

THE UNDERGRADUATE MAGAZINE OF COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY, EST. 1890

# THE BLUE AND WHITE

Vol. XIX No. IV

Orientation 2013



## The Deciders

Four Trustees share the view from the top

## No Sugarcoating

A conversation with Ta-Nehisi Coates

ALSO INSIDE: INSIDE NSOP ELEVATORS

# THE BLUE AND WHITE

Vol. XIX

FAMAM EXTENDIMUS FACTIS

No. IV

## COLUMNS

- 4 BLUEBOOK
- 6 BLUE NOTES
- 8 CAMPUS CHARACTERS
- 12 VERILY VERITAS
- 20 CURIO COLUMBIANA
- 32 MEASURE FOR MEASURE
- 44 SKETCHBOOK
- 46 DIGITALIA COLUMBIANA
- 47 CAMPUS GOSSIP

## FEATURES

- 10 AT TWO SWORDS' LENGTH: ARE YOU GONNA BE MY BEST FRIEND?  
*Our monthly prose and cons*
- 13 WE KNOW WHAT YOU DID LAST SUMMER  
*B&W staffers bring back tales from the real world*
- 15 **THE DECIDERS**  
*Four Trustees share the view from the top*
- 21 **GROWING PAINS**  
*One transgender B&W staffer's experiences*
- 23 **THINKING AND DRINKING**  
*Alex Hall gets back to basics at d.b.a.*
- 25 WILSON  
*Two fresh-people navigate NSOP*
- 29 AND ALL THAT JAZZ  
*Why radio still matters after the college DJ's halcyon age*
- 34 MONKEY BUSINESS  
*On the latest from Columbia Business School Publishing*
- 35 **DON'T ROCK THE BOAT**  
*Kayaking one of America's dirtiest canals*
- 37 NEIGHBORHOOD WATCH  
*The blandification of Morningside Heights continues unabated*
- 39 **NO SUGARCOATING**  
*A conversation with Ta-Nehisi Coates*

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# BLUE BOOK

## LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

Here is the letter I almost wrote, in brief:

“This summer I visited another college, and its campus wasn’t nearly as graceful as ours, which is pleasingly rational and rectilinear and was designed by McKim, Meade & White.”

So I won’t go there, despite this being the Orientation issue and probably the best time of year for mawkishness. Instead I will be “negative,” and offer the Class of 2017 one piece of advice.

By the end of last spring, some vital stuff in me had been replaced by bile. Accordingly, I fled Columbia’s toxic miasma of triple-irony, feigned academicism, and narcissistic self-effacement, of which I had regrettably become a particle. I spent the summer working in what the weatherman unfailingly called the “heart of Arkansas.”

A month into my sequestration in a dry county surrounded by dry counties, some Columbia friends stopped by on a road trip. Drinking late into Tuesday morning, we zealously and capriciously debated our ideals, each contending that only he had a claim to the word “ideal” at all (except for one dirty pragmatist). It’d been a while since I’d had one of those, and I overdid it.

The next morning, as my indolent friends snored in my living room, I swallowed two Advils and two electrolyte tablets and went to what would be a long morning.

That afternoon, after my head cleared up, I realized that I was more exhausted from our spirited debate than our drinking.

Last spring, too much of that sort of strain had worked up mental calluses to the point that I never let my defenses down. I know I am not the only one who, having carelessly introduced an idea into a conversation, has felt strangely and not-quite-consciously compelled to defend it to the death of the conversation. After all, retraction or modification would amount to surrender.

2017, that pressure is stimulating. It is what makes Columbia so worthwhile, and too little of it will render your undergraduate years spiritless and cold. But too much can make you no fun at all.

— *Conor Skelding*

## TRANSACTIONS

### ARRIVALS

The Class of 2017

A specsucks redesign

Wi-Fi in some city parks

A 1020 Twitter account, as lazy as 1020

An Office of Student Engagement

### DEPARTURES

@sree, Columbia’s first Chief Digital Officer, to become the Metropolitan Museum of Art’s first Chief Digital Officer

Two of the five original Morningsiders, over “disparate visions” in “the musical direction of the band”

### COME AGAIN!?

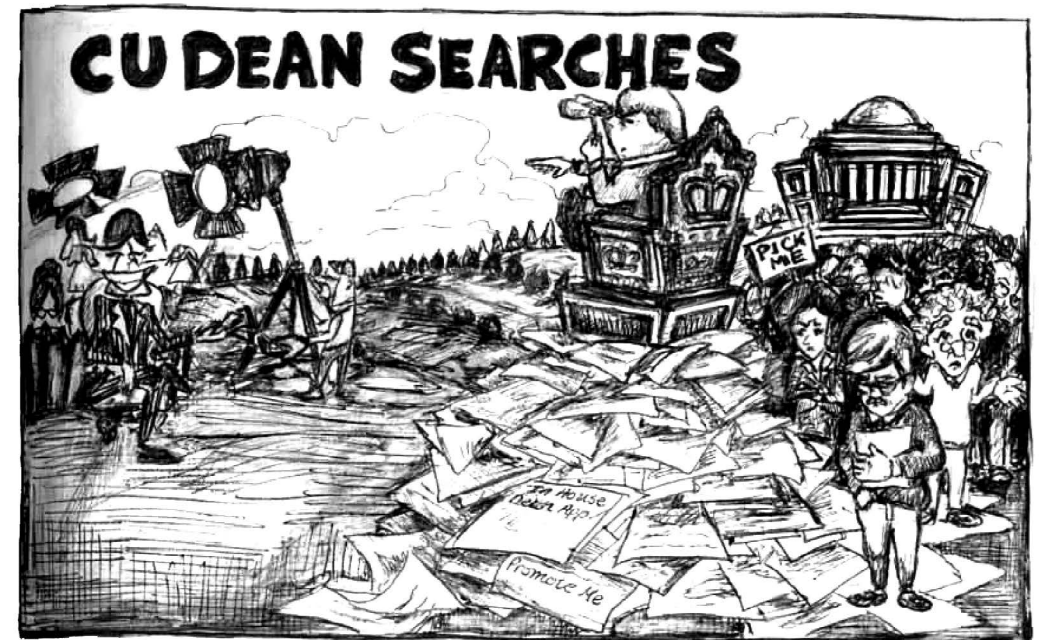
“We hope students will follow the precedent set by the greatest astronomers who challenged commonly accepted ideas for the sake of scientific advancement.”

— *NSOP coordinators Jade Bonacolta, BC ’15, Emma Chaves, CC ’14, and Tawanna Currence, GS ’14, announcing the 2013 NSOP theme, “Infinite Possibilities”*

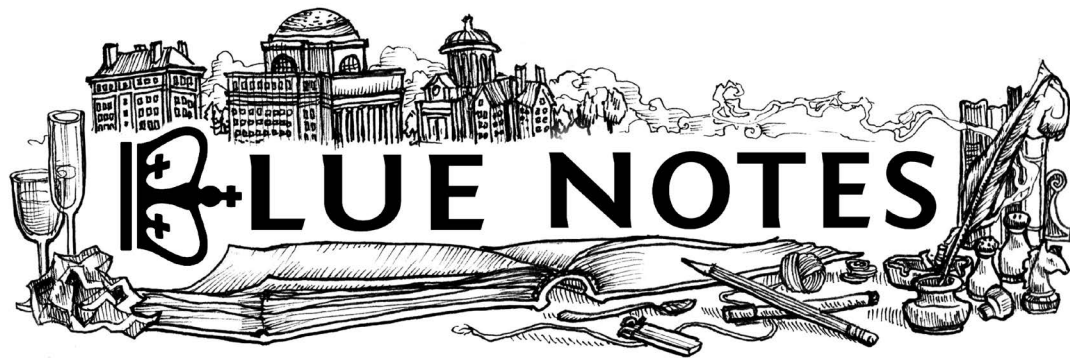
*We at The Blue and White know that matriculating to college is a Big Transition. In hopes of slightly smoothing out your Transition, we have simply defined a few common phrases that you frosh are likely to hear, to help you pick up the lingo. For, “Intemperance in talk makes a dreadful havoc in the heart.” And the absolute last thing college should wreak is havoc in the heart.*

- ♦ “I’m really looking forward to Lit Hum” means, “I’m smart (and relatable, too!).”
- ♦ “I’m not going to the first Lit Hum lecture,” means, “I’m numb to this bullshit.”
- ♦ “Econ,” means, “Economics.”
- ♦ “I live in John Jay,” means, “I’m a creative individual living in a world of harsh realities.”
- ♦ “We’re going out tonight,” means, “Nikolai on Carman 12!!!”
- ♦ “That’s heteronormative,” means, “We are no longer friends.”
- ♦ “What dorm do you live in, where are you from, and what’s your major?” means, “Name, rank, and serial number?”
- ♦ “We’re going to Mudd Balc’,” means, “Blaze it?”
- ♦ “It’s such an interesting class,” means, “What parts of the reading I did blew my mind.”
- ♦ “He’s a Golden Nugget,” means, “Maybe this one will change my life.”
- ♦ “It’s Friday,” means, “John Jay is closed.”
- ♦ “You have such a nice bed,” means, “Let’s freak each other.”
- ♦ “I’m going to Avery,” means, “I need more, more than the average person.”
- ♦ “I got tapped,” means, “The frats are interested in my style, and they want to see if it will mesh with their crew.”

## POSTCARD FROM MORNINGSIDE







It's 10 o'clock on a Saturday night at the Paris Blues Bar on 122<sup>nd</sup> and Adam Clayton Powell. Between jazz sets, they switch the burden of tunes over to the well-stocked jukebox. With the change-over, some musicians step outside for a smoke; others head inside to set up.

The small bar hosts a mixed crowd: young and old, black and white. Two "old timers" lean against the bar by the door, and a large group of tourists gets up to leave.

Samuel J. Hargress Jr. presides over it all.

"I'm the founder, the owner, the president," he says. Born in Alabama, Hargress came to New York in 1962 to join his brothers after being discharged from the army.

"Coincidental, I guess," he explains, when asked how he came to own a bar. "I got a job tending bars and became the manager. During that time, history will tell you that the people who owned the bars in Harlem, the Jews and the Italians, started to leave. They were leaving because the place was bad. You could buy a bar cheap, so I did."



Illustration by Leila Mgaloblishvili

The bar has survived turbulent times. "We've been to hell and back," says Sam. "Harlem had the blackouts and the riots and they took over the neighborhood. The really bad parts were when Martin Luther King got killed. They tore the place up."

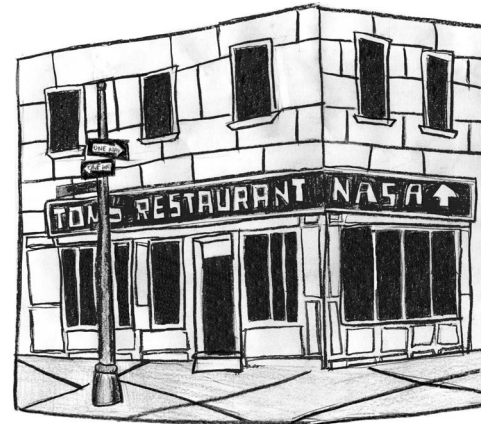
"I couldn't afford to leave," he says. "It's my home and my job. There were times when we were just barely making it, and it was tough, but we stayed here." Sam says he was lucky to own the property with his family and live above the bar he owns. "I didn't have to worry about getting priced out like most of my neighbors did. Just a brownstone on my block is now worth two and a half million dollars," he says. "Some people say 'gentrification,' but the way I see it, somebody's using it and it wasn't being used before."

The bar doesn't look much different now from when it was founded in 1969, except for some scaffolding out front. "I'm doing a renovation," Sam explains. "I'm going to upgrade the bar, not change it. I want it to look its age."

— Hallie Nell Swanson

The building on the corner of Broadway and 112<sup>th</sup> Street seems an unlikely home for a NASA laboratory. It's unremarkable—it blends in with surrounding, bland campus housing. I try to peer into windows of the pale building. It's dark inside; no astronauts or aliens to be seen.

The NASA Goddard Institute for Space Studies (GISS) on 112<sup>th</sup> and Broadway has been inconspicuously advancing scientific thought on climate since 1981. According to its online about page, GISS was specifically founded in Morningside Heights because it was thought that scientific research was "greatly facilitated by being close to the leading universities."



GISS declined to be interviewed.

I settle for talking with other insiders on the scene. I head into Tom's Restaurant, which is right below the NASA lab. A floor above the pancakes and coffee is the leading laboratory for atmospheric modeling and climate change. I ask a waitress who knows about the lab if she ever hears anything funny coming from her upstairs neighbor. She said she sometimes hears bangs, but those are from the boiler room. What do these rocket scientists order? The usual—bacon and eggs. Why shouldn't they?

The small glass entrance to the laboratory's building cleverly has "Columbia Business School" written on it, as if finding it wasn't already hard enough. At first I couldn't believe that this was the entrance, because I thought it would involve something more technologically advanced, probably with blacked-out glass. I imagine the cool stuff is locked in the lab.

The lobby of the building is the color of white bread. I ask the non-robotic security guard if I'm at the right place. He says that I am, so I ask him, could I enter the lab and check out at all the cool shit? No. Only briefly hindered, I fire off a string of questions, "Do they have giant telescopes? Is there a rocket? Is our planet in danger?"

He shakes his head, hardly concealing a smirk, when he says exactly what somebody guarding a top-secret lab would say, "Nah, that stuff only happens in the movies."

— Angelica Modabber

I passed the West 111<sup>th</sup> Street People's Garden at least once a week for a year before I stepped inside. Sitting in the shadow of St. John's Cathedral, the tiny patch of green ivy appeared to warrant neither its lengthy name nor a second glance; and if

the hulking statue at its center was any indication of what the rest of the garden would be like, I wasn't interested in learning more. The bronze statue is overbearing and ugly. Disjointed figures overlap in a three-dimensional collage; it seems a gratuitous orgy of metaphor and symbolism gone wrong.

Sculpted by Greg Wyatt, CC '71 and creator of campus' *Scholar's Lion* statue, the *Peace Fountain* does contain an overabundance of images wrought in twisted metal: the moon smiles as numerous giraffes stand upon him; the Archangel Michael banishes Satan to the depths of hell; a crab's legs protrude from the pedestal. Good triumphs over evil through classically opposed forces: discord and harmony, light and dark, life and death. The plaque at the fountain's base describes how each pair of opposites coexists and is reconciled by God's will.

The plaque states the objective of each statue in the garden, as well: peace is made possible through disciplined learning—an act embodied by the inclusion of student work. While the fountain is the most noticeable feature of the garden, the space also houses a series of children's sculptures, which surround the *Peace Fountain* at the edges of the green space. Since 1985, the garden has selected twelve sculpted "Animals of Freedom" each year, handmade by K-12 students across New York City. The title page of Thoreau's *Walden* is captured in bronze; a family of penguins huddle together; a unicorn stands on its legs while a two-headed dragon looks on a few feet away. These mystical creatures carry fantasy into reality and the message of freedom into other realms. Freedom becomes a universal quality, embodied by all creation.

I've returned to the garden several times since my initial visit and my distaste for the aesthetic presence of the statue that serves as the face of the garden is strong as ever. Still, the *Peace Fountain* and children's statues remind us of our own histories—our own art projects—while linking us to artists across New York. No matter how many times you walk around the thing, a new figure emerges at a new angle, poking its head through the ivy.

—Michelle Cheripja



# Campus Characters

You might not know the following figures—but you should. In *Campus Characters*, THE BLUE AND WHITE introduces you to a handful of Columbians who are up to interesting and extraordinary things and whose stories beg to be shared. If you'd like to suggest a Campus Character, send us an email at [editors@theblueandwhite.org](mailto:editors@theblueandwhite.org).

