

THE RISE OF ECO-ANXIETY

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for Canadian citizenship

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the Border

...

QAnon Comes
to Canada

Plus

A New Look
at the Group
of Seven



WASTE NOT

Why financial co-ops are the natural choice for Canadians transitioning toward a more sustainable, circular economy

BY KATIE UNDERWOOD

If all of life is a web, then to be an informed consumer is to see, everywhere, evidence of rips in that web: burning forests, depleted ecosystems, and people in the streets protesting how they've been left behind by our capitalistic model. To understand how we got here, you'd have to review capitalism's existing relationship between ecology and economy—the latter designed along a linear model of “take-make-waste,” as experts have put it.

A newer, waste-eliminating remedy is gaining momentum in the form of a circular economic model, one that reintegrates all those seemingly non-renewable byproducts back into the production loop, creating new technologies, businesses, and, essentially, purpose out of the extracted resources that gum up our works in the form of

emissions and plastic sea sculptures. Importantly, a circular model demands that auxiliary industries—educational, social, and especially financial—take their environmental legacy into account.

Consumers that are keen to explore financial institutions from a more “interdependent” lens might naturally gravitate toward a cooperative model, which employs a democratic, member-owned structure that takes a more holistic approach to wealth. “Capitalism has really put human ingenuity to work, but by focusing solely on the pursuit of profit, it's virtually ensured [the progression of] climate change, economic inequality, and eroding trust in financial institutions that is quite obvious now,” says Guy Cormier, CEO of Desjardins Group. “Co-ops are built for the long haul.”

Cormier cites Desjardins' origins as

evidence of the co-op model's “needs-based” approach to finance: 120 years ago, when—as Cormier notes—banks were resistant to doing business with Francophone farmers, Alphonse Desjardins (a journalist and parliamentary stenographer at the House of Commons in Ottawa) and his wife, Dorimène, modelled their co-op after existing European institutions. Their goal was not only to combat usurious lending rates, but also to empower individuals and their communities to be financially autonomous. From about 130 farmers investing pennies to start the first *caisse populaire* (or credit union in English), Desjardins has grown to become the leading cooperative financial group in Canada and the sixth largest cooperative financial group in the world, with over 7 million members and clients and more than 47,000

Economic Models, At A Glance



employees.

Each of the individual caisses that comprise Desjardins has its own board of directors. Having more than 2,900 directors helps ensure that the overall organization is governed by democratic principles and strongly connected to its local communities.

“At Desjardins, our cooperative values are guided by the unwavering belief that economic development should drive social progress,” says Cormier. “That comes with the prerequisite of protecting our people, our communities, and our environment.”

Desjardins has already taken concrete action on this front: since 2017, the financial cooperative group has been purchasing verified carbon credits to offset its greenhouse gas emissions, and, in 2019, it became the first financial institution in Canada to sign the United Nations’ Principles for Responsible Banking, a framework that seeks to establish a more sustainable banking system for posterity. Desjardins was also a fervent supporter of the transition to clean energy, committing to the installation of 200 electric vehicle charging stations at its caisses and credit unions. As well, the cooperative group is focusing its significant infrastructure investments into renewable energy production, with over

\$1.2 billion invested to date (46 percent of their total infrastructure investments). Desjardins has taken other smaller, but practical steps, too. This includes banning single-use plastic water bottles, cups, stir sticks, and straws across the whole organization.

“Sustainable development is a model that does not compromise meeting the needs of future generations,” says Tima Bansal, director of the Ivey Centre

“At Desjardins, our cooperative values are guided by the unwavering belief that economic development should drive social progress,” says Cormier. “That comes with the prerequisite of protecting our people, our communities, and our environment.”

for Building Sustainable Value at Western University and chair of the Expert Panel on the Circular Economy for the Council of Canadian Academies. “In a circular approach, the waste becomes the feedstock for future production and can generate wealth and increase employment, arguably affecting other industries just as much as those [tied to]

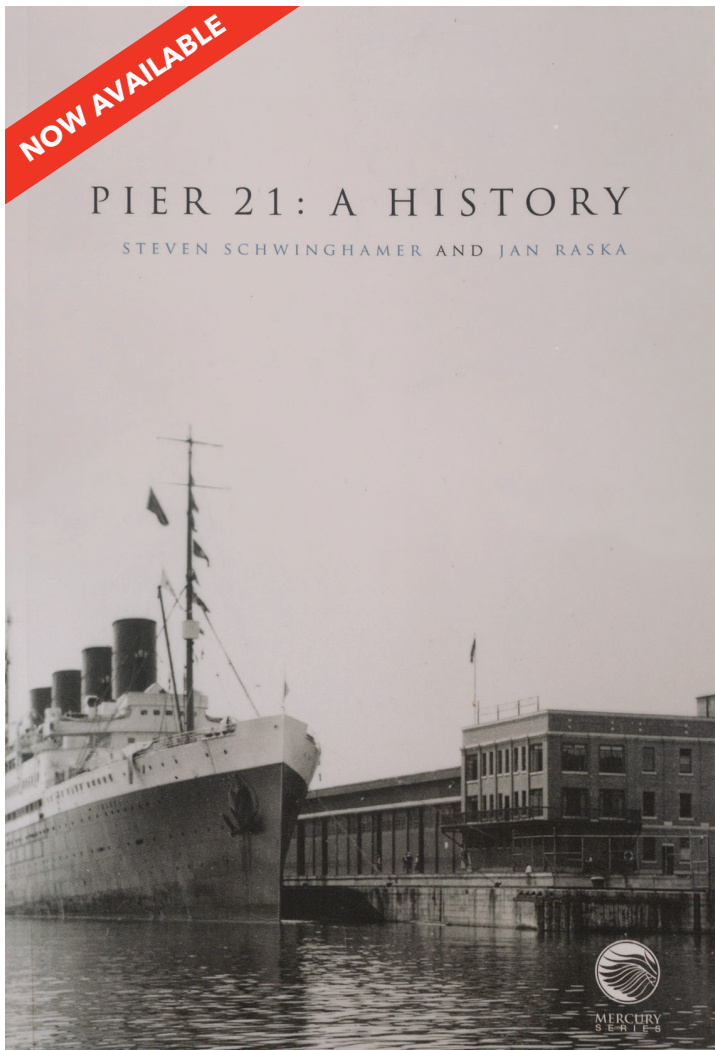
natural resources.”

Where critics of capitalism have chiefly taken issue with its single-minded for-profit approach, a circular model not only creates a slew of new market opportunities for waste management solutions, but naturally gives rise to more ethical financial products—ones that are still aimed at wealth building—like responsible investment products. It’s also one of the reasons why Desjardins partnered with École de technologie supérieure which aims to grow and innovate the field.

“The boards of directors at our local caisses understand what it means to have an impact on the socioeconomic environment where they live,” says Cormier. “During the process of production, companies must be more involved in their impacts on all aspects of society—not just, ‘I’ll pay my taxes and someone else will take care of the environment.’” He adds that co-op members can put pressure on leaders and stakeholders in a circular economy to integrate environmental goals into their decisions and force discussions at the co-op’s board level regarding shared prosperity. “Because is it okay to have short-term rewards if we’re not here in the long run?”

Bansal is heartened at the idea of so much of capitalism’s ingenuity being redirected into solutions for a less wasteful world, across every industry. “It used to be that the argument [for a circular economy] was the win-win: more market share, more money to be made in waste. But to make this work, we need to make some hard choices,” she says. “At least the conversation is a bit less superficial now—that we need to change the nature of our economy, our collaborations, our metrics, and our products. It’ll be revolutionary when we get there, but it has to be a major transformation.”

What Cormier says of the co-op model’s capacity to assist in achieving systemic change—that is to say, in repairing our vast web—is optimistic: “I have great expectations for what we can achieve when we think collectively about the next quarter century, instead of the next quarter.”



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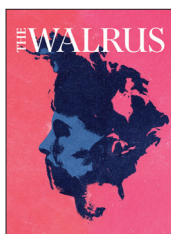
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Illustration by *Paul Kim*

Paul Kim is the design director at The Walrus.

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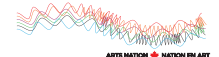


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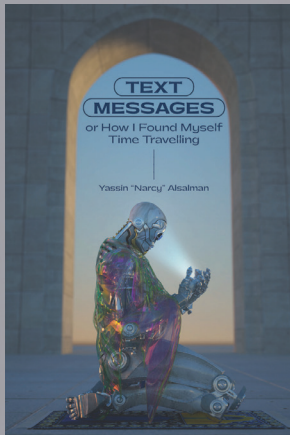
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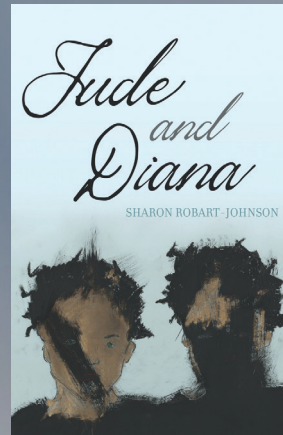
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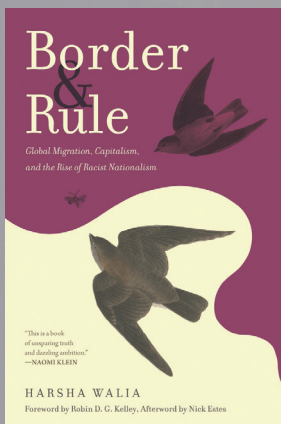
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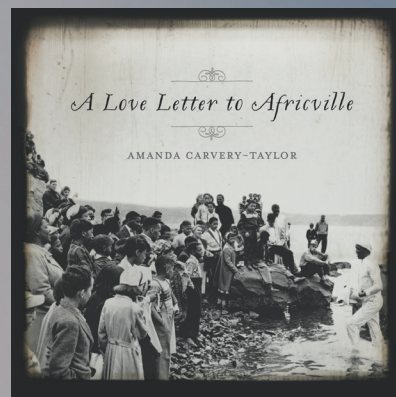
"Text Messages is an ambitious and bold time capsule capturing the insane times we're living through. Poems, barbs, and bars — take a bow, Yassin, you've made a classic."
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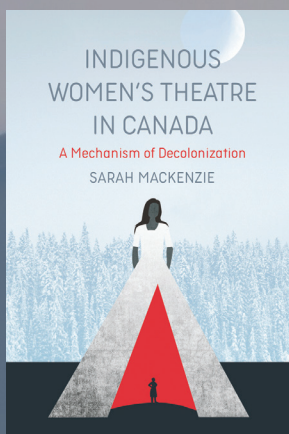
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— Rosemarie Nerville



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— Naomi Klein, author of On Fire



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MacKenzie suggests that colonialist misrepresentations of Indigenous women have served to perpetuate demeaning stereotypes, justifying devaluation of and violence against Indigenous women.



"Winona LaDuke is one of those Water Protectors who has made a compelling call to all peoples to rise up and protect the water and in so doing protect life itself on this planet."
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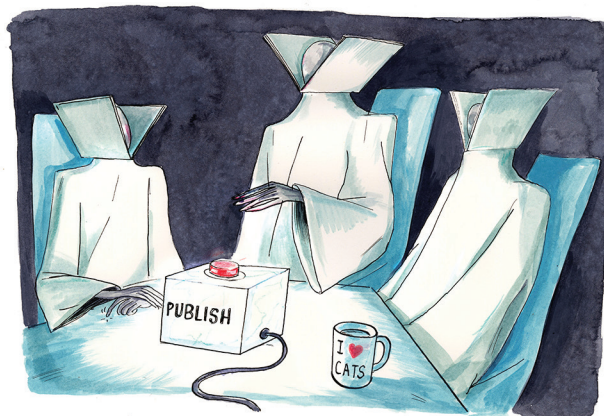
To the artists and storytellers who enlivened a cold night
with inspiration and hope, a heartfelt thank you.



Editor's Letter

ONE OF the oldest surviving publications in Canada is a 135-year-old trade magazine called *Canadian Grocer*. A chronicle of the food industry, it offers news of suppliers and supermarkets as well as industry trends. Although it's never been a household name, I've often thought of it as a model magazine. It's not known for its flashy headlines or the parties it hosts at film festivals—although it would be fun if it did. It has survived because, for 135 years, there has remained a market for it.

At this point, like many journalists, I seem to have worked for more influential publications that have folded (*Saturday Night*, *FQ*, *Lucky*) than are still around. What's sunk in is that titles endure not because of the brilliance of their ideas but due to the solidity of their financing. We tend to associate successful publications with creativity and innovation, whether it's a digital outlet like BuzzFeed or a legacy brand like the *Harvard Business Review*. But editors—even celebrities, like *Vogue*'s Anna Wintour or *Monocle*'s Tyler Brûlé—have always had to be equal parts creative and entrepreneurial. Even *The New Yorker*, which many look to as one of the world's greatest magazines, has struggled at various points in its nearly 100-year history to find readers and revenue. In recent years, it's been able to leverage its international reputation to good effect. Today, *The New Yorker* is one of the few publications in the US to declare a profit with a combined print- and digital-subscription strategy. They say content is king, but its



reign would be impotent without an adequate business model.

The Walrus has been able to offset the financial challenges faced by many other publications through a nonprofit structure and revenue from departments such as The Walrus Talks and The Walrus Lab. But, as it has done to virtually every industry, the pandemic has disrupted our work. If you're a subscriber, you already know that we took the serious decision to reduce the frequency of our print publication from ten issues to eight in 2020. Looking at the economic uncertainties of the year ahead, my colleagues and I have made the preemptive decision to keep a print schedule of eight issues in 2021.

I can't predict what will happen in 2022, but I want to be transparent about what it takes to run an enterprise like ours. My colleagues and I are invested in making a version of The Walrus that will be around for at least a hundred years, not one that enjoyed a good run and then flamed out. To that end, we have responded to the immense social, economic, and political changes of the past year—and to the proliferation of misinformation and the need for in-depth reporting during the pandemic—by creating the most relevant,

timely version of The Walrus we can. That purpose will continue to drive us in 2021.

As we send this issue to press, parts of Canada are under lockdown; it's no coincidence that a number of stories in this issue reflect a theme of borders and freedom. In "Quitting America," M. E. Rogan takes up a question many have considered over the past four years: What does it mean to be a Canadian citizen versus an American

one? In "When QAnon Came to Canada," Matthew Remski reports on the spread of a wide-ranging political and cultural conspiracy theory—a phenomenon that suggests the public imagination has no limits, geographical or otherwise. In "Crossing the Line," Hilary Beaumont looks at how the increased use of artificial intelligence could shape travel and immigration, addressing now familiar concerns about personal privacy and surveillance technology in the digital age.

In a back-page interview, "Ask an Economist," University of Victoria economics professor Rob Gillezeau offers his analysis on the impact of lockdowns. This new column was developed by The Walrus head of research Erin Sylvester and our fact-checking department in response to the recognition that our network of academics and experts includes thinkers with original approaches to the world's biggest problems. If you have questions about current issues relating to health care, politics, the climate crisis, the arts—or, why not, even how to run a magazine—send them to pitch@thewalrus.ca with "Ask an Expert" in the subject line. ✉

—Jessica Johnson

Contributors' Notes



M. E. ROGAN

"Quitting America," p. 34

"I see this as a story about the lies we tell ourselves. Usually, we tell ourselves lies about things that are difficult, and my childhood was difficult.

It took some time before I could look at it through a larger lens, beyond how it affected me. Over the past four years, as I watched things unfold in the United States, where I grew up, I saw a mirror image in America's inability to tell the truth about America."

M. E. Rogan is an award-winning magazine writer living in Toronto. Their work has appeared in Esquire, GQ, and The New York Times Sunday Magazine.



PHIL BERGERSON

Photography for "Quitting America," p. 34

"I've criss-crossed the United States for thirty years now, photographing in the streets of small towns and large cities. The battle for a normal existence that

M. E. Rogan describes in their memoir is everywhere in the US. Instead of showing things that are being expressed about the president or the tweets or whatever, I've stayed down on the ground, photographing everyday scenes. Rogan's memoir is talking about human beings going through specific experiences that speak to the larger picture—the decline of America's democracy. I hope I've also been able to reflect this within my own work."

Phil Bergerson is a professor emeritus of photography at Ryerson University. His latest book is Phil Bergerson: A Retrospective, and his latest exhibit, Retrospective, In Search of Meaning, is on display at the Stephen Bulger Gallery, in Toronto.



SORAYA ROBERTS

"Funny Bones," p. 44

"Comedy is probably the hardest genre to get right as a practitioner because what makes people laugh is extremely personal. You go back to the things you like. At the time that I started working on this story, I didn't know Meredith MacNeill was a trained theatre actress—my exposure to her had been through totally wacky, off-the-wall comedy such as the CBC's *Baroness von Sketch Show*. I was curious about how she would fit into an established genre such as a sitcom. But, over the course of my reporting, I realized she doesn't fit anywhere, which sort of means she fits everywhere."

Soraya Roberts is a freelance writer and the culture editor of Pipe Wrench, a new bimonthly online magazine.



SARAH WOLFSON

"The Needs of Humans," p. 43

"I've been working on poems lately that consider how people talk about themselves online—in particular, the way that many people have no qualms asking about things they need, whether

it's medical advice, dog sitters, or refrigerator repairs. I thought it would be interesting to apply that same rhetorical stance to our less practical human needs. What would the needs of our imaginations sound like? That's what got this poem off the ground."

Sarah Wolfson is the author of A Common Name for Everything, which won the A.M. Klein Prize for Poetry from the Quebec Writers' Federation. She lives and teaches writing in Montreal.



CHRISTOPHER KATSAROV LUNA

Photography for "Crossing the Line," p. 52

"Photojournalists always have a relationship with their subject, usually based on trust. But, when you're under surveillance, you don't have a relationship with the people on the other end of the camera. You're alienated from the authorities that are recording and controlling your images, and you have no input. To cover this story, about surveillance at international borders, I used both photojournalism and surveillance to contrast these institutions and underscore the different approaches to truth and power."

Christopher Katsarov Luna is a Latinx photojournalist based in Toronto. He is a regular contributor to the Globe and Mail, the Canadian Press, and The Narwhal.

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Letters



CLASS ACTS

I found Max Fawcett's essay on the crisis of the middle class well thought out ("How to Save the Middle Class," January/February), but his uncritical use of the term *middle class* itself was a problem. Class is one of those essentially contested concepts. Sociologist Max Weber defined it as an axis of social stratification based on wealth; Karl Marx understood it in relational terms: economic outcomes are the results of states operating at the behest of their most powerful members. Fawcett appears to offer a bit of both takes, though his focus on individual consumer choices obscures more than it reveals. Politicians currently focus on middle-class needs because organized working-class political participation has declined sharply. The answer is less about individual actions and more about collective bargaining.

Dennis Pilon

*Department of Politics, York University
Toronto, ON*

In response to Fawcett's report on worsening economic conditions for middle-income earners, I would argue that there is not one bloc of middle-class Canadians but two distinct middle classes: private and public. Over the past several decades, the unionization of private-sector workers has declined while public-sector unions have held strong, so the public-sector middle class generally has better working conditions, salaries, benefits, pensions, and job security. I worked as a teacher for many years, a public-sector employee with regular salary increases and a pension indexed to inflation. The various unions to which I belonged led us in strikes in Quebec, Ontario, and British Columbia, and we won concessions each time. My husband, who worked in the private sector, wasn't so fortunate.

*Mary Stokes-Rees
Saint John, NB*

PUBLIC GOOD

In "The Myth of Universal Health Care" (January/February), doctors Nadine Caron and Danielle Martin lay out a compelling vision of postpandemic medicare. Due to the burden of COVID-19, countries around the world are coping with backlogs and wait-lists for care, and proponents of privatization are already using this situation to advance their agenda. The best available research tells a different story: to achieve true universality, including pharmacare, long-term care, and mental health support, we need more public funding, not less. Policy makers and health care practitioners would do well to heed Caron and Martin's advice.

*Danyaal Raza and Sarah Fraser
Canadian Doctors for Medicare
Toronto, ON*

CONSIDER THE LOBSTER FISHER

I was glad to see Zoe Heaps Tennant's article on the East Coast lobster fishery ("The New Lobster Wars," January/February) alongside the art of my fellow Qalipu First Nation member Marcus Gosse. As a journalist and host of the podcast *Mi'kmaq Matters*, I'm all too familiar with the challenges of getting information from Fisheries and Oceans Canada. When a government department can seize lobster traps without laying charges and interfere in a fishery the Supreme Court says is legal, we have a problem. When officials feel they don't have to answer questions about their conduct, you worry about the rule of law.

*Glenn Wheeler
Toronto, ON*

I was impressed by Tennant's article on Mi'kmaq treaty rights and the lobster fishery. Other publications have put out stories on the topic, but Tennant's work stood out by weaving personal anecdotes with

historical context. One quotation in particular, from Mi'kmaq fisher Marilynn-Leigh Francis, stuck with me: she says the Canadian government is "so used to us not having anything that even a little bit of something is too much." That insight invites so much reflection about what it really means for Canada to limit Indigenous people to a "moderate livelihood."

*Tegwyn Hughes
Duncan, BC*

"The time has come," The Walrus said, "to talk of many things." Send us a letter, email (letters@thewalrus.ca), or tweet, or post on our Facebook page. Comments may be published in any medium and edited for length, clarity, and accuracy.

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ENVIRONMENT

Climate Blues

More and more people are seeking therapy to treat anxiety about the future of the planet

BY BRITT WRAY

ILLUSTRATION BY ELIJAH WHITE



ON SEPTEMBER 1, 2019, the category five storm Hurricane Dorian slammed into the Bahamas with gusts of 354 kilometres per hour and storm surges of over six metres. Instead of sweeping up what it could before steadily moving on, Dorian was patient, pummelling the islands for over forty hours straight. More than 70,000 people were displaced and 13,000 homes destroyed. On land, as the morgues filled up, bodies were piled high in refrigerated containers. Search-and-rescue dogs sniffed out corpses from under the debris; many were buried

too deep for anyone to reach. Though the official death toll was seventy-four, some—including the Bahamas health minister at the time—believe the real number is much, much higher.

Bethuel Nyachienga is a mental health expert who has provided psychosocial support to more than 4,000 Hurricane Dorian survivors since September 2019. Nyachienga says the most common effects that survivors of catastrophes like this one report are insomnia, depression, and feeling retraumatized every time the wind is strong. What's clearer from observation is the excessive drinking and

drug consumption that many survivors don't want to talk about. A 2017 report from the American Psychological Association (APA) titled *Mental Health and Our Changing Climate* details this kind of fallout, describing how PTSD, suicidality, depression, compounded stress, domestic abuse, child abuse, and substance abuse often spike after climate-linked calamities.

Even far away from these disasters, psychologists are now finding, just knowing about the severity of our climate predicament can take its own kind of toll. In recent years, the climate and wider ecological crisis has led to an explosion of what has been termed eco-anxiety, which the APA defines as the “chronic fear of environmental doom.” It is born of the barrage of increasingly worse environmental news combined with the knowledge that actions taken so far to address the problem have been ineffective or insufficient, and it destroys people's capacity to feel safe in the world. The stress of worrying about the future of the biosphere, the species, one's community, and one's life, as well as already occurring environmental disasters, can look more like cycling through grief, fear, shame, guilt, resignation, despair, and nihilism than just anxiety.

Last spring, University of Helsinki researcher Panu Pihkala wrote a piece for the BBC that explored this growing phenomenon. An environmental theologian, he described how many people, even far from the front lines of climate change, are increasingly being forced to confront the idea of their own vulnerability because “the world is revealed to be much more tragic and fragile than people thought it was.” This profound disruption then sends them into a process of mourning the future they believed would come—a future of ecological stability—and which they now know won't.

IN 2019, the Yale Program on Climate Change Communication mapped the opinions of more than 9,000 Canadians, and 64 percent responded that they think climate change will start to harm people living in Canada within the next ten years. A national opinion survey of 2,000 people, carried out by Abacus

Data that same year, showed that one in four Canadians think about climate change often and are getting “really anxious” about it. A similarly sized 2020 survey conducted by OnePoll revealed that 78 percent of Generation Z in the US do not plan on having kids because of climate change, while 71 percent of millennials in the US say that climate change has negatively affected their mental health. Stress levels are on the rise, and young people, who feel betrayed by older generations that aren’t cleaning up their own mess, are the most susceptible. As

one young climate striker’s sign put it: “We won’t die from old age. We’ll die from climate change.” Another’s asked: “Why Should I Study For a Future I Won’t Have?”

“I’ve been seeing teens who [felt] suicidal because the pain and distress... from the coronavirus is finally starting to mirror

how they’ve been feeling about climate change for a long time, and they’re wondering, Why on earth can’t people recognize the scale of the threat in the longer term?” says Caroline Hickman, a British clinical psychotherapist.

Hickman is part of a growing movement of “climate-aware” psychotherapists, who help people cope with complex emotions that stem from awareness of environmental crises. It can be difficult to isolate climate change as a reason for seeking therapy, so no one can say precisely how many therapists are working with people on climate-related issues. But those specializing in eco-anxiety and its companion emotions are starting to get professionally organized in groups like the Climate Psychology Alliances of the United Kingdom and North America, which between them have about 2,000 mental health care practitioners on their mailing lists.

Often, these therapists say, their clients seek them out because of work stress or depression, then concerns about the climate arise in the course of therapy. Some started mentioning the climate as a source of stress after the 2016 election of Donald Trump; others did so after the publication of major news, like the 2018

UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change report, which was widely summarized as saying, “We have twelve years to avert climate catastrophe.” For others still, it was in the wake of a variety of climate disasters that have since struck. Leslie Davenport, a climate-aware marriage and family therapist in Tacoma, Washington, says those who sought her help for eco-anxiety made up 25 percent of her client base last year, up from none five years earlier.

