"PRETTY GOOD" BOOKS
Why Barnard First-Year Seminars Fall Short of Greatness
By Juli N. Weiner

ON THE STREET WHERE YOU LIVE: THE B&W WALKS THE LENGTH OF BROADWAY
BY HANNAH GOLDFIELD

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This isn’t the Barnard issue. Rather, it’s an issue of *The Blue and White*, a Columbia publication, with articles affiliated with themes of Barnard. The cover says *The Blue and White*, but the cover story’s about Barnard. And we are a Columbia organization, but we let them on our staff. The good ones. And we’ll let them read it. We may even distribute it on their (separate) campus.

Our Barnard issue isn’t about “The Barnard Issue,” it’s about the fact that Barnard shouldn’t be an issue. Rather than questioning its right to exist or chiding girls with lower SAT scores (but higher high school GPAs) for wearing Columbia apparel, it’s time to treat our neighbors across the street on their own terms. Thus, we offer this publication’s first ever in-depth pieces on Columbia’s feminine side.

Delving into the topic of Barnard academics, Juli N. Weiner explains why the First Year Seminars privilege Michael Crichton over the canon—because the content discussed really doesn’t much matter (p. 14). Conversely, Kate Linthicum’s piece on the Barnard dance department (p. 28) sheds light on a unique asset to the Columbia experience, requiring equal dexterity of mind and body. And Hannah Goldfield offers a walk down Broadway (p. 20), that line in the sand between the two campuses, to reveal the mysteries of Creationist street artists and the Marriott elevators.

Yeah, Barnard jokes are easy... really easy. But these girls may have it all figured out—attentive advising, Barnard Babysitting (with pay so high it’s like taking money from a baby), no swim test, and access to all the Columbia resources they desire—sounds like the best of all possible worlds.

Maybe the real issue is a case of Barnard envy.

—Taylor Walsh
*Editor-in-Chief*
BY THE NUMBERS

According to the Cunix alias list, the top five largest email aliases for student groups are:

1. The Ballroom Team
2. CU Dance Marathon
3. Roadrunners
4. “Iranians”
5. Philolexians

And the smallest 5 are:

1. Triple Helix Society
2. Polish Club
3. Charles Drew Pre-Med Society
4. Thai Club
5. AEPi alumni

ACROSS

1. One of the three goddesses of the land, raped by the white vanquishers.
6. Quasi-mythological viral vessel injecting the new land with its pestilence.
8. The archetypal indigenous female on whose body was enacted the power capitulation to the conquerors.

DOWN

2. The Noble Savage and Uncle Tom, full of innate skill and childlike wonder.
3. The fetishized fo[u/w]ll.
4. The first outpost of the City on a Hill, the American hegemon destined for world subjugation.
5. The Aryan ur-male come to spread his Western pathologies.
7. One of the first successful imports to the new colonies, natch.

Check www.bwog.net for this month’s solution.

REVELATION OF THE MONTH

The good folks at CUIT have recently re-vamped Cubmail, resulting in an email system that is less visually grating—yet barely more functional—than the old one. The most notable change? When users receive an email with a photo attachment, the accompanying icon depicts a small, dark-skinned, mustachioed man.
During an American Urban History lecture several years ago, Professor Kenneth Jackson reflected sagely that “cities are places where freaks go to congregate.” To anyone who has ever stumbled upon the Central Park Dance Skater’s Association, this maxim might ring true. Every weekend and holiday afternoon between mid-April and Halloween, dozens descend upon “Skaters Road,” a mid-park stretch of blacktop, to form “The Skate Circle,” a disco al fresco pulsing with a live DJ’s funk and reggae beats and the sheer, boundless joy of organized roller-dancing.

At first glance, it is easy to classify these people as freaks. They’re so happy! They’re in costume! They’re twirling around on ROLLER-SKATES! But what becomes apparent after just a few hours in the circle is how normal they are. The skaters are traffic cops and Ph.Ds, flight attendants and real estate developers. They are native New Yorkers from all five boroughs, Americans from the redwood forest to the gulf-stream waters, and recent immigrants from Jamaica, Holland or Montreal. And, above all, they are people to whom family is enormously important—theirs just happens to unite around an unadulterated, multi-cultural, class-defying love for dance-skating, the most whimsical of all dying arts.

Most of the skaters never miss a weekend, even if it means being late with a credit card payment to afford the drive from Philadelphia, as one man confessed. They love the sport, sure. Some of them have been boogying since dance-skating’s heyday in the early 1980s, and rumor has it that Lezly Ziering, one the founders of the CPSDA, even got married on quad skates at the Roxy. But what really keeps them coming is the natural high that they get from belonging.

Like any family, theirs is not without oddballs. Robert Oxnam is a world-renowned East Asian scholar with multiple-personality disorder. One of his personas, Bobby, likes to roller-skate with several Nalgene bottles stacked atop his head, earning him the skater-title “Bottle Bob.” But the circle is about acceptance. Learn to share its bliss with whoever should choose to join it, and you’ve got yourself something harder to find than a freak in a city: a genuine community.

—Hannah Goldfield

At 11 a.m. on a drizzly Friday morning, a ragtag assortment of undergraduates filed into a narrow seminar room. At the head of the long mahogany table dominating the trim space, the monolithic, balding, bespectacled Michael Seidel—Columbia’s preeminent Joycean—addressed his students. “Let’s relax,” he said in the soothing tone of an Oxbridge scholar. Welcome to ENGL 3940, the creatively entitled *Finnegans Wake* and, according to Seidel, the only undergraduate class in the nation exclusively devoted to the study of Joyce’s infamously cryptic magnum opus.

He began to expound on notion number one: the *Wake* as comic novel. Eighteen minutes later, he introduced number two: “If *Ulysses* is the day book, then *Finnegans Wake* is the night book.” Theme twelve deals with Catholic guilt; nineteen mentions masturbation. An hour later, Seidel had enumerated and explicated all twenty-three. “Let’s not take a break!” he said cheerfully, commencing with a catalogue of a dozen more ideas. Once he finished these, the class was dismissed.

“This isn’t usually how we do class,” Seidel said, leafing through a pile of papers by way of explanation. “Look,” he said, gesturing towards a stack of students’ assignments. The first of them was a geometric schematic consisting of two equally sized, calligraphic circles set side-by-side with a pair of triangles suggestively inscribed within their overlapping area.

“This girl really went crazy!” Seidel said, his enthusiasm crescendoing. “I mean, this is the book right here. You’ve got the ass, and you’ve got the—well, the pussy—and if you turn it around, it’s the asshole. It’s also the portrait of the artist—Joyce’s two nearsighted eyes, his nose. And the whole loop, the infinity thing.” He paused for a second before launching into an anecdote about some faraway *Finnegans Wake* society. “They’d only do a page a month,” he said.

I pointed out that it would take upwards of fifty years to get through the entire tome. “Maybe so,” he replied, “but they had fun with it.”

—Christopher Morris-Lent

They say that the best art moves you. Well, this art will really move you.

—Mayor Michael Bloomberg

Over this past spring and summer, flocks of local schoolchildren and young hospital patients painted the enormous flowers that can now be seen on a sizable proportion of NYC taxi-cabs. Enlisted by Portraits of Hope, the nonprofit “creative therapy” organization behind similar aesthetic ventures on blimps, NASCAR vehicles, and airplanes, the act of collective creation is intended to have a palliative effect on sick children and an esteem-building effect on healthy ones. The group calls this project “Garden In Transit” and claims to be the largest collaborative work of art in the city’s history.

The colors are bold and the cause commendable, but how do the drivers feel about the petals and stigmas? Do curmudgeonly cabbies resent the whimsical embellishments on their hoods? Most of those I asked were surprised anyone cared.

“The flowers? My boss told me I had to do it.”

“Sure.”

“Uhh…you mean on my hood and trunk?”

“They’re for kids with cancer, right? I guess they’re okay.”

Many cab drivers I spoke to were surprisingly receptive to my hailing them, asking them a few questions, and sending them off without a cent.

“So very pretty,” said one.

“I was so happy I got purple ones!”

One smiled and explained, “This is my first year owning my own cab, and it was such a good little surprise when I got to do this to my car.” And twice I heard a variation of “the flowers are nice but I don’t like the GPS system.”

No driver said adorning their automobiles with floral arrangements made him feel effete. Only one threw me for a loop—this time while I was a full-fledged patron in the back seat. As I extended my hand forward to pay the fare outside of my dorm, he announced that, I, like the colorful creations on his car’s hood, was a flower. “And I will put your tip to the sick kids,” he promised.

—Jessica Cohen

Illustrated by Allison Halff
Several months ago, Stephanie Davidson, CC '08, was standing on a curb when a bus drove past with an advertisement for the television series *Nip/Tuck*. The show’s two main characters—both plastic surgeons—sat dressed in tuxedos with a naked woman lying prostrate over their laps. The woman was swooning, her toes were curling, and a gleaming scalpel was stuck in her side.

“It felt like I had been slapped in the face,” Stephanie said. “Just the symbolism…” She trailed off. “The naked woman…the violent alteration…” She isn’t feigning offense, either—she is deeply horrified. As she speaks she stares at her hands as if she had played a key role in the fictional stabbing.

Stephanie, admittedly, doesn’t experience the world the way many others do.

As the coordinator of Columbia Urban Experience (CUE), the one-time producer of the Vagina Monologues, a leader of the yearly “Take Back the Night” march, and a Rape-Crisis/Anti-Violence peer counselor, Stephanie is one of the more active activists and feminine feminists on campus.

Stephanie clearly loves women—no, not like that—but given the environment she grew up in, her devotion to the anti-sexual violence crusade seems inevitable. She has a fraternal twin sister, a mother who she counts among her best friends, and a younger brother whose first college essay was a feminist critique of *The Odyssey*. And her father?

“Oh,” she shrugs. “He’s a gynecologist.”

Once, in high school, Stephanie and a friend got into a fight over a boy. (Fair warning: She was voted Most Likely to Be a Heartbreaker.) But rather than rip out some hair extensions and call it a day, she responded by creating a girls mentoring program designed to “get girls to recognize the reasons why they don’t always turn to each other” as allies. The program was a solid idea. Stephanie insists, but it lacked structure: “I hadn’t discovered feminism at the time!”

There is not a hint of self-mocking in Stephanie’s voice when she says that she found feminism on a Jewish, vegetarian, community service trip when someone introduced her to Ani DiFranco’s music. Virginia Woolf and Simone de Beauvoir came much later, and though she found their work inspirational, Stephanie isn’t steeped in feminist theory. Her brand is more DIY feminism; it’s personal, it’s political, and it allies her more strongly with Eve Ensler and Naomi Wolf than, say, Julia Kristeva.

In many ways, Stephanie never left Jewish day camp. “She’s wonderful, but there’s nothing hip about her,” said one friend. “It’s actually really refreshing.”

Sometimes though, Stephanie sounds like she’s reading from a rape crisis textbook. Her speech is peppered with politically correct phrases like “rape culture” and “support system.” She’s tired of talking about “safe spaces”—not because the term is an irritating piece of politically correct jargon and an excuse to kick reporters out of meetings, but because it’s so often misused. If she has a favorite word, it’s probably “consent.”

“I love overhearing people talk about consent. That kind of language is really exciting,” she said. “They’re definitely mocking it, but it’s becoming part of the cultural vocabulary.” There can never be too much consent in Stephanie’s world. When she first
started dating her current boyfriend, he asked for consent to hold her hand. “That’s awkward,” she said, “but he was just listening to me.”

On a Thursday evening, I ran into her at Kim’s Video. I was pacing the store with an expression of existential and geographical loss, and before I knew what had happened, she had pulled me across the room and found the movie I was looking for. “And what about you?” I asked. “Oh, I can’t decide,” she said. She’s been agonizing. “What do you think, Evita or Rent?”

— Anna Phillips

ALEX GARTENFELD

Like most people, Alex Gartenfeld, CC ’08, bites his fingernails. Unlike most people, he began to worry about the psychological implications of this particular bad habit when he read an article on Lesch-Nyan syndrome in a September issue of The New Yorker.

