democracy should have been co-produced.

Without any alternative positive account, one may wonder at the end of *Experiments in Democracy* what the prospects are for future deliberations on human-embryo research. With fortuitous timing, the book arrives just as the administration of Donald Trump enters Washington DC, with two ideological opponents of embryonic stem-cell research in tow: vice-president Mike Pence and Tom Price, nominee for health secretary. Many fear a revival of the 'embryo wars' of President George W. Bush's tenure, and the restrictive federal research policies introduced in 2001 (or worse). Both stunted progress in US stem-cell research, introduced great uncertainty among early-career scientists and biotechnology investors, and upended state funding priorities. How might we apply Hurlbut's insights to the battles to come?

To be fair, it is not Hurlbut's intent to issue ethical prescriptions for the future. His only normative commitment in this book is to the question of how we should understand democratic science, not what we should do politically. He wants us to interrogate the idea of "right public reason" and widen the field of potential participants. In my view, however, our greatest collective challenge is not constructing a more inclusive ideal of public reasoning. Rather, it lies in finding cause to believe that, given human nature, divisive social inequities and the current political climate, US citizens are capable of realizing such an ideal. Sadly, social media and the Internet, once embraced as tools for broadening democratic discourse, are now serving mainly to narrow and harden people's views.

At the opposite end of the Cleveland Museum hangs the enormous 'pixelated' portrait *Paul III* (1996) by the artist (and supporter of stem-cell research) Chuck Close. Close created the work by superimposing a grid over a photograph of the sitter and painting abstract forms approximating the details and colours in each square. The result is a face 'mapped' in cells — at arm's length impossible to parse, but at a distance coalescing into a man's cool stare. Close has described the effect of his portraits as the democratization of life experience. Yet there is also something unsettling about this piecemeal portraiture. It could be an apt metaphor for the coming embryo-research controversy in the United States: citizens inhabiting isolated bubbles of (mis)information who, through the aggregation of their votes, coalesce into a picture of democratic agency that one might find unappealing. ■

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Books in brief

Why Time Flies: A Mostly Scientific Investigation

Alan Burdick SIMON & SCHUSTER (2017)

Few concepts are as slippery as time, but science writer Alan Burdick takes on that wrestling match with verve. On his journey through the concept's science and psychology, he interfuses multiple storylines, from the intricate synchronization of Coordinated Universal Time to the stretch and snap of time as felt by infants and the elderly. He does a free fall for neuroscientist David Eagleman's research, delves into geologist Michel Siffre's underground studies on circadian rhythms and explores freshwater biology in the perpetual daylight of an Arctic summer. Wonderfully rich and utterly beguiling.

Amazing Stories of the Space Age

Rod Pyle PROMETHEUS (2017)

Seasoned space writer Rod Pyle returns to orbit with this cavalcade of oddball missions, many only recently declassified. We learn how the Nazis planned to reduce Manhattan to radioactive rubble with Silbervogel — a huge rocket bomber that never materialized, yet spawned key spaceflight technologies. And in 1952, rocket scientist Wernher von Braun devised an inflatable solar-powered space station. There is plenty more, from analyses of near-failures such as NASA's Apollo 8 mission to a capsule history of a late, lamented 'thrill ride': the US X-15 hypersonic rocketplane, which last flew in 1968.

Arthur and Sherlock: Conan Doyle and the Creation of Holmes

Michael Sims BLOOMSBURY (2017)

How did Scottish physician Arthur Conan Doyle conceive of Sherlock Holmes — hyper-logician, forensic genius, maverick? Michael Sims reveals a complicated birth. Holmes's real-life model was Doyle's professor, hawk-eyed diagnostician Joseph Bell; writers from Émile Gaboriau to Edgar Allan Poe offered fictional prototypes. Holmes's mastery of chemistry and occasional impetuosity stem from Doyle's own training and personality. Sims even ferrets out the influence of Robert Louis Stevenson (who also knew Bell) in Doyle's *A Study in Scarlet*. A delightful piece of detective work.

The Upstarts

Brad Stone LITTLE, BROWN (2017)

So ubiquitous are Airbnb and Uber in the world of online services that many forget how outlandish they seemed a few years ago. Technology writer Brad Stone chronicles their swift rise to the corporate stratosphere, juxtaposing visionary zeal with the often deep impacts they've left in their wakes. As he shows, "regulatory rancor" has dogged the companies in some cities, leaving Uber drivers at odds with traditional taxi services and Airbnb's hosts up against hoteliers. The book is a timely reminder that pushing the digital realm into the physical can disrupt communities as well as the competition.

Override

Caroline Williams SCRIBE (2017)

Science journalist Caroline Williams does the rounds of top neuroscience laboratories for this immersive investigation of neuroplasticity — changes in the brain induced by training. Eager to work on issues such as attention span, Williams turns guinea pig, submitting to magnetic brain stimulation to achieve better focus, geeing up creativity by means of electrodes over her prefrontal cortex, and more. The human brain, she concludes, is "an amazing thing to play with" that can do more than you might imagine. [Barbara Kiser](#)