JANUARY 18/19 2020
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MISSION: CONTROL

How Dominic Cummings plans to reinvent politics. By George Parker

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ALESSANDRO FURCHINO CAPRIA

‘Raphael is complicated. He was both an artist of genius and a shrewd entrepreneur’

Cullen Murphy on the restoration of the Vatican’s Raphael Rooms, p20

‘We had nothing. So I have this obsession with wanting to own things’

Photographer Don McCullin on collecting antiques, p32

‘When it’s grey outside, a colourful dish can lift the spirits’

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FT Weekend Magazine

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Issue number 853 • Online ft.com/magazine • Editorial inquiries 020 7873 3282 • Advertising inquiries 020 7873 3121 • FT Weekend Magazine is printed by the Walstead Group in the UK and published by The Financial Times Ltd, Bracken House, 1 Friday Street, London EC4M 9BT

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SIMON KUPER

OPENING SHOT

Why Trump is proving Orwell wrong

The last person to see George Orwell alive was probably the poet Paul Potts. Finding his friend asleep in his sickroom in University College Hospital, London, Potts left a packet of tea for him. Orwell was planning to take it on a restorative trip to Switzerland. That night, January 21 1950, an artery burst in Orwell's lungs and killed him.

Seventy years after an author dies, the copyright on their fiction expires. Expect an explosion now of rights-free versions of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. When the novel first appeared, it was read as an anatomy of totalitarianism; after Edward Snowden's revelations about the US government's spying programme in 2013, it was reread as a prophecy of digital surveillance; and in the Trumpian era of "alternative facts", it has returned to the bestseller lists as a defence of truth.

I'm an Orwell nut – aged 18 I could quote verbatim from, say, a 1935 letter to Rayner Heppenstall – and the work of his that I think about most nowadays isn't *Nineteen Eighty-Four* but his 1946 essay "Politics and the English Language". I'm forever pressing it on people as a primer for how to write. The essay expresses one of Orwell's main ideas: clear speech enables clear thought and prevents lies. But I have come to think that he was wrong. What Donald Trump has shown is that clear speech can enable lies.

Orwell's essay attacks debased 1940s political language. Demagogues of all shades were using euphemisms, fancy Greek and Latin words, and the passive voice to "make lies sound truthful and murder respectable". Instead of saying, "We have massacred people," they'd say, "Opposition elements were liquidated." Marxists favoured awkward jargon translated from foreign languages: "hyena", "petty bourgeois", "flunkey" etc. None of these people were funny; Hitler's go-to insult was "joker".

Orwell ends his argument with his famous rules for writing: avoid clichés, foreign, scientific or jargon words; cut words whenever possible; use short words and the active voice; and, finally, "Break any of these rules sooner than say anything outright barbarous."

He had me convinced that clear speech was an auxiliary to truth, until Trump came along. In both speech and tweets, Trump adheres to all Orwell's rules except the one against barbarism. He prefers one-syllable words ("Build the wall"), can keep it snappy (140 characters) and avoids lapses into Greek. His tweets approach Orwell's ideal of prose that sounds like speech; in fact, social media blur the very distinction. Trump has even mastered a rhetorical genre that Orwell didn't have: huckster's utopianism.

Like Orwell, Trump understands the rules of communication: the audience is bored before you've even said anything; style trumps substance; and facts don't persuade people (there's a reason Orwell wrote *Nineteen Eighty-Four* as a story, not an essay). If you say something important and true in wooden prose while wearing the wrong clothes, nobody will listen. Like Orwell in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, Trump also knows that the most powerful story is a nightmare with a hero: *immigrants are coming to kill you, but I will protect you*.

And Trump dispenses with euphemisms for violence. He promises to "totally destroy" North Korea, encourages police officers to bump suspects' heads, muses publicly about murdering 10 million Afghans and tweets that 52 Iranian cultural sites "and Iran itself, WILL BE HIT VERY FAST AND VERY HARD". He enjoys describing graphic violence, perhaps because in his mind it evokes TV shows and films rather than reality.

> **'Orwell had me convinced that clear speech was an auxiliary to truth, until Trump came along'**

Above all, Trump demonstrates a chilling truth: politics today is communications. Speaking persuasively is no longer just a tool. It's the whole game. Just as you win the high jump by jumping highest, you win elections nowadays by communicating best: "Get Brexit done." I admire the professionalism of today's politicians who have emerged from television, journalism or comedy, because I'm in the communications business myself. I do what they do, just much less well.

Orwell believed that clear language enables clear thought. But Trump demonstrates something quite different: simple language can encourage simple thought. Unburdened by complex ideology, he can take a multifaceted policy with endless trade-offs and paint it as unequivocally good or bad: "The Iran deal is a disaster", "insane", "terrible". Simple language also makes lies more persuasive: if you can sound like a human being rather than a script written by committee, you'll be better able to deceive people, especially if you use Trumpian repetition. Orwell, for all his faith in clarity, intuited that. That's why he equipped the regimes in *Animal Farm* and *Nineteen Eighty-Four* with homely phrases: "Four legs good, two legs better" and "Big Brother is watching you".

Just as Trump has made me suspicious of clear language, Boris Johnson has weaponised something else I used to revere: British humour. I had always vaguely assumed that humour could pierce high-blown lies. (Orwell himself could be pretty funny.) Since Brexit, I've realised that, especially in Britain, humour can allow a politician to pose as a harmless jokester and distract people from boring, painful truths.

Demagogues used to rely on force. But in a democracy, language is more effective. FT

simon.kuper@ft.com *@KuperSimon*

ILLUSTRATION BY HARRY HAYSOM

INVENTORY MONTY DON
GARDEN WRITER AND BROADCASTER

'I am 65 this summer; I have realised there are things I'm not going to do, and that's liberating'

Monty Don, 64, has presented the BBC's *Gardeners' World* since 2003. He was president of the Soil Association for eight years, and was appointed OBE in 2018.

What was your childhood or earliest ambition?
To be a butcher. Shopping with my mother, I loved going to the butcher. I love every tool that cuts, from garden shears to knives. I loved the wood of the chopping block, the sawdust on the floor. From the age of 10, all I wanted to do was write.
Private school or state school? University or straight into work?
I was kicked out of my first school for being unruly. I wasn't predisposed to authority. A little prep school in Crowthorne, from seven to 13. Malvern College for two years - I hated it and left at 15 or 16. Then a state comprehensive and a sixth-form college in Basingstoke. I worked for three years on building sites and farms, went to France and worked in gardens, then put myself through night school and got into Cambridge. I changed a lot - I became quite focused and I realised I liked working on my own.
Who was or still is your mentor?
At prep school, my English teacher. He made me want to write. At Cambridge, my supervisor Arthur Sale. He made me feel my academic and intellectual contribution was worthwhile. In television, the producer John Percival. He was starting a new programme for Channel 4 about gardens. He said "show me your hands", looked at them and said "you'll do".
How physically fit are you?
Aerobically, I'm very fit - I row every day, I do yoga, I work outside. But my knees are shot - they're about 85, the rest of my body is about 45.
Ambition or talent: which matters more to success?
Neither is as important as determination and hard work.
How politically committed are you?
I'm informed, but don't feel aligned to any party. I am committed to environmental and organic issues.
What would you like to own that you don't currently possess?
A new tractor.
What's your biggest extravagance?
Expensive guitars that I play badly.
In what place are you happiest?
I have a farm which I think is one of the most beautiful places. I love it with every cell in my being. And in the garden, on a summer evening, with Sarah [his wife].
What ambitions do you still have?
To continue the work I'm doing as well as I can. And to have more time on the farm. For years, I thought I'd write the novel floating around inside me, but I am 65 this summer; I have realised there are things I'm not going to do, and that's liberating.
What drives you on?
Work tends to be more fun than fun. I wake up in the morning and think: yippee. And I'm very competitive. And the fear of failure - of it all disappearing.
What is the greatest achievement of your life so far?
Sarah and I have been together for 40 years. I've got three children and a grandson, and I've made homes and gardens that we love. Home is the greatest achievement. And I've strung a few good words together.
What do you find most irritating in other people?
People expressing views based on prejudice rather than consideration and knowledge. That is proliferating through social media: people with shit for brains given a voice.
If your 20-year-old self could see you now, what would he think?
He would be utterly astonished.
Which object that you've lost do you wish you still had?
The first good guitar I bought in 1973 - an Epiphone FT-150 for £125, £1,000 today. I saved every penny working on a building site. I sold it and I've regretted that ever since.
What is the greatest challenge of our time?
Climate change. And a huge challenge not being talked about: population growth. It's not going to go away and, with all its ancillary problems, we need to address it.
Do you believe in an afterlife?
Absolutely. I believe that the energy lives on and is connected to place. I do have this idea of rejoining all my past dogs and family on a summer's day, like a Stanley Spencer painting.
If you had to rate your satisfaction with your life so far, out of 10, what would you score?
10. I've been so lucky. I've loved and been loved, and in the end that's all everybody ever wants. FT

Interview by Hester Lacey. "Monty Don's American Gardens", Fridays at 8pm on BBC2 - also available on BBC iPlayer. The related book is due out this year, published by Prestel

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BY ELAINE MOORE IN SAN FRANCISCO

ILLUSTRATION BY PÂTÉ

Why can't we resist online reviews?

A tricky request arrived in my inbox this week from a friend who has recently published a book. Knowing that online reviews can bump a title's standing, he sent an email to everyone in his address book asking us all to write one. This was awkward because so far I've only skimmed the book and checked the acknowledgments section to see if my name was in it (it wasn't).

Online reviews are commonplace but until moving to San Francisco I had not come across so many people actively seeking them out. The surgeon who took out my wisdom teeth reminds me to write him a review at every check-up. The laundromat on my street has a sign by the door requesting that customers give it a five-star rating. But then this is the home of local business review site Yelp – the first start-up to really capitalise on the business of crowdsourced reviews.

The veracity of Yelp reviews has been argued over since it was founded in 2004 by Russel Simmons and Jeremy Stoppelman, two PayPal engineers. Right away, business owners began to complain about negative comments. Several have tried to sue the company. Others attempted to game the system by posting glowing reviews of their own products and negative reviews of competitors'. Yelp has said in the past that it rebuffs about a quarter of all reviews it receives.

Online review fakery can be lucrative. Back in 2013, academics Georgios Zervas and Michael Luca concluded that an extra star on Yelp caused the revenue of a business to rise by up to 10 per cent. This could explain why they also found that at least 16 per cent of reviews online are fake.

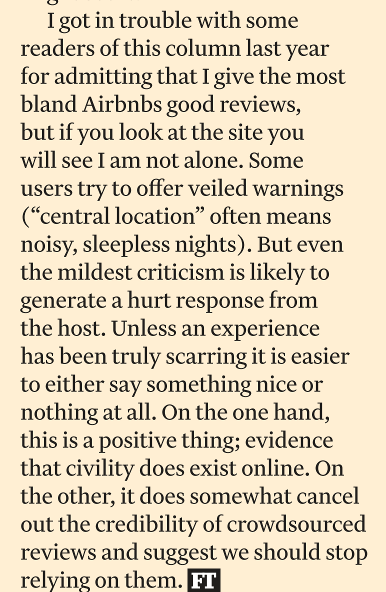
As more sales move online, that percentage is likely to have grown. Still, it is hard not to reflexively look up public opinions posted on Google or Yelp or Expedia when you move to a new city – even if you suspect that some of those reviews might be sourced from friends and family, and others might be fake.

For the average person glancing at their phone, trying to sift out the questionable reviews is tricky. But some are obvious. There are thousands of obscure five-star reviews for products sold on Amazon – "When my phone is charging, everyone is jealous" – that suggest questionable authenticity. Low ratings used for personal attacks are fairly transparent too. In 2015, Dr Walter J Palmer, a dentist from Minnesota, killed Cecil, a lion popular with tourists in Zimbabwe. His business page on Yelp then filled with one-star reviews and complaints that his office was dirty and the staff rude.

Even legitimate reviews can be skewed. The group of people who want to share opinions about restaurants in the US tend to be largely white and relatively wealthy. Movie, TV and games reviews are dominated by young men – which might explain why *Avengers: Endgame* has a 90 per cent audience score on the film website Fandango while *Damsels in Distress* has 39 per cent.

The quirk I find most interesting is how unwilling most of us are to

'It is hard not to reflexively look up public opinions posted on Google or Yelp'



leave bad reviews for services we have received in person. Perhaps once you have used someone's towels in an Airbnb, or seen them cooking in their restaurant, it is hard to write something negative. Especially if you think that they might see it.

I got in trouble with some readers of this column last year for admitting that I give the most bland Airbnbs good reviews, but if you look at the site you will see I am not alone. Some users try to offer veiled warnings ("central location" often means noisy, sleepless nights). But even the mildest criticism is likely to generate a hurt response from the host. Unless an experience has been truly scarring it is easier to either say something nice or nothing at all. On the one hand, this is a positive thing; evidence that civility does exist online. On the other, it does somewhat cancel out the credibility of crowdsourced reviews and suggest we should stop relying on them. FT

Elaine Moore is the FT's deputy Lex editor in San Francisco

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ROBERT SHRIMSLEY
THE NATIONAL CONVERSATION

The contest to be the real Mark Darcy

ILLUSTRATION BY LUCAS VARELA

The exciting news that Keir Starmer, lawyer and putative Labour leader, might have been the model for *Bridget Jones*'s Mark Darcy has added a frisson of interest to the contest. I mean, if Labour can find a leader who could be played by Colin Firth then it might at last be on to something. Obviously, it could just go for Colin Firth but apparently he doesn't have the backing of the Unite union and could struggle to win the support of three affiliated societies.

The evidence that Starmer is the real-life Darcy is, it must be said, not entirely compelling. He might have known the author Helen Fielding and he is, like Darcy, a human-rights lawyer. Starmer himself has never denied the suggestion but then, why would you? After all, it is not unhelpful to a man who, for all his other merits, can seem a tad dry. To be the real-life literary sexpot Mark Darcy would add a touch of glamour to his campaign. He may seem dull, ladies, but he's smouldering underneath.

