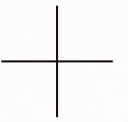


SEPTEMBER 11/12 2021

FT Weekend Magazine



24-PAGE
DESIGN
SPECIAL



DOUBLE FEATURE

REVOLUTION OR EVOLUTION?

By Gillian Tett

INSIDE THE CULT

By Siddharth Venkataramakrishnan
and Robin Wigglesworth

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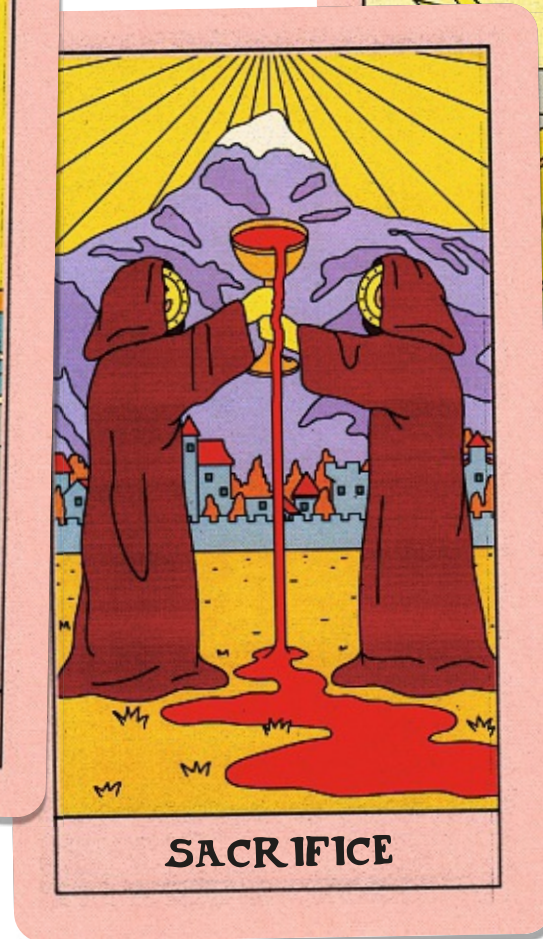
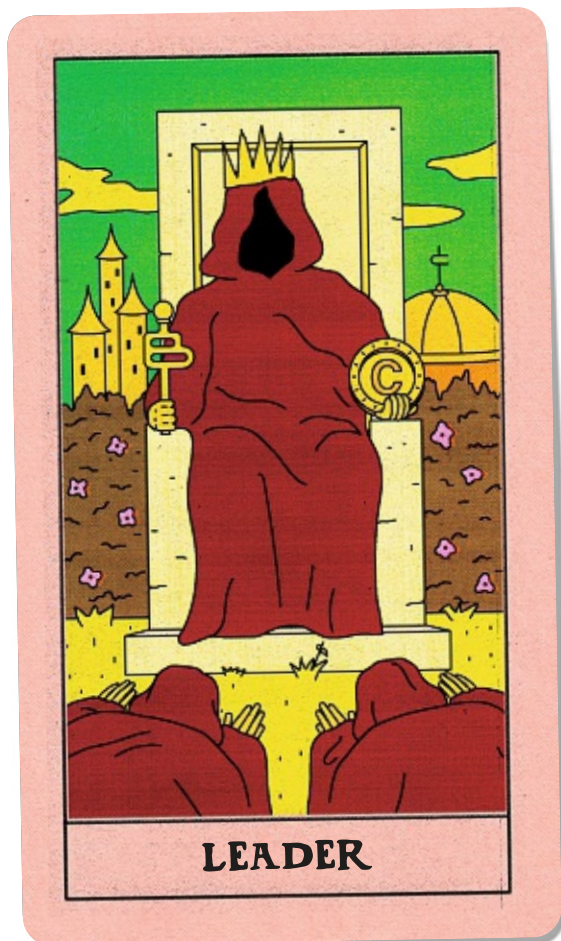
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By *Siddharth Venkataramakrishnan* and *Robin Wigglesworth*

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BENNETT WINCH

HANDMADE IN ENGLAND



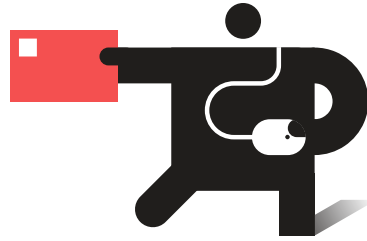
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L E T T E R S

MERKEL'S CHILDREN

by Guy Chazan

Under Merkel, Germany took in a million refugees because it was the right thing to do (compared to, for example, the 20,000 Syrians accepted by the UK). And when Israeli PM Netanyahu tried to link the Holocaust with a Muslim leader in October 2015, Merkel responded through her spokesman by saying: "We know that responsibility for this crime against humanity is German and very much our own." It is difficult to think of any leader of any country with such a solid moral compass, or a fraction of her honesty.

Frank 123 via FT.com

I never liked Angela Merkel but the criticism in this article seems unjustified. People who moan about capable leadership seemingly need a stint of incompetence to regain their bearings. By the way, Merkel is 67 - she has given Germany and the world more time and energy than most people in her generation. It is normal at that age to run out of steam.

Enlightened via FT.com

I was the Kohl generation: I was born a few weeks before he got to power, in a leftwing household, and my entire childhood was dominated by the CDU. I was once one of the kids distancing myself firmly from the CDU - however, in the past 16 years this changed, thanks to Merkel and her interpretation of CDU policies.

I am grateful for her leadership during turbulent times, for her courage to help so many refugees - a great asset for Germany in the long run.

- **London** via FT.com

HOW NOT TO WASTE YOUR TIME

by Oliver Burkeman

Big fan of the aimless walk and the stare out of the window. I do think that there is a correlation between the days I do those and the days I am happiest.

Darksider via FT.com

Well done you. Once you grasp the futility of existence, the more aimless walks, staring out of windows, commenting in the FT you can do.

Cities Licker via FT.com

WE SHOULD GUARD AGAINST THE DANGERS OF NATURE FETISHISM

by Simon Kuper

Simon Kuper's condemnation of the most extreme anti-vaxxers does not sit well beside his passionate support for nuclear energy. It is not clear at whom the article is targeted. I don't meet his definition of a nature fetishist - I had my vaccination at the first opportunity - but I have real concerns about nuclear energy that don't relate to whether it is "natural". For starters, the waste-disposal problem has never been resolved - applying a discount rate and leaving it for



ON THE SEPTEMBER 4/5 COVER Angela Merkel: the woman who shaped a generation - and Europe

future generations is not an acceptable solution.

R Donaldson, London, UK

It's hard not to laugh at Simon Kuper's claim that "nature fetishism" is "one of the most dangerous ideologies of our time". If nature fetishism exists, it is a mindset of an ineffectual minority. If Kuper wanted to make a meaningful point, he would have highlighted that the most dangerous ideology of our time continues to be climate change denial. Corrupting the judgment of our world leaders, it is this denial that leads the charge toward societal breakdown, not small-scale protests against Sizewell C.

Jude Whiley, Towcester, UK

WHY A WORM'S EYE VIEW OF THE WORLD PAYS OFF

by Gillian Tett

So, the world is full of subtle complexities. Thanks. Actually, there was probably no complex international environment that was more thoroughly studied than Afghanistan (if there's any western academic expert who didn't provide advice to the coalition at some point, it's only because s/he has an unlisted phone number)... This, I'm afraid, sounds like another instance of people who can't really argue with the policy falling back on criticising a so-called lack of empathy (or the so-called manner of withdrawal).

srebrenica via FT.com

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Quiz answers The link was types of list
1. Waiting for Godot 2. Back to Black (Amy Winehouse)
3. Amber Rudd 4. Last of the Summer Wine
5. "The Night Watch" (Rembrandt) 6. Spanish civil war
7. Christopher Guest 8. Buckhead
9. Passenger pigeon 10. Checkpoint Charlie
Picture quiz The Two Romnies + Caron Wheeler =
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FT Globetrotter has launched a brand new guide to Singapore, celebrating the joys of the Garden City with expert advice on eating and drinking, exercise, cultural activities and much more. We're looking for your best Singapore tips too. Submit them at ft.com/globetrotter/singapore



SIMON KUPER

OPENING SHOT

Did I mention I've got a book coming out?

When the pandemic began, I essentially locked myself in a room and wrote books. I've published two in 2021, with another due in spring. Plunging back into the world of publishing, and the mystery of what people read, I am marvelling at how much has changed.

In the old days, most books had brief lives before going out of print. As a teenager in the 1980s, I had sometimes worked in bookshops. When customers made arcane requests, we'd haul out a large red volume called *Books in Print*. Any title not in it was effectively dead.

My first book appeared in June 1994, a month before an ex-Wall Streeter incorporated his internet start-up, Cadabra. After a lawyer misheard that as "Cadaver", Jeff Bezos renamed the company Amazon.com. So back in 1994, books were still bought in bookshops and promoted chiefly by reviews in paper publications. My first book got dozens of reviews. The Manchester Evening News accidentally reviewed it twice. My publishers even flew me to Leeds and Edinburgh on a mini-book tour. The expense undoubtedly outweighed copies flogged, but they were showing me they cared.

Everything is different now. Few of today's shrunken news publications still run books pages. Many books get zero reviews. The pandemic closed literary festivals (which will return), ended author tours (most of which won't) and completed the conversion of writers into unpaid self-promoters. The New Yorker magazine once ran a skit about a desperate author offering readers her phone number and home address: "In fact, if you drop by and I'm not home? *Sleep with my husband.*" It was a parody, I think, but we're all seeking a response to our books that's the tiniest bit commensurate with the energy we put in.

Promotion on social media favours journalists, who tend to



ILLUSTRATION BY HARRY HAYSON

have lots of followers, including other journalists. Publishers sometimes even give book contracts to people with lots of Twitter followers. "Which is perhaps not the way it should be," says a journalist-author friend with lots of Twitter followers. The rise of the podcast helps authors, but everyone and their dog now has one and sometimes the listenership consists of the podcaster's mother.

In 1994, you'd see advertising posters for books at train stations – mostly designed to show booksellers that the publisher was backing said book. Now publishers buy ads on Facebook. If you are plugging a biography of a double agent, you might target Facebook users who have posted about other double agents. One publisher told me that Amazon inserts clauses into his contracts requiring him to advertise on its site.

Google matters too. Most titles nowadays are chosen for search engine optimisation. If *War and Peace* appeared today, someone at the publishers might insist on renaming it *Dating Hot Russian Women*.

Much authorial time is spent begging blurbs from celebrities. After all, a potential reader might give three seconds' attention to a

I'll keep at it regardless. If you write, a book is the highest expression of yourself

new book, taking in title, jacket, obscure author's name, and reassuringly famous person's blurb.

Even before the pandemic shut most bookshops, Amazon accounted for nearly half of all new book sales in the US. Yet physical stores remain essential to bookselling. Readers typically visit Amazon to find specific and often older titles. But in a local bookshop, especially an independent, people are open to being swayed by book-loving staff who display favourite new titles in the window and press them on customers. A friend in publishing says the Vietnamese-American writer Ocean Vuong owed his success partly to what she lovingly called "the indies".

Then there's the rest of the world. Like all wannabe entrepreneurs, authors are forever enticed by the Chinese market. I once asked a Beijing colleague about my chances of selling Chinese translation rights to my first book. "You won't," he said. "There've been several pirated translations of it already." Later, after China became a fairly well-behaved international citizen, a book I co-authored in 2009 was translated into both simplified and complex Chinese. But this March, our Chinese publishers emailed with a request: for a new edition, could they cut all geopolitical bits, including even references to Spain's Franco dictatorship? My co-author said we had to say no.

"No man but a blockhead ever wrote, except for money," said Dr Johnson. Yet we blockheads keep writing, even with Amazon extracting massive discounts from publishers and selling our works second-hand for pennies. From 2007 to 2017 American authors' median income dropped by more than half to \$6,080. That's in the world's biggest book market, includes earnings from sidelines such as speaking, and excludes the one in four published writers whose total book income in 2017 was \$0.

I'll keep at it regardless. If you write, a book is the highest expression of yourself. It will probably outlive you on Amazon. A book is an end in itself.

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Meet the Candace Blazer. An essential piece that empowers you and your wardrobe. Self-love advocate, Candace Reels founded Female Collective to support and celebrate women across the globe. At ba&sh, we whole-heartedly support female entrepreneurs – in fact, we were founded by two (Barbara & Sharon, the ba & sh of our name). That's why we've named this blazer after Candace, and will be investing all of its profits back into her platform*.

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ROBERT SHRIMSLEY

THE NATIONAL CONVERSATION

Are phone calls obsolete now?

At a time when our offspring seem surgically attached to their mobiles, it surely seems counter-intuitive to worry about the lost skills of telephony. The phone is now our one piece of truly indispensable kit, the thing we always turn round for if we leave it at home. And yet, for a growing generation, basic phone skills are atrophying.

The withering of what was once a fundamental life skill was brought home to me by a conversation with one of the spawn. The girl was waiting for news of something and growing increasingly frustrated at the radio silence. “Why don’t you phone them up?” I asked innocently. She looked at me with a mixture of terror and pity, as if I had just advised her to do something as primitive as darning or turning on a light without asking Alexa to do it.

This is an observable trend among the spawn and their contemporaries. They are articulate kids and have all the social skills in person. They can talk for hours with friends on a phone or video call, but transacting with strangers over the phone comes less naturally and can even make them anxious. They rarely call those they do not know, even when there is a good reason. When they do, they can be uncomfortably direct. It is not just about effort. There is something they find awkward about what they see as cold-calling. If a problem comes up, they are more relaxed about texting or even, god forbid, emailing. It is all strictly impersonal and, of course, ignorable.

But beyond that they are trained in new methods. If there is a problem, they deal with some form of a customer service chat box where service can vary from the excellent to the awful. Perhaps they may send a chasing text or email. What they don’t seem to do is try to



ILLUSTRATION BY LUCAS VARELA

shortcut the system by speaking to another person. Where people of my age see advantage in direct human contact, the spawn’s generation has lost both the instinct and the art of what they see as an obsolete skill.

And they are partly right. For those of us whose formative years were pre-internet, talking to strangers on a telephone was as essential as finding a WiFi connection is today. You called shops to find out if they had what you wanted in stock. Appointments were booked, arrangements made and so on. In the days before Google, I used to call the now defunct Daily Telegraph Information Service in search of facts for my homework. Telephoning someone was the quickest way to find things out. Other times it was knowing that we had to speak to our friends’ parents before they would pass the phone to the object of our call.

The key to success was a friendly voice, an ability to make small talk and a capacity for building a rapport with someone you did not know. Since the call was often a request for something they had which you needed, learning to ask the right way was essential. All

For those of us whose formative years were pre-internet, talking to strangers on a telephone was as essential as finding a WiFi connection is today

these skills can be acquired in adulthood, especially if work demands it, but learnt behaviours are rarely as good as those naturally gained in childhood.

Clearly many of the old reasons for phoning can now be met more efficiently with a few clicks of a mouse, especially in an era where companies are cutting back phone staff. (Your call is important to us and will be answered in the spring of 2023.) Google will help answer your questions, almost any product or service can be ordered online. So overwhelmingly, the only people you speak to are those you already know and even then, phoning may be the second-choice option.

But while this outlook may be most common among Gen Z-ers it is not unique to them. Reflecting on the possible awkwardness of a spontaneous call, without prior warning by message, one friend notes that describing the hesitancy makes it seem ridiculous. “It never used to be like this.” Perhaps the knowledge that mobiles have made us perpetually available is making us more cautious about calling without warning?

Outside of work, we are all being trained off the phone as a means of communication with anyone we don’t know. As for landlines, these are now the sole province of relatives, scammers and those kind souls who were upset to hear about your recent car accident for which you were not responsible.

And yet while the web has made many skills obsolete, it is still important to know how to talk to strangers on the phone, to be able to persuade someone to help you in some way even though they have no need to do so. There are plenty of jobs where it is essential but also many aspects of life where it can still make a difference.

Anyway, I’ve run out of space. But if you want any further clarification, do call. Actually on second thoughts, maybe email. **FT**

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INVENTORY ELEANOR ALBERGA,
COMPOSER AND PIANIST

‘I don’t believe in retirement. Wanting to improve is a never-ending journey’

Eleanor Alberga, 71, has been commissioned by the BBC Proms and Royal Opera, among many others. Her works range from solo instrumentals to symphonies and operas. She was appointed OBE this year for services to music.

What was your childhood or earliest ambition?

I decided at about age five that I wanted to be a musician. I wanted to be a concert pianist.

Private school or state school? University or straight into work?

My school days started at my mother’s school in Jamaica. I won a scholarship to a Catholic convent school - that was my high-school education from 11. I was fortunate to win a scholarship to the Royal Academy of Music [in London].

Who was or still is your mentor?

I started playing for modern dance classes when I left the Academy. I’d been playing for ballet classes but modern dance was much freer - the counts were out of this world and you could go a bit mad with harmonies. I was asked to play at the London Contemporary Dance Theatre. Robert Cohan, the co-founder, was my mentor, whether he knew it or not. He was so inspiring. I ended up playing for his classes and completely improvising the whole time. The tempos would change, the dynamics would change - I just swam in this world of dance. One or two dancers asked me to write music for their choreography and that’s when I seriously fell in love with composing.

How physically fit are you?

I should be fitter. I love going for walks, especially at the beginning of writing a piece. But once I get into a very dangerous deadline, exercise is one of the first things to go.

Ambition or talent: which matters more to success?

Ambition, in this day and age, would win out.

How politically committed are you?

I’m not so interested in party politics, but so many things need to be done to help the human race live better. I try to show my politics in how I live my life.

What would you like to own that you don’t currently possess?

I can’t think of anything! Stuff sometimes gets in the way. In practical terms, I’d like to upgrade my computer system.

What’s your biggest extravagance?

I like to buy films or series that I find entertaining, sometimes it’s the only way that I can shut off my brain.

In what place are you happiest?

If I’m with my husband, I’m happiest at home or on holiday.

What ambitions do you still have?

Simply to keep improving what I’m doing and put more and more into what I’m writing, to write large-scale pieces, to write music that communicates and means something. That list would include another opera, symphonies and more string quartets.

What drives you on?

I don’t believe in retirement. Wanting to improve is a never-ending journey. I’m always wanting to go a step further.

What is the greatest achievement of your life so far?

Just carrying on. In practical terms, I wrote an opera in 2009 and I had a piece performed at the Last Night of the Proms a few years ago.

What do you find most irritating in other people?

Insensitivity. I can’t understand why people shouldn’t try their best to be kind.

If your 20-year-old self could see you now, what would she think?

I was concentrating on being a pianist at that time. She would be surprised that there has emerged a composer - and someone who’s taken on more things than I imagined I would or could.

Which object that you’ve lost do you wish you still had?

I do get quite attached to some objects and I feel bereft when they’re gone - but I get over it. Objects are just objects.

What is the greatest challenge of our time?

The pandemic and how it has changed lives. But I’m thinking some good will come out of that. Climate change. How are we going to reverse the damage we’ve done?

Do you believe in an afterlife?

I don’t know. It’s possible. I think I do. There are more things in heaven and earth than we can dream of.

If you had to rate your satisfaction with your life so far, out of 10, what would you score?