The field is emerging, and the evidence base is not yet firmly established for which approaches work best to help people manage their environmentally linked distress. That’s partly because eco-anxiety is not a pathology. You won’t find it listed as a condition in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, and climate-aware therapists aren’t rushing to

include it. “What you don’t want is for people to first and foremost think their eco-anxiety is in itself a problem,” Hickman says. It is a natural response to a real and unfolding threat, so the only label it deserves is “reasonable.” After all, what’s more daunting than realizing we’re all stuck on a cooking rock and have wasted the bulwark of precious time we had to cool it off before everything changes irreversibly? She typically tells her eco-anxious clients that their feelings are “a sign that you’re waking up; there’s nothing wrong with you. Welcome to a community that can share and mirror your concerns.”

That mirroring itself brings enormous relief. Social norms for talking about these emotions are still pretty underdeveloped. Even environmental professionals typically have to bottle up their eco-emotions at work. “It made me feel like I was crazy,” says Mary Annaïse Heglar, who works at the US Natural Resources Defense Council. For years, her colleagues never seriously spoke of being rattled by the harrowing implications of the reports they were writing while she grew ever more unsettled. After an outpouring of support in response to

an article she wrote about climate grief, Heglar felt a lot better, “realizing that it wasn’t only me who felt this way and had to compartmentalize just to get through their day.”

As the public narratives have gotten direr, so have people’s psychological responses. And eco-anxiety can be a problem if it overwhelms a person so much that it interferes in their everyday life. Andrew Bryant, a climate-aware clinical social worker in Seattle who runs a website called *Climate and Mind*, has worked with people who believe societal collapse or human extinction are now inevitable, which can make the day-to-day feel meaningless. It’s a delicate place, he says. “If they feel you don’t get it and you’re just trying to convince them it is not that bad, they’ll stop coming. At the same time, I don’t know what’s going to happen, so I have to walk a careful line of not endorsing specific outcomes they are predicting while also not downplaying them.”

A lot of climate-aware therapy is about helping people sit with overwhelming amounts of ecological uncertainty. The climate crisis can generate extreme scenarios in people’s minds, futures in which humans will either save the world or die out within a few decades. Landing on an imagined future that sounds certain—whether or not it reflects scientific or political realities—can at least take a person out of that tense place of not knowing, which brings some relief. But it can be damaging when it isn’t grounded in the truth, says Bryant. By transforming uncertainty into a sense of acceptance and courage about facing what’s going to happen, climate-aware therapists try to help their clients imagine the role they could play in bringing the ecological future they hope for to life.

What traps people in eco-anxiety, Hickman says, is not their difficult feelings themselves but the feelings they have about their difficult feelings. Often, we resist these feelings because we fear they’ll ruin our lives if we give them space. But it is this resistance to feelings we’ve been raised to think are negative, like vulnerability and grief, that make them frightening. A biomedical approach to therapy would file such hopelessness

The climate emergency has many mourning the future they believed would come.

under depression and try to treat it with a pill. But several climate-aware therapists use mindfulness as a strategy to help their clients bear those painfully barren thoughts and feelings. The key lies in embracing complex emotions, Hickman says. This is another important aspect of addressing eco-anxiety, Davenport says: after you validate the legitimacy of the feelings, you learn not to banish them but to live with and, ideally, channel them.

A mindful approach holds that emotions are not bad or good but are natural and inevitable parts of the human condition. Paradoxically, if we learn to create some acceptance around our emotions by naming them, observing them, and eventually learning to sit with them with an element of curiosity, we can change our relationships to them. A successful experience with a climate-aware therapist is about channelling and transforming what the heaviness of the climate crisis makes one feel rather than weeding that heaviness out.

After years of battling eco-anxiety and trying to beat it into submission, twenty-one-year-old climate activist Clover Hogan learned, with the help of climate psychologists, to lean in to her difficult feelings. At Force of Nature, an organization she founded that engages youth to champion environmental and social justice, they encourage young people to welcome their eco-anxiety and use it as a compass. Hogan says that the grief and hopelessness so many eco-anxious youth feel reveal what matters most to them. When that's overlaid with their passions and talents—this is visualized for participants in a Venn diagram—a sweet spot of available agency emerges. “If you're into fashion, why not look at the fact that a third of the world's microplastics come from the textile industry? If you're motivated by your gut, why not rethink that 50 percent of [fresh produce] is wasted in America? If you're passionate about music, why not use your art to communicate the urgency of this situation in universal language?” Hogan says. The key to living well with eco-anxiety is finding some power to act.

Hogan is Australian. The record-breaking bushfires of the 2019/20

summer, which burned more than 20 percent of Australia's forests, marked the first time she grieved the loss of a part of her culture along with a part of herself. The fires forced her to look at the more than 3 billion animals that were harmed or killed, and her friends who lost their homes, and think, “Okay, I really get that we are fighting for our lives; this is do or die.”

What Hogan finds hardest is accepting that all the action in the world may not be enough to save humanity and so many other species. Instead of advising her to banish that upsetting thought from her consciousness, climate-aware therapist

Fiat Lux

BY KATERI LANTHIER

If cinema is time plus light,
I've got a sequel to Marclay's *The Clock*.
It begins with my grandad's “fiat lux,”
delivered in a fond mock-heroic tone,
followed by a montage of the cheap and dear
switches I've handled in a long life cycle.
The pull chains, the panels of sticky plastic,
the button on a hotel's fancy brass bouillotte.
The snapped lights-out in my childhood bedroom
where roses on satin turned ghost-pale by streetlamp.
Lights beyond my reach
(oh, how I would reverse this)
in the theatre where a stranger grabbed my thigh
when the lights dimmed before *Trop Belle Pour Toi*.
(I leapt up and left. How does it end?)
The night lights for nursing, the bedtime story light.
And this: the bakery boss at my first job
who led me down the cellar stairs
to the cold dark storeroom, then leaned close,
growling, “This way, you won't forget!”
placed his hand over mine,
and set our hands on the switch.

Hickman (who has also served as a bit of a mentor) has helped her tap into it in order to keep going without expectation of what fruits her efforts will bear. Hogan will continue with her coaching work regardless of the outcomes. “Now that I've gone to the dark place of grief I was afraid of and come out the other side, I see I'm okay,” she says, “and it makes me feel more authentic in my hope for the future.” 🙏

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BRITT WRAY has a PhD in science communication and is the author of *Generation Dread*, forthcoming from Knopf.

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JUSTICE

Standoff at 1492 Land Back Lane

In southern Ontario, twenty-five acres of farmland have become a new front in the centuries-long battle for Indigenous self-governance

BY LUKE OTTENHOF

ARTWORK BY BRONWYN BUTTERFIELD



IN AN EMPTY LOT off Highway 6, along a stretch of country road that connects Six Nations of the Grand River with the nearby town of Caledonia, eight people banter around a midafternoon fire. This grassy field in southern Ontario, dotted with a few tents and temporary structures, is called Kanonhstaton. Back in 2006, it was the future site of a 600-home subdivision. Members of Six Nations, which claims ownership of the land, moved in and halted construction, leading to a months-long standoff that began to de-escalate only when the province bought out the land from the developer and abandoned the project. Today, Kanonhstaton serves as the headquarters for a new land fight, this

one just across the road. There, Foxgate Developments is planning to turn twenty-five acres of farmland into McKenzie Meadows, a suburb of 218 homes. Haudenosaunee from Six Nations arrived once again in July, stopping construction, occupying the lots, and renaming the barren field 1492 Land Back Lane. It's now a new front in the centuries-long struggle between Canada and Indigenous nations over where one another's sovereignty begins and ends—one that sees the Haudenosaunee at odds with the government, the courts, and many of their neighbours.

Skyler Williams, a thirty-eight-year-old ironworker and spokesperson for the activists, pulls up in a mud-spattered Jeep.

He grins and lights a cigarette, and we walk a few hundred metres down the road toward the main blockade, up since October. There, a battered, spray-painted school bus sits atop a ridge of torn-up asphalt, barring one of the main roads into Caledonia. Four Ontario Provincial Police (OPP) officers, standing outside their vehicles, keep watch from afar. There are arrest warrants out for several of the camp's members, Williams included, on account of an injunction ordering them to allow construction to resume. The protesters have been disparaged by politicians and police as criminals and outlaws, but among their supporters, they have another name: land defenders. They haven't left, and the situation has now settled into a tense stalemate.

Williams tells me that, though he's the group's spokesperson, he isn't its leader. That responsibility lies with a collective of unnamed women, in keeping with the Haudenosaunee's matriarchal society—the anonymity, he explains, is necessary to shield them from harassment and legal ramifications. However, Williams's public-facing role may have put him on the hook for nearly \$20 million in legal fees, per an order from an Ontario Superior Court judge. Still, he's undeterred. "Indigenous people are continuing to be forced to make a stand for the health, the safety, the futures of our people," he says.

The conflict playing out at Land Back Lane has roots dating back 250 years. The proposed site of McKenzie Meadows falls on the Haldimand Tract, a parcel of roughly 950,000 acres granted by the Crown to its Haudenosaunee allies in 1784, after many were displaced from their New York territories following the American Revolutionary War. The deal gave the Haudenosaunee ten kilometres on both sides of the Grand River, a ribbon of land that unspools over some 200 kilometres, from the river's headwaters, near Orangeville, in the north, to Lake Erie, in the south. Today, the Haudenosaunee at Six Nations—the most populous reserve in Canada, with more than 27,000 members—control just 5 percent of their original land. The government says that the Haudenosaunee Confederacy sold most of it back in the

1800s; many Haudenosaunee say that much of the land was illegitimately taken.

Since 1980, the Six Nations council has submitted twenty-nine separate land claims through the courts to try to remedy the situation. Only one—the original 1980 filing—has been resolved to date. And, as the cases languish in the legal system, the Haudenosaunee have watched their lands shrink, piece by piece turned over to encroaching construction. Once houses arrive, the best Six Nations can hope for is monetary compensation—the territory itself is lost. The movement at Land Back Lane, then, is a last-ditch attempt to prevent their homelands from shrinking any further.

The unrest in Caledonia is just one of many high-profile land disputes that have unfolded over the past year. From Mi'kma'ki on the Atlantic coast, where lobster fishers are defending their treaty right to the ocean harvest, to British Columbia, where the Secwépemc and Wet'suwet'en are blocking construction projects on contested territories, land defenders say they are merely enforcing the rights they were promised and calling in debts that are owed.

In previous decades, these conflicts often played out in isolation, but today, there's a growing and concerted effort from nations across North America to support one another in their struggles, with thousands rallying in person and online under the banner of the #LandBack movement. At Land Back Lane, this has taken the form of Indigenous folks showing up from across the country to stand guard with the defenders, bring supplies, orchestrate solidarity rallies, and donate to a legal-defence fund. The occupation, now stretching into the winter, has no end in sight. As Williams says, "People across all of Turtle Island right now have been oppressed to such a degree that there isn't much choice in the matter for us. We're going to have nothing left for our grandchildren."

THE LEGAL DEFENCE of land reclamation hinges on the question of authority. Many First Nations, Métis, and Inuit see their territories as independent states with their own laws.

Meanwhile, the Constitution Act is vague in defining what level of authority it sees these nations possessing, and, as a result, disputes have continuously cropped up over where Indigenous nations' powers end and Canada's begin. "Most Canadians believe that [Canada] encapsulates the entire land mass that we see on a map," says Matthew Green, MP for Hamilton Centre and one of the few local representatives who support Land Back Lane. "This is a legal fiction of Canada, and we have to come to grips with that."

The animosity that these disputes raise, Green says, is easy to understand: as a city councillor, he often saw neighbours in his ward "go to war like they were Hatfield and McCoy over under a foot of a fence variance for a property line." For many First Nations, the land in question is exponentially larger—and essential to their futures. As recent history has shown, taking direct action is often the only way Indigenous communities can get the government to act.

In 1990, Mohawks at Kanehsatà:ke set up a camp on their traditional territory, which borders the nearby Quebec town of Oka. The municipality was planning to build a golf course on the land, which contains Mohawk burial grounds. The standoff saw armed land defenders staring down the army and police, lasting more than two months and leading to widespread media coverage. The government eventually agreed to purchase the land and leave it undeveloped, though tension over ownership remains. Five years later, it was the Chippewas of the Kettle and Stony Point First Nation, in Ontario, who fought to regain hundreds of acres that the country had commandeered. Some of it had been sold under government pressure in the 1920s and turned into Ipperwash Provincial Park; during the Second World War, more land was appropriated and turned into military training grounds. When members of Stony Point First Nation set up their camp in 1995, the OPP was deployed and a brief siege ensued. The authorities eventually killed Dudley George, who was unarmed, leading to a three-year-long inquiry. Last September, some of the land

at Ipperwash was finally returned to the Chippewas of the Kettle and Stony Point.

Beverly Jacobs, associate dean of the University of Windsor faculty of law and faculty adviser to the 1492 Windsor Law Coalition, which works in support of Land Back Lane, says that the Canadian legal system often takes decades or longer to resolve land disputes—the claim at Kanehsatà:ke, for example, was first raised in 1761 and remains contested to this day. When faced with imminent development that would make future ownership impossible, direct action can be the only option left. "If there was another way, it would be done," Jacobs says. "Our young people, they want something done now because my generation, my parents, my grandparents, have been through the same struggle, and they're just tired of it."

It's a sentiment echoed by Courtney Skye, a Mohawk research fellow and policy analyst who has been a regular presence at Land Back Lane. She says that, in spite of the many legal wins Indigenous people have achieved in recent decades—via the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, amendments to the Indian Act, and the creation of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada—when it comes to true self-determination, little has actually changed. "[The previous generation] gained all these tools and all these avenues in a policy and technical sphere, and the next generation has just witnessed how none of those strategies worked," she says. "For a lot of people, they've come to the conclusion that the only thing that actually makes a difference is direct action and radical land reclamation."

But, more often than not, protests prompt force rather than diplomacy. The OPP is a constant presence at Land Back Lane—last October, officers moved in and fired rubber bullets and tasers at those assembled. The previous month, Skye was pulled out of a friend's SUV and arrested—according to those at Land Back Lane, she's one of thirty-six charged to date. Ken Hewitt, mayor of local Haldimand County, has a down payment on a home in McKenzie Meadows. He's publicly applauded the arrest of Skyler Williams's wife, Kahsenniyo,

and wrote that he would “look forward to hearing of [Skylar’s] arrest shortly.” Last September, the Haldimand County Police Services Board called the land defenders “terrorists” in a meeting document and encouraged the OPP to crack down harder on them.

Heavy-handed responses have come to be expected by Indigenous activists. “When people take things into their own hands, then the whole weight of the system comes crushing down on Indigenous people,” says Karl Dockstader, an Oneida journalist and host of the radio program *One Dish, One Mic*. Dockstader is one of many reporters who have travelled to Land Back Lane to document the protest, but unlike most others, he has been targeted for doing so. Last September, he was arrested and charged with mischief and failure to comply with an injunction. It was three months before the charges were dropped.

POLITICAL organizing between Indigenous nations has always been present, from the Nisga’a’s Land Claims Agreement Coalition, in British Columbia, to the allied Coast Salish nations that banded together in the 1800s to protect themselves against nearby powers. During the Mohawk defences in Kanehsatà:ke, solidarity protests, leafleting, and blockades occurred from Toronto to Vancouver. But, with the new #LandBack movement, people say that alliances have been accelerating. Photos of RCMP officers breaching the barricades at Wet’suwet’en, or of settler fishers attacking Mi’kmaq workers, are instantly circulated across nations via social media, leading to rail blockades, solidarity marches, and grassroots fundraising.

Raven-Chanelle Augustine, from Elsipogtog First Nation, an hour north of Moncton, has been on the front lines of the fisheries dispute in Mi’kma’ki. It’s a movement, she says, that has united Mi’kmaq nations despite their long-standing differences. “When things go down, when the commercial fishermen are out here setting things on fire, our people really know how to show up for each other,” she says.

Shady Hafez, an Anishinaabe community member from Kitigan Zibi, was involved in the Algonquins of Barriere Lake’s blockade against Quebec hunters last fall, an action to address declines in local moose populations. “I had to tell people so many times, ‘This is not your playground—this is not yours,’” he says. “We have no problem sharing, but if we’re saying you need to take a break, then you need to take a break. Our jurisdiction needs to be acknowledged.” Hafez says his community faced retaliation for its actions—people shot up signs and barricades and spread butchered moose parts around the blockades—but the blockade was nonetheless a success. “Organizers both young and old in our community are prepared now,” he says, “and are organized in a way that we weren’t before.”

When the RCMP invaded Wet’suwet’en territory in January 2020, the Mohawk of Tyendinaga blocked rail lines in Ontario—one small part of the nationwide #ShutDownCanada movement, which eventually forced a sit-down with the federal minister of Indigenous services, Marc Miller. Last October, people at Land Back Lane orchestrated a rolling car blockade to show support for Mi’kmaq fishers. This kind of inter-nation support from east to west may be the biggest threat to the government’s slow-moving response to Indigenous sovereignty.

The original treaties between settlers and Indigenous nations were drawn up not out of benevolence, Skye says, but because of a “cost-benefit analysis.” Back then, the government concluded that continued skirmishes were too expensive. It was forced to come to the table and make deals. With the #LandBack movement growing, it may come to the same realization. As Skye explains, “It is always because of Indigenous resistance and Indigenous organizing that Indigenous people still exist.” #

LUKE OTTENHOF is a freelance writer based in Kingston, Ontario. His work has been published by the *Guardian*, *Vulture*, *Pitchfork*, the *Globe and Mail*, and the *Toronto Star*.



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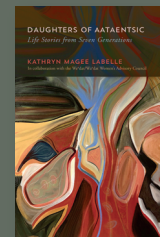
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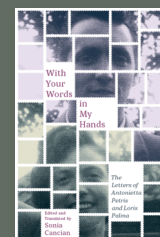
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Can Denser Be Better?

The idea that dense urban communities are bad for well-being is a myth. As it turns out, having more neighbours may actually help you live better



Watching COVID-19 devastate New York City, the most densely populated metropolitan centre in North America, made it easy to imagine that urban density is a problem. The soaring infection and mortality rates of early 2020 gave Canada's urban residents reason to consider a switch to country life — or at least more space in the suburbs.

But with COVID-19 cases popping up everywhere, from metropolises to small towns, experts are reassuring city dwellers that they can safely stay put rather than create more sprawl. In fact, public health researchers from Johns Hopkins University have found that people living in denser communities are not experiencing higher infection rates than their spread out counterparts. Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) is also

increasingly recognizing that intensification, or creating denser communities, can play a positive role in addressing not only housing affordability but other challenges — such as access to services, health status, and climate change — that factor into where people choose to live. Here's how.

ACCESS TO SERVICES

From leading-edge hospitals that tend to attract the best medical talent to specialized clinics for every kind of illness, health services can be superior in dense urban centres. "You simply can't offer the same level of service in smaller centres; it is just not economically justifiable," says Michel Tremblay, senior vice president of policy and innovation for CMHC. "You can't have cancer treatment centres everywhere, for example.

People in larger urban centres tend to have access to services, whether they are preventive in nature or at the treatment stage." Beyond health facilities, everyday needs such as groceries, libraries, and community support services are not only more numerous and varied in a city, but also easier to get to by walking, cycling, or public transit. Steve Mennill, chief climate officer for CMHC, explains that when services are walkable, people prefer to go on foot, which is the basis for an inherently healthy, active approach to living. "When you have car-oriented neighbourhoods and suburbs, people develop more sedentary lifestyles," he says.

The strong social connections forged in walkable communities can also act as a safety net in times of crisis. They create the conditions that allow community

members to come together and ensure their most vulnerable have resources, as many have done during the COVID-19 lockdown. Mennill further underscores that accessible community services and social supports – which can be limited in smaller, more sprawling cities – are vital to the health and well-being of vulnerable communities and low- and moderate-income families. And ensuring that these communities can get to and use them is less challenging when they're not far-flung. "Community services are much more available and easier to provide in a denser setting," he says.

HEALTH OUTCOMES

There is a long-held North American belief that urban dwellers are less well than people in spread out communities, but this is simply not true. A Statistics Canada report notes that people living in rural areas have worse health outcomes – including higher incidences of high blood pressure, heart disease, diabetes, asthma, and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease – than their urban counterparts due, in part, to limited access to services and lifestyle factors. According to Tremblay, the three provinces with the largest cities (Ontario, Quebec, and British Columbia) actually have slightly higher life expectancy figures than other provinces.

Studies in the United States suggest urban density between 360 and 1,540 people per square kilometre leads to more walking. (In 2016, thirty-two Canadian urban areas had at least 360 people per square kilometre, and one had at least 1,160 people per square kilometre.) A less sedentary lifestyle decreases the risk of cardiovascular disease and cancer, while increasing mental health and a sense of community belonging. Tremblay also points to the social benefit of inclusiveness, which is not so easily found in suburbs and exurbs. "If we favour a socially inclusive society, sprawl leads to more homogeneous clusters than in denser areas, which is counter to this goal," he says.

HOUSING AFFORDABILITY

The sticker shock of housing prices in downtown Vancouver, Toronto, and, increasingly, Montreal neighbourhoods is hard to ignore. But a 2018 CMHC study revealed that commuting costs often offset any savings gained by moving to more affordable homes within the Greater Toronto Area.

So as suburban sprawl becomes a less and less affordable option for Canadians, where should we go? Easy – to dense urban neighbourhoods. Mennill says they don't have to be "the stereotype of impoverished slums" but rather well-designed, not crowded, places where people of all economic abilities can make their homes. "All over Europe, there are lots of examples of dense cities that are not high-rise: Paris, Copenhagen, Barcelona, Vienna, and Amsterdam are all very dense, but the way they've been designed makes for a highly liveable environment," he says.

ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY

When it comes to daily life's carbon emissions, living in low-density suburbs can mean driving everywhere. "When you force everyone into cars for everything, you force them into high-carbon lifestyles whether they like it or not," says Mennill. He adds that there are also carbon costs associated with the municipal services necessary to keep up with suburban sprawl: road maintenance, snow removal, garbage pickup, fire protection, policing, and schools. Low-density housing also requires more road infrastructure and generally has less efficient energy use than in multi-unit homes.

Mennill stresses, however, that no housing benefit should be thought of in isolation. "Good housing is not just affordable, or just healthy, or just climate-friendly, or just socially inclusive. It has to be all those things," he says. "We should see good housing as a package, and density is one of the key ingredients to achieving all of these things simultaneously." ■



Commuting: What does it really cost us?

Commuting may have changed during the pandemic, but certain habits remain the same. According to Statistics Canada, 84 percent of commuters who used personal motor vehicles before the pandemic were still using that mode of transportation to go to work in June. Here's what commuting looks like across the country.

Average car commute times for people living in urban centres*:

Toronto:
28.7
minutes

Vancouver:
25.7
minutes

Montreal:
25.6
minutes

Number of commuters driving an hour or more each way*:

Toronto/GTA:
642,934

Vancouver Metro:
54,460

Montreal/GMA:
183,301

19.9%

Canada's total greenhouse gas emissions per year that come from personal-use cars and commercial-use cars and trucks**

Canadians who report having "very stressful days"***

23%
of people commuting
15 minutes or less

36%
of people commuting
45 minutes or more

*Source: Statistics Canada, "Results from the 2016 Census: Long commutes to work by car"

**Source: Prairie Climate Centre, "Where Do Canada's Greenhouse Gas Emissions Come From?"

***Source: Statistics Canada, 2010 General Social Survey



TECHNOLOGY

When QAnon Came to Canada

*A far-right conspiracy theory is creeping north.
How much damage can it inflict here?*

BY MATTHEW REMSKI
ILLUSTRATION BY ANSON CHAN

BLAIN MCELREA is an auto-glass repairman in Elliot Lake, Ontario. In the mid-1990s, he discovered that the corporate auto-body companies out-competing his small chain of shops were cutting corners on a windshield adhesive that was crucial for safety. He became an industry whistleblower. Ever since, he has believed in the power of the well-informed little guy to overcome injustice.

Years later, he put that belief to work in his moderation of QAnon Canada, a Facebook group named for the fevered conspiracy theory now disrupting politics and families around the world. Gripped by QAnon's vision of a secret battle being waged against pedophiles and Satan worshippers, the group's membership, according to McElrea, exploded during the COVID-19 pandemic, growing from 400 members to over 4,000—and still representing only a fraction of QAnon's Canadian followers. I asked McElrea who the members of his group are. He was warm and effusive about the online connections through which he's found a kind of frontier family. He couldn't be positive of members' citizenships, but he described Canadians from all walks of life who were, like him, "suspicious of the narrative."

What narrative? The World Economic Forum, McElrea claimed, is selling its COVID-19 plan as a ruse for instituting globalized rule. For McElrea, such a plan mimics the qualities of the virus itself—it can be anywhere, it wants to be everywhere, and it is designed to proliferate and control as many carriers as possible without them knowing. Talking with McElrea, it was clear that QAnon supporters like him view themselves as the real epidemiologists—not of the virus, which they minimize, but of a pandemic of political corruption that only intuition and spiritual renewal can cure.

When Justin Trudeau closed the physical border with the US, on March 21, to help control the spread of COVID-19, it did nothing to stop the newest American export from travelling northward. QAnon surged into the country with the rise of

data usage among the anxious housebound. According to the movement's lore, Q is an intelligence insider working as a White House mole on behalf of Donald Trump in his crusade against the Democrat "deep state" and, by extension, against a global cabal that keeps itself young and powerful by gorging on the blood of abused children. Some speculate that Q is the online avatar of either Jim Watkins, an American pig farmer and porn purveyor living in the Philippines, or someone Watkins knows or works with. Whoever Q is, the figure rallies supporters in a digital war with the unenlightened, promising that, with enough social media engagement, the cursed truth of the world will be forced into the daylight.

What follows this "Great Awakening," as they call it, is unclear. But, since none of Q's prophecies—that photos of Barack Obama in tribal attire holding an AK-47 would be released, say, or that Hillary Clinton was on the cusp of being arrested—have come true, the concern is that Q's warriors, driven mad by expectation and cognitive dissonance, will force the issue.