## REBEKAH LOWIN

“Try to see everything as a blessing—it’s true, okay? It’s true!” protests Rebekah Lowin, CC ’14, laughing a little. “I say a lot of clichéd things, but I believe them.”

We’re sitting by St. John the Divine’s Peace Fountain (Rebekah suggested the meeting place) on a windless, hot July afternoon. From the moment she breezed in, wearing a white sundress and waving brightly, Rebekah seemed genuinely touched to be interviewed—a little unexpected, considering that her interview count this summer has already included *Bwog*, the *Columbia Daily Spectator*, the *Greenwich Time*, and *nytheatre.com*.

With a soaring coloratura soprano and disproportionate amounts of charm packed into her 5’3” frame, Rebekah is perhaps most often recognized at Columbia for playing the role of high-strung antagonist Niamh O’Brien, champion of the Corporate Core, in the 118<sup>th</sup> Varsity Show.

More recent attention came her way after she



won The Callback in June, a 12-week singing competition at Broadway’s well-known cabaret club 54 Below. A string of performances followed, including at the New York Musical Theatre Festival and the New York Fringe Festival. This fall, she’ll perform at the Lincoln Center’s Rose Theater and return to 54 Below for a solo cabaret show.

“She has this way of winning an audience over,” remarks Solomon Hoffman, CC ’14, the musical director and composer who worked with Rebekah for the 117<sup>th</sup> and 118<sup>th</sup> Varsity Shows, among other productions. “Even when she plays a villain.”

In person, that charisma translates to a warmth and unaffectedness that puts other people at ease. She talks animatedly, interrupting herself to dart between ideas and punctuating her responses with exclamations like, “This is the question I’ve always wanted to answer!”

“I feel like her brain works at five times the speed of everyone else’s,” says Emily Ellis, CC ’14, who became close friends with Rebekah after the pair lived together in Carman.

They later shared a Ruggles suite, which Emily describes leaving one morning as Rebekah tinkered with her professional website. “She was perched in bed, one leg under and one leg over the covers,” Emily recalls. “I remember coming back around five hours later and she literally hadn’t moved a muscle the entire time I was gone. Her focus is unbelievable.”

Even as she works toward Broadway, Rebekah lacks the steely-eyed, cutthroat drive common in show business. “I love singing. It’s the biggest part of my life,” she says simply, before making a distinction: “But for me, the most important thing is to have a varied life and not to focus all my energy on one thing.”

A creative writing major, Rebekah makes time to write poetry, do yoga—“I’m trying to be a hippie, but clearly I’m just some preppy girl from Connecticut,” she quips—and collect inspirational

quotes. (When I ask for one, she starts to recite Wendell Berry’s “The Peace of Wild Things” from memory.)

She’s quick to point out factors in her success besides her own talent, from her financial background to good karma. “I think I’ve been a good friend and a good person, and that’s why a lot of this is happening,” she says. If that would sound trite coming from someone else, Rebekah says it with sincerity.

She adds, lightly, “I buy into all that crap.”

— Naomi Sharp

## JACK WALDEN

Recovering from his weekend diet of “a shitload of beef jerky,” Jack Walden sips a flaming pink juice, which he chose because its name included the word “dragon.”

Despite the fierce drink, there’s little aggressive about his appearance. His slightly sunburnt, lightly freckled face looks used to smiling. Within the first ten minutes of conversation, Jack doesn’t hesitate to bring up his identical twin Charlie, poisoning strategies, and an allusion to his medical background.

His campus celebrity, on the other hand, is too sensitive a topic. He doesn’t like the idea of people talking about him when he’s not there, he says.

Not to say that he avoids the spotlight. Jack performs in a musical nearly every semester, most recently playing a cheeky Santa Claus in *XMAS!7: APOCACHRISTMAS*. He’s active in the campus comedy scene through the *Jester*, stand-up shows, and (briefly) student government, when he campaigned for freshman class representative. But, for Jack, writing trumps performing. He interned for CollegeHumor his freshman year, co-wrote *XMAS!6: A Mall-y Jolly XMAS!* the next year, and has since ventured on a few independent projects.

Despite his high energy and high visibility on campus, you won’t see Jack grinning vacantly in an admissions brochure. He says he applied to Columbia to rebel against those who laughed at his chances and “came to Columbia despite Columbia.” He admits that unlike its typical students, he has as little career ambition as organization. (After experimenting with the literature of Atlantis and a phallicly-obsessed film class, Jack tried computer science and environmental science, before settling on a combination of American Studies and English.)

“Columbia’s broken my spirit,” he says. “It’s



like breathing in noxious gas.”

Jack doesn’t let that stop him. As his notable presence on Columbia Compliments suggests, Walden is far from lost on campus; *XMAS!6* costar Eleanor Bray, BC ’14, confesses that “everybody wants to know him.” He resists the stiff climate in his own ways: Jack gives two-digit bills to panhandlers and laughs at other comedians’ jokes.

Fellow funny-man Eli Grober, CC ’13, says he’s most importantly a loyal friend. “He’ll pay for my beer if I forgot my wallet,” he says. “But I didn’t forget my wallet. He knows that. He’ll still pay for my beer.”

Jack blames his agreeableness on his Minnesota roots. But even at home, he was the nice one from day one: he let his twin Charlie push him aside on their day of birth to be third in a line of five boys. Jack holds no grudge: his most aggressive act was once stabbing Charlie with a Coke can for hogging the phone.

This was in a house of “Greco-Roman style” sabotage and Indian burns. The youngest brother is still convinced that his juvenile diabetes, diagnosed by Charlie, will kill him prematurely.

Though he had once considered running away—“I have an unhealthy anti-authoritarian streak”—Jack now draws creative inspiration from his rowdy home.

With Charlie, a television writing student at Tisch, Jack is now producing, writing and starring in a web series on a first love—between twins. Significant Brothers, the inside joke-turned-summer project that began as a test of his father’s tolerance for his work, premieres in September. No didacticisms or nudity, he says, just a pair of clumsy narcissistic lovers.

The narcissism, he insists, is pure fiction.

— Naomi Cohen





# Are you gonna be

“Wow, Lexi, this room is dope! What a great place to pregame for the Beta party. Emily wasn’t kidding when she said you were awesome—I’m so glad I’m finally meeting you, I’ve been Facebook stalking you since Days on Campus. The forums on College Confidential said to try and meet as many people online as possible, so....

Anyway, it looks like we’re the same size, which is great—I just love sharing clothes with my girlfriends. Sweaters, tees, blouses, underwear—and it looks like you’re a spring, like me. I was nervous about my wardrobe when I got here, but I feel like throwing out all of my Ohio State gear was enough to look more “with it” on the East Coast. Isn’t this owl necklace adorable? The lady at Icing in the mall said it looked very boho (that’s near SoHo, right?).”

You start talking about being from New Jersey, and while I try to pay attention, the only things I know about Jersey are Snooki, *The Sopranos*, and *Real Housewives*. When you say that you’re from just over a bridge or a lake or something, I figure that you’re not orange enough to be from the shore and hope you don’t ask too much about Ohio. It may be a little boring to be from there, but at least it isn’t Michigan!

“I’m so amped for this Beta party. My Gossip Girl personality test said I was a total Serena—maybe I’ll meet my Dan! This is way better than hanging in Furnald—even though we’re totally breaking that antisocial streak this year—being here makes me feel like I’m in the “Carman Forever” video. We should totally do a “We Can’t Stop” parody.

I really do wish I lived here, though, Carman is where all the cool kids from the 2017 FB group are at. Apparently one kid even invited the whole class to a party in his room on the first day of NSOP. Weird

that I never saw you posting.”

I can’t believe I’ve made all these friends during NSOP. Days on Campus was awesome—singing “Roar, Lion, Roar” from the tour bus was basically the highlight of my senior year (besides retaking the SAT and getting a 2400 right before apps were due)—but I’ve never had this many friends before. Or any. Everyone back at home thought I was a total nerd for taking (and speaking) Latin and reading Homer in the original Greek, but here you get to discuss Plato over pizza in Ferris! I’m so excited to be somewhere people actually definitely read the first twelve books of *The Iliad*.

“You’re going downtown? I can’t believe you’re missing the party! Sure, it’s not in a village or at Chelsea’s or wherever you’re going, but there could be cute guys! But your closet door is perfect for beer pong. I’m going to Snapchat a pic of it to my NSOP group and with “pong pregame???” in hot pink.

Anyway, before you head out, do you like to cook? Why are you giving me a blank look? I can’t believe you don’t cook, I mean, you have to at least bake or something. Actually, don’t answer that.

Maybe this could be a great opportunity for us to bond in the kitchen. I did have my mom buy me a subscription to Martha Stewart

Living.”

Emily and I get the pong ready while you check Tumblr on your phone. Becca, Amber, London, John, and the rest of my orientation group show up with beer-ritas and we’re having such a good time that Bri puts down her iPhone and joins in.

You give us a disgusted look and storm out. Is it that painful to be seen enjoying yourself? I halfway hope you get lost Lena Dunham-style with only cake to keep you company—guess it’d be good fodder for your novel.♦



**AFFIRMATIVE**  
*By Alexander Pines*



# my best friend?

Who do you think you are, Carol? No, I’m serious.

Do you think everyone will think you’re some kind of “with it” East Coaster? Oh, honey, we can see straight through that blue eyeshadow and grey pencil eyeliner. My roommate, Emily, said you were in her NSOP group and that you invited yourself over. Thanks, but we’ve got all the Smirnoff Ice we need for the night.

When I ask, you sheepishly admit that you’re from Michigan or Missouri or Minnesota—I already forgot which—and your eyes widen when I tell you I’m from Bergen County, just over the bridge.

You gasp! Like *Real Housewives*!?

I roll my eyes. At least you didn’t ask if I was from the shore.

Stop prattling on about how excited you are for this party. I’d already decided you weren’t the type of person I want to hang out with, and when you opened your mouth you confirmed that. You invite me to come, but there’s no chance I’m going. Everybody knows Beta’s only SEAS kids and nice guys. I went to Pike all the time when I was 15, and none of these remaining bullshit frat parties can compete with Pike’s Peak. Anyways, my friends and I stopped going to Columbia parties after junior year of high school. They’re lame as fuck.

Bri comes to the door. We met during the “Morningside Heights tour.” By that I mean we saw how incredibly lame it was going to be, skipped the tour, and traded cigarettes in front of John Jay instead. She’s from, like, Summit. It doesn’t really

matter: all my friends, who are seniors in college, told me you don’t actually make friends during orientation, so who cares if I remember where she’s from?

Everyone from home goes to NYU, so Bri and I are going downtown to meet up with a friend at a hookah bar. I can tell you’re looking us up and down in our black outfits; and, no, you can’t borrow these boots you’ve been eyeing since you walked in.

When you tell me you really hope to meet a cute guy tonight, I can’t help but burst out laughing.

I have to tell you that you don’t find cute guys at frat parties. I gently explain that some douchelord in a brotank rubs his nuts on you in a 500 degree basement that’s so packed you can’t run away when he starts groping your ass. Maybe I went too far; but to your credit you keep a polite smile on your face.

Next thing I know, a dozen people are in our room and someone’s unhinging the closet door to play pong. Apparently you invited all these people over while you and Emily were at dinner.

You’re talking like you’re all the best of friends and I’m chuckling because you think you’re really going to stay friends with them.

I turn to tell Bri we should go, but she must have been possessed or something because she’s playing pong with you. I shake my head, leave, and get on the subway. At Times Square, I get a text from my NYU friend: she’s at a concert with her orientation group. I take the train back up, get to my now-empty room, and look down at the crowd outside Beta.

Lame. I go to sleep.♦



**NEGATIVE**  
*By Alexandra Svokos*

## TOLD BETWEEN PUFFS

*In which our hero rages against the machine*

Pedestrians on Broadway. What sad excuses they were for residents of the City of New York, who only a decade ago had held their heads up proudly. Now, hunched over, they shuffled along, neutered, leashed to one another through a few square inches of liquid crystal.

No, they were a proud people no longer, unworthy of their inheritance. They were ignorant Vandals, pitifully unaware of the ruined city through which they tromped! (That this time around the enemies of culture had chosen to tromp in desert boots rather than jackboots, V.V. took to be a curtsy to fickle Choice, grinning goddess of the modern age.)

If only they would raise their eyes! V.V. prayed that they might detect in crumbling buildings some remnants of the beauty that they themselves had laid to waste.

Shaking his head, V.V. smoothly removed himself from the impotent flow of foot-traffic, stopping in front of a newsstand for a pack of cigarettes. As the shopkeeper filled his order, your champion sadly contemplated the newspapers and magazines. Oh, they were sorry looking! It was as if even the wilted paper knew itself to be obsolete.

Nodding to the newsstand attendant, Verily Veritas walked to Riverside Park. He lit a cigarette with practiced grace, and returned to people-pondering. The smoke satisfied; not least because it only befouled his body, and not his immortal soul.

Another hunchback passed. Did he ever consider the consequences that the very device now before his eyes was the first thing he reached for in the morning after it woke him and the last thing he touched at night; facilitated work in invading leisure,

and leisure in impeding work; put him in touch with his mother and his girlfriend and...as it were...adult entertainers? Did he ever marvel that the device he carefully set on meeting-tables (next to his so insufferably anachronistic leather journal) was the selfsame toy that he fiddled with when, pants around his ankles, he defecated?

V.V. knew what he would do. Rushing into campus through the 116<sup>th</sup> Street gates, he squared his narrow shoulders against the addicts, each clutching his fix. Screens! Screens everywhere. They were somehow mesmerizing: even as he hated their ubiquity, his eyes were somehow drawn to look at them. His spirit was willing, but his body weak. (He briefly, seriously, considered plucking his eye out, before censoring himself for his melodrama.)

He stopped at the Sundial and climbed upon it. Standing in its center, he faced southward.

So slowly and deliberately did he read the names upon the facade of Butler Library that V.V. did not even sneer when some half-man below him, aiming an iPhone at the library observed, "Buildings like this? Like a Congress building or something? Righteous. Powerful shit."

Descending from the Sundial, V.V. hastened across South Field to enter the library, that last buttress of civilization. Re-entering the Reference Womb (as he had so many times before), your cavalier studiously ignored all the phone operants (who in turn paid no attention to the neglected reference books for which the room was named).

Verily Veritas let forth a great groan. Looking neither left nor right, he raised his eyes. He read:  
*A MAN IS BUT WHAT HE KNOWETH*♦



## We Know What You Did Last Summer

*B&W staffers bring back tales from the real world*

BY STAFF

A stranger on a park bench asked me this summer if I was an artist.

"Painter," he guessed. He eyed the streak of green across my forearm, the splattered sneakers, the color palette of splotches that ran up my legs to the hem of my unfashionable shorts. I searched for a charming way to inform him that I was covered in bits of crusted-up smoothie.

At the time, I was working forty hours a week at a juice and smoothie bar. But I also had what often felt like an alter ego, thanks to a part-time internship for a website whose masthead mysteriously elided my title from "editorial intern" to "editor" of its dining section.

Those few missing letters had an impact—several hundred dollars of compensated meals at some of the pricier restaurants in the city, courtesy of PR representatives who I suspect would have been surprised to learn that I was both underage and an undergraduate.

I fed and wrote: Peruvian donuts in a pool of spiced honey, sweetbreads with apricot preserves, tiny pork belly sliders, a wasabi-flavored cocktail, risotto fritters with braised oxtail, shrimp with tequila-spiked cocktail sauce, deep-fried tripe, and chicken wings with tingling Sichuan peppercorn that has a numbing effect similar to novocaine.

Less appetizing was the implicit pressure to give these restaurants glowing recommendations, made explicit when I was asked to remove some criticism from a review before it was published. I didn't, and I went back to jet-spraying peanut butter off of blenders with as much dignity as I could muster.