“There’s a genetic gradient between biting your fingernails and totally gnawing your hand off,” Alex explains, glancing at his hands. “To think that my disposition is part of a spectrum with these people who are totally having to wear lead gloves because they otherwise will eat themselves. The guy said, ‘My left hand’s my devil hand.’...I think my index finger is my devil finger.”

With his thick, black horn-rimmed glasses and pants that resemble denim-patterned spandex, Gartenfeld comes off as the archetypal Brooklyn hipster. But even on the surface, there is something alien, even anachronistic, in Alex’s demeanor. Whatever it is, don’t call it New Jersey.

“I definitely have a Jersey complex,” says Alex, born and raised in Edison. “People who are most New York are from New Jersey. I think it was Philip Roth, he said something like that.” He thought again. “That was a butchered quote and a butchered attribution.” Though he doesn’t chug Bud Light, root for the Giants, or rock out to Bon Jovi, Alex’s tastes may well be credited to his roots.

“I have an aesthetic,” Alex explains. “I love the Technicolor, new wave. That’s the kind of music I like. I was listening to girl groups for a year and a half. I kind of got sick of it, but it’s the kind of thing I respond to. Part of it is a kitsch thing. It’s like an expression of mastery.” Quick to separate himself from the ever-growing Williamsburg music scene (“Todd P shows are just too sweaty for me”), Alex insists, “Cool music sucks. It’s very zeitgeist-y to not be listening to cool music.”

This seems a strange outlook for Alex, the current Editor-in-Chief at the Spectator’s weekly arts magazine The Eye, considering that his resume is heavy on entertainment journalism.

As the magazine’s second EIC, Alex is largely responsible for The Eye’s tone and style. He’s known among writers for his no-holds-barred critiques, and among readers for his labyrinthine editor’s intros. Typical Gartenfeld columns have titles like “Unpacking a Self-Referential Opening” and “Breaking From the Hipster Mold.” He’s blasé about issues of privilege on a campus where they are touchy subjects; his intro from February 22nd begins: “For Lent I was going to give up my BlackBerry.”

Over the past three years Alex has interned at Paper Magazine (for which he now freelances, writing about fashion and music), The New York Observer, Rolling Stone, and The Sun. More recently, he worked for the art theory journal Parkett, evidence of his gravitation towards more scholarly pursuits that will put his art history major to use.

“My boss [at Parkett] and I were talking about what I was going to do when I graduate,” Alex says. “I said, ‘I might want to go to Berlin and learn my German.’ She said, ‘I know of this estate, Colin DeLand’s—a guy who lived in Soho or the East Village. He died in 2003 and had an estate in Germany. They need an archivist.’”

Alex was quickly offered the position, starting immediately. The deal includes airfare, room and board, and an hourly rate to thoroughly catalogue DeLand’s archive over winter break. When I last spoke with Alex, he had just returned from his first sojourn into Berlin. “I went there this last weekend to begin work on the archive,” Alex explains. “I have a little intern named Magnus, and he is so nice.”

— Justin Gonçalves
The professor’s office is a curious thing. Forget the cubicles of commercial America: in the academy—or at Columbia, at least—no two offices are alike. You might be shunted in with a junior colleague, forced to operate out of a cinderblock-and-white-paint monstrosity, quietly praying for retirements and/or deaths. Or, if you’re lucky, no one will realize that you landed a wood-paneled room so large that you almost feel guilty. Almost.

Just as jeans and a bow tie are a perfectly appropriate sartorial combination in academia, family photos are easily paired with, to give one example, a futon and six massive oil portraits of 19th century philosophers. Professors, denied the privilege of making business deals and filing TPS reports, are free to decorate their offices as they see fit. Some of them do.

Richard Bulliet started by dividing his office in half. When I showed up to talk with the scholar of the Middle East on the 11th floor of IAB, I was confronted with the first half: solemn bookshelves, a long empty table, and an leather jacket. The owner was nowhere to be found. I knocked, and a startling “Come in” resounded from an archway obscured by what appeared to be love beads—just one of the many Middle Eastern accoutrements Bulliet has acquired over his 32-year tenure at Columbia.

The second room was also lined with bookshelves, paintings, hangings. Knickknacks and a motley assortment of tattered chair crammed the empty spaces, as Bulliet himself typed away at an old computer. This was his third office, he told me, and his most satisfactory, as it was large enough to partition. He could conduct seminars on one side, and write in the other.

Bulliet got up, and with a wry smile began shambling around the room, pointing to many of his favorite knickknacks—droves of glass camels (one of his areas of expertise); a converted kerosene lamp (also adorned with camels) that he’d inherited from his cousin; a decorative hanging he had convinced a graduate student to cut off of a lamppost in Tehran shortly after the 1979 revolution; the Edgar (Allen Poe) Award he won for Best First Mystery Novel; and a number of quirky paintings from the collection of his grandfather, art critic C.J. Bulliet.

On the other side, through the love beads, Bulliet showed off his Hello Kitty doll (“I teach about domestic animals, so I lecture on Hello Kitty”) and The Pen at War...
With Onslaught, a rare collection of anti-Salman Rushdie cartoons that he got his hands on in Iran ("Someone was not so great at English"). A painting of Alma Mater and its environs is perched above the doorway. “That’s the only blood-red Low you’ll ever see,” he smiled. “I painted that.” Then, Bulliet turned slowly towards the bookcase and sighed. “I have three thousand books here,” he looked at me. “I’m going to teach for three more years and then I have to figure out what the hell I’m going to do with all this shit.”

Ralph Holloway doesn’t have that problem. In fact, the physical anthropologist is not much for decorations, *per se*. His office is small and empty except for a computer and some metal cabinets. But he opened the cabinets with a grin, revealing rows and rows of teal, rubbery endocasts he makes of the inside of human skulls. And just outside the door is the Schermerhorn bone lab, where rows and rows of the original skulls are laid out on long lab tables—real skulls, the market for which Holloway told me is now closed. “I’ve got lots of interesting things here,” Holloway said. “Gunshot wounds, sword slashes.”

The wooden cabinets that line the walls feature monkey skeletons and abnormal skulls, evoking *Frankenstein* more than modern science. This has been Holloway’s home for his studies of the brain and evolution for many years—ever since he and some students, fed up with their inadequate lodgings, simply moved up to a recently emptied floor in the Schermerhorn extension. “This is all from squatters’ rights,” Holloway said with a smile.

Perched on the sixth floor of Mathematics, Dylan Thurston’s office is moderately-sized and as inconspicuous as Holloway’s. But Thurston, who specializes in topology, will gladly show off his collection of geometric objects that fills his bookshelves and spills over onto filing cabinets—polytopes of various shapes, sizes, and colors, origami versions of Platonic solids, and a Klein bottle, which has only one side. “They’re…” he paused and pondered. “They’re definitely somewhat related to my work.”

Thurston opened a box of what looked like Tinker Toys: a series of red rods and rubbery, yellow connectors. From these, he quickly built an icosahedron (he had to write the word on the board for me)—rigid when all twelve rods are in place, but flexible when only one is showing that the original can be rigid in a different formation. Thurston seemed most proud, however, of a giant almost-ball, made of what looked like multi-colored K’nex, that rested near his window. “This is the largest four dimensional regular polytope,” he told me, and held it up to his window at various axes. As with most of the objects in his room, Thurston built the large polytope from Zone tools, which are indeed a fancy version of K’nex. “Well, it’s mostly a toy,” he smiled, “but it’s a fun toy.”

When Victoria de Grazia ushered me into her office on the sixth floor of Fayerweather, I was taken aback. I hadn’t imagined that the doorway, wedged between an alcove and stairwell, could lead to a room this large, a room that just sort of meanders back towards the building’s exterior—if de Grazia took a seat at her desk, and I had stood in the doorway, I thought she might have to shout. As de Grazia told it, no one had really wanted the long office when she first joined the history department in 1994. “They were worried about how they were going to decorate it,” she laughed. “I was just happy that I’d gotten a larger apartment, because this was about the size of where I lived when I was junior faculty.”

As for interior decorating, de Grazia hasn’t gone nuts, but the office is certainly not empty. There’s plenty of room for books along one of the long walls, which face the office’s most distinctive feature on the other: a mysterious, beautiful tapestry, reportedly 18th century Flemish. De Grazia has also hung up an Italian circus poster that features a ravishing female snake charmer dancing among some startled-looking alligators. “That’s one of those they put up when the circus comes to town,” she said. “I took that off a city wall in Greece during my wanderings in, oh, the 80s.” The center of the room has ample space for a comfy sofa and some chairs, on top of a rug de Grazia brought with her from Rutgers. “That, I think, is called New Jersey Chinese *choinoiserie.* That was probably made in Burlington.”

“"That, I think is called New Jersey Chinese choinoiserie. That was probably made in Burlington.”
What is it that language provides for us that is of such value?

Her features are carved as if from marble and stained a golden chestnut brown. Part White, part Chereke, part Black Foot, and part Black. Her blood is a hodgepodge, a cocktail where generations of conquest, the genetics of conquerors and their conquered, meet and mingle. The lights of passing cars slide down her figure illuminating full lips, prominent eyes, and what her mother would term a hooked “Mangum” nose. As the lights pass further down they play upon the rounded melon of her belly. She looks like a snake that has swallowed beach ball sized meal twice its own size, and might choke at any moment, is fit to burst.

we have no duties directly to animals; rather, animals are a sort of medium through which we may either succeed or fail to discharge those direct duties we owe to nonanimals, other human beings

While this one example does not explain all the reasons why I am thinking about a future in investment banking, it does illustrate many of the important things about it that I find appealing.

I.M. Pei designed building so all patients would have a window to look outward (even inside patients!)

My philosophy of life, the way I go about pursuing knowledge, is to question. I try to question everything, whether it be religion, politics, or why I like ice cream.

The five of us: Zev, David, Rafi, Michal, and I pulled up to the Palm Beach Hotel and rolled down the windows of our rented black Yukon XL. “I don’t believe this!” Rafi shouted. The luxurious streets of Palm Beach were a long way away from the subway smells and tall buildings of New York City. Arriving at two AM the morning before the beginning of the holiday of Sukkot, we had come here with the mission of helping the New Synagogue of Palm Beach make it through the three-day holiday.

with an inflatable polyurethane phallus when she got her new forehead

Most men prefer women who have Drew berrymore and Angelina Jolie’s face, height and bust. The important point is that standard of beauty ah s not changed for last 60 years. Why are men attracted to beautiful women? It looks like a simple question, but it’s hard to answer even though judges are scientists.
I actually read all the readings assigned, the old ones by accident and then all the new ones, so I’m going to write about both.

Congratulations! You have been selected for final round interviews with the Investment Banking Division of Goldman Sachs Asia in consideration for a full-time analyst position!

Feelings continuously sputter out of range.

First, the pointed to Now is negated as that which has been; then the negation itself is negated to “return to the first assertion, that the ‘Now’ is” (63). This double negation leads to the Universal ‘now’, which interestingly involves a process of self-reflection that mimics Life and Consciousness. For the ‘now’ posits the otherness of the particular ‘now’s which have been, but then supercedes this otherness to bring this set of particulars back under itself (64). The process is complex and mediated.

Vodka: Poland, Mendeleev, the man who brought you periodic table; aqua vitae **

This painting creates a scene where multiple racial and cultural groups are portrayed together all the individuals seem to be happy and getting along but that is the fallacy of the work because they seem to get alone racial and cultural bias still shrouds the work. Every painting has a different perspective and this painting also seems to propose the continued inequality that existed in the Americas through the lack of action because everyone seems happy the artist is perpetuating a lie.

“What I want to know,” Pam interjects, “is what’s up with all these boys? I mean, it seems like the girls are doing fine.” Six eyes look at me, Glenda’s twenty-year old daughter, with quizzical accusation.

I’m afraid of water. It’s silly, I know. Terrified. I can’t even begin to tell you. I go to sleep at night thinking of slow, dark ripples way out in the middle of the sea. My bed becomes a water bed and when I wake up I still feel it moving, flowing like a gradual current below is pulling me towards something, anything. The more I wake the more I feel a pull like an undertow. My husband laughs at me softly now, it’s been so long, I don’t know. Whenever it rains I want to hide, I want the leaves of the plants in my garden to grow ten feet wide so that I can cover myself from the rain, bury myself, hide somewhere deep inside of my womb where it’s warm and safe and secure. Deep inside of me where Seth first learned to swim, to kick, to grow, to love. I’m afraid of it, yet for some strange reason, I can’t sleep without surrounding myself in it. Late at night, after Derek is asleep I draw myself a bath and submerge myself in the water. I hold my breath as long as I can, some miracle to take me to Seth, to show me my baby, so that I can play with him for one more hour, five minutes, ten seconds, a day, anything but I always rise to the top of the tub exhausted, soaked, ready for bed.

Lastly, my thoughts on the dynamic between Jason and Medea. Their interaction greatly reminds me of the book Men Are From Mars, Women are From Venus. **

Death seems to be waiting for its turn in the game.

Guns are too strong and too fast to avoid. There is no time to resolve the misunderstanding and not enough time to run away. There is no one or nothing that can survive in front of a gun. It is very difficult for victims to survive, but also attractive for murderers.

Hot fluff although seemingly substantial and right, under closer inspection, one finds the loopholes and the pomp intellect

Gen Y, Gen Why.
“Pretty Good” Books

Why Barnard first-year seminars fall short of greatness.

BY JULI N. WEINER

Chaos was my first choice. But it was completely full, so instead I was assigned Symmetry for my Barnard First-Year Seminar. My other options included The Art of Being Oneself, The Beautiful Sea, The Summons to Adventure, Exploring the Poles, Shapes and Shadows of Identity, The Crisis of Authority, and The Uncanny, among others.

First-Year Seminars (FYS) constitute 1/9 of the 9 Ways of Knowing—the ridiculous name given to Barnard’s not necessarily ridiculous set of distribution requirements. When FYS began in 1983, it was seen as a liberating counterweight to Columbia’s phallocentric, Western-philic Core. “It was a reaction to the Core’s list of dead white men,” said David Goldfarb, who taught Death—a seminar created years ago when Barnard was trying to position itself as a more intellectual alternative to NYU.

These days, with the Core loosening its collar, the most significant way in which FYS differ from their siblings—Literature Humanities and Contemporary Civilization—is the role the texts play in pedagogy. Lit Hum and CC, the centerpieces of the Core, require the study of canonical texts with inherent historical, literary or philosophical value, while in the seminar program, the books function as a springboard for discussion. “The emphasis is not on what we read,” explained Mindy Aloff, a professor who currently teaches The Art of Being Oneself. “The seminars are to encourage skills in writing, reading, and speaking. The content is an occasion for helping people do something else.”

But the “Content as Occasion” philosophy—namely, that worthwhile content is not a necessary component of meaningful discussion—contributes to the widespread dissatisfaction with the FYS program. The seminars are a jumble of disorganized syllabi, reluctant professors, and disillusioned students. Furthermore, when it comes to meeting their objective—providing an intellectual foundation outside the rigid strictures of the canon—many students say they fail. The disappointment is particularly acute because these are first-year courses. They should provide the means and the desire for four years of intellectual growth—one of the aims of the 9 Ways of Knowing. Instead they risk extinguishing any academic curiosity.

Lauren Saltiel, BC ’10, characterized the collective disdain as a sentiment directed not at specific classes, but at the entire program. “I didn’t really go into the seminar thinking it would be this great discussion class—it’s just something I had to do and didn’t have high expectations for.” The lack of seriousness

Illustrated by Zoe Shachy
HEPOMENE TOI LOGISMOI

regarding the construction of FYS and the incoherence of the syllabi are evident in the administration’s nonchalant attitude toward canonical considerations. “We like to say: ‘Not Great Books, but pretty good books,’” laughed Robert McCaughey, looking down at his anchor-patterned tie. A current professor of The Beautiful Sea, McCaughey was the founding director of the FYS program from 1983-1987. Were this same statement applied to Barnard’s intellectual mission the result would be offensive: Let’s not produce great minds, but pretty good minds.

During my interview with Lisa Gordis, Director of the First-Year Seminar Program, she asked me what inspired me to write this article. I squirmed in discomfort, unable to make eye contact, and responded that I had taken Symmetry.

“Oh,” she said.

From there on out, the interview was off the record.

Symmetry has earned the dubious reputation as a metonym for the First-Year Seminar program’s failures. Symmetry’s raison d’être is weak, but it was designed around identifying “symmetries” in literature, art and the natural world. The syllabus included “The Tyger” by William Blake; Gödel, Escher, Bach (a tome of propositional calculus and Lewis Carroll, popular among the computer-programming set); and artist M.C. Escher’s autobiography Escher on Escher.

In the first month of class, the professor drew the letters of the alphabet on the board so that we could draw dashed lines through them, proving their geometric symmetry. “I could understand that the syllabus proposal could pass but I don’t think it was fair for them to actually hold this First-Year Seminar,” Sharona Kahn, Symmetry survivor and BC ’10, reasoned one night in Butler Café. Last year’s First-Year Dean Hilary Lieberman Link “asked how it was going and I said I think that someone needs to go check on the class because i don’t see how we’re all going to last the semester.”

But many of Symmetry’s problems lay beyond the scope of the First-Year Seminar Oversight Committee’s powers. Discussions were unplanned and bordered on the absurd, yet they were legendary. Girls kept quote notebooks of nonsensical things said in class and performed re-enactments of class discussions to the delight of the hallway. By the end, laptop abuse was rampant and to stay awake students would view movie trailers (complete with low volume), an act of disobedience that went unnoticed by the professor. My boyfriend requested that I liveblog him the class. What follows is a discussion of a chapter of Borges’ The Death and the Compass captured verbatim on October 4th, 2006 and archived for posterity on Google Talk:

Professor: “Now that we’ve heard some criticisms, let’s hear some defense of the story.”

Student 1: “Well I just don’t think it was very well written.”

silence

Student 2: “Um, I have a question. This isn’t so much on the subject of symmetry, but this is about how everyone hated the story so much...”

Professor: “I think that’s a very interesting question... and one that you should figure out for yourself.”

Student 1: “Are we just looking at this way too closely? Making something out of nothing?”

Professor: “Uh, well. I mean, it’s certainly a possibility to consider.”

Narrow themes like Symmetry would have made great one-hour lectures, but not mandatory bi-weekly discussions for 14 consecutive weeks. “The topic was interesting for two days, but everything was repeated a hundred times,” Cyrena Lee, BC ’10, said of her seminar, The Uncanny. “There were a lot of long pauses cushioned with the professor trying to force some kind of dialogue, because there was nothing of substance to talk about.”

Symmetry, along with several other courses that semester, was a residential seminar. Before their freshman year, students apply for seminars and housing simultaneously and if they opt into a residential seminar, they’re housed on the same hall, sometimes in the same room, as their classmates. In other words, when Symmetry the class ended, Symmetry the lifestyle had just begun.

“The experiences with residential seminars are mixed. A problematic dynamic in the hall can carry over into the seminar,” Gordis said. Likewise, a problematic dynamic in the classroom can carry over into the hall: “Living together perpetuated the fact that we all hated Symmetry while we were in it. We would all come back and discuss how much we hated it and then that would just all build,” recalled Haley Zamer, BC ’10.

Residential seminars are designed to encourage discussions of the subject material outside the classroom—though recording the professor’s voice
on a MacBook, remixing it with the sounds of thunder and lightning on GarageBand, and naming the song “Yriemmys” (symmetry backwards) presumably doesn’t count. Madeline Langlieb, BC ’10, formerly of Ethnicity and Social Transformation, laughed when I asked her if the residential seminar fostered the discussion of class topics outside the classroom. “Maybe we all took the elevator back and forth, but that was pretty much it.”

Barnard is currently weighing the failures of the residential seminars against their ideological significance to the program. “Residential seminars are not under formal review, but it’s an issue we’re thinking about,” Gordis explained.

Another major gripe—and disincentive for faculty—is the pay structure. “Staffing bottleneck is a huge problem,” said Professor Perry Mehrling of the seminar Economics in the New World, referring to the difficulty of finding faculty to teach the seminars. Though he said that professors are compensated with an extra $1000 for teaching a seminar, “It’s a lot of work,” he emphasized. “Teaching a seminar. $1000—it’s like a tip!” This is about $30 an hour—which is less than your average SAT tutor makes.

“Barnard faculty aren’t given that much incentive to teach in the program,” agreed David Goldfarb. “Actually, when professors find out the differences between Columbia’s program and Barnard’s, they’re livid.” He explained that if Columbia faculty teach the Core for three consecutive semesters, they are given a full semester of course release. This reprieve allows faculty members to take a break from teaching to focus on their own research. “This is a major thing that Columbia does. They’re spending more money, but they’re getting a better product,” Goldfarb continued. But Mehrling, an economist, believes that something like the Core is a fiscal impossibility at Barnard. “I’d say it would be prohibitively expensive to adopt the Columbia model of Lit Hum and CC,” he said.

Another side effect of the “Content as Occasion” philosophy—besides allowing for peculiar topics like The Summons to Adventure to anchor a semester-long discussion class—is that the seminars are inherently ineffective at dealing with issues of race, ethnicity, class and sexuality. If one of the goals in the creation of the seminars was to provide a more nuanced look at the canon, it’s certainly not doing any better than the Core itself.

Barnard, in its own counter-intuitive way, has already attempted (albeit unsuccessfully) to address issues of race and gender. The First-Year Seminars Oversight Committee mandates that all syllabi include at least one woman and one minority. Though Gordis stresses that these compulsory inclusions on the syllabi are not a quota, they still allow for the possibility that in a student’s first semester at Barnard, she will only read one text by a woman—and not because it’s germane, just because it’s mandated. If a syllabus fails to meet the provisions of the non-quota, the Oversight Committee will send it back to the professor for revision. “That’s a little rigid,” replied Peggy Aloff, amazed, upon learning of these requirements.

It’s a little saddening that this requirement exists to mandate one-woman-per-syllabus at a women’s college known for cultivating celebrated female authors. Many students attend Barnard because of an interest in women’s studies, but the current structure of the seminar program seems not to know its audience. In the case of The Ordinary Estranged, the list reads: Descartes, E.T.A. Hoffman, Dostoevsky, Poe, Henry James, Nietzsche, Freud, Kafka, Beckett, Camus, and Mary Shelley. One of these things is not like the other.

While the same criticism can and has been directed at Columbia’s Core, Barnard is the last place you’d expect to find women as afterthoughts. “The seminars were especially lacking in addressing issues of gender,” Sarah Kupferberg, BC ’10, said. “I’m at a women’s college and I just think that I missed out on some great literature and some great discussions I could have entered into school with.”

In the course of researching this piece, all the students and most of the professors interviewed had never heard of the “suggested inclusion,” but upon finding out they were equal parts incredulous and horrified. Keondra Prier, BC ’08, is the Student Government Association representative to the Committee on Instruction and founding editor of The Proxy; an undergraduate magazine that focuses on issues concerning the African Diaspora. Of the non-quota, Prier responded in disgust, “Everyone assumed that was what’s going on!” She laughed in disbelief. “I don’t think any of this is malicious. It’s honestly just ignorant.”

Prier does not reflect on her FYS experience fondly. “I remember when we read Their Eyes Were Watching God... We just didn’t have any discussion of race and history,” she said. The text was “marginalized and wasn’t linked to any of the other texts. It’s
like, “Oh, let’s have a Harlem Renaissance section and not weave any theme between them.” Prier said that when it comes to the “ethnic texts” many professors turn to the one or two students of color in the room as primary sources, leaving them feeling tokenized. “Students of color feel like teachers will turn to them and expect them to be knowledgeable about issues concerning their heritage.” In some cases, there’s no opportunity to be tokenized as not a single “ethnic text” exists (refer back to the syllabus of The Ordinary Estranged—that’s a pretty white crew).

