



GO THE FK TO SLEEP**

A Bedtime Book for Parents Who Live in the Real World

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Celeste Bartos Forum

LIVE from the New York Public Library

www.nypl.org/live

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: Good evening. My name is Paul Holdengräber, and I'm the Director of LIVE from the New York Public Library. As you know I have said in the past that my goal is to make the lions roar. Well, in fact in this book you will see there are lions, and "the cubs and the lions are snoring, wrapped in a big snuggly heap. How come you can do all this other great shit, but you can't lie the fuck down to sleep?" So here

come the lions in a different incarnation, and I'm very delighted to be welcoming you all tonight to this event, the last event of our season. So welcome to our closing night to our Spring LIVE from the New York Public Library season, which began on January 8 with a centennial tribute to Gypsy Rose Lee, some of whose papers the New York Public Library holds and to whom Eleanor Roosevelt wrote in a telegram in 1959, "May your bare ass always be shining." That's Eleanor Roosevelt. So we started our season with an evening of burlesque and we end our season tonight on pub date to celebrate this marvel of a little time bomb of a book, *Go the Fuck to Sleep*, to celebrate its writer, Adam Mansbach; its illustrator, Ricardo Cortés; its independent publisher, the publisher of Akashic Books, my friend Johnny Temple. Congratulations to all of them for this mega-runaway success!

(applause)

You will note on Sunday, for those of you, there may be some in the audience that read the *New York Times* that *Go the Fuck to Sleep* is Number 1. **(applause)** I have actually never had the privilege and delight of cursing as much from this stage. After our conversations, Adam and Ricardo will be signing their book, which is made available also by an independent bookseller, which over the last few years has been providing us with all our books. I'd like to thank them on our closing night. 192 Books.

(applause)

I will virtually say nothing about our upcoming season. You have an announcement on your chair, but do come and hear Shea Hembrey and Umberto Eco and Diane Keaton and Gilberto Gil and Harry Belafonte and members of Def Jam, Joan Didion, and many others. No, Joan Didion is not a member of Def Jam, I'm sorry, I'm reading too fast, and others this fall LIVE from the New York Public Library. I will introduce each one of our guests, and you will see we have a new way of introducing them. We ask them each to tell us in seven words who they are, and I forgot to tell you who I am. I'm an insomniac and a collective agitator of the mind. That defines me. About tonight's program, let me quickly give you a sense of what to expect while you are expecting. We will start with a very special reading. I think some of you may know who the very special guest, who is virtually here, is, but I'm not going to say anything about that right now. Then I will bring Adam Mansbach onstage to chat with me about parental sleeplessness and other frustrations associated with bringing a child into the world. Then I will bring Ricardo Cortés onstage. Together with Adam, we will discuss the book and its illustrations. Then we will bring Johnny Temple onstage, the publisher of the book. After talking briefly with them, we will turn to the audience, see if you have anything to say about the subject of getting your children the fuck to sleep. Think up a good question or a story of personal frustration. Might be hard, but try. Start thinking now, we will take a couple, perhaps three questions or comments. Think of it as a brief interlude in the program. Then we will continue with Adam, Ricardo, and Johnny onstage for another ten minutes or so, concluding our conversations and leaving the floor and the stage as world champion Judah Friedlander, author of the instructional karate book *How to Beat Up Anybody*, reads *Go the Fuck to Sleep* one last time. That is the evening for you.

Now in closing before the program begins, I would like to warmly thank my producer Meg Stemmler, who has been assisting me in many extraordinary ways and producing LIVE from the New York Public Library events for nearly six years. Let us all wish her well as she takes off for new challenges and adventures. **(applause)** Well, thank you, Meg. I would like finally to thank our DJ for tonight, who provided me with fantastic walk-on music, I have no idea what it was, but I'm sure many of you recognized it, I'm just not hip enough, Eugene Cho of the Brooklyn Disco Orchestra Escort. **(applause)** And now, ladies and gentlemen, thirty seconds of silence before we turn down the lights and listen to someone rather special read an extraordinary new book, *Go the Fuck to Sleep*.

WERNER HERZOG:

The cats nestle close to their kittens.

The lambs have laid down with the sheep.

You're cozy and warm in your bed, my dear.

Please go the fuck to sleep.

The windows are dark in the town, child.

The whales huddle down in the deep.

I'll read you one very last book if you swear

You'll go the fuck to sleep.

The eagles who soar through the sky are at rest
And the creatures who crawl, run, and creep.
I know you're not thirsty. That's bullshit. Stop lying.
Lie the fuck down, my darling, and sleep.

The wind whispers soft through the grass, hon.
The field mice, they make not a peep.
It's been thirty-eight minutes already.
Jesus Christ, what the fuck? Go to sleep.

All the kids from day care are in dreamland.
The froggie has made his last leap.
Hell no, you can't go to the bathroom.
You know where you can go? The fuck to sleep.

The owls fly forth from the treetops.
Through the air, they soar and they sweep.
A hot crimson rage fills my heart, love.
For real, shut the fuck up and sleep.

The cubs and the lions are snoring,
Wrapped in a big snuggly heap.

How come you can do all this other great shit
But you can't lie the fuck down and sleep?

The seeds slumber beneath the earth now
And the crops that the farmers will reap.
No more questions. This interview's over.
I've got two words for you, kid: fucking sleep.

The tiger reclines in the simmering jungle.
The sparrow has silenced her cheep.
Fuck your stuffed bear, I'm not getting you shit.
Close your eyes. Cut the crap. Sleep.

The flowers doze low in the meadows
And high on the mountains so steep.
My life is a failure, I'm a shitty-ass parent.
Stop fucking with me, please, and sleep.

The giant pangolins of Madagascar are snoozing.
As I lie here and openly weep.
Sure, fine, whatever, I'll bring you some milk.
Who the fuck cares? You're not gonna sleep.

This room is all I can remember.
The furniture crappy and cheap.
You win. You escape. You run down the hall.
As I nod the fuck off, and sleep.

Bleary and dazed I awaken
To find your eyes shut, so I keep
My fingers crossed tight as I tiptoe away
And pray that you're fucking asleep.

We're finally watching our movie.
Popcorn's in the microwave. *Beep*.
Oh shit. Goddamn it. You've gotta be kidding.
Come on, go the fuck back to sleep.

(applause)

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: Adam Mansbach is the author of these words. It was read by Werner Herzog. Adam Mansbach in seven words: "Motherfucking zeitgeist overlord, with words to spare." Adam Mansbach. **(applause)** So how does it feel, actually, to have Werner Herzog read this book to you? I must say that, from my point of view. Don't worry, I won't answer every one of your questions, but from my point of view, if I played this book to my children, I think they would be so damn scared that they would go the

fuck to sleep. And I'm actually going to use it as a technique.

ADAM MANSBACH: I think you should. Yeah, no, it was horrifying. I'm terrified, scared out of my mind, really.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: Tell me more.

ADAM MANSBACH: Kinda want to leave and curl up in a fetal position and go the fuck to sleep.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: This book has been read by many people now. It's gotten a life of its own already online, as we know. It began that way in some form or fashion, but it's been read by so many people. Tell me the reaction to Herzog's reading for you.

ADAM MANSBACH: Well, you know, what's great about Herzog is that he gives everything his all. So that he sort of seems to have one speed and it's total intense terrifying focus.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: Relentless.

ADAM MANSBACH: Relentless. As a big fan of *Grizzly Man*, when he mentions the bear, it's particularly—

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: He's good with animals.

ADAM MANSBACH: He's good with animals, yeah. Yeah, no, that was amazing, that was one of the great moments of my life, I think, hearing him read that book.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: You know, I remember when my older boy milked a cow. Werner Herzog found—I'm staying in the animal theme for a moment. Werner Herzog found out that he had milked a cow and he called me up, and he said, "Paul! This is of monumental importance! A boy needs to know how to pull the udder!"