McElrea doesn't dwell on QAnon's gruesome stock-in-trade tales of demonic worship. He describes his passion as "an information project" that builds bridges between truth seekers. His big-tent vision of QAnon's meaning prompted him to start subgroups for religious devotees, New Agers, and UFO-believers. When asked about QAnon's far-right, racist, and antisemitic themes—the movement's premise of an all-powerful cabal is part of a long-standing slander against Jewish people—McElrea presented himself as a peacemaker. "I might have been a prude or a goody two-shoes when I was growing up, so I know what bad behaviour is and what unseemly behaviour is," he said. "Basically, all of the bad things that the *New York Times* says about us—I am making sure that I'm not plugging into any one of those negative labels that they're talking about."

It's unclear just how QAnon will adapt as it spreads. In the US, the movement is increasingly violent and has been denounced by the FBI and the House of Representatives. During election

week last November, two men, one of them a member of the Virginia Armed Patriots militia, were arrested outside of a ballot-counting centre in Philadelphia. Allegedly plastered on their firearm-packed Hummer were QAnon decals.

But, in Canada, the infiltration is quieter, subtler. It has become a visible, nationalized thread—mostly online but increasingly in the streets—quilting together a motley alliance of yoga moms, Yellow Vesters, anti-vaxers, pedophilia obsessives, and white nationalists. For psychologists and cult researchers, the focus is on the slow burn: How much damage can Canadian QAnon, untethered from American politics, bring?

MARC-ANDRÉ ARGENTINO, a PhD candidate and Concordia University scholar of technology and extremist groups, is one of a handful of academics who track QAnon. He estimates that, at their height last summer, Canadian QAnon Facebook groups boasted more than 100,000 members. He also pointed out that Quebec had become a vector for QAnon content to find its way to Europe and even to French-speaking communities in North Africa and the Caribbean. "Q-tuber" Alexis Cossette-Trudel, whose channel, Radio-Québec (emphasis on the Q), had 120,000 followers, was recently banned by YouTube for spreading COVID-19 disinformation.

Regardless of where they are, just how committed any given QAnon member is to their beliefs is hard to measure. "Like any extremist movement," Argentino wrote to me, "most of it is 'online bolstering.'" But he also explained that QAnon "has found a strong capacity to mobilize people offline, which is a concern." Phil Gurski, a retired Canadian Security Intelligence Service (CSIS) analyst with a background in studying jihadist radicalization, urged moderation with regard to threat assessment. "They might have 100,000 guys online," he said, referring to Canadian QAnons, "but 99,999 of them are gonna be useless wankers."

All it takes to inflict harm, however, is one motivated wanker. Several American QAnons have already been charged with

real-world acts of mischief or violence. The incidents appear to have begun in 2018, starting with an Arizona man who, according to the *Arizona Daily Star*, sabotaged water barrels left out for migrants because he believed they were connected to a global pedophile ring. Next, a Nevada man blocked traffic on the Hoover Dam in an armoured truck packed with ammunition, demanding that law enforcement release a secret government report sought by QAnon followers. In 2019, a Staten Island man allegedly murdered a mob boss, claiming Q had told him to. He was declared mentally unfit for trial. In May of that year, the FBI released a statement on the rise of conspiracy-driven domestic extremism. The report called QAnon out by name.

QAnon's 2020 rap sheet tragically reflects the movement's obsession with and impact on children. Members routinely claim that clues in coded language from Disney movies and children's toys are proof of our pedophile overlords. A Colorado woman, active on QAnon forums, awaits trial, accused of plotting with fellow Anons to kidnap her son from foster care. Other kidnapping cases, according to the *Daily Beast*, involve QAnon-influenced mothers egged on by bogus QAnon lawyers to violate custody orders and "rescue" their children from globalist exes or Child Protective Services, who have allegedly abducted said children for sex-crime networks.

So far, Canada has seen only one possibly QAnon-related attack. On the morning of July 2, 2020, military reservist Corey Hurren, heavily armed, allegedly drove his pickup truck from Bowsman, Manitoba, to Ottawa—more than 2,600 kilometres—to ram through the gates of Rideau Hall. A half-hour beforehand, he'd posted Q-related content to the Instagram account belonging to his meat business. But, in an explanatory letter obtained by police, Hurren reportedly focused on his financial woes during the pandemic, his grievances against the government, and his concerns about gun rights. He's being held without bail and is expected to be tried on twenty-two charges, including uttering threats against the prime minister.

In an email statement, CSIS spokesperson John Townsend wrote that the intelligence service could not comment directly on the Hurren case but is "aware of how conspiracy theories have the potential to inspire individuals to take violent extremist actions." Barbara Perry, who directs Ontario Tech University's Centre on Hate, Bias, and Extremism, expressed doubt that CSIS would spotlight QAnon. "The far-right has certainly not been very high on their priority list," Perry told me by phone from Oshawa. By email, Caroline Duval, a corporal with the RCMP, also declined to comment on the Hurren case, as it is "before the courts." She wrote that the Mounties are aware of QAnon but restrict their investigations to criminal acts.

The CSIS reticence to investigate QAnon may increase the feeling among some social justice activists that they're on their own. I spoke by Zoom with CJ and Mama K (they use code names to protect their safety), who organized an antiracist event last September, in Red Deer, Alberta, that was mobbed and ultimately stopped by a mask-free gang that included Wexit co-founder Pat King, Yellow Vest supporters, and—according to Mama K—the anti-immigrant group Soldiers of Odin.

In the lead-up to the event, Mama K said, she had noticed far-right extremists speaking violently on social media, and some posts carried QAnon themes. "They say our security is full of pedophiles," said Mama K, referring to members of Black and Indigenous Alliance who try to physically secure the space at their protests. At the event, one attendee saw an extremist carrying Q-related paraphernalia. Another QAnon sympathizer had plastered their own van with photo decals of abused toddlers, captioned: "Our government is trafficking children." No arrests were made during the melee, but after investigating, the RCMP laid assault charges against two individuals, one of which involves assault with a weapon.

"It's something extra," said Mama K when I asked whether the presence of QAnon has increased the danger of their work promoting diversity and

inclusion. "We used to be able to know who was going to racially attack us." Now, QAnon seems to have given additional permission for latent bigotry to rise to the surface. "It's the people in the grocery store. It's the normal people. You can't walk down the street anymore."

On October 2, 2020, the US House of Representatives passed a bipartisan resolution condemning QAnon. Seventeen Republicans and one independent voted against it. But, in Canada, no parliamentary motion against QAnon seems to be in the offing. In June 2019, People's Party of Canada leader Maxime Bernier tweeted a video by Amazing Polly, a Canadian QAnon celebrity who produces a steady stream of sermons on everything from the coming "technofascist takeover" of society to the "Global Health Mafia" running public health measures against COVID-19. Bernier's share was a one-off. By email, a spokesperson clarified that "Mr. Bernier does not follow the QAnon movement and never referred to it anywhere."

He was far from the only politician testing the QAnon waters. Last August, Conservative MP Kerry-Lynne Findlay retweeted an antisemitic post about the purported closeness of Chrystia Freeland and George Soros, a favourite QAnon target. Facing swift backlash, Findlay deleted the tweet and posted an apology within hours. And, last October, Daryl Cooper, the Saskatchewan Party candidate for Saskatoon Eastview, was busted by reporters for posting a QAnon-related suggestion that COVID-19 may come from the sun, then "liking" two pieces of QAnon content on Twitter. It took just hours for him to step down from the party. He issued a statement the next day denying involvement with QAnon.

The only Canadian politician to unapologetically nod at QAnon is perhaps Peter Downing, former leader of Wexit Canada. Last January, he made his pro-secession group, Alberta Fights Back, famous in the province with a series of billboards that applied the Trumpian "lock her up" rally rhetoric to Trudeau, ostensibly for various crimes including tax theft and economic sabotage. One billboard accused Trudeau of "normalizing pedophilia." By phone from Alberta, Downing said this

claim stemmed from the similarity between the triangle logo from a Pierre Elliot Trudeau Foundation report and a symbol identified by the FBI in 2007 as code used in online sex trafficking.

I asked Downing how he felt about the billboard campaign now. “It was great,” he said. “All sorts of left wingers in Alberta said that they were going to move, and all sorts of conservative people in the rest of Canada said they would move to Alberta. This one girl said that it made her want to throw up. Another said this made her want to ugly cry. And I laughed and I laughed and I laughed.”

I asked if the pedophilia reference aligned him with QAnon. “Well, we’re going to see what happens with Hillary Clinton’s emails,” Downing said. QAnons have perennially echoed Trump’s empty speculations on the crimes Clinton’s emails will disclose. In the lead-up to election day last year, the frenzy shifted to the child pornography allegedly tucked away in a busted laptop belonging to Joe Biden’s son, Hunter. Many are still pinning their hopes on Trump revealing the truth about a CIA-developed super-computer suspected of illegally flipping Trump votes to Biden. The entire movement turns on secrets hidden in hard drives, algorithms, and hearts.

WHILE CANADIAN politicians have mostly stayed quiet on QAnon, the country’s social media influencers have played an outsize role in its international spread. Amazing Polly, who ran her 377,000-subscriber YouTube channel out of Ontario before the platform banned it in a purge of QAnon-related content last October, was the instigator of the runaway Wayfair conspiracy last June, in which the home-goods retailer was accused of trafficking children in expensive cabinets—because, it was claimed, the cabinets were named after children.

By August, the Wayfair rumours had rolled seamlessly into the #SaveTheChildren movement, eventually sparking rallies in US cities. That movement is now widely understood as a front for QAnon recruitment that paradoxically disrupts the work of legitimate antitrafficking

organizations. Century-old US nonprofit Save the Children had to issue a statement distancing itself from the QAnon group that had hijacked its name.

For about a month, Vancouver-based self-help author Danielle LaPorte—featured on Oprah’s SuperSoulTV—drew her 249,000 Instagram followers right to the edge of the QAnon cliff via the #SaveTheChildren theme. In one tirade, she called child trafficking a “pandemic” that’s “not being talked about enough” and suggested that ending it was a matter of spiritual warfare. (The post is no longer visible on her profile.) In another video, she complained that the term “conspiracy theory” is used to smear whistleblowers with unpopular points of view. On the subject of QAnon, she hedged. “I got no patience for that association,” she said, “although there might be some truth in things.” By email, LaPorte declined to be interviewed but did point out that the charitable arm of her organization was supporting Ally Global, a real-world antitrafficking nonprofit in Vancouver.

On a smaller but more diffuse scale, yoga and wellness influencers with house-league followings have also drifted into the QAnon universe, possibly because they found that, as soon as they began to post QAnon materials, their engagement rates climbed. Montreal is a minor hotspot, with several of my colleagues reporting a rash of QAnon-related support for antimask rallies. One neo-Tantric sexual-healing teacher posted that the public health guidelines are intended to obscure the pandemic of pedophilia. Commenters in the thread boosted Wayfair and other conspiracy theories. In the Maritimes, one yoga teacher interrupted her Instagram feed to post a four-minute lecture to her more than 1,400 followers about a coming mass spiritual awakening—after COVID-19 is revealed as a distraction—and how the satanic cabal is about to be overcome by Trump, who belongs to the “team of light.”

On the Prairies, at least two popular yoga instructors in Saskatoon have posted overt QAnon content. One of them declined an interview. He explained that he didn’t think I was

coming from “a heart centred space” and that I was “condemning people for speaking up.” The other is the organizer of a major yoga festival in Saskatchewan. In July, they directed their more than 1,200 followers to watch “Out of Shadows,” a popular QAnon recruiting video made by a former Hollywood stuntman reported to have found QAnon while recovering from a career-ending injury. They didn’t respond to requests for comment.

Canada is not new to aiding and abetting moral panic. The modern-day spectre of globally networked satanic ritual abuse, after all, arose almost wholecloth from a single book published in 1980. *Michelle Remembers* was based on psychiatrist Lawrence Pazder’s recordings from his therapy sessions with a patient who recounted tales of the lurid abuse she suffered as part of a satanic cult when growing up in 1950s Victoria.

The book sparked the Satanic Panic—the belief that hidden among us were hundreds of Satanists abusing and murdering children. In Martensville, Saskatchewan, nine people were charged for being members of a nonexistent satanic pedophile ring. One man was eventually convicted of sex-related charges, but no evidence ever turned up to verify the core rumours of the panic. The harrowing court cases took over a decade to resolve and left the community and many of its families in tatters. The conspiracy theory ravaged North America and the UK in the late 1980s and early 1990s and arguably laid the predigital groundwork for QAnon.

In a way, that Satanic Panic is back, this time strained through the dregs of the web, creating what media researchers Whitney Phillips and Ryan M. Milner call “polluted information.” The security and extremism analysts I spoke to agreed that, at this point, QAnon in Canada is disorganized, but that it may bolster existing extremist groups—as in the Red Deer incident—and could inspire lone-wolf attacks. In the absence of political traction, and if the Trumpian core of its mythos burns up with the president’s fortunes, some Canadian QAnons will pivot and adapt.



ADVENTURE
CANADA

Explore Newfoundland with The Walrus

©Gord Follett



The Walrus has a long partnership with Adventure Canada, an award-winning, family-run adventure travel company. As the new executive director, I'll be joining their **small-ship expedition Newfoundland Circumnavigation**, October 1-11, 2021.

My family has roots in Newfoundland, and I'm excited to return. This trip will start in St. John's and cover the island's northeast coast, L'Anse aux Meadows, Red Bay, Gros Morne National Park, Miawpukek First Nation (Conne River), as well as other beautiful spots. I'm looking forward to the colourful homes, whale watching, and breathing in the fresh, coastal air!

During this trip, I'll join you on our daily excursions and host a special dinner for supporters of The Walrus, where I'll share some insights from our work in 2021 to spark a conversation on the country Canada could be.

One of the things I've missed the most over the last year is exploring. Travel gives us a unique opportunity to **learn more about our country and ourselves**. I would love for you to join us!

Jennifer Hollett, Executive Director, The Walrus



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A FEW DAYS after Facebook's site-wide QAnon purge last October, I phoned Blain McElrea to check in, wondering what it felt like to have an entire network of relations deleted overnight. "We knew this was coming," he said, "and so what we've done is we learned from our mistakes. How participating under QAnon, but not having anybody setting rules and organizing it, was used to our disadvantage." McElrea denounced the violent rhetoric that got the groups banned and affirmed that his group was a peaceful "idea project." They would be using a new name, he said, implying that QAnon could more appropriately be called Quantum. "It's just a matter of getting the band back together," he said.

If McElrea does make a comeback, he may find himself playing alongside other groups that avoid explicit reference to QAnon but that have simmered in the same pandemic pressure cooker, borrowing many of its flavours. The Line Canada is a broad-based antilockdown coalition with a messy agenda but a tidy logo: a Zen-brushed *O* with a red slash through it. Tilt it just a few degrees and

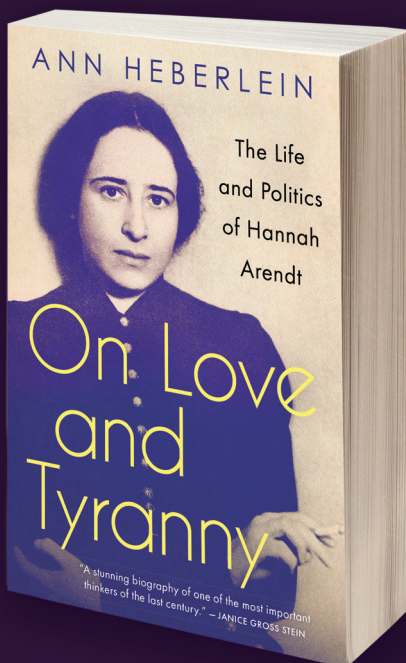
you see a bleeding *Q*. (George Roche, The Line's executive director, would not comment on whether the organization is affiliated with QAnon.)

In a Zoom interview, co-founder Lamont Daigle told me that the *O* stands for oppression. "The red is to signify blood," he said. "It's the Braveheart mentality. It's the hero's journey. It's: What brought you here? Are you fed up? Every segment of society has failed us because of this new world agenda, quite frankly. There's no other way to look at it." Daigle was evangelical and polite. He called me "brother," and I felt that, in some way, he meant it.

When we spoke, Daigle had organized almost thirty weeks of protest events in as many as ten cities, including Toronto. The Line Canada also has branches in Winnipeg, Saskatoon, and Edmonton. By email, Daigle wrote that the events average between 1,500 and 2,000 attendees and that he's expecting numbers to grow. (Another spokesperson suggested the number averages between 4,000 and 4,500.) There are no plans to stop. The Line Canada also coordinates with

the anti-vax group Vaxxed Canada and an antilockdown group called Hugs Over Masks. Daigle's most visible event to date was a Toronto march last year on October 17. CTV News reported more than 1,000 in attendance; the right-wing broadside *Post Millennial* counted 4,000.

The Line's events are typically packed with speeches and rock songs with gospel fervour. On October 17, the mostly white but generationally diverse march added music thumping from pickup trucks. From the makeshift stage, raw-food celebrity David Avocado Wolfe shouted out his disbelief in germ theory and his desire that Bill Gates be "captured alive" to stand trial for crimes against humanity. (In Calgary, earlier this year, Wolfe posted a video speech in which he poured brimstone down on satanic pedophiles and asserted that Trump was the only answer.) Trump flags flew from the windows of pickup trucks crawling up Yonge Street. The fleur-de-lys flew alongside the Métis flag. Members of Aylmer's Church of God were also marching, surrounded by a smattering of QAnon supporters declaring, "Where we go one, we go all"—one



"STUNNING."

— Janice Gross Stein, political scientist and founding director, Munk School of Global Affairs

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of the movement's rallying cries (usually shortened to WWG1WGA). One man carried a sign saying "Q sent me."

Last November, Daigle posted a video to his personal Facebook page expressing his hope that his American friends would rise to the occasion of defeating the New World Order. He tagged the post with #WWG1WGA. Later that month, news footage revealed members of The Line waving their zero-slash flags in the parking lot of Adamson Barbecue, in Toronto, which had opened for mask-free indoor dining in defiance of public health measures. Adam Skelly, the Adamson proprietor, was arrested amid shouting Liners and later released on \$50,000 bail. A GoFundMe campaign was started for his legal bills, with some donors sending salutations from the US.

QANON MAY FEEL like an alternate reality, but it belongs very much to our world. "We are at the stage where we have citizens and people who are completely distressed," said clinical psychologist and violence researcher Ghayda Hassan from her office

at the Université du Québec à Montréal. People who, she continued, "are rendered vulnerable by a globalized economic system that is producing more and more injustices, who feel that institutions and governments are violating their basic rights, but who cannot self-organize into a smart, structured line of thought." Hassan argued that this kind of feeling of injustice is expressing itself "in nihilistic and anarchistic ways: 'Let's destroy these organizations; let's destroy governments.'"

One positive way forward, Hassan suggested, is for public responses to stop demonizing QAnon supporters, as this can play into their self-isolating narratives. Adherents should be taken at their word, she said, as people who yearn to connect the dots toward justice. "So how do we help people connect the dots in a way that's not destructive, eventually to themselves in society?" she asked, adding that governments should recognize that COVID-19 crisis measures really can create the perception of a repressive, black-box government. "We have to answer to those people's emotions and

frustrations," she said, "and not just give them orders on what they should and shouldn't do, which will increase the perception that the government is like an elite doing whatever they want."

Hassan isn't alone in highlighting the fears that drive modern-day conspiracists. CBC Radio journalist Lisa Bryn Rundle spent over eight months researching *Uncover: Satanic Panic*, a richly layered 2020 podcast on the satanic-pedophile frenzy that overtook Martensville. I asked her what she'd learned and what people—journalists especially—should be aware of. "These things thrive in the gaps," she said, "in terms of how well we're doing as a society. I would keep that in mind and come with empathy and an interest in understanding, because I think that's the only way that we can move past it." She added: "I feel like, very often, the pain is real, even if the facts are not." ■

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MATTHEW REMSKI writes and presents on yoga and Ayurveda. He is the author of eight books of poetry, fiction, and nonfiction.

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SOCIETY

QUITTING AMERICA

*I came to Canada to escape a childhood—
and a nation — consumed with lies*

BY M. E. ROGAN

PHOTOGRAPHY BY PHIL BERGERSON

I'M SEVEN YEARS OLD, and under my bed is a go bag for when I head over the wall. Inside the green plastic garbage bag are a few stuffed animals that I take out every night and return each morning. A fraying rabbit, Winnie-the-Pooh, a Rin Tin Tin dog. It's not always the same three that make it into the go bag. I line up all my stuffed animals and decide which I can take with me. My older sister watches but never says a word. She knows there is no way out, but I still see potential openings. Our tall bedroom window looks out onto the back porch and has a wooden screen that can be removed only from the outside. When no one is watching, I sneak around to the porch and loosen as many swivel clips as I can reach. At the grocery store, I wander off from my mother and six older siblings and try to look like a child who needs rescuing, like I wouldn't make a sound if someone snatched me away.

Nobody takes the bait. It will be fifty years before I make it over the wall on my own.

It was 1968 and I was stranded deep in the wilds of New York's Westchester County with my parents, five brothers, sister, and 250 boys who had been sent to Lincoln Hall by the state to be rehabilitated for their petty crimes and truancy. Lincoln Hall was well camouflaged. Its expansive property was bisected by Route 202, a highway bounded by old stone walls that meandered through the southern tip of New York state and across the Hudson River. The Lincoln Hall campus

encompassed a new chapel, a gymnasium with gleaming hardwood, an outdoor quarter-mile running track, a manicured baseball diamond, a swimming pool, handball courts, and a movie theatre. The entire property, on both sides of Route 202, was surrounded by acres of farmland.

Lincoln Hall was run by the De La Salle Christian Brothers with a handful of lay staff. Our family of nine had moved out of the Bronx two years earlier. Our parents, Ed and Pat, sold the brothers on a package deal—my mother, Pat, would be the school's librarian, and Ed the new assistant vice-principal. Neither had the formal requirements for their jobs. Pat told anyone who asked that she was inspired by the Hollywood blockbuster *Boys Town*, starring Spencer Tracy as the real-life Father Flanagan. Ed looked the part of a man who could keep troubled youth in line, with his regulation Navy crewcut and the American bald eagle on his forearm. When we first arrived, Ed called Lincoln Hall a "country club for delinquents." His office was on the main floor of the Fishbowl, an L-shaped red-brick building with wide glass double-doors framed by a semicircular portico. Near Ed's office were the locked cells for the boys who acted up or tried to run away. When a Linky kid jumped the wall, it was Ed's job to fetch him back and drop him in the cells for a few days.

Pat had negotiated our housing on Lincoln Hall property as part of the package deal. We lived on the ground floor of what was then the Lakeview, a 100-year-old house without



Lash LaRue with Whip and Flag, Alexandria, Louisiana (1997)

lake or view. Ed sunk a pole into the front lawn and raised the American flag every morning. Every night, he picked two of his children to lower the flag and fold it into tight military triangles. On Sunday nights, Ed ironed his five white work shirts, then polished both his pairs of black penny loafers and both his pairs of brown penny loafers, in that order.

Life at the Lakeview was a roulette of transgressions. It always started the same way. Ed and Pat lined the seven of us up in the kitchen in age order. Ed promised nobody would get hit if we told him the truth. He wanted to know who broke into the locked fridge, who stuck gum on the dog, who left the car window open, who ate his pistachios, moved one of his razor blades, busted the couch, put a hole in the screen

door, or drank the Vicks cough syrup. Sometimes there was no transgression at all.

Ed began at one end of the line and worked his way down to me. "Was it you?" Each *No* bought you a crack across the side of your head, clipping your ear with his Knights of Columbus ring. My oldest brother's hands would fly up to cover his inflamed face, a scalded combination of fear and confusion. When my brother cried, Ed sneered, "Why are you crying? Tell me why you're crying."

Ed was a lefty but swung right with my second oldest brother, the only redhead in the lot, born with a misshapen ear and a birthmark on the side of his head. The ear was off limits. That was Pat's rule. Pat liked to tell the story that she had



Liberty Fading, Winona, Mississippi (1998)

seen her husband cry only twice: the first time he saw his son's birthmark and when JFK was assassinated. Down the line, my brother with the bullet-shaped head, the beefiest of all the boys, would jut his jaw out to enrage Ed even more. It always worked.

Once, the middle brother, with sanguine hazel eyes the size of half dollars, jumped the gun and confessed just to get it all over with. It didn't work. "You think I'm a fool?" My sister stared at the ground, shoulders rounded, plucking at the ends of her too-short shirt sleeves and hiccupping from fear and tears. "I bet you feel sorry for yourself." I could feel our collective rage gather and dissolve with each pass up and down the line.

Ed talked a lot when he beat his kids. He liked to lean in close, looking at your forehead instead of your eyes. With spittle at the corners of his mouth, he would remind you that you had no problems. "You think you have problems? You don't know what a problem is. I've got real problems. You've got it made."

After making his way up and down the line a few times with no result, Ed would turn to Pat and begin their canned exchange. What followed was part Beckett, part vaudeville.

"How did this happen to us, Pat? How did we get saddled with seven lying sacks of shit?" Pat would sigh and cock her head to one side, resigned, heartbroken. "To have to raise savages. A pack of animals. Thieves. Did we miss something? The roof over their heads, the food on their plates—Isn't it enough?"

When they'd run through their script, Ed would pull out the big guns. It was the final, violent punctuation of the battering. Vile slurs we knew were wrong—vile even for the time we lived in. “I go to work every day and have to deal with n---ers and s--cs. Do you think I want to work with those animals? Do you think your mother wants to work with n---ers and s--cs and then come home to this? You kids? Seven lying sacks of shit?”

Ed and Pat would take a well-timed smoke break so we could spin a butter knife on the kitchen table to choose a victim. We watched the beating that came next. Afterward, with scarlet faces and ears ringing, we were piled into the car for King Kone ice cream, careful not to drop a sprinkle on Ed's car seats.

If Ed was methodical in his violence, Pat was chaotic, hijacked by despair. She brandished a shotgun at her children. She grabbed knives from the kitchen and accused us of wanting her dead. She tore through the house at odd hours, cursing the man who had stuffed her full of babies and ruined her life. She would leave the house in her nightgown with an empty suitcase to sit at the end of the long gravel driveway, waiting for one of the boys to coax her back inside. Ed always played possum, asleep in his La-Z-Boy, until she spun herself out.

We were told, “What happens in this house stays in this house.” They needn't have worried. At six, I stopped speaking for a while. I couldn't drag a single word out of my mouth. I was terrified Ed and Pat were going to hell. I prayed for my parents and did my best to sound sincere. I worried that I couldn't be a good person in a family like this and that maybe we'd all go to hell together. At St. Joseph elementary school, we stood with our hands over our hearts, facing the American flag, and recited the Pledge of Allegiance every morning. The nuns told us how to be good: carry orange UNICEF boxes at Halloween, pray for African babies, keep our hands and feet to ourselves, keep our mouths zipped in the hallways, and most of all, never lie.

The first lie I ever told myself was that I couldn't run away from home because I loved my family. I told myself that my brothers and sister would never survive without me, that I mattered to them. I ran sentences in my head, practised lies to defend against the futility of my useless go bag. I told myself that I loved my father, and that I loved my mother, even when they beat me.

I did love my family, but that wasn't why I stayed. A seven-year-old has nowhere to go.

ON OCTOBER 25, 2018, after more than three decades living and working in Canada, I walked into the American embassy in Ottawa and renounced my American citizenship. As instructed by my lawyer and embassy officials, I carried only a slim valise. Inside were a fistful of US government forms, my American passport for surrender, my American birth certificate, my Social Security card, and my Canadian

passport to prove I would not be stateless after my renunciation. The valise also held a self-addressed express-post envelope, to receive my Certificate of Loss of Nationality once the US State Department had stamped its final approval, and a cashier's cheque for \$2,350 (US)—my exit fee.

My formal renunciation was the final step in a byzantine two-year journey that began when I applied to become a Canadian citizen a few months before the 2016 US presidential election. My creeping fear had evolved into grim certainty that Donald Trump would win. I was desperate to shed all birth-right ties to my country.

Until the 2016 election, I'd always thought of my childhood as an outlier, so extreme that I couldn't shoehorn it into a larger narrative. It wasn't until Trump's transgressive campaign—the ominous stalking of Hillary Clinton on a debate stage, the grotesque pantomime of a disabled reporter and fusillade of racist statements at his rallies—that I recognized my family as a diorama of America's dysfunction. As I watched Trump lie in real time, disavowing reality while inciting violence, I realized that my family shared the same superpower: we could hide in plain sight, lie to ourselves, and make others believe it. And, just as Trump would disproportionately attack anyone who threatened to unmask him, we would go to any lengths to protect our lies.

Once, I walked into the kitchen just as Pat whipped her Bloody Mary at Ed's head. She missed, and the tumbler exploded against the wall behind him. I was certain she had shot him. One of my brothers tried to comfort me and said this kind of thing happened in all families. I knew that wasn't true. When Ed and Pat stopped eating meals with us and instead brought their plates of better food and pitchers of cold Tom Collins into the living room each night, I knew that that wasn't normal either.

When Ed and Pat trotted us out in public, people would marvel at their outsize brood and how well behaved we were, how scrubbed clean we looked in Pat's handmade clothing. They couldn't hear Ed's *sotto voce* in our ears, his breath on the backs of our necks as he'd lean over with a smile on his face if anyone was acting up and warn, “Fuck with me now and you're fucking with your heartbeat,” or, “I'm going to lose my shoe up your ass when we get home,” or, “I'm going to knock you into the middle of next week.”

At home, my family was a cauldron of threats and violence. Outside of the Lakeview, America was seething. Early in 1968, South Carolina Highway Patrol officers fired into a crowd of student protesters at South Carolina State University, a historically Black school in Orangeburg. Three Black students were shot dead. In April of that year, Martin Luther King Jr.'s assassination ignited widespread rioting that escalated into shoot-to-kill orders. Antiwar demonstrations on college campuses spread across the country even as the US increased troop deployment in Vietnam. The Democratic National Convention in Chicago turned into a televised brawl. Richard Nixon ran on a “law

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and order” campaign that won him the 1968 presidential election, then dog-whistled about the rise of Afrocentrism and the Black Panther Party.

In 1972, right before his second term, Nixon’s White House was under investigation for a break-in and phone-tapping at the Democratic National Committee headquarters, in the Watergate complex. Beginning on May 18, 1973, the Watergate hearings aired live on

all three major US networks. I was eleven years old and glued to the TV along with tens of millions of Americans who watched live or stayed up half the night to catch the rebroadcasts on public television.

When the Watergate hearings ended, in August, Ed had already lost or quit his job after seven years at Lincoln Hall (he never said which), and we moved to Connecticut. We bounced from one rental to another while Ed commuted back to Westchester to teach grade seven at Somers Middle School. The job came with a pay cut and a sixty-four kilometre daily round trip in the middle of America’s crushing recession and national gas shortage. In Connecticut, Pat wallpapered and sewed drapes for wealthy homeowners in Newtown, Bethel, Brookfield, and Darien.

At the end of our first year in Connecticut, Nixon resigned to avoid his inevitable impeachment. Vice-president Gerald Ford was sworn in as president, promising Americans that their “long national nightmare was over.” A month later, he pardoned Nixon. President Ford’s message was clear: Nixon was just a bad dream; the greatest country in the world doesn’t have paranoid presidents who order criminal acts and keep enemy lists.

In 1975, I started high school. My parents bought a house on Washington Avenue in Danbury with the student loans of their older children. Danbury was a small city surrounded by prettier towns, a dreary place pocked with abandoned hat factories. If you bought a hat in the early decades of the twentieth century, it was likely made in “Hat City” by European immigrants. But the industry was already in decline: by the early 1950s, when headgear began to go out of fashion, Danbury was washed up.

After buying their new home, Ed and Pat’s first act of community involvement was to sign a petition to bar a Black family



I promised myself that there would be a day when I would tell the truth. I could be a good person.

from buying the house next door. Black families were largely confined to the public housing projects on Eden Drive and Laurel Gardens. Throughout the 1970s, race riots were a regular occurrence at Danbury High School, violent brawls that landed at least one student in the hospital. In 1979, fifteen years after the Civil Rights Act was passed, a member of the KKK was distributing pamphlets on the local state university campus.

I got a job as a cashier at the Danbury A&P just as Ronald Reagan resurrected the ugly myth of the welfare queen in his unsuccessful presidential run of 1976. Black families who arrived at the store with food stamps and WIC vouchers were greeted by security at the front and in the aisles. Deli cold cuts were wrapped and labelled in sets: one of three, two of three. Cashiers were told to check under Black toddlers sitting in shopping carts if three of three was missing.

By the time I hit my teens, I hadn’t prayed for my parents in years. I did, however, agonize that my own moral compass was in jeopardy.

Deceit—about where I was going, whom I was seeing—was required every time I wanted to leave the house. Pat insisted that my friends were laughing at me behind my back, that they were not to be trusted. Late at night, I would roll the lies I’d told over in my head like worry beads. I promised myself that there would be a day when I would tell the truth. I could be a good person.

By 1980, Reagan was elected president and the house in Danbury turned out to be a lemon. The back half was below ground level and flooded on schedule. Mushrooms sprouted in the rust-coloured shag carpet, and our family was keeping pace with the decomposition. My second and third oldest brothers were both married and divorced before they hit



OPPOSITE, LEFT
M. E. Rogan, 1966

OPPOSITE, RIGHT
Ed and Pat,
South Bronx, 1952

LEFT Rogan siblings,
Fort William Henry,
upstate New York, 1967

their late twenties. My eldest brother never returned home after attending university in Nova Scotia. My middle brother had a psychotic break and landed in the locked psych ward at Danbury Hospital. My brother's doctor recommended that Ed and Pat participate in his treatment and attend family therapy. They wouldn't risk being exposed if details about our childhoods emerged, so my brother was left on his own for three weeks at the hospital. The seven of us scrambled away from one another. In 1981, when I left to attend university in Toronto, only two of my siblings remained at home.

A few years later, it was just Pat and Ed on Washington Avenue. They opted for a second chapter. In 1984, they came to Canada and soared through the immigration process on the wings of a recently passed bill to extend funding to Catholic schools in Ontario. They rented an apartment in North York and were promptly hired by the Toronto Separate School Board (today the Toronto Catholic District School Board) as special education teachers. Pat taught the primary grades in downtown Toronto and Ed taught at a high school just around the corner from their apartment building.

Ed delighted in being the brash American with the Bronx accent and badass tattoo. His students loved him. Among the stories he liked to tell was the time he stood on his desk in a toga to teach Julius Caesar, and how he had coached the baseball team wearing the Yankee pinstripes. Ed asked his students to help him out when school board evaluators came around during his probation period. He would ask the class a question, and every student would raise a hand. A right hand signalled that they knew the answer; a left hand would never be called on. One hundred percent participation with an astounding success rate.

BEING AN AMERICAN in Canada was a lot easier than being one in America. I picked the best version of the American mythos and stuck with that until I couldn't. I was breezy, opinionated, and confident. In my work life and with friends,

I presented my Irish American family as a sprawling, grittier version of the Kennedys playing touch football on the front lawn — only our version included parents who didn't take us to the hospital when we ended up with broken bones. The best lies are rooted in parallel truths.

I didn't stay in touch with anyone from the States outside of a few family members. And, even though they had relocated to Toronto,

I didn't see much of Ed and Pat either. Instead, I settled into my Canadian life. After university, I became a landed immigrant. By the late 1980s, my work as a producer for the CBC took me to Alberta, Quebec, and Ottawa. My magazine writing took me to Saskatoon and to First Nations communities in Labrador. After my son was born, in 1991, I knew I would never live in the United States again. I couldn't imagine uprooting him — or myself, for that matter. Still, I never considered renouncing my American citizenship or formally becoming a Canadian. Occasionally, a friend would ask why, and I never had a good answer.

I didn't spend any significant time in the US again until the summer of 2001, when *Esquire* sent me to Florida to write about Nathaniel Brazill, a fourteen-year-old Black boy being tried as an adult for the fatal shooting of his white seventh-grade teacher, Barry Grunow. On the morning of May 26, 2000, Brazill had been suspended for throwing water balloons. He was sent home and returned with a handgun he had found at his grandfather's house. Brazill later told police he had just wanted to say goodbye to two girls before the school year ended. When Grunow wouldn't let him into the classroom, Brazill took the gun out to scare his teacher. As Brazill later told police, he didn't know what had happened after the gun went off. "Well, like, I couldn't see 'cause my eyes started to get real watery and stuff, so I just ran. After I seen the blood, I ran."

Brazill spent the next year awaiting trial in the Palm Beach County jail. Through the Plexiglas, I could see a whisper of hair over his top lip. He had also filled out: he was four inches taller and twenty pounds heavier. His defence attorney knew what this meant. Brazill had gone from being a boy to a "thug." His story was going to end only one way.

Brazill was convicted of second-degree murder and sentenced to twenty-eight years in prison, where he remains today. His story was in the queue for publication when the

Twin Towers fell. *Esquire* held the piece. It wasn't the right time. The right time never came.

AFTER Nathaniel Brazill and 9/11, the distance between myself and America cracked open. In the immediate aftermath of the attack, I bought an American flag and hung it on my front porch in Toronto. It was a strange impulse, a phantom-limb spasm of patriotism that I thought had been properly excised. It was also an echo of my childhood attempts at prayer, an obligation to feel what others felt.

Whatever cell memory made me hang the American flag quickly fizzled. I didn't hang the flag on the one-year anniversary of 9/11 or any year after that. What followed for America was the steady erosion of its meticulously crafted image on the world stage. A bad-faith pursuit of nonexistent weapons of mass destruction led to the disastrous foray into Iraq. At home, the Patriot Act and Homeland Security expanded the government's surveillance powers. Police departments were militarized with equipment off-loaded from the US Army—equipment used in full force today. When Americans took to their streets last spring to protest the police killing of George Floyd in Minneapolis, they were greeted by police officers straight out of *Call of Duty*: bulky monochromatic uniforms, body armour, tactical vests, flak jackets, helmets, visors, and semiautomatic assault rifles at the ready.

When I joined Facebook, in 2010, a window into the America I'd left behind opened with friend requests from my Immaculate High School class of 1979. Dozens of my Catholic schoolmates now identified as conservative evangelical Christians. I remember being unsettled by the vociferous religiosity that cluttered my Facebook feed: prayer chains, personal testimonies about God's love, and anti-abortion rhetoric. The burgeoning Canadian in me noticed that almost every American political speech ended with the command *God bless America*. By 2015, the conspiracy theories about Barack Obama's US citizenship had turned into misogynistic attacks on Hillary Clinton. My New Jersey cousins were vocal Trump supporters. By the summer of 2016, I'd worn out the unfriend button, and my application for Canadian citizenship was in the queue.

Trump's victory, on the evening of November 8, 2016, was a flash-bang grenade. When the country's senses came back, president-elect Donald Trump was lumbering across the stage with his family in tow. Clinton was the winner of the popular vote, with almost 66 million votes, but it didn't matter. Trump's gleefully nihilistic campaign had earned him almost 63 million votes. He'd promised a border wall, maligned Mexicans, advocated a Muslim ban, stoked violence against protestors at his rallies, threatened to jail Clinton, and bragged about sexually assaulting women. I was on the phone through much of the night and into the early morning with my middle brother in Connecticut. He'd been reassuring me for weeks

that Trump didn't have a hope in hell; Clinton would mop the floor with him.

When Trump won, my brother said he'd be impeached within a year. He wasn't alone in this belief. The day after Trump's inauguration, the Women's March drew millions of protestors in cities across the country. Similar protests continued for the next two years. It seemed that many Americans could not reconcile Trump's ascendance with their ideas about America. The dissonance was profound.

On February 22, 2017, about a month after Trump's inauguration, I took my oath of Canadian citizenship along with dozens of others at Scarborough Town Centre. It was standing room only, with friends and family members of the soon-to-be new Canadians crowded together along the back and side walls, holding tiny Canadian flags. The excitement was infectious, and almost immediately, I was caught off guard by how emotional I felt. What had begun as a calculated off-ramp to unload my American citizenship had deepened into something else when I wasn't looking. The presiding judge kept things short and sweet. She congratulated us and suggested we get to know our neighbours, make new friends, and visit Canada's provincial parks.

And so it was as a Canadian that I watched the midterm elections in November 2018 and watched Trump roll back Obamacare and withdraw from the Paris Agreement. It was as a Canadian that I watched him hand out tax boons for the rich, withdraw from the Iran nuclear deal, put children in cages at the southern border, embolden violent white supremacists in Charlottesville, attack the press, shelter US enemies, and alienate allies.

While Trump napalmed the sociopolitical landscape, the mainstream media—CNN, the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*—paddled in circles, wilfully pretending, perhaps even believing, that Trump would transform into something more presidential—that he'd stop slandering his opponents, colluding with Russians, or egging on white supremacists. He never did.

For people mortified by Trump's victory, these years were a psychic grinding of gears. Seeing but not believing. Predicting nonexistent tipping points—"This is not who we are"—and waiting for the country to be rescued by a rotating cast of heroes who never showed up: James Comey, Robert Mueller, John Kelly, James Mattis, Susan Collins, any honourable Republican. It was a cruel political Ferberizing. But I wasn't surprised. I was watching my childhood, writ large.

WITH MY Canadian citizenship in hand, I hired a lawyer at the end of May 2018 and slogged on with the bureaucratic waterboarding of renouncing my US citizenship. I struggled to remember exact dates and the addresses of where I had lived and worked in the United States almost four decades ago. I was unnerved by sinister warnings about the repercussions of lying or trying to evade taxes.

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Gun, Hand on Neck, Cuffed Boy, New York City (2002)

They demanded the highest balance in every one of my bank accounts over the past five years (Form 114a) to screen for possible money laundering. I had to provide the name and credentials of my lawyer (Form G-28). I had to fill out a Non-Resident Alien Income Tax Return for each of the past five years (Form 1040NR). With each completed form, I revealed more of myself to the American government.

To complete my formal renunciation, I was instructed to appear at the American embassy in Ottawa on October 25, 2018, at 1 p.m.—six months after I began the process. The embassy looks like an above-ground bunker, rising at an illusory slant and bulwarked by concrete barriers, a modern-day portcullis to prevent anybody from driving in. Cameras are mounted like

turrets. The interior is muted in comparison. I was greeted outside the front door by a guard who waved a security wand over me. Inside, a second guard checked my valise and pointed me down the hall, to the cashier's wicket, to hand over my bank draft. After a short wait, vice-counsel Angela M. Mora went through my personal documents and government paperwork sheet by sheet. She then had me read and sign form DS-4081, Statement of Understanding Concerning the Consequences and Ramifications of Renunciation or Relinquishment of US Nationality. The statement reiterated warnings about tax evasion, becoming an alien, and America's power to extradite me back for a criminal offence.

Finally, the question I'd been warned about by my lawyer and by other expats who had already renounced: "Why are



A Dream, Burning Towers, Moving Bus, Fort Worth, Texas (2006)

you choosing to renounce your citizenship today?” I had been given straightforward instructions for this exact question. I was to make it clear that I had no plans to ever work or live in the United States again and I no longer wanted to keep my citizenship. Instead, I prattled on about how I had come to love Canada. I blurted out that I didn’t hate America and I might even feel sad about giving up my citizenship, but my life was in Canada now.

I was seven years old again, trying to convince myself that I loved the country I was escaping. Vice-counsel Mora looked relieved when I stopped talking. She stamped the final sheet of paper before confiscating my passport.

I renounced my American citizenship so I could stop lying, about my family and about America. The cherry-picked mythos

of my American childhood that I’d imported with me to Canada didn’t hold up over time. It didn’t hold up with my siblings either. A brutish childhood is a burdensome thing to have in common. One of my brothers tells people his whole family died in a tragic plane crash. I appreciate the economy of his solution. Another brother simply disappeared. My family fled to three different countries and two continents. The shortest distance between any two of us was a five-hour drive we never made.

PRESIDENT Joe Biden ran a successful campaign on the myth of the American character. He promised the American people that he would restore the nation’s soul as well as its standing at home and abroad. He called Trump’s

presidency an “aberrant moment in time” and reassured exhausted voters that it wasn’t too late to turn things around for the country.

More than 81 million Americans voted for Biden, the most votes a candidate has won in any American election. Trump garnered the second highest number of votes, almost 74 million—nearly 10 million more than he won four years ago. By any calculation, this election was not a repudiation of Trump or his policies. His 2016 declaration was prophetic: “I could stand in the middle of Fifth Avenue and shoot somebody, and I wouldn’t lose voters.” Trump is the end-stage manifestation of America’s malignant self-deception. Biden’s victory doesn’t change this diagnosis, and his job got harder. On January 6, Trump fortified his supporters with another helping of lies about a stolen election, then watched them storm the Capitol Building, an attack that has so far claimed five lives and telegraphed America’s wounds around the world.

In a nation riven by racial pain, discrimination, violence, and poverty, the biggest threat is not what divides Americans but what they have in common: the abiding lie that America is the greatest country in the world.

IN 1991, my sister wrote a letter to Ed and Pat from England. In it, she catalogued the horrors of her childhood and the shadow it cast over her present. I got a copy of the letter at the same time and dreaded what might happen next. I didn’t hear from either Pat or Ed, and a week later, I got a call from a police officer telling me my father was dead. I assumed Ed had killed himself. It wasn’t until I got to Scarborough General Hospital, where my mother was waiting, that I learned he had died of a heart attack. He was sixty-two.

Ed had hidden the letter from Pat. My second oldest brother told me I had to find it before it killed Pat as well. After the funeral, my siblings went home to England, Vancouver, Ottawa, Chicago, California, and Connecticut. (There were fewer of us together in the same room when my mother died, in 2003.) It was just Pat and me and my six-week-old son left in Toronto. For weeks, I got regular phone calls from my brother asking if I’d located the letter. I hadn’t, because I’d never looked for it.

Months after Ed’s death, Pat called me, crying uncontrollably, and I knew immediately that she had found the letter. I wondered what had taken her so long. I went to see her at her apartment, in Don Mills, where we sat across from each other at the dining room table. She asked me if it was true, what my sister had written in the letter. I understood that the question was a dare; Pat didn’t look away until I answered, Yes. I remember her hands resting lightly on her teacup. She looked past me, out the window, and told me she couldn’t remember anything like that ever happening in our family. ☒

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M. E. ROGAN is an award-winning magazine writer living in Toronto. Their work has appeared in *Esquire*, *GQ*, and *The New York Times Sunday Magazine*.

The Needs of Humans

BY SARAH WOLFSON

I am in need of a manicure.
 A manicore. A man to cure.
 A cure-all. A curiosity. A
 costume shop. A wholesaler
 of the sea’s calcic treasures.
 A pair of puddle jumpers, size four.
 An extra U-lock. A vampire
 metaphor. Some zebra stripes
 to describe an angry octopus.
 A sheep to take me back to
 childhood, an electric fence,
 and the perfect willow reed
 with which to reach out and
 receive the shock. I need
 the rumour of a rabid fox
 to spark a lifetime of imagined
 illnesses. Some thin ice to wave
 at the many ways of escape. A
 good milk cow. A single rectangular
 pupil to uphold my idea of
 ideation. A skin rash, hay induced.
 A small brook with a slippery rock,
 a curtain of moss. An afternoon.
 All of it. And ticks, drinking
 themselves to perfect sickness
 by the four-thousand-fold on
 the hirsute moose’s hide. Someone
 close. Someone who knows.
 Someone who where there’s a will,
 there’s a. I need a way. And a
 why. Moreover, I need a lone
 black sock. An open foundation.
 A short report about the ordinary
 mating habits of crickets.

THE WORST TIME to interview Meredith MacNeill is during a pandemic. She's too covered up. MacNeill is a performer who does so much with her face, her voice, her body that, even on a regular day—when we couldn't both die from sharing the same room—the fewer barriers between her and the audience, the better. She has, as her British colleagues kept telling me, “funny bones.”

Maybe that's why “Send Nudes” is my favourite sketch from her popular CBC comedy, *Baroness von Sketch Show* (the series she co-executive produced, the one she co-wrote with three other women, and the one that concluded after its fifth and final season, last December). For almost the entire three minutes, MacNeill is in a tiny kitchen, contorting her limbs into various poses and states of undress—including supine and sushi-covered—in response to the text “send nudes.” Her initial reaction is a cascade of emotion wrapped in a feat of physicality: a coy smile reconfigures into a furrowed brow that explodes into bulging eyeballs before she literally ducks, as if the command had been lobbed at her head. “That seems,” she says before scrunching up her nose, “that seems early...” (Slight shrug.) “Is that what you do now?” Even the way MacNeill pops out her dialogue—abrupt, emphatic—is enough to explain why *Toronto Life* named her the show's “breakout star” and the *New York Times* designated her the “wild, physical one.”

But, right now, at 5 p.m. on August 17, 2020, she's wearing a mask. We're sitting in the spartan surroundings of a production office that feels like a makeshift interrogation room. It has a desk, a kitchenette, and a bathroom—the kind of place that's probably just on the line of legal for a Toronto bachelor apartment. MacNeill is wearing loose pants in a Japanese print and a bright-yellow

T-shirt that confesses, “I wish I could but I really don't want to.” The mask is that disposable blue kind. And perhaps it's the way her huge eyes arrest me, but I keep expecting the face covering to jump off her head. Similarly, her clothes don't quite seem to sit still on her body, which is—You know rock climber Alex Honnold? The one with the stringy limbs and broad fingers, like a tree frog? The guy clearly born to free solo El Capitan? Well, MacNeill was born for physical comedy. There's something delicately monkey-like about her: the way her legs

her fit into the conventional box of a police procedural? Hers is not a body meant to be strapped into a suit, yet there she is wearing one in *Pretty Hard Cases*, CBC and NBCUniversal's new series co-starring Adrienne C. Moore. (Remember Black Cindy from Netflix's *Orange Is the New Black*?) *Pretty Hard Cases*' name and setup—Moore is the off-the-cuff detective, MacNeill the by-the-book one—suggest a comedy, but the show, which premiered in early February, is being sold as a drama. This identity crisis is perhaps unsurprising for a buddy-cop show that was forced to recalibrate not only around a pandemic but around protests to defund the police. A further indication of the show's struggle to find the right tone was its abrupt name change, from *Lady Dicks*, days before the announcement of its premiere date. *Pretty Hard Cases*' Instagram page cited concern from gender-rights advocates about the “derogatory use of those two words together.”

But it's August, several months before all of this will go down, and MacNeill is having her own crisis. She just had her first read-through on Zoom. I ask her how she felt about it. “Terrified. Had diarrhea.” Her prop pistol sits near us, emasculated in a grey plastic bag. (“My East Coast carry-on,” says MacNeill, who was born in Nova Scotia.) She says she was trying really hard and it just wasn't “happening.” (*Pretty Hard Cases* showrunners

Tassie Cameron and Sherry White will later tell me that it was happening just fine.) I can see messages flooding her phone. Her friends are asking how it went. Cameron and White are texting too. MacNeill says that, if they fired her right now, she wouldn't blame them.

This cycle of torment is nothing new. MacNeill was shocked when Cameron and White initially approached her to do *Pretty Hard Cases*. “Are you sure?” she kept asking, even though they tell me she was their “Platonic ideal” for the role of Sam Wazowski. MacNeill knew

PROFILE

Funny Bones

With Baroness von Sketch Show, Meredith MacNeill helped elevate the state of Canadian comedy. Her latest role presents an even more daunting challenge

BY SORAYA ROBERTS

PHOTOGRAPHY BY KOUROSH KESHIRI

are kind of bowed, the way her arms never seem to really relax, the way her back is always a little bent. It's something you can't always spot in photos; you have to see it in person. Hers is a body made to move.

Which is why it's weird that, in her follow-up to half a decade of *Baroness*, in her first co-starring role and her biggest role yet, MacNeill will be playing a cop. I mean, yes, she played one a few times on *Baroness*, but it was always satirical, always as a punchline. This is different—How does an instinctual performer like



they wanted her to play their uptight A-type lady of the law because of what she could do on *Baroness*, but she wanted to make it clear that she could do that only under very particular circumstances.

