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Building Trust Builds Resilient Organizations

Canadians are warier than ever before. To navigate uncertainty, leaders need to make earning and maintaining trust a top priority

BY LEAH GOLOB

Since early 2020, the global news cycle has been decidedly negative. A worldwide pandemic, systemic social injustices, mass unemployment, and struggling small businesses are the topics that dominate our daily newsfeeds. One of the casualties of all this bad news—and the prevalence of disinformation—has been the public's trust in people and businesses.

Research from Proof Strategies, a public affairs and communications firm, suggests that trust levels, across the board, have declined steadily over the past five years. In May 2020, three months after the threat of the pandemic became a reality, Canadians demonstrated an overall trust score of 38 percent toward institutions such as charities, media, small and medium businesses, governments, and large corporations—a 7 percent drop from 2016.

The good news is that Canadian leaders can fix this gap and increase the trust that is essential to building resilient communities and organizations.

What is the Status of Trust in Canada?

Canada's institutions and public figures have considerable work to do when it comes to establishing and maintaining trust. Although 67 percent of Canadians believe most of the people they interact with are honest and trustworthy, faith in business institutions is strikingly low, according to the 2021 Proof Strategies CanTrust Index. The report found that just 27 percent of people said they felt they could trust corporations, while 28 percent said the same of management. Boards of directors rated just 26 percent, and business executives a mere 24 percent.

Worker confidence has been similarly hard hit in the past year. In that same report, employees gave their employers a near-failing grade of D for their capacity to build trust. Front line service workers, who have been exposed to greater health and safety risks during the pandemic, gave employers an even lower grade of D-minus. Both grades have fallen from a C-minus just one year ago.

Why Trust Matters

Kathleen McGinn, director of Trustlab, a research and consultancy firm created by Proof Strategies, defines trust as "the willingness to be vulnerable to the actions of others based on positive expectations of their intentions or behaviour." It is the key to well-functioning societies and economies.

For instance, companies can struggle to evolve and innovate without the trust of their employees. "Trust creates hope, energy, and positivity," McGinn says. "Distrust creates anxiety, vigilance, and self-protection behaviour." And with the pace of change organizations are currently facing, failure to innovate makes them more likely to lag behind the competition or, worse, wither and disappear—especially as technology makes it easier for competitors to vie for consumers' attention.

Companies benefit most when they create a trusting environment that elicits "prosocial behaviour," she adds, which fosters positive group dynamics that lead to cooperation, collaboration, creativity, and problem solving.

Trust also fosters high engagement, which reflects the well-being and satisfaction of a workforce. Engaged employees create resiliency to help businesses weather uncertainty, McGinn says. In the absence of trust, it's harder to get people to rally around the same vision.

What Leaders Can Do Today to Build and Protect Trust

Boards of directors, CEOs, and senior management need to adopt a long-term vision for their businesses. "A very simple short-term view is to enhance share price, raise more money, or create more profit," says Rahul K. Bhardwaj,

FIVE ACTIONS THAT PRESERVE TRUST

Leaders who put the following principles from Proof Strategies into practice can help their institutions emerge from the COVID-19 pandemic with continued trust from customers and employees, ensuring a renewed sense of engagement and well-being.

BE INCLUSIVE
Regularly consult with your employees and ensure they have a voice during the disruption—particularly over decisions that affect them.

PRIORITIZE PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY
Identify or create safe places where employees can work through emotions raised by disruption and change, and help leaders and staff members develop coping skills.

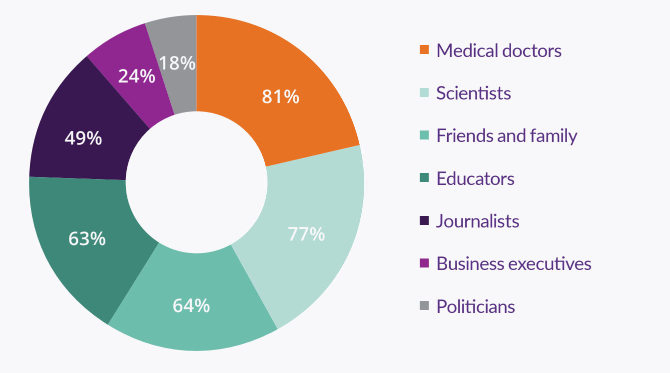
president and CEO of the Institute of Corporate Directors. Embracing a long-term view means connecting trust to the organization's sense of purpose, such as a collective commitment to a company's founding principles or serving a need in the community. When a deep sense of purpose permeates organizational culture, it brings out the best in everyone, Bhardwaj says.

Leaders should also consider whether they are rewarding the right types of behaviour, he adds. For example, if a company is truly committed to diversity, equity, and inclusion, they need to actively communicate that internally and externally. Transparency and follow-through are keys to earning and protecting trust among consumers, employees, investors, and society at large, and they complement values-based leadership. "Saying what you do and doing what you say are the fundamental building blocks of trust over time," McGinn says. People are inclined to trust whoever is looking out for their best interests, and customers are more likely to stick with companies that they feel reflect their values.

CANADA'S MOST-TRUSTED

To calculate its 2021 CanTrust Index, Proof Strategies asked Canadians which people—from friends and family to public figures—earned their confidence. Below are the percentages of people who ranked each category a seven, six, or five on the seven-point scale.

ON A SCALE OF ONE TO SEVEN, PLEASE INDICATE HOW MUCH YOU ARE WILLING TO TRUST EACH OF THE FOLLOWING CATEGORIES OF PEOPLE FOR RELIABLE INFORMATION.



ACTIONS THAT MAKE A COMPANY OR BRAND MORE TRUSTWORTHY

Who Do Canadians Trust?

Leaders seeking positive examples of trust building can look to the health professionals unexpectedly thrust into the spotlight during the pandemic. By January 2021, medical doctors and scientists (at 81 and 77 percent, respectively) had become the most trusted figures by far for reliable information in Canada—higher even than friends and family, at 64 percent —according to the 2021 CanTrust Index. On the opposite end of the spectrum were politicians, who, as a group, are trusted by only 18 percent of Canadians.

"People responded well to health professionals because they were credible, reliable, and offered timely information as the pandemic was unfolding," McGinn says. "Doctors and scientists were very honest about what they didn't know and, on some occasions, acknowledged the difficulty people were going through. That empathy makes us feel seen."

Honest, open communication was pivotal in encouraging Canadians to change their behaviours to curb the spread of COVID-19, while also providing a sense of reassurance and support. By following in health professionals' footsteps, leaders can similarly bolster employee and consumer confidence and make changes that benefit everyone. ■

COMMUNICATE CONTINUITY

Build bridges between past, present, and future visions of your organization. Connect any change agenda to the company's core values and purpose.

DEVELOP TRUST LITERACY

It's easier to preserve trust during difficult times if you understand how it was built and maintained in the first place. Create a common language and understanding of trust within your organization, and then develop specific skills that enable you to build on these foundations.

SAFEGUARD VALUES/PURPOSE

Evidence shows that managers who see their role during disruptions as guardians of the organization's purpose and core values are more likely to preserve trust than managers who perceive their role as "change agents" in the organization.

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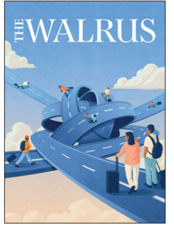

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Illustration by Myriam Wares

Myriam Wares is a Montreal-based illustrator whose work has been published in *Nautilus*, *The Atlantic*, and the *Globe and Mail*.

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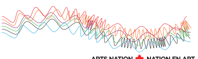

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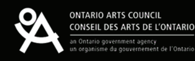

Returning to Normal Won't Fix Alberta's She-cession

How can the province rebuild post-pandemic? The answer lies in supporting the economic participation of women and gender-diverse people BY BRIANNA SHARPE

Five years ago, Carolina Quintana-Kohut left her job as an executive assistant for a large coffee company to stay home with her newborn. The now 37-year-old Calgarian had planned to put Dante in preschool in 2020 and look for work again—but then, the pandemic hit. "It threw all that out the window for me," she says.

At the same time, Quintana-Kohut and her husband were desperate to keep his mother, who has health challenges, from having to move into a long-term care home. As a result, the couple decided Carolina would delay her dream of returning to work so she could care for both Dante and his grandmother.

Like many women in mixed-sex relationships, Quintana-Kohut's salary was significantly lower than her husband's, though they have a similar education. If and when she returns to the workforce, she will likely experience the "motherhood penalty," the reduction in wages women come up against after having children. This wage gap will likely be compounded by the COVID-19 pandemic, given that women's economic recovery will depend on factors like availability of affordable childcare. As a person of colour, she faces more pay discrepancy and career-building challenges. Post-pandemic, Quintana-Kohut fears "the climb will be even harder" to go back to work.

By the beginning of 2020, Alberta's economy was still recovering from the 2014 recession, which saw unemployment peak, tax revenues tank, and oil-related sectors struggle. Then the COVID-19 pandemic crippled the economy. By July 2020, the unemployment rate had almost doubled from the 2014 recession's worst, reaching more than 15 percent. In particular, parents, women, and gender-diverse people have been hit the hardest. It's primarily these groups who are losing work in sectors such as childcare, retail and hospitality; working reduced hours; and staying home to be caregivers, like Quintana-Kohut. As governments contemplate how economies will recover, experts are urging that they support these groups. "A meaningful economic recovery must include women and gender-diverse people," says Sue Tomney, CEO of YW Calgary, the city's largest and longest-serving women's organization.

While late 2020 data from the Business Council of Alberta shows that pandemic-related jobs recovery was at gender parity in the province, that data tell only part of the story. As of December, women's labour participation in Alberta was at its lowest since 1992. Labour force numbers do not capture unpaid work like Quintana-Kohut's or predict how women will fare in future shut-downs. There is also no way to predict the wage penalty parents might accrue by spending extra time at home and with their children.

ILLUSTRATION: MARY LONG/STOCK.ADOBE.COM

Another important consideration is how women were managing before the pandemic. If provinces truly want to "build back better," YW Calgary and other advocates say, governments must reckon with the public health crisis while also keeping an eye on the inequalities the pandemic has brought to light. This is particularly true for Alberta.

Pre-pandemic, women in Alberta were making sixty-eight cents for every dollar men earned, represented almost two-thirds of the province's minimum wage earners, and were more likely to work part-time despite being among the country's most educated. Alberta has the highest rate of stay-at-home mothers and increasingly inaccessible early childcare options. The male-dominated oil and gas industry provided 6 percent of Alberta's jobs in 2018, but only 21 percent of those were held by women.

Data on LGBTQ, Two Spirit, and racialized Albertans are lacking, as is information on how these groups are faring during the pandemic. However, advocacy organization Egale Canada reported in early 2020 that sexual and gender minorities across the country—who are more likely than average to be BIPOC—were experiencing the largest gaps in pay equity and housing access. Almost half of trans individuals earn less than $15,000 a year. The picture is also dire for racialized women. What we do know is that racialized women in Alberta's biggest cities earn almost half as much as their non-racialized male counterparts.

When COVID-19 hit, inequities multiplied. By April 2020, Canadian women's participation in the workforce had plummeted from record highs to the lowest level in thirty years. Alberta's was the lowest in forty years. Early in the pandemic, women accounted for almost two-thirds of the jobs negatively impacted by lockdowns, and racialized women were overrepresented.

Most Canadians are simply longing for life to return to normal—but the truth is that pre-pandemic "normal" came with systemic inequities. That's why community leaders like Lee Stevens of Vibrant Communities Calgary (VCC) are asking that we not simply return to the pre-pandemic economy. "Normal is why we're in this mess," she says. Supports like CERB and tax relief frameworks are "just sticking band aids on this leaky pipe. We need to replace the whole pipe."

This metaphor resonates for a province wrestling with an economy that's historically dependent on the oil and gas industry. Tomney, for instance, would like to see the community "change the narrative that only certain kinds of jobs are valued in our province." Meaningful inclusion of women and minorities, she says, can help Alberta tell a different story post pandemic.

"A MEANINGFUL ECONOMIC RECOVERY MUST INCLUDE WOMEN AND GENDER-DIVERSE PEOPLE,"

SAYS SUE TOMNEY, CEO OF YW CALGARY.

While flattening the COVID-19 curve and vaccinating the population are certainly priorities for recovery, Tomney emphasizes that plans for improvement and growth must address barriers to women's and gender-diverse people's participation in the workforce in order to truly build a stronger post-pandemic economy. To this end, the YWCAs of Alberta—Calgary, Edmonton, Banff, and Lethbridge—published a report detailing their own recommendations for economic recovery.

Women are a significant driver of economic growth. Tomney points out that paying them equitably would add $1.2 billion to Alberta's economy. In order to reap the benefits of pay equity, however, women who are parents must first be able to afford and access the high-quality childcare necessary to work. Childcare and early childhood education are not only key to a strong economy, the report states, but also allow children to flourish.

Attraction and retention of women in careers such as STEM is also critical to strong economic growth. Tomney notes that one-third of Alberta's tech entrepreneurs are women, which is double the national average. From renewable energy to agriculture, women and gender-diverse people are still not adequately represented in Alberta's STEM careers, and the report recommends a provincial strategy to change that.

To create a more equitable future, Lee Stevens says that a guaranteed basic income and affordable childcare should be top priorities. But an economic recovery that includes all Albertans also depends on granular, everyday policies. Social procurement, she says, is one way to ensure businesses put their money towards inclusive equitable partnerships and investments. Tomney wants businesses to set diversity targets and make gender equity a topic at their team meetings. One reason is that it makes good financial sense: she stresses that, according to a 2018 report by McKinsey & Company, companies in the top quartile for gender-diverse executive teams are 21 percent more likely to outperform on profitability—and teams that are ethnically and culturally diverse perform even better.

Adopting more equitable policies is key to helping Canadian women and gender-diverse people re-enter the workforce post-pandemic. Quintana-Kohut, for example, says looking after her son and her mother-in law is important for her, but she's exhausted by how gendered and underappreciated care work is. "I feel like I'm on the fringes, like I'm not participating in society in a way that is valued," she says. "I want to be able to participate in the economy and keep developing, using my skills to have some sort of impact." ■

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For more information about YW Calgary visit ywcalgary.ca.

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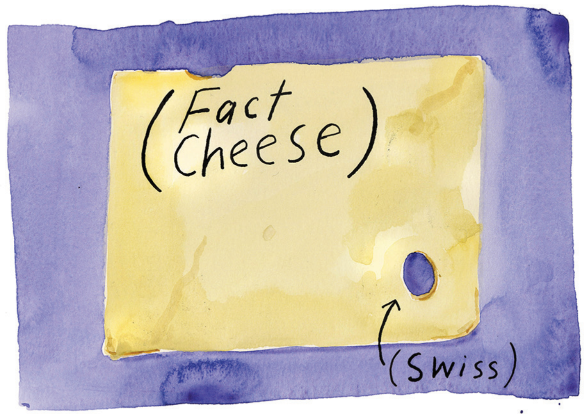
Editor's Letter

IN A 2016 cover story I wrote for The Walrus, Nespresso was falsely identified as an Italian coffee brand. The error stood until 2019, when a reader pointed out that Nespresso is, of course, a Swiss company. In the context of the story, it was a relatively minor detail, tangential to the article's primary theme of Canadian marketing. I believe the fact stood unchallenged for so long because, in many people's minds, apparently including mine, the spiritual home of espresso is Italy. But the correction haunts me.



Most journalistic corrections reveal embarrassments of the relatively inconsequential variety. Bigger mistakes pose a more severe threat to the outlets that publish them, ranging from diminished credibility to lawsuits. In recent months, two of the industry's most respected publications have been forced to qualify entire projects of original reporting. *The New Yorker* returned a National Magazine Award for a story on Japanese "rent-a-families" in which some sources turned out to have misidentified themselves, while the *New York Times* issued substantial corrections to *Caliphate*, its documentary podcast about ISIS, upon the discovery that the claims of its primary subject had been inadequately vetted. But it would be a mistake to see the revelation of an error as a sign of overall unreliability. The *Toronto Star*, Canada's biggest newspaper in terms of circulation, ran around 9,000 corrections in the decade ending in 2019. Maybe we shouldn't view the most trusted publications as the ones that make the fewest errors—but rather as the ones with the most transparent and thorough processes for correcting them.

As soon as we receive a request for a correction at The Walrus, it's forwarded to our research department, which reviews the details against our fact-checking files. If we determine that a correction is warranted, the information is updated online, with an explanation appended to the story, and in our next print issue. (You'll see one such correction in this issue's Letters page.) If a reader or source isn't satisfied, we invite them to write a letter to the editor.

These days, the stakes for journalistic accuracy are probably higher than they've ever been. Oxford Languages named *post-truth* its word of the year in 2016, encapsulating the Pandora's box of objectively fake news proliferating in a declining media climate with diminishing resources, not to mention a time when an increasing number of people are dedicated to challenging one another's realities. In the years since, *fact-checking* has become a buzzword—even if none of us are in exact agreement about what it means. In this issue, Viviane Fairbank, a former head of research at The Walrus, chronicles the evolution of fact-checking from a somewhat arcane editorial practice into headline news, including the emergence of dedicated operations like the Poynter Institute's International Fact-Checking Network. There may be fewer "fake news" accusations in the air since Twitter suspended Donald Trump's account, in January, shortly before he left the White House, but the atmosphere remains permanently changed. As Fairbank writes in "After the Facts," the post-truth era has forced us to reconsider what the truth is—including who has the authority to determine that.

My own philosophy of accuracy has changed with time. As an editor, I don't mind the discovery of errors (within reason) because their exposure adds to our body of knowledge. More significantly, the conversation many newsrooms are having now about trust and authority may be the most important one in the history of journalism. The fallibility of media and the subjectivity of its institutions were always with us; the difference is that, now, we've all begun to acknowledge that vulnerability more openly. Maybe it's not possible to know everything, but for the time being, the willingness to admit what we don't know and to hold ourselves accountable are the media's biggest strengths.

At The Walrus, the strongest defence against errors has long been fact-checking, which includes identifying what details need to be checked, then not just confirming them but looking at the overall context and querying how they *could* be wrong. If you're interested in trying your hand at what that job looks like, the first paragraph of this essay contains at least eighteen facts. Can you identify all of them? ☑

—*Jessica Johnson*

ILLUSTRATION BY GRAHAM ROUMIEU

Contributors' Notes

JUSTIN LING
"The Mole Hunt," p. 34

"What surprised me, and what always surprises me in crime stories, is the degree to which major breakthroughs come from good old-fashioned detective work. Criminals are always going to be one step ahead of governments in terms of technology. It's not just the fancy bells and whistles, the new laws, or the new investigative powers that outsmart them; it's chasing them on the ground and shoe-leather investigating."

Justin Ling is a Montreal-based freelance journalist and the author of the book Missing from the Village, *which was published last September.*

KELLY TOUGHILL
"How Immigration Really Works," p. 26

"I think Canada unfairly advertises the ease with which one can immigrate. I've known of many international students who wanted to stay here after graduating but struggled to navigate the immigration system. Often, the issue is not that the door is closed but that nobody knows where the door is. While reporting this story, I came to appreciate how Canada's immigration system is an amazing labyrinth of constantly changing policy."