(laughter)

ADAM MANSBACH: Sure.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: And at that moment I thought, because I've been quite influenced by French philosophy, I thought he was talking about the "other," but it was the "udder."

ADAM MANSBACH: What's intriguing to me to me about that is that he "found out." You didn't tell him, he found out that your son had milked a cow.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: Had milked a cow, yeah. He did find out. And when I asked him to do this recording, at first he wasn't quite sure, and then he did it, and when

he wrote back to say that he had done it. He said, “I liked the job.”

ADAM MANSBACH: It’s all you can ask.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: It’s really scary, though. Is the book supposed to be that?

ADAM MANSBACH: No, most of the time it’s not read with that frightening overtone.

(laughter) Samuel Jackson, who’s doing the audio book, reads it in a very dramatic—

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: Differently.

ADAM MANSBACH: Differently, yeah, with mounting frustration but not with this sense that if you don’t go to sleep he’s going to burn down your house. **(laughter)**

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: Mounting frustration seems to me to be part of what this book is about.

ADAM MANSBACH: Absolutely.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: And I was preparing for our conversation today and as I often do, I read the works of a psychoanalyst I very much like, Adam Phillips, who wrote a book called, *On Kissing, Tickling and Being Bored*, but in a different book called *On Balance*, he has a chapter called “Truancy.” Adam Phillips has said to me, he’s a child

psychoanalyst, he said, “Children basically are unbearable.” Which is interesting for a psychoanalyst to tell you.

ADAM MANSBACH: Does it say that on his office door?

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: Yeah, “children are unbearable,” and I think he mentioned, he means it that way. They are unbearable. We can’t bear them.

ADAM MANSBACH: Some of us can—that’s a great thing about women, yeah.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: Exactly. And he writes, “I have always admired people who have left behind them an incomprehensible mess, Bob Dylan once said in an interview.’ The psychoanalyst Winnicott talks about what he calls ‘delinquent children’ having to test their environment through really bad behavior. Only by being really difficult can children discover whether parents are worth having where they are resilient and robust.” And in a way this comment made me think of your book because there is a testing going on there. Children are in some way testing the limits of our ability to cope with them. **(laughter)** Do you agree?

ADAM MANSBACH: Yes.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: But this book is written from the point of view—and we’re doing it as a Father’s Day celebration—from the point of view of a father.

ADAM MANSBACH: Yeah, that's true, I should say, though, that I took great pains in the text to keep the gender of the parent ambiguous for as long as possible, because while I am a father, I wanted it to be as universal as it could be. So just like there are different kids on every page, the identity of the parent is supposed to be neither male nor female until we see an image at the very end of a parent. But it's funny—I think there's been more response maybe to the book from women in terms of who e-mails me, who talks to me.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: Why do you think that is? I think there's a good reason.

ADAM MANSBACH: I know that I only put my daughter to bed 27 percent of the time.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: Twenty-seven?

ADAM MANSBACH: Yeah, give or take. **(laughter)** So I think the greatest burden of child care, and this is, you know, sort of global, too. I mean, motherfuckers are e-mailing me from China and shit, so.

(laughter)

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: I like that sentence. "Motherfuckers are e-mailing me from China and shit."

ADAM MANSBACH: Yeah, thanks. I mean, I'm a writer. You know, it's what I do.

(laughter)

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: We'll get back to your serious career in a while.

ADAM MANSBACH: I will also get back to my serious career in a while.

(laughter)

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: But in a way this book because you mentioned the word "frustration," it is a book about frustration, too. And it would seem that the real taboo is that we at times just don't want to be with our children.

ADAM MANSBACH: I think that's absolutely right. The language is a sort of false taboo, the real taboo is the sentiment being expressed, but that's ultimately what's honest about the book. And there's the dual narrative, so the kid doesn't know about the frustration, which is important, right? I mean, this book would be very different and kind of terrible if the parent was saying these things to the kid rather than thinking them. So it's about a kind of sublimated frustration.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: The sublimation, though, it's because in some sense we as

parents recognize the fact that this word which is so prominently on the cover though not immediately legible, and inspired in some way perhaps by *Goodnight Moon* and other such books is really you're speaking as it were the unconscious.

ADAM MANSBACH: Yeah, that's about right.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: You're speaking what we really are thinking about when it takes thirty-eight minutes and the kid is still not asleep.

ADAM MANSBACH: Yeah. Thirty-eight minutes is like on page three, too, so, you know, that's the tip of the iceberg.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: I hadn't thought of it. How many pages are there?

ADAM MANSBACH: Fourteen.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: So that's a long story.

ADAM MANSBACH: So that's thirty-eight divided by three you know times fourteen whatever that comes out to.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: Let's figure that out.

ADAM MANSBACH: Somebody got an iPhone or something?

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: That could take the whole program, just there.

ADAM MANSBACH: Yeah. Somebody want to help us out?

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: But in some way and I wonder if you're trying to make a deeper point.

ADAM MANSBACH: I wonder, also.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: But do you think so. In other words, are we—putting children to sleep has been since Mesopotamia, I've discovered, has been something that has been going on forever. There were lullabies in Mesopotamia. Did you know that?

ADAM MANSBACH: No.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: I didn't either before preparing for this. Lullabies were written in Mesopotamia to put children to sleep. But I wonder if in recent times, maybe in our generation, perhaps in the generation before but I wonder if putting children to sleep was not such a big ordeal because it always was, but whether it was the subject of such conversation. Whether your book fifty years ago would have had the same resonance, whether parents fifty years ago became the over-, perhaps, indulgent parents that we have

become?

ADAM MANSBACH: Yeah, I wonder too. I mean, I think. My sense is that no, it was not this ordeal because people just threw the kid in the room or the barn or whatever and, you know, let him cry it out and you know if they were alive in the morning, then so be it, but if not you had like sixteen other kids, and you know it's all good. **(laughter)** There is a culture of preciousness and perfection around parenting right now that makes the conversations we have about it hemmed in a certain kind of way which is what makes this book I guess different because a lot of people I think are very isolated in their experience because we all are to some extent trained to talk about our kids as if they are perfect and our parenting as if it is perfect and not acknowledge these frustrations that we all go through and thus we feel like we're the only ones going through them.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: You see that in 1945 Dr. Spock—remember him?

ADAM MANSBACH: Ahhh, sure.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: Dr. Spock wrote a book which I highly recommend to all of you called *Spock's Baby and Child Care*, with a very alluring cover, and you'll be happy to hear that it's the fortieth anniversary edition that the Library has, and it's "newly revised and updated for the 1980s." **(laughter)** And in Dr. Spock's book he has fantastic entries. "Chronic resistance to sleep in infancy, going-to-bed type." And the first line, I'll just read the first line and then another paragraph. "This is a difficulty that develops

insidiously.” In it, he writes, in that very chapter, he says, “A baby who becomes engaged in a nightly struggle to keep parents walking has to really train herself to stay awake and she succeeds step by step as the months go by. First to nine p.m., then to ten p.m., even eleven p.m., even midnight. Her parents say her lids often close and her head droops while she’s carrying her, but as soon as they start to lay her down, she wakes up with an indignant yell. Such a sleep problem is exhausting to baby and parents. The baby is apt to become more irritable in daytime, too, and may eat less well. The parents can’t help getting more and more irritated and resentful. A baby shouldn’t be able to put the parents through such a performance like this every night. They know it but don’t know what to do about it. Even a baby senses, I think, that she shouldn’t be able to get away with such tyranny.” **(laughter/applause)** What is your response to that? I know I’m scaring you.

