



SPY MAGAZINE: THE FUNNY YEARS

THE 20th ANNIVERSARY

**WITH GRAYDON CARTER, KURT ANDERSEN, GEORGE KALOGERAKIS,
AND DAVID CARR**

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Celeste Bartos Forum

The New York Public Library

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The Simpsons clip:

“Thanks for driving us back to town.”

“No problem, we’re going there anyway, to pick up the new *Spy Magazine*.”

“I’m sorry, they don’t publish that anymore.”

“The world I grewed up in is gone.”

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: Good evening, brothers and sisters, my name is Paul Holdengräber, and I’m the director of public programs here at the New York Public Library, now known as LIVE from the New York Public Library. As you know, my goal here at the Library is to make the lions roar. David Carr said that they might make cartwheels, they might levitate, they might dance, with an evening like *Spy Magazine*

celebrates its twentieth birthday, a magazine that's celebrating its birthday though it's not alive anymore. It's wonderful to be here tonight, and to have you all here in the audience. I would like to introduce this evening by reading to you the first two paragraphs of this extraordinarily beautiful book that Miramax Books has put out called *Spy: The Funny Years*. And the three authors of that book are here tonight to sign the book afterwards, and I highly recommend that you get it as an advance Christmas present.

Here we go: "Back in January, 1985, Kurt Andersen and Graydon Carter crafted notes to each other describing their vision for this new magazine, and that vision was as bold and fearless, as culture-changing, as the magazine would prove to be. Some excerpts from Graydon's January 10, 1985, note"—and I read it—"In style, *Spy* will be witty, bright, the very life of the party. *Spy* will crackle with smartness and sophistication. Its comments will be saucy, its manner that of the flaneur, of a dandy boulevardier with the mind of an atom-smasher. *Spy* will confound social conventions, while at the same time pay tribute to them. By day, *Spy* will investigate the great commercial machines that fuel the city, the behind-the-scenes stories in art, literature, journalism, broadcasting, theater, fashion, banking, business, show business, and the law. By night, *Spy* will dress up for a night on the town, to seek out the stories at Manhattan's cabarets, nightclubs, theaters, restaurants, and after-hour haunts. *Spy* will be a spectator to a commentator on the passing parade of life in the city." Quite a beginning, isn't it?

Now, the evening. As I told you, after the event is over, when usually the discussion will last about as long as a psychoanalytical session, so about fifty minutes. There will be a conversation between the three participants and David Carr. And right after the conversation, you will have occasion to pose some provocative, *Spy*-like questions to these three individuals and David Carr.

I also encourage you to join our e-mail list, so that you might find out about some of the upcoming events. For instance, we have an event with David Remnick and David Sedaris, which is a benefit to the Library. I'm also excited to say that the former President of the New York Public Library, Vartan Gregorian, will be coming to speak with David

Nasaw about Carnegie, the man who gave everything away. Kati Marton and Samantha Power. And I'm also very excited to tell you about the series of events we have to celebrate the hundred-and-fiftieth anniversary of *The Atlantic Monthly*, which happens also to be the hundred and fiftieth anniversary of Sigmund Freud. So we have a couple of events about Sigmund Freud. We also have events about "Lust," which seems particularly appropriate when you speak about Freud, with Esther Perel. I'll ask you to turn off your phone if you would be kind enough. Esther Perel wrote a book with a wonderful title called *Mating in Captivity*. I'll leave it to your imagination what it might be about. Also an event about "Gluttony," with Mario Batali, Dan Barber, Barbara Kafka, and Corby Kummer, and many others, which you will find on your chairs if you haven't already.

Now, let me introduce David Carr, who in turn is going to introduce Graydon Carter, Kurt Andersen, and George Kalogerakis—I probably mispronounced his name—and I might say that in my interactions with David Carr, he relentlessly made fun of my accent, and I must say I don't really know what he's talking about, but let me say something about David Carr, who—I'm sure that's not how you pronounce it. David Carr writes a column on media issues for the Monday business section of the *New York Times* and also covers popular culture for the newspaper. During the season he writes a daily blog about the Academy Awards as the Carpetbagger. He has been a contributing writer for *The Atlantic Monthly*, and the *New York* magazine and Inside.com. Before that he lived in middle places and came to know New York only through *Spy*. He was disappointed when he moved here and found out that *Spy* often engaged in parody, but has since recovered. David Carr and the *Spy* crew.

(applause)

DAVID CARR: Wow. I think we've gotta add a little applause there for Paul's spoken-word performance of that book. Let's give it up. **(applause)** I know if I ever write a book, I'm going to ask Paul to do the Books on Tape. The amazing thing about that accent: I'm from Minnesota, so is he. We turned out so different. **(laughter)** In the interest of brevity

and clarity, I'll just start with what *Spy* did not invent. *Spy* did not invent Botox, cold fusion, modernism, iPods, the first reality show, the second Bush, Stephen Colbert, Frappuccinos, or the Internet, the agency of which has already been claimed by someone else. But they have, I think, clearly prefigured the modern media tableau, coming up with mashups before there were such a thing, a high-low ambidextrousness that has been baked into kinda the subsequent cultural conversation. It's easy to forget what they did. It's been ubiquitous to the point of transparency, and, if you think about it, *Spy* has become a way of thinking, talking, and writing that seems as natural and as transparent, as the Web is now. Sadly, the one thing that hasn't been replicated is the *Spy* cover. It's about itself, a thing of pure marketing genius, sort of heterosexual camp and seriousness rolled into one. I thought we would roll a few slides, or I was instructed to do as much, and then I would ask you guys to either defend yourselves or contextualize your editorial decisions, whichever.

KURT ANDERSEN: Chris Elliott, of course, it was about the ten most embarrassing New Yorkers. Back when we were a New York magazine, which we were for many years. Graydon?

GRAYDON CARTER: The first cover, Chris Elliott. No, I'm kidding, there's not much else to say. It was—I think it was Steven Doyle's idea, who's here, I saw him here tonight, to shoot just from this angle. And it's sort of with wonderful shadows, it sort of set the tone of what we wanted to do. And even the typefaces, which became—we used classical typefaces rather than sort of wacky typefaces, the way some humor magazines do. It was very sort of, actually, very conservative, the actual look of the type, right from the very first issue on.

KURT ANDERSEN: This was, we did this about a year into it. And it was, I think, the first time we did a, we had a—Ted Kennedy didn't in fact pose, and mostly at that time, we had these famous people pose and of course nowadays, you'd say, "Oh, it's a Photoshop thing," and of course there was no such thing then, and basically we had to hire a supercomputer in order to make that happen, and actually it was a thing that

Graydon had seen that Michael Kinsley had written somewhere about what would be the measure of true journalistic bravery.

GRAYDON CARTER: Of taking on the *New York Times*, of taking on the Kennedy family, and I can't remember what the third thing was.

KURT ANDERSEN: But here we were taking on the Kennedys, in a way. And it was—the fact that we could do this, this sort of magical realist image, was astounding, it was wonderful.

DAVID CARR: Just a sec, though, the fact that you did this with like two sticks and a rock is great, but did you ever say to yourself, like, when you look at this, “God, we were so mean.” **(laughter)**

GRAYDON CARTER: It was a small magazine, first of all, the good thing about it is it had a very small circulation back then. **(laughter)** And you could get away with it because it did have a small circulation, and because it was a—well, just because it was put out by people who were youngish at the time.