As counterintuitive as it sounds, MacNeill can succeed only if she is allowed to fail. For instance, *The Walrus* terrifies her. To her, the magazine implies a level of expectation, and she's loath to disappoint. "Tell her I'm not a good interview," she told a publicist to relay back to me. "She probably would like to talk to another baroness." This is a profile of Meredith MacNeill, so of course I spoke to another baroness (mostly to find out about MacNeill). When she heard that I had indeed talked to someone else, she was relieved. "Oh, that's good," she thought.

"I don't have to do it." Thinking that gave her the freedom not to fall short. And that's when she feels most comfortable—when there are no demands.

Of course, there are always demands: demands on herself to be better, demands of a tradition that is almost entirely male. But MacNeill's refusal to sit pretty, or still, in an industry that expects female performers to do both (especially if they are over forty) has helped turn her physical comedy into a feminist act.

TURNS OUT, you don't have to see MacNeill for her comedy to work. It's also in how she uses her voice, the rhythm of it, the volume. Which means that, even if she's literally squeezed into a box, she busts through. In the third episode of the final season of *Baroness*, her character is on a camping trip that includes her partner, Gary, and a woman named Jenna. They are filling a "bear box" with anything that might attract wildlife—including MacNeill's



character, who has her period. "Don't sleep with Jenna when I'm in the box," she tells Gary. Once the box is secured with her in it, Gary puts his right arm around Jenna as they go off on their hike. Now, all you hear are the waves and, occasionally, MacNeill's disembodied voice from inside the container. "Gary, I mean it." Pause. "If you sleep with Jenna, I'll know." And then, much lower, basically to herself, "I'll be able to smell it. I'm like a God. Damn. Bear."

How does MacNeill take this kind of internal discomfort and externalize it? How does she manifest our collective shudder and diffuse it through laughter? One thing I do know is that this talent could only ever belong to a woman, because only a woman can embody that kind of humiliation. And extinguish it. Men don't have to.

As a girl, MacNeill's days were "go out in the morning, come back at dinner-time," but a lot of kids had that childhood. She tells me she thought she could

fly when she was five, made wings out of the Saturday comics, jumped off her veranda, and landed in a bush at a weird angle, hurting her ankle, then thought, "Oh, I can't fly." I mean, that's funny, but once again, it's something that a lot of kids do. Maybe they don't all pee their pants in grade three during a Highland Sword Dancing competition and then grind their hips to cover it up, but kids do a lot of weird stuff—it doesn't turn them all into Lucille Ball. MacNeill wasn't a particularly strong dancer and she wasn't a particularly strong athlete. Things were also harder for her because she couldn't quite communicate the way she wanted to. She doesn't know if it was some kind of debilitating shyness, but something would happen on the way from her thoughts to her lips, and it never seemed to work out right. "I just felt like I was smarter than what was coming out of my mouth," she says.

Dyslexia may also have had something to do with it. In grade two, MacNeill



wrote a poem as a class assignment. It was about leaves. She was proud as hell of it. When her teacher took a while to get to her, going over the assignment in class, MacNeill thought she was saving her for last because her poem was so good. When it was finally her turn, the teacher asked if she had anything to add. “No,” MacNeill said, barely containing her excitement. She remembers the teacher then handing her back the poem, in which basically every word had been misspelled, and saying flatly, “I guess you’re just stupid then.”

MacNeill didn’t do community theatre because it made her feel smart—she did it because it didn’t make her feel stupid. “My love of it and wanting to pursue it wasn’t because I was, like, super talented,” she says. “I think, for so many different reasons, it made me feel good. It made me feel safe.” Bette Douglas and Beverly True, who both taught MacNeill drama in Nova Scotia, made her feel like that. Not like she was the best, or the

**For women,
writes Hennefeld,
physical comedy is
about “destroying
a world that gives
you a subservient
place.”**

worst, but like she wasn’t being judged at all. Douglas says that her number-one rule is: “I never, never, never ask you to do anything you don’t want to do.” But it was more than that—it was the way they redefined failure. The first time Douglas met her, MacNeill was trying out for the lead in the Amherst Drama Society production of *Goose Girl at the Well*. She didn’t get the part. Apparently, her dad found her crying in the street

on her way home. “I know I could’ve done the lead,” she told him. She was eight. Douglas repeats this story a few times in the course of our conversation. It says everything you need to know that she defines her “most outstanding student” in a half-century of community theatre by the way she failed. Failure isn’t failure to Douglas; it’s determination.

But even Douglas and True couldn’t cure MacNeill of that stupid feeling. Instead, MacNeill found that, the less she had to say, the more comfortable she could be. She remembers a class at Dalhousie University, where she studied theatre, in which everyone was instructed to remain completely silent. “That hour and a half was complete and utter peace for me,” she says. Expressing herself corporeally felt secure, in-

stinctive. There was no laborious translation involved, no words to write or to say—there was just being.

Maybe that’s why, as a kid, she was obsessed with slapstick comedian Carol Burnett. Maybe that’s why, of all the Muppets, blue tapir-nosed stunt-nut Gonzo was her guy. Maybe that’s why physical comedy didn’t seem outside her purview even though it was mostly performed by men. “Women have always had a marginal position in physical comedy because audiences often feel uncomfortable laughing at comical images of violence against female characters,” writes film scholar Maggie Hennefeld. Even if audiences don’t, Hollywood does. Men can be uncomfortable with women being loud, being ugly, being punchy, all of which subvert their notion of femininity as a form of contained domesticity. It’s worth noting that MacNeill’s recent work—*This Hour Has 22 Minutes*, *Baroness*, *Pretty Hard Cases*—has been largely chaperoned by

women. According to Hennefeld, for women, physical comedy, especially slapstick, is about “destroying a world that gives you a subservient place.”

But, as silenced as MacNeill often felt, the plays she performed spoke for her. Particularly Shakespeare, chiefly his heroines. “These women had these voices,” she says. “And I might not have understood all the words, but I understood that they had a platform and they were angry or they were hurt or they were hilarious.” It was a Greek heroine who gave MacNeill back her voice, or at least the beginnings of it. At Dalhousie, she appeared in *The Love of the Nightingale*, a feminist adaptation of the ancient Greek story about the rape of Philomela. In the play, Philomele—as the corresponding character is named—has been assaulted by her brother in law, Tereus, and threatens to tell his wife. But, before Tereus can cut out her tongue to keep her quiet, Philomele gives a speech, and it was here that MacNeill decided to add something, a primal kind of retching howl she describes as “almost other.” It speaks to the moral complexity of theatre that an actor can be empowered by the disempowerment of their character. But, in a way, MacNeill was using the role of Philomele to do the same thing for herself: claiming power where she felt, for so long, that she had none.

IMAGINE A WILD-EYED MACNEILL, about twenty years younger than she is now, tearing across a stage in a dishevelled white bridal gown, a veil trailing behind her. Imagine her dizzily vacillating between jugular-popping absurdity and a more subdued, vibrating neurosis. Imagine her then puking and passing out. This approximates MacNeill’s graduate performance at London’s Royal Academy of Dramatic Art (RADA). It was her version of Cindy Lou Johnson’s off-Broadway play *Brilliant Traces*, a romcom subversion in which a young woman fleeing her wedding lands at a remote Alaska cabin where she finds love by recounting how she lost it. For once, MacNeill used her own accent, the accent that marked the fact that, according to the *Chronicle Herald*, no other

Atlantic woman had been let into this British institution before her. RADA is the type of school that is populated by the kids of acting dynasties (the son of *Sexy Beast* actor James Fox was in MacNeill’s class) and turns out the likes of Anthony Hopkins. The three-year program cost \$39,000 for the first year alone. To help cover the fee, friends and family set up a crowdfunding account at a local bank, something MacNeill struggled with for years. It wasn’t shame, exactly, but the overwhelming responsibility she felt to earn it. “Receiving that kind of love is really hard,” she tells me. “I *had* to make it worth their while.”

MacNeill’s tactic for succeeding was by trying not to. This was her thought process: “I’m going to fail every day. I’m going to push it to the point where people won’t be my friends. It will be so embarrassing, what I’m about to do.” Think of a runner testing out a bunch of different speeds, most of which will defeat them, in order to find the most extreme one that won’t. It’s a way of establishing your limit, or what MacNeill calls the line. “I needed to know the line. Because what I discovered is it’s that line... that’s interesting. When you’re *right* on it, that’s what’s captivating.... For me, I couldn’t know what that line was until I got there, and I’d go past it.”

But what does that look like in practice? At RADA, it looked like MacNeill pushing her characters to such emotional extremes that her peers became uncomfortable. In other words, their discomfort would signal when she had gone too far. She uses an example from when she was in elementary school performing improv. She remembers everyone laughing at what she was doing. Then she picked her nose and the laughter stopped. She recalls thinking, “Went too far. Went too far.” She was only a kid, but the line was clear. At RADA, failure was more extravagant. MacNeill decided, for instance, to play Hamlet as a Southern man. She thought, Wouldn’t it be interesting if he was a cowboy? It wasn’t. Then she took *Black Narcissus*, the 1947 Powell and Pressburger film about a bunch of sexually frustrated nuns, and reimagined it for a combat-training

class. In the middle of the fight sequence, having retrofitted their costumes with Velcro, she and her foe tore off their habits and sparred in their briefs. “So that one didn’t work.”

In the final year at RADA, the school invites talent agents to watch the graduating class. MacNeill didn’t think anyone would be looking at her, so she did what she wanted. That’s how she landed on the idea of reimagining *Brilliant Traces*. In a sense, she was acting on instinct. That one worked. Or, at least, it made Rachel Freck, an agent and casting director, laugh. According to MacNeill, Freck then convinced the producer of a new sketch series to audition her. Somehow, MacNeill got the role. The show, *Man Stroke Woman*, aired in the UK from 2005 to 2007 and starred six comedians—three men, three women—who played recurring characters in vignettes that dissected the absurdity of life, relationships, and gender. One sketch—two wives sitting outside a fitting room, appraising their husbands as the men model Halloween costumes—was the kind of feminist flip that would later characterize *Baroness*.

“I’m *shit* in it,” MacNeill says. She’s not. Co-star Nicholas Burns recalls MacNeill often being cast as “the slightly outsider-type characters”—a clingy one-night stand, a painfully unfunny dinner date, a wedding guest in full bridal regalia. “She will go to places where you didn’t know there were places,” he tells me. “She’s completely unafraid.” In fact, she was afraid. She wasn’t a comedian. That wasn’t her training. When the series was picked up for season two, she tried to back out of some of the sketches. If nothing else, she knew how to cede space.

“I’m a big believer in collaborative work,” says MacNeill. “What’s electric about storytelling isn’t so much what’s happening to you, it’s what’s happening between the two people—the story that you’re creating together.” Her physical comedy—the way she is prone to making exaggerated expressions, speaking in hyperbole, invading various spaces—is steeped in this philosophy. It is, according to Simon McBurney, “part of her beauty.” McBurney is the co-founder of Comlicité, a touring theatre company based

in the UK, where he directed MacNeill in 2004 and 2005. To him, her physicality implies “enormous generosity because she doesn’t self-censor.”

It also implies hospitality because MacNeill creates room for others, not just herself. “As well as giving out,” McBurney says, “there’s an invitation to come in.” Which is why she fit so seamlessly into *Complicité*, a company that recalled the community theatre she grew up in, where there was no judgment, failure was part of the process, and no one was exceptional—everyone mattered. It’s a way of working that is paradoxical to a star-centric industry like Hollywood: in a system made up of heroes, the entire production revolves around the individual. *Complicité* helped show MacNeill that physical comedy could not only be a salve for low self-esteem (it’s not about the self) but could also remove the burden from one person. It resists both individualism and the idea that any individual can be worthless. It confirms that everyone has their place.

THE REASON MACNEILL is sitting opposite me in this production office right now is that she has a daughter. That’s what brought her back to Canada. MacNeill had a baby in 2010. A single mom in her mid-thirties, she had to leave England in the middle of her career only to start all over again, back home with her parents in Nova Scotia. I can’t imagine not feeling resentful of this—of the life I had worked so hard for suddenly being derailed. But the word MacNeill uses is “lucky.” She says she is lucky she had her daughter because it became clear what was important, lucky because it provided relief from herself, lucky because it was the reason she made the choices she made and is where she is now. MacNeill compares it to being a kid and climbing a tree, putting your foot down and instinctively knowing a branch will support you. “Having to get to the top of that tree was just like, I was just going to do it,” she says.

It helped that she had already appeared in an episode of the British sitcom *Peep Show* in 2005. She played Canadian Merry, an unstable, hyper,

sparkly, energetic entrepreneur who impulsively gives away her pub to the show’s main characters and is reduced to a monotonous bed-rocking inpatient by the episode’s end. Before *Baroness*, this was one of the main roles MacNeill was known for. (A cult favourite, *Peep Show* ran for nine seasons.) Creators Sam Bain and Jesse Armstrong actually wrote the part with her in mind. “I think we just felt, as you probably understand, she’s a one-off,” Bain tells me. “There’s no one really quite like her.” *Peep Show* is what the CBC associated her with when they approached her to write for *This Hour Has 22 Minutes*, in 2011. Creator Mary Walsh recognized MacNeill’s sense of humour, a feral power she associates with the “darker and wilder” energy of East Coast comedy. Of course, MacNeill being MacNeill, she felt entirely unqualified. But she was broke.

It was somewhere around this time that MacNeill had an epiphany. It was pretty simple, actually: all she had to do was treat comedy the way she had theatre—which is to say, as a space in which she could be uninhibited. She recalled the feminist play that had prompted her to make that guttural sound, the monologue she had reworked for graduation, her stage work at *Complicité*, where she had experimented freely. The genres aren’t so different in the end, if you think about it. Like tragedy, comedy can also be used to expose the truth. But that’s not how MacNeill had been approaching it. On *Man Stroke Woman*, in *Peep Show*, even on *22 Minutes*, she had been working within the confines of other people’s stories, where there was no room for her to be honest—to explore, to fail, to be unjudged. The only way to do that was for the story to be hers.

Baroness was the product of that epiphany. MacNeill chose sketch because she knew the model from *Man Stroke Woman*. She knew she could be funny in stops and starts, she knew an all-female sketch show could be a novelty (England had a lot of them, Canada had none), and she knew that, by working with other female comedians, not only would she improve but the responsibility would be diffuse. She took the idea to Carolyn

Taylor, with whom she had worked on *22 Minutes* and who had all the connections MacNeill didn’t. Taylor brought on two fellow Second City alums: Jennifer Whalen and Aurora Browne. That meant all the baronesses were trained in comedy except MacNeill. Again, she was the oddity. “The only reason they probably had me around was I had the idea,” she says. “It wasn’t even that original.”

But it kind of was. It’s not that women hadn’t led sketch shows in Canada before, but an all-female comedy troupe had never been allowed to make something like *Kids in the Hall*. Not to mention that, in 2013, sketch comedy wasn’t particularly in vogue here, even if Amy Schumer seemed to be doing just fine in the US. “There was this notion that you shouldn’t pitch sketch to the networks because they weren’t interested,” explains Whalen. But the timing seemed right. When *Baroness* premiered, in June 2016, #MeToo was proliferating both online and off. Even famous women were speaking out on social media. It was this changing climate that sold the show, which CBC shrewdly advertised online by releasing, piecemeal, zeitgeist-friendly sketches on sexism, ageism, and every other -ism. *Baroness* was a feminist protest comedy for a culture awash in feminist protest.

The first sketch to go viral, season one’s “Locker Room,” also happened to star MacNeill. In it, she plays a gym member who has just turned forty only to realize she suddenly feels comfortable strolling around naked. “Welcome to not giving a shit at the gym,” she is told. The three other baronesses—also nude—slow clap as MacNeill cracks her neck and bends over. Whalen remembers driving to her brother’s cottage while her husband updated her on the sketch’s mounting page views: 20,000—turn off, get coffee—50,000, then 60,000. And it didn’t stop upon their arrival. “People would be going for a swim, and they’d come back and they’d be like, ‘Oh my God, it’s 600,000,’” Whalen says. By the end of the weekend, it was nearing a million.

Baroness’s success is particularly notable when you consider that MacNeill had just learned how to write a sketch. While

the show would go on to have up to ten writers, it was just the four women at first. And, when MacNeill sat down to write at the same table as everyone else, she felt like she was back in that class with the leaf poem again. “That old feeling of—ughhh—that block,” she says. So she went off by herself. For each sketch, she would stand up and act out the character first—finding the walk, then the look, then the dialogue. By the time she got it all down, she was already more than halfway there. “The way I approached comedy was always the truth,” she says. “It was *never* about trying to be funny. It was, like, build a situation that you can’t get out of, it’s just so uncomfortable.”

That philosophy was there from the jump. When the *Baroness* team initially had to run through a preview of their material for CBC’s producers, MacNeill was left shadow-performing one of her sketches—a toned down, sped up, mimed version of what would air—so they would not be reading mere stage directions. What she pantomimed for execs was “Clean Pole,” the one where MacNeill plays a hygiene-obsessed bride at a pole

dancing bachelorette. As the rap pumps in, she slides toward the pole on two wet wipes, pulls Purell out of her pants, pours it all over herself...you get the drift.

Mortification is the essence of MacNeill, which is why *Baroness* shows her at her most self-actualized. It is her insecurity made physical, her honesty worn on her body. It also helped that the people she was working with were older women who, says Whalen, had the freedom to “give no fucks.” Their only real concern was to punch up, to mock those with more power. (One sketch has a group of women engaging in performative social justice while ignoring a man in a wheelchair.) With them alone in charge, the lines were theirs to draw. “I kept waiting for the network or somebody to say, ‘Nope. Nope. Too far,’” says Whalen, showrunner on the last two seasons and a writer on *Pretty Hard Cases*, “but nobody did.”

“Unfounded” was right on the line. That’s the rape-kit sketch, which MacNeill co-wrote, from season three. In it, she plays a cop who gets a daily follow-up call from a sexual-assault

victim checking to see if her rape kit has been processed. The title comes from MacNeill’s cop throwing a dart at a board with a whole bunch of arbitrary answers on it—the joke being how infamously ineffectual the police are at processing assault claims. MacNeill got the idea from a *Globe and Mail* investigation (also titled “Unfounded”), which reported that one in five sexual assault cases are claimed by police to be baseless. She really pushed to have that sketch in. But, at some point after it was shot, she had a moment of uncertainty. MacNeill says she called one of the CBC producers and they had to talk her down.

While *Baroness* leaned hard on misogyny, MacNeill was particularly concerned about the sexual objectification of women. “Clean Pole” and “Send Nudes” were a couple of the many ways she tried to recalibrate how women’s bodies are seen. MacNeill was desperate to use her comedy to draw in the kind of guys she grew up with, to show them what it’s like to be a woman in their world, and to force them to watch that world get destroyed.

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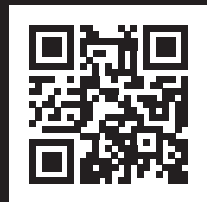
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DOES *Pretty Hard Cases* cross the line? It's a buddy-cop show in which MacNeill plays an edgy detective specializing in gangs and Adrienne C. Moore plays her more relaxed drug-squad colleague. They are both mid-career, apparently the best at what they do, but with opposing approaches. The show follows their relationship and how they navigate this new world in which cops are more widely loathed than lionized.

I'll stop right here. My initial impulse, before seeing it, was to make clear how easy it would be for *Pretty Hard Cases* to get it wrong. The show could prove too glib, too politically correct, too any number of things that don't capture the current realities of policing that are too front-of-mind for the audience to overlook. MacNeill is painfully aware of the stakes. When I texted to ask her how she felt about being in a cop show in the wake of Black Lives Matter and defund the police protests, she took the night to respond. "I feel like you imagine I would," she wrote. MacNeill faces a very real, very consequential line. If she fails, it's not the kind of failure where she may be

slightly off the mark. It's the kind where she may be on the wrong side of history.

The producers could have decided to pull the show. *Pretty Hard Cases* was announced last February, the latest wave of protests against police brutality began last May, and filming didn't start until last September. Instead, they used the time to try to figure things out. In a passionate email to the cast after the protests kicked off, showrunners Tassie Cameron and Sherry White explained that they wanted to, in Moore's words, "make the show that is reflective of what's going on in this world, but more importantly, what we hope we're going to get to, you know, in the future." Within weeks of the demonstrations, they found that much of their script had become dated. They had to rethink the action sequences and what it now means to be a "badass." They had to address that one of their leads is Black, one white. Racial tension became part of the dialogue, police brutality part of the storyline. "We believe it's made the show deeper and more relevant," Cameron says.

Part of why Cameron and White kept going with *Pretty Hard Cases*, they told

me, is because of how much trust they have in MacNeill. If the first episode is any indication, that trust is well placed. Underneath the suit, MacNeill wears her generosity, her self-effacement, her discomfort in every scene. She is aware of the nuances of who she is and whom she is playing. As "Unfounded" demonstrated, MacNeill understands what is wrong with the police, just as she has shown, in viral moment after viral moment, that she knows what it means to be a white woman in our society. It reminds me of the *Baroness* sketch in which she plays a provocatively dressed cop who is allowed to get away with anything and ends up shooting her colleague in the arm, physicalizing the self-destruction of myopic authority. Whether *Pretty Hard Cases* knows how to find that line is almost beside the point. MacNeill does. As Moore, who holds the show together with her, explained it to me, "I can fall back and know that she's going to catch me." ♡

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SORAYA ROBERTS is a freelance writer and the culture editor of *Pipe Wrench*, a new bimonthly online magazine.

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INSIDE THE Cameron County Detention Center, in Brownsville, Texas, inmates wearing orange jumpsuits peer from behind the glass of five group holding cells. The jail is about a twelve-minute drive from the banks of the winding Rio Grande, which marks the US-Mexico border. Facing issues like violence, economic pressure, and climate change, and looking for a better life, thousands of migrants cross the southern US border every month. If they're arrested and don't have documentation, the US deports them.

Every day around noon, people who were arrested the previous day and held at local city jails overnight are bused here and booked into the system. Guards fingerprint them, take their mugshots, and since 2017, they take one additional step: they scan their eyes into the Inmate Identification and Recognition System (IRIS). Developed and patented by Biometric Intelligence and Identification Technologies, or BI² Technologies, a privately held corporation headquartered in Plymouth, Massachusetts, IRIS is more accurate and faster than fingerprinting—identifying inmates in approximately eight seconds or less.

Kassandra Flores is wearing a state-issued boxy maroon top, matching baggy pants too long for her legs, and beige sandals. She stands up straight with her arms at her sides and her toes at the edge of a piece of black and yellow tape on the tile floor. A guard tells her to look directly into the lens of a camera that will capture a high-resolution image of her irises so an algorithm can compare it against a vast, ever-growing database owned by law enforcement. The image will be stored there indefinitely, unless a judge orders the record expunged, and shared with law enforcement agencies across the country, including the FBI. Individual law enforcement agencies can also choose to share the data with Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE).

Cameron County's use of this technology does not stem from state or federal regulations, statutes, or protocols—it is not part of any broader official policy. It was, rather, introduced at the behest of local officials. Omar Lucio, who was sheriff at the time I visited last spring, was the first along the US-Mexico border to start using IRIS. Another thirty soon followed suit. That success, along with its popularity with other US law enforcement agencies, allowed BI² Technologies to expand and ink a deal in June 2019 to make the technology available to more than 3,000 sheriffs across the US.

BI² Technologies first started out developing iris scanning as a tool to identify missing children. CEO and co-founder Sean Mullin tells me that law enforcement officials immediately started suggesting new uses for the technology; the next step was to expand to locate missing seniors. Today, BI² Technologies also sells an iOS and Android app called MORIS that allows for mobile access to IRIS, and a revenue-generating background-check system for sheriffs' offices.

I volunteered to interact with IRIS to better understand how it works. I stood facing a mesh wall that separated me from a guard sitting behind a large screen. He adjusted the black camera to my eye height. My eyes were reflected in a thin,



WORLD

Crossing the Line

*How international borders became testing grounds
for underregulated surveillance technology*

BY HILARY BEAUMONT

PHOTOGRAPHY BY CHRISTOPHER KATSAROV LUNA



An officer at the Cameron County Detention Center, in Brownsville, Texas, watches security footage from the control room.

rectangular mirror above the lens. Red lights flashed on either side of the lens, then another light flashed green. A monitor typically available only to the jail staff showed two close-up greyscale photos of my eyes. The images had a cold, unhuman quality, like an X-ray.

Similar to facial-recognition technology, BI² Technologies' algorithm measures and analyzes the unique features of a person's irises and checks them against the database. Mullin says that, because the human eye does not change over time the way a face does as it ages, iris scanning is the more accurate biometric tool. When the system finds a match, a person's profile, including any mugshots and criminal history, flashes onto the screen. The algorithm tries to find my irises but doesn't turn up anything. Still, my mind races with questions about where my eyes could have ended up: BI² Technologies' system feeds into a government database of information gathered from many sources in many places, not just Cameron County (that's why it can find matches with records in other jurisdictions). The FBI? Homeland Security? Joe Elizardi, the lieutenant in charge of the jail's booking and intake, assures me that my eye scans will not be kept in their system once this demonstration is over.

In recent years, and whether we realize it or not, biometric technologies such as face and iris recognition have crept into every facet of our lives. These technologies link people who would otherwise have public anonymity to detailed profiles of information about them, kept by everything from security companies to financial institutions. They are used to screen CCTV camera footage, for keyless entry in apartment buildings, and even in contactless banking. And now, increasingly, algorithms designed to recognize us are being used in border control. Canada has been researching and piloting facial recognition at our borders for a few years, but—at least based on publicly available information—we haven't yet implemented it on as large a scale as the US has. Examining how these technologies are being used and how quickly they are proliferating at the southern US border is

perhaps our best way of getting a glimpse of what may be in our own future—especially given that any American adoption of technology shapes not only Canada-US travel but, as the world learned after 9/11, international travel protocols.

