THE WAR ON FUN
Prohibition Returns to Morningside Heights
By Joseph Meyers

FAVORITE SON
A Conversation With Playwright Tony Kushner
By Lydia DePillis

THINKING OUTSIDE THE GODBOX:
RIVERSIDE’S INTERCHURCH CENTER KEEPS THE FAITH

ALSO: MAC GENII, KEROUAC, MARGOT AT THE WEDDING
THE BLUE AND WHITE

Vol. XIV FAMAM EXTENDIMUS FACTIS No. IV

COLUMNS
4 Bluebook
8 Campus Characters
11 Verily Veritas
14 Digitalia Columbiana
33 Measure for Measure
35 Campus Gossip

COVER STORY
Joseph Meyers 16 The War On Fun
Prohibition returns to Morningside Heights.

FEATURES
Andrew Flynn 12 Thinking Outside the Godbox
Riverside's Interchurch Center keeps the faith.
Juli N. Weiner 20 Cult of the Genius
High noon at the Fifth Avenue Apple Store.
Lydia DePillis 22 Favorite Son
A conversation with playwright Tony Kushner.
Karen Leung 26 Annals of Fandom
Shouts and murmurs from the desktops of New Yorker devotees.
Sumaiya Ahmed 34 Letter from Lyon
Our far-flung correspondent.

CRITICISM
Daniel D'Addario 29 Baumbach on Barnard
Margot at the Wedding provides a glimpse of our futures.
Sasha de Vogel 30 The Dead Beat Scroll
Jack Kerouac retrospective at the New York Public Library.
Merrell Hambleton 32 Contemporary Civilization
Tara Donovan at the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

WWW.theblueandwhite.org • COVER: “Club Columbia” by Shaina Rubin

DECEMBER 2007
Some issues of the *The Blue and White* are deliberately themed, but this one wasn’t. The thread that weaves these articles together was only identified after the fact, in a telling moment of editorial serendipity. Blame it on finals-inspired bursts of renewed academicism, or the bitter weather that keeps us close to our computers, but this month, our collective unconscious has clearly been funneled toward all manners of geekery.

Our December issue showcases the many faces and facets of lameness—revelations of repressed awkwardness, wholehearted embraces of dork mores, and further oppressions of the already downtrodden.

Sasha de Vogel knocks Jack Kerouac’s cool factor down a notch, reviewing an exhibition that reveals the degree of self-fashioning that went into his beatnik rebel persona—he was, after all, once a Columbia student: a mediocre athlete doing drugs to fit in. Juli Weiner brings us a meditation on the epicenter of urban nerddom—the Fifth Avenue Apple Store—and the generally civil war between the guys who sell you your computer and the guys who fix it.

Lydia DePillis sits down with dramatic demigod Tony Kushner, a geek success story and the hero of writerly nerds everywhere. Reclaiming his decidedly pedestrian roots, Kushner recalls coming out, getting laid (in Furnald!), and striking on behalf of that consortium of misfits, the Writers Guild. And Joseph Meyers’s cover story on the “War on Fun” shows that social outcasts who choose to party in their dorms are having a tougher time than ever drinking Sparks while watching their Family Guy DVDs.

But geek taxonomy extends beyond our subjects. It runs rampant from Milstein to McBain, and *The Blue and White* is no exception: we marvel over all new Gmail features, compulsively track bylines, and argue over the proper Latinate plural of words like “genius.” And you, gentle reader, most likely fall into this category too.

So take a break from “studying” (living on Facebook); because who doesn’t like reading about themselves?

—Taylor Walsh
*Editor-in-Chief*
Beginning in the fall of 2008, the Center for Comparative Literature and Society will offer a study abroad program at the University of Ghana in Legon. Buried deep in the Center’s email to interested students was the following statement: “Applicants should be aware that, regrettably, homosexuality is illegal in Ghana.”

Study abroad administrators were reluctant to discuss the statement, and State Department travel information for Ghana did not include warnings based on sexual orientation, focusing instead on crime and special $1.75 taxes on incoming electronics. Other advisories for Tunisia and Cameroon, however, noted that homosexuality “can be punished by imprisonment.”

**BY THE NUMBERS**

Using publicly available census data, we determined that Columbia University employees commute from their primary residences in the following locales:

- **1727** Morningside Heights
- **322** Upper West Side
- **313** Harlem
- **180** Bergen County, New Jersey
- **99** Kingsbridge, Bronx
- **80** East Village
- **35** Williamsburg, Brooklyn
- **26** Staten Island
- **14** Baltimore, Maryland
- **8** Litchfield County, Connecticut
- **1** Albemarle County, Virginia
- **1** Bluffton, South Carolina
- **1** Chicago
- **1** San Diego, California

*Bodeled compiled by Katie Reedy; Illustrations by Allison Halff*
Your copy of *The Iliad* is the first free thing you’ll get out of Columbia—and most likely the last. But if a cheap, practical paperback is an assault on your classical tastes, one bibliophile is offering a deluxe version for students with a penchant for the finer things.

Ben Heller, CC ’09, is embarking on a business venture with some wealthy backers to create a series of fifteen mini-*Iliads* that will have hand-set type on hand-set pages. These modern-day relics will cost up to $1000 a pop.

Heller’s original vision was more modest: inspired by people reading pocket Bibles in the subway, he thought he’d like to have Homer’s epic in his breast pocket. But his work as a bibliographer for Robin Raybould, a real estate developer and avid collector of Renaissance symbolist literature, drew him into the New York rare book scene, and drew his mini-*Iliad* project into strata of greater exorbitance. The project will actually be more financially viable as a no-holds-barred, spare-no-expense limited run—Columbia’s Rare Books Library and a handful of private collectors have already committed to purchasing the pricey mini-books, which will probably be completed in spring 2008.

But there are only so many classicists with the required amount of disposable income, so Heller and his backers are also devising a $100 version that looks similar but uses computer-set type and mechanized binding. This slightly pared-down edition, still an elegantly constructed book, may not top everyone’s Christmas list, but is closer to what Heller initially set out to create—a talisman that need never leave the body of its owner.

Despite the book’s lavish construction, Heller has opted to use Alexander Pope’s translation, which is in the public domain and therefore free for republication. The book will not feature Richmond Lattimore’s *Iliad*, the Core’s standard issue translation, but Heller’s judgment seems sound. In contrast to the brawny line-by-line literalism of the Lattimore, the Pope is very much the aspiring 18th-century dandy’s *Iliad*. And who better to carry a handcrafted, leatherbound Greek classic tucked behind his cravat, close to his heart?

—J. Joseph Vlasits

Many people outgrow the desire to don masks and save the world, but GS student Chaim Lazaros, has amassed an adult Justice League of his own. An aspiring filmmaker, Lazaros is the co-founder of Superheroes Anonymous, an organization that brings together and then chronicles real-life superheroes—costumed, alter-egoed do-gooders with names like Red Justice and Direction Man, who roam the highways and byways helping lost tourists and offering subway seats to the elderly.

Lazaros’s own superhero avatar is Life—the Hebrew translation of his first name—and his costume evokes Clark Kent with hipster finishing touches: a leather Robin-esque mask, white shirt, skinny tie, black vest, black trench coat, black skinny jeans, a studded belt, and a fedora. He looks more like a slick villain than a savior.
Despite the vitality of his alter ego, running Superheroes Anonymous, filming the Superhero movie, and being a superhero, have been exhausting. “I lost my life,” says Lazaros plaintively. “I’ve spent my student loans, I lost fifteen pounds, and I pull two or three all-nighters a week working on this.” With bags under his eyes and quivering hands, Lazaros looks like any struggling filmmaker trying to muster a bit of strength from the dregs of a cup of coffee. Asked about his future at Columbia, Lazaros is grim. He says it will take “a miracle” for him to be enrolled next semester—but Superheroes Anonymous is a fundamentally optimistic project, and his enthusiasm for this element of his career seems unfaltering.

For without him, there would be no movement—these heroes would probably still be in their cyberfortresses of solitude (i.e., MySpace pages and clandestine online superhero forums). And if he is made haggard and careworn by trying to find a balance between Chaim Lazaros and Life—between his own financial, social, and academic needs and the needs of the masses who depend on him—well, isn’t that the struggle of every superhero worth his man-sockings?

— Lucy Tang

Indecision. It plagues us all, especially here at Columbia University in the City of New York, where the options are nothing if not plentiful. What movie to rent at Kim’s? Which seminar to take? Which of your TAs to flirt with coyly? You’ve read your horoscope, but have you tried ancient Chinese prophecy? It’s the next step in the search for self-awareness, and you don’t have to go too far to find it. Deep in the bowels of Kent rests Columbia’s very own collection of oracle bones.

Dating back roughly 3,000 years, oracle bones were the means to answering the most pressing questions of the Shang Dynasty’s royal court. The king, curious about the sex of his next child, or whether it was a good day to go hunting, would commission a necromancer, or diviner. This necromancer would chisel shallow indentations into a bone, hold it over fire or apply a hot poker to the indentations until it cracked, and then read and interpret the cracks, engraving the questions and their heavenly answers into the surface of the bone. The bones were fashioned from either the shoulder of an ox or the shell of a turtle—although when they were first discovered in the late 19th century, they were thought to be dragon bones and were often crushed into powder for medicinal use.

Columbia’s collection boasts about 70 fragments of oracle bones, excavated in the 1920s and 30s and donated over the years by various East Asian scholars and benefactors, and includes the largest on record, which, according to East Asian Studies librarian Ria Koopmans-de Bruijn, has been featured in almost every East Asian textbook published in the last century. Unless you read archaic Chinese—oracle bones are the earliest written form of the language—you will not be able to decipher the celestial revelations. But then again, you’re probably not wondering which day would be best for your marriage or whether or not you should wage war on a neighboring country. Use them instead as inspiration: save a few chicken carcasses from your next meal at John Jay, find yourself a necromancer, and make some oracle bones of your own.

— Hannah Goldfield
Emilie Rosenblatt

Emilie Rosenblatt, CC’08, is of average height and build, unassumingly pretty with straight brown hair and fair skin. In her daily uniform of jeans, a hoodie, and a tank top, at first glance she could be in the admissions brochure of any East Coast private college. But those jeans? They’re Baby Phat. And the tank top says “Latina is Beautiful” in rhinestones. When she opens her mouth, it is clearer still that she doesn’t fit the mold: she uses a distinctly urban dialect—sounding more like a hip-hop artist than an Ivy League student—readily admitting that she’s not too concerned with colloquial grammar.

And then there’s her resume. At one point during our interview, Rosenblatt used the word “myselfs.” Though it was an accident and she laughed and corrected herself, it was a fitting Freudian slip: her incredibly busy schedule requires a few extra limbs, if not personalities. As an English and African-American Studies double major, Rosenblatt manages an ambitious course load—last semester she took 24 credits. As if that weren’t enough to keep her occupied, at only 21 she’s already held more jobs than most retirees. As a first-year she worked full-time at Duane Reade—the 4 p.m. to midnight shift—to compensate for “lousy” financial aid. She’s held countless internships, including stints at Grove Atlantic Press, Cortona Park in the Bronx, the Working Families Party and Sean John, and she used to copy-edit for an economics professor specializing in contract law.

