IT’S A SMART WORLD AFTER ALL
Bollinger’s Blue-Chip Committee on Global Thought
By Marc Tracy

TIM WU OWNS THE INTERNET
How a Columbia Law Professor Saved the Web
By Brendan Ballou

DISILLUSIONED MAJORS GUIDE Declare at your own risk.

ALSO: ART SPIEGELMAN, OPERA, FILMING ON CAMPUS
THE BLUE AND WHITE

Vol. XIII FAMAM EXTENDIMUS FACTIS No. VI

Columns
4 Bluebook
8 Campus Characters
32 Digitalia Columbiana
33 Measure for Measure
38 Verily Veritas
39 Campus Gossip

Cover Story
Marc Tracy 10 It's a Smart World After All
Bollinger’s blue-chip Committee on Global Thought.

Features
Brendan Ballou 18 Tim Wu Owns the Internet
How a Columbia Law professor saved the Web.
Brendan Ballou & Andrew Flynn 23 The Brooklyn Dodger
Two Editors discover a hidden treasure in Park Slope.
Marc Tracy 26 Back to the Drawing Board
A conversation with graphic novel great Art Spiegelman.
Rachel Lindsay 30 Beautiful Things
B&W does the funny pages.

Criticism
B&W Staff 16 Disillusioned Majors Guide
Why the Econ-PoliSci crowd might just be right.
Michael Snyder 34 Through the Opera Glass
How the Met is trying to woo students who don't go to the opera.
Daniel D'Addario 36 Columbia Motion Pictures
Beautiful people on campus—they just don't go here.

www.theblueandwhite.org  COVER: “The Committee” by Jerone Hsu

March 2007
In The Blue and White’s (conceptual) offices, change is in the air. A glance at our masthead reveals that members of the new guard are all some form of Catholic (from practicing to wannabe to lapsed to Episcopalian)—thus, this issue came together under duress. Lent, in its self-flagellating drudgery, has afflicted us all, but compiling this most secular of magazines offered a hedonistic escape. We hope it provides the reader with similar solace during this most celibate of times.

So rejoice! For the March issue is chock full of earthly delights, serving up meaty stories for those of you restricted to fish on Fridays. Marc Tracy’s piece on the Committee on Global Thought rewards those of you who gave up small-minded localism along with chocolate for Lent.

If the forbiddance of indulgence forces you to sip liberally from the communal wine, read how Andrew Flynn and Brendan Ballou were served orange juice in champagne glasses while sitting in the bed of a crazy person—truly crazy, but in the best possible way.

Read how Art Spiegelman, one of the most compelling storytellers of the 20th century—whose seminar you’re not in, but wish you were—is also a delightful curmudgeon. And finally, bask in the Schadenfreude of the returned Disillusioned Majors Guide, knowing that, however unsatisfying your choice of major, you could have done worse. Like, Creative Writing worse.

’Tis the season to transubstantiate, and we’re thinking this issue should tide you over—at least until Palm Sunday.

—Taylor Walsh
Editor-in-Chief
COME AGAIN…?

“Mr. Bollinger considered a site along the Hudson River in the West 50’s, but decided in favor of West Harlem, in part because of its proximity to neighboring Morningside Heights and in part because, he said, ‘Harlem is a place of great magic, of mystique, of tremendous creativity and accomplishment.’”

—From Matthew Schuerman’s NY Observer article Mr. Bollinger’s Battle, 2/19/07

REVELATION OF THE MONTH

An Amazon search reveals that Columbia’s academics—or strangers with the same names—have created wish lists in the hopes that you’ll buy them what they won’t buy for themselves. Sunil Gulati pines after a $500 multimedia projector; “LadyBo” Jean Magnano Bollinger is really into Ladysmith Black Mambazo; one Chris Colombo requests a book called *The Adonis Complex: The Secret Crisis of Male Body Obsession*; and Andrew Delbanco, in search of domestic bliss, hopes for a 2.75-quart Le Creuset Oval Oven in non-Columbia blue.

DIGIT TALES: DIG IN!

Nutrition Facts for John Jay food, per serving:

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<th>Mashed Potatoes</th>
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<td>Iron</td>
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CALENDAR

March 21, 6:15 p.m., Low Rotunda, free
University Lecture
Professor Gayatri Spivak speaks on the topic of “Saving a World.” Unfortunately, it is not ours.

March 23-24, Teacher’s College, $175 with CUID
Popular Culture in the Classroom: “Teach, Think, Play” Conference 2007
Guest speakers at this two-day event include Art Spiegelman and Ice-T, who, we are told, knows a lot about education. And ganster rap. And solving crimes. The entry price might seem steep—but if he brings Coco, it’s a steal.

March 23-24, 8 p.m., Miller Theater, $25
Steve Reich: Music for 18 Musicians
A octodecatet of guest artists performs Reich’s 1976 piece, which the Miller Theater website touts as a “landmark masterpiece (and) seminal work of musical minimalism.” You should probably pretend to like it.

Bluebook compiled by James Williams and Katie Reedy, illustrations by Rachel Lindsay
If Milano Market is a Mom-and-Pop establishment, then Apple Tree Supermarket is what happens when your crazy uncle decides to turn his garage into a grocery store. On a quick midnight milk run, Apple Tree may seem like a standard Manhattan market. But look around—or more specifically, look up. The movie selection that lines the ceiling and the Columbia memorabilia hanging above the produce suggest otherwise. Apple Tree is Morton Williams with personality, Pinnacle with gritty panache—and much better bagels. For the unconvinced, one conversation with Dr. Phil, a seasoned, lab-coat-wearing, night-shift employee is all it takes to convert.

Dr. Phil began Apple Tree’s movie rental service in 1992 with his home collection; nowadays it has expanded to include hundreds of titles from a wide range of genres. The Best of Chappelle’s Show sits on one shelf, while Love and Death on Long Island, a 1997 drama starring John Hurt and Jason Priestley, sits on…the same shelf. This organizational scheme is little more than free association, but it only adds to the charm.

This type of collecting (read: amassing) is one of Dr. Phil’s characteristic strengths. His collection of vintage Columbia postcards is displayed in various nooks throughout the store and in a large glass display case outside. Photo documentation of the past five Halloweens lines one of the walls. Until recently, a mass of thank-you notes hung beside the register. Around his neck, what was once as a chain holding a single house key has turned into an assemblage of worldly gifts from Apple Tree’s customers over the past six years—a bulky accumulation of Australian tchotchkes, Mexican jade brooches, rings from Woodstock, Egyptian figurines, and many, many more.

Like the large cardboard cutout of Abraham Lincoln that watches over the deli, there’s no business motivation or explanation behind these bits of scrapbooking. Dr. Phil cannot account for the doctor-persona he’s cultivated over the years but instead waxes poetic. “It’s a real community here.”

The Apple Tree community is one that appreciates ordered chaos, the aesthetic of debris, and, unwaveringly, the best egg-and-cheese sandwiches on Earth.

—Lauren Glover
consists of around 14 members, enforces its own a cappella beat and then engages in full contact interpretations of their own internal music, pounding rhythm on their arms, legs, the floor, and each other.

I show up at a team practice just as CU Step is preparing a performance for Black History Month, a tacit nod to step’s origins in historically black colleges and universities. Heather Janey, BC’10, who leads the day’s practice, performs bits of the step sequence alone, then watches as the rest of the team imitates. She catches every missed beat, scanning through her mental register of the choreography. Occasionally, she’ll do a quick, almost unconscious rendition of an entire step to make sure it’s right, in the same automatic way someone recites the alphabet.

During a break, stepper Alison Reid, CC’09, explains where they get their moves. “Some of us did step in high school, so we contribute what we know,” she says with a shrug, “but we make changes as we go along.” The team combines these individual steps into seven- to fifteen-minute routines that transforms hand-clapping and knee-slapping into something complex as a martial art.

After a demonstration of one complicated arm segment, the team gets the whole thing down pat almost immediately, and repeats it several times in perfect unison. “That,” says one stepper, “was an accomplishment.”

They all nod as if they are surprised they’re so good, cracking jokes about adding some Beyoncé-esque flair to their set. When they do a run-through of the whole step, the floor of Wien lounge shakes—and this is just their “lazy Sunday afternoon” style.

Finally, I stand up to try it myself, recalling instances of friends at summer camp trying to teach me the basics before totally giving up on me. The CU Steppers are more patient, and I get a couple of beats down. I’m not very good, but there’s something about the form that saves the situation; it’s all about the attitude, and that can rub off on anyone.

—Katie Reedy

As I’m walking into the Wallach lounge after class, the euphony of Chopin’s 4th Ballade spills through the door. Larry Weng, C’09, is at the piano, where he consistently practices on Mondays and Wednesdays around noon.

Weng, a student in the Columbia-Juilliard exchange program, plays throughout our conversation, pausing for the occasional page turn. The highly selective program allows students to complete a Bachelor of Arts at Columbia and Masters of Music at Juilliard within five years. But it is not without its pitfalls.

Administrative communication is muddled, scheduling is difficult, and admissions have historically been a mess. “We can’t expect the same level of support from both schools that exclusive students would,” says Weng, who has adapted to the frustrations. “But all in all, it’s a great option for musicians...who aren’t quite ready yet to confine themselves to the practice room.”

For others, the exchange is not the only off-campus route. A handful of students participate in lessons and chamber music through agreements with Juilliard; others, such as such as Michael Szeto C’10, opt to study with conservatory faculty through private arrangements.

Szeto is content playing chamber music and serving as concertmaster of the University Orchestra. “If I were in a dual-degree program, I’m positive things would be much harder,” he says. “[It] would involve practicing three to seven hours a day. There wouldn’t be a lot of time for non-school/violin related activities.”

For Weng, practicing a minimum of three hours a day and balancing an Economics major is especially complicated, thanks to his troubled search for a decent piano. “[It’s like] a homeless man looking through a dumpster,” he says. But the Wallach lounge has been good to him, even if the piano is long overdue for a tune-up.

—Maryam Parhizkar
On a cold day in early February, I caught Seth Flaxman, C’07, on the walkway to East Campus. He nodded and smiled and we passed each other by. Not five steps later, he stopped and turned around. “Hey, why aren’t you wearing a coat?” he called out. “Go put on a coat! It’s winter!”

The unsolicited advice was warm and welcome—reminiscent of a Jewish mother’s—but seemed like micromanaging from a leader of the people.

Last spring, while transitioning from president of the Columbia College Democrats to president of Columbia College Student Council, the position he currently holds, Flaxman was training to become an auxiliary cop. Now, on Monday nights, for four or five hour stretches, he patrols sections of Broadway and 125th Street. Dressed in the commanding blues of the NYPD, Flaxman carries a baton, badge and handcuffs.

Sometimes he stops for hot chocolate and pizza from Pinnacle. As a man of law and order, he’s meant to deter crime, but in person he’s about as intimidating as his goofy, labyrinthine, space odyssey emails.

His handcuff keys have a Superman keychain, a present from his sister. His Facebook photo is Captain America, his toy shelf—which he shares with his roommate—has a fire truck and a police car, and he owns a poster of a front page newspaper story announcing the first manned moon landing. He’s surrounded by heroic figures, and although he does refer to a picture of himself with a bullhorn as “the hero shot,” he lacks the brash immodesty of someone with a messiah complex.