Aretha Choi, a sophomore who took Chaos as her FYS, voiced nearly identical complaints about the nature of Asian American literature chosen for the class. “The fact that the professor selected some ancient Korean princess story bothers me,” she said. “Even modern day Koreans wouldn’t read that as what Korean literature is.” Choi said she was frustrated with her professor’s tendency to reduce Asian American literature to an example of minority thought, rather than reading it as literature. “Asian American writers are not studied as writers and the whole genre shouldn’t be limited to discussion about their troubles as Asian Americans,” she said. (As of November 7th, Choi joined a handful of other students in a hunger strike against the University.)

But, because of the non-quota, in many instances it’s impossible to not to marginalize certain texts. Professor Mehrling said that when he first submitted his syllabus, it was sent back. “It needed to include one woman, one minority and one book before 1900,” he said. To put different economists’ theories in context, Mehrling planned to include biographies. The Committee told him no biographies—they didn’t have enough literary qualities and he had to include novels that he said he’d never read before, such as one by Edith Wharton. “I was told there was too much economics,” he said. The Committee told him to add Henry George and Thorsten Veblen. “That pissed me off,” Mehrling said. “I didn’t want to do this in the first place.”

He shrugged and reached for his computer. “Here,” he said, pointing at his computer screen. “It’s on the Wiki.” He twirled the screen around to show me a password-protected Barnard FYS Wikipedia page.

“There’s a Wiki?!” I exclaimed, inching to get a better look at the computer.
archived minutes from what Gordis described as “monthly pedagogy meetings.” A quick Google search for “Barnard First-Year Seminar Wiki” pulls up notes from one such meeting—apparently they forgot to password protect all of it. “Science students can’t deal with critique, humanities students can’t deal with empiricism,” read the meeting notes for February 21st, 2007. It gets better: the minutes provided insight into the observed differences between Barnard and Columbia students, calling Columbia students “more adversarial.” The notes also indicated that there were only five people present at the meeting (including Gordis), out of approximately 20 who were, in theory, required to be there.

“It seems to me that the pedagogy meetings are not covering new material,” said FYS instructor Patricia Stokes. Mehrling also recognized problems within the design of the Oversight Committee and its meetings. The Oversight Committee “believes in the program, so its continuity is guaranteed. It’s just made up of previous heads of the program. They don’t meet very often, and it’s a slow-moving body, so it’s not going to change very much.”

One radical reform to FYS occurred when Barnard professor Mark Carnes invented a class called Reacting to the Past. In this seminar, each class session corresponds to a historical event (e.g. the trial of Socrates) and students are assigned to take on the roles of historical figures within a debate. Stokes teaches a Reacting class and loves the non-traditional approach. “It’s so difficult to put yourself in the place of another person. It’s hard to drop out of thinking about who you would be in terms of who you are in the 20th century.”

The course is catching on across the nation—the Reacting to the Past Consortium includes Smith, Trinity, the University of Georgia, and Drake University, among others. It’s also a required course for all first-years at the University of Texas. But there is a healthy amount of skepticism about the philosophy and intellectual value of Reacting to the Past. “Oh I hate it.” Goldfarb shook his head. “Carnes tried to rope me into that, too. It seems like a gimmick. It substitutes emotions for an intellectual approach. It’s like Physics for Poets, but for people who don’t want to become intellectuals. But Barnard likes the recognition and the grant money from the Department of Education for innovative pedagogy.”

Seminar reform seems inevitable, but it’s complicated by the need to balance the flexibility of the 9 Ways of Knowing with the reality that Barnard students share classes with canon-versed Columbia students. “The Core is irreplaceable,” Stokes stated. “There’s a common body of knowledge, of discourse, I can assume that’s there in Columbia students. I just have to make the assumption that Barnard students are picking it up from somewhere.” The Core’s intellectual rigor only underscores the vapidity of many of the seminar topics; while CCers across the street move from Freud to Foucault, students in the Chaos seminar progress from Jurassic Park (the novel) to Jurassic Park (the movie). “I would really like Barnard to have a Core,” Stokes said. She paused, and then laughed, “Oh, God don’t get me in trouble!”

Barnard students are also pressuring the administration to look critically at the 9 Ways of Knowing—the structure of the general distribution requirements has been up for review for about a year. SGA President Laura Stoffel spoke about the current re-evaluation of the Barnard requirements. “SGA is trying to understand how students feel about the 9 Ways of Knowing. Students feel like the Barnard curriculum isn’t dealing with certain issues.”

Jill (a pseudonym, as she is currently taking the
Technology and Society seminar) is one such student. “I like the 9 Ways of Knowing because it gives me academic freedom. It’s the best way to have a curriculum. I think it’s a good program, with good structuring, but I would take the seminar out of there. It’s all torture—it’s not a hard class, I just get nothing out of it.”

Existing problems with seminar reform are exacerbated by first-years’ reticence to speak up. One might even say they’re not being “adversarial.”

“The main issue is that within the administration, there’s no idea that anything’s wrong. First-years don’t know who to talk to, and they don’t even know what the standard level of a class at Barnard is like—this might be the norm. But it’s when you’re a junior or senior that you realize, wow, I was really slighted.” Prier said.

“I don’t even know who the seminar director is, and even if I did, I wouldn’t have gone and complained because I was a freshman and scared and naive to the process,” Madeline Langlieb, BC ’10, said.

There’s also no understanding of the responsiveness (or unresponsiveness) of Barnard’s bureaucracy. The reticence of the first-years to talk to the administration has created an environment within the Oversight Committee of reinforced ignorance. “It’s hard to imagine 38 seminars without a single complaint, but no students have come to see me to complain about their seminars,” Gordis admitted.

“Basically the seminars are a joke and everyone knows this and the freshman are told this,” Choi said. (She is especially aware of what first-years are and aren’t told: she was an Orientation Leader last year). As a first-year, Lindsay Griffith, BC ’10, was told by an older student: “Don’t pay attention to the First-Year Seminars. And don’t let them scare you off of Barnard English classes. Your other classes will be so much better.”

Ironically, the students’ disenchantment with the seminars is precisely what the program was designed to prevent. According to Professor McCaughey, the seminars were the first program at Barnard with course evaluation forms. “The program is designed to be especially alert to problems,” McCaughey said. But Mehrling said that the course evaluation forms are currently used for promotion decisions. During a junior professor’s third year, department heads review the evaluation comments and numerical ratings as part of the tenure process.

Small steps forward like the arguable success of Reacting to the Past and the alleged “re-thinking” of residential seminars have had little effect on the air of static hopelessness that surrounds discussions about the program. “I have to take this class, I’m not going to spend time talking to the professor about something I can’t get out of or change,” Jill rationalized. But the SGA is furiously trying to cultivate open dialogue and the potential for reform—especially in light of the hunger strike and recent spurt of bias incidents at Columbia. Now would be a good time to talk to the SGA or write to the provost if you’re unhappy,” Prier said. While comparisons with the Core give FYS the aura of tradition and permanence, the program is a young one and its flexibility may be key to saving it from itself. Prier is convinced of this: “It hasn’t been around for that long and it can be changed.”

The seminars’ shortcomings go beyond fodder for Barnard jokes—they risk engendering a culture of academic mediocrity. Problems run the gamut from monetary concerns to reluctant participants to deranged topics, and neither students nor faculty seem to understand the program’s mission. It’s the blind leading the blind for two hours a week.

The transition from a fresh-faced first-year to a jaded upper classman is a natural one, but a bad first experience unfairly accelerates the process. The seminars have a particularly strong ability to shape the way a student looks at Barnard’s curriculum in its entirety. It’s a credit to the Barnard woman’s mental fortitude if she emerges without transfer applications in hand, and her ABCs intact (those letters are, incidentally, symmetrical).

“The First-Year Seminar is the first thing you take at Barnard, and it shouldn’t be mediocre at all,” Griffith sighed. In asking students to recount their travails, the stories told are entertaining, even enjoyable. But the humor may be a defense mechanism—a reclamation of a lost semester. After four years and $200,000, stories of Symmetry and Chaos aren’t that funny anymore.
The Blue and White walks the length of Broadway.

By Hannah Goldfield

The average New Yorker experiences Manhattan in pieces—a neighborhood here, an avenue there. But what would it be like to swallow the city whole? I decided to find out by walking the length of Broadway—the only street that runs from tip to tip—in a single day.

About a week after I'd completed my sojourn, I got an e-mail from a friend. “Did you find yourself on Broadway?” he wrote, “Or did you find that when you assess a street in its entirety, it tends to be kind of ugly and unremarkable?”

The answer to both questions is no. What i found was a narrow slice of city life, both literally and figuratively. What I found is that this enormous, complex organism we call New York simply cannot be engulfed in one gulp.

Because of archaic zoning, Marble Hill, though technically part of the landmass of the Bronx, is officially considered a neighborhood of Manhattan. At around 10:20 a.m., my companion Ashby and I start here, getting off the 1 at 225th Street. Marble Hill Broadway is very, very quiet at this hour, lightly trafficked and lined with a smattering of small shops that seem demure compared to the huge Target looming just off Broadway to the East. Within minutes, we are crossing the Harlem River. From the east a flock of long, slender boats sweeps around the curve of the river, a single motorboat playing sheepdog: the Columbia Rowing team! As they glide out of sight beneath us, we continue on to Inwood.

By 10:30, Columbia confronts us yet again. It is impossible to ignore the huge bunches of blue and white balloons tied all along the fence that leads down 218th Street towards the entrance of Baker Field, heralding the Homecoming football game. Not much is going on: stands selling Columbia merchandise, people milling around, but no sign of the mobbed 9 a.m. tailgate you’d find at the Harvard-Yale game. We snag some free snacks before returning to Broadway.

Over the next half an hour, we make our way through the rest of the 200s, past dozens of auto repair shops, paint and office supply stores, and a smattering of Irish pubs. It doesn’t feel like Manhattan, especially since most of the signs include the word “Riverdale,” suggesting the Bronx. Residential gentrification—dare I say it—is apparent in the occasional Pilates studio and organic neighborhood restaurant.

At around 207th, we stop into Pic-A-Pet pet store, intrigued by an elaborate window display of pet supplies and—inexplicably—cacti. Owner Anthony Madonna, an Inwood native, tells us he’s been in business for 45 years. He used to have two stores, but one of them went under after 9/11, when former downtown residents fled North—way north—doubling his rent. “New York’s gonna be one big mall,” he sighs.

And yet as we continue, Inwood feels more and more idyllic. With the sun on our backs and a breeze rustling through the trees, we fall into a sort of drowsy lull, so dazed that we nearly miss one of the historical landmarks we’ve been most eagerly anticipating. Luckily, I happen to glance over my shoulder as we begin to cross 204th Street and I’m jolted back to earth by the site of an extreme rarity in Manhattan: a free-standing house. The Dyckman Farmhouse is Manhattan’s last Dutch colonial, built circa 1784 and donated to and
restored by the city in 1916, after which point it became a museum. Step inside and you’ll really forget you’re in Manhattan, let alone the 21st century. The tiny formal garden, nestled in the backyard and boasting 1,600 plant varieties, has all the qualities of an oasis.

The neighborhood’s complexion changes as restaurants, nail salons, and barbershops (sometimes as many as four of each on one block) owned by recent immigrants take over in the 190s, and we begin to overhear snatches of Spanish conversation. At 181st Street, our progress into Washington Heights is slowed by tables of cheap jewelry, toys, sunglasses, and fruits and vegetables clogging the sidewalk.

It’s now about 1 PM—time for lunch. After refueling on rotisserie chicken, rice, peas, and mango shakes at bustling Dominican-diner El Malecón, we cross the street to the historic United Place Theater. One of the most majestic New York movie houses of the early 20th century, the former Loew’s 175th is most commonly known as the Reverend Ike Theater, after the popular African-American evangelist who has been preaching there since he bought it in 1969. Lately, it has also showcased such musical acts as Bjork and Bloc Party. The letters on the marquee declare that everyone is welcome, but we don’t make it past the front lobby, thanks to a Gestapo-like security guard who refuses to explain why we are denied entry.