She also participates in America Reads, takes dance classes at Barnard “just for fun,” and performs with the Black Theater Ensemble. She played a major role in a production of Ntozake Shange’s (BC’70) For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide When the Rainbow is Enuf, which was written for an all-black cast. “I called and said, ‘I’m white, is it OK if I show up?’” As a resident of the Intercultural Resource Center, she helped found Freedom School, a program designed as an “answer” to the Core Curriculum: a recent alternative-Art Hum field trip took students to 5 Pointz, a graffiti mecca in Queens. She’s devoted past spring breaks to working for social justice in Nicaragua (with Hillel) and New Orleans (with the Office of Multicultural Affairs). “I’m indecisive to the point of, well, I’ll just do everything,” she said.

And then there’s her life story, which she is hesitant to share and careful about relaying. She was born into a Jewish family on the Southside of Chicago—a specific I had to coax out of her because she is wary of being pegged as the token white kid from a poor black neighborhood. That said, she is something of an anomaly, though she moved to Minneapolis by the time she entered (a mostly white) high school. The environment of her early years, coupled with her activist-type father, might help explain the particular bent of her resume, her reasons for participating in last month’s hunger strike, and why she is “often the only white person in the room.”

It wouldn’t be fair to accuse Rosenblatt of denying the fact that she’s white. She maintains a connection to Judaism, attending Temple on the High Holy Days and Passover—though she doesn’t quite see eye-to-eye with one of her older brothers, who is Hasidic and has seven children. And she considers criticism of her lifestyle to be valid, explaining that a lot of white people appropriate black and Latino culture in a manner that is not respectful. “There’s a tendency to go into it ignorantly,” she said. “I’m not saying that I don’t, but I try to do it in a way that’s conscious of power and race and privilege.”

In the end, Rosenblatt isn’t too preoccupied with
defining herself—any of her selves—and she shrugs off the question of her own identity. Said one of her friends: “After years of failed attempts to place her into a category, I’ve decided that she’s just Emilie: a sum of different experiences, different social groups, different ideals. She throws her entire self in every situation of importance to her. She’s so real, and I admire her for being that.”

—Hannah Goldfield

Emma Kaufman

Emma Kaufman, CC ’08, can’t keep herself out of jail. She’ll tell you this and laugh, because she’s been saying it a lot recently, in as many ways as possible. Kaufman is a petite brunette who can switch between her pensive, introspective self and her caffeinated, scrutinizing alter-ego with relative ease. When we get on the topic of jail, her eyes are wide and agleam with reformist passion, as she expounds at auctioneer speed on the prisons she’s visited as a Guggenheim Fellow, working with the not-for-profit Correctional Association. She squinted in thought: “I find them problematic.” At an early age, Kaufman began to internalize the radical feminist views of her college professor mother. Dinner was all about sparring. “The rule was ‘talk or die,’” she deadpanned.

Kaufman knew that there was something politically murky about her rural public elementary school’s insistence that she sign a virginity pledge in the fifth grade. The pledge worked about as well as a condom bought in the fifth grade—by high school many of her classmates were breaking their vows, having litters of children, and dropping out. Kaufman herself split her teenage years between hell-raising on the back of her boyfriend’s motorcycle and assisting clinicians at the Susquehanna Valley Chapter of Planned Parenthood.

She said of her patients there: “They’re not the cleanest vaginas.”

When Kaufman arrived in New York to attend Columbia, she found five boroughs of problems. While working at a Madison Avenue boutique for a summer, (“I never knew ‘belt’ was a verb”) she took an unpaid internship with the office of the Brooklyn D.A. A staunch critic of the Rockefeller Drug laws, she told her bosses, “don’t put me in Narcotics.”

But, her assignment—felony domestic violence cases—made her even more ambivalent about the judicial process. She was surprised to learn that domestic violence felonies often lead to the prosecution of women who murder or assault their male abusers after years of suffering. Kaufman learned that the system doesn’t always work when the crimes committed are about relationships, power and “consent in ways that the law didn’t make it possible to make sense of.”

Kaufman pauses.

“So then I ended up in prison,” she laughs, referring to the string of legal aid-type internships that led her to work with the Correctional Association, examining prison conditions, corresponding with prisoners about everything from getting a lawyer to getting tested from Hepatitis C. “That’s the end of every story I tell. I use that line as many different ways as I can.”

If her trajectory from rural Pennsylvania to Rikers Island sounds gift-wrapped, especially when packaged with the cheesy one-liners she throws in, it’s because she’s spent all semester memorizing the spiel—a monologue of meaningful experiences and life goals for her half-hour Marshall Scholarship interview. Kaufman got it—and will use it at Oxford to study criminology, a combination of things she knows best: jail and theory.

If you didn’t know her, Kaufman might come off a bit saccharine. Her expositions give way easily to gushing—gesticulating as wildly for her loves as she does for her hates. She idolizes Janice Huff, the weather woman on WNBC local News Channel 4’s nightly broadcast. “I was in a cab at Rockefeller Center, and I saw her. I called everyone I knew,” she said.

But between breathless canned lectures about the white paternalism inherent in prison rehabilitation programs and the racial injustice of mandatory minimum sentencing, she stops, brow furrowed, deep in thought.

“Aren’t these hard questions?” She looked up. “But urgent ones at the same time.”

And you can tell she really means it.

—Sara Vogel
I would like to begin by thanking *The Blue and White* for publishing an article in last month’s issue concerning Columbia University’s efforts to prepare for a potential influenza pandemic. While the article, entitled “Apocalypse Soon,” did a good job of introducing Columbia’s Pandemic Preparedness efforts, there were some points that we believe require clarification.

The Vietnamese and Swedish “scientific” study mentioned in the article estimates the current fatality rate of the H5N1 bird flu to be less than 1%, only slightly higher than normal seasonal flu. What the article did not explain was that this study was conducted using questionnaires rather than actual blood samples. According to the World Heath Organization, H5N1 has infected 335 people and killed 206. Since 2004, the virus has maintained a death rate close to 60%. The study cited in the article is simply not good science and leads to misrepresentations about the current pandemic threat posed by H5N1.

Mr. Rosen’s article seems to create a controversy where one does not exist. Both the administration and Students Prep America are concerned with the potential of a flu pandemic and seek to prepare for one. While there is no scientific agreement as to what a worst-case scenario might look like, it is important to remember that a severe pandemic could be worse than the Spanish Flu of 1918 while still not being the worst-case scenario.

In his article, Mr. Rosen states that “America, presumably, is ready.” We at Students Prep America do not share this presumption and believe that efforts must be taken at every level of our society to promote awareness and preparation for a potentially severe flu pandemic. For more information on pandemic flu, the developing threat of H5N1 and what you can do to help prepare, visit our website at www.studentsprepamerica.org.

—Justin Kamen, CC ’09
Co-Founder of www.StudentsPrepAmerica.org
Verily Veritas holds between his two fingers a pink letter: “You are cordially invited to the Sweet 16 Celebration of Kayla and Kristal Veritas...” Yes, yes, the twin nieces, in Los Angeles, the worst city on Earth. Of course he wouldn’t go, but he may already be in town on business.

Business?! Yes, Verily is Hollywood’s best-kept secret, and no, it’s not what you think. VV can hear you huffing: “After all the talk of his vaunted North-Eastern Lifestyle, he sold out, he went West to become Matthew McConaughey’s personal romantic-comedy screenwriter—a disgraced, latter-day Faulkner.” Or maybe you think Verily is the man-slave Tom Cruise keeps in his attic, his monthly dispatches fingernail-carved into various leather straps and spirited out through a sympathetic housekeeper? But hold fast, dear reader! He is neither—Verily is, in fact, what the executives call a “film consultant.” And, Verily might add, one very much in demand.

Verily’s consultation, and he is only slightly exaggerating, has provided the seed of every eccentric European aristocrat in every Hollywood-produced movie of the last ten years. The source of this knowledge? Why, his own family, of course. Verily is blue-blooded American, but his roots stretch back to Old Europe, and even when they don’t—well, as Verily has learned, in La La Land, the romans all have British.

The genesis was an evening in Toronto, where Verily attended an Anne Carson reading. It was her early Sappho translations, not, God forbid, her original dung, and although Verily was hopeful—personally annotated Greek text in hand—the event was such a fiasco that in twenty minutes he was out the door and into the nearest grog shop, where he imbibed two bottles of sherry, told many choice bits of his family history to an endearing, supple young man, and gave him his business card should he ever be in New York.

Only later did Verily learn this man had used key elements of his Uncle Vetatus’ life in the monologue of a character called “Dr. Evil” (what is so nefarious about luge lessons and summering in BurmaVV will never know), and that this man had been doing a variety show in New York every weekend for several years. Why no telegram? Verily sighed. And immediately threatened lawsuit. Soon Hollywood had its muse—le cinema, c’est moi.

Contractual obligations keep Verily largely mum, but suffice it to say: Great-uncle Viscus Veritas filled in the details of a certain cannibal’s teenage years. All vampire movies draw from the Greenwich Veritas (and take a moment to fathom this past decade’s entries in that noble sub-genre.), etc. etc. Verily did indeed sell out his family, but he doubts recrimination; since when does a Veritas attend the cinema?

But back to this “Sweet 16”—Verily would be a skip away in some mogul’s office; to skip or not or skip? Decisions, decisions. But first, une petite histoire: Verily was once dubiously feted at a party of a purported motion picture director named Quentin Tarantino. VV arrived and quickly retired to a dark corner. QT pursued, and when Verily tried to rebuff him with a lamentation over how he had to cut a criminally overlong column down to word count, and needed peace and quiet, the incorrigible one offered a not unhelpful bon-bon. Verily will save you the man-child’s Valley Girl elocution and profanities. The distilled version is this: Mr. Tarantino had an idea for an epic, two hundred minute revenge film. When faced with the prospect of truncation, and losing any of his pet project’s self-indulgence, he instead made it longer, split it into two parts, and released them separately. Verily took a cigar from his breast pocket, and took the night off. And what of the “Sweet 16”? Is Verily West-Coast-bound? ‘Twill have to wait ’til next time.

Indeed, a cliffhanger. Welcome to Hollywood, bitches.

— Verily Veritas
Thinking Outside the Godbox

Riverside’s Interchurch Center keeps the faith.

