

THE NEW YORKER

IN THIS WEEK'S ISSUE

A Brooklyn Attorney Protects Sexual Privacy

In the December 5, 2016, issue of *The New Yorker*, in “Taking Trolls to Court” (p. 56), **Margaret Talbot** profiles Carrie Goldberg, the Brooklyn attorney and pioneer in the field of sexual privacy, who is using the law to defend victims of hacking, leaking, and other online assaults. Although people record and share so many images of themselves today, Goldberg believes in protecting privacy as a form of dignity: “I think that privacy is something that has to be respected, because otherwise where’s the boundary between you and me? And I’m not saying that everybody has to have the same level of modesty, but, if you are not wanting to show your naked pictures to everybody, that seems like a choice you ought to be able to have.” Goldberg’s clients are often battling an angry ex who’s posted intimate images of them on the Internet; other clients are being extorted into providing sex or money because someone has graphic pictures of them and is threatening to send the images to employers or parents or siblings. Goldberg has even begun advising teens who have been sexually assaulted and had the incidents recorded on cell phones. Last year, partly in response to arguments by Goldberg and other activists, some major social-media platforms and search engines began banning “revenge porn.” Reddit, Twitter, and Facebook adopted policies against involuntary pornography in early 2015; Instagram, Google, Bing, and Yahoo soon followed; in October, 2015, Pornhub, one of the most popular X-rated sites, announced that it would honor requests to take down revenge porn. One former colleague calls Goldberg “a total badass. . . . A lot of the people called to legal-services work are do-gooders, and they are a little passive and meek. They don’t have that fierceness that Carrie has.”

By this summer, Goldberg had more than thirty-five active clients, and she decided to expand her firm. She tries to impress on her clients that they should not feel ashamed: “even if you did take a naked picture and send it to somebody, that’s not necessarily reckless behavior. That’s time-honored behavior! G.I.s going off to war used to have pics of their wife or girlfriend in a pinup pose,” she tells Talbot. In May, Goldberg was invited to the White House for a meeting about sexual assault in elementary, middle, and high schools. Since the election of Donald Trump, she’s seen a “drastic uptick” in people seeking her firm’s help—evidence of what she worries is a “new license to be cruel.” At her office in Brooklyn Heights, Goldberg tells Norma—a client whose ex posted her full name, phone number, address, and intimate photographs on Pornhub—“You’re a warrior goddess, holding him accountable.” The next week, Talbot accompanied Goldberg to a New Jersey courtroom, where Judge Michael Ravin remarked that the facts of Norma’s case hit him as a father, before sentencing her ex to five years of probation, the maximum allowed under the law. Goldberg tells Talbot, “I wish it wasn’t always ‘As the father of a daughter’ or ‘As the husband of a wife.’ I wish it were ‘This kind of assault on someone’s dignity bothers me as a human being with a soul and a conscience.’”

The Evolution of Pedro Almodóvar

In “Sombre Colors” (p. 42), **D. T. Max** reports from Madrid, where he profiles Pedro Almodóvar—Spain’s most famous director since Luis Buñuel—who made a name for himself with raunchy, transgressive films, and whose latest, “Julieta,” is a tender adaptation of stories by Alice Munro. Almodóvar began directing feature films in the late seventies. In 1985, Almodóvar and his brother, Agustín, founded their own production company, El Deseo, and their movies have modest budgets—today’s cap is roughly ten million dollars. Almodóvar says small-budget films come with plenty of problems of their own, “but you are *owner* of that difficulty. And that is of the greatest importance.” Before filming, Almodóvar plans out the entire shoot and then instructs his actors with great precision. He tells Max, “I’m a partisan of writing ironclad screenplays, going over them many times, solving all the problems on paper. If there’s something that doesn’t work in the screenplay, it’s going to be impossible to solve it in the filming.” He rehearses his actors extensively, playing their roles in front of them to show them how lines should be read. The actor Rossy de Palma tells Max, “You have to be careful not to imitate him. You want to do it exactly the same way, but you have to make it yours.” Antonio Banderas says, “I try to become almost a white canvas, so he can paint on it.” Almodóvar often shoots multiple takes of each scene, sometimes without giving feedback; unlike most directors, he edits as he goes. Banderas calls the experience “a very creative Hell. . . . When you finish the process, you are exhausted and very insecure. But when you see the result it is spectacular.” If Almodóvar’s watches any of his twenty feature films, he can’t help but notice flaws—a poor shot, a line spoken by an actor that misses the effect Almodóvar was after—but he says, “I don’t see them as faults but as part of the adventure.” In America, Almodóvar was seen, by many, as a gay director—ironic for an artist whose films had done so much to suggest that sexuality was not so easily defined. Almodóvar tells Max, “Binary gender is condemned to disappear.”

Almodóvar voraciously reads fiction, often seeking out books with an eye toward filming them. He had long been an enthusiastic reader of Alice Munro, and particularly admired the three linked stories in Munro’s 2004 collection, “Runaway.” In 2009, Almodóvar optioned “Runaway,” and created his sombre new film, “Julieta,” about a mother whose teen-age daughter abandons her. By the time the script was ready to shoot, he had made many narrative changes. The ending he engineered for “Julieta” is not Munro’s, but “is more open-ended than usual for Almodóvar,



who tends to tie up his complicated plots with a heavy bow (if not a gunshot),” Max writes. By the time he finished filming, in August, 2015, Almodóvar felt that he had made so many changes to “Runaway” that he owed Munro an explanation: he began writing her a letter that is “not a justification but a declaration of love toward the work, and an explanation of where I have taken it as a filmmaker, because clearly I’ve taken it on a long journey.” Almodóvar is proud of the film, telling Max, “It is a very different movie from my others. I imposed sobriety and compression every day of the shoot.” But to Almodóvar’s dismay, the debut of “Julietta” in Spain, earlier this year, went badly. As for his next project, Almodóvar mentioned that he had been toying with one more movie treatment: the story of a brother and sister who moved to Madrid, had some disappointments, grew old, then died. “It’s very sad,” he said. “I think in this moment after ‘Julietta’ I shouldn’t try something quite so sad.”

