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Norbert Ehrenfreund '50GSAS was a judge of the San Diego Superior Court for more than thirty years. A former European correspondent for *Stars and Stripes*, Ehrenfreund is also the author of *The Nuremberg Legacy* and *You Be the Judge* and the coauthor of *You're the Jury*. >> [Page 46](#)



Stuart Firestein is the chair of Columbia's Department of Biological Sciences, where his laboratory investigates the mammalian sense of smell and how it relates to fundamental brain functions. He also works on several programs with the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation to bring science into the mainstream culture. >> [Page 11](#)



Timothy Frye '92SIPA, '97GSAS is the Marshall D. Shulman Professor of Post-Soviet Foreign Policy in Columbia's Department of Political Science and the director of the Harriman Institute. His latest book is *Building States and Markets after Communism*. >> [Page 42](#)

EILEEN BARROSO



Reinhold Martin is an associate professor of architecture in Columbia's Graduate School of Architecture, Planning, and Preservation, where he also directs the PhD program in architectural history and theory. His work focuses on the architectural and cultural history of the American university since the eighteenth century. >> [Page 14](#)



Sarah Smarsh '05SOA is an assistant professor of English at Washburn University, in Topeka, Kansas, where she teaches nonfiction writing. She compiled and edited the 2011 essay collection and art catalog *A Waiting Room of One's Own*, and has written for the *Huffington Post* and *Village Voice Media*. >> [Page 64](#)

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letters

CURRENCY EVENTS

Your in-depth interview with David Beim, “Too Late for the Euro?” (Winter 2011–12) was both fascinating and disturbing. It was a sad conclusion that an exit strategy is under consideration and that the euro may become history.

Josh Weil’s short story, “Half of All of What Was True,” was a beautiful account of human nature at work.

Having recently become a New Yorker, residing here in Morningside Heights, I was intrigued by the book review of *Harlem* and the piece on the New-York Historical Society.

The issue was interesting and informative throughout.

Victor Levin ’56CC, ’59LAW
New York, NY

With all due respect to David Beim (“Too Late for the Euro?”) and the many commentators on this side of the Atlantic — particularly in the pages of the *Wall Street Journal* — since the 2008 crisis, I think the most important factor arguing for the ultimate sustainability and eventual strengthening of the euro is consistently overlooked. That factor is the general high level of intelligence of the European electorate. Measures to cut government programs are rarely

popular at first. Quite possibly the level of current social expenditures is not “sustainable” if one views it as a continuing ascending curve. But the politics of any democratic state and the pressures being exerted today virtually assure this will not be the case. And the electorates will come to grips with it. Greece might indeed depart the euro temporarily, although even this seems highly unlikely.

The most likely result is a long period of consultation and gradual reform among the countries of the EU and a stronger euro in five years’ time at the most. A result not unlike what will probably transpire in the US as we come to terms with the same problems, only slightly less serious.

John V. N. Philip ’90LAW
New York, NY

Thanks for sending me another terrific edition of *Columbia Magazine*. The articles are poignant, well written, and educational. They give me inspiration and always enrich my knowledge of New York and the many offerings the city provides for its visitors. The interview with David Beim (maybe Britain has been right all along not to adopt the euro) and Stacey Kors’s article, “Tell It on the Mountain,” were particularly fascinating. Articles like these and others make

me look forward to receiving the magazine each quarter. I can’t thank you enough for such high-quality reading.

Charles A. Garabedian
Boston, MA

It is unfortunate that the accuracy of Professor Beim’s interesting article is immediately called into question by the following sentence: “Of the ten EU members that did not adopt the euro, only four meet the Maastricht criteria: Sweden, Denmark, Luxembourg, and Estonia.” The last, having adopted the euro very recently, could have slipped past the good professor’s eye, but Luxembourg has been in the euro group from the very beginning.

Harold Beyerly ’49CC
Vienna, Austria

I shall not engage in predictions of the future of the euro, but when prognosticating by extrapolating from the current state of affairs, one at least should get the most basic facts right.

David Beim says that under the EU’s December declaration of intent, “debts would have to be reduced to below 60 percent of GDP and a deficits to below 3 percent of the GDP . . . Only Finland [meets these criteria today]. A treaty change

LETTERS

would require the signatures of all twenty-seven EU members, which is horrifically difficult to achieve. Of the ten EU members that did not adopt the euro, only four meet the Maastricht criteria: Sweden, Denmark, Luxembourg, and Estonia.”

First, Estonia is a member of the Eurozone.

Second, Luxembourg adopted the euro from day one.

Third, Estonia is below the 60 percent indebtedness and 3 percent deficit ceilings, and indeed has the lowest indebtedness of any country in the European Union, let alone the Eurozone, at 6.1 percent of GDP. In comparison, Greece's debt is 159.1 percent of GDP, Italy's stands at 119.1 percent, and Portugal's at 110.1 percent.

Hence, fourth, Finland, our northern neighbor, is decidedly *not* the only country to meet these requirements.

And fifth, Luxembourg also meets the indebtedness and deficit requirements.

Toomas Hendrik Ilves '76CC
Tallinn, Estonia

Toomas Hendrik Ilves is the president of Estonia.

TWINS

I was surprised to see Camilo José Vergara's "The Looming Towers" in your Fall 2011 issue. I worked from 1963 to about 1995

as a magazine writer-editor-photographer and spent many years photographing the World Trade Center, work that culminated in a show at Brooklyn's Gallery on Dean in 2006. In all that time, I had never heard of anyone with the same interest.

My work had its roots at the J-school, where I had a Sloan-Rockefeller fellowship in 1962–63 in the science-writing program. After I graduated, I freelanced for, among others, the third edition of the *Columbia Encyclopedia*, where I updated articles that dealt with the world's tallest buildings.

When plans for the World Trade Center were announced, I wrote "Sorry, Empire State" for the April 1964 issue of Hearst's *Science Digest*. (My lead was, "In 1970, visitors to the Empire State Building will have to look *up* to see the sights.") I became interested in following the towers' construction photographically. Fortunately, I had already taken photos of the Cortlandt Street Radio Row and the Washington Market, which were flattened to make way for the World Trade Center.

By the time the Twin Towers were finished, I lived in Park Slope and could shoot them from my roof. On the morning of their destruction, my son, who was working on Water Street, warned me by phone that something was up. I saw the first burning building on TV. When I went up to the roof, all I could see was a veil of smoke, so I had to watch the rest inside. At the end, I could readily understand why the floors caved in succession, because I had described the columnless construction in my article. Such construction made more rentable space and thus raised the economic height limit.

Bruce H. Frisch '63JRN
Norfolk, CT

SOMETIMES A CIGAR . . .

Thomas Vinciguerra's College Walk article about smoking ("Smoking Rules," Winter 2011–12) reminded me of my student days in the Columbia music department, which was housed in the journalism building at the time. I can still remember

the emanations from the pipes and cigars of musicology professors and new graduate students.

Vinciguerra states that Professor Paul Henry Lang smoked cigars. My recollection is that he smoked a pipe. The cigar smoker was Professor Erich Hertzmann. It is not important, but I thought you would want to know.

Isabelle Cazeaux '61GSAS
New York, NY

Photographic evidence suggests that Lang also smoked cigars. — Ed.



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MORE SMOKE

I don't smoke and am the last person to defend such a filthy habit. Cigarettes are clearly harmful, but their effect is unpredictable and idiosyncratic. We should do all we can to discourage smoking, but we should limit our arguments to the objective evidence and refrain from unsupportable dogmatism.

I admit more than two thousand patients per year to my hospital and see a cross section of pathologies. I have admitted more non-smokers with chronic obstructive pulmonary disease than smokers or ex-smokers; most of these patients also deny overt secondhand exposure. It is the same with atherosclero-

Travel with Columbia

sis, cancer (lung cancer excepted), and most pathologies strictly ascribed to smoking.

Smoking prevents obesity, calms the smoker, and is alleged to increase mental acuity; smokers cite these perceived benefits as the primary reason for their reluctance to quit. The untenable exaggeration of the little hard data we do have regarding the effects of smoking plays into the hands of these holdouts.

The theatrics around the antismoking crusade not only discredit those who resort to fuzzy logic, but also compromise an overall laudable effort to improve public health. There are no prospective case-control studies of smokers. Nor will there ever be, since a properly designed study would require fifty years and millions of participants.

Embarrassingly, smokers are right to protest that we don't understand the extent and mechanisms of harm. Statistics ignore herd immunity and exposure to volatiles and particulates since the onset of the industrial age and don't translate into the real world.

I understand the zeal that makes my colleagues give free rein to their imaginations. This scourge is particularly bothersome because it's a result of a policy to subjugate a worldwide market regardless of the consequences. Cigarette vendors have been the most successful in history in fostering addiction and have killed millions.

Mob rule and tyranny of any kind is reprehensible. Subversion of legislation to impose the majority's will without proper justification is inconsistent with our supposedly liberal society. Before we intrude into our fellow citizens' private lives and private right to make their own choices, we should reflect on the facts and refrain from falling victim to the prevailing hype.

Attila Mady '92PS
Santa Rosa, CA

REACTIVE REACTION

Stacey Kors's article on Katori Hall gave an illuminating account of how the playwright's artistry and development as an artist have been informed by her roots,



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Islands and Sanctuaries of the Gods: Springtime in the Greek Islands
with Emeritus Professor
Alan Cameron
May 22–June 2

Byzantine Odyssey (Turkey)
May 26–June 9

Changing Tides of History: Cruising the Baltic Sea
with Presidents
Mikhail Gorbachev
and Lech Walesa
May 28–June 8

A Musical Odyssey in the Mediterranean, featuring performances by Frederica von Stade
with Emeritus Professor
Alan Cameron
June 13–26

Voyage to the Lands of Gods and Heroes: A Family Learning Adventure
with Emeritus Professor
Suzanne Said
June 21–July 2

Coastal Life Along the Adriatic
with General Wesley Clark (Ret.)
June 24–July 2

Wild Alaska
June 25–July 2

The Great Lakes: A Voyage of Discovery
July 7–14

The Black Sea
with pianist Leon Fleisher
July 18–28

Great Cities of Russia: A Cultural Tour of Moscow and St. Petersburg
July 19–27

Classic Mediterranean Islands (Istanbul to Rome)
July 27–August 6

Discovering Eastern Europe
July 31–August 16

Mongolia: Land of Genghis Khan
August 9–19

Opus Mediterraneo (Venice to Barcelona)
August 14–24

Classic Safari: Kenya and Tanzania
August 15–31

Danube River and Habsburg Empire
August 31–September 13

Village Life in the Italian Lakes
September 8–16

From the Walls of Troy to the Canals of Venice
September 16–27

Provincial French Countryside
October 15–29

Israel: Timeless Wonders
October 19–31

China, Tibet, and the Yangtze
October 20–November 7

The Ancient Coasts of Turkey and the Greek Islands
October 25–November 3

Australia and New Zealand
November 3–24

Moroccan Discovery
December 8–21

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her race, and her encounters with racism. Kors lost ground in allowing Hall's story to speak, however, when Kors labeled Hall "racially reactive." This term appears to reflect Kors's judgment that three African-Americans' plays debuting on Broadway this season are sufficient to erase a legacy, as well as a future, not promised to sustain the present. It appears in the same vein as those who have proclaimed our society to be postracial now because we have a black president. Rather than coin a term that casts the anger of injustice as a pejorative emotional response, I suggest Kors look into her own reactivity and assumptions.

Thandiwe D. Watts-Jones '73SSW
New Rochelle, NY

THE REAL THING

J. D. Scrimgeour's poem "Me and Kenneth" (Fall 2011) shook me back to those days when Professor Koch would hold court in Hamilton. The grade-grubbing wannabe poets, the already poets, and voyeurs like me enjoyed his twice-weekly performances — and they really were performances, for he could be as effusive as anyone could be in a tweed blazer a size or two too small, posing at will with book in one hand, the other at the hip, while reading one of his favorite odes.

I was probably one of a few engineers to make it for two semesters of his modern-poetry class. It's also likely that Koch was in disbelief when I showed up for the second one — his meager grade for the first semester having proved to be no deterrent — knowing he would once again have to read my awkward attempts at his imitation assignments. But that spring, when he read Apollinaire, Rimbaud, and O'Hara while New York City was falling apart, the sidewalk cracks and the girlfriend's place, as in Scrimgeour's piece, took on an unreal veneer and the world seemed an endless possibility. Come to think of it, he did spend a lot of time telling us about other books we might like. Thanks for the reminder, J. D.

A. Mauricio Matiz '79SEAS
New York, NY

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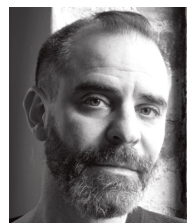
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MARK STEELE

Bookmakers

1966: Eric Banks '88CC is born in Vicksburg, Mississippi. In New York, Katherine Anne Porter wins the National Book Award for fiction and the Pulitzer Prize. Kauai King wins the Kentucky Derby and the Preakness but finishes fourth in the Belmont Stakes.

1975: John Ashbery '50GSAS publishes his poetry collection *Self-Portrait in a Convex Mirror*. Eric Banks listens on the radio to a battle of the sexes between the magnificent filly Ruffian and the Derby-winning colt Foolish Pleasure. On the backstretch at Belmont Park, Ruffian breaks down, and is later destroyed.

1976: Ashbery's *Self-Portrait* wins the literary triple crown — the Pulitzer Prize, the National Book Award, and the first-ever National Book Critics Circle (NBCC) award for poetry. Banks, for his tenth

birthday, receives from his father an open account at the local bookstore.

1977: Seattle Slew wins that other Triple Crown. Banks reads *On the Road*.

1978: Affirmed wins the Triple Crown. Of the eleven Triple Crown wins in history, this is the only time two have come back-to-back, putting a gallop in a boy's chest in Vicksburg. Ashbery is an NBCC poetry finalist for *Houseboat Days*. In the criticism category, *Gates of Eden: American Culture in the Sixties*, by Morris Dickstein '61CC, finishes behind Susan Sontag's *On Photography*.

1979: The NBCC finalists for criticism include three books by Columbians: *Orientalism*, by Professor Edward Said, *Modern Art: 19th and 20th Centuries*, by Professor Meyer Schapiro '24CC, '35GSAS, and

The Eye of the Story: Selected Essays and Reviews, by Mississippian Eudora Welty, who attended the business school in the early thirties. It's *Modern Art* by a nose.

1981: Banks enters high school in Vicksburg, where the reading is skewed toward Oxford's William Faulkner. Greenville-raised Walker Percy '41PS is an NBCC fiction finalist for *The Second Coming*.

1981–2011: MTV. The Internet. Amazon. Barnes & Noble megastores. E-books. Reports of death, some exaggerated, some not: the death of independent bookshops, of newspapers, of book-review sections, of publishing, of Barnes & Noble.

2012: Books still exist. So does the NBCC. So does Eric Banks, who, as the NBCC's president, has just marshaled his first

NBCC Awards — a month of events and intense book devouring, culminating in a two-day run of readings and ceremonies — and is well-nigh about to drop.

“I feel like a character in *They Shoot Horses, Don’t They?*” says Banks, the day after the NBCC Awards ceremony in New York. (Lest one think Banks has a one-track mind, the referenced novel concerns not *Equus caballus* but a group of Depression-era dance marathoners.) Banks, a Southern-inflected gentleman of lavender shirts, white-and-black checked jackets, and glasses perhaps unavoidably evocative of Tennessee Williams, has an out-of-time quality, and would not appear incongruous at a Plimpton cocktail party circa 1963 or in the grandstand last summer at Saratoga or at the Algonquin Hotel in 1974 when critics John Leonard, Nona Balakian ’43JRN, and Ivan Sandrof got the idea for a book award granted by working critics and reviewers. Banks, in preparation for the 2012 awards, has been reading, chairing panels, deliberating with the other critics, stuffing goody bags for the guests, printing out thank-you letters to the finalists, and rushing to the market to pick up lemons, limes, and an extra bottle of vodka for the reception.

On the evening of March 8, four hundred people crowded into the New School’s Tishman Auditorium to witness this literary Run for the Roses. The event was free and open to the public, but it had the feel of an advance-sale affair. A few flashbulbs burst in the front rows, raising the glamour factor a notch, but never beyond a level of tasteful understatement, a sense of proportion in the digital age. The atmosphere was one of reverence for books, not personalities. A luster of high accomplishment did radiate from the thoroughbreds in the room, but any air of intimidation was genteelly absorbed into a larger spirit that followed Banks’s lead: humble, gracious, bighearted, hungry for the printed word.

In his opening remarks, Robert Polito, director of the New School’s writing pro-

grams, honored the NBCC’s thirty-seven-year history by reading a passage from the title poem of Ashbery’s *Self-Portrait* that began:

On the surface of it

There seems no special reason why that light
Should be focused by love . . .

Polito then introduced Banks, who informed the audience that the six winners — for autobiography, biography, criticism, fiction, nonfiction, and poetry — had been selected just an hour before. This gave matters a fresh-off-the-presses glow. “We are fortunate,” Banks said, “to have represented on the stage this evening the most exemplary works published in 2011.”

“The most exciting thing about Columbia for me was the great-books program,” says Banks, who was an anthropology major and a John Jay Scholar. While chewing on Homer and Plato, Banks sat in on Andreas Huyssen’s class in the Department of Germanic Languages, where he read Nietzsche, Walter Benjamin, and the Frankfurt School writers. In anthropologist Robert Murphy’s Introduction to Structuralism, he studied Lévi-Strauss, Foucault, and Althusser. He gives much credit for this intellectual romp to the efforts of Michael Rosenthal ’67GSAS, the assistant dean at the time. “The John Jay Scholarship, which Rosenthal oversaw, made it possible for me to come to Columbia,” Banks says. “Rosenthal was incredibly generous about helping students. I was a middle-class kid from a small town, and he and the program made me feel comfortable.”

After Columbia, Banks began graduate studies in anthropology at the University of Chicago. It was in the Windy City that he developed a taste for playing the ponies. He frequented two Chicago racetracks — Sportsman’s Park and Hawthorne, which he describes as “rinky-dink, the equivalent of a bad card at Aqueduct.” He worked as a copyeditor for the University of Chicago Press, but the horses, too, kept his critical faculties sharp. “I love handicapping, looking at a set of races and trying to figure out which

horse is the most likely winner. You have to process a lot of information and determine what’s relevant and what’s not.”

Banks returned to New York in 1994. He freelanced as a copyeditor at the university presses of Oxford, Chicago, and Nebraska, and for Zone Books, which was publishing art-history and theoretical texts from France being translated for the first time. A year later, he became a senior editor at *Artforum*, and in 2002 he resurrected that journal’s book review, *Bookforum*, where he was editor in chief until 2008. That year, Banks joined the board of the NBCC, and in March 2011 he was elected president.

“We look for literary excellence, originality, and intellectual substance,” Banks says, the “we” being the board’s twenty-five members, who read the thirty finalists — five books apiece in the six categories — and discuss, debate, and vote. “A book should be worth the time it takes to read it. The finalists are books that are worth the time.”

After the winners gave their speeches, each a gem of grace and humor, the festivities moved to a New School hall on West 13th Street. There, guests filled plates with meatballs, broccoli florets, hummus, and pita crisps. At the bar, beer and wine trailed behind bourbon. Banks was in meet-and-greet mode among the milling editors and writers, many of whom figured into the NBCC’s six-hundred-strong membership. Nearby, NBCC vice president Steven Kellman, a critic and University of Texas professor dressed in chestnut tweed, talked to writer Jay Neugeboren ’59CC, well-groomed in a red shirt and checked blazer and about to publish his nineteenth book. Parul Sehgal ’10SOA, winner of last year’s NBCC Nona Balakian Citation for Excellence in Reviewing, in a black dress that matched her long hair, chatted with Craig Morgan Teicher ’05SOA, a brown-maned bard in a pale buttoned shirt who is chair of the NBCC poetry committee. And there, moving fluidly through the room, her glimpsed face reminiscent of one of those fair and regal film actresses who play Queen Elizabeth, was

Jennifer Egan, whose novel *A Visit from the Goon Squad* won the 2011 NBCC Award for fiction and the Pulitzer Prize. Over in a corner, James Marcus '84SOA, the deputy editor of *Harper's*, was heard to say, "You learn how to write a book and not write a book at the same time." No one disagreed.

Meanwhile, Banks, who has written about racetrack life for the *New York Times*, *Slate*, and the *Guardian*, was discussing his side interest with a man from the neighborhood.

"When people talk about literature and sports, it's usually baseball, but horseracing has a very rich literature," Banks said, and tossed off names like flinging flowers off a bridge: William Nack's *Big Red of Meadow Stable*, Jaimy Gordon's *Lord of Misrule*, Laura Hillenbrand's *Seabiscuit*, Jane Smi-

ley's *Horse Heaven*, Joe H. Palmer's *This Was Racing*, W. C. Heinz's article "Death of a Racehorse."

Death. The neighbor, holding a salmon-on-pumpernickel finger sandwich, said to Banks, "As a young boy, you must have been traumatized when they shot Ruffian."

"They didn't shoot her," Banks said.

"They didn't?"

"They don't shoot horses anymore."

"They don't?"

"No, they stopped doing that back in the 1940s and '50s. Now they use an injection containing barbiturates."

We'd like to go on, but it seems we're in the homestretch; the finish line approaches, and so we must leave Banks to his marathon and announce the 2012 NBCC winners: for

criticism, Geoff Dyer (*Otherwise Known as the Human Condition: Selected Essays and Reviews*); for poetry, Laura Kasischke (*Space, in Chains*); for biography, John Lewis Gaddis (*George F. Kennan: An American Life*); for autobiography, Mira Bartók (*The Memory Palace*); for nonfiction, Maya Jasanoff (*Liberty's Exiles: American Loyalists in the Revolutionary World*). In the evening's most talked-about contest, the fiction prize went to Boston writer Edith Pearlman for *Binocular Vision: New and Selected Stories*.

Pearlman, who has received little recognition until now (she was also a finalist for the National Book Award), is seventy-five years old, reminding us, as the Good Book says: the race is not always to the swift.

— Paul Hond

Window of the World

In 1908, Joseph Pulitzer, publisher of the *New York World* and future benefactor of Columbia's journalism school, stood before the New York World Building in Lower Manhattan and looked up at the immense stained-glass window that had just been installed above the entrance. The window shone in blues, greens, yellows, and purples, with a tiny flame tip of orange, and depicted a female figure with whom Pulitzer was more than casually acquainted.

Pulitzer had reason to admire this lady's likeness, even if the real thing could be glimpsed from his private office in the dome of the World Building — all 151 feet of her out there in the harbor, her copper skin already oxidized to green. Where would she be, if not for Pulitzer? And where would *he*, an immigrant from Hungary, be, if not for the ideals she embodied?

Yet in the early 1880s, the statue's home was in doubt: work on her pedestal had been suspended, and without an additional \$100,000, some other city might

well have taken possession of France's 225-ton gift to America.

Pulitzer decided to use the *World* to help. In May 1883, he ensconced the Statue of Liberty — a peacock fan of sun rays behind her, her pedestal flanked by the two hemispheres resting on a bed of clouds — on the *World's* banner, replacing the paper's former logo (two hemispheres and a ray-emitting printing press), which Pulitzer had created when he took over the paper earlier that year. Then, in 1885, he wrote in an editorial that it would be "an irrevocable disgrace" if the funds for the statue were not raised and promised his readers that the name of every donor would be published in his paper, no matter how small the gift. Within five months, the *World* collected more than \$100,000 from 120,000 men, women, and children.

At the time, many of New York's newspapers, including the *World*, the *New York Times*, and the *New York Tribune*, were located on Park Row, near the Brooklyn Bridge. As they competed for circulation,

each paper sought wide-ranging ways to outdo its rivals, whether in the grandeur of its building or in the yellowness of its journalism. Pulitzer commissioned a headquarters for the *World* that would cast a literal shadow over its competitors. On October 10, 1889, construction began on the New York World Building, at 63 Park Row. It took just fourteen months to build the twenty-story, 309-foot tower — the tallest building in the world.

But Pulitzer's tower wasn't finished. In 1905, Pulitzer, mindful of his legacy, hired artist Otto Heinigke to design a large stained-glass window to honor his fundraising crusade for Lady Liberty two decades earlier. Heinigke based the image on the banner's motif, and in 1908 the window was mounted over the building's William Street entrance.

Other skyscrapers, meanwhile, had surpassed Pulitzer's in height, just as other papers would surpass the *World's* circulation. In 1931, twenty years after Pulitzer's



death, the *World* folded, and Pulitzer's gold-domed monument became just another office building.

The building outlasted the paper, but not by much. On January 7, 1953, the city approved a plan to expand the Manhattan approaches to the Brooklyn Bridge. Pulitzer's temple was slated for demolition, along with twenty other buildings that stood in the way of progress. By 1954, the World Building was vacant and in disrepair. The furniture, doors, and chandeliers were removed. A collector offered \$3,000 for the window,

but the city had already bought the building in a condemnation proceeding. It would be up to the city to decide the window's fate.