—Naomi Sharp

I interviewed for the job in a peplum dress; but once I an "Emissary" for a Brooklyn arts organization, I quickly realized I wasn't expected to do so at work. "Headquarters" meant a one-bedroom apartment with kittens, incense, and mood lighting. Operating as a non-profit out of an apartment meant that the Department of Labor would send an auditor knocking.

For my boss, work is life; the distinction proved to be as ambiguous as our responsibilities. We clocked in by actions, not hours: researched Dada in Brooklyn, bought ponchos in Manhattan, stenciled sidewalk in Queens. Two days per week at the office didn't imply five days of rest. A twelve-tab internet browser of art-world happenings and the anxiety to be present at said happenings amounted to a full five-day week. Even so, official business left me with a few bits of useful knowledge. People still fax. Art is uncomfortable. Enthusiasm shouldn't be.

Practiced indifference is a defensive camouflage for tatted kiddies trekking from warehouse to office, but has no place in a three-person operation fueled by the belief that its work isn't frivolous (plus a few grants from others who agreed). Once I'm back on campus, hours in Avery's archives will replace those here at "Headquarters", each as futilely sincere as the other.

—Angel Jiang

PBS's digital department looked to be a practical combination of my planned double major—film studies and computer science. That's why I took the job. The digital department, living up to its name, implemented a new web-based task management system: my supervisor would assign tasks to me and I check off progress before deadline. While this streamlined web-producing, it also gave me the feeling that I was being monitored from the moment I logged on each day to the time when I turned my computer off to leave.

For some of the more mundane pages I would put into HTML (e.g., associated links and books for a film), I would wonder to myself whether my work would be seen. PBS is a relatively small community—I once had to call all of the member stations, and half had never even heard of us. Indy filmmakers included, the average age of "viewers like you" lies somewhere in the mid-sixties.

When I signed out of said task management system for the last time, I was glad to leave Elmo and the Dowager Countess of Grantham behind. And I





The fact is, the university's administration—the president and his team—are the decision makers, all the time. We are a band of people that have a lot of expertise and we try to provide our expertise to that group ... and see if we can help them.

*There is no linear chain of command between the Board and President Bollinger; neither can operate independent of the other. While the Board offers advice and helps finance the President's ideas, most board members have full time engagements outside of the University and cannot draft a University agenda of their own. The President takes on the role indicated by his title and the Board operates like a combination of his electorate and the House of Representative's Appropriations committee.*

*According to the Organization and Governance section of the Faculty Handbook, "Six of the 24 are nominated from a pool of candidates recommended by the Columbia Alumni Association. Another six are nominated by the Board in consultation with the Executive Committee of the University Senate. The remaining 12, including the President [an ex officio member of the Board], are nominated by the Trustees themselves through their internal processes. The term of office for Trustees is six years. Generally, they serve for no more than two consecutive terms." The Coach explains that every aspect of a candidate's profile is considered: race, gender, professional background, commitment to Columbia, and, notably, what expertise they bring to the table. The current Board of Trustees is made up of 19 men and five women.*

### The Board in Action

**THE COACH:** A few years ago we really felt like we had been weak in the sciences, and really had not been as up to speed on what was going on in the computing world so we could make sure our students had ... access to the best undergrad academic teaching in the sciences and we put a subcommittee together with the faculty. We feel really good about that now.

*The board exercises most of its policy power through nine committees: Alumni Relations and Development, Audit, Compensation, Education Policy, Finance, Health Sciences, Physical Assets, Public Affairs, and Trusteeship. Each board member is assigned to a com-*

*mittee based on his/her background and expertise. The committees spearhead policy that board members advise on and support with their own resources. With respect to the undergraduate science initiative, the same structure held; a policy-oriented subcommittee was assembled and the trustees advised it and approved its financial arrangement.*

**LISA CARNOY: THE WHIZ KID:** Depending on the priorities of [both] the president and the board, certain things gain focus, so there are certain committees that we've brought to the fold in recent years. We take direction, naturally, from the president. And he's been very clear about his priorities including science, including Manhattanville, including globalization.

*The Coach pipes in with athletics as another example, which several board members echo.*

**A'LELIA BUNDLES:** So when you say, "What's the next big thing?" ... Lee has a vision of the next big thing, so Manhattanville was something that was very important to him; Mind Brain Behavior very important to him; improving alumni engagement ... Those things, he brings to us and says, "This is my vision," and then ... we try to help facilitate that.

*Several board members simultaneously share examples of recent initiatives for a liberal five seconds.*

### Manhattanville

**PHILIP MILSTEIN: THE MOGUL:** Let me amplify on that: Manhattanville.

*The group talk ends—due deference is paid to Manhattanville.*

The first thing that [Lee] kept saying to everybody was that we need more space ... It required someone with his courage and risk taking to say, "Listen, this is uncharted territory," [given Columbia's historically tense relationship with the surrounding neighborhood].

*The Manhattanville web page states that Columbia has the least square footage per student than any other school in the Ivy League, at roughly 194 square feet—slightly larger than a Carman double. Harvard*

*nearly doubles that ratio, and UPenn lavishes 440 square feet per student. In an interview with Columbia Magazine, President Bollinger stated, "If college and university rankings were based on creativity per square foot, Columbia would far surpass everyone else."*

**THE COACH:** One of his missions in not only doing Manhattanville and getting the space was to say, "We're good people, the University is a good neighbor, and we're going to show it."

*Manhattanville and its surrounding controversy within the student body most resembles the 1968 demonstrations against the building of two separate gymnasias in Morningside Park: one for Columbia students and the other for the residents of Morningside Heights and Harlem. Current Manhattanville procedures and literature stress inclusion and cooperation, rather than division; Ms. Bundles cites the Community Benefits Agreement as a prime manifestation of this change. Inevitably, there are still protests against the University's expansion. The Coalition to Preserve Community, accompanied by many Columbia students, staged its last demonstration against property seizure in March 2012.*

*I ask Milstein whether he really believes that the University has changed on such a fundamental level since its more riotous days.*

**MILSTEIN:** I really do: it's a people change, from the president on down. There's an approach that we have to work within this neighborhood as good neighbors. Previously all the issues when I was a student involved the fact that Columbia viewed itself as superior.

**BUNDLES:** And it was evolving even before Manhattanville with many of the programs in the community, Community Impact and some of the others.

*Community Impact was founded in 1981. According*

*to its website, CI oversees roughly 950 Columbia students who volunteer in Harlem, Morningside Heights, and Washington Heights, serving an approximate total of 5,000+ community members.*

**THE COACH:** This is more attitudinal, this comes from Lee Bollinger, it comes from all of us here and wanting to do the right thing. We want to be really good members of our community ... That's a Lee Bollinger Principle. Will that remain? We sure hope so.

**MILSTEIN:** [Community Impact] is one of the major activities for the students on the campus in terms of engagement in terms of giving back service and so it's certainly a major priority of the trustees. We're in the middle of raising an endowment for this organization for the future because we recognize how important it is.

**CARNOY:** We also have a Student Affairs committee within the board and that group is focused on topics ranging from student advising to major advising to quality of student life, and also that group meets before three out of the four board meetings.

*To give you an idea of the past relationship between students and the Board: in 1969, 12 conservative students filed suit with the Supreme Court of the State of New York, demanding the expulsion of all 24 trustees, blaming them for causing the infamous riots. The students believed that the trustees were deliberately allowing left-wing radical professors to shape impressionable students, instigating the demonstrations.*

### Columbia and its Peers

**THE COACH:** [In the Ivy League] all of the presidents will help the chairs, so twice a year ... chairs of the board meet with a different president who provides us with feedback on what they're doing uniquely in their university that might be able to help us all. Now we happen to be very close with Stanford, I live right in the area, and the president there happens to

be a very good friend of mine.

There was a professor at Stanford who was a Columbia grad and he gave us a lot of his time and introduced us to a lot of local people here in New York including a professor over at the business school who came up with a lot of that research [about how to compete as a top ranking research institution] for us. So, yes, there's a lot of exchange.

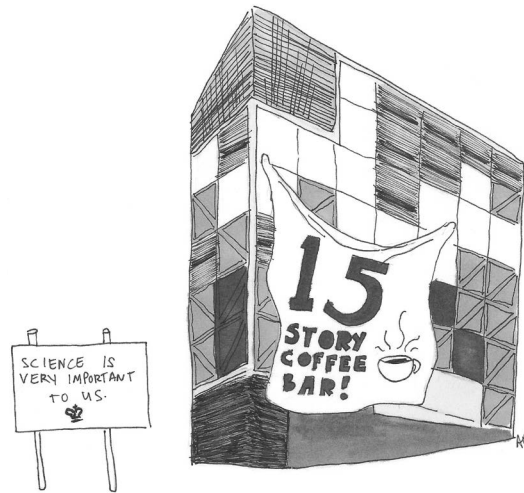
*I step on some toes when I press the assembled members about the perceived weakness in the undergraduate science department.*

**THE COACH:** It wasn't the department—it was how we were deploying the curriculum that we had in the sciences ... We thought that and a lot of the feedback that we got from the student life groups that Lisa talked about felt that Frontiers of Science was not strong enough and what were we going to be able to provide the students to give them a richer understanding of science.

**MILSTEIN:** And plus, with Northwest Corner Building, that became the physical imprimatur of saying, "Science is very important to us"; and they hadn't built a science building in 50 years.

**BUNDLES:** Having Manhattanville and Northwest Science Building ... the idea is not just to have more space, the idea is to be able to give labs to faculty. When you're recruiting faculty and they say, "I [could] go to some other school, one of our competitors, they'll give me lab space, but at Columbia they'll give me a desk and a cubicle," you can't really compete with that. So in order to compete for really top people you have to be able to have those labs.

*Noam Scheiber wrote a piece in New York magazine in 2005 about Columbia's professor poaching strategies as it assembled a more robust economics department. The approach was, fittingly, based on an economic principle called "sunspots," which holds that people are more productive when surrounded by other productive people. Instead of recruiting a couple of star professors, Columbia would attempt to poach a group of economists simultaneously from its competitors which would put the "sunspot" principle to test with respect to the economics department's success. I ask the Coach where he draws the line between poaching*



*to boost the university's reputation and respecting a preexisting relationship.*

**THE COACH:** All's fair in love and war. There's nothing hostile between [us] ... we can get a faculty member, give them somebody. People try to take our people, we try to take other people's faculty. It's a war game.

### Why They're On Board

*At this point, David Stone hints that the trustees have other engagements on campus. So I ask, "Why do you all want to help this school?" This time, no one tries to speak first.*

**BUNDLES:** You guys start first.

**CARNOY:** My debt to Columbia only grows with time. I think the *esprit de corps* of this group and the sense of satisfaction, and hoping that this institution be even better is tremendously rewarding and Bill is a phenomenal leader, he calls us 'the dirty fingernail' group because we work hard and we keep on taking on more but it is rewarding ... the best is ahead of us and that's really exciting.

**MILSTEIN:** Since I'm the oldest serving trustee, I'll say a few words. It comes from love, it comes from passion, it comes from competition—that you feel inside that you want your school and your university to be the best. I started off in a very odd way, I was a member of the Athletic Varsity Club in tennis my

freshman year with the riots at Columbia ... the grittiness of having to go to school and missing a lot of semesters of school, it only made me better as a person, better as a human being ... It comes from a warm feeling that you just have, or that as the more you get involved the more you desire to do.

**THE COACH:** I came by here in the summer, I was taking my son around visiting colleges and Jim McMennamon, who's the head of principal gifts in the university, had set up a meeting ... with Lee in his office and I started to talk to him and ... Manhattanville was only a little bit of a dream, he was talking about what would go there ... And I'm listening to this guy's incredible view of expanding the campus to make sure that it can grow so we can add more faculty, more research. So the following year, he was coming out to California ... he comes over to my office and he asked me to be a ... a Trustee. And I didn't know what to do.

*It feels like a good time to chime in.*

**ME:** "Did he get down on one knee?"

**THE COACH:** I could feel a tear coming out of the corner of my eye, I couldn't wait to call my wife and tell her. I never thought ... that I would have an opportunity to ... help the institution that helped me develop. Everything about it has made me a better person.

*All eyes are on the Coach. He is giving us a rundown of how Bollinger wooed him. Like a group of teenagers watching a romantic comedy, we laugh on cue and—despite knowing the inevitable end—delight in the story.*

So I told Lee, "Could I let you know?" And he said, "Sure, you could let me know." I called my wife on the way and she said, "Did you tell him, 'Yes?'" I said, "I didn't tell him anything." She said, "You get over there and tell him 'yes' before he changes his mind!"

We work hard. This isn't some ceremonial role that a couple people do, this is people working hard to make sure that our University gets better and better and better.

**BUNDLES:** As someone who didn't go to the College

... one of the wonderful things I think about from the board is... while the core is people who went to the College ... From the moment I walked in, Bill's big bear hug makes you feel like you're a part of it.

### A Trustee's Wishlist

*It is the board's prerogative to skeptically assess the agendas and various policies that are brought before it. And in order to better understand the root of its decisions, it seems appropriate to determine what the trustees would do if they were on the other side of the aisle.*

**ME:** If you could each set your own agenda for the school, what would it look like?

**THE COACH:** I'd close my eyes and go: Manhattanville be done.

**MILSTEIN:** We are dealing with what I call a gap in terms of our endowment, versus the other schools ... but we do have what I describe as the shadow endowment. Which is, we have New York City ... So as a result we can overcome most of that financial experience where we have so much less, and so what would my dream be? ... If we had another five or ten billion, it wouldn't hurt. And were working towards that, because remember when Lee originally started his campaign it was a four billion dollar campaign, we're going to end the campaign at six billion. And except for, I think, Stanford, we will have raised more money by any other place ... And we should all be proud of that because the last campaign was two billion and it took double the amount of time. We're headed up and up and up.

*Columbia's endowment hovers between seven and eight billion dollars. The next wealthiest Ivy, Princeton, has more than double our endowment with only a quarter of our student body. Curiously, Columbia's endowment has grown since the recession, while those of Harvard and Yale have yet to fully recover.*

**THE COACH:** Lee surrounded himself with really good people, both in the academic side and on the administrative side, so we feel fortunate that we get to work with people that we view as peers ... maybe except for the communications guy.♦

*This interview was edited for clarity and brevity.*





## CURIO COLUMBIANA

*The ruler of a four little, walled-off city-state—President Bollinger—is rarely seen. His chauffeur even drives him the two blocks from his palace on 116<sup>th</sup> Street and Morningside Drive to his offices in Low Library. Eighty years ago, university president Murray Butler had a similarly distant presence. In his 1932 book, King Football, former Spectator editor in chief Reed Harris recounts the rare experience of securing the president's audience.*

If, by achieving a minor University title, and by using every known persuasion upon the sacred Presidential secretariat, you gain entrance to the office of this educational czar, the impression will be long with you. Entering the enormous room, you will see at once His Excellency, the Maharajah of American Educational and World Peace. If this be your first visit. His Excellency will raise his head and scowl upon you until you feel impelled to crawl to the throne and receive his blessing, then to back reverently from the chamber. If, with considerable strength of will, you can for a moment evade the scowl, you will discover that there is no throne, after all, but one of the most tremendous desks ever placed in an office. You will note telephones, piles of letters, and an assortment of ornate pens and pencils which would shame any bank president. If the chief secretary has phoned the proper mystic words to the President, the world figure may rise to meet you, move a step or two away from the desk, and extend his hand. There will be no smile. The President never smiles except at titles. Trustees, or politicians of the first water. Nor will the handshake be cordial—the President will grab a finger or two swiftly and by this means move your hand up and down once, dropping it as if completely disgusted with the necessity for contact. The President, you must realize, is a liberal, a believer in democracy, and a worker for world brotherhood—but this does not apply within his own University. Seldom has an absolute sovereign been more carefully protected from the people of his land, and no sovereign today or in the past has ever enjoyed the pomp and ceremony of position as thoroughly as does the President.

