THE BLUE AND WHITE

Vol. XVI No. II

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THE FOG OF WAR
The Erratic Course of Columbia’s Push to Ban Smoking

FUN: A BLUE AND WHITE SPECIAL INVESTIGATION
An Intoxicating Night at NYU, a Safari Through the Suites of EC,
and the Best Camping Trip Ever!

AMERICAN IDOL
A Conversation with Ira Glass

Also: Should You Call or Text?: Our Monthly Prose and Cons
THE BLUE AND WHITE

Vol. XVI

FAMAM EXTENDIMUS FACTIS

No. II

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thefictionalparty.org

Cover: “Puff Piece” by Stephen Davan
Throughout its history, the Blue and White has respected a self-imposed restriction on using the following words and phrases more than one (1) time per issue: “flâneur,” “Harold Bloom,” “2 girls, 1 cup,” and “zeitgeist-y.” Early into the editing of this issue, we realized that we had two (2) references to William F. Buckley, Jr.’s National Review founding statement (see: Verily Veritas’s renunciation of postcolonial studies on p. 12 and Eliza Shapiro’s investigation of the cult of COÖP on p. 30).

We considered cutting one or both: what does capital-C Conservatism have to do with capital-C Camping? And who even reads Verily? Ultimately the staff, almost at once, came to a consensus: cut neither, and let’s have fun with the magazine. Capital-F Fun. Invigorated and enlightened by our new-found sense of empowerment, we began to conceptualize the entire issue as one giant, giddy, friendly embrace of Fun.

We discovered that this ethos is more pervasive at NYU, where Menachem Kaiser spent the night embedded in a pre-pre-pre-gaming zone (p.24), but can occasionally be found above 14th St.—or 114th St., as the case may be—which is exactly what the staff’s charting of East Campus’ most exotic territories maps out (p. 14). Michael Snyder and Nina Pedrad debate the ecstasy and the agony of calling and texting (p. 10), and Mark Hay interviews Ira Glass, radio’s most enjoyable source of news, and figures out that even economics can be exalting (p. 26). But this is Columbia, and fun isn’t for everyone, and, despite the air quality outside of Butler, neither is smoking cigarettes—although, as Adam Kuerbitz explains, it’s the latter that might be harder to formally ban (p. 18).

We hope you’ll enjoy immersing yourself in our Annual Nod to Fun. We certainly enjoyed writing it. Please check back in with us next month, when we will commence our new tradition of publishing a minimum of one article about Tap-A-Keg per issue. It seems like a fun thing to do, so we’re just going to do it.

Yours,
Juli N. Weiner
Editor-in-Chief

BY THE NUMBERS
Number of current and past non-US world leaders with a Columbia background: 20

Number who currently lead sovereign states: 3

Number of those nations considered “free”: 2

Number that have become more “free” under Columbia-related leadership: 1

Number of Columbia-related leaders involved in coups or civil wars: 7

Number of assassination attempts: 4

Number successful: 2

Number involved in violent shootouts in Afghanistan: 2

Number involved in violent shootouts in Afghanistan with each other: The same 2

REVELATION OF THE MONTH
For decades, rumors have swirled that Dwight D. Eisenhower’s stint at Columbia was all one big misunderstanding. The myth goes that on his deathbed, Nicholas Murray Butler—the imperious University President whose tenure lasted 43 years— instructed university trustees to “Get Eisenhower” to be his successor. But, in a case of mistaken identity, the trustees jumped the gun and sought out the deco-rated general instead of his lesser-known younger brother, Milton S., who, well-qualified as president of Kansas State University, was the Eisenhower that Butler actually meant.

As it turns out, this fiction is much stranger than the truth. Dwight Eisenhower was offered the presidency in 1946—a full year before Butler would have been on his deathbed—and was selected from a list of candidates for the job prepared by the University trustees, not by Butler himself. University presidents are not chosen in the manner of Roman emperors, after all. Dwight was also a well-respected leader in his own right—having been Supreme Commander of the Allied Forces certainly accorded him a level of administrative experience on par with, if not superior to, his brother’s presidency of a then-minor state school.

Finally, the source of the myth seems to have been Dwight’s own words: when trustees approached him with the job, he is reported to have joked, “I think you have the wrong Eisenhower.”
ONOMASTICON: THE GAME!

See if you can guess which names belong to Columbia faculty members, and which we made up and just wish belonged to Columbia faculty members.

a. Teodolinda Barolini
b. Macalester Bell
c. Pu’anani Schrader
d. Anaxagoras Papageorge
e. Tavius Cheatham
f. Phineas Featherstone
g. Brinton Tench Coxe
h. Shprintza Minchew

i. Severin Fowles
j. Cordula Grewe
k. Merlyne Beauvoir
l. Dorsey Savage
m. Gil McGillycuddy
n. Pablo Piccato
o. Quandra Prettyman
p. Bixby Blessing

q. Perla Rozencvaig
r. Lula DeMent
s. Alfredo Billembour

t. Tycho DelMonte
u. Cherry Garcia
v. Javious Thisteroy

POSTCARD FROM MORNINGSIDE
For Toby, a small but loquacious kelly green parrot, the fence around the 91st Street Gardens in Riverside Park is a stage. Toby delights a crowd of adoring fans and his rather demure caretakers by performing afternoon concerts of *The Magic Flute*. His aria of choice? “Papageno, Papageno, Papageno,” of course.

According to Bob, one of said caretakers, Toby is a double-headed Amazonian parrot, which, “you know, is the national bird of Belize.” Officially, the keel-billed toucan is cited as the country’s national bird, but what Toby doesn’t know can’t hurt him. Besides, he doesn’t even speak Spanish.

He does have a bit of French under his belt, though. The conversations between Toby and Audrey, a francophone chow chow, whom he meets from time to time in the park, are casual and consist mostly of him repeating, “*Allons*, Audrey, *Allons*, Audrey!” In addition to Audrey, Toby’s network of friends extends to Sylvie, an African gray macaw, who unfortunately prefers her Riverside Drive apartment to the park.

Not every parrot, though, travels in Toby’s jet-setting clique. Sam, a more introverted Amazonian parrot, tends to remain in the closed quarters of his protective doggy carrying case. Sam’s caretaker has not clipped his wings, which means that if released from his cage, Sam could fly away. For those parrots who want to experience the open air without having to have their wings clipped, the Feather Tether Parrot Harness and leash offers a solution. But for Sam, a modest parrot of Minnesotan origins, the spacious, if relatively unadorned, interior of the carrying case will do.

Lovy Dove Dove, a 14-year-old blue, peach-faced lovebird, however, would cock his head in derision at Sam’s spartan lifestyle. When the weather is just right, Lovey Dove Dove splits his time between Zabar’s in the mornings—the seeded loaf is his carb of choice—and Riverside Park at 72nd Street in the afternoons. Lovey Dove Dove is a bird with taste: a reproduction of Van Gogh’s *Sunflowers* (in magnet form) decorates his cage.

Parrots have long occupied a place in the literary tradition of avian sidekicks thanks to Gustave Flaubert, Robert Louis Stevenson, and Walt Disney. Now, given the style and panache of Toby and his feathered brethren, the breed proves to have the making of A-list urbanites.

– Mariela Quintana

To land Joseph Stiglitz, Columbia had to throw in a (very large) University-owned apartment on top of his robust salary and staff requirements. But to convince literary wunderkind Wells Tower to teach in Morningside, all Columbia had to do was ask.

Tower is the first to admit that he’s no Stiglitz. “This is a literary position,” he said. “And I’m just a writer.” Still, that’s a whopper of an understatement: earlier this year, he released his first book, a collection of stories, *Everything Ravaged, Everything Burned*, to widespread acclaim—naturally the movie rights have already been optioned—and he’s currently writing a highly anticipated novel. And now Tower can be found, once a week, teaching an Advanced Fiction class to 15 presumably awed upperclassmen.

Tower, who is better-looking in person than in the picture in his book, is personable, with a soft voice that speaks passionately of writing, and not just of the literary sort—Tower’s first writing gig after college was ghostwriting his boss’s e-mails.
“I just wanted to construct sentences,” he said. But there wasn’t enough e-mail correspondence to keep Tower occupied, and, out of boredom, he would pilfer various office supplies and take them down to the train tracks to be squashed.

Tower may appreciate flattened paper clips and pens, but he is, foremost, a connoisseur of language. For years, he kept a notebook detailing overheard conversation snippets that struck him as memorable or accidentally poetic, and he nixed a career in academia because he couldn’t stomach “acadamese.” So it’s slightly ironic that he’s now technically Professor Tower.

Tower graduated from the Columbia MFA program in 2002, and it’s here he first experienced literary success. He had two unsolicited submissions published by the Paris Review, a feat that inspired considerable jealousy—a peer who bought the issue told Tower that he couldn’t bear reading Tower’s name on the spine, and had to rotate the magazine to get it out of sight.

Tower is a small-town guy—he grew up in Chapel Hill, North Carolina, where he still owns a house—and was hesitant to commit to New York for the semester. He agreed, in part, “to escape the loneliness of intense writing,” he said. If the isolation of writing doesn’t intimidate his students, Tower hopes that the time commitment won’t either. “I think I scared them enough when I told them how long it takes to write my fiction.”

— Menachem Kaiser

CORRESPONDENCE

À La Lettre

Dear Editors:

There is nothing so offensive as comparing Campo to Canon’s, as Eliza Chira Shapiro did in “ID-ology” (Sept. ’09). Those faux-antique chandeliers and exposed brick walls intone words like “sophistication” and “elegance” in perfect Victorian English. We ought to appreciate the magnanimous attempt of the Eastern European businessmen to bring the high class Village life to our far-flung hamlet on a hill. To think that a Canon’s girl could find a place on the hardwood dance floor of that hallowed hall, or that the gilded mirrors would ever deign to reflect her earnestly chosen Macy’s empire waist or tasteless low-fashion club wear. Though she’ll recognize the slightly-indie hip hop of the student DJ, it is obvious as she moves among the regulars—she owns no vintage pumps, and simply could not dance to Parliament.

The thought sickens me. I may never again fully enjoy my delectable flatbread pizza straight from the Campo kitchen with a cloth napkin and silverware.

I await your humble apologies,
Emily Cheesman, BC ’10

Dear Emily:

I don’t know what I was thinking—I was really drunk.

Warmest regards,
Eliza Chira Shapiro
Senior Editor, The Blue and White
Nellie Bowles

Nellie Bowles, CC ’10, is an hour and a half late to the potluck, but you wouldn’t know it from the way she waltzes into the crowd. Three or four people—house-mates and others just eager to make her acquaintance—dance around her in conversation, but her eyes are locked on the crockpots of organic delights. “This is a great potluck,” she muses. “Cabbage? Quinoa? I’m stoked.”

