THIS IS NOT YOUR BRAIN ON DRUGS
Why Columbia Feeds Crack Habits in the Name of Science
By Jessica Cohen

THE WONDER YEAR
You Think You Know, But You Have No Idea: Life on John Jay 5
By Anna Phillips

ZEN AND THE ART OF ACADEMIA: A CONVERSATION WITH ROBERT THURMAN

ALSO: CAMPUS DRUG DEALING, 80S FANTASY MOVIES, MARY GORDON
All Hallow’s Eve: night of ancient rites and ripped fishnets. For the Celts of yore, it was a liminal season for nocturnal ancestor worship and communion with the spirit world. For Columbia students, it’s a time to shed the daily armor of Girl Talk and Goethe; to trade the “I roll out of bed with this hair” costumes in for real ones. And to gawk at the family in the Village parade dressed as sushi rolls and chopsticks.

Thus, in the spirit of the season, The Blue and White’s October issue is replete with tricks and treats—kick back with a fun-sized Snickers and enjoy.

Maintaining the pagan tradition of idol worship, Andrew Flynn sat down with Professor Robert Thurman, the Jeffrey Sachs of Eastern thought, to hear his musings on Germans, Christopher Hitchens, and the Core (p. 32). And from the gothic to the genuinely creepy, our series of articles on drugs (p. 16) sheds light on Columbia’s grittier side—and just may scare you straight. Jessica Cohen’s stranger-than-fiction account of our own uptown drug lab is sure to send chills down your spine. And from Katie Reedy’s chronicle of on-campus dealing, learn how your classmates are making bank by pushing powder of the non-Pixie Stick variety.

Ah, Halloween at Columbia—charade, masquerade, midterms, orange jello shots. And a bit of advice for the uninspired: if you can’t think of a costume for your ADP/Hogan Suite/internship office party, wear whatever you want and tell people you’re Walter Benjamin. It’s a name everyone knows they should know, but no one has any clue what he looks like, and they won’t want to admit their ignorance.

—Taylor Walsh
Editor-in-Chief
REVELATION OF THE MONTH

Newly nominated US Attorney General, the Honorable Michael Mukasey—replacement of Alberto “What Wiretapping?” Gonzalez—is a proud Columbia College alumnus, class of 1963. What’s more, a recent article in *The Politico* has identified him as a member of the Senior Society of Sachems, those of the diamond-spangled pinky rings. According to the article, Mukasey has no comments regarding his past shenanigans.

The Sachems presumably have no comment regarding the fact that a Google search for the word “Sachem” only returns 54 hits, while “Mukasey + incompetent” comes in at a healthy 28,600.

AUTUMN TIDE

ACROSS

1. Small groups of likeminded weirdos
4. “I just hope _____ will be better.”
7. The sleepy enzyme
8. Unpleasantries that last from September to December
9. What trees do in the tree-spa

DOWN

1. California kids get such a kick out of it
2. A fowl consumed with family
3. Colloquial term for the pool outside our student center
5. The delicious substance of pumpkins
6. A melanin-related byproduct of global warming

Find last month’s crossword answers online at www.bwog.net.

COME AGAIN…?

“Instead of writing a post-9/11 book like several hundred others have, I embarked on a gathering. Now I wish to sell it. I love my work, but I earn only audio-video tech wages.”

— Columbia Medical Center videographer Michael Ragsdale, criticized on Bloomberg.com for marketing press releases, cards, flyers and about 3,000 homemade posters gathered from makeshift memorial sites in the aftermath of the World Trade Center bombings.

Bluebook compiled by Katie Reedy, Juli N. Weiner, and James R. Williams; Illustrations by Allison A. Haff

October 2007
The specter of absinthe is haunting midtown. One hundred years since its initial ban and 15 years after its European re-legalization, the drink is experiencing a North American re-birth. As they say, absinthe makes the heart grow fonder.

*Artemisia absinthium* is an herbaceous perennial plant that thrives in rocky soil and uncultivated areas. Absinthe is the anise-flavored spirit created from the plant, blossoming in only the most cultivated of milieus. In 19th century Paris, amidst the pre-natal heartbeat of modernity, absinthe was the preferred drink of French literary and intellectual circles: Toulouse-Lautrec and Manet personified its purported—in fact, falsified—hallucinogenic side effects in their paintings of small green fairies taunting drunk café-dwellers.

At the turn of the twentieth century, government officials became nervous about its narcotic quality, and most European countries banned the drink. In late September, 2007, however, *The New York Times* proclaimed Manhattan the center of the absinthe renaissance.

Amalia, a laughably trendy 55th Street restaurant, is at the forefront of the resurgence. Their Artemisia Cocktail contains absinthe, Citronac, Metaxxa 5-Star, and Calvados. The drink is pale yellow, like a cheap beer poured into a glass you didn’t realize was already full of water. It tastes like stale black licorice (the Metaxxa) and water (the melted ice). Last week, I took on its challenge, but the frequently employed method for drinking the undrinkable—sipping quickly through the stirring straw—ultimately proved futile. I found myself chasing the alcohol with my own saliva. There were no noticeable narcotic effects aside from the $15 bill I received, which could only be explained as an absinthe-induced hallucination.

Thrill-seekers and francophiles will have to get their phantasmagoric fix elsewhere—perhaps in paintings of the wormwood-worshipping Impressionists. For New Yorkers searching for a sip of romanticized history in drink-form, Amalia serves an excellent Manhattan.

—Juli N. Weiner

Every morning except Sundays, suburbanites from all reaches of the tri-state area arriving at their jobs in Morningside Heights pull into the coveted metered parking spaces on 120th Street between Broadway and Amsterdam. The spots aren’t legal until 8am, so early-risers sit in their cars, reading the paper, tapping at their laptops, and waiting.
Those who’ve claimed their spots must stay alert and on the lookout for cops-in-a-box brandish their leather-bound ticket books.

For a parking spot with a six-hour meter, it’s worth it. Frequent parker Patricia, of Queens, says even the meter maid can’t keep her from her plot of Manhattan real estate. “When she comes, we leave the spot and find another...we just circle and circle until she leaves.”

Near 8 A.M., the New York Department of Sanitation’s street cleaning vehicle commences an intricate vehicular dance. The prima ballerina poses at the top of the hill and as she begins her approach, each parked car, one by one, peels away from the curb and makes way. The bulky machine whirrs her way by the cars in a cloud of dust and exhaust, allowing them to return to their spots once she has passed. In an encore, the danseuse noble turns around, and the angled cars on the other side of the street depart from the curb like un corps de ballet.

Around the corner on Amsterdam, an elite group of high-level faculty members pull into one of 111 reserved spots two garage levels beneath the Computer Science building. Joseph Ienuso, Executive Vice-President for University Facilities, exits his black sedan on the top level, completely unaware of the choreography that has just occurred—a piece of performance art with a cast of Fords, Nissans, and Pontiacs.

— Sara Vogel

Palestrina? A Renaissance composer, sure—but for my strategy to work, all Renaissance composers would need to be named Palestrina. I was grasping. This was the last Music Hum exemption test I could ever take.

Actually, every Music Hum exemption test is the last Music Hum exemption test you can ever take. Under the policy as it has stood for the past few years, you are allowed to try your hand once, and only once, in your Columbia career. I just happened to procrastinate for three years. And with enough Wikipedia, I passed.

New freshmen will never experience this dilemma. Due to a recent policy change, the test will only be given in the first week of your first year at Columbia. In other words, if you are a first-year and you have no idea what I am talking about, you have no choice but to take Music Hum.

This is probably a good idea. Music Hum is the only Core course for which such an exemption exam exists, and for good reason. Gung-ho music majors who have been playing piano for as long as they can remember and know Schoenberg inside out—or, in my case, amateur oboists whose schooling just happened to include two years of music history—do not need to take an introductory course in music appreciation. “This doesn’t mean that music shouldn’t be a part of the core curriculum,” qualified Professor Walter Frisch, who chairs Music Humanities. “It’s an invitation to take a more advanced class—on jazz, on the symphony, on opera.”

Many, however, have not been getting that message. Last year, Frisch and other members of the Committee on the Core Curriculum decided that the test was being abused—mostly by people like me, except with less experience and more Wikipedia. “We thought that the test was not being taken in the right spirit,” he told me. “It really should be based on knowledge you’re coming in with.”

For some future Columbians, this does not bode well. But for me—well, I can’t help but feel a certain satisfaction at the fact that I beat the system just before it could beat me. So, dear sirs, group me with your narwhals and your spotted leopards. I am the dilettante symphoniaphile. I’ve completed only three-quarters of the Core’s core, and I will gladly pretend to discuss Steve Reich and Charles Ives anytime you like.

To those green 2012ers who dare to follow in my footsteps, a word of advice: be sure to review the Tristan chord.

— Andrew Flynn

Illustrations by Alexandra Voûte
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 e-mail at theblueandwhite@columbia.edu.

Jonathan Alonzo Rios

“What do Germans think when they think of bread?” Alonzo digresses from an erudite defense of poetry from the ravages of philosophy, aided by the words of Walter Benjamin on *pain* and *brot.* “I don’t think I’ve ever gone out and just said to myself, ‘I think I’m going to have some German bread today.’ I’ve said, ‘I’m going to have a baguette,’ and it’s worked out quite nicely. But German bread...”

This is Jonathan Alonzo Rios, CC ’09—though he answers simply to Alonzo, due to both Hispanic heritage and grammar school confusions with five other Jonathans. When he says “Ah-lon-zoh,” most think he’s English, or perhaps a poseur English major, but the accent is all his own, the anomalous result of a bilingual upbringing. The name, however, is a relative pittance: Alonzo is a man to be known by sight, to be picked out from a distance by his gait—an easy trot, often supported by a cane for an undiagnosed knee ailment—and his dress. Alonzo favors the obscure and the refined: crème-colored fedoras, gold pocket watches, suspenders. In cold weather, his stout frame is draped in black trench coat, his neck wrapped tightly in a wool scarf. When he smokes, which he quite likes to do, his Nat Sherman is frequently wedged in a cigarette holder, bobbing between his faint moustache and slight goatee, kept afloat by a tight, sly grin.

But don’t let looks deceive you. To know Alonzo is to know the roles of Alonzo: gracious host, Muslim seeker, language-dabbler, painter, thinker, to-be-writer, night-walker, and, most of all, constant reader. Upon entering his 191st Street apartment, one must take off one’s shoes before padding down the oriental-carpeted hallway to Alonzo’s study, a room spacious enough for a sofa, a writing desk, and almost all of the classics of Western and Islamic literature, most in their original languages. (Alonzo’s bathroom reading includes Rousseau, Montaigne, and the Iliad in German—“to remind me I should be learning my German.”)

“Assume I haven’t read the books. I’m a terrible reader. But I have great faith in reading.” He gestures to a darkened adjacent room filled with luggage. “Poncho puts me to shame.” Here lives his roommate, a high school dropout who has befriended theoretical architect Peter Eisenman and is attempting to ace the SAT under Alonzo’s tutelage. Alonzo shakes his head: “I’m a terrible tutor.”

Raised Catholic by traditionally religious Colombian immigrants, Alonzo was originally devout. “If I had remained Catholic, I would have considered the priesthood,” he explains. Instead, he experienced a robust intellectual conversion in high school that puts the punk teenage atheist stereotype to shame. “The Trinity”—his brow furrows, remembering thorny theological wrangling of years gone by. “I didn’t buy it.” Now, the Islamic convert places a fruit plate in front of me and offers me hookah as he begins to recount his most recent quest—the year he intended to spend abroad in Turkey learning Arabic, Persian, and Turkish, the languages he thought would lead him to wisdom.

After a whirlwind romance with a red-haired anarchist and a growing paranoia (“I would see meaning in the patterns of the garbage on the street”), Alonzo arranged, via a community of Turkish immigrants living in his hometown, to go to Turkey and study languages. But, when he arrived, it was all a bust.
There was no way to study language, no one to teach him Arabic. He returned two months later and holed himself up in his room to read the Qur'an and Kant's Critique of Pure Reason.

Six months ago, he would have worn a turban, but now Alonzo is feeling the need to be a bit more social and a bit less introspective. "I know it sounds trite," he nods, "but I've truly convinced myself that when you find God, God is not the answer. God is the question."

In a momentary revelation of the spiritual limits of a well-stocked library, Alonzo begins to pace, shakes his head, and takes another drag of his cigarette. "I don't do anything," he laughs.

—Andrew Flynn

LINDSEY LAZOPoulos

Lindsey Lazopoulos, CC '08, is an RA in Hogan for a group of upperclassmen who avoid floor meetings like the plague. She is a cheerleader—literally—for teams that are infamous in the annals of NCAA history. As CCSC Vice President of Campus Life, she is in charge of campus events for an undergraduate population that widely prides itself on its disdain for campus events. Lindsay is an overachiever, but her heart bleeds for the underdog.

Bearing school spirit at Columbia is hard, and Lindsay has the scars to prove it. In her three years as a cheerleader, she has had the skin torn from her arm, the gum torn from her lower jaw, a tooth knocked loose, and her nose broken twice—-injuries perhaps even more painful than actually attending a football game.

