

# Should you keep a list of every book you read?



By Nilanjana Roy

“He’s nothing fancy, this Book of Books of mine[...]he is factory-made, gray and plain, with a charcoal binding and white unlined paper, an inelegant relic from the days before bookstores stocked Moleskine notebooks,” writes Pamela Paul in *My Life with Bob*. And yet Bob is special, the most charming of inanimate protagonists, “a bound record of everything I’ve read or didn’t quite finish reading since the summer of 1988”.

All bibliophiles are touched by a form of divine madness, but the strain that overtakes readers such as Paul, editor of the *New York Times* Book Review, is a particularly benign aspect of the condition.

She displays true bravery by listing all of the books she’s finished reading, placing an empty square or an “inc.” (for “incomplete”) to mark the few that she abandons. This is a baring of one’s soul that merits respect — especially when she lists not only the modern classics or the children’s books that she loves (“the yellow-bound *Nancy Drews*”), but also the flirtations with pulp, cheap romances, the dive

into self-help literature.

I can take consolation from another of the great list-makers, the lady-in-waiting in the *Empress Sadaiko*’s court who drew up over 160 lists in *The Pillow Book*. Sei Shonagon was a sceptic of the diary proper but a genius at keeping entertaining, and sometimes stingingly truthful, records of, among others: “Things That Give a Clean Feeling”, “Things That Irritate Me” (lovers who snore, lovers who bumble about while taking their leave), “Elegant Things” (duck eggs, a rosary of rock crystal, wisteria blossoms).

It is quite heroic to list with honesty everything that once appealed to you, without snobbery or discomfort. Even for the most fearless of diarists, much of the shadowed truths of their lives lie in what was not recorded, the moments that slipped through the fishing net of journal entries.

Reading Paul, I began to see how much the books you gravitate towards reveal about your truest loves, your most instinctive urges, as well as more thoughtful, curated appetites. Many of her memories tackle the gap between reality and imagination. A trip inspired by

Vikram Seth’s *From Heaven Lake* sends her into a landscape rendered unfamiliar because she arrives at the wrong time of the year, the weather lowering and dark. In China, Jung Chang’s *Wild Swans* sends her spinning into a brief period of austere abnegation, as she tries to balance her trials — the cold weather, bleeding feet, spurts of hunger — against the sufferings narrated in that classic.

**It is quite heroic to list with honesty everything that once appealed to you, without snobbery or discomfort**

Trying to understand the appeal of the simple but revealing list-keeping that Paul embarked on, I rummaged through other ways

of mapping the self that might be more useful than keeping a diary. Besides, diary entries had begun to take on the dull shape of duty, and I didn’t like being dutiful. Instead, I jotted down odd notes and observations on index cards, keeping them in an empty tin of Old Delhi delicacies, reading them perhaps once a year. Others have maintained records of the meals they cook or eat, for instance, or keep a running record of films watched.

Recently, I discovered the pleasure of not-for-Instagram photography — pictures taken of daily life, or places travelled to, that function as a running journal, not for publication. I envy artists and illustrators, the shining ones whose notebooks are filled with sketches or pen-and-ink doodles.

In an age of Facebook and selfies, people don’t even realise that they might be “lying” by curating a flawless (or at least less imperfect) version of their lives. The opposite is also true: we distrust the over-emotional status update, sensing that perhaps the deepest emotions are not so easily paraded on the public stage. Blogs allowed people more room to be human

— to be flawed, or low, or slightly off-kilter. Facebook, with its steady stream of holiday posts and shiny happy family photos, encourages a collective humble-bragging (I am not immune). It’s not so much that we’re making our lives up as that we’re selecting the more flattering bits, though I notice that the truly happy among my friends increasingly choose to keep the happiest moments of their lives more or less private.

Pamela Paul’s *Bob*, her book of books read over a lifetime, appeals to me far more than Facebook’s seductions because it seems a more authentic way of revealing — and perhaps even being surprised by — yourself. It’s a measure of the success of this simple but brilliant way of list-making that my first reaction was to think with dismay of the many decades of reading life I’d left unrecorded — and now it’s too late.

