

DOMO



At the center of power

Historic times in the USA.
How correspondent Nicola Imfeld
reports for the Blick Group.

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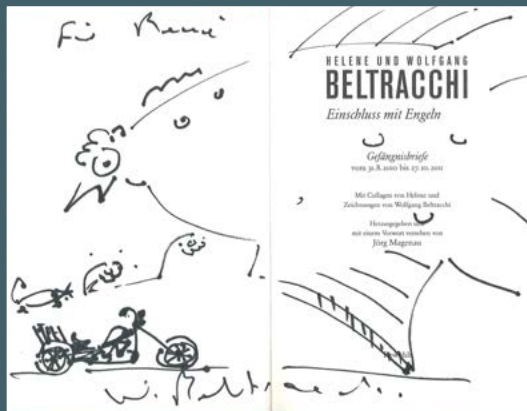
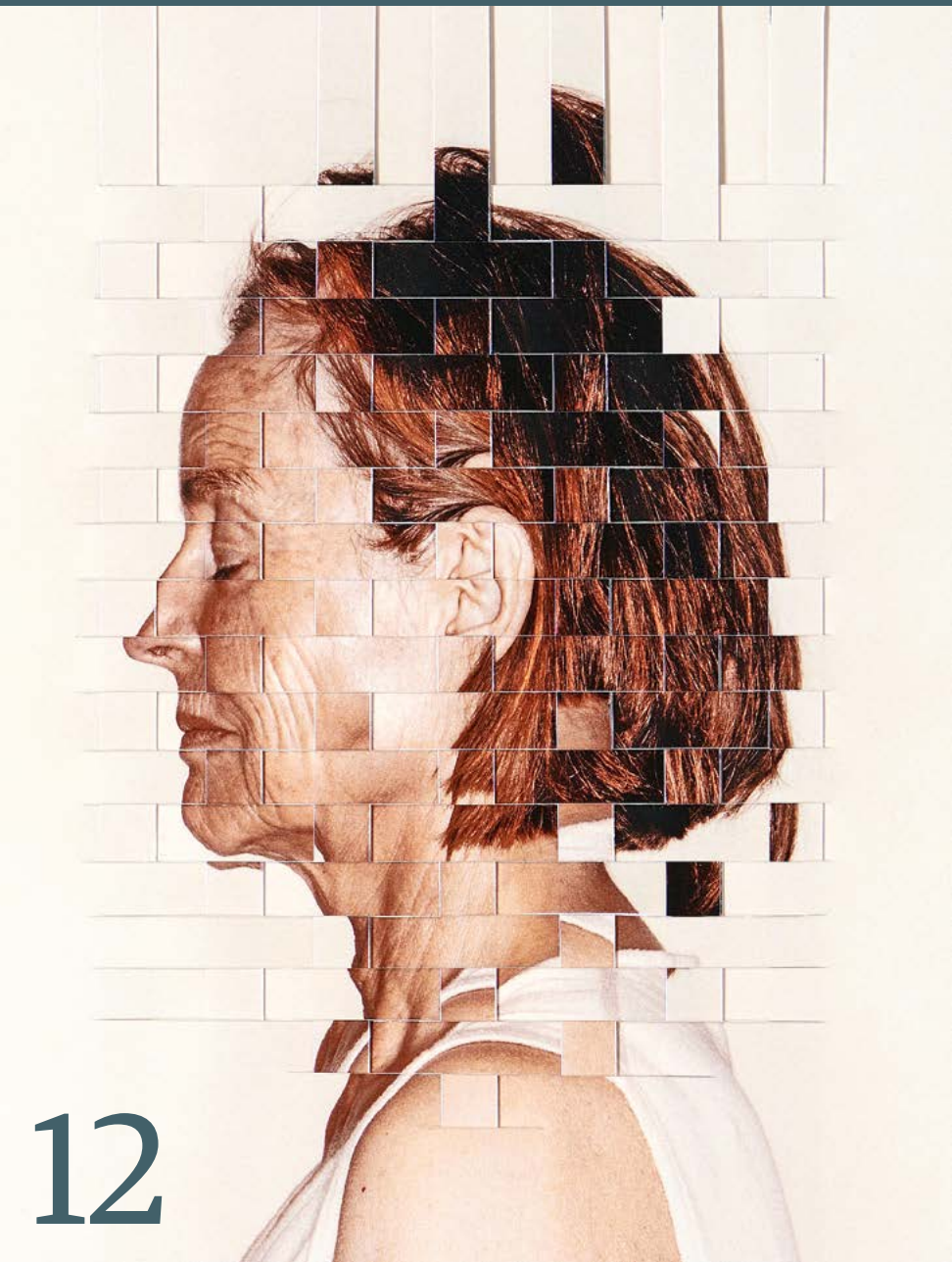
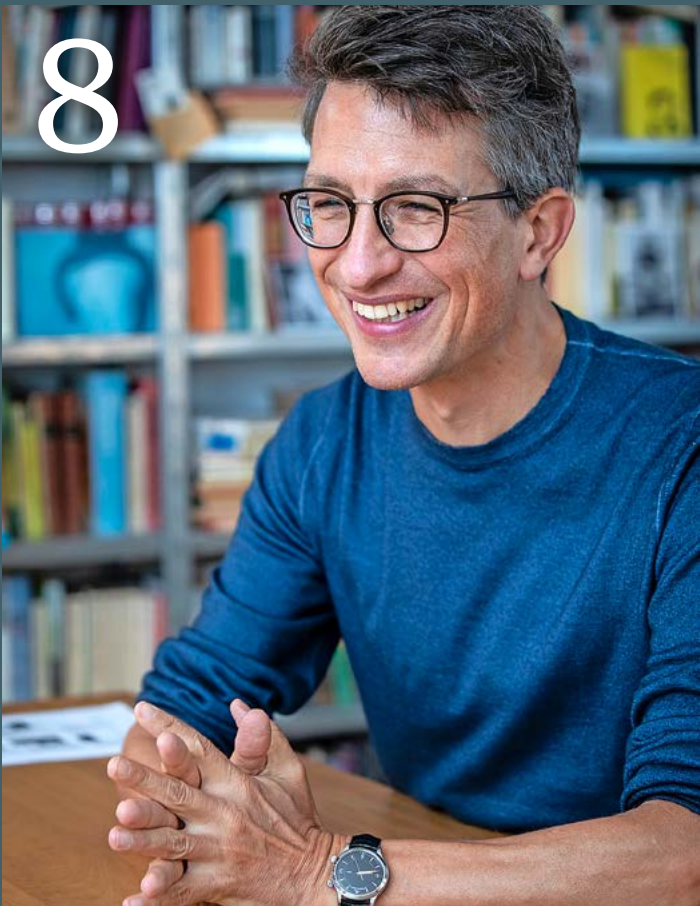
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Cover photo: Getty Images

