20 November 2008 / vol. 5 issue 11

the eye

The Egg Hunt

cashing in on college fertility

by Sadia Latifi

catching up with hanson, 11 years after mmmbop \\\ haute headwear \\\ turkey basting at *the eye*

the eye

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THE EGG HUNT

Fliers on campus tout huge sums for egg donation—but is it worth it? pg. 07

by Sadia Latifi
cover photo by Molly Crossin

FEATURES

ARTS

LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

In a *GQ* feature last month called "The Book of Me," novelist Richard Powers became one of nine people in the world to have their entire genomes sequenced. It's a great read—for Powers, the process of learning everything about his own genetic sequence was a daunting one. "I have nine genetic variants associated with increased risk of colorectal cancer," Powers says, "but 10 associated with decreased risk." So much for answers.

So is it something you or I could do—get some blood drawn, then suddenly know whether we'll get cancer in 20 years or dementia in 60? Not exactly. Several agencies run programs at a cost that's currently prohibitive for most people. Powers explains the criterion for candidacy with the program he ended up using: "As long as I could pass an exam demonstrating a master's-degree level of understanding about genetics, they could use me. I commenced to cram." In other words, you have to really want to know.

Throughout the article, Powers isn't sure he really does want to know—and I'm not sure I would, either. With your future mapped out before you on a USB drive, what changes would you actually put into effect in your life, besides worrying more? Isn't there something to be said for blissful ignorance? It reminds me of a line from Will Eno's *Thom Pain*: "If you only had one day left to live, what would you do? ... What would you do if you had forty years?"

Our lead story this week, on the culture of egg donation at Columbia and Barnard, raises similar moral-genetic questions. Is it ethical for prospective parents to court the Blair Waldorfs of the world, hoping they'll donate their eggs to produce children just like them? What about offering more for Jewish eggs or less if a possible donor is shorter than 5 feet 7 inches? Like Powers' dilemma, the debate seems to be knowing vs. not knowing—shouldn't your future be a surprise? And, at least to some extent, shouldn't how your child turns out be surprising, too? Do we have any right to try to control these things?

And is it ethical to donate eggs if your sole aim is to get paid?

I'll admit I've considered it, in passing—I've seen the fliers around campus and thought about what 10 grand could do for my peace of mind. It seemed so *easy*—a misconception Sadia's article puts to lie. As the recession goes on, it may seem an attractive option, but I think I'll just stick to trying out for *Jeopardy!* And if I ever do come into money, I certainly won't be spending it on a genome map like Richard Powers': I'm too fond of surprises.

–Alexandria Symonds

Out of Africa

congress of the people?

BY ARIEL POLLOCK

I recently attended a lecture assessing the state and future of the "new South Africa." South Africa's Minister of Finance Trevor Manuel, the featured speaker, explained to the crowd the essence of South Africa's political system. True democracy, he said, means that all people must be accountable for their government and for themselves. Big and small, wealthy and poor, politicized and apathetic—if people do not hold a stake in their leadership and demand more than corruption and laziness, then they do not deserve the democracy in which they live.

I've thought a lot about Manuel's words recently, as popular opposition to the ruling African National Congress grows stronger. In Cape Town especially, I have noticed an overwhelming sense of disappointment and dissatisfaction with the ANC—at signs of corruption time and again, at a shockingly ignorant health minister, and at the failure of former President Thabo Mbeki to condemn the actions of Zimbabwean president Robert Mugabe.

In the past few weeks, a breakaway faction of the ANC—the Congress of the People—has formed in direct response to dissatisfaction with ANC activity and policy, especially in terms of economic policies and the various scandals plaguing the ANC. Despite its supposed mantle of reform however, the Congress of the People spent its early weeks being ridiculed. The first choice for a party name, the South African National Congress, was dismissed as too similar to ANC, and the first party gathering, a posh affair in a wealthy suburb of Johannesburg, was seen by many as an extravagant meeting of a privileged few.

The ANC is still alive and well, and asserting its influence on the youth of Cape Town, especially as it continues to support the slander that the Congress of the People is bourgeois and disconnected from the struggling masses.

With time, the shaky legs of Manuel's true democracy may steady themselves, and opposition will emerge—not as fodder for slanderous comments—as the essence of the democratic system itself. But change is slow and uncertain. South Africans are hesitant to betray those leaders who gave them freedom and democracy in the first place. For now, most of South Africa's voters will likely continue to see the ANC as the only legitimate South African political party.

COMPILED BY MELANIE JONES AND RAPHAEL POPE-SUSSMAN

Editors' 10

what we're into this week

1. The Roches' album *We Three Kings*: This is the only Christmas album I listen to year-round.
– *Melanie Jones, interview editor*

2. Video chat from Gmail: Making annoying people in Butler so much easier!
– *Shane Ferro, food and drink editor*

3. *2666* by Roberto Bolaño: I've been anticipating the English translation of Bolaño's posthumous masterpiece for over a year and a half now. *2666* will be my big winter-break project, and with the discovery of another manuscript, *The Third Reich*, there is still more to come!
– *Lucy Tang, books editor*

4. Babka: This traditional Jewish dish is delicious and can be eaten for any meal, or dessert. Check it out!
– *Raphael Pope-Sussman, humor editor*

5. Foo Fighters acoustic songs: Damn, they've got a vibe.
– *Hayley Negrin, features managing editor*

6. Cooking with pumpkin: Seasonal and surprisingly delicious, it is a good substitute for squash in many recipes, and the seeds make a great treat also.
– *Jennie Rose Halperin, music editor*

7. Uris Library: As some students probably know, it has this awesome giant room where people can study and talk at the same time! Why did I only discover this in sophomore year?
– *Learned Foote, film editor*

8. *Lady Chatterley's Lover*: D.H. Lawrence's steamy novel makes for quite compelling subway-reading, and it's always entertaining to shock the inevitable over-the-shoulder readers on the 1 train.
– *Julia Halperin, art editor*

9. Pigtail braids: Not necessarily infantile, they can be dressed up or worn in clever up-dos.
– *Moira Lynch, style editor*

10. Buying books as Christmas presents: Booksellers are expecting a dismal Christmas, as consumers pick cheaper items as gifts. Much as we'd all like to see B&N suffer, this is just unacceptable. Buck the trend—splurge on hardbacks.
– *Rebecca Evans, A & E managing editor*

Eye Spy

Between two homeless men on 103rd Street:
One: "Jesus is come!"
Other: "Shit! And here's me with nothin' to wear!"

Eye Get it!

What do you call someone who really loves turkey?
A triptofanatic!

What did the turkey say at the table?
"I'm stuffed!"

How did the sweet potato prove its own existence?
"I think, therefore I yam."

Eye Tunes

Thanksgiving Playlist, Or: My Thoughts as the Holiday Approaches

"The Thanksgiving Song," Adam Sandler: Ah yes, the time of turkey and stuffing.

