UNPLUG, READ, & CONNECT: A SILENT BOOK CLUB GATHERING

October 28, 2025

UNPLUG, READ AND CONNECT

A Silent Book Club Gathering

THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 6TH
FROM 7PM - 9PM
390 SOCIAL
390 5TH AVE, BROOKLYN

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CO-SPONSORED BY
THE PARK SLOPE FOOD COOP FUN COMMITTEE
AND PARK SLOPE PARENTS

Join us for a cozy community reading event where we turn off our screens to reconnect with the joy of reading and being in community.

Thursday, November 6, from 7:00–9:00 p.m. • 390 Social • 390 5th Ave, Brooklyn

We'll begin with 30 minutes of quiet reading, followed by conversation and reflection with fellow readers. Another 30 minutes of reading will follow, plus connection time at the end. Bring whatever you'd like to read, settle in, order a drink or bite to support 390 Social and make some new reader friends. Sign up here: https://forms.gle/7fr-J2Xmg3xZXM4qT6.

Open to Coop members and fellow community members.

Co-sponsored by the Park Slope Food Coop Fun Committee and Park Slope Parents.

CONVERSATIONS WITH COOP AUTHORS

October 28, 2025



By Juliet Kleber

July 23, 2024

It should come as no surprise to readers of the *Linewaiters' Gazette* that the Coop is home to a great number of writers of all kinds—from celebrated newspaper journalists to children's book authors and writers of literary fiction. The *Gazette* interviewed three of these member-authors recently: Eileen Kelly, author of the novel *Small Wonder,* an introspective and suspenseful story of a young single mother living and teaching in Park Slope; Lauren Mechling, *Gazette* editor and co-author of the "comedic time travel novel" *The Memo*; and Stephen Savage, *Gazette* illustrator and author of *Rescue Cat*, an illustrated story for young readers in which the titular character takes her turn as rescuer.

The *Gazette* spoke to each author about their recently published or soon-to-be-released books, their experiences at the Coop and the creative community that exists

here.

The following interviews have been edited for clarity and brevity.

Eileen Kelly, author of *Small Wonder*—out August 6 from Flexible Press

How long have you been a Coop member?

My husband, Anthony Richter, and I joined the Coop in 2003, when our children were five and three years old. Now both of them are Coop members.

Tell us a little about your novel.

It's about a single parent with a poorly-paying teaching job who is facing some economic crises, including losing her housing, and encounters a widower whose child is in her class and whose other child is a friend of her son's. They have a flirtation and she is tempted by the idea of saving herself by attaching herself to this man. He is very charming, but his children are behaving badly, becoming more and more aggressive. At the same time she's trying to figure out what happened to his wife, who died kind of mysteriously. It's a bit thriller-ish. But it's also about a very civilized place where people have very high standards for how they treat other people, and the challenge of dealing with children who do not follow those rules.

Your novel is set in Park Slope; do you think there are any features of life in the neighborhood that Coop members would recognize?

In my 20s, I was moving around to lots of different places. In my 30s, I settled in Park Slope, and it was a different experience of life—covering the same ground, the same blocks back and forth. That can be monotonous, but it can also be building a deeper connection to where you live. I wanted to give a sense of this woman walking from her house to work, from her house to school, from school to her house. And even in a big city, in a community like this you can have a very small-town experience of life.

I draw from my decade working as a classroom teacher at Beansprouts preschool. It's been around since 1984. It occupies from 10th Street to 7th Street on 6th Avenue in Brooklyn, so right up the road from the Coop. [In the novel] I make up the school and invent the characters, but I try to re-create from my experience the relationships and experience of teachers, parents and younger children growing up in this area.

What aspects of that experience feel especially particular to this neighborhood?

Everything happens on foot. Private moments happen in public spaces. And I think people who've lived here a long time have a sense of privacy that they sort of carry with them as they move through a place crowded with people.

Also, this particular family likes to go walking down by the Gowanus Canal. It's set a little earlier in the past, so it isn't developed, and they like looking at the excavators and the machines and the big cement-processing plant down by the Gowanus and under the BQE. I hope to capture the experience of children growing up in a city, too. They're playing in parks, they don't have a yard, so all their play takes place in public.

Do you think the Coop is kind of a microcosm of that familiar-but-public type space?