It’s not long before we hit more Columbia real estate: the 168th Street Medical Complex. Fresh-faced medical school students in scrubs bustle past us for the next few blocks. We pass a Starbucks with a “Grand Opening” sign and are shocked to realize that it’s the first we’ve seen on Broadway. Ashby points out a low, gilded building on the corner of 165th Street: 3940 Broadway, the Audubon Ballroom and the site of Malcolm X’s assassination in 1965.

Serenity overtakes us again at 155th, where the picturesque Trinity Church Cemetery and Mausoleum flanks Broadway on both sides. But by the time we reach the 140s, the charm has started to wear off. As we near Harlem, we pass more and more chains and generic clothing stores. We cross 125th Street just before 3p.m. and the divide is palpable—stately Columbia is the Romanesque figurehead on the ship that is the rest of Manhattan.

We’re tired and starting to get a little cranky. At around 91st Street, we pledge to survey the island in another way—by talking to people.

At 76th Street we find the perfect opportunity. Like many on the Upper West Side, this block boasts an abundance of street vendors hawking books, records, cats (technically for adoption, not sale) and what some call art. One of them, Ionel Talpazan, stands behind a table covered in his paintings and drawings—and photographs of his paintings and drawings—of UFOs. Mr. Talpazan is wearing a fraying trench coat and oversized bifocals. He is missing several teeth and most of his hair. Jumpy and hostile, he refuses, in a thick, unidentifiable accent, to be photographed or answer any of our questions—referring us instead to a worn copy of a magazine called Raw Vision, in which he is profiled—until Ashby forks over $15 for a photograph of three of his UFO renderings. From the article and the few reluctant sentences he offers after we pay him, we gather that he is from Romania, that he sees UFOs, and that one of his paintings is actually on display at the American Folk Art Museum.

At a table exactly ten blocks down, signs advertising “Free Advice” and “Free Dream Interpretation” are nestled among Arthur Robins’ collection of oil paintings (which have titles like “Sleazy Hotel” and “Neighborhood Billiards”). I wait while Robins closes a sale—he assures a giggling middle aged woman, “You will never get sick of my art,”—before I take him up on his offer for free prophesy. He’s wearing a cracked leather jacket and a tie-dyed cotton Skull Cap and tells me that God taught him to interpret dreams. He agrees to interpret mine, staring off intently as I
describe the most vivid one I can remember. He accuses me of leaving something out and asks me to repeat it. I do, embellishing a few details, and then he says, “I’ll be back in 20 seconds,” walks over to a folding chair and tiny table behind his art stand, and sits down with head between his knees.

When he comes back, his watery blue eyes gaze deeply into mine as he delivers his muddled analysis, repeating the words God and love enough to make me question the potency of both. When he’s finished, I thank him and start to make my exit. “What do you do?” he asks me.

“I’m a student.”

“What are you studying?”

“Evolution.”

Whoops.

“Evolution?!! Let me tell you something. There are zero pieces of evidence to support evolution, and hundreds to support creationism. I’m going to give you just one. Scientists—scientists!—have proven that animals need plants to live, and plants need animals. So there’s no way one could have lived for thousands of years before the other. It’s fact. I used to believe in evolution. But it’s fact.”

“That’s an interesting perspective,” I suggest.

“Oh no, it’s not a perspective—it’s the truth.”

I smile and make a point of walking away. As we depart, Ashby points out the bumper sticker on his car, parked behind his table. It reads, “Jesus would never tailgate.”

The sun is setting as we make our way around Columbus Circle. Just past it, we encounter a couple dressed entirely in crochet, right down to their bicycle seats, on one of which sits a large fluffy white cat. As I’m getting ready to take a picture, I notice something else: a sign charging for photos. I roll my eyes and lower my camera. “Take a picture!” the woman shouts as we pass. Smoke from the sticks of incense shoved into her bike spokes twists through the air. “Come and pet my pussy!”

It’s getting darker and we’re starting to feel a sense of urgency. Times Square is mobbed by the time we reach it at about 6:30. I want to barrel on through but Ashby insists we stop at the Marriot Marquis and ride the elevator.

The hotel is built around a cavernous atrium, at the center of which is an enormous elevator shaft with little glass space pod elevators zooming up and down its exterior. Balconies run the length of each floor, lit by dim, glowing sconces, adding to the bizarre futuristic effect. We hop into a pod and ride it up and then down again. The speed leaves me feeling weightless and dizzy, and this, compounded with the view, literally takes my breath away. Back on the street, it feels like we’ve just stepped out of an alternate universe.

We pick up our pace and forge ahead, past Macy’s at 34th Street, which looks strangely forbidding and mysterious in the dark. It is 7:38 by the time we reach Union Square, and the outdoor market is about to close. At 8th Street I make my first and only celebrity sighting—but she’s so obscure I don’t know her name. I know I’ve seen her in something, but this could be just because she’s middle aged and looks vaguely British, her warm, round face framed by soft blonde hair.

By 8:15 we’ve hit Soho and by 9:00 we’re crossing Canal and ready for dinner. We stop at a Chinese restaurant just off Broadway on Walker Street and feast on scallion pancakes, sesame chicken, and rice noodles with fish cakes. Sated and revived, we’re ready for the last leg of our journey.

By this point, pedestrians are scarce. We see nary a soul until White Street, where people are bustling about on an elaborate film set just west of Broadway. I stop to ask what they’re filming and the man guarding the orange cones looks at me disdainfully and replies, “Something small and independent.”

A few minutes later we’ve reached 290 Broadway. Just steps to the east of this federal office building lies the oldest known African cemetery in urban America, once called the Negro Burial Ground.
was nearly excavated in the early 1990s when the building went into construction, but a group of concerned citizens managed to enact a federal law that not only stopped the excavation but also allocated three million dollars for on-site reburial and a memorial. At night, the cemetery is particularly haunting.

Down here, at the business end of Manhattan, everything is closed and there's no sign of life beyond the occasional night watchman. When a stretch Escalade slows beside us, we start to fear for our lives. But the driver just wants directions, and when we can't help him, he speeds away angrily and pulls a dangerous looking U-turn.

We've hit 26 Broadway, which appears to be a hotspot for niche museums. Home now to the Museum of American Financial History, a banner announces “Sports Museum of America coming soon! 2008.” We are tantalizingly close to the end of our trek and elated to find ourselves in front of 2 Broadway. We rush toward the dimly glowing storefront that we think must be One. What could be at One Broadway? What treasures could it hold? Apparently: tortilla chips and guacamole. It's a Chipotle. One Broadway is a Chipotle.

Luckily, when we look up at the street sign, we realize that we have veered off Broadway and are now on Whitehall Street. We hadn't realized that Broadway forks at its very end, divided in two by Bowling Green. We race back and cross Bowling Green, past the majestic steps of the Museum of the American Indian, and there it is: over twelve hours after we embarked at 225th Street, and we are standing in front of Number One Broadway. It's nothing more than an office building, but it's a beautiful, old office building, and it's certainly not serving fast food.

Our odyssey is over. Exhausted, a little sick of each other, and yet glowing with triumph, we make our way to South Ferry to catch the 1 back uptown. We are alone on the subway platform except for a man in a tuxedo. When the train arrives he chooses a different car than we do but then, just as the doors are closing, dashes onto ours. It is fate. He sits down directly across from us. As the train pulls away, I turn to Ashby and sigh. “I never want to stand up again.” The man in the tuxedo looks up and smiles, curious.

“What'd you guys just do, walk the length of Manhattan?”

Illustration by Zoe Slutzky
Columbia's secret plan to save us all from bird flu.

BY ARMIN ROSEN

Columbia epidemiologist Steven Morse can't say for certain, but he expects the pandemic will start in Asia. Pandemic germs have historically kicked off their destructive world tours from there, although scientists haven't figured out why. In fact, Morse told me, there's a lot about pandemic flu that science can't explain or predict. But in a worst-case scenario, once a single infected individual boarded a plane to a major overseas population center, it would already be too late.

"It'll move fairly quickly through the entire country and probably the entire world," Morse hypothesizes in a clinically calm voice that hardly suggests the chaos he is contemplating. "It's not a matter of if the pandemic will come," he added, as an afterthought. "It's when."

The germ in this scenario doesn't have to be H5N1, the pathogen popularly referred to as avian influenza, or simply "bird flu." It is believed to be an efficient killer: contagious at close range, but also consistently vicious in places that are thousands of miles apart.

America, presumably, is ready. In November of 2005, Congress approved a comprehensive, $7.1 billion pandemic preparedness package. Columbia followed suit: about a year later, Associate Dean for Health Affairs Dr. Robert Lewy assembled a Pandemic Preparedness Working Group, which has developed a campus plan for the worst event in human history. The group, which Lewy says exists to prepare for "any type of biological epidemic," consists of six doctors and associate deans, including Morse and Dr. Samuel Seward, head of Health Services.

While Lewy described preparing for a pandemic as just "good organizational planning," he acknowledged that fears about H5N1 partly inspired the group's creation. "There was a lot of information about a year or so ago about a potential pandemic, bird flu, and a short supply of influenza vaccine," he said, referring to the flurry of warnings from scientists and journalists that bird flu could turn into a major killer—including Foreign Policy magazine's prediction that a pandemic could kill close to a billion people.

"The CDC and many of the other organizations were recommending that institutions prepare a plan in advance, so we took the initiative," Lewy said. Other schools have done the same: a respected bio-defense journal recently published a survey of preparedness plans for schools in the

Illustration by Julia Bunareva

THE BLUE AND WHITE
Philadelphia area, and Dartmouth epidemiologist Michael Blayney has helped design a plan for his school based on a 90-day pandemic scenario. Dartmouth’s isolated location has led Blayney to orient his plan around “continuity of operations.” Blayney speculates that worker absenteeism and disrupted supply lines could require Dartmouth to conserve electricity and sustenance by “taking some buildings offline” and stockpiling about two weeks worth of food.

At Columbia, the working group’s plans are based on a broad hypothetical: “We say: let’s imagine a situation where a student is infected with a pandemic strain,” Seward explained. “What do we do about that?” In brief, the answer is to send healthy students home and try to care for whoever is left behind, a strategy detailed in the group’s not-yet-finalized report. In the interest of concision, the latest draft of the Pandemic Response Plan is only 19 pages. While some internet message boards are abuzz with discussion of what a street full of dead bodies might smell like, the report owes more to Greek tragedy than it does to George Romero, and its sterile, Strangelovian language appeals to the darkest corners of its readers’ imaginations.

During “Stage I”—human to human transmission outside the U.S.—the University Provost is to “develop policy for suspension of classes and sporting events,” while the Department of Environmental Health and Radiation Safety would “inventory, order and stockpile personal protection equipment.” Once the pandemic reaches North America, Public Relations is to prepare a press release in case a Columbia student becomes infected. Students, faculty and staff are advised to check “influenza updates at least daily.” And finally, when the time is nigh, a team of “Incident Commanders” representing Public Safety, Health Services and various other departments will activate the third and final stage of the pandemic response plan. They will order Public Safety to “protect quarantine and isolation areas,” and begin staffing designated “social isolation floors” for students who are unable to make it home during the pandemic’s assumedly panicked first days. Morse says that the average pandemic “wave” lasts about two months. In a bad wave, Columbia would be in Stage III for a very long time.

The working group has been operating mostly under the radar. Although Public Safety links to the group’s webpage, the only way to get to it through the Columbia homepage is by directly typing the words “pandemic flu” into the search field. Sociomedical Sciences professor James Colgrove suggests that this is the right tack for public health officials planning for a pandemic: “If you react too aggressively and nothing happens, you lose the public trust,” he explains. But, he adds, overreaction is a sign of responsibility for doctors—for example, in the 1970s, it appeared that swine flu would turn into a rampant killer. It never did, and much of the hysteria surrounding that flu (which included a costly inoculation program) had been based on a few crucial scientific miscalculations. Colgrove insists that the public health community was right to play it safe. “It’s always easy to second guess,” he says. “But what would you do if you were the head of the CDC and the health of the nation depended on you?”