"I get so mad when people say stuff like that," Lindsey said. "I even see tour guides telling their tours, 'Our football team is just awful and everyone talks about how bad they are... and I'll shout out to the tour, 'Don't listen to them! We're doing really well. We were .500 last year! Our new coach is great!'" Because the cheerleading squad only attends home games, Lindsey joined the Columbia Marching Band, a group that does travel with the team, in order to maximize her cheering quota: "Full member, initiated and everything." You might have seen her playing a fierce triangle in Cambridge or New Haven.

This enthusiasm carries over to everything Lindsey does. "If I say I'll commit, I'm 100% committed," she said. But it seems that this same 100% commitment applies even when she is ostensibly not committed. The two-time high school class president thought she had had her fill of student council when she arrived at Columbia, so she was "just a class representative" her freshman year. But the position quickly snowballed into those of greater and greater responsibility, and eventually, Lindsey found herself at the heights of student government.

I asked if it was her impressive work ethic or her scads of friends and supporters that propelled her to the top. She demurred: "I have a hard time saying no. And I love Columbia."

"I fell in love with this place immediately. Even now, when I walk by Butler at night and it's lit up, it takes my breath away. But, it's true, there are aspects of the school I wasn't fully aware of going in, like the campus spirit. Also, I checked the male/female ratio, and that was pretty exciting—but then I forgot to take Barnard into my calculations."

Lindsey's schedule, besides the aforementioned activities and a major in history, also includes community service, working part time at a law firm, and what one friend referred to as "an extensive partying history."

"I am inclined to go out most weekend nights," Lindsey said, "and I do include Thursday in that." She hosted the legendary Carman "Pimps and Hos" party her freshman year, around the same time that Playboy's website published a photo of her—fully clothed, mind you. "Playboy was doing a write-up of the West End, and there I was with a glass of wine, a freshman, going 'Go, 'Stend!'"

The unusually lavish Homecoming Week festivities we just enjoyed were largely her doing. If you didn't take part—try it next time! Lindsey promises it will be worth it.

—Paul Barnard

October 2007
The Wonder Year

You think you know, but you have no idea: life on John Jay 5.
BY ANNA PHILLIPS

Every freshman floor has its mythology—a pantheon of characters both noble and base that comes to define one year’s worth of life.

Three years ago, on John Jay 5, one such character made his drunken way up four flights of stairs to the 9th floor, where he poured what he described as “a limited amount” of urine onto the floor outside of the RA’s door. It was an intoxicated act of revenge, prompted by the RA’s earlier discovery that this character had been drinking in a friend’s room, an act that, due in part to the offending stench it produced, became legendary throughout the building. Not surprisingly, the offender describes this incident, for which he is still on housing probation, as regrettable and a real “low moment.”

The point of this is not to embarrass the one-time criminal. Nearly everyone does things freshman year that they regret and many describe the entire year as a low moment. At its best, freshman year is a tragicomedy—a two act play riddled with intoxication and formulated, quite often, as an assault on one’s former identity. The dream that one’s college self will be so supremely cool that it would have stuffed one’s high school self in a locker is a relatively common (and unfulfilled) fantasy. Freshman year is like no other year of your life.

This is the story of one floor—John Jay 5, 2004-2005—“the floor that everyone at Columbia loved,” its Facebook group decrees. Of course, not everyone loved it, and not everyone on it was loved. John Jay 5 was a unique floor that year, though it never acquired the mythic status of those floors that precociously evolve into drug dens or bordellos, infamous even in the darker corners of Hartley/Wallach where gossip rarely reaches. The fifth floor was never that sinister, but it is one of three floors in John Jay remembered by this year’s seniors as a social destination.

“John Jay 5 was known for being very open—people on that floor just meshed well. There were three or four awkward people, but they were pretty nice,” said Calvin Sun, CC ’08, of room 504.

The denizens of JJ5 were an interesting crowd, to be sure. Many of them took alternate routes, both getting to college and getting through it. As you’ll see by their years, a handful of them are now juniors, and one a sophomore, as the rest of their hallmates prepare to graduate. Among them are the president of the Columbia Political Union, the former president of LionPac, the former president of Columbia’s BDSM...
TABLEAU VIVANT

Club Conversio Virium (a hallmate referred to her as "Kurt Cobain girl"), Calvin Sun in all of his manifestations, the Treasurer of the Senior Class, a Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu enthusiast, five rowers (two lightweights, three heavyweights, the distinction matters), and the literary editor of this esteemed publication.

"We had a great floor... I felt as if we were a fairly tight knit group," said Colin Kirits, CC '08. Over the course of interviewing 13 of Colin's 44 hallmates, more than half echoed this sentiment. Others were more guarded with their enthusiasm, or denied it altogether.

"I really don't have fond memories of my freshman year floor," said Ashby Hardesty, CC '08. "I kind of bonded with the people who weren't bonding together."

Regardless of who bonded with whom, a general air of camaraderie persisted. People kept their doors open and wandered in and out of each other's rooms. They studied together and smoked together, and some of them slept together.

All of this sounds quite ordinary, and it is—for freshmen dorms. Wien is nearly identical to John Jay in room design and spatial arrangement, but floor life in Wien—if it can even be called that—differs entirely because freshmen don't live there. As mostly sophomores and juniors, Wien residents don't expect to meet people or make friends. They nod to each other in the halls, but they don't know each other's names. Nearly everyone I spoke with acknowledged that freshman year on John Jay 5 was a unique social experience and one that would never be repeated.

"I had a good time because everyone was very open to meeting other people. That hasn't really happened ever since freshman year," said Kenneth Tong, CC '08.

Evan Sholle, CC '08 agreed. "I've never been that happy and I don't think I will be again. It was really a time when everything seemed laid out in front of me. There was an overwhelming array of choices."

"Everybody remembers things about their freshman year differently," said Sam Scioscia, CC '09, a former JJ5 resident. He's right—if siblings are known to conjure wildly different visions of the same family life, one can only imagine the discrepancies between how residents of the same floor remember their collectively distant past. For some, it was a great year; others kept transfer applications next to their Lit Hum books. One girl did transfer, to the University of Virginia, because she didn't find Columbia's social scene and academics remarkable enough to warrant the oppressive costs.

Sam falls somewhere in the middle. He and I live on the same floor now and he distinguishes himself as the only person to have bothered with door decorations, including a magazine cutout of a blonde girl wearing tight, yellow shorts and staring brazenly at passersby. Sam circled the model's crotch and wrote "Exhibit A: cameltoe" in black marker. "Great," I thought before entering the room, "someone obviously never left John Jay 5."

But like any brash judgment, mine doesn't do Sam justice. Sam came to college as a swimmer, thinking he'd renounce his pot-smoking ways and lead a clean, straight life. But college, especially freshman year, rarely leads people to that effect.

It certainly didn't have that effect on the floor as a whole. Exhibit A: The Abyss. Sholle's room, 516, was called The Abyss—an apt name for the home of Evan's "bongtropolis," a bookshelf of conquered liquor?
bottles, and the central site of hedonistic self-sabotage. It was Ibiza and Amsterdam in one. As relaxed as Abyss culture was, it was also, like all illicit freshman activity, supremely self-conscious. Even Abyss regulars weren’t particularly casual about the experience. For each bowl they smoked, they made a mark on the wall. In a few months’ time, the marks had encircled the room.

Even though there was a core group of just five to ten JJ5ers who regularly hung out in the Abyss, everyone on the floor remembers the room. The less time the person spent in the room, the more fantastical the recollection. “The Abyss was legendary,” said Tong. “I went inside like once, maybe.”

In theory, John Jay 5’s RA, who has long since graduated, should have noticed that smoke and mischief were seeping out of Sholle’s room. She did, but rather than hold this discovery against her charges, she chose to smoke with and even buy weed from them. The RA, who could not be reached for an interview, was not so buddy-buddy with other floors. Petite for her advanced years and often confused for a first-year, she was known to enter freshman parties while on duty, help herself to beer, then shed her disguise and write everyone up. Almost every JJ 5 guy I spoke with admitted to having a crush on her.

Another quintessentially freshman milieu is the cigarette scene outside John Jay. Because cigarettes are unassailably cool, Lizzy Smith, CC ’08, came to college an occasional smoker and turned it into a full-blown habit she has since kicked. Freshman year “was a confused mess,” she said. “There was the cigarette smoking and the bumming and the sharing...It felt very grown up. I thought, ‘This can be my habit.’” Smith joined others on the floor who felt similarly, and her evenings were marked by a smattering of cigarette breaks with people who will graduate as they matriculated, nonsmokers.

For some, it didn’t stop at cigarettes or weed. At least two people on the floor became heavily involved in drugs. Between them, they covered the regrettable grounds of ecstasy, DXM, cocaine, oxycodone, and heroin. Plus Adderall, of course.

Sam bears the mark of it. On his left heel, the word “Thizzlam” is tattooed in a lilting, cursive scrawl. Thizzlam is a Mac Dre term for those who use ecstasy, “thizz” being a Bay Area term for the drug. “I kind of fell off the horse,” he said. He fell fast and far enough that he left school for part of his junior year, an experience which he said changed him completely.

Of Romance and Floorcest

Of course, drugs weren’t the only temptations. “One of the biggest bonding experiences on John Jay 5 was listening to exceptionally loud sex,” said Alastair Shearman, SEAS ’08. “It got everybody into the halls, laughing and talking.” To clarify: it wasn’t that people on John Jay 5 were abnormally sexually aggressive—all of this noise came from one room and one person. And the loud sex didn’t only titillate the residents on that floor—defectors and visitors from other floors remember it too.

If freshman year is a ridiculous period of one’s life, the relationships it engenders are often an integral component of the absurdity. Smith remembers a freshman-year boyfriend whom everyone on the floor referred to (behind her back) as Rasputin. Rasputin played the violin and was a General Studies student. “I knew he was completely bad news,” Smith said, beginning to laugh. “I thought he was mysterious.” As it turned out, there were quite a few other girls wrapped in Rasputin’s mystique—Smith remembers watching him exit John Jay after spending time with her, only to see him from her window holding hands with someone else. Like most freshman year relationships, “it was an interesting experience,” Smith said. She can laugh about it now because she began dating her Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu instructor that same year, and they’re still happily together.

Fall semester of that year, Calvin Sun dated three girls sequentially—one girl from high school, one girl from John Jay 9, and one from Carman 13. During my interview with him, Sun referred to all the girls he’d dated over the last three years by their buildings and floor numbers (he could do this even for the girls he only hooked up with). After his breakup with Carman 13, whom he dated for six weeks, he was devastated. “People in John Jay were there for me,
they stayed up with me all night, and I would do that for them,” he said.

If Sun and Smith’s various entanglements sound extravagant, it’s because few freshman successfully date. Examples of floorcest do arise, but they sound about as awkward in the telling as they probably were in the doing. On John Jay 5, Shearman and Morgan Robinson, CC ’08 dated for almost a year, and broke up in the fall of sophomore year. “Getting together, it was very gradual,” Shearman said. Then sophomore year, the pair “just sort of drifted apart.” Usually, freshman year romance is too site-specific to survive anywhere else. This was certainly true of one John Jay 5-er who had a brief affair with the RA. It was so contained, so isolated, that to this day few on the floor know about it.

In a way, the residents of JJ5 were ripe for romance. As freshman, they were incredibly optimistic and naïve—even the few who felt jaded and unimpressed by college at the time realize, three years later, exactly how innocent they were. But while that space was a perfect incubator for intense but brief romantic relationships, what have lasted are the friendships that formed—especially those based on mutual dislike of the rest of the floor. “Looking back, a lot of my friends came from John Jay 5,” said Abby Rosebrock, CC ’08.

Some relationships grew too close for comfort. One resident’s mother basically moved in with her and would occasionally sleep in the common room. Not ones to offend a guest, JJ5 residents didn’t complain until the mother accused one student of mocking her. She sent a long, accusatory email about him to his RA, CPA, and track coaches, among others. To say it caused floor drama is an understatement, and she was asked to limit her sleepovers.

Spiritual Awakenings

Looking back at freshman year, “it’s hard to put myself in that place because that guy no longer exists,” said Colin Kirts. Three years ago, Kirts came to Columbia as a freshman recruited for the crew team. “I wasn’t a jock,” Kirts said. “But I was here to do crew and get good grades and try and get through Columbia.”

When I asked if anyone on the floor had changed dramatically, several of Kirts’ former hallmates instantly offered his name. His hair, once crew cut, is now down to his shoulders and he sports a full beard. “Hair grows and I simply haven’t cut it,” he said. “I’m trying not to be attached to things.” His extreme inner calm makes it unnerving to talk to him.

When Kirts talks about his “greater goal,” he’s referring to his desire to learn to live completely self-sufficiently. He wants to live off the land and considers the ill-prepared protagonist of the Jon Krakauer book Into the Wild a “kindred spirit.”

In a four-year period of constant moving, constant absorption, constant tumult, it seems inevitable that freshmen will go through various incarnations. When Sholle came to Columbia, he was preparing for the test to convert to Orthodox Judaism. By the end of freshman year, he didn’t believe in God. Smith discovered Brazilian Jiu Jitsu her freshman year and now considers herself a serious athlete, which she never was before. Kirts describes the changes he’s undergone as “an inevitable shaking that was going to happen” to bring him to his current self. Some former John Jay 5 residents are still patiently awaiting that shaking. The guy who saved his urine is probably among them.

