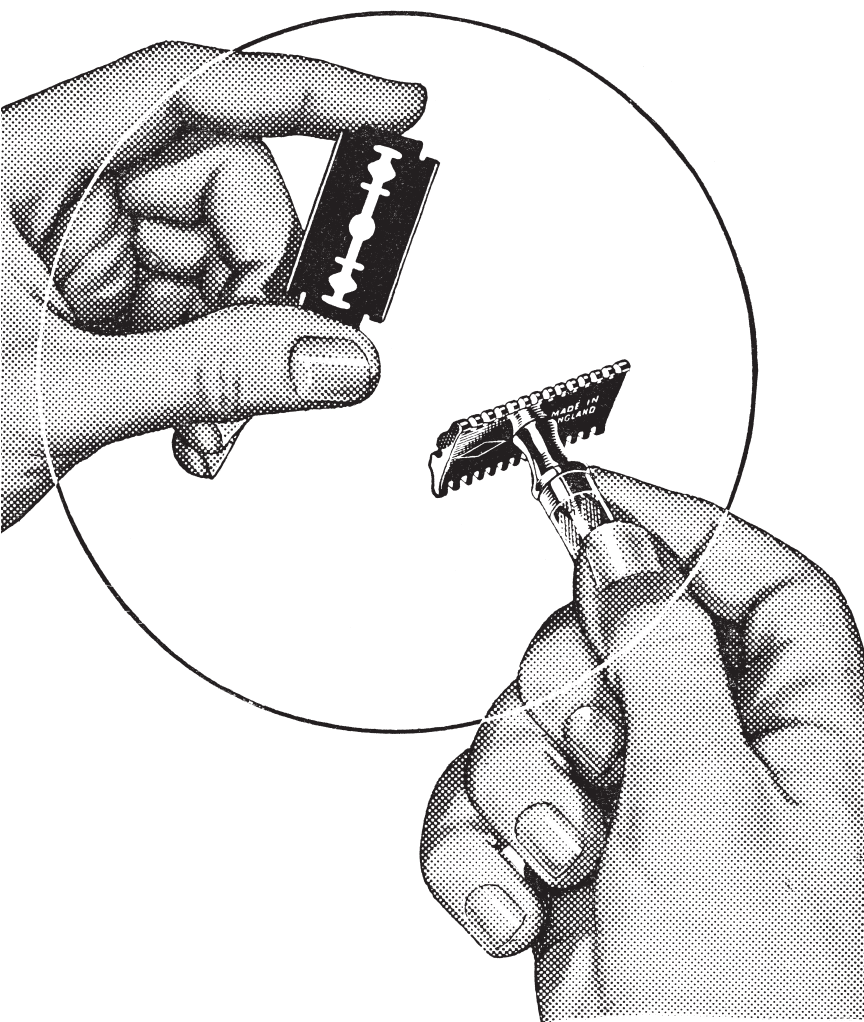
William Shakespeare



SHORPY

“Baseball is ninety percent mental and the other half is physical.”

Yogi Berra



Blade Runner

Peter Rogers

The beard? This hair on my mug? It is temporary and temporal. I stopped shaving for a little while - it's not like I grew a beard, that's just a consequence of not shaving. I just got tired of using those crappy little blades that you throw away. Plus, they are insanely expensive. Insanely expensive garbage. Sometimes a blade lasts for a week, but usually just 2-3 shaves. Where's the quality control? I know no one wants to sell me a ceramic blade razor that I'll never have to sharpen or throw out. I get it. It's like when they give you a free printer as long as you pay \$100 every other month for ink. For ink! Why is the disposable part the expensive part? Why is ink more expensive than oil or gas or I don't know... everything.