*Nilanjana Roy is the author of ‘The Wildings’ and ‘The Hundred Names of Darkness’.*

Copyright The Financial Times Limited 2017

# What's wrong with the cultural elite?



AP PHOTO

By Simon Kuper

Picture a coffee shop in a big city almost anywhere on earth. It is filled with stylish, firm-bodied people aged under 50 drinking USD5 coffees. Fresh from yoga class, they are reading New Yorker magazine articles about inequality before returning to their tiny \$1.5 million apartments. This is the cultural elite — or what Elizabeth Currid-Halkett, professor of public policy at the University of Southern California, calls the “aspirational class”. Her book *The Sum of Small Things* anatomises it using fascinating American consumption data. Currid-Halkett herself is a class member (as are some of my best friends), and yet she helps explain why the cultural elite is so despised as to have generated a global political movement against it. Though

Trump is the unmentioned elephant in the room in her book, you think of him on almost every page as the antithesis of this class — indeed, in the minds of his supporters, as the antidote to it.

Trump likes to tag the cultural elite as “the elite” but not all class members are rich. Adjunct professors, NGO workers and unemployed screenwriters belong alongside Mark Zuckerberg. Rather, what defines the cultural elite is education. Most of its members went to brand-name universities, and consider themselves deserving rather than entitled. They believe in facts and experts. Most grew up comfortably off in the post-1970s boom. Their education is their insurance policy and, so almost whatever their income, they suffer less economic anxiety than older or lesser educated people. Their political utopia is high-tax, egalitarian,

feminist and green. They aim to be “better humans” rather than simply rich, writes Currid-Halkett. Though often too busy to be happy, they feel good about themselves. The inequality they see everywhere is never their fault.

When it comes to consumption, the cultural elite’s core belief is a scorn for stuff. Branded goods no longer convey status now that any old oaf can buy them. The top 10 percent of American earners (which includes most of the cultural elite) spends a shrinking slice of its income on cars, TVs and household items, things that the middle class still values. With the sharing economy taking off, hipsters barely own anything at all. Forget shared bikes — Americans can now rent designer dresses.

What stuff the cultural elite does buy is used to adorn their bodies. Living in dense cities where everyone is on display, they need expensive clothes. New Yorkers in particular also have watch fetishes. In 2010 they “spent about 27 times more on watches as a share of total expenditures than everyone else — no city even compares,” writes Currid-Halkett in a typically delicious titbit.

The cultural elite spends relatively little on beauty products, but splurges on exercise, because it thinks that bodies (like food) should look natural. The thin, toned body expresses this class’s worldview: even leisure must be productive. Instead of trawling shopping malls, class members narrate their family hikes on Facebook.

These people maximise what Currid-Halkett calls “inconspicuous consumption”: things you cannot

see. They buy nannies to save time, elite magazines to feed their brains and status, and education to propel their children upwards. “The top 1-5 percent [of American earners] spend on average 5 percent of their total expenditures on education, while the middle class barely spends 1 percent,” writes Currid-Halkett. Her intellectual ancestor Thorstein Veblen, in his 1899 study *The Theory of the Leisure Class*, portrayed Wasps frittering away money, but today’s cultural elite is engaged in a ruthless project to reproduce its social position. Barring some huge economic shift, today’s breastfed elite toddlers will be the elite of 2050. The meritocracy is becoming hereditary.

## What stuff the cultural elite does buy is used to adorn their bodies in dense cities where everyone is on display

This is where the cultural elite’s self-image diverges from the view held by its critics. Trump voters see a class that talks equality while living privilege and exuding contempt. Here are Greenpeace mem-

bers who are always on planes, proclaiming their goodness instead of improving the world. Maybe if everyone shopped at Whole Foods (the upscale grocery chain nicknamed “Whole Paycheck”) the world would improve, suggests Currid-Halkett. But there’s a counterargument: if everyone shopped at Whole Foods, it would lose its status, and the cultural elite would have to shop elsewhere.

These people live in places and ways that hardly anyone else can afford. The only poor people they know are their nannies. Their New Yorker subscriptions might cost just \$90, but are usually premised on expensive educations.

Though Currid-Halkett is too polite to do more than hint at this, class members regard outsiders with either scorn or pity. Overproductive themselves, they look down on iPad parents, the obese and the uninformed. Many even mock their own parents as kitsch provincials. There’s an element of this in the relationship between Ivanka Trump (raised in Manhattan) and her father (from Queens). In fact, long before Trump became president, he was the exemplar of everything the cultural elite abhors. His hair and orange skin scream artificiality. He loves buying stuff. He is fat and ignorant. He thinks exercise depletes the body. He gets his information from cable TV.

