

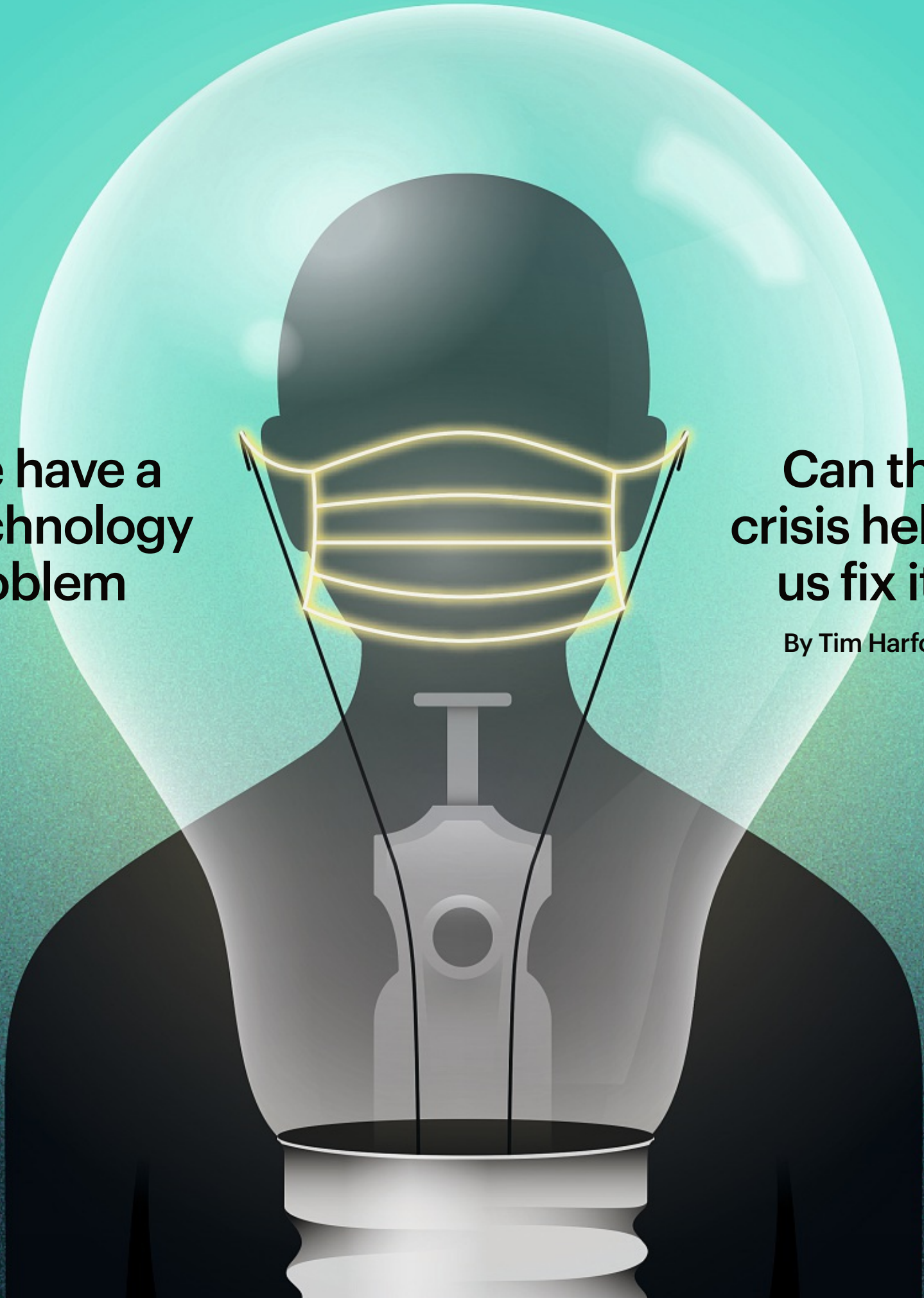
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FT Weekend Magazine

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**Can the
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By Tim Harford



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Enterprise Edition

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Cover illustration by *Vanessa Branchi*



RICK MCCLOSKEY

'Gas was cheap, times were great and the boulevard hummed with life during the evenings'

Rick McCloskey on California car culture, p30



'The public discovered I had a personality'

Ed Miliband, p20



'The asparagus starter was so tender you could eat it with a spoon'

Honey & Co on recreating restaurant memories, p40



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SIMON KUPER

OPENING SHOT

Why the US risks a new epidemic of violence



Violence spreads like a virus. If someone with Covid-19 coughs near you, the disease can enter your lungs. And if someone commits violence against you, or in your presence, violent tendencies can enter your brain. That's why violence, like a virus, often appears in clusters. One killing generates others, just as one person with Covid-19 can start a chain of infections. The best way to stop contagion is to interrupt it early: trace, isolate and prevent spread.

That was Gary Slutkin's insight when he returned to the US in 1995 after 10 years in Africa combating tuberculosis, cholera and Aids. The epidemiologist and doctor now leads Cure Violence Global, an NGO. CVG employs "violence interrupters" who find people at risk of committing violence and deter them before they act. Its work has sharply reduced violence in parts of New York, Baltimore, Mexico, Honduras and elsewhere, according to evaluations by Johns Hopkins University, John Jay College, Arizona State University and others.

If violence is contagious, then certain conclusions follow. First, police arriving after violence happens aren't much use. In fact, they often spread violence, by introducing their own. Second, a new nationwide epidemic of violence now threatens an armed and divided US.

Slutkin argues that contagion operates in all types of violence, whether gang, domestic, political or mass shootings. "If you have experienced violence, you are dozens to hundreds of times more likely to do it," he says. The risk is dose-dependent: "Your likelihood of doing violence depends on your amount of exposure to it." Sometimes violence is instantly infectious: one man gets killed, and his friends kill the killer. Sometimes violence infects over generations: a father beats his son, who later beats his own. Poverty helps breed violence, as it does Covid. However, social circumstances aren't determinant, says Slutkin. The main cause of violence is violence.

It often originates in petty, resolvable disputes: one man flirts with another's girlfriend, owes him money or disrespects him. CVG's interrupters - many of them ex-gang members who know their neighbourhoods - sniff out these quarrels. They visit the wronged man in hospital if he's been shot and spend hours talking him out of violence, perhaps finding him job training or drug treatment. Sometimes they'll be summoned by a mother worried that her son is loading guns in the cellar.

The interrupters also train people to change their behaviour. This is something public health does well, says Slutkin: wear a mask, wear a condom, learn to get over a quarrel instead of letting it escalate.

Police in the US often act as spreaders of violence. No wonder, because they are exposed to it daily. It may also be that people infected by violence while young are attracted to a profession in which

they are effectively licensed to kill - especially, it seems, if the victims are African-American.

Slutkin doesn't propose abolishing the police force. He just favours shrinking it. Even liberal New York City pours \$6bn a year of taxpayer dollars into its police department, "more than... on health, homelessness, youth development and workforce development combined", says the NGO Public Citizen. Yet US police officers are constantly dealing with people afflicted by mental health problems, homelessness, drug addictions or poverty so extreme they can't pay a \$50 fine.

'US police deal with people afflicted by a series of problems. They walk in like untrained social workers with guns'

Police walk into these situations like untrained social workers with guns. Public health experts and criminologists have been saying this for decades, with almost no impact on political debate - until, perhaps, now.

US streets, TV and incendiary social media have recently been saturated with violence. Police attack protesters with pepper spray, tear gas and batons, while a minority of protesters commits violence too. The national soundtrack is Trump, talking like a super-spreader of violence: "When the looting starts, the shooting starts."

Making things worse is the epidemic of misinformation that accompanies most epidemics (including Covid-19). For instance, the White House's Twitter account shared a video montage of piles of bricks stashed on streets, supposedly prepared for protesters by Antifa and "professional anarchists". In fact, the bricks (many of them at construction sites) predated the protests.

Slutkin has worked in enough fragile countries to see predictors of violence in the US: elites are divided, while many people's health, incomes and status have declined. He says these factors breed violence just as dirty water breeds disease.

Then there are the upcoming US elections. Electoral violence is often ethnic, as in Kenya in 2007-08. Trump was elected president stigmatising Hispanics and Muslims. This time, his scapegoats might be African-Americans or the Chinese. "It's also very rare that the Jews aren't in the blame mix," adds Slutkin.

There may be nothing to worry about. Perhaps the armed protesters who occupied Michigan statehouse last month won't reappear. Everything could go swimmingly in November. If Trump loses, he may graciously hand power to Joe Biden. However, CVG is preparing for trouble. It is training ordinary citizens nationwide as violence interrupters. We've learnt this year that it's best to catch epidemics early. **FT**

.....
simon.kuper@ft.com @KuperSimon



INVENTORY
OYINKAN BRAITHWAITE, AUTHOR

‘I’ve learnt not to throw any idea away – I’ve lost stories because I thought they were terrible’

Oyinkan Braithwaite, 32, won the 2019 Anthony Award for best first novel for *My Sister, the Serial Killer*, which was also shortlisted for the Women’s Prize for Fiction and longlisted for the Booker Prize.

What was your childhood or earliest ambition?

In primary school, we were asked what we wanted to be when we grew up. I wrote that I wanted to be an author and an interior designer, and also work part-time in Toys R Us.

Private school or state school?

University or straight into work?

I went to three primary schools and three secondary schools, some were private, some state. I changed schools so much because my family and I moved between Nigeria and England. In the English schools, I was a wallflower for the most part. In the Nigerian schools, though I was still the quiet girl who liked to read, I stood out more. I was even appointed social prefect, which no one could make head nor tail of. But that was the least of the differences. The facilities, teaching styles, disciplinary measures – sometimes I feel as though I have lived different lives. I went to two universities. I dropped out of the first, and finished from Kingston University [in the UK], where I read creative writing and law.

Who was or still is your mentor?

My family and friends. My dad is a big ideas man and my mother never sits still, she is always doing something, learning something. I have friends who work extremely hard for themselves and their families. My fiancé is one of the most disciplined people I have met. They all inspire me.

How physically fit are you?

I like to sleep a lot; I wish sleeping was exercise. However, in recent times, I have been making an effort to exercise for at least 30 minutes a day, as it is expensive buying new clothes every few months.

Ambition or talent: which matters more to success?

Ambition. If you are willing to do the work, you’ll achieve your goals.

How politically committed are you?

I vote, but I believe I could do more. I’m often ashamed of how ignorant I am of things going on around me.

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

Floor-to-ceiling bookcases with a sliding ladder.

What’s your biggest extravagance?

Laptop, iPad and phone. Other than that, the costs add up for my books, clothing and all things art-related.

In what place are you happiest?

My room. On my bed.

What ambitions do you still have?

I would like to create an animated series. I would also like to write more books and put together a few encyclopedias. There is so much about Nigeria that I don’t know – for example, we have so many tribes here and I am only familiar with a handful of them. But it is difficult to find information on the subject that is easy to digest; so I figured creating encyclopedias would be a way to educate myself and make the information accessible.

What drives you on?

The desire to be better than I was yesterday.

What is the greatest achievement of your life so far?

Based on success, *My Sister, the Serial Killer*. But I think in reality, it would have been the first novel that I was able to complete. And, perhaps in 2018, when my sister and I were privileged to teach kids how to read.

What do you find most irritating in other people?

Duplicity. Also, people who want to go out all the time are exhausting.

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

“Damn!”

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

There are stories I wrote and lost because I thought they were terrible. I’ve learnt not to throw any idea away.

What is the greatest challenge of our time?

Social media. For all its benefits, our worth is now measured by follows, retweets and likes, and it has created an unhealthy competitiveness. Also, nothing is sacred any more. Everything can and will be performed for the camera.

Do you believe in an afterlife?

Yes, I do.

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

Nine. **FT**

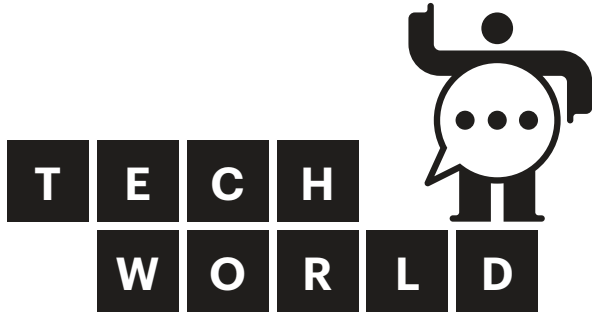
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Interview by Hester Lacey.

“My Sister, the Serial Killer” by Oyinkan Braithwaite (Atlantic Books) is shortlisted for the British Book Awards Crime & Thriller Book of the Year

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BY LEO LEWIS IN TOKYO

Robostrop: is it OK to terminate a menacing android?

I have been wondering about the solidity of my legal position if I had just smashed a robot to pieces. It would not have been a premeditated attack, you understand, but I do already know my victim's name.

This lockdown fever dream is another philosophical gift of Covid-19 and the hypotheticals it continues to create. Many long-term changes have been suggested as part of the new world the virus will establish. And Japan has jumped on this brand of futurology with relish.

Give a child a hammer, says Abraham Kaplan's Law of the Instrument, and they will discover that everything needs to be pounded. Give Japan a crisis, and its engineers will see it as the great breakthrough moment for robots.

This happens a lot: from natural disasters to the slow-burning challenges of ageing and population decline, Japanese companies are always first out of the blocks to identify pivotal moments in robo-evolution. Often, there are thrilling prototypes to go with the predictions. More often, there are admissions that, while these demo models are pushing technological frontiers, the interesting ones that make witty conversation while on a temple tour of Kyoto or cook a full English breakfast are not quite ready for real-world action.

The corona-crisis, with its underlying message that safety lies in lowering human-to-human contact, has sent this into overdrive. In a Covid-endemic world, the robot proselytisers claim that businesses must automate to survive.



ILLUSTRATION BY PÂTÉ

Clearly, there are huge parts of the manufacturing, logistics and services sectors where this is true. The rise of dull, barely visible robots is inexorable and probably now accelerated by events. In a recent research note, Nomura highlighted the likelihood that the Covid-19 crisis would drive a long-term boom in sales of industrial dishwasher machines, a product at both the most prosaic and profitable end of the automation spectrum.

But on the more showbizzy side, life under the pandemic is a giant trade fair for peddlers of robot bartenders, burger-cooks, fruit-pickers and cleaners - many of them unnecessarily anthropomorphised and many operating at unacceptably low speeds. Into this bionic beauty parade has rolled Patoro - the

'Into Japan's bionic beauty parade has rolled Patoro - the "autonomous security patrol and disinfection robot"... and what a versatile little tyke it is'


"autonomous security patrol and disinfection robot".

