

The magazine of the Columbia Spectator
01 October 2009 / vol. 7 issue 3

the eye

Beyond the Bullhorn

inside columbia's new activism

by Tess Rankin

google kidnaps orphan books \\ the nyff knows what's best for you \\ busts and "brokeback" in butler

Editor in Chief
Thomas Rhiel

Managing Editor, Features
Melanie Jones

Managing Editor, A & E
Hillary Busis

Deputy Editor, Features
Raphael Pope-Sussman

Senior Design Editor
Meredith Perry

Photo Editor
Kristina Budelis

Online Editor
Ryan Bubinski

Eyesites Editor
Evan Omi

Ideas Editor
Jia Ahmad

View From Here Editor
Sophie Meislin

Interview Editor
Zach Dyer

Film Editor
Peter Labuza

Music Editor
Rebecca Pattiz

Books Editor
Yin Yin Lu

Food Editor
Devin Briski

Art Editor
Hannah Yudkin

Theater Editor
Ruthie Fierberg

Dance Editor
Catherine Rice

TV Editor
Joe Daly

Style Editor
Helen Werbe

Lead Story Associate
Libby Brittain

Staff Illustrators
Rebekah Kim
Matteo Malinverno

Production Associates
Alexander Ivey
Phoebe Lytle
Talia Sinkinson
Shaowei Wang

Photo Associate
Vitaly Druker

Copy Editors
Wesley Birdsall
Tess Rankin

Spectator Editor in Chief
Melissa Repko

Spectator Managing Editor
Elizabeth Simins

Spectator Publisher
Julia Feldberg

Contact Us:
eye@columbiaspectator.com
eye.columbiaspectator.com
Editorial: (212) 854-9547
Advertising: (212) 854-9558

© 2009 The Eye,
Spectator Publishing Company, Inc.



Andra Mihali

BEYOND THE BULLHORN

Inside Columbia's new activism,
pg. 07.

by Tess Rankin

cover photo by Angela Radulescu

FEATURES

03 \\\ EYESITES

\\ \ IDEAS

04 **Egalitarian or Elitist?** *Lucy Sun, Moses Nakamura, and Jia Ahmad*

\\ \ EYE TO EYE

05 **Neo-Folk from Down Under** *Zach Dyer*

\\ \ VIEW FROM HERE

06 **Cafe Culture** *Michelle Harrison*

ARTS

\\ \ MUSIC

11 **School(House) Rock** *Zach Dyer*

\\ \ FILM

12 **Cameras Obscura** *Rachel Allen*

\\ \ THEATER

14 **Lord of the Stage** *Melissa von Mayrhauser*

\\ \ ART

15 **Where the Art Is** *Liza Eliano and Annie Agle*

"We need to take action! People want to see that others are in motion, that something is happening around them, that students are striking, that people are willing to take to the streets." So said Karina Garcia in the pages of New York Magazine two years ago, in an article called "Can a Columbia Movement Rise Once More?" The story, illustrated by photographs of Columbia radicals literally gazing into beams of light, begins by profiling a few of that generation's most starry-eyed activists. Garcia, then a senior, was only one of several students portrayed as fiery crusaders against injustice, the administration, the war in Iraq.

Of course, the New York Magazine piece goes on to burst their bubble. A big anti-war rally that the activists spent most of the article planning and debating, an event headlined by Noam Chomsky and expected to draw 1,000 screaming change-agents, attracted only two or three hundred. (Some of you seniors may remember going—or not.) The story

ends dolefully, documenting post-rally careerist talk among the radicals and concluding, somewhat pitifully, that at least they had each other.

It's been two years, and the activist community seems to have suffered another setback. Despite the hunger strike and numerous SCEG rallies, construction in Manhattanville has begun, and judging from the paucity of protests on campus, you might think that the activist spirit of Columbia has withered and blown away as a result. But as Tess Rankin explains in our cover story this week, a new form of campus activism has emerged. "The days of taking over buildings and obstructing daily life have passed," says Derek Turner of the College Republicans, and there's reason to believe he's right. Unlike the self-described radicals of a few years ago, today's activists are purposefully avoiding the spotlight, and while that may not land them in a magazine, it might just make life around here a little better.

—Thomas Rhiel

Submit your creative writing to The Eye.

We are now accepting short stories, narrative non-fiction, and humorous essays. For more information, e-mail eye@columbiaspectator.com.

USE YOUR IMAGINATION

CLUB EC

BY JONATHAN KAPLAN

After a long Friday night of controlling the heavy crowds and lines outside EC, a security guard meets his friends at a bar to unwind.

Security guard: Hey guys, I'm back!
Friend #2: Another late night at work?
Security guard: Yep. Sorry if my voice is a little hoarse. I had to deny so many people, and I'm much more effective when I yell.
Friend #1: I thought the late shift meant less people...
Security guard: What? For happy hour? This isn't your grandma's place! It's a young crowd. They get there around 11. Right in time for "The Enforcer" to start his shift.
Friend #1: But you work alone.
Security guard (flexing): Exactly.
Friend #1: You're still uptown at...
Security guard: You guys wouldn't believe the lines tonight! Do you know where they sell those velvet ropes? I could use those. I like to make people wait for a long time, makes it seem more exclusive.
Friend #2: Sounds like quite the place. Can we swing by next weekend?
Security guard: Uh... well.... you need these special passes. Otherwise you gotta know one of the club owners, they can sign you onto the VIP list. But you wouldn't know them. Plus they only really sign in girls. There are so many girls just waiting to get onto the VIP list.
Friend #1: Can't you let us in?
Security guard: I mean I could. I do have that power. But I have to stick very strictly to the rules. Without rules the club would erupt into chaos. I'm talking crime, hospitalized patrons, absolute madness. You wouldn't want that, would you? Now I need some sleep. There are some private parties going down tomorrow in the exclusive suites on the 20th floor.

POP QUIZ

WHO SAID THE FOLLOWING?

BY EVAN OMI

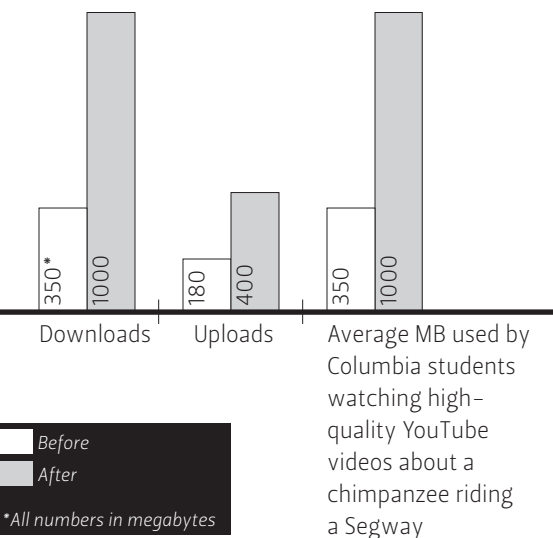
"I am widely regarded, I know, as an evil, profligate dwarf."
A. Danny Devito — 5', actor in "It's Always Sunny in Philadelphia"
B. Roman Polanski — 5'5", recently arrested Oscar-winning director
C. Nicolas Sarkozy — 5'5", president of France
D. Mahmoud Ahmadinejad — 5', president of Iran
E. Jonathan Taylor Thomas — 5'4", actor and GS student

Answer: B

THE MORE YOU KNOW

NEW CUIT INTERNET QUOTAS

BY EVAN OMI



Columbia recently pledged to recycle 77 tons of material from buildings recently gutted on 125th Street in preparation for Manhattanville construction. Here's our guide to recycling the messy results of your own controversial decisions.

Where to recycle: The Recycling Center in Lerner accepts books, batteries, light bulbs, toner cartridges, and electronics.
Where to recycle: Chain stores that bag your goods with plastic, such as Duane Reade, are required by New York City law (since 2008) to take your old plastic bags and recycle them.
Where to recycle: Barnard. In terms of university plastic recycling policy, Columbia is far more selective than Barnard. Columbia will only accept plastics 1 and 2, which means you have to take the caps off your bottles before you recycle them. Barnard, on the other hand, accepts all plastic recycling (1 to 7), all the time.