Kelly Toughill is an associate professor of journalism at the University of King's College whose work focuses on Canadian immigration and the economics of journalism.

ANUBHA MOMIN
"At Home with Frank Lloyd Wright," p. 56

"People in my generation seem to understand that you need to talk about your problems or you'll never get through them. But, for my mum and women of her generation, that is a more distant concept. She initially felt that this essay, about how touring Frank Lloyd Wright houses helped me reflect on our relationship, was too invasive, like I was airing our family's dirty laundry. I thought about not writing it at all—but I did, and she came around, and I think it brought us closer in the end."

Anubha Momin is a writer whose work has been published by Vice, *the CBC, and* Chatelaine.

ELENA VILTOVSKAIA
Illustrations for Contributors' Notes, p. 14

"Since I started doing portraits, my perception of beauty has changed. I worked in fashion and beauty illustration for so long that I find the airbrushed, perfect beauty of models almost forgettable. Now, I romanticize fly-aways and wrinkles and scars—the things that humanize us, that make us unique and interesting. Everyone has beauty, and I can always find something beautiful in a person's face to focus on without having to flatter."

Elena Viltovskaia is an illustrator and art director based in Toronto. Her work has also appeared in Elle Canada *and the* Globe and Mail. *She has produced 136 portraits of contributors to The Walrus since 2018.*

KEN BABSTOCK
"I Fought the CRA, and I Won," p. 23

"Spending months going back and forth with the Canada Revenue Agency, arguing why I, as an artist, was eligible for CERB payments, felt like being stuck in a circle of hell where you're told that the sky is red and two plus two is five. When someone finally understood my case, I almost started crying on the phone—not just because I had won, but because I was being told that the sky is blue after all."

Ken Babstock is the author of six books of poetry, including Swivelmount, *which was published last October.*

ILLUSTRATIONS BY ELENA VILTOVSKAIA

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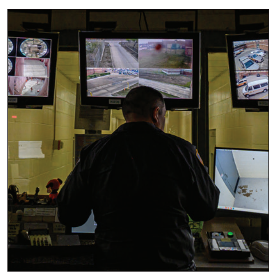

AS FAR AS THE EYE CAN SEE

In her feature "Crossing the Line" (March/April), Hilary Beaumont discusses with admirable nuance the risks inherent in technologies such as iris- and facial-recognition software. We should all be paying attention. The progression of high-tech surveillance—from borders to big box stores, from refugees to employees, and from border agents to police officers—is already well underway. Moreover, it is happening largely without transparency or accountability. We have critical societal decisions to make to ensure that we do not allow these kinds of intrusive technologies to change our world into a place we'd rather not live in.

Brenda McPhail
Canadian Civil Liberties Association
Toronto, ON

In her investigation of unregulated surveillance technology at the southern US border, Beaumont quotes BI^{2} Technologies CEO Sean Mullin, who believes the intentions of state actors who biometrically monitor their citizens are not "nefarious." This sense is also implicit in the argument that only lawbreakers need worry. But current governments will not be in power forever, and whatever surveillance technologies we accept will be available in perpetuity, to all future governments, whatever their intentions.

Greg DePaco
New Westminster, BC

WORLDS APART

Reading Patricia Pearson's essay on the history of grief hallucinations ("Why Do We See Dead People?" January/February), I was reminded of a description by historian Peter Brown, in *The Ransom of the Soul*, of how members of the third-century Christian church would eat meals in cemeteries to remember—and be remembered by—dead friends and relatives. These meals, called refigeriums, were meant to celebrate departed souls. The boundaries between this world and the next were perceived as permeable. Only as centuries passed did the distance between the living and the dead, earth and heaven, material and imaginary, grow further and further apart.

David Tickner
Abbotsford, BC

I found Pearson's article a wonderful, thought-provoking read. "Reality doesn't play by our rules," she writes, quoting anthropologist Jack Hunter. There are many cultures on earth that don't question or deny the feeling that there exist spiritual beings who are as real as we are. Some Inuit, for instance, place a handful of snow in the mouth of a killed seal to quench its thirst as it continues on its journey. Perhaps our need to understand the world is attached to our need to measure it—and maybe, rather than measure, we should take time to develop relationships with the other side.

Pete Smith
Toronto, ON

KEEPING IT REAL

Sejla Rizvic's article on the social media generational divide ("Everybody Hates Millennials: Gen Z and the TikTok Generation Wars," *thewalrus.ca*) notes that TikTok, the short-video-sharing app in vogue among Gen Z, has a refreshing frankness compared to other social media. But all platforms have an arc: there was a time when blogs, Twitter, YouTube, and Instagram were all way more verité and off the cuff than they are now. Sorry, Gen Z, but you didn't invent being "real." I think it's a valid observation that TikTok is a more fun place to spend time than other social media sites, but the better question to ask would be, How do we protect platforms from getting contrived?

Casey Johnston
New York, NY

TUSK, TUSK

In the March/April issue, a caption in the article "Quitting America" misspelled Lash LaRue's name. The Walrus regrets the error.

"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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PHOTOGRAPH BY CHRISTOPHER KATSAROV LUNA

Shifting the She-cession

Thank you to everyone who attended YW Calgary's 10th YWHISPER Gala on March 11th, presented in partnership with The Walrus. **It was a virtually unmissable event!**

Together, we inspired courageous conversation around the **She-cession** – COVID-19's disproportionate burden on women and gender-diverse people. Thanks to the amazing generosity of sponsors and attendees, YW Calgary will continue investing in programs that help women build the skills and confidence necessary for a more equitable society.

We all have a role to play in shifting the **She-cession** – please join the conversation at:

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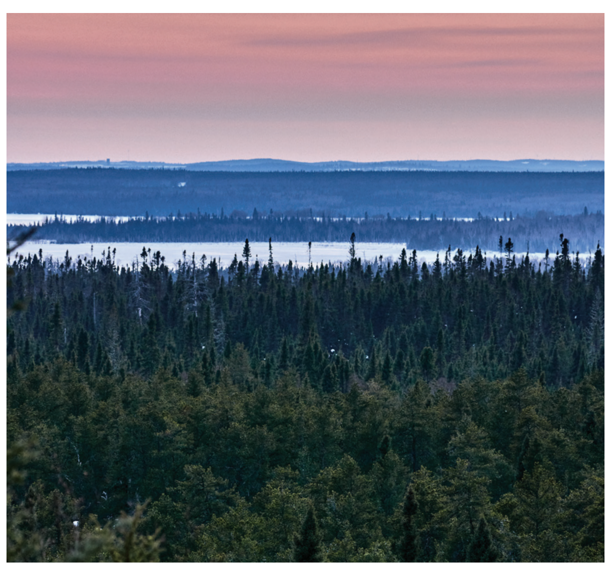
ENVIRONMENT

The Hidden Cost of Rechargeable Batteries

A proposed lithium mine in western Quebec raises questions about the damage green tech can cause

BY CAITLIN STALL-PAQUET
PHOTOGRAPHY BY JEREMIE STALL-PAQUET



In a world of USB wall outlets and universal charging cables, it can be easy to forget that, not too long ago, we could often be found roaming our houses in search of fresh AA batteries—disposable power sources for our non-rechargeable gadgets—sometimes giving up and stealing them from the TV remote. The single-use batteries many of us still use in said remotes, not to mention alarm clocks, flashlights, and smoke detectors, work thanks to chemicals stored in the negative and positive ends of the battery (an anode and a cathode, respectively), which react with each other and create a flow of electrical energy. Once those chemicals run out, you're back on the hunt for a fresh power source.

Then, in 1991, the first commercial lithium-ion batteries hit the market: in these, external energy flows back into the battery's chemical system and replenishes it, allowing for repeated use. This let environmentally conscious consumers make the shift from disposable to rechargeable batteries and eventually paved the way for whole new categories of devices, like the laptops and phones that we recharge by plugging into a wall. The technology has so profoundly changed our lives that John B. Goodenough, M. Stanley Whittingham, and Akira Yoshino won the 2019 Nobel Prize in Chemistry for developing it. Lithium batteries are also big business: the global industry was valued at $36.7 billion (US) in 2019 and is predicted to balloon to $129.3 billion by 2027.

The surge in both demand and production made the 2010s the decade of the rechargeable battery, with a nearly 90 percent decline in prices over that time. It was also the period when electric vehicles (EVs) entered the mainstream—it's projected that more than half of all new passenger cars will be electric by 2040. The environmental benefits are obvious: in Europe, an EV can produce anywhere from about 30 to 70 percent less emissions than a gasoline car and is the less polluting option almost everywhere in the world (this varies with the source of the electricity used for charging). EVs are cheaper to run and maintain than gasoline-powered vehicles, and because lower emissions equal better air quality, they are healthier.

However, lithium batteries do come at some environmental cost. Lithium is a non-renewable resource, a metal that needs to be extracted from salt flats or igneous rocks called pegmatites. That process requires a lot of energy and irreversibly damages landscapes and habitats while often depleting or contaminating local water sources. There's also a serious waste problem. Though it's possible to reuse their components, less than 5 percent of lithium-ion batteries get recycled: it's cheaper to extract new lithium than to repurpose what's already been mined. In Canada, efforts to reduce waste thus far have focused on extending battery life. This kicks the waste problem down the road to future garbage heaps; industry analysts predict approximately 11 million tonnes of these batteries will reach the end of their life cycle by 2030.

In 2018, these facts were on the minds of residents in the Abitibi-Témiscamingue region of northwestern Quebec, where Australian mining company Sayona submitted a proposal for an open-pit lithium mine. With just 147,897 inhabitants on its nearly 60,000-square-kilometre territory, the area is known for its wild spaces. Abitibiens took issue with the project—named Authier, after a local prospector—because of its planned location near a regional centre of biodiversity: the 8,000-year-old, 170-kilometre Saint-Mathieu-Berry esker. (An esker is a stratified ridge of sand and gravel that is created when an ice sheet or glacier retreats, leaving sediment behind.) An important geological formation, the esker is home to hundreds of animal species, including the wood turtle that is provincially designated as vulnerable; wolves, black bears, and moose frequent the banks, and rare Connecticut warblers fly overhead or make homes in surrounding jack pines. The esker is the water source for Amos (population 12,823), at the northeastern edge of the formation, winning the town awards for the best tap water in the world, and is the pristine supply for bottled-water company Eska.

Sayona's plan called for extracting 1,900 tonnes of lithium a day—just 100 tonnes short of the 2,000-tonne daily extraction rate that would require the company to appear in front of Quebec's environmental assessment agency. That assessment process would have ensured that local residents could learn about the project's details and speak in public hearings. Guy Laliberté, CEO of Sayona

Québec, told me that "investors chose this path to avoid delays, which isn't necessarily a sign that we wanted to hide information. It was simply a business decision."

Unable to find clear and accurate details about the mine or independent studies of its potential impact on the entire ecosystem, residents struck the Comité citoyen de protection de l'esker. One of the Comité's early actions was to ask then environment minister MarieChantal Chassé to require a public hearing regardless of Sayona's proposed extraction rate, which Chassé did not do. The Comité then obtained documents about the mine through an Access to Information request and determined that Sayona's proposed extraction rate would actually amount to 2,100 tonnes a day by the time the mine was fully developed—enough to have forced an environmental assessment hearing in the first place. The minister of economy and innovation, Pierre Fitzgibbon, nonetheless claimed that his Coalition Avenir Québec (CAQ) government would try to greenlight the Authier project without a hearing, an announcement that was contested by the three opposition parties and met with a 30,000-signature petition. (Neither Chassé nor Fitzgibbon replied to requests for comment.) The Comité then took more formal action, sending a demand letter to the new minister of the environment, Benoit Charette. A hearing is now slated to take place later this year.

After the hearing was announced, Sayona upped its proposed daily extraction rate to 2,600 tonnes. Combined with ongoing uncertainty about the precise location of the mine and the sense that the company's plans may continue to shift or develop, this generated further concern within the Comité. Sayona's updated feasibility study for the Authier project, submitted to the provincial government at the end of 2019, suggests that the company may "increase the size of the Mineral Resource by testing extensions of known mineralization along strike at both the main Authier pegmatite and Authier North pegmatite"—technical jargon for expanding the mining activity beyond the existing proposal.

It's not that the Comité is staunchly against this mine, but it takes issue with efforts, by both the company and the province, to quickly push toward extraction packaged as a green initiative. Quebec is already deeply invested in lithium and is taking actions to further strengthen the industry, but this commitment could come at a steep social and environmental cost—and the government isn't, the Comité believes, taking that seriously enough. "What bothers us beyond the mining industry and Sayona...is the Quebec government's objectives, going into bulldozer mode and identifying this sector as something that needs to be developed quickly," says local environmental lawyer Rodrigue Turgeon, who is heavily involved with the Comité. "If we're always cutting corners without assessing environmental, climate, and ecological gains, a lot of things could slip past us."

THE ABITIBI-TÉMISCAMINGUE region and the mining industry are historically linked. Resources are why Europeans first came to this area, in the 1890s. Mines started extracting lead, zinc, and silver, followed by copper and gold, along the Cadillac Fault, which snakes all the way into eastern Ontario. During the Great Depression, the Quebec government provided incentives for city dwellers to move to rural areas like this region in order to colonize the land. Mining companies recruited immigrants during the Second World War to move to Abitibi from Montreal or directly from their home countries to do often-dangerous manual labour; there were many major injuries and 292 deaths in the area's mines between 1925 and 1950.

Quebec is responsible for one-fifth of Canada's mining activity and produces the most diverse array of resources in the country, including fifteen metals and fourteen minerals, according to a 2018 provincial report. The sector directly creates roughly 48,000 jobs and $9 billion in economic activity, about 2.5 percent of the province's GDP. With seven active mines, Abitibi has the largest number of mining projects in Quebec; the industry accounts for nearly 20 percent of jobs in the region.

Between 2014 and 2018, spending on lithium mining in Quebec increased by 789 percent; the Quebec government is bullish about lithium's economic promise as well as its potential to uphold the province's commitments to electrification. Premier François Legault's CAQ party wants Quebec to be an EV leader at every link in the supply chain, from mine to finished battery, and the provincial government has formalized its commitment

PREVIOUS The location of the proposed Authier lithium mine

ABOVE Rodrigue Turgeon (right) on a new trail the Comité has made across the esker

to EVs by vowing to ban the sale of gas-powered cars as of 2035. (This target is five years ahead of the zero-emissions-vehicle goal set by British Columbia, the only other Canadian province with this official objective.) The province already has the highest number of electric cars on the roads, and there's no sign of that slowing down: in its 2020/21 budget, Quebec allotted $1.4 billion to Roulez Vert, a program through which people buying new EVs can save up to $8,000, the most generous such rebate plan in Canada.

Fitzgibbon places electrification and the processes that enable it at the heart of the province's environmental future, championing plans to turn Quebec into a battery-producing market by investing up to $3.6 billion in the industry over five years, starting this year. Last August, the CAQ reinvested $300 million in Nemaska Lithium, a company plagued with financial issues that filed for creditor protection in 2019. Nemaska is trying to open a mine in Whabouchi, Quebec, in the James Bay region, where its estimated 36.7 million tonnes of reserves would make it the seventh largest lithium-extraction project in the world. And, before Sayona showed up, North American Lithium (NAL) operated a mine in La Corne, a town sixty-four kilometres from the proposed Authier site; NAL has since filed for bankruptcy, and Sayona is bidding to purchase the site. With a third exploration site nearby—the Tansim project, eighty-two kilometres southwest of Authier—the company is hoping to turn the area into a major lithium hub.

Laliberté emphasizes that Quebec's lithium industry is greener than those of other producing countries, which he says is due to two factors: lithium here is found primarily in pegmatites, which are easier to extract from than salt flats, and the endeavour would be powered by hydroelectricity. By contrast, Australia uses coal as its primary power source, so mining there creates far greater emissions, while Chile's vast lithium deposits are in the brine of hard-to-extract salt flats, and production there has depleted water supplies. Though Quebec's projects may not seem so damaging in comparison, before going bankrupt, the NAL mine was responsible for over eighty environmental accidents between 2013 and 2018, leaking hundreds of thousands of litres of lithium sulfate, hydraulic oil, process water, lime, diesel, motor oil, and other toxic products into surrounding groundwater.

It is that history, in addition to questions of transparency, that concerns the Comité, which continues to advocate for a balance between economic development and environmental protection. Companies, Turgeon says, "need to realize the resource-rich regions in their minds aren't just there for resources, they're also inhabited." The mining industry often cites employment and prosperity as advantages of its projects, though that is not how Turgeon sees it playing out, pointing to influxes of a relatively small number of high-paying jobs (approximately 160 for Authier) that create wealth gaps within communities.

Because the project would be located partially on Algonquin territory, the Abitibiwinni First Nation of Pikogan would also be affected by mining development. In 2019, the Abitibiwinni signed an agreement with Sayona; in a press release, chief Monik Kistabish said the agreement "provides benefits for the Abitibiwinni First Nation in terms of sustainable development and economy" and that she looked forward to collaborative discussions about the environmental ramifications of the project with Sayona. (Representatives of the Abitibiwinni First Nation declined to comment further.)

Following the Comité's actions, Sayona moved the planned location of its mining pit to be farther from the esker, though its precise whereabouts are still not publicly known. The company hired independent experts to conduct studies about the mine's potential environmental ramifications and issued an environmental impact report. And, though few details are available, Laliberté maintains that Sayona will work with Ducks Unlimited Canada and the Abitibiwinni First Nation on wetland wildlife relocation.

Though they perhaps recognize the mine's inevitability, members of the Comité have a hard time accepting that projects threatening ecosystems are fundamentally on the side of ecology. "There's a rich forest ecosystem here, there are wetlands…and groundwater for the entire region," says Turgeon. "The company has two messages: one for investors, which is to present the project as being as big as possible, and a second message for the local population, which is to present the project as being as small as possible."

CAITLIN STALL-PAQUET is a Montreal-based writer whose work has appeared in *Elle Canada*, *Flare*, the *Globe and Mail*, *enRoute*, and *Xtra*.

ADVENTURE CANADA

Explore Newfoundland with The Walrus

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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*, July 4–15, 2022 (a new date in 2022 due to the pandemic).

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 2022 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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SOCIETY

I Fought the CRA, and I Won

The Canada Emergency Response Benefit helped me survive COVID-19's first wave. Then the government tried to claw back the cash

BY KEN BABSTOCK
ILLUSTRATION BY GLENN HARVEY

SOME INDETERMINATE day last fall, back from my biweekly masked trudge to the grocery store, I arrive home to a letter from the Canada Revenue Agency. They want proof that my income in 2019 was greater than $5,000 to confirm eligibility for CERB payments I received over the summer.

The Canada Emergency Response Benefit was a sensible, wide-ranging backstop, shoring up the livelihoods of those who found themselves struggling in a suddenly frozen economy. Rolled out quickly and efficiently last March and run on an honour system, CERB allowed anyone facing loss of income because of COVID-19 to go online, check a few boxes confirming eligibility, and receive $2,000 in monthly assistance. I put in a call to the CRA in September, inquiring after one of these cheques that had gone missing.