The promotional video released by Patoro's makers shows what a versatile little tyke it is: one moment silently gliding through office corridors, the next escorting schoolchildren home after dark, its once-cute goggly eyes narrowed and alert to the "suspicious people" it spots with its 360-degree heat-sensitive cameras. At one point, a just-robbed shopkeeper orders a Patoro to give chase at a top speed of 20kph, its paint-gun discharging round after round of ordnance at its fleeing target. For Covid times, Patoro has been repurposed to squirt disinfectant instead.

This is the machine that I imagine having to confront - not because I envisage turning criminal, but because I see post-pandemic streets teeming with the likes of Patoro and one of them going berserk. If it were threatening me or a child, what level of violence would be covered by a self-defence argument? A firm, debilitating slap or a parts-mangling rain of blows?

The first part of this scenario has been pored over by lawyers and government officials as they have attempted to establish where the criminal or civil liabilities would lie (with the software programmer, component supplier or final vendor) if a robot caused harm. The consistent theme is that at no point should it be argued the robot has agency beyond its creators.

Very much less attention has been paid to the right to self-defence and whether, for example, it would be equivalent to the laws covering the treatment of dangerous animals, given that robots are not, in the eyes of the law, alive.

A call to the justice ministry for clarification elicits a giggle and a "no comment" from its press office. A call to the police in Tokyo's Shakuji district draws a more practical answer: "It depends on the situation," says the duty officer. "If I harm a dog that attacks my kid, I might be accused of cruelty to animals or destruction of property. In case of a robot threatening life, it might be OK. But if I beat the shit out of it, I would be accused of destroying property." 

Leo Lewis is the FT's Tokyo correspondent

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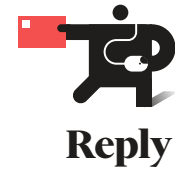
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ROBERT SHRIMSLEY

THE NATIONAL CONVERSATION



The it-will-do-for-now Great British haircut

I am not altogether sure what the Great British haircut is but apparently there is one. Boris Johnson deployed the phrase while answering questions about when hairdressers might be free to trim the tresses of our increasingly shaggy society.

He hoped it would not be too long before he was able to “unleash the Great British haircut”. This, I have to be honest, is a fairly troubling image, calling to mind Mr Burns in *The Simpsons* telling his aide to “release the hounds”. “Unleash the haircut” conjures up images of Britons being chased down the high street by a ferocious mullet. Are there heroes of the haircut? The Coiffeur of Agincourt? The Barber of Blenheim?

It is a very Johnsonian tick to stick the phrase “Great British” before almost any noun. I have lived here my whole life and I have literally no idea what a Great British haircut looks like – though, in fairness, I haven’t got much idea what a great haircut looks like either, British or not. Is a Great British haircut very expensive and delivered by a Nicky Clarke or a Vidal Sassoon, or is it very cheap and the work of Colin the Barber?

Before we moved house, I used to get my monthly trim at one such establishment in Shepherd’s Bush. I’m not sure it was great, but it was a haircut, it was definitely British and it was done by a man called Colin.

So, all things considered, I ought to have been one of the least troubled by the thought of a home haircut, although the last time I had one it involved my mother, a pudding bowl and a sudden dash to Edgware General Hospital with a small flap of my earlobe hanging down. On social media I saw many of my acquaintances making merry with the clippers. Twitter was replete with middle-aged men with buzzcuts. And yet, still I hesitated.



ILLUSTRATION BY LUCAS VARELA

My hair is not my best feature, but the competition is not fierce.

I had, with typical organisational flair, failed to consider the issue ahead of lockdown. It soon began to oppress me. Some men can rock long hair. I am not among them. There was the illicit, secret snipper option, but it felt like too significant a breach of lockdown and not something I could easily explain to my wife. Furthermore, it would be hard to insist on the spawn socially distancing with their friends when their father was engaged in covert crimping.

But first I needed a set of clippers, which were suddenly in very short supply. The boy had one – but only with the shortest settings. I wanted something that would not leave me looking like an extra from *This Is England*. Finally, last week, a package from China arrived. Naturally, I was nervous. Conservative MPs have warned of the risks of buying Chinese. What if Beijing was wirelessly monitoring every snip?

After watching tutorials on YouTube, I learnt how to hold another mirror while cutting so I could see the back of my head, though mainly I just saw my ear. And so, with the most forgiving setting, I began to shear. The clippers buzzed into life and I

prepared to join the heroes of the Great British haircut – the Crimper of Crécy, the Stylist of Trafalgar – and take my place among them. At first, I seemed to struggle; large amounts were coming off but no good shape was emerging through the thickets. But like the Light Brigade, I charged on. Half a lock, half a lock, half a lock onward.

The girl returned from a walk to declare that I had given myself a “side mullet”. I sensed from her tone that this was not a good thing. The criticism stung because she had previously clipped the back of her brother’s head in a way that offered a possible explanation for the phenomenon of crop circles. Nonetheless, I enlisted her help with the back, even though her last grooming effort was to dye the boy’s hair blue.

Through luck and trepidation, the thing just about worked out. The fiddly bits were solved through the cunning expedient of combing them behind the ears. I can’t say it is great, but it will do. My hair is short, boxy and pretty much the same as it has been since I was about 15. In other words, it’s a Great British haircut. **FT**

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Re: Guy Chazan’s “How Germany got coronavirus right” (June 6/7). As many suspected, the decentralised nature of the health system was key. Anyone who has worked as a manager will know that if you give real responsibility to the local experts, you will get a more efficient response and stronger buy-in from the team on the ground. Of course, the higher authorities have to relinquish some power and there will be no uniformity in the approach. That tends to be what frightens top-level management but the best managers (as Angela Merkel’s government, no doubt, is) understand that high-level control is an illusion to be relinquished.

Nouv via FT.com

@lilycogan June 6
Excellent article explaining Germany’s low death rate from #COVID19. Comprehensive national testing & tracing; gov led by Angela Merkel, a physicist; decentralised health system; and a bit of luck

Convertible it has to be (Robert Shrimmsley’s “Drive-in cinemas: the one good thing to come out of all this?”, June 6/7). Modern cars don’t quite do it: steamy windows. If you try to leave the ignition on to allow you to use the air con, all of the sensor lights come on... you become distracted. Not quite paradise by the dashboard lights. **Crebank** via FT.com

Re Gillian Tett’s “When tear gas comes to TikTok” (June 6/7). I had the same experience – my daughter’s Instagram was full of Black Lives Matter while my Twitter feed was still obsessing about Dominic Cummings. We have to accept young people are getting their news in a different way. I’m proud of their desire to change the world – and now they have the ability to connect and support one another. **Avs1** via FT.com

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Catch up on recent interviews on the **Culture Call** podcast, including: psychotherapist **Esther Perel**, chef **Samin Nosrat**, podcaster **Ira Glass**, *Slave Play* author **Jeremy O Harris** and cartoonist **Liana Finck**; ft.com/culture-call

Quizzes answers The link was personal titles 1. “Miss You” 2. The Master and Margarita 3. Notre Dame 4. The Lady of Shalott 5. To Sir, with Love 6. Mr and Mrs 7. James Dean 8. Lord’s 9. Father of the House 10. The Fremantle Doctor **Picture quiz** Dwayne “The Rock” Johnson + Bottom (from A Midsummer Night’s Dream) = Rock bottom

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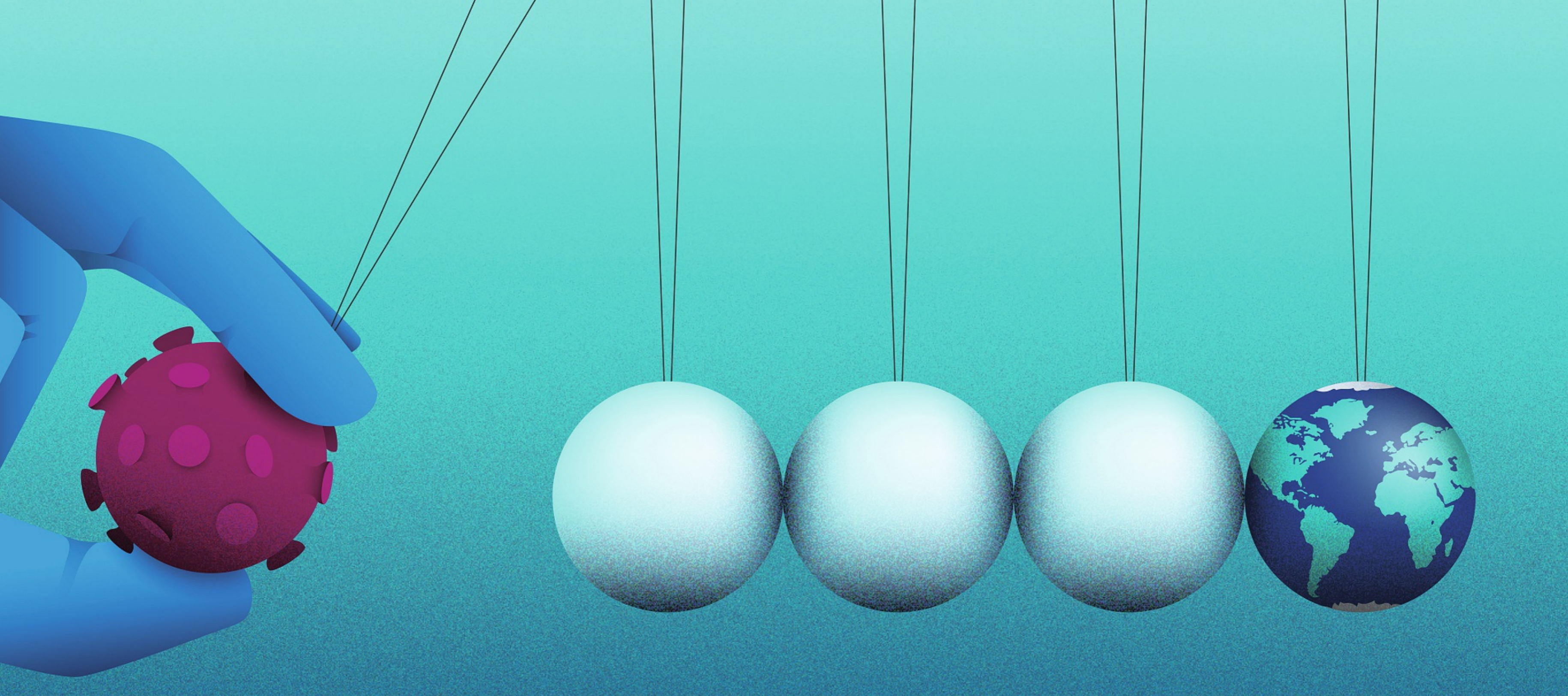
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Can the pandemic end the great innovation slowdown?

Incentivise invention, take advantage of catastrophe and never forget the simple solution: *Tim Harford* on why the history of technology has much to teach us about how to fight our current crisis – and transform our future. Illustrations by *Vanessa Branchi*

T

he world has a technology problem.

By that, I mean that we currently lack the technology to deal with the coronavirus pandemic. We don't have a cheap, easy, self-administered test. We lack effective medicines. Above all, we don't have a vaccine.

But I also mean something vaguer and more diffuse. We have a technology problem in the sense that scientific and technological progress has been sputtering for a while. That is evident in the data. The 2010-19 decade of productivity growth in the UK was the lowest for the past couple of centuries, and coronavirus can take no blame for that.

If productivity statistics do not speak to your poetic soul, go into your kitchen and look around. You'll see little there that you couldn't have seen 50 years ago. The same could not be said of, say, the 50 years between 1920 and 1970. Or ponder air travel, if you can remember what that is like. Between 1920 and 1970, we went from aviator goggles and fabric-covered biplanes to the Boeing 747 and Concorde. Not only have we failed to surge forward since then, one could even argue that we've gone backward. Given how much we keep being told about the disruptive pace of innovation and the boundless creativity of Silicon Valley, the reality is both surprising and disappointing.

After several years pondering the history of inventions and inventors, I wondered whether these two problems might shed light on each other - what can we learn from the pandemic about technology, and what does the history of technology teach us about the pandemic?

Get the incentives right

In 1795, the French government offered a prize of 12,000 francs for inventing a method of preserving food. Napoleon Bonaparte was an ambitious general when the prize was announced. By the time it was awarded, he was France's emperor, and two years away from his disastrous invasion of Russia. Napoleon may or may not have said: "An army marches on its stomach," but he was keen to broaden his soldiers' provisions from smoked and salted meat.

One of the hopefuls who tried his hand at winning the prize was Nicolas Appert, a Parisian grocer and confectioner credited with the development of the stock cube and - less plausibly - the recipe for chicken Kiev. Through trial and error, Appert found if you put cooked food in a glass jar, plunged the jar into boiling water and then sealed it with wax, the food would keep - all this was before Louis

Pasteur was born. Having solved the problem, Monsieur Appert duly claimed his reward.

This is by no means the only example of an innovation prize, a policy tool that has waxed and waned over the years. The most famous was the 1714 Longitude Prize, for solving the problem of how far east or west a ship was. The Royal Society for the encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce, the RSA, also awarded prizes on a frequent basis, often for safety measures that were regarded as unprofitable but socially valuable. Anton Howes, author of *Arts and Minds*, a history of the RSA, reckons that the society awarded more than 2,000 innovation prizes between the mid-1700s and the mid-1800s. Some were "bounties", ad hoc recognition for good ideas; many, however, were classic innovation prizes like that awarded to Appert, which pose an important problem and promise to reward the person who solves it.

Nowadays such prizes are out of fashion. Governments tend to favour a combination of direct support for researchers and the award of an intellectual monopoly, in the form of a patent, to those who develop original ideas. But just like the innovations the RSA rewarded, rapid vaccines can be unprofitable but socially valuable.

So a group of the world's leading economists believes that if we are to maximise the chances of producing that vital coronavirus vaccine at the speed and scale that is required, we need to bring innovation prizes back in a big way. This team, known as "Accelerating Health Technologies", includes Susan Athey, the first woman to win the prestigious John Bates Clark medal, and Michael Kremer, a Nobel laureate.

"Whoever discovers the vaccine first is going to get such a big hug," joked the Financial Times cartoonist Banx. It's safe to say that they would get much more than that, but would they get enough? Major pharmaceutical companies have been scarred by earlier experiences, where they sank money into vaccines for diseases such as Zika or Sars, or in 2009 rushed to fulfil large orders for flu vaccines, only to find that demand had ebbed.

The problem is that most vaccine research programmes do not produce successful vaccines, and so companies - understandably - try to keep a lid on their spending until one is proven to work. Anthony Fauci, director of the US's National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, lamented the problem in February: "Companies that have the skill to be able to do it are not going to just sit around and have a warm facility, ready to go for when you need it," he told an Aspen Institute panel.

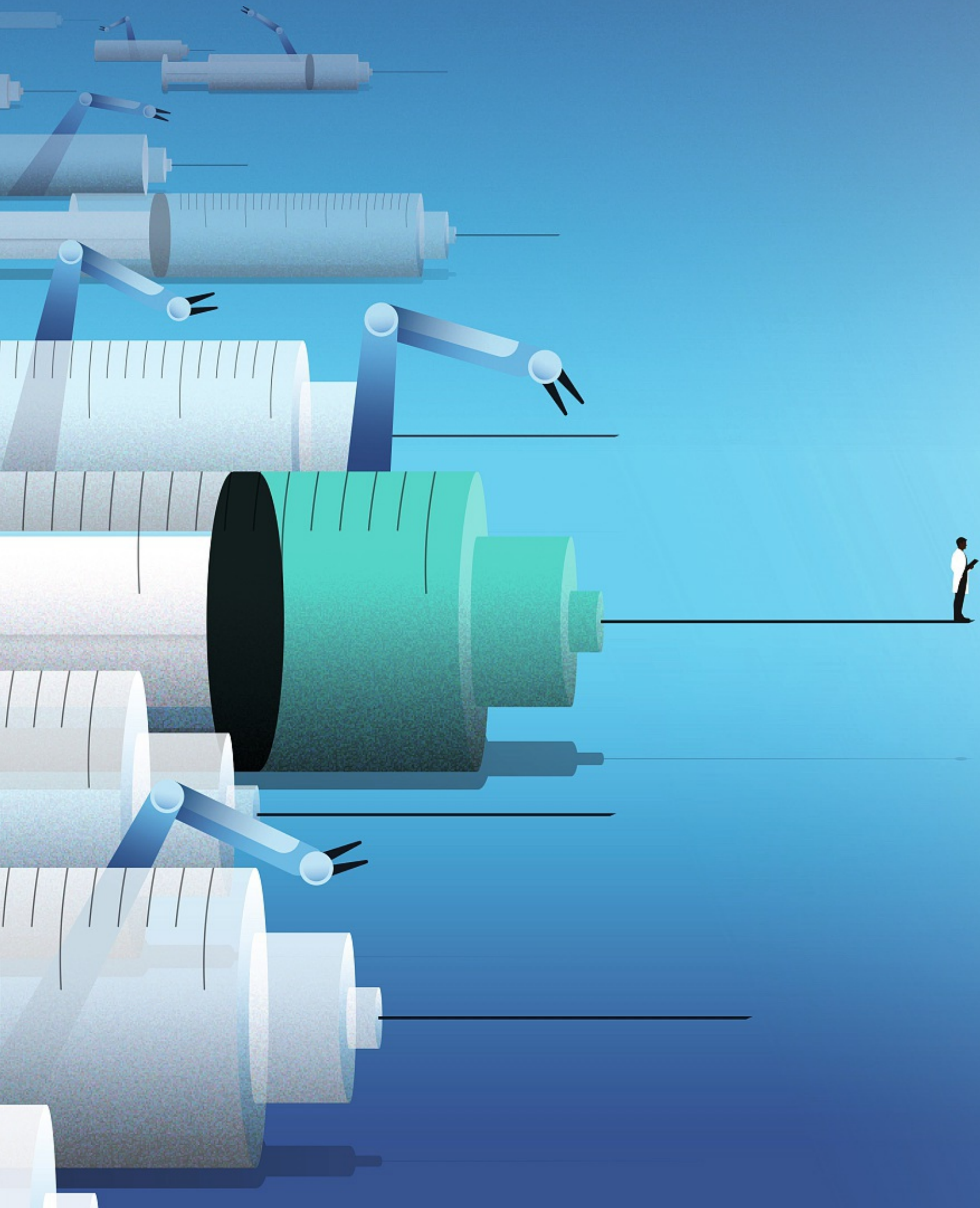
We need the leading vaccine contenders to invest vastly more in trials and production than they normally would, even though much of that investment will ultimately be wasted. And of course, they already are investing more - up to a point. That is partly an act of good corporate citizenship and partly in response to subsidies from governments or the Gates Foundation. But it may not be sufficient.

After all, the cost of failure will be borne mainly by the companies involved, while the benefits of success will be enjoyed by all of us: the IMF estimates the benefits are more than \$10bn for every day that widespread vaccine delivery is hastened. Any inducement the rest of us can offer might be ►

'Scientific and technological progress has been sputtering for a while. The 2010-19 decade of productivity growth in the UK was the lowest for the past couple of centuries'



Nicolas Appert developed a food preservation technique to win a prize offered by the French government in 1795



‘The simplest technologies – such as soap and gloves, and, it seems increasingly likely, cloth masks – have proved invaluable and much-missed when in short supply’



In 1945, the US ambassador in Moscow, Averell Harriman, was presented with a gift that hid a listening device that went undetected for years

◀ money well spent. So Athey, Kremer and their colleagues have proposed a kind of prize called an “advanced market commitment”, a promise to buy hundreds of millions of doses of a vaccine for a premium price. This is not an untried idea. In 2004, Kremer and Rachel Glennerster, the current chief economist of the UK’s Department for International Development, proposed the concept of an advanced market commitment (AMC). In 2010, donors promised \$1.5bn as an AMC for a pneumococcal vaccine for low-income countries; this dramatically accelerated the rollout of successful vaccines and saved hundreds of thousands of lives. But the AMC is really just a sophisticated variant on the innovation prizes of the 18th and 19th centuries, such as the one claimed by Nicolas Appert.

Incentives are not the only thing that matter – but matter they do. If we want a solution that badly, we shouldn’t hesitate to commit to rewarding those who produce it. It is not such a leap from food preservation to a vaccine.

Don’t overlook what seems simple

On August 4 1945, as the US and USSR were manoeuvring for position in a post-war world, a group of boys from the Young Pioneer Organisation of the Soviet Union made a charming gesture of friendship. At the US embassy in Moscow, they presented a large, hand-carved ceremonial seal of the United States of America to Averell Harriman, the US ambassador. It was later to become known simply as “the Thing”.

Harriman’s office checked the heavy wooden ornament for signs of a bug but concluded that, with neither wires nor batteries, it could do no harm. Harriman mounted the Thing proudly on the wall of his study. From there, it betrayed his private conversations for the next seven years.

Eventually, a British radio operator stumbled upon the US ambassador’s conversations being broadcast over the airwaves. These broadcasts were unpredictable: scan the embassy for radio emissions, and no bug was in evidence. It took yet more time to discover the secret. The listening device was inside the Thing. And it was so subtle, so simple, as to have proved almost undetectable.

The Thing had been designed – under duress in a Soviet prison camp – by none other than Léon Theremin, famous even then for his eponymous musical instrument. Inside it was little more than an antenna attached to a cavity with a silver diaphragm over it, serving as a microphone. There were no batteries or any other source of power. The Thing didn’t need them. It was activated by radio waves beamed at the US embassy by the Soviets, at which point it would broadcast back, using the energy of the incoming signal. Switch off that signal and it would go silent.

Theremin’s Thing pioneered a principle that is now used all around us in Radio Frequency Identification Tags. These RFID tags are embedded in library books, clothing labels, credit cards, passports, tollgate passes and even the tags attached to the ears of cattle. For all the excitement about “the Internet of Things” – in which your phone, your car, your toaster, your fridge and perhaps even your

sex toys are broadcasting over the internet – hundreds of billions of RFID tags remain a backbone of our attempts to make the physical world legible to computers. That is not because the tag is sophisticated, but because it is simple and cheap – a more powerful, flexible version of the barcode that does little more than nod to a passing RFID scanner and say, “right here, right now, this is me”.

The US agents who examined the Thing for bugs did not understand its potential to do them harm. It seemed too simple, too primitive, to matter. And I worry that we often make the same mistake. When we think about technology, we think of the flashy, sophisticated stuff. We overlook the cheap and the simple. We celebrate the printing press that produced the Gutenberg Bibles, but not the paper that many of those Bibles were printed on. Alongside paper and the RFID tag, place the brick, the postage stamp and, for that matter, the humble tin can: inventions that are transformative not because they are complicated but because they are simple.

We should remember the same lesson when it comes to the innovations that fuel public health. The simplest technologies – such as soap and gloves, and, it seems increasingly likely, cloth masks – have proved invaluable, and are much-missed when in short supply.

And those are just the obvious technologies. The UK and the US stumbled in their efforts to scale up testing in the crucial early weeks of the epidemic. It will take post-pandemic inquiries to establish exactly why – and incompetence is clearly one explanation – but reporters highlighted a shortage of the chemical reagents necessary to conduct the test, the protective gear needed to shield the medical staff and even something as simple as cotton swabs.

Even now, it is too easy to dismiss the potential of truly cheap and simple testing. The economist Paul Romer, another Nobel memorial prize winner, argues that if everyone in a country could be tested twice a month – the equivalent, in the UK, of more than four million tests a day – that should provide enough information to suppress the virus whenever there was an outbreak. That is a vast leap beyond our current testing capacity – but the benefits could be enormous. Imagine a reliable test that was cheap and self-administered, like a pregnancy test or a thermometer. Highly sophisticated is good, but being cheap has a sophistication of its own.

Contact tracing is another simple but vital approach. An age-old idea that requires little more than a phone, a notebook and a small army of persistent and diplomatic people, it was abandoned in the UK for the three gravest months of the crisis, apparently on the basis that the army had yet to be recruited and so the tracing system could cope with no more than five new cases a week. Since the lockdown was eased, we have well over a thousand a day.

Then there are the everyday logistical miracles made possible by other simple inventions, the barcode and the shipping container. Nobody cares about logistics until things go wrong. It has been remarkable to see how resilient retail supply chains have been in the face of the most extraordinary disruption. At a time when much of the world’s population was told not to venture beyond their own

front doors, we saw little more than a brief awkwardness in sourcing flour, pasta and toilet paper.

But it has not been so straightforward to duplicate this feat when it comes to testing. Embarrassed by the early deficiency, the UK government set ambitious targets. Ministers then claimed to hit them, first by including testing kits that had merely been posted out, and then by bragging about “capacity”. Meanwhile, the government simply stopped reporting how many people had been tested at all. The logistics of conducting, or even counting, the tests proved challenging enough that for the purposes of meeting targets, logistical problems were simply assumed away.

In our desperation to develop high-tech solutions such as drugs or contact-tracing apps, there is a risk that we ignore the simple technologies that can achieve a lot. As Averell Harriman discovered, it is a mistake to overlook technologies that seem too simple to matter.

Manufacturing matters too

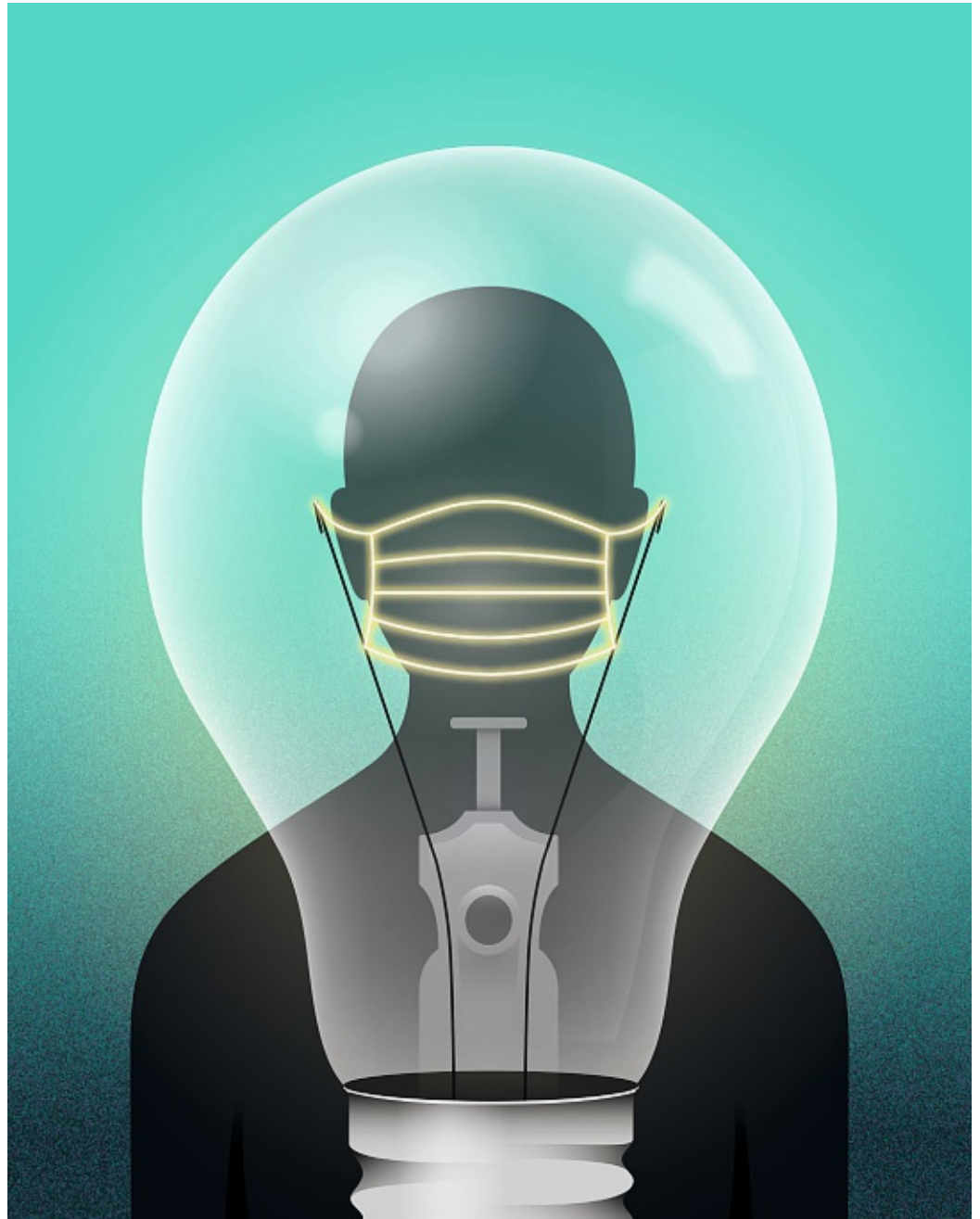
There is more to innovation than a good idea. The food-preserving “Appertisation” technology did not stay in France for long - it migrated across the Channel to seek London’s entrepreneurialism and venture capital, allowing production to scale up. (This was a time when the British were, evidently, not too proud to borrow a good idea from the French.) Appert himself was also trying to expand his operations. He invested his prize money in a food-preservation factory, only to see it destroyed by invading Prussian and Austrian armies. Ideas matter, but factories matter too.