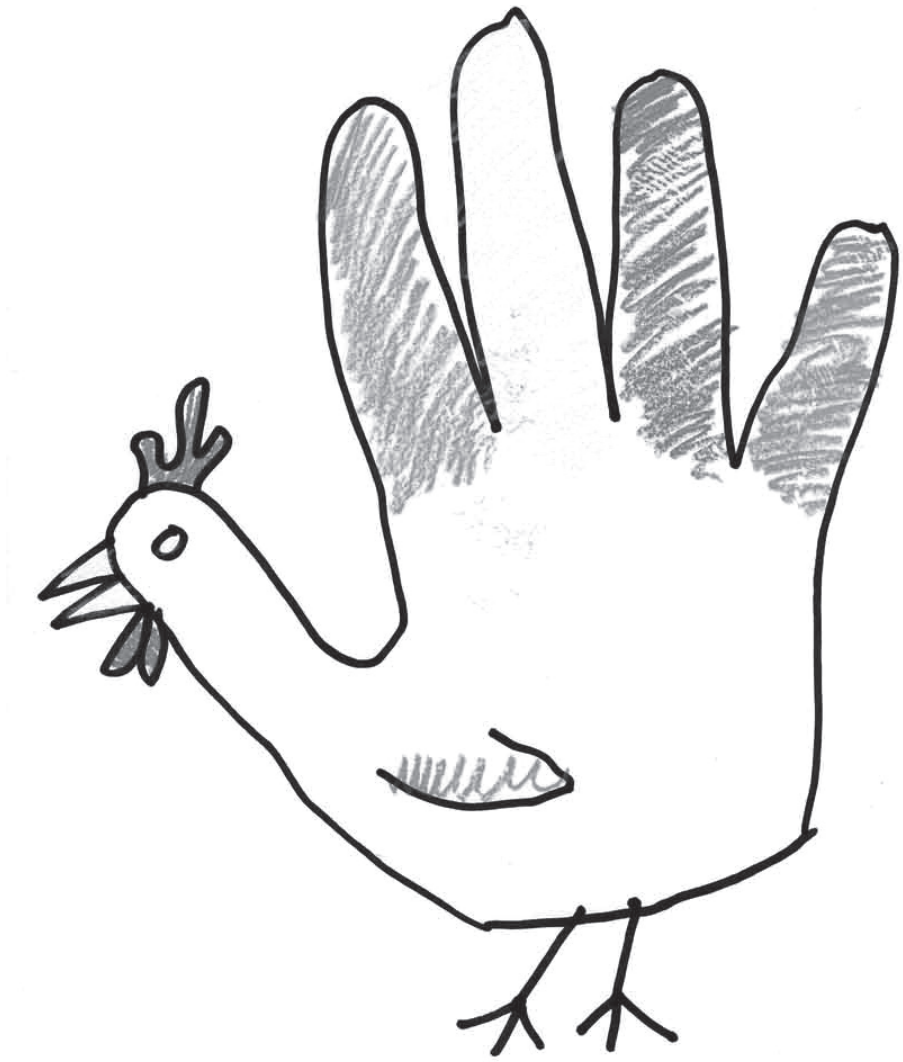
"Cigarettes and Chocolate Milk," Rufus Wainwright: But I'm going to be sick from all that food and probably end up imitating a sloth for two days.

"Don't Drink the Water," Dave Matthews Band: Why am I celebrating this, anyway? We killed people, stole their land, and gave out a lot of smallpox! It's Columbus Day all over again!

***A Charlie Brown Thanksgiving* theme:** On the other hand, I do have some fond memories of family dinners...

"Ode To My Family," Cranberries: ...And some not so fond ones. Who made the cranberry relish again?

"Immigrant Song," Led Zeppelin: I guess it's all about Plymouth Rock/Valhalla, in the end. Now where did I put my flag lapel?



The Origin of Species

BY RAPHAEL POPE-SUSSMAN
TURKEY COURTESY OF BLOGADILLA

The coming of the Thanksgiving holiday brings us—once more—to the ancient *Spectator* tradition of the "Turkeyshoot." For those not closely associated with this newspaper, the Turkeyshoot is the annual election for positions on this august newspaper.

Now, right now, you are probably saying to yourself: "Self, this is no august newspaper—it's a November newspaper." Wise words, indeed. But I digress.

While we take the Turkeyshoot for granted, few Columbians are aware of its origins. Legend has it that early *Spectator* editors were chosen through a grueling interview process, in which applicants were forced to stalk, shoot, and baste a wild turkey in a single hour.

LEGEND HAS IT THAT EARLY *SPECTATOR* EDITORS ... WERE FORCED TO STALK, SHOOT, AND BASTE A WILD TURKEY IN A SINGLE HOUR.

Sadly, political correctness and a dearth of readily available wild turkeys prevents modern Spec-ies (or as Charles Darwin would say, "Species") from recreating the grandeur of the very first Turkeyshoot. Perhaps that's why I'm surrounded by such buffoonery. The people here couldn't baste to save their lives. And yet, they are expected to produce a quality publication five days a week. What kind of sense is that? Nonsense.

I mean, do you think the *New York Times* just hires any idiot who can write a news story?

They don't, because they have standards. Every *Times* writer must—at a minimum—know how to prepare the three essential cranberry dishes (sauce, relish, and chutney). That's why the *Times* is the Newspaper of Record.

If *Spectator* is going to thrive in future generations, we must implement some standards. Editing tests and interviews are nice, but they aren't going to cut it. That's the job of a carving knife.

So let's go back to the basics. Food for thought? Sounds delicious.

And may the shooting of the turkeys begin!

Hell Raiser

jennie rose halperin interviews richard hell

BY JENNIE ROSE HALPERIN
PHOTO COURTESY OF ECHO DANON

Musician, critic, poet, and fashion icon, Richard Hell is the embodiment of the Lower East Side. Adopting the neighborhood in the late 1960s as a newly published teenage poet, he became a legend through his boundary-crossing punk rock, only to reinvent himself as a successful writer and columnist. His two novels, *Godlike* and *Go Now*, as well as his book of short pieces with David Shapiro, *Rabbit Duck*, have all been highly acclaimed. Currently working on his memoir and a film about aging, he lives with wife Sheelagh Bevan (GS '03 salutatorian). The New York icon sat down with Jennie Rose Halperin to talk about history, heroin, and music.

You've played a lot of different roles in life. What does each transformation and reinvention mean for you?
To me, it wasn't linear—for a period I was this, and for a period I was that. It's wanting to take a shot at getting some sort of idea in a medium and carrying it out. I wish you could have parallel time where you can commit yourself to one thing for decades. One thing I regret is not getting into, or really making, a movie, but that requires so much perseverance and focus, and you can't do that just because you have an idea one day. It's getting closer and closer to being able to do that with digital video—maybe it will still happen. Probably the most unlikely line of work I've been in is music, because that isn't easy. … That takes rehearsing, it takes dealing with all these other people—your band members, club owners—having this big investment to having a record made and putting it in a record store. I'm glad I did that when young, when I had the initiative and everything you need to do to make a record.

IT'S ALSO IMPORTANT TO KNOW THAT THE PERSON WHO WAS A DRUG ADDICT—I DON'T REGARD THAT AS BEING SOME SORT OF ABERRATION, SOME SORT OF MISSTEP—IT'S BUILT INTO ME. IT COULDN'T HAVE HAPPENED ANY OTHER WAY, AND I DON'T HAVE ANY REGRETS.

How do you feel about the changes that are taking and have taken place in your adopted city of New York, particularly in the East Village?
I'm kind of lucky because the arc of my way of life has insulated me from the worst horrors of the influx of gentrification of the East Village. I had hit the period where I didn't want to leave my apartment anyway, when the neighborhood was overrun with college students and boutiques and restaurants. It's a funny thing: you realize, if you've been around long enough, that it's inevitable, that these kinds of things go through cycles because you see it happen, the rise and fall of fortunes in all kinds of areas, and I kind of take it in stride.

What places in the city hold particular significance for you?
The Lower East Side, because I spent my whole life there, and for a long time I hardly ever left it. I mean, there's a lot of places that can set off streams of recollections of the Lower East Side, but there's very little left of the days when I roamed the streets.