If anything remains of their year together, it’s these stories. Some of JJ5’s residents haven’t spoken since that year. In a few cases this is intentional, in others it’s incidental. “I don’t know what they’ve all done, nor do I particularly care,” said one former resident. They often describe each other as having “fallen off the face of the earth.” But a surprising number are currently living with at least one friend from the floor. Sophomore year, a handful of them reinstated the Abyss on McBain 8. It “was like John Jay 5 all over again,” some said. Except that it never could be. ♦
Negritude. It was a new way of thinking, of uniting all blacks under one ideal whilst simultaneously rejecting their Western conquerors ideals. Stirring the heart-strings of his people, Senghor and his contemporaries helped inspire a revolution against their oppressors while also insulting their academic peers.

The sentence, "Babar is riding happily on his mother’s back when a wicked hunter, hidden behind some bushes, shoots at them," orients the reader very clearly with sympathies for the elephants.

"You got into Columbia because you’re Colombian." The words had echoed in my head since our salutatorian had said them to me when I was accepted to the school of my dreams. Now, sitting to his left on stage in front of 364 students, my heart was pounding from my graduation speech, which I had finished with, "Every one of you has the ability to make a difference."

Just because cowboys weren’t a part of bucolic realism doesn’t mean that their aestheticization was necessarily “inauthentic” – after all, I enjoy reading Lolita and yet feel no yen to molest little nymphets.”

“Peterson talks about what a terrible singer Rodgers was, how Carson’s voice could peel whitewash off walls, and how the Carter family personified gloriously marketable mediocrity: none of them were anywhere even close to being great musicians. At once Ralph Peer looked down upon them and peddled their records for dolladollabillz, which sold like whores in Times Square circa 1980.”

My soul is a petri dish of asexually reproducing desires.

Surreal. Absolutely unbelievable, and terrifying. It’s been a fortnight now, and I think I am well enough to write about it with some perspective. Lady was, of course there, and mother, being the woman she is, insisted on coming. Almost more fascinating than the child’s being born was watching two women who could not be mordifferent try to encourage me at once. When compared to Meg, mother is a gale wind compared to a breeze, an oak to a sapling. I hope I can find even a taste of what she’s like in my own role as a mother. Mother. Mother mother mother.

Liam’s hearing
Comes back and he peels the deaf
From his ears like maggots off a good blond Peach.

He was my foil, my gadfly, my heart, and somehow this passion fills me more than anything I have ever felt. How pathetic that he could not see it. He would absolutely love it. And now this – not a slap in the face, but a full out spitting on his grave (Gd, there is no grave. There is no grave. I cannot even visit my mourning.). You know, I hate him more than I hate Hal. It is, at it’s root, his fault. And that fucking cunt of a lady.

Arizona, Stephen reasoned, was New Jersey with cows, New York City without sidewalks.
Therefore, Rousseau’s vision is not a tenable solution, as it is based off human nature, and not rationally or scientifically sound. One can be reminded of Dilbert cartoon, in which Dogbert wishes for world peace, just so that he can conquer the world with a butter knife. So too here – abolition of private property leads only to the resetting of the cycle, in which inequality is started all over again.

It was luck of the draw; sometimes they would come up with no grain at all, sometimes missing limbs. It was of no matter to them, as long as they didn’t ruin the grain. Blood would destroy its color.

“Intimate”

How much can there be to a person? I was convinced layers ran deep As instruments, (you were a drummer) Read like sheet music— concrete, universal symbols— Little brothers lost in wells. Percussion, I thought, has that way of being simple.

And now, to think that I thought I knew you. Before the house in Wareham, 4th of July, Shells covering the entire beach, No sand unless you found it and Laminated place sets, rosaries on bed posts, An old picture of Jesus curling on the wall. We ate raspberries alone— And your grandmother, owner of the place, With her dinner solitary in the kitchen, Sweet white corn shining on her teeth.

This poem is kinda gay, but I like it because we are all gay. Anyhow enjoy writing gay poems... gay as you can be... lol.

I walk to the back of the bar and look out a window... sure enough I see her standing... not in the patio... I can’t see her face which is obscured from me by a wooden beam... she’s speaking to someone... she laughs then she walks out towards the boulevard... I catch a glimpse of her face and her eyes, gray like mean rivers, then she turns and keeps walking.

At the age of three, I knew what had happened to our ancestors, I knew what a potlatch was; I knew how to beat on a deer hide drum; I knew how to distinguish my clan from the rest. My relatives taught me to take pride in what I am as a Tsimshian native. However, I was confused as to why I classified myself as a Tsimshian. The only phrase that I knew in my native language was, “akwadeewalegalahown.” Ironically, its literal translation in English is, “I don’t understand a word you’re saying.”

Albus Dumbledore
The principle of the Hogwarts school. He has long silver hair and semicircle glasses. He is the greatest as a wizard and an educator. He also has love, wit, and bravery

Rubeus Hagrid
The keeper of the key. He is tender and little awkward. He loves animals except cats.

Ron Weasley
Harry’s best friend. He is tall and the second youngest of the big Weasley’s family. He has an inferiority complex as his brothers are superior.

Professor Quirrell
He is in a position of Defense Against the Dark Arts teacher. He is a turbaned person and looks like weak. However, his real face is a dark follower of Voldemort.

I hear Thomas Jefferson never felt so alive as when he had to put up Monticello to back his bet with Hancock that he could get the Continental Congress to go along with “pursuit of happiness” instead of “property.” (Word is he thought a bit different after a night with Sally Hemings.) And then the Louisiana Shim-sham; old TJ lost a ton to Livingston, thinking there was no chance the French would sell for less than five cents an acre. I myself am no stranger to losing. I had the Supremes pegged for Gore in 2000—let’s just say if I’m ever in a room with Sandra Day O’Connor, it won’t be pretty. You want to talk losses, though; big, epic losses? How about Farrakhan after the not-quite-Million Man March?
This Is Not Your Brain on Drugs

Why Columbia feeds crack habits in the name of science.

BY JESSICA COHEN

Dr. Carl Hart doesn’t want to hear what you have to say about drugs. At least that’s what the Columbia researcher and associate professor tells students on the first day of “Drugs and Behavior,” his popular class for undergraduates. But often when he opens the floor for discussion, some students just can’t keep quiet about the surprising information offered in lecture. The “crack baby” phenomenon of the 1990s was completely overblown? It’s possible to become dependent on marijuana? A few tablets of ecstasy generally cause no measurable damage? In CULPA reviews, some accuse Hart of teaching pro-drug propaganda, while others embrace his skepticism of the government’s $20 billion-a-year war on drugs. A third contingent is ambivalent, completely confused as to Hart’s motives.

Hart is the co-author of the textbook *Drugs, Society, and Human Behavior*—which comes in at a respectable #23 on the Pharmacology Bestsellers List on Amazon.com—and director of both the Residential and Methamphetamine Laboratories within the Division of Substance Abuse at the Columbia-affiliated New York State Psychiatric Institute. He is also one of a few scientists in the world who design experiments in which individuals live in an artificial environment and use a variety of illegal drugs under observation. In a short profile that appeared in the last issue of this magazine, I noted his penchant for reggae music (the walls of his uptown office pay homage to Bob Marley), his luminous dreadlocks, lengthy fingernails, and occasional use of *Simpsons* clips to punctuate his lectures. His approach to academia may seem casual, but make no mistake: Hart is dead serious about his work. He’s overturning a mythology.

Much of the information about drugs available in our society is about as reliable as a middle school gossip mill. In May of 2002, *Science* magazine published a study by neurologist George Ricaurte of Johns Hopkins University on the effects of 3,4-methylenedioxymethamphetamine, commonly known as ecstasy, on monkeys. Two of the monkeys fed ecstasy died and two others came dangerously close. Ricaurte found that MDMA, the active chemical in ecstasy, administered at relatively normal dos-
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es just two or three times, resulted in the neurological equivalent of Parkinson's disease. The animals that survived oscillated between violent shaking and temporary paralysis, and came away with permanent damage to their dopaminergic systems. In humans, Ricaurte warned, this damage could lead to similar symptoms and the eventual inability to experience pleasure at all.

But Ricaurte blundered, badly. His researchers had mislabeled bottles and accidentally gave methamphetamine—commonly known as meth—to nine out of the ten animals. Meth is typically used in far smaller quantities than ecstasy—the administration of an ecstasy-sized dose accounted for the horrific effects. Ricaurte formally retracted the study a few months later, in September of that year. Though thoroughly disgraced, Ricaurte's study still found its way into folklore, and because many newspapers never corrected their initial reports, became legitimized by default. The Anti-RAVE act, passed by Congress in 2003, which eventually morphed into the Illicit Drug Anti-Proliferation Act, likely owes its existence to Ricaurte's findings. To this day, government websites refer to the erroneous study. Take E, they warn, and you could become a vegetable.

Most of the research conducted on the effects of psychoactive drugs focuses exclusively on the effects of long-term habitual drug use. A number of serious scientists have tried to simulate what it's like to take multiple doses of drugs over a prolonged period of time, but there is still very little known about immediate human reaction to drugs, and observing drugged animals is far from equivalent to observing drugged humans. Only in the past few years have researchers begun to shift focus, examining the instantaneous effects of drugs like meth, cocaine, marijuana, and ecstasy by enlisting human participants to live in tightly controlled residential facilities and use illegal drugs.

Hart is on academic leave this year to do just that. His dollhouse-like residential drug lab is located at the NYSPI on Riverside Drive at 166th Street—an unglamorous part of town where the nondescript buildings belie the nature of the research within. Here, Hart seeks to recreate daily life in a space about the size of two dorm floor lounges. His research employs roughly 12 participants, each paid $70 a day to stay for 15 to 25 days. They rotate in groups of four, keeping the ResLab in constant use. “Who wants to stay in a unit for three weeks, cooped up?” wondered Audrey Perez, the nurse at the ResLab who administers the drugs. I offered a possible explanation: “Free drugs?”

Despite the offer of free, high-quality coke, meth, and weed, qualified subjects are difficult to find, largely because the studies require participants to completely abandon their regular lives for an extended period of time. The ResLab advertises for its studies in New York City newspapers and magazines that cater to gay male readerships. “Do you like Tina, Crystal or Ice?” one inquires. “Healthy methamphetamine users are sought by the Substance Abuse Research Center.”

Research Center at Columbia. Participants live in a research unit at the New York State Psychiatric Institute (NYSPI) for 22 days. Earn up to $1457.” People who respond to these ads are interviewed by phone before being invited to the lab for a face-to-face conversation.

Not every drug user qualifies for admittance to the ResLab. To begin with, a drug user is not necessarily a drug abuser, or a drug dependent—the definitions of which are decreed by the bible of abnormal psychology, the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-IV). In some studies, researchers look specifically for sporadic users, but Hart is often looking for full-blown dependents.

To clarify, no one in the lab is an addict. To Hart, the word “addict” borders on the profane. As he explained to his class, he favors the term “dependent” because of the stigma surrounding “addiction”—a term that conjures images of the grotesque and suggests specific drugs like heroin. Hart finds this counterproductive to objective, empirical studies of illicit substances.

Another issue is that the subjects taking part in these studies cannot desire treatment—offering drugs to a dependent individual who is trying to overcome his illness is unethical. The subjects may be HIV positive, but cannot have AIDS, nor suffer from any other
serious physical or mental illness that might affect their reactions to the drugs. Finally, subjects can’t be homeless: A university paying 10 to 20 healthy individuals without a place to sleep for the privilege of monitoring their drug abuse is, at the very least, ethically problematic.

Provided they meet these criteria, eligible participants are given several doses of a drug to make sure they don’t have any initial adverse reactions, then they’re in business—and a very bizarre one at that.

Hart’s earlier research, like his class, dispelled common (and often unfounded) drug lore. In 2001, Hart found that subjects who smoked on average 24 joints per week—an amount that puts any collegiate dabbler to shame—performed about equally on cognitive function tests when sober as when stoned. In a separate study that year, his team concluded that repeated meth use over the course of 15 days resulted in an increasingly negative response to the drug, not a growing desire for more. He also found that smoking marijuana and orally ingesting THC, the primary active chemical in marijuana, produce the same “high,” which may erode some of the popular support for offering medical marijuana in pill form only.

In one of Hart’s most radical experiments, which he refers to frequently, participants smoked less cocaine when they were simultaneously given modafinil, which is currently used to treat narcolepsy. Hart’s work has also corroborated the claim that the psychoactive effects of crack cocaine and the drug in its powder form are roughly the same.

The lab’s website describes its environment as “relatively naturalistic,” but the ResLab doesn’t resemble real life in any meaningful way. The four strangers, who may choose to interact or not, live without clocks, windows, or access to current news. The magazines on the coffee table (Allure, Vogue) are at least four months old; the books (John Grisham, Patricia Cornwell) are strictly airport fiction. The common area boasts two couches, a few chairs, two video game consoles (Nintendo 64, naturally), two televisions with VCRs, art supplies, reading materials, and board games.

The individual bedrooms afford participants a clean bed, a desk, one ancient Macintosh, a microwave, toaster, refrigerator, and space to prepare food. Bathrooms and showers are unisex and connected to the common room. The tightly controlled environment is based on the assumption that if a subject’s mood is altered by anything besides the drug itself, the results of the experiment will be contaminated. Hart draws the analogy of a Yankees fan performing poorly on a test of cognitive function after hearing that his team has lost. By the same token, all videogames must be “non-competitive” to preclude mood change due to victory or defeat.