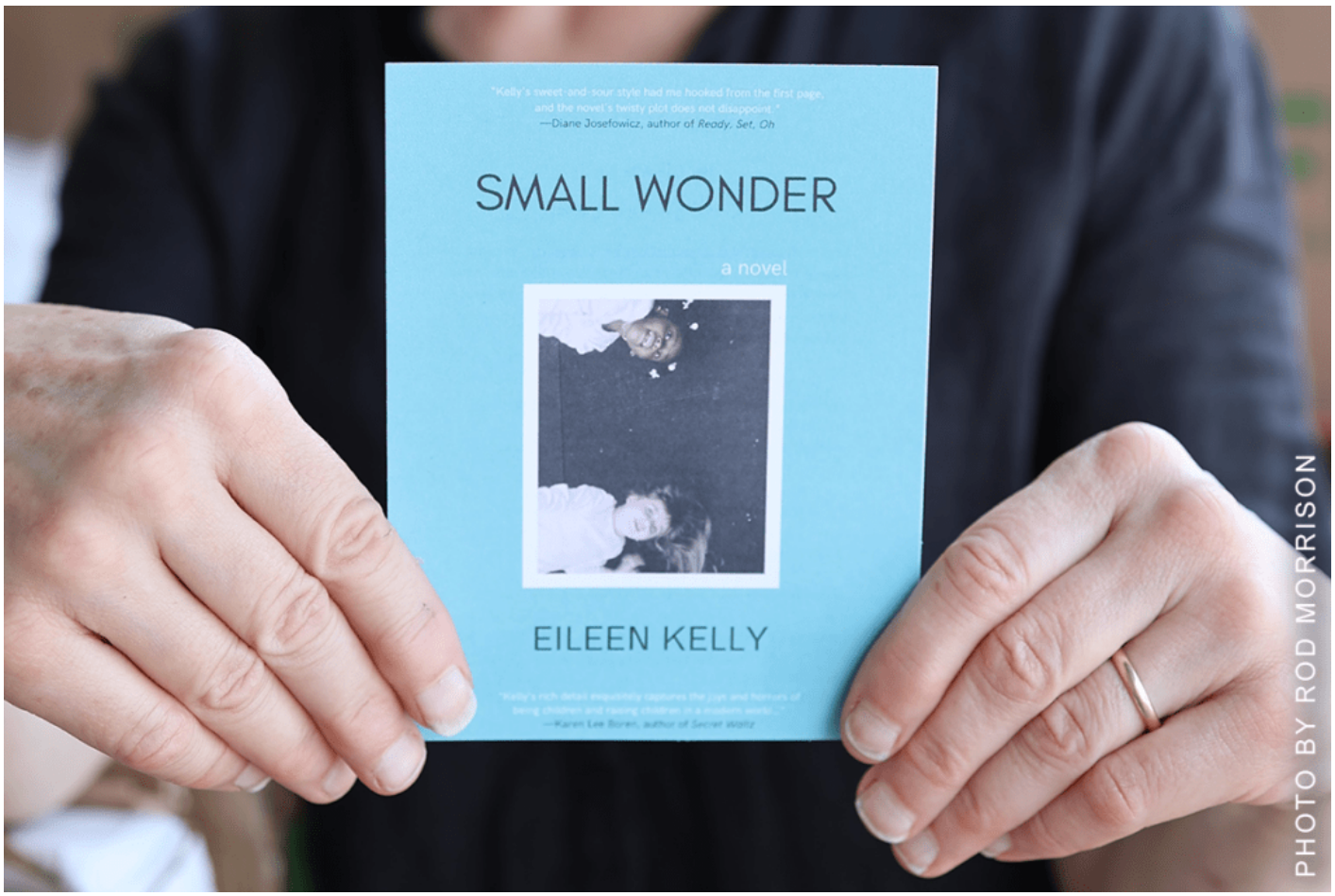
Going into the milk cooler is a metaphor for Eileen's life as she tends to work in private. But with her book coming out, she's determined to step outside the milk cooler.

That's very true. When they had child care pre-COVID, I would work up there, and it was sort of that same thing. But like many writers, I'm an introvert, and I found the best place for introverts to work their Coop shift is the dairy cooler. I would just go in, put on my big heavy coat and my gloves, and space out entirely unbothered. Whereas my husband, who is a super social guy, would be in places where you're all wrapping the cheese together and you can talk. Every time he goes, he comes back with another person he found who he knows from work connections or school. So there is a place for everybody, and people form their little communities and alliances and probably there are feuds I don't know of.

We're definitely overdue for a novel or a TV series like *Parks and Recreation* set in a food coop.

I LEFT COLLEGE THINKING, “HERE COMES MY LIFE. I’M GOING TO BE A NOVELIST.”

A portion of the proceeds from *Small Wonder* go to the Center for Popular Democracy—can you tell us about their work and how you came to that decision?



Flexible Press will publish *Small Wonder*. Eileen plans to donate some of the proceeds to the Center for Popular Democracy.
Flexible Press asks all of their authors to choose a nonprofit to share proceeds with. This was my choice.

I got connected to them from Trump-era activism. Their model is to build local power to work toward national change. They work with independent groups across the US

like Make the Road Nevada or Lucha in Arizona. And they really listen to and support the goals of the local group, meeting the needs of that community. In national elections, they work with those groups to elect candidates that they think will meet progressive goals. But the idea mainly is helping people who tend to be without economic or political power build local power so that they can shape their communities.

This is your first published novel and you've described yourself as a "second-act author." Could you talk a little bit about that and how you got where you are now?

I first had a novel represented by a well-connected and pretty powerful literary agent in 1984, when I was a senior in college. I left college thinking, "Here comes my life. I'm going to be a novelist." But she didn't sell it, and then she didn't want the next thing I wrote. And I got another agent who could not sell that book, and then another. I've written five adult novels and come so close so many times to being published, but it never happened. Then 40 years go by, and I stopped telling people I was a writer. It was almost like an embarrassing secret.