As an American iconoclast, how do you reconcile narrative and reality?
Narrative and reality can't be reconciled. A narrative is an impoverishment of reality because reality is complete chaos, but we make up these stories to feel a little bit safer. But it's okay—it's pretty scary out there. … When I look in retrospect at my history, you can't get around the presence of heroin addiction in it. And there's a lot of different ways to frame that. I had this moment for a few years in my 20s when I was full of ideas and I had confidence in my own powers to make works that fulfilled these ambitions, and those were a rich few years. But at the same time, I was becoming addicted to narcotics. So there was a length of about 10 years.
At the beginning it wasn't a struggle, it was a pleasure. Then it became a grind, then it became a nightmare. And in that period, there was a lot of despair and a lot of mistakes made, and it was barren. And finally I came out of that in about the mid-1980s. And I had to kind of figure everything out all over from scratch. I knew I didn't want to keep playing music for a lot of reasons, but also because the whole way of life reeked of drugs for me. It's not a coincidence that so many musicians end up using drugs in rock 'n' roll and in jazz also—it's kind of built into it. It's part of the whole ideal of living outside of the law and gaining instant gratification and being hedonistic, but it's also because the grind of working as a musician is so boring and tedious that you want relief all the time.

So what did you do?
After a few years, I realized that I wanted to be a professional writer, so I started working hard to get as good as I could and figure out what I did well. That's the narrative in my head, of my life. It's also important to know that the person who was a drug addict—I don't regard that as being some sort of aberration, some sort of misstep—it's built into me. It couldn't have happened any other way, and I don't have any regrets. In the last 15 to 20 years I've been focused about figuring out how to write well and what I want to write. There was before that, and then there was after that.

How does publishing and filmmaking, in particular independent and DIY creation, play into your work now that you no longer need to utilize underground methods?
But I do. I like working on that scale with those kinds of bodies. The kind of writing that interests me the most doesn't have a very big audience, so it has to be on the scale of people doing it themselves. To me there's no division. I always have a lot of little projects going on at a different scale.

What was it like, then, working with established publications?
It's been very important to me as a writer to establish that, when I'm hired, it's me. I don't do something to fit a house style, and when I did, it was always nightmarish… I only want to work with editors who want me for what I do.

It must have made moving to writing a bit easier, being an established name.
At the beginning it was easier, but it is a disadvantage in that you're not taken as seriously as a writer. That's been more of a problem with the novels because you're treated as some sort of novelty. But I feel like I've been able to overcome that, and it's worked out.

From Laos to Brooklyn: 23 Years of Footage

an acclaimed cinematographer works in the long term

BY JEREMY PFAU
PHOTO COURTESY OF THE CINEMA GUILD

The Betrayal: Nerakhoon, a documentary that opened on Nov. 21, is unconventional not only for its brilliant cinematography, but also for the unusually long span of its production: Making the movie took 23 years.

Yes, 23 years. The film was shot from 1984 until 2007. The audience watches as characters age dramatically, producing a time scale that genuinely feels like a narrative, rather than a brief probe into someone's life. "It was almost like we were living in our own film," director Ellen Kuras says.

Kuras' directorial debut follows Thavisouk Phrasavath—a Laotian refugee who co-directed the film—from his war-torn nation to the streets of Brooklyn. A unique blend of lyrical cinematography and gritty documentary footage, the film explores issues both political and personal, from the war in Laos to urban life, an immigrant community, and a family's efforts to stay together in America.

The film begins with an overview of American involvement in Laos throughout the '60s and '70s, when the U.S. established covert operations to provide anti-communists with military training and weapons. Phrasavath's father was an anti-communist who fought with the Americans. When the U.S. terminated its involvement in Laos and the communist government took over, he and his family became targets for persecution. One day, soldiers arrested Phrasavath's father. The rest of the family fled to Thailand, and then to Brooklyn. *The Betrayal* follows Phrasavath and his family as they attempt to integrate into American society. The title of the film alludes to the Americans' abandonment of their allies in Laos.

Kuras, an award-winning cinematographer whose recent work includes *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* and *Berlin*, brings the eye of a photographer and the heart of a close friend to Phrasavath's story. She lets evocative images tell the story as much as words, and demonstrates humanity without oversentimentalizing the film. "The idea was always to make a documentary, but a more poetic documentary," Kuras says. "The challenge was looking for where documentary and narrative met." Indeed, the film pushes the boundaries of genre. At times it's philosophical, at others raw—injecting ancient Laotian prophecies between scenes of family discord, and brilliant shots of landscapes that follow archival footage of bombs dropping over Laos.

Kuras' power as a filmmaker comes through not only in the construction and cinematography of *The Betrayal*, but also in the invisibility with which she tracks Phrasavath and his family. She is there at several crucial points in the lives of the Phrasavath family: when they get a call from the father, when they attend a funeral for a murdered family member, when a neighbor reports being tied up by a local gang—but no one seems to notice the camera.

HER POWER AS A FILMMAKER COMES THROUGH THE INVISIBILITY WITH WHICH SHE TRACKS PHRASAVATH AND HIS FAMILY.

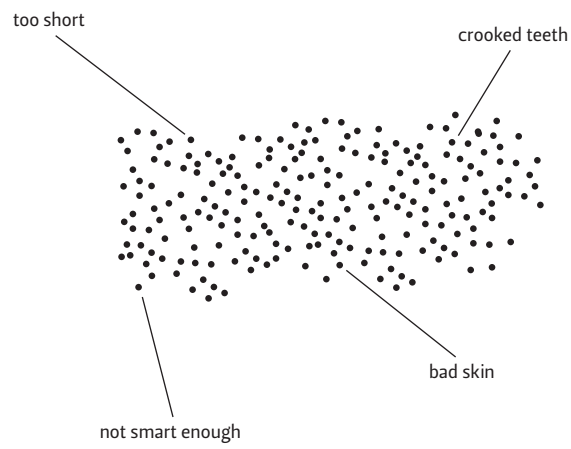
Americans' ignorance of the Laotian war compelled Kuras and Phrasavath to make *The Betrayal*. At the outset, Phrasavath labeled his feelings as an "inspirational type of anger." He recalls, "When I first came to America, no one knew why we were here. All they thought was, why is this Chinese guy walking around in my neighborhood?" But his anger turned to determination: "I said, one day, they will know where I came from." The two of them realized that a film could inform Americans of a chapter in the nation's history that has never been written. The U.S. government still does not acknowledge its involvement in Laos.

Kuras and Phrasavath saw the Bush administration's policies and the Iraq War as an impetus to finish *The Betrayal*. "We have to remember that for many people the war never ends. I think that it's important that we, as a world, recognize the responsibilities and the consequences of war," Kuras states. "War is war no matter what country you come from. Suffering is suffering," Phrasavath adds.

The Betrayal begins and concludes with a beautiful image of two Laotian boys swimming in a river with water buffalo. The vibrant colors of the sunset reflect off the waters; the children play gracefully. In the beginning of the film, the shot has a majestic, joyful quality. When revisited at the end, though, it has a mournful tone, as we see a nostalgic Phrasavath watching through the window. It is in these moments that the visual meets the emotional, that the beautiful meets the elegiac, that the film holds its most power and clarity—affirming Kuras' authority as a director.

Thavisouk Phrasavath and his mother, Orady Phrasavath, in Ellen Kuras' documentary *The Betrayal*.

THE EGG HUNT



valedictorian,
clear complexion,
talented musician,
tall and lean,
winning smile

cashing in on college fertility

BY SADIA LATIFI
PHOTOS BY MOLLY CROSSIN

"**Listen,** I'll tell you whatever you want, but this absolutely, positively, cannot get back to my parents," Alex Greenbaum tells me at our first meeting. "I mean, it's not like I'm ashamed, but my parents didn't exactly send me to Barnard so I could donate my eggs."

She tells me to create an appropriate pseudonym for her, one that makes sure to capture her "50-percent Jewy-ness."

"So, what do you want to know?"

How has she been feeling since her egg-removal surgery in September?

She takes a long gulp from her Ethos water bottle and pauses for a few seconds.