About a nine. **BT**

Interview by Hester Lacey. “Wild Blue Yonder” by Eleanor Alberga is out now. Her trumpet concerto “Invocation” premieres at the Barbican on September 20. eleanoralberga.com

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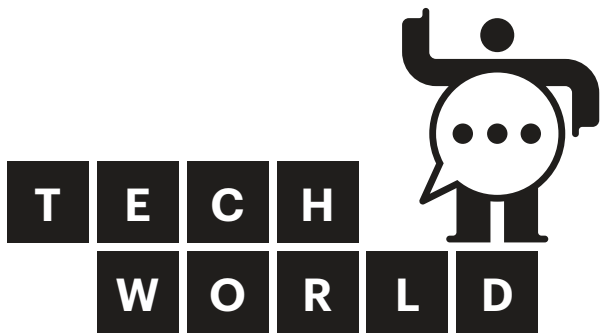
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A close-up photograph of a young man with dark hair, smiling broadly. He is wearing a dark blue button-down shirt. The image is partially obscured by a large, light teal graphic of a smiley face that overlaps the text on the left and the man's face.

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BY TABBY KINDER IN HONG KONG

Kids aren't the only target of China's tough gaming curbs

Every day in China, nearly 10 per cent of the population - 100 million people - enter the virtual world of *Honor of Kings*, an online video game where heroes based on historical figures fight their enemies in the hunt for gold. This role-playing fantasy is, with more than \$7bn of revenues, the highest-grossing game in the world - but you'd be forgiven for not having heard of it. Though it is a craze that has engulfed its home market, the game has gained little traction elsewhere - more than 95 per cent of its users are in China.

Until now, the huge numbers of new players signing up for the game were not discouraged by a growing unease in the Chinese Communist party about the social consequences of gaming. The risk of addiction, overspending and overindulgence, particularly by minors who also may be exposed to graphic content or violence, has led to games like *Honor of Kings* being dubbed a "poison", a "drug" and "spiritual opium" by state-controlled newspapers. Headlines about individuals dying in internet cafés after a three-day gaming binge have been seared into the public consciousness.

But last month those headline sentiments were transformed into harsh new policies as China imposed the world's strictest limits on video games. New rules to "effectively protect the physical and mental health of minors" mean under-18s may now only play online games for three hours a week, between 8pm and 9pm on Fridays, Saturdays, Sundays and public holidays.

The rules were not a surprise. China has been coming up with



ILLUSTRATION BY PÂTÉ

ways to counter what it sees as the negative consequences of gaming on society since 2000, when it effectively banned all video-game consoles for 15 years. In 2018, it introduced a new stronger regulator to police the industry and a year later laid out a curfew and other limits for children who'd now migrated to gaming. But the severity of the new rules has still shocked the industry and analysts, who have described it as a departure from Beijing's recent paternal control of the sector into a full-blown attack.

This escalation is in keeping with a series of measures this year that reflect Beijing's increasing concerns about the size and reach of the country's technology behemoths. It has begun a sweeping crackdown on the monopolistic power of tech giants like Alibaba, Tencent and Didi that has already wiped

Headlines about individuals dying in internet cafés after a three-day gaming binge have been seared into the public consciousness

hundreds of billions of dollars from their value.

This political flexing follows decades of supercharged growth. In gaming, companies like Tencent, which owns *Honor of Kings*, and NetEase, which operates *Overwatch* and *Minecraft* in China, are among the largest in the world. The market value of Tencent is about a third that of Amazon. The games have become a significant new marketplace, with brands like Burberry and Nike selling virtual costumes - "skins" - to players. Since *Honor of Kings* was released in 2015, players have spent an average of nearly \$3.7m a day in the game, around \$15 per user, according to analytics platform Sensor Tower.

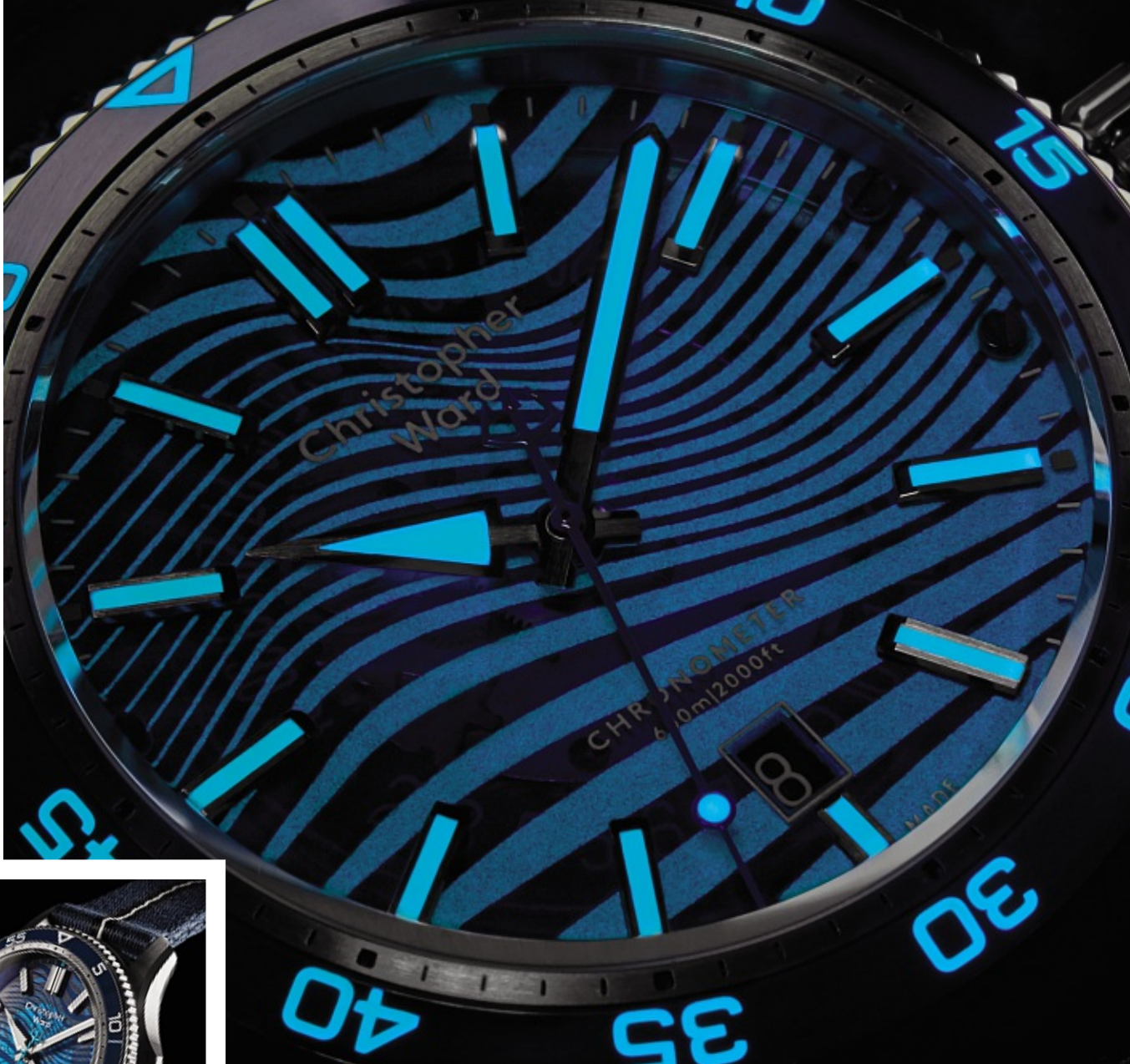
But now, Tencent and NetEase will struggle to attract and retain young users, which is likely to dent their ability to breed future gamers and to damage customer growth. There will also be greater pressure on the companies to speed up development of facial-recognition technology to prevent children skirting the rules by using their parents' or older siblings' accounts.

Yet the stock-market response has so far been muted. Tencent's shares have rallied since the announcement as investors believe the worst has happened. The company has already reduced its reliance on income from under-18s, wary that new regulations were likely to come.

Companies such as Tencent pride themselves on anticipating wider trends. On its website it boasts: "Understanding the unique characteristics of each new generation has always been an important issue for the entire game industry." Previously it has linked the craze for *Honor of Kings* to society becoming "quite introverted", while claiming the game serves a "social function" by providing ways to socialise online.

The Chinese state is fighting back. Fears over the risks of addiction have heightened as the pandemic has resulted in greater social isolation. President Xi Jinping is campaigning to remake the world's second-largest economy with an emphasis on "common prosperity". This includes instilling "correct values" among its younger generation and reining in the excesses of civil society. As this real-life battle heats up, it's the country's tech tycoons who once again are set to play the role of the bad guys. **FT**

Tabby Kinder is the FT's Asia financial correspondent



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TIM HARFORD

THE UNDERCOVER ECONOMIST

How to spot scientists who peddle bad data

I never planned to fake my data. My project involved interviewing the customers visiting a games shop in central London, then analysing the distance they had travelled. Arriving at the location with a clipboard, I realised that I didn't have the nerve. I slunk home and began to dream up some realistic-seeming numbers. I am ashamed but, in mitigation, I was about 14 years old. I am confident that the scientific record has not been corrupted by my sins.

I wish I could say that only schoolchildren fake their data, but the evidence suggests otherwise. Stuart Ritchie's book *Science Fictions* argues that "fraud in science is not the vanishingly rare scenario that we desperately hope it to be".

Some frauds seem comical. In the 1970s, a researcher named William Summerlin claimed to have found a way to prevent skin grafts from being rejected by the recipient. He demonstrated his results by showing a white mouse with a dark patch of fur, apparently a graft from a black mouse. It transpired that the dark patch had been coloured with a felt-tip pen.

Yet academic fraud is no joke. In 2009, Daniele Fanelli estimated that "about 2 per cent of scientists admitted to have fabricated, falsified or modified data or results at least once". I believe that the majority of researchers would not dream of faking data, but it seems that the dishonest exceptions are not as unusual as we would hope.

This matters. Fraudulent research wastes the time of scientists who try to build on it and the money of funding agencies that support it. It undermines the reputation of good science. Above all, if the insights produced by good science make the world better, then false beliefs produced by fraudulent science make the world worse.

Consider the desperate search for treatments for Covid-19. Medical researchers have scrambled to test out treatments from vitamin D to the deworming drug ivermectin, but the results of these scrambles

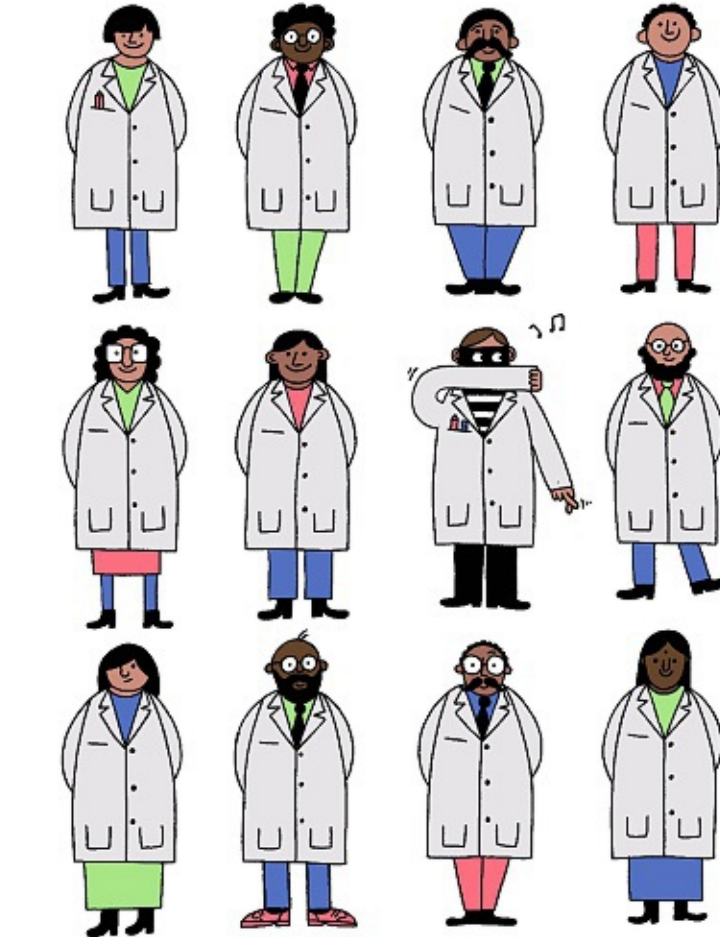


ILLUSTRATION BY ANNA WRAY

have often been small or flawed studies. However, an influential working paper, published late last year, described a large trial with very positive results for ivermectin. It gave a lot of people hope and inspired the use of ivermectin around the world, although the European Medicines Agency and the US Food and Drug Administration advise against ivermectin's use to treat Covid-19.

The research paper was withdrawn on July 14, after several researchers discovered anomalies in the underlying data. Some patients appeared to have died before the study even began, while other patient records seemed to be duplicates. There may be an innocent explanation for this but it certainly raises questions.

On August 17 there was an unsettling development in a quite

different field, behavioural science. Data detectives Uri Simonsohn, Joe Simmons, Leif Nelson and anonymous co-authors published a forensic analysis of a well-known experiment about dishonesty. The experiment, published in 2012, was based on data from a motor insurer in which customers had supplied information about mileage along with a declaration that the information was true. Some signed the declaration at the top of the document, while others signed at the bottom - and those who signed at the top were more likely to tell the truth.

It's an intuitive and influential discovery. The only trouble, conclude Simonsohn and his colleagues, is that it is apparently based on faked data. "There is very strong evidence that the data were fabricated," they conclude. Several

of the authors of the original article have published statements agreeing. What remains to be seen is who or what was behind the suspected fabrication.

Dan Ariely, the most famous of the authors of the original study, was the one who brought the data to the collaboration. He told me in an email that "at no point did I knowingly use unreliable, inaccurate, or manipulated data in our research", expressing regret that he did not sufficiently check the data that were supplied to him by the insurance company.

Both episodes are disheartening: science is hard enough when everyone involved is engaged in good faith. Fortunately, science already has the tools it needs to deal with any fraud - much the same tools that it needs to deal with more

Fraudulent research wastes the time of scientists who try to build on it and the money of funding agencies that support it

innocent errors. Scientists need to get back the traditional values of the field, which include the open sharing of scientific ideas and data, and rigorous scrutiny of those ideas.

They should bolster those traditional values with modern tools. For example, journals should demand that scientists publish their raw data unless there is an extraordinary reason not to. This practice dissuades fraud by making it easier to detect, but more importantly allows work to be checked, reproduced and extended. Algorithms can now scan research for anomalies such as statistically implausible data. Automatic systems can warn researchers if they are citing a retracted paper. None of this would have been possible in the era of paper journals, but it should be commonplace now.

Our current scientific institutions reward originality, curiosity and inventiveness, which are classic scientific virtues. But those virtues also need to be balanced with the virtues of rigour, scepticism and collaborative scrutiny. Science has long valued the idea that scientific results can be repeated and checked. Scientists need to do more to live up to that ideal. **FT**

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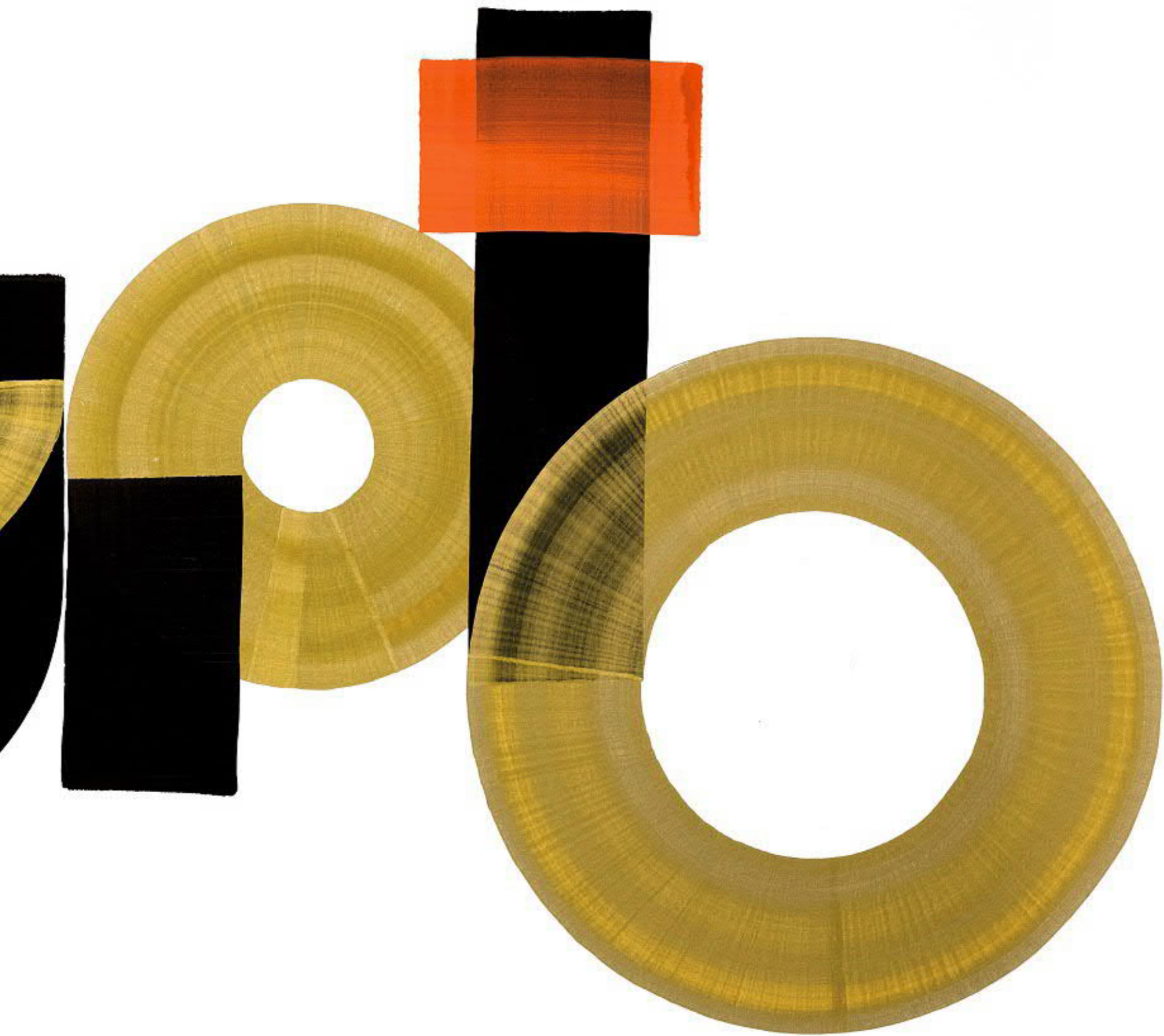


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Artwork by Dave Towers



CRYPTO GROWS UP

Technically and logically difficult to grok, crypto finance has been the domain of the young and the extremely online. Perhaps that's why the world's central banks are increasingly turning to a mild-mannered, middle-aged Canadian CEO for guidance on the future of money. By *Gillian Tett*. Portrait by *Ike Edeani*

In the summer of 2016, a group of central bankers from the American Federal Reserve left their Wall Street branch office, crossed the East River and headed to Bushwick. Their destination was a graffiti-covered warehouse on Bogart Street, home to a small company called ConsenSys. Joe Lubin, a Canadian programmer in his mid-fifties and founder of the financial software-maker, waited as they walked down the street to a scrappy front door festooned in stickers.