There was a period of time where I felt very frustrated, and very much as though I'd failed, and then at some point, I just decided: "This is your only life. You've just got to live this, whatever it is." So I got married, I had a family, and I kept writing, but I let it be less important to me in some ways and got more out of other things. I've also been very politically active and that's very rewarding to me.

Then I finished this novel. I had an agent, she couldn't sell it, and she said, "Well that's it, we're done." And I thought, "No, no, no—not this time." I started sending it out to small presses. Coming at this point in my life it doesn't mean as much as it would have when I was 21, but in some ways I have less at stake, so I can enjoy it more.

I think a lot of people—I'm sure so many Coop members—set out into adulthood saying, "I'm an actor, I'm a playwright, I'm a singer, I'm a painter," and the world is so

economically not built for that and punishing and exclusionary. If I were to do it again, I think I would not be so quick to say, “I’m not a writer because I’m not a published writer.” That was a mistake I made in my thinking. People have rich lives that are not dependent on their employment, and definitely the Coop is an example of that. So few people there are working there for their job. But they write for the Coop, they make art, they do music, they do performances. This is an example of how people’s lives are defined by far more than their paycheck.

Have you found any kind of creative community at the Coop?



Eileen found the best place for introverts to work their Coop shift is the dairy cooler. People say, “You’re a debut author,” and this is kind of a debut in that I’ve been almost a secret author. Going into the milk cooler is such a metaphor for my life. I’m very connected to people, family and close friends, but I really worked in private. I’m now making new connections to people because the book is coming out. So if there is a group of writers at the Coop I don’t know of, I am now determined to step outside the milk cooler and make some friends.

Lauren Mechling, author of *The Memo* (with Rachel Dode)—released by Harper Perennial on June 18.

How long have you been a member of the Coop?

Maybe 20 years. I joined when I was single and very young. Then I got engaged to my then-boyfriend and one of the conditions of marriage was that he join the Coop, so I moved in with him and we now live in Gowanus.

Tell us a little about *The Memo*.


A NOVEL
THE MEMO
RACHEL DODES + LAUREN HECKLING
PHOTO BY ROD MORRISON

The Memo is a novel and a comedy about a woman who gets to go back over the past 10 years and do things over.
In very short… I think of it as a magic carpet ride—it's a time-travel story, but not in the way that most people think of time-travel stories, because it doesn't go back to the Victorian times or when-have-you. It's kind of a sliding-doors tale of a woman who gets to go back over the last 10 years of her life and do things over.

Is there a moment in your life that you would "blitz track" (to use the terminology of the novel) if you could?

There are a million. One thing that keeps coming to mind is that I've started doing more and more humor writing lately and I wish that in college I had not doubted myself on that front. I wish I could blitz track to college and join the humor magazine and give that my all. I'm 46, so the idea of having had the last 25 years to really hone those skills… it's something I'll never get back.

You wrote this book in collaboration with another author, Rachel Dodes. Can you tell me about how that came to be and what the process was like on a granular level?

Rachel and I were reporters together at the *Wall Street Journal* when we were in our 20s. We sat near each other, but it was the kind of office where you put your head down and worked hard. Then five years ago, I wrote a novel called *How Could She,* and Rachel received an early copy and loved it and invited me on her podcast. We discovered in this conversation that there was so much more to the two of us than we had ever realized when we were both in Midtown in this corporate setting. We made each other laugh a lot. I think she's incredibly kooky and ingenious. We kept making each other laugh on Twitter, and she wrote me a message one day and said, "Is there any chance you would want to work on something together? I think we'd be really good collaborators."

I was very excited about that idea because I had been writing things by myself, which

can be lonely. So we started hanging out. We were both unemployed, and we were coming up with different ideas and mapping them out on white boards.

We initially thought we were going to do a scripted podcast, but we kept having meetings with different executives and nothing was happening. And then there was a pandemic, and it became incredibly clear that we don't need to wait for some guy who runs Spotify to give us the green light. We can take one of these stories and we can write it as a novel.

We had a shared Google Doc and took turns every day reading over what the other person had written, rewriting or trying to tweak it to make it funnier, and then adding more. So by the end, we'd kind of established a third voice that's not hers or mine.

I think that's pretty unusual to do with the novel form. I was wondering what drew you to that and—I'm very sorry for what I'm about to say—if it is a kind of cooperative impulse?

It's definitely cooperative in the sense that Rachel and I share all the money half and half. If you're more of a capitalist, I think you would probably say, "No way—I'm going to do this all by myself and keep everything for myself." And like the Coop, I think you just have to kind of love the charms of the place even when it's a little herky-jerky or crowded. You have to be more accepting. There were times that Rachel or I would take out things we didn't love, but others when you have to go, "Alright if you really feel strongly about that—I love you and I trust you."

Food has a pretty important role in the novel—I was wondering if you could speak to the symbolic and personal function that it plays in the story.



Lauren and her co-author, Rachel Dodes, are foodies. Their book features a character that loves baking.