That's what happened with shaving. The blades used to be \$15 for 8. Not cheap but reasonable, I guessed. Then \$17 for 8. Then \$18. Then \$19.99. Then \$25 for an eight-pack! I figured I could buy a good electric razor for about four months worth of blades. I don't even shave that much. Every other day at most. I usually use a four-pack a month, maybe breaking into a second four-pack. On average I use one blade for three shaves. I shave about 3 times a week, so it's about \$25 for 2 months, which is \$150 a year. A good electric razor runs about \$200, but recently I saw I had enough Air Mile points to get one that was \$189. Then that particular razor became available on Amazon and Futureshop for \$89. I don't want to bore you with the math, which I could scarcely understand myself but as soon as the razor went on sale, it's Air Miles value changed

dramatically (meaning I wasn't getting good value per Air Mile point, which seems to fluctuate between 1 to 15 ancient Nubian cowrie shells per Air Mile point). Regardless, it would have been a poor use of my Air Miles.

Besides I'm tired of paying for the Gillette family vacations. Screw them! Go get a real job you little turds (nay, 1 per-centers!) When I ran out of blades, I just stopped shaving. I ordered an electric razor last week. When it arrives, good-bye beardy!

You'll know when the razor arrives because I'll be clean shaven. I'm getting pretty tired of this beard. Paul Rudd has said you know you've got a big beard when you look down, and you see it. I think a beard is too long when you start combing it. It's really too long when you start combing out dead red-wing blackbirds.

On a side note, apparently in the 21st century, razors are now called "Shavers"? Where did this word come from? Shavers? I "shave" with a "razor", just like I "pedal" a bicycle. I don't "pedal" a "pedaler"? I "cut" with a "knife", I don't "knife" a potato, unless I'm in potato prison and some big Yukon Gold wants to make me his Fingerling. No way "Yukon"! You get "knifed".

What exactly has become of the language I once spoke? The world I grewed up in is long gone.

UPDATE: I just came back from lunch and lo & behold, there on my desk was a package containing the Philips Norelco Sensotouch 2D Electric Shaver. I can't help but think I should run out and commit a crime wave under the banner of "Bearded Bandit Breaks Bank Vault" then like totally getting away with it because I would shave my whiskers like The Blade Runner in The Fugitive. Time is running out on this beard. It's plan to slowly grow back into my head, Triffid-like, are numbered. Tonight, WE SHAVE!



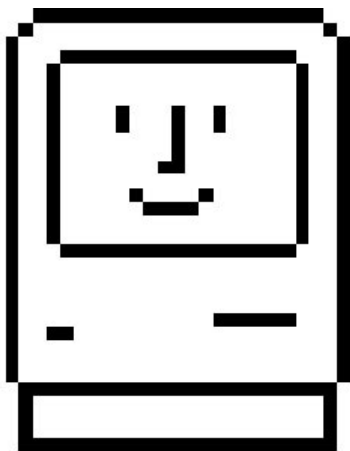
"Shave and a haircut, two bits?! Outrageous!"

Sunday, April 24, 2011

Hello, I'm a Mac

Peter Rogers

A few years ago I was driving home from a late night hockey game. At that hour, the streets near Spadina Road and Dupont (for non-Torontonians, North of Bloor, Spadina Avenue becomes Spadina Road) are pretty much abandoned, except for this Asian guy I see riding his bicycle loaded with overstuffed bags (like a scene straight out of Beijing, this guy is riding a bicycle completely overloaded like Juan Valdes' mule, after midnight in January — I see him every week). That's beside the point.



My real point is, on this particular night, I realized what a huge cliché I was. There I was, wearing, what I like to think of as a very hip, vintage racing jacket (Johnson outboard motor sports in metallic gold - very 1970s), a “trucker-style” baseball cap (which, in truth, I only wear after hockey because I need to cover my head but don’t want to wear a wool tuque), listening to what was then a huge Moby hit (mix of dance/house/pop/electronic - verification needed), and driving a Volkswagen Golf GT (2.0L, totally kicks the ass of anything else in it’s class). It’s like I just walked out of marketer’s hand book.