The besuited bankers looked out of place in Brooklyn. Lubin wondered if ConsenSys should be worried about them.

The Fed officials were there to fact-find. ConsenSys was quickly becoming influential in the world of cryptocurrency, and Lubin was turning his company into the world's first crypto conglomerate, a network of for-profit projects tied into bitcoin's biggest rival, ethereum. As such, Lubin was not only an expert in blockchain technology - the databases underlying nearly all cryptocurrencies - but also an ardent proponent of decentralised finance.

David Mills, an economist in the Fed group, had plenty of questions for the ConsenSys team. Who could access these new financial platforms? How susceptible were they to hacking? What, if any, was the role of central banks in a financial world like the one crypto's boosters imagined? "It was a very warm, thoughtful conversation," Lubin recalls, even though he tried to explain that "the reality you all know and operate in is going to be totally turned on its head in a few years".

The real topic of discussion was trust. The Fed and all central banks are the avatars of trust the world has been accustomed to for the past few centuries: people have faith in the financial system because these large, seemingly competent institutions appear to be in charge. Cryptocurrency proponents such as Lubin offer a different avatar: they want people to have faith in a financial system essentially guaranteed by computer code that normal people can inspect. "It's a whole new foundation of trust for the world," says Lubin. "And a new way to organise ourselves."

In the five years since the Bogart Street meeting, financial elites who once sneered at the idea of crypto have come around. The New York Fed, for example, is about to unveil a new cryptocurrency research hub, bringing some of the ideas being championed by ConsenSys into its orbit. The Boston Fed has been studying the viability of building a digital version of the US dollar, the world's most important reserve currency. A host of central banks, particularly in Asia, are investigating similar ideas. And financial titans such as JP Morgan have created digital money of their own. Wall Street is starting to dance with Brooklyn.

If you met him casually, you might not guess that Lubin has been pivotal in this change. For one, he prefers to listen, not talk. And when he does speak, his intonation rises at the end of each sentence, making him sound oddly self-deprecating. (The exception is when he starts to discuss ethereum, which analysts estimate will host some \$8tn worth of transactions this year.) Until he hit his early fifties, there was little in his career to suggest he was about to play a crucial role in answering the most

important economic question of this century: does crypto represent a revolution for global finance or merely a natural evolution?

Somewhere along the way, Lubin became a go-to guy for crypto-curious central bankers, not to mention a putative billionaire on paper. (In 2018, Forbes named him the second-richest person in crypto, worth an estimated \$1bn-\$5bn.) All of which means this mild-mannered Canadian with the no-flash profile increasingly holds sway over the staging area for the future of money.

Lubin was born in 1964 in Toronto to a dentist father and property agent mother. As a teenager, his main passions were squash and maths, a combination that helped him get into Princeton, where he studied engineering and computer science. He forged a tight-knit group of friends, including Michael Novogratz, now a billionaire hedge-funder. "Joe was one of the brightest among us, a forward thinker, but by 45 hadn't done anything to stand out," recalls Novogratz. "I don't think any of our gang would have guessed how things would turn out."

After graduating, Lubin got a job managing the Princeton robotics lab, where he became fascinated by artificial intelligence. As a software and AI consultant, he worked for two computer companies in New York, before landing a job at Goldman Sachs, where he stayed for almost two years. "I was never really a Wall Street person. I was a software person," he says. His growing disillusionment was catalysed during the 2008 financial crisis when, as he once told a ConsenSys summit, he realised "it was folly to trust all those structures that we implicitly ►



WHAT MAKES ETHEREUM DIFFERENT?

- Launched in 2009, bitcoin promised a form of online currency secured without a central authority, as opposed to government-issued currencies.
- Over time, one of the innovations underlying bitcoin – the blockchain – appeared to be useful for other purposes.
- The blockchain is a database that stores information in a way that decentralises control.
- Ethereum uses blockchain technology not just for maintaining a payment network, but also for storing computer code that can be employed for financial applications such as contracts.
- Ether is the currency used by applications and contracts on the ethereum network.
- Although it was supposed to complement bitcoin, ethereum has become a competitor on cryptocurrency exchanges.



PREVIOUS PAGE: JOE LUBIN; ABOVE: VITALIK BUTERIN

◀ felt had our best interests at heart. I felt we were living in a global society and economy that was figuratively, literally and morally bankrupt.” He was convinced “a slow, cascading collapse” was taking place.

Lubin briefly toyed with the idea of moving to Latin America to build a survivalist bolt hole. Instead in 2012, he moved to Jamaica with a girlfriend who was trying to forge a career in dancehall music. For a couple of years he dabbled in music production, while also investing in bitcoin as a hedge against the collapse in traditional currencies he expected to see.

In late 2013, Lubin travelled to Toronto to visit his parents over the holidays. On New Year’s Day he headed to a meet-up for bitcoin devotees at a downtown warehouse and met a teenager named Vitalik Buterin. Buterin, now 27, is a legendary figure among crypto enthusiasts; his persona is the basis for the creation myth that binds the ethereum tribe.

A Russian-born wunderkind who emigrated to Canada as a child, Buterin grew up in Toronto and became so obsessed with bitcoin as a teenager that he dropped out of college and lived in anarchic computer coding communities in Spain and Israel. Then, in late 2013, aged 19, he wrote a white paper proposing ethereum and subsequently rallied eight software enthusiasts from around the world to build it. (For the differences between ethereum and bitcoin, see adjacent panel.)

Lubin and Buterin only talked for a few minutes the day they met. “But he told me about his paper, and I read it that night and was blown away,” Lubin says. So much so, he joined the band of geeks Buterin recently compared to Tolkien’s “fellowship of the ring” who were working to turn his vision into reality. Over the next few months, they slumped together, student-style, in a series of shared houses in Miami, Toronto and Zug, Switzerland, creating the computer code that would underpin ethereum.

Lubin always seemed an odd addition to the group. He was old; many of the others were in their twenties. Then there was his background at Goldman Sachs, as if Gandalf had shown up on the road to Mordor wearing a three-piece suit. “The people who are attracted to, and influential in, paradigm shifts tend to be out-of-the-box thinkers and on the fringes of society,” Lubin says, recalling the free-wheeling mood in the hackers’ houses. “I am an out-of-the-box thinker too, but I can speak different languages” – including that of Wall Street.

Many in the group had a strongly anti-establishment bent. There was endless tension between a camp that wanted to run ethereum as a commercial, for-profit venture and those who wanted to make it a mission-driven non-profit instead. Buterin was among the latter, but Lubin wanted to build a business. So did Charles Hoskinson, the first CEO, who was eventually expelled from the group. Gavin Wood, the chief technologist, also left after repeated disputes. (Both Hoskinson and Wood now run ethereum rivals.)

“Lubin’s interests are not exactly aligned with Vitalik because he is more of a financial type pursuing commercial gains,” observes Alexander Lipton, a finance and maths professor, who recently published a book on blockchain. “Vitalik is a visionary and is pursuing the common good.”

Lubin survived the feuds, and forged a close bond with Buterin. The middle-aged man respected the “genius” of the teenager’s vision. He “really doesn’t care about material things at all”, says Lubin. “It’s about wanting to change the world.” Buterin, in turn, seems to have valued getting some seasoned counsel on politics and high finance. Presciently, Lubin insisted the ethereum team consult with the US Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) at an early stage, and that it hire high-priced lawyers from the Manhattan firm Pryor Cashman to minimise legal risks. “Joe is in the background,” says Novogratz, “but he is as important as Vitalik.”

That was Lubin’s other advantage in the run-up to ethereum’s launch: his ability to slide into the background and remain level-headed when personal vendettas exploded. “With Joe, you never actually know more than 5 per cent of what he is thinking,” says Hoskinson. Or, as Lubin observes, “I am not reactive in the way that most humans are. It’s just how I am wired.”

He also describes himself as “meta”, referring to an idea promoted by lifestyle guru Deepak Chopra. (In Greek, meta means “beyond”). “You can take yourself out of the drama of reference and not react instantly and emotionally to things,” Lubin says. “So when other people are reactively bouncing off each other, I have a different perspective.” Meta-ness seems to shape not just Lubin’s dealings with colleagues, but his vision of how cryptocurrency could eventually remake finance and business.

In the summer of 2015, Buterin finally launched ethereum via a non-profit foundation. Lubin was at his side, but he had worked out a way to pursue his commercial dream too. His company ConsenSys was a for-profit venture offering the infrastructure to make the products and services around ethereum work. These days, he describes ConsenSys as “just a software company”. Mere “software” is not something the SEC normally regulates.

That modest label conceals a bigger ambition. As the concept of crypto has gone from marginal to mainstream, the money-making proposition has shifted. To make an imperfect analogy, once it became clear in the 1990s that the internet was a useful way of storing information, the business contest quickly became a fight between companies trying to help people easily find stuff online. In some sense, ethereum is trying to be to blockchain what Google has been to the internet: a service provider that creates order in a digital mess.

But the early years of both ethereum and ConsenSys were rocky. Shortly after the platform launched, a hacker tried to steal about \$60m worth of ethereum’s digital currency, ether. “The attacks were perpetuated with someone with a deep understanding and were designed to catch us off guard,” says Lubin. The hack failed. But the saga, coupled with fundraising controversies in 2017 and 2018 at ventures launched using ethereum, caused ether’s value to wobble. Lubin had to let go about a tenth of the people he had hired to work at ConsenSys when the price was soaring. By late 2018, a Forbes article declared that “Lubin’s ethereum experiment is a mess” with “cryptopia in crisis” and asked how

long the venture, largely funded by Lubin's vast stock of ether, could survive.

Lubin insists that ConsenSys was "almost intentionally decentralised". It aims to seed and launch numerous ethereum projects, not control them all itself. This approach also created a sandbox in which mainstream companies could dabble in the hot new technology without much risk. Santander, the Spanish bank, started testing ethereum for payments. BHP Billiton experimented with it as a means of tracking mineral supply chains. John Hancock, the US investment company, explored creating a vaccine register.

Then there was JP Morgan. Since 2016, it had been running two rival experiments, building a proprietary version of a blockchain system, while working with ConsenSys to import ethereum technology into its operations. "We wanted to test all the different scenarios, to see which would work," says Umar Farooq, head of the so-called Onyx project at JP Morgan.

The bank eventually settled on the ethereum system, and went on to work with the Monetary Authority of Singapore (MAS), Temasek and the Singaporean bank DBS to create digital money. "We decided that the easiest way for us, as a central bank, to understand this new technology is to get involved in building a system ourselves," says Sopnendu Mohanty, a senior MAS official. Lubin says Beijing's central bank, the People's Bank of China, has also been in contact with ConsenSys.

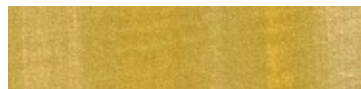
This behind-the-scenes activity was a striking twist, especially for long-time crypto boosters. When the mysterious person or group of people calling themselves Satoshi Nakamoto first described their vision for bitcoin in a 2008 white paper, the rallying cry was that it should remove all the middlemen and gatekeepers who control global business and finance, allowing everyone to participate in the financial system on an equal footing. That, incidentally, was also the young Buterin's mantra for ethereum.

The idea of an open-to-all system is referred to as "permissionless" - a computing term meaning roughly that anyone can inspect or add code without permission from an authority figure. As institutions such as JP Morgan started to dive in, permissionless systems proved to have a few big problems. For one, the larger they are, the slower they tend to operate, since each new transaction recorded on the network requires computers to synchronise their records with each other. The more people involved in a platform, the greater the risk of hacks and leaks. And while such systems are supposed to build trust through transparency, since anyone can check everyone else's records, this flies in the face of how banks have historically operated: their clients usually want to keep their finances secret.

Last year, JP Morgan sold off its first, relatively open version of blockchain, called Quorum, to ConsenSys for an undisclosed amount and set about building a private system that would only be open to select clients, a quasi-crypto club. On paper, that seems like a betrayal of the whole blockchain ideal. But Lubin and Buterin admit that until a technological breakthrough occurs that can make permissionless systems run faster, private chains are a more practical solution for companies.

'PEOPLE LIKE ME HAVE LOTS OF HOUSES. JOE DOESN'T DO ANY OF THAT'

MICHAEL NOVOGRATZ, HEDGE-FUNDER



Indeed, these days many blockchains are so-called private chains or permissioned chains. Users' trust in the system tends to derive as much from the organiser behind that chain - a brand name such as JP Morgan, say - as the computing code itself or the theory of decentralised finance. So, too, with the central bank experiments. "Distributed finance is not really DeFi [decentralised finance] today," says Hoskinson. "It's actually quite centralised." Another way to put that is that the old avatars of trust, namely large central institutions, remain important.

Lubin argues that, in history, "We see these moments of revelation, when someone brings the tablets down the mountain and there is something profound and beautiful there. Then everyone starts to bicker about what the correct interpretation is, and we are in that moment now." Rhetoric has collided with reality. "We were always really interested in this convergence strategy where revolutionaries build out this infrastructure and then meet the evolutionaries in their comfort zone," he says. He thinks these private blockchains will eventually be interlinked. "We have always been pragmatic," Lubin notes. Not to mention commercial.

In the late summer, I found myself staying a few miles away from Lubin out on Long Island. So on a glorious sunny day, as we paced down a vast sandy beach, I quizzed him about where crypto is headed next. In many ways, the future seemed almost as bright as the summer skies: activity in ethereum is exploding. Last year ConsenSys restructured itself with \$65m investment from JP Morgan, UBS

and Mastercard, and is now engaged in a proliferating set of projects with financial institutions and central banks. It is developing new tests with non-financial companies too. Artists such as Damien Hirst are starting to use the platform to sell unique, time-stamped digital creations. Hollywood is looking into doing the same.

"We are making a lot of money," says Lubin, which is impossible to verify in detail, since ConsenSys is private. Nor would you know it from his scruffy jeans and T-shirts. Lubin shuns the glitzy toys of most Wall Street financiers and says that, on the rare occasions when he is not working, he hangs out with his fashion-designer girlfriend, cooking and engaging in simple pleasures such as caring for their pet tortoises. He doesn't even own a car. "People like me have lots of houses," says Novogratz. "Joe doesn't do any of that."

Lubin says, by way of explanation, that he "never did ethereum or anything in my life for money" but because "I had an opportunity to build something profound that I think will transform life on the planet for a pretty long time". Maybe. He also knows that the vision that drives him and Buterin is still in its infancy, and the sands could shift again. For one thing, regulators are increasing their scrutiny. For another, ethereum still faces unresolved technical challenges limiting how many transactions it can process at speed.

Proponents argue this will be resolved when an important technological upgrade takes place early next year (the move from a "proof of work" system to "proof of stake", which is far less energy-intensive). But the maths professor Lipton retorts that it will be hard to "fix" ethereum. "Ethereum [introduced] this brilliant idea of smart contracts. But I don't think that ethereum is the last word in this," Lipton says. "Other [blockchain] systems, like Cardano and Polkadot, use more advanced payment systems, are cheaper and they are going to win." Cardano and Polkadot are rival platforms launched by Hoskinson and Wood, former members of Buterin's "fellowship".

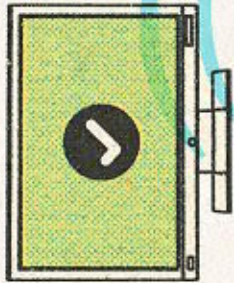
Lubin insists he is unruffled by his colleagues-turned-rivals or the doubts about ethereum's long-term viability. "When people say ethereum won't scale, that is pretty naive. You should never say that about technologies," he says, arguing that history shows that people always overestimate how quickly new innovations will catch on and underestimate the scale and speed of disruption that can occur when those ideas are finally embraced. "Just look at the internet," Lubin continues. "A few decades ago, nobody could imagine that. But it scaled to support all the economically viable use cases. Blockchain will do the same thing."

As I listen to him speak, part of me remains sceptical. No matter how much I read about cryptocurrency and blockchain technology, something always remains opaque. Possibly sensing my doubt, Lubin asks, "Why am I doing this, rather than just hanging out in nightclubs? We are building a new organising principle for the planet and a new foundation of trust. Don't you think it would be a good thing for humanity?" I wonder. Then I remember how many central bankers seem to think Lubin is on to something. **FT**

Gillian Tett is the FT's US editor-at-large

SO YOU'VE FOUND YOURSELF IN A CONVERSATION ABOUT CRYPTO

These can be interminable. Here's a guide on how to handle it – and potentially escape. Illustration by Tobatron



If you're feeling churlish
Drown them in acronyms like DApp, HODL, FUD, DeFi, ICO, NFT. Your choice if you want to bother throwing a few verbs and prepositions in between.



If you're feeling funny
Try a joke or two.

Q: Why can't Superman pay with bitcoin after dark?

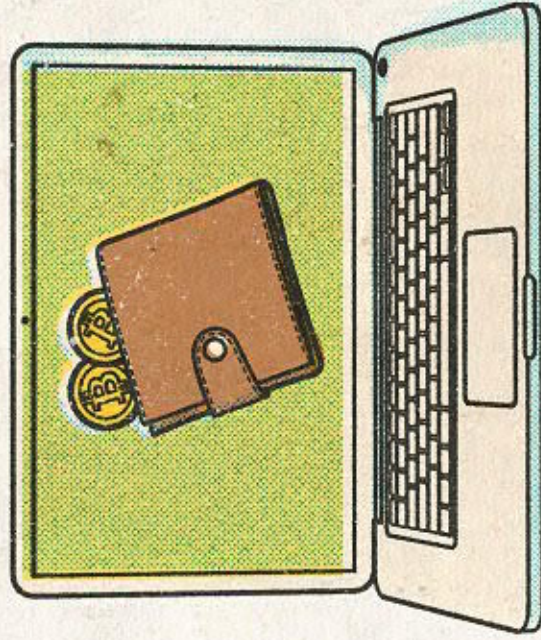
A: Because it's crypto-night.

Q: Why did the early-adopter bitcoin miner fry his GPU?

A: He was mining before it was cool.