At Columbia, John Hohenberg '27CC, a journalism professor and the president of the journalism school's alumni association, was determined to rescue the window. Hohenberg, with Herbert Bayard Swope, the former executive editor of the *World*, negotiated with the administration of Mayor Robert Wagner. A deal was struck. On March 9, 1954, the window was dismantled and carted away to its new home

at a cost of \$8,000, paid for, in large part, by journalism-school alumni.

On the morning of April 23, 1954, Mayor Wagner, Joseph Pulitzer (grandson of the *World's* founder), journalism-school dean Carl W. Ackerman, Columbia president Grayson Kirk, and other dignitaries gathered in Morningside Heights to rededicate the window in a place where it might feel at home: the Columbia Graduate School of Journalism. At the ceremony in room 305, Kirk called the window an "enduring memento of the life and work of Joseph Pulitzer and of the friendly and efficient collaboration between Columbia and the city."

The window stands sentinel in room 305 today — what is known as the World Room. Displayed in a heavy wooden frame inscribed with a dedication to Swope, the colorful glass panel is backlit and aglow at all hours, and serves as a backdrop for many events, including an annual spring ritual in which writers and composers receive one of the world's most exalted awards: the Pulitzer Prize.

— Benjamin Waldman '08GS/JTS

Read how the J-school is honoring Pulitzer as part of its centennial on page 72.

Known Unknowns

It had the look of a trial. And to Mark Churchland, an assistant professor in the neuroscience department, it probably felt like one.

Behind a small wooden table at the front of Hamilton 717, Churchland sat with the chairman of the biological-sciences department, Stuart Firestein, facing a lecture hall full of students eager to quiz Churchland on what he didn't know. It was the second meeting of Ignorance, a class that invites researchers to publicly expose the gaps in their knowledge. All in the name of science.

The idea for the class, now in its sixth year, came to Firestein while he was teaching Neurobiology I: Cellular and Molecular Neurobiology, "a big, tough class with a big textbook of 1,400 pages that weighs 7.7 pounds," Firestein says. "I came to realize that I was giving the kids the idea that we know everything there is to know in neuroscience. So I thought maybe I should tell them more about what we don't know, which is really more interesting."

Curiosity, not certainty, inspires progress, as Firestein writes in his forthcoming book, *Ignorance: How It Drives Science*: "The

undone part of science that gets us into the lab early and keeps us there late, the thing that turns your crank, the very driving force of science, the exhilaration of the unknown — all that is missing from our classrooms."

In Hamilton 717, Churchland eased into the two-hour discussion by explaining some things he *did* know. "Take Larry Bird," he said, referring to the former NBA star. In 1989 and 1990, Bird "had the longest streak of free throws. Seventy-one free throws. Generally considered a remarkable feat. You might want to ask yourself, 'Why didn't he hit seventy-two?'"

As a neuroscientist who specializes in the motor cortex — the region of the brain that controls body movements — Churchland is obsessed with such questions. A robot could be programmed to throw the ball in the hoop every single time, he said, and Larry Bird had successfully made that same shot thousands of times. So what went wrong?

To study this problem of inconsistency, Churchland taught monkeys in a lab to point at an object on a screen. (They were rewarded with juice.) He then attached electrodes to their heads, prompted them to point to the object, and monitored the signal that traveled from their brains to their muscles. He discovered that the monkeys picked up the movements easily, but no matter how much they practiced, there were still variables in how the signal traveled, producing inconsistent results.

Churchland's conclusion? "We're built to be really good at making motor plans on the fly for situations we've never encountered before," he said. "You've never stood on that exact rock throwing a spear of that exact weight at that particular mammoth

running in that direction. And yet, you can come up with a pretty good plan for doing that." But you can't hit the mammoth in the same spot with the same force every time. Or hit every free throw. "We sacrifice reliability for flexibility," he said.

What Churchland doesn't know is why.

Firestein, leaning back in his chair, arms crossed and eyes fixed on Churchland, began the questioning. Are there any ways in which animals benefit from this variability?

"For Tiger Woods, it's always bad," said Churchland, because the golfer can't re-create his perfect swing every time. But there is a species of songbird, one that has a region of the brain dedicated to variability, in which males can generate an endless supply of new melodies to attract females. "So sometimes variability is good, because it allows you to find a solution that you didn't know was there before."

"Are there any neural differences between genders?" said a man in the audience wearing thick-rimmed glasses.

"We train male and female monkeys to reach," said Churchland. "It's all the same. But we prefer male monkeys because

they're thirstier." (In other words, they work harder for the juice reward.) He conceded, however, that there were probably some neural differences between genders, "but I don't know what."

A curly-haired student in a blue T-shirt asked if there had been any research tying motor activity to memory. "I ask because I was taught that musical improvisation isn't really improvisation," he said, "but is just drawing on what you've done before."

"There's a lot about music I don't know," said Churchland, who then noted that it takes longer to execute most motor activities than to plan them. "I can take five seconds to gather my thoughts and utter a sentence that lasts twenty seconds," he said.

At 8 p.m., the class applauded and filed out of the room. Some people were left scratching their heads.

"I'm just realizing how much I really don't know," said Issa Mase, a sophomore. "You're talking to someone who's a leader in his field talking about what he doesn't know, and it's just like, 'Wow, I've got a long way to go.'"

— Douglas Quenqua

Mr. Smith Goes to Washington?

In 1967, Gallup asked Americans whether they'd be willing to vote for a Mormon presidential candidate and found that one in five would not. Now it's 2012, we're months from a presidential election, and this number has barely changed. Americans are much more likely to vote for a Jewish, Catholic, black, or female candidate than they were forty years ago, but not a Mormon. If you're Mitt Romney, a devout member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints and the presumed Republican nominee, this is problematic.

This semester, Columbia's Institute for Religion, Culture, and Public Life held a two-

day conference on Mormonism and American Politics to explore the faith's role in the presidential campaign and its treatment in the public sphere. The second day began with a screening of *The Religious Test*, a 2011 documentary in which academics, religious leaders, and ordinary citizens discuss Mormons in politics. "There can be no religious test to hold public office," one of the interviewees says, then adds, "But I'd have some big problems voting for Tom Cruise."

That many Americans confuse Mormonism with Scientology, which is not broadly accepted as a religion, explains the frustration that many Mormon attend-

ees expressed throughout the conference, held in the Kellogg Center, in the International Affairs Building. Non-Mormons, they said, simply do not understand the Mormon faith.

During an audience discussion after the film, a School of the Arts alumna admitted that she had felt uncomfortable telling her Columbia classmates that she was Mormon. "Secular people are the problem, not Evangelicals," she said emphatically, and referred as an example to the atheist writer and commentator Christopher Hitchens, who once said that he'd never vote for a Mormon.

“Yeah, well, he’s dead!” shouted a man wearing a plaid tie.

Peggy Fletcher Stack, a journalist for the *Salt Lake Tribune*, gave a talk on Mormonism in the media. She suggested that the media have a difficult time covering the Mormon Church because they don’t understand the religion’s language.

“People don’t know that a nineteen-year-old boy, or even a fifteen-year-old, can be an ‘elder,’” Stack said, noting also that in Mormonism, “prophets” are not only mystical figures from the Bible but current-day church leaders. She told an anecdote about one such Mormon church leader who introduced himself to a reporter as an “apostle.” Upon hearing this, the reporter thought, “Yeah, right. And I’m the Virgin Mary!”

Stack’s story had the Mormons in the room cracking up. It took everyone else a few seconds to get the joke.

While mainline Christian sects have plenty of differences among them, they

share the New Testament as the primary source of their religious belief. But Mormons have an additional narrative of revelation — Joseph Smith’s story — which many Christians consider heretical. This puts American Mormons at a double disadvantage: they are seen as outsiders, and they see themselves as outsiders.

Russell Arben Fox, an associate professor of political science at Friends University, a small Christian liberal-arts college in Kansas, told the audience about monthly “testimony meetings,” in which Mormons gather to reaffirm the truth of their religion to one another. “Mormons say they’re the only true church on the face of the earth,” Fox said, “and they say that to each other a lot.”

Before the election of John F. Kennedy in 1960, the public’s attitude toward Catholic politicians was similar to its view of Mormon politicians today. The conference speakers agreed that if America could

overcome its religious prejudice then, it can do so now. But how? Some in the audience proposed greater exposure. And that’s exactly what Mormons are getting today: through two presidential candidates (Romney and former Utah governor Jon Huntsman, who dropped out of the race in January) and popular culture like HBO’s hit drama *Big Love*, the TLC reality show *Sister Wives*, and the Broadway smash *The Book of Mormon*. Whether this exposure is beneficial or even accurate (despite what you see on *Sister Wives*, the Mormon church outlawed polygamy in 1896) — or whether it will help Romney get nominated or elected — isn’t clear. Mormons want to be known, but they’re also wary of the portrayals.

A young man in the audience summed up the contradiction. “Most Mormons won’t go see the *Book of Mormon* musical,” he said, “but we love that there is one.”

— Jennifer Miller ’08JRN, ’11SOA

Train Ride

Riding back from our day in the Big City on the sluggish old New York, New Haven, and Hartford, hot as blazes, train windows that couldn’t be opened, air-conditioning years away, or broken, and dusty blue plush seats —

all romantic enough. Also it was very late, black outside the black glossy plate-glass squares that shone our images back at us as you leaned a little against my shoulder, then finally leaned your head against my shoulder.

No, I’m making that up. It didn’t happen that way. Your head, I think, was turned away from me, against the corner where the seat meets the wall of the car. . . . What happened, very slowly, was that the shaking

of the train began to send your pink hand closer and closer to mine as my hand trembled on the seat. Closer, closer, as if my hand were some benign little animal lying in wait for its companion, O, how much I wanted to take

your hand, to tame it, claim it as mine — and hoped that you would be willing to let me. That was what the train ride home meant to me — your hand slipping towards mine, and I pretending that I had nothing to do with it,

that coming together would be an inescapable conclusion, a result of the laws of physics when finally they touched, those two hands that at that moment seemed neither to belong to you or to me; that no intention could bring your hand

to me, that our touch would be the result of motion, fate, and time until I touched your fingers or they touched mine. And when they did I took them and then your palm in my hand and we began. And this is what I understood

as poetry, that it would come to me when I was ready, and this is what I also first understood as love

— Bill Zavatsky ’74SOA, ’74GS



"Nature-City," Keizer, Oregon

DREAMING AMERICAN

Columbia's Temple Hoyne Buell Center for the Study of American Architecture and the Museum of Modern Art asked five architect-led teams of urban thinkers to reimagine the suburbs in light of the foreclosure crisis. The result, *Foreclosed: Rehousing the American Dream*, currently on exhibit at MoMA, has inspired new discussion and new thought — and created a few subdivisions. • [By Paul Hond](#)

PHOTOGRAPHS BY LEVI STOLOVE

I. The Buell Hypothesis

On February 18, 2009, the day after President Obama signed into law the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, two of history's most stimulating conversationalists got stuck in traffic on I-95 South. Socrates, the Greek philosopher, and his pupil Glaucon, son of Ariston, were headed to Athens, Georgia, for a symposium on housing and the American suburbs. The men took note of their surroundings along the highway — the grassy berms, shopping malls, and housing developments riddled by foreclosures — and broke into a dialogue on the assumptions that underlie the American Dream.

So begins *The Buell Hypothesis*, a four-hundred-page book produced by Columbia's Buell Center for the Study of American Architecture. "The suburb is organized around an ethos that construes homeownership, or at least the feeling of being at home, as something essential or fundamental," says Socrates, scrutinizing the roots of happiness as he used to at Polemarchus's house. "However, the financial crisis has made clear that the houses in and through which Americans dream their dreams are not owned by them but rather by banks, whose octopus-like networks make a mockery of national borders, never mind national 'dreams.'" The American Dream "is a fiction, but a real one," Socrates says, a kind of movie, profitable and risky, "requiring tax incentives and other types of government support to prop it up and to keep it running in theaters nationwide."

Change the dream and you change the city: this is the central premise of *The Buell Hypothesis*, which is written in the form of a screenplay as an alternative to the old metaphorical script that

equates homeownership with happiness and full civic participation. Supplemented by a montage of newspaper clippings, photographs, and other documents, *The Buell Hypothesis* examines the housing crisis through playful Socratic argument and tells the story of public housing in America from the Great Depression to the Great Recession — how failed housing projects were demolished or privatized, their bleak examples (most notably, the Pruitt-Igoe complex in St. Louis) held up to discredit the very idea of public housing.

To challenge that narrative, the *Buell* authors — Buell Center director Reinhold Martin, Anna Kenoff '07GSAPP, and Leah Meisterlin '09GSAPP — identified eight distinct suburbs marked by high foreclosure rates, potential access to high-speed rail, and large tracts of public land, to present test cases for reinvention at a time when stimulus funds had begun flowing to infrastructure projects.

Socrates, in the passenger seat, argues that the boundaries between suburb and city, private and public, are blurrier than we might think, and that the suburbs, with their cul-de-sacs and idyllic street names and promises of escape, belong to "the same world systems that have produced megacities with vast urban slums." The house, Socrates points out, while imagined as one's freestanding castle, is a profoundly public object — surrounded by public land, served by public roads and schools, subsidized through tax deductions — and is the site, whether at the kitchen table or at the home computer, of the most public act of all: the exchange of ideas.

"So those who believe that the only options available to us must originate within the marketplace are mistaken," Socrates says. "Publicly supported universities, public schools, even the interstate highway system, all hint at other options. But these options will only become viable if values other than financial profit become common sense, and that can only happen in and through a reclaimed public sphere."

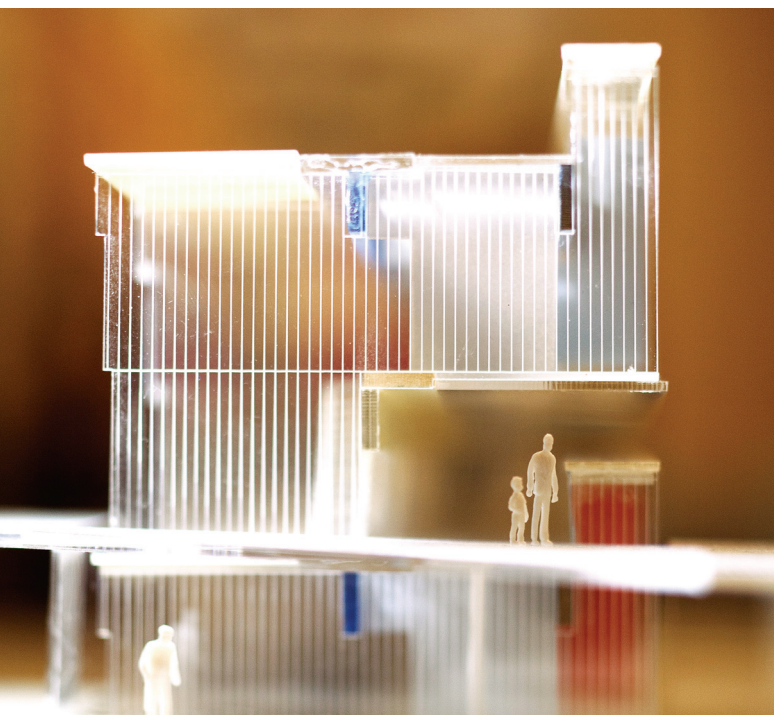
Where are you going, Socrates? And don't say Athens.

II. Public Dreams, Private Needs

"In the end, Socrates asks, what if there were public housing in the suburbs in response to the foreclosure crisis?" says Reinhold Martin, an associate professor of architecture at Columbia, in his office on the third floor of Buell Hall. "And that is left as an open-ended question rather than a direct proposal."

The Buell Hypothesis grew out of discussions on public housing that the center had begun generating in the fog of the subprime mortgage implosion of 2008. The hypothesis was fourfold: that globalization affects the inside as well as the outside of a house; that the suburb is a kind of city; that all houses are a type of public housing; and that you change the city by changing the cultural narratives behind the single-family house.

"The house is a sacred term in American public discourse," says Martin. "But a house could just be a house, like a car, or a chair, or a computer. It doesn't necessarily bring with it — nor should it, I think — transcendent social meaning. A house isn't sacred: it's



"Simultaneous City," Temple Terrace, Florida



"Thoughts on a Walking City," The Oranges, New Jersey

just one among many artifacts with which we live. You could say that we have attempted to gently secularize the idea of the house.

"The ownership-based housing model has consequences in architecture. You could ask, what is the type of architecture that corresponds with this political economy — more or less the suburban house. Or you could go the other way and look at a house or any work of architecture and ask, what kind of a world does this building belong in? What does it imagine?"

"That was partly our point in insisting that all kinds of housing, including the suburban house, are forms of infrastructure: they connect with, and are made possible by, the larger systems that are supported by the public sector. The myth of individual determination and freedom is precisely that: a myth."

In late 2009, Martin compared notes with Barry Bergdoll '77CC, '86GSAS, professor of art history and architecture at Columbia, and MoMA's curator of architecture. Bergdoll was organizing a series of public issues-based shows at the museum, and Martin was developing a research project on housing at the Graduate School of Architecture, Planning, and Preservation's Studio-X New York that yielded a pamphlet called *Public Housing: A New Conversation*. Together, they conceived and planned *Foreclosed: Rehousing the American Dream*. They selected five teams led by architects and including economists, housing activists, public-health experts, and engineers, and furnished them with *The Buell Hypothesis*. The teams, three of them headed by Columbia architects, read the work, chose suburbs, and, on the basis

"All kinds of housing, including the suburban house, are forms of infrastructure," says Martin. "They connect with, and are made possible by, the larger systems that are supported by the public sector."

of their interpretations of the text, designed what the *Foreclosed* curators cannily call "provocations," as opposed to "projects."

"When people hear 'project,' they think that it's meant to be built tomorrow," Martin explains, "and these are not to be built tomorrow. It's not that they couldn't be built. It's not that they're unrealistic. It's that they really are interventions in the space of the museum, in the discourse of architecture, and in other areas of the public sphere."

III. Public Outcry!

The provocations lived up to their name. The show was widely praised in the media for its ambition, vision, and social and environmental engagement, but there has also been some dust raising on the architectural blogs. Dissenters called the proposals out of touch, self-indulgent, elitist, esoteric. Some saw a cabal of ivory-tower types imposing their social-engineering fantasies upon a constituency they don't know or understand. Others confused a theoretical exercise meant to incite discussion with a shovel-ready project.

Martin has been taking the attacks in stride. “It’s a kind of cliché to describe this whole endeavor as elitist,” he says. “I’m not going to pretend that MoMA and Columbia are not, in effect, elite institutions. But the effort has been to call the elite institution to its responsibilities, both here and at MoMA. I think Columbia has significant responsibilities with respect to the housing crisis. We could do more to support the very idea of public housing, given that our neighbors are in danger of losing their housing through policies that have afflicted housing complexes in other parts of the country, where it’s either demolition or privatization.”

For Martin, the vitriol on the Internet illustrates how public discourse on housing crumbles at its foundation. “What hasn’t been asked is, what is the role of the government in addressing the housing crisis?” Martin says. “Again, that’s a question we’re barely able to enunciate in public because of the stigmas associated with public housing and the durability of the fetish of the single-family home. You can see from some of the reactions that we were denounced for asking that. There was a certain amount of name-calling. That is not surprising, but it’s interesting: even though these are hypothetical projects, they draw out the political contours of the country. They draw out different strategies: more activist strategies that consider this to be fiddling while Rome burns, purely academic speculation that doesn’t take into account the voices of the people who would actually live in these places.

“Certain fault lines will always be hard to overcome. One is the genuine suspicion that many activists have toward settings like MoMA or Columbia, whatever our intentions may be. Learning how to overcome those suspicions, to work together productively and critically, and, most important, to confront our own contradictions, is something we can all do, including the well-intentioned activist.”

IV. A Public Option?

In the end, *Foreclosed* might be remembered as much for what it says about economic and cultural life in America in 2012 as for its bold conceptual designs.

“*Foreclosed* demonstrates the tools that are available under current conditions,” says Martin. “The teams have been very innovative within the market parameters, using land trusts, co-ops, real-estate investment trusts — various forms of communal ownership intended to empower the residents.”

But for Martin, one possibility was conspicuously absent.

“In my view, some options were overlooked, like public housing. I’m not surprised, but it’s a fact. Despite our encouragements — we even provided publicly owned land, and identified sites that were either publicly owned or under the supervision of the local municipalities — in virtually all cases that alternative was side-stepped. So the results have proven that it’s very difficult to contemplate options outside the market.

“That’s the bottom line: the option of public housing is not currently available in the mainstream.” 📌

OUTSIDE THE BOX:

Three teams led by Columbia architects propose daring new models for suburban living.

COURTESY OF MUSEUM OF MODERN ART



Simultaneo

Temple Terrace, Florida

Firm: Visible Weather

Architects:

Michael Bell, professor of architecture at Columbia

Eunjeong Seong '02GSAPP



us City

Foreclosure rates are high on the Tampa–Temple Terrace border. Here, Temple Terrace’s suburban single-family houses meet Tampa’s recent condominium conversions — the last homes to be sold before the crash and the first to fail afterward. We propose that Temple Terrace suspend its current public-private partnership (a 225-acre commercial redevelopment on land the city plans to give over to a private developer) and instead redevelop this border with a dense housing stock, creating a walkable urban area on city-owned land, with private housing for sale and rent. Our proposal is not about changing a 1950s suburb into a city, or critiquing suburban culture from an urban perspective, but rather sparking innovation in housing design by reversing the notion that public-private development models are more creative than purely public ventures.

We propose a zone in which a diversity of housing, retail, and government buildings would fuse so that all could share a deep well of financial resources. These resources, in time, could fund innovation in energy management, structural design, and housing. We envision a three-level structure topped by eighty-eight courtyard houses that form the roof of office spaces and a new city hall. By recapturing underused space (parking lots, sidewalks, setbacks), this plan could bring ten thousand new residents to the area adjoining the Tampa border, expanding Temple Terrace’s population by 40 percent.

The development at Temple Terrace could work on both a macro and a micro scale, creating a large-scale housing development that is diverse and responsive to need, and thus more financially stable than the housing models that are ubiquitous today.

Thoughts on a Walking City

The Oranges, New Jersey

Firm: MOS

Architects:

Hilary Sample,
associate professor
of architecture
at Columbia

Michael Meredith

The City of Orange — more urban than suburban — is linked to New York City and Newark by commuter rail but is nonetheless struggling with foreclosures, vacancies, property abandonment, lack of fresh food, and social isolation. By turning underused streets — a significant expense for the city — into sites of redevelopment, we seek to redirect homeownership toward a dense environment rather than individual enclaves. People converge around courtyards and public spaces, and walking becomes a principal mode of transport.

The housing, a series of structurally solid units, is designed with floor-to-ceiling

windows to provide health-giving light and air. Gardens permeate the ground floor and continuous roof surfaces. The courtyards, formed by the angled units, provide additional garden spaces linked to the adjacent vacant and overgrown lots. The idea is that private space that is now abandoned, foreclosed, or empty would be given back to the public. Through a shared-equity model, units are developed for either living or work, with ground-floor commercial space and open-air passages so that people can walk between buildings. The units are meant to be modified by residents, as in Le Corbusier's Quartiers Modernes Frugès in Pessac, France.





Nature-City

Keizer, Oregon

Recognizing the failure of our current suburban landscape — sprawling single-family homes that have become untenable both environmentally and economically — Nature-City reinvents the British urbanist Ebenezer Howard’s late-nineteenth-century model of the “town-country” for the twenty-first century, building upon the long-standing dream of living closer to nature by emphasizing land stewardship and sustainability.

To do so, Nature-City integrates housing and ecological infrastructure to provide five times the density and three times the public open space of its neighboring Keizer. Nature-City extends a series of urban “piers” into restored native habitats — an oak savanna,

wetlands, a Douglas-fir forest — to create a neighborhood in which more than 70 percent of the land is dedicated to nature. Within each band of city, a wide range of housing blocks provide various landscapes, such as sky gardens and orchard courtyards. In addition, the housing itself behaves as ecological infrastructure, treating organic waste in the compost dome, generating electricity using methane, storing treated water in towers. With its embrace of density (of humans, animals, and plants) and diversity (of uses, housing types, and habitats), Nature-City creates a community grounded in difference rather than sameness, and promotes a renewed investment in public life.

Firm: WORKac

Architects:

Amale Andraos,
assistant professor
of architecture
at Columbia

Dan Wood '92GSAPP

HEARTS & BONES

Gordana Vunjak-Novakovic
is at the forefront of
regenerative medicine.
Can her laboratory-grown
body parts really work?

BY ADAM PIORE





When stem cells populate this sponge-like mold, shown here atop a plastic form used to produce it, they will grow into a piece of human jawbone.

Photographs by
John Loomis

Jeffrey Ascherman had seen dozens of patients who looked like Marika, an eleven-year-old girl from Uniondale, New York. She had the drooping eyelids and sunken, formless cheeks of someone afflicted with Treacher Collins syndrome, a hereditary condition that causes people to be born without certain facial bones.