Jenny, the main character, graduated from a prestigious college and majored in economics, but she really just loved baking. That's a huge part of the story—because of the sliding door, there's her life as a "loser" and then her life as a "winner" and in both stories food is how she expresses herself.

In the first draft of the book, food was not a big part of it. But one of the notes we got from a reader was that it was lacking. Rachel and I both love food, and it just seemed like the most obvious, easy and exciting way to rework the story. Initially she was a sound artist, and then we said, “What if she loves baking?”

Even between the two versions of the character’s life, the relationships to food are very different and very representative.

Yeah, she is indulgent in her regular life. She loves eating and going to the farmer’s market and getting pierogies and baking. Then in her alternate life, where she’s supposed to be her “optimized self,” food is a big part of how she is supposed to live but it’s a rather joyless version of how to how to eat and how to nourish yourself, with lots of disgusting smoothies that taste like dirt. But she has a bikini bod.

You’re an editor on the *Gazette*—how long have you been doing that?

Maybe three years. I had been trying for 20 years and then during COVID when suddenly a bunch of journalists left the city, I got on. I started out on the cheese squad, which used to be in the basement and was really fun. It was the same group of people on Friday afternoons and I just loved having these regular catch-ups with the same cast of characters. Then I moved over to an amazing squad at the soup kitchen, but I got kicked off because they needed fewer people and I was the last one who joined. Then I was an exit worker.

> I TEND TO GET A WALKER TO GO HOME, AND I ALWAYS TALK TO MY WALKERS AND ASK THEM A MILLION QUESTIONS. THEY’RE ALMOST ALWAYS ARTICLE-WORTHY.

Has working on the *Gazette* changed your Coop experience?

I keep my eyes open more. Now that I oversee a team of writers, I'm always noticing tiny things, like "We suddenly have all these non-alcoholic cocktails—is that a story?" "What about the new blinking sign where you come in?"



Lauren, oversees a team of writers on the *Gazette*. She always talks to her "walkers" asking them a million questions which are often article-worthy.

I tend to get a walker to go home, and I always talk to my walkers and ask them a million questions. They're almost always article-worthy. I'll ask them how their day was and by the end, I learn that they're the wardrobe designer for *The Bear* or run the exhibition wing at the Brooklyn Museum. Then I'll tell my team maybe someone should write about them, because I'm excited about the community that we have here.

Have you found any kind of creative community at the Coop?

It seems like half of the time when I talk to my walkers, they're also writers. It's exciting that there's this little gem in the neighborhood where I'm surrounded by so many

fellow writers of all different genres. There are some famous writers at the Coop, but even more extraordinary to me, a lot of people who are not famous but still at it and living in Brooklyn. That's so hard to do. We are very writer-rich.

Stephen Savage, author of *Rescue Cat* — out July 23 from Roaring Brook Press

How long have you been a Coop member?

I think about a year and a half. It's very new and exciting. In your 50s, what can you radically do to renovate your life? Well, joining the Coop has been one of those things.

And what's your shopping routine like?



Shopping has always been Steve Savage's job. He gets an electric CitiBike and heads to the Coop with one bag on each of the handlebars.

Shopping has always been a job in my life; when I was a kid I used to go grocery shopping to help my parents. Now I do it for our family. Being in that space is a very comfortable home-like space for me. It doesn't change—I feel like I'm 7 years old again.

But we have a teenage daughter so one challenge is always just getting [nutritious] food that she'll eat. I go probably twice a week with small bags. I feel like if I get more than two bags, then we end up not eating some of it. I get an electric Citi Bike and put one bag on each of the handlebars.

Tell me a little about your work.

My books are on the younger side of the already young picture book demographic—pre-K to six-year-olds. I like that audience a lot: I relate to it, I like going into kindergarten classes and I feel like I have lots of ideas for that group of readers.

Could you tell us a bit about this book in your own words?

It's a story about a cat that sees a little lion cub on a nature show and wants to go and rescue the cub. It's kind of a story about a portal or an alternate universe or your imagination.

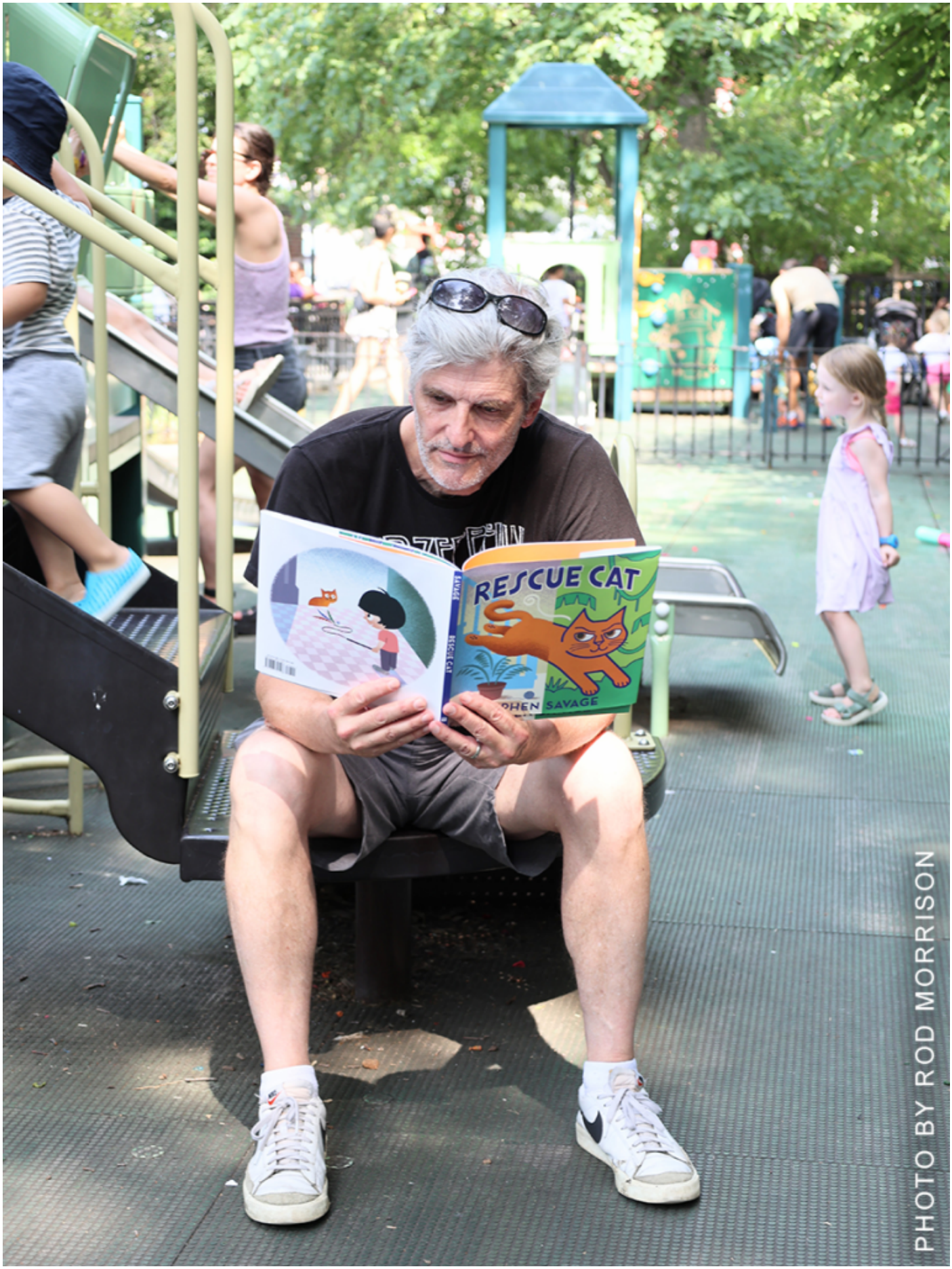
How did you land on this idea?

I've done a lot of vehicle books. So I was trying to think of something new, and I thought it might be fun to do an animal book.

Having worked as an editorial illustrator, I think it's nice when there's a little concept or hook, so I came up with this idea of a cat that goes into the TV and has an adventure. And then the trick was making it a story that feels emotional and has a satisfying arc for the reader. It becomes like a two-year process to create these things—you start with a little kernel of an idea and then you just keep revising it, and in the end it becomes something a little bit different. I'll come up with another idea for a book that

I'll think is just as cool as *Rescue Cat* and then it won't go anywhere—it'll just die after a couple of weeks or months. Good ideas tend to keep you interested and stay alive over time.

I saw in your author bio that you have dogs—why make the main character for this book a cat?


RESCUE CAT
SAVAGE
PHOTO BY ROD MORRISON

Steve mostly writes and illustrates books for pre-K through six-year-olds. His current book is about a cat with magical powers.
The story actually started with a dog—the kernel for the idea came from my in-laws telling us that they couldn't put on certain movies because one of their dogs would freak out and get really aggressive when he saw an animal [on the TV]. That got me thinking—does the dog really believe that's like a window they're looking through?

So the original story was a dog seeing a Lassie-type character on a show and going to rescue Lassie. We shifted to a cat, but it wasn't because of my preference for animal-s—I was just thinking of what character would work better. And for the story, I think the idea of taking in a stray cat is a little bit easier as a starting point because you don't see dogs on the street.

> BUT THE FUNNY THING IS, I ACTUALLY REALLY ENJOY GOING IN AND WRAPPING CHEESE JUST AS MUCH AS DOING THE ILLUSTRATIONS.

How did you end up as an illustrator for the *Gazette*? And what has that experience been like?

We have a neighbor who said that there might be an opening on the *Gazette,* and it was an easy way [to work a shift] where I wouldn't have to get my hands dirty. But the funny thing is, I actually really enjoy going in and wrapping cheese just as much as doing the illustrations.

But for many years, I primarily did newspaper illustrations. And I like doing the *Gazette* illustrations because I don't do much of that work anymore, I do this longer-form illustration with the picture books that takes a long time. With something like the *Gazette,* you spend three hours or four hours and it's over and you get to see the results very quickly.

Have you found any creative community at the Coop?

PHOTO BY ROD MORRISON

Steve, seen here at the J.J. Byrne Playground on 5th Avenue, commented that Park Slope is a mecca for children's book illustrators.