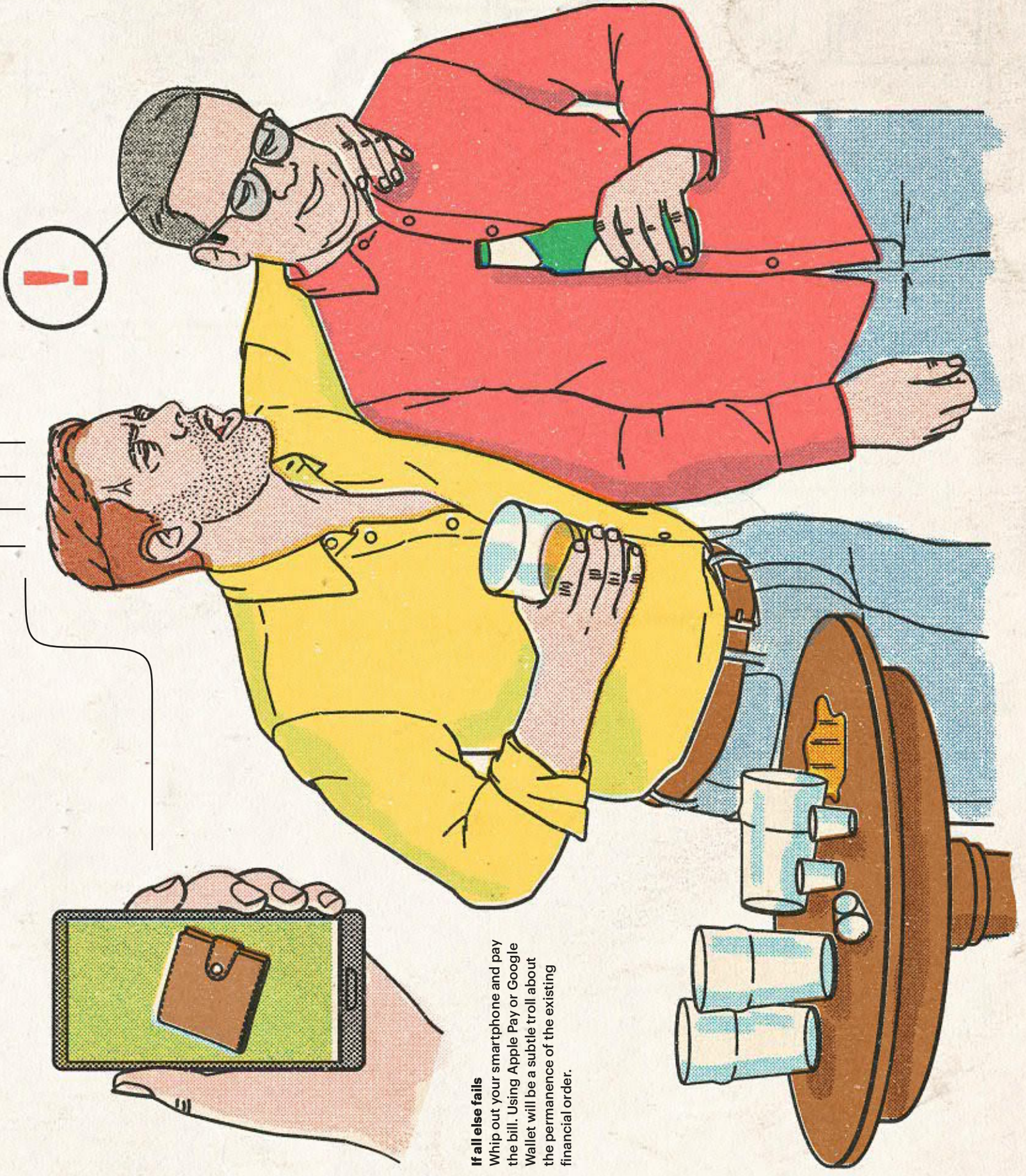


If you're genuinely confused
Start by asking small-bore questions: how are bitcoins created? What's your preferred cryptocurrency? But cut bait before more complex technical topics come up.

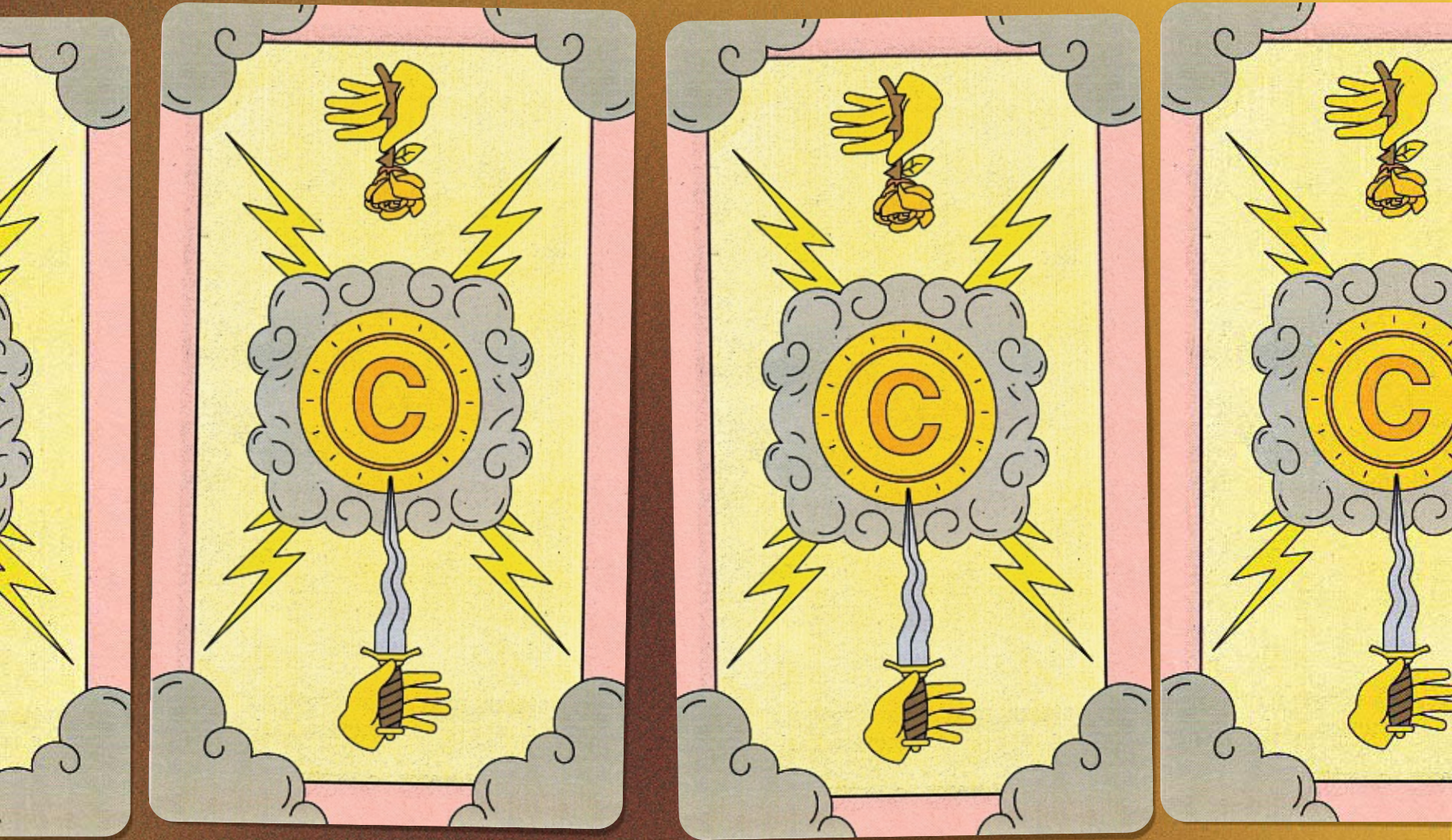


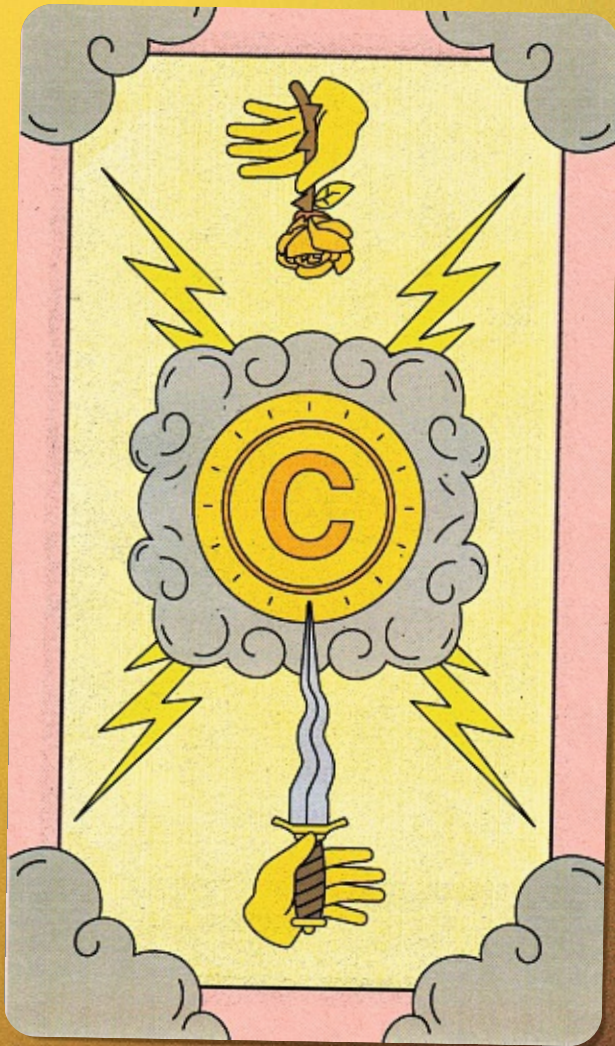
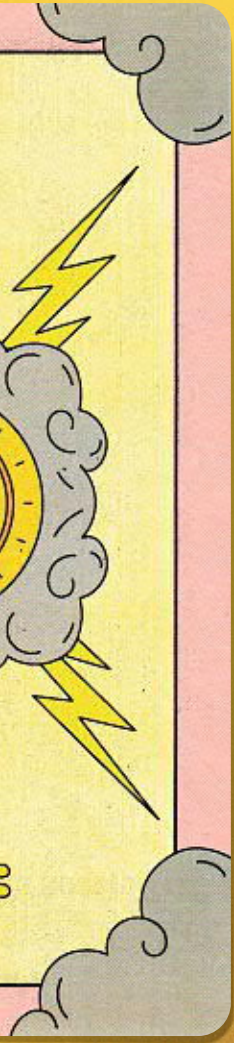
If you're feeling generous

Ask about the bigger picture. Most crypto diehards see a bigger picture that the rest of us can't fathom. Be kind to your friend, and let them clue you into how things really work.

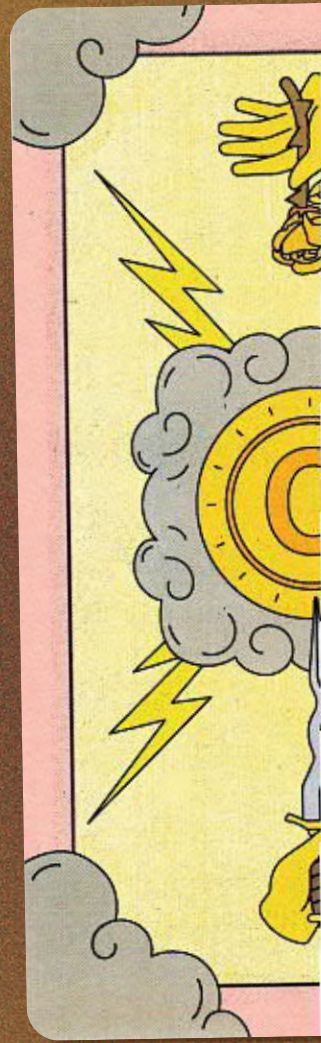


If all else fails
Whip out your smartphone and pay the bill. Using Apple Pay or Google Wallet will be a subtle troll about the permanence of the existing financial order.





THE CULT OF CRYPTO



Debate? No thanks. Doubts? Not welcome.
Criticism? Better watch your back.
How the increasingly insular community
of cryptocurrency diehards really works.

By *Siddharth Venkataramakrishnan*
and *Robin Wigglesworth*
Illustrations by *George Wylesol*

Chris DeRose was noodling away on the internet when he stumbled over an intriguing post on Slashdot, a forum for extremely online hyper-geeks like himself. “How’s this for a disruptive technology,” a user wrote on July 11 2010, enthusiastically describing a decentralised, peer-to-peer digital currency with no central bank, no transaction fees and beyond the reach of any government. Using computers to solve cryptographic puzzles would earn people “bitcoins”.

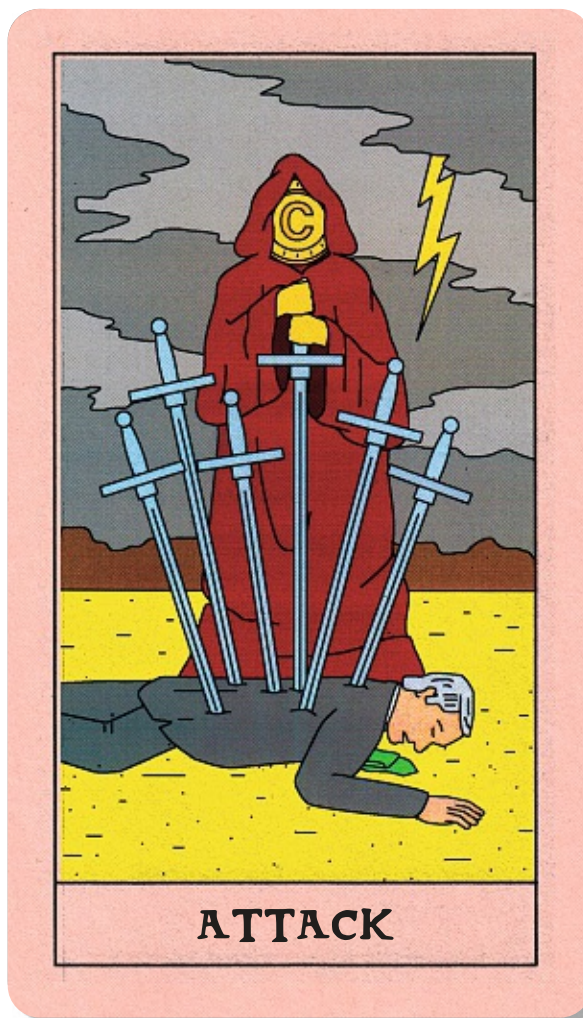
DeRose was intrigued yet unconvinced by the concept. The young Floridian programmer struggled to see what utility it might serve. Many others on the forum were also sceptical. “Hey thanks for trying to post something all edgy or controversial or whatever the hell you think it is,” one replied.

All this changed with the rise of Silk Road. The “dark web” marketplace, launched in 2011, convinced DeRose of bitcoin’s potential. Finally, the cryptocurrency had found its “killer app” and could become real digital money. And his fascination took flight. Regular board game nights with friends morphed into bitcoin nights at the local pub. By 2013, DeRose, then aged 31, ditched his successful computer consulting business and threw himself wholeheartedly into the mushrooming cryptocurrency world, becoming a popular if controversial podcast host.

The protean crypto subculture welcomed debate and criticism, DeRose told the FT last month. Although it had a mysterious creator-messiah in whoever was hiding behind the moniker “Satoshi Nakamoto”, it was an open-to-all-comers, intellectually stimulating online brawl between everyone from hardcore libertarians and bank-hating leftwingers to dedicated “cypherpunks”, a group of privacy-obsessed cryptographers and coders that had coalesced in the 1980s.

DeRose loved it. “The difficulty of the technology in those days filtered out the technically inept,” he recalls, “and this increased the ability to comprehend nuance and cultivate the constructive value of scepticism.” But then things started to change.

In 2015 soaring interest triggered an explosion of new digital currencies of variable quality. Scams



proliferated. The debate began to balkanise. By 2017 - when the price of bitcoin took off like a rocket, going from under \$1,000 per “coin” to almost \$20,000 - early discussion had calcified into rigid dogma that bore little relation to reality. Bitcoin and its zealots were the strongest example of this, DeRose felt.

“If you look online at ‘what is bitcoin’, what you’ll see is a gigantic amount of literature and decontextualised media snippets that paint a beautiful picture of the imminent success and domination that is surely awaiting us,” he says. “However, if you look at bitcoin off the screen, what you’ll see is declining merchant uptake, zero evidence of blockchain deployment or efficiency, and mostly just a lot of promotional events offering cures to whatever ails you.”

DeRose is not alone in his disillusionment. Cryptocurrency has over the past decade become a broad movement with its own language and symbols, driven by a constellation of prophets with varied but overlapping gospels, who treat both external and internal dissent as blasphemy and promise adherents that they form the intellectual vanguard to a bright new future. Sound familiar?

The definition of a cult isn’t cut and dry. Scholars, civil society groups and anti-cult counsellors offer varying and at times contradictory criteria, and the line between cult activity and mainstream religion can be vanishingly thin. Most groups identified as cults feature a single charismatic leader, something that the crypto world lacks. But many other classic hallmarks of culthood - apocalypticism, the promise of utopia for worthy believers, shunning of external critics and vitriolic denouncement of heretical insiders - are increasingly dominant.

“Crypto is essentially an economic cult that taps into very base human instincts of fear, greed and tribalism, combined with economic illiteracy as a means to recruit more greater fools to pile money into what looks like a weird, novel digital variant of a pyramid scheme,” argues Stephen Diehl, a crypto-sceptic software engineer. “Although, it’s all very strange because it’s truly difficult to see where the self-aware scams, true believers and performance art begin and end. Crypto is a bizarre synthesis of all three.”

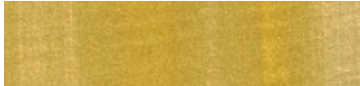
Given the global financial system’s growing exposure to digital currencies, the culture around crypto, how much or little it changes, could have major consequences for retail investors, central banks and the environment. Crypto’s most ardent proponents predict it will eradicate inequality, wipe out corruption and create untold wealth. Most cults make similarly expansive promises. And as the gulf between promise and reality grows, things get dark.

The cryptocurrency movement can be unforgiving of apostasy, so “Neil” asked the FT not to use his real name. Fascinated by the idea of “programmable money”, Neil joined an upstart cryptocurrency exchange called Coinbase in 2014 immediately after finishing a degree in software engineering. He found the heady narrative of a revolutionary resetting of the financial order intoxicating and immersed himself in the “crypto-anarchist” scene of San Francisco.

In the cultural imagination from which cryptocurrencies were spawned, the 2008 financial crisis loomed large, a *casus belli* for war against the old order to build a better alternative. The swift success of crypto appeared to affirm the mission’s importance and resonance for many

**'CRYPTO IS ESSENTIALLY
AN ECONOMIC CULT
THAT TAPS INTO THE
VERY BASE HUMAN
INSTINCTS OF FEAR,
GREED AND TRIBALISM'**

STEPHEN DIEHL, SOFTWARE ENGINEER



young technologists like Neil. Coinbase is now one of the industry's biggest trading venues, and earlier this year listed its shares at a \$76bn valuation - more than the Nasdaq or the New York Stock Exchange owner ICE. "I went from thinking, 'Oh, cool, I can program money' to thinking I was part of a movement, a revolution founded on this technology," Neil recalls.

But he quickly became disenchanted. Heretical podcasts like DeRose's fed his nascent cynicism. Many new cryptocurrencies appeared pointless. Even the promise of bitcoin itself started to lose its lustre on closer inspection of its economic, social and technological merits.

Today, Neil says the cryptocurrency movement is actively harmful to its members and the environment. "I think nerdy types like me got fooled because bitcoin made us feel cool, like a *Revenge of the Nerds* type thing, so we were incentivised to not ask ourselves hard questions. And then, the non-technical people got fooled because they didn't understand the technology," he says. "So, it created a powerful pair of blinders."

The idea that cryptocurrencies are a cult, though not a new criticism, may seem unfairly pejorative to what is now a \$2tn market with tentacles reaching around the world and across industries. Like many new technologies in human history, crypto has attracted genuine investors and utopian ideologues, technocratic dabblers and bored punters, scam artists and sharks.

Nor is the crypto world a homogenous blob. It boasts myriad distinct tribes and schools of thought.

It has also become undeniably more mainstream. Staid finance industry stalwarts such as Fidelity and Mastercard have embraced digital assets. S&P Dow Jones Indices now produces cryptocurrency benchmarks alongside venerable gauges like the Dow Jones Industrial Average. Currencies named after memes are regular segments on CNBC. Many pedigreed venture capitalists are convinced that the digital asset industry will prove revolutionary. El Salvador has even adopted it as an official currency. ▶

◀ Using survey data gathered by the Federal Reserve Bank of Atlanta, the Bank for International Settlement - a kind of central bank for central banks - found that cryptocurrency investors were actually no more concerned by the state of the financial system than the populace at large.

For many of those dabbling in cryptocurrencies, the goal is simply to get rich, not to build a new world order. “When Lambo?” is a common phrase on crypto forums, with members wondering when they’ll be rich enough to buy a Lamborghini. In practice it can be tricky to disentangle crypto belief from crypto greed.

Perhaps the biggest difference to traditional cults is the lack of a single leader figure. Even modern-day cults or sects, such as the purported multi-level marketing scheme-slash-sex cult NXIVM or Dera Sacha Sauda, led by Indian “godman” Gurmeet Ram Rahim Singh, need a strong, charismatic leader to both forge a group and to keep it moving.

Satoshi Nakamoto, the pseudonymous creator - or creators - of cryptocurrency is perhaps its most enduring mystery. In 2008, Nakamoto released the whitepaper “Bitcoin: A Peer-to-Peer Electronic Cash System”, and the first bitcoin was mined the following year. Then in 2011, they emailed developers saying that they had “moved on to other projects”, and have not been heard from for more than a decade.

Another major way in which crypto-cultism differs from traditional cults is the lack of physical gatherings. Beyond events such as Bitcoin Miami and “crypto cruises”, or scattered communities like El Salvador’s bitcoin beach, cryptocurrency advocates communicate online. “It’s a very different dynamic to creating a cult on a compound,” says Martin Walker, director for banking and finance at the Center for Evidence-Based Management. “It’s [also] quite hard even with traditional cults to distinguish between cultism and criminality.”

Though its lack of a single leading figure and its amorphous online footprint marks it out from traditional cults, some say the cryptocurrency movement bears a striking resemblance to another progeny of the digital age: the QAnon super-conspiracy. “Both have doctrine passed down by a mysterious unknown founder, puzzle-



solving, and internet meme culture and lots of predictions about politics/economics that are completely unfalsifiable,” says Diehl. “They’re both rooted in this ideology that claims to oppose a common enemy: corruption and untrustworthy intermediaries, and both see the internet as the way to finally eradicate those problems in some great apocalyptic event.”

Perhaps the most interesting comparison between the two is the role of a “priestly class” of influencers. Both QAnon and the crypto world are characterised by evangelists that understand and mediate their prophets’ truth through everything from tiny blogs to Telegram, TikTok and Twitter accounts with hundreds of thousands of followers.

Tesla chief executive Elon Musk was once the most obvious example. On May 9, he tweeted that his company SpaceX would launch a satellite to the moon next year funded by dogecoin, a seven-year-old joke cryptocurrency named after the Shiba Inu dog meme. He followed up two days later, asking his followers whether Tesla should accept dogecoin.

Yet, on May 12 Musk alienated many in the community when he announced he would bar

consumers from using bitcoins to buy Tesla cars, citing energy consumption. Both crypto influencers and their flocks can be very fickle.

Cults don’t merely promise that the existing order is about to collapse. Key to their appeal - as with mainstream religions - is the promise that complete belief will be rewarded. The exact nature of those rewards has varied, though it has often been a spiritual gift of some sort, whether enlightenment and peace on earth. Others, such as Jim Jones’ Peoples Temple, mixed in political elements such as racial equality.

Crypto-cultism promises a social and financial revolution that will energise technological innovation, all the while rewarding the worthy with vast wealth. Many cults have offered such transformative promises, but few if any have posed such risks to retail investors, central banks and even the environment if they cannot live up to them. “Most cults affect a few hundreds or thousand people,” says David Golumbia, a professor of English at Virginia Commonwealth University who has written extensively on cryptocurrencies. “This really is much more widespread and affects many more, which makes it much harder to find out how to resist it.”

To many cynics, elements of crypto-cultism feel more like an effort to put a veneer of religiosity over an otherwise starkly Mammonite enterprise. HODLing - meaning to hold on to cryptocurrencies no matter their falls - is a prime example of this. The term dates back to 2013, when a fateful misspelling of holding became elevated to a pseudo-philosophy. Those who cash out early, causing the price to fall, are weak. The act of buying digital assets, no matter how ludicrous in name or nature, is valorised.

For Jackson Palmer, one of the creators of dogecoin - the joke cryptocurrency that shot to prominence this year thanks to Musk - this has now morphed into something profoundly pernicious. “After years of studying it, I believe that cryptocurrency is an inherently rightwing, hyper-capitalistic technology built primarily to amplify the wealth of its proponents through a combination of tax avoidance, diminished regulatory oversight and artificially enforced scarcity,” Palmer wrote on

"WHEN LAMBO?" IS A COMMON PHRASE ON CRYPTO FORUMS, WITH MEMBERS WONDERING WHEN THEY'LL BE RICH ENOUGH TO BUY A LAMBORGHINI

Twitter this summer, announcing his permanent withdrawal from the industry.

"These days even the most modest critique of cryptocurrency will draw smears from the powerful figures in control of the industry and the ire of retail investors who they've sold the false promise of one day being a fellow billionaire," he added. "Good-faith debate is near impossible."

There is a well-established playbook on how to deal with criticism like this. Even crypto novices are likely familiar with the acronym FUD, for "fear, uncertainty and doubt". Though the term preexisted bitcoin, the cryptocurrency community has adopted it with gusto. There are various kinds of FUD - they include China FUD, which emerged after regulatory crackdowns by the Chinese government on crypto-miners and exchanges; Tether FUD, surrounding the \$66bn cryptocurrency which has faced years of questions over the nature of its reserves; and energy FUD, focused on the considerable electricity usage required to power mining. The sources of FUD include legacy media houses, "fiat shills" in the financial establishment, government agents, regulators and hopeless "no-coiners".

It is easy enough to find examples of new religious movements who have resorted to questionable methods to deal with external enemies. Scientologists, LaRouchians and NXIVM have all attempted to smear, frame or hack critics.

In the crypto wars, one such victim is Jorge Stolfi, a professor of computer science at the State University of Campinas, who was targeted after he wrote a letter to the Securities and Exchange Commission opposing a proposed bitcoin fund by comparing it to shares in a Ponzi scheme. A fake account on Reddit purporting to be him started signing up to sadomasochist forums and publishing embarrassing material until Stolfi managed to convince administrators to close the account. "I get all kinds of insults," he says. "Every time I criticise cryptocurrencies, they tell me you are defending fiat because you are an employee of the government, you want to continue the scam of national currencies which are Ponzi schemes, you work for an entity which extorts money from people with guns."

A more common way that crypto-cultists combat FUD is to simply refuse to engage

with it, instead herding into echo chambers on YouTube, Clubhouse or WhatsApp messaging groups where only positive content can be found and discussed. "If you associate yourself with FUD (even just reading them), you are likely to become poorer," Changpeng Zhao, chief executive of major cryptocurrency exchange Binance, once warned his Twitter followers.

The flipside to shunning outside criticism is the need to police internal dissent. Alternative ways of thinking pose a challenge to the authority of cult leaders in their group, with ex-members of movements such as Scientology often attacked by their former fellows. Crypto is no exception.

In some cases the pressure to stay on message is self-directed - a form of self-preservation. Neil, the former Coinbase employee, points out that there are huge incentives to avoid expressing any dissenting views. "Their career depends on them being right, their financial stability may depend on them being right - because they hold their wealth in crypto - their friendships may depend on them being right," he says. "To admit they are wrong would be literally life-changing."

For very public apostates like DeRose, the backlash can be fierce. Airing his criticism has eroded his standing in the community, with one rival podcast claiming that DeRose must be a "CIA shill". Despite having witnessed the degeneration of the debate over the years, he admits he was a little taken aback at the vitriol that has come his way.

"There's a large swath of internet neurotics that take it upon themselves to homogenise the herd by chastising the deviants in their midst," DeRose observes. Nonetheless, he feels confident that in time the cryptocurrency phenomenon - for all the zealotry of its adherents - will eventually go the same way as one of the most infamous financial calamities in history.

"I think when the final retrospective on this space is written, we'll come to find a kind of 'History never repeats itself, but it does often rhyme' story," says DeRose. "With a specific kind of rhyming here, to the story of the 'South Sea Bubble.'" **FT**

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Siddharth Venkataramakrishnan is an FT capital markets correspondent.
Robin Wigglesworth is the FT's global finance correspondent






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Roaring back

Inside Greenwich's new Design District, London's first bespoke creative quarter

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London Design Special

After a frustrating couple of years for design fairs, this month has started with a bang. The Salone del Mobile, one of the landmark events in the design calendar, finally returned to the streets of Milan this week, while next weekend sees the latest London Design Festival, with events across the city occurring throughout the month. We focus on the city's new design district on London's unsung Greenwich Peninsula, which will launch during the festival. As dark as the recent past has been, the future looks very bright indeed



HELEN CATHCART

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REINVENTING THE REINVENTION

Greenwich Peninsula has undergone several re-dos since the 1990s. Will its latest one aimed at artists and makers stick? By *Roddy Clarke*

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THAT '70S SHOW

The best of the decade's home furnishings married glamour to cosiness. Time for a comeback, writes *Cherish Rufus*

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◀ AN INFLUENTIAL CAREER: ILSE CRAWFORD

The designer has influenced a generation with a career spanning interiors, furniture and journalism. *Rory Robertson* meets her as she is awarded the London Design Festival's top honour

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MEND AND MAKE NEW

Design is stepping in to tackle the ever-growing mountain of e-waste created by runaway throwaway culture. *Andrew Dickson* reports

Time for London to get creative

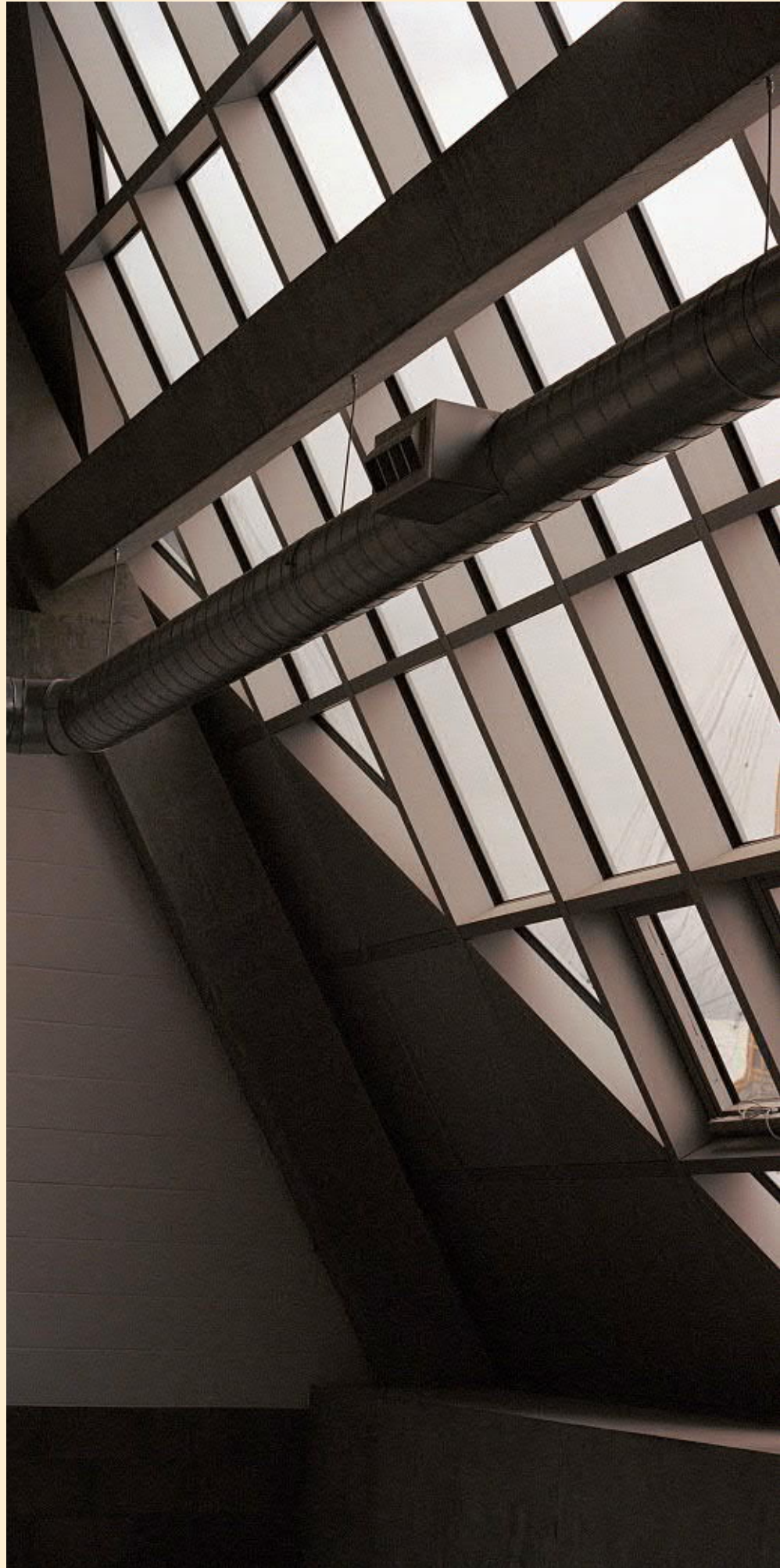
Greenwich Peninsula has undergone several reinventions since the 1990s. Is its latest transformation, into a bustling Design District aimed at artists, makers and all manner of creatives, the one that will stick? *Roddy Clarke* reports. Photography by *Maite de Orbe*

The posters are optimistic enough: “Welcome to new London” and “A new destination for contemporary urban living”. Perhaps the only surprise is that they’re next to the former Millennium Dome and not far from the southern terminus of the Emirates Air Line cable car. It’s a reminder that the Greenwich Peninsula is an area that has seen more than its fair share of fresh starts over the past 25 years.

In the late 1990s, this former industrial zone – once the site of Europe’s largest gasworks – was decontaminated and redeveloped by Tony Blair’s Labour government, which built the Dome and attempted to turn the surrounding area into London’s newest village. In 2012 came former mayor Boris Johnson’s cable car, supposedly erected to draw visitors to the area but widely derided as a white elephant; in 2019, it was The Tide, an “elevated linear park” running along the Thames billed as London’s answer to New York’s High Line (one critic was harsher: “pointless folly”).

The latest reboot comes courtesy of the developer Knight Dragon, which has been leading the renewal of the Peninsula for the past nine years and must be hoping its vision for the area will be the one that sticks. Called Design District, it centres around a 150,000 sq ft purpose-built “creative quarter”, offering affordable workspace for 1,800 people. Made up of 16 buildings designed by eight architectural firms, it will provide a hub for makers, fashion designers, artists and tech entrepreneurs – as well as being a new destination for anyone interested in those worlds.

With 12 of the buildings opening in time for this month’s London Design Festival, it’s ▶





Left: slanted windows and stone cladding form a harlequin pattern in a building designed by Ga architects. The Millennium Dome is visible in the background

Right: Helen Arvanitakis, the Design District's director, with Matthew Dearlove, Greenwich Peninsula's head of design

Below: London-based studio HNNA used clean, sinuous lines in one of the two buildings it designed



◀ a development that aims to show that the post-pandemic city and its creatives are not just open for business, but ready for whatever comes next.

Strolling around the site last month, going from offices to dance studios and makers' workshops, what is most striking about it is the amalgam of aesthetics, angles and façades in a fusion of architectural styles. This is a result of the studios designing "blind" of each other, an unconventional approach adopted by master planners HNNA and Knight Dragon, but one that lends itself to the variety of spaces needed to house diverse inhabitants.

Walking through narrow passageways which open on to "working courtyards", there are plenty of moments of discovery: from landscaping that changes with the seasons to small Roman atrium-style seating where one envisions a performance taking place. The new public spaces, conceived by Copenhagen-based urban designers Schulze+Grassov, were influenced by those in Tokyo and by Moroccan souks, according to Matthew Dearlove, Greenwich Peninsula's head of design.

"With height restrictions in place to preserve the view of the Dome, it gave us the opportunity to create a district with its own identity," Dearlove explains. "Immersive" and "productive" were key words in the design brief he outlined, as was "low-cost". Not just relying on its flashy architecture to tempt creatives into the area, the workspaces are priced at £5 per sq ft for the first 12 months. Even factoring in service charges on top - starting from £10 per sq ft and roughly equivalent to those in areas such as Shoreditch or Clerkenwell - this is very competitive.

Helen Arvanitakis, the Design District's director, says her ambition is partly to help businesses get back on their feet after Covid-19, and to elevate the standard of studio space that creatives expect. "As an industry, [it] is one of the UK's single best exports," she says. "Why aren't we building purpose-designed, beautiful, safe spaces for them to do their best work?"

One of the founding tenants is the design- and tech-focused Ravensbourne University, which moved into purpose-built headquarters nearby on the peninsula in 2010. Its new Institute for Creativity and Technology will be housed in a four-storey building with a reflective aluminium façade and floor-to-ceiling windows, designed by Spanish-Italian architects Barozzi Veiga. It is a centre for postgraduate study, research and industry partnerships at the forefront of creative technology.

"Harnessing the passion of graduates and connecting it with businesses will only encourage fresh ideas and innovation," Arvanitakis says.

Other tenants include Queercircle, an LGBTQ+-led non-profit which combines arts and social action, and ConceptKicks, a footwear-design research project led by product designer Daniel Bailey. "We want a cross-pollination of creative sectors," Arvanitakis explains. "Each building is a mix of sectors with no specific areas designated for just one. This way, it will inspire collaborations." The plan is for everyone to link up: creatives could do everything from 3D printing and food preparation to hosting events

'The creative industry is one of the UK's best exports. Why aren't we building beautiful, safe spaces for them to do their best work?'



and planning photo shoots, without leaving the district. Just as important is fostering a sense of community. “Collaboration is central to our programme,” says Ashley Joiner, the founder of Queercircle, “especially as we offer a space where LGBTQ+ people feel comfortable enough to drop in and meet new people.”

Independent freelancers are also in the developers’ sights: a co-working space called Bureau is part of the scheme, offering desk space beginning at £125 per month. Nearby is Canteen, the district’s food hall, placed in a caterpillar-like structure designed by SelgasCano. There’s a communal basketball court and working courtyards for those who want to eat and work and soak up the environment.

Coinciding with the opening on September 15, visitors will also be able to take in Art Block, a free art exhibition in two of the buildings presented in collaboration with the neighbouring NOW Gallery. A series of talks are also scheduled for September 21-23, addressing topics across design, fashion and craft. Plans are forming for workshops to open across the wider neighbourhood.

With rising property prices and a lack of available workshops putting many creative sectors in London at risk, Design District is a welcome addition to the capital. The question, of course, is whether they can pull it off. The pandemic has shifted working patterns, possibly for good, and not just in London or among those in the design sector. Developers who have committed themselves to huge office blocks in the central commercial areas now find themselves exposed: smaller, more flexible working spaces and mixed-use planning, in which small-scale manufacturers neighbour artists’ studios and flexible desk space, is one vision of the future.

