Foreign Aid
What Columbia’s need-aware policy means for international applicants

The Washington Diarist
A conversation with Leon Wieseltier
THE BLUE AND WHITE

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LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

Nineteen is an odd number. Stephen King was obsessed with it, for one thing. For another, 19 echoes 1999 and the expectant pause right before a significant numerical shift.

At 19 years of age, you might have a past self (or two) that differs significantly from yourself as you are now. You might pity, miss, or even loathe your past selves. At 19 years of age, adolescence isn’t such a distant memory, but your college identity is still in flux. At 19 years of age, you certainly haven’t peaked yet, but neither do your knees bend quite like they did at nine (and your brain certainly recognizes a “hangover”).

Volume XIX commences with this issue of The Blue and White. But the magazine is neither 19, nor 123, years old. The Blue and White was founded in 1890, un-founded in 1893, and re-founded in 1998.

A lot has happened since 1998: Lerner, for one thing, and Bwog, for another. (Which is now seven—the meaning of which we leave to the reader.) In the years since 1998, The Blue and White has changed its voice, layout, and style. But it has not changed its mission.

Former Editor Sidney Treat, CC 1893, intended for the magazine “to give bright and newsy items, which are of interest to all of us, combined with truthful comments on the same, in order to show clearly the exact tone of the College.” We still do, and at Barnard and the School of Mines, too.

So: this is Volume XIX, Issue 1. Learn how international applicants are affected by Columbia’s need-aware policy (p. 16). See what a global university really looks like (p. 18). Read a conversation with Leon Wieseltier (p. 26). If you like (or hate) what you read, or want to contribute, write us at editors@theblueandwhite.org.

– Conor Skelding

TRANSATIONS

ARRIVALS
Lately, James Franco
Catholic guilt
The documentary Beyoncé made about herself
Sam Adams Alpine Spring
The omnipresence of Lena Dunham
An overambitious Marco Rubio

DEPARTURES
Forest Whitaker’s dignity
Zeta Beta Tau
30 Rock
Sam Adams Winter Ale
Your chance at avoiding another lonely Valentine’s Day
Your chance at avoiding another lonely President’s Day

REVELATION OF THE MONTH
“People who go to Mel’s are a certain kind of people supplying a certain kind of good.”

– Philip Ross, CC ’14, brother of Delta Sigma Phi, and financial economics major, as quoted in The Eye
Sometimes, after too much Tennyson, one cannot choose what to make for dinner, let alone what to make of one’s life. The Blue and White is no stranger to such malaise—the psychologists call it “decision fatigue.” But the fault isn’t in you—it’s in your stars. Therefore, we’ve consulted your stars, and arrived at the following horoscopes, just for you, Columbia.

Aries: What would your high school friends think if they saw you wearing that?
Columbia Aries: Nicholas Murray Butler, Whittaker Chambers, (James) Franco

Taurus: Speak your latent conviction, and it shall be the universal sense.
Columbia Tauruses: Lee C. Bollinger

Gemini: True friends appear less moved than counterfeit.
Columbia Gemini: Debora Spar

Cancer: Accept them as they are, or move on. They’re not going to change for you.
Columbia Cancers: John Jay, Lionel Trilling

Leo: Greatness isn’t achieved by those who yield to popular opinion.
Columbia Leos: Barack Obama

Virgo: Quote others only to better express yourself.
Columbia Virgos: Alexander Hamilton, R. Glenn Hubbard, Meyer Schapiro

Libra: You are not here merely to make a living. You impoverish yourself if you forget that.
Columbia Libras: John Dewey

Scorpio: You’ll finally be content, once you have that thing you really want.
Columbia Scorpios: King George II, Edward Said

Sagittarius: You ought to take a nap. Not for too long, though. You never know what might go wrong in the meantime.
Columbia Sagitariuses: The earliest surviving copy of The Blue and White

Capricorn: Wise students speak because they have something to say; fools because they have to say something.
Columbia Capricorns: Saskia Sassen

Aquarius: Try saying what you mean, in joke form.
Columbia Aquariuses: Isaac Asimov, Eric Foner

Pisces: If a dog will not come to you after having looked you in the face, you should go home and examine your conscience.
Columbia Pisces: Ruth Bader Ginsberg, Jack Kerouac

All star signs alert: You should get away from your computer more.
"Excuse me," I said, as I turned to a stern woman in her Sunday best. "Could you point me in the direction of the bell tour?"

"Honey, we do bells after we thank the Lord." I was pointed toward a familiar wooden pew, and seated for services. The choir began to sing and a congregation’s worth of eyes silently impelled me to stand.

An hour and fifteen minutes later, as I heard the bells—the carillon—I had found a reason to thank the Lord.

A carillon is a set of bells played in harmony by a keyboard and stacked in a kind of tree house, each bell nestled into a branch. Riverside’s carillon is the world’s largest. Donated by John D. Rockefeller, the set consists of over 70 bells, the heaviest weighing in at 20 tons, or approximately 12 elephants. And if that doesn’t interest you, Pantha du Prince (first described to me as “dope electronic muzak”) used the bells on his last record, “Elements of Light,” lending a depth to what might otherwise be typical techno. But these are just fun facts: to know the bells, you must hear the bells. They’re loud. They’re confident. They’re their own orchestra.

Walking along with my tour group, I didn’t expect much. To paraphrase Dr. Seuss, I figured that bells were bells no matter how large. But boy, was I wrong. When the carillon plays, it begins like any set of church bells, but quickly grows into something deeper, with each overlapping ring creating a sound so mesmerizing and so complicated that even the Hunchback himself would pause to take it in.

And if the bells weren’t enough, Riverside’s carillonneur (yes, that’s his official title) is one of only a few in the world able to ring the bells properly. No word on his annual salary. If at first the idea of a certified bell-ringer seems funny, after hearing him perform, it’s anything but.

—Katie Donahoe

"Why, yes, I know the story well: the paintings are post-WWII constructions—"

“You’re a post-WWII construction. Be more specific.”

“It’s post-WWII, that’s all I know! They were made to represent the struggle of America to come back from war and rebuild their lives from the dust of inhumanity.”

“You’re pulling this out of your ass, aren’t you?”

Of course he’s pulling this out of his ass; no one knows what 1020’s twin murals mean or where they came from. Indeed, few of 1020’s patrons even notice the paintings.

On the left is a propeller plane that looms over the viewer; on the right stands a cavernous train station. In dark shades of brown and beige, they are indistinct from the bar’s wood paneling. Although they cover a huge amount of wall space and must have...
taken some time and effort to bring to life, they do not beg for attention. But the incisive, if temporarily clouded, minds of Columbia are eager to analyze it.

“It has to be about the Industrial Revolution, right? I mean look at all the smoke. It’s definitely about the struggle of the working class. Think about it—we’re in a bar! Bars are all about the working class!”

Asked late one afternoon, bouncer Alejandro admits from behind the mostly empty bar that he, too, has no idea why they are there. Alejandro was at 1020 when they first went up around 1995 (post-WWII, indeed), but no current employees can say why.

“And it’s not like they’ve done much more with the place,” he jokes, gesturing to the otherwise sadly decorated and rotted walls.

Alejandro did reveal one detail that I’m sure no student has noticed: each painting has “1020” written on it. The plane on the left has serial number “1020” printed in two lines on its nose, and, in the train station, the hands of the clock read “10:20,” mirroring the real clock behind the bar which also always reads “10:20.” Suspended in time and space, I can only hope the paintings remain for years to surprise those patrons who brag of their perfect familiarity with the bar.

—Alexandra Svokos

Every year, 20,000 visitors flock to the 200-year old country estate of founding father Alexander Hamilton, located at 414 West 141st Street. Officially the Hamilton Grange National Memorial, the word “incongruous” doesn’t quite capture the manner in which this building sits on the gentle hill of St. Nicholas Park, bound on all four sides by a typical Harlem streetscape. Constructed in 1802, a three-story, neoclassical structure, the Grange bears its ostracism with quiet dignity.

It’s startling to imagine that the area we now know as West Harlem used to be an expanse of lush countryside, an upstate retreat that provided an escape for those who felt battered by the clamor and depravities of the city. Although the Grange wasn’t particularly opulent for its time, certain aspects of the Grange flaunt Hamilton’s taste for luxury: the green walls of his study are, according to one of the rangers, an expression of wealth he didn’t have. (Green was apparently the most expensive color of paint at the beginning of the 19th century.) The rooms also contain a conspicuously large collection of art, including one bust of Hamilton himself—apparently another thing he could barely afford. He coughed up the cash only when the sculptor threatened to sell the bust to somebody else.