However, having progressed this far, you are expected to say something. In case you are easily impressed, you may have forgotten your mission entirely, but something must be said, and said quickly, because the President registers impatience with every motion.

If you have a definite request, His Excellency will not answer you except in the most confusing generalities. In all probability, he will lead you to believe that your request will be granted, but he will inform you that you should take it up with one or another of the multitude of pompous officers of administration who clutter up the University campus. (On taking the matter up with the designated officer, your request will be refused—and, if you are observant, you may note a short memorandum from the President's office directing that that action be taken.)

In presenting your request and receiving the wholly vague and unsatisfactory answer, you will have taken up almost a minute. Perhaps you harbor a desire to talk further with this extraordinary monarch, but that is impossible. He rises, moving toward you, and your only escape is through the door.♦

## Growing Pains

*One transgender B&W staffer's experiences*

BY ALEXANDER PINES

A few days after I started injecting testosterone, I sent my friends Snapchats of my face with shakily drawn beards in pink and green. “Nothing here yet,” I’d type, wondering what it was, precisely, that made me a man. I still don’t know. I don’t think it’s a beard, though, or a lower voice or leg hair.

Five months later I’m still beardless, but pricklier than ever before, from the stubble under my chin to the temper that pops up in traffic and checkout lines. People keep asking me if I’m happy now, as though I’ve triumphed over something. They tell me how brave I am. I’ve been called brave before—I was the token lesbian activist in high school, back when I used my pretty female name and spoke with my pretty female voice, but for me it’s not so much bravery as survival. The Transgender Narrative has violence that’s largely absent from its gay counterpart. Forget being stuck in a closet—trans people are supposedly

men or women “trapped” in the wrong bodies who need hormones, doctors, needles, and scalpels to construct a body that is somehow truer.

It’s not that I’m trapped, I’ve just outgrown.

There are days when I can see the way my new name twists as it comes out of my friends’ mouths—four syllables in the space of two. I’m stretching as well. Five months on testosterone and I’m a mess of hair and scar tissue with a voice that cracks and rises and breaks when I sing. Growing isn’t always pretty. I have acne; I’m afraid of losing my hair; and there’s a remote chance I’m frying my liver.

Sometimes the roughness of my skin scares me. Sometimes I wonder if I’ll ever be able to keep violence out of my own story—for someone who hates being called “trapped” I’ll eagerly mention stabbing myself in the leg with hormones biweekly. Sometimes the new hardness in my arms makes me feel brutal. I wonder if strength has to mean hardness. Sometimes I miss being fragile, but then I catch the curve of my breasts not quite suppressed under my binder and crumple.

This is what fragile looks like: the first time I used the men’s restroom on the fifth floor of Lerner I was literally scared shitless when a janitor walked in. Curling into myself in the stall as he swabbed the floors, I was overwhelmed with gratitude for the gender-neutral bathroom back in Hartley.

This is also what fragile looks like: I came out to my suitemates by sheepishly writing “call me Alexander” in dry erase marker on the board taped to my door. For weeks the name felt foreign in my mouth and I had to write “he/Alexander” on the inside of my left thumb as a reminder.

Once you decide to change your name, however, you realize how impossible it is to escape. At the start of each semester I sent emails to professors somewhat timidly asking them to ignore the name on their class rosters when they addressed me and hoped that no one looked at Courseworks too carefully. Every time I swiped my CUID I was afraid the cashier or security guard wouldn’t believe me, and while my LionMail account sent emails from the right



*Illustration by Alexander Pines*

name on my computer, no such luck on the mobile version. While approximately 70 schools allow students to use their preferred name on campus records (including Cornell, Princeton, and Yale, according to the Transgender Law & Policy Institute), Columbia requires a legal name change.

If you're under 22 in Michigan and you want to change your name, it'll cost two months and \$225. Copies of the name change are five dollars each while you're in the courtroom, but if you leave and come back (even an hour later), they're fifteen. Replacing your driver's license is another nine bucks, so all in all I'm out around \$250 to successfully change my middle name from Catherine to Cameron and the "-ra" to an "-er" at the end of my first name. On the bright side, because I'm not yet 22, I don't have to add another hundred or so (and a month of waiting) for fingerprints to be sent to the state police and FBI. In contrast, to change your last name after marriage, all you need to do is bring some identification and a marriage license to the Social Security office.

While I'm not entirely sure what makes me a man, the state of Michigan thinks it's an affidavit signed by my doctor saying I've had the "appropriate surgical procedures for gender transition"—which gets expensive. A quick email to the registrar was all I needed at Columbia.

Even though I doubt people will stop asking me if I've gotten it, there's no such thing as "The Surgery" for trans folks. Instead, there are several surgical options that generally count as sexual reassignment surgery (SRS) which can be roughly lumped into two categories: top and bottom surgery. Less important than the specifics of each procedure is the fact that at least one of them is required (by most states) to legally change genders.

In short, the trans body is a public one. Outside of the trans community, trans bodies are discussed with little to no respect for privacy. Trans students' rights to use the correct bathroom is frequently up for debate and the vote and most coverage of trans people is generally focused solely on physi-

cal transition or statistics about how many of us are murdered. Within the trans community, particularly online, representation is almost entirely confined to transition milestones. I'm not Alexander, student and writer: I'm pre-op and so many months on T. I understand the documentation of transition—reporting on its changes has definitely helped me relearn my body. However, the emphasis placed on physical transition can sometimes perpetuate the idea that gender is dependent on what parts one has (or doesn't have), which, among other things, erases the identities of trans people who choose not to (or can't afford to) undergo medical transition.

For most of the past year, I've been trying to figure out how to pay for both school and surgery. In an immediate sense, this has meant critically evaluating my desire to have surgery—is a flat chest worth eight grand? At first, I thought I could put things off until graduation. But that was before binding everyday started rubbing my skin raw, before nearly passing out trying to play basketball, before I had to spend nearly a day in bed because my back hurt too much to do anything else. Sometimes I even forget what a deep breath feels like. By adding SRS to its health care policy last year, Columbia has effectively made it possible to avoid taking on thousands of dollars in debt to pay for top surgery.

I found a picture of myself at fifteen from my freshman winter semi-formal. I mistakenly thought a skirt and ballet flats would make me feel more girly. What I don't tell you is how long I tried to not be trans, how I was afraid I'd lose myself somewhere between shots and scalpels. I looked at that picture and remembered the dull throb of doing it wrong.

Sometimes I feel constructed, the sum of so much scar tissue and synthetics. Sometimes I feel fake. But so are you. We carry around the best versions of ourselves to measure up to with the hopes of someday growing into the person we always have expected to be. I looked at that picture and thought, this is not who I'm supposed to be. Finally, I feel like I'm doing it right. ♦



## Thinking and Drinking

Alex Hall gets back to basics at d.b.a.

BY WILL HOLT

On a Friday afternoon in June, I stopped by a Williamsburg bar called d.b.a. to meet with Alex Hall, the man most responsible for popularizing cask ale in New York City. Hall, a straggly-haired, cherubic Englishman in his mid-40s, runs the cask program at d.b.a. and has very much committed himself to spreading the good word on the subject. Since moving to New York from England in 1999, Hall has become something of a cask evangelist, if not *the* cask evangelist, in the tri-state area.

Aptly called "real ale" in United Kingdom and Ireland, cask ale—"cask-conditioned beer," as it's referred to in some rarified circles here—is about as fresh as beer can get. Unfiltered and unpasteurized, the ale is naturally carbonated in the 10.8-gallon casks ("firkins") in which it undergoes its second fermentation. Unlike most kegged beers, which are almost invariably kept at low temperatures and force-carbonated, cask ale stays at "cellar temperature"—about 54 degrees Fahrenheit, optimal for mouthfeel and flavor.

"Big breweries dumbed it down," Hall told me. "They made their beer artificially carbonated, they made it artificially cold, and they made it artificially crappy."

While kegged beers are forced to the tap with gas, cask ales are pumped up from the cellar manually with a simple device called a beer engine. A pump clip is usually attached to the nautical-looking handle, which displays the name, brewer, type, and strength. When the contents of a cask have been depleted, the clip

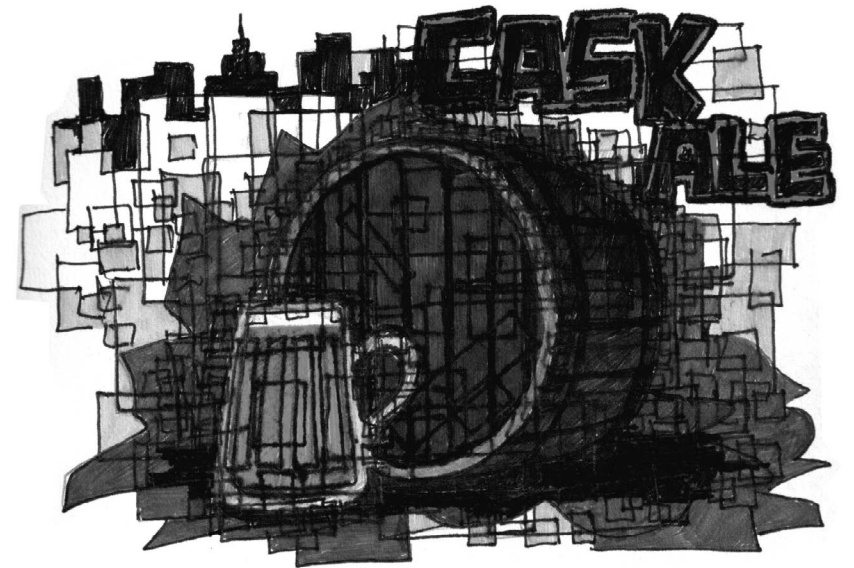
gets turned around.

To many Americans, cask ale tastes warm and flat (most apparently opt for beers akin to soda-cold and fizzy). But real beer—*real ale*, as it were—shouldn't give you a brainfreeze. My first exposure to cask ale came during high school in South Wales, where the nearest pub was only a 15-minute walk from campus. On Friday afternoons we'd get a table by the fire and knock back several pints of the local stuff, from Tomos Watkin's to Otley. I practically came of age on cask ale.

"This is a niche of the craft brewing movement now," Hall said. "But this is what beer used to be."

While genuine cask-conditioned beer is much more difficult to find in the United States, its popularity is growing swiftly in cities as disparate as Philadelphia and Portland, Oregon—and with no small thanks to guys like Alex Hall.

Sitting at d.b.a.'s bar in June, I watched as Hall





cleaned out the taps. He rinsed them with a sanitizer solution pumped up from the basement, then flushed them out with clean, cold water.

Then he caught me off guard with a request that I'd hardly expected.

"You want to go hook up the casks?" he asked.

I went silent for a couple of seconds, assuming that the grin on his face meant that he was joking. After a beat, I realized he was serious.

"Shit yes, I want to hook up the casks!"

We went down a set of warped, narrow stairs into the basement. Littering the damp cement floor was an odd assortment of kegs and tools—like something between a frat house and a mechanic's garage.

Off to the side was the cask cellar, a temperature-controlled walk-in closet where Hall told me I would have to tap the firkins. Bent over the casks and awkwardly crowded into this temperature-controlled room no bigger than a closet, I took the mallet off the wall and used it to pound in the taps on two the casks.

The first beer was Kuhnenn Conundrum, a mild English-style ale from Michigan. But it was the second that I was really excited about: Bear Republic's Grand Am, an American pale ale from California. With the mallet in one hand and a tap in the other, I readied myself for Hall's instructions.

"Whack it!"

I found out almost immediately that the blows had to be hard and fast, or the beer would spill out onto the floor. My first cask took a few more strikes than it should have needed, but the tap for the second keg went in smoothly.

Once I was finished, Hall brushed past me into the cellar. He took a pint glass from a nearby table and drained some of the beer into it from the first cask. He held the glass up to the dim light hanging from the ceiling, examined the color, swirled and drank. Afterward, he fixed the tap into the sanitized, rinsed-out tubing that travels up to the bar, and repeated this process with the second cask.



Hall first developed a taste for cask ale while working for British Railways in his early 20s, he told me. Traveling from town to town and county to county across Great Britain, he started to pick up on some of the local peculiarities in beer.

"I got free travel all over the UK," he told me. "I started discovering beers that you wouldn't find all the time at some of the smaller pubs."

Hall later worked at the Evening Star pub in Brighton, England, and helped start its award-winning brewery, Dark Star. The bar now holds up to a staggering 180 casks at a time (d.b.a. keeps just three).

In 1999, when Hall ended up following an American girlfriend to New York, he couldn't believe the pathetic state in which he found the nascent American craft brewing scene.

"My first question was, 'Where do I find cask in New York?'" he said. "Ten years ago, there were very few breweries who did cask. Brooklyn [Brewery] and Victory [Brewing Company]—that's about it."

Hall epitomizes the do-it-yourself mentality that has become something of a Brooklyn cliché in recent years. When he couldn't find any purveyors of real ale in the States, he started bidding for beer engines on eBay and looking for interested bar owners around New York.

"I started walking them around to bars because I wanted them to stop selling just these shitty, fizzy beers," he said.

Eventually Hall met the late Ray Deter, who opened the first d.b.a. in the East Village in 1994. Deter, something of a legend among craft beer enthusiasts, helped establish New York's Good Beer Seal, a quality assurance organization that grants seals of approval to beer bars around the city in an effort to "separate the wheat from the chaff." He and Hall worked out an arrangement to have a small-scale, meticulously kept cask showcase at Deter's Williamsburg location.



Back upstairs at d.b.a., Hall went back behind the bar and began pumping the beer engine for the Bear Republic Grand Am. He went at the task like a farmhand milking a cow, working the engine up and down.

When he was finally confident with the clarity of the pint, he handed it to me across the counter and poured another one for himself.

"Cheers," he said, raising his glass.

We toasted to real cask ale and to one of the few New York bars that does it right. ♦

**"This is what beer  
used to be."**

# Wilson

*Two fresh-people navigate NSOP*

BY TORSTEN ODLAND

## CHAPTER ONE

There was a period of five days where Andrew Parson had the concerted bliss of feeling like an undergraduate before he knew what being one meant—the orientation program that preceded his first week of classes at Columbia. Not that the significance of college life ever dawned on him in a decisive revelation. When he tried to reminisce about it with Wilson a year later, he was certain that his memory of the week was impractical, that it no longer told him anything about himself. Of course, he indulged the fantasy of seamless transition between Andrew the Nerd and the New Andrew—Andrew the Whatever—which was a convenient oversight. He met Wilson on Wednesday, the third day of the program.

Like every conversation he had during those five days, it was simultaneously insignificant and full of possibilities, which seemed to hang in the air like an electric charge. Andrew had gone down for breakfast alone—it was early and he wanted to do some exploring before "Team Building Session Part 3" or whatever they called it.

"I like your shirt." Wilson approached with a big grin, pointing to Andrew's Steely Dan T-shirt and making a stabbing motion. He had long, straight brown hair, tucked behind his left ear and swooping to the right. "My name's Wilson; mind if I join you?"

"Thanks. I mean—of course. I'm Andrew."

He set down a plate full of eggs on the opposite side of the table, and extended his hand.

"Let's make this official."

They shook. Wilson raised his eyebrows and slid to his seat, saying, "Great. Now we're homies."

Andrew chuckled. He thought about saying, "Just like that?", but didn't want to be a wiseass. While he sat there thinking of the next move, Wilson asked, "Are your parents fans of the Dan?"

"Ah, not really. My dad is a classic rock guy; Mom listens exclusively to Joni Mitchell. "Why?"

"Oh just, my parents are huge fans. Seen them like twenty-five times or something. I grew up listening to Pretzel Logic and Aja in the car and everything."

"Sounds like you have cool parents."

