NYT-0201
Personal Data's Value? Facebook Is Set to Find Out ... By SOMINI SENGUPTA and EVELYN M. RUSLI
The social network's stock offering, expected to value the company at $80 billion to $100 billion, is bound to raise even more concerns about privacy and other issues.
===== notyet (2 pages)
Facebook, the vast online social network, is poised to file for a public stock offering on Wednesday that will ultimately value the company at $75 billion to $100 billion, cashing in on the fuel that powers the engine of Internet commerce: personal data.

The company has been busily collecting that data for seven years, compiling the information that its more than 800 million users freely share about themselves and their desires. Facebook's value will be determined by whether it can leverage this commodity to attract advertisers, and how deftly the company can handle privacy concerns raised by its users and government regulators worldwide.

As the biggest offering of a social networking company, the sale is the clearest evidence yet that investors believe there is a lot of money to be made from the social Web. Facebook's dominance in this field has left Google, a Web king from an earlier era - less than a decade ago - racing to catch up.

Facebook is considered so valuable because it is more than the sum of its users. More than the world's largest social network, it is a fast-churning data machine that captures and processes every click and interaction on its platform.

Every time a person shares a link, listens to a song, clicks on one of Facebook's ubiquitous •glike• h buttons, or changes a relationship status to •gengaged,•h a morsel of data is added to Facebook's vast library. It is a siren to advertisers hoping

to leverage that information to match their ads with the right audience.

Barring an unforeseen event, the Internet giant plans to list a preliminary fund-raising goal of $5 billion, according to people briefed on the matter, smaller than some previous estimates of the offering. But it is essentially a placeholder, a starting point used by companies to generate interest among potential investors. The eventual offering is expected to be the largest for an Internet company, bigger than Google's in 2004 or Netscape's nearly a decade before that. Trading of the stock is expected to begin by late May, the people briefed on the matter said.

In recent months, Wall Street's banks have competed fiercely for a top assignment in Facebook's offering, a coup that comes with millions in fees and valuable bragging rights. The company has hired Morgan Stanley to serve as its top underwriter, while J.P.Morgan and Goldman Sachs will also be co-leads on the deal, according to people with knowledge of the matter who did not want to be identified because the discussions were private.

The offering will compel Mark Zuckerberg, Facebook's 27-year-old founder and chief executive, to do what he has until now preferred to avoid: share information about his company.

Facebook, created in 2004 in Mr. Zuckerberg's dorm room at Harvard, grew from being a quirky site for college students into a remarkably popular platform that is used to sell cars and movies, win over voters in presidential elections and organize protest movements. It jumped from 50 million users in 2007 to 800 million in 2011, according to company figures. It offers advertisers a global platform, with three-fourths of its users outside the United States; the notable exception is China, where Facebook does not operate.

Facebook's offering is "an American milestone," sa
id Lawrence H. Summers, the former Treasury secret
ary, who has been a mentor to Sheryl Sandberg, Fac
ebook's chief operating officer, and knows Mr. Zuc
kerberg. "Many companies provide products that let
 people do things they•fve done before in better w
ays. Most important companies, like Ford in its da
y or I.B.M. in its, are those that open up whole n
ew capabilities and permit whole new connections.
Facebook is such a company."

Facebook has deftly kept more and more users on it
s site for hours every day. Its users can stream m
usic, read the news, play virtual games, check hor
oscopes or upload family pictures - all without le
aving Facebook's orbit. They reveal to the company
 not only their names (Facebook prohibits pseudony
ms) and hometowns, but also their friends and fami
ly members and their tastes on everything from pop
 music to politics.

Facebook offers advertisers a giant basket of info
rmation so they can find precisely the audience th
ey covet: a Boston woman who posts that she is "en
gaged" may be offered an ad for a wedding photogra
pher on her Facebook page, while a Bombay bride-to
-be might see ads for wedding saris. Similarly, ev
ery press of a "like" button on Facebook signals a
 consumer's preferences and shapes the ads that ar
e shown. The Facebook Connect service allows users
 to log into millions of sites using their Faceboo
k username and password - and it can report back a
bout their activity on those sites, amassing even
more data for Facebook's trove.

That this business - a monster tangle of digital c
onnections - could become a global corporate colos
sus in less than a decade is a testament to the ex
plosive growth of the social Web. The stock offeri
ng will come as Facebook's peers, Google and Amazo
n, have disappointed investors in their latest qua

rters with sales growth shy of expectations.

"Fifteen years ago, AOL was the Internet to most p eople, five years ago it was Google, now Facebook is the Internet," said Lise Buyer, a former Google executive who helped guide the company's initial public offering in 2004. "Facebook's I.P.O. will p rove that there is an enormous amount of money to be made in the social media space."

Led by Mr. Zuckerberg, Facebook has been trying to hang on to its start-up spirit, even as it takes its place among Silicon Valley's elite. In Menlo P ark, Calif., its new headquarters, employees have wrapped the walls with graffiti splatter art. Expo sed pipes and air ducts line the ceilings and belo w, scuffed gray floors resemble a modified racetra ck with white lines.

Facebook's biggest stumbling block has been privac y. It has repeatedly alienated users over privacy - as in the case of the 2007 controversy over Beac on, a tool that automatically posted on Facebook w hat its users did or bought on other sites. It has also faced lawsuits over the use of its membersf "like" endorsements in ads and drawn scrutiny for a facial recognition feature.

The company announced a settlement agreement in No vember with the Federal Trade Commission, which ac cused the company of having deceived its customers about privacy settings. And the pressure from reg ulators is likely to grow. Facebook now faces pote ntial rules on privacy in Europe, along with slow- moving privacy legislation in Washington.

The company's flubs in this area reveal a fundamen tal tension in the way sophisticated ad-supported sites work. Consumers" time and information are ef fectively the price they pay for free Web services . Facebook allows its users to keep up with far-fl ung friends and family, for instance, in exchange

for that information. Google allows anyone to search for anything, so long as the company can serve up ads based on those searches.

At the moment, the battle is on between those two models of making money from online advertising. If Google's search engine cast the Internet as an instrument of solitary exploration, Facebook requires its users to share what they do with their Facebook "friends." In some ways, the Facebook offering is a test of how valuable the social model of the Internet could be.

According to comScore, a market research firm, Facebook has become the largest platform for display advertising on the Web in the United States; 28 percent of all display ads come to Facebook, followed by Yahoo, which gets less than half that share.

While advertising is its bread and butter, Facebook has sought new sources of income by becoming a place where goods and services are bought and sold, whether it is virtual farm animals or real concert tickets.

Analysts expect Facebook to be the driver of more such transactions, using the persuasive power of Facebook "friends." Company officials use the word "frictionless" to signal that whatever you watch, read, listen to or buy on Facebook or its partner sites can be displayed automatically for the friends of your choosing.

Chris Cox, the company•fs vice president of product, said in a recent interview that this information hoard was both a blessing and a curse for the company. "The challenge of the information age is what to do with it," he said.

(Michael J. de la Merced contributed reporting.)

This article has been revised to reflect the follo

wing correction: Correction: February 1, 2012
A Web summary with an earlier version of this arti
cle misstated the possible valuation of Facebook i
n the expected public offering as between $80 bill
ion and $100 billion. The offering is expected to
value the company at $75 billion to $100 billion.
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NYT-0205
Tharp's New Tale, Woven In Dance ... By GIA KOURLAS

Twyla Tharp tackled the task of building a narrati
ve ballet from the ground up. The result was a fan
tastical work based on a story by George MacDonald
 and set to music by Schubert.
===== notyet (long)
ATLANTA WHAT ever happened to the great narrative b
allet?

The centuries-old tradition of ballets that tell s
tories is still beloved by audiences - it's why Am
erican Ballet Theater continues to attract hordes
of little girls in tutus to the Metropolitan Opera
 House each spring. But it's not so easy to create
 the next "Swan Lake" or "Giselle." These days the
 story ballet has become the Charlie Brown of the
dance world: earnest and clumsy, eager to rise to
the occasion, yet repeatedly defeated by ineptitude.

In the last decade there have been plenty of attem
pts, with any number of Draculas as well as more r
ecent additions like the Houston Ballet's "Marie"
and New York City Ballet's "Ocean Kingdom," which,
 though dull, was at least a stab at something dif
ferent. Alexei Ratmansky has the best track record
, and Mark Morris's "Sylvia" was enchanting. But m
ost new story ballets have fallen flat with critic
s and audiences alike.

Lynn Garafola, professor of dance at Barnard Colle
ge , said, "I think many choreographers are approa
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ching it almost as a marketing proposition: we nee d a big ballet because audiences like stories." Bu t even at the rate at which they bomb, it seems no one is ready to let them go. Especially not Twyla Tharp, who brought modern dance to ballet, choreo graphed four Broadway shows and remains as prolifi c as ever at 70.

"I'm not satisfied sitting in just the world of ab stract work," she said on a sunny afternoon at her Upper West Side penthouse. "I'm all in favor of m assive structural reality, but I also feel that th ere are many ways to skin a cat. Will one do? Sure , if you've only got one cat. Who wants to just se ttle down? Ambition is not necessarily the word yo u want to use, but a desire for range, a desire to explore, a desire to give full honor to your prof ession."

Over the past year Ms. Tharp spent 13 weeks in the South where, on Friday, the Atlanta Ballet will u nveil her full-length production "The Princess and the Goblin" at the Cobb Energy Performing Arts Ce nter.

The new work is based on a fantastical 19th-centur y tale by George MacDonald and was, for Ms. Tharp, many years in the making. It was commissioned joi ntly by the Atlanta Ballet and the Royal Winnipeg Ballet.

It's a daring move; the libretto isn't one that Am erican audiences are familiar with. Just as she is stepping into unknown territory, she is hoping th at her audiences will take the leap too.

"There's the tradition of the 19th-century ballets , and the 20th century has had a difficult time wi th that tradition," Ms. Tharp said. "And it's had a difficult time with many components of the Roman tic imagination because of modernism. It's not a g ood name for a way of thinking about aesthetics, b

ut much of the grandeur of the Romantic imaginatio n was dismantled by the 20th century. I think that it warrants revisitation."

Clearly Ms. Tharp is extremely comfortable in the world of abstract ballet. "Give me a nice 20-count theme, and I can keep you happy for quite a while ," she said. But, she added, "it's not the only wa y to communicate."

Even though, as she put it, the representational a pproach to ballet "has been in the doghouse for a while," she sees it re-emerging as a reaction agai nst modernism. Still, there's always the question of language. Many story ballets falter when the li bretto is overly complicated.

"I think that needing to translate into words to t ell the story of a ballet is a problem," she said. "The ballet needs to tell its own story in such a way it can be received without having to be trans lated into language. That the emotions can be felt , I think, that's another thing. Abstract can tend to be very sterile, and the so-called narrative h as the capacity for an emotional connection."

While the MacDonald story provided the impetus for the production, Ms. Tharp is essentially creating a narrative ballet from scratch, which, as she po inted out to the dancers in Atlanta at the end of last summer, is a difficult task. Set to music by Franz Schubert, as arranged and orchestrated by th e composer and Schubert scholar Richard Burke, it is also her first ballet with children.

The work, featuring 12 scenes and a prologue, cent ers on young Princess Irene, a rare heroine for wh at she is not: saved by a prince or a victim of fa te. When Irene discovers that the town's children - including her two little sisters - have been kid napped by goblins, the adults, including her fathe r, ignore her. With the help of her magical Great-

Great-Grandmother Irene, she and her friend Curdie travel to the Goblin Kingdom to rescue the children.

It's a tale appropriate for the current fantasy-friendly age: MacDonald was an inspiration for writers like J. R. R. Tolkien and C. S. Lewis. Ms. Tharp first discovered the story years ago on the recommendation of the poetry critic and scholar Helen Vendler.

At its heart "The Princess and the Goblin" is about how the innocence of children can open an adult's eyes to a better world. Throughout her adventure Irene must demonstrate courage and wit; she must also demonstrate faith.

"The notion of faith is something that's been very challenged in this 20th century, and I think faith has its values," Ms. Tharp said. "So to put it center stage in a ballet is not telling anybody what's what, but I'm saying this is valuable."

The ballet also has its share of humor, which is not hard to justify in a story where the goblins are cursed with extremely tender feet - perfect ammunition for a jabbing point shoe - and detest rhyming. Why has it taken so long for someone to turn this into a dance?

"I think a sense of humor will help get a girl out of a dark place," Ms. Tharp said. She paused before flashing a brilliant, mischievous smile. "I'm just guessing here."

As one might surmise, the spirited Irene has something in common with Ms. Tharp, who stops at nothing to get what she wants "You can base a ballet on a great male dancer who's the hero of the adventure, but I thought it was time to give a woman center stage, especially in the world of the ballet where women in point shoes have been held up and supported or allowed to be very fragile and vulnerable

, and this has been a portion of their appeal," Ms. Tharp said. "I do think a powerful female figure should be valid in the ballet world." She raised an eyebrow, adding, "Don't you?"

Over the past year Ms. Tharp has condensed her Frank Sinatra show "Come Fly Away" for Las Vegas - it is currently touring the United States - and choreographed "Scarlatti" for Hubbard Street Dance Chicago.

She has learned a great deal from her experiences on Broadway, which include the arduous work of putting up three shows in eight years: "Movin' Out," "The Times They Are a-Changin' " and "Come Fly With Me."

"It's like, O.K., I got an opportunity to work," she said. "I worked very hard. I learned a great deal. Some of the pieces were controversial. Some people loved all of it, some people hated all of it, and that's everyone's prerogative."

She said she hopes "The Princess and the Goblin" will show the advantage and the experience of working on Broadway.

"All of those things which are critical in a Broadway show will be functioning here," Ms. Tharp said. "In revising the Sinatra I made the lineage much more direct."

She added: "I liked the version that was here, but it rambled. It also had a dark component to it that confused people. You're either going to do a tragedy or a comedy. A funny tragedy or a tragic comedy is a little confusing, so I made it simpler. And simplicity is a really important narrative lesson in theater."

For Ms. Tharp everything comes back to dance. In some ways "The Princess and the Goblin" reflects th

e singleminded resolve and faith that it takes to become a ballet dancer. Few things worth having, in other words, are easily won.

Alessa Rogers, 24, a brunette with a certain knowing innocence and comely line, will perform Irene. It is her first lead. That the role was not Ms. Rogers's from the start highlights another challenge in choreographing a story ballet: casting. As Ms. Tharp discovered early on, a preprofessional dancer couldn't carry the part alone. Part of the dilemma in "The Princess and the Goblin" had to do with finding a dancer who didn't appear too mature.

"MacDonald's Irene is much younger than ours, and I thought about making her a child, but it was too limiting in terms of the dancing that couldn't happen," Ms. Tharp said. "In my opinion, in trying to make a full-length narrative, there are certain capsules you need to have. She has to be able to deliver that pas de deux."

In August, after spending five weeks with the company, Ms. Tharp presented the ballet in several studio showings.

About three hours before the penultimate showing she told the cast that she was putting Ms. Rogers, the understudy, into the part. "Remember, no journey is made without many stops along the way," she said. "Relish the stops."

For the delicate-boned Ms. Rogers, who was primarily trained by Melissa Hayden at the North Carolina School for the Arts, it was a shock. "Being thrown in like that was kind of a blessing because I didn't have too much of a chance to freak myself out or overthink the role," she said. "It had to come from a very natural organic part of me to go into, what would a 14-year-old-girl in this situation do? It had to be more about the acting."

In terms of working with children Ms. Tharp has had her ups and downs.

"I broke my foot," Ms. Tharp said, accusingly. (She was teaching a step to the children when she fractured a metatarsal.) "They're adorable," she later said of the young dancers, with almost as much tenderness as she reserves for her grandson. They're also necessary for the story.

"My mission was to find movement, which they could really do that was not something they were straining to reach at," Ms. Tharp said. "But that would not just be running and skipping and hopping and chaos. First thing I did was to get them out of their ballet shoes and put them in street shoes. Next thing was: 'Girls, get your hair out of the buns. Now let's be who you are, and let's figure out how you move.' "

For Catherine Carlos, 11, dancing with her hair down is a sacrifice she's willing to make. Ms. Tharp "makes up some of the parts while you're going, and changes it while you're going instead of you learn the dance and that's it," Catherine said. "It's really cool."

A couple of weeks before her final trip to Atlanta in advance of the ballet's premiere Ms. Tharp spoke about how she was fine-turning aspects, particularly the relationship between the children and the goblins: "By their intention," she said giving each word equal weight.

And then seemingly out of nowhere, tears filled her eyes. "A strange thing happened, which impacted on this piece for a while, and then I unimpacted it," she continued. "Vaclav Havel died. "

Havel, a writer and dissident who was the former Czech president, was a true hero, she said. She knew him through the filmmaker Milos Forman. (Ms. Tha

rp has worked as a choreographer on three of his f
ilms: "Hair," "Ragtime" and "Amadeus.")

"He and Milos were best friends. He was an amazing
 man. You think about his struggle for release, hi
s struggle for freedom for his country. It's not d
issimilar to what is being said here. I said, 'O.K
. kids, you guys have got to be really brave littl
e troopers, and you have to represent this spirit
that is undefeatable.' I gave them something more
to play off against. The kids are not going to get
 pushed around."
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NYT-0208: DINING & WINE
Mindful Eating as Food for Thought ... By JEFF GORD
INIER
A concept based on Buddhist teachings encourages p
eople to eat slowly, paying close attention to the
 sensation and purpose of each morsel.
===== notyet (2 pages but maybe more)
TRY this: place a forkful of food in your mouth. I
t doesn't matter what the food is, but make it som
ething you love - let's say it's that first nibble
 from three hot, fragrant, perfectly cooked raviol
i.

Now comes the hard part. Put the fork down. This c
ould be a lot more challenging than you imagine, b
ecause that first bite was very good and another i
mmediately beckons. You're hungry.

Today's experiment in eating, however, involves be
coming aware of that reflexive urge to plow throug
h your meal like Cookie Monster on a shortbread be
nder. Resist it. Leave the fork on the table. Chew
 slowly. Stop talking. Tune in to the texture of t
he pasta, the flavor of the cheese, the bright col
or of the sauce in the bowl, the aroma of the risi
ng steam.
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Continue this way throughout the course of a meal, and you'll experience the third-eye-opening pleasures and frustrations of a practice known as mindful eating.

The concept has roots in Buddhist teachings. Just as there are forms of meditation that involve sitting, breathing, standing and walking, many Buddhist teachers encourage their students to meditate with food, expanding consciousness by paying close attention to the sensation and purpose of each morsel. In one common exercise, a student is given three raisins, or a tangerine, to spend 10 or 20 minutes gazing at, musing on, holding and patiently masticating.

Lately, though, such experiments of the mouth and mind have begun to seep into a secular arena, from the Harvard School of Public Health to the California campus of Google. In the eyes of some experts, what seems like the simplest of acts - eating slowly and genuinely relishing each bite - could be the remedy for a fast-paced Paula Deen Nation in which an endless parade of new diets never seems to slow a stampede toward obesity.

Mindful eating is not a diet, or about giving up anything at all. It's about experiencing food more intensely - especially the pleasure of it. You can eat a cheeseburger mindfully, if you wish. You might enjoy it a lot more. Or you might decide, halfway through, that your body has had enough. Or that it really needs some salad.

"This is anti-diet," said Dr. Jan Chozen Bays, a pediatrician and meditation teacher in Oregon and the author of "Mindful Eating: A Guide to Rediscovering a Healthy and Joyful Relationship with Food." "I think the fundamental problem is that we go unconscious when we eat."

The last few years have brought a spate of books,

blogs and videos about hyper-conscious eating. A H arvard nutritionist, Dr. Lilian Cheung, has devote d herself to studying its benefits, and is passion ately encouraging corporations and health care pro viders to try it.

At the Food and Brand Lab at Cornell University, P rof. Brian Wansink, the author of "Mindless Eating : Why We Eat More Than We Think," has conducted sc ores of experiments on the psychological factors t hat lead to our bottomless bingeing. A mindful lun ch hour recently became part of the schedule at Go ogle, and self-help gurus like Oprah Winfrey and K athy Freston have become cheerleaders for the prac tice.

With the annual chow-downs of Thanksgiving, Christ mas and Super Bowl Sunday behind us, and Lent comi ng, it's worth pondering whether mindful eating is something that the mainstream ought to be, well, more mindful of. Could a discipline pioneered by B uddhist monks and nuns help teach us how to get he althy, relieve stress and shed many of the neurose s that we've come to associate with food?

Dr. Cheung is convinced that it can. Last week, sh e met with team members at Harvard Pilgrim Health Care and asked them to spend quality time with a c hocolate-covered almond.

"The rhythm of life is becoming faster and faster, so we really don't have the same awareness and th e same ability to check into ourselves," said Dr. Cheung, who, with the Vietnamese Buddhist monk Thi ch Nhat Hanh, co-wrote "Savor: Mindful Eating, Min dful Life." "That's why mindful eating is becoming more important. We need to be coming back to ours elves and saying: 'Does my body need this? Why am I eating this? Is it just because I'm so sad and s tressed out?' "

The topic has even found its way into culinary cir

cles that tend to be more focused on Rabelaisian excess than monastic restraint. In January, Dr. Michael Finkelstein, a holistic physician who oversees SunRaven, a holistic-living center in Bedford, N.Y., gave a talk about mindful gardening and eating at the smorgasbord-friendly headquarters of the James Beard Foundation in New York City.

"The question isn't what are the foods to eat, in my mind," he said in an interview. "Most people have a general sense of what the healthy foods are, but they're not eating them. What's on your mind when you're eating: that's mindful eating to me."

A good place to try it is the Blue Cliff Monastery, in Pine Bush, N.Y., a Hudson Valley hamlet. At the serene refuge about 75 miles northwest of Manhattan, curious lay people can join Buddhist brothers and sisters for a free "day of mindfulness" twice a week.

At a gathering in January, visitors watched a videotaped lecture by Thich Nhat Hanh (pronounced tik-nyot-HAHN), who founded this and other monasteries around the world; they strolled methodically around the grounds as part of a walking meditation, then filed into a dining room for lunch.

No one spoke, in keeping with a key principle of mindful eating. The point is simply to eat, as opposed to eating and talking, eating and watching TV, or eating and watching TV and gossiping on the phone while Tweeting and updating one's Facebook status.

A long buffet table of food awaited, all of it vegan and mindfully prepared by two monks in the kitchen. There was plenty of rice, herbed chickpeas, a soup made with cubes of taro, a stew of fried tofu in tomato sauce.

In silence, people piled their plates with food, a

dded a squirt or two of condiments (eating mindful ly doesn't mean forsaking the hot sauce) and sat d own together with eyes closed during a Buddhist pr ayer for gratitude and moderation.

What followed was captivating and mysterious. Surr ounded by a murmur of clinking forks, spoons and c hopsticks, the Blue Cliff congregation, or sangha, spent the lunch hour contemplating the enjoyment of spice, crunch, saltiness, warmth, tenderness an d like-minded company.

Some were thinking, too, about the origins of the food: the thousands of farmers, truck drivers and laborers whose work had brought it here.

As their jaws moved slowly, their faces took on ex pressions of deep focus. Every now and then came a pause within the pause: A chime would sound, and, according to the monastery's custom, all would st op moving and chewing in order to breathe and expl ore an even deeper level of sensory awareness.

It looked peaceful, but inside some of those heads, a struggle was afoot.

"It's much more challenging than we would imagine, " said Carolyn Cronin, 64, who lives near the mona stery and regularly attends the mindfulness days. "People are used to eating so fast. This is a prac tice of stopping, and we don't realize how much we 're not stopping."

For many people, eating fast means eating more. Mi ndful eating is meant to nudge us beyond what we'r e craving so that we wake up to why we're craving it and what factors might be stoking the habit of belly-stuffing.

"As we practice this regularly, we become aware th at we don't need to eat as much," said Phap Khoi, 43, a robed monk who has been stationed at Blue Cl

iff since it opened in 2007. "Whereas when people just gulp down food, they can eat a lot and not fe el full."

It's this byproduct of mindful eating - its potent ial as a psychological barrier to overeating - tha t has generated excitement among nutritionists lik e Dr. Cheung.

"Thich Nhat Hanh often talks about our craving bei ng like a crying baby who is trying to draw our at tention," she said. "When the baby cries, the moth er cradles the baby to try to calm the baby right away. By acknowledging and embracing our cravings through a few breaths, we can stop our autopilot o f reaching out to the pint of ice cream or the bag of chips."

The average American doesn't have the luxury of ru minating on the intense tang of sriracha sauce at a monastery. "Most of us are not going to be Buddh ist monks," said Dr. Finkelstein, the holistic phy sician. "What I've learned is that it has to work at home."

To that end, he and others suggest that people sta rt with a few baby steps. "Don't be too hard on yo urself," Dr. Cheung said. "You're not supposed to be able to switch on your mindfulness button and b e able to do it 100 percent. It's a practice you k eep working toward."

Dr. Bays, the pediatrician, has recommendations th at can sound like a return to the simple rhythms o f Mayberry, if not "Little House on the Prairie." If it's impossible to eat mindfully every day, con sider planning one special repast a week. Click of f the TV. Sit at the table with loved ones.

"How about the first five minutes we eat, we just eat in silence and really enjoy our food?" she sai d. "It happens step by step."

Sometimes, even she is too busy to contemplate a c
hickpea. So there are days when Dr. Bays will take
 three mindful sips of tea, "and then, O.K., I've
got to go do my work," she said. "Anybody can do t
hat. Anywhere."

Even scarfing down a burrito in the car offers an
opportunity for insight. "Mindful eating includes
mindless eating," she said. " 'I am aware that I a
m eating and driving.' "

Few places in America are as frantically abuzz wit
h activity as the Google headquarters in Mountain
View, Calif., but when Thich Nhat Hanh dropped by
for a day of mindfulness in September, hundreds of
 employees showed up.

Part of the event was devoted to eating thoughtful
ly in silence, and the practice was so well receiv
ed that an hourlong wordless vegan lunch is now a
monthly observance on the Google campus.

"Interestingly enough, a lot of the participants a
re the engineers, which pleases us very much," sai
d Olivia Wu, an executive chef at the company. "I
think it quiets the mind. I think there is a real
sense of feeling restored so that they can go back
 to the crazy pace that they came from."

It's not often, after all, that those workhorse te
chnicians get to stop and smell the pesto. "Somebo
dy will say, 'I ate so much less,' " Ms. Wu said.
"And someone else will say, 'You know, I never not
iced how spicy arugula tastes.' "

And that could be the ingredient that helps mindfu
l eating gain traction in mainstream American cult
ure: flavor.

"So many people now have found themselves in an ad
versarial relationship with food, which is very tr

agic," Dr. Bays said. "Eating should be a pleasura ble activity."

Consider These

O.K., so you don't happen to live in a Buddhist mo nastery. You can still give mindful eating a spin by incorporating a few chilled-out gestures and ri tuals into your regular calorie intake.

WHEN YOU EAT, JUST EAT. Unplug the electronica. For now, at least, focus on the food.

CONSIDER SILENCE. Avoiding chatter for 30 minutes might be impossible in some families, especially w ith young children, but specialists suggest that g reenhorns start with short periods of quiet.

TRY IT WEEKLY. Sometimes there's no way to avoid w olfing down onion rings in your cubicle. But if yo u set aside one sit-down meal a week as an experim ent in mindfulness, the insights may influence eve rything else you do.

PLANT A GARDEN, AND COOK. Anything that reconnects you with the process of creating food will magnif y your mindfulness.

CHEW PATIENTLY. It's not easy, but try to slow dow n, aiming for 25 to 30 chews for each mouthful.

USE FLOWERS AND CANDLES. Put them on the table bef ore dinner. Rituals that create a serene environme nt help foster what one advocate calls "that momen t of gratitude."

FIND A BUDDHIST CONGREGATION where the members inv ite people in for a day of mindfulness. For New Yo rkers, it's an easy drive to the Blue Cliff Monast ery, about 90 minutes north of the city: bluecliff

monastery.org/ on the Web.
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NYT-0211: CULTURAL STUDIES
Don't Tell Me, I Don't Want to Know ... By PAMELA P AUL
Unless you are my best friend or my husband, don't tell me, I don't want to know.
===== notyet (long)
UNLESS you are my best friend or my husband, I don 't need to know the macabre symptoms of your gastr ointestinal virus. I don't need to know about how much candy anyone, other than me, has eaten. As fo r my ex-boyfriend, I don't need to hear about his wife's ability to Zumba.

There are things I'd rather just not know about you .

Yet I, like most people, have become inundated wit h Too Much Information about the people I know and the people I wish I didn't know but am now acquai nted with. It's as if we're all trapped at a perma nent reunion with everyone we ever bumped into at a street fair or waved to mistakenly in the cafete ria.

"The entire world has become this Dickensian serie s in which you are not visited by three ghosts but by eight million ghosts," said Sloane Crosley, au thor of "How Did You Get This Number." "I feel as if I see things about people that I don't necessar ily want to see, and then it's lodged like a piece of corn in my subconscious."

Whether it's via Twitter, Facebook, Foursquare, Li nkedIn, e-mail or some other form of Internet conn ectedness, the latest headlines from your super-su ccessful frenemy from high school, the boss who fi red you and the awful 14-year-old boy your daughte r is in love with are now in your face. Sometimes
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you don't want to know about these people at all. Other times, you don't want to know quite so much.

"My high school friends from Kansas are dear, swee t people," said Colby Hall, the founding editor of Mediaite.com. "But nothing says depressed like pe ople asking you to feed the cows on Farmville."

Last month, Google announced that posts from its G oogle Plus member profiles would be sprawled acros s the company's search results. Searching for the phrase "yellow bikini," for example, you might see a snapshot of your former English teacher on the beach in Aruba. A Google spokesman asserts that th e program is designed to combat "the faceless Web."

The faceless Web, seriously? More like the Web of t oo many faces.

"There's one person who keeps coming around in the People You May Know box on Facebook where just th e suggestion of this person changes my whole day," said Pam Houston, a novelist. "It's essential to my well-being to create the illusion that this per son doesn't exist."

Even if we like a person, we don't necessarily lik e - or even "like" - what we find out about them o nline. Do we need to see a rival's witticism promi scuously retweeted? "I had to stop following certa in friends because I was constantly seeing them tw eet about all the parties that I wasn't invited to !" said Laurie David, a Hollywood producer and aut hor. "The worst is the Twitpic - people take pictu res of themselves at these fun dinners, and you're not there."

Sure, you can unfollow, unsubscribe, de-link or tu ne people out. "At least the Internet gives us the option of blocking them, consigning them to obliv ion forever," Andy Borowitz, a humorist, "shared" in an e-mail. "The only equivalent option in the r

eal world is strangulation."

But many people see no escape. "Even if you hide a person's news feed, you know it's there," Ms. Crosley lamented. "And then you might find yourself going to their page to get a direct hit, which can only be worse."

Let's be straight: it's not just that other people's minutiae bombard us regularly. Sometimes, we seek it out despite ourselves. Whether you call it low-buzz stalking, cyberstalking or the unsettling new term "creeping," people can now browse around the edges of former intimates' lives, learning much too much about them: they can do perfect inverted yoga poses; they have married well; last week they had dinner with Bono.