"You know, I felt like shit for days," she finally says. "But they were able to extract 10 eggs from me, so the procedure was officially successful, and I don't have any more headaches. I feel physically just fine. And my check just cleared, so that's $9,000 I can put to post-graduation travel and apartment-hunting."

But how does she feel about her DNA's being used to help a couple produce a baby?

"It's a great feeling," she laughs loudly. "I'm a mom without any of the actual stress of being a mom!" But then she abruptly stops. "Are you looking for a more serious answer? I don't know. I don't know how I feel yet, really."

College females like Alex are regularly offered thousands of dollars to go through a time-consuming, invasive process that helps infertile couples conceive. Egg donation is a popular process that continues to satisfy the desires of both donors and anxious intended parents—and in a troubled economy, interest is rising. More than 14,000 babies are born each year via egg donation.

Aggressive marketing to debt-ridden students and the subsequent commoditization of the egg is leading researchers and specialists to raise concerns about a lack of government regulation and the long-term mental and physical effects of donation.

WHOSE EGGS?

Alex Greenbaum is beautiful. She's a 5-foot 10-inch, blue-eyed blonde with raised cheekbones and a lean, athletic body. When she arrives 10 minutes late to our second Starbucks interview, she apologizes profusely, pushing long strands of hair away from her face into a ponytail. I'm struck by her sense of style (which she describes as "sorority hipster").

"I gotta check my e-mail for one second. I'm expecting to hear back from a professor about a paper topic. Hang on, if you wouldn't mind." She whips out her BlackBerry and furiously thumbs her way down a stuffed inbox with curt responses that she reads out loud while she types. I stare at my notebook of questions.

Why does she need the money?

"My parents are great for financial support now, but after graduation, it's over. I'm not studying a viable major so by the time it's May 20, 2009, and I'm making shit per hour, I'm going to be broke. I have loans like everyone else. My parents said they won't pay for my BlackBerry then, either. I may have to say goodbye." She pouts jokingly.

Classified ads for egg donors appear regularly in the *Spectator* and fliers are posted inside buildings like Barnard Hall and Schermerhorn, seeking out women from specific ethnic backgrounds or with certain physical or academic qualifications. New York City's Craigslist publishes scores of ads each day, and a cursory Google search provides hundreds of links to local "egg brokers." They sometimes promise up to $25,000 for donated eggs.

It was one of these advertisements that caught Alex's eye and led her to fill out an online questionnaire at a Web site for a Manhattan-based agency that she refuses to name because of contractual obligations.

"It was a Sunday night this summer, and I was procrastinating before work the next day, so I started filling in this huge form that asked about my physical appearance, medical history, even my interests," she says. "By Monday afternoon, I had received a call saying these people wanted me to come in for an appointment."

College students make extremely desirable candidates for donations because young women produce more high-quality eggs with a lower risk of genetic defects. Donors are usually between 21 and 28 years old. Couples also look for donors with traits they wish to have passed on to their children, including higher education or even a special talent, like musical ability.

Egg "donations" are never truly that, with donors' being compensated thousands of dollars on average. Students are often struggling to pay off debts, making the opportunity more alluring. The deal seems right for everyone.

Jewish Ivy League women are in especially high demand in New York, where there is a large Jewish population alongside a small donor pool. Though blond-haired, blue-eyed white women are thought to be top dollar nationally, there's a premium for "eggs of color," which are harder to find because of a small population pool. A Craigslist ad in Manhattan from October offered up to $25,000 for East and South Asian donors with fluent language skills in their native tongues.

But Alex puts it more bluntly. "If I was short,

overweight, or a minority, I'm sure I wouldn't have found immediate success or made that much money to start. I made more money than what's typical because I was deemed an 'ideal type' by the agency. The couple agreed to pay more."

In one extreme case reported on by researcher Barbara Rothman for the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, a couple offered $500,000 for an Ivy League donor who was taller than 5 feet 10 inches and scored at least a 1400 on her SATs.

These stories are mostly myths, though. A report in the journal *Fertility and Sterility* found that "despite scattered and largely unverified reports of amounts of $50,000 or more appearing repeatedly in the media … the average level of compensation provided for egg donors was less than $5,000." Most of the time, five- and six-figure offers posted in advertisements are attention-grabbers to generate leads, but little more, the report said.

Over 15 "egg brokers" and fertility centers, including Columbia's own reproductive services department, were contacted for this story and either did not return repeated calls for comment or declined to be interviewed on the record after questions of egg valuation and ethics were raised.

The American Society for Reproductive Medicine is the nation's leading advocacy and watchdog group for egg donation. Its online materials list best practices for donation centers and monetary compensation for donors. The fact that prospective parents want donors who look and behave much like the babies they dream of is not surprising or unwarranted, ASRM says, but rising prices for beautiful women with excellent grades is a "morally troubling" trend that's akin to eugenics.

A recent CNN report indicated that while the nation's economy is weakening, interest in donation has surged. "We are so inundated right now," Robin von Halle, president of Alternative Reproductive Resources in Chicago, told CNN. The agency, which serves as a intermediary between donors and parents, receives up to 50 inquiries a day, more than double the amount from the same time last year. Von Halle said she was convinced that the increase had to do with the financial crisis. "They [donors] don't like to openly admit that, but … I know that's why they call us, for that financial remuneration."

A survey of 52 anonymous donors by Northwestern University in Chicago and Fertility Centers of Illinois found that all of them felt that compensation was important and that only 11 percent would donate if they were not paid. Thirty percent responded that financial gain was the most important motivation for donation.

The ASRM has its own guidelines for compensation: its ethics committee found that payments over $5,000 need justification and "sums above $10,000 go beyond what is appropriate."

In one analytical article, Amherst College professor Mary Lyndon Shanley points out that "the differential pricing based on characteristics like the provider's height, skin, and hair color, athletic or academic achievement, and musical ability seems to validate the assumption that persons with such attributes—both providers and as-yet unborn children—are 'worth more' than others."

Experts agree that there's a basic revulsion behind the idea of "playing God" by screening for specific traits outside the realm of genetic disease.

"I'm sure everything in my education here has taught me that that sort of unequal pricing is wrong, but this is about making money and helping a family get pregnant in the process," Alex says. "I have something that some women cannot give. For me, at this moment, that's all that matters."

NO PAIN, NO GAIN

Alex says that the initial meeting was "somewhat confusing, tedious." The entire procedure was explained to her before she filled out longer questionnaires about her family's medical and reproductive history. The forms asked her when she had her first alcoholic drink, if she was a virgin, and about the regularity of her periods.

The intensive screening also included a physical exam, blood work, and then a psychological evaluation.

"They wanted to make sure I was completely ready," she recalls. "You can't just walk into a clinic and give your eggs and get paid."

They asked questions about her mental health history, including school stressors, and asked her hypothetical questions.

"Let's say you see a child on the street who has strikingly similar physical qualities to you, and you think one of your eggs could have helped produce that child. How will that make you feel? What would you do?"

Women who smoke, have a body mass index over 30, or a history of gynecologic problems are ineligible for donation. Other illnesses and genetic disorders can disqualify women from the process—everything from a history of mental illness to paternal-side diabetes.

Ninety percent of women are eliminated from the donation process before a single egg is culled.

But Alex moved forward. After she was approved, she signed a document that confirmed that she'd give up her rights to the donated eggs once they were harvested—that is, physically removed. After waiting for several weeks, she was informed that a donor had been found and that she would need to start the actual process of donation.

Egg donation is not as simple as sperm donation. There aren't adult magazines and private rooms that make the process of producing eggs as simple as a five-minute jerk-off session. Instead, it requires weeks of hormone injections and then minor surgery to retrieve the eggs.

Alex learned to inject herself with fertility drugs for a little over a month. The drugs stimulated her ovaries to produce several egg follicles, increasing the likelihood of pregnancy. A drug like Lupron that temporarily stops the ovaries from releasing a single egg each month (a normal menstrual cycle) is also administered by daily injection.