There you have it. I’m an over-educated Mac user, who works as a designer in the “tech-sector”, drives a VW Golf, wears vintage duds (ironically or otherwise), drinks French-press fair-trade coffee, listens to popular yet progressive music, prefers galleries and museums over monster truck rallies, prefers pubs over bars, only drinks locally brewed beers, chooses organically raised beef, local produce when possible, performs some level of physical activity 2-3 times a week and believes mistakenly, beyond the shadow of a doubt that I am a unique individual.

A hunch.com survey about Mac-vs-PC users however, begs to differ. Not only does it reinforce every PC vs Mac cliché, it drives home the point that Mac users see themselves as unique and different but really are just all the same. Of course, there’s a slight problem here. The questionnaire is from a Web site where almost 25% of respondents didn’t even identify themselves as either a Mac or PC type person. So you’re really focusing on a subset of a subset; only 75% of people that use Hunch.com identify themselves with their computer of choice. As a caveat, I’ve tried hunch.com before and found it pretty useless. It reminded me of the Seinfeld episode where Kramer starts taking Movieline calls only to ask callers in a robotic voice, “Why don’t you just tell me what movie you’d like to see?” when he can’t decipher their push button prompts.

Here are some tidbits that the survey discovered.

When asked which style of art they preferred:

Mac users were more likely to choose Modern art.

PC users were more likely to choose pictures of dogs of playing poker.

When asked which vehicle they preferred:

PC users would rather ride a Harley.

Mac users would rather ride a Vespa.

When asked which newspaper they preferred:

PC users prefer USA Today.

Mac users prefer New York Times.

When asked which kinds of movies they preferred:

PC users were more likely to see Hollywood films.

Mac users were more likely to see indie films.

PC users enjoy casino gambling.

Mac users are more likely to say they can draw well.

PC users are more likely to say they are stronger at math skills.

Mac users are more likely to say they are stronger at verbal skills.

...and so on.

In the end, I don't think this shows the difference between PC and Mac users as much as the difference between Mac users and everyone else. Only 10% of respondents said they were Mac people and really PC users are made up of users of Microsoft, HP, Dell, Sony etc. (though that's not shown). Mac users typically work in fields of creative media such as art & design, music, film, and writing because either the device lends itself to those applications or it is marketed that way. People who work in those fields probably do tend to be more liberal or have particular tastes. The keyword is "tends". I believe the difference between my "tendency" to do something and my likelihood, while not fundamentally huge, is still an important distinction. Despite the adage that you can't judge a book by its cover, it turns out you probably can judge a user by their MacBook.

A Hard Drive of One's Own

Peter Rogers

What of machines? Do they have a heaven? I hope so. I am, at this very minute, abolishing a hard drive in what was once a very tidy and reliable laptop, but it fell on hard times and became... neglected. It refused to open its eyes and speak to me. It no longer wanted to be a part of this world so I'm taking it apart from this world. I'm erasing it. Obliterating it. I'm wiping it down carefully with an electronic squeegee. There may be microscopic bits of its former self left, burned deep into the magnetic grooves like so much dirt under your fingernails, but I doubt anyone will notice. No one will see those pitted blemishes once I've polished out all the blots and stains. You see, I'm not just erasing but also re-formatting. I'm going to re-build anew atop the old. No one will ever remember what this little adding machine was like once I'm done. There'll be no vector programs, no raster manipulators, no crumpled up crushes of code, just pure, simple programs for the weekender or amateur (pronounced Ahm - ah - toer). This will be a quiet, clean and casual petit ami, for your music and movies but mostly for your words, in your widely available typefaces. Faces so familiar they'll feel like family.

Once this computer was a seedy petrol station selling fumes, lubricants, dusty candy bars, dented soda cans, cartoonish cardboard air fresheners and charcoal briquettes but that will

be smashed and flattened and will go to seed. After the weeds have popped up and colourful wild flowers appear at the edges, you'll ask yourself, "What was there?" and a vague image of tarmac and dirty aluminum siding will nudge you to say, "A gas station, was it, or a convenience store?" You'll have forgotten the smell, the dark oil stained ground and long lollipop shaped shadow that cast itself out into the street as though it were trying to escape. All you'll know is the space it left behind.