"If the F.B.I. came and ransacked my computer, they'd be like: 'What is your obsession with this person from sixth grade? Why have you looked at her picture a million times?' " said Julie Klam, whose next book, "Friendkeeping," is about actual friendships.

Those who might shudder at the notion of cracking a close friend's diary feel no compunction about browsing through the timeline of an utter nonconnection. "I'm incredibly intrusive about looking at old girlfriends to see what their kids look like," said Euan Rellie, an investment banker. "I am constantly looking at people and thinking: 'What a lovely ski holiday! I wish I'd been with that group of good-looking people in Aspen.' "

How is it that activities we wouldn't in a million years be roped into doing in real life - paging through an acquaintance's baby album, suffering through a relative's slide show from Turkey - become strangely alluring online?

"I had to go on a vacation-photo diet," admitted L

aura Zigman, a novelist. "I had this bizarre, voye uristic habit of scrolling through people's travel photos online and then feeling like, 'Why haven't I walked the Great Wall of China?' And guilt: 'I should be taking my son to Spain.' I don't even li ke to travel!"

Some people force their information on you.

"People will post things on my Facebook walls - po litical statements that are just strange - religio us rants that don't reflect my values," said Adam Werbach, chief sustainability officer at Saatchi & Saatchi. "I feel like I've got to scrub it off li ke a graffiti squeegee man."

But while other peoples' unsolicited information c an be amusing or annoying, it can also be hurtful. For singles, the Internet is fraught with painful T.M.I. Never mind a man graciously telling a woma n he's met someone new and wants to pursue that re lationship. One look at his active profile on Matc h.com, and his cover is blown.

"You meet someone at a party, and instead of them asking for your number, they'll say, 'I'll find yo u on Facebook,' " complained Dodai Stewart, editor of Jezebel.com. "Then I'll see drunk party photos of the guy with other women he's dating. I end up unfriending because I just can't deal with it."

It's impossible to electronically untangle yoursel f from an ex without generating a big fuss in your mutual extended network.

"You'll have just successfully put a person out of your mind, and then you'll see a friend of a frie nd comment on his Facebook status, 'Congratulation s on your engagement!' " said Maura Kelly, a co-au thor of "Much Ado About Loving: What Our Favorite Novels Can Teach You About Date Expectations, Not-So-Great Gatsbys, and Love in the Time of Internet

Personals."

"Other people's happiness doesn't bother me unless I've dated them before," Ms. Kelly said. "And then I'm really disturbed by it."

Sherry Turkle, a psychologist and author of "Alone Together: Why We Expect More From Technology and Less From Each Other," spoke of the effects. "People pay a psychological price for seeing information about former friends and spouses and colleagues that they really shouldn't be seeing," she said. It's not good for our emotional health and, she said, "it makes people feel bad because they know they shouldn't look at this stuff - but they can't help it!"

A study published last month in the journal Cyberpsychology, Behavior and Social Networking found that the more time people spent on Facebook, the happier they perceived their friends to be and the sadder they felt as a consequence.

What we're losing, Ms. Turkle said, is a healthy form of compartmentalization. We can no longer box up aspects of our home life when we go to work or tuck away distressing episodes from our past. Never mind ever moving on.

Think of a life without closure: The boy you made a fool of yourself over in high school is now a private-equity king with 400,000 followers. The face of the guy who date-raped you in college pops up as Someone You Might Know.

"For most of my life, I'd encounter people and then they'd be gone," said Caitlin Flanagan, the cultural critic. "You'd have to go to a major library and pore through phone books or hire a private detective to track them down." Now it's way too easy. "You can get this instant download and find out their whole life story and download all their pictu

res," she said. "But then you're like, 'That's enough of that person.' "

Weren't we better off knowing a little bit less, a little less often, about everyone else? Once, after high school graduation, a theater geek could dye his hair blue, come out of the closet or declare himself a semiotician without so much as a backward glance. Once the kinks were worked out, he could introduce his new self, by which time most people would have forgotten about whom he used to be.

Today, kids who graduate have to drag all their elementary school and high school "friends" along with them.

"The whole system is giving very ambitious people much less chance to reinvent themselves," said Jaron Lanier, author of "You Are Not a Gadget," and the change is less dramatic. Who would Bob Dylan end up as, he wondered, if Zimmerman were there with him the whole time?

And while you're still in upper childhood, unneeded social information is plastered everywhere. "There's no such thing as a small party that you only hear about a month later, because now kids make sure that everyone knows a party is going on and that everyone else isn't invited," said Mark Bauerlein, author of "The Dumbest Generation: How the Digital Age Stupefies Young Americans and Jeopardizes Our Future."

What does this mean for our own data spills? "Honestly, I'm more worried about people finding out stuff about me," said Jill Soloway, a comedian and TV writer and producer. "A lot of times I'll post things like, 'Let's organize a hipster Jewish Shabbat!' and then I think, what if businesspeople think I'm this religious Jewish person now? Something that seems fun and silly to me might seem really weird to a co-worker."

Alas, what strikes us as witty, original and winni
ng often comes across to the rest of the world as
sloppily confessional, self-promotional or trite.
It is, I confess, paradoxically and distressingly
difficult for me not to post about how much candy
I've eaten on a given day. And even I don't really
 want to know about that.

This article has been revised to reflect the follo
wing correction: Correction: February 19, 2012
An article last Sunday about oversharing personal
information on social networks misstated the given
 name of a psychologist who commented on its effec
ts. She is Sherry Turkle, not Shelly.
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NYT-0213: OPINION: ROOM FOR DEBATE
Being Alone Together
Can people live alone without being lonely? Given
that more people are choosing to live solo, are ou
r needs changing?
===== notyet
Two recent New York Times articles, "Alone Again,
Naturally" by Dominique Browning and "One's a Crow
d" by Eric Klinenberg, extol the virtues and perks
 of living alone. While Browning theorized that wo
men have an easier time living alone than men, Kli
nenberg noted that in the developed world, both mo
re men and women are choosing to live alone, and a
re loving it.

In prosperous societies, where social media is com
mon, social lives are affordable and accessible, a
nd families are no longer a financial necessity, i
s the era of communal living over and done? If so,
 are we losing our ability to be intimate, or are
we simply evolving into creatures with different n
eeds?

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A New American Experiment ... Bella DePaulo, a visiting professor of psychology at the University of California, Santa Barbara, is the author of "Singled Out." She writes the "Living Single" blog for Psychology Today.

There are so many ways to live and love. The sentimentalized image of Mom, Dad and the kids gathered around the hearth has had its day. A new American experiment has begun. We're not all going nuclear anymore.

Among the innovators are people of all ages who are single at heart. They are not single because they have issues or because they have not yet found a partner. They are not looking. Single is who they really are. Many are in the market for places of their own. So, too, are plenty of divorced and widowed people and single parents whose children have grown.

An unlikely demographic has also joined the quest for solo living – committed couples. In a trend dubbed "living apart together," the two people maintain homes of their own not because far-flung jobs demand that but because they want it. A study of married couples at two different points in time showed that even living together under the same roof is not what it used to be. In 2000, the couples were less likely to eat together or work on projects together than they were in 1980. They also had fewer friends in common.

Are we all just crying out for more solitude and separation?

I think not. What we are really seeking is the optimum balance of time alone and time together. It is the social and personal quest that transcends marriage, family status, age, race and just about every other demographic characteristic.

Walk outside the door of the people living solo and you may just find a sibling or lifelong friend in the neighborhood or even in the same building. That's not happenstance. In a variation on the same theme, people live in the same home with some private spaces and some shared.

Adults approaching the end of their working years are opting out of "retirement homes" and instead creating their own communities. Singles and couples, friends and family members, plan years in advance where and how they want to live. Rather than stepping into someone else's vision of how to age, they are inventing their own, complete with roommates or neighbors of their own choosing.

Sometimes people are jolted into shared living by economic challenges or natural disasters. Young adults or parents with small children move in with their own parents. Friends welcome friends into their homes to ride out the rough patch. The new doubled-up arrangements can be experienced as little more than a hardship. Occasionally, though, the sailing is so smooth and warm that all agree to continue. When people organically develop their own experiments in living, the results can be far more fulfilling than the solutions unpacked from the same old boxes from the past.

Alongside all of the imaginative designs for living generated in free-wheeling conversations by a pair of friends here or a group of baby boomers there, are options that are becoming systematized. Co-housing, co-ops, pocket neighborhoods, co-parenting and condos with dual master bedrooms are just a few examples. Sometimes the community members share an identity – perhaps as artists or single parents or home-schoolers; other times, the main connection is affection. These living arrangements are the communes of the 21st century.

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One Person Sharpens Another ... Juli Slattery, a Christian psychologist, speaker, wife and mother, serves as family psychologist at Focus on the Family and is the author of "Finding the Hero in Your Husband: Surrendering the Way God Intended" and "Beyond the Masquerade: Unveiling the Authentic You."

The growing trend for American adults to live alone is one I can understand. After all, it means never having to negotiate over who cleans the bathroom or at what temperature to keep the bedroom. But is living alone healthier?

To answer that question, let's backtrack a bit and talk about how, as a society, we evolve. Each generation is slightly different from the one before, thanks to either what I would term drifting evolution or intentional evolution. Drifting changes tend to be those that make life immediately easier or more pleasurable but result in regression down the road. Intentional change takes work and effort up front, but fights against our baser instincts and yields long-term benefits.

The trend toward living alone and even living together without a marriage commitment is a drifting change, based on our desire for immediate comfort and happiness. But it ends up destroying the beauty of the human experience.

Sharing all of life with another person is difficult – but it matures us. Only the presence of another person can reveal our selfishness and prompt us toward learning the art of compromise and working together.

The alternative is to retreat into our own world, where we are so absorbed with personal comfort that we can't be bothered to hear the concerns of another person or be inconvenienced to consider someone else's needs. Is this what we really want?

Just as our bodies were made for exercise, our souls were made for relationship. Is it easier to loaf on the couch instead of going for a run? Sure. But what stresses a muscle also allows for strength and survival. Likewise, as the timeless wisdom from the Book of Proverbs says: As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another. We grow stronger as a result of the pressures we overcome together when we embrace relationships and community.

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Man, I Need a Good Cuddle ... Thomas Matlack is a venture capitalist, writer, dad, husband and founder of The Good Man Project. He is on Twitter as @tmatlack.

Fifteen years ago now I was going through a difficult divorce (as if there is any other kind). I had a baby son and toddler daughter. Amid the suffering, something miraculous happened. I began to give my son his evening bottle and rock him to sleep.

I think it was the smell of his innocence that changed me. That and the feeling of his soft cheek in the crook of my neck. I inhaled as deeply as I possibly could, and held him tight, well past the point he had fallen asleep.

For six years I lived alone in something of a bachelor garret, dispelling the myth that men cannot live by themselves. My kids visited my apartment on Saturday nights, but otherwise I was left to watch the sun rise each morning over the brownstones of Boston's Back Bay alone.

I read, meditated and had plenty of friends. I relished my solitude. At heart I am a profoundly introverted person. I've gone on weeklong silent retreats without a problem. Not having to talk was a great relief to me.

But I always came back to the tactile feeling of my son and daughter in my arms. And as they grew up, I realized that soon it wouldn't be appropriate for my boy to wander into my bed in the middle of the night with his drooping stuffed dog to slip under the covers in a father-son spoon.

But in addition to being an introvert, I'm a romantic at heart. A decade ago I fell in love. Within a month we were engaged, three months later we had bought a big old house in Brookline to fix up, and inside of six months, we had gotten married.

Now I have another little boy who wanders into my room with his stuffed animals. My kids from my first marriage are 17 and 15. But what I look forward to most every day is holding my wife at night. It soothes my soul like nothing else does. It's a kind of unconditional love that I have never experienced on e-mail or Facebook.

If more people are living alone, in the United States and around the world, I would argue that our humanity is being chipped away by the lack of cuddle. People can do what they want, of course. And I don't doubt that I am a particularly needy and sometimes neurotic man of a certain ilk. So maybe the cuddle is more important to me than it is to some independent-minded woman.

But then again, I also thought that guys were supposed to be the ones afraid of nesting. Well I, for one, am not. And all the social media and connectivity in the modern world won't change that.

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Finding Solitude in a House Share ... Kate Bolick, a contributing editor at The Atlantic and culture editor of Veranda, lives alone in New York City. She is the author of the forthcoming book, "Among the Suitors: Single Women I Have Loved," an outgrowth of her recent Atlantic cover story.

Last winter I took up temporary residence with a married couple - friends of friends - in their two-story Tudor in Los Angeles. It was a short-term plan: I'd stay there intermittently for two months, when work wasn't keeping me in New York, just for a break, a change of scene. They lived upstairs, I lived downstairs, and we shared the kitchen and public spaces, including a backyard and pool.

Somehow two months turned into four, and then nine - we all liked it so much we kept it up for a year. I'd been living alone in Brooklyn for a decade, and now I was paying rent for some strange version of sexless, domestic polygamy. What had come over me?

The obvious analysis is that I was lonely and needed company. Actually, the opposite was true. To live alone well requires balancing solitude with socializing, and for years I'd thrived on the upkeep of my many and varied relationships - to the point that I had begun to feel terrorized by my own calendar.

Los Angeles was my unlikely respite. I'd go days without seeing anyone, save those quick morning minutes Dave and I brewed our separate coffees (his strong and dark; mine unfashionably weak) and mid-workday chitchats with Pauline. It was an entirely new kind of intimacy for me: provisional, easy, made possible by a necessary respect for boundaries.

In my time I've enjoyed all the usual domestic arrangements: growing up en famille with two parents and a sibling; a college roommate; post-college housemates; a live-in boyfriend; and now alone again. Each model, with all its blessings and curses, seems inexorably linked with a life stage, as if there is one best way to be at any given point in time.

The unforeseen rise of solo dwellers forces us to

reexamine this assumption. Can living styles be fluid, like our modern paradigm of multiple careers? What new forms of emotional nourishment do new living styles inspire? We are social creatures - our needs for intimacy are essential to our humanity - but being social takes many forms. I'm happily living alone again - for now.

But what comes next?

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Social Media as Community ... Keith Hampton is an associate professor in the School of Communication and Information at Rutgers, and a past chairman of the American Sociological Association's section on Communication and Information Technologies. He is on on Twitter as @mysocnet.

Dominique Browning and Eric Klinenberg extol the virtues of living alone. In so doing, Klinenberg correctly points out that living alone is only common in cultures where prosperity makes this arrangement economically feasible. However, this has not slowed arguments that social media is increasingly a part of these same prosperous societies, and that this new tool is responsible for a growing trend of social isolation and loss of intimacy.

Neither living alone nor using social media is socially isolating. In 2011, I was lead author of an article in Information, Communication & Society that found, based on a representative survey of 2,500 Americans, that regardless of whether the participants were married or single, those who used social media had more close confidants.

A recent follow-up study, "Social Networking Sites and Our Lives" (Pew Research Center), found that the average user of a social networking site had more close ties than and was half as likely to be socially isolated as the average American. Additionally, my co-authors and I, in another article publ

ished in New Media & Society, found not only that social media users knew people from a greater variety of backgrounds, but also that much of this diversity was a result of people using these technologies who simultaneously spent an impressive amount of time socializing outside of the house.

A number of studies, including my own and those of Matthew Brashears (a sociologist at Cornell), have found that Americans have fewer intimate relationships today than 20 years ago. However, a loss of close friends does not mean a loss of support. Because of cellphones and social media, those we depend on are more accessible today than at any point since we lived in small, village-like settlements.

Social media has made every relationship persistent and pervasive. We no longer lose social ties over our lives; we have Facebook friends forever. The constant feed of status updates and digital photos from our online social circles is the modern front porch. This is why, in "Social Networking Sites and Our Lives," there was a clear trend for those who used these technologies to receive more social support than other people.

The data backs it up. There is little evidence that social media is responsible for a trend of isolation, or a loss of intimacy and social support.

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The Best of Both Worlds ... Mary McRae is an associate professor in the department of applied psychology at the Steinhardt School of Culture Education and Human Development at New York University. <a black woman>

Living single in the 21st century is now about finding ways to connect while holding on to a sense of autonomy and independence. We grow and develop a sense of meaning and well-being through relationships with others. The desire to connect is strong

and the threat of disconnecting can be just as str
ong. This is the paradox of living alone. The stru
ggle for those who value living a single life is h
ow to maintain connections with significant others
, family and friends without sharing a communal space.

In the developed world, societies have become more
 accepting of women and men living as singletons.
For women the stigma of being single and the press
ure of marriage have eased, and we are enjoying ac
tive social lives that involve a circle of family
and friends and a plethora of cultural and social
activities. Intimate relationships do not necessar
ily translate into living together. Sometimes spen
ding a weekend or a week together, when the love i
nterest lives faraway or travels a lot, is enough.
 Sometimes distance really does make the heart gro
w fonder.

The identity of being single has changed, and it h
as to do with social media, more affordable and ac
cessible social activities, different meanings of
family, and accepting the fact that we are creatur
es with different needs. Susan Stanford Friedman,
in her book "Mappings: Feminism and the Cultural G
eographies of Encounter," uses the term "relationa
l positionality" to describe a relational framewor
k that allows identities to shift within a changin
g context that is dependent on a certain vantage p
oint or perspective of the individual, given the s
ituation and the cultural context. Thus from a rel
ational standpoint, living single can be seen as a
 position or location in a broader map that is sui
table for some individuals. This in turn makes sin
gles not less than or better than - just different
 from - those who choose to live communally.
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NYT-0227: OPINION: ROOM FOR DEBATE
Are People Getting Dumber?
Sometimes when you turn on the TV, it's hard not to
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wonder: Is humanity devolving?
===== notyet
If you turn on the TV, or flip through standardized tests, or spend a mindless hour on YouTube, it's hard not to wonder: Is our species devolving? Are people getting dumber?
Thinking in More Sophisticated Ways
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(1)
James R. Flynn, an emeritus professor of politics at the University of Otago in New Zealand, is the author of "What Is Intelligence?: Beyond the Flynn Effect" and "Are We Getting Smarter? Rising IQ and the Twenty-First Century," forthcoming in August from Cambridge University Press.

UPDATED FEBRUARY 27, 2012, 2:37 PM

On an IQ test, the average person today would be 30 points above his or her grandparents, so we are not getting any dumber. But are we smarter? That's a more complicated idea. In fact, it's the subject of my next book: "Are We Getting Smarter? Rising IQ and the Twenty-First Century."

If the question is "Do we have better brain potential at conception," or "Were our ancestors too stupid to deal with the concrete world of everyday life," the answer is no. If the question is "Do we live in a time that poses a wider range of cognitive problems than our ancestors encountered, and have we developed new cognitive skills and the kind of brain that can deal with them," the answer is yes.

I would prefer to say that our minds are "more modern" than those of our ancestors. Our ancestors lived in a world that was concrete and utilitarian. In 1900, schoolchildren were asked, "What are the capitals of the 46 states?" Today they are asked, "If rural representatives dominated a state legislature, where would they put the capital?" (The answer is that, because they hate big cities, they wo

uld put the state capital in Albany rather than New York City.) In other words, we take applying logic to hypothetical situations seriously, plus of course playing video games that take us into hypothetical and symbolic worlds.

As a result, we are better prepared to learn about science, which is all about the hypothetical and abstractions, and even to reason better about ethics. If you asked my father, "What if you woke up one day and were black," he would say that is ridiculous. But a modern racist would have to take the question seriously. He would have to say that black people are worthy of discrimination not simply because they are black, but because of some genetic taint. Immediately, evidence enters the debate and takes it to a higher level.

Join Room for Debate on Facebook and follow updates on twitter.com/roomfordebate.

(2)
Stupidity Is Funny, but It's No Joke

Erin Jackson is a stand-up comedian. She is on Twitter.

UPDATED FEBRUARY 27, 2012, 11:36 AM

Are people getting dumber? Without a doubt.

Does it bother me? Yes and no.

I am a professional stand-up comedian, so dumb people are good for business. Without dumb people doing and saying dumb things, I wouldn't have anything to blog, or tweet, or riff about on stage. No joke about the CVS cashier who couldn't figure out how to give me 15 cents in change because "we ain't got no dimes," or the acquaintance who can't double a cookie recipe without using an iPhone app.

But in the part of my life that exists outside com
edy clubs and social-networking sites (all 30 minu
tes of it), I've become increasingly frustrated wi
th the dumbing down of society and our too-easy ac
ceptance of it.

Even the institutions whose job it is to help us b
ecome smarter are dumbing it down. Case in point:
the "earn your college degree in your pajamas" com
mercials I'm forced to sit through during nearly e
very television show. Remember when online educati
on first became popular? The sales pitch was all a
bout making college accessible, helping people fit
 it into their busy schedules. But over the years
it's somehow been boiled down to "Hey, you wanna g
et a master's degree without leaving your master b
edroom?" Look, I'm all for people earning their de
grees in whichever way is most convenient and affo
rdable for them, but if your school's target stude
nt population includes people for whom getting dre
ssed was previously a deal breaker, you may want t
o rethink your mission.

Our dependence upon technology has played a huge p
art in our "endumbening." We don't memorize phone
numbers anymore. We've forgotten how to use maps a
nd compute basic math problems. But beyond that, I
 believe it's also resulted in a collective inabil
ity to discern nuance, interpret social cues, take
 a joke. Somewhere in between all the LOL's and J/
K's, we've lost our sense of humor.

And that is undoubtedly bad for my business.

(3)
To See Humans' Progress, Zoom Out

Steven Pinker is Johnstone Professor of Psychology
 at Harvard University and the author of "The Bett

er Angels of Our Nature."

FEBRUARY 26, 2012

James Flynn's eponymous effect - a worldwide rise in IQ scores - shows that in one important sense, people have been getting smarter, not dumber, over time. The increase is not in raw brainpower, nor in crystallized skills like arithmetic or vocabulary, but in abstract reasoning: the ability to ignore appearances and reckon in formal categories. Flynn attributes the effect to the spread of education and the trickling down of scientific and analytical concepts into everyday discourse.

In a culture that seems to be getting dumb and dumber, this claim needs a sanity check. Can we see the fruits of superior reasoning in the world around us? The answer is yes.

In recent decades the sciences have made vertiginous leaps in understanding, while technology has given us secular miracles like smartphones, genome scans and stunning photographs of outer planets and distant galaxies. No historian with a long view could miss the fact that we are living in a period of extraordinary intellectual accomplishment.

Nor is our newfound sophistication confined to science. It's easy to focus on the idiocies of the present and forget those of the past. But a century ago our greatest writers extolled the beauty and holiness of war. Heroes like Theodore Roosevelt, Winston Churchill and Woodrow Wilson avowed racist beliefs that today would make people's flesh crawl. Women were barred from juries in rape trials because supposedly they would be embarrassed by the testimony. Homosexuality was a felony. At various times, contraception, anesthesia, vaccination, life insurance and blood transfusion were considered immoral.

Ideals that today's educated people take for granted - equal rights, free speech, and the primacy of human life over tradition, tribal loyalty and intuitions about purity - are radical breaks with the sensibilities of the past. These too are gifts of a widening application of reason.

(4)
The World Grows More Complex

Linda S. Gottfredson, who studies the sociology of intelligence, is a professor in the School of Education at the University of Delaware.

FEBRUARY 26, 2012

Many of us feel stupider by the year, if not the week. Age and ill health take their toll, but Mother Nature isn't the culprit. It's those clever people busily complicating our lives, innovation by innovation, upgrade upon upgrade. They don't lower our native intelligence, but relentlessly burden it.

Just ask a humorist. One "Frank and Ernest" comic strip shows a caveman pointing to an engraved stone tablet and saying: "Look! I just invented writing!" His companion says: "Thanks a lot! You just made everybody else in the world illiterate!" Scott Adams's "Dilbert principle" explains how a few thousand amazingly smart deviants turned the other six billion people into ninnies by designing a civilization too complex for everyone else.

Smart deviants scoff at the "mindless" simplicity of everyday tasks, but Adams was right. A 1993 literacy survey revealed the level of difficulty at which tasks stump American adults:

· 21 percent could perform most Level 1 tasks like locating one piece of information in a sports article, but they couldn't complete tasks on the next

tier.

· 27 percent could do most Level 2 tasks like locating two pieces of information in a sports article, but were stymied by Level 3.

· 32 percent could handle tasks like entering information given into an automobile maintenance record form, but failed at tasks more complicated.

· 17 percent could do Level 4 tasks like using a bus schedule to determine the appropriate bus for a given set of conditions, but could not clear the next hurdles.

· 3 percent could answer the most complex questions, like determining the total cost of carpet to cover a room (using a calculator).

More than missed buses is at stake. Health is one example: Modern lifestyles predispose us to chronic diseases like diabetes. New technologies help patients keep blood glucose within safe limits to avoid life-threatening complications but are too complex for many patients. Just substitute the words "nutrition label" for sports article; "daily blood glucose readings" for automobile maintenance; "insulin dose" for bus schedule; and, for calculating required carpet, "healthy meal plans with enough but not too many grams of carbohydrates at each meal and snack."

(5)
Smart Moments Don't Go Viral

Ritch Duncan is a staff writer for Dumb as a Blog on truTV.com.

UPDATED FEBRUARY 26, 2012, 11:19 PM

I was putting the finishing touches on a post abou

t a naked man who was arrested on burglary charges while covered in chocolate and peanut butter - it turns out there is a wrong way to eat a Reese's - when I was asked: "Are people getting dumber?"

Based on the number of times I've written about criminals getting caught because they posted pictures of their stolen loot on Facebook, anecdotal evidence would indicate: Yes. People are getting dumber.

But that's not really fair. Honestly, if people were getting dumber, my job would be a lot easier.

Because of the Internet, the really dumb things that people do - even people of average intelligence - get amplified almost instantaneously. You can get a perfect score on your SATs and it will barely register in a world of 200 million tweets a day. But give just one stupid answer in a beauty pagean t, and you'll be the laughingstock of the world before you have time to clear your name on the next morning's "Today" show.

And while watching something smart takes time, you can see something stupid in a flash. Today at work, when I had a spare moment, I didn't try to learn a new language. I watched a video of a guy getting a tattoo removed with an air-blast sander. And now I know that's not a very good idea.

If anything, people are getting more sophisticated in using our insatiable desire for stupidity to their advantage. There were a lot of performers onstage with Madonna at half-time of the Super Bowl, but the only one I can name today is the rapper M.I.A.: overnight she had become the talk of the Internet because she flipped the bird to 111 million people. Some folks called her dumb, but I'm sure her publicist feels the notoriety she received was well worth the ridicule.

It is possible that our society has gotten more sh
ameless, but I don't have time to get into that. I
'm on deadline for a post about a guy who left his
 marijuana in a courthouse security tray, and it i
sn't going to write itself.
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NYT-0311
Anti-Putin Protesters Struggle to Keep Up Steam ...
 By DAVID M. HERSZENHORN and ELLEN BARRY
As protesters gathered again in Moscow, their move
ment collided with its own limitations and Vladimi
r V. Putin's decisive victory in Russia's presiden
tial vote.
===== notyet (2 pages)
MOSCOW — Thousands of people thronged a concourse
along a main street in Moscow on Saturday to denou
nce President-elect Vladimir V. Putin and to cry o
ut together, one more time, for political freedom.
 They waved the flags of opposition parties, in a
kaleidoscopic swirl; wore white ribbons that said,
 “Russia demands change”; and chanted now-familiar
 refrains: “Russia without Putin!” and “Russia wil
l be free!”

And so Moscow’s winter of dissent drew to a close.
Or so it seemed.

The protest movement that burst forth after disput
ed parliamentary elections in December and drew th
e largest antigovernment demonstrations since the
fall of the Soviet Union collided with the cold re
ality of Mr. Putin’s convincing victory in the pre
sidential election last Sunday, and with the limit
s of the opposition’s own inchoate coalition. In t
he 13 weeks since the first rally on Bolotnaya Squ
are, the movement had not spread much beyond Mosco
w and no clear leader had emerged.