KURT ANDERSEN: And there was no meanness, to use your phrase. That kind of scurrilousness was—no, we didn't invent anything—but it was rare to sort of say the kinds of things and make the kind of spectacle and mischief that we were.

DAVID CARR: Next slide.

GEORGE KALOGERAKIS: They actually posed for that one.

KURT ANDERSEN: That was Tama Janowitz and the late whatever that guy's name is.

GEORGE KALOGERAKIS: Al Lewis.

DAVID CARR: How soon they forget.

GRAYDON CARTER: We actually, no—he had a problem. When we asked him to come and dress as Grandpa Munster, and he said, “I can’t. Universal Pictures owns the rights to this image,” of him. So we did it step by step, as like the factory worker who steals a Cadillac piece-by-piece. We said, “Okay, can you put on tails and a white waistcoat?” He said, “Yes.” We said, “Well, would you put on a white tie?” He said, “Yes.” “Would you put on a cape with a red lining?” He said, “Yes.” “Would you make your lips red?” He said “Yes.” And we got what we wanted.

(laughter)

GEORGE KALOGERAKIS: If I remember correctly, that was the first issue we were short, that was in short supply. You know, because—

GRAYDON CARTER: Tama Janowitz was a huge customer.

KURT ANDERSEN: This was, again, as we kept trying to push the edge of our little envelope to do cool computer-generated images, we did this thing about feuds, this cover story. It was out of this, I think, it was out of this that Gore Vidal threatened to sue us, actually, for saying in the course of this cover story in a piece by Lynn Hirschberg, that he was litigious.

(laughter)

GRAYDON CARTER: Though, as he—I’ve spoken to Gore about this numerous times since. And he still does not get the humor or the irony of him threatening to sue us over calling him litigious. **(laughter)** You’ve gotta love that man.

KURT ANDERSEN: This is Chevy Chase. And a piece that Paul Rudnick and I wrote about irony that our future editor, Walter Kirn, accused us of building a noose and a

hangman's gallows for ourselves by nailing what we were an emblem of. But the fact that we were able to pull off that thing as a graphic device always pleased me.

DAVID CARR: And you've been doing it sort of reflexively ever since.

KURT ANDERSEN: One has. I've never done it since.

GRAYDON CARTER: This thing, this picture was so unfortunate. **(laughter)** She went out and had—you know that drastic remake she had done, it came within months after this.

DAVID CARR: I wonder why.

KURT ANDERSEN: And again, it was a simple idea. It was an unretouched photograph.

GEORGE KALOGERAKIS: And the piece itself was a celebration of sorts.

GRAYDON CARTER: Yes, it was very sort of mock-celebratory, and I think probably in the history of the magazine, that it took more edit time on this story to get the certain voice right. I think everybody edited this story.

KURT ANDERSEN: We did a thing every year called the *Spy* 100, you know, in the beta days of everybody doing a list of 100s. I think you do that today, don't you? And of course George Bush, the great—the good president Bush, was president, and again, we used—that was back in the day of course, when people, young people were doing that to their hair.

GEORGE KALOGERAKIS: Matt Groening.

DAVID CARR: Before he was worth billions.

GRAYDON CARTER: Now, this was basically, it's explanatory, it's like *Spy* for kids.

KURT ANDERSEN: It's the issue in which a thing that now is—if Bruce Handy, who wrote it, had royalties, he'd be a rich man, because the thing he wrote in that issue about why there is no Santa, *Spy* for Kids, explaining that for children, is just the Internet viral thing to end all Internet viral things.

(laughter)

GRAYDON CARTER: This came out one month after the *Vanity Fair* Demi Moore cover. Didn't pose for it. That's me.

(laughter)

DAVID CARR: I like you with the short hair, Graydon, I gotta say.

GRAYDON CARTER: No, from the neck down.

KURT ANDERSEN: And those people all posed. This was Wayne's World and Wayne Newton himself. Wayne Newton became a kind of odd friend of the magazine. At our fifth anniversary he sang "Spy Way," which was our version of the Frank Sinatra tune "My Way."

DAVID CARR: Yeah, but if you look at his eyes, he's significantly drugged when you had him do this.

(laughter)

GRAYDON CARTER: Some medication.

KURT ANDERSEN: This appeared actually right at the beginning, January, 1993, it was kind of our inaugural celebration of the beginning of the Clinton era.

GRAYDON CARTER: She posed for it. **(laughter)** That was before the whole Senate thing, before she, you know, before she wanted to run for office herself.

DAVID CARR: I find that oddly stimulating. **(laughter)** Did I say that aloud?

KURT ANDERSEN: No computer at work. That was a bit early in the administration.

DAVID CARR: When you guys say no computer, what do you mean? What did you do?

KURT ANDERSEN: No, it was a joke, David!

GRAYDON CARTER: You mean, no computer work, no Photoshop, is that what you mean?

DAVID CARR: Yeah, you guys were working with this Fred Flintstone sort of technology, you know—

KURT ANDERSEN: Except for this. There was no money, except for literally, the ten-thousand-dollar, twenty-thousand-dollar computer bills to fool around with images like this. That was our one big-budget item.

Rich skinny ladies.

GRAYDON CARTER: This was by Nell Scovell, and she had a wonderful expression within the story that said, “How unfair it is that a woman who is a size 10 lives in a two-room apartment, and a woman who is a size 2 lives in a ten-room apartment.

(laughter)

KURT ANDERSEN: Paul Rudnick wrote this about why—trying to convince people that they didn't need to feel bad for disliking opera and poetry and ballet.

GRAYDON CARTER: Again, this was at the time of the *Mahabharata*, and those nine-hour operas at the Brooklyn Academy of Music.

KURT ANDERSEN: It was what it was. And we did books of these. They were—and, it's funny, people tried to—this is done, obviously, it was done before us, and it has been done since. And thanks to Nikki Gossin, who is now a photo editor at *Newsweek*, the amount of, the labor-intensiveness of getting the right images was extraordinary, although in the case of Tammy Faye Bakker and Ewok, it was actually pretty easy.

(laughter)

One of our many letters from Donald Trump, I don't know if you can read it. But it says, "Dear Graydon, as per your letter of March ninth, I am surprised that you do not know who called me from *Spy Magazine*. Your curiosity will be satisfied in court, although, hopefully, that will not be necessary. Sincerely, Donald Trump."

DAVID CARR: He's such a great writer.

(laughter)

GRAYDON CARTER: One of many fan letters he wrote to us, and the logo is just spectacular.

(laughter)

KURT ANDERSEN: That comes about a quarter-inch off the paper.

(laughter)

GRAYDON CARTER: It's subtle, but it works for him.

(laughter)

KURT ANDERSEN: This is from our TV show. One of our TV shows in 1992.

(clip not transcribed) (laughter)

KURT ANDERSEN: Now, I look back at that, and see that NBC put Hitler's voice in a national politician, allowed us to do that on prime time, and it still just shocks me that that was permitted, even for the twelve seconds we did it. So there's a little—sampling.

DAVID CARR: It occurs to me that I haven't actually introduced you people. George Kalogerakis, deputy op-ed editor at the House of Many Doors, *New York Times*. Kurt Andersen, novelist, radio host, bunch of other stuff we all envy and covet, and Graydon Carter, the king of *Vanity Fair*, the editor, actually is his formal title, let's give them a round of applause.