But life in the ResLab is not all fun and non-competitive games. Simulated life requires work, including a battery of cognitive function tests taken both high and sober. Most of the tests are staples of institutional research, and have been for about 50 years. They include measures of reaction time, sustained concentration, spatial reasoning, and ability to divide attention. In one computer test, I was told to follow an object moving in a circle around the screen and click when and where it stopped. Performance on that task, Perez told me, often improves after subjects have taken small doses of meth. I didn’t stick around to find out.

The disparities between the ResLab and real life are relatively unimportant when you consider that in all of the studies, the researchers are only interested in changes in mood. The scores on the tests taken sober serve as individual controls. Moreover, researchers are unconcerned with the small sample size because, in general, drugs have the same effects on all humans.

Imagine the least fun place you could possibly get high. The ResLab is worse. Each subject is assigned a color that corresponds to one of four tinted light bulbs in the common area. When a bulb lights up, the patient with that color heads over to a vestibule and picks up drugs that have been laid out for them on a similarly colored shelf. (Sometimes what lies there is actually a placebo.) Participants are given specific instructions on when and how to take the drug. “Dosing” occurs between 9:30 am and 4:00 pm. During that time, participants are expected to complete their computer tasks on a tight schedule.
To keep the data clean, all experiments in the ResLab are “double-blind”: The residents don’t know how much of a drug they’ve taken, and none of the staff, other than Hart, knows how much they’re dispensing.

The ResLab is designed to keep contact between researchers and participants to an absolute minimum, and feels like a strange combination of the *The Truman Show* bubble and the quarantine wing of a hospital. While I was checking out the common space, a resident opened her door and I was rushed out into the hallway at once—our eye contact was considered highly unacceptable as it might compromise the regulated atmosphere. Each bedroom is equipped with an intercom connected to the lab staff outside. Participants can speak if necessary, but they usually communicate through an instant messaging program.

While they’ll never know their subjects personally, the researchers know pretty much everything else about them. One of Hart’s assistants, Matthew Pecht, sits in front of rows of closed circuit TVs that, 24 hours a day, seven days a week, monitor the activity in each of the bedrooms as well as in the common space. Every two minutes, he or another staffer glances at the screens and notes what each of the participants is doing.

The research staff also keeps records of everything the residents eat. Each morning, one of the assistants delivers an enormous crate of refrigerated food to the four rooms. Participants can choose from an enviable wide array of packaged food, including 11 different “sweets,” 18 beverages, and a variety of frozen snacks. They can eat whatever they want whenever they want, and are told to record their choices so the researchers can tally their calorie consumption. Just to be sure no one is lying, the lab staff goes through the trash a few times each day to match the food wrappers to the participants’ reports. A few studies have investigated the impact of drug use on food consumption, but, according to one research assistant, the primary reason for such careful records of food is to respond to allegations that the lab is not sufficiently controlled.

Back in 2002, when Ricaurte began his study, the country was experiencing an ecstasy mania. These days, according to Hart, meth is the demon drug du jour.

Hart’s other project, governed by a different philosophy, is the Methamphetamine Laboratory at Columbia. Its purpose is to gather as much empirical evidence about meth as possible, hype-free. Studies at the Methamphetamine Lab are less about the impact of drugs on lifestyle and more about the visceral, somatic responses they elicit. Participants stay about the same length of time as those in the ResLab, but live in a hospital ward in the NYSPI building. During each day of their occupancy, they’re brought to a small room, often two at a time, where they are dosed and subjected to an array of tests.

Matthew Kirkpatrick, a TA for Hart’s class, is a graduate student at Columbia who just received a federal grant to assess the acute, subjective, and cognitive effects of methamphetamine. According to Kirkpatrick, people claim to use much greater quantities of meth on the street than they use in the lab. “They’ll say they’ve taken 300 milligrams or something crazy like that,” he noted. Participants also usually give the lab drugs good reviews. Outside University doors, meth is often of a pretty poor quality.

Considering the real-world implications of his research, one might assume Kirkpatrick is itching to reform drug policy, but he’s not. “Right now,”
he said, “I’m just asking sound questions using proper procedures and then putting it to good use.” He finds legislative issues and societal conceptions of drug use interesting, but is now solely concerned with collecting data. To Kirkpatrick, his role as a scientist is separate from the implications of his conclusions.

His boss, however, is a bit of a firebrand. When Hart began his research, he was more focused on cataloging the effects of drugs on humans, but has since become very political. He has speaking engagements all over New York and once gave a lecture to the NYPD on the effects of meth. With his full, bel- lowing voice, amplified by the microphone he uses in class, he delivers lectures with binary titles: "GHB: Medicine or Club Drug?" "Marijuana: Menace or Medicine?" "Tobacco: Agricultural Product or Dependence-Producing Killer?"

Hart’s class, “Drugs and Behavior,” should probably be called “Drugs and Society”—almost every scientific exploration into a specific drug concludes with details of its use and misuse in the real world. During my visit to the ResLab, Hart talked at length about the “Montana Meth Project,” a well-endowed ad campaign meant to prevent youth from taking meth. He described the ads, which he insisted on e-mailing to me after our interview, as “very polished and Hollywood,” but notes that they are based on fundamentally flawed science. One of the spots features a wild-eyed, black- hooded young man with gruesome facial sores stabbing a man in a Laundromat. We’re clearly meant to believe he’s high on meth and prowling for more.

In the long term, Hart wants to use the knowledge he’s gathered to understand why people abuse drugs. He’s also interested in designing different types of drug therapies to help dependents kick their habits, as well as figuring out how drugs might be used to improve performance by professionals who work the night shift.

According to Hart, the U.S. government’s “War on Drugs” has been frequently based on bad science. The crack cocaine laws “are an example of a clear injustice,” Hart said, referring to the oft-alluded-to fact that punishment for crack possession is far more severe than for powder cocaine. It was his interpretation of this discrepancy as institutional racism that inspired his research comparing the effects of smoking crack and snorting powder cocaine.

“People used to think marijuana made you crazy,” Hart said, until pure science debunked that theory. “We’re not stupid. We’re not encouraging drug use. We just want to offer the best available information.” All of his studies, Hart said, are peer-reviewed and “considered meritorious by the government.” As such, he continues to receive federal funding each year.

But where does Hart get his drugs? As luck would have it, he gets them from you, fair tax-paying citizen. Hart’s corner dealer is the U.S. government.

So how does he reconcile misinformation propagated by the suits at the Office of National Drug Control and Policy with federal support of his research? There are apparently huge disparities in opinion between government-bureaucrat scientists and politicians who ignore statistics and legislate their ideologies. For Hart, uncovering the truth is all that matters. “Whomever’s in power will focus on whatever they want. They don’t care about data,” he said, shaking his head.

But this slight sign of resignation does not mean Hart is giving up anytime soon. He’ll be there “until I’m completely gray,” he said. His dreadlocks are already tinged with white.
A Return to Temperance

The story of an ideological think tank that thrives on the Columbia name. By Lydia DePillis

By the numbers, Columbia isn’t stingy with its brand name. The online directory lists 83 affiliated Centers, plus 21 Institutes. Most of them at least have a corner in one of Columbia’s buildings, and most are staffed by faculty and grad students.

One of them, on the other hand, does not occupy space in any of Columbia’s buildings; its staff of 70 has an independent office in the Carnegie Building in Midtown. It employs only one Columbia faculty member. It takes no money from the University and the only funding it gives Columbia is in the form of small grants for “various reports” to the board of Trustees. But the National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse at Columbia University—handily abbreviated to CASA—holds on to those last three words as tightly as Columbia holds on to “in the City of New York.”

Unlike the other research centers at Columbia, CASA is big. In 2005—the most recent year for which financial information is available, and a down year, in relative terms—the Center pulled in over $10 million in private donations and federal funding, giving it a net worth of about $52 million. In 2006, CASA received 17 checks for over $100,000 each from corporations and individuals including Citigroup, Coca-Cola, IBM, and Safeway. The board is a pantheon of high rollers and power brokers, including the presidents, chairmen and CEOs of companies like American Express, Xerox, JPMorgan, Universal Music Group, the Hearst Corporation. And at the top of the list sits University President Lee C. Bollinger, looking down in approval.

But if CASA barely registers on President Bollinger’s radar screen—he sits on over 20 boards, including those of the Washington Post, the Royal Shakespeare Company, and the New York Federal Reserve—the use of his name, and Columbia’s, has made CASA into a heavyweight in the field of substance abuse prevention. Every time it puts out a study, the information therein is cited in media outlets across the country, from the smallest regional papers to the CBS Evening News with Katie Couric. Invariably, these reports cite “Columbia scientists” as having done the research. That’s the part that, over the years, has unsettled drug reform activists and academics alike.

When CASA speaks, it does so with the voice of its founder and president, Joseph Califano. A jowly Brooklyn native with hooded eyelids to match his mafia-esque name, Califano has an impressive resume: His career in government included serving as general counsel to the Army, deputy defense secretary, senior domestic policy aide to President Lyndon Johnson, and secretary of Health, Education, and Welfare under the Carter administration. He was fired from the last because, according to a 1998 article in the Chronicle of Higher Education, his “blunt, high-profile, self-promoting approach cost Carter too many political allies.”

But not all of them. Califano’s effectiveness as a fundraiser is due in large part to the connections he made on both sides of the aisle in Washington while serving on corporate boards and at high-profile law firms. Califano’s ex-employer, the law firm Dewey Ballantine, continues to provide pro bono legal services to CASA, and many of his former colleagues, including Johnson-era Defense Secretary Robert S. McNamara, still lend their financial support.

The same bombastic personality that makes (and breaks) Califano’s alliances also saturates the office environment at CASA. His “strong presence pervades the place,” according to a former employee. “I could never figure out if he was a liberal or a conservative. He is a very clever man in terms of his interpersonal connections.”

As he puts it in his autobiography, Califano, a committed Catholic, had a religious calling to found
CASA in 1991. To fund his self-described "think-action tank," he appealed to the healthcare-oriented Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, which focuses a good chunk of its $9.3 billion on anti-alcohol efforts. After securing the promise of startup capital, Califano cast about for a university that would share its name.

Columbia took the bait. In his autobiography, Califano recounts the process of affiliation. "[Former Columbia President Mike] Sovern and [former Medical School Dean Herb] Pardes understood the concept and were prepared to tackle an area of serious concern for New York’s Harlem and Washington Heights communities, where the University and its medical school were situated."

The idea, according to Califano, was to maintain a freestanding institute within the University that would be able to work with a broad range of graduate schools. He recruited Dr. Herb Kleber, a conservative Republican who had started a large drug-treatment research clinic at Yale before serving as drug czar William Bennett’s Deputy for Demand Reduction in the White House Office of National Drug Control Policy.

But even early on, it was clear that Califano wanted Columbia’s name more than substantive assistance the University could provide. “I understood it to be a political thing to give CASA more credibility,” said the same CASA employee, who left during the mid-1990s. “I understood much better what was in it for CASA than what was in it for Columbia. CASA hitched its wagon to a star.”

CASA doesn’t behave like a typical research institute. It issues reports and surveys on a wide range of drug-related issues with titles like *Dangerous Liaisons: Substance Abuse and Sex* and *Non-Medical Marijuana: Rite of Passage or Russian Roulette?* Although CASA does do some phone surveys—in which the questions are asked “on behalf of Columbia University” with no mention of CASA—the reports are largely a mishmash of data from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) and other annual surveys. Although CASA started submitting some papers to peer-reviewed journals in the late 1990s, its major policy reports skirt that process, submitting only to an in-house Institutional Review Board (distinct from Columbia's own IRB, which evaluates all other research conducted at the University).

In almost all cases, CASA's reports highlight some sobering aspect of the problem of substance abuse in America. One of them, entitled *Teen Tipplers: America's Underage Drinking Epidemic*, announced the disturbing finding that underage drinkers were responsible for one quarter of all alcohol consumed. According to *The New York Times*, however, that number was vastly over-stated. In February of 2002, a few weeks after the study was published, the *Times* ran a long story on CASA's failure to correct for a known imbalance in the original survey data, in which the younger bracket was intentionally over-sampled—but not before the inflammatory headline had run on CNN, NBC, and the Associated Press. SAMHSA, the agency that generated the data for *Teen Tipplers*, said the number was more like 11.4 percent. In the revised version on CASA's website, the number stands at 19.7 percent.

That sound-bite-over-science mentality even influenced the Center's hiring practices. Dr. Mark Kleiman, who currently directs the Drug Policy Analysis Program at UCLA, said that when he interviewed to be CASA's Policy Research Director in the mid-1990s, Califano told him that the job was "to find data and develop arguments in support of the Center's pre-conceived policy stances, rather than..."
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to perform impartial policy analysis.” Kleinman isn’t a pro-drug “legalizer,” as Califano calls those who don’t share his views on marijuana. He just sees each drug as a separate problem, rather than as part of an overarching culture of addiction that makes no distinction between “use” and “abuse”—CASA’s underlying ideology.