The outrage over electoral fraud in December and a
nger over Mr. Putin’s return to the presidency, pe
rhaps for 12 more years, brought together radicals
~~~~~~~~~~

and moderates, liberals, fascists, communists, nationalists, social democrats, the young and the old, many of them from Moscow's new and growing middle class. But while they shared grievances, organizers acknowledged that they had yet to settle on a common goal or a common path forward.

"We know who we are against," said Kseniya Sobchak, a television celebrity and socialite who is one of the most recognizable protesters. "We need to show what we are for."

For Saturday's protest, the authorities granted a permit for up to 50,000 people — perhaps 20,000 showed up — on a promenade that runs along one side of a six-lane thoroughfare called New Arbat. It is a shopping and entertainment strip, flanked by high-rises known as the "little books" for their angled design and dotted with the trappings of capitalist comfort: Dunkin' Donuts, a Chili's restaurant, a mall and a multiplex movie theater.

Alexander Greshnov, 20, a salesman at the Swatch boutique there, wore a white ribbon, the modest symbol of the protest movement, under his name tag. "I already see there is a decrease in energy," he said. "The mood is different than in previous protests."

"People still think that Putin is a criminal and a thief," he said, but the opposition "has not offered us any alternatives to oppose him. I think that this movement will get real strength only when we choose a united leader."

Some prominent opposition organizers have called for more radical and sustained action, including a tent encampment like those of some of the Occupy protests in the West. Sergei Udaltsov, the charismatic leader of the radical socialist group Left Front, called on Saturday for a million protesters to march on May 1. But there are no official plans f

or a next event, even as some said continued protest was the only way to bring change.

“People can get tired of demonstrations, but life will force us into the streets,” said Gennadi V. Gudkov, a member of Parliament with a minority party called Just Russia, who predicted that an economic crisis would galvanize the public. “Everyone needs to understand the authorities have left them no option other than the street. We can’t go to the courts. We can’t go to the prosecutor. We can’t change our leaders through clean elections.”

Mr. Putin received 64 percent of the vote, according to official returns, and while there were allegations of widespread voting irregularities, even many of his critics acknowledged that he had won a majority of votes.

With the protest movement at a crossroads, some participants talked about possibly joining a new political party that the billionaire Mikhail D. Prokhorov, who finished third in the election, has vowed to create. Others talked about pushing Mr. Putin hard to fulfill his campaign promises of government reform.

If the crowd was less buoyant than at previous occasions, the anger was no less evident. Many people carried signs mocking Mr. Putin for shedding what appeared to be tears of emotion at a victory party on a wind-whipped square near the Kremlin. “How loud I cry,” said one sign showing a photograph of him that night. “How little I know.”

Some participants said Saturday’s crowd had been diminished by fear after the previous demonstration, Monday evening on Pushkin Square, ended with the police clearing the area and arresting hundreds of demonstrators.

“Several of my friends refused to attend today,” s

aid Kseniya Koshymyakina, a 19-year-old law student whose mass of curly dark hair was tucked into a black beret. “They’re frightened.” She said previous rallies of more than 100,000 people had raised expectations that were difficult to meet.

She recalled that a demonstration of 5,000 people the night after the parliamentary elections had seemed huge after years of political inertia. “Already on the fifth of March, 20,000 seemed like only a few,” she said, adding: “People will keep coming, because the thing is the authorities continue to do the things that cause these demonstrations. The outrages continue.”

That Moscow’s winter never gained the momentum of the Arab Spring seemed to be the result of many forces, including Mr. Putin’s effectiveness in restraining the rise of opposition parties and candidates.

International election monitors from the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe said the race had been tilted in Mr. Putin’s favor, citing his dominance of the state-controlled media and the use of state resources on behalf of his campaign.

After citizens used cellphone cameras to document fraud in the parliamentary election, the Kremlin spent nearly $450 million to install about 180,000 Web cameras in polling stations across the country. It is still unclear whether the cameras prevented voter fraud or drove it out of sight, but there was no repeat of the dramatic videos in December that showed blatant ballot-box stuffing.

Throughout the country, there was also genuine support for Mr. Putin; Moscow was the only region where he won less than 50 percent of the vote. Some experts said many voters believed that life in Russia had improved since he was first elected preside

nt in 2000 and feared it could get worse.

“We have sociological evidence which indicates tha t resentment of the system and Putin personally is increasing and it’s getting more tense and aggres sive,” said Mikhail Dmitriyev, an economist at the Center for Strategic Research in Moscow. “This is somehow paradoxically combined with the intention to vote for Putin in the elections, because peopl e are even more concerned with the prospect of the complete disorganization of their country. They a re very apprehensive.”

Ilya Yashin, one of the protest organizers, said t he movement would continue. “When you are trying t o run a distance like this, basically with closed eyes, you really don’t know how far it is to the f inish line, or how much distance you have already covered,” he said. “We’re not out of breath yet.”

Nikita Y. Kononnikov, a 23-year-old programmer, ca rried a sign that said, “Sunshine will melt the po wer vertical.” It showed a melting snowman with Mr . Putin’s face for a head.

“Moscow is a city that voted against Putin,” Mr. K ononnikov said. “It will be hard for him to rule t his city. Soon it will be spring, and we will have more demonstrations. Yes, we didn’t get what we w anted in the election. But it would be strange if we accomplished everything in three months. We’re just getting started.”

Andrew E. Kramer, Michael Schwirtz and Anastasia Sa dovskaya contributed reporting.
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NYT-0311
Beyond Mile-High Grub: Can Airline Food Be Tasty? . .. By JAD MOUAWAD
Carriers are turning to science and celebrity chef
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s to figure out how to make onboard meals more app
ealing to high-revenue business travelers.
===== notyet (long)
ONE of the world’s busiest airports, Hartsfield-Ja
ckson in Atlanta, lies a mere 1,026 feet above sea
 level. Which, it turns out, is perfect for your t
aste buds.

At low elevations, the 10,000 or so taste buds in
the human mouth work pretty much as nature intende
d. With an assist from the nose — the sense of sme
ll plays a big role in taste — the familiar quarte
t of sweet, bitter, sour and salty registers as us
ual. Tomato juice tastes like tomato juice, turkey
 Florentine like turkey Florentine.

But step aboard a modern airliner, and the sense o
f taste loses its bearings. This isn’t simply beca
use much airline food is unappetizing, although th
at doesn’t help. No, the bigger issue is science —
 science that airlines now want to turn to their a
dvantage as they vie for lucrative business- and f
irst-class travelers.

Even before a plane takes off, the atmosphere insi
de the cabin dries out the nose. As the plane asce
nds, the change in air pressure numbs about a thir
d of the taste buds. And as the plane reaches a cr
uising altitude of 35,000 feet, cabin humidity lev
els are kept low by design, to reduce the risk of
fuselage corrosion. Soon, the nose no longer knows
. Taste buds are M.I.A. Cotton mouth sets in.

All of which helps explain why, for instance, a lo
t of tomato juice is consumed on airliners: it tas
tes far less acidic up in the air than it does dow
n on the ground. It also helps explain why airline
s tend to salt and spice food heavily and serve wi
nes that are full-bodied fruit bombs. Without all
that extra kick, the food would taste bland. Above
 the Atlantic, even a decent light Chablis would t
aste like lemon juice.

“Subtlety is not well served at altitude,” says Andrea Robinson, a sommelier who has selected wines for Delta Air Lines since 2008.

The science of airline food, which Delta, Lufthansa and other airlines have studied assiduously for years, has opened a new front in the battle for passengers in the upper-class cabins. Until recently, airline food seemed in terminal decline — another victim of widespread cost cuts in this long-troubled industry. Industry experts trace the problem back to 1987, when American Airlines removed a single olive from its salads to save a little money.

Anyone who has flown coach in recent years knows what happened next. Catering budgets were cut drastically. Free meals disappeared from cattle class. It might seem hard to believe, but flight attendants once whisked racks of lamb down the aisles on silver trays. Today, they hawk chips and soda.

But after years of belt-tightening, airline executives are investing again to attract business passengers willing to pay a premium for tickets, and food is a big part of that effort. This includes devising new menus and even hiring celebrity chefs like Gordon Ramsay, of “Hell’s Kitchen” fame, to consult. The motivation is obvious: business and first class account for about a third of all airline seats but generate a majority of the revenue. Keeping high-end customers is crucial to the bottom line.

THE industry can’t afford missteps. Airlines suffered mightily as travelers pulled back after the Sept. 11 terrorists attacks. In the decade that followed, domestic carriers lost a combined $60 billion as competition intensified and fuel prices rose. For many carriers, bankruptcy was the only option. American Airlines was the most recent major airline to do so, last November.

After so much turbulence, airlines are trying to chart a more profitable course through mergers and a renewed focus on business and first class. Many have installed flat-bed seats on some domestic flights, fancier entertainment systems and Wi-Fi.

But in the kitchen, science is still working against airlines. To crack the taste code, Lufthansa, the German airline, went as far as enlisting the Fraunhofer Institute for Building Physics, a research institute near Munich. Among other things, the airline wanted to know why passengers ordered as much tomato juice as beer — about 423,000 gallons of each annually. The answer was that for many passengers, tomato juice apparently has a different taste in different atmospheric conditions.

“We put a lot of effort in designing perfect meals for our clients, but when we tried them ourselves in the air, the meals would taste like airline food,” says Ingo Buelow, who is in charge of food and beverages at Lufthansa. “We were puzzled.”

So are many other people.

“Ice cream is about the only thing I can think of that tastes good on a plane,” says Marion Nestle, a professor of nutrition, food studies and public health at New York University. “Airlines have a problem with food on board. The packaging, freezing, drying and storage are hard on flavor at any altitude, let alone 30,000 feet.”

The journey from recipe book to industrial kitchen to a plane in midflight is fraught with peril. It’s not just a culinary feat — it’s also a logistical nightmare. The $13-billion-a-year airline catering industry serves millions of meals daily worldwide. It must maintain supply chains, standards and quality under a variety of local conditions.

“The cooking is the easy part,” says Corey Roberts

, a chef based in New York with LSG Sky Chefs, the biggest catering company. “What we have to worry about is the logistics of getting the correct meal on the correct flight, on the right trays, into the right galley, at the right time. It’s a logistical puzzle of juggling all these meals, every day, for hundreds of flights.”

Catering facilities are part restaurants, part industrial production halls where thousands of workers grill, fry, bake, simmer, boil, poach, beat and braise. Food safety standards require all meals to be cooked first on the ground. After that, they are blast-chilled and refrigerated until they can be stacked on carts and loaded on planes.

In 2010, LSG Sky Chefs produced 460 million meals for 300 airlines in 200 flight kitchens in 50 countries. GateGourmet, the No. 2 caterer, served 9,700 daily flights in 28 countries.

Once all the food is aboard, airlines face another hurdle: planes don’t have full kitchens. For safety, open-flame grills and ovens aren’t allowed on commercial aircraft. Flight attendants can’t touch food the way a restaurant chef might in order to prepare a dish. Galley space is cramped, and there’s little time to get creative with presentation.

So attendants must contend with convection ovens that blow hot, dry air over the food. Newer planes have steam ovens, which are better because they help keep food moist. Either way, meals can only be reheated, not cooked, on board.

“Getting any food to taste good on a plane is an elusive goal,” says Steve Gundrum, who runs a company that develops new products for the food industry.

STILL, there was a time not so long ago when airline food could seem very special. Mr. Gundrum recal

ls, for example, that he had his best airline meal aboard a British Airways Concorde 25 years ago. It was grouse cooked in a wine reduction, accompanied by little roasted potatoes.

Today, airlines want to recreate some of those glory days in their upper-class cabins, with American carriers — trying to bounce back from years of financial cutbacks — aiming to catch up with foreign rivals' international service.

And some of those foreign carriers have been raising the stakes. The menu at Air France, for instance, includes Basque shrimp and turmeric-scented pasta with lemon grass. The dishes were created by the chef Joel Robuchon, who has collected a total of 27 Michelin stars in his career. The airline's roster of chefs also includes Guy Martin, the chef at le Grand Vefour, and Jacques Le Divellec, who runs a restaurant that bears his name in Paris.

Air France isn't alone in reaching out to celebrity chefs. Lufthansa teams with chefs from the luxury hotel chain Mandarin Oriental to prepare meals for its flights between the United States and Germany. Singapore Airlines, meanwhile, has published a book of in-flight recipes from 10 chefs, including Mr. Ramsay. Its business- and first-class passengers can pick their meals from an online menu 24 hours before takeoff. The airline offers a braised soy-flavored duck with yam rice — a specialty from Singapore — or a seafood thermidor with buttered asparagus, slow-roasted vine-ripened tomatoes and saffron rice.

Korean Air owns a farm where it raises beef and organic grains and vegetables for its in-flight meals, including bibimbap, a Korean classic of rice, sauteed vegetables and chili paste that the airline serves in coach. The farm has more than 1,600 head of cattle and more than 5,000 chickens destined for meals in first class.

And the catering business of Emirates Airlines, in Dubai, handles 90,000 meals a day and bakes its own bread, crumble cake and pecan pie. It also prepares nearly 130 different kinds of menus daily. It offers Japanese and Italian dishes, for instance, and has 12 regional Indian cuisines. Eighteen workers spend their days just making elaborate flower designs out of fruit.

American carriers, while elevating their international food service, have generally shunned such refinements on domestic flights. But Peter Wilander, managing director of onboard services at Delta, wants to bring some glamour back.

Last year, Delta hired Michael Chiarello, a celebrity chef from Napa Valley, to come up with new menus for business-class passengers flying on transcontinental routes — New York to Los Angeles and New York to San Francisco. It was not the first time that Delta had worked with a renowned chef. The airline has served meals created by Michelle Bernstein, a Miami chef, since 2006 in its international business class.

“Our chefs are like portrait painters,” Mr. Wilander says. “They can get pretty creative. But we need to translate that into painting by numbers.” That process began last May, when Mr. Chiarello met with executives and catering chefs from Delta at a boxy industrial kitchen on the edge of the San Francisco airport to demonstrate some of his recipes. Among the dozens of dishes he tried were an artichoke and white-bean spread, short ribs with polenta, and a small lasagna of eggplant and goat cheese.

“I am known for making good food, and airlines generally are not,” says Mr. Chiarello, who is also the author of a half-dozen cookbooks, the host for a show on the Food Network, and a former contestant on “Top Chef Masters” and “The Next Iron Chef.”

“I probably have a lot more to lose than to gain doing this.”

Huddled around him, white-toqued chefs from Delta and its catering partners weighed each ingredient on a small electronic scale, took scrupulous notes and pictures and tried to calculate how much it would cost to recreate each dish a thousand times a day.

It took Mr. Chiarello six months to come up with the menu. He tested recipes, picked seasonal ingredients, considered textures and colors and looked at ways to present his meals on a small airline tray. Then Delta’s corporate chefs had to learn his way of cooking and serving. Bean counters — the financial kind — priced each item. Executives and frequent fliers were drafted to taste his creations.

There were a lot of questions. How should cherry tomatoes be sliced? (The answer: Leave them whole.) What side should a chicken fillet be grilled on? (Skin first.) How many slices of prosciutto can be used as appetizers? (Two large ones, rather than three, struck the balance between taste and price.)

FOR airlines like Delta, these are not trivial matters. A decision a few years ago to shave one ounce from its steaks, for example, saved the airline $250,000 a year. And every step of kitchen labor increases costs when so many meals are prepared daily. An entree accounts for about 60 percent of a meal’s cost, according to Delta, while appetizers account for 17 percent, salads 10 percent and desserts 7 percent.

Delta also calculated that by removing a single strawberry from salads served in first class on domestic routes, it would save $210,000 a year. The company hands out 61 million bags of peanuts every year, and about the same number of pretzels. A one-cent increase in peanut prices increases Delta’s c

osts by $610,000 a year.

Others are catching on. United Airlines said in February that it would upgrade its service to first- and business-class passengers and would change the way it prepares meals “to improve the quality and taste.” It also said it would start offering a new ice cream sundae option with a choice of six toppings on international flights. On domestic flights, premium passengers will get new snacks, including warm cookies.

At Bottega, his high-end restaurant in Yountville, Calif., Mr. Chiarello specializes in modern Italian flavors, with a focus on fresh ingredients and an obsessive attention to detail in the kitchen and in the dining room. His staff is meticulously trained and has an intimate understanding of the dishes and wines served. And Mr. Chiarello is the undisputed boss of his kitchen.

Translating that in an airline setting is arduous. Delta sent some of its flight attendants based in New York to Mr. Chiarello’s Napa restaurant, and organized Webcasts so others could hear him talk about his food. It also introduced new silverware and trays in time for his new three-course meals.

Delta hopes that passengers will come back if they have a good meal. But for chefs like Mr. Chiarello, airline cooking will always pose challenges.

“If I put a sauce on a plate at my restaurant, I bark at the waiters to hold the plate straight so it doesn’t spill,” he says. “But you can’t bark at the pilot to fly the plane straight, right?”
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NYT-0311
When Today's Deal Is Tomorrow's Regret ... By DOUGLAS QUENQUA
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Some people lately find their leisure activities d
ictated less by their own free will than by the do
mination of daily deal sites.
===== notyet (2 pages)
HOW much is a $150 coupon worth? For Matt Sumell,
the cost turned out to be one new relationship, as
 well as a little bit of pride.

In January 2011, Mr. Sumell bought a $150 coupon f
or a romantic overnight stay in a hotel from Livin
gSocial, the daily deal site (a savings of about 5
0 percent). He planned to use it with a woman he h
ad been dating for five years, until that relation
ship ended.

But Mr. Sumell, an English teacher and fiction wri
ter from Los Angeles, is not one to throw away mon
ey. So 11 months later, with the coupon unused and
 an expiration date looming, he set aside his bett
er judgment and invited a woman he had been dating
 for only a month.

“I said to her, ‘Come with me, we’ll take a ride,’
 ” Mr. Sumell recalled. “ ‘It’ll be great.’ ”

It was not great.

“The hotel was directly across the street from a H
ooters,” he said, “and it was bikers’ week,” meani
ng the hotel was overrun with growling motorcycles
 and middle-aged men wearing leather. Ambience asi
de, the sleepover seemed rushed and uncomfortable.
 “The whole thing was just really awkward,” he said.

So it goes for those people who lately find their
leisure activities dictated less by their own free
 will than by the opt-in domination of daily deal
sites. While the rapid spread of services like Gro
upon, LivingSocial and Amazon Local has allowed mi
llions to try restaurants or leisure activities th
ey otherwise couldn’t afford (or wouldn’t have kno
wn about), it is also compelling some people to sp

end time doing things they don’t necessarily want to do.

For some, it’s eating dinner in a restaurant they already know they don’t like. For others, it’s taking classes that promise “You can learn to salsa” despite a lifetime of evidence to the contrary.

For Karen Eddinger, a real estate agent in Seattle, it meant signing up for a local cooking class even though she hates cooking almost as much as she hates taking classes.

“I really don’t know why I bought it,” she said.

She also recently made her grandson visit the Seattle Children’s Museum for the second time since October not because he liked it, but because she and her ex-husband had unknowingly bought the same Groupon deal. Her daughter and son-in-law have lately attended a number of yoga classes, massages and bad restaurants in an effort to use up their mother’s coupons. (For those without family members willing to help, a secondary market for digital coupons has emerged. Sites like DealsGoRound and CoupRecoup let people sell their unwanted coupons at a discount.)

Coupons are nothing new, and shoppers have long made poor decisions in pursuit of saving pennies. But daily deal sites have raised the stakes in convenience (they arrive via e-mail and are bought with a click), savings (half-off deals to upscale establishments are common) and experiences (Want to hang glide? There’s a Groupon for that).

Hence a new generation is discovering the hidden downsides of couponing. “A deal sometimes feels like a really wonderful thing, like you’ve outsmarted the system and have something special,” said Dan Ariely, the author of “Predictably Irrational,” a book about how a skewed perception of economics ca

n result in poor decisions. “Because of that, you have an extra sense of accomplishment, which you a re willing to pay for in terms of time and money.”

But that perspective can mean a bid to save money can quickly devolve into a boondoggle. Lindsay Hal l Harrison, a lawyer from Orlando, Fla., bought a $6 Groupon for $12 worth of ice cream from a shop near a beach that she and her husband had visited a couple of times. The problem: the beach was an h our and a half away, and the Harrisons weren’t alw ays in the mood for ice cream by the time they dro ve there.

“We started making deliberate trips down there jus t to use up this Groupon,” she said. “It was the p rinciple of the thing.” In the end, she estimated that the couple burned through two to three tanks of gasoline to claim $12 in ice cream, which, she noted, was not particularly great.

Jamie Roo, a marketing director from the Upper Wes t Side, last year found herself eating in a nearby restaurant that she and her husband had long ago decided they didn’t like, because she couldn’t res ist a deal from Amazon Local.

“We somehow persuaded ourselves to go back,” she s aid. Not surprisingly, the deal did not make the f ood taste any better. “The moral of the story is, don’t go just because it’s a deal.”

The idea that all of one’s leisure-time decisions can be outsourced to daily deal sites is encourage d by the sites themselves. In 2010, Groupon recrui ted Josh Stevens, a former Census worker from Chic ago, to live on nothing but its own deals for a ye ar. The company called Mr. Stevens the Groupawn. M r. Stevens’s real-life counterparts can be found i n Kimberly and Stephen Kuhn, who recently moved to Trinity, Fla., from Miami. Before the move, Ms. K uhn was a self-described LivingSocial “near-addict

,” who would use up to a dozen coupons a week, not to save money, but to decide where to eat.

“In Miami, there are all these great mom-and-pop places you would never know about because they don’t have money to advertise,” said Ms. Kuhn, who gives credit to her local LivingSocial representative (whom she has met) for having her finger on the pulse of the city.

The Kuhns set a one-day record for themselves in June when they realized they had a backlog of coupons to use before they left Miami. “My husband took the day off work and we used seven deals in one day,” all for restaurants, Ms. Kuhn said. “We started at the very tip of north Broward County and worked our way all the way down to South Beach. It was a really great way to say goodbye to the area.”

Thus far, Ms. Kuhn said, she is disappointed with the quality of the deals in Trinity, which tend to feature chain restaurants.

“It’s funny, because I never considered myself a deal addict,” she said. “I’m not a couponer, I don’t do Sunday sales. We really just used it as a tour guide, so we are missing it for sure.”

But that hasn’t stopped her from buying the deals she likes, even if they require some travel. “My husband still works out of Fort Lauderdale, so we still buy those LivingSocials,” she said. “We’ll go back.”
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NYT-0311
Adapting, Revising, Provoking ... By ANTHONY TOMMASINI
Why do some elaborate revisions of operas and musicals draw so much fire, but not others?
===== notyet (2 pages)
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BROADWAY audiences have spoken. “The Gershwins’ Po
rgy and Bess” is a big hit at the Richard Rodgers
Theater, where it opened in January. The run has b
een extended through September.

But since it was first presented at the American R
epertory Theater in Cambridge, Mass., last fall, t
his heavily revamped version of the opera “Porgy a
nd Bess” has provoked outrage from a minority of G
ershwin lovers who assert that the creative team,
headed by the director Diane Paulus and the playwr
ight Suzan-Lori Parks, crossed a line. This tailor
ed-to-Broadway “Porgy,” detractors say, is no reim
agined adaptation but a desecration of a great Ame
rican opera.

Contrast this stinging criticism with the receptio
n of the director Peter Brook’s adaptation of Moza
rt’s “Magic Flute,” presented by the Lincoln Cente
r Festival last summer. Mr. Brook pared Mozart’s o
pera down to a streamlined 100-minute version, per
formed by just seven singers, two actors and an on
stage pianist. Whole plot threads and characters w
ere removed. The vocal lines were sung in the orig
inal German, and the dialogue spoken in French. (T
he production originated in Paris.) The pianist ev
en folded bits of other Mozart works into the score.

Mr. Brook called his production “A Magic Flute” no
t “The Magic Flute,” to emphasize that this was hi
s take on a beloved opera (and perhaps to fend off
accusations of directorial distortion). I loved i
t for the innocence and simplicity that came throu
gh, and if there were complaints that it violated
Mozart, I did not hear them. That was simply not a
n issue.

Why do some elaborate revisions draw so much fire
but not others? The disparate reactions to these t
wo productions suggest a lack of ground rules when
familiar operas and, for that matter, musicals an
d plays are revived in adapted or reconceived vers

ions. Works still under copyright protection allow limited tinkering and are protected (or not) by the estates of the creators. (That the Gershwin estate gave the O.K. for the revamped “Porgy” is a sore point for those who love the opera.) Older works, though, are fair game, but shouldn’t artistic principles and respect for the creator’s intent factor in?

To explore the parameters for adapting and revising existing works I talked to Stephen Sondheim, an outspoken critic of “The Gershwins’ Porgy and Bess.” Before the production was introduced in Cambridge, Mr. Sondheim wrote a letter published in The New York Times. His critique was leveled not at the show, which he had not seen, but at comments by Ms. Paulus, Ms. Parks and some cast members, quoted in an article in The Times, which described the opera as badly in need of a dramatic overhaul to reach today’s audiences. Mr. Sondheim strongly defended the original “Porgy and Bess,” particularly the contributions of DuBose Heyward, who wrote the libretto and, with Ira Gershwin, the lyrics.

Mr. Sondheim has been party to some bold reimaginings of his own works. In recent seasons Broadway audiences have seen the director John Doyle’s powerful, experimental and intimate productions of “Sweeney Todd” and “Company.” Jonathan Tunick’s orchestrations, which for many Sondheim devotees are crucial to the sound of the musicals, were dispensed with. Instead the actors, playing instruments, doubled as mini-orchestras. What if this radical concept had come up at some future time, when Mr. Sondheim was no longer around? Actors playing instruments? Enraged Sondheim lovers would probably picket the theater.

All types of directorial concepts are possible “as long as they honor the notes,” Mr. Sondheim said in the interview. Mr. Doyle’s “Sweeney Todd” and “Company” were both faithful to the original notes,

lyrics and book, though small cuts were made in “Sweeney,” with Mr. Sondheim’s permission. So the most obvious ground rule is that when a work’s creators are still around, what they say goes.

Would it be unacceptable for a production to cut “The Ballad of Sweeney Todd” and the recurring chorus that narrate and comment on the story? “No, no, no,” Mr. Sondheim said. But, he added, if a director were to call and say, “We want to do it with all dwarfs,” sure.

Then again the chorus is cut entirely in Tim Burton’s film version of “Sweeney Todd.” Mr. Sondheim gave his blessing because film has its own ground rules.

But “Porgy and Bess” is a work in need of special protection. Rattled by reactions to the tryout of his long opera in Boston, Gershwin was persuaded to make sizable cuts before the 1935 premiere in New York. He died in 1937, at 38. Four years later a Broadway version stripped of recitative, with spoken dialogue linking songs and ensembles, had commercial success. But not until the revelatory 1976 production of the complete work at the Houston Grand Opera did it get its due.

Mr. Sondheim said if he had been around when “Porgy” was new, he would have advised the Gershwins and Heyward to “do what you want to do, and then that will be the official version — and tell your publisher not to release the first version to anyone.” If Gershwin had wanted two versions, one for the opera house, another for musical theater, that would have been fine, Mr. Sondheim added.

But today, if composers and writers want their works presented in the versions they deem best, they had better do something about it. Mr. Sondheim has designated in his will what he called a phalanx of composers, writers and associates to protect his

works.

The debate over “Porgy and Bess” on Broadway brings up another ground rule for revivals and adaptations: the more familiar the piece, the more freedom a production team wants to claim in revising it. You can play around with “The Magic Flute” because it’s so well known. “Porgy and Bess,” though, presents special problems in this regard. The songs are imprinted in the public memory, but the opera in its original form is not well known.

As Gershwin made clear in an article he wrote for The Times in 1935, when “Porgy and Bess” was on Broadway, he had worked hard to create an orchestral and choral entity, a true opera with recitative and arioso, and a narrative arc determined by the shape and flow of the music. Those familiar songs are meant to be heard in context, emerging naturally from the continuous score.

The question of revisions applies more to opera than to musicals, Mr. Sondheim said, since only classic musicals tend to be revived and no one wants to tamper with success. Flops that could use some revamping tend to languish, he added.

He was gratified, he said, by the enthusiastic audience response to the recent Encores! production of “Merrily We Roll Along,” a flop at its 1981 Broadway premiere. Encores! presented it in a heavily revised version that essentially came out of a La Jolla Playhouse production from 1985. “Merrily” may be my desert-island Sondheim score, and I slightly prefer the original version. But the revision is the only score being licensed today.

In the world of opera, when a director takes a radical approach to a repertory work, the changes and tweaks, however outrageous, are usually confined to the stage. Music and text are almost always honored, though various cuts, sometimes including who

le arias, have become standard with many staples.

Most classic operas have no real legal protection. There was nothing to stop Mr. Brook from tampering with Mozart's score. Still, if music and words are respected in most productions today, the reason is not just a principled devotion to the masters but also something more pragmatic.

The orchestral and vocal parts are set, published and widely available. Musicians know how to play them; singers know how to sing them. Reorchestrating Mozart or Verdi would be complex and expensive. But stagings start from scratch, whether slavishly traditional or radically modern in concept. A company has to build sets and make costumes anyway, so if a house wants to be hip, directors are given leeway to shake things up.

Sometimes a production is so concept driven that though the music is performed as written, its character and intent are altered. Take Willy Decker's staging of Verdi's "Traviata," which opened at the Metropolitan Opera last season and returns on April 6, starring Natalie Dessay as the courtesan Violetta. This surreal modern-dress production plays the entire story within the confines of a tall, curved whitish wall that suggests an arena under clinically bright lights.

Mr. Decker certainly puts his slant on the music. In Verdi's conception Alfredo, Violetta's smitten lover, pours out his contentment in the aria "De' miei bollenti spiriti" alone onstage at the opening of Act II. In the Decker staging last season the tenor Matthew Polenzani, as Alfredo, was not alone but romping on a couch with Violetta (Marina Poplavskaya). When Alfredo quoted his beloved's avowal of love to him, Violetta mouthed along with the words, mocking the moment with melodramatic arm gestures. An aria meant as a character's confession of love in a solitary moment became a couple's rom

antic game of hide and seek. Whatever you may think of this idea, you hear the music differently.

Many opera directors are eager to take the next step and fiddle with words and music. At the 2013 Bayreuth Festival in Germany the Wagner bicentenary will be celebrated with a new production of the “Ring” cycle. The director, Frank Castorf, recently divulged his ideas for his radical staging in an interview in Berlin. His “Ring” will center on the race for oil, the “gold rush of our time,” he said, and will pivot from Russia to Texas during the oil boom of the 1950s.

Mr. Castorf is known for anarchic interpretations and likes to fold texts from other works into the theater pieces he directs. He wanted to cut and alter the “Ring” libretto and, as he put it, “edit Wagner together with something else,” a concept that was quashed by the conductor of the production, Kirill Petrenko, with the support of the two Wagners (half sisters and great-granddaughters of the composer) who direct the festival. One of them, Katharina Wagner, in her work as a stage director, has done wild productions, including a stupefying “Meistersinger” at Bayreuth. But even for her, tampering with her great-grandfather’s words and music is going too far.

In time every opera will be fair game, of course, just as Shakespeare’s plays have long been not just reconceived but rewritten. Ultimately, perhaps, these ground rules are just subjective calls in a living art form. Though Mr. Sondheim is a stalwart defender of a creator’s original intent, he admits to being a very impatient operagoer. “I love Puccini,” he said, “but I would cut some of it.”
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NYT-0319
Playing at No Cost, Right Into the Hands of Mobile
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Game Makers ... By BRIAN X. CHEN
Many developers have adopted a lucrative strategy known as freemium: giving away games and then charging for extra features.
===== notyet (2 pages)
Still paying 99 cents to download a smartphone game? That’s far too much. More developers are now giving their games away — and then charging for extra features.

The strategy is known as freemium, as in free meets premium. And it is being adopted even by giant game makers like Electronic Arts that might once have sneered at the idea because free games had the reputation of being low quality or full of annoying ads.

As it turns out, going freemium can, in the end, lead to bigger profits for the game makers.

Natalia Luckyanova and Keith Shepherd, a husband-and-wife team in North Carolina, learned this lesson when, in August, they released a 99-cent iPhone game called Temple Run. In the game, players must stay a step ahead of angry apes while avoiding booby traps and collecting coins. The game had some initial success but soon started losing traction.

In September, the couple began offering Temple Run free and promoted it through Free App a Day, a Web site that features free games. The game immediately had a spike in downloads and quickly soared in popularity. To date it has topped 40 million downloads, and about 13 million people play it at least once a day, Ms. Luckyanova said.

“When you tell a friend about it and they go to the App Store and it’s free, they download it without thinking about it,” Ms. Luckyanova said. “Then there’s stickiness and the addictiveness and people talking about it.”

But how does the free version of Temple Run make money? Inside the game is a virtual store to buy new characters, different backdrops and power-ups, or special boosters. While players can use the virtual coins they collect inside the game to buy these bonuses, a dedicated few use actual money to buy virtual currency and get them faster.

Ms. Luckyanova declined to say how much money Temple Run had earned, but on Sunday afternoon it was No. 14 in Apple's top grossing chart, a list of the apps that are making the most money in the company's App Store.

The company that has had the most success with freemium games and helped to popularize them is Zynga, which rode FarmVille and its other Facebook games to an initial public offering that raised $1 billion. FarmVille is free to play, but players can buy "farm cash," which can be used to make crops immediately available for harvest.

Freemium is implicitly a risky business model because it is always unclear how many people will play only the free game and how many will become paying customers. But those who have profited from this approach, like Ms. Luckyanova, say the key was to get as many people as possible to fall in love with the product so that at least a few would be willing to pay.

In Apple's App Store, the largest store for mobile software, the freemium strategy has become more lucrative than charging for apps.

Flurry, a mobile-software analytics company, estimates that 65 percent of all revenue generated in the App Store — roughly $2 billion — has come from free games that charge for extra goods. Peter Farago, vice president for marketing at Flurry, said that was partly because Apple had made it easy for people to buy goods within apps and charge them to

a credit card on file with Apple.

In contrast, Google has said that its app store, the Android Market, has generated little revenue. Mr. Farago said that was because making payments in the Android Market was more difficult.

Matt Coombe, a founder of the small Toronto-based game studio Get Set Games, can tell a story similar to Temple Run's.

His company initially released the game Mega Jump in May 2010 as a 99-cent download. An initial sales burst did not last, so the company created a miniature store within Mega Jump, selling things like extra lives. In August 2010, the company made the game free and promoted it through OpenFeint, a gaming network; it quickly got one million downloads.

Mr. Coombe said he did not have exact figures for sales, but he said the company had earned millions from Mega Jump alone.

"As far as consumers are concerned, the ability to take the game home, try the hell out of it and then decide whether to give a couple of bucks to the game developer is a hell of a deal, and it's hard for them to go back after that," he said.

One potential downside to freemium is that it could lead developers to build games in which players can pay more to get ahead and pump up their scores — what traditionalists might call cheating. Money instead of skill would determine the victor.

Phillip Ryu, chief executive of Impending, a software company that is planning to release a freemium game for Apple devices this year, said game makers should avoid that route by focusing on offering cosmetic goods inside games. For instance, they could sell characters with different looks or new levels for a game, which would not necessarily give

players an unfair advantage.

The success of freemium is attracting bigger game studios, which have traditionally charged more than $50 for games that run on PCs and game consoles.

Nick Earl, a senior vice president at Electronic Arts, one of the largest American game publishers, said a vast majority of its games coming this year for iPhones and Android smartphones would be free, with the option to buy extras. He said the company had made the decision based on the success of Sims FreePlay, a freemium game, during the holiday season.

“Generally speaking, there’s been a critical mass of quality products at freemium,” he said. “The audience has responded in a way which has become incredibly obvious to game makers like Electronic Arts.”

PopCap Games, a mobile game studio that was acquired by Electronic Arts, is in the freemium camp as well.

Giordano Contestabile, a business director at PopCap, said that its free game Bejeweled Blitz, in which players can buy power-ups, was bringing in five times more revenue than the $1 version of Bejeweled and had made more money than any other Bejeweled game. He said freemium was also useful in retaining a large audience that could be exposed to future games from PopCap through promotions in free games.

“It’s a little more about portfolio management than an individual game,” he said.

But in general, Mr. Farago said, independent game makers should benefit more from freemium than major publishers like Electronic Arts, Nintendo and Microsoft. He said that the big companies had always

relied on charging for games and that it would be difficult for them to change their makeup.

When creating a free game with an online store associated with it, Mr. Farago added, game companies must devote staff and resources to maintaining it because it is a live service. Smaller companies are in a better position than the major ones to start from zero and focus on releasing and maintaining freemium products, he said.

“Freemium is a weapon against the establishment,” he said, “and the establishment has a hard time even wanting to pick up that weapon.”
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NYT-0320: SCIENCE TIMES
To Detect Cheating in Chess, a Professor Builds a Better Program ... By DYLAN LOEB McCLAIN
Cheats at chess can use powerful computer programs that play better than people do, but a computer scientist is trying to code a way to catch them.
===== notyet (2 pages)
When it comes to cheating, chess might seem all but invulnerable. After all, the board and its pieces are out in the open for all to see.

But an eruption of recent scandals has made it clear that cheating — fueled by powerful computer programs that play better than people do, as well as sophisticated communication technologies — is becoming a big problem for world championship chess.

Last year the French Chess Federation accused three players of colluding at the Chess Olympiad in Russia in 2010 by using coded text messages and a signaling system. The federation banned the players for five years, though the ruling is under appeal.

Of course, elite players are elite precisely because they win lots of games. When they come under su
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spicion, how can officials determine whether they are cheating? That is where Kenneth W. Regan comes in.

An associate professor of computer science at the University at Buffalo who is also an international master at chess, Dr. Regan has been researching the problem for five years and was an expert witness in the French case — though his principal focus is the holy-grail math problem P versus NP. (P versus NP is about whether problems that have solutions that can be verified by a computer can also be solved quickly by a computer.)

Dr. Regan, 52, became interested in the chess issue during the 2006 world championship match between Vladimir Kramnik of Russia and Veselin Topalov of Bulgaria.

The match came to a halt after Silvio Danailov, Mr. Topalov's manager, accused Mr. Kramnik of consulting a computer in the bathroom. The organizers locked the bathroom, whereupon Mr. Kramnik forfeited a game and refused to continue unless the bathroom was unlocked. It eventually was; he went on to win the match, and the incident went down in chess lore as Toiletgate.

"I thought that the chess world needed someone to try to help investigate these accusations," said Dr. Regan, who acted as an online commentator during the brouhaha. "I felt I was qualified. I felt some definite responsibility."

In constructing a mathematical proof to see if someone cheated, the trouble is that so many variables and outliers must be taken into account. Modeling and factoring human behavior in competition turns out to be very difficult.

Part of the problem is that sample sizes tend to be small — maybe 150 or 200 moves per player for an

entire tournament. Another problem lies in how computerized chess programs evaluate positions. They are given in increments of one-hundredth of the value of a pawn, the least valuable piece.

“A change of a hundredth of a pawn might change the agreement with the computer,” Dr. Regan said.

The potential payoff for a proof of cheating goes well beyond chess. Jonathan Schaeffer, a professor of computer science at the University of Alberta and the inventor of Chinook, the computer that solved checkers, said that Dr. Regan’s research, and that of others who are also investigating this field, has great potential value.

“What he is doing, what these people are doing, is they are trying to model how people make decisions,” Dr. Schaeffer said.

That could also be of immense value to a big online retailer, like Amazon, that wants to customize its offerings, or for more important uses, like personalizing medical treatment.

Dr. Schaeffer said that these applications had probably occurred to Dr. Regan. “The thing I would say about Ken, although he is using this research in the context of his hobby and passion, he is a big thinker,” he said.

In analyzing the 2006 match, the first thing Dr. Regan tried to do was reproduce Mr. Danailov’s claims, but he did not know how. “Initially, I was just a newbie to computer chess,” he said. “I didn’t even know the right questions to ask.”

He tried to find articles on the subject, but turned up nothing. “It is one of those situations that it is hard to believe that this hasn’t already been covered in the literature,” he said.

So he decided to create his own solution.

He was fairly certain that anyone using a program to cheat would have it set in single-line mode — in which the program quickly selects a possible move , then runs through a sequence of moves to evaluate its soundness. That is efficient, but not thorough.

Dr. Regan decided that he also needed to have his programs running in multiline mode so that he could see where and why the programs changed their evaluations. That takes much longer.

He wanted to create a model of how often the moves of players of varying ability match those of chess programs, so he began building a database by downloading and analyzing games dating to the early 19th century.

In each game, he had the computer evaluate each position in single-line mode to a depth of 13 ply (6 or 7 moves by each player). To date, he has analyzed nearly 200,000 games, including all of those from the top 50 major tournaments in history.

He also has analyzed 6,000 to 7,000 games in multiline mode to create models of different player abilities.

To test someone for cheating, he runs that player’s relative skill ranking, known as an Elo rating, against the comparative model.

The research has yielded some interesting things about how chess programs work, particularly Rybka, the strongest of the commercially available products. For example, in situations in which the evaluation of the position is particularly unfavorable, the program can get stuck looking for a solution. “I think that 47 hours is my longest stall,” Dr. Regan said.

He has also discovered that the way people play ha s evolved. According to his analysis, the player n ow ranked No. 40 in the world plays as well as Ana toly Karpov did in the 1970s, when he was world ch ampion and was described as a machine.

Dr. Regan says his models are at a stage where the y can be used only as support in cases in which ch eating is alleged.

In the French case, he concluded that two performa nces by one of the accused players, Sebastien Fell er, were outliers, meaning they had an unusually h igh correlation with a chess program.

The models can also be used to clear someone. At t he Canadian Open last year, a player whose rating was 2,100 (a candidate master) beat three internat ional masters, whose ratings are usually at least 300 points higher.

After analyzing the games, Dr. Regan said, “I was able to prove that his intrinsic rating was in the 2,100s and the international masters had just pla yed poorly.”
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NYT-0327: ON COLLEGE BASKETBALL
Sticking to Business as Others Celebrate Her Career ... By JERE LONGMAN
Pat Summitt, the Tennessee women's basketball coac h, insisted that this bittersweet season be focuse d on her team rather than her early symptoms of Al zheimer's disease.
===== notyet (2 pages)
DES MOINES - Kim Mulkey took grim joy in this 77-5 8 victory. Pat Summitt had coached her on the 1984 Olympic team. Summitt was a friend, a mentor. But she would not allow anyone to patronize her. The best way to honor her was to beat her for a berth
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in the Final Four, even if defeat ended Summitt's 38th season and perhaps her pioneering career.

"It's not fun for me to coach against Pat," Mulkey, the Baylor coach, said of Summitt, the Tennessee legend, after Monday's Des Moines Region final. "But I have a job to do."

Summitt, 59, insisted that this bittersweet season be focused on her team, not herself. That became impossible once she announced last summer that she had early symptoms of Alzheimer's disease. With her future undecided, the Lady Vols embarked on a kind of extended farewell tour, greeted with heartfelt affection for Summitt and appreciation for her role as a trailblazer and adviser.

"None of us will ever have the impact Pat Summitt has" on women's basketball, Mulkey said. "She's our John Wooden."

On Monday night, fans of both teams stood and applauded as Summitt walked to the Tennessee bench. Mulkey hugged her friend but seemed pained by her gloomy task. Summitt got to her feet early on, given the urgency of the moment, exhorting her players, barking at the referees.

"She may forget where her phone is, but she's not going to forget to yell at the officials," said Holly Warlick, who played for Summitt in the 1970s and has been her assistant for 27 years. "She's still competitive. I don't care what disease she has, she's going to go down swinging."

Summitt and Mulkey embraced again with 46.8 seconds left after a tense moment on the court. Baylor's 6-foot-8 center Brittney Griner (23 points, 15 rebounds, 9 blocked shots) and two teammates were ejected for leaving the bench after a near scuffle between Baylor guard Odyssey Sims (27 points) and Tennessee's Shekinna Stricklen. But tensions quickl

y eased and players on both teams hugged. N.C.A.A. officials said no Baylor players would face suspensions at the Final Four.

Summitt skipped her postgame radio show courtside as Baylor (38-0) celebrated. She has not spoken this season at news conferences. If Summitt’s career has ended as a head coach, it is unsurpassed with 8 national titles and 1,098 victories. Significantly, these achievements bloomed from rural soil.

While the N.C.A.A. dismissed women’s basketball, not sponsoring a tournament until 1982, the sport flourished in small towns in places like Texas and Tennessee. Girls who lived and worked on farms, as Summitt did, baling hay, plowing tobacco fields, eating her sack lunch on a tractor, could hardly be told that they lacked the stamina to play basketball.

In 1974, Summitt became the coach at Tennessee. Her salary was $250 a month to coach, teach physical education and attend graduate school. She laundered the team uniforms, drove the team van and was so intent on winning that “we never even stopped at McDonald’s,” Warlick said.

Quickly, Summitt learned that the best coaches were those with the best players. “Don’t take donkeys to the Kentucky Derby,” her father, Richard Head, told her.

She demanded college administrators take her sport seriously when few did. In the 1970s, Tennessee went into overtime during a game at Louisiana State. The men’s teams were scheduled to play next and, Dale Brown, the L.S.U. men’s coach, wanted the women to play their overtime period in an auxiliary gym, according to the Lady Vols. Summitt refused.

Later, when Tennessee officials asked whether Summitt was interested in coaching the men’s team, she

replied, “Why is that considered a step up?”

Eventually, her salary surpassed $1 million a year.

She demanded from her players the same discipline and work ethic she developed as a girl, when her father often reminded her, “Cows don’t take a day off.” Other women’s teams could learn from this insistence, said Geno Auriemma, Summitt’s rival who has won seven national championships at Connecticut.

“She is one of the few coaches who are coaching basketball players and not girls,” he said.

Summitt was unapologetic about her forceful approach. Her stare could be icy, her voice blistering. Many years ago in the preseason, Summitt called a student into her office and yelled at her: “What have you been doing? Did I not tell you that you had to lose 10 pounds?” Only later did Summitt realize that the student was a team manager and not a walk-on player.

“Her face was all red,” Warlick said with a laugh. “She was so intense, ripping into this poor manager.”

While that relationship was quickly repaired, Summitt permanently soured on Auriemma over UConn’s recruitment of Maya Moore. She canceled the annual series between Tennessee and UConn. It was a mistake. Summitt had spent her career as a basketball evangelical, spreading the word, playing anyone, anywhere, anytime. Then, without full explanation, she halted her sport’s most necessary rivalry.

Still, the career scale has tipped lopsidedly in Summitt’s favor. The championships are important, sure, but “I’ve never gotten a sense that her success is who she is,” said Bonnie Henrickson, the women’s coach at Kansas. Instead, Henrickson and othe

rs said they most appreciated Summitt for her grac iousness, for the notes she sent and the patient, encouraging conversations she had with younger coa ches who aspired to follow in her path.

Weeks before the 1984 Los Angeles Olympics, Mulkey , a point guard, developed a stress fracture in he r foot. Summitt showed her loyalty by keeping a sp ot on the team for Mulkey, who recovered to win a gold medal.

Twenty years ago, Mulkey was an assistant at Louis iana Tech, pregnant with her daughter Makenzie, wo rried that she could not be both a coach and a mot her. Summitt, who had a young son named Tyler, ass ured her that she could.

“It comforted me,” Mulkey said. “She was speaking a language I understood. She lived the life I live d.”

Mulkey learned another lesson from Summitt. It occ urred in the 1980s, when Louisiana Tech was a domi nant power in women’s basketball. “I’m going to ke ep playing you until I beat you,” Summitt told the Tech coaching staff, “and become what you are.”

So, Mulkey said, Monday’s game was about business, not honor. Summitt would have it no other way.
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OPINION
A Man. A Woman. Just Friends? ... By WILLIAM DERESI EWICZ
We're just friends. No, really.
===== notyet (2 pages)
CAN men and women be friends? We have been asking ourselves that question for a long time, and the a nswer is usually no. The movie “When Harry Met Sal ly...” provides the locus classicus. The problem, Harry famously explains, is that “the sex part alw
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ays gets in the way.” Heterosexual people of the opposite sex may claim to be just friends, the message goes, but count on it — wink, wink, nudge, nudge — something more’s going on. Popular culture enforces the notion relentlessly. In movie after movie, show after show, the narrative arc is the same. What starts as friendship (Ross and Rachel, Monica and Chandler) ends up in bed.

There’s a history here, and it’s a surprisingly political one. Friendship between the sexes was more or less unknown in traditional society. Men and women occupied different spheres, and women were regarded as inferior in any case. A few epistolary friendships between monastics, a few relationships in literary and court circles, but beyond that, cross-sex friendship was as unthinkable in Western society as it still is in many cultures.

Then came feminism — specifically, Mary Wollstonecraft, the mother of feminism, in the late 18th century. Wollstonecraft was actually wary of platonic relationships, which could lead too easily, she thought, to mischief. (She had a child out of wedlock herself.) But she did believe that friendship, “the most sublime of all affections,” should be the mainspring of marriage.

In the 1890s, when feminism emerged from the drawing rooms and genteel committees to become a mass, radical movement (the term “feminism” itself was coined in 1895), friendship reappeared as a political demand. This was the time of the “New Woman,” portrayed in fiction and endlessly debated in the press.

The New Woman was intelligent, well read, strong-willed, idealistic, unconventional and outspoken. For her, relationships with men, whether or not they involved sex, had to involve mental companionship, freedom of choice, equality and mutual respect. They had, in short, to be friendships. Just as su

ffrage represented feminism’s vision of the politi cal future, friendship represented its vision of t he personal future, the central term of a renegoti ated sexual contract.

Easier said than done, of course. But the notion o f friendship as the root of romantic relationships started to seep into the culture. The terms “boyf riend” and “girlfriend” also began to appear in th e 1890s.

We take the words for granted now, but think of wh at they imply, and what a new idea it was: that ro mantic partners share more than erotic passion, th at companionship and equality are part of the rela tionship. A boyfriend is a friend, as well as a lo ver. As for husband and wife, Wollstonecraft’s ide al has long since become a cliche. Who doesn’t thi nk of their spouse — or claim to think of them, or want to think of them — as their best friend?

So friendship now is part of what we mean by love. Still, that doesn’t get us to platonic relationsh ips. For that we needed yet another wave of femini sm, the one that started in the 1960s. Friendship wasn’t part of the demand this time, but the thing s that were demanded — equal rights and opportunit ies in every sphere — created the conditions for i t. Only once the sexes mixed on equal and familiar terms at school, at work and in the social spaces in between — only once it was normal and even bor ing to see a member of the opposite sex at the nex t desk — could platonic friendships become an ordi nary part of life.

And that’s exactly what has happened.

Friendships with members of the opposite sex have been an important part of my life since I went to high school in the late 1970s, and I hardly think I’m alone. Consult your own experience, but as I l ook around, I don’t see that platonic friendships

are actually rare at all or worthy of a lot of winks and nudges. Which is why you don’t much hear the term anymore. Platonic friendships now are simply friendships. But doesn’t the sex thing get in the way? At times, no doubt. It’s harder for the young, of course — all those hormones, and so many of your peers are unattached. In fact, one of the most common solutions to Harry’s quandary is to have sex and then remain friends. If the sex thing gets in the way, the answer often seems to be to just get it out of the way.

But it doesn’t always get in the way. Maybe you’re not attracted to each other. Maybe you know it would never work out, so it’s not worth screwing up your friendship. Maybe that’s just not what it’s about.

So if it’s common now for men and women to be friends, why do we so rarely see it in popular culture? Partly, it’s a narrative problem. Friendship isn’t courtship. It doesn’t have a beginning, a middle and an end. Stories about friendships of any kind are relatively rare, especially given what a huge place the relationships have in our lives. And of course, they’re not sexy. Put a man and a woman together in a movie or a novel, and we expect the sparks to fly. Yet it isn’t just a narrative problem, or a Hollywood problem.

We have trouble, in our culture, with any love that isn’t based on sex or blood. We understand romantic relationships, and we understand family, and that’s about all we seem to understand.

We have trouble with mentorship, the asymmetric love of master and apprentice, professor and student, guide and guided; we have trouble with comradeship, the bond that comes from shared, intense work; and we have trouble with friendship, at least of the intimate kind. When we imagine those relationships, we seem to have to sexualize them.

Close friendships between members of the same sex, after all, are also suspect. Even Oprah has had to defend her relationship with Gayle King, and as for men and men, forget about it.

I cannot think of another area of our lives in which there is so great a gap between what we do and what our culture says we do. But maybe things are beginning to change. Younger people, having grown up with the gay-rights movement and in many cases gone to colleges with co-ed dormitories, are open to a wider range of emotional possibility.

Friendship between the sexes may no longer be a political issue, but it is an issue of liberation: the freedom to love whom you want, in the way that you want. Maybe it’s time that we all took it out of the closet.

William Deresiewicz is an essayist, critic and the author of “A Jane Austen Education.”
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NYT-0408
Tuna Again? In Fault-Finding Britain, It's a Cause for Divorce ... By SARAH LYALL
Excessive servings of tuna casserole is just one example of marital distress from the divorce dockets of Britain, which does not have no-fault divorce.

NYT-0408
China Said to Detain Returning Tibetan Pilgrims ... By EDWARD WONG
The detainees are being interrogated and ordered to denounce the Dalai Lama, according to groups who have conducted interviews with family members.

NYT-0408
At the End of the Earth, Seeking Clues to the Universe ... By SIMON ROMERO
High in the Chilean desert, scientists have instal
~~~~~~~~~~