Wilson snorted.

"If you think Steely Dan is 'cool,' then you're out of touch."

"With what?"

"With reality."

"Come on."

"What, I'm serious."

"You came over here because I was wearing a Steely Dan T-shirt. How can—if you're telling me that you're not cool, then," Andrew shook his head, "then I don't see how we can be homies."

"Ahh, I get it," the grin returned, "Tough love. Fine: you, me, my parents—we're all cool. Does that make you more comfortable?"

"I'm very cool," Andrew muttered, his stomach turning at the possibility that Wilson wouldn't pick up on the joke. But he did. Then they went over the basics: hometown, major, etc. Inside the folder they gave out on move-in day, there was a pink checklist titled "How to Make Friends," a series of questions designed to quickly establish an informed relationship between fellow first-years (where are you from, what's your major). It also included a few taboo topics (religion, mental health). Indignant that there could be a "new friend formula" (much less that he would need one), Andrew righteously stuffed the form into his recycling bin and proceeded to follow it point by point with each person he met. Having spent half an hour in the dining hall together, he and Wilson



exchanged numbers, and Andrew left to take his walk.



Later that day, after dinner, Andrew was led out to the lawns by a free-floating train of smiles from other first-years, tanned and tanked, sundressed, boat-shoed—a great circulating mass of young people trying to broadcast their eagerness to have fun. All of these people have no friends, and I’m no exception, Andrew thought, when his phone buzzed. It was Wilson: “You wanna go to a banger tonight?”



“I get the feeling that we’re watching something very strange. And I think I’ve figured out what it is. There are four separate parties going on right now and there’s only enough room for two.”

Andrew pointed out his theoretical divisions of the bright, gossipy double. The group of four sitting on Eric’s bed listening to two short white girls telling a long story as if it were the most important, thrilling way they could represent each other’s lives. The clique on Eric’s roommate’s bed, which actually included Mark from Andrew’s floor, who, Andrew knew based on their one conversation, liked to drink and chat. The five girls talking in a loose circle by the dresser, where Eric had set up a bar. The hip threesome by the desk. Wilson rolled his eyes.

“Were you expecting Studio 54? It’s a dorm room. And including us there are five ‘parties.’ Would you rather have us all sit Quaker-meeting style?”

Andrew conceded, shook his head.

“Besides, it looks like everyone is having fun. That’s all a party is for.”

Andrew looked around the cramped double for



some confirmation. Cheeriness was in the air; astonished, semi-constant laughter punctuated the tune of the girl group song playing in the background. On Eric’s bed a girl with bright eyes was saying “no, no, no” to her friend, and throughout the room everyone was speaking with an attentive familiarity, of which Andrew was inclined to be skeptical. It’s a fun party, he mentally shrugged. It belittled his sensibilities to consider the value of conversation in the abstract, and it terrified him to approach the question of the value of fun.

“You’re right. But it still feels strange—maybe because they’re all just hanging out, talking. The ‘party’ doesn’t matter—any of these groups could be having separate conversations in separate rooms. People like to be around other people, I guess.”

Wilson chuckled.

“I’m not sure *you* do. You left us out of the picture again—we could be having this conversation in your room. You’re not masking your pitiful, self-righteous wish to leave very well, by the way.”

“Hey, I didn’t say I wasn’t having fun. And we wouldn’t be having this *particular* conversation if we were in my room,” Andrew nagged. He looked at the humming clumps of students and imagined the network that had brought each of them to Eric’s room. He’d come as a guest of Wilson’s; Mark was on the fencing team with Eric, Andrew drew the lines of his map, demarcating unrelated, twin segments in a variable cloud of two-day friendships. Maybe the fun was all in the mingling. It was beginning to look like Wilson didn’t actually know anybody, otherwise some introductions would have been in order. The talk in the room passed through Andrew in flat, awkward waves, until he distinctly made out a slick, androgynous “so *what* are we doing tonight?”

“It’s probably just that I didn’t go to very many parties in high school,” Andrew allowed, “It doesn’t seem so special.”

“Well they usually start to heat up once you forget about ‘the party’ as a topic of conversation.”

“Fair enough,” he took another observational pause that had a lot more to do with pacing than actual reflection, “You think they’re all talking about gun control?”

Wilson caved and gave Andrew the giggle he’d been looking for a way to unearth.

“Did you go to many parties?”

“Sure. Once in a while.”

“What was fun about them? I’m not asking as,

like, a critical voice, but as a genuine social idiot.”

Wilson shrugged.

“Oh, I’m not fancy—I went for the same reason as everybody else.”

“What’s that?”

“I just wanted to get fingered,” Wilson said with nostalgic eyes, bringing out Andrew’s high-pitched guffaw.

“I’m sorry, do I shock you? Am I being too *real* for you? It’s not funny.”

“Stop it.”

“What if you fingered me—would that freak you out?”



On Eric’s roommate’s bed, a melodic honking jolted Monica out of the weakly meditative stupor she’d receded into once it became clear that Amy and Mihn were not going to stop talking about Beyonce, which she traced to Andrew, trying simultaneously to catch his breath and suppress his smirk. Monica felt the gentle stab of something incredibly cute, a pain that locked her in place watching the two of them—not just because Andrew had dimples, but because Andrew and Wilson were so obviously and publicly behaving like buddies.

Monica was one of those incredible people who are easy to delight and by delight are transformed. She hopped off the bed and walked over to the duo, trying to think of something to say, but not exactly worrying about it. Wilson was half smiling, embarrassed by the noise his friend was making and continuing to whisper to him.



“Look at this, Andrew. Maybe she’ll be the lucky lady,” Wilson encouraged sympathetically, “the lady who gets to finger *you* tonight.”

“Hi,” Monica announced herself, sweeping a tress of her straight black hair behind her left ear, a tic that struck Andrew as theatrical, “I love your shirt.”

“Really? Thank you,” he turned to Wilson, “this shirt is very popular.”

“It’s great. It brings people together.”

“My parents are huge fans,” Monica confessed with some gravel in her voice.

“Incredible,” Wilson looked actually dumb-

struck, but the way he kind of drawled made Monica wonder if they were mocking her, “We had this exact conversation earlier. A love of Steely Dan has thrown us all into a cosmic loop.”

“Soul mates,” Andrew nodded to Monica who had no reaction, and then quickly laughed to fill the space.

“Imagine the expanse of discourse waiting for us to put on our boots and explore. Panoramic. This party kicks ass. What’s your favorite Dan album to listen to on a long car ride? Or plane trip, whatever.”

“Oh I never paid attention to the albums. I’m not, like, a *huge* fan,” she decided to add a lie, “I know a lot of their songs though.”

“You came over here because you liked the design of the t-shirt?”

“Yeah, I guess.”



Andrew looked down at the black t, the white cursive print centered, Steely Dan. They all observed it for a silent moment. Wilson turned to Monica with a blank face.

“You have pretty low standards, huh?”

She curled her lips. Her eyes hardened, accepting Andrew and Wilson’s condescension—which she knew was just their sense of humor—

accepted Andrew’s chuckle with the detached peace one is granted confirming a rotten suspicion; she knew boys like this in high school.

“Fuck you guys.”

She strolled back to Eric’s roommate’s bed, and sat next to the boring blonde guy who had been flirting with her. Wilson’s mouth hung open, as if she’d slapped him for saying a swear word.

“I really thought that one was funny. It was a coy, self-deprecating pun too. Because,” he paused and shrugged, “I don’t know. Why’d she really come over here?”

“Well, I laughed. But you did sound like an asshole. Or a bastard.”

“Go ahead, hurt me.”

“I sort of felt guilty laughing because it was like you had never spoken to a human being before.”

Wilson rolled his eyes and walked over to the bar realizing that he was so obviously full of shit to begin with that Andrew couldn’t take his embarrass-



ment seriously. He found two empty vodka bottles and two beers, which he chugged in frustration. He turned and walked through the crowd of girls who had all probably seen—pathetic, they could hear how pathetic he was in just that little word: “hello”—he emerged in the center of the party where he was completely exposed but no one was watching and stood for a second to recompose.

Andrew felt a passive obligation to hold their spot, and had stayed in exactly the same place.

“I’ve finished their alcohol. Do you want to go back to my room and watch tv?”



Andrew turned from the computer screen to Wilson who was laughing, seemingly at the anticipation of something funny, and then back to David Cross on the computer. *I knew Eric. Really? Why didn't you say hi? He didn't either. Why not? Because we went to high school together and my hatred for him was pretty well documented at the time. He didn't seem so bad. From a distance. Right. Well he doesn't have an identity here yet, and he's waiting to determine which qualities will be most advantageous for him. He only needs to pick three. Why did he invite you then? He has to; I'm one of the only people he knows! I make the room feel a little more familiar I don't know,* he trailed off and set his face like he was done talking, but his eyes stayed wide, maybe even got wider, as if it were his duty to see ghosts and never acknowledge them. I must have stared at his face, four inches away, for a full ten seconds until he sighed and said *that party was exactly what I wanted* and we got to his door.

It was a waste of time networking-wise and we actually made one enemy, Andrew kneaded a flap of Wilson's sheet as he remembered why he had the distinct feeling Mark and Eric were on the fencing team together—the slow exchange with Mark he had in the eighth floor lounge, which devolved into Mark listing his “best friends so far” (presumably as recommendations for Andrew) while Andrew slid between a daydream about office hours with his prospective sociology professor and a state of half-conscious assent, bobbing and making eye contact with Mark, listening to him as he might listen to a rainstorm, but alert enough to absorb at least two crucial subject headings in the fencer's benevolent address: Eric and The Party. Fidgeting on Wilson's bed, exactly two floors above his own, Andrew felt the weightlessness of every story he might try to build out of the evening.

If he'd gone to breakfast at a different time, he might have gone to the same party with Mark and made new friends or actually partied. It soothed Andrew to think of it in terms of probability, but, obviously, *he'd* said yes to Wilson's text; he gave concrete, irrevocable shape to the night through decisions he couldn't specifically identify but could not, nonetheless, ignore, as Wilson turned to him, pointing at the screen.

“Never mind. Just watch.”

“Can I ask you something?”

“Ahhm,” Wilson reached over to his computer and pressed the spacebar, “Sure.”

“I know this is the sort of question that you're supposed to keep to yourself and suck on, or whatever. Because it's embarrassing I suppose. But I feel comfortable—anyway I'm starting to feel like you're my friend, but I can't explain how I got *here* and why I'm not—I don't know—at an after-party on the eighth floor with yesterday's crew. So my question is: why did you choose to hang with me tonight? What set me apart from all of those people in Eric's room? It sounds vain but I'd really just like—”

“No, I understand; I'll play your game,” Wilson shrugged amicably, “But you have to tell me why you picked me.”

“That's fair.”

“That's how the game's played. Now let me think,” Wilson dipped his head side-to-side and drummed on his thighs for a few seconds and then froze for another few, trying to shake out his instinctive barriers to an honest, introspective idea. He ran a hand through his hair. “I have to approach it from the negative if you want to hear something I'm certain of. I dislike almost everyone that I talk to—which people don't always pick up on because I love to talk—but when we ate breakfast, I didn't distrust you or feel the canned despair I get when I meet a lot of people. That's special, I'm not disparaging that. What about me?”

“I find you remarkably easy to communicate with. We keep talking and it seems very natural.”

“That's great, Andrew. Would you mind being quiet so we can watch this?”

“Jesus.”

“I'm serious,” Wilson grinned, reaching over to the computer again and avoiding eye contact with Andrew, which would have spoiled the joke, for a moment almost proud of being who he was, “You're going to have wanted to shut up after you see this.”♦

## And All That Jazz

*Why radio still matters after the college DJ's halcyon age*

BY TORSTEN ODLAND

I'm not sure where I developed the image I have of the “college radio DJ.” Neither of my parents were DJs; I never listened to college radio growing up. Other than maybe a caricature I saw on *The Simpsons*, I have to assume the archetype I have in mind is based on a variety of Wikipedia sources.

If you look far enough in the history of indie rock, every band's page claims “their album *dfsd* was very popular on college radio stations in the United States.” The more popular '80s alterna-bands (R.E.M., The Replacements, Pixies) have been classified, in retrospect, as “college rock”, which gives one the impression that not only were these intrepid DJs introducing America to the jangle music we all respect so much today, they were leading a youth movement. The college radio persona I'm think-

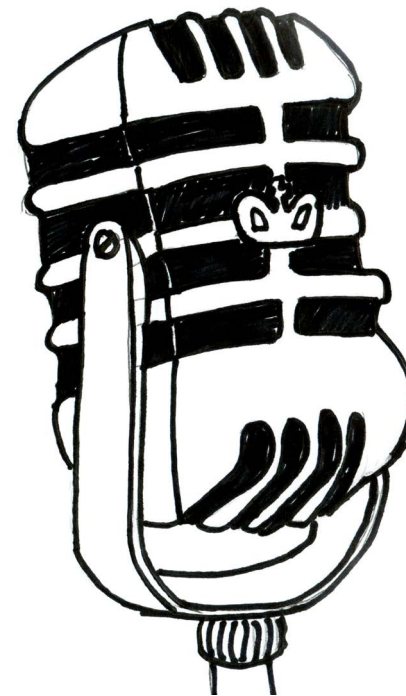
ing of—the rock-nerd saving space in the airwaves for interesting pop music, the sarcastic taste-maker who may actually just be Stephen Malkmus—lives eternally in 1986, when they were socially necessary.

Though I didn't realize that when I first started programming at WKCR; part of my motivation to get involved had to do with the role I thought I might fill as a cool one. But there's a crucial difference between the college radio stereotype and radio at Columbia today: WKCR and WBAR have very few listeners on campus and are functionally irrelevant to the taste and cultural sense of most Columbia students (insofar as they're radio stations).

Though it ranges into the twenties with some frequency, Joe Bucciero, CC '15, WBAR Treasurer, assured me that the average listenership for online-streamed WBAR shows is “in the single digits.” During the late-night shows, in all likelihood, there are long stretches of air when the DJs are just listening to music alone in the basement of Sultzberger.

With 'KCR it's tougher to say. There's no way of precisely determining how many students are physically tuned in to 89.9 FM, but I only know one Columbia student who owns a radio. If students are listening, they're streaming it. WKCR doesn't track those numbers. But I don't think I overstep my bounds in claiming that outside of the 'KCR community very few students listen to the station regularly (though I may be discounting the segment of Columbians I suspect exist who only listen to classical music). To put it another way, I don't know anyone who does.

The answer seems obvious as soon as you formulate the question. Why don't college kids listen to the radio these days when it seemed to mean so much to them 25 years ago? Computers. If I sound pedantic, it's because I need to remind myself periodically that before 15 years ago, human beings did not have free, instant access to all media. Anyone with a computer and Wi-Fi, even if they confine themselves to YouTube, has more music to choose from than any station library ever had, and they can listen to it in whatever order they please. If you want



variety but aren't terribly curious, Pandora can give you a mathematical approximation of the radio station you'd want to listen to anyway.

One shouldn't forget that the best thing about radio was that it was free; it brought free music into peoples' homes in a world where, if you liked what you heard, you had to go out and physically buy it (if you could find it). Now that access to music is free in general, it seems natural that students would gravitate toward the systems that give them the most control ("control") over what they listen to. You don't have to look hard to see an authoritarian color in the traditional DJ-masses arrangement—even when its figurehead is a slacker dork, one person determining the limits of what can be heard, the holder and source of all relevant information about pop music.

Thanks to Great Wikipedia, the information that made college radio DJs important cultural middlemen is available to anyone with a computer. Today, when one hears, and particularly enjoys, a Limp Bizkit song (say), one is only three clicks away from a full biography of the band. Easy access to a list of all their albums (when they were recorded, for what label), their associated genre, and usually even a gloss on their "legacy," not only democratizes the brute facts of pop music, but empowers one to really explore the formless, unfathomable, de facto public library of music on the web.

