By Jordan Harrison
Directed by Mark Rucker
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**COVER** Republic Steel Kitchen advertisement, 1956

Characters, Cast, and Synopsis of *Maple and Vine*

*Maple and Vine* received its first reading at New Dramatists in New York in September 2009 and its world premiere production at Actors Theatre of Louisville during the 2011 Humana Festival in March 2011. American Conservatory Theater’s production is the West Coast premiere.

**Characters and Cast**

KATHA.........................................................Emily Donahoe  
RYU .............................................................Nelson Lee  
DEAN..........................................................Jamison Jones  
JENNA/ELLEN .............................................Julia Coffey  
OMAR/ROGER ..............................................Danny Bernardy

**Setting**

New York City and the Society of Dynamic Obsolescence, a 1950s intentional community.

**Synopsis**

**ACT I** Katha and Ryu, young married professionals in Manhattan, are unhappy. They have stressful jobs they find unsatisfying (Katha works in publishing; Ryu is a plastic surgeon), little time to relax, and attachment issues with their electronics. Happiness is “not having enough time to wonder if you’re happy,” Katha laments. The couple is also mourning a miscarriage that occurred six months earlier—the catalyst for Katha’s current insomnia. Finally fed up, Katha quits her job, to the shock of her snarky underlings, Jenna and Omar. Later that day, she encounters Dean, dressed in 1950s attire, in Madison Square Park. She admires his vintage duds and discovers just how serious the throwback really is: Dean is an ambassador for the Society of Dynamic Obsolescence (SDO), an authentically recreated 1950s community. He and his wife, Ellen, moved into the past, not because they found contemporary life to be too difficult, but because it was too easy. Modern-day conveniences, Dean claims, were ruining their lives.

Katha convinces Ryu to move to the SDO for a six-week trial run. As they prepare for the transition to life in 1955, Ellen and Dean visit the new recruits. While the women root through Katha’s wardrobe to identify period-appropriate clothing, the men discuss the complications that Katha and Ryu—who is Japanese American—will face as an interracial couple in a community governed by mid-20th-century attitudes. This will affect their SDO dossier, Dean tells Ryu: for authenticity’s sake, he and Katha will have to live in a more liberal part of the SDO, and Ryu will have more limited job options, despite his medical degree. Ryu expresses his reluctance to leave the 21st century, but he is swayed when Dean mentions that the SDO is a great place to raise kids and could be just what Katha needs to emotionally recover from the miscarriage and find the desire to try for another baby.

**ACT II** At the SDO, Ryu starts work at a box factory. Roger, his new boss, makes racist comments; Ryu, uncomfortable, plays along. That night, Dean and Ellen visit Katha and Ryu’s house for a welcome dinner. As the couples relax into an evening of traditional 1950s entertainment, a rock hits the window. Dean goes out to investigate and discovers Roger, who is angry that Dean has been avoiding him. Dean chastises Roger for his recklessness and sends him away, but not without a kiss and a plan to meet in the park at midnight. After Dean and Ellen leave, Ryu tells Katha about the kiss, which he saw from the window.

In addition to learning to cook traditional 1950s fare, Katha (who now goes by Kathy) attends meetings of the SDO’s Authenticity Committee, which is dedicated to eradicating all anachronisms in the community. Ellen, leader of the committee, addresses the community’s prolific use of contraception, which she says has become “disruptive.” She proposes limiting the sale of birth control. Later, Kathy and Ryu discuss the possibility of having another baby. Ryu wonders if raising a child in the SDO would confuse the child, who would not understand anything about the modern world. When Kathy later discovers that she is pregnant, Ryu’s elation supersedes his concern. With a baby on the way, Ryu asks Roger for a raise; when he is refused he threatens to blackmail Roger and Dean.

Speaking to the Authenticity Committee, Kathy shares her concern about the community’s tolerance of her “Oriental” husband, which is cheating him of an authentic 1950s experience. She asks that the committee find ways to highlight their differences and keep true to the prejudices that would have been current in 1955. She goes so far as to recommend forms of harassment to which the community might subject her husband and herself.

A vandal attacks the community, spray-painting the blasphemously anachronistic word “Google” on Dean and Ellen’s house and car and at Dean’s office. Dean blames the Communists, but he knows the truth, which is confirmed when Roger calls the emergency cell phone locked in Dean’s desk to remind Dean that “Google” is their safe word—the coded alert they use when they need to talk normally, i.e., as their 21st-century selves. Roger begs Dean to run away from the SDO with him. Dean ends the
call and tells Ellen that he has received an urgent summons from headquarters and must leave immediately.

Five days later, with still no sign of Dean, Kathy visits a bereft Ellen. She tells Ellen what Ryu witnessed that night outside their house. Ellen laughs: the revelation of her husband’s homosexuality is no surprise to her. Ellen explains that, back in the modern world, Dean had been openly gay and in a relationship with Roger. The men believed that life was too easy—their families and friends accepted them and they lived in New York, where they had every convenience at their fingertips—and, as a result, they were deeply unhappy. Dean asked Ellen, his best friend, to join them in the SDO as his wife, and, because she was in love with him, she agreed. Dean has now left for good, however, and Ellen is devastated. Kathy decides that they will fit Dean’s departure into Ellen’s dossier: they invent a love affair gone sour and create the fiction that Roger killed Dean and then himself in the park. The town will gossip and Ellen will hold her head high as the tragic widow. A grateful Ellen begins her new life. Kathy and Ryu take over as ambassadors of the SDO.
The Play That Wasn’t

by Jordan Harrison

Last autumn, Jordan Harrison wrote an article for Playwrights Horizons’ newsletter, introducing his new play Maple and Vine. The article, reprinted below, explains the play’s origins—a series of interviews conducted by director Anne Kauffman and The Civilians, the New York–based “center for investigative theater.” These first-person accounts from members of communities that have purposefully distanced themselves from modern life provided the inspiration for Maple and Vine’s Society of Dynamic Obsolescence (SDO). Ultimately, Harrison chose not to dramatize the real-life organizations, yet their presence is very much felt in the fictional world he created. Following Harrison’s article are excerpts from The Civilians’ original interviews.

For nearly a month now, I’ve been throwing away old papers in anticipation of moving to a new apartment. This is harder than it sounds, mostly because I never throw anything away. My partner insists that these papers—bursting from drawers, holding up short table legs—are threatening to take over our lives. “Do you really need this envelope of receipts from 2006?” he asks. I hug it to my chest protectively. “What about this Christmas card from the dentist’s office?” Sentimental value, I tell him. Steam comes out of his ears.

Many of these papers are plays that never were. Or plays that became something better. These are the most difficult to part with. Sure I have digital copies, but there’s the impulse to save the scribbles in the margins, the X-ray of the creative process. (There is also my faint distrust of technology and its transience: today’s USB drive is tomorrow’s floppy disk.) Dwarfing the receipts and Christmas cards are the reams of pages that led to Maple and Vine. Back then it was called Untitled Modern World Project. Obviously there was room for improvement.

In spring of 2008, director Anne Kauffman approached me about working on a project with The Civilians, a theater company that specializes in investigative, documentary-style plays. But Anne didn’t want me to make an investigative, documentary-style play. She and a team of Civilians actors had already conducted hundreds of interviews with people who “retreat” in different ways from the modern world: the Amish, Civil War reenactors, cloistered nuns, prospective Mars colonists, off-the-grid artists living in Maine. Anne hoped that, as a newbie with no direct attachment to the interview sub-
jects, I could be unsparing with the material, I would play fast and loose, I would make something new. No one had told her about my problem throwing things away.

The interviews were irresistibly colorful: A Civil War reenactionist explains how to make a fake wound out of raw chicken thighs; a Mars Society member talks about his wife’s reluctance to move to Mars; a cloistered nun discusses her relationship with her cell phone. It was unthinkable to throw any of this out, so I wrote a reverent first draft that was literally about the lives of Civil War reenactors and Mars Society members, with sequences quilted together from the interview language. Something wasn’t working. The problem, Anne and I came to agree, was that most of the interviewees were simply proselytizing their way of life—they weren’t interested in the ambiguities or challenges of escaping the modern world. Their way was the way.

The project was already six months of my life—giving up wasn’t an option. So I did something I’d never done before: I threw the entire first draft out, and the interviews along with it. (Or, more precisely, I shoved them into a dusty corner under the bed.) I started a new play—simply making things up this time, the way I’m used to—about a contemporary couple who move to a society of 1950s reenactionists. Setting the new draft in a fictitious society allowed me to explore the condition of existing in two worlds—and two time periods—at once. Making things up also allowed me, paradoxically, to invest the play with personal experience. (I’m probably not the first person to fret that the modern world leaves me increasingly disconnected from other people, and from my own body and mind.)

Something I never anticipated was that the cast-off interviews lingered, happily, underneath the surface of the new play. One of Maple and Vine’s central ideas, the surprising benefits of limitation, has its genesis in the interviews. Many of the escapees had said that they were scared by how much freedom they had in the modern world—they were compelled to go to a world where their choices were more limited, where a path was laid out for them. It’s a somewhat queasy-making idea, that someone could be happier with fewer freedoms (a friend of mine, having lived through the first wave of feminism, was dismayed by the idea that someone would elect to be a ’50s housewife), but if I’ve done my job, it’s a comprehensible one. The interviews resurfaced, too, in the form of farbing, a Civil War reenactor term, which refers to anachronistic gaffes like wearing sneakers with your Gettysburg uniform. Writing Maple and Vine, farbing—or “disrupting,” as the denizens of the SDO call it—became a major structural and dramatic cue. The danger of disrupting hovers over all of Act II.

Tomorrow morning the moving truck will be here. Reluctantly I toss the dusty pages of the Untitled Modern World Project into a trash bag. I toss the interviews in with it. My partner nods his approval. I feel all right. A little lighter, even. Writing Maple and Vine taught me to be less scared of throwing things away: the most valuable parts still stick with you.
Excerpts from Representative Civilians Interviews
Conducted between 2003 and 2007 by Civilians members Maria Dizzia, Gibson Frazier, Nina Hellman, Anne Kauffman, Matt Maher, Caitlin Miller, Jennifer R. Morris, Jenny Schwartz, and Colleen Werthmann

Gettysburg Civil War Reenactor: Chrissy, Head Cook with the 70th New Jersey Field Hospital

The first major Civil War reenactment took place in 1961 at the official Civil War Centennial celebration in Manassas, Virginia, but it was not until the 1990s that reenactment became a popular trend in the United States. Today, there are hundreds of reenactments of Civil War battles in the North and the South each year. Reenactors (many of whom prefer to be referred to as “living historians”) range in their commitment to authenticity: the less serious wear polyester uniforms, eat modern food, and sleep in hotels, while the most serious subsist on hardtack and pork rind, wear scratchy wool and ill-fitting boots, and sleep spooning under thin blankets. Each reenactor chooses to portray either a Union or Confederate soldier and joins an appropriate regiment; the regiments engage in reenactments of historical battles, carrying muskets loaded with blanks.

It actually starts out as a funny story. We live on Staten Island, New York. And one July 4 we went to Sail Day. That’s when all the big tall ships come into New York harbor. We were down there for most of the day, watching the ships come in, and the sailors, and they were handing out flyers for living history, which is basically what we’re doing right now. And my husband was like, “Oh man!” Because we’ve always been interested in history, but it was always a passing interest. And he was like, “Oh man, I would totally like to do that.” So I was like, “You go ahead, no way, have fun.” After he was gone for three weekends in a row, I thought, “Hey, I never see my husband.” We’d only been married a short while, and I knew I’d have to join up if I was ever gonna see him. So, they were like, “What can you do?” and I said, “I can cook,” and suddenly I was cookin’.

“It puts things in perspective. You know, when you’re out here for two or three days and you don’t have the TV and you don’t have the phone. . . . I call it getting back to the earth. There’s something very . . . calming about it to me.”

It took us a while to find a unit we liked. You know, you have to be careful: you’re spending a lot of time going from place to place with these people, so you gotta make sure they’re a fit. So we tried a couple that didn’t work out and we found this unit and that woman over there [pointing] used to be the head cook and when I came along she was like, “Whew, congratulations: you’re the new head cook.”