The inhabitants of Potluck House, the special-interest group known for its doors-open weekly soirées, have all been charmed by Bowles, whose signature deep voice and unruly mop of curly black hair only enhance her reputation as the house’s grande dame. “Nellie is ridiculously good-looking,” says her former roommate Kate Redburn, CC ’10, also a three-year veteran of Potluck. The minute Bowles gets through the front door, she lets out a primal ululation known among her housemates as “the catcall.” It’s not quite the greeting you might expect from a woman who was presented as a débutante three years ago; she and half her family are alumni of a Santa Barbara boarding school. Through the eighth grade, she attended a private girls’ school in San Francisco, where she didn’t let the prissy uniform—a skirted sailor suit—get in the way of rugby matches at recess. Redburn, who has known Bowles since kindergarten, recalls an enchanting, magnetic alpha-child. “Nellie was just stronger than everyone,” she says. “When I was reading Nancy Drew, she was reading Redwall!”

Bowles’s reading interests have progressed considerably since then. She’s a Comparative Literature and Society major, at work on a thesis about psychoanalysis in the works of William James and Gertrude Stein. Inspired by her Christian Scientist grandmother, she grew curious about the power of hypnosis over mind and body, which she further explored this past summer at a research fellowship in Montréal. There, her literary skills came in handy (she is the current editor-in-chief of the Columbia Review, where her own poetry has been published), as she revised the work of her writing-wary scientist colleagues. “I don’t know how to read a scan or anything,” she admits. Rather, she let her comp lit background shape the papers, synthesizing experimental data with ideas from the body of critical theory that has lately gained standing in psychology departments. Of rape, for example, she observes that “maybe it changes the brain because our culture tells us it’s horrible.”

In intimate matters, she is curious—never prying—and something about her curiosity is flattering. At the end of her interview, she turned the questions back on this Blue and White reporter. “Now how are you? How’s your love life?” As a volunteer counselor to students seeking HIV tests, she asks the same question to perfect strangers. Back at boarding school, Bowles served as a dorm prefect, and though she was generously lax about reporting her friends for “binge drinking under their beds,” she says, any girl seeking the morning-after pill could count on her as a buddy for the trip to the pharmacy.

“She has a domestic prairie wife side,” says Laura Seidman, CC ’10, a Potlucker who has known Bowles since high school. She was reflecting not on her grit but on a recent morning when the housemates awoke to find fig preserves that Bowles had made, canned, and placed in front of their doors. It was an apt gift in that farmer’s market-happy house. Stop by Bowles’s room and she’s sure to offer you a snack of raw almonds—gelatinous, green-centered nuts only available two weeks per year—or any of three honey products. Before this interview, she put together an,
ahem, rather diverse salad at Nussbaum and Wu. Its contents: baby spinach, jalapeños, broccoli, onions, beets, tomatoes (both cherry and sun dried), noodles, kidney beans, corn, and marinated red peppers. All under a drizzle of fat-free tomato-basil dressing and balsamic vinegar. This indecisive reporter ordered an exact copy for herself. And—wouldn’t you know—it was delicious.

—Alexandra Muhler

David Mills

Initially, David Mills, SEAS ’12, can come off as intimidating. At 6’4”, sporting a three-piece suit and carrying a briefcase, he stands above the crowd of students shuffling through Lerner. But then he opens his arms in bear hug fashion, setting his friends—and those who will soon become his friends—immediately at ease.

Mills’s sartorial elegance is designed to enhance his social savvy. “It makes it easier to be memorable,” he says, smoothing his tie. “I’ll go up to some random person in the cafeteria and say, ‘Hi, I’m David Mills,’ and get their contact information, and maybe a couple weeks later I’ll contact them. They won’t remember me, but when I say ‘I’m the guy who wears a shirt and tie to class,’ they immediately will. It makes it really easy to meet people.”

These people are, more often than not, girls. While he claims to be interested in all people, he does admit that “It’s always nice to network with the beautiful people, and beautiful members of the opposite sex,” citing the Barnard cafeteria as a prime “networking” ground. But Mills doesn’t just chat his contacts up once and forget them. He finds his friends’ birthdays—not just those of the beautiful girls, he promises—on Facebook and syncs the dates with his Google calendar. Then he sends birthday cards to everyone whose address he knows and texts all the others. “I think one of my biggest positive attributes is my networking ability,” he says.

The benefits of the birthday cards go both ways: Mills believes that the people he meets may be able to help him in future business ventures. “Everyone knows that at Columbia we’re not paying for the education, we’re paying for the people we meet here,” he says. And while he isn’t sure of his ultimate career goal, he knows he wants to “make an incredible amount of money doing something I love doing that also allows me to give back to the community entrepreneurially.” Currently, his idea of how to fulfill this set of goals is to combine his two loves—food and basketball—into an athletic catering company.

He already has a business partner: a friend from back home in Nashville will take care of the culinary side of the business while Mills manages the company’s finances. And they aren’t wasting any time—the duo has already researched Boston and Atlanta as their first two sites.

This seriousness of purpose is also evident in the rationale behind the suits. When his father went to college, his grandmother paid for his education on the condition that he would wear a suit to class every day. “She wanted people who saw him on campus to think, ‘That’s a man, that’s not a boy,’” Mills explains. While his parents didn’t require the same dress code, Mills decided to follow in his father’s footsteps. The blue pinstripe that he’s sporting in Ferris Booth belonged to his father in college. “It’s a little small,” Mills admits, “but I still like it.”

There is one time when you won’t see Mills wearing suits, though—when he’s on the basketball court. He came to school with the intention of walking on to the team, but since Columbia builds its team through heavy recruiting, Mills took on a managerial role instead of, say, power forward. Although Columbia’s lack of school spirit “gets very frustrating very easily,” Mills hasn’t let it dissuade him from his goals. “I still work out every morning and I still try [to make the team] because regardless of whether or not I make the team I love to play basketball. Some people like to party at night, I’d rather play basketball in the morning.”

It was even Mills’s seventh grade basketball coach who first taught him how to tie a tie. He’s now learning how to tie a bow tie. “I own a tux,” he says. “It comes in handy.”

—Hannah Lepow

Illustrations by Chloe Eichler
“Whatever you want…”

This was the text I had just received from the guy I was flirting with. “Whatever you want?” Ellipses? What does that even mean?

Cut to 15 minutes later. I’m standing in the center of my suite, with four suitemates huddled over my phone. Everyone has interpreted the text differently. No one can agree on its meaning. “It sounds kind of passive-aggressive but whatever,” says one suitemate. “He wants in your pants. You don’t do ellipses unless you want in the pants,” says another.

I leave the arguing clump and mass-forward the text to three friends. Each sends back a drastically different response. “Go to his party, Nina. DPOLYUD!” Don’t puss out like you usually do? “He’s just not got dat in2 u. :/ but ;) be now u won’t waste ur thyme!” Sure, T-9, that’s exactly what she meant to say. Thyme. And then this, from my best friend: “SeXy!” Beads of sweat run down my forehead as it dawns on me that I will die alone. Someone will need to mass-text the invitation to my funeral.

The guy and I had been getting really intimate, textually speaking. Casual banter blossomed into full-out SMS diary entries in 160 characters or fewer. Tonight he was throwing a party, and were it not for three vague dots, I’d know where I stood with him. If this were a normal courtship I would just call him. But no, this was a textship, and with a textship there were rules. Wait double the time it takes for them to respond to you. Do not send two-part messages. Do not send a text before noon. Use emoticons sparingly :). Use the semicolon wink emoticon never. Avoid using acronyms, typing “haha” (or hehe, for that matter), and saying “I miss you” unless it’s your mother or your best friend. Do not have a textship with your mother or your best friend. And never, under any circumstances, call the other person. I mean it. That is a breach of contract. If you call the other person, it is a personal affront to their privacy, and deep resentment will follow. It is the Dementor’s kiss of a textship, and it will ruin you. If it’s really an emergency, dial 911.

Which brings me to that special word I miss in modern communication: dialing. A phone call has no rules. It’s rogue. There’s no confusion, no AIM acronyms—the worst that could happen is you hear his friends giggling in the background. It’s instant gratification. Calling is brash and forward-thinking; texting is an abbreviated form of communication, a crutch for the socially awkward.

I decided to respond. Leaving our latest conversation at an ellipsis just seemed… gauche.

I ruminated: “You ;)” I might as well have lobbed a condom in his general direction and attached a note that says, “for 8Ber.” I settle on a simple “We’ll see” and head to my room to get ready.

After a frantic 20 minutes of digging and throwing, I borrowed a dress from my suitemate, and departed towards EC. But just as I gained entrance past the friendly iron bars, I realized that I didn’t even know what his room number was.

No matter, a single character question mark in our de facto medium of choice should do the trick. Hm. Five minutes pass and the simple text elicits nothing from him. I send a text with a “#” (admittedly extremely gauche) and still, nothing.

This is absurd. Why am I bound by the chains of my textship? Why does he get to determine we’re in a textship anyway? I don’t care if it’s brash; I have to return this dress tomorrow. I’m calling Michael.
It's Sunday morning and I am awake, showered, dressed, and reading the Times over a cup of coffee. I know it's disgusting, but I can't help it—because of a strange guilt inculcated in me since grade school, I can't sleep any later than 9 a.m. I don't need many things, but I do need order; I need structure. In short, I need brunch.

Two options present themselves: I can call around to see if anyone else has managed to slither out from under the covers, or I can text. Now were this dinner, I wouldn't even bother. I could pull out a book—preferably a very large book with an intimidating name and a foreign-sounding author—and look aloof, with bespectacled eyes mysteriously downcast, grad student-style. But brunch is an experience to be shared with companions. Without them, “brunch” becomes just what slobbish drunks call breakfast, and I’m no slob. I woke up at 9 a.m.

I still haven’t solved my original dilemma, though, and I’m already at the bar of Kitchenette—alone—unable to resist the siren song of hollandaise and runny yolks. Calling anyone at this point opens the door to myriad public humiliations. Suppose I call and wake someone up. The first stream of the 11 a.m. brunch crowd will overhear my attempts to veil my irritation and disdain with a flimsy skein of contrition as I shout, “Did I wake you? I’m so sorry...” at the lazy drunkards whom I spent last night assiduously ignoring.

Alternatively, no one might pick up when I call, in which case I am seen dialing, waiting, and hanging up, dialing, waiting, hanging up, repeating ad nauseam, a public affirmation that I don’t have a single damned acquaintance to my credit. Perhaps the most horrific prospect of all: someone might actually pick up. I brunch alone.

Hours pass and, after a delightfully solitary dinner, I want a drink. Sunday night or no, I plan to celebrate another successful day of avoided confrontations and embarrassments. Regrettably, I somehow feel compelled to drink with someone else, lest I turn into one of the questionable lone lusters lurking in the dingiest recesses of 1020. Phone in hand, I’m back to that same quandary from brunch, but I’m a little more certain this time: after several hours of public solitude I will admit to my desperation not to appear desperate. This calls for a mass text, which allows for the maximum number of contacts with a minimum of personalization. This way, the plaid-bedecked co-eds will see that I have people to contact, while I pose myself little to no serious risk of actual interaction. A mass text will tell these urchins precisely this: I want to drink with someone and it may as well be you.

Texting, you see, puts me in control. I have learned the art of distillation, whittling my texts down from long, accurately punctuated sentences, to the briefest possible interrogatives.