led one of the world's largest ground-based astron
omical projects to look for clues to the origins o
f the universe.
===== done
LLANO DE CHAJNANTOR, Chile — Trucks stall on the r
oad to this plateau 16,597 feet up in the Atacama
Desert, where scientists are installing one of the
 world’s largest ground-based astronomical project
s. Heads ache. Noses bleed. Dizziness overcomes th
e researchers toiling in the shadow of the Licanca
bur volcano.

“Then there’s what we call ‘jelly legs,’” said Die
go Garcia-Appadoo, a Spanish astronomer studying g
alaxy formation. “You feel shattered, as if you ra
n a marathon.”

Still, the same conditions that make the Atacama,
Earth’s driest desert, so inhospitable make it beg
uiling for astronomy. In northern Chile, it is far
 from big cities, with little light pollution. Its
 arid climate prevents radio signals from being ab
sorbed by water droplets. The altitude, as high as
 the Himalaya base camps for climbers preparing to
 scale Mount Everest, places astronomers closer to
 the heavens.

Opened last October, the Atacama Large Millimeter/
submillimeter Array, known as ALMA, will have spre
ad 66 radio antennas near the spine of the Andes b
y the time it is completed next year. Drawing more
 than $1 billion in funding mainly from the United
 States, European countries and Japan, ALMA will h
elp the oxygen-deprived scientists flocking to thi
s region to study the origins of the universe.

The project also strengthens Chile’s position in t
he vanguard of astronomy. Observatories are alread
y scattered throughout the Atacama, including the
Cerro Paranal Observatory, where scientists discov
ered in 2010 the largest star observed to date, an
d the Cerro Tololo Inter-American Observatory, whi

ch was founded in 1961 and endured Chile’s tumult of revolution and counterrevolution in the 1970s.

But ALMA opens a new stage for astronomy in Chile, which is favored by international research organizations for the stability of its economy and legal system. Like other radio telescopes, ALMA does not detect optical light but radio waves, allowing researchers to study parts of the universe that are dark, like the clouds of cold gas from which stars are formed.

With ALMA, astronomers hope to see where the first galaxies were formed, and perhaps even detect solar systems with the conditions to support life, like water-bearing planets. But the scientists here express caution about their chances of finding life elsewhere in the universe, explaining that such definitive proof is likely to remain elusive.

“We won’t be able to see life, but perhaps signatures of life,” said Thijs de Graauw, a Dutch astronomer who is ALMA’s director.

Still, scientists believe ALMA will make transformational leaps possible in the understanding of the universe, enabling a hunt for so-called cold gas tracers, the ashes of exploded stars from a time about a few hundred million years after the Big Bang that astronomers call “cosmic dawn.”

ALMA’s construction, said Jesus Mosterin, a prominent Spanish philosopher who writes about the frontier between science and philosophy, and who visited the observatory last year, is taking place at “the only time in history that windows into the universe are being thrown wide open.”

Chile is not the only country luring big investments in astronomical projects. South Africa and Australia are competing to host an even bigger radio telescope, the Square Kilometer Array, which would

be fully operational by 2024. China has begun building its own large radio telescope in a craterlike setting in the southern province of Guizhou.

At the same time, the financial crisis in rich industrialized countries has raised concerns that funding for some ambitious astronomy projects could face constraints. In the United States, a Congressional panel last year proposed killing NASA’s James Webb Space Telescope before a compromise spending plan saved the project.

“It would be very sad for humankind if we were so spiritually decadent to forgo the pleasures of consciousness and of knowledge,” said Mr. Mosterin, reflecting on the funding choices political leaders need to make. “These things make human beings a very interesting animal indeed.”

ALMA’s Operations Support Facility, an outpost built for the scientists here in the Atacama, offers a glimpse into the lengths to which people go for astronomical discoveries. From Chajnantor, where dust devils dance across the plain, and unusually extreme weather in recent months has included rains and sand storms, a dirt road runs to the facility past towering cactuses and herds of wild donkeys and vicunas.

The facility, at an altitude of about 9,500 feet, houses about 500 researchers and other staff in shipping containers turned living quarters. In a system similar to that on offshore oil platforms, scientists have daily shifts lasting up to 12 hours for 8 days straight. Many toil through the night.

“Quiet Zone,” reads one sign in an area of containers for ALMA’s so-called day sleepers.

Supervisors enforce other rules, ensuring a work environment almost as austere as the surrounding Mars-esque landscape. Alcohol is prohibited, and tho

se found drinking after trips into San Pedro de Atacama, a town about 30 minutes away by car, must dry out at a security checkpoint before entering the futuristic complex.

In the control room, where astronomers spend hours peering into screens displaying the array of antennas, some gallows humor prevails. “We are well in the control room, the 17,” reads one message scribbled on a piece of roofing and posted on the wall after fire alarms went off by accident at the facility in 2011, sealing those inside the control room until they broke a door to escape.

The note riffs on the 2010 mine accident and subsequent rescue of 33 miners in the Chilean desert, during which the trapped men sent a note to the surface saying, “We are well in the shelter, the 33.”

Developments elsewhere in Chile occasionally raise eyebrows here, like antigovernment protests that have rocked remote regions of the country this year and spread in March to the nearby mining city of Calama. “The protests are not directly a concern,” said Mr. de Graauw, ALMA’s director. “They are part of a democratic process, not a revolution.”

Still, it seems at times that the astronomers stationed here are as far removed from the world around them as the miners working beneath other parts of the Atacama. English predominates as the observatory’s language, tying together scientists from dozens of countries.

A sense of awe still accompanies the installation of each new antenna. Two giant German-manufactured transporters, each with 28 tires and engines equivalent to two Formula 1 racing vehicles, are used to transport the antennas. Called Otto and Lore, they look like massive mechanized centipedes making their way across the arid landscape.

“There’s a quietness that comes to you at Chajnantor,” said Lutz Stenvers, a German engineer who came here in 2008 to lead a team from General Dynamics building the antennas. “I can see why this place was chosen.”
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NYT-0414: THE SATURDAY PROFILE
Beneath That Beguiling Smile, Seeing What Leonardo Saw ... By SUZANNE DALEY
A researcher at the Prado, using high-tech tools, discovered that a copy of the Mona Lisa was most likely painted by someone sitting next to Leonardo da Vinci as he produced his masterpiece.
===== notyet (2 pages)
MADRID

UNTIL recently, the Prado’s copy of the Mona Lisa — one of dozens made over the centuries — was not much of a draw.

Then, Ana Gonzalez Mozo took an interest.

Over the last two years, Ms. Gonzalez, a researcher in the museum’s technical documentation department, has used all manner of modern-day techniques — X-rays, infrared reflectography and high-resolution digital images, among others — to make, and then document, an unlikely finding.

It turns out that the Prado’s Mona Lisa is not just any 500-year-old copy. It was most likely painted by someone who was sitting right next to Leonardo da Vinci, trying to duplicate his every brush stroke, as he produced his famous lady with the enigmatic smile.

When Leonardo adjusted the size of the Mona Lisa’s head or corrected her hands or slimmed her bosom or lowered her bodice, so did whoever was painting the Prado’s Mona Lisa.
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“It had to be painted at the same time,” Ms. Gonzalez said. “Someone who copies doesn’t make corrections because they haven’t ever seen the changes. They can see only the surface of the painting.”

The discovery is primarily important for what it reveals about the real Mona Lisa, a painting that has been darkened by layers of aging lacquer.

The copy, now restored, offers details that are obscured in the original Mona Lisa. For instance, the copy shows an armrest where none can be seen in the original, and reflectographs show a much clearer image of her waistline.

“What is really important about the copy is that we can see how Leonardo worked,” Ms. Gonzalez said. “We know something new about his creative process.”

The copy, which also shows a much younger-looking figure, has once again ignited a debate about whether Leonardo’s Mona Lisa should be restored as well. Ms. Gonzalez says this is a hard call for the Louvre because people are so used to the way the painting looks now. But she cannot help being curious.

Most of the time, Ms. Gonzalez spends her hours looking beneath the surface of the Prado’s masterpieces, searching for insights into the artists’ methods and thinking. And there, she said, she has found great treasures. Many important paintings have sketches or first tries — adjusted and reworked — under the final image. Sometimes, she said, the work underneath is even more fascinating than the painting itself.

“I get to see what only the artist saw,” she said. “And he saw it five centuries ago.”

ON a recent visit, Ms. Gonzalez’s work space was a

s cool and tidy as any computer lab. Only a messy pool of life-size images of the Louvre’s Mona Lisa and the Prado’s copy spread out on a table suggested her purpose.

She ran her hands over the photographs, pausing over the similarities; they were clear even to the untrained eye. What was she thinking when she made these discoveries? Was she in awe?

She shrugged off such questions. “Other people have asked me that,” she said, by way of an answer. “I am very calm, very prudent. When I made the discovery, I talked to the curator here.”

Some art magazines have speculated that the Prado’s Mona Lisa was painted by Leonardo’s lover. But Ms. Gonzalez has no patience for such gossipy talk. “That is irrelevant,” she said. “We don’t know that. And that is not what the work here is about.”

Until two years ago, the Prado, which inherited the painting with the rest of the royal collection in 1819, displayed it but never suspected its significance. It was catalogued without fanfare as an anonymous copy, painted on poplar.

The copy’s background was black, and the painting was covered in a layer of dark varnish, which gave it a yellowish glow and further diminished its vibrancy.

But the Louvre was planning a special exhibition of Leonardo’s work and, because it did not want to move the original Mona Lisa from its protected area, wanted to borrow the Prado painting as a stand-in. A casual comment by one of the Louvre curators, asking whether the painting had ever been studied, got Ms. Gonzalez thinking.

The next day she took her infrared camera into the gallery and got to work. Just the first pictures

were enough for her to conclude that the two paintings had been produced in tandem. After that, it was just a question of watching the evidence pile up.

Perhaps the most exciting discovery was that the painting’s original background had been obscured by a layer of black paint, a practice sometimes used in the 18th century. Luckily, a layer of lacquer protected what was under it. So, once the paint was removed, the same Tuscan background as in Leonardo’s painting appeared, offering a tantalizing preview of what might be seen if Leonardo’s Mona Lisa were restored.

THERE is no doubt, however, that the Prado painting was not a copy made by Leonardo himself. While the corrections are identical, the lines are not. “Like I write an A and you write an A, you can tell it is not the same,” Ms. Gonzalez said.

Parts of the Prado copy are beautiful, she said, like the hands. But in general, it is not nearly so fine a painting.

Just why it was made remains an open question. It could have been simply for a pupil’s instruction or a double commission.

Ms. Gonzalez started working at the Prado 16 years ago, when she was completing her doctorate, one of the first art researchers to focus on the use of computer techniques to study paintings. “We did not even have Windows when I started as a student,” she said. But little by little, she said, computer techniques of all kinds have become important tools in studying paintings.

Everyone in her family is a scientist, she said. Her choice to get a fine arts degree was a sort of rebellion.

When she begins studying a painting, she does a dr

awing of it, she said, as a way to familiarize her self with the work.

Ms. Gonzalez seems somewhat indifferent to the attention her recent discovery is getting. She said she had participated in far more spectacular discoveries. For instance, she said, X-rays and infrared reflectographs show that Tintoretto sketched nude figures under his clothed ones.

But, somehow, it is the copy of the Mona Lisa that everyone is talking about.

“It has grabbed people’s imagination,” she said. “She is an icon.”

The Prado’s Mona Lisa is on loan to the Louvre until June.

Rachel Chaundler contributed reporting.
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NYT-0417: OPINION: OPINIONATOR - DRAFT
Make-or-Break Verbs ... By CONSTANCE HALE
Without verbs, words would simply cluster together in suspended animation.
===== notyet
Draft is a series about the art and craft of writing.

Tags: verbs, Writing, writing lessons

This is the third in a series of writing lessons by the author.

A sentence can offer a moment of quiet, it can crackle with energy or it can just lie there, listless and uninteresting.

What makes the difference? The verb.
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Verbs kick-start sentences: Without them, words would simply cluster together in suspended animation. We often call them action words, but verbs also can carry sentiments (love, fear, lust, disgust), hint at cognition (realize, know, recognize), bend ideas together (falsify, prove, hypothesize), assert possession (own, have) and conjure existence itself (is, are).