ADAM MANSBACH: I kind of zoned out in the middle a little bit, but I guess my main thought is that I’m actually pretty lucky because my kid is actually, with that as a point of reference, pretty damn reasonable. Like, I don’t get the sense that she’s waging a deliberate war against us, you know? Or, she’s even smarter than I thought and she’s tricked me into thinking that.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: The book is dedicated, and I’ll read out the dedication, “to Vivien, without whom none of this would be possible.”

ADAM MANSBACH: Yes.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: Talk about that.

ADAM MANSBACH: Not to get overly technical, but no kid, no book. I'd still be writing literary fiction like an asshole.

(laughter/applause)

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: Well, you have your kid to thank.

ADAM MANSBACH: I do.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: *New York* magazine in their blog writes, "This little picture book is the physical manifestation of parental imposter syndrome."

ADAM MANSBACH: Is that a real syndrome? Is that a real thing?

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: "You're not even good enough at being a parent to get a break from being a parent. Shouldn't you know how to make this little person know how to go to bed?" And that is what this book is about.

ADAM MANSBACH: That's a very insightful quote. I think that is at the heart of a lot of it, it's not just the nightly ritual of frustration and failure and a kind of Pyrrhic victory eventually, but the sense that on some level, biologically or otherwise, we should know

how to do this, you know? It's—it seems like it should be hard-wired on some level. You know, you read about you know women who have a baby and can't figure out how to breast-feed effectively and they get depressed because it's supposed to be so natural. I think a lot of things in parenting are like that. You sort of assume that you should know how to do and it when you don't, you become sad or you become frustrated or you start drinking.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: Well, and in this particular case it's men and women alike. Tonight a friend of mine was going to come and she sent an e-mail an hour ago saying, "I cannot make it tonight as the sleep specialist requires that I not go out for the first nights of training."

ADAM MANSBACH: Wow.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: Isn't that amazing?

ADAM MANSBACH: That is.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: I had told her that she should bring the sleep specialist here. They would learn something. How much of it is though since the book is dedicated to Vivien, how much is autobiographical?

ADAM MANSBACH: It's pretty autobiographical. I mean, this is a book that I wrote

really with very little deliberation. Certainly with no research, you've certainly done far more to prepare for tonight. **(laughter)** I mean, everybody knows about Mesopotamia and all that. **(laughter)** It really came out of my own sentiments. It was unguarded and spontaneous and whimsical and, you know, was sort of over almost as soon as it began. I mean, it's a very short book. I wrote it in two sittings, probably, so it really was a very unfiltered translation of the feelings that I have or had. I mean, the thing about these feelings is that, for me anyway, they sort of exist only as the experience is actually happening, right? The frustration for me would always end almost as soon as I left the room where Vivien was at long last sleep.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: That assumes you were able to leave the room.

ADAM MANSBACH: When I was able to leave the room, yeah. So as soon as the door shuts behind you and you're liberated from this situation all that stuff sort of for me anyway would sort of vaporize and I would almost forget what it had felt like twenty minutes earlier when you were convinced that you'll never leave this room again. You would do almost anything to leave this room, all these thoughts are running through your head, all these profanities, you're inventing new curse words. So it was my attempt to capture some of that. And it is almost entirely autobiographical. The sentiment of "I'm a shitty-ass parent" is probably the most—is probably the thing in the book, the sentiment that strays the furthest from how I actually feel because I'm not really one of those people whose self-worth is caught up in having to feel like, you know, I know how to do everything in parenting. I don't know. I don't give a fuck. I mean, which also I think goes

back to Mesopotamia in some ways.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: In what way do you think?

ADAM MANSBACH: I mean, just kind of the standard ways that you would expect.

(laughter)

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: This book started with a posting.

ADAM MANSBACH: Yeah, it did.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: It started in a way, in a whimsical way.

ADAM MANSBACH: Absolutely and it continued in a whimsical way.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: But it started in a whimsical way and—

ADAM MANSBACH: It started with me one night writing on Facebook. And I should say I don't use Facebook in any sophisticated way. I just fuck around. I mostly post quotes from eighties rap songs. Mostly the only reason I'm on Facebook is to amuse my friend Blake Lethem, who's in the audience tonight. That's all I'm on Facebook for, is so Blake will like read the quote or see the video and be like, "I like that." **(laughter)** That's

the only reason I do it.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: So that one night you decided, “This is not for Blake.”

ADAM MANSBACH: This is not for Blake. You know.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: It could be for Blake.

ADAM MANSBACH: No, but this night I wrote, “Be on the lookout for my forthcoming children’s book, *Go the Fuck to Sleep*,” which I had no intention of writing, it was a joke. But you know when I make a joke that I feel is successful, **(laughter)** I tend to repeat it, you know, so like, twelve people were “ha ha,” and I was like, Yeah, that was funny and I continued to make it.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: And then twelve hundred.

ADAM MANSBACH: But I didn’t make it on Facebook. I made it to my partner and I made it to friends and stuff and after a couple weeks of this, the idea sort of congealed, and I said, let me sit down and actually try to do this and I wrote about eight or nine verses. And I knew going into it as soon as I did the post I knew what this hypothetical book would be were I to write it. I knew that it would be this sort of takeoff on the rhythm and the look and the sentiment and the whole sort of gauzy feel of these bedtime books that I’ve read so many of to my daughter. So I wrote about eight or nine verses at

once, and at that point having a full book seemed within reach, because I knew that the standard board book, bedtime book, was thirty-two pages, fourteen verses, you know, so it was then sort of a battle against the limited number of words in the English language that rhyme with “sleep,” so I sort of just got in under the wire.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: Difficult to do?

ADAM MANSBACH: Not compared to writing a novel or putting a kid to sleep. No, it was fun. It was a lot of fun and of course sometimes these things are more fun when there are no expectations, when you’re really just doing it for the hell of it. Even as I was writing it, I didn’t really conceive of publishing it. When it was done and it had been run through the gauntlet of reading it to friends and family and seeing whether people thought it was funny and it was and so forth, probably a month went by before I actually got serious enough to call Ricardo and ask if he wanted to illustrate a couple pages so that we could present it as a book and see if anybody wanted to publish it.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: What is your favorite page?

ADAM MANSBACH: I’m partial to the giant pangolin page, which is the kid is peering up out of the crib.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: I’d like you to read that one.

ADAM MANSBACH: Okay. It's my favorite page visually. I don't know if it's the best verse. It's also a tribute to my daughter because she's really into giant pangolins.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: What is a pangolin?

ADAM MANSBACH: It's kind of a—it's also known as a spiny anteater. They're indigenous to Southeast Asia, Madagascar, and parts of Africa. You're not the only one who did fucking research, Paul.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: I didn't do enough fucking research, you're right. So why don't you fucking read this?

ADAM MANSBACH: Yeah. This also I should say after hearing Sam Jackson's version, this is maybe the verse he does best. I love his reading of this verse. This audio book is his best work since *Pulp Fiction*, I would say. **(laughter)** "The giant pangolins of Madagascar are snoozing as I lie here and openly weep. Sure, fine, whatever. I'll bring you some milk. Who the fuck cares? You're not going to sleep." This is a later page, obviously, when the reality starts to set in.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: There is another article in *New York* magazine that Kathryn Schulz wrote, "Ode to a Four-Letter Word."

ADAM MANSBACH: Yes, it's a great article.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: She says, “*Go the Fuck to Sleep* is not at base a parody. It’s more like a book that tells a familiar story from the perspective of a previously marginalized character. Bedtime like a lot of modern parenting is organized around the child, the thirsty, hungry, OCD child. Mansbach shows us the parent’s side, and despite some charming lion cubs, et al., by the illustrator Ricardo Cortés, it ain’t pretty.” Do you agree?