The group’s discretion suggests it is sensitive to this kind of dilemma. But its anonymity undermines the dangerous position many Colombians would find themselves in if a pandemic struck. While students from the East Coast would be able to get home as soon as the first wave canceled classes, a good number of Midwestern, West Coast and international students would be stranded on campus. With transportation disrupted and killer flu on the loose, Morse says that marooned students would be confined to sparsely populated floors where social contact would be kept to a minimum. These Colombians would be in for some lonely, scary months, spent on half-empty floors in Carman or John Jay. “This isn’t a prison situation,” Morse says. Even so, the committee isn’t too keen on students venturing off campus or even into any moderately-sized gatherings of people—while the preparedness plan allows faculty to continue at least some campus-based research projects during the pandemic, the lunch rush at Ferris Booth would be put on hold. “We’ll try to keep people at low density,” said Morse. “Food will be brought to them.”

The working group has the strange responsibility of imagining a situation that is horrifying and abstract, yet one informed by legitimate precedent. The 20th century saw three pandemics. The worst of them, which killed over 50 million people worldwide in 1918, infected several hundred Columbia students and killed two. According to Blayney, whose voice is split between professional detachment and real concern, the “Spanish Flu” claimed between 15 and
18 Dartmouth students and a couple of faculty members. If anything, 1918 proves that flu preparedness is essential work.

While Morse and Blayney are preparing for a pandemic of 1918-proportions, they stress that a “worst case scenario” approach does not reflect scientific certainty. But Justin Kamen, CC ’08, is prepping for a civilization-buster. For the past year, pandemic flu has been an obsession of his, and he is starting a website to raise student awareness.

Kamen’s knowledge of flu borders on the encyclopedic, probably because his expectations border on the apocalyptic. Ever since his father began encouraging his family to develop their own preparedness plan, Kamen has been reading up on the possibility of pandemic flu, and hasn’t found much comfort.

“You have to construct a logical argument that goes against your psychological tendency to discount scary things,” he said, and for him, logic indicates that the worst pandemic in human history is on its way.

He rattles off stats and facts about bird death in Indonesia, human-to-human transmission in Vietnam, warnings from major public health figures, and H5N1’s increasing resistance to treatment. The typically easygoing Political Science major never comes off as having lost his grip, but rather as someone who badly wants you, and everyone else living in ignorance of the coming pandemic, to believe him. He immediately dismissed a Swedish and Vietnamese study estimating a death rate of less than one percent. “I haven’t heard anything about that,” he said, before launching into another litany of pessimistic news and figures.

Most of Kamen’s information comes from the PFI forum, an online message board where about 600 people fixated on pandemic flu share everything from articles to pandemic fan fiction. The board is a place for esoteric, compulsively well-informed discussion, and while epidemiologists apply a scientific skepticism to pandemic preparation, the posters harbor an almost religious trust in the virus’s ability to kill millions of people. Believing otherwise is denial—an “adjustment reaction” that Kamen says he overcame as soon as he started imagining friends and family members struggling through days and weeks without food and basic resources. “I know that there will be a pandemic flu at some point in my lifetime,” he said. The only thing that scares him is the possibility that we won’t be prepared. His fears have rubbed off on at least a few people: about a half dozen like-minded friends are helping him launch www.StudentsPrepAmerica.org later this year.

Morse, on the other hand, is set against any preemptive hysteria. “We’re saving the website for the big one,” he said, in reference to the pandemic committee’s grey-toned, Columbia-hosted webpage.

For Seward, the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 are a reminder of just how dangerous it can be to discount near-unimaginable possibilities. “Bad things do happen,” he said. “9/11 was time when a lot was thrown into question. It’s like a fire alarm.” To Seward, a world in which the World Trade Center can be brought down by terrorists is one in which the worst of natural disasters have to be considered a serious possibility.

But how serious? Colgrove says that it probably doesn’t matter very much. “The big question is: how do you proceed in the face of uncertainty and insufficient evidence?” When asked about their personal safety measures, the doctors involved with flu preparedness gave pretty similar responses. Seward said he has some “basic supplies stored up, and some cash set aside” for a pandemic. Blayney is glad to have a generator attached to his home in New England, and has his own plan in case of a pandemic. Morse, however, regrets the spatial limitations of his New York apartment, which make it less than pandemic-ready: no room to stockpile food or supplies.

Of course none of this means that a pandemic will hit tomorrow, and the flu planners’ hypercautious approach makes grim demands of the imagination. But convincing the world that they’re not just paranoid—that they might save us from The Big One—is part of their job.

Says Blayney, “I’m not some crazy yahoo.”

Kamen's knowledge of flu borders on the encyclopedic, probably because his expectations border on the apocalyptic.
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En Pointe

Barnard’s dance department embraces the avant-garde.

BY KATE LINTHICUM

On a muggy late September afternoon, Mary Cochran gave her students a set of vague instructions. She asked the women, who stood in pairs among the ballet barres in a Barnard dance studio, to control their partners’ movements without using their hands. The movement should be light and airy, she said, more about the skin than the bone.

“I want to see just skin against skin,” she told them.

Cochran turned on some warbling Cambodian music, and they began.

One pair of dancers started by resting their wrists lightly together. Slowly and with great flourish, they used this delicate point of contact to push and pull their connected arms back and forth. Soon they softly crumpled, and one used her toes to urge the other gently across the floor. They danced like this, intimate and odd, for several minutes. Outside, a light rain began to fall.

When Cochran finally stopped them, she had a big smile on her small face.

“Beautiful,” she told them, nodding with approval. “That was gorgeous.”

In the three and a half years that she has been the director of the Barnard dance department, Cochran has put an increased emphasis on experimentation. This weekly improvisation class is part of a larger scheme to edge the program closer to the center of New York’s avant-garde dance world. The shift has been more than just symbolic. Two years ago, Cochran moved Barnard’s annual fall performances, which for decades had been held at Columbia’s Miller Theater, to the Dance Theater Workshop in Chelsea.

The partnership with DTW has given lesser-known, non-traditional choreographers a chance to direct Columbia dancers. Barnard’s hasty turn toward this “downtown aesthetic” has raised eyebrows on campus and in the dance world, but it has also won over critics—a New York Times review of the first Barnard performance at DTW in

Illustrated by Jenny Lam
2005 praised the program’s “intriguingly different look.”

Barnard, which is the only dance department on Columbia’s campus, has long been the lone Ivy to offer a dance major, and each year, about 15 students major or double major in dance. The department was formally established in 1987, but the school has had a reputation for turning out talented dancers, choreographers and critics since the 1950s, when dance was offered through the physical education department. Modern master Twyla Tharp, Barnard’s most renowned dance star, graduated in 1963.

Its extensive modern and ballet offerings, combined with its location in the center of the dance world, makes Barnard appealing to serious dancers who also want a liberal arts education. Each semester, students can choose from six levels of both modern and ballet technique as well as classes in African dance, classical Indian, flamenco, jazz and tap—a selection comparable to that of a conservatory.

Many of the roughly 2,500 students who take dance classes at Barnard each week don’t want to work in the dance world when they graduate. For those who do, the two performances that Barnard puts on each year are incredibly important. Hopeful students must go through a rigorous audition process, and they spend so many hours preparing the dance that the school gives them studio credit (which is required for majors).

The department’s former director, Janet Soares, typically presented modern and ballet programs heavy on the classics, often directed by established choreographers. With Cochran in charge, that’s all changed. Of the 16 or so choreographers whom Barnard has featured since she took over, only two have put the dancers in point shoes.

While some students have embraced the experimental, performance-art style that characterizes DTW choreography, others feel left out.

“What’s going on with modern is great,” said Lydia Walker, a professional ballet dancer and part-time General Studies student. “I just think that something else is missing.” Walker, who toured the country for years with Suzanne Farrell’s ballet company, said this while seated on the steps in the shadow of Low Library. With elegant, but reserved gestures, she explained that some ballerinas think they’re being edged out of the department, especially when it comes to performances. “There are amazing ballet teachers and ballet technique classes, but there are no ballet performances, and there haven’t been for two years,” she said. “I definitely think that fewer professional ballet people will come here now.”

Walker said she felt forced to take matters into her own hands. She and several friends formed the Columbia Ballet Collaborative, a student-run group that will offer ballet dancers a chance to practice and perform on campus. The University recognizes more than a dozen dance clubs on campus—including a hip-hop troupe and a ballroom team—but CBC will be the first ballet-oriented group.

CBC is awaiting recognition and funding from the Activities Board at Columbia, but Walker said dozens of students have already expressed interest.

Traditional dance, Walker argues, deserves a bigger place in Columbia culture, “Ballet is not terribly relevant on this campus, which I think it tremendously sad,” she said. “We’re taught the core curriculum, and ballet is one of the high forms of western culture.”

High Modern authoritarianism,” Mary Cochran said sharply. “That’s what I’m seeking to avoid.” She was seated in her snug office in Barnard Annex, a small building behind Barnard Hall. The office was filled with the sorts of things you’d expect a well-regarded professional dancer to have: a container of “optimal health and beauty” dietary supplements, a bottle of Chanel No. 5, and a huge poster of an October 1995 issue of Dance Magazine. Cochran is the dancer on the cover.

Cochran is quite small, but her steady energy and unruly red-brown curls give her a large, spunky presence. Her body is never in repose; everything she said or thinks is reflected in her movements. When she’s asked a question, she sinks back to absorb it. When she answers, she seems propelled forward by the force of what she’s saying.
From 1984-1996, Cochran was a celebrated soloist in the Paul Taylor Dance Company. She has continued to work for Taylor over the years—restaging his master works and directing his second company—but has branched out to make her own art. These days Cochran is primarily concerned with expanding notions of beauty in performance. With the help of choreographer Sara Hook, she’s performing pieces that are about aging, about ugliness and about anxiety. “People have this idea that dance is supposed to be beautiful,” she laughed.

The most exciting work today is being made outside of the “narrowness of conservatory training,” Cochran said. “Conservatories are authoritarian, they’re trying to create a specific product. [Barnard] is anti-authoritarian. Courage, questioning, depth, refusing to let yourself be defined by someone else, all these things fit in perfectly with my dance philosophy.”

Those analytical skills one acquires in a liberal arts education, then, go hand in hand with the tenets of the downtown dance scene that Cochran seems to have embraced.

Hadley Smith, BC ’09, has both participated in and studied that scene. She said these downtown, avant-garde choreographers work by subverting expectations, collaborating with dancers, and asking for improvisation—more than any singular aesthetic, they are united by this choreographic process. Sitting outside of Lerner Hall with a cigarette and her “nighttime cup of coffee,” Smith said the recent changes in the department have made Barnard dancers more attractive to many choreographers. Improvisation classes teach dancers how to spontaneously create, which make them better collaborators. “You’re never just a dancer, you’re never just a little worker bee doing steps on stage,” Smith said. “You’re an artist.”

Smith and a handful of other students have spent the semester collaborating with professional choreographer Amanda Loulaki on a work that will be part of this winter’s Barnard Project performance at DTW. The piece is currently nameless; Loulaki said she and the class are working together to title it. The students have had a similar role in shaping the artistic direction of the dance. “I don’t even see them as my students, I see them as my choreographers and we’re working together,” Loulaki said. “It’s my work, but I’m interested in having their voices there, too.”

When asked how she would classify her work and contemporary dance as a whole, Loulaki bristled. She is more interested in getting at the root of dance than exploring its semantics. “I think we’re going to a period where a bunch of us are investigating what is the essence of dance,” she said. “People are really pushing the envelope.” She said she hopes her work at Barnard will help open some eyes. “There are a lot of different ways to approach making art and students should experience that,” she said. “It’s really important that students are exposed to downtown community.”

