

son he bends toward bemusement. His long gray hair and strong, rather Russian-seeming face give him a bearing and intensity that one associates more with Eastern European intellectuals than with his suave and ironic countrymen. At sixty-five, he remains an original. Beginning in 1968 as an anarcho-Maoist, and as an ally of Sartre in the founding of *Libération*, he has made an exceptional journey, to end in a place that belongs to no one but him. Though he is staunchly pro-war (and comes as close to being pro-Bush as any Frenchman can, announcing that "underneath the carapace of the Baptist bigot there is someone who is a nearly Shakespearean figure, a man who has met tragedy and recognized it as such"), he is not really of the right. He is simply pessimistic.

Glucksmann believes that the only worthwhile "political" project is the constant, unrelenting, and most probably futile amelioration of obvious suffering. "It's very odd that the idea of the doctor, and of medicine, predates by thousands of years the actual ability of doctors to help anyone in more than small ways. Why should it be?" he said once in a conversation. "Well, it's because we recognize the presence of evil as being stronger than the promise of a cure. The simple Hippocratic oath, 'First, do no harm,' is a far, far more radical sentence in the history of thought than it seems. It recognizes the existence of evil—illness—that is in many ways beyond our control. It is the opposite of magical thinking, witch-doctor think, which promises to make well, to cure. 'Do no harm' is the truly radical sentence; 'Cultivate your garden' the unforgivable one."

Above all, literature is for him the natural model of thought: he sees history through the lens of Chekhov and Dostoyevsky and Aristophanes. In the nearly two years since September 11th, Glucksmann has written two books, neither of which has yet been translated into English. The first, "Dostoyevsky in Manhattan," is a strange, brilliant, nightmarish rumination, which sees in the attacks not some strategic rebound or medieval throwback but the evidence of a basic and essentially irrational will to destruction that has found a new home in the Islamic world. To explain the attacks with reference to a



"cause"—poverty, or the Palestine question, or Islamic eclipse—is to miss their essential nature as surely as would reducing the Holocaust to flaws in the Treaty of Versailles. The second book, "West vs. West," which he has just finished, is an acerbic, unhappy account of the Franco-American quarrels, rich in a kind of head-shaking disbelief at the unreality of both sides, but especially the French *bien-pensant* one. Both books point to the same moral. Mass killing has become, in our time, the means of expiating doubt and uncertainty, and the central reality of September 11th was that "a capacity for massive destruction, until then available only to a few, was suddenly in every hand, in countless pockets, and in millions of deranged minds." Dostoyevskian killers were descending on Chekhovian cities.

"What's happening is simple," Glucksmann said. "There are no longer battles, or Auschwitzes. But anyplace can become an Auschwitz. I kill, therefore I am' is the motto of the new generation of murderers. It's really very easy: the Hutus attacked with machetes and a few machine guns, and committed a genocide of a million people. The Russian Army blunders its way into Grozny, and no one cares or objects. Rwanda and Chechnya are the intimations of Manhattan—they are rooted in a will to kill no matter whom. The crime is to be, and the act is to kill: to be a Manhattanite on that morning was your crime, as to be a Jew was the crime in Germany.

"In France, the problem, more than a will against America, is a will to hide—to hope not to be seen at all. But it is insane for the French to see all this as somehow apart from them. It began against us. Nine years ago, the G.I.A."—the Algerian Islamists—"who are a group of the same kind, hijacked a plane and were going to fly it into the Eiffel Tower! The only difference? They didn't know how to fly a plane! They were trying to use the pilots to do their work. Seven years later, they knew how. So to imagine that we are somehow immune is not only crazy on principle—it is the direct opposite of what we know to be the facts!"