ADAM MANSBACH: I do. I think that article is great. And yeah, that’s exactly right, it is a turning of the camera around. Bedtime books are always focused on the kid, the parent is always out of the frame, the parent’s sentiment doesn’t exist, so yeah.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: And the parent’s sentiment here is of utter inadequacy.

ADAM MANSBACH: Loving despair. Let’s trade two-word phrases a little more—this is fun.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: Total despondency.

ADAM MANSBACH: Fuck.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: Continue. Let’s do it for at least twelve more seconds. You do one, I do one.

ADAM MANSBACH: What was the last one you just said?

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: I forget. Utter despondency.

ADAM MANSBACH: Supreme—you said frustration already. Affectionate. Fuck. I shouldn't have suggested this.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: Affectionate is—

ADAM MANSBACH: Affectionate is a key word here.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: Is a key word because in some sense you think this book is tender.

ADAM MANSBACH: I do, yeah. I consider this book to be very tender. **(laughter)** I hope that comes across, the tenderness with which the book is written, the idea that this is a perspective of a parent who loves their kid enough to not say these things to the kid. But also loves them enough, loves them unconditionally enough, to express a certain kind of frustration for them at a given moment.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: And this is why you think the book has been successful?

ADAM MANSBACH: I hope so, yeah, and yes, I do, I think it's cathartic but it also doesn't make people feel bad about feeling these things. It makes them feel like you can feel these things and still be a good person, a good parent, just a little more of an honest person and parent.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: Well, a lot of people have felt this. I think three hundred thousand copies have been printed, something like that.

ADAM MANSBACH: Yeah, more, actually. We just went to print again. We're up to like four hundred thousand.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: And there is a disclaimer on the back, which I quite like, I have not at all followed, which says you probably should not read it to your children.

ADAM MANSBACH: The lawyers made us put that in.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: Did they?

ADAM MANSBACH: We can't afford lawyers!

(laughter)

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: Now you can. I didn't read it at all to my child, my older

boy, but my older boy read it. And do you want to know his reaction? He's nine years old.

ADAM MANSBACH: I do. I enjoyed hearing his reaction to Jay-Z's lyrics, so I'm very much—

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: Well, in a way he's pretty well exposed to various things. Jay-Z and Mansbach, and he read the book. He read the book. I was there when he was reading it. His eyebrows were going in every possible direction, and he just said, "Wow." But I am wondering shouldn't our children at a certain point read it to know what's going on in our brain? I mean, is it such a bad thing that by shying away and keeping this away from them, the feeling of torture, isn't it actually at a certain point—I'm not saying when they begin—this should not be the first book they read when they begin to read—

ADAM MANSBACH: Right, we can agree on that.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: As they begin to learn to read.

ADAM MANSBACH: No, I don't think so. The last thing I would want to do is tell anyone how to parent, you know, or be a parent. I don't know if I approve of parent as a verb, actually.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: What do you actually think about this?

ADAM MANSBACH: I think sure, at some point, you read the book to the kid or the kid reads the book. At some point, I think it's very important that your kid view you as a human being. You know, there's that—I don't know if you guys remember as kids, for a lot of your education you think the teachers live in the school, you know, like they go to sleep under the desk or whatever? And I think there's this same thing, for me anyway as a kid—you know, my parents are lovely people but it was always hard for me to get a sense of the fullness of their humanity, you know, because they were Mom and they were Dad. And sure I think at a certain age, I don't know what that age is, we would have to ask Dr. Spock about that or Werner Herzog or somebody. At some point I think it is interesting and probably a good thing for kids to understand their parents in a fuller sense as human beings. I try not to hide my sadness from my daughter if I'm sad. I don't want to overload her with it, I don't want to freak her out, but if I'm sad, if I'm crying—which I never do, of course. **(laughter)** You know, like, I don't want her to think that I don't have those emotions, I don't want to disguise my humanity from her. But I think it is a delicate balance and as kids get older, you gradually reveal more. I don't know. I don't know what age I'll let Vivien read this book, but I mean, but it will hopefully be the reason that we're living in a house and not like in a Dumpster outside of a Taco Bell or something, you know, so she should appreciate it on that level.

(applause)

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: By writing this book you've done something for her. You

don't like the word "parenting." Neither do I.

ADAM MANSBACH: I don't like the verbization of nouns all that much, that irritates me.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: The what?

ADAM MANSBACH: The making of nouns into verbs. "Party." You know, party's not a verb, it's a noun. Or it's some part of speech, it's not a verb. I don't really do very grammar very well, except for this one random objection, you know what I mean? That's all. But parenting is kind of an annoying word, I would agree with that.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: Why?

ADAM MANSBACH: Because everything written about parenting is sort of annoying, I think. Except for the things written about parenting by people in this audience right now.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: But in a sense you've written this book against those parenting annoying books, to free, because I think that one of the comments I've gotten so freely about this book is that in a way you have functioned as a savior for many people.

ADAM MANSBACH: That's always how I've seen myself.

(laughter)

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: Yeah, but you have liberated them of their inhibition to feel this.

ADAM MANSBACH: I'm sort of like the Dionysus of this parenting shit, in a way.

(laughter)

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: You phrase it so well, you really do.

ADAM MANSBACH: I wrote that on my hand earlier.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: Now, what I would like to do is bring onstage Ricardo Cortés. Ricardo Cortés is the illustrator of this book. He's an artist, he says, a writer, a publisher, a designer, an activist, and a researcher. Ricardo Cortés.

(applause)

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: Tell us how you work together.

RICARDO CORTÉS: Well, Adam sent me the first phase of the poem before it was

actually totally completed as a full narrative. It was just a number of verses that just gave me the idea of the story and obviously the title. Adam and I have been friends for over a decade. We grew up together close by, so I've been familiar with his work as a novelist. He's been familiar with my work as a children's book illustrator and writer and of books that are in some degree not your typical children's books. I did a children's book about marijuana.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: That is not typical. I have to tell you. I read it, it really is not typical. And Bill O'Reilly, who had you on his show, didn't think it was typical, either. He didn't take to you very much.

RICARDO CORTÉS: Well, I tried to kill him with kindness.

ADAM MANSBACH: It didn't work, he's still around. We gotta try harder.

RICARDO CORTÉS: So when I first saw this I knew immediately this was something I'd never seen before. I mean, I think that was the key to this. It was about an issue, it was about a topic. I mean, similar to my book about grass, which I wrote because it's a topic that's been covered a million times before, but never as a children's book, and that was a totally new way of talking about this issue. So similarly, this was a genre of children's literature that I'm you know very familiar with, and I read this and it was just a totally new take, and I was just excited thinking about how people were going to be talking about it, so I said, "yeah," I said, "Sure, yeah, let's try, let's do something." So we

knocked together about two three illustrations, drawings, and I think we immediately both had the same idea of—we were on the same page of what the book is going to look like, the aesthetic, the vibe we're trying to do. Which essentially as you see is just an homage to classic children's illustration and classic children's books, and I felt my role was in a certain way to be the quiet one, the one that was laid back and not in a totally unnoticeable, but my illustrations are not jumping out at you. Adam's words are doing that already, and they're hitting the nail on the head perfectly with the comedy that he does.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: What you are also saying is that you are to some extent attracted by taboo subjects.

RICARDO CORTÉS: Sure, yeah, I'm interested in especially doing things that haven't been dealt with before.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: But in a way what you're trying to do—are you trying to do counterpoint in some way in this book so that the illustrations are in some way in tension with the words, which are might I say quite vibrant?

RICARDO CORTÉS: Yeah, I was a straight guy. I was a straight guy. Just some idyllic landscapes and some beautiful scenes, that would just kind of lull you. The visualization is the lullaby. Adam is the lullaby, too, but he's really the one who is grabbing you by the jugular and—

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: By the udder.