(applause)

DAVID CARR: Wasn't that really an elegant little switch of position, there? Wow. I think it's easy to sort of minimize what—the accomplishment, what these guys put together. They did this—you have to remember, they did this back when celebrities were gods and they weren't cat toys like they are now. Deconstruction, at least in the media, was something more likely to happen to a building on the Lower East Side. And media criticism, which *Spy* was full of, took place mostly in two-hundred-word letters to the editor. If you think back, they presaged Clinton's downfall. I can remember a picture in the book where Clinton is standing at the top of the stairs and a woman is kind of staged at an unfortunate level, and the president—the future president is leering down at her and it doesn't take a lot of imagination to sort of infer what might have happened next. You

guys pointed out that Saddam Hussein was a fairly durable guy and might be around for a while and sort of predicted the Disneyfied Manhattan that we all ended up living in. I think it wouldn't be a *Spy* event if we didn't sort of deal with the hanging trope in the room, which some might say is a word that begins with an I and ends in a Y but whose name must not be spoken.

GEORGE KALOGERAKIS: What word are you talking about?

DAVID CARR: Irony, damn it, IRONY! Graydon said it's dead.

GRAYDON CARTER: Great prediction.

DAVID CARR: One of the things that I was thinking about was this book is put out by Miramax, which is owned by Disney, which used to be run by Michael Eisner, who was treated like a piñata is at an eight-year-old's birthday party by *Spy*, and yet here we are, right? George is an editor at the *New York Times*, where I also work, but it was an institution that was first knocked off its pedestal by *Spy* before anyone did it. The *Times* was untouchable before that. Graydon sort of made the quick trip from guerrilla sniper to fortified target and now presides over an Oscar party that is sort of a *Spy* charticle waiting to happen (**laughter**) and Kurt with his multiplatform genius, you know, the historical novel, the avuncular radio host, magazine columnist at *New York* magazine. You'd think on general principle that *Spy* would have turned him into a red mist in an afternoon, something you'd tuck away after lunch. So let's stipulate that the right and decent thing to do after you all were at *Spy* would have been to kill yourselves, I think. (**laughter**) Right? I mean, that would have been the honorable thing. Instead, you went out and got jobs and continued to live and do work but be that as it may, I was wondering why at twenty years it felt like the right time to put this book together? Did you guys finally begin speaking to each other again, or . . .

GRAYDON CARTER: No.

KURT ANDERSEN: We don't speak to each other.

GRAYDON CARTER: No, actually.

DAVID CARR: I was in the green room with stony silence the whole time. So cold.

GRAYDON CARTER: No, actually it was supposed to come out last year at the nineteenth anniversary, and just twenty seemed like a rounder, chunkier, more appropriate way to do it. It was literally procrastination that made it twenty years.

KURT ANDERSEN: On whose part?

GRAYDON CARTER: On mine. (laughter)

KURT ANDERSEN: No, Graydon and I wanted to take, you know, the easy man's way out and just do a kind of greatest hits thing, and George, who's a hard worker had independently this had the idea of doing a history, so we merged

GEORGE KALOGERAKIS: But I do think that it would have been too soon after ten years or something. It was like going back to high school.

GRAYDON CARTER: Too soon after twenty, as well.

GEORGE KALOGERAKIS: It's like going back to graduate school, if not high school. There's a point where it's time to look back, and a point where you don't want to.

KURT ANDERSEN: It felt like the right time for a retrospective.

DAVID CARR: That, and a fat check from Miramax sort of helped things along.

GRAYDON CARTER: Didn't hurt.

DAVID CARR: Okay. I thought it was interesting you guys put the book together in a collaborative fashion. Of course, what you did is actually annotate George's work, but that *Spy*, which was this thing that sort of networked, aggregated, it kind of went the same way with the book. I mean, was that conscious on your part?

GRAYDON CARTER: It was a small version—when we edited *Spy*, Kurt and I sat like this far away from each other for five years, and spent from early in the morning to late at night of many days there, and we'd have lunch together, we'd often have dinner together. So—

KURT ANDERSEN: Sleep together, bunk together.

GRAYDON CARTER: We actually did.

DAVID CARR: Keep going.

GRAYDON CARTER: Not in the same bed, but in the same room on the road, but it was a sort of a more relaxed vacation version of that.

KURT ANDERSEN: And, so, all we knew how to do together—oh, I can shout. **(has mike trouble)**

DAVID CARR: Let's get some tin cans and some coconuts up here. **(laughter)**

KURT ANDERSEN: It's—so, we just sort of reverted to the way we'd worked in the past, ordering George around and editing each other's stuff, and then Alex Isley, who was one of our great art directors, came and designed the book, and so it was just—it was, oddly—it was like going home for Christmas and falling back into the old patterns for better or worse that one does as a child.

GEORGE KALOGERAKIS: I can attest to that. It was like writing a very long piece for *Spy*, you know. *Spy* was edited in a way that the stories would go around and around. Different people would put things in on different drafts, so we did many drafts of the history . . . yeah, just like the old days.

DAVID CARR: I have to say it worked. I think it's just a wonderful book, and everybody I've given it to has said the same thing. The thingness of it, the craft of it, its touch, its feel.

GRAYDON CARTER: Also because of those typefaces, because we didn't use those exaggerated typefaces of the 1980s or wacky typefaces of humor magazines. They are classical typefaces, they stand up well over time. So you can still put out a magazine—a book—that purports to be somewhat funny, but it still look like something kind of clean and classical.

KURT ANDERSEN: No again, thanks to Alex and Miramax, I mean, we wanted it to be a beautifully crafted artifact, but not take itself too seriously, so there's holes punched in the cover, just to sort of subvert itself a little bit.

DAVID CARR: That's the effect I got exactly when I saw it—it's weird. **(laughter)**

KURT ANDERSEN: That's what we're going for, David.

DAVID CARR: One of the things I wondered about is what you guys are willing—I mean, when I looked at the book, and looked at the spreads, I said, “Well, I don't know a ton about magazines, but *that* was the first time that graphics and words danced in that particular way,” but I also got the impression when I looked at it, I don't know if it's really come together that way since. I suppose Graydon would argue that, you know, *Vanity Fair* is at the vanguard of typography and photography and words all together, but it still looked kind of modern to me. I mean, when you were looking at it and looking at

pages, did you go, “These seem dated and a little weird,” or did they seem sort of fresh to you?

GRAYDON CARTER: But David, we actually didn’t set out to create something that looked sort of chic, of its time, or modern, or anything like that. The lack of money inspired a lot of the ideas that then went on to other places. Like the little silhouetted heads—it’s because we had no money for photography, and so by using those as like decorative elements, it gave the magazine a certain look and we crammed—because we could only print so many pages in the magazine—we crammed more and more things onto an individual page that the type kept getting smaller and smaller. And things actually look more intelligent when the type is smaller than if the type is really big. And I think that all these sort of factors of not having anything to work with sort of played to our favor. Also one of the things that made the—we were talking about this earlier today—what made the magazine different. It didn’t have *any* of the things that other magazines do. There was no service section, there were no reviews, there were no contributors’ pages.

KURT ANDERSEN: In fact, the first discussions began as—

GRAYDON CARTER: Having none of those.

KURT ANDERSEN: What won’t we do? Because it was a lark, it wasn’t like “Let’s start a magazine,” and it was really almost like a game for ourselves as we were having lunch, to say, “How could you do this magazine without all of this?”—and a city magazine is what really what we conceived of it as, without all these, you know, standard things.

