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eye

# HOW WE'RE DOING

reflections on wellness, community, and friendship

by Wilfred Chan and Sarah Ngu



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# are we well?

## HOW WE'RE DOING

A reflection on wellness, community, and friendship, pg. 07

*by Wilfred Chan and Sarah Ngu*  
*cover design by Cathi Choi and Zack Etheart*

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## LETTER TO THE EDITOR

To the Editor:

I was honored to be mentioned in Devin Briski's Nov. 17 article about sidewalk book vendors. As a member of the Columbia College Class of 1971, I learned a great deal about free speech and the freedom of assembly during the anti-war demonstrations on campus in the Spring of 1968.

When it comes to the occupation of public space—whether a sidewalk or a park—the key to our liberty is to balance the competing rights of everyone: vendor and pedestrian, protester and passerby. I am very proud to have exempted vendors of written material from pernicious licensing laws, but I believe that first amendment liberty also means there must be room on the sidewalk for others. On Broadway that's not a problem.

Thanks for a great article on an important issue.

Ed Wallace, CC'71

# GET YOUR TREAT ON NON-DENOMINATIONAL ADVENT CALENDAR

BY MARGARET BOYKIN AND ASHTON COOPER  
ILLUSTRATION BY STEPHANIE MANNHEIM

As winter rolls in, some religions like to reward us for getting through every day of December with an advent calendar. Often these calendars have little punch out holes where you can take a chocolate (or, if you're us, several) or a small treat each day until a certain holy baby is born. We've repurposed this religiously exclusive calendar to be a bit more winter holiday-friendly and remind you that yes, we know it's hard, we know there's, like, five hours of sunlight outside and it's really stupidly cold, but we support you—and the end is near. **Cut out the prizes below and assign them to the days on the back-cover calendar** to help you remember—it will end soon. You're human. Don't forget to take breaks.



## REMAKES FAIRY TALES FOR THE SCREEN

BY CHARLOTTE MURTISHAW

*There comes a time in everybody's life when they read an original version of one of the Grimm Brothers' fairy tales that retroactively spoils their childhood. So used to the bland, white-washed Disney interpretations, it's easy for us to forget that once upon a time, Cinderella was synonymous with "majorly gruesome" and "shoe full of blood." Recently, Hollywood has been trying to cash in on the edgier details of the tales with adult-targeted shows such as Grimm (NBC) and Once Upon a Time (ABC) and the dime-a-dozen "Snow White" movies in the making. Eyesites takes a by-the-numbers account of some tales not yet turned into cinematic gold. Pay attention, Kristen Stewart—these are ripe for the taking.*

### "CLEVER HANS"

—BROTHERS GRIMM

Clever Hans may be mentally-challenged, but that's part of what makes this totally politically correct tale so poignant. A love story for the ages, Hans courts Gretel, the comely lass down the road. She bestows upon him many gifts, which he misuses in various ways—for instance, he accidentally smothers a goat, and gets kicked in the face by a cow. Ultimately, though, the story becomes just your average farm-oriented rom-com with the twist ending—they don't get married after all when Clever Hans ties Gretel to a cart and throws gouged-out sheep and cattle eyes at her. Moral of the story, ladies: if he throws the eyes of his livestock at you, you'll probably be happier without him.

### "THE MOUSE, THE BIRD, AND THE SAUSAGE"

—BROTHERS GRIMM

This is the heartwarming story of the three best friends that anyone could have: the mouse, the bird, and the sausage. Of course, all three protagonists die suddenly at the end, but as *The Sopranos* taught us, that just leaves the audience begging for more.

### "MR. FOX"

—JOSEPH JACOBS

What cinematic canon would be complete without the romantic-thriller-slasher film? In this particularly charming English fairy tale, the wealthy Mr. Fox woos Lady Mary, but refuses to show her or her brothers his home before the marriage. Curious, Lady Mary sets off on her own to find it, passing through three gates warning her to turn back. Long story short, she discovers Fox is a serial killer who preys on brides. The good news is that her brothers chop him into a thousand pieces. The better news is that it would require more fake blood than the elevators in *The Shining*, and America loves gore in movies like it loves ketchup on its freedom fries.