Factories are likely to prove equally fateful for vaccine production. Developing a successful vaccine is far more than just a manufacturing problem, but manufacturing is undoubtedly the kind of challenge that keeps experts awake at night. The candidate vaccines are sufficiently different from each other that it is unfeasible to build an all-purpose production line that would work for any of them, so we need to build several in parallel.

“Imagine that your life depended on completing a home construction project on time,” Susan Athey told the *Planet Money* podcast. “Anyone who’s ever done a construction project knows that none of them had ever been completed on time... literally, if your life depended on it, you might try to build five houses.”

Or to put it another way, if your life depends on a letter being delivered on time, send multiple copies of the letter by as many methods as you can find.

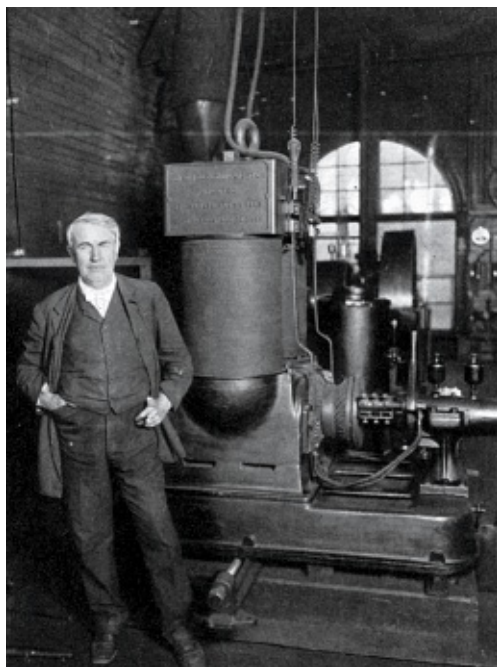
In the case of a coronavirus vaccine, setting up multiple redundant production lines costs money - tens of billions of dollars. But remember that an accelerated vaccine is worth more than \$10bn a day. Any reasonable subsidy would be value for money, assuming it increased the probability of quick success. Some subsidies are already available - for example, as part of the US “Warp Speed” project, and from the Gates Foundation. But Michael Kremer wants to see more international co-ordination and more ambition. “We think the scale of the problem and the risks associated with each candidate warrant pursuing a substantially larger number of candidates,” he told me. ►





· 2020 ·

‘There is no guarantee that a crisis always brings fresh ideas; sometimes a catastrophe is just a catastrophe. Still, there is no shortage of examples for when necessity proved the mother of invention’



Within a few years of developing a usable light bulb in 1879, Thomas Edison was selling electricity as a commodity

◀ Alex Tabarrok, another member of the team, added: “Bill Gates is doing the right thing but even Gates can’t do it all. Governments are acting too slowly. Every week that we delay a vaccine costs us billions.”

Athey, Kremer, Tabarrok and the rest of the team behind the Advanced Market Commitment proposal want to supplement it with generous 85 per cent subsidies for the immediate construction of vaccine factories. The calculation here is that firms are the best judges of their own prospects. A firm with a marginal vaccine will not build much capacity, even with an 85 per cent subsidy. But anyone with a decent chance at producing a vaccine will see the prize on offer, and the subsidies, and start building factories at once.

On the principle of not overlooking what seems simple, even the most sophisticated vaccines rely on ingredients that are all too easy to take for granted. Consider the supply of glass vials. Several doses can be included in a single vial, but that still suggests a demand for hundreds of millions of them if a successful vaccine is made. The vaccine industry is used to operating at scale but this would be something new: vaccines simply aren’t given to everyone in the world all at once.

Or perhaps the hold-up won’t be the glass, but something else. James Robinson, a vaccine manufacturing expert, told the science writer Maggie Koerth: “A vaccine manufacturer... might source several thousand ingredients to make a vaccine. But each material is coming from factories with hundreds of sources, and those sources have sources.”

For example, GlaxoSmithKline uses an extract from the soap-bark tree to produce a vaccine-enhancing ingredient called an adjuvant; for some of the vaccines now in development, the adjuvant may enhance their effectiveness or make a certain quantity stretch to more doses. As Koerth noted, however, the bark is harvested in Peru, Chile and Bolivia during the summer months of the southern hemisphere. Last year’s crop was harvested before the coronavirus had become a household name; this year’s harvest will not begin until November.

Disruption can help

It hasn’t just been the past few decades in which apparently remarkable technologies have made an underwhelming impression on the productivity figures. Consider the history of electrification in American factories. In the 1890s, the potential for electricity seemed clear. Thomas Edison and Joseph Swan independently invented usable light bulbs in the late 1870s. In 1881, Edison built electricity-generating stations at Pearl Street in Manhattan and Holborn in London. Things moved quickly: within a year, he was selling electricity as a commodity; a year later, the first electric motors were used to drive manufacturing machinery.

Yet by 1900, less than 5 per cent of mechanical drive power in US factories was coming from electric motors. Most factories were still in the age of steam. This was because when manufacturers replaced large steam engines with large electric motors, they were disappointed with the results.

I’ve written about the work of economic historian Paul David before. He argued it wasn’t enough

merely to replace steam engines with electric motors. The capabilities of those new motors could only be used fully if the factories were redesigned.

While replacing a large steam engine with a large electric motor had achieved very little, electric motors could be efficient at a smaller scale. That meant that each worker could have a small motor at their bench. Wires could replace driveshafts; factories could spread out into lighter, airier spaces; the flow of product could be optimised, rather than being constrained by proximity to the power source.

But a fascinating part of David’s argument is that all this was catalysed by a crisis. After 1914, workers became more expensive thanks to a series of new laws that limited immigration into the US from a war-torn Europe. Manufacturing wages soared and hiring workers became more about quality, and less about quantity. It was worth investing in training – and better trained workers were better placed to use the autonomy that electricity gave them. The recruitment problem sparked by the immigration restrictions helped to spark new thinking about the design of the American factory floor.

Some of the modern parallels are obvious. We have had email, internet and affordable computers for years – and more recently, video-conferencing. Yet until the crisis hit, we had been slow to explore online education, virtual meetings or telemedicine. 3D printing and other agile manufacturing techniques have moved from being curiosities to life-saving ways to meet the new demand for medical equipment. We are quickly learning new ways to work from a distance because suddenly we have had no choice. And we are learning about resilience.

There is no guarantee that a crisis always brings fresh ideas; sometimes a catastrophe is just a catastrophe. Still, there is no shortage of examples for when necessity proved the mother of invention, sometimes many times over.

The Economist points to the case of Karl von Drais, who invented an early model of the bicycle in the shadow of “the year without a summer” – when in 1816 European harvests were devastated by the after-effects of the gargantuan eruption of Mount Tambora in Indonesia. Horses were starved of oats; von Drais’s “mechanical horse” needed no food.

It is a good example. But one might equally point to infant formula and beef extract, both developed by Justus von Liebig in response to the horrifying hunger he had witnessed in Germany as a teenager in 1816. Or, if we are to recognise art as well as science, there is Mary Shelley’s masterpiece *Frankenstein*, written that same rainy summer beside Lake Geneva; the creature’s isolation mirrors that of the starving peasants she saw, begging for food. One crisis may lead to many creative responses.

The same may be true of this pandemic. Disruptions – even calamitous ones – have a way of bulldozing vested interests and tearing up cosy assumptions, jolting people and organisations out of the status quo.

It is just possible that future generations will point to 2020 as the year the innovation slowdown ended. Even economists need to be able to hope. **FT**

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Tim Harford’s new book is “The Next Fifty Things that Made the Modern Economy” (Bridge Street Press), from which parts of this article are adapted

The reinvention of Ed Miliband

The former Labour leader has returned to his party's front bench: older, more relaxed and as convinced as ever about the need for profound economic reform and a green revolution. *George Parker and Jim Pickard on an unlikely comeback. Portraits by Charlie Bibby*



Ed Miliband (right), then minister for the Cabinet Office and Duchy of Lancaster, with his brother David, then foreign secretary, outside 10 Downing St in June 2007, after attending Gordon Brown's first cabinet meeting



‘Reforming capitalism is tough and there’s big resistance to it. But I think the mood has changed’

Ed Miliband is back, but he admits some people will be wondering: why? The man who beat his elder brother in the most famous episode of political fratricide in British history, then led the Labour party to catastrophic election defeat, helpfully suggests how our interview to discuss his return to the frontline might be framed: “Relic or relevant? That could be your headline!”

Five years in the political wilderness have sharpened Miliband’s appetite. Restored to Labour’s top team, the man dubbed “Red Ed” by the tabloids has been handed the job of designing the party’s future for a post-Covid British economy, with a brief covering business and climate change. Miliband, 50, insists the world is a very different place from that harrowing night in 2015 when he left the political stage in despair. “Reforming capitalism is tough and there is big resistance to it,” he says. “But I think the mood has changed.”

He contends that while the financial crash was an insufficient trigger for fundamental change, the social angst exposed by Brexit and the fragility of a global system laid bare by the coronavirus crisis have transformed the political landscape. He is convinced that Britain is now ready to embrace his vision of an active state working in “partnership” with the private sector and driving a green revolution. “The notion that the state just gets out of the way and that will then make for success – that has been buried by this crisis,” he says. “We’ve seen the state and business working together necessarily.”

Perceptions of Miliband have also undergone a transformation in the past few years. He admits the pressures of the Labour leadership turned him into something of an automaton. He was widely portrayed as a hapless figure apparently unable to eat a bacon sandwich and whose idea of a good stunt was to carve a series of pledges on to a 9ft slab of lime, gleefully dubbed the “EdStone” by the media.

But today, in a video interview from his north London home, he is animated, self-deprecating and

jokey, sprinkling our conversation with expletives. “What kind of fucking question is that?” he expostulates at one point.

“It feels strange how much everything has changed,” says Abby Tomlinson, who started the “Milifandom” movement to counter his portrayal in the media in 2015, when she was a sixth-form student (fittingly, she now works in communications). “Now people see him as someone who is up for a laugh, who can make a joke. He’s got good, intelligent ideas and has a wealth of knowledge and experience.”

But is that really enough for Miliband’s second coming to have a significant impact?

A Miliband renaissance of any kind seemed highly improbable in May 2015, when he resigned as Labour leader after taking the party to a disastrous defeat that incurred a net loss of seats on just 30 per cent of the vote. “I was mildly disappointed,” he says with an ironic smile. “OK, I was pretty devastated. It was also, I felt, devastating for the country.”

In his place the party picked the far-left rank outsider Jeremy Corbyn, a consequence in part of a decision Miliband made to allow grassroots members more say over the choice of leader. As Labour headed deeper into its ideological – and electorally barren – comfort zone, Miliband went off to see friends in Australia, growing a beard and reflecting on his failure.

He takes little comfort from the fact that after he stepped down, Conservative leaders Theresa May and Boris Johnson moved on to Labour’s turf to adopt some of his policies, including an energy price cap and more active state intervention, higher public spending and regional activism. “Vindication doesn’t do much for me,” he says.

Corbyn famously responded to his decisive election defeat last year by claiming he had “won the argument” but Miliband is not about to follow suit. “I take responsibility for having lost that [2015] election,” he says. “The notion that the show was great but the audience was poor is not one that I subscribe to. I think

that I wasn't bold enough... [that] there was more of an appetite for change than I perhaps realised."

Instead, he pursued a soft-left agenda promising to take on economic "predators", to rein in privatised monopolies and to undertake some limited redistribution. He was unable to dent the central message of David Cameron's Conservative party that the country needed more austerity to sort out the mess left by the financial crash, or to expose the danger posed to the economy by Cameron's pledge of a Brexit referendum, a policy opposed by Labour.

"There was modest social democratic reform, which is essentially what I was offering, versus the gamble of the European referendum," he says. "A paper like the FT preferred the gamble and I think quite a lot of business preferred the gamble. They underestimated the gamble, I think."

He admits there were aspects of the top job he didn't handle well. "I think there's something about being the leader of the Labour party which imposes big pressures and I think I probably succumbed too much." He says he was "robotic" at times, desperately trying to look like a prime-minister-in-waiting, warily viewing every bacon sandwich as a disaster waiting to happen.

Yet, even in the aftermath of defeat, Miliband "never really thought about leaving politics". He decided not to follow his father Ralph Miliband, the renowned Marxist academic, into an ivory tower and instead returned to the back benches as MP for Doncaster North. And then, something remarkable happened. "The public discovered I had a personality," he smiles, his hands pushing deep into his slightly greying hair.

As Miliband was about to be reminded, there is nothing the British public loves more than a loser. Where previously his academic air and occasionally goofy looks had proved an electoral liability, now they combined with a waspish and hitherto-suppressed sense of humour to create a more intriguing package. One of the earliest signs of this came in 2017 when, with the

broadcaster Geoff Lloyd, Miliband launched the *Reasons to be Cheerful* podcast, an affable look at political ideas, on which he owns a made-up dog called "Chutney", and even burst into a rendition of "We All Stand Together" by Paul McCartney & The Frog Chorus. According to Miliband, the podcast pulls in 60,000-80,000 listeners a week.

Other offers started to come in from unlikely places, Miliband recalls, including a proposed reality-TV show where "you had to get fit and then show your fit bod". He turned that down, along with opportunities to appear on other shows such as *Drive*, *Dancing on Ice* and - he archly notes - the "after-show" party on *I'm a Celebrity*. "Oh, and *Celebrity Bake Off*." As he reels off the list, Miliband sounds relieved that the public eventually got to see another side of him. The demands of leading Labour had, he says tactfully, put him "in a certain space with a certain persona, which can be problematic".

Miliband's spell in charge of Labour ended badly, but it began in the bitterest of circumstances too. It was the fag end of the New Labour era, as the party's 13-year dominance of British politics came to an end, when he succeeded Gordon Brown on September 25 2010. On a day of agonising drama, he unexpectedly beat his elder brother David Miliband, the former foreign secretary, to take the party crown.

The rictus smile on the beaten brother's face told of a family torn apart by ambition. David left the country to work for the International Rescue Committee, an NGO in New York, where he remains a decade on. Meanwhile, some on the Blairite wing of the Labour party, who saw David as their continuity candidate, have never forgiven Ed, who was regarded as very much the junior of the two siblings in both age and experience. "He was perhaps the most ill-suited, miscast, frightened, unskilled, lacking-in-judgment leader in Labour's history," says one former Labour minister.