DAVID CARR: Okay, but I’m interested—sort of what moved it off the cocktail napkin and into this thing that you can hold? Was it something about the times, the relationship with you guys, the fact that there was all this talent floating around? What made it actually come to pass? I mean, we’ve all made the greatest magazine ever in our minds.

GRAYDON CARTER: Well, Tom Phillips had a lot to do with that, because he quit his job at Rothschild, and, which sort of alarmed us—

DAVID CARR: Sort of called your bluff.

KURT ANDERSEN: Yes, totally.

GRAYDON CARTER: We were still fooling around. He made us sit down and write up a hundred story ideas, which is sort of a very logical and mature thing to do, but we hadn't certainly thought of it. And once you start doing the story ideas, it actually gave you a form of roughly what this thing, this magazine, would look like. And then Tom was very effective at raising money. And we had a very good record for raising money. We didn't have very much to show anybody. We had a manifesto that was printed at the—by the *Life* Magazine, or the *Time* and *Life* printer, because we both worked there at the time. They didn't realize this at the time we were starting up, because they didn't have a piece of it, but it was. And the people who decided to invest in the magazine bought lunch in celebration of the gesture, and those who didn't invest in the magazine felt so bad that they picked up the tab anyway. So we had almost zero startup costs prior to getting, raising all the money.

KURT ANDERSEN: But getting a third person so it didn't—we could have gone on like that for years—just saying, “And our ideal magazine will be this and our ideal magazine will be that,” a third guy, as Graydon says, who suddenly quits his high-paying Wall Street job to do it with us, we felt, “God, I guess we've got to do this,” just to keep him employed.

DAVID CARR: Isn't part of the reason that people gave you some money—not a bunch—and bought you lunch when they didn't, is that you guys actually showed up in like hula skirts and coconuts when it was time to pitch, did a little dance?

GRAYDON CARTER: You may have been reading some other part of the story. I don't remember that. No, we actually dressed very conservatively throughout the entire run of *Spy*. We wore jackets and ties most of the time because—

DAVID CARR: Unlike now.

GRAYDON CARTER: —a greater disguise if you're going to write revolutionary-type things, I think it's better to look like a Wall Street banker than a longhair.

DAVID CARR: I wonder when you look at—when you consume your daily media diet and you watch Jon Stewart and you maybe stop by Gawker and you or someone like you is reading *Lucky*, that if you look at this sort of B-list nation that we live in, how much of it do you either take credit or blame for, in terms of how the conversation is framed?

GRAYDON CARTER: Not that much.

KURT ANDERSEN: Actually, not. When we sat down, you know, when you sit down to write this book and *read* this book, frankly, you know, you think about drawing the lines of ancestry and family tree, but, you know, and there are particular graphic devices, or things you look at, but it's not like I think we stand over on our balcony, and say, "This is the world we made," (**laughter**) or anything like it. Or at least I don't.

DAVID CARR: What do you think the—accounted for the fact that, now on a business level, it sort of tanked coming out of the gate. Three months, right, it had some circ trouble and—

KURT ANDERSEN: Although, to be fair, it was—we ran out of money quickly because we were printing too many copies, because it was being embraced, and we had to print all these copies, and so it was the pain of success at the beginning.

DAVID CARR: But what accounted for the subsequent like, explosion in appetite, coverage, embrace, apart from the fact that it was good?

GRAYDON CARTER: It was not a big—I mean, magazines start off with huge projections of where they want to get now. We started off with a 25,000 circulation and were very happy with *that* for the first year. We were going to platform it the way they did movies before *Jaws*. They'd open in like, two theaters in New York and two theaters in L.A., and then it would gradually sort of increase over, say, a six-week period. Where we actually ran into trouble is we had to start—L.A. wanted copies and then Houston wanted copies, and Boston, and really our budget and our, the money we raised, didn't allow for that kind of growth. It allowed for arithmetic growth, rather than exponential growth.

KURT ANDERSEN: And before there was such a thing as viral-ness, there was word of mouth. And so somehow people in Austin and in Seattle, you know, started wanting to read it. So who knows how that happened? Really, because there was no marketing.

GEORGE KALOGERAKIS: And there was no competition. That was another thing, you know, as Kurt has said, I think, we were the only game in town. So we also attracted the people who *got* what we were doing and wanted to work there and write for it or draw for it.

GRAYDON CARTER: And also if you grew up in the sort of so-called sticks, like I did, I mean, I remember when I was a kid, reading *Mad* magazine, was the first magazine that sort of explained things to you, and explained things that—I grew up in Canada, and they explained these sort of major things that were happening in America in a way that like a seven-year-old or a ten-year-old could understand. And I think for a lot of people it was—people—*Spy* magazine—it was people who wanted to live in New York but through consequences, or age, or whatever it is, couldn't live in New York at that moment.

DAVID CARR: Yeah, but, when I was looking at it, I thought to myself, “Why’d it go out of business? What happened?” I mean, I read the book, and watched, but in a sort of the more meta-sense, a general sense, what was wrong with it? It seemed like it was filling a need, reader interest, assembled a tribe that people would want to advertise—everything about it seemed—

GRAYDON CARTER: But if you look at the magazine business, there are except for magazines that have foundations behind them like *Harper’s* or the *Nation*, there are no standalone magazines, and the fact is that this had never occurred to us when we were starting up—it’s quite remarkable—and the fact that the investors, it had never occurred to them.

KURT ANDERSEN: So during downturns—there was a big recession in 1990, ’91. If you’re part of a big company you can obviously weather that. That was much harder.

GRAYDON CARTER: And also, we knew nothing about how to actually sort of make friends with advertisers. When we started this magazine, we didn’t realize that you could go to designers and borrow clothing for a cover shoot, so we would go down to Moe Ginsberg or some cheap discount place and buy the clothing for like—suits for a hundred and forty-nine dollars, and whereas if we’d borrowed the clothes from a designer, the designer might have looked favorably upon us, and then stuck an ad in the magazine.

KURT ANDERSEN: Is that how it works?

(laughter)

GRAYDON CARTER: I don’t know. **(laughter)** In public radio, that’s what they do, I know that.

(laughter)

DAVID CARR: Nice one. I wonder, apart from the kind of like durable punching bags like Donald Trump, who are the real true mortal enemies and/or secret admirers? If you look back, like, you did Oprah, she said she forgave you. Did Kissinger ever forgive you for that Bohemian Grove thing?

KURT ANDERSEN: He probably never saw it.

DAVID CARR: Do you ever talk about it?

GRAYDON CARTER: If you call a man a number of times a “socialite war criminal” in the pages of a magazine, **(laughter)** I wouldn’t wait around for the day he’s going to forgive you.

(laughter)

KURT ANDERSEN: Although I’m friendly with his son. And Bob Kerrey, the President of the New School, has told me that that issue of Henry Kissinger and Merv Griffin wearing coconut bras was the favorite magazine cover of his adulthood, young adulthood, so there you go.

GRAYDON CARTER: I remember being at a cocktail party, and Abe Rosenthal and Shirley Lord, who did take a—

DAVID CARR: Severe pummeling.