# HAPPY HOLIDAYS DECEMBER CHECKLIST

BY MARGARET BOYKIN

Yes, exams are looming. Yes, it's going to be so cold that you probably won't want to leave your extra-long twin bed, but these are some December traditions you shouldn't miss this month:

#### ☐ Columbia Tree Lighting & Yule Log Ceremonies Dec. 1, 6–7 p.m., College Walk and John Jay Lounge

You may have missed the Rockefeller tree-lighting, but don't miss the personal, on-campus version of this cheery holiday tradition. Wear something warm, grab a bag of street nuts, and come to College Walk to watch the trees sparkle (and to finally discover what this elusive "yule log" thing actually is).

#### ☐ Annual Candlelight Concert Dec. 10, Union Theological Seminary

One thing you can be sure of during the holidays: candles and singing. And although caroling in New York can be uncomfortable and perhaps result in injury or fines, the Candlelight Concert is a wonderful time to appreciate other people's singing as you bask in the dulcet tones of student choirs and the Opera Hispanica.

#### ☐ Midnight Breakfast Dec. 15

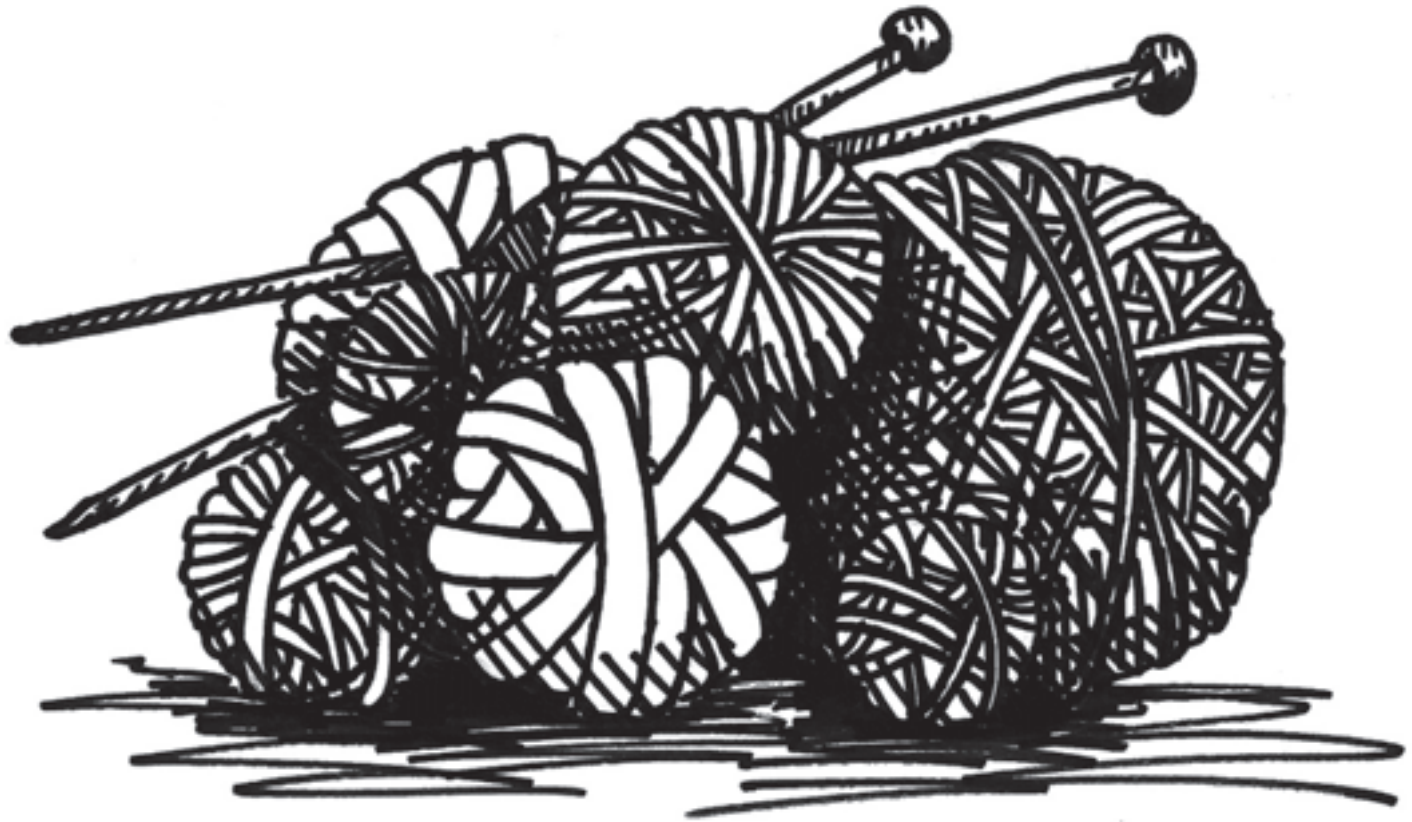
Few things beat this Barnard tradition. Students line up outside LeFrak, broken down from studying and sleepless nights, and the professors and staff of Barnard College welcome them with pop music, waffles, bacon and ice cream sundaes. It's a fantastic free-food respite from the dark hell of Butler, and a perfect chance to have an awkward encounter with Millie the Bear.