When the frame of the new comes into view you'll begin to wonder all that there could be. Is it a bakery? No. Too big for that? Not a sandwich shop, or worse a burger joint? No. Where would you park? Could it... no, no. No one would make a home there? Would they? Oh, but they would. Not just a home. A weekend get-away, back to the simple life, view of the forest and a quaint chimney stack from which shall plume a wee puff of wood smoke. Wait. Not so traditional. There's an angle here that is far too modern to be "quaint". That colour. That's not quaint. Yet, it is unadorned and calming and feels just about the right size. Just the kind of place to relax and put your feet up. A place with a single comfortable chair and a table for a lamp and a glass. Empty enough to be clean. Bright enough to have cheer. Small enough to enclose. Like a Scandinavian cottage, designed by a Finish architect to sit close to the sea, on an outcrop of rock. Bare, minimal, simple not sparse. Just a touch of old framed by the lightness of the new.

That's what this laptop will be when I'm done.

Update: It didn't make it. The machine is dead. Long live the machine. Yet like a child, it's hard drive will live again and rise from the ashes transporting files on the world wide "sneakernet"



Thursday, December 30, 2010

Is it just me...

Every once in a blue moon, sequential posts on Twitter from random sources seem to create a sum greater than the whole.

I give you such a case:

CBC Top Stories



Canadian gives birth to royal great-grandchild

<http://bit.ly/eXFbz8>

9 hrs ago

CBC Top Stories



Invasive species play a role in mass extinctions

<http://bit.ly/dFDG2S>

9 hrs ago

Really? That must have been intentional. No? C'mon! It's too good to be true.

Twitter Profile

@ROWDYMAN

“Not clever enough by half.”

4,569

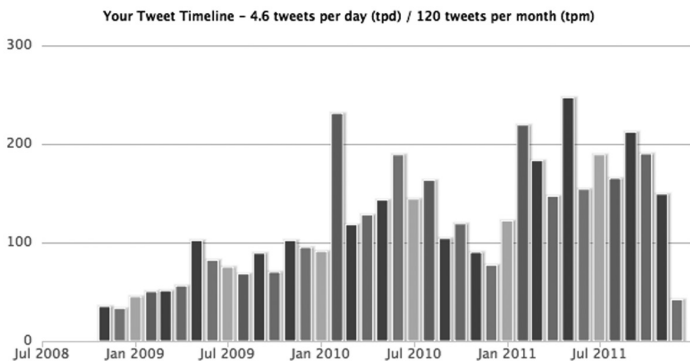
Tweets

191

Following

165

Followers



PLACES



Pine Clad Hills

Peter Rogers

Last night I attended a talk at the University of Toronto by Canadian ex-pat architect, Todd Saunders whose practice is based in Bergen, Norway. Saunders is originally from Gander, Newfoundland (you read that correctly) and has recently begun an ambitious project on a pile of rock known as Fogo Island, in Bonavista Bay, Newfoundland (which is really out there in the North Atlantic). The instigator of the project is a success story herself. Zita Cobb made her millions as a top level executive at JDS Uniphase and had an idea to create a sort of cultural resort and artists retreat on the island, sort of in the mould of The Banff Centre. Saunders had been slowly gaining international attention for his beautifully detailed and captivating projects (usually set against striking and wondrous Norwegian landscapes) when he received a call from Cobb. Funny story; he said Cobb called him on his mobile while he was on a kayaking trip and as he was so tired of work he sort of blew her off. When he got ashore, he wandered into an Internet café and searched her name online. After discovering who Cobb was (one of those “Holy Shit” moments) he called her back right away (a few of his stories were punctuated that way).