Tall and lean, clean-cut with ginger hair, Flaxman is a good-looking guy. Of course, he’s got a boyfriend. Which sometimes puts him in an awkward position at the precinct, where the atmosphere is more homophobic than not.

“The captain will be like, ‘Oh, yeah, we’ve even got a faggot on the force.’ And they’re talking about some other guy who just moved precincts,” Flaxman said. “And then he looks at you, expecting that you’re going to laugh. But you don’t correct him because you’re not sure if it’s your place or your community yet.”

Being gay on campus has been nearly effortless, where the dialogue is more about your approach to being gay than the fact of it. Flaxman doesn’t identify as queer and isn’t a member of the Columbia Queer Alliance.

“I went to one [CQA meeting] once when I was a freshman, and some really gross senior started hitting on me. And I was like, ‘oh, I get it, this is where gross seniors hit on freshmen…do you do anything else?…No….I’m leaving.’”

He laughs after this—a loud nasal guffaw, signature Flaxman—but it’s something he could only have said this publicly in the second semester of his senior year. Now that elections are around the corner, Flaxman is more liberal with his words, less careful in maintaining a CCSC identity.

Post-graduation, Flaxman plans to defer from law school for a year and live a quieter life downtown—perhaps one less patrolled.

—Anna Phillips
“So I just had a sort of moral dilemma,” Maria Baibakova, B’07, gushes in an expensive-sounding Russian accent. “There was a gold ring I found in the bathroom, on the sink, I didn’t know what to do.” Her loose brown ponytail swishes from side to side as she shrugs and smiles.

At the suggestion of her Italian TA, the ring was left on the sink. “I’m not really on campus much and it would be a hassle to have to take it back if the owner claims it,” Maria explains.

The bathroom sink on Columbia’s campus is literally a plane ride away from Maria’s habitual locales: two weeks ago she was in London (to supervise a Sotheby’s contemporary art auction), this week she stopped off in the Caribbean (reasons for visit unknown). Maria’s job as an advisor to an art consultant—“I don’t want to name names,” she says—necessitates international globetrotting for the sake of postmodernism on a weekly basis.

But a transatlantic lifestyle is nothing new for Maria, who moved to New Jersey from Russia eleven years ago. After attending the Dwight-Englewood School, Maria enrolled at Barnard, a decision governed largely by geographic considerations—it’s easier to fly back to her family’s home in Moscow from New York City than just about anywhere else. Currently Maria lives in the Time Warner Center on Columbus Circle; “I wouldn’t trade the Whole Foods in the basement for anything,” she explains.

Maria landed her first internship at the Mike Weiss Gallery in Chelsea as a second-semester freshman and has continued apprenticing extensively at various galleries. She has extensively apprenticed at various galleries in America and Europe ever since, while independently advising her own private clients. “A lot of people who try to go into the art world take the standard trope from galleries to auction houses. I did all this much earlier, so by junior year I was doing mainly networking.”

Lately Maria has been “very seriously talking with Sotheby’s” and is toying with the idea of attending the Courtauld Institute in London for her master’s degree. “Although my boyfriend just got into Georgetown Law, so I might pass on that and stay in New York,” she offers.

Maria describes herself as the product of a generation of affluent Russians who were able to send their children abroad to Europe and the United States for university. Eventually, Maria would like to return to Russia to open up a contemporary museum on par with the MoMA. “Well, not by myself, of course. But I’d like to be part of a team. I’d like to give back culturally to my country because the discourse of modern works is still, ‘Oh, my son could have drawn that.’”

Baibakova has already begun cultivating the necessary curatorial and philanthropic skills. On the groundbreaking Willem de Kooning exhibition at the Hermitage in July: “I was, let’s say, marginally involved,” she says with a smile. Maria also works extensively with Sunflower Children, an umbrella organization founded by Czech supermodel Helena Houdova.

She describes a Russia still dealing with the remnants of the old socialist system, the realities of which have caused many handicapped children to be placed in poorly run group homes. “I’ve done a lot of research, and it’s best to sponsor individual families. For my twenty-first birthday, my parents threw me a big party and instead of asking for presents I asked for donations.”

When asked the inevitable stock art-history-major question, Maria cringes. “Who are my favorite artists? Oh, I hate this question!” She pauses and carefully, slowly provides two names. “I’ll want to change that. I’ll email you.”

Maria puts on her enormous furry hat and starts to leave, but hesitates. She turns around and repeats her previous instruction. “If you choose to say the names of my favorite artists then maybe I’ll choose to later correct that, because it’s a very big deal to me.”

–Juli Weiner
It’s a Smart World After All

Bollinger’s blue-chip Committee on Global Thought.

BY MARC TRACY

University Professors Jagdish Bhagwati and Joseph E. Stiglitz are both economics superstars. Bhagwati has served as an adviser to the United Nations, to Kofi Annan, and to India’s finance minister; Stiglitz, a Nobel Laureate, chaired Clinton’s Council of Economic Advisers before serving as Chief Economist of the World Bank. Both have written popular books outlining their basic views on globalization: Bhagwati’s is called In Defense of Globalization, while Stiglitz’s is called Globalization and Its Discontents. It was Stiglitz, the discontented one, whom President Lee C. Bollinger handpicked to chair Columbia’s Committee on Global Thought.

The Committee’s purpose, its role at the university and its mandate, is hard to pin down, partly because it’s still so young and malleable—it was formally announced only in December of 2005. It comprises six hot-shot professors as well as a smattering of staff and postdoctoral fellows. The Turkish novelist Orhan Pamuk, fresh off a Nobel laurel, recently signed on as a Fellow. Vice President for Arts and Sciences Nicholas Dirks tried to define the Committee for me by pointing to its emphasis on research and thinking, distinguishing it from something more “activist-oriented” such as Professor Jeffrey Sachs’s Earth Institute, which seeks to eliminate poverty.

For lack of a better description, the Committee is a space—for symposia, for classes, for discussion, of and pertaining to “global thought.” But what is “global thought”? The term is vague by design, but most people associated with the Committee define it by differentiating it from globalization.

“Global thought is a necessary consequence of globalization,” Stiglitz parsed to me. Even the Committee’s website plays this game: “‘Global thought,’ an even broader concept than globalization,” is how its answer to the question “What Is Global Thought?”
begins. Global thought is not globalization, but globalization is crucial to global thought.

It’s hard to overstate how anomalous Stiglitz is in his stance towards globalization. No other prominent economist—and to call Stiglitz “prominent” is almost insulting—on the right or left is as skeptical of free trade, unregulated international markets, and what’s known as neo-liberal policy.

Paul Krugman, the liberal New York Times op-ed columnist, made his bones in the academy arguing for open markets in East Asia. Sachs, Mr. End of Poverty himself, was a famed proponent of a free-trade policy known as “shock therapy”—just ask Russia and several Latin American countries, for whom Sachs made “neoliberal” a dirty word.

The other five Committee members are not all as interested in globalization as Stiglitz. “The -ization words are unhelpful,” George Sansom Professor of History Carol Gluck, a member, remarked to me. “I don’t use the world globalization. That’s Joe’s word.” But the other members do share with Stiglitz a general interest in looking beyond a single country and a single discipline, as well as wariness of the pro-globalization cheerleading that began in the mid-’90s and remains somewhat in vogue today.

The Committee members also share a level of accomplishment unusual even for tenured Columbia professors. Harold Brown Professor of International Affairs, Law and Political Science Michael W. Doyle has served as assistant secretary-general of the United Nations. Gluck founded and used to direct the Weatherhead East Asian Institute at the School of International Politics and Affairs. Law Professor Katharina Pistor, who has studied in Germany, England, and the US, is an expert in the European Union and its privatization policies.

But the Committee’s composition has raised its share of complaints. For one thing, “It seems to me the Humanities have been sidelined,” mentioned Villard Professor Andreas Huyssen, who chairs the German Department.

Huyssen is also the founder of the Center for Comparative Literature and Society, one of the numerous other institutes at Columbia that are already concerned, from various angles, with problems of global thought. Just look at the Committee members. Doyle has done work with the Earth Institute; Gluck maintains involvement with Weatherhead, which is one of seven institutes for the study of a given region housed in SIPA. Yes, SIPA too: people in that giant filing cabinet next to East Campus, Doyle and Gluck among them, have been known to apply their mind to other parts of the globe from time to time.

Still, in addition to boasting a list of fancy names, the Committee is serving as a springboard for thinking about Columbia in the world. Last semester, Dirks, along with Johnsonian Professor of Philosophy Akeel Bilgrami and Anthropology Professor Partha Chatterjee—the other two Committee members—taught a pilot course, “Issues of Secularism and Diversity in Global Thought”; this semester, Pistor and Stiglitz are doing the same with their class, “Global Governance.”

The Committee screened Bamako, a Malian film that puts international financial institutions on trial, with Stiglitz commenting afterwards on his time at the World Bank. The Committee has even, to an unprecedented extent, included undergraduates in its conversation. Add to this its genuine and informed skepticism towards globalization, and the Committee seems thoroughly relevant.

Courses and screenings aside, the Committee on Global Thought’s significance may seem largely symbolic—but the symbolism is important, too. If expansion is one leg of Bollinger’s hopes for a legacy, making Columbia more global is the other. And the Committee is, in Bollinger’s words from his announcement of its formation, “an institutional vehicle for rethinking the ways in which the University confronts challenges stemming from globalization”—really Bollinger’s first such institutional vehicle.

And make no mistake: Stiglitz may be the Committee’s auteur, driving it intellectually and guiding it in a general direction, but it is Bollinger’s baby. As Gluck put it, “I wouldn’t have done this if I didn’t think Lee were behind it.”
Carol Gluck wants the Committee—this hip-to-it cadre of dedicated university servants, to hear her persuasively tell it—to serve an advisory role within the university in order to make it think more globally. Sitting for an hour in her office in the International Affairs Building, surrounded by her colleagues on the Weatherhead Institute, I learn why people still resort to the cliché. “Her enthusiasm is contagious.” I also learn what the Committee is doing, what it ought to do, and how the university’s little children—the undergraduates—shall lead them.

Gluck heads up the Committee’s Undergraduate Initiative—if you can think of a catchier, better name, you should e-mail her—which aims to involve undergraduates in sketching the path toward increased global thinking. The Initiative was her idea. She feels that it exists more for the Committee’s sake than for the undergraduates: “The students are way ahead of the institutions on this—their heads are already there,” she told me. Later, she leaned over her desk and whispered, “This is student-driven!”

But if the undergraduates are vital to the Committee, Gluck is crucial to the undergraduates. “Carol Gluck is really the essential link there—she’s in communication with Stiglitz.” Wei Wei Hsing, C’08, who has attended several Undergraduate Initiative events, explained. There are no formal members of the Initiative (other, really, than Gluck). The lack of compulsion is intended as a sort of encouragement. “I keep wanting new people,” she said to me. Later, she leaned over her desk and whispered, “This is student-driven!”

But if the undergraduates are vital to the Committee, Gluck is crucial to the undergraduates. “Carol Gluck is really the essential link there—she’s in communication with Stiglitz.” Wei Wei Hsing, C’08, who has attended several Undergraduate Initiative events, explained. There are no formal members of the Initiative (other, really, than Gluck). The lack of compulsion is intended as a sort of encouragement. “I keep wanting new people,” she said to me. “Anybody is welcome.” I was holding a notepad, but I’m pretty sure she saw me as a potential recruit.

