

It's an absurdly vast house, among the largest in Manhattan, but the dining room is windowless, creating a hermetic or stop-time sense, broken only by the household staff ferrying in time-of-day-appropriate foods and beverages.

The real world seems terribly far away, but with paparazzi often posted near by, it's dangerously close too. Once I arrived for a visit and found several police cars blocking the street and thought the worst—they'd come for him again. But it was a security detail for a controversial head of state who had come for tea.

We met several years before he became arguably the world's most notorious sex offender. In 2002, his plane, a meticulously appointed 737, ferried a group of people to the TED conference in Monterey. He was the mysterious and peculiarly gracious host arriving after everyone had boarded: tanned, relaxed, attentive, soliciting every guest's story and views, and accompanied by three young women not his daughters, witty, poised, helpful, and beautiful—out of a men's magazine fantasy of the luxe life.

One more thing about this trip suggesting something of his unique view of the public world and what you got to see when you are near him. Google founders, Larry Page and Sergey Brin, with their company rising into the stratosphere, came out to see his plane on the Monterey tarmac and, with a few other Googlers, literally ran whooping from one end of the plane to the other. Then, sitting in the plane's plush

living room, they described, in what I could not be sure was a put-on or entrepreneurial brainstorm, a brand extension in which they would market a line of Google bras with the Os as convenient cups. In fact, the name Google, they said, was invented out of the belief that men would focus on a word with two Os in it.

Since that trip, and through his travails, I have often been invited to his house to participate in the conversations that take place there.

In sweatshirt, draw-string pants, palm beach slippers, and half glasses, Jeffrey Epstein—*that* Epstein, most recently embroiled in charges involved under age girls and Alan Dershowitz and Prince Andrew—spends most of his day at his dining room table in the in front of a laptop and beside a row of reading glasses (there are a lot of them in case, apparently, he misplaces a pair, but being quite meticulous he never does) conducting what must surely be the world's most extraordinary colloquial.

These meetings, and this lifestyle, have somehow stayed private or secret—or apart—not out of any formal or stated restrictions, but because, in some sense, it would be very hard to explain just what you're doing there with a brazen sex offender in a guffaw-inducing home flaunting all moderation.

And yet, defying disgrace, and tolerating his tone deafness—or mocking attitude toward the zeitgeist—so many come. Gladly. Willingly. Feeling that his invitation is quite an extraordinary privilege.

Among his frequent guests is Bill Gates, for whom Epstein has become a key advisor, proposing a way to leverage the resources of the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation to accommodate many other fortunes, so that, Epstein explains, “you might join 50 or 60 billionaires on one giving project.”

As part of a Gates-encouraged effort to get “out in front” of the notice that might be expected to greet the Gates association with him, Epstein agreed to these on-the-record conversations with me.

His subject, on a morning in late fall, sitting at the dining room table—its faux-baronial quality disturbed by an ever-present white board—is “hyper wealth.” His subject is always wealth—how capital should react to the given global political, economic, and cultural moment.

His stock in trade is not precisely the making of money, but the issues that arise when money, at a heretofore unimaginable rate, makes itself, altering many basic economic, social, and personal calculations. He recounts a dinner he had two nights before. The scene is, like much of what he does, a conspiracy theorist’s fantasy—the six men at this dinner, all technology entrepreneurs, representing, together, several hundred billion dollars and now trying to figure out how to use it to shape the world to their liking.

“In the past, only governments had this kind of money, money of a reality altering scale,” says Epstein

in a chipper and smoothed-out Brooklynese. “In fact, it used to be that the rich, reaching a certain point of philanthropy, merely hoped to help make the world a better place, now they want to change the world. Rockefeller and Carnegie were, as examples of social-engineering philanthropy, unique. They alone had such resources and will. Now you have legions of people who have to give away vastly larger fortunes than Rockefeller or Carnegie had at their disposal, or might even have imagined.

“Except that it’s actually hard to give away this kind of wealth, without unintended consequences that can cause more problems than you’re solving.”

Epstein’s long-time business thesis is that the rich know very little about money. They may know about their own businesses, but the great sums that are the result are ultimately an afterthought and demand an entirely different sort of intellectual discipline. The Forbes 400, says Epstein, not immune to an amount of wonder, increased their wealth by \$500 billion last year, meaning, in effect, that on average every Forbes-list billionaire makes more than another billion every year. And, points out the 62-year-old Epstein, they will almost all be dead in 40 years, most well before that, meaning \$4.2 trillion, compounding everyday, will have to be given away. “So, to understand the future, what you have to begin to do is follow the money, not in Watergate-like terms backwards, as in who has gotten it, but forwards to where it will go and who will get it.”