Smith, for one, thinks that the downtown approach deserves could energize the uptown dance scene. She and fellow dancer Tara Willis, BC ’09, are working to assemble adventurous Columbia artists to form a dance group that would be the post-modern equivalent of Columbia Ballet Collaborative. Though they’re only in the beginning phases of organization, they have a name and a mission: “CoLAB,” the Collective of the Ludicrous and Beautiful, will be a collection of dancers that works in collaboration with all types of performer on campus.

Both Smith and Willis fell in love with dance as kids, took ballet and modern technique classes for years, and chose Barnard because they wanted to continue dancing while getting a good education. They say the things they’ve been exposed to in the last three years have made them re-think everything. “Barnard gave me a range of awareness,” Willis said. This re-ed-ucation hasn’t always been
easy. Willis said she struggled last year in a DTW performance directed by avant-garde choreographer Ivy Baldwin, in which she spent half of her time on stage simply twitching. She said she was annoyed at first because the role didn’t allow her to use any of her hard-earned technique. Eventually, though, Willis came to respect the dance. “Yes, all of the postmodern stuff is crazy,” she said. “But it’s also what’s happening right now.”

Because Willis and Smith have both been in dances where technique doesn’t matter much, they understand the frustration of Columbia ballet dancers who practice their craft but who have no place to perform it. “If I was someone really dedicated to ballet, I’d be mad,” Smith said. “I think this campus could benefit from some good contemporary ballet.”

Lydia Walker hopes to make that happen. She recognizes ballet has a reputation of being patriarchal and old-fashioned, but that the Columbia Ballet Collaboration is bound to be different. After all, all of the choreographers are female students with a professional background. “It’s definitely an opportunity to subvert the norms,” she said. “Not because we’re trying, but because we’re all there is.”

On a recent Monday night hundreds of people pressed into a Barnard lecture hall to catch one of the most anticipated dance events of this fall: Alastair Macaulay, newly-anointed chief dance critic at *The New York Times*, was giving his first public talk. Macaulay spent almost two hours bantering with the audience, which was packed with students and a who’s who of the dance world, including Wendy Perron, the editor-in-chief of *Dance Magazine*.

Cochran is working to raise the profile of Barnard dance, and the department has clearly benefited from her connections. Since 1995, when federal support for the National Endowment for the Arts took a 40% cut, the dance world that depended on it constricted. The funding has hardly increased since then, making it nearly impossible for young people to infiltrate the dance world without relationships with insiders. According to Cochran, helping her students build those relationships was her primary motivation in moving the fall dances downtown. “It was a big statement on my part, but it’s misunderstood,” she said. “It’s less an aesthetic statement and more about connecting with artists and organizations in the city in a bigger way.” She believes the institutional partnership between Barnard and DTW will have “trickle down” benefits for students.

Hadley Smith said Barnard’s partnership with DTW has helped her on both a creative and professional level. “The thing that I like about how we do performances now is you get to meet people who are working and creating in your time and space. We have access to people who have been around and are well-respected. That’s one of the best things you can give an artist.”

Smith believes Barnard has given her another tool to help inform her art. “So much of the academic world has given me the power to be a better artist,” she said. “It gives you better context.” Unlike most college dance departments, Barnard’s puts a near equal emphasis on dance technique and academics. Aside from technique, majors are required to take writing-heavy classes in dance history, as well as a senior seminar. They may either write a thesis, or perform one.

Lynn Garafola, BC ’68, was the first dance professor in the department to receive tenure in winter 2007. She had been an acclaimed critic, editor and curator before returning to the school to teach dance history. Though she identifies herself primarily as an academic, she holds herself like a dancer. She stood in front of her History of Dance II class a few days after Alastair Macaulay’s talk, interspersing a discussion of Macaulay’s theory with tidbits of dance world gossip.

Garafola believes the Barnard dance department’s emphasis on academics has helped it gain legitimacy. Still, she noted, it’s only recently that scholars in other academic fields have begrudgingly begun to accept the dance department’s presence. “Certain colleagues have treated me differently since I’ve gotten tenure,” she said, arching her thin black eyebrows.

Dance as an academic discipline is ignored at
many universities because some administrators don’t think it should be a part of a liberal arts education. Schools that do offer dance often focus their courses on the physical side of the discipline. Although Harvard students can now earn a minor in dance and take technique class at the school’s new $4.5 million dance center, they cannot take classes on theory. And while Yale does offer some technique and theory classes, there is no dance department, program or center.

Most dancers have theories about why dance often goes unrecognized as a legitimate liberal arts pursuit. Holly Williams, a Barnard graduate who is now the Associate Chair of Theater and Dance at the University of Texas at Austin, posited that dance is treated with more skepticism than music and visual arts because of its focus on the body. “Dance traditionally came to college from kinesiology and sports. In a lot of schools it still kind of lives in those areas, it lives in recreation and health.” Williams argued dance should be treated and studied like a foreign language. “It just happens to be that the language is on the body.”

Williams, who sits on the boards of the American College Dance Festival Association and the Council of Dance Administrators, said Barnard’s attempt to forge a synthesis between academics and technique is one of its biggest strengths. “To me that’s the beauty of it, it allows students to be thinking dancers and thinking movers. It doesn’t think of people as a dichotomy, as ‘your body’ and ‘your head.’ What’s fueling your mind is equally important to how you’re training your body.”

Almost all Barnard dance majors double major in something else, from biochemistry to comparative literature. While that is in part an indication of the department’s emphasis on academics, it also makes practical sense. “The majority of dancers who graduate from American universities will never get a job as a professional dancer.”

Though Williams would not say whether she thinks Barnard should emphasize the contemporary “downtown aesthetic,” she did say it makes sense for a good dance department to pour its energies into developing strengths in one particular kind of dance. A department shouldn’t be “the United Nations of style,” she said. “I think it really depends on the constitution of the institution, you cannot be all things to all people all the time.”

Back at the Barnard dance studio, where Cochran had run her class through a few more improvisation exercises, she gave her sweating students a break. “Come over,” she said to them. “Let’s chat.”

They straggled toward her and gathered in a circle beneath a struggling ceiling fan. Cochran asked their impressions of the exercises and listened as they went around in a circle to articulate the challenges. The students said they had had fun, but that they felt a little awkward not knowing how or when each dance would end. Cochran smiled and said it had been a success. “People get stuck in their notions of beauty,” she said. “They forget that there are many kinds.”

Then she leaped in the air to do a quick ballet kick and to demonstrate exactly whom she was talking about. “One of the things in exploring the art form is expanding the boundary of what is beautiful.”
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How Hollywood trivializes the war on terror.

Last Oscar season seems, in retrospect, an innocent time. It was the autumn of Queen Elizabeth and her corgis, sexed-up suburbanites, and whatever Dreamgirls was about. Even a movie about the African diamond trade had a romantic subplot and a perversely happy ending.

It is only in 2007, as the Iraq war stretches into its fifth unpopular year, that films dealing with the turmoil in that region of the world have begun to be released. Perhaps taking their cue from Syriana—the competent, critically-respected (but widely overlooked) 2005 thriller about the global oil trade—directors with Something To Say about conflict in the Middle East, from Iraq to Saudi Arabia, have queued up and occupied the multiplex. The films are largely didactic, and in their desperate attempt to better inform the moviegoer, they often go down like cinematic cod liver oil.

Rendition is a prime example of the Iraq war film. Released in mid-October to great fanfare and disappointing box-office returns, the film is about U.S. torture of terrorist suspects in secret overseas prisons. This is a suitable topic for a newsmagazine article or a 60 Minutes report, or even for a small film willing to take its subject seriously. Director Gavin Hood is liberal with images of waterboarding and beatings, but rather than examine America’s justification of torture or the management of the war on terror, he cuts to a pregnant Reese Witherspoon crying—in front of the Capitol, in case we missed the significance.

Rendition gives us Good, in the person of Witherspoon. It gives us Evil, in bureaucrat Meryl Streep, doing Miranda Priestly with a chicken-fried Texas accent. It gives us a Confrontation. What it lacks is moral ambiguity. It is very easy to dismiss torture, and a well-educated citizen ought to. But the film gives no voice to any counterargument, beyond a practically mustache-twirling Streep bleating about government protocol. Of course Witherspoon’s husband (Omar Metwally) is innocent, of course his torturer (Jake Gyllenhaal—isn’t he dreamy?) sets him free, but not before a car bomb explosion literally leaves Gyllenhaal with blood on his hands. And of course the film ends with Metwally running into Witherspoon’s arms. Never let politics get in the way of your Hollywood ending.

With its multi-plotline structure and simplistic worldview, Rendition strongly resembles Crash, the 2005 Oscar winner about how everyone is a racist. Crash’s director, Paul Haggis, made a surprisingly watchable Iraq war film of his own, In the Valley of Elah, in which Tommy Lee Jones plays a retired Marine searching for his son, who went AWOL after returning from Iraq. Unlike Crash and
Films

Rendition, this film sidesteps issues of right or wrong in the Iraq war—at least for most of its running time.

In the Valley of Elah finds success in small details: the strip clubs around Fort Bragg, Jones’ restrained dignity. Still, as the film unfolds, Haggis’ desire to make a Significant Statement can’t help but nag. The title refers to the story of David and Goliath, without making explicit whether Iraq is David, Goliath, or the setting for the battle.

While Jones’s investigation is fairly intriguing, the conclusion (spoiler alert)—that Jones’ son was killed by his fellow officers, for sport, and thus the war has been a horrifically destabilizing force in American life—is unsatisfying and almost silly. The consequences of war have been portrayed throughout the film; this final touch feels self-indulgent. In abandoning moral ambiguity, Haggis abandons logical narrative as well. A final, lingering shot of the American flag flying upside-down cheapens the poignant details of the film. He ultimately sacrifices storytelling for a statement, and falls back on the moral certitude that made Crash so irritating. The story is no longer about Jones and his son but about David and Goliath. How can any actor compete with that?

In In the Valley of Elah, Tommy Lee Jones’ character watches recovered cell-phone video footage featuring American soldiers misbehaving ghoulishly, portraying Iraq as the quagmire one would imagine it to be. Videos of this sort comprise Redacted, the new film by Brian De Palma, in its entirety. Screened at the New York Film Festival and opening this month in limited release, Redacted takes the form of spliced-together YouTube videos and security tapes, and depicts the events surrounding the rape of a young Iraqi girl and murder of her family by American soldiers. Unsurprisingly, it was made on a far smaller budget than, say, Rendition, and American brutality in this Middle East doesn’t end with anyone running into Reese Witherspoon’s arms.

The film is unspeakably graphic, but its political message is surprisingly subtle by the standards of the season’s other Middle East mélanges. The nonchalant attitudes of the soldiers in the moments following the assault of the Iraqi girl speak as strongly about Americans’ capacity for cruelty as the four tooth-gnashing hours of Rendition and In the Valley of Elah combined. The violence seems almost beside the point—the true cruelty of Redacted is in American soldiers’ choice to record the violence and play it back, treating carnage as an entertaining aesthetic experience.

If the soldiers’ callous home videos had a budget in the eighty-million-dollar range and starred Jennifer Garner, they might resemble The Kingdom, a slice of Oriental revenge fantasy served on a plate for a bloodthirsty audience. Directed by Peter Berg, this film is an action-adventure about four brave, righteous American operatives sent to administer justice in Saudi Arabia in the mid-1990s. While The Kingdom begins as pure genre, it’s not long before dashes of “seriousness” are thrown between explosions. The film ends with a reversal that will shock anyone who has never had an independent thought—it turns out the Americans and the Saudis are not that different! Such sentiment seems an afterthought to a movie that lovingly showcases its stars blowing up Saudis with bombs and machine guns while sending the Americans home as heroes.

The political turmoil of the 1970s inspired movies like All the President’s Men and Network, movies that avoided easy answers. These films were acclaimed at the time and are now considered classics. Reviews for Rendition, In the Valley of Elah, The Kingdom, and Robert Redford’s Afghanistan war movie Lions for Lambs have been mixed at best, and public reception has been largely apathetic (though The Kingdom exceeded modest box-office expectations).

