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Partha Chatterjee is a political theorist, historian, and professor of anthropology at Columbia. His most recent book is *Lineages of Political Society: Studies in Postcolonial Democracy*.

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Nan Rothschild '62GSAS is a research professor of anthropology at Barnard College and the director of museum studies at Columbia. She is working on a book about archaeology in modern American cities.

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HERBERT SEIGNORET



J. D. Scrimgeour '86CC, '87GSAS is a poet and professor of creative writing at Salem State University in Massachusetts. His work has appeared in *Ploughshares*, the *Boston Globe Magazine*, the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, and *Organica*.

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Camilo José Vergara '77GSAS studied sociology at Columbia before devoting himself fully to the photographic documentation of America's decaying cities. He was a Revson Fellow at Columbia and received a MacArthur Foundation fellowship in 2002.

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Thomas Vinciguerra '85CC, '86JRN, '90GSAS is a writer and the executive editor of *This Week From Indian Country Today*. His latest book is *Backward Ran Sentences: The Best of Wolcott Gibbs from the New Yorker*.

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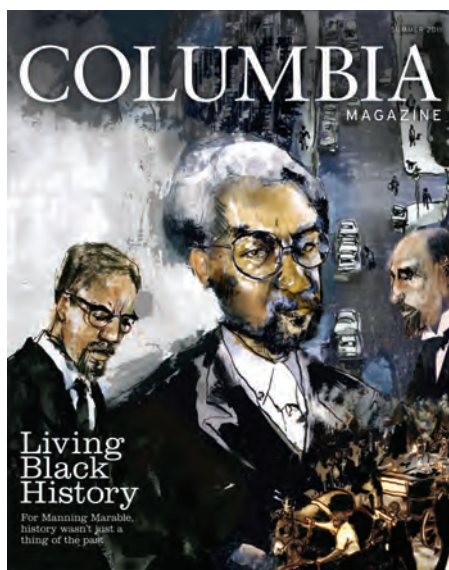
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 **COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY**
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letters

RACISM? WHAT RACISM?

Manning Marable thought the black elite do not discuss the problems of the “underclass” because in doing so they would be forced to confront the common realities of racism that underlie the totality of America’s social and economic order (“A Message for the World,” Summer 2011). After 40 years of civil-rights legislation, affirmative action, and minority set-asides, at a time when African Americans play a prominent role in the sports and entertainment industries and can be found at every level of government, from state legislatures to the highest offices of the land (not just president, but national security adviser and chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff), blaming racism for the problems of the underclass is not very convincing.

Carol Crystle '64GSAS, '70TC
Chicago, IL

PULITZER SURPRISE

The College Walk piece describing the 2011 Pulitzer Prize awards ceremony (“Nibs and Nibbles,” Summer 2011) quotes DeWitt Clinton Professor of History Eric Foner as stating that the last Columbia historian to win the Pulitzer was Richard Hofstadter in 1964. While true for Columbia *faculty*, the 1981 Pulitzer Prize for history was won by Lawrence A. Cremin, then the president of

Teachers College, for his *American Education: The National Experience, 1783–1876*. Cremin received his PhD in history from GSAS in 1949. Foner’s larger point, “That shows you it’s not an inside job,” is of course sustained, since all three Pulitzers were richly deserved.

Roger Muzii '88GSAS
Sleepy Hollow, NY

I enjoyed Thomas Vinciguerra’s piece on the Pulitzer Prizes. The article reminded me of a question I’ve had for years: Why is Columbia rarely, if ever, mentioned when the names of the winners are announced?

Living in Greater Boston, I can assure you that if someone at Harvard so much as sneezes, it’s publicized. Does Columbia University purposefully downplay its role in the Pulitzers? If so, why?

The Pulitzer Prize is an internationally recognized and respected award, and the University would do well to more appropriately advertise its stewardship of this annual event.

Lee J. Dunn Jr. '65CC
Concord, MA

Sig Gissler, journalism professor and Pulitzer Prize administrator, responds:

In a widely distributed press release, Colum-

bia University announces the Pulitzer Prizes each April after they are determined by the Pulitzer Prize Board, an essentially independent body that meets on campus and includes the president of the University and the dean of the journalism school. Other important Pulitzer news is also disseminated through Columbia press releases. While the Pulitzer Prize office is not an administrative part of the journalism school, it is located there and has a good working relationship with the school.

CHEMICAL REACTION

Paul Hond’s “Chemical Bonding” College Walk essay in the Summer issue brought back memories of Havemeyer and Chandler from a half century ago. The arrival of Gilbert Stork in 1953 marked the establishment of a renowned research program that attracted and ultimately trained and inspired many of the preeminent organic chemists practicing today. It is good to know that the Thursday-evening problem sessions created by Stork are still operating. Of course, personal computers and PowerPoint presentations did not exist, so one stood exposed at the chalkboard trying to draw and explain simultaneously. These multi-hour informal discussions were

LETTERS

among the most exciting and stimulating experiences I, and many of my fellow students, enjoyed at Columbia.

William Reusch '57GSAS
Okemos, MI

DONOVAN'S BRAIN

Phillip Knightley's review of Douglas Waller's biography of "Wild Bill" Donovan, the founder of the OSS and progenitor of the CIA, was compelling and nothing short of brilliant ("Soldier, Spy," Summer 2011). This was particularly true of Knightley's conclusion that Donovan's role in creating the CIA unleashed on the American people a monster that has cost billions of unnecessary taxpayer dollars, stomped all over civil liberties, and been a complete failure — the emperor with no clothes who sits in the middle of the intelligence community. Anyone who has read Pulitzer Prize-winner Tim Weiner's *Legacy of Ashes: The History of the CIA* knows what a disaster the CIA is and has always been. This agency's only successful operations, as Weiner '78CC, '79JRN shows, were to overthrow three democratically elected regimes — Iran under Mosaddeq in 1953, Guatemala under Árbenz in 1954, and Chile under Allende in 1973. Knightley properly lays a lot of the blame for this horror show on Donovan. Congratulations

on this spot-on, informative, and beautifully written review.

J. Michael Parish
Morristown, NJ

You have an excellent magazine. It is professional, prudent, timely, and comprehensive.

But one unattractive and unwarranted comment in Phillip Knightley's review of *Wild Bill Donovan: The Spymaster Who Created the OSS and Modern American Espionage* was not in keeping with your high standards.

The final paragraph refers to J. Edgar Hoover spreading the rumor that his rival Donovan had died of syphilis. Why mention a rumor about an American who won every combat medal of the United States? We are taught that we should not repeat an alleged wrongdoing unless it is justified and relevant.

I worked at Donovan's law firm at 2 Wall Street in 1959 and had the highest esteem for Donovan, who died that year. In 1959, the firm had a reunion of the French Maquis. I attended and was impressed with the gratitude of the French toward Donovan for his stellar work on behalf of the French Resistance and the Allied cause.

Alfred J. Boulos '59LAW
Houston, TX

WITHOUT ARMS

I congratulate Columbia for reinstating Naval ROTC. I agree that, at this time, it is the right thing. As I wrote in my letter in the Winter issue, this praise comes from someone who "consider[s] myself a veteran — but one who fought for my country by blocking the steps of Low Library to prevent the ROTC from recruiting on campus; by being dragged away from anti-Vietnam War rallies by the police; and by registering voters in South Carolina for Martin Luther King's Southern Christian Leadership Conference."

My letter then was in response to Paul Hond's article on Lt. Col. Jason Dempsey '08GSAS and his study of political attitudes in the military, from which we perhaps could summarize that there is not, nor is there a need for, a monolithic political attitude amongst military personnel.

My letter drew out a few responses that ignored what I wrote and focused on one point: that I was not a veteran. The writers assumed that the only real veterans are military veterans, and that no one else can fight for freedom or for one's country.

But if the military was then fighting for our freedom, they left out a big chunk of freedom back here at home. Who was excluded from freedoms such as voting, or sitting at a lunch counter or on a bus? Furthermore, the protesters at the rallies I attended were protesting not against the soldiers, but against the misdirection of our leadership. It is this leadership with which many in the military have recently had problems.

Perhaps the silliest letter was from David Clayton Carrad '66 JRN, who invited me to visit the "local VFW and American Legion posts armed with . . . that issue of *Columbia Magazine* (since [I have] evidently never been armed with anything else)" to "help round out" my education. Leaving aside Carrad's notion that only armed people can do something for their country, I would have invited him, in turn, to have faced police dogs, fire hoses, southern sheriffs, extremely hostile FBI agents — all done the MLK way, without arms.

The U.S. military is a fantastic institution that, like this country, can still use a lot of improvement. Narrow-mindedness is a big obstacle. As Lt. Col. Dempsey stated — and as I closed my original letter — political opinions, particularly strongly one-sided ones, should be repressed until after retirement or other exit from the military. No one has responded to the main concern I expressed in that letter, the rampant and open, unmitigated disparagement of President Obama by currently active military personnel.

Claude Suhl '65GSAS
High Falls, NY

DULY NOTED

This elderly Glee Clubber enjoyed "Sing, Lion, Sing," Paul Hond's piece on the resurgence of singing groups at Columbia

Questions? Comments?

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(“Finals,” Summer 2011). I also enjoyed singing at the 2010 Alumni Weekend. But I take some issue with the idea that the Blue Notes are now Notes & Keys.

I can’t document all the vocal group configurations between 1955 and the present, but back when I was in the College, the Blue Notes (the barbershop quartet) and Notes & Keys (the triple quartet that specialized in madrigals and “fun songs”) coexisted. I was part of Notes & Keys, its leader during my senior year.

It’s conceivable that at some point during the past 56 years there was a period when only one group might have existed and the Blue Notes might have later been Notes & Keys, but back in the early ’50s the two thrived happily, side by side.

Stuart M. Kaback ’55CC, ’60GSAS
Cranford, NJ

Several articles in the Summer 2011 issue caught my attention: “Sing, Lion, Sing” might have mentioned one of the most famous Glee Club and Blue Note members, Art Garfunkel ’62CC. My late cousin Andy Krulwich sang bass with the quartet.

“The Untouchables” failed to mention Irv DeKoff, the coach who was responsible for starting the fencing success and tradition at Columbia.

On a more obscure note, your news article on the retirement of Donald Keene reminded me of Henry Graff, professor emeritus of history at Columbia and presidential historian, who was a contemporary of Professor Keene. I interviewed Professor Graff for an oral-history book I am compiling. Graff, who earned his master’s and PhD from Columbia, was drafted into the U.S. Army in 1941, where, because of his fluency in Japanese, he was enlisted to translate and decode ciphers from General Oshima regarding his visit to French landing sites with German foreign minister von Ribbentrop. These translations told the Allied forces where the Germans expected an invasion and, needless to say, changed the course of the war.

Peter Krulewitch ’62CC
New York, NY



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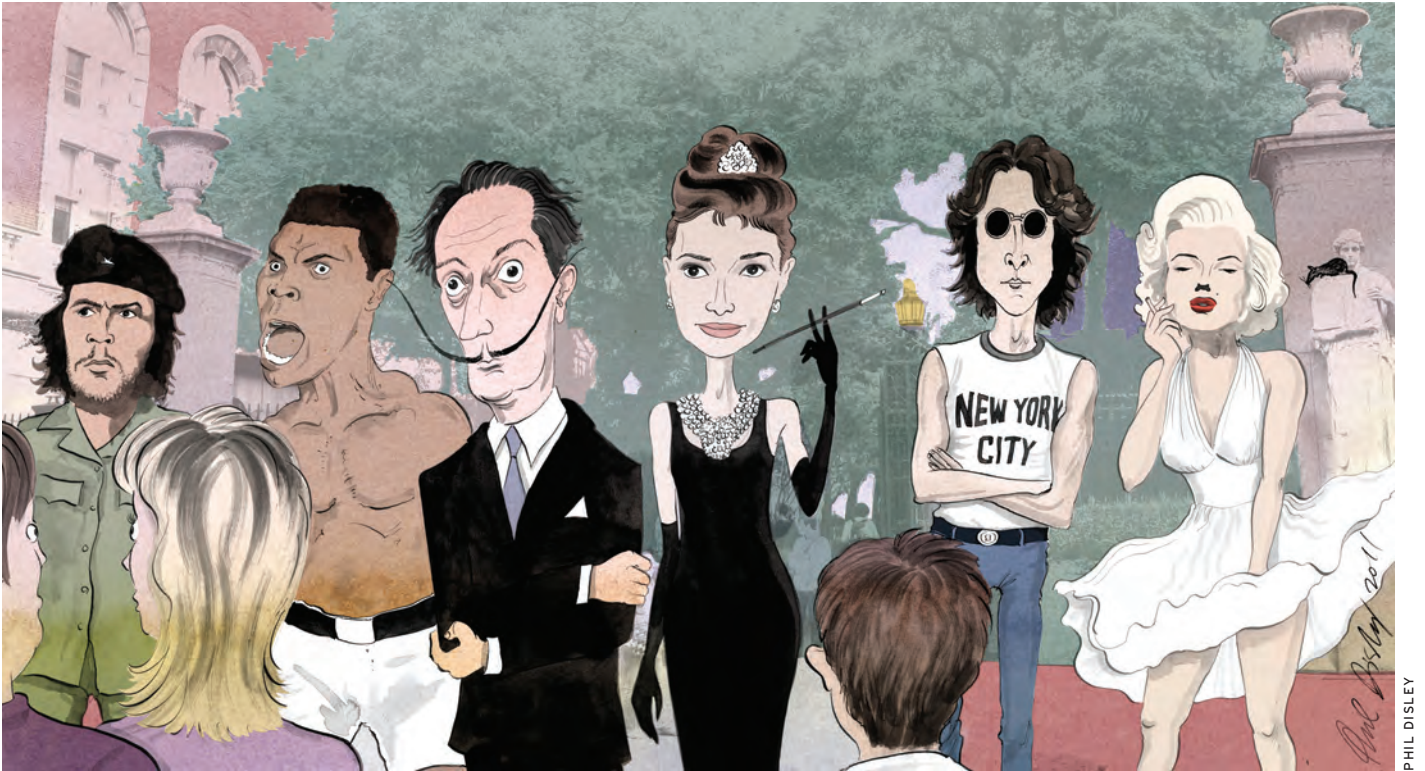
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PHIL DISLEY

Poster Children

“**T**he first two weeks out here are the best, because people are full of hope, identifying and projecting who they are as individuals,” said Michael Wells, standing behind his table in front of the 116th Street gates on Broadway. “Who am I? What does my room say about me?”

On a sunny, beach-blue day a week before the start of classes, Wells, 53, wearing braids, tan-tinted Ray-Ban sunglasses, and a gray Columbia T-shirt, was helping students answer those perennial questions. Dalí or Ali? Van Gogh or Golightly? Monet or — money?

Wells sells posters. For the past eight years, he has brought pop personality to local apartments and dorm rooms with his stash of Hollywood pinups, famous paintings, Harlem jazz legends, the rock 'n' roll tragic dead, and arty photographs of couples kissing. For many of his customers, wallpaper means the backdrop of a computer screen, and the sight of 18-year-olds turning

over the big laminated leaves of Wells's folio called to mind the tactile discovery of holding a record album, or a world atlas.

On either side of Wells, under canopies of Chase blue and Citibank white, purveyors of other products and services competed for students' attention. Time Warner Cable offered high-speed hookups; a yellow booth for Havana Central touted dollar empanadas on Wednesdays and live Latin music all weekend; assertive young bank reps in blue V-neck pullovers hawked credit lines and cash rewards; and by the curb, on its haunches, crouched a 25-foot-tall, red-eyed, inflatable rat.

“Audrey Hepburn,” said Wells, when asked about his biggest sellers. The choice was surprising for a clientele born circa 1993, the year of Hepburn's death, but as Wells remarked, “I never fail to see a mother or grandmother talking about Audrey Hepburn to a daughter or granddaughter.” (On

this day, Audrey, sporting her *Breakfast at Tiffany's* pearls, black gloves, and long cigarette holder, was purchased by an undergrad from Russia.) John Lennon, Jimi Hendrix, and Jim Morrison remain popular, said Wells, but “Marilyn Monroe has dipped off. She used to be huge.”

The same could be said of Barack Obama and Lady Gaga, according to Wells. (Earlier that morning, a teacher had bought an Obama poster, which Wells speculated was for classroom use.) Chase and Citibank, on the other hand, were still huge, and every so often a student would stop at one of the brochure-covered tables and fill out forms. Chase proffered lollipops. In the bright-red stall of Sovereign Bank, which was bought in 2009 by Spain's Banco Santander, and which promised \$50 if you applied for a loan, one of the friendly agents cast a wary

glance at the towering rat. “What company is *that* from?” she said.

The rat was in fact a prop deployed by the New York City District Council of Carpenters to protest alleged labor violations involving a subcontractor working on campus. It was the closest thing on the sidewalk to a political statement. The Time Warner guys, 20-year veterans of this back-to-school bazaar, noted there were fewer socialist booths than there used to be (the current figure was zero), though earlier that day a man was handing out a special edition of *Revolution*, the newspaper of the Revolutionary Communist Party, USA. In it were Bible-style excerpts from *Basics*, a collection of writings by RCP leader Bob Avakian. (*Basics 3:1: We need a revolution. Anything else, in the final analysis, is bullshit.*) Such were the choices on 116th: violent overthrow or free

checking with no minimum balance? Audrey or Marilyn? Cubism or Cuba?

Wells had answers. Picasso, for instance, always flew off the rack, but sales of the iconic red-and-black graphic of Che Guevara, the physician-turned-Marxist-guerrilla, had been flagging since 2008. Wells blamed oversaturation. Market forces had put the “Che” in “cliché,” creating a dilemma for the fashion-conscious that no bargain could correct. (All of Wells's posters cost \$12, or the price of Havana Central's Ultimate Mojito.)

Despite lowered interest in some of his stock, Wells, who is from Harlem, has a better time selling posters at Columbia than he does elsewhere in the city. Etiquette-wise, Wells suggests, Columbians are more Holly Golightly than *How to Marry a Millionaire*.

“It's nice,” he said, “when no one tries to haggle.” — Paul Hond

Ten Years After

“This has been a very bewildering decade,” *New Yorker* staff writer George Packer told an overflow crowd of 200 in the Renaissance-style auditorium of Columbia's Italian Academy.

On a gray, rainy anniversary, when memories seemed raw and talk promised comfort, Packer and a panel of writers whose fiction has touched on 9/11 — Claire Messud (*The Emperor's Children*), Joseph O'Neill (*Netherland*), and Deborah Eisenberg (*Twilight of the Superheroes*) — addressed the cultural fallout of that day. By turns lively and dull, rambling and insightful, the discussion had, as Packer quipped afterward, “its own fitful trajectory.”

Andrew Delbanco, director of the Center for American Studies, and literary critic Adam Kirsch, who teaches a class at the center called “The New York Intellectuals,” introduced the panel, which was moderated by *New York Times* book review edi-

tor Sam Tanenhaus. The participants were attired mostly in grays and blacks, but the repartee was less muted. Tanenhaus, the bearded, bespectacled biographer of Whitaker Chambers and William F. Buckley, and Packer, with his elegant suit and polished manner, traded literary references like star students in a graduate seminar. And while no systematic cultural critique emerged, there was at least one consensus: that the impact of 9/11, notwithstanding two wars and some erosion of civil liberties, had been less profound than originally anticipated.

Packer, the author of *The Assassins' Gate: America in Iraq* and *Interesting Times: Writings from a Turbulent Decade*, said that his first thought after seeing images of the terrorist attacks, followed quickly by concern for the victims, was “Maybe this will make us better.”

“But I think on the whole,” he continued, “it did not. Our institutions, which

were already in a state of early decadence, continued to decline, from banking to politics to the media. We've been in a state of perpetual reaction for 10 years.”

Eisenberg gave voice to the resulting muddle: “It's hard to say any one thing — immediately, the opposite springs to mind. There's a sense of fear, shame, defeat, and hope that everything will just change somehow the next time we wake up.”

“We overestimated it,” O'Neill said of al-Qaeda and the terrorist threat. “[9/11] was obviously a gigantic fluke. Why is that so hard to say?”

But Packer disagreed. He cautioned that al-Qaeda and its ideas remain a menace, and he credited the U.S. government with preventing more terrorist attacks.

The events of 9/11 changed the relationship of New York with the rest of the country, if only temporarily, making it, said Packer, “an American city.”

“New York is an international city,” he said. “And, for a short while, New York became part of the country. Then, like so much else, that faded. What was left was, in New York, grief, and, in the rest of the country, fear and anger. I think the grief ennobled New York. The rest of the country inevitably didn’t feel it in the same way. That emotional reality set us on a different course, and I think we are back to being this strange international outpost on the coastline of the United States.”

Some of the panel’s most penetrating exchanges concerned the challenges of writing fiction in the wake of 9/11. Messud, whose novel *The Emperor’s Children* deals with the lives of a group of privileged young adults in New York before and after the tragedy, said, “One of the things about 9/11 was that none of us could ignore it. If you were a butterfly in the Amazon, there was some change in the air.”

At the same time, she said, “the novel that sets out to be a political novel is 99.9 per-

cent of the time a bad novel. The novel is a human form about the human experience, and the politics will resonate outwards from the specificity of the human experience.”