Donors must also avoid unprotected sexual contact, as it could result in the birth of twins, triplets, or quadruplets.

Alex said that she visited the fertility center she used almost 15 times for regular blood tests and ultrasound monitoring. She had to schedule appointments around her full course schedule and media internship.

When eggs are ready to be harvested, the donor undergoes a minor surgical procedure called transvaginal ovarian aspiration. While the donor is under anesthesia, a fertility specialist uses a needle to pass through the top wall of the vagina and inserts it into the ovary to remove an egg. This process is repeated for each egg. The procedure can take anywhere from 30 to 60 minutes, and the donor can go home the same day.

Alex skipped a day of classes in order to participate in the surgery, and she spent the weekend resting. Her eggs were tested and found to be acceptable by doctors, so they were fertilized with the intended father's sperm. She says that she doesn't know if her eggs contributed to a successful pregnancy, and she signed a form so that she won't have to know. Different programs can allow for different relationships between donors and intended

parents. Alex is keeping hers totally anonymous.

"For me, this egg is DNA, and I'm not sure I am going to put much weight into whatever child may be born," she says. "I guess I prescribe more to the nurture side of things."

Donors get paid regardless of whether a pregnancy occurs. If a donor has a proven success rate, however, she often can receive higher compensation for any subsequent donations since her eggs are deemed dependable. The ASRM recommends that women donate no more than six times, but there's no real system in place to monitor that.

The vast majority of egg donation procedures run smoothly, but there are real risks. Injected hormones increase ovulation, which leads some women to experience headaches, hot flashes, mood changes, fluid retention, and bruises and discomfort at the site of injections.

"I definitely felt like I was experiencing menopause at some points," Alex laughs. "But otherwise, it could've been worse."

The most dangerous of the side effects is a condition called ovarian hyperstimulation syndrome, which occurs when ovaries become enlarged. Short-term symptoms are mild and include bloating, weight gain, and abdominal pain. Long-term risks have yet to be fully researched.

Women with severe hyperstimulation also have an increased risk for blood clots. The Center for Egg Options reports that approximately three women out of every thousand are known to have had severe medical complications during the procedure.

If done correctly, the donation procedure won't interfere with a donor's fertility. But, in truth, that's the one thing that Alex says she worries about.

"If I am unable to have my own children in the next 10 years, yeah, I'm going to be really fucking pissed off at myself," she says. "But the likelihood of that is near zero, so why would I stress about it now?"

THE BABY BUSINESS

Barnard's newly inaugurated president Debora Spar examined the economics of the fertility industry in *The Baby Business*, which was published in 2005. In it, Spar argues that the U.S. would do well to establish a more regulatory framework for egg donation.

Donors are mostly American women because many other industrialized nations have banned paid donations. The number of paid donors is unknown, but Spar estimates that spending on donor eggs was about $38 million in 2005.

In the United Kingdom, government agencies have capped the amount of payment to egg donors at about $24 in U.S. currency. This amount is hardly enticing, which is why intended parents across the pond may wait for more than five years before they are matched up with a donor. Spar says that this is most likely because other countries have nationalized health systems with more regulation than the that of the U.S.

At a minimum, Spar says that she'd like to see a public registry in place so that if egg donors want to track their children and if children want to track their genetic parents, they'd be able to do that.

To make her case, Spar cites new research on former sperm donors who fathered many children decades ago and now feel strong, painful connections to children they've never met.

"For decades with adoption and sperm donation, the idea was that it's better for everyone to not know anything, but this was wrong," she says. "It's hard to imagine that the same attachment would not exist for women, if not more so. People should just be aware of the fact that they may feel a connection even if they have never met. Genetic ties do exist."

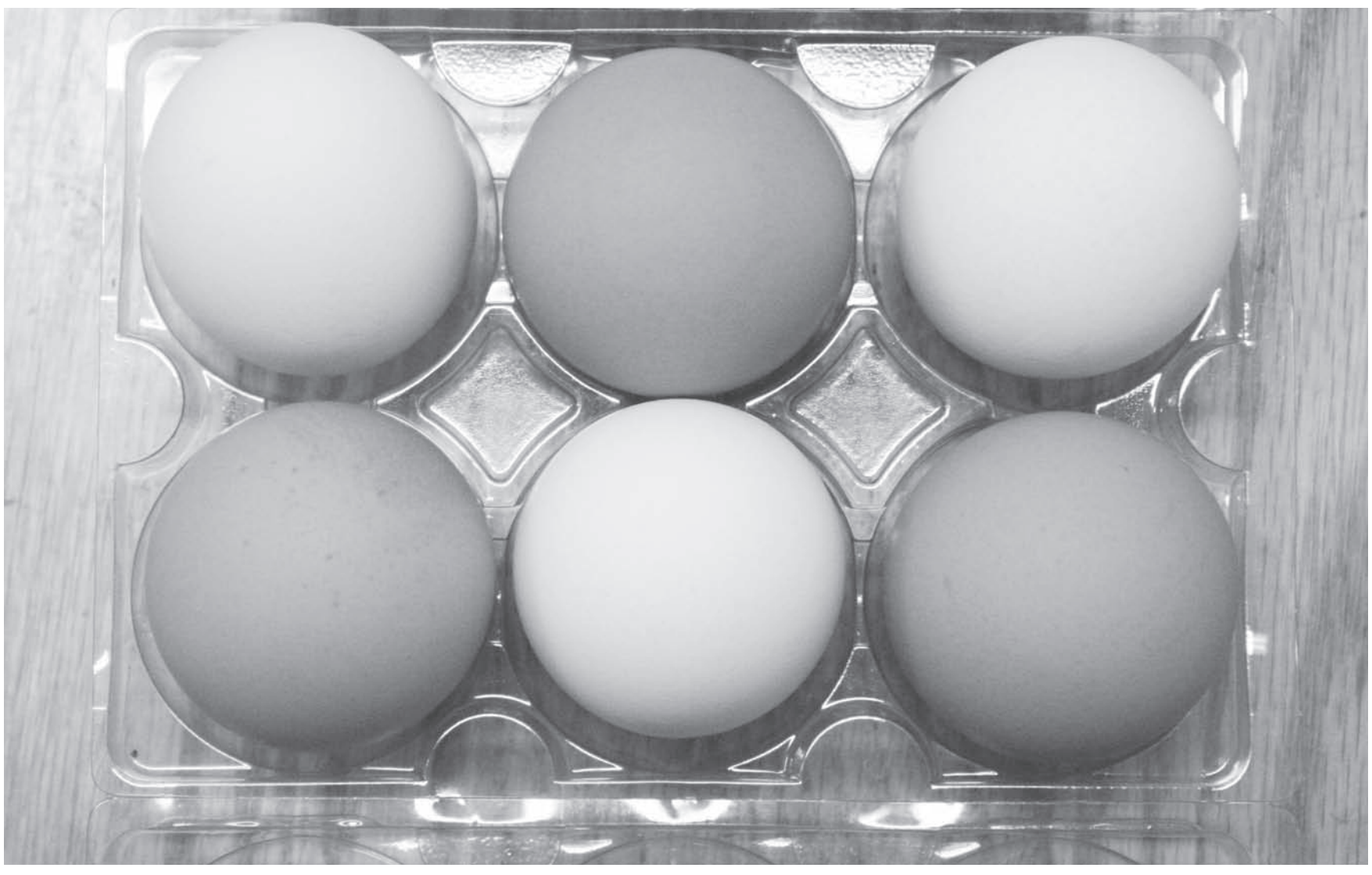
Spar says that she cares less about the financial end in the scope of larger medical issues.