Saunders is not your typical internationally recognized architect. He’s self-effacing, unpretentious and genuinely amazed at the attention he has received. As a Newf who has traveled extensively and lived longer in Norway than he ever did in Canada he readily admits to having a messed up accent. You

get the feeling, it's his innate curiosity that keeps his work fresh and why more and more people want to work with him. We're talking about a guy who left his home town and hitchhiked from Paris to Norway just to see how far North he could get on a few bucks. With a background in town planning, he somehow wound up working in London, Berlin, and Moscow before returning to Norway with just "four pairs of underwear and a knapsack." It was a fateful return. Within a week he had found a job that became a calling, found a place to live and met his future wife.

He showed a lot of work and sprinkled his lecture with humorous anecdotes of surprises, successes, failures and discovery. One of those stories will stick with me. He said the first time he met with Fogo Island residents to discuss the project he wasn't sure he could convince them and didn't want to come across as some snobby asshole but when he looked out into the crowd he saw faces that reminded him of his own aunts, uncles or cousins. Then it became difficult to speak and he became surprised by his own emotions. That's when he realized not just how important the project was to the residents but to himself. I would go further and say the project is equally important to Newfoundland as Saunders single-handedly brings a high quality contemporary and colloquial architecture to the island. The effect is already spreading as Saunders starts a project in the newly formed national park in Labrador's Torngat Mountains. On the surface, it might seem odd for a Newfie to be a working architect in Norway but the geography is so similar to Newfoundland to me that it seems natural. Todd Saunders said as much himself saying Norway was probably one of the few places as close to being Newfoundland where he could practice architecture. Like a typical Newfoundlander, I felt very proud of the success of a fellow native son and exile.

Saturday, February 26, 2011

Thinking of You...

Peter Rogers

I have a widget on my computer which includes a CBC Web cam that overlooks St. John's harbour and I happened to see it just at around 5:30 PM, St. John's local time. It's a fuzzy image but I still saw the lady I knew as my home town, even though I've never actually lived there. I saw the grey, late afternoon sky filtered through heavy, still clouds while the street and porch lights were just starting to come on. There is something about those big iron cold clouds above barren trees and brightly painted row houses stuck on St. John's hills that calls to me. It's not something that beckons me like some asinine faux folk song sang like melted cheese spewing from a sentiment dipped singer. Still, it gets my attention. As if I had been flipping through a neglected paperback and an old photo fell out. At first you'd pick it up in a huff then you'd notice it, examine it more carefully, turn it over in hopes of finding a hand written note or even a date. You recognize the image and it churns up a snap of synaptic charges going off in your head like static sparks after removing a sweater too quickly. It's like that. All I'm saying is, "I miss you. Take care."



Boys Wrestling, 1969, Fred Herzog

It's All There in Black & White

Peter Rogers

I spent a few minutes rummaging through some photo albums yesterday, picked out a handful of pictures and took them to the local pharmacy to scan them. Those Kodak photo kiosks are a real dog's breakfast of memory card slots, output trays and scanner drawers. Eventually, I managed to scan almost a dozen photos of my parents and relatives taken between 1955 and 1960 or so.

It is odd, seeing your parents at an age younger than yourself. They look so fresh faced and slim. It's so hard to imagine what they would be like if you'd met them. Not in some "Back to the Future" sort of way, but just on some kind of equal terms if you know what I mean. As it is we can never really know them like that. I sometimes think that when we are with friends and they are with their own children. Some day those kids will grow up, and wonder what their parents were like. Will they ever ask you, "What were they like, really?" You wonder what you'd have in common with them. I don't know if I would have any more in common with my parents then than now. Certainly not music. Dad only ever enjoyed folk or country music of the simplest kind. Mom only ever seemed to like waltzes or Rogers and Hammerstein musicals. Music just wasn't something that occupied them. Books? My parents read, but nothing very contemporary (even for their own time). Films? That makes me



Jake Rogers, Ruth Ross circa 1960

laugh a little. They give so little thought to that sort of thing. Work and family. That seemed to be their only interest, their life was defined by work and family. I'm the lucky beneficiary of that interest.