No wonder the key rite of cultural-elite conversation has become Trump-dissing (see previous paragraph). And so the cultural wars that got him elected rage on.



AP PHOTO

## ANALYSIS

# An airline-cabin laptop ban could kill people

AP PHOTO



By Joe Nocera

**T**HE laptop ban is coming. Can anyone doubt it? The latest signal came on Fox News last week, when Chris Wallace interviewed President Donald Trump's secretary of homeland security, John Kelly. "Are you going to ban laptops in the cabins on all international flights into and out of the U.S.?" Wallace asked.

"I might," Kelly replied, flashing the small, satisfied smile of a man who enjoys his power. "There are numerous threats against aviation," he added, because terrorists are obsessed with blowing up airplanes filled with "U.S. folks."

When Wallace asked him for a timetable, Kelly just said, "We are going to raise the bar, generally speaking, for aviation security. It'll be much higher than it is now."

Already, the Trump administration has imposed a laptop ban on flights arriving from 10 airports in eight Middle Eastern countries. Not only must laptops be put in checked baggage on those flights, so must any computing device larger than a cell phone. Next, Washington is expected to broaden the ban to include flights arriving from Europe. And, as Kelly implied in his interview with Wallace, eventually the laptop ban is likely to be imposed on out-

going flights as well.

Although the Department of Homeland Security refuses to specify why the ban is necessary — it's classified intel, you know — intelligence sources have told the New York Times and others that Islamic State jihadists now have explosives that can be hidden inside laptop batteries, and that can't be detected by the X-ray machines deployed by the Transportation Security Administration at passenger security checkpoints.

Apparently, the government's view — though, again, no one is saying — is that it's more difficult for terrorists to set off a laptop bomb in the cargo hold than one in the cabin, where they can manually detonate it. Plus, the theory goes, a laptop bomb in the cargo hold would need to be rigged with a timer, which could be more easily be detected by scanners.

Even putting aside the most obvious flaw in this logic — that checked bags are scanned randomly rather than comprehensively — the proposed laptop ban has so many problems, and raises so many questions, that it is hard to know where to start. Why does Homeland Security assume that laptop bombs will only be smuggled onto international flights, not domestic ones? Why can't it just insist that people go through airport security with their laptops turned on, so that agents can see that they are compu-

ters, not bombs?

If people don't have possession of their laptops, won't laptop theft from checked bags become a problem? Will travelers who are part of the USD17-a-year TSA pre-check program be exempt — and if so, won't that exacerbate the unseemly divide between haves and have-nots on flights?

## ■ On a flight with 200 passengers there could be as many as 400 lithium-ion batteries in the cargo hold

Will business travelers revolt? Passengers "won't accept the delays and confusion this rule will cause as it's rolled out," the security expert Bruce Schneier noted recently. "Unhappy passengers fly less." Joe Brancatelli, who runs Joe Sent Me, a website for business travelers, says that the disruption to global business will cost the airlines billions.

But there is one question that looms above all the others, or at least it should. Will a laptop ban actually increase the odds

of an airplane full of passengers exploding — not because of terrorism but because of the lithium-ion batteries that power modern computers? Although this can't be said with 100 percent certainty, the answer appears to be: yes.

Lithium-ion batteries are not benign devices; that's well known among computer engineers and aviation experts. The liquid inside the batteries is flammable, and a short circuit can cause a fire. On rare occasion, the short circuit is the result of faulty design, as with the Samsung Galaxy Note 7 that was ultimately banned from flights and recalled by the company.

But sometimes it happens because a device is jostled or overheats. According to the Federal Aviation Administration, there have been 160 "incidents" involving lithium-ion batteries in cargo holds since 1991. In 2010 and again in 2011, cargo planes carrying pallets of the batteries caught fire and crashed, killing the crew members aboard. And in January, 2016, the F.A.A. issued a warning about transporting batteries in the cargo hold, noting that "a lithium battery fire could lead to a catastrophic explosion."