Tanenhaus responded with a litany of novels that he described as “explicitly political” and “still of some consequence,” among them Lionel Trilling’s *The Middle of the Journey*, Arthur Koestler’s *Darkness at Noon*, George Orwell’s *1984*, Henry James’s *The Princess Casamassima*, and Joseph Conrad’s *The Secret Agent*.

Packer, seeking some middle ground, agreed in part with Messud, saying, “You’re right: If you try to write a political novel, it will be a bad one.” But not so writing *about* politics, he maintained. In fact, he said, “Politics is such a central subject that it’s hard to imagine a great writer *not* writing about it sooner or later.” It was an intriguing, if murky, distinction.

One audience member asked whether the conspiracy theories that have grown up

around the terrorist attacks — for example, that they might have been an inside job — might be “worthy creative fiction.”

Packer dissented. “We live at a time when facts are so fungible,” he said. “My inclination at this moment is to resist the free play of imagination over this event. I think what we need to work on is getting our head around certain facts.”

Messud suggested that the terrorists “have taken America’s imagination and used it against us.” Without the template of disaster films such as *Independence Day*, attacking skyscrapers “never would have occurred to those 19 guys,” she said, referring to the hijackers. “We put out narratives that are fictional entirely for diversion and entertainment, and they, too, have implications.”

“I think you have to give those 19 guys a little more credit,” Packer said dryly, and, 10 years on, this New York audience was able to laugh. — Julia M. Klein

Hacking It

In the commons room of an NYU dormitory this summer, Aditya Mukerjee ’12CC sat with other HackNY fellows amid a jumble of tangled power cords, empty pizza boxes, and cans of Red Bull. It was 4 a.m., and the hackers had been at it all day and night. Incessant clicking filled the air, while questions about computer languages — Java, Delphi, PHP — flashed over the monitors, leading to new lines of code that sparked from the fingertips of the programmers behind the screens.

Ah, hackers. Their vocation so misunderstood, their good name sullied by those who would gain illegal access to your bank records.

“If you think hacking is a bad thing, you’re probably not a hacker,” says Chris Wiggins ’93CC, an associate professor of applied mathematics at Columbia. For

Wiggins, hacking means building on existing technologies to make them better and more powerful.

In 2010, Wiggins, with Hilary Mason, of the URL-shortening service Bitly, and Evan Korth, an associate professor of computer science at NYU, cofounded HackNY, a nonprofit that, according to its mission statement, “aims to federate the next generation of hackers for the New York innovation community” through student hackathons (those heavily caffeinated all-night coding sessions), internships, and informal networking events.

“Last year, a blogger wrote that New York has a problem — that there are no good engineers here,” Wiggins says. “But I know all these energetic and creative engineering students. So I asked myself: ‘What

can engineering faculty do to improve opportunities for students?’”

It was a real question in a market where, for every 10 coding and programming jobs, there is one qualified engineer to fill the role. HackNY acts as a kind of matchmaker, pairing talented young engineers like Mukerjee with the increasing number of technology start-ups in New York, like Etsy, Gilt Groupe, Tumblr, OkCupid, and BuzzFeed. In 2010, there were 12 HackNY fellows creating online games, social-media applications, and even musical instruments for iPhones. This year, there were 35.

Mukerjee, a double major in computer science and statistics, worked on the data team at Foursquare, a social-media site that allows members to let others know where they are by checking in with their



MARK STEELE

smartphones. The person with the most check-ins at any given location is considered the “mayor” of that place.

Foursquare has more than 10 million members who check in about 3 million times a day. These numbers resulted in a prob-

lem that any start-up would love to have: an overwhelming amount of data. Mukerjee helped write code to organize this data, and also analyzed where members check in most often and the things they say when they do. The data revealed that Foursquare users

type the word “Yay!” about six times more often than they type “Ugh!” Knowing that, Mukerjee’s team was able to create heat maps of New York, London, and Hong Kong that compared the “Yay!” levels of users in different neighborhoods in those cities. (For those keeping score, the Upper West Side appears to be happier than the Upper East.)

Although Mukerjee has been interested in New York’s start-up community for a long time, he says he never would have thought to apply to Foursquare on his own. He enjoyed the perks of the fellowship so much — the lectures about the start-up environment in New York City, the student-led meetings where fellows shared new technology skills and efficiency tricks over pizza, the “DemoFest” at the program’s end that showcased their work — that he extended his internship beyond the 10-week program.

Now, as the fall semester begins, he’s back at Columbia, bringing his new knowledge to his role as the publisher of the *Spectator*. And, of course, he’s the mayor of the Spectator Publishing Company.

— Leslie Hendrickson '06JRN

Ghost upon the Floor

On the mezzanine level of an office on the sixth floor of Butler Library, amid files and boxes, shrouded from the public eye, there stands a black wooden 19th-century mantelpiece. The front is decorated with elegant neoclassical details. The paint is chipped in spots. The mantel no longer frames a fireplace, nor is it surrounded by purple curtains and a bust of Pallas. Few people know it even exists.

The mantel first came to the attention of Columbia on December 21, 1907. That morning, Charles A. Nelson, the University librarian, opened his copy of the *New York Times* and saw a letter in the Satur-

day Review of Books that stirred his interest. The letter, from William Hemstreet of Brooklyn, offered a mantelpiece to a public institution on the condition that the relic be prominently displayed and preserved. By 9 a.m., Nelson was on the phone with Mr. Hemstreet, pleading Columbia’s case. Nelson coveted the mantel because of its history, and the history it had witnessed.

In the 1840s, the mantel was located in a farmhouse belonging to the Brennan family on the bucolic Upper West Side, in the vicinity of what today is the intersection of West 84th Street and Broadway. In 1844, a new boarder came to the farmhouse. He was a

struggling poet who occupied a small room on the second floor with his wife. The furnishings in their room were simple and included an unassuming mantelpiece bracketing the fireplace. During his stay there, the poet wrote what would become his most famous poem. He composed in the glow of the hearth. The fireplace, which provided him with warmth during the cold winter months, also made its way into the poem: *Ah, distinctly I remember it was in the bleak December, / And each separate dying ember wrought its ghost upon the floor.* Other aspects of the room also appear in the manuscript: *“Tis some visitor,” I muttered, “tapping at my chamber door / — Only*

COLLEGE WALK

this, and nothing more.” It was in that chamber, behind that door, that Edgar Allan Poe composed “The Raven.”

In 1888, when the Brennan farmhouse was being torn down, Hemstreet went to see what could be salvaged from this former residence of Poe, who had died in 1849. When Hemstreet reached the poet’s room, he found the mantelpiece and the chamber door still intact. Unable to carry more than one heavy item, Hemstreet had to decide fast. Whatever he took with him would be saved, while everything else would be lost when the house was razed. Hemstreet, for reasons that remain unclear, chose to save the mantel, leaving the chamber door, which figured more prominently in the poem, to end up in splinters. He took the mantelpiece back to Brooklyn and placed it in his personal library, where it remained for nearly two decades.

Nelson wasn’t the only respondent to Hemstreet’s 1907 letter. Organizations from

Norwich, Connecticut, and Atlantic City, New Jersey, vied with more prominent institutions, including the University of Virginia, for what the *Times* called “The Raven Mantel.” The mantel was extremely desirable because Poe’s star was rising. According to the *Times*, “The growing interest in Poe gives [the mantel] an ever-increasing value, and the next generation will doubtless put an even higher estimate on Mr. Hemstreet’s forethought than will the present.” Around the same time, the New York Shakespeare Society referred to Poe as “our American Shakespeare.”

Columbia University president Nicholas Murray Butler personally assured Hemstreet in a letter that the Raven Mantel would be “appropriately placed and sedulously cared for.” Hemstreet accepted Butler’s guarantees and presented the mantel to the University on January 4, 1908. The mantel was accompanied by documents

that testified to its having been in Poe’s room and having witnessed the composition of “The Raven.” The mantel was placed in Low Library, where it remained until 1974, when it was transferred to Butler Library. There it rests today, in a solitude that would have surprised the *Times* writer who, in 1907, predicted that at Columbia the mantel “would be visited by thousands to whom in any other place it would be inaccessible.”

Although this prophecy has yet to be fulfilled, the mantelpiece has survived for more than 150 years, and is now a part of Columbia’s Edgar Allan Poe collection, which also includes an original manuscript of “Annabel Lee” and a facsimile manuscript of “Epi-manes,” an unpublished Poe tale. From time to time, a Poe scholar ventures into Room 655 to regard the Raven Mantel, just as the poet himself did, in the saintly days of yore.

— Benjamin Waldman '08GS

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Me and Kenneth

Hearing Dean Young on a Poetry Foundation podcast talking
about Kenneth Koch
and reading his elegy for Koch,
and then, once I got to my office,
reading a few of Koch's poems in *Thank You*,
and then remembering Jeffrey Harrison's elegy for Koch
that I read online,
and the AWP panel that Mark Halliday was on celebrating Koch,

I think: I should write an elegy for Kenneth Koch!
I was in a class of his at Columbia. We read the anthology
of modern poetry he had put together with Kate Farrell,
Sleeping on the Wing. I probably wouldn't have been a poet
without that class and that book.

I wasn't a dedicated student then. When I went to my classes,
it was out of obligation. But Koch liked D. H. Lawrence so much,
and Apollinaire, and Mayakovsky, that I went to class
to hear him read their poems.

That was the year I started writing poems.
It was the year that I would walk five long blocks from my dorm
to my girlfriend's dorm, trying not to step on the cracks
in the sidewalk,
seeing how many steps I could take without doing so,
but not altering
my gait noticeably (I didn't want to look nuts).
Why didn't I look up, though? I was in New York City.
Numbers would always be there, and everywhere.
Irrelevant records would be set and broken and set,
yet I counted. And when I made it to Nicole's door
(I changed her name),
I put the numbers aside and fell into her arms and her bed.
I wrote a sentimental love poem to her about those cracks,
it even rhymed,
and when she read it she hugged me and kissed me and
thanked me.

I don't know where that poem is now.
Nicole is a pediatrician somewhere in Delaware — I Googled her
a couple times.
I wonder if Kenneth Koch got to enjoy the word Googled.

And that was also the year that students put chains
across the doors
of Hamilton Hall, where Koch's class was held,
and if you wanted

to go to class, you had to take a tunnel from Philosophy Hall,
so even though I agreed with the protests — I wanted Columbia
to divest from South Africa — I would go to class. Sometimes.

I didn't go to class the day Koch read a few student poems.
I was telling another student how I had turned in my parody of
Lawrence's poem,
"Snake" — God, that's a good poem. You should read that
after you finish reading this — and that student said,
"Oh, he read your poem in class!"

If I wanted to be maudlin I could make that moment
emblematic of my life:
How I missed the times when my words were read aloud,
and there may even be some truth to that. I'm a teacher,
and students, if they talk about me at all, probably repeat things
I've said in class outside of class, among themselves,
so I don't get to hear my own words being appreciated.

If you're interested, there's more about me and Kenneth Koch
in my essay "Me and Langston." But I didn't write about
the letter that he sent me a few months before he died,
after I'd written to him to thank him for *Sleeping on the Wing*
because I'd used the book in my creative writing classes
for a decade and I still loved it, even if my students didn't.
In the letter, he did what I did at the beginning of this stanza —
He told me about other books of his. "If you liked that book,
you might like . . ." he wrote.

Before I finish, I want to mention
that I was listening to the podcast about Kenneth Koch
on my iPod as I was walking to school on the day
after Halloween.
Did Kenneth ever hear that word, iPod?
And as I was walking, and listening to him read a poem,
and then Dean Young read his elegy to Koch on the podcast
through a cell phone —
"Elegy on a Toy Piano" it's called —
I was seeing how many steps I could take, consecutively,
without stepping on a crack.

— J. D. Scrimgeour '86CC, '87GSAS

*Scrimgeour is the author of the poetry
collection The Last Miles and two nonfiction
books. In 2010, he released Ogunquit and
Other Works, a poetry and music CD. He is a
professor of English at Salem State University.*



THE

By Paul Hond

LONG NIGHT

TACKLING THE SCOURGE OF SEX TRAFFICKING, FROM THE BIG SCREEN TO THE BIG STREET

I Tanya Domi remembers a garden, a pot of coffee, Madeleine's cigarettes, and a sunny spring day on the west side of Sarajevo.

It was May 2001, and Domi '07GSAS, who from 1996 to 2000 worked in Bosnia for the U.S. State Department as a human-rights and media-rights officer and as spokesperson for the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) in Bosnia and Herzegovina, had returned to Sarajevo to follow up on her academic research. Her first order of business was to visit her friend Madeleine Rees, the British-born head of the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights in Bosnia.

Domi's concern was sex trafficking. She had learned of the horror during her years in postwar Bosnia with OSCE. The sex trade in Bosnia was an open secret among UN contractors, a situation that Domi found especially grievous, given that during the Bosnian War, from 1992 to 1995, tens of thousands of women had

been raped as a matter of policy. Many died, by injuries or suicide. Others were sold into slavery. It was unthinkable, then, that UN peacekeepers in Bosnia, there to help bring order to a country that had seen rape camps and mass slaughter, could be involved in human trafficking.

Prostitution is illegal in Bosnia, but international personnel had full diplomatic immunity, and, in any case, the plight of women was not a burning issue for the international forces there. Domi had been in rooms with men like U.S. ambassador to the UN Richard Holbrooke, NATO commander Wesley Clark, and U.S. Army Europe commander Eric Shinseki, where, as Domi later said, the issue of sex trafficking never came up. "*Never*. Women were just not a priority."

In the garden, Rees leaned back in her chair, smoke unwinding from her fingers, a copper coffee cup in her hand, and told Domi about a UN peacekeeper named Kathryn Bolkovac.

Photography by Tanit Sakakini and Ingrid Skousgard

THE LONG NIGHT

Bolkovac was an ex-cop from Nebraska and a divorced mother of three. In 1999, looking for a change in her life, she took a job with DynCorp, the government-services company that the State Department had hired to recruit American peacekeepers for the mission in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The contract paid \$100,000 for six months. Bolkovac became an investigator in the UN Gender Affairs Office, and uncovered an appalling scandal: UN monitors, including some DynCorp employees, were not only patronizing the hundreds of brothels that had sprung up around the peacekeeping presence in Bosnia, but were buying, selling, and transporting women and girls, most of whom came from the former Soviet Union. When Bolkovac reported the problem to her superiors in the UN International Police Task Force (IPTF), she was told to back off — no joke in a part of the world where accidents could happen. Military commanders removed her case files. But Bolkovac kept pressing. In 2000, the UN relieved Bolkovac of her duties, after which DynCorp fired her for allegedly falsifying her time sheets.

Domi had heard some outrageous things during her years in Bosnia, but she was still shocked by Rees's account.

"Are you going to the press with this?" Domi said. "Are you ready to go public?"

"Yes," Rees told her. "I'm ready."

The women agreed that the story should be broken in a Bosnian paper, out of regard for a population whose trust had been so profoundly violated. Domi had worked in media development in Bosnia and had even written articles for *Oslobodjenje* (Liberation), Bosnia's oldest daily newspaper.

"How would you feel about my doing this through *Oslobodjenje*?" Domi said.

Rees didn't have to think. "Tanya," she said, "you've got to get this out."

The timing was crucial. In just a few weeks, on June 14, Jacques Paul Klein, head of the UN mission in Bosnia and Herzegovina, was scheduled to address the UN Security Council. Months earlier, Rees had confronted Klein about the mistreatment of Bolkovac, and Klein responded by going to UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan to get Rees fired. But Rees had two key allies — Mary Robinson, the UN high commissioner for human rights, and Angela King, Annan's special adviser on gender issues — and Klein's maneuver failed. "Madeleine outflanked him," Domi later recalled.

That seemed to be happening again, in the garden in west Sarajevo. Rees handed Domi a folder of documents, and Domi drove back to her apartment near the Sarajevo Brewery and phoned the editor of *Oslobodjenje*.

Sex trafficking?

Like most people in North America, Larysa Kondracki had never heard of it. But in 2003, Kondracki '01GS, then a graduate film student at Columbia, was visiting her parents in Toronto when the topic came up. The Kondrackis belonged to



Tanya Domi

INGRID SKOUSGARD

that city's large Ukrainian-Canadian community, and were aware that many of the victims of sex slavery in Europe came from places like Ukraine and Moldova, poor countries hit hard by the economic turmoil that followed the collapse of the Soviet Union.

A week later, Kondracki, who was searching for an idea for her thesis film, received a package from her mother: a recent book by the Canadian journalist Victor Malarek called *The Natashas: Inside the New Global Sex Trade*. Kondracki was horrified and fascinated by what she read. She came to a section on the UN, and it was there, in a brief passage, that she first saw the name Kathryn Bolkovac.

The freewheeling early 2000s were good years to be in film school. "It was the height of the million-dollar short, where anything seemed doable," Kondracki says. "It was also the time of *Boys Don't Cry* and *High Art* and *Monster*, all these amazing, low-budget first features. And a lot of Columbia professors were saying, 'Hey, maybe you can do your thesis as a feature film.'"

Kondracki knew she wanted to examine sex trafficking. A producer friend, Christina Piovesan, told her that she needed to find a way in. "So I went back and reread *The Natashas*, because nobody can take a two-hour movie of just sex trafficking,"

Kondracki says. “I found that bit about Kathy again, and, when I googled it, I saw that it was all over the news — or at least the European news.”

Kondracki took the idea to a screenwriter in the graduate program, Eilis Kirwan ’04SOA, who agreed to collaborate with her on the script. Kirwan lived in Ireland, a convenient base from which the two women could make their research trips. In February 2004, Kondracki and Kirwan visited Kathy Bolkovac at her home in the Netherlands. That summer, the writers set out on a six-month rail trip. They began in Vienna, where they spoke with OSCE officials, then journeyed to Poland, Romania, Ukraine, Georgia, Bulgaria, Bosnia, and Kosovo. They visited underground shelters for trafficking victims, literal holes in the ground that housed a half dozen frightened girls, run by women who, Kondracki says, “were risking their lives.”

Over the next five years, the screenplay of *The Whistleblower* took shape. In 2009, the project, funded with Canadian and German money, attracted two big stars for the lead roles: British actress Rachel Weisz would play Bolkovac, and another Briton, Vanessa Redgrave, would play Madeleine Rees.

The movie was green-lighted. Kondracki began shooting in Romania in late October 2009. That same week in New York, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon gave his annual United Nations Day message. “On this UN Day,” he said, “let us resolve to redouble our efforts on behalf of the vulnerable, the powerless, the defenseless.”

III Tanya Domi’s article broke in *Oslobodjenje* in early June 2001. An English-language version also appeared on the website of the Institute for War & Peace Reporting. The piece was stark and direct. “Bolkovac alleged that extensive trafficking of women into prostitution had been carried out by UN personnel, NATO troops, and other international officials in Bosnia, along with the local police,” Domi wrote. “Bolkovac was diagnosed as ‘stressed and burned out’ by the IPTF deputy commissioner Mike Stiers, and her contract with the UN was subsequently terminated by DynCorp, the U.S. State Department’s personnel subcontractor for the UN Mission.”

After filing her report with *Oslobodjenje*, Domi approached her friend Aida Cerkez, the bureau chief for the Associated Press in Bosnia, and helped Cerkez prepare a story for the wire.

The bid to put Jacques Paul Klein on the defensive succeeded. By the time Klein stood before the Security Council to talk about the UN effort in Bosnia, all the member states had the documents, and reporters were ready with questions.

But Klein had come prepared. He announced that the Bolkovac matter had been brought to his attention, that the UN was not involved in human trafficking, and that there was no cover-up, but that, in response to Bolkovac’s complaints, he was implementing a measure called STOP — the Special Trafficking Operations Program — which would include a series of raids on brothels.

“He knew he had to cover his ass,” says Domi. “The raids were done as a reaction, and it was a good show. But the real work that Bolkovac had done in confirming the identities of UN personnel and Bosnian officials involved in sex trafficking was never presented in a court of law.”

Still, the reporters seemed satisfied with Klein’s response, and so did the members of the Security Council.

I “The term *human trafficking* can be problematic,” says Siddharth Kara ’01BUS, the author of *Sex Trafficking: Inside the Business of Modern Slavery* and a fellow of Human Trafficking at Harvard’s Kennedy School. “‘Trafficking’ tries to encapsulate everything — acquisition, movement, and exploitation — but the nature of the term focuses on the movement, and, as a result, we’ve become fixated on movement. Do we stop movement? Do we make movement the crime?”

“But the movement is almost always incidental to the exploitation. We used to refer to the acquiring and movement of people for the purpose of selling them into servitude or exploiting them as slaves as ‘slave trading,’ and it was very clear exactly what was going on.”

In the summer of 1995, Kara, then a Duke undergrad, spent eight weeks as a volunteer in a refugee camp near the town of Novo Mesto, Slovenia. The camp was filled with Bosnian Muslims who had been routed from their homes. Kara lived as the refugees did, on “stale bread, oily soup, and rotting brown salad.” He lost 18 pounds. His main occupation was listening to survivors’

Domi had heard some outrageous things during her years in Bosnia, but she was still shocked by Rees’s account.

stories of death and despair. A particular atrocity bore into his conscience: Serbian soldiers, he was told, had raped countless Bosnian women and trafficked them to brothels across Europe.

Five years later, Kara, still haunted by the stories, began poking around in libraries to see what research and analysis was being done on sex slavery. He didn’t find much. Then, in 2000, while getting his MBA at Columbia, Kara decided that his own advantages and abilities required him to dig deeper.