GRAYDON CARTER: Yeah, month after month after month after month. I remember sitting at the office one day, and one of the interns came in and said, “Abe Rosenthal was in front of me at the video store.” I said, “Really.” And he said, “Yeah, he was renting out all these porn tapes.” And I said, “Really?” **(laughter)** And I said, “Like what?” and I just jot down the names and there are felicitous things. And I remember we called, at one point we called, we had sort of epithets for a lot of people, and Larry Tisch, we called a

“churlish dwarf billionaire.” And John Scanlon, who was representing him at the time, he’s this PR guy who’s a very good friend, and he called up and he was really indignant, and he said, “Graydon, you’ve just gone too far with this,” and he said, “For one thing, Larry is not *technically* a dwarf.” **(laughter)** So I wrote that down, “not technically a dwarf,” and we put that in the magazine the next month.

(laughter)

DAVID CARR: What about any secret admirers, some people you stapled who came up and said, you know, “As nasty as you are, I really like the magazine.”

KURT ANDERSEN: Harvey Weinstein, for instance. We did early on in Miramax’s rise, a very, one of the earlier rough kind of vivisections of Miramax.

DAVID CARR: And the compliment came after he threatened to kill you.

KURT ANDERSEN: Well, yes, but, you know, it’s all of a piece.

DAVID CARR: The strong embrace of Harvey’s love.

GRAYDON CARTER: You know, it’s warming.

DAVID CARR: Harvey was going to be here tonight, but he got hung up in L.A. I wonder if you could help us a little bit, George, in terms of, kind of, you’ve got these two guys and you can say, well, *Spy* was a collective enterprise, but it was sort of like a wiki that only two people were allowed to finally alter in the end, and a lot of times—you had strong-voiced writers who came in with great pieces that you ran, and other people’s work was more sort of dots on screen, to be reiterated as you might choose, and I’m wondering what it is in either the Keith and Mick, Ozzie and Harriet, like, who was the good mom, who was the bad mom, what it was about these two guys. I mean, you’d

never, you'd never do a psychic sort of Separated at Birth, they're very different guys, so why did that end up working?

GEORGE KALOGERAKIS: Well, I think Susan Morrison says this in the book, that we began to learn after a while who, which of the two of them would be more receptive to a certain idea, so we'd play them off each other, basically, not always to our advantage, and they were seldom that far apart. It *was* odd having two editors-in-chief, in a way, but . . .

KURT ANDERSEN: It was weird, it was a strange setup.

GEORGE KALOGERAKIS: I mean, is there another example?

DAVID CARR: It didn't come off as weird in the book, it seems like, unless George left a lot on the cutting-room floor.

KURT ANDERSEN: It was just, you know, we had this idea together, we did it together, it didn't—we would never—strike us as odd.

GRAYDON CARTER: I know that I'd been able to—if I'd put out the magazine on my own, it wouldn't be a tenth of the magazine that we did with Kurt. I think it sort of—it doubled and tripled by doing it two people together, and it was a very fluid thing from the very first day. There was no—there was no sort of A/B thing, it was just—everything just sort of went around in a circle. And the office was very collegial. You know, when I read the book, I thought we had a sort of reasonably good time, but we were always worried about money and a million other things. If you were twenty-one years old and this was your first job—and there was at one point, there was one thing we used to do which was the Iron Man Nightlife Decathlon. And two of the interns, Bob Mack and John Brody, they had to infiltrate Priscilla Rattazzi and Chris Whittle's wedding on Georgica Pond. And in the dark of night, they're taking like a Zodiac boat across Georgica Pond James Bond-style with dinner jackets on, so they would fit in with the people in the wedding,

and if that's your first job, it's downhill from there, because nothing's as much fun as that.

(laughter)

DAVID CARR: One of the things, even though you're kind of different guys, you do have this sort of from-other-placeness going on where—

GRAYDON CARTER: That's code for Canada.

DAVID CARR: —you're from that place called Canada—

KURT ANDERSEN: And I'm from Southern Canada, Nebraska.

DAVID CARR: Nebraska, and there's a tradition in New York media, dating back to Harold Ross and probably before it, of rustics coming in from—

GRAYDON CARTER: Clay Felker, too.

DAVID CARR: Yes, Clay Felker. Of people coming from other places and experiencing New York with some degree of shock but not really awe. That the town never really got over on them and the fact that you were from a long ways away, you were from a long ways away, you were from the Bronx, so that sort of counts, **(laughter)** although your dad is a New York shrink, so that brings you a little closer in to the—and you did end up on the Upper West.

GRAYDON CARTER: Actually we were in—at least I was certainly in awe of the city, was not blasé about it at all, and in fact I still am not blasé about it.

KURT ANDERSEN: There was a certain Gershwin soundtrack, literally, sometimes, and certainly figuratively in—so I mean, but, point taken, that we were enough outsiders to be astounded, appalled, whatever, *struck* by this—

GRAYDON CARTER: And enthralled by the whole circus too.

DAVID CARR: When I first came to New York, I actually went to work for Kurt, which will account for any sort of face-licking I do on this panel.

KURT ANDERSEN: Eeeew.

(laughter)

DAVID CARR: All right, hand-holding, whatever you want. We worked at Starrett-Lehigh. At night, you tried to sell a magazine in 1991, the deepest media recession.

KURT ANDERSEN: Did sell a magazine in 1991. For a dime.

DAVID CARR: For a pair of pants. And you started an Internet media company in 1999, 2000, 2001, right?

KURT ANDERSEN: Yes.

DAVID CARR: So stipulate your great market timer. **(laughter)** But anyways we were—you're writing a historical novel in the YouTube age, too, so you tend to counter program at times. Okay, that's what I meant to say. But I can remember being—

KURT ANDERSEN: Is that the face-licking part? **(laughter)**

DAVID CARR: Yes, this ends in a hug, believe me. I can remember being at Starrett-Lehigh, thirteenth floor, where it faced north, and it was my first day in New York. I fell

off a turnip truck like six years ago, it was at night, by the way, and looking up at midtown, and Kurt came around the corner by the coffee thing and I was just staring at midtown, and taking it in, and it took my breath away, and one of the things he said to me is, “You know what? That keeps on happening. This city will *not* let you down.” Do you think New York, as it is today, is as charming, as wonderful, as rich a newsbed, as *Spy* magazine fell into? I mean, there’s a lot more clutter to fight through.

KURT ANDERSEN: I would have to say yeah, I mean, you know, I mean, Times Square is now what it is as opposed to what it was then, and there are all of the versions of that, but, you know—

GRAYDON CARTER: Actually, I feel the opposite. I feel that the city is now there *just* for money. That it is impossible to be middle class in New York City and have your kids in schools. It’s all about hedge-fund money, very little of that money that flows into the city sticks to the people who actually help make the city run and I think that there are—very few writers live in New York now because they can’t afford it. I know on our staff at *Vanity Fair*. Most of the—almost the entire sort of assistant-level staff, they all live in Brooklyn, live in the far reaches of Brooklyn.

KURT ANDERSEN: And what’s wrong with that?

GRAYDON CARTER: No, no, no, Brooklyn’s the hip borough, but the city’s just too expensive now. And I think that it’s very suburban, no smoking, no trans fats, and that’s not what New York was when we got here.

KURT ANDERSEN: It was a city of trans fats. It really was.

(laughter)

GEORGE KALOGERAKIS: And we just lucked into that, you know.

GRAYDON CARTER: Skyscrapers and trans fat. It was what brought us here.