Her parents were hoping for a cosmetic fix. Marika, an honor-roll student, violinist, and aspiring actress whose name has been changed for this article, dreamed of looking more like her classmates.

But Ascherman, a plastic surgeon at the Columbia University Medical Center (CUMC) who specializes in treating children with cleft palate and other facial deformities, had no easy solution to offer. Implanting prosthetic bones was not an option for a still-growing child. The only way to fill out Marika's face, Ascherman told her parents, would be to make an incision across the top of her head, remove a portion of her skull, and carve it into the shapes of two cheekbones. If Marika was lucky, the bones, once implanted, would grow along with the rest of her face.

But this solution was not ideal. The recovery would be long and painful as the skull bone grew back. Even then, there was no guarantee the procedure would work. Over time, the grafted bone

"She said anything was possible," he recalls, "and that she was willing to try."

Last fall, a team of Columbia clinicians led by Sidney Eisig, a pediatric oral and maxillofacial surgeon, took a big step toward achieving this goal. They implanted in pigs — whose facial anatomy is similar to that of humans — jawbones that Vunjak-Novakovic had grown in her laboratory. Soon, Ascherman hopes to try the procedure with cheekbones. If the experiments prove successful, human trials could begin as early as next year.

Growing human facial bones is just one of the seemingly insurmountable medical challenges that Vunjak-Novakovic is now close to solving. She is also growing strips of heart tissue that beat with life, small pieces of lung, and chunks of cartilage that she hopes doctors will one day put into people like spare parts into automobiles.

Like many engineers in the nascent field of regenerative medicine, Vunjak-Novakovic works with adult stem cells taken from bone marrow or fat deposits. These cells are powerful tools for medical researchers because they are highly versatile, able to differentiate as replacement cells throughout the body so that our organs, bones, and muscles can recover from normal wear and tear. Once the stem cells are extracted, Vunjak-Novakovic places

Only a handful of biomedical engineers have ever succeeded in growing tissues that could be put into people — and these have been relatively simple tissues, like skin and blood vessels.

might simply dissolve in her face, requiring reparative surgeries and more suffering.

Unpleasant as this was to contemplate, Ascherman knew that, to the girl and her parents, doing nothing seemed unthinkable.

"This is a condition that often leads to social withdrawal and ostracism," he says. "When you see what these kids go through, it breaks your heart."

Ascherman, who sees a handful of children with Treacher Collins every year, had resigned himself to the limited options available until he learned about the work of Gordana Vunjak-Novakovic, the Mikati Foundation Professor of Biomedical Engineering at Columbia's Fu Foundation School of Engineering and Applied Science. Last July, he heard Vunjak-Novakovic deliver a lecture about her efforts to grow living human tissue. Afterward, he approached her and asked if she might grow facial bones for his young patients.

them into a three-dimensional mold in the shape of the tissue she wants to create. But it takes more than the right-shaped mold to tell these cells what type of tissue to become.

"Stem cells take their cues from the nutrients they receive, the intensity of electrical impulses they feel, how much oxygen they get, and even how much movement they experience," she says. "All these factors, in addition to the physical dimensions of their surroundings, indicate to the stem cells what part of the body they're in. We need to create an artificial environment that mimics all of that."

When this works, as it has in a few initial experiments, Vunjak-Novakovic says, she feels a sense of wonder, as if she's glimpsing the mystery of life itself: a tiny cell, containing within its DNA a blueprint for the entire body, develops into the one type of tissue she needs.

Because reproducing the right conditions for growth is so difficult, only a handful of biomedical engineers have ever succeeded in



Vunjak-Novakovic consults with Jeffrey Ascherman, a craniofacial surgeon, in her laboratory at Columbia University Medical Center.

growing tissues that could be put into people. And these have been relatively simple tissues, like skin and blood vessels — nothing as complex as bone, lung, or heart tissue.

“If we manage to create a human bone, we will have participated in something amazing,” she says. “A brand-new bone derived from a patient’s own body would function very smoothly, since it would be a perfect genetic fit. This will be a game changer in medicine.”

BETWEEN WORLDS

Vunjak-Novakovic can look up from her desk on the twelfth floor of CUMC’s Vanderbilt Clinic and gaze upon her birthplace, Belgrade. On the far wall hangs a large aerial shot of the city, with its closely clustered medieval buildings, bracketed by the Sava and Danube Rivers.

In the early 1980s, when Vunjak-Novakovic was working toward a PhD in chemical engineering at the University of Belgrade, the prospect of growing body parts never occurred to her. She was interested in the forces and motions created by the intermingling of gas bubbles and tiny solid particles in liquids. Her research involved mathematical modeling and experiments in enclosed reactors, and was applicable, most obviously, to indus-

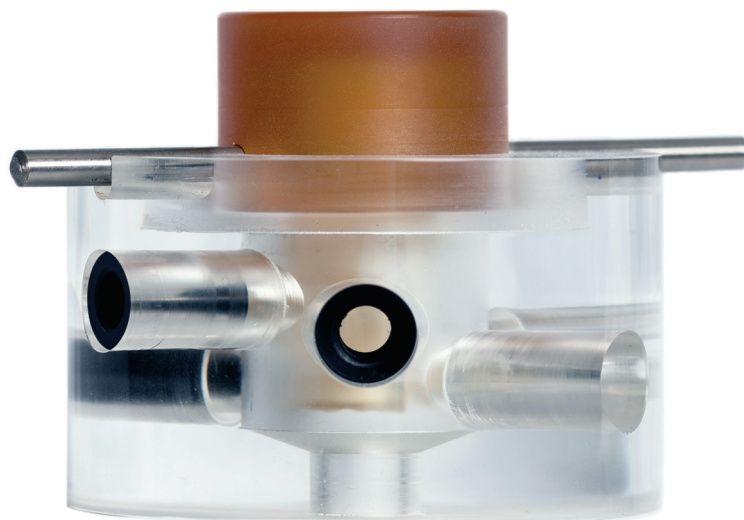
tries that rely on fermentation, like food production and the manufacture of penicillin and other antibiotics.

“My interest in engineering was quite intellectual and abstract,” she says. “I’ve always loved solving complex puzzles. I didn’t think much about the applications.”

Over the next few years, though, as a young faculty member at the University of Belgrade, she became captivated by the chemical interactions that take place among molecules within living organisms. In 1986, she won a Fulbright fellowship to pursue this interest and chose to spend her year at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. There, she caught the attention of a researcher named Robert Langer, who was trying to purify human blood for use in medical experiments. He was looking for someone to create new machines to remove toxins from blood.

The two began a collaboration that continued after Vunjak-Novakovic returned to Belgrade, and in the years that followed she made biannual trips back to Boston. During one such visit, in 1991, ethnic tensions in her homeland boiled over into war.

“It became clear that it would be good to leave Yugoslavia,” says Vunjak-Novakovic. “So I began spending more time in Boston.” Concerned colleagues at MIT, upon learning in 1993 that her visa was



Within this two-inch plastic vessel, or bioreactor, Vunjak-Novakovic can mimic the physiological environment of a developing human jawbone.

about to expire, lobbied successfully to get her a permanent position that allowed her to stay in the US with her husband and young son.

Around the same time, Vunjak-Novakovic's career took another turn: Langer informed her that he had received a grant to do something called "tissue engineering," and asked if she would like to join the project.

"Tissue what?" Vunjak-Novakovic asked him.

LIFE'S COMPLICATIONS

The term "tissue engineering" had been coined a couple of years earlier to describe what were the first serious attempts to create living tissue through artificial means.

For a young engineer interested in this challenge, Vunjak-Novakovic was in the right place. Langer was about to develop some of the field's most important lab techniques. His main contribution would be to create three-dimensional molds, or scaffolds, that could be seeded with developing cells and then put safely into a person's body. These lattice-like scaffolds are typically made out of natural molecules, such as collagen, or synthetic materials designed to be biodegradable. This approach is still used by most tissue engineers today.

"One of Gordana's roles in my lab was to manage the flow of nutrients in and out of that mold," Langer says. "That's extremely

complicated. You've got multiple fluids swishing about, and you need to control where, when, and in what quantities they're touching the developing cells."

When Vunjak-Novakovic opened her own laboratory at MIT in 1993, her first project was to try to create cartilage, the flexible connective tissue that cushions joints. Many of the first tissue engineers, including Langer, were trying to make cartilage because it is among the body's simpler tissues and seemed like a good place to start. Government funding agencies and private companies, recognizing the huge market potential for helping people with arthritis and other joint problems, invested heavily in these projects.

"The thing about cartilage is that it doesn't connect to the body's vascular system," says Vunjak-Novakovic. "So from a technical standpoint, it seemed like the easy target."

At the time, tissue engineers saw their primary challenge as determining the right mix of nutrients, minerals, and proteins to feed their growing cells. Even slight variations in the nutrient soup they injected into their molds had a profound effect. A little extra calcium, for instance, would signal to the stem cells to develop into bone.

"I think everybody assumed that was 99 percent of the game," says Vunjak-Novakovic. "Could other factors be influencing these cells? Sure, perhaps. But the consensus was that if you had a well-shaped mold and the right nutrients, you were probably good."

Vunjak-Novakovic, however, was reading a lot about systems biology at the time. She was fascinated to discover that many physiological systems — genetic, molecular, electrical, and mechanical — are interconnected in surprising ways. In particular, she noted that people immobilized in hospital beds for long periods of time often experience a weakening of their bones and cartilage. It seemed that physical movement was essential to the upkeep of these tissues. Was it possible, she wondered, that developing cells are also sensitive to movement?

This was an idea that many physicians and biologists had considered but never had the means to test. To do so, Vunjak-Novakovic conducted an experiment in which a piece of developing cartilage was periodically rotated upside down. After a few weeks, she tested its strength. She'd hit the scientific jackpot. "The improvement in its structural integrity," she says, "was beyond what we'd imagined."

This led to a technical innovation: Vunjak-Novakovic developed a plunger-like device that gently presses down on the chemical solution in which developing tissues are immersed, replicating the forces of movement experienced by stem cells in the body's joints.

But the real advance was philosophical, Langer explains: "Since then, all tissue engineers have come to appreciate the need to consider lots of variables, besides the molecular factors. She helped inspire this shift in outlook."

For her design of highly sophisticated bioreactors, or tissue molds, Vunjak-Novakovic was recently elected to the National Academy of Engineering, one of the profession's highest honors.

OPEN HOUSE

Vunjak-Novakovic, a gentle-natured and cheerful woman who speaks with a soft Slavic accent, came to Columbia in 2005 intent on moving her technology from lab bench to bedside.

She knew she was going to need help. By this time, all biomedical engineers had come to realize that creating tissues capable of functioning in the human body would be much more difficult than they'd initially anticipated. "Even the cartilage wasn't working as we'd hoped," says Vunjak-Novakovic, who today also is a professor of medicine at the College of Physicians and Surgeons. "One

of the odd things about cartilage, which makes it surprisingly difficult to work with, is that it has no natural ability to repair itself. When your cartilage deteriorates, that's it — it doesn't regrow. We discovered that stem cells, once they begin to identify themselves as cartilage, will get lazy and stop growing, too.

"Why nature would create a tissue with no ability to repair itself is one of life's mysteries," she continues. "The same thing is true of brain, heart, and pancreatic tissue."

The body parts that biomedical engineers *were* making progress on were those that, in addition to having some capacity for self-repair, have large surface areas relative to their mass. This was because a thin piece of tissue, once implanted, would be well exposed to the body's veins and capillaries, increasing the likelihood that it would receive the blood and oxygen it needed. Skin was in this category, as were some tubular structures such as the urethra, trachea, and intestines, as well as the sack-like bladder, which is among the body's simplest organs. (Today, biomedical engineers have succeeded in growing and implanting in people all of these tissue types, in addition to blood vessels.)

At Columbia, Vunjak-Novakovic continued working on cartilage but shifted her focus to one of the most daunting targets of all: the heart. The fibrous muscle tissues that compose the heart have little capacity for self-repair. Also, it would be difficult to get engineered heart tissue enough blood. "The walls of the heart are quite beefy, nearly a centimeter thick," says Vunjak-Novakovic. "So any heart tissue we created would need to have its own vascular infrastructure ready to work efficiently as soon as it went into the body."

But Vunjak-Novakovic decided that it would be worth the effort to create a tissue that could save lives. And she figured that by exploiting the knowledge of Columbia's physicians, cell biologists, and other engineers, she might at least make some progress. "I decided that a key strength of our laboratory," she says, "was going to be our openness to collaboration."

Among the first Columbia physicians who showed interest in her work was the cardiologist Warren Sherman. In 2001, he was one of the first clinicians ever to inject stem cells into a person's heart as a way of facilitating the organ's recovery. He did this

Why nature would create a tissue with no ability to repair itself is one of life's mysteries.
But this is true of cartilage, as well as brain, heart, and pancreatic tissue.

GORDANA VUNJAK-NOVAKOVIC

“We’re now able to grow a full-size jawbone or cheekbone within three weeks. Doctors say the wait would be worth it, in many cases.”

GORDANA VUNJAK-NOVAKOVIC

a few days after his patient had suffered a heart attack, aiming the stem cells straight into the region of the heart that had been deprived of blood and oxygen. His goal was to help the damaged muscle grow back. A large-scale clinical trial later showed that the treatment was beneficial, reducing the chances of subsequent cardiac episodes.

This procedure had shortcomings, however. “The stem cells you shoot in there don’t have good survival rates,” Sherman says. “If you inject two hundred million cells, you might get 5 percent of them to start growing as muscle.”

Sherman hoped that Vunjak-Novakovic might create new tissue in physically intact strips that could be applied, like living Band-Aids, to the damaged parts of the heart. He’d heard that a few years before showing up at Columbia, Vunjak-Novakovic had discovered that stem cells are more likely to turn into heart cells if they get zapped with electricity in the laboratory.

“I’ll never forget when I stared down into the mold and saw those cells begin to twitch with life,” Vunjak-Novakovic says. “I thought the table was shaking at first.”

The link between electricity and heart cells didn’t surprise many biologists, since the heart starts to beat in a fetus only when it receives an electrical signal. But it was another example of a crucial variable that other tissue engineers had not yet tested or incorporated into their laboratory techniques.

Today, Vunjak-Novakovic is working on a heart study with a team of Columbia faculty that includes Sherman; his fellow cardiologists Robert Kass, Shunichi Homma, and Lynne Johnson; biomedical engineer Elisa Konofagou; and stem-cell biologist Christopher Henderson. With grants from the National Institutes of Health and the private Helmsley Charitable Trust, they are cultivating heart cells in a bioreactor that Vunjak-Novakovic has configured to mimic the physical environment of a heart chamber. With her colleagues’ guidance, Vunjak-Novakovic has replicated the heart chamber’s temperature, moisture level, electrical stimulus, and even the gentle flushing motions of blood flow.

“We each benefit from this arrangement,” says Kass, the Alumni and David Hosack Professor of Pharmacology and the chairman

of that department. “Scientists who study the electrical properties of heart cells, as I do, have traditionally been limited to observing isolated cells. In Gordana’s laboratory, we’re now able to see how groups of heart cells interact with one another in a living system.”

HEARTS AND BONES, LOCALLY GROWN

Vunjak-Novakovic now believes she is on the cusp of creating a heart patch and facial bones.

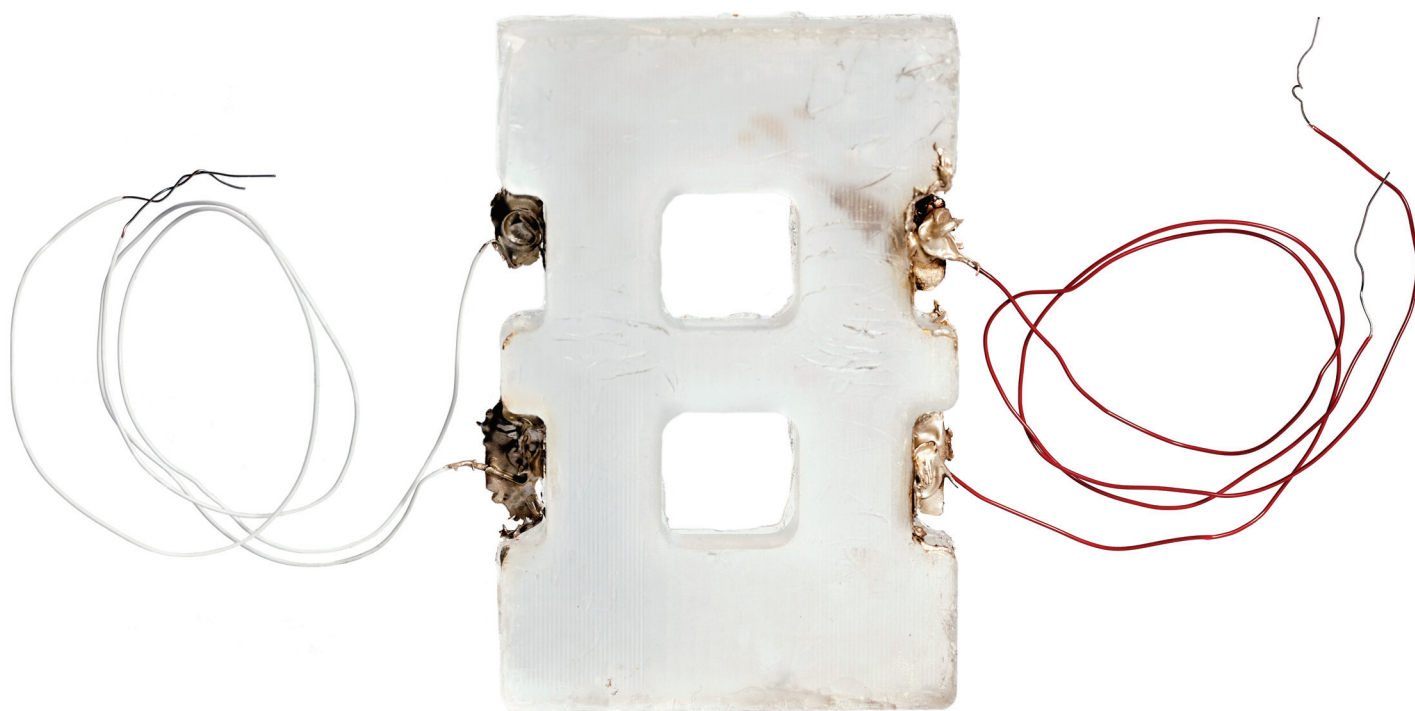
She recently tested a patch in mice that helped repair the rodents’ hearts after they had been damaged by mild, localized heart attacks.

“This was one of the first heart patches to provide much benefit to its recipient, even in small animals,” says Vunjak-Novakovic. “What’s often happened, until now, is that the new tissue wouldn’t beat very enthusiastically along with the rest of the heart.”

Challenges still must be overcome before Vunjak-Novakovic can create a heart patch for humans, though. Chief among them is properly connecting the new tissue’s tiny blood vessels to the organ’s existing vascular system. This plumbing problem, she says, remains a frustration to all biomedical engineers working on complex tissues.

“The blood vessels in the lab-grown tissue always seem to close in on themselves, shutting themselves off from the outside,” says Vunjak-Novakovic, who is currently seeking grant support for a heart-patch study on pigs. “That’s why our results with the mice are exciting. It’s going to be even more challenging to make it work in larger animals, but we’ve got a good shot.”

Meanwhile, Vunjak-Novakovic thinks she is close to revolutionizing the treatment of some craniofacial problems. Recently, she has been developing a method for growing jawbones and cheekbones to help people who have suffered traumatic injuries or been born with congenital deformities, like many of the children that Jeffrey Ascherman sees. Children could benefit the most from her work in this area, Vunjak-Novakovic says, since full-grown adults typically have the option of receiving plastic prosthetic bones. But even adults may benefit from lab-grown bones, because prosthetics can cause side effects, like inflammation, and they need to be replaced after ten or fifteen years.



To discover the right conditions for growing heart tissue, biomedical engineers in Vunjak-Novakovic's laboratory stimulate heart cells with electricity in these two culture dishes.


"We're now able to grow a full-size jawbone or cheekbone within three weeks," she says. "And doctors say the wait would be worth it, in many cases."

Bones, too, are very difficult to engineer. In addition to the problem of connecting them to the body's vascular system — all bones have at least one or two blood vessels — there is the additional complication of convincing the body's ligaments, tendons, cartilage, and muscle to hold them in place. Vunjak-Novakovic thinks she's found a solution. She is now about halfway through the study in which Sidney Eisig, the oral surgeon, has given pigs jawbones that Vunjak-Novakovic created using their own stem cells. Preliminary results suggest that the bones are binding properly to the native connective tissues. Vunjak-Novakovic won't disclose exactly how she accomplished this, but she says it involves the precise timing of the bone's implant.

"Basically, you cultivate the bone in your lab until it's ready to function in the body, but not so long that it starts to think of itself

as an independent system," she says. "You put it in the body the moment nature is ready."

Learning to work with nature is, to Vunjak-Novakovic, the essence of regenerative medicine. She regards herself not as a creator of tissue but as a sort of lab-coated shepherd guiding the body's own powers of growth and healing.

"The only real tissue engineers are the cells in our body," she says. "The people on my team are toolmakers, builders. We make little physical environments that help cells do what they're capable of doing. If your bone breaks, it wants to grow back. But maybe it's gotten old and cannot recover like it used to. We're tricking stem cells only in the sense that we're putting them in an environment where they can feel how young and strong the body is capable of being again. I believe that." 

Adam Piore '94JRN is a contributing editor at Discover. His work has appeared in Newsweek, Condé Nast Traveler, and Mother Jones.



the eyes of **gotham**

By Paul Hond

How did Jen Chung and Jake Dobkin, cofounders of the New York blog *Gothamist*, turn a simple message board among friends into the hottest news source in town?

Photographs by Nicole Brown

"A Bronx-bound D train was evacuated at West 4th Street early Friday morning after a suspicious passenger was discovered cowering under a seat. It was an opossum! Aw, isn't it adorable? Well, no, not really; opossums are actually quite terrifying."

— *Gothamist*, January 2012

"The whole city smells like maple syrup and everyone knows it!"

— *Gothamist*, October 2005

Eight million stories in the Naked City, sure. A Manhattan banker stabs a cabbie over a disputed fare, a car kills a bicyclist on Staten Island, the health department shutters a Queens hospital, Brooklyn sanitation workers get caught issuing bogus tickets. The Bronx? They closed down the Monkey House.

The other 7,999,995?

Step this way.

Maybe you, too, have heard the rumor, echoing in the corridors of the *New York Times*, that Jake Dobkin '98CC and Jen Chung '98CC, the dynamic duo behind the local news blog *Gothamist*, gather their wide-ranging NYC intel with the aid of a crystal ball. Crazy? We think so. But we're not taking any chances. We're getting on the F train to Brooklyn to see for ourselves. Stand clear of the closing doors, please.

Brooklyn! With a name like *Gothamist* and a logo of skyscrapers, we'd figured the blogcave would be wedged beneath a winged gargoyle in Midtown. Instead, we get off at York Street and emerge in a district of converted warehouses and new brick high-rises once known as Gairville but rebranded in the nineties as Dumbo, which stands for Developers Urge Millionaires to Brooklyn, Oh no! — or, more officially, Down Under the Manhattan Bridge Overpass. Names aside, Dumbo has become home to the smarties of New York's tech startup community — companies like e-commerce upstart Etsy and branding consultancy Big Spaceship.

We walk down Jay Street to a nineteenth-century warehouse by the river, go inside, ride a packed elevator to the eighth floor, follow a long hallway to the door of Gothamist LLC, and step into a big, immaculate, sun-flooded office — the opposite of a cave. "Holy *Front Page*!" we murmur as we behold the true source of the blog's omniscience: a dozen staffers in their twenties and thirties who sit at Ikea tables, pecking quietly at laptops. Not a crystal ball in sight. Nor any messy desks, bulletin boards, or ringing phones. Just large windows framing the girders and cables of the Manhattan Bridge, blond wood floors, and, on the white walls, color photographs of New York industrial landscapes, shot by Dobkin. In the clean, open kitchen, a small metal table holds a city of bottles: vodka, gin, Kahlúa, Purell.

Have we just entered the twenty-first-century newsroom?

Chung, *Gothamist*'s executive editor, strides cheerfully into the waiting area and greets us. Having settled the crystal-ball question, we wish to delve into another. Chung offers us water and leads us into a conference room, where an aerial photo of the World Trade Center construction site hangs on the wall. In a moment, Dobkin, *Gothamist*'s publisher, arrives. With his glasses and silver singe at the temples, he looks like the nice doctor he might have become had he stayed in medical school.

"Now, then," we say, "since no business was ever born in a palace of sunlight, we must know: was there *ever* a blogcave?"

“In 2006,” says Chung, “I was working at an ad agency in SoHo. They had some extra office space that they let us sublet, so Jake and our operations person, Tien Mao, were able to take some cubicles.”