The type of person who would have listened to college radio 25 years ago has all the tools today to be their own DJ, so to speak, and construct their own musical education. Ironically, though the Internet may have destroyed the significance of the "college radio figure," the official canon inherited by our generation of rock-scholars—in which The Smiths, Sonic Youth, etc. are undisputed greats—is the narrative developed and maintained by college DJs, standardized, and made universally available.

One finds a pretty illustrative example of the way times have changed in the case of Can, a strange, groovy band from Germany, and its reception in America. Today it's "accepted fact" that Can was one of the more seminal bands of the '70s—innumerable alt-people, from Johnny Lydon to Thom Yorke, have been outspoken about the band's influence on their work. If you're interested in rock history, you don't

have to do very much research before the name Can surfaces as kind of legend.

But in 1986, you'd be in a very small community of Americans if you ever heard a Can song. Their classic record *Tago Mago*, released in Germany in 1971, wasn't distributed by an American label until it was released as a CD in 1990. If you were voracious enough to buy British music journals, you might read their name; if you lived in a metropolitan area it's possible that you could track down a British or German import of the album—but most people weren't. Every Can song is too long and creepy for American commercial radio; so the band's music was unavailable to almost everyone.

**Without WKCR, no one  
would have taken the  
time to tell me,  
"Jazz is important."**

If you did hear a Can song, it was probably on college radio, where it became a cult favorite and made impressions on a lot of young musicians. My path to Can in 2009 was slightly more direct: I was reading about *Kid A* on Mother Wikipedia, where Thom Yorke is quoted talking about *Tago Mago* as an inspiration, so I listened to a few Can songs. Then I downloaded their two critically significant records, which subsequently have become two of my favorites.

College radio may have been educational and groundbreaking in '86, but today it's a laughably inefficient and inflexible way to disseminate culture. Which begs the question: can we write WKCR and WBAR off as institutions of undergraduate wankery, or, more to the point, as mere clubs?

Neither station is in huge danger of this. From the station's spring blowout, WBAR-B-Q (which consumed roughly two thirds of their annual budget last year, according to Joe), to smaller events highlighting student musicians, WBAR's primary contribution to Columbia's cultural life is the concerts it organizes and promotes. In that respect alone, they're a welcome tonic to the Bacchanal committee. At the risk of short-shrifting them, however, I'm going to focus on the way 'KCR justifies itself.

It would be a mistake to characterize WKCR as wankery. For one thing, it has dedicated fans that aren't Columbia students. I know because they call. On average I get a call an hour during my jazz show, though I'm not sure I've ever mentioned the station phone number on the air. Some people have ques-

tions—they call to ask the name of the last song you played, who the bassist was, etc.—but equally as many call in just to say thanks. Last time I was in the studio, a guy streaming the broadcast in Chicago called to tell me, "You're giving me goose bumps!"

Secondly, even in college rock's heyday, 'KCR didn't have any social influence in the sense usually attributed to college radio stations, because it didn't broadcast contemporary pop music. Engaging listeners on campus, at least since WKCR's transition in the early '70s (under pressure from the Columbia administration, who were displeased by the station's coverage of the 1968 protests) from primarily intellectual content to primarily music, has only been tangential to 'KCR's purpose.

"We're the lifeboat for stranded cultural artifacts. Especially jazz," solemnly explained Sophie Rubashkin, BC '15, WKCR Publicity Director. When I asked her what she sees as WKCR's mission, she added, "I think we say, 'Yes, we will put Eric Dolphy on the radio five days a week, because he should be. And no one else is doing that.'" WKCR's slogan is "The Alternative," which sums up the station's programming philosophy pretty efficiently: it plays what, for a variety of reasons, commercial radio stations won't.

'KCR preserves a public space for forms that are no longer popular, like jazz. Its six music departments—Classical, New Music (basically avant-garde), Jazz (60% of the station's air time), American, In All Languages, and Latin—put varieties of music on air that one more Top 40 station wouldn't.

Philosophically, it stands on more solid ground than your average college radio station. But this contributes to a kind of rigidity in its programming—by which I mean that, for a lot of people, joining WKCR means signing up to DJ music you don't listen to in your spare time and know, basically, nothing about.

It's mission doesn't nullify the fact that WKCR is basically inefficient in the way I earlier described—they may put Eric Dolphy on the air daily, but I when I'm in the mood for Dolphy I usually want to pick the song. But it does demonstrate something about the musical education one receives from the Internet. Almost everything I know about jazz can be backed up somewhere on Wikipedia, and Youtube; conceivably, I could have learned all the same stuff without 'KCR. But I know that without WKCR, I wouldn't have, because no one would have taken the time to tell me, "Jazz is important."

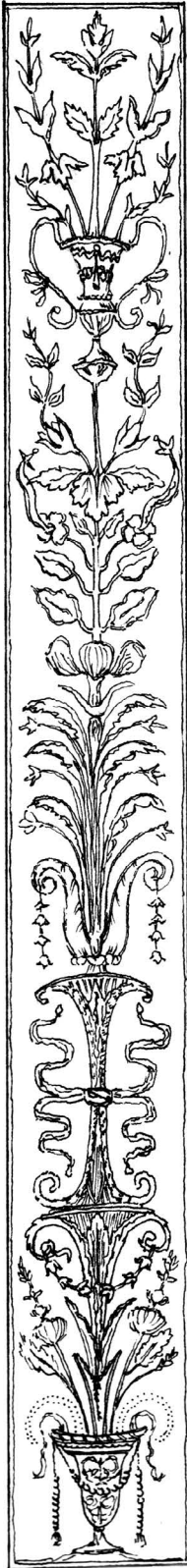
There's a decent argument to be made that the ease and freedom of choice afforded to us by the Internet is counter-educational musically, because it allows you to very quickly identify the limits of your comfort zone and fill its interior with lists of largely interchangeable bands. I think that's a cynical take—my personal research has certainly introduced me bands (like Can) that have taken real effort to appreciate—but there can be no denying that the sheer amount of information one is confronted with online encourages the kind of inquiry centered around a particular *perspective*. A standard in music can be organized, analyzed, criticized. And because the Internet makes each perspective infinitely investigable, it can mask how narrow your vision really is, until you're at a place where you actually (though unconsciously) believe that what you read on Pitchfork is the world-consensus. WKCR's point is that engaging with a plurality of perspectives is the fullest way to experience music; while unfamiliar perspectives take some study to appreciate, any genre is intrinsically worth studying.

Sophie and I agreed that the experience we've had as programmers has been dominantly educational. Neither of us listened to much jazz before coming to school. Other than Kind of Blue, everything I play on the radio is music I've been introduced to in the past year and a half; talking to listeners on the phone, I'm often acutely aware that my audience knows much more about jazz than I do. I don't expect I'm able to teach a 'KCR listener much about anything, so I've always approached my show as a chance to dig through the library for a few new records I have good reason to believe are cool.

Though I'll always hunger for the style-points and cultural entitlement of yesteryear's college DJ, I have to admit there's something decent and modest about the arrangement between me and my listeners on 'KCR that strikes me as a purer expression radio than the "socially significant DJ" of 1986.

There's no pretense that I'm any kind of authority, or that the listeners need to come to me for the esoteric music they want to hear—if that's what my audience wanted, they'd be better served by Google. Without those coercive elements, the listeners who stick around do so, presumably, because they prefer sharing musical experiences with other human beings. After they hear a flugelhorn line that really affects them, they want someone to call, someone they can tell, "Thank you so much for playing this."♦





# MEASURE FOR MEASURE

The First Elegy, from the *Duino Elegies*

by Rainer Maria Rilke

Translated from the German by Torsten Odland

*Who, if I cried out, would hear me among the angels' hierarchies?  
and even if one of them pressed me suddenly against his heart:  
I would be consumed in that overwhelming existence.  
For beauty is nothing but the beginning of terror, which we are still just able to endure,  
and we are so awed because it serenely disdains to annihilate us.  
Every angel is terrifying.  
And so I hold myself back and swallow the call-note of my dark sobbing.  
Ah, whom can we ever turn to in our need?  
Not angels, not humans, and already the knowing animals are aware  
that we are not really at home in our interpreted world.  
Perhaps there remains for us some tree on a hillside, which every day we can take into our vision;  
there remains for us yesterday's street and the loyalty of a habit so much at ease  
when it stayed with us that it moved in and never left.  
Oh and night: there is night, when a wind full of infinite space gnaws at our faces.  
Whom would it not remain for—that longed-after, mildly disillusioning presence,  
which the solitary heart so painfully meets.  
Is it any less difficult for lovers?  
But they keep on using each other to hide their own fate.  
Don't you know yet?  
Fling the emptiness out of your arms into the spaces we breathe;  
perhaps the birds will feel the expanded air with more passionate flying.*

*Yes—the springtimes needed you. Often a star was waiting for you to notice it.  
A wave rolled toward you out of the distant past,*

*or as you walked under an open window, a violin yielded itself to your hearing.  
All this was mission. But could you accomplish it?  
Weren't you always distracted by expectation, as if every event announced a beloved?  
(Where can you find a place to keep her, with all the huge strange thoughts inside you  
going and coming and often staying all night.)  
But when you feel longing, sing of women in love; for their famous passion is still not immortal.  
Sing of women abandoned and desolate (you envy them, almost)  
who could love so much more purely than those who were gratified.  
Begin again and again the never-attainable praising; remember: the hero lives on;  
even his downfall was merely a pretext for achieving his final birth.  
But Nature, spent and exhausted, takes lovers back into herself,  
as if there were not enough strength to create them a second time.  
Have you imagined Gaspara Stampa intensely enough  
so that any girl deserted by her beloved might be inspired by that fierce example of soaring,  
objectless love and might say to herself, "Perhaps I can be like her?"  
Shouldn't this most ancient of sufferings finally grow more fruitful for us?*

*Isn't it time that we lovingly freed ourselves from the beloved and,  
quivering, endured: as the arrow endures the bowstring's tension,  
so that gathered in the snap of release it can be more than itself.  
For there is no place where we can remain.*

*Voices. Voices. Listen, my heart, as only saints have listened:*

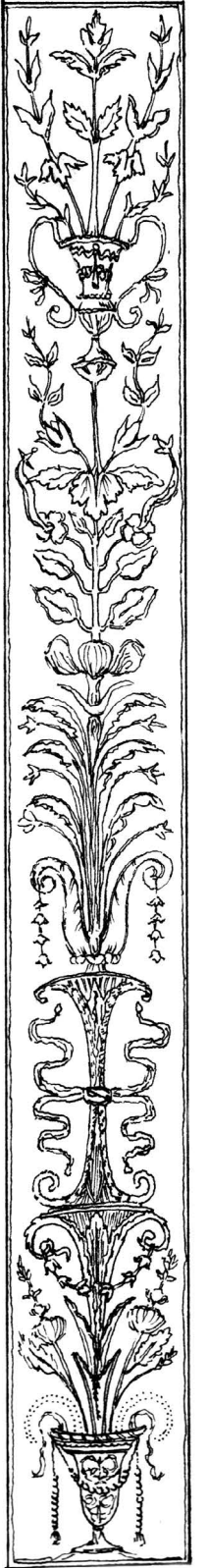
*until the gigantic call lifted them off the ground;  
yet they kept on, impossibly, kneeling and didn't notice at all: so complete was their listening.  
Not that you could endure God's voice—far from it.  
But listen to the voice of the wind and the ceaseless message that forms itself out of silence.  
It is murmuring toward you now from those who died young.  
Didn't their fate, whenever you stepped into a church in Naples or Rome,  
quietly come to address you?  
Or high up, some eulogy entrusted you with a mission,  
as, last year, on the plaque in Santa Maria Formosa.  
What they want of me is that I gently remove the appearance of injustice about their death—  
which at times slightly hinders their souls from proceeding onward.*

*Of course, it is strange to inhabit the earth no longer,*

*to give up customs one barely had time to learn,  
not to see roses and other promising Things in terms of a human future;  
no longer to be what one was in infinitely anxious hands;  
to leave even one's own first name behind,  
forgetting it as easily as a child abandons a broken toy.  
Strange to no longer desire one's desires.  
Strange to see meanings that clung together once, floating away in every direction.  
And being dead is hard work and full of retrieval before one can gradually feel a trace of eternity.  
Though the living are wrong to believe in the too-sharp distinctions which  
they themselves have created.  
Angels (they say) don't know whether it is the living they are moving among, or the dead.  
The eternal torrent whirls all ages along in it, through both realms forever,  
and their voices are drowned out in its thunderous roar.*

*In the end, those who were carried off early no longer need us:*

*they are weaned from earth's sorrows and joys,  
as gently as children outgrow the soft breasts of their mothers.  
But we, who do need such great mysteries,  
we for whom grief is so often the source of our spirit's growth—  
could we exist without them?  
Is the legend meaningless that tells how, in the lament for Linus,  
the daring first notes of song pierced through the barren numbness;  
and then in the startled space which a youth as lovely as a god has suddenly left forever,  
the Void felt for the first time that harmony which now enraptures and comforts and helps us.*



# Monkey Business

On the latest from Columbia Business School Publishing

BY CONOR SKELDING

***Business Secrets of the Trappist Monks: One CEO's Quest for Meaning and Authenticity***  
**August Turak**  
**Columbia Business School Publishing, 200 pages**

August Turak's book is belied by both halves of its title—on the one hand, *Business Secrets of the Trappist Monks*, which is no doubt deliberately evocative of Dan Brown; on the other, *One CEO's Quest for Meaning and Authenticity*, which, needless to say, put the undergraduate ass in me on guard. And so, I ordered a review copy, ready, judging the book by its cover, to hack the thing to pieces.

Turak draws on time he spent over 19 years living and working as a Trappist monk at Mepkin Abbey, and explains how he applied the principles he learned there to his two successful business ventures. Turak, citing personal “cases that would never show up in a business school class,” aims to not just help the reader excel in the boardroom, but “enjoy a more meaningful and satisfying personal life.”

The Trappist motto is *ora et labora*—prayer and work; work as a form of prayer and prayer as a form of work. Turak's book, fittingly, features laudatory blurbs by professors from both Wharton and the Duke Divinity School.

(N.B. If you're going to read this book, you will have to willingly suspend your knee-jerk irony, and take words like “authentic” and “genuine” as intended.)

You have been warned: Turak writes, “[T]he significant dividends that this quantitative approach has produced have often come at the expense of the more qualitative aspects of business—things like mission, purpose, values, principles, integrity, ethics, service, and people, which, the monks would argue, are even more critical to success.”

Basically: put quality over quantity and people over short-term profits; in the long run, that'll nourish both your bottom line and your soul. There are two sides to why this will work, according to Turak.

The first part is practical: people will trust you, etc.; the second is transcendent: basically, karma exists, and what goes around comes around.

He gives this example: Turak has turned around a failing sales department at a dot-com era software distributor. At a company party, a tipsy programmer asks him just how he did it. “He wanted a technique, and all I had to offer was a way of life. The ‘secret’ was that, just like the monks, through lots of mostly little things, I had tapped into the universal human longing for transformation.”

Importantly, Turak “defines himself as a spiritual man who happens to be good at business, rather

than a businessman who happens to have an interest in the spiritual.” When he had the chance to go full-time with the spiritual search that he'd begun at 20 with his Zen teacher, he did. (In 2002, he retired from business and continued to lead the Self Knowledge Symposium, a secular group of college students that he began in 1989 devoted to reading about and discussing the good life.) It's unclear, then, what this book offers the businessman

who happens to have a decidedly secondary interest in the spiritual.

Part memoir, part philosophy primer, and part case study, *Business Secrets* breaks no new ground literarily or philosophically. But it isn't meant to: rather, it's “a highly personal, nuts-and-bolts account” of how Turak succeeded at business not only without losing his humanity, but while finding meaning in business (and not in spite of it). The book is intended to convey conversationally serious ideas to the businessman. (Columbia Business School Publishing has certainly priced it for the businessman, at \$29.95.)