Jeff Rogers
Fundamentally, verbs fall into two classes: static (to be, to seem, to become) and dynamic (to whistle, to waffle, to wonder). (These two classes are sometimes called “passive” and “active,” and the former are also known as “linking” or “copulative” verbs.) Static verbs stand back, politely allowing nouns and adjectives to take center stage. Dynamic verbs thunder in from the wings, announcing an event, producing a spark, adding drama to an assembled group.

Static Verbs
Static verbs themselves fall into several subgroups, starting with what I call existential verbs: all the forms of to be, whether the present (am, are, is), the past (was, were) or the other more vexing tenses (is being, had been, might have been). In Shakespeare’s “Hamlet,” the Prince of Demark asks, “To be, or not to be?” when pondering life-and-death questions. An aging King Lear uses both is and am when he wonders about his very identity:

“Who is it that can tell me who I am?”

Jumping ahead a few hundred years, Henry Miller echoes Lear when, in his autobiographical novel “Tropic of Cancer,” he wanders in Dijon, France, reflecting upon his fate:

“Yet I am up and about, a walking ghost, a white man terrorized by the cold sanity of this slaughter-house geometry. Who am I? What am I doing here?”

Drawing inspiration from Miller, we might think of these verbs as ghostly verbs, almost invisible. They exist to call attention not to themselves, but to other words in the sentence.

Another subgroup is what I call wimp verbs (appear, seem, become). Most often, they allow a writer to hedge (on an observation, description or opinion) rather than commit to an idea: Lear appears confused. Miller seems lost.

Finally, there are the sensing verbs (feel, look, taste, smell and sound), which have dual identities: They are dynamic in some sentences and static in others. If Miller said I feel the wind through my coat, that’s dynamic. But if he said I feel blue, that’s static.

Static verbs establish a relationship of equals between the subject of a sentence and its complement. Think of those verbs as quiet equals signs, holding the subject and the predicate in delicate equilibrium. For example, I, in the subject, equals feel blue in the predicate.

Power Verbs

Dynamic verbs are the classic action words. They turn the subject of a sentence into a doer in some sort of drama. But there are dynamic verbs — and then there are dynamos. Verbs like has, does, goes, gets and puts are all dynamic, but they don’t let us envision the action. The dynamos, by contrast, give us an instant picture of a specific movement. Why have a character go when he could gambol, shamble, lumber, lurch, sway, swagger or sashay?

Picking pointed verbs also allows us to forgo adverbs. Many of these modifiers merely prop up a limp verb anyway. Strike speaks softly and insert whispers. Erase eats hungrily in favor of devours. And whatever you do, avoid adverbs that mindlessly re

peat the sense of the verb, as in circle around, m erge together or mentally recall.

This sentence from “Tinkers,” by Paul Harding, sho ws how taking time to find the right verb pays off :

“The forest had nearly wicked from me that tiny ger m of heat allotted to each person….”

Wick is an evocative word that nicely gets across the essence of a more commonplace verb like sucked or drained.

Sportswriters and announcers must be masters of dy namic verbs, because they endlessly describe the s ame thing while trying to keep their readers and l isteners riveted. We’re not just talking about a p layer who singles, doubles or homers. We’re talkin g about, as announcers described during the 2010 W orld Series, a batter who “spoils the pitch” (hits a foul ball), a first baseman who “digs it out of the dirt” (catches a bad throw) and a pitcher who “scatters three singles through six innings” (kee ps the hits to a minimum).

Imagine the challenge of writers who cover races. How can you write about, say, all those horses hus tling around a track in a way that makes a single one of them come alive? Here’s how Laura Hillenbra nd, in “Seabiscuit,” described that horse’s winnin g sprint:

“Carrying 130 pounds, 22 more than Wedding Call an d 16 more than Whichcee, Seabiscuit delivered a tr emendous surge. He slashed into the hole, disappea red between his two larger opponents, then burst i nto the lead… Seabiscuit shook free and hurtled in to the homestretch alone as the field fell away be hind him.”

Even scenes that at first blush seem quiet can bri

stle with life. The best descriptive writers find a way to balance nouns and verbs, inertia and action, tranquillity and turbulence. Take Jo Ann Beard, who opens the short story “Cousins” with static verbs as quiet as a lake at dawn:

“Here is a scene. Two sisters are fishing together in a flat-bottomed boat on an olive green lake….”

When the world of the lake starts to awaken, the verbs signal not just the stirring of life but crisp tension:

“A duck stands up, shakes out its feathers and peers above the still grass at the edge of the water. The skin of the lake twitches suddenly and a fish springs loose into the air, drops back down with a flat splash. Ripples move across the surface like radio waves. The sun hoists itself up and gets busy, laying a sparkling rug across the water, burning the beads of dew off the reeds, baking the tops of our mothers’ heads.”

Want to practice finding dynamic verbs? Go to a horse race, a baseball game or even walk-a-thon. Find someone to watch intently. Describe what you see. Or, if you’re in a quiet mood, sit on a park bench, in a pew or in a boat on a lake, and then open your senses. Write what you see, hear and feel. Consider whether to let your verbs jump into the scene or stand by patiently.

Verbs can make or break your writing, so consider them carefully in every sentence you write. Do you want to sit your subject down and hold a mirror to it? Go ahead, use is. Do you want to plunge your subject into a little drama? Go dynamic. Whichever you select, give your readers language that makes them eager for the next sentence.

Next from me: Pitfalls of passive construction.

Constance Hale, a journalist based in San Francisc
o, is the author of “Sin and Syntax” and the forth
coming “Vex, Hex, Smash, Smooch.” She covers writi
ng and the writing life at sinandsyntax.com.
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NYT-0417: SCIENCE TIMES
A Sharp Rise in Retractions Prompts Calls for Refor
m ... By CARL ZIMMER
Retractions of published papers are on the rise, a
nd some scientists fear the situation is out of co
ntrol.
===== notyet
In the fall of 2010, Dr. Ferric C. Fang made an un
settling discovery. Dr. Fang, who is editor in chi
ef of the journal Infection and Immunity, found th
at one of his authors had doctored several papers.

It was a new experience for him. “Prior to that ti
me,” he said in an interview, “Infection and Immun
ity had only retracted nine articles over a 40-yea
r period.”

The journal wound up retracting six of the papers
from the author, Naoki Mori of the University of t
he Ryukyus in Japan. And it soon became clear that
 Infection and Immunity was hardly the only victim
 of Dr. Mori’s misconduct. Since then, other scien
tific journals have retracted two dozen of his pap
ers, according to the watchdog blog Retraction Watch.

“Nobody had noticed the whole thing was rotten,” s
aid Dr. Fang, who is a professor at the University
 of Washington School of Medicine.

Dr. Fang became curious how far the rot extended.
To find out, he teamed up with a fellow editor at
the journal, Dr. Arturo Casadevall of the Albert E
instein College of Medicine in New York. And befor
e long they reached a troubling conclusion: not on
ly that retractions were rising at an alarming rat
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e, but that retractions were just a manifestation of a much more profound problem — “a symptom of a dysfunctional scientific climate,” as Dr. Fang put it.

Dr. Casadevall, now editor in chief of the journal mBio, said he feared that science had turned into a winner-take-all game with perverse incentives that lead scientists to cut corners and, in some cases, commit acts of misconduct.

“This is a tremendous threat,” he said.

Last month, in a pair of editorials in Infection and Immunity, the two editors issued a plea for fundamental reforms. They also presented their concerns at the March 27 meeting of the National Academies of Sciences committee on science, technology and the law.

Members of the committee agreed with their assessment. “I think this is really coming to a head,” said Dr. Roberta B. Ness, dean of the University of Texas School of Public Health. And Dr. David Korn of Harvard Medical School agreed that “there are problems all through the system.”

No one claims that science was ever free of misconduct or bad research. Indeed, the scientific method itself is intended to overcome mistakes and misdeeds. When scientists make a new discovery, others review the research skeptically before it is published. And once it is, the scientific community can try to replicate the results to see if they hold up.

But critics like Dr. Fang and Dr. Casadevall argue that science has changed in some worrying ways in recent decades — especially biomedical research, which consumes a larger and larger share of government science spending.

In October 2011, for example, the journal Nature reported that published retractions had increased tenfold over the past decade, while the number of published papers had increased by just 44 percent. In 2010 The Journal of Medical Ethics published a study finding the new raft of recent retractions was a mix of misconduct and honest scientific mistakes.

Several factors are at play here, scientists say. One may be that because journals are now online, bad papers are simply reaching a wider audience, making it more likely that errors will be spotted. “You can sit at your laptop and pull a lot of different papers together,” Dr. Fang said.

But other forces are more pernicious. To survive professionally, scientists feel the need to publish as many papers as possible, and to get them into high-profile journals. And sometimes they cut corners or even commit misconduct to get there.

To measure this claim, Dr. Fang and Dr. Casadevall looked at the rate of retractions in 17 journals from 2001 to 2010 and compared it with the journals’ “impact factor,” a score based on how often their papers are cited by scientists. The higher a journal’s impact factor, the two editors found, the higher its retraction rate.

The highest “retraction index” in the study went to one of the world’s leading medical journals, The New England Journal of Medicine. In a statement for this article, it questioned the study’s methodology, noting that it considered only papers with abstracts, which are included in a small fraction of studies published in each issue. “Because our denominator was low, the index was high,” the statement said.

Monica M. Bradford, executive editor of the journal Science, suggested that the extra attention high

-impact journals get might be part of the reason f
or their higher rate of retraction. “Papers making
the most dramatic advances will be subject to the
most scrutiny,” she said.

Dr. Fang says that may well be true, but adds that
it cuts both ways — that the scramble to publish
in high-impact journals may be leading to more and
more errors. Each year, every laboratory produces
a new crop of Ph.D.’s, who must compete for a sma
ll number of jobs, and the competition is getting
fiercer. In 1973, more than half of biologists had
a tenure-track job within six years of getting a
Ph.D. By 2006 the figure was down to 15 percent.

Yet labs continue to have an incentive to take on
lots of graduate students to produce more research
. “I refer to it as a pyramid scheme,” said Paula
Stephan, a Georgia State University economist and
author of “How Economics Shapes Science,” publishe
d in January by Harvard University Press.

In such an environment, a high-profile paper can m
ean the difference between a career in science or
leaving the field. “It’s becoming the price of adm
ission,” Dr. Fang said.

The scramble isn’t over once young scientists get
a job. “Everyone feels nervous even when they’re s
uccessful,” he continued. “They ask, ‘Will this be
the beginning of the decline?’ ”

University laboratories count on a steady stream o
f grants from the government and other sources. Th
e National Institutes of Health accepts a much low
er percentage of grant applications today than in
earlier decades. At the same time, many universiti
es expect scientists to draw an increasing part of
their salaries from grants, and these pressures h
ave influenced how scientists are promoted.

“What people do is they count papers, and they loo

k at the prestige of the journal in which the rese
arch is published, and they see how many grant dol
lars scientists have, and if they don’t have fundi
ng, they don’t get promoted,” Dr. Fang said. “It’s
 not about the quality of the research.”

Dr. Ness likens scientists today to small-business
 owners, rather than people trying to satisfy thei
r curiosity about how the world works. “You’re mar
keting and selling to other scientists,” she said.
 “To the degree you can market and sell your produ
cts better, you’re creating the revenue stream to
fund your enterprise.”

Universities want to attract successful scientists
, and so they have erected a glut of science build
ings, Dr. Stephan said. Some universities have gon
e into debt, betting that the flow of grant money
will eventually pay off the loans. “It’s really go
ing to bite them,” she said.

With all this pressure on scientists, they may lac
k the extra time to check their own research — to
figure out why some of their data doesn’t fit thei
r hypothesis, for example. Instead, they have to b
e concerned about publishing papers before someone
 else publishes the same results.

“You can’t afford to fail, to have your hypothesis
 disproven,” Dr. Fang said. “It’s a small minority
 of scientists who engage in frank misconduct. It’
s a much more insidious thing that you feel compel
led to put the best face on everything.”

Adding to the pressure, thousands of new Ph.D. sci
entists are coming out of countries like China and
 India. Writing in the April 5 issue of Nature, Dr
. Stephan points out that a number of countries —
including China, South Korea and Turkey — now offe
r cash rewards to scientists who get papers into h
igh-profile journals. She has found these incentiv
es set off a flood of extra papers submitted to th

ose journals, with few actually being published in them. “It clearly burdens the system,” she said.

To change the system, Dr. Fang and Dr. Casadevall say, start by giving graduate students a better understanding of science’s ground rules — what Dr. Casadevall calls “the science of how you know what you know.”

They would also move away from the winner-take-all system, in which grants are concentrated among a small fraction of scientists. One way to do that may be to put a cap on the grants any one lab can receive.

Such a shift would require scientists to surrender some of their most cherished practices — the priority rule, for example, which gives all the credit for a scientific discovery to whoever publishes results first. (Three centuries ago, Isaac Newton and Gottfried Leibniz were bickering about who invented calculus.) Dr. Casadevall thinks it leads to rival research teams’ obsessing over secrecy, and rushing out their papers to beat their competitors. “And that can’t be good,” he said.

To ease such cutthroat competition, the two editors would also change the rules for scientific prizes and would have universities take collaboration into account when they decide on promotions.

Ms. Bradford, of Science magazine, agreed. “I would agree that a scientist’s career advancement should not depend solely on the publications listed on his or her C.V.,” she said, “and that there is much room for improvement in how scientific talent in all its diversity can be nurtured.”

Even scientists who are sympathetic to the idea of fundamental change are skeptical that it will happen any time soon. “I don’t think they have much chance of changing what they’re talking about,” sai

d Dr. Korn, of Harvard.

But Dr. Fang worries that the situation could be b ecome much more dire if nothing happens soon. “Whe n our generation goes away, where is the new gener ation going to be?” he asked. “All the scientists I know are so anxious about their funding that the y don’t make inspiring role models. I heard it fro m my own kids, who went into art and music respect ively. They said, ‘You know, we see you, and you d on’t look very happy.’ ”
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NYT-0418
In Agent Scandal, Inquiry Leads to Colombian Borde llos ... By WILLIAM NEUMAN and MICHAEL S. SCHMIDT
Investigators are searching for as many as 21 wome n who are believed to include prostitutes and to h ave spent the night with a group of security offic ers.
===== notyet (2 pages)
CARTAGENA, Colombia — At the Ligueros Club, one of many busy bordellos in this seaside tourist city, prostitutes dressed in lingerie wait for a bell t o ring, signaling the arrival of men on the prowl. But the next group of American visitors to walk i n the door may not be customers at all.

American investigators seeking to get to the botto m of the reported late-night activities of a group of Secret Service agents and military personnel a ssigned to President Obama’s recent visit to Colom bia have begun searching for as many as 21 women w ho are believed to include prostitutes and to have spent the night with the security officers, Ameri can security officials say.

After uncovering evidence of misconduct, investiga tors for the Secret Service are seeking to intervi ew women who are said to have accompanied 11 agent s — including snipers and explosives experts — to
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their hotel rooms after a night of heavy drinking, said Representative Peter T. King, the chairman of the House Committee on Homeland Security.

The agency knows their identities because the hotel where they stayed had a policy requiring women to leave copies of their identification cards before going into rooms, said Mr. King, a New York Republican who was briefed on the investigation on Tuesday morning by Mark Sullivan, the Secret Service director.

Senator Susan Collins of Maine, the senior Republican on the Senate Homeland Security Committee, who was also briefed on the investigation by Mr. Sullivan, said a total of 20 to 21 local women were brought into the sprawling beachfront complex called the Hotel Caribe. She said that some of the women accompanied Secret Service agents and that others escorted members of the military, which is conducting its own investigation.

Prostitution is legal in Colombia in “tolerance zones.” A number of brothels in Cartagena are in these zones.

On Monday, an Air Force colonel and a military lawyer arrived in Colombia to conduct an investigation on behalf of the Defense Department, said Col. Scott Malcom, the chief spokesman for the United States Southern Command in Miami.

The enlisted personnel under scrutiny include two Marine dog handlers; at least one member of the Green Berets from the Seventh Special Forces Group, which focuses on South America; and Air Force and Navy personnel who specialize in the disposal of explosives.

The dual investigations have cast a light on Cartagena’s freewheeling nightlife, where prostitutes walk the street, the bars and an array of private c

lubs, where they sometimes live and in some cases charge $300 or more to go out with customers. Exactly where the American security personnel met the women they reportedly took back to their rooms was still under investigation, the American officials said, with more than one establishment under review.

“The 11 agents are having different recollections about what happened, or are not telling the truth,” Mr. King said.

The 11 individuals were part of a much larger Secret Service contingent of dozens supporting Mr. Obama’s visit. The agents arrived in Colombia on Tuesday or Wednesday and, according to Mr. King and a senior United States official, had not yet been briefed on their specific assignments or started their official duties when they went out on Wednesday night and met the women.

The president arrived in Cartagena on Friday afternoon for the Summit of the Americas, which drew leaders from throughout Latin America.

The number of military personnel under scrutiny in the case, which the Pentagon initially numbered at 5, is between 10 and 12, the officials said. At least one member of the military has been questioned and cleared of wrongdoing, the officials said. It was not believed that the Secret Service agents and the military personnel had gone out in one large party, officials said, indicating that there may have been two or more groups of Americans who went out that night.

At the Ligueros Club, when new customers arrive, a bell rings on a back patio where women go to relax, prompting them to jump to their high-heeled feet and go back to work. At Pleyclub, another bordello popular among Americans and rumored to have hosted a group of American security personnel on a recent night, a bottle of Old Parr whisky costs $160

, and the women, who pole-dance naked on a stage t o the rapid-fire beat of reggaeton, can charge dou ble that.

“A lot of Americans come here,” said Carlos Ramirez , a manager at Pleyclub.

Then there is Rocio’s House, a brothel that caters to men from the nearby port. Prostitutes in tight dresses sit almost demurely in plastic chairs the re, lined up against a wall like shy students at a junior high dance.

The city’s prostitutes, many using English-friendl y names like Lady, Daisy and Paola, say all the in ternational attention might be good for business. They shrug their shoulders at all the fuss.

“Now we are world-class, with the president’s body guards coming to try out Colombian girls,” said on e freelance prostitute who walks the streets of th e walled city and came to Cartagena from her homet own, Cali, because she preferred well-heeled forei gn clients.

While a Tracy Chapman video played on a flat-scree n television next to the bar at Angeles, another c lub, another prostitute explained how she and her co-workers were required to be tested for AIDS as often as once a week. The brothels insist that all clients use condoms, she said, describing how she paid the brothel owner about $6 a day to rent a t iny room and preferred to call herself an escort o r a companion rather than a prostitute.

The behavior of the security personnel came to lig ht because one of them got into an early morning a ltercation over payment with one of the women, the American security officials said.

“There are different versions of what happened, bu t the latest version is that one of the women comp

lained at 6 in the morning that she hadn’t been paid,” Mr. King said. “The Secret Service wouldn’t let the hotel manager into the room, and the police came.”

A taxi driver on Tuesday provided a slightly different version of events than the one that has emerged so far from the American investigation.

The driver, Jose Pena, 43, said in an interview that he drove two women home from the hotel at about 9:30 a.m. Thursday.

They told him they had met a group of five Americans the previous night at a club, Tu Candela. They said the Americans invited them back to their hotel at 4 a.m.

In the morning, one of the men refused to pay the $250 he was asked for in exchange for the previous night’s sex with one of the women and instead handed over the equivalent of about $30 in local currency and shut her out of the room, the driver recounted. The woman and her friend banged on the door, they told the driver, until other Americans came out of their rooms and gave the women $100, and the women left.

Carlos Figueroa, a spokesman for the Cartagena mayor’s office, said that the local police were assisting their American counterparts, but not conducting their own investigation. Ms. Collins said she pressed the Secret Service to find out who the women were and whether they had ties to groups hostile to the United States.

Ms. Collins said she had asked of the Secret Service, “Could they have planted bugs, disabled weapons,” or in other ways “jeopardized security of the president or our country? Is there any evidence of previous misconduct by these or any other agents on other missions?”

William Neuman reported from Cartagena, and Michael S. Schmidt from Washington. Thom Shanker and Eric Schmitt contributed reporting from Washington, and Jenny Carolina Gonzalez from Bogota, Colombia.
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NYT-0419
Woman Recounts Quarrel Leading to Agent Scandal ... By WILLIAM NEUMAN and MICHAEL S. SCHMIDT
A dispute over what a Secret Service agent owed a Colombian woman working as a high-priced escort led to a scandal that has now prompted the exit of three employees from the agency.
===== notyet (2 pages)
CARTAGENA, Colombia — A Secret Service agent preparing for President Obama's arrival at an international summit meeting and a single mother from Colombia who makes a living as a high-priced escort faced off in a room at the Hotel Caribe a week ago over how much he owed her for the previous night's intercourse. "I tell him, 'Baby, my cash money,' " the woman said in her first public comments on a dispute that would soon spiral into a full-blown scandal.

The disagreement over her price — he offered $30 for services she thought they had agreed were worth more than 25 times that — set off a tense early morning quarrel in the hallway of the luxury hotel involving the woman, another prostitute, Colombian police officers arguing on the women's behalf and American federal agents who tried but failed to keep the matter from escalating.

On Wednesday, in a setback to the reputation of those who protect the president, the Secret Service prepared to fire one supervisor tied to the alleged misconduct with prostitutes on the Cartagena trip, the agency said in a statement. Another supervisor has decided to retire, and a third employee wi
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ll be allowed to resign, the statement said. Eight other employees remain under investigation.

“These guys have the clearest cases,” said a government official briefed on the investigation, referring to the three who are being pushed out.

The employees under scrutiny have been asked to take lie detector tests; only one has agreed to do so, the official said. The supervisor who is being fired has threatened to sue, Mark Sullivan, the director of the Secret Service, has told officials.

Sitting in her living room wearing a short jean skirt, high-heeled espadrilles and a spandex top with a plunging neckline, the prostitute described how she and another woman were approached by a group of American men at a discotheque. In an account consistent with the official version of events coming out of Washington, but could not be independently confirmed, she said the men bought a bottle of Absolut vodka for the table and when that was finished bought a second one.

“They never told me they were with Obama,” she said, addressing published reports that some agents may have openly boasted to prostitutes that they were there protecting the president. “They were very discreet.”

A taxi driver who picked up the woman at the Hotel Caribe the morning of the encounter said he heard her and another woman recount the dispute over payment. When approached by a reporter for The New York Times, the woman was initially reluctant to speak about what had occurred. As she nervously told her story, a friend gave details that seemed to corroborate her account.

There was a language gap between the woman, 24, who declined to give her full name, and the American man who sat beside her at the bar and eventually

invited her to his room. She agreed, stopped on th e way to buy condoms but told him he would have to give her a gift. He asked how much. Not knowing h e worked for Mr. Obama but figuring he was a well-heeled foreigner, she said, she told him $800.

The price alone, she said, indicates she is an esc ort, not a prostitute. “You have higher rank,” she said. “An escort is someone who a man can take ou t to dinner. She can dress nicely, wear nice makeu p, speak and act like a lady. That’s me.”

By 6:30 the next morning, after being awoken by a telephone call from the hotel front desk reminding her that, under the hotel’s rules for prostitutes , she had to leave, whatever deal the two had agre ed on had broken down. She recalled that the man t old her he had been drunk when they discussed the price. He countered with an offer of 50,000 pesos, the equivalent of about $30.

Disgusted with such a low amount, she pressed the matter. He became angry, ordered her out of the ro om and called her an expletive, she said.

She said she was crying and went across the hall, where another escort had spent the night with an A merican man from the same group. Both women began trying to get the money.

They knocked on the door but got no response. She threatened to call the police, but the man’s frien d, who appeared on the scene, begged her not to, s aying they did not want trouble. Finally, she said , she left to go home but came across a police off icer stationed in the hallway, who called in an En glish-speaking colleague.

He accompanied her back to the room and the disput e escalated. Two other Americans from the club eme rged from their rooms and stood guard in front of their friend’s locked door. The two Colombian offi

cers tried to argue the woman’s case.

A hotel security officer arrived. Eventually, she lowered her demand to $250, which she said was the amount she has to pay the man who helps find her customers. Eager to resolve the matter fast, the American men eventually gave her a combination of dollars and pesos worth about $225, and she left.

It was only days later, once a friend she had shared her story with called to say that the dispute had made the television news, that she learned that the man was a Secret Service agent.

She is dismayed, she said, that the news reports described her as a prostitute, as if she walks the streets picking up just anyone.

“It’s the same, but it’s different,” she said, indicating that she is much more selective about her clients and charges much more than a streetwalker. “It’s like when you buy a fine rum or a BlackBerry or an iPhone. They have a different price.”

The woman veered between anger and fear as she told of her misadventure. “I’m scared,” she said, indicating that she did not want the man she spent the night with to get into any trouble but feared that he might retaliate.

“This is something really big,” she said. “This is the government of the United States. I have nervous attacks. I cry all the time.”

The Secret Service declined to comment on the woman’s account, but a United States official who has been briefed on the inquiry said the details were generally consistent with what agents have said. “On the whole, it’s pretty accurate,” the official said, indicating that the woman at the center of the dispute at the hotel had not yet been interviewed.

The Secret Service has expanded its investigation to look at its employees' conduct on previous presidential trips, the person briefed on the investigation said. So far, investigators have not uncovered anything similar to what apparently happened in Colombia last week, the person said.

Besides the 11 Secret Service personnel, 10 military personnel, including explosives experts and dog handlers, are under scrutiny in a separate Pentagon investigation, officials said.

"There was no evidence that these women were seeking these guys out — that they were waiting for Secret Service agents — but all of that is being looked into," said Representative Peter T. King, the chairman of the House Committee on Homeland Security.

Mr. King, a New York Republican, who was briefed on the matter this week by Mr. Sullivan, said the Secret Service agents at the hotel had provided conflicting reports about the night's events. "Some of them were saying they didn't know they were prostitutes," he said. "Some are saying they were women at the bar. I understand that there was quite a bit of drinking."

"I fully support what Mark is doing," Mr. King said of Mr. Sullivan. "I know that he wanted to take strong action once he had a legal basis."

Senator Susan Collins of Maine, the senior Republican on the Homeland Security Committee, said the woman's account generally comported with what Secret Service officials said occurred. But she noted differences in some details, including the specifics of the amount of money in dispute. "It helps the Secret Service if in fact the guy did not identify himself," said Ms. Collins, who has raised concerns about a potential security breach.

In a letter to Mr. Sullivan, Representative Darrel

l Issa, Republican of California, the chairman of the House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform, and the committee’s ranking member, Elijah Cummings, Democrat of Maryland, said the Secret Service personnel in Colombia had brought “foreign nationals into contact with sensitive security information” and were potentially exposed to “blackmail and other forms of potential compromise.”

Mr. Issa and Mr. Cummings listed 10 requests for information that they want answered by May 1. “Your swift and decisive action in response to this scandal has given us confidence that the agency will complete a thorough investigation and take steps to ensure that similar lapses in judgment will never again jeopardize the important work of the U.S. Secret Service,” the representatives said.

As for cooperating with the investigators for the Secret Service who are seeking to interview the prostitutes as well as witnesses from the bar and outside the hotel room, the woman who was involved in the payment dispute said she was not interested in that. She said she was planning to leave Cartagena soon.

William Neuman reported from Cartagena, Colombia, and Michael S. Schmidt from Washington. Eric Schmitt contributed reporting from Washington.
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NYT-0419: FASHION & STYLE: SKIN DEEP
Making the Most of Nothing ... By DANIEL JONES
For men with hair loss, an alternative to baldness is head shaving, which has gone prime time, and with it come pros and cons.
===== notyet (2 pages)
ALTHOUGH I am married with no plans to be single, I recently signed up for several online dating sites as research for a book I am writing. The process was fun until I saw a question asking me to desc
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ribe my hair. I didn’t want to check the “bald” box. I wanted to say I had a shaved head. But a “shaved head” wasn’t a choice. (What? No write-ins?) So I sighed and checked bald, no doubt setting off an instant downgrade of my profile.

I noticed that several women listed “bald” as a trait they hoped to avoid. A few even called it a “deal-breaker.” That I was merely lurking on these sites, not actually looking for a date, failed to ease the sting of prerejection.

Yet their aversion came as no surprise. Like anyone, I have seen how the ravages of male pattern baldness can make even the most youthful and handsome men look old and clownish. But that’s only part of the problem. What is particularly insidious about hair loss is the toll it takes on a man’s ego during its slow but steady march, the years of mirror gazing and shower-drain inspecting as he helplessly monitors his hairline’s inexorable retreat. The options for dealing with it (comb-overs, hair plugs, toupees, topical hair-growing slime, or, most humiliating, the infomercial powder-in-a-can product that promises to fill in thin spots with the squeeze of a spray pump) only aggravate feelings of inadequacy.

It’s as if he’s a fragile flower held together with duct tape and glue, deathly afraid of rain, wind or a flirtatious hair-mussing from a colleague. It’s no way to live.

Luckily, I hit my hair-loss turning point at a time when there is, if not a solution to baldness, then a cooler alternative: head shaving. Not that the Mr. Clean look hasn’t been the choice for some: soldiers, competitive swimmers, ascetics like those in the Hare Krishna movement. But if you weren’t the sort of person who spent his days wearing a saffron robe, a Speedo or a sidearm, chances are you didn’t shave your head either.

In this millennium, however, it’s a whole new bald game. Head shaving has gone prime time. And not a moment too soon for guys like me, who would never have had the guts to take such a drastic measure if so many men hadn’t acted so bravely to make an odd look so mysteriously hip. Macho types are inspired by the likes of Jason Statham and Vin Diesel; music fans have Pitbull, Chris Daughtry and Michael Stipe; intellectuals can look to Chuck Close and Sir Ben Kingsley; and aspiring athletes can air-slap high-fives with Andre Agassi, Michael Jordan, Kelly Slater and countless others.

Thanks to such pioneering royalty, commoners no longer have to deal with creeping baldness as farmers do with droughts, desperately nurturing, praying, begging and paying to get something (anything) to grow atop our infertile plains. Instead we’ve been liberated to rise up, stand tall and torch our fields with a pre-emptive razor strike (and to emerge from the flames like Samuel L. Jackson or Dwayne Johnson a k a the Rock, arms rippling and grizzled domes beaded with sweat).

Psychologically, too, the appeal is obvious. Shaving your balding head is like breaking up with someone before he or she can break up with you. Or like marching into your boss’s office and saying: “You can’t fire me. I quit.”

After all, nothing screams “gradual decline” like thinning or retreating hair. It’s a constant voice of anxiety whining, “It’s only going to get worse!” But with a shaved head, it can’t get any worse. There’s no voice of anxiety. You’ve already gone ahead and chosen the nuclear option.

We men already are facing way too many gradual declines without adding baldness to the mix. Compared with the women in our lives, we’re fading in nearly every category: educational achievement, income

growth and general necessity. For years we've no longer been needed (at least not in person) even to make a baby. And along comes this "mancession" to inflame our sense of passive victimhood even further. Can we really afford to acquiesce in the face of yet another slow deterioration by standing idly by as our last clumps of active hair follicles decide when they would like to close up shop?