I've read that followers of Buddhism meditate by concentrating on the "now". On the moment. I've heard great athletes have an ability to focus on the moment better than most normal people. I used to admire that, but if you've ever been under the fog of pharmaceuticals you might know what "living in the Now" would be like. It would be terrible. No past and much worse to me, no future. I think of people with dementia or brain injuries who have lost memory and know that they live in the "Now" and it sounds horrible. I suppose even the phrase "living in the now" is overly simplistic. Living without learning from the past, without the ability to anticipate, that wouldn't be living at all, that would just be existing.

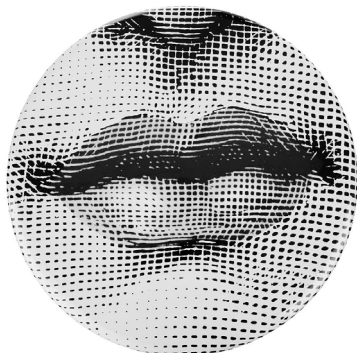
Three Days in a Foreign City

Peter Rogers

A small fan by the bed passes over me like a search light. Thin sheets flutter and the hair on my legs bristle. It is no relief. I feel like I'm slowly cooking from the inside out. A hot late summer night in Montreal. It's dark but light from the nearby houses is soaking through the room. Morning comes too soon and a heavy rain wakes me but at least the heat has fizzled out. Cooler air starts to penetrate the small apartment where we're staying.

It occurs to me that no other city confounds me like Montreal. I can never make sense of its cardinal points. Maybe it's because the city feels canted on the diagonal or that I'm always looking at the foreign feeling streetscape or the people or more significantly the Young Women of Montreal.

The Young Women of Montreal wear high boots and short breezy skirts. They wear large fashionable sunglasses, and snug, plunging v-neck t-shirts that reveal elaborate tattoos or unique jewelry or uncommonly graceful necks. Their posture and poise is remarkably upright compared to the common hipster slouch of Toronto. Theirs is a walk of confidence, ease and certainty. Like dancers versus sulking teens. Young women of Montreal wear little make-up while older women of Montreal wear too much. Though to be honest even the older people seem younger and move with same thrust as their youthful



counterparts. Montreal feels younger, more energetic, more awake than Toronto.

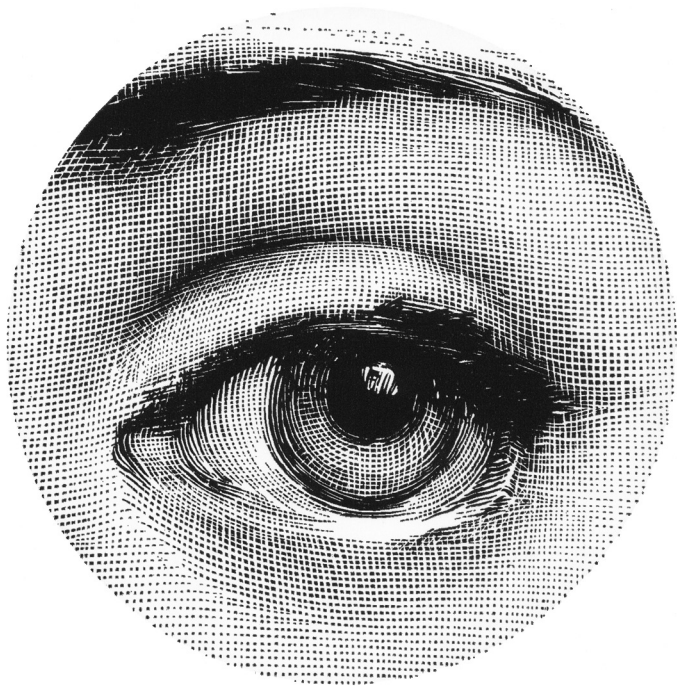
Is it inappropriate that I've given so much attention to these Young Women of Montreal? Probably. I can't claim any anthropological merit like a modern bird-counting Audubon, who arranges his subjects in some taxonomically correct matrix. I'm no plotting creep either. Just an amateur enthusiast. In honesty, I do give many residents of Montreal more than a glancing consideration but Young Women of Montreal, have by their plumage earned my gaze. In some sense their presence only adds to a lifelong construction of personal inadequacy and my feeling of being an outsider in this city.