I have my own reasons for doubting the claim, not least because almost every heterosexual male human-rights lawyer I have ever met has thought he might be the real model for Mark Darcy. (Of course, technically speaking the character is modelled on Mr Darcy from *Pride and Prejudice* – or at least Colin Firth's version of him – but he never took human-rights case and none of the Labour candidates is owning up to being a stand-offish country landowner.)

One human-rights lawyer I know may actually have been telling the truth when he suggested he had been at least partially drawn upon. He was a successful, left-leaning, saturnine human-rights barrister who knew the author. Reflecting further, he might have told me he was an adviser for the movie rather than the inspiration, but I think at least one of his cases was referenced in the film. Interestingly, he didn't mention Keir Starmer's rival candidacy.

My acquaintance's claim to a connection is less tenuous than Starmer's, but it does seem that being the model for Mark Darcy is pretty much a staple of any middle-aged human-rights barrister. Letting people know you might be the real Mark Darcy certainly seems like a potentially good chat-up line, though I should stress that the man I was talking about above is happily married and that even if he weren't, he could definitely do better than me. He's also, well, a barrister, so it is probably wise to clear that up. Anyway, I like to think that all the men who might have been Mark Darcy could meet up once a year in their Christmas jumpers for dinner and a drink.

Of course, being or not being the inspiration must not be allowed to intrude on the serious issue of winning the Labour leadership, even though it could definitely help the party in some of its weaker age demographics. Perhaps we could add spice to that contest by providing an extra category so MPs could then stand for leader, deputy leader or the real Mark Darcy.

I know there are problems with this idea. For one thing, it would work against women. Labour MPs are already embarrassed that the party has never had a female leader; how much worse to also never have had a female, real Mark Darcy. Rebecca Long Bailey has been a lawyer for some years but has no chance of being the real Mark Darcy.

This is quite a problem for a supposedly progressive party. It is frankly a disgrace that the real Mark Darcy has never been a woman. There are plenty of female human-rights lawyers and I can see no reason why one of them could not do the job. The real Cherie Blair is female and has been for 65 years but is not even considered a contender. If they cannot be the real Mark Darcy, Labour ought at least to find other film roles they could have been. The real Erin Brockovich, perhaps.

Still, this is a long contest and, while Starmer may seem the front-runner today, there is plenty of time for the others to catch him. The contest to be the real Mark Darcy remains wide open. The contest for Labour leader also continues and even though it is much less glamorous, we'll try to keep you up to date. FT

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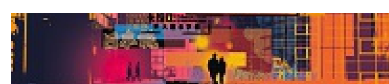

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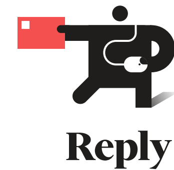

Reply

Thanks for a fascinating read ("Generation Putin: young Russians on the only leader they've ever known", January 11/12). What struck me was how deep and considered the interview subjects' musings are, especially considering their youth. Even when talking about their own apathy, they show more maturity than young people in the west (or elsewhere).
Mrs Chan *via FT.com*

@AlexKokcharov January 9
A brilliant take via @FT on the younger generation in Russia: most youths are disengaged from politics and many support Putin and his system

I generally agree with Simon Kuper's column ("Why I love and deplore the French welfare state", January 11/12). However, I believe that the long arm of the state has created a very static society whose population has an irrational fear of change, which is not a good thing.
La bergerie *via FT.com*

Re Douglas Coupland on "Why the fate of the ozone layer should give us hope on climate change" (January 11/12): the threats to the ozone layer and from acid rain were overcome by government action. In contrast, decades of evidence of the threat from global warming have so far produced completely inadequate measures. You will be long gone when those younger people you dismiss as victims of manipulation are facing a deepening crisis. It's reassuring to hear they are not as complacent as you.
Global *via FT.com*

Further to Simon Kuper's article on "What footballers really eat" (January 11/12): while at the Lowry Hotel in Manchester, a friend pointed out the gentleman who was the United team's omelette maker. Until now, I had assumed it was a hoax.
Dominic Regan *Bath*

To contribute
Please email magazineletters@ft.com. Include a daytime telephone number and full address (not for publication). Letters may be edited.

Quiz answers The link was words that sound like single letters 1. Ewe 2. Bee 3. Jackie Kay 4. *Oh! What a Lovely War* 5. *Cat's Eye* 6. "See how they run" 7. El Greco 8. Dee 9. "Theirs not to reason why" 10. *Are You Being Served?* **Picture quiz** Sister Wendy Beckett + Craig David = Wendy Craig

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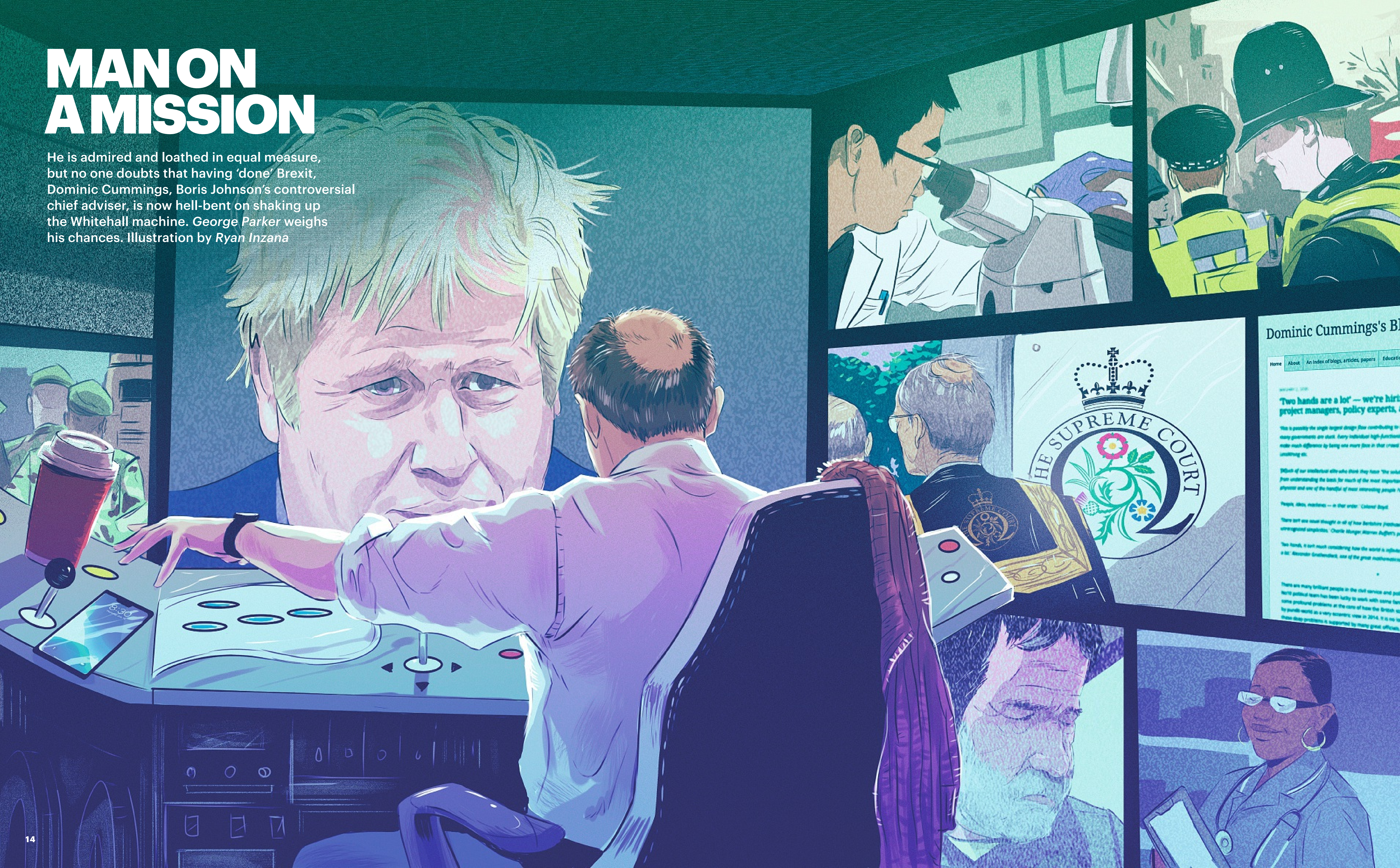
MAN ON A MISSION

He is admired and loathed in equal measure, but no one doubts that having 'done' Brexit, Dominic Cummings, Boris Johnson's controversial chief adviser, is now hell-bent on shaking up the Whitehall machine. *George Parker* weighs his chances. Illustration by *Ryan Inzana*



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When Boris Johnson walked through the front door of Number 10 on July 26 2019, the British political system was in a state of Brexit-induced paralysis. But in a small room upstairs, arguably the second most powerful man in Britain was already issuing new instructions to demoralised staffers: "Don't be shit."

A dishevelled figure with a soft voice and the appearance of an eccentric scientist, Dominic Cummings explained to his political team – largely inherited from a broken Theresa May – that from now on Number 10 would be run like Nasa, with him at Mission Control. There was one single objective: delivering Brexit. "It was genuinely jaw-dropping," says one of those present. At times, in what a staffer said was a 90-minute diatribe, Cummings started waving his pen around so frantically that they feared he would deface the oil painting behind him.

"The overriding sense was we had wasted the last three years," says another witness. "He said bad performance wouldn't be tolerated. Then he invited everyone next door for some drinks – it was so different to the old regime. It was genuinely quite inspiring." Jason Stein, an adviser who attended the meeting, noted at the time: "Astonishing meeting. He says the last government made a total mess of this and we won't mess it up again. He says unlike the last government, decisions are going to be rapid and final. It's absolute Darwinism in there. Titles don't matter."

Six months later, Cummings is still in Downing Street, presiding over a new political landscape that he has helped shape. The man who directed the 2016 campaign to take Britain out of the EU is chief adviser to Johnson, a prime minister who used the promise "Get Brexit Done" to secure an 80-strong House of Commons majority. On January 31, Britain will formally leave the EU – although the challenge of agreeing a trade deal with the bloc will be just beginning.

Cummings, who gave Britain Brexit, is leaving the tricky details of delivering it to others. The 48-year-old is moving on to a new agenda, in which he hopes to remake the civil service, put money into "left-behind" regions and turn the UK into a leading centre for science, putting it at the cutting edge of artificial intelligence, robotics and climate change. This month, he published a blog post that went viral, inviting "weirdos and misfits" to join him at the heart of government.

Those who see him in Number 10 meetings with Johnson detect no deference towards the prime minister. "He sits there, leaning back in his chair – they act as though they are equals," says one senior government figure. "There's no doubt about that."

For now, Johnson embraces Cummings, who is seen by friends as a "Renaissance man" with rare skills spanning campaigning, policy, communications and project delivery. To his enemies he is vicious, unscrupulous and an intellectual showboater who is riding for a fall. For all his successes in plotting election strategies, the pressure is now on to deliver his highly ambitious agenda. One government insider says: "He's all-powerful and he's running the country. But nobody ever dies in a ditch for an adviser. Of course he's expendable."

Cummings, who declined to be interviewed for this article but responded to fact-checking queries, tells people he will quit long before he is fired. He likes to give the impression that he is just passing through, moving from one project to the next, and that he could happily walk away at any time and return to his "bunker" at his parents' farm in County Durham.

When he joined the Vote Leave campaign in October 2015, Cummings insisted he would only be the "acting" campaign director, but went on to lead it to victory. Similarly, he predicted in November 2019 that he would soon quit Number 10: "There's a reasonable chance I won't be around any more. As you know, I strongly dislike Westminster, so I'm reluctant to return," he told colleagues.

But Cummings did come back after Johnson's victory in December and immediately announced plans to create his dream Downing Street operation, inhabited by data scientists, policy experts, project managers and people with "odd skills". Uri Geller, the celebrity spoonbender, has applied.

Even Cummings' appearance is seen by some as an outward symbol of his avowed contempt for Whitehall tradition. His sartorial standards have deteriorated the closer he has got to the centre of power. Some see it as insolent and disrespectful. Cummings argues, however, that it is simply that he has "always been a scruffy bastard". Nor is he the first dishevelled iconoclast to operate in Number 10: Steve Hilton, who padded barefoot around Downing Street as David Cameron's "blue-sky thinking" adviser, quit after becoming frustrated at his ability to achieve change.

'Cummings said bad performance wouldn't be tolerated. Then he invited everyone for drinks. It was so different to the old regime – inspiring'

A Downing Street staffer

But Cummings' style has become more idiosyncratic over the years. His "low-riding", loose-fitting trousers are usually accompanied by threadbare shirts, often open to the chest and covered in biro marks. He likes to set off this ensemble with a bulldog clip, attached to his shirt. Freddy Gray, deputy editor of The Spectator and a friend of Cummings and his wife Mary Wakefield, another journalist on the magazine, says: "On occasions, Dom has come into the office with two pairs of tracksuit bottoms on and Mary's looked up and thought that he was one of the homeless people she helps to look after."

His friends say he is not planning to be in Downing Street in the long term. "He doesn't dream of some permanent Metternich or Talleyrand continuance in office," says one. But they also agree that now Cummings is installed, he wants to get big things done quickly. The country is in for an interesting ride.

Cummings was born in Durham, a cathedral city in the north-east of England, in 1971. His father was a construction manager on oil rigs and his mother a special educational needs teacher. Although his upbringing was geographically distant from the gilded world inhabited by the Eton-educated Johnson and David Cameron, Cummings nevertheless attended Durham School, a prestigious fee-paying establishment founded in 1414, and Exeter College, Oxford.

In spite of railing in this month's unorthodox Downing Street job ad against the "blah blah" spoken by Oxbridge humanities graduates, Cummings himself studied ancient and modern history. Robin Lane Fox, his tutor in ancient history (and FT Weekend gardening columnist), says: "He got a very good First in both parts in three years," adding that Cummings was "a whole class better" at the subject than Boris Johnson, who studied classics at Oxford some years earlier.