A phone number is included in the letter, and I call it. With my bank account well into an uncontrolled dive, I'm on hold, waiting to speak with one of the more than 44,000 personnel who make up the largest apparatus of the federal public service, its average budget a nose over $5 billion in pursuit of around $430 billion in annual tax revenue. It's a leviathan. I'm krill. After thirty minutes, I'm talking to a perfunctory but non-threatening CRA agent, Barney. (Agents, supervisors, and managers all offer their names on contact, I'll come to learn.)

Barney seems eager to help with my case and be on his way—bigger fish, a man about a deduction. It should be straightforward. In 2019, I was one of the Canadian writers who got lucky with a $25,000 arts-production grant, an award of taxable income to help with subsistence while working on an ongoing project. The grant represented the largest portion of what I'd made that year. The CRA's online portal listed types of income and/or situations that would be ineligible for CERB. "Arts-production grants" didn't appear.

I'm now sitting cross-legged on my floor, the central stamen in an array of splayed-petal papers. "So this one will work? The T4A?" "From the arts council grant? Yes, that'll work. Upload that." That was my first, cataclysmic mistake. Doing what I was told. On the day I was told to do it.

LOCKDOWN LAST MARCH exploded everyone's sense of the future's relative predictability. Yes, the sun kept coming up, but over the never seen before. It hit everyone hard psychologically and some harder materially: the underemployed, the working poor, the self-employed, the "precariat." As happens for writers, I was already having a thin year. Now, COVID-19. My course at the University of Toronto's School of Continuing Studies was cancelled. Three residency/fellowship opportunities: cancelled. My upcoming book: bumped from spring to fall. Prospects looked grim.

I'm living in a one-and-a-half-bedroom, the cheapest rental I could find within my son's school catchment in Toronto. With me half the time, in his half bedroom, he's been Zen-ishly uncomplaining throughout this upheaval, as though he's seen pandemics before. If we're going by the usual metric advising we allocate no

more than 30 percent of our income to housing, I'd need to be in or around the $65,000 bracket. I don't come within astral-projecting distance of that. Can renters be house poor? Bottom line: priced out of Toronto, I remain in Toronto. It's where my son is. Operating in the red for years, I've tried plotting my way through to his eighteenth birthday—it doesn't add up.

We scraped through summer propped up by CERB. For me, $2,000 a month amounts almost precisely to rent, internet, phone. No food. I was trying to leapfrog the worst of it by aiming for fall, resorting to long gambles and blind hope. A news snippet caught on a loud radio: "Construction remains ongoing," and I'm regretting not having done my apprenticeship during the years I worked with builders in Dublin. I'd be working now. Or, had I managed to stay in university somehow, I'd be still working.

These, though, are counterfactual hypotheses, of interest to dodgy historians and judgmental deities. To get a university job in creative writing, one needs a postgraduate degree in creative writing. I have six collections of poetry and a high school diploma. At fifty-plus, I'm a tough case for an employment adviser.

I WORK ON new ways with lentils while I wait for my proof of income to be approved and my eligibility for CERB confirmed. I pick up applications for employment from the LCBO, Loblaws, hospitals; I know how to unload trucks. Given a chance, I'm a dab hand at stacking boxes. Another letter arrives: the validators—like Klamm in Kafka's *The Castle*, CRA validators have never been seen or spoken to by a human being not employed by the CRA and never will be. They have examined my T4A and declared me ineligible for CERB or for the Canada Recovery Benefit (CRB). Furthermore, I must pay back whatever emergency assistance I have until now received—a cool $10,000. No explanation. No phone number.

Over the next sixty days, I spend upward of twenty hours on the phone, my voice crumbling, rising, clinging to civility while trying to respond to what I come to understand is a classic double bind. During crisis, authority offers assistance. Assistance delivered, authority demands proof of eligibility for what has been claimed in good faith. Authority withdraws assistance until proof is delivered. Upon delivery of proof, authority declares proof nonproof, continues to withhold assistance, and exacts penalty, causing crisis. There is no exit. One cannot negotiate escape from a logically impossible demand enacted by the CRA. It's why they compare taxes to death.

The exchanges I have with agents, supervisors, and managers based in St. John's, Sudbury, Ottawa, Surrey, and (for all I know) somewhere in my own building verge at times on psychological warfare: evasive, irrational, nonsensical, suspicious, blatantly wrong. I'm learning shades of despair I never knew existed. My son has previously seen me cry; he's never seen me cry, laugh, and pull my hair while insisting into my phone that the supervisor tell the validators to make headquarters call the minister of national revenue *because you are acting in contravention of Canadian tax law!* (I was beginning to sound unstable even to myself.)

I haven't been able to make rent. The eviction notices arrive midmonth, each month, and increase in threat level. Explaining one of these letters to a visibly concerned twelve-year-old is suboptimal, as a parent. Agreeing with said twelve-year-old that Christmas will be unavoidably postponed is also, as a parent, suboptimal. He calls me "an utter plank," which I take to mean love in the argot of the young, and we hug a lot. He also asks permission to remain in his quarters when next I find myself "in discussion" with a CRA agent. "Granted," I say.

I DIDN'T HAVE the wherewithal to record the hours and hours of phone exchanges. The best-of reel is burned in memory, though, and I could recite ten of the most flamboyantly unreal.

CRA supervisor: "It's possible that, whatever an 'arts-production grant' is, it isn't distinguishable from those other forms of income that are not eligible. Bursaries, fellowships, scholarships, they're not eligible."

KB: "Grants are distinguishable. They're so distinguishable, they've been distinguished in the Canadian tax code under the heading 'Arts Production Grants.'"

CRA: "That may well be, but—"

KB: "Can I ask if you've read the Canadian tax code?"

CRA: "Of course not."

KB: "I have it right here. May I read you the paragraph I'm talking about?"

CRA: "No."

KB: "Can I email it to you?"

CRA: "No."

KB: "Have the validators read the Canadian tax code?"

CRA: "You'd have to ask the validators."

KB: "Has anyone at the CRA read the Canadian tax code?"

CRA: "How would I know that?"

WHEN NOT on hold, or being redirected, or misdirected, or calling back, or awaiting a call back, I'm now also compiling a second dossier, then a third. The preassessment department—acting independently of the CERB/CRB department and unconnected to the department handling the Canada Child Benefit—has also written, requiring proof of my son's existence. He's been dividing his time equally between his parents since 2015 but is also now, apparently, a locus of potential fraud. It's common, I'm told, for people to invent dependents who don't exist. You know, to make up children. Affidavits, birth certificate, letters from school principals and soccer coaches, passport, signed statements from people who know us but aren't family. Tax return, Canada Child Benefit, and CERB/CRB are all now concurrently log-jammed in disparate, sclerotic, balkanized departments of the CRA, none apparently speaking to the others, all cut off from their peers and superiors, their superiors' superiors. Mass-trawling, dragging the sea floor for the scavenger fish conspiring to push federal coffers to the brink of insolvency with their arts grants and make-believe babies.

I've collected statements from the Canada Council for the Arts, the Toronto Arts Council, the Writers' Trust, The Writers' Union of Canada, and my MP's office

confirming that, yes, my understanding that arts-production grants are CERB-eligible income is correct. There was even a meeting earlier in December: this issue, along with other more contentious ones, has been sorted out and settled.

The agents I speak to know of no meeting. They sound put out at not having been invited. I speak to my accountant. She's written a "white paper," she says, on the very subject of arts-production grants. She identifies for me a bulletin—IT-257R—that clarifies their legal standing. Another thirty minutes on hold, and the next supervisor will not allow me to identify IT-257R. I try saying it faster, "*Eyeteetoofysenner!*" He's talking over me. I could be identifying a red dwarf in the Andromeda Galaxy or a gene responsible for the putting of fists through drywall. I have $80 and change. In the world. And no—What's it called?—support network. I've been of "no fixed address" before. I've never yet been homeless.

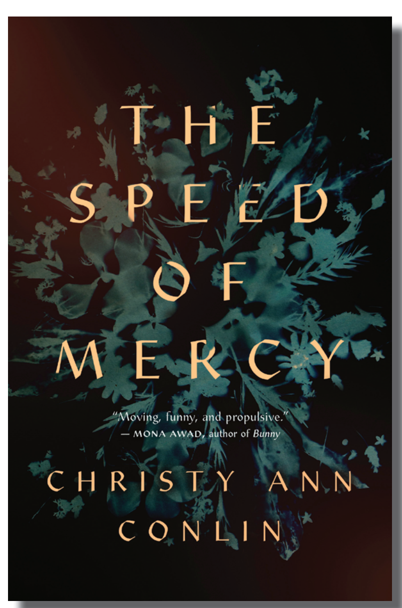
I take to Twitter. I mean, I was already *on* Twitter, but my tendencies there leaned toward gnomic one-liners and photos of unwashed kitchenware claiming to be NASA images of cosmic wonders. Until now. Now, I am campaigning. I'm tagging blue checkmarks, @-ing influential accounts in the Twittersphere who may, what, look away from the rending of the social fabric south of the border to notice I was… in trouble?

READER, they noticed. I got notifications, responses, retweets, and DMs. I heard from other artists in the same position. I heard, again, from the unions and the arts councils and MPs, and from a policy adviser to the minister of national revenue. I was now so emboldened (and so very afraid) that I @-ed a journalist. She listened, asked for documents, went elsewhere for context, and the story appeared two days later, my accompanying headshot credited to my son.

Within forty-eight hours of the piece in the *Globe and Mail*, I got a call from CRA HQ: the disarmingly communicative Frieda, sounding prepared and a bit lawyerly, with a message of contrition. Things were in flux, policy-wise. Administration of initiatives always contains wrinkles, and if an agent had been misinformed, she was sorry. She was. The decision had been reversed, in fact, in my case, now that they'd seen the bigger picture and acquired requisite information, but that's not to say they hadn't, sadly, had cases of fraud elsewhere, sadly. I'd be receiving a letter confirming my eligibility, reimbursing me for stopped payments, and also my tax return was finished, and, you understand…

Now, imagine encountering a CRA "wrinkle" in other circumstances. If I were a mother of three, shared this apartment with extended family, worked in food processing or transport or cleaning or long-term care. If I didn't know anyone in publishing, media, or the arts. If I'd not had hours to spend on the phone. What choice but to cut one's losses and roll over, whatever the cost?

KEN BABSTOCK is the author of six books of poetry, including *Swivelmount*, which was published last October.



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POLICY

How Immigration Really Works

Who will choose Canada's next wave of newcomers? It could be someone in your town

BY KELLY TOUGHILL
ILLUSTRATIONS BY MYRIAM WARES

In 2017, the head of Canada's largest labour organization sat down with Ahmed Hussen, then minister of immigration, to discuss an idea that had bubbled up from a building trades union in Toronto. The Canadian Labour Congress suggested testing a program that would invite an underground workforce into the light. According to the CLC's estimates, thousands of carpenters, concrete finishers, and other foreign tradespeople were working in the region without the legal right to do so. Some had expired work permits; others had originally entered Canada as students or tourists and never had a work permit. With the construction sector expecting a quarter of its workforce to retire in the coming years, the building boom had come to rest on the labour of under-the-table workers. Instead of tracking workers down and deporting them, argued the CLC, why not set them on the path to citizenship?

It wasn't the first time the idea of a limited amnesty for construction workers had been raised. Some building-industry groups, along with community groups and unions, had taken a similar proposal to five different immigration ministers over six years, but it didn't fly, according to a *Globe and Mail* report. This time, there was a twist: instead of having federal employees run the program or select applicants, unions would manage the first stage—the CLC would recruit and vet candidates for permanent resident status. The program, which started accepting applications in January of last year, is tiny, with slots for just 500 workers and their families. But it may be the only immigration program in the world managed by a labour organization. It's also just one example of how Canada has spent the last two decades rolling out a radical policy innovation: devolving immigration decisions away from the federal government.

Many national governments, such as those of the United States and the United Kingdom, keep immigration tightly centralized: choosing new citizens is a function of nation building, so it is the level of government responsible for the nation as a whole that should decide who can settle there. That's the simple theory. Then there's Canada. Here, provincial governments, community groups, municipalities, and private employers all have a hand in selecting economic migrants. In 2019, for example, Canada accepted 341,175 new permanent residents: almost 30 percent were chosen by someone outside the federal government.

With more than 100 programs scattered from coast to coast to coast, Canada has one of the most complex immigration systems in the world. It's unclear whether the country is the first to shift immigration decisions away from the federal government—both New Zealand and Australia have a few similar programs—but it is the country that has pushed the trend the furthest and fastest. There are pathways to permanent residency and citizenship designed specifically for butchers, mushroom harvesters, and greenhouse workers; one that includes cleaners in Sudbury; one for long-haul truckers in British Columbia; others for international students who want to start businesses in New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, or Saskatchewan; and still more for dozens of other tightly defined groups of workers in specific parts of the country. The programs are always changing: the federal government doesn't even try to keep a current list.

This hodgepodge of niche programs was not planned. It grew out of political pressure and economic need with almost no national consultation. And it has problems. It's inefficient—immigration bureaucracies often rely on people with shockingly little training. It has been susceptible to fraud. It doesn't always land immigrants where they are most needed. But Canada's decentralized immigration system may be one reason this country is winning a global competition for labour. It may also be one reason Canada has the highest public support for immigration of any country in the world.

This year, immigration minister Marco Mendicino wants to bring in a record 401,000 new permanent residents to help make up for the loss of immigration during the COVID-19 pandemic. His department has also set targets of 411,000 immigrants in 2022 and 421,000 in 2023. Combined, immigration over those three years will make up 3.3 percent of Canada's population. His ambitious targets are part of an international race to counter a looming population crisis. A July report published in *The Lancet* warns that the global population will start to decline in 2064, with significantly lower numbers of working-age adults

in many developed countries. Such a demographic shift would devastate national economies: shrinking the tax base, consumer spending, and the ability to deliver basic services like health care and education.

The same report, however, predicts that Canada will be able to maintain higher levels of immigration than most other nations. But the country doesn't just need more people: the looming population crisis is most acute outside major cities. Canada's uniquely decentralized immigration system—where local governments and employers choose the applicants best suited for their towns and labour needs—may be its best bet.

THE FIRST STEPS toward decentralization took place where most experiments in Canadian federalism begin: Quebec. In 1991, after years of lobbying Ottawa, the province won the right to select its own economic immigrants. Unsurprisingly, it wanted to pick more French-speaking applicants and to integrate them in a way that respects its distinct identity. The federal government would still control family sponsorships and refugee migration, and it would ensure newcomers passed health and security screenings, but other than that, Quebec could create its own system and decide how many new immigrants to accept each year.

Soon, other provinces wanted power over immigration too. Robert Vineberg, then director general of the immigration department's Prairies and Northern Territories Region, says federal politicians and bureaucrats didn't just shrug and agree—they had several reasons to strike deals with the provinces. First, immigration is explicitly a shared jurisdiction under Section 95 of the Constitution, so Ottawa couldn't just ignore provincial demands. Second, federal politicians were afraid that, if they didn't negotiate a limited agreement with provinces quickly, Ottawa would lose all control over the selection of worker and business immigrants, as it had in Quebec. Third, the demand came as the federal government, under Jean Chrétien, was shedding programs as part of a deficit battle. So, in 1996, the Provincial Nominee Program (PNP) was born: the federal government would retain the right to set quotas and approve the details and standards of provincial programs, as well as vet all applicants for security and health concerns, but the provinces would design the programs themselves and much of the work—and cost—would be borne outside Ottawa.

IN MANY CASES, the provincial programs offer immigrants an easier path to coveted permanent residency than federal programs do. Permanent residents—unlike students, visitors, and temporary workers—can stay in the country indefinitely and become citizens if they wish. Some provinces want baristas while others want software engineers, which means criteria for education, language, and work experience are specific to each province and program, and minimum standards can be lowered. Manitoba was an early leader in using the programs to boost the workforce in rural areas. The Maritime provinces also launched programs quickly. BC followed. Ontario didn't get its own agreement until 2005, but even then, PNPs were a sideshow to the main stage of federal programs.

At first, PNPs seemed like a bad idea to Naomi Alboim, now a distinguished fellow at Queen's University's school of policy studies and the senior policy fellow at the Canada Excellence Research Chair in Migration and Integration at Ryerson University. In a 2009 paper, she argued that the decentralization of immigration had resulted in a "patchwork of criteria, admission requirements, costs, processes, services and supports, which are difficult to understand or predict." Provinces, employers, and postsecondary institutions don't have the national interest as their mandate, she wrote. Businesses, colleges, and universities also don't have the capacity to provide the necessary supports for newcomers. In addition, Alboim worried that immigrants would engage in a kind of jurisdiction-shopping: applying to come to a province with easier entrance standards while intending to live elsewhere. Another concern was that the complexity of competing programs would lead to the exploitation of newcomers by unlicensed immigration recruiters.

Initially, these worries proved true. Some provinces approved hundreds of immigrants who never even showed up at their supposed destinations, going directly to Toronto, Montreal, or Vancouver instead—locations that can be more attractive because they already have robust multiethnic communities where newcomers share the same languages, observe the same customs, and may find networks of friends and family to help them launch a Canadian life. In 2013, only 28 percent of those nominated for immigration by Prince Edward Island since 2008 were still living there, according to Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship Canada (IRCC). Manitoba, which put more emphasis on helping applicants settle into the community, showed more promise, with an 84 percent retention rate over the same period. But not all provinces were so effective.

PNP pathways that catered to immigrants who wanted to buy, start, or invest in local business (as opposed to those designed to attract potential employees) also suffered. "The business streams were rife with—I don't want to use the word *corruption*—but difficulties with implementation. There were some initial scandals and fraud," Alboim says.

Nova Scotia's business-mentorship program, which launched in 2002, demanded that immigrants pay an $80,000 fee to a private business, as well as $30,000 for the administration of the program and $20,000 to fund their own salary at the business for six months. In some cases, immigrants who had agreed to settle in rural areas forfeited investments of more than $100,000 so they could settle elsewhere. For example, in 2016, more than two-thirds of the immigrants in Prince Edward Island's investor program abandoned bonds of $200,000, leaving $18 million in provincial coffers. Critics and opposition leaders accused the PEI government of selling access to Canada. PEI eventually shut down the program in 2018.

In 2011, a federal evaluation of PNPs across the country warned that there was little information about the number of businesses or jobs created under the programs—it was unclear whether they were working. The same report flagged issues of fraud as well as a lack of standards, evaluation, and training for those who ran the programs. Canada's experimental new immigration system was off to a very bumpy start.

The crisis of dwindling populations in Canada's rural communities has always been personal for Bernie Derible. The former IRCC director of issues management grew up in Dartmouth, Nova Scotia, but spent his childhood summers on the family dairy farm, in the Cape Breton village of Mabou. He watched as his aunt and uncle struggled to find help with the day-to-day tasks of maintaining the land. "There was nobody up there who would take less than $300 to cut the goddamn grass," he says, "and it was because there are no people, right?" Last year, his elderly aunt and uncle had to sell the beloved farm.