In the near future, the Initiative is going to issue a brief paper—a very short document, not a report,” Gluck said—that will contain several recommendations, based on the Initiative’s discussions. They are meant to ensure that all Columbia grads know “what any person graduating from any university in any country needs to know about the world in the 21st century.”

The Initiative will call for a pedagogical approach that seeks, without compulsion, to incorporate global thinking into existing courses. Gluck gave the example of an Art Hum student who wrote about the Taj Mahal instead of the Parthenon. She stressed that SEAS, too, could easily be made more global—case study on China’s Three Gorges Dam, anyone?

One of Gluck’s pet projects is relaxing the rule, stricter at Columbia than at most colleges, that students know the host language of their study abroad destination. “We really can’t require languages,” she said, while acknowledging the opposition such a relaxation will receive. “I’m gonna have to find a nice way to say that.”

The Initiative’s initiatives continue. “We need more international students at Columbia, and not just the people who can afford it”—so she’ll push for more financial aid for foreign nationals. Perhaps, she posited, we should create a program of global scholars that students can apply to before they matriculate, or at the end of their first years. “Use our Millenium Villages, get the Earth Institute involved.” “We can do a lot of this in Jackson Heights, the NGOs downtown.” She’s on a roll. “Global is also here.”

That’s part of her pitch to would-be donors: “We are not in Princeton. Let’s use it.” (Remember, it’s “Columbia University in the City of New York.”) It’s a pitch she’ll need to hone. “I’ve seen an awful lot of will,” she insisted optimistically. But she is also bearing down for the long haul. “Institutions are so, so hard to move,” she observed. “I know this. I’m a historian.”

The Committee on Global Thought arose out of the Task Force on the University and Globalization, which Bollinger created and chaired in the early days of his reign to set Columbia on a path to being, as he pledged to make it in his inaugural address, a more global university. One question the Task Force asked, Stiglitz recalled, was, “How do we globalize our research and teaching?” The Committee was “one of the strands that came out of that.”

Stiglitz was the first to sign on to the Committee, as chair; Bollinger brought him in during the spring of 2005. Bollinger then chose the other members in consultation with Stiglitz, as well as Dirks and Provost
Alan Brinkley. The Committee’s funding comes from the president’s discretionary fund, which has recently been used towards such ventures as the Diversity Initiative and the bulking up of the Economics Department’s faculty roster—endeavors in need of quick and unrestricted sums.

Putting the maverick Stiglitz in charge of an academic group that studies globalization has not gone unnoticed. English Professor Bruce Robbins, who has been outspoken in his distrust of unregulated marketplaces and broad theories of everything, looked on Stiglitz and his appointment as an embarrassment of riches. “I’m grateful for someone like this, who’s got the clout that he does, who comes out swinging,” he told me.

Stiglitz is still only one among six, but his colleagues on the Committee share his ambivalence regarding globalization. “I think it is certainly fair to say,” Dirks told me, “that this Committee recognizes, a) that globalization’s happening, and b) that it has certain effects, and they’re not good for everybody.”

Gustav Peebles, the Committee’s assistant director, easily acknowledged the Committee members’ academic proclivities: “They care more about the people being left behind,” he said. “We’re not just falling into line with what The Economist publishes each week.”

Peebles compared the study of globalization to his own field, anthropology, which in theory concerns the study of all cultures but must pragmatically focus on otherwise less-studied ones. The Committee’s skepticism, in other words, could be a virtue irrespective of one’s personal views; an economist like Stiglitz is immensely useful as a counterweight to the scholarly firepower (and potential for groupthink) among the legions of neoliberal economists.

If Stiglitz bucks the trend among his fellow economists, though, ambivalence toward globalization is now the political norm. Anxiety over outsourcing was a major campaign issue in 2004—even economists, who originally dismissed this concern as ignorant, have now acknowledged it could have serious effects on America’s technology service sector—and it looks likely to reprise in 2008. Given how popular and significant he’s become, Lou Dobbs’s basic instability and xenophobia seem like nothing less than a tribute to the resonance of globalization-skepticism. In light of this political atmosphere, the Committee seems much more of-the-moment than your average academic panel.

Three floors above Gluck in the International Affairs Building, Catharine Theimer Nepomnyashchy, Ann Whitney Olin Professor of Russian Literature and chair of Barnard’s Slavic Department, has a different view from her corner office. She is director of the Harriman Institute, the oldest of the SIPA regional think-tanks. It studies the former Soviet Union and Eastern Bloc. (When Montenegro gained official nationhood last June, they had one more country to deal with.) She pointed out that, in her words, “knowing specific points in the globe well is a part of thinking globally.” She also reminded me that Columbia isn’t exactly hermetically sealed off from the rest of the world.

Nepomnyashchy, graciously acknowledging her bias as the director of a regional institute, outlined her “utopia” of a globally minded Columbia: “seven fully endowed regional institutes, cooperating, making sure that the university as a whole is really covering the world.” In this utopia, the scope of the Committee on Global Thought would be narrower.
Provost Alan Brinkley, who rides shotgun as Bol linger’s second-in-command, is more sanguine about the Committee’s relationships with the centers and institutes. “I don’t see the Committee as competing with or challenging the regional institutes,” he told me. “I see it as a resource for them, and vice-versa.”

The Committee faces an uphill bureaucratic battle on another front: the extreme difficulty at Columbia of cross-listing a single course over multiple disciplines and departments. “More cross-listed seminars,” Pistor, a member, responded when I asked her what the Committee needed to thrive. “It’s a bureaucratic nightmare right now.” “You shouldn’t just look in the English Department for literature,” is how Nepomnyashchy illustrated the importance of cross-listing. And cross-listing would seem in particular to benefit the Committee, which is designed to reach across disciplines; better cross-listing would enable it to direct interested students towards pre-existing classes that illuminate issues of global thought.

The Office of the Registrar, for its part, pointed to its computer program, and the lack of available computer technology, as the culprit. “It appears the sheer volume of courses requested for cross listing would be problematic,” Associate Registrar Brady Sloan responded in an e-mail. He added: “Unfortunately, we are not aware of any student information system available that could handle this sort of complexity. This scenario presents challenges for all of higher education in that current academic trends are towards more cross disciplinary overlap.”

Gluck, too, told me that the Registrar’s computer program was unable to cross-list effectively. Her response to this scenario was, “Well, write another one, dammit!”

Then there’s the language proficiency issue. Nepomnyashchy is a staunch supporter of language proficiency requirements for studying abroad: “although all rules have exceptions,” she’s in favor of maintaining the present strictness, which makes it very difficult to study abroad unless you have a solid base in the host country’s tongue. “You’re missing the point,” she explained, “if you don’t make some good-faith attempt to learn the language.” Huyssen, with undeniable legitimacy: referring to the Committee, she told me, “The regional institutes have not been much consulted.”

CCLS should, logically, have a role to play in global thought at Columbia. It was founded, Huyssen said, “to expand the discipline of Comparative Literature beyond its European core”; as he pointed out, “The CCLS already does lots of the work in the Humanities that the Committee wants to do.” And although the Humanities would seem to be represented on the Committee by Bilgrami—it is, after all, the Heyman Center for the Humanities that the philosopher Bilgrami directs—Huyssen is referring more to literature, language, art, music, and architecture.

To see the potential to include the CCLS (and the other institutes, centers, and departments) in the notion of global thought at Columbia—and the failure in neglecting to do so—just look at the Committee’s first major Fellow. Even before he won the 2006 Nobel Prize in Literature, Orhan Pamuk was made a Fellow at the Committee—in part due to the hospitality of his friend, Huyssen, who brought him to Columbia for the first time in 2004.

Pamuk sat in on most sessions of the Committee’s
course on secularism last semester. Next semester, he’s co-teaching a class with Huyssen, tentatively titled “Word, Image, and Imagination.” It will study, according to Huyssen, “the ways literary texts deal with images.” The conflict is clear: Pamuk, now allied with the Committee, would be just as much at home with the CCLS.

Huyssen is the single person most responsible for bringing Pamuk to Columbia. And his sense that his Center, and the other centers and institutes, were somewhat left behind when the Committee on Global Thought came riding into town with a presidential imprimatur and a handful of rock stars seems justified. So Huyssen can be excused for sounding a tad territorial when, discussing his future class with Pamuk, he insists to me, “The class will be a CCLS class.”

The Committee’s territory, though, will only expand. “It’ll have to get bigger,” Gluck said, referring to the 200-plus applications it received for four postdoctoral fellowships. “The Committee has an ambitious agenda.”

Stiglitz’s goals are abstract, but no less important for their lack of concreteness. “It would be the hope,” he told me, “that we would have succeeded in both raising awareness of these various perspectives within the Columbia campus but also, equally importantly, advance thinking globally on these issues.” In Stiglitz’s world-view, just as the Committee on Global Thought is small but has ambitions to influence the entire university, so Columbia should set its sights on influencing the entire globe.

Brinkley’s vision is compelling. He pointed to two models—“not mutually exclusive,” he noted—of what the Committee could become. An academic program, for one. But also, “something like a little think-tank, to help stimulate research around global issues.” Discussing the University of Chicago’s Committee on Social Thought, whose name Columbia’s Committee very deliberately echoes, Brinkley spoke of each Committee “as a way of circumventing the boundaries of discipline.”

The Committee in Hyde Park, which has hosted Hannah Arendt, T.S. Eliot, and Friederich Hayek, was formed, Brinkley explained to me—this is something of his area of academic expertise—after World War II to respond to the war and attract a group of recent European émigrés. It was, in other words, in tune with its times.

Columbia’s Committee formed in the wake of a backlash to economic globalization’s late-’90s heyday as well as a sense, brought home on 9/11, that what happens halfway across the globe is vital to what happens here. It will be interesting to see which changes first: the Committee or the times. For now, though, they’re happily married.
Disillusioned Majors Guide

Last year, in the spirit of major declaration, six poor souls imparted their frustration, bile, and, yes, disillusionment about their chosen fields of study. Now, six more embittered undergrads share their stories.

Philosophy

Philosophy is a great major if you have deep insights into the metaphysical puzzlements of human existence. The problem is not the scant few undergrads who have deep insights about the metaphysical puzzlements of human existence, but the glut who think they do. Could you tolerate that guy in CC who thought that Kant’s Groundwork was “solidly argued, though ultimately, existentially unconvincing”? He’s probably a philosophy major.

And the professors—the people who have made careers of claiming special insight about the nature of existence—think it is a mark of their intellectual prowess not to teach undergraduate classes, or answer emails, or show up to office hours. When your other liberal arts-majoring friends are struggling to decide which of their chummy professor-friends will write their fellowship recommendations, you’ll realize you’ve never taken a seminar.

But at least you get to sound like hot shit at office parties, right? Think you can drop some Deleuze and Derrida and leave them all fawning? Stop it right there, buddy. That’s comp lit. Any real philosopher knows that stuff is crap. And don’t even get started about the meaning of life here—there’s a reason Columbia has lost three renowned political philosophers in under a decade. Face the facts, dilettante-to-be: a philosophy degree won’t even make you a moderately competent poseur.

Art History

Art history requires learning a little about a few disparate topics, and the sum is considerably less than its parts. In Greek Art and Architecture, one learns how to date ancient vases, while in a Gothic architecture survey, one reads arguments about which philosophies influenced the design of 13th century French cathedrals. Then you get to the 20th century, where the shit really hits Duchamp’s urinal. Mostly, you learn great sound bites to impress nubile MoMA visitors: Picasso was terrified of contracting VD, and may or may not have actually done so, which may or may not be important to understanding his depictions of women; Mondrian’s entire career can be understood as an attempt to produce a completely flat picture plane; Robert Rauschenberg’s Monogram is a “very ejaculatory” work. Thank you, Professor Krauss.

It’s like, art, dude.

Creative Writing

Everyone’s a poet. Still more think they’re short story writers or, worse, novelists. Far fewer claim to be playwrights or screenwriters, and thank God for that, because there’s nothing quite like reading 20 pages of “fictional” dialogue about the death of someone’s beloved sheep dog.

Here are five things to expect as a student in the creative writing program—now a major/concentration: (1) Bad writing. (2) Teachers who are, first and foremost, writers themselves. Some of them are de-
cent, but “those who can’t do, teach” is a good rule of thumb. They have one objective only: paying the bills. Some will write detailed comments on your work, and once in a while their feedback might even be coherent and helpful, but for the most part, the graduated grad student sitting at the head of the table does not care about you or your bad writing.

He is too busy being bitter about his first book, which went straight to remainders, and his MFA, which—surprise, surprise—is the most useless degree of them all. (3) Outraged students who don’t understand why no one can see the brilliance in their bad writing. (4) “Hills Like White Elephants” by Hemingway. In every class. Every single class. It’s a great story; we get it, and we never want to read it again. (5) Bad writing. Very, very bad writing.

**Computer Science**

You walk into Advanced Programming on the first day and you find a half-empty room. The students that did bother to show up are in it for the free wireless, already actively engaged in leveraging competing job offers from Wall Street firms and scary overseas conglomerates. You shuffle into the back row for a lecture recapping the very topic that got you expelled from high school—when you were twelve. You can’t hear yourself think over cell phone chatter and the clacking of keys on E-Trade, the Merrill Lynch website, and CareerTrak.

You should have known something was wrong when you found out that the class met in Hamilton. You’re a long way from the Gateway Lab. The comfort of painted cinderblock and linoleum tile are a distant memory.

At some point between long, unkempt beards and the development of the DVDR burner, computer science turned its back on nerdiness and became the engineer’s Investment Banking major in all but name. These slick, pocket-protector-less yuppies-in-training do not play Dungeons and Dragons; they wear Brooks Brothers suits and spend more time in job interviews than in class.

Those of us who grew up thinking of programming as the domain of an elite community of social outcasts were, in hindsight, idiots. The modern computer scientist isn’t a hacker, or outsourced to India—more likely, he bought and sold you six times this morning and didn’t even get out of bed to do it. His PC did it for him when the Nikkei opened at 4 a.m.

**East Asian Languages and Cultures (EALAC)**

At Columbia, you can major in many languages: French, German, even Yiddish. But woe betide the eager beaver who chooses a little-known world language like Chinese—these bits of esoterica fall under the auspices of EALAC. If your destiny lies here, you will soon discover it to be an ill-assembled grab-bag of disciplines vaguely pointing—you guessed it—East.

Language? Check. You must take three years of Japanese, Chinese, or Korean, which will just about get you through a language textbook, or a dinner menu. Disciplinary focus? Check. Choose from topics you didn’t want to major in like religion, political science, or economics, and learn how they relate to East Asia. Thesis? Check. It’s required, and due months before those of other majors. Disquisitions on the hegemonic, phallocentric discourse of post-industrial Japanese gender identities? Double-check. Get used to this stuff, because you’re going cross-cultural and cross-disciplinary whether you like it or not. You might just want to major in Chinese, but for once, the Orient is actually going to give you more than you bargained for.

**Music**

You’ve declared yourself a music major, have you? I guess that means one of three things: (1) You weren’t quite good enough to get into conservatory, but your musical ego wouldn’t admit defeat. (2) You actually did get into conservatory but turned them down because your academic ego wouldn’t admit defeat. (3) You’re one of the elite(ist) Columbia-Juilliard joint-degree students who likes stroking both egos at once. In any event, welcome to the madness.

As a music major you’ll be spending a lot of time in Dodge Hall, one of Columbia’s most colorful, dysfunctional locales. The entrance is located in the coldest wind-tunnel on campus, but despite the harsh winter weather, there are always three or four music/film grad students in thick-rimmed glasses smoking unfiltered cigarettes outside the door. You’ll have every class in the same shitty classroom on the sixth floor, but keep clear of the office at the end of the hall—sleeping monsters dwell within. The powers-that-be guard the key-codes to all the classrooms ruthlessly, so you’ll have to find your own devious ways to acquire them if you want a decent space to practice or rehearse. But that’s okay—there’s no performance requirement. You’re not here to play music. You’re here to theorize about it.
Tim Wu Owns the Internet
How a Columbia Law professor saved the Web and democracy as we know it. By BRENDAN BALLOU

For people who go to meetings with names like “Net Neutrality and the Future of the Internet,” Columbia Law Professor Tim Wu is a rock star. They know him from NPR or from his articles in Slate, or maybe from his book Who Controls the Internet? or his blog. Perhaps they saw the Columbia Law Revue’s skit last semester, entitled “We Heart Wu.” To those who have followed his career, Tim Wu is the person who saved net neutrality—and the Internet.

The net that we’ve all grown up with has always been “neutral,” meaning that behemoth websites like Google and personal, homemade blogs both load at about the same speed, and both can offer roughly the same services; whether the sites do so is entirely up to their programmers, not to the companies that deliver their content. This accounts for a large part of the success of the Internet: it costs almost nothing to get your ideas published on the web, and to compete with everyone else in cyberspace. Net neutrality—equality of access for all users—allowed Facebook, YouTube, and Google to get off the ground.

But as recently as 2003, the term “net neutrality” didn’t even exist. That year, Wu, then an assistant professor at the University of Virginia, delivered a paper called “Broadband Discrimination, Network Neutrality” at a conference in Boulder, Colorado (Wu gave the paper both titles because he wasn’t sure which phrase would catch on). He recalls asking the organizers, “Is anyone else talking about this issue?” They replied, “You’re the only one.”

Wu was worried that large telecommunications companies who own the cables and routers that make the Internet possible could interfere with the information coming across their wires. In a web without neutrality, CNN’s ability to pay more than the average Joe could mean that a personal website would take longer to load and face more limitations than the CNN homepage, to give one example.

At the time Wu delivered his paper, Riverstore Networks, his former employer, was already in the process of making such control possible. Wu told me, “we [Riverstore] were trying to sell the exact same technology to Verizon and AT&T as we were trying to sell to the Chinese government,” which uses such technology to censor political dissent.

Rob Malda, founder of the influential techie website www.slashdot.org, said the problem comes when the physical infrastructure of the Internet is “actually owned by companies that
also own the news agencies. So if the cable company owns the tubes, and can regulate the speeds everyone gets, there’s no reason they can’t say “Our news site is fast, and yours is slow.”

Putting the corporate squeeze on net neutrality was neither possible nor profitable until a few years ago. As technology evolved, AT&T and Verizon planned to offer cable TV in addition to their existing Internet and phone services. But because sending TV signals over fiber-optic cable isn’t easy—TV needs to be streamed continuously, and doing so takes up enormous amounts of bandwidth—they decided they would have to prioritize those signals over other text and image information. The result would be a tiered Internet, where some kinds of data—movies, music, etc.—would be ranked over others.

The companies reasoned that since YouTube’s videos eat up a disproportionate amount of bandwidth, it should pay more, and that if any site wished to offer more services at a faster speed, it should pay for the privilege. This meant that certain kinds of data would be prioritized, but so too would certain providers of data—Yahoo! might move faster than Google, or MySpace faster than Facebook—depending on who was willing to pay more.

This would be the end of the “neutral” Internet—and it would mean more than just some sites loading faster than others. There would be a cost attached to putting out information that had never existed previously. The Internet wouldn’t collapse. But, as Wu wrote, it would “become slower and slower; and the Internet as we know it would become more and more like cable television, or the restricted Chinese Internet.”

“WHERE A LOT OF ENGINEERS HANG OUT”

Back in 2003, when Wu presented at the conference, no one was listening. “I got up there and I was completely on a different track than anyone else,” recalled Wu, who was in attendance. To some, it isn’t clear that net neutrality is beneficial in the long run. Chris Sprigman, a professor of intellectual property at University of Virginia Law and a former colleague of Wu’s, told me that “Internet infrastructure doesn’t just pop out of nowhere. It has to be built and it has to be invested in.” If you alone benefit from the money you spend improving a product, you’re more likely to produce and innovate than if anyone can profit from your effort.

But it is men like Southwestern Bell Communications Chairman Ed Whitacre, not academics like Sprigman, who lead the opposition to net neutrality. When asked about the issue in 2005, Whitacre said, “What they would like to do is use my pipes [for] free, but I ain’t going to let them do that because we have spent this capital and we have to have a return on it.” He added, “For a Google or Yahoo! or Vonage or anybody to expect to use these pipes [for] free is nuts!”

In reality, no one uses Whitacre’s “pipes” for free. We pay to get an Internet connection, and content providers like bloggers or Google have to pay for server hosting. Charging for the speed or type of content provided would be charging a third fee for Internet activity.

Had Whitacre been more diplomatic, net neutrality might have remained an academic dispute—but his comments came as public advocacy groups were mobilizing against a new telecommunications bill under consideration in Congress. Tim Karr, of the media reform group FreePress and Savetheinternet.com, was watching closely. He said the legislation “was being pushed by people in Congress who were basically on the payroll of the telecom companies.”
The net neutrality controversy both implicates corporate villains and appeals to free-speech rights—just the kind of issues that motivate liberal activists. “While the bill itself had a range of problems”—among them the reduction of cable discounts for low-income families and of power for public access television—“we chose net neutrality as the one to focus on,” Karr explained.

And so the movement to save net neutrality began, and an inept PR campaign on the part of the opposition only helped it to gain momentum. In the spring of 2006, Matt Stoller, who writes for the liberal blog MyDD, got in a flame war with former White House press secretary Mike McCurry, who was the chief lobbyist for the net neutrality opponents.

The debate got ugly. McCurry got upset, and he shot off the following missive on The Huffington Post: “This is a clear disagreement on principle about what will get us the next generation of the internet that will work for all of us. Anyone want to have a rational conversation about that, or do you want to rant and rave and provide a lot of May Day rhetoric that is not based in any fact?”

McCurry just didn’t understand the issue. Stoller retorted, “Don’t go on the Internet if you don’t know a lot about software engineering and network administration policy and pretend that you do, because that’s where a lot of software architects and engineers and policy makers tend to hang out.”

Within three months of Savetheinternet.com’s launch, over 700,000 people had signed a net neutrality petition. According to Technorati, a search engine that indexes blogs, as many as 1,000 blogs were mentioning net neutrality each day. As of early 2006, it remained largely an online-only phenomenon. Then came the “series of tubes.”