Much of CASA’s language reflects Califano’s deeply-held religious beliefs and his finger-shaking approach to substance abuse. According to him, parents must instruct children that smoking marijuana is “morally wrong.” Having kicked a pack-a-day smoking habit back in 1975, Califano speaks with the fire of the converted. A November 2001 study entitled So Help Me God: Substance Abuse, Religion, and Spirituality concluded that mental health professionals are “failing...to take advantage of the importance of God, of religion and spirituality in prevention and in their treatment of those struggling with addiction and recovery.”

“He’s a throwback to the old temperance warriors, except instead of being demon rum, it’s demon marijuana,” said Ethan Nadelmann, president of the Drug Policy Alliance, a national group that promotes harm reduction over use reduction and one of CASA’s main detractors. Nadelmann noted that, while he respected Califano for his work on tobacco and respectfully disagreed with his positions on marijuana, CASA lost scientific credibility when it continued to oppose safe needle exchange programs in the late 1990s. In 1998, a letter from Califano prompted President Clinton abruptly to pull out of a promise to lift a federal ban on funding for the widely accepted public health measure.

They can agree on something: neither CASA nor the drug reformers advocate for longer prison sentences or steeper fines for drug crimes, a signature feature of the Reagan-era war on drugs. But CASA, which doesn’t shy away from using its bully pulpit, has long been silent on policies from that time—such as New York’s Rockefeller drug laws—that continue to incarcerate hundreds of thousands of minor-league offenders. While much of the public health field has largely turned its focus to harm reduction programs like safe needle exchange, CASA still campaigns for a drug-free America, by any means necessary.

In its early days, CASA became one of the first groups to aggressively promote gateway theory, the idea that users of cigarettes, alcohol, and marijuana are more likely to venture into cocaine, heroin, and prescription drugs as a consequence of their early experimentation. Since then, numerous studies have debunked that idea—most recently, in December 2006, the American Psychiatric Association found that youth who used marijuana were no more likely to develop substance abuse disorders later, and that other factors such as delinquency and drug availability were much larger drivers of substance abuse. Nevertheless, in his May 2007 book High Society: How Substance Abuse Ravages America and What to Do About It, Califano devotes a whole chapter to re-explaining gateway theory. The book—an 186-page laundry list of statistics raising alarm about “drug-infested schools” and the “sinister status” of substance abuse and addiction as “Public Health Enemy Number One”—acknowledges that correlative findings do not prove causation, yet still asserts that “these relationships are so powerful and the risk to America’s children and teens is so great” that policymakers should suspend their scientific skepticism and crack down anyway.

For CASA, any drug use reduction is good drug use reduction—even if it means taking liberties with the truth.

CASA’s odd affiliation with the University has not gone unnoticed. In the late 1990s, the campus chapter of the National Organization for the Reform of Marijuana Laws (NORML) mounted a haphazard campaign to investigate the CASA/Columbia connection.

The effort got rolling in large part due to the work of Aaron Wilson, a Teachers College student also working for the Partnership for Responsible Drug Information, a now-defunct anti-drug war organization. At PRDI, Wilson was working on a large compendium of information about illegal drugs as an unbiased source of information for politicians and
In 1998, in accordance with a University policy requiring review of affiliated institutions three years after their establishment, CASA conducted an internal review of its own practices. In the wake of lengthy, damning critiques of CASA's work in both the *Washingtonian* magazine and the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, and with added pressure from Wilson and NORML, the University Senate appointed an ad hoc committee to audit the internal review.

The committee approved what CASA found in its report (both documents have been lost in the Senate archives), calling the research presented “impressive, both in its range and potential public health value.” Still, some expressed skepticism. “I found [the review] insufficient to erase doubts brought on by critics,” Professor Robert Jervis told the *Spectator*. “It did not meet the objections and did not rebut them.” NORML especially wasn’t having it—they submitted a letter to the University Senate in November listing their complaints with the organization and requesting a comprehensive, external review.

In response, CASA deployed Dr. Kleber, then the organization’s medical director and the only CASA staff member to also be a tenured faculty member at Columbia, to defend its actions and practices. In a letter to the University Senate dated February 11th, 1999, he wrote: “It is not surprising that this small group is opposed to CASA’s activities, denigrating our work, and aggressively attempting to confound our relationship with the university... CU NORML is a narrowly focused, political advocacy organization—an advocacy organization based on personal values and preferences.”

CASA’s response to the allegations was characteristic of its aggressive leader. “Califano got to work right away,” said Dr. Thomas Haines, then head of PRDI and Director of Biochemistry at the City University of New York. “They worked very hard with the Senate to stop this from happening.”

Even former University President George Rupp, who inherited a seat on the CASA board from his predecessor Michael Sovern, stepped in to defend CASA. “Joe Califano is a lawyer and a very astute shaper of public opinion,” Rupp told the *Spectator*, brushing off CASA’s cavalier approach to peer review. “[CASA] would rather influence public policy by having an op-ed piece.”

After that, the CASA campaign unraveled. The students and their allies in the scientific establishment were unable to create the same kind of outrage over CASA’s affiliation with Columbia that they felt themselves. After the Senate review and Kleber’s letter, administrators responded apathetically to the students’ requests for further review.

“We hit a brick wall,” said one organizer. “It was just this intractable thing—a Gordian knot.” In light of their difficulties, the group moved on to issues like medical marijuana and the Rockefeller drug laws.

In the late 1990s, NORML transformed itself into Students for Sustainable Drug Policy, another national organization that deals with a broader range of issues than just marijuana. SSDP is very careful to distance itself from stereotypes about drug activists: they’re hyper-aware of the fact that marijuana legalization advocates can quickly be dismissed as stoners who, as Kleber alluded to in his letter, work for policies in line with their “personal values and preferences.”

Marijuana, while still not mainstream, is certainly widespread—and it haunts the past of more than just politicians. A former SSDP member now in law school asked that I not use his name, fearing that an association with the organization could jeopardize a future job in a U.S. attorney’s office. Another SSDPer, Rich-
The drug reform activists, like Califano and company, can be absolutists too. "I think DARE is horrible just like CASA is horrible," said Rorvig, referring to the anti-drug program that, like CASA, wants America to just say no. In interviews, various students and professors called CASA "a joke," "working with the devil," and "doing more harm than good."

Here, however, the sentiment is largely borne out of real frustration that, despite CASA’s less-than-stringent peer review standards, its well-funded conclusions make headlines far and wide as the gospel truth from “Columbia scientists.” All the while, real Columbia scientists scrounge for grants and publish at the mercy of the peer-review process. According to a former SSDPer, now in law school: “You wouldn’t get a passing grade in a public health class if you tried to do what they do.”

One of CASA’s recent efforts illustrates the fluff factor: how much of its resources go into obvious conclusions with a family values spin. Since 2001, CASA has celebrated “Family Day—A Day to Eat Dinner With Your Family™.” This year, the Center released its fourth report with statistics demonstrating the correlation between eating family dinners and reduced substance abuse, next to glowing stock photographs of Norman Rockwell-esque parents and children around elegantly set tables, as if to obey President Reagan’s dictum that “all change begins at the dinner table.”

“We’ve been advising parents to be better parents for a long time,” said Dr. Rodney Skager, a former UCLA professor who founded and now directs California’s Biennial Student Survey of substance abuse in secondary schools. “Parents just don’t have that kind of control unless they’re going to keep their kids under lock and key, and that’s just impossible.”

“The world has changed,” he continued. “It would be nice if the world was the same as how it used to be, but that’s not going to happen.”

America has room for ideological think tanks that fit research into a way of seeing the world’s problems and what to do about them. Without Columbia, that’s all CASA would be.
Slingers

How Columbians learn to deal.

BY KATIE REEDY

"Can you take me to the drug den?" I casually asked P. It was a Saturday night. Students were on the prowl for their night's fleeting fun and I had a journalistic mission to chill with a coke dealer. P, I had found out with some prodding, was planning on buying for his friends that night.

"Okay, yeah," he answered after a moment. "I don't think he'll let us all in—he's been really paranoid lately." He quickened his pace. "But you can try."

In addition to me and P, our questing band included a nervous-looking student couple who kept their arms crossed in their sweatshirts and their eyes fixed on the ground.

"What're you getting? Coke, too?" I asked out of politeness.

"Uh, weed," the girl said, glancing nervously at her boyfriend and adjusting her arms.

P, however, was in the mood for something more thrilling. He had $60—enough for a gram of cocaine for himself and three of his friends at two or three lines per nose. It was, a friend in-the-know noted, a pretty decent deal. The couple, meanwhile, planned to drop $50 on a plastic cube containing a nugget of marijuana.

We hustled into the East Campus courtyard and pulled up at a nondescript townhouse. Three tall, handsome, upperclassmen dealers, well-known in the drug world, chatted and meandered around the immediate space of the courtyard, their arms pinioned by fawning female consorts. We pretended not to notice. P rapped on the door, and an athletic guy in a pale blue t-shirt answered.

"What'd I tell you about bringing other people?" he snapped, his eyes narrowing. "Buyers only." He frowned and scanned our faces.

P immediately acquiesced; he motioned to the girl from the couple and they slipped in past the guard. "Sorry," he mouthed as he turned around, shrugging.

Later that night, while I was trying to interview the group, I watched P and three other guys chop up the fine white powder they had purchased and lay it out in lines on the back of a history textbook. They shared a hollow Bic ink tube to snort the drug, reminiscing about other books and albums they'd used as snorting trays over the years.

"How are you feeling?" I asked one.

"Pretty euphoric," he answered, completely earnestly.

After an hour, the friends divvied up what little of the drug remained and stashed it away in their pockets for later, when they started coming down. This group would probably do the same thing sometime..."
ALTERED STATES

during the upcoming week, or at least by the next weekend, when they'd contact their dealer and throw down some more cash. These kids are an exceptional case for Columbia—but they're certainly not alone.

Drug dealing may be an art as old as prostitution, and is perhaps the only trade as simultaneously sordid and glamorous in its various forms and guises. At Columbia, where disposable income flows like beer at a frat party, economic conditions are ripe for a thriving trade in illicit drugs. Students often come from private school backgrounds in upper-middle-class suburbs—places where high-end drugs are a dime bag a dozen. And, in an environment where Adderall and other pharma-stimulants are deemed valuable study-aids, cocaine and more intense amphetamines aren't that big of a leap.

But campus dealers usually have more pressing concerns than the demographic profiles of their clientele. In some cases, they're pure businessmen; in others, they're addicts looking to line their pockets. In either case, it's all about the bottom line.

Take P and Q, who have dabbled in everything from marijuana to mescaline and might parlay their habits into semi-lucrative supplemental careers while they're still at school. They are keenly aware of Columbia's collective drug habit, as well as the benefits of its location. There's no place like New York—Harlem in particular—if you're looking for a steady supply.

"We'll get calls from [places like] Princeton, Wesleyan. They'll say 'Campus is dry. We really need some,'" explains P. "Columbia has a lot of it. There's more at Columbia than party drugs," like "coke, weed, and maybe ecstasy," which, he added, are common across college campuses.

"There's heroin," Q chimed in.

The pair said they're considering using their hard-earned paychecks from campus jobs to start buying in bulk. From there, it's a matter of building an under-the-radar reputation entirely through word-of-mouth, using the tips and strategies they've learned from other dealers. Typically, they said, a dealer will start as a user, and then get into the habit of buying bulk quantities of his drugs. After he has made himself known as a reliable source, his name and number enter the unwritten registry of campus suppliers, and he'll start getting phone requests from friends and strangers.

A typical campus drug ring is centered on a particular phone number or chain of numbers, often controlled by a charismatic figurehead with a coterie of slingers or a group of friends who pass clients from one member to another. Almost all are male, although female dealers occasionally join the fray, usually as intermediaries. Some dealers operate out of frat houses or dorm rooms and ask buyers to come to them, while others make house calls personally or send emissaries to conduct business transactions. For safety, some use pseudonyms, and others will refuse to discuss their wares and operations explicitly on the phone.

Several drug users explained to me that in a market where nothing is on the record and all transactions are based on trust, getting to know the big players—at least in name, as personal interactions are rare—is essential to not getting cheated and keeping a secure supply. For example, when the biggest weed dealer on frat row disappeared for a time last semester, his clientele were at a loss.

"When L left—when the main man left—there was a power vacuum," said Q.
“There was a point last year when everyone was depending on him,” explained P, “and he stopped answering his phone. And everyone got creative.”

“Started smoking cough medicine,” Q joked. “Anything to get high,” said P, shaking his head in mock disgust.

Among illegal substances, weed is the unchallenged blue-chip drug on campus, followed closely by cocaine. Acid, opium, psilocybin mushrooms, mescaline, ecstasy, mood-altering pharmaceuticals, amphetamines, methamphetamines, and heroin are also part of the campus drug cocktail, albeit to a far lesser extent. Heroin, while available, is not widely used and still carries much of the social stigma that marijuana and cocaine have managed to shed. One junior claimed he only knew a handful of other people who have tried the opiate.

Many dealers suggested that Columbia has a more vibrant drug culture than similar schools due in large part to its geography—an urban locale eliminates many problems of availability. One user referred to the area “across Morningside Park” as a reliable source of hard drugs, and also recalled making a deal near the “crack deli” on 109th and Amsterdam. In that instance, he took a female friend out with him, waited until a man hit on her, and then asked for some “Arizona,” a type of weed. The man, who knew the code, became his new hookup. Even the small number of heroin users on campus, who are occasionally forced to trek to the Lower East Side or Brooklyn to connect with an established junkie culture, have more access to such indulgences than students whose universities are less centrally located. And, with every trip, a user’s circle of direct sources has the potential to expand.