I may accidentally send virtually incomprehensible messages from my antiquated SMS device—I have yet to switch over to one of those magic mini-ENIACs masquerading as phones—but I nevertheless decide with whom I speak and when. They say that texting has reduced us to the least common denominator of human contact, but that erroneously presupposes that those you contact are actually human. Only in a world where Twitter serves as your news source and your blog becomes your therapist could a conversation via cell phone constitute a substantive human interaction anyway. If I really must talk to someone, I expect an excuse for candlelight, at least three kinds of cutlery, and twice as many bottles of wine. I will take a stand in the name of real conversation, even as it recedes toward an ever-darkening digital horizon. Now, if I could only find someone worth conversing with.

Horror of horrors: my phone rings. Oh God, Nina’s calling. Decline. I’ll text her later.

Text
By Michael Snyder

Illustrations by Grant D’Avino
In which our hero eventually discovers that actually he looks rather fetching in hats.

Twas nary a fortnight ago when Verily Veritas, CC 'Inmemorial, received correspondence from some woman with a hyphenated surname. She self-associated with one hideous, vowel-less acronym or other that apparently had been attempting to query your hero through “Email,” whom your hero could only assume to be a rather unskilled Turkish bounty-hunter. Glossing over her unforgiving gloss of your hero’s admittedly idiosyncratic transcript, a pragmatic exegesis of the gospel of polynomial bureaucratax might read as such:

The University is requiring that your hero, should he wish to “further prolong”—an adverb of gratuitously and surprisingly pejorative inflection, V.V. observed with derision—his scholastic inquiries, and should he wish the Columbia University Department of English and Comparative Literature to further subsidize and “nominally endorse” said scholastic inquires, V.V. should make it his top priority to satisfy one (I) of the Major’s prescribed imperatives. And so, academia rex, V.V. had no choice but to arrest his own, more rewarding, private pursuits and enroll in Critical Reading, Critical Writing, an excruciating exercise in bad faith that insisted on perpetually alluding to the irony of its frantic appellation.

Essay? V. refuse! A mere dependent clause and thoughtless comma into the mandated five (V) paragraphs and three (III) lenses, V.V. flicked the RETURN key on his Smith-Corona in disgust and opted for what he’ll call... strategic redeployment. Verily preferred to think of his single malt exit strategy as a form of self-directed humanitarian intervention.

An institutionalized endorsement of On Photography? Was this really any different than another Crown’s so-called systematized intellectual barbarism—a failed indoctrination that Verily seemed to recall from his pupils’ Said idolatry. And is it not this very University—and the same sadists and Saidists behind Critical Reading, Critical Writing—that encourages V.V. and his peers to stand athwart academic propaganda and yell “Stop” in whichever exotic tongue happens to be en vogue that decade? No, V.V. would not be “using Sontag’s theory of aesthetics to talk about a really awesome concert or something,” as per the suggestion of his instructor. He handed in a polemical exposition of Sontag’s misreading of Borges, which he wrote as in the style of Irving Howe on hashish. He received an “incomplete.”

His Critical Reading, Critical Writing professor—although, intellectual, insincere second-year Ph.D. candidate,” or “au pair,” or “wet nurse,” would be a more intellectually judicious job title—had suggested that any student who was dissatisfied with his mark on the Sontag essay could participate in the class’s nod to All Hallows Eve, the autumnal coronation of Celtic commodification. So much for the separation of church and taste! V.V. huffed.

Or perhaps that too was indiscriminately remitted to the first local pubescent vagabond brazen enough to ask for it. The opportunistic exhibitionists in Verily’s class—they were invariably enthralled by the affected posturing of Sontag yet could not, evidently, suitably co-opt the essay as a satisfactory “lens”—were delighted that their trips to Ricky’s would now be venerated by the Academy. Oh certainly, V.V. mumbled caustically. Throw a whimsical hat atop your empty skulls, that will suffice just merrily.

O, but woe is V.V., the unwilling clown! Your hero—equal parts offended by his peers, their preening masquerades, and the Ph.D. student’s obvious displeasure with Verily’s fantastical 1,500 word Magical Realism Mystery Tour—unfortunately had little choice but to participate in this blight of passage. The stern words of the acronymic functionary bandied about his head: V.V. did indeed want to “further prolong” his studies, and if he had to perform as something Other for one hour and ten minute’s time in order to do it... then... then... he would don that whimsical hat with aplomb! On Style — V.V. committed himself to exactly that. •
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EAT IN ~ TAKEOUT ~ DELIVERY

Weekend BRUNCH

Drink Specials

PEACE LOVE & GUACAMOLE
When it’s time for members of the Philolexian Society to begin their weekly party, the 14th floor of EC vibrates with chants of the beloved first-year slogan, “Hold fast to the spirit of youth, let the years to come do what they may!” The Society has three suites—two five-person and one four-person—in which to host these fêtes. Philo, as its members affectionately call it, is Columbia’s oldest and certainly its quirkiest literary society. The heart of Philo is the weekly Thursday night debate, where members try to top one another in wit, rhetoric, and snappy Boccaccian comebacks.

It’s difficult to separate business from pleasure in the Philo suites. When not hosting the weekly party, members sometimes hold dramatic readings of undergraduate fiction from one suitemate’s creative writing course. Other times, they stage peculiar pranks. One scheme, now aborted, was to fill the suite with cushions embroidered “Noam Sweet Noam,” in honor of Noam Prywes, CC ’10.

Though the Philo suites were started for the benefit of the whole Society, living in close quarters has done wonders for member bonding. Prywes and Grace Laidlaw, CC ’11, discovered that they both prefer no-pulp calcium-added orange juice (“the blue carton”), which they take turns buying. “That’s how Noam and I bond,” said Laidlaw. “Through orange juice.”

Philo did not always have a place of its own. Last year, members endured a weekly struggle to find a place to gather after meetings. Members would either rush through the end of the meeting to make it to V&T’s before it closed, or were forced to wilt under the poor lighting of M2M. Now, EC 14 has more than enough room for Philo members to debate and to rage. “That was what we got them for, pretty much,” admitted Beezly Kiernan, CC ’11, “the afterparties.”

It’s there that members improvise drinking games and engage in a timeless Philo tradition: inter-Philo incest. However, these hookups remain in the so-called “sexually charged acquaintanceship” state, a term which prompted its own Philo debate. Resolved: it won’t spoil the friendship.

—Stephen Blair

CORRIDORS OF POWER

The only thing more terrifying than what I now know about EC 1216 is the thought of what they’ve surely kept hidden. Headed by Sue Yang, President of both Columbia College Student Council and the Econ Society, this five-person suite is perched on an upper floor of East Campus like the gods atop Mount Olympus.

Called decorative “visionaries” by their suitemates, Sue and Melissa Im, a Pre-Professional Representative and a Vice President of the Ivy Council, have covered walls with rich purple sheets and littered the suite with dozens upon dozens of bottles of wine (full, half-empty, or otherwise). As Im explains, “every party is for one of the student groups” this clique runs, and the entire suite is run with the precision of a well-oiled machine. Meetings and parties are carefully scheduled in the common room that Scott St. Marie, President of Activities Board at Columbia and head Columbia International Relations Council and Association delegate, calls “Lerner extension #2.”

The suite is rounded out by James Bogner, Elections Chairman and Building Supervisor of Dodge Fitness Center, and Heather Hwalek, a Circa delegate with fluency in upwards of five languages and professional ties to the State Department.

In some cases, suite members’ ties to one another go as far back as Columbia Urban Experience and high school leadership programs. Currently, St. Marie...
and Bogner sit on the Manhattanville Expansion Committee, and St. Marie and Im were on the same marketing team in a Business School course, and Bogner and Yang both serve on their class council. All the girls speak Mandarin. The totality of their web of mutual ventures is dizzying.

There is a very real sense that, sitting around the common room table of EC 1216, these yuppies-to-be could swing an election, bring Bollinger down in one fell swoop, and have you killed—all of this, mind you, without having to reschedule their weekly international dinner party.

The word “synergy” buzzes through the air in EC 1216, and President Yang admitted, “we watch out for each other.” But what happens when the interests of this omnipotent syndicate don’t match those of the student body? “When are we releasing the fish flu?” St. Marie asked, and the suite burst into laughter.

—Brian Phillips Donahoe

THE BANDSUITE

Drink a little too much whiskey in EC 1418, and you might just be lucky enough to hear verses like these sung in your honor on the bus to Princeton the following weekend: “There once was a bandie named Craig/For crazy adventures he begged/He drank down some whiskey/and got a bit frisky/and said ‘Hey! I’m fucking your eggs.’”

Many Columbians can’t remember the names of their first-year floormates, but in the world of the Columbia University Marching Band (CUMB) nothing is forgotten. The self-titled “BandSuite” is home to the Band’s Thursday night after-rehearsal hangouts, Saturday night victory parties, and an extensive collection of “found” flags from Ivy League opponents that dates back to the 1970’s. It’s a place where bandies can honor their forefathers and begin transforming the present into legend.

Its residents include Dan Miranda, SEAS ’10, Sam Bhattacharyya, SEAS ’10, Louise Stewart, CC ’11, Jonny Groh, SEAS ’12, and William Liu, SEAS ’12. BandSuite features a stereo, a wall-mounted set of sound activated disco lights, an “alcohol graveyard” on the windowsill, and a large Marching Band banner that hangs in blue and white splendor amid all the stolen signs. Thanks to Miranda, a CUIT employee, it also boasts wireless connectivity throughout the suite and a television with free cable. For crafty bandies, it can also enable a quick getaway; as Miranda divulged, “if you live in the BandSuite, having parties in the suite is a huge advantage because it’s just upstairs. And you can just go downstairs. Other bandies have been famous for it.”

Removed from the administration’s prying eyes, the Suite is a haven where the Band’s storied past lives on. The Band conducts its famous tunnel and rooftop tours from the Suite, and alums with epithets like “Fred the Clam” and “Trashy Constantino” often come back to visit. “We have a lot of oral tradition,” said Stewart. “There are certain people whose names you just know.”

Although the Band longs for a house or associated frat, their little corner of East Campus allows them to keep the spirit of bygone eras alive. Recreated in the 1960s by “members of the wind ensemble that were just rowdy,” as Miranda explained, the Band now seeks to remember what its forebearers once em-bodied. Indeed, Miranda proudly proclaimed that “The Cleverest Band in the World” once lived by the motto: “Hey let’s get that flag, let’s punch that guy.”

—Anna Kelner

THE WALL O’ BITCHIN’ SUITE

Anyone entering EC 2007 should be warned about “Manny,” the headless mannequin covered in bright red feathers, layers of paint, and verses of poetry, who rests on the dining table. Manny looks out over a beautiful and absurd hallway wall plastered entirely with chalk sketches, phrases, and symbols in dozens of different handwritings.

Between Manny, the aforementioned “Wall O’ Bitchin’ a.k.a. the FML Wall,” and their many other visually stimulating artifacts, Diane Botta and Melissa Diaz, both CC ’10, have brilliantly converted their top floor East Campus flat into a habitable canvas for perpetual “drunken art and inspiration.”