Epstein can find himself echoing aspects of Thomas Piketty on the inequities of the accumulation of wealth (“the divide is between people with assets, which appreciate, and people without assets, who fail to advance—that is, of course, the miracle of compounded interest”), except for the fact that Epstein, knowing the rich, understands a point that Piketty doesn’t: “Nobody, *nobody*, wants to give it all to their children. Everybody now has the modern appreciation that one of the curses of great wealth is that it can make your kids weird and fucked up.”

Epstein’s position in this private allotment of a decent fraction of the U.S. Gross Domestic Product is not as a philanthropist but as a sort of adviser or guru or brain—a rich whisperer—making him, in addition to rich himself, arguably among the most influential people you’ve only heard of for reasons that have nothing to do with his influence.

Epstein sometimes seems to have an out-of-body attitude toward his own fate and bad press—that’s something that occurs in a less interesting parallel world. Not long ago, when I met him for lunch in New York, he noted that he hadn’t been out to lunch in a restaurant in ten years. It was a not particularly pleasant experience for him and we were done in 30 minutes.

On the other hand, Epstein’s life sometimes seems part of a purposeful challenge: not just look at me, but do you even believe what you see? But, perhaps, he is

just oblivious to what others are thinking: a willful and in a sense fatal tone deafness.

Press accounts recycle the mysterious billionaire mythology—a man of vast and unsourced riches living in a parallel universe of absolute entitlement—with brief glimpses of him stepping out of the house (the same photos endlessly republished), and the assumption of depravity inside.

In fact, the life in the house, without wife or children or conventional domestic demeanor, rather conforms to the scripted fantasies: somewhere between Daddy Warbucks and Eyes Wide Shut. There is indeed a group of young women—in their twenties and thirties—who act as Epstein’s support staff and companions. Some have worked for him for many years, marrying, having children, and continuing as part of his business and household infrastructure. One woman, on an afternoon when I was there, had just returned from an around-the-world honeymoon that Epstein had arranged for her. Some are, or have been, his romantic interests. His present girlfriend, whom he met four years ago at a dinner party in New York, has just graduated dental school. One former girlfriend, Eva Andersson Dubin, a Swedish model and Miss Universe finalist whom Epstein has known for more than thirty years, became a doctor—Epstein sent her to medical school—and married hedge funder Glen Dubin. Together they finance the Dubin Breast Center at Mount Sinai Hospital.

Epstein will sometimes move a meeting in his dining room outside to the park—his idea of going out to lunch is a Sabrett’s hot dog—with the various girls in the house the accompanying entourage, as though something out of an 18th-century French court.

But the Hefnerian prurience can also be quite businesslike: poised young women in a mansion on the Upper East Side with various office responsibilities are really not that different from any of the art galleries in the surrounding neighborhood. They mingle freely with his powerful guests, not so much as hostesses—or, in tabloid language, harem-like “sex slaves”—but as attentive students (which, of course, might be regarded as having its own fetish-like attraction). Epstein explicitly denies that there is an sexual quid pro quo. (“If you’re screwing someone you work with they can come in late—that’s what Jimmy Goldsmith used to say.”) Still, the constant attendance of so many comely young women, seems so outside of conventional living or staffing or social or romantic relationships that it is hard to describe in a straightforward or straight-faced way. And while it may be part of the appeal for the men who come to visit Epstein, it is as well a peculiarity they put up with in order to spend time with him.

The Epstein house/office is, by careful design, exclusive and clubby, part hang out, part secret society. Along with the fact that, even after his jail term, the rich and powerful have continued to so eagerly solicit him, it’s also notable in the fixed hierarchy of who comes to

whose turf, that, when they want to see Epstein, they tend to come to him. He's created a world and you enter it.

His conversations are less meeting-like—focused and agenda-driven—then narrative. In effect: the outside world comes to Epstein's and he eagerly solicits reports. It's a real time newspaper, or the news you don't read in a newspaper, market movements before they occur, the health and eccentricities of world leaders, high level government appointments soon to be announced.