"The more boring issue we need to address is that we ensure the process is safe and that women understand all the complications and that the rights of children are well-protected," she says. "Once we've done that, I don't really care if a parent spends $4,000 or $40,000. I think it's silly to pay that, but it's also vaguely patronizing for women to have a law that puts a limit on the cost of their own genetic material."

Though Spar says that every woman is an individual who can make her own decision, she does offer some advice for any Barnard or Columbia women who are contemplating the procedure.

"Do your homework," she starts. "Think hard. It's a very tempting way to make a lot of money very quickly, but it demands more than a cost-benefit calculation. I don't think young women think long and hard about the emotional risks. Try to imagine not how you feel at 19, but how you're going to feel at 29."

When I relayed the message to Alex, she shrugged.



Growing Up Russian in the United States

gary shteyngart reveals his not-so-hidden cynicism

BY VALERIYA SAFRONOVA
PHOTO COURTESY OF MARION ETTLINGER

For me, a Russian-slash-American citizen, reading Gary Shteyngart's *The Russian Debutante's Handbook* feels like being taken backstage of a world I know very well, but do not understand at all. People like me, who are culturally unsure and in need of some straightforward, unflinching language, are the audience that originally inspired Shteyngart to write. In college, Shteyngart noticed that among all the novels describing the American immigrant experience, there were none featuring America's favorite nemesis—Russia. Shteyngart, a typical liberal arts student, freshly returned from Prague, decided to respond to this obvious dearth by writing a novel both for and about his people.

The book, which is partially autobiographical, wittily describes the adventures of a very confused Russian-born American who stumbles into a post-Soviet world of crime and craziness. It does away with political correctness and boldly marches into unexplored territory, thrusting the reader into a portrait of a proud culture that is still unsure of its place in the new world order.

Both this novel and his second, *Absurdistan*, are satirical creations interspersed with philosophical musings, Russian terms, and references to modern culture. The intense personality that can be felt through his work is not far from his reality. "I don't have the happiest view of the world." Shteyngart says stoically.

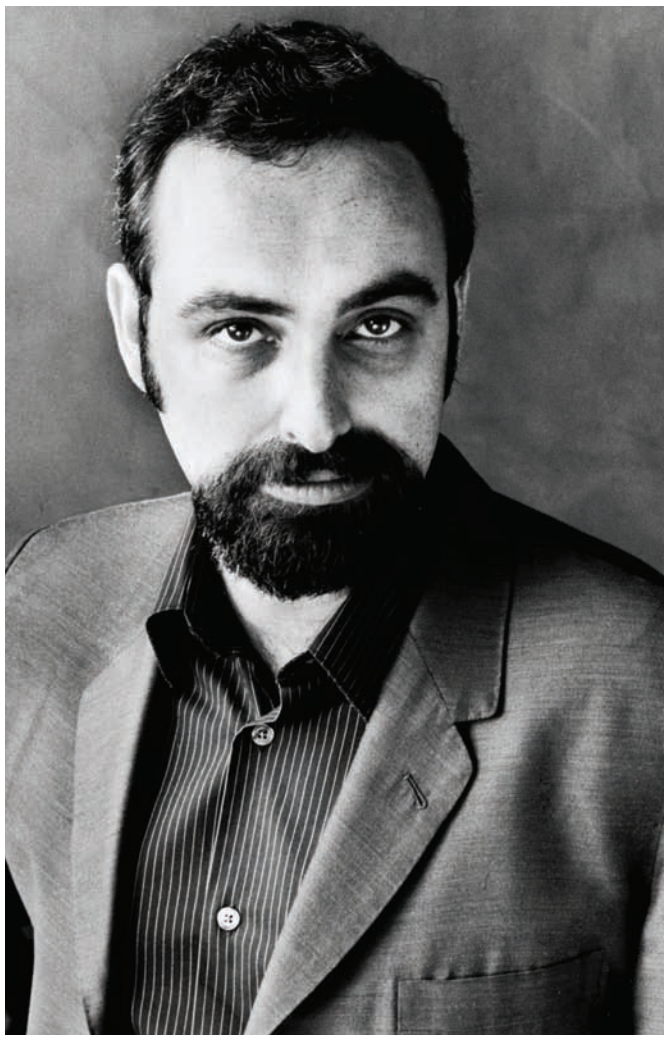
Discussing the current situation of the world, Shteyngart jokingly admits that at times he wishes he could be Italian or German, rather than a perpetual citizen of dying empires. He talks about the Russian state with a large dose of cynicism and a healthy splash of honesty, all the while comparing it to the United States. In his discussion of both countries, he mentions his fascination with the nations' use of gluttony to fill cultural, spiritual, and emotional voids. Shteyngart sees this über-consumption as something prevalent in the United States, and something to which growing countries such as Russia cannot resist falling prey.

All of these themes are evident in *Absurdistan*, which is about an overweight oligarch, stuck in St. Petersburg and desperately trying to return to the land of optimism, buffets, and rap music: America. The main character, Misha Vainberg, is based on Shteyngart's college friend, a foreigner who was more grounded than the native citizens, and who, despite his xenophobic mother country, was incredibly open-minded. Alongside the satire and the cynicism, the characters Shteyngart creates and sets loose on our minds are embodiments of what he feels humanity lacks. "I want to find a character who really feels like he'll change my world," he says. For Shteyngart, Misha embodies optimism in a time that is generally depressing and "not very pretty." Shteyngart wants to let his audience get to know Misha, to see through his eyes while maintaining a truthful description of his world.

Shteyngart's nostalgia for something better is evident when he speaks of St. Petersburg and his annual visits to the city. "Walking past the canals and hearing the language you can almost envision what it was like," he says, referring to the days in which the Russian classics were written. Many of the authors Shteyngart names as his favorites are writers who lived in that time. The way Shteyngart talks of the past is in strong contrast to his direct and honest (to the point of being harsh) discussion of modern Russia. "Russians at this point don't really care who their leader is. They don't care if Stalin comes back—all they want is stability, a paycheck, and improving the quality of life," says Shteyngart. The blunt words and the almost-tender reminiscing about old Russia make it clear that Shteyngart's relationship with his motherland is, most simply, one of the love-hate variety.

Add to that his confusing upbringing, which, according to Shteyngart, "was very difficult … it was equivalent to being from Iran or North Korea or whatever axis of evil we come up with next week." In order to compensate for the negative portrayal of Russians, Shteyngart attempted to be overly patriotic, which did not result in much. Overall, "it wasn't a very happy childhood," he says.

Luckily, Shteyngart has gotten past that and will soon be releasing a satire-free collection of essays about his early days in the United States. Though this type of writing will be a move away from the longer pieces he has previously published, his readers need not worry. Shteyngart, who advises up-and-coming writers to "read everything," will no doubt delve deep into his upbringing and the long-term effects it has had on him with his usual disregard for the possibility of shame. The removal of satire from his writing may even redirect Shteyngart's brave and honest approach, away from the characters he wishes there were more of, and toward one of which there is plenty—himself.



Gary Shteyngart may not be an optimist, but at least he's honest.

"RUSSIANS AT THIS POINT DON'T REALLY CARE WHO THEIR LEADER IS. THEY DON'T CARE IF STALIN COMES BACK—ALL THEY WANT IS STABILITY, A PAYCHECK, AND IMPROVING THE QUALITY OF LIFE."

Walk *The Walk* With Hanson

everyone's favorite boy band grows up

BY REBECCA PATTIZ
PHOTOS BY RACHEL MERSKY

In third grade, I believed that I would one day marry Zac Hanson. I wasn't entirely sure how we would meet or how I would woo him, but I truly thought that we were meant to be together. I read the unofficial Hanson biography, which became my favorite book, and I listened to "Thinking of You" from their debut album, thinking of nothing but Zac.