Park Slope is kind of an artist enclave. I did an article years ago for *The Horn Book* about all the illustrators that are in the neighborhood. It's like a mecca for children's book illustrators. I've bumped into a few people [at the Coop]. I'm sure there are others who I haven't asked if they're a member, but secretly you know they have their Coop card in their wallet.

Juliet Kleber is a writer, editor, and musician based in Bed-Stuy. She joined the Coop in 2021 and always comes home with too much cheese.

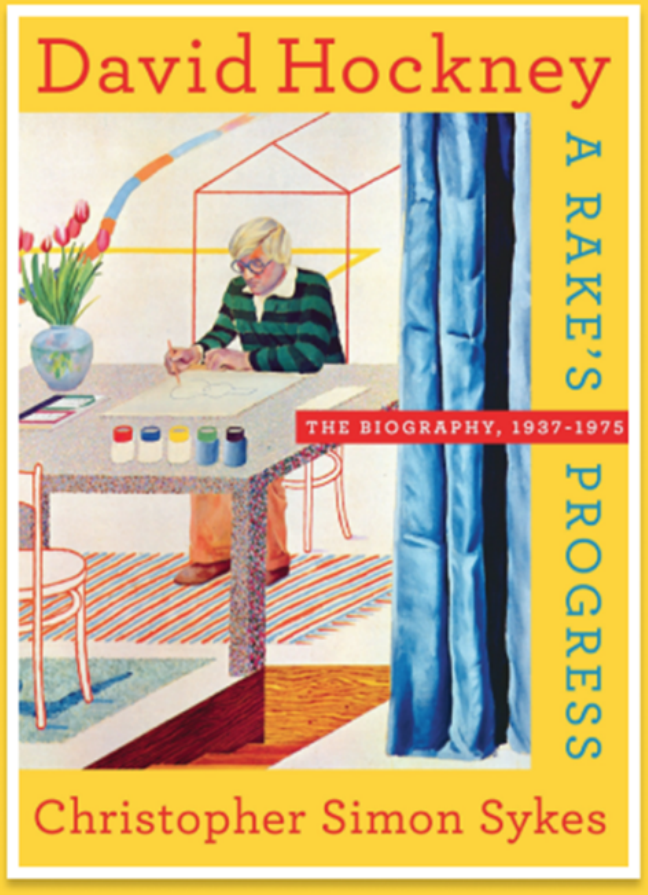
WHAT ARE WE READING? MEMBER BOOK RECOMMENDATIONS

October 28, 2025



By Juliet Kleber

As the days grow shorter and colder, few things seem more appealing than hunkering down with a good book, so the *Gazette* caught up with a few Coop members to hear what they're reading. Taking a moment from their shopping or their shifts, members were gracious enough to share their thoughts and recommendations for the winter nights ahead.



David Hockney: A Rake's Progress by Christopher Simon Sykes, Nan A. Talese/Doubleday, 2012

Christopher Simon Sykes's biography focuses on the beloved English artist's early life and work, from his birth in 1937, to 1975 when he completed the stage design for the Stravinsky opera from which the book takes its title. In addition to the overarching biography, Sykes gives detailed accounts of the conception and completion of a few particularly notable works, highlighting the artist's process and the context his life offers.

Waiting in line to enter the Coop, Danae Oratowski—a member for over twenty years—told the *Gazette,* "If you love David Hockney, this is a great way to find out how he thinks about things and how he approaches his paintings."



Parable of the Sower and *Parable of the Talents* by Octavia Butler, Grand Central, reprint 2019

Octavia Butler's works are some of the most treasured in contemporary science fiction. The Nebula Award-winning *Parable* novels are no exception—they have become genre classics since their releases in 1993 and 1998, respectively. Set in the 2020s, the books follow a "hyperempathetic" Black teenager's coming of age in a dystopian United States ravaged by climate crisis, wealth inequality and capitalistic corruption. Butler is famously incisive on racism and injustice, and the duology has remained remarkably relevant—if not somewhat prescient.