And we ride in this city. The availability of Bixi bikes and the freedom afforded by separated bike lanes makes you feel its energy and flow so much more. Not just riding itself, which always makes me feel like a kid but the presence of so many other riders allows you to feel like a member of a greater tribe. There was no fighting for your inch of pavement. There was no cursing or shouting, just riding sprinkled with a few pings of a bell.

I don't know why, maybe it's just because I'm in a different

environment and visits to art galleries fill the trip, but whenever I'm here, my mind is darting and thinking of the possible (and maybe even the impossible). The creative inner eye opens and I can actually imagine myself writing, drawing or filming. It's just a place where artistic pursuits seem pursuable or my mind ignores the mundane temporarily and temporally. Does that make sense? It does here. A city where I struggle with the language, where my neck suffers from a twisting strain (see: young women of Montreal), where I am the "other", it is a place that breathes new life into me that is both difficult to capture and sustain. That's why I love Montreal. It is a young woman and anything is possible.

That sounds like a horrible, misogynistic cliché therefore I cannot end there. Plus, the trip isn't over yet. Now we are on a train heading back to Toronto. The train car seems full not of Montrealers heading to Toronto but Torontonians heading home. I have a confession that I've said so often it's probably more of a slogan at this point. Torontonians remind me of Americans. Louder and more self-centered than anyone else I know. Not to mention that tin-flat nasal accent. I can't tell people apart anymore or maybe I'm too lazy. That's a good bet. I'm surprisingly lazy for a guy that has a full time job. For a guy that swims, runs, and cycles over great distances I can be shockingly lazy. So lazy that I find it easier to ride 80km than do something new. I'm not sure how that works? Am I too lazy to even think of a new idea? I'm certainly too lazy to act on any new idea I might get by accident. Maybe that should be my new approach. Just do something accidentally new. Maybe that would maintain the energy you get from a vacation. Allow yourself to make something accidentally. Sounds good. Make it happen by accident.





Wednesday, November 09, 2011

There and Back

Peter Rogers

It's so odd to travel so far so easily. Air travel must be one of the most powerful forces in our modern world. Spreading people, ideas, commerce and viruses faster than ever in our history. I work for a company that not only uses a powerful video conferencing system, we also sell it. I'll even go on record about how surprisingly convincing it is to sit in front of a television talking to a video of someone and feel that some-

how, you're in the same room. As sophisticated as that is, it doesn't really replace being there, shaking a hand or breaking bread with other people. I guess it's not meant as a kind of simulacrum but the idea is it'll replace phone conversations at some point. But it won't replace flight, driving, traveling to be somewhere else.

"What were the luxury bath products in my American luxury hotel? Bliss. Made in Canada. The circle is complete and unbroken..."

We must live in a rare time. We are witnessing a migration of sameness. I mean, I can go to London, a place I've been seven or eight times over the last 30 years or so, I can see the differences and I can see how the things that used to seem extremely different are fading. It feels like in the near future all major cities will not just kind of look the same but be the same. Particularly cultural things. We are sort of all moving to some mass middle bottleneck of popular culture, art, food, music and fashion. That's not to say London isn't wholly unique the same way New York, Paris etc are. It is. It's just, now, in 2011 it is less unique than it used to be. Gone are the Wimpy's (well, they've gone somewhere. Underground, maybe?) Starbucks has arrived. It's not even Starbucks itself, but the Starbucks Effect. Kids learn to sling a hot cup of brown at Starbucks then leave and open their own "unique" coffee shop where the last drops of steamed milk are carefully poured into cups of fresh roasted coffee. Now every great city boasts fine coffee and artisan baristas. Coffee slinging started where? Istanbul? Then in Venice, then Paris and by God before you know it there's a Tims on every corner of Canada. Except in Britain where coffee was mostly a foreign and questionable substance. Enter an ever expanding American enterprise and voila. For over 3 decades Starbucks itself used to be the Local Coffeeshop for those of the Pacific Northwest. In the last decade or so it's gone global. Almost any city over a certain size has a few. Globalisation isn't just about slave-like labour and container shipping. It seems to be about the normalization of the loss of local culture.