DAVID CARR: Other things have changed, and, you know, Updike talked—I think it was Updike who talked about liking things with edges, whether it's this book, which is sort of die-cut elegance, or *Spy*, which had edges every which way you wanted to think about it. Do you think in a post-Internet age, and I'm interested in what *you* think because you and I have talked before about this, that there is no general interest per se anymore, and yet Graydon edits a very successful general-interest magazine. So I wonder if there, let's say you had instead of Si Newhouse, who instead of wanting to put a hundred million into *Portfolio*, he wanted to drop something into the next version of *Spy*. Would it have a shot?

KURT ANDERSEN: You know, I think it would be very tough. You know, *Vanity Fair* is what it is, and the *New Yorker* is what is, *New York Magazine* is what it is, the *New York Times* is what it is, they were grandfathered in, effectively, before the Internet existed, or before this era of a zillion channels, including the Web, existed. So I think to start a thing that we—we lucked out in a million ways, among them being that, you know, that there weren't ten or a hundred other things trying to do what we were doing, so, you know, we were lucky, in our little tiny way to have the impact that we did, that would be very tough to do these days.

GRAYDON CARTER: Also we would have—if we started this up again, if we were starting this up today, we'd probably do it on the Internet, we wouldn't do a print version at all, there'd be absolutely no point to it.

DAVID CARR: Do you ever think to yourself, George, when you look around and say, well, *Spy* is everywhere, but *Spy* is really nowhere in terms of like pulling the trigger and really finishing somebody off.

(laughter)

GRAYDON CARTER: That may be a good thing, David.

GEORGE KALOGERAKIS: *Spy*'s been everywhere in my life in the last few years, so I don't feel that, but, I mean, are you talking about like, Donald Trump, or—

DAVID CARR: No, what I mean, but it seems you've been put as this—but there's nothing really *like* it, is there?

GEORGE KALOGERAKIS: Ah, so there should be something like it, otherwise we've failed.

DAVID CARR: Why does there gotta be a dig in there? I'm just trying to run a—no, maybe it speaks to the sui generisness of what you built in the first place, but people, people could say, well, you know, *Spy*'s unholy spawn is every which way—forget that image—but in a way there isn't really anything like it.

KURT ANDERSEN: Well, it's probably true, that the people who deserve to be scared of, are scared of, that's probably true. There's probably the same aggregate amount of whatever, vitriol, mischief-making, mockery, and all that, but it's just spread around.

GRAYDON CARTER: Well, also, the money is—you know, there are many more multimillionaires and billionaires in New York today than there were in the Eighties. But in the Eighties they really showed off. And I mean it was a real parade, and you could see the money. The money here now, it's very—it's sort of damped down and quiet and, you know, shuffled off to Greenwich or sort of offshore, basically.

KURT ANDERSEN: And it was new. New York was practically bankrupt ten years before we started, and so when we started, it was this first flush of boom time, you know.

DAVID CARR: And some of those nouveau-riche people, became, by now they're practically old money, if you want to think about it.

GRAYDON CARTER: Or no money in a lot of cases as well.

DAVID CARR: And there's that. One of the things I wanted—there is such a touch of the absurd when you go back and look at *Spy*. I mean, you think of Sammy Davis, there's a lot of ways to go with that, but in the page I was looking at he was kind of a muse for Cubism, and so you're going, "Sammy Davis, Cubism," and I'm thinking to myself, "I wonder what drugs went into that, was it an opium thing, was it a coke thing?" And then I talk to you guys and I find out, not really.

KURT ANDERSEN: No, but that's a good example of things we did which I love that we did, like that was called "People who Looked Like Art," **(laughter)** and Sammy Davis looks Cubist, looked Cubist, because of his eye and everything, and again it was just this strange conceit that we did. Keith Richards looked like a Klimt, and so you know, I mean, people say, "Oh, yes, you were mean to everyone, you did this," but we also just had these—we had these curious little conceits that we relentlessly pushed to make a ten-page feature out of. There was, I mean, if there are any *Spy* alumni in the audience who want to contradict us about there being not a lot of drugginess—

GRAYDON CARTER: As far as I was concerned, there was no drugs in the office, and first of all, we never paid anyone enough money for them to have drugs. **(laughter)** It wasn't the intent, but it was the net result. There was drinking.

DAVID CARR: So brown liquor and desperation produced this kind of creativity.

GRAYDON CARTER: In equal measure.

KURT ANDERSEN: And just—instead of, if you work in a magazine, if you work in anything, there are special brainstorming sessions and editorial meetings, and to a degree I've never encountered since, it was pretty constantly that way. I mean, yeah, we had meetings, but it was, everybody—as George talks about it, in the book, I mean, there was

this sense of taking pleasure in a seed of an idea and carrying it on to a bigger seedling, and so it was not a lot of “Wowwww, people who look like art, man” kind of conceptualization.

DAVID CARR: You do that very well for somebody who hasn't had practice. Graydon promised me if I did this that you would reveal who Celia Brady was, finally lay it out there and tell us. Who was she, Kurt?

KURT ANDERSEN: Oh, all right. **(laughter)** She was our Hollywood columnist, and she still is well employed in Hollywood. It's amazing that, I mean, you know, we know who Deep Throat is, but we don't know who Celia Brady is. It's amazing to me that that's lasted.

DAVID CARR: Why do you think she hasn't—I mean, there still is no great sort of industry gossip columnist. I mean, it filled such a need at the time, and then just kind of went.

KURT ANDERSEN: Well, again, interestingly, if you think back, and you look back, just as the *New York Times* was unchallenged, as you said and so that was scary and interesting to do our column about then, you know, people like Michael Ovitz and Michael Eisner were then and their equivalents are now, very rarely, you know, criticized, or teased, or made fun of. So it was extraordinary at the time.

GRAYDON CARTER: Also, Ovitz—it happened one night around 1987 at the Oscars. Three people who accepted Oscars thanked Michael Ovitz. And we came in the next day, and said, “Who the fuck is Michael Ovitz?” So we discovered that he is this superpowerful agent out there, and we try to get some photographs of him, and there are no photographs of him, he's bought up every single photograph of himself, as had Michael Milken at the time, and with that kind of mystery, that bred sort of curiosity, and it was the first magazine to introduce Michael Ovitz to the—sort of the popular world.

And it, in Hollywood, none of the newspapers in Hollywood have a gossip column, so there's no industry *anything* out *there*. So this came as a sort of jolt of freshness to them.

KURT ANDERSEN: And we were too stupid in that particular case to have sold out. About a few months before we started wondering who Michael Ovitz was, one of the things that led us to wonder that is that these three agents from CAA called us up. It was about a year—not quite a year—into *Spy*, and said, “You know, we want to represent you, we want to put you in Hollywood,” and we go, “Well, who are you? What’s this?” Literally, we were that clueless about the opportunities to sell out (**laughter**) that we then went ahead and burned our bridge.

DAVID CARR: And as it is, the book, if it does well, will probably outperform the magazine in terms of what you pulled out of *Spy*?

KURT ANDERSEN: Well, isn't that rude, to even suggest that sort of money talk, David? (**laughter**) No, it—personally? Yeah, that's probably true. Although, we had this—George got most of it.

DAVID CARR: Just checking. I was wondering why you guys treated him with so much deference. One of the things that I found myself wondering when I was looking at the book is how you would have maneuvered past 9/11? It would have been—

KURT ANDERSEN: We would have declared irony dead.

DAVID CARR: You know, dead bodies everywhere, la la la, and just waited for satire.