Turak seeks to marry idealism and pragmatism. His is a boldly prescriptive book: moral relativists of both the postmodernist and corporate variety are going to chafe at it.

Even if it seems doubtful that business can be as civil and humane as Turak thinks, the reader hopes he is right. ♦



Illustration by Anne Scotti

THE BLUE AND WHITE

# Don't Rock the Boat

Kayaking one of America's dirtiest canals

BY WILL HOLT

Insofar as you can get past the nauseating smell of raw sewage, oil, and God knows what else, Brooklyn's Gowanus Canal makes for an excellent place to canoe.

During one of the hottest weeks in July, I asked a good friend of mine whether she had any interest in joining me on one of the most polluted waterways in America. As I might have expected after years of throwing herself into all kinds of dumb shit, her response was brief and to the point: “I'm down.”

We met at Penn Station just a few minutes after noon, transferred from the A to the F, and continued on to Carroll Street in Brooklyn.

Even the most cursory search will provide plenty of rumors about the Gowanus Canal as a longtime Mafia dumping ground, somewhere to dispose of the bodies after incidents that “couldn't be helped”—and, disturbingly enough, there's some truth to this.

In April 1931, the body of a 21-year-old racketeer named Tony Gubitosi was pulled from the canal, bound and garrotted. Fifteen years later and a full two months after his disappearance, local Grain Holders Union President John Flaherty was discovered face-down in the water.

There might well be more recent corpses sunk below the water's murky surface, but no one's in a hurry to go diving for them. According to the EPA, the Gowanus Canal is “one of the nation's most extensively contaminated water bodies,” a conduit for sewage outflows, storm water runoff, and industrial pollutants from the various plants, mills, and tanneries that line its garbage-strewn shores.

To canoe or kayak this extensive crime against nature sounds like the idea of someone who's been drinking paint thinner; but the prospect is no doubt an interesting one. Aside from the rarefied views of Brooklyn's most decrepit and industrial skyline and bridges, there's a sense of trespassing out on the water, of being somewhere that should be strictly off-limits.

Since 1999, a volunteer organization called the Gowanus Dredgers Canoe Club has provided

free waterfront access from a few convenient spots along the canal to draw attention to the necessity of a wholesale cleaning effort. On clear, warm-weather Saturdays between 1 and 5 p.m., you can borrow one of their canoes from a small dock at 164 2<sup>nd</sup> Street in Brooklyn and take it out on the water.

We waited for over an hour before anyone came by to open the shed that holds the boats. Needless to say, we had plenty of time to take in the sights and smells of the canal and to question our judgment on the matter.

The water—a ghostly, greenish white—gave off an odor that can only be described as a mixture of fresh sewage, hot tar, and overpowering ammonia. The thought of dipping even the tip of a shoe into the canal is inconceivable.

Around 2:15, a volunteer arrived with the keys. In some kind of European accent that I couldn't quite place, he asked whether we'd been waiting long. We shrugged. Leading us into the shed, he asked us to sign two-page waiver and handed over a simple map of the canal.

“The waiver's for—y'know...”

While I was bent over the multiple release forms with a pen, the volunteer brought my friend over to a nearby tree to show her a bird's nest. The whole scene felt like we were picking out flowers or some other domestic adornment. As I skimmed paragraph after paragraph of incomprehensible legalese, the guy kept telling both of us to “check out the babies” and “be careful of the mother bird.”

Finally, after a few more minutes of aimless, offbeat conversation with the guy, we were hauling out the boat and sliding it into the water.

“If you're doing a science project on the pollution, you might want to head north,” the volunteer informed us as we hunkered down in the canoe. “Very dirty there.”

“We're not doing a science project,” said my friend. “Look, we just want to get some good views.”

“Oh, just go the other way.” He gestured in the direction of Gowanus Bay, out of sight beyond the



multiple warehouses and barbed wire fences. “You know, the water gets a little cleaner and you can head out there around dusk. Bring a bottle of champagne and watch the sunset.”

“Maybe someday we’ll do that,” I said. “What do we do with the canoe when we’re done? Are you going to be here when we get back?”

“Oh, I’ll be here for hours.”



Named for Gowane, the sachem of the Canarsie tribe of the Lenape Indians, the Gowanus Canal is bordered by present-day Park Slope, Cobble Hill, Carroll Gardens, and Red Hook—straddled by some of Brooklyn’s most affluent neighborhoods as well as its most industrial.

Upon their initial purchase of the land near Gowanus Bay in 1636, Dutch settlers found a pristine tidal inlet surrounded by salt marshes and full of fish and oysters. Full-fledged commercialization began in the late 18th century, when the Colonial Assembly of New York enacted a law to widen the creek, fill in the surrounding marshes, and charge sailors for their passage.

Just over a century later, the Gowanus Canal had become Brooklyn’s largest coal distribution center and served as a local nexus for oil, dyes, bricks and stone. In 1910, one local businessman described the canal as “almost solid” with sewage and whatever else had found its way into the water.

After World War II, the construction of the Gowanus Expressway and the rise of commercial trucking led to dwindling use of the canal. Over one hundred years of unbridled industry began to take an obvious toll, with many referring to the canal as Brooklyn’s “Lavender Lake” for its noxious sheen.



A few days after the outing (thankfully), I read that the water’s green color in several spots is the result of algae feeding on human waste.

Indeed, the water goes through several color transformations as you paddle down the

canal, from cloudy, treated-looking white to deep sewage-brown and eventually a dark, murky blue on par with the East River once you’ve made it to the Gowanus Bay.

With that kind of gradual improvement, you might even delude yourself into thinking the canal has become clean enough to (just maybe) dip your hand in. However, a few lone egrets keeping ample distance from the water’s edge set the record straight.

Out in the bay, the factories, plants, and tanneries gave way to low-slung warehouses and shipping containers. The sky opened up in a way that you rarely see in Brooklyn.

As we paddled by a couple of moored barges, a light drizzle fell and we decided to turn around. On the way back to the access point, we passed several candy wrappers, tampons, a couple of boots, and a condom. We circled the condom twice before we were close enough to get a decent picture, because we needed proof of our journey along the River Styx.

The volunteer was there to meet us when we returned to the dock a few minutes later. A brown rat scurried past as we pulled the canoe up and disembarked, and we were handed wet wipes to clean our hands of the chemicals and sewage we’d inevitably picked up on the canal. ♦



Illustration by Angela Song

## Neighborhood Watch

*The blandification of Morningside Heights continues unabated*

BY DANIEL STONE

In the fall of 2008, an article appeared in these pages documenting the rise of chain stores in Morningside Heights (“The Chain Gang,” November 2008). Small independent businesses that lent character to the community were giving way to “chain outlets that you might find in Nolita or New Jersey, Staten Island or San Francisco.” The new businesses, which could afford higher rents, reflected the growth of an increasingly affluent community. Continued existence of the old independent businesses depended on goodwill from landlords, namely Columbia, and was ultimately uncertain.

Five years later, the trend continues unabated. Just this July, the storefront previously occupied by P&W Sandwich Shop, just south from the Hungarian Pastry Shop on Amsterdam Avenue, was filled by Insomnia Cookies.

The very location of Insomnia, which is part of a thirty-plus-store national chain, accentuates the contrast between the old and new. The stretch of Amsterdam from 111<sup>th</sup> Street south has very few chain stores, and has changed very little over the past decade. But most striking is the juxtaposition between the new shop and its next-door neighbors, V&T Pizza and Hungarian—some of the oldest establishments in Morningside Heights.

Hungarian even deals in the same goods as Insomnia. Certainly, their business models differ. Insomnia brings cookies to college students at absurdly late hours, while Hungarian is a café. As Hungarian’s owner Philip Binioris put it when asked, “they don’t serve coffee; they don’t serve tea; they don’t have seating.” Nonetheless, a corporate cookie chain now abuts an independent pastry shop.

Along Broadway, the newly opened stores have predominantly been chain branches. In 2011, a Crumbs cupcake shop opened on 109<sup>th</sup> Street, in the space of the old Sub Conscious. Five Guys, which owns more than 1500 stores nationwide, replaced both Jas Mart and the stationery store that had for decades occupied a storefront on Broadway between 110<sup>th</sup> and 111<sup>th</sup> streets. Mel’s Burger Bar, which opened in 2010, is owned by the people behind

Goodburger and Patsy’s pizza. Amigos, the Mexican restaurant that recently replaced Il Cibreo, is owned by “The Restaurant Group.” The Restaurant Group also owned IL Cibreo, and runs several restaurants and small chains.

Ever-increasing rents continue to pressure existing businesses to raise their prices and limit who can open stores. Businesses have some control over most of their expenses, but rent is an unavoidable fixed cost. Columbia, which owns much of the storefront property along Broadway, doesn’t have a particularly bad reputation as a landlord. Cathy Hawkins, co-owner of Liberty House on 112<sup>th</sup> Street and Broadway, whose landlord is Columbia, even says that the university “has been very supportive” and that she “feel[s] that they want [her] there.”

Frank Pappas, proprietor of Flowers by Valli on 112<sup>th</sup> Street and Broadway for forty years, says different. Flower by Valli is in a Columbia building, and Pappas has found that when rent goes up, “Columbia says ‘Too bad, what can we do? This is the going rate.’” And eventually, as Justin Faye, manager of Ivy League Stationers, observed, “You get to a point where the rent is just high.” Higher operating expenses pressure stores into raising prices.

Columbia’s own line on the topic has remained steady. In public statements, the university has repeatedly expressed a preference toward selecting commercial tenants for local and independent ownership and an effort to reflect the community’s needs. But another side of the party line is just which community’s needs the university is considering. As Binioris observed, “It’s not just the demographic, it’s the demographic they want to cater to.”

Indeed, few of the new businesses that have opened recently are known for their affordability. Ruth Eisenberg is a member of the neighborhood group Coalition to Preserve Community (CPC), which has opposed Columbia’s Manhattanville expansion over the past decade. She voiced a suspicion that recent years’ increase in Morningside food carts is due to the fact that “there are lots of students who can’t afford the food themselves.”



Unsurprisingly, as the first building of the new Manhattanville campus is completed, the area between 120<sup>th</sup> and 125<sup>th</sup> streets has increasingly become part of Columbia's sphere. Chain stores have not come to replace the stores along this stretch, so much as establishments that cater to the new younger and more affluent crowd. One such business is the noodle shop Jin Ramen, on Broadway off 125<sup>th</sup> Street, which opened in early 2012.

Richard Kashida, co-owner of the restaurant that on many nights is jam-packed, believes that Jin fills a previously existing void in the neighborhood's food offerings. Their decision to open the ramen shop was ideal "because of the student population," and because it was "something that the neighborhood didn't have access to."

"There's a need for change, I feel, and we are trying to bring better food to the neighborhood," he said. Kashida also considers the new wave of which he is a part an improvement to a previously dangerous area. "It's changing pretty quickly," he observed. Tom De Mott, another highly active member of CPC and longtime resident, chalks the shift up to the new demographic: "The new restaurants generally cater to younger people with more disposable income, not families."

Construction in Manhattanville began in earnest in late 2009. Today, the apartments and businesses that occupied the current construction site are long gone. In Eisenberg's view, "a community was shattered."

Floridita, the only business displaced by the Manhattanville construction to return, is the exception that proves the rule. The restaurant, which once stood at Broadway and 129<sup>th</sup> Street, now occupies a building on 12<sup>th</sup> Avenue and 125<sup>th</sup> Street. The old location was prime real estate; the new location sits next to a highway onramp and demands careful and deliberate street crossing. Owner Ramon Diaz, who considers himself "the last of the Mohicans," finds that the nature of his business has completely changed since he re-opened earlier this year.

Floridita's customer base was demolished along with its building. Diaz says that before he could depend on a constant stream of business from local workers, taxi drivers who used the gas station across the street, and truck drivers who went to 12<sup>th</sup> Avenue—"people who couldn't afford to spend 15 dollars on lunch and were in

too much of a hurry." Today, "it's not even a tenth of what it used to be." Even the many Columbia students who once went to Floridita do not come as they once did. The restaurant dropped out of student consciousness in the thirty-month period between its closure and reopening.

The movement to oppose Columbia's expansion plans has itself fundamentally changed in recent years. Preservation groups once hoped Columbia would work alongside community members in plotting the expansion, that the expansion would work around existing structures. When Columbia began moving forward with its expansion plans, which called for leveling a swath of several blocks, opposition centered on limiting the physical impact of the project. That opposition failed. Eminent domain was invoked to force land-owners who initially refused to sell to Columbia their land, and construction crews have razed large parts of the site.

The first Columbia building in Manhattanville, the Jerome Greene Science Center, is due to open in 2016. Seventeen years later, by which time today's incoming freshmen will be nearly in their forties, the new glass and steel campus should be completed. Already, the neighborhood to its south has markedly changed. That change shows few signs of abating.♦



Illustration by Angel Jiang

# No Sugarcoating

A conversation with Ta-Nehisi Coates

BY CLAIRE SABEL

*Ta-Nehisi Coates is a senior editor at The Atlantic, author of a memoir about growing up in Baltimore, and a Morningside local. In his book, he chronicles his own coming of age, and inheriting Consciousness from his father, a term he uses to mean a political and cultural awareness of of the black struggle in American history. Despite being a brilliant memoirist, Coates isn't much interested in talking about himself, or his reputation, as The Observer recently phrased it, as "the single best writer on the subject of race in the United States." Indifferent to labels, Coates instead describes himself as "profoundly interested in the force of racism in American history and in world history, the invention of racism, and how it exercises itself." Nostalgic for her own past as a senior editor of The Blue and White and an undergraduate history major, Claire Sabel, CC '13, met Coates in The Hungarian Pastry Shop to talk about past and present.*

*The Blue and White:* So you just wrapped up at MIT right? What were you doing there?

Ta-Nehisi Coates: I taught a class called "Writing and Reading the Essay," first semester, which was about, you know, writing [laughs], and second semester I taught the advanced essay workshop, which was just more writing.

*B&W:* Had you taught writing before?

TNC: Never.

*B&W:* So what was that like?

TNC: I loved it! Actually let me change that [previous answer], I had worked in this Americorps program many many years ago, when I was young, like 19, 20. So I had taught in prisons, Norton correctional facility with some older cats, I had done workshops for high school kids, and that was the extent of it. So no, not like academia. I liked it a lot. I mean, MIT's a little different, because they were really really hardworking, they were tough. In writing people talk too much about talent. I think talent is way fucking overrated. I should say it has

almost nothing to do with learning. I mean, plenty of talented writers don't ever become writers, and I think that toughness is much much more important, and I had a lot of tough kids there, and it made the job a lot easier. You know I had it easy, I really did.

*B&W:* Is it weird to be back in the other side of college having spent that long out of academia?

TNC: You mean having dropped out of college to now be teaching college? Yes.

*B&W:* What happened in between dropping out and becoming a recognized writer?

TNC: It's pretty easy, I just wrote and wrote and wrote. I dropped out of college because I loved writing, and I could not believe someone would pay me to write. I really just tried to look for as many opportunities as I could to do the writing that I wanted to do. I didn't have any other real skills, I wasn't good at much else [laughs], but that's cool because that focuses you. Other people have options, I had no other options.



Illustration by Leila Mgaloblishvili



The best advice I ever got, I was about 25, and I was applying for this fellowship at the New America Foundation, which I didn't get. But the guy that was in charge of it said something really remarkable to me. And he said, "Look, the whole thing is this game is to not get knocked out. If you can stay up, and you keep doing this, until you're in your mid-thirties, what you'll find is that being 25, there are a lot of people that are competing with you, there are a lot of people that want to be writers. But by the time you get to age 35, many of those people will have gone back to school: they'll have gone to get an MBA, they'll have gone to law school. They'll do something that is more financially rewarding." Because people that go into this tend to be fairly well-educated, and people tend to want to be rewarded for being well-educated. Which I mean is understandable. The beautiful thing is that I was not well-educated.