When Derible criss-crossed the country, in 2015, holding town halls to discuss bringing Syrian refugees to Canada, he heard similar stories. Outside major cities, people told him of dramatic labour shortages. In Alberta, he says, one man told him it took three years to find an electrician to help him build a house.

Canada's workforce problem is at the heart of its decentralized immigration programs. Canadians aren't having enough children to replace themselves in many provinces, and baby boomers are retiring from the workforce. In fifty years, up to 30 percent of the population will be over the age of sixty-five. This demographic crisis is particularly acute in Atlantic Canada, where the population is oldest and fertility rates are lowest. Immigration is the main driver of population growth in this country and the most important source of essential workers in some industries. Consider Alberta, where in 2016 more than 50 percent of all nurses' aides, orderlies, and patient-service associates had been born outside the country.

The problem is exacerbated by the fact that many immigration programs have had trouble retaining immigrants in more rural communities. Officials won new tools to tackle that problem in 2008, when an amendment tucked into an omnibus budget bill gave the immigration minister broad new powers

Applicants faced with over 100 different paths to Canada can have a hard time figuring out which may work for them.

to create and abolish programs without holding public hearings or asking Parliament for permission. In 2016, newly appointed Liberal immigration minister John McCallum used those expanded powers to launch a second wave of decentralization. Now, it wasn't just the provinces that could create their own immigration programs. Towns, community groups, and employers could too. The hope was that locally run programs would have better connections to information centres, language courses, and the kind of local supports that newcomers needed to grow roots in their first Canadian destination.

Soon after this, Derible was part of a team that launched the Atlantic Immigration Pilot, Canada's first employer-driven regional program to ease population woes. It would be administered by New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island, and Newfoundland and Labrador, but employers would take the lead in selecting applicants. Companies were also required to create settlement plans for their new workers as a way to encourage retention—figure out housing, transportation, school for kids, and plans for winter clothing. And employers were expected to shepherd workers' paperwork through the immigration bureaucracy.

The program failed to meet its quotas. Announced in July 2016, it followed the pattern of many subnational programs that were announced with great fanfare but struggled to reach their targets. It launched with an initial goal of 2,000 permanent residents for 2017, but by the end of that first year, only eighty newcomers had arrived in the four provinces—and that number included workers, their spouses, and their children. The next year was better, with 1,400 people arriving. Again, there were rumours of fraud and allegations that some employers were demanding that recruits pay huge fees for a job guaranteed to lead to permanent residence. That year, the CBC reported that some job applicants had been duped into paying an unlicensed consultant more than $150,000 in the hopes of joining the pilot program.

When yet another set of pathways was proposed—the Rural and Northern Immigration Pilot and the Municipal Nominee Program—IRCC took only some of the lessons from the Atlantic pilot. Employers would no longer be in charge: only economic-development agencies and municipalities would screen applicants. The emphasis on settlement plans was gone. One thing that didn't change is that many people with no experience

in immigration law or practice would be tasked with designing, funding, and running the programs.

Leigha Horsfield was one of them. She is the executive director and general manager of Community Futures North Okanagan, a nonprofit in Vernon, BC, that helps promote economic development across the northern tip of the Okanagan Valley. The group, which offers employment counselling and business consulting and administers more than $1 million in development loans and grants, applied to the Rural and Northern Immigration Program on a lark. “I knew nothing about immigration,” Horsfield recalls. “Absolutely nothing.” Being chosen was the first surprise. The second was that there was no funding.

In 2019, the agency in Vernon was one of eleven in rural or northern communities selected to pilot the new program. Each agency had a bespoke approach to fill labour shortages in those locales: Sudbury looked for applicants working in mining and tourism while Thunder Bay originally searched for nurses and pulp-mill operators. Requirements for education, language, experience in Canada, interviews, and visits were all set locally. Horsfield’s primary goal was to ensure that newcomers stayed: her program gives extra points to temporary workers already living in the area and applicants with relatives in the area. But designing, launching, and running new immigration programs was a stunning amount of work for little economic-development agencies in rural Canada.

Horsfield scrounged up provincial funding for the program and hired a coordinator to sort through thousands of profiles, answer hundreds of emails, verify documents in dozens of applications, and select candidates. The coordinator received a week of training. (In comparison, federal visa officers typically get a year of training before deciding on applications.) Ottawa had allowed Community Futures North Okanagan to recommend up to 100 applicants for permanent settlement each year, but almost one year after its launch, the agency in Vernon had recommended only twenty-four. The experience with Community Futures is not unique. It’s not just a lack of training and funding that hampers some programs: applicants faced with more than 100 different pathways to Canada can have a hard time figuring out which ones may work for them. In Vernon, more than 10,000 applicants filed profiles on the organization’s website when it went live, early last year, but most hadn’t understood the program and didn’t qualify.

In 2017, Daniela Castro Luna came to join her uncle as a temporary worker on a mushroom farm near Whitby, Ontario. She’d dropped out of law school two years earlier with the intent of moving to Canada. The reason for coming, she says, was simple: “In Guatemala, too many people are looking for jobs.” She had to leave behind her infant daughter, Ariana Victoria, who stays with Castro Luna’s mother when her own mother is in Canada. Castro Luna visited her daughter in 2018, but now she’s counting on one of Canada’s newest niche programs to end her transcontinental commute. The Agri-Food Pilot offers permanent residency to people who work in year-round agriculture, like Castro Luna. “All I want is to bring my baby to Canada, and my mom,” she says. “I want to make a better life for them.”

Her uncle, Erick de la Rosa, has been working on mushroom farms in Canada off and on since 2012. He too is betting on the Agri-Food Pilot to bring his family—his wife and seven-year-old son—to Canada. “I want to be in Canada forever,” he says. Neither one, however, is sure the new program will work.

Nor is Janet Krayden, the woman who dreamed the program up. The pilot doesn’t decentralize immigration processing—applicants are chosen by the department of immigration—but it makes employers in specific industries the gatekeepers of who can apply. It restricts applicants by both industry and type of work. Krayden, of the Canadian Mushroom Growers Association, worked for four years to convince federal officials to launch the program. In December, she said, she hadn’t been able to find a single person who had applied for immigration through the program, which was launched last May. She blamed unrealistic federal demands—like requiring original high school diplomas from remote villages—and complicated paperwork for the delays.

Decentralized and niche immigration programs marked a shift in both who selects the next Canadians and what kind of people the country wants to attract. For example, federal immigration programs tend to favour managers and white-collar workers with university degrees who are fluent in English or French, while new initiatives often favour foreign workers who require fewer credentials—snowmobile mechanics in Labrador, nursing home attendants in Alberta, or dishwashers in British Columbia. Some of the programs focus on recruiting workers from overseas while others focus on foreign workers who are already here on temporary permits.

In some cases, the programs offer permanent residence to some of Canada’s most disadvantaged workers. Many temporary workers can stay in the country only if they keep working for the employer who sponsored them, and some are required to live on the job. During the pandemic, many migrant workers shared crowded bunkhouses and were banned from leaving their farms. More than 1,300 contracted COVID-19, including more than thirty in one mushroom farm alone. And, while these immigration programs were intended to be a boon for workers, they’ve instead been plagued by complexity. De la Rosa has been looking at permanent resident programs for years but hasn’t been able to figure out which programs, if any, would work for him. “They tell me, if I do an English test here, this program will make me a permanent resident. I hope so. I don’t know.”

Montreal immigration lawyer David Cohen employs more than a dozen people to track Canada’s shifting immigration opportunities. His website, *CanadaVisa*, is the only up-to-date public list of Canada’s many immigration programs. The site’s newsletter, run by

Kareem El-Assal, director of policy and digital strategy, has more than half a million regular readers. "David has been working in immigration for more than forty years, and I have been for more than ten years," El-Assal says. "We are immersed in it, but it is impossible to keep up." Not only is there no official list of programs, many of the decentralized and pilot programs are started and shut down with little notice. Now, says El-Assal, imagine trying to sift through the criteria for more than 100 programs spread across more than a dozen websites when your first language is not English or French. "It's very difficult—almost impossible."

NAOMI ALBOIM is more positive about the decentralized approach to immigration today. IRCC has tackled a few of the problems, killing off some programs with low application numbers and retention rates—and those hampered by allegations of fraud—while adding more oversight to others. It has set basic eligibility standards for most streams, which eliminate some of the jurisdiction-shopping by newcomers. The consistency means immigrants are less likely to select a pathway with an easier application only to move to a bigger city once they have been accepted. But one of the most important changes has happened in the provinces: they developed expertise and a core of skilled bureaucrats who now have experience devising and delivering immigration programs. A 2017 federal evaluation of Provincial Nominee Programs reported that most of the issues identified in the early stages had been resolved.

The decentralization of immigration has also succeeded in its primary goal: to fight population decline outside the largest metropolitan areas by distributing newcomers across the country. Twenty years ago, only one in ten permanent residents settled outside of Ontario, Quebec, or British Columbia. By 2019, the share of immigrants arriving in the rest of Canada had tripled to almost 30 percent.

Newcomers are also settling for longer in the places where they first arrive: retention rates outside Ontario, Quebec, and BC are steadily rising. For those approved through PNPs, retention has topped 90 percent in some places. An October 2020 analysis of the Atlantic Immigration Pilot suggests it has also improved retention. That program attracted more than 4,000 new immigrants in 2019, more than twice as many as the year before, though there's no data yet about how many stayed in the region.

Derible, who has since left federal service, knows the Atlantic Immigration Pilot didn't roll out as planned, but he thinks it helped forge a new future for Canada. "There is no perfect solution to anything," he says. "It's definitely a B grade, but that B grade brought thousands of new people to the Atlantic region."

> "The fact that so many Canadians have a stake in the immigration system makes a really big difference."

The complexity of the system remains a problem. Some would like IRCC to offer centralized information about the kaleidoscope of programs; others want a single portal for all program applications. Those changes aren't in the pipeline. "The reason why Canada has a great immigration system isn't because we have figured out one amazing program," El-Assal says. "It's that many programs together fill economic needs and cater to a greater pool of applicants.... Now, selection is much more diverse, and you don't even need a university degree anymore.... It has allowed Canada to open its doors to a greater talent pool."

This is not the first time Canada has led a radical policy innovation in immigration. In 1967, it became the first country in the world to use a points system to select permanent residents. In 1979, it became the first country to allow groups of private citizens to sponsor refugees. Both of those innovations were copied elsewhere. International experts are looking at this latest innovation too, not just because of how it gives Canada an edge in the competition for new immigrants but also because of how it may be affecting public opinion.

Canada has largely avoided the divisive immigration debates that have riven its closest allies: the United Kingdom, the United States, and Australia. A Gallup poll shows that Canada is more welcoming to immigrants than any other country in the world. The Environics Institute for Survey Research has been polling Canadian attitudes about immigration for four decades and reports a remarkably steady rise in support for immigration since 1998—the year the push for decentralization really began.

In a widely cited 2016 report for an international policy institute, Daniel Hiebert, a professor emeritus of geography at the University of British Columbia, argued that the decision to shift responsibility for selecting and settling immigrants away from the federal government has been an important factor in creating the resilience of public support for immigration. "The fact that so many Canadians, through so many different pathways, have some kind of a stake in the immigration system, that makes a really big difference," he says. "Lots of jobs depend on it. Lots of public thinking goes into it."

In the 1980s, roughly 70 percent of Canadians thought the country accepted too many immigrants, according to Environics' annual polling. Today, that number is down to 27 percent, with 84 percent believing immigrants are good for the economy. Xenophobic incidents do occur in Canada, and immigrants are more likely than nonimmigrants to face discrimination on the basis of language, ethnicity, culture, and religion. But political parties that have based national campaigns on anti-immigration platforms have failed on election day. The most recent leader to try—Maxime Bernier, founder of the People's Party of Canada—won less than 2 percent of the vote in 2019.

Six months into the pandemic, in its annual survey of Canadians, Environics

found the highest levels of support for immigration ever recorded. Support had increased in every region, in every demographic group, and among members of every political party. More than half of those surveyed agreed that Canada needs more immigration to boost its population.

Decentralizing immigration programs also affects local politics. Robert Vineberg, the former director general of the immigration department's Prairies and Northern Territories Division, points out that anti-immigration movements in other countries have been spearheaded by local politicians in rural areas. That's unlikely to happen in Canada, he says, because provincial leaders are increasingly in charge of immigration programs, so they would be able to criticize only themselves.

El-Assal and Cohen both agree that the decentralization of immigration decisions has helped build support for immigration across Canada. But they don't think that's the whole story. Canada's strong social programs and relative wealth play a role too. "If you are providing a high standard of living to people born in Canada, they are less likely to be looking over their shoulders to see how immigrants are impacting the country," says El-Assal. "If I have a high standard of living, I'm not going to be too apprehensive about that." These same factors, however, haven't prevented public opinion from turning against immigrants in the US, Australia, and the UK.

A paper by Queen's University professor Keith Banting reminds us that we should not assume that public support for immigration is simply baked into Canadian culture: "The challenge of sustaining public support for immigration rests not only with the ministers responsible for immigration and multiculturalism but also with ministers of finance and economic development. The ability of governments to preserve low levels of unemployment and—by extension—to foster Canadians' faith in the economic benefits of immigration is also critical."

What El-Assal doesn't mention is that Canada's immigrant population is increasingly reflected in the political class. When the minister of immigration sat down with the president of the Canadian Labour Congress to discuss the construction-worker pilot program, both were men born abroad who had come to Canada, alone, at age sixteen. Hussen arrived as a Somali refugee; CLC president Hassan Yussuff was sent by his parents from Guyana to live with his brother in Toronto. "Knowing that I had to come to this country as an immigrant, I had a sense of affinity to people and their status," Yussuff says.

Hussen was then one of four cabinet ministers born outside the country and one of forty-seven immigrants sitting in Parliament, according to a *Hill Times* analysis. In Ottawa, there was plenty of personal experience at the political level with the advantages of robust immigration and the dangers of cultivating xenophobia. As for the CLC program, Yussuff says it took him a long time to wrap his head around why the organization should get involved in immigration—then he realized it was an issue of protecting exploited workers. The public rollout of the program was low-key and careful: no one used the word *amnesty*. Still, he was glad there was no controversy. The CLC helped thirty-four out-of-status construction workers and their families apply for permanent residence last year; fifteen of those have already been approved and are on the path to apply for citizenship by 2023.

Yussuff says there are 500,000 to 1 million undocumented workers in Canada. He sees the tiny GTA construction-worker program as a test of something that could bring hundreds of thousands of workers into the Canadian fold—and help boost the economies of towns, provinces, and regions from sea to sea to sea. "I am hoping in my heart of hearts that Canadians see this for what it is—an initiative to try to resolve the uncertainty in the lives of so many people who are in our country in the recognition that Canada is a unique place."

KELLY TOUGHILL is an associate professor of journalism at the University of King's College whose work focuses on Canadian immigration and the economics of journalism.

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Cameron Ortis was privy to Canada's biggest national security secrets — and in a prime position to exploit them

BY JUSTIN LING

ILLUSTRATIONS BY MICHAEL BYERS

On March 7, 2018, Vincent Ramos was sitting alone at the Over Easy restaurant in Bellingham, Washington, just across the border from his home, in Richmond, British Columbia. He didn't protest when a phalanx of cops marched in and arrested him. Speaking to the *Bellingham Herald*, the restaurant owner said Ramos "seemed like a mellow guy."

It's not mentioned in the account of his arrest, but the first thing officers likely did after they cuffed Ramos was reach into his pocket and grab his BlackBerry. That device, and the network it connected to, was at the heart of a sprawling FBI indictment that accused Ramos of racketeering activity involving gambling, money laundering, and drug trafficking. But that doesn't quite cover the scale of his operation.

Ramos was founder and CEO of Vancouver-based Phantom Secure, a company that offered what it called "military-grade encryption" to criminal enterprises across the globe, from small-time loan sharks right up to Mexican drug lords. Fundamentally, Phantom Secure was a hardware company. It sold modified BlackBerry handsets that had been customized to communicate only with other Phantom Secure devices. On top of that, it ran an email system that routed encrypted messages through Panama and Hong Kong. As a result, conversations were nearly impossible to intercept, and if law enforcement did snag a message, there was no way of decrypting it. The FBI says as many as 20,000 clients signed up for protection that ran upward of $2,000 (US) for a six-month subscription. It even came with a customer service line. As a last safety measure, the company installed a remote kill switch, allowing phones seized by law enforcement to be wiped from afar.

Investigators had been watching Phantom Secure for some time. Police in different countries had been finding repurposed phones in stash houses and on suspects. But, by the time the devices were seized, they had been wiped clean and rendered useless. Police needed one with its data still intact. The year before Ramos was apprehended, agents at the Blaine, Washington, border crossing—just a half-hour drive from the Over Easy restaurant—intercepted an SUV loaded with twenty-five kilograms of party drug MDMA. The driver was carrying a Phantom Secure phone. Agents had, by then, developed an ingenious tactic: they would slip such phones into a Faraday bag, a specialized pouch designed to block outside signals. With the device cut off from its network, Phantom Secure would be unable to activate the kill switch. In this way, investigators used the information collected to build their case against the company. With each Phantom Secure customer they nabbed—drug dealers, mobsters—police got closer to Ramos. Eventually, they went after Phantom Secure itself.

By June, Ramos had turned state's witness. As part of his plea deal, he handed over the login credentials for his servers, domains, and accounts, which gave police access to his entire operation. The technology was only one layer of protection, however. Ramos didn't even know the identities of many of his clients. Police worked feverishly to untangle the complicated network of pseudonyms and code names gleaned from Ramos's emails and messages. As word spread that Phantom Secure had been compromised, his co-conspirators began to disappear into the wind.

By then, investigators had already managed to disrupt the trafficking routes and communications structures of a litany of criminal gangs. It was a big score, though hardly the biggest. Drug busts happen all the time, and whenever the FBI knocks down a platform for a cocaine-smuggling operation, two more pop up. But investigators also came upon something unexpected, something that would shake the world's largest intelligence-sharing partnership to its core. In Ramos's emails, the FBI found a classified memo prepared by the Royal Canadian Mounted Police.

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The file had intelligence on Ramos himself, information that would have been invaluable in his attempts to elude investigators—information Ramos should never have possessed.

The list of individuals, worldwide, with access to such a memo wasn't long. The discovery set off a mole hunt inside the upper echelons of Canadian national security that would lead to the Ottawa condo of one of the country's most senior intelligence officials. In September 2019, the RCMP arrested one of its own: Cameron Ortis.

SITUATED IN RCMP headquarters, the National Intelligence Coordination Centre is the analytic branch of the Mounties. Launched in 2013, the NICC helps keep tabs on the dark web and hackers both at home and abroad. It tracks international organized crime groups and biker gangs. It also monitors ideologically motivated actors, from terrorist groups to peaceful protest movements that could sabotage critical infrastructure. All this information is collected by RCMP officers in the field and blended with research provided by other intelligence arms of the Canadian government—agents at the Canadian Security Intelligence Service (CSIS), say, or at the Financial Transactions and Reports Analysis Centre of Canada. From that mass of data, NICC analysts and researchers produce reports that help set RCMP priorities, steer investigations, and inform on-the-ground policing.