ADAM MANSBACH: There's also though a different—one thing we tried to do is create a different relationship on each page in subtle ways between the illustration and the verse, so sometimes the illustration is totally playing the straight man, sometimes there's a sort of a hint of subversion. Sometimes the idyllic landscape is being invaded by a sleepless kid, sometimes the kid's bedroom is being invaded by nature. We tried to keep it sort of moving so that on each page, it's kind of coming back to me, all these conversations we had now as we're sitting here. We really strategically sort of talked about how every time you turned a page you were going to be met with a slightly different skew on the relationship between the two elements.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: I must say it is extraordinary to read and reread it. Each and every time there are more and more elements and more and more details of your illustration and of your prose.

ADAM MANSBACH: You found all the Masonic symbols.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: I found a few of them, I didn't find all of them, that's why I'm going to read it again. I do like rereading.

RICARDO CORTÉS: I think it was also something about just the intimacy of just

Adam and myself and Johnny, who's going to be coming up soon, of being such a small outfit, that it was just us and there was no other creative direction that we had to deal with at first, and that intimacy, how we bounced off each other, particularly with the pangolin that came up. For me that represented a lot of how I think Adam and I work so well together.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: The pangolin.

RICARDO CORTÉS: That was a late addition. That was a later addition to the story on that page. I was happy with that page on the child I thought the expression was excellent. We had a couple detours in—at some point, at later points, there was some creative direction from other sources. They were tending to say, “maybe you could change this, and take out some curse words,” at some point. I mean, it was really going off in far directions, to a point where I was getting a little frustrated of all this work for no money or anything, **(laughter)** and at some point, “how are we going to fix this page?” And Adam just threw this e-mail at me, “throw in a pangolin, a giant pangolin,” he had this verse.

ADAM MANSBACH: I rewrote the verse and threw the pangolin in there, I think.

RICARDO CORTÉS: And it was just another example—sometimes Adam would throw these things that were just so out of left field. I feel like if we were with Random House, they would have said, “no pangolin, that's getting a little—” I just immediately, I was

like, yeah, that's it. And there were a lot of things like that that were just sort of zany. A lot of that came from Adam that I would just catch and be like, let's grab that zany thing, I don't want that normal thing.

ADAM MANSBACH: And being a small outfit, like a onesie.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: I don't know that word.

ADAM MANSBACH: Onesie?

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: Yeah, what is it?

ADAM MANSBACH: You know, that one-piece baby thing—

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: The onesie, yeah, I should know it, yeah.

ADAM MANSBACH: They had those in Mesopotamia.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: That really stuck with you, huh?

ADAM MANSBACH: It did, it did. I love saying the word.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: Mesopotamia. Maybe you can use it in the next book.

ADAM MANSBACH: I may set the next book in ancient Mesopotamia. It's funny because my daughter—her preschool teacher always talks about how she has this love of words, she tastes words, and when she gets a word she really likes she just enjoys it so much, and I feel that way about “Mesopotamia,” I think. Anyway, being a small cadre was certainly key. We would have these you know phone conversations and really just hammer stuff out and take directions and back up and try it again. I think the fact that we have a lot of history, and have worked together on stuff before, too. That's another element in our relationship. When I was in college, Ricardo and I went to different high schools in the same town, then reconnected in college, and I started a hip-hop magazine in college, and Ricardo was the art director and so we've had—

RICARDO CORTÉS: The art director, because at that point I wasn't familiar with any layout software or anything, so really it was basically about collecting illustrations and giving it to a friend, never got the title “art director.”

ADAM MANSBACH: He had some other title. There were only like four people on the staff. We just raided your portfolio. Right, like we had an issue and we needed art, so like whatever random stuff Ricardo had been illustrating, which was totally unconnected to any of the pieces in the magazine, would just end up in there. So, Professor Tricia Rose discusses, you know, hip-hop literacy, and there's like an illustration of like Bob Marley smoking a joint and, like, the smoke is, you know, turning into Peter Tosh or something, and it's like, “Yeah, let's put that in there, yeah.”

(laughter)

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: Let's bring to the stage the other missing link of this small outfit and when I asked Johnny to define himself in seven words, Johnny Temple wrote this: "Neurosis, stress, touchy-feely bureaucracy, Brooklyn booster." Johnny Temple.

(applause) Johnny, talk a little bit about the creative process of this small outfit you run, Akashic Books, and how you worked with Adam and Ricardo and where the level of agreement resided.

JOHNNY TEMPLE: In general, I would like to think that one of the hallmarks of Akashic Books is that we do tend to be pretty author-oriented, and I think we're good at following our authors' leads and I think this ties back a little bit to the fact that I had a long career as a musician, so I started publishing, I came into it with a very sort of artist-friendly orientation. Girls against Boys was a rock-and-roll band I played in for a long time. So this project in that sense was very much like the other projects. As an editor, you know, you're doing your job when you're invisible and you know they—Adam and I have known each other. I've known Ricardo a little bit, but Adam and I—I've published a couple of short stories by Adam in the past, dating back to I published, the first time I published a story of yours was 2004, which is now a healthy amount of time has passed. You mentioned you guys having known each other for a decade or more, but not to date you, but it sounds to me like it's a lot more than a decade.

(laughter)

ADAM MANSBACH: Probably.

RICARDO CORTÉS: That's probably true, yeah. It's a decade, I've knew you since high school.

ADAM MANSBACH: Tells you how we think about ourselves.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: Children have not aged you that much.

JOHNNY TEMPLE: So when Adam had also coedited a fiction anthology with another great fiction writer named T Cooper, a fiction anthology.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: For you.

JOHNNY TEMPLE: For us, called *A Fictional History of the United States, with Huge Chunks Missing*, which is a fun and playful take on American history through short fiction. So anyway, Adam and I, in addition to having developed a friendship over the years have also, you know, published some stuff together in a limited capacity. I'm not the publisher of Adam's novels, but we've done some work together. I'd like to think that's part of the reason why Adam contacted me about the project is that he knew that I wasn't going to sort of, you know, take it and be like, "This is mine," and treat it like a

piece of clay that I would like to shape and so that was sort of how we started off into the process. As the process developed, in fact, you know, I did become more concerned about the shaping of the book—

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: Concerned—were you—I’m curious about one thing. Do you think this book would have been successful if had borne another title? Or do you think that one particular word in this book made it—get, galvanize its success? Or differently put was that one word, which for some reason I’m shy to say now, I haven’t been all evening, maybe in front of you, but if the word “fuck” had not been there, would it have made you feel more at ease or was that a subject of worry to you?

JOHNNY TEMPLE: Well, the very first book that Akashic published in 1997 was a very successful novel called *The Fuck-Up*.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: So there’s a tradition there.

(laughter)

JOHNNY TEMPLE: There’s a tradition here. When *The Fuck-Up*—the rights were licensed to Simon & Schuster and when they did their edition the author then retroactively dedicated the book to me, *The Fuck-Up*, dedicated to Johnny Temple. That was my beginning in publishing and now this is perhaps my end.

(laughter)

ADAM MANSBACH: That was my nickname in high school, so that's all right.

JOHNNY TEMPLE: I do want to say, though, obviously the word “fuck” is integral, is important to the title and I think that the title of the book is a really key element to the success of the book, but it's not just the word, it's the phrase. It's the phrase and what's really interesting is looking at—we're licensing the book into translation—we have, you know, over twenty different countries have licensed now the book into translation. And it's very interesting to see how they're going to tackle the title, because obviously they're not necessarily going to make a literal translation, because it's colloquial. *Go the Fuck to Sleep* is very sort of American and certainly English expression, so obviously the word “fuck” is key to it, but you know people have been saying, “All you have to do is put the word ‘fuck’ in the title of a book and it's successful,” and while we do have two very good examples of that, the word obviously by itself doesn't do the job.