I’ve started collectin’ a lot of this stuff [indicating her cookware]. You find it at flea markets, some on eBay, but it’s expensive. But, for instance, I bought that whole collection of baking stuff for two dollars. So some of it you can find for cheap, but you gotta
wait ’til the right stuff comes along. It’s an investment. You don’t wanna farb. Oh, yeah, farb stands for “Far be it from me to tell you that you’re not period correct.”

It was awful, the first time I did one of these [i.e., farbed]. I’d bought a dress. (You know, it’s expensive: this one was 75 bucks. I couldn’t wait to learn how to sew. Yeah, I sew my own stuff now.) So I was out here cookin’, and I had a dress that was authentic but hadn’t found the shoes yet, so I thought it was okay just to wear black tennies. I was hopin’ my dress would hang far enough down so no one could tell. But, sure enough, this woman from another camp comes strollin’ up, takes a look at my shoes, and says, “You’re really farbin’ with those sneakers.” I was so upset. I couldn’t believe I’d got caught. And, I’m whinin’ and my husband says there’s a woman sellin’ authentic shoes in a booth across the way, but they’re 90 bucks!

See, like, all this [indicating what is around her tent] is farbin’. Normally, I’d cover this tin foil up with a coupla towels. We got all this stuff in the tent, but the public don’t see it. Someone’ll come through the camp before the gates open and say, “Public in 15 minutes: hide your farb!”

Oh, I love it. It’s nice bein’ out here without the TV or a phone. It gives me time to myself—to think. This is my vacation time. I don’t go on cruises and I don’t do all that. I come out here and live like I’m poor. I actually have people at work (I’m an administrative assistant) who say, “When is your next reenactment? You’re awful cranky!” Because I come back with a totally different attitude. It puts things in perspective. You know, when you’re out here for two or three days and you don’t have the TV and you don’t have the phone. You kind of have time to just be by yourself. I call it getting back to the earth. There’s something very earthy about cooking over an open fire. Something very calming about it to me. And I enjoy it.
The Twelve Tribes: Josh

Founded in Chattanooga, Tennessee, in 1972 by Elbert Eugene Spriggs, the Twelve Tribes is a religious sect and intentional community born of the Jesus movement of the 1970s. Members of the Twelve Tribes are Messianic Christians (those awaiting the second coming of Jesus—whom they call Yahshua) who live together in communities in 30 cities across the United States (Spriggs assigns each new member to a community), renouncing worldly possessions, refurbishing old buildings, and homeschooling their children. Twelve Tribes members do not watch television, and the men wear their long hair in ponytails while the women wear baggy pants or long skirts. The Twelve Tribes support themselves through such cottage industries as The Yellow Deli, a sandwich shop franchise with eight locations.

The modern world? Do you mean modern society? Well, I mean, look around. You go to a big American city, they all look the same, the same strip malls, the same stores, the same restaurants. You don't get that in a small town like this. There's culture here. I mean, yeah, I guess that's what it is—culture. . . .

If I was doing a play about the Community, you know what I'd do? I'd have two people on the stage and they see a rundown building, you know? And one of them would say, “Hey, this is a great building. Wouldn't it be great to fix it up?” And they would start to work on the building, and then, like out of nowhere, a whole mess of people, like 12 people, come from out of nowhere and start helping these two build. And they would be singing songs, and someone would say, “Hey, can I have that hammer?” and someone else would say, “Hey, would you mind handing me that ladder?” and then they'd finish it and look up at what they’d done and just start singing a song.

Well, I used to skateboard and snowboard—I was in the punk rock scene for a little while—but I just thought there was something more. I grew up in Atlanta, so the Bible was very important to me. I lived in Florida for a little while, and I gave up everything and moved to California with nothing but my backpack. I lived in California in a tent, in Big Sur. Then I trained with David Jackson—do you know who he is? David Jackson? He was a man who lived with Native American Indians and he trains people in wilderness survival. You know, how to hunt and how to live in the wild, and that's what I wanted to do. Just to walk out in the wilderness, you know? Leave it all behind and not be afraid and just go. . . .

Well, when I was in Colorado, I was just trying out the Community. You know, I wasn't getting paid, I was working and staying with the Community. But I still had my possessions in Florida, and I owed my grandfather money, and I had some credit card debt that I needed to take care of, and the Brothers in the Community said that maybe I should take care of all of that if I really wanted to be a part of the Community. Because
when you give your life to the Messiah, you have to give over completely. You can't be still hanging on to your personal things. That would be putting yourself first and in order to live this life you have to put Yahshua first. It’s not for everybody.

So I left Colorado and went back to Florida. I found a job working at the YMCA where I got housing and a paycheck, you know, doing maintenance, but something was still missing. I was real close to becoming an alcoholic. My grandfather is an alcoholic and my father was close and I came real close. I would spend most of my nights drinking wine and reading the Bible. And then I called the 800 number. That 800 number on the back of those free papers that goes right here, in this house. So I called that 800 number and talked to someone here and told them my situation and they suggested that I should come up to the Northeast and visit the Communities here; because they’re more established, they really have it down, and that’s important. So I checked out Oak Hill and Cambridge and finally came here and that was it.

I've given up my sovereignty. I used to think about only me. I mean, in the big city, what is life like? I want some coffee, so you go get some coffee. I want to watch TV, so you go watch TV. I want to drive around, so you go drive around. It's all about me, me, me. When you follow Yahshua, you’re giving that up and following the Master. You can't be tied to yourself and follow the Master. I had to give up the travel bug. If I wasn't happy some place, I'd just leave. I've been here two and a half years. Before this, I think the longest time I'd spent in one place was nine months.

The Mars Society: Member

In 1998, aerospace engineer and author of The Case for Mars Robert Zubrin founded the Mars Society, an international organization of Mars enthusiasts (who include filmmaker James Cameron and serious scientists from NASA). Whereas NASA has estimated the cost of a manned mission to Mars at \$450 billion, the Mars Society has designed a voyage plan that would cost just \$20 billion and would take under a decade to launch. (The travel plan involves mining fuel for the return trip from the red planet. The Mars Society mantra: “travel light and live off the land.”) The Mars Society raises funds for Mars-travel-related research and launches exploratory earthbound missions on terrain similar to that of Mars. The society's more modest goals have to do with acquiring knowledge about Earth through interplanetary study; its most ambitious goal is "the settling of the Martian New World," according to the society's website: "an opportunity for a noble experiment in which humanity has another chance to shed old baggage and begin the world anew; carrying forward as much of the best of our heritage as possible and leaving the worst behind."

The Mars Society was founded by some very renowned NASA scientists, people who were frustrated by the government dragging its heels on Mars research. You see, we have the technology to get to Mars. If we had the funding, we could have a permanent human presence on Mars in ten years. In just ten years! It’s true. We have what we call the ten-year plan. The great thing about Mars is that all the resources you need are
“You can be of two minds. You can be safe and comfortable in your own little life, or you can have curiosity and interest in what else is out there. I’m of the second mind.”

there on the planet. We don’t need to bring it all with us. Think of the first explorers to the New World. They could come with very little supplies because the land they were settling had so many resources. They could live off the land. It’s the same with Mars. For example, right there on the planet you have the gases to make jet fuel. You don’t need to bring it with you. There is a frozen ocean just under the surface of Mars. So, if we set up a presence we could terraform the planet. Yes, *terra* meaning earth—basically we could reform Mars’s atmosphere to be like Earth’s. We could remake Mars in Earth’s atmospheric image. We don’t have all the technology for that yet, but it is definitely possible.

The world has gotten so small. There are no new ideas. We need some new ideas. . . . For example: last night, my wife and I, we were watching some beauty pageant on TV. I hate beauty pageants, don’t get me wrong, but we were watching it, and I said to my wife, “How are they going to pick a winner? All the women look the same. They all have the same hair. The same body. They all look the same.” [Laughing] The world is totally homogenized. There is nowhere left for us to explore. For example, my wife and I, we went to Costa Rica for vacation, and we are at this tiny little restaurant in the middle of nowhere. This is a very remote place. There are no phones, no TVs, no nothing, and we go to this little restaurant for a drink and what t-shirt does the waitress have on? What t-shirt does she have on? A Carnegie Deli t-shirt. It’s unbelievable. We went to London and we got off the plane and we had to drink tea from Starbucks. Everything’s the same. Homogeneous.

How do I define the modern world? That term doesn’t really mean anything if you ask me. We get in our cars, we drive to work, we punch in numbers, we get back in our cars, we drive home. We get in our cars, we drive to dinner, we get back in our cars, we drive home. . . . We eat the same food, we wear the same clothes, we’re fat, we’re completely out of touch with our bodies. We need some new frontiers. Human beings have always been explorers, discoverers, but there’s nowhere left on Earth to discover. So we have to look to space.

You can be of two minds. You can be safe and comfortable in your own little life, or you can have curiosity and interest in what else is out there. I’m of the second mind.

Am I religious? No. I don’t care about that. I think it’s going to lead to the downfall of civilization. If there’s a big mushroom cloud that appears over the city, trust me, it’s not gonna be because of money or politics, it’s gonna be because of someone’s imaginary friend. You know that guy who got beheaded? The last thing they said before they cut off his head was, “God is great.” . . . That’s fine if you need that kind of comfort and security, you can do whatever you want, but me, I’m just not interested. You’d be surprised. There are lots of religious people in the Mars Society. There are all kinds of people, teachers and artists and everyone.
Would I go? I think I might. I think I might. But I don’t know if I could convince my wife. It takes six months to get there and then you have to stay there a whole year until the planets realign, and then it takes six months to get back. And if you need to radio for help it takes 40 minutes to send a message. On the moon it’s instantaneous. But we don’t need to go to the moon. We’ve been to the moon. The moon is rock. People think you need to go to the moon first because it’s closer. But if you want to fly to Paris you fly to Paris. You don’t fly to Brussels first because it’s closer.

If we could go to Mars tomorrow, there’d be a line around the block. We want to start over. From scratch. A new civilization. For example, how would we choose to structure our lives? Would we use currency? What would it be? Maybe we would trade in water? Maybe air? Maybe we wouldn’t use any money at all. God! In several generations, would we look different? Would we adapt to the atmosphere on Mars? What would the settlers’ children look like? Would they adapt to the 38 percent gravity? They might be taller. They might have enlarged spines. Their kids might not be able to come back to Earth. Or they might not want to.

Other space groups, they just want to talk about space. But we actually do something.
The Amish: Henry, Retired Farmer

The Amish, a Protestant sect founded in Switzerland by Jakob Ammann (1644–1730) following a schism in the Mennonite order, emigrated to North America in the early 18th century, settling primarily in Pennsylvania, which remains the home of the largest community of Old Order Amish. The Old Order Amish are famous for their eschewal of modern technology: they do not use cars, electricity, or telephones. They work the land using centuries-old practices; the children attend one-room schoolhouses and finish their education at the eighth grade. The Amish wear plain, homemade clothing (for the men, black hats and dark-colored suits; for the women, bonnets and long skirts). Although the Amish have drawn the attention of tourists who enjoy a glimpse into the past, they try to maintain a simple life “in the world, but not really of it,” as their truism goes.

Why do you wanna talk to us anyway, we’re just like you, we’re human beings. We just wanna take it more slowly, hold back a little bit. Don’t wanna go as fast as the world is going, but we can’t anymore, we’re losing out. I used to bale hay by hand, but now we gotta have hay balers. You can’t run a farm anymore with less than 40 or 50 head of cattle. I used to have 8 when I first started out. We had room for 16, but I just got 8, milked them all myself. Now, they’ve got machines that do that for you because you’ve got to: it would be impossible to milk that many cattle without a machine. [Whispering] It’s all going down [makes a gesture with his hands of being wiped out]. There’s no more salt on the earth, and when there’s no more salt [makes wiped out gesture again]. Those two planes flying into the buildings was pretty modern, wasn’t it? Don’t you think those two planes flying into the buildings was modern?

I believe that modernization will ruin the world. The whole deal.
Nuns: Mother Superior Teresa

The sisters of the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox Church devote themselves to a life of monasticism, characterized by solemn vows of celibacy, poverty, and obedience. Traditionally cloistered and living communally, depending on the order, nuns live more or less hermitic lives. Some spend more time in the outside world, ministering to the sick, for instance, while others rarely step beyond the cloister walls during a lifetime dedicated to prayer, meditation, and simple, hard work.