WE SPEAK FOR THE TREES

A LAYMAN'S GUIDE TO RECYCLING

BY NATHAN MCALONE

Item: The laptop you accidentally cracked in half during an overly aggressive "study break"
Item: The plastic bags from when you failed to achieve autoerotic asphyxiation
Item: The credit card you reported stolen this morning after drunkenly buying a round for everyone at 1020

EDITORS' TEN

WHAT WE'RE INTO THIS WEEK

- 1. Alain Resnais:** I assumed Resnais, the director of "Hiroshima Mon Amour" and "Night and Fog" was dead. But then he came out with a new film at NYFF! What a rad 87-year-old.
—Kristina Budelis, visuals editor
- 2. The vertical tour of St. John the Divine:** The ascent upwards through the impossibly narrow staircase is surprisingly vertiginous and panic-inducing, but the view of Morningside Heights at the top is unparalleled. Also, now I'm never again going to complain about having to climb stairs to get to class.
—Yin Yin Lu, books editor
- 3. "House":** Did anyone see that season premiere? It seems like "House" has come back to life! Not to mention the fact that the performance by theater's Lin-Manuel Miranda was amazing.
—Ruthie Fierberg, theater editor
- 4. "Seinfeld" crew on "Curb Your Enthusiasm":** The only question left for this brilliant idea is whether Larry will bring up Kramer's racist rants.
—Peter Labuza, film editor
- 5. Spinning:** 45 minutes of heart-pumping cardio is just what I need to forget about Butler and all my work. Plus, the dark room and blasting music are a nice touch that (almost) makes me feel like I'm out clubbing.
—Helen Werbe, style editor
- 6. Sharon's Sorbet:** I've never found a flavor of theirs that I didn't love. I especially recommend the coconut, the mango, or the chocolate.
—Melanie Jones, managing editor, features
- 7. The biblioteca rap from "Community":** "Buenos días / mi gusto patatas frías / El bigote de las cabras / es Cameron Díaz!"
—Hillary Busis, managing editor, A & E
- 8. Prioritizing my mental health:** After realizing that I was already in over my head this semester, I dropped a class and am attempting to do at least one thing per day just for me—whether that means working out, getting a manicure, or just taking 10 minutes to sit on my couch and read Cosmo. Columbia students, myself included, often think that we can do it all but we're not supposed to be robots! Take a moment to breathe and unwind every now and then. I promise your CC reading will wait.
—Meredith Perry, senior design editor
- 9. Online Risk at Warfish.net:** It combines my two favorite things—staring at my computer and world domination.
—Raphael Pope-Sussman, deputy editor, features
- 10. Sweaters:** It's so cold outside, and they're so warm!
—Thomas Rhiel, editor in chief

COMPILED BY EVAN OMI

Egalitarian or Elitist?

the debate over google books reaches columbia

BY LUCY SUN, MOSES NAKAMURA,
AND JIA AHMAD

Google Books is changing how the world reads.

The project's start coincided with the emergence of the search engine itself. According to the Google Books Web site, in 1996 Stanford graduates Sergey Brin and Larry Page were working on a digital libraries project that sought to index book content and enable Web crawlers to analyze cross-references and citations within books. The crawler they built inspired the PageRank algorithm that fuels the search engine Internet users know so well. The Google Books project didn't reach full steam until 2002, however, when the company actively sought to digitize as many books as possible.

They've been pretty successful. Through direct partnerships with authors and publishers or collaborations with universities like Columbia and public libraries, Google Books has been rapidly digitizing much of the written word. Books in the public domain—ones, in other words, whose copyrights have expired and can be distributed for free—are fully on view and downloadable in PDF form. Books still under copyright are often available through limited views.

The project has marked advantages: authors and publishers use limited view to tap into an Internet market they couldn't access before, and students and scholars can easily search through texts to analyze cross references and pull quotes and information. But there are also significant problems. Before Google, no company had ever digitized books under

copyright online, so no company ever had to examine the legality of doing so.

In 2005, the Authors Guild and the Association of American Publishers both independently filed class action lawsuits against Google for "massive copyright infringement" for publishing snippets of in-copyright works without authorial consent. On Oct. 28, 2008, Google, the AG, and the AAP reached a settlement in which authors of in-copyright books were to receive a cut of the profits Google made through Google Books, including online advertising revenues. The corporation also set up a database to allow authors and publishers to opt out of their digitization project, but the AG and AAP were still agitated over Google's lackluster efforts to directly contact rights holders to establish consent to publish their works online. They set a court date for Oct. 7, 2009. (Federal judge Denny Chin has postponed the court date indefinitely.) And on Friday, Sept. 18, 2009, the Department of Justice released its own highly critical report on the lawsuit, questioning Google's aggressive plans for so-called "orphan books"—books that, while still under copyright, are out of print and essentially abandoned by the author and publisher. The report also slammed the company for publishing portions of in-copyright books without direct consent from the authors.

Now the situation becomes even more complicated. Columbia is one of the main participating universities in the digitization project. Jim Neal, vice president for information services and university librarian at Columbia, is a strident defender of the University's stance. "One of our challenges as a library is to put more and more of our content

online," he explains. And while Columbia does have in-house digitization technology "somewhere in the bowels of Butler," money is a considerable obstacle. Due to the need to hire staff to manage high-tech digital cameras, catalogue, and preserve the media, costs would inflate rapidly. A much more viable option is outsourcing the work to another company, especially one as already invested in massive digitization projects as Google is.

From Neal's perspective, the online program could be the best way to make Butler's unique collections available online to anyone in the world. The Rare Book and Manuscript Library has already largely been uploaded, and the Columbia University Libraries are in the process of preparing the History of Religion project and the History of Medicine for upload as well. Columbia has also given Google all out-of-copy books published prior to 1923.

"SCHOOLS WILL BE FORCED TO PAY MONOPOLY PRICES FOR ACCESS."

This will be comparable to Google's agreements with public libraries, and will, Neal suggests, facilitate interlibrary loans. According to some of Google's opponents however, the opposite is true. Beyond AG and AAP's questions about copyright, another group, Open Book Alliance, is arguing from an antitrust perspective. A conglomerate, made up of individuals, libraries, nonprofits, and companies including Yahoo, Microsoft, and Amazon, launched a formal attack against Google's advances this past August. Peter Brantley and Gary Reback outline the problem with Google in their manifesto "Opening the Book." While large, well-funded universities can easily participate in Google's book-scanning effort, most will "be forced to pay monopoly prices for access ... creating a system of have and have-nots in our nation's educational system." Community libraries would only get a single terminal for the private database, and public schools K-12 would likely get nothing. The digitization then, instead of spreading knowledge to those with less access to it, instead "widens the digital divide by limiting access to digital books in financially hard-hit communities that have budget-constrained libraries."

It will be a long while before these issues will be settled. Kenneth Crews, director of the Copyright Advisory Office of Columbia Libraries, predicts that the earliest possible hearing for the lawsuit would take place in late 2010 and will likely have a re-hearing in 2011. In the meantime, campus resources are being set up to help authors and readers alike understand the Google Books case. The CAO is building a Web site where users will find a page of information and links about the settlement. The student group Free Culture does not have an official stance on the Google Books case and is not planning on adopting one, says spokesperson Gabe Schubiner, a Columbia College senior. Schubiner says that Free Culture wants to provide an outlet for students on all sides of the issue to become informed and, if they so choose, involved with the case. ●



Neo-Folk From Down Under

the eye interviews lenka kripac

BY ZACH DYER

PHOTO COURTESY OF HASSLE MEDIA

Lenka Kripac is an Australian-born singer-songwriter who's made her mark in the U.S. unconventionally, through TV shows, advertisements, and even an indie compilation CD. The Eye chats with Kripac about what it's like for a transplanted musician and the how to work with advertisers without "selling out."