Critics say Cummings is a poseur, name-dropping Thucydides and Bismarck – later broadening his repertoire to include physicists and data scientists – to claim intellectual superiority. But Lane Fox disagrees: "Dominic is not a pseud."

At Oxford, Cummings was also highly influenced by the late Norman Stone, his tutor in modern history and an adviser to Margaret Thatcher, who encouraged him to travel to Moscow in 1994 to witness the new world being created behind the old iron curtain. Liam Halligan, a Telegraph journalist who was then working as an academic at the London School of Economics and writing columns for The Moscow Times, offered Cummings somewhere to stay.

"A lot of smart young westerners were going to Moscow at the time," Halligan says. "Norman Stone asked if I could help him out. I had a sofa in the hallway and he slept on that. He was intense, very clever, socially a bit awkward. He didn't have a job initially but wanted to see what was going on. Later, he worked on a bond desk. There were lots of investment projects coming and going."

Cummings helped to set up an airline flying from Samara on the Volga to Vienna, but it was spectacularly unsuccessful. "It once took off forgetting its only passenger," he once recalled.

Halligan says he could see why people thought that some of the bright young Brits arriving in Moscow were security service "assets". "The whole atmosphere was like a Graham Greene

> **'They admire each other's strengths. Boris is funny, charismatic and brings out the TV cameras. Dom is massively bright, and drives things'**
>
> **Matthew Elliott, former head of Vote Leave**

Above: Dominic Cummings arriving at No 10 on December 16, the week after Boris Johnson's election win

Right: setting off for the House of Commons with Johnson on September 3 2019 for a key Brexit debate

novel," he says. Conspiracy theories have been built around Cummings' time in Russia, a country that 20 years later celebrated Britain's departure from the EU. "It's utter bollocks," says Halligan.

Back in the UK in the late 1990s, Cummings entered the world of rightwing pressure groups, becoming campaign director for Business for Sterling, a group campaigning to stop Britain joining the euro. Again, Stone helped with the introductions. Cummings believed the euro was a doomed project and the EU was a lumbering behemoth, but he has never actually been a member of the Conservative party.

Instead, his instinctive view that politicians are squanderers of public cash and his dislike of big bureaucracies – including the one based in Brussels – were fused in 2004 in the referendum campaign in which he made his name: an often-forgotten vote on Tony Blair's plan to create a regional assembly in the north-east of England.

Blair wanted to decentralise power to the English regions and saw the north-east as a good place to start. He had reckoned without Cummings, who helped to campaign against the new regional assembly with the aid of a giant inflatable white elephant and the slogan: "Politicians talk, you pay."

County Durham manufacturer John Elliot, who chaired the campaign, says that when they met every morning to plan the day's events, Cummings was highly important. "He was not the most talkative but he was probably the most influential." He adds: "He was quite single-minded. He wanted to keep things simple. He kept on message." The "No" side won 78:22.

Some 12 years later, Cummings deployed the same simple messages, visual stunts and a focus on "waste" in the 2016 Brexit referendum. But first, he retreated to the three-room outhouse at his parents' farm near Durham. One visitor says: "It's what you'd expect – quite ramshackle, packed with books." He disappeared from the scene for over two years, reading history and developing his growing passion for science, which he believed held the key to understanding and solving public policy problems.

He also immersed himself in the art of campaigning. Elliott says Blair's polling guru, the late Philip Gould, and Bill Clinton's adviser James Carville, an abrasive Washington outsider from Louisiana, are among his heroes. Carville mastered the three-word campaign slogan "The economy, stupid." Cummings later came up with "Take Back Control" and "Get Brexit Done."

In 2007, Cummings caught the eye of Michael Gove, a fast-rising Tory shadow minister, who made him his special adviser for seven years and brought him into David Cameron's new coalition government to overhaul England's education system and take on what Gove liked to call "the blob" – the teaching establishment, which he blamed for accepting low standards.

By now, Cummings had started writing down his thoughts, expounding in sprawling online tracts how a more rigorous education system could help to solve the country's ills. "We need what Murray Gell Mann, the discoverer of the quark, calls 'an Odyssean education' that integrates knowledge from maths and science, the ▶

◀ humanities and social sciences, and training in effective action," he wrote in 2014.

In 2011, Cummings married Mary Wakefield, having met at a party. "He was already friends with my brother Jack," Wakefield says. "Anyone who's friends with Jack is OK by me." They have one son, Alexander Cedd, known by family as "Ceddy" and named after the Northumbrian saint. Friends say Cummings is a doting father.

Wakefield's father owns Chillingham castle in Northumberland but friends say the couple, who own a house in Islington, do not enjoy a lavish lifestyle. "Typically English – asset rich, cash poor," says one. "Mary has to earn a living."

Cummings, who has long railed against officials earning six-figure salaries, earns just under £100,000, less than other senior Number 10 staff.

The couple's relationship was depicted in a Channel 4 film on the Brexit referendum, in which Cummings is sympathetically played by Benedict Cumberbatch, a Remainer who spent an increasingly bibulous evening with the couple, noting Cummings' mannerisms. "Because of the film, people see Mary as the sweet one," says Freddy Gray. "She hates that. If either of them is Machiavellian, it's her."

Cameron initially blocked Cummings from entering government on the grounds he was too confrontational. Gray says Cummings' parents had excitedly texted their son when they saw television pictures of him entering Number 10 on the first day of the new government, only to be told he wasn't wanted. "I think that cemented his and Mary's deep dislike of Dave and the gang. I remember thinking the day after the referendum, 'Well, that's what happens if you f**k with Mary and Dom.'"

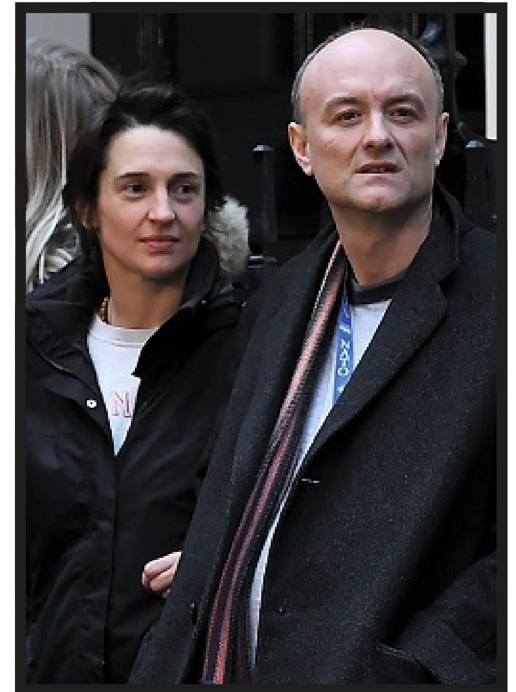
Cameron later relented and allowed Cummings to join Gove, but he came to regret it. David Laws, a former Liberal Democrat minister who worked with Cummings at the education department, witnessed the abrasive style that he would eventually take into Downing Street.

"He can be unnecessarily rude, hectoring and create a climate of fear, which isn't generally conducive to good government," Laws says. "I think he's genuinely interested in serious policy issues rather than 'spin', but whether he

'He can be unnecessarily rude, hectoring and create a climate of fear not generally conducive to good government'

David Laws, former Lib Dem minister

Above: Cummings beating a carpet outside journalist Liam Halligan's flat in Moscow, 1994



Above: with his wife, Mary Wakefield, waiting to hear the newly elected Boris Johnson speak, December 2019

Left: in March 2001, during his time as campaign director of Business for Sterling, which lobbied to stop the UK joining the euro

AFP/GETTY IMAGES; GETTY IMAGES; COURTESY OF LIAM HALLIGAN; REX/SHUTTERSTOCK

engages at a level where he actually delivers is another matter."

By 2014, Cameron was tiring of the fact that his flagship education reforms – which sought to toughen up exams and curriculums – had become "toxic" with voters, partly thanks to Cummings waging war with the teaching profession. Cummings jumped first in 2014 – Cameron later labelled him a "career psychopath" – and returned to his bunker, while Gove was shuffled out of the department.

Two years later, Cummings would return as the prime minister's nemesis, working with Boris Johnson and Michael Gove to deliver Brexit in the 2016 referendum, campaigning on EU "waste" and ruthlessly exploiting fears about immigration with a false claim that Turkey was about to join the EU and that millions of Turks would soon be heading for Dover.

"What he is brilliant at doing is creating a kind of guerrilla warfare against the establishment," says Craig Oliver, who helped to run the Remain campaign. "He found the weak spots and probed them relentlessly. He understood how to get into the psychology of discontent and leverage and used that against the establishment. Can he maintain that in government?"

Dominic Cummings barely knew Boris Johnson when the two linked up in the 2016 referendum but the adviser was immediately impressed: "He thought people were wrong not to take Boris seriously – he thought he had an extra gear," said one friend. Matthew Elliott, chief executive of Vote Leave, says they went on to forge a close partnership, which has been carried into Downing Street. "They admire each other's strengths," Elliott says. "Boris is funny, witty, charismatic, intelligent and brings the TV cameras out. Dom is massively bright, can bring a team together and drive things."

Cummings, who had spent the previous 20 years dreaming about what he might do if he found himself running Number 10, moved to a completely new level when he walked in there with the new prime minister. Nominally Johnson's "assistant", in reality he acts as his chief adviser and chief enforcer. He hires and fires staff and set the tone of the new government, focusing on delivering Brexit and the three things he says people actually care about: the NHS, tackling crime and ending austerity. But his arrival in Number 10 also highlighted some paradoxes.

Wakefield says that her husband is "extremely kind" but some see Cummings as ruthless and vindictive in securing his objectives. He summarily sacked a young Treasury adviser, Sonia Khan, for alleged disloyalty and had her marched off the premises by armed police. "He ruined a young woman's life," says one Tory insider. In his most recent blog post, Cummings fulminated against "the horror of human resources".

But Cummings' urgency and drive have inspired loyalty among many colleagues. Sir Mark Sedwill, cabinet secretary and Britain's top civil servant, has put off a plan to become Britain's ambassador to Washington to help deliver Cummings' civil service reforms. "They have a good relationship," says one Downing Street insider.

A Tory official adds: "Dom is genuinely open about things. He's keen to hear criticism. But he'll also tell you that if you don't like it, 'F**k off – there's the door.'"

'Cummings isn't a soothsayer. He spent ages telling us that we would be toast if we didn't deliver Brexit on October 31. He was completely wrong'

A government insider

Cummings is often seen as a revolutionary who wants to kick down bastions of the establishment – he has loudly criticised the civil service, the Supreme Court, parliamentary "lobby" journalists and the BBC – yet he retains a remarkable conviction that the state can be a force for good. Provided it is run on his terms.

Downing Street has magnified what one government insider calls "the Cummings myth" but also put a spotlight on his shortcomings. David Laws says: "He's very, very good at defining himself against things like the north-east assembly, the EU, Nick Clegg [the former Lib Dem leader] or David Cameron. Now he has to show he can deliver not just bloody good campaigns but something positive."

His strategy of closing down parliament last October to try to force through a no-deal Brexit was blocked by the Supreme Court and could have been disastrous for Johnson, had the Lib Dems and Scottish National party not obliged the prime minister by agreeing to a snap election.

"He's not a soothsayer," says one government insider. "He spent ages telling us that we would be toast if we didn't deliver Brexit on October 31. In fact, he was completely wrong: the 'Get Brexit Done' message won us the election. If he had delivered Brexit, the election would have been totally different."

Meanwhile, Cummings recently lost a battle with the Treasury when he proposed that chancellor Sajid Javid should embark on a massive pre-election spree of tax cuts and spending. Javid said it would be folly to engage in a spending race with Labour and was ultimately backed by Johnson.

Although Cummings advises Johnson across all aspects of government, those inside Number 10 say it is important to strip away the "myth" and recognise that in some areas he is much less influential than others. Since his run-in with Javid, Cummings has taken a lower profile on the economy, while the former chief of the Vote Leave campaign is increasingly letting others sort out the details after Britain formally leaves the EU on January 31.

A complex post-Brexit trade deal with the EU is being run by Johnson's Europe adviser David Frost. When Ursula von der Leyen, European Commission president, visited Number 10 this month, Cummings did not ask to attend. "There were six places at the table but he didn't want to come," says one person briefed on the meeting.

Cummings recognises there is a danger of spreading himself too thin and failing to deliver. His new focus reflects the passions developed in his bunker: putting science at the heart of government and ensuring that the government machine delivers what the politicians promise.

His inspiration is the US government's Manhattan Project, which created the first atomic bomb, and – as he put it in his blog – "the way in which George Mueller turned the failing Nasa bureaucracy into an organisation that could put man on the moon". He wants to set up a civilian version of the US Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (formerly known as Arpa), pursuing "high-risk, high-return projects that markets won't fund – ie failure is normal". His WhatsApp account profile says: "Get Brexit done, then Arpa".

But Cummings risks making enemies by denouncing some officials as work-shy, knocking off at 4pm and leaving their minister to take the flak for their mistakes. Oliver notes: "The danger for Dominic is there are an awful lot of civil servants and not many people in Number 10."

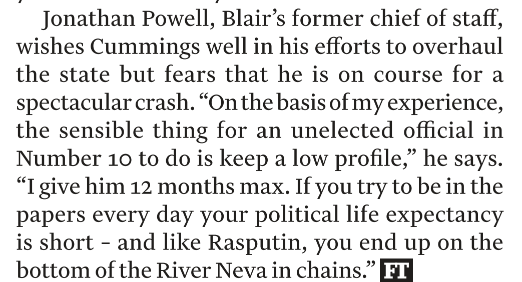
Cummings recognises that his abrasive and relentless style has a time limit. He suffers from a much-discussed mystery ailment that causes pain in his abdominal area, and often has to stand in meetings, grimacing with pain. He says he will have a long-delayed operation after January 31, and tells colleagues that he will then find out if "Mary and the PM agree on a job for me".

Everyone in Number 10 assumes he will carry on. In his ad inviting "wild cards" to work in Downing Street and improve the advice given to Johnson, he suggested he might stay for a year and then quit: "We want to improve performance and make me much less important – and within a year largely redundant."