RICARDO CORTÉS: And I'd also add on a visual level, I think coming up with the cover, of how we actually put the word in place, for myself, especially, because I'm a visual person, was very important. How the U and the C is obscured. There were a couple versions where we—

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: And I think it would be a good moment now to show those versions.

RICARDO CORTÉS: Yeah, and we'll see those—and the moon. There was one point where the moon was brighter and there was no U or C. I love the hint of the C and the hint of the U that keeps it real in some way.

ADAM MANSBACH: Keeps it real out of Walmart, yeah.

(laughter)

RICARDO CORTÉS: But I like how there was a little bit of—

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: Has it kept it out of Walmart?

ADAM MANSBACH: I don't know. I mean, it's not in Walmart.

[MISSING SPEAKERS' NAMES ~56:30—57:10]

XXXX XXXX: I mean, yeah, yeah. But you know, it may be because with everything that happens, every bit of sort of legitimacy that we get from some mainstream coverage—you know, it's in Target, which is Walmart's competitor, so if they don't want to give pipes, they don't have to.

XXXX XXXX: Target—

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: What were you saying?

XXXX XXXX: Oh, nothing, nothing.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: I have many hats to wear.

XXXX XXXX: Sorry, I didn't mean to take it as a—

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: No, no, no, but it is—I am interested in what a word, what a name can do, what a word can do. You were talking about your daughter tasting words. Let's play that one audio we have, just to see—

GEORGE CARLIN AUDIO: I love words. I thank you for hearing my words. I want to tell you something about words that I think is important. As I say, they're my work, they're my play, they're my passion. Words are all we have, really. We have thoughts, but thoughts are fluid. Then we assign a word to a thought, and we're stuck with that word for that thought. So be careful with words. I like to think that the same words that hurt can heal, it's a matter of how you pick them. There are some people that aren't into all the words. There are some people who would have you not use certain words. There are four hundred thousand words in the English language and there are seven of them you can't say on television. What a ratio that is. Three hundred ninety-nine thousand, nine hundred, and ninety-three to seven. **(laughter)** They must really be bad. They'd have to

be outrageous to be separated from a group that large. “All you over here, you seven. Bad words.” **(laughter)** That’s what they told us they were, remember. “That’s a bad word!” No bad words. Bad thoughts. Bad intentions. And words. You know the seven, don’t you, that you can’t say on television? Shit, piss, fuck, cunt, cocksucker, motherfucker, and tits, huh? **(laughter)**

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: I discovered the work of George Carlin on this stage by having a tribute that Tony Hendra put together of George Carlin a year after his passing and so one word, one word can make a big difference. But that one word which makes a big difference can also be the subject of censorship. Have you suffered that yet anywhere?

JOHNNY TEMPLE: Not enough.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: Good answer. But in New Zealand.

JOHNNY TEMPLE: In New Zealand, yes, but we have not suffered censorship, unfortunately. There was a—we just read two days ago, the book is going to be published in July in Australia and New Zealand and there’s been a tremendous amount of interest in Australia and New Zealand about the book, so a Christian group called Family First is attempting to get the book banned in Australia and New Zealand.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: On what grounds?

JOHNNY TEMPLE: You know, that it's abusive to children, I suppose.

ADAM MANSBACH: If I can elaborate on that, because I read their press release of like ridiculously illogical weird babble. What they say is they're like, "This book may be innocent and even amusing to normal people, but to dysfunctional and aggressive parents, this could cause them to be aggressive toward their kids." Like what the fuck are you talking about? So by that logic shouldn't we ban everything from aggressive and dysfunctional people. I mean, what is safe in the hands of aggressive and dysfunctional people, really. You know, I don't want them getting their hands on spoons.

(laughter)

JOHNNY TEMPLE: I was pleased that there was online I think it's called *Christianity Today* that wrote a positive thing about the book, an American group, which was really great to see and sort of actually I would go so far as to say courageous of them, someone to come out and advocate on behalf of the book. But when the Australian publisher e-mailed me last night or something saying we had already seen this article from, this thing about Family First, and then the Australian publisher e-mailed about it. And I couldn't tell from his e-mail if he was concerned. I said, "This was very funny to me. Are you concerned?" and he wrote back, "it's all manna from heaven." Which is—online, when people do object to the book, they encounter immediate resistance from a mob of impassioned parents who shout them down.

ADAM MANSBACH: Aggressively. Dysfunctionally and aggressively.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: It's quite extraordinary the reaction the book has had before its pub date, which is really today, hundreds of pages online of reactions, very impassioned reactions. Adam and Ricardo were talking about what it meant to work in a small outfit such as Akashic Books, which is not known for its children's books geared towards adults, is it?

JOHNNY TEMPLE: No, that's not where we've made—it is where we've made our biggest mark, but it's not what we're known for.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: So it doesn't really fit totally within your publishing program.

JOHNNY TEMPLE: Right, we specialize, I call it urban literary fiction. We also publish some nonfiction, we publish some poetry, we occasionally publish an art book, but fiction usually with sort of dark or subversive themes, serious literary fiction.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: And noir, a whole Noir series. And Caribbean literature.

JOHNNY TEMPLE: Caribbean literature is a major focus of ours. The whole African diaspora is one of my biggest personal passions.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: So why did you take this on?

JOHNNY TEMPLE: Well, when Adam e-mailed me the proposal, which was a bunch of verses with two or three or four pieces of art, when I first received it I laughed out loud, but I didn't actually think seriously about publishing it, because it doesn't really fit our list. We've done one strange graphic novel. You know, graphics has not been a strong suit of ours. But it was funny enough that I forwarded it to a few parents, other members of the Brooklyn Parent Industrial Complex, my wife included Kara Gilmour, who's here in the audience and the first reaction I got back was from Kara, who just said, "I'm weeping." And other, there was just like three or four parents who I had sent it to. I got these incredibly emotional responses back about it and it was you know, it was—I sent out like four or five—I sent it to four or five people and I got that many responses back, among them, the people just sort of urging me to publish the book. And then I stopped and sent it to a couple more people, and everyone had the exact same reaction, and then something clicked in my head and I got on the phone and tried to twist Adam's arm into immediately signing a book deal.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: Which he did.

JOHNNY TEMPLE: Which he did. He and Ricardo did.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: He did. And since then you have been asked by other

publishers the right to this book, which you turned down.

JOHNNY TEMPLE: As soon as the book started to explode, which was totally unplanned, and it was before we had even begun promoting the book. We had only been promoting the book to the book trade. We had been reaching out to booksellers, but we had not started promoting it to the public. Adam gave a reading of the book in Philadelphia which led to some people in the audience, had a very good reaction from the audience, and the book caught on, and there was a preorder page on Amazon.com for the book, and that preorder page on Amazon.com somehow became a peg around which this burst of parental enthusiasm sort of started circulating, which shot the Amazon ranking of this book that wasn't due out till October 2011, it shot it up to the top of Amazon and I found out that everyone in the book business looks at the top ten list on Amazon because, you know, Polish publishers immediately started contacting me.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: Not even really knowing what it was yet.

JOHNNY TEMPLE: No, they didn't know what it was, they just saw the Amazon thing happened. And that sort of alerted the industry, you know, that there was something happening. But it wasn't about the industry, it was about the parents reacting to it, but this sort of Amazon page, on the sort of business level, was the sort of business magnet, and then yeah all the big publishers started immediately saying, "Can we buy this book from you?"

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: And you said?