New residents are arriving this month. With the design district just 15 minutes from central London by Tube and plans for a new station, 17,000 new homes and a park, the hope is that many others will follow. Performing arts group Clod Ensemble recently moved into the top floor of a building designed by Mole Architects, a Corten steel-clad tiered structure with large, slanted glass panels on the roof creating a light-filled space for the group. The ensemble has been dreaming of its own studio space “for a long time”, says its director Suzy Willson.

Willson is certainly hoping that the Greenwich Peninsula’s time has finally come. “Initiatives that value and respect artists, understand the contribution they make to communities and offer them affordable workspace are incredibly rare,” she says. **FT**

LONDON DESIGN FESTIVAL ON GREENWICH PENINSULA

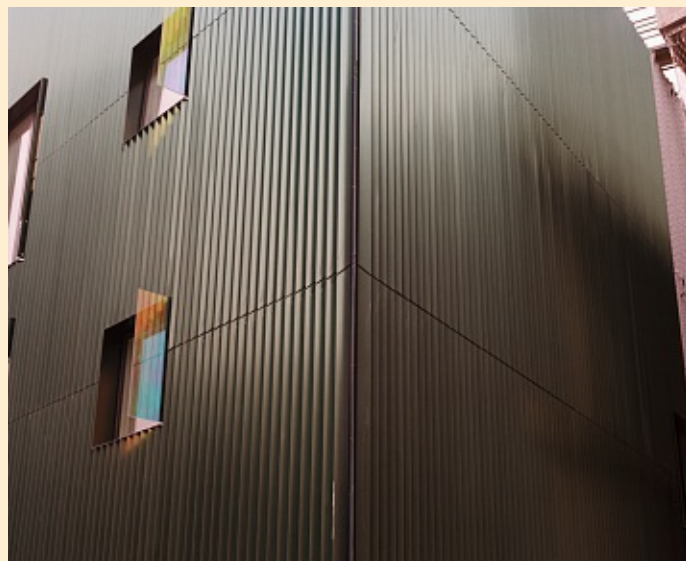
Two of the District’s buildings will be taken over by art and design exhibitions both running into October. A series of talks on fashion, design and creative innovation, curated by Nick Compton of Wallpaper magazine, will take place from September 21-23. Other highlights include a hoarding installation by artist Lois O’Hara on buildings B3 and B4, recycled-plastic furniture designs by Smile Plastics and an e-bike pop-up for Polestar



Facing page: Bureau, a co-working space and members’ club

Above, from left: Daniel Bailey of ConceptKicks; Clod Ensemble members Jonathon Baker, Suzy Willson, Valerie Ebuwa, Djenaba Davis-Eyo; and Ashley Joiner from Queercircle

Right: building D2, designed by Mole Architects, will serve as studio and office space



See the sights at the city's Design Festival

There are plenty of in-person events to savour this month. *Roddy Clarke* on what to see and where to see it



Soundbounce room dividers by Mathilde Wittcock at Planted

Planted

**King's Cross, Coal Drops Yard
September 23-26**

Claiming to be the first zero-waste design event, Planted focuses on biophilic design that aims to reconnect spaces with nature. The exhibition comprises installations, talks and a presentation featuring 30 recent design graduates who will offer solutions for greener lifestyles. planted-cities.co.uk

Design London

Magazine London, Greenwich Peninsula, September 22-25

Replacing what was previously known as 100% Design, this event showcases new collections from the contemporary furniture, lighting



Magazine London, North Greenwich

and design sectors. Alongside panel conversations with speakers including Yinka Ilori and Henry Holland, there'll also be a Danish Design Pavilion and a lighting design pop-up. designlondon.co.uk

The Makers' Market

**The Royal Exchange
September 20-24**

Marking this grand building's 450th anniversary, The Makers' Market will appear in a pop-up space on the mezzanine level. Handcrafted products including glassware, ceramics and leather will be on sale. londondesignfestival.com

**Medusa:
Architecture + Reality
Raphael Gallery, Victoria & Albert Museum, September 18-26**

The result of a collaboration between technology developers Tin Drum and the Japanese architect Sou Fujimoto, this mixed reality installation will change and evolve as audiences move around the space, highlighting the links between modern life and climate change. vam.co.uk

The Muse

Tala Showroom, 25B Vyner Street, E2 9DG, September 18-26

Lighting maker Tala will mark the launch of a new portable design by transforming its canal-side showroom in east London into a space that takes inspiration from the 18th-century Vauxhall Pleasure Gardens. tala.co.uk



Tala's The Muse Pleasure Garden Green

Design posts

**Various locations across the city
September 18-26**

London Design Festival's 10 design districts, including King's Cross, Mayfair and Clerkenwell, will each feature a sculptural signpost. The American Hardwood Export Council has partnered with furniture studios to select design students and graduates to create the public landmarks from red oak. Designs range from a homage to William Morris to a celebration of the Shoreditch streetscape. londondesignfestival.com



Salvaged steel scrap furniture in Brompton

**Islington design district
Islington Square and other locations, September 18-26**

Involved in the festival for the first time since 2017, the north London district is hosting a number of free installations, exhibitions and activities. Highlights include eye-catching ping-pong tables in Islington Square from Art of Ping Pong and Campbell Hay, and a series of vintage furniture pieces transformed into sculptures by Sam Jacobs Studio. londondesignfestival.com

**Brompton design district
South Kensington
September 18-26**

Titled "From Here Onwards", this year's Brompton pop-up programme explores how design

can respond to a period of immense change. Events in the district will explore current global shifts, including a research project into sustainable materials from Design Exhibition Scotland and a graduate show from the Royal College of Art. londondesignfestival.com

**Baltic design exhibition
Tactile Baltics, Dray Walk Gallery
September 18-October 3**

With 36 exhibitors, including a showcase titled "Designing Futures" by Adorno London, this event puts a spotlight on craft talent from the Baltics. Projects by established designers are complemented by three immersive virtual environments. tactilebaltics.com



Ping-pong tables in the Islington Design District



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Are you sitting comfortably?

As we spend more time at home, the design classics of the '70s are back to show us how to meld cosiness with glamour, writes *Cherish Rufus*



Few pieces of furniture are so on-trend as Michel Ducaroy's Togo sofa. Shaped like a tube of toothpaste folded over on itself and available in a variety of toothsome colours, it's been popping up all over the place, from chic Instagram feeds to Victoria Beckham's pre-spring-summer fashion campaign. Rock star Lenny Kravitz says that he has one in each of his homes. Sales have almost doubled over the past year, not just in Europe but also in Australia and China.

You could be forgiven for feeling a twinge of déjà vu. The Togo design is nearly 50 years old; Ducaroy himself died in 2009. This structureless sofa - which is modular and can be reconfigured in a variety of ways - was originally inspired by Pop Art and caused a sensation when it was launched at the Salon des Arts Ménagers in Paris in 1973.

It's far from the only 1970s furnishing being talked about again. From earth-tone palettes, Murano-glass mushroom lamps and wild houseplants to glamorous velvet, sleek chrome and homely rattan furniture, everything we loved about that decade, and thankfully very little of what horrified us, is suddenly in vogue again. We get to rediscover modular sofas while leaving lurid, headache-inducing wallpapers and carpeted bathrooms firmly where they belong - in the past.

Michel Roset, creative director at Ligne Roset, which has produced the Togo sofa since it launched, suggests that the decade's experimental aesthetic is part of its contemporary appeal. "People were aspiring to change," he says. The '70s were also a period of freedom, even anarchy, he adds. "Fitting in with what's 'normal' is not glamorous - pushing the boundaries is glamorous. And of course that is what we want today."

Ligne Roset's excavation of the period began in 2008, with a reissue of Pierre Paulin's appropriately named Pumpkin armchair and sofa from 1971. With a curving, structural silhouette reminiscent of the eponymous fruit, it was an unexpected hit. It inspired the reissue ►



Clockwise from above: Togo sofas from Ligne Roset; Bacharach swivel chair, Bond console and Puzzle lamp from Jonathan Adler; Alexander T-arm sofa with a Nixon cocktail table from Jonathan Adler; and a Wilkes Modular Sofa Group chair





Pierre Paulin's Pumpkin armchair, Elysée table and Gavrinis 3 rug

◀ of another Paulin classic, 1975's Bonnie, which is plump, playful and designed to warmly cradle the human body.

Other companies are travelling back in time too. Earlier this year, Herman Miller reissued Ray Wilkes's "Chiclet" - officially known as the Wilkes Modular Sofa Group - 35 years after it was discontinued. Curvaceous in form, the injection-moulded foam cushions are shaped like the chewing gum it was nicknamed after. The collection's playful but unusual shape helped it acquire a cult life on Pinterest, design blogs and Instagram, which led the company to take notice, says Herman Miller's lead archivist Amy Auscherman (who happens to own a vintage Chiclet set herself).

When it was originally released in 1976, the Wilkes Modular Sofa Group was intended as a workhorse for work spaces and hotel lobbies, a flexible, light and easy-to-maintain solution. But its bold colours and eye-catching shape also made it a statement piece, says Auscherman. "It looks like a piece of sculpture," she adds.

That balance between offering thrilling, bold new designs while not sacrificing comfort sums up the spirit of the '70s. And it goes a long way to explaining why we've become so infatuated with it now. As our homes have become the place where we live out every aspect of our lives - from work to play to rest - it's understandable that we'd want these spaces to become more exciting but also cosy.

"The '70s was comforting, it was comfortable and it was very human. I think as we are spending so much time at home right now we are all looking for this in our home spaces," says Australian designer Sarah Ellison, whose modern yet warm and beachy designs have garnered a loyal following. "We are coming off the back of the Scandinavian minimalism trend so this is the antithesis to that."

Born in the 1970s, Ellison grew up with a lot of the materials, textures and shapes that have found their way into her most recent collections. A series of brass and rattan tables are freshened up with generous proportions and modern silhouettes; a velvet modular sofa is modernised with cushy, exaggerated curves. The effect is simultaneously relaxed and glamorous.

Social media-friendly shapes may have pushed '70s design to the front of our consciousness. But it's the time spent at home over the past 18 months - and how well-suited 1970s' designs are for the way we live now - that has encouraged a thorough reassessment of what that period has to offer. "There is good and bad to come out of every decade," says the American designer Jonathan Adler, who admits to being a brass evangelist himself. "It's all about picking out the good and repurposing it for the present." **FT**

.....
Cherish Rufus is the FT Weekend Magazine's deputy chief sub-editor. @cherishrufus



Get the look

Massoni Trolley

Italian designer Luigi Massoni's round nesting Dilly Dally vanity table and chair for Poltrona Frau may be one of his most highly coveted pieces, but Massoni's less well-known designs are equally lustworthy, particularly the plastic space-age bar trolley (pictured) he designed for Guzzini in the 1970s. The shelves on this round, two-tiered cart are removable and double as trays. While the original came in a typically '70s palette - orange, black, cream or white - the reissue released by Guzzini has been given a thoroughly modern update and is completely transparent. fratelliguzzini.com, £290

Kartell magazine rack

From brightly coloured nesting tables and sinuous winding vases to bar sets and clever lamps, the Italian architect and designer Giotto Stoppino elevated the use of plastic with his quirky designs. One piece enjoying renewed popularity is a magazine holder (pictured) designed for Kartell in 1971. The deceptively simple rack comes in four- and six-pocket versions, and is still being made today in a host of hues and finishes. kartell.com, £131

Teddy textiles

Teddy, shearling, sherpa, fleece. Whatever you call it, fluffy textiles have returned in a big way. Armchairs from the likes of Sarah Ellison, the US furniture retailer CB2 and countless vintage resellers - and even a footstool from Christian Siriano's new interiors brand - have used it to add texture to their pieces and our homes. What could be more inviting than a tufty and tactile fabric?

Rattan

Rattan furniture and accessories are timeless. The '70s may have been the material's zenith, but it has never entirely fallen out of favour. It is, however, finding new relevance today. Vintage rattan plant stands, bookshelves and side tables are all the rage with vintage resellers on eBay and Gumtree, while retailers such as Urban Outfitters and Habitat are reproducing that bohemian aesthetic with headboards, mirrors, light pendants and coffee tables.

Spider plant

We haven't been as crazed as we currently are about plants since the '70s, which is probably why a lot of the decade's favourite houseplants, such as the ubiquitous monstera and more recently the fiddle leaf fig, have found cult popularity today. The spider plant (pictured) hasn't quite had its moment in the sun, though. Famously resilient, it's a forgiving plant that's hard to kill and easy to propagate. It's long overdue a bigger comeback.

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'People aren't so satisfied with things that just look nice'



Writer, magazine editor, designer – Ilse Crawford is a polymath whose sensual, immersive approach has inspired a generation to take interiors seriously. *Rory Robertson* meets her as she is awarded the London Design Festival's top award

Portrait by *Tobias Regell*

My first decorating statement, if you can call it that, was painting my room – Biba-style – with dark purple paint,” says the designer Ilse Crawford. The iconic London fashion store of the '60s and '70s was not the only source of inspiration for the young Crawford. Her childhood home had a wisteria climbing the wall outside, and, inspired by the lush, serpentine drawings of Aubrey Beardsley, she coaxed it in through the window and trained it to wrap the walls. “Dad was furious,” Crawford laughs.

Nearly 50 years later, we're sitting in a beautiful sunlit converted warehouse with floor-to-ceiling windows in Bermondsey, south London. The walls of Crawford's studio are not dark purple but a soft putty-green hue and I've sunk back into a vintage tan leather chair (“They are by Mario Bellini and I found them in a flea market in France,” she says).

We're here because Crawford, 59, is the recipient of this year's London Design Medal. It marks a long and illustrious career that spans not just interior and furniture design but also influential ►

◀ journalism on the subject. Festival director Ben Evans describes Crawford as “a design polymath” who has influenced a generation of designers through her work.

She cut her teeth on Condé Nast’s *The World of Interiors* magazine in the mid-1980s, where one of her missions was to bring contemporary design and architecture to the table. She was selected for the role largely, she says, “due to the fact that Min [Hogg, the magazine’s bohemian founding editor] thought I was the modern girl”. It worked. At the age of 27, in 1989, she was recruited to be the launch editor of the modern interior design magazine *Elle Decoration*, and over the next decade, built that title to huge success and acclaim. Then, at the peak of her powers, she made the surprise move to leave journalism. “I just thought every 10 years you should do something different, right?”

She had a stint “working with Donna in New York” (I quickly work out she is referring to Donna Karan), which Crawford calls “my Devil Wears Prada moment”. Then it was on to the Design Academy Eindhoven before, in 2003, she launched Studioilse. One of the interior design studio’s first jobs was the New York outpost of Nick Jones’s Soho House members’ club. For Jones’ UK hotel Babington House, she turned traditional country house decor on its head, with an informal look that was adored by the London media crowd and imitated widely. Other immer-

sive, sociable spaces followed, from Cecconi’s in Mayfair to Duddell’s restaurant and gallery in Hong Kong. Places that don’t just look good but feel good are a signature of Crawford’s work.

The surprise is that, despite such credentials, Crawford claims, “I’ve never really felt that creative and I don’t consider myself to be ‘a creative’ per se.” At college she studied history. “I was fascinated – and still am – by human narratives.”

She is reluctant to let her identity be condensed to a single job description. “In the end, I think all of us are a sum of our parts,” she says. “If you look at me through the rear-view mirror, I didn’t train as a creative. It certainly wasn’t a plan and the layers of different things I’ve done have certainly helped. Being a historian, going to work at *World of Interiors*, being an editor, all of that helps in figuring out how to get to the kernel of a story.”

One of Crawford’s organising principles is that the way a space is designed can enhance the health and dignity of the people who occupy it. Recent projects include a community kitchen called Refettorio Felix, which Studioilse worked on in collaboration with nonprofits Food For Soul and The Felix Project in 2017.

“We were approached and asked to design an environment where people feel respected, like every other human being,” Crawford says. “To us, this meant bringing dignity through the design of the space,” which is St Cuthbert’s church hall in ▶



‘People still have a puritanical streak when it comes to social and public spaces, and that shouldn’t be the case’



Community kitchen Refettorio Felix, right. Stockholm’s Ett Hem hotel, top

STUDIOILSE; MAGNUS MARDING; TOM MANNION

ELIZABETH HARROD & STEVEN MCRAE, SOLOIST & PRINCIPAL, THE ROYAL BALLET



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Ett Hem, left. Zanat Touch collection, below



‘People are now focused on how to make their homes work on a day-to-day basis’

◀ Earl’s Court, London. “We phoned Vitra and managed to use chairs that they were taking out of the cafeteria on the Vitra campus. They were lightly used and look fantastic, and Alessi donated tableware. We were able to keep the design spec really high,” she explains.

Crawford recalls a recent sceptical remark from an audience member at a lecture she was giving. “A chap said, ‘Come on, it’s just about getting food, isn’t it?’ and I thought, well actually, one of the people came up to me and told me that what’s great about the space is that we had made it so beautiful and, to him, it made him feel like someone cares. These are the kind of places that really deserve good design,” she says. “I think people still have a puritanical streak when it comes to social and public spaces, and that shouldn’t be the case.”

In 2019, Crawford was asked to design the Anna Freud Centre, a mental health research and therapy institution. “When we were asked to do this, we talked to the families and what they really wanted was: comfort, natural materials, safety,” she says. “We brought in Unesco-crafted wood furniture, Artek pieces and beautiful lighting that was fragile and delicate. There’s something in that fragility that suits the space. Often, anxiety and anger come from fear, so actually being delicate and sensitive with design is exactly what is needed.”

This commitment to accessible design is also behind Studioilse’s collaborations with Ikea.

Following on from the cork-topped tables, benches and stools that were part of her popular Sinnerlig line in 2015, Crawford is enthusiastic about the latest pieces that she has been designing with the Swedish furniture giant, which include subtle, coloured glass candleholders and containers. “Some people think Ikea sells throwaway products,” she says, “but I hear that being said and I think ‘well, only if you think of it that way’. These products are all made using recycled glass and the vessels can be reused multiple times. If looked after, they will last for ever.”

When Crawford steps back to view the industry as a whole, she thinks things have changed over her decades in it - but particularly since the start of the pandemic. “Good design is more available now and is woven in the design process,” she says. “People are now focused on how to make their homes work on a day-to-day basis. We are living, working, exercising and playing much more at home. As a result, people are becoming super thoughtful and bringing a more critical eye to design. We aren’t so satisfied with things that just look nice.” **FT**

Ilse Crawford will be taking part in a talk at London Design Festival on September 22. Work by her can be seen at two locations. For details, search programme. londondesignfestival.com

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Our throwaway culture, coupled with the built-in obsolescence of many tech products, means that the global e-waste mountain is growing. But sustainable – and repairable – design is part of the fix, says *Andrew Dickson*

Mend and make new

Here's an uncomfortable question. How many electronic devices have you bought in the past five years? Maybe your mobile provider tempted you with a free upgrade (or two). It's likely you got a new laptop or tablet after the old one ground to a halt. Did the pandemic encourage you to invest in a bigger TV or some smart speakers, or a monitor and keyboard for homeworking? Or you may have kids, in which case the quantity of items you possess that eat batteries and emit irritating beeps is probably uncountable.