Miliband's critics continue to hold him accountable for what they view as five wasted years under Corbyn, ▶

'The notion that the state just gets out of the way has been buried by this crisis'



From top: with his wife Justine Thornton and their sons Daniel and Sam outside their London home on May 9 2015, the day after Labour's election defeat; unveiling the party's pledges on the much-mocked 'EdStone' in Hastings, during the 2015 election campaign



From top: with then Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn addressing supporters in Doncaster in May 2016, before the EU referendum; at Haverstock, his former school in north London, with (from left) Keir Starmer and Tristram Hunt, listening to a talk on education while party leader

Facing and opening page: photographed near his London home



‘I think – just like my leadership was an issue in 2015 – so Jeremy’s was in 2019’

◀ who benefited from a Miliband reform that saw Labour leaders elected under “one member, one vote” with people able to register as supporters for £3 and vote.

“There is an enormous warmth in the party for Ed Miliband but many still blame him for the rule changes that led to Corbynism, and for failing to stand up to the advances of the left when he was leader,” says Paul Richards, co-founder of Blairite campaign group Progress.

As Miliband sat out the Corbyn years, some in the party’s mainstream believed he should have been more forceful in his criticism of his successor, particularly of the way in which anti-Semitism was allowed to flourish during his tenure. “They were very bad times for our party,” admits Miliband, who is the son of Polish-Jewish immigrants. “I think Jeremy himself acknowledged he was too slow to get a grip on it.”

He says he did speak out, but confirms that anti-Semitism was not the reason he did not serve in the Corbyn team, and that he did consider doing so. “It was more the time just wasn’t right. When you do a job like being the leader, it takes it out of you.”

Miliband is currently serving on a party review into why Labour lost last year’s election so heavily, but says some conclusions are already obvious. “There’s a whole host of factors... and I think – just like my leadership was an issue in 2015 – so Jeremy’s was in 2019.” He admits Brexit was also a factor, and there were “real doubts about the deliverability of what we were saying”.

While Miliband underwent his personal reinvention, the political debate on issues such as the environment also seemed to move back in his direction. A cabinet minister for climate change in the last Labour government, he believes that Covid-19 could be the trigger for a green revolution in the UK. “This crisis supercharges things and underlines the need for us to go faster. We need to put young people back to work. What people can do, in terms of green energy and nature, is an absolute core of that in my view.”

His decision to return to the front bench in April, when new Labour

leader Keir Starmer offered him the post of shadow business, energy and industrial strategy secretary, reflects this belief that Britain is on the cusp of great change.

He argues that the cumulative effect of the 2008 financial crash, the public dissatisfaction with the status quo expressed in the 2016 Brexit referendum, and the convulsions caused by Covid-19 make profound reform unavoidable and says the state has a key role to play. He cites the example of retraining laid-off Rolls-Royce aircraft engine-makers: “They could be incredibly useful to the future of our renewables industry.”

Miliband is also an admirer of Starmer, a former director of public prosecutions whom he encouraged to stand for parliament in 2015 and whom he describes as “an incredibly decent bloke with incredibly good values”. And yet he admits, “I had to think hard about coming back now, in truth, because my last experience of the frontline was pretty full-on”.

He adds that his wife, high-court judge Justine Thornton, “might agree with that description”. Their sons Sam and Daniel are aged nine and 11 respectively. “These are pretty critical years. I wouldn’t recommend losing an election but one of the virtues for me was that it allowed me to be a proper father and husband. So these are difficult dilemmas. But I’m glad I decided to come back.”

So Ed Miliband is back. Whether he can help Labour overhaul an 80-seat Tory majority at the next election to implement any of the above ideas remains a huge question. “I think it’s a big mountain to climb, we shouldn’t be under any illusions about that,” he says. “But I think this is a moment of reassessment. You’ve got to go out and make your arguments and see where we are.”

He believes that under Starmer’s leadership, there is at least a prospect of the party presenting a united front at the next election after five years of “incredibly damaging factionalism”. “Most people say, ‘Let’s bury our differences,’” he adds. “We’re good at burying our similarities.”

So far Starmer has made it his mission to appear statesmanlike and to sideline the Corbynites without trumpeting the fact. The new Labour leader, like Miliband, believes soft-left social democracy will strike a chord with voters who can see the state coming to their rescue in the face of a pandemic.

Peter Mandelson, a leading Blairite, fears that Labour may be about to make a huge strategic mistake. “People can see the difference between emergency measures and normal times,” he says. “We would be fooling ourselves if we thought the country, as a result of the Covid experience, is now ready for some ideological project to usher in state control of the economy.”

But Stewart Wood, who was Miliband’s consigliere during his leadership, says his former boss has come through the “brutal” experience of election defeat and his moment has now arrived. “Ed spent his time as leader of the opposition trying to get rewriting the rules of our economy up in lights... It wasn’t enough for us to win in 2015. But the Covid crisis has made the question of rebuilding our economy the central question of the next few years.”

As for the most famous sibling rivalry in British politics, Miliband says that relations with his elder brother are healing. “He’s in New York - we talk quite a lot. We talk about my mum, we talk about the world, we talk about the pandemic. It happened a long time ago.”

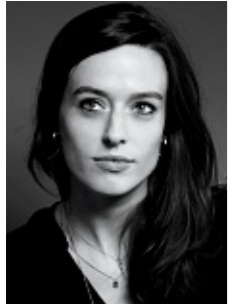
Indeed, it is easy to see Ed Miliband’s own time in the furnace of British politics as ancient history. The pre-Brexit, pre-Covid era seems a lifetime ago; contemporaries such as Cameron, George Osborne and Nick Clegg are long gone.

But he insists that he is still relevant, not a relic. “There’s this Milton Friedman line about when a crisis hits, it’s the ideas that are lying around that get picked up.” Miliband’s gamble is that his career, like his ideas, can yet be retrieved from the floor. **FT**

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George Parker is the FT’s political editor. Jim Pickard is the FT’s chief political correspondent



STEFAN ROUSSEAU/PA IMAGES; CHRISTOPHER FURLONG/GETTY IMAGES; DANIEL BEREHULAK/GETTY IMAGES; NIGEL SUITON; ROB STOTHARD/GETTY IMAGES



The great debaters

Novelists Sally Rooney and Ben Lerner both emerged from the world of competitive debating – as have many of our politicians. But, asks *Lou Stoppard*, how does their training shape the world we live in?

When I was studying at Oxford university, my then boyfriend was the world debating champion. Other debaters would talk in hushed tones about the time he so cleverly, eloquently and really just so *forcefully* won the title, arguing against the motion “This house would ban abortion at all stages of pregnancy”. The final took place in Cork, Ireland, where abortion was still then limited by the eighth amendment. It consisted of eight men.

He and his debating partner avoided getting bogged down in typical abortion rows over whether the foetus is *alive* and argued that the foetus may well be human, but this side says kill it anyway. The proposition team gradually fell apart – wrapped up in trying to prove personhood, an argument that the other side had decided not to bother having.

When I met my ex, I was 18 and he was 27, a graduate student. (Somehow, I still seemed to win all of our own arguments. Of course, then, there was no audience.) He debated British Parliamentary Style – “just like in the actual British parliament,” he tells me, when I call him about this article. Numerous debaters have gone on to become politicians, including Boris Johnson, Jacob Rees-Mogg, William Hague and Michael Gove – all former officers or presidents of the Oxford Union.

In the bar of the Union, where many debates took place, I would hear students plan cases for the merits of, say, computer-generated child pornography or the death penalty. In the Union chamber, I would listen to them speak fervently, sweating with effort, in favour of things they had been told to care about just

minutes before. They skewered each other with conviction. No one ever seemed to struggle to find something to say.

The 29-year-old Irish novelist Sally Rooney – author of the award-winning books *Conversations with Friends* and *Normal People* – is also a former champion debater. “When I was 22, I was the number one competitive debater on the continent of Europe,” she writes in a 2015 essay, “Even if You Beat Me”. During her time at Trinity College Dublin, she recalls attending competitions in the Philippines, India and Serbia. “I had low self-esteem and a predilection for hero-worship, and I was extremely determined. This was probably the perfect cocktail of tendencies for the novice debater. But by the time I could see that, I wasn’t a novice any more,” she writes.

Citing the psychologist Mihály Csíkszentmihályi, Rooney refers to “flow” – the seductive sensation of speaking at great speed, brilliant facts and rebuttals pouring forth, as one dissociates enough to admire oneself doing it. “Complex things become simple,” she explains. I watched my boyfriend in that state, one hand pounding the air like a judge’s gavel, his expression tight, even when he laughed loudly to enhance a point, the other hand dismissively batting away his rivals as they stood to offer points of information.

Ben Lerner, another of this generation’s celebrated writers, is also a former debater. But he grew up in America, where they favour different styles: policy debating and extemporaneous speaking. “Extemp”, as it’s called, is about speaking confidently on a ▶



Illustrations by Mark Wang



‘Surely some people debated because they really cared about the issues? He cuts me off. “No. It’s a game. It was intellectual masturbation”’

◀ range of current affairs. But, as Lerner puts it in his 2019 novel *The Topeka School*, “It was of course as much about the opposite: how a teenager in an ill-fitting suit could speak as if he had a handle on the crisis in Kashmir, how polish could compensate for substance as one determined the viability of a two-state solution.”

The Topeka School is a debating novel.

Its characters range from teenagers to future political advisers, and many of them serve to show that speaking confidently and fluently is not the same as knowing what you’re talking about. Delivery is everything. High school student Adam Gordon, Lerner’s alter ego, is a competitive debater and a master of the “spread” – “that is, to make more arguments, marshal more evidence than the other team can respond to within the allotted time”.

And Adam’s debate coach later becomes “a key architect of the most right-wing governorship Kansas has ever known... an important model for the Trump administration”, underlining the novel’s more serious political point.

Debating runs on the idea that, in any argument, there are two sides: for and against, right and wrong. It is about the easy dichotomy, the binary. As much as it promotes the idea of broadening perspectives, in its formal, competitive sense debating presumes that we are all working from the same parameters, the same two ends of each question.

It takes place in schools everywhere. At the Worlds final where my boyfriend won, more than 1,000 students competed from about 40 countries. At times, nearly 80 debates were

running simultaneously. The Model United Nations, another competition, runs globally but is particularly popular in the US where it originated. Ostensibly with Model UN, the goal is consensus – but really, of course, it’s victory. In 2013, *The New York Times* referred to it as a “Dog-Eat-Dog World”, explaining how it had moved from prioritising “protocol and decorum” to become a “full-fledged sport, with all the competitiveness and rowdiness that suggests”.

The Topeka School is about truth, status, politics, whiteness, toxic masculinity. Those are, in a way, the themes of debating too: it’s an arena that rewards privileged young men from elite institutions, performing sincerity. And, of course, they are themes of today. They characterise an America, and a world, where trust in institutions has dissolved, the prevalence of racism and misogyny is being revealed, and where lying – or bending the truth until it is unrecognisable – is commonplace.

“Even before the 24-hour news cycle,” Lerner writes, “Twitter storms, algorithmic trading, spreadsheets, the DDoS attack, Americans were getting ‘spread’ in their daily lives.” School pursuits – detentions, proms, power struggles – have long provided meat for novels. But here Lerner is picking away at the way we learn, the attributes we reward and the systems they reflect and shape.

Rooney cares about this too. In *Normal People*, one of her protagonists, Connell, glances around a seminar at Trinity College Dublin filled with students richer and more confident than he, and wonders “why all their classroom discussions were so abstract and lacking in textual detail”,

until he realises “that most people were not actually doing the reading. They were coming into college every day to have heated debates about books they had not read.”

“A lot of debating is just about being emotionally persuasive,” my ex tells me when I call him. “You are always trying to work out the mood of the room. You give people what they like.” Could there be better crash-training for a politician? Or, perhaps, a novelist? As much as these two books question the linguistic practices of debating, they benefit from them too. It’s there in both Rooney’s and Lerner’s writing – flow.

Rooney’s dialogue, in particular, recalls the speed of debating; so believable, so pacy. In “Even if You Beat Me”, Rooney turns her back on that male-dominated world; the judging, the free trips. “I didn’t want to give up the feeling of flow, that perfect, self-eliminating focus, but I didn’t want to perform it for points any more,” she writes. “Maybe I stopped debating to see if I could still think of things to say when there weren’t any prizes.” She has won more prizes as a novelist, it turns out.

Recently, after finishing *The Topeka School*, I watched a video of my ex winning Worlds. It’s still there on YouTube and has nearly 100,000 views. Responding to his opponent in the abortion debate, he gets up, stern and slim, and says: “There are scenarios where, even when the other agent is a person, it is still legitimate to remove the life of that individual in order to sustain the life of another... we think this is a scenario where if the woman doesn’t want the baby, then the baby is akin to someone

who is assaulting her.” He associates the unborn baby with a murderous parasite – would you think twice about killing it?

“Does debating make you good?” I ask him on the phone. He recalls his time as a debate coach when he was still at school: “A mother, a Christian mother, came up afterwards and said to me, ‘I don’t want my son to do debating, because you’re teaching him that there is no truth, and that everything can be argued either way.’ For a while, I wondered if it was a bad thing.” He pauses. “Sometimes people would find ways of making arguments that were consistent with their moral frameworks, [but] it just makes it harder.”

Surely some people debated because they really cared about these issues and wanted to talk about them? He cuts me off. “No. It’s a game. It was intellectual masturbation.”

And where did they all end up? Some are lawyers or politicians, many are management consultants – “a 25-year-old reshaping the way a company works, with almost no information, no background, no knowledge”, as he puts it. And some, of course, are writers.

But today’s crop of fast talkers is more media-savvy than before. Many refuse to be filmed when they debate. “A ruthless kid who wants to be prime minister one day doesn’t want some video of him online arguing for, say, computer-generated child pornography,” says my ex. Maybe they just want to be able to leave that life behind at some point, like Rooney, I wonder aloud. “Or maybe they are just even more willing to say things that they don’t believe in order to win,” he replies. **FT**

VAN NUYS NIGHTS

Throughout the early 1970s, Van Nuys Boulevard in a suburb of Los Angeles was the place to hang out and show off your ride. Rick McCloskey's photographs capture not only the spirit of youth – but also the freedom of a newly mobile generation



No car was necessary to come out for 'cruise' nights in the Valley. Two young women, perhaps not yet old enough to drive, meet up with some friends in a GTO Pontiac



1

' GAS WAS CHEAP, TIMES WERE GREAT,
AND THE BOULEVARD HUMMED WITH LIFE '

Wednesday night was “cruise night” in the San Fernando Valley, a suburb sprawling north of Los Angeles. The stretch on Van Nuys Boulevard between Ventura Boulevard, on the southern end, and well past Sherman Way to the north, teemed with kids and cars from all over Southern California. It was a terrific place to see and be seen - and to show off your ride.