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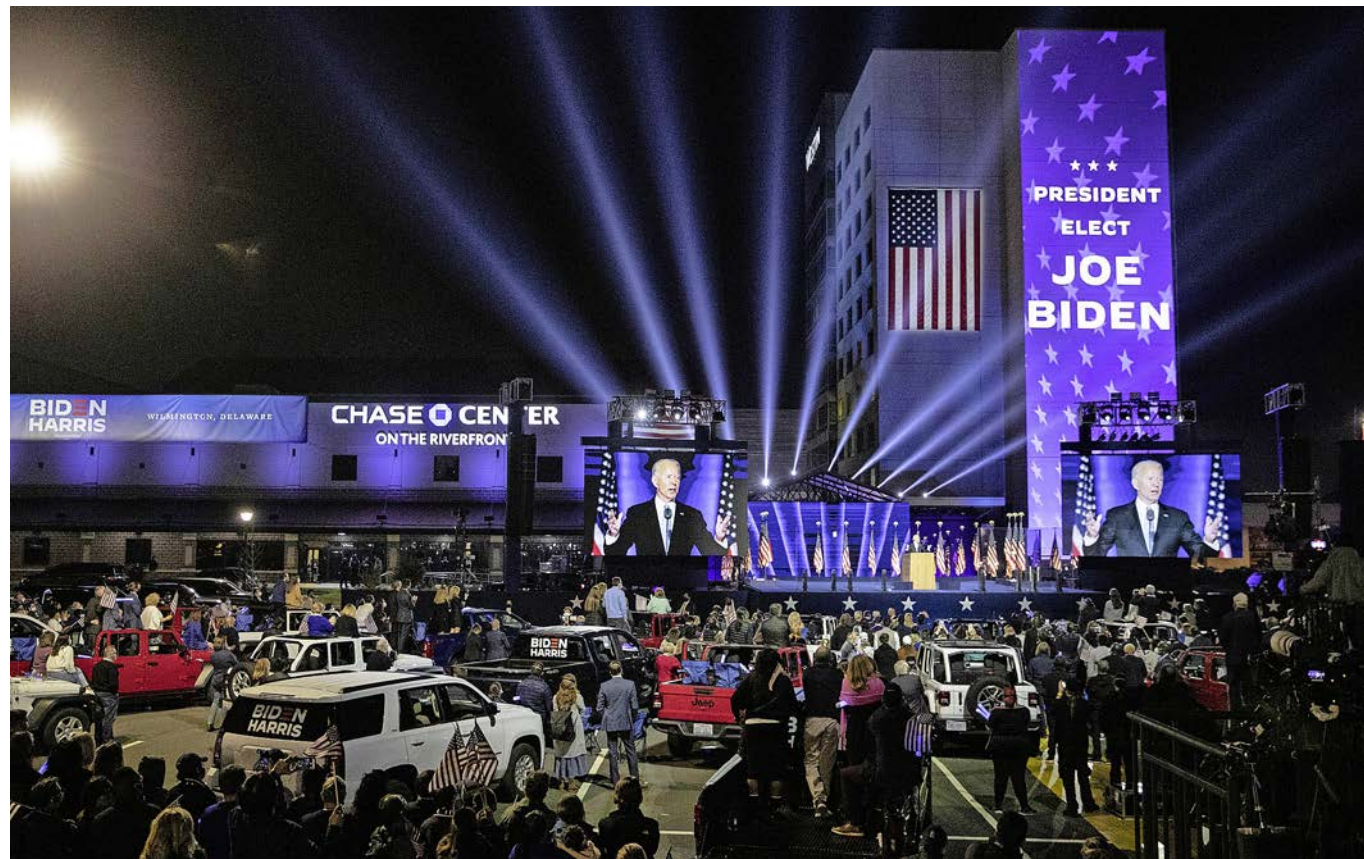


A protester wearing an oversized Trump costume in the streets outside the White House in Washington, D.C., celebrates the defeat of incumbent U.S. President Donald Trump in the election.

Convergent – around the clock.

All out on all channels. For three years, Nicola Imfeld has been reporting from the USA for Blick Group and he has learned: a Swiss journalist has a tough time in the United States. Nevertheless, Imfeld says: «Being a correspondent here is a dream job.»

By Nicola Imfeld



Wilmington, Delaware, November 7, shortly before noon: Loud ringing jolts me awake. The phone already lists four missed calls, my iPad is lying on my duvet, CNN is on: Joe Biden has just been called «President-elect» - but I had dropped off at some point around dawn. Hastily, I open my laptop, but my colleagues in Zurich have been quick to respond: The article we'd prepared on Biden, the requisite analysis - everything is already published. I throw on some clothes and take an Uber. On the way, I produce a first assessment for Radio Energy - disrupted by a car-horn symphony in the streets of Biden's hometown. Hundreds of the new US president's enthusiastic supporters have already gathered by the river in Wilmington. Now, I'll have to move fast: Another Blick TV live broadcast is about to begin.

This is the hectic conclusion to a long, nerve-racking election campaign. US correspondents like myself have been preoccupied with this political event for years. America, and especially Donald Trump, are always of interest to our readers. During the summer, the intensity and interest increased even more. Election night and then the endless

days of waiting finally robbed me, and all the other journalists working on the ground, of sleep.

In the weeks and months before this climax, I had traveled to various parts of the country. This is especially important for any correspondent, because the USA does not only consist of the West and East Coasts. For BLICK, I researched the most important issues in a countdown series - in the Rust Belt, in West Virginia, in New York, in Tennessee, Florida and other states. For SonntagsBlick, we created a series of interviews with activists, politicians and voters.

The journalistic goal of this pre-election coverage was to represent the entire country and both political camps, and - this was a particular concern of mine - to take voters seriously or, more precisely, never to make fun of either the Trump or the Biden electorate. To my colleagues in Switzerland, this may sound banal and like a matter of course. Too many media, however, failed to do so in 2016 and again in 2020.

There are now scarcely any media in the United States that don't appear to pursue a political agenda. The same story is often told completely differently on the various TV chan-



Supporters of new U.S. President Joe Biden celebrate his victory in Wilmington. Bottom: «Getting interviews with political heavyweights is next to impossible,» says Nicola Imfeld, USA. This time it worked - Imfeld interviewing Democratic Representative Don Beyer.

nels and in newspapers - «spin» is the name of the game here. For a Swiss journalist, media consumption thus devolves into a daily battle between CNN and Fox News, The New York Times and the Wall Street Journal. The challenge? To provide the reader with as comprehensive and unbiased a picture of political events as possible.

At Blick Group, we covered the unconventional presidency of Donald Trump quite well on the whole. Always in a critical, systematic, entertaining way. But one thing we, and I in particular, did not always fully achieve was to lose the sardonic undertone in reporting on Trump.

Photo: Sarah Silbiger/Bloomberg via Getty Images

A little more soberness would sometimes have been befitting.

For a Swiss journalist to establish him- or herself in the USA is hard. Unlike at home, a BLICK reporter is a nobody here. Which is why I went to great lengths to build relationships, right from the start. As a result, I now have various contacts, including political scientists, the former US ambassador to China or a member of parliament in Washington, whom I can call almost around the clock and ask for an assessment.

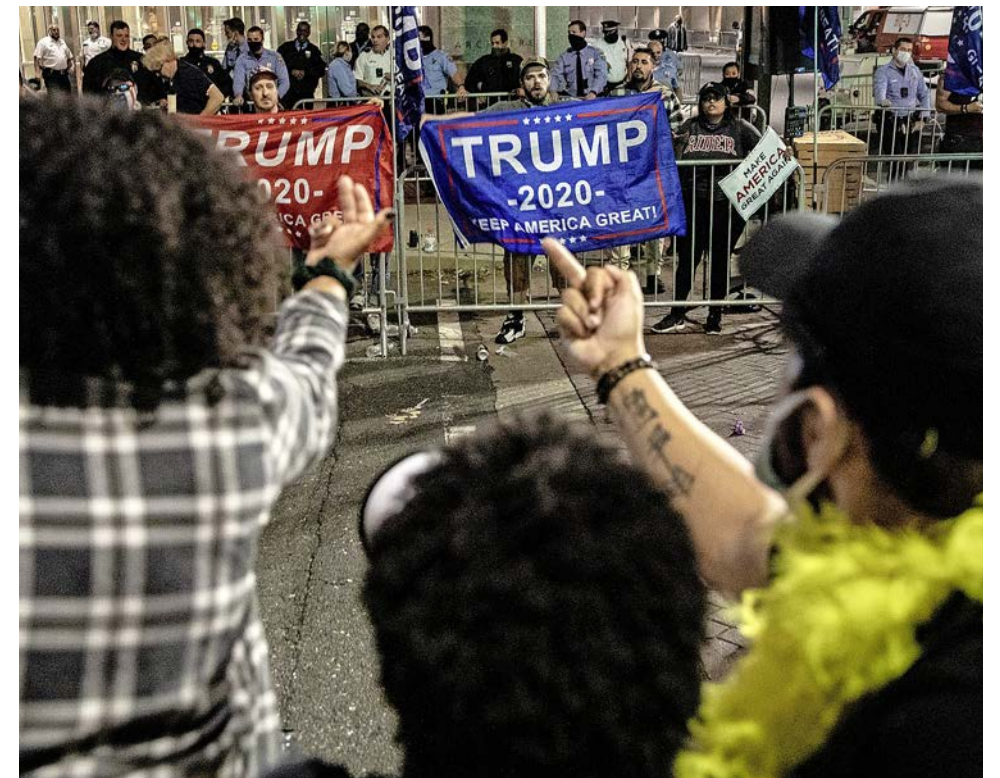
But getting interviews with political heavyweights is next to impossible. My credo: Cast out your net and try anyway. California Senator and now elected Vice President Kamala Harris has her local office in San Diego just a few floors above our BLICK office. Despite countless efforts, we have never gotten a meeting. After a year and numerous telephone calls, I finally arranged an interview with Democratic newcomer and presidential candidate Pete Buttigieg. In the end, however, that was cancelled as well.

The reality is often tough - a huge effort with little payoff. But persistence - and a little luck - sometimes do work out. One such instance came about in winter of 2018, when I was able to meet Michael Avenatti, star lawyer for porn actress Stormy Daniels in the trial against Donald Trump, for an interview in Los Angeles.

Working as a US correspondent has been and still is a dream job for me. Even as a child, I had heated discussions with my grandfather about George W. Bush, whom he considered a «war criminal». In my youth, politics and the person of Barack Obama always fascinated me more than what Switzerland's Federal Councilors or Germany's Angela Merkel were doing.

Actually, the original plan wasn't for me to take over US reporting at Blick Group at all. When I moved across the Atlantic to San Diego at the end of May 2018, I took on the job of the night shift. Several months and numerous Trump stories later, the correspondent's job was officially added. Since February 2019, I have been writing the weekly column «BLICK auf die USA» (Look at the USA) for Blick.ch.

What distinguishes me from my fellow correspondents is this dual burden. Because I have always remained a night-shift worker. When I'm not travelling in search of US



topics, I have fixed working hours, from 10:30 p.m. to 6:30 a.m. While everyone in Switzerland is sleeping, I am responsible for the online presence of Blick.ch. I then work as a chief editor, writing breaking news, searching for and writing stories and creating the daily newsletter and much more. So, I have always had to stay on top of the latest domestic and international news and at least have a rough idea of the current political, economic and celebrity-related issues.

In order to do justice to this dual burden as much as possible, I have developed a morning ritual. Hours before my night shift, I read at least the New York Times, The Washington Post and the Wall Street Journal. Just before my official workday begins, I update myself on events in Switzerland and around the world. During a normal night shift, I often find myself writing an article about Trump and US politics while preparing a story on German singer Michael Wendler for the celebrity-news section.

My role as a night-shift worker is also the reason I chose San Diego for my home base rather than Washington - unlike most US correspondents. The nine-hour time difference makes the shift slightly more pleasant. And so Ringier has an outpost in the southernmost city on the West

Hate needs to be curbed. Protesters celebrating Joe Biden's election victory taunt supporters of U.S. President Donald Trump across the road in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

Coast, which is dubbed «America's finest city» for a reason. Beautiful beaches, a pleasant climate all year round and a laid-back vibe unknown to Switzerland. The work-life balance could not be better, although it has suffered from the pandemic and the current third California lockdown.

After the U.S. elections, there is one more highlight ahead: the inauguration of the new President, Joe Biden, in Washington, on January 20, 2021. I will be on the job again, fully convergent, for print, online, TV, social media and Radio Energy. But this will be the last time.

In early February, I will return to Switzerland after almost three years. In March, I will take on the job of business journalist at Blick. I will no longer have my own office in the Zurich newsroom and probably have less freedom. On the other hand, I will no longer have to attend the daily and often repetitive Trump press conferences. And I can finally work with a team again. That's a new challenge that I am honestly looking forward to.

But I can't and don't want to fool anyone: These historic years in the United States of America, with the Trump presidency and the coronavirus pandemic, will forever remain a journalistic and personal highlight for me. 🌐

Photo: Chris McGrath/Getty Images



Science journalist Urs Hafner at home in Bern: «It's exciting to observe the power struggle between science and politics,» he says.

«A naive faith in facts»

Journalism should no longer think of itself as the mouthpiece of science, says historian and science journalist Urs Hafner (52). In this respect, the corona pandemic has turned out to be a blessing.

By Adrian Meyer Photo: Kurt Reichenbach

Mr. Hafner, new findings about the coronavirus have been published every day for months now. How do you keep track of it all? I don't think I'm keeping track of it. While I do read the newspapers every day, I constantly have to ask myself what measures actually make sense and why, or whether the vaccine is really the cure.

What brought on your skepticism? In the course of the corona pandemic, many media have obediently been following both science and politics. Certain researchers gained attention by making maximum demands. Some of this was sheer panic mongering. And many media parroted it indiscriminately.

What shortcomings in science journalism did the corona crisis reveal? On the one hand, science journalists were and are in demand. People want to know what a virus is or whether the crisis is leading to depression. On the other hand, it is becoming obvious how science journalism is suffering from the media

crisis. There is a lack of money, time and expertise. This is why, this summer, the Swiss Club for Science Journalism sounded the alarm with an open letter, saying science journalists are currently considered essential workers and working around the clock in view of the great interest of media users, but media companies still continue to cut jobs.

Despite the fact that, during the pandemic, science in particular gained great political power.

It is exciting to observe the power struggle between science and politics, how compromises were hammered out in the fight against the virus and how they are still being negotiated. Certain scientists - almost all of them are men - appear to love the limelight and enjoy this new power. Epidemiologists like Marcel Salathé or Christian Althaus have no qualms about dictating to the government which policies to adopt. That is unbelievable. Many media were happy to go along with this.

Did the media become too dependent on experts, on virologists and epidemiologists in the corona crisis?

It is a dilemma. Only experts can assess the epidemiological aspects of a pandemic. Journalists always know less than scientists, at least in the natural sciences. In that field, journalism has always acted mostly as a mouthpiece. This is less the case for journalism in the fields of arts and humanities. In the natural sciences, too, journalists could become more involved and ask critical questions.

Which experts should we trust?

Mostly those who carefully weigh up the situation and state the limits of their knowledge. But as a rule, one tends to consult those experts who are considered competent. And who is considered competent? The experts who are consulted. One thing feeds the other.

Accurately communicating expert knowledge while at the same time having an impact in the media is a balancing act for scientists. Does science need media training? Or do the media need science training?

I know many scientists who are frustrated by the media. They say that the time spent talking to the media is not worth it because at the end of a long conversation they often only use a single quote and even that needs to be corrected. Actually, it would take both: journalists with time, interest and competence, who are familiar with the academic culture and know how

to ask simple questions. And scientists who understand how the media work and can let it go if a sentence is not written exactly as it should be.

Has science not paid enough attention to the public?

It should actually have an interest in informing the general public, since it is financed by taxpayers' money. The universities are even obliged to do so. Science communication and journalism are primarily charged with doing the translating. But you cannot force scientists to do public relations. Their main job is to research and teach.

In your book «Forschung in der Filterblase» (Research in the Filter Bubble), you criticize that Swiss universities neglect the discourse between science and the public.

In my research, I came to the conclusion that there is not enough critical distance to science in the communication departments of universities. They are obliged to do PR. That is hardly surprising. Unfortunately, the universities don't give enough thought to what could be interesting to the general public. Basically, science communication should select topics that matter to the public and support scientists in communicating their work properly. This could stimulate debate.

Why is this dialogue important?

When it comes to politically relevant issues such as climate change, energy, animal testing, racism or gender, science has a lot to contribute! It ought to get involved so citizens can inform themselves and be encouraged to think about these matters. Many scientists have begun to do this on their own, without a communications department to support them. They have built up communities, some of them quite sizeable, on social media. However, these are mostly filter bubbles. People stay amongst themselves.

On the one hand, we have science, which is very influential and uses communication for

PR purposes. On the other, we have science journalism, which is currently in crisis. Who will fill the gap?

Only journalism can do that. The Swiss Academies of Arts and Sciences have founded a commission with the objective of supporting science journalism. There is talk of establishing a foundation.

Why should science worry about critical journalism?

Good question! According to opinion polls, more than half of the population have a positive attitude towards science. I think it's because the science system is afraid that at some point there will be no more funding if the public does not hear enough about their work. That is why the pandemic is a blessing for science communication and science journalism.

In what way?

Many citizens only gained insight into how science really works as a result of this crisis. And they learned that the world of science is very complex, that even research sometimes does not have the answers to our questions, and that there is certainly no single, eternally valid answer. There is always another investigation, a next study.

You are calling for a deeper understanding of the sciences based on more reflective knowledge and less faith in facts. What does that mean?

I find it significant how, in the course of the debate about so-called fake news, editorial offices reacted with increased fact-checking. But this faith in facts is naive. Of course, the earth is not flat. But there is no such thing as a definitive fact in science. All knowledge is temporary. Reflective knowledge is the kind of knowledge that stimulates citizens to ask their own questions and think for themselves.

What kind of journalism does this require?

A journalism that points out contradictions and unanswered questions and which conveys a realistic, unvarnished image of science. Journalism that does not try to provide definitive answers, but rather stimulates reflection. That takes journalists who do not consider themselves the mouthpiece of science and who do not want to explain the world to the public. Instead, they should be people who dare to ask scientists real questions: What does that mean? Why do we need that? What kind of world do we want to live in? 🌍

Personal

Urs Hafner, 52, is a historian, author and science journalist. From 2007 to 2014, he worked as a science editor at the Swiss National Science Foundation. His study «Research in the Filter Bubble - The Scientific Communication of Swiss Universities in the Digital Era» was published in spring 2020.