As in the US, the use of new technologies in border control is underregulated in Canada, human rights experts say—and even law enforcement officials acknowledge that technology isn't always covered within the scope of existing legislation. Disclosure of its use also varies from spotty to nonexistent. The departments and agencies that use AI, facial verification, and facial comparison in border control—the Canada Border Services Agency (CBSA) and Immigration,

The end goal of facial recognition at borders is to replace other travel documents—essentially, “Your face will be your passport.”

Refugees, and Citizenship Canada (IRCC)—are a black box. Journalists and academics have filed access to information requests to learn more about these practices but have found their efforts blocked or delayed indefinitely.

These powerful technologies can fly under the radar by design and often begin as pilot projects in both Canada and the US; as they become normalized, they rapidly expand. By keeping their implementation from public view, governments put lawyers, journalists, migrants, and the wider public on the back foot in the fight for privacy rights. For companies developing these tools, it's a new gold rush.

The US has gathered biometric records of foreign nationals—including Canadians—as part of its entry/exit data system since 2004. Its Customs and Border Protection agency (CBP) is currently testing and deploying facial recognition

across air, sea, and land travel. As of last May, over 7 million passengers departing the US by air had been biometrically verified with a facial-matching algorithm, the Traveler Verification Service.

By the end of last year, CBP had facial-comparison technology in use at twenty-seven locations, including fourteen ports of entry. A few days before I arrived in the US, one of these had been installed at the port of entry I was visiting. A sign disclosed this—sort of. It didn't use the words “facial recognition” and had a far more standard-sounding description (“CBP is taking photographs of travelers entering the United States in order to verify your identity”). Way at the bottom, the sign indicated that US citizens could opt out. A majority of Canadians apparently have the choice to opt out as well; nobody advised me of this. The thing about these new technological screening systems is that, if you don't have a choice or aren't aware that you have one, they quickly become routine.

IN 2019, there were about 30 million refugees and asylum seekers on the move worldwide, according to the UNHCR. Despite COVID-19's temporary slowdown of border crossings around the world, global migration is projected to rise for decades due to conflict and climate change. International borders are spaces of reduced privacy expectation, making it difficult or impossible for people to retain privacy rights as they cross. That makes these areas ripe for experimentation with new surveillance technologies, and it means business is booming for tech companies. According to a July 2020 US Government Accountability Office report, from 2016 to 2019, the global facial-recognition market generated \$3 to \$5 billion (US) in revenue, and from 2022 to 2024, that revenue is projected to grow to \$7 to \$10 billion (US).

With increased demand and lack of regulation, more surveillance is appearing at international borders each day. In Jordan, refugees must have their irises scanned to receive monthly financial aid. Along the Mediterranean, the European Border and Coast Guard Agency has tested drone surveillance. Hungary,



Kassandra Flores is processed through intake using eye scanners at the Cameron County Detention Center.



Latvia, and Greece piloted a faulty system called iBorderCtrl to scan people's faces for signs of lying before they're referred to a human border officer; it is unclear whether it will become more widespread or is still being used.

Canada has tested a “deception-detection system,” similar to iBorderCtrl, called the Automated Virtual Agent for Truth Assessment in Real Time, or AVATAR. Canada Border Services Agency employees tested AVATAR in March 2016. Eighty-two volunteers from government agencies and academic partners took part in the experiment, with half of them playing “imposters” and “smugglers,” which the study labelled “liars,” and the other half playing innocent travellers, referred to as “non-liars.” The system's sensors recorded more than a million biometric and nonbiometric measurements for each person and spat out an assessment of guilt or innocence. The test showed that AVATAR was “better than a random guess” and better than humans at detecting “liars.” However, the study concluded, “results of this experiment may not represent real world results.” The report recommended “further testing in a variety of border control applications.” (A CBSA spokesperson told me the agency has not tested AVATAR beyond the 2018 report and is not currently considering using it on actual travellers.)

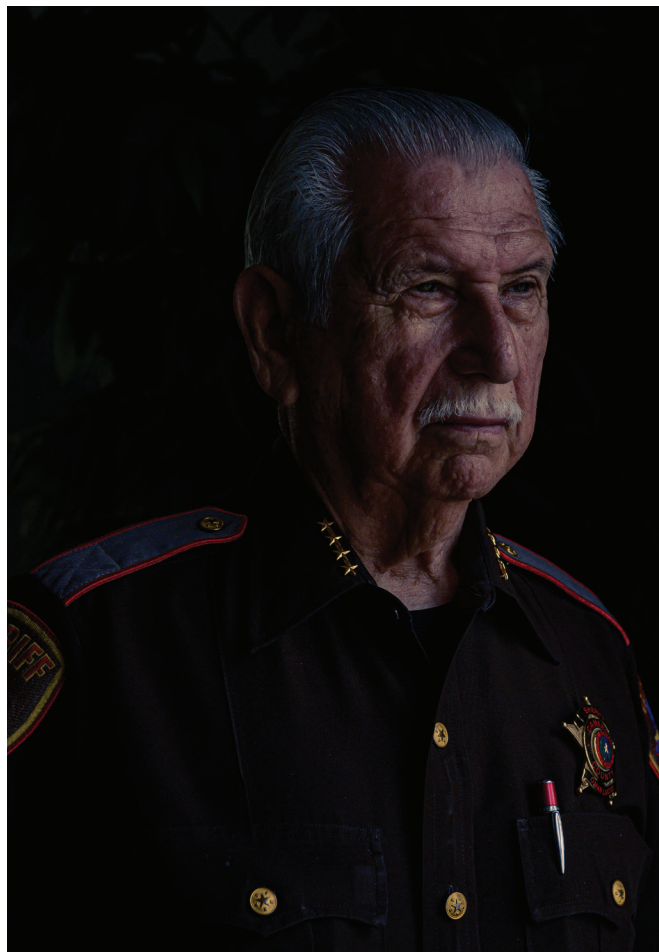
Canada is already using artificial intelligence to screen visa applications in what some observers, including the University of Toronto's Citizen Lab research

ABOVE People wait to pass through customs on the US–Mexico border.

RIGHT Former Cameron County sheriff Omar Lucio

OPPOSITE

A border crossing at the Rio Grande, in Matamoros, Mexico



group, say is a possible breach of human rights. In 2018, Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship Canada launched two pilot projects to help officers triage online Temporary Resident Visa applications from China and India. When I asked about the department's use of AI, an IRCC spokesperson told me the technology analyzes data and recognizes patterns in applications to help distinguish between routine and complex cases. The former are put in a stream for faster processing while the latter are sent for more thorough review. “All final decisions on each application are made by an independent, well-trained visa officer,” the spokesperson said. “IRCC's artificial intelligence is not used to render final decisions on visa applications.” IRCC says it is assessing the success of these pilot projects before it considers expanding their use. But, according to a September 2020 report by the University of Ottawa's Canadian Internet Policy and Public Interest Clinic (CIPPIC),

when governments use AI to screen applications, “false negatives can cast suspicion on asylum seekers, undermining their claims.” In a world first, the UK's Home Office recently suspended its use of an AI tool in its visa-screening system following a legal complaint raising concerns about discrimination.

The end goal of facial recognition at borders, CIPPIC says, is for the technology to replace other travel documents—essentially, “Your face will be your passport.” This year, Canada and the Netherlands, along with consulting behemoth Accenture and the World Economic Forum (the NGO that runs the glitzy annual Davos conference), plans to launch what the group calls “the first ever passport-free pilot project between the two countries.” Called the Known Traveller Digital Identity, it's a tech platform that uses facial recognition to identify travellers' faces and match them to rich digital profiles that have a “trust score” based on a person's verified information,



including from their passport, driver's licence, credit card, and their interactions with banks, hotels, medical providers, and schools. The program may be voluntary at first, but the CIPPIC warned that, if it is used widely, "it may become effectively infeasible for citizens to opt out."

Iris and facial recognition fall under biometrics, which the Office of the Privacy Commissioner describes as the automated use of "physical and behavioural attributes, such as facial features, voice patterns... or gait" to identify people. These technologies work like our brains do—we look at a person, our minds process their features, and we check them against our memory. With biometrics, mass amounts of data are captured and stored. There are two parts in the process: enrolment (when the data of a known person is stored in a reference database) and matching (when an algorithm compares a scan of an unknown person against the reference database). The algorithm finds likely matches and returns a result. The

bigger and more diverse the database, the more successful the technology should be in returning a match.

In addition to far-ranging privacy concerns, these technologies have been shown to be biased. In one case last January, Detroit police wrongfully arrested a Black man after a facial-recognition algorithm misidentified him. In another case, in 2019, facial recognition mistakenly identified a Brown University student as a suspect in Sri Lanka's Easter Sunday bombings, which killed more than 250 people.

These are not random glitches. Studies have shown that facial-recognition algorithms are less accurate in identifying people of colour—an MIT and Stanford University analysis found an error rate of up to 0.8 percent for light-skinned men and up to 34.7 percent for dark-skinned women. The bias comes from the data that's used to assess the performance of the algorithm: this research also found that the data set one major tech company

used to train its algorithm was over 83 percent white and over 77 percent male. The company claimed an accuracy rate of more than 97 percent; according to the CIPPIC's September 2020 report, even a 98 percent accuracy rate would result in thousands of false outcomes per day if applied to all travellers entering Canada. Almost certainly, based on the algorithms and databases currently available, these errors would be concentrated within certain demographic groups, targeting them for greater suspicion and scrutiny.

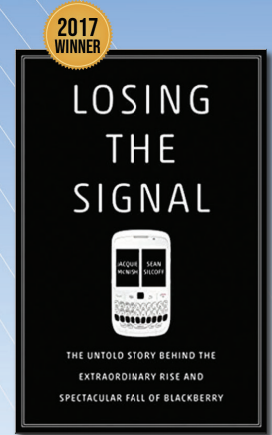
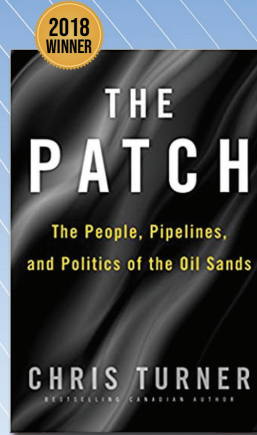
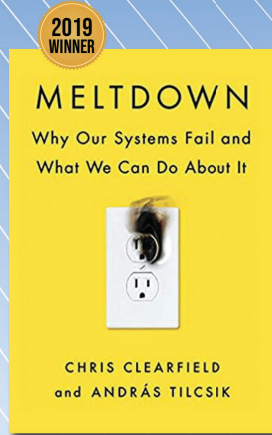
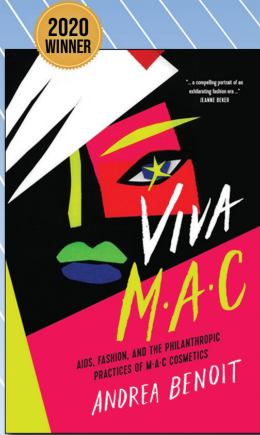
If you've returned from abroad through Toronto Pearson International Airport in recent years, you've interacted with new passport scanners, or Primary Inspection Kiosks, that use facial verification to compare a traveller's face with their passport. Internal CBSA communications obtained by the CBC through an access to information request suggest that these kiosks may refer people from countries including Iran and Jamaica for secondary inspection at higher rates.

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OUTSIDE Sheriff Lucio's office door is a display case of confiscated prison shivs. He welcomes me in and invites me to sit at his conference table, taking his seat at the head, Lieutenant Elizardi sitting to his right. Spanish is Lucio's first language, and he speaks with an accent you'd find on either side of the border. His family moved to the area now called Texas seven generations ago, from Italy. Lucio sees himself as a trendsetter and, until his term ended in December, was eager to adopt more surveillance tech—at one point during our interview, he says it would be a good idea to implant tracking chips in babies when they're born, to prevent human trafficking. "Technology changes every day," Lucio tells me. "If you do not go ahead and go with the times, you stay behind."

BI² Technologies approached Lucio and other sheriffs in 2017 to try IRIS for free. Mullin, the CEO, told me the offer was well-intentioned—he believes border sheriffs don't have the tools they need to do their jobs well. But he also acknowledges that it was a business decision: if the company could demonstrate IRIS was useful at the southern border, it might be adopted more broadly and outpace other iris-identification companies.

Within a few days of setting up the technology, Elizardi caught an alleged violent criminal; Lucio said he had been using fake identities to elude police. "He's been captured four previous times with no results," Lucio says. "But, using the IRIS, we found out he was wanted in Boston, Massachusetts, for human smuggling, narcotics, kidnapping, and murder. How's that?" When the system identified the wanted man, Elizardi remembers, Cameron County started receiving calls from the FBI, Secret Service, and other police agencies. "We were ecstatic. We were like, Wow, we caught our first one!"

Lucio says it wouldn't bother him to have his eyes scanned—he was fingerprinted when he first became a police officer. He argues that, if you haven't done anything wrong, you have nothing to worry about. Lucio explains that he has an expectation of privacy inside his house, inside his bedroom, and for his family and children. When I ask

him where he draws the line, he says he wouldn't want someone tapping his phone or listening to his conversations. He says it's a good thing that, in the US justice system, you need to have probable cause to get a judge to issue a warrant to tap your phone. "I'm a private person, okay? That's the way I am. But the same token, by me being private, I respect other people's privacies."

I ask Flores, the woman I'd seen go through the scanning process at the Cameron County Detention Center, if the process invaded her privacy. "When you're in jail, you have no privacy, so you have to do it," she replies. "If you refuse, it's just going to go worse for you." If given the choice, she would have refused the IRIS scan. "Now they have everything about you, even your eyes." But Lucio doesn't think anyone in custody—which includes people who have not been convicted of a crime—should have a choice when it comes to IRIS.

Mullin argues that, since, unlike facial recognition, it's hard to scan a person's eyes covertly, tools like BI² Technologies' are more transparent and ethical. He also says that it does not suffer from the same biases in falsely identifying people of colour that facial recognition does. He is closely following the discussion around regulation of biometrics and AI: "Only technologies that fall within the constitution of both our federal government and the state should be used in any case. And all of these biometric technologies and the people that provide them and the people and the agencies that use them—I believe their intentions [are not] nefarious."

He said it's tough to strike the right balance when technology moves so quickly, and he believes human rights advocates play an important role in the debate. "It's a difficult balancing, of the state legislatures... and at the federal level, to say, Okay, where do we draw the line here? Where do we legislate and implement exactly what the appropriate use of technology capabilities are?"

FOUNDED IN 1990, the Electronic Frontier Foundation is a nonprofit focused on defending civil liberties in the digital world. Saira Hussain,

a staff attorney at the EFF, focuses on the intersection of racial justice and surveillance. Often, she says, new technologies are "tested on communities that are more vulnerable before they're rolled out to the rest of the population."

Hussain has abundant concerns about the iris-scanning and facial-recognition tools. If people who are arrested are not told of what is going to happen to their biometric data, it raises the question of whether they can meaningfully consent to it being collected. (There have also allegedly been cases in New York in which people have been detained longer for refusing to have their eyes scanned.) And the use of this technology at border checkpoints means it will disproportionately affect racialized travellers and migrants. "It's going to be individuals who are trying to flee from persecution and come into the United States, taking refuge," Hussain says, "and so the people who are going to be affected are people of colour."

Iris scans can be used to not just identify people but track them, Hussain explains. Iris and face recognition could be integrated into CCTV networks—surveillance cameras that are now found everywhere from shopping malls to transit vehicles—to identify a person without their knowledge. The concern is mission creep: once biometric data is gathered, it can be used to identify people in other contexts, and there's nothing individuals can do to monitor or stop it. (Mullin maintains that, while integrating iris scans with CCTV is theoretically possible, "In reality, it just doesn't work.")

"That's something we hear again and again in the space of privacy," Hussain says of the familiar argument that, if you've done nothing wrong, you have nothing to worry about. That flies in the face of any justice system that is "premised on the idea that you're innocent until proven guilty," she says. "So you're flipping the equation the other way. You can say the same thing about [a police] agent sitting outside of your house all day every day, tracking your movements. 'Well, if you don't have anything to hide, what's the big deal?'"

Applying for asylum is a process that is enshrined in international law.

It allows people fleeing violence, political persecution, or human rights abuses to claim asylum simply by arriving at an international border. The border agency of the country a person arrives at is then supposed to allow them into the country while they present their case to a court and the legal process unfolds.

Although this legal process exists, there are many reasons why asylum seekers may not trust that it will result in a fair outcome, and researchers are learning that the increasing use of AI and biometrics as mechanisms for border control exacerbates this problem. Sam Chambers, a geographer at the University of Arizona, says the surveillance and tracking of migrants makes crossing the border more precarious. “It’s not just about privacy—it’s about life and death there at the border,” he tells me. Chambers explains that the growth of border surveillance, including face and iris recognition, fits into a policy known as “prevention through deterrence,” an Orwellian-sounding term that has existed since the Bill Clinton administration. One example of the policy

is the Secure Border Initiative Network, or SBInet, created under George W. Bush and eventually shut down under Barack Obama: the system included sensor towers, radar, long-range cameras, thermal imaging, and motion sensors, all working in concert to detect, analyze, and categorize unauthorized border crossings.

Chambers has published studies demonstrating that SBInet led to a significant increase in migrant deaths in the unrelenting Arizona desert because people were forced to take more dangerous routes to avoid surveillance towers and checkpoints. Between 2002 and 2016, the mortality rate of unauthorized migrants in Pima County grew from about 43 deaths per 100,000 apprehensions to about 220 deaths per 100,000 apprehensions—five times the death rate.

“That’s the way the whole system is set up,” he says. “Even though it’s called prevention through deterrence, the thing is, it’s not really preventing people from crossing, and it’s not deterring people from crossing—they’re just taking more risk to do this. And that’s the case with crossing the river or, in the case of

southern Arizona, traversing the Sonoran Desert for an extended period of time.”

While SBInet was cancelled, private companies are innovating the same basic idea to spot more undocumented migrants. For instance, Lattice, an AI system developed by Anduril, a company started by former Facebook employee Palmer Luckey, has erected its sentry towers along the southern US border in Texas and California to recognize “threats,” including people and vehicles, crossing the border.

Chambers disapproves of using innovations like Lattice and IRIS to more quickly identify and deport people. “That’s a whole other reason [for migrants] to stay hidden.... If you had this happen and you have to try crossing again, you’re in a database somewhere, and if there’s some reason you’re found again, they can deport you more easily.”

Actually being granted asylum is rare in the US. According to a data research group at Syracuse University, under Donald Trump’s administration, 69,333 people were placed in Migrant Protection Protocols that kept them wait-

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ing in Mexico for asylum; only 615 were granted relief—less than 1 percent. Most migrants aren't provided with lawyers or translators: many struggle to present their cases in English, and they may not have enough evidence to back up their claim. For all the legitimate concern about the US push, over multiple administrations, to build a border wall and implement inhumane immigration policies including family separation—and Canada's ongoing use of detention centres to jail migrants—the increased use of AI struggles to gain ground in the conversation. But, for people with legitimate asylum claims, who are often people of colour, the growth of AI and biometrics in border control is yet another factor preventing them from crossing safely. There is comparatively little attention paid to AI and biometric systems we can't easily see but that, in many ways, are more effective than a wall.

PETRA MOLNAR, a human rights lawyer and associate director of the Refugee Law Lab at York University, is documenting the use of technology to track and control migrants, including drones, automated decision making, AI lie detectors, and biometrics. Last summer, she conducted field research on the island of Lesbos, Greece, the site of one of Europe's largest refugee camps. "There are all sorts of critiques about [surveillance technology] making the border more like a fortress, and that will likely lead to more deaths along the Mediterranean," Molnar says. "It's a proven phenomenon—the more you enforce that border, people will take riskier routes, they will not be rescued, they will drown, and so the fact that we are moving ahead on this technology without having a public conversation about the appropriateness of it, that's probably for me the most troubling part."

Molnar says we're seeing AI and biometrics experimentation in spaces where there is already a lack of oversight and people are unable to exercise their rights. Efforts to counterbalance this are so far scant. The EU has the General Data Protection Regulation, which prevents the use of solely automated

decision making, including that based on profiling. Massachusetts recently voted to prohibit facial recognition by law enforcement and public agencies, joining a handful of US cities in banning the tool. Molnar says that, in Canada, there are laws that may govern the use of AI indirectly, such as provincial and federal privacy and data-protection regulations, but these weren't written with AI specifically in mind, and their scope is unclear at the border.

Crucially, no country will be able to entirely address these issues in isolation. "In terms of a regionalized or even a global set of standards, we need to do a lot more work," Molnar says. "The governance and regulatory framework is patchy at best, so we're seeing the tech sector really dominate the conversation in terms of who gets to determine what's possible, what we want to innovate on, and what we want to see developed."

She says that, in Canada, there isn't enough of a conversation about regulation happening, and that's particularly worrying given that we share a massive land border with the US. She questions how much Canada is willing to stand up for human rights for vulnerable populations crossing the border. "Canada could take a much stronger stand on that, particularly because we always like to present ourselves as a human rights warrior, but then we also want to be a tech leader, and sometimes those things don't square together."

In 2018, Molnar co-authored a groundbreaking report, titled *Bots at the Gate*, that revealed the use of AI in Canada's immigration system. Produced by the University of Toronto's International Human Rights Program and the Citizen Lab at the Munk School of Global Affairs and Public Policy, the report exposed the Canadian government's current use of AI to assess the merits of some visa applications. She filed access to information requests to several federal bodies three years ago and is still waiting for them to turn over records. Agencies and departments can deny records, in full or in part, based on exemptions including national security grounds. "That is one of the key areas of concern for us because, in the

existing regulatory framework, there is no mandatory disclosure," she tells me.

Hussain from the Electronic Frontier Foundation says it's a similar story in the US, where the use of surveillance at the border remains shrouded in secrecy. "When it comes to ICE and Customs and Border Protection, we have found there's often an unwillingness to produce documents or that you may have to sue before you actually get to see anything," she says.

Molnar is up against rich tech giants, slow-moving, opaque bureaucracies, and a largely uninformed and complacent public. "It feels like a new fight, but it's not a new fight. It's the same kinds of questions that we've been asking ourselves for years, like, Where does power locate itself in society? Who gets to decide what world we want to build? Who gets to participate in these discussions?"

She is particularly worried about financial interests playing a role in determining which systems get implemented in border control and how. Governments rely on private companies to develop and deploy tech to control migration, meaning government liability and accountability are shifted to the private sector, she explains. Thanks to a freedom of information request by migrant-rights group Mijente, she tells me, we now know that tech firm Palantir, founded by Trump supporter Peter Thiel, quietly developed technology to identify undocumented people so ICE could deport them—just one example of the kind of threat she anticipates. "That's where I get worried, for sure, about whether we will win this fight, or whether it's even a fight that's possible to win," Molnar says. "But I think we have to keep trying because it's yet another example of how unequal our world is. The promise of technology, the romantic idea of it, was that it would equalize our world, that it would make things more democratic or more accessible, but if anything, we're seeing broader gaps and less access to power or the ability to benefit from technology." 🗨️

HILARY BEAUMONT is a freelance investigative journalist who has reported from Canada, the US, and Mexico.

FICTION

THE STARTUP

BY RACHEL JANSEN

ILLUSTRATION BY NIMIT MALAVIA

ON OUR THIRD and final round of interviews, they read us the Riot Act. Literally. Brian from middle management reads us an abridged version of the 1714 British proclamation and says that, if more than three of us are seen together, talking, and don't immediately disperse, we will be fired on the spot. I can't imagine a scenario where we would gather in such numbers—we are all fighting for the same coveted position, after all. As soon as a customer walks into the cucumber-mint fragranced entranceway, we pounce. Those gabbing would be last to catch the prey, the batlike cameras in the corners would swivel in their direction, and a quick tap on the shoulder from Brian would let them know they had been unceremoniously axed. Or, at least, that's what happened during Saturday's trial shift. Looking around at those of us still in the running, I know that won't be a problem. None of us are talkers.

It's hard to say what the startup sells because it sells experiences, which some argue can't be boxed and shrink-wrapped. But the startup's simulations are so good that the main complaint from users is how difficult they are to differentiate from reality. Customers recount to friends the time they heli-skied the Swiss Alps in the dead of winter, their blades cutting through the deep snow like knives through lemon meringue, only to have their friends remind them that they've never actually skied and that they get rashes when exposed to the cold for long periods of time.

During Saturday's trial shift, I managed to convince a customer to purchase ten minutes in the booth with that same ski sim and five minutes with one of our top-shelf sims—a lap of a circus tent on the back of an elephant for \$100 a minute. This earned me the camera's approximation of a mechanized nod from Brian, who himself was vying to become part of upper management by proving how proficient he was at training us.

We weren't sure what the task would be for the final round. Over the course of the initial interview and trial shift, we'd

been whittled down from a group of thirty-two to four candidates. On Saturday, after we had officially been told we had passed the second round by successfully upselling a customer from one sim to two, those remaining went for a smoke break in the mall's parking lot, which reeked of piss and chlorine.

"I bet it's weirdo clientele," Heather speculated, her voice baritone with vapour, "like we have to sell deep-sea diving to a claustrophobe or crowd-surfing at a music festival to an agoraphobe."

"I bet we have to try and get them to stay in the booth for over an hour," said Rory.

"What if we have to sell to masochists," asked Ian, his voice hitching at the word.

Everyone sucked a little harder on their vapes. "No way," said Heather, relaxing us all with an eye roll. "That's a different job altogether."

Post Riot Act reading, we stand in our assigned placements, Ian and I on one side of the entrance, Heather and Rory on the other. It's strange how quickly even this small arrangement manifests: I'm much more annoyed when Heather gets a sale than when Ian does, since he's, physically, on my side. I suspect management planned it this way, inspiring competition and animosity between us to drive up sales. And, even though I know this rationally, I still feel a primal churning in my stomach when I see Heather roll up her sleeves.

We were told that the candidate who makes the most money by EOD—by selling either a top-shelf sim or a few mid- to low-range ones—will get the job. I fiddle with the brochures in my apron, sliding my thumb along the glossed descriptions of the sims, ready to brandish one as soon I see a customer approaching.