People have called your music anti-folk. Does that resonate at all?

You know, I saw that on Wikipedia, and I think that's really random! I don't understand what that means at all. I could maybe fathom the idea of neo-folk or post-folk, but anti-folk seems a little weird to me. I guess it's just one of those American academic terms, I suppose. I mean, there's definitely a folk element to my music, I love folk artists like Nick Drake and all sorts of folk-esque music. I don't really think I'm anti-folk. But I'm sure there are worse things to be called.

You just came off your first major U.S. tour. Is this your first time in the states as a musician, or is this old hat for you?

Well actually, I relocated to L.A. a year or two ago when I signed my record deal. And the first time I came to America was in 2006, and I never really wanted to come over here or do anything here before that. I came over with a band I was playing with for SXSW. And then I really liked it, and I just kept coming back. And that's really how I landed here.

When you came to New York on the tour, how was that for you?

I love New York and I love playing here. I actually find New York audiences really great. I've heard people say that New York audiences are really aloof and almost judgmental, but I've found them to be really awesome and interested.

What was it like moving from Australia to the U.S., in terms of your career? Do you think you're more popular here or back home?

I think more people know who I am back home, mostly because I worked as an actor for a while. And then I was with this band, Decoder Ring, so I already had all that. But since I'm not there touring a lot right now, I'm not really cutting through. There's this kind of attitude that if you are Australian and you've gone overseas, if you don't come back and put in a lot of time there, they're not going to welcome you with open arms again. That's just how it is. Of course, if I had a big hit on the radio here I would probably have a hit on the radio there because they tend to play American charts;



but as far as being an Australian artist, I'd have to do there what I'm doing here in America.

A lot of your music has become popular through things like Old Navy commercials, "Ugly Betty," and "Grey's Anatomy," and your contribution to the Christmas album "Hotel Cafe Presents Winter Songs." Is it easier to work through other media to get a name for yourself and make it big?

Yes, absolutely. Those kind of opportunities are definitely more prevalent here, and the commercial aspect is available more readily here, and the consumerism is so much larger here. ... But it has made it really good for me, and I think that's why America is so attractive for artists from other countries, because you can really access that—the film and TV world—because there is this voracious hunger for more and more art and music here. So people can really get into it and I am very, very grateful for that.

I HAVE MET SOME PEOPLE WHO SAY, "YOU HAVE TO PRETEND LIKE YOU'RE 20."

And what's that process like? Having someone decide that your songs are applicable to this scene here or this show here.

You know, with the TV shows, the dramas and such, I really get a kick out of watching it, having been an actor mostly, because I do love acting

and dialogue and characters. And if the song really works in the scene and enhances what's going on plot-wise, it's great for me because it brings a new level to the song. ... In the example of "Ugly Betty," I love that show, I'm such a fan of the show and of the character. But I never really thought of my song in context with that character, so when I saw that, it was just really cool.

As far as advertising, I'm definitely more cautious of that. I don't want to sell out (or whatever that means), but it is such a great resource because you're going to access people who might not be actively searching for music, but they'll be exposed to it through the commercials. So I think most bands and artists are taking that with a grain of salt now, and accepting the opportunity for gaining fans without worrying too much about being linked to a certain brand because that just doesn't really happen anymore, people just don't care very much about that these days.

And I hate to mention it, but I read somewhere that you were a little worried about your age when you came over here. Is that true?

Well, I'm 30. I'm actually pretty old for just starting out. I was actually really concerned about that, but then I met the people at my label ... and they said to me that they loved that I had the life experience and they hoped that I would keep writing songs like I was. They were actually rather excited about it. But I have met some people who say, "You have to pretend like you're 20." And I just rejected that. So I just happen to behave like a 5-year-old most of the time, and I kind of think like ... a 17-year-old. Very rarely do I have the brain of a 30-year-old on. ●

Cafe Culture

reflecting on a laid-back staple of argentine life

BY MICHELLE HARRISON

PHOTO COURTESY OF MICHELLE HARRISON

It was my second day in Buenos Aires, my first day of orientation, and my first time actually out in the city. I knew it would be winter when I arrived here in July. But I figured, it's South America—how cold can it really get? To my dismay: quite cold. That day it was in the high 40s, but there was terrible windchill. Naturally, the director of my program thought this would be the perfect time to take a walking tour of our new home. For once, I was glad to have experienced truly freezing weather. It was somewhat amusing to watch the Porteños (people from Buenos Aires) tightly bundled up in their fur coats, hats, scarves, gloves, and boots, their faces showing signs of fear that they would freeze to death at any moment.

I tried to enjoy my first real glimpses of the city, but it was hard with tears streaming down my face and a hood pulled so tight that my peripheral vision was cut off. As we finished trudging through the streets, my new-found friends and I decided that the best thing to do was to seek immediate refuge, preferably in one of the hundred cafes we had passed earlier. We made it through to Santa Fe, one of the major thoroughfares in the city, and crowded into a booth.

We sat, trying to warm up with coffee and tea while stuffing our faces with warm empanadas, and told stories. We compared the journeys that had led us to Buenos Aires, speaking in a slur of Spanish and English. But after a while, we decided to not-so-subtly listen in on the many

too, in no rush. And suddenly we realized that two hours had magically vanished.

I sat in the cafe that day, impatiently waiting for the check to come, unaware that I had just encountered cafe culture—a way of life that would punctuate my next five months here. Little did I know, in Buenos Aires it's normal to order a single drink and sit in the cafe for hours, uninterrupted by the waiters (so unlike the waiters in restaurants in the United States, who constantly hover). Little did I know, every time I would go to a cafe or a restaurant in Argentina, it would take a good 25 minutes to flag down the waiter and get my bill. Little did I know, it would be a normal occurrence for the cafes to be filled with people in the middle of the day—people who, one would think, should be at work, but instead are relaxed and immersed in enjoying a good medialuna.

This same relaxed attitude is everywhere in Buenos Aires. I was not aware, that first day, that at my internship I would spend a large quantity of my time observing the other employees as they showed up late, left early, and walked around the office singing, eating, and telling stories: all of which are common office practices. I also didn't

know that one of my classes at the local university would always start 15 minutes late, and then pause half way through for a 30-minute coffee break. I could even walk into class 40 minutes late, with no excuse, and still be greeted with a smile and a “¡Buen día! ¿Cómo te va?” from the professor.

As I think back now on that first day wandering through Buenos Aires, on my first experiences and observations of the locals, and my time here over the past two months, I realize that perhaps the Argentines in the cafe had the right idea about life. Coming from Columbia and New York City, where each day is a test to see how much can be accomplished, I often become frustrated and impatient with the great inefficiency that this relaxed, laid-back attitude can produce.

Yet some of my most memorable and treasured times here have been sitting in a cafe sipping tea with friends and doing what the locals do best: relax. At least for now, I welcome this cafe culture with open arms. Here, I am slowly learning to be patient. When something goes wrong, I just sip some tea and think back to that first day in the cafe, repeating to myself one of the Porteños' favorite phrases: “Así es la vida.” That's life. ●

IT'S NORMAL TO SIT IN THE CAFE FOR HOURS, UNINTERRUPTED BY THE WAITERS.

vivacious customers who were speaking in the usual exceedingly emotional, Argentine way. The cafe was filled with all types of people: older women sharing gossip in stage whispers, young people reading newspapers and magazines, and businessmen in suits. They all must have had somewhere to go. And yet no one seemed to be in a rush to go anywhere.

We gazed out the window onto Santa Fe and saw the shops and other cafes. We heard the honks of the crazy bus and taxi drivers. We saw multitudes of people meandering down the street, they,





Angel Radulescu

BEYOND THE BULLHORN

inside columbia's new activism

By Tess Rankin

ON A BULLETIN BOARD IN HAMILTON, STUDENTS HAVE been debating the state of activism on campus in chalk graffiti. "It's over dumbass," reads one comment. Below is a thoughtful reply: "If you think that you live on another planet."