Over the past few decades, many of us have become uneasily aware of how much stuff we consume, and of the moral onus to do something about it. We've switched to energy-efficient lightbulbs, learned to recycle and tried to break our plastic-bag habit (with mixed results). But what about objects such as mobile phones and TVs? The fact that few of us regard electronics as disposable belies the fact that we are throwing them away at a faster rate than ever.

According to recent UN estimates, in 2019 the world generated a record 53.6 million metric tonnes of electronic waste – more than the combined weight of all the adults in Europe. That's around 7.3kg per person, although the tech-hungry developed world is responsible for most of it.

Unappealing as waste is, it's the subject of the London Design Museum's keynote autumn show, *Waste Age: What Can Design Do?*. Its contention is that we're living through exactly this: an era in which the problem of waste is as defining as the problem of an overheating planet (the two, of course, are linked). And the lack of appeal is part of the problem. As Design Museum chief curator Justin McGuirk puts it: "It's a really massive issue that no one really wants to think about. It goes without saying that the whole point of waste is that it's out of sight and out of mind."

Timed to coincide with the COP26 UN climate-change conference, the exhibition aims instead

to put waste of all kinds front and centre: construction, food, packaging and fashion, as well as electronics. One section will showcase the epic problem of global waste (some 80 per cent of products are thrown away in their first six months of life). In another exhibit, designers try to find fixes, whether through experimental materials or objects specifically made to be disassembled and reconfigured as part of the "circular economy". E-waste figures prominently.

It's a tricky problem to solve: electronics are unusually resource-intensive and complex to handle. Mining the lithium, copper, rare earth elements and other toxic materials required for components and batteries is hazardous for the people involved in extraction, and again if they're disposed of in landfill (one of numerous ironies is that Silicon Valley itself is peppered with toxic-waste sites dating back

to the dawn of the semiconductor age). The sheer number of different elements that go into even straightforward pieces of tech also make disassembly and recycling a nightmare – as anyone who has attempted to dispose of a dead monitor can attest.

Perhaps the biggest headache is the shrinking life cycles of many appliances. Complaints about built-in obsolescence have been around for at least a century (in 1924, a cartel of lightbulb manufacturers began artificially limiting the lifespan of their products, a scandal that was exposed decades later). But until comparatively recently, it wasn't unusual to keep a washing machine or TV going for a decade, maybe longer. Now many of us change our smartphones more frequently than we do our hairstyles.

"It's crazy," says Janet Gunter, co-founder of the UK-based Restart Project, a social enterprise





Left: Recupel, an electronic-waste sorting and recycling nonprofit organisation in Belgium. In 2019, the world generated an estimated 53.6 million metric tonnes of e-waste

that campaigns to reduce e-waste. “When we buy devices, we accept that we can’t replace the components when they wear out. If your car battery died, you wouldn’t junk the car. But people do [junk] their mobile phones.”

Gunter sees this as emblematic of a societal malaise - a culture that yearns for new and shinier objects and takes a neglectful, throwaway attitude to the ones we already possess. McGuirk, by contrast, puts the blame squarely on tech manufacturers, who - for all that they have begun to advertise their green credentials - produce endless hardware refinements and software updates that mean devices age much faster than they should.

The materials that make up, say, an iPhone - aluminium, glass, copper, gold - are durable as well as valuable, and the form in which they’re shaped looks timeless in its perfection.

Designers are trying to find solutions, whether through experimental materials or objects specifically made to be disassembled and reconfigured

But three years after buying one, you’ll most likely need to upgrade. “It’s the production of desire,” McGuirk says.

Both McGuirk and Gunter agree that, though consumers might feel guilty, it’s hardly our fault: whereas a restored vintage motorbike can function all but perfectly seven decades on, anyone who tries to revive a 10-year-old laptop or find the right tool to mend a smartphone is doomed to frustration.

No one disputes the issue. So what to do about it? The thrust of the Design Museum exhibition is that, much as these are design problems, there are design solutions too. McGuirk and his fellow curator Gemma Curtin feature a “sustainable” mobile called the Fairphone, which is assembled from responsibly sourced materials and designed to be repairable by the user.

They also focus on insights gleaned from a village called Kamikatsu in Japan, which has been trying to turn itself into the planet’s first “no-waste” community: recycling must be sorted into no fewer than 45 different categories, and almost everything reused.

Another innovative project the curators highlight is a start-up based in Silicon Valley called Framework. Founded by the ex-Apple, Facebook and Oculus engineer Nirav Patel, the company, as the FT recently reported, has recently begun shipping the first fully “modular” laptop, one in which every major component - battery, screen, keyboard, storage, memory, ports - is easily replaceable. As with the Fairphone, physical parts can be swapped or upgraded when they wear out, with little more than a screwdriver.

Speaking over Zoom, Patel explains that Framework’s objective is to increase the number of “happy years” people experience. “With a typical consumer electronics product, you might get a year or two where you’re just totally happy,” he says. “After that, you find your battery is starting to wear out. Maybe a key on your keyboard is getting a bit flaky.” ▶

◀ With conventional laptops, options narrow at this stage; simply because one part doesn't function, you might find yourself being forced to get an entirely new machine. It's a broken system, says Patel: "The practices that were the norm in the industry just don't make sense. They don't serve the consumer well. And they certainly don't serve the environment well."


Does he regard it as a tech-world conspiracy? He laughs. "You'd almost hope that there was a nefarious plot for this to be a revenue-generation strategy. But actually, I think it's almost worse than that." Many tech companies, he explains, don't see much beyond the product launch; the end-of-life cycle barely figures. "When you've got products that last three years and your revenues and unit-volume projections revolve around that, it becomes very hard to move out of that space."

Janet Gunter's Restart Project aims to shift power back to people. One strand of its work involves sharing tips about how to mend gadgets you already own, from jammed printers to leaky vacuum cleaners, often via skill-sharing workshops called Restart Parties. Another strand promotes neighbourhood repair businesses, which used to be commonplace in the UK but have declined as manufacturers have made appliances harder to fix by "unauthorised" personnel.

"Repair jobs are the original green jobs," says Gunter, pointing to a recent report by the think-tank Green Alliance suggesting that "remanufacturing" and repair work could generate work for more than 450,000 people in the UK by 2035.

The charity also pushes hard on the so-called "right to repair". In April, the European Parliament passed legislation declaring that manufacturers of appliances like washing machines, dishwashers and TVs must make parts available so they're fixable for at least 10 years. In July, the British government passed a similar law, although it has been criticised for not being far-reaching enough. Legislation is yet to reach the US (one estimate suggests that not having a right to repair costs American consumers \$40bn). Activists are agitating for similar rules to be extended to devices such as smartphones and laptops – so far with little success.

The environmentalist mantra "reduce, reuse, recycle" is excellent advice, but if we're to achieve a properly circular economy we need to add another verb: repair. In this, suggests McGuirk, we could learn from developing economies that have had to do this out of necessity, whether in Cuba (where many 1950s US automobiles are famously still on the road, bodged together despite trade embargoes) or India, where the concept of *jugaad* – perhaps best translated as "cobbling together" – is a point of pride, referring to everything from trucks assembled from spare parts to semi-legal water mains run into informal settlements.

Seductive as the latest electronic device might be, makeshift solutions like these possess their own beauty, argues Gunter. We might think of another, older mantra, she suggests: "Time to make do and mend." 

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"Waste Age: What Can Design Do?" is at the Design Museum, London W8, from October 23; designmuseum.org



RECUPEL, COURTESY OF THE DESIGN MUSEUM; FRAMEWORK

From top: dismantling electronic devices at Recupel; Framework's 'modular' laptop, in which every component is replaceable

Many tech companies don't look beyond the product launch – the end-of-life cycle barely figures



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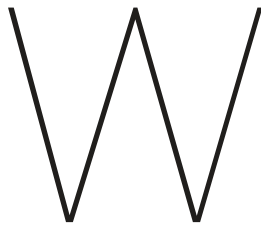


Ravinder Bhogal Recipes

Preserving summer

Transform the bounty of September into pickles and preserves for the months ahead. Photography by Aaron Graubart





When I was growing up, no meal was complete without a pickle. There were eye-wateringly hot ones and mouth-puckering sharp ones, but my favourites were the ones that trod the tightrope between sweet and sour with immaculate balance. While my mother made lots of *murabbas* (jams and preserves) and *achaars* (pickles) at home, the best ones were made by the elderly *achaar-waali* (pickle maker) who we called *maasi* (auntie) out of respect.

On Sunday afternoons, when my mother might notice her stock was dwindling, she'd send me with an older cousin to *maasi's* house to pick up fresh supplies.

Maasi made them in a little shed in her yard that she had turned into a factory. I loved nosing around it, with its vinegar and spices. "What's that?" I'd say, picking up bits of cooking paraphernalia. She never once got impatient with me. She'd display the fruits of her craft for her customers, laying out open jars like bait to see if they would respond. And they almost always did.

In September, as summer slides into autumn, I think of *maasi's* pickling shed and become nostalgic for the ceremony and ritual of preserving. It is a bountiful and beautiful fruit and vegetable moment that brings a languid feast of plumpness - peppers and stone fruits, weighty aubergines, fat courgettes and buxom tomatoes. The magic of vinegar, salt, sugar and good olive oil infused with spices, flower waters, herbs and time will transform this glut into things that jangle with flavour.

All these pickles and preserves can be made at home safely with basic cooking equipment and without too much fuss. Wash all your jars and their lids in warm soapy water and rinse thoroughly. They need to be sterile when you fill them, so place your washed jars in a 140C oven for 20 minutes or run them through a hot wash in the dishwasher and let them air dry thoroughly before filling and sealing. The glow of a row of jewel-coloured jars gleaming from your kitchen shelves will not only give you a Women's Institute-style sense of achievement but will add pizzazz to the most lacklustre meals. And it's beautiful to preserve the sunny harvest for winter when pickings will be slimmer. **FT**

Ravinder Bhogal is chef-patron of *Jikoni*. jikonilondon.com

[@/cookinboots](https://www.instagram.com/cookinboots)

Grilled courgettes in olive oil with whipped feta and saffron oil

Makes enough to fill a 1l jar

- 500g yellow and green courgettes
- 3 tbs olive oil
- Sea salt
- Pepper
- 1 tsp caster sugar
- ¼ tsp chilli flakes
- 2 lemons, juice and zest
- 2 cloves garlic
- 1 tbs fresh oregano leaves
- 200ml olive oil

To serve

- 200g feta cheese
- 1 tbs lemon juice
- Pinch of saffron
- 60ml extra virgin olive oil
- 35g pine nuts

1 — Finely slice the courgettes lengthways into long ribbons with a vegetable peeler and place in a bowl. Mix salt, pepper, sugar and chilli flakes with the three tablespoons of olive oil and massage all over the courgettes.

2 — Heat a griddle pan and grill the courgette ribbons for approximately one minute on each side until charred and striped.

3 — Have the lemon juice ready in a bowl and toss the cooked courgette ribbons in the juice. Set them aside to cool.

4 — Layer garlic, lemon zest, oregano and courgette ribbons in a sterilised jar. Top up the jar with olive oil. Make sure the courgettes are completely covered in the oil and pop on a lid. Store in the fridge and use within one month once opened.

5 — These make a great addition to salads but also to cheeses such as feta. To make the whipped feta, whizz together the feta and lemon juice in a blender until smooth. Crush the saffron using a pestle and mortar, then pop in a small pan and pour over the olive oil. Heat over a low heat for four minutes to infuse.

6 — To serve, smooth the feta over a plate. Arrange courgette ribbons over the feta, spoon over saffron oil and scatter over pine nuts and serve.





Goan aubergine pickle with pan-fried mackerel

Makes enough to fill a 1l jar

- 125ml rapeseed oil
- 1 tsp each fenugreek, fennel, cumin, nigella and brown mustard seeds
- 15 fresh curry leaves
- Thumb of ginger, finely grated
- 4 garlic cloves, finely grated
- 2 very large aubergines, diced into 2cm chunks
- 2 red bird's eye chillies
- 250ml apple cider vinegar
- 100g soft brown sugar
- 30g flaked sea salt
- 1 tsp ground turmeric

For the mackerel

- 2 tbs rapeseed oil
- 8 mackerel fillets, pinboned
- Sea salt
- Pepper

1 — Heat oil in a large saucepan over medium-high heat. Add fenugreek, fennel, cumin, nigella and mustard seeds, and cook until seeds begin to pop. Add curry leaves, stir for 20 seconds, then add ginger, garlic and turmeric, and cook until fragrant. Then add aubergine and chilli, stirring frequently until tender. Pour in vinegar, sugar and sea salt, and stir occasionally until vinegar reduces by two-thirds. Transfer to a sterilised jar, seal, stand until cooled and then refrigerate. The pickle will keep for three weeks once opened.

2 — This pickle works well as a side to pan-fried oily fish such as mackerel because it cuts through the richness. To prepare the mackerel, heat the oil in a large pan. Once hot, lay the fish skin side down and cook for three to four minutes without moving it. Flip it over, take off the heat and leave it to cook in the pan's residual heat for a further three minutes.



Apricots in orange blossom and cardamom syrup with labneh, honey and pistachios

Makes enough to fill a 1l jar

- 300g caster sugar
- 80ml lemon juice
- 1 strip of lemon peel
- 15 green cardamom pods, bruised
- 800g apricots, halved and pitted
- 1 tbs orange blossom water

For the labneh

- 1kg Greek yoghurt
- Honey
- Handful of roughly chopped pistachios

1 — Combine the sugar, lemon juice, lemon peel, cardamom and 1.5l water in a large pan over high heat. Bring to the boil and cook, stirring, until the sugar dissolves. Reduce heat to medium-low and add apricots. Cook for five minutes or until apricots are plump and tender. Remove from the heat, add the orange blossom water, stir and cover. Set aside at room temperature overnight. The next day, spoon into a sterilised 1l glass jar. Store in the fridge and consume within one month of opening.

2 — These are wonderful with cream or ice cream for a lovely dessert but I especially love them with labneh. To make the labneh, scoop the yoghurt on to a muslin cloth and let it hang from a rack in the refrigerator with a bowl underneath to catch the fluid. To serve, scoop the labneh into a bowl, top with apricots, drizzle with honey and scatter over pistachios.



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Cool Catalans

The Catalans seem to take conservation seriously. To the extent of removing an entire Club Med holiday village in order to restore the geologically unique north-eastern tip of the region to its natural state. Knocking down more than 400 buildings, which admittedly looked as integrated within the landscape as a caravan site, is surely taking rewilding to a new level.

This dramatic decision was inspired by the 1998 designation of Cap de Creus - the rocky outcrop in the hinterland of the seaside town of Cadaqués and the famous El Bulli restaurant - as a protected natural park. By 2010 the resort had been excised from the landscape and today the extraordinary rock formations of Tudela, where the Club once was, are again as nature intended.

On the August Saturday morning that I visited, the carefully landscaped trails were dotted with shiny Lycra as runners and cyclists made their determined way up them. My host was the energetic Anna Espelt, who runs her family's Espelt wine operation, which has the most vineyards, 172ha, in the local appellation of Empordà (although the vast Perelada operation sells more wine).

Espelt's tourist-friendly modern winery in Vilajuïga is based quite far inland and draws from vineyards in several different locations, but I feel Anna's heart is most moved by those she was encouraged to plant in Cap de Creus, within sight of the sea. "I feel very good in this place," she smiles as she takes in the view of the deep blue Mediterranean, the resort town of Roses in the distance and a bronze-age menhir that was unearthed by her father at the foot of her vineyards.

Before the phylloxera louse, which is fatal to vine roots, arrived back in 1879, Catalonia was wine country. By the turn of that century, a wine region with about 10,000ha



As imagined by Leon Edler

of vines had been almost wiped out. Today, evidence of the 30,000km of painstakingly built stone terraces for vines can be seen on many a hillside. There are currently only 1,821ha of vines in production in this recently revived denomination.

It was partly to honour Cap de Creus's viticultural legacy that Espelt planted vineyards there. The vine trunks were so spindly I thought they were only a handful

of years old but they bear witness to how tough conditions here are for vines. The chilly *tramuntana* whistles through the mountains from the north, and the vines are buffeted by winds off the sea too. The park's guardians are keen to encourage biodiversity. They see vines as more fire-resilient than many other plants in a landscape that is tinder-dry in a "normal" summer, let alone 2021 which,



Espelt tells me, has so far seen just 153mm of rain.

The precision of that number is testament to the pain imposed by the drought but also Espelt's scientific training. She was meant to be a biologist but in 2000 the opportunity to carry on her grandfather's wine-producing legacy lured her back from California where she had been a cellarhand. She was very much thrown in at the deep end. Nineteen years ago, they planted 25ha of vines on Cap de Creus, partly to encourage others. Her first mistake, she says, was the decision to trellis the vines on wires rather than plant them as standalone bush vines, which would possibly have been

Empordà is definitely on the move. It is well past its flirtation with international vine varieties

more resilient and less thirsty. Nevertheless, the single-vineyard varietal wines they have yielded since 2017 are pretty impressive.

She has named them after places on Cap de Creus that have a special meaning for her. The white, made from Picapolla, as they call tangy Clairette grapes here, is called Pla de Tudela, after the beach where she particularly likes to swim. The red is made from Garnacha, a grape that is called Lledoner Negre here, and seems to be slimmed down and freshened up with each successive vintage. It's called Cala Rostella after a pine-covered outcrop overlooking El Bulli.

These special bottlings are offered at the same price and I wondered if the Spanish market was ready to pay so much for a white wine. I was assured that the white sells out faster than the red, although admittedly it is made in smaller quantities. According to Espelt, "For many years we ►

Exciting Empordà wines

I gave all these wines at least 17 points out of 20 and am very sad to see how few of them make it to the UK.

WHITES

- Clos d'Agon, Clos d'Agon 2018 13.5%
- Espelt, Pla de Tudela 2018 12.5% €36.90
espeltvicultors.com, \$75 European Cellars in the US

REDS

- Castillo de Perelada, Aires de Garbet 2017 14.5%
- Castillo de Perelada, Finca La Garriga 2016 14%
- Espelt, Cala Rostella 2018 and 2017 14.8%
€36.90 from espeltvicultors.com
- Masia Serra, Aroa 2018 14.5%
- Mas Vida, Vida Nua 2017 14%
- Roig Parals, Camí de Cormes Carinyena Vinyes Centenàries 14.5% £60 Seckford, £70 Fine + Rare plus duty and VAT (2007)
- Sota els Àngles, Sota els Àngels 2019 13%
- La Vinyeta, Microvins Carinyena Negra Bota 2018 15%

SWEET

- Masia Serra, Ino NV 16%
- Vinyes dels Aspres, Bac de les Ginesteres NV 14.5%
£36.50 Albion Wine Shippers (2004)

Tasting notes on Purple Pages of JancisRobinson.com and such international stockists as there are on Wine-searcher.com



◀ thought Empordà was a red wine area but now we learn we should focus on whites too – especially from the local varieties Lledoner Blanc [Grenache Blanc], Lledoner Roig [Grenache Gris] and Carinyena Blanc [Carignan Blanc].”

Espelt also covertly converted the family’s vineyards to organic viticulture and says she waited to break the news to her father, an agrochemical merchant, until after a bibulous Sunday lunch.