“I had a diverse background in finance and economics and literature, and eventually law as well, and I thought, Let me take a plunge and see what I come up with,” Kara says. “I knew that in essence these were economic crimes.”

Kara’s self-funded odyssey took him around the world and under it — down into the brothels, sex clubs, and all-night mas-

THE LONG NIGHT

sage parlors of India, Nepal, Burma, Thailand, Vietnam, Italy, Moldova, Albania, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, Mexico, and the United States. With hired guides and translators, he traveled to big cities and remote villages to get a grasp of economic conditions; made his way to border towns to observe the mechanisms of transport; and met with former and current slaves, the majority of whom were too terrified, distrustful, and traumatized to speak. “Most victims I interviewed were under the age of 25,” Kara reported in his book, “and most suffered debilitating physical injuries, malnutrition, psychological traumas, post-traumatic stress disorder, and infection by a scourge of sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV/AIDS.” Dozens of Kara’s subjects were minors.

Kara estimates that there are between 22 and 30 million slaves worldwide, forced into everything from prostitution to construction. By Kara’s calculation, the sex-slavery market generated about \$38 billion in 2010, making it one of the world’s fastest-growing criminal industries. He credits the global marketplace for driving down prices to the point of stimulating new demand.

“If you take the fundamental premise that slavery has always been about maximizing profit by minimizing or eliminating the cost of labor, the nature of globalization puts that formula on steroids,” Kara says. “It’s not just acquiring people from one continent, spending weeks to cross seas, and then putting them to work in agricultural servitude, which you can monetize once or twice a year depending on the crop; you can now acquire poor, desperate, vulnerable individuals from almost anywhere for a very small amount,

“The traffickers repeatedly rape them and beat them, burn them in discreet places, and break them down.” — Larysa Kondracki

transport them to almost anywhere in the world within a day or two or three for a relatively small cost, and then, in the case of commercial sex, monetize them several times a day.”

In *The Whistleblower*, a Ukrainian teenager, Raya, is sold into slavery by her uncle, who had promised her and her friend jobs in a hotel. Kondracki describes a crucial step in the trafficking process that she didn’t depict onscreen: “The traffickers hold these girls and repeatedly rape them and beat them, burn them in discreet places, behind the ear and on the bottom of the foot, and break them down, to the point where they can sell them. Then they give them this weapon of hope, which is, ‘You can rebuy your life.’ If you look at how psychologically advanced the crime is, it’s quite brilliant, in a way.”

What Kondracki does show, through the eyes of Weisz’s Bolkovac, is awful enough. The Polaroids that Bolkovac finds tacked to a wall in a raided bar tell the story: young, listless girls being groped by partying peacekeepers wearing UN T-shirts. What might look at a glance like vulgar frat-house hijinks becomes, as we absorb the context, a ghoulish tableau of human misery. Then, in the searching beam of Bolkovac’s flashlight, we see the slaves’ dungeon-like living quarters, suffused with the gunmetal blues and grays of contemporary noir: filthy mattresses, strewn condoms, syringes, a waste-filled bowl, and, most startlingly, metal chains and cages.

The Whistleblower’s sharp, straightforward script evokes a 1970s conspiracy thriller (Kondracki’s favorite kind of movie growing up), and the movie’s dark, stylized look exposes a vivid moral ugliness, rendered in the gaudy hues of smeared makeup, bruises, and dried blood. But the movie might well be remembered for its one explicitly brutal scene. In it, Raya, whom the police had handed over to Bolkovac after finding her dazed and beaten, is recaptured by her traffickers, and now they will make an example of her. The other girls are forced to watch, their screaming faces wide with terror as Raya, bent over a table, receives her punishment. None of them will talk to the police anytime soon.

V *The Whistleblower* opened in New York on August 5, 2011. A *New York Times* review stated that the movie “tells a story so repellent that it is almost beyond belief.”

In the months before the release, *The Whistleblower*’s distributor, Samuel Goldwyn Films, had proposed screening the movie for UN officials. The officials weren’t enthusiastic. The UN correspondents wanted to see it, though, and in July, Goldwyn Films gave them a screening at UN Headquarters in New York, followed by a press conference with Kondracki and Kirwan. Soon afterward, a private DVD screening was held for members of the UN media division.

But there was still no response from the top. Kondracki wanted a major screening for the entire UN staff, including Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, with a discussion to follow. Again, *The Whistleblower* team urged the UN to embrace the movie and show a willingness to confront its mistakes. The UN remained noncommittal.

Behind the scenes, however, *The Whistleblower* was being intensely debated. On July 5, assistant secretary-general for human rights Ivan Simonovic circulated an internal memo, which was leaked to Kondracki. It described a meeting among Ban’s senior advisers on how to handle the imminent PR challenge of *The Whistleblower*. Some voices called for a positive, proactive approach, with a public screening and dialogue. Others argued for ignoring the movie and making statements only if asked.

The memo stunned Kondracki; evidently, high-ranking UN officials had already seen *The Whistleblower*. Had the secretary-general seen it, too? How serious was this talk of a screening and

discussion? Kondracki hadn't heard about it, and neither had anyone at Goldwyn. What was going on?

Kondracki decided to find out: She sat down and typed a letter to Secretary-General Ban.

I have been made aware that UN leaders are split as to how to deal with this film, Kondracki wrote. I have heard that the UN is opting for a "damage control" mode. Sir, I strongly wish to impart to you how very wrong a decision that is. I believe in the United Nations. I believe in the values of such an organization, but I lose faith, not only when I hear of involvement in sex-trafficking, but when I hear that you may not want to use this opportunity to right those wrongs.

And then:

Please know that I was very careful to ensure that the film was not a sensationalized account of the story, but rather depicted very well-documented facts. To be completely honest, the film tones down the extent of the crimes being perpetrated. Crimes that were being committed by the very people who were meant to protect the innocent. I believe there is now a chance for the United Nations

to own up to these events, learn from history, and begin to tackle how to make changes in future missions.

Kondracki put the letter into an envelope and sent it to the head of the UN correspondents, who personally delivered it to the office of the secretary-general. Included in the package was a DVD of *The Whistleblower*.

VI In the summer of 2003, President George W. Bush, in a speech before the UN General Assembly, called the issue of trafficking and human slavery "the biggest human-rights violation of our time." That same year, Congress passed the PROTECT Act of 2003, which made it illegal "to recruit, entice, obtain, provide, move, or harbor a person or to benefit from such activities knowing that the person will be caused to engage in commercial sex acts where the person is under 18 or where force, fraud, or coercion exists," according to the U.S. Department of Justice. Three years earlier, President Bill Clinton had signed the Victims of Trafficking and Violence Protection Act, the first comprehensive federal law in the United States to deal with modern slavery.



Larysa Kondracki and Ellis Kirwan

THE LONG NIGHT

At that time, Faith Huckel '04SW was a social worker in Philadelphia. Huckel had seen a lot — women who were coming out of incarceration, who were HIV-positive, who had suffered domestic violence. But it wasn't until she got to New York in 2003 to attend Columbia that she heard about sex trafficking. "To learn that this was happening in our own backyards was absolutely astonishing," she says. "I became a little obsessed."

One night in 2004, Huckel and two lawyer friends were sitting around a kitchen table, talking about the one thing they would do to change the world if they could. They all agreed that it would be to help the victims of sex slavery.

"So I told them about some of the research I'd been doing over the year, and mentioned that one of the biggest needs in the city is safe housing," Huckel says. "Most women who have been sex-trafficked are placed in domestic-violence shelters or homeless shelters. We concluded that we wanted to start New York's first long-term safe house for this population. It was important that the program be culturally and linguistically tailored to the survivors' needs, and that they could stay for as long as their recovery was going to take."

In October 2007, Huckel threw a fundraiser with a small group of friends, supporters, and volunteers. They raised \$17,000. That got them started. By the following September, they had raised enough money for Huckel to work full-time. A few months later, the nonprofit, called Restore NYC, began cultivating a relationship with the Queens criminal court.

"If you are looking for trafficking survivors, you should go to the courts and see who's being arrested on prostitution charges," says Huckel. "Most of our clients come through Queens criminal court. Initially, they are seen as criminals. They're seen as the problem. The city is arresting the wrong people. In our annual report, there's a breakdown of trafficking arrests versus prostitution arrests, and the numbers are absolutely staggering. In 2010, there were 344 prostitution arrests in Queens and zero arrests for trafficking."

Meanwhile, Huckel had to find a building owner willing to rent space to Restore NYC. "It came down to meeting the owner and saying, 'This is what we do; it's a smaller facility, we're piloting this program for a year, and we are going to be taking on six clients.'"

Eventually, Huckel found a place in Queens. The facility opened in 2010 and filled up immediately. The women, who had been trafficked from China, Korea, and Mexico, were nabbed in brothel raids in Flushing or Corona and handed over to a criminal-justice system that really didn't know what to do with them.

Today, in the Restore NYC house, the women busy themselves with activities — knitting, sewing, yoga, ESL classes, drawing. They are assigned household chores and are required to take a 12-week job-training course.

"When the clients come in, we see a huge distrust of everything and everyone, and rightly so," Huckel says. "These are cases where girls were trafficked at 16, worked six years in New York in a room, were raped 20 or 30 times a day, were forced to have



Faith Huckel

INGRID SKOUSGARD

multiple abortions, had sexually transmitted diseases and complications, had probably attempted suicide. The list goes on. They're shy, timid, quiet. There's obviously a lot of PTSD, which presents itself as sort of a vacancy in their eyes. There's no life.

"We tell all our coordinators and volunteers that the safe house is a home to these women. Don't bring up their trafficking stories. Don't pry, don't ask questions; just support them and help them with the basic things that they need. Do they have the food they like and can cook? Do they have enough clothes? Are they comfortable in their rooms? Think of it as if you were an RA in a dorm; don't dig deeper than that.

"Just giving the women the space to work stuff out has been unbelievably helpful," Huckel says. "They can come home and shut their door and have privacy. They don't have to worry about paying for food or rent. They can simply heal. In giving them space, supporting them, showing them a sense of love, you start to see the walls come down. It just takes time."

Over the past decade, the number of U.S. programs for international and domestic sex-trafficking survivors has grown. Carol Smolenski '92GSAS, the cofounder and executive director of the U.S. chapter of the international organization ECPAT (End Child

Prostitution and Trafficking), has been focusing on changing state laws so that underage victims who through force, coercion, or manipulation of power have ended up in the sex trade are not arrested for prostitution.

“Many of these kids are sexually abused their whole lives, told by their parents to just get out of here, and end up on the street, leaving them vulnerable to a pimp who says, ‘Baby, you’re the greatest. I love you,’” Smolenski says. “The stories about the pimps are always the same. ‘Yeah, he told me I was beautiful.’ The pimps lure a 12-, 13-year-old girl and send her out on the street, and what does our system offer? We arrest her and tell her that she’s a bad kid who needs to be punished and reformed. A kid who’s been abused her whole life. And that’s the paradigm that has to change — we have to put protections in place for these kids, not arrest them.”

In 2008, the New York State Assembly passed the Safe Harbor for Exploited Children Act, which provides protections and services for exploited children as an alternative to incarceration. ECPAT-USA is working on getting similar legislation passed in New Jersey. In 2011, Minnesota and Vermont passed safe-harbor laws.

“It’s been a good year,” Smolenski says.

VII

11 August 2011

Dear Ms. Kondracki,

I write to thank you most sincerely for your letter of 1 August and for sending me a copy of the film for my personal viewing.

Last week, I saw the film, along with our senior advisers. I was pained by what I saw. I was also saddened by the involvement of the international community, particularly the United Nations, in the abuses connected with the trafficking of women and their use as sex slaves, as highlighted in the movie.

The letter from Secretary-General Ban to the director of *The Whistleblower* went on to list the measures taken by the Security Council on the issue, such as appointing a special representative of the secretary-general on sexual violence in conflict, stricter standards for recruiting personnel, the addition of Conduct and Discipline Teams to peacekeeping operations, and due protections for “those who blow the whistle.” Ban went on:

But, I recognize, rules and measures alone are insufficient. The culture must change. I am determined to lead by example.

*I welcome your suggestion that *The Whistleblower* be screened especially for United Nations staff. I propose to go further. I have asked that a special screening be arranged at United Nations Headquarters not only for staff but also for Member States, with full support of the President of the General Assembly. As suggested by you, after the screening we shall have a panel discussion as the starting point for a frank and honest discussion of the issues the film raises. I hope you will be able to join us in this engagement.*

I want to assure you that we shall embrace the challenge your film places before the United Nations. The vulnerable women

whose condition your film showcases will not be forgotten. Thank you for raising this issue with such passion.

The screening was scheduled for mid-October. Kondracki and Kirwan planned to attend.

VIII

In her fourth-floor office in Low Library, Tanya Domi, senior public-affairs officer at Columbia, is enjoying a moment of satisfaction over the news from Turtle Bay.

“That the secretary-general invited Larysa to screen the film at UN Headquarters represents a seismic change in attitudes,” Domi says. “After 10 years, this is really an about-face.”

But Domi cautions that it doesn’t fix everything: Neither DynCorp nor the UN has apologized to Bolkovac.

“The American people should be disgusted,” says Domi, who served in the U.S. Army from 1974 to 1990. “Disgusted that somebody went over there, did her job, uncovered incredibly heinous crimes, and was fired for it. Fortunately, Kathy came out of this intact. She did a brave thing, and I really believe that that comes out of being an American who knows the difference between right and wrong, and standing up and saying, ‘This is not okay.’ Now peacekeepers are held to an accountability that didn’t exist before. We have Kathy to thank for that.”

Ten years ago, Domi had expected that the story of Bolkovac would shake the U.S. media. That never happened.

“Colum Lynch of the *Washington Post* wrote a couple of stories, and there were a couple in the *New York Times*, but there was

“But, I recognize, rules and measures alone are insufficient. The culture must change. I am determined to lead by example.” — Ban Ki-Moon

no ongoing coverage about Kathy, about DynCorp’s retaliation, about the fact that in 2003 a British labor tribunal unanimously found in Kathy’s favor. Despite all our best efforts in 2001, *The Whistleblower* has accomplished what the news media and law enforcement were unable to achieve.”

Domi pauses. On her desk is a photo of row upon row of slender coffins wrapped in bright-green cloth, containing victims of the Srebrenica Massacre of July 1995, in which 8000 Bosnian Muslim men and boys were murdered. On her shelves, among her books, is a Bosnian hand-hammered copper coffee set.

“I’m grateful to Larysa and her colleagues for making this film,” Domi says. “Kathy Bolkovac and Madeleine Rees are the real heroes here. I’m grateful that I got the opportunity to break this story, but as I’ve said to everybody: This is not going to be the end of this.”

New Crop City

Can Dickson Despommier's
radical vision for urban agriculture
take root in the United States?

By David J. Craig

The English city of Manchester put on a culture festival this summer that was, by any measure, startlingly ambitious. Over the course of three weeks in July, the Manchester International Festival presented newly commissioned works by 28 artists known more for challenging audiences than for pleasing them: Avant-garde theater director Robert Wilson, performance artist Marina Abramović, and oddball songstress Björk were among the blue-chip provocateurs brought in to shake up and inspire the old industrial city. The whole program was intended to be, according to festival director Alex Poots, a celebration of “risk-taking, the pioneering spirit, and valiant attempts.”

Dickson Despommier '64PH, a Columbia scientist best known as the progenitor of a concept he calls “vertical farming,” fit right in. He had been invited to announce that the nonprofit organization that runs the biennial festival will soon create a towering multilevel greenhouse inspired by his vision: Alpha Farm, to be located in an abandoned eight-story office building in Manchester, will hold several floors of broccoli, lettuce, tomatoes, onions, carrots, and strawberries, all cultivated beneath huge banks of lights. The idea is that local residents, by growing food in a high-rise, will put less pressure on surrounding farmland and reduce the amount of fossil fuel used to transport fruits and vegetables from as far away as northern Africa.

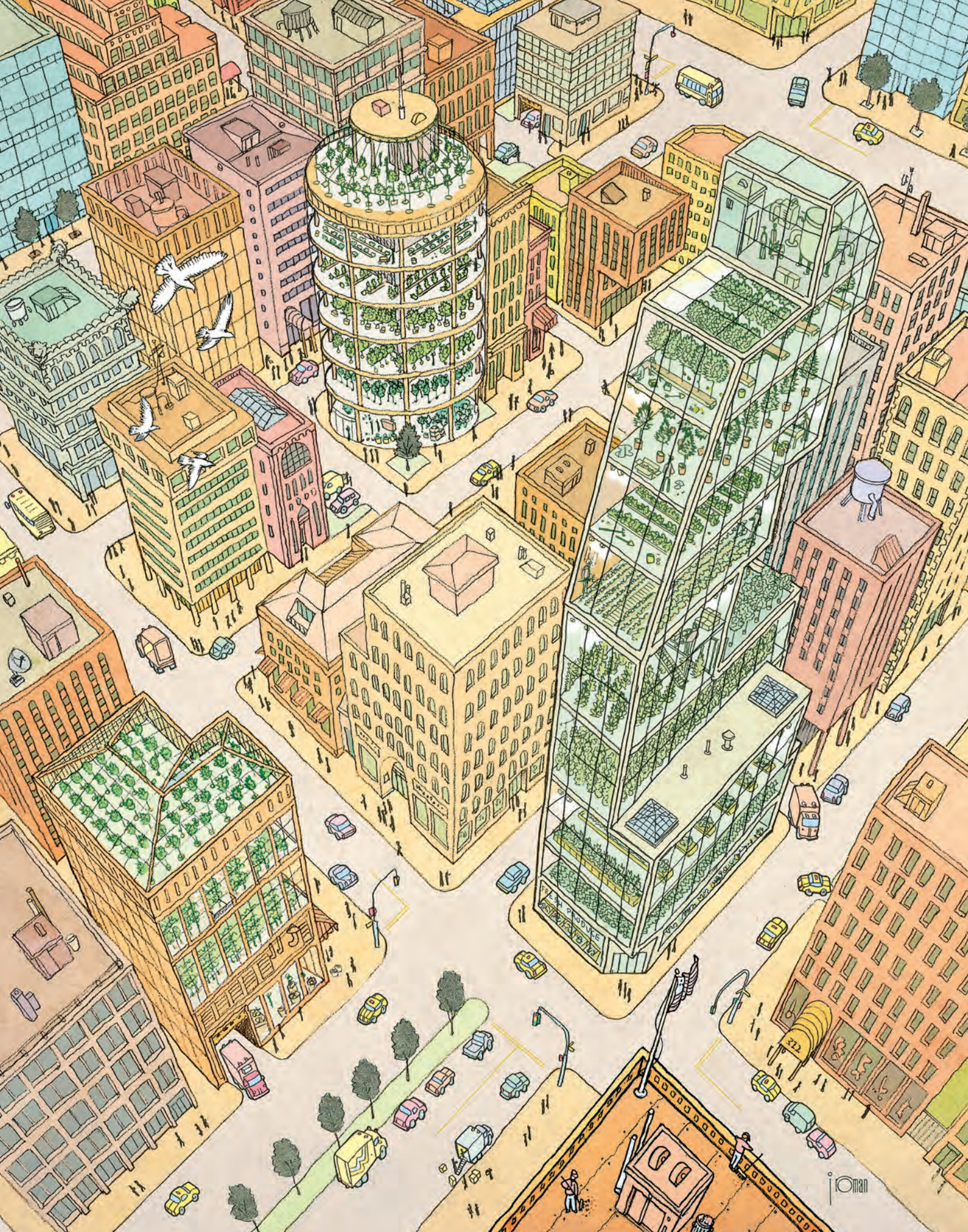
“I’m not surprised that somebody is actually doing this,” Despommier told a crowd of 300 people gathered in Manchester’s Albert Square on a drizzly Sunday morning. “But I am amazed.”

Alpha Farm won’t be the first vertical farm — similar projects have been launched recently in South Korea, Japan, the Netherlands, Chicago, and Seattle — but it will be the tallest, most fully realized embodiment of Despommier’s vision. It is scheduled to open in 2013, nearly a decade after the professor first proposed planting fields in the sky.

Onstage, Despommier, a tall, rosy-cheeked 71-year-old, wore the peaceful expression of a man enjoying a victory lap. He paused to survey the crowd, scratched his white beard, and then began a lecture that many Columbia students have heard over the years: Farming is the principal cause of deforestation; irrigating crops uses 70 percent of all available fresh water on Earth, and this water — after being contaminated with pesticides, herbicides, fungicides, and fertilizers — seeps into rivers, streams, and aquifers; this toxic runoff is responsible for more ecosystem disruption than any other kind of water pollution; and, partly because of droughts and floods, which are becoming more frequent as the planet warms, only 50 percent of all crops planted in the United States ever reach the dinner table.

The way to fix this mess, Despommier said, is to pack up the farm and move it indoors. A vertical farm generates more crop yield annually than a field with the same acreage, and it uses less water.

When he finished, a dozen people approached the stage with questions: “How can lettuce sales possibly pay for the cost of that building?” “How much electricity will be required to power the lights?” “How heavy is the dirt?” “Won’t it smell awful?” And



finally, from a middle-aged woman who runs an organic farm in Kent: “Isn’t this all a bit . . . unnatural?”