A brief chat with the ranger revealed that the Grange has been involved in an “ongoing feud” between The Hamilton Society and The Burr Society. The members of the Hamilton Society once postponed their visit to the Grange when they learned that fans of Aaron Burr, the man who fatally shot Hamilton in a duel in 1804, had arranged a trip to the site on the same day. For those with an underdeveloped knowledge of important duels in American history, Hamilton accepted Burr’s challenge in order to preserve his honor, deliberately misaimed his shot because he was morally opposed to murder, and was promptly shot for his humanity. (Incidentally, he left his wife in poverty because of the debt he had accrued by building the Grange.)

Next time you need an inspirational lift, take some lessons from an old alum: study hard, go green, die for honor, live beyond your means. And definitely commission a bust of yourself.

—Sally Gao
Evan Welber, CC ’13, has traveled the world with greater breadth than a typical college senior. He could go about rattling off his many achievements and adventures—but he doesn’t. Instead, the Political Science and Social Anthropology double major’s broad smile invites one to see a person with a “quiet persistence” and “eclectic interests, warmth, and intelligence,” according to his close friend, Yanyi Luo, CC ’13.

If you were on campus three years ago, you might have known Evan as “the mustache guy.” His full handlebar mustache made him famous among his fellow freshman. (NSOP first-years were then heard drunkenly singing, “Do you know the mustache man, the mustache man, the mustache man?”)

After he permitted a begging hairstylist to shave it off, Evan exclaims, “People didn’t even recognize me!” Though his CUID still features his former facial hair, today he is more widely known for his ability to start up conversations in one of the over ten languages he’s studied, or for organizing Polyglot Bar NYC on West 72nd, where “anyone who speaks any language” can come to fine-tune their skills.

But, just as three years ago there was a person behind his mustache, today Evan isn’t just “the language guy.” “That’s still really pigeonholing,” he says. You might have seen Evan playing percussion for a Middle Eastern ensemble (he’s also trained in the flute and classical saxophone) or maybe you unwittingly heard campus groups performing works he composed. You might have come across his Couchsurfing profile—through which he’s hosted a photographer from Mecca and a Korean/Brazilian fashionista from São Paolo. Maybe you’ve been in his East Campus suite, adorned with maps of the world, national flags, and hundreds of empty glass bottles. There, he hosts Balkan Bar Mitzvahs, Middle Eastern ragers, and other themed parties.

Evan’s breadth of experiences is impressive; he is an adventurer. He made it through the first few rounds of auditions for “The Real World” his freshman year, even traveling to D.C. for one of the rounds before they found out that he had shaved his mustache (and didn’t permit him to advance to the next round. “I was just such a commodified mustache,” he laughs.) He’s taught English in China, shared a two-bedroom apartment in Mauritius with nine people, and interned for UNESCO, though Evan doesn’t belong at a desk. “I mean, [UNESCO] was in Paris and I went to all of these fancy parties, but it wasn’t super interesting or fulfilling,” he says.

During this past summer in Nepal, he couldn’t travel to his internship for half of his stay because...
roads were blockaded during the dispute over the country’s constitution—and that was Evan’s favorite internship, the one that spurred his interest in helping post-conflict countries develop their legal and political institutions. “Evan genuinely loves the world,” Yanyi proclaims. “He will bring delight and real change somewhere.” As Evan puts it, “I really value learning new things through new people.”

If you don’t know Evan, you only have a few more months before he graduates and leaves, perhaps to teach at the Tajikistan Academy of Sciences or work in the public sector. “Obviously my number one aspiration is to live happily ever after, but other than that, I don’t know,” he said about his future. “I’m all about these random experiences.”

—Sarah Thompson

KARISHMA HABBU

A red knee-length peacoat, white fluffy earmuffs, and matching white gloves: that was Columbia College Student Council President Karishma Habbu’s uniform for three winters at Columbia. “Oh god, how do you know about that?” she grimaced when I bring it up over coffee. “I came home for winter break last year and my mom said it had to go.” The coat, now replaced with a retro military jacket, was purchased as a bit of downtown retail therapy after Habbu bombed her Orgo final freshman year. “You could say I found love in a hopeless place,” she mused.

Even if you don’t recognize Karishma by her red coat, if you’ve ever met her there’s a good chance she recognizes you. “I have this thing for names and faces. And know I will say ‘Hi’ to literally anyone and everyone; they can’t get away.” She added, laughing, “It made NSOP a little awkward.”

You may also recognize her name from the weekly CCSC emails to all Columbia College students, or the countless initiatives she has worked on with an eye to improving student life at Columbia. As a four-year member, Karishma has spearheaded many CCSC initiatives—including gender-neutral housing, financial aid reform, the Student Wellness Project (SWP), and the Turbovote voter registration drive.

“She’s at meetings constantly,” added Karishma’s roommate, Fiona Kinniburgh, CC ’13. “Karishma really feels like she has a responsibility to the whole student body. She sees it as a real opportunity to enact change.”

“She is the most ‘student council’ person I have ever met. She might as well bleed light blue,” said Will Hughes, CC ’13 and CCSC VP Policy.

“I got Karishma for CCSC Secret Santa, and gave her pink lace panties with ‘PREZBU’ written on them in rhinestones, which opening in front of a room of people of course left her completely mortified,” Hughes related. “But she has taken to wearing them when she goes out. Which is the clearest example I can think of her slowly accepting the nickname I gave her in the campaign.”

She’s “a gem of a person,” Hughes concluded. “But,” he warned, “don’t let her bubbly nature fool you into not taking her seriously. She knows how to get things done with a smile on her face and, because of that, has managed to charm the pants off every administrator in the school.”

When I asked Karishma what advice she would give herself as a freshman, she responded without a second’s hesitation: “Calm down, chill out. Freshman year was a low for me. I didn’t have a lot of friends, got bad grades, was lost in terms of how to handle pre-med. It was a matter of coming down from the high expectations I had from high school.”

And asked to name a high point during her time at Columbia, Karishma came up with an answer just as quickly. She explained: “The feeling of walking into my first Lerner Pub this year—oh my god. Something like 250 people showed up and I was just so happy to be with these people. It was like a middle school dance party.”

—Grace Rosen
I like to have the blinds up.

It’s nice to be able to look out the window, isn’t it? To see the vernal hornbeams lining the street, little boys and girls playing tag on their way to school, the sunshine—it’s all out there when you have the blinds up, like an extension of the room. When they’re down, my space feels so small and dark. Cut off, you know? It feels like the whole world is just me, my stress candles, and all my little daily worries. I forget the hornbeams—I forget what it’s all about. The eyes, they say, are the windows to the soul. But the window is also...a kind of eye.

Like an eye, a window is the vital link between you and the outside world—as long as you’re inside. Those hornbeams aren’t just “the view.” I have a relationship with these trees. One glimpse and—I don’t just see bark—I see where I am, where I’m going: I am in my dorm room; I’m going to continue looking at these trees. With the blinds down—I mean—how am I supposed to know what season it is? I don’t have fucking x-ray vision, Carrie.

Having the blinds up reminds me of my place in the universe.

But a window doesn’t just let you look—no, a window is really two eyes. Or two eyeballs...looking at each other. I like knowing that it goes both ways. That while I’m looking out, someone could be peering in, penetrating my interiority. In that way, the window is a means of communication. There’s nothing like that connected feeling you get when, late at night, you’re doing some casual surveillance, and suddenly find yourself looking straight down the tubes of someone else’s binoculars. You can’t look away. You have a perfect moment, staring at each other. That’s the kind of experience you’ll never have with the blinds down.

And that’s the kind of experience you’re supposed to have. As a human being, I know why we build walls between our neighbors—warmth, protection—but hiding’s not in our nature. Do animals hide? Obviously not. And we’re just animals, baby. Walls are a symptom of our collective neurosis: our need to build walls. In other words: they’re an illusion. It’s through seeing and being seen that we develop a sense of who we are. That we determine the boundary between our community and ourselves. Was I “paying attention” in class that week? Public, private, nature, self-knowledge—it’s all the same thing.

If it were up to me, we wouldn’t even have windowpanes. Just open air. That’s why I usually leave my windowajar. Let me tell you, on Sunday mornings, when the sun starts streaming in, one of my favorite things is to stand on my windowsill and lean out into the new day. There’s nothing like that crisp air, the subtle breeze over my genitalia, the faces of people walking below...it really puts you in touch with your environment—with the people in your world. Sometimes, even when I’m not physically masturbating, the visual bond I form with those pedestrians, making that weird Sunday morning face, excites me to climax.

So come on, baby. Don’t be afraid. I want them to see all the freaky things I’m going to do to your asshole.
Let’s keep the blinds down.