JOHNNY TEMPLE: “No, we’re publishing it.” I didn’t get into this business to be an agent. There’s a lot of literary agents who I’m very fond of, but to just sell it off would have been to just be a sort of middleperson for a very exciting book that was having a very tangible huge worldwide reaction, and we wanted to do it ourselves.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: I have to say that when the idea of Werner Herzog reading it came up it was in that spirit, you know, a man, a filmmaker, a director, who has remained absolutely and utterly independent, and to have an independent voice reading it at the inception of our evening tonight, to have an independent publisher who has remained independent despite the pressures of the market. Has this been good for Akashic. We get notices now from everyone that you’re about to be able to retire.

JOHNNY TEMPLE: Either we will go down in flames or I will retire to the Caribbean, yes. One of those two things is definitely going to happen.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: Speaking now about the relationship—

RICARDO CORTÉS: Can we talk about some of the friction that we had?

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: The onesies or whatever, to talk about the relationship you had, I’d like you to show some of those images. We have here six images I believe of

various covers of the book. I would like you to talk all of you quite independently about how you came about to decide which cover to use.

ADAM MANSBACH: Some of these also are not proposed covers, but sort of mockups of covers, that obviously, you look at this, Ricardo would have illustrated these photos into a cover.

RICARDO CORTÉS: This was the first idea that I had and in getting a lot of the illustrations for the children in the story, I reached out to a lot of friends, parents, who, and I asked them for photographs of their kids. Kind of at first I think I just said in that state of when they're kind of sleepy or trying to get to bed. I got a great assortment of photographs. This was a collage of what I thought would be a great cover, like just sleeping kids, so we're going to go into a little procession of about six images of how the three of us went over things.

ADAM MANSBACH: I called this one the "slaughtered toddlers cover."

(laughter)

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: How did you react, before we get to the next image? I like that by the way.

ADAM MANSBACH: It's the title of my next book.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: It's good. How did you react to this cover?

JOHNNY TEMPLE: This one just doesn't, this one just doesn't grab me. It's too busy. It's not—it doesn't visually captivate me and we—I would say that well, this might not be wholly true, but we knew we needed a knockout cover, and the book, you know, as it was coming together, and it was coming together beautifully, with some problems along the way, but as it came together, we knew we really had something on our hands, I as a publisher, I've learned the hard the way that the book cover—it's obvious, but still lots of people mess it up, and you know, we mess it up, but the book cover is the most important marketing tool you have. In this case, the title of the book is also a brilliant marketing tool, but the cover is so important and so we weren't looking—we didn't need a really good cover, we needed a fucking amazing cover. And this just wasn't cutting it.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: Let's look at that.

RICARDO CORTÉS: So this is obviously an image from the story and it was Adam actually who first I think mentioned, "Hey, what about that page for the cover?" And at first I wasn't feeling it and then I started to feel it a lot, and then I realized I wouldn't have to draw another page, and I really started to like it, and I think this was also the inspiration for where we started to think about the moon playing with the title.

ADAM MANSBACH: And ultimately we just—it just sort of wasn't exciting enough. I

mean, it was peaceful, it was pretty, it's a page from the book that I always liked, so I came up with it and then Ricardo got really attached to it, and then I was in this weird position of having to talk him out of what I had proposed, which was difficult.

JOHNNY TEMPLE: This one to me I never particularly liked and one of the bumps along the way was that I didn't really state that clearly enough early in the process.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: But this is a moment to do it.

JOHNNY TEMPLE: No, it was, it came out.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: When these tensions emerge in this nice threesome, how do they emerge?

JOHNNY TEMPLE: It got really tense. It would usually be—Ricardo would state a really firm opinion, **(laughter)** “Sorry guys, I just have to tell it like it is, I'm not good at bullshitting.”

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: And you are on the phone.

ADAM MANSBACH: No, no, no, we would consistently make the mistake which I encourage everybody to not make in any facet of your life of doing this delicate communication almost entirely over e-mail, so everybody would get real gangster with it

over e-mail, real aggressive, you know, like, and then we'd get on the phone and everything would chill out and we'd remember who we were, but these e-mails would always escalate—any seed of tension would get bigger and bigger.

JOHNNY TEMPLE: I think we all obviously had a stake in it being the best book it could be. And when I was thinking—when I had my opinions, I always knew it wasn't totally a selfish thing, it was like, "This is how I think the book is going to be best." So as we go along, I think this is where you guys started saying, "We need some kids on the cover."

RICARDO CORTÉS: This seemed a little too dark, and it seemed that we needed—

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: Dark and peaceful.

JOHNNY TEMPLE: A little sedate, even though the book title itself has an excess of life to it.

ADAM MANSBACH: And there's also a way to read this title, I mean, because "fuck" isn't in the middle of a one-line title you can sort of ignore the word that's blotted out in a kind of way and read "Go the to sleep."

JOHNNY TEMPLE: There is—I would like to go back and visit an e-mail, I think there was one e-mail I sent to—it was probably to both of you, but it was directed at Ricardo.

Where I was like trying to shoot down this cover, and I went so far as I'm sure you remember as to say the moon as a solution for covering up the word, I was like, I was not going to have that. I was like, "I am totally opposed to this." **(laughter)** And in retrospect, I mean, I think during the process, you know, there was all this tension and frustration, and I just remember so vividly certain things with both of you but especially with Ricardo, things that I just worked myself up into total, at least in my mind, opposition, and then as it all played out, like Ricardo was like totally right about like 98 percent of the things.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: Let's look at—

RICARDO CORTÉS: So as we're going through these, we're showing six images, but I also have to say that part of my frustration was that we went through I think about twenty-five images and I was the one at that point where, as Adam said it took him maybe about two days to write the story.

ADAM MANSBACH: Yeah, I was done, I was drunk after that the whole time.

RICARDO CORTÉS: So I was going through months and months of more illustrations and certain sidetracks. So this is when we started—we had the idea of let's start putting some kids on the cover. So this was an illustration that you as you see was a child that was also in the book itself, and this was the first illustration I did. This didn't work as a cover, but I loved the illustration, and when this illustration got kicked out of the book, I

was a little upset, I really liked it, but of course the girl comes back.

JOHNNY TEMPLE: An element of this, as a small operation, is that Adam and Ricardo signed up with Akashic, there was a tiny, tiny advance on the book, so I think one of the frustrations for Ricardo was that it's easy enough for me and Adam to be like, "why don't you try this and try that?"

ADAM MANSBACH: Why don't you do another fifty, Ricardo, and we'll pick the best one of those.

JOHNNY TEMPLE: Every little idea is like robbing Ricardo of seven hours of his life for no monetary gain, and of course we all hoped for a successful book, but there was also of course no guarantee whatsoever and we're all busy people, so in doing the cover you know you brainstorm but then it was Ricardo that was the one who had to like put in in the time to sort of generate, you know, generate these varieties. I'm not sure there's anything more to say about this one.

(laughter)

JOHNNY TEMPLE: So this one was the brainchild of the evil, intrusive publisher. I felt after a couple of failed attempts at getting the cover that I also felt like, I felt like we had such a great book, we needed a cover that was little more slick, a little more like pro-style.

ADAM MANSBACH: Right, that looked like the poster for a shitty movie.

(laughter)

JOHNNY TEMPLE: This was when—so I got permission from the two of these guys to pull in an outside designer to try a sort of fresh perspective because we were wearing each other down. Ricardo was getting burnt out and we were sort of hitting an impasse and so we pulled in a really, really excellent designer named Jim Pascoe, who's done a lot of covers for Akashic and is one of our very best designers and this I think may look like a tone-deaf interpretation of the book, but it was my mistake in the direction that I gave Jim. Because I was kind of looking, "let's go for a new direction," and we went in too much of a new direction, because the tone of the cover clearly doesn't match the tone and the palette, the color scheme, the aesthetics, of the book. I think that this helped us to clarify the parameters of what we were looking for.