By the early 1950s, the boulevard was already a gathering place, a regular destination for a young and newly mobile generation. These were good economic times in the US. After 10 years of the Great Depression and five years of a world war, a wave of prosperity had finally allowed Americans to trade in their ageing automobiles for new cars. This in turn delivered millions of “classic” used cars to the marketplace: inexpensive models that were scooped up by teenagers eager to gain some freedom. Souped-up versions of these cars soon decorated the evening scene on streets across America.

With the coming of the 1960s, the teenagers of the baby-boom generation started to reach driving age and the industry began to design very cool and very powerful cars aimed at this market. “Muscle cars”, such as the Ford Mustang, “mid-sized” performance cars, such as the Chevrolet Chevelle, the Pontiac GTO and Chevrolet Camaro, were all slick and hot. Many of these were actually produced at a huge Chevrolet assembly plant located in north Van Nuys. For more than three decades, the plant ran three shifts, 24 hours a day.

Gas was cheap, times were great and the boulevard hummed with life during the evenings. Even the draft during the Vietnam war did not dampen the street scene. By 1972, the year I went back to Van Nuys to shoot my series of photographs, the culture had become an amalgamation of divergent lifestyles, cars - used and new - and some very different looks and styles. There were van kids - surfers, mostly - low-riders, muscle cars, street racers, Volkswagen owners and many more. I set about portraying the people, their cars and the iconic background settings - and I tried to capture my images in that order of importance.

Little did I suspect that cruising would soon come to an end. My project would become more a historical record than an account of contemporary life. The oil crisis in late 1973 and the commensurate rise in gasoline prices, coupled with ever-increasing complaints from the local business community, took their toll and by the end of the 1970s, the night-time-driving scene along Van Nuys Boulevard was nearing its end. Similar trends dampened cruising culture in most communities across the US. What was once the spontaneous use of public space by so many young people disappeared. Images like these are what we have left. **FT**

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Rick McCloskey’s “Van Nuys Blvd 1972” is published by Sturm and Drang and is available from the end of this month. This text is an edited extract from the book

1 — Friends watch a custom Chevy leave the parking lot of June Ellen's donut bakery at the southern end of Van Nuys

2 — After seeing *The Godfather* at the Capri Theater in downtown Van Nuys, some moviegoers savour the last of their popcorn

3 — Going barefoot was the standard during the summers in Southern California, especially in the extra-hot Valley. A young driver leans against his muscle car, a Plymouth 383

4 — Young women in a Datsun pick-up truck, parked on the boulevard across the street from Bones Hamilton Buick

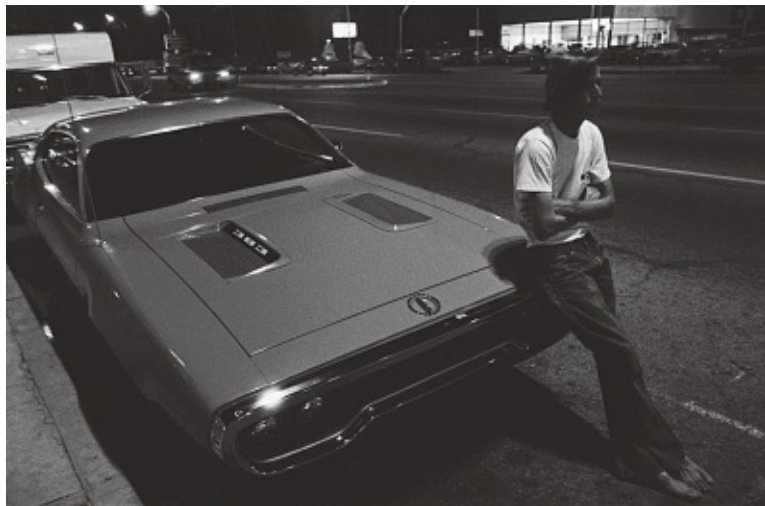
5 — Officers from the Van Nuys Motors Division of the Los Angeles Police Department. Both the city authorities and the business community held a rather negative view of cruising

6 — 'Lonely Teardrops', a heavily customised Pontiac. I took this image while the owner of the car was receiving a traffic citation just out of view – his girlfriend took her pose by the car

7 — Riding in the back of a pick-up truck was still legal when this image was taken, and this tribe is enjoying the best of it. Pure fun



2



3



4



5



6



7



‘When I cooked for Hugh Hefner, I was sent this detailed recipe, which he ate most nights. It proves to be the perfect bunker food’



have been living in my pyjamas recently. In fact, I have not put on “real” clothes for weeks and am becoming quite accustomed to my every-day, all-day bedwear wardrobe. I’m so comfortable, I find myself pondering if I could get away with this attire all the time.

I often think of the late Hugh Hefner, who effortlessly perfected this perennial daytime slumber style. Even his yearly Christmas card showed him in his famous silk pyjamas. In the evening, he merely added a bathrobe, and when he had company, he “dressed up” by draping a smoking jacket over the top. He was a man of habit and, as with his trademark PJs, he was known to keep many things in his life routine, including his meals.

Musing in my silk pyjamas, I recall when I cooked for Hef in 2011 during my stint as executive chef for the Playboy Club. I was briefed by a rather didactic personal assistant, who emailed me a detailed recipe with intricate specifications for Hef’s lamb chop dinner, which he apparently ate most nights. Even when he dined out in Los Angeles, restaurant chefs were instructed to recreate this precise dish. Luckily, it is a modest and simple recipe, and it proves to be the perfect bunker food.

Hef’s lamb chops are served alongside canned Le Sueur Very Young Small Sweet Peas, a baked potato, Mott’s Applesauce, gravy made from Campbell’s tinned beef broth enhanced with Swiss Chalet thickener, and sliced tomatoes. Most of these ingredients I now happen to store in my panic-bought flight-to-safety pantry.

Tinned goods have long had a bad rap. With Covid-19, though, demand has outstripped supply

– canned is now king. One must peer along dark shelves at the back of the store to find that one lost tin of muddy-coloured greens.

When I was cooking for Hef, though, his bulky security attaché brought me all of the prepackaged branded items I needed. Once, he offered a few words of gratitude: “Chefs always hate cooking this kind of food. Thank you for doing this,” before leaning in and whispering, “The restaurant chefs in LA always put in one fresh pea in the mix of the canned ones, just one... we call it the ‘Fuck You’ pea.” Then he winked at me and left.

When I made the dish recently, the hardest item to find was the rack of lamb or cutlets on the bone, but I managed to procure a plastic-wrapped pack of lamb ribs. If that’s all you can get, you’ll have to be your own butcher and execute a proper “French”, a technique that plunges as deeply as the Dow did earlier this year. An alluring French cut requires one to trim off all the excess fat and any sinew, and unveil the coveted white bones all the way down to the meat. There is something elegantly pleasing, even sexy, about extended exposed long lamb ribs, and it makes them easier to handle and gnaw. I didn’t think I was that kind of chef but, I admit, I do enjoy stripping the bones naked and flaunting them.

Hef liked accompaniments to be separated from the main attraction. If there were other items on the main plate, they should not encroach upon each other. The baked potato, for example, is served flirtingly next to the ribs, but the lamb gravy is not allowed to touch it. The potato must be split open, but the butter



Hugh Hefner's lamb chop dinner adapted by Judy Joo

Serves one

Lamb chops

- 3-5 French-cut lamb chops (preferably cut from a 1.4kg rack)
- 1 tbs fleur de sel salt or Maldon sea salt
- 1 tsp ground white pepper
- ½ tsp extra virgin olive oil

Lamb sauce

- 1 can (300g) Campbell's Beef Broth or 1 beef bouillon stock cube dissolved in 235ml hot water
- 120ml cold water (if using Campbell's Beef Broth)
- 1½ tsp of Swiss Chalet vegetable starch thickener or ¼ tsp of cornstarch/flour mixed with ¼ tsp water
- Sprig of rosemary (about 10cm long)

Baked potato

- 1 medium-sized baking potato (any starchy variety, such as Russet, Maris Piper or King Edward)
- Pat of butter

Peas

- 425g can of Le Sueur Very Young Small Sweet Peas or similar brand
- 1 tsp salted butter
- Pinch of fleur de sel
- 1 single fresh or frozen pea

Tomato "salad"

- 1 large beefsteak tomato (c130g)
- 2 leaves of romaine lettuce

Apple sauce

- 115g prepackaged apple sauce, at room temperature

1 — French the lamb chops, season generously with the salt and white pepper and drizzle with olive oil. Allow to marinate for 15 minutes. Then, in a very hot sauté pan, sear the chops on both sides until they are dark brown and have reached your desired doneness. Remove from the pan and allow to rest. Keep warm in a low oven if necessary.

2 — Combine the canned beef broth and 120ml of water (or dissolve the bouillon cube in water) and bring to a simmer. Whisk in the Swiss Chalet thickener or cornstarch and return to a simmer. Add the rosemary sprig and allow to infuse for 5 minutes. Remove the rosemary and keep the sauce warm.

3 — Wash the potato well. (I was told to prepare three potatoes and pick the best one for Hef, but I just prepared one.) Wrap it in foil and bake at 190C for 90 minutes or until done. Remove from the oven, keeping it warm, and take off the foil before placing it on the plate. Split the potato at the top and fluff the insides slightly. Put the pat of butter on a small side dish. Keep warm.

4 — Drain the peas and heat in a saucepan. Season lightly with the salted butter and salt, tossing to coat. Spoon about one-third of

the peas into a side bowl, and add one "FU" fresh or frozen pea.

5 — Cut two 1.25cm slices horizontally from the centre of the tomato and cut the top two frilly leaves off the lettuce. Line a side plate with the leaves, and place the tomato slices in the middle, on top. Reserve the rest of the tomato and lettuce for a real salad.

6 — Tip the apple sauce into a small side bowl.

Plate presentation

Place the lamb chops on a warm dinner plate, preferably personally monogrammed. The bones should be pointing to the centre of the plate. Spoon a little of the gravy over each chop and allow it to flow slightly on to the plate. Place the baked potato next to the chops, making sure there is no sauce touching it. Do not put butter into the potato - it should be served on the side with some additional salt. Serve with the side dishes of peas, apple sauce and "salad".

Serving

Everything should be ready before cooking the chops. When the chops are cooked, a butler should serve the meal immediately.

Dress code

Pyjamas, preferably silk.

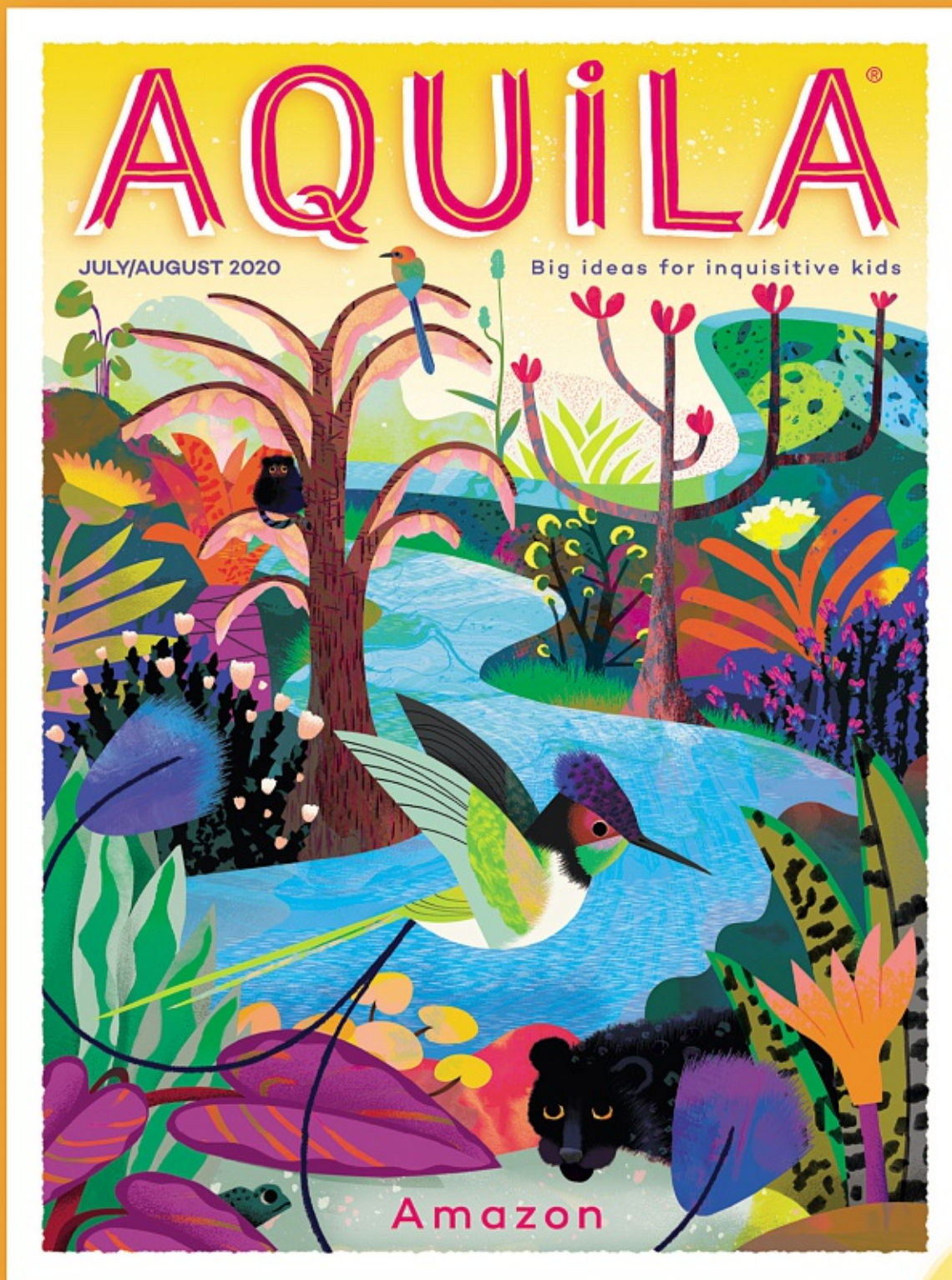
and salt must be served on the side. Same with the apple sauce and the "salad" of two beefsteak tomato slices, cut from the middle of the tomato and placed on romaine lettuce leaf tops, all served separately.

The peas were the exception. I was instructed to warm them through with a pinch of sea salt and a pat of butter mixed in. Fresh butter does lift the flavour significantly, and during Covid times I have opted to use fleur de sel as my salt. I had been hoarding a stash of these precious crystals, deeming them so special that I dared not use them. But every boost of flavour is necessary when bunker cooking, so I sprinkle fleur de sel liberally on everything now, and tinned peas scream for a final flourish. As a nod to Hef, I chuck in one bright green "FU" pea from my freezer.