By Andrew Flynn

There was a time, not so long ago, when life was a lot better. Things were simpler, people were nicer, and the world was much happier, not to mention cleaner. This ended, inevitably, when Kennedy was shot, when Vietnam went to hell, when Tricky Dick erased those tapes. But this world lives on in pockets—diners with dollar egg creams, movie marquees—preserved like sepia cells that somehow survived the botched colorization process. If you are walking down Claremont on a blustery December day and you find that suddenly, unexpectedly, you need a moment’s respite, you will find such a pocket. Across from Milbank’s ivied brick, a building you never noticed will catch your eye, its boxy, business-like symmetry too eager to indulge in the rest of the block’s longing for the classics. And, though you can’t quite see through the shiny silver revolving doors, if you could you’d be able to read the capitalized axiom that hangs in judgment of the white-marbled lobby:

WHATEVER YOU DO DO ALL TO THE GLORY OF GOD

This is the Interchurch Center, and it is the only place like it in the U.S. of A. Not in style, of course—in this it is the apotheosis of 1950s optimistic efficiency: right angles; cool, bright marble; heavy-wood paneling; and two banks of automatic elevators. The gold-leafed names of venerable donors, prudent bishops and forgotten laymen are chiseled into every imaginable surface. The building’s midcentury information booklet goes to great lengths to stress this, touting the “modern, air-conditioned, efficiently laid-out offices.”

“Glass partitions give desks maximum lighting from the windows,” we learn, “supplemented by the modern artificial lighting. The feeling of light and spaciousness is further heightened through the use of low filing cabinets, space-saving office furniture and light-colored paints.” Perhaps nowhere is the company-man aesthetic more present than in the sprawling lower level cafeteria. Down a department-store style escalator from the East Lobby, one passes through double glass doors into a “warm, relaxing atmosphere” designed for interdenominational fraternalizing. Bright lights, stainless steel, lime Jello. The cafeteria—which truly is a hot-meal-serving cafeteria of the grammar school sort—is still home to the best lunch you can get in Morningside Heights without breaking the bank. While the planners (including John D. Rockefeller, Jr., who donated the land and a substantial chunk of money toward the building’s construction) did their best to make sure that the building didn’t look out of place, it is clearly of a different milieu from its surrounding structures. Indeed, in The Interchurch Center: Reminiscences of an Incorrigible Promoter, Francis Stuart Harmon, a trustee from the very beginning, recounts how he hoodwinked the Rockefellers and the architects into accepting a 19-story rather than 17-story building by adding two of his own floors to the scale model (“‘O.K. friends,’ I said. ‘Now see what ‘wild-man’ Harmon has done!’”).

But, if Interchurch’s means were common, its goals were unique. “For decades men had dreamed of a center for Protestant and Orthodox communions in America,” the booklet explains. The dream was finally realized in 1960, when the Interchurch Center opened its doors, housing the new national offices of many of the mainline Protestant denominations, as well as the decades-old ecumenical body, the National Council of Churches and a branch of the World Council of Churches. New York was not an obvious choice—as Randall Balmer, historian of Christianity at Barnard, pointed out to me; the city was regarded as a hotbed of radicalism even in the 50s. But, the institutional optimism of the Godbox’s interior is a visible sign of the sort of changes that were going on in places like Riverside Church and Union Theological Seminary. Kathy Todd, who has worked for World Student Christian Federation at Interchurch since 1986, and whose husband, Rev. George Todd, worked in the Presbyterian office there during the 1960s, remembers that heady time well. “The period in which the Interchurch Center was built,” Todd told me, “was
a great period for ecumenicity, which is the coming together of the different Christian branches, to build a worldwide community of Christians who were bound together by a common tradition.” Interchurch was, in some senses, the highest achievement of this movement—the greatest concentration of Christian denominations in the United States.

Of course things were never simple, not for the world, not for America, and certainly not for Christian ecumenism. Breaking down the barriers between the denominations went hand in hand with mobilizing the resources of the Christian tradition for the Civil Rights movement and all that was to follow. And what was to follow was bound to be controversial. “It was a time when denominations who were working here became very much involved in the social upheavals that were taking place in the 60s,” Todd remembered. “They were very much involved in the Civil Rights movement and the aftermath of that, of the sort of city riots that were taking place, of a kind of cultural revolution that was taking place among students. And my husband remembers very much supporting these movements, as were the national directors of the national programs here.”

The common story of mainline Protestantism was the fallout: The perceived radicalism of the national leadership caused backlash from local congregations. With declining attendance numbers and the rise of evangelicalism, congregations began to move their national offices out of Interchurch. Of the original denominations, only the Methodists and the Reformed Church of America retain national offices in building. The Presbyterian case is typical: New York was deemed too out of touch with the average Presbyterian, and the national headquarters was relocated to Louisville, Kentucky. As denominations have downsized, moved away, or replaced national offices with local ones, Columbia has taken over office space, moving operations like Columbia College Today into the emptied floors. The dream of Christian unity seems less likely than half a century ago, when President Eisenhower presided over the laying of Interchurch’s cornerstone, calling it a symbol of a “prime support of our faith, the Truth that sets men free.”

Nestled in one corner of Interchurch’s Treasure Room Gallery is a small room dedicated entirely to the New Revised Standard Translation of the Bible—“As literal as possible. As free as necessary.” Opposite panels depicting the evolution of the Bible in English (from Tyndall to Revised Standard) are pamphlets touting the wide appeal of the recent (1989) revisions: “Why Women, and Men, Welcome the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible,” “A Needed Resource for the Black Church,” “In a Catholic Edition,” and “A New Standard for the 21st Century.” Condemned by some and lauded by others for its sensitivity to gender-neutral use of language, the New Revised Standard is the ecumenical movement’s gift to the world. The Treasure Room Gallery itself boasts global consciousness with an exhibit of Hye Sung Lee’s representations of the sacred “Om.” Just outside the exhibit’s doors, an obligatory line of artificial Christmas trees have appeared in recent weeks. They obscure, but cannot hide, the writing on the wall: “ONE LORD • ONE FAITH • ONE BAPTISM.” •
He made everything his own, was interested more on jazz than Beethoven.

I hope my presentation makes your next subway ride a joyride.

It’s a small bathroom . . . for one person only . . . a toilet, a mirror and a sink . . . I placed the cd case on the back of the toilet and emptied some of the yellowish powder onto the cover of Milestones . . . I used my student id to fine the powder . . and rolled a 100 euro note into a tight tube . . I put one end in my nostril and in one one motion cleared the surface . . I looked in the mirror and the feeling washed over me . . . like a powerful orgasm inside the quickening of my heart . . . my eyes opened wider and an involuntary smile came to me . . .

cheers Mardi!

A quiet darkness, steeped in solitude;

A craving more intense than comfort food;

The heart begins its rapid, anxious beat;

A jerking to and fro, taut muscles tense;

Upon the brow, a sweating and a heat;

Commotion down below, mad and immense.

So suddenly, the floodgates now release;

And crashing through comes calm euphoria;

A tranquil stillness glows, the world’s at peace;

Beneath, a touch phantasmagoria.

Indeed, there never a sensation was that feels as good as masturbation does.

On Broadway and 113th, in the middle of winter when everyone was buried within themselves, nestling in layers of Gortex and fake fur linings, she thought of Achilles. Bare-chested, bronzed Achilles, trudging through the snow, waiting in line behind the Barbras and Natalies of the Upper West side that gather on the edge of the sidewalk in the one spot where a safe crossing is possible—a crossing where the sludge cannot find its way into boots and cannot nip the edges of skirts. One by one they cross, like penguins lined up to belly flop into the ice flow.

In this recording, the Evangelist was very articulate with his words but sounded like he was whining and complaining.
The proper resolution of the autoinfanticide problem is not hard to find.

Any mushroom picker knows that the only way to exterminate a poisonous mushroom from the ground is by eradicate all of its roots. In 1513, the Medici family comes back to power in Florence. The first thing it does it is to eliminate, or eradicate from the territory, any entity that was or that might be poisonous to them.

If you are modest, they say “he is stupid”, and if you are not modest, they say “he is bold”. If you are sad, they say “he is in love or in debt” and if you are happy, they say “he is always laughing and cracking the walnut with his tail (acting like an idiot)”. If you spend your money sparingly, they say “he is stingy and tight”, and if you are generous, they say “he is wasteful.” If you wear good clothes, they say “she is a flashy bimbo and he is a gigolo”, and if you wear bad clothes, they say “he is untidy”.

She had begun to write stories, most of which were about herself, most of which were written with tears in her eyes, tears that, with words, welled. Regardless, it was never her voice. Some days Woolf came through, not Woolf in her essence or in her perfection, but in small moments, dabs of stolen color. The lark, the plunge, she’d steal it away, swiftly into the night like a thief with something precious—like the shadow men in The Great Gatsby bearing away the woman in a thin, white dress, lying on a stretcher.

This is a character I play and it has taken me years to get it down . . . I’ve got it down let me tell you . . . so well in fact that im invisible . . . so invicible . . that . . . well . . . I cant even see my own reflection in the mirror . . . But this coming together of the European Union . . . it has shot the whole thing to hell . . .

My leadership skills are exemplified in my experiences with Whoopstock, a student run organization. Some of my friends, as usual, are gathered in apartment 4C, and in addition to their fun and supportive presence, the smell that fills my nostrils is comforting in its deep familiarity: the mingling of joviality, burning marijuana, and hubris, I swear, can be smelt as well as felt.

“Yes she is . . what you see is Christ reaching out you.”

“You think so.”

“I know so” and for some reason I wonder what she looks like when she masturbates.

Firms that MAY or MAY NOT have my resume

BNP Paribas: emailed resume to a friend, don’t know what he did with it.

Nightmare: Yasmin is naked, bound and chained to the yard outside 2409 East Weaver. A storm is brewing, but no ones home. The house is empty, hollow. Its door, flung open, bangs in the wind creaking against the sound of leaves racing across wet grass. There are purple clouds forming in the east as Yasmin tugs against her chains, attempting to pull them from the very dirt. They sway but will not give way, stubbornly refuse to budge as grass tufts and pebbles are racked by her effort. She begins to scream. She screams and screams and screams. She screams until her voice is horse and blood trickles from shackled wrists. She screams.

Since the instruments were much less significant in the piece, it was hard to tell whether or not these instruments were more or less complex.

Elvis Presley . . the king of cocaina
The War on Fun

Prohibition returns to Morningside Heights.

By Joseph Meyers

The occasion was her roommate’s 21st birthday, the theme was the 90s, and the setting was Woodbridge dormitory where her friends—a majority of whom were over 21—had gathered in celebration. Around 12:30 a.m., just as the party was getting good, several campus security guards knocked on her door and, in vague terms, explained that the fun would have to stop. Her party wasn’t registered and the RA, a fellow senior, had reported it because the music was too loud. Like any mass of indignant people, they went to find the RA to ask why she hadn’t warned them first. “Do you think I don’t want you guys to have fun?” the RA, who was now in tears, asked. That was precisely what they thought.

The school year began with long lines outside of East Campus on Friday nights, needless breakups of parties in Ruggles, and nostalgia for a once thriving local bar scene. That initial frenzy was intensified by rumors that the administration was imposing citation quotas on RAs, that they were systematically patrolling Facebook for any signs of party-activity, and that the university was purchasing ID scanners for local bars. Most of these rumors were dubious, but that did little to assuage the aggravation of the student body, who perceived—from the inception—an epic battle between the administration and collegiate revelers. The War on Fun—as this esteemed publication called it—was on.

But then midterms season came and, by mid-October, the panic had fizzled as quickly as it had begun. The state of the war was ambiguous. Perhaps it had ended. Or, perhaps it had only become a Cold War. Like the U.S., threatened on all fronts by the encroaching Red Menace, the administration fears one thing: lawsuits. Thus, while there is no point-by-point strategy for the takedown of fun, the university is ready to fight satellite wars wherever and whenever revelry poses legal complications.

Columbia crime statistics for the Morningside Campus reveal that in 2004, there were 11 incidents of discipline for alcohol, then 10 in 2005. In 2006, there were 61. Discipline for drug use also increased during those years, from six to eight incidents, and then to 20. There has been a persistent crackdown on the numbers at fraternity parties, more rigorous enforcement of IDs at off-campus parties, and greater restrictions placed on traditions like 40s on 40 and Bacchanal.

These statistics coincide with a changing of the guard. Two years ago Cristen Scully Kromm—previously Director of Barnard’s College Activity Office—became Director of Residential Programs at Columbia. At the same time, Eleanor Daugherty was appointed Assistant Dean for the Office of Judicial Affairs and Community Standards. According to most RAs interviewed for this article, the switch resulted in tighter enforcement of residential policies, though these remain virtually unchanged. Both Kromm and Daugherty declined to be interviewed, however, so it is impossible to say how much direct responsibility they bear, or whether their appointments reflects changes from Low.

Traditionally, RAs in upperclassman dorms are uninterested in policing their charges. Nominally responsible for building community amongst a highly heterogeneous collection of seasoned cynics, many are rarely seen by their residents in any official capacity except at the beginning and end of the year when students are reminded not to smoke in bed or toss beer bottles out the window.

But when Scully Kromm began her new position, some RAs who were comfortable with the policy of benign neglect sensed a change.

“There was definitely an emphasis on adherence to protocol,” said an RA, who asked to remain anonymous. ResLife “emphasized how the policies contribute to a better community, which you can believe or
not depending on your personal views.”

The greater emphasis on disciplining students led many RAs to quit after last year, which contributed to the decision to allow sophomore RAs. The new batch of RAs is younger, leaner and meaner. Compared to their predecessors, they’re far more willing to end a party and involve Public Safety.

Though EC residents may gripe, their situation is enviable compared to that of Hartley-Wallach inhabitants. The dorm is officially substance-free, and policing has increased: on the weekends, suite inspections on weekend nights have increased from two to three per evening. Ameneh Bordi CC ‘10, said that one evening her entire suite was reported because two residents had a beer with dinner and left the bottles on the table.

Perhaps more insidious than physical inspection is a new method of surveillance: Administrators are on Facebook, possibly to keep tabs on the social lives of students. Dean Scully Kromm has a Facebook account with no information and no friends. One Hogan resident reported being invited to an EC party via Facebook and then uninvited half an hour later when the host received a warning e-mail about the fête from Public Safety. “I’ve been pissed,” she said, “East Campus is where we’re supposed to go.”

Not according to ResLife. As one RA explained, students are not officially permitted to have parties in their rooms. Early in the year, extra public safety officials were stationed in EC to preempt possible parties.

Jim McShane, Associate Vice-President for Public Safety, said that increasing incidents of alcohol discipline may be because of Morgan Levy, who was hired two years ago as the first Dean of Judicial Affairs at Columbia. McShane believes that this increase is not due to stricter enforcement, but may have to do with the creation of a whole new position to hold people accountable once they’re caught.

For over 20 years, Hot Jazz, an evening of live music and freely flowing champagne sponsored by Alpha Delta Pi, took place in the literary society’s brownstone with little incident. Last year, Housing and Dining officials “discovered” that for all of those years, during which upwards of 300 people had filled the house, ADP was violating New York City’s fire code. According to Scott Wright, Associate Vice President of Student Auxiliary Services, the building’s maximum occupancy is 74.

ADP, which had already invested in party preparation, scrapped the party altogether after Housing and Dining approved it on the condition that only 74 people came. This year, they held it on a boat instead, but the $40 ticket and strict ID policy kept many away.

“It’s overwhelming,” said ADP president Michael Magdaleno, CC ’08. “The people in housing haven’t been helpful unless pressed to an extreme degree.” According to Magdaleno, during the Hot Jazz affair, administrators postponed speaking with ADP organizers until a month before the event, took three weeks to schedule a meeting with members of the organization, and generally were “dragging their heels the entire way.”

The brothers of Zeta Psi had a similarly frustrating experience, though the stakes were significantly higher. After a guest of the frat punched a hole in the ceiling, and subsequently apologized and paid for repairs, housing began the disciplinary process to have the frat expelled from its brownstone.

Frat president Alec Glucksman CC ’08 postulated that Levy had strongly influenced the decision of the Greek Judicial Board. “She really doesn’t like us,” he said. In July, the frat was ordered to vacate its brownstone. Victoria Lopez-Herrera, Assistant Director of Greek Life, declined to be interviewed for this piece, so it’s unclear whether any previous incidents colored this decision.

Wright, however, was quick to dispel notions that
the end of Hot Jazz and other forms of campus partying were part of any specific administrative scheme. “I’ve never sat in a meeting with any colleague and heard them say, ‘This campus is out of control, we have to restrain the campus,’” Wright said. “But,” he was quick to add, “we cannot put ourselves in a position of neglect.” Wright believes his department has the obligation to provide safe residences, even if that has the “unfortunate” consequence of killing some fun. Wright was not entirely sympathetic to the complaints of stifled students. “There are acceptable options to replace what ‘fun’ was referring to,” he said.

Apparently, Housing and Dining defines “party” differently than students do, which is one reason that most frat parties go unregistered. If a party is approved for registration, its host organization is required to provide graduate student proctors at the event to oversee a strict one-beer-per-hour rule. “We registered a party two years ago and it worked out pretty well, but people were upset because of the drink limit,” said Scott Hughes, CC ’08 and Sigma Chi president. “It wasn’t a traditional frat party.” Technically, registration is required if there are to be more than 40 people in a house at the same time. In most houses, this means that if every brother invites one friend, they are in violation of policy.

With a certain inventive spirit, hosting a rousing party with a trio of unknown grad students telling people not to drink might be possible. The trouble is, these party-poopers don’t do it for cheap. According to Hughes, the three proctors necessary for a three-hour event cost around $180, at $20 per proctor, per hour. Most frats don’t have that kind of money.

Recently, the Inter-Greek Council has been attempting to reform party registration guidelines. In early December, the group drafted a policy and presented it to Lopez-Herrera. The policy would allow fraternities to have more beer at parties and eliminate the one-beer-per-hour limit. The plan also currently proposes substituting graduate student supervisors with representatives from other fraternities—a point that Hughes acknowledges “may be harder to sell.”

Wright believes his department has the obligation to provide safe residences, even if that has the “unfortunate” consequence of killing some fun.

The War on Fun has also made it more difficult for student groups to gather together on the weekends. “You scrounge for people’s suites or you go to 1020 with the people who can,” said Bordi, a member of CU Players. “There’s no space anywhere for anything, so having fun gets pushed to the wayside.”

Student Development and Activities has become crotchety about permitting organized on-campus gatherings where alcohol is served. In previous years, at the senior class’s monthly Lerner Pub, students were IDed at the door, but once they were inside it wasn’t too hard to snag three or four of the 700 Miller Lites. This year, a limit of 550 beers has been imposed—that is, the maximum capacity of the room times two. At the last Lerner Pub, a guard was stationed at the door of Lerner Party Space to stop admission as soon as the room was filled to capacity. “I was under the impression that the first three Lerner Pubs ran smoothly,” said Senior Class president Neda Navab. “It came as sort of a surprise to me that they were enforcing the rules.” To supplement the policed Lerner events, the senior class council hosts weekly senior nights at Amsterdam Café, which (surprise!) have been well attended.

But these are only unpublicized, strategic air strikes compared to SDA’s high-profile assassination of last year’s 40s on 40—the cherished, anti-establishment tradition in which seniors sit nursing bottles of malt liquor on the Low steps 40 days before their graduation. Of course, the virtue of having a campus with gates that essentially demarcate a playpen for students is that it’s conducive to such public acts of mild intoxication. Predictably, SDA no longer agrees. Last year people stood around in a white-fenced corral on Low Steps, two IDs to drink. The day was neither 40 days before graduation, nor were students permitted to drink 40s.

Due to an odd exception in SDA rules, Bacchanal is the only non-student-council group allowed to purchase alcohol, a privilege which they have traditionally used to throw open bar parties and large events.
on campus in the spring. Juniors Jordan Keenan and Jeremy Reich, president and vice president of the club, recall parties from their freshman year that were liberally supplied with cheap beer.

But things have become more difficult. Last year, the club bought 30 cases of beer for a homecoming soirée in the Lerner Party Space, but the strict ID policy and two-drink restriction limited attendance. By the end of the party, only four of the cases were gone.

Without alcohol, it’s difficult to attract Columbians to their student center on a weekend night. The Fed, which throws its semesterly Fed Bash in Lerner as well, has reported similar problems.

“Nobody wants to come to a place where they get their mail and eat their lunch to go to a party,” said Keenan.

While suites are too small and well-policed for big parties and space on campus is too tight to organize parties people want to go to, getting university money for off-campus events is no easier. This year, Bacchanal was not allowed to throw its traditional last-day-of-classes party at an off-campus bar because SDA Associate Director Robert Taylor said it would be an unfair use of student life fees to pay for an event which only half the student body could legally attend. John Rawls would agree. But the underlying reason is liability—the university can be held responsible for any incidents that occurred on its dime.

The class of ’09’s semi-formal, held at Havana Central, was the first official off-campus student group party where an 18-to-party, 21-to-drink policy was enforced; its posters warned attendees that the bar would only accept “real, valid, legal, legit, scan- nable, and black-lightable forms of identification.”

All this would be manageable if students could still count on being able to escape the policed dorms to slake their thirst at local bars. But—zut alors!—Columbia’s squeeze on consumption has coincided with a citywide crackdown on underage drinking and fake ID sales. Our neck of the woods is faring particularly poorly: Mona and Roadhouse have both closed in the last year. The West End, formerly a haven for underclassmen without look-a-like older siblings, was replaced by ID scanner-equipped Havana Central. The Heights, also formerly a freshman haunt, recently hired a professional bouncer after repeated raids by local police. According to Maria, a bartender at The Heights, since then the bar has been significantly less crowded. The faithful remnants believe that it is only a matter of time until Columbia’s administrators relax their war against fun.

The piecemeal, peripheral-war strategy makes retaliation difficult. But the domino theory was disproved long before the fall of the Berlin Wall, so students can only hope that administrators think of a less destructive containment strategy. “They’re not managing risk, they’re just managing their responsibility for risk,” says Reich. “The only group it’s benefiting is the administration. It’s not helping students, and it’s not lowering the risk for them; students are safer when they’re out in public spaces and not alone in their rooms.”

—Additional reporting by Lydia DePillis
Cult of the Genius

High noon at the Fifth Avenue Apple Store.

BY JULI N. WEINER

Two years ago, after purchasing an iBook, a Columbia sophomore received an unexpected call. It was a Mac Genius, one of Apple’s specially trained customer support employees. This particular Genius had programmed the sophomore’s virus protection software and had apparently dug up her cell phone number from her warranty’s registration form.