Matthew Elliott believes Cummings can change the country and that he is doing it with the best of intentions: "He's not a partisan person. He's there to represent people who live outside London and people living in the north-east, where he comes from. That's quite a pure motive."

But Steve Bannon's defenestration from Trump's White House is a reminder of the danger that advisers face, especially when they become public figures in their own right. Cummings could hardly complain; this month he told potential applicants to join his team in Number 10: "I'll bin you within weeks if you don't fit."

Jonathan Powell, Blair's former chief of staff, wishes Cummings well in his efforts to overhaul the state but fears that he is on course for a spectacular crash. "On the basis of my experience, the sensible thing for an unelected official in Number 10 to do is keep a low profile," he says. "I give him 12 months max. If you try to be in the papers every day your political life expectancy is short – and like Rasputin, you end up on the bottom of the River Neva in chains." FT



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THE RESTORATION OF RAPHAEL

When Raphael died suddenly in 1520, the Renaissance master was in the middle of designing the final of four rooms at the Vatican. Now 500 years on, experts are painstakingly restoring it. *Cullen Murphy* gets a rare glimpse before the reopening. Photographs by *Alessandro Furchino Capria*

The Hall of Constantine during its restoration

The Hall of Constantine, the fourth and last of the Raphael Rooms in the Vatican to undergo restoration, is sealed off from visitors by a barrier that runs from the marble floor to the frescoed ceiling. Fabio Piacentini, the Vatican restorer who is directing this final stage, enters a code on the keypad, hands me a hard hat and leads the way inside. The dense crowd of tourists and the ambient hubbub are left behind. Within, the atmosphere is tranquil. Scaffolding divides the room into six levels connected by staircases and walkways. Snaking up and around the metal framework are vacuum hoses to remove dust. Indirect lighting brings the frescoed walls out of the shadows – a pontiff here; a battle there; landscapes; cityscapes; allegorical figures; apparitions; grotesques; putti. Men and women in white lab coats, papal insignia stitched on the pocket, concentrate on their tasks, looking up briefly to greet us.

At floor level, where a frieze of monochrome historical scenes winds around the room, Piacentini and his colleague Francesca Persegati, who heads the conservation laboratory for paintings, point out graffiti that was etched into the plaster over the centuries – by casual visitors and expressive clerics – before protective measures were taken. Brushes between fingers, restorers steady their hands on maulsticks – rods with padded tips that can rest safely on the wall – as they mitigate the damage. "Sometimes the graffiti will mention an event that has just happened," Piacentini says, his finger tracing the words *Fu fatto Papa Pio IV*, the inscription indicating that Pius IV had just been elected. (This would have been Christmas Day, 1559.) Sometimes, he goes on, a person will just write his name. His finger directs my gaze: "Like this – *Alessandro*." The restorers nearby laugh and put up their hands as if to say, "It wasn't us!"

The frescoes in three of these rooms in the Apostolic Palace, including "The School of Athens" and "The Deliverance of Saint Peter", have been restored to luminous condition and are fully open to the public. These are the largest and best-known works of the Renaissance master Raphael Santi. He did not complete the fourth room, the Hall of Constantine. On April 6 1520 – Good Friday – as the painting was in its early stages, Raphael succumbed to a sudden fever. In his *Lives of the Artists*, the chronicler Giorgio Vasari, who can be unreliable, attributed the illness to the activities of a single night: Raphael had been diverting himself, in Vasari's words, "beyond measure with the pleasures of love". At the time of his death, Raphael had completed plans and drawings for parts of the room. Members of his large and sophisticated studio operation, notably Giulio Romano and Giovan Francesco Penni, took it from there.

"Unfinished" is a word that carries a haunting charge when applied to any work of art. In Raphael's case, the loss is especially acute. He was young – only 37 – at the time of his death. Unlike his older and grumpier rival, Michelangelo, Raphael had been a popular figure in Rome. He could wield sharp elbows when it came to competition, but he was also an entrepreneurial diplomat with natural charm who moved with ease at the highest levels of society. His body was

'Donation of Rome', Hall of Constantine

'Justitia', Hall of Constantine

borne by four cardinals in a funeral procession that drew many thousands. To this day, you sometimes find fresh flowers left at his tomb in the Pantheon. (There is talk of opening the tomb to obtain a more clinical determination of cause of death than Vasari provided.)

The restoration of the Hall of Constantine will be nearly finished – and the room will be reopened – this spring, in time for the 500th anniversary of Raphael's death. The restoration work has been supported by a group called the Patrons of the Arts in the Vatican Museums. Reopening the fourth room is one of many events, at the Vatican and elsewhere, to mark the quincentennial. The Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, in Boston, opened an exhibition around Raphael's warm and intimate portrait of Tommaso Inghirami, the papal librarian, last autumn. The Scuderie del Quirinale, in Rome, will mount a major exhibition that brings in works by Raphael from the Louvre, the Uffizi and elsewhere. An equally ambitious exhibition at the National Gallery, in London in the autumn, will cover the full sweep of Raphael's career.

At the Vatican, paintings by Raphael and his studio that hang in the Apostolic Palace, and are typically seen only by visiting dignitaries – paintings of Saint Peter and Saint Paul, the patron saints of Rome – will be moved to public display in the Pinacoteca gallery. There will be attention devoted to Raphael as printmaker and Raphael as architect. In February, the tapestries designed by Raphael for the lower walls of the Sistine Chapel – too delicate for permanent display – will grace the walls again for at least a week, returning the Chapel to the way it looked on St Stephen's Day in 1519 when they were first hung. Woven in Brussels from Raphael's full-scale colour cartoons – each weaver producing no more than 10 square centimetres a day – the tapestries are usually kept suspended on roll-out metal frames in a climate-controlled storage unit, safe from light and insects, under the care of Chiara Pavan and her tapestry-restoration laboratory. (The seven surviving cartoons from which the weavers worked are held by the Victoria and Albert Museum, on loan from the Royal Collection, and will soon be on display in a refurbished gallery.) "When the tapestries go up, the Sistine Chapel will not look *exactly* the way it did," says Barbara Jatta, director of the Vatican Museums, who is overseeing much of this activity, "because in 1519, Michelangelo's 'Last Judgment' had not been painted yet."

In April, an international conference will be held at the Vatican to discuss what has been learnt in the course of the most recent restoration. Particular focus will be on two figures – the allegorical *Justitia* (Justice) and *Comitas* ▶

FT.COM/MAGAZINE JANUARY 18/19 2020

Fabio Piacentini, restorer

Paolo Violini, restorer

Raphael was both an artist of genius and a shrewd entrepreneur. He operated at times more like a film director or a starchitect

◀ (Friendship) – that Raphael himself may have had a hand in painting right before the fever took him. Two years ago, news reports from Rome invited such speculation, but the experts I spoke to at the Vatican Museums more recently were careful not to get ahead of themselves. Connoisseurship is a delicate calling. And Raphael is complicated. He was not a solitaire, like Michelangelo. He was both an artist of genius and a shrewd entrepreneur who managed a busy workshop of accomplished associates. New and urgent commissions came in continually. Some could not be refused. A curator I know put it this way: if Michelangelo was staging a one-man show, Raphael operated at times more like a film director or a starchitect.

That said, Raphael's hand is distinctive, and he was also an avid student of technique. Fresco painting uses water-based pigments but there are references to his experimentation with oil. Ulderico Santamaria, director of the diagnostics laboratory at the Vatican Museums, cannot resist inviting me to run my fingertips across the surface of *Justitia*, noting the texture, and then for comparison running them across another figure nearby. I hesitate, but he is insistent. "It is allowed to touch," he says. Then he follows my fingertips with his own. "This is not the same," he says of *Justitia*. "Why is it different? Because this is in oil and the other is not."

To touch that surface is to feel an instant connection with a moment in time. Raphael Santi, a painter from Urbino eager to make his name in the city where it mattered most, arrived in Rome in 1508. Soon thereafter, he was commissioned by Pope Julius II to decorate one of four rooms in the Apostolic Palace intended to serve as the pontiff's personal apartments. Raphael may have been recommended to Julius by Donato Bramante, the papal architect, also from Urbino, who was deeply involved with the initial design and construction of St Peter's Basilica.

The Raphael Rooms lie directly above what are known as the Borgia Apartments – Julius's predecessor, Alexander VI, had been a member of the Borgia family – and an element of one-upmanship was perhaps at play. Other artists were also working on the rooms, but Julius eventually put the entire commission in the hands of Raphael and his workshop. Meanwhile, minutes away, Michelangelo was labouring on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel. He did not welcome visitors and, by some accounts, disliked Raphael. According to Vasari, when Michelangelo was away in Florence, midway through the painting, Bramante let Raphael into the Sistine Chapel to have a look. Raphael was known for adapting style and method, and he was influenced by what he saw.

Barbara Jatta, director of the Vatican Museums

Guido Cornini, curator

Restoration of the Raphael Rooms began in the 1980s – the first restoration since the 19th century, when tools and standards were very different. The Vatican restorer Paolo Violini took responsibility for two of the rooms. He brings me to a roped-off corner of the Room of the Segnatura and offers a quick tutorial. Before coming to Rome, he explains, Raphael had had little experience with frescoes, and as a result you can see his method evolving rapidly.

"The first part of the fresco is painted with a very complicated technique," Violini says. "Raphael had a cartoon, and to transfer the drawing to the wall he made hundreds of holes to follow the path of the lines, then dusted the holes with charcoal. After that, he used a stylus to connect the dots and draw other lines or incisions in the wet plaster. But as he becomes more confident, he works faster, more fluidly, and he stops using the stylus – and we can see this change as we move in time from one side of the room to the other."

Violini pauses to point out examples on the walls, which he then illustrates with close-up photographs on a tablet. "His manner of painting also changes," he continues. "At first, he builds up flesh colours in layers on a base of translucent greenish tint, in the traditional Umbrian way. But by the end of the room, the flesh is more liquid and unified, and weightier. Some of his figures are also becoming bigger, brighter, more monumental: he has now seen Michelangelo. And then, in the next room, the Stanza di Eliodoro, after he comes to know the Venetian painters, some of whom are in Rome – or he went to Venice, maybe – he plays more than ever with light and colour."

We move into the Room of Heliodorus, Violini calling attention to certain details in the frescoes: the way the light from a painted candle seems to be caught in the hair and clothes and jewellery of the painted figures it illuminates; the way an actual window in the room is captured in a trompe l'oeil reflection on the shield of a soldier; the way a delicate blue glaze gives clean-shaven men the appearance of having five o'clock shadows.

"The Deliverance of Saint Peter", depicting a scene from the Acts of the Apostles, occupies a space above a window on the north wall of this room: glimpsed through a grid of painted black bars, an angel frees Peter from prison while guards around him slumber. A previous restoration had cleaned the explosion of light that defines the painting but left the angel at the centre untouched, looking as if it were backlit. Now the angel itself glows, almost translucent. "They didn't understand that the angel is not in front of the light – the angel *is* the light," Violini says. "Cleaning this was very emotional for me."

A restoration on this scale involves many types of investigation. To begin with, there is textual research: a variety of sources from the time – official documents, invoices, notebooks, personal letters, biographical accounts – can shed light on the paintings. Sketches and cartoons are of course invaluable. Infrared and ultraviolet analysis offer clues about both the painted surface and what lies beneath it. The material condition of the walls and ceilings must be checked, inch by inch, for cracks and deterioration. One result of all this close study is a detailed map of the frescoes indicating the order in which each *giornata* – a day's work in wet plaster – was painted.

In the Room of the Segnatura, Violini points out an area on the ceiling and says: "That is what Raphael painted on the first day in this room, which also was the first room he painted." Then he indicates the seated figure of the philosopher Heraclitus in "The School of Athens", whose contorted pose calls to mind Michelangelo's prophets and sibyls in the Sistine Chapel – and whose features are unmistakably those of Michelangelo himself. "And we know that he added this figure late, two years after he finished the rest of the painting," Violini says.

Dust, soot, wax, water, salt, pollution – the contamination builds up over time, darkening the paint and working its way into the porous plaster. The colours in these rooms were originally vivid, ▶

Brushes and solutions used to restore the hall's frescoes

◀ not veiled in the dullish-brown fog I remember from decades ago. And they are vivid once again. At its most basic, the cleaning of frescoes made on wet plaster – the greater part of the painted surface – involves the application of Japanese paper brushed with ammonium bicarbonate and water, and then the gentle removal of the paper from the surface. But the restorers have to be careful: any portions of a fresco painted *a secco* – when the underlying plaster and paint was already dry, making it easier to add detail – have not hardened into structural permanence. They must be treated differently, because *a secco* painting is soluble in water. The grid of black metal bars in "The Deliverance of Saint Peter" is entirely *a secco*, meaning that each of the frescoed squares showing what happens "behind" the grid had to be cleaned without touching the grid itself. ("It took three months," Violini recalls.)

In areas where there is actual damage to the wall, the restorers do not attempt to reconstruct what is missing, a course of action they might have pursued in another age. Any restorative work must find a way to "declare itself", as Vatican curator Guido Cornini explains, so that restorers and scholars in the future will be clear about interventions in the past. The solution in this case: a stippling technique – *puntinato* – that tints the damaged area in a way that is honest about the intervention but reduces the eye's perception of damage. Thus, the restorers mitigating the graffiti in the Hall of Constantine will ensure that the words can still be read – they are historical artefacts in their own right – but the room at a glance won't seem to be covered in chicken scratches.

'The Deliverance of Saint Peter', Room of Heliodorus

The Hall of Constantine is the largest of the Raphael Rooms and the most overtly political in its message. The frescoes depict the life of the Roman emperor who converted to Christianity and effectively made it the state religion. A supposed imperial decree – the Donation of Constantine, now known to be a medieval forgery – was long cited to justify Church authority in temporal matters, including sovereignty over lands in central Italy. That power was being tested in the early 16th century. Julius II was often at war, personally leading troops into battle. Rome itself would be sacked by German forces in 1527, and you can still see the damage done by the pikes of the Landsknechte to some of the frescoes in the Raphael Rooms.