At the time of his arrest, Cameron Ortis had been running the NICC for three years. There was a lot to keep him busy. During his tenure as director general, Islamic State militants had proven themselves adept at using social media to recruit and radicalize disaffected youth. Online black markets, like Silk Road, grew to popularity by offering everything from rocket launchers to heroin. Predators had moved away from the global internet and had begun sharing and selling child pornography on private servers.

The NICC wasn't just producing intelligence reports for the RCMP—it was also distributing them to its partners around the world. After the Second World War, Allied nations banded together to share information in hopes of preserving a fragile world order. Canada, the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia, and New Zealand became the Five Eyes. The partnership started out as a military pact but expanded to tackle cybercrime and terrorism.

Information that circulates around the Five Eyes is the sort marked "top secret"—it can be seen only by officials with the proper clearance. Getting that clearance is no small feat. Security officials will scour a candidate's social media accounts, interview friends and family, and dig into tax returns and bank records. Areas of concern include money troubles or addiction issues—anything that could cause someone to be blackmailed or lead to their loyalty being compromised. The last time Canada reported statistics for security classification—1998—around 2,000 people a year were being granted top secret clearance.

After joining the RCMP in 2007, Ortis passed his security vetting and was hired as a strategic analyst—"a sort of jack of all trades," as one of his former colleagues told me. Ortis was a rarity in the organization. He wasn't, like his bosses, a cop. He was, first and foremost, an academic, having recently completed a PhD at the University of British Columbia, where he studied the intersection of technology and crime. Ortis wrote dense, thoughtful papers on how governments, primarily in the Asia-Pacific region, were failing to take seriously the threat posed by internet-literate criminal organizations. Drug cartels, anarchists, hackers, doomsday cults—all were using the World Wide Web, barely a decade old at that point, to organize and carry out nefarious deeds. Technology, Ortis felt, was giving criminals a door to a universe far removed from the prying eyes of law enforcement, and police needed to adapt.

But the digital world of the early 2000s was patrolled largely by troops and spies. The National Security Agency, in America, and our own top secret electronic-surveillance outfit, the Communication Security Establishment (CSE), were both branches of the military. CSIS, which investigates threats to Canada's safety, focused on the internet only insofar as it was being used by terror groups and radical elements, whose ranks it sometimes tried to infiltrate. The RCMP, however, had long been frozen out of the national security game thanks to a string of screw-ups and ethically dubious activities in the late '70s and early '80s. Government investigations found that, during the 1970 October Crisis, the agency had, in the name of collecting intelligence, done everything from stealing documents to attempting to plant dynamite on suspected radicals. The reports led Ottawa, in 1984, to cleave off the RCMP's national security work into a new body: CSIS.

The 9/11 terrorist attacks reinvigorated the Mounties' zest for national security work. While the CSE could intercept communications and CSIS could recruit informants and moles, they needed the RCMP to make arrests and obtain search warrants. But years out in the cold had left the force with an acute skills shortage. That became apparent pretty quickly. Just months after 9/11, the RCMP started up an investigation into roughly half a dozen Canadian citizens over their supposed ties to al Qaeda—among them was an engineer named Maher Arar. The unfounded conclusions linking Arar to foreign terrorism were eventually shared with the FBI, which led to his arrest, rendition to Syria, and torture. In 2006, a scathing review found no evidence that Arar was involved with overseas terror groups and concluded that the RCMP "lacked the expertise to conduct national security investigations."

Part of the RCMP's problem was its personnel. Mounties were trained to be cops, not intelligence analysts. They may have been given some basic grounding in counterterrorism strategies but not much more. To address its shortcomings, the RCMP began scouting for non-officers skilled in digital forensics who could comb through web forums, Usenet groups, and chat rooms to, as per a 2004 job posting, "identify criminal trends and patterns."

Ortis, who joined the RCMP the year after the Arar inquiry released its findings,

seemed a perfect fit. As an academic, he believed it was a mistake to hand the cyber domain over entirely to soldiers and spies. Criminals and organized crime networks, after all, were the earliest and most eager adopters of new technology—and that, he argued, made the internet police business. And it was a business he seemed remarkably good at. He struck many of those around him as "super competent." Overconfident, maybe, but as one former colleague frames it, Ortis was "no more arrogant than any other mediocre white dude in the public service." Working within any government system has its fair share of challenges and headaches, but coworkers say handling internal processes was part of Ortis's skill set. Less than a decade after joining the force, he became director general and, as has been widely reported, had a close relationship with then RCMP commissioner Bob Paulson. It was an undeniably quick rise, especially for a civilian in a system of skeptical cops.

Maybe more skepticism was warranted. Investigative documents from Ramos's trial, and sources in the Canadian security world, point to Ortis as the origin of the sensitive documents that wound up in Ramos's email. It's still unclear just what else Ortis is alleged to have stolen and sold, but as director general, he would have had access to the most sensitive details on investigations by all Five Eyes countries. "He had a lot of leeway," a former coworker says. His access would have been invaluable to foreign governments, such as Russia's and China's, which have engaged in long-running cat-and-mouse games of espionage with the Five Eyes—Moscow frequently looking for kompromat on Western politicians, Beijing often looking to steal commercially valuable information from private industry. It would have been worth plenty to foreign terror groups that regularly find themselves infiltrated by undercover operatives. And it would have been incredibly useful to international criminal outfits, whose phone calls and emails are often intercepted, to know which channels were safe. Whatever Ortis allegedly took was enough, according to the Canadian Press, to have the CSE call the breach "severe." (Shortly after his arrest, I contacted his lawyer with an invitation to talk about the case, but I never heard back.)

The charges against Ortis hint at his alleged crimes. Court documents claim that, in the winter and spring of 2015, he communicated "special operational information" to "V. R."—believed to be Ramos. But it is also alleged that he communicated "special operational information" to "S. H.," "M. A.," and "F. M." According to Global News, one of those sets of initials likely belongs to Farzam Mehdizadeh, a currency trader who, the RCMP believes, was connected to a multibillion-dollar money laundering organization that secured cash for Hezbollah, Mexican drug cartels, and many groups in between. Investigators believe Ortis contacted one of Mehdizadeh's business associates, Salim Henareh (likely "S. H."), offering information on the RCMP investigation in exchange for cash. All told, Ortis is facing ten charges under the Security of Information Act and the Criminal Code, which allege he stole classified information, attempted to cover his tracks, and communicated the information to a foreign entity or terrorist group. Taken together, these crimes could carry a lifetime prison sentence.

Investigators appear to have executed their first search warrant related to the leaks in the summer of 2018, soon after Vincent Ramos began cooperating. Over nearly two years, the courts authorized more than two dozen warrants, searches, and tracking devices in British Columbia and Ontario. They called it "Project Ace."

Maybe this whole saga could have been avoided had the RCMP only familiarized itself with Ortis's academic work. Reading his PhD thesis, it's hard not to see foreshadowing of what he would, eventually, be accused of doing. He notes, for example, that in the late 1990s, the Pentagon faced down an extensive effort to steal sensitive military information from its servers. The hack, dubbed "Moonlight Maze," exposed that not even the world's most hardened cyberdefences could protect against dedicated individuals. Indeed, in his field research, Ortis writes that "government officials from two other countries acknowledged similar cases of serious breaches against military or highly sensitive research sites—some originating internally via a 'trusted insider.'" More than a decade after writing that paper, Ortis would be charged with being the very "trusted insider" he warned about.

We know now, of course, that there *were* signs—disturbing behaviour by Ortis repeatedly flagged to RCMP higher-ups. After his arrest, three former colleagues filed a lawsuit accusing Ortis of reigning over a dysfunctional and toxic workplace, even telling one of them their work was "horrible" and "garbage." The allegations, which have not been proven in court, claim that Ortis "systematically targeted them and attacked their careers as part of a larger plan to misappropriate their work and use it for personal gain." Dayna Young, one of the analysts suing the RCMP, alleges that some of the intelligence Ortis tried to sell was, in fact, hers. The employees say they went to the RCMP with their concerns multiple times, but nothing came of it.

In February, Global News reported that an RCMP superintendent named Marie-Claude Arsenault had joined the lawsuit, claiming that, when she worked under him in 2016 and 2017, Ortis's "bizarre and alarming behaviour" caused her to suspect he was trying to "deliberately sabotage" RCMP intelligence. She claimed to have repeatedly warned her superiors and was eventually transferred out of the NICC, which Ortis headed.

It's still an incomplete picture. Ortis stood at the top of his field, not struggling on the middle rungs. Why risk it all? In his book *The Anatomy of a Spy: A History of Espionage and Betrayal*, Michael Smith describes four main motivators for going rogue: lust, money, ideology, and revenge. Ortis fits awkwardly into those categories.

Lust is a powerful motivator. The East German Stasi was said to be particularly adept at the honeypot—using romantic entanglements to encourage secret holders to betray their countries. Over the course of the Cold War, some forty women were prosecuted for slipping state secrets to their lovers, who turned out to be spies working for the Soviets. Those who knew Ortis, several of whom spoke to the *National Post*, suggest that, for all or most of his time at the RCMP, he was a workaholic bachelor. With its long hours, his career seems to have left little time for dalliances with, say, Russian diplomats.

Ideologically driven espionage tends to line up with a cause. Daniel Ellsberg, the man who leaked the Pentagon Papers, stole government documents in the hope that they would end the Vietnam War. Ortis, on the other hand, didn't seem to have any discernible politics. "I can tell you what I told the RCMP: if he was extreme in his beliefs in any way, I certainly would remember, and I don't remember any such thing," says Tom Ngi, a fellow student who wrote code that helped Ortis analyze data for his thesis.

Espionage also pays well. CIA case officer Aldrich Ames made some $2 million (US) by selling secrets to Moscow in the 1980s. He began betraying his country because he was drowning in debt but ended up getting caught by amassing an unexplained wealth. If Ortis was desperate for money, there are few indications of it. His salary, as a senior intelligence official, would have likely been in the six figures. According to reporting, he dressed smartly and liked dining out, but he also rented sensible accommodations in Ottawa's Byward Market. And his career prospects were hardly stunted. As Ngi noted, he could have made orders of magnitude more money in the private sector.

Then there's revenge, often stemming from professional or personal dissatisfaction. FBI special agent Robert Hanssen spied for the Soviets for more than a decade, compromising the identity of countless American agents in the USSR, until the fall of the Berlin Wall. While his betrayal paid well, Hanssen would later confess he felt "rage" at having been passed over for promotion at the bureau. It's hard to imagine that Ortis—one of the golden boys of the RCMP—would have been frustrated with his employer. His ascension through the ranks was remarkable.

In the end, it may not make sense to psychoanalyze his actions. Ortis was brilliant, wasn't shy about it, and appears to have been caught selling secrets to the very type of criminal organization he was tasked with investigating. Maybe there's

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no great explanation of why beyond the fact that he simply did. Maybe the sport was in the game, regardless of what side he was playing for.

ORTIS'S ALLEGED crimes, however, do point to a fundamental problem with the RCMP: how it investigates its own. Any department that handles top secret material is required to do regular checks of staff with security clearance. CSIS, for example, conducts polygraph tests at five-year intervals. One former intelligence official told me, flatly, that the RCMP's internal processes are "not as good as they should be." Indeed, an audit of the agency's personnel security-screening process, published in 2016, found it "not sufficiently rigorous." And, while it has a Truth Verification Section—a unit dedicated to particularly difficult interrogations of suspects and witnesses—the RCMP seems to have generally been negligent about vetting its own staff.

Employee reviews, however, are only one way of probing for weaknesses. Robust security protocols also demand regular auditing of classified information. When Ortis's residence was raided, investigators found dozens of encrypted computers, according to the CBC. While it's not known yet what these computers held, taking any sensitive documents home is enough to raise eyebrows. According to a former intelligence official, it's generally uncommon to leave the office with files marked secret. To walk off with anything top secret is strictly forbidden. Such files are typically accessed only in a SCIF—short for Sensitive Compartmented Information Facility. It's a room where cellphones, laptops, or any other devices are prohibited and where walls are usually reinforced to prevent electronic eavesdropping. To prevent breaches and theft, security agencies are also supposed to keep precise records of who handled what classified assets when. These safeguards are standard for all Five Eyes and most NATO countries, given that a large portion of top secret material is a blend of intelligence from various international agencies. If one agency is lax, it could expose the secrets of allies.

Which is why the Ortis affair is such a calamity for Ottawa and the spy bosses on Ogilvie Road, where CSIS and the CSE are headquartered. The fact that the breach first happened some four years before Ortis was arrested is especially embarrassing. (Compare it with other leakers from the digital era, such as former US Army private Chelsea Manning or ex–Air Force intelligence officer Reality Winner: each exfiltrated sensitive information with ease, yes, but each was promptly identified.) If a partner in the alliance can't be trusted, it may weaken the vital openness of the Five Eyes partnership. Such moves could inspire countries to withhold material.

Canada has had a few of these embarrassing high-profile episodes. But so have its allies. Most notably, in 2013, National Security Agency contractor Edward Snowden leaked thousands of top secret documents about the US government's surveillance methods. In 2017, Wikileaks released details of the CIA's Vault 7, a database of powerful hacking tools. One of the most effective strategies after a leak, according to a former intelligence official, is the rather cynical practice of saying "maybe you tomorrow." That is, you remind other agencies that they, too, have had leaks. And they will likely have more. It was Canada today, but it may be you tomorrow.

That strategy only goes so far if Canada can't prove that it's taken significant steps to address security deficiencies. RCMP commissioner Brenda Lucki has insisted that "mitigation strategies are being put in place"—presumably to avoid another Ortis. What those strategies are, however, Lucki hasn't said.

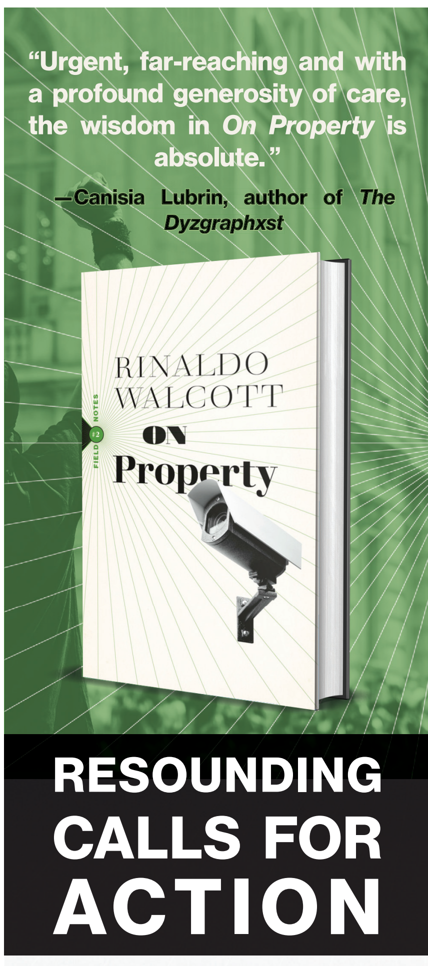
CAMERON ORTIS'S story tells us a lot about insider threats at the government agencies designed to protect us. But, if the charges against him are true, his story also tells us an enormous amount about the value of in-depth, investigative policing.

In February, CSIS director David Vigneault gave a virtual address to the Centre for International Governance Innovation, warning that "any individual with inside knowledge of—or access to—an organization's systems can be targeted by hostile intelligence services." He told the audience that the "significantly more complex environment" necessitated more powers for CSIS "to use modern tools." It's a variation of what the RCMP has also long lobbied for. In 2016, then commissioner Bob Paulson warned that "the single most important issue we have" was the threat of "going dark"—referring to the ability of criminals to hide behind strong encryption standards. Indeed, Canada is joining a chorus of national security agencies in other Five Eyes countries that have pushed for ever-broader powers to outlaw or weaken these encryption standards in order to better hunt down criminals everywhere.

One threat of particular concern is something called Pretty Good Privacy, or PGP. Over the years, PGP has become the bedrock of modern encryption—it was the foundation of Phantom Secure—and has influenced the technology used to scramble data in WhatsApp, Signal, iMessage, Wire, and a host of other popular messaging clients. The concept is rather simple: PGP gives anyone, through a series of equations, the ability to generate a string of letters and numbers—a key. That key, a version of which is uploaded publicly, is used to encrypt any message or file the user wants. A whistleblower, say, may want to contact a journalist securely. To do so, they may use the journalist's public key. The journalist, in turn, can read the message only once they unlock it with their private key.

While we know that security services in Canada and abroad have figured out all manner of hacks to beat commercial encryption, PGP remains more or less secure. In his thesis, Ortis predicted what would happen when criminals have privacy defences that outpace the investigative methods available to police. "Faced with a quickly evolving predator," Ortis wrote, governments will try to turn the tables with "more police and more laws and, possibly even framing the problem as a threat to 'national security.'"

Some governments have tried exactly that. Singapore has long given its police agencies the power to force citizens to



Geese in Formation

BY TIM BOWLING

O uninspired tattoo of the lesser-than symbol,
tiny above the planet as a daughter's barrette,
frayed chevron of the officer of the end of summer love,
I refuse to write the elegy you summon.

You yourself are never an ending,
never collapse like the pinsetters' set-up
or vanish like the smudged pencil
of all my father's strikes and spares.

You are only creatures
with somewhere to go,
called by the condition
of what you are

—blood, not wings,
the basis of all
flight and
metaphor.

decrypt their communications. In 2018, Australia passed a bill requiring technology companies to decrypt any messages sent on their platforms. While the full impact of that law hasn't yet been felt, the *Guardian* has reported that Australian police may use their new powers to snoop on McDonald's free Wi-Fi or on citizens' online-shopping habits.

But, as Philip Zimmermann—who invented PGP—told me recently, fighting against encryption and against the evolution of technology is like trying to force Henry Ford to limit the size of his cars' engines in order to stop Bonnie and Clyde. It's "a fool's errand." And Ortis's own arrest shows why. During the years the RCMP spent trying to convince the public it needed expansive new legislative powers to do its job, its top brass was allegedly spiriting away its secrets to a criminal encryption company.

Ortis wasn't fatalistic about the threat that cybercriminals pose in a world with strong encryption. Far from it. He argued that police agencies too often treat the internet as "a kind of black-box." As governments spend more time worrying about how to crack encrypted communications, the most effective way for them to combat digital criminals—even in their own ranks—continues to be low tech. Tactics used in effective online investigations aren't all that different from how cops bust drug rings or organized crime groups in real life. It was, after all, a Faraday pouch—a bag lined with aluminum—and the capture of a cyber kingpin that ultimately led to Ortis himself. Good police work, not draconian laws, dismantles criminal enterprises. Ortis was right. So right that he may go to jail for it.

JUSTIN LING is a Montreal-based freelance journalist and author of the book *Missing from the Village*, which was published last September.

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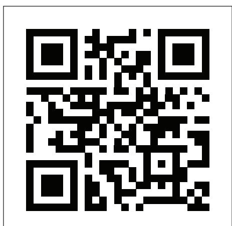

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MEDIA

After the Facts

The post-truth era of fake news fuelled a push for greater accuracy. Is it working?