“Everybody asks that,” Despommier responded with a jovial laugh. “But what’s so natural about farming to begin with? For 12,000 years we’ve been clearing plots of land from which we’ve tried to eliminate every species except the one we want to eat. Meanwhile, we’ve selectively bred corn, wheat, apples, barley, rice, and lots of other crops to be humongous, so that they barely resemble their original form and lack the genetic variety to withstand any serious climatic changes. There’s nothing *natural* about farming.”

FRESH START

A microbiologist by training, Dickson Despommier spent the first 30 years of his career holed up in a Columbia laboratory studying a tiny parasitic worm called *Trichinella spiralis*. His major contribution was to describe how this worm, which thousands of people ingest every year by eating undercooked meat but which rarely causes serious illness, can survive in our bodies for long periods by burrowing into muscle tissue.

In 1999, the National Institutes of Health decided that his research had run its course. “I lost my grant support,” Despommier says. “At age 60, I was faced with reinventing myself.”

He then began studying how infectious diseases take advantage of certain environmental conditions. In 2001, he published *West Nile Story*, a book chronicling how that mosquito-borne virus had gone epidemic in New York State the previous two summers because of successive waves of drought and heavy rains. He also created a new graduate course at Columbia’s Mailman School of Public Health exploring how the use of chemical pesticides and other ecologically disruptive farming practices affects human health in subtle ways, such as by altering the relationships between parasites and their hosts at various levels of the food chain.

Dozens of architects and designers have created hypothetical building plans that address the challenge of providing light to plants in a high-rise.

Halfway through the semester, the students rebelled against what they considered their teacher’s relentless negativity. “They said, ‘Okay, we get it. Farming is bad for the environment. So why don’t we figure out how to improve it?’” Despommier recalls. “Their idea was to grow crops right in Manhattan, on rooftops.”

Despommier indulged his students, assigning them a group research project in which they were to calculate how much food could be grown if every available rooftop in Manhattan were made into a garden. “It was a purely theoretical hypothesis, really, to imagine that every property owner could be enticed to plant crops on his or her roof,” says Despommier. “But it would test the limits of their idea.”

The students, after poring over maps at the New York Public Library, became discouraged. Even if every square foot of flat, undeveloped rooftop space in Manhattan were devoted to growing rice — an unusually nutritious and calorie-dense grain — the resulting harvest, they estimated, could feed only a tiny portion of the borough’s residents. “This told us that rooftop gardening, for all its benefits in absorbing carbon dioxide and stormwater,” Despommier says, “wasn’t going to be much of a solution.”

The idea of urbanites growing their own food had captivated Despommier’s imagination, however. He wondered: Could crops be grown *inside* some of the vacant buildings he saw on his drive into northern Manhattan every morning? Over the next few years, he returned to the topic each time he taught his course. He encouraged new groups of students to assess the research done by their predecessors and to build upon it, asking increasingly difficult questions, such as, What kinds of crops could be grown inside a building? How would they get sunlight and nutrients? Could this process be energy efficient?

Some answers they found by researching the nascent greenhouse-farming industry, which, since the late 1980s, had been developing rapidly in drought-prone regions such as the American Southwest,



WEBER THOMPSON





“For 12,000 years we’ve been clearing plots of land from which we’ve tried to eliminate every species except the one we want to eat. . . . There’s nothing *natural* about farming.” — Dickson Despommier

the Mediterranean, and the Middle East, as well as in cool areas such as northern Europe. Sensitive crops like tomatoes, lettuce, and strawberries seemed to benefit the most from indoor living. Some greenhouses were also experimenting with a cultivation method known as hydroponics, in which crops, rather than being planted in soil, have their roots submerged directly in a nutrient bath. These farms boosted their profits: Not only were their crops safe from the elements and capable of growing year-round, but they were maturing faster in the nutrient solutions.

“Our vision was to stack these hydroponic greenhouses on top of each other,” says Dennis Santella '03CC, '05PH, '09SOA, a photographer who took Despommier’s course in 2005. “This would maximize space, which was obviously a priority in a city.”

Creating a multilevel greenhouse would introduce new technical challenges, though. Chief among them was providing light to crops in the center of the building, away from windows and sunny rooftops. The students determined that even the most energy-efficient forms of light-emitting diode (LED) lamps would run up an enormous electricity bill.

“We realized this was going to be the main stumbling block,” says Despommier, who was named the 2003 National Teacher of the Year by the American Medical Student Association. “And we didn’t have an answer for it.”

Then, about five years ago, several architects specializing in sustainable design learned about vertical farming from a website

the Columbia students created, and they began sending Despommier unsolicited plans to address the lighting problem. Their solutions ranged from the fantastical (a pyramid-shaped building made entirely of glass) to the workmanlike (a conveyor-belt system on which plants would rotate past the building’s windows). The designs tended to ignore other economic considerations, such as the expense of a custom-designed building. But they were visually stunning, and, Despommier recognized, public-relations gold. Soon after he posted some of the images online, journalists began to call. The media coverage intensified over the next few years, culminating in a barrage of press surrounding the publication of Despommier’s book *The Vertical Farm: Feeding the World in the 21st Century* (St. Martin’s Press) last year. Hundreds of newspapers and magazines, including *Scientific American*, *Discover*, and *National Geographic*, have since run articles featuring Despommier’s exuberant pronouncements about the future of vertical farming.

“Not all the press has been favorable,” says Despommier. “Far from it. The *Guardian* ripped us apart. They said our idea made no economic sense whatsoever.”

Nevertheless, the media exposure has galvanized interest in vertical farming among many agriculture specialists. “The idea of growing plants under artificial light isn’t entirely new,” says Gertjan Meeuw, a bioengineer whose company, PlantLab, created two vertical farms in the small Dutch city of Den Bosch this year. “But no one had ever assessed all the potential social benefits as thoroughly as Dickson and

his students did. That helped me articulate a new vision for how my company's greenhouse technology could be useful.

"A few years ago, if I'd asked agriculture officials in my country for help in building a vertical farm, I would have gotten blank stares," says Meeuws. "Now, everybody is familiar with Dickson's book, and they're lining up to help us. Meanwhile, I've received 300 media calls this year to comment on vertical farming. The impact has been huge. My company is now in conversations to create some 20 new vertical-farm projects around the world."

TOSSING SEEDS

The first vertical farm, in Suwon, South Korea, was established in 2009. The next, in Kyoto, Japan, followed last year. The two Dutch farms in Den Bosch were created by Meeuws's company this past spring. A two-story farm in Seattle and a three-story project in Chicago went up this summer. Most of these farms are located in office buildings converted for the purpose. They don't look anything like the transparent, strangely shaped structures on Despommier's website. They don't need to, partly because LED lamps have become more efficient. Furthermore, PlantLab recently worked with lightbulb manufacturer Philips to produce a new type of LED that shines light only in the blue and red wavelengths that plants need for photosynthesis.

"Incredibly, the plants grow faster when they receive only these wavelengths," Despommier says. "It seems the full spectrum of visible light actually punishes plants a bit."

On a recent trip to the farm in Suwon, Despommier's face took on an eerie pink glow beneath the special LED lamps that illuminated a room full of lettuce. A gentle percolating sound emanated from the plants, as a broth of nitrogen, phosphorus, potassium, calcium, zinc, and many other nutrients circulated through their roots. The air was sultry, and the temperature nearly 85 degrees Fahrenheit. "Just right for lettuce," observed Despommier, his knit shirt darkened with sweat. In adjacent rooms, other types of leafy greens sprouted in their own ideal climatic conditions. On the way out, before changing clothes in a clean room — the farm is hermetically sealed and sterilized to avoid the need for pesticides and herbicides — Despommier grabbed a moist lettuce leaf and folded it into his mouth.

"This place is going to lose money, just as all the first vertical farms will," he remarked later. "These are experimental projects, and it's going to take years for them to become commercially viable. They're already getting annual crop yields that are six times larger than what you'd get from a plot of soil with the same square footage, but even that's not enough to offset the costs of the operation. The lighting technology still needs to be made more efficient. And they need to figure out which crops will be most profitable."

For governments with serious concerns about food security, however, the long-term investment apparently seems worthwhile, as the South Korean and Dutch farms are backed with public funds.

"South Korea, like many countries in Southeast Asia, has simply run out of farmland," says Despommier. "They're importing a large share of their food, which is a position that no country wants to be in. The Dutch, meanwhile, are worried that rising sea levels in the next few decades will saturate their aquifers and their farmland, most of which are just a few feet above sea level. So these countries are hell-bent on making these projects work."

FOOD FIGHT?

Today, Despommier travels constantly, meeting with proprietors of vertical farms to advise them on pest control and other microbiology issues, as well as to help them raise funds and court the support of politicians. He says he receives 10 or more e-mails a day from people seeking guidance about how to start a vertical farm.

"They ask what crops are easiest to grow, and I tell them: lettuce, tomatoes, strawberries, and bell peppers," he says. "They ask about getting the right LEDs, and I tell them: Call Holland."

Planning officials from a dozen American cities, including Chicago, New York, San Francisco, Seattle, Philadelphia, Los Angeles, Newark, and Jersey City, have asked Despommier to advise them on how to create vertical farms. But the only major U.S. projects to have moved past the discussion stage are the one in Seattle, which is operated by the young company Civesca, and the farm in Chicago, run by the start-up 312 Aquaponics.

"In the U.S., we have lots of farmland and cheap food," says Despommier, who retired from teaching last year. "If vertical farming takes off in this country, it will be because people view it as a moral imperative. It will be because people care about the environmental damage caused by traditional farming and they want their communities to be part of the solution."



Proprietors of two vertical farms in the Netherlands say their crops grow faster beneath special LED lamps that emit light only in blue and red wavelengths.



Scientists at a vertical farm in Suwon, South Korea, work in a hermetically sealed, clean-room environment.

Many agricultural scientists agree with Despommier on a crucial point: that farming can be made sustainable only with high-tech growing methods.

Even among scientists who share Despommier's environmental concerns, though, vertical farming has its detractors. One is Bruce Bugbee, a crop physiologist at Utah State University who has been conducting research on indoor farming for nearly 30 years for NASA, with the hope of enabling astronauts to grow food in space. He says the technical challenge of providing light to crops in an energy-efficient manner has proven so formidable that he doubts vertical farming will ever become economically feasible.

"I think there are more realistic things we could be doing to make land-based agriculture more sustainable," Bugbee says. "For instance, we could invest more public funds into genetic-modification research, in order to develop crops that require fewer pesticides and herbicides. Frankly, I find the whole vertical-farm concept to be a distraction."

Despommier counters that land-based agriculture will never be able to feed our planet's growing population without disastrous effects. A landmass the size of South America is currently devoted to growing food, he points out; over the next century, an additional Brazil-sized swath of land may need to be cleared, mostly by flattening tropical woodlands. He says there are already signs that the U.S. agriculture system is breaking down in densely farmed states like California and Florida, where water shortages are increasingly common. "To fix this, we can't satisfy ourselves with half measures," he says. "We need to look 100 years into the future and begin investing in long-term solutions."

Yet Despommier and Bugbee and many other agricultural scientists agree on a crucial point: that farming can be made sustainable only through high-tech agricultural methods. Crops grown in vertical farms, like those cultivated in most hydroponic greenhouses, sprout from seeds that are not necessarily free of genetic modification and are fed chemically refined nutrients to speed their growth. This is sharply at odds with the ethos of organic farming, with its

rejection of genetic modification and refined nutrients. But the way many agronomists see the situation, organic farming, while avoiding some of the environmental pitfalls of modern food production, reintroduces problems that for thousands of years hobbled agriculture: low crop yields; a frightful vulnerability to droughts, floods, and pests; and intense demands on human labor. Although organic food is increasingly popular in wealthy countries — where consumers can afford its premium price tag and can find nonorganic options during a bad harvest — organic farming is simply too expensive and too risky, many scientists say, for the majority of the world's population.

Will the preference for organic food in developed countries hinder vertical-farm projects? "That will be a serious challenge, I'd expect," says Bugbee. "There's no reason to think that crops grown in vertical farms are unsafe, but most people dislike the idea of scientists tampering with their food. I think that's partly because a lot of the technology that's involved, like the genetic engineering of crops, has been developed by private corporations that people don't trust with their health. There's also a visceral component: It just *feels* wrong."

Despommier says he's confident that organic-food advocates will warm up to vertical farming if they learn about its environmental benefits. If he's right, he will have accomplished an unlikely feat: persuading people sympathetic to a back-to-basics food movement to embrace an idea that represents, perhaps, the ultimate industrialization of farming — raising nonorganic crops in a high-rise, without any dirt, using purified nutrients — all in the name of sustainability.

"Farming has a lot of romance attached to it, with its image of simple, hard-working farmers tilling their own land in overalls," Despommier says. "We need to articulate a new vision that's equally compelling. It needs to be a vision that encourages people to embrace technology rather than fear it. And it needs to push agriculture forward, not backward. I hope that vertical farming provides that." 📖

View from the elevated
Marcy Avenue subway stop
in Williamsburg, Brooklyn, 1977



The Looming TOWERS

Camilo José Vergara is best known for his photographs of urban decay in post-industrial America. Now, ten years after the attacks of September 11, he shows us another angle of his work: the World Trade Center's Twin Towers, as they rose and became pillars of the city below them.

I rarely photograph something just once. If I take a picture of the Lower Manhattan skyline, I'll go back to the same spot and photograph that stretch of the skyline year after year, almost by compulsion. The question for me is, What images will be needed to make a place and its evolution comprehensible?

I was immediately attracted to the Twin Towers in 1970 when they were being built: They were so big and so American. I was a recent arrival from a provincial town in Chile whose tiny population could easily have fit inside one of the towers. But I also disliked them.

As the structures rose to become the tallest buildings in the world, I regarded them as a wild expression of hubris, arrogance, and mistaken priorities in a troubled time. More than half a million Americans were fighting in Vietnam, and the ghettos of New York were crumbling, violent, and segregated. This shaped my early encounters with the towers, and I tried to convey my feelings by photographing them with homeless people in the foreground or in harsh sunlight, which turned the buildings into gleaming blades. I followed the construction closely, watching the heavy trucks bringing in steel or hauling away dirt amid the noise of jackhammers and clanging metal. But as I moved farther away to photograph the towers from the distant boroughs, they seemed to lose their solidity and become mysterious, alluring, and fantastic shapes hovering in the skyline. I liked to see them in the background of my photos rising above the waterways, vegetation, junkyards, expressways, subways, and houses that were my primary interest.

For nearly two decades, the Twin Towers alone dominated Lower Manhattan. Then, in the 1980s and '90s, Battery Park City, erected on landfill extracted from the WTC site, came between them and the waterfront. Gradually, the entire southern end of the island became bounded by a massive assemblage of shiny buildings. They brought new colors to the skyline — greens and blues in their tinted glass facades, and reds and yellows from the brickwork — but their bulky form gradually obscured the wonderful slivers of sky between the towers.

I was unaware of the intensity of my interest in the towers until they were destroyed on 9/11. In the days after the attack, I photographed the family portraits of missing office workers posted around the city with urgent notes seeking information. Later, I spent several months gathering any of my images that included the World Trade Center. I returned to many of the sites from which I had photographed the towers to record the new look of the skyline. Over time, in cities as far away as Richmond, California, and Detroit, I documented street murals depicting the towers, as local residents sought to express their solidarity with the people of New York.

As I watched the towers being built, it seemed impossible that I would outlive them. Early on, I resented them and all that I thought they stood for. Eventually, I grew to see them as great human creations — such simple buildings that could turn into upright fields of amber in late afternoons in winter, and reflect passing clouds in the summer sky.

Now, I miss them.

— *Camilo José Vergara* '77GSAS



“As I watched the towers
being built, it seemed impossible
that I would outlive them.”



World Trade Center under construction, seen from West Street, Manhattan, 1970



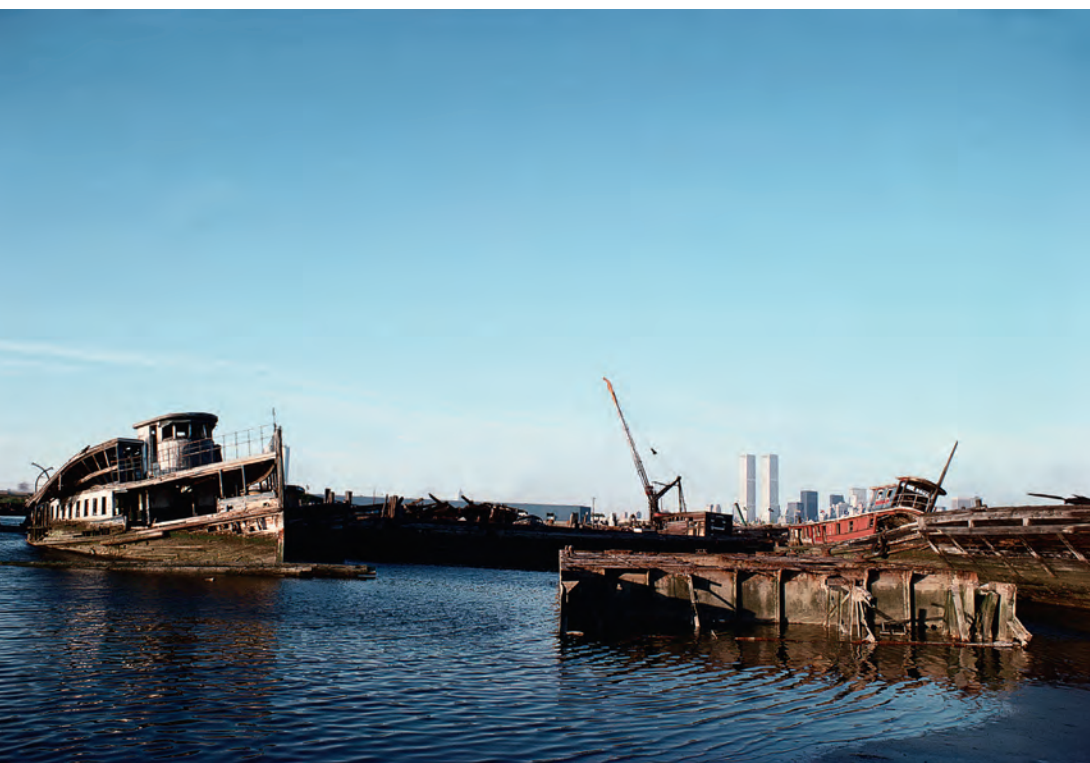
A junkyard at the foot of the Manhattan Bridge, Brooklyn, 1971



An abandoned pier, Jersey City, New Jersey, 1970

“They had the capacity to surprise by appearing in strange
at the end of a street in Williamsburg, Brooklyn,

— Camilo José Vergara, from his 2001 book, *Twin Towers Remembered*



Ferryboat graveyard on the
south Jersey City waterfront,
New Jersey, 1977



Hoboken,
New Jersey, 1977



Exchange Place,
Jersey City,
New Jersey, 1977

places: above a junkyard in Jersey City,
or above a nature preserve in Jamaica Bay, Queens.”



“The two tall slabs
seemed to me like stakes
holding Manhattan in place.”

— From *Twin Towers Remembered*





Lower Manhattan skyline
from the Manhattan Bridge,
Brooklyn, 1979



View from
Exchange Place,
Jersey City,
New Jersey, 1978



Staten Island Ferry, 1986

More of Vergara's photographs of the World Trade Center can be found in his book Twin Towers Remembered. They are also on display at the Museum of the City of New York through December 4. For information visit www.mcnyc.org.

In one of his last essays, left unfinished at his death in 1975, Lionel Trilling tried to understand “Why We Read Jane Austen.” Trilling started wondering about Austen’s lasting appeal, he writes, because of the extraordinary popularity of a seminar on Austen that he offered at Columbia in 1973. There was room for 20 students in the class, but on the first day, “to my amazement and distress,” 150 showed up. Trilling could only explain this enthusiasm as a sign that Austen had become one of that select group of writers who “can be called ‘figures’ — that is to say, creative spirits whose work requires an especially conscientious study because in it are to be discerned significances, even mysteries, even powers, which . . . bring it to as close an approximation of sacred wisdom as can be achieved in our culture.”

Trilling ’25CC, ’38GSAS was too modest to suggest, or maybe even to recognize, another reason for the interest in his Austen seminar: that he himself had become a figure in American culture. To generations of students at Columbia, where he spent almost his entire career, starting as an undergraduate in the 1920s, and to many more who knew him through his essays and books, Trilling was more than a great literary critic: He was a symbol of the life of the mind in America. Like a handful of other professors in midcentury Morningside Heights — Jacques Barzun, Richard Hofstadter, Meyer Schapiro — Trilling wrote at the intersection of the academy and the wider culture, in the belief that literary and critical ideas mattered to society at large.

Why We (Should)

For two generations, Lionel Trilling was synonymous with literary criticism, but since his death in 1975, he has been written off as out of date. **Adam Kirsch** argues that Trilling matters as much as ever.



Read Trilling

His best-known book, *The Liberal Imagination* (1950), collected his essays on subjects ranging from Henry James to the Kinsey Report, demonstrating how the kind of intelligence cultivated by the study of literature, with its virtues of “variousness, possibility, complexity, and difficulty,” was essential for the health of democracy. For Trilling, true liberalism often meant resisting the certainties of right-thinking liberals, whether the pro-Soviet views of the 1930s Popular Front or the antinomian spirit of the 1960s.