GRAYDON CARTER: Well, the tail end of the Nineties for the editors who were there, I think it was a much more difficult period than the tail end of the Eighties when we were there. It just—the city sort of drained out a lot. It was not the sort of hothouse that it was in that first flush of sort of Eighties money and exuberance and sort of nonbankruptcy in New York.

KURT ANDERSEN: And *Us* Magazine had become sort of *Spyified* and *EW* had become sort of *Spyified* and there was an Internet, so it was just tougher all the way around, I think, to do it. So your question of how 9/11 would have happened is so sort of triply hypothetical it's even hard to imagine, although, you know—

DAVID CARR: So the question sucked, basically.

KURT ANDERSEN: David, I'm not your editor anymore.

DAVID CARR: One of the things I thought about was the—in the book, Graydon, you're the mercurial young man moving from thing to thing, and yet now you seem to have found a job where you're not tilting toward the next thing, where you've found a way to reinvent where you are, maybe making movies while you do it, maybe bringing on new people, is that just the fact that you've grown up, or you've finally found a megaphone that sort of suits you?

GRAYDON CARTER: Well, it—*Vanity Fair* is whatever you want to make it, and I made it into something that I feel comfortable with and a job that I absolutely adore. It has a great influence, and I've got more war reporters than society reporters at the magazine now. So, and I've been there almost fifteen years, and I just can't imagine going anywhere else. I'm surrounded by friends at the magazine and long-standing colleagues and why would you leave *that* job? Also, I don't get any offers.

(laughter)

DAVID CARR: For the longest time, you guys were pushed up against the glass, pointing at all these sort of exotic fish in the aquarium, and suddenly you went through the glass and ended up on the other side. I'm sure that wasn't the business plan, per se, is "Let's build up bright shining futures for ourselves," but doesn't it feel a little weird how things turned out?

KURT ANDERSEN: Sure, you know.

GRAYDON CARTER: But it's weird in small incremental steps. It's not—do you mean the ironies of the situation?

GEORGE KALOGERAKIS: Any job after *Spy*, I said, is ironic, you know.

KURT ANDERSEN: Yeah, we should have all died in a, you know, limo accident on Lafayette Street in 1991 and then, you know.

DAVID CARR: It would have been a great story.

KURT ANDERSEN: Well, there you go. Not that we took limos.

GRAYDON CARTER: Actually, one time we were on—we used to have the *Spy* closing dinner at a restaurant and one time we had it on a boat, and we thought, what would happen if the boat sank and we all died and Jamie Malinowski imagined the headline, “Now Who’s Laughing?”

(laughter)

GEORGE KALOGERAKIS: Well, Graydon was also—Graydon hated all of us riding the same elevator, it has to be said too. Like, we’d split up. Just in case. **(laughter)**

DAVID CARR: That’s what they say about journalism, is your assets take the elevator every single night. I wonder if—you know, one headline I read, “A friend in need is not as good as a friend with a house in Tuscany.” Do you remember who wrote that?

GEORGE KALOGERAKIS: Jim Collins’s friendship piece, I think.

DAVID CARR: I mean, it's such a crisp and clear thought, and, I mean, it really stands for the ages, doesn't it?

KURT ANDERSEN: Jim Collins is and was a great writer, and has just sold a novel to Little, Brown, so everybody can buy his beautiful work in a year.

DAVID CARR: Why do you think so many—we'll get to questions in a moment, but so many of your guys—your people, excuse me—went on to television, right?

KURT ANDERSEN: Starting at a certain point, yeah, well, when we started making television shows, they all saw, "Uh, I can be paid hundreds of thousands of dollars doing this thing, or thirty-four thousand dollars doing this thing," and so they all got poached. But, yeah.

GRAYDON CARTER: And then one would attract another—a lot of them wound up with Letterman, and there was a long sort of flood to *The Simpsons*. And there was a period there, I remember, there were four of five writers out of ten were former *Spy* people.

DAVID CARR: And so that's how you ended up with the clip, I guess.

GRAYDON CARTER: Tim Long, who had been an intern at *Spy*, was the executive producer of *The Simpsons*.

DAVID CARR: Are you guys ready to ask some questions? Good. I'm glad. Do we have some mikes out there, or how are we going to do it, Paul?

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: There are mikes. If you could come up to the mike, that would be very helpful.

DAVID CARR: We can't really see you, so you're just going to have to start shouting at us.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: The mikes are here.

Q: Do I get to go first? I was thinking, as I was listening to this, how so many of the phrases that you used to describe people—you know, “the bosomy dirty-book writer” and “short-fingered vulgarian” have stuck in my head the way that, you know, “the wine-dark sea” does. **(laughter)** And so I was just wondering, Graydon, what was it like the first time you met Si Newhouse after *Spy*, because you had a particularly good phrase for him, which I'm sure half the people here know but I forget. I think it involved the word “short” but I don't quite remember. What was that like for you?

GRAYDON CARTER: Well, he, um. Si is funny, because he tried to buy *Spy* at one point. But we didn't talk much about it for a couple of years after I'd joined the magazine, and then at one point, we were having dinner at the Connaught in London. And he said, “You know something, I wish you'd done a column on Condé Nast like you did on the *Times*.” And I said, “Why?” and he said, “So then I'd know what was going on.” **(laughter)** So he took—that sort of thing rolls off Si like—he really—nothing could bother Si. But with Shirley Lord, I know that people—immediately their eyes when they were introduced to her, immediately went to her chest, to see if in fact she was bosomy, and people's eyes go to Donald Trump's hands very quickly.

KURT ANDERSEN: And he's had them surgically lengthened, I think.

GRAYDON CARTER: But also, that was a style we'd sort of picked up a bit from *Time* magazine, where we'd both worked, of this just sort of very dense, adjective-filled, writing style and at *Time* in the 1940s and '50s, they were not that far from bosomy dirty-book writer.

KURT ANDERSEN: Evil-eyed fellow-traveler.

Q: In the life of *Spy* how many libel lawsuits did you have? Did anybody win big, or do you have any amusing stories about those lawsuits?

DAVID CARR: Good question.

KURT ANDERSEN: There were, during our era, no libel suits. No suits filed. There was—somebody can correct me—there was a suit filed after we all left by Steven Seagal, **(laughter)** and that’s really why the magazine died—no! He withdrew the suit. He was persuaded to withdraw his lawsuit.

GRAYDON CARTER: We’d done a story on Patricia Kluge when she and John Kluge were big social figures in Washington. He owned Metromedia and was a billionaire and it was about her days as a belly dancer in Soho in London. She used to go out with the man who owned *Knave* magazine, which was a sort of soft-porn magazine in London. And he went to his lawyers to talk about suing us, but his lawyers happened to be our lawyers, Paul Weiss, and they were also investors in the magazine, so that sort of went away very quietly. **(laughter)**

KURT ANDERSEN: We also once, we had a letter from Richard Gere’s lawyer once. We had no story planned on Richard Gere, we weren’t doing anything, but suddenly we get this—on a legal letterhead, all this talk of “gerbils this” **(laughter)** . . . so we were threatened with lawsuits over things that were in *their* minds.

GRAYDON CARTER: We were going to run in the Separated at Birth thing a picture of Richard Gere and a gerbil and just say Separated at Cedars-Sinai **(laughter)** but it never ran.

DAVID CARR: Go ahead, sir.

Q: I was always fascinated by “The Mating Habits of James Toback,” and not just because I look like the guy, which is unfortunate, but— **(laughter)**

DAVID CARR: Did you ever try that on anybody? “Hey, I’m James Toback!”

Q: I just want to ask you. How did that get put together? Were that many people willing to speak on the record, and were you really in fear of your life?

GEORGE KALOGERAKIS: We did have a bodyguard.

KURT ANDERSEN: The only time we ever hired security as a result of threats.

GRAYDON CARTER: We should remind them of what the story was. What it was—it was, James Toback, the film producer would stand outside Zabar’s—director—stand outside Zabar’s and just basically work on the odds and if a thousand women walk by and if you ask a thousand women if they’d like to sleep with you, at some point somebody’s going to say, “What the hell? Yes.” **(laughter)** So this is what he did in his off hours. Five months ago, I have a niece who’s just out of university. And she called, she says, “This guy James Toback came up to me on the Upper West Side of New York,” and I said, “Just stay away from the man.” **(laughter)** He’s still at it. He’s constant.

KURT ANDERSEN: You know, when we did it, because we were so happy with it, we did it in the form of a giant chart with these different women and all of the lines he’d said and what he’d said once he had them naked and everything. And it was a quadruple-foldout chart.

DAVID CARR: Well, it tracked outcome, second pickup lines. The amount of industry that sort of went into that. You guys were pretty serious about goofy things.

GRAYDON CARTER: There was one—George’s soon-to-be wife, Rachel Urquhart. We did a CAA—the *New Yorker* didn’t have a masthead, so—did she work at the *New*

Yorker? Oh, the CAA did not have a list, a unified list of all their clients, nobody knew what all the clients were, some of the partners didn't know all the clients and Rachel spent the better part of a year compiling the CAA list, and they had to shut this place down when it was published because they had to call Dustin Hoffman and tell him why he wasn't getting the parts that were going to Al Pacino and calling Pacino and tell him why he wasn't getting the parts for Dustin Hoffman. Because they had everybody in those days. Somebody spent a half-year compiling a *New Yorker* masthead.

GEORGE KALOGERAKIS: Which was published, I think, the week before William Shawn was fired.

DAVID CARR: I think people forget how much sort of serious journalism that you guys published. You sort of figured out the high/low thing early on that a lot of magazines now tend to emulate, but when you did the book, like, what was your favorite, like, proudest *Spy* moment in terms of a get, a prank, an execution of, you know, a particular idea, what's one thing, where you all just stood back and said, "Yeah, there it is."?

GRAYDON CARTER: Mine were mostly non-serious journalism. My favorite things were the Iron Man Nightlife Decathlon, where we had interns following three bachelors at the time through New York to log the number of girls they tried to pick up, the amount of drinks they cadged, the nightspots they stopped off at, and it was taking something so frivolous and treating it with such detail and seriousness. And then there was this thing we did where we sent multimillionaires thirty-four-cent checks and waited to see who cashed them. **(laughter)** We wanted to see if they would take the time to open the thing, write their name, "for deposit only," but a quarter of them, they signed the thirty-four-cent check, and so if they signed a thirty-four-cent check, we sent them a sixteen-cent check, and the ones who didn't cash the thirty-four-cent check, we sent them a sixty-eight cent check to find out what the barriers were. **(laughter)** Now, this took almost a year to do, because you had to keep waiting for the checks to come back, remailing new checks out, and it was all done by Eddie Stern, whose father was Leonard Stern, one of the billionaires. But at the end of the day, the two people who signed the sixteen-cent check,

and you couldn't have asked for better, were Adnan Kashoggi, then the giant arms dealer in the country, in the world, and Donald Trump.

(laughter)

GEORGE KALOGERAKIS: We should also mention “Bohemian Grove,” which a lot of people have cited as one of their favorite investigative pieces. Phil Weiss wrote that. One of my colleagues at the *Times* the other day referred to it as *Spy*'s Pentagon Papers.

KURT ANDERSEN: One of the perfect moments for me was—David Ives, who was a great playwright, and wrote a piece that he'd sent in over the transom, which was all of or a good part of David Mamet's work reduced to one-minute plays. And we published it in the magazine, it's in the book as well, with a little theater you can cut out and little cut-outs of the actors—

GRAYDON CARTER: Finger puppets.

KURT ANDERSEN: —finger-puppets so you could perform it, and that was wonderful, and it was funny, but then, as a charity thing, for a Broadway AIDS charity, we got his—Gregory Mosher, who had directed Mamet, and all of these actors, William H. Macy and all of these, and Mamet himself and we went to Lincoln Center and performed all these things in one minute and had two or three fifteen-minute intermissions. And it was just—it was this one night only, and it was just, I don't know, it was bliss. It was awesome.

GRAYDON CARTER: And the premise was also, this is how long theater should really last. **(laughter)** Rather than that hour-and-a-half, two-hour thing with no lunch break or dinner break. Ten minutes.

DAVID CARR: It's okay to hate high culture unless it lasts sixty seconds. Did you—while these things were happening, all these things kept sort of turning out and turning

out and turning out, and you guys did a good job of playing out that string, did you say to yourselves, “This can’t possibly last.”

GRAYDON CARTER: I felt it actually. We used to have these annual big parties in the *Spy* ballroom, our offices were up on the top floor, and we’d have these annual parties. I remember the very *first* party, walking around, a little bit drunk, thinking, “This is it. It’s not going to get any more fun than this.” And I thought, I had a sort of impending sense of—that it could never be like this forever.

GEORGE KALOGERAKIS: Speaking for the rank and file on the staff, I have to say they did a very good job of persuading the rest of us that it was going to go on forever—this was for life, so work hard, you know. **(laughter)**

KURT ANDERSEN: But, you know, I think there was an undercurrent of that which, you know, tends to accelerate the sense of, you know, pushing the pedal to the metal, because it’s not going to last forever.

DAVID CARR: One thing—if you look at the pictures of the staff, journalism is generally produced by pasty-faced trolls working in cubes with headsets on. What’d you do with all the ugly people? I mean, I’m looking at these pictures and you’re all super-natty and cute. I mean, was there some kind of like, dress code, fashion standards?

GRAYDON CARTER: It didn’t hurt. **(laughter)** There’s a line in *His Girl Friday* where Cary Grant says, or Walter Burn says, “It’d be nice to have a face around here you could look at without blanching,” which was basically part of the philosophy there.

KURT ANDERSEN: Anyway, the point is, they were all young, and everyone when they’re twenty-two is decent-looking, so—

GRAYDON CARTER: And now look at us. We’re grizzled old hulks.

DAVID CARR: Have you ever been watching the daily news and think, “Oh, this just cries out for *Spy*? This is such a *Spy* moment.”

KURT ANDERSEN: I have those times, and I still have a little bit of the Separated at Birth tic in me. It’s just oh, George Kalogerakis and the star of Gandhi. Ben Kingsley!

(laughter)

GRAYDON CARTER: Sir Ben Kingsley.

DAVID CARR: Do you ever find yourself pushing people together at cocktail parties, giving it a little back and forth?

KURT ANDERSEN: Not so far. **(laughter)**

DAVID CARR: Do we have a question out there? I think there’s a lot of people out there just sort of anxious to get to the book signing. I know all these guys a little bit and one of the coolest things about them is, you know, Graydon is so all-powerful, Kurt is so mysterious, George is so smart. They all play ball, they’re all fun, nice people, and part of the reason I was thrilled to come out tonight is I knew we’d have a little bit of fun talking to them, but I most appreciate you guys coming, as well, and thanks to Paul.

(applause)