RICARDO CORTÉS: Yeah, as we'll see with the next slide is basically this was the jumping-off point, pretty much the last leg of what we were trying to do. And you will see here Adam's daughter is again in the center of the piece here and then we went through a couple different versions of her standing in front of the tigers. At this point it was still sunset, it was still vibrant, people were awake, the child is kind of. I was doing these very reluctantly. This stage I was not happy with. And I was really afraid that something that I had put so much time into was going to end up. I just didn't think this

really got it. At the same time, why we worked so well together is because it wouldn't have gotten as far as it did if I had had my way in the first place. Basically, them pushing this far was able for me to get a little bit farther back here. So we went through these three different versions, and you start to recognize obviously the end of the book, the final version. We said okay, "Let's go—" I was really pushing I think for the darker sky and so then we switched that around. We put a sleeping child instead of an awake child, which I kind of liked.

JOHNNY TEMPLE: And on that last one when you kicked that out and then—I think Adam and I were still like, "It's getting closer," but still resistant. And I think you were kind of like, "Fuck it, this is bullshit." And then that was the realization that this e-mail thing is just really breaking down on us. And you and I had what I like to think about as the historic meeting at the No. 7 restaurant in Fort Greene, Brooklyn.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: What happened?

JOHNNY TEMPLE: It was just like—it was really getting to be a crisis, it was feeling like a crisis. We were near the end of the book. The inside of the book was all done at this point. And the communication between the three of us felt to me like it was getting, like there was like animosity, at least that was from my perspective **(laughter)** and a lot of unexpressed animosity, but then it was like—then Ricardo and I agreed to get down and like just look at things and it just seemed like an in-person meeting. Adam was in Philadelphia so he couldn't join us. And I felt like you and I had the most incredible

meeting and it felt like that was like, we were really able to get ourselves on course.

ADAM MANSBACH: I had a really good day that day, too.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: And that's when you got to the last image, let's look at it again, the very last. And this became—

ADAM MANSBACH: Then Ricardo fucking nailed it.

RICARDO CORTÉS: As much as it seemed tense, I mean, that's kinda just how I speak, and once we got together, I think it was clear.

ADAM MANSBACH: That's just how I do.

RICARDO CORTÉS: I'm still on board, I just wanted to get, let's get—

JOHNNY TEMPLE: This has been very therapeutic, I think.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: No, I know. I think in a way it's in keeping with the book itself which has been therapeutic for a lot of people. So I'm glad to have actually provided this service to you.

RICARDO CORTÉS: No, I have to say though it was, I mean, it was hilarious, at every

single night, I mean, I'm up at two o'clock in the morning, just saying to myself, "I'm just going to go the fuck to sleep." Like really it was this meta thing here.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: Let's just take a couple of quick questions if we could. If there are no quick questions, what we will do is I think, is there a quick question.

JOHNNY TEMPLE: No, I'm pointing at Judah who is standing in the wings.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: If there are no quick questions. There is one person who will ask a quick question. Go ahead.

Q: This is a question for Adam in particular. I'm wondering if when you were drafting those verses you ever generated something that you thought, "You know what? Even for me, this crosses the line."

ADAM MANSBACH: No, I didn't. I think I had a pretty good handle on what I wanted the tone to be. So no, there was never, and it's funny because like, sometimes I get these e-mails from people, from fans of the book that are a little over the top for me. And I'm like, eh. People are like, "Your book speaks to me because I just want to fucking murder the shit out of my kids all the time." And I'm like, "That's not really what I said. You're a bad person." Or people will be like, "I've got your title for your next book: *Shut the Fuck Up or I'm Going to Kill You*." And it's like, it's like, I don't want to be the mouthpiece for your unreasonable rage. This is in a slightly different lane here. So no I

think I never had to rein myself in in that way. I think I had a pretty good idea of what I wanted the tone to be, so.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: Well I think the moment has come for us to all hear the book read once more. So I'm going to bring onstage now Judah Friedlander, who as all of you know is the world champion author of instructional karate book *How to Beat Up Anybody*. So we'll give the stage now to Judah Friedlander.

JUDAH FRIEDLANDER: I'm going to make this levitate first, pretty cool. Keep it going for everybody and congratulations Adam and Ricardo and everybody. Very impressive. A lot of people are wondering what my connection is to the book. There's a couple. Adam and I were actually, uh, we were roommates in prep school and I had a lot of sleeping problems, so he would actually read me bedtime stories when I was a kid. That was at Philips Exeter Academy, I think. I'm fucking kidding, everybody, okay? No, actually, from this library in 1983, I stole a Judy Blume novel, and this is part of my service that I have to come here and do readings every once in a while. **(laughter)** So, but congratulations. This book is an absolute sensation. It's unspeakable how popular it is and I actually wrote a book, an instructional karate book to help America and the world safer called *How to Beat Up Anybody*. It's currently ranked, my friend just texted me. It's currently ranked on Amazon as the 97,996th top selling book on Amazon. So whatever your book is mine is the opposite of that. I think this book is awesome. Adam actually gave it to me a few days ago and I've been reading it to kids all over my neighborhood and they're loving it. So I think I will start with the reading of the book.

Go the Fuck to Sleep

By Adam Mansbach, Illustrated by Ricardo Cortés.

Feel free to applause here if you want, it's okay.

(applause)

The cats nestle close to their kittens.

The lambs have laid down with the sheep.

You're cozy and warm in your bed, my dear.

Please go the fuck to sleep.

The windows are dark in the town, child.

The whales huddle down in the deep.

I'll read you one very last book if you swear

You'll go the fuck to sleep.

The eagles who soar through the sky are at rest

And the creatures who crawl, run, and creep.

I know you're not thirsty. That's bullshit. Stop lying.

Lie the fuck down, my darling, and sleep.

The wind whispers soft through the grass, hon.

The field mice, they make not a peep.

It's been thirty-eight minutes already.

Jesus Christ, what the fuck? Go to sleep.

All the kids from day care are in dreamland.

The froggie has made his last leap.

Hell no, you can't go to the bathroom.

You know where you can go? The fuck to sleep.

The owls fly forth from the treetops.

Through the air, they soar and they sweep.

A hot crimson rage fills my heart, love.

For real, shut the fuck up and sleep.

The cubs and the lions are snoring,

Wrapped in a snuggly heap.

How come you can do all this other great shit

But you can't lie the fuck down and sleep?

The seeds slumber beneath the earth now

And the crops that the farmers will reap.

No more questions. This interview's over.

I've got two words for you, kid: fucking sleep.

The tiger reclines in the simmering jungle.
The sparrow has silenced her cheep.
Fuck your stuffed bear, I'm not getting you shit.
Close your eyes. Cut the crap. Sleep.

The flowers doze low in the meadows
And high on the mountains so steep.
My life is a failure, I'm a shitty-ass parent.
Stop fucking with me, please, and sleep.

The giant pangolins of Madagascar are snoozing.
As I lie here and openly weep.
Sure, fine, whatever, I'll bring you some milk.
Who the fuck cares? You're not gonna sleep.

This room is all I can remember.
The furniture crappy and cheap.
You win. You escape. You run down the hall.
As I nod the fuck off, and sleep.

Bleary and dazed I awaken
To find your eyes shut, so I keep

My fingers crossed tight as I tiptoe away

And pray that you're fucking asleep.

We're finally watching our movie.

Popcorn's in the microwave. *Beep*.

Oh shit. Goddamn it. You've gotta be kidding me.

Come on, go the fuck back to sleep.

The end.

(applause)

Thank you. Congratulations!