*B&W:* When did you become aware of the fact of your own story as something you wanted to share with people?

TNC: Well, I always had no problem writing anecdotes, and stuff like that from my life. I met with my editor in '03, and ... I have known him for 10 years, that is ridiculous ... woah! We started talking about my dad and he said there might be a book there. And I tried various iterations of it, and it wasn't coming together ... I had always wanted to be a rapper. It's really strange, this is like my pet peeve when people—the First Lady just did this—denigrate people for wanting to be a rapper. I wanted to be a rapper. What I loved was that these guys did these wonderful things with language, and I wanted to do that. I wanted to make people feel like I felt listening to Wu Tang, or Nas or whoever. I wasn't doing that in the early drafts of *A Beautiful Struggle*, and it really really upset me. And I kept trying and I kept doing it over again, until a hit upon a voice that I thought was newer and different and really communicated the spirit of the times.

*B&W:* Are there other writers you feel are trying to do similar things to what you're doing?

TNC: Well the master is Junot Díaz, I mean obviously. He's the best at that. He's probably the one I

think of the most actually.

*B&W:* You tend in your writing to give things labels, with proper nouns [he laughs], something like "The Horde" or "Consciousness."

TNC: It's always kind of funny. I mean it's almost always mocking the concept of labels in and of itself, you know. I think I got a little bit of that from Junot.

*B&W:* At least in *My Beautiful Struggle*, Consciousness is definitely a real thing, and it's important that it has a name, and it's a place that you get to.

TNC: Yes.

*B&W:* Do you still think about it in those terms? Do you still think of yourself as being Conscious?

TNC: All the time.

*B&W:* And do you think that what it means to be Conscious has changed, from growing up?

TNC: Yeah, from when I was kid, it was much more race-centered, African-American, Afro-centered. As an adult it's been much more about being a thinking person. What does it mean to be a thinking person? Which I think about all the time, which I think about quite a bit. What responsibilities do you have. How do you proceed, how do you hold yourself? Yeah, I think about that all the time.

*B&W:* Are you trying to impose some kind of Consciousness on your son?

TNC: No. I mean, I talk about ... no. Obviously I talk about being black, we have a big poster of Malcom X in the living room, but no, not too much.

*B&W:* How does your father interact with him? Is there a different generational thing going on?

TNC: See, the thing is, [my father] is going to be black in a way that I am not.

“Can any state  
ultimately be really  
reflective upon itself?  
I don't know.”

*B&W:* What do you mean by that?

TNC: Well, it changes. It changes. I didn't have the experiences my dad had. My son just won't have the experience that I had. We are aware people, so I guess there are a lot of conversations—I should change that—there are a lot of conversations in the house that he picks up on, so almost by osmosis, you know. I don't think it's as—he's 12—so he'll talk about things. So I know that he's aware of things. But it's much more passive, it's the air that surrounds him, whereas I think my parents were much more didactic.

*B&W:* There's a big difference in the ways we have a conversation about race between the interpersonal level, within a community, and then on a national level. And the way that we talk about race, especially at a national level, really doesn't have much to do with the actual issues.

TNC: We are not prepared, as a country. We just don't know enough.

*B&W:* Would you say that we just have to have more historical knowledge?

TNC: Yeah, I mean there's the time thing, and I think part of the problem with racism and with power in

general, is that power creates narratives to justify itself. So whenever you talk about race or black folks, people will often say to you, "Well, that's in the past so why don't we forget about it." But no one says, "Let's forget about George Washington"; no one says, "Let's forget about the American Revolution"; no one says, "Let's stop celebrating July 4<sup>th</sup>." So what you find is that power rigs the game to put itself in a certain place, and then pretends as though it didn't rig the game, rigs the history as though it didn't happen.

That sounds really abstract. To make that really real for you: I've been doing a lot of writing about the New Deal, and about the wealth gap. You ask most folks in this country, very few people will tell you that the American middle class as we know it, suburban, primarily white, is a government creation. People don't want to hear that, they think its dedication or hard work. I'm not saying it isn't, but without government intervention, it would not have happened, and the intervention that happened for white people was very different than the intervention that happened for black people. But we don't really know that. We like to think that the world we live in is reflective of some sort of deep natural something or other. It's somehow natural for Harlem to be a ghetto, it's natural for white people to want to live around white people and for black people to live around black people. You have

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to have a pretty entrenched ignorance of history to believe that.

*B&W:* Decisions were made to separate people.

*TNC:* That's right, for specific reasons. There was an interest being pursued, it was not random, it was not arbitrary; we are the way we chose to be. Half the problem is not that the game is rigged, but getting people to face the history of the rigging. So we're not really prepared for any sort of conversation about race, and on racism, which is really where the conversation needs to happen.

*B&W:* So how do we go about getting better prepared?

*TNC:* I don't know. People may need to feel good about a state. We're at a point where we can say, "Slavery was wrong," right? Well that's because everyone who held slaves has been long, long dead. Can we say there were racist aspects to the New Deal? Let me go further: Can we say that white supremacy made the New Deal possible? Probably not. Because the New Deal is within living memory of this country, so that gets harder. You get into existential questions about the nature of a republic. Can any state ultimately be really reflective upon itself? I don't know. Absent some great military defeat—I mean I'm thinking about Germany.

*B&W:* One of the things that people my age, which is not that much younger, but a bit younger than you, haven't figured out how to deal with yet, is the social movements of the '60s. In some ways they feel very close to me. Civil rights, gay rights, women's rights are intuitive, they don't seem radical. I can understand how at the time it was radical, but it's also far enough away that it doesn't really touch me, I wasn't personally involved. It was a generation away, and there's a lot of complacency that comes with that.

*TNC:* I think something horrible has to happen.

Activists in the '60s, they weren't better people. There wasn't something in their bones that made them more determined or better. They were determined by conditions: World War Two happened, and raised profound questions of inequality. You were talking about the massacre of 90% of an ethnic group, based on what? We fought against the people that tried to do that—not because they tried to do that, by the way—but because they were our enemies. That creates profound questions within a society that's tolerating white supremacy, that's tolerating systemic sexism. But what I'm trying to say is, actual events happened that made that happen, but people weren't any better. It was just in a different time. When people are complacent, it's for reasons.

*B&W:* People talk about Twitter activism, things that make you feel like you are reacting to the bad things, but in this way that is totally comfortable. That seems like a definitive trajectory, that the bad things are getting more and more removed, from Americans, at least.

*TNC:* I assure you that's temporary. I assure you that will change.

*B&W:* You don't sound that optimistic about the future in general.

*TNC:* I don't know. How can you be optimistic? I mean, you hope for the best. But the worst probably happens. At the end we all die, we know that [laughs]. You know about the Civil War right? The North didn't launch a war to free black people, the South went to war to protect slavery. It's the same with World War Two. We didn't go to war to save the Jews, we got bombed by Japan. And I'm not saying that America's particularly worse than anyone else. Did you guys do a lot on the 30 Years War? There's this great book by this historian C.V. Wedgwood, called *The 30 Years War*, have you seen this? It's fucking incredible, I mean just like a novel, but it's history, beautiful, you'll love it. It's a beautiful read.

They're fighting over nothing, they're butchering each other. At the end of the book, she says the 30 Years War solved no problems, basically the poor and the lowest suffered the worst, it did nothing. They were descending literally into cannibalism. It's very hard to be optimistic. I'm not cynical, I love being alive, I love human beings, but ... you hope. I guess there are ideas that are around today that weren't around before: the notion of women's rights actually does exist. There have been changes that will liberate history for the better, maybe. I live in hope that it will be better.

*B&W:* That's why I love history. It facilitates, and provides context for, being hopeful, while not being optimistic.

*TNC:* Yeah. At the same time, though, it's like, racism is a modern invention. I mean racism as we know it today; there have always been concepts of race. People thought all sorts of things about people who were different than them, but the notion that it was concluded that there was this thing called "whiteness"; that having straight hair, or certain eyes equated intelligence. People don't even think that in the early days of the colony of Virginia. Our phobias around interracial sex, these are modern inventions. And that is scary.

*B&W:* And history shows that in a really stark, clear way. I love Barbara Fields formulation of that, which is "it's weird."

*TNC:* It really is.

*B&W:* It's a terrain of thinking that you can take a step back from, and say, "This doesn't make any sense."

*TNC:* Right, right, right. If you think history began with the slave trade, then, yes, it makes sense. But you talk to people and they think, like, race is natural. It's ridiculous! It's absolutely ridiculous. And it's as though black people and white people had never

encountered each other before the slave trade—what we call black people and white people. And it's like, what? Do you know that the Portuguese had been there, that the Moors had been there, that the Arabs had been there, that the Arabs had encountered black people in 700? Do you know anything about this at all? The answer is no. Even if you say, in American history, did you know that black people and white people were sleeping together in the early days of Virginia and it was not considered bizarre? It happened after laws were passed, and laws were passed for reasons of property. This is what I mean about power creating its own science and ideology to justify itself. You're right, Barbara Fields is great on that. But we don't get that, and we don't want to get that, because it would create terrible problems for us. We would immediately figure out that if this world isn't natural, that means somebody changed it, and made it this way, and thus we have the ability to change it back.

**“Activists in the '60s, they weren't better people. There wasn't something in their bones that made them more determined or better. They were determined by conditions.”**

*B&W:* And nobody wants to be accountable.

*TNC:* No, because then not only can we change it back, but we kind of have to: it would make it morally right for us to change it back. Which is scary. So, like, if that's the case, then what? What does that mean? If there's nothing particularly special about it, then racism, the hatred of somebody based on the creation of a race is not special—fuck, that's scary, that's really, really scary. The Civil War really brought that home to me. You really start getting to what would make people do that sort of thing, you get to what slavery represented, and that is power. Again, it's always power. It's not just, 'I hate you because you're darker than me,' but why? What does that justify, what's behind that, what are you getting out of that? And you get to these questions of power, so that's been really profound to me.

*B&W:* So are you writing, history? What are you writing?

*TNC:* We'll see. That's probably the best answer I can give you.♦

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# DIGITALIA COLUMBIANA

These excerpts were culled from documents left on Columbia's lab computers. We encourage our readers to submit their own digitalia finds to us, via email, at [bwgossip@columbia.edu](mailto:bwgossip@columbia.edu).

“Only in the past century have we seen English spelling standardized. Fear of spelling incorrectly inhibits young students from taking literary risks. Many teachers I talk to observe students lose their grasp of grammatically correct English as their spelling abilities improve.”

Mr. Miller's friend, Professor William Thornton of Mildwell College Cambridge, an associate editor of the Oxford English Dictionary and expert on the history of the gerund in Babylonian societies, takes a longer view. He says that six hundred years ago, when the language was invented by scholars in what is now Turkey, the notion that the language could be formalized would have been considered absurd. It was concocted as a gift to the blabbering barbarians of England that would permit them to understand one another. English was devised to be, as he put it, “a one-size fits all germanic solution with a bit of latin thrown in” that should be tailored constantly. Today, the language has lost its adaptability. The “new words” are but rearrangements of the old. “We have,” he concluded, “strapped on a linguistic straight jacket.”

Yet many say that Mr. Miller is on the wrong path. Eugene Flint, CEO of the famed communications firm Interconnect Inc., considers standardized spellings essential to a global economy. “Sure Larry and I might be able to understand each other if we spell like it sounds, but how about Fritz in Mexico? His accent might lead him to spell in completely different ways. Standardized spellings permit those who know English to communicate around the world. If we get rid of them, we'll soon be speaking Chinese!”....

Class II: Shaken Drinks:  
Singapore Sling  
Long Island Iced Tea  
Mongolian Motherfucker [cross between a Long Island and an Alabama Slammer]

surrounded by such a diverse culture and atmosphere made me more aware of my surroundings as i didn't want to miss anything at all. not being in a regular atmosphere pushed me to try new food, and not just the usual start bucks.

4. NEW CONCEPT. HEADLINE: “It's a LITTLE Secret” that makes me glow all day.

In the “Rape of Lock” by Alexander Pope, many figures of speech abound, lending it to being a sublime work of poetry. Anaphoras, for one, abound.

The American Dream is more about spiritual happiness than just a professional success. The real value of the dream is related to BE and not TO HAVE. On the other hand, I have a big concern in what the American Dream will be for the future generations given the poor personal values that are seen around the world.

I think, no matter how long does a person work, how experienced a person is, these values should always be with the person for his or her career, business and customers. And I think commitment and integrity is more important than other two values. Because it's about the nature and personality of the person. It's hard to change or pretend. But people can become knowledgeable and professional after learning and gaining experience. So that's why I want to work with Kinsey capital because I want to become a knowledgeable and professional person with integrity.

If it is “necessary” (to be defined later) an ambulance will be directed to the phones location using GPS. This APP is unique in that it is the only one of its kind to offer all these amenities with the luxury and security of letting one know that their health is always being monitored.♦



## CAMPUS GOSSIP

This summer, for only \$7,686 in tuition, fees, room, and board, high school juniors and seniors got two weeks of the full Columbia experience with non-credit courses like, “Why Are Poor Countries Poor?” Budding global scholars were advised by Columbia to “have access to a minimum of \$900” in walking-around money.

### TECHNOLOGIC

The [columbia.edu](http://columbia.edu) homepage of Edward Mendelson, Lionel Trilling Professor in the Humanities and contributing editor at PC Magazine, features a QR code at center bottom. Translated, the barcode imparts the following quotation from Virginia Woolf's Jacobs Room: “Whether we gain or not by this habit of profuse communication it is not for us to say.”

On the selfsame homepage is Mendelson's self-written guide entitled: “How to Bounce Lowercase-Only E-Mail Messages on the Columbia University Mail System (obsolete since 2006).”

### DO YOU HAVE THAT ON TAP?

Tim, celebrated 1020 bartender, has a part in Tony n' Tina's Wedding. He reportedly “plays a drunken, horny priest,” a role which he originated.

One curious *B&W* reporter tried looking into how NSOP was organized. But he was stonewalled: every NSOP organizing committee member had signed a non-disclosure agreement.

Possibly related is the fact that on June 7, Interim Dean of Students Terry Martinez announced to student leaders that Cynthia Jennings, Director of New Student Orientation and Class Year Programs, would be “explor[ing] other opportunities,” i.e. ones not at Columbia.

### STOCKHOLM SYNDROME

Over the summer, multiple members of the Class of 2013 were spotted skulking around Butler Library.

### A HOUSE DIVIDED

Sources say that The Dark Hand of specsucks and a former managing editor of the *Columbia Daily Spectator* are “kind of sort of dating.”

### SUBSCRIBE TO THIS CHANNEL

On July 18, Columbia Athletics uploaded a video to YouTube, featuring what several athletes told the *B&W* is the big athletics joke of the summer: “Columbia Football 2013 Uniforms.” To put it politely: many manly bulges are involved.

One particularly observant athlete with a quantitative bent explained that out of the video's 1:16 runtime, “17 seconds were crotch shots of #91 alone, more than 20% of the video, not including other players' crotch shots.” She added, “and the whole thing is set to, like, really bad porn music.” (A quick look at the video's description alerts us that it is, in fact, an acoustic cover of Drake's “Fear.”)

### THE TWO CULTURES

Until late this summer, James Shapiro's listed title in CUIT's directory was the “Larry Miller Professor of English and Comparitive [sic] Literature.” An editor-turned-Good Samaritan notified CUIT, who, after confirming that the title was spelt “Larry Miller Professor of English and Comparative Literature,” made the fix.

Orientation...it only comes once a year!♦





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