What did I covet most in London during my stay? My luxury American hotel and Belgian beers. That and more, but here's the kicker, Uniqlo, Muji and Wagamama were also on my list. The first two are Japanese chains that don't have retail in Canada nor do they ship here; the third is a British noodle shop, based on a Japanese ideal. What were the luxury bath products in my American luxury hotel? Bliss. Made in Canada. The circle is complete and unbroken.

It's not just shopping either. My free day was spent at the incredible Tate Modern which sits majestically on the Thames along the Queen's Walk. What did I see? A retrospective of a widely revered German painter. In Trafalgar Square, the NFL was holding a pre-game concert to promote the big game of the Chicago Bears vs the Tampa Bay Buccaneers being played at Wembley Stadium. This goes both ways as Toronto has hosted soccer matches between Chelsea and Barcelona. Even at the National Gallery across from Nelson's Column, the portrait I most admired was from Dutch master.

In Leicester Square, I drank coffee made by a Polish guy, served by a French girl and paid in pounds sterling to a Spaniard working the till. As I write, a Greek financial crisis threatens to implode the Euro and European Union throwing markets world wide into a frenzy.

Then I flew back. I flew. 30-something-thousand feet over the Atlantic Ocean, in a "heavier than air" craft. Lifted by science and optimism. The Globalism that we feared or hoped for is here but did it make the world a better place or just a more homogeneous one? That's a bit of a shame. After Qadaffi was killed in Libya, a teen-ager held the former dictator's gold plated pistol aloft in celebration. The boy was wearing a New York Yankees ball cap. I was going to say he's probably never even seen a baseball game but then again, I'm sure they get satellite out there in the desert. Circle, unbroken.



The Tate Modern, London

Friday, august 19, 2011

Beginning of the End

In Ontario (I can't speak for other Canadian cities) everyone knows, summer begins to end when the "Exhibition" comes to town. In Ottawa, it's known as "The X" or "The Ex" (depending on the current marketing campaign). Whereas in Toronto, it's called the CNE, short for the Canadian National Exhibition. How grand. I can't remember what we called the one that appeared in the Avalon Mall's parking lot in St. John's. The Midway, the Fairgrounds? Midway sounds right. Right?

So that's it. At 10 AM Eastern Standard Time, August 19th, the end of summer begins. At the same time it's the official close of the sale of 112 Fern Avenue. A summer of house sales, house builds, house moves and endless, endless trips back and forth. I'll always think of it as "The Summer of a Thousand Lifts". A summer of endings and beginnings. At times it seemed like a cruel "Groundhog Day" version of an Endless Summer. It certainly was the summer of our discontent, in the real sense that of my "discontent" was in full summer bloom. Of course, summer really ends with the explosive, howling Air Show on the Labour Day long weekend. If I could escape the city for a weekend, that would be it. Though Caribana would also be in the running.

I recently heard a quote from MacBeth that seems fitting. "It is a tale, told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing." Yeah. Full of sound and fury. Signifying nothing. That's it.



ONE ferris wheels at night 1924?

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2 mags

City of Toronto Archives, Fonds 1244, f1244_it2017a

*“Ars longa, vita brevis, occasio praeceps,
experimentum periculosum, iudicium difficile.”*

*“Life is short, art is long, - the path is fraught
with occasional crises, perilous experiences,
and difficult judgments.”*

Hippocrates