To live in New York is to live in a series of interiors, scurrying from one room to the next. Really, to live is to peek into a series of interiors—the thoughts of others, our subconscious, our souls. Think about the language we use to talk about ourselves: “innermost feelings,” “deepest secrets,” “the core of my being.” We should embrace these walls as the physical manifestation of our perceptions’ horizons. To close the blinds is an act of humility. We should feel it. More importantly, we should feel each other. Take your binoculars for example: they let you see who’s far away, showering, but they make it impossible for you to see me, Carrie, sitting right here in front of you, trying to shower you in affection. I’ve got a place you can bury those daily worries and it’s right here between my—

Stop opening the blinds! You know what else they say about eyes? You gotta keep them on the prize, and the prize is sitting right here, directly opposite your window. You’ve got to exchange that telescope for a microscope and focus. On me. Just like you did the time I caught you staring at my belly-button ring from across that crowded Carman room. There’s nothing more attractive than a navel-gazer.

Now I see you looking out that window thinking that making crazed eye-contact with a passing stranger somehow makes you part of a “community.” But before you can enter any sort of public, you have to make crazed eye-contact with the strangers that lurk within—past lives, suppressed memories, the ghosts of secret fears. Then you’re going to have to think long and hard about the division between the public and the private. But all that soul-searching doesn’t have to happen now. Really, I would prefer you to be unthinking, long, and hard. And if you would just close the blinds you could resolve a division currently keeping you out of a different kind of “private space.”

Would you stop opening the blinds? I know you like to admire the greenery outside, but I too am like a flower: unique, easy to bruise emotionally, and in desperate need of affirmation. Take a note from Georgia O’Keeffe: nature is most beautiful when you notice its subtle intricacies and genital resemblance. Think of me as a fleshy mirror up to nature. It doesn’t even have to be subtle, I can be a “penis fly-trap.” Just let me catch you in my folds. Is that a tree growing in Brooklyn or are you just happy to see me?

Do you even see me?

Haven’t you studied the panopticon? Your sense of self is so firmly subjugated to the gaze of disciplinary society that you can’t even appreciate your fucking hornbeams without the possibility of being watched by others. This is not the hot kind of Discipline and Punishment. Didn’t you pay attention? The sexual liberation myth is just that, a myth. Your exhibitionist act of defiance only further colonizes your body. But I know some organs of power I think we can subjugate and I have a plan to free us from biopower. You can start by freeing me from these jeans, you can start by just looking, damnit.

No? Fine. The only thing you’re about to “come on” is the window pane, asshole.
What state, my discerning reader, surpasses solitude? What transcends the bliss of spending one’s time in the best of company—i.e., one’s own. One finds that one seldom disagrees with oneself, or is disagreeable with oneself, despite the mumblings of one or two addled psychologists. And since one is known by the company he keeps, V. can hardly do better than to be known for and by himself.

All this is not to say that V.V. is unsociable. In fact, he’s been long searching for the true, bonded Aristotelian friendship, two bodies sharing the same soul. (It only happens that he’s as yet had better luck with one soul, one body.)

Verily Veritas had been having a mostly-pleasant time with his most recent, mostly-civilized roommate. Chuck Kelsey, who’d roomed with V.V. this past fall, was a plain-spoken gentleman. He did not mind the records V.V. played. (V. can assuredly go an entire semester listening repeatedly, and only, to the “Threnody for the Victims of Hiroshima.”) His opinions, if V. were to generously call them such, were unobjectionable and unexceptional. Occasionally, he would politely cough at old V.’s neuroses: each time old V. rearranged the volumes of The Rise and Fall of the Roman Empire, a quiet clearing of the throat invariably followed.

This arrangement, like all good arrangements in this world, did end. It being the coming thing, Kelsey had gone abroad for the spring term, to study at a foreign university. (Kelsey was a student of an un-Christian number of southeastern Asian languages, and so had seasonally migrated to the Orient.)

But even Kelsey, who got along passably with V.V., was only milk and water next to the great roommate of Verily’s life: Peter Cross. They had blissfully boarded together at Devon. For years, their friendship grew steadily, entirely un-jounced and unhindered. Late into the night, the pair planned and simulated their escapades. With V.V. masterfully scheming the ruses and Peter smoothly improvising, they headed a gang that pulled so many of the school’s aptly proverbial strings!

Naturally, V.V. had no desire for a new roommate. Nor did he readily possess a friend in need of a roommate with whom he could live pleasantly. Accordingly, he composed an assiduously footnoted letter to Housing. It demonstrated—patiently and irrefutably—that V.V. possessed at least twice the personhood of at least half of the sorry student bastards, and therefore deserved at least twice the normal amount of Lebensraum.

But perhaps one ought not have expected the administrative deanlets of Columbia to comprehend semiotics, and his letter went unanswered.

Housing printed out and mailed to V.V. what his new roommate, Sandy, had evidently sent to him via electronic mail. The message read:

Hey, man, totally looking forward to living with you. A little about me: I’m from NorCal, lived there all my life, I’m addicted to boarding, and I’m so excited to check out the East Coast. Though it seems pretty crusty!! When I’m not boarding, I’m chilling. You know what’s up. What about you? Couldn’t find anything about you on google haha. ok, later. –Sandy

V.V. had his suspicions—and every last, sordid one of which was confirmed when this Sandy—this stranger in a strange land, this dissipated Californian, this walking caricature—drifted into his apartment!

His roommate was a dope-fiend!
What Were We Smoking?

The failure of Columbia’s supposedly safer cigarette

By William Holt

On July 13, 1967, for just a few hours, it seemed that Columbia was about to trump the splitting of the atom: “a development of far-reaching importance which promises to benefit mankind” was announced by the President of Columbia University and the dean of its medical school. According to a statement released by CU News Office Director John Hastings that morning, this lofty “development” had something to do with “reducing the health hazard of cigarette smoking”—big news, considering that this was a time when Butler Library was filled with ashtrays.

Later that day at a major press conference, President Grayson Kirk and Dean H. Houston Merritt of the College of Physicians and Surgeons announced the invention of what, in Kirk’s words, “may well be a revolutionary cigarette filter.” The “Strickman filter”—named after its creator, an obscure New Jersey chemist named Robert Strickman—purportedly removed two-thirds of the tar and nicotine inhaled through traditional cigarette filters. Strickman, perhaps unsurprisingly, claimed that the filter made for a much safer cigarette without any loss of flavor.

Interestingly, the majority of the questions that arose in the weeks that followed weren’t so much about the invention as they were about the announcement itself. Why was a major research university, and not a tobacco firm, publicizing the Strickman filter? Furthermore, why hadn’t news of this supposedly groundbreaking invention come through the scientific community that was supposedly backing Strickman’s claims?

The press release of the Strickman filter was ill-timed—or, perhaps, perfectly timed, depending on how conniving you think the Columbia administration was at the time. Kirk and Merritt made their announcement the very same week that US Health, Education, and Welfare Secretary John W. Gardner gave his groundbreaking report to Congress on the health hazards of cigarette smoking (though the connection to lung cancer had been established since the 1940s). For a time, Columbia’s decision eclipsed Gardner’s address in the headlines, and Life magazine reported in July 1967 that cigarette stocks began to rise almost immediately after the announcement had been made. Over the next few months, the Strickman filter seemed to be popping up everywhere. An article titled “The New ‘Safe’ Cigarette Filter” even appeared in the November 1967 issue of Good Housekeeping with the rather quaint subheading, “What You Should Know About it and What Parents Should Tell their Children.” The Strickman filter started to feel like an “issues” talking point that one might see in sitcoms and comic books. One imagines Captain America warning kids about the dangers of cigarettes, telling them to “be safe and smoke a Strickman.”

But members of the press were already looking at Columbia’s announcement with a healthy dose of skepticism. Despite Kirk’s confident tone at the press conference, the test results concerning the filter’s efficacy were never as conclusive as its namesake had originally led the University to believe. Obvious from the start, Columbia was looking for a windfall. Some even saw the University’s endorsement as actively encouraging cigarette smoking at a time when its damaging effects were becoming better known. In the pages of Life, writer Albert Rosenfeld reported, “Many critics felt that Columbia’s announcement had given the misimpression that a completely safe filter had been developed”—which, given the scant and rather dubious test results that Strickman had offered the University, certainly wasn’t the case. One political cartoon from an issue of The Washington Post featured Kirk as a carnival Barker on the steps of Low, replete with cap and gown. Another showed a Columbia athlete sprinting with a cigarette in his mouth, a trail of smoke billowing out behind him.

Others took issue with the fact that Columbia had apparently given in to egregious commercialism in an attempt to get itself out of the red, pointing to the fact that the announcement of this supposed scientific breakthrough had been made through a flashy press conference rather than the more traditional channel of peer-reviewed journal articles.

It became increasingly clear that both Columbia
and Strickman had very little backing for their claims of a safer cigarette outside of the tests of a single independent laboratory in Midtown Manhattan. As the summer of 1967 wore on, several tobacco industry experts came forward with their own inconclusive results. Edwin P. Finch, president of the tobacco company Brown & Williamson, said, “In our testing, we found that the pressure drop required for significantly reduced tar delivery was so high that the filter was not practicable for use in the production of a smokable cigarette,” meaning that the smoker would have to breathe in so slowly that he or she would hardly be smoking at all. The advertising agency McCann Erickson was much more succinct in its conclusion: the filter was simply “unreliable.”