She pioneered the local renaissance of Grenache Gris, which can make arguably more interesting and perfumed wines than the pale-skinned Grenache Blanc. I had previously been rather unimpressed by the Carignan Blancs I had tasted in the Pyrenees in France, and one or two of the Empordà versions confirmed this. But La Vinyeta’s Microvins 2019, aged for 14 months in old French oak barrels and tasted at its stylish winery, won me over. It was dense, vibrant and had rather impressive grip. That said, both Josep Serra, co-founder of La Vinyeta, and Anna Espelt admitted that the grape doesn’t have that much actual flavour. Perhaps it will end up as a useful blending ingredient rather than as a varietal wine.

La Vinyeta, set up by Josep and Marta Serra in 2002, is another particularly interesting operation, very much informed by the fact that Josep’s brother is a designer in Barcelona. Microvins’ labels are a lesson in providing useful, geeky information in a clever, attractive way. And the team at La Vinyeta

have really shown the locals how to entice visitors, with their outdoor café, sheep, cheeses and olive oil. La Vinyeta looks as though it belongs in California.

Empordà is very definitely on the move. It is well past its flirtation with international vine varieties and is now concentrating on the two most-planted varieties, both local: Lledoner Negre and Carinyena Negra, or Grenache and Carignan. These are the same varieties that dominate Priorat, the wine region that fetches Catalonia’s highest prices. Empordà is perhaps too small to be similarly appreciated, even though the average age of these Empordà vines, and their pale-skinned mutations, is impressively high. In a tasting of 73 Empordà wines recently, I was also delighted to see that some of the best wines included single-vineyard bottlings by one of the handful of co-ops – a welcome change from throwing everything into the same vat.

Some of the best wines of all are the strong, sweet ones, made in a wide range of ways and a number of them are completely stunning (after all, in terms of geology and climate, Empordà is a mirror image of Roussillon, home of Banyuls, on the other side of the Pyrenees). But I won’t waste space saying any more about them since I know how unfashionable such wonders are at the moment. I do hope their day will come. Together with their dry counterparts. **FT**

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FT Weekend





FROM LEFT: IBN BATTUTA; ITAMAR SRULOVICH; BRUCE CHATWIN; ROSE MACAULAY; ASTERIX & OBELIX

LIZZIE GILL

FANTASY DINNER PARTY

ITAMAR SRULOVICH

The Honey & Co chef heads to Greece with a group of well-travelled guests to eat, drink and revel in his post-lockdown freedom – and his wife’s apple tart

After two years of semi-confinement, my fantasy dinner is a gathering of travellers. Nowhere could be more appropriate than Patrick Leigh Fermor’s home in Greece, a collection of stone buildings perched above the sea in Kardamyli. But I have taken certain liberties with it: I got Sarah Raven to zhuzh up the garden and had the swimming pool from La Colombe d’Or in Provence brought in, complete with the Alexander Calder mobile.

Accidentally or not, I have triple-booked the band, but I hope that somehow Umm Kulthum, Fela Kuti and Joni Mitchell will make it work together.

In the kitchen is the best cook I know – my wife Sarit Packer – and I have assembled a crack team for her to have fun with: Nof Atamna, whose Instagram posts we’ve been drooling over for years; Junya Yamasaki, the chef who opened Koya – we still dream about the last meal he cooked for us there; and the great cookbook writer Claudia Roden.

We go to the local market, see what’s good, then have a delicious debate about the menu – often this is the best part of any meal. Junya gets excited about the fresh fruit and vegetables; Claudia and Nof about the local olive oil. I have entrusted my good friend Caroline Eden, a traveller with a particular ear for food stories, to chronicle the excursion for posterity.

First to arrive is the author **Rose Macaulay**. Lately I’ve been bewitched by her novel *The Towers of Trebizond*, in which

a group of Anglicans travel across Turkey by camel. Rose appears on a white one.

Next is **Ibn Battuta**, a 14th-century Moroccan whose travels make Marco Polo’s look like a trip to Tesco. His accounts include everything from the price of a slave in Persia to an Indian samosa recipe. He and Rose hit it off immediately, when he asks how she came to own a “white Arabian Dhalur (single hump) from the famous herd of the Ruola tribe”.

My next guests are **Asterix & Obelix**, the Forrest Gumps of the ancient world, whose love for their village is matched only by their love for adventures. And last is **Bruce Chatwin**, my favourite travel companion of all. He is no stranger to this house, having stayed here before. And he chose the hills above it as his final resting place.

We drink the slightly rough local wine and lots of tsipouro (except Asterix & Obelix, who brought a flagon of potion) – then we have course after course, drink after drink, song after song. We have the whole world at our table.

We tell these travellers about the past 18 months, about lockdown and Zoom and WFH, and Bruce remembers something he once wrote: “Man’s real home is not a house, but the Road.”

Dessert is my wife’s apple tart, the only thing that can make our rowdy group silent for a bit before we wish each other good night and, more importantly, good travels. **FT**

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ROBERTA HALL-MCCARRON; MACKEREL, GOOSEBERRY AND SUNFLOWER GAZPACHO. PHOTOGRAPHS BY AMELIA CLAUDIA

The Little Chartroom, Edinburgh

It would usually count against a place if you walked in off the street and there were deliveries lying around. Not this time. You step off Edinburgh's grubby Leith Walk into the pool of calm that is The Little Chartroom and there, on the table, is a basket of wild mushrooms that looks like it was just dropped off by some forest-dwelling elf. In other circumstances this might be a wilful flaunting of sustainability credentials, but I don't think The Little Chartroom does flaunting. In design terms, it's a tiny little temple of modest restraint.

The food, on the other hand, is pyrotechnic.

The chef is Roberta Hall-McCarron, who has been working her way through kitchens, running a pub in Cambridgeshire that I still can't quite believe I missed, and appearing on *Great British Menu*, which I'm glad I did. The Little Chartroom, which opened in 2018, marked a triumphant return to her hometown.

Combining a lightly house-cured mackerel with goseberries is by no means unusual, but what is remarkable is laying it out over a puddle of Andalusian gazpacho made not with the traditional almonds but with sunflower seeds. It had a distant relationship to tahini and a passing resemblance to a fashionable nut milk but was far more interesting than either. Most of all, it was a masterpiece of creative thinking: instantly recognisable foreground, entirely new background. When chefs try a big idea it is usually that most wearily jejune of turns, deconstruction. Recontextualisation is a new one for me, and I love it.

A few years ago, I had a dish by Heidi Bjerkan on the tasting menu at Credo in Trondheim that, at the time, felt like it rewired my appreciation of the potato. Hall-McCarron's confit potatoes with girolles, wild leek, summer truffle and cheese equal Bjerkan's, which is the highest compliment I can imagine. Confitting usually just packs fat into an ingredient (another high compliment) but here, the gentler, slower treatment



The subtlety, the cleverness, the profound feeling for ingredients – Hall-McCarron has them all

The Little Chartroom
(from September 16)
14 Bonnington Road
Edinburgh, EH6 5JD
thelittlechartroom.com
Starters £12.50-£13.50
Mains £24-£33

concentrates the taste of the potato. It's not a bland starch filler. It's a glorious, starring vegetable.

There was a very good piece of duck on smooth borlotti beans accompanied by both beetroot and cherry purée, simple yet delightful in its interconnections. Sure, duck goes with cherry, but the cherry also harmonises with the beetroot... and then you realise that that earthy tone in the beetroot gets picked up by the same slightly soily note you get in borlotti... not black-eye peas or kidney beans or cannellini or castellana lentils, just borlotti. And it feels like the fantastic geometry you sometimes see in the tiling of a mosque. The closer you look, the tighter the logic, the more glorifying the overall effect.

Halibut was served on the bone accompanied by cauliflower dyed with turmeric but not overdone – the yellow was pronounced but the flavour merely subtle enough to emphasise the cauliflower – and, to continue the “coronation” theme, fat, soaked raisins “curried” not with some arcane, handmade garam masala but tasting of proper old-fashioned curry powder. Witty, without archness.

What saddens me a bit is that you won't get to go to The Little Chartroom, at least not in this incarnation, because in September, Hall-McCarron and her partner will be opening a new, bigger restaurant and this little gem will be relaunched in a more casual guise.

So why am I telling you all this? Because about two-thirds of the way through the meal it began to dawn on me that this was the work of a significant and important cook. The subtlety, the cleverness, the profound feeling for ingredients – Hall-McCarron has them all, and she's going to take that talent to a great big restaurant across town, where every reviewer will tell you she's a phenomenon.

So don't think of this as a review, more as an historical document, a record of a phenomenal meal, and also an advance warning. Something very exciting is happening in a corner of Edinburgh and I suggest you get in before everyone catches on. One day, just like me, you'll be proud to be able to say you were there at the beginning. **FT**

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Games



A Round on the Links by James Walton



All the answers here are linked in some way. Once you've spotted the connection, any you didn't know the first time around should become easier.

1. In 1999, what was voted "the most significant English-language play of the 20th century" in a Royal National Theatre poll?

2. In the list of Britain's bestselling albums of the 21st century, Adele's *21* and *25* are first and third – which album, also by a female artist, is second?

3. Who resigned as home secretary in 2018 because of the Windrush scandal?

4. What is Britain's longest-ever running sitcom?

5. What's the more common name for the 1642 painting "Militia Company of District II under the Command of Captain Frans Banninck Cocq"?

6. Which war ended on April 1 1939?

7. Who played Nigel Tufnel in *This Is Spinal Tap* (above), before going on to direct

Best in Show and *A Mighty Wind*?

8. Which "Lord" stood in the constituency of the serving prime minister at the general elections of 1987, 1992, 2017 and 2019?

9. Which species of pigeon went extinct with the death of "Martha" at Cincinnati zoo in 1914?

10. What was located at the junction of Berlin's Mauerstrasse, Zimmerstrasse and Friedrichstrasse between 1961 and 1989?

The Picture Round by James Walton

Who or what do these pictures add up to?



+

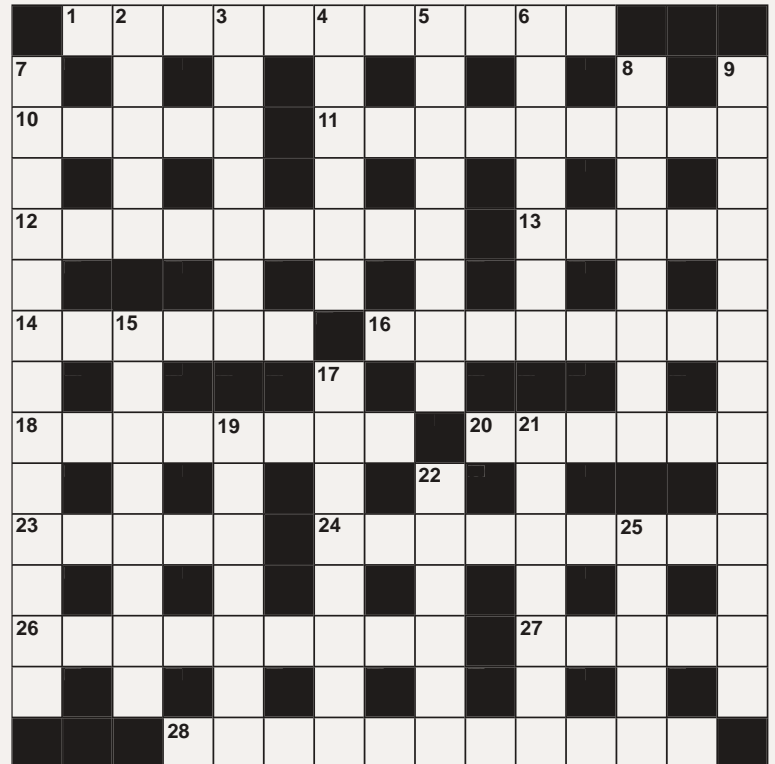


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Answers page 7

GETTY IMAGES; ALAMY

The Crossword No 556. Set by Aldhelm



The Across clues are straightforward, while the Down clues are cryptic.

ACROSS

- 1** One who's wasteful with money (11)
- 10** Wrong, awry (5)
- 11** Care, kindness (9)
- 12** Keep on trying (9)
- 13** Open, in full view (5)
- 14** Up till now (2, 4)
- 16** Small spotted beetle (8)
- 18** Pull back (8)
- 20** Sultanate in southeast Asia (6)
- 23** Ruling class (5)
- 24** Purefying (9)
- 26** Excited, enthusiastic (9)
- 27** African river mammal (5)
- 28** Theatre's balcony area (5, 6)

DOWN

- 2** Former religious community inhabitant (5)
- 3** Beginning climb under the foot of Snowdon (7)
- 4** Plant rag on line (6)
- 5** Marine on manoeuvres captures Florida soldier (8)
- 6** Plant craft you endlessly manoeuvre (7)
- 7** Little slates on top with each domestic appliance (6, 7)
- 8** Raining horribly around East African (8)
- 9** Nation minted old penny OK with half of nugget I treated (6, 7)
- 15** Remains trusted, perhaps, when embracing impartiality, primarily (8)

- 17** Criticise church leader about one's organ (8)
- 19** Inhabitant fared well without food and last two drops of water (7)
- 21** Farmer managed cows, initially, with her (7)
- 22** Very busy ambassador's court in charge (6)
- 25** Force that is taking politician left (5)

Solution to Crossword No 556





BRENDAN GREELEY

PARTING SHOT

September 11's dark theatre of terrorism

When the South Tower started to fall, I was the last to turn, rooted on Cedar Street for maybe a second as people streamed past me. Then I ran, just fast enough, in the right direction. I stopped behind a bagel cart on Nassau Street and then a low glass wall on Chase Manhattan Plaza, and then the cloud hit me, black and heavy. I found an open door, I still don't know how, and stepped through it.

It was just a drawing of lots. A lot of people died. I watched them die. I know the soft thud of each floor collapsing in turn. People around me died. I assumed I would die. And then I didn't. There is a hierarchy of grief and I know my place in it. I lost no one. I never fought in the wars that followed. I never came home from those wars missing a limb or a friend. I just stumbled around lower Manhattan for two hours.

When I heard the North Tower go, I tried to fling myself through a glass door into a copy shop for safety. I bounced off, humiliated in the middle of my own terror. Someone told me to go to a hospital and the instructions were a relief. I moved oxygen tanks, pushed people in wheelchairs from triage up on to the wards. I helped someone into an ambulance that had arrived from an Orthodox Jewish community in Queens. Then there were no more people and I walked across the Brooklyn Bridge and into the rest of my life.

If you grew up white and American at the end of the 20th century, you grew up knowing that nothing bad would ever happen to you. An accident, perhaps - a tragedy, but not a catastrophe. And so all I did on the morning of September 11 was become one of those people that bad things happen to. It is a large group of people. It includes most of the people in the world. I was 26 years old then. I'm 46 now, with a wife and four children. I told myself that what happened mattered less to me with each passing year. Then last

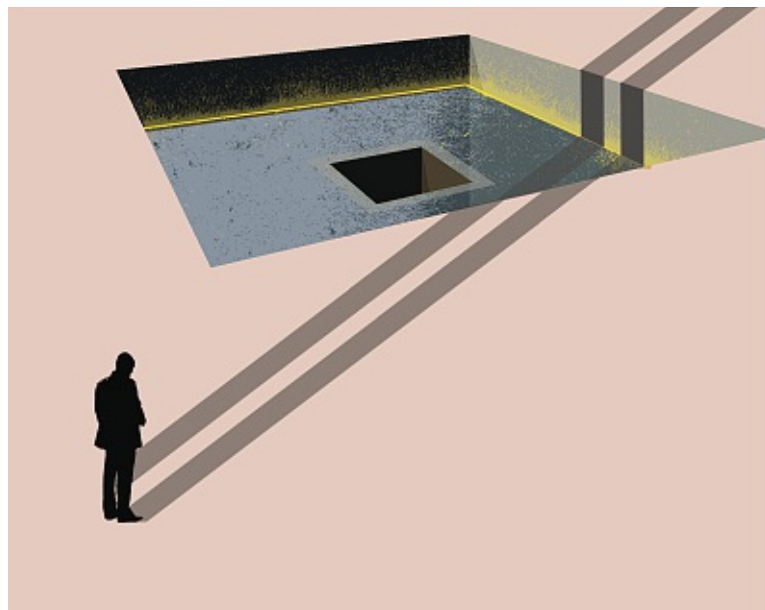


ILLUSTRATION BY SHONAGH RAE

month, with everyone else in the house asleep, I began to think about details. Dust. Thuds. Screams. I sat alone in my basement and wept, heaving, uncontrollably, in waves for about an hour. And then I opened my bedroom door, woke up my wife and told her I wasn't over it. How could I be?

I think of terrorism now as pure performance. I don't take the ostensible political goals of any terrorist seriously, because I don't think they do, either. Terrorism is simply a display of potency. It is always theatrical, with proclamations and flourishes, because that's the point. It's a one-act play with a single message: I can do this, you have to watch and you will always remember. I'm left now with a loathing for any kind of theatrical politics - flags, costumes, armed patrols, street brawls, occupations, even a fist pounding on a desk. I've lost the patience to watch anyone play at revolution.

After 2001, I spent a year in denial, then left my job in reinsurance and drank for two years until I ran out of money. I thought about killing myself but my mum made me promise I wouldn't, so then I couldn't. And so I began the slow process of starting from scratch, as a journalist. One of the pleasures of

I lived and walked away, and that moment sometimes still arrests me. I remain captive, in a seat in the dark

this job is that you get to meet people who actually fix problems. I've found those people aren't that dramatic. Actual change is boring. It asks for dogged resilience and attention to detail. It measures victory in tedious little steps.

I still love actual theatre. I'll sit in the dark and watch pretty much anything, grateful for small moments of beauty. In 2000, I saw Philip Seymour Hoffman in Sam Shepard's *True West*. Just after the lights went down, ushers hustled Sean Connery into the audience and seated him two rows in front of me. In the second act, Seymour Hoffman plugged in a stage full of toasters that his character had stolen, and filled them with slices of bread. The bread actually toasted, and I thought "I smell toast right now, and so does Sean Connery." I will be grateful for that moment for ever. I will remember it for ever.

That is the unforgivable problem with terror. It's a performance you have to remember for ever. I am one person, of thousands standing there, 20 years ago. I lived and walked away, and that moment sometimes still arrests me. I remain captive, in a seat in the dark. A group of young men staged a play about how virile and important they were, and one small consequence of all that destruction is that they wasted years of my life. I get to have a wife and children. I used to think that meant I won. I also still live with long bouts of depression. I've got better at managing it, but I didn't win. Nobody wins.

In 2015, I went to Paris to cover the aftermath of some more kids who thought it would be cool to kill people. They too staged it dramatically, shooting literally into a theatre in the dark. On the last night I was there, I talked to a bartender who had pulled screaming, fleeing Parisians into his basement for shelter. He had the flat affect of someone who's watched something horrible and hasn't even begun to think it through. I told him the only thing I could, the only thing I knew was true. You will never forget this. You will never be completely OK. I'm sorry. **FT**

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Brendan Greeley is a Financial Times contributing editor

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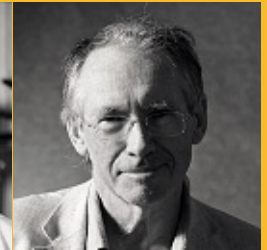
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