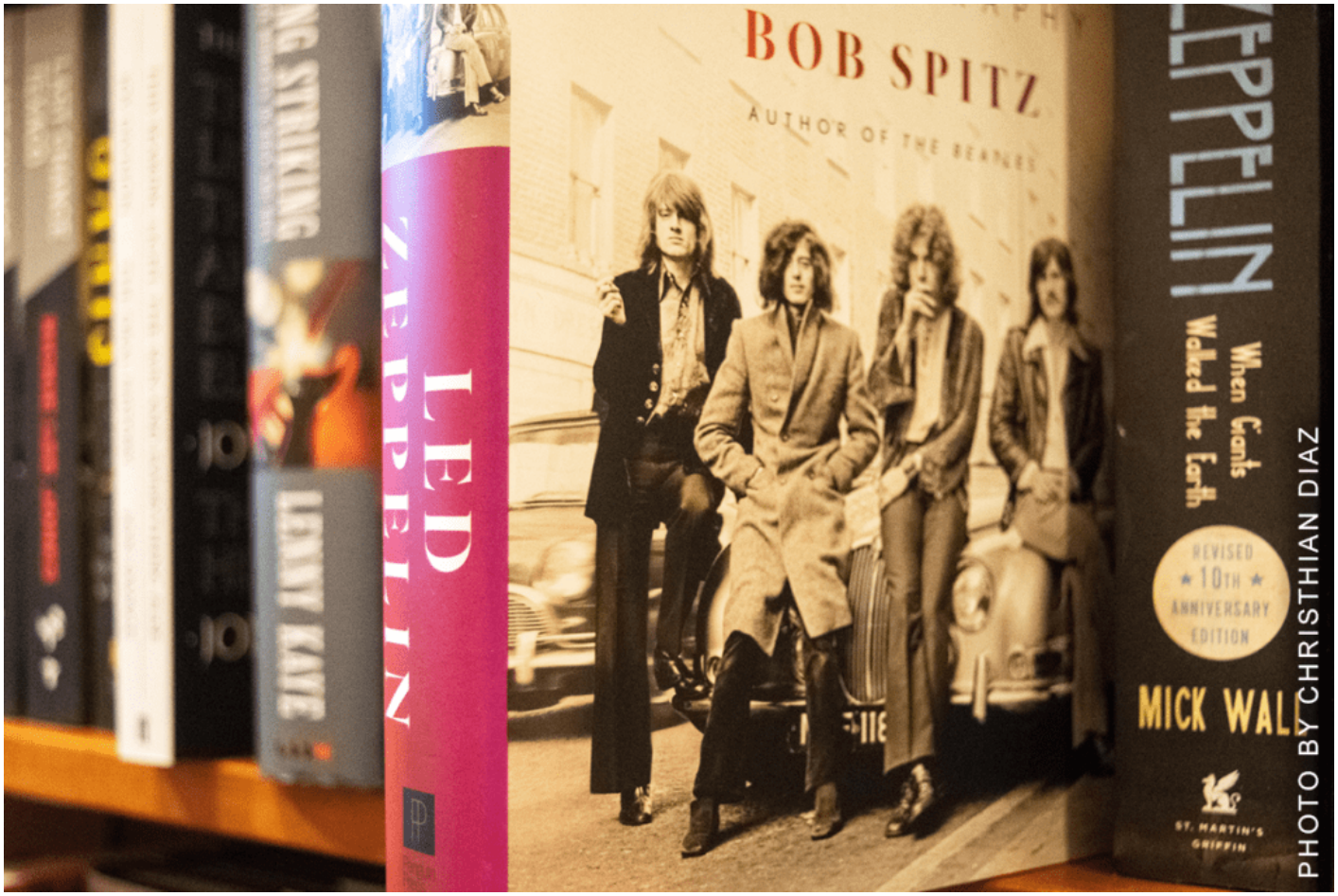
Coop member Chelsea Watson recently finished the duo and recommended them enthusiastically. When asked what she appreciated about the novels, she told the *Gazette:* "I like climate sci-fi stories because I work in climate change and imagining some responses to disaster is really helpful."



Strangers to Ourselves: Unsettled Minds and the Stories That Make Us by Rachel Aviv, Farrar, Strauss & Giroux, 2022

Phillip Stafford, a Coop member since 2014, recommended this new release by *New Yorker* writer Rachel Aviv, an exploration of mental illness and how popular narratives about it affect our lives. Aviv uses her own personal experience as well as detailed and intimate retelling of others' struggles to construct a nuanced and compelling narrative of the state of mental health in our time. Using a mix of memoir and reporting, Aviv examines the currently accepted tenets of psychology and psychiatry, the infrastructure and industry that's been born of them, and their consequences for individuals.

According to Stafford, the book "shows how the stories and diagnoses we use to talk about mental health can be so destructive."



Led Zeppelin: The Biography by Bob Spitz, Penguin Press, 2021

Journalist and biographer Bob Spitz has written extensively on the classic rock legends of the 1960s and 1970s with books about Woodstock, Bob Dylan, and a 2005 bestseller on the Beatles. Last year's *Led Zeppelin* is a characteristically hefty (nearly 700 pages) and authoritative history of the British rock icons, from their early influences to their one-off reunions, with a thorough accounting of their often unsavory exploits in the intervening years. *The Washington Post* described Spitz's retelling as "admirably unsparing, without being egregiously harsh."

Yosef Brody, a Coop member since 2016, recently finished the biography and recommended it with the caveat that his reading experience was "enlightening and then ultimately very depressing."