“Liberal intellectuals have always moved in an aura of self-congratulation,” he wrote. “They sustain themselves by flattering themselves with intentions and they dismiss as ‘reactionary’ whoever questions them. When the liberal intellectual thinks of himself, he thinks chiefly of his own good will and prefers not to know that the good will generates its own problems, that the love of humanity has its own vices and the love of truth its own insensibilities.” That is why Trilling was especially drawn to writers like Matthew Arnold and E. M. Forster, the subjects of his first two books, who criticize liberalism from within. He was also a great, though not uncritical, admirer of Freud, whose work he read less as science than as “grim poetry” about the contradictions of human nature.

Yet the very things that made Trilling so compelling to his original readers have conspired, in the decades since his death, to turn much critical opinion against him. It wouldn’t really be fair to say that Trilling is a marginal figure today. Most of his work is still in print — the essays gathered in *The Moral Obligation to Be Intelligent* and his only finished novel, *The Middle of the Journey*. In 2008, Columbia University Press even published the incomplete manuscript of another novel, edited by Geraldine Murphy ’85GSAS, as *The Journey Abandoned*. Every time Trilling’s work is reissued, it is greeted with long, serious discussions in leading magazines.

The tone of these discussions tends to be a peculiar combination of nostalgia and disdain, with a strong undercurrent of “goodbye and good riddance.” Critic and University of Cambridge professor Stefan Collini, writing about Trilling in a deliberate parody of Trilling’s own style, captured the mood best: “There is, for many of us, something vaguely oppressive about the thought of having to reread Lionel Trilling now. . . . We can’t help feeling that we should be improved by reading Trilling, and this feeling itself is inevitably oppressive. . . . Reading him keeps us up to the mark, but we can’t help but be aware that the mark is set rather higher than we are used to.”

Clearly, Trilling has been assigned the role of literature’s superego. As a student of Freud, he could have predicted what must follow, for if the superego is the savage enforcer of unattainable cultural ideals, then the ego’s health and happiness require that it be humbled. That is why so much recent writing about Trilling focuses on the failure of his hope of becoming a great novelist, on his private doubts about his teaching and criticism, on the moments of unhappiness he confided to his journals. Pitying a writer is an excellent way of undermining his authority.

But this kind of semi-Oedipal rebellion against Trilling only makes sense for those readers and writers who remember him as a stern presence in the world of letters. By now, 36 years after his death, that is a shrinking group. Like most readers under the age of 40 or even 50, I have no personal memory of Trilling, or of a literary culture in which he was a figure of authority. On the contrary, when I was an undergraduate English major in the mid-1990s, I don’t believe Trilling was ever assigned or discussed in any of my courses. I first came to him on my own, and, though I found people to encourage my enthusiasm, I always read Trilling for pleasure, not from obligation.

Part of the pleasure, certainly, came from the authority of Trilling’s judgments, and of the prose that conveys those judgments. When he writes, in “Manners, Morals, and the Novel,” that “the novel . . . is a perpetual quest for reality, the field of its research being always the social world, the material of its analysis being always manners as the indication of the direction of man’s soul,” we can sense the ambition and precision of his mind at work. Indeed, Trilling’s authority, like all genuine literary authority, is itself a literary achievement. It is not a privilege of cultural office or a domineering assertion of erudition and intellect, but an expression of sensibility, the record of an individual mind engaged with the world and with texts.

This is true of all the best literary critics, but it seems especially true of Trilling, who was surprisingly uninterested in the traditional prerogatives and responsibilities of criticism. In his major essays, he does not bring news of important new writers or teach us how to read difficult new works — the way that, for instance, Edmund Wilson did. If Trilling’s essays are not exactly literary criticism, it is because they are something more primary and more autonomous: They belong to literature itself. Like poems, they dramatize the writer’s inner experience; like novels, they offer a subjective account of the writer’s social and psychological environment.

And like all literary works, Trilling's essays are ends in themselves. This helps to explain why there has never been a Trilling school of criticism. He does not offer the reader findings or formulas, which might be assembled into a theory; he offers what literature alone offers, an experience.

It is a kind of experience that today's serious readers and writers are hungry for. Over the last 10 or 15 years, many of the institutions that once sustained literature in America have changed or disappeared, including independent bookstores and newspaper book reviews. In the last couple of years, this process has reached its ultimate conclusion with the disappearance of the book itself, the site and symbol of literature for 500 years. Margaret Atwood expressed the anxiety of many readers at this development: "This is crucial, the fact that a book is a thing, physically there, durable, indefinitely reusable, an object of value . . . electrons are as evanescent as thoughts. History depends on the written word."

Over the same period, literature itself began to suffer a crisis of confidence. Poetry, of course, was the first to go. Already in 1991, in his essay "Can Poetry Matter?" Dana Gioia declared that "American poetry now

readers under those difficulties is, above all, the consciousness of one another's existence. This is, in fact, the consolation that Franzen finds at the end of "Perchance to Dream": "In a suburban age, when the rising waters of economic culture have made each reader and each writer an island, it may be that we need to be more active in assuring ourselves that a community still exists."

The name of the activity by which readers and writers communicate, by which they make the private experience of reading into the common enterprise of literature, is criticism. And Trilling is the critic who best demonstrates what it means to read seriously — how the encounter with the ideas and attitudes we find in books can help us create our selves. As he wrote in "Manners, Morals, and the Novel," one of his most famous essays, "For our time the most effective agent of the moral imagination has been the novel of the last 200 years. . . . Its greatness and its practical usefulness lay in its unremitting work of involving the reader himself in the moral life, inviting him to put his own motives under examination. . . . It taught us, as no other genre ever did, the extent of human variety and the value of this variety."


If Trilling's essays are not exactly literary criticism, it is because they are something more primary and more autonomous: **They belong to literature itself.**



belongs to a subculture. No longer part of the mainstream of artistic and intellectual life, it has become the specialized occupation of a relatively small and isolated group." Five years later, Jonathan Franzen lamented in his essay "Perchance to Dream" that whatever attention the novel continued to receive was just "consolation for no longer mattering to the culture."

At such a moment, readers and writers could be forgiven for thinking that "we are all a little sour on the idea of the literary life these days. . . . In America it has always been very difficult to believe that this life really exists at all or that it is worth living." But, in fact, it was Lionel Trilling who made this complaint, some 60 years ago, right in the midcentury moment that we remember now as a golden age. And this suggests why Trilling, in particular, has so much to say to us today.

"Generally speaking," he pointed out, "literature has always been carried on within small limits and under great difficulties." What sustains writers and

Trilling's criticism shows what it means for a book to involve a reader in the moral life. When Trilling reads Henry James's novel *The Princess Casamassima*, he confronts the ethics of political violence and the psychology of radicalism; when he reads *Mansfield Park*, he wonders about the nature of virtue in a post-religious society; when he reads the letters of Keats, he takes courage from the poet's trust in the world's sensual abundance. Again and again in his essays, Trilling shows that the literary life is really the same enterprise that Keats called "soul-making." Now that Trilling is no longer such a name to conjure with, it is possible that a new generation of readers will find that he matters more than ever. 

Adam Kirsch's newest book, Why Trilling Matters, was published this fall by Yale University Press. He is a senior editor at the New Republic and a columnist for Tablet magazine.

NEWS

Global Center established in Santiago, Chile

South America is likely to become a more common destination for Columbia researchers.

That's the intention of University officials in choosing Santiago, Chile, as the site for Columbia's next Global Center. The new center, inaugurated at a ceremony in Morningside Heights on September 12, is part of a network of Columbia outposts in Amman, Beijing, Mumbai, and Paris. The Columbia Global Center in Chile, like the other centers, will support a wide variety of academic activities throughout its region.

Karen Poniachik '90SIPA, a Chilean economic-policy analyst who was her nation's minister of energy from 2006 to 2007 and its minister of mining from 2006 to 2008, has been appointed interim director of the new center. Most recently, she was Chile's special envoy to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD).

The center, Poniachik says, will help Columbia faculty and students undertake new research, teaching, and service projects in South America; it will offer new student-exchange and fellowship opportunities; and it will host conferences, seminars, and social events open to alumni.

Poniachik says the center's small office in downtown Santiago, which is expected to open this winter, will provide a place

for Columbia professors and students to conduct business when they travel to the region. In addition, Poniachik and her staff will introduce Columbia researchers to locals with whom they might collaborate.

"There are a lot of academics in Latin America whose perspectives will enrich intellectual conversations taking place at Columbia," says Poniachik. "The Global Center is going to make those connections."

At a roundtable discussion on campus on September 12, several of Columbia's Latin America experts talked about how the University might increase its presence in the region. Miguel Urquiola, an associate professor of international and public affairs and economics, said that Chile is an ideal place to undertake new economics studies. "Chile is one of the Latin American nations that has most seriously taken the proposition that it's a good idea to have private enterprise and competition," he said. "A lot of the phenomena that economists like to study are crystallized there."

Barnard historian Nara Milanich said the center could organize an international conference on class and gender inequity. She pointed out that Chile, despite its rapid economic growth in recent decades, has the most extreme social inequality in

Columbia students learn about the ecosystem of Brazil's Atibainha Reservoir as part of a summer program run by the Center for Environmental Research and Conservation. The establishment of the Columbia Global Center in Chile should increase the University's presence in South America.



Karen Poniachik '90SIPA

Latin America. "This would necessarily be a global conversation," Milanich said, "because these problems are universal."

President Lee C. Bollinger said that Columbia's Global Centers are intended to promote exactly that type of intercontinental dialogue, whereby Columbia scholars studying an issue in one part of the world can easily trade perspectives with academics, public officials, and businesspeople in other regions. One way this could happen is through teleconferences that link Columbia's Global Centers in real time.

"In an increasingly interdependent world, it's no longer possible for anybody to learn deeply about a field without gaining knowledge of what is happening around the world," said Bollinger, who signed the center into existence with banker Andrónico Luksic, vice chairman of Banco de Chile and a major donor to the new center. "We at universities have to figure out new ways to perform our great mission of research and education. The Global Centers are our way of doing that."

From November 1 to 3, the University will host a series of public events in Istanbul, Turkey, to celebrate the opening of a Global Center there; the University has plans to open a Global Center in Nairobi, Kenya, in subsequent months.

See video at globalcenters.columbia.edu.



DESMOND BEIRNE

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ASSOCIATION

James J. Valentini steps in as interim College dean

James J. Valentini, a Columbia chemistry professor and former chair of the department, has been appointed interim dean of Columbia College and vice president for undergraduate education.

Valentini's appointment on September 2 came just one week after the unexpected resignation of Michele Moody-Adams, who said she was stepping aside because she feared that administrative changes being considered at the University could diminish the College dean's authority. She is remaining at Columbia as a tenured professor in the philosophy department.

President Lee C. Bollinger, in an e-mail announcing Valentini's interim appointment, affirmed the University's commitment to the College. "I can say to you, without any qualification, that our commitment to the College has never been stronger," he wrote, "and that the College has never had a stronger role in the University."

He noted that Valentini's "two decades at Columbia have been marked by a love of teaching undergraduates and a dedication to supporting their intellectual journey."

Valentini, an expert on chemical-reaction dynamics, has served on Columbia committees for curriculum matters, undergraduate affairs, faculty governance, and tenure.

Since his appointment as interim dean, Valentini has held a town hall-style meeting with students, created a special e-mail account for students to send him ideas, and posted online a video introducing himself to the community.



MICHAEL DIVITO

James J. Valentini meeting with College students in early September

"The students of Columbia College are brilliant, inventive, creative, imaginative, and also . . . fearless," he said in the video. "There is an enormous number of fantastic students that I've known over the years, and the opportunity to have more extensive interaction with you, the student, is one of the more important things in my life."

— Joshua J. Friedman

Old York archive living on at Avery

A family of real-estate developers has given Columbia one of the largest collections of historical materials on New York City ever privately assembled, along with \$4 million to maintain the collection and to create related programs.

The donation from members of the Durst family — which operates the Durst Organization, a Manhattan real-estate firm — includes tens of thousands of New York City-themed books, maps, postcards, prints, and eclectic artifacts ranging from theatrical playbills to souvenir World's Fair plates. The late Seymour Durst, who led his family's company from 1974 until his death in 1995, began assembling the archive, now known as the Old York Library collection, in 1962. It remained a passion for the rest of his life, ultimately

growing to occupy most of a five-story East Side townhouse.

Columbia's Avery Architectural and Fine Arts Library will be the collection's new home; the Graduate School of Architecture, Planning and Preservation (GSAPP) will help maintain its materials.

The archive of materials dating back to the 18th century has been a boon to museum curators, scholars, and researchers over the years. Among the rarest items is one of only 10 copies of the Commissioners' Grid Map of 1811, which set out Manhattan's street development for the following century, and the six-volume first edition of *The Iconography of Manhattan Island*, which chronicled the city's history before 1915.

Avery Library will receive \$1.2 million to house, catalog, and digitize the collection so

it can be easily accessed by students, scholars, and the public at large. Carole Ann Fabian, Avery Library's director, praised Durst's participation in what she called the "important tradition of collection building" and suggested that the materials would be a valuable resource for Columbia's real-estate curriculum and research efforts.

The gift also allocates \$1.8 million to GSAPP to create the Durst Digital Research Laboratory as part of a new research and conference facility slated for Amsterdam Avenue. The architecture school will devote the remaining \$1 million to establishing the Durst Fund for Research, which will be used by its Real Estate Development Program in coordinating seminars, exhibitions, and other activities that bridge the disciplines of architecture and real-estate development.

CAA helping alumni on the job hunt

What do Columbia alumni want from their alma mater? When the Columbia Alumni Association (CAA) asked 4000 alumni this question in an online survey in 2008, one of the top answers was career help. Since then, the CAA has responded by giving alumni access to online job-search tools, holding more networking events, and, soon, offering discounted career coaching.



BRUCE GILBERT

Nearly 250 alumni and students recently attended the first Columbia Networking Night.

“We want to provide alumni with resources that will help them throughout their career,” says Jesse Gale ’10BUS, the Office of Alumni and Development’s director for CAA marketing and new media.

In the past, the career centers of Columbia’s various schools have directed their services mostly toward current students. Over the past two years, however, career-center directors from across the University have been coming together regularly with representatives of the CAA to talk about how to serve alumni better.

Now, the University provides its alumni free access to the commercial websites Vault, WetFeet, and Going Global, which publish career advice, company rankings, and job listings. Alumni can access these tools by clicking on the new “Career Connections” link on the CAA home page. By the end of this academic year, alumni in many cities will be able to get one-on-one coaching from Columbia graduates who are professional career coaches and have agreed to offer their services at a discounted rate.

In addition, Columbia recently began hosting University-wide networking events for students and alumni interested in specific lines of work. The first of these Columbia Networking Nights, organized by Columbia Engineering around the theme of entrepreneurship, was held in September at the Columbia Club in Manhattan. More than 250 attendees listened as alumni entrepreneurs described how they started their own businesses. Afterward, alumni and students milled around for hours, exchanging business cards and stories.

“When you’re in the classroom, you don’t always know what it looks like to be an entrepreneur,” says David Whittemore ’06CC, who cofounded a New York City-based technology start-up called Clothes Horse, which helps shoppers find clothing brands that fit them best. “An event like this shows you how people’s careers take shape. It shows the path for you.”

To learn more about alumni career resources, visit <http://alumni.columbia.edu>.

“This historic gift is truly transformative for our program,” said Vishaan Chakrabarti, Marc Holliday Professor and Director of GSAPP’s Real Estate Development Program and the Center for Urban Real Estate. “Not only will Columbia become home to an incredible collection of materials, but this gift moves us so much closer to our goal of opening our new Center for Global Design and Development and further supports our new research efforts for the Real Estate Development Program.

“We are deeply grateful to the Durst family for this gift,” says Chakrabarti, “and we look forward to a wonderful collaboration to enhance our programs and make our cutting-edge work and research even more accessible to the academic community and beyond.” — *Marcus Tonti*



ALAN CHIN

The Old York Library collection contains wooden models of Manhattan tenements that date from the early 20th century.

Jordan's King Abdullah speaks of reform

"Demanding reform is the first step," said Jordan's King Abdullah II on September 23 as the Arab Spring turned into the Arab Autumn. "Delivering it is an entirely different — and much more difficult — proposition . . . one that is defined by each country's specific history, circumstances, and challenges."

The king spoke as part of Columbia's annual World Leaders Forum.

"Today, in Arab lands . . . millions of voices are telling the world their story," said the king. He identified three groups in particular: the unemployed, women and girls, and the marginalized.

The government of Jordan, like many in the region, has had to respond to pro-democracy, anticorruption demonstrations earlier this year, and the king emphasized his commitment to reform. "We have seen some real successes, but we have also witnessed resistance and inertia," the king told

the Low Library audience. "For me, the Arab Spring brings the opportunity to create the real reform we have sought. . . . In Jordan, we hope the path will be an evolutionary and consensual one."

King Abdullah also criticized Israel while, five miles away at the United Nations Headquarters, Arab leaders were pressing the Security Council to recognize a Palestinian state.

"Today, many in Israel would like to reassure themselves, and the rest of you, that the unrest in the Arab street is unrelated to them," King Abdullah said. "What is required, perhaps, is an Israeli Policy Spring that will see its politicians break free from the siege mentality and engage with its neighbors as equals."

Jordan is one of the few countries in the region that maintain diplomatic relations with Israel.



EILEEN BARROSO

King Abdullah II of Jordan speaking at Columbia as part of the World Leaders Forum.

Watch video of King Abdullah and other heads of state who spoke at Columbia, including Atifete Jahjaga of Kosovo, Alpha Condé of Guinea, and Rafael Correa of Ecuador, at www.worldleaders.columbia.edu.



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THE 1754 SOCIETY

In brief

Van Amson to lead CAA

George L. Van Amson '74CC, a managing director of Morgan Stanley and a Columbia University trustee emeritus, is expected to be confirmed as the head of the Columbia Alumni Association (CAA) on October 22.

As the chair of the CAA, Van Amson will oversee the University's broadest alumni network, which connects nearly 300,000 Columbians from all schools through more than 80 regional clubs and affinity groups, online resources, and hundreds of events each year. In this role, he will succeed James Harden '78BUS, '83PH, who became chair of the CAA in 2008.

Van Amson, after graduating from Columbia with an economics degree, worked as a financial analyst at Citibank and Goldman Sachs before joining Morgan Stanley as a vice president in 1992.

He currently sits on the board of Community Impact, a Columbia-based nonprofit organization that serves disadvantaged people in and around Morningside Heights.

New names on the board

The University Trustees recently welcomed three new board members: Rolando T. Acosta '79CC, '82LAW; Fiona Druckenmiller '84BC; and Jonathan Lavine '88CC.

Acosta is an associate justice of the New York State Supreme Court and previously worked as an attorney for the Legal Aid Society, a nonprofit that provides representation to low-income New Yorkers. A star pitcher for the Lions in the 1970s, Acosta had offers to play professional baseball but opted to attend Columbia Law School. He has served on the boards of the College's and the law school's alumni associations.

Druckenmiller is a former portfolio manager at the Dreyfus Corporation. With her husband, Stanley, she heads the charitable Druckenmiller Foundation, which has supported medical research, education programs, and antipoverty initiatives.

Lavine is a managing director at Bain Capital. He serves there as the managing part-

ner and chief investment officer of Sankaty Advisors, Bain Capital's fixed-income and credit affiliate, which he founded in 1997. Lavine is also the chair of the Columbia College Board of Visitors.

Earlier this year, longtime trustees Stephen Case '64CC, '68LAW and Savio Tung '73SEAS stepped down from the University's board.

Pathway to public-health careers

Columbia University Medical Center has received a five-year, \$3.7 million federal grant to create a program that will encourage minority undergraduates to pursue careers in public health and biomedical science.

The Summer Public Health Scholars Program will train 50 students each year from community colleges, four-year colleges, and postbaccalaureate programs. Participants, over the course of the 10-week program, will shadow public-health professionals and take courses on subjects such as epidemiology and health-care disparities.

The program, funded by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, will be led by obstetrician Hilda Hutcherson, a clinical professor at the College of Physicians and Surgeons and an associate dean in charge of that college's office of diversity.

Towering achievement

Columbia's new science and engineering building, the Northwest Corner Building, has won a Merit Award for excellence in architecture from the Society for College and University Planning (SCUP).

The 14-story glass and aluminum structure, designed by the Spanish architect José Rafael Moneo, is a "magnificently detailed building with superb proportions and public spaces of highest quality," according to a SCUP statement. "Light in the building is unbelievable . . . This is 5-star architecture."

Quantum visions

Dirk Englund, an assistant professor of electrical engineering and applied physics,

has been awarded the Presidential Early Career Award for Scientists and Engineers, which includes \$500,000 in research funding to be used over five years.

Englund, a leader in the emerging fields of chip-based quantum optics and nanophotonics, addresses problems in communications, computation, sensing, and information technology. His research team at Columbia Engineering's Quantum Photonics Group has drawn upon the lessons of quantum mechanics to develop new technologies for processing information and making precision measurements.

In memoriam: Fu, Weatherhead

Shanghai-born businessman Z. Y. Fu, who in 1997 gave \$26 million and his name to Columbia's engineering school, died in August at the age of 90.