Russian Infodemic

Their names are «RT Deutsch», «Sputnik», «Redfish» or «In the Now». They are news channels that are active on the Internet and on social networks. In Switzerland, too. They are operated by media companies that belong to the Russian state. And they have only one purpose: propaganda. Text: René Haenig

Big protest in Basel - Antifa is mobilizing the masses against the «racist state», as the headline of the online edition of «Basler Zeitung» reads on Saturday, November 28. According to this news outlet, some 2,000 demonstrators marched through the center of Basel; some property damage ensued. Apart from that, only the Swiss commuter daily «20min.ch» published a brief report. But on the same day, the YouTube channel of «RT Deutsch» posted a video on the Internet entitled: «March in Basel: Antifa mobilizes masses against 'racist' state».

It seems odd that a small Internet TV station, of all things, would report on these events in Basel. «RT Deutsch» belongs to the state-owned Russian media company Rossiya Segodnya, which operates a news portal and radio stations in 30 languages under the umbrella brand «Sputnik». The station is based in a TV studio in Berlin-Adlershof. Critics regard the station as a foreign-propaganda channel of Russian President Vladimir Putin, 68.

The station's program includes news about international and Russian politics, business, culture and sports as well as documentaries and current-affairs programs. On Instagram, where «RT Deutsch» numbers more than 53,000 subscribers and

has posted 2,489 articles to date, the station advertises itself with the tagline: «Off-mainstream reporting». Germany's Federal Government accuses both «RT Deutsch» and the news agency «Sputnik» of spreading Kremlin propaganda in Germany. On their websites and in the social media, they offer a wide range of articles, «which in their overall view disseminate the position of the Russian government in a propagandistic manner», says the Federal Ministry of the Interior.

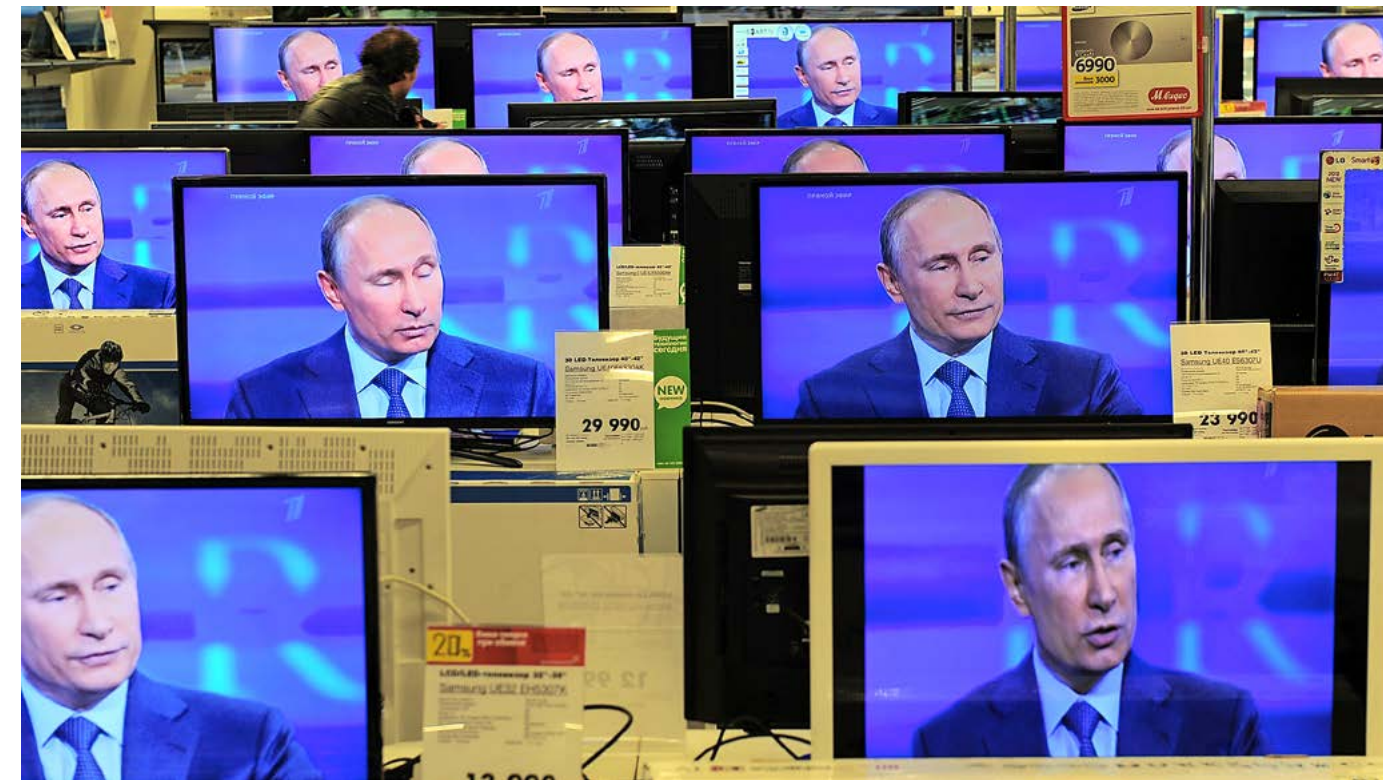
«Russian media are a weapon in the information war waged by Russia.» Susanne Spahn, historian

Switzerland is also discussed in certain articles. In addition to this most recent report on a protest, the Internet channel features an interview with Professor Reto Stocker, 65, head physician at the Hirslanden Clinic in Zurich. The video is entitled: «Intensive-care physician on corona

situation in Switzerland: Lockdown is not a good idea.» Switzerland's Federal Intelligence Service (NDB) has the Russian media campaign on its radar. In its situation report on «Switzerland's Security 2019» he writes: «Russia's increased confidence is based chiefly on its regained military strength and its tightly organized power apparatus under President Putin ... Russia will therefore continue to focus on influence operations, ranging from activities such as information campaigns, manipulation and propaganda ...»

Russian foreign media such as «RT Deutsch», «Sputnik» et al. are some of the weapons in the information war waged by Russia. The editor-in-chief of the foreign television station RT, Margarita Simonyan, makes no bones about this. The 40-year-old, who was something like Vladimir Putin's chief propagandist for a long time, described her station as the Kremlin's «Ministry of Defense» - and as «a weapon like any other». Anyone who believes that Russian media are only on the scene when right-wing groups like Pegida protest against the «Islamization of the Occident» or the AfD disseminates its Eurosceptical slogans is mistaken. There are Russian channels for leftists and environmentalists, too. Their headquarters: an

Photo: Andrey Smirnov/ AFP via Getty Images



eleven-story building in the German capital, more precisely in Berlin-Mitte. Three names on one doorbell: Ruptly, Redfish, Maffick.

These droll-sounding names stand for Facebook channels, some of which have millions of followers, which expend a lot of effort to conceal their true identity from their fans. On Instagram, Ruptly identifies itself as a media and news company based in Berlin - posting seemingly harmless videos like the one of Mr. Gru, a cat with vampire fangs. Two years ago, however, a video for which a Redfish employee shot scenes of a police operation at Kottbuser Tor in Berlin-Kreuzberg caused a ruckus on the social networks. Police officers are beating up a black man, «just an alleged bicycle thief». When passers-by attack the police with bottles and flowerpots, the Redfish report praises their «courage». The makers fail to mention that the man had previously attacked the police officers and fiercely resisted his arrest.

The video circulated rapidly in social media. Within a few days, 2.4 million people had seen it on Facebook. Very few people know that Redfish is part of the Russian media company Rossiya Segodnya. Nor do they know that the Redfish employees' mission is politically motivated. The lines between activism and journalism are deliberately crossed.

«Redfish is a new kind of media company that develops critical investigative and collaborative short documentaries to stimulate social and economic change,» as the makers of the portal themselves put it. Their target group: anyone fed up with the «mainstream media industry».