I admit that I lost track of Hanson and their career shortly after the peak of their fame, growing out of the phase, as most tweens did. Nonetheless, as the boys aged, got married (alas), and had children, they surprisingly never stopped making music or performing for thousands of screaming fans.

When Hanson emerged in 1998 with their first single, "MMMBop," the three long-haired, angel-faced adolescent brothers managed to forever ingrain their catchy three-part harmonies in the minds of Americans of all generations. Of course, Hanson's biggest fans were girls around their own ages, which, at the time, ranged from 11 to 14 years old. The Hanson brothers—Zac the drummer, Taylor the lead singer and keyboardist, and Isaac the guitarist—appeared on every major television program and in every teen magazine, and toured the globe for throngs of crying and screaming fans. They were the three most famous pre-teens in the world.

At a recent benefit concert at the Nokia Theatre, Hanson proved once again that they are here to stay.

Following their initial success, Hanson began to fall off the teeny-bopper radar. It took two years for their next album to come out—enough time for the boys' soprano voices to change, and for many of their former fans to all but forget about them. Riding on Hanson's teen fame, other artists like Christina Aguilera and Britney Spears took their place. The brothers themselves became a novel anachronism: "MMMBop" has appeared on practically every one-hit-wonder-themed clip show.

If Hanson's celebrity waned, it was not because they stopped making records. The band's fourth album, titled *The Walk*, was released in 2007, and they are still touring. The brothers have also added celebrity philanthropy to their scope: They have been using their music and fan base to raise funds for pediatric AIDS research and assistance in Africa. The actual walks—which give their album its title—began in collaboration with TOMS Shoes. Hanson wanted to help the company send 50,000 pairs of shoes to Africa. Once they reached that goal, they kept walking. At every show, Hanson sponsors a mile-long walk prior to the performance. For each mile walked, the band donates a dollar to their cause. The band also walks barefoot, even through such questionable streets as those of downtown Philadelphia, and asks their fans to do the same. "This tour has become … an extension of those walks. It's grown. What we wanted to do is say, okay, we've done these walks, and now the goal is to make sure that just by people coming to the walks and walking a mile that they realize they're part of something bigger, that they're part of a larger goal," Taylor explained before their recent benefit concert at the Nokia Theatre.

As far as the members of Hanson are concerned, a desire to do something constructive with their music has always been part of their image. Even when their faces were plastered on T-shirts and bedroom walls worldwide, Zac insists that their band was always about making music with a message. "I think we've always intended for our music to be used as something that was supposed to mean something, something that's supposed to have lasting value for people," he says. "I mean, from the very beginning. 'MMMBop' is all about the fact that most of the relationships in your life will be gone in an 'MMMBop.' … That's why the chorus is what it is—it represents the passing of time. C'est la vie. Using our music to help support things we're passionate about, that's always what we thought we'd do with our music. That's the way we've intended to have our career."

Though Hanson no longer appears on the cover of *Tiger Beat*, they say their career is just as they want it. Many celebrities cling to their former mega-fame for dear life, but Hanson has managed to shift its focus while retaining its fans—you won't see the brothers walking on *Celebrity Fit Club* any time soon. "The record's called *The Walk*," says Taylor. "Not the run, or the jog—it's the walk. From a musical point of view, it was meant to symbolize that we're on a steady path, and that we're comfortable with where we're headed." He continues, "I think a lot of the reason why we've been able to have really passionate fans for so long is because we never deviated from what we said we were doing. … You serve your fans, you connect with them."

"NOT THE RUN, OR THE JOG—IT'S THE WALK. FROM A MUSICAL POINT OF VIEW, IT WAS MEANT TO SYMBOLIZE THAT WE'RE ON A STEADY PATH, AND THAT WE'RE COMFORTABLE WITH WHERE WE'RE HEADED."

If the mission hasn't changed since the "MMMBop" days, Hanson maintains that the music hasn't either. "Our voices changed a lot more than our music has," asserts Isaac. Feel-good, melodic rock songs full of three-part harmonies and catchy choruses are still the band's forte. Though the brothers confess that they would be bored if their music hadn't evolved at all, Zac says, "We don't ever need to worry that we're not going to sound like Hanson. We are Hanson. There's no way for us not to sound like Hanson. No one ever created the sound of Hanson—it's just what happens when the three of us play and sing and write together."

After the release of their second album, *This Time Around*, in 2000, the band was moved to Island Def Jam, a primarily hip-hop and R&B label, when their original label, Mercury, was bought up. To maintain their musical integrity, Hanson split from their label. They felt they had to leave Island "in order to stay on the path that we've been on since the beginning, in order to stay true to our selves, from this most recent record to 'MMMBop.' You have to be true to yourself and we've never deviated from our emotional, musical honesty. It felt like because of the corporate structure of the record business, because of the fact that we were no longer with the record company that signed us … there was nothing holding us there—in fact, everything was pushing us away. Hip-hop wasn't the direction we were going in," explains Isaac. Expressing disdain for MTV and musical careers based on hit singles alone, the brothers created their own label, 3CG, for subsequent albums. They even made a documentary about the process, called *Strong Enough to Break*, in order to educate people about the intricacies of the music industry.

The Hanson brothers may once have been famous for their flowing locks and catchy lyrics, but philanthropy, not just pop appeal, is now part of the package as well.

"'MMMBOP' IS ALL ABOUT THE FACT THAT MOST OF THE RELATIONSHIPS IN YOUR LIFE WILL BE GONE IN AN 'MMMBOP.'"

Fans certainly respond well to Hanson's committed consistency. Last month, the Nokia Theatre was full of girls screaming for the guys—now sporting facial hair and skinny jeans—and wearing Hanson T-shirts. Though most Hanson fans have been listening to the band for a decade now, new listeners have been attracted to Hanson's music and message since the pinnacle of their fame.

Lia Russo is 18 years old and a huge Hanson fan. She has only been listening since 2002, though her friends have all been fans since the start. "My friend was obsessed with them and she used to play their music all the time. And I was like, this is amazing, I need to get on that. And then I did, and then it took over my life," she says. Though Russo had heard Hanson before, she never took notice until after the height of their celebrity. Now, she loves "everything about them" and calls them "the best-kept secret in rock and roll." Hanson's heartthrob status remains intact, as Russo admits that while she thinks it is "awesome" that all members of the band are now married with kids, she "would rather that it be me."

Hanson still plays "MMMBop" at their shows—not as reluctantly as might be expected. Girls still go wild when Taylor, clad all in white, runs across the stage with his mic outstretched toward the crowd. Fans still buy albums, sweatshirts, and posters emblazoned with the brothers' images. Impressively, the band is not ashamed of their former teen-stardom or of the infectiously absurd song that made them famous, but instead looks forward to a slightly less glitzy, and slightly more substantive, future.

To some of Columbia's international students, "traditional" food connotes curry, not cranberry sauce.

International Flavors

thanksgiving the columbia way

BY DEVIN BRISKI
PHOTO BY MOLLY CROSSIN

As ghost decorations get replaced by cornucopias and turkeys, sweaters turn to jackets, and pumpkin spice lattes fill many a Starbucks cup, Columbia students are gearing up for the long Thanksgiving weekend. For many students, this means a trip back home to spend cherished time with their families, but for most international students, the airfare and traveling convenience is not worth the trip for this exclusively American-recognized holiday.

Instead, international students take this time to explore a new tradition, frequently going home with their American friends and experiencing for the first time the culinary joys of turkey, stuffing, and cranberry sauce. In the home stretch of first semester, international students are also pausing to be thankful for the traditional foods of the countries they left behind.

Leonard Langenscheidt, CC '12, who hails from Germany, says he is thankful for the native German breakfast dish of weisswurst. "Weisswurst is a special kind of sausage that is only eaten for breakfast. It is in some kind of peel, and you cook it right before you eat it so it is warm. But it is not as meaty as other sausages," Langenscheidt explains. "You usually eat it with normal mustard, or sweet mustard, which adds to the sweet taste of it."