Here's what to do. Grab a razor and shaving cream, and step into the shower. (Depending on how long and thick your horseshoe of hair is, you may want to hack it first with a beard trimmer.) Lather up and commence shaving. Keep going until your entire scalp is uniformly (and freakishly) smooth. Be careful not to nick your ears or shave off your eyebrows.

Now you have entered the Mr. Potato Head phase: You have a clean palette (or pate) on which to create your new look. Time to accessorize. After all, you don't want your head looking as if it's nothing more than a doughy thumblike appendage protruding from your collar. You need to give your potato definition.

Depending on your body type and profession, you have several options. There is the architect look, which typically would include flamboyant designer glasses and some sort of facial hair, like a stubble goatee or perhaps a Howie Mandel soul patch (not recommended). Rockers and artists can be creative with ear hoops, piercings, tattoos and maybe some zany sideburn carvings. Athletes and tough guys will probably want to forgo glasses, jewelry and facial-hair features for a whole-body approach that involves working out 24/7 until their bodies and heads coalesce into a kind of flawless, sexy uber muscle upon which hair would look unnatural. At that point, they may want to accessorize with a tight T-shirt and wraparound sunglasses.

The pluses of head shaving, now that it’s in vogue , are almost too many to count: No chance of going gray, no wet hair after a shower or swim, no hair cut bill, no bed head, no risk of infestation with hair lice from your third grader.

The minuses are almost nonexistent, though you wil l need to be careful when wearing a cycling helmet to avoid inflicting upon yourself a bizarre (if g eometrically pleasing) sunburn. Another minus is a direct result of head shaving’s soaring popularit y: It’s to the point where many spouses, partners and children of head shavers may find it hard to f ind their loved ones in urban coffee shops or at j azz clubs, where head shavers tend to congregate i n large numbers.

Yet even that scary scenario can have its sweet up side. Last summer while attending a James Taylor o utdoor concert (the kind of event where, as you ma y imagine, you can hardly spit without hitting mul tiple shaved heads), I was startled when a girl, 3 or 4 years old, toddled up and grabbed my leg, se eking comfort in the crowd. And she didn’t look up or let go until another man — a bespectacled, goa teed, shaved-head father just like me — called out to her and rushed over. He and I exchanged a smil e of recognition as I handed her back. Poor little thing. She had become so lost in a sea of lovable shaved heads that she couldn’t figure out which o ne she loved most.

We’ve come a long way, baldies.

Daniel Jones is the editor of the Modern Love colu mn and the anthology “The Bastard on the Couch.”
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NYT-0420: OP-ED: CAMPAIGN STOPS
The Boys Who Cried Fox ... By NICOLE HEMMER
How did we get to the point where Newt Gingrich an
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d Rick Santorum could complain about the bias of F
ox News and National Review?
===== notyet
Just last week, Newt Gingrich delighted observers
on both the right and the left when he slammed Fox
 News for “bias” and “distortion.” Gingrich claime
d that the conservative news channel slanted its c
overage to favor the less conservative establishme
nt candidate, Mitt Romney. At first this seemed to
 be just another example of the former speaker’s a
bility to unabashedly embrace contradictory ideas.
 This is, after all, a man who saw nothing inconsi
stent about inviting reporters to the “private mee
ting” with Delaware Tea Party leaders where he mad
e his comments.

But accusing Fox News of pro-establishment bias is
 not simply a quirk of the Gingrich mind. In mid-M
arch, Rick Santorum (like Gingrich, a former Fox N
ews contributor) accused the network of boosting f
or Romney. “He has Fox News shilling for him every
 day,” Santorum grumbled to Fox News Radio host Br
ian Kilmeade. “No offense, Brian, but I see it.” T
he conservative journalist Robert Stacy McCain cal
led out Fox for “a clear bias toward front-runners
.” He was backed up by a pair of columnists who re
ported concerns “that Fox News is morphing into ju
st another liberal leaning voice.”

Nor do conservatives reserve the bias complaint fo
r Fox News. When National Review promoted the cand
idacy of Mitt Romney in mid-December, it stoked ou
trage among the base. Rush Limbaugh dismissed the
magazine as part of the “Republican establishment
media.” The promotion of Romney, the nephew of Nat
ional Review’s founder claimed, “proves only that
this is no longer the magazine of William F. Buckl
ey, Jr. My uncle would be appalled.” Commenters on
 National Review Online unfurled the nickname Nati
onal Romney Online, which soon began popping up on
 other conservative sites.

The funny thing is that this role reversal is the end product of a process that was set in motion by the conservative media. Having spent decades promoting the charge of bias, they have helped strip it of meaning. These days, bias translates roughly to “reporting something I don’t like,” a reflexive defense against stories that cut against conservative interests. (Liberals claim bias, too, but here we’re focused on the curious spectacle of right-on-right crime.)

That definitional drift entered new territory in 2008, when the mere fact of reporting on Alaskan Governor Sarah Palin became a hostile act. When the story broke about Palin’s pregnant daughter, the Republican National Convention transformed into an airing of grievances against liberal media. Most memorably, Arkansas Governor Mike Huckabee thanked “the elite media” for unifying the Republican Party behind the ticket, calling their coverage “tackier than a costume change at a Madonna concert.”

A few weeks later Katie Couric asked Palin what newspapers and magazines she regularly read, only to get a fumbling “all of them” in response. This episode led conservatives to lambaste Couric for her anti-Palin slant. Only those with a very elastic concept of bias could interpret asking a vice-presidential nominee about her reading habits as lobbing a mortar-round rather than a softball.

The 2008 election involved an unusually expansive use of media-bias claims, but they didn’t start there. To trace their roots requires going back to the 1950s, when modern conservative media first appeared. In the midst of an anticommunist liberal consensus, a new conservative movement emerged. The messengers of that movement — a group of men (and a few women) — developed publishing houses, periodicals and radio programs dedicated to rolling back the liberal tide at home and the communist threat abroad. They sought to uproot the liberal anti-co

mmunism of the day, which called for containing co mmunism where it was. The right militated against this policy, seeing it as both morally and strateg ically flawed. How could America be content to sim ply contain an evil enemy bent on eradicating free nations everywhere?

Conservatives saw established media as the major o bstacle to advancing political alternatives. Exist ing media, they believed, professed objectivity bu t in fact shored up the liberal establishment. The new conservative media made no bones about their own tilt. The newsweekly Human Events called itsel f “objective” but “not impartial,” explaining that the publication “looks at events through eyes tha t are biased in favor of limited constitutional go vernment, local self-government, private enterpris e and individual liberty,” principles that “repres ented the bias of the Founding Fathers.” This stor y is more familiar at National Review, with its ce ntral purpose “to counteract the reprehensible jou rnalistic trend toward a genteel uniformity of opi nion” that “permeates our Liberal press.”

They had a point. Mid-century American media refle cted the liberal consensus of its day. Not uniform ly, of course. The Chicago Tribune sustained the M idwestern conservatism of Robert Taft long after t he hero of the hard-nosed, isolationist Republican Right died in 1953. And to say the press reflecte d liberalism is not to say it did so consciously o r conspiratorially, as many conservatives claimed, nor to say it stifled only one type of opinion. T ry being a socialist or anywhere to the left of Ad lai Stevenson in the 1950s and 1960s and you would quickly find the limits of media’s leftward lean. Still, the bias charge, which equated “liberalism ” with “the establishment,” was rooted at least pa rtly in reality.

That factual basis turned media-bias accusations i nto a potent weapon, one whose influence trickled

up to the presidency when Richard Nixon took office in 1969. The media had long been Nixon's bete noire. The day after he lost his 1962 gubernatorial race, Nixon blasted the press for supporting his opponent. "You won't have Nixon to kick around anymore, gentlemen," he growled, "because this is my last press conference."

It wasn't: his October 1973 press conference was a master-class in attacking journalists. After lashing out at the assembled press for "outrageous, vicious, distorted reporting" on Watergate, Nixon added, "Don't get the impression that you arouse my anger. You see, one can only be angry with those he respects."

Yet Nixon hardly invented complaints about the news media. Such complaints were practically a presidential rite of passage. They stretched back at least to 1805, when Thomas Jefferson spent a healthy chunk of his second inaugural address protesting the press's assaults on his administration. "The abuses of an institution so important to freedom and science are deeply to be regretted," he said, lamenting that the press that so bedeviled him had managed to escape the "wholesome punishment" of defamation suits.

But a hostile press was not the same thing as a biased press. When Vice-President Spiro Agnew took a swipe at "a closed fraternity of privileged men, elected by no one" in a 1969 speech on Vietnam, he triggered a national conversation about bias. The attack troubled members of established media. "My feeling is that the White House is out to get us, all the liberals in the media," one CBS commentator worried. "We're in for some dangerous times."

For conservatives, however, Agnew's words signaled that their message was breaking through. Right-wing media reverberated with praise for the vice-president. On the conservative radio program "The Man

ion Forum," Red Motley, the publisher of Parade magazine, called Agnew's indictment "timely, and proper." Buckley declared that the vice-president had "done an extremely useful service" in unleashing what National Review saluted as "a counterattack in the struggle for public opinion." The right then set about providing evidence of the bias Agnew condemned.

Edith Efron, a writer for TV Guide, began documenting liberal bias for a book called "The News Twisters," which appeared in 1971. With research funds that Buckley made available, Efron compiled what purported to be a scientific study of liberal bias. Her method? Watching news coverage of the 1968 election and tallying up favorable and unfavorable comments about Richard Nixon.

This methodology was clearly susceptible to confirmation bias, and sure enough, Efron concluded network news followed "the elitist-liberal-left line in all controversies." (An internal review by CBS in response to the book found, also unsurprisingly, that its coverage was balanced and largely neutral.) Despite its weaknesses, Efron's book won accolades across conservative media. "The News Twisters" soon became a best-seller, thanks to Nixon. The president ordered Special Counsel Charles Colson to get the book on the best sellers list of The Times, which Colson managed by buying out the stores used to determine sales numbers.

Efron's slipshod, self-confirming method reveals one of the weaknesses of the bias argument, as well as the reason Fox News has fallen prey to the accusation from its right. The words "liberal bias," "establishment" and now "lamestream media" have become a sloppy shorthand for an entire system of beliefs. This has its parallels on the left, where reflexive cries of "rigged elections" and "Faux News" create the same divisions. For both sides, the world can be easily split into us and them, conser

vatives on one side, liberals on the other, locked in a pitched ideological battle for political power. When it’s us, it’s truth; when it’s them, it’s bias.

So when the anti-Romney crowd started seeing Fox News and National Review as “them,” it could only mean one thing. Though long considered bulwarks against pro-establishment (read: liberal) bias, these once-trustworthy media outlets were now hopelessly riddled with it. When everyone not with you is against you, the world becomes a bleak place indeed.

This is the dynamic Newt Gingrich exploited in Delaware. After his scornful rebuke of CNN’s John King in a January debate, it’s unlikely the former speaker meant it when he told the gathered Tea Party crowd that “CNN is less biased than Fox.” By deploying the media-bias charge against an institution developed to combat it, Gingrich demonstrated just how meaningless the indictment has become.

Nicole Hemmer is a postdoctoral fellow at the United States Studies Centre at the University of Sydney.
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NYT-0422
In Uprooting of Kurds, Iraq Tests a Fragile National Unity ... By TIM ARANGO
Facing attacks, Kurds are fleeing for Kurdish-majority areas amid a deteriorating relationship between Kurdish leaders and the Arab-dominated government in Baghdad.
===== notyet
KHANAQIN, Iraq — In January, the dismembered body of Wisam Jumai, a Kurdish intelligence officer, was discovered in a field in Sadiyah, a small town in northeastern Iraq. Soon his family and friends, one after another, received text messages offering a choice: leave or be killed.
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“Wisam has been killed,” read one message sent to a cousin. “Wait for your turn. If you want your life, leave Sadiyah.”

After Mr. Jumai’s killing, nearly three dozen Kurdish families fled their homes and moved here, according to local officials, to the sanctuary of a city that is claimed by the government in Baghdad but patrolled by Kurdish forces. Other Kurds from the area have come here after being pushed out over property disputes that can be traced to Saddam Hussein’s policy in the 1970s of expelling Kurds and resettling Arabs.

Whether by terrorism or judicial order, the continuing displacement of Iraq’s Kurdish minority lays bare the unfinished business of reconciliation in the wake of the American military’s withdrawal, and it is a symptom of the rapidly deteriorating relationship between the semiautonomous Kurdish government based in Erbil and the central government in Baghdad.

The schism, which is most immediately over sharing oil wealth but is more deeply about historical grievances and Kurdish aspirations for independence, raises serious questions about the future of a unified Iraq. The crisis, American officials say, is far more grave than the political tensions between the Shiite-dominated government of Prime Minister Nuri Kamal al-Maliki and the country’s Sunni Arab minority set off by an arrest warrant on terrorism charges issued in December for Tariq al-Hashimi, the Sunni vice president.

The Kurds, unlike the Sunnis, have their own security forces, oil reserves, ports of entry and even their own de facto foreign policy, with envoys operating in other countries. This could eventually lead them to seek more independence from Baghdad.

“Fearing a resurgence of a strong central state, Kurdish leaders want to leave Iraq, and they appear to believe their moment to do so may soon arrive,” wrote Joost Hiltermann, an analyst at the International Crisis Group, in a recent report.

In the latest chapter of a long-simmering dispute, Kurdish authorities have shut off their oil exports, claiming that Baghdad is behind on payments to oil companies working in the Kurdish region. Officials in Baghdad, angered by this and by Kurdistan’s oil deal with Exxon Mobil that bypasses the central government, in turn threatened to cut off billions of dollars that flow to Kurdistan from the Iraqi budget. Massoud Barzani, the president of the Kurdish regional government, has called Mr. Maliki a dictator and expressed fears that Baghdad might use American-supplied F-16 warplanes against the Kurds. Both sides have accused the other of smuggling oil and siphoning off profits.

“I cannot respect myself, working with the people in Baghdad,” said Mohammed Ihsan, the Kurdish government’s representative in Baghdad, who is calling for a referendum in Kurdistan on independence, something he acknowledged was unfeasible in the short term because of Western opposition. “But a lot of people are thinking that way,” he said.

American officials are concerned that Kurdish leaders are considering seeking a deal to sell oil to Turkey, in an effort to become economically self-sufficient. Such a pact would probably be illegal and unlikely before 2014, when Kurdistan is expected to complete its own oil pipeline.

“The Kurds hope, however, that Turkey’s thirst for oil and gas will align with their own thirst for statehood,” Mr. Hiltermann wrote in his report.

Kurds are captive to the painful memories of repression under Hussein; like the Sunni and Shiite Ara

bs, who fought a brutal sectarian war, the Kurds, too, cling to a narrow identity, theirs defined by ethnicity, rather than national citizenship.

“How can we forget?” said Bakir Karim, a member of the Kurdish Parliament in Erbil who described Iraq as a “fake state” created by the British after World War I that, he said, has only “harmed us and tortured us.”

He added, “If you ask any Kurd if he wants independence from Iraq, without hesitation he will say yes.”

Khanaqin, a few miles from the Iranian border, lies at the end of a belt of rugged land in northern Diyala Province that runs from Sadiyah through Jalawla, another disputed town. It is also a place of ethnic rivalry, where Arabs and Kurds are trying the soft ways of democracy to settle feuds that nevertheless can still end in bloodshed.

Outside a Kurdish political office in Jalawla is a mural of three men, representing the area’s main ethnicities: Arab, Kurd and Turkmen. “We are all brothers,” it declares.

Inside, Khader Mohammed, who directs the office, waved an intelligence report he recently received from authorities in Baquba, Diyala’s capital. It claimed that the Islamic State of Iraq, an umbrella group of militants, would “attempt a number of attacks to destabilize the security situation in the province.” Among the targets: Mr. Mohammed.

“I’m not afraid,” he said. “This is my duty. I have to do my work.”

Karim Ali, 60, is among those who may soon leave. Like many Kurds here, Mr. Ali was forced out in the mid-1970s as part of the Hussein government’s “Arabization” policy, which aimed to dilute ethnic o

pposition. He resettled in Ramadi, the capital of Anbar Province, but reclaimed his old home in 2003 as some Arabs, fearing revenge from the Kurds, de cided to return to their original homes in other r egions.

Though a court was set up to handle claims stemmin g from the Arabization policy, Kurds say that prop erty records that would verify their ownership cla ims were destroyed. As a result, Arabs are now rec laiming homes that were seized from Kurdish famili es in the Hussein years.

This, Mr. Ali said, is what happened to him. “This belonged to my father,” he said, standing outside his home. “In 20 days, I have to evacuate my hous e.” He said he was taken to a police station in ha ndcuffs several months ago and forced to sign pape rs turning the property over to an Arab who held t he deed from 1975 to 2003.

“It’s the same as during Saddam,” Mr. Ali said. “I t’s even worse now because I was young then, and n ow I’m old.”

Local officials say nearly 400 houses in Jalawla a re being turned over in a similar fashion. Mr. Ihs an, the Kurdish representative in Baghdad, is also involved in matters related to these disputed are as. He said the process was rife with corruption: “We have the most corrupted judicial system in the world.” (A 2009 report on internal displacement i n Iraq by the Brookings Institution and the Univer sity of Bern called the process one of “incomprehe nsion” and “frustration.”)

“It’s getting worse,” Mr. Ihsan said. “The America ns left without finishing the job. We are worried that history is going to repeat itself.”

For their part, Arabs in the area say that they ar e also targets of terrorist attacks, and that the

property transfers are the result of a fair and le gal process.

On a recent afternoon, Rasmiya Ahmed, the mother o f Mr. Jumai, the murdered officer, unzipped a blue nylon pouch and out tumbled the strips of pills t hat provide her with a measure of relief from her sleeplessness and anxiety. Another son, a soldier, was killed last year. “I don’t have anyone now,” she said.

The Kurds may be free from the Baath Party’s bruta lity, but for Ms. Ahmed things were better then, b ecause, she said, “at least I had my boys.”

Duraid Adnan contributed reporting from Khanaqin, and employees of The New York Times from Diyala an d Erbil Provinces.
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NYT-0422: OPINION
The Flight From Conversation ... By SHERRY TURKLE
We use technology to keep one another at distances we can control: not too close, not too far, just right: the Goldilocks effect.
===== notyet
WE live in a technological universe in which we ar e always communicating. And yet we have sacrificed conversation for mere connection.

At home, families sit together, texting and readin g e-mail. At work executives text during board mee tings. We text (and shop and go on Facebook) durin g classes and when we’re on dates. My students tel l me about an important new skill: it involves mai ntaining eye contact with someone while you text s omeone else; it’s hard, but it can be done.

Over the past 15 years, I’ve studied technologies of mobile connection and talked to hundreds of peo ple of all ages and circumstances about their plug ged-in lives. I’ve learned that the little devices
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most of us carry around are so powerful that they change not only what we do, but also who we are.

We've become accustomed to a new way of being "alone together." Technology-enabled, we are able to be with one another, and also elsewhere, connected to wherever we want to be. We want to customize our lives. We want to move in and out of where we are because the thing we value most is control over where we focus our attention. We have gotten used to the idea of being in a tribe of one, loyal to our own party.

Our colleagues want to go to that board meeting but pay attention only to what interests them. To some this seems like a good idea, but we can end up hiding from one another, even as we are constantly connected to one another.

A businessman laments that he no longer has colleagues at work. He doesn't stop by to talk; he doesn't call. He says that he doesn't want to interrupt them. He says they're "too busy on their e-mail." But then he pauses and corrects himself. "I'm not telling the truth. I'm the one who doesn't want to be interrupted. I think I should. But I'd rather just do things on my BlackBerry."

A 16-year-old boy who relies on texting for almost everything says almost wistfully, "Someday, someday, but certainly not now, I'd like to learn how to have a conversation."

In today's workplace, young people who have grown up fearing conversation show up on the job wearing earphones. Walking through a college library or the campus of a high-tech start-up, one sees the same thing: we are together, but each of us is in our own bubble, furiously connected to keyboards and tiny touch screens. A senior partner at a Boston law firm describes a scene in his office. Young associates lay out their suite of technologies: lapt

ops, iPods and multiple phones. And then they put their earphones on. “Big ones. Like pilots. They t urn their desks into cockpits.” With the young law yers in their cockpits, the office is quiet, a qui et that does not ask to be broken.

In the silence of connection, people are comforted by being in touch with a lot of people — carefull y kept at bay. We can’t get enough of one another if we can use technology to keep one another at di stances we can control: not too close, not too far , just right. I think of it as a Goldilocks effect.

Texting and e-mail and posting let us present the self we want to be. This means we can edit. And if we wish to, we can delete. Or retouch: the voice, the flesh, the face, the body. Not too much, not too little — just right.

Human relationships are rich; they’re messy and de manding. We have learned the habit of cleaning the m up with technology. And the move from conversati on to connection is part of this. But it’s a proce ss in which we shortchange ourselves. Worse, it se ems that over time we stop caring, we forget that there is a difference.

We are tempted to think that our little “sips” of online connection add up to a big gulp of real con versation. But they don’t. E-mail, Twitter, Facebo ok, all of these have their places — in politics, commerce, romance and friendship. But no matter ho w valuable, they do not substitute for conversation.

Connecting in sips may work for gathering discrete bits of information or for saying, “I am thinking about you.” Or even for saying, “I love you.” But connecting in sips doesn’t work as well when it c omes to understanding and knowing one another. In conversation we tend to one another. (The word its elf is kinetic; it’s derived from words that mean to move, together.) We can attend to tone and nuan

ce. In conversation, we are called upon to see things from another’s point of view.

FACE-TO-FACE conversation unfolds slowly. It teaches patience. When we communicate on our digital devices, we learn different habits. As we ramp up the volume and velocity of online connections, we start to expect faster answers. To get these, we ask one another simpler questions; we dumb down our communications, even on the most important matters. It is as though we have all put ourselves on cable news. Shakespeare might have said, “We are consum’d with that which we were nourish’d by.”

And we use conversation with others to learn to converse with ourselves. So our flight from conversation can mean diminished chances to learn skills of self-reflection. These days, social media continually asks us what’s “on our mind,” but we have little motivation to say something truly self-reflective. Self-reflection in conversation requires trust. It’s hard to do anything with 3,000 Facebook friends except connect.

As we get used to being shortchanged on conversation and to getting by with less, we seem almost willing to dispense with people altogether. Serious people muse about the future of computer programs as psychiatrists. A high school sophomore confides to me that he wishes he could talk to an artificial intelligence program instead of his dad about dating; he says the A.I. would have so much more in its database. Indeed, many people tell me they hope that as Siri, the digital assistant on Apple’s iPhone, becomes more advanced, “she” will be more and more like a best friend — one who will listen when others won’t.

During the years I have spent researching people and their relationships with technology, I have often heard the sentiment “No one is listening to me.” I believe this feeling helps explain why it is s

o appealing to have a Facebook page or a Twitter f
eed — each provides so many automatic listeners. A
nd it helps explain why — against all reason — so
many of us are willing to talk to machines that se
em to care about us. Researchers around the world
are busy inventing sociable robots, designed to be
companions to the elderly, to children, to all of us.

One of the most haunting experiences during my res
earch came when I brought one of these robots, des
igned in the shape of a baby seal, to an elder-car
e facility, and an older woman began to talk to it
about the loss of her child. The robot seemed to
be looking into her eyes. It seemed to be followin
g the conversation. The woman was comforted.

And so many people found this amazing. Like the so
phomore who wants advice about dating from artific
ial intelligence and those who look forward to com
puter psychiatry, this enthusiasm speaks to how mu
ch we have confused conversation with connection a
nd collectively seem to have embraced a new kind o
f delusion that accepts the simulation of compassi
on as sufficient unto the day. And why would we wa
nt to talk about love and loss with a machine that
has no experience of the arc of human life? Have
we so lost confidence that we will be there for on
e another?

WE expect more from technology and less from one a
nother and seem increasingly drawn to technologies
that provide the illusion of companionship withou
t the demands of relationship. Always-on/always-on
-you devices provide three powerful fantasies: tha
t we will always be heard; that we can put our att
ention wherever we want it to be; and that we neve
r have to be alone. Indeed our new devices have tu
rned being alone into a problem that can be solved.

When people are alone, even for a few moments, the
y fidget and reach for a device. Here connection w
orks like a symptom, not a cure, and our constant,

reflexive impulse to connect shapes a new way of being.

Think of it as “I share, therefore I am.” We use technology to define ourselves by sharing our thoughts and feelings as we’re having them. We used to think, “I have a feeling; I want to make a call.” Now our impulse is, “I want to have a feeling; I need to send a text.”

So, in order to feel more, and to feel more like ourselves, we connect. But in our rush to connect, we flee from solitude, our ability to be separate and gather ourselves. Lacking the capacity for solitude, we turn to other people but don’t experience them as they are. It is as though we use them, need them as spare parts to support our increasingly fragile selves.

We think constant connection will make us feel less lonely. The opposite is true. If we are unable to be alone, we are far more likely to be lonely. If we don’t teach our children to be alone, they will know only how to be lonely.

I am a partisan for conversation. To make room for it, I see some first, deliberate steps. At home, we can create sacred spaces: the kitchen, the dining room. We can make our cars “device-free zones.” We can demonstrate the value of conversation to our children. And we can do the same thing at work. There we are so busy communicating that we often don’t have time to talk to one another about what really matters. Employees asked for casual Fridays; perhaps managers should introduce conversational Thursdays. Most of all, we need to remember — in between texts and e-mails and Facebook posts — to listen to one another, even to the boring bits, because it is often in unedited moments, moments in which we hesitate and stutter and go silent, that we reveal ourselves to one another.

I spend the summers at a cottage on Cape Cod, and for decades I walked the same dunes that Thoreau o nce walked. Not too long ago, people walked with t heir heads up, looking at the water, the sky, the sand and at one another, talking. Now they often w alk with their heads down, typing. Even when they are with friends, partners, children, everyone is on their own devices.

So I say, look up, look at one another, and let’s s tart the conversation.

Sherry Turkle is a psychologist and professor at M .I.T. and the author, most recently, of “Alone Tog ether: Why We Expect More From Technology and Less From Each Other.”
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NYT-0422: MAGAZINE
How Exercise Could Lead to a Better Brain ... By GR ETCHEN REYNOLDS
A mouse that runs all the time is smarter than one that doesn't. Probably true for people, too.
===== notyet
The value of mental-training games may be speculat ive, as Dan Hurley writes in his article on the qu est to make ourselves smarter, but there is anothe r, easy-to-achieve, scientifically proven way to m ake yourself smarter. Go for a walk or a swim. For more than a decade, neuroscientists and physiolog ists have been gathering evidence of the beneficia l relationship between exercise and brainpower. Bu t the newest findings make it clear that this isn’ t just a relationship; it is the relationship. Usi ng sophisticated technologies to examine the worki ngs of individual neurons — and the makeup of brai n matter itself — scientists in just the past few months have discovered that exercise appears to bu ild a brain that resists physical shrinkage and en hance cognitive flexibility. Exercise, the latest neuroscience suggests, does more to bolster thinki
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ng than thinking does.

The most persuasive evidence comes from several new studies of lab animals living in busy, exciting cages. It has long been known that so-called “enriched” environments — homes filled with toys and engaging, novel tasks — lead to improvements in the brainpower of lab animals. In most instances, such environmental enrichment also includes a running wheel, because mice and rats generally enjoy running. Until recently, there was little research done to tease out the particular effects of running versus those of playing with new toys or engaging the mind in other ways that don’t increase the heart rate.

So, last year a team of researchers led by Justin S. Rhodes, a psychology professor at the Beckman Institute for Advanced Science and Technology at the University of Illinois, gathered four groups of mice and set them into four distinct living arrangements. One group lived in a world of sensual and gustatory plenty, dining on nuts, fruits and cheeses, their food occasionally dusted with cinnamon, all of it washed down with variously flavored waters. Their “beds” were colorful plastic igloos occupying one corner of the cage. Neon-hued balls, plastic tunnels, nibble-able blocks, mirrors and seesaws filled other parts of the cage. Group 2 had access to all of these pleasures, plus they had small disc-shaped running wheels in their cages. A third group’s cages held no embellishments, and they received standard, dull kibble. And the fourth group’s homes contained the running wheels but no other toys or treats.

All the animals completed a series of cognitive tests at the start of the study and were injected with a substance that allows scientists to track changes in their brain structures. Then they ran, played or, if their environment was unenriched, lolled about in their cages for several months.

Afterward, Rhodes's team put the mice through the same cognitive tests and examined brain tissues. It turned out that the toys and tastes, no matter how stimulating, had not improved the animals' brains.

"Only one thing had mattered," Rhodes says, "and that's whether they had a running wheel." Animals that exercised, whether or not they had any other enrichments in their cages, had healthier brains and performed significantly better on cognitive tests than the other mice. Animals that didn't run, no matter how enriched their world was otherwise, did not improve their brainpower in the complex, lasting ways that Rhodes's team was studying. "They loved the toys," Rhodes says, and the mice rarely ventured into the empty, quieter portions of their cages. But unless they also exercised, they did not become smarter.

Why would exercise build brainpower in ways that thinking might not? The brain, like all muscles and organs, is a tissue, and its function declines with underuse and age. Beginning in our late 20s, most of us will lose about 1 percent annually of the volume of the hippocampus, a key portion of the brain related to memory and certain types of learning.

Exercise though seems to slow or reverse the brain's physical decay, much as it does with muscles. Although scientists thought until recently that humans were born with a certain number of brain cells and would never generate more, they now know better. In the 1990s, using a technique that marks newborn cells, researchers determined during autopsies that adult human brains contained quite a few new neurons. Fresh cells were especially prevalent in the hippocampus, indicating that neurogenesis — or the creation of new brain cells — was primarily occurring there. Even more heartening, scientists found that exercise jump-starts neurogenesis. Mic

e and rats that ran for a few weeks generally had about twice as many new neurons in their hippocampi as sedentary animals. Their brains, like other muscles, were bulking up.

But it was the ineffable effect that exercise had on the functioning of the newly formed neurons that was most startling. Brain cells can improve intellect only if they join the existing neural network, and many do not, instead rattling aimlessly around in the brain for a while before dying.

One way to pull neurons into the network, however, is to learn something. In a 2007 study, new brain cells in mice became looped into the animals' neural networks if the mice learned to navigate a water maze, a task that is cognitively but not physically taxing. But these brain cells were very limited in what they could do. When the researchers studied brain activity afterward, they found that the newly wired cells fired only when the animals navigated the maze again, not when they practiced other cognitive tasks. The learning encoded in those cells did not transfer to other types of rodent thinking.

Exercise, on the other hand, seems to make neurons nimble. When researchers in a separate study had mice run, the animals' brains readily wired many new neurons into the neural network. But those neurons didn't fire later only during running. They also lighted up when the animals practiced cognitive skills, like exploring unfamiliar environments. In the mice, running, unlike learning, had created brain cells that could multitask.

Just how exercise remakes minds on a molecular level is not yet fully understood, but research suggests that exercise prompts increases in something called brain-derived neurotropic factor, or B.D.N.F., a substance that strengthens cells and axons, fortifies the connections among neurons and sparks

neurogenesis. Scientists can’t directly study simi lar effects in human brains, but they have found t hat after workouts, most people display higher B.D .N.F. levels in their bloodstreams.