Even if Strickman’s claims that the filter removed a great deal of tar and nicotine were correct, the scientific correlations tying cigarette smoking to lung cancer were still rather murky. The linkage had been well established since the 1950s, but the causal particulars remained unclear. According to then-US Surgeon General William H. Stewart, “The gaseous content of the smoke also constitutes a significant danger. Therefore, the reduction of tar and nicotine can never provide full protection.”

Before summer waned, Columbia was already burying its head in the sand. In August, Kirk announced that the University would have to “re-study” the efficacy of the filter before leasing the rights to any cigarette manufacturers. Furthermore, when the Senate Commerce Committee scheduled a series of hearings on safer cigarette smoking for August 23–25, Kirk refused to answer its request for testimony. Not long afterward, Wesley First, the head of University public relations and the man who had overseen the announcement of the Strickman filter back in July, was apparently fired for his mishandling of the affair.

According to the magazine Advertising Age, Columbia had asked tobacco companies for an advance of $2.5 million (about $17 million today) within weeks of the initial press conference. Considering that the University was in the middle of a $200 million fundraising campaign to alleviate a crippling deficit, the figure isn’t all that staggering, but rather an embarrassing example of counting one’s chickens before they hatch. But the problem wasn’t money. What troubled critics was the question of whether it is in any way ethical for a university—an institution supposedly committed to free intellectual inquiry—to throw its weight and reputation behind something as controversial (and as hazardous) as cigarette smoking.

An October 1967 “The Talk of the Town” piece in The New Yorker provided a neat summation of the affair: “We do not see an easy solution to [the financial plight of private universities] . . . but we are convinced that the type of private enterprise represented by the Columbia cigarette filter is not the solution.”

Months of administrative foot-dragging followed Kirk’s announcement in August about the need for further testing. By December, Columbia’s attorneys were sitting down with Strickman to rework the contact, ultimately trying to wash their hands of an affair that had exhausted University resources, time, and money. Meanwhile, the chemist was threatening a $100 million lawsuit against NBC after the network ran a news story reporting that Columbia’s tests of the filter were just as inconclusive as all the others.

Finally, on February 28, 1968, Columbia officially turned over the rights of the filter to Strickman, who later sold them to Imperial Tobacco of Canada. The University ultimately received only $370,000 from the chemist and his associates as reimbursement for its various expenditures on the project, including legal, laboratory, and patenting fees—nothing even close to the millions in yearly revenue that Kirk had expected from the filter back in July. The real cost, it seems, should have been measured not in dollars, but in reputation. Columbia had received a veritable beating from the press for months on end, while Strickman simply decided to pack up his goods and peddle them elsewhere. When anti-establishment sentiment was running high—thanks to national problems like the Vietnam War, and more local ones like the administration’s plan to wipe out half of Morningside Heights for a University gym—the Strickman affair constituted just another notch in the president’s jackass belt. •
Jean Pierre Salendres, CC ’14, applied to 15 universities. With the exception of Dartmouth, he checked off all of the Ivies on his Common Application. Of all his acceptance letters, only those from Columbia and University of Pennsylvania offered him financial aid—a surprisingly small handout from schools which publicly boast the magnanimity of their aid programs. Beyond the prestige, students hope for acceptance at these schools because of their nearly comprehensive coverage for undergraduates. But the generous aid boasted about in admissions pamphlets comes with an asterisk. Where American students are guaranteed a financially objective evaluation of their applications, international students have no such luck.

The principle behind need-blind admissions gestures toward affirmative action: it is intended to ensure socio-economic diversity, to address the growing income gap, and to “level the playing field” for disadvantaged applicants. Very few universities in this country offer any form of need-blind admission. Most that do are selective colleges with deep pockets; and most of these guarantee at least meeting “demonstrated need.” But it’s a pricey policy. Wesleyan University recently announced that it would end its need-blind admissions because of its high cost. Grinnell College plans to review its aid policies because its process is financially unsustainable.

But even among the universities that choose to omit financial need from admissions decisions rarely extend such amnesty to their international applicants—for these kids, one’s ability to pay for school plays into the merit of his application. The perception among international students, says Jean Pierre, is that the school principally admits applicants from wealthy backgrounds, instead of a diverse cross-section of smart, diligent kids who may have felt discouraged from even applying because of low family income. Emilia Rearick* CC ’13, is Mexican. She only applied to schools that offered need-blind applications for international students after a high school friend in need of financial assistance was accepted at every need-blind schools to which she applied, but rejected by their need-aware equivalents. Emilia sees this as no coincidence.

Of all American universities, only six offer need-blind admission and full-need financial aid to international students: Amherst, Dartmouth, Harvard, MIT, Princeton, and Yale. Although Columbia makes no such allowance, both Jean Pierre and Emilia, both Mexican citizens, were able to capitalize on a since-retired program in which Canadian and Mexican citizens were admitted based on a need-blind process. Our continental cousins lost that privilege after the 2011 admissions year.

Because they do not qualify for federal aid, needy international students who do not receive sufficient funds from Columbia often face graduation with debt accrued solely from private loans. As Jean Pierre puts it, “International students must either be loaded or rely on very tough systems of loans that make sure that we go into the private sector, despite wishes of working for, maybe, our governments back home. The bigger the debt, the bigger the incentive to stay in the US and continue the brain drain cycle—at least when it comes to developing countries like mine.”

He had hoped to intern back home in Mexico last summer, but the job didn’t pay enough for him to meet Columbia’s expected summer contribution from students who receive financial aid, a minimum of $2,870 USD for sophomores. So, instead of working in local government, his summer work of choice, Jean Pierre, picked up a more lucrative job in marketing at First Databank. I spoke with a sophomore in CC who was expected to pay $4,000 over the three month summer—a sum amounting to $500 more than the
total savings a student could make working 8 hours a day, 5 days a week, at a $7.25/hr. minimum wage job. This summer payment increases for each year spent at Columbia and can be difficult to meet for a non-citizen looking for temporary work in the US and also in need of an additional visa. Applying for the summer work often requires an F1-OPT visa, which allows international students to work in the US for 12 months total, as long as the job is related to their major—a requirement which directly impacts the choice students make in their academic concentrations.

Why major in English when you can fulfill your summer contribution more easily at Morgan Stanley than Random House? As Emilia understands it, “I was lucky enough to be interested in economics and consulting, so I personally did not struggle to find summer or full-time positions, but I do know that if your interests lie in anything beyond [those] fields...you’re pretty much screwed.”

If you don’t get screwed by working restrictions, there’s always the financial market. Due to erratic fluctuations in the exchange rate, the amount a student pays can change drastically from the time they apply for aid to when tuition is due. To manage this unpredictability, Jessica Marinaccio, Dean of Financial Aid and Undergraduate admissions explains that Columbia uses “exchange rates determined by the College Board in our needs analysis” which are set each academic year. In the summer of 2011, Emilia did not receive her aid package until mid-August. In conjunction with the steady devaluation of the peso, the exchange rate had jumped from 11.65 pesos/dollar in May to 12.64 pesos/dollar. Hypothetically, had Emilia’s family contribution been $10,000 USD, from May to September the cost would increase from 116,500 pesos to 126,500 pesos—a nearly 10 percent increase.

While Emilia’s family has managed to pay her full amount, the unpredictability of the market is never far from her mind: “It is definitely a source of stress not knowing where the exchange rate will land...[Our family budget] was tighter for sure after the Peso devalued.” Despite problems with the exchange rate, Emilia has never been forced to take out a loan and feels “Columbia has been generous in its aid and true to its word.”

Jean Pierre, on the other hand, considers himself the rare exception. He received a comprehensive aid package—his family’s contribution only amounted to around $2,500 a year. Columbia guarantees to meet “demonstrated need” once a student is admitted, regardless of one’s country of origin. But because his sister, as an international, received no aid from her school, most of his family’s funds are allocated to her tuition. Thus, the money that Columbia expected would be available for his familial contribution is being funneled to tuition at a different school with less generous aid. As a result Jean Pierre will take out at least $10,000 in private loans to cover his “Expected Family Contribution” to Columbia. Had he applied without the now-dismantled Canadian/Mexican need-blind exception, he doubts he would have been accepted. “My situation is a very lucky one. I know people that did not fare as well. I perhaps represent a few good things that are slowly going away at Columbia, and the climate for international students is getting tougher in terms of financial aid. The international population expands, but not the equal opportunity for families with different incomes.”

According to an April 2012 report by the International Students and Scholars Office, in the last eight years, University-wide, international student admits have increased by 60.1 percent. In that same window, Columbia’s income from international students has skyrocketed by over 120 percent. This translates to the university nearly tripling its net income from international student tuition, from $137 million in 2004 to $304 million in 2011. And while Columbia guarantees “to meet 100 percent of your demonstrated financial aid once admitted,” the
number of international students receiving aid has plummeted by nearly 10 percent to cover only 23.8 percent of the population.

It would appear Columbia has offset the costs of its ever expanding need-blind admissions for American students by upping its annual admission of internationals, whose prospective applications are read with family income in mind. Asked directly about the increase in April, Columbia College Dean James Valentini assured the Columbia Daily Spectator that the College “does not admit international students as a means of generating revenue.”

The numbers echo a trend becoming standard across the country. The University of California system, the American exemplar of affordable, superior public education, admitted 43 percent more out-of-state and international students than last year, significantly boosting its efforts to reach out to those higher-paying freshmen. Those students pay an annual $23,000 more than in-state students—a sum that could help to smooth over the state-wide education budget crisis.

University President Lee Bollinger admitted to Spec in April, “We do not have sufficient financial aid for international students. And as you gradually [increase the number of international admits] and you don’t have enough financial aid, it’s not surprising that the numbers you cite are going to go in the directions they are.”

Agreeing to pay for an exorbitantly priced American education—particularly when compared to its international equivalent (an undergraduate degree at Paris’s Sciences Po, for example, costs $13,000 annually; Columbia College currently charges $45,208—and that’s without factoring in universal healthcare)—speaks to both the quality and clout of a degree from the more prestigious US colleges. Columbia has made its concession to a wealthy international community clear: its commitment to being a global university entails catering to a global elite. But until the same financial flexibility is afforded to international applicants as their American counterparts, Columbia’s energized response to globalization, its open commitment to diversity, feels shallowly geographic. For now, the influx of internationals seems to serve a statistical purpose; Columbia, on paper, is more “global” than ever before, but with 76 percent of our international students requiring no aid, is the university’s responsibility to promoting diversity of thought and experience threatened?

There is no doubt that extending need-blind admissions to the world is an unreasonable financial burden for which there is no quick fix. Providing for the depth of intellectual diversity Columbia aspires to cannot be solved by shifting some figures around the annual budget. Last April Dean Valentini told the Spectator, “if we had need-blind admissions throughout the world, we’d end up with a whole different kind of college than we have now.” Isn’t that the idea?

*Some names in this piece have been changed.*
Centerfold by
Leila Mgaloblishvili
Price of Oil Rises

The trials and travels of Columbia’s former Rembrandt

BY NAOMI SHARP

A Rembrandt painting that Columbia sold in 1974 for $1 million—$4 million today—is once again on the market, now with a price tag of $47 million.

This development is only the latest chapter in the odd history of Rembrandt’s “Portrait of a Man with Arms Akimbo,” dated 1658. The painting was donated to Columbia in 1958 by supermarket billionaire George Huntington Hartford II, on the condition that it be sold to fund neurological research in the College of Physicians and Surgeons. When the Vietnam War ignited the 1968 student occupation of Low, protesters in the president’s office allowed the painting to be removed for safekeeping.

Amid doubts of the painting’s authenticity, Columbia sold “Portrait of a Man” to John Seward Johnson of the Johnson & Johnson consumer empire. Upon Johnson’s death in 2004, the painting resurfaced at an auction at London. It was proven to be a genuine Rembrandt and sold for $33 million. The buyer was Steve Wynn, a Las Vegas casino owner. In the art world, Wynn isn’t exactly known for his curatorial finesse; during a now-infamous dinner party in 2006, while showing off his private collection to guests (including Nora Ephron and Barbara Walters), he managed to poke a six-inch hole in Picasso’s masterpiece “Le Rêve” with his elbow.

Fortunately, “Portrait of a Man” emerged unscathed from its brief stint with Wynn. In 2009 Wynn sold the painting—intact—to Otto Naumann Ltd, a private gallery on the Upper East Side. A former college professor, Naumann left academia after learning that garbage workers in New York were striking to protest a salary that was higher than his own. Naumann is one of the leading art collectors in New York. Dutch paintings fill his quiet three-room gallery, where the only visitors are potential buyers.

Though Naumann described the painting as “a little schmutzy-looking” before cleaning, it was in beautiful condition when I visited the gallery. The man in the portrait meets the viewer’s eye with a steady gaze, unruffled by wild-eyed students and wild-elbowed art collectors. Against a backdrop of muted browns and greens, an unseen light brightens half of the man’s face and streaks his brown doublet with amber.

Before I visited his gallery, Naumann had emailed me a copy of the letter verifying the painting’s authenticity. The letter’s author was Ernst van de Wetering, a Dutch art historian generally recognized as the world’s leading Rembrandt expert.

“Look at the cuff of the sleeve,” Naumann indicated, gesturing with a magnifying glass to a sliver of deep brown visible among the brushstrokes. Analysis has shown it to be quartz ground, a material unique to Rembrandt’s studio. Because Rembrandt was bankrupt and unable to support students in 1968, any work produced then in his studio is almost certainly his own.

Although the piece’s creator is now undisputed, Naumann still calls the painting “a puzzle.” No one has identified its subject—though some have supposed him a Dutch admiral, a traveler from the Mediterranean, or a pirate (the last based on the faint shadow of what could be a dagger tucked into his sash). He may never have existed at all, outside of Rembrandt’s imagination.

The painting has never been exhibited publicly, and it will most likely be sold into a private collection once more. That’s the most practical path, says Naumann: “There are very few museums that can afford this.”

Illustration by Katharine Lin

THE BLUE AND WHITE
“You’re not tweeting enough,” my boss angrily texts me as I scramble in and out of various fruit-themed clothing. It’s a Friday night and I’m supposed to be working the EC party scene, which means stopping by every occupied suite with a free case of Coffutti (coffee that’s fruity). “You need to make [coffee cup] [cranberry] [pineapple] [banana] Coffutti hip [mustache] [hipster glasses]!!!” he texts. He assured us that he was working on his emoji addiction but it’s pretty clear that that only means using fewer beer/wine/martini animations in his messages.

I decide on cranberry colored chinos with an apple print cardigan and a coffee bean tank top. “Look the brand, breathe the brand, be the brand,” reads the company tag line that is both copied across the bottom of every email and tattooed to my boss’s rib cage. I didn’t come to Columbia for this—I came hoping to fetch coffee and pick up dry cleaning for a bitter New Yorker editor who will be more bitter that she didn’t read my writing samples when my Paris Review interview is published. Not for this.

Instead, I have become the fresh new face of a caffeinated fruit beverage, tweeting such lyrical masterpieces as “@Columbia got u low? Get outta the But and @drinkcoffutti to get pumped!”

Several minutes later, I’m talking my way into a 16th floor EC suite, tote bag filled with Coffutti in hand. I get paid a commission based on how many people I can get to “like” Coffutti on Facebook, follow us on Twitter, or Instagram an “action shot” of our bottle. The guy who answers the door is in Toms, Ray-Bans, and a “Space Jam” jersey, so I’m betting he’s the Instagram type.

“Hey, what’s in your bag?”

“Dope new drink! It’s free if you Instagram a pic of me holding it,” I say, assuming the duck face position.

He does, and uses the Kelvin filter, so maybe he has poor enough taste to enjoy this shit. I’m hoping he’s too drunk to notice the foul Coffutti stench that makes one long for the sweet nectar of cat piss.

“What does it taste like?”

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“Sorta like PBR,” I say, which is true except that instead of making you drunk it induces the Harlem Shake.

He takes a disastrously large gulp of cranpineana, and I page CAVA.

This is my life. I spend my nights migrating from suite to suite with my tiny insta-triumphs becoming more frequent as the consumer market gets progressively more beer-addled. By 12:30 I’ve thrown shade in Valencia, Amaro, and Inkwell. Checking my phone as I head back to my room around 4 a.m., I see row after row of smiley faces, thumbs up, and “$$$. My boss was up, closely following the follower counts.

Brushing past a late night jogger in Adidas track pants and Nike running shoes, I sneer at a pack of Armani clad B-school students, shining their Rolexes and class rings. I may sometimes look like a giant smoothie but at least I’m not a walking advertisement for that kind of—shit, my boss is calling.

“Great work tonight, we got over fifty new followers on Twitter alone. I heard that your basketball team has a game tomorrow, think you can pull on the Coffutti bottle costume for us? We’ll throw some rad new stickers your way!”

Illustration by Alexander Pines
At Lincoln Center
where I saw Mahler’s Second
and it made me think about
   my mom,
who at home would move through
a line of Puccini or Mussorgsky
or Mahler—Mahler was her favorite—humming
while getting out the pots for dinner.
Her Classical Radio
that I learned to ignore
like you learn to ignore your parents entirely.
And the fact
that she was training to be an opera singer
when she had me.

At Lincoln Center,
at the first symphony I hadn’t been dragged to,
watching the women move through their cellos
into the furls and contours of Mahler’s cloudbank
above Lincoln Center and all the tiny members of the orchestra
dressed in black,
where I realized that I’ve never had to sacrifice for anything
and it made me think about
   my mom.

—Torsten Odland
Leaves

There are 206 bones in the human body
And I can feel you weaving yourself into each one of mine
Seeping straight to the marrow
Making yourself at home there.

You are embedding yourself into each part of me
Underneath my fingernails
Behind my ears
And in between my toes.
You are planting yourself a garden in the spaces
Between my ribs
With the hope my heart will blossom into a cherry tree
That you can carve our initials into.

Be my fly.
Rewire your brain into only loving me
And if I die
Wipe your memory clean.
The only remnants of our love being
The remnants of the forest fire
Our passion leaves in its wake.

—Evy Exime
There’s No Accounting for Taste

The Sisyphean struggle of Bacchanal

By Britt Fossum

To many students, Bacchanal seems to come fully formed, like Athena sprung from Zeus's head. With an allocation of $106,425 in the 2012–2013 academic year, the need to work within Columbia's limited infrastructure, and a vocal undergraduate population to please, the pressures of producing such a widely attended event leave little room for error. More than any bureaucratic oversight, the biggest threat to the yearly music festival might be its own popularity.

Former Bacchanal board president Daniel Weinstein, CC ’12, spoke to the problems of hosting an event at a college in New York: “Public Safety needs to get ready as soon as the lineup reaches any New York blogs. As soon as someone reports on a free concert at Columbia, security needs to prepare itself for a rush to campus.”

2011 Bacchanal openers Das Racist once took advantage of the show themselves. Ashok Kondabolu of the now-defunct rap group admitted to Bwog, “[I]t was De La Soul opening for I think Kanye in 2004 [...] I think that was the last time I ever sat in a circle at Columbia and smoked weed.” A friend of the rapper, Aleksy Weintraub, added, “I was so fucking drunk and we came up here and started playing Ultimate Frisbee with these kids. And we had been drinking for hours, so we’d start getting short of breath and start vomiting in the bushes. Then after a while it started to freak them out so we had to go.”

Besides dealing with the general public, interaction between campus publications and the Bacchanal organization can be fairly complicated. Efforts to build up hype for the concert, such as delaying and withholding the release of information to interested campus publications, introduce tension both to Bacchanal’s event planning and to the acts they book for the event.

Current Bacchanal co-president Kay Sorin, CC ’13, addressed friction between Bwog, The Blue and White, and the entertainment group in an email. Said Sorin, “Bwog published a speculative lineup earlier this month without contacting our club in any way ahead of time.” Sorin chafed at Bwog’s post from February 16, “Reports from the Rumor Mill – IT’S MACKLEMORE! (maybe).” She went on, “We are contractually obligated to keep performer’s names secret until a specific day closer to the concert.” (Bwog posted part of Sorin’s email on February 20.)

Weinstein confirms the importance of keeping the lineup secret for as long as possible: “Often there are contractual details that bar us from releasing the lineup, so we’re really under pressure.” Bacchanal’s occasional agreements “to allow press members backstage,” has mixed results: sometimes “great interviews of musicians,” and other times “publishing artists’ contractual information which [...] can potentially harm Bacchanal’s reputation.” In 2010, Bwog obtained and published Wiz Khalifa’s hospital- ity list. (Including a box of extra-large condoms, later found unopened.) Weinstein, famous conciliator, allowed, “Everyone’s trying to do their job well and sometimes there’s a conflict of interest.”

The bulk of the group’s efforts and allocation go towards booking an artist that will appeal widely to the Columbia student body and as Weinstein noted, “negotiation comes down to the minutiae on an artist’s hospitality list [...] we explored offering a potential guest a private flight to New York from Coachella.” A balance between confidentiality and publicity, both equally important to Bacchanal as an event, is a contingency that needs as much planning as any of the more tangible parts of a concert.

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Above the Influence

An editor reviews David Shields’s latest reaction to “the Novel”

BY ALLIE CURRY

How Literature Saved My Life
by David Shields
Alfred A. Knopf
224 pp., $25.95

For a book about other books, David Shields’s newest work really is as dire as its title claims. This may or may not be immediately discernible from the form: like Kundera and Nietzsche, Shields writes in brief, aphoristic passages. His most famous work to date, 2010’s Reality Hunger: A Manifesto, is a composition assembled from hundreds of sources, many only half-remembered. He views his current stylistic tendency—self-reflexive, searching collage—as a break with the capital-N Novel and, therefore, as a literature that can remain competitive with other, newer media.

Shields’s publisher has elected to classify the nonfiction work as both “literary criticism” and “personal memoir.” The book is essayistic, but then again, it’s organized by its themes, not its arguments. This genre position has some literary precedent (see: Walter Benjamin; see: Renata Adler) and How Literature Saved My Life feels largely a response to criticisms that charged Reality Hunger with pretentious flag-planting.

In a move that may disquiet readers who regularly stare into the abyss that is the literary Internet, Chapter Six indexes 55 books the author “swears by.” To be fair, Shields’s motivation in listing these works does diverge from Flavorwire’s: Shields is negotiating how he is so indebted to, and influenced by, works whose form he no longer works to emulate. Shields was trained in fiction, first as an undergraduate at Brown and later in the MFA fiction program at Iowa. As Shields articulates influence that was implicit in the fragments and uncredited citations of Reality Hunger, How Literature charts his movement toward nonfiction. The shift, Shields believes, was cultural:

We live in a culture that is completely mediated and artificial, rendering us (me, anyway; you, too?) exceedingly distracted, bored, and numb. Straightforward fiction functions only as mere bubble wrap, nostalgia, retreat. [...] I want work that, possessing as thin a membrane as possible between life and art, foregrounds the question of how the writer solves being alive.

The book is rich with personal detail, including an early passage that Columbia readers may appreciate for its admission that Brown more than likely lacks a dominant aesthetic, and that if one does exist, it is something along the lines of “Fuck You.” In one passage, Shields describes his interest in literature as it metastasized his freshman year of college. Prometheus Unbound caused the young author to avow in manic fits, “‘If I don’t fully grasp each question, after a week of studying, I’ll probably jump off the Caucasus.'” When test time came, Shields “filled four blue books in fifty minutes. My pen didn’t leave leave paper: whole speeches stormed from my mind.” (It turns out he misidentified many of the passages; his TA gave him an A- anyway.)

“A myth is an attempt to reconcile an intolerable contradiction,” he writes, and the myth-like conceit of How Literature Saved My Life is that Shields will answer the question that he implicitly raises in his title. Literature saved Shields’s life in many ways: it gave him a means to aestheticize his stutter; it addresses questions he views as literally vital. It offers him the faintest, most undefined outlines of truth. It’s not a way out, but, he writes, it doesn’t lie.
Leon Wieseltier: I like to think so. One of the things that I was taught at Columbia and subsequently: I was raised in the tradition that used to be described as the New York Intellectuals. Many of them were my teachers and friends, and a few were really mentors to me, and as I grew older there were aspects of that intellectual tradition with which I became impatient, but basically what I admired was their insistence upon deep, even scholarly, knowledge with intense, even fervid, commitment.

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B&W: And do you see many writers of the next generation doing what you do in the Washington Diarist, applying ideas to events?

LW: Some, some. Not that many. You know, look: the Internet for me is basically a kind of plague of articulateness. And articulateness is not the same thing as thoughtfulness; and information is not the same thing as knowledge. But articulateness can pass for thoughtfulness; and information can pass for knowledge. I have my worries about the damage to intellectual life that the speed of this technology and the nature of the discourse that it generates will cause.

B&W: I read somewhere that in terms of sheer recorded data, humanity has produced since 2006 as much as it produced until 2006. I think the year is 2006.

LW: Well that’s what this machine does more than anything: it generates data. And historians, ordinary people—everyone is going to have to sooner or later come to grips with its enormous cultural implications. We are now living in a terrifying—some would say golden—age of quantification. It leads to the quantification of everything.

B&W: I’m horrified by how few books my generation reads. Including myself—I find lately that I need to force myself to read.

LW: But yeah, every once in a while [those writers appear]. And it’s really one of the greatest satisfactions of this job—to find a good old-fashioned, young ideas man, or ideas woman. And every once in a while I find one, and I do what I can to nourish that man or woman.

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LW: Well, it’s narcotic. It is literally mesmerizing. Even the backlight; something about it is literally mesmerizing. Screens. Screens.

I was passing by two young people I know talking, and I overheard one of them say to the other something like, “Well, she told my friend that she thinks she loves me, which is an important data point.” I’ll never forget that sentence. And I stopped, and told him, “Do not ever speak of love as a data point again.”

I’m telling you: quantification is the single most salient feature of our culture right now.

B&W: My friend insists to me that reading an e-book is no different than reading a real book. And I read that it tracks and transmits your reading habits: how long it takes you to read a book, how often you start and stop, et cetera.