Diaz, a former spelling bee champ applying to Teach for America, maintains a spotless room. A poster from her high school, an Obama poster from her work on the campaign last year—Joe Biden has serious “game,” she reported—and a Columbia poster neatly hang on each of her walls. The adornments of Botta’s much
messier room include a used shooting range target; the enigmatic phrase “Bunniez wit Tittayz”—I’s dotted with hearts—scribbled on the walls; and a dreamy watercolor of figures dancing, playing music, and fishing. She said it represents the haziness of her post-graduation plans.

Despite their decorative differences, Botta and Diaz said they have a number of things in common: an appreciation of humor, love for adventurous art, and mutual joys and struggles as Latina women. This, too, is displayed on their wall. Observe, for instance, their Sonia Sotomayor poster, hung across from the august Dr. Dre proverb, “Bitches Ain’t Shit” and among the many other interesting inquiries (“What do you call a female tool?”), valuable recommendations (“If you can read this, be happy”), and insights (“tit”) scribbled in multicolored chalk on the Wall O’ Bitchin’.

Friends drop in and out the suite, sharing pick up lines (“Are you my brother? No? Good, then this could work out between us”) and Peruvian foods cooked by Diaz from the expansive collection of Goya products in the kitchen. Yes, life is good in EC 2007, where (again according to the infallible Wall O’ Bitchin’), we “get high, eat pie, and ride or die.”

—Tony Gong

THE FRISELECTRONIC SUITE

Six hundred Frisbees sit in five large cardboard boxes in the stairwell of East Campus 1814. This is no postmodern furniture thought piece; rather, it’s what happens when four members of the Columbia University Ultimate Frisbee team live together. The disc-slingers—Milo Snyder, CC ’11, Connie Chang, CC ’10, Albert Chen, CC ’10, and Gui Cavalcanti, CC ’12, along with Dan Weinstein, CC ’12,—a non-Frisbee-playing friend roped in to complete the Exclusion Suite—are drawn together by a shared love of the game. Their devotion to Ultimate is matched only by their passion for both listening to and creating electronic music. This seemingly odd commonality is reflected in the suite’s décor: a copy of Official Ultimate Frisbee Magazine lies on a table cluttered with bleeping and pulsating audio equipment and cables—the scene bathed in a soft, moody glow by two small light boxes from what could be either Ikea or the future. The “minimalist modern” furnishing, as Cavalcanti jokingly called it, creates the perfect atmosphere for his and Snyder’s late-night musical experiments, but suggestions for a house band remain mere suggestions. “We’re just jam buddies,” they said mock-seriously. “Nothing serious.”

Casual as their jamming may be, the group admitted that they’ve gained a reputation as the source of any and all high-decibel electro in East Campus. The characterization is occasionally unfair—“I think they just assume it’s us now,” Chen said—but the group acknowledges that they are more often than not the culprits. Planning for the suite’s first Space Party is already underway; though details are not exactly clear, the event will combine Frisbee players, heavy electronic music, and a space-age computer light show projected onto the walls.

Weinstein prefers classical music and an earlier bedtime than his suitemates do. The same warbling thrum of synthesizers that sustains Cavalcanti and Snyder through the night is for Weinstein a soothing lullaby. That’s not to say he doesn’t have his own otherworldly, electronic moments—a COÖP leader, like Cavalcanti and Snyder, he has playfully campaigned for a Columbia Outdoor Space Orientation Program.

All told, the group gets along famously. They clean together, they eat bowls and bowls of Annie’s Macaroni and Cheese together, and, together, they liberate massive Barnard flags to hang on their walls. The only real spat they can think of took the form of a brief argument over whether or not one electronic music act had knowingly borrowed another song’s complementary synth line. This is what passes for heated argument in the Frislecticronic suite. They went to practice mad that night. We should all be so lucky.

—Sam Schube

THE COLUMBIA STATE SUITE

A blasé wit resides comfortably in EC Townhouse 805, the home of Mike Molina, Adam Nover, Jeff Schwartz, Paul Rodgers, Tobin Mitnick, and Rob Stenson, all CC ’10. These boys are always “A-OK.” The name of the suite, says Molina as he puts up his feet and pours a second drink, is the OK Hotel.

Each Hotel resident sips a Dewar’s-rocks and some have wrapped themselves in a derivative of the robe
called a Snuggie. “Snuggies not robes” is one of the first rules of the suite. “Floss,” is another. Suitemates must also call each other “Brah” or “Broha,” at all times, according to a piece of notebook paper taped to the wall, listing rules both for conduct and for a themed party. To attend an OK Hotel-hosted “Columbia State University” or CSU party, one must come clad in unmistakably state-school-type garb, then shotgun a Keystone Light and partake of a Milano-purchased keg.

The OK Hotel also has unwritten rules: “no sharing girlfriends” (strictly adhered to), “no sharing toothpaste” (Rodgers never adheres to) and “glass bottle beer is not communal” (occasionally adhered to). The suite itself is fraught with peculiarities: there is a “Scrabble den” that blocks a hallway, observed by a fake security camera. But the best decor is in the six king-sized singles, ranging from Rodgers’ obsessive-compulsive minimalism, to Molina’s wall murals in progress, to Stenson’s abstract designs colored tape. Similar tape designs adorn the walls of the common room, which is where the gentlemen relate some hard facts. Every suitemate is or has been involved in on-and-off-campus arts: Molina used to do a lot of theater “shit,” while Mitnick is still involved in—as he indignantly puts it—“what Mike just referred to as shit.” Both remain members of the improv troupe Fruit Paunch. Rodgers used to play in most musical ensembles on campus, but now enjoys a quiet life as a Math major and tutor. Stenson has designed almost every Columbia start-up ever to grace the World Wide Web and is one of three people in CC pursuing the History and Theory of Architecture major. Molina and Stenson make up 2/5 of the campus’ most popular pop-folk outfit, the Kitchen Cabinet. Schwartz and Nover are also Columbia theater alums; Nover now runs the Jester and Schwartz interns at Focus Features, works at Le Poisson Rouge, and produces independent films with Molina under their label, Project Bluelight.

The Rowing Suite

Despite having clumped themselves into the mezzanine and first floors together, the rowers of Harmony Hall are reluctant to own up to even the slightest affections for each other. Rather, as one suite member put it, “You have to live with rowers if you’re a rower—no one else can stand you.”

The life of a rower is early, cold, and dripping wet. At 7 a.m. every morning, they must trek up to the tip of the island for a three-hour practice. And that’s off-season. Rowing is a sport that, as crew member alias Steve Hicks said, “takes you to a dark place inside,” and upon return from practice they’re all tired and crabby. Living in self-seclusion, they are too exhausted to take out their rage and frustration on each other. If they had the energy, hulking as they are, surely no suitemate—except for another rower—could survive an oarsman’s wrath. “We’ve turned our brains to cheese with aerobic workouts,” claimed Hicks.

Having neglected to view the rooms during selection, they lucked into Harmony’s most spacious common area. Still, their suite has taken on the spartan aura of a barracks. Blank walls, a few chairs, and splayed behemoths gobbling down Koronets—the dominant features of the rowers’ suite.

Gruff veneer aside, the rowers are gentle giants—at least with each other. They share in each other’s activities, and tend to travel in a pack from party to bar to film to home. It’s difficult for a non-rower to join in, and the other residents of Harmony certainly seem bemused and distanced from the crew. The non-rower might find it hard to communicate with such conversationally single-minded folk. One chat began with a discussion of whether or not Chicago would win the chance to host the 2016 Olympics to “think Michael Phelps will still be swimming by then?” to “Anyone know where they’re going to swim?” to “So where they’re gonna row? Like, in the Thames?”—four degrees to rowing in one minute flat. On the first floor of Harmony, all roads lead to Row, a state utterly incomprehensible to the outside world.

—Liz Naiden

—Mark Hay
The cigarette break has changed drastically in the past decade: What was once nothing more than a courtesy to anti-smoking relatives—or even just a good excuse to leave a bad party—has become a mandatory exodus. Since 2003, when New York State banned indoor smoking, a culture of urban smokers has developed under the city’s awnings and streetlights. Smokers at Columbia are no different: Friendships begin around ashtrays outside John Jay and Carman and continue during study breaks and chance meetings outside Butler and Lerner. Last month though, New York City officials, led by Michael Bloomberg, suggested banning smoking at all public parks and beaches. Smoking is similarly under fire at Columbia, as the University is now considering a ban on the activity on its Morningside campus. The most recent proposal drafted by the administration, prohibits smoking within the gates of the Morningside campus, including the bridge over Amsterdam Avenue and the areas around Wien Hall, the Law School, and the School of International and Public Affairs. But the movement has been tempered by bureaucratic mismanagement, confusion within student government groups, and a dearth of information about whether a smoking ban is even a policy Columbia students want implemented.

The idea of a smoking ban gathered steam in the summer of 2008, when New York State banned smoking in all residential college dormitories. At the time, the University went back and reviewed its own policies on tobacco use on campus. Administration officials realized that there were five separate documents regarding tobacco use on the Morningside campus, some of which were inconsistent with the stipulations of the new law. The state’s ban included different regulations for mixed residential buildings—that is, residences home to undergraduates, graduate students and faculty members—in addition to specifications concerning the size of non-smoking zones outside the main doors of various buildings. Given the impending state law, administration members thought an overhaul of the University’s tobacco policy was in order. Scott Wright, Vice President of Campus Services, formed a Tobacco Work Group that autumn to determine the most feasible ways the University could comply with the law, and asked Michael McNeil, Interim Director at the Alice Health Promotion Program, to chair it.

“The question, really, that got raised was, ‘Does it prompt us to think about smoking in the outdoor spaces since the indoor spaces basically are now governed by law?’” says Wright. “It’s less of a question of ‘What do people want?’ and rather [one of] compliance.” The Work Group—which, when it was first created, included professors, building managers, members of the campus grounds crew, and one student representative—tried “really just to review our current documents, review the state of the issue as it applies to higher education in the U.S., and then make some recommendations,” says McNeil.

The Work Group initially proposed expanding smoking restrictions from all campus buildings and certain zones outside campus buildings to include the entire area within campus gates. They considered the possibility of creating smoking areas on campus, but they ultimately concluded that Columbia’s concentrated geographical layout made on-campus smoking areas impractical. McNeil explains, “If you went, say, 50 feet from some buildings, you’re within 50 feet of another building. So that would make that space a de facto prohibited zone.” Before submitting their initial proposal to Wright, the Work Group sought to gather more student input.

The Group held four open-forum sessions in Lerner and set up an online feedback process where students, faculty, and staff could voice their opinions on the proposal without voting one way or another. The online poll garnered a paltry 211
responses, 56% of which were in favor of a ban. The open fora, which coincided with final exam preparation during the last week of April, saw a total attendance of three people. Despite the poor turnout, though, the Work Group submitted a proposal to Wright that suggested instituting a smoking ban on the Morningside campus. “I looked at the proposal,” says Wright, “and said, ‘I can’t really do anything with this until you get me a much, much, much greater sampling of Columbia opinion.’ On all three levels—faculty, staff, and students—it was not even close. I mean we’re talking about a couple dozen responses. I would think we’d want a couple thousand.”