One does. A man in his mid-forties, pouched in the middle, with a knob at the base of his neck I intuit to be the product of years of listless work punching numbers into a computer. An easy sale. I select the brochure without taking my eyes off him, "Winning an Oscar for Best Director." But, before I can



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get to him, my mouth already folded into a smile, I feel a tap on my shoulder.

“A word,” says Brian, whose features cluster together in the middle of his wide face, giving him the appearance of a baby trapped in a man’s body. He crooks a finger, indicating for me to follow him. A few steps away, we stop. Just enough time for Heather to swoop in with a “Lead Singer/Guitarist at a Sold-Out Stadium Show” brochure, her hand fluttering above, but careful not to touch, the small of the customer’s stooped back.

“Sorry to interrupt,” Brian says. “Upper management wanted me to come to you personally to tell you we’ve—I mean, they’ve—noticed how well you’ve been doing.”

“Thank you,” I say, my eyes flicking back to Heather, who’s now leading the man into one of the simulation booths, where, once the experience technicians have sat him down on the leather chair and wired him up with electrodes, he will soon be so immersed in thunderous applause—guitar pick warm between his fingers, marijuana smoke wafting around him—and so filled with the sudden, undeniable, and temporary revelation that he is worthy of praise that he’ll walk out of the booth a little straighter, thanking Heather effusively. He may even forget himself and his budget and ask for another suggestion.

“You’re a recent graduate, correct?”

“Yes,” I lie. Technically, I should be finishing my final year now, but no one ever bothers to confirm that sort of thing.

“Your degree was in—What was it again?”

“Psychology.”

“Ah,” says Brian, his tiny mouth breaking out into a tiny grin. “Makes sense. I knew there was a reason I kept you so long. Well, as I was saying, upper management,” he raises his chin toward the camera, “noticed you. They think you have great potential.”

Great potential. I heard that in the seven job interviews I had before I applied to the startup, all ending in how I “wasn’t the best fit” or how they had “decided to go with an inside hire.” My chest deflates. “Can I at least say goodbye

to Ian?” Between job-hunting and ensuring my mom showers, eats, and shuffles her slippers around the block before slumping back into bed each day, I didn’t have too much time for friends. There was something about Ian—beyond the manufactured alliance I had just experienced—that reminded me why they were necessary. Like the way he passed a customer off to me last shift when he saw I was struggling to make a sale, or how animated his face gets when he speaks of the simulations, as though he genuinely believes they can help people live better, richer lives.

The simulations could cost up to \$500 per minute, and here we were, getting them for free.

Brian’s eyebrows tug inward. “Oh, oh no.” He laughs. “We’re not letting you go. No no no. *Au contraire*, we think you have immense potential. Immense. A real grasp on human behaviour, unlike some of your fellow applicants. Which is why we think you’d be a good fit for our Growth Development Program.”

“You want me to sell to the masochists?” I say without thinking. As trainees, we’d all been comped every simulation so that we could have experience with each experience. That was another gauntlet only those now remaining had survived. At first, we were thrilled: the simulations could cost up to \$500 per minute, and here we were, getting them for free. We hang-glided through the Arabian Desert; we made out with Robert Pattinson, who told us he loved us after we had delivered coffee to him on set; we discovered an entirely new species of monkey in the Amazon. But we also had to sample the

negative sims, the ones the Growth Development Program employees sold to “Seeker-Type” customers, or as we called them, “masochists.” I found myself stuck in a city without knowing the language. I ate the spiciest pepper from Spanish tapas. I wasn’t able to move my arms or legs properly while trying to outrun a bear. Of course, it sounds crueller than it actually is: we were allowed to opt out of certain simulations if we’d been through something similar in real life, probably in order to avoid lawsuits. I opted out of “Death of a Beloved Parent” and “Living on 800 Calories a Day.”

Brian’s face suddenly becomes much more adult, weary and expectant. “We don’t like to use the word *masochists*, especially around the customers.”

“Sorry.”

He brightens. “It’s an incredible opportunity. Think of it as giving people the requisite tools they need in life. Pain is the cornerstone of growth, you know.” I begin to think of growth as a callus—a protective barrier but an ugly one, devoid of feeling. Before I can object, Brian beckons over Paige, one of the GDP employees placed at the back of the store. Brian introduces us, explaining that I will be doing a trial shift as a Growth Development Guide. “Why don’t you take her into the break room to give her a brief overview?” Paige, who has bouncy red curls, just gives Brian a curt nod.

PAIGE LEADS ME into a windowless room with two matted chairs.

She removes a sandwich from the mini fridge. I tamp down the urge to ask her questions about the job—why she chose to become a Growth Development Guide, how quickly she received a pay raise, if the benefits covered counselling for family members. She sits down on one of the chairs and crosses her ankles, acting as though she’s management and not just a staffer like me. “At least I get a bit of an extra break out of this” are her first words. After taking a bite out of the sandwich, Paige turns her attention to me. “So, you’re training as a GDG?”

“I didn’t ask to.”

She gives me a look of painful disdain. “None of us did.” A bead of mayo rests



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on the corner of her lip. “The trick,” she continues, “is to know the difference between those who know they want a bad experience and those who don’t yet know.” I take out a piece of paper and a pen from my apron and scribble this down, perching on the arm of the chair Paige’s feet rest on. “The ones who know they want it are easy. They’re people looking to ‘expand their horizons,’ to have a taste of something difficult but not the whole dish. They’re usually white, usually rich.

“The ones who don’t know they want it yet are tougher to pick out,” she continues, her face becoming more animated. “They’re wandering around the store kind of aimlessly. They’re usually older, around forty or fifty. They clear their throats or crack their knuckles a lot. Give them space. Hover close, but not too close.” Paige pulls her feet off the chair, her neck pushing forward, arms winged out on either side. “They’ll pace, their eyes drifting around the room until they meet your eyes.” Paige’s own eyes are two hot pans. She leans back and takes another bite of the sandwich. “That’s the moment. That’s when you make your offer.”

“And offer them what?”

“Anything that counts as a Growth Development Program simulation. My biggest go-to is ‘Going to School Naked Thinking It’s a Dream but Then Realizing It’s Not,’ but everyone has their own arsenal. ‘Barely Escaping a Fire That Burns Your Entire House Except Your Cat’ is pretty popular.”

“Why would anyone want to do that voluntarily?”

Paige shrugs. “Boredom. Anger. Grief. The desire to have a defining moment in their life.” Her eyes narrow. “Just remember to take payment up front.”

“Why?”

“Because no one’s going to be thanking you afterward.”

brochures lining the walls and stacked in my apron; apparently, the CEO felt the analog format would inspire a sense of nostalgia in customers, easing open their purse strings. A few customers approach me eagerly but with the wrong sim brochures in their hands. Begrudgingly, I pass them off to Ian and Heather and Rory, who thank me with mystified smiles. I don’t bother returning them except for Ian’s. It’s bad enough that I lost precious time in the meeting with Paige, but GDP sims are notoriously more difficult to sell, for obvious reasons, even if they are all technically top shelf, and I don’t need my fellow candidates’ pity on top of everything else.

A woman appears in my line of vision. She’s so slight I feel she could turn sideways and disappear. It’s hard to gauge her age, but I get the feeling she looks older than she actually is, her pale face worried into lines. Her hands skim the brochures placed against the back wall, never resting on one for too long. Her eyes meet mine briefly, then turn back toward the wall.

I approach slowly, my hands behind my back. “How can I help you?” I ask, careful to keep my tone even.

“I was just looking for something...” She trails off and touches her forehead as if she’s forgotten something important.

I round my shoulders. There’s something in the frailty of this woman that makes me want to send her to Ian to sample every dessert in a Parisian café or jump into a cold lake on a hot day. I look up into one of the cameras mounted on the wall opposite me. “May I ask what you do for a living?” I say, running through my script.

“I was a teacher.”

“Was?”

“I’m on bereavement leave.”

I force myself not to react outwardly. “Oh,” I say. “Perhaps you need a trip.” I glance at the camera once more, willing it to swivel away. But the camera’s lens remains fixed on me.

“Perhaps,” she says, flossing her necklace across her chin.

I take in a deep breath. “Or maybe something a little more unusual. A shock to the system.”

“A shock to the system,” she repeats.

“People often don’t know what they need until they get it,” I say, improvising now. At this, the woman nods. “We have several options for experiences that are a little bit...unusual.” I select a brochure out of my apron. “One I’d recommend is ‘Held Under Waves Until You Lose All Air Then Kick Off Sand Bottom.’” I show the customer the brochure of the sim, one of our most expensive, with its photo of a middle-aged woman triumphantly breaking the surface of a roiling sea.

For a moment, I consider tearing up the brochure; telling the woman to high-tail it out of this store, to get real help, to resist the urge to escape; reminding her that she must have people who still need her, and not just financially, although that too.

The woman slips the brochure from my hands and holds it carefully. I blink and the face on it becomes anonymous again. “Does it hurt?”

“Pain is the cornerstone of growth,” I say.

“I don’t know,” she says.

Out of the corner of my eye, I see Heather leading another customer to the booths. My stomach swoops, my skin static with attention again: even if she’s selling mid-range sims, that’s still two more sales than I have. I meet the woman’s eyes. “You don’t know what you’re capable of until you’re pushed,” I say in an urgent voice. “And, once you see, once you see how much you’re able to withstand—well, that’s something you’ll never forget. You won’t know until that moment just how much you want to survive.”

She looks down at the picture. “Just like that?”

I break protocol and touch her hand. “Just like that.” ☼

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RACHEL JANSEN lives and writes on the unceded territories of the Musqueam, Squamish, and Tsleil-Waututh Nations, otherwise known as Vancouver. Her work has appeared in *Maclean’s*, the *Globe and Mail*, *Maisonneuve*, *Geist*, and *The Malahat Review*. At the 2020 National Magazine Awards, she received an Honourable Mention for Best Emerging Writer.

TEN MINUTES LATER, I’m wandering around the back of the store, which looks, with its glossy white walls and ubiquitous logos, like just about every other tech store in the mall. The only thing that sets it apart are the

MEMOIR

Death in the Age of Facebook

What it's like to mourn a mother via social media

BY SANDY POOL

ILLUSTRATIONS BY MIRI MOLEV

—You have never known a Woman's body!
—I have known the body of my mother, sick and then dying.

Roland Barthes, *Mourning Diary*

I LEARNED THE NEWS of my mother's death on Facebook. I had left her the day before, tiny swimmer in an Olympic-sized hospice bed. Her parched mouth was open, but her breathing was wet. When I kissed her forehead, she smelled salty, sweet—a sticky, human smell.

I read the news of her death sitting in Pearson airport, stress eating a hamburger. I was heading back to stupid London, where I had a stupid job interview I was not prepared for. When I had kissed my mother in her hospice bed, she was still alive and full of desire. She wanted to swim. I, too, needed her to be alive. I'd asked everyone not to disclose anything mother related until my interview was done, worried I wouldn't board the plane. And then, instantly, she was gone because my uncle posted it on Facebook.

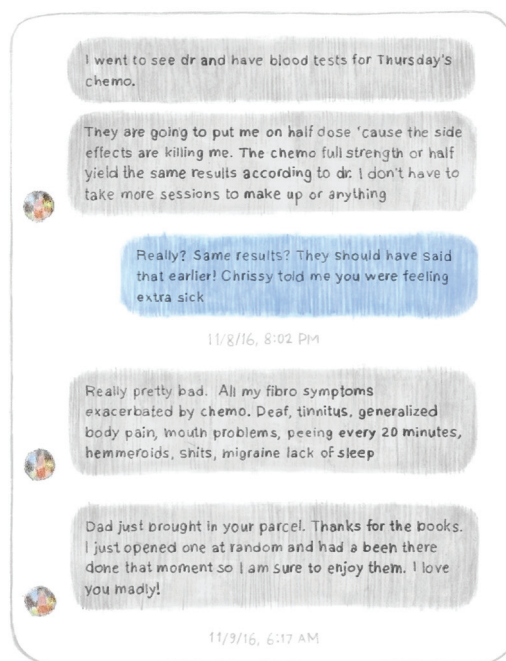
Forty minutes later, I was standing in the middle of a Boeing 767. I hadn't known what else to do. I tried to fit my bag above my seat, but it wouldn't fit. I panicked. I approached the flight attendant, weeping. *My bag doesn't fit and I just found out my mother died on Facebook.* I was instantly upgraded.

Serious question: If your mother dies on Facebook, is it true?

In 2015, Facebook announced a new policy that allows you to designate a “legacy contact” who is allowed to pin a post on your timeline after your death. The contact can't log in or read private messages but can respond to friend requests, archive posts, etc. Before, Facebook profiles of the deceased could only be “memorialized,” deleted or left unchanged after death.

I found this out after my sister and I spent hours trying to guess my mother's password, which turned out to be frustratingly obvious.

There was some comfort in finally getting my mother's password right. It was like a test, a sibling competition to see how well we knew her. My sister won, but I was a close second. When we finally cracked the code, we didn't know what to do. It was suddenly too intimate to





see her whole digital life splayed out before us. We scrolled endlessly. Months later, I had the same feeling seeing my mother's wedding ring on my hand in a different country: a reminder something world altering had occurred.

I was charmed by the fact that my mother's Facebook friends were mostly family, that her news feed featured the same names over and over. I have often thought about paring down my own friend list this way. I also noticed that my mother seemed fixated on posting about Canadian social issues—dying with dignity, ADHD awareness, Amber Alerts: missing children from Thunder Bay, missing children from Midland, from Montreal, from Aylmer, from Cliford, from North Vancouver, from Kenora. So many missing children. A pang—What was she trying to say?

MARSHALL McLuhan: “The new electronic interdependence recreates the world in the image of a global village.”

What I don't know: What does it mean to exist in an image that will outlive you?

In 1977, when Roland Barthes lost his mother, he returned to live in the apartment he had shared with her. The apartment became a fixture in his grief. He did not want to live in the apartment, but he also knew there was no other place. The furniture took on a life of its own: “As soon as someone dies, frenzied construction of the future (shifting furniture, etc.): futuromania.”

When my mother died, I had not lived with my parents for many years, and I lived in a different country with very little furniture to shift. Instead of repositioning the couch, I obsessively reread my mother's Facebook messages.

Eventually, my mother had become too sick to talk on the phone. Most of our conversations took place on Facebook Messenger at incredibly odd hours.

Barthes: “In the sentence ‘She's no longer suffering,’ to what, to whom does ‘she’ refer? What does that present tense mean?” In my old Facebook messages, my mother is still alive—suffering and symptomatic in the middle of the night.

Serious question: How to mourn when your mother becomes an avatar?

Barthes: “Don't say *Mourning*. It's too psychoanalytic. I'm not *mourning*. I'm suffering.”

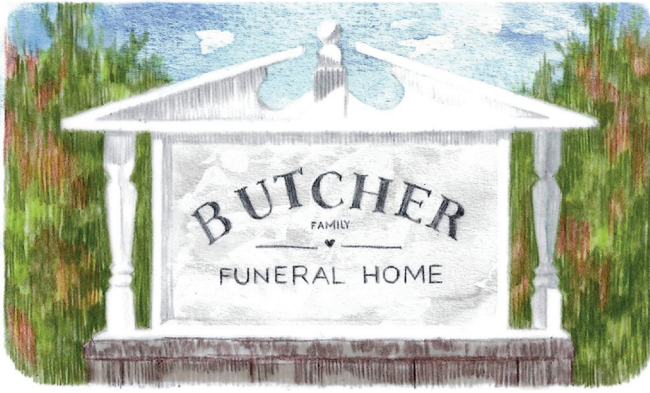
Is Facebook my mother's digital urn?

After his mother died, Barthes wrote: “Since *maman's* death, my life has not managed to constitute itself as *memory*. Flat, without the vibratory halo of ‘I remember...’”

I, too, have had trouble remembering. I arrived home in Canada the night before my mother went into the hospice. I know I brought my mother's favourite foods: strawberries and whipped cream, pasta salad, chips and dip. But I can't remember what we said to each other. I asked my sister later, but we could only vaguely remember what we had talked about. The next morning, my mother fell out of bed and went straight into hospice care, where she was heavily sedated. A week later, she was dead.

I consulted my last Facebook messages, but they were of little help. Toward the end, my mother was too sick to answer.

This is the trouble with any urn, digital or otherwise—it doesn't hold the right kind of data.



After my mother died, my father and I struggled to find the “perfect” urn. Eventually, we settled on an antique copper jug that she had owned—the kind you would find with matching water basins in a southern Ontario farmhouse. It seemed correct, but I was troubled by the lack of a lid. I wondered how my mother would have felt if she’d known that she would eventually be put inside a copper jug that she had chosen as decor.

I called my sister to discuss the choice of jug. A long silence on the end of the line. “But it doesn’t have a lid.”

BARTHES: “Sometimes, very briefly, a blank moment—a kind of numbness—which is not a moment of forgetfulness. This terrifies me.”

Also Barthes: “No sooner has she departed than the world deafens me with its *continuance*.”

We decided on a celebration of life instead of a funeral. We catered it with all the foods my mother liked. As I couldn’t afford a second ticket home from Europe, my sister Facebook video’d me into the service.

The funeral home was just as I remembered it from my grandmother’s service, an untouched relic of the ’80s: turquoise carpeting and light-pink walls. It had recently changed ownership, but when we were growing up, it had been called the Butcher Family Funeral Home. The sign used to be a running joke on the internet because the word “Butcher” was in large letters over smaller letters that read “Family Funeral Home.” My father, a typesetter, declared it a perfect example of why the art of typesetting isn’t dead.

My sister and I had always thought of it as perfectly normal when we were growing up, since we knew all the Butcher kids. We didn’t understand why people kept pulling over to take pictures of the sign with their phones.

My sister switched to her front camera, to show me the urn, and indeed it looked quite wonderful with a spray of white and yellow roses and wildflowers around it. She’d polished the jug, she mentioned, because she’d decided my mother wouldn’t want to be put inside any piece of copper that wasn’t perfectly buffed.

She asked if I wanted to say anything, but I couldn’t think of anything to say. I couldn’t bring myself to video chat with the jug. I could only imagine my mother laughing mercilessly from the next room as I said goodbye to part of her dining room set.

What bothered me, of course, was death deranging my grasp of the object. The copper jug was mimicking life. It demanded cleaning and maintenance. It was standing there, cruelly immortal, and my mother was not.

When Barthes returned home to his mother’s apartment, he tidied his “new” living space. “Around 6 p.m.: the apartment is warm, clean, well-lit, pleasant. I make it that way, energetically, devotedly (enjoying it *bitterly*): henceforth and forever I am my own mother.”

Serious question: How do you make your dead mother continue to live?

Recently, on Facebook, a green dot lit up beside my mother’s name. My heart swelled and then plunged into my stomach. Of course my mother is not online. It is only my sister on my mother’s account: another avatar.

The problem with Facebook is that it is so incredibly alive. Even without an avatar, there’s always a cache, a backup, a screenshot. The posts we publish are the digital furniture that remain after all other abandonments have occurred.

IT IS UNCLEAR how Barthes intended to publish his mourning diary. For two years after his mother’s death, he jotted fragments on 330 individual slips of paper. These were not published until twenty-nine years after his own death. Perhaps he hoped the fragments would eventually gel into a fluid form.

Neil Badmington, in *The Afterlives of Roland Barthes*: “To write loss is to honour love and what has been lost, but ‘making literature out of it’ involves accepting death, accepting the empty room, and accepting this, moreover, in language which, as language, honours no singularity.”

Barthes: “*Despair*: the word is too theatrical, a part of the language. A stone.”

For Barthes, images also present us with a multitude of semiotic confusions.

For instance: at the university, someone asked me how I was. I said I couldn’t stop thinking about a bathing suit my mother used to wear. This isn’t what I meant, exactly, or maybe it is.

To me, the bathing suit was iconic of my mother. I had a clear image in my head. Recently, at H&M, I found one with a similar pattern and sent my sister a picture on Facebook.

We both knew immediately that it was not exactly right. A simulacrum with no original.

Barthes, too, understood this. “What we have is a new space-time category: spatial immediacy and temporal anteriority, the photograph being an illogical conjunction between the *here-now* and the *there-then*.”

On Facebook, my mother is caught in a film reeled backwards:



leaping out from churning water, waving her arms—leaving a perfectly smooth surface behind her.

McLuhan: “One thing about which fish know exactly nothing is water, since they have no anti-environment which would enable them to perceive the element they live in.”

Digital time will not right itself.

My mother swimming farther and farther away.

Like Barthes, I provide no monument for my mother. Only fragments—a tissue of quotations in the wrong order.

Barthes: “There’s no text without filiation.”

Also Barthes: “Everything pains me. The merest trifle rouses a sense of abandonment.”

On the day of his own death, Barthes left an unfinished essay curled in his typewriter, titled: “One Always Fails to Speak of What One Loves.”

Every sentence struggling against its own momentum.

Every image, a punctum, a wound. ✨

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SANDY POOL is a Canadian writer and a professor of creative writing at the University of East Anglia, in Norwich, UK. Her third book, *I Love Lucy*, a collection of essays, is forthcoming.



24 Comments 10 Shares

Palinopsia

BY JACOB SCHEIER

I confess there’s something lovely about you, red smear
outside the window pecking the fallen grain.

A cardinal or warbler, perhaps. I don’t
give a shit what kind of bird you are.

I haven’t done my research into the red birds
of southern Ontario. Before the accident,

I would have admonished my students
for writing about anything

without doing their homework. I can’t
explain how entirely irrelevant

your name is to me. How to make an image
for the pain of not caring? It’s like the pain

of not caring. I would have told them,
“If you can’t explain, you’re not trying

hard enough, because writing is finding words
for those who claim words fail.”

I’m not trying hard enough. It doesn’t matter
if I was right then. I know only

that writing is like my medication.

It may be stopping me from dying,

which is not the same thing

as keeping me alive. I can’t

explain it better than that,

or I refuse. There’s a language game

we could play over whether

a perception of a flapping red thing

is still a bird. If I cannot see you

properly, whatever you’re named,

are you still functioning as ode material?

Keats’s nightingale flares

and smears, a neurological malady

that dies with him. I watch you, mortal smudge

with the contrast of your deep red feathers

against the green tint of a browning roof,

to admire or despise. To go on (or not go on),

to record your beauty, ugly. I celebrate you,

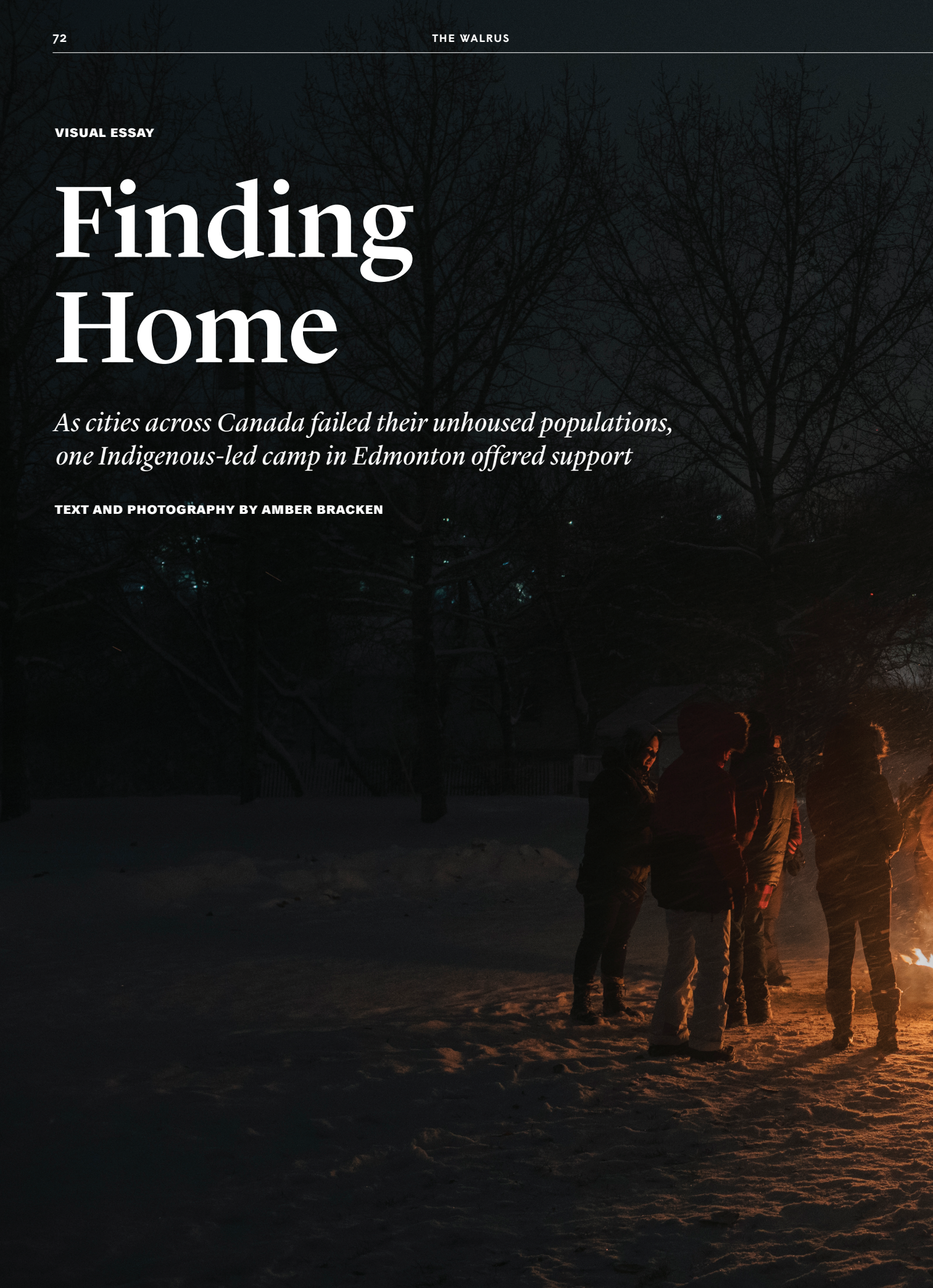
small red beat, out of protest.