Fu became acquainted with Columbia through his brother-in-law, Chia-Kun Chu, who taught applied mathematics here beginning in the 1960s and is today a professor emeritus at the Fu Foundation School of Engineering and Applied Science. At the time of his naming gift, Fu told the engineering school's magazine, "I wish to ensure that Columbia will continue to grow as an international leader in science and technology."

Another major Columbia benefactor, the industrialist and philanthropist Albert J. Weatherhead III, died on September 20 at the age of 86.

Weatherhead, too, had fraternal associations with the University, through his younger brother, Richard W. Weatherhead '66GSAS. Following Richard's early death, Albert created Columbia's Weatherhead Fund in his brother's honor in 1980. The Weatherhead East Asian Institute was named in the family's honor in 2003, in recognition of the fund's role in supporting its postdoctoral fellowships, visiting professorships, faculty research program, graduate training grants, student internships, and resident fellows program.

NEWSMAKERS

High notes

Cellist Alisa Weilerstein '04CC has received a 2011 MacArthur Fellowship, which comes with a grant of \$500,000. Weilerstein, 29, performed at the invitation of First Lady Michelle Obama at the White House in



COURTESY OF MACARTHUR FOUNDATION

Alisa Weilerstein '04CC

2009; she played Elgar's Cello Concerto with the Berlin Philharmonic in a concert that was broadcast live internationally last year . . . The Lilly Awards, named after playwright Lillian Hellman, were started in 2010 to honor the work of women in the American theater. This year, two Columbians were honored: School of the Arts professor Kristin Linklater, who is an actress, writer, and lecturer, and **Bathsheba Doran '03SOA**, a playwright.

TV guides

Cinema Verite, an HBO film directed by **Shari Springer Berman '95SOA** and **Robert Pulcini '94SOA**, was nominated for nine Emmy Awards this year. The film, starring Diane Lane and James Gandolfini, about



MONICA ALMEIDA / THE NEW YORK TIMES

Robert Pulcini '94SOA and Shari Springer Berman '95SOA

a groundbreaking reality TV series from 1973 called *An American Family*, won an Emmy for single-camera picture editing. Berman and Pulcini, who are married, also codirected the 2003 movie *American Splendor*, about the comic-book writer Harvey Pekar, which was nominated for an Academy Award for best adapted screenplay . . . **David Bohrman '78JRN**, a former CNN Washington bureau chief, has been named president of Current TV, a cable network that features the one-time MSNBC ratings grabber Keith Olbermann. Bohrman, who will be responsible for all programming, is



EDWARD M. PIO RODA / CNN

David Bohrman '78JRN

known as an innovator in the broadcasting of political debates, conventions, and elections. One of his more flamboyant ideas was to beam a hologram of musician will.i.am into the CNN studio on Election Night 2008.

Editor! Editor!

Richard L. Berke '81JRN, the national editor of the *New York Times*, was named an assistant managing editor on September 6. Executive editor Jill Abramson promoted Berke to her senior-management team on her first day in the position. A week later, she promoted **Adam Bryant '87JRN**, a deputy national editor, to senior editor for features.

Good yarns

John Glusman '78CC, '80GSAS was recently named editor in chief of W. W. Norton & Company. Glusman has worked in book publishing for more than 25 years, with authors who include Czeslaw Milosz, Richard Powers, and Jim Crace . . . **Matt Weiland '78CC** was named a senior editor at W. W. Norton effective October 24. He comes to the position from Ecco, an imprint of HarperCollins, where he edited such books as Padgett Powell's conceptual novel *The Interrogative Mood* and Philip Connor's memoir *Fire Season* . . . **Kerri Majors '04SOA** has been awarded one of four Innovations in Reading Prizes from the National Book Foundation for her young-adult journal *YARN*, the Young Adult Review Network, which publishes teens alongside established writers. The prize can be up to \$2500.

Going viral

Columbia virologist **Ian Lipkin** shared his scientific expertise as an advisor to Steven Soderbergh's movie *Contagion*, about the outbreak of a virus that kills millions around the world. Lipkin was involved in everything from script development to costumes



Jacqueline K. Barton '74BC, '78GSAS

to set design. The actor Elliott Gould plays Dr. Sussman, a character based on Lipkin . . . **Jacqueline K. Barton '74BC, '78GSAS** has received a National Medal of Science for her work on the chemistry of DNA. The award is the highest honor the United States bestows on scientists. Barton is a professor of chemistry at the California Institute of Technology.

Medics on the move

First Lady Michelle Obama has appointed **Judith S. Palfrey '71PS** executive director of the Let's Move! campaign to fight childhood obesity. Palfrey is a professor of pediatrics at Harvard Medical School . . . In June, **Peter W. Carmel '70PS**, a pediatric neurosurgeon in Newark, New Jersey, became president of the American Medical Association. Founded in 1847, the AMA is the nation's oldest and largest physicians' organization. Carmel has served as chair of the National Coalition for Research in Neurological Disease and Stroke, and subsequently as chair of the National Foundation for Brain Research.

Young at art

Danielle Evans '04CC and **Mary Beth Keane '99BC** were recently included in

the National Book Foundation's annual list of the country's outstanding "5 Under 35" fiction writers. Evans, who earned her MFA at the Iowa Writers' Workshop, is the author of the short-story collection *Before You Suffocate Your Own Fool Self*, which won the 2011 PEN/Robert W. Bingham Prize. Keane, who graduated from the University of Virginia's MFA program, is the author of the novel *The Walking People*, which won honorable mention at the 2010 PEN/Hemingway Foundation awards. Both Evans and Keane are being honored for their first books. Winners are selected by National Book Award recipients and finalists.

Smart money

Kai-Fu Lee '83CC, the president of Google China from 2005 to 2009, has created a business incubator to provide financing, advising, and support services to young



Kai-Fu Lee '83CC

Chinese entrepreneurs. His firm, Innovation Works, recently announced that it had raised \$180 million in private funds to help technology start-ups get off the ground . . . Republican presidential hopeful Mitt

Romney has chosen Columbia B-school dean and supply-side economist **R. Glenn Hubbard** to lead his economic policy team. Hubbard advised Romney in 2008 and helped construct the Bush tax cuts of 2003.

Excellent friends

The Howard G. Buffett Foundation has a new executive director. **Howard W. Buffett '08SIPA**, Howard G.'s son, will preside over



LINCOLN JOURNAL STAR

Howard W. Buffett '08SIPA

a fund that donates some \$50 million a year to initiatives in areas such as sustainable agriculture, clean water, poverty eradication, and refugee assistance. The younger Howard, who has worked as a domestic-policy advisor for President Obama, is the grandson of investment icon **Warren Buffett '51BUS** . . . On September 13, philanthropist and media entrepreneur **Gerry Lenfest '58LAW, '09HON** was awarded the insignia of Officier de la Légion d'Honneur, which is one of the French government's highest awards. The French ambassador to the United States, François Delattre, called Lenfest "a great Philadelphian, an exceptional businessman, an extraordinary philanthropist, and a most excellent friend of France."

EXPLORATIONS

A step toward stem-cell therapy

It is the closest scientists have ever come to cloning human cells as a means of developing medical treatments.

On October 5, researchers at the New York Stem Cell Foundation (NYSCF) and Columbia University Medical Center (CUMC) reported in the journal *Nature* that they have discovered a new way to create embryonic stem cells that contain a sick person's unique DNA.

Their breakthrough is considered significant because scientists have long sought to develop patient-specific embryonic stem cells as a way to grow replacement tissue for people with heart disease, Parkinson's, and other illnesses. But no method has ever proven safe and useful.

The scientists at NYSCF and Columbia put a new twist on an old cell-replacement strategy. They started by extracting nuclei from skin cells of people with type 1 diabetes and then injecting these nuclei into unfertilized human eggs. Other researchers had tried this

basic approach before. What the scientists at NYSCF and Columbia did differently was to leave the egg's own nucleus intact.

To their surprise, this enabled the egg to be rebooted. That is, when the egg developed into a tiny embryo — smaller than a pinhead and containing fewer than 100 cells — the stem cells contained therein had nearly the same genetic profile as the diabetes patient. As a result, the researchers were able to successfully entice these stem cells to grow into other types of cells, including nerve cartilage and muscle tissue.

The scientists hope their approach could ultimately be used to develop insulin-producing cells that could help individuals with diabetes. The NYSCF and Columbia scientists haven't attempted to do this yet, because the embryos they created were abnormal, having an extra set of chromosomes that originated from the egg. For this reason, they say, additional research is needed before their method is clinically useful.

Parks and re-creation: African American village unearthed

When Seneca Village, one of Manhattan's early African American settlements, was uprooted to make way for Central Park in 1857, many dismissed the inhabitants as obstructionist squatters. "The policemen

find it difficult to persuade them out of the idea which has possessed their simple minds," wrote the *New-York Daily Times* on July 9, 1856, "that the sole object of the authorities in making the Park is to pro-

cure their expulsion from the homes which they occupy."

The idea that Seneca Village was merely a squatters' camp persisted among scholars until 1992, when a history of Central Park called *The Park and the People*, cowritten by Columbia historian Elizabeth Blackmar, drew on archival records to reassert the facts: This was not a shantytown but the first community of African American property owners in New York. The village had a population of nearly 300, a school and three churches, and it existed for 30 years.

This summer, Columbia anthropologist Nan Rothschild, along with colleagues from City College and New York University and several of her students, unearthed some of the most intimate evidence yet that people here enjoyed a stable middle-class life. For eight weeks in June and July, the anthropologists gently scraped away topsoil that had been dumped upon the village's former site, between 82nd and 89th Streets near Central Park West, when the park was created. Their dig represented the culmination of



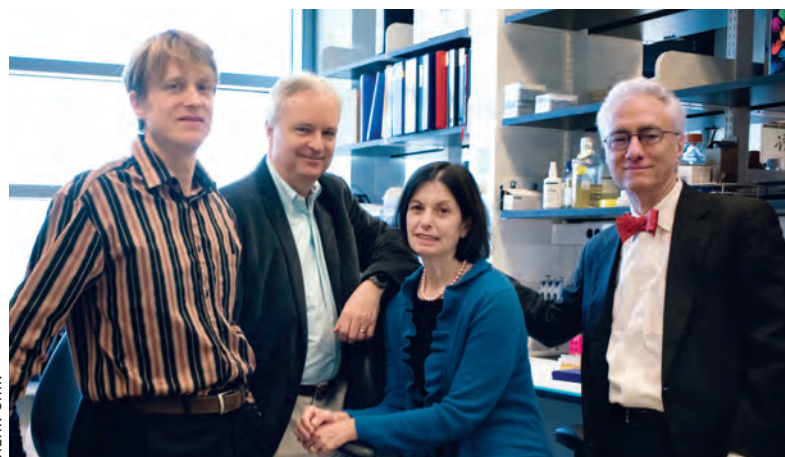
BRUCE GILBERT

Researchers led by Nan Rothschild this summer excavated the remains of an African American village that was cleared in the 1850s to make way for Central Park. Pictured are Madeline Landry, an anthropology student at Barnard College, and Ashton Dorminvil, a student at City College.

“In this three-year study, we successfully reprogrammed skin cells to the pluripotent state,” says Dieter Egli, a senior scientist at NYSCF and an adjunct associate research scientist at CUMC. “Our hope is that we can eventually overcome the remaining hurdles and use patient-specific stem cells to treat and cure people.”

The lead authors of the paper were Egli and Scott Noggle, who is the principal investigator of NYSCF’s scientific team. Other Columbia scientists involved in the study were Mark Sauer, vice chairman of CUMC’s department of obstetrics and gynecology as well as its chief of reproductive endocrinology; and Robin Goland and Rudolph Leibel, codirectors of Columbia’s Naomi Berrie Diabetes Center.

“This is an important step toward generating stem cells for disease modeling and drug discovery,” says Leibel, “as well as for ultimately creating patient-specific cell-replacement therapies for people with diabetes or other degenerative diseases or injuries.”



ALAN CHIN

Dieter Egli, Mark Sauer, Robin Goland, and Rudolph Leibel



FRED R. CONRAD / NYT / REDUX

A pottery shard unearthed at Seneca Village

12 years of work, during which the researchers scanned the ground with radar to identify building foundations and took soil samples to determine if the site was preserved well enough to be worth studying.

“We know a great deal about Seneca Village from historic documents,” says Rothschild, “but the archaeology gives us evidence of the fabric of people’s lives: what foods they ate, what dishes they chose for their homes, how their homes were built. These details are completely missing from the historical record

and are really important in understanding, for example, how expressions of class were manifest in the village.”

The hundreds of recovered artifacts are only beginning to be analyzed, but they already reveal hints of the village’s inhabitants’ middle-class existence. For example, included among them are shards of blue-and-white porcelain imported from China and a style of white stoneware dishes with paneled rims known to be popular among 19th-century middle-class families.

The excavation focused on two houses identified through archival records. At the site of the home of William G. Wilson, a sexton at All Angels’ Episcopal Church in Seneca Village, the team uncovered metal roofing, a stoneware beer bottle, kitchen utensils, and clothing. Where villager Nancy Moore lived, they found ceramics and the bones of butchered animals.

Wilson and Moore, like two-thirds of Seneca Village’s population, were African American, living in this autonomous community as a refuge from racism; the rest

of the village was predominantly Irish. Rothschild says it is intriguing to see that African Americans and Irish immigrants, whose communities often were at odds, apparently chose to live side by side here.

Questions of class and the interaction between groups interest Rothschild, who considers herself a social archaeologist and has written books on the encounters between European colonizers and the indigenous peoples of North America. Currently, she is writing a book about the archaeology of early American cities.

The Seneca Village project, she says, has transformed how she sees Central Park.

“I walk my dog every morning in the park,” says Rothschild, “and I will never see that part of the park again without thinking about how close to the surface Seneca Village was and how disenfranchised and forgotten these people were.”

To learn more and see an interactive map of the village, visit the project’s website at www.learn.columbia.edu/seneca_village/.

— Joshua J. Friedman '08JRN

Old-school tools

One of modern humans' predecessors, *Homo erectus*, used advanced tool-making methods at least 300,000 years earlier than previously thought, according to a new study.

A team of Columbia geologists led by Christopher Lepre and Dennis Kent made the determination by dating mudstone at an archaeological site in Kokiselei, Kenya, where French scientists had found ancient stone axes in the late 1990s. Since the French made their original discovery of the tools, there has never been any serious question about who produced them: Their oval shape and carefully sharpened edges are the signatures of *Homo erectus* craftsmanship, which was unusually sophisticated for the period in which he lived.

"The skill involved in manufacturing such a tool suggests that *Homo erectus* was dexterous and able to think ahead," says Lepre, whose paper appeared in the journal *Nature*. "He could probably chop wood and slaughter large animals."

Scientists were less sure, however, about when the tools were made. The sediments in which they were found were estimated to be roughly 1.4 to 1.9 million years old. Until now, most scientists suspected that the tools

were made during the recent end of that range, perhaps 1.5 million years ago.

But the Columbia geologists challenged this consensus by using a novel dating technique called magnetostratigraphy. This involved making microscopic observations of individual grains of sand in the mudstone in which the tools were found. Elongated grains of sand tend to point north, as a result of the earth's magnetic field. And scientists today know that the earth's magnetic fields have been shifting in regular cycles for millions of years. By analyzing the positions of the sand grains and correlating this data with the earth's polarity cycles, the geologists concluded that the sediment is 1.76 million years old.

"We knew that Kokiselei was a very old site, but we were taken aback when we realized that the geological data indicate that it's the oldest site ever to contain these types of tools," says Lepre, who holds appointments at Columbia's Lamont-Doherty Earth Observatory and at Rutgers University.

The finding raises new questions about *Homo erectus*, believed to have hit an evolutionary dead end about 70,000 years ago. The authors point out that archaeological



This eight-inch-long hand ax, viewed from two angles, was made by hominids in Africa 1.76 million years ago.

evidence suggests that populations of *Homo erectus* that lived in Central Asia much later did not make sharp instruments.

"These tools represented a great technological leap," said geologist and study coauthor Dennis Kent, who also has joint appointments at Lamont-Doherty and Rutgers. "So why didn't *Homo erectus* take the tools with them to Asia? That's the mystery."

Scientists from France's National Center for Scientific Research and Seton Hall University also contributed to the study.

Dentists join fight against diabetes



Columbia dentists are trained to care for patients' overall health.

Researchers at the College of Dental Medicine have found that dentists can play a significant role in fighting a major public-health crisis.

In a study of 535 patients treated at the college's dental clinic in northern Manhattan, Columbia dentists correctly identified 73 percent of those 182 patients who had diabetes or pre-diabetes, simply by looking for multiple missing teeth and gaps between their teeth and gums. With the addition of a finger-stick hemoglobin test, their accuracy increased to 92 percent. None of the patients had previously been told they had diabetes.

"Periodontal disease is an early complication of diabetes, and about 70 percent of U.S. adults see a dentist at least once a year," says Ira Lamster, dean of the College of Dental Medicine and the senior author of the paper. "Prior research focused on identification strategies in medical settings — oral health-care settings had not been evaluated before. Our findings provide a simple approach that can be easily used in all dental-care settings."

The study was published in the *Journal of Dental Research*. Other Columbia authors include Evanthia Lalla, Carol Kunzel, Sandra Burkett, and Bin Cheng.

The power of forgetting

Quick: What's the capital of New Zealand? The name of the 17th president of the United States? How about the year Hemingway's *The Sun Also Rises* was published?

If you can't remember, you're not alone. Today, it's normal to forget information that you can retrieve easily on the Internet. But lest you fear that Google is making you dumb, rest assured that your cortical hard drive, now that it's storing fewer facts like these, has become increasingly efficient at searching out information.

That's what psychologists Betsy Sparrow of Columbia, Daniel Wegner of Harvard, and Jenny Liu of the University of Wisconsin-Madison concluded in a paper that appeared in the journal *Science* this summer. The authors say their study is the first to demonstrate how the Internet is changing the way our brains work.

In a series of memory experiments, the psychologists asked college students to

type statements such as, "The space shuttle *Columbia* disintegrated during reentry over Texas in 2003" and "An ostrich's eye is bigger than its brain." Half of the subjects were told that the statements they typed were being saved on their computer, while the other half were told that they would be deleted. Later, those students who thought the information they typed had been saved were less likely to remember its content.

"Participants did not make the effort to remember," the authors write, "when they thought they could later look up the trivia statement they had read."

In a related experiment, the psychologists instructed the students to type statements and then save them into various folders on their computer desktop. The students subsequently remembered very little of what they had typed but tended to know exactly *where* each statement was stored.

"That kind of blew my mind," says Sparrow, who is the study's lead author. "It shows that people now perceive that it's more important to remember where they can find information than to commit to memory the information itself."

So, is there any danger that our brains will weaken, like an unused muscle? Alternately, might there even be an advantage to outsourcing some of our knowledge to Google and Yahoo?

Sparrow says that psychologists are just beginning to ask these questions and don't have answers yet. But she doubts that our reliance on the Internet will diminish our raw intellectual ability. She points out that human intelligence, as measured by average IQ scores, has risen steadily over the past century and that this trend has continued straight through the information age and up to the present day. In fact, she hypothesizes that we may be becoming more creative problem solvers by devoting less brain power to memorization.

"The amount of information that's stored in our brains and to which we have ready access — what psychologists call our working memory — is finite," she says. "So there's reason to suspect that these changes we're seeing are adaptive. First of all, if you spend less mental energy remembering facts that you can easily access online, this means you have more synaptic space for different types of tasks, such as recognizing new associations between concepts and ideas."

Sparrow says she is currently designing experiments to test whether information we are exposed to but which we fail to memorize may seep into our subconscious and later be accessible to us in unexpected moments. "My hypothesis is that a lot of the information that seems to wash over us today may actually get stored deep down in our brain and periodically pop up into our working memory," she says. "I want to know if this can lead to the type of 'eureka moment' that occurs when we notice a connection between seemingly disparate ideas."



ALAN CHIN

Psychologist Betsy Sparrow is conducting memory experiments to determine how the Internet affects our brain function.

REVIEWS



Mahatma Gandhi in 1947 with his grandnieces Abha and Manu at Birla House in New Delhi, where he would be assassinated the following January.

Untouchable? // By Partha Chatterjee

Great Soul: Mahatma Gandhi and His Struggle with India

By Joseph Lelyveld (Knopf, 425 pages, \$28.95)

A few months before his death in 1948, Mahatma Gandhi remarked that men like him must be measured “not by the rare moments of greatness in their lives, but by the amount of dust they collect in the course of life’s journey.” Few of the hundreds of Gandhi’s biographers have followed this dictum, choosing instead the safe comfort of hagiography. Pulitzer Prize winner Joseph Lelyveld ’60JRN, former executive editor of the *New York Times*, puts

the record of Gandhi’s life to Gandhi’s test. The result, *Great Soul: Mahatma Gandhi and His Struggle with India*, is a hard-edged, grainy, but cogently persuasive biography of one of the most illustrious figures of the 20th century.

The subtitle reveals Lelyveld’s key idea: Alongside his well-known political struggle *for* India against British colonial rule, Gandhi carried out an even more determined struggle *with* the

country of his birth, or at least with all of those things he believed were wrong with it. Gandhi's list of complaints about the ills that plagued Indian society did not come to him ready-made. He chopped and changed the list, shifting priorities, learning from his experience and making new discoveries — having, as Lelyveld remarks somewhat acidly, a moment of epiphany every two years or so. But once he decided to launch a struggle against a retrograde practice, whether a gigantic one, such as caste discrimination or sectarian violence, or something mundane concerning habits of personal hygiene, he would set himself the most severe trials and present his own ordeal as an example for everyone else to follow. When he campaigned against the persecution of *dalits* — untouchables — he would perform, and make his family and close associates perform, the lowly job of the scavenger; when preaching peace in the middle of sectarian violence, he would disregard saner advice and take extreme risks with his own safety. He did not always have perfect clarity in identifying his targets and, as Lelyveld shows with meticulous analysis, the results of his campaigns were often mixed. But Gandhi's ceaseless efforts to learn from his “experiments with truth” were a journey of striving to rise above his received inheritance of class, caste, race, and religion.

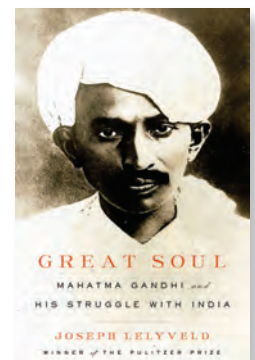
Gandhi spent 21 years as a lawyer in South Africa before leaving for India on the eve of World War I. Lelyveld's research into this period reveals much that has been papered over by later myth-making. Gandhi's political career began in South Africa with his efforts, mostly through appeals and petitions but soon shifting to more unconventional tactics, to win legal equality for Indians with whites. The Indians he was concerned with were mostly merchants and professionals. Lelyveld shows that not until his last campaign in 1913 — a strike by Indian coal-mine workers, joined by indentured laborers in sugar plantations — did Gandhi seriously engage with the problem of including low-caste Indians within the domain of equal rights. When he did, it was by the prompting of his own discoveries about the wretched lives of untouchable migrant workers and not because of any doctrinal adherence to abstract theories of human equality. What is troubling, however, is that Gandhi kept himself thoroughly apart from the African people and their struggles: His casual remarks about “the kaffirs” show nothing more than the received prejudices of his own upbringing.

The unprecedented mix of religious idiom, ethical practice, and tactical skill that Gandhi brought into modern politics has perplexed many. One of his most controversial fasts-unto-death was launched in 1932 over certain abstruse voting rules for the so-called “depressed classes” in the new constitutional reform proposals. In truth, the contest was about who could legitimately speak on behalf of India's untouchables: the erudite

B. R. Ambedkar '15GSAS, '27GSAS, who was an untouchable, or Gandhi, an “untouchable by adoption,” as he called himself. In a furious test of wills, Ambedkar gave in, at least for the time being. But Gandhi's victory, as Lelyveld shows, if not quite Pyrrhic as far as his hold over the national movement was concerned, had little effect on the real lives of the untouchable castes.

One by one, Lelyveld homes in on those moments in Gandhi's life that shine with his greatness — the amazing transformation he brought about in the Indian National Congress, taking it from a genteel annual gathering to one of the largest mass movements in the world; his rousing successes and heroic failures with Hindu-Muslim amity; his fight against untouchability; his last desperate bid to prevent the partition of the country — and points to the underlying tensions, vacillations, and retreats, the bluff and bluster, the hard bargains, the frequent emotional blackmails, but also Gandhi's unshakable resolve never to spare himself from criticism and punishment. Was Gandhi a saint who had unwittingly strayed into politics or was he in fact a supremely Machiavellian politician who cleverly donned the mantle of morality when it was convenient? Lelyveld takes seriously Gandhi's many personal fads and idiosyncrasies but does not fall into the easy trap of suggesting psychological solutions to the political puzzles posed by a saintly life. As a biographer faithful to the available records, he admits that many of these enduring questions cannot in fact be satisfactorily answered.

The reticence to judge after presenting the evidence is, unfortunately, not a guarantee against self-appointed jurors who are itching to condemn or absolve. Alongside Gandhi's surprising avoidance of Africans, Lelyveld also discusses, with jocular indulgence, the great man's relationship with Hermann Kallenbach, the Jewish architect who was his closest friend in South Africa. Soon after the publication of the book, a reviewer in a British daily declared that Lelyveld had proved that Gandhi was a racist homosexual. Within days, the news traveled to India. The government of Gandhi's home state of Gujarat, unwilling to take chances with fomented passions, immediately banned Lelyveld's book, even before it had arrived.



Partha Chatterjee is a professor of anthropology at Columbia and an honorary professor at the Centre for Studies in Social Sciences, Calcutta. His most recent book is Lineages of Political Society: Studies in Postcolonial Democracy.

Not Tonight, Dear // By Kelly McMasters

Sugar in My Bowl: Real Women Write About Real Sex

Edited by Erica Jong (Ecco, 256 pages, \$21.99)

“Is Sex Passé?” So ran the headline of Erica Jong’s provocative *New York Times* op-ed piece, timed to coincide with the publication of her *Sugar in My Bowl: Real Women Write About Real Sex*. Jong ’63BC, ’65GSAS concluded that her daughter’s generation of women had been overtaken by a prim nostalgia and was “obsessed with motherhood and monogamy.” Her sneer was nearly audible. The *Times* online comments section was set aflame.

That is why I was surprised to discover the nuance and grace and variety of the 29 pieces included in her anthology. I admit coming

to the book with certain prejudices, namely, that the sex writing would be overwrought or overpoliticized. That the book’s cover is decorated with a vaguely vagina-shaped candy dish full of gumballs didn’t help. However, the roster of writers and the range of topics and styles make for a strong and impassioned collection, perhaps because, as Jong said recently, “the collection is really much more psychological than it is explicit.”

The candy dish metaphor is an apt one for this delectable mix of fiction, memoir, and lyric essay, with a long-form cartoon and a dramatic trialogue thrown in. Tone and texture run from bare to brutal, sorrowful to sexy; as for passion on the page, there is novelist Jean Hanff Korelitz confessing about being a prude (even though she wrote an erotic novel under an undisclosed pseudonym) while Linda Gray Sexton experiments with erotic asphyxiation. The age range of the contributors is impressive, as is the span of their subjects, covering pre-primary exploration to elder sex. Jong’s one regret was that she was hoping to include more aspects of lesbian life. (“Even the avowed lesbians chose to write about heterosexual sex,” she told me.) And while some of the names belong to the old guard — Anne Roiphe plays doctor as a child with a neighbor boy in a closet, Rebecca Walker remembers the best sex that wasn’t, and Liz Smith loses her virginity to her first cousin — there are plenty of newcomers.

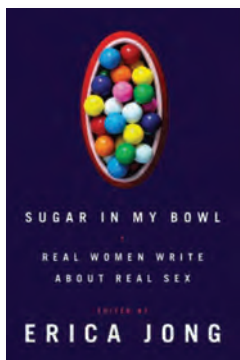
As presaged by Jong’s op-ed, the offerings from the younger set certainly lean toward the domestic as opposed to the catalog of unrepressed, Internet-age, postfeminist kink one might expect. The collection kicks off with an essay by Elisa Albert ’05SOA, who writes gamely about the making of her firstborn and her fulfillment as a mother and partner to her child’s father. Excuse me? Isn’t this supposed to be a sex anthology, edited by Erica Jong no less? Albert

seems to sense this paradox and apologizes midessay, admitting to the strangeness of writing about the joys of procreative sex, since “freedom from it is fundamental to the possibility that a woman can do as she pleases with her life, body, self. It’s taken eons to liberate us from reproductive sex, from the notion that sex can only be a means to an end (the end being a *baby*, of course; not an *orgasm*).” Yet the romance remains. J. A. K. Andres writes about her six-year-old daughter’s discovery of her “cho cho” in a brave essay called “The Diddler,” and Margot Magowan’s luminous piece “Light Me Up” traces the disappearance of her sexual desire after the birth of her son. Finally, Jong’s daughter, Molly Jong-Fast, contributes an essay called “They Had Sex So I Didn’t Have To,” lamenting her mother’s generation’s overexposure of sex. Jong-Fast admits that, in her stable-married-monogamous-maternal state, “I am my mother’s worst bourgeois nightmare,” adding, “I am the person my grandmother and mother would have watched in silent scorn.”

Jong *mère* acknowledges her disappointment. “I guess I had bought the bullshit that *everything* had changed, that *pudeur* was obsolete, that women today were wild viragos,” she writes in her introduction. She shares her shock that so many of the writers she invited to participate felt the need to ask permission of a partner or child before committing to the assignment, and worries about what this means for feminism. Jong could have cut these writers off because they watered down her message. Instead, she embraced them, including their experiences in her sisterhood tableau.

Jong has said she believes strongly that feminism is mentoring. By giving the younger set a place to talk about their relationships with sex alongside Susan Cheever and Susie Bright, Jong has stayed true to her terms. In her view, these women may be offering up their wrists to the very shackles her own generation struggled to cast aside, but by including their voices, *Sugar in My Bowl* becomes an important and truthful tribute to the complicated and knotty ways in which our experience of sex has — and has not — shifted over the past half century. Domestic does not equal demure, of course, and Albert’s point should not be missed: Although the sex she describes was procreative, it was also her choice, as is Jong-Fast’s monogamy. Rather than moving backward, as Jong frets, these younger writers are ultimately describing a new way forward.

Kelly McMasters teaches the writing seminar More Than Memoir at the School of the Arts. Her book Welcome to Shirley: A Memoir from an Atomic Town is currently being made into a documentary film.





Alfred Kazin, in a 1968 portrait by Arnold Newman.

Not the Creed, but the Believer // By Eric McHenry

Alfred Kazin's Journals

Selected and edited by Richard M. Cook (Yale University Press, 598 pages, \$45)

“What will not be forgiven me by the reader of these diaries is my obstinate unhappiness,” Alfred Kazin wrote in 1968. “Lord, what a disease, what sentimentality, what rhetoric! What an excuse for not living.”

What a lack of self-awareness, the reader is tempted to add. Kazin ’38GSAS, a public intellectual who helped shape the American conversation on literature and politics for nearly 60 years, had one of the 20th century’s most alert, curious, passionate minds, and *Alfred Kazin’s Journals* is a 600-page monument to its indomitability. Kazin suffered from chronic dissatisfaction, to be sure, but that seems to have been the necessary condition of his restless, searching intellect. (It’s also the human condition.) And for every despairing passage in the book there’s another that reaffirms his love of literature and of living. After reading Emily Dickinson in 1960: “Every day my cup runs over. I have so many perceptions. They bombard me. . . . One has only to get up in the morning to face in the direction of hope.” These are not the words of an obstinately unhappy man.

In fact, the reader of these diaries will find any number of things harder to forgive Kazin, including his willingness to forgive himself (for his almost pathological skirt-chasing, among other behaviors),

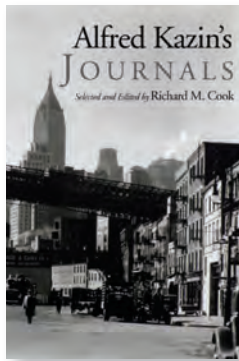
his odd self-deceptions and social myopias, and his assumption that these diaries would one day have readers. He was right about this last point, obviously, but now those readers can never be sure of the extent to which he was performing, and thereby denying them the thing they most want from private notebooks: the private self.

That said, there’s not much evidence of self-presentation here. If Kazin was writing with posterity in the back of his mind, it was in the very back. As a matter of principle, his ultimate loyalty was to “the subversive, the indefeasible truth of the human heart,” and he distrusted writing that seemed overdetermined or excessively conscious of its audience:

Everything that is really good — in [Edmund] Wilson, in [André] Malraux — has the quality of coming undiluted and fundamentally even unmediated — from a personal insight that he neither contrived nor could edit. I dislike [Lionel] Trilling’s specious “reasonableness” — I fear it; for behind this air of prudent good sense and modest tentativeness, I always feel the presence of someone who is trying to arrange a “structure,” rather than trying to get a fundamental point made and said.

For this reason, the journal may have been Kazin's ideal medium — a place where he could pursue “self-communion” without worrying about self-contradiction or reproach or a word limit. He was a faithful diarist his whole adult life, filling some 7000 pages, and Richard M. Cook's thoughtful selection reads like an autobiography written in real time. There's less artifice than in Kazin's three fine memoirs and more voice and interiority than in Cook's laudable biography of 2007.

Clearly, Kazin also prized his journals as a release valve: “They all outrage me; the sanctimonious [Sidney] Hook and the idiotically smug Stalinists, and the crooked Nixon.” Sometimes his candor can be cringe-inducing: “The deliciousness of the married woman, taking literally what belongs, or had belonged to someone else!” But when Kazin allows himself to be needy or petty or covetous, it's often an attempt to come to terms with these parts of his personality. He was aware of the tension between his public and private selves: “I am a critic-teacher-authority to so many, but to myself, a raging *id*, a volcano of passions.” The journals helped him to see these two aspects of himself as related, because he was seeking the same thing in his public and private lives, in literature and in sex: “Anything with the touch of real transcendence in it wins my heart.”



Born in 1915 to Russian immigrants, Kazin grew up in the Brownsville neighborhood of Brooklyn when it was still both a Jewish slum and a suburb, full of new tenements, old farmhouses, and vacant lots, a childhood he immortalized

in his first memoir, *A Walker in the City*, which has now been in print for 60 years. His father was kind but remote and passive (although he introduced young Alfred to radical politics); his mother was loving, long-suffering, and overbearing, setting a precedent of codependence that would haunt all of Kazin's relationships with women.

As a schoolboy he had a bad stammer, in response to which he developed a “tyrannical fluency.” Introverted and exceptionally smart, he graduated from high school at 15 and matriculated to City College. The earliest entries in his journals, which he began keeping a couple of years later, are all about big books and big ideas, and are tedious in the way that only teenage profundities can be, but also endearing: “Life calls us to nothing more than passionate and rigorously logical (truthful) introspection.” When reading the great novelists, Kazin clearly felt he was communing with his intellectual peers: “The ‘Epilogue’ to *Crime and Punishment* is . . . one of the most beautiful and impressive scenes in the whole of fiction,” he wrote, a couple of months after his 18th birthday. The whole of fiction!

Within 10 years, Kazin had completed a master's in English literature at Columbia, become literary editor of the *New Republic*, and published *On Native Grounds* (1942), a reconsideration of American realist fiction that made his reputation as a critic. Now

the great writers *were* his peers, and a parade of marquee names began marching through his diaries: Malcolm Cowley, Hannah Arendt, T. S. Eliot, Isaiah Berlin, Ralph Ellison, Sylvia Plath, Saul Bellow, Elie Wiesel, Susan Sontag. By his mid-20s, Kazin had also come into his mature writing style, and it is the most distinctive thing about this book. He doesn't tell stories very often, or very well (he admits that for a literary critic he has no sense of plot), but he lives to work through an idea until he has worked it out:

Whenever I had a chance, I kept at [Thomas] Merton's autobiography, *The Seven-Story Mountain*; moved me so deeply that I got a little scared at one point that I was falling back into my old abject jealousy of les religieux again. But it seemed to me as I stood there on the porch, thinking hard and close on it, that the real reward of such a book is not in the discovery or rediscovery of Catholicism, which is fundamentally not important to the book, but in Merton's own quality. In sum: and a good thing to get clear in my head for once: not the creed, but the believer.

Though not an observant Jew, Kazin revered religion and reviled its stand-in: ideology. In a sense, the search for understanding was his religion, and he conducted it, on the evidence here, largely in good faith. The sincerity of the effort is witnessed not only by the persistent self-criticism, but also by the lack of glibness in the writing.

Not that Kazin couldn't deliver a bon mot when he wanted to. Something about recording impressions of people, particularly, concentrated his mind and his writing. On Jacques Barzun: “He manufactures sentences, he emits thoughts, with a proficiency that I find deadly. I keep trying to imagine him in his underpants, but it is impossible.” On Hannah Arendt: “She is so slow, often, on the ‘pick-up’ simply because she cannot really imagine what [it] is *for anyone else to be unnatural*.” But when grappling with someone's writing, Kazin would often take several passes at an idea, really trying to get it right rather than merely to make it sound right.

Kazin may be easier to admire from a reader's distance than from up close. He tended to grow restless in relationships, personal and professional, and his marriages usually lasted about as long as his academic appointments — although in both cases the last ones stuck (CUNY and Judith Dunford). Kazin also grew estranged from many of his important friends, although politics and personality made that difficult to avoid. Like most Jewish intellectuals of his generation, Kazin had grown up with socialist sympathies. But he was wary, too, of political commitments: He never joined the Communist Party and was an early anti-Stalinist. Nor, later in the century, did he follow his disillusioned former comrades in their migration to the right — their new certainties bothered him just as much as their old ones had: “Letter from Sidney Hook in this morning's *Times* explaining that the peace movement assists Communism. Mr. Hook is one of those people who long ago learned the art of sounding positive, about anything he thinks at the moment. The crusades change, the crusader never.” His old friend

Saul Bellow, whose body of work Kazin revered, never fully forgave him for a negative review of *Mr. Sammler's Planet*. Kazin was no good at keeping opinions to himself, and when faced with a choice between loyalties to his opinions or to his friends, he lost friends.

He also, pretty clearly, lost some friends simply because he was exasperating. In early 1968, Kazin reported the following encounter:

At Elly Frankfurter's party . . . [Norman] Mailer in his lapelled vest, jutting ex-pug belly, and inhuman actor's look of "taking it all in," annoyed me so much that I said some very rough things to him. I said he looked like a pig, and he did. A pig of American prosperity. But I realize now that Norman's inhumanness is that *he* is always nothing, a blank on which his mind is writing some new part for him to play and that the method of incessant confrontation which makes up the scenario of [*Armies of the Night*] is his extraordinary way of locating and dramatizing.

Kazin includes his own hateful words in the service of a larger point about Mailer's writing. The reader further learns in a footnote that Mailer had responded by challenging Kazin to a fistfight — a detail so peripheral to Kazin's point that he didn't think to include it. For Kazin, literature was primary. It's hard not to love that about him, however hard he may have been to love. The day after his first wife left him, he mentioned it in his journals, but only after a few sentences of praise for the philosopher Alfred North Whitehead, whom he was reading at the time: "The really extraordinary thing about Whitehead is his *feeling* for eternity," Kazin wrote, in the first hours of his new life alone. "He is in the celestial halls."

Eric McHenry teaches creative writing at Washburn University. His books of poetry include Potscrubber Lullabies and Mommy Daddy Evan Sage (Waywiser, 2011), a collection of children's poems with woodcuts by Nicholas Garland.

Wisdom of the Ancient // By Thomas Vinciguerra

Jacques Barzun: Portrait of a Mind

By Michael Murray (Frederic C. Beil, 352 pages, \$26.95)

Stephen Vincent Benét famously wrote that Robert E. Lee kept his heart safe "from all the picklocks of biographers." The same could be said of Jacques Barzun. As Barzun approached his 100th birthday in 2007, his friend and student Arthur Krystal '70GSAS recalled trying to draw him out about his life. Barzun replied with a sigh, "It's not a subject I'm interested in."

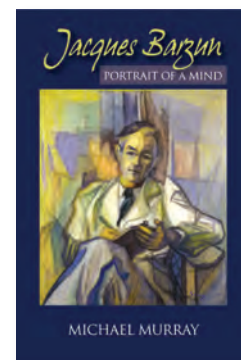
Today, residing in San Antonio as he nears 104, Barzun remains reticent about himself. Necessarily, then, in *Jacques Barzun: Portrait of a Mind*, Michael Murray forsakes conventional biography for a more intellectual overview. Barzun '27CC, '32GSAS — author, editor, and translator of more than 40 weighty books; conversant with baseball, the prose of Abraham Lincoln, and the grotesqueries of racial theory — is for many also the last word on William James and Hector Berlioz. Columbia rightly celebrates him as a primary architect of Literature Humanities and the Colloquium in Important Books, the successor to the famed General Honors course created by John Erskine 1900CC, 1903GSAS. During World War II, the U.S. Navy even commissioned Barzun to write an official history of significant seafaring events.

The son of a poet and diplomat, by age three the young Jacques Barzun was already attending orchestra concerts, and, writes Murray, "his mother could not keep him from lecturing fellow passengers on streetcars, or her guests who came to call." He witnessed and participated in the salon that his parents established at their home

in Créteil, outside Paris, where in the years before World War I, Apollinaire, Duchamp, Pound, and Zweig regularly held court. At Columbia he learned from Mark Van Doren '21GSAS, Franz Boas, Mortimer Adler '23CC, '29GSAS, and Harrison Steeves 1903CC, 1913GSAS.

No figure was more important to him than Carlton J. H. Hayes 1904CC, 1909GSAS, who taught Barzun to glean from history, as he put it, "what was culturally diagnostic." Inspired by Hayes, Barzun largely created the field of cultural history, which Murray describes as "an all-inclusive synthesis: not only kings, battles, laws, and statistics, but also habits, beliefs, influences, and tendencies, in art and literature, manners, morals, science, and religion, and the social setting in which these were found."

That broad approach animated Barzun during the 48 years he taught on Morningside and the 36 years that have followed. Reading Murray's account, it is hard not to be dazzled by a man who, during a four-week period in 1953, read and reviewed André Malraux's *Voices of Silence* and *The Letters of Franz Liszt*, edited the galley proofs of his book *God's Country and Mine*, adapted them



into articles for the *Atlantic Monthly* and *Vogue*, gave speeches on campus and at a *Partisan Review* banquet, reworked four lectures for publication, and offered a broadcast on WNYC. All this, mind you, apart from his teaching and dissertation duties.

Murray also devotes whole chapters to such Barzunian fascinations as the translator's craft and the writing of Barzun's masterwork, *From Dawn to Decadence: 500 Years of Western Cultural Life, 1500 to the Present*, published when the University Professor Emeritus was 92. An especially rewarding chapter is given over to Barzun's teaching of the Colloquium with Lionel Trilling '25CC, '38GSAS. Contemplating his pairing in 1934 with a confirmed Marxist and Freudian, Barzun initially wondered, "O Lord! What is this going to be like?" But for decades, the brooding Trilling and the energetic Barzun meshed wonderfully, both in and out of class.

Columbia aficionados will also enjoy reading about Barzun's tenure as provost and dean of faculties from 1957 to 1967. His determination to keep plodding graduate students on track for their PhDs is still relevant. For those who continue to dissect the turf wars between Low Library and Hamilton Hall, Barzun's genteel attempts to centralize authority and reconcile factions will ring true. On a more idiosyncratic note, Barzun recalled that as an administrator, "I requested Buildings and Grounds to see to it that all directive signs on campus should begin with the word *please* — keep off the grass, use the other door, do not smoke in elevators."

These glimpses into Barzun the man help leaven the rarefied tone of the book. We learn that the carnage of World War I left the sensitive, prepubescent Jacques feeling downright suicidal; that the first of his three marriages, to the actress, dancer, and Barnard alumna Lucretia Mueller, failed because she was not his intellectual equal; and that the great man himself was happy to change his children's diapers. There is

much humor, too. At one point, Barzun writes in his copy of a psychological study of Ruskin, "This is a mad book and I mean to shoot it."

Murray, a library scholar at Ohio State University and a noted organist, previously edited the fine omnibus volume *A Jacques Barzun Reader*. Here, though, he has a few problems with the biographer's art. Regal though Barzun may be in his manner, he has long advocated simple and direct prose. It is thus distressing to read passages that are windy ("These may conduce to intuitive glimpses of transcendent reality"), passive ("Certainly the theoretical was favored over the practical"), or awkward ("Not serious intellection alone marked the years Barzun spent as a graduate student and lecturer"). So beholden is Murray to his friend of 35 years that an air of idolatry seeps through. Too often, he describes Barzun's long-ago thoughts in the present tense, as if he were somehow omniscient, an impression that Barzun did not always discourage.

Rarely does Murray question Barzun's authority. Yes, in a chapter that culminates with the publication of *Berlioz and the Romantic Century*, Murray ticks off some critics' attacks on the work: "Berlioz did not merit two thick volumes. The book was mere special pleading. . . . The musical analyses filled too few of the nine hundred pages. The author's judgments lacked musicological authority." But there is little of this kind of second-guessing. In general, Murray might have heeded Barzun's own gentle rejoinder to an admirer: "I recommend that you try to balance views and tendencies by looking for other opinions on the same subject. . . . Discipleship is dangerous!"

Thomas Vinciguerra '85CC, '86JRN, '90GSAS is a regular contributor to the New York Times and the editor of Backward Ran Sentences: The Best of Wolcott Gibbs from the New Yorker (Bloomsbury USA, 2011).

In the Dark // By Julia M. Klein

The Rules of the Tunnel: My Brief Period of Madness

By Ned Zeman (Gotham Books, 308 pages, \$26)

Strange Relation: A Memoir of Marriage, Dementia, and Poetry

By Rachel Hadas (Paul Dry Books, 204 pages, \$16.95)

It takes bravery to expose the darkest psychological crevices of one's life. True, nowadays that sort of courage is not in short supply. Candid memoirs of mental illness, dementia, and family dysfunction crowd bookshelves, and authors offer their souls for sale on talk shows and Twitter. Still, recent books by Ned Zeman '88JRN, a *Vanity Fair* contributing editor, and Rachel Hadas, a poet and Rutgers University professor who taught at

Columbia in the early 1990s, are worth singling out for the stories they tell and the ways in which they stretch the memoir form.

The Rules of the Tunnel is a witty, sometimes farcical, often elegant, and occasionally confusing account of Zeman's descent into what he calls, optimistically, "my brief period of madness." His demons include depression, amnesia, and a predilection for the wrong women. The narrative, a jumpy, nonlinear account



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REVIEWS

of Zeman's life on both sides of electroconvulsive therapy (ECT), is entirely in the second person. It's a device, forced at times, that seems to signal the author's alienation from his own psyche, an especially remote reportorial objectivity, or both.

Strange Relation is Hadas's tale of her husband's encroaching dementia, and of the losses and challenges that ensue. The man in question is George Edwards, a composer and professor of music at Columbia from 1976 to 2008. Like Zeman, who kept a journal, Hadas used language to impose order on a life spiraling out of control. Her first resort is poetry, her own and others'. (The title is drawn from a Wallace Stevens poem, "Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction.")

Hadas frequently situates her ordeal in the landscape of myth, comparing her fate to that of Homer's Penelope, who weaves and unweaves her creations while awaiting her husband's unlikely return. But Hadas, unlike Penelope, waits in vain. (Hadas is the daughter of the esteemed classics professor Moses Hadas '30GSAS.)

Zeman's catastrophe may lack the grandeur of tragedy, but it is not without tragic elements. Apart from his mood disorder, he is plagued by social anxiety and seems to lack the maturity to find a life

partner. One girlfriend compares him to a seven-year-old, which — like other unflattering observations — he dutifully reports. In many respects, though, Zeman is a fortunate guy, blessed with a loving family, intensely loyal friends, ex-girlfriends who still worry about his well-being, and a job at one of America's premier magazines.

Zeman's account of his bewildering first day as an editor at *Vanity Fair* is at once precise and satirical:

Figures materialized out of nowhere, forming a natural ecosystem. At the center of the system were platoons of copy editors ("it's *composed*, not *comprised*") and fact checkers ("Camilla used brands other than Tampax") in hot, futile pursuit of the top-shelf editors. The latter were too busy talking their writers off the ceiling ("I'm aware you drank with Hemingway, but this paragraph still needs to go").

Eventually, Zeman, who is just 32, is introduced to his first writer: Carl Bernstein. Bernstein calls him Ted and asks for a Diet Coke. Running this errand, Zeman misses an imperial summons from Graydon Carter, *Vanity Fair*'s ruling eminence.

From there, life at the magazine can only improve, especially once Zeman starts filching stories destined for his writers. He makes his mark with chronicles of doomed, driven geniuses in love with penguins and grizzlies, who meet seemingly inevitable wilderness deaths. He is drawn to these stories of mania and obsession, even as his own mental health declines.

After a stint in New York, Zeman returns to Los Angeles as a *Vanity Fair* contributing editor, writing both celebrity features and his signature tales of doom. But when clinical depression lays him low, a battery of meds, shrinks, and hospital visits doesn't work, at least not well enough. Even a stay at the elite private-pay McLean Hospital, near Boston, the facility favored by Robert Lowell, Sylvia Plath, and other tortured poets, isn't a sufficient jolt to his system.

He finally decides on ECT, the treatment of last resort for depressives. Short-term memory loss is a common side effect, but Zeman's side effects turn out to be more severe: He loses a year or more of his life, forgetting everything. And his depression cedes to hypomania, causing him to drive, date, and berate his nearest and dearest with equal recklessness. He can't remember, and he lies about what he does remember. Then he can't remember his own lies. The manic episode may signal that he is bipolar, but doctors disagree on his diagnosis.

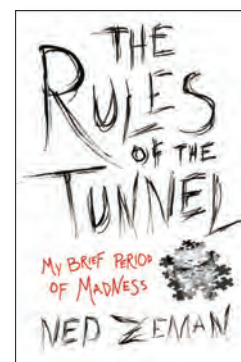
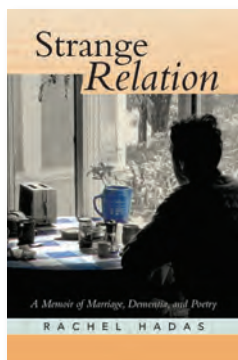
While the patient pursues recovery, the writer tries to recover his own story from the fog of amnesia. As his madness and short-term memory problems subside, Zeman interviews friends, peruses e-mail trails concerned with his fate — and discovers what a jerk he has been (shades here of David Carr's 2008 addiction memoir, *The Night of the Gun*). It's not always clear in the narrative just how Zeman knows what he knows.

"Good luck finding a miserable amnesiac," Zeman writes in his sardonic, self-deprecating prologue. But he realizes he has lost something because he feels its absence. "The heart," he tells us, "remembers what the mind forgets."

Hadas, unlike Zeman, enjoys the gift of a mostly happy marriage, punctuated by classical music and companionable silence. Over time, though, as her husband's mental faculties decay, a different silence develops, and she undergoes the privation of "living with, eating with, waking up next to someone who has nothing to say to you."

Hadas leads the reader gently, eloquently, through the terrors of such a life. Edwards's decline is gradual; he is not diagnosed until 2005, at age 61, but Hadas (56 at the time) believes in retrospect that his symptoms were first detectable six years earlier. As with Zeman, diagnosis is an issue: Hadas is still not sure whether Edwards suffers from frontotemporal dementia (FTD) or an atypical variant of Alzheimer's disease. In either case, however, there is no cure. Edwards, forgetful and confused, must end his teaching career in 2008; he eventually stops composing, playing the piano, using the phone, interacting with the world. He still walks, eats, smokes. A friend analogizes him to "a giant hamster."

With the help of aides, and occasionally the couple's grown son, Hadas cares for her husband as long as she can at home before



finally seeking an institutional placement. She draws insight from dementia memoirs and comfort in “the sustaining power of literature,” which she reads with new understanding. In lines by Greek poet C. P. Cavafy — “With no consideration, no pity, no shame, / they have built walls around me, thick and high” — she sees a description of a progressive, incurable disease. She writes her own elegiac poetry about a man who “has never really left,” and yet “is also long and gradually gone.”

Hadas’s excursions into literary quotation and analysis add an intellectual dimension to a by-now-familiar tale, but they also

blunt its narrative drive. It’s as if she is willing the deterioration to slow by stopping to ponder it.

Edwards himself is the one source who has little to say about his illness, but what he says pierces the heart. “I’m so sorry to visit this on you,” he tells Hadas. And then, once: “I’ve been very lucky.” Hadas writes, “I wanted him to say more, but I didn’t want to put words in his mouth, so I just agreed.”

Julia M. Klein is a cultural reporter and critic in Philadelphia and a contributing editor at Columbia Journalism Review.

Family Fen // By Phoebe Magee

Swamplandia!

By Karen Russell (Knopf, 336 pages, \$24.95)

At the start of *Swamplandia!*, Karen Russell’s debut novel, 13-year-old narrator Ava Bigtree reflects on her family’s unusual business. “Our mother,” she says, “performed in starlight.”

Hilola Bigtree, mother of three and alligator wrestler extraordinaire, is perched on a diving board in the dark, directly above a pool where “dozens of alligators pushed their icicle overbites . . . through over three hundred thousand gallons of filtered water.” Her husband, Chief Bigtree, operates the spotlight while Ava, her older sister Osceola, her brother Kiwi, and 265 tourists look on. Like many other life forms taking hold in the swamp, the Bigtrees are technically a nonnative species. Father Bigtree named himself Chief, and that he prefers that title to Dad speaks to his unusual style of parenting. His own father, Grandpa Sawtooth, left behind debt and a dead-end mining job in Ohio to seek out in the Florida islands the American Eden realtors promised, “with a greed that aspired to poetry.” Instead, he got the island Swamplandia!, where he, his children, and his grandchildren could shed their mainland names and, “without a drop of Seminole or Miccosukee blood, . . . become [their] own Indians.” Like her fictional Bigtrees, Russell ’06SOA builds a beautiful show out of a wilderness scrubland that has been virtually unexplored in American literature.

Swamplandia! is set in the Ten Thousand Islands off Florida’s southwest coast. A region of tiny, marshy isles between the Gulf of Mexico and the wilds of the Everglades, it’s best known for real-estate scams and a natural resistance to the type of development that covers the rest of South Florida. Like the con men who sold underwater plots of Florida swampland to would-be farmers and vacationers throughout the 20th century, Russell convinces her audience that these wild patches can support human life. *Swamp-*

landia! is really a story about family — in this case, a family of alligator wrestlers who live on a 100-acre island reachable only by ferry and run a “Gator-Themed Park and Swamp Café.” Ava serves as guide to this world, speaking from her isolated position of adolescence. Because she is so self-sufficient, and her voice so irresistible, the reader trusts her judgment as mature, and winds up believing with her in certain types of magic. She is the best type of unreliable narrator. Through her, Russell is able to explore not only the strange wonders of an alligator swamp, but also the hard difference between innocence and experience, reality and delusion.

If backwater Florida is an American Eden, then *Swamplandia!* is *Paradise Lost*. As Ava tells it, her family’s story can be summed up in two words: “We fell.” The heroic Hilola makes it through the pool of gators but is defeated in the first couple of pages by cancer. With its star performer gone, *Swamplandia!* is no longer able to compete with the Florida Interstate System’s latest attraction — the World of Darkness, a state-of-the-art theme-park Hell that draws visitors to such amenities as a “Tongue of the Leviathan” ride and “Faustian bargain fish tacos.” And with their mother dead, Ava, Osceola, and Kiwi are no longer able to rely on much. The slowing stream of tourists dries up entirely, the last one leaving only her hat. Kiwi is able to turn his sadness into anger at his ineffectual father, and also leaves *Swamplandia!* for the mainland, where he takes a job



with World of Darkness in an attempt to save his family from financial ruin. Chief Bigtree soon follows, on a similar but separate “business venture.” The sisters are left behind on the island: Osceola, 16 and lonely, finds a book called *The Spiritist’s Telegraph* and begins to communicate with, then romance, a series of ghosts. Ava, meanwhile, is fierce and tragically hopeful in her attempts to keep the park running and the gators fed.

In Russell’s novel, the concrete mainland that Kiwi Bigtree inhabits is just as weird and fantastic as the ever-shifting swamp. Russell alternates chapters between Ava’s story and Kiwi’s story, told in the third person, but it is Ava’s adventures in the sunny, ghost-and-alligator-inhabited islands that seem more truthful. When applied to dry land — specifically, the World of Darkness in which Kiwi toils — Russell’s wild aesthetic reads more like wacky satire. For the reader, the story cannot be resolved until brother and sisters meet again in the swamp, after they have gone, in their different directions, to Hell and back.

Russell has said that Katherine Dunn’s 1989 novel *Geek Love* made a lasting impression upon her, and like it, her novel uses powerful, inventive language to earn a reader’s emotional investment in the outlandish. It’s through her language that Russell is able to produce a moving, haunting, *familiar* family story set under unusual circumstances. Consider Ava’s description of a “bend in the channel, where dry grass exhaled yellow butterflies.” Or a cyprus dome: “The interior trees in a cyprus dome are one hundred feet tall, with roots, or ‘knees,’ that stick out of the water and breathe for them; with their veins of vines they look like petrified rain. Really, it feels like you’re walking through the weather of the dinosaurs. The gray-blue fossil of a storm, now dropping small leaves. I watched my sister stand *The Spiritist’s Telegraph* against a live oak, her mouth full of flowers.”

Phoebe Magee is a freelance writer living in New York City.

The Game of the Name // By Phoebe Magee

Nom de Plume: A (Secret) History of Pseudonyms

By Carmela Ciuraru (HarperCollins Publishers, 368 pages, \$24.99)

“Whatever may be the success of my stories,” wrote Mary Ann Evans to an editor in 1857, “I shall be resolute in preserving my *incognito*, having observed that a *nom de plume* secures all the advantages without the disagreeables of reputation.” Evans then signed the letter, and all subsequent work, “George Eliot.”



In *Nom de Plume: A (Secret) History of Pseudonyms*, Carmela Ciuraru (her real name) chronicles the lives of 16 notable authors who wrote under false names, and recounts the lives of the pseudonyms themselves. Samuel Clemens, for example, was born in Missouri in 1835, but Mark Twain was born in Nevada in 1863, and Ciuraru ’96JRN accounts for both their stories.

Mary Ann Evans — a woman in Victorian England who not only lived with someone else’s husband, but worse, *wrote novels* — was exactly right in her assertion that George Eliot’s reputation was more respectable than her own.

Ciuraru doesn’t shy from the “disagreeables of reputation,” and instead presents a serious work of literary criticism that still reads in places like a literary *Us Weekly*. She argues that as a whole, great writers were a strange and lonely bunch, blessed with imagination,

but scarred by childhood traumas, compulsions, and drinking problems, and that the pseudonym allowed them to express themselves without fear. More compelling, Ciuraru skillfully uses diary entries and letters from her subjects to illustrate how figures from Sylvia Plath to Isak Dinesen to the Portuguese poet Fernando Pessoa felt the presence within themselves of at least one other being. As Dinesen wrote in one of her stories, they believed that “all the people in the world ought to be, each of them, more than one, and they would all . . . be more easy at heart.” With duality in mind, the same Ciuraru who seeks a better understanding of the English canon also delights in gossipy tidbits, revealing that Charlotte Brontë (aka Currer Bell) had a “head too large for her body” and a terrible, unrequited crush on her dashing young publisher; that science fiction writer Alice Sheldon used her alter ego, James Tiptree Jr., to flirt with the women she secretly desired; and that William Sydney Porter could never make a deadline and used the name O. Henry in part to hide the fact that he began his writing career in an Ohio jail.

The underappreciated novelist Henry Green (“a stinky drunkard with brown teeth and dirty hair” whose real name was Henry Yorke) remarked that reading prose should be “a long intimacy between strangers.” While authors themselves may prefer to be known only through their work, *Nom de Plume* will satisfy readers who wish to deepen the relationship.

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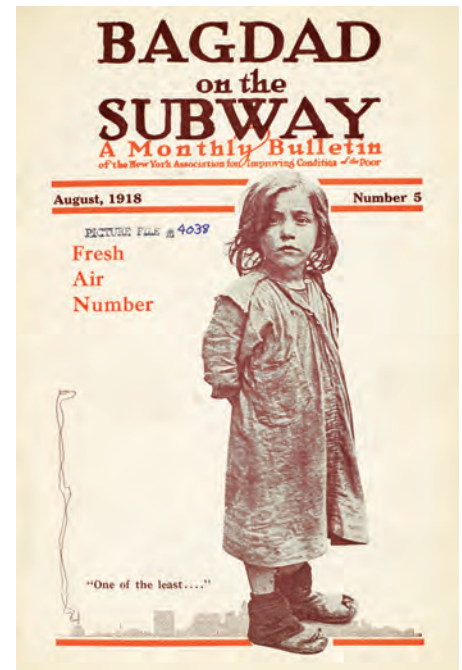
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FINALS

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"Family in Airshaft" by Jessie Tarbox Beals, circa 1915.



The August 1918 issue of the AICP's bulletin.

The Art of Giving

If all art is propaganda, as George Orwell, Upton Sinclair, and W. E. B. Du Bois each observed, the emerging practice of street photography in the late 19th century signaled a revolution — the most potent means yet for promoting a social agenda.

A hundred years ago, New York's major benevolence agencies, the New York City Charity Organization Society (COS) and the New York Association for Improving the Condition of the Poor (AICP), capitalized on that potential. In their rival campaigns to understand and address the social ills of urbanization during the late 19th and early 20th centuries, they used photography to reach the emotions of New York's donor classes. Pictures of ragged children and sprawling families in cramped quarters were a good bet.

In an exhibition at the Miriam and Ira D. Wallach Art Gallery, *Social Forces Visualized: Photography and Scientific Charity during the Progressive Era*, curated by art history PhD candidates Drew Sawyer '08GSAS and Huffa Frobes-Cross, images of New York's immigrant poor by photographers like Jacob Riis, Lewis Hine, and Jessie Tarbox Beals are paired with maps, charts, models, and brochures to give a sense of the marketing and education strategies of scientific charity groups.

Above, we see a photograph by Beals showing a family in a tenement air shaft. The commissioned image appeared in *Bagdad on the Subway*, a newsletter on urban poverty published by the AICP from 1917 to 1919. The photo essay was titled "Little Prisoners of the Slums."

"This is just speculation," says Sawyer, "but it's possible that Beals brought the three children on the left into the photograph to make the family seem larger. A bigger family would appear needier than a smaller one."

In another dozen years, both the AICP and the COS felt the pinch from the growing role of government in delivering services to the poor. Finally, in 1939, the organizations merged to form the Community Service Society (CSS), which still operates today.

The Wallach exhibit, on view through December 17, draws heavily from CSS materials held at the Rare Book & Manuscript Library. The CSS began donating its records in the 1970s to Columbia — an apt choice, given the genealogy: In 1898, the COS announced a summer course in the *New York Times*, an initiative that grew into the New York School of Social Work, which in 1940 became affiliated with Columbia. By the early 1960s, the school joined the University and was renamed the Columbia University School of Social Work.

In assembling those early records, Sawyer and Frobes-Cross not only offer an institutional and social history, but mark the rise of documentary photography and, in the process, show us a different way of seeing.

"The exhibit provides an opportunity to reinterpret images that have been stripped of their context," says Sawyer. "When we look at these photos in a museum, we don't normally see the journals or newsletters in which they appeared. Our purpose goes against a purely aesthetic interpretation." — Paul Hond

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