Columbia College Class of 2011 President Learned Foote agrees with Wright’s conclusion that whatever suggestion offered by the Work Group should be informed by a greater proportion of the Columbia population. “We do not believe that student opinion has been accurately collected at this point. The next step in this process is collecting student opinion in a more accurate and unbiased way.” McNeil similarly acknowledges the Work Group does not have the information it needs to make a formal recommendation, and stresses that the Group’s task is not yet finished. “We recognize there are some limitations to our previous efforts,” he says, “and we don’t want to short-change the campus community.”

Like much of the student body, the new student council members were caught off-guard when they learned of the Work Group’s proposal last spring. Immediately, the councils expressed their strong opposition to the plan. At the end of last year, the Columbia College Student Council voted almost unanimously against the smoking ban on the grounds that the University had no right to impose these regulations on individual behavior. Council President Sue Yang, CC ’10, joined the Work Group during the spring, along with Foote, CC 2011 Vice-President Sean Udell, and later, CCSC Vice-President for Policy Sarah Weiss, who joined last summer. Yang characterizes CCSC’s participation in the process by pointing out that “originally [the administration] had been thinking about enforcing it this year, starting Fall 2009—so right now. However, after talking with a lot of students they decided against it. They’ve been pretty good about trying to engage students.”

While Columbia will avoid a ban this fall, the question remains as to why the Work Group initially proposed a campus-wide ban without strong student support. Current members of student council believe that biased student representation on the Work Group led to a skewed idea of student opinion. Although administrators were allowed to invite students to join in the discussion, last year’s CCSC Vice-President of Policy, Adil Ahmed, CC ’09, was the only student representing the councils within the Work Group last year. Sean Udell believes that Ahmed was supporting the smoking ban without conferring with the rest of the council. “It was really Adil who was at the Work Group and it was only Adil’s opinion, but the Work Group interpreted it...
as CCSC’s opinion,” says Udell. McNeil confirms that Ahmed’s vote was part of the unanimous decision to propose the ban to Wright. “They’re confused why CCSC has seemed to sort of switch up their stance on this,” says Udell.

Ahmed tells an entirely different story. He says he was working with the administration on alcohol policy and the administration reached out to him about representing student interest on the Tobacco Work Group. “I was like, ‘Yeah, students will definitely have an interest in this,’ so I jumped right on that too,” says Ahmed, who says he brought up the Work Group’s deliberations at student council meetings numerous times. “No one on student council wanted to take initiative on it because they were afraid of not being reelected the next year.”

Last year's CCSC president, George Krebs, CC '09, confirms that Ahmed did engage the council in smoking ban discussions. “We were up to speed,” he says. “It wasn’t as though he gave us a two-minute update, glossed over it, and then considered his own opinions. You know, we had lengthy debates about the smoking ban during our council meetings where we discussed a lot of the issues at length and, from what I understood, he took those back.” Sue Yang, however, does not remember the smoking ban coming up in meetings until the end of the year. “I don’t think we think he was purposefully abusing power or anything like that. But I think it is a lesson to be learned in transparency, too.”

To that end, the administration is working with the student councils to conduct a second, more scientific poll of 1,000 students to be chosen proportionately within the various schools’ populations. The structure of the poll, as well as its publicity and timing, are being designed to remedy the flaws in last semester’s feedback sessions that failed to poll community members in a statistically significant way. “We’d really like to engage also the other councils, so like the business school, the architecture school, a lot of the grad schools who share this very campus with us. But of course, engage more of our own students because we are the residents here,” says Yang. Council members hope the survey will be conducted sometime in October. Once it is completed, the council plans to present the results to the Work Group in the hope that they will lead to a more informed decision.

Smoking is already prohibited at the medical center, Union Theological Seminary, Jewish Theological Seminary, and Barnard, which successfully established a similar ban in Spring 2007. Barnard, however, created two designated smoking areas on campus in response to student concerns about safety. According to Katie Palillo, Barnard Student Government Association President, “Student government and a number of individuals came forth and said that not being able to smoke on their campus was inconvenient and frankly not safe if they had to go out at midnight and stand outside of our gates to smoke.” Palillo doesn’t think the Barnard ban is a significant inconvenience mostly because “so few Barnard students are habitual smokers.” Even so, she admits that the ban is difficult to enforce.

Safety has not been mentioned as an obstacle to the smoking ban at Columbia. However, one point of contention among smokers and non-smokers alike is the congestion the ban would create outside the University gates. Forcing smokers in Butler, Carman, and John Jay onto 114th Street, opponents claim, would exacerbate the traffic problem already created by fraternities and dorms. Others have said that the farmers’ market would be negatively affected by the presence of smokers from Lerner, Furnald, and other buildings on the west side of campus congregating on Broadway. But McNeil thinks that designating smoking areas on the sidewalks will channel smokers away from already congested areas. He points out that because the University maintains the sidewalks, it has the legal authority to create designated smoking areas and install ashtrays there. Smokers walking down the street will not be in violation when they are outside of a sidewalk zone, but smokers standing outside of a zone will be asked to move.

McNeil says he realizes the objections this policy could raise among residents of the neighborhood. “We also recognize that before a formal
set of recommendations can take place, we need to have conversations with the businesses in the area and with non-Columbia affiliated residents of the Morningside Heights area.” Ten locations have been preliminarily identified, but discussions with locals have not yet begun. Wright acknowledges the problem, but thinks it will lessen over time. “The more restricted you make accessing smoking spaces, the more likely people are to quit,” he says. If the expanded restrictions become official policy, Wright plans to push for increased publicity for Health Services’ tobacco cessation program.

As for the future, Wright has asked the Work Group to make a formal set of recommendations before the end of the academic year, but how this recommendation will translate to official University policy is unknown. Wright is unsure if the authority to move forward with the recommendation lies with the executive vice-presidents of facilities and administrative and student services or possibly another group. “Right now I just don’t know what the answer to that is. Nobody’s ever asked a question like this,” he says. But Wright does know that whatever the Work Group does suggest, it’s crucial that it accurately reflect the opinion of the entire community. McNeil, for his part, hopes that the Work Group is able to help draft a sensible, consistent campus-wide tobacco policy, whatever that may be. Although, he qualifies, “You’re most successful when no one is happy.”

Illustrations by Liz Lee

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October/November 2009
Everyone wants to TA for Eric Foner,” said Simon Taylor, a fourth-year Ph.D. candidate who also serves as a Teaching Assistant in the History department—although not for Foner. Celebrity scholars have appeal for obvious reasons. Jenna Alden, a sixth-year history Ph.D. candidate who was fortunate enough to be assigned to Professor Alan Brinkley, explained: “I mean, it’s Brinkley—he wrote my high school history book.”

But the pool of graduate students and the number of courses in need of TAs varies from semester to semester, no one’s top choice is a lock. “There are always people who will be disappointed,” said Thai Jones, a fourth-year History Ph.D. candidate and head TA for Kenneth Jackson’s History of the City of New York class.

The process begins each spring, when academic departments send emails to all eligible graduate students informing them of the available TA positions for the following two semesters. From this list, graduate students then rank their top three choices and, based on those rankings, the department goes about matching TAs to courses.

During this academic rushing process, novice TAs (3rd year Ph.D. candidates) are on the bottom of the pile, and fourth and fifth years have seniority. This means that technically, every year prospective TAs must repeat the process, which necessarily compounds the chances of an individual being assigned an undesirable TA position. “In that sense, you’re at the mercy of the department,” said Alden.

TAs hoping to get comfortable with their academic idols are often disappointed. “I literally know no one who calls Eric Foner ‘Eric,’” said Alden. “It’s ‘Professor Foner.’ Not even people with their Ph.D.s can do it.” Alden characterized her time as a TA with Professor Eric Foner as “a pretty business-like arrangement. It’s not like you’re sitting around his office shooting the shit.” Taylor agreed: “Most grad students spend an inordinate amount of time worrying, A, if the professor like them and, B, if he thinks they’re an idiot or not.”

At Harvard, the arrangement between professors and teaching assistants takes a different form. Heavy emphasis is placed on coaching TAs to improve their teaching skills and preparing them to lead their own students once they eventually become professors. The departments track TAs before, during, and after their courses, and consultants are made available to help interpret the results of students’ course evaluations given at the end of the semester.

At Columbia, similar evaluations are distributed to students, but as Jones observed, “Professors don’t look at our evaluations at all.” Columbia’s TAs appear to have accepted this as a quirk of institutional nature. “You know, research is more important than teaching for professors here,” said Alden.

“You’re not going to have professors checking in on you,” she said. She also claimed not to have “known anything about the course material” prior to TA-ing Eric Foner’s Jacksonian Democracy course. Foner and other professors simply “assume we’re pretty decent at what we do because they don’t give us terribly much guidance,” she said. Taylor agreed: “There’s no vetting process to make sure we don’t totally suck.”
Circumstance: I invited Johannes to my private apartment for a drink and to look at the stars.
Objective: To sexually devour Johannes.
Obstacle: Johannes is in love with another woman.
Action: To seduce Johannes with alcohol, affection, humor, my intellect, play, passion, poetry.
Relationship: I am an older friend to Johannes, an adolescent. We are attracted to each other, but have not yet consummated the relationship.

Super Objective: To tear through life according to my rules and to completely satisfy my own appetite.
Center of Gravity: My hips, the sexual center of my body.
Opinion of Self: I am God.

Artifice

The theater was black, totally so, and at the center of my own row in the balcony I could see the light of the stage and nothing else; I was about to pitch forward over the railing from the crux of sheer pleasure and pain rushing to fill the emptiness. I cried, then. Never before had I cried at a piece of art, never wept at a film or sobbed over a swell of music. But here, in the dark, because I was entirely alone, I could completely give myself over to emotion. I could give myself over to this play, to these adolescents muddling through the darkness at the edge of sexual and emotional understanding in a repressed 19th century Germany.

Are all the black men in a white neighborhood undercover assassins?

Ode to a Blue Yankee Fitted

I can trace the outline of your dark blue hard-edged brim
against the dark blue New York City skyline
I can trace the outline of your N and Y intertwined
bright white like New York City lights
Your crown the cool head of
a six-figure athlete or a blinged out rapper
You grace the head of
a boy from the Dominican Republic with a bat and
dusty cap;
a boy from Marcy with a rhymebook and some rusty raps
You stood for the city in the dark, dusty time when foundations were crumbling and spirits were tested and yet
You, blue Yankee fitted, remained, unfafttering
At ease, sitting atop men’s heads
Like the team you represent, undeafeatable
A simple testament of triumph in the face of hardship

As the print media dies a slow, ink-stained death, it’s taking one of the most important visible social markers of American society to the grave with it – the morning paper. For many, and especially at Columbia, the newsprint that a person chooses is strongly indicative of his personal character; a lady of distinction would never be seen descending into the metro with AM New York (if she were forced to take the train at all), for example. Similarly, a peach-colored Financial Times pairs most suitably with the industrious investment banker (suit by Brooks Brothers), while a crisp copy of the New Yorker looks posh aside a vintage floral-print skirt and tortoise shell Ray-Bans on the taste-conscious student. As these time-tested symbols of place fill the recycling bin, how are we to tell who’s who by the news?
Seven people are standing in the small apartment on 2nd St. and Avenue C; it is time for the pre-pre-game. Your correspondent, for reasons of safety and convenience, will cling like a scared-shitless macaque to L_____, the most conservatively-dressed of the bunch, who is wearing a tan trench coat over a faded and worn cocktail dress. L_____ has mentioned (independent of anything that even slightly resembles prodding) that she has no intention of hooking up with anyone tonight, and will therefore be honored to serve as a guide/subject.