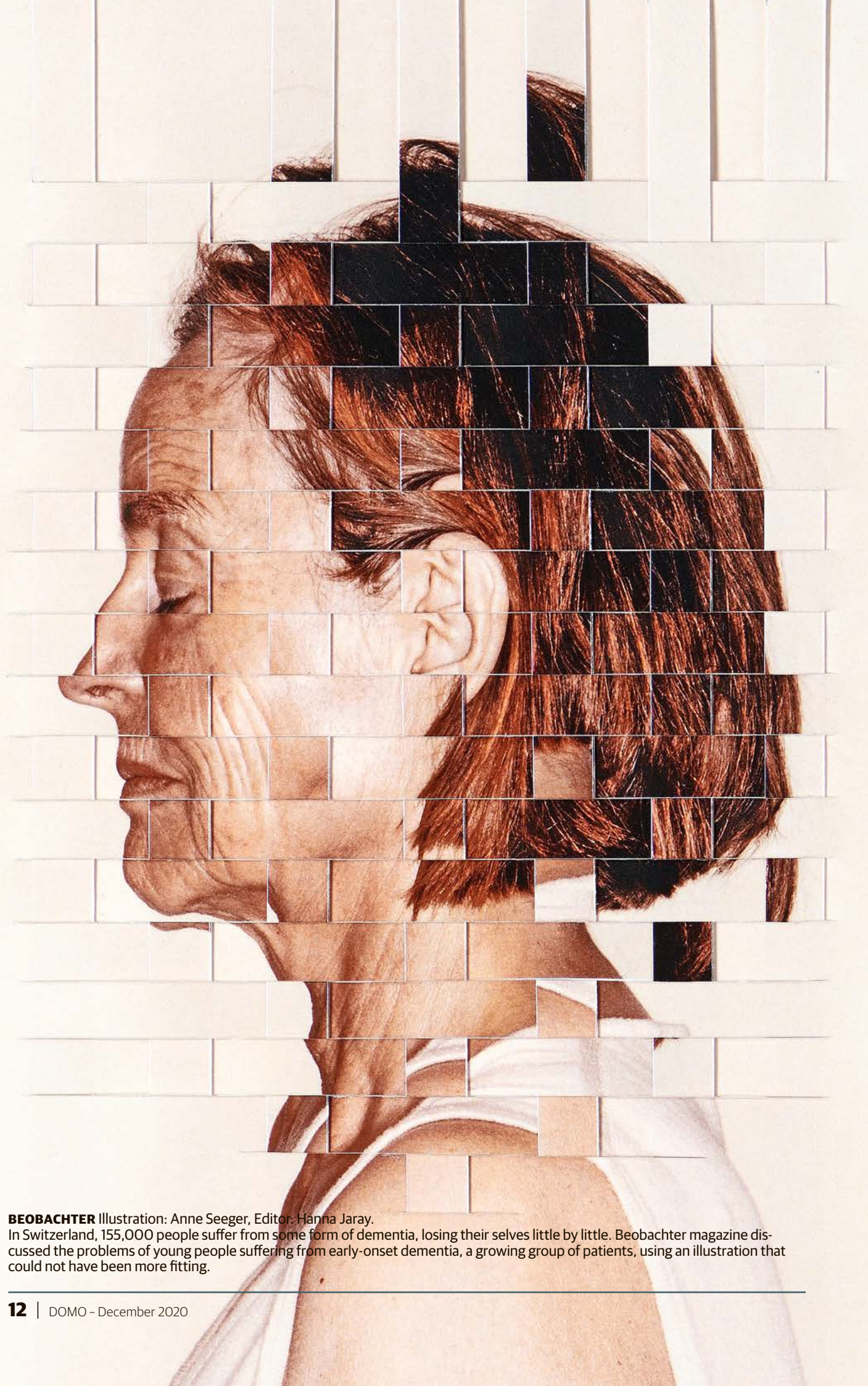
Maffick Media GmbH is also an enthusiastic participant in the Kremlin's information war against the West. The CEO of this media company founded in Berlin in 2018 is US journalist Anissa Naouai, 38. On Facebook alone, 5.2 million people follow her channel «In the Now», which numbers more fans than «Spiegel.de» or «Bild.de». «In the Now» attempts to conceal the fact that this channel with an international target group belongs to the empire of state-run Russian media. The homepage in thenow.media was registered in the Moscow area by a state-owned medium. Facebook itself blocked an advertised political commentary of «In the Now» some time ago. The reason: it had been displayed only to people in California and paid for in Russian rubles.

Influencing public opinion abroad is an official goal of the foreign policy of Russian President Vladimir Putin, says Susanne Spahn, an expert on Eastern European history. «The Russian media in Germany are a weapon in the information war waged by

Russian president Vladimir Putin on every channel. Russian media companies provide «off-mainstream reporting» in Europe.

Russia.» Spahn's assessment is based on statements by leading Russian media representatives. The tendentious reporting, which employs misrepresentations, pursues the objective of weakening opponents of Putin's leadership and supporting his advocates in the media. At the top of the list of Putin's opponents are Chancellor Angela Merkel, 66, and President Emmanuel Macron, 42. Spahn is convinced that the Russian media intend to polarize and exacerbate conflicts in order to divide society. This is particularly evident in the Corona crisis, which is also called an «infodemic» because of the associated flood of disinformation. Spahn: «First it was the refugee crisis, then the EU and Brexit and now the pandemic. The statements of the Russian state-run media about these crises are always the same: They suggested that the governments are unable to cope with the crisis. At the same time, they regularly deploy the horror scenario that the collapse of the system is imminent.»

Germany is not the only country to have become an important venue for the dissemination of Russian narratives and disinformation through Kremlin-controlled media - Switzerland now also appears to be one of them, as evidenced by the coverage of the Antifa demonstration in Basel. 🌐

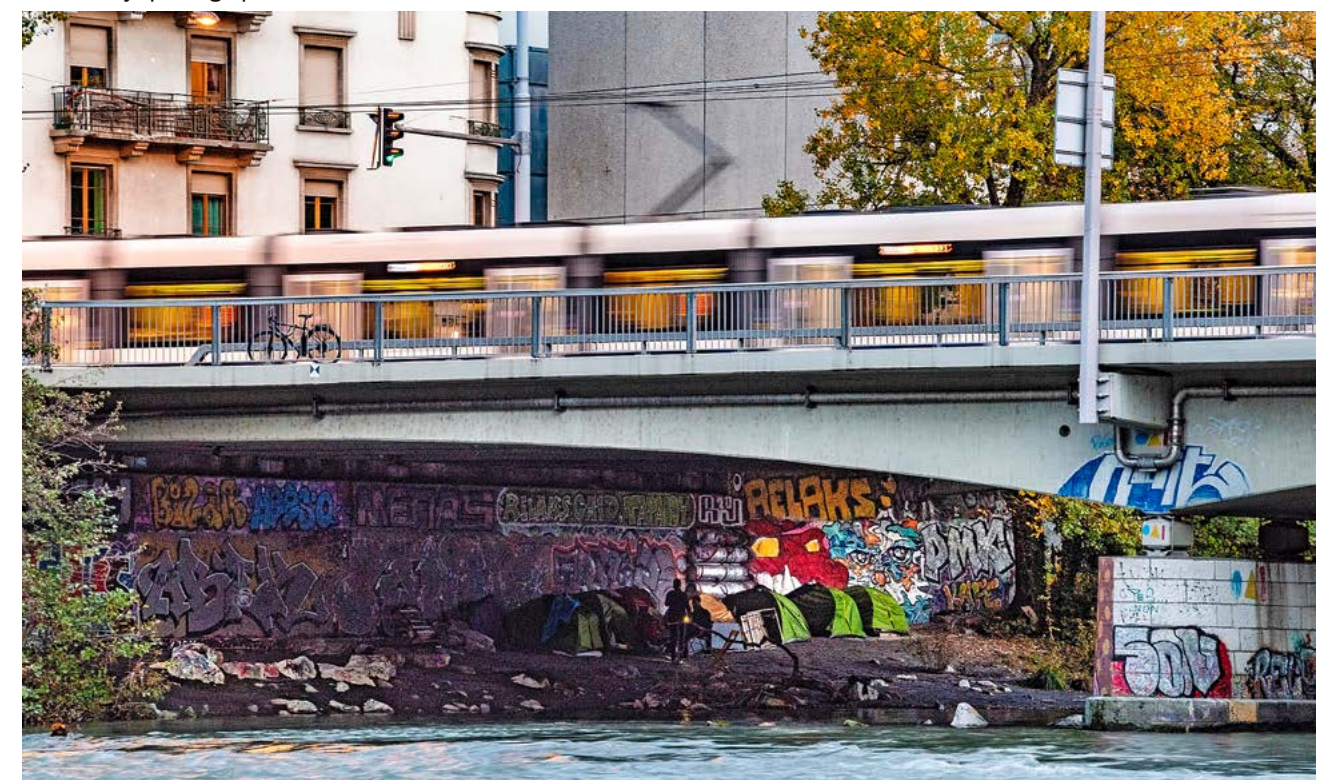


BEOBACHTER Illustration: Anne Seeger, Editor: Hanna Jaray.
In Switzerland, 155,000 people suffer from some form of dementia, losing their selves little by little. Beobachter magazine discussed the problems of young people suffering from early-onset dementia, a growing group of patients, using an illustration that could not have been more fitting.