It's Sunday lunch—in his schedule from a week last fall—with Gates, Mort Zuckerman, the real estate billionaire and owner of the Daily News, and Peter Thiel, the PayPal co-founder and early Facebook investor.

That evening its Sheikh Hamad Bin Jassim, the foreign minister of Qatar. Hamad lives across the street in a similarly furnished house—he and Epstein have the same decorator. (Epstein, in his relaxed and amused manner, keeps prodding: “Why are you financing the bad guys? What do you get out of that?”)

Next morning, Epstein is joined for breakfast in the dining room by the lawyer Reid Weingarten, who's represented, among other fat cats in trouble, Worldcom's Bernie Ebbers and Goldman Sachs's Lloyd Blankfein. Weingarten, hoarse with a cold, is still lamenting his failed defense of former Connecticut Governor John Rowland. After a blow-by-blow of the trial, they discuss the Qatarian's visit—Epstein served

chocolate made from pistachios grown on the Sheikh's farm—and speculate about who actually controls ISIS, with Weingarten arguing that the Turks are not getting enough scrutiny. There is, in Epstein's dining room, always an alternative version of world events—"perception versus reality," says Epstein, "not to imply that one necessarily has greater weight than the other."

"Why," I ask Weingarten, when Epstein briefly steps out of the room, "do so many people keep coming back here, everything considered."

"Why we camp out here? I guess because there's no place like it."

Epstein summons in the next person cooling his heels in the ante-room. It's a young man named Brock Pierce, a former child actor and dotcom high flyer who now describes himself as the "the most active investor" in Bitcoin and the programmable currency space.

After a bit, Epstein invites his next appointment to join them: Larry Summers, the former treasury secretary and President of Harvard, off Diet Coke, digs deep into the Sheikh Hamad chocolates, then focuses in on the Bitcoin investor.

"Okay," he says, after listening for a bit to Pierce and his update on the rapid Bitcoin price swings, "I have opportunities here. But an additional feature of my decision problem, roughly speaking, is that the worst that could happen to you is that you could lose all the money you put into it. Whereas, I could go—I mean I don't look that great now—but I could go from being

seen as a figure of some probity and some intelligence to being a figure of much less intelligence and much less probity...”

“Well,” says Pierce in seeming dramatic understatement, “you are going to have some low quality characters playing early in the space...”

That evening, in the Epstein dining room (he seems rarely to use the rest of the house’s 50,000 square feet), there is a small cocktail party, which includes the former Prime Minister of Australia, Kevin Rudd, and Thorbjørn Jagland, the head of the Nobel Peace Prize Committee, who offers an affable, but generally scathing, critique of U.S. diplomacy (and a brief defense of Obama’s Peace Prize award) and to whom Epstein offers a ride back to Europe on his jet.

The next morning, it’s Ehud Barack, the former Israeli Prime Minister, for breakfast. Barack is, over his omelet, able to defend both Obama and Putin. Then a high ranking official from the Obama White House, whose name I am asked not to use. There follows the former head of the UN Security Council, Hardeep Purie, and then head of the central bank of Kazakhstan, Kairat Kelimbetov. Then Nathan Myhrvold the former chief technology office at Microsoft. Then Martin Nowak, a Professor of Biology and Mathematics and Director of the Program for Evolutionary Dynamics at Harvard, the institute that Epstein has funded with \$30 million. Part of Nowak’s research has to do with trying to “describe cancer mathematically.” (Epstein preempts Nowak’s

explanation : “Think of cancer the same way as you think of a terrorist group. The NSA has been able to thwart a great number of terrorism acts by intercepting communication signals from one terrorist to another. That same dynamic, a form of signal intelligence, of finding a terrorist in Europe, can be used to intercept communication between cancer cells. Cancer cells merely communicate in protean code rather than electronic code. If you can decode what the signals are saying you can jam those signal between terrorist calls—essentially wipe out their cell phones. Likewise if you can decode biological signals you can jam them too, that’s the holy grail.”)

Then Richard Axel, a Nobel prize winner in physiology. Then Ron Baron who has \$26 billion under management in his Baron Fund. Then Josh Harris, the co-founder of Apollo Global Management (\$164 billion under management) and owner of the New Jersey Devils and the Philadelphia 76ers.

The question is why, in the face of such disgrace, with the paparazzi so near, the high and might still come?

Perhaps simply that it’s intelligence of a high order. Not just market moving information, but Epstein and Summers trying to unravel the conundrum of zero interest rates, or Epstein and Noam Chomsky on memory and language, or Epstein TK...