#### ☐ Orgo Night Dec. 15

Traditionally occurring the night before the organic chemistry exam, this is when the marching band invades your personal space. It's a lot easier to endure if you think of it as a really cute holiday tradition, so do that, and let yourself take a break to enjoy the sound of pop music filtered through a trombone.

#### ☐ Primal Scream Dec. 18

Traditionally occurring on the Sunday off finals week, all students open their windows and scream. Ask around to try to make sure you get the right time—a solo scream is nowhere near as satisfying.



# Yarns and Recreation

new york's knitting culture will have you in stitches

BY SOMALA DIBY  
ILLUSTRATIONS BY MADDY KLOSS

"You think I give a shit if people think I'm queer? It's what I love to do, so I don't care," says Alphonse Paulin, 63-year-old knitter and longtime facilitator of Wednesday's "men's night" at Knitty City knitting shop off Broadway on W. 79th Street. Paulin teaches ballet at Julliard, speaks four languages, and has been knitting since he was eight years old. He knits birthday gifts, baby gifts, divorce gifts, dresses, skirts, sweaters, shawls, and wedding veils, one of which took him eight months.

I met Paulin in his element: among knitters. He knits methodically but passionately, taking genuine pleasure in passing on the craft to others. "It's a wonderful ... I hate to say 'pastime' because I don't want to pass my time. I like to utilize my time wisely and productively," Paulin says. So, what is it that makes knitting so worthwhile?

Indeed, knitting seems to be on the rise as publishing houses rush hundreds of knitting books to press, Meetup.com overflows with knitting circles, and men have taken to a stereotypically effeminate task. Even Ellen Page has produced a TV series on knitting called *Stitch N' Bitch* to premiere next year on HBO. Still, pop culture is only catching up to an art Paulin touted in the early days of its popularity—and, moreover, that a whole subculture of ardent knitters have kept thriving through the ages.

## Masculi-knitty

According to Paulin, knitting originated as a competitive 16th century men's profession, which included a five-year apprenticeship in a knitting guild to prepare for a six-week knitting exam. Receiving a diploma in knitting was, at the time, equivalent to being a doctor or a scientist and even entailed a job within the royal family. It wasn't until the late 18th century that women took over the trade—a fact that may challenge your grandma's perceived ownership of the profession. However, the gender divide we attribute to the skill is still ingrained within our society today, though it appears to be slowly losing its hold with the appearance of men's nights like the one Paulin so enthusiastically hosts. "Why shouldn't women go to the moon? Why should it only be men?" he asks. "So why should it only be women who knit?"

Moreover, men's night at Knitty City seems to offer something even more valuable than a diploma from a knitting guild. When I walked in on Wednesday, I saw 10 men sitting and knitting around the table, simply having conversation. The

deep timbre of their voices seemed to calm the atmosphere of the entire store. There's something about concentrating on the same repetitive action in a group that puts people at peace. Even I felt a little serene, watching men young and old, seasoned and amateur, knit scarves, doilies, and hats together.

"So much of our lives is about going at computer speed, not human speed, which is unnatural," says men's group member Alec Satin, who enjoys knitting for its relaxing element. Sitting next to him was Ed Rodriguez, a businessman by day who may have converted two of his colleagues to the hobby. One thing that all knitters seem to take advantage of is the individual freedom inherent in the activity: all considerations aside, you knit at your own pace. This universally appealing aspect is what causes Rodriguez to recommend knitting to his colleagues. "You may find that knitting's not for you, but at least you tried," Rodriguez says. "And if you like it, you've found something worthwhile."