RINGIER'S BEST PHOTOS OF THE LAST QUARTER



SCHWEIZER ILLUSTRIERTE Photographer: Kurt Reichenbach, Editor: Nicole Spiess.
Daniel Koch from the Federal Office of Public Health is known as «Mister Corona» throughout Switzerland. But would he be willing to pose with a Corona beer? «Yes, he was completely easy-going. He even had Corona beer in his fridge because it's his favorite brand,» says photographer Reichenbach.



L'ILLUSTRÉ Photographer: Mark Henley, Editor: Julie Body.
They live in Geneva, but not like the city's other inhabitants. Every night, dozens of mostly young men from Ghana, Nigeria or the Maghreb set up camp on the banks of the Arve river. And during the day, they hide their belongings so nobody will take them away. Sad.



L'ILLUSTRÉ Photographer: Fred Merz, Editor: Julie Body.

Who is coming out ahead here? If you could hear Janus speak, you would certainly hear two different answers. Because this turtle is something like a Siamese twin and the star of the Geneva Natural History Museum. It's fascinating: Janus' two heads are independent, each has a brain, but the rest of the body is shared, including the shell that is too small for two heads to retract. That is why the animal would not survive in nature. So, instead, Janus is a museum mascot. Which of the two is more popular is a neck-and-neck contest.

FOCUS ON RINGIER



UNICA Photographer: George Pruteanu, Editor: Irina Hartia. Photographer George Pruteanu set the stage for model Maria in a cool and clever way, dressing her from top to toe in Burberry gear for the September issue of the Romanian magazine Unica.

In this feature, DOMO regularly presents the best photographs published by Ringier titles in the past quarter.



LIBERTATEA Photographer: Elena Driu, Editors: Paul Antoniu und Mihaela Radu. Older people are particularly affected by the corona virus and are often left alone with their loneliness and fears. With her picture from a hospital in the Romanian city of Oradea, photographer Elena Driu shows just how much a little affection and comfort can achieve.



SCHWEIZER LANDLIEBE Photographer: Nico Schaerer, Editor: Denise Oechsli. An idyllic mountainscape near the Bernina Pass between Italy and Switzerland, captured by photographer Nico Schaerer. The pastoral scene is somewhat deceptive, for at the bottom of the picture you can see the customs house La Motta. And there, the customs officers set boundaries for all those who won't abide by the law.



Photo: Geri Born

Master Forger

In 2010, he caused the biggest art-fraud scandal of the post-war era: Wolfgang Beltracchi came up with new pictures of old artists. I now own two drawings of his. A gift from the master. Just because we are united by our love – of motorcycles!

Text René Haenig

If you work for Ringier, you're surrounded by art all the time. Legendarily, publisher Michael Ringier, 70, «the man with an artist's soul and a merchant's mind» (as the alpine lifestyle magazine «Bianco» described him) does not let his artworks gather dust on the walls of his home but prefers to let them delight and inspire his employees.

At the Medienpark in Zurich, I would periodically gaze at the IKEA logo artwork. That's what we journalists dubbed a blue-and-yellow light-box that really only lacks the letters spelling IKEA (I hope the publisher will overlook my possible lack of art expertise). Since my internal move to a different office, I now have a sheep in my field of vision. This beastly poster was put up by a colleague. Whatever it is, it's not art!

For a year now, I have been an art collector myself, the proud owner of two works by an «old» master:

Wolfgang Beltracchi is his name!

He is 69 years old!

And in the art scene, he is considered the master of forgers.

Okay, my works are «just» drawings.

But they're originals.

Nothing's fake about them!

And I know this for sure. Because I watched Wolfgang (we were soon on a first-name basis), keeping a close eye on his fingers, while he was drawing for me. He did it in the books «Selbstporträt» (Self Portrait) and «Einschluss mit Engeln» (Arrest with Angels), which he had written with his

wife Helene. They are about their adventurous story and their correspondence in prison.

Criminal or prankster?

Many regard Beltracchi and his wife as criminals. In Germany in 2011, at the end of the biggest art-fraud trial since the end of the Second World War, the couple were sentenced to six years in prison for organized professional fraud. Beltracchi never copied artworks. He «merely» painted in the manner of well-known artists such as Heinrich Campendonk, Max Ernst or Fernand Léger. «Some 300 paintings by 100 painters in 40 years,» as he reveals. How do you do that? «That's my genetic defect,» says Wolfgang. A perfectionist, he immerses himself in the world of these painters, reads everything worthwhile about them that he can get hold of – and appropriates their respective styles.

Renowned experts have thus been hoodwinked by Beltracchi. They confirmed the authenticity of his paintings in their appraisals. Auction houses and gallery owners fought over his work, sometimes paying millions for a single painting. The prosecutor estimated that the master forger and his accomplices netted a profit of some 16 million euros.

Beltracchi was sentenced to six years in jail, Helene to four years. Before the trial they spent 14 months in custody, and they were allowed to serve the remainder in «open prisons», which are akin to halfway houses.

I met Wolfgang and his wife in

When he was a forger, he had a brush with the law. Today, however, Wolfgang Beltracchi paints by the book in his studio on the Lake of Lucerne. For 60 000 euros, he will paint your portrait. For real.

February 2018. They had recently moved to Switzerland, and the artist was working for Art on Ice. The master and his muse have found a suitable studio in the picturesque town of Meggen on Lake Lucerne. Beltracchi is now wielding his brush in a hall where people used to shake a leg.

There are people you shake hands with for the first time and you immediately feel you know each other. Beltracchi is one of them. We start chatting, chewing the fat about everything under the sun. About his childhood as the son of a church painter and his adolescence as a waiter in a strip joint (where he caught his math teacher on a fun night out). About France (where he used to live in a village in the south) – and about motorbikes! As a young man, he enthusiastically cruised through Europe and North Africa on a Harley-Davidson. I ride an Indian, and when he heard that, Beltracchi began to rave and revealed that he would have loved to buy an Indian back then.

His eyes shine and he makes me promise to show up with my Indian some time.

I mean to keep this promise soon. Especially since Wolfgang even immortalized my Indian in one of his drawings for me. And the other is of a rooster. After all, being a Haenig, I am quasi related to the animal that Germans call «Hahn».

So, my Beltracchis are not only authentic. They are unique works.

Very personal masterpieces.

Utterly unfake. 🌐



The tough job of journalism

The feature-length documentary «Collective» is a masterpiece. It shows how the Ringier newspaper «Gazeta Sporturilor» uncovered one of the biggest scandals in Romanian history and strengthened citizens' trust in the press. Media companies ought to show this film, which won an award at the Zurich Film Festival, to their journalists in order to motivate them to ask hard questions in everyday life.

By Christian Jungen

Every journalist dreams of the big scoop, of uncovering dark deeds and making sure that heads will roll at the executive level. This yearning has always been nurtured by Hollywood with thrillers like «All the President's Men» (1976) with Robert Redford and Dustin Hoffman, «State of Play» (2009) with Russell Crowe or «Spotlight» (2015) with Mark Ruffalo. At the showdown, you get to see how the newspapers with the shocking headlines are spewed out by the

press and how trucks leave the printers' at dawn. And every journalist who has a heart gets goosebumps.

«Collective», by Romanian director Alexander Nanau (41), who won the Golden Eye for Best International Documentary Film at the 15th Zurich Film Festival (ZFF), follows this tradition. The difference, as compared to the Hollywood role models is: «Collective» does entirely without pathos and exaggerations - the scene in which the editor-in-chief, holding

Top: Scene from the film «Collective» by Alexander Nanau. Catalin Tolontan and Mirela Neag of the Ringier newspaper Gazeta Sporturilor during their research.

a cup of coffee in his hand, has to convince the publisher, who has ties to the establishment, that they have to drop their bombshell now, is not there. The film is set in the lowly, unglamorous everyday world of an editorial team and documents how the «Gazeta Sporturilor», a sports newspaper belonging to Ringier with a circulation of 20,000 copies, uncovered one of the biggest scandals in Romanian history.