LW: That’s just it. A friend of mine once proudly—you know, he’s reading War and Peace for the first time, and I’m very proud of him, and I said, “So how do you like it?” He said, “Well, I’m fifty-seven per cent of the way through it.”

That’s not what I asked. It’s everywhere! We’re exporting quantification and scientific categories into realms of life where they don’t belong; where they don’t explain things, where they distort things, where they just don’t belong. It’s everywhere!

Now, in recent years, one of the things I’ve been writing about more and talking about more, is just a defense of the humanities.

So Jonah Lehrer’s first book comes in, Proust Was a Neuroscientist. When I look at this title, I think that I don’t have to read this book! Because if Proust understood this and I’ve read Proust, then I don’t need the neuroscience. Because Proust already had it! Because literature already had it!

But of course for a lot of people, it didn’t have it until it was scientific, because we live in a time when everybody is just waiting to hear what neuroscience has to say about everything. I mean, if you’re looking at the menu at the pasta joint, and you don’t know if you want the spaghetti or the linguini, you should just Google it and see if the neuroscientists have anything to tell you.

B&W: Do you think the appreciation of beauty will become just a minority exercise?

LW: The appreciation of beauty was always a minority activity, but the prestige of that activity in the larger culture was different. I can’t say I’m optimistic, because I find the digital tide overwhelming.

I’m optimistic that good books will continue to be written, and art will continue to be made, and serious thought will continue to take place. But it will be an increasingly marginalized and isolated activity. In other words, it was always lonely, but it’s about to get a lot lonelier.

Which is ironic, because one of the problems the computer was supposed to solve was loneliness. But sometimes when I can’t sleep I go on the Internet, and it leaves me feeling incredibly lonely. All the ideology of connectivity aside, when I’m done, I feel like this isolato, this monad, in front of these pixels. It’s incredibly isolating in some ways.

B&W: I was looking at the Columbia library statistics for the past ten years. The library holds the most volumes it’s ever held—around 12 million—but circulation is down about 40% since 2005.

LW: That’s so interesting.

B&W: And this is at Columbia.

LW: That’s so interesting. Meaning that people are going online. I used to give a seminar here with a friend, for graduate students. One did a paper and on his bibliography he put in The Social Contract. But it went like this: in the bibliography it went like this, “Rousseau, Jean-Jacques, The Social Contract, http://worldclassics/philosophy/france/rousseau.” And I have to confess that in the margin of the student’s paper, I inscribed the words, “The Social Contract is a fucking book.”

B&W: This is a graduate student who did this.

LW: Yeah, yeah.
The Blue and White

B&W: Part of a book’s beauty is the isolation. A computer has one thousand functions . . .

LW: Well, the isolation and also the temporality. The thing about a book is that no matter how fast a reader you are, you can only read as fast as you can read it. I think one of the reasons that a traditional experience of art will be important, and will be a standpoint of offering some cultural resistance to the digital tide, is that it takes time. And it takes as much time as it takes.

One of the reason people love Andy Warhol paintings is that this is art for busy people. You can take it in at one look. But you can’t take Chardin, or Poussin, or Cézanne in at one look. And you can’t hurry up and finish a Mahler symphony. And you can’t hurry up and finish Madame Bovary.

Personal relations would also be another realm in which you could offer some resistance to the acceleration of everything. Though, I’m not sure. I’m not on Facebook, but I hear my younger friends talk about their social lives. If intimacy is the slow revelation over time of one self to another person, I’m not sure what is gained or even how it works when on your first date you already know everything there is to know about someone. Now at some level you don’t: you don’t know what they sound like or what they touch like. And they could be misrepresenting themselves.

B&W: What’s changed in journalism in your years, and what’s changed over your thirty years at TNR?

LW: Well, the big change obviously is the Internet, is digital journalism. The first ten years of the Internet, I hated. I hated it because everybody was inebriated by it. These were the years in which blogging became a prestigious activity. Which always seemed perversive to me, because anybody who’s ever written anything knows that one’s first thoughts are always not one’s best thoughts. It’s kind of obvious. And blogging was the cult of first thoughts—I don’t even want to say narrative, because a lot of time they were just raw, undigested, un-thought through reactions to things, intensely emotional journalism.

The Internet has now been with us for a while, and things have calmed down. I don’t think blogging is quite the divine activity that it used to be. And there are more people who do serious reading who are online. In the old days, I’d get something online and then print it out. Now people who had the same original allergies as me have gotten used to it. So now it’s more mixed.

There is serious stuff online, though I have to say, in what I care about, and maybe I don’t know of it, but in politics and culture I don’t know of a single essay of any genuine real-world consequence that originated online and not in some journal somewhere. I’m sure in science it’s different, but in the world of ideas, in the battle of ideas, in the world in which I live, I don’t think that’s happened yet. So that was the big change.

B&W: If we could just break off there—you wrote in “The Washington Diarist” last year, “Listen up, children, we didn’t used to have this playground of ideas.” Do you think the Internet has affected the war of ideas?

LW: Well, I think the Internet has had a paradoxical effect. I think the Internet is better at the war part than the ideas part.

I firmly believe in the war of ideas. If we’re talking about primary ideas, about how society should be governed, or how people should live, or what is true about the universe, all the answers to those questions cannot all be right. And they all have far-reaching implication. So the stakes are very high. And the ferocity of the intellectual combat that I was raised
in and that I admired so much was owed to recognition of those stakes. There was something admirable about that ferocity; not like now.

B&W: Okay. One last question: you’ve called yourself a liberal but not a progressive. How would you define that?

LW: First of all, I don’t like the term “progressive,” because it has a nasty whiff from the ’40s and ’50s fellow travelers. So the term for me is tainted. But nobody knows that now; people who use it today are not making a statement of any kind about Stalin.

But aside from that, liberalism as I see it, my liberalism, is a liberalism that believes in the welfare states, and believes in strong government, and believes in governmentally regulated capitalism. I’m not a socialist; I don’t have a socialist bone in my body. So a very generous and beneficent domestic policy, alongside a belief in the use of American power for good abroad.

I’ve never voted once in my life happily in a general election. Not once. I mean, my conservative friends, when they voted for Reagan they put on their best suits and ties with a little flower in their lapels, and so on. Progressive friends, when Obama ran, same thing. I voted for Reagan, and I voted for Obama. I voted for Reagan because I was a foreign policy and national security voter, and there was this thing called the Soviet Union that I regarded as the single most important fact, worldwide, strategically. In the ten years between the fall of the Berlin Wall and the fall of the World Trade Center I voted on domestic grounds.

You know, there’s a great expression in the Talmud, “Accept the truth from whoever utters it.” I’ve always been impressed with that sentence, because we’re trained to do the opposite, which is to get into this discussion of not what was said, but who said it, and who attacked it, and who is qualified to say it, who has the right to say it.

B&W: That’s a way to make a lot of enemies.

LW: Yeah, that’s right. But the older I get the wiser it seems.

B&W: It seems like social media and Twitter is about the name brand, and about who said it.

LW: Anything that ephemeral has to be based on symbols, on name brands. I don’t tweet, and I don’t expect I’ll ever tweet. What it is is a trillion press releases a second. It’s turning us into an unbelievably other-directed, extroverted society, even more than we were, because everyone is sending themselves out.

B&W: Shallowly.

LW: Yes, shallowly, and I think that extroversion is usually shallow. It goes back to what we were saying earlier; inwardness takes time. It’s the single most important fact about it.

This interview has been edited for clarity and brevity.

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By the Staff of The Blue and White

After spending Valentine’s evening drunk at the movies once again, the staff of The Blue and White is ready to return to the world of love. Should these vulnerable, earnest essays (which nonetheless exude sexual maturity [and undeniable potency]) move the reader to the appropriate human response, the ads are followed by our personal mailbox numbers.

Seeking Men:

Seeks to layout, stroke, and master. (2179)

Endurance runner needs someone who can stick it out for the full three hours. (6317)

Ex-fencer still savor the sabre. (5819)

Looking for a fellow bibliophile to crack my spine. (2673)

DJ Sarah Jessica Parker looking for sex in the city. (Altschul 4652)

Seeking physics whiz who can teach me how to torque it. (3348)

Self-conscious freshman navel-gazer looking to explore the same. (6663)

I’m a little green, but still ripe for the picking. (1313)

Student of history interested in obsessing over your past. (Altschul 4832)

Graphic artist would like you to appreciate her centerfold. (5553)

Homebody looking for hard body. (Altschul 5992)

Elvira seeks to be Giovanni’s 641st Italian. (5485)

I’m into old white men. (Hamilton Hall)

Anyone born great? Young careerist needs greatness thrust into her (2765)

Seeking Women:

Bay Stater looking for large mammal to harpoon. (3170)

I don’t need to know her to vaporizer. (3758)

Creative writer looking for sexual muse/pity-machine. (4731)

Lover of Russian literature seeking DTFski. (6399)

Computer engineer looking to integrate his hardware into your software. (7066)

Beanie wearer seeks Beanie Baby. Openness to stuffed animal play a plus. (4030)

Public radio enthusiast wants to Consider All your Things. (6000)

Bleeding Kansan looking for a relationship with no chains attached. (4417)

Plato fan seeking fellow cave explorers. (6000)

WHATEVER I CAN GET:

Former Rugby player misses rough ball play (6485)

Drunk man looking for phone. (1020)

Seeking somebody to tell me what’s wrong with my shaft. (John Jay)

Into feet. Looking for someone to pound me. (College Walk)

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There and Back Again

One correspondent’s attempt to get the most out of going to school in New York City.

BY DIANA CLARKE

Of course I’d like to say I’ve been everywhere good. I’d like to say that I already know this neighborhood well enough to duck briefly into a gay bar with a friend who’s scared and eager to stay longer, suggest the next bar, and then pick the pizza place after that—and I trust myself to do it—but I’d never even heard of SideWalk Café until this show.

The truth is, I only know a few places, and I’m great at Yelping the rest. For someone with a solidly mediocre Klout score, I’m pretty talented at the Internet—not at making it, but at hunting through what’s already there. But rather than resolving themselves into a codependent relationship with Reddit, my Internet skills (which, to be real, are just reading comprehension and an intuition for keywords) have let me into the city. Knowledge of New York is my status symbol, my business card, my compensation for not being anything more than usually skilled at Columbia itself. I’m not alone in this; in fact, many of the best places I know were shown to me freshman year by a good friend in whom I recognized a familiar and pleasurable dissatisfaction with our collegiate surroundings. We lived together for two years after that, until we became part of the surroundings the other couldn’t stand—each of us needed a great deal of privacy, lots of emptiness in which to stretch our long limbs when we weren’t tensing them, running avenues. We haven’t spoken much since, but I often unfurl the memory map she helped me draw, show it around when I’m in a group, or making a new friend. See: this is what I offer.

So one night I head to meet some friends in Alphabet City, at SideWalk Café. The bar is full, but most of the crowd up front, with their elbows on the bar, are locals, wearing leather jackets and knitted caps. I don’t see my friends at all. A few text messages later, I learn they’re in the back room, away from the regulars—the good sweet ease of pushing back the heavy sound drape to see smiles twinkling into glasses.

Coat off, a seat, a hug, a sip of beer: I look around and see more familiar faces than I expect. I’m not drunk yet, I think. No, it’s just Columbia students, off-campus. That guy who sort-of dated my old suitemate. The girl who I went to Rosh Hashanah services with freshman year. This is my life. The band is Bold Forbes (based at Columbia). Their sounds are folky, soaring, incompatible with a 9 a.m. recitation; we are all far enough away to escape that. Most people back here—including me—know one of the band members well enough to be here, or else we wouldn’t.

Once the band’s done playing, and a second round of hugs and cheers exchanged, we do get that pizza before the long, sleepy train ride uptown. In the moment I’m too cold and tired and happy, my friend’s head on my shoulder, to think much. This is a first, just enjoying it. It’s not until the next morning until I realize the success. While I’m at work (off-campus, thank you, at a café) I get an email from a good friend, who of course I met in class:

Dear Manhattan Ranger,
Do you know where I could take a friend of mine for a trendy drink in the ABC city/East village tomorrow?
Yours dearly

In my reply, I’m shocked at how quickly and easily the words flow, my recommendations for her (after a quick Yelp, of course). How accessible it seems to conjure for her another evening like mine—if only I could be this bold in class; the way I imagine the people seated beside me in lecture. It’s never just getting dinner or drinks—it’s that destination. It’s not an evening but an academic excursion, something to dissect the morning after. Oh, you don’t know this place? That neighborhood? You haven’t read Hegel? Best two out of three.
CORRECTIONS: In the winter issue’s article, “Buy Now, Pay Later,” The Net Price Calculator (p. 20) is a tool used for prospective families to estimate their potential eligibility for financial aid. The Expected Family Contribution included in Columbia’s final aid package is created after a comprehensive review of information provided on the FAFSA, CSS Profile, and federal tax returns. There is no such thing as an “Expected Need Calculator.” The “Entrance Counseling” (p. 22) as required by Columbia is actually a federal requirement for any student who borrows a federal student loan, and the content is mandated by the Department of Education.
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I wish for you my friend
This happiness that I've found
You can depend on it
It matters not where you're bound
I'll shout it from a mountain top
I want the world to know
The lyre of love
Has come to me
I want to pass it on

My interest of operations research management spans as far as my elementary school years, when I have not even heard of the word “operations research” yet. I played erhu (a traditional Chinese musical instrument) since six years old and was the concertmaster of my elementary school Chinese orchestra. As one of the best orchestras in Beijing, we were invited to give performances in different countries, including Singapore, Malaysia and Austria. I was always having lots of fun in looking at the flight schedule board at airports. Managing all the flight information to satisfy people’s demand of travelling while taking care of airports capacities and flying costs, was an attracting and mysterious process to me. Ten years later, I get the opportunity to actually learn about this (*** decision-making process. My first class in operations research at Columbia University, mathematical program, confirmed my desire to build my study in this field because I do find it quite fascinating.

Morgan’s tasks contributed toward the promotion and improvement of the Disney Baby brand. Specifically, she attended meetings regarding content optimization for Disney product on the Babies R Us website, and played an important role in the completion of the project. Disney Baby, for lack of better terms, is in its infancy stage.

It Only Takes a Smile

It only takes a smile
To start a friendship growing
And soon all those around
Will warm up to it’s glowing
That’s how it is with Alpha Chi
Once you’ve experienced it
You spread your love to everyone
You want to pass it on

Dear Diary,

My Teen Angst Has a Body Count

How to eat yogurt in a sexy way—Gangnam Style!

I am so fucking brave.

I imagine a majestic sea captain catapulting over our fears

Oh Captain, my captain!
Oh, Walt Whitman, my man!
Oh, Robin Williams, my captain, my man!
[Lights flicker on, off—electric automatic lights that snap to the sounds of your demands]
Chilly, hungry—hunger chills like hungry chili, warmer in Chile.

I can walk on water I can fly

Lalalalalalalala!

I imagine a dark-cold terror terroring the teens.
JOCK JAMS
On January 11, at 5:30 p.m., in a game billed as “Columbia’s Strongest vs. Columbia’s Finest,” Facilities and Public Safety faced one another in basketball in Levien Gym. Columbia’s Strongest prevailed, 43-39.

PRESIDENTIAL PARDON ME?
Aki Terasaki, CC ’12, was the first president of Columbia College Student Council in six years to apply for a job at McKinsey & Company and not receive an offer.

PRIVATE AFFAIR
In the early hours of January 28, the managing board of the Columbia Daily Spectator drunkenly broke into the provost’s office from the roof of Low Library. A certain speccie had a whip-smart idea to turn on the lights, and lo, they were caught by Public Safety (who threatened to put them in handcuffs and arrest them for breaking and entering). After much groveling, Public Safety agreed to hand them over to the Office of Judicial Affairs instead of the police. Spec’s newly contrite (and still inebriated) managing editor, Finn Vigeland, CC ’14, fired off a late-night email to Deans Valentini, Shollenberger, and Martinez begging pardon.

(Teacher that night, at 3:23 a.m., Finn would comment “lolz” on an accomplice’s Facebook photo taken from the roof of Low.)

Pardon was granted. As for the staff’s punishment? To write a private letter of apology to the selfsame administrators.

THINGS NOBODY READS
Time to talk about inter-publication incest! In exchange for free advertising space in the yearbook, The Columbian, the Spectator sends its photographers out around the Big Apple to capture Columbia students doing typical student activities—you know, like laughing and eating salad in the Village and giggling at fake Elmo in Times Square.

A HAZING SHADE OF WINTER
Regarding the alleged ZBT hazing incident, for which the fraternity’s charter was revoked: rumor has it that it was actually not the fine men of ZBT who were hazing, but instead the women’s field hockey team— who were allegedly hazing their freshmen inside the hallowed halls of the ZBT house. The other leading theory concerns a ZBT brother dumping beer on a field hockey girl’s head during a wet ’n’ wild political disagreement.

Notoriously open-minded people-lover Dean Goldfarb of SEAS recently addressed the engineering school’s tradition of gifting ties to its men and scarves to its women. He joked, “I guess if you’re a crossdresser, you can have both!” SEAS: sartorially and semantically challenged!

In the midst of Group Dynamics, COÖP’s competitive application process to select new leaders, an undertaking that includes such discerning tasks as “game playing,” “role playing,” and “scavenger hunts,” the outdoor adorers noticed a group of Asian tourists who had joined in. When the COÖP coordinators politely told them that the event was private, the tourists exclaimed, “But we’re just having so much fun!” before going on their merry way.

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