Designed for certain official meetings and state occasions, the Hall of Constantine was meant as a reminder of the Church's claims about where its temporal power came from. The frescoes depict Constantine's baptism, his vision of the cross, his victory over the emperor Maxentius, and the Donation. The Battle of Milvian Bridge takes up most of the south wall – a sprawling tableau that was rendered in preliminary drawings by Raphael but painted after his death by Giulio Romano. As we stand before it, Guido Cornini explains that Raphael had also been an archaeologist and was meticulous about historical details – the armour, the weapons, the buildings, the countryside. Down by our feet, emperor Maxentius, on horseback, was about to be swallowed by the Tiber river.

To either side of this painting is where the allegories of *Justitia* and *Comitas* can be found. Were they painted in part by Raphael's own hand? "The sources, some of them, say that Raphael was able to finish up not only drawings for the room," Cornini explains, "but also some of the painted figures, and that he was experimenting in oil. Other sources say that his pupils were responsible for preparing these figures while working strictly from Raphael's drawings. Raphael was certainly in health right up to the very last minute. And there's technical evidence that makes these figures distinctive: they are the only ones that are made in oil rather than in fresco, and they were respected as such. That is, the painters who made the other frescoes kept the figures done in oil as they were, coming right up to the edge. For now, the only thing to do is to work on the evidence, all of us together" – the art historians, the curators, the restorers, the technicians. "We'll present our conclusions at the symposium."

When walking in Rome, a favourite moment comes when moving at night between the energetic clamour of the Campo de' Fiori and the subdued elegance of the Piazza Farnese, a short connecting street away. The transition between the Sistine Chapel and, up a staircase or two, the Raphael Rooms offers a version of that same contrast. Michelangelo's compositions are muscular, fleshy, sometimes impossibly kinetic. Raphael's are calmer, softer, suffused with intelligence. Barbara Jatta speaks of Raphael's "beauty and harmony", and she is right. But I think also of another word. I think of *grace*, in all its meanings. FT

Cullen Murphy is the editor at large of The Atlantic. His most recent book is "Cartoon County: My Father and His Friends in the Golden Age of Make Believe"

I heart the heartlands

As the Iowa caucuses approach, *Patti Waldmeir* cuts through the clichés about America's misunderstood Midwest

"Can we give you a hand?"

The jogger with the close-cropped steel-grey hair was already hoisting up one end of our 42-inch flat-screen television, while her husband grabbed the other and headed up the dimly lit, narrow stairs of our fourth-floor Chicago walk-up. "We're your neighbours from across the alley. We can get that up to the top floor in no time," she said, with the cheerful (sometimes irritatingly so) can-do spirit of the American Midwest.

Even as a child growing up in Detroit, I was aware that the rest of the country – not to mention the world – looked down on us Midwesterners. The phrase "flyover country" was coined to describe a part of the US that many Americans only see while travelling coast to coast on an aeroplane. But these days we are faulted not just for being hicks – we're also held responsible for almost single-handedly ushering Donald Trump into the White House.

Next month, the first presidential primary contests in Iowa will unofficially kick off the 2020 US election campaign. Reporters from around the world will once again touch down in flyover country, briefly to study the natives before explaining them to the world. As the FT North America correspondent, I'll be doing it too: trying to figure out what role the Midwest – from the industrial suburbs of Detroit to the dairy farms of Wisconsin, from the rust belt to the prairies – may have in determining whether President Trump will win a second term. Then I will try to explain it to FT readers in Shanghai and Mumbai, not to mention really foreign places like Palo Alto and Manhattan.

As in every election, we will all – local reporters or coastals, Americans or foreigners – struggle mightily to capture that special Midwest essence without descending to caricature. In the 2016 election, when swing states such as Ohio, Michigan and Wisconsin handed Trump a surprising victory, clichés abounded: this was, we were told, a region of opioid addicts and unemployed factory workers, racist whites and backward religious conservatives.

I was not blameless but I knew those particular caricatures did not do justice to my homeland – or even do much to help anyone understand why Trump won there.

By far the most prevalent cliché about the Midwest is that the natives are friendly. And running into the sixtysomething joggers was certainly a welcome-to-the-Midwest experience of the first order. I and my two then teenaged daughters were unloading our worldly goods from the back of our Honda after eight years in China. We had no idea how we were going to get my brother's cast-off flat-screen up the stairs of our 1930s apartment block on a day when humidity and temperatures were soaring. If it weren't for the neighbourly contingent from across the alley, we'd probably still be standing there fighting about it.

I had begged the FT to send me to Chicago after Shanghai – and earlier stints in Johannesburg, Cape Town, Accra, Lagos, Brussels, London and Washington. I wanted my (Chinese adopted) children, raised almost entirely in China, to get a dose of the Midwest values I'd been raised on – that old "Welcome Wagon" thing that is honoured among Midwesterners even overseas. If you get in trouble in a foreign place, I always told my girls, find the nearest Midwesterner and they will help you.

One of the other clichés about the Midwest is that it's full of small, ▸

'Even as a child growing up in Detroit, I was aware that the rest of the country – not to mention the world – looked down on us Midwesterners'

Illustrations by Col McElwaine

‘Few Americans can agree on firm geographical boundaries for the region... The Midwest is more a state of mind than a place on a map’

◀ lily-white towns; but there is plenty of diversity in places like Chicago. That’s why I enrolled my daughters at Evanston Township High School, in a close-in suburb, where African Americans, Latinos and a handful of Asians slightly outnumber the population of white students.

I was so focused on the quality and ethnic mix of the school, and the difficulty of finding a place to live on a public transport route, that I failed to notice that our new flat was only three blocks from Lake Michigan and walking distance from one of its prettiest beaches. That’s another thing flyover journalists seldom mention about the Midwest: much of it is close to water. When I was a child, one of the largest rivers caught fire because of industrial pollution and one of the Great Lakes was so full of waste it was said to have “died”. These days, the waters are clean and the air is blue – and not only because the rust belt has largely stopped making things.

Quality of life is a big selling point for the region these days: migration from both coasts to some Midwest cities is on the rise. In summer, I spend every morning watching the sun rise over Lake Michigan, which has waves like the sea but none of its annoying salt. In winter, I can drive across Wisconsin’s frozen Lake Winnebago just for fun, or snowshoe by candlelight across Lake Superior. This isn’t the Midwest that usually makes the headlines.

“Work-life balance, check. High-tech jobs, check. America’s heartland has more than meets the eye,” says Becky Frankiewicz, Chicago-based president of ManpowerGroup North America, a multinational staffing company. “We tell employers all the time that a job may attract someone to a city, but it’s the quality of life that makes them stay.

“At first blush, attracting people to the Midwest isn’t always easy,” she admits. “Chicago is popular but other cities like Indianapolis and Minneapolis may not be as well known.” But once they move here it’s a different story: “The quality of life is good, the cost of living is good, the region has fantastic universities. Even at Manpower, we move people from all over the world to the Midwest and often they want to stay.”

What is the Midwest anyway?

Few Americans can agree on firm geographical boundaries for the region: is Pittsburgh in it? Most Pittsburghers say they are Midwesterners but many outsiders would dispute that. Detroit, where I grew up, is most definitely a Midwestern town; but, geographically, it’s in the eastern third of the US land mass. The Midwest is more a state of mind than a place on a map.

A famous 1976 New Yorker magazine cover captures the Midwest’s image problem. The cartoon shows the US from the mind’s eye of a Manhattanite: skyscrapers in the foreground, Pacific Ocean in the distance, and nothing in between apart from an almost invisible note that says “Chicago”. To many Americans, the Midwest is a place where matrons wear garish appliqué Christmas sweaters halfway into January (I’m still wearing mine); a region that came to the American party late – Chicago was only founded in the 1830s – and prospered for little more than a century, on the back of steel and carmaking and commodities trading.

At the suggestion of an FT reader and Midwest expat living in London, Anne Shreiner, I asked every Midwesterner I know what three adjectives first came to mind to describe the region. Almost all immediately delivered the same one: friendly. Then came “straightforward”, “down to earth”, “solid”, “honest” or “what you see is what you get”.

But if the Midwest *is* a state of mind or a set of values, those are apparently no more clearly defined than its map coordinates. Many non-Midwesterners I canvassed opted for an entirely less charitable string of adjectives: bigoted, gun-toting, conservative, uber-religious, even racist. Shreiner says: “I think it’s ultimately that people in the Midwest tend to be genuine. Whether they’re racist, religious, dumb, smart, they meet you at face value and I think that’s the thing I miss the most. I’ve been in the UK five years and I still wonder if people mean what they say.”

We agreed that today’s Midwest is not the one of our childhoods: heading into the Iowa caucuses, opinion polls put Pete Buttigieg, the gay former mayor of South Bend, Indiana, somewhere near the top of a crowded Democratic field. That is just one sign of how the region has changed. But for journalists like me, there is still the problem of portraying the Midwest without either romanticising or belittling it. When I tried to capture the colour of a county fair in Wisconsin recently, by writing about its deep-fried Oreos and pulled-pork “sundaes”, more than one reader thought I was sneering. In fact, I adore all the improbable foods that can be bought deep-fried at a Midwest fair, and would gorge myself on them happily were I not diabetic. It’s hard always to get the tone right.

And tone matters in the Midwest, because Middle America is allergic to the idea of being “talked down to” by the liberal media, especially from the East Coast. Wayne Youngquist, a Wisconsin political analyst and retired pollster, says a big reason Trump won there in 2016 was because many Midwesterners are “culturally non-coastal”. There’s a strong conservative religious tradition in Wisconsin, he says, and “the sense among the religiously conservative that everyone looks down on them as poor hicks adds to the sense of cultural alienation. That’s more the reason that Trump won here than any great love for the man.

“When Hillary Clinton referred to Trump supporters as ‘deplorables’ [before the 2016 vote], I think that sealed the election right then,” he adds. Wisconsin voters abhor being condescended to by the likes of Clinton, a born Midwesterner who abandoned the region to spend decades on the coast. They hate being sneered at. And while many factors, economic and sociological, can explain the rise of Trump, I agree with Youngquist that the biggest factor was this sneering.

The last thing I want to do is sneer. But even a girl with the Midwest burned deep into her soul – so deep that 40 years of living mostly overseas could not erase it – will struggle to portray the region during an election campaign without reducing it to something one-dimensional. Part of that is just reality: with so few words and so little time, often the best we journalists can do is aim to get the big picture right, alas sometimes at the expense of nuance.

Too positive or too negative, my words will occasionally prove an inadequate shorthand for the homeland I love. But any time I am tempted to condescend, I will think of our neighbours trotting up the stairs with our TV. I’ve lived all over the world, in cultures from one end of the earth to the other, and no one else has ever carried a flat-screen up four flights of stairs for me. That, surely, is nothing to sneer at. FT

Patti Waldmeir is the FT’s North America correspondent

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'We all need distractions in our lives'

The celebrated photographer has captured shattering images of war. He tells *Simon Willis* why collecting antiques is a vital counterpoint and how taking pictures of his local landscape is 'a form of meditation'. Photographs by *Kamila Lozinska*

Don McCullin is leaning over a glass case containing three monkey skulls, a necklace made of whale bones and a set of false teeth. He is mildly taken with the teeth, if only because one of his own recently fell out and had to be replaced at a cost of £600. "I could have come here and got a whole set for 15 quid!" But in general he is unimpressed with the display. "That's hideous," he says, as he looks up and sees a taxidermy ostrich foot fashioned into a doorstop.

It is a wet Sunday morning and we are at a flea market at the Bath & West Showground in Somerset. The cavernous hall, which has a concrete floor, strip lighting and a background pong of animal excrement, usually hosts rare-breed livestock as part of the Royal Bath & West agricultural show. But today it is filled with hundreds of stalls arranged in neat rows, flogging all manner of bric-a-brac: cut-glass wine goblets and sepia photographs, carriage clocks and trinket boxes, antique knives and old boots, posters of King Kong and Kate Moss.

McCullin, 84, has been collecting antiques since the early 1960s, when he was beginning his career ▶

Right: Don McCullin in the print room at his Somerset home in October 2019. Left: the flea market at the Bath & West Showground in Shepton Mallet

‘We had nothing [growing up]. So I have got this obsession with wanting to own things, because I never had things’

Above: one of McCullin’s collection of small bronze Buddhas
Facing page: McCullin (left) and Simon Willis in search of antiques

◀ as a photographer. He got his break in 1958, when The Observer published his picture of the Guvnors, a north London gang. For The Observer and then, from 1966, for The Sunday Times Magazine, he was dispatched to war zones all over the world – Cyprus, Biafra, Vietnam, Cambodia, Lebanon – producing many of the most shattering images of war and destitution ever committed to film. As he describes his experiences, such as watching as an old woman was shot in the stomach in front of him in Beirut or carrying a man whose jaw had been blown away in El Salvador, it is a wonder that McCullin has stayed sane. He admits: “I sometimes think to myself, ‘Have I dreamt all of this?’” Searching for bargains has been a vital counterpoint to all the conflict. “We all need distractions in our lives.”

He has been coming to this market near his Somerset home for years, but on this dreary morning it is not at its best. “It’s quite dismal today,” he says despondently. Then his eye alights on something interesting. Among a group of small bronzes, he spies a tiny figure of a naked woman slipping into a bath. He picks it up to feel its weight and looks at the label tied to her leg with string: “Art deco, £120.”

“It’s quite nice that,” he says. “It’s really special actually.” Hoping to fan McCullin’s enthusiasm, the stallholder, a bald man with a pendulous belly, pipes up. “I call her the floozy in the Jacuzzi,” he calls out from behind his table. McCullin asks for his best price.“I’ll take £95,” the dealer says. McCullin, who claims to be bad at haggling, doesn’t press him further. He reaches into the pocket of his khaki trousers (paired for the occasion with a tweed jacket) and slaps down two fifties. Deal.

Bronzes are McCullin’s thing. That morning I had arrived at the honey-coloured stone cottage he shares with his wife and 17-year-old son and interrupted his reading of the Sunday papers. Gruff at first – “You’re a bit early, aren’t you?” he says as he answers the door – he warms up as he shows me his collection of small bronze Buddhas in the library. “I’ve got about 30 of them,” he says, gesturing to the shelves. “This one is Tibetan, this one is Cambodian, this is probably from Thailand.”