Cook the lamb to your chosen level of "done". Hef was a "medium well" kind of guy, whereas I prefer my lamb a light rosé. I was told to cook four ribs and taste-test one of them. If the test rib was deemed exceptional, I could serve the other three to Hef. Otherwise, start over.

When you've set the table for your pyjama party, pour yourself a stiff glass of Jack Daniel's and Pepsi - Hef's drink of choice - and tuck in. Rip into your juicy ribs, ravish those charming side dishes and dine like a playboy... or playgirl, just for one lockdown evening. **BT**

Judy Joo is a former banker turned chef, restaurateur and author. Her latest book, "Judy Joo's Korean Soul Food", is published by White Lion. Her new restaurant, Seoul Bird, is due to open in Westfield Shepherd's Bush; @judyjoochef



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Richard Robinson, Brighton Science Festival

Jancis Robinson Wine

California's new-wave wines



I've been thinking more and more about the massive gap between what non-Americans think about the world's fourth biggest wine producer, California, and the current reality that persists.

Most wine lovers I discuss California with, even those well-informed about the rest of the world, think primarily of extremely expensive, potent Napa Valley Cabernets. Those who shop for wine in the supermarket may also be aware of mass-market, high-volume brands such as Barefoot, Blossom Hill and Echo Falls.

But, in fact, California's vitality and excitement lie neither at the top nor the bottom of the price scale, but in the lower middle where there is a much, much wider range of grape varieties, styles and appellations than there were 10 years ago. They are typically produced by young, dynamic, innovative and independent winemakers. And that, I hope, is where California's wine future lies.

Campaigners such as the author Jon Bonné, with his 2013 book *The New California Wine*, and the sommelier-turned-winemaker Raj Parr, instigator of a series of tastings of these sorts of wines called In Praise of Balance, have done their best to draw attention to the evolution of California wine, but the effects have been largely within the US.

The problem is that American wine producers aren't great exporters. Italy and Spain export more than six times as much wine as California, and France four times as much. So even wine drinkers in major wine-importing countries such as the UK are relatively ignorant about the dramatic widening of what's on offer from vintners on the West Coast, which produces the majority of American wine.

New Yorkers, perhaps not surprisingly, are much better informed about California wines than wine drinkers in Europe and



As imagined by Leon Edler

Australasia. Currently fashionable in that trend-conscious market are light, fresh wines made in California from relatively obscure French grape varieties such as Trousseau, Valdiguié and Cunoise, and from Italian varieties such as Refosco, Ribolla Gialla and Friulano.

Even Mission - the grape originally known as País in Chile, which was brought north by the missionaries who settled along the west coast in the late 18th century, and scorned until recently - is enjoying new-found esteem and ingenuity.

A grape glut on the West Coast is turning American vintners' thoughts to the possibilities of exportation, and California's Wine Institute is focused on encouraging this. Just before lockdown, a team of Americans flew to London to host a showing of about 450 California wines that are currently available in the UK, with not one supermarket brand among them.

Among the 50-odd Napa Valley wines, there were only 12 Cabernets, none of them in the triple-digit per bottle price range.

Instead, there was Napa Albariño, Grenache and Pinot Grigio, as well as creative blends of all sorts.

In terms of appellations, Napa, Sonoma and Central Coast no longer have a monopoly. As co-author of *The World Atlas of Wine*, in my tastings both in London and in California last February, I kept coming across such relatively unfamiliar names as Dunnigan Hills, Coombsville, Borden Ranch, Clements Hills, Yorkville Highlands and Red Hills Lake County.

Just as in Australia and South Africa, ambitious young California producers without land or much capital are making silk purses out of grapes with sow's ear

'California's excitement lies neither at the top nor the bottom of the price scale, but in the lower middle'

reputations. The grapes are so much more affordable - last year you could buy a ton of Friulano grapes from Mendocino for just \$1,500, while some Napa Valley Cabernet Sauvignon grapes sold for as much as \$50,000 a ton. That makes a heck of a difference to the selling price per bottle.

Some of the "Cinderella vines" - varieties that are not international classics but are becoming increasingly fashionable, thanks to the work of these new-wave winemakers - are usefully old and therefore produce low yields of particularly flavourful grapes. (Thanks to Prohibition in the early 20th century, California has some of the oldest vines in the world, plants that were not worth replacing when there was no market for their produce.)

If the varieties of these new-wave California wines are not so familiar, some of the producer names are just as unusual: ►

Recommended new-wave California wines

UK importers who specialise in new-wave California wines include Indigo, Nekter, Roberson and Tiger Vines.

WHITES

- Pax, Buddha's Dharma Vineyard Chenin Blanc 2017 Mendocino \$27.30-\$32 various US retailers £34.90 Indigo
- Minus Tide, Mariah Vineyard Chardonnay 2017 Mendocino Ridge \$36 Flatiron Wines & Spirits, San Francisco
- DeSante, Old Vines White 2014 Napa Valley £39.99 AG Wines
- Paul Lato, Matinee Sauvignon Blanc 2016 Santa Barbara County £44.40 james@tigervines.com
- Matthiasson, Matthiasson Vineyard Ribolla Gialla 2017 Napa Valley \$45-\$54 various US retailers

REDS

- Mountain Tides Petite Sirah 2018 California \$19.99 K&L £22.95 Jeroboams
- Minus Tide, Feliz Creek Vineyard Carignan 2018 Mendocino \$30 Flatiron Wines & Spirits, San Francisco
- Kutch range of Sonoma Coast Pinot Noirs Widely available in Europe and the US. 2017s from £36.80 Roberson
- Birchino, Bechthold Vineyard Old Vines, Vignes Centenaires Cinsault 2018 Mokelumne River \$23.69-\$31 various US retailers 2016 is about £29 Noel Young, Butler's Wine Cellar, The Salusbury Winestore
- Matthiasson, Matthiasson Vineyard Refosco 2017 Napa Valley 2015 is £55 Nekter Wines or \$45 various US retailers
- Dirty & Rowdy, Maple's Spring St Petite Sirah 2016 St Helena \$55-\$73 various US retailers
- Halcón, Elevación Syrah 2018 Yorkville Highlands \$32 Halconvineyards.com To be imported by A&B Vintners



Tasting notes on Purple Pages of JancisRobinson.com. International retailers on Wine-searcher.com

◀ Dirty & Rowdy is now quite well-established but there are Ashes & Diamonds, The Federalist, Jolie-Laide, Angels & Cowboys, Benevolent Neglect, Bread & Butter, Donkey & Goat, Notary Public, Once & Future and Reckless Love. You get the picture.

A leader of the pack in this sort of enterprise is the Napa-born Tegan Passalacqua (his own name is presumably quite arresting enough for him to choose a simple name, Sandlands, for his personal wine label). Sandlands produces wines such as Lodi Cinsault and Mataro (Mourvèdre), which comes from the ancient vine stumps that push out of sand in Oakley, Contra Costa County, saved from the clutches of property developers only by their proximity to the PG&E power plant.

On my first night in Napa, a name so readily associated with some of the most expensive wines in the world, I had dinner with Passalacqua. He took me aback by claiming that only about 25 per cent of wineries in Napa Valley are profitable. I had naively assumed that high prices guaranteed margins that were easily high enough to cover costs and much more. But during the rest of my week in northern California, I floated this statistic and everyone agreed it was about right.

Land costs there are the highest of any American wine region by a considerable margin. The cost of vineyard labour has increased

enormously and is typically provided, via a management company, by decreasing numbers of highly skilled Mexicans, who often need local lodging. And then there are the fees of the well-known consultants who help to bolster the quality and image of the wines and wineries respectively. A very high proportion of Napa wineries are owned by well-heeled incomers without proven winemaking expertise.

All this is in stark contrast to the typical model of the new-wave winemakers: buying inexpensive grapes and making wine themselves in the corner of a shared shed, often in the evenings and at weekends while holding down a day job at a better-funded winery.

It may be difficult for newcomers to make money out of wine production in Napa but that doesn't seem to be putting off potential investors. Owning a Napa winery, or at least a Napa wine label, still seems to be a widespread ambition - or perhaps a tax write-off - for many a successful American who has made a great deal of money elsewhere. And the number of high-profile French wine producers investing in California wineries continues to grow, with the most recent acquisition, just before lockdown, being Champagne Louis Roederer's of Diamond Creek, one of Napa's most terroir-conscious producers. **FT**

More columns at ft.com/jancis-robinson

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FT Weekend



FANTASY DINNER PARTY

ISABEL BERWICK

The FT's Work & Careers editor picks the guests, destination, dishes and drinks for a dream meal with a difference

My fantasy dinner party isn't a dinner at all but a picnic on the meadow at Kenwood Ladies'

Pond, on Hampstead Heath in north London. The meadow is a grassy bank, hidden from the wider world and prying eyes. For almost a century, women have gathered here in small groups to sunbathe, eat, read and talk. And my picnic is doubly a fantasy because the lawn - like the pond - is currently shut.

I'll take a blanket to spread out and an old-fashioned basket packed with food from Phoenicia, a friendly grocery in Kentish Town run by a Lebanese family (Yotam Ottolenghi shops here, so you can usually get all his ingredients). As starters for my picnic, I buy fresh hummus and baba ganoush, zaatar-laden flatbreads and a pot of lemon- and garlic-infused olives.

My husband Michael is a brilliant cook. He once packed his pasta machine when we went camping - OK, glamping - in France. So for the main course, I'll ask him to make his signature long-simmered tomato sauce, with a De Cecco pasta and ingredients bought from another local marvel, Lo Sfizio. I know spaghetti with tomato sauce is traditional, but I like *zite*, long hollow tubes that are a celebration pasta served at weddings (*zita* means bride in southern Italy). These are especially satisfying to eat with your fingers, so will make perfect picnic fodder.

Because of the location, my guests are all women, but that's no hardship. My first, the 20th-century author **Barbara Pym**, wrote exquisitely observed books that are wise and funny companions through the best and worst of times. Her most famous novel is *Excellent Women* - new readers, start there - in which not much and everything happens to Mildred Lathbury, one of those young-ish women who take care of everything, except themselves.

Pym's interwar London is one of lonely bedsits, high-church vicars and terrible brown-and-grey food in cheap cafés. She will certainly love my colourful picnic, which I'll serve

up on mismatched plates bought at my church's jumble sale. I hope she will appreciate the gesture - church events and their inevitable tensions have a recurring role in her fiction.

We'd also invite **Lady Mary Wortley Montagu**, a traveller and independent spirit who introduced the smallpox inoculation to Europe having seen its use in Turkey, where she lived for many years - and where she mixed with women

'After the feast, we'll head into the pond for a turn as the crowds leave and the temperature cools'

living in harems. (I think she will love the pond.) Her words and life story captivated me as a young woman, when the voices of 17th- and 18th-century female writers were mostly absent from the literary world. I hope she and Pym will have plenty to discuss - both are observers of others, while being extraordinary writers themselves.

When the conversation flags, we can ask **Buffy the Vampire Slayer**, as played by Sarah Michelle Gellar, to show us her moves. Buffy's story is one (obviously) of slaying demons in California, while

(less obviously) dealing with bad - sometimes murderous - boyfriends and other setbacks, all the while building deep friendships and learning to accept help, and her own shortcomings. She is a heroic Everywoman, who just happens to carry a pointy stake. *Buffy* remains my favourite TV series of all time.

With our picnic spread out, I'll pour the chilled rosé wine - something light, almost pinkish-white from southern France, reminding me of holidays with friends and family. I don't care that rosé is not smart or cool. Heretically, I even like it served with a couple of ice cubes. There's also tart Italian lemonade, San Benedetto, for those who want to swim and will not drink until later (in real life, no alcohol is allowed at the pond).

Finally, we will need a true storyteller, someone to take us from lunchtime into the lazy haze of a late summer afternoon in London. In lockdown I've met my final guest, **Zora Neale Hurston**, author of *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, an extraordinary 1937 book I picked up by chance in a second-hand shop, and which carries the reader into African-American communities of the south, where Janie Stark attempts, and succeeds against all odds, to be herself and find love.

Hurston was a famous intellectual, a playwright and a regular at the parties of the Harlem renaissance. She and Pym were near-contemporaries, albeit from different worlds and continents. What will they find in common? Perhaps the search for a meaningful life that allows women to be fulfilled - but liberated from the crushing demands of society and family. I am hoping Buffy and Lady M can teach us all a thing or two on those points.

The meal ends with my favourite taste of the summer, fresh English strawberries. We will be doing our bit to eat up this year's unexpected glut, the melancholy result of closed restaurants and cancelled events - dipping the tip of each berry deep into a pot of Rodda's delicious Cornish clotted cream.

After the feast, we'll risk lying in full sun and, as afternoon turns into evening, head into the pond for a turn as the crowds leave and the temperature cools. I've brought rugs to help us warm up after our swim - served with flasks of tea and home-made biscuits. Our party will surely go on long into the evening. Let's just hope Buffy can get the night off. **FT**

Isabel Berwick is the FT's Work & Careers editor



Honey & Co Recipes

A return to Italy

On a trip to Florence last year, *Itamar Srulovich* and *Sarit Packer* discovered a trattoria close to the Ponte Vecchio and settled down for a perfect afternoon. Now in lockdown, they have recreated that magical meal

On the table next to us were two stylish elderly women with silk headscarves and sunglasses, compacts and lipsticks in snakeskin handbags, looking just so. They were speaking Italian so fast we couldn't understand all of it, just enough to know that they were talking about food.

A waiter cleared their salad starters and brought their mains - a pair of two-inch-thick T-bone steaks, blackened on the outside and barely cooked within. We were amazed to see how elegantly they put away such huge quantities of red meat; we had eaten one of those steaks the night before in one of Florence's famous *bucas* - hole-in-the-wall trattorias - and, between the two of us, we could barely manage half.

It was about this time last year, and we were dining in a trattoria on the tiny Piazza della Passera, just a stone's throw from the teeming Ponte Vecchio. We arrived late afternoon and the maitre d' had to check with the kitchen before taking us to our table, situated between the elderly women and a long table full of chatty young Italians, all dressed in a way that would look absurd on anyone who wasn't Italian.

We didn't want steak - we'd had our fill the night before - and the menu was full of lovely seasonal options. It was the last meal of our holiday. We didn't have much to say to each other but we were happy to sit quietly, sip our cocktails and watch the world go by: the trees in the dappled square, the mix of tourists and

locals, kids, dogs and loiterers, the waiters getting ready to end lunch service and begin preparation for dinner, and the two women next to us, polishing off every last scrap of meat from their T-bones.