When a laptop in the passenger cabin spews smoke or bursts into flame — it's happened some 19 times over the last five years, according to Christine

Negroni, Forbes's aviation blogger — it is quickly noticed and extinguished. But a fire in the cargo hold won't be noticed, and experts say that the heat from such a fire quickly grows too high to be extinguished by the fire containment equipment in the hold.

That's why the United States Postal Service stopped shipping products with lithium batteries overseas. It is why Federal Express classifies lithium-ion batteries as "dangerous goods" and imposed strict rules about how they must be packaged. It is why the Air Line Pilots Association has called for "comprehensive regulation governing cargo shipments of lithium batteries."

When I made some inquiries about why the F.A.A. wasn't raising holy hell about Kelly's laptop ban, giving its warnings about the dangers of the batteries, I was told that transporting lithium batteries in bulk creates a different scenario than shipping laptops and iPads in checked luggage. But the agency is also going to be conducting tests to gauge the potential danger a laptop ban might pose. Those tests are now in the planning stages. Given the pace at which the government moves — as well as the need to get this right — the work is unlikely to be done soon.

But consider: On a flight with, say, 200 passengers, there could be as many as 400 lithium-ion batteries in the cargo hold. Yes, they're not packed together. But if one burst into flames in a suitcase, it is not hard to envision the flame spreading, and one battery after another exploding. And what if another manufacturer comes out with a faulty product, as Samsung did, after the ban is in place? It would dramatically raise the odds of a disaster.

When I asked Schneier whether he thought as I do that the odds of a crash caused by a battery fire in the cargo hold was higher than a terrorist attack using a laptop bomb, he replied that there was "simply no way to make the numerical comparison." But, he added, "My intuition matches yours."

In his blog, Schneier calls the laptop ban "security theater," which he describes as "security measures that make people feel more secure without doing anything to actually improve their security." At the very least, you would think that Kelly and Homeland Security would stop to consult other branches of government about the danger they will create by insisting on putting devices with lithium ion batteries in the cargo hold.

After all, it doesn't really matter if you're killed by a terrorist or by a battery explosion resulting from a government mandate. You're dead either way. **Bloomberg**

# Haley: Trump believes 'climate is changing'



U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations Nikki Haley (right)

**D**OES he or doesn't he? Believe in climate change, that is.

You'd think that would be an easy enough question the day after President Donald Trump announced he was pulling the U.S. out of the landmark global accord aimed at combatting global warming.

But don't bother asking at the White House.

"I have not had an opportunity to have that discussion" with the president, responded press secretary Sean Spicer on Friday.

"You should ask him that," offered White House counselor Kellyanne Conway.

Environmental Protection Agency chief Scott Pruitt dodged the question, too.

The president also ignored it during an unrelated bill-signing.

But his U.N. ambassador, Nikki

Haley, answered the question in a new way this weekend. "President Trump believes the climate is changing," she said on CNN's "State of the Union." "And he believes pollutants are part of that equation. So that is the fact."

If so, it's quite a reversal for Trump, who spent years publicly bashing the idea of global warming as a "hoax" and "total con job" in books, interviews and tweets. He openly challenged the scientific consensus that the climate is changing and man-made carbon emissions are largely to blame.

"Global warming is an expensive hoax!" he tweeted in 2014.

But Trump has been largely silent on the issue since his election last fall. On Thursday, he made scarce mention of it in his lengthy remarks announcing America's exit

from the Paris accord. Instead, he framed his decision as based on economics.

Here's what he's said before:

#### TRUMP'S TWEETS

The president's twitter feed once was filled with references to "so-called" global warming being a "total con job" based on "faulty science and manipulated data."

An Associated Press search of his twitter archives revealed at least 90 instances in which he has referred to "global warming" and "climate change" since 2011. In nearly every instance, he expressed skepticism or mockery.

"This very expensive GLOBAL WARMING bulls--- has got to stop," he wrote in January 2014, spelling out the vulgarity.

Often the president has pointed

to cold weather as evidence the climate scientists are wrong.

"It's 46 (really cold) and snowing in New York on Memorial Day — tell the so-called "scientists" that we want global warming right now!" he wrote in May 2013 — one of several instances in which he said that warming would be welcome.

"Where the hell is global warming when you need it?" he asked in January 2015.

The same message was echoed in the president's books.