VISUAL ESSAY

Finding Home

As cities across Canada failed their unhoused populations, one Indigenous-led camp in Edmonton offered support

TEXT AND PHOTOGRAPHY BY AMBER BRACKEN



LAST JULY, an encampment appeared on an unassuming two-acre plot of grass in Edmonton, almost in the shadow of the Alberta Legislature Building. A collective of outreach workers and advocacy groups erected a tipi and a few tents and started a sacred fire. They were there to increase visibility of the sometimes brutal treatment of unhoused people and to aid Indigenous people in a country where, due to colonization, they are more likely to be homeless than non-Indigenous people are.





Clark Redhead

“I’m in good health. I’m strong. I’m not aching anywhere, no bones aching. I keep my feet warm all the time. I change my socks at least three times a day on account of my shoes, because they’re so absorbent of the water. . . .

“The greatest fear is just not being with my baby. I want to spend the new year with her. I just hope I get housed soon—I miss her so much.”



Larry Gallagher

“Homeless for the first time right at the start of the pandemic, in the cold of winter. I didn’t know how to be homeless. I was cold. I was riding a bus all night, till like three in the morning, till they closed, and riding the bus again at five o’clock in the morning. Sleeping under bridges, breaking into abandoned buildings to sleep in. . . .

“There’s a lot of people who are homeless. And, because of COVID, now there are hundreds more, so now it’s getting all the attention. But there are people I’ve met who have been homeless for three years, two years, seven years. And that’s not because of COVID, but maybe it’s because we’re not helping them properly.”



Charlie Cardinal *and* Douglas Adams

CARDINAL: “I’m tired of being shipped around and moved around. We’ve got to have a ground where we can stand and say it’s our own, without having the government or city police or any authority come telling us we have to get evicted or move on somewhere else. There’s really nowhere for us to go.”

ADAMS: “All my life, I’ve been on the street. But I’ve suffered the same thing the whole time. So I’m kind of stuck in my ways, knowing that there’s nothing out there for me. This is not my world. There’s a lot of things where you hope for it but it never happens, because of my skin colour. . . . The bottom line is that we do what we need to survive out here. That’s what they call us from residential schools: survivors. And we are survivors.”

Kathy Hamelin

Volunteer

“The true leaders are the youth and the Two Spirit and queer folks. They’re the ones who established this camp. They’re the ones who have the dream, who had the vision—the same dream and vision we have, my generation had, and the generations before my mom’s generation had....

“[My grandfather] said that, when people need medicine, you give it to them. It’s not for you to decide who is worthy of medicine.... But, when people smudged with us, even though they were under the influence or less than four days clean and sober, they just cried, some of them just broke down and cried. Some of them even got down on their knees and kissed the ground. A lot of these people keep that culture within themselves. And that’s what’s lacking in these houseless agencies.”







LEFT The camp is closed with a round dance.

ABOVE Edmonton police oversee the camp eviction.

OPPOSITE

Camp members take care of one another, including braiding hair and wrapping feet in plastic to protect against frostbite.

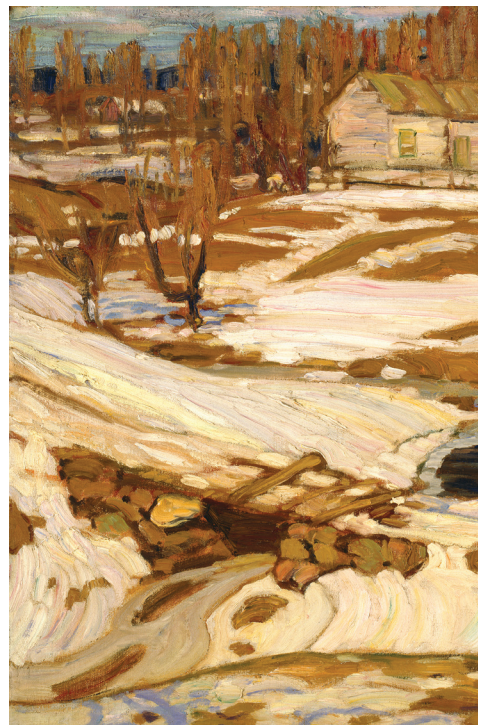
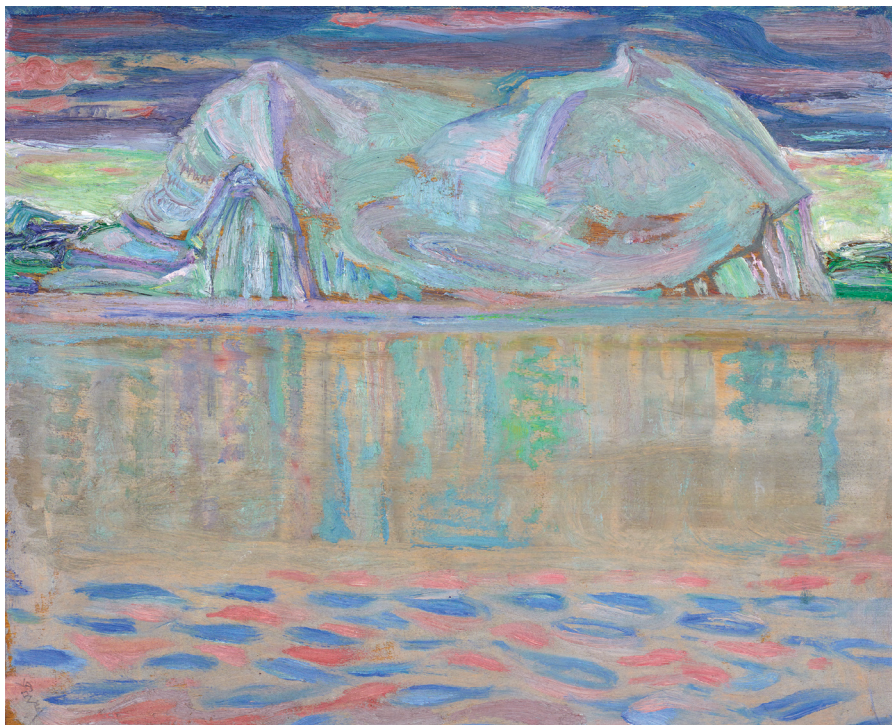
Intentionally established on an ancestral Indigenous gathering and burial place, the camp was named Pekiwewin, Cree for “coming home.” It quickly began welcoming unhoused people, offering critical essentials like food, water, and ceremony. Within weeks, the camp grew to around 170 tents and served 400 people. Elders offered prayers, volunteers prepared meals and handed out supplies, and medics stood by in case of emergencies.

Lack of access to safe, affordable housing has been a rising issue in Canadian cities for years, with 235,000 people experiencing homelessness each year. In Edmonton, the COVID-19 pandemic upended services for the city’s approximately 1,900 unhoused people in a way that made survival difficult. Restrictions for physical distancing

meant they had even less access to basic needs like food, health care, and housing support. The Alberta government committed \$48 million to expanding emergency shelter space and funding services, and opened new spaces with more beds, but many in the city’s homeless community preferred to avoid a shelter’s proscriptive rules and close quarters—particularly concerning during a pandemic—and found safety and support in Pekiwewin.

Camp organizers called for the city to divest \$39 million from Edmonton police, waive transit fares, and put an end to tent-slashing and bylaws that target homeless people. Pekiwewin called itself a prayer camp; officials saw it as a protest camp. It stood for more than a hundred days and closed in November, under threat of eviction. The next day, a city-run shelter hit capacity and had to turn people away in the midst of a snowstorm. And, within days, police evicted those who remained at Pekiwewin. Camp organizers and officials agree that there are no short-term solutions to homelessness, but the pandemic has forced a reckoning. And no one wants things to go back to the way they were. 🏠

AMBER BRACKEN is an Edmonton-based photographer who has been published in *National Geographic*, the *New York Times*, and the *Globe and Mail*.



THE GROUP OF SEVEN'S first exhibition was a bit of a disappointment. It was May 1920, and the founding seven artists—Franklin Carmichael, Lawren Harris, A. Y. Jackson, Frank Johnston, Arthur Lismer, J. E. H. MacDonald, and Frederick Varley—had booked Toronto's then fledgling Art Gallery of Ontario to share their work. After the nearly three-week run, only five of the 121 works were sold. And, when the reviews came in, some were critical. Compared to the traditional European styles that dominated at the time—think John Constable's romantic landscapes or the gauzy realism of Jean-Baptiste-Camille Corot and Jean-François Millet—the group's bold takes on the northern landscape provoked strong reaction. "Are these new Canadian painters crazy?" asked a headline in the *Canadian Courier*, preceding much of the derision that the group would later receive over its thirteen-year-run.

One hundred and one years later, the Group of Seven may comprise the most popular artists in this country's history (matched only by their close associate Tom Thomson, who disappeared during a canoe trip before the group officially formed). Their landscapes are not just rooted in the national canon; at times,

they feel like they define the canon. The artists have been the subject of blockbuster exhibitions, books, documentaries, and at least one rock album (The Rheostatics' 1995 *Music Inspired by the Group of Seven*). In the private market, Harris's *Mountain Forms* is the most expensive work ever sold by a Canadian at auction, going for more than \$11 million in 2016. The National Gallery of Canada, the Art Gallery of Ontario, and the McMichael Canadian Art Collection have entire wings dedicated to the group, each with associated gift shops featuring postcards, calendars, wall prints, and coffee table books.

It's easy to understand the continued popularity: the group defined how innumerable Canadians have perceived this country. Harris's signature mystical

icebergs and winter suns capture feelings that photographs rarely can. In *North Shore, Lake Superior*, his clouds are so solid it's easy to mistake them for mountains; the sun streaks down on a lone tree stump in unreal opacity. MacDonald took a more organic approach to nature and had the uncanny ability to translate into thick paint the saturated colours of autumn with each stroke. Jackson, meanwhile, often worked with an almost monochromatic palette, capturing how light can imbue the northern landscape with various hues: in *Early Spring, Emileville, Quebec*, a shadow of purple interrupts the oranges and whites like a bruise.

The Group of Seven's centennial, last year, may have been partly muted by the many COVID-19 closures, but there was still plenty of celebration. There were

ARTS

Looking Past the Group of Seven

A century after the group's debut show, it's time to rethink how we see Canadian art

BY TATUM DOOLEY



articles and essays, and forty-five minutes outside of Toronto, in Kleinburg, the McMichael is hosting a massive exhibition, featuring more than 280 works, until November. The McMichael's executive director, Ian A. C. DeJardin, also recently published *A Like Vision*, a hefty compendium to the show that compiles images along with essays by artists, scholars, and musicians, who all muse on their personal relationships with the group.

A Like Vision is a surprising text: coming from the McMichael, an institution created in the 1960s with the mandate of championing the Group of Seven, the book, though still largely laudatory, also deconstructs the myths that have grown around the artists over the decades, examining how and why this particular smattering of men came to dominate our collective imagination and embody Canadian identity. Talented as the Group of Seven's members were, their cultural capital did not come about entirely through word of mouth or the sheer force of their genius. Rather, these few artists were chosen by a handful of institutional leaders and rose on a relentless PR campaign mixed with some rather calculated self-promotion. They were made on a level of support that no other artists, before or since, have ever received.

THE GROUP OF SEVEN's success is, in many ways, a story about reproduction. From the late '20s on, certain members—Lismer and Jackson in particular—worked closely with the National Gallery of Canada to move their art beyond galleries and into the public's everyday life.

This populist appeal was possible thanks to a new national program that sold inexpensive silkscreen prints to government buildings and the public, a strategy designed to educate the nascent country on the burgeoning Canadian art movement. As visual arts academic Joyce Zemans describes in her definitive 1995 research paper "Establishing the Canon," this series was created to elevate and support homegrown artists alongside their European peers. Tasked with selecting the artists was staunch Group of Seven ally Eric Brown, director of Ottawa's then young National Gallery. Also involved was Lismer himself, who selected the images and wrote the associated study guides. Perhaps unsurprisingly, Lismer and his colleagues became the focal point of the series and benefited most when hundreds of thousands of prints flooded into schools, libraries, and homes.

"The selection of work for the Canadian series was as remarkable for what it excluded as for what it included," Zemans writes. There were no artists from the

Prairies. None from the east or west coasts. Emily Carr was omitted—as was every other woman painter. So too were Indigenous artists and even art that depicted Indigenous people. Rather, the selected works focused on pristine, empty wilderness, untamed by industry and untainted by people—an aesthetic with the Group of Seven as its epitome. "It influenced the entire country's idea of what was Canadian about Canadian art," Zemans writes. It also positioned Tom Thomson and the Group of Seven "at the apex of Canadian artistic achievement."

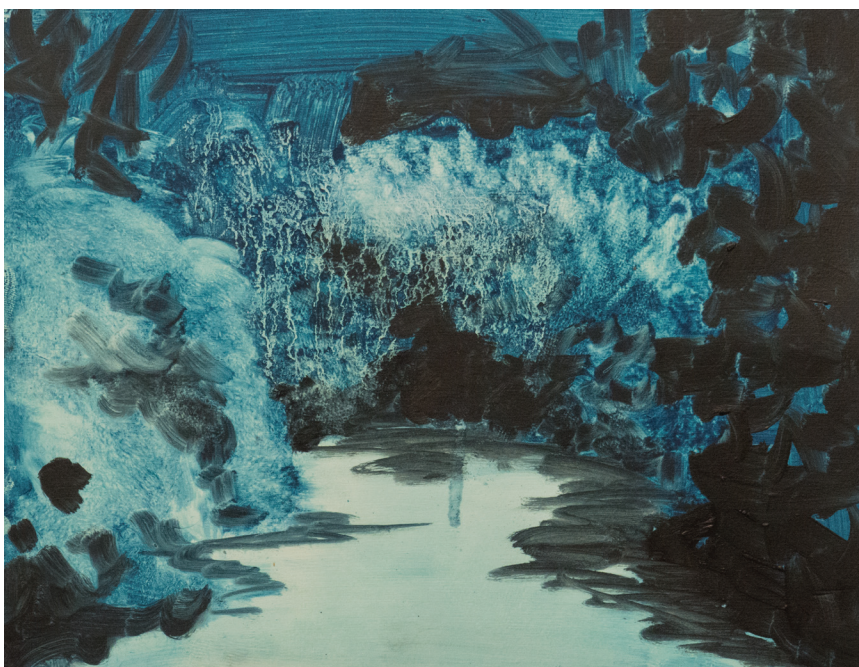
The print series was expanded during the Second World War to help promote nationalism. This time, it was Jackson leading the charge, working alongside the National Gallery of Canada to create a similar series of reproductions for army bases, at home and abroad, in a bid to raise troop morale. Once again, about one-fifth of selected works were by Thomson and the Group of Seven.

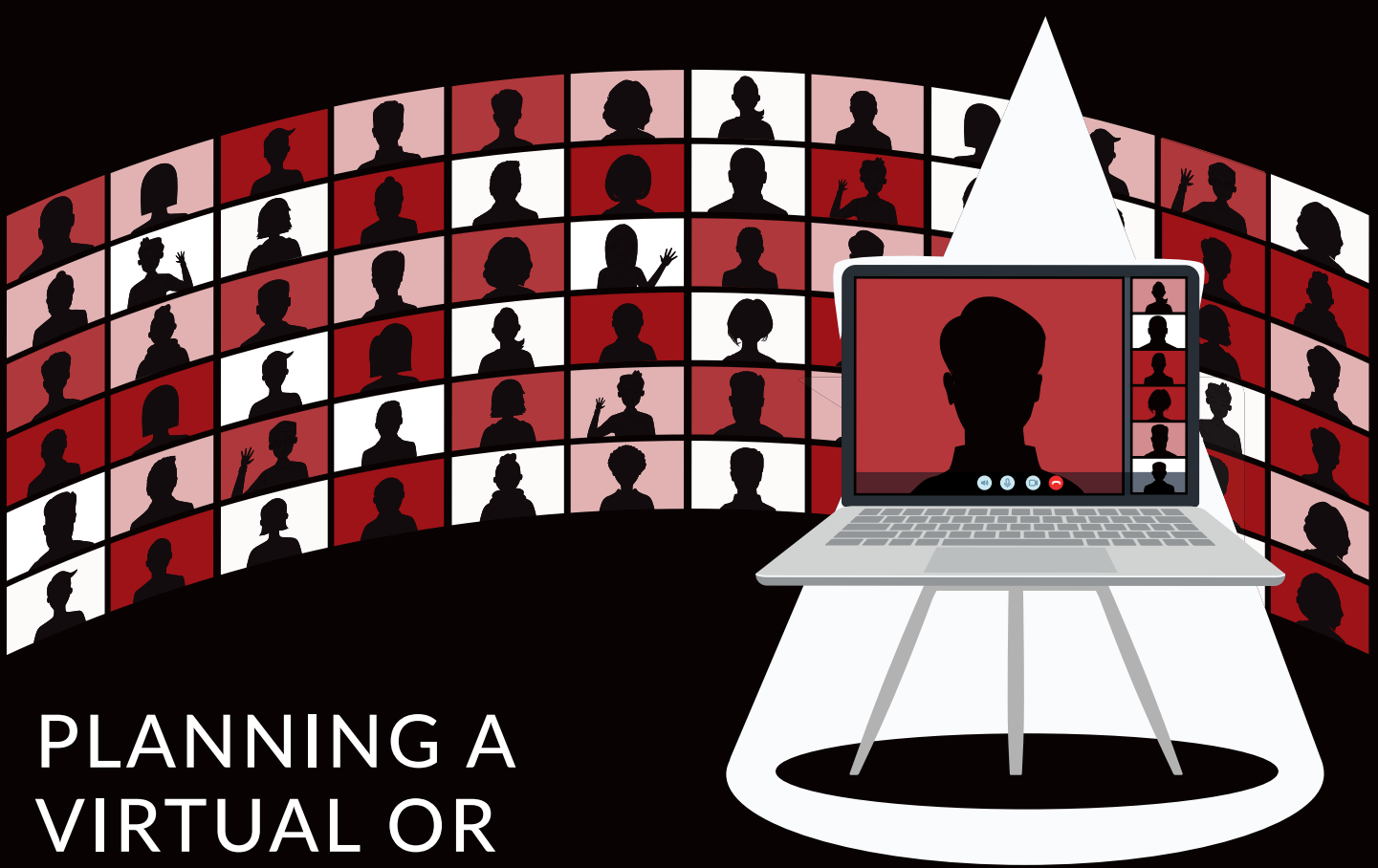
These reproductions became a regular part of public life over the following decades. "Tom Thomson's paintings *The Jack Pine* and *The West Wind* were an

TOP, LEFT TO

RIGHT *Iceberg* by F.H. Varley (1938); *Early Spring, Emileville, Quebec* by A.Y. Jackson (1913)

BOTTOM RIGHT *Sanctuary (Study I)* by Emmanuel Osahor (2017)





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inescapable part of growing up in Canada in the 1950s and '60s, displayed as they were in every classroom, every bank," writes singer Bruce Cockburn in *A Like Vision*. In another essay, Jayne Wilkinson, of *Canadian Art*, writes about how these prints found their way into childhood memories and describes inheriting a coveted J.E.H. MacDonald reproduction after the death of her grandmother.

For generations, the Group of Seven was ubiquitous. But dissent over its prominence was also present. And, to its credit, *A Like Vision* allows its contributors to air some of their discontent. An essay by jewellery and textile designer Taralick Duffy is notable in its honesty: "My first reflection on seeing Varley's *Iceberg* was, Am I allowed to think this is ugly?" Others articulate their unease with the way the group's works have upheld colonial values. Wilkinson, for example, criticizes MacDonald's painting of British Columbia's Lake O'Hara for making the land appear unpopulated even though it was the traditional territory of the Ktunaxa people. As she writes: "This painting thus offers us a fantasy."

That fantasy is something that also bothers Bonnie Devine, founding chair of OCAD University's Indigenous Visual Culture Program. In her own essay, she examines how these settlers' perspectives of the North were inadequate in capturing the land because they lacked a fundamental understanding of it. "So go ahead, Painter," she writes. "Try to uncoil the bulky length of Pic Island. She will twist away and gather herself elsewhere like a drift of heavy snow just out of your reach."

But it's not just the content of their work that must be grappled with. After 101 years of reproducing the Group of Seven's art to the point of saturation, it feels like the time has come to give other, contemporary voices the same opportunities. It's not enough to mount gallery shows with diverse rosters—perhaps a new reproduction program, like the national series that first catapulted the Group of Seven to the masses, is needed. One that gives access for anyone who wants it, encompassing the many talented artists who reflect the lived reality of Canadians. What would it look like to see prints of Inuk artist Mark Igloliorte's

Islands in our banks, its deep-red canvas—the same hue as the ore from Labrador's mines—overlaid with fractures that mimic a topographical map? Or what about the lush, sanctuary-like landscapes from Nigerian-born, Toronto-based Emmanuel Osahor hanging in classrooms from coast to coast to coast? The fading tableaux of Inuvialuk/Gwich'in artist Darcie Bernhardt, which beautifully reflect the nature of memory, should garner the same reach.

It's no longer the shadow of Corot, Constable, and Millet that contemporary painters must escape but that of a cluster of modernists who started out wanting to upend the pantheon and, in the end, only replaced it. The Group of Seven has admirably done its part in bridging Canadian art from traditionalism to disruption. But, a century later, it's time to pivot once again: a new zeitgeist must form. ✍

TATUM DOOLEY is a writer and curator based in Toronto. Her work has appeared in *Artforum*, *Bordercrossings*, *Canadian Art*, *Garage Magazine*, the *Globe and Mail*, *Lapham's Quarterly*, and more.



Allan Slaight Prize
for Journalism

Congratulations to Sharon J. Riley, recipient of the 2020 Allan Slaight Prize for Journalism.

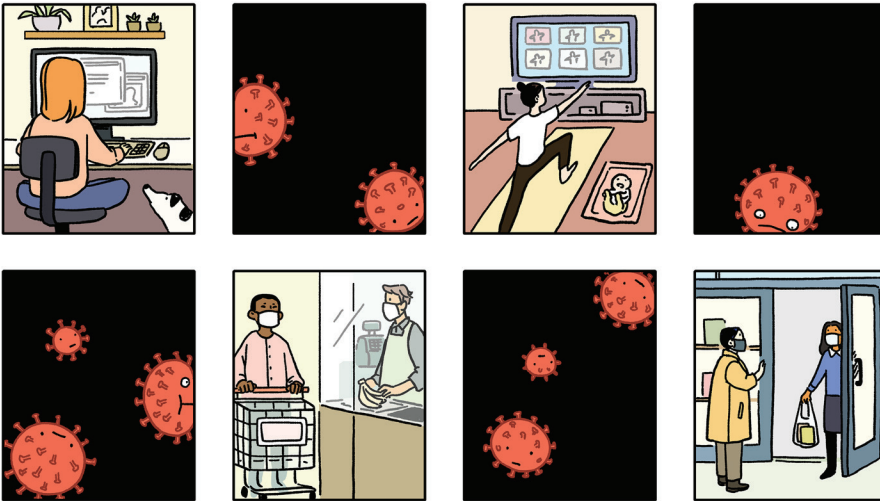
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THE FACTS

Ask an Economist

How bad are lockdowns for the economy?

BY ROB GILLEZEAU, AS TOLD TO ARIELLA GARMAISE
ILLUSTRATION BY IRMA KNIIVILA

OVER THE COURSE of the COVID-19 pandemic, we've seen the media presenting a stark trade-off between economic growth and public health measures to limit viral spread. But that idea isn't coming from my fellow economists, who overwhelmingly support a strong public health response. If we look at the literature, there are a number of research papers consistently finding that the spread of the virus itself, rather than public health measures restricting movement and gathering, explains the vast majority of the decline in economic activity.

When the government takes strong measures to limit the spread of the virus, you typically have less contagion within a few weeks. When people lack confidence, when they are not sure that they can go to the store or go to a fitness class safely, economic activity decreases. If you're not sure that the economy is going to recover rapidly, then you're less likely to spend because you may lose your job. That's how the virus really suppresses the economy. The literature is finding that economic activity in the US declined before public health interventions were implemented—that can be explained by virus spread itself.

There is some great research that has been published recently on the 1918 flu, so we can actually look at similar public health interventions in the past. In one study,¹ the researchers looked at the lockdown measures implemented in various US

cities during that pandemic. They found that those measures limited the spread of the flu and, using contemporary economic data, also found that they led to an 11 percent increase in manufacturing employment and an 18 percent increase in manufacturing output over the following years. My expectation, based on the literature and on the fact that it is the virus itself that is driving the decline in economic activity, is that measures that limit the spread of the virus are going to boost our medium-run recovery. Another recent paper² discusses how, by lifting public health interventions too early, you may think that you've succeeded and you see a little positive blip in GDP, but in reality, GDP growth in the medium run may be suppressed. People go to a few stores, they buy some things—then the virus spreads again, and that actually undermines economic growth.

Despite evidence showing the overall benefits of public health measures, there are different impacts on people and industries. One of the great public policy challenges here is compensating folks who take the hardest hits—lower-wage earners in general have had a much slower recovery versus higher-wage workers. CERB³ wasn't perfect, but the government has done a good job of bridging income and adapting policy during the crisis. In terms of ensuring equitable treatment across companies, for example, the Manitoba government has fined Costco for selling nonessential items while other businesses that sold nonessential items were shuttered.

Even after mass vaccination, we could certainly be in a difficult economic position. But it's possible that the vaccine rolling out will boost confidence enough on its own to have us off to the races in terms of economic growth. [✍]

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ROB GILLEZEAU is an assistant professor of economics at the University of Victoria. He is a former chief economist in the office of the leader of the official opposition.
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This interview has been edited from two conversations for length and clarity.

1 From researchers at the Federal Reserve and MIT (currently a preprint paper, which has not been peer reviewed)

2 From researchers at the National Bureau of Economic Research (currently a working paper, which has not been peer reviewed)

3 The Canada Emergency Response Benefit allocated \$500 per week to people who had lost work because of COVID-19 and who met other requirements.

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