This back-and-forth hints at the deep emotional response evoked by Columbia's activist reputation. Whether they are earnest or cynical, most students have something to say—or scrawl—about the matter.

Columbia imagines its history as a series of peaks—moments of activist glory or hullabaloo—that, as they approach the present, come closer and closer to Earth. The collective events of 1968 tower in the distance with images of building takeovers and the protests of a generation of radicals. The 1985 hunger strike for divestment from apartheid South Africa, the 1996 hunger strike that led to the creation of the Center for the Study of Ethnicity and Race, and the hunger strike of 2007 that is most closely associated with Gatorade and a papier-mâché oc-

topus are some of the other highlights of Columbia's activist heritage.

Nostalgia—or thank-goodness-we're-over-it-ism—tends to arise in conversations that cite these, and perhaps a few other, events. But are we really over it? A close look at Columbia's current activist scene reveals significant change, rather than decline. An unseen—and successful—activist movement exists on campus. Why does it remain in the shadows?

Work to relocate a gas line between 125th and 129th streets began Monday, Sept. 21 in front of Floridita Tapas Bar & Restaurant. The restaurant, where the Student Coalition on Expansion and Gentrification frequently meets to discuss Columbia's relationship with its neighbors, has been a flashpoint of the Manhattanville controversy, as its owner, Ramon Diaz, has bitterly protested Columbia's expansion. But on the street, traffic passed calmly. There were no megaphones. Campus basked in the crisp but mild fall weather.

AS DESTIN JENKINS PUTS IT, “ACTIVISM HERE AT COLUMBIA IS NOT SEXY.”

It might appear that this nonchalance indicates a lack of interest in the plight of Manhattanville. But across campus, SCEG had papered bulletin boards with fliers exhorting students to attend its regularly held meetings. This emphasis on meetings might seem to have replaced demonstrations,

protests, and righteous indignation. A more stirring alternative to logistical drudgery is mocked on one not-yet-covered board. “Hunger strike,” reads the chalk graffiti. Added derisively below are the words “for douchebagery.”

As Destin Jenkins, a Columbia College senior, puts it, “activism here at Columbia is not sexy.” In his attempts to revive an activist coalition on campus and bring progressive campus leaders to his WKCR radio show, Jenkins has witnessed the un-sexiness of campus activism firsthand. It consists of meetings, research, e-mails, wrangling with Lerner Hall bureaucracy, phone calls, more meetings—and a lot more e-mails.

The hours of fliering, meeting, and planning stand in stark contrast to any vision of activism as hunger-striking or building-storming. Students have forgone much of this high-profile work, now relying on a glut of paperwork and logistics in their quest to accomplish more than jaded campus wisdom commonly assumes possible.

Laura Seidman, a Columbia College senior and a member of Students for Environmental and Economic Justice, emphasizes the effectiveness of research and similar leg-work. Green Umbrella, a coalition of campus environmental organizations, of which SEEJ is a member, wanted to have campus printers accept used paper. The first step was to figure out whom to talk to. Upon discovering that the set-up of such a printer would fall under the purview of Columbia University Information Technology, SEEJ arranged for a meeting. There they discussed feasible locations for the project, and now such a printer is located in Mudd.

Setting up printers, like SEEJ's current campaign for environmentally and socially responsible

purchasing, is bound to be low-profile. But the payoff of this sort of mundane, practical work is that it gets things done.

SEEJ member Zak Accuardi, a junior in the School of Engineering and Applied Science, notes that activist groups are moving away from the usual awareness-raising events. These tend to be less effective for issues like scrap-paper printing and socially responsible purchasing—two areas in which it may be difficult to inspire student excitement. But these sorts of projects can succeed without grand campaigns, as the arrangement with the Mudd printer demonstrates.

Accuardi does not dismiss the value of protests and demonstrations, which, he maintains, have their place. The wise allocation of resources—and student indignation and involvement are both resources—is important, especially for smaller campus groups. The apparent trend away from protests and rallies is, then, pragmatic, rather than simply a sign that protests are out of vogue.

Getting the right people together to talk, as SEEJ strives to do, is a logistical challenge faced by all student organizations, especially those whose work takes them off campus. Plugging students into larger campaigns is “a jigsaw puzzle”—one frequently solved by “just a lot of e-mailing,” says David Eddie, a student in the School of General Studies and president of Students for Sensible Drug Policy. Because there is already a lot of activism surrounding this group's broad mandate for reform, SSDP focuses on supporting other activists, disseminating information, and getting students involved. It “requires a great level of diplomacy” to present the organization professionally and avoid its radical connotations, Eddie says. Very little about the networking, meetings, and conferences that characterize the bulk of SSDP's work supports the stereotype of the group as solely focused on legalizing pot. Nor do these tireless logistical efforts set this organization apart from the many others on campus.

The Columbia University College Republicans also steer clear of highly visible forms of public protest, though perhaps for different reasons. Derek Turner, a Columbia College sophomore and director of communications for the Republicans, says that the group avoids protests and demonstrations as these are rallying tactics that fall flat without a receptive audience. But, he continues, their alternative approach is not just a place-filler for more visible forms of activism. In addition to connecting conservative students with various opportunities on and off campus, the Republicans participate in debates and host speakers in order to create, as Turner puts it, “a discussion as opposed to a spectacle.” If speakers like Ann Coulter have led to discussion rather than solely spectacle, the Republicans have succeeded.

Besides the impracticality of the Republicans' inciting a liberal campus to revolution, Turner notes a general trend: “The days of taking over buildings and obstructing daily life have passed.” If his observation reflects the different times we're living in, it may also overlook the still-vibrant spirit of traditional activism that plays out on a smaller scale.

That said, rallies, protests, and demonstrations have clearly not met their end. Lucha, a group



Students reclaim a parking space in front of Barnard's gates.

Angela Radulescu

that has its origins in the Minuteman protests, took part in a march in Washington Heights against domestic violence this past Saturday. Of course, there is a subtle difference between these types of highly visible activism and what might be called the militant activism of an earlier era. It's easy to ignore the many scenes of activism at Columbia, or to witness them without experiencing any particular obstruction in daily life. This isn't 1968. We're again at war—but without a draft, the atmosphere surrounding today's conflict is different from that surrounding Vietnam. The current University administration, responsive and engaged with the student body, barely resembles '68's authoritarian bureaucracy.

The persistent organization and hard work of today's culture of activism does not represent just the dregs of an earlier, more vibrant era. After all, despite the advent of e-mail and the unattractiveness of imagining campus revolutionaries spending hours printing up event posters, this mundane, logistical work represents the continuity in on-campus activism rather than the inauguration of anything radically new. But once the e-mails are written, meetings adjourned, and fliering accomplished, the groundwork is laid for an exploration of the various social, cultural, and political consequences of bringing about change and for engagement in a move toward an increasingly multifaceted activism.

THOUGH SOME GROUPS MAY CHOOSE TO CHAMPION a single cause, all of them recognize that no one issue stands on its own. While the most recent hunger strikers drew criticism for their litany of unrelated demands, many groups today address a similarly broad range of issues (albeit with different tactics).

"We've been trying to reject the idea of single-issue activism," says Katie Miles, a Barnard sophomore and a member of SCEG. As many feel that the moment of the Manhattanville saga has passed, this attitude may help keep SCEG alive in the campus psyche as it connects with other groups, works with housing organizations and citywide and local tenant organizations, and tries to examine "the wider forces we see beyond gentrification." The group grapples with a variety of issues, such as the effects of policing on gentrification and gentrification's impact on queer culture. SCEG combines long-term and short-term concerns and relates them to Columbia's expansion, setting it in its broader context.

Multifaceted activism is more than just a solitary move by a single student organization to remain relevant. Two of SCEG's goals that might be said to represent the spirit of many progressive campus groups are to promote "an alternative vision for the rights people have living in this city" and "building accountable relationships with people in the community." Since low-profile activism depends less on its public persona, campus groups are able to delve into issues of race, class, and community without having to target an audience with concise, simplified explanations of their positions.