Few if any researchers think that more B.D.N.F. ex plains all of the brain changes associated with ex ercise. The full process almost certainly involves multiple complex biochemical and genetic cascades . A recent study of the brains of elderly mice, fo r instance, found 117 genes that were expressed di fferently in the brains of animals that began a pr ogram of running, compared with those that remaine d sedentary, and the scientists were looking at on ly a small portion of the many genes that might be expressed differently in the brain by exercise.

Whether any type of exercise will produce these de sirable effects is another unanswered and intrigui ng issue. “It’s not clear if the activity has to b e endurance exercise,” says the psychologist and n euroscientist Arthur F. Kramer, director of the Be ckman Institute at the University of Illinois and a pre-eminent expert on exercise and the brain. A limited number of studies in the past several year s have found cognitive benefits among older people who lifted weights for a year and did not otherwi se exercise. But most studies to date, and all ani mal experiments, have involved running or other ae robic activities.

Whatever the activity, though, an emerging message from the most recent science is that exercise nee dn’t be exhausting to be effective for the brain. When a group of 120 older men and women were assig ned to walking or stretching programs for a major 2011 study, the walkers wound up with larger hippo campi after a year. Meanwhile, the stretchers lost volume to normal atrophy. The walkers also displa yed higher levels of B.D.N.F. in their bloodstream s than the stretching group and performed better o n cognitive tests.

In effect, the researchers concluded, the walkers had regained two years or more of hippocampal youth. Sixty-five-year-olds had achieved the brains of 63-year-olds simply by walking, which is encouraging news for anyone worried that what we’re all facing as we move into our later years is a life of slow (or not so slow) mental decline.

Gretchen Reynolds writes the Phys Ed column for The Times’s Well blog. Her book, ‘‘The First 20 Minutes,’’ about the science of exercise, will be published this month.

Editor: Ilena Silverman
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NYT-0424: SCIENCE TIMES: BASICS
The Spirit of Sisterhood Is in the Air and on the Air ... By NATALIE ANGIER
Researchers have lately gathered evidence that female friendship is one of nature's preferred narrative tools.
===== notyet
When first we meet Hannah, the wondrously mopey mid-20s heroine of HBO’s new hit series “Girls,” she seems to have more strikes against her than a bowling alley at Fenway Park. Her parents have cut off her monthly stipend. Her literary-magazine boss refuses to turn her unpaid internship into a real job. Her atonal lover explores his sex fantasies on her awkwardly untitillated body. She lives in New York City. She majored in English.

Yet offsetting all those slings and risk factors is a powerful defense system: girlfriends. Hannah has a tight-knit network of three female confederates, one best friend and two sturdy runners-up; and while none of the girl-women can offer much material support, no spare bedroom in a rent-controlled apartment, they are each other’s emotional tourni
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quets. You, fat? Don’t make me laugh. An unpleasant doctor’s appointment? We’re going too. Lena Dunham, the creator and star of the series, has said that while her titular characters may all date men, female friendship is “the true romance of the show.”

As in urban jungles, so too in jungle jungles. Researchers have lately gathered abundant evidence that female friendship is one of nature’s preferred narrative tools.

In animals as diverse as African elephants and barnyard mice, blue monkeys of Kenya and feral horses of New Zealand, affiliative, longlasting and mutually beneficial relationships between females turn out to be the basic unit of social life, the force that not only binds existing groups together but explains why the animals’ ancestors bothered going herd in the first place.

Scientists are moving beyond the observational stage — watching as a couple of female monkeys groom each other into a state of hedonic near-liquefaction — to quantifying the benefits of that well-groomed friendship to both picking partners. Researchers have discovered that female chacma baboons with strong sororal bonds have lower levels of stress hormones, live significantly longer and rear a greater number of offspring to independence than do their less socialized peers.

Similarly, wild mares with female friends are harassed less often by stallions and have more surviving foals than do mares that lack social ties. Female mice allowed to choose a friend as a nesting partner will bear more pups than females forced to share straw space with a mouse they dislike.

And female elephants keep in touch with their chums through frequent exchanges of low-pitched vocalizations called rumbles. “We liken it to an elephant cellphone,” said Joseph Soltis, a research scien

tist who works with elephants at Disney’s Animal K ingdom in Florida. “They’re texting each other, I’ m over here. Where are you?”

Hannah may even be onto something primal, or at le ast primate, in setting the size of her inner circ le of friends. Researchers have determined that a female baboon with a small but devoted core of gro oming companions will be less prone to jagged spik es of the stress hormone cortisol than a female wh o casts her social net wide but not deep.

The ideal buddy count? “To have a top three seems to be what’s important here,” said Joan B. Silk, a primatologist at the University of California, Lo s Angeles. With a trio to lean on, she added, “you see the kind of strong, stable relationships that help females cope better with stress.”

Some signs of female camaraderie are easy to spot. Lionesses suckle each other’s cubs. Female spotte d hyenas greet each other through elaborate ceremo nies of mutual trust, lifting a leg and exposing t heir famously penislike genitals to their snufflin g sisters and their bone-crushing jaws.

Elephants touch trunks, share food, play lifeguard for the day. Dr. Soltis cited the time a female e lephant rescue the wayward baby of her closest fri end after it stumbled headlong into the elephant s ubmersion pool, by hauling the panicked calf out w ith her trunk. Hey Hortense where RU? Got Dumbo. B ring towel.

Sometimes displays of female friendship become hea ted, hyperbolic, a monkey chant for the home team. Marina Cords of Columbia University has spent mor e than 30 years studying the blue monkeys of Kenya , 10-pound primates that, their name notwithstandi ng, are really charcoal gray.

She has seen many violent territorial disputes bet

ween neighboring monkey groups, in which the adult females line up to fight in the treetops, the adult males mostly hang back to watch, and the young monkeys scamper obliviously below. The females scream, lunge, bite, rip the flesh of an enemy's calf down to a bloody frill round the ankle. And when the battle ends, the salon sessions begin.

"There's a frenzy of grooming among the females in the same group," Dr. Cords said. "You see them huddling together in clusters, with individuals scooting from one huddle to another, as though everybody is trying to groom as many individuals as possible." They comb and pluck with their fingers, soothe scabs and wounds with their lips.

Through grooming, the monkeys decompress, and remind one another that their fates are still linked. After all, should a group of blue monkeys grow too large it will split into factions, and the sisterly comrades of today may be flaying you a new pair of anklets tomorrow. Shall we groom?

In other cases, affiliative behaviors are subtle and difficult to track. For years female chimpanzees were viewed as asocial, content to forage alone or with dependent offspring while largely ignoring other females of their group. The males may be legendary kin-based allies, born and reared together and wedded to their natal turf. But as the so-called dispersing sex, female chimpanzees must leave their birthplace at puberty and seek asylum in another group, which means being surrounded by unrelated females all competing for the same goods. What's to like about that?

In a 10-year study of West African chimpanzees, however, Julia Lehmann of Roehampton University in London discovered that at least for her population, the stereotype of the standoffish female was wrong. Her adult females were cultivating friendships and expressing their affections in myriad ways — s

taying within eye contact as they foraged by day, resting back to back while relaxing at home.

“Most of the females in my study have at least one close associate with whom they always hang out,” Dr. Lehmann said. Coalitions between the males may be showier, she said, but female friendships appear more resilient, lasting until one member of the bonded pair dies.

Dr. Lehmann does not yet know why female chimpanzees seek female friends. But it’s not as a deterrent to male aggression. “Male chimpanzees are so dominant that even two females can’t do much against them,” Dr. Lehmann said.

Instead, Dr. Lehmann and others suspect that the story for chimpanzees will turn out to be similar to what’s been shown in female baboons. For baboons, friendship is not about extra weaponry. It’s about biochemistry and predictability.

According to Robert M. Seyfarth of the University of Pennsylvania, who with his colleague Dorothy L. Cheney, recently reported in the Annual Review of Psychology on the evolutionary origins of friendship, baboon life is extremely stressful, especially for females.

Male baboons are comparatively huge and nasty. The ones you know boss you around and bite off the tip of your ear. The ones you don’t are infanticidal. Leopards are always leaping. Food is scarce.

“You have to have somebody to hang onto,” Dr. Seyfarth said. “A friend gives you an element of predictability and certainty, and you can use that to buffer you against all the things you don’t have control over. There’s a biochemical component to this.”

A familiar friend calms and equilibrates, mops up

the cortisol spills that can weaken the immune sys tem, and in so doing may help lengthen life — in b aboons, humans and other group-minded kinds. “Yes, having coffee with friends is good for you,” Dr. Silk said, “and we should all do it often.”

You look gorgeous. Have a cookie. Now tell me what’ s on your mind.
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NYT-0425: DINING & WINE
Who's Rocking to the Music? That's the Chef ... By JEFF GORDINIER
For a new generation of chefs, music inspires the way they cook, becoming a pivotal part of their cr eative process.
===== notyet (very long)
THINGS can get frantic at Recette. It’s one of tho se tiny West Village spots where the kitchen and t he dining room rub up against each other like pass engers in a packed subway car. But even in the pan demonium of a dinner rush, even with orders and qu estions pouring in from all directions, Jesse Sche nker, the 29-year-old chef, manages to stay in the zone.

There’s just one thing you don’t want to interrupt.

“If a server needs something from me, and I’m in t he middle of an air-guitar lick,” he said, “I’m go ing to finish it before I respond.”

Mr. Schenker, who has Pearl Jam lyrics tattooed al ong his left arm and left thigh, treats the practi ce of air guitar with great reverence, and a propu lsive display of air drumming is such a common rit ual in the kitchen at Recette that it should proba bly be listed as an invisible garnish for most ite ms on the menu.
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Plenty of pundits have pointed out that chefs have turned into America’s rock stars. That’s not just a metaphor: For a new generation of stove-top virtuosi, music (punk or hip-hop, classical or country) is far more than the fuel that powers them through a busy Friday night. It inspires the way they cook, and the way they live.

Music is the secret ingredient (on full blast) at Recette, and it’s not the sort you would automatically associate with a delicate presentation of, say, roasted foie gras or blue prawn crudo. At this urbane bistro, those elegant dishes ride out of the kitchen on the percussive thunderclouds of Pearl Jam, Nine Inch Nails, Alice in Chains, Metallica and Tool.

“It clears my mind and gives me a blank canvas to work from,” Mr. Schenker said as the dining room quickly filled on a Thursday in March, and Metallica’s “Fade to Black” laid waste to the kitchen sound system. (The slightly more genteel Foo Fighters serenaded diners a few yards away, but the two sonic blasts tended to collide at the bar.)

“That helps me create. When it gets too hectic and overwhelming, I just turn on a tune. And I focus.”

Ask around, and you’ll hear a spate of testimonials like that. Many chefs in New York and across the country, especially those who are younger than 40, depend on music as such a pivotal part of their creative process that they would feel adrift in the kitchen without it.

“I would kill myself,” said the chef Emma Hearst, 25, who could be found with her team, one evening in March, cranking Led Zeppelin’s “Custard Pie” by the stove at Sorella, on the Lower East Side. “I wouldn’t want to work with someone who didn’t play music. I just wouldn’t be happy.”

Ms. Hearst is convinced that a good vibe on the line gives the food an ineffable quality. O.K., maybe you can’t taste Jimmy Page’s guitar licks (and as a customer, you can’t necessarily hear them, since a cowboy ballad by Neil Young may be piped into the dining room), but you may detect a trace of the camaraderie that his fretwork fosters.

“It kind of grooves better, and I think it translates into the food,” she said. “It’s an emotional thing. I’m a firm believer in energy in restaurants.”

It’s impossible to miss that energy at Baohaus, Eddie Huang’s sandwich shop on East 14th Street. Hip-hop thumps along on a perpetual loop, and there are nights when the guys behind the counter get so caught up in trading lines from various tracks that Mr. Huang refers to it as “show time.”

“Hip-hop informs my life in general,” Mr. Huang said on an evening while the tiny dining room quaked to songs by Cam’ron and Clipse. “The only two American things that made sense to me growing up were hip-hop and barbecue.”

Both of those cultural forces contribute to the Baohaus ethos. Mr. Huang was so determined to find employees who shared his taste in music that he placed “help wanted” ads on Craigslist that hinged on cryptic snippets of lyrics. If you didn’t happen to know that “play Nintendo with Cease-a-Leo” was a nod to a Notorious B.I.G. song, well, you might not fit in.

“That’s how we hired people,” he said.

If an employee’s favorites don’t pass his smell test, too bad. “I think it’s cheesy to play Dre or Snoop — it’s too old,” he said. “No Naughty by Nature. I can’t do that. The most upset I’ve ever been

at Baohaus is when I walked in and someone was playing Taylor Swift.”

His devotion to raw, authentic hip-hop has given Baohaus a following among rappers (Prodigy from Mobb Deep even performed at Mr. Huang’s 30th birthday party in March), but some customers flinch when they step into the store and hear a stampede of expletives coming from the speakers.

“In the beginning, we had a lot of complaints,” Mr. Huang said. “But I thought: This is what we do. This is what we’re about. Someone said, ‘Yo, man, it’s like a house party.’ And that’s what we’re selling.”

At Jeni’s Splendid Ice Creams, in Columbus, Ohio, what they’re selling is emotion. Jeni Britton Bauer, the founder of the sweet factory, believes so strongly in the link between her product and the emotions it can summon that every ice cream flavor is created with its own test-kitchen serenade.

A stroll through her headquarters can feel like a tour of a satellite radio station. “Each room has a different soundtrack, depending on what they’re doing,” said Ms. Bauer, 38.

If employees are languorously toasting marshmallows with a blowtorch, you may hear Schubert. If they’re stirring ancient ingredients like frankincense and honey and almonds for one of the holiday flavors, the backdrop may be the somber, runic ballads of a Danish singer named Agnes Obel. Summery, cake-studded batches come to life to bright and shiny pop by the likes of Lady Gaga, Katy Perry, Madonna and Nicki Minaj.

When she is alone in the kitchen, Ms. Bauer turns to the Willie Nelson album “Stardust,” a classic that was one of her grandfather’s favorites. “It’s like having a friend there with you,” she said.

In some kitchens it’s not always so friendly. Taste in music, as with political viewpoints and religious beliefs, can be a source of friction, especially when everyone crammed next to the furious burners wants to hear something different.

“The rule has always been that whoever gets to the kitchen first gets to be the D.J.,” said Graham Elliot, 35, the Chicago chef who has been a culinary curator for the annual Lollapalooza festival, in charge of feeding the bands and their legions of fans. In his eponymous restaurant, Graham Elliot, there’s a daily sprint to the iPod dock.

“Sometimes it’s hip-hop, sometimes it’s the Grateful Dead or Phish,” he said. “You have the ubiquitous jam-band guy in the kitchen. And then I have the guy from Seattle who listens to the 1992 soundtrack of Alice in Chains, Soundgarden, Pearl Jam. And then Nordic death metal will make an appearance.”

At America’s most heralded sanctuaries of cuisine, every tiny detail is expertly fussed over. So it makes sense that if you step into, say, Eleven Madison Park, in New York, you’re about to have an experience where the very essence of music has been extracted as if it were bergamot oil.

Sure, you might hear Miles Davis’s muted trumpet playing at a perfectly calibrated volume as you stand in the entryway. What you might not notice is that the jazz trailblazer is the spectral, ornery muse for the entire restaurant. Inside the kitchen, Daniel Humm, the chef, has hung a framed poster with 11 words and phrases on it. Among those words: cool, innovative, adventurous.

In 2006, Moira Hodgson wrote a glowing review of Eleven Madison Park in The New York Observer. And yet the review expressed one sly critique: a suggestion that this palace of gastronomy “needed a bit

of Miles Davis.”

To say that Mr. Humm, 36, took that phrase and ran with it would be a vast understatement. He and his business partner, Will Guidara, 32, determined that the entire operation would henceforth be guided by the restless spirit of Davis, a creator who was constantly detonating his strategy, shocking his fans and forging something new. Members of the restaurant team did research to help come up with a sense of what Davis was all about — and what words best encapsulated his ethos.

“Just to show you how serious we are about the whole thing,” Mr. Humm said. “For the past six years, that’s been our life.”

He is not exaggerating. Those words on the wall are what inspired the chef, not long after receiving four stars from The New York Times in 2009, to play a game of chicken with conventional wisdom by slashing the number of seats to 80 from 114, and converting the restaurant’s menu into an impressionist tone poem that looks like a cross between a grocery list and a haute-cuisine haiku.

“We went to a menu that has 16 words,” Mr. Humm said. “And that’s Miles Davis. Miles was never concerned with what people would think.”

Mr. Humm and Mr. Guidara believe this musician-driven philosophy is working so well that they’ve adopted a fresh set of words for their new restaurant, the NoMad. Among them: loose, alive, glamorous, satisfaction.

Their inspiration? The Rolling Stones. “It’s going to be Eleven Madison Park with our hair down,” Mr. Humm said.

All that said, a curious sensation hits you on entering the kitchen at Eleven Madison Park: silence.

“No music,” Mr. Humm said. “The kitchen has its own music. Based on the sound in the kitchen, you can tell how things are going. Music would interrupt that.”

He’ll get no argument from Grant Achatz, the Chicago chef whose restaurant Alinea draws hungry pilgrims from around the world.

“There’s no music in the restaurant at all,” said Mr. Achatz, who turns 38 on Wednesday. “And no music in the kitchen.” For years, he didn’t want anything to interfere with the cooking and savoring of each bite.

“However, now I’m almost going completely the opposite way,” he said. “At Alinea we’re trying to use music as an ingredient, just like you would use salt or pepper to enhance a dish.”

He recently set up an experiment. He gathered his top lieutenants, and brought two cellists into the dining room to conjure up a range of sounds and moods while the team sampled simple ingredients. “We just started eating food and having them play, and it was crazy what happened,” Mr. Achatz recalled. “We would have a slice of tomato, and they would play notes on the cello that were indicative of when you close your eyes and think of sunshine and summer. It worked. It made the tomato taste riper. I’m not kidding.”

He’s now planning to blend the audible and the edible at Alinea. The crescendo of the dessert course comes when servers roll out a silicone tablecloth and begin smearing the surface with a variety of sauces and garnishes and treats. All of a customer’s senses go into overdrive: There is the visual spectacle, the fragrance, the flavor, and even the feel. Although given spoons, some diners devour the Rabelaisian spread with their fingers.

Soon there will be a feast, too, for the ears. Martin Kastner, who has dreamed up various art and design elements for the restaurant, has collaborated with a cellist named Ted Rankin-Parker to compose a piece of evocative music that will serve as a soundtrack to the choreography of that sweet smorgasbord.

“It enhances it, it enriches it, it makes it deeper,” Mr. Achatz said. “I’ve got to tell you, it’s powerful.”
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NYT-0429: REPORTER'S NOTEBOOK
For Edwards and Aide, Another Lost Love Story ...
... By KIM SEVERSON
John Edwards, the former Democratic senator who is facing 30 years in prison, leaned forward and watched as Andrew Young, the man who had held his deepest secret, sat on the witness stand.
===== notyet (2 pages)
GREENSBORO, N.C. — For hour after grueling hour, Andrew Young sat on the witness stand in a small federal courtroom here last week and stared straight ahead, never once facing the man he had once looked upon as a father.

John Edwards, the former Democratic senator who is facing 30 years in prison, leaned forward and watched. Much of his defense rests on proving that Mr. Young, the man who had held his deepest secret, is a liar.

The charges in this trial, which is expected to stretch well into May, concern whether nearly a million dollars that Mr. Edwards and Mr. Young secretly solicited from two wealthy donors to help hide an affair was a conspiracy to violate campaign finance laws during Mr. Edwards’s run for the 2008 presidential nomination.
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But the trial also tells a painful story of family and love and broken relationships.

Mr. Young, 46, became enamored with Mr. Edwards when he and his wife, Cheri, heard him speak at a resort during Mr. Edwards's 1998 campaign for the Senate.

"He was really on that day," testified Mr. Young, who recalled sitting in the back of the room in beach clothes. Mr. Edwards walked by and touched his left shoulder. "He looked at me like he'd known me forever."

A law school graduate who was as much a fan of the University of North Carolina Tar Heels as Mr. Edwards was, Mr. Young became swept up in the campaign, which was Mr. Edwards's first. He volunteered. One of his first jobs was arranging the Edwards family's Christmas photograph.

On election night that year, he was in Mr. Edwards's suite, watching him deftly calm one of his crying children, accept congratulations and talk of a bright future for America.

"He was a great man, inspiring, exciting," Mr. Young, who has been granted immunity in exchange for his testimony, told the court.

At that point, he knew that working for Mr. Edwards was all he wanted to do. He was drawn to the power and to the money.

"I thought it would lead to good things for my family," he said.

Within the year, Mr. Young was spending his days doing whatever the Edwards family needed. He changed light bulbs at their home and changed the oil in their cars. He became Mr. Edwards's driver, always making sure the senator had three newspapers, ha

nd sanitizer and cold Sprite and wine at the ready.

Soon, he and Mr. Edwards were spending hours toget her on the road, touring the state. On the stand, Mr. Young even claimed credit for some of Mr. Edwa rds's political strategies, although defense lawye rs challenged his account.

Mr. Young worked for Mr. Edwards in Washington and Raleigh, eventually moving into fund-raising. His big break came in 2005 when he picked up the phon e and the wealthy banking heiress Rachel Mellon wa s on the other end. Nicknamed Bunny, she had gotte n his number from a friend and wanted to help elec t Mr. Edwards president.

Mr. Young brokered a meeting at her Virginia estat e, and she gave $1 million, he testified. Eventual ly, other money from Ms. Mellon — Bunny money, he said Mr. Edwards called it — would finance the exp ensive lifestyle preferred by Rielle Hunter, the c ampaign videographer who became Mr. Edwards's mist ress.

... By 2006, Elizabeth Edwards, Mr. Edwards's wif e, had discovered the affair. So Mr. Young became the lovers' go-between, holding the special "bat p hone" that Mr. Edwards used to call Ms. Hunter and making sure she got in and out of hotel rooms so the two could be together.

Mr. Young said he went to increasingly elaborate l engths to help Mr. Edwards hide his relationship w ith Ms. Hunter. At one political event where both women were present, it was his job to keep them ap art. In return, Mr. Edwards gave Mr. Young access to his business associates and helped him acquire some land so Mr. Young and his wife could build a dream house. Such was his devotion to Mr. Edwards that by the end of their relationship in 2008, Mr. Young would claim paternity of the child Mr. Edwa rds fathered with Ms. Hunter while running for pre

sident. “You said you actually fell in love with M r. Edwards?” Abbe D. Lowell, Mr. Edwards’s lawyer, asked him at one point during last week’s testimony.

“We all did,” Mr. Young replied.

And, Mr. Lowell pressed, you fell out of love?

“Later, yes sir.”

Mr. Edwards had stopped taking his calls. Mr. Youn g feared that the ride was over and that he would be left criminally liable, he testified.

The defense lawyer showed the jury an e-mail, writ ten by Mr. Young in 2009, in which he said he want ed to defecate on the head of Mr. Edwards, the man who had once meant everything to him.

Mr. Edwards’s own family relationships were front and center all week in the courtroom. Whenever det ails of the affair were mentioned, and they were a t length, many in the courtroom would glance at hi s eldest daughter, Cate, 30, gauging, perhaps, how it must feel to hear about your father’s mistress getting caught in a luxury hotel room after your father had left. And there, on the witness stand, was the former family friend left to untangle the mess.

And what if Ms. Hunter takes the stand? She is on the witness list for both the defense and the gove rnment. She lives 90 miles away in Charlotte with her daughter by Mr. Edwards, Quinn, 4. Mr. Edwards visits the child regularly, friends report.

Since Elizabeth Edwards died in 2010 after a publi c battle with cancer, Cate Edwards has married a W ashington doctor and has been running her mother’s foundation. She helps her father care for her you nger brother and sister, who are in a private scho ol.

Every day of the trial, Ms. Edwards and her father make the hourlong drive from the house in Chapel Hill that her mother decorated. It is the home Elizabeth Edwards once forbade her husband to live in during the height of the affair, and one that Mr. Young knew well before he, too, was banished and Mrs. Edwards threatened to sue him for breaking up the marriage.

A lawyer herself, Cate Edwards sits in a reserved seat right behind her father in court and keeps pages of notes on the jury and trial proceedings, exchanging them with her father. When harsh details come out, like the nicknames that the Edwards campaign staff had for her mother, she often twists her long hair relentlessly but remains cool, her eyes on the witness stand.

On most days, Mr. Edwards's elderly parents sit next to her, kitchen-chair cushions protecting them from the hard wooden benches in the Art Deco courtroom. Ms. Edwards rarely speaks to them, but Mr. Edwards will sometimes lean over, smile and ask, "Are y'all O.K.?"

No one was there for Mr. Young, so his uncle, Perry Deane Young, a writer and former Vietnam War correspondent, decided to show up in court, sitting so Mr. Young could see him.

The uncle said he understood well the weaker parts of his nephew, the pieces of ambition, material desire and risk-taking that led him to a witness chair in a federal courtroom. But as with every family drama, he knows there is more to the story.

"When I sit there looking at Andrew on the stand, I do not see a young man corrupted by ambition, power and greed," he wrote in an e-mail. "I see a loving daddy, a good and faithful son."

Why Mr. Young so loved Mr. Edwards, he said, and why he cannot look at him in court, is perhaps as simple as this: Mr. Young’s father, Robert T. Young, was a well-regarded Methodist minister who was once dean of the Duke University chapel.

Like his son and like Mr. Edwards, the elder Mr. Young loved sports and politics. He died in 2009 with his son at his side.

The summer before Mr. Young started college, a church deacon caught his father on videotape at a Red Roof Inn. He had been having an affair with the deacon’s wife. “My hero,” Mr. Young wrote in his tell-all book about Mr. Edwards, “The Politician,” “was exposed as an adulterer, and our family broke apart.”
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NYT-0505: TRAVEL
A Great View of Seoul, if You Follow the Rules ...
By CHOE SANG-HUN
A well-guarded mountain trek open for the past several years offers a picturesque panorama of the president's compound and a sprawling city.
===== notyet (2 pages)
SEOUL — On a clear day, the peak called Bukaksan soars up behind the Blue House, South Korea’s presidential residence, like something out of an Asian watercolor painting.

But there are several things to keep in mind if you intend to take the Bukaksan Fortress Walk, a trek of 2.2 kilometers, or 1.4 miles, that was off limits to the public until 2007 and still has security restrictions.

A visitor’s pass must be worn at all times during the hike. To get one, a hiker must come to one of the two trail heads between 9 a.m. and 3 p.m., present a passport or government-issued ID and comple
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te a short form, which is available in English.

Once you are on the trail, which is closed Mondays , you can turn back but you cannot leave the path. Unarmed soldiers dressed in pea-colored windbreak ers watch every hiker’s every move. The soldiers a re respectful, offering directions, but they will intervene the moment a camera is turned in the wro ng direction: toward the presidential office downh ill.

On the north-facing side of the trail are a centur ies-old granite fortress wall, part of a 21-kilome ter enclosure that once protected central Seoul, a nd two modern steel fences topped with concertina wire. The trail side facing the presidential compo und is lined with infrared sensors that would aler t soldiers, heavily armed and waiting in out-of-si ght bunkers around the hill, if they had to defend the presidential compound from intruders.

Such restrictions are part of the allure of the wa lk, which generally takes about two hours to compl ete and attracts about 400 people a day. On weeken ds the walk can get crowded, with as many as 2,000 hikers piling up on the narrow, steep path.

“It’s a curiosity that makes a Korean like me want to come here at least once in my lifetime,” Chung Song-un, 54, a first-time visitor, said as he sto pped to catch a breath.

The capital city sprawled below the trail, which w as lined with azaleas, forsythia and magnolia in b loom. The mountain is so close to the city center that one hiker could pinpoint his hotel.

Decades ago, Westerners flying into Korea likened the land beneath them to a sea in a gale: 70 perce nt of the territory was covered with mountains and , over the centuries, rocked by foreign invasions, wars, civil strife and political and economic uph

eavals.

Nearly every hill has a tale, most related to ancient invasions from Manchuria or from Japan, or to the Korean War of 1950-53.

Bukaksan, in particular, has its own rich history.

Taejo, founding king of the Yi Dynasty (1392-1910), chose Bukaksan as the guardian mountain of his new capital when he built a palace at its southern foot. The modern-day presidential compound is squeezed in between that palace and the mountain.

The steep, 342-meter, or 1,122-foot, peak was supposed to protect the capital from invaders from the north. But the city was sacked several times, most recently by North Koreans during the Korean War.

The granite fortress wall — first built in 1396 along the Bukaksan ridge, rebuilt 26 years later at a cost of 872 lives and mended numerous times since — looks like a patchwork today, a testament to the country's tumultuous history and the evolution of wall-making techniques. A signpost says in Korean that the methods used to chip and stack blocks can help determine when portions of the wall were rebuilt.

"The wall doesn't look too refined, but it bears the marks of our nation's long history and culture," said Cho Si-young of the Korea Cultural Heritage Foundation, which is in charge of maintaining the fortress.

Near the western trail head stands the statue of a police commander killed in action in 1968. At the time, 31 North Korean commandos crawled through the heavily guarded border 50 kilometers to the north and came within striking distance of the office of President Park Chung-hee. In skirmishes that raged for two weeks around Bukaksan and other cragg

y mountains in the region, all the intruders, except two, were killed.

One survivor is presumed to have returned to the North and another one, Kim Shin-jo, was captured, saying at a news conference: “We came to slit Park Chung-hee’s throat.”

A government sign near the statue reads: “We may open our heart but must keep our guard up.”

From the statue, hikers climb steps made of stone or wood along the old granite wall. At rest stops under pine trees, you can meet people sharing their seaweed roll snacks or school children who have paused for a history lesson. Some hikers say they have run into President Lee Myung-bak on the trail, surrounded by bodyguards.

Past the peak, where Vulcan anti-aircraft guns faced the northern sky until they were moved to a nearby pillbox in 2000, is the most famous landmark on the trail: a pine tree that took 15 bullets during one of the 1968 gunfights.

The crooked tree, with bullet scars highlighted in red paint and circled with white, is treated reverently by local hikers, who touch it as if to soothe it or to share the pain of being part of a divided country.

A favorite topic among Bukaksan hikers in recent days has been North Korea — its latest provocations and the chances of Park Geun-hye, the daughter of the South Korean leader it once tried to assassinate, for winning the presidential election in December.

Further along the trail is Candlestick Rock, a spot where a long steel shaft was removed after 1945, the end of Japan’s colonial rule. Koreans say the Japanese drove many such shafts into the country’

s mountains during the era, believing they would s uppress the citizens’ rebellious spirits.

The trail ends at Sukjeongmun, one of the four mai n gates of the wall that once encircled central Se oul. The city government recently opened a longer walk retracing the path of the whole 21-kilometer wall, though half of it has given way to urban dev elopment.

Hikers who want to finish at Sukjeongmun can desce nd into Samcheong-dong, a district famous for its small and large museums, tea and coffeehouses, tri nket shops and restaurants.

Bukaksan is “not the biggest or most dramatic of S eoul’s many peaks,” said John Delury, an American professor who likes hiking in the mountains around Seoul. “But there’s a delicate beauty to it, some stunning views looking down on downtown Seoul, as well as intriguing bits and pieces of modern Kore an history.”