Republican Senator Ted Stevens of Alaska, chairman of the Senate Commerce Committee, was directly responsible for the legislation that would decide the future of net neutrality. But he didn’t understand the issue at all. On June 28th, Stevens gave a long, rambling speech:

“I just the other day got... an Internet was sent by my staff at 10 o’clock in the morning on Friday, I got it yesterday. Why? Because it got tangled up with all these things going on the Internet commercially... They want to deliver vast amounts of information over the Internet. And again, the Internet is not something you just dump something on. It’s not a big truck. It’s a series of tubes.”

Alex Curtis, of the advocacy group Public Knowledge, posted the audio file that afternoon, with the disclaimer, “Trust us. It’s worth listening to the whole thing...”

Blogs jumped on the speech and ironic folk ballads—techno remixes of which were posted on YouTube—were composed in Stevens’s honor. On July 13th, The Daily Show headlined with the Stevens quote (Jon Stewart to Stevens: “You don’t seem to know jack shit about computers or the Internet, but that’s okay—you’re just the guy in charge of regulating it.”). As The Daily Show continued to cover the net neutrality controversy, it became a youth and civil rights issue.

Wu had been laying the foundation for the movement since May, when he published an article on Slate entitled “Why You Should Care About Network Neutrality.” While
on tour promoting his first book, *Who Controls the Internet?*, he talked up the issue on NPR, the television show *Moyers On America* and the *CBS Evening News*. A small cult of his personality began to emerge—in addition to female law students in hot pants singing his praises in the Columbia Law Review skit, *The New York Observer* published a fawning profile touching on his fashion, his party habits (apparently he frequents East Village sake bars), and the revelation that Judge Richard Posner had nicknamed him “the Genius Wu.”

“I think for the movement it’s very important that it have a public face; it’s easier to digest,” Wu said. His would be that face. By the summer of 2006, the Savetheinternet.com coalition had grown to include traditional liberal groups like MoveOn.org and the American Civil Liberties Union, but also the Gun Owners of America and the Christian Coalition. Each group supported the issue for a different reason; the Christian Coalition explained that without net neutrality, “an ISP with a pro-choice board of directors could decide that it doesn’t like a pro-life organization using its high speed network to encourage pro-life activities.”

**CIVIL RIGHTS IN THE 21ST CENTURY?**

The coalition moved forward quickly, without ever meeting in person. On August 30th, 2006, the 700,000-strong petition hit the desks of twenty-five U.S. senators. Within days, six senators switched their positions to support net neutrality, and even more net neutrality supporters were voted into Congress in November.

Meanwhile, Ed Whitacre was in the process of acquiring BellSouth, effectively rebuilding the shattered AT&T network of a prior generation. With a Republican chairing the FCC, the merger itself seemed inevitable, but with a Democratic Congress in office and the known obstinacy of Democratic FCC Commissioners Michael Copps and Jonathan Adelstein, it was obvious the merger wouldn’t be approved without some protection for net neutrality.

What happened as the merger neared completion in late December isn’t exactly clear. “In that last week of the year, there were a flurry of phone calls with interested parties to craft language that would allow our side to get net neutrality on the books,” Tim Karr said. Tim Wu was almost certainly among those on the phone.

Under the final agreement, AT&T could not discriminate by the content of information, but could discriminate by kind. That is, AT&T can give priority to video over email but it has to do so for all videos, not just for those from websites that pay more. Wu said, “AT&T and Verizon screamed bloody murder, but basically [the bill] just said, ‘Keep doing what you’re doing.’” While the provision only holds for 24 months, the agreement will likely serve as the basis for permanent legislation in Congress.

Tim Wu took an obscure academic issue and rode a wave of Internet activism to celebrity as he fixed the problem he first noticed. Now Wu has secured tenure, a national audience, and writing contracts with *The New Yorker* and *Playboy*.

Many who care about the issue, however, worry that it’s joining the ranks of abortion or gay marriage as a moral absolute. “I think it’s become really polemical.”

Many who care about the issue, however, worry that it’s joining the ranks of abortion or gay marriage, existing in moral absolutes. “I think it’s become really polemical,” said Sprigman. “More and more it’s going to be not so much an academic issue and more about organizing the Left.” For political gain, supporters of net neutrality have simplified the issue into slogans, overlooking the issue’s complexities.

The debate over how to solve the problem of net neutrality—and even how to define it—still boils. For some, no legal fix is necessary; for others it’s the only way to ensure AT&T will not discriminate on the basis of content. Sprigman suggests that the problem is inherent in how the network was built: “We distinguish between network and application. This conflict happens because both are built by private interests.” If the network were state-run (something Sprigman did not suggest), then all conflicts over open access to content would be solved. But the right answer isn’t obvious.

Wu is a little less concerned and believes that even the simplest explanation of net neutrality conveys its importance. “It’s sort of like the civil rights movement. There are complexities in the discrimination law, but when people are marching in Birmingham for the right to sit at a lunch counter, then that’s the simple version.”

**Many who care about the issue, however, worry that it’s joining the ranks of abortion or gay marriage as a moral absolute. “I think it’s become really polemical.”**
Howard Bloom blew off our first interview because his stepson had just been caught dressing up like Hitler. The administrators at Leon Goldstein High School had dismissed Walter Petryk for wearing a Hitler Halloween costume to class, and neither Bloom nor Petryk’s mother were speaking to the press. Walter, on the other hand, seemed to be having a good time with the whole crisis—so much so that he wore the costume a second time to talk to reporters and angry citizens.

Joel Levy of the New York Anti-Defamation League said the Hitler costume “is not only anti-Semitic—it’s anti-American, and anti-the values of Western democracy.”

So when no one came to answer the door at Bloom’s Park Slope brownstone, we thought maybe the guy was lying low until the heat died down. Or maybe he was at the Tea Lounge, the coffee shop/bar where we were told he spends most of his time. But Bloom wasn’t there either, so we asked around. Almost everyone in the joint knew who Bloom was—knew that he spent a lot of time there with his laptop, that is, but not much else. No one knew what he did.

“He’s a scientist of some kind,” one of the bartenders told us. “I think.”

At that point, his guess was as good as ours. Bloom’s website, Howardbloom.net, is a patchwork of words and images. There are excerpts from his writings about science, with titles like “Reality is a Mass Hallucination” and “Isolation: The Ultimate Poison”; a gallery of Bloom’s photography; “Thou Shalt Bloom,” a blog where Howard comments mainly on foreign policy; “Postcards from Planet Bloom,” which are literally postcards; and a link to a site where you can determine whether or not your car will run on bio-fuel. Bloom also has his own entry on Wikipedia, further complicating matters. Here, the dedicated Bloom-ologist will learn that he spent years working as publicist for people like Bob Marley and Bette Midler, that he invented two new fields of scientific study, and that, according to the title of one of his books, he accidentally started “The Sixties.”

Something must be wrong here. And, naturally, it is.
EXHIBITIONISM

At Howardbloom.net, you’ll read glowing quotes from *The New Yorker* like the following: “For those who worry that our ingenuity has upset nature’s equilibrium, Bloom has a message that is both reassuring and sobering.” But the magazine’s archives offer nothing about the guy.

According to Wikipedia, Bloom is currently a “visiting scholar in the Graduate Psychology Department at NYU.” We called NYU: Bloom has never worked there.

Yet we knew that this man couldn’t be a complete fraud—he’s written two books put out by legitimate publishers. We initially became interested in Bloom after reading *The Lucifer Principle: A Scientific Expedition into the Forces of History*, a sprawling account of world history which concludes that evil is biological. On the cover are the words of novelist Leon Uris: “An astonishing act of intellectual courage.” The back features laudatory quotes from scientists. But when we dug deeper, that Howard Bloom strangeness reared its head.

Contact with Bloom can only be made through an intermediary, a mysterious fellow who goes by “JZ.” At our first successful meeting, we met a nondescript thirty-something man in track pants and a baggy sweat-shirt who jogged down the stairs of Bloom’s brownstone and ushered us into the foyer. Did he live with Bloom? JZ was at a loss to explain his job, and didn’t seem particularly interested in developing an articulate definition. “I’m Bloom’s, uh, multi-man,” he told us.

JZ walked us up to the third-story landing, where we finally met Bloom himself. He was short, with uncombed remnants of curly brown hair. His pants were extremely tight. He wore a Howardbloom.net T-shirt and carried a backpack containing his beloved laptop. It was 8:00 PM, and he was roaring to go, displaying an absurd amount of energy and an intimate knowledge of our own journalistic output. He smiled broadly. “How did you find me? I’m quite an obscure individual, you know.”

Up the creaky stairway to the fourth floor of the building, where Bloom’s décor revealed the inspired madness we expected. The room, large and attic-like, was dominated by piles of old computers and printers, propped up with dog-cared copies of books on neurology, religion, and new-age spirituality, which seemed to have spilled over from the over-stuffed bookshelves. Add a few dressers dividing the room in half and a huge bed, and we could barely walk through the space.

He invited us to lie on the bed and then served us orange juice in wine glasses. Bloom stayed seated in the chair next to us for the whole time, punctuating his statements by hunching forward and leaning back, playing with his hands and rubbing his knees.

Before we could begin, there was the meta-interview. “Are you going to take notes or record me?” We had a recorder. Bloom disapproved with an odd, analytical joy. Citing his experience as a reporter, he claimed, “Writing it down forces you to process the information. So, you actually get more by taking notes.”

We politely dissented, triggering a disquisition on how growing up in different technological settings activates different cells in our brains. As a result, Bloom’s hour-long monologue barely got beyond his childhood in Buffalo, New York—everyone thought he was retarded, but he loved science, had read through the entire library, and decided that he wanted to dedicate his life to the study of everything, or as Bloom would have it, omnology.

Omnology is one of the two sciences Bloom alleges to have created. As a young science-enthusiast, Bloom observed researchers devoting the labors of a lifetime to the study of a single, tiny organism, filling countless volumes with obscure minutiae unreadable even by fellow scientists. This was not for Bloom.

So, he founded omnology. What exactly constitutes omnology is unclear, but perhaps that is the point. “Omnology is a science, but one dedicated to the biggest picture conceivable by the minds of its practitioners,” Bloom writes in his cheery Omnologist Manifesto. “Omnology will use every conceptual tool available—and some not yet invented, but inevitable—to leapfrog over disciplinary barriers, stitching together the patchwork quilt of science and all the rest that humans have yet to know. If one omnologist is able to perceive the relationship between pop songs, ancient Egyptian graffiti, Shirley MacLaine’s mysticism, neurobiology, and the origins of the cosmos, so be it. If
another uses mathematics to probe traffic patterns, the behavior of insect colonies, and the manner in which galaxies cluster in swarms, wonderful. And if another uses introspection to uncover hidden passions and relate them to research in chemistry, anthropology, psychology, history, and the arts, she, too, has a treasured place on the wild frontiers of scientific truth—the terra incognita in the heartland of omnology. If not exactly a lucid map of the future of science, this tract seems to articulate the guiding principles of Bloom’s life.

He supplemented the interview by e-mailing us his current book, *How I Accidentally Started the Sixties*. The advance copy included a gushing quote, supposedly from Timothy Leary: “The comparisons to James Joyce are inevitable and undeniable. *Finnegans Wake* wanders through the rock ‘n roll sixties. Wow! Whew! Wild! Wonderful!”

“Rumor in my grammar school had it,” Bloom wrote, “that I was hatched from an egg, and not even an earthling egg at that. Those in the know implied that a batch of inept Martians had misread a road map as they rushed to an obstetrical facility and had landed on the wrong planet. Without competent medical guidance, they’d barely hauled me out of my shell.”

Buffalo was not hospitable to Bloom, but Reed College wasn’t much better. He spent his first semester sleeping on a wooden board at odd hours in odd places, never carrying more than what he considered essential for survival. He dropped out after less than a year and moved in with a Seattle anthropologist and a transvestite.

The rest is hazy, but we know that Bloom forayed into the music world. He probably didn’t, as his Wikipedia entry claims, start the careers of Michael Jackson, Bob Marley, and Bette Midler. But he did edit the rock magazine *Circus*, where, among other things, he profiled David Bowie in 1973.

Apparently the stress of the industry took its toll, and Bloom had an epic nervous breakdown. He lay in bed—incidentally, the bed on which we were sipping orange juice—for fifteen years. The product of that period was *The Lucifer Principle*. We’re not entirely sure if Bloom has really recovered—he spends almost all of his time at home or in the Tea Lounge—but maybe that’s just how he wants to live his life.

And therein lies the problem: it’s impossible to determine how Bloom wants to live, or is living, his life. These disparate facts lack a unified narrative. In a second interview we told Bloom as much, but he didn’t seem concerned.

“One of the secrets of whatever is going on here is beyond multi-tasking: it’s living multiple lives,” he said. “It’s observational science—Darwin couldn’t give you a p-factor and yet we consider it legitimate science. That’s what I’ve spent my whole fucking life doing.”

In reality, he’s spent his life dropping out of school, working in the music business, writing science books, and creating websites. ✤
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“Art Spiegelman” is a frequent character in Art Spiegelman’s comics, but it’s the real Art Spiegelman that 14 (lucky) Columbia students meet with every Thursday night. Spiegelman’s crowning achievement is *Maus*, the two-part graphic novel about his father’s experience in the Holocaust – and his own experience dealing with his survivor father. *Maus* is astonishing; moving and revelatory; it is what a Modernist novel would have been if those 1920s café-dwellers had known how to draw. This semester, inspired by a museum show on comics that he helped to spearhead, Spiegelman is teaching an American Studies seminar, “Comics Marching Into the Canon,” and will give a lecture on campus on April 9th, “Comix 101.” B&W Senior Editor Marc Tracy, also a student in Spiegelman’s class, talked with him about his latest role: teacher.

*B&W*: To start with, how did the class, “Comics Marching into the Canon,” come about?

AS: I was contacted by the Heyman Center of the Americas; I think they got a Mellon Foundation grant to set up classes where Columbia, which is sometimes considered in New York City but not of New York City, would be able to take more advantage of the intellectual and artistic life of the city. To find people, not necessarily university instructors, but intellectuals, artists, people of one kind or another in the cultural life of the humanities of New York, and I was asked if I wanted to do such a thing. How much work could it be? I thought. But then found out how much work it could be.

*B&W*: How much work could it be?

AS: Oh man, my life has stopped, it’s on total hold ‘til this semester’s over. I’m working about five days a week, as opposed to what I thought was, oh, you plan a little the day before, then you do it, then the next morning your life can resume. What a jerk. I said yes because a) it seemed lucrative, and I didn’t have to put much time into it, and b) well, I’ve been so involved with this “Masters of the Comics” show, and it was the culmination of many years of working towards seeing such a show happen. It seemed like it would be good for me to reassess and revisit what this whole notion was and what it might seem to be at a moment when comics themselves have undergone such a major reassessment. And thereby just let me take stock in, while comics are changing this much, what actually makes me care about comics.

Because now, in some ways, it’s mission accomplished. I landed on the deck of the aircraft carrier with 12 socks in my jumpsuit and everything is accomplished, but it still makes me quite alienated from what I’d hoped on some level to bring about. I thought this was a great way to relay what I found useful and important to myself.

*B&W*: You mentioned that your drive to have a comics museum show had something to do with the 1990 “High and Low: Modern Art and Popular Culture” show at the MoMA. Could you elaborate on that?

AS: What happened was I got a call from some curators at the MoMA, who realized that they didn’t own any of my originals, and would be interested in buying...
some pieces of mine. I said I wasn’t interested in seeing that happen, because having spent time at the museum I realized that their attitude to my medium was at that time rather stunted, as proved by the “High/Low” show that had taken place a few years before, in which all comics were just there as exhibiting-urinals to explain what Duchamp did as opposed to looking at the fine craftsmanship of the urinal. As a result, I said, ‘I just don’t think it’s a good idea to put stuff in your vaults, they won’t come out for air.’ They were curious and interested in learning about comics, so I invited them over, gave them a lecture (which will be not too dissimilar from the public lecture that I’ll do at Columbia). As long as I was doing it, I invited curators from all over the Eastern Seaboard, and to my surprise they came, and I was asking to redress a Low/Low show to make up for the High/Low show. It took quite a few years before one of the people in the room was able to get it together, and it led to the Hammer and the MoCA in LA finally setting up this Masters show.

B&W: To move on a bit to your work: except for someone like Charles Schultz, you’re probably the comic artist who people who don’t read comics know, and if people have read one graphic novel, it’s Maus.

AS: Possibly, probably. I think as many might have read Watchmen, but from a less central part of the culture, perhaps. But not only don’t I like the praise, I’m not even sure that long comics were such a good idea. They were necessary for that one project of mine.

B&W: If there’s someone reading a conversation with you who isn’t in the class, how would you suggest they get involved with comics?

AS: [The] thing about the history of comics is it’s short. If you really want to start going back through the pre-pre-history, you can’t get much before [19th-century German artist Rodolphe] Töpffer, the inventor of the graphic novel, who deserves to have his work reprinted and probably will in the next couple of years in an academic press, so you’re talking about from 1830 to 2007; short history, even though it’s got flurries of activity. [It’s] a lot easier to study than the history of literature or sculpture, and I think that there’s enough stuff readily available on Amazon for you to begin to explore a canon—if that’s interesting to you—of great comics artists and what makes them tick. I want to begin poking at this stuff that wasn’t around five years ago. There are histories of comics, there are biographies of cartoonists—that used to be such a rarity. There are interviews with artists.

One thing that came about in class—I think it was Max that brought it up, bringing it in from his literature class—is that his professor was convinced that comics couldn’t be an art because comic strips didn’t have a beginning, middle, and an end. I found that fascinating, because Bill Blackbeard, who did this great now-out-of-print book that we were using called The Smithsonian Book of Comic Strips, points to comic strips as the “endless art,” as a way of defensively moving into something that doesn’t have the closure of a beginning, a middle, and an end.

B&W: How has the class lead you to re-assess contemporary comics?

AS: It made me aware of how important this re-branding of comics as graphic novels has been, despite my own cynicism about it, in the sense that graphic is respectable, novel is respectable, graphic novels are doubly respectable, but what it did offer people who might have such a notion that “well, it can’t be a work, because you can’t get the shape of Little Orphan Annie,” which went from 1924 and I think it’s still on in some form.

B&W: If you taught the class again, would you do anything differently?

AS: If I taught it again, I think I’d do a lecture class. This is really interesting; I’m getting something out of this for sure. But it’s either that or committing to a two-year-long seminar. It takes 15 people or so at a time for it to be able to happen, and be-

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“I said, ‘I just don’t think it’s a good idea to put stuff in your vaults, they won’t come out for air.’ They were curious and interested in learning about comics.”
cause there’s not an easy-to-go-to, one-stop-shop for my take on comics, it seems that maybe it would be useful to be able to posit it. Sometimes I’m trying to squeeze two lectures as well as a conversation into the classes.

*B&W*: Ironically, if you focused on superheroes, the material would be easier to come by.

*AS*: Well, it’s more around, and people would be coming at it knowing the material before they came into class, and they’d be able to run around the stuff they’d already familiarized themselves with. What’s interesting is how everything I know I learned from comic books—and that does mean, in some ways, God, the guy’s a moron. But it also means I was able to extrapolate from this very limited area a lot of vital concerns coursing through the century, and a lot of the dynamics that form every art form as well. So in that sense, we’re dealing in fractals, you know.

*B&W*: Do you think you’ll do it again?

*AS*: I don’t know. Not next semester, that’s for sure. Like I said, my work level has really come down to a crawl if even that. But, you know, it is a way of me doing this kind of radical re-immersion in things that formed me and things that have happened around me.

**Art Spiegelman Recommends**

- George Herriman
  *Krazy Kat*
- Winsor McCay
  *Little Nemo in Slumberland*
- Chester Gould
  *Dick Tracy*
- E. C. Segar
  *Thimble Theatre*
- Harvey Kurtzman
  *MAD* magazine
- Robert Crumb
  *Fritz the Cat*
- Justin Green
  *Binky Browne Meets the Holy Virgin Mary*
- Chris Ware
  *Jimmy Corrigan*
- Daniel Clowes
  *Eightball*
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Beautiful Things

1. A girl wearing a strawberry hat on the subway.

2. Tracking down opera singing: La, la, la, la, la, la.

3. Wearing weather appropriate shoes: Boots.

Eek! My incredibly hip vintage designer shoes!

Because you don't hear enough about them!
4. Discovering found art in your very own backyard! Behold!

5. Not spilling coffee on yourself or the table even though there was a tall cat-like reflexes!

6. Using math in everyday life:

...and finding a heads-up penny -- but only if you believe in luck.
I like that they defined the word daysack using the word rucksack. This is extremely helpful.

A few months ago, feeling slightly homesick and considerably nostalgic, I reached over for my security blanket: a well-worn copy of Megan McCafferty’s novel Sloppy Firsts.

He finds an abandoned camp and goes through the contents of their backpacks. He finds canned food, jeans, and hair gel. “Oh, yeah. Ya gotta look good while you’re on the run. It’s disgusting. It’s all disgusting.”

“We need our president to go down to the border and say ‘No mas!’” These seemed to be the only words that the man knew in Spanish.

I am five years old and I love sweaters.

Dear Malcolm Gladwell,
I would like to begin by expressing how much I enjoyed reading Troublemakers. You have explored a controversial issue in an extremely tactful way. This well-composed and engaging essay on racial profiling certainly managed to hold my attention, and allowed me to think carefully through many personal conclusions that I had made about racial profiling.

Oral cavity à oral pharynx à laryngeal pharynx à esophagus à stomach à duodenum à jejuno-ileum à mesenteric vein à hepatic portal vein à liver sinusoids à hepatic vein à cava à RA à tricuspid valve à RV à pulmonary trunk à pulmonary artery à capillaries of lung à pulmonary vein à LA à bicupid valve à LV à arch of the aorta à descending aorta à l. external iliac artery à l. deep femoral artery

We suspect, especially after the pit bull is shot, that we’ll get a better view of domestic details, emotional landscape of the adult characters all in due time. The discussion about the various chicken types cut into poetry is simply amazing.

I can barely feel the middle finger on my left hand or the pointer finger on my right and when they touch I see the connection but I don’t feel it. That’s where God comes in.

More specifically, I will demonstrate how hizzy has redefined this genre of music by dividing it along the coasts, I will reveal what rapper Tupac Shakur and author Vladimir Nabokov have in common, I will show how a handful of rapping rednecks influenced what we thought we knew about hip-hop, and finally, based on what we have looked at I will try to predict where this budding genre is going from here.

Another overly-dramatic point would be the band, standing on a raft, singing in the middle of the river. Although I liked that they used native music to score it. (what about Manu Chao song? Look up soundtrack?)

Ludwig van Beethoven. Simply the name conjures images and ideas that cannot be written. Thus music... But enough of the verbose pish-posh.

It’s as if parents, administrators, school teachers, politicians, and priests feel as if it is their right to discuss the sex lives of this country’s youth. And they feel it is their right to control and legislate it.
Measures for Measure

Amethyst, South Fork

Kyra’s driving us through Long Island summer darkness, through that hour when night has truly settled. Dusk was marked by smoky chicken and plump-headed mushrooms, by leaves drifting through the muted azure of the pool, by the clack of claws as dogs paced the wide expanse of weathered wooden deck.

Dawn will be fresh dew on plastic chairs, will be sleeping hearts ticking slowly in the witching hour, will be sunlight’s first blush spreading slowly, weaving denser like threads on a loom. But right now it’s pitch black, Casey’s riding shotgun, I’m in back nestled amongst crushed ice cream cups and other dreck.

It’s late, half past eleven by the time we pull in and park in the lot behind the bay. We can barely see the brush that backs the sand, lining the beach like a fence. The moon is a half-closed eyelid, not bad for meteors, those fireworks crackling just beyond our cloudless atmosphere, zooming forth, beckoning our eyes to the heavens. Hard to say if the shower has started—we question glinting stars and jet trails, brace against the gusts of wind that prod the barely-rippling water, slapping smooth sheets of tide higher and higher up the shore, smacking sand and beach wood and fractured rock. And then: intake of breath as one patch of stagnant canvas implodes in purple, stark. A flash of humbling brilliance and it didn’t leave a mark.

—Hannah Goldfield
When it comes to the average age of its audience members, the Metropolitan Opera is essentially CBS. On any given night, the likelihood of finding more than a few dozen patrons under 30 is astonishingly low. Financially speaking, it’s a problem; an audience that might well be dead before the eleven o’clock curtain offers little promise of repeat business. For three of the last four years, the Met has been working on budget deficits—in 2002, they just broke even—with operating costs surpassing $200 million.

Even more troubling is the steady decline in the percentage of filled seats over the past decade, dropping from 92 percent in 1996 to 79 percent in 2005. Such statistics beg the question of what keeps people—especially young people—away from the opera.

With this in mind, and with new General Manager Peter Gelb at its helm, The Met is working hard to shed both its stodgy image and its economic woes. To do that, the most venerable of New York’s cultural institutions knows that it needs to bring opera back in vogue, and that means getting college students off the train at Lincoln Center for more than just a movie.

“Ask most people our age, and they’ll say that “the opera is A, very expensive; B, for old people; or C, boring,” laments Lieven Van der Veken, a Ph.D candidate at Columbia Medical School. Van der Veken hopes to change this misconception by starting an as-yet unnamed opera society for college students in New York, modeled after a similar group called Eurydice that he founded in 2000 at the University of Leuven in his native Belgium.

If young people are to attend the opera, he says, “you’ve got to make it attractive.” In Belgium, he did this by securing discounted tickets, arranging dinners and discussions with opera directors, and coordinating meetings with singers during intermissions—perks he hopes to bring to the Columbia community next year. Eurydice began as a small group of friends, but five years later, the society has 110 members, a hopeful indication of student interest.

“Opera houses are begging for groups of young people,” says Van der Veken, and Gelb’s marketing campaign seems to prove his point. So far, it has included radio broadcasts, posters in the style of iPod-adverts, new productions with celebrity directors, and live broadcasts to cinemas around the country, including a free showing of the lavish opening night gala on the Jumbotron in Times Square.

To Van der Veken, though, “it’s all too sterile.”

In the near future, Van der Veken’s opera society will help take care of the expense of opera-going, but for the young, money is only a small part of a larger problem. With student rush and standing room policies already in place, one can feasibly secure a ticket to the Met for $25—less than a discounted Broadway ticket. Why, then, do students...
continue to wait hours in the cold for tickets to *The Producers* and *Wicked* instead of taking the considerably more convenient fifteen-minute subway ride to Lincoln Center?

“People associate opera with melodrama,” says opera enthusiast and classically trained mezzo-soprano Maddy Stokes, CC ’08. Many people look down on opera as the purgatory of chest-beating, ear-splitting prima donnas, but “going to the opera and seeing good, real drama can convince someone,” she says. People also tend to forget the rich tradition of comic opera, which includes some of the most popular works in the repertoire. “Making someone laugh at an opera is important,” says Stokes, “for people who don’t think that’s possible.”

What Stokes describes as the perceived “lock-box of propriety” surrounding the whole institution of the opera, especially at the Met, might prove the single greatest obstacle for Gelb to overcome in his quest to invigorate the world of opera. For years, opera has been marketed to a very exclusive demographic—namely the buttoned-up, bistro-bouncing, Cabernet-drinking set. The opera is cursed by its perceived remoteness from ‘ordinary’ people. This intimidation factor is as real as it is absurd, and if Gelb wishes to attract a new audience, he has to make the Met fashionable, not only among the cultured and moneyed elite, but also among…well, the fashionable.

Van der Veken sees this as the primary difference between opera in the states and opera in Europe. “In Europe,” he says, “opera is very much a part of the modern art scene.” Conversely, many American opera companies maintain antiquated productions for years instead of incorporating more daring elements, something that Gelb has railed against since starting at the Met. New productions of *Die Zauberflöte* and *Madama Butterfly* have included modern elements, including multicultural design schemes and minimalist aesthetics. Each has met with stunning critical and financial success.

The task of securing a young audience, though, cannot fall only to Gelb. Lynn Owen, a voice coach for Manhattan School of Music and Barnard, is a professional soprano who has performed in opera houses worldwide, including the Met. She feels that educational institutions must take some responsibility. In spite of changing box office yield for the Met, Owen doubts whether young people have changed significantly in her 20 years teaching in Morningside Heights.

The university, on the other hand, has. Over her years at Barnard, Owen has witnessed the demise of the Columbia Opera Ensemble, as well as a group devoted to the performance of works by Gilbert and Sullivan. If opera is going to find a younger audience, Owen believes that “schools like Columbia need motivated people—people who believe in the opera and love it with a passion.”

One resource that Columbia maintains is its sizable (and under-publicized) music library. While students cannot check out CDs, it’s never difficult to bring your laptop with you to the library and simply rip as many recordings as you like onto your iTunes—it’ll save you about $30 per recording. But Van der Veken, Stokes, and Owen all agree that there is no substitute for experiencing the opera first hand.

“The combination of great literature, costumes, sets, orchestras, conductors and the world’s greatest music…when it all comes together it’s just magical,” Owen says. Even competing against the glitz of Broadway, the special effects of film, and the convenience of television, opera remains a powerful spectacle—but it can only continue as such so long as new generations of audiences support this grandest of musical traditions.

At the beginning of February, I attended a performance of *Jenufa*, an early 20th century Czech opera about sin, redemption, and infanticide. After three spectacular, heartrending hours, the audience rose and literally screamed during a standing ovation that lasted more than five minutes. I was overwhelmed. The baby had died, but the stage, and the audience, were very much alive.

For me, at least, it was worth being late to 1020.

–Michael Snyder

For years, opera has been marketed to a very exclusive demographic—the buttoned-up, bistro-bouncing, Cabernet-drinking set.
Scarlett Johansson—America’s sweetheart, Woody Allen’s muse, and Justin Timberlake’s friend-with-benefits—has a few Ivy League ties. She played a Yale alumna in *Lost in Translation* and picked up Harvard’s Hasty Pudding Award earlier this year. And let’s not forget her beau Timberlake’s Princeton degree.

That said, Johansson has no seeming Columbia connection—she didn’t attend the school, as her colleagues Maggie Gyllenhaal and Julia Stiles did, and her *Ghost World* character didn’t end up in Morningside Heights either. But publicity shots and clips from her upcoming film *The Nanny Diaries* indicate that the star has at least spent time on campus. One still shows Johansson sitting, in all her pneumatic glory, on the Low Plaza fountain; a paparazzi photo from further away catches her being filmed by a large crew, shielded by makeshift white walls.

*The Nanny Diaries*, based on Emma McLaughlin and Nicola Kraus’s popular comic novel that recounts a young woman’s struggle to put herself through grad school on a nanny’s salary, is hardly the only film to have been shot on Columbia’s campus. Many movies filmed at Columbia are set at the school in all but name. Think of the *Spider-Man* series: Peter Parker lives in New York and attends a nameless uptown university.

Joe Ricciutti explains that this is hardly an accident: “Often films do not want to seem so specific as to be associated with Columbia.” As Director of Lerner Hall, Ricciutti approves all commercial filming that takes place on Columbia’s campus, in addition to overseeing all use of Lerner.

One enters Ricciutti’s office on the seventh floor of Lerner expecting to see photos of movie-producer friends and maybe even a gold statuette or two, but the office is indistinguishable from the cubicle maze home to the rest of Lerner’s bureaucracy, indicating, perhaps, that permitting film shoots is no different than issuing student IDs.

On the rare occasion that a film does want to be associated with Columbia University, a review board consisting of Ricciutti and representatives from Public Affairs and Columbia’s General Counsel, among others, assess the script to ensure that it does not reflect poorly on the school. Ricciutti was unable to recall any specific examples; he maintains that scripts with Columbia references are just that rare.

One is tempted to wonder why Columbia lacks a *Legally Blonde*, *Good Will Hunting*, or *Love Story* of its own. But it’s worth noting that those three scripts set at Harvard, like all others filmed since the 1960s, used the Harvard campus for aerial shots only. Harvard, unlike Columbia, does not allow filming to take place inside its buildings, even for a fawningly positive portrait like *Good Will Hunting*. (And some external shots of Harvard in Spike Lee’s *Malcolm X* were actually filmed outside of our very own Hamilton Hall).

Harvard’s refusal to cooperate with Hollywood may become the trend among colleges. Emory recently cancelled on-campus filming for the *Revenge of the Nerds* remake after two weeks, reportedly because of the film’s content; if it is anything like the original, it will likely feature sex and drug use.

It makes sense, then, that most of the films shot at Columbia cannot possibly reflect on the school—they are films not set in college at all. Look closely, for instance, at the “Boston hospital” in the Jack Nicholson-
Adam Sandler film *Anger Management*—you’ll recognize Lerner Hall. Columbia can accommodate a variety of backdrops: a recent publicity photo shoot for the upcoming stage musical adaptation of *Legally Blonde* took place on Low Library steps, chosen for their resemblance to the U.S. Capitol. The lawns in front of Mathematics and Lewisohn have been used as parks by Manhattan-based productions not set in the city.

“Columbia is generally seen as film-friendly,” Ricciutti explained. Still, the school is able to accommodate only about twenty percent of total filming requests. “Students are absolutely our first priority... if it looks like the scope of the shoot is enormous, we’re not going to unload twenty film trucks at eleven a.m.,” Ricciutti said.