What goes on at Epstein’s house might seem just to

confirm everyone's worst fears about power and the powerful: it's all insider stuff. But the conversations at Epstein's are the conversations, I suspect, that rich men dream of, but in the real world, such a buttoned-down and agenda-driven place, are actually hard to have.

"That's Jeffrey," says Mort Zuckerman, (whose paper, the Daily News, is ever vitriolic in its coverage of Epstein), with a twinkle in his eye.

On Epstein's part, there is the wink: In his Paris apartment, 10,000 square feet on the Avenue Foch, a neighborhood otherwise occupied by foreign potentates, there is a stuffed baby elephant in his living room—that is, the *elephant in the room*. (Epstein says too it's a reminder that elephants have 23 copies of tumor suppressor genes and humans have only 1.) The single book on his bedside table is Lolita (he is, beyond the joke, a great Nabokov fan).

Epstein has a yet more structural explanation as to why, after prison and with continuing tabloid infamy, he can maintain his valued place. It comes back, not unexpectedly, to the nature or the needs of money: "At a certain level of finance, almost everyone is allied with an institutional interest. You are part of government, or you want to be in government, or you are connected to a bank or other portfolio, or you have key relationships with certain corporations or industries. Because of my situation, I have none of that. I have no institutional ties which makes me in some sense one of the few wholly independent sources of information and actual honest

brokers. That's the usefulness of disgrace."

In some sense, too, it is perhaps generational: Most everyone who is now of a certain age and ambition and status grew up in, and found they were temperamentally suited to, the era of wealth that started in the late 1970s. A meritocracy on steroids, or, as *Vanity Fair* would baldly dub it, the new establishment, an increasingly parallel world, a self-invented one, at further and further remove from the ordinary one.

Epstein often tells his middle class to riches tale: born in 1953 in Coney Island, father worked for the city's Parks Department, mother a housewife.

The captain of the math team at Lafayette High school in Bensonhurst, he went on to Cooper Union where the tuition is free. He dropped out after two years. Without a college degree, hence by a slight of hand, he got a job teaching math and physics at Dalton in 1974. (A few years ago, during a chance encounter with a former Dalton math department chairman, Margo Gumport, I asked her about Epstein. She said he was the most brilliant math teacher at Dalton in her 50-year career and that she had often wondered what had become of him.)

Dalton fathers perhaps sensed in him a young man on the make. Punch Sulzberger, the publisher of the *New York Times*, and a Dalton father at the time, tried to recruit Epstein to come to the *Times*. (Epstein recounts a story of riding with Sulzberger in his wood

paneled station wagon to the family's country estate and Sulzberger talking to the chauffeur on a phone from the backseat to the front.) Another Dalton father, asking "wouldn't you rather be rich than be a teacher?" introduced him to Bear Stearn's chief Ace Greenberg.

Hence, Epstein, like many in the late '70s, arrived on Wall Street.

If on one side of Wall Street there were the salesmen (the Wolf of Wall Street model), on the other side there was a new sort of finance type able to embrace a level of acute abstraction. "In the past," says Epstein, "investing was all about reputations and relationships. You invested in a company on the basis of who was running it. Did they have integrity? Were they married? Good family men? It was a '50s mentality. But in the mid '70s options started to be traded. In essence, the first formal derivatives. The movement of this instrument is not directly attached to the stock price. The world of investing began turning from relationships to math. In a sense I didn't really make money as much as I tried to create it.."

He soon became the protégée of Jimmy Cayne (also hired by Ace Greenberg on a whim—he met him in a bridge game), who would go on to run Bear and to lose his fortune in Bear's 2006 collapse). Epstein's leave-taking or ouster from Bear was the result of politics, envy, overreaching, or a securities violation, or...unclear. But, no matter, when he left in 1982 he took with him billionaire clients, including Marvin

Davis, a real estate developer who owns Twentieth Century Fox, and Herb Seigel, a major media investor in the 1980s. At this point, Epstein was dating Morgan Fairchild, a television star in the new mega-rich-family soap operas, Dallas and Falcon Crest.

If the '80s were happening pell mell in New York, they were happening at double time and catch up speed in London. "I would head to Kennedy and, on the theory that most important events in one's life are serendipitous, I wouldn't decide where I was going until I got there." Thirty-year-old Epstein was living a Lifestyle of the Rich and Famous (he befriended the show's star, Robin Leach), at English shooting parties and country estates with Saturday night black tie dinners, where he was meeting the over-the-top families of Europe.