The food, when it came, would not win any Michelin stars - nobody foraged for ants in any forgotten forest - but it was, nevertheless, simple and delicious: the asparagus starter was so tender you could eat it with a spoon, the gnocchi tossed with sharp olive oil, sweet chunks of artichoke and draped with salty slices of ham. A year on, we don't remember the name of the trattoria but we pine for this perfect afternoon and for the delights of eating out.

With restaurants shuttered for God knows how many weeks now, there are serious questions about how they will reopen and what eating out will mean in a post-pandemic world.

Are restaurants even that important? They are to us - and not just because we make our living from them. A good restaurant provides so much more than food. It is a place for joy and comfort, a meeting spot for the community and a window into it, a stage set for life's big and little moments that will become, in time, happy memories.

We can't wait for restaurants to start serving again, to sit with friends and compare lockdown stories, or just sit with each other and watch the world tick over. In the meantime, we've set up our own little restaurant at home where we recreate our favourite restaurant memories. **FT**

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*By Itamar Srulovich. Recipe by Sarit Packer
honeyandco@ft.com*

Photographs by Patricia Niven



‘A year on, we don’t remember the name of the trattoria but we pine for this perfect afternoon’



Green and white asparagus with anchovy butter

To serve two

We like our asparagus cooked longer than is fashionable so that it comes out quite soft. Just reduce the cooking time if you want more of a crunch.

- 1 tbs salt
- 1 tsp sugar
- 4 fat spears of white asparagus
- 4 fat spears of green asparagus
- 50g salted butter
- 4 anchovy fillets in oil

1 — Heat and boil plenty of water in a large pan and season well with the salt and sugar.

2 — Chop off the bottom inch of the asparagus stalks and peel a little around the fibrous base (until about halfway up).

3 — Drop them into the boiling water and cook for five to six minutes until the asparagus is soft.

4 — While the asparagus is cooking, melt the butter in a frying pan and add the anchovies. Allow the anchovies to melt into the foamy butter.

5 — Lift the asparagus from the boiling water directly into the frying pan, and coat and toss with the melted butter.

6 — Serve straight away.



Gnocchi with Parma ham and artichokes

A generous meal for two with leftovers

You can very easily sub the home-made gnocchi with the shop-bought variety or any other short pasta, especially if you are using tinned artichokes. That said, making these is so much fun and a great skill to master.

To make the gnocchi

- 3 large baking potatoes (about 700g-750g)
- 1l water
- 1 tbs salt
- 100g-150g plain flour
- 1 egg yolk
- 1 egg
- 40g grated Parmesan
- ½ tsp salt
- Generous pinch of nutmeg

To make the sauce

- 3 tbs olive oil
- 2 cloves of garlic, peeled and lightly crushed

- 150g preserved or tinned artichokes or two globe artichokes prepped down to the hearts and sliced
- Salt and freshly ground black pepper
- 50g thinly sliced Parma ham
- A few sprigs of parsley, leaves picked and chopped

1 — Place the whole potatoes in a pan with water, making sure they are fully covered. Add the tablespoon of salt and bring to a boil, then reduce the heat, semi cover the pot and simmer for 35-40 minutes, or until a knife goes through the potatoes easily. You can turn the potatoes halfway through but don’t add any extra water.

2 — Remove the potatoes from the water, put them on a plate and let them dry

and cool until you can handle them. Using the rough side of a grater, peel and grate them onto a large board or tray that you can use for mixing and shaping, (you should end up with about 550g-600g potato flesh, net weight).

3 — Create a little well in the centre of the grated potato mass and add half the flour, eggs, Parmesan, salt and nutmeg. Start working the mix to form a solid dough, using more of the flour if needed to help bind it together.

4 — Sprinkle some more of the flour on the board and roll the dough into four “snakes”, cut them into little chunks about 2cm long and set them aside until you are ready to cook and serve. You can also freeze them and cook from frozen when required.

5 — Set a large pot on the stove to heat with plenty of salted water. In a large frying pan, heat the olive oil and add the garlic and sliced artichokes. Toss a little to colour, and season with salt and pepper. Then tear strips of prosciutto into the pan and stir to distribute and crisp them up a little.

6 — As soon as the water starts to boil, pop the gnocchi into the pan and wait for them to float. Then remove the gnocchi from the water with a slotted spoon and put them straight into the frying pan with the artichokes. Add the chopped parsley, toss once or twice to coat the gnocchi in the sauce and serve immediately.



‘This recipe makes quite a generous helping, so you can keep some for the next day or simply indulge – you haven’t been out in ages’



Tiramisu

Makes two large portions

We never make this at home but whenever we go out for an Italian meal we usually order one to share. This recipe makes quite a generous helping, so you can keep some for the next day or simply indulge – you haven’t been out in ages after all.

- 4 sponge fingers
- 1 cup strong coffee
- 2 egg yolks
- 20g sugar
- 200g mascarpone
- 2 egg whites
- 20g sugar
- 20g dark chocolate chopped, or 1 tbs cocoa powder

1 – Dip a sponge finger in the coffee and place one at the bottom of each serving glass. Whisk the egg yolks with the sugar until really fluffy, add the mascarpone and continue whisking until well mixed.

2 – In a separate bowl whisk the egg whites with the other 20g of sugar to form a light foam, and then fold the egg-white mix into the mascarpone.

3 – Fill the glasses until half full with the mascarpone mixture, then dip another sponge finger in the coffee and pop it in the glass, top with the remaining mixture and sprinkle with chopped dark chocolate or cocoa powder.

4 – Place the glasses in the fridge until you are ready to serve.

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.

- Which 1978 single was the most recent top three hit for the Rolling Stones (right)?
- In which novel by Mikhail Bulgakov does Satan visit 1930s Moscow?
- The football team of which American university are known as the Fighting Irish?
- In a poem by Tennyson, who speaks

the words, "The curse has come upon me"?

- The cast of which 1967 film included Sidney Poitier and Lulu?
- Which TV game show, presented by Derek Batey in the 1970s and 1980s, returned in 2008, in a celebrity version presented by Phillip Schofield?
- Who was killed in a car crash in California on September 30 1955, while driving a Porsche Spyder?
- The Grace Gates and the Tavern Stand

are features of which sports ground?

- Gerald Kaufman, Kenneth Clarke and Peter Bottomley are the last three MPs to have what role in the Commons?
- What's the nickname of the wind that blows through Perth (above) in Western Australia during the summer months?



The Picture Round by James Walton

Who or what do these pictures add up to?



+

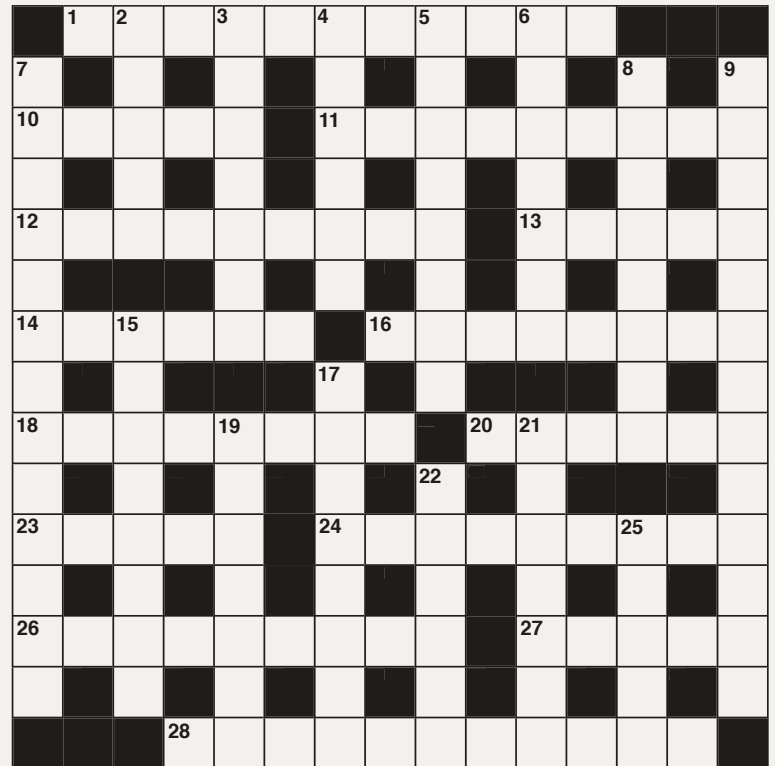


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Answers page 10

GETTY IMAGES; ALAMY

The Crossword No 492. Set by Aldhelm



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

ACROSS

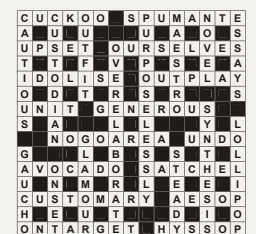
- Thickness (11)
- Vast expanse (5)
- One using medicinal plants (9)
- Extremely unsafe situation (9)
- Printed letter's decoration (5)
- Encrypt (6)
- Feeling sick (8)
- Greed (8)
- College's head of finance (6)
- Go in (5)
- Deliberately (2, 7)
- Legislation (9)
- Sound of pain (5)
- Formal swearing in (11)

DOWN

- Old character put up in village motel (5)
- Coordinated building around NYC replanned (7)
- This place is next to second bit of planet's orbit (6)
- Possibly French wine, finally – pour out one with energy at first (8)
- Framework for reforming his class that's left out (7)
- Callously company try deal held incorrectly (4-9)
- Glass spilled over suit (8)
- English county to greet an unsteady soldier (5, 8)
- Southern city can encompass exercise for two, perhaps (4, 4)

- Never mean to be upset with it (2, 2, 4)
- Particular one found in strange trance (7)
- Instrument could be this if not grand? That's quite correct (7)
- Sip somehow obtained for regulator of drink (6)
- Scent's the same rising for us (5)

Solution to Crossword No 491

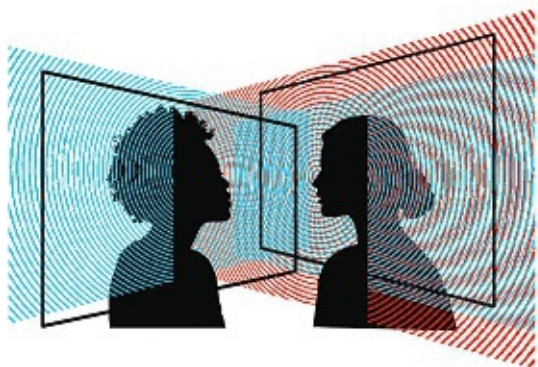




ELAINE MOORE

PARTING SHOT

Lessons from lockdown: we all need some face-to-face time



A few weeks ago, I was sent a terrifically off-putting invitation to a new social media platform. “You heard of Lunchclub?” a friend texted. “Wanna sign up? It’s a super-connector-networking thing where you chat to strangers by video.”

This happens quite a lot in San Francisco. Start-up founders lean on friends to bulk up their early-user numbers. I was once asked to attend a women’s health app launch by someone who added the disconcerting caveat: “They’re planning to test everyone who goes but you may be able to skip the swab if you ask.”

I steered clear of the launch party - and Lunchclub. Who needs another social media platform in their life - especially a networking one? And what does being “super-connected” even mean? It sounded exhausting.

Besides, my posting habits on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and every other social network have dwindled. All those revelations about the psychological war games conducted by algorithms and personal-data scrapes to feed the business models have taken the shine off. The rise in professional content has filled my feed with “parasocial interactions”, a term for one-sided relationships coined in the 1950s to describe the way TV presenters addressed their audiences directly. The phrase nails how many of us feel about slick content creators on YouTube, TikTok, Twitter and Instagram and the passivity they engender.

But after more than two months working from home, I reconsidered. Although work chat and gossip have flowed thanks to instant messaging, it is not the same as real conversation. I’ve missed seeing new faces and having the kind of serendipitous encounters that happen when you’re out and about in the world.

When it became clear that lockdown was not going to end any time soon, I clicked on the Lunchclub link and joined. The process was easy enough. I wrote a short paragraph about myself and let the magic of machine learning match me with another user. After an emailed introduction - with the company copied in to keep things above board - I arranged a video call.

Of course, when the time came to actually speak to a stranger, the awkwardness of the interaction loomed large. What if you have nothing to talk about? How do you end the call? Why put yourself in such a weird situation when you could just watch Netflix? “Lol. Think of it like a work date,” my friend texted. “It’s fine. A bit awkward but interesting.”

What I had forgotten is that Americans are great at chatting - far better than us diffident Brits. Before I could text back with another set of objections, a cheerful face appeared on my screen. My connection, a political campaign manager from the US, was full of energy and ready with all sorts of things to talk about. There was no need to plan

an escape. We talked for an hour, made plans to speak again and I left ready to sign up for more.

The set-up is undeniably odd - somewhere between a date and a job interview, without the end goal of either. But Lunchclub is not the only social media platform facilitating random online connections during lockdown. Virtual-gaming hangout Discord already has millions of users. Nextdoor is a way to meet your neighbours. Various dating apps have a “make a friend” option, including Bumble and The League. And Slashtalk promises to improve communication for virtual teams by facilitating “decentralised” meetings.

‘I’ve missed seeing new faces and having the kinds of serendipitous encounters that happen in the real world’

Tech VCs have also taken to boasting on Twitter about their love of Clubhouse, reportedly valued at more than \$100m, an invitation-only network that lets users join spontaneous audio chat room discussions. Clubhouse’s appeal is its exclusivity - plus the possibility of chatting to MC Hammer, a Bay Area local and early adopter. But users also talk about the relief of communicating via conversation, which is ephemeral, rather than photos or text that can linger online for ever.

It is impossible to know whether my good experience on Lunchclub was because talking is better than texting, because the company has superior matching abilities, or its small user base means it can keep a close eye on things right now. Probably all of the above. Either way, I’m a convert. One of the criticisms levelled against Twitter, Facebook and other social media apps that provide a constant stream of information from millions of users is that humans are not designed to connect with one another at such scale and speed. It is much harder to troll someone when you are speaking to them face to face.

Right now, group-chat fatigue appears to have kicked in. The early excitement of lockdown quizzes and happy hours was hobbled by bad WiFi, people talking over each other and the distraction of seeing your own face when speaking. But if social distancing is here to stay, we will need to find new ways to meet and talk. Face-to-face interactions are the ones humans are best at - they help us trust one another and build empathy, even online. Small-scale is best. Speaking to a stranger one-on-one on Lunchclub was less stressful than some of the big group calls I’ve been on with friends.

Making unexpected connections was always one of the best parts of social media. Lockdown might be the moment we remember that. **FT**

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🐦 @ElaineDMoore. Gillian Tett is away

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