It is hard of course to give up things. It is a struggle. Iceland—food so bad I didn't eat for the first six months; the food was so terrible it was gross in my mouth. It was not what I was used to. My mother came and brought me food from home: for the first time I experienced pleasure in six months. I was so happy, it was the first time I ate in six months. Oh, of course I ate. I did not die. But, yes, it is hard to give up things.

I am the filter. Some of the older sisters, the job is too much, because you have many responsibilities as Mother, so it's not always the oldest who is the Mother. You are elected to be Mother by the other sisters every three years, but most of the time you are reelected.

I have to decide what to tell the other sisters. I have more access to the news and people—here I am talking to you. And if it's gossip about so-and-so dating, I don't tell them; but when a plane crashes into the World Trade Center, I tell them. When the war in Iraq started, I tell them and we pray. I pray to know what to share with the sisters. I also have the same calling as the sisters. I am no different. I have more access to the outside world, so it can be a struggle for me, but I pray. I have a cell phone so the nuns can always find me. I'm always running around, but they need to find me so I have a cell phone.

At first when you come to the monastery it is exciting. You have so much energy and zeal for it, and you think, "Oh, I am going to be a great nun!" But then it's the same every day and every month and year—and it's boring. You get bored. And that can be hard when it's time to pray. You can't pray in your mind because you are not quiet in your mind. You need to rid yourself of the distractions and the breaks in your mind, because when it's time to pray it's time to pray.

I never thought I would be a nun. Never! When the priest would say at the end of a sermon, "We pray for all of the priests and missionaries and nuns and if you are calling please let it be me to serve," I thought, "No way! Don't let it be me!" But then I read the autobiography of Saint Teresa, and was very inspired. It was gradual. I started asking questions about being a nun, and then my priest gave a sermon on charity, and I remember walking home with my cousin. We were very good friends, and I said, "I think

"You get bored. And that can be hard when it's time to pray. . . . You need to rid yourself of the distractions and the breaks in your mind, because when it's time to pray, it's time to pray."

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I want to be a nun.” She said, “You are crazy!” Then, soon after that, I went and spent eight days at a convent near my home. I did not tell my mother where I was going because I knew she would be very angry, and when I came home, before I said anything, she opened the door and said, “No way! You are not becoming a nun!” She was very upset. . . .

We have one nun who is 82 and she has been here since she was 18. And another who is 78 and she has been here since she was 21. One nun found an American quarter on the street in Poland and she saw it as a sign to come to America and get rich. So she came to America and then she lost the quarter and she didn't know how to interpret it. But now she knows. She became a nun after she lived in Philadelphia for a while. . . .

My mother was very upset: “Will you never come home for Christmas? For my birthday? For my funeral? I will never get to hug you again?” She didn't speak to me for a year. But now she is reconciled with it. Parents don't understand that this can be a career. Like an engineer is a career. Parents have plans and dreams for their children and to them this life seems like a waste. They want grandchildren. My brother was so angry at me for leaving. The day I was leaving for Iceland he would not get up out of bed; he pretended he was asleep he was so mad at me.

One of the nuns I was with in Norway, her father wanted her to be an engineer. She always wanted to be a singer; she went to engineering school and got her degree, but all the while she was taking singing lessons. Then she decided to become a nun and her father said to her, “Bad enough you wanted to be a singer, now you want to be a beggar!?” . . .

I have written two plays and an opera. Sometimes, like you, I am inspired by one sentence or phrase or idea and then I make a play. We perform them for each other. One was a Christmas play about the Prince and the Beggar. The Prince asks, “What is Truth?” The Artist says, “Look at the sky and the trees: that is truth.” The Astronomer says, “See that star: that is truth.” And the Prince says, “Let’s go. I want to follow that star.” And they came to the King, who is truth.

The theater is a nice ministry. You can get people to realize things without even knowing it.
Revisiting the ’50s
An Interview with Scenic Designer Ralph Funicello

By Emily Means

Last season, scenic designer Ralph Funicello faced the challenge of Bruce Norris’s award–winning Clybourne Park. He was tasked with creating a middle-class 1959 Chicago home that, during intermission, could age 50 years and appear, in the second act, as the same house—but extremely timeworn—in 2009. For Maple and Vine, A.C.T. brought Funicello back for another 1950s challenge. Whereas Clybourne Park presented an “everyday, less idealized version” of the 1950s, he says, in Maple and Vine he could embrace the fantasy of the era. And, unlike Clybourne Park, in which the static set changed only once, between acts, Maple and Vine takes us to multiple locations, requiring more than 30 scene changes. In fact, he admits, “When I first read it I thought, ‘Geez, this seems fairly impossible!’” When we spoke with Funicello before rehearsals began, we learned how he overcame his initial doubts and how his own experiences during the 1950s helped shape his design for Maple and Vine.

This play begins in New York City. Can you start by telling us how you created that modern-day world?

I tried to achieve New York without doing a series of completely realistic rooms and environments. I hit upon the idea of using a large photographic drop. Even though it’s a photograph, it’s shot from something like the 14th floor of a building, so it’s not completely realistic. The same backdrop is used in every scene in New York, so it’s become a symbol of the impersonal, bustling city.

What will the transition into the 1950s environment be like?

I have to keep reminding myself that the second act, even in terms of the play, is a construct. The characters in the SDO [Society of Dynamic Obsolescence] pretend that they’re living in the ’50s, but it’s pretend: it’s an ideal, fairytale view of life in the 1950s. I thought of a couple of different ways to replace the New York City drop during the second part of the play and ended up framing all of Act II with this monopoly house cutout upstage, through which we see a beautiful cloud-filled sky. It’s that iconic image of the suburbs in the ’50s: the perfect little house and picket fence.
I know several scenes in Act II take place inside homes in the SDO. How did you design those interiors?

Our modern image of the ’50s—the Ozzie and Harriet house—was not really the ’50s at all. That was Hollywood’s version of the ’50s. For the most part, everything we see in those television shows, the furnishings and architecture, is really much older. That architecture is based on the ’20s and ’30s, because that’s when old movie-lot houses were built. Ozzie and Harriet’s actual set was based on Ozzie and Harriet’s real house, which was built long before the ’50s. People have an image of the 1950s without realizing that some of it is not 1950s at all.

Are you playing with this misconception?

One of my ideas (we’ll see if we get there or not) is that Katha and Ryu’s New York apartment in the first act is actually decorated with Mid-Century Modern furniture: the Danish sleek stuff that everyone wants to own now, which we think of as quintessential ’50s. In the 1950s, those were the type of high-end furnishings you might have found in an ad executive’s house in New York—it wasn’t what the average American lived with.

When they go “back in time” in the SDO, Katha and Ryu choose the Ozzie and Harriet version of the ’50s, but I thought that perhaps Dean and Ellen consider themselves a hip couple, and so, even in the SDO, they choose to live in the “hip” version of the 1950s.

For Act II, the show calls for many settings in the SDO: from living rooms and bedrooms to a box factory to a park. How did you design for so many specific locations?

I knew that the scenery in the second act would need to be fragmentary, because shifts between scenes need to happen so fast. I had to make choices about how much scenery
we could use in any single scene. For example, there’s a small piece of kitchen in one scene—it’s only going to be a counter, actually. The fact is, I don’t need much more and don’t have much more room. To transition elegantly, scenes will break apart, furniture going off in one direction, the wall flying out, whatever it might be, as other things slide in for the next scene. Hopefully, it will be extremely smooth getting from one place to the next.

Do you think having lived through the 1950s yourself affects your design?

I was a kid in the ’50s: I’m probably the only person working on this production who actually was alive then. I’ve obviously been looking at a lot of clips from TV shows I grew up with: Father Knows Best, Ozzie and Harriet, My Three Sons, and all the others.

I could say that my life experience always affects my work, but I will also say that I do not have a particularly warm and fuzzy feeling about what life was like back then. There’s a lot of nostalgia: “Do you remember when things looked like this, and you could do that, and kids played outside all day long?” My thinking is always: yes, I remember, but I also remember that it was a time of incredible segregation, sexism, and anti-Semitism. I remember all that going on in our community right outside New York City, even though the sense was that everything was fine, certainly for white America. By the 1960s we started to realize that there really was a problem.

Do you enjoy designing shows that require you to delve into historical periods?

I enjoy designing, period. I’m forever investigating different eras, trying to figure out what choices people would make at a certain time, what choices a character of that period might make. As I said, for Maple and Vine we’re designing a world in which people believe it’s 1955, which gives me a little leeway. It’s a reconstruction. The characters living in the SDO are making do, trying to recreate something in much the same way that I try to do for the stage all the time.
Rules of Excess
An Interview with Costume Designer Alex Jaeger

By Dan Rubin

*Maple and Vine* may have a cast of just five actors, but among them they wear close to 80 costumes. Not only are these costumes responsible for telling us which world the characters are inhabiting in any given scene—whether modern-day New York City or a recreated 1955 community—they also help to articulate just how deeply each of the characters has embodied the 1950s ethos of the Society of Dynamic Obsolescence (SDO). “There were a lot of rules in the 1950s,” explains costume designer Alex Jaeger. “Rules about wearing white, wearing gloves—all these rules we don’t see any more that gave people clues to social status, even education.” The day before rehearsals began in A.C.T.’s studios, Jaeger was kind enough to take time out of his hectic schedule to tell us about how those rules influenced his designs and to teach us the importance of period-correct undergarments.

When designing *Maple and Vine*, did you strictly follow the rules of 1955 fashion?

Yes and no. The SDO is actually a made-up 1950s world: we’re not really in the ’50s. What I am trying to do is make the costumes too good. It’s a *Stepford Wives* kind of situation: very contrived. Obviously it’s not the same feeling as *Stepford Wives*, but everything is modeled on the idea of striving for perfect authenticity. All these people make a conscious effort to follow the rules [of the SDO]. They have classes and debriefings [about every aspect of life in 1955].

How does Katha’s costume depict her decision to move to a more restrictive world?

Her first office look is very mannish: pants, a man’s tailored shirt. Her clothes at home are ultra casual: jeans, which would have been completely unacceptable in the ’50s. After she makes the decision to move to the SDO, her office look is a skirt with a pretty, feminine blouse, so even though she is still in the modern day, she is getting her mind around the ultra-feminine way of dressing [that defined the ’50s]. The first time we see her in the ’50s, she’s wearing a very feminine floral dress.
Is the clothing of Ryu (who is Japanese American) affected by racial sentiments of the 1950s?
Yes, in that the only job he can get is working in a factory. He doesn't have an opportunity to wear nice suits, so there is kind of a disconnect between him and Katha: because she's white, she has the freedom to go all the way with playing the dress-up game, but his situation keeps Ryu from doing that. There are a lot of interesting dynamics in terms of the couples in this play, including Dean and Roger, the businessman and the rough trade worker he's having an affair with.

How was status defined by what a man wore?
There wasn't as much variety of styles as we have now, so men's clothes were all similarly cut. It was all about fabrics. Pants may have been cut in the same silhouette, but some would be made of heavy cotton and others would be nice wool.

People would notice the difference?
It would be obvious. People didn't wear jeans outside the house. You wore them gardening or working in the factory, but you wouldn't be seen walking down the street in them, necessarily. It's more like the difference between chinos and a suit today. One is a little more casual and one is more formal.

Have you been thinking about how fashion defines us as a society less today than it did in 1955?
I think that's definitely in the play. It's interesting to see how people change and how people don't change. For example, the fit of somebody's dress—or the color, or being inappropriately overdressed for an event—could mark her as a “loose woman.” There were day dresses, dresses you wore at home, dresses you wore for lunch, dresses you wore for cocktails, and dresses you wore for evening. They were all very defined and different. If a woman was a little trashy, a little low-class, she might wear a cocktail dress to a luncheon, because maybe she didn't have all those different kinds of dresses.
Whereas today we purposefully buy clothes that function in multiple situations. Today it’s a lot more about being practical. But people—some people—still have an innate desire to express themselves in what they wear, and even people who don’t dress fashionably have made the choice not to for specific reasons—whether for practical reasons, or financial reasons, or anti-societal reasons. Everyone has to choose every day what they purchase and what they put on. There is intention behind those choices.

Were people free to make that choice in 1955, or was it mandated by social decorum? It was more mandated, I think.

When designing a costume for, say, Ellen, did you think about what she would choose for herself, or were you more interested in what society would have put on a woman of her stature?