At the same time, he was developing a perception, or, at least a market differentiation: the hyper wealthy had different problems than the very wealthy. Dealing with a billion dollars was different from dealing with \$100 million. "The traditional wealth service structure, an accountant, and investment advisor, a personal lawyer, and an idiot brother-in-law, became hopelessly outdated as amounts exponentially increased. You can't spend a billion dollars, you can just reallocate it to a different investment class. And you can't give away a billion dollars without a vast staff, in effect going into the business of giving away money, yet another business you are likely to know little about."

For a period, one part of his activities, he says, was recovering monies for countries looted by exiled dictators or military strongmen. Then, in his telling, he was representing a series of vastly wealthy people and families—not just doing their bidding or their investing, but helping them to navigate the ambitions of their wealth. If they had big dreams before, it’s nothing to what they can have now.

If early in his career he might have seemed like a sort of George Peppard (there’s a physical resemblance) in *Breakfast at Tiffany’s*, a charming hustler, later he’s George Peppard in *Banacek*, a smart and astute operator. At just about this point in the narrative, the incredulity about Epstein began to circulate in social circles. Epstein had acquired the major symbols of wealth but without position, public holdings, or obvious paper trails. His is a questionable substrata of wealth, without institutional credentials or bona fides. He’s a freelancer. That’s the rub: he doesn’t work for anyone.

Sure, Goldman Sachs partners and tech geniuses, they might have stratospheric wealth, but what to make of a Coney Island, Zelig-like no-namer?

In 1994, just at the moment when Prince Charles was on television acknowledging his love for Camilla Parker Bowles, Jeffrey Epstein was sitting with his arm around Princess Diana at a dinner at the Serpentine Galley in London (Diana wearing her “revenge” dress that evening). Graydon Carter, in his second year as

editor of Vanity Fair, was also at the dinner. Epstein's rise and Carter's rise are not, with a little critical interpretation, that different. Both are a function of the age of new money, both are helped by strategic relationships with the exceptionally wealthy, both have made themselves up. To say that Epstein, in the company of the Princess, stuck in Carter's craw would be an understatement. Epstein became one of the "what do you know about him" figures in Carter's gossip trail—a story waiting to happen. Carter once advised me not to go to Epstein's house or accept a ride in his car least I risk being blackmailed. ("For what?" I asked Carter. "You can't even begin to imagine," said Carter.)

He joined the board of Rockefeller University. He was suddenly on the Trilateral commission, that cabal of business people who fancy themselves, and who are fancied by conspiracy buffs, as running the world. He bought, from his client Limited Founder Les Wexner, the largest private house in Manhattan. (Rumors will continue for many years, that Wexner owns the house and Epstein is just squatting in it—an 18-year squat.) He bought an airplane. Then another. He expanded his holdings in New Mexico. He began a Xanadu-like refurbishment of his Caribbean Island.

He befriended Bill Clinton in his new after-office life—and that would prove to be quite the fatal pairing.

The post-Monica Clinton, now having pardoned the on-the-lam financier Marc Rich—at this point, before his own rehabilitation, Clinton really is the world's

ultimate sleaze ball—was suddenly being ferried around in the jet of...*who* exactly? The New York Post was the first to take formal media note of the Clinton-Epstein connection, hinting at a sex and money bromance. “I suppose travel with Clinton changed the arc of my life,” Epstein tells me. “There were, I knew, lots of obvious reasons not to do it, but having the ability to spend 100 hours with a former president just doesn’t happen to many people.”

I met Epstein around this time, on the flight out to TED. Not long after this trip, Epstein’s assistant called to invite me for tea at his house in New York, where Epstein, with what seemed to me little understanding of the subject, began to ask me about media—the upside, downside, and nature of media coverage. (Epstein’s flirtation with the media would result in his backing an unsuccessful effort, of which I was a part, to buy New York Magazine in 2004.)

New York magazine was then soliciting him for a profile, as was Vanity Fair, who had assigned the British tabloid journalist, Vicki Ward, to the job. Both profiles—New York’s by Landon Thomas—pivot on the Clinton connection and detail the same quandary, how a man without clear institutional bona fides nevertheless achieved such wealth and influence. Epstein, sensing that he might be exposing himself, called Carter and said he was having second thoughts about being a public figure.