Prices are slightly higher here—in New York, at Columbia—than elsewhere in the country, users say. However, these same users testify that the quality and variety of the drugs makes up for their cost.

“It’s not bullshit cut… it’s cut, but it’s, like, fucking good,” said Q, referring to the quality of Columbia-area cocaine, which is often mixed with white powders—anything from sugar to bleach—to stretch its quantity.

“[Cost] is based on how good it is and how many levels you’re buying it from,” said P, who claims not to know exactly where his drugs come from (anywhere from South America to Afghanistan is a reasonable possibility). Regardless of the origins of the goods, the Columbia drug scene, like almost all others, is subject to the whims of the world market. Notes P with a shrug, “One of the bigger dealers said that a big bust in the summer—it was in The New York Times—affected him.”

Depending on its purity, cocaine by the gram, the standard buying unit, will cost $50 to $60. A pill of ecstasy costs between $10 and $20, and weed runs between $40 and $70 for an eighth of an ounce. A full ounce can cost up to $500. Regular clients often qualify for special rates; some are even allowed to descend the slippery slope of buying hard drugs on credit.

Altogether, said P, how much a drug dealer makes depends on “how much you’re doing it [and] how many people you know.” From dealer to dealer, there’s no reliable way to tell.
"It's like asking how much music you could make in a rock band." I did manage to speak with one member of a two-man team of current seniors, however, that claims to have dealt primarily to John Jay residents their freshman year. They noted in an email that they made between $3,000 and $4,000 a month—cash that they hid inside their ROLM phone—from weed alone.

Despite the apparently thriving trade, CU Security reports document just two arrests for drugs on campus in 2005 and only one in 2003, as well as a total of 19 drug-related disciplinary incidents in the same two-year span. Some dealers say that security's laissez-faire attitude, combined with the lack of real law enforcement beyond ID-swiping security guards, makes campus a relative "safe zone" for trafficking.

"You could do a drug deal in [Café] 212 if you want to," said Q. "I passed coke to T here yesterday."

"I can't get anything else but weed at home," explained P. "I don't want to get arrested."

Jim McShane, the head of public safety, seemed puzzled when I asked whether he had heard of any hard drugs being bought or sold on Columbia's campus.

"We generally try to take the high road and assume that Columbia students are here for a good education and not to do drugs," he said querulously, though he added that he would be "very concerned" with the possibility that it was taking place.

Far beyond the Columbia gates, gangs and drug cartels wreak havoc on countries in nearly every developing nation in the world, from South America to Southeast Asia and beyond. While the United States' "drug epidemic" may be a rhetorical relic of the Reagan era, noted sociologists like Columbia professor Sudhir Venkatesh have made careers out of studying drug trafficking among the urban poor. But in a strangely insulated age in which The Wire is hailed as a Shakespearean opus and hip-hop duo Clipse brings its couplets about coke-slinging to the steps of Low Library in a University-funded outdoor concert, drug culture has a lasting appeal among college-aged students.

On campus, the drug economy depends on a delicate balance between the worlds inside and outside of the Columbia bubble. Some will try hard drugs, get hooked and start dealing, rarely giving a thought to where the fun stops. Others merely make a quick buck and then move on to more "adult" pursuits. Neither kind will ever see the actual violence and vice of the black market.

And as part of a greater campus culture, drug consumption crosses social boundaries. Users run the gamut from disaffected intellectuals to club kids to jock-stoners. Some said that they tried softer drugs like pot in high school, but began experimenting further when they moved to New York.

K, a coke connoisseur, said part of the appeal comes from the excitement of coming into contact with a dangerous subculture. "You meet characters. Characters who make their living off of this shit," he said. "They're affected by it in their sensibilities. They just don't give a shit. They're daring."

The drug trade seems to have the essential elements to maintain its modest yet noteworthy hold on the Columbia scene: local supply, local demand, plenty of money, wide appeal to a wide subset of students, and authorities who appear largely oblivious to it all.
Sobriety Bites

BY DANIEL D’ADDARIO

Vanity, thy name is Accutane. What other medication seems appealing with one completely superficial benefit (clearer skin!), but dozens of reported side effects (nosebleeds and depression, among others)? This summer, though, I was vain enough to seek a prescription. My future seemed bright: I’d strut down the street with the skin of a god, my nose cutely streaming blood and my wrists crisscrossed with adorable scars. And I’d look terrific, like some sort of Swedish model. But there was one more side effect I hadn’t considered.

And so it was that I was to spend six months—the entire duration of my treatment—a teetotaler. “One sip,” my doctor told me, “will make your liver explode.” My mother backed him up on this, but she’s been telling me that since middle school. Some light Googling indicated that drinking wouldn’t make my liver explode, but it could cause serious long-term damage.

The first four months were easy. I was at home in Connecticut, and it takes a very specific sort of teenage temperament to want to get drunk in Connecticut. I can still pull off an argyle sweater with boat shoes, but I can’t manage G&Ts at someone’s beach house while listening to Custer. When a high-school classmate left me a Wall post asking when Dave Matthews was coming to Hartford, I merely admired my lack of blackheads in the computer screen. This not-drinking thing was a breeze.

Alas, Columbia is no Connecticut. I left the first party of the school year supporting a friend on each arm, both of them wobbling as they talked over one another about boys, the stupidity of said boys, and maybe going to Pinnacle later. Before my newfound sobriety, I’d have plunged right in. But no sober man has ever gone to Pinnacle. I simply muttered, “You guys are so wasted.”

Replied one: “I am not a racist!”

After a few parties like this one—overheated, sitting in a corner, telling people I was in AA just for the double-take—I began to get stir-crazy. The perfect opportunity for me to break my pledge presented itself when some philosophy-major friends of mine threw a party called “Sinposium.”

I entered to find the group at Bacchanalian levels of intoxication. A friend who knew I couldn’t drink handed me a cup of rum punch tauntingly, and I was done for. I shared vulgar non-sequiturs, I forcibly switched the party soundtrack to Madonna, and I awoke the next morning at eleven with my head pounding and my internal organs quivering.

A couple days later, I got a Facebook message from a new acquaintance I had apparently met at the party: “we can break the laws of accutane again sometime!” it read. Tempted as I was to capitalize on this uncapitalized e-offer, I had to stay the course. The weird gastrointestinal side effects I had for three days after my little bender were enough to put me back on the wagon.

Weeks came and went. The interstitial days that I spent last fall anxiously anticipating a vodka-soaked weekend were now wasted with trifles like reading for class or thinking about the Middle East.

One Saturday night I ended up at an ADP party. The crowd ranged from gin-smelling and giddy to coke-out and clench-jawed. I walked to the bar to get a glass of ice water, and noted the specials list. “Gin and Tonic—$3.” Even the indignity of paying for a drink at a frat might be worth it under these circumstances.

A boy near me twirled his cigarette holder; my friends were taking turns trying on a hooded sweatshirt. Partying sober had reminded me of just how dull Columbia’s social scene can be without a stiff drink in hand. Although I had a month left of treatment, this was one of my last nights out, and it was an early night.

Illustrated by Shaina Rubin

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Tenzin Bob is a lightning bolt of energy. Fresh off an NPR spot about Burma, he burst into our interview sipping lentil soup, brimming with information about his new diet and questions about my reactions to Ahmadinejad. As the more academic Robert Thurman, Jey Tsong Kappa Professor of Indo-Tibetan Studies, he has shown similar verve in helping the West to understand Buddhism. He is, among other things, the first Western Buddhist monk and the father of Uma.

The Blue and White: How have religion departments evolved over time? Were they immaculately conceived?

Robert Thurman: A religion department is kind of a ghetto for non-Western philosophies. They only began to exist about 40 or 50 years ago. They used to be the chaplain’s office, and therefore they were mostly Protestant in the Ivy League. At Amherst College, I used to have a yearly conference on comparative monasticism and I would invite people from all different traditions. My colleagues, with their Harris tweeds, they’d be kind of cool with some weirdo from Burma or a Japanese Zen master, but when they saw a Catholic father come in, they were very nervous—more nervous actually. The Rabbis, the Muslims, they were cool with that, but when they saw a Catholic they’d be upset. In those days, they’d look really like, “What’s going on? The Pope is coming.”

B&W: Ideally, how do you envision the Columbia department?

RT: Hans Küng [a Catholic theologian] has a great slogan, he says, “No peace among the nations without peace among the religions. No peace among the religions without dialogue between the religions. No dialogue between the religions without investigations of the foundations of the religions.”

Now that could be a slogan of our new center at Columbia, although our anthropo-and socio-people and political science people don’t really like that. They’re nervous. They say, “What’s the religion department doing there?” If we’re going to study fundamentalists we’re going to study the sociology, the movement, the political impact. They have to realize that if you want to actually do something about it in the Bollinger-esque activist way—the Earth Institute way—you can’t take John Locke and throw it at some Muslim or Christian or Zionist or Hindu fundamentalist. You cannot. John Locke, that’s Satan! That’s a weird Anglo. They’re not going to read that.

I jokingly tell Jeff Sachs, “You’ve got an Earth Institute, that’s great. You’re going to save the Earth.” We’re all gung-ho about that, but you know what? If you go in and
you try and do this and that, [such as] prevent the abuse
of women; if some priest comes in and starts quoting
a sacred text that gives [the man] the right [to abuse
women]—which is in our view a misinterpretation—than
all your work will be undone. So you need a Heaven
Institute to go along with the Earth Institute. That’s my
joke.

B&W: Our religion department is disparate. There are
people doing history, theory...

RT: Columbia has the chance to have the great religion
department. The Union Seminary does not belong to
the Columbia Corporation and it has no control over
us, although we do work with them. That’s why I think
Columbia has this great opportunity.

It’s very important that people who are non-Protestant
or non-orthodoxy are given the credibility and the
mental flexibility to be academic in an academic setting,
even if they happen to be a Sufi or a Hindu or whatever
they are. We really want to make Columbia a forum for
that, including bringing in secular humanists as a kind
of world ideology.

B&W: How does Columbia’s religion department
respond to shifting attitudes in the religious world?

RT: Today, we are in this situation where religious
fundamentalism has reared its ugly head all over the
planet. It’s very dangerous and it isn’t just as simple
as Christopher Hitchens or Sam Howard or Richard
Dawkins writing some big blast that religion is all
crazy.

It’s very important that the clash of these ideas happen
in a dialogue form. The department is creating a new
center for the critical study of the world religions,
which will be a place where basically we’ll go after the
fundamentalists.

I want to have a whole computer group that goes out
and finds all the fundamentalist websites where they
recruit extremists, and sees what is the theology with
which they recruit them. What suras do they quote,
or what shlokas of the Hindus? And then go into the
theology and intervene in some way to show that there
was a context for this fiery statement by Mohammad or
by Moses, and that [the statement] can’t be taken as a
justification for this and that.

B&W: Speaking of Hitchens and others, what do you
make of them?
RT: I like Dawkins and I like Sam Harris. I don’t like
Hitchens at all—he’s just a wannabe. He doesn’t know
anything about religion. Whatever’s trendy he gets in
there to try and get himself a bestseller. It’s just a pain,
but he’s a good zinger writer.

B&W: So what’s on a Buddhism expert’s bookshelf?

RT: Someone just gave me this book that I’m thrilled
to have. (Points to book). I’m so excited, although I’m
not excited about the length. Have you ever heard of
this guy?


RT: Do you know who he is?
B&W: Yeah, yeah.
RT: Do you know him personally?
B&W: No...

RT: He’s a fantastic man. He has done this amazing
study of Islam with the view of opening different doors
where there could be dialogue and, in a way, defending
it against those who try to pretend that it’s the really
bad one of the three Abrahamics. They’re [Muslims]
all interested in killing everybody; their extremism is
normal for them... When we have fanatics who go and
do crazy things—crusades and so on—it’s just apparent.
I started reading it and the first thing he’s after is
Samuel Huntington’s Clash of Civilization. I love it—
the secularists can also be fanatics in their opinion.

B&W: Is there such a thing as a Buddhist fanatic?

RT: The Buddhist view about religion is that blind faith
is dangerous, because if you believe something for no
good reason or even against reason, you’ll believe
anything because it’s just whoever gives you the sense
of authority—or whether Daddy whacks you and says,
“Believe this.”

Therefore, each extreme side takes the Buddhists on
the other side. There was a case in India: the Hindus
thought the Buddhists were nihilists. And the nihilists
thought the Buddhists were religious fanatics because they were trying to be in the middle. That’s the Buddhist way.

B&W: In the U.S., church-state relations are the subject of perennial debate. Where do you see Buddhism in terms of its relationship with government?

RT: The Dalai Lama, as a leader of Tibetan Buddhists, has totally gone for democracy. He thinks that total secular democracy is the only way in the modern society. And he probably is right.

But [Buddhism and government] have had their ups and downs. The Buddhist monastic order is a very big stumbling block to a militaristic king because it gives space to escape for your warriors; your samurai go and become Zen monks and they’re not available for you for your campaigns. So, in the history of Buddhism in different countries, there’s kind of a seesaw where monasticism and Buddhism become very strong in the country and the king becomes weak.