In the words of Johanna Ocaña, a CC senior and chair of Lucha, the group not only tries "to advocate for social, economic, political progress in working-class Latino communities," but "to draw



connections between different struggles, different injustices and bring those to light." This means that Lucha not only addresses a wide variety of issues but also examines the relationships among them. Similarly, Eddie explains that his group's work on drug policy benefits from exploring the comprehensive social implications of drug laws.

In the past, SSDP campaigned for the passage of drug reform legislation, sending a delegation to Washington, D.C. to talk to New York's senators. The new legislation resolved a discrepancy in cocaine sentencing that was based on the scientific fallacy that crack is more addictive or dangerous than powder cocaine. It simultaneously addressed a social concern: heavier sentencing for crack cocaine targeted low-income African Americans.

SSDP is now shifting its focus to the local arena with the same concern for the social and economic repercussions of drug policy. In an attempt to curb illegal police searches, SSDP is reaching out to the community and working to educate young people about their rights. "These kids get prosecuted for pot possession. ... It bars them from getting federal funding for the rest of their lives," Eddie says. This means no financial aid for college and the accompanying life-long ramifications. Their take on a sensible drug policy is not limited to legal activities but also involves a close examination and unraveling of the implications of laws and engagement with the community to educate it about these technicalities.

This all-encompassing view of activism—one that includes SSDP's community education as well as SEEJ's scrap-paper printing—is central to a new mode of campus work. If these groups have their way, it may also be what introduces a taste of the glory days of Columbia's activism to campus. Leaders of various organizations, from Lucha to Take Back the Night, speak of cultural change. Their goal is not just to affect policy, but to leave the campus in a different state from that in which they found it. This is not about a return to

TURNER NOTES A GENERAL TREND: "THE DAYS OF TAKING OVER BUILDINGS AND OBSTRUCTING DAILY LIFE HAVE PASSED."

the 1960s; it is a fully forward-looking embrace of 2009 and beyond.

Linnea Hincks, a Columbia College senior and former coordinator of Take Back the Night, refers to "multi-attack activism" to describe the group's strategy for creating widespread cultural change. TBTN is best known for its annual march and speak-out, but Hincks emphasizes that although the march is a traditional form of protest, it serves a distinct purpose for the group: Due to media restrictions surrounding the march, it's less about getting out a message and more about creating a safe space. Much of the group's work aims to bolster consent culture on campus and occurs "not so much through the march itself but through the events throughout the year" and through coordination with other groups. The literal space created by students marching through the streets should ideally be mirrored by a cultural and social safe space on campus and in the community.

It's a startling sign of the times, or perhaps of our one-dimensional interpretation of past times, that one of the most highly visible of campus demonstrations, one that most resembles earlier protests in the street, is more nuanced and multi-layered. "It's a movement," Hincks says, "It's in some ways a decentralized movement."

When an event like TBTN, which might appear to be a straightforward demonstration, is far more complex beneath the surface, and when questions of cultural change cross single-issue boundaries,

campus groups must adapt. Various decentralized movements pose both exciting opportunities for broad-based change and challenges for the feasibility of working in multiple directions. Nuanced, multifaceted campus activism brings together groups and individuals in challenging alliances.

Attempts at centralization through coalition-building can be organized or more informal. Hincks, for example, is also involved in the Anti-Violence Coalition, which for several years has united some of the groups that do anti-violence work on campus—including Nightline, the Men's Peer Education Program, the Rape Crisis Center, and the Sexual Violence Prevention and Response Program—to create a central place for the anti-violence movement on campus. This ensures mutual support and that the groups' work doesn't overlap. Hincks, who was inspired by increased participation in consent workshops, hopes to expand the coalition "to a larger number of groups." With recent growth including individuals with diverse interests, Hincks is optimistic that "the movement is really growing."

There are many advantages to a growing movement, but widespread resonance can be hard to corral. Individual organizations often differ internally over specific issues—TBTN, for example, has struggled over the place of men in the march. Because the anti-violence coalition is a locus of communication it doesn't need to come to consensus over every issue—that is not its main concern. Other campus coalitions take a similar route; the many queer advocacy groups on campus informally communicate among one another in order to provide logistical support and amplify their individual voices.

While multi-issue activism is the clear trend on campus, Ocaña notes that successful coalitions are frequently built around single shared issues. "I think unfortunately to stay dedicated to social justice work," Ocaña says, "it, for a lot of people, takes a rallying point which is often a negative event ... and sometimes they stick." The NROTC coalition, for example, was built around opposition to the military's Don't Ask Don't Tell policy, and, she says, the coalition would have fallen apart without it. According to Ocaña, other elements brought into the conversation, such as "predatory recruiting techniques of low income and communities of color," fell slightly by the wayside. "Stuff like that tends to splinter groups, it's a problem on this campus and historically."

Yet the bureaucratic challenges of spontaneously formed coalitions of individuals or groups, as was the case with NROTC, can multiply. Consequently, activism that addresses an immediate issue that has arisen on campus—frequently the most visible of Columbia's activism—can also be the most cumbersome.

THIS IS NOT ABOUT A RETURN TO THE 1960s; IT IS A FULLY FORWARD-LOOKING EMBRACE OF 2009 AND BEYOND.

Miles, whose group deals with some of the most high-profile of recent events, notes something slightly more insidious than the mere proliferation of red tape in Lerner. Since the 1960s, the administration has done a good job of assimilating protests, which, she says, can inhibit sweeping change by channeling energy and dissent into approved structures and processes. Activists on campus are responding by intensifying their own organizational and support structures, working across group lines to build a community and effect change.

To combat institutional sluggishness, facilitate change, and perhaps even make activism sexy again, Jenkins hopes to assist in the formation of a new, leftist activist coalition on campus. He aims to revive some of the momentum of the now-defunct Columbia Coalition Against the War in order to provide a place for complex, fruitful discussion. With many CCAW members graduated, Jenkins wants to reengage the new board members of groups that introduced their incoming leadership to the coalition at its last meeting.

This cycle of re-engagement and organization places Jenkins and others squarely in the tradition of decades of activist work at Columbia. The unflagging grunt work of activism rarely captured in glowing retrospectives continues to animate student efforts, but it also nurtures complex, insightful discussions and debates that do not get blasted from bullhorns or Low Plaza speakers. The relationships built among activists—occasionally fleeting, sometimes fraught with politics and difficulties—are the real testaments to today's quietly tireless work. ■



SCHOOL(HOUSE) ROCK

what we listen to when we study, and why

BY ZACH DYER

ILLUSTRATION BY MEREDITH PERRY

“How can you study like that? Shut that off!” That’s what my mom always shouted from outside my door when I lay sprawled on my carpet, buried deep in a chemistry book as I tapped my pencil to the beat of “Genie in a Bottle.” I can’t count the number of times that the top 250 hits of the 1990s have gotten me through midterms and finals relatively unscathed.

Scan any given room in a library during finals, and you’ll see the majority of students sporting earbuds while engrossed in their textbooks. While practically all of us listen to music as we study, the idea is a little counterintuitive: you’re asking your brain to process two things at once but expecting it to remember only one of those things. So why do so many of us play music and study at the same time? Why do we even have trouble studying without music? And what about those who don’t or can’t listen to music while studying? Is one group learning more than the other, or is this variation just due to the different ways our brains work?

“It really depends on what I’m studying,” explains Kristin Moore, a Columbia College junior, when asked if she listens to music while hitting the

books. “If I’m reading, I can’t listen to music because I won’t pay attention; I may even start singing. But if it’s something like a problem set, definitely. I am not really sure why, though.” Moore’s response is typical—when asked, most students say that if they are only reading, they can’t listen to music or they’ll be distracted. “Sometimes it feels like I have to listen to music, though, for the same reason I can’t study in Butler—I need some kind of background noise ... I can’t stand it being so quiet,” Moore continues.