The host, an affable and handsome young man wearing canary yellow and royal blue plaid pants (and who henceforth shall be referred to as Y.B. Plaid) brings out peach Schnapps, a bong, and half a watermelon. Y.B. Plaid stands and declares that each ingredient should be consumed in rapid succession, as they do in the Czech Republic. Your correspondent, who has partied in Prague, is skeptical, but voices no objection. A man with a haircut best described as a reverse-mullet shoots his Schnapps, grabs a wedge, and, before biting, asks your correspondent if such cultural experiences are available uptown. Your correspondent, hindered only by his occasional trouble detecting irony, replies in the negative, and, together with R. Mullet, enjoys the unseasonably delicious watermelon.

The original seven have grown to about 15, and we’re in our third venue of the night, which, like the last two, is a warmly decorated Lower East Side apartment with an unverifiable number of occupants. L_____ has said that though this is technically only the pre-game, it is probably going to be the last stop. Y.B. Plaid and accomplice Pink Argyle disagree; they call L_____ a recognizable variation of feces caput, though it’s apparently in good humor.

A beer bong is brought out. Half of the crowd is nonplussed, everyone else looks bummed. L_____, whose pleasure in her role as guide/subject has surged in direct proportion to her drunkenness, sidles up. She motions to a pale girl on the couch, wearing a killer pair of checkered bell-bottoms. (Disclaimer: Your correspondent owns an embarrassing number of bell-bottoms, and is rather partial to those who actually look good in them.) C. Bellbottom, L_____ explains, vomited at the last get-together after choking on the beer bong’s tubing. C. Bellbottom appears displeased when someone starts shouting “Rematch!” (L_____, on the other hand, looks very excited.) Y.B. Plaid and P. Argyle want a falafel with fries, however, and usher us—your correspondent, a disappointed L_____, and some obscenely beautiful hipsterette—out into the hallway towards the stairs.

(Admission: Your correspondent had by this time...
developed a sizable crush on O.B. Hipsterette, who remained utterly immune to any and all come-ons, conversation attempts, clothing compliments, and completely transparent indie music references. Your correspondent is more confused than hurt by O.B. Hipsterette’s decision to make out with an apparent stranger with whom she seemed to exchange everything but words, later in the evening. Your correspondent will live, despite the heartache.)

4 October 2009; 00:02

The five of us, over french fry-filled falafels, go to a local, very crowded bar. There, a man who resembles nothing so much as a mime without makeup—bowler hat, suspenders holding up hiked-up pants, black and white horizontally striped shirt—welcomes us. It is clear he knows the group well, but he is noticeably cold toward L_____; they had had some sort of romantic entanglement. M.W. Makeup doesn’t take too kindly toward your correspondent, either, though it’s not clear why. (It’s possible that he did not appreciate your correspondent’s earnest and non-ironic compliment that he “pulled off the mime look really well.”) In any case, M.W. Makeup is very drunk—in his own words, he has “grizzled more shots than pubic hairs,” a phrase that your correspondent is not familiar with, but could, with some reflection, decipher.

P. Argyle, egged on by Y.B. Plaid, challenges M.W. Makeup to some sort of drinking game, the rules of which seem rather opaque to everyone but those three. This much is observable: one player shouts the name of a country, and the other player—after the briefest moment of shut-eyed contemplation—starts dancing. A winner is somehow decided after each round, and the loser pays for the round. Your correspondent’s best guess is that the dance must somehow represent the declared country. This would explain why M.W. Makeup has so much difficulty with “Suriname” (he eventually just grabbed his foot and hopped), while Y.B. Plaid breezes through “Ireland” with an exaggerated step routine. (In retrospect, if these are indeed the rules, “Ireland” is an unbelievably easy challenge, though in all fairness, M.W. Makeup had grizzled more shots than pubic hair.) The game doesn’t last long; few of the other patrons appreciate the erratic (nationalistic?) dances, and it is decided that we seek a dedicated dance floor.

But at which venue? This requires extensive, almost scholarly arguments re: the music. P. Argyle: “I would rather be double-fucked [sic?] by donkeys than dance to house.” Your correspondent abstains from such discourse, until it is resolved that everyone is either drunk or high enough to simply go back to Y.B. Plaid’s apartment and dance to an iPod.

4 October 2009; 02:30

The group’s dancing lasts for a solid hour, though L_____ continues for some time in what appears to be a one-person mamba line. The party is clearly winding down; P. Argyle is quasi-comatose on the sofa; O.B. Hipsterette has gone off, presumably with the aforementioned stranger; a gaggle of suspiciously young-looking students is trying to convince L_____ that she looks like William Shatner’s sister, a comparison which L_____ initially rebuffs but eventually chooses to accept as flattery. Only Y.B. Plaid is going strong; the man needs, in your correspondent’s unprofessional and unsolicited opinion, sexual release. This is not going to happen here, at his apartment. So he leaves, presumably off to another house party, offering no invitation for any of us to accompany him.

As soon as the door shuts, L_____ shouts, to nobody in particular, “Now we can start the party.”
American Idol

While Ira Glass refuses to admit that he has adoring fans or that he is a journalist’s icon, it’s hard to prove otherwise. Named best radio host in America by TIME magazine, Glass hosts NPR’s This American Life, which is broadcast on over 500 stations nationwide to some 1.8 million listeners. In his weekly interviews, Glass has covered a lot of ground—from cattle ranches to a cruiser somewhere in the Arabian Sea and everything in between. On-air success has translated into a television series, involvement in production on nearly a dozen films, and a popular book, The New Kings of Nonfiction. Still, he is most comfortable in conversation on the radio waves. Blue and White contributor Mark Hay met up with Glass at the Chelsea studios of This American Life, as production wound down on a show about the health care crisis. Glass took one look at Hay’s puny audio recorder, laughed heartily, and brought Hay in for a full-length interview in the studio’s audio booth. Readers can listen to the uncut conversation at theblueandwhite.org.

The Blue and White: What is your approach to storytelling and interviews?

Ira Glass: Stories on This American Life are narrative stories. That’s the way they’re different from a lot of things on TV or in journalism. That is, there’s a character, the character’s in a situation, there’s a plot, things happen to that character and they learn something from their experiences—or at least their experiences drive them toward some thought or some thought about the world that then they share with the audience. It’s very old school... It’s the most traditional way of telling a story.

B&W: In the past you’ve shied away from run-of-the-mill headline news stories. But I recall you in a recent episode saying that you felt bad for sitting out Kosovo.

IG: [Laughs] Yes. Well, I felt bad as a news consumer. At the beginning I didn’t get the characters straight and, “Wait, who’s who and which one is the one we like and which is the one that we’re not supposed to like?” And I kept waiting for the big New Yorker piece that was going to explain it all to me and, in fact, there even were a couple pieces like that, but then I didn’t get around to them. And I think people don’t generally talk about what our experience is as consumers of the news, but at least for me I know for sure there are entire news stories that seem too hard, and I just think, “I’m never going to figure that out.” And so I just sit it out.

And I’m not proud of it. I’m just observing it as a fact, and also in solidarity with everyone else who has to consume the news. When I moved to New York City, we’d see these stories about how they can’t get it together to actually build something at the World Trade Center site, and it just dragged on for years. And I always felt as a news consumer that [laughs] these are the most boring stories in the world, because it was all about the internecine politics of New York City and New York State and the Port Authority. Any story that includes the Port Authority is automatically boring. And I vowed to my wife that as long as I lived in New York, I would never read any of those stories. The whole, like, New York and New Jersey fighting...who cares...

B&W: It seems like that would have been perfect for you though, the New York politics... You have done a few shows where you’ve gone into, say, the rubber rooms in New York public schools. What ended up dragging you into those New York politics and all of that?

IG: Truthfully, we haven’t done that much on New York politics. It would be a good story if there was something at stake. But I don’t really know because I refuse to get involved in that story. You know what I mean, like, I’m too busy [scoffs] being obsessed with
Iraq and Afghanistan and health care and the insurance business and the collapse of Wall Street. That’s a big enough agenda for me in my news consumption.

*B&W*: Your Giant Pool of Money stories [designed to explain different components of the recent economic crisis] have been excellent recaps in addressing those problems where things get confusing. So you have been transferring some of that guilt into producing these new shows [laughs]. Where do you think that’s going to drive you?

*IG*: We’ve consciously decided as a show to take the way we tell a story—where there’s characters and scenes and funny moments and emotional stuff and all that—and apply it to stuff that’s in the news in the hope that it will make journalism be a little more engaging on those subjects. And they’re fun stories to do, and it’s really a challenge to do an entertaining hour on the writ of habeas corpus. It’s really like climbing Mount Everest. [Laughing] We did that show and …

*B&W*: I was impressed.

*IG*: It’s just interesting to try. And with the economic stories, that really came out of one of our producers not understanding the stuff he was reading and just thinking, “Well, there must be an explanation for this that makes sense.” I find often that that’s the best way—to go about trying to figure out what’s not being covered by other people. There’s a gap for us to cover. And the answer turns out to be really interesting. And I feel like asking the basic questions often drives you towards a nice story.

*B&W*: Why is that not happening more prominently in the news?

*IG*: The mission of daily journalism isn’t to explain in that way, I guess. And what we’re doing is kind of more appropriate for a weekly product than for a daily product. The thing in daily journalism that comes closest is Slate.

The mission of daily journalism is to figure out what happened today and provide a little moment of analysis, of “what does this mean?” Versus what we’re
doing, which can take months, you know? Like our take on health care—it took us from July to October to put together. I think other organizations could do it, but they have other things they’re trying to do first.

I feel like there’s a kind of news-robot language that news organizations use in reporting in general, where you feel like—especially when it gets to economic stuff—the language that they do it in is very technical and they assume that you know what they’re talking about. And they don’t step back and just explain, “What is this all about? How did we get here?” They don’t talk in a normal person’s language. And I feel like that’s one of the things that radio in particular can address. Because radio just works better for talking in normal-person’s language.

Every year, journalism loses audience to commentary and opinion and comedy. And I feel like for journalism to hold its own it has to really talk the way the commentators talk. The ideal news show right now would be one that has the tone of The Daily Show, where you feel like the host is a guy who doesn’t have any particular political axe to grind. He leans this way or that way, but he’s pretty up-front about that. He talks about the news in a normal way, like the way you would with your friends, and reacts with surprise to stuff that’s surprising and is amused by stuff that’s amusing. I think you could do, actually, a mainstream news show in that tone, or even a newspaper in that tone, where it wasn’t ... as much as I love the New York Times and read it every single day ... in the dry kind of tone of the New York Times.

B&W: So do you think that you’ll just be on radio forever then? No gentle migration toward another medium as an equal part, or maybe even more?

IG: Right now, that’s what I think. I can imagine feeling like, “Okay, we’ve done this enough years as a staff and let’s stop and let’s invent something else.” I could imagine getting attracted by another project, like a daily news broadcast with a completely different tone than anything that’s done as news now. Or even a newspaper done with a different tone. Both those seem like really exciting projects that I bet somebody will do, and there’s a part of me where I want to do it. But I can also imagine, and I also think that the most likely thing is, you know I’m better suited to this job than I am toward anything else actually. And one of the things I feel like I learn when we try to make a TV show or work on a movie is I feel like we did a really nice job for the network, and I feel like we made some nice shows, but I feel like as radio producers, I and my colleagues here, we’re as good as, if not better than, anyone in the world. If we’re not number one, we’re certainly tied with the other people who really know what they’re doing. And, whereas TV, I think there are a lot of people who know more about making TV. So these other experiences just reinforce what a nice situation we’re in with radio, where we have an audience, we know really what we’re doing, and we’re good at it.

B&W: It seems like so much of this, when you look back at the history of This American Life, the show came together just by such chance—that you would get people like David Sedaris, Sarah Vowell, yourself, all in the same studio creating something that people really want to consume. How much of what you do absolutely happens by chance?

IG: A disturbing amount of it. I met David Sedaris, for example, before he had published any books, but he was already writing, and his work was just as good then as it is now, and I just happened to be the first person to bring him to a national audience. So that’s just crazy luck.

I think a lot of making things for a living is luck. Inevitably. And I think that that’s okay, especially to make a show like ours. For us to find three or four stories that we really love enough to put on the radio, we’ll run at 15 or 20 stories and go into production on seven or eight stories and then throw out half of those. All you need is for luck to kick in on some of them.

When I was in college, I wish somebody had been more explicit about how hard it is to find ideas for stuff that you’re making. Like if you want to write songs or make movies or be a writer, or anything like that—I wish that somebody had taken me aside and said, “Okay, it seems really hard for you to come up with an idea for something. That’s appropriate [laughs]. That is really hard [laughing].” It’s
always inevitably a numbers game if you want to do something good—you surround yourself with a lot of people and a lot of ideas, and you start making your thing, and hopefully something will come forward, and you’ll get lucky. My experience is you always get lucky if you’re willful enough about it. I discovered when I was in my twenties, and I started trying to make work, that if I would spend even more hours on it, luck would kick in on some story. And then you have to be ready to throw stuff out, too. You’re making room for the better stuff that’s going to come.

**BW:** You seem to have such a great empathy, such compassion for so many different types of people. All the people that you’ve talked to on this show. Do you ever meet people who you just patently can’t stand?

**IG:** I do have a much higher tolerance for people. And it’s rare for me to meet people who I can’t stand. And this comes up all the time with my wife, where we’ll be at a party and someone will be totally annoying to her and, truthfully, to everyone. And I’ll still be thinking through the math of, like, “why are they this way?” I don’t know why that happens, it’s just how I feel.

... Should we talk at all about college at all? Because I started off at one college, at Northwestern, and I transferred halfway through to another college, to Brown, and I was really lost for a long time. Somehow I get the feeling now that people who enter college are a little more prepared than I was. Is that true?

**BW:** Almost freakishly, yes.

**IG:** Anyway, I was a terrible writer for a long time. I started at NPR when I was 19 and at the time I was a really great tape editor, but a terrible writer, terrible reporter, and I was in my late twenties before I could do that. And I find that period just really typical. I feel like, if anything, I got stuck in it longer than most people. Most people come out of it when they’re 22, 23 but I was really lost until I was 27 and was kind of a late bloomer, you know? And I wish that there had been people who had gone through that who would have said to me, “This is normal, to be lost. And to also have ambitions to make stuff, or to write.” But I would have the experience where I was making radio stories—I could tell that they weren’t that great. I could tell that they weren’t what I wanted them to be. And I didn’t know what to do.

I’m basically a pretty optimistic person, I feel like things are going to work out, but it was really rough going and my parents were 100 percent against everything that I was doing and couldn’t understand why I wasn’t getting a decent job for a smart kid—going to med school. I think a lot of people face that, too.

**B&W:** The TV show: you got some very great reviews. And that was, to me, a very heartening sign that you could transfer this radio show into another medium.

**IG:** I feel like it worked out rather nicely. I wish more of our core fan base, the people who knew us from the radio, had gotten to see the TV show, but I feel like most people didn’t migrate over. And my sense is that people just had a feeling like, “Yeah, I like those guys, but I’m good with them. You know, like I’m good. I’m getting it once a week.” [Laughs] “I don’t need anything else. Eh, pictures, whatever.”

**BW:** The last time I checked, the show *This American Life* was being beamed to New Zealand. This whole issue of the name and the discontinuity between *This American Life* and your international fan base—can you speak to that?

**IG:** To me *This American Life* is just a name. If you go into the bathroom in our office, you’ll see on the wall the piece of paper I used to take notes on while we were deciding on the name and you’ll see all the names that we rejected. And *This American Life* is written down there at the bottom somewhere in pen because it wasn’t even on the list that we came into the meeting with. We are American as reporters, and so anything we do is American. We’ve done plenty of shows overseas now; plenty of shows on people who aren’t Americans—American-ness doesn’t matter. It’s sort of like we carry that with us, it’s luggage that we can’t lose at the airport. So *This American Life,* since the show is so casual, it’s nice that the name would have a faux grandeur to it.
Columbia is not a place that encourages silliness. Students are criticized for working too hard, complaining too much, and staying in on Saturday nights.

But COÖP, the Columbia Outdoor Orientation Program, stands athwart self-seriousness and yells, “Stop!” Or, more precisely, advocates openness, goofiness, and what hiking trip—or HOP—co-coordinator Nuriel Moghavem, CC ‘11, dubs the anomalous “ability to drop everything and have fun.” After all, “that’s not something you see a lot with Columbia kids.”

COÖP, a four-day camping trip, occurs every summer before the New Student Orientation Program even begins. There are three COÖP subgenres: hiking in the Catskills, biking in Westchester County and the Hudson Valley, and canoeing down the Delaware River.

COÖP is a cult in the way that many groups at Columbia are cults. COÖP has its traditions, its own games and songs, its initiation rituals. In particular, COÖP-ers take pride in their icebreakers; one favorite is the “race car game,” in which a circle of students each make race car noises and “steer” towards one another to signal the next person should begin humming like an engine. (When this reporter asked about the race car game, a group of nine interviewees promptly offered a five-minute-long demonstration.)

COÖP leaders have their own spirit animals: “if you could have an emotional experience in which you discovered yourself, it would be in that animal’s eyes,” clarified Julie DeVries, CC’11, ROP Coordinator. COÖP has its own jargon: BOP for the biking trip (overheard at Potthuck House: “BOP kids are so full of themselves”), HOP for hiking, and ROP for river (canoeing). But for many of COÖP’s members, calling COÖP a mere cult would be an understatement of criminal proportions. COÖP is much, much more than a biannual camping trip. COÖP is a way of life.

“Our leaders consider COÖP a spirit and a group of friends, a spunkiness and a comfort level,” said Moghavem. Dhruv Vasishtha, CC ’11, a HOP leader, takes it one step further: COÖP is “a family unit.” The COÖP brood tends to travel together, often to relatively obscure events, preferably in outer boroughs. He explained: “There’s only a certain type of person on this campus who could say, ‘Hey, do you want to go to Brooklyn? It’s 3 a.m.; it could be fun!’”

Other colleges have comparable programs, but none have the element of geographical escape that COÖP offers. Going camping and returning to a campus like Dartmouth’s is not quite as novel as biking through upstate New York and arriving home to 116th and Broadway. Janaye Pohl, a sophomore ROP leader gushed: “It’s just amazing to be without a cell phone or an iPod or a book or a computer for four days and just enjoy the beauty of nature.” Diana Clarke, a first-year HOP-er, said she was simply excited for a “last dose of nature before coming to the city.”

For some, the relatively dramatic change of scenery is emblematic of a larger departure that COÖP offers. “I have to say COÖP for me is sort of an escape,” said Javi Plasencia, CC ’11 and BOP leader. Mogahvem describes the end-of-year Spring Trip, during which new leaders are trained, as a “catharsis” from a year at school. Of course, everyone still has homework—it’s just that they don’t talk about it all the time. “At the end of the year, there’s nothing like knowing at the end of the tunnel of all those exams that there’s a trip in the middle of woods with your closest friends,” he said.

Academia still follows COÖP-ers into the forest—“We were having discussions about literature and philosophy when we were half-naked in a river with life jackets on,” recalled Gabriel Moyer-Perez, CC ’11, a ROP leader—but its COÖP that trails its members back to Morningside even more. On their first night at Columbia, before they travel to their respective camping locations, first-years sleep on South

A degree of Columbia love is all but required for a COÖP leaders, or “parents,” who chronicle their college experiences to their campers (“babies”) before the other first-years even arrive for Convocation. Vasishtha acknowledges that “to a certain extent you have to genuinely believe that the school you go to is really awesome. You have to convey that to these kids, that the Core really helped me out, I enjoyed being in New York.” Simply put, “you can’t have COÖP without Columbia,” said Roxanne Unger, CC ’11, HOP leader.

Earnest, honest-to-god school spirit was alive and well at the end of one HOP group’s trip this summer. “We were hanging out in Phoenicia [HOP base camp in upstate New York] and all of a sudden we hear the Columbia fight song,” Moghavem recalled. “We looked over in the distance, and we saw a group of COÖPers with their backpacks on, sprinting, with twenty or thirty pounds on their back, singing ‘Roar, Lion, Roar’...They ran in singing the whole way. It was absolutely badass.”

An almost overwhelming earnestness and optimism about COÖP does not mean that nothing goes wrong; it just seems to go right again very quickly. This year, it rained. “The roads were slippery, the brakes were shoddy... but by the end of that night we had constructed a Hooverville for 50 people and were dishing out mac and cheese,” said Plasencia. “There was one freshman who was like, ‘This sucks,’ and an hour later he was biking up a mountain in the pouring rain. I was driving next to him playing him music and he just turned to me and said, ‘I’m so happy right now,” said Sari Ancel, BOP Coordinator, CC ’10.

It’s the sort of liberation only possible when unbreakable rules are in place. “Don’t judge” seems to be the most pervasive one. “Right from the start we create this aura of no judgment,” said Joanna Farley, CC ’11 and ROP leader, “we make freshmen feel more at home and help them realize that for the next few days it doesn’t matter who they are.” In fact, COÖP-ers take great pleasure in absurdity. “On this trip, you just make a fool out of yourself,” DeVries admitted, “that’s what camping is.” Another, relatively more official COÖP law is “no amorous conduct on the trip.” Or, to borrow a COÖP-speak catchphrase, “Our love is intense, but not in our tents.”