He is more of a magpie than a connoisseur. “I’m not that knowledgeable. I buy things purely for the look of them.” He points to a larger, wooden figure of a reclining Buddha on a side table. “I paid $12 for that in Burma about 25 years ago. The shop was full of crap, and I thought, ‘There’s nothing here.’ Then I looked up, saw that and I fell in love with it.”

The love is not always shared by McCullin’s wife, the travel writer Catherine Fairweather. “I’ve got a piece of pottery I bought in China for a dollar. I bought it purely for the shape, and my wife hates it. She does her best to keep moving it around until one day it walks out the house.”

As well as being objects of delight, McCullin’s treasures serve as mementos. Some, like the statue of Jesus he bought in the mid-1970s at a market in Chichicastenango, Guatemala, remind him of old friends. He was there on assignment for The Sunday Times with the writer Norman Lewis. “Norman did the bartering,” he says. “He was trying to beat the guy down, and the man said, “Stop *señor*! I am not dealing in vegetables!” Other items have more grisly resonances. In the room where he keeps his archive of photographic prints, he shows me a dented bugle, made in London in 1900 for the Belgian army. “I found it in the Congo in 1964,” he tells me. “I was with a bunch of mercenaries who were chasing some Simba warriors. The warriors had captured 100 nuns and priests and were murdering them each day along the road. We went into this mission they had just fled, and I found that in the attic.”

McCullin whizzes around the house from object to object with a boyish enthusiasm undimmed by age. After showing me 16th-century tiles he bought recently in Damascus while on assignment in Syria, and a painting of Oliver Cromwell’s mother that he picked up in Frome, we set off to the market in his silver BMW.

As we drive through the country lanes, shut in with high hedges, he talks about his earliest memories of Somerset. He first came here in 1940 as a five-year-old evacuee from Finsbury Park in north London, where he lived with his family in a tenement flat. He credits the austerity of his upbringing for sparking his interest in collecting. “We had nothing. We all slept in the same room and I would go to school in the shirt I slept in. So I have got this obsession with wanting to own things, because I never had things.”

In Somerset, he stayed in the village of Norton St Philip with some farm labourers. “They weren’t particularly nice to me,” he says. “When my father came to visit, I remember chasing him up the street begging him to take me back.” Yet even though the experience was tough, Somerset was “heavenly beautiful” compared with Finsbury Park. He never forgot that first experience of the countryside.

McCullin came to live in Somerset permanently in 1982, when it proved a haven once again. His first wife, from whom he was separated, had just died of cancer at the age of 48. The woman he was then living with had kicked him out. In his new Somerset home, more or less a wreck when he bought it, he would get drunk every night and go to bed thinking about the wars he had witnessed. “I was in a sorry old state. And then I suddenly felt, ‘Get a grip.’ I started doing landscape, and bringing myself back to photography.” Photographing the landscape became “a form of meditation, a way of curing my war damage”. McCullin has continued to travel to war zones such as Iraq and Syria, but landscapes have become his major preoccupation. In these dark, mournful studies of winter hills or bare trees, the idea of the battlefield is never far away.

The visit to the flea market offers him a break from preparing for an exhibition of these landscapes at Hauser & Wirth in Somerset this month. On the road, he had pointed out some of the places in the pictures: a waterlogged pathway by a corn field, a circular dew pond beneath an iron age hill fort. “Somerset is full of history,” he says. “You feel the energy of the land.” Looking through the windscreen, we could see rooks circling overhead. “It’s like an old woodcut isn’t it?” he says. “The birds in the wind and the naked trees.”

McCullin on the favourites in his collection

16th-century Syrian tiles
I bought a pair of tiles for $60 in the old city of Damascus, which is the most amazing city in the world. If someone said to me, "What's the one place you would go," I would say the old city of Damascus. It has an incredible souk and the most extraordinary mosque built on a Roman Christian site. I was in Aleppo during the war when it was being bombed, and I saw people arrive at the hospital in truckloads. Then you go to Damascus and see a normal life.

A north African landscape
My son has a partner in his property business, and I saw this picture in his house. I told him I loved the painting, which was probably done in the 1950s in Tunisia. He said, "If you give me one of your Beatles pictures, you can have it." So I swapped it for a portrait of the Beatles, with the band crowding round John Lennon, who was playing dead on the ground.

Books of early photography
These are the most important books I own. I bought the series, which is about the early history of photography, starting in 1886, in Tintagel while I was in Cornwall working for The Telegraph. I went into this empty antiques shop, the bell rang and this man clattered out. There didn't seem to be anything interesting in there. But then he said he had these photographic books, and I almost levitated. I thought, "Don't let him see, because he'll bang the price up." He said he wanted £10 for them. Well, in those days I only earned about £20 a week and I had a little family to support. I don't have the complete set, which is in the V&A. But they were incredibly important for my development as a photographer.

Vintage magazines
I have stacks of early magazines – fashion magazines from Paris from the turn of the century, old copies of Esquire, lots of American magazines from the 1940s containing adverts for the war effort. I used to collect them purely for their design. I love design. I remember that when I worked on The Sunday Times, from the 1960s to the 1980s, I always went to watch the layouts being done, and they always used to kick me out. I would say: "I'm going to watch this because I was the one who was there in this war, so I want to get it right." I had the nicest editors in the world. I couldn't have been there at a better time.

With the bronze of the woman in the bath now stashed in his pocket, McCullin's mood begins to brighten. "Hey, look at this," he says, and strides over to a stall with a rifle on it. "It looks like a Lee-Enfield. Can you see it? I haven't got my glasses on." "Lee-Enfield No 4 Mk 1", says the stallholder. McCullin learnt the technicalities of photography during his national service in the air force, where he also learnt to shoot a Lee-Enfield. "It's got a kick on it, but very accurate. A good rifle. I know a lot of modern weapons. The AK-47, and the M16, the American assault rifle. But I've never really wanted to collect guns." He tells me that his brother, who was in the Foreign Legion for 30 years, once gave him a replica Colt 45, but he decided not to keep it. "When you think I've spent years being anti-war, having a weapon in the house, it's not right."

Then something really snags his attention. "Oh, I love parrots!" he says. The bird in question is pictured in a lithograph from 1794. McCullin has never taken to wildlife photography but collects pictures of birds. He has two parrots in his library. One is shown in a print by John Gould, a 19th-century ornithologist and bird artist. The other is ceramic, and sits next to the picture on a windowsill. McCullin thinks they could do with some company, but the stallholder is out to lunch and he decides to come back later. "What do you think they'll ask for it? About £65?"

We go outside to see if there are any stalls worth looking at. "We may be missing great works of art," McCullin says optimistically as we head into the fresh air. We are not. In a van, three men are wrestling with a statue of man who McCullin thinks resembles Captain Birdseye. On the ground there is a collection of old tin bathtubs. "This reminds me of my childhood," he says, examining one of them. "We had a bath like this at our house in Finsbury Park. My mother got in first, then my father got in, and then my brother got in, and my biggest fear was that he would pee in the bath before I got in!"

With nothing doing outside, he decides to go in to see about the parrot picture. The stallholder is back but there's no sign of the lithograph. "It's gone I'm afraid," he says. McCullin asks how much he got for it. "A tenner," comes the reply. This is galling. "I thought it was worth about £60," McCullin says. "You should have put the price up." As we walk away, he mutters disappointedly. "That man should get his act together. He must have realised it was worth more than a tenner. That was the best bargain in the whole place today."

But McCullin is happy with his purchase. He thinks he might give it as a gift to his son at boarding school. On the way home, his mind returns to photography. "I normally shoot landscape at this time of year, but the sky today isn't right for me. I like more tonal separation in the clouds. It's all too much of the same thing." As we drive, the cloud begins to lift slightly and by the time we get to the house, he looks again and reconsiders. "You see the sky is changing now. The sun has got into it." Maybe this afternoon he will head out with his camera. FT

"Don McCullin: the Stillness of Life" runs at Hauser & Wirth Somerset from January 25–May 4

The History Cook

Polly Russell

Left: animal-rights protesters march in London in 2017. Above: Greggs' vegan sausage rolls

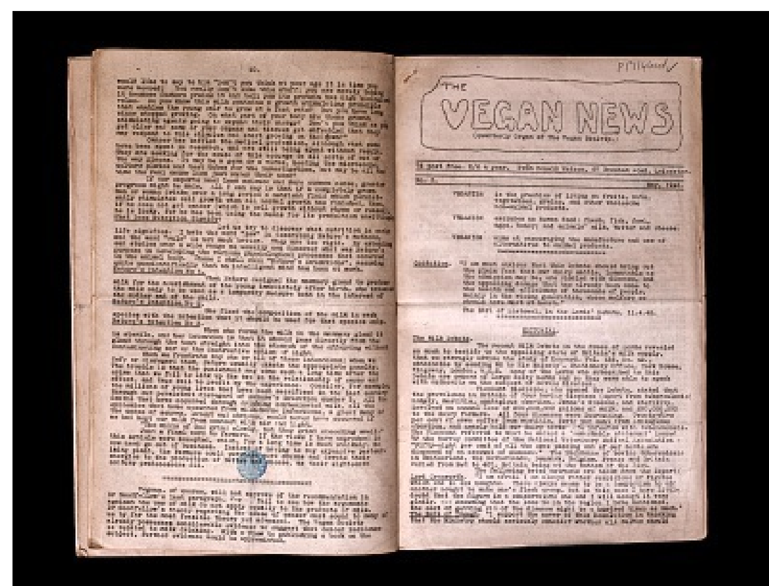
The seeds of veganism

Some 75 years before meat-free sausage rolls and vegan ice cream, a like-minded group of dairy-free vegetarians advocated abstinence from all animal products. But what should they call their new movement?

Now that the bakery chain Greggs has launched a vegan sausage roll and McDonald's sells a McVegan burger, it is fair to say that veganism has moved from the margins to the mainstream. A vegan used to be a rare thing. No longer. According to the UK Vegan Society, the number of vegans has increased from 150,000 to 600,000 in the past four years. Where once they were regarded as extremists, weirdos, hippies or hipsters, they are now tolerated, catered for and listened to - part and parcel of the culinary landscape.

This transformation is exactly what the pioneers of British veganism hoped for when they set up the Vegan Society in 1944. At a time of nationwide rationing, most people wanted more, not less, meat and dairy. The strictures of veganism appealed to very few. The first meeting of what was to become the Vegan Society took place in The Attic, a vegetarian café in London's Holborn, and comprised a handful of people. According to Elsie Shrigley, one of those present, there was "sunshine and a blue sky - an auspicious day for the birth of an idealistic movement".

Veganism in the UK did not come out of nowhere. In 1849, William Horsell, a vegetarian and owner of a water-cure establishment in Ramsgate, published *Kitchen Philosophy for Vegetarians* by Asenath Nicholson, the first cookery book free of animal products in Britain. The UK Vegetarian Society, established in 1847, regularly debated the notion of a dairy-free diet. As the The Vegetarian Messenger explained in 1923, although the "ideal position" was abstinence from animal products, "most of us are... in a transitional stage". As the editor noted in 1935, "The question as to whether dairy products should be used by vegetarians becomes more pressing year by year." Nevertheless, vegetarians, it was felt, should be focused on the "task of abolishing flesh-eating" and non-dairy vegetarians were encouraged to establish their own separate society.


THE VEGAN NEWS

The Vegan News, No 3, May 1945, with hand-drawn masthead and uneven typeset

KALPESH LATHIGRA; GETTY IMAGES; ALAMY

Attending the inaugural meeting at The Attic along with Shrigley was Donald Watson, a teetotal woodwork teacher based in the Lake District, who later became the Vegan Society's first president. Born in 1910 at Mexborough in South Yorkshire, Watson was the son of a headmaster. His conversion to vegetarianism took place when he witnessed a pig on his grandparents' farm being slaughtered. When he learnt about milk production in the early 1940s, he became a vegan. Reflecting on the impact of veganism through his life, he said: "If one is going to be out of step with all the catering that is done for people who are different from oneself, one must accept a certain amount of excommunication, as it were, from the rest of society."

Initially, establishing a regular committee for the breakaway group of "non-lacto" vegetarians was impossible given their small numbers and their being "scattered far and wide". Watson therefore took on the roles of secretary, treasurer and auditor, and committed to produce a first issue of Vegan News. Watson and his wife Dorothy, and founder members GA Henderson and Fay K Henderson, are credited with coining the term "vegan". The splinter group had determined that "non-dairy" and "non-lacto" were too negative as names. Other proposals included "allvega", "allvegan", "neo-vegetarian", "dairyband" and "vitan" but in the end vegan stuck.

For the first year of its publication the Vegan News had a distinctly homespun feel, with a hand-drawn masthead, uneven typeset and thin, cheap paper. Working alone typing the newsletter, creating duplicates with a stencil duplicator and stapling pages by hand, Watson described the process of creating Vegan News as taking the "whole night". What the newsletter lacked in appearance, however, it made up for in content. Watson's editorials put the case for veganism with passion and clarity. The production of dairy, the first edition argued, "involves much cruel exploitation and slaughter of highly sentient life". "Our present civilisation," he continued, "is built on the exploitation of animals, just as past civilisations were built on the exploitation of slaves."

Room was given for discussion and debate and members were invited to submit articles, letters, recipes, diet charts, health records and gardening hints. By the time the second issue was produced, the newsletter was as much an organ of propaganda as a source of information, as well as a focus for an otherwise isolated and disparate community. There were adverts for vegan bed and breakfasts, recipes for dishes such as "macaroni savoury", "vegetable pie" and "wholemeal almond biscuits", and vegan trade lists for products such as toothpaste, nut butter and soap. For those seeking a real alternative, a notice by "Louis Naturist and his wife" described a plan to "live a life of harmony, leisure and contemplation..." by starting a vegan colony in the subtropics. From the perspective of weary, wartime, wintery Britain, this doubtless sounded tempting, if a little eccentric. As Watson pointed out, however, going against the grain was the norm for vegans: "Our members are pronounced individualists, not easily scared by criticism... This is real pioneer work."