Religions have other dimensions. They seek to provide an education, in a way, that cultivates gentleness, compassion, tolerance. They try, they all say that. Even “An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth” is a teaching of gentleness. It’s an old tribal ethic so you don’t start a tribal war. You don’t nuke ‘em if they annoy you by having an ugly moustache.”

B&W: What about proselytizing?

RT: It is critical and crucial that in an academic setting that there is objectivity and that people don’t proselytize so that religious competition and conflict doesn’t happen in the academy. The university should be a place based on pluralism.

On the other hand, all of the so-called religious traditions have multiple veins. That is to say, there is something like Muslim medicine. Buddhism has its own psychologies and philosophies. When you study Plato in the philosophy department, no one thinks, “This person is proselytizing the worship of Apollo.” Plato had his own religious views, but you’re studying his thought. Confucius’ philosophy should be taught in a philosophy department and so should Buddha’s.

B&W: I see two strands in pluralism the way you’re talking about it. Some people want to find out what the common core is to world religions, and other people think it trivializes religious traditions to do that. Should we work on becoming certain about what we disagree on, so we can clearly say, “We disagree on this?”

RT: I think that’s right, not totally right though. The Dalai Lama says, “We should avoid all the theologies and philosophies because we’ll never agree. I’m not a theist, you guys are theists, we don’t agree on that. Avoid all that, but go to the ethical core insofar as it supports ethical humanism.”

I say, that’s fine, but there are certain complications, like for example, the current trend in the U.S. that we’re supposed to convert everybody to Christianity. In dialogue, we find that common ground, but then we say, “Look. There are certain doctrines of yours that are troublesome, because, although you are a nice person and agree with this common ground, if you don’t do some interpretative work around these doctrines, other people in your tradition will take them as the excuse for a crusade, for a suicide bombing, for some sort of fanatic thing.”

And I personally think it should be a human rights violation for Southern Baptists to come to you, or go to your children—I used to have Jehovah’s Witness or something, and they would catch my kids while we were out running to get gas or something, and they would start talking to the women and children, “You’re going to go to Hell if you don’t believe in Jesus.” How dare they go and say that to somebody’s children, or to someone? In my opinion, in a way you’re completely demolishing...you’re sending them to hell in your mind. You could come and say, “I love Jesus, boy it’s beautiful, Christianity, you’d love it if you knew about it.” That’s okay. But then to say, “Oh, you’re doomed, you’re going to hell.” I’m sorry.
B&W: But, do you think there’s an ethical secular core we can get out of these things? Or are we bound to have disagreements?

RT: Yeah, thou shalt not kill, for example. And then the interpretation—are you killing a human being when you abort a fetus? Buddhists would agree actually that from the moment of conception, there is a human being there, although its not yet a developed one, so it’s a little less grave than killing someone who already got their M.A. or B.A. from Columbia. [laughs]

The Dalai Lama, however, does say that he thinks it would be wrong, in a pluralistic society, to legislate the beliefs of the Buddhists. You can’t actually legislate based on one group’s view.

B&W: When you started teaching Buddhism, did you find that students didn’t understand it, or that they came with presuppositions? New Age stuff?

RT: Presuppositions, definitely. Somewhat early on in the ’70s when I first started teaching academically, I found that people had some unrealistic ideas about how they were going to get enlightened or something like that. I found them very eager to understand and very able to understand. But the one thing I did find, too, was tremendous ignorance about Asia in general, which has improved a little bit, but not much. So many people have that stereotype that Asians don’t care about life, that they’re passive, they’re not energetic—there are all these weird things.

B&W: Columbia is famous for the Core Curriculum, which focuses exclusively on Western thought. Do you see that exclusivity as us becoming clearer about our Western presuppositions, or should we include more Eastern thought and be slightly more comparative?

RT: Definitely. I think that when you read Plato, you should read Buddha and Confucius. I think eventually a Core Curriculum should be a global Core Curriculum. Columbia is freer, than some of the other institutions I think, to take the lead in that. And that means not dealing with people teaching in the Core Curriculum who say [fakes a creepy accent] “Oh, but we couldn’t teach it with some dialogue of the Buddha, because we don’t know about India.”

Well what do they know about ancient Greece, really? They think it was all white marble, meanwhile the Greeks painted it like Mexican colors. And you know they had topless goddesses and whatever, you know. So they could just as easily with a little preparation, read a text that was originally written in Sanskrit. We shouldn’t think that the West is so special. Get off it about the West!

B&W: Is this a pervasive egoism?

RT: The West is not the best! You know it’s actually backward, a bunch of beer-drinking weirdoes running around. Look for example at the Germans, and their Holocaust, and their stupid Hitler, before that they were worshipping them. At Harvard in the philosophy department they have like some big paintings of different great philosophers and they have painted out all the German guys, because of the war, and well I don’t blame them. But still, that’s not just some aberration in Germany—the West is pretty backward. Look at what we did to the Native Americans here, killed them like mad. So, we have still some growing up to do in the West.

B&W: In order to reach this idea of a global curriculum, would you get rid of some of the texts that are currently read in Lit Hum and CC?

RT: Changing curriculum is difficult because alumni are all nostalgic about how they suffered through it so everybody else should suffer through it. They would suffer just as much if they were looking at Buddha and Confucius and Zoroaster, because it’s boring a little bit, these old things. But this Greco-Roman thing is not celebrating our wonderful Western tradition, it’s continuing to create it, is what it’s doing. It’s continuing to cater to whitey, you know, and to whitey superiority. And that’s something whitey has to get over.

— Interview by Andrew Flynn; edited by Anna Phillips, with help from Justin Gonçalves
The Babe with the Power

How cult becomes culture: Muppets marching into the canon.

Not so long ago, the press unleashed a spate of articles about mumblecore, a clique of movies starring and directed by wan, slacker-chic, twenty-something Brooklynites. In other words, movies by and about people we meet all the time in real life and probably don’t like. A mini-mini-genre far more worthy of discussion, I think, and certainly far more exotic, is what I will call muppetcore. It is a small group of 1980s fantasy films with cult followings and strikingly similar approaches to storytelling.

Only two muppetcore movies—The Dark Crystal and Labyrinth—star official Muppets created by the Jim Henson Company. (Muppet aficionados debate whether the puppets in those movies actually deserve that capital M.) But regardless of nomenclature, most muppetcore movies are chock-full of fuzzy, slimy, or otherwise strangely-textured non-human creatures.

Have you heard of The Dark Crystal or Labyrinth? What about Krull? The NeverEnding Story? The NeverEnding Story II?

I hope at least one of these movies effects a nostalgic shiver in your upper thighs, but if not, don’t worry—I know the world of 80s fantasy is a sordid, confusing place, and I’m here to help. I think it will be useful, in lieu of jumping right into what muppetcore isn’t, to discuss what muppetcore isn’t.

Muppetcore isn’t medievalcore, the kind of 80s movie set in fantastical, Dark Ages Europe. John Boorman’s Excalibur was the full-blown Arthurian extravaganza of its time, but you also have Ladyhawke, in which Michelle Pfeiffer is a hawk by day and her bodacious self by night, and The Black Cauldron, Disney’s first PG-rated animated movie. These films take place on Earth—something a muppetcore movie would never do. On the off chance a muppetcore hero is an Earthling, he or she will enter a parallel fantasy world within twenty minutes of the opening credits.

It isn’t manlymancore, the burly action-fantasy movies that enjoyed popularity in the 80s. I’m talking about Beastmaster, Masters of the Universe (i.e., He-Man), Conan the Barbarian, et al. Sword-wielding, skull-bashing, and glute-flexing have no place in muppetcore.

And it isn’t The Princess Bride, a fantasy movie whose prime virtues are swashbuckling, charm, and good humor. That movie is the antithesis of Dungeons & Dragons-style nerdcore grandiosity, while muppetcore is a decidedly earnest genre: it buys into the worlds it creates. One of my favorite small touches comes from the film Legend. The hero, played by a young Tom Cruise, asks his companion how much time is left to save the day. (Here I will mention that muppetcore movies are a great place to find early, awkward performances by current big-shot actors. You probably know about Jennifer Connelly in Labyrinth, but what about Liam Neeson in Krull or Jack Black in NeverEnding Story III?) The friend pulls out not a pocket watch, but an inscrutable shining orb, declaiming in utter seriousness, “Oh, la! Only three hundred beats of a bluebird’s heart!” Even when David Bowie, who stars in Labyrinth, prances around in bulge-tacular lavender tights and sings a musical number with a band of googly-eyed Muppets, there’s never a knowing wink to the audience.

Now that we’ve demarcated some of muppetcore’s boundaries, let’s go to its heart. The aforementioned Legend is, to me, the genre’s archetypal movie—and, sadly, one of its least watched. “Once, long ago,” at some unspecified time in some unspecified fantasy realm, scrappy forest boy Jack and beatific Princess Lily, two young lovers, romp through a forest. On the other side of the world, the Lord of Darkness, brooding in his giant Tree of Darkness, wants to kill the last of the unicorns and, in doing so, bring about an Age of Eternal Darkness. So he sends out the vast manpower of his empire—two or three bumbling goblins.

To be fair, the goblins do manage to capture the last unicorn and kidnap Princess Lily, whom the Lord of Darkness wants as his Queen. (As a general rule, if the muppetcore hero has a special lady, the muppetcore villain will be after her affections.) After assembling the requisite motley crew of fairies and elves, Jack sets off the castle to rescue his damsel. Travails ensue, and then on to the grand finale.
In other words, a young, untested hero must journey to an evil stronghold at the edge of the world to do battle with its generically evil lord in order to save someone dear to him or her, along with the entire imperiled fantasy world. This is the essential muppetcore plot. Now, let's tease out some of its peculiarities.

One fantasy convention muppetcore eschews completely is the epic battle, and by extension, physical combat. In fact, the genre tends to avoid showing large numbers of people altogether. Countless single shots in Peter Jackson’s *Lord of the Rings* films contain more weapons and more sentient beings than every muppetcore film ever made. Instead, muppetcore favors an *Alice in Wonderland*-style plot, in which the hero encounters a succession of eccentric characters in outlandish, uninhabited landscapes. The genre’s greatest visual influence is *The Wizard of Oz*, a movie of lavish, plainly artificial setpieces, where even a metropolis like the Emerald City feels strangely deserted.

The element of *Lord of the Rings* from which muppetcore *does* draw heavily is the Frodo/Sam plotline, where, as it were, a young, untested hero must journey to an evil stronghold at the edge of the world in order to save his imperiled world. What ultimately ensures the hobbits’ success is not incredible physical or mental prowess, but inner kindness and purity. But whereas Frodo ultimately succumbs to the ring’s power, muppetcore has none of this equivocation. Let sappiness prevail!

Take, for example, *Krull*, a movie that is about as swashbuckly and *Star Wars*-esque as muppetcore gets. But, even here, it’s not swordplay that wins the day, but heart. Here’s a gem of an exchange between our hero and heroine as they prepare to wallop the evil Beast:

**Princess Lyssa:** “It’s not the Clave [mystical five-pronged ninja star boomerang thing that was supposed to kill the Beast but didn’t]—it’s you, Colwyn.”

**Prince Colwyn:** “It’s us! It’s us he can’t defeat! It will not return to me except from the hand of the woman I choose as my wife.”

Did I mention that muppetcore movies aren’t especially good? All of them had respectable budgets; most of them had surprisingly high-powered directors (Ridley Scott for *Legend*, Wolfgang Petersen for *NeverEnding Story*, and Ron Howard for *Willow*); but none was a resounding success. Now, most of them have avid cult followings, but that’s about all that can be said for them.

*The Dark Crystal* holds one possible answer for the particular fate of muppetcore. Two reasons traditionally given for the film’s decidedly mild success are its general subject matter, considered too dark for children, and the overshadowing effects of *ET*, which came out the same year. Each point has its merit. Firstly, Muppetcore movies may seem harmless and campy now, but admit it: you were scared shitless by them as a seven-year-old. And as for *ET*, few would argue with the claim that it is one of the most winning, infinitely relatable movies of the 1980s. The best Disney movies are the same-focus tested and engineered so that every six-year-old will relate to a mermaid or an Arabian street beggar.

Muppetcore is a little more principled. It takes itself, and its world, seriously—whether it’s ugly races of rockmen, ninja star boomerangs that cut through mystical barriers, or timepieces that measure by the bluebird’s heartbeat. As such, the muppetcore auteurs never produced a truly great movie—but they’ve carved out a weird little hobbit hole for themselves.

—Paul Barndt

Illustrated by Jenny Lam
RETURNING

Let me walk along these tracks until I find the end,
The place where the riverways meet,
The final resting place of lost leaves and branches
Thrown into the water by heedless children.

No one can translate the unending eddies
And no one can face the circling lights
That make the surface buckle and snap
Against the air of the ravine.

It’s much too late to care, we know,
And words are not worth their weight in lead,
And so many of us are better off dead,
And the rest of the living are harnessed in dread.

— Katie Reedy
All Barnard students are members of the Student Government Association by contributing their student activities fees, which fund over 80 SGA recognized clubs and student programming. The SGA Representative Council, elected each spring by the student body, is the primary liaison between students and the administration. The SGA advises on policy issues, coordinates Tri-partite committees of faculty, administrators and students and co-sponsors student programming. As both a funding and governing board, the SGA works in collaboration with student groups to enhance campus life, affect change, instill a sense of Barnard pride and promote community. The SGA exists in order to enhance YOUR Barnard experience.