“He asked me how my dad was doing since buying me my iBook!” she told me in disbelief. After slyly ascertaining her age—“Your student discount is for college, right?”—he asked her to Film Forum. “I live in the Village,” he added casually. Alas, not even a downtown address and promises of independent film could redeem our Casanova’s lecherousness.

Near-romantic encounters are common among Apple Store-frequenting females. But while Apple employees have a reputation for treating the Genius Bar like 1020, when it comes to broaching the subject of their jobs they’re uncharacteristically tight-lipped.

“Oh, we’re not allowed to talk to reporters,” Genius Devin explained, slyly behind his black rimmed glasses. Devin scrolled through his iPhone for Apple’s PR contact. The music of Coldplay—as it usually does—filled the subterranean sales floor of the Fifth Avenue Apple Store. Devin pressed on, “We’re just really not supposed to. I can get you in touch with a manager?”

While Genius Devin described what sounded like an impenetrable fortress of secrecy, Apple’s website tells a different story. AppleJobs (no, not that Apple Jobs) gleams with inclusiveness, filled with cheery portraits of pan-ethnic Genii (as they preferred to be referred to in the plural). “If you were the kind of kid who took things apart just to put them back together (correctly), we’d like to talk to you. You’re our kind of Genius.”

“Are you ready to join the retail revolution?” AppleJobs asks.

Adam was ready. Specialist Adam, the false name given to a friend of a friend who works at an Apple Store, was invited to a group interview after creating a profile on AppleJobs. “In the interview we basically just discussed Apple products and why they are so good.” Adam emerged victorious from this presumably grueling survival-of-the-damnedest group Q&A and now works as a Mac Specialist, which is different, mind you, from a Mac Genius.

Genii are “expected to solve pretty much every problem [people] have with their computer or iPod,” said Specialist Adam. Specialists are the sales team, who talk to customers and gauge what sort of products or support they might be looking for.

This hierarchy—one might say iErarchy—is borne out in the hiring process. While Adam and other hopeful Specialists hotly debated which was best, an iPod mini or an iPod nano, Trevor recalls being quizzed via telephone for nearly an hour on everything from the definition of a Bootrom to the RAM capacity of a MacBook.

Trevor (again, a pseudonym) has served as both Genius and Specialist. “I can say that the two groups don’t tend to mix too much. I feel like a lot of the Specialists are afraid or nervous around the Genii, because they have less technical knowledge, which at times can be annoying to Genii who are working...
in a chaotic environment and cannot be slowed down with simple questions.”

MacGeekery.com—the online home of Macophiles and their detractors—features “Rumors at the Bar,” a vitriolic collection of stories describing the harrowing aftermath of such “simple questions.” “Everyone asks about new products,” read one entry. “Hey do you have the new MacBook Pros yet?” Arrrrr? What the hell is a MacBook Pro?”

This sort of hostility extends beyond the borders of the Apple Store. Best Buy’s Geek Squad is a like-minded rival of the Genii. MacGeekery tells the sorry tale of one Genius who made the horrifying discovery that the Geek Squad hadn’t even heard of a mini-TOSLink. The Squad advised him to try CompUSA instead. “I stumped the Geeks. Score,” he wrote. The Genius posting characterized the Geek vs. Genii entanglement as having “a little vitriol that stems mostly, I think, from the generic Mac vs. PC flame-wars. Don’t quote me on that, though.”

The power that stems from such feelings of superiority also factors into on-the-job decision-making; cost and timeliness of Apple services are largely dependent on the whim of a Genius. Earlier this year, a MacBook and an iBook brought in by two Columbia students had nearly identical logic board problems. One student explained that her damaged logic board was the aftermath of an iPod falling on her computer. “Mac on Mac action!” her Genius laughed. She was told her computer would be fixed in three to five days. The second student, who came only with a broken MacBook and no tales of dueling hardware, was told seven to ten days.

One “Rumors at the Bar” entry illustrates the subjectivity of Apple’s pricing. “According to the letter of the warranty,” the post begins, “You owe Apple $30 to process your warranty request—even at the Genius Bar—after 180 days of ownership. I was a Genius for four years, and I never once charged this fee. The fee is a bad business practice, in my book, and when the heat started to come down on enforcement, that was one of the cues I took to leave.”

While Genii may comprise Apple’s upper echelon of employees, the location of one’s Apple Store can be a further mark of distinction. Working at a flagship store—like the towering minimalist cube on 59th and 5th, Chicago’s grass-roofed Michigan Avenue location, or one Stockton in San Francisco—carries more prestige, said Genius Trevor. The Fifth Avenue store “is a store to some, a museum to many,” mused one Specialist. She also estimated the clientele to be about 90% foreign: “The store is a total freak show.”

For all of their navigating the sea of foreigners and freaks, Genii and Specialists do not go underappreciated. The perks are generous, said Specialist Adam. Though Adam was hesitant to discuss it, he did mention that he receives “a discount on one computer, one of each iPod model per year as well as a general discount on all other Apple products.” Internet rumors estimate the discount at 25% on Apple hardware as well as a 10% friends-and-family discount.

The veil of secrecy shrouding the netherworld of the Genius Bar originates with Apple’s cryptically-named “spherical branding.” MacGeekery explains this tactic as a PR method in which the company adopts a unified front for the public so that customers will feel as if all employees are equally well versed in every product and service. “Reality is vastly different,” the website grimly prophesized.

Apple is a company that prides itself on transparency, user-friendliness, and the apparent embracing of U2 as forebears of the counter-cultural zeitgeist. The Specialists and Genii are the techies who staff the Apple Stores, and they are the human embodiments of this ethos. But Apple is notoriously mum on the issue of the employee experience: all Genii are required to sign non-disclosure agreements. The Genii’s inaccessibility makes Apple Store fieldwork nearly impossible—wading through Mac subculture is an anthropological mission that doesn’t come with a search bar.

And yet, with iPhone in hand (very possibly storing your cell phone number) and black-rimmed glasses secured, the Genii and Specialists trail on. From Fifth Avenue to Soho, Bethesda to Short Hills; if it’s a high-gross-income-per-capita blue state, that there’s Apple country. So sleep easy Mac users—the Genii are watching over, ready to serve you in a time of crisis, and silently judging you based on your desktop background. •

Cost and timeliness of Apple services are largely dependent on the whims of a Genius.
Emmy and Pulitzer winning playwright Tony Kushner, CC ’78, had to cancel our first interview when the Writers Guild of America strike called him to the picket lines. When we finally corralled him at the Hungarian Pastry Shop, the Angels in America author arrived on a little folding bike to regale us with tales of activism, experimentation, and a room near and dear to his heart (residents of 1013 Furnald, you’ve been warned).

The Blue and White: How involved have you been in the strike?

Tony Kushner: Well, I’ve been on the picket line pretty much every day there’s been a picket line. I’ve been a responsible member. I’m not writing a screenplay that I was in the middle of writing when this started.

B&W: What’s that been like for you? To completely step away from something you’re immersed in?

TK: It’s been tough because it’s a script for Steven Spielberg and I’d been working on it for a year before the strike happened. I think it’s important that it’s in basically the same shape that it was in when the strike started, so that people running things in Hollywood understand that it’s not like a lot of work is secretly getting done while we’re on strike.

B&W: One of the things you mentioned in your 2004 Class Day speech is that you wouldn’t have been there unless the grad students were taking a rest from their strike. Were you involved in activism as a student?

TK: Yeah, that’s one of the reasons why I came. I had a fantasy that I would walk on campus and May ’68 would still be going on, and I had really powerful romantic feelings about Columbia’s history of student unrest. This was 1974, so I was somewhat surprised by what I found when I got here. But there was still actually a lot going on, and I think about a month after I arrived, Abe Beame, the mayor of New York, announced that they were closing all the branch libraries in the public library system, because this was at a point when the city was completely bankrupt. And a bunch

Illustrated by Julia Butareva
of old people who were all 1930s radicals who used the library as a place to sit on cold days announced that they were going to sit in and not allow the libraries to close. And then somebody, I don’t know who, put up posters saying, “Let’s go support the old people.” And so it became, every day, this amazing gathering of 80-year-old communists who still lived in rent-controlled apartments on the Upper West Side and student radicals who had occupied Grayson Kirk’s office in ’68 and one guy who claimed to have put acid in the water cooler in Low Library—and people like me who were interested in being part of that tradition at Columbia.

B&W: Would you say that the activism was one of the more formative parts of your experience?

TK: No, because I had done political stuff in Louisiana when I was growing up, and I learned certain things about activism from my days at Columbia, but I certainly learned a lot more about activism when I left school and came out of the closet and got involved in various gay political issues. I wasn’t out when I was on campus—I could have been, there were dances at Earl Hall, but I was just trying to become a straight person, so I sort of missed that.

The most important thing to me was the education. The Core Curriculum and all of those classes did what they were supposed to do, they laid a firm foundation for me, both knowledge and also analytic skills. And a few other classes I took at Columbia, like Edward Taylor’s Shakespeare class, Kenneth Coates’ 20th Century American poetry class. They were transformative. I wasn’t a particularly diligent student, but I got an enormous amount from my education here, and I feel a deep gratitude to the place. There were no arts majors at Columbia at that point, which unfortunately is no longer the case, right?

B&W: Yeah, I think you can major in music, and dance...

TK: I think there should be no undergraduate arts majors, except maybe if you’re a dancer or instrumentalist, then I think you sort of have to train at a very early age. But I feel very strongly that arts training is vocational training. Acting classes in undergraduate colleges are ridiculous; you don’t actually have the emotional capacity in your first four years away from home to do acting training, which is really a very painful and difficult thing. So thank God people who teach acting to undergraduates don’t go near any of that, and instead just teach them bad habits, which if they’re really talented they’ll unlearn.

B&W: Was the Varsity Show a big deal when you were in school?

TK: It wasn’t. I think the Varsity Show existed, but I certainly never saw one. We were very into [Jean-Claude] Arteau and Peter Brook, and were very serious—there was a lot of interesting experiment of various kinds going on. It was the golden age of American experimental theater, really. There really was just astonishing stuff going on downtown, and we were all in awe of it, reading a lot of high modernist theory and figuring out what we wanted to do. So things like the Varsity Show were beneath us.

B&W: Do you mind if I probe a little more into why coming out was difficult for you, and why it only happened towards the end of your college years?

TK: Well, I came here from a small town in Louisiana, and I was very close to both of my parents, my father especially. My father had sort of known that I was gay, but was very eager to believe that I could do something about it, and fix it. In Lake Charles there were no analysts, and so at Columbia I went to Health Services my second week here, and said “I need to talk to somebody, I have a terrible problem.” And I certainly had never had sex with anyone, but I knew that I wanted to have sex with men. I got very lucky—because in 1974, it was sort of hit and miss, you could easily end up with some wizened old
homophobe—and instead I got a guy who was a very gifted analyst. After about a year that we’d worked together, he said “I’m not sure the real problem is your homosexuality, I think the real problem might be your relationship with your father.” And I was reassured to hear that, but I still found the idea terrifying. I didn’t want to be a member of a marginal group. I’m sure ultimately it was all rooted in my father’s disapproval. I remember walking in Central Park at one point when I was a student at Columbia and there was a march of gay people, and I sort of watched them go by, and I was very moved by the thought that they were marching, and I thought to myself, “Well, when I work all this out and I become straight, I will be very nice to them.”

The very first thing I did in terms of theater at Columbia was I went to an audition for *Marat/Sade*, which Columbia Players was doing a production of. And there were two guys, students, I later came to know them both very well. And they were sitting next to each other holding hands, and they kissed, and I was shocked. I was really frightened. I avoided making friends with gay men, which is weird because most of my friends were in theater at Columbia. I wasn’t sexually active in any way. And then I finally had sex with somebody about a week before graduating.

*B&W*: A lot of people do that.

**TK:** 1013 Furnald.

*B&W*: OK. Wow. You said that the ’70s were definitely the age of experimental theater in New York. Do you feel like there’s any sort of age that we’re living in now?

**TK:** I certainly think there’s a lot of very interesting experimentation that’s going on now. It seems to me that at some point—and people disagree about what point this was—when I was starting out in theater, *The New York Times* simply didn’t review anything below 14th Street. They weren’t interested in it. It wasn’t what everyone aspired to as much. The city was so much cheaper to live in. You could find places to do theater for nothing. So as a result you had people who were sort of middle aged and who had arrived at a maturity of vision and were still doing downtown experimental work. And that’s changed to a certain extent. I think it’s mostly now people who are really willing to put up with the deprivation that comes with not being commercially successful—it’s primarily young people. And there’s an automatic, well-laid and well-trodden path from doing experimental work downtown to something like commercial success.

*B&W*: I think it’s interesting that you didn’t say anything negative about the theatergoer. Do you think young people are still interested?

**TK:** I think a lot of the not-so-young people in their 20s and 30s who were sort of trained by their parents [are interested]. Like my partner, who’s 44, subscribes to, like, six different theaters. My aunts and uncles who lived in New York, his parents, bought tickets for the whole season, and went to see what they had to offer. Some of it was shit (a lot of it was shit), but some of it was great, and you knew that you were giving your money to fund not just your own entertainment but also a cultural milieu from which your society would derive benefit. Now, the mentality has shifted much more towards consumer expectation and criticism written from that point of view. *The New York Times*—it’s an appalling sort of rag now—there’s no sense of history, no sense of antecedents.

I’m a little bit afraid there’s a generation passing from this earth of people who have a connection to culture as being an absolutely essential part of life. Those people are going away, and I worry a little bit whether we’re worthy successors to that generation. These were people who really believed that the point of civilization is getting a cheap theater seat and going to see something good and difficult. I don’t know how you have a civilization without
people like that.

B&W: You’ve also made a shift recently in starting to work on screenplays. What drew you to that?

TK: Mostly I was just interested in what I was asked to write about. I’ve found over the course of working with Spielberg and Mike Nichols that I really enjoy film, not as much as plays, but I really do like to be on a film set, and I find the difference to be both frustrating but also really exhilarating.

B&W: You recently became the subject of a film yourself, a documentary that came out in October 2006. The reviews around it suggest that you hadn’t seen it. Have you seen it yet?

TK: I haven’t seen it. I promised Freda Mock, who made it, that I would watch it before we have to do one big interview together the day before it airs. The idea of staring at myself and watching myself talk... It’s hard to watch how much you don’t resemble what you [think you] look like and sound like.

B&W: I think that’s interesting, because as a writer, you have to see your work.

TK: But it’s writing, it’s not you. It’s sometimes very hard to listen to your writing—it sounds stupid and you can’t believe you did that—but you’re still not watching yourself. To a certain extent when you read what you’ve written, you start to rewrite it, and the impulse to do that is a kind of progress.

B&W: You mentioned politics and speaking a lot about the war. Do you think your writing is going to get more political?

TK: I have no idea. There are some times when the world is so horrible that it is impossible to write overtly political things, and there are times when suddenly your rage becomes organized, and very clear, and you feel compelled to create something that’s very overtly political. I give myself permission to go with the times. I’d like the work that I do to be useful to those who are struggling for progress or political change, but my main job is always [that] when I come up with a situation that I want to write about, to tell the truth about it. The truth is almost always, among other things, political.

B&W: Are you excited to get back involved with campaigns this year? Do you have a favorite?

TK: I’m not going to say. I just saw John Edwards speaking downtown for the WGA—Hillary and Barack both sent telegrams. Any one of them, including Mike Gravel and Dennis Kucinich, would be such a vast improvement over what we have, or any of the monstrous people who are running for the Republican ticket. I’ve liked a lot of what Edwards has said. I think the choice to go towards a really fierce populism and a Left Democrat approach was admirable, and sort of forced Hillary and Obama away from their centrism a little bit. I wish I was a little bit happier with Obama. I don’t like his whole line about being the non-political politician. I think that’s garbage—it’s sort of a page from the Reagan playbook. There’s nothing wrong with politics, and there’s nothing wrong with being partisan. It’s very clear now that the Republican Party is not going to play along with rectifying the horrendous mess that they’ve sunk the world in. I wish that Obama, who I think in many ways is a very admirable man, would drop this whole fantasy of finding common ground to talk about. As a gay man, I find this deeply offensive.

“I wish that Obama, who I think in many ways is a very admirable man, would drop this whole fantasy of finding common ground to talk about. As a gay man, I find this deeply offensive.”

B&W: Well thank you so much for meeting us here, Mr. Kushner.

TK: I’m excited being back in the Hungarian Pastry Shop. I used to live here, and it looks like it hasn’t been cleaned since.

—Lydia DePillis
Annals of Fandom

Shouts and murmurs from the desktops of New Yorker devotees.

By Karen Leung

When literary critic James Wood announced this August that he would be leaving the staff of The New Republic to write for The New Yorker, arts sections in newspapers around the country acknowledged the defection, but Emily Gordon’s coverage was unique. Gordon, BC ’93, rushed to feature the story as breaking news, linked to articles speculating about Wood’s future, and in characteristically decorous fashion wrote, “Congratulations, New Yorker—Wood is a gentleman and a scholar.”

All of this appeared on emdashes, Gordon’s straightforwardly doting blog about “The New Yorker between the Lines.” Emdashes is usually appreciative and always earnest; its critics are not. Gordon says that when she tells people she writes a blog about The New Yorker, “Some immediately think it’s a great idea and want my card, others think it sounds obsessive.” A few bloggers have answered her fervor with derision; she even heard that a film critic for the magazine had called her a “New Yorker groupie.”

Gordon, however, is no iconoclast. Her site just happens to be the oldest and most prominent member of a larger tribe that blogs about The New Yorker. The online community that’s developed around the discussion of and love for the magazine now includes Blog about Town, newyorkette.com, I Hate The New Yorker (whose author doesn’t actually seem to), New Yorker comment, Silence of the City, and a string of cartoon-centric blogs.

Those who don’t blog, read: Emdashes, the nuclear hub, receives 500 unique readers on an average day, with 1,000 on a good day and 5,000 or 6,000 on a great one. The blog interviews writers, runs a monthly Q&A with the head New Yorker librarians and is staffed by about seven regular contributors, most of whom are involved in journalism or publishing in “real life” (after several years working in journalism and a brief detour to get her M.F.A. at NYU, Gordon is now an editor at PRINT Magazine in New York City). Her dissatisfaction with her job at PRINT was what ultimately drove Gordon to seek out fulfillment in online fandom. She and her co-workers “spent a fair amount of time online and very depressed.” Emdashes was born.

Gordon originally conceived of Emdashes as an intimate blog about the idiosyncrasies of The New Yorker, observing small details out of “the kind of love that makes you notice if someone got a subtle haircut.” But the site quickly grew beyond mere unabashed fawning. To name a very few features: for the blog’s readers, the magazine’s weekly publication alone is newsworthy, so the Emdashes team drafts summaries of articles and posts them as “Headline Shooters”; changes in New Yorker staff are given all the attention of a professional sports team roster, and personal reading experiences (“Tom Mueller’s engaging ‘Letter from Italy’ exposes the thriving fake olive oil syndicates. My mother is an avid consumer of extra-virgin olive oil...”) are encouraged and enjoyed.

With its notoriously unpublished masthead, it’s challenging for even the most attentive fan to cover changes at The New Yorker; Gordon calls it her “mission.” To create a sense of what the magazine is and where it’s going, many bloggers revert to their Bible: The Complete New Yorker, a $100, nine-CD compendium of the magazine’s 4,000-plus issues. Martin Schneider writes for Emdashes as the correspondent for The Squib Report, where his “nominal beat” is the DVD archive. He began collaborating with Gordon after starting a blog called Between the Squibs, whose ambition was “to single out articles and other things from the past that weren’t so well-known, and also to get other people to submit their choices, their picks for articles people with the DVD set shouldn’t miss.” Between the Squibs was Schneider’s greatest-hits list—an intertextual love affair with an archive.

“My relationship with The Complete New Yorker is relatively intense,” he says. “I probably check it, for some reason or other, on almost a daily basis.” For Schneider—who’s day job entails editing books for university presses—the variety is the attraction; he calls the Complete New Yorker “simultaneously the best anthology of 20th-century short stories ever compiled, ditto 20th-century American poetry, and several shelves’
worth of extremely fine non-fiction books.”

Both Gordon and Schneider, ever conscious of achieving the highest level of eloquence, requested AIM and e-mail interviews, respectively. They were more comfortable with writing their responses than saying them aloud—after all, even the most well-crafted thoughts need great editing, as any New Yorker reader will attest.

The New Yorker is many things to many readers, and its online enthusiasts’ approaches to reading it—which mingle cryptic cartoons and investigative reportage with arts profiles—are as eclectic as the magazine’s lineup. Schneider’s approach is to begin with the cartoons and content in the front of the magazine, particularly the Goings On About Town and Talk of the Town sections. They’re “two forms that The New Yorker has perfected since the first years of the magazine,” Schneider says matter-of-factly. “I am not a completist when it comes to The New Yorker.” He seeks out profiles and reportage pieces that bring him “into contact with material that no other periodical does with such regularity or with so little fuss,” and looks out for interesting criticism, gravitating less to fiction and poetry.

Blogger “inmichigan” posts summaries of New Yorker articles on his “Drunken Volcano,” but funnels his descriptions into haikus. Of his reading habits, he says, “I’m probably a more careful reader than most. Many of the haikus turn on an evocative detail or a line from the article, and I look out for those things.” inmichigan’s entry on a recent essay by Ian Frazier is next to useless for readers curious about the actual content of the article, but it does encapsulate the bloggers’ particular brand of New Yorker beatification:

It takes obsession,
Countless casts, to
catch your own
Holy Grail of fish.

New Yorker blogging might seem refreshingly infatuated—and in important ways, it is—but a seductive mythology that surrounds the 82-year-old magazine far predates the internet. Fans appearing online within the last few years have been burdened with the paper trails of New Yorker enthusiasts of yore: reading material for the bloggers includes a growing list of books on New Yorker history, many of which were written during the late 90s by former magazine contributors. The blogs are newcomers on a scene that has long valorized New Yorker editors-in-chief, tracked changes in the magazine’s design, and hungered after stories about inter-staff fighting. This mythology can be alluring even for those actually on the New Yorker staff. Talk of the Town deputy editor Lauren Collins says she sometimes reads Em dashes and calls its “Ask the Librarians” columns “a treat. It’s fun supplementary reading that enhances my experience of the physical magazine.”

L.A. Weekly writer Tim Appelo, who seems to have reviewed almost all of the books about The New Yorker, has often remarked on the loyalty that the New Yorker staffers-turned-biographers have for their former editors. The magazine’s readers can clearly be just as loyal—and frequently emotional.

“It had a touch of melancholy about it,” mused an Em dashes poster on a recent Adam Gopnik essay. “Hope everything’s OK.” Who is she addressing? Not actually Adam Gopnik—she doesn’t really expect him to be reading. Her audience is comprised of other fans, at least some of whom, it’s assumed, will hope that everything’s OK in Gopnik’s world, too. And this is what the vigorous fandom of Em dashes is about: the intimacy and companionship of collective zeal.

Gordon grew up in what she calls a “New Yorker family,” but her characterization could just as easily apply to the network of fangirls and boys who find companionship on the web. “The family can fracture, disperse, dissolve, die, but the magazine is read by everyone who is alive, and when we are together, we are all soaked in it, live through and within it,” she says. “It’s important to us.”

DEPT. OF IRONY

Illustrated by Maxine Keyes
Sponsored [in part] by the Arts Initiative at Columbia University. This funding is made possible through a generous gift from David and Susie Sainsbury.
Margot at the Wedding
Directed by Noah Baumbach; 93 minutes
Now playing

Academic snobbery suffuses Noah Baumbach’s Margot at the Wedding. In his follow-up to The Squid and the Whale, a group of forty-something writers, whose focal point is the talented and loathsome Margot (Nicole Kidman), shamelessly drop their intellectual credentials. Margot’s husband and her lover studied together at Stanford, and her husband teaches at NYU. Her flaky sister spent time at Bennington. and the neighborhood temptress is headed to Harvard, prompting Margot to muse that plenty of “stupid people” get accepted there. And where did Margot study? She issues an answer in two clipped syllables:
“Barnard.”

At the screening on the Upper West Side, this line earned gratified chuckles. For the subset of moviegoers who know Columbia, the revelation that Margot went to Barnard grants a new insight into her character. For a moment, we understand Margot’s blithe meanness because we—sophisticated Manhattan intellectuals that we are—see her traits in ourselves, or at least in some of the English majors who walk among us. She is simultaneously over-educated and ill-equipped for human interaction—it makes perfect sense that she is a creature of an insular school on a small island.

Margot has a number of Manhattanite neuroses; she nags her son incessantly about seemingly insignificant problems while indulging all manner of nervous tics. She has used her commercially successful short stories to reveal closely kept family secrets. She is insecure in her career despite having published several books and feels inadequate in the shadow of the men in her life—her professor husband and novelist lover. She also betrays her sister with astonishing ease: the two have a relationship anchored in a mutual acknowledgment of their rivalry.

Margot is clearly miserable visiting her family and spending time in nature, referring constantly to her home in “Manhattan,” the site of anecdotes both glamorized and damning. Even the film’s conclusion, as Margot runs to escape on a bus to Vermont, is disheartening. We know that eventually she’ll need to go back to Manhattan, to return to the rivalries, social circles, and sarcastic jibes that sustain her self-destructive tendencies. Columbia students are often no different. While we may pity Margot in her failings, we leave the theater for the gated-in campus that distills our own elitism and narcissism.

Margot is a woman from the city, but not of it; she is perpetually reassuring herself of her New Yorker credentials by rejecting her own family. Sound familiar? It’s easy to imagine Margot in a Columbia English seminar, knitting her brow as she plans out both her literary rise and the ever-so-cosmopolitan ways to spend her time on weekends. Baumbach’s sketching of the New York-Ivy League intellectual sort is brilliant. Margot is stymied not only by simple tasks—climbing a tree, playing croquet—but by any expression of genuine emotion.
The film transcends mere character study and becomes a cautionary tale for Columbia and Barnard humanities students who are already well on their way to Margot’s neuroses and ennui. How many of the Columbians in the audience of this film have considered writing a roman à clef, or using their families as a caustic punchline rather than a support system? And after the rejection letters come in, how many see Harvard (Yale, really) as the (new) haven of idiots, or at least not true intellectuals like themselves?

Noah Baumbach shows how destructive the twin forces of New York and academia can be: his heroine is a civilized malcontent who maintains little interest in relating to the world around her. Her writing is acclaimed but not fulfilling. No one should be shocked to discover that Baumbach’s father earned a Ph.D. at Columbia, and the Baumbach family has been immersed in the New York intellectual scene for decades. After all, Margot isn’t the only one writing from life.

—Daniel D’Addario
The Dead Beat Scroll

Jack Kerouac retrospective at the New York Public Library.

Beatific Soul: Jack Kerouac on the Road
New York Public Library
Closes March 16, 2008

He’s one of Columbia’s most loved and loathed. Graffiti on the bathroom walls of the Hungarian Pastry Shop decry him as a bigot, a drug addict and, still worse, a talentless sell-out. Columbia College Today happily ignores the fact that he didn’t actually graduate alongside the class of 1944.

Like many of us, I read my fair share of Jack Kerouac in high school. I was frustrated with the direction my life seemed to be heading (nowhere) and works like On the Road and Desolation Angels provided a gritty, romantic vision of the racier life I had longed to lead. But by the time I came to Columbia, I was less convinced that when Kerouac claimed to be a “crazy dumb saint of the mind,” it was actually a good thing. Though I still enjoyed his writing, I didn’t rush to the West End, the Beats’ celebrated Morningside haunt; I knew that not even the thrill of breaking-in my first fake ID would reconnect me with what I only dimly understood as “the magic of that time.”

What was “the magic of that time”? Although Columbia seems distinctly non-magical today, it did connect the formative minds of the Beat Generation. Kerouac met Allen Ginsburg, CC’48, here, as well as William S. Burroughs and Neal Cassady (the pseudonymous Dean Moriarty of On the Road). Burroughs first became addicted to heroin in the Morningside apartment he shared with Kerouac (once Kerouac had moved out of Hartley). Even if I didn’t feel that the ghosts of beatniks’ past were drifting through the halls of Hamilton, I did recently begin to feel that the time was ripe to reconnect with one of the most important movements in American culture, and one of the heroes of my adolescence.

It was fifty years ago this September that Kerouac’s seminal novel On the Road was first published, six years after the famous three-week long, Benzedrine-fueled spree in which Kerouac typed the first full draft onto a 120-foot scroll in his girlfriend’s West Village apartment. In honor of the anniversary, the New York Public Library has arranged a dense exhibit culled from the Berg Collection, an astonishingly complete archive of notes, drafts, paintings and other artifacts catalogued by Kerouac himself. The pièce de résistance is the scroll itself—making a brief stop before continuing its world tour—which celebrates its May 2001, $2.2 million sale to Indianapolis Colts owner Jim Irsay.

Encased in fiberglass, the scroll already looks like a relic; the yellowing parchment’s decaying edges and meticulous typing seem right out of a 15th century monastery, far removed from the novel’s supposedly frenzied, spontaneous composition. In fact, very little of On the Road was spontaneous; it was almost entirely based on writings amassed in Kerouac’s travel notebooks and journals and other telling documents like “Original Self-Instruction List for Composing On The Road.” Even though only the first 60 feet of the scroll are displayed, the document stretches out like a road itself, a metaphor Kerouac himself enjoyed. The scroll can’t help but speak to the lionized image of Jack Kerouac—the myth, not the man. Since it was the man I’d sought, I turned to the carefully curated artifacts that surrounded the treasure.

The exhibit emphasizes the nearly maniacal desire Kerouac had for cataloging. Two lists of every girl he’d ever slept with are on display (one chronological and the other alphabetical) just feet away from the highly comprehensive fantasy baseball league he developed as a child and played by himself all his life. Dozens of photographs chronicle Kerouac’s exploits—from childhood to handsome literary celebrity to bloated alcoholic who died following a bar fight at age 47. The exhibit also presents Kerouac’s pocket watch, his paintings, his shoes, his harmonicas, his cigarette papers, Valentines he made his mother as a child, a lamp he carried when he worked on the railroad, even notes he wrote to himself in his own blood—almost all of them assembled by Kerouac himself, who, despite his early death, archived nearly everything in his life.
for posterity. Whether he did so because of a desire to be understood after his death or out of vanity is a matter of opinion, but due to the sheer size of the archive, I can’t help but believe the former. Even the crutches he used when he broke his leg playing football for Columbia are encased in a plastic box in one corner.

Most people who associate Kerouac with Columbia also know that he was admitted on a football scholarship. To some this detail suggests that Kerouac was a happy all-American collegian, but in reality his time here was fraught with difficulty. In high school in Lowell, MA, Kerouac was offered scholarships to several schools, Boston College and Columbia foremost among them. The decision to accept Columbia’s offer was made by Kerouac’s domineering mother. The brunt of this decision fell on Kerouac’s father, who lost his job when his boss, a zealous BC fan, discovered where his son would attend. The Kerouac family soon moved to Ozone Park, Queens, where Jack’s father died soon after. Far from a football star, Kerouac had a difficult time fitting in and never forgot the cost of his free college education.

Even in college, Kerouac had his notoriously independent and errant spirit. Though he was a voracious reader and had serious literary ambitions, he strained against the rigidity of the College curriculum—though the Core of 1944 was less rigorous than what we take today. On display are some of his notes from Contemporary Civilization and Literature Humanities, where he copied down theories of history and penciled in remarks like “The hobo is Virgil.” On some level, displaying anyone’s notes from Lit Hum is ridiculous; to think that Kerouac saved his notes for his personal archive is more so. Still, what Columbia student would say no to such an exhibit of his own? Isaac Gewirtz, the curator of the show, writes that as a student Kerouac had a “sense of himself as a rebel outsider whose intellectual and imaginative capacities both intrigue and threaten his professors.” This sounds like half the students I know, but I can hardly believe they’re all Kerouacs in the making. Perhaps Kerouac’s uniqueness lies only in the fact that he eventually vindicated his over-blown sense of self.

The Beat movement did come together in Morningside Heights in the ’40s, but the glue was not Columbia. Sure, Columbia gave many of the Beats a home on the Upper West Side, but it did little to galvanize them in their philosophies. They nursed heroin addictions while World War II raged. They debated Existentialism at the West End before it was in the CC curriculum. Kerouac wrote sports articles for the Spectator while the atomic bomb dropped. Only a few of the Beats even had the pleasure of attending Columbia classes, while they all experienced the events of the 1940s, which proved far more influential than the University.