Floorcest will have to wait until NSOP, a week that inspires skepticism on behalf of COÖP-ers. “NSOP week,” Moyer-Perez said, “you meet a lot of people and shake their hands. On COÖP you get to share where you’re from, as opposed to, ‘Hi, I’m this, what’s your phone number?’” After Fall Trip, leaders and coordinators have NSOP week off to celebrate COÖP parties, raucous as they can be, are still “bacchanals with a little b,” Moghavem clarified. “I’ve never seen anything like it at Columbia. Maybe that’s what a frat party is like.”
To see the festivities that marked last year’s 40th anniversary of the 1968 student strikes, one might think that Columbia’s brush with militant student activism was a critical but singular chapter in the University’s history. Called “the center of reflection for Columbia’s history in the late 20th century” by University historian Robert McCaughey, the episodes in April 1968 of building occupations, riots, and protests have become enshrined as one legendary moment. It’s an apotheosis aided by the sheer number of commemorative conferences, seminars, articles, and references in popular media like the 2007 film Across the Universe.

While Columbia notables may have spent the spring of 2008 toasting the veterans of the 1968 strikes, no one raised a glass this year to honor the leaders of the 1969 building occupations, nor are there plans for next spring to celebrate 40 years passing since the strikes of 1970. In fact, a whole era of Columbia strikes stretching from 1969 to the mid-1970s will likely receive little campus commemoration. Thanks to ideological struggles between the protesters themselves and the overwhelming successes of 1968, this turbulent phase of student radicalism at Columbia may be lost to history.

Perhaps the root of this memory lapse lies in the lack of measurable success by subsequent protests. The 1968 strikes can at least be credited with shutting down the University’s plans to construct a gym in Morningside Park; no similar accomplishment can be found for the later strikes. They may have simply had the misfortune of timing, for militant activism’s popular support waned quickly among students following the University shutdown. As a Columbia Daily Spectator editorial commented in September 1968, “While the tension on campus persists, the confluence of circumstances that made last spring’s demonstrations possible no longer exists... SDS has become ingrown to the point where its members have lost their ability to relate to students.” In that same issue, the Spectator noted that “a faction known as the Labor Committee, which believes in building alliances with the community and with workers” opposed Rudd’s plan for continued confrontation.

That did not stop the Student Afro-American Society from launching the first of the “sequel” strikes in the spring of 1969, almost a year to the day since the initial wave of unrest hit Columbia’s campus. SAS took over the admissions office in Hamilton Hall and demanded African-American control of the admissions process for black undergraduates, but after two days and the possibility of arrest, the students relinquished control of the building. The Spectator editorial had been prescient: SAS’s demands had indeed been met with stiff opposition from much of the student body. Further strike attempts that year—including a temporary occupation of Mathematics and Fayerweather by SDS—only deepened the rift between activists and the rest of the campus, which began to resent the militant tactics.

Cracks within the groups began to grow, too, as the 1969 strikes failed to produce results. By the following year, the SDS split into two wings, and racial tensions led SAS to pull its support for “any white radical organization.” This kind of internal disunity ultimately
undermined every following protest, occupation, or strike, even when external conditions—like President Richard Nixon’s 1972 decision to end student deferments for draftees—stirred massive unrest on campus. In the last building occupation of May 1972, attendance flagged to the point where strikers were forced to end the protest.

Given the string of unsuccessful strikes, it is not surprising that popular history has forgotten 1968’s stillborn siblings. “For historians, there’s a necessary lag, and for journalists, the focus tends to be on momentous events,” says McCaughey, who notes that the later protests do not fit neatly into the clean, “Year of Revolution” narrative that dominates many accounts of 1968. Without charismatic student leaders like Mark Rudd, heavy-handed administration reaction, or the novelty of being the first strike, the activism of the 1969-1972 period ends up reading like a story without a hero, villain, or climax.

The strikers themselves, however, maintain that they did make an impact on the University’s history, and possibly even American history. “They focused the media on what was going on in Vietnam, and it forced people to pick a side on the war, with most ending up against it,” says Jarvis Kellogg, CC ’73 and a University Senator during the ’72 strike.

Some of their schoolmates disagree about the long-term effects. “Much-needed change came to America out of that era, but the grandiose delusions of the revolutionary Left were deeply pernicious and destructive,” says Paul Starr, CC ’70 and a Spectator editor-in-chief, who condemned the protesters’ use of confrontational tactics. That the later protests are not remembered is not necessarily a bad thing in Starr’s view. McCaughey agrees: “If they were trying to put the university in a bad light, they succeeded... Pretty much everyone at Columbia came out of the era in worse light—the professors looked irresolute, the administration ham-handed, the students rude and confrontational.”

1968 will always have first place in Columbia’s history books. However, despite their lack of notoriety, the protests of 1969-72—during which protesters sought to replicate the earlier movement’s spirit and successes but proved unable to repair their inherent flaws—are key to understanding the powerful effects of those first and most famous actions of ’68. •
MEASURE FOR MEASURE

BY DALTON LABARGE

SELF PORTRAIT AS SEA MONSTER

Together we left the Greater Olympia Bigfoot Enthusiasts group for something simpler. I took to sea alone.

Avoid the ship lanes, the tangle and first things first: master the float. Cold, like any departure, is something you reconcile with time and there’s all the time in the world to drift so long as you meet no shore. Shores mean carcass, concerned crowds, media.

No threatened ship when I came by accident; to earn your place stuffed for expo one would have to be bigger than its captors or Jurassic. Tentacles, no. All brain, no gill. I am guilty of nothing but fleeing south. Rewards, no. Palest flopper in a net of royal mackerels; fisherman have no use for me. Take my hands for soup, toss the rest. Flashlights on deck, all hands to.

ON CONSUMING

I am learning quickly how to take you without nourishment, to live where you point to the temple. Two weeks it has taken me to unravel you though you peeled me from the rind out in so little time.

Slender fingers, like white noise, break open mermaid purses on the beach. I am writing this close to dark waiting for a song. Cacma baboons are known for their unusual appetite, shark eggs for their silence.
When Columbia’s Model United Nations met for a General Assembly in Lerner Hall, the delegates were not content to merely present their position papers and go through the motions, as it were. To spice up a debate over Catalanian independence, they staged a hostage situation. As the business-suited ambassadors parsed policy in a conference room, a terrorist—clad in head-to-toe camouflage and a balaclava—Skyped his demands from a public computer in the hallway. “Ah-lee-thee-ah,” he informed a Catalan delegate, “we have your lover, Ricardo. You have my phone number, so just let me know when you’re ready to discuss ending the economic embargo.” Ricardo was sequestered in the Student Government Office, and allowed momentary Internet access. “Por favor,” he implored through the computer screen, “get me out of here.” Minutes later, a band of diplomats and terrorists, bearing water guns and rubber ammo, stormed the office. Their demands were unclear. “Do you all know the lyrics to West Side Story?” one asked the group. Of the improbable situation, the Blue and White can only conclude that if teenage gangsters can sing about love, then diplomats can, too.

At Morton Williams, a girl in a T-shirt reading STOP AHMADINEJAD’S EVIL started a campaign against evil of her own.

Girl: “It’s like, slave labor! This guy is, like, ‘Stand up straight, get your hands out of your pockets, smile when you’re making phone calls!’”

From an e-mail sent by Barnard’s Senior Associate Director of College Activities:

“Yesterday, an e-mail intended only for the Senior Class was sent out to the entire community in error. We are very conscious of the amount of e-mails you receive and are mindful not to overload your inbox. I apologize for this mistake and ensure that this will not happen again.”

Barnard’s entire student body was, of course, thrilled to see the situation remedied. In their inboxes. Again.

Upon entering the classroom for his senior seminar in Comparative Literature and Society, Professor Hamid Dabashi’s first question was, “Is this table off center?” The roomful of women, comfortably seated around the heavy, wooden table, glanced nervously at each other, as if to find assurance that the question was rhetorical. Alas, it was not. “Please center this table,” he demanded. After a spirited, “1-2-3-Lift!” the tabletop was somehow severed from its base, which tipped and crushed the flip-flopped foot of a student. She asked if anyone might have a cold drink to ice her rapidly swelling toes, but no one did. Professor Dabashi responded swiftly, grabbing his iPhone and placing a call to his office. “Tell them to send someone or Columbia’s gonna have 15 lawsuits on its hands,” he said, adding to the class that it never hurts to overstate one’s case. Five minutes later, when a Public Safety officer arrived, he was proven wrong.

“They said you ladies was holding up the table with your hands,” the guard stated. The table, by now, stood on its own, and 15 pairs of feet shuffled awkwardly beneath it.

“So I just ran over here for nothing?” Some mumbled
apologies from the students, who cast their glances aside as the officer excuses himself.

“Sorry about the humor, too,” he offered, departing.

“Not to worry, everything is cool,” replied Professor Dabashi, who appeared markedly more laid-back for the rest of the session.

Overheard at the Heights:

Man, to female companion: “How could we be so different? Because I’m a sexual Tyrannosaurus Rex.”

Overheard on the Steps:

Grad student: “Really, who needs the Oscars? If you’re doing good work, you’re doing good work. Do you watch any art cinema from Southeast Asia?”

On a recent sunny evening, a B&W staffer and her younger sister strolled through Washington Square Park to appreciate the human furniture. There was a slight chill in the air, but an anachronistic-looking couple was gallivanting in the fountain. He wore corduroys with suspenders; she, a lacy white dress.

“Look, hippies!” exclaimed the naïve younger sister.

“Those are hipsters,” corrected her wizened companion. The two turned, saw a camera crew capturing the fountain antics, and the younger sister corrected her mistake.

“Oh, hipsters. They’re being filmed.”

Overheard in a Broadway crosswalk, a mother and her second-grade son recounted the school day as they walked home from the Catholic school on 114th Street:

Boy: “Then Amanda called me ugly!”
Mother: “And what did you say?”
Boy: “Well, I told her she had no fashion sense.”

The B&W supposes that’s the Upper West Side’s version of “nanny-nanny-boo-boo.”

Each year the Metropolitan Museum of Art hosts a fancy-dress party for college students. This year the theme was Gatsby—“West Egg on the East Side.” Flapper girls in plumage flirted in front of an orange-lit Temple of Dendur. But anachronisms abounded. Tattoos peeked over necklines. One could identify the 12 heterosexual men present by the inadequacy of their costumes—most appeared to be wearing their suits from prom. Frustrated by the meandering beats of the jazz trio, one partygoer asked another: “Do you think they know ‘Get Low’?” But when the two returned, after a tour through the new American Wing, the trio had packed up, and Coolio’s “Ooh La La” was blaring over the ancient Egyptian sanctuary.

2008 was the year of vice-presidential debate-themed drinking games, but 2009 is an off year for political parties, strictly speaking. A suite in Plimpton, uninspired by the New Jersey and Virginia gubernatorial races, picked a Civil War theme. The floor was bisected by a duct-tape Mason-Dixon line. The theme did not extend much further than this, though a sign on the closet door advertised, “Four Score and Seven Minutes in Heaven!”

Meanwhile, a troop of freshmen decided to put on a “problem-set party.” A B&W writer overheard their plans.

Frosh 1: Let’s go to Morton Williams to get the Schnapps.
Frosh 2: Dude, it’s not Schnapps. It’s Schweppes.

A keg...it’s been tapped!