A little bit of both, but then we also have to think about how the audience sees it. We want to clue the audience in to the psychology, the psyche, of these characters. The design might be correct for the time but not the right choice for the play.

Were you able to find a lot of what you’re using at vintage stores? We built a couple of things [in A.C.T.’s costume shop]. There were more elements on the original build list, but San Francisco has such fantastic vintage shopping that we
ended up finding many things that we couldn't have built any better, so we kept crossing them off the list. Both Julia Coffey, who plays Jenna and Ellen, and Emily Donahoe, who plays Katha, have great figures for this period. Often, vintage clothes don't fit modern women; that is true for men, too, but especially for women. People have different body shapes now to begin with, and then with the corseting and such . . . We've put the actors in period underwear that helps with the silhouette, but when people grew up wearing what they wore back then, their bodies ended up shaped a little different from ours.

What do you mean by “period underwear”? They weren't really wearing corsets?

They weren't wearing corsets, but they did wear pretty hefty foundations—girdles. At the end of the ’40s and all through the ’50s, there was something called the New Look, which Christian Dior started. It was a revolution in fashion—something no one had ever seen before—and it required a very small waist. So they made these little mini corsets that were just for your waist so you could get an hourglass figure. With very pointy breasts, so they had these bras called “bullet boobs.” They had to stuff them, because nobody’s breasts are shaped that way.
Will the actors get rehearsal underwear?

A lot of actors say that wearing period-appropriate undergarments in rehearsal helps them, no matter what the period. Having the proper foundation helps them with their posture. The skirts are really big, so we’re going to give them petticoats and little girdles and things to wear in rehearsal, high heels, all the stuff they have to get used to. The men have it a little easier.

Do the men have a different kind of undergarment? Or just briefs?

Boxer shorts. I think briefs came into fashion around this time, but most men still wore boxer shorts. We found some period boxers, because there is the sex-in-the-park scene and we will see the men’s underwear.

The things you have to keep in mind!

I know.

How much research do you need to do before you go to vintage stores?

Often things are mislabeled, and there’s a fine line [between decades]. We think of the fashion of the ’40s, ’50s, and ’60s as distinct, but there wasn’t one fashion until 1949 and then suddenly something completely different in 1950. There are transitions. And 1955 was a real transition year. Some of the clothes look more ’60s and some more ’40s. We are right in the middle. You have to know what those fashions were and the different fabrics they used. Dresses in the early ’60s were cut the same way as dresses in the ’50s, but the fabric was different. Colors were different, and the types of prints. The ’50s stuff was a little sweeter. The ’60s stuff has a lot of abstract painterly elements and different colors: for example, turquoise patterns on a lime-green background would be more ’60s or very late ’50s. You have to have a close eye on these things.

Are there any 1950s elements that we still see in modern attire?

That’s what’s so interesting about modern fashion: everything is okay today. Most fashions are influenced by clothing history. The ’70s were based on the ’30s, the ’80s by the ’40s and ’50s. Currently, the skinny suits are the Mad Men look of the ’60s. There are always elements around if you look for them. The “hipster” look popular now is a combo of ’50s and ’60s. It all comes around again at some point.

A big part of ’50s fashion was a reaction against the fabric rationing of the ’40s because of the war: you were allowed one yard of fabric for a skirt, for example. A lot of ’40s designs were based on those restrictions: what is the nicest thing we can make with that much material? As a result, the ’50s were all about excess and abundance. They had really big skirts made from six yards of fabric. People were sick of the restrictions.

Also, during the ’40s women went to work in factories. It was a kind of early women’s liberation movement; a lot of women loved working and responded to it. But when the soldiers came home, there was this feeling that it was unpatriotic to keep a job that
a man could have. Also, a lot of people wanted to have families and children. There was a pendulum swing: women went back into the home and this ultra-feminine look appeared.

People really wanted to enjoy their prosperity and feel rewarded for working so hard and surviving the war. The cars were huge, with big fins on them, and fur coats . . . any sort of luxury item was really big. A lot of movies during the ’50s were set in France. There were a lot of French elements in decorating, and everybody went to Paris for vacation. France’s economy is based on luxury—champagne and wine and chocolate and fashion.

Are you purposely using any 1955 fashion in the modern-day scenes of the play?
Not really. I’m trying to make a clear distinction. The modern-day clothes are all black, gray, and sleek.

There are a few dream sequences in this play. Are you designing anything in particular for them?
They are a little over the top. The one gown we’re building is for the last dream: a really big, elaborate ball gown, which would be ridiculous for the character to be wearing at home. So we’re pushing the ’50s as far as we can go.
So Much Choice, So Little Time
Why We Long for the Past

By Dan Rubin

In 1813 Robert Owen, a successful British cotton-mill manager popular for improving the working conditions of his employees, urged his countrymen to reject the unhealthy impulses of the Industrial Revolution and instead focus on the well-being of their bodies and souls. He lamented that they would waste years improving the effective powers of “lifeless machines” and feared a future in which people would “estimate time by minutes . . . [and] the chance of increased gain by fractions,” while letting their “living machines” fall into disrepair. In our modern world, where time is measured by the microseconds of CPU speeds and profit by the penny-fractions of high-frequency stock trades, Owen’s warnings seem especially prescient.

Owen longed for the community of a simpler era and fantasized about a place where inhabitants worked the land together, trading the selfishness of capitalism for the cooperation of communal living. In this environment, he thought, moral character would thrive. The fledgling United States held the promise of such a paradise, and in 1826 Owen launched his utopian society, New Harmony, along the Wabash River in Indiana. Less than two years later, the enterprise was abandoned (largely because the population was comprised of intellectuals who knew nothing about farming), but it connected Owen to a long line of malcontents who have gone to extremes to reject the ways of their contemporaries—from Diogenes the Cynic, who flouted the social conventions of ancient Greece, to the merry destitution of the Bohemian and Beatnik countercultures of 19th-century Paris and 20th-century San Francisco, to England’s current Time Warp Wives pretending to live in the early 20th century so that they escape “the hectic grind of modern life.” American philosophers Arthur O. Lovejoy and George Boas called this phenomenon “the unending revolt of the civilized against civilization.”

Present-day manifestations of the escapist impulse captured the attention of director Anne Kauffman, a founding member of the New York–based “investigative theater” company The Civilians, when she met a Hasidic restaurateur in Brooklyn. She and her then-boyfriend (now-husband) were suffering from relationship woes, and the restaurant owner extolled the benefits of his own arranged marriage. He shared other ways his community resisted the present: for example, they had little access to the internet. “I started to wonder what made people, living in the age of information, choose to limit
their access to technology, information, modern conveniences, choice, etc.,” Kauffman said in an interview. “I also remembered something my mother had said to my four sisters and me. She said, ‘I feel sorry for you girls. You have so many choices these days. When I was growing up, I knew I was going to get married and become a housewife. How do you deal with the limitlessness of your world?’”

How do we deal with the limitlessness of our modern world? Not well, according to sociologist Barry Schwartz. In his 2004 book, The Paradox of Choice: Why More Is Less, he argues, “As a culture, we are enamored of freedom, self-determination, and variety, and we are reluctant to give up any of our options. But clinging tenaciously to all the choices available to us contributes to bad decisions, to anxiety, stress, and dissatisfaction—even clinical depression.” Compiling and analyzing data from a number of studies, he shows that, beyond a certain threshold, the presence of additional choices (both consumer choices and life choices) not only makes decision making more irritating, it also negatively affects the chooser’s satisfaction with his or her choice once made, because “thinking about the attractions of the unchosen options detracts from the pleasure derived from the chosen one.”

In other words, too much choice makes us miserable. And a lot of us are miserable. A 2008 Gallup Poll found that 10 percent of Americans—more than 30 million people—are “not too happy”; despite our prosperity and achievements, we are only the 15th-happiest industrialized nation in the world.

The default options of society were once so powerfully engrained that most choices were made for us. This is no longer true. Schwartz observes, “Millions of Americans can live exactly the lives they choose, barely constrained by material, economic, or cultural limitations. They, not their parents, get to decide whether, when, and whom they marry. They, not their religious leaders, get to decide how they dress. And they, not their government, get to decide what they watch on television or read in the newspaper.”

But with no one telling us what to do, how do we decide how to live, what to wear and watch? There are guides out there, but the reputable statistics-driven Consumer Reports has spawned websites like Yelp and Angie’s List that aggregate consumer-generated anecdotal reviews; e-tail merchants like Amazon.com even offer their own rating systems to help the indecisive shopper make the right purchase. Before we can trust the information these resources provide, we must vet them, making sure we choose the right resource to rely on. As Schwartz writes, “The avalanche of electronic information we now face is such that in order to solve the problem of choosing from among 200 brands of cereal or 5,000 mutual funds, we must first solve the problem of choosing from 10,000 websites offering to make us informed consumers.”

The autonomy associated with seemingly infinite choices comes with a price. As informed consumers, we believe that we have no excuse not to find an option that perfectly fulfills our needs. The perfect cell phone. The perfect college. The perfect mate. They are out there. They must be. With so many options, how can one not be perfect? And when we realize that we have settled for less than perfect (and we inevitably have),
it is our fault. We have failed. And after putting in all the time and energy it took to sift through all the possibilities, that failure feels substantial.

In addition to feeling lousy because of all the bad choices we have made, we have also sacrificed time itself. Schwartz suggests, “Time is the ultimate scarce resource, and for some reason, even as one ‘time-saving’ bit of technology after another comes our way, the burdens on our time seem to increase.” This, too, contributes to modern malaise, because the time we spend picking and choosing could otherwise be spent doing what truly makes us happy: fostering relationships.

The 1950s were not the golden age so many—including Maple and Vine’s Society of Dynamic Obsolescence—make them out to be: racial segregation was legal and gender inequality accepted; intolerance of “otherness” was declining but still high; as depicted in LIFE magazine, Americans were white, straight, and Christian. However, writes Robert D. Putnam in his 2000 treatise on the collapse of the American community, Bowling Alone, what that decade had going for it was a sense of community. Since then, while obvious strides in equality have been made, the country’s social capital (which Putnam defines as “the connection among individuals—social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them”) has suffered:

During the first two-thirds of the century Americans took a more and more active role in the social and political life of their communities—in churches and union halls, in bowling alleys and clubrooms, around committee tables and card tables and dinner tables. Year by year we gave more generously to charity, we pitched in more often on community projects, and (insofar as we can still find reliable evidence) we behaved in an increasingly trustworthy way toward one another. Then, mysteriously and more or less simultaneously, we began to do all those things less often.

We are still more civically engaged than citizens in many other countries, but compared with our own recent past, we are less connected. We remain interested and critical spectators of the public scene. We kibitz, but we don’t play. We maintain a facade of formal affiliation, but we rarely show up. We have invented new ways of expressing our demands that demand less of us. We are less likely to turn out for collective deliberation—whether in the voting booth or the meeting hall—and when we do, we find that discouragingly few of our friends and neighbors have shown up. We are less generous with our money and (with the important exception of senior citizens) with our time, and we are less likely to give strangers the benefit of the doubt. They, of course, return the favor.

Putnam argues that our once-deep involvement in organizations with diverse goals and constituents has been replaced by passing interests in “smaller groups that reflect the fluidity of our lives by allowing us to bond easily but break our attachments with equivalent ease.” The same can be said about our friendships. In the mid 1970s, the
average American entertained friends at home 14 to 15 times annually; by the 1990s, that figure had fallen by nearly half to 8 times a year. In terms of actual time spent socializing informally, we spent only two-thirds as much time at the end of the century as we had three decades earlier. “If the sharp, steady declines registered over the past quarter century were to continue at the same pace for the next quarter century,” Putnam fears, “our centuries-old practice of entertaining friends at home might entirely disappear from American life in less than a generation.”

Putnam’s worries came four years before the advent of Facebook, which revolutionized how a generation communicates with its peers. A significant majority of experts surveyed by the Pew Research Center’s Internet & American Life Project in 2010 agrees that the internet quantitatively improves social relations: “Email, social networks, and other online tools offer ‘low friction’ opportunities in people’s lives. The internet lowers traditional communication’s constraints of cost, geography, and time; and it supports the type of open information sharing that brings people together.” The internet may bring people together in a certain sense, but not physically. The study observes, “Among the negatives noted by . . . the respondents: time spent online robs time from important face-to-face relationships.” Another prevalent concern was that the majority of internet relationships are superficial, which might help explain the center’s 2009 finding about social isolation: “Compared to the relatively recent past, most Americans now have fewer people with whom they discuss important matters, and the diversity of people with whom they discuss these issues has declined. . . . There are simply fewer people we can rely on in a time of need—whether it is a shoulder to cry on, to borrow a cup of sugar, or to help during a crisis.”

Putnam explains this trend started well before the World Wide Web: the fabric of American community life began to unravel in the 1960s and 1970s, and the process accelerated in the ‘80s and ‘90s. A generation of Americans unified by the World War II zeitgeist of patriotism was replaced by the baby boomers, who favored individuality over engagement. Women, who had been largely responsible for facilitating social interactions, began focusing more on careers. Suburban sprawl meant we were spending more time alone in our cars, commuting to neighborhoods where, more and more, our neighbors were strangers. And a half-century before the internet, television increasingly allowed us to indulge in news and entertainment privately at home. T. S. Eliot once described television as “a medium of entertainment which permits millions of people to listen to the same joke at the same time and yet remain lonesome.” With the proliferation of countless channels and shows to choose from and the ubiquitous use of recording devices, on the off chance that we are still laughing at the same jokes, in 2012 we are almost certainly doing so at different times.

“We are paying for increased affluence and increased freedom with a substantial decrease in the quality and quantity of social relations,” Schwartz summarizes Robert Lane’s findings in The Loss of Happiness in Market Democracies. “We earn more and spend more, but we spend less time with others. More than a quarter of Americans
report being lonely.” Schwartz’s solution to the paradox of choice should therefore be unsurprising: spend less time choosing.

As the number of choices we face increases, freedom of choice eventually becomes a tyranny of choice. Routine decisions take so much time and attention that it becomes difficult to get through the day.

In circumstances like this, we should learn to view limits on the possibilities we face as liberating not constraining. Society provides rules, standards, and norms for making choices, and individual experience creates habits. By deciding to follow a rule . . . we avoid having to make a deliberate decision again and again. This kind of rule-following frees up time and attention that can be devoted to thinking about choices and decisions to which rules don’t apply.

In 2003, inspired by the Hasidic restaurant owner, Kauffman and a team of Civilians actors set out to find contemporary populations that had retreated from modernity’s overabundance of choices to embrace lifestyles with more rules. They spoke with a Mother Superior who struggled with what to tell her cloistered nuns about what is happening in the world outside. An Amish farmer who longed for the days when he could bale hay by hand. A Civil War reenactor who made sure her clothes and cookware were period correct. An earthshipper who lived in an entirely off-the-grid, fully sustainable house made from natural and recycled materials. And a member of the Mars Society who lamented that Earth has become too small and too redundant.

Four years later, these interviews would inspire Jordan Harrison’s play Maple and Vine. Harrison’s first draft strung together stories of a family of Mars colonists, a troupe of Civil War reenactors on the battlefield, and a vision of what would happen if New York City suffered a prolonged blackout. But the reverence with which he treated the source material handicapped the piece, and three years ago he started over. This time he stuck with one story: that of a successful married couple who, miserable with their lives in New York City, choose to embrace a more restrictive 1955 lifestyle.

Harrison infused the new draft with fears and anxieties he and his partner share about New York. “Some weekends we’ll drive up the Hudson River and find a field and just sit there for two hours straight doing nothing because we need more space,” he confessed during the first day of Maple and Vine rehearsals at A.C.T. He has friends who moved to Vermont and are now raising chickens. Another friend lived in a one-room

“I want the kind the milkman used to leave on my doorstep.” By Dan Rubin.
shack in India for six months. “I see this impulse in people in their 30s to slow down and to limit their choices. That was one of the common themes in the original Civilians interviews: people said they were frightened with how much freedom they had in the modern world. It wasn’t that they were running from how noisy and fast-paced the modern world was: they felt like it was almost too quiet and lonely. They missed having a society looking down on them saying, ‘This is morally right and this is morally wrong.’ That’s what they were looking to create for themselves.”

Although he is not ready to don Civil War regalia or pack up for Mars, the playwright understands how nostalgia might morph into something more extreme. Like Katha in Maple and Vine, he too pacifies himself by watching Anne of Green Gables. “It’s not that I long for the ’50s,” he told Playwrights Horizons last fall. “I wasn’t there. But I certainly long for the ’90s: that feels simple to me relative to today. I feel like, increasingly, it’s difficult to—as Dean would say—be quiet with my own thoughts. It’s more difficult now to fall into the experience of reading a book and being transported by it, and it’s more difficult not to be on Facebook and yet be connected to my friends. The terms of our world are changing. The terms of the way we engage with other people.”

This is one of the reasons why Harrison champions theater—as the world has evolved, theater has adapted, but the shared experience of theatergoing has remained relatively unaltered. “I don’t think theater will ever die for that exact reason,” he told Playwrights Horizons. “Society could fall, and one of the things we can make with our hands will continue to be theater. It may be at the fringe of public awareness now, but it’s also like the cockroach of the arts. It will always be around.”

In a sense, making and attending live theater fulfills Robert Owen’s fantasy of communally enjoying a creation meant to benefit our “living machines.” And you do not have to move to New Harmony, or Maple and Vine’s idyllic 1955 neighborhood, to experience it. You can safely escape in the velvet-seated darkness of a hundred-year-old theater for hours at a time and then return to the modern world—if you choose to.

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“With All Deliberate Speed”
A 1955 Retrospective

by Michael Paller

On May 31, 1955, a year after it ruled that segregation in schools was unconstitutional, the Supreme Court ordered that desegregation be carried out with “all deliberate speed.” The phrase, which allowed school districts to carry out the order as slowly as possible, was as appropriate as it was unfortunate: its peculiar contradiction captured the essence of the 1950s. We may associate the decade with conformity and complacency, and while there was plenty of that, from Communist witch-hunts and blacklists to vast tracts of suburban look-alike houses, the ’50s were ambiguous and complex. The seeds that led to the social and cultural upheavals of the ’60s were quietly—or in some cases, not so quietly—being sown.

Some of the characters in Maple and Vine choose living in 1955 over 2012 because they’re overwhelmed by the number of choices available to them on a daily basis. In 1955, however, Americans faced an array of choices that in their experience was also dizzying. Consumer goods, which had been scarce in the preceding decades of depression and war, were suddenly abundant—cars, refrigerators, stoves, washers and dryers, televisions, toasters, record players—and buyers who had gone without for so long were in no mood to hold back. Many went on buying sprees not just for themselves but for their children, who, they determined, would not be deprived in the way they had been. This materialism would eventually give way to the (short-lived) antimaterialism of many of those offspring in the ’60s, but, meanwhile, the total retail sales of consumer goods in America reached $15 billion in 1955 (equal to about $120 billion today). Not everyone, however, shared in the abundance.

The December 24, 1956, issue of LIFE magazine reported that 22 million American women—one-third of the nation’s total—held jobs. Never before, the article declared, had so many women been at work—not even during World War II, when they built the ships, planes, jeeps, and weaponry that won the war. Most of those 22 million, however, held low-paying jobs as clerks, factory workers, or salespeople. The only professions open to large numbers of women were the “helping” ones: teachers and nurses. Income was also unequal: The median salary for a man in 1955 was about $3,400; for a woman, it was $1,100. Still, LIFE declared, since the rise and fall of Eve, women had never had it so good. Some thought that maybe they had it too good. Actress and writer Cornelia
Otis Skinner groused in that issue that women were pursuing too many mannish occupations. “Trains are my favorite means of transportation,” she wrote, “but the day I look though the cab window of the Century and see a woman behind the throttle . . . I will take a plane.”

Meanwhile, away from public view, boundaries were being pushed. A small trial of a birth control pill underway in Boston produced perfect results: not one of the 50 women taking part ovulated while on the new drug. When the results were announced in October 1955 at the annual International Planned Parenthood League conference in Tokyo, no news service found them important enough to report.

In Rockland County, near New York City, a housewife who’d been fired from her job in journalism for wanting a second maternity leave was writing magazine articles from home. At her typewriter, she mulled over the fate of women like herself, educated women who were raising children, taking care of the house, volunteering in the community, and feeling that, fulfilling as these activities might be, they weren’t enough. This sense of dissatisfaction, she wrote, was “the problem that has no name.” The pages piled up as she raised her family and the ’50s came to an end, and in 1963 Betty Friedan published the book that had begun as an article no magazine would accept: The Feminine Mystique. The modern women’s rights movement that emerged with such vigor in the ’60s had its quiet beginnings in the ’50s while eight million people a week were reading LIFE.

Presiding over the nation’s politics and managing the tensions of social change—sometimes by ignoring them—was President Dwight Eisenhower. His “middle way” philosophy of governance sought to prevent liberals from expanding on New Deal programs while restraining conservatives from ending them altogether. The results depended on how you looked at them: one could argue that, compared to the ferment and advances of the ’30s, domestic policy in the ’50s was stagnant and timid; on the other hand, Eisenhower presided over the expansion of Social Security to provide monthly benefits to permanently and totally disabled workers; an increase of the minimum wage; and the establishment of the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare. He initiated the interstate highway system, which stimulated the economy and the growth of suburbs.
but also facilitated white flight from city centers. At the same time, millions of federal employees were forced to sign oaths attesting to their political and moral purity or risk accusations of communism or homosexuality. Thousands lost their jobs, as Eisenhower made no attempt to rein in the witch-hunts conducted inside and outside of Congress. In 1957, Senate Majority Leader Lyndon Johnson pushed through Congress the first civil rights legislation in 82 years by persuading liberals that the bill was the strongest one possible, and conservatives that it was the weakest one they could get.

In some places, such slow progress was no progress at all. Three months after the Supreme Court issued its order to speed up desegregation (but not too much), a 14-year-old African American from Chicago named Emmett Till was kidnapped, beaten, and murdered in Money, Mississippi, for allegedly whistling at the white owner of a grocery store. An all-white jury found his killers not guilty after less than an hour’s deliberation. On December 1, however, in Montgomery, Alabama, a seamstress named Rosa Parks refused to give up her seat on a bus to a white passenger. She was the third young African American woman to be arrested in Montgomery that year for so refusing. Martin Luther King, Jr., Roy Wilkins, and the NAACP became the high-profile faces of the bus boycott and federal lawsuit that followed, but it was a less-known group of women, the Women’s Political Council, led by Jo Ann Robinson, who decided the day after Parks’s arrest to organize the boycott. Early on December 2, without waiting for the consent of Parks or her lawyer, Robinson and three colleagues wrote and copied flyers that were distributed in the afternoon. Three days later, the boycott began. That week, the civil rights movement took a major step forward, thrusting itself into the national consciousness of a supposedly sleepy era.

In 1948, Alfred Kinsey published his *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male*. He reported that about one-third of American men had at least one homosexual experience resulting in an orgasm in their lifetime, and that men who were exclusively gay comprised about 10 percent of the population. The report confirmed what many gay men were beginning to experience as they gathered in ever greater numbers in bars, parks, and on beaches. At least in urban centers, gays and lesbians were forming a group identity for the first time. In the decade ahead, they would need it. Kinsey’s report sent shockwaves through mainstream America, as did his 1953 follow-up on women’s sexuality, which suggested that up to 6 percent of women were exclusively homosexual. J. Edgar Hoover called Kinsey’s work “a threat to our way of life” and ordered the FBI to investigate him and the Kinsey Institute. The Bureau established contacts with police departments in cities and small towns across the country gathering evidence of “perversion,” and gay men and lesbians were regularly harassed, arrested, and in some instances committed to mental institutions. In 1952, the American Psychiatric Association classified homosexuality as a sociopathic personality disorder—a disease—and instructional films teaching the warning signs of homosexuals were shown in schools.

Some gays and lesbians decided to fight back. In 1950, a group of men in Los Angeles led by Harry Hay established the Mattachine Society to organize gay men into a politi-
cal minority group—no one had thought of them that way before. So concerned were its members, many of them married, by the consequences of exposure that the society was kept secret. Still, in 1952, it paid the trial expenses of one of its members who had been arrested for soliciting a policeman; to everyone’s surprise, he was acquitted. The following spring, Mattachine distributed a leaflet around Los Angeles that instructed gay men on how to respond to police harassment and arrest.