Alex Poots and the Boom in Mixed-Media Art

In “Art Without Walls” (p. 34), **Calvin Tomkins** profiles Alex Poots, a leading impresario of the cross-discipline art movement, who has been hired to create and direct the program for the Shed, an experimental center for music, theatre, film and video, dance, and visual art, which is being constructed in the Hudson Yards, in New York City, and is expected to open in 2019. Since 2000, the number of visual artists experimenting with performance art has expanded greatly. “As the value of paintings and sculptures increases, some artists make things that can’t be sold,” Poots told Tomkins. He sees the Shed as a permanent festival of the ways in which art is evolving. A six-story building with movable walls and ceilings and computerized lighting and sound systems, the Shed may be the city’s first example of performative architecture. “This will be the most flexible space ever made,” Poots told Tomkins. Daniel Doctoroff, the chairman of the Shed’s board of directors, told Tomkins, “This is the largest effort to start a new cultural institution in New York in a very long time.”

Poots was named the Shed’s director in 2014. “I hire a lot of people, and I have great confidence in my powers of cynicism,” Doctoroff told Tomkins. “Alex evaporated my cynicism.” Elizabeth Diller, one of the designers working on the project, said that Poots “provided the magic link, the sense of what artists could do here.” Poots and his staff have less than three years to develop a program for the Shed’s opening season, which will start in April, 2019. The premises will be available for fashion shows, product launches, and other commercial enterprises, at rentals that are expected to help subsidize the artistic program. “I think this is a new model of how an art center can function,” Poots told Tomkins. “You have to be more resourceful in America about these things, and I’m up for that.” The Museum of Modern Art, the Whitney Museum, and other established institutions have added performance spaces in recent years. Poots welcomes the competition. There can never be too many cultural venues in the city, he maintains, any more than there can be too many good restaurants. “The core of what matters is that we’re exploring a shared essence among different art forms, to create a whole that’s greater than any of its parts. It’s a kind of alchemy. We’re ready to do something significant, I hope.”

A Mother’s Lesson Plan

In “The Teacher” (p. 28), **James Wood** reflects on the life of his late mother, a teacher and devout Christian who sent her two sons to Eton and a daughter to a boarding school in Scotland, even though it was “financial insanity” that brought her “to the verge of ruin.” Wood’s mother “warily encouraged” his desire to be a writer, preferring that her children pursue the law or medicine (her “expressed hope was that when she answered the phone and a stranger asked to speak to Dr. Wood she could reply, ‘Which one? My husband, or one of my three children?’”). Wood writes, “The profession of letters was generally admirable, but the idea of my being a writer made her anxious: How would I earn a living? What sort of social status could I ever achieve? Was writing, at bottom, even a moral activity?” But after her death Wood received a letter from his mother’s former student, a poet named Katrina Porteous, who wrote, “Your mother . . . gave me the confidence to believe in myself as a ‘writer’ at a precocious age, when I had no right to think of myself as such, but every opportunity to become one.” Woods writes, “Sometimes, in anger or rebellion, I had felt that it was at best a frustration and at worst a misfortune to be the son of such a possessive and sharply gifted teacher. But my father knew better. To my surprise, he had these words put on her gravestone: ‘A devoted mother and grandmother and dear friend of many, including her former pupils.’ He had properly assessed the components of her identity, the parts of her great labor, the variety of her lifework.”

Plus: In Comment, **Amy Davidson** looks at the many transitions occurring as President-elect Donald Trump prepares to enter office: the handover of institutions from one set of hands to another, a businessman becoming a President, and “the transition that a Trump Presidency threatens to inflict on our common conception of what it means to be American” (p. 21); in the Financial Page, **James Surowiecki** considers how Donald Trump’s victory will likely be a bonanza for the private-prison system (p. 26); in Shouts & Murmurs, **River Clegg** imagines the commentary of an honest museum audio tour (p. 32); **Emily Nussbaum** watches “Rectify,” now in its fourth and final season, on Sundance (p. 74); **Dan Chiasson** reads “Envelope Poems,” a new edition of Emily Dickinson’s poetry (p. 77); **Joan Acocella** writes about the tap dancer Michelle Dorrance, whose troupe, Dorrance Dance, just completed a run at the Joyce, in New York City (p. 82); **Hilton Als** attends a New Group production of “Sweet Charity,” at the Pershing Square Signature Center, in New York City (p. 84); **Anthony Lane** reviews Pablo Larraín’s new film, “Jackie,” and Robert Zemeckis’s “Allied” (p. 86); poetry by **Joy Harjo** (p. 52); and **Michael Earl Craig** (p. 72); and new fiction by **Sam Shepard** (p. 66).

Podcasts: **Sarah Stillman** visits “Forced from Home,” an interactive exhibit created by Doctors Without Borders designed to simulate a refugee’s experience; and **David Means** reads Sherman Alexie’s story “The Toughest Indian in the World,” and discusses it with **Deborah Treisman**.

Digital Extras: **Joy Harjo** and **Michael Earl Craig** read their poems.

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