BY VIVIANE FAIRBANK
ILLUSTRATIONS BY JOSH HOLINATY

At nineteen, I moved to New York City for my first magazine internship. I was hired as a fact checker, and at the time, I knew little about the practice; it hadn't yet gained the popularity it now enjoys, with regular headlines about "Fact-Checking the President in Real Time." I interpreted fact-checking literally: journalists report facts, sometimes they make errors, and fact checkers clean everything up before the story is published.

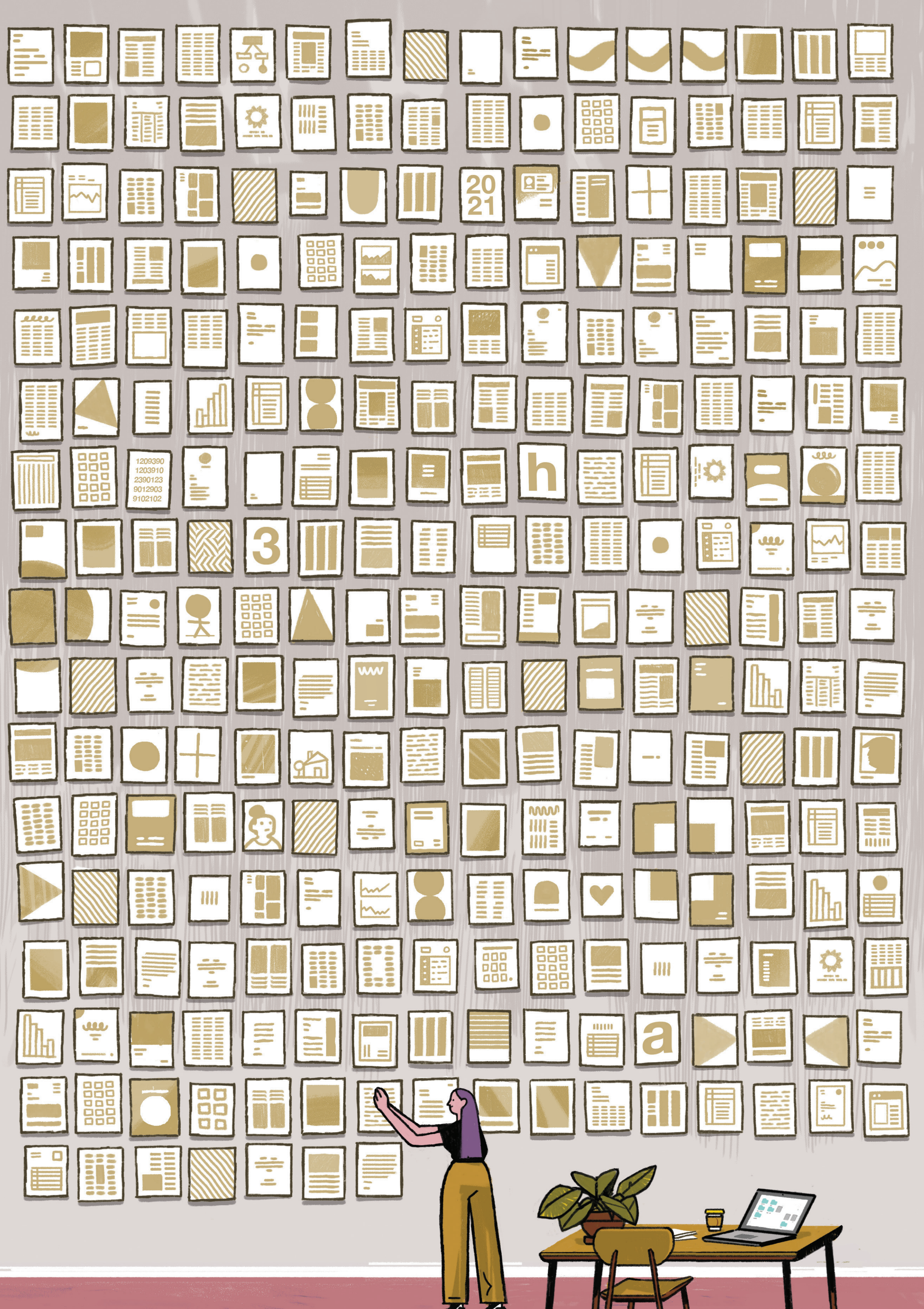
This was roughly the process that awaited me at *Harper's*: every day for three months, I sat with three other young journalists, meticulously researching sentences that would appear in the upcoming issue. Once we had investigated a fact to satisfaction, we pored over our work with an imperious senior editor, who would interrogate us about nuances and details. I was thrilled by the rigour of the process. When our work was done, the published product would be empirically incontestable. Over the next few years, I worked as a freelance fact checker for various publications, and I eventually became head of research at The Walrus for two years, until 2019—a job in which I took on a similar role to that of the imperious *Harper's* editor.

I learned that the steps to fact-checking at The Walrus are exactingly methodological. Fact-checking a story is different from reporting it from scratch: you start with a finished product, working backward to confirm its accuracy. Before an article can be published, the writer provides what's called a research package—typically an electronic file containing the documentation they used in their reporting, audio and transcripts of conversations with sources, and a draft of the story in which every statement is footnoted with reference to the source that should confirm it. The fact checker takes this material and starts by isolating each fact from the story (typically with coloured pens and highlighters), then verifies them with the relevant sources, which could be scientific studies, experts, or the people directly involved. Whenever possible, the magazine defers to primary sources. The number of daily new COVID-19 cases in Montreal, for example, would be confirmed not by reading news reports but by going directly to the official tally on Quebec's health ministry website—or by calling the city's public health authority.

No fact is too minor to be checked: celebrities' names, basic mathematical statements, or even that winter in the northern hemisphere ends in February. (Actually, depending on whether one uses the astronomical or meteorological definition of the seasons, winter could end in March.) Every article—and I mean every article, including this one—will require adjustments, whether it's a small change in date or a major interpretative clarification. Once these corrections are made, the story is ready to be published, and we can be assured that it is unshakeable. At least, that's the idea.

Of course, few people outside of journalism know about traditional fact-checking. Even within the industry, the practice has become increasingly rare over the past decade of media layoffs and budget cuts. But it's the approach I'm most familiar with: behind-the-scenes and meticulous, with a touch of pretentiousness. This standard was established by *Time* and *The New Yorker* in the early 1900s, when magazines were most concerned with protecting themselves from public criticism and libel lawsuits. (Back then, fact-checking was a woman's job. According to the *Columbia Journalism Review*, writers such as gonzo journalist Tom Wolfe saw *The New Yorker*'s fact-checking department as "a cabal of women and middling editors all collaborating to henpeck and emasculate the prose of the Great Writer.")

This kind of fact-checking, however, wasn't built for the immediacy and viral spread of online news. Amid the growing phenomenon of "fake news," journalists needed something more reactive. The term *fake news* became widely used during the 2016 US presidential election, when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the internet was flooded with inaccurate information. A *BuzzFeed News* investigation at the time showed that many of these deliberately false headlines came from an unexpected source: content writers in Macedonia were profiting off the advertising revenue from the increased traffic on their sites.

False content online has only multiplied over the years. But the *fake news* designation has also been used to serve all kinds of purposes—including, increasingly, to disparage real news reporters—so most experts now avoid the term. Instead, researchers usually talk about disinformation, which is purposefully false, and misinformation, which is unwittingly false (either because the publisher made a mistake or because the person sharing the content did). As false content spreads through social media networks, it can oscillate between the two, and it can manifest in various forms, including memes, tweets, or "imposter" content made to imitate real news stories. Last summer, for example, a list of advice—some accurate, some dangerously inaccurate—about COVID-19 prevention made the rounds on social media, falsely attributed to various health officials including BC's Bonnie Henry.

We now consider disinformation a defining part of the contemporary experience. In 2016, Oxford Languages chose *post-truth* as its word of the year. The essential characteristic of our age, the accompanying press release stated, was the loss of a distinction between truth and feeling; we were entering an era in which "objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief."

Governments and social media companies have employed various strategies to address the threat of disinformation, including closer scrutiny of political ads, flagging posts as "inaccurate," or tweaking algorithms to favour reliable outlets. But these efforts have had little effect on the widespread production and sharing of disinformation.

Journalists and media organizations, on their end, have championed fact-checking as the silver bullet—not the prepublication kind done at *Harper's* or *The New Yorker* but the public-facing kind done by *PolitiFact* or the *Washington Post*: instead of verifying stories written by an outlet's own reporters, fact checkers apply the same filter to public claims, such as politicians' statements or other outlets' reporting, then publish the results. According to this interpretation, to fact-check someone's claim is to find all the relevant primary sources (budget documents, election results) and point out, in a published article, any errors in their declaration. Instead of printing only what one knows to be true by virtue of having fact-checked it, journalists explicitly call a person or organization wrong in order to correct the record after the fact. In this sense, the most famous fact checker of our time is reporter Daniel Dale, who rose to fame via the ambitious goal of itemizing the lies told by Donald Trump throughout his presidency (a total of 30,573 false and misleading claims, according to the *Washington Post*).

In 2014, there were fewer than sixty initiatives around the world focused exclusively on checking others' claims, according to the Duke Reporters' Lab; today, there are more than 300. The growing instinct to fact-check isn't particular to journalists either: it's part of a growing cultural movement emphasizing revision and debunking. Popular podcasts such as *Revisionist History* and *You're Wrong About* ask us to change our understanding of well-known stories, while tell-all memoirs promise to give us the "real story" about crime, government misconduct, and our favourite celebrities.

Like many journalists, I used to subscribe to what philosopher Neil Levy calls the naive view of fake news: that today's problems of political polarization and extremism are caused at least in part by the spread of inaccurate information, and that "careful consumption and fact-checking can eliminate the problem." According to this view, people who share false content do so because they believe it to be true. Everyone *means* to share real news—they are simply making a mistake when they don't. If this were true, then by simply correcting the record, we would make all of our post-truth problems go away. Instead, those concerns have grown, and I now wonder: What if it is precisely our manner of clinging to the idea of "facts" that has aggravated the problem?

I've now come to believe there's another, more salient characteristic of our age, beyond the post-truth designation. It is a relic of the past few centuries of rationalism in the Western world: the idea that there can ever be a definitive distinction between *fact*, on the one hand, and *everything else*, on the other. We maintain that journalists—our de facto heroes in the fight against mis- and disinformation—are capable of distilling truth from the murky waters of interpretation, opinion, and ambiguity in such a way as to present the only true reality of the world. Implicit in the presentation of 2016 as the year after which facts needed to be differentiated from their "alternatives" is the idea that it is actually always possible to do so—that we can know immediately and with absolute certainty, for example, that homemade cloth masks provide reliable protection against COVID-19. In theory, it may seem easy enough to agree on whether a statement is true: simply check whether all available evidence supports the claim or at least does not refute it. But, in practice, we struggle to agree on what makes a fact and how to present it—even as we agree on the importance of being able to do so. We intuitively maintain that opinion and truth exist in different realms, yet removing interpretation entirely from factual reporting is impossible.

Today, I believe the naive view of facts has only fuelled the rise of disinformation and polarization. *Fact check* has become a political signal such that journalists' very attempt at neutrality ruins any chance of communicating with those who don't already believe them. This is not just a media industry problem; it is a pressing issue with consequences for everyone hoping to engage in productive dialogue. Though journalists have clearly invested in fact-checking, trust in news media has continued to erode, and researchers have found that exposure to contentious media discussions about fake news decreases trust further. According to Gallup's annual governance poll, by 2020, 60 percent of Americans said they trusted

mass media "not very much" or "not at all." This problem cannot be solved only by fact-checking Trump's press conferences: those who already believe Trump have no reason to accept our fact checks. Without a trusted forum for conversation, we lose the ability to establish a common ground from which to converse and debate; we lose the ability to understand or negotiate with one another at all.

SINCE 2016, newspapers have begun devoting columns to fact-checking the tweets, campaign promises, and speeches made by politicians and pundits. This public fact-checking has become a way for daily outlets to gain credibility and readership as their ad and subscription revenues disappear. Attach the term *fact check* to the headline of any news article and it has a similar effect to adding "Based on a true story" to a movie poster: it demands credulity while promising a touch of drama.

Prepublication fact-checking, on the other hand, is time consuming, laborious, and largely invisible. Due to budget and time constraints, newspapers typically do not independently fact-check their own articles. Podcasts, radio shows, and TV networks also rarely fact-check their work. Plummeting ad revenues have pushed many magazines to shutter or dramatically cut their fact-checking departments. These changes are concerning for the state of the industry. When I began working in journalism, I knew what it meant for an article to be fact-checked: the same established standards of sourcing and methodology applied. Today, as the term *fact check* is adopted by more publications, it is used to describe a growing number of practices that don't necessarily conform to the same definition.

The most rigorous kind of public fact-checking is conducted by members of Poynter's International Fact-Checking Network, a partnership of media organizations created in 2015 to unite under methodological standards and a code of principles. This includes *PolitiFact*, the Pulitzer-winning website that rates claims, such as politicians' statements, based on their accuracy. In the past few years, even as many news organizations have closed their doors, the IFCN's membership numbers have skyrocketed.

Members of the IFCN must be public-facing and must have strict principles for transparency, neutrality, and reporting, says Cristina Tardáguila, the network's associate director. But only about ninety fact-checking organizations, out of the hundreds in existence, have made the cut. And there's nothing stopping other publications and public figures with lesser standards from publishing their work under the *fact check* label, riding on the legitimacy of the term without being rigorous about the content. (This is exactly the case for many YouTube videos "fact-checking" coronavirus news.) It's as though today, as Tardáguila puts it, "anyone can fact-check." On the surface, that may seem like a good thing: fact-checking should not be elitist. But, without any agreement on standards, some fact checkers' work could unwittingly add to the digital cocktail of misinformation and polarization.

"THERE IS a pervasive idea in Western culture that humans are essentially rational, deftly sorting fact from fiction, and, ultimately, arriving at timeless truths about the world," write Cailin O'Connor and James Weatherall, two philosophers of science, in their 2020 book, *The Misinformation Age: How False Beliefs Spread*. This conception of rationality dictates that, "if we want to achieve better outcomes—truer beliefs, better decisions—we need to focus on improving individual human reasoning." It is tempting because it tells us that news consumers form inaccurate beliefs by accident and that they can be subtly steered toward more accurate beliefs if we simply present them with reliable information.

Human beings, however, are more complicated. The authors ran several mathematical models to illustrate how true and false information spreads. As soon as they allowed the people in their models to be influenced by their peers and social networks—as everyone in the real world is—the programs would sometimes conclude in whole communities adopting false beliefs even when accurate information was consistently presented to them. In other words, O'Connor and Weatherall write, "individually rational agents can form groups that are not rational at all." According to these models, which information someone chooses to believe will depend primarily on who is passing it along; trust trumps accuracy every time. Polarization between groups with different beliefs is therefore easy to incite, and once this polarization is established, no amount of fact-checking from outside a particular community will convince the people within it to change their minds.

Media-literacy campaigns often seem like the most promising solution to this problem: instead of simply giving people facts, we should teach them how to assess the quality of information on their own. But, as a group of researchers in Denmark recently concluded, people don't spread fake news because they think it's real. Media-literacy programs are grounded in the same kind of naive reasoning as fact-checking is: the idea that the spread of disinformation is caused by ignorance as opposed to by issues of polarization and distrust. In the Danish study, researchers showed 1,600 Twitter users a series of educational videos teaching them to identify untrustworthy content online and examined their Twitter interactions before and after they had watched the videos. The study found that the media-literacy training effectively taught people to identify false content but that this did not dissuade them from sharing it afterward. "Participants performing well on the 'fake news' quiz were just as likely to share untrustworthy news stories," the researchers wrote—leading them to conclude that, generally, people don't share fake news because they actually believe in the content's accuracy. Rather, they believe in its *value*.

Hugo Mercier, another researcher, has argued that the overwhelming majority of people who share disinformation online *know* that it's inaccurate. Mercier's social experiments suggest that, when people share "fake news," they do so because they think that it's funny, or that it's interesting, or that it will demonstrate their allegiance to a particular social

group. Someone may share a fake news item about Justin Trudeau "[begging] Nigeria President for one million immigrants," for example, not because they believe it to be true but because it will publicize their membership in the social group that finds such content amusing, invigorating, or politically important.

Overwhelmingly, results from social science are telling us that fake news is not only a problem of false or misleading information but also one of social bonding. With this in mind, O'Connor says, it's reasonable to fear that aggressive fact-checking may be both ineffective in changing false beliefs and a contributor to the very kind of polarization that perpetuates disinformation. Fact checks that begin with the implicit premise "look how wrong and stupid these people are" lead only to greater mistrust between groups—and they probably won't convince anyone who did not already believe in the facts presented. Sometimes it feels like even using the term *fact check* online has become a way to signal membership in the group of people interested in rational and moral superiority.

Not all fact-checking websites reflect this attitude, of course—particularly not those that have met the strict requirements of the IFCN. For those journalists, *fact check* is a way of saying "we really did the research." Still, some fact-checking websites are grounded in the same attitude as those peddling conspiracy theories: a request for the audience to be skeptical of the outside world and trust the site's content above all else. Sure, fact checkers publish true content whereas conspiracy theorists clearly do not. But, for someone who has already decided to distrust mainstream media, fact checks are no more trustworthy than any other news article. In the end, the tone in which something is written may be just as important as its content.

Take what *BuzzFeed* dubbed the most-shared piece of "fake news" on Facebook during the 2016 US election, which racked up more than 960,000 engagements: "Pope Francis Shocks World, Endorses Donald Trump for President, Releases Statement," published by ETF News. (This was, to be clear, a blatant lie: Pope Francis does not endorse political candidates.) Compare it with the piece of journalism that had the most engagements during the same time (849,000 shares, reactions, and comments): "Trump's History of Corruption Is Mind-Boggling. So Why Is Clinton Supposedly the Corrupt One?" published by the *Washington Post*. Without a doubt, the second article was written to meet stricter reporting and accuracy standards. But both headlines are nakedly partisan; anyone sharing either article on social media is making their political allegiance clear.

It's hard to ignore the irony here: well-intentioned fact checkers may not realize that their work could push some people away instead of unifying them under a common truth. Arguably, however, this is not a fact checker's problem. Their job is simply to establish an accurate record of information—not to foster trust in media or communication between polarized groups. As Tardáguila emphasizes, no public fact checker claims to be solving the problem of disinformation. "What we work for is to expose people to good facts. It's one step behind," she says. In fact, "it drives fact checkers a bit crazy" when people ask them to fix the problem of disinformation. "Nobody goes around accusing investigative reporters, 'You've been writing about corruption for twenty years, but it's still there, so you suck,'" Tardáguila says. Why should the case be different for fact checkers? They're reporting on disinformation—not claiming to do anything more.