In 2015, 27 young people died in a

fire at the hip Bucharest music club «Collective». The number of victims was so high mainly because the club was overcrowded and had no emergency exits. The scandal broadened when 37 injured people died in various hospitals - not as a result of their burns, but due to bacterial poisoning caused by bulked-up disinfectants. The fact that diluted cleaning agents were being used in the hospitals was revealed by the Ringier newspaper «Gazeta Sporturilor».

Director Alexander Nanau shadowed the team around the nationally known investigative journalist Catalin Tolontan for 14 months during their ongoing research. We are there in real time as spectators when the journalists stake out the gates of the chemical company Hexi Pharma, which produced the deadly substances, and we are there when Tolontan asks the country's health minister tough questions at press conferences. The film immerses us in a deeply corrupt system where bribes are paid and persons who could be dangerous to the government mysteriously die - the owner of Hexi Pharma perished in a car crash. According to the police, it was a suicide, but relatives of the deceased emphasized that he would never have taken his own life.

The newspaper's investigation led to the largest mass protests in Romania since the revolution of 1989, and several ministers had to step down. As viewers of the film, we keep abreast with the developments, the film is as breathtaking and exciting as a political thriller.

The disastrous fire of Bucharest

On October 30, 2015, a fire and the ensuing mass panic at the nightclub «Colectiv» in Bucharest killed 27 people and injured 147, some of them gravely. In the weeks that followed, 37 of the casualties, who were not in critical condition, died of MRE germs in hospital because the leading Romanian pharmaceutical manufacturer had diluted the disinfectants to the point of ineffectiveness. This scandal was uncovered thanks to the honesty of a physician and the investigative research of the Ringier newspaper Gazeta Sporturilor. Filmmaker Alexander Nanau followed the investigation at close range.



Nanau calls «Collective» an «observational documentary». «I am here because I am curious and I want to learn something», he explained his motivation at ZFF. His approach was very elaborate and risky - «because at the outset, I didn't know what a crazy story would develop in front of our camera.»

The film ennobles journalism because it shows that the fourth estate is important to the protection of citizens, for instance from the consequences of corruption. In Romania, the whole affair has helped citizens to regain trust in the press. However, the film also shows how dangerous it is for investigative journalists in Romania to rap the people in power over the knuckles. Journalist Catalin Tolontan and his editorial colleagues are tipped off by the Romanian secret service that the Mafia has targeted them. Although the film is shot in very sober images, «Collective» is very emotional because it gives the victims a voice. It shows crippled people who have to go on living with severe burns. And it shows parents crying bitter tears at their child's grave, knowing that the corrupt government is to blame for their loved one's death.

«Collective» deeply affected the audience at its ZFF premiere and provoked vigorous debates. Since

The team behind the film:

Alexander Nanau (left) with co-author Antoaneta Opris and Catalin Tolontan. Nanau is a German-Romanian director, cinematographer, screenwriter and documentary filmmaker. He has won, among others, an Emmy Award for «The World According to Ion B.» He was awarded the Golden Eye at the Zurich Film Festival in 2019.

then, this masterpiece has traveled around the world in triumph, picking up many other festival awards along the way. Alexander Nanau believes that the film has met with such a great response because many countries - he names the USA, Brazil, Great Britain and Turkey as examples - are run by incompetent politicians who do not care about the health system and who trample on media freedom. His film, which ends abruptly and confronts us with the question of whether we too would fight against social injustices, is meant to jolt the audience awake. And here is something that «Collective» does have in common with the great Hollywood films like «All the President's Men» and «Spotlight»: It stands a good chance of winning an Oscar. Time magazine, at least, has just voted «Collective» the second-best film of the year. 🌐



The author

Christian Jungen, 47, took on his job as director of the Zurich Film Festival in 2020.

Previously, he had worked as a film journalist for 25 years, having studied Italian linguistics and literature, history and film.

Photos: Hill Studios, Ferda Demir/Getty Images, Magnolia Pictures

«Fear of mistakes wears you down»

Catalin Tolontan and his team at the Ringier newspaper «Gazeta Sporturilor» agreed to be filmed by director Alexander Nanau for a whole year while doing their investigative work. «In the beginning, I was strictly against it,» says Tolontan. The fact that the film might even win an Oscar nomination leaves him cold. «We don't work for the sake of applause.» By Alejandro Velert

Mr. Tolontan, how did you react when filmmaker Alexander Nanau asked you if he could film your work and the members of your editorial staff?

I reacted like a narrow-minded person: That's impossible, an editorial office is full of secrets and we cannot share them. But our greatest and most warranted fear concerned the safety of our sources.

Why did you eventually allow him to follow your work?

Apart from my ego? Okay, I'm kidding. We thought that our work deserved to be promoted, especially at a time when people are so suspicious. And we hoped that a documentary film might reach a younger audience. And this is exactly what happened: Young audiences around the world were deeply impressed. Even schools of journalism in the USA are discussing the film. In Toronto, a young Canadian told me that he would henceforth deactivate ad blockers. Because he now understands that the press needs money and journalism is important.

Your work exposed a swamp of corruption, abuse and lies. Could you have imagined the scale of this scandal when you began your investigation?

Any investigation, no matter how big, begins with a small bit of news. You never know where it will lead. That's why, in my opinion, curiosity is the requisite for any journalistic activity, not the potential size of a story.

And what constitutes a good investigative journalist?

Their ability not to please the public.

To what extent was it an advantage that you and your colleagues are sports journalists? Were you perceived as less threatening?

«Variety» magazine described our usual work as «incompatible» with investigative journalism. I take that as a compliment.

The truth is that it was a great advantage for us to be sports journalists. In the movie «Spotlight», there is a scene in which the lawyer tells the reporter it takes someone from outside Boston to report about the church. And that's the way it was with us in terms of the public health sector. If you want to write about the «Gods in white coats», you should not be indebted to them. Even if they may have given you a little tip-off at some point.

How concerned were you about making a mistake or being misled by false information?

It's fear of mistakes that wears journalist down, not fear of the mafia. For me, the antonym of fear is not courage, but team spirit. Without my colleagues Mirela Neag, Razvan Lutac and dozens of others, none of this would have been possible.

Is a country like Romania, a relatively young democracy, particularly susceptible to corruption?

Of course, an up-and-coming country like Romania is more susceptible. Also, I am not ashamed to say that it is far too much praise when people compare us to Bernstein and Woodward, as the British «Times» did, calling this the best film about journalism since «All the President's Men». We are not



Catalin Tolontan, 52, editorial coordinator for Gazeta Sporturilor & Libertatea.

that good, and I don't even have the right training for it. But the younger generations in Romania are already much better than us. When I joined Ringier in 2018, as editorial coordinator at Libertatea and Gazeta Sporturilor, my goal was to stay for 20 years to train new generations of journalists.

Has this whole affair regarding the catastrophic fire and its consequences made you more optimistic or more pessimistic as a person?

I am optimistic in the sense of the definition given by US-American writer Rebecca Solnit. To be optimistic does not mean assuming that all will go well. To be optimistic is to act in order to choose from all possibilities the one that will make our life as a community better.

You were in Zurich in 2019 when «Collective» was awarded the Golden Eye in Zurich. What are your memories of that event?

Mostly, how after the screening of the film at the Zurich Film Festival, Annabella Bassler, CFO Ringier, and Robin Lingg, head of Ringier's digital marketplaces, approached me and Mihnea Vasiliu, CEO of Ringier Romania. They were visibly moved. They asked me what would have happened if our information had been wrong. I told them that it would probably have meant the end of our careers. I think, right then, they were very proud to be part of this media company. Or to put it with less pathos: it was one of those moments when even the people in charge and the owners realize that the content of their newspaper does not really belong to a company but to the public.

Is a journalist allowed to feel like a hero now and then?

Absolutely not. In my opinion, that is most dangerous. We do not work for the sake of applause.

How well do you like the film «Collective» itself? And how does it feel to see yourself on the screen?

Each time I watch «Collective», I am completely involved. There are so many years of work I see in it. Other than that, I honestly find it quite embarrassing to see myself onscreen.

The film is now going to enter the Oscar race. How would you like attending the Academy Awards ceremony in Hollywood?

I'm a journalist, not a star. And the Oscars are far away. There are hundreds of films competing in each category. In sports, they say that a coach is only as good as his last result. In journalism, it's the same. We are as good as the latest news we provide for the public. 🌐

Photo: Annett Müller



Michael Ringier, Publisher

«Say, how's your home-office day going?» «Very well, I'm on episode eight of season four.» Netflix and Sky Sports are certainly among the winners of the corona crisis. Media companies like ours, sadly, are not. The year 2020 will go on record as our worst year in 177 years of business. Thanks to conservative financing and provident liquidity planning we'll be able to simply forget it in a few weeks' time.