By November 1945, the Vegan News was being distributed to 500 subscribers. In spring 1946, the newsletter changed its name to become The Vegan magazine, a title still published by the Vegan Society. Watson stayed on as secretary and editor but soon resigned due to the "pressure of his professional work". His involvement with the Vegan Society, however, continued until his death in 2005. Interviewed aged 92, Watson sounded like a man vindicated. "Having outlived all my critics, I'm a keener vegan now even than I was when I started! And I do feel we're on to something really big!" FT

Polly Russell is a curator at the British Library @PollyRussell1

Honey & Co Recipes

Beauty and the beets

Close your eyes and say "winter food". You will likely conjure up a sombre colour palette, a symphony of brown, beige and mushroom: things bubbling in big, battered pots; pulses and grains simmering in murky broths; and *après-ski* visions of cheese melting on hot, mushy carbs.

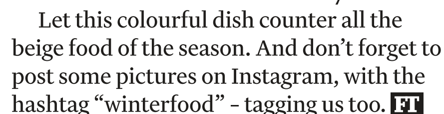
The food that keeps you warm on a cold, miserable day might not always shine on the pages of a food supplement or boost your Instagram, but it's what you want to eat now and what the season demands.

That said, when it's grey outside, a bright and colourful dish can lift the spirits. Brown, hearty fare just needs something fresh, sharp and lively on the side to make a balanced, joyful meal (and to ward off scurvy – it is all too easy to forget our vegetables until spring).

Beetroot offers alternative visions of winter food. Place one on a bed of salt in the oven and after an hour it will look like a crinkly lump of coal. But once the skin is off, its bright colours and exceptional flavours are unmistakable. Deep, sweet and slightly smoky, beetroots can be served like roast potatoes, hot from the oven with a knob of butter or a spoonful of sour cream.

Or you can brighten up your table even more by making this simple yet wonderful salad, with a lick of sweet-and-sour pomegranate molasses, chilli heat, a savoury kick of oregano and a riot of whatever soft herbs you can find.

Let this colourful dish counter all the beige food of the season. And don't forget to post some pictures on Instagram, with the hashtag "winterfood" – tagging us too. FT



By Itamar Srulovich. Recipe by Sarit Packer
Instagram @Honeyandco; honeyandco@ft.com

Beetroot sabzi salad

Serves six to eight

- 3 tbs salt
- 1 small bunch Greek oregano (dry or fresh)
- 2kg whole raw beetroots, of various colours
- 1 green chilli, thinly sliced
- 60g pomegranate molasses
- 1 small bunch thyme, leaves picked
- Sea salt and freshly ground black pepper
- 4 tbs olive oil
- 1 handful picked leaves of each of the following herbs: dill, mint, coriander, tarragon, chervil

1 — Heat your oven to 180C (fan assist). Sprinkle a tray with the salt, place most of the oregano bunch (keeping a tablespoon of picked leaves for the finished beetroots) on the salt, and then pop the raw, unpeeled beetroots on top. Bake for about an hour (or until a knife penetrates the beetroots easily – larger ones may take up to 20 minutes longer to soften).

2 — Remove from the oven. As soon as they are cold enough to handle, top and tail the beetroots and pull the skin away from the flesh. Cut them into wedges, then cut each wedge in half. (If using different-coloured beetroots, keep the lighter ones separate until the last minute to preserve their colour.)

3 — Mix the chilli, pomegranate molasses, the rest of the oregano leaves and the picked thyme with the red and purple beetroots. Season with sea salt, pepper and olive oil and mix well. At the last minute, mix all the beetroots with the herby leaves and serve immediately.

Photographs by Patricia Niven

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Jancis Robinson Wine

Vin retrospect

My problem is that when I get drunk I say what I mean. And when I get very drunk I say what I don't mean." With that threat, a wicked grin and his habitual wheezy snicker, Belgian Jean-Marie Guffens kicked off a massive retrospective tasting of the exceptional white burgundies he's been making since 1980. His first swear word came nine minutes into the tasting. He clearly delights in being rogueish and is well known for falling asleep in the company of wine luminaries.

Fine wine trader Farr Vintners has been importing his wines since the early 1990s and, to celebrate his 65th birthday, suggested the tasting to Guffens. When he decides to do something (and often he doesn't), he goes the whole hog. So, at the end of November, a group of us wine writers and traders were treated to a unique showing of no fewer than 54 of his wines at Farr's headquarters on the Thames in Wandsworth.

Guffens began his winemaking career in the Mâconnais, known for producing poor man's white burgundy, well to the south of the hallowed Côte d'Or. Later he ventured north to make wine on the "golden slope" and a considerable quantity of Chablis under his Verget negociant label, but you could say that his mission in life has been to prove that Mâconnais whites can be better than those from such famous white-wine villages as Meursault and Puligny-Montrachet. This tasting of his exceptionally nervy, long-lived wines confirmed his hypothesis to a large extent.

He told the story, with delight, of how the famous American wine critic Robert Parker wrote in 1983 about a crazy Belgian who made Mâcon wine as good as Puligny. Two weeks later, when Parker visited him, Guffens told him that this was an awful thing to say: "I just want to be me and make wine my way. Art is not to be compared."

The first vintage of Domaine Guffens-Heynen, 1980 – Heynen being the surname of his stupendously indulgent wife Maine – was notoriously late to ripen. The second, 1981, was frozen by spring frosts. According to Guffens, their first "decent" vintage was 1982 but that wasn't perfect either. He described it as "too much". Nevertheless, the early wines made a significant impression not just on Parker but also the venerable Dutch wine importer Okhuysen, a representative of which was at our recent London tasting. But this modest domaine could make only 2,500 cases and Guffens needed a bigger canvas.

The negociant Verget was formed in 1990, long before buying-in grapes became respectable in Burgundy. Helped in the early years by fellow Belgian Jean Rijckaert, Guffens also started making remarkably fine Mâconnais wines, under the Verget label, that belied their lowly appellations, before adding a panoply of other wines from grapes bought in Chablis. In 2009, in particular – the last year he made any Côte d'Or wines – Guffens bought heavily in Chablis "because no one else wanted them".

"I love Mâcon-Pierreclos, Tri de Chavigne the most," Guffens told us, "because it was our very first vineyard and no one wanted it because it was too steep. We always take what others don't want." He smiled at his wife before adding, "I would be unable to make great wine somewhere well known like Meursault, for example, because I can't change it or make it my way."

His way is slow. He likes to pick as late as possible. "I hurry only when the vintage is really perfect, but for a bad one, take your ▶

> 'Mâconnais whites can be better than those from such famous white-wine villages as Meursault'

As imagined by Leon Edler

Stars of the Mâconnais

Domaine Guffens-Heynen
Please note that Guffens keeps making slight changes to the exact names of his cuvées.

- Mâcon Pierreclos, Chavigne 1997, 2000, 2002, 2004, 2006, 2010, 2011
- Pouilly-Fuissé, Clos des Petits-Croux 1997, 2002, 2005
- Pouilly-Fuissé, La Roche 1997, 2004, 2008
- Pouilly-Fuissé, Premier Jus 1998, 2003
- Pouilly-Fuissé, Les Hauts des Vignes 2000, 2003

Verget
- St Véran, Terres Noires Atom Heart Mother 2002
- Mâcon-La-Roche-Vineuse, Vieilles Vignes de Sommere 2002
- Mâcon-Vergisson, La Roche 2006

Tasting notes on Purple Pages of JancisRobinson.com. See Wine-searcher for stockists of Guffens wines

◀ time. The only thing that interests me in wine is vibrancy. Wine has to mean something, has to tell you something. How many good-made but boring wines have you had in your life? You have to ask yourself: what's good in the vintage and what should I avoid? You have to accept the vintage and not work against it. Not make what people want you to."

Nor does he have any illusions about his customers. "To run a business like Verget, you need some stupid people. They always say there are more drinkers than knowers. You need to be able to sell your lesser wines easily."

He admitted, "I make a good living but I don't want to sell to very rich people. To make a lot of money you have to play the stock market and so on. Much more interesting are the people who are just really interested in wine - but not the very, very rich ones. I'd say to them: 'Wake up, guys.' There is so much expensive shit in Burgundy, it becomes a problem. I know I keep mentioning Meursaults but really I'm not sure about them because I don't drink or buy them any more."

It's hardly any wonder you don't see Guffens on the general wine circuit: he is not civilised in a conventional sense. Asked whose wines he does admire, he came up with a typically unexpected answer: Domaine Gallety of Côtes du Vivarais, a low-key producer in a particularly obscure appellation. He was also asked what effect he thought the long-awaited, forthcoming delimitation of Premiers Crus in the Mâconnais would have. "It won't make any difference," he shrugged, adding, with reference to an appellation between the Mâconnais and the Côte d'Or, "who knows the Premiers Crus of Montagny, for instance?"

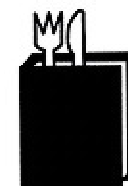
But some of his tastes in wine are perhaps more predictable. "I hate Sauvignon Blanc. I hate cat's piss. I was a very good friend of Didier Dagueneau [the late producer of the Loire's most expensive Sauvignons] but I told him: 'Your wines are so pale you can see through them.'"

In 2003, he was one of the earlier French producers to adopt screwcaps. He told us: "We use a lot of screwcaps. Winemakers don't like them because if a wine has a fault it means they have to admit they screwed up." (They can't blame a faulty natural cork.)

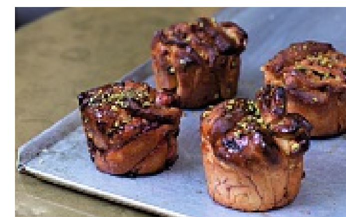
The fourth of our five flights of wines - three before lunch, two after - focused on the highest, best plots of the Pouilly-Fuissé appellation. "I never did this tasting in my life," Guffens observed happily. "The chalky La Roche we call the Montrachet of Vergisson." And the fifth flight included four Grand Cru white burgundies of the Côte d'Or, including a 1994 Montrachet and 1994 Chevalier-Montrachet, made when Verget still sullied its hands producing Côte d'Or wines. They were pretty stupendous but, as Guffens observed to his wife: "It's amazing. They're almost as good as our Mâconnais wines." FT

More columns at ft.com/jancis-robinson

MY ADDRESSES — LONDON



OLLIE DABBOUS, CHEF/RESTAURATEUR



It's a misconception that chefs eat out all the time – I rarely have more than one meal out a day. But going to restaurants is one of life's great pleasures and should be enjoyed, especially in London, with so much choice on offer.

— A perfect day would begin with a cake and coffee at **Jacob the Angel** (above right) in Neal's Yard. I drink far too much of the caffeinated stuff but it serves me well: I don't sleep much, yet manage to be fairly productive.

— For lunch, **Bancone**, in Covent Garden, serves delicious pasta (above left) and you can be in and out in a flash. Being an adult, I refuse to queue for a meal, and happily you can book. Another great spot is **Petersham Nurseries** on King Street. The menus are fantastic and the food is healthy.

— **Dean Street Townhouse** is always fun for a drink. As I am on my feet for much of the day, I prefer somewhere with table service. One drink ends up being several and possibly dinner. The menu offers plenty of comfort food.

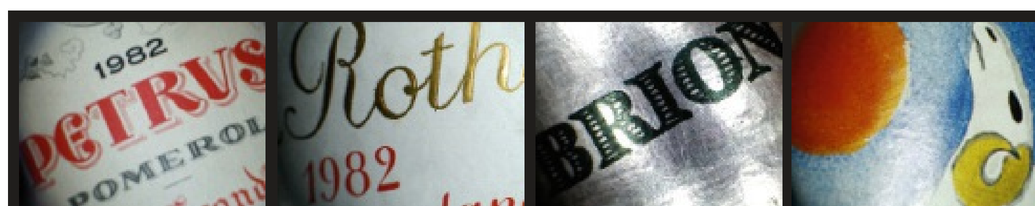
— **The Luggage Room** in Grosvenor Square is also fun. It's buzzy, but intimate, and feels like a treat. I had a memorable "Last Word" cocktail here.

— I had a fantastic dinner at **Bombay Bustle** recently. The menu was very interesting, it was good value and many of their smaller touches were executed extremely well. For something more old-fashioned, I like the "butcher burger" at **Smith & Wollensky** just off The Strand.

— I also love Japanese fare, not least at **Umu** in Mayfair. From the food to the tableware, it's all very refined.

Ollie Dabbous is chef-patron of Hide in London; hide.co.uk

JADE NINA SARKHEL; GEORGIA RUDD



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FT Weekend

Restaurants
Tim Hayward

SOLA'S DINING ROOM. ROASTED CHALLANS DUCK BREAST WITH HARISSA, CARROT AND PLUM. PHOTOGRAPHS BY SONYA METZLER

Sola, London

Since the French codified cooking in the 19th century, there's been a sort of hemi-global hegemony of "haute cuisine". Movements that have challenged this are important. In Britain, for example, we can look to our own innovation and diversity over the past 20 years. But the first and perhaps most significant flaring of organised rebellion took place in California in the late 1960s.

The state had a wealthy population of consumers who were well educated, well travelled and predisposed to bohemian experiment. As it also had large Hispanic and Asian cultural influences and an exciting wealth of produce, it was the natural spot for the first attempts to break the bonds of French haute tradition with local ingredients, iconoclastic fusions and exciting informality. California cuisine, created at Chez Panisse, Stars, Spago and others, was the result – globally significant but too often forgotten except, it seems, by American chef Victor Garvey.

In Soho, on the site of his much-loved Catalan restaurant Rambla, Garvey has opened a delightful oddity, Sola, his own personal homage to California cuisine. The bright dining room has been decorated in the sort of knocked-back LA/Zen aesthetic that simultaneously induces the desire to chant, order an egg-white omelette and nip to the gents to rehearse a couple of lines with your agent.