Many of Seoul’s mountains are less than an hour aw ay by subway from the city center. So on weekends, seats may be filled with residents dressed in bra nd-name hiking gear, carrying backpacks — and ofte n drunk, at least on the return trips.

“The only downside about Bukaksan is, due to the h eightened security concerns, soju and makgeolli — the local spirits that Korean hikers are fond of b reaking out at the summit — are forbidden,” Mr. De lury said.

How to get there

Take subway line No.3 (the orange line) to Gyeongb okgung station. Use exit 3 and take bus No. 7212, 1020 or 7022. After a ride of five to 10 minutes, get off at the Jahamun stop, which is a minute’s w alk from the western trail head.

More information can be found at www.bukak.or.kr/etc/english/index.asp. However, the site’s description of how to obtain a trail pass is outdated.
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NYT-0505: TRAVEL
A Tourist in My Son's New Home ... By DOMINIQUE BROWNING
It is a wise mother who remembers the lessons that once came out of her mouth about how to be a good houseguest.
===== notyet (2 pages)
I THOUGHT it was hard when my sons went away to college. That fearfully empty nest. Everyone else can go right ahead and be chipper about all the newfound free time. About how nice it is not to have to wake up at 2 in the morning to see if high school curfews have been met. Frankly, that was a piece of cake compared with the difficulty of knowing what one’s children were doing in college and when they were doing it. Little did I know that college was only the first step in the painful process of parental separation. Why do we talk about the children’s need to separate? It’s the parents who come unglued.

The worst was yet to come. Departures for college turned out to be nothing compared with departures from college. Somehow, it had never occurred to me that my sons would eventually find their own homes. I had never tuned in to the dismayed chorus of psychologists, amplified in the news media, sounding off about a generation of kids moving back in with their parents after college. So what? Mine were welcome to boomerang back into their beds whenever they wanted. I even urged them to consider it. They didn’t.

I thought I had made my peace with having my sons move out, until I suddenly realized they were moving so far away that I would have to travel to see
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them. And I don’t mean across town. I would have to pack a suitcase, get on a plane, the whole nine yards. When I became a houseguest in my younger son’s home, the reality of our new lives was made blindingly clear. I understood that the journey had taken me across an entirely new parental frontier.

There is a moment of truth all parents must face, usually on a sofa bed. Children eventually make their own lives, entirely separate from ours, and we participate in them only by invitation. It is a wise mother, indeed, who remembers the lessons that once came out of her mouth about how to be a good houseguest.

This story is about Theo, my younger son. My older son, Alex, who I am sure cannot wait to host me in his own home, will have to get his own home first. He is renting a room in an apartment for a year in San Francisco. His brother, Theo, entered a graduate program in Colorado to study contemplative psychotherapy, which is a very useful pursuit to put into practice when a mother visits. (As, of course, I had to point out. Eye roll, please.)

Theo moved into his first apartment in a town I had never seen. Naturally, once he moved there, I was seized with a burning desire to visit Boulder, which does, after all, have mythical status to anyone (like me) who ever lived in or near the state of Hippie. As soon as Theo was done drilling the last screw into his furniture, I booked a flight.

Yes. He was screwing his furniture together. Theo had decided to make his own tables, beds, chairs, bookcases and stools.

The first photograph I got from Boulder was of Theo at Home Depot, his shopping cart bristling with sticks of lumber. He had designed each piece of furniture, sketched it out, measured how much lumber he would need, and had it cut at the store. I may

have snorted. I was quite sure that lumber would become a giant pile of pickup sticks.

When photograph No. 2 arrived, I found myself peering, dumbfounded, at a full suite of furniture, designed and built by Theo in the U.S.A. It was modernist, with clean, simple lines; it had its own Donald Judd meets Home Depot sort of vibe. I sighed with pride, gazing at the photograph.

And then I became truly alarmed at this display of committed nesting.

That was when I booked my flight to Boulder, a city I really had to see.

When I got there I was overjoyed to see Theo; it had been an entire month since he had been home. “Not really, Mom,” he said, laconically. “This is my home. I’ve been here a few weeks.”

Well. I dropped my bag in the apartment — and believe me, deciding to stay with Theo, rather than book a hotel room, involved many hours of existential angst. He gave me the full tour. It took a minute or two. But the furniture! It was stunningly, mind-bogglingly beautiful. I checked for wobble, examined the joints. There was nothing to criticize. I immediately placed an order for a card table.

Then we set out to explore Theo’s Boulder, a charming, eccentric city of teahouses, yogurt bars and bookstores. We started at the Boom Yogurt Bar, a beautiful new place that also employs my son.

Then we went on to the Boulder Dushanbe. This may be one of the more eccentric examples of what I have come to think of as “gifted architecture” — entire buildings sent from one city to its sister across the ocean. The teahouse was completely hand-built, without the use of power tools, in Dushanbe, Tajikistan, between 1987 and 1990. More than 40 ar

tisans in several cities were involved. Then it was disassembled, crated and sent to Boulder. Such are the quaint ways of global friendship.

We settled into our cozy chairs, but I had to keep popping up to look at yet another incredible panel of tiles, painted in the Persian style, with stars, suns and flowers. Around us were elaborately carved columns. Even the ceiling was a wonder. There was a little pool burbling away in the center, surrounded by copper sculptures. The tea menu was generous, and I learned that a Rocky Mountain Tea Festival was in the works.

We had gotten off to a splendid start.

After tea, we walked through the Pearl Street Mall, and it, too, featured one eccentricity after another, particularly of the musician variety. As Theo explained, when you move to Boulder, you become a triathlete or a stoner. Surely he jests — one of the most admirable people I know lives in Boulder and she is a lawyer; though, come to think of it, she looks suspiciously athletic.

There were a lot of stoners around — and where in most places you would find Starbucks on every corner, in Boulder we spotted smoke shops, my favorite being Buddha's & Goudha's ("featuring brands like Illadelph and Medicali"). I've never seen such a vibrant, productive community of potheads. They were at work at easels, on drums, on guitars, smoking and smiling decoratively. I stopped trying to avert Theo's eyes. I mean, really. Like he's 5? Theo pretended not to know me while I took some discreet snapshots.

Boulder has more bookstores in eight square blocks than any part of Manhattan, I noted with pleasure. Trident Bookstore and Cafe, with its bright red facade, was so inviting that we had to linger and have a brownie and another cup of tea.

Theo rushed me through a marvelous home emporium called Peppercorn — “Dear, don’t you need a salad spinner? Do you have a whisk?” And he wasn’t too patient when I wandered into Gaiam Living, either, which I thought was only a catalog but turned out to be a shop that looks exactly like the catalog.

We ended up in another tea shop, because I had suddenly remembered something about Boulder being thousands of feet above sea level, and one had to remain hydrated. At the Ku Cha House of Tea, the owner gave us a few sips of some of his premium Pu-erhs, a kind of earthy Chinese tea. We lifted a tiny cup in honor of Theo’s brother, who had turned us both on to a tea habit.

Later, we drove back from a delicious dinner at a restaurant called Frasca, which managed the trick of combining elegant and hearty. We wended our way through a neighborhood of handsome old houses, a relief from all the seriously ugly ’70s and ’80s architecture that spreads like a brown stain across the town. Theo pointed out places he would like to live in, while I slammed on the brakes whenever I saw a great tree or garden. Just like the good old days, when my sons were small and sleepy and we drove around while Alex would ask tirelessly, “Is that a mansion? Is that one? Why not? What about this one?”

I was tired — dehydrated, no doubt — but also profoundly moved by the evidence of my son in the process of finding the touchstones of pleasure in his new surroundings. And choosing to share with me places he knew I would enjoy, places full of books, pajama-like clothing and tea. He was a gracious host. What more could I ask?

A mother can always ask for more. When we got back to Theo’s home, I eyed the living room. There was a futon folded on a wooden frame, and small table

s on either side of it (designed and built by Theo in the U.S.A.). Across from the sofa was the dining and homework table — this was the piece of furniture I liked the best, and said so. “Thanks. But, uh, Mom, I don’t exactly have ‘homework’ anymore. Those are my studies I’m doing there.” A fine distinction, perhaps, but a meaningful one.

“Well, Theo, I’m sure you are going to have a comfortable night on the futon,” I said, hopefully, zipping open my suitcase. In my head, I was in a Greek myth, of the sort where the peasant folk give their visitor the place of honor at the table, all their food and wine, and their comfy bed, too — just because a visitor is a sacred person. The visitor, of course, turns out to be a god. Or a goddess, as the case may be.

“Uh, Mom?” Theo said. “I don’t think you’ll be taking my bedroom. That’s the master bedroom. I am the master. I don’t want to sleep out here. This is the guest room. Anyway, I’m really curious to see how it works.”

That was the moment. That was when I realized the earthshaking reality of having traveled to see my child, only to become a guest in his home. He was not my child, but my host, a grown-up. I could feel the tectonic plates of power shifting and grinding between us. A volcano of protest sputtered out, and I agreed that the living room, er, guest room, was the perfect place for me.

Theo made my bed. He opened up the futon and spread it across the frame. He extravagantly unfurled a sheet from the closet and whipped it through the air. The lovely scent of clean laundry breezed across the room. He plumped up a couple of foam inserts for pillows, and tucked everything in.

And then he folded down a corner. A hospitality corner. Just like in a hotel. Just as I had done for

him, and for his brother, welcoming them to bedti me, wishing them pleasant dreams, letting them kno w that I had prepared safe passage through the nig ht for them, for all those many years before I had to travel to see them.

I slept like a goddess.

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NYT-0509
Among New York's Soviet Immigrants, Affinity for G. O.P. ... By JOSEPH BERGER
New Yorkers vote overwhelmingly for Democratic pol iticians, but immigrants from the former Soviet Un ion are an exception, perhaps because of Communism 's legacy.
===== notyet (2 pages)
To many Russian and Ukrainian immigrants, the corn ucopia in the shops along Brighton Beach Avenue — pyramids of oranges, heaps of Kirby cucumbers, bus hels of tomatoes with their vines still attached a nd a variety of fish, sausages and pastries — seem s like an exuberant rebuke of the meager produce t hat was available to them when they lived in the S oviet Union.

This contrast helps explain a striking political a nomaly: immigrants from the former Soviet Union ar e far more apt to vote for Republicans than are mo st New Yorkers, who often drink in Democratic Part y allegiance with their mothers’ milk and are four times as likely to register as Democrats than as Republicans.

Even as New York is expected to overwhelmingly sup port the re-election of President Obama this fall, his presumptive Republican opponent, Mitt Romney, and other down-ticket Republicans can expect cons
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iderable support from enclaves of Russian speakers, like those in the Brighton Beach, Manhattan Beach and Sheepshead Bay neighborhoods of southern Brooklyn.

These areas favored Senator John McCain by roughly 55 percent to 45 percent in the 2008 presidential contest, while New Yorkers over all preferred Mr. Obama three to one. Since then, Russian speakers have helped the Republican candidates in three recent local elections: those involving Representatives Bob Turner and Michael G. Grimm, both of whom won, and David Storobin, a State Senate candidate who held a slim lead initially in a special election in March but has not been declared the winner because some ballots are still being challenged in court.

One reason these voters tend to support Republicans is that they see them as more ardent warriors against the kind of big-government, business-stifling programs that soured their lives in the Soviet Union. Their conservative stances on issues like taxes and Israel seem to outweigh their more liberal views on social issues like abortion.

Tatiana Varzar came to the United States in 1979, at age 21, from the Ukrainian seaport of Odessa. She worked as a manicurist and then opened a small restaurant on the boardwalk that grew into Tatiana Restaurant, a spacious magnet for foodies who like a whiff of salt air and a sea view with their pirogen. Today it is a destination for high-powered Russians, like some of the executives who own the Brooklyn Nets.

“I am what I am because of capitalism,” Ms. Varzar said, “and Republicans are more capitalistic.”

Anatoly Alter immigrated from Kiev, Ukraine, in 1978, worked as a machine operator in Manhattan’s fur district and now owns one of the fur emporiums o

n Brighton Beach Avenue, a shop lush with mink, sable and ermine coats. In his view, Democrats like Mr. Obama have introduced “a socialist mentality,” which is why he prefers Republicans. “Too many people want to rely on free money and socialist institutions, and they want businessmen to pay for it,” Mr. Alter said.

Some scholars likened the attitudes of Soviet immigrants to those of the Vietnamese boat people who fled their homeland’s Communist government and of the Cuban refugees who fled the government of Fidel Castro, both of whom took a more conservative tack in the United States than the members of most immigrant groups.

“Having been seared by statism, they see Democrats as drifting toward statism and see that as dangerous for themselves and for the country,” said Fred Siegel, a senior fellow at the Manhattan Institute’s Center for State and Local Leadership.

Support for Israel is another motivator. The majority of the 350,000 Soviet immigrants in New York City are Jewish, culturally if not in practice; scholars estimate the number as between 70 percent and 90 percent. Many Russian speakers have relatives and friends in Israel, where their population has also exerted a rightward push on national politics, and they tend to reward Republicans, whom they view as more unswerving defenders of that nation.

Another inspiration for their conservatism, scholars and political professionals say, is the legacy of President Ronald Reagan. Kalman Yeger, a campaign manager for Lewis A. Fidler, a city councilman and Mr. Storobin’s Democratic opponent in the State Senate race, said many Soviet immigrants never lost their gratitude to Reagan for his role in the collapse of Communism in the Soviet Union. His 1987 exhortation to Mikhail Gorbachev that he tear down the Berlin Wall still flutters hearts in Bright

on Beach.

“The Republican Party was the party that brought th em out of despair,” Mr. Yeger said.

As with any demographic group, Soviet immigrants a re not monolithic. They will largely support veter an Democratic officeholders, like Senator Charles E. Schumer, whom they see as having funneled gover nment money to their communities or who have campa igned heavily in Russian areas. And they tend to s upport Russian-speaking candidates from either par ty when they run against non-Russian speakers, whi ch partly explains why Mr. Storobin got an estimat ed 60 percent of the Russian vote against Mr. Fidl er, said Ari Kagan, a Russian-language journalist.

Given the importance of primaries in this overwhel mingly Democratic city, Soviet immigrants may regi ster as Democrats in roughly the same numbers as t hey do as Republicans, political professionals say . In fact, the Russians of southern Brooklyn may p rove influential in the Democratic Congressional p rimary battle between Hakeem Jeffries, a moderate state assemblyman, and Charles Barron, a city coun cilman who has criticized Israel’s policies toward the Palestinians.

Still, they are far more likely than most New York ers, even immigrant New Yorkers, to support Republ ican candidates. Soviet immigrants make up almost one-third of the 27th State Senate district, which includes parts of Brighton Beach, Coney Island, M anhattan Beach, Mill Basin and Sheepshead Bay and voted 55 percent for Senator McCain in 2008 — the second-highest proportion of the state’s 62 senato rial districts, said David Simpson, a spokesman fo r Mr. Storobin.

“They are not your average New York City voter,” Mr . Simpson said.

Of course, the Soviet immigrants in New York are, in part, self-selected, having come to the United States because they were disenchanted with Communi sm, said Philip Kasinitz, a sociologist at the Gra duate Center of the City University of New York.

Ruslan Pelin, 40, a software developer who left Mo ldova and lives in Westchester County, said those who preferred state-run economies chose to immigra te to “more socialist societies.”

“Russians who immigrated to the U.S. are looking f or and believing in core or true capitalist ideals ,” Mr. Pelin said. “Otherwise they would go to Sca ndinavian or European countries, or to Canada.”

Assemblyman Alec Brook-Krasny, a Democrat and the first Soviet immigrant to win elective office in N ew York, said that despite the antipathy many Russ ian immigrants expressed toward state programs, a large number of his compatriots worked in hospital s, nursing homes and social-service agencies that received government financing, and that elderly Ru ssians in particular were beneficiaries of those p rograms. But the local businessmen who profit from consumption by those wage earners and public-bene fit recipients do not understand the link, he said : they simply want low taxes and believe “the less government, the better.”

Mr. Brook-Krasny said he believed that younger Rus sian speakers and those who had educated themselve s in American politics would ultimately move towar d the Democrats.

“In my opinion,” he said, “the more you know, the m ore liberal you become.”

But people like Arkadiy Fridman, 54, who publishes Citizens, a monthly, Russian-flavored magazine wi th a circulation of 53,000 that has endorsed Mr. R omney in the presidential contest this year, disag

reed.

“I grew up under Communism; I know what it’s like,” said Mr. Fridman, who also runs a child-care center on Staten Island. He said he believed too much government involvement in the economy would lead to an economic crash, adding, “The Russian government took money from the people and waste it.”
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NYT-0511: CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK
So Whose 'Swan Lake' Is It? ... By ALASTAIR MACAULAY
The big ballet spring season brings a series of 19th-century classics almost all attributed to the choreographer Marius Petipa. Yet much of what now bears the Petipa brand name has actually been rechoreographed by his successors.
===== notyet (2 pages)
In ballet “classic” and “19th century” are almost synonymous. Core essences of ballet — academic virtuosity, big-theater projection, formal grace, boy-hunts-girl romantic drama and spectacular ceremony — were forged in the era of 19th-century Romanticism in ways that audiences continue to respect. A good “Giselle” or “Swan Lake” can still take us to the heart of the genre.

This year, like every other, the big ballet spring season brings to America, and especially to New York, a series of 19th-century classics almost all attributed chiefly or partly to the choreographer Marius Petipa (1818-1910). The list is short. It varies little. Yet most of these ballets, as staged today, are laden with cliche; and much of what now bears the Petipa brand name has actually been rechoreographed by his successors.

In recent years, however, scholarship has improved our understanding of Petipa’s work. One example arrives in New York on Sunday and Monday, when Doug
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Fullington of Pacific Northwest Ballet and several dancers from that Seattle company present three excerpts from Petipa choreography at the Guggenheim Museum as part of its Works and Process series. The excerpts are as they were notated during Petipa's lifetime. At the same time we can see the juggernaut of big ballet companies carry on with their quite different, and usually more hackneyed, renditions.

To give you an idea of Petipa's enduring influence over today's repertory, let's look at this year's statistics. Half of American Ballet Theatre's eight-week season at the Metropolitan Opera House, which begins on Monday and runs through July 7, will be devoted to these 19th-century ballets: "Giselle" (May 15 to 21), "La Bayadere" (May 22 to 28), "Swan Lake" (June 25 to 30) and "Le Corsaire" (July 2 to 7). The Paris Opera Ballet follows at the Met (July 11 to 22): 6 of its 12 performances will be of "Giselle." Meanwhile the Bolshoi Ballet tours other North American cities (Toronto, Ottawa, Washington, Los Angeles) with three classics: "Swan Lake," "Coppelia" and "Don Quixote." All these ballets come to us by way of Petipa.

No 20th-century choreographer — not even George Balanchine, who often spoke of Petipa as the prime mover from whom he derived much of his work — has ever dominated the art form internationally as much as Petipa still does. Yet one of the biggest of the many puzzles that surround this man is: What did he actually choreograph? Quite often what we're shown under the name of Petipa turns out to be some mid-20th-century revision.

What kind of revisions do I mean? Let's go to the most famous of these ballets, "Swan Lake," and take the end of the adagio first section of the grand pas de deux that Petipa choreographed for Odile and Siegfried (the number wrongly called "Black Swan").

Here’s what happened in the 1895 St. Petersburg pr oduction, the staging that has become the basis fo r almost all others since: Odile (who for the ball et’s first several decades didn’t wear black and w as never a swan) and Siegfried are dancing togethe r for the first time, though he thinks she is Odet te (who wasn’t a swan when he fell in love with he r in the previous act). Siegfried used to end on b ended knee; and she, after holding both his outstr etched hands as she took a deep arabesque penchee, would then clutch his knee with both hands, while her leg maintained its upward line.

That’s what the notation for the 1895 original sho ws; and it’s what, until the mid-1940s, the Vic-We lls Ballet (today’s Royal Ballet) used to dance. Y ou can find it in photographs of Margot Fonteyn an d Robert Helpmann. It’s certainly odd: nowhere els e in traditional ballet does the ballerina hold he r partner’s knee while extending her leg in the op posite direction.

You can see why ballet companies today have sought an alternative to this strange image. American Ba llet Theatre and most Russian companies usually co nclude with a partnering pose that is actually the diametrical opposite of the 1895 one: Odile and S iegfried are both upright, both facing the same wa y, she with one raised leg possessively angled aro und his body.

The old knee-clutching pose is remarkable because it’s unique; Petipa seems to have had something sp ecific in mind. What do we think that was? “Swan L ake” was originally set in the Middle Ages; the wa y the prince kneels to the enchantress Odile is an image of chivalry. This belle dame sans merci has him in thrall: hence the grip of her hands, the f ixation of her regard, the gestural implication of her arabesque. That line of her leg, after all, i s the very same with which Odette, the ballet’s tr

ue heroine, began her leave-taking of him at the end of the previous act.

But in 37 years of watching “Swan Lake” I’ve seen the 1895 ending to that adagio only in some old photographs. At the Guggenheim, Mr. Fullington, one of several current scholars who seriously researched the notations of the old ballets, presents this pas de deux following the 1895 records; he and his dancers also show two pas de deux from “The Sleeping Beauty” (1890), also by Petipa.

What’s valuable here is that Mr. Fullington and other scholars are at last scrutinizing the choreographer who, for all the global proliferation of his work, has been taken for granted for over a hundred years. Working in Russia in the last four decades of the 19th century, Petipa helped to turn Romantic ballet into what we now recognize as classical ballet. He overhauled several ballets that had been created in Paris (notably “Giselle,” “Coppelia,” and “Le Corsaire”); he made a varied series of spectacular ballets (particularly “Don Quixote” and “La Bayadere”); and he collaborated with the new generation of Russian composers, Tchaikovsky and Glazunov, in works like “Sleeping Beauty” and “Raymonda.”

“The Nutcracker” was partly Petipa’s plan; illness obliged him to hand over most of its dance making to his colleague Lev Ivanov. Tchaikovsky’s “Swan Lake” reached no definitive form during the composer’s lifetime; but when Petipa and Ivanov revised it after his death, they gave it the general shape and look that has made it central to the repertory ever since.

All these ballets are called classics. Yet all of them are mired in issues of textual corruption and confusion that go beyond anything in drama or classical music: they’re somebody’s version of somebody else’s version of somebody else’s version of so

mebody else’s version. The grand pas de deux from “Le Corsaire,” a showstopper widely attributed to Petipa and often danced out of context, was staged after his lifetime. It’s “School of Petipa” — and that, apparently, is enough.

We don’t even know if Petipa was a particularly original choreographer — the senior choreographer Jules Perrot successfully sued him for “infringement of copyright in choreography” once — and yet his name has become the label for ballet’s essence. He may have stolen from others — most choreographers are magpies to some extent — but his were the ballets that survived. I don’t argue that we should see only textually authentic stagings of the Petipa ballets. But we do at least need a firmer idea of what Petipa did in the first place. We need in particular to attend to those moments in his choreography that were singular, and that have often been replaced by formulaic poses. Fifty or so years ago scarcely anyone used to study this area, but now there is a new commitment to research. Last year in Seattle, Marian Smith and Mr. Fullington staged a “Giselle” for Pacific Northwest Ballet that used three different 19th-century sources.

In most current, eroded productions of “Giselle” the dead heroine returns to her grave, leaving Albrecht alone in an image of romantic desolation. Usually the curtain falls on this situation — very pretty but a fairly sentimental cliche. The Smith-Fullington production in Seattle showed what Petipa and his French predecessors wanted: Giselle with her final gesture urges Albrecht to remember his betrothal to a woman of his own class, Bathilde; and Bathilde arrives at that point to reclaim him, tenderly, back to real life and to his duties.

Such moments — there were many — give far more detail and meaning to a ballet. Is it too much to hope that more ballet companies will pay attention?
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NYT-0511: MOVIES
Jean Renoir's Timely Lessons for Europe ... By A. O . SCOTT
Renoir's "Grand Illusion," from 1937 (and now newl y restored), may have lessons for a Europe bitterl y divided at present.
===== notyet (2 pages)
“GRAND ILLUSION” had its premiere at the Venice Fi lm Festival in 1937, and it has been around ever s ince, by enduring consensus one of the greatest fi lms ever made. It is true that Joseph Goebbels, th e Nazi propaganda chief and cultural arbiter, was not a fan, but Mussolini, patron of the festival a nd Europe’s leading fascist cinephile, kept a prin t in his personal collection. Franklin D. Roosevel t declared that “all the democracies in the world must see this film,” which is still sound advice. The nations that fall within that rubric may have grown in number since those days, but none of thos e democracies, old or new, is so secure as to be i mmune to the lessons of Jean Renoir’s great and pi ercing antiwar comedy.

Which is not to say that “Grand Illusion” is didac tic, though it is, like much of the art of its era , unapologetic about its social concerns and polit ical implications. It survives partly as a documen t of those volatile times, and of the idealism tha t persisted through them even as history prepared a new, unimaginable round of horrors. Seventy-five years on, Europe is far from a state of war, but in light of its current crisis — which is not only economic and political, but also, once again, a c risis of identity — Renoir’s film is still news.

In France the late 1930s were the years of the Pop ular Front, an attempt by the left to counter the rise of fascism and overcome its own tendencies to ward sectarianism and orthodoxy. The political fac e of the front was Leon Blum, a moderate Jewish So

cialist whose two truncated, frustrating terms as prime minister coincided with the production and release of Renoir's film. It is hardly incidental that the friendship at the heart of "Grand Illusion" — the alliance that carries the germ of its political hope — is between Lieutenant Marechal, a proudly working-class Parisian played by Jean Gabin, and Rosenthal, an assimilated, wealthy French Jew played by Marcel Dalio. The action takes place during World War I (in which Renoir had served as a pilot), when the Dreyfus Affair was still a recent memory, but it has an eye on contemporary anti-Semitism and labor militancy as well as a subtle, anxious premonition of global conflicts to come.

Renoir was a man of the left and would remain so through a career that took him to Hollywood in the 1940s, to India (where he made "The River" and inspired the great Bengali director Satyajit Ray) and then back home to France. But while injustice, inequality and the abuse of power are problems that surface in every phase of his work — he started out making silent films and was still going in the age of television, Technicolor and CinemaScope — Renoir rarely used the medium to send simple messages. His movies are sensual, funny, and, for all their meticulous artistry, invitingly informal.

The emblematic Renoir shot may be of a room or a stretch of landscape bustling with people passing the time together in a mood that is suspended between gravity and whimsy. They are at a party, putting on a show, embroiled in argument or attending to everyday tasks or pleasures. The camera moves in their midst like a discreet, curious guest, drawing the viewer into a situation of sociable intimacy. Confidences are overheard, jokes are shared, and the overdone, censorious distinction between playfulness and seriousness melts away. As the American critic Andrew Sarris once put it, "The easy paths of sentimentality and cynicism have never appealed" to Renoir, "and his unyielding sincerity is on

e of the glories of cinema.”

That quality, and the warm, democratic sensibility that accompanies it, are among the reasons that “Grand Illusion” remains, after 75 years, so fresh and vibrant. The new, digitally restored 35-millimeter print (made from a newly unearthed camera negative) playing at Film Forum in Manhattan through May 24 is not a revelation or a rediscovery. It is, instead, a sparkling reminder of how a movie absorbed in its own historical moment and preoccupied with the legacies of the past can resonate into a future that lies beyond its specific range of imagination (while looking at least as luminous as it did when Mussolini first laid eyes on it).

This is not simply a matter of fuzzily applied universal themes. Or of paying dutiful homage to an established masterpiece. Renoir’s humanism is always grounded in particulars, and while the characters in “Grand Illusion” — principally a group of French prisoners of war and, crucially, the German officer who is their keeper — can be understood as types, they are also highly specific, fully fleshed-out individuals. Rosenthal and Marechal may represent an oppressed minority and an embattled proletariat, but they are so fully embodied by Dalio and Gabin that they wear their allegorical significance as comfortably as their overcoats.

Besides, the habit of classifying people according to ethnicity or social status is identified, in the film, with the reactionary thinking of the old order. The highest-ranking French prisoner, Captain de Boeldieu (Pierre Fresnay), is an aristocratic career officer who seems to have more in common with his German jailer than with his fellow prisoners. Boeldieu and Captain von Rauffenstein (played by the German director Erich von Stroheim) recognize each other as members of an elite whose customs, tastes and family connections link them across national boundaries. When the prisoner’s beds are b

eing searched for evidence of a suspected escape p
lan, Rauffenstein offers to take Boeldieu at this
word that he has nothing to hide, since they share
 a gentleman’s code of honor. But he cannot accept
 the word of “a Marechal or a Rosenthal.”

The measure of Renoir’s generous spirit is that Ra
uffenstein and Boeldieu are also spared caricature
. Renoir would hardly have forced von Stroheim, a
director he revered, to play a cartoonish Prussian
 villain, and the script, by Renoir and Charles Sp
aak, takes pains to emphasize the tragic aspect of
 Rauffenstein’s situation. Once a dashing flyer, h
e has been terribly injured in a plane crash, and
his physical agony amplifies his pessimism. He for
esees a future with no place for him and Boeldieu,
 a new Europe that belongs to the Marechals and Ro
senthals.

Boeldieu sees it coming too, and embraces it as a
cause. This is partly patriotism, a devotion to th
e bonds of common nationality that link the prison
ers in the French part of the prison. In addition
to the worker and the Jew there is an intellectual
 — devoted to the Greek poet Pindar, who has never
 been properly translated — and a music-hall enter
tainer played by the great comic actor Julien Care
tte.

In the midst of a catastrophic war, far from the n
ightmare of the trenches, the gas and what seemed
like the collective suicide of a civilization, the
y live in a peaceful microcosm of Europe. Care pac
kages arrive full of the tastes of home. (In one h
ilarious scene the prisoners gather in the Russian
 barracks, waiting to share the caviar and vodka t
hat must be in a newly arrived crate. But the czar
 has sent his loyal soldiers books instead, inciti
ng a comic riot.) Much time is spent planning and
performing sketches and musical numbers, including
 a cross-dressed version of “It’s a Long Way to Ti
pperary” by British soldiers that segues into a st

irring, impromptu rendition of “La Marseillaise.”

It may not be an accident that that scene prefigures one of the most famous moments in “Casablanca.” One of the singers in that film, Rick’s erstwhile mistress, Yvonne, is played by Madeleine LeBeau, at the time married to Dalio, seen in the role of Emil the croupier. Small world!

Which is, in its way, the films’ common moral. “Casablanca” aimed partly to rally Americans to the cause of democratic Europe, a cause that animates the hopes of “Grand Illusion.” The title, taken from a 1909 book by Norman Angell (later called “The Great Illusion”), refers to the fallacy that the divisions among nations are inevitable causes of war, an illusion that is large (“grand” in French) but not necessarily exalted or noble.

But is it also, in retrospect, an illusion that those divisions can be permanently overcome, that decency and fellowship can take the place of combat? The long history of modern Europe — in particular of France and Germany, the focal points of Renoir’s film and of the present real-life Continental drama — pivots between a dream of community and a nightmare of conflict. Renoir traces both possibilities to a common source in the realm of ordinary human feelings and aspirations. Which is why Roosevelt’s advice is still worth heeding, for statesmen and citizens alike.

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