Indeed, research into fighting disinformation is beginning to steer away from fact-checking altogether. Mason Porter, a mathematician at the University of California, Los Angeles is currently working with his team to study how different content spreads online. They hope, in the long term, to develop a kind of "spam filter" for false content. Porter's team uses models to illustrate a news item's "spreading tree," which shows how many times and following what pattern a headline is retweeted, liked, and so on. Porter's hypothesis is that content shared for its accuracy lives a different digital life than content shared for other reasons, such as for political or social signalling. "We want to know how much we can explain without taking into account the actual content," Porter says. The next question would be what to do once inaccurate content has been identified: slapping a big red warning label on it wouldn't be much more helpful, but the project would at least solve the problem of trying to identify disinformation in the first place, allowing for more nuanced research and responses. After all, Porter says, "flagging is much quicker than fact-checking."

TO BE CLEAR: although I am convinced that our cultural reliance on fact-checking as a catch-all solution is problematic, I don't interpret these developments as arguments against the importance of accuracy. They

simply serve as important reminders that accuracy isn't everything. One of the problems at the root of these difficulties is the public's loss of trust in news media, which is not always as unreasonable as some of us like to believe.

In a 2020 article for this magazine, writer and producer Pacinthe Mattar expands on what she calls a "crisis of credibility in Canadian media." Mattar recalls travelling to Baltimore, in 2015, to put together a CBC radio documentary on the demonstrations against police brutality after the death of twenty-five-year-old Black man Freddie Gray at the hands of the city's police department. Mattar interviewed two local men about their experiences of being mistreated by police. She later called the police department and union to request a comment, as any responsible journalist would, but received no response, which is also quite typical. When she returned to Toronto, however, her producer initially refused to air the interviews, skeptical that the men had given her their real names, and questioned the veracity of their story. "That's when I learned that, in Canadian media, there's an added burden of proof, for both journalists and sources, that accompanies stories about racism," Mattar writes.

One reason Mattar's experience is so concerning is because of the different standard to which her work was held compared to that of her colleagues. There was no more reason to believe the men had lied to her than to believe that any other source in any other CBC documentary had lied. The whole journalistic enterprise is based on trust: journalists—including fact checkers—decide to trust the sources they quote. We do as much digging as possible to feel confident and responsible about passing on the information (as Mattar did by calling the police department and union), but we also treat everyone as equally reliable until we have reason to do otherwise. If we do uncover inconsistencies, that's when there's reason to follow up, add qualifications, or remove the source altogether. But, until then, if a journalist is comfortable quoting a scientist about their research without conducting the same scientific experiment themselves, they should feel equally comfortable quoting a protester about their personal story.

Mattar's experience is part of a wider conversation that broke into the mainstream last spring. As public demonstrations about systemic racism took place across North America, journalists of colour also protested the structures that, under the guise of "objectivity," prevent certain kinds of stories from being told. What is at stake is the idea that journalists can be perfectly objective—that there exists a neutral version of every story. But, just like our emphasis on "facts," this notion is grounded in the same historical rationalism that has made efforts to fight disinformation so unsuccessful. It relies on the assumption that only certain kinds of people can discern what the real facts are and that only certain kinds of people can be neutral—namely those uninvolved in the stories. Last year, "many Black journalists... said very loudly and publicly that coverage of issues of Black people and policing had not been done well," said Denise Balkissoon, previously a long-time reporter at the *Globe and Mail* and currently executive editor at *Chatelaine*, in her recent Atkinson Lecture on trust and disinformation. "Part of the reason that it had not been done well is because of the marginalization of Black journalists in journalism organizations."

This realization should push journalists to confront the ambiguities of "facts" head-on. When journalists or media organizations choose to distrust certain voices because of their backgrounds or experiences, we become stuck in

a problematic conception of objectivity according to which emotion is a stain on the purity of "fact." If there's one thing I learned over the course of my time as head of research, it's that there is no purity to defend here: what we agree upon as fact is always changing. During much of my work at The Walrus, I witnessed first-hand the harm that comes from being too stringent with standards of verification, particularly when those

standards are ill-informed. For one, the kinds of sources that are available to "confirm" a fact will change drastically based on context. It may sound reasonable, for example, to require that all demographic data about the country be confirmed by primary government sources, such as the annual reports from Statistics Canada. That's a relatively easy demand to satisfy for an article about, say, the population or development of big cities such as Calgary or Montreal. But it is an unreasonable standard for reporting on, say, First Nations communities in British Columbia. Many records relating to Indigenous people and history have been lost or destroyed—in large part because of Canadian government policy. According to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 200,000 Indian Affair files were destroyed between 1936 and 1944. This complicates the traditional fact-checking requirement for strict sourcing. Those records were destroyed in an attempt to obliterate history, including the details of the federal government's management of residential schools. If I refuse to report on something because a government record does not exist to confirm it, I am essentially perpetuating the government's erasure of Indigenous history. Instead, I should be open-minded about the kinds of sources I use, including oral history or community testimony.

Magazines with prepublication fact-checking practices can accommodate these considerations since they have the luxury of time. But, when I asked Tardáguila about the difficulties of fact-checking stories about marginalized communities, she answered that such complications are typically not the concern of organizations that fact-check public statements. "We try to focus on the very big issues that go viral across platforms," she says. "We don't think about different community contexts and records." The implication is that these methodological questions about proper, ethical sourcing concern people who *report* stories, not people who *fact-check* disinformation. I understand this perspective, but I'm skeptical that there is such a distinction: we all have the same goal of publishing the truth. Sticking to topics in which the facts are "easy" or quick to correct—such as established historical narratives and reports published by government sources—means ignoring other stories altogether.

Over time, all of these considerations have strengthened my conviction that journalism is not only about getting facts right—it's also about deciding which facts can be confirmed in the first place, which ones we choose to include in our reporting, and whom we consider fit to assess them. These considerations cannot be separated, yet we often treat them like they can be. We pretend that the job of an objective journalist is simply to pick the right, ready-made facts from a silver platter. Really, most of the time, we're cooking from scratch.

I HAVE COME to believe that, once we have shed our naive conceptions of objectivity and rationality, journalists should be comfortable taking into account how people *feel* about our reporting—not because we want everyone to be pleased about the final product (an impossible and problematic goal) but because we want everyone to feel acknowledged, even if coverage is critical. We should, as a rule, be conscious of our relationship to our audience. It matters whether the people who read and participate in our work feel represented, listened to, and involved—whether they feel their experiences are being respected instead of held to unfamiliar or unfair standards. This, I believe, is how we start gaining the trust that O'Connor describes as crucial for reducing polarization and the spread of "alternative facts."

With this goal in mind, I hope we come to place greater value on prepublication fact-checking—perhaps even prioritize it over the external, reactive kind despite its greater cost in time and resources. Establishing an agreed-upon public record of fact is undeniably helpful, but hammering people with facts, tallying their mistakes, or rejecting the legitimacy of certain communities will likely only worsen polarization and distrust. Prepublication fact-checking, on the other hand, focuses on collaboration with sources and making sure everyone who deserves to participate in a story has an opportunity to do so. Today, when I fact-check a story for a magazine, I call everyone involved not only because I want to confirm the accuracy of their quotes but also because I want to underline that everyone should be treated equally, whether or not the story about them is complimentary. It's this notion of equal treatment that deserves more elaboration and investigation in the future: different contexts, such as reporting on controversial topics or problematic people, require different methods. This is why, to reestablish trust in media, we should focus on teaching people not only how news should be *consumed* (through media-literacy programs) but also how news should be *made*, by making our own methodologies and internal sourcing debates more transparent.

How the journalism industry should heal in the midst of the post-truth era is a difficult question; we need some way of insisting on the existence of truth while acknowledging that its boundaries are blurry—that it is reasonable, even necessary, to push against them sometimes. One of the greatest hurdles to this realization is our stubborn separation of rationality from emotion, a distinction both sides of the political spectrum rely on. People on the left will often say it is the right's stubborn belief in a preferred alternative reality and its surrender to emotions of fear that lead it to problematic views and conspiracy theories. But people on the right use the exact same rhetoric as those on the left: as Ben Burgis points out in his recent book, *Give Them an Argument*, the right often criticizes the left for being too "emotional" and failing to assess situations logically, as though feelings themselves cannot be rational responses to situations. Both sides believe they are the ones best suited to make informed decisions based on available facts, and each judges the other for being incapable of doing the same.

The beginning to a possible solution is to realize that, although the world is politically divided in many ways, the main division is not between rational, intelligent people and irrational, emotional

Asymmetry

BY ANDREAE CALLANAN

Left elbow broken at the age of three
and never quite corrected, bending rogue,
impeding push-ups, locking
me into a childhood of purple
participation ribbons. Left ankle, thick
from decades of sprains and fractures,
stiff and reluctant and no doubt
a site of arthritis to come. Left
eye, weak, taking in a blur through pop-bottle
glasses lens, its right-side partner compensating,
always overworked, doing its best but leaving
me clumsy and anxious. Left corner
of my mouth, scarred from a winter's
collision with dense, untended branches
at the base of a snow-covered hill,
an evening's sledding brought to a bloody
halt, a lump of lip growing where no lump
should be, a red crack at the edge
of each self-conscious school-photo smile.

The next-to-smallest finger of my left hand,
embedding my ring in its bulging flesh,
a fat tree swallowing a chain-link fence.

ones. Fact, opinion, and emotion often go hand in hand—in politics, journalism, and any kind of social interaction. Lately, I've been thinking about how these reflections may apply to the storming of the US Capitol, in January, and to the various efforts by journalists to fact-check Trump's and his followers' claims about election fraud. The fact-checking work done on this topic was incredibly valuable: it provided the necessary information for people to understand exactly *why* and *how* Trump's claims that the election had been "stolen" and that he was the real winner were wrong, if that's what they're interested in doing. But fact checks of claims about election fraud were published weeks before the storming of the Capitol took place; if anything, the violent reaction in January was evidence that repeating facts into the digital void over and over again will do little to change a polarized dynamic. Polarization on this topic is so extreme—fuelled by the insistence of politicians and media on both sides that the other side is cruel and hopelessly lost—that information coming from outside one's community will likely never be trusted. We still don't know how to engage with people who don't agree with us on our most fundamental, sensible beliefs, yet this engagement is a crucial part of any productive way forward. In the case of the Capitol, we didn't fail to fact-check: instead, we failed to establish, beforehand, the dialogue that is required for people to listen to and care about facts at all.

VIVIANE FAIRBANK is a writer and philosophy student based in Montreal and the former head of research at The Walrus.

MEMOIR

At Home with Frank Lloyd Wright

On a tour of the architect's iconic houses with my mother, I saw how our spaces reflect our dreams

BY ANUBHA MOMIN
ILLUSTRATION BY DOROTHY LEUNG

As kids, my younger brother and I would snicker whenever my mother stopped to run her palms over what she thought was an exciting bit of a building. It could have been a limestone handrail at a shopping mall, a granite column at an old bank, or reclaimed wood at a hipster restaurant; sometimes, she would take our little hands and guide us to do the same. To this day, I can walk into a room and estimate its ceiling height because she taught us how to assess the highness and lowness of rooms. I'm also well versed in the slip resistances (a technical term for slipperiness) of a variety of flooring substrates. Believe me when I say that my mother really, really likes buildings.

My mother is an architect. At eighteen, she enrolled in architecture at Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology, a program—and profession—bereft of women. She then worked in Dhaka, the Bangladeshi capital, and Bauchi, Nigeria, before coming to Canada in 1988. She has a strong technical background in hospital and long-term care design (she was on the master planning team for Toronto's University Health Network and was one of the design leads for Humber River Hospital), but Mum's personal taste has always skewed to the artist's side. At her drawing table, this translated into humanizing details, like indoor gardens or window angles keyed to let in more light—and, of course, her love of texture and materials.

Once my mother had inspected most of Toronto's surfaces, family expeditions turned south of the border, to landmarks she had studied at university in Bangladesh, the country where she and I were born. In cities like Chicago and New York and Philadelphia, we took in—and, where we could, touched—sleek steel-and-glass structures, the carved concrete of art deco facades, and modern entryways by some of the world's greatest designers, including one of my mother's favourites, Frank Lloyd Wright. In the fall of 2000, after consulting CAA maps and guidebooks from the library, my mother planned a kid-free trip for herself and my dad to see one of Wright's most famous works. Her plan was to reach the iconic Fallingwater, in Pennsylvania, in a two-day drive. But it would be almost two decades before Mum was able to access the site in the way she'd imagined.

In the summer of 2019, after returning from a long road trip, I told Mum that I was eager to do a multiday drive and just needed a destination. She responded that, for years, she had been wanting to

retrace that route to Fallingwater. But she'd never had the time, the energy to plan, or a travel buddy to do it with.

I'd heard about the ill-fated trip in snippets before, minus several damning details. My parents' marriage was (as I remember it and as Mum tells me) always difficult, and this excursion followed that vein. My mother later told me she had found herself crying to sleep every night during their self-guided tour, including one night in the back of our family van, which was parked on the side of the road because her then husband had failed to book a hotel. She also told me she had been deprived of certain key sites that charged entry fees. And she had felt rushed, as if the trip were a chore rather than an experience to be savoured. Within two years, my parents had separated, and my dad became entirely estranged from our lives. I haven't had any real contact with him since I was a teen, and with no way to reach him, I am able to present only my mother's side of this experience.

It is both unsettling and enlightening to see your parent's vulnerabilities, their soft spots of loneliness, of regret, of want. I've been my mother's closest companion since I was a teenager, so I am under no pretense that mothers are indestructible, but I still hate sensing her fragility.

Within a month of the road trip conversation, I mentioned her interest in visiting Wright sites to a friend who happened to be a former architecture journalist and whose partner was a long-time member of the Frank Lloyd Wright Foundation, an organization that preserves several Wright buildings. Within days, the pair sent me a draft itinerary, and two weeks later, all four of us—the friend, his partner, my mother, and I—started a Frank Lloyd Wright trip that took us from western New York to western Pennsylvania, with visits to seven Wright-designed buildings along the way.

While this was ostensibly a treat meant for Mum, I found myself caught up in the pilgrimage as well. Walking through the halls of each house, I thought about not only Wright's life and design choices but also my mother's. Wright died in 1959 (the year my mother was born), and I can draw few parallels between these two architects as people. But it wasn't until I learned about how Wright related to his homes that I began to understand the one my mother had created for us.

MY FIRST Wright experience was at the Darwin D. Martin House Complex, a set of ochre-brick buildings on a massive corner lot in an affluent suburb of Buffalo, New York. Wright scaled homes, regardless of whom they were for, to his own height—five feet, eight and a half inches. I found the rooms, whose door frames hovered less than a foot from my head, cozy and cute; one of my travelling companions, whose head grazes the six-foot-four mark, did not.

Like Frank Lloyd Wright, she may be arranging her abode not for current needs but to evoke an idea of a model household.

Though Wright is known for iconic public designs, like the Guggenheim Museum in New York, the vast majority of his work consisted of single-family residences. In describing the standard style of home being built in the US during his time, Wright wrote that it "*lied* about everything"—it had no unity, merely a series of boxes within boxes. A Wright home, he contended, was harmonious, flowing from room to room and outside with a fluidity that reflected Wright's idea of how families should function.

The irony is that Wright, who had eight children from three marriages, would never know a happy family life. In his autobiography, Wright notes that he never felt a connection to his own father, who walked out on his family when his eldest son graduated from high school. Apparently echoing his father's ambivalence toward parenthood, Wright once wrote, "I am afraid I never looked the part. Nor ever acted it. I didn't feel it. I didn't know how." His second oldest child, John Lloyd Wright, echoed this sentiment in his book *My Father, Frank Lloyd Wright*, noting that the senior Wright had likely never wanted children but, at the very least, built a large playroom for the ones he had. It was as if, by creating an idealized space for a family, he could compensate for its absence in his real world.

I've now seen my mother renovate three personal residences, the most recent her three-storey home in Toronto's Little Italy, a residential neighbourhood of detached and semidetached brick houses originally built by and for middle- and lower-class families. Always, the kitchens are expanded and furnished with restaurant-quality appliances—fitting for us, a food-focused family. And, on the same floor, Mum reserves a large, open living-dining layout, with long tables that can seat eight or ten people and cupboards that hold nearly forty wine glasses and special bowls for ice cream. The receiving areas are adorned with art and plush couches, with space to hang a dozen coats, as though she is readying her home for entertaining scores of people—but this she rarely does.

My mother's layouts match what I've heard of her childhood home, in Bangladesh, where her father would regularly host colleagues from the UN or his tennis-club buddies. She remembers that the guest room was always occupied by some uncle, a friend's niece, or a student awaiting a spot at the university residence. Her recollections are full of festivities and gaiety, busy memories that are so different from my own adolescence. She doesn't seem to realize, even as we visit Wright's famous houses, that, like the iconic architect, she may be arranging her abode not for current needs but to evoke an idea of a model household—one informed by the home she left behind.

I have heard a host of stories from my mother's first days in Canada, but one of my favourites is about how Mum came upon her first architecture gig in this

country. Not long after we arrived, she left my brother and me in our father's care, stepped out of the tiny apartment she was trying to make into a home, crossed Bloor Street West, and walked into the office of architect Arthur Erickson. She knew of Erickson (who died in 2009) in much the same way she knew of Wright: she had studied his work at school, which is what she had told the receptionist when she had called to request an office tour. When she was led into Erickson's personal office (he was not present at the time), she slid a very short, very handwritten resumé onto his desk. A month later, the office manager called to offer her a junior position. To this day, Mum isn't sure whether it was because Erickson was impressed by her tenacity or because, upon finding her CV, he simply assumed he must have offered her a gig at some point.

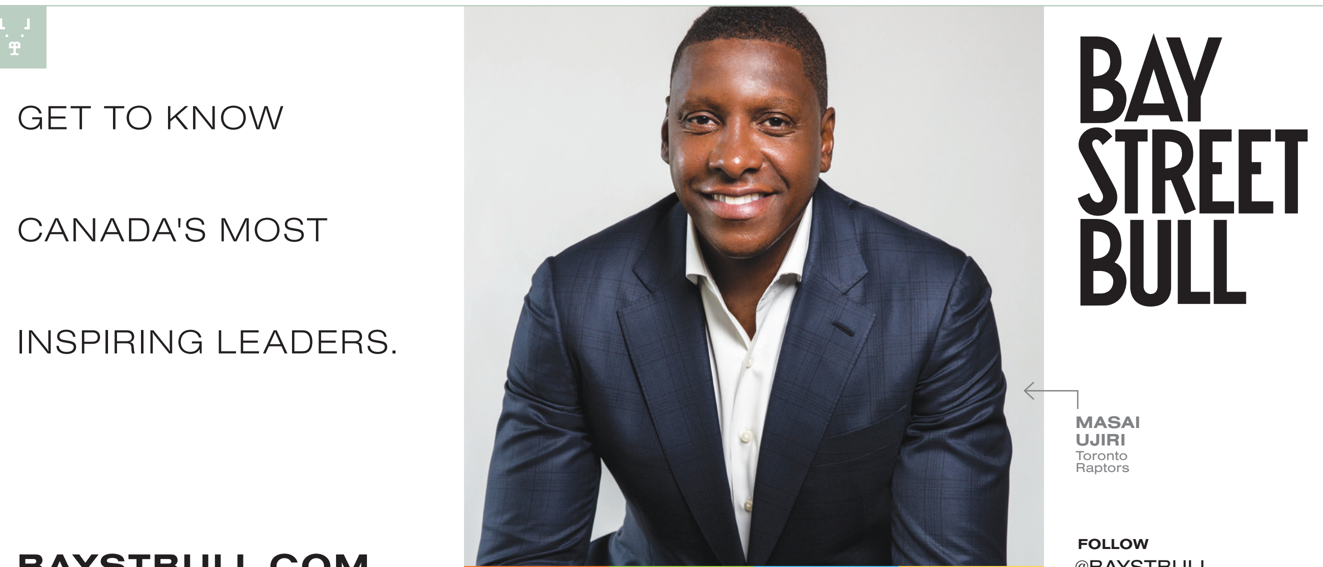
This job was within walking distance of our little apartment on Irwin Avenue, just north of downtown Toronto. From her desk on the sixteenth floor, Mum could see the yard of Jesse Ketchum Public School, where my brother and I were enrolled in daycare. I can just picture her, in a mint-green silk skirt suit set, sketching designs and looking out over the schoolyard we played in. I wonder where my family would be now had my mum not gotten that proximal advantage that saved her from having to choose between work and mothering. Mum continued to ascend in her field, eventually becoming financially able to support us on her own after she left my dad.

As she manoeuvred through her career and new roles required longer hours and travel, she sometimes had to put her job over her role of a parent. She wasn't always there for school functions or holiday breaks. She also missed out on less celebratory occasions: she didn't know that I was routinely bullied in high school or that, while she spent weeks or months at a time on projects in New York, Shanghai, and Dubai, her teenage kids were figuring out how to cook by watching Food Network.

As I grow older, I find myself more and more interested in talking to my mother about that period of our lives. Sometimes, it's because I'm curious about a detail, like how long I slept in her room after watching *The Ring*. (I maintain that it was a few months; she, preposterously, claims it was nearly twelve.) Other times, it's because I want to understand the version of her when she was the age I am now. These conversations aren't necessarily sweet, sentimental trips down memory lane: my mother can be alternately affronted and defensive when I try to revisit the past. Her grievance is usually with the mere suggestion that she, in some way, abandoned her children. The thing is, I never felt abandoned, and I never used that term. I tell her that I am proud of how we managed—she, my brother, and I—through that difficult time. Not completely mollified, she'll offer the adage that, whatever she did, she did it only for us. Which makes me wonder, Is that the whole truth? And does it need to be?

For racialized people and those coming from poorer, non-English-speaking countries, immigration carries a certain mythology. It is a story that immigrants and Canadians collectively laud, the arc about the engineer-or-doctor-back-home who drives a cab to put their kids through university, possibly to become engineers or doctors themselves in their new country. At the centre of this narrative is the sacrifice of the first-generation immigrant, their selflessness in leaving the land they knew for this cold one, in passing on their dreams for another generation to fulfill. Of course, this narrative cannot apply to every immigrant family. But it has affected us in the way my mother still harbours guilt for doggedly pursuing a career not only as a woman but as a brown, immigrant, single mother. And perhaps it is also why she didn't come to me earlier, when she needed help retracing her steps to Fallingwater—and finding her own, personal, selfish, and deserved happiness.

A WRIGHT SITE is usually like a museum: visitors, herded by tour guides into the centres of rooms or balconies so as not to disturb anything, can't get too close to the furniture and



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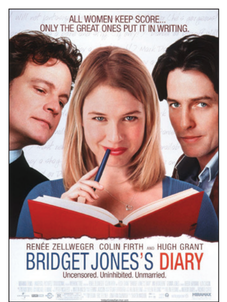
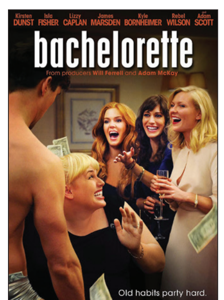


Bridget Jones's Diary



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decor. Even at Fallingwater—the spot that had motivated Mum's initial road trip—she had to keep her hands to herself. The outlier for us was Polymath Park, a sort of Disneyland for Frank Lloyd Wright fans and our final stop. There are four structures on the property, two by Wright and two by his apprentice. We stayed in one overnight, before our final event: a private dinner at Mäntylä House, a home by Wright that was relocated from Minnesota and rebuilt, tile by tile, on the Polymath site, in Pennsylvania. Diners at Mäntylä *have to* interact with the art since the multicourse meal is served at an original Frank Lloyd Wright table. Here, finally, Mum could express her tendency to touch, which, after days of carefully containing her arms and hands, was released with abandon upon the hodgepodge collection of Wright-designed furnishings and fixtures. It was here, while we perched on diamond-shaped velvet stools in soft desert colours, that I inquired why she hadn't asked me to redo this trip with her sooner. "You have your own trips to take," she answered.

Moments later, I carefully pulled out a low-backed barrel chair—one of Wright's most recognizable designs—to seat myself for dinner as Mum continued to talk shop with our companions and the tour staff (punctuated, of course, with the pat of a beam or the rub of a finial). Her back was to a wall of windows, the panes five times as tall as they were narrow, much like the forest of skinny trees visible between the frames. This is common in Wright's buildings, that the inside should mimic or complement the outside (Fallingwater has a stream running from the front walkway into the living room), a style he dubbed "organic architecture."

So much of what Wright envisioned was rooted in approximation: of nature, of a perfect household, of an idealized version of America. I wonder, then, What would the house look like if it were true to his lifestyle rather than to his lofty fabrications? Would he have included extra bedrooms at the back, for a client's wife with whom he was known to have had an affair, in lieu of the playrooms and fireplaces he thought necessary for a family he created in his mind?

I think of my mother's homes and our family life. Mum's house could more accurately reflect our family's reality, where a four-top table and a single set of dishware would suffice. It is also a painful reminder that, for all her measurable successes and achievements—checks on the immigrant scorecard that have afforded us many privileges—there remain less tangible, unfulfilled desires on her personal lists.

It isn't fair, though, to brand her designs and her hopes as inaccurate or, even worse, unattainable. To do so would be to limit my mother to that myth, the immigrant identity shaped by necessity. Razing that belief means I need to see the homes Mum has built in the way Wright had envisioned: more symbolically, as a blueprint for the family we want to be. The homes she created are not a lie but a wish. ✣

ANUBHA MOMIN is a writer whose work has been published by *Vice*, the CBC, and *Chatelaine*.

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WHEN THE RIGHTS to Jon Klassen's first children's book, *I Want My Hat Back*, were being auctioned, he recalls that one potential publisher was aghast. The story follows an affable bear who goes searching for his lost red hat, querying a series of animals as to its whereabouts. This sounds like a fairly standard plot for a kids' book—until you keep reading and learn that the bear eventually gobbles up a red-hat-sporting rabbit who has clearly lied about their culpability in the theft. The wary publisher, Klassen tells me, felt it was barbaric to end a children's book on a death, even one that occurs off-page, and suggested that the bear could instead beat up the rabbit—which Klassen felt was a much more monstrous conclusion.

I Want My Hat Back was published with its original ending in 2011, marking Klassen's first solo project as both author and illustrator. (He had previously won a 2010 Governor General's Award for English-language children's illustration for a book written by Caroline Stutson.) Throughout his career, he has remained steadfast in trusting that his readers, even preschoolers, are capable of understanding and appreciating challenging emotions and darker themes. Adults, Klassen says, "have this reaction to death where it's a personal fear." Kids "treat it like anything else—they just want to ask questions about it." The following year, Klassen published the second in what would become a trilogy of hat books, *This Is Not My Hat,* which included a similarly dark plot and for which he became the first person to win both the Caldecott Medal and the Kate Greenaway Medal, two prestigious awards in children's literature, for the same book. Both titles

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BOOKS

How to Teach Kids about Impending Doom

Award-winning children's book author and illustrator Jon Klassen on trusting four-year-olds with difficult realities

BY HARLEY RUSTAD

spent more than forty weeks on the New York Times Best Sellers list.

This sense of complicating expectations is also evident in Klassen's latest book, *The Rock from the Sky*, out in April. It opens with a turtle comfortable in his "favourite spot" beside a pink flower. The turtle is unwelcoming of change, even when a prophetic armadillo appears and tries to get him to check out a new spot, warning of a "bad feeling." Overhead, a giant rock is hurtling earthward. The turtle is obstinate, unflinching in his position, and often quite mean. When the meteor—a known yet still surprising threat—slams into the turtle's beloved spot, everything changes for the turtle, who narrowly avoids being crushed, and for all creatures. The meteor offers a new perspective, new dangers, and a glimpse into the future. (The book's particular relevance to our current moment was largely unforeseen; Klassen and his publisher finalized it the same week, early last March, that the WHO declared a pandemic.)

Coming to terms with uncertainty is a running theme throughout *The Rock from the Sky*. Rocks are falling. More rocks may fall. They could hit us. Life may change dramatically at any moment. "I was interested in finding ways of talking about potential problems that you are never going to understand—and maybe there's no reason for them," Klassen says. "That rock doesn't have an agenda, we don't know what set it on its course, we don't know where it's from, but now it's part of your day. I think that's how kids

ABOVE, FOLLOWING SPREAD *The Rock from the Sky* complicates our usual expectations about heroes and villains in children's books.

feel a lot: they have to function in a world where they understand that they don't understand." When Klassen speaks, softly yet ebulliently, he obsesses over the elements of the form, bouncing from fonts to colour theory to dramatic structure to Alfred Hitchcock's delineation of surprise versus suspense.

Klassen was born in Winnipeg; after preschool, his family moved to southern Ontario, where he attended elementary school in Markham before moving to his father's hometown of Niagara Falls. Now thirty-nine, he doesn't remember much of those early years in Manitoba, but prairie imagery is evident in his latest book: the flat land and that big sky and those lingering sunsets. For years, Klassen found himself drawing a particular kind of tree, again and again, before he realized that he was attempting to recreate the big elms that had lined his childhood street in Winnipeg. His foundational years in Niagara Falls had a larger influence on his illustrations. Even in the early 1990s, everything in the town felt stuck in the 1950s: the boulevards, the architecture, the hanging on to Elvis Presley and Marilyn Monroe. Most of Klassen's early reading material was found in his father's childhood bedroom, which was filled with faded books from the '50s. The artistic style he later developed has a throwback feel—a soft, muted palette akin to a midcentury postcard. "I'm kind of scared of colour," he says. "Unless it's meant to be symbolic and it's meant to stand out as a point."

Children's picture books are a tricky genre, where an author has to appeal both to a parent in a bookstore as well as to a child at home. "I'm not sure kids concern themselves with how the books look, particularly," he says. "I don't think they are attracted to great illustration versus bad illustration." Meanwhile, Klassen offers adults something they'd be proud to display on a coffee table—subtle, unobtrusive, elegant. For children, he brings what he thinks they connect to most: an engaging narrative. For the story, he aims to land both crowds, "and hopefully the kids first," he says, not through oversimplification but by placing trust in the sophisticated mind of a child, believing that they will get it.

When Klassen moved to Los Angeles, in 2005, after graduating with a diploma in classical animation from Sheridan College, he noticed a trend in animated features for children that fell into the trap of splitting them off from adult viewers—writing narrative or humour for two separate audiences. He cites 2001's *Shrek*, which had jokes for the kids and very separate jokes for the adults, as an example. "We can do better than that," he says. He has noticed his four-year-old son react to a kids' show or book and look back at him with the glee of simple comprehension. "He's almost excited that he got it," Klassen says. "There's an excitement that you're being trusted with that amount of joke." In *The Rock from the Sky*, there's slapstick (when the turtle falls off the meteor and lands on his back) but also irony (when the turtle and the armadillo are dreaming of an idyllic new future and an Eye of Sauron–like alien appears and begins zapping flowers) and even morbid humour (no spoilers for that one).

Klassen pushes this trust beyond humour, believing that children will be drawn to characters that don't fall into any classic protagonist-versus-antagonist rubric. While he was working on *The Rock from the Sky*, for instance, Klassen got stuck wondering how to get his stubborn turtle out of the way of the meteor—until it dawned on him that the turtle may move to join the armadillo and the snake after all if he grew envious of their friendship. His characters are rarely purely good or bad. Instead, there is ambiguity in each of their arcs, motivations, and actions—that way, when one of them does something dark, it never comes across as a gratuitous trick or shallow plot device.

What is it?

We are in the future.
I don’t know what it is.

What is it doing?

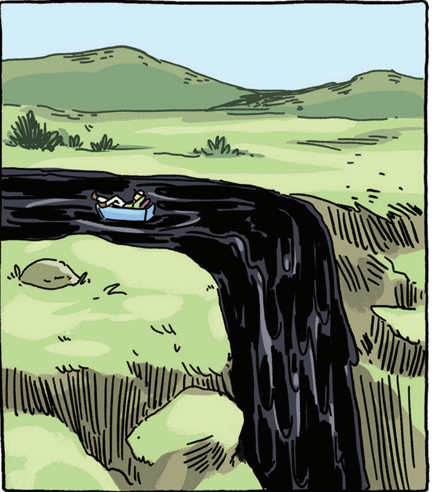
SHHH, it will hear you.

Klassen is steadfast in trusting that his readers, even preschoolers, are capable of understanding darker themes.

Above all, his latest characters share an unshakable hope in the face of challenge and confusion: the turtle climbs atop the meteor to find a new perspective, the armadillo continually tries to include the turtle, and the snake relishes the simple things. “Now they know that rocks fall from the sky,” Klassen says, “but they’re still having arguments over the sunset and they’re still taking naps and working on a relationship that has problems. They don’t freak out—they don’t spend the rest of the book wondering about the rock; they take a nap next to it.”

Klassen, now settled in perennially sunny southern California, relates this plucky optimism to an aspect of living in Canada that he dearly misses. “I didn’t like the cold when I lived there, but I miss the feeling that a whole city wakes up to the same problem in a morning,” he says. “There is a unifying feeling to that. And you can feel it when you’re in those cities—everybody is digging out at the same time. It has an effect on your mentality and your feeling of what you’re capable of—and what you’re not capable of—controlling.” There are sweet lessons in *The Rock from the Sky* for adults and children alike. Keep dreaming of the future even if it may seem dark. Don’t be scared of new perspectives. Listen to others, for they may offer help. But it’s the themes of death, uncertainty, and fate throughout Klassen’s body of work—as well as the spectrum of complicated emotions including jealousy, revenge, and judgment—that set him apart as a children’s writer and illustrator. “A lot of things that are going to happen to you are outside of your control, or they’re not necessarily deserved,” he says. “What happens in the hat books is not necessarily commensurate with their actions. No one has it coming that much. But it still happens. You still stole a bear’s hat.”

HARLEY RUSTAD is a features editor at The Walrus and the author of *Big Lonely Doug: The Story of One of Canada’s Last Great Trees*.



THE FACTS

Ask an Oil Expert

What does the Keystone XL pipeline's cancellation mean for the future of oil in Canada?

AS TOLD TO ARIELLA GARMAISE
ILLUSTRATION BY IRMA KNIIVILA

ANGELA V. CARTER

OIL IS ECONOMICALLY VOLATILE and unstable.[1] This isn't the first downturn Canada's oil-producing provinces have experienced—there have been a few since the 1980s.[2] Major financial actors are choosing to move investments away from oil, and even some oil companies are moving away from investing in its exploration. And we know we have to ramp down production to avoid catastrophic climate change.

Prime minister Justin Trudeau and his cabinet say that we can have an economy that is in great part dependent on expanding fossil fuel extraction and that we can also meet our international climate responsibilities. But those two things are irreconcilable.[3] This is why climate activists and researchers were so frustrated when the federal government purchased the Trans Mountain pipeline extension[4] and when it fought hard to try to keep the Keystone XL pipeline alive.

Now, we've got our American neighbour investing trillions in a green transition, reentering the Paris agreement, and taking bold action on pipeline projects and drilling. Canada's emissions keep growing at a faster rate than American emissions. Canadians don't imagine ourselves that way. But, if politicians in Canada were waiting for a chance to boost their ambition to confront the climate crisis, this is the opportunity. Rather than pinning our hopes on another oil boom, the surer path—for both climate and economic reasons—is to enact a just transition. Instead, what I see happening, particularly in these oil provinces, is that political leaders are hoping this moment will just blow over—the price of oil will increase, we'll get another boom, we can go back to normal. But there is no back to normal.

1 US president Joe Biden cancelled Keystone XL, a planned expansion of a major pipeline system that would have substantially increased the quantity of oil sent from Alberta to refineries in Texas.

2 Oil prices plummeted last year in response to COVID-19.

3 Climate experts largely agree we can't reach our emissions-reduction targets and grow the oil-and-gas sector.

4 The government bought the pipeline in 2018, after then owner Kinder Morgan threatened to walk away.

5 One of these is the Climate Change Performance Index, which assesses emissions, energy use, and climate policy to rank countries—Canada came fourth from the bottom out of fifty-eight.

IMRE SZEMAN

There's a misperception that the Canadian government is attentive to the environment, that there's active work being done on climate change here. I think Canadians would be alarmed to know that they were at the bottom of the list.[5]

Especially in Alberta, over a relatively recent period, there has been a concerted attempt to produce messages about the importance of fossil fuels to provincial identities and to the national economy. People in those regions often really believe their identity is linked to the production of fossil fuels. Shifting that culture will be difficult. Some change is starting to happen—generational shifts that recognize fossil fuels are neither synonymous with Alberta's identity nor the only way to power an economy.

Previously, many people in Alberta would be able to point to someone in their family who worked in oil fields. Indeed, my father worked in the oil field. Now, I think it's harder to make that direct connection, both because there are more city dwellers and because technology has developed so quickly that there are fewer bodies needed on a work site. There's an interesting group called Iron & Earth, which is composed of former and current fossil fuel workers who believe their skills can instead be put to use developing renewable-energy technologies and installing solar panels. Within the industry, there is a growing sense of not wanting to be left behind.

ANGELA V. CARTER is an associate professor of political science at the University of Waterloo. Her new book, *Fossilized*, is out this spring.

IMRE SZEMAN is a professor of communication at the University of Waterloo. His most recent book is *On Petrocultures*.

These interviews have been edited for length and clarity.

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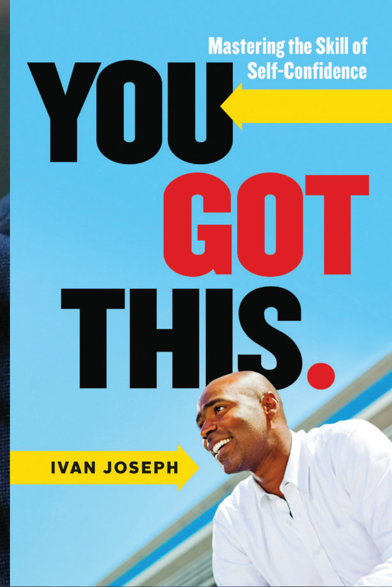

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