*The Nanny Diaries* shoot aroused some campus controversy due to its pointed presence in a central location. In April 2006, Bwog reported on the shoot’s perceived intrusiveness: “The whole production area is roped off, and imposing looking members of the film’s security team are very rudely keeping onlookers from getting too close to the action. Bwog was yelled at by said men, who even went so far as to scream at us in a threatening voice and call us ‘dude.’”

Even *People* magazine took note of the tension between students and the production: “[Johansson’s] work wasn’t welcome last week at Columbia University: Annoyed students yelled ‘Go back to Hollywood!’ when they were ousted from their picnic area for filming.”

Ricciutti denied that the shoot was a problem for Columbia students, regardless of the location and the alleged brusqueness of the crew. “We worked closely with Public Affairs to ensure that the shoot didn’t get in the way of goings-on around campus.” Hence the temporary white walls, erected to prevent the film crew from spilling onto College Walk.

And any temporary hassles pay off for Columbia students, if indirectly. Ricciutti wouldn’t get specific about how much a shoot puts into Columbia’s coffers, but noted that compensation varies according to “nature, size, and impact,” and that production companies pay fees for Columbia Public Safety and Facilities support as well.

Ricciutti attempted to finally dispel an oft-repeated rumor that a percentage of the film *Ghostbusters*’ box office take was earmarked for Columbia lawn upkeep. “Logically, why would any film shoot be so invested in a location that they’d give up their residuals?”

—Daniel D’Addario

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**Look closely — the following films have scenes shot at Columbia.**

**Set at Columbia:**

*Ghostbusters:* After Venkman and Stantz (Bill Murray and Dan Aykroyd) get fired from Columbia, they drink while sitting next to Dodge, just south of the east steps that lead to Low Plaza.

*Hannah and Her Sisters:* Lee (Barbara Hershey) meets the Columbia professor whom she later marries at the top of the steps, walking east.

**Set at “Columbia”:**

*Spider-Man 2:* Peter Parker (Tobey Maguire) walks out of Hamilton and sits in class in Havemeyer.

**No Columbia connection:**

*Kinsey:* Alfred Kinsey (Liam Neeson) speaks in a lecture hall at “Indiana University” – otherwise known as 207 Havemeyer.

*Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind:* The scenes in Barnes & Noble, where Clementine (Kate Winslet) works, take place in the Columbia Bookstore.

*New York Minute:* An Olsen twin rides on a bike up a ramp on the Low steps. Low, randomly, has a clock affixed to it.
TOLD BETWEEN PUFFS

In which our hero ventures, warily, south of the border.

THE UTMOST OF GLOBALIZED DECADENCE,
CANCUN—No, Verily does not like piña coladas. Nor does he bloody enjoy getting caught in the rain. Can anyone make sense of that song outside of a drunken haze? Outside of a hot, setting sun, a cool breeze, and various “hones” “grinding” against your “thighs”? Outside of being in a resort—where the only resort is last, and it’s Oxycontin—where they force you, at the gunpoint of fruit punch, to trade in your money for beads to make you forget that you are getting swindled, spending real money? Can anyone make sense of it when not in a place with—oh, say, air conditioning?

These thoughts and more—Jacqueline Bisset’s heavily figure rarely deserts Verily’s mind’s eye—occurred as Verily stood at the outskirts of the dance floor, like a more courageous Nick Carraway, at La Villa Música, at Playa Fiesta, Cancun, Mexico, North America, the Universe, where Verily belongs not. La Villa Música, so some 20-year old with 34Cs told Verily (Verily worked at Victoria’s Secret one long, sexually frustrated summer), translates, roughly, to “Woo-hoo!”

Silly Verily, thinking all along that his functional knowledge of both Spanish and the ancient Mayan tongue of Yucatec would enable him to at least be passable in southern Mexico; at his year-long sabbatical from Columbia. Verily should instead have studied Drunkenly Vapid! How foolish of him! And damn all those semesters dedicated and devoted to the useless study of Genet’s minor works. Verily shouldn’t’ve attended his seminar on the subaltern; he should’ve ascended The Heights every Tuesday!

But contrary to his prior plans, Verily is in Puerto Rico this week. He thought he was headed for a jaunt, in the true fashion of the cosmopolitan lustful for flesh—to eat, you perverts, to eat; Verily does not go abroad for that which can be obtained at home with a mere name-dropping of Gayatri Spivak—that would straddle Europe and Asia: Prague to Istanbul (in homage to new Alma Mater Orhan Pamuk) to Basra, there to rendezvous with Niall Chapham (Sgt.), his old chum from his days in Edinburgh, before he is pulled out of Iraq altogether.

Green Zone, indeed. Verily’s chum-no-more defrauded Verily, more or less placing him on a plane headed to the state—commonwealth—occupied territory—what is it, a viceroydom?—of Puerto Rico (translation: “Yeah Spring Break oh seven showusyourtits!”). How? In what way was Verily’s mind, sharper than a Pakistani dagger, captured by the trickery of one who felt Verily needed to, in the Vulgate, “chill out”? Let the explanation that “Santo Domingo” looks awfully similar when one has been intoxicated by six-too-many shots of single-malt suffice. Damned Admiral’s Club and your free drinks. You’ve ruined many a ruined businessman, and you’ve ruined Verily.

Which brings you, sweet, dulcerous reader, to the present (to the diegetic present—all of the events described and depicted transpired ages and ages ago, the truths it reveals resonant ages and ages hence). But Verily takes a sip. A sip of his piña colada. Well to be perfectly honest, he likes them. Quite a bit. He’s had four in the past hour or so.

The song has been redeemed, its unmellifluous and rhythmic genocide tempered and then some by its inner veracity. Or partial inner veracity—Verily still (as with anyone!) prefers not to get caught in the rain. But these nectars of the islanders—pineapple, coconuts, rum; no greater a combination has been attained since Sullivan happened upon Gilbert—is delectable and delightful. Dash cynicism, and unhappiness, and sadness for sadness’ sake. Verily wishes you a merry spring break.

—Verily Veritas
WHO LET THE DOGS OUT, ENLIGHTENMENT REMIX:

Overheard in Professor Fred Neuhouser’s Kant lecture:

Student: “What would happen if you just had an intuition of Lassie?”
Neuhouser: “Without Rin Tin Tin or Spot? Nothing. There’s no knowledge there. What were you thinking?”

Two Orthodox Jewish girls were seen mounting treadmills in Dodge gym one night at about 11:45 p.m. Each was wearing an ankle-length black skirt over sweatpants, and, within five minutes, burdened by her cumbersome attire, one had tripped, struck her face on the moving belt, and fallen on the floor. Her friend, startled, turned her head to look, only to trip herself and land on top of the other.

A recent visit to the Business School revealed that Uris Café sells fair-trade, organic coffee.

In related news, the café in Jerome Greene Hall is now selling soul food.

IS THIS WHAT THEY MEANT BY CAFÉ FRESH?

Customer to barista: “What do you want to spill on me today: Costa Rican, Guatemalan, Colombian, or House Blend?”

Overheard in an elevator:
Girl 1: “So I was gonna give up soda but no. I need chasers.”
Girl 2: “Yeah.”
Girl 1: “So I’m gonna give up candy and cookies and...” (a pause, then a gasp!) “...I can’t give up brownies!”
Girl 2, after thinking for a second: “Oh, Pssh. No way.”
Obviously, these two were impostors. Real Catholics don’t need chasers.

WISE WORDS FROM THE PARENT OF A LEGACY APPLICANT

Overheard in Lerner:
“I have the perfect life—a nice husband, a nice house—you know, some of the people around me have a little more money, but they really don’t have everything like I do. You know, a husband. And kids that are at least tolerably smart.”

On a recent Saturday night, students on Furnald 10 were approached by a CU Security guard and asked if they had seen a woman wrapped in white sheets wandering around the floor. Taken by surprise, the residents replied that they had not noticed anything strange, and the guard moved on to the next floor.

Downstairs, about 15 minutes later, security was sighted cuffing a crazed woman wrapped in blankets, being escorted out of the building.

Barnard girls are never going to get flash access that way!
Over the past eight years, a man identifying himself as “Tom Barran, class of ’68,” has been leaving regular messages on editorial assistants’ voice mail at the offices of Columbia College Today. His lengthy messages, which he usually leaves in the middle of the night, concern the 1968 riots, the women and president of Barnard College, and “American Idol,” among other matters. Occasionally, the caller asks that his messages be forwarded to “the honorable Professor Jeffery Sachs.” The man, who has been assigned the title, “The Crazy Guy,” has been traced to six or seven pay phone numbers, all based out of the Bronx.

Last semester, one work-study employee of the office took particular interest in discovering the man’s identity. Delving into the back issues of CCT’s class notes, she discovered that Tom Barran is an associate professor of Russian at Brooklyn College who “read a paper at the International Conference of Scholars, held...at Yasnaya Polyana, Tolstoy’s home estate” in 1999. Moreover, according to the class note, “Tom lives in Park Slope (Brooklyn) with his wife, Barbara, and two dogs, and travels ‘whenever [he] can write it off.’”

Some people have exciting double lives. Tom Barran has CCT, and you’ll be damned if you try to take that from him.

On a recent visit to Mudd, a B&W staffer became mesmerized by the looping images displayed on several large flat-screen televisions in the lobby. The succession of images included a man playing the saxophone on the subway, some shadows of Victorian people, a profile of a chess board, and a picture of the Statue of Liberty, all attributed to Prof. Ken Jackson. Rounding out the loop was an informational slide about natural disaster control, a picture of Mt. Everest, and a picture of the Cat’s Eye Nebula.

Engineers: Guardians of the future, champions of useless shit.

J. Sachs’ First-Ever B

The Sustainable Endowments Institute, a group that aims to make college campuses more environmentally friendly, recently released its College Sustainability Report Card, rating the efforts of 100 top institutions by looking at “campus greening practices and endowment policies.” Columbia received an overall grade of B, which includes an A in “Food and Recycling” and Cs in “Green Building” and “Investment Priorities.”

We fare pretty well next to other Universities in the city—NYU gets a C, and Yeshiva gets a pathetic D-minus—although Harvard and Stanford both earned A-minuses, the highest grade given.

One would think the $80 million Earth Institute could get at least a B+/A-.

On a recent Saturday, a supposed vandal defaced the elevator lobby and the inside door of the south elevator in John Jay. Residents received a chastising email from the building’s GA: “Although it does not look like a bias incident at this point, we are looking very closely into the incident as to who may be responsible. If you have any information as to who the perpetrator(s) may have been, please let myself or any of the RAs know. This is a serious matter, and one which will not go unresolved. I personally have zero tolerance for vandalism in John Jay of any kind, and will push for immediate consequences for this type of behavior. Please be aware that if you have visitors staying in John Jay, you are directly responsible for their behavior while they are present in our community.”

Upon closer inspection, however, residents noticed that the graffiti was not only reasonably inoffensive, but almost unnoticeable, consisting only of some sharpie-marker doodles and the letters “KER FDA.”

Overheard on the elevator: “Oh, is that it? I wouldn’t have ever seen it if it wasn’t for the email.”

The HPV vaccine... it’s a girl thing!