Langenscheidt is going to eat Thanksgiving dinner with some family members living in New York. He misses weisswurst and other German food on a regular basis, but "I won't miss German food on Thanksgiving," he says. "Turkey makes up for it."

This is not Langenscheidt's first experience with Thanksgiving or American food culture, because he attended boarding school in Pennsylvania. For native Austrian Simon Herzog, CC '12, however, Thanksgiving dinner, along with many of the dishes served in John Jay, are all new culinary experiences.

Herzog confesses that he is nostalgic for the traditional Austrian dish of wiener schnitzel with fries and potato salad, a specialty of his home country. "I would eat schnitzel at home any day that ends in 'y,'" he emphasizes.

Schnitzel, he describes, is a snack made of either turkey or veal, hammered until flat and then breaded and deep-fried in oil. He hasn't found satisfactory schnitzels in New York City yet, but he continues to search.

WITH A TOTAL INTERNATIONAL STUDENT ENROLLMENT OF 20 PERCENT, COLUMBIA IS LUCKY TO HAVE SO MANY DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVES ON FOOD.

Herzog mentions a typical Viennese café called Café Sabarsky on the corner of 85th Street and Fifth Avenue as a good place to try German and Austrian specialties. Café Sabarsky is a part of the museum Neue Galerie, which displays early 20th-century German and Austrian art, and it serves both the Austrian dish of schnitzel and the German breakfast delicacy weisswurst that Langenscheidt describes.

Despite having to wait another month before he can return home to eat schnitzel again, Herzog is excited to attend his first American Thanksgiving. "I am having dinner at a friend's house, and then I am seeing [the electronica band] Deadmau5 at Webster Hall," he explains. "This will be my first Thanksgiving ever, and I am hoping for a classical turkey."

Another international student adjusting to the American food culture, Duygu Yilmaz, CC '12, has dual citizenship in the Netherlands and Turkey. She misses the traditional Turkish food made by her mother and grandmother more than anything else. "My mom's food was generally really good, and John Jay food is not that good at all," she says, laughing.

Her favorite delicacy from back home is her grandmother's Turkish pizza, or lahmacun. Yilmaz describes lahmacun as "a very thin pizza with ground beef, pepper, garlic sauce, and sometimes salad. You roll it, then eat it."

In New York City, lahmacun pizza is available at Lahmacun Pizza & Mediterranean, a restaurant in the Financial District. Yilmaz has yet to try a restaurant's version of lahmacun, and is skeptical because of her personal associations with the traditional dish.

"The person who made lahmacun best was my grandmother. She would have these lahmacun family gatherings, and she would make 30 of them, and we would all come together and eat. It was a lot of fun," Yilmaz explains. "We would do this whenever my grandmother felt it was time for the whole family to come together again."

Even though she misses her native food quite a bit, Yilmaz is also excited to experience the American tradition of Thanksgiving, which she thinks will be somewhat similar to her grandmother's lahmacun gatherings.

"I might go to Cape Cod with a friend to eat with his family, but I have no definite plans," Yilmaz says.

The infusion of international students into the homes of their American counterparts this Thanksgiving break will bring an added flavor to the dinner tables of many Columbia students. With a total international student enrollment of 20 percent, Columbia is lucky to have so many different perspectives on food readily available.

The cultural exchange that will surely take place in many American students' homes over break will embrace the true spirit of Thanksgiving: cross-cultural interaction, the sharing of food and different traditions, and giving words of thanks. At the same time, international students can gain insight into American culture by way of one of our proudest traditional holidays.

Headband Havoc

celeb lines versus retail stores

BY LINDSAY WEAVER
PHOTO COURTESY OF BRYAN BEDDER

The ubiquitous trend of celebrity fashion lines has taken a turn upwards to hair accessories. From *Gossip Girl* to College Walk, the popularity of headbands gives celebs a chance to market their "creative vision" at outlandish prices.

Some actresses who launch clothing and accessory lines have actual talent and a marketable aesthetic. The likes of Mischa Barton and Phoebe Price do not have either, but they are the latest to design (or, as is more likely, put their names on) hairwear lines.

While it's arguably cute, does one really want to pay $100 to $200 for a braided circlet that looks exactly the same as cheaper offerings? Often, the celeb line is not about originality, but about buying the goods for the sake of the name on the label. At the same time, most of these lines lack the quality of legitimate designer offerings.

There are plenty of on-trend offerings at more affordable prices. As always, Urban Outfitters has the current styles for less. Feathers, lace, bows, and hippie head wraps are priced between $10 and $34. One item, with an oversized silk flower, is the perfect accent for holiday dresses and is sure to stand out among all the plumage at parties this December. If you're looking for something unique, the whimsical wares of Frolic should satisfy. Designed by Caroline Weaver, a self-described "imagineer" still in high school, Frolic's handmade headbands range from $7 to $21.

For those looking to spend more for the sake of definite quality, the sparkly goods at Henri Bendel's will make any girl's holiday. The innovative mixes of satin, velvet, and brooches cannot be found at cheaper stores, and still cost less than Mischa's headwraps. Priced from $58 to $138, and with Swarovski crystals and jewel tones, the headbands are a bit more grown-up and polished. The same goes for Jennifer Ouelette's hair accessories ($55 to $150), found at Barneys New York. Satin turban-style bands are perfect for the Blair Waldorf devotee, and extra-wide feather headbands are reminiscent, in a good way, of New York City Ballet's *Swan Lake* headgear. These adornments are the perfect antidote to celebrities' attempts to cater to passing trends.

WHILE IT'S ARGUABLY CUTE, DOES ONE REALLY WANT TO SPEND $100 TO $200 FOR A BRAIDED CIRCLET THAT LOOKS EXACTLY THE SAME AS CHEAPER OFFERINGS?

Mischa Barton (above) is one of many celebrities to come out with overpriced, underthought lines of accessories.

Person of the Week: Rei Kawakubo

BY SHIRLEY CHEN
PHOTO COURTESY OF H&M

Explosively imaginative, Rei Kawakubo's style influences everything from the shelves of H&M to the designs of Louis Vuitton.

Swedish retail chain H&M released its Comme des Garçons capsule collaboration last Thursday, its most avant-garde project to date. For many it was an unimaginable dream—a momentary chance to acquire pieces designed by the ultimate countercultural fashion rebel, Comme des Garçons designer Rei Kawakubo.

In terms of influence, Kawakubo is unmatched. She pioneered a new aesthetic, a beautifully disastrous, deconstructed, dark-yet-explosive style. In contrast to most designers' sexy and polished offerings, Comme des Garçons is draped, torn, destroyed, and frayed. At times austere and simple, at others garish and chaotically layered, it takes jolie-laide to a perfect extreme. Comme des Garçons, which means "like boys," is beautiful without any hint of typical feminine prettiness.

In addition to her line with H&M, Kawakubo collaborated with Louis Vuitton earlier this year to honor the French fashion house's 30th anniversary. Comme des Garçons will also preview its lower-priced "Homme Deux: Suits for the Handsome Mind" line at Pitti Uomo 75 in January 2009. Her global appeal is growing, and Kawakubo's "Hiroshima Chic" has inspired a new generation of designers, including her former apprentice Junya Watanabe, Belgians Martin Margiela and Ann Demeulemeester, and minimalist Helmut Lang. The fashion elite will continue to celebrate Kawakubo throughout November, as Comme des Garçons commemorates its birthday with a special exhibition, entitled "Printed Matter," in its London Dover Street store. After 40 years, Rei Kawakubo is still building momentum, which shows that while prettiness fades, style lives on.