In a slow moment on his walking shift, Brody also recommended the book he's currently reading:



How to Be a Dictator: The Cult of Personality in the Twentieth Century by Frank Dikötter, Bloomsbury Publishing, 2019

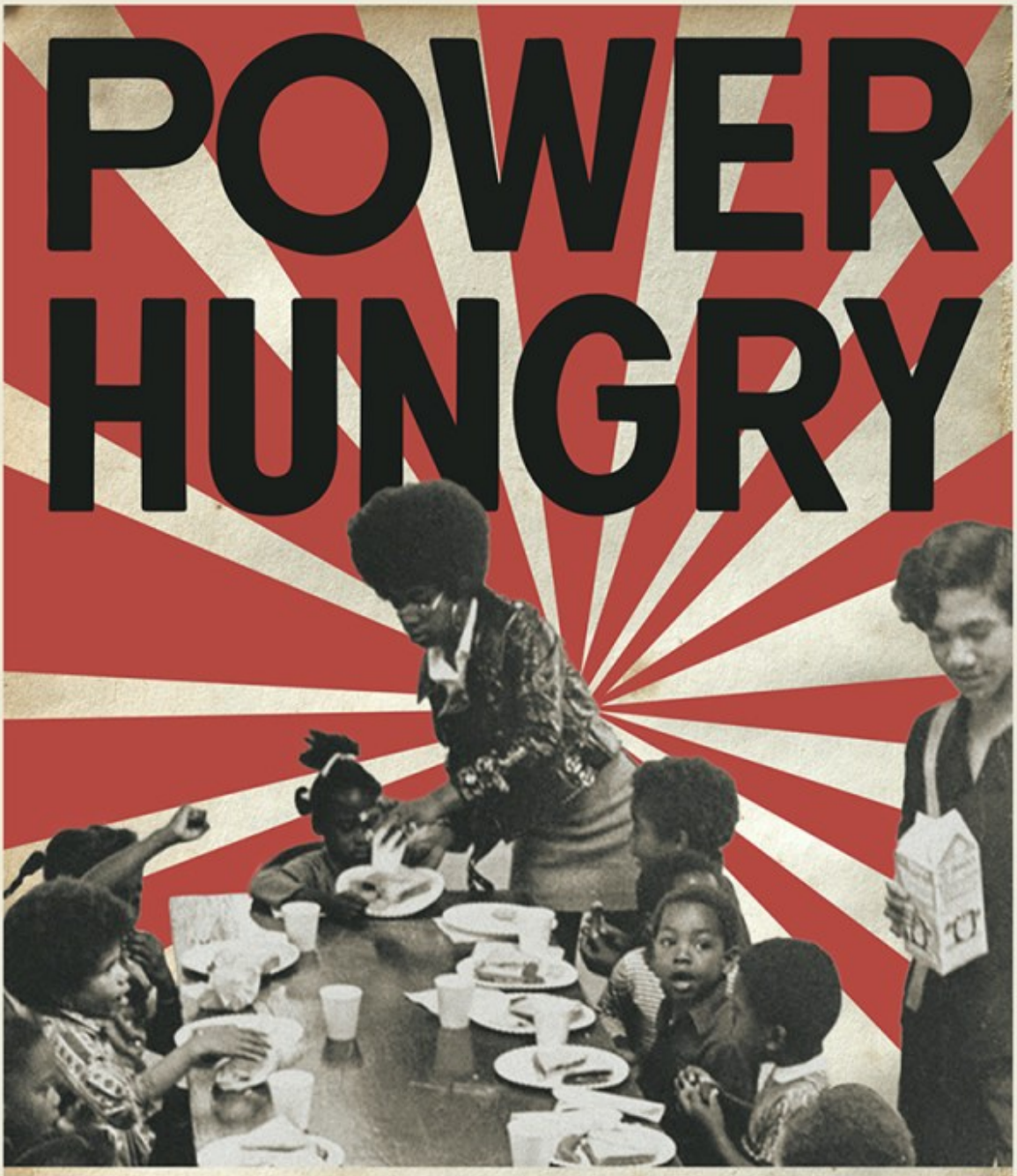
Dutch historian Frank Dikötter makes the case for a kind of consistent performative style among modern dictators, a worthy subject for some post-midterm contemplation. Dikötter explores not only the histories and policies of figures like Hitler, Stalin, and Mao, but more specifically their use of language and image to manipulate public opinion.

“I just read about Mussolini and learned about how much of his regime was about performance art,” Brody told the *Gazette.* “He learned about D’Annunzio in Fiume, Italy, and you can see a direct line from D’Annunzio to Mussolini to Trump—they’re all doing the same thing, basically.”

Juliet Kleber is a writer and editor based in Bed-Stuy. She serves as a member of the editorial board of n+1 *magazine.*

SUZANNE COPE’S BOOK SPOTLIGHTS THE UNSUNG HEROES WHO FED THE BLACK PANTHER MOVEMENT

October 28, 2025



WOMEN OF THE BLACK PANTHER PARTY AND FREEDOM SUMMER AND THEIR FIGHT TO FEED A MOVEMENT

SUZANNE COPE

PHOTO BY SUZANNE COPE

By John B. Thomas

The *Linewaiters' Gazette* recently sat down with Coop member and author Suzanne Cope to discuss her recent book, *POWER HUNGRY: Women of the Black Panther Party and Freedom Summer and Their Fight to Feed a Movement* (Chicago Review Press). The timely book touches on themes of food, community, and social justice through the story of two Black women civil rights activists: Cleo Silvers and Aylene Quin. Although they are from Mississippi and New York City respectively, their stories are united through the use of food as a means to support the voting rights and civil rights movements of the 1960s. What follows is a lightly edited conversation.