“I DARE YOU TO LISTEN TO SOMETHING BRAND NEW AND TRY TO STUDY.”

Her statement seems contradictory, especially with my mother’s voice still ringing in the back of my head. Isn’t quiet exactly what we need to focus properly? But the evidence seems to suggest otherwise: out of 50 students I polled, 42 of them generally prefer to study with music playing.

The type of music we play, however, varies greatly. Three Barnard sophomores sitting in

the Butler lounge, for example—all plugged into their laptops as they study—are listening to vastly different genres. “I tend to listen to music in Spanish so that I’m not distracted by lyrics,” says one. The second prefers “The Beatles—all day, every day.” The third just uses Pandora and “lets that take care of it for me.” And Aliko Carter, a Columbia College junior, specifies that if she’s reading a book, “it has to be instrumental.” With such a broad spectrum of preferences and practices, how can we predict why we tend to listen to music while studying?

Though the Columbia psychology professors I contacted couldn’t be reached, Claire Jennings, Ph.D., a neuroscientist, does have a few answers. “It’s all rather logical ... why many of us submit to such practices [listening to music while studying],” she explains. “You described it as ‘counterintuitive,’ but really, it makes sense.” Some shallow studies, she says, conclude that listening to music is detrimental because it forces the brain to focus on two things at once. Jennings, though, describes these studies as simply “false.”

The reason we listen to music while studying is actually to reduce the amount of input into our brain, Jennings explains. “If you’re sitting in the library and you hear people walking in, opening their bag, coughing, maybe the buzzing of someone’s cell phone in their pocket,” she says, all of that noise actually diverts attention away from the material a hand. We listen to music to block it all out.

As for our divergent musical preferences while studying, “it really does depend from person to person. But there are clear patterns,” says Jennings. I tend to listen to ’90s pop, she tells me, because it’s familiar to me—these are the songs I grew up listening to. Different people are familiar with different genres, which accounts for our preferred study music. “I dare you to listen to something brand new and try to study,” Jennings says. “It would be even more difficult that hearing all those people moving around and doing whatever in the library.”

The people who listen to classical or instrumental music while reading—or don’t listen to anything at all—do so because of the way memories are stored while reading, she explains. “When we read something for the first time it requires many sections of our brains,” says Jennings. “You need to process vocabulary, grammar, and then sort out the information behind the words and store that. That’s a lot for one brain to do!” It’s also nearly impossible while words stream in from iTunes.

That said, listening to music with lyrics does work for some people. “Music triggers something different in each of us, so there really is no rule for any of it,” Jennings clarifies. She does agree, though, that the more familiar a song or album or playlist is, the less it will distract us, and the more distraction drowning capability it has. So feel free to whip out those earbuds, dig out “Now 11,” and head to Butler.

Or avoid distractions in more creative ways: When I ask one girl in Butler what she’s listening to right now, she replies by saying, “Oh, I’m not actually listening to anything. I can’t study with music playing. I just put them in so no one tries to talk to me. It usually works.” ●





CAMERAS OBSCURA

is the new york film festival only for snobs?

BY RACHEL ALLEN
PHOTOS BY CATHI CHOI

The 2009 New York Film Festival knows what's best for you. Featuring films crafted by our most intelligent and creative filmmakers, as well as—in this year's case—some of today's oldest, the annual event has unequivocally made a name for itself on the festival circuit. But whether the films shown at the festival are the movies people really want to see is a matter of heated debate.

Festival selection committee member and film critic Dennis Lim succinctly presents the festival's intent: "For the New York Film Festival we're making a statement. We've done the choosing for you and we're saying that these are the films that we think are important this year in world cinema," he says.

In addition to a strong slate that includes a strengthened nonfiction film section, impressive up-and-coming new talent, and the return of a few old masters of cinema, Lim points out that this year, NYFF also has "a few films that are going to be quite provocative and challenging."

The festival's five committee members, most of whom are critics, do what they do best when choosing the lineup—they dictate what is "good." But in today's consumer culture, where "bigger is better" has become the entertainment industry's mantra, film festivals are becoming accustomed to showing hundreds of films in a matter of days to appeal to broader tastes. With this in mind, why should students pay attention to NYFF, which not only screens a paltry amount of films in comparison to other film festivals, but also shows movies that often challenge viewers rather than entertaining them?

LIM CLAIMS THAT THE FESTIVAL'S ORGANIZERS DON'T MAKE A "CONSCIOUS DECISION TO PICK DIFFICULT OR EASY FILMS."

Lim insists that a festival's quality does not lie in numbers. "I think it's very hard to compare the NYFF with Tribeca or Toronto or a festival that is on that scale, really, just in terms of the number of films," he says. "The New York Film Festival has always been a highly curated festival. We are presenting no more than 30 features this year, and I think if you go to Tribeca or Toronto you have a couple of hundred films ... They necessarily serve very different functions."

"Curated" is an apt descriptor for NYFF, which aligns itself much more heavily with art than entertainment. The historic festival, which has been renowned for its selective and academic nature since its inception in 1963, has kept its positive reputation by bringing auteur cinema, classic film, and unique independent movies to New York's eager cinema audience. This year's lineup is no different, featuring hotly debated films like Lars von Trier's incendiary "Antichrist" and "Precious," 2009's "little film that could." The latter is taking festivals by storm and has already won awards at both the Sundance and Toronto film festivals.

Columbia students love having intellectual and entertaining pursuits available in the city, but on campus there's been a surprisingly lackluster response to this year's festival. To one student, it boils down to cold, hard cash. "I was considering not going because of the ticket price," says Jin Chen, a Columbia College sophomore.

When asked about NYFF '09, the students of one Columbia film history course simply stared blankly, or ignored the question entirely. They were asked for their views and if they were at—

tending the festival, but not one student raised a hand to offer an opinion. Someone from the crowd did indicate why he wouldn't be attending, though: as he said, "The tickets are expensive; I don't have money for that!"

Spending \$20 a ticket for regular screenings—or \$40 for the red carpet opening, closing, and centerpiece showings—is a bit of a stretch for any student. Thankfully, the festival has been working to be more monetarily accessible. One hour before each screening, 50 tickets will be released to students for only \$10. The average movie ticket at the AMC up the street costs over two dollars more. Additionally, a greater total number of tickets will be available: "You don't have to make sure you get your tickets the first day they go on sale," says Lim. "There will be more tickets available the day of the screening."

NYFF ALIGNS ITSELF MUCH MORE HEAVILY WITH ART THAN ENTERTAINMENT.

More theoretical problems of accessibility have often come up while discussing NYFF. Another reason that Columbia students aren't flocking to Lincoln Center for the festival could be because most are under the impression that the fest's films are abstruse and dull, totally perplexing to those who don't obsessively pore over movie history. Festivals like Tribeca publicize themselves as events held for the people—a claim that NYFF has never made, with good reason. Lim dismisses the topic of "accessibility" altogether by calling the term "kind of a loaded word."

Igor Simic, a Columbia College junior and a film student who has not been deterred from attending the festival, commends NYFF's innate intelligence and complexity in an e-mail. He actually prefers NYFF over other festivals: "Viewing a film at the NYFF is a chance to see and experience a different artistic view of the world," says Simic. "The selected films deal with specific subjects that can be interesting and useful to anyone. I believe that auteur film serves the viewers—it does not deceive, but it penetrates issues, offering an emotional and intellectual experience. Take advantage of New York City and its festivals."

Despite any preconceived notions of the NYFF's lofty reputation, this year's festival slate is truly a sight to behold. Lim claims that the festival's organizers did not make a "conscious decision to pick difficult or easy films ... I think for people who do follow world cinema, there are a lot of very familiar names in this lineup." Those familiar names include Pedro Almodóvar ("Broken Embraces"), Lars von Trier ("Antichrist"), Michael Haneke ("The White Ribbon"), and many more. Alongside the features are an avant-garde mini festival, discussion panels with directors, a 70th anniversary showing of "The Wizard of Oz," and a screening of the first known Korean film, 1934's "Crossroads of Youth."