THE STUDENT GOVERNMENT ASSOCIATION OF BARNARD COLLEGE
239 Brooks Hall, 2nd. Floor
e-mail: sga@barnard.edu
Webpage: barnard.edu/sga
Tel: x1202

LAURA STOFFEL
President, SGA
ls2283@barnard.edu

SARAH BESNOFF
Vice President, SGA
sb2512@barnard.edu

CHRISTINA CHANG
Vice President of Student Activities
ce2401@barnard.edu

LARA ROSNER
Vice President, Finance
lr2168@barnard.edu

KATE MCNAMARA
Vice President of Communication
km2214@barnard.edu
In which our hero searches for his drug of choice.

Verily Veritas has a dirty secret: his tweed from the Hebrides, his ink from India, his port from (where else?) Portugal, all of it—paid with drug money! The financial fate of the vast Veritas clan has indeed circumnavigated Fortuna’s Wheel times beyond measure, but the latest apogee of Verity’s particular branch, well...

1831. Great-uncle Verum Veritas steps off a junk and into the florid fragrances of Canton. A foot-binding fetish lured him to Oriental shores, but what kept him was the rollicking opiate trade.

Verily will spare you the sordid details: Chinamen wanted opium, Englishmen wanted Earl Grey, and Verum pioneered the method of placing the drug inside tea bags for easy smuggling. He made his fortune peddling this technique, and by the time the sun finally set on the Empire, the old dastard was safely ensconced in his Devonshire estate.

...but why is Verily baring all? Ah, yes: wanton lushery. Crushed by infirmity—ennui, malaise, neurasthenia, coulrophobia, and an intertemperate case of the blue jaundice, i.e., the usual October symptoms—he drains the last of the port. Great-uncle Verum is particularly on the mind in light of Verily’s failed, costly attempt at acquiring more exotic mind-impairing substances. VV had considered rekindling his love affair with laudanum, but no, he thought, better something novel. What, pray tell, keeps the kids of today in such a blissfully insipid stupor?

Findings: (I) cannabis sativa, inhaled, sometimes imbibed; (II) cocaine hydrochloride, insufflated through nostrils.

(I) was out of the question. One bright spring day not so long ago, a lanky, blood-eyed mophead pointed at Verily’s parasol, and declaimed, “Hell yeah, dude! Mothertruckin’ umbrella in the sun. My buddies and I will smoke you out.”

Verily ran from what he presumed was a deranged tramp. He learned only later that the tramp was an Ivy League undergraduate; that “smoking out” was not an idiom for “forcing out in the open,” as the OED had told him; and that these smoker-outers were tranquil, mirthful folk who enjoyed sharing and indulgent guitar-playing. He was glad he ran.

(II) seemed at first equally unpromising. Verily remembered cocaine as a populist, sportive man’s drug, in every elixir and nerve tonic of the day. An athlete in need of vis corporis before a bout of knuckledusting might take a pinch.

But, Verily learned with no small relish, the drug had enjoyed a modern resurgence, and its new users were wealthy, sallow wraiths sealed in airtight cliques fond of discussing their own native intelligences. Which is to say, VV’s social set.

And, as luck would have it, intermingled with some galley proofs of a Ford Madox Ford novel, our hero found an 1892 invitation from a secretive, selective campus fraternity. It mentioned well-bred gentlemen, stimulating discourse, limited membership—just the people, Verily induced, who must be shoving powder up nasal cavities in 2007. Assuming, of course, this outfit was still standing—but what society worth its salt would crumble so quickly? The paper was yellow-verging-on-festering, but good bloodlines are forever.

Verily made his appearance, presented the proper socio-genealogical information, and was summarily sent off to Lisbon in order that he might retrieve a most particular, most expensive port. Verily bought a whole case, and found it much more suited to his ailment-alleviating purposes than he imagined any septum-searing South-American snowdrug would be. He never got back to the society [which for propriety’s sake we will refer to as St. A_______’s].

But with the last of the port just-drained, what to do? It is a sun-dappled day, and, is it just Verily, or is the blue jaundice lifting a bit? Perhaps an afternoon jaunt is in order? Let Verily hope so. But it has been unseasonably summery as of late; allow our hero to grab his parasol.

—Verily Veritas

October 2007
Song of Myself

Circling My Mother
By Mary Gordon
Pantheon Books, $24.272 pages

When I was younger than I am now, I yearned to expose the world as I saw it through the written word. Seeking an outlet for my impotent juvenile rage, I spent hours planning out a picture book about the elementary-school bully who made fun of my glasses, or a screenplay about the eighth-grade teacher with ridiculous expectations, or a roman à clef about my freshman-year-of-college nemesis (I didn’t say how much younger). But I never developed my “work” past a couple pages, because I couldn’t bring myself to spend hours dwelling on people I felt so much anger towards.

This account illustrates what’s wrong with Mary Gordon’s Circling My Mother—a so-called memoir about the Barnard professor’s mother, Anna Gagliano Gordon—in two ways. For one, you, reader of this review, expecting insight or at least a consistent line of reasoning, are stuck reading a random story about me, the author. Why should you care about the dry details of my personal history? You turned to this page to read what I thought about Mary Gordon.

What’s more, my story alludes to an ugly motive for writing a book, one that many writers suppress but Mary Gordon seemingly cannot. Gordon’s book about her mother, beyond being poorly written, is often cruel, more an act of revenge than of love. She treats all of her subjects with withering disdain—all but one, that is: herself. Although Gordon tries to portray herself as a long-suffering, clever bon vivant, the book’s subtext reveals her to be as self-mythologizing as I was at age ten.

Considering Gordon’s repute as a writer (best-selling author, Guggenheim Fellow, Reader’s Digest award winner), she makes a striking number of amateurish blunders. Her writing is riddled with dull generalities that seem tangential to the text: “What a strange thing it is, singing. So inefficient. Putting words to music. Putting them—where?” It is as though the reader is having a loose conversation with Gordon during her office hours rather than reading a coherent narrative.

When the conversation turns from professorial musings, Gordon’s tone grows disturbingly brutal. She is deeply angry at her mother’s decline and death and at the world that allowed it to happen. Anna Gagliano Gordon lived a very difficult life, suffering from alcoholism, the loss of her husband, and eventually descent into old age and dementia—a condition Gordon paints quite vividly. After swallowing a certain unease at Gordon referring to her mother as a “problem” in the preface, this reviewer couldn’t help but wince when Gordon described her mother’s “rotting feet” in explicit detail and declared unequivocally, “I prayed for her death... I do not now wish her alive. Not the mother who had become entirely wretched.”

The reader gets to look at the problem of Gordon’s mother from a variety of perspectives. In the section entitled “My Mother’s Body,” Gordon subjects her readers to a vicious pun: “when my mother’s dominant scent was urinous, it was ruinous of my love for her.” This at least contains some anagrammatic wordplay, but later, the language deteriorates into passages that resemble a tween girl’s LiveJournal: line-breaks, italics, and all. “In our ears, at our throats, jewels sparkle. We are dressed for the ball. / Beautiful mother. / Beautiful girl. / Where are we, Mother?” Add a few emoticons, and Mary Gordon could be any girl from my middle school.

In the book’s most significant section, “My Mother and Priests,” Gordon overplays her own rebellion: “I had spent the spring demonstrating; I had been tear-gassed and pushed by cops, I was in love with a homosexual; more than one classmate I knew had died of a heroin overdose...” She goes on to link this to her aversion to priests, in stark contrast to her mother’s devotion to the men in robes. While Gordon could surely teach current Columbia students about protesting, one wishes she could show, not tell in a snappy barrage, her personal history of rebellion.

—Daniel D’Addario

Illustrated by Diana Zheng

THE BLUE AND WHITE
CAMPUS GOSSIP

At 6:40 PM on a school night, a guy with headphones walked into a second floor reading room in Butler and sat down across from a girl very focused on her reading.

In an apparent attempt to initiate some old-fashioned stacks action, the young Don Juan tried a compliment. “Your calculator’s cool!” he said in his most seductive voice. His music, however, blared too loudly in his ears, and he ended up shouting loud enough to disturb everyone in the room. The female student, unperturbed, looked up and gave her harsh reply. “Shhh!”

The formula of love apparently eludes even a TI-83.

IF EXCLAMATION POINTS WERE DOLLARS

From a school-wide email sent by CCSC president Michelle Diamond:

“4. DO YOU LIKE GRILLED CHEESE SANDWICHES?? DO YOU WANT TO HELP END WORLD HUNGER??

Feel Good CU invites everyone to join us on our OPENING DAY in JJ’s Place, this Sunday September 23rd from 4:00pm til’ midnight! Feel Good is a group of grillers, a conglomerate of chefs if you will, serving up melted Grilled Cheese goodness to solve world hunger. How, you may ask? All proceeds from the grilled cheese sandwiches we sell will be donated to the World Hunger Project!!! So come to JJ’s Place! Eat some grilled cheese! And FEEL GOOD Columbia! (We will be selling in JJ’s every Sunday from 4 to midnight and every Wednesday from 8 to midnight….so even if you can’t make it to the opening day, be sure to stop by!”

Overheard outside the Apple computer store on 59th Street:

Middle-aged man to his middle-aged wife: “You know, just because you’re buying me an iPhone doesn’t mean I’m going to put out for you.”

What about a Blackberry?

DOES THIS HEADBAND LOOK NEOCON TO YOU?

The College Republicans recently staged a free pizza event on Low Plaza to attract new recruits. Two lefty-looking girls were seen mooching, looking guilty.

Girl 1: So, we met at Bible camp, okay?
Girl 2: And we hate sodomites. And welfare.

A Business School student on his cell on College Walk:

“I don’t want to go if I don’t have floor seating. It’s Bon-fucking-Jovi, man. I want to rock!”

AH, YOUNG LOVE IN BLOOM

A freshman couple walked through the doors of Lerner, the boy slightly behind the girl.

Boy: (in a harsh, demeaning tone): “That skirt is totally riding up. I can see your whole ass!”

Girl (Shoots him a murderous glance, is quiet for a second, then speaks, very seriously): “Maybe we shouldn’t have come to college together.”

OCTOBER 2007
A B&W staffer found herself waiting for an elevator with a Political Science TA:

British male TA (Looks her up and down): “That’s a great dress.”

B&W: “Um... thanks?”

TA: “Oh! Did I just out myself?”

B&W (relieved): “Haha, I guess so.”

TA: “Well at least I didn’t ask to try it on!”

Later in the elevator:

TA: “Quick, let’s switch clothes!”

In the aftermath of Ahmadinemania, self-described “journalist” and ex SIPA student David Fine— he lasted a full six weeks back in 2002— penned an “Open Letter to President Bollinger” expressing his concerns. He sent the letter to the editors of about fifty illustrious publications, including the Times, the Economist, and our very own Spectator. In it, he complains about...something.

“Visiting Columbia’s website and seeing the SIPA-World Leader’s Forum brought up some old personal wounds. In 2002 I was accepted to SIPA and actually enrolled that September, but without a place to live, and subsequently withdrew about 6 weeks after enrolling, with the excuse that I couldn’t afford to attend financially—but that was only part of the reason why. Some very powerful New Yorkers, one of whom being Robert Tishman, Chairman of TishmanSpeyer Real Estate, were using advanced satellite electromagnetic technologies which can control humanity anatomy, physiology, and the brain to manipulate me and many others at Columbia university during that time.

“In your introduction of the President of Iran you said, ‘Lastly, in universities, we have a deep and almost single-minded commitment to pursue the truth.’ The truth happens to be that these satellite-broadcast electromagnetic technologies are secretly influencing our world in many ways today, up to the highest levels, have been for decades, and any analysis of world events and foreign policy that ignores their influence is going to be, probably, faulty.

“Thanks for your time and consideration. Columbia is a beautiful and excellent university.”

A B&W Staffer was approached by an honest-to-goodness old man, complete with thick Eastern European accent, in the locker room of Dodge Gym:

Old Man: “Someone forgot a hat. Is this your hat?”

B&W: (Blank stare.)

Old Man: “No? Well, I want this hat. To take to the lost and found!”

B&W: “Uh-huh.”

Old Man: “People get more and more forgetful these days. So I have to look out for them. Look out for the other forgetful people.See, I am forgetful too!”

B&W: “Hah. Me too.” (Accelerates pace of unpacking belongings into locker.)

Old Man (now completely naked): “Have you ever forgotten yourself? Have you ever walked out without paying?”

B&W: “Hah. I guess.”

Old Man: “Well, I have. So many times. But that isn’t shoplifting. I’ve never shoplifted. There are plenty of witnesses, all over the country.”

The Blue and White called his references. The man is not a shoplifter, but he has a checkered past of hat-related obscenity charges.

In a recent email to her academic charges, Geraldine Winifred Visco of the Classics Department announced an upcoming outing. “Venias latine collocutum rosasque olfactum! Come and join us for a Latin tour of the NY Botanical Garden! Friday, Sept. 28 @ 4-6pm.” After the announcement, her bizarre electronic signature contained a quote from Dirty Harry. “‘Do you feel lucky’ - Clint Eastwood”

Quite frankly, no, we didn’t...until we were invited to speak a dead language in a hothouse on a Friday afternoon. Venite nobiscum!

The class of 2011... it’s an improvement!