In "Great Again: How to Fix Our Crippled America," Trump made a reference to "the mistaken belief that global climate change is being caused by carbon emissions."

"If you don't buy that — and I don't — then what we have is really just an expensive way of making the tree-huggers feel good about themselves," he wrote.

#### CANDIDATE AND SKEPTIC

"I'm not a believer in man-made global warming," Trump told conservative radio host Hugh Hewitt in September 2015, after launching his bid for the White House. He bemoaned the fact that the U.S. was investing money and doing things "to solve a problem that I don't think in any major fashion exists."

"I am not a believer," he added, "Unless somebody can prove something to me [...] I am not a believer and we have much bigger

problems."

By March 2016, the president appeared to allow that the climate was changing — but continued to doubt humans were to blame.

"I think there's a change in weather. I am not a great believer in man-made climate change. I'm not a great believer," he told The Washington Post. "There is certainly a change in weather," he said.

Then-campaign manager, Conway explained Trump's view this way: "He believes that global warming is naturally occurring. That there are shifts naturally occurring."

#### EVOLVING PRESIDENT

In an interview with The New York Times in November, after the election, Trump was asked repeatedly whether he intended to leave the Paris accord and appeared to have a new open-mindedness.

"I'm looking at it very closely," Trump told the newspaper. "I have an open mind to it. We're going to look very carefully."

He went on to say that he thought "there is some connectivity" between human activity and the changing climate, but that, "It depends on how much."

Asked about the comment several days later, Trump's now-chief of staff Reince Priebus told Fox News that Trump "has his default position, which is that most of it is a bunch of bunk."

"But he'll have an open mind and listen to people," he said. **AP**

## ASK THE VET

by Dr Ruan Du Toit Bester

### 5 BEST EXERCISES FOR OLD DOGS

**O**LD dogs can still play like puppies. Don't give up on exercise and games just because you have an older dog. A regimen of regular exercise will keep your dog fit and healthy. Here are five great ways to exercise your older dog.

#### Light walks great for dogs with arthritis

Walking is always a good choice. Even with arthritis, dogs can walk for a good distance. Be aware of your distance, however, and don't overtire your dog. If possible, spend some time walking on grassy, uneven turf. This provides a lower-impact walk and may improve her balance. If your dog begins to limp or show signs of pain, let her rest. Don't force your dog to walk if she is in obvious pain, but encourage activity as much as possible.

For dogs suffering from paralysis or severe hip dysplasia, dog carts can restore some mobility. Properly fitted, many dogs are able to continue their daily walks. Other walking aids include a sling-like device that can assist your dog as she goes up and down stairs and ramps that allow easier access to your car or truck.

#### Giving your dog something to retrieve

Fetching does not have to involve long throws or fast running. A gently rolling ball can entertain an older dog, and this game can be played indoors. Be sure you use a ball that is large enough to prevent choking. In a Labrador Retriever-sized dog, a tennis ball may be too small. Pet supply stores carry oversized balls for larger dogs.

#### Tug-O-War instills confidence

Tug-O-War is not recommended for young or aggressive dogs, but in a gentle older pet, this game can instill confidence and strengthen their teeth, gums and jaw. Do not yank or tug forcefully, and let her win sometimes! Look for a dental-friendly rope toy at pet supply stores. They provide a minor flossing action when your dog chews.

#### Swimming minimizes pressure on joints

For the pain of hip dysplasia, dogs often find swimming to be very soothing. Water reduces the painful pressure on the joints and allows a free-



dom of movement that is impossible on dry land. If your dog is not used to swimming, ease her into a shallow area. Often a lake or pond is preferable to a swimming pool. The slippery surface of man-made pools can frighten some dogs. Enter the water with her if possible. Most-but not all-dogs can swim. Some very chest-heavy dogs like Dobermans may not be able to swim safely.

#### Some vets offer water treadmills

Some veterinary clinics offer water treadmills. These devices allow your

dog to walk naturally while being supported by the natural buoyancy of water. Originally used for surgical rehabilitation, they are being used more often for exercise in older or arthritic dogs.

Hope this helps  
Till next week  
Dr Ruan

#### Ask the Vet:

Royal Veterinary Centre

Tel: +853 28501099, +853 28523678

Emergency: +853 62662268

Email: royalveterinary@gmail.com