“Then you should have lived in a two bedroom

apartment in Queens,” responded Carter.

 And then the real troubles began. Epstein had a prodigious massage parlor outcall habit especially in Palm Beach with its many “Jack Shacks.” After Epstein’s round of publicity and widely touted association with Clinton, the stepmother of one of the massage parlor girls who went to Epstein’s house called the police. The police interviewed the girl—who was TK at the time, but whose website identified her as 18—and the girl supplied the names of other girls, some of whom were also younger than 18.

In the end, the police tracked down 18 girls—nine of whom were under 18; the others were in their 20s and 30s (one woman was in her 60s)—a number of whom gave statements describing happy-ending massages. (Although the nature of the allegations will dramatically grow into threesomes and forced sexual encounters, nobody at this point alleged anything more than this.)

Epstein called in Dershowitz, who flew into Palm Beach to put the local authorities in their place—alienating Palm Beach officialdom—and, further amping up the profile of the case, also brought in Roy Black, the famous criminal attorney who defended William Kennedy Smith in his rape trial in Palm Beach.

The release by the Palm Beach authorities of the depositions by the 18 girls describing the incremental details of the sex acts, the timing of the charges coming just after Rush Limbaugh’s high profile Palm Beach drug bust, the Clinton connection and then with the

sudden interest of the Bush FBI in the case, moved the case from solicitation to scandal, and a plea deal with a sentence of 18 months.

He got out of jail in 2009, serving 13 months, and moved mostly seamlessly back into his life, to the shock-shock of tabloids whenever they are reminded of his existence (notably, when Epstein's payment of Fergie's debts slipped out, likely leaked by Fergie herself).

Some things changed. While surprisingly few others dropped him, the Clinton's did, an irony of the present tabloid interest in Epstein's old address book with its many Clinton contacts. And his sex offender status has transformed him from libertine playboy to pedophile in tabloid parlance.

While he has regularly entertained PR proposals aimed at his public rehabilitation, until Gates prodded him, and until this recent renewed tabloid fever, Epstein had concluded that he was perfectly satisfied living behind high walls and in his own exclusive club. Even the recent Dershowitz-Prince Andrew chapter seems like a parallel disturbance rather than something that is actually affecting him. "Bad press is not something actually bad," he notes, trying to balance perception and reality.

But true or not, the story has taken on a life of its own, with the US and British tabloid press continuing, so far unsuccessfully, to search for a smoking gun connecting Clinton to underage girls, which could

have—many obviously hope—the effect of derailing the Hillary Clinton presidential campaign.

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It is a curious attribute of his character that, other than perhaps being more circumspect about what legal advice to follow, Epstein would have done little differently. (When I suggested recently to Epstein that one obvious way to blunt the animus bearing down on him would be to get married, he said he'd rather go back to jail.) His life, living it as he wants, seems to him to be an extraordinary accomplishment. Being on the wrong side of morality, custom, politics, feminists, the media, that's just a bit of bad luck.

And it is perhaps this attitude of his that irks his critics the most. Although he has spent more than a year in jail and paid out what may be as much as \$20 million, he yet seems somehow to have gotten away with it—that worst sin of all. He is the unrepentant catchall of up-to-the-minute badness: the financier whose wealth is a product of Wall Street math rather than work; a rich middle-age white man who not only parades his wealth and entitlement, but has a Peter Pan complex to boot; an insistent playboy (excuse me, pedophile) in a correct and prudish world—someone who somehow didn't get the memo about vast changes in mores and culture.

But Epstein's friends—and I think that is, in the end, the best word for the powerful people who orbit him—are willing to take him as he comes. Epstein is their confidant. Not the only nexus of them, but one of them. Dr. Epstein. Lay on my couch. As he is

everybody's confidant, everybody becomes his confidant. This is the back and forth, the power loop. His expertise is knowing what other people know. Which surely offers a unique sense of confidence that it is possible to understand how the world works. And in a time of such radical flux and existential instability, everybody wants to seek out someone who might have some answers or at least make you feel like he does—even, and maybe especially, the rich.

In the last days of my interviews with Epstein, he was called by a particular world-stage individual, among the richest and most powerful—proudly louche himself—who, feeling out of his depth in a world of crashing oil prices and wild currency fluctuation, had come to believe he might benefit from some private tutoring. Epstein welcomed him to the club.

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