One September night in 1955, Del Martin and Phyllis Lyon got together with three other female couples in San Francisco to discuss creating a place for lesbians to socialize away from the bar scene. Their discussions led to the creation of the Daughters of Bilitis, the first national lesbian association in America. Within five years, the organization had chapters in most major American cities and was publishing a monthly magazine, The Ladder. As the scholar Marcia Gallow writes, “Through dances and debates, advocacy and research, conferences and correspondence, the Daughters helped build a significant 20th-century movement for social change.” Later, Mattachine and DOB would be viewed by post-Stonewall activists as cautious and conservative, but in the ’50s, when homosexual activity was illegal, they laid the groundwork for organizations that would combat discrimination out loud and in public.

When we think of popular culture in the ’50s, boomers among us might first remember television and its multiple portrayals of happy, white nuclear families who solved their problems in 22 minutes: I Love Lucy, Ozzie and Harriet, Father Knows Best, and The...
Among them. On other screens, however, mores were less certain and behavior less restrictive. One of the most iconic film images of the ’50s was of Burt Lancaster and Deborah Kerr in a horizontal, wet, nonmarital embrace as the waves of the Pacific crashed over them in From Here to Eternity. In The Rose Tattoo, Anna Magnani finds her life renewed through sex with a man (Lancaster, again—towed-off but still inspirational) to whom she’s not married. Disney’s Lady and the Tramp, with its final image of the formerly footloose mutt Tramp, collar around his neck, gazing fondly at his Lady and their pups, may have celebrated the suburban comforts of domesticity, but James Dean infiltrated the dreams of men and women alike in Rebel Without a Cause and East of Eden. At the record store, you could choose either Pat Boone’s or Fats Domino’s recording of “Ain’t That a Shame.” Mitch Miller’s “Yellow Rose of Texas” and The Four Lads’ “Moments to Remember” were popular, but neither sold nearly as many records as “Rock Around the Clock.” In November 1955, Elvis Presley, whose name recognition was then limited largely to the South and Southwest, signed a record deal with RCA committing him to four singles for a 5 percent royalty and $5,000.

On October 7 at Gallery Six on Fillmore Street, Allen Ginsberg read Howl to an astonished crowd that, led by Jack Kerouac, urged him on with chants of, “Go! Go!” When the poem was published a year later, it didn’t displace Peyton Place, The Last Hurrah, or Auntie Mame on the New York Times’s best-seller list. Still, the event heralded the arrival of a new generation of writers devoted to frankness, sensuality in all its variety, and the kinds of experiences that weren’t covered in family newspapers. These writers were probably not the sort to be found at Disneyland, which had opened on July 17—unless they were participants in the CIA’s Project MK-ULTRA, which began testing LSD on unwitting civilians in 1955.
“Gracious Living”
From Rosie the Riveter to Domestic Goddess

By Amy Krivohlavek

“[We have noticed] the clear emergence, since the war, of a new attitude among women toward homemaking ... they are finding that housekeeping and family management are fascinating, enjoyable pursuits, offering the fullest opportunities to express themselves and their capabilities.”

—House Beautiful magazine, 1954

Sandwiched between the war-torn 1940s and the brazen cultural revolutions of the 1960s, the 1950s can be personified best by their resplendent female centerpiece: the serenely smiling mother, smartly outfitted in dress, heels, and pearls, pulling a home-cooked meal from the oven. Her home was more than a retreat from the outside world; it was her fortress, as the media promoted fears about nuclear warfare and Communist invasion to reinforce the importance of domestic life.

But women who had enjoyed an unprecedented degree of freedom and self-actualization during the 1940s weren’t keen on giving it up to become housewives again. In fact, nearly 18 percent of women—12 million, mostly working class—already held full-time jobs when the United States entered World War II in 1941. Thanks to the propaganda of Rosie the Riveter, that number soon grew to 18 million, as women took over many of the jobs that conscripted men left behind. And they didn’t consider it temporary work: 80 percent wanted to keep their jobs after the war, according to a 1944 survey by the Women’s Bureau of the Department of Labor. Once the men returned, however, they wanted their jobs back, and many women were dismissed from or quit their jobs to return home, where the importance of their role was underscored and celebrated. The Ladies’ Home Journal slogan “Never Underestimate the Power of a Woman” was meant to offer the ex-working woman some consolation. Although she might no longer have the power to make decisions in the outside world, at home she could rule.

This new emphasis on home life—and the lack of access to birth control, which was introduced in the 1950s but was illegal in most forms until the 1960s—resulted in a dramatic baby boom. Falling from around 22 in 1890, the median age at which women married reached a record low of 19 in 1956, after which it would steadily climb, reaching
a new high of 25.6 in 2007. And women didn’t just marry, they quickly started families, conceiving on average seven months after tying the knot. They also had ambitious goals, as the number of children young couples wanted increased from two to four. According to Elaine Tyler May in *Homeward Bound*: “The baby boom was accompanied and reinforced by a wide-spread ideology favoring large families, reflected in everything from media images and medical theories to public practices. Parenthood was practically deified in the popular press.”

More babies meant more mouths to feed, with more money needed to bring home the bacon. Not only that, but the war had awakened women—especially middle-class women—to the satisfactions of working in the outside world. As Laura Shapiro writes in *Something from the Oven*, “Rosie the Riveter had gotten fired at war’s end; a few years later, she was married and living in a brand-new suburb. But for the rest of her life she remembered what it was like to work for pay. In one way or another, that memory changed everything.”

Despite the national push to return women back to the home, many continued to work. By 1960, 40 percent of all women over the age of 16 held a job. Whether they worked or stayed at home, however, one thing all women had in common was the responsibility of putting food on the table. “The bride’s first chore and the grandmother’s last,” as Shapiro describes it, cooking was still very much the woman’s duty in 1955. Her domain, the pulsing heart of every home, was the kitchen, framed by the media as women’s ideal “work environment.”

The rationed austerity of World War II was followed by a time of prosperity and extravagance, as the number of homeowners nearly quadrupled between 1950 and 1960. Consumer spending increased 60 percent in general, but the amount spent on household furnishings and appliances rose a staggering 240 percent. In the four years following the war, Americans bought 21.4 million cars, 20 million refrigerators, 5.5 million stoves, and 11.6 million televisions. Publications such as *Living* (“the magazine for young homemakers”) and *LIFE* magazine promoted an ideal for entertaining and aesthetics known as “gracious living,” a state of living tastefully marked, it seems, by magnificently complex home-cooked meals.

But for working women, spending hours toiling over the stove to put home-cooked meals on the table simply wasn’t possible. The food industry, which during wartime had perfected methods of dehydrating, canning, and freezing to create battlefield rations, saw a new market and rushed to meet it head-on, unveiling a wide spectrum of quick-cooking products. Canned soups and vegetables were already readily available, but many of the new products on the market were direct crossovers from the war: field rations such as Spam and canned bacon, as well as dehydrated potatoes. One enterprising engineer even attempted to create dehydrated wine. The first shortcut introduced by General Mills after the war was Pyequick, “an entire pie in a package”—essentially, a bag of dehydrated apples and a bag of crust mix. The frozen foods company Birds Eye became a legend in the industry when it sold 7 million pounds of fish sticks in 1953 and 30 million in 1954. The ultimate convenience food, breaded and fried and dipped in ketchup, fish
sticks tasted remarkably little like fish, but they made an easy dinner for a busy evening. An ad for Hunt’s tomato sauce raved in praise of this clever culinary combination: “It’s a perfect recipe for busy homemakers and career women—ready in a jiffy.”

Still, few women were willing to accept the wholesale substitution of “convenience foods” for home-cooked meals. Although frozen orange juice was readily available, half of all families continued to squeeze oranges, and stringent social pressures pushed middle-class women away from the efficiency of quick-cook cuisine. The Ladies’ Home Journal even advised its food editors to limit their use of packaged foods in recipes lest they fall below standard.

What’s more, few families owned freezers in the early 1950s. In 1952, roughly every American home had a refrigerator, but those who had freezers typically lived on farms, where they froze their own homegrown vegetables. Freezers soon became more commonplace, however, as they were resized to fit into the modern American home (or small apartment). In 1953, International Harvester presented a refrigerator and freezer trimmed with plaid fabric slipcovers that could be changed whenever women had the urge to redecorate. Other models were made to look like regular furniture, with laminated wood veneers, and it was even suggested that they be installed in the bedrooms of small apartments. But as a need for expanded living space drove more families to the suburbs, they found room for freezers—just in time for the TV dinner.

In 1952, the first frozen dinners—turkey, potatoes, and vegetables—began to appear. Packaged in oven-ready aluminum trays, they were described as “the housewife’s dream,” a hearty, square meal that didn’t demand hours of preparation. But it was Swanson & Sons, introducing its own take on the trend in 1954, that cemented the frozen meal’s
status as an American icon by first dubbing it a “TV dinner.” Two out of three American families owned a television set in 1955, so dining on a quick-prep meal in front of the television became a regular pastime.

Many women confessed to using a ready-made ingredient or two—a can of soup here, a Jell-O mix there—when preparing a meal, but creating one’s own meal from scratch was still something of an art and source of pride. As Shapiro writes,

> Many women simply felt . . . a vast and murky guilt that seeped across issues of work, love, identity, and responsibility. Aside from raising children, cooking was the job that led all others on the list of chores that defined homemaking and ruled women’s daily lives. And cooking wasn’t just a chore; in many ways, it was a responsibility similar to taking care of children. The emotional component was huge, the day-to-day necessity was relentless, the social pressure to perform well could be imposing, and there was no mistaking failure.

In a sense this new pressure on women to work and maintain a household unleashed something of a food fight between those who clung to old, honorable standards and those who sought shortcuts. To find inspiration in the kitchen, women turned to the flurry of recipes in newspapers and magazines, which they clipped and squirreled away in bulging envelopes of favorites. Within these publications, women also found community, as they wrote in to comment on one another’s recipes and share tips. The Boston Globe’s “Confidential Chat” was one such forum, and traditional “American” dishes like casseroles, pork chops, meat loaf, stews, and baked goods dominated the discussion. Although packaged foods weren’t recommended, they weren’t discouraged, either, provided the use of the product was justified in the recipe. Cake mixes, in particular, were a viable part of baking, but women still continued to exchange from-scratch recipes by the dozen.

While these “Chatters” lavished high praise on “easy” recipes, it was also crucial to keep up with the latest trends. As new cookbooks began to emerge, they redefined respectable cuisine. In 1954 a critic at the Saturday Review bemoaned a passé dish, the candle salad, which she described as “that bridge-club pest of yesteryear.” The pesky culprit? Half of a banana standing in a ring of canned pineapple, crowned with a cherry. House Beautiful furthered the critique: “You are dated if you top your desserts with a maraschino cherry and whipped cream . . . you are up-to-date if you serve your peaches in orange juice, your figs in sour cream, and your ice cream with a blazing sauce.”

One trailblazer during this era—who also heartily endorsed setting many foods ablaze for effect—was Poppy Cannon, a journalist and food writer who strived to help women balance full lives in the home and on the job. At the forefront of the efficiency movement, her popular publications The Can-Opener Cookbook (first published in 1951) and The Bride’s Cookbook (1954) caught the scathing eye of star culinary purist James Beard, who dismissed Cannon as another “home-ec gal”—not a cook, but an assembler of mixes who lacked skill and attention to flavor. Despite Beard’s reservations, the books quickly became favorites of women across the country.
Cannon’s approach and subject matter captured the conundrum facing women, and her writing encompassed intensive, from-scratch recipes (including scalloped oysters and featuring fancy ingredients like edible flowers), as well as such simple pantry recipes as steak-and-kidney pie out of a can. The approach was contradictory, but her goal was to create a menu that would meet the needs of the new “Everywoman” of the 1950s. Cannon’s legacy would be the ubiquity of the can-opener—and the opening of women’s kitchens to “glamorizing” everyday foods. Above all, in matters of cooking, Cannon urged women, “Don’t check your brains at the door.” She identified with a middle-class reader who wanted to cook well, entertain memorably, and stand out from the crowd—all while maintaining a fulfilling career and caring for her family.

“Is Home Cooking on Way Out?” a *Boston Globe* headline despaired in 1954. The answer, of course, was no, but the methods that women used to create their home-cooked meals would continue to evolve, as women merged pantry goods with fresh ingredients and found shortcuts that would help them carve out time for other ambitions. “Working wives are one of the great factors in making Americans the most prosperous people on earth,” said Secretary of Commerce Sinclair Weeks in 1954. Over the next decade, which would produce enduring humorist Erma Bombeck, many women writers developed a sharp sense of humor in relation to the trials of home life. Cynthia Lindsay’s *Home Is Where You Hang Yourself* was the title of one such volume. Launching “the literature of domestic chaos,” the writing of this era also produced Peg Bracken’s *The I Hate to Cook Book*, published in 1960. At first glance, it seems a direct challenge to Irma Rombauer’s optimistically titled *Joy of Cooking*, yet Bracken does, in fact, love to cook. What she hates is spending too much time on cooking, so she offers simple, no-frills recipes that take a more realistic perspective on what women can expect—and should expect—to accomplish in the kitchen.

Those expectations—whether placed on oneself or imposed by others—wouldn’t disappear in the 1960s, but they would transform in dramatic ways as women began to imagine new possibilities for themselves. Just around the corner in 1962, unmarried women would thrill to Helen Gurley Brown’s audacious *Sex and the Single Girl*. A year later, women would devour Betty Friedan’s *The Feminine Mystique*, which woke them up to “the problem that has no name” implicit in their stuck-at-home lives; yet 1963 also introduced the unabashedly joyful cooking of Julia Child, who brought a sense of play (and a willingness to fail) to her popular television show. And in 1960s Berkeley, future food star Alice Waters began adapting French cooking into her own American style, using fresh, seasonal ingredients to reimagine the table yet again for a new generation of home cooks, who weren’t likely to prepare meals while wearing pearls.

**SOURCES**  
Japanese Americans in 1955

Transitioning out of Crisis

By Dan Rubin

In *Maple and Vine*, Ryu must examine his Japanese heritage when he moves to the Society of Dynamic Obsolescence’s perpetual 1955, where he is given a character backstory that identifies him as a former prisoner of a World War II internment camp.

The years immediately following the internment of more than 120,000 Japanese Americans—87 percent of the national Japanese population; 97 percent of their population on the West Coast—have historically been glossed over as a period of transition that witnessed the quick transformation of a persecuted people into “superior citizens,” as they were called by the *Los Angeles Times* in 1962. But, in reality, 1944 to 1955 was a period of extreme crisis for a race robbed of its property, livelihood, and place in society. The impact of their unjust incarceration was felt for decades.

Japanese immigrants first sailed to the United States in the 1880s, when federal legislation restricting Chinese immigration created demands for new cheap foreign labor. By the 1920s, the number of Japanese families (issei, or first-generation immigrants) living in America, primarily on the West Coast, was significant. To the chagrin of white farmers, issei had advanced from migratory work to owning farms of their own. Under pressure, states passed laws prohibiting Japanese immigrants from leasing or owning land, effectively halting the expansion of Japanese farming in the Northwest.

Discrimination also occurred at the federal level. In 1922, the U.S. Supreme Court prohibited issei from becoming naturalized citizens. In 1924, Calvin Coolidge signed the National Origins Act, which essentially excluded any further Japanese immigration. During this period, writes Dr. Laurie Mercier, “While struggling for a place in American society, issei sought to retain ties to Japan, foster ethnic traditions, and teach their American-born children those cultural traditions. Denied American citizenship because of their ‘race,’ they formed chapters of the Japanese Association of America to maintain official links with Japan.” As the population of second-generation nisei (American citizens by birth) increased, Japanese Americans grew more interested in Americanization and pursuing civil rights. World War II, however, cut their efforts short.

In the wake of the attack on Pearl Harbor that crippled the U.S. Pacific Fleet and left 2,400 Americans dead on December 7, 1941, President Roosevelt issued Executive Order 9066, authorizing the military to remove “any and all persons” from any area of the
country to ensure national defense. Weeks later, General John L. Dewitt designated the western portion of California, Oregon, and Washington exclusion zones and, soon after, made internment and relocation of anyone of Japanese ancestry mandatory. Given as little as 24 hours to get their affairs in order and permitted to take only what they could carry, Japanese Americans were sent to temporary assembly centers until ten isolated camps were constructed in desert regions of the American West and forested swamps in the South. By May 1942, no one with Japanese ancestry remained in San Francisco. Two-thirds of those interned were American citizens; the median age of internees was 17.

Conditions in the camps were harsh, cramped, and unsanitary. Internees were provided a cot, a sack, and hay for bedding. Shelter was minimal and privacy was nonexistent. Mail was censored and personal effects were searched. Temperatures in the eight desert camps could reach upwards of 120 degrees during the day. To create a semblance of ordinary life, internees established schools, sports teams, swing bands, orchestras, and theater groups. They were expected and encouraged to work, but pay was meager and the camps offered few good jobs—mostly in camp operations, such as food preparation, health and sanitation, and security.

In June 1942, U.S. Naval Intelligence reported to Washington that the West Coast was no longer at risk of invasion from Japan, but it was not until December 17, 1944, that President Roosevelt lifted the ban excluding Japanese Americans from the West Coast. He announced that all relocation centers were to be closed within a year. Approximately 90,000 internees returned to the West Coast. Others sought new lives in the Midwest and out East.

During the years they had been gone, their neighborhoods had been taken over or fallen into disrepair. Their businesses had been sold, closed, or stolen. They had nowhere to stay and no jobs to work. “We had to make do with whatever was available to us,” one nisei put it. “In addition to the economic losses lies the intangible social issue,” writes
Tetsuden Kashima in “Japanese American Internees Return, 1945 and 1955: Readjustment and Social Amnesia.” “Feelings of insecurity and apprehension were manifest; mental suffering was felt by many as they faced the return to their pre evacuation homes hearing tales of physical violence and damage to property.” In the six months following the 1944 release of the internees, there were 31 major attacks in California on Japanese Americans returning to the lives they were forced to leave behind.

Internees were returning home at the same time as the soldiers from World War II, but they had to “face and fight other battles on the social and legal fronts,” writes Kashima. Some battles were won relatively quickly: in 1948 the Evacuation Claims Act was passed, but it only partially compensated Japanese Americans for the material losses suffered as a result of their internment. In 1952 the Alien Land Law was declared unconstitutional, allowing Japanese Americans to own land. That same year, under the Walter-McCarran Immigration and Nationality Act, issei were finally able to become naturalized citizens. But restrictions remained. “As late as 1950 there were more than 500 federal, state, and local laws and ordinances aimed directly or indirectly against resident Japanese,” writes Bill Hosokawa in Nisei: The Quiet Americans.

By 1955, the lives of Japanese Americans were returning to normal, but there were lasting consequences to losing years to the camps. In her study “Long-Run Labor Market Effects of Japanese American Internment during World War II on Working-Age Male Internees,” Aimee Chin shows that internment effectively reduced the annual earnings of males by as much as 9 to 13 percent for 25 years afterward. Analyzing her findings, she writes:

Prior to the internment, the children of Japanese immigrants were poised to do at least as well as their fathers. They had more education, better English-language skills, and more legal rights (to own property, to vote) than their fathers. Their fathers had started in the United States as laborers but had managed to build up their own businesses. The children were expected to go to the next step, to professional and other nonmanual labor occupations. After the internment, we observe the U.S.-born working-age internees going through what their fathers had gone through decades ago—working as laborers (mostly in contract gardening), saving money, and building their own businesses. The internment seems to have set the U.S.-born working-age internees back a generation.

After their release, internees did not readily discuss their experiences in the camps with anyone outside their community nor with the Japanese American children born after the experience (sansei). They settled into a social amnesia, and as the immediate problems of readjustment were handled, life took on an appearance of normalcy. “The Japanese Americans tried to forget the past and attempted to work, raise families, and to attain some modicum of personal security that had been lost during the previous years,” Kashima explains. “It was not easy. Racial animosity continued to torment this group. One nisei, for example, stated: ‘When I came back from the [military] service in 1945,
people would spit at me and push me off the road. We don’t tend to tell our kids that, we try to forget and look at how good things are now.”

Relying on a broad community network and emphasizing education, Japanese Americans overcame the obstacles they faced when they found themselves with nothing. During the 1950s, Jere Takahashi explains in Nisei Sansei, “Japanese Americans, particularly the nisei, experienced a significant shift in their economic position. . . . They slowly left manual labor and petty entrepreneurship and found jobs in clerical and technical fields. By the 1960s, they were entering the professional ranks and finding economic opportunities that had been closed to them before the war.” William Petersen notes in a 1966 New York Times article that, in fact, in 1960 “Japanese males had a much higher occupational level than whites—56 percent in white-collar jobs as compared with 42.1 percent of whites, 26.1 percent classified as professionals or technicians as compared to 12.5 percent of whites, and so on.” And yet, their 1959 median income was still notably lower than their white counterparts.

**SOURCES**
The Adventures of Ozzie and Harriet

From 1952 to 1966, The Adventures of Ozzie and Harriet's Nelson clan—Ozzie, his wife Harriet Hilliard, and their two sons, David and Ricky—was regarded as the preeminent icon of the nuclear family. One of the reasons for the program's tremendous following was that audiences actually believed that the Nelsons were playing themselves, a myth the Nelson family helped perpetuate. The exterior of the television house was modeled on their real-life home, and Ozzie incorporated many real-life events, neighbors, family members, and hobbies into the program.

From the outset, The Adventures of Ozzie and Harriet had a nostalgic feel, resembling the 1920s New Jersey of Ozzie's youth more than 1950s Los Angeles. The picket-fenced neighborhood and the corner drugstore and malt shop featured weekly in this slow-paced half-hour show depicted a peaceful American culture, when, off camera, it was a time of social unease and quiet distress. Most 1950s fathers were working ten-hour days and commuting long-distances to and from isolated suburbs. On Ozzie and Harriet, however, Dad was always home, neighbors still chatted over the back fence, and downtown was a brisk walk away. The Nelsons presented an America that never existed, but which, to this day, is mistakenly thought of as authentic.

Anne of Green Gables

A novel by Lucy Maud Montgomery published in 1908, Anne of Green Gables is about the orphan Anne Shirley, who is adopted by brother and sister Marilla and Matthew Cuthbert. Having expected a boy to help them with farm work, the siblings decide to keep the red-headed, spunky, and imaginative girl. The novel follows Anne's years with the Cuthberts, her education at the prestigious Queen's Academy, and her decision to return to care for Marilla after Matthew's death. There have been several television and movie adaptations of the novel. A four-part miniseries, starring Megan Follows as Anne and Colleen Dewhurst and Richard Farnsworth as Marilla and Matthew Cuthbert, aired on the Canadian Broadcasting Company in 1985 (one of the most-watched programs in Canadian history) and on PBS in the United States in 1986. It is this version, broken up into 26 installments on YouTube, that Katha watches so avidly.

The Beats and the Hot Rodders

The Beats refers to a generation of writers based primarily in San Francisco in the 1950s who, disillusioned with con-
temporary American values, created a new kind of literature. Most famous among the Beats were Allen Ginsberg, Lawrence Ferlinghetti, and Jack Kerouac, who experimented with hallucinogenic drugs and Eastern religion to achieve a higher state of consciousness.

Hot rodding refers to “souping up” a car—adding or stripping parts to make it go faster. Hot rodders of the 1950s were tough guys who souped up their cars for dangerous drag races, but the term also could refer to anyone who drives a car in a showy or reckless manner.

From Here to Eternity

*From Here to Eternity* is a powerful 1953 film (based on a novel of the same name by James Jones) that depicts the American military stationed in Hawaii leading up to the surprise Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in late 1941. In gritty, documentary-style black and white, director Fred Zinnemann captured the isolation and boredom of personnel living in a close-knit Army barracks on the island of Oahu. Three of the film’s stars were cast against type and their wholesome images: Donna Reed as “hostess” bar-girl Lorene; dignified British actress Deborah Kerr as an adulterous sexpot wife; and Montgomery Clift, as a bugler, former boxer, and stubborn, insubordinate soldier. Burt Lancaster fit his role perfectly as a rugged sergeant. The film won eight Academy Awards out of thirteen.
nominations, including Picture, Director, Adapted Screenplay, Supporting Actor (Frank Sinatra), and Supporting Actress (Reed).

Ikebana

According to Ikebana International, “Ikebana is the Japanese art of flower arrangement. It is more than simply putting flowers in a container. It is a disciplined art form in which the arrangement is a living thing where nature and humanity are brought together. It is steeped in the philosophy of developing a closeness with nature.”