Blogcave!

“But we weren’t all together,” Chung continues. “We had writers working out of their apartments. Finally, in 2008, we got a small office in Dumbo so that we could be together and actually see each other, versus communicating just through e-mails and IMs.” Chung laughs. “Now, people sit right next to one another with headphones on and communicate by instant message.”

Gothamist moved into the present space last June. Between 2010 and 2011, the blog saw a 50 percent increase in unique visitors and a 100 percent increase in income. It now employs more than twenty people, including a sales staff and seven full-time New York editors who generate fifty posts a day on crime, politics, pop culture, restaurants, and urban wildlife. And just to be clear: this isn’t a blog written by wannabes from Podunk Hollow who wear Brooklyn T-shirts and don’t know a bodega from a deli.

“It’s not like I think you have to be a New Yorker to be a good person,” says Dobkin with a sly smile. “But to write about New York in an honest way, you really do have to understand the city.”

And to get to the eighth floor, you’ve got to know which of the eight million stories people care about. What drives *Gothamist*’s traffic most are the big social themes: gentrification, suburban-strip-mall-ization, police violence, the bicycle wars, Occupy Wall Street. “OWS was huge for us,” says Dobkin. “We were covering it probably a month before the major media because it was a youth thing — all the young people were there, and our audience and our writers were very interested in it, so when it did explode, we were right there on the scene. We had a lot of sources and got a ton of

traffic from it.” A recent story on one of the *Times*’s neighborhood blogs mentioned *Gothamist*’s coverage of an OWS march:

Christopher Robbins, a reporter for *Gothamist*, tweeted about the arrest on 14th Street, as well as about another arrest involving a bottle hurled on Ninth Street between Avenues B and C: “Protester right next to me throws bottle, ducks down into crowd. NYPD swoop in, arrest wrong guy, thrower gets away.”

Readers of *Gothamist* would have gotten further context from reporter Robbins:

The instances of projectiles being thrown were met with scorn, outrage, and chants of “This is a peaceful protest” by a majority of the protesters. When a can and a bottle were thrown on 14th Street, the crowd was stunned into silence.

There have been other watersheds for the blog. Remember Hurricane Irene, when the city was going to be destroyed? *Gothamist* featured a map of evacuation zones and got tens of thousands of new visitors after the servers for NYC.gov and NY1.com both went down. But if you had to pinpoint *Gothamist*’s breakthrough, its CNN/Gulf War moment, it would have to be the Great Gotham Pancake Syrup Mystery. In October 2005, and sporadically in the following weeks and months, an odor suggestive of Mrs. Butterworth after a hot-yoga workout pervaded much of the city, and Chung’s breaking coverage of the phenomenon spread thickly through the blogosphere. *Gothamist* even whipped up a map so that people could identify the locations of the “smellings.” So central was *Gothamist*’s role in the affair that in 2009, when Mayor Bloomberg held a press conference at City Hall to announce, after years of investigation, the source of the smell (a fenugreek-seed processing plant in New Jersey), Chung was invited to attend.



One problem: real reporters don't have to wait for invitations — a press pass is their entrée. *Gothamist*, with its history of original reporting, had been trying to get press credentials from the NYPD since 2004. After months of delays, the department informed *Gothamist* that websites weren't eligible. It wasn't until 2010 that Dobkin could even apply for what he calls "this basic tool of doing news." He was rejected. The same thing happened in 2011. For another year, *Gothamist* was kept on this side of the barricades.

In the meantime, there were stories that the mainstream media *weren't* covering that *Gothamist* could. "I'm always looking for a story with larger meaning than the story itself," says Dobkin. "A bicyclist getting hit by a car: that may not sound like much, but it speaks to the conflict between young and old, rich and poor, people who bike and people who own cars. If a bicyclist is killed by a car in Williamsburg, it might not be news for the *Times's* Metro section, because they have a news hole that can fit only twenty-five stories a day, but to us, it could be a real story. Who was the bicyclist? How did the accident happen?"

Gothamist doesn't always have to look far for material. Half the blog's content is aggregated from other sites and retold in the *Gothamist* voice, or else supplied by camera-toting tipsters, often in the form of some serendipitous video, such as a rat in a subway car running across a sleeping man's face. "Recently, someone sent us a picture of a hawk in Madison Square Park eating a pigeon in the most disgusting way possible," says Dobkin. "But what was remarkable was that he wasn't the only person to send us that picture. We got it from three or four people. What are the chances?"

The rest of *Gothamist's* goods are homegrown: photos, video, and on-the-scene reportage. Amid the spectacle, there's also a strong public-interest aspect that can be traced to *Gothamist's* birth in 2002, when Chung realized how little she knew about

her city. "How many twenty-somethings in New York know who their city councilperson is?" she recalls thinking. So she educated herself, and now writes many of *Gothamist's* pieces on crime and local politics, with headings like "Hello, Gerrymandering: NY's Sucky Proposed Redistricting Maps Will Probably Get Vetoed" and "I Am Not the Catwoman,' Wails Convicted Robber." Posts usually run from one hundred to three hundred words.

"We can operate with a much faster metabolism than the *Times* or the *Post*," Dobkin says. "We don't have to be comprehensive. We have fifty posts a day, and we want all of them to be super-interesting. We want people to pass the information around."

"It's exciting to help spread information and empower people to know their city," says Chung. She plucks some wisdom from her advertising days: "You want people to have a reaction to these stories. You want to hit emotions."

"*Gothamist's* voice is 'We love the city,'" says Dobkin. "It's not perfect, and when it's imperfect we can talk about why. But it's a great city, and we should all feel really lucky to live here.' It's a voice that is honest, positive, and sarcastic when called for, like the voice of a real New Yorker who knows the city and cares about it but who doesn't tolerate bullshit, and who can enjoy a good joke." Or, as Chung says, "It's the voice of your most knowledgeable New York friend who's going to give it to you straight."

Not Jimmy Breslin barroom-wisdom-like-a-fist-through-cigar-smoke straight, though that's the spirit. This voice has been cured not with Joe Mitchell's gin, but with *Onion* satire, *Vice* saltiness, the sweet dust of *Entertainment Weekly*, the nutritional yeast of the *Times*, and the "roaringly funny gay wit," as one *Gothamist* writer called it, of *Village Voice* gossip columnist Michael Musto '76CC. (When *Gothamist* asked Musto in an interview how he's



And just to be clear:
**this isn't a blog
 written by wannabes
 from Podunk Hollow
 who wear Brooklyn T-shirts
 and don't know a
 bodega from a deli.**





had to adapt to the rise of gossip blogs like *Gawker* and *Perez Hilton*, the Gossipist replied, “Not at all, because I was sort of the original blogger anyway — I just didn’t have a blog. I was the original snarky, sardonic person.”)

Typical of *Gothamist*’s biting style and unapologetic New York chauvinism is the commentary of *Gothamist* managing editor John Del Signore, who performs the service of pointing out the un-New York character of spectacles like the worldwide No Pants Subway Ride (“We’ve had just about enough of this formulaic nonsense and want it to stop. Not because we’re against fun, but because New York City *is fun enough* without this inane exercise in half-assed exhibitionism”) and SantaCon, a national event whose local version brings thousands of young adults dressed as Kris Kringle to the bars, sidewalks, and eventually the gutters of Manhattan, starting at 10 a.m. “Over the years, this annual drunken shitshow has steadily devolved from cleverly subversive to barely tolerable to ‘time to lock yourself in your apartment for the day,’” Del Signore wrote. “Is it just us or was this year’s SantaCon even more obnoxiously frastastic than usual?”

As on many blogs, the comments section is a combination clubhouse, graffiti wall, jury room, and kill zone — a group exercise in venting and verbal marksmanship whose favorite targets are yuppies, hipsters, and out-of-towners. Race-baiters and other sociopaths turn up reliably to fling dung, but other exchanges can be illuminating: a discussion of the unsolved murder of a Brooklyn café owner reads like a postmodern detective novel, in which the shrewd deductions of armchair sleuths accumulate into an intriguing literary document, and a post about a forty-two-car police escort speeding up First Avenue to Bellevue after a cop was shot in Bushwick prompts audience tidbits on NYC trauma centers and the art of the rolling roadblock. And where else would a snarling subway marsupial be hailed as “one tough-ass NY ’possum,” since, as a reader points out, your average country opossum, when confronted, rolls over and plays dead?

Chung and Dobkin met at Columbia in 1995. Both were transfer students — Dobkin from SUNY Binghamton and Chung from Smith College, where she was friends with Jake’s twin sister, Molly. Jake and Jen became friends, and after college they and their circle would chat during the workday via e-mail and instant messaging. This was during the dot-com bubble of 1999–2001. Chung was doing brand consulting and marketing, and Dobkin, who had been premed at Columbia — and who, in 1999, attended the College of Physicians and Surgeons for ten days before deciding he wasn’t long for hospital life — was working as an IT consultant.

One day in early 2002, Dobkin saw a blog for the first time, a site called Kottke.org, run by the pioneering blogger Jason Kottke. Dobkin’s immediate thought was, “I’d like to do this.”

So he created a personal website where he could post his photographs, writings, and links to things that interested him. Chung would leave comments and supply her own links. Other friends joined in. Dobkin, seeing potential, tracked down blogging software that allowed multiple authors to post on the same site. This was the great leap: Chung and others could now post their own items about goings-on about town. Later in 2002, Dobkin moved the blog to a



PHOTOS BY ESON CHAN



What Chung and Dobkin would
really like is for *Gothamist*
to become both the
**best aggregator and the
best original news source.**

new domain, which he named *Gothamist*. “The first year, it was still very casual and conversational, maybe ten or twenty of us posting links,” he says. “I was surprised that pretty quickly, into 2003, we started seeing a few thousand visitors a day.”

The following year, they landed their first ad, which paid for a new laptop for Chung. They got to know other New York bloggers and attracted a core of contributors who were willing to write for free. They also began to introduce the model to other cities. In 2005, Dobkin, having graduated from business school at NYU, decided he wanted to “do a startup” and make money. *Gothamist* was a fun hobby, but now Dobkin considered it from another angle. What if he devoted himself to it? Could *Gothamist* be the one? Dobkin called Chung, and the pair formalized a partnership. In June 2005, Dobkin went to work full-time on the blog. Chung, essentially working two jobs, quit her marketing gig in 2008 and committed herself wholly to *Gothamist*.

“We’ve been trying to build a real company, which you now see around you,” Dobkin says. “No one ever gave us any money. We paid for all this out of our profits.”

Gothamist now gets two million unique visitors per month. The *Times*, *Gawker*, *Huffington Post*, and thousands of other sites link to *Gothamist* regularly. The *New York Times Book Review* called the blog “marvelous, not-to-be-missed . . . a crystal ball that reflects everything worth knowing about this city.”

You can see how rumors get started.

Dobkin was born and raised in Brooklyn “around a lot of militant leftists — ex-Weathermen, hard-line Stalinists — the normal crowd you’d find at the Park Slope Food Co-op,” he says. His mother, an RN, works for the Nurse-Family Partnership in Harlem, and his father, a lawyer, defends the poor in housing cases. “Growing up, there was this idea that doing something meaningful and positive was much more important than making money. Making money was very

much frowned upon.” Dobkin smiles, a little guiltily. “I’ve always had a complicated relationship with money. *Very* complicated.”

Chung, the daughter of a businesswoman and a civil engineer — immigrants from Hong Kong — seems less conflicted on that count. She grew up in northern New Jersey (“I always had New York envy”), and the family took frequent trips to the city: the Guggenheim, Radio City, and Chinatown for dim sum and groceries. At home, the Chungs received the *New York Times* and the local paper, as well as *Time* and *Newsweek*. Chung consumed it all. When she was thirteen, her parents bought her a subscription to a new magazine called *Entertainment Weekly*.

Now, in her thirties, Chung is costar of a media extravaganza that has traveled to nine other cities: there is an *LAist*, a *DCist*, a *Chicagoist*, a *Shanghaiist*. (None roll off the tongue as nicely as the original, and there is not yet a *Minneapolisist*.) For the three foreign sites (Shanghai, London, Toronto), *Gothamist* LLC gets a licensing fee in exchange for domain use and tech support. The US sites are run through the New York office, and the “-ists” of LA, Chicago, and San Francisco are the most popular independent blogs for those cities.

That’s a lot of crystal balls (actually, a lot of editors — another dozen full-timers outside New York), but, then, Chung and Dobkin have always had a big vision for the business. While they value their role as news aggregators (“It’s an essential function and always has been,” Dobkin says), what they’d really like is for *Gothamist* to become both the best aggregator *and* the best original news source. The dream got a little closer to reality this March, when Dobkin and reporter Robbins, with the help of former New York Civil Liberties Union director Norman Siegel, finally attained press credentials. You could almost hear the jitters at the *Post*.

“I’m a really big believer in original news, and increasingly, as we hire editors, we look for reporting experience,” says Dobkin. He smiles, and a wink of sunlight flashes in his glasses. “Imagine what we could do with *twenty* reporters.” 📖

A woman with long dark hair, wearing a dark cardigan over a dark top and blue jeans, stands with her arms crossed in a dark, industrial setting. She is leaning against a black equipment case with the number '1001' on it. The background is filled with dark, vertical structural elements, possibly scaffolding or ladders, and a warm light source is visible in the upper right corner.

Out of the Woods

With her radical interpretations of familiar works, theater director Diane Paulus has often led audiences down surprising paths. Then she wandered into *Porgy and Bess*. | By Julia M. Klein

“Be bold.”

This was what the estates of George and Ira Gershwin and DuBose and Dorothy Heyward advised director Diane Paulus '97SOA as she took on a towering creative task: transforming one of the benchmarks of American music, the 1935 opera *Porgy and Bess*, into a Broadway musical attuned to present-day sensibilities.

The admonition was probably superfluous. This was, after all, an artist who had staged an all-female version of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* in a nightclub, with cross-dressing and disco songs. Her daring paid off: the 1999 off-Broadway production of *The Donkey Show* ran for six years and toured internationally. As the artistic director of the American Repertory Theater (ART) in Cambridge, Massachusetts, since 2008, Paulus has built on the experimental tradition of one of the country's most prestigious regional theaters. And her fortieth-anniversary revival of *Hair*, which concluded with the audience dancing onstage, received rapturous reviews and a Tony Award.

But *The Gershwins' Porgy and Bess* — the production's official title — represented a more daunting challenge: adapting the opera would mean figuring out how to approach African-

American characters written by white men in the 1920s and '30s. To wrestle with that question, Paulus brought in some heavyweights: Obie Award-winning composer Diedre L. Murray, Pulitzer Prize-winning playwright Suzan-Lori Parks, and four-time Tony Award-winning actress Audra McDonald, who quit the television series *Private Practice* to play Bess.

Last summer, during rehearsals for *Porgy and Bess* at the ART, which is resident at Harvard, Paulus shared her thoughts about this undertaking with *New York Times* theater reporter Patrick Healy. “In the opera, you don't really get to know many of the characters as people, especially and most problematically Bess,” Paulus told Healy. “I'm sorry, but to ask an audience these days to invest three hours in a show requires having your heroine be an understandable and fully rounded character.”

These remarks, echoed by Parks and McDonald, might not have seemed particularly outré in an age of sometimes-radical revivals. Consider, for example, the surgery recently performed on one decidedly lesser work, *On a Clear Day You Can See Forever*, in which the female lead morphed into a gay man. But when Healy's article was published in the *Times* on August 7, one reader in particular was appalled. Stephen Sondheim, perhaps the greatest

Out of the Woods

living figure in musical theater and a great admirer of *Porgy and Bess*, fired off a blistering letter to the editor.

“Ms. Paulus says that in the opera you don’t get to know the characters as people,” Sondheim wrote. “Putting it kindly, that’s willful ignorance. These characters are as vivid as any ever created for the musical theater, as has been proved over and over in productions that may have cut some dialogue and musical passages but didn’t rewrite and distort them.”

“If she doesn’t understand Bess and feels she has to ‘excavate’ the show,” he wrote, “she clearly thinks it’s a ruin, so why is she doing it? I’m sorry, but could the problem be her lack of understanding, not Heyward’s?”

Hundreds of *Times* readers responded, most as outraged as Sondheim. Paulus’s *Porgy and Bess*, scheduled to open in Cambridge in just days, was spectacularly savaged, its Broadway future thrown into doubt — all before the curtain had risen on a single performance.

“**WHAT’S IMPORTANT TO KNOW,**” says Paulus, forty-five, a diminutive woman with piercing eyes, long dark hair, and a forthright manner, “is that the Gershwin estate said, ‘We have the opera, and the opera is going to exist forever. We’re not asking you to do the opera. We’re actually coming to you to create a version of the show that

will coexist with the opera, a version that will be for the musical-theater stage, for Broadway, which means for a broader audience.’ That was something that the estate was very passionate about. That was our charge.”

Based on a best-selling 1925 novel by the Charleston, South Carolina, writer DuBose Heyward and a stage adaptation by his wife, Dorothy, *Porgy and Bess* is the story of a crippled beggar and his lover, who live in a fictional black slum called Catfish Row. Even those who don’t know the opera are familiar with parts of the George Gershwin score: “Summertime,” “Bess, You Is My Woman Now,” and “It Ain’t Necessarily So.” Heyward, a poet as well as a novelist, wrote the libretto and collaborated with Gershwin’s brother, Ira, on the lyrics.

The early reaction to the opera, and its mostly black cast, was respectful, but critics didn’t always know what to make of it. Over the years, the work has toggled between the opera house and the musical-theater stage. It has also been subject to considerable tinkering. George Gershwin himself made about forty minutes of cuts to the four-hour piece between its Boston tryout and Broadway opening, and Cheryl Crawford, in her immensely popular 1942 version, which replaced recitatives with dialogue, streamlined it even more.



His woman now:
Audra McDonald
and Norm Lewis in
Porgy and Bess.

In 1952, a production initially starring William Warfield and Leontyne Price toured Europe to great acclaim. But Otto Preminger's 1959 attempt to translate the opera to the screen, with a cast that included Sidney Poitier, Dorothy Dandridge, and Sammy Davis Jr., was not successful. A 1976 Houston Grand Opera production reestablished the piece's operatic bona fides, and the Metropolitan Opera finally undertook its first *Porgy and Bess* in 1985.

Michael Strunsky '62GS, the sole trustee of the Ira Gershwin Estate (and Gershwin's nephew by marriage), says he has wanted a Broadway version of *Porgy and Bess* since he saw Trevor Nunn's 1992 Covent Garden staging. Nunn's 2006 Savoy Theatre production, intended for Broadway, never made it there. Strunsky calls that production "opera lite" and says he thought a more ambitious approach was needed.

In the spring of 2010, the Gershwin and Heyward trustees and their lawyers flew to Boston to meet with producer Jeffrey Richards, Paulus, and staff members in Paulus's ART office. Suzan-Lori Parks attended via speakerphone.

"It was a pitch meeting," Paulus says. "Suzan-Lori and I both talked about how much we loved the piece, and how evocative and stirring it is, not only as great music but great theater." Their aim, they said, "would be to look at the arc of all the characters in the show and really strengthen that . . . so that the audience feels

"I Got Plenty of Nothing" was transformed, she says, from an offensive "happy-darkey song" to a love song, with "nothing" now referring to "sexual relations and love." When Bess follows the drug dealer Sportin' Life to New York, she now does so for more complex reasons than mere addiction and weakness, including her own complicity in Crown's murder. And the ending — though not as radically reimagined as Paulus and Parks first envisioned — features a more dignified Porgy setting off to find his Bess.

"I ALWAYS HAD AN INSTINCT FOR MAKING SHOWS," says Paulus.

The daughter of an actor-turned-television producer and an interior decorator, Paulus was raised four blocks from Lincoln Center. As a child, she studied dance with Mikhail Baryshnikov and was a serious pianist, but the loneliness of long practice sessions deterred her from a concert career. Meanwhile, she directed plays in her family's living room, which led to a high-school production of *Wonderful Town*, where she met her future husband and collaborator Randy Weiner. (They now have two daughters, and commute between homes in Manhattan and Cambridge. Weiner runs both a Lower East Side nightclub called the Box and the ART's second stage.)

Paulus attended Harvard, graduating in 1988, and enrolled in the New Actors Workshop in New York to study with director Mike

Paulus's *Porgy and Bess*, scheduled to open in Cambridge in just days, was spectacularly savaged, its Broadway future thrown into doubt — all before the curtain had risen on a single performance.

engaged and involved with both Porgy and Bess from the moment they step on stage till the minute they leave."

They discussed turning some of the recitatives into dialogue and modifying the show's dialect: "It's written in a form of Gullah that Suzan-Lori felt very strongly is not necessarily authentic because it's DuBose Heyward's impression of Gullah," she says, referring to the Creole spoken by some groups of blacks in South Carolina and Georgia. Instead, she and Parks wanted the dialect to emerge from working with actors.

"One of the things that was very clear was that we wanted to keep the show, with intermission, somewhere between 2:30 and 2:35. That was necessary for Broadway audiences," Strunsky says.

The changes eventually encompassed the libretto, the staging, the voicing, and the orchestration, revamped for the much smaller show orchestra. Whole numbers were dropped; some solos turned into duets and quartets. The crippled Porgy, instead of being confined to a goat cart, would have a brace and cane. A scene in which a shady white lawyer sells Bess a fake divorce from her husband, Crown, would be given to Mariah, the matriarch of Catfish Row.

Overall, Parks says, Catfish Row characters were endowed with more agency. With a few introductory words of dialogue, Porgy's

Nichols and Paul Sills, a cofounder of Chicago's improvisational comedy troupe Second City. But the life of a novice actor, with its uncertainty and constant waiting, quickly lost its appeal: "I had this entrepreneurial spirit. I was always interested in organizing people." Plus, Paulus says, "I could fuel more of myself as a director."

Paulus called some friends and started producing her own shows. For one production, she wangled permission to stage Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* in an Upper West Side community garden — on the condition that she could not stop anyone from gardening. No problem, Paulus figured: "If I could get someone to put the shovel down and listen to the play, we'd be doing something right."

But it was hard to keep a fledgling company together in New York. With Sills's help, Paulus, Weiner, and some colleagues relocated to Door County, Wisconsin. The shows made by their Blue Circle Theatre (later Project 400) were avant-garde and site-specific. The company's version of *The Tempest* featured a local bar band. Weiner puts it this way: "One of Diane's strengths is her complete commitment to theater. One of my strengths is a questioning of theater."

For Paulus, it was a superb apprenticeship: "It gave me an opportunity to experiment. I did everything. I was fundraising;

Roll dem bones:
David Alan Grier
as Sportin' Life in
Porgy and Bess.



I was acting in shows. I started with *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and ended with *Ode to Joy*," a play about Beethoven that featured twenty-five child actors. "We staged it in Lake Michigan — literally, in the water."

But after five years, Paulus began to yearn for more training as a director. "I thought, 'I need more tools; I need more stimulus. I want to go back to school.'"

At Columbia's School of the Arts, Paulus studied under Andrei Serban, the director of the University's Oscar Hammerstein II Center for Theatre Studies, and Anne Bogart, a professor of directing and artistic director of the SITI ensemble theater company.

"I carry Anne and Andrei with me every day," Paulus says. "Anne is one of the most generous, open-hearted artists on the planet, and as a teacher, she was like an earth mother, nurturing each of us to pursue our interests. On the other side, you had Andrei Serban, a Romanian director who comes from that tradition of 'You're never good enough. You're banal. Everything you do is not good.'"

"Certain students collapse under that," Paulus says. But having been a child ballerina trained by demanding Russian teachers, "I kind of thrived on it. To be told you're not good enough is amazing training."

Serban says that, as a graduate student, Paulus was "impeccable . . . well-behaved, disciplined but also inspired." Citing her

thesis production of *King Lear*, he notes: "Her best work then was as it is now: a unique marriage between traditional material and the avant-garde."

Paulus "was already a remarkable force" when she entered the directing program, Bogart says. At Columbia, "she was continually innovating, not only with the plays and projects that she realized," but by making "strong alliances with students and faculty," many of whom would become colleagues.

While still a student, Paulus assisted Serban on a Massenet opera in Paris, where she met the impresario Brian Dickie. Dickie would later call on her to direct Monteverdi's *Orfeo* at the Chicago Opera Theater. It was Paulus's first opera.

Before graduating, Paulus sought advice from Bogart on what to do next. "She just looked at me, and she touched my heart. It was a physical gesture, like 'Follow your heart.'"

IN 2007, THE PHONE RANG, and the Public Theater was on the line. Would Paulus like to direct a fortieth-anniversary concert version of the rock musical *Hair*?

"I almost dropped the telephone," she says. "Are you kidding? I know every song of that show, backwards, forwards."

James Rado, one of the original creators of *Hair*, was impressed by both Paulus's precision and her preparation during their collabo-

ration on script changes. “I was elated by the working process,” Rado says. “She was aware of the original production; she’d studied the history. She did not want to repeat any of the ideas. She wanted to make it her own.”

The concert morphed into a fully staged production in Central Park in the summer of 2008 and was transferred to Broadway the following year. The revival featured powerhouse singing, exuberant interaction with audiences, and a sense of both the energy and pathos of America’s 1960s youth culture. The *Times* critic Ben Brantley called it “thrilling” and “emotionally rich.”

The tweaks Paulus and Rado made, including giving more voice to the female characters, were subtle rather than startling. “I made the decision early on that we’re not going to update *Hair* and make it about Iraq and Afghanistan,” she says. “We’re going to go back to 1967 and really look at what America felt like to a young person.”

The obvious antiwar parallels nevertheless contributed to the show’s resonance, making it simultaneously a historical snapshot and a more general lament against violence and cultural repression. Paulus’s work deepened *Hair*’s emotional connections by treating its characters “as living people, with all their flaws and virtues” and would become a prototype for *Porgy and Bess*.

The producer Jeffrey Richards visited Paulus in her dressing room. “Diane, I don’t give opening-night presents,” he told her. “I give you your next project.”

Following *Hair*’s triumphal Broadway opening, the producer Jeffrey Richards visited Paulus in her dressing room. “Diane, I don’t give opening-night presents,” he told her. “I give you your next project.”

Richards suggested *Greta Garbo Came to Donegal*, by the Irish playwright Frank McGuinness. Paulus followed her heart. “This is a great play,” she told Richards after reading it, “but, you know, I’m really mad for musicals.”

A few weeks later, in celebration of Paulus’s Tony nomination as best director of a musical, Richards took her to lunch and made another suggestion. “OK, how about *Porgy and Bess*?”

“Now you’re talking,” Paulus recalls thinking.

ON AUGUST 10, the day the Sondheim letter was posted online, Richards flew up to Cambridge to address the brewing crisis. He and Paulus met with the company. “As artists, they were devastated by it, because everyone has such respect for Stephen Sondheim,” he says. “But I think that when Diane and I spoke with the company, it had a bonding effect, because everybody believed in what we were doing.”

As for Paulus, Richards says admiringly, “She did not let this deter her.”

In fact, Paulus says she placed a call to Sondheim the day the letter went live. He never called back. “Our reaction,” Paulus says, “was to put our heads down and stay focused on the work.”

In Cambridge, *The Gershwins’ Porgy and Bess* drew sellout crowds, and the estates approved the transfer to Broadway.

In New York, Paulus and her team continued to refine the piece before it opened this past January.

Now playing on Broadway, Paulus’s *Porgy and Bess* moves swiftly, dispensing with some of the grandeur and musical sophistication of the opera. Bess, with a prominent scar on her cheek, is physically as well as emotionally damaged, teetering, in McDonald’s edgy performance, on the precipice of drug addiction and worse. Her preference for the robust Crown (beautifully sung by Phillip Boykin, who’s performed the role in opera houses) no longer seems a given, since Norm Lewis’s Porgy is a splendidly handsome man handicapped only by a limp. Catfish Row is powerfully portrayed as an affectionate, if still afflicted, community.

The critical response has been split. The *New Yorker*’s Hilton Als, who saw the production when it was still in Cambridge, praised it as “politically radical and dramaturgically original,” while the *Wall Street Journal*’s Terry Teachout blasted the Broad-

way version as “a sanitized, heavily cut rewrite that strips away the show’s essence so as to render it suitable for consumption by 21st-century prigs.” Only McDonald’s portrayal of Bess has won near-universal accolades.

Addressing students on March 9 at Columbia’s Miller Theatre, Paulus delivered this valedictory on the Sondheim controversy: “I’m just always desperate to get people to care about the theater. I joke, ‘I don’t want to be on the arts page — I want to be on the front page.’ I guess be careful what you ask for. But it showed me how much people cared about this. It had very little to do with our production; we hadn’t even opened. It became a flash point for discussion of what is sacred in art, what is not to be touched, and what you can reimagine.”

These artistic questions linger, as contested as ever. But in commercial terms, Broadway audiences have spoken. They have been giving *The Gershwins’ Porgy and Bess* standing ovations, and its run has been extended through September.

“We are doing very well,” producer Richards says. “I anticipate that we will enter the Promised Land of recoupment.” 🍷

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



RUSSIAN RESOLUTION

Vladimir Putin won the presidential election in March, but was bruised along the way by spirited street protests.

Timothy Frye, director of Columbia's Harriman Institute, explains what a weakened Putin means for Russia.

As I rode in from Sheremetyevo Airport on the morning of December 10, 2011, the streets were nearly empty. Then, as we crossed the Garden Ring road to enter central Moscow, I saw the first security forces and personnel carriers. When we approached the Kremlin, riot police in full gear were preparing to take their positions, and as we passed over the Bolshoy Moskvoretsky Bridge, a long line of buses and police wagons waited to take demonstrators to jail.

It wasn't supposed to be like this.

Everyone expected that — with some creative counting by the Central Election Commission — the December parliamentary elections would give a solid majority to the ruling United Russia Party. Then the March 2012 presidential election would certainly return Vladimir Putin to the presidency without incident.

Yet now, six days after volunteer election monitors began posting YouTube videos of ballot stuffing, vote fraud, and multiple voting, some forty thousand demonstrators gathered on Bolotnaya

Ploshchad (Swampy Square) in central Moscow to protest that fraud and call for new elections. In a rare show of unity, nationalists, liberals, and leftists put aside their divisions to direct their grievances toward the Kremlin. The mood was more akin to a carnival than a revolution. One poster mocked Putin's alleged use of Botox. Another offered election-commission chairman Vladimir Churov a copy of *Counting Votes for Dummies*. Police officers looked on while deciding whether the weight of the protesters would collapse the bridge over the Moscow River.

Two weeks later, on Christmas Eve, that solidarity was still holding, as one hundred thousand demonstrators gathered on Andrei Sakharov Square in Moscow. Emboldened by the Kremlin's feeble response, speakers took turns denouncing the government for its corruption and calling on Putin to resign. Demonstrations continued in the run-up to the March 4 presidential election.

Considering that these were hardly the first fraudulent elections in Russia, the size of the protests surprised everyone, including the

Illustrations by Craig LaRotonda

demonstrators themselves. In the days before the demonstrations, a Russian journalist friend bet me that no more than five thousand people would join him at the first protest. In the end, an academic colleague said that the demonstrations were like a school reunion: he ran into many friends whom he had not seen in years.

Most of the demonstrators appeared to come from the middle class, a group that had prospered under Putin. Thanks in large part to high energy prices and sound macroeconomic policy, Russia's economy doubled between 1998 and 2008 and rebounded quickly from the global financial crisis. Russia's GDP per capita stands at more than \$16,000, significantly outperforming its emerging-market peer group of Brazil, India, and China. Moscow's standard of living rivals that of southern Europe, and Russia has the largest Internet market in Europe, with more than fifty million users. One poll estimated that roughly 70 percent of demonstrators at the December 25 protest had attended college. One Kremlin insider referred to the demonstrators as the "best people" of Russia. For this and other offenses, he was unceremoniously demoted.

Alexei Navalny, a thirty-six-year-old lawyer turned anticorruption activist, is the most prominent of a new generation of opposition leaders to emerge from the demonstrations. He won his fame by scouring the purchasing requests of state-owned companies on the Internet and publicizing the most egregious abuses on his organization's website, Rospil.ru. Navalny rallied the opposition by branding the ruling elite "the party of crooks and thieves" and helping to attract popular literary figures, such as the writer Boris Akunin, and celebrities, such as Ksenia Sobchak, Russia's own Paris Hilton. Protesting became cool.

Within a few weeks, the demonstrations had pierced Putin's aura of invincibility. Protesters were bold enough to hang a large banner opposite the Kremlin calling on Putin to resign and to circulate a fake news report on the Internet showing Putin on trial in a Moscow courtroom. Staging these events would have been unimaginable a few weeks earlier.

The demonstrations caught the Putin administration off-guard. After initially blaming Hillary Clinton for the disorder, Putin mocked the protesters' white ribbons, saying they reminded him of condoms. His usual mix of machismo and pointed humor failed badly. But he soon regained his balance and turned the tables on the demonstrators. His team organized large counterdemonstrations, including one on February 4, in which 120,000 Putin supporters turned out in western Moscow to counter an equal number of anti-Putin demonstrators gathered in the center of the city.

Putin also decided to change his strategy. In previous years, he had found favor with both the middle class and the lower class: economic growth had helped him draw support from the emerging middle class, and increased state spending had gained him favor from socially vulnerable pensioners, state workers, and rural populations. However, the demonstrations and voting patterns in the parliamentary elections indicated that Putin was losing the young,

urban, and educated populations, and that his supporters were now older, more rural, and less well off than in previous elections. Putin's campaign turned to populist economic policies to appeal to this audience by raising pensions and salaries for the military and many other state workers.

Putin also played the nationalist card with fervor. His campaign's most common tactic was to accuse the demonstrators of being in league with foreigners, often in the employ of the US government, who were intent on dismantling Russia. His pre-election foreign-policy platform mentioned only two potential enemies: NATO and the US.

On March 4, with thousands of security officers in full riot gear on the streets, Russians cast their ballots for president. The results surprised no one: only Kremlin-approved candidates were permitted in the race, and Putin's faux foes included two four-time losers of presidential elections (Zyuganov and Zhirinovskiy), a thoroughly compromised ally (Mironov), and a political neophyte, albeit a wealthy one (Prokhorov). Incumbents who choose their opponents tend to do well; Putin won 64 percent of the vote.

As the day progressed, blatant ballot stuffing by election officials appeared to be less of a problem than it had been in the parliamentary elections, thanks in part to newly installed webcams at polling places. But videos showed busloads of voters touring from one polling station to the next, and reports came in of company bosses using threats of dismissal to motivate their employees to vote. As usual, votes for Putin in many of the largely ethnic republics were well above 85 percent — figures that stretch credibility.

This is not to say that Putin is unpopular, nor that he could not win a free election under the scrutiny of a free media and critical questioning by rivals. The problem is that we have no idea whether he could or not.

For all the drama of the protests, Russia's future will be shaped by deeper structural factors, such as its resource-dependent economy; well-educated public; vast regional inequality; and aging, shrinking population. Yet the elections have left their mark. To begin with, they have revealed Putin's vulnerability. His approval ratings fell from 80 percent in June 2010 to 44 percent in December 2011, before rising to the mid-50s in March. These would be enviable figures in many settings, and Putin faces no clear rival among established politicians; but Putin fatigue has clearly set in even among those who still support him, and it is hard to see how the government can generate the enthusiasm needed to tackle the country's economic and social problems.

The elections and demonstrations also indicate that Putin will face a more engaged public than in the past. The new activists are likely to push for greater media freedom and use the Internet and social media to keep tabs on the government from the outside. These activists, with their high levels of education, wealth, and



social standing, will play a crucial role in economic reform and the future of the country. Still, for all their efforts, they have little organization or political power. The hard work of creating parties, winning local offices, and building alliances lies ahead. The Putin administration has organization but little energy, and the opposition has energy but little organization.

A diminished leader facing a weak opposition is hardly a recipe for addressing deep problems. More likely, we will see political and economic changes at the margin — a privatization here, greater media freedom there, and selective crackdowns on corruption — but not the introduction of policies that would destabilize the Putin government and the status quo.

Not that maintaining the economic status quo is bad for the short term. Russia's economy is growing on the order of 3 or 4 percent a year, which is impressive compared with Europe and the United States. The Putin administration has done a good job managing its oil bonanza and has built enviable reserves of foreign exchange; but in the long run, the country needs better governance and an influx of foreign capital.

The impact of the election extends well beyond Russia. A non-democratic Russia will continue to support friendly autocrats in the region and frustrate groups pushing for political liberties outside Russia.

The Putin administration has organization but little energy, and the opposition has energy but little organization.

The election has also complicated US–Russian relations. The Obama administration had been in a good position to point to some real achievements with Russia. In recent years, the two sides have concluded a new Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty, known as New START, which will cut the number of strategic nuclear-missile launchers in half. They have cooperated on transporting US troops through Russian airspace to fight in Afghanistan. With some pressure from Washington, Russia has limited its sales of missiles to Iran, and, after more than seventeen years of negotiations, Russia has finally gained entry to the World Trade Organization. But Putin's anti-US campaign rhetoric and Russia's flawed elections have emboldened critics of Obama's Russia policy at home, especially those with an eye on the November election in the United States. These critics accuse Obama of abandoning those fighting for democracy in Russia.

Putin takes the inaugural oath on May 7. Organizers are making plans for large protests to mark the event. It is not likely that the opposition will surprise the regime again. 🐞



To Capture a King

Fiction by
Norbert Ehrenfreund

Ofelia stood behind the bar and made a face as she watched the chess players hunched over the tables. *El juego de ajedrez*. She had lived all her life in this remote village of Ibiza in the middle of the Mediterranean and had never heard of chess until Tomayo came back from Madrid three years ago. Then everything changed.

Ofelia had inherited the inn from her father when she was still a young woman. The inn had always been the center of activity in the little village on the Ibiza coast, population 473. But how different it was before Tomayo went away. Then the men came to play cards or dice. They talked and drank wine and beer, and the inn made money. Now the men still came, but they hardly talked. They would sit for hours staring at that stupid board with the squares on it without saying a word to each other. Instead of wine and beer they drank coffee and Coca-Cola. When you play chess, they said, your mind must be clear. Ofelia's business suffered.

Ofelia looked for Tomayo, but he was not here tonight. Once the game caught on and the men

learned to play by themselves without his help, he came less and less. She knew where he was. His bride didn't want him to come. Ofelia tried to shut out the picture that forced its way into her mind. She knew his bed well, knew how it creaked when the activity on the mattress became tempestuous. She remembered the morning three years ago when Tomayo sat up in bed after they made love, when, without warning, he announced that he was going off to a new job in Madrid. She was almost sixty then. A widow with no children. He was ten years younger and had never married.

What about *us*? she said.

What *about* us? he said.

Don't I count?

I'll be back, Tomayo said.

Before he boarded the boat to Valencia, he took her in his arms and said the same thing: I'll be back.

Ofelia almost answered, We don't have much time, but she bit her lip and said nothing. When the ship's horn blew, she expected him to kiss her, but he did not. She felt his long mustache brush her cheek. Tomayo returned to Ibiza three years later with two new things, both of which brought sorrow to Ofelia's heart.

First, he brought the game of chess, which he learned in Madrid. He taught it to all the young men in the village, and it caught on. Now it was their favorite pastime. The women, of course, never played. It was strictly a man's game. Second, and more devastating to Ofelia, was the young madrileña who came off the boat with her arm through his. The woman was more than twenty years younger than Tomayo. She had bleached blond hair and fair skin that made her stand out like an electric light among the villagers. She spoke Madrid Spanish that was hard to understand for Tomayo's people. Their tongue was Ibicenco.

Suddenly a loud voice outside drew Ofelia to the window. In the courtyard she saw a young couple in khaki shorts straddling their bicycles. The woman glared at the man and spoke to him in a foreign voice.

Ofelia couldn't understand what they were saying, but they were arguing. They circled around, and he pointed at the inn hopefully, but she crossed her arms and shouted. Eventually, they parked their bikes, and he reached for the lady's hand, but she drew it away. "No," she said, and walked ahead.

The woman was exceptionally pretty, much prettier than Tomayo's bride. She was very young, hardly twenty-one, and a natural blond with bright blue eyes, a big chest, and long legs. Her hair curled around her shoulders, and she wore a man's white shirt, which was wet with sweat in the back from the bicycle ride in the sun. She stopped at the doorway, turned to the man, and spoke in an angry whisper, gesturing back toward their bicycles, but he opened the door anyway.

Ofelia guessed from the movies she had seen in the main village that they were Americans. When they entered the inn, the men sat up and stared. Television had not yet reached the island, and the



only movie house was thirty miles away. Ofelia was sure that here in this remote corner of Ibiza the men had never seen anything like this woman.

"Kevin . . ." the woman said sharply as they approached Ofelia's counter, and tugged on his shirt sleeve.

"*Habla inglés?*" the man named Kevin asked Ofelia.

"No," she said.

The woman threw up her hands and rolled her eyes at Kevin. They fought for a few minutes more, and finally he sighed, conceding the battle to her. She crossed the room impatiently and went to wait for him by the door.

He turned to Ofelia. "*Tiene teléfono?*" He made a motion with his hand to his ear as if he were calling on the phone. This time she understood.

"No," Ofelia said. "*No teléfono.*"

Kevin turned and went to leave too. But the woman's expression had changed. She held up her hand and nodded toward the men playing chess at the tables. She seemed pleased with what she saw.

The couple looked at each other. This time they were in agreement. They turned back to Ofelia. Kevin pulled a book from his backpack and referred to it as he spoke to Ofelia in broken Spanish. Yes, she had a room upstairs, she said, and led them out to

the backyard behind the inn to show them the pump. She worked the handle up and down in the dim light until water came out. She filled a pitcher and handed it to Kevin.

“*El lavatorio*,” she said, and pointed to the outhouse across the yard. It was an old shack with boards nailed to the side.

Back at the counter, the couple turned over their passports. Now Ofelia was sure they were Americans. Kevin looked at his book and said: “*Electricidad?*”

“No,” Ofelia said. “*Lo siento*.” She lit a kerosene lantern and handed it to Kevin, who looked at his bride and shook his head. He held the pitcher in one hand, the lantern in the other.

Ofelia showed her new lodgers the room upstairs, which was dark, even with the lantern. It consisted of a single bed and chair and smelled of insect spray. Ofelia came downstairs and examined the passports further. She had heard Kevin call the woman Skinch, but that was not the name on her passport, so Ofelia guessed it was her nickname. Besides that, all she could make out were the letters *USA*.

Half an hour later, Ofelia heard a rustling on the stair. She saw the men look up as the young woman descended alone. She was indeed a striking figure. This time she had on a skirt instead of the khaki shorts, and the white shirt had been replaced with a pink pullover sweater. Her long blond hair was freshly brushed and hung behind her shoulders. Her lips were brightened with lipstick. The men at the tables tried not to stare. They squirmed and coughed and looked at each other with their eyebrows raised and turned back to their games. Skinch stopped at one of the tables and stood watching the chess game. Her hair glistened in the flickering lantern light. The men tried to concentrate, but it was very difficult with Skinch there. Besides Ofelia, who stood behind the counter, Skinch was the only woman in the room. To the men, she was a creature from another world.

“*Muy bonita*,” Ofelia said aloud to herself.

Skinch moved to another table, where Alfonso and Quilvio had been playing for a long time. When she approached, they both looked up at her and smiled, and she smiled back. Only a few pieces were left on the board. For more than five minutes the two men stared at the table like statues, without moving or speaking. Skinch watched in silence. When Quilvio finally moved his rook, Skinch shook her head.

Ofelia did not understand chess, although she knew the names of the pieces. She also knew the two words *jaque* and *jaque mate*. And she knew that when one of the players said *jaque mate*, it meant the game was over.

Soon Alfonso picked up his queen and with a little flourish held it above the board. Quilvio didn’t see what was coming, and Alfonso was making the most of the little drama. Finally, he set the queen down next to Quilvio’s king and said, “*Jaque mate*.” Alfonso’s queen was protected by his pawn. It took a moment before Quilvio recognized the painful fact of the matter. Then he laid his king down on its side and shook his opponent’s hand.

When Quilvio stood up, Skinch took his chair and tried to speak to Alfonso. She pointed to him and to herself, then to the board.

He did not respond. What was this woman trying to say to him? She continued to gesture, but he still did not understand. Finally, she sat down in the chair and again pointed to him and to herself. She picked up one of the pieces and waved it between them.

“*Comprende?*” she said. Eventually, it dawned on Alfonso. She wanted to play *him*. His face reddened. He had never played with a woman before.

“*Bueno?*” she asked.

“*Bueno*,” Alfonso replied. What else could he do? Together they started to put the pieces in place.

At the counter, Ofelia gasped. How bold! Was this woman really going to play chess? Against a man? Against Alfonso? It was unthinkable. Never in Ofelia’s inn had a woman done such a thing. Chess was a man’s game. It was too intellectual for a woman.

As the game started, the men gathered round. Skinch looked up and smiled at them and showed her gleaming white teeth, and then

She knew that when one of the
players said *jaque mate*, it meant
the game was over.

hunched forward with her elbows on the table, her chin resting on her folded hands, and concentrated on the board.

Ofelia assessed the lady’s chances. Alfonso was one of Tomayo’s best pupils. But Ofelia also knew him for his gallantry toward the weaker sex. He would defeat the lady. He had to do that. But he would not embarrass her.

Meanwhile, Skinch’s husband had come downstairs to join the social activity.

He did not approach his wife when he saw her engrossed in the game, but remained at the counter behind the circle that had formed around her, hidden from her view.

The game with Alfonso did not last long. From the outset Skinch took Alfonso by surprise with the way she attacked with her knights. After just a few moves, she said: “*Jaque*.” Alfonso looked trapped but he got out of it. “*Jaque*,” she said, again and again. Always in a quiet voice, almost a whisper. As if it meant nothing. He knew he was doomed. In desperation he moved his king one square to the right. She moved in with her rook and it was all over. She didn’t have to say it. He kindly said it for her: “*Jaque mate*.” He stood up and kissed her hand in the Continental way, without actually making contact. The men turned to each other and shook their heads. Can you believe it?

In the circle looking on was a young man named Esteban. As soon as Alfonso got up, Esteban sat in his chair and rolled up his sleeves. He nodded, Skinch nodded, and a new game began without a single word passing between them. This will be different, Ofelia thought.

Esteban was the best after Tomayo. Once he had even beaten the master. He would not let himself be embarrassed by this foreigner.

Again a circle gathered around the players. Ofelia was busy with new orders for beer and wine. The men could drink now because they weren't playing. Ofelia served the drinks, washed the glasses, and went outside to feed the chickens. When she came back, the game was still going and the circle around them had grown. Esteban did not look happy. Oh, no. Could he be in trouble too? Not Esteban. Ofelia stood at the counter hoping to hear Esteban say, "*Jaque mate.*" But he said nothing. He looked around at his friends as if to call for help. Skinch never changed her expression. She did not look at Esteban. Her attention was on one corner of the board. She put down her queen, and the game was over.

"Ay," Esteban said, as if in pain. He laid the king down on its side.

"*Increible,*," Ofelia said.

Suddenly a murmur traveled across the room. The voices came from all sides. Call Tomayo! Call Tomayo!

"*Dónde está Tomayo?*"

"*Llame a Tomayo!*"

Ofelia joined in the cries. "*Dígale a Tomayo que venga,*" she shouted. The slaughter had gone far enough. Someone had to stop it. Ofelia knew where Tomayo was. He was in bed with his bride. The bride would not want him to leave her so late in the night. She would make a scene if he tried to go to the inn to play chess. No matter, Ofelia thought. Never mind her. This was important. Tomayo must come. This stranger is embarrassing our people.

Ofelia called for silence by banging a knife against an empty beer mug. "*Tomayo,*" Ofelia shouted. "*Tiene que venir.*" He must come.

But who would fetch the maestro? Who could persuade him to come at this hour? The men turned to Ofelia. She knew Tomayo best. He would respect her request. She would know what to say.

No, Ofelia said. I can't do it.

Why not?

Please don't ask me.

The men talked of honor. The honor of Ibiza.

Someone else must go, Ofelia said. Please understand.

The men nodded. They respected Ofelia. They understood. Something in the past. A woman's pride. Of course. Someone else must go. So it was decided that the two losers, Alfonso and Esteban, would be the messengers. They could warn Tomayo about the woman's clever maneuvers with the knight. They could explain why Tomayo had to come. They wouldn't be afraid of Tomayo's bride. Amid the cheers, Alfonso and Esteban put on their black caps and went out into the night.

To the people at the inn, the wait felt like hours. But soon there was a shout from someone at the window. "*El viene!*" And Tomayo came in like an actor making his entrance. He wore a white shirt open at the neck, baring his hairy chest. The long black mustache almost reached his collar. Ofelia felt her heart jump. The old feeling. Would she ever be rid of it? The shirt was clean, but it was not ironed. Ofelia would have ironed it. Now that Tomayo was there, a sense of relief settled in the room. Now the intruder would be put in her place. It was near closing time, but everyone knew Ofelia would not close at the usual hour. The news was spreading through the village of the big game between the beautiful American *señora* and the village champion, Tomayo.



Ofelia hoisted herself up on the counter to get a better view and announced that everyone present would be given one free drink.

Several men surrounded Tomayo, all talking at once, acting like his seconds in a prizefight. Tomayo listened and smiled. Then he came over to Skinch, bowed to her, and sat down to play.

“No speak *inglés*,” he said. “*Lo siento*.”

Skinch pointed to herself, said, “No speak *español*,” and they both laughed.

For more than an hour, the battle wore on. It was one of those games where after a long time no one could say who was winning. Tomayo captured one of Skinch’s pawns and a bishop. Skinch had one of his pawns and a knight.

Then Tomayo took her rook and a loud murmur ran through the crowd. Several of the men winked and grinned at each other. The maestro was not over the hill yet.

“*Qué pasa?*” Ofelia asked one of the men nearby.

“*Tomayo gana*,” he said. Tomayo is winning.

Ofelia sighed. “*Bueno*,” she said.

Skinch did not change her expression. She seemed unperturbed by the whispering behind her back. She remained hunched over

It was one of those games
where after a long time no one
could say who was winning.

the board, staring at the pieces. She brushed back strands of blond hair that were blocking her view.

Soon Ofelia heard Tomayo say, “*Jaque*.” The men moved in closer. Ofelia thought: *Finish it, Tomayo. Finish her off. Do it, for heaven’s sake. Then we can have time together before you go. We can have a late snack alone in the kitchen. I have bacon in the icebox. I will make the eggs the way you like them.*

Remember, Tomayo, how you liked my eggs? Perhaps . . . but no . . . she dared not imagine more. She waited to hear the word. She waited to hear him say, “*Jaque mate*.”

Another hour passed with no conclusion. Now it was past midnight. Tomayo continued to hold the advantage gained by taking the rook, but he could not score the knockout. Skinch’s king was tucked away behind two pawns, but it was about to be trapped. The men behind Tomayo held their breath. They sensed victory at last. One more move and Tomayo could finish her off.

But it was Skinch’s move, and she didn’t hesitate. She picked up her black knight, which was shining in the light from the oil lamps, and caressed it with her thumb and forefinger before she set it down and said, “*Jaque*.” Tomayo looked at her. Then he looked at the board. He couldn’t move his king. He couldn’t take her knight. For the first time he realized he was in serious trouble.

He stood up and started to walk around in a little circle. The men drew back to give him space. He came back and studied the board from a standing position. Five minutes went by. Skinch never moved. She just stared at the board also. Tomayo ran his fingers through his hair and sat down again and examined the situation.

“*Jaque mate?*” he asked. He knew the answer.

Skinch nodded and watched him lay down the old king.

“*Ay*,” he said. “*Ya acabé*.” I am finished. “*Ay*,” said the men behind him.

Tomayo was a gentleman with good manners. He did not show anger or disgust. He got up and went over to Skinch, then bowed and lifted her hand close to his lips. When the men filed out, some of them stopped by Skinch’s table to pay their respects. A few bowed and said words she didn’t understand. Tomayo sat back in his chair, stared at the pieces on the board, and shook his head. Ofelia came over to Tomayo and put her hand on his shoulder. She could tell he was embarrassed. “*Es de nada*,” she said. But she was lying. It was a big thing. A king was dethroned.

Come in the kitchen, she said. I’ll fix the eggs the way you like.

I have to go, he said, and stood up.

Come, she said. She took his hand and held on tight when he tried to draw it away. He let her lead him across the room. He walked like a prisoner in surrender, head bowed. They went in the kitchen, and she closed the door. She tried to console him. She put her arms around him and caressed his neck with her fingers.

You’re still my Tomayo, she said.

He moved closer. “*Mi Ofelia*.”

She expected him to kiss her, but suddenly he dropped his arms and shook his head.

Don’t go, she said. The bride can wait. I never see you anymore. You come here. You play chess. Then you go. Now sit down. I’ll fix the eggs.

Please, he said. I can’t stay. He turned to leave.

She went up to him and placed his arms around her neck. She kissed him. He did not resist, but he did not respond either. His lips were closed.


Oh, she said. That is not the Tomayo who used to kiss me.

Again he drew back. I am going, he said.

You don’t love her. I can tell.

He opened the door. “*Lo siento*,” he said.

Ofelia stood at the door and watched him go. *Go home, Tomayo. Go home to your little bride. Tell her you lost the game. Tell her you lost to a woman. Tell her, Tomayo.*

Skinch was still sitting at the chess table. All the men were gone. Kevin went to her and sat in the chair. They sat for a while in silence, and then she held out her hand to him, and they went upstairs to the dark room with the narrow bed. 

Norbert Ehrenfreund ’50GSAS is a retired judge. This is his first published fiction in more than fifty years.

NEWS

SIPA dean John Coatsworth appointed provost

John Coatsworth, who, according to President Lee C. Bollinger, was a “transformational dean” at the School of International and Public Affairs, has been named the University’s provost.

As provost, Coatsworth is the University’s chief academic officer, overseeing all faculty appointments and tenure decisions,

as well as the development of the University’s annual academic budget.

“I am, personally, very pleased that John will serve in this vital University role and as my colleague,” said Bollinger in announcing the decision on February 17. “It is a gift to all of us, for John will bring his wonderful talents to bear on the work ahead.”

Coatsworth became interim provost last summer, when Claude Steele stepped down from the position to become dean of Stanford University’s School of Education. Coatsworth continued to serve as dean of SIPA, a position he had held since 2008, during his eight months as interim provost. Now that Coatsworth is no longer the dean of SIPA, Robert Lieberman, the school’s vice dean for academic affairs and a political-science professor, is filling the role on an interim basis.

At SIPA, Coatsworth oversaw the school’s transition into a self-governing unit of the University. The school was previously administered by the Division of Arts and Sciences; now it has the power to hire its own faculty and determine its own budget and student

enrollment. Coatsworth also led SIPA on a remarkable fundraising run: the school raised more than \$10 million annually while he was dean, enabling it to increase its fellowship budget by 50 percent.

Coatsworth, a scholar of Latin American economic and international history, came to Columbia from Harvard in 2006.

The provost’s office, in the first eight months under Coatsworth, has made progress on several major initiatives. It has created a Standing Tenure Committee, whose faculty members review all tenure applications to ensure that the final decisions are made in adherence to a consistent, University-wide standard. The provost’s office is also working with each of Columbia’s schools to strengthen their efforts to recruit a diverse faculty.

“When you consider the overall academic experience of our students, nothing is more important than the diversity of our faculty,” Coatsworth says. “We’ve made some good strides in hiring women and minorities in the past few years, but we need to do more.”



EILEEN BARROSO

John Coatsworth

Holder: Feds still investigating 2008 economic crash

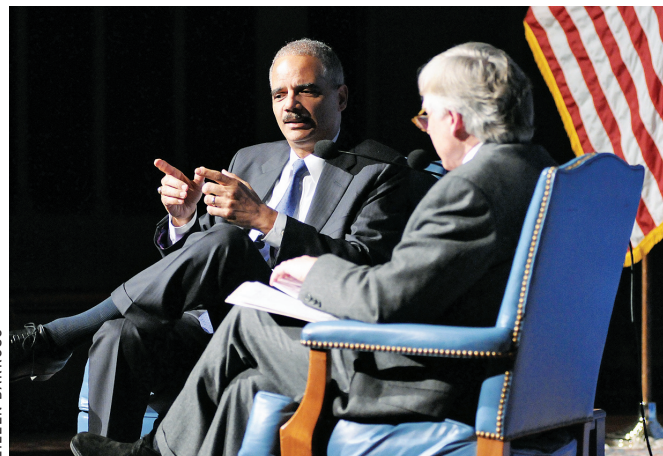
Would you like to see more white-collar criminals hauled into court?

So would Eric Holder Jr. ’73CC, ’76LAW. In a February appearance at Columbia, he talked up the recent creation of a federal task force aimed at rooting out the perpetrators of the fraudulent lending and investing practices that led to the 2008 financial crisis. Holder, the US attorney general, addressed 400 students, faculty, and alumni as part of the University’s World Leaders Forum.

The new task force brings together officials from several regulatory agencies “to strengthen current state and federal efforts to investigate and prosecute abuses” in the mortgage-backed securities market, Holder said.

“Believe me, I understand the public desire to, as one pundit put it, ‘see the handcuffs come to Wall Street,’” he said before sitting down for a Q&A with President Lee C. Bollinger. “So let me assure you: whenever we do uncover evidence of criminal wrongdoing, we will not hesitate to bring prosecutions.”

To watch video, visit news.columbia.edu/oncampus/2695.



EILEEN BARROSO

Legendary Cosmo editor funds media institute

Helen Gurley Brown, the longtime *Cosmopolitan* magazine editor in chief whose plucky writings about sex and dating in the 1960s made her an influential figure in the women's movement, is now getting behind another kind of revolution.

Brown, who is ninety, recently announced that she will give Columbia and Stanford \$30 million to create an institute for digital journalism. The David and Helen Gurley Brown Institute for Media Innovation, named in honor of her and her late husband, David Brown '37JRN, who produced such Hollywood blockbusters as *Jaws*, *The Sting*, and *Cocoon*, will support journalists and engineers who collaborate to develop technologically savvy ways of gathering and disseminating news. It will be run jointly by Columbia's journalism school and Stanford's engineering school, with participants on each coast working together remotely.

"This gift will help us develop the most innovative forms of media and journalism, especially with regard to visual storytelling," says Nicholas Lemann, the dean of Columbia's journalism school.

Under the gift agreement, Stanford and Columbia will each receive \$12 million to endow a new faculty position and to fund fellowships and grants that will go to journalists and engineers who do collaborative work; the award recipients may be students, post-graduate fellows, or faculty from either university. Columbia will receive an additional \$6 million to create a high-tech newsroom and production studio that will be the headquarters of the Brown Institute and serve all Columbia journalism students. The facility will be located in a large, high-ceilinged room at the eastern end of the journalism building's second floor; construction is expected to be completed by fall 2014.

At the Brown Institute, Lemann says, teams of journalists and engineers could develop computer programs to help report-

ers spot patterns in huge data sets, new types of interactive charts and graphs to display statistics to audiences in more compelling ways, or strategies for disseminating news articles through social media.

"Another possibility is that we could develop some sort of reputation-management system for online journalism," says Lemann. "There's this giant world of electronic

journalist and publisher before entering the film industry; in his later years, he served on the journalism school's Board of Visitors.

The Brown Institute is part of a larger effort at the journalism school to advance its digital programs. In 2010, the school launched its Tow Center for Digital Journalism, partly to expand the training that the school provides to all its students in



Helen Gurley Brown and David Brown '37JRN in 1984.

news, and people aren't sure which websites are trustworthy. Is there a way to help readers navigate the vast sea of information online, maybe through user ratings of websites' reliability? That's one option that comes up a lot in conversations among journalists."

The ideas for the projects will come from the Brown Institute's fellows and grant recipients. "We aren't assigning the projects," Lemann says. "We're inviting proposals and approving the most exciting ones."

Brown says that her gift was inspired by the memory of her late husband, who attended Stanford before enrolling in Columbia's journalism school. David Brown worked as a

video, audio, and other multimedia reporting tools. This past fall, the J-school, in conjunction with Columbia's own engineering school, launched a dual master's degree program in journalism and computer science.

"Our programs with these two engineering schools will be complementary, given their emphasis on different stages of a journalist's education," says Lemann. "We imagine that the graduates of our new master's degree program with Columbia's engineering school, for instance, will be among those applying to the Brown Institute."

To read more about Brown's gift, visit www.journalism.columbia.edu/news/609.

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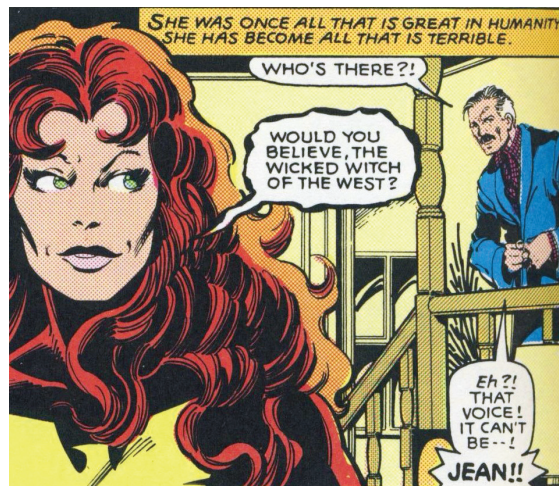
X-Men to reside at Columbia

BAM! POW! ZONK! it's not. When Chris Claremont started writing the storylines for Marvel Comics' *Uncanny X-Men* in 1975, he introduced sophisticated plots and characters in a medium that had known little of the sort. In doing so, he turned an obscure comic book about mutant superheroes into a hit and helped create an audience for today's graphic novels.

Columbia's Rare Book and Manuscript Library recently acquired Claremont's archives, which include intricate charts mapping the relationships between his X-Men characters, the spiral notebooks in which he jotted down his ideas, and drafts of his science-fiction and fantasy novels, plays, and short stories.

Claremont, who collaborated with numerous graphic artists during his seventeen-year career writing for the X-Men series, is also credited with creating some of the first strong female characters in any comic book.

"For a long time, female characters in comics were either sidekicks or sex kittens," says Carrie Hintz, a Columbia archivist who is organizing Claremont's papers. "Chris's women have depth and strength, they are intelligent, and they can go head-to-head with any male characters in a fight."



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An *Uncanny X-Men* comic written by Chris Claremont in 1980.

Women's track-and-field team earns historic first

Columbia women took the team title at the Ivy League Heptagonal Indoor Track and Field Championships for the first time in school history on February 25 and 26.

Marvellous Iheukwumere '14CC led the Lions with a win in the 200-meter dash and a second-place finish in the 60 meters. A native of Austin, Texas, Iheukwumere

was on a roll, having set a school record in the 60 meters just three weeks earlier. (In March, she would be named the College Athlete of the Year by the Armory Foundation, a nonprofit that promotes track-and-field competitions in New York City.)

Other Lions women to win individual events at the Ivy Championships were Uju Ofoche '13CC in the long jump, Monique Roberts '12BC in the high jump, Nadia Eke '15CC in the triple jump, Miata Morlu '14CC in the 400-meter dash, and Waverly Neer '15CC in the 3,000-meter dash.

"It sounds like a cliché, but it really was an overall team effort," says Willy Wood, Columbia's director of cross-country and track and field. "We couldn't have asked for more from any kid on the entire team."

The men's team also performed well at the Heps, finishing third behind Princeton and Harvard, despite not competing in many of the field events and sprint events. Kyle Merber '12CC took first place in the one-mile run and then ran the anchor leg behind Adam Behnke '12CC, Byron Jones '14CC, and Daniel Everett '15CC to win the men's distance-medley relay.



CU ATHLETICS / MIKE MCLAUGHLIN

The women's track-and-field team after their victory at the Ivy League Championships.

Mess, mess, mess . . . art

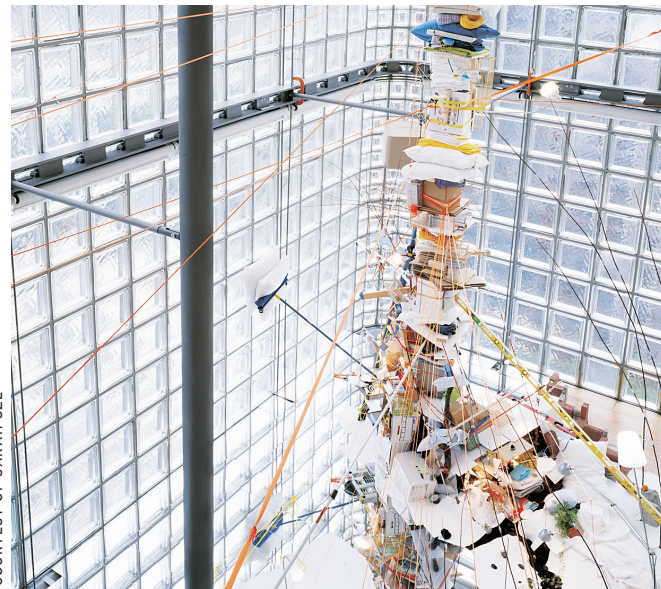
A piece of sculpture by Sarah Sze is a pack rat's fantasy: empty bottles, wire, paper clips, food containers, newspapers, hangers, pillows, light bulbs, pipes, fabric scraps, utensils, and plastic toys all arranged in a way that makes their gathering seem, somehow, monumental.

"As with Calder's art at its best," the critic Holland Cotter '03GSAS once wrote, "Sze's is reverse-heroic, tinkering made sublime."

Sze, a professor at the Columbia School of the Arts and a past recipient of a MacArthur Foundation "genius grant," was recently chosen to represent the United States at the 2013 Venice Biennale. The arts festival, which is arguably the world's most prestigious, consists of dozens of nation-themed pavilions scattered around the Italian city.

The forty-three-year-old Sze plans to create a series of installations in and around the US pavilion, a 1930s Palladian-style structure designed by Delano and Aldrich, over the next year. The Bronx Museum of the Arts will soon begin streaming video highlights of her artistic process on its website.

"My work is always a mix of stuff collected over time and all over the place," Sze told the *New York Times* recently. "Wandering around Venice without a map, you find the most incredible things. And I'm hoping to create an immersive environment that deals with that abstract experience of discovery."



COURTESY OF SARAH SZE

Hermes I by Sarah Sze

Without precedent: Ruth Bader Ginsburg honored at law school

Back when she was litigating gender-discrimination lawsuits for the ACLU in the 1970s, Ruth Bader Ginsburg '59LAW had plenty of strong cases to choose from. There were the teachers fired for being pregnant, the high-school girls barred from a science camp, and the factory workers denied health insurance for their families

because a woman couldn't be considered a breadwinner.

"We saw a steady trickle of these types of cases, which had never been filed before," Ginsburg remembers. "There was a spirit in the land that said: maybe the way things are isn't right."

The US Supreme Court justice, who did pro bono work for the ACLU while teaching at Columbia from 1972 to 1980, returned to Morningside Heights on February 10 for a daylong symposium in her honor. The event, hosted by the Center for Gender and Sexuality Law, commemorated the fortieth anniversary of Ginsburg's hiring as the law school's first female tenured professor.

Ginsburg, in conversation with two of her former clerks, Columbia law professors Gillian E. Metzger '96LAW and Abbe R. Gluck, reflected on her time here teaching courses on gender discrimination, co-authoring the first course book on the subject, and mentoring women's rights advocates on campus. While teaching at

Columbia, she also argued six cases before the Supreme Court, winning all but one.

One of those cases, *Duren v. Missouri*, surprised many people at the time because it challenged a law that seemed, at least at face value, to grant women a privilege: it made jury duty for them voluntary. Ginsburg, addressing the high court in 1978, insisted that the law's gender bias was unconstitutional and that it sent a message that women were less competent to serve on juries. Justice William Rehnquist, after listening to her argument, famously remarked: "You won't settle for putting Susan B. Anthony on the new dollar?" Silently, Ginsburg took her seat. "On the drive home, I thought of a good comeback: 'No, Mr. Justice Rehnquist, tokens won't do,'" she said at the symposium, laughing. "Unfortunately, I didn't say that."

Ginsburg won the case, which is now considered a landmark of gender-equality law.

To watch video of Ginsburg's talk, visit law.columbia.edu/ginsburg-symposium.

Ruth Bader Ginsburg '59LAW at a symposium held in her honor February 10.



EILEEN BARROSO

In brief

Spectators forever

The *Columbia Daily Spectator's* board has announced plans to digitize and publish online the student newspaper's entire run from 1877 to the present, creating what will be known as the Spectator Archive. The multiyear project will be overseen by the Columbia University Libraries. It is expected to cost about \$125,000 and will be paid for by the libraries and with donations from *Spec* alumni and friends.

The first issues to go online will be those from 1955 to 1992. "This includes the paper's coverage of some key events in Columbia history, including the protests of 1968 and the implementation of coeducation in 1983," says Stephen Paul Davis, the director of the Libraries Digital Program. These first issues, he says, should be available electronically by this fall.

Provocative profs

Columbia professors Kara Walker and Kenneth Frampton are among ten new fellows being inducted into the 250-member American Academy of Arts and Letters this spring.

Walker, a silhouette artist best known for creating elegant and sexually charged scenes that depict racial power dynamics in the old South, is a professor of visual arts at Columbia's School of the Arts.

Frampton, a British-born architecture historian and theorist, developed the concept of "critical regionalism," which argues that contemporary Western architects have tended to adopt a universal progressive style and should counter this by incorporating local building traditions in their work. He is the Ware Professor of Architecture at the Graduate School of Architecture, Planning, and Preservation.

Math major wins Marshall

Alex Frouman '12CC has received a Marshall Scholarship for up to three years of graduate study in the UK. Frouman, a mathematics major who is a member of the University Senate and co-chairs its

student-affairs committee, plans to study economics at Oxford.

He hopes to conduct research on economic policy and financial regulation, with a particular focus on how the United States and the United Kingdom can work together to regulate international markets.

CJR names new editor

Cyndi Stivers '78BC, the former managing editor of *Entertainment Weekly's* website and the founding editor of *Time Out New York*, is now editor in chief of the *Columbia Journalism Review*.

Stivers, who began her career with a full-time job at the *New York Post* while an undergraduate at Barnard College, made a name for herself in 1995 by launching *Time Out New York*, an offshoot of the London listings guide, where she remained for ten years. During Stivers's three years at *Entertainment Weekly*, the website doubled its audience.

Stivers is a trustee of Barnard College and an adjunct professor at Columbia's journalism school.

Firestein and Zajc elected to AAAS

Biologist Stuart Firestein and physicist William Zajc have been elected to the American Association for the Advancement of Science. The Columbia professors were among 539 fellows inducted at the scientific society's annual meeting in Vancouver in February.

Firestein, who is chair of the biological-sciences department, is known for his pioneering work on the mammalian olfactory system. Zajc, the chair of the physics department, is a leader in relativistic heavy-ion physics, which uses high-energy nuclear collisions to try to understand what happened in the first milliseconds of the universe's existence.

That's teaching them

Nine professors were honored for their teaching and mentoring skills in March,

when they received the Distinguished Columbia Faculty Award at a celebratory dinner at the Italian Academy. The awards carry a prize of \$75,000 paid out over three years; they were made possible by a \$12 million donation from Trustee Gerry Lenfest '58LAW, '09HON.

This year's winners are political scientists Fredrick C. Harris and Robert Y. Shapiro, chemist Laura J. Kaufman, art historian and archaeologist Holger A. Klein, history-department chair Mark Mazower, Latin American-literature scholar Frances Negrón-Muntaner, Russian-literature expert Cathy L. Popkin, French-studies scholar Emmanuelle Saada, and psychologist Daphna Shohamy.

Go Ask Alice! gets makeover

In January, the University launched a new version of its health and wellness website, Go Ask Alice! The site, on which Columbia health-promotion specialists provide answers to user-generated questions, has long been praised as a candid and reliable source of information about sexual health, alcohol and drug use, and other issues of particular relevance to young adults.

Now the site's thousands of archived questions and answers, which are regularly updated to ensure their continued accuracy, are easier to search by topic. The revamped site also offers health-related news alerts, polls and other interactive features, and compatibility with social-media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and Tumblr.

Northwest wins gold

The Northwest Corner Building has been awarded LEED Gold certification by the US Green Building Council for its energy efficiency, water savings, indoor air quality, materials selection, and environmentally friendly construction. LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) is the nation's most widely recognized seal of approval for green buildings.

Barnard, this is the White House calling

Barnard College has nabbed some impressive Commencement speakers in recent years, including Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton, Meryl Streep, New York City mayor Michael Bloomberg, and Sheryl Sandberg, the chief operating officer of Facebook. For the Class of 2012, Barnard lined up another inspiring key-note: Jill Abramson, the executive editor of the *New York Times*.

Then the call came in. On a Wednesday afternoon in late February, a White House official telephoned Barnard president Debora Spar's office to inquire if the women's college would like to host the president of the United States.

"I said, 'Well yes, we certainly would,'" says Spar. "I thought Jill Abramson would understand. And, as it turned out, she was entirely gracious. She said she'd be pleased to speak another time."

President Barack Obama '83CC will address Barnard's six hundred graduating seniors on Monday, May 14, at 12:30 p.m., on Columbia's South Lawn. The ceremony, at which Obama will receive the college's highest honor, the Barnard Medal of Distinction, will be broadcast on www.barnard.edu.

According to Spar, Barnard students have taken a keen interest in the Obama administration's recent political battles over reproductive rights. These include its hard-won fight for the inclusion of mandatory contraception coverage in the Affordable Care Act but also its acquiescence to GOP pressure to restrict federal funding for abortions under the same act.

"I think Barnard women know the president is personally committed to women's empowerment," Spar says. "At the same time, he's operating in a political environment where some of the reproductive



Barack Obama '83CC addresses *Fortune* magazine's Most Powerful Women Summit in Washington, DC, in 2010.

rights that women won forty years ago are suddenly under threat. For many of our students, this has prompted something of a political awakening. I'm sure the president's speech is one they won't forget."



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'66CC, '69LAW, '70BUS
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THE 1754 SOCIETY

NEWSMAKERS

Words' worth

School of the Arts poetry professor **Timothy Donnelly '98SOA** won the \$100,000 Kingsley Tufts Poetry Award for his second collection, *The Cloud Corporation*. Donnelly,



Timothy Donnelly '98SOA

whom the *New Yorker* called “an acrobatic formalist,” is also a poetry editor at *Boston Review* . . . *Modern Terrorism*, a play by **Jon Kern '07SOA**, was selected for the second annual Laurents/Hatcher Foundation Award, which grants \$50,000 to an emerging playwright and \$100,000 to the nonprofit theater that produces the play's premiere. The dark comedy, about “the difficulties of being a terrorist in the 21st century,” was chosen by the trustees of the foundation, formed in honor of writer Arthur Laurents (*West Side Story*, *Gypsy*) and his partner, Tom Hatcher.

If the startup fits . . .

Shopping has gone digital in two new ways, thanks to businesses started by alums. Clothes Horse, founded by **Dave Whittemore '06CC** and **Vik Venkatraman '06SEAS**, is a virtual dressing room, provid-

ing custom recommendations for sizing at more than fifty different online stores. Venkatraman, who formerly owned a tailoring company, created a series of algorithms that combines measurements submitted by the manufacturer and the customer to determine the best size and predict how well an item will fit . . . **Doug Krugman '93BUS** and **Lynn Zises '89BC, '96BUS, '96SIPA** created some new competition for the Salvation Army, taking charity shopping online with their site WebThriftStore. Donors post and price their own items (ranging from \$5 to \$5,000), promote them instantaneously through social media, and select their charitable beneficiary from a list of site partners.

Executive decision

President **Barack Obama '83CC** awarded **Andrew Delbanco**, the Mendelson Family Professor of American Studies and director of Columbia's American Studies Center, a National Humanities Medal “for his writings on higher education and the place classic authors hold in history and contemporary life.” Delbanco, whom *Time* magazine once called “America's best social critic,” is the author of *College: What It Was, Is, and Should Be*, the subject of this issue's Booktalk interview . . .



Andrew Delbanco and Barack Obama '83CC



AP PHOTO / STEPHAN SAVOIA

Christina Hull Paxson '87GSAS

Christina Hull Paxson '87GSAS will become president of Brown University on July 1, succeeding Ruth Simmons. Paxson studied economics at Columbia and since 2009 has been the dean of Princeton University's Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs. She is also the founder of the Wilson School's Center for Health and Wellbeing, which focuses on the impact of economic factors on children's health and welfare.

Language lab

Jacob Andreas, a senior computer science major at Columbia's engineering school, became the second Columbian in history — and the first since 1963 — to win a Churchill Scholarship for a year of study at the University of Cambridge. Andreas plans to use his time there to continue his research on computation and natural language . . . Codecademy, a company founded by **Ryan Bubinski '11CC** and **Zach Sims**, a current Columbia College student, was featured in the *New York Times* in March. The free site helps users to understand basic computing and Web languages through interactive lessons. New York City mayor Michael Bloomberg pledged to use the site to learn code this year.

Connecting the dots

Thomas Jessell, a neuroscientist and co-director of Columbia's Mind, Brain, and Behavior Initiative, received Canada's Gairdner International Award, which honors significant contributions to medical sci-



Thomas Jessell

ence. The \$100,000 prize is considered one of the most important in the medical field; many of its recipients have gone on to win the Nobel Prize. Jessell was recognized for his research revealing the basic principles of communication within the central nervous system . . . Columbia chemist Louis E. Brus '69GSAS won the 2012 Bower Award and Prize for Achievement in Science, which comes with \$250,000. Brus was honored for developing the quantum dot, a type of semiconductive nanocrystal that is used in solar cells, diode lasers, LEDs, and medical-imaging equipment.

Fearless director

The *Daily Beast* and *Newsweek* magazine included Jessica Greer Morris '06PH on their list of "150 Fearless Women," alongside names like Oprah Winfrey, Hill-



Jessica Greer Morris '06PH

ary Rodham Clinton, and Nobel laureate Leymah Gbowee. Morris was recognized for her work as executive director of Project Girl Performance Collective, which addresses women's issues through theatrical productions, giving girls a space in which to write and perform their own work.



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EXPLORATIONS

Tracking down the Alzheimer's executioner

The first part of the brain destroyed by Alzheimer's disease is always the entorhinal cortex, a small sliver of tissue behind the ear that acts as a neuronal traffic cop, shuttling memories in and out of storage. Corkscrew-shaped brain tangles — a hallmark of the disease — appear there first before popping up in nearby memory centers and then ravaging the rest of the brain.

How exactly does the disease spread? Do compromised regions infect their neighbors? Or does the disease strike the whole brain at once but only become manifest as regions fall, one by one, in order of their resiliency?

The answer, which has serious implications for developing Alzheimer's treatments, has long eluded scientists.

Now, in a remarkable case of scientific synchronism, two teams of researchers working independently of each other, yet using nearly identical methods, have made the same discovery: the protein tau, which composes the destructive tangles, is capable of migrating from brain cell to brain cell.

One of the research teams, led by Columbia neuroscientist Karen Duff, published its findings in the online journal *PLoS One* on February 1. The other, led by Harvard neurologist Bradley T. Hyman, published in *Neuron* on February 23.

"We heard about each other's work over the past year and realized we were getting very similar results, so we decided to coordinate our press outreach," says Duff. "I think we're each excited to have our findings confirmed by another group."

The teams used essentially the same study design: they genetically programmed mice to produce tau, but only within those sections of the brain that are affected by Alzheimer's early on. "Since only certain parts of the mouse brain would be capable of producing this human protein," Duff says, "if the tangles appeared anywhere else, it would mean the tau protein had traveled."

Sure enough, the scientists, upon examining mouse brains at various stages of disease development, found that the tangles were spreading in the same pattern as seen in people with Alzheimer's.

How low can we go?

New Yorkers have a long history of building on water. In the nineteenth century, they dumped huge quantities of coal ash and wood ash offshore to create much of

the land beneath the present-day Brooklyn neighborhoods of Red Hook, Carroll Gardens, Williamsburg, and Greenpoint, in addition to nearly one-quarter of Lower

Manhattan. During the last century, they built the 1939 World's Fair site, JFK airport, FDR Drive, and Battery Park City upon dirt excavated from nearby construction sites and the beaches of Jamaica Bay.

Why stop now? A team of Columbia researchers has proposed what would be the city's most ambitious land-reclamation project yet: a land bridge that would extend Manhattan's southeastern tip all the way to Governors Island, a half mile out in the harbor. The researchers presented their idea at a conference hosted by the city's planning department recently. They displayed artist renderings of a tall and verdant new district with a dozen skyscrapers surrounded by nearly 270 acres of greenways and waterfront parks. If we were to start soon, they said, the entire 640-acre development could be finished by 2035.

The researchers, who are based at the Center for Urban Real Estate (CURE), a new think tank at Columbia's Graduate



Researchers at the Center for Urban Real Estate are proposing the creation of a land bridge that would connect Lower Manhattan to Governors Island.

Duff and her colleagues hope this will lead to new types of drug treatments. Most Alzheimer's drugs currently being developed aim not to stop these tangles but rather the sticky brain plaques that are another sign of the disease. Although tau tangles are ultimately responsible for killing brain cells by ripping them apart from the inside out — some scientists call tau “the executioner” — amyloid plaques appear first, which has led many researchers to think that by controlling the body's production of amyloid they could head off the disease in its earliest stages. Drugs that target amyloid plaques have so far been ineffective, however, causing pharmaceutical companies to begin looking for ways to stop the tau tangles directly.

“To treat Alzheimer's, we might need to go after both the plaques and the tangles,” says Duff. “Our next step is to find the mechanism by which tau jumps from one cell to another. This could help us prevent the disease from spreading to other regions of the brain, which leads to more severe dementia.”



CHANG W. LEE / THE NEW YORK TIMES / REDUX

Karen Duff and fellow Columbia scientists Li Liu and Scott Small have shown how tau tangles spread throughout the Alzheimer's brain.

School of Architecture, Planning, and Preservation, call their imagined neighborhood LoLo, for Lower Lower Manhattan. They say it could provide housing for 100,000 people, jobs for 360,000, and tax revenue for the city totaling \$900 million per year.

“In addition to the long-term economic returns, the environmental benefits would be pretty dramatic,” says Vishaan Chakrabarti, who directs CURE and is the Marc Holliday Associate Professor of Real Estate Development. “When you create a neighborhood from scratch, you can put in waste-to-energy facilities, desalination plants for fresh water, and other types of green infrastructure that people don't want squeezed into their existing neighborhoods.”

Where would all the dirt come from? That's easy: the Army Corps of Engineers routinely dredges the bottom of New York Harbor to maintain shipping channels. Over the next two decades, the federal agency is expected to remove 190 million

cubic yards of silt — ten times what LoLo would require.

“All that material is going to end up in abandoned mines around the country if we don't use it,” Chakrabarti says.

Chakrabarti acknowledges that LoLo is a long shot. Zoning regulations for building atop landfill are much stricter now than when the city last undertook a big land-reclamation project, the ninety-two-acre Battery Park City, on the western shore of Lower Manhattan, in the 1970s. There is also the fact that LoLo would alter Governors Island, an old military base turned into a park in 2003. LoLo would envelop that historic landmark, forming a new ring of land around it that would be open to developers. This wouldn't necessarily violate the island's protected status, Chakrabarti says, because its grassy interior and historic infrastructure would be preserved. But it could make LoLo a tough sell to New Yorkers, many of whom

like Governors Island the way it is — as a quiet getaway accessible only by ferry.

Nevertheless, Chakrabarti, an architect and developer who led the firm Related Companies' rezoning applications for the Hudson Yards project in Midtown Manhattan, insists that he is “dead serious” about realizing this plan; he and his colleagues at CURE intend to release a full report to the public this summer.

The best argument in favor of LoLo, Chakrabarti says, is that it would be good for the planet. He points out that city dwellers, with their small homes and use of public transportation, tend to have moderate carbon footprints.

“In the next few decades, New York City's population is projected to grow at a much slower pace than the region's suburban population,” he says. “That's not good. We should be doing everything possible to make room for more people in the city.”

Visit arch.columbia.edu/cure.

REVIEWS



President John F. Kennedy surveys a divided Berlin from an observation platform in June 1963.

Up Against the Wall // By Norman Birnbaum

Berlin 1961: Kennedy, Khrushchev, and the Most Dangerous Place on Earth

By Frederick Kempe (G.P. Putnam's Sons, 579 pages, \$29.95)

At midnight on Sunday, August 13, 1961, three siren blasts roused the East German border police. They gathered before their company commander and got their orders. An hour later, Berlin's dark streets filled with armed soldiers and police officers, unspooling barbed wire and stretching it between wooden sawhorses and concrete posts. Subway and trolley lines were cut. At dawn, a wall began to rise. The US chief of mission in West Berlin, in hapless understatement, told his colleagues, "Something seems to be happening in East Berlin."

Families waved pathetically to one another across the demarcation line; East Berliners jumped from apartment houses on the border into the nets of West Berlin firemen; desperate swimmers under gunfire made a dash for the western bank of the River Spree. West Berliners, stunned to find themselves imprisoned, had to be held back by their own police from attacking East German forces.

President Kennedy, vacationing in Hyannisport, kept an increasingly loud silence as West Berliners went from dismay to outrage: why did the Americans not demolish this wall?

Thereby hangs a tortuous tale, well told by Frederick Kempe, the onetime Berlin bureau chief of the *Wall Street Journal*. In *Berlin 1961: Kennedy, Khrushchev, and the Most Dangerous Place on Earth*, Kempe '77JRN conveys the anxieties of the period as Berlin became a crucial site of struggle between the superpowers. This drama played out in human terms as a fraught confrontation between two men who could not have been more different in background and disposition. Khrushchev was a self-made Soviet man, the son of a coal miner, who had risen to power as a protégé of Stalin. He had risked much in speaking out against Stalin's legacy after his death and instituting internal reforms and a policy of peaceful coexistence with the West. But results had been

mixed: Khrushchev's ambitious plan to raise Soviet living standards through agricultural production had amounted to little, and he had let his temper sabotage a summit with President Eisenhower. Alternating aggression and conciliation, Khrushchev was impulsive and obsessed with his nation's standing. The Stalinist old guard saw him as weak, ripe for removal. Kennedy was an American patrician who in his first seven months in office had yet to acquire the respect of the nation's elites. His fluent charm concealed a great deal of inner doubt and physical pain requiring constant medication, as Robert Dallek's 2003 biography explored.

Two months before Khrushchev ordered the construction of the wall, at the German Communist regime's urging, Khrushchev and Kennedy met in Vienna. Kennedy was seeking a *modus vivendi* in the Cold War, but he also needed short-term successes to shore up his standing in Washington and on the world stage. Khrushchev thought Kennedy weak for having accepted defeat in April 1961 following the Bay of Pigs fiasco.

The Vienna summit began cordially enough, but it soon unraveled. When Kennedy asserted the Allied claim to West Berlin, Khrushchev reddened and waved the threat of war. "The US is unwilling to normalize the situation in the most dangerous spot in the world," he sputtered. "The USSR wants to perform an operation on this sore spot — to eliminate this thorn, this ulcer . . . Any violation of [East German] sovereignty will be regarded by the USSR as an act of open aggression." Kennedy, who had hoped to make progress on nuclear arms control, was shocked by Khrushchev's intransigence. He had ascertained that there was no middle ground between refraining from using nuclear weapons and destroying the entire planet. When the *New York Times* reporter James Reston asked him how the summit had gone, Kennedy told him, "Worst thing in my life. He savaged me."

Kempe tells the story with knowledge and flair, but the book is skewed by his disdain for Kennedy, whose first year in office was defined, in Kempe's words, by "inconsistency, indecision, and policy failure." Kempe excuses Khrushchev in light of the constraints working against him, without acknowledging the parallel constraints on Kennedy. True, Khrushchev was limited by a faltering economy and Chinese Communist opposition, but Kennedy was buffeted not only by his Republican critics but by US military commanders and many Democrats. Kempe describes Kennedy's bargaining as capitulation: "The consistent message he had sent Khrushchev . . . was that the Soviet leader could do whatever he wished on the territory he controlled as long as he didn't touch West Berlin or Allied access to the city." But in defending West Berlin, Kennedy was defending a Cold War border. In fact, as Khrushchev continued to insist that the Allies leave West Berlin, Kennedy asked his advisers to plan a limited nuclear attack on the Soviet Union.

"A wall," Kennedy famously told his aides, "is a hell of a lot better than a war." Kempe argues that Kennedy's acceptance of the wall was weakness, not strategy. He tells the story of a dramatic October 1961 face-off at the legendary crossing point Checkpoint Charlie as an example of the sort of conflict that the wall failed to prevent: an armored ballet of opposing US and Soviet tanks, which backed down only after discreet negotiations. More accurately, it was an event precipitated by Soviet fear that the US might try to tear down the wall. With the wall accepted, both sides reduced their armed forces in East and West Berlin to token contingents.

Kempe depicts Khrushchev's reckless act of sending nuclear missiles to Cuba in 1962 as a consequence of Kennedy's failure to demolish the wall and praises Kennedy for finding the courage to face down Khrushchev in 1962 as he had failed to do in 1961: "Khrushchev backed down in Cuba once challenged by a decisive Kennedy, exactly as General Clay had predicted he would a year earlier in regard to Berlin." But this is the wrong lesson: there is no evidence that Khrushchev would have backed down in 1961 if the US had attempted to demolish the wall. Both men had learned from the past year. Kennedy's success in Cuba was greatly aided by Khrushchev's realization that he had started something that he could not finish. Khrushchev and Kennedy looked into the abyss — and pulled back.

The German Communists saved their state. But in the end, Gorbachev's reforms, the abdication of the Polish Communists, and the East German regime's endorsement of Chinese repression in 1989 generated the protest that swept the regime aside. Before that, Willy Brandt, then West Berlin's mayor, had persuaded the West Germans to accept the new map of Europe and to work for change through contact and not confrontation.

Change came first in West Berlin itself. The city provided a full-employment program for the conventional ideologues of the "free West." However, since West Berlin was administered by the Allies and therefore not a full legal part of West Germany, its younger citizens could not be drafted. Thousands came to study at its universities — and to enjoy its mixed Turkish, working-class, and bohemian neighborhoods. An oppositional culture developed, from which both the Green Party and the peace movement grew. These were the benign consequences of the Berlin situation. Kempe's book is a vivid record of days when the division of the city seemed anything but benign. What would have happened had Kennedy listened to Clay and tried to tear down the wall? No one can say, but the president's warm reception in Berlin in June 1963



suggests that the West Berliners were quite satisfied with what he had accomplished. I happened to be visiting my wife's mother in East Berlin that day, and I recall the massed Eastern border guards at Checkpoint Charlie laughing when my four-year-old daughter asked if they had assembled to see President Kennedy. They came to attention and saluted when he climbed the observation platform at the checkpoint. East Berliners, kept blocks away, cheered

him. Survivors of danger, the Berliners on both sides knew a hero when they saw one.

Norman Birnbaum is a University Professor Emeritus at Georgetown University Law Center. In 1986, the government of the German Democratic Republic barred him from its territory for three years "for conspiring with enemies of the state."

Linguicide // By Sarah Smarsh

The Flame Alphabet

By Ben Marcus (Knopf, 304 pages, \$25.95)

When the biblical Esther, a lovely orphan who becomes the queen of Persia, learns of a plot to exterminate every Jew in the kingdom, she faces a conundrum: inform the king and risk death for speaking when not spoken to, or stay quiet and risk death in the pending slaughter, since she — unbeknownst to the king — is herself a Jew. Esther decides to speak, revealing

to her husband both the scheme and her true identity. The king is so moved by Esther's boldness that he forgives her breach of protocol, and ultimately he allows the Jews to save themselves.

The Flame Alphabet's Esther shares her namesake's flair for candor. A hostile teenager, she loathes her parents' banal how-was-school-today conversation — what her dad, Sam, who narrates the novel, calls "all the functional vocal prompts one bleated in order to stabilize the basic

encounters." If Esther says something, you can bet she means it. But in the apocalyptic setting that the author Ben Marcus has created for her, when she speaks, her words kill rather than save.

Here, from the mouths of babes comes a mysterious, seemingly viral force, carried by speech, that infects the adults who hear it — their tongues harden, their orifices seep, their skins loosen. In the face of this plague that science can't name, bodies across the world go slack, electronic transmissions go silent, and packs of damn creepy kids rove dark streets, carelessly — or maybe maliciously — talking.

Marcus, an associate professor of creative writing at Columbia who defended experimental fiction against its critics, the most prominent among them Jonathan Franzen, in a widely discussed *Harper's* essay in 2005, gives his second novel a much more con-

ventional arc than he gave *Notable American Women* (2002). But *The Flame Alphabet* continues his tradition of drawing profundity from unapologetically unsentimental contexts. This tale, rooted in philosophy and rife with agony, is a Zen retreat in hell.

Children are part of that hell, and the author never treats them as precious. But for Sam and his wife Claire, their pretty only child is dangerously precious; they value her far more than they value themselves. While many parents, sickened beyond recognition by their children's speech, abandon them in order to survive, Sam and Claire refuse to let Esther go. Instead, while Claire laments her failing ability to care for the girl, Sam tries to reason his way through the incomprehensible crisis. He devises a method for mapping his neighborhood's residual sound and, later, obsessively chases a cure through experiments in both medicine and written language. Meanwhile, in a society where speech has been turned off, Sam and Claire steal away with a group of fellow Jews (Jewish children are the first carriers of the contagion) to receive radio messages from a rabbi they know only by voice. In their earthen "hole that is hot with language," they are advised to take responsibility for what is happening.

"I did this to you," the rabbi encourages them to say to their neighbors. "Not my child. *I did it.*" Yes, sad Sam and ashamed Claire created Esther, the source of their suffering. They cling to her, and she resents them for it. When the epidemic escalates to include adult carriers, and speech becomes physically detrimental even between husband and wife, Sam clings to Claire, too.

"You realize that you're hurting her, right?" says a man who calls himself Murphy. "You probably think you have her best interests in mind, but believe me you don't know what they are." But Sam holds on to the belief, the narrative, that he can fix things.

Stories are dangerous, Murphy warns. "Because they happened long before we were born," he sneers at Sam, "we somehow decide they are extraordinarily important and we shut our brains



down, we turn into imbeciles, we let the past start thinking for us. *That's sickness.*" Adapting, it seems, will require letting go of narratives — ideas, even — and becoming whatever exists without them. Mental energy is precisely the wrong treatment for a problem rooted in thinking; it's no coincidence that smart people are the first ones to see their faces shrink and pucker.

When the underground radio signals cease, Sam is left with himself, and millennia of hackneyed human notions are suddenly silent. "I was alone out there, and any channel of insight would have to be one I manufactured myself." This struggle against cliché, which recalls Ben Lerner's 2011 fictional portrait of a young writer, *Leaving the Atocha Station*, permeates the story and the narrator's telling of it, and this question of expression is as fascinating as the plot.

Along the way, discomfiting imagery — a child tapping menacingly on a car window, urine the consistency of pudding, salt crammed into mouths in accordance with an ancient remedy — keeps one from lingering too long on any given page. Some of the most disturbing scenes

occur after Sam's hypotheses land him a research gig in the laboratory complex of some mysterious authority. Amid horrors, he must wonder: for whom am I working? For whom is language working?

Sam's tale is one of a man who tries and hopes, but his tone is defeatist and sarcastic. (Marcus has reported laughter at some readings, but *The Flame Alphabet* is most definitely not a comedy.) Sam acknowledges his scientific failures, sometimes shifting into the second person to address the unknown reader. Fine, he asserts for much of the novel, I don't need to communicate; I only need my family to be reunited. "My shame would be safely contained inside what was left of me. Barring some miracle, I'd never be able to tell this story. It could die with me." But he did tell that story, of course, through hundreds of pages of prose — the one irony that seems to escape this self-aware character.

Whether he speaks or doesn't speak, in some way he dies. It's scriptural Esther's conundrum: does one stay quiet against impulse, or to follow that impulse without regret?

Jealous Boy // By Rebecca Shapiro

American Dervish

By Ayad Akhtar (Little, Brown, 368 pages, \$24.99)

In Ian McEwan's novel *Atonement*, a thirteen-year-old girl in pre-war England makes a terrible mistake. Led astray by a head full of melodramatic stories, Briony Tallis callously breaks up a romantic relationship, creating a rift that opens into a chasm, leaving two lives ruined and her own eclipsed by guilt.

Had *Atonement* been set in suburban Milwaukee, circa 1981, and had Briony been a Pakistani-American boy, she'd have been a dead ringer for Hayat Shah, the narrator of *American Dervish*, the much-anticipated debut novel from Ayad Akhtar '03SOA. Like Briony, Hayat is responsible for the demise of an important relationship and the tragic chain of events that follows it. But while Briony is inspired by fiction, the voice in Hayat's head — his moral compass — is Muslim fundamentalism.

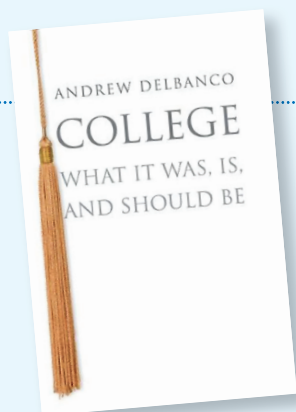
Hayat doesn't start out as a zealot. The only child of educated, secular parents, he sees Islam as a minor inconvenience, something that excludes him from the church ice-cream social and the school-cafeteria line on hot-dog days. His father, Naveed, a philandering doctor who hides liquor bottles in his car, is firmly opposed to religion, while his mother, Muneer, is more improvisational. She adheres strictly to some traditions but also exercises her own spiritual whim, pulling Hayat out of school on Yom Kippur, for example, having been touched by the holiday's spirit of repentance and

forgiveness. If Muneer, who trained as a Freudian psychologist but was forced to give up her career for marriage, has a parenting goal, it is not that Hayat grow up to be a pious man but, rather, simply a good one, particularly where women are concerned: "When a Muslim woman is too smart, she pays the price for it . . . in *abuse*," she warns, dramatically. "That's why I'm bringing you up differently, so that you learn how to respect a woman."

Then, suddenly, there is a woman: Muneer's best friend, Mina, who flees a dismal marriage in Pakistan and comes with her four-year-old son to live with the Shahs. Eleven-year-old Hayat is wary, but Mina turns out to be the stuff of preadolescent fantasy — breathtakingly beautiful, with just enough charm and confidence to give him hope ("She smiled and I was struck," he says when they pick her up at the airport, paving the way for an onslaught of coming-of-age clichés).

Soon, Mina is inviting Hayat to her room for nightly stories from the Koran, against his father's will. Mina is relatively secular, too, with no headscarf and an eye toward a career as a beauty technician, but she has a devotion to the Koran that is intellectual, almost artistic. For her, Allah is a benevolent, peaceful source. "Allah will always forgive you, no matter what you do," she reminds Hayat.

With Mina's encouragement, Hayat begins not just to study the Koran but to memorize it, the first step toward becoming a



Four Years for *What?*

The book: *College: What It Was, Is, and Should Be* (Princeton University Press)

The author: Andrew Delbanco, Mendelson Family Chair of American Studies at Columbia

Columbia Magazine: Why do students go to four-year colleges in 2012? Are the reasons the same as they were, say, forty years ago?

Andrew Delbanco: I think today's students are searching for a way to construct a meaningful life just as young people always have. Part of the responsibility to show them the possibilities rests with their college teachers — not to coerce them into a certain view, but to put in front of them opportunities for opening their minds.

CM: Some colleges offer more of a smorgasbord, others more of a set menu.

AD: With our Core Curriculum, Columbia College falls on the prescriptive end of the spectrum. Those who don't understand the Core say it's an ideologically narrow education. But the truth is that all the texts that students encounter in the Core are arguing with each other. The Core is an opportunity for students themselves to debate the big questions.

CM: One of the big themes in your book is the religious origins of most of the older American colleges.

AD: On the façade of Earl Hall are the following words: "Erected for the Students That Religion and Learning May Go Hand in Hand and Character Grow with Knowledge." This was an axiom in the era when virtually all colleges had a denominational connection. It's a history that is still evident at places like Baylor or Notre Dame, but harder to see at an institution like ours. Columbia never was a sectarian college, nor should it be. But that doesn't mean we should give up the idea that college is about the growth of character.

CM: "Character" can be a loaded word, especially in admissions.

AD: Yes, for a long time it was a word invoked by the gatekeepers to describe something that minority candidates, especially Jews, were thought *not* to possess. And yet the idea that admissions decisions should be based on something more than grades and test scores also has an honorable history.

The culture of college admissions is a modern reiteration of how the early gathered churches were formed — churches from which our oldest colleges emerged. At least in theory, these were communities into which you were invited upon demonstrating that you had something to offer to the other members. From our point of view, they were not diverse communities — after all, everyone looked more or less alike and had a similar genealogy — yet admission was understood to signify, as the Puritans put it, an "aptness to edify another."

Today this is still the question that my colleagues in admissions ask of every candidate who wants to come to Columbia College: What would you bring to the class? How would you enrich the community?

CM: Because students have as much to learn from each other as from their teachers.

AD: That's one reason why the small discussion class is such a critical component of education at Columbia. Students from different backgrounds come into a room with established opinions, but once they start to listen to one another, to reflect on their own ideas in the light of others, they learn the difference between an opinion and an argument. Surely we want to be a society that respects that difference. The college

classroom is a place where one learns the procedures of deliberative democracy.

CM: You worry about the well-being of humanities studies.

AD: As numerical measures are applied more and more as tests of the quality of a college — what's the graduation rate, what's the job-attainment rate, what's the performance on standardized tests — the subjects closest to my heart are coming under even more pressure. The percentage of students majoring in the humanities at virtually all elite colleges is already declining. Yet a book like *Moby-Dick* has the power to transform a life — as it did mine.

CM: Over the years, you have suggested several reasons why people go to college — pragmatic reasons, philosophical reasons. In your book you describe the experience of running into an older alumnus who said you had missed the point.

AD: He said Columbia College had taught him "how to enjoy life" — and I was knocked over. Columbia had opened his mind and his senses to the world, which was very moving. We need to make sure that kind of education persists.

But how do you measure that power? How do you know about the joy of music or the arts if you have not experienced it? If the College gives up telling students at least to some degree what they ought to try out, students will tend to stick with what they are already familiar with. There are students who have never seen a play by Shakespeare. If the College doesn't provide that opportunity for them, who or what will?

— Michael B. Shavelson

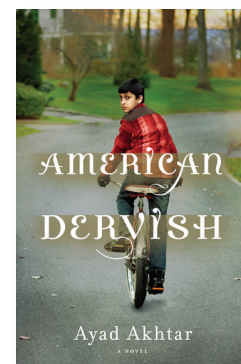
scholar, or hafiz. Sexual and spiritual development merge in awkward, confusing, and thrilling ways, and Hayat becomes charged with feelings: “That night my nerve ends teemed and pulsed,” he says, after Mina gives him his own Koran. “I still recall the vividness of my cotton pajamas against my arms and legs, the fabric pressing here and there, distinct points of contact alive with pleasure . . . I fell asleep and dreamt all night of Mina’s hands turning the yellow-white pages of my new Quran.”

But Mina is oblivious to Hayat’s interest, finding favor instead with Naveed’s brilliant young research partner, Nathan Wolfsohn (“Jewish, urbane, and pleasantly gregarious”). He and Mina meet at a family barbecue and are instantly smitten, leading to a heavily chaperoned courtship. Both Naveed and Muneer encourage the relationship, especially when Nathan makes an enormous sacrifice: despite having lost much of his family to the Holocaust, he offers to convert to Islam. As the relationship escalates, though, so do the hateful attacks against it from Muslim extremists. The Shahs cannot shelter Mina and Nathan from the community. “My father warned me about this,” Nathan despairs. “He’s said his whole life that no matter who we try to be, no matter who we become, we’re always Jews.” Nor can they silence their own son, who has been listening a little more closely than anyone thought.

Akhtar studied film, not fiction writing, at Columbia, and his plotting is more impressive than his prose, which borders on the overwrought. But in many ways his experience in film ideally prepared him for writing this book: while still in graduate school, Akhtar developed

the idea for *The War Within*, a film in which he eventually starred, about a Pakistani student’s radicalization and journey toward terrorism. Things don’t escalate that far for Hayat, though the idea that they could, that they might have in another time, is haunting. Twenty years before September 11, tensions were already ripe between some Muslims and the West, and Akhtar spells them out boldly and clearly. Several novels have already been set in the aftermath of the 2001 terrorist attacks; Akhtar’s choice to look back instead at some of the forces that shaped that day is fresh and illuminating.

What most distinguishes Akhtar’s novel from its peers, though, are the complicated people that he creates to wrestle with these tensions. Akhtar’s characters are laudably three-dimensional: hypocritical, sanctimonious, confused, and also deeply sympathetic. Mina and Muneer are hardly the picture of submission, and yet we come to understand the ways in which it is important to them to be Muslim women. Naveed is a wretched husband but a devoted father and friend, and his righteous indignation at his own religion’s potential for bigotry is heart-swelling. And Hayat, at the center of it all, is not a terrorist; he is a jealous boy, a young, foolish Briony Tallis who, in his desperate quest to do right, shows how very easy it is to do wrong.



The Elderberry Statement // By Paul Hond

Diary of a Company Man: Losing a Job, Finding a Life

By James S. Kunen (Lyons Press, 245 pages, \$24.95)

“I’m like Jonah in the whale,” James Kunen ’70CC writes in the October 27, 2000, entry of his diary-style chronicle of midlife redemption *Diary of a Company Man: Losing a Job, Finding a Life*. The whale was the newly merged entity of AOL Time Warner, and Kunen, a celebrated scribe of the 1960s student antiwar movement, had become its director of corporate communications. “How the hell am I going to tell you the inside story?” he says to his imagined readers. “I can’t see a fucking thing! I’m in the belly of the beast.”

Kunen ends up telling a different inside story: that of his own spiritual rebirth after eight years in a job that he doesn’t believe in but performs exceedingly well. His duties include writing speeches for AOL Time Warner chiefs Gerald Levin and Steve Case and a column for the house organ *Keywords* emphasizing employee uplift in the face of

mass layoffs. When he comes across a muckraking website’s attack on *Keywords* headlined “Internal AOL Time Warner Newsletter Rallies the Troops by ‘Humanizing’ Leadership,” which calls the journal “old-fashioned hucksterism, mixed with lessons from management seminars,” Kunen writes, “I can just picture the angry young man writing these scathing criticisms. He looks a lot like me twenty years ago.”

Or longer. For those familiar with Kunen’s first book, *The Strawberry Statement: Notes of a College Revolutionary*, a wise, funny, dazzlingly precocious account of the Columbia student uprisings of 1968 written when Kunen was nineteen, the spectacle of the fifty-something author trembling inside the whale feels like a cosmic joke.

“How did a youthful idealist end up as a corporate flack?” Kunen writes at the outset, speaking for many an educated, middle-class

radical, just as he had done in *The Strawberry Statement*. “God, I don’t know. It’s not something I planned.” There is real despair here, but the simple answer is that Kunen, who had once toiled as a public defender and later as a public-interest journalist, and who has two kids, needs the paycheck, and each time AOL Time Warner plumps his bank account with a direct deposit he is “suffused with a feeling of well-being that lasts for several hours.”

Then it’s back into the existential pit. Kunen feels guilty “spending ten minutes of the company’s time e-mailing the president of Egypt, asking him to grant clemency to a woman sentenced to hang for the murder of her husband.” He befriends homeless men on the streets outside company headquarters and admits, “I like the *idea* of homeless outreach work, but I don’t do well with horrific odors and running sores and bare feet with grotesque black nails.” A secular Jew, he teaches English one night a week at the Arab American Association in Marine Park, Brooklyn. He feels a “secret shame” in the face of plumbers and electricians, whose know-how he values above his own. And he has at least one awkward encounter in

an elevator with a company bigwig. Here he runs into AOL Time Warner COO Dick Parsons. The men exchange pleasantries, and Parsons, upon exiting, tells Kunen to “have a good day.”

“‘Have a *productive* day,’ I replied, in the grip of some sort of madness. *Thank you* would have sufficed.

“‘I’ll do my best,’ he said sourly, looking distinctly unamused.”

Kunen, shaken at having overstepped his bounds, likens his reply to “slapping the queen on the back.”

Funny stuff, but the laughs come easier because we know up front that the story will not play out as tragedy, that we will not see Kunen, his soul finally depleted, making a self-mocking speech at his no-frills retirement party. Nor is there any dramatic “take this job and shove it” moment; Kunen isn’t a nut. Instead, in February 2008, AOL Time Warner, in another round of cost cutting, axes Kunen, or, to extend the whale metaphor, vomits him up Jonah-style. Kunen is honest enough to express anger and hurt at his impersonal treatment at the hands of an entity he compares to “The Blob” and from which he could not have honestly expected better. Jobless at sixty, Kunen is “Too Young to Retire and Too Old to Hire,” and here, a third of the way through, the book’s focus shifts: Kunen must now find meaningful work or drown in a sense of worthlessness.

He decides he wants to tutor immigrants, something that had given him satisfaction in the past. He volunteers to teach ESL at the International Rescue Committee and applies to tutoring agencies and language schools. No one seems interested. Meanwhile, wanting to write about “work and the loss of work,” he travels to interview a retired autoworker named Ed Booth (who gives a

beautiful and memorable monologue about assembly-line life) and a woman named Esther Keeney, who nearly committed suicide and later found peace as a volunteer parish nurse. He reads *Man’s Search for Meaning*, by the psychiatrist and Holocaust survivor Viktor Frankl, whom he quotes: “I could show that this neurosis [the feeling of meaninglessness] really originated in a twofold erroneous identification: being jobless was equated with being useless, and being useless was equated with having a meaningless life.”

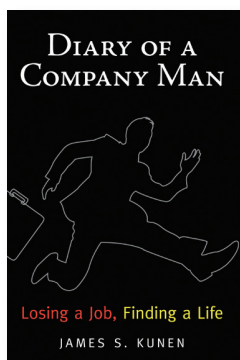
Jobs eventually come through for Kunen. We sit in on lessons, meet the students, and hear their stories, which Kunen gathers like a field collector. There’s the Muslim Iraqi couple Muhie and Suad (Muhie was a chemistry professor in Baghdad); a doorman named Reggi who taught history in Kosovo; and the courageous Sachiko, who when asked to use the word “hardly” in a sentence, says, “I have hardly any hope that my physical problems will get better.” All the while, Kunen struggles to stay afloat emotionally; he identifies with the immigrants who have left behind high-status occupations and must start over. He picks up another job teaching wealthy international students (though he’d rather teach poor refugees) and finds his class biases challenged by, among other things, a Japanese heiress’s painful inferiority complex. (“Lesson for me: Affluent people are people, too. They can need help, and sometimes you can help them. You take your meaning where you find it, not necessarily where you expect it.”)

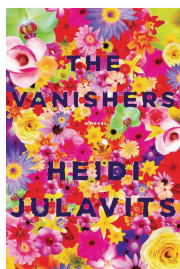
As he teaches, Kunen reports that “I’m gaining an awareness of my own language.” He must have had a similar reaction crafting euphemisms for *Keywords*, but here the engagement is positive, the learning difficult and alive. The quirks of English, seen through the eyes of his students, become riddles that Kunen must solve with clever pedagogical ploys. Kunen finds all this fulfilling but also plunges periodically into depression over his small, unheralded life — feelings that vanish the instant he returns to the classroom.

Diary of a Company Man, in its empathy, its cynical but tender social outlook, and its diaristic device, can read as a bookend to *The Strawberry Statement*. Coming more than forty years later, it is inevitably a darker, less mannered, more hardheaded book. Kunen’s wisdom and perceptions flow as ever from his bell-clear prose, and his elemental sweetness imbues even his crankiest moments with likability. In a characteristic passage, he writes, “I love my students, and I love loving them, and I love their loving me — or, should I say, the character I play at the front of the classroom — funny, engaging, patient, kind — nothing like I am the rest of the day and night.”

If Kunen, cast out from the whale’s belly, is rising to a new purpose, then a conversation about Jonah that Kunen had with a friend in the Time Inc. cafeteria back in November 2000 takes on a prophetic glimmer.

“I would assume that being in the whale’s belly is a metaphor for the quiescent period of the hero,” the friend tells Kunen. “There are many heroic tales in which the hero gives up his crusade and leads a domestic life, but then a new cause arises and he picks up his sword and crusades again.”



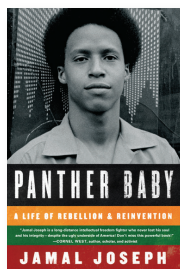


The Vanishers

By Heidi Julavits
(Doubleday,
304 pages,
\$26.95)

“In the beginning, an attack can look just like regular life,” explains Julia Severn, a star student at an elite New Hampshire psychic-training academy and the narrator of Heidi Julavits’s darkly comic fourth novel, *The Vanishers*. “You wake to discover eyelashes on your pillow, bruises on your skin where you’ve never been touched. You smell a stranger on your bedsheets and that stranger is you.” When Julia falls victim to a “psychic attack,” she feels not only brutalized but betrayed, since the perpetrator is her own mentor, the grandiose Madame Ackermann. Her powers waning, Ackermann has failed at her latest project — tracking down a missing French feminist pornographer named Dominique Varga — and when she discovers her protégée’s superior gift of clairvoyance, she lashes out. Mentally paralyzed and heavily medicated, Julia retreats to a mindless Manhattan office job. But she is soon recruited to another group’s search for Varga, and embarks on a bizarre, noir-tinted quest that leads her to the “vanishers,” distressed souls looking to start anew. Julavits, who teaches fiction writing at Columbia’s School of the Arts, at times veers in strange directions, and this deeply sardonic, often hilarious examination of female relationships is at its best when it, like the attacks that Julia describes, looks just like regular life. Women do constant damage to one another — teacher to student, mother to daughter, friend to friend — and Julavits takes these subtle, complex levels of competition and amplifies them. The result is both perceptive and entertaining, a treatment that feels long overdue.

— RS



Panther Baby: A Life of Rebellion and Reinvention

By Jamal Joseph
(Algonquin,
280 pages,
\$14.95)

“You must do more than take over this campus today,” Jamal Joseph shouted during a 1970 protest on the steps of Low Library. “You need to burn this motherfucker down!” The crowd roared, but Columbia still stood, and forty-two years later, Joseph is an associate professor in the School of the Arts’ film program. His refreshingly unapologetic memoir, *Panther Baby*, charts his path from turmoil to tenure track, and though the vivid writing is at times unpolished, the story is captivating enough to carry it. An honor student who joined the Black Panthers at fifteen, Joseph was one of the youngest leaders arrested with the notorious “Panther 21.” He earned two degrees while spending nine years in state and federal prisons, cofounded a youth theater company, collaborated on an original song that was nominated for an Oscar, and wrote and directed screenplays for a variety of networks and studios. A militant underground revolutionary group seems a far cry from the Ivy League, but Joseph’s complicated story shows that they aren’t as incongruous as they seem: “I thought you said you were going to arm me,” Joseph says at an early Panther meeting when the leader gives him a pile of books instead of a gun. “Excuse me, young brother,” comes the response. “I just did.”

To watch footage of Columbia’s event celebrating the Panther Baby release, featuring the author, political activist Afeni Shakur, and Columbia professor Dorian Warren, visit magazine.columbia.edu.

— RS

Mongrels or Marvels: The Levantine Writings of Jacqueline Shohet Kahanoff

Edited by Deborah A. Starr
and Sasson Somekh
(Stanford, 269 pages, \$60)

The Israeli essayist, journalist, and novelist Jacqueline Shohet Kahanoff ’44GS, ’45JRN never felt fully at home. She was a French-speaking Jew in Egypt, an Egyptian in the US, and an Oriental in Israel. She was born in Cairo in 1917 and grew there into an intellectually curious young woman, baffling her parents and middle-class community with her ambition to make her creative mark. She came to the US in 1940, earned two degrees from Columbia, and began her literary career with short stories that drew directly from her life in Egypt. Her first novel, *Jacob’s Ladder*, was published here in 1951 and was well received, but America left her cold. She moved to Paris, was disappointed with France, and settled in Israel.

Kahanoff arrived in Israel along with waves of Jews from the Arab world. She was troubled by the Israeli establishment’s effort to stamp out the new immigrants’ “primitive Orientalism,” which didn’t suit the country’s socialist ideal. In response, Kahanoff developed her notion of Levantinism, a multicultural society she hoped would extend beyond Israel and into the entire Middle East. It’s a theme that evolves through this welcome collection of essays and fiction. We read about her girlhood in Cairo, where none of her friends knew Arabic; we marvel that her parents rented her room to a nice young man from Algeria who turns out to be Ben Bella, the revolutionary and later the president of Algeria; and we understand, as she didn’t, that the conclusion of her final piece (an essay on Sadat’s 1977 visit to Jerusalem written two years before her own death) was illusory: “Now everything can start here anew.”

— MBS

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NORTH HAMPTON, NH: Stunning 1837 Colonial on 4.5 acres with park-like setting. Close to Atlantic/beaches. Authentic interior details include wide pine floors, three fireplaces, wainscoting, and paneling. Large barn with attached office/studio. Clay tennis court. Ralph White 'S1SEAS, Tate & Foss Sotheby's International Realty: 603-964-8028. View property at sothebysrealty.com, property ID 4215377.

SCARSDALE, NY: FSBO, 5-bed, 4.5-bath near all. See www.16GreenacresAve.com. Contact: ABINNY@aol.com, 914-722-2757.

ST. CROIX, USVI: Near Buccaneer Hotel. Family home on newly paved road. Cathedral ceilings, 2 bedrooms, 2 baths. Separate apartment with bedroom, bath, cooking. Full attic for storage. One-acre fenced yard. Automatic generator, split A/C, new water pump with UV filter. \$299,000. Contact Thomas Lerner: 631-286-5770; Joel Ureta: 340-643-4665; stxpm.com.

ST. JOHN, USVI: Oceanfront, elevated quarter-acre parcel on protected bay with anchorage. Stunning location. \$450K. '83LLM. Steve: 732-232-7929.

STONE RIDGE, NY: Contemporary 3-bedroom, 2-bath home. Sun-filled, colorful, soaring spaces. Fireplace, views, separate studio, huge garage. \$545,000. paula.saintamour@coldwellbanker.com; 917-554-5035; www.ulteriormode.com/UltMode/Husten___Haskin.html.

SUSQUEHANNA COUNTY, PA: Lakefront, 216 feet, 1.2 acres. Custom cedar home, 4+ bedrooms, 3.5 baths, 3,000-sq.-ft., indoor pool. Gated community, 25 homes. \$569,000. Nancy Fike: Longfordlake@gmail.com; 800-333-0818, x321; Longfordlakehouse.com.

Vacation Rentals

CULEBRA ISLAND, PUERTO RICO: Newly built, fully furnished, 2-bedroom, 2-bath waterfront casita, private dock. Rent weekly. mandrillo@masnyc.com.

DEERFIELD BEACH, FL: Lakefront 2-bedroom, 2-bath villa, fenced backyard, near I-95, beach. Weekly/monthly. Contact: ABINNY@aol.com, 914-722-2757.

HAMPTONS, NY: Summer house seeks singles/couples, 50s-60s. Educated, athletic, fun-loving group. May-Sept. Pool, tennis court, walk to beach/town. Photos available. Near Jitney/LIRR. Contact: mtc01605@gmail.com.

MOUNT DESERT, ME: Luxury rental, landmark lighthouse, oceanfront home. Impeccable accommodations. Sleeps 10. Vacation without ownership/maintenance expense. Access Photos Home-Away Bernard #376334. 781-690-0333.

NANTUCKET, MA: 3-bedroom, 2-bath; close to beach, town. Fully equipped. Weekly, June-October. NantucketRich@gmail.com; 518-227-6558.

PARIS: Fifth floor, quiet, alcove studio sleeps three, balcony. View Eiffel Tower. www.parisgrenelle.com; 207-752-0285.

PARIS, MARAIS: Luxury rental in center of Paris. Close proximity Picasso Museum, Centre Pompidou, and other historical sites, as well as gourmet shops of rue de Bretagne. See owner's website at www.parischapon.com.

PARIS, SAINT-GERMAIN-DES-PRÉS: Lovely studio apartment on rue Jacob. 212-463-8760; www.lefanion.com/paris.

ROME: Spacious, stylish, renovated apartment. Living room, 2 generous double bedrooms, 2 baths, kitchen/breakfast room. Central location near St. John Lateran. \$850 weekly. 212-867-0489; www.casacleme.com; Lm603@columbia.edu.

TORTOLA, BVI: 3-bedroom house 60 feet above Long Bay Beach. 646-526-7111; ewinghouse@gmail.com; www.ewinghouse.com.

VIEQUES ISLAND, PUERTO RICO: Newly rebuilt and elegantly furnished with all modern conveniences in beautiful private setting, 3-bedroom, 3-bath, swimming pool. Casa Elegante, http://enchanted-isle.com/byowner/casa-elegante.htm.

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PHOTOS COURTESY OF COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY ARCHIVES

The journalism building opened for use in 1912.

The Writing on the Wall

James Boylan saw it in print.

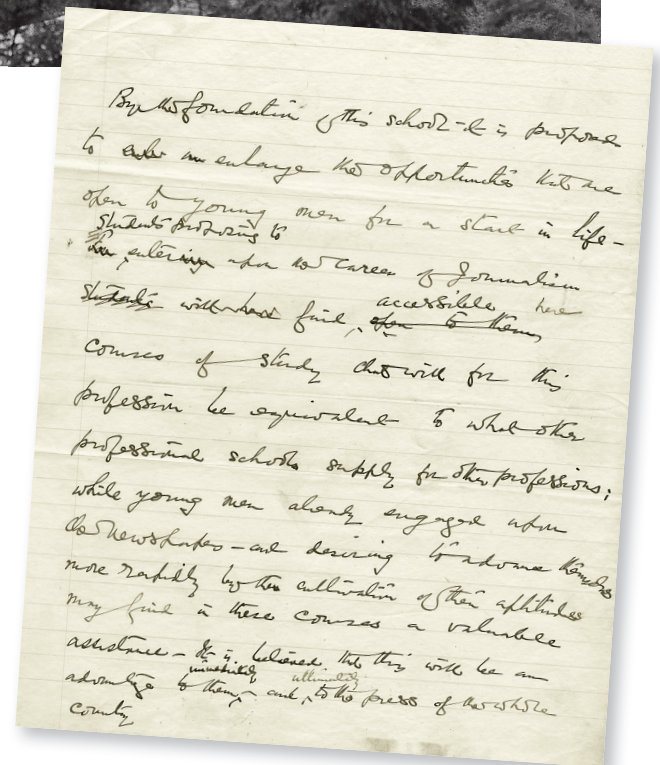
While researching his 2003 book *Pulitzer's School: Columbia University's School of Journalism, 1903–2003*, Boylan '51JRN, '71GSAS read the original 1903 gift agreement between Columbia and benefactor Joseph Pulitzer. The letter contained a stipulation that, a century later, had still not been fulfilled: "The building shall bear the name of the donor."

Nicholas Lemann, who became dean of the J-school in 2003, read Boylan's work. He then conferred with Boylan and other alumni, who suggested that it would be more appropriate to call the building "Pulitzer" rather than "Journalism."

Lemann agreed. He decided that the ideal moment to make the change would be during the J-school's centennial. He appealed to the Trustees, who gave their blessing. A renaming ceremony, at which the newly engraved façade will be unveiled, was scheduled for April 20, 2012 — the kickoff date of the J-school's observance of its hundredth year.

"Our school is very fortunate in having a compelling founder and a fascinating institutional history," Lemann says. "We are happy to have an opportunity to make the connection more plainly."

See you in Pulitzer Hall.



A page from the draft agreement with Columbia University to endow a school of journalism, August 1903.

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Cassia Burke '11GS

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-  Join the Columbia Alumni Arts League
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-  Make a gift
-  Forward the CAA newsletter
-  Read Columbia magazine online
-  Tune in to a CAA webcast
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