He shook his head. "There is a kind of nihilism at large in the world now,

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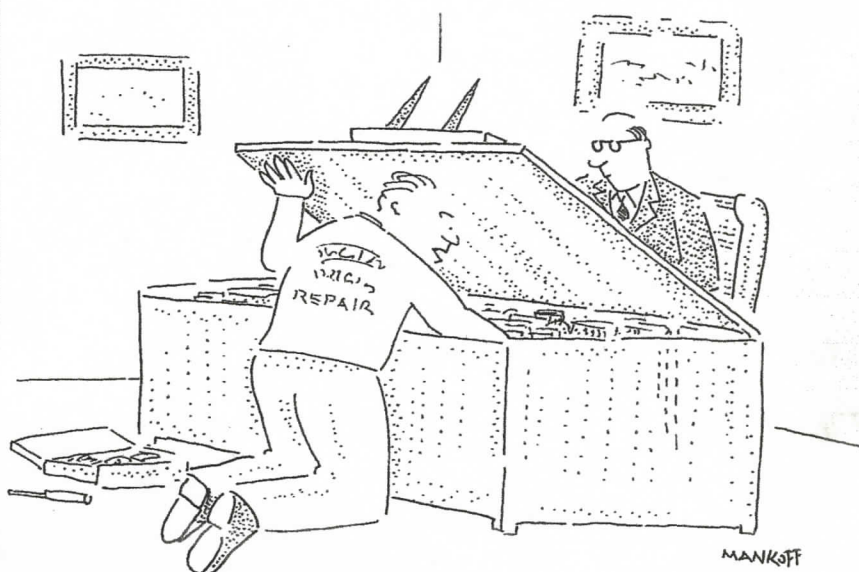
AND: A calendar of *New Yorker*
events across the country

which ranges from the murderous nihilism of the terrorists to the comic, domestic nihilism of the *intermittents*, who have only the power to block, to destroy, and they use it."

What is finally moving about the anti-anti-Americans in France is that they are defending a cosmopolitan tradition—the tradition of the Marshall Plan and the melting pot, where, as B.H.L. rhapsodizes, Daniel Pearl could be Jew and journalist and American and internationalist all at once—that they continue to identify, stubbornly and, these days, perhaps quixotically, with the United States. What is striking, and a little scary, in Paris this year is the *absence* of anti-Americanism—of a lucid, coherent, tightly argued alternative to American unilateralism that is neither empty rhetorical nor mere daydreaming. (In fact, it is easier to find this kind of argument in Britain than in France.) The real threat to France is not anti-Americanism, which might at least have the dignity of an argument, an idea, and could at least provoke a grownup response, but what the writer Philippe Sollers has called the creeping "moldiness" of French life—the will to defiantly turn the country back into an enclosed provincial culture. "For the first time, French people care about their houses," a leading French journalist complains in shock. "That was always a little England thing—and now you find intelligent Parisians talking all the time about home improvements."

This narrowing of expectations and horizons is evident already in the French enthusiasm for cartoon versions of French life, as in "Amélie," of a kind the French would once have thought fit only for tourists. It has a name, "the Venetian alternative"—meaning a readiness to turn one's back on history and retreat into a perfect simulacrum of the past, not to reject modernity but to pretend it isn't happening.

This urge could be felt in an almost unconscious force deforming even the two major exhibitions of the summer, the Centre Pompidou's Jacques-Henri Lartigue retrospective and the National Library's show of the complete Cartier-Bresson, in which the two great photographers were suddenly made cozy and diminutive. The Museum of Modern Art's outsize 1963 black-and-white prints of Lartigue's photographs of speed and action were put on view in an anteroom only to be debunked inside, with all the albums and stereoscopes from which the great work was adapted put on view in "period" glass cases. See, the show said, he's a little Frenchman, one of us, small and stylish and delectable and amateur. The refusal to live in the world as it exists is a kind of nihilism, too. It is possible to look into Lartigue's work and see a modern visionary of dynamism and forward motion; possible, too, to make him a static and comfy mediocre artist of domesticity. It depends, perhaps, on just how spectacular you want things to be, and for just how long. ♦



"O.K., chief, see if she starts now."