## Bitchy Stitching

Paulin's conviction against gender-exclusivity in knitting is in line with the sassy disposition of knitting culture, which today requires a lot more attitude than grandma crocheting in her rocking chair could feasibly muster. But attitudinal knitting often translates to something politically and collectively valuable. An ardent Chicago knitter, for example, began the "Occupy Wool Street"

**"MANY OF THEM KNOW HOW TO KNIT, SO IT'S BECOME A WAY OF GETTING PEOPLE TOGETHER TO TALK."**



movement, a campaign “encouraging knitters, crafters, and designers to make hats, scarves, gloves, blankets, and such to help OWS protesters more safely endure the cold weather,” according to Kimberly Massengill, the program’s NYC coordinator, on her blog “Thump and Growl.” Knitty City is also a haven for politically-minded knitters: the store frequently donates yarn, needles, knitting tools, and unfinished projects to the New York Asian Women’s Center. Senior sales associate and 12-year knitter Susie Dippel says, “Many of them know how to knit, so it’s become a way of getting people together to talk.”

In spite of the many who knit constructively, the attitude of some knitters can be discouraging—though, thankfully, this was not something I came across personally. Unfortunately, Tiger Buchman, a member of the Park Slope Knitting Circle based in Brooklyn, can’t say the same. She shared with me a negative experience at Knitty City, something I could barely conceive of after having fallen in love with the place. Buchman had braved the subway voyage to knit with an author of popular knitting books, because the two shared a unique style of knitting.

The author, however, failed to share Buchman’s excitement. “The teacher was very mean to me. She actually told me to leave before the class even got started because she didn’t like the look on my face,” Buchman says. “It was a very odd thing.” The concept of “knitting prima donnas” doesn’t seem to be confined to this single incident, as Paulin had a similar experience with less-than-friendly knitters, even at a yarn store from which he purchased hundreds of dollars worth of yarn. “They were just mad because I could knit better than they could,” he says.

These less than pleasant occurrences aside, it seems this sass ultimately does more good than harm, especially when applied to the collective concentration of group knitting, where it can breed discussion, kinship, and activism. Just ask the women of the Mindanao island of the Philippines, who imposed a Lysistrata-style sex strike against their husbands for dragging on a war that was plaguing their villages. Against all odds, the strike ended the war. Still, what’s almost more impressionable about the strike was the origin of the idea: the plot was conceived in a women’s sewing cooperative, which makes one think twice about the latent power of needle and thread.

### Social Knitworking

In addition to the Park Slope Knitting Circle, which meets three times a week in various Brooklyn restaurants and homes, forums for knitting groups are myriad. The Brooklyn yarn shop La Casita is also a knitting café and even a bar, after recently acquiring a beer and wine license. Some notable titles in knitting literature include acclaimed book of funky patterns *Stitch ‘N Bitch*; haute-couture pattern magazine *Vogue Knitting*; *Knitting Without Tears*, which addresses frustrations for knitters at every level; and the *Vogue Knitting Stitchionary Series*, any crafter’s go-to for knitting terms. Meanwhile, “Ravelry”—a web interface for patterns, tips, and photos—has emerged as the premiere knitting networking site and is only gaining in popularity, connecting stitchers from coast to coast.

If this formidable online presence weren’t enough to solidify the art as having a culture of its own, then the lexicon of knitting slang I learned from Buchman and the Park Slope knitters should give it that extra push. For example, “frogging,” is when you “rip-it, rip-it, rip-it” to undo a row or two. “Tinking” is knitting backwards. Your “hiya-hiyas” are your knitting needles. “WIPs” are your works in progress, and “UFOs,” your unfinished objects. Wise knitters discipline their “knotty” skeins to prevent “yarn vomit.” Even some terms from other subcultures have made it into the mix: “muggle” has been appropriated from Harry Potter to refer to a non-knitter. Plus, you can’t be a true knitter without your “stash”—in this case, a yarn collection. Personally, the most impressive slang I’ve found is “yarn bombing,” the yarn equivalent to graffiti. Recently, it has even become a “craftivist” