

READINGS

[Essay]

DISAPPEARING INK

By Claire Messud, from *Kant's Little Prussian Head and Other Reasons Why I Write*, a collection of essays, which will be published next month by W. W. Norton.

We live in an era crippled by our devotion to capitalism. We are beleaguered by hopelessness (what is the opioid epidemic if not the symptom of a people duped by false dreams?) and by rigorous utilitarianism (formed by a late-capitalist mindset, we ask always: What's in it for me?). We inhabit a time and place in which falsehood and truth are fatally commingled; in which our ideals appear shattered and abandoned by leaders and priests and coaches who are unmasked as predators; and in which any sense of self is assaulted and abused by advertisers. In short, recent years have been a dark maelstrom, a Hieronymus Bosch hellscape, in which, under the guise of the pursuit of pleasure, individuals are tortured, dehumanized, discarded, destroyed.

We had come to see this ominous hurtling as inevitable. But in the past few months, at the mercy of a ravaging virus, we have discovered that in other ways we aren't disempowered. Crisis and extremity are by no means desirable. But these extraordinary times have forced us to slow down, to think collectively, to seek hope, to value the truth, and to celebrate resilience and faith in our fellow human beings.

We may look to the past, to the vast compendium of recorded human experience, for

wisdom, solace, or at least a sense of recognition. When our abiding principles seem upended, I remember an Enid Blyton story I loved as a child, about a little girl who loves lying until she gets trapped in the Land of Lies, where untruths are praised and the truth disregarded. Considering the opioid epidemic, I recall Odysseus and his men in the land of the lotus-eaters, or Tennyson's poem of the same name: "What pleasure can we have/To war with evil? Is there any peace/In ever climbing up the climbing wave?" Meanwhile, our political fiascoes call to mind a line from *King Lear*: "A dog's obeyed in office." If we pause and listen to history and literature, we'll find, as Louise Glück puts it in "October," "you are not alone,/the poem said/in the dark tunnel."

Language makes this possible. It enables us not only to ask for a glass of milk, or to say that we feel sick, but to speak of our sorrows and ecstasies, of our philosophical musings and our memories. I am constantly amazed at this extraordinary medium—created by our distant ancestors out of nothing, still evolving. The written or printed word enables the transmission of thoughts and experiences across centuries and cultures. Our passion for storytelling—not simply for sharing information, but for giving meaning and shape to events—has motivated individuals and armies. The dissemination of the written word, from the time of Gutenberg, has enabled us to tell stories of great depth and complexity, and to share our analyses of these stories. I don't just mean literature: history, too, is the analysis of human stories; as are psychology, anthropology, law, and philosophy. The dramatic prevalence of the image over the written word in our present moment is akin to a return to the

Lascaux caves: immediacy has its advantages, but nuance isn't one of them.

Just as we are called to be active custodians of our planet, we must also be custodians of human knowledge and of our own minds. We need not be alone in our experiences, nor passive: the riches of all human thought and imagination are available to us. If we were to ensure, as a society, that people's basic needs were met, then we might recognize that a richer life doesn't require money, or access, or things: each of us can be nourished by the life of the mind. Frederick Douglass was born into slavery, and yet when we read his writings, we encounter a mind profoundly free, a mind able to articulate itself in language both urgent and lucid, that serves as a reminder that power over language is power tout court.

When you read fiction or encounter a work of art you are invited into an open-ended

[Closure]

THE LONG GOODBYE

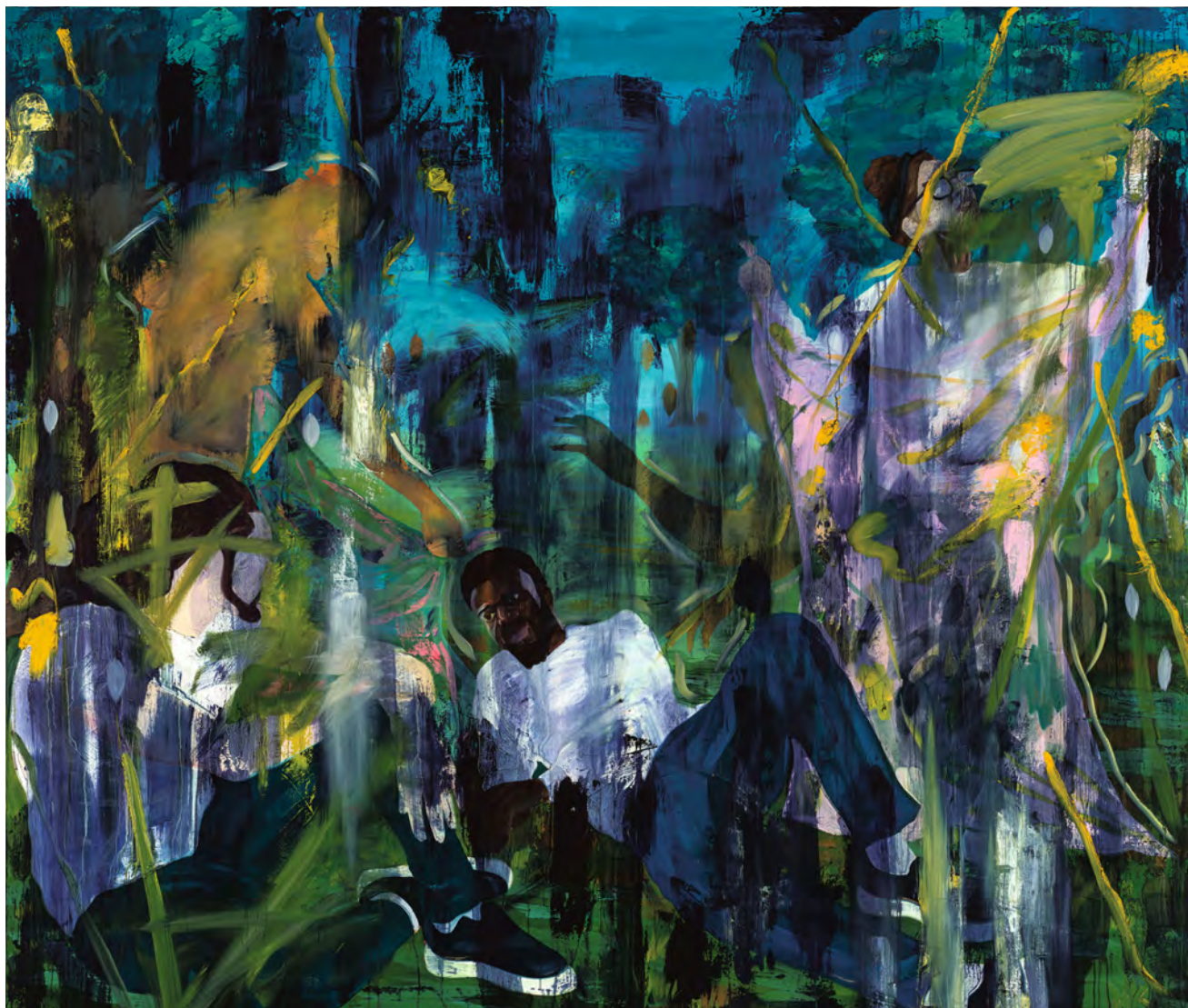
From sign-offs in the correspondence of the philosopher Gilles Deleuze, collected in Letters and Other Texts, which was published in July by Semiotext(e).

Wishes, wishes, wishes
Friendship and wishes
Thinking of your future
You are among the greatest poets
Let me express the strong effect our meetings,
both recent and upcoming, have on me
Have a good conference, impose your talk, and
stroke the good doctor
Forgive me for troubling you in this way, as I hope
you will see it as proof of my great admiration
I need some type of long sleep at present but
cannot
I am somewhat ill-suited for travel
I am not furious, as you say, but very annoyed
With all my heart, you are a terrible battlefield,
from which friendship can extract joy and
complicity
I have pushed back my departure for Paris, no
way to sell this fucking disgusting apartment
I find all that I am saying to you grotesque and
pitifully intellectual
There, I've done all I could to satisfy you
Forgive my inadequacy

conversation. You're engaged in an experience that is simultaneously private and universal. Your encounter with a work of fiction is yours alone. And yet in words, our encounters can be shared, our experiences thereby expanded and deepened. Reading opinions that differ from our own, we are challenged to articulate our own experiences, and through the articulation we live more deeply. The hurtling slows.

I advocate for the actual, irreducible, and irreplaceable animal record—outside the age of mechanical reproduction. The movement of the hand that holds the pen; the imprint of ink upon paper; the dignity and intimacy of the individual letter, written for a particular addressee (and hence so different from a blog or social-media post), without thought of other readers. The loss of what that represents philosophically is enormous: my grandparents, my parents, even my friends and I in youth, spent hours writing letters about what we were doing and thinking, where we were going and what we noticed, as a gesture of intimate communication. It signified that each of us mattered, that the person to whom I wrote mattered, and that our communication was important—often precisely because it wasn't widely shared. Privacy, intimacy, dignity, and with them, depth and richness of thought—all were a readily available part of daily life, for even the most modest among us.

My paternal grandfather spent the better part of a decade in his retirement writing a 1,500-page family memoir for my sister and me. He did not expect anyone else to read it. He titled it "Everything That We Believed In." His undertaking was a gesture of faith in himself, in us, in language and the transmissibility of experience. The result was an extraordinary and life-changing document; nobody else need think so, but for me and for my sister, it was. My father, on the other hand, of more melancholic temperament, a businessman during the day, spent a lifetime of evenings, weekends, and holidays as a scholar and thinker who, as in Bernhard's account of Wittgenstein's nephew, was a philosopher only in his head, committing nothing to paper. My abiding memory of him in old age is of a man in his library, sitting in his leather chair in a pool of light surrounded by darkness, wearing half-moon glasses, with a book in his lap and a Scotch on the table beside him. He had nobody to talk to, nobody with whom to share his considerable erudition; he lived in the splendid and terrible isolation of one who, while still retaining faith in the life of the mind and the power of books to speak to him, had



All This Life in Us, a painting by Dominic Chambers, whose work is on view this month at Anna Zorina Gallery, in New York City.

renounced the possibility of being understood and the value of passing on his knowledge. Both figures have their Beckettian absurdity—my grandfather toiling at his desk, for what? My father, reading voraciously, for what?—but also represent hope of a kind, and inspire me to persist.

So many stories remain untold; so much that we have to learn, and to experience, is still hidden from the world. To attend to these stories is to slow our current hurtling, to calm the chaos, to return to what makes us human. It is to find the past and the present restored, as well as the possibility of the future. We can't go on, we must go on: in this period of trial and transition, those of us for whom the power of the word is paramount must keep the flame alive. Nothing matters more.

[Memoir]

REBORN TO RUN

By Betsy Bonner, from The Book of Atlantis Black, which was published last month by Tin House Books.

1.

Once, when my older sister Nancy was twelve, she told me she'd decided to run away by hopping a freight train. Her best friend, Jen, had done it. When she invited me to join her, I refused, and threatened to tell our father.

"Don't be a wuss," she said. She stared me down and ordered me not to say anything to anyone, even if she never came back.



© THE ARTIST COURTESY DANZIGER GALLERY, NEW YORK CITY

"Clair de Lune," a photograph by Paul Cupido, whose work is on view this month at Photo Basel, in Berlin.

She was gone for several hours. Mom had a doctor's appointment that day but wasn't leaving her room. I was about to wake her when Nancy came in the front door and breezed past me into the kitchen.

"Did you do it?" I called.

"Wouldn't you like to know."

"You couldn't have gone that far, or you wouldn't be back," I said.

That night, she came into my room. She said that she never intended to go all the way to Harrisburg, or wherever that train was heading. She rode it for a few minutes, and then jumped off to spend the remainder of the afternoon in the woods with Jen. I knew, then, that she could disappear whenever she wanted, whether to scare me or to feel alive or to imagine herself gone.

2.

When Nancy was thirteen, she climbed out her window in the middle of the night and walked the nine miles to our school, through woods and fields and across Highway 1. The next day, she showed up on time for her envi-

ronmental science class and took her seat near where a buck's head hung on the wall. She told me that night-walking was a beautiful and tranquilizing experience.

3.

When we were teenagers, my sister would come into my bedroom, lie down on the floor, and start talking. She told me she believed in reincarnation, and that she was attracted to the desert because her spirit was a coyote. She asked whether I had ever experienced astral projection, and when I said I hadn't she told me I'd have to be lying down and hovering at the edge of a dream.

4.

In 1994, my seventeen-year-old sister gave birth to a new self. For Atlantis Black to exist, she had to get rid of Eunice Anne Bonner. Two local newspapers printed the legal notice, and the people of Chadds Ford had a month to present objections. There were none. Eunice Anne Bonner drove herself to the hearing

and emerged Eunice Anne Black. Later on, she forged a document to make Atlantis her middle name.

5.

In 360 BC, when Plato invented the lost island of Atlantis in his dialogues *Timaeus* and *Critias*, most readers understood that it was not a real place. But in 1882, Ignatius Donnelly, a politician from Philadelphia, published *Atlantis: The Antediluvian World*, a pseudoscientific account of the flora, fauna, and history of Atlantis. The Theosophists Madame Blavatsky and Rudolf Steiner expanded on the mythology and wrote about Atlanteans as a “root race” that had existed ten thousand years earlier. Blavatsky’s *The Secret Doctrine* described Atlanteans as god-like beings who had become human and thereby destroyed themselves. Steiner’s *Atlantis and Lemuria* claimed that Atlanteans existed in a kind of “dream consciousness” and valued personal experience over traditional learning: an Atlantean “did not think, he remembered.”

6.

On June 25, 2008, a young woman with my sister’s IDs was found dead on the floor of a hotel room in Tijuana. Her body had needle marks in the left arm, a wound on the right middle finger, and a bruised cranium. She wore blue jeans and a brown T-shirt that read GOOD KARMA. Two syringes were in the room: one on the nightstand, one in her purse. The police report said that the IDs—including an American passport and a California driver’s license issued to “Eunice Atlantis Black”—did not appear to match the body, which was cremated without taking fingerprints or checking dental records. The autopsy report said the woman had green eyes and weighed less than one hundred pounds. It estimated that she had been twenty to twenty-five years old. My sister had hazel eyes, like my mother. She was thirty-one and running from felony charges in a prescription-drug case in California when she disappeared.

7.

The story I told to myself, to my therapist, and to my friends, was that Atlantis was dead, and that she’d killed herself in protest against the DEA. The story I kept to myself was that even if Atlantis hadn’t really died in Tijuana, she couldn’t have managed to live much longer on the run.

[Escalation]

APPLE WATCH

From surveillance measures taken by governments and institutions around the world in response to the novel coronavirus pandemic.

Connected patient case numbers with location data

Deployed drones to scold pedestrians for not wearing masks

Deployed drones to instruct people to disperse with a recorded message from the mayor

Deployed drones to peer into windows to check whether residents were obeying quarantine

Aggregated data from Google and Facebook to track how the virus spreads among friends

Accessed the cell phones of citizens who tested positive and sent text messages to people whom they had possibly infected

Required citizens to download an app that assesses their health, labels them green, yellow, or red, sends this information to the police, and grants them access to public spaces on the basis of their color grade

Launched a platform to track the movement of confirmed cases using credit card transactions and CCTV footage

Installed CCTV cameras in front of the homes of people under mandated quarantine

[Denomination]

CALL ME BY YOUR PAIN

From first names given to babies born around the world during the early months of the novel coronavirus pandemic.

Corona

Corona Kumar

Corona Kumari

Covid

Covid Marie

Covid Rose

Coviduvidapdap

Lockdown

Sanitizer

Covid Bryant

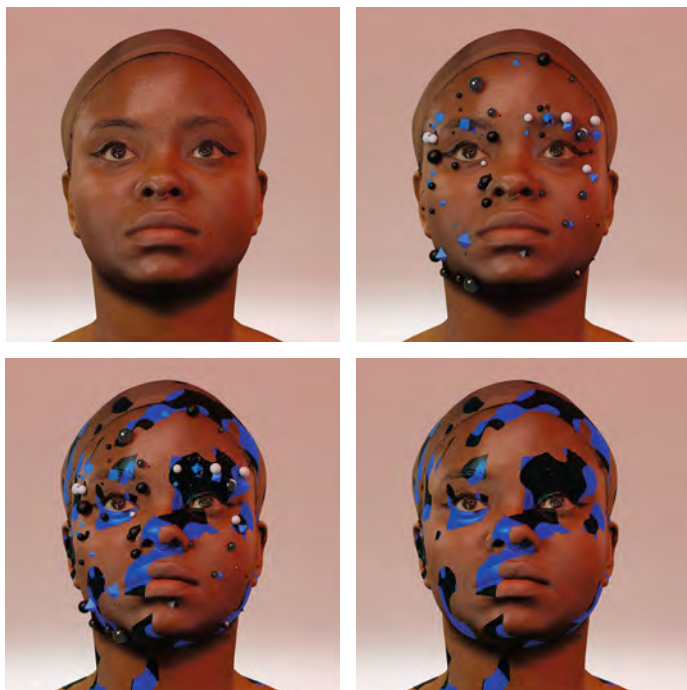
- Installed heat-detection cameras outside hospitals
- Integrated AI technology with surveillance cameras in the subway system to assess whether passengers were wearing masks
- Introduced a robot to track when employees came within six feet of one another
- Used RFID technology to determine whether employees were washing their hands
- Required arriving travelers to wear electronic tracking wristbands

- Required students to wear electronic tracking devices
- Forced undocumented immigrants to wear electronic tracking bracelets
- Required individuals who tested positive to download an app that notifies the police when they leave their homes
- Introduced a police helmet with facial-recognition technology that uses thermal cameras to measure body temperature
- Assigned citizens QR codes that contain personal data
- Required people in quarantine to submit one selfie per hour between 7 AM and 9 PM
- Secretly registered users for a game show called *Are You at Home?* in which the host calls random users to check whether they are obeying quarantine

[Instructions]

VANISHING CREAM

From *CV Dazzle*, a project by Adam Harvey that demonstrates how makeup, hair styling, and accessories can be used to foil facial recognition technology. Harvey ran the below looks through a neural network that evaluates the similarities between two faces. Each face is given a score between 0 and 1, with scores below 0.8 interpreted as likely not a match. When compared with a makeup-free image of the same subject, the looks below (clockwise from top left) received scores of 1.0, 0.73, 0.56, and 0.53, showing the extent to which contouring and asymmetrical designs can be used to confuse the software by altering the spatial and textural relationships between key features such as the eyes, eyebrows, and nose. These are considered more identifiable than features in the bottom half of a face, which is dynamic and easily obscured by collars, masks, or other garments.



[Personal Growth]

EMPATHY, MY DEAR WATSON

From a lawsuit filed in June by the estate of Arthur Conan Doyle alleging that an upcoming Netflix film about Enola Holmes, the younger sister of Sherlock Holmes, depicts Sherlock in an empathetic manner distinct to Doyle's later short stories, which are not yet in the public domain. The following is taken from allegations in the lawsuit describing Sherlock's emotional evolution over the course of Doyle's career.

Sherlock Holmes was famous for his great powers of observation and logic. He was famous for being aloof and unemotional. His closest companion, Watson, revered Holmes and was generous in his admiration. But to Holmes, Watson was utilitarian—to be employed when useful, then set aside. Holmes did not treat Watson with warmth. Holmes told him, “You have a grand gift for silence, Watson. It makes you quite invaluable as a companion.”

Holmes did not even congratulate Watson when Watson told Holmes he was going to marry. “I feared as much,” said Holmes. “I really cannot congratulate you.” “I felt a little hurt,” said Watson. Then all of this changed. The Great War happened. It was no longer enough that Holmes was the most brilliant rational and analytical mind. Holmes needed to be human. Holmes became warmer. He became capable of friendship. He could express emotion. He developed a knowledge of medicine. He embraced modern technologies. He changed from one who cared little for dogs to someone who had great interest in them. He began to respect women. He reacted with warmth and emotion to a woman—quite unlike his famous aversion to women. His relationship to Watson changed from that of master and assistant to one of genuine friendship. Watson became more than just a tool for Holmes to use. When Watson married for a second time and moved out of Baker Street, Holmes described the emotional impact this had on him, calling Watson’s remarriage “the only selfish action which I can recall in our association. I was alone.” Holmes became a partner. When a villain fired a gun and Watson was hit, Holmes said: “You’re not hurt, Watson? For God’s sake, say that you are not hurt!” “I caught a glimpse of a great heart,” said Watson. “All my years of humble but single-minded service culminated in that moment of revelation.”

[Lecture]

INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY

By Eileen Myles, from For Now, which will be published this month by Yale University Press as part of the Why I Write series. A version of the essay was delivered at Yale last year.

In 2015, I had a conversation with a man named Chris. He was an agent for archives and he said, well what

do you got, and I told him about the notebooks dating back to 1960 and all the posters from readings and performances and the videotapes. Any pictures. Well. Yeah, though it’s kind of

[How-To]

EXTRA EXTRA

From the headlines of advice columns published in the New York Times since the onset of the novel coronavirus pandemic.

If You’ve Got Lemons, Make Limoncello
 How to Raise a Happy, Carefree Butterfly
 How to Make Your Own Coronavirus Piñata
 How to Make a Frozen Margarita
 Go Ahead, Blow Out the Candles on Zoom
 It’s Not Too Late to Get a Virtual Internship
 How to Go on a First Date During Quarantine
 Be Your Own Spin Class
 Give Yourself a Buzz Cut Now
 It’s Robes and Slippers All Day Now
 How to Hug During a Pandemic
 Masks, No Kissing and ‘a Little Kinky’
 Turn Your Demanding Child Into a Productive Co-Worker
 How to Create Screen-Life Balance
 Make Stress Work for You
 Silver Lining to the Mask? Not Having to Smile
 You’re Stronger Than Your Quarantine Fatigue
 It’s OK to Not Be a Perfect Quarantine Employee
 You Don’t Have to Emerge From Quarantine a Beautiful Butterfly
 Maskne Is the New Acne
 What Is All of That Screen Time Doing to Your Skin?
 How to Politely Decline a Call
 How to Write a Condolence Note
 Emotional Eating in Quarantined Kids
 Please Do Not Eat Disinfectant
 Does Online Babysitting Work?
 Oh, Good, the Kids Are Fighting Again
 I Left My Husband Before the Pandemic. Can I Go Back to Him Now?
 How to Rethink Your Wedding
 Is It OK to Dump Him Because of His Medical Condition?
 How to Reduce Your Risk of PTSD in a Post-Covid-19 World
 Nature Deficit Disorder Is Really a Thing
 Hoping to Buy an Aboveground Pool to Salvage Summer? It May Be Too Late
 How to Entertain Your Kids This Summer? Maybe Don’t
 You and Your Kids Can’t Stand Each Other. Now What?
 Should You Renew Your Lease If You’ve Lost Your Job?
 Should We Be More Pessimistic?

weird and I told him how I had a collection of archival photographs of myself and Andrei Voznesensky on a couch as he was putting the moves on me; Adrienne Rich and I hugging at some reading; captioned photos of me by Allen Ginsberg; and even outtakes from the Mapplethorpe shoot. But I don't know where they are. There's this box and then I described the poems in binders in the milk crate. It's weird I

[Expert Opinion]

SYSTEM OF A CLOWN

From an interview of Larry Kudlow, the director of the National Economic Council, by Sara Eisen, the cohost of Closing Bell on CNBC, conducted in June.

SARA EISEN: Larry, I just wanted to follow up on something you told reporters last week. You said, "I don't believe there's systemic racism in the U.S.," which I found surprising given the moment that we're in.

LARRY KUDLOW: Well, I don't believe in systemic racism. I think the American system is the best system ever devised for mankind. Here's a thought: the first black president was elected twice and he got seventy-nine million white votes. Therefore I find it hard to understand something called "systemic racism." You know, I'm old enough to remember the Fifties.

EISEN: Larry—

KUDLOW: You gotta watch this PBS documentary about the great black jurist and Supreme Court justice—um, uh—whose name I've forgotten. Sorry, I've forgotten him. My point is this: we can learn from our history.

EISEN: Larry—

KUDLOW: Is this a systemic problem? No. Systemic means America is bad. America is wrong.

EISEN: Larry, I think you have to look at the explanations for why the net worth of a white family is ten times more than the net worth of a black family. Or why a black family led by a household with an advanced degree doesn't make as much as a white family led by a household member with a high school degree. The statistics are endless. That's what people are referring to when they talk about systemic racism in society.

KUDLOW: Number one, I'm not sure what systemic means. But I do not believe in whatever it may mean.

said but I'm not sure where those two things are. I mean I've got to have them. I think they are either in my New York storage space or I guess I still have one storage unit in San Diego. A place called Big Box. I smirked. He was not interested in the details.

He paused for a moment, sipping his drink. He was thinking about the box with the binders. Or maybe it was the photos. Now he looked up at me. In my business, he said, we call a box like that the gusher.

I talked on the phone with a psychic tarot reader from Tucson. She said the box was very close. I just had to write a letter and send it to everyone who ever came in contact with the box in the time it was traveling with me. People were heartbroken. Are you sure it wasn't in your apartment. Are you sure it isn't in hers. My girlfriend had a big old apartment she grew up in. It was kind of a railroad. There was this hall she called the closet, but it was more like a long clothes rack with very high shelves. I went to a psychic in New York and he told me she had it. She may not have known she had it. I asked her and she said she was very sorry but she would never lie about something like that.

I talked to a hypnotist who said she saw something green like a lamp, something high. No, actually she led me into a hypnotic state, and I looked around up there and that's what I saw. There was that apartment I took in L.A. before I left. I had it for about three days and then I asked for my check back. I was moving to New York. They had this weird storage space that was actually right on the street and I remembered locking and unlocking it and I am pretty sure the box was right in there. I remember talking to some comedian who lived there after me and he said I'm sorry I don't have it.

I have so many theories.

Bedbugs. My girlfriend had had them a couple of times in her building so when she saw the bloodstains on the side of the mattress she freaked. It was our blood. We did a giant purge of the apartment. Putting things in trash bags, getting the place sprayed, and then throwing out a ton of stuff. Her building had one of those cement dungeons right below the street where you dropped your trash and we filled that entire dungeon with black bags. She had this extra mom because her own mom had been irresponsible and this woman named Sally helped us clean and lug the mess down. I mean if you date a significantly younger person, especially if you are the same age as her parents and her parents' friends, it's like you're John Wayne Gacy. So I find it very easy to imagine Sally sliding my box into a trash bag and throwing it out. And why not the second



"Antonín Kalina, Czechoslovakia, 1988," and "Zofia Baniecka, Poland, 1986," photographs by Gay Block, from *Rescuers: Portraits of Moral Courage in the Holocaust*, which was reissued last month by Radius Books.

one too. This is the kind of thing that makes you entirely paranoid. She was a nice woman. She wouldn't do that. Who knows. Few people really care that much.

The second psychic said he didn't find things but he knew somebody who did and would give me their number. But then he got cancer. And then he got better. He was pretty good. By then I was as much asking about the woman I was dating as anything else. And this was somebody else. I wrote a pilot about the box because she said if I didn't, she would. So I did and I showed it to her and she said the format was wrong. I got busy and the next time I talked to psychics and astrologers they didn't think the box was close anymore.

It became my thing and it's been my thing now for probably ten years. I mostly don't tell people. I went to Palestine in 2017 on a tour of five cities with American and British writers, several of Middle Eastern extraction and a few Jews. In Palestine I met writers and lawyers and human-rights people and every night we read our work. I was at this party one night in Ramallah and I just spontaneously started telling this filmmaker, a woman about my age—I figured she'd get it and she laughed and said it's gone and it's wonderful. Somebody else will find it. It's not your problem anymore.

[Fiction]

AFTER MIDNIGHT

By Wolf Wondratschek, from *Self-Portrait with Russian Piano*, a novel, which will be published this month by Farrar, Straus and Giroux. Translated from the German by Marshall Yarbrough.

You ask me whether I still keep up with my piano playing. I'll tell you, I don't, not anymore, not for many years now, and it's not just the piano I've stopped keeping up with. Life isn't easy. My hands are bored, my heart's worn out, to say nothing about how my legs feel. When I go to the kitchen to make myself some coffee, I forget that I've gone to the kitchen to make myself some coffee. But by that time I'm already standing in the kitchen, which hasn't smelled very pleasant for quite some time now. At my age nothing smells very pleasant anymore. My bed. I'm ashamed to sleep in this bed, but at night I get tired. What am I supposed to do if not lie down in this bed to sleep? It is a joy, a small one, to get out of my clothes, which have the smell on them of long, arduous days, of entire weeks. Even if I've made it through the day not in a bad mood, my pants smell of despair,



© THE ARTIST. COURTESY ROBERT KLEIN GALLERY, BOSTON

A photograph from the series Land/s by Gohar Dashti, whose work was on view in July at Intersect Aspen, in Aspen, Colorado.

my shirt smells like my socks, like the hallway where the smell starts and then pours out into the other rooms, and the kitchen as well, of course. So long as I'm here there's little use in opening the windows. If the sun is shining, the warm air just pushes the smell back through the window into the apartment. If it's raining, I get to hope that things will be made fresh again. Or I tell myself I do. Rain washes the world clean, that's what they said in the villages where I grew up. Even the old would pour themselves a glass when the sky turned dark and the wind and the rain started in. We were all quiet, because that's how it always was. Everyone listened, even me, even the boys. No one would have dared say a single word.

A holy silence, which I only ever found again in music—later, much later, when I began to love music. I won't say when I began to understand music. Even today I don't think I have any idea what music is. I sit at the piano, I play, I love what I'm playing, but I understand nothing. After midnight, when I'd had enough to drink, I sometimes played like someone who'd been allowed to

trick himself into believing he understood what he was doing. I was at my best at these times. I liked to drink. We all liked to drink. All musicians drank. Even if we had wanted to sober up, we couldn't stop drinking. These rare hours, they were what mattered. The hours before sunrise, when I was alone with my hands on the piano and the music that I played. I don't know whether I was happy. I was concerned with more important things than being happy. Even today I have no interest in the answer to that question. Sometimes I think the whole of a person's happiness rests on his wanting neither to seek nor to find it. Still happier the person who doesn't make a fuss about it, whether happy or unhappy. Not questioning whatever judgment is imposed upon us. Showing the same equanimity in remembering and in forgetting. I've told myself for a long time: nothing can happen to you, whatever God might do. I hear His angels in the apartment. I hear them listening when I sit at the piano. I hear the quiet of their presence. Maybe that's what I wanted when I played: to make angels sing, to make their

invisibility, their silence, ring out. Angels are a good audience, the best a musician can ask for.

The young and old women who bathed me as a child believed in all that. None of them played an instrument. When I started playing, they felt guilty. A piano in a village. A child who doesn't sleep. What had they done, where had they gone wrong with this child who didn't stare up at the sky or into the pots in the kitchen or at the books that were lying around, but at his hands, at how they fluttered when he moved his fingers, how they galloped? Was this their handiwork? Artists only existed in cheap novels, so easy to pass from hand to hand, wherever you were in the world. That far away from Moscow, artists were a figment of the imagination. The horse that drew the plow was not, neither was poverty, nor the ground in which so little grew. What was supposed to happen? I kept still, if only outwardly, when in the parlor the old people, the whole family, sat around the table, silent, eyes closed. I did not have to risk much for my pleasure, I stuck my hands in my pants pockets and moved my fingers in secret. I still think of all those people who pray in silence when I think of music. When I listen to music, I still hear the rain in every note. And so, depending on how you look at it, I never really left my village, not in London, not in Paris or Vienna. And I never took my hands out of my pockets. I played like I practiced. Even onstage I had the feeling that what I did, I did in secret. I was at home. I was in my childhood. How long ago that was. Too long to try to trick myself about it.

Nowadays I'll say that, where I'm concerned, playing the piano no longer makes sense. I lack the necessary strength. The strength of the night, the burning clarity in my head, there only in the deepest exhaustion. Today I'm a smelly old person in a dark apartment, which now that my wife is dead is far too

big. I live on a diet of medication—very expensive medication. I don't have a choice. I am old. I am

[Poem]

WALKING TOUR OF AN IMAGINARY HOMELAND

By Chris Martin, from Things to Do in Hell, a poetry collection, which will be published next month by Coffee House Press.

The airplane inside us was running out of pretzels

We took the drugs in the morning so we could see at night

All day clinging to ghastly seaweed on the naked internet ocean

We thought, okay, neglect equals geography

As our habits grew unrecognizable so far from the strobe

And cold menace of a quivering *if*

What I didn't say was I was worried you might think

I was fine but insufficient

A total dick with wet cuffs like Zebulon Pike

In the vacuum of night

I can almost smell all these leases expire

Leashes?

Softening in the efflorescent decay tenure

And crippled in near-attainment

But less here already

We sipped unlegislated self-light like half-sour breast milk

Midlife is a drop ceiling

The future like a lake of cooling bacon fat

Computers do it for us anyways

Unless we tell them not to

Which we won't

trapped in a body, without hope. Even if I haven't managed to get rid of you, I don't receive visitors anymore. Well, with the exception of a young violinist who whenever she comes to my door I ask inside, a violinist who despite her youth has had a lot of success all over the world, whose father was a friend of mine and whose mother in her youth was considered one of the most beautiful but also one of the most stubborn women in all of Moldavia, an object of temptation for every one of us. Everything you need to make music on a violin the daughter inherited from her mother, plus her temperament and her beauty, which she considers a nuisance. She's hard on herself, which I like. I don't hold back either. It's not about beating your rivals. And careful, don't burn yourself up before the first note. You're not going for a record! Everything develops slowly. Play the dead like they're your contemporaries, and play your

contemporaries like classics. She listens, doe-eyed. The audience isn't in charge, especially not the lords and ladies in the orchestra seats. Don't look at them! And don't let them love you! We speak in our language. I serve tap water. A way of passing the time. I enjoy it, but I feel myself getting tired. I can't keep up the concentration the young thing demands of me for long, and soon I'm no longer even capable of thanking her for the compliments she pays me, and for the gift of a diversion, a change of pace, which she has given me with her excitement for music and her innate recklessness, at least where her conception of the violin and a career without compromises are concerned. I can't even prevent her from taking me in her arms when she says goodbye. This is always embarrassing for me. Doesn't she smell it? Doesn't she see the pile of unwashed dishes in the sink, the dust on the letters that are lying around everywhere? No, she doesn't—or she acts like she doesn't. She wants to save me, to get me back onstage, wants to appear alongside me, the old man and the girl, she says, and laughs. It'd make me happy, she says, I want to. You've still got it, even now. There's no one who plays like you. You'll get yourself back into shape. I trust you. Do it, she begs, do it for me. We'll make it happen. We'll travel together. My God, she's about to burst into tears. Somehow we both keep standing there like that for a while, both ashamed, both helpless, but, we know, lost to each other. It's better if you go now, I say. Well before midnight I'm finished as a human being and fall into bed.

At what would be the right time for making music, I'm snoring. I miss those hours, oh how I miss them! The hours that decided every truth, the hours that were good to me, that brought order to my mind. Brought the requisite disorder, to put it better. Or better still, a kind of higher order. The late Schumann. The Russian alcoholics. Czechs who didn't sleep at night. This time was everything, the time of hyperactive weariness. Even for Sibelius, who tormented himself with his music and with alcohol. Who, driven to despair by loneliness and isolation, listened to the night. No, said Suvorin, with the photograph of his wife on the wall over the table, whatever is played before midnight sounds like nothing. Even in the concerts that I myself played, it sounded like nothing. But who would dare take the risk of allowing a concert to begin after midnight? Even with free admission it wouldn't work. Oh night, sing the poets, and it's not just the romantics among them who are singing. There are good arguments to be made against sobriety. The soul opens up in darkness. It is capricious, as we know. It is an owl. It hides in the light. And, like me, it wants to be alone.

I didn't notice that she was still standing there. And only now, after these last words, which I had spoken to myself, did she go.

[Accusations]

WHEN LIFE GIVES YOU LEMON

From FCC complaints filed between 2016 and 2017 that allege inappropriate behavior by CNN host Don Lemon. The documents were obtained through a Freedom of Information Act request and published by Muckrock.com.

Don Lemon has been cutting people off on purpose
 Don Lemon flipped off Larry Wilmore
 Don Lemon showed a clip of the assassination attempt on Ronald Reagan
 Don Lemon said that anyone who supports Donald Trump is complicit in his racism
 Don Lemon said that taking a knee is protected by the Constitution
 Don Lemon depicted protests live with signs saying FUCK all over the place
 Don Lemon used the word "bullshit" two or three times
 Don Lemon said "cojones," which means testicles
 Don Lemon had on a CNN employee who intentionally said another word for "vagina"
 Don Lemon had on a so-called expert woman
 Don Lemon drank tequila from a Jose Cuervo bottle
 Don Lemon spoke his feelings



Appendix 137_120 (detail), an archival inkjet print from the series *Scratching on Things I Could Disavow* by Walid Raad, whose work was on view last month at Paula Cooper Gallery, in New York City.