What will remain is the debate about the future of working life. For myself, however, I have already found the answer. I want my old world back. The crucial point isn't even whether I'll spend more time working from home or at the office. First and foremost, I want to see people again. I want to sit across from them. I want to feel the environment they live in. I want to look them in the face, I want to comprehend the ambience in which they present themselves. An office or a living room can also convey a mes-

Photo: Maurice Haas

What Tinder can't do

sage, sometimes more honestly than words.

What sort of meetings are these, where you're only sitting across from a face, hooked up on a 12" screen? It just doesn't work; you can't feel each other. It consists entirely of matters and arguments - with no body language to interpret, no way to read the reactions of those who are not speaking. And no opportunity of spending a short coffee break talking about something completely different. A major meta level of communication is lacking altogether.

How did we make our most important business deals? Would we ever have been able to establish our activities in Eastern Europe if it hadn't been for dozens of trips with hundreds of conversations? Thomas Trüb's frequent-flyer card gives us the answer. Does anybody really believe that you can build companies in Africa online from your desk? Robin Lingg's air-miles account tells a different story.

Why have we been working for almost two years with Palantir - one of the most coveted companies in the world? Marc Walder's and my own restaurant receipts from Silicon Valley chronicle how it all began. And why did la Mobilière become our new partner and shareholder? Because, years ago, Marc Walder and I flew to New York with la Mobilière's CEO Markus Hongler. And because that's where we dined at the loudest restaurant I've ever visited, had enormous fun and grew closer.

After la Mobilière had acquired a share in the Scout24 Group, Marc Walder and I met Urs Berger, the Chairman of the Board, and Markus Hongler for dinner twice a year over several years. We would discuss business, politics, sometimes personal matters. And thus grew a relationship without which la Mobilière would not be a shareholder in our company.

Trust doesn't grow digitally, and neither does creativity. Digital communication is certainly helpful and sometimes efficient, too. But it requires human contact, and it is limited to facts, data and figures. And those, by themselves, have never built a company.

PS: I am the last person who'd want to glorify the good old days. But my wife and I met almost 50 years ago - at the carnival in Lucerne. And that was a thousand times more fun and romantic than Tinder, OkCupid or Facebook will ever be.

Michael Ringier

«From the basement to the roof»

Sandra Vonderach is the new Head of Facility Management at Ringier. And she is always on the job: for a dry stairwell, a good signal and clean energy.



MONDAY

I usually get up between 6.30 and 7.00 am. My morning routine for waking up: shower, coffee, checking the first news of the day. At 8 o'clock, our building manager Daniel Reiser calls me. He informs me about a problem that has preoccupied him for weeks: Water is seeping into the second floor of the

Pressehaus. But where does it come from? And what can we do about it? We chisel away at the concrete stairs, seal them and wait for the next big rain. Let's see if it helps. At least, the low office occupancy works out for us: Nobody complains that the passage is temporarily closed ;-)

TUESDAY AND WEDNESDAY

There is work to be done from the basement to the roof. First of all, I take care of the final inspection of the e-charging stations in the basement: In a cooperation with the city's electric utility, ten e-charging stations have been installed in our underground parking lot. And it's not only the basement that is equipped for the future: In cooperation with Swisscom, we have installed a 5G antenna on our roof. This job allows me briefly to enjoy the view over Zurich's Seefeld district and the lake.



Long live sports! In order to stay fit and regularly overcome my weaker self, I have discovered electrical muscle stimulation training for myself since the beginning of the year. Very effective: after 20 minutes of working out, you are done – and done in!

FRIDAY

Farewell after more than 31 years! We say goodbye to my predecessor Peter Gasser, who is taking his well-deserved retirement. In times of Corona, we can only organize a digital farewell drinks party. Still, more than 50 longtime coworkers inside and outside the company take this opportunity to say «Thank you» and «Take care» on Friday evening – and to toast him.

WEEKEND

The weekend is all about rest and recreation. In summer, I can do that hiking in the mountains, in winter on my snowboard. Vast views and the powerful presence of the mountains mean freedom and relaxation to me. And I also enjoy going to Constance. But not as a shopping tourist! In my hometown, I meet my friends and family and have a good time.



Immune to Lady Luck

Christine Näf runs what is arguably the most beautiful newsstand in Zurich, the one located in the Ringier Pressehaus. She knows exactly what her regular customers want and defies the changes in the media landscape.

Photos: Geri Born, private

Christine Näf, 53, rarely tries her luck. Only when there is a lot of money in the jackpot does she play the lottery, just as many of her customers do. «But even if I had the jackpot in my bank account, I wouldn't want to give up my newsstand.» Christine has been working at the Ringier Pressehaus newsstand for ten years and managed it for seven.

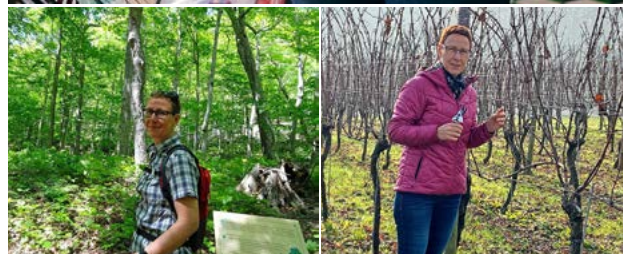
Many customers say the Pressehaus newsstand is the most beautiful newsstand in Zurich. It almost certainly is the cleanest and tidiest in the city. «It is a privilege to have a newsstand in this building. It has to be well maintained, down-the-line,» says Christine.

Christine, who grew up near Solothurn, originally did an apprenticeship as a shoe saleswoman, later managing various Coop supermarket stores and sold train tickets in an Avec convenience store. «I like being in touch with people.» The Pressehaus newsstand mainly attracts a clientele of regulars. One of her loyal customers is publisher Michael Ringier. «He has a wide range of interests. He will buy magazines about art, cars or cooking, she reveals.

The changes in the media landscape have left their mark at her newsstand, too, says Christine, but she bucks the trend as best she can. Her recipe for success: «Our product range is geared to our regulars' wishes. And customers are happy to pay good money for that, because nobody wants to read an architecture magazine online.»

The Corona crisis is a pain, she says. The majority of her customers have been staying away. She has noticed that many people have recently switched away from regular cigarettes, the newsstand's best-selling product group, to tobacco alternatives such as IQOS.

Fortunately, Christine Näf's hobbies are corona-resistant. «I go to my TRX training, I cook, I hike, and my husband and I have vines we cultivate.» Another of her hobbies is jigsaw puzzles. «I managed one with 4000 pieces. I annoyed my husband and my daughter because I occupied all of our tables.» Alternatively, she likes to read. And nobody knows better where to find good reading material than Christine Näf. **AV**



«I never get bored», says Christine Näf. The manager of the newsstand in the Zurich Pressehaus is the mother of a grown-up daughter and has many pastimes. Cooking and reading are just as much a part of her hobbies as hiking. In Oberhasli, located in the Zurich Unterland, she and her husband cultivate their own vines.



Editor's Choice
by Marc Walder

Ringier CEO Marc Walder tells you which books he is reading and why they fascinate him.



Frank Bodin

DO IT, WITH LOVE

While Frank Bodin hasn't written a huge amount of text in his book «Do it, with love», its 216 pages are packed with wisdom, food for thought and inspiration.

One of the best, if not the best advertising executive for many years, Frank Bodin is one of the most creative minds in Switzerland. Each day in 2011, he coined a hypothesis on creativity on Twitter, boiled down to 140 characters, in English.

Unexpectedly, a large community grew around his daily tweets, and as a result, he wrote the book «Do it, with love - 100 Creative Essentials», which became a bestseller and is now in its seventh edition.

Just how timeless these Creative Essentials are was brought home to me by the Corona year 2020. Number 26 of 100 for example: «Embrace your limitations.» Or 34/100: «Look ahead. But not too far.» And, for a dash of optimism, 10/100: «Believing something can make it happen.»

Bodin's Creative Essentials are as simple as they are brilliant - always inspiring, always new. Each word is carefully chosen - in fact, every single comma is, as the book's title proves.

Because «Do it, with love» is also a delight in terms of typography and feel, it is even suitable as a Christmas present. Admittedly, it's not particularly original to give someone a book for Christmas. But as Bodin himself says, 13/100: «Make rules. Then break them.»

Publisher: Hermann Schmidt
ISBN: 978-3-87439-870-1

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