June Cleaver

Portrayed by Barbara Billingsley, June Cleaver is the mother on the hit television series Leave It to Beaver, which aired on network television (first CBS and later ABC) from 1957 to 1963. The Cleaver family—June, Ward, and their sons, Beaver and Wally—represented “Mr. and Mrs. Average-American living in their typical Good Housekeeping home,” writes critic Robert Lewis Shayon. One of the first primetime situation comedy series written from a child’s point of view, the show differed from its rival The Adventures of Ozzie and Harriet in that its primary focus was on the children.

Labradoodle

Bred as the cross between a Labrador retriever and a poodle, labradoodles are “sociable, friendly, nonaggressive, and extremely intuitive,” according to labradoodle-dogs.net. “Their intelligence and high trainability make them well suited for guide dogs, therapy dogs, and other assistance dogs. Their hypoallergenic coats make them popular among people who have not been able to enjoy pets because of their allergies.”

Mason-Dixon Line

Originally surveyed between 1763 and 1767 to resolve a border dispute between the colonies of Pennsylvania and Maryland, the Mason-Dixon Line demarcates the borders of those states as well as those of Delaware and West Virginia. It became historically significant, however, as a result of the Compromise of 1820, which made slavery illegal in all states north of the line. In the years leading up to the Civil War, the line increasingly came to represent a cultural divide far greater than a geographical one.

Master Cleanse

The Master Cleanse is a popular liquid fast, developed by Stanley Burroughs in the 1940s, that is undertaken for detoxification and weight loss purposes. It has also been called the Master Cleanser Diet, after Burroughs’s 1976 book of the same title; the Lemonade Diet, the Maple Syrup Diet, and the Cayenne Pepper Diet, after some of the ingredients consumed during the fast; and the Beyoncé Diet, after its most famous fan.

Mimeographs

The stencil duplicator or mimeograph machine was a low-cost printing press that worked by forcing ink through a stencil onto paper. Mimeographs were for many decades used to print short-run office work, classroom materials, and church bulletins. They were supplanted
by photocopying and cheap offset printing in the late 1960s.

“Office equipment used by the War Production Board (WPB). Here are a few of the 12 automatic mimeographs in the WPB’s duplicating section. Each of these machines runs 24 hours a day and turns out 6,000 copies in an hour.” 1942. By Howard Liberman. Library of Congress.

Miscarriage and Stillbirth

Even though miscarriage—the spontaneous end of a pregnancy during the first or early in the second trimester—is a common occurrence, it is usually emotionally devastating. Overall, between 20 and 25 percent of known pregnancies end with the loss of the unborn child. After the 20th week, the loss is referred to as a stillbirth, which occurs in only about 1 percent of pregnancies.

Miscarriages usually occur because of a poor fusing between the chromosomes of the sperm and the egg at the time of conception. Disease and infection can also play a role. The National Institutes of Health suggests that drug and alcohol abuse, exposure to environmental toxins, obesity, and smoking may increase a woman’s risk.

The risk of miscarriage increases with age. From a medical/biological standpoint, the ideal age for a woman to carry a child is between 18 and 32. Twenty-somethings run a 14 percent risk of miscarrying, while women in their early 30s have a 17 percent chance. This risk increases to 23 percent for 35- to 37-year-olds and jumps to 28 percent for those in their late 30s. As middle-class couples like Katha and Ryu wait to start families until after advanced degrees are attained, careers are advanced, and financial safety nets are established, women are conceiving later in life, thus increasing their chances of having problematic pregnancies. Other than that, there is no proof that modern life is less conducive to childbearing than “simpler” lifestyles of the past.

Mirepoix

Mirepoix (pronounced “meer-pwah”) is a combination of two parts onions, one part chopped carrots, and one part celery used to add flavor and aroma to stocks, sauces, soups, and other foods. Mirepoix is ultimately strained out of the finished stock.

Mixed-Race Couples

In 1955, marriage between whites and nonwhites was illegal in 38 states, and, although some states repealed their laws voluntarily, it was not until 1967 that the Supreme Court declared antimiscegenation legislation unconstitutional. However, this did not mean there were no Japanese-Caucasian couples in 1955. The War Brides Act of 1945 allowed GIs who had married European women to bring them to the United States outside of the established immigration quo-
tas; in 1947 the law was amended to eliminate race as a factor and thus admitted Japanese and other Asian women who had married servicemen.

Nyack
A suburb located north of New York City, Nyack is a town of about 6,800 people with a 2009 median household income of $52,432. In that same year, the median cost of a house or condo in Nyack was $465,610. The median age of its residents is 38.5 years.

Peyton Place
A 1956 novel by American author Grace Metalious, *Peyton Place* tells the story of Constance MacKenzie, a young widowed mother. A series of rumors and scandals—including a murder, a trial, and a raft of other revelations—shake the foundations of the seemingly idyllic, fictitious little town that gives the novel its title. The novel sold more than 60,000 copies in the first ten days after its release and it remained on the *New York Times* best-seller list for 59 weeks. It is estimated that more than 12 million copies have been sold, putting it among the top-selling novels of all time.

The novel inspired a 1957 film adaptation (starring Lana Turner and Hope Lange) and hugely popular prime-time television series, both of the same title, which aired on ABC from 1964 to 1969. A total of 514 half-hour episodes were broadcast, first in black and white and later in color; at the show’s peak, ABC ran three new episodes a week. Considered television’s first American soap opera and depicting such unsavory social issues as teen pregnancy, adultery, divorce, murder, insanity, prostitution, and suicide, *Peyton Place* showed its viewers the dark underbelly of the wholesome lifestyle typically associated with small-town America. For a time, the term Peyton Place was slang for any small town or community rife with gossip and bad behavior.

Sanka
Sanka, the instant coffee that “lets you sleep,” was one of the earliest decaffeinated coffee varieties. It was developed in Germany in 1903 and from there spread across the European continent. Named for its French brand name (derived from *sans cafféine*, or “without caffeine”), Sanka was introduced to the United States in 1909. As a result of aggressive advertising campaigns—Sanka became a sponsor of *I Love Lucy* and *The Andy Griffith Show* during the 1950s and early 1960s—the orange-handled Sanka decaf coffee pot became a widely recognized fixture in 20th-century American diners, coffee shops, and restaurants.

Sisyphus
In Greek mythology, Sisyphus is a troublemaker who tricks the god of death. As punishment, he is forced to repeatedly roll a boulder up a hill in the underworld, only to have it roll back down as soon as he reaches the top, for all eternity.

Stepford Wives
*The Stepford Wives* is a 1972 novel by Ira Levin (also the author of *Rosemary’s Baby*). The satirical thriller follows Joanna Eberhart, a photographer and new
mother who has recently moved to an idyllic Connecticut town, as she begins to suspect that the perfect wives in her neighborhood are in fact robots. Two film adaptations have been produced: one in 1975, starring Katherine Ross, and another in 2004, starring Nicole Kidman. The term Stepford wife refers to an exception- ally submissive, docile, and manicured married woman.

Tupperware Parties
A line of plastic, airtight containers, Tupperware was invented by Earl Tupper and first introduced to consumers in 1946. It sold poorly because customers did not understand how the airtight seals worked. To remedy this problem, the Tupperware company promoted Tupperware parties starting in 1948, during which a female freelancer would demonstrate the power of Tupperware in the comfort of a neighborhood home. Tupperware parties proved a popular way for women to earn money in the '50s and '60s.

Velcro
The first commercially marketed fabric hook-and-loop fastener, Velcro was invented in 1941 by Swiss engineer Georges de Mestral after an Alpine walk left his clothes covered with burrs, inspiring him to develop a synthetic material that mimicked their adhesive capabilities. He patented Velcro in 1955; the name was a combination of the words velvet and crochet. Velcro gained traction among American consumers in the 1960s, when NASA began to use it to secure equipment for space travel. In 1968, Puma introduced the first Velcro sneakers.
1955 Facts and Trivia

U.S. President
Republican World War II General Dwight D. Eisenhower began his first term in 1952; despite suffering a heart attack in 1955, he won a second term.

Population
United States: 165,931,202
World: 2,781,208,967

Cost of Living
Today’s dollar was worth $8.14 in 1955. The average salary for men was $3,400 with minimum wage at $.75/hour; among women, the average income was $1,100. An average car cost $1,950 and gas cost $.29/gallon; the average house (around 1,000 square feet) cost $17,500. A gallon of milk cost $.23 and a dozen eggs cost $.60. A pound of sugar was $.10, a pound of flour was $.09, and a pound of bacon was $.66.

Notable 1955 Dates
February 12: The U.S. government agrees to train South Vietnamese troops.

March 7: Peter Pan, starring Mary Martin, becomes the first Broadway play to be televised in color.

April 15: Ray Kroc launches the McDonald’s fast food franchise in Des Plaines, Illinois.

April 18: Albert Einstein dies.

May 14: The Warsaw Pact, a defense treaty among eight Iron Curtain countries, is signed.

May 31: The Supreme Court rules on Brown v. Board of Education and orders that all public schools be integrated with “all deliberate speed.”

July 17: Disneyland opens in Anaheim, California, with the backing of the new television network ABC.

August 24: Emmett Till, age 14, is murdered for allegedly whistling at a white woman while visiting family in Money, Mississippi. His attackers are found not-guilty by an all-white jury.

September 30: James Dean, star of 1955’s Rebel Without a Cause and East of Eden, dies in a car accident.

December 1: In Montgomery, Alabama, Rosa Parks refuses to give up her seat to a white man, prompting the famous bus boycott.

Most Popular Television Shows
1. The $64,000 Question (CBS)
2. I Love Lucy (CBS)
3. The Ed Sullivan Show (CBS)
4. Disneyland (ABC)
5. The Jack Benny Show (CBS)
6. December Bride (CBS)
7. You Bet Your Life (NBC)
8. Dragnet (NBC)
9. The Millionaire (CBS)
10. I’ve Got a Secret (CBS)

Billboard’s Top Five Singles
1. “Cherry Pink and Apple Blossom White,” Prez Prado
2. “Rock Around the Clock,” Bill Haley & the Comets
3. “Yellow Rose of Texas,” Mitch Miller
4. “Autumn Leaves,” Roger Williams
5. “Unchained Melody,” Les Baxter

Top Grossing Movies
1. Lady and the Tramp
2. Cinerama Holiday
3. Mister Roberts
4. Battle Cry
5. Oklahoma!

Academy Award Winners
Motion Picture: Marty
Actor: Ernest Borgnine in Marty
Actress: Anna Magnani in The Rose Tattoo
Supporting Actor: Jack Lemmon in Mister Roberts
Supporting Actress: Jo Van Fleet in East of Eden

Tony Awards
Play: The Desperate Hours
Musical: The Pajama Game
Actor in a Play: Alfred Lunt in Quadrille
Actress in a Play: Nancy Kelly in The Bad Seed
Actor in a Musical: Walter Slezak in Fanny
Actress in a Musical: Mary Martin in Peter Pan
Choreographer: Bob Fosse for The Pajama Game

Pulitzer Prizes
Fiction: A Fable, by William Faulkner
Drama: Cat on a Hot Tin Roof, by Tennessee Williams
History: Great River: The Rio Grande in North American History, by Paul Horgan
Biography or Autobiography: The Taft Story, by William S. White
Poetry: Collected Poems, by Wallace Stevens
Questions to Consider

1. Playwright Jordan Harrison was inspired by original interviews conducted by The Civilians: What reasons do the interviewees share for retreating from the modern world?

2. Why do Katha and Ryu decide to move to the SDO? What are they giving up by doing so? Why did Ellen, Dean, and Roger decide to move to the SDO, and how are their situations different from Katha's and Ryu's?

3. What is the significance of sleep in Maple and Vine? What do you make of Katha's final nightmare?

4. How will having a baby change Katha and Ryu's SDO experience? Will they stay?

5. What are your perceptions of the 1950s? On what are those perceptions based? If you were on the Authenticity Committee, what one 1950s element would you make sure the SDO got right?

6. Why might you retreat from the modern world? In what ways have you already retreated? To what decade would you retreat? What modern-day convenience would you miss most if you moved to the SDO? What would you be happiest to give up?

7. When was the last time you were paralyzed by having too many choices? How did you finally make your decision?

For Further Information . . .