Redacted aside, these films, aiming for Oscars and high-minded prestige, sidestep provocative issues in favor of Hollywood simplicity—the wife and husband reunited, the flag flying upside down, the plane full of heroes returning home: Mission Accomplished. It’s enough to make one nostalgic for Dreamgirls.

—Daniel D’Addario
Verily Veritas was writing an etymological tract about the neo-Freudian implications of the term “metrosexual” (“metro” from the Greek mater, or mother, and “sexual” from the Latin sexum, or sex) when a bird fluttered through his window, landed on his desk, and extended a scaly leg. There was a rolled-up message on its ankle; it was a carrier pigeon!

“In NY for a spell—meeting with investors about a new invention. We’ll get dinner. Some Columbia parents I know say good things about a place called Deluxe. –Auntie Vespa”

Vespasia Veritas—Verily had suspected as much from the bird, a mode of communication the wench picked up from Nikola Tesla, her former colleague and occasional hang-gliding partner. Every family of moody aesthetes has one incorrigible science dweeb, and in the Veritas clan it was Auntie Vespa.

From the copper bowels of her laboratory, she berated Barthes, dressed down Diaghilev, shat on Schiele. Vespasia was without doubt a black sheep, but Verily holds a particular, and he thinks justified, grudge.

It was the year of the Exposition Universelle in Paris, and Verily had just taken a flat for the summer in the Quartier Latin, when one of Vespasia’s birds flew par la fenêtre:

“Have a booth at the Exposition. Everyone’s abuzz about this new moving staircase contraption, but they don’t know what I’ve got in store! Need a place to run some tests. You have lodging, yes? –Auntie Vespa”

Verily did not reply, but she arrived soon after—with eight trunks’ worth of apparatus—and claimed the largest room for herself. Three days later, she summoned Verily. “Stand over there,” she directed. Suffice it to say that what happened next involved a lightning gun, a misplaced vinculum, and one unfortunate test subject.

“It should have whizzed right by you,” Vespasia offered Verily by way of apology over soggy salmon cakes at Deluxe. “Frankly, I don’t know why you dashed out so quickly. You were hit by what was essentially a tiny bolt of lightning, and even people hit by large ones out in nature rarely suffer any lasting injury; all you needed was a glass of water.”

Verily remembered, for the ten-thousandth time, crawling, horrified and horripilated (Verily’s hair has forevermore been a shock), out the door of the flat. He had hidden out in Prague for the summer—tragically, the escalator won first prize. It hurt! The rage built, but Verily attempted small talk:

“Still using carrier pigeons, eh?”

“Actually, it’s a homing pigeon, a rather different breed, although of course both are, taxonomically speaking, Columba livia. You should know that—you are after all a Columbia student, are you not?”

Bad science humor! Vespasia was all but snorting the house red on her frumpy blouse. Verily hummed with rage. Must ignore, look away, focus on the ambience...

All but impossible given Deluxe and its environs—a grimy bourgeois diner where a small watery cola is 20 francs and the costliest port comes to just 900 f. VV, eventually, was forced to make one last attempt at conversation.

“The Portsmouth Estate seems a good place for a dip this weekend, but the forecast is stormy, and the water will certainly be too cold and choppy—”

“You know, of course, that what determines the contours of waves is not the wind or other phenomena, but the surface of the ocean,” Vespasia interrupted. “Transverse patterns are, as regards...”

Verily tossed a morphine tablet in his glass of filthy port, swilled, and clenched his steak knife.

—Verily Veritas
MEASURE FOR MEASURE

CAPE COD

Here we are all lobster trap and lupine
Dock and hull
Salt is our rock and rock is our salt
And every hour there are stones in our scalps
And more prickles in our path,
Nettles here, mothers there,
Than any other grove or low spot.
All is crustacean crust, barnacles drooling their jags
And dragging their frosting florets up every pressure treated piling.
I remember when they planted these pilings.
Two men cut them down and the water was pollinated with
Arsenic dust, its swale and wash
Fibrous, almost papery,
Their shoulders were green with it.
They were tan and smoking and shook it off in huge clouds,
Back-flipped off when they were done
Butts floating like other debris.
The cluttered tide swallowed our poison.

There is no end to this lapping and scuttling.
Fish turn warmly under terns.
I seek cormorants, black smudges of birds
To stretch masts to the sky but
This pier is beaded with gulls.

—Lizzy Straus
Pinter’s Darker Sleuth

The key moment of the 1972 film Sleuth comes when the wealthy, aging mystery novelist Andrew Wylke (Laurence Olivier) strikes up a conversation with the young and charismatic Milo Tindle (Michael Caine) over drinks in his Gothic English manor: “I understand that you want to marry my wife,” Andrew says. “With your permission, of course,” Milo replies.

Andrew and Milo, both in love with the same woman, commence a maniacal battle of wits. As the plot complicates, however, the competition becomes less about winning the girl and more about who can outwit the other, even if the game takes on violent proportions. The setting is perfect: Andrew’s mansion is filled with bizarre toys that often complement the plot’s twists with abrupt tinkering and laughter and give the film the eerie feel of a puppet play gone wrong.

Sleuth is a refreshing twist on the classic mystery. Originally a Tony-winning play by Andrew Shaffer, the film version of was written by Shaffer and directed by Joseph L. Mankiewicz, CC ’28. Olivier’s performance walks the line between comic relief and malice, and the combination of his and Caine’s Oscar-nominated performances and Mankiewicz’s direction support Shaffer’s complex plot well, carrying the viewer through its two hour running time.

In October of this year, playwright/screenwriter Harold Pinter and director Kenneth Branagh (of thin-lipped Shakespearean fame) released a new version of Sleuth. Jude Law stars as Milo, and an older, now knighted, Sir Michael Caine is Andrew. In its third iteration, the film has taken a dark, enigmatic turn. The surrealist playthings have been replaced with surveillance cameras and other gadgets, while Caine is less child-like than Olivier and much colder—his stone face is the cause of much audience discomfort.

The new Sleuth is a deeply discomforting film, and this is both a strength and a weakness. While in the 1972 version Shaffer uses drawn-out dialogue as a way to highlight his characters’ absurdities—in one memorable scene in which Olivier’s Andrew forces Milo to wear a clown costume and proceeds to humor him endlessly. Pinter, whose plays are characterized by their moments of silence, has cut the chit-chat (making the 2007 adaptation fifty minutes shorter than its 1972 counterpart). At one point, Milo stares at his opponent slyly while fielding a call from his lover, to whom he says, “I love you too.” But the audience never hears the other half of the conversation—who’s to say that the person on the line is Andrew’s wife, or that there’s anyone on the other end at all? The audience fills up the dead air with questions.

The 2007 Sleuth is a darker variation on Shaffer’s treatment of deception, which works in concept—but some of its themes don’t quite fit. For one, the new Sleuth ditches the original film’s well-handled emphasis on class distinction (i.e. snobby novelist vs. poor hairdresser) in favor of an aggressive, homoerotic tinge (in one scene Milo humiliates Andrew by forcing his wife’s jewelry around his neck). Homoeroticism is rarely an unworthy inclusion, but Shaffer would have done well to deemphasize such theatrics. Front and center, they distract from the heart of the plot.

In both inceptions, the directors do well in capturing the essence of Sleuth: In a grim contest where reality and fiction collide, the object of the game is not merely to be the better deceiver, but to avoid taking the fantasy too far. Viewers looking for a classic “whodunit” may fare better with the former film. Crazy props and dark humor aside, the new Sleuth doesn’t quite live up to the original, though Pinter fans and those unfamiliar with Shaffer’s screenplay may appreciate the results in spite of its flaws. 35 years later, the Pinter-Branagh team, still manages to pull the viewer into the same trap of deception.

—Maryam Parhizkar
A few weeks ago, *The Blue and White* received, for utterly inexplicable reasons, the following email:

“Subject: Season 2 of MTV’s #1 Rated Show: “A Shot at Love” Wants Bard Students!

“Season 2 of MTV’s smash-hit reality dating show “A Shot at Love” is presently casting its second season. If you are at least 21 years old and have the sex appeal, heart and spirit to win the love our NEW Bi-Bachelorette, then we want to hear from you!”

You know what they say about Bard kids. By and large, they’re bi and large.

Editor-abroad Brendan Ballou sends the following gossip from Cambridge:

Outside a little English cemetery in a little English town, hangs the following sign:

“We hope you enjoy your time here.”

On the Student Services course listings, the titles of classes are often shortened or abbreviated to ensure that they fit on a single line. One English lecture this semester:

**STDs in the 18th Century Novel**

*The Blue and White* signed up, hoping the subject matter was more de Sade than demure.

Late one night at the end of September, the second-floor men’s bathroom in Butler was temporarily shut down. A sign on the door read:

“This piece of equipment is temporarily OUT OF SERVICE. Please use another terminal or printer.”

Campus females were shocked to learn that those things on the walls are actually word processors.

Overheard in front of the Condé Nast building:

Woman approaches another with a tiny dog in a purse. “Oh my God, is this your dog? I haven’t met him yet! Does he work at *Glamour* too?”

Professor Michael Seidel, during his Beckett/Nabokov Seminar:

“I’m gonna whip out a theory at the start. I mean, I don’t mean a real theory. I don’t have theories that are theories, like real theories. When I say theories, I mean cockamamie, bad ideas.”


Overheard in Lerner, with no context:

“Living in Carman is like hitting the jackpot!”
On Halloween weekend, two girls in costume were waiting in the long line to enter East Campus (as two men in Mexican wrestling garb duked it out in front of the crowd):

Girl 1: “What are you dressed up to be?”

Girl 2 (wearing a cheap, frizzy blonde wig and a dress that resembled Dorothy’s from The Wizard of Oz): “Oh, I’m Courtney Love.”

[brief awkward pause]

Girl 2: “Yeah...I think once I get the pills and the beer in a brown paper bag, it’ll be good.”

OVERHEARD AT PINKBERRY: OUT OF AFRICA

An expensive-looking M’side woman in her 60s—clearly a novice—walks up to the register.

Woman: “Now what’s a pinkberry?”

Manager: “Hi ma’am, welcome to Pinkberry. There’s actually no such thing as a ‘pinkberry,’ it’s just the name of our company.”

Woman: “No, it’s something...”

Manager: “We have plenty of other lovely berries. Raspberries, strawberries, any kind of berries—just no pinkberries.” (Manager starts to snicker a bit to his female co-worker)

Woman: “Pinkberries are real. I think they’re from Africa.” (At this point, the two employees—who happen to be black—can barely contain their laughter.)

The female employee leans over to the manager and whispers “I think we’d know.”

Manager: “Can I get you anything?”

One hour after the official start of Hunger Strike ‘07, members of the Freshman Class Council stood on College Walk passing out tasty vittles, free of charge. In exuberant voices, they yelled: “Free pastries and hot chocolate! Free hot chocolate and pastries!” A Blue and White Staffer approached for a frothy cup.

*B&W*: “What’s this all about?”

Freshman Rep: “We’re in a good mood.”

*B&W*: “You know the hunger strike’s going on, right?”

Freshman Rep: “Yeah, but we’ve had this planned for weeks. They just sort of showed up.”

The next day, our B&W staffer passed by again, only to find that a campus theater group had set up a bake sale even closer to the striker’s tents.

Next in the administration’s covert plan to break the strikers’ wills: a full spread, brought to you by Columbia Catering.

Early one morning, as the sun rose over Wien, a foul stench crept down the hallway of floor 5, rudely awakenuing one B&W writer. She gingerly left her room, each step taken in the economy of fear. Before her, lay the remains of a very dead chicken—its feathers strewn about, its innards still attached to those feathers. Flecks of dried blood and chicken were stuck to the carpet. Was it fowl play? The once-live chicken, she suspected, had sloughed off its mortal coil at a fraternity initiation; the body has not been found, and the perpetrators have not been identified.

Despite circumstantial evidence, including backpacks full of bricks, combat boots, and oversized black sweatshirts, there appears to be a lack of pollus corpus.

Barnard...it’s less controversial than the Hunger Strike!