We need to acknowledge up front the small glitch in the logic at Sola – using "local" American ingredients in London means putting them on a plane. Once we accept this, it's a privilege to see what a cook with Garvey's chops can do with them.

In California, cardoons (artichoke thistles) are so highly regarded that restaurants are only permitted a weekly allocation. Sola's are flown in from Santa Barbara and can run out each week. They could possibly get them from Italy but the American ones are supreme. Baked in a gratin – the way they do it here – with white truffle, they are a staggeringly gorgeous vegetarian main or the sort of side that will provoke an intervention from your personal trainer.

Roulade of smoked salmon is presented rolled, like *makizushi*, around crispy Yukon Gold potato and Maui onion, dressed with a little wasabi and perched on a block of ice. A miniature portrait of the California ethos and, tangentially, quite the loveliest bit of fish you'll consume for approximately an aeon.

'A miniature portrait of the California ethos and, tangentially, quite the loveliest bit of fish you'll consume for approximately an aeon'

Try the lamb from Colorado because it's so unlike any lamb you'll eat in Britain – cleaner, more fragrant, with less lanolin load – but keep space for foie gras "poêlé". It's the stuff from Spain, from birds that are fed normally, without gavage, and comes with dim sum purses of langoustine, ginger, cavolo nero and a "century" quail egg. Like everything else on the menu, that should be enough cultural dissonance on one plate to give the twitterati a collective nosebleed, but here it is unified and given context by a different place, a different time and Garvey's timeless skill and eclectic creativity.

Crêpes "Gisele" – should you require dessert – is performed, so to speak, on a guéridon, tableside, flavoured with buckwheat, satsuma and tonka bean... and I don't think I need to repeat how I feel about that sort of thing. Suffice to say I'm still grinning.

There are greater wine experts than I in these pages but I should mention a list of otherwise largely unobtainable American wines at levels of mark-up that must be close to self-harm for the business.

There is a possibility that some people won't "get" Sola. They might believe that ideas such as "local ingredients" and fusion-without-shame are just part of chef thinking these days, and not give a jot where those ideas came from. They might fail to be fascinated by the sort of dishes that first broke the bonds of the French canon. They might object to the distances fine ingredients are shipped. They might think that California wines are not for them or that there is something to be deplored in desserts not made from a fermented infusion of yesterday's peelings. A few might even feel that air plants in macramé hangers and jazz so soft it can yogically induce a semi-vegetative state are too thematically arch. But all will be converted in the end by solidly brilliant cooking from someone who turns out to be that most important and rare thing in a chef... a total enthusiast. FT

Sola
64 Dean Street
Soho, London W1D 4QQ
020 7287 8716
solasoho.com
Main dishes £14 to £22
Prix fixe (lunch) £45

Tim Hayward is winner of the Restaurant Writing Award at the Guild of Food Writers Awards 2019. tim.hayward@ft.com; @TimHayward

I'D BE LOST WITHOUT...

My brass cogwheel

Using this traditional tool for cutting pasta not only preserves historical techniques but also enhances the ingredients, writes *Ugo Alciati*

ANNA BU KLIEWER

A cogwheel is a small hand-held tool used to cut pasta sheets into shapes. I learnt how to use one by watching my mother Lidia while I was growing up in Piedmont. She used to make her famous *agnolotti del plin* at Guido, my parents' restaurant in the village of Serralunga d'Alba.

Agnolotti is a type of pasta parcel from Piedmont. It is similar to ravioli and translates more or less as "pasta squares with filling", while *plin* comes from the local word for "pinch". Lidia and her colleagues started "pinching" their fresh pasta parcels shut – and today I still do the same.

I remember my mother being awarded a golden cogwheel in recognition of her herculean work over the years. In four decades, she had produced more than 5,760,000 *agnolotti del plin*. If they were lined up, they would reach 17km.

In my own restaurants, including Guido Ristorante in Serralunga d'Alba, I try to stay true to my region's traditions and continue to use a small brass cogwheel to cut pasta. It's not just a way of preserving simple, historical cooking techniques. Cutting pasta sheets with a brass cogwheel creates rough edges, which help sauces stick to each piece. The ingredients are also enhanced by this method – not least in my own *agnolotti di Lidia*, named after my mother.

To make this dish, I follow traditional methods, using high-quality ingredients sourced from Italy. For the pasta, I kneed 500g of flour with 11 egg yolks and 80g of water until a smooth dough begins to form. Then I let it rest and stretch it out. Traditionally, *agnolotti* contain a mixture of braised meats. In this version, I use veal flank, pork loin and ground sausage to create a rich filling.

Then I place it on the stretched dough in small spoonfuls, fold the dough over and cut each piece using my cogwheel. I "pinch" – or *plin* – each parcel shut with my forefinger and thumb and boil the *agnolotti* in salted water. Then I strain it and mix with the leftover sauce from the braised meat filling. FT

Ugo Alciati is responsible for the menu of L'Assaggio Restaurant at the Castille in Paris and heads Guido Ristorante (one Michelin star) inside Fontanafredda winery, in Piedmont. He is also ambassador for Eataly and for the white truffle of Alba

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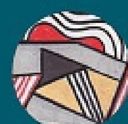
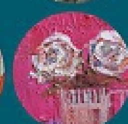
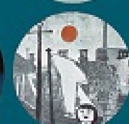






FT

Games

A Round on the Links
by James Walton

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

1. What's a female impala called?

2. On BBC radio (below right) before the second world war, what was the usual word for what we'd now call a quiz?

3. Who is the current makar – or poet laureate – of Scotland?

4. An adaptation of which 1963 stage musical – created by Joan Littlewood and regularly revived since – was Richard Attenborough's first film as a director?

5. Which 1988 novel by Margaret Atwood shares its name with a traffic safety measure?

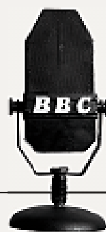
6. Which line from a nursery rhyme appears in both "I Am the Walrus" and "Lady Madonna" by the Beatles (above)?

7. By what name is the Renaissance painter Doménikos Theotokópoulos better known?

8. The city of Chester stands on which river?

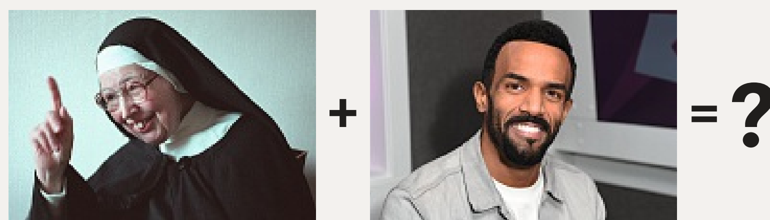
9. In Tennyson's "The Charge of the Light Brigade", what line comes between "Theirs not to make reply" and "Theirs but to do or die"?

10. On his death in 2015, Nicholas Smith was the last surviving original cast member of which sitcom – in which he played Cuthbert Rumbold?



The Picture Round
by James Walton

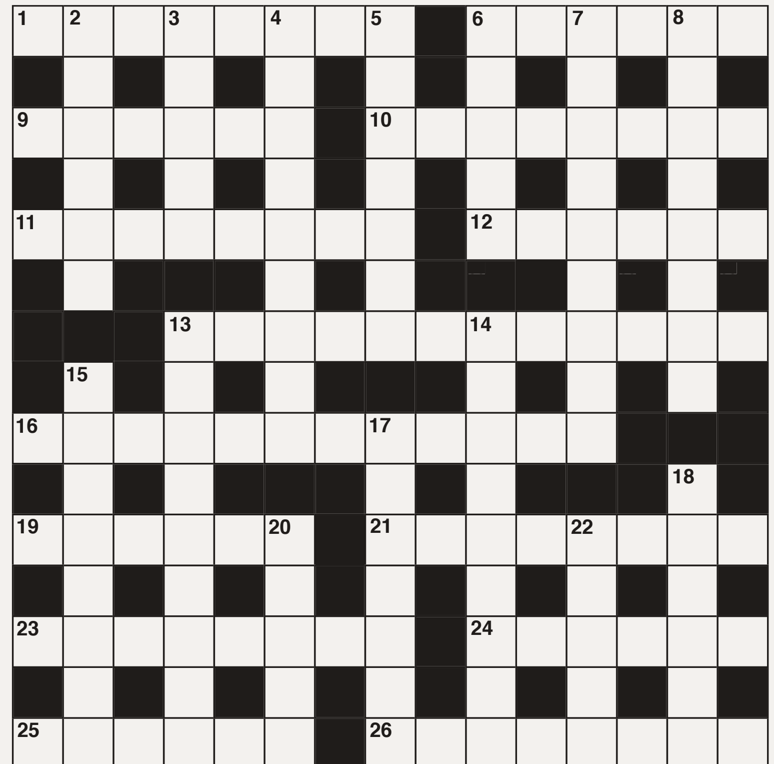
Who or what do these pictures add up to?



Answers page 12

GETTY IMAGES; ALAMY

The Crossword
No 471. Set by Aldhelm



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

ACROSS

1 Red, yellow or green pepper (8)
6 Alter (6)
9 Picturehouse (6)
10 Spotting (8)
11 Fielding position near the batsman (5, 3)
12 Ceremonial act (6)
13 Study of humankind (12)
16 Repayment (12)
19 Broken limb support (6)
21 Woodwind instrument (8)
23 Obvious, clear (8)
24 Relaxing (6)
25 Vigour (6)
26 Of the heart (8)

DOWN

2 Land's burning (6)
3 Cut what's complete for the audience (5)
4 Fake map incorporating the French one (9)
5 One running race, initially, after player takes time (7)
6 Open country includes time for driver (5)
7 Event happening after last month's unfortunate halt (9)
8 Dance with lover and maybe leave (8)
13 Praise film that's reproduced without second piece of audio equipment (9)
14 One plundering pirate gets over not starting, perhaps (9)
15 Protest about corrupt policeman losing MDMA (8)
17 Hermit crab's initially found under case it refashioned (7)
18 Note's tone is heard (6)
20 Small adolescent's starting young (5)
22 Best lines re-edited – lest this playwright's upset (5)

Solution to Crossword No 470

GILLIAN TETT

PARTING SHOT

Suits v hoodies: the digital currencies battle

Can a pinstripe suit be combined with a hoodie? That might sound like an unlikely fashion dilemma. But it also reflects a policy question hanging over central banks.

In decades past, central bankers ruled the financial system by projecting an image that seemed unchanging, conservative and sober. Think marble pillars and sensible suits (pinstripe or otherwise).

Last year, however, the central banking community received a shocking challenge: Facebook, the tech group with a freewheeling, hoodie-wearing culture, announced plans to launch a global digital currency project called Libra.

We have seen breakthroughs in this area before. China's digital-payment and cryptocurrency sector is growing explosively fast. Countries such as Kenya have been using digital payments for a long time, while bitcoin has been a fixture in western finance for several years. Yet the Libra idea is so ambitious that it not only threatens to disrupt private banks but could potentially challenge some of the functions – and oversight – of central banks as well.

The issue is made doubly difficult for central banks (and intriguing for amateur anthropologists) because it is not just a story of high finance. It also involves a culture clash between the systems employed by central-bank "suits" on one side and freewheeling "hoodies" on the other.

When Mark Zuckerberg, the founder of Facebook, outlined his plans for Libra last year, he seemed to imply that he wanted to create a "stablecoin", or digital token, backed by a basket of currencies, run by a large consortium of (mostly) financial groups. Such projects already exist on a tiny scale. But Facebook's vision seemed so massive and global that it threatened to create a channel for international finance, partly outside central bank control.

Zuckerberg never defined what assets might sit in this basket, however, or how it might be regulated (or not). Now, after months of debate, central bankers say the concept will only work if Facebook either backs the coin with vast reserves of money (which would be posted at a central bank) and/or submits to banking regulation.

Agustín Carstens, head of the Bank for International Settlements (BIS), which acts like the central bank for central banks, told me at a recent conference at Princeton University: "Libra has good ideas behind it but it has to evolve in such a way that it can conform with regulation." But he conceded that "events [with Libra] have been a wake-up call [for central banks]. We central bankers were in a comfort zone, but [Libra] showed we needed to change. So, there has been a lot of consulting and debate with Facebook, and ourselves."

Where this frenzy of "consulting" leaves Libra is still unclear. Nobody knows if Facebook will accept this type of central-bank control; indeed, the contours of the plan are still so vague that some observers suspect Libra may yet wither away or be eclipsed by digital rivals. (An alternative initiative being developed by Gary Cohn, the former Goldman Sachs luminary and Trump adviser, aims to use encrypted phones to create a digital payment network that would adhere to existing bank regulation.)

Either way, central bankers are – belatedly – scrambling to adapt to the new realities. At next week's annual conference of the World Economic Forum in Davos, for example, there will be a blitz of meetings between financial regulators and tech companies to talk about cryptocurrencies. Meanwhile, the BIS is creating "innovation hubs" in Zurich and Singapore, and may yet replicate this in Silicon Valley as well.

> 'It involves a culture clash between the systems employed by central-bank "suits" and freewheeling "hoodies"'

"We are trying to avoid being surprised by innovation, as we were with bitcoin and Libra," says Carstens. Central banks are also trying to hire more tech experts. The officials who handle payment systems in central banks typically have a knowledge base that is "70-80 per cent finance and 20 per cent tech": Carstens says the goal is to reverse this.

Will this help to close the knowledge – and culture – gap between the two sides? One problem dogging these initiatives is that central bankers are (in)famously wary of change. But, as Alan Blinder, former vice-chairman of the board of governors at the US Federal Reserve, pointed out to Carstens at Princeton, "there is a high likelihood that the hoodie culture doesn't want to cross that line" either.

As Blinder notes, tech entrepreneurs "see their business model as [tapping into] the segment of the population which doesn't trust pinstripe culture". Indeed, the raison d'être of the bitcoin project, and many other forms of fintech, is a dislike of existing financial structures, including the hierarchies embedded in central banks.

It will be fascinating to see what transpires in the coming months, just as it will be to watch innovation hubs try to forge an unlikely hybrid of hoodies and suits. For the sake of a smooth transition in global finance, let's hope they succeed. Maybe it could also start a fashion trend. FT

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