In the end, perhaps it’s better that way. When I read On The Road, I don’t want to hear an analysis of the Aeneid or a definition of utilitarianism; I want to feel what it was like for Kerouac in the middle of the century, living on the fringes of society. Evidence of his time at Columbia is there, but on a subtle, almost imperceptible level. Perhaps Kerouac did what many of us hope to do: he made phenomenal friends, learned all he could from Columbia, and then moved on to better things.

—Sasha de Vogel
Contemporary Civilization

Tara Donovan at the Met
Metropolitan Museum of Art
Closes April 27, 2008

Tara Donovan’s new installation at the Met took seven days and seven assistants to install, in addition to four months of prep work in the studio. I felt a little guilty that I only spent the fifteen minutes before closing time looking at the work.

Donovan has built a reputation on her ability to render everyday ephemera unrecognizable—ordinary plastic cups arranged on the ceiling in distended billows evoke a shelf of coral or the suckered underbelly of some giant octopus; segments of No. 2 pencils are stacked into a metropolitan topography.

Her current show follows in the same vein. A two-dimensional sprawl that looks like the map of an unfamiliar land-formation is constructed from thousands of small Mylar tape hoops; the identity of the material is only obvious upon close inspection. Light reflects on the small patches of white wall that peek through the hoops, and first impressions suggest a wall intermittently paved with tiny glass pebbles. This is, incidentally, the only exciting or suspenseful part of the installation.

This is not to say that Donovan’s new work isn’t beautiful. At best, it’s almost magical—but not in a transporting way so much as in the way a Barney’s window at Christmas is magical. It’s hip, sleek, and in good taste, but its not enough to keep you occupied. And it’s certainly not asking any interesting questions. I wasn’t sure what to do with the rest of my fifteen minutes, having surveyed the entirety of a piece that would have better served as a backdrop for something else.

One girl who seemed disenchanted with the show wondered aloud: “Maybe it would be better if it was in the shape of something—like Africa.” Maybe not. But the comment does get at the heart of what’s frustrating about the piece. If Untitled (Mylar) has any appeal, it lies in the contrast between cheap, synthetic materials and organic, biomorphic form. You want it to mean something more, but it’s depressingly one-dimensional. Two other viewers summed the experience of the installation up neatly: “Wow! Niice.[they approach the wall] What is it? Is it paper!? I think it’s metal.”

“Nice” seems to be a theme underlying the Metropolitan’s recent efforts to bring in more contemporary acquisitions. Currently, the Met is a space where serious art-lovers, Upper East Side ladies-who-lunch, and Midwestern tourists can come together for their semi-annual dose of high culture—think Rembrandt and Temple and Dendur. But contemporary art? That’s the potentially tawdry, offensive domain of the New Museum and (when it occurs to them) the Guggenheim. There’s the danger that a foray into contemporary art might tarnish the Met’s reputation for impeccably chosen and easily digestible works.

But the Donovan installation makes it clear that while “contemporizing” might seem edgy, the Met is moving into the present in the safest way possible. This is the fourth in the Museum’s series “devoted to contemporary artists at mid-career.” One immediately thinks of Met-darling Kara Walker, whose curatorial meditation on Hurricane Katrina went up in 2005. Walker’s art certainly isn’t “safe,” but displaying her work in 2005 is. Another member of this “series,” Neo Rauch, makes political paintings that border on the surreal, but it’s nothing that a viewer acclimated to the unfailingly popular Dalí wouldn’t be able to palette.

The reality is, the Met won’t touch most contemporary art with a ten foot pole. But as contemporary artists in “mid-career” slide towards middle-age, will the Met use its clout to pull some out of obscurity and into the canon? As America’s definitive art institution, the Met has some responsibility to acknowledge important art as it’s happening. Maybe “safe” isn’t the best way to go about it.

—Merrell Hambleton

Illustrations by Zoë Slutzky

THE BLUE AND WHITE
That morning, your eyelids
were squirming like they were holding back
water-bugs.
   I knew I was seeing something dangerous
   scuttling away, unrecorded.
All I could think of was apple seeds.

Since then, I’ve stopped
searching for patterns
   in wind-chimes,
   trying to remember
   the tune of laughter,
   the rhythm of an Indian motorcycle,
   a certain shade of blue that knocks
you down,
   like a child, flat
   on his butt,
big-eyed,
befuddled.

   I am ready to believe
   in that point
where the hummingbird’s wings
cease to exist and he
   still hovers,
dangling, blank-eyed in front
of you
to submit

to the delicate surrender—
   the flicker of an AM radio,
the calm reception
   of uncertainty,
of wonder.

—Caroline Elizabeth Robertson
I keep thinking about the hot pink curtains Benoite puts up for wintertime, how she changes them to white for spring. The pink matches the flowers on her balcony, the cyclamens I brought her from a marché the other day. The red, mint greens, and creams in the living room chatter with the colors in her paintings on the walls. The white sunlight falls softly on the wooden floors. On days like this, you say the sunlight is “plat” or flat, Benoite tells me and I repeat it, like everything I hear on the streets or on the metro, in whispers to myself, “plat soleil, plat...”

There is a string of glass beads on every door handle, notes tucked into the edges of a mirror, an evil eye amulet hanging over the toilet paper, a chart tracing the origins of alphabets to ancient Syrian underneath the sink. The apartment is on the fifth floor, sixth to an American, and there is no elevator. On the door outside of the apartment, Benoite has posted a note: “Vous êtes arrivé. C’est bien ici.” You have arrived. It’s good here.

I am in Lyon for a week on a home stay trip that Columbia’s Reid Hall program organizes to give students a glimpse of French culture outside of Paris, and I don’t want to leave. I want to sit on the steps by the river Rhône and watch skateboarders twist under the brilliant sunlight all day, the waters scintillating. Children will fold paper boats and watch them float at the bottom of the steps, where grey concrete encloses a flat surface of water about one inch deep. On a hot day you can dip your feet. That spot makes me miss Low steps so badly.

It was Benoite who spotted me at Gare de Lyon. She is petite with short, silver blond hair and hazel eyes that droop a little at the sides, wearing a string of silver beads around her neck and earrings to match. She is 59 years old, lives in this apartment in the Algerian quarter of Lyon, a city just two hours south of Paris by le train à grande vitesse. I can still see, looking into this memory seven weeks later, the rural landscapes fleeting outside the windows, me trying to get it down: two lines for a telephone pole, a line for the horizon.

This has happened many times before. I have to take pictures of the apartment because I fear my memory won’t retain my mental notes, the big blow-up plastic globe in the living room, her lavender soap. I have already forgotten so many of the French words that Benoite taught me.

The memories that I will no doubt retain are culinary: melon with salt (try it!); her zucchini soup, so creamy; small apples we pick from the countryside, where her daughter Caroline resides; the wine grapes we eat off the vine; slim glasses steaming with thé à la menthe. In the ten minutes we have to spare before a movie, Benoite makes pasta in cream sauce with salmon from the marché. “We’ll add a little bit of lime juice,” she says. “Though I know not what the cream will say...we’ll see!”

The Paris I love, the marché along rue Mouffetard, the bread, the butter, is not unique. C’est typique. Lyon, however, Lyon I love in terms of Benoite.
CA\textsc{MPUS GOG\textsc{SIPP}}

NE\textsc{VERMORE}

TempTime, the Center for Career Education’s cesspool of odd jobs for broke college students, featured the following post by “Lenore”:

DESCRIPTION: Need someone honest, reliable and QUIET to sit in my apartment while I run errands. You can’t leave the apartment for ANY REASON or open the door to anyone. You can read, watch tv, listen to the radio, use the frig, but you cannot touch my papers, or use my phone and would prefer someone who won’t be on their cell phone all day. Prefer people who can sit from 9 to 5pm a few times a week (it could be once, depending on how many acceptable replies there are).

QUALIFICATIONS: Honest, reliable, QUIET, studious. Leave me a msg on my cell with your number.

DURATION: Weekdays 9 to 5pm, give or take an hour.

COMPENSATION: $4 per hour

Disturbed yet intrigued, \textit{The Blue and White} called Lenore and heard the following tale: She suspects her superintendent’s wife of sneaking into her apartment and “moving things around.” Cell phone calls are strictly verboten because if that alleged furniture-mover pops in, Lenore wants her employee to seem like a friend, not a below-minimum-wage spy.

We don’t know who’s more likely to murder us: Lenore or the landlady.

SO\textsc{Y AW\textsc{KWARD}}

A Columbia student was teaching young female elementary schoolers about nutrition at P.S. 125 for the “FitNut” program. In a conversation about healthy food choices, the following exchange occurred:

Columbia student: “So does anyone know what soy milk is? It tastes like milk, but it comes from beans.”

P.S. 125 student: “Hold the phone: beans has titties?”

WE SMELL SEX AND BAGELS

Overheard in Nussbaum & Wu:

Guy: You’ve seen these jeans before.

Girl: I’ve never seen those jeans before.

Guy: You’ve pulled these jeans... off my body before.

DEPT. OF CHARLATANISM

Overheard outside of Ferris Booth:

“I was going to major in Econ, but I’ve decided to major in, like, Spanish and Sociology. They’re both fake majors, but they, like, add up to one real one.”
Three girls are walking from Barnard to Columbia, talking about Manhattanville.

Girl 1: So yeah, Columbia’s going to take over Harlem with eminent domain.

Girl 2: OH MY GOD. NO.

Girl 3: Wait, what’s imminent domain?

Girl 2: It’s like, if you had a cookie and I just grabbed your cookie and ate it, wouldn’t you do that?

For so long, the Harlem community has been seeking a metaphor that would embody their struggle against the 400-ton gorilla. And here it is.

Late one Friday night, *The Blue and White* listserv received the following email:

“Hi,

I am a Fulbright student at Parsons doing my masters in photography. I apologize for this unsolicited email. I started this fall and I am working on a project where I need a volunteer who sports a beard. I asked around as many people as I could but haven’t made any headway. Any Pakistani/Indian/Bangladeshi/Mexican/South American/Middle Eastern person will do. I badly need that help for my project. Since we don’t have an MSA at the New School, I didn’t know who else to write to. Your help will be really appreciate. Would be eagerly awaiting your reply.”

Unfortunately, we were unable to help, but if anyone’s looking for an adorable redheaded Catholic boy, we have one of those!

Overheard in Upstate New York:

“I have a shotgun. I eat at the Waffle House and I have a shotgun at home!”

But do you have a side of hamsteak?

To the former—I’ve read (and always suspected) that the supposed ‘baby-killer’ stories were made up from the whole cloth. That’s the sort of stories which were floated when I was in the service (72-75) and I know of only one incident that I heard first-hand, otherwise it was all second-hand legend. Given Mr. Sanchez’ fudging (pardon) about other aspects of his life, I’d suspect the entire story was nonsense.

As to the Iranian honcho speaking—I’ll defer to you.”

Curious—we always thought our publication was more TNR than T&A.

Overheard at the Hungarian Pastry Shop:

Guy to girl: “Yeah, he’s really cool. He’s the first atheist, anti-Zionist I’ve met. Then I realized that’s just Marxist.”

Then she realized she was talking about isms at the Hungarian and imploded.