Still, the festival is by no means distancing itself from its roots in auteur and classic cinema.

Three of the most noted directors showing films at the festival this year are over eighty years old. New Wave veterans Alain Resnais ("Wild Grass") and Jacques Rivette ("Around a Small Mountain") are still going strong. Lim defends their work, explaining, "The Resnais is really a lot fresher and riskier than you would expect from a man in his 80s, while the Rivette film has this kind of serene bittersweet quality ... They're two very different kinds of late works."

Lim also highlights the remarkable Manoel de Oliveira ("Eccentricities of a Blond Hair Girl"), who at 101 years old is still actively making films. As Lim proudly notes, "He's almost as old as the medium itself." In this sense, the New York Film Festival will never change; there will always be a place at NYFF for film lovers to pay their respects to those who were pioneers of the art form.

The 2009 New York Film Festival is sure to be an education for those who attend—and in the best way possible. The cinematic quality of every film on the schedule reflects NYFF's mission to, as Lim puts it, make "a statement about what's important, what people should be paying attention to." Truly, because of its impressive slate, this year's New York Film Festival is certain to succeed at doing what every great festival aspires to: creating a passionate discourse among its attendees. The films shown at NYFF are key to the history and future of film. Just as Columbia appreciates the classics and honors them with the Core Curriculum, the New York Film Festival is an institution that knows how to honor cinema. ●

BANGERS AND TRASH

Those who aren't planning to go to this year's New York Film Festival may want to reconsider. Here, Dennis Lim, one of NYFF's selection committee members, discusses one of his favorites from this year—a film with quite a title. His chosen movie is an example of the thought-provoking films that define NYFF.

"Trash Humpers" follows a gang of misfits who not only commit the titular act but also engage in a number of other strange, ridiculous, and ugly behaviors. In Lim's own words:

"Because it's a film that will generate a lot of discussion, I would pick a film that we're showing at midnight. It's a film by Harmony Korine called 'Trash Humpers.' It's obviously a provocation. I think it's going to be very divisive. We have a few films that are going to be quite provocative and challenging like 'Antichrist' by von Trier. I think 'Trash Humpers' will be another one. Some people are going to love it and some people are going to hate it. But I think that people will be talking about it. If I had to pick one film I think I'd pick that. He's [Korine's] also a filmmaker that I think has a cult following. I don't know if he's that well known among students these days, but certainly in the '90s when I was a student, his first feature, 'Gummo,' was a huge hit—and this is a film that could revive his cult among a younger generation." \\\



André Dussollier and Mathieu Amalric star in NYFF's opener, "Wild Grass," directed by the 87-year-old Alain Resnais.

LORD OF THE STAGE

the 1st Irish theater festival's attempt to master New York's theater scene

BY MELISSA VON MAYRHAUSER
PHOTO COURTESY OF 1ST IRISH

It took a lot more than luck to get the 1st Irish Theater Festival up and running. The festival, which runs from September 1 to October 4 this fall, was inaugurated in 2008 by George Heslin and Origin Theater. It showcases Irish-written theater in a New York setting.

"The festival is meant to create a national crossroads for theater in which everyone is working under the banner of the 1st Irish," says Heslin, Origin Theater's artistic director. It includes the work of 21 contemporary playwrights in 12 venues throughout the city. The festival aims to launch a dialogue between the public and the playwright by exposing New Yorkers to modern Irish plays.

Heslin and his associates select plays that they believe will best connect American audiences to Irish playwriting, providing equal opportunities to male and female playwrights from both northern and southern Ireland. This year, says Heslin, the festival also widened the pool of prospective writers by deciding to "invite theater companies from Ireland."

1st Irish introduces such a diverse group of Irish playwrights and companies in an attempt to appeal to a young audience. As Heslin says, "We

select work to attract an audience under the age of 45. We want to have a cutting edge." He believes that the low ticket prices and multiple venues presented by the festival will still attract youth despite the shortage of the kind of razzle-dazzle that characterizes a typical glamorous, large-scale Broadway show.

The festival has introduced many little known writers and theater companies from outside of New York to the city, like Irish playwright Bryan Delaney. He recently presented his first play, "The Cobbler," under the umbrella of the 1st Irish. "I'm getting to work with some of the finest actors in the city," he says of the experience. "I'm just delighted to be part of it." Delaney was inspired to write his play after seeing "the textures of the shoes in the window of an old cobbler shop in Dublin." Now, due to his involvement in the festival, Delaney can share his stories of Irish culture with a large, stateside audience.

"Inis Nua," a Philadelphia-based company, is also presenting a play—"Trad," by Mark Doherty—through the festival. Artistic director Tom Reing reflects that he has found a great deal of "cross-cultural, hybrid communication between Ireland and the United States ... The Irish get a lot of American imports [from media sources], but they make them into their own." Reing finds that the festival's plays represent Irish culture and connect it to the United States, an idea that has been mirrored in the takeaway messages of many of the festival's plays.

Whether or not each individual play can convey a cross-cultural message to young adults is key to the success of the festival as a whole, as both "Cell" and "Blood Guilty," two of the 1st Irish's productions, demonstrate.

Paula Meehan's "Cell" is emotionally riveting. It confronts the brutal realities of poverty in Ireland as experienced by four female cellmates. From the opening scene in which a cellmate rushes onto the stage and demands to know who dared to bleed into a pail, "Cell" reeks of emotion. It's so raw and gripping that it may even cause its audience to reflect on the effects of poverty in the United States.

WHETHER EACH PLAY CAN CONVEY A CROSS-CULTURAL MESSAGE IS KEY TO THE SUCCESS OF THE FESTIVAL.

"These women [in the play] are on the edge of society," says actress Laoisa Sexton, who plays a cellmate. "They're not criminals. Their class has put them where they are. These women are very unrepresented ... This is inner-city Dublin."

But the play proves that problems in Dublin are applicable to American cities as well. "Cell" builds a cultural bond between its American audience and its Irish subject matter, one so strong that the issues explored by the play seem almost to leave a layer of soot on audience members' skin during the performance.

The stale sentiments expressed in Antoine Flatharta's "Blood Guilty," however, do not try to communicate a similar cross-cultural message. This play explores the generation gap that separates two sets of brothers, but it gives its audience no reason to care about their predicaments. The inability of the two generations to understand one another mirrors the incapacity of the play to convey meaning to a young audience.

Despite occasional missteps like "Blood Guilty," the 1st Irish Theater Festival has launched a transnational dialogue by unifying a diverse group of playwrights and theater companies. Connecting New York City with the work of rising Irish playwrights, the festival has provided a link to a rich heritage that remains a vibrant force in the present day. When asked about possible changes for next year's festival, Heslin says that the festival will not increase the number of plays presented in order "to preserve the quality and standards of the festival." Perhaps in order to improve the festival, its organizers could actually present fewer plays that better present Irish narratives to young American audiences. Even so, 1st Irish has begun to write a narrative of lyrical success. ●



BUTLER'S WHERE THE ART IS

the weird campus art collection you never knew existed

BY LIZA ELIANO AND ANNIE AGLE

PHOTOS BY JOEY SHEMAUEL AND PHOEBE LYTLE

Ah, Butler, the place most of us have come to know as a second home—that is, if your home is a self-imposed dungeon of constant reading, typing, caffeinating, and procrastinating. Butler Library, like so much at Columbia, is both a dream and a nightmare. On one hand, it has over two million books and beautiful rooms to study in. On the other, it has grumpy guards, odd smells, and limited seating that makes finding an empty chair a process that's a bit like natural selection—only the early studiers survive. But “The But” has a lot more to offer than just a place where you can stay on Facebook until 3 am and not feel completely guilty (hey, at least you made it to the library!). Butler is also home to an extensive collection of art that allows students to study in style.

THOUGH BEAUTIFUL, THE GODDESS BEARS AN UNCANNY RESEMBLANCE TO BARBRA STREISAND.

Immediately upon entering Butler, library-goers are confronted by Eugene Savage's otherworldly mural of Athena. Students have a range of reactions to the piece: as Dina Georgas, a Barnard junior, comments, “The Athena mural is an amazing example of classical grandeur. It makes me proud to go to this school.” Others have more negative observations. “The appliqué on Athena's toga looks like fifty year old gum!” said Alisha Kaplan, a Barnard junior. This famous Butler mural is a mix of kitsch and class. The regal portrait of Athena, goddess of wisdom and knowledge and our most beloved Alma Mater, stands in front of a déclassé background image of the Empire State building, imitating an art deco style. Gruesome hulk-like beings that glow an effervescent green crouch menacingly below the unperturbed Athena. The goddess herself, though beautiful, bears an uncanny resemblance to Barbra Streisand.

Elizabeth Hutchinson, professor of American art at Barnard, gives some background on the mural: “Savage was a successful painter whose career began in the heyday of American mural painters in the interwar years. The Athena is typical of his work in the 1930s, offering a composition that combines images of ‘everyday folk’ as were popular in the '30s with allegorical representations that allowed him to demonstrate his mastery of the figure,” she says. Eugene Savage's mural is

indicative of Butler's overall design: an amalgamation of American and Classical artistic principles. The prominent location of this important piece inspires students to take on Athena's strength and stare calmly at the hideous green beast of studying as they walk into Butler.

Savage's work has also been described as a “decadent manifestation of Classicism,” a description that applies to Butler as a whole. As Tamar Newman, a GS sophomore, comments, “Butler was designed with the intention to inspire intellectuality. The art's emphasis is on aesthetics rather than functionality. The whole place feels like a stuffy men's club, but in the best sense.”

Butler is certainly not short on portraits of dignified, aged men. Hutchinson explains that libraries “have been an important space for the display of portraits for centuries. Gazing at the heads of notable figures was thought to offer important lessons in history and character akin to those offered by reading.” Under the stern gazes of these high rollers from the past, one has the urge to don tweed, light a Cuban, and chat with chaps about the races.

The portrait of Queen Elizabeth and King Charles VI's visit to Columbia on the third floor is especially evocative. It portrays a staid, English way of life that contrasts nicely with the framed “Brokeback Mountain” movie poster on the opposite wall—part of an ongoing exhibit. Oh, the dichotomy!

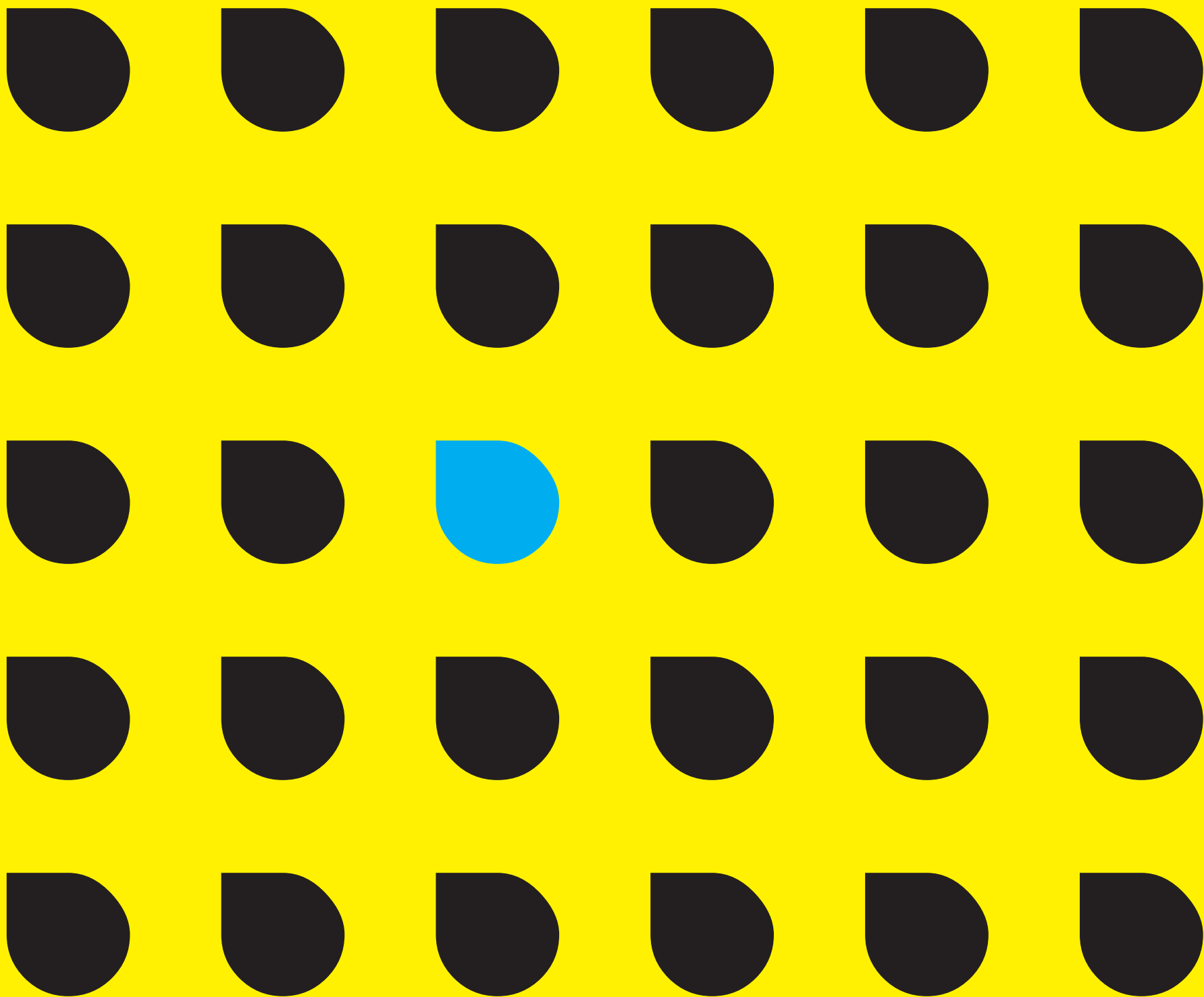
Across from the circulation desk stands another of Butler's esteemed donors: Lawrence A. Wein, Doctor of Law and recipient of honoris causa in 1974. Wein is commemorated by a Rodin-esque

bust with deep craters that look like an artistic rendering of acne scars. Walk into the main reading room, and you will find a vast collection of Wein memorabilia including everything from his diplomas to his soccer ball and fencing sword. En garde! The achievements of this great Columbian remind us of the sweet victories that await at the end of four years—provided that we finish that 30-page paper by sunrise. Save your Frisbees just in case.

Also worthy of a visit is the stained glass mural of a peg-legged Peter Stuyvesant on the main floor near the video reserves. The engraving reads, “Stained glass window given by the people of the Netherlands and Antilles to New York on the 300th Anniversary of New Amsterdam.” This room also boasts a gilded map of Manhattan behind the clock, in case you should forget where you are in the midst of translating “The Iliad” into Ancient Greek or hyperventilating over a chemistry problem set.

Unfortunately, most students say they've never noticed Butler's extensive art collection. Josh Faber, a GS junior, argues that this is a good thing: “The best décor art is the sort that you can ignore. The art should blend into its environment.” Butler is indeed like an old New York broad—classic, elegant, sturdy, yet understated. Her accessories add flare without detracting from the overall experience of the library, which provides an atmosphere that is conducive to learning. The art in Butler can be stuffy, silly, and even pretentious, but it lends a sense of glorified seriousness to the appropriation of knowledge. Even if you dread going to Butler, you can't help falling under its spell. ●





Work for The Eye.

We're looking for writers, photographers,
illustrators, and web designers.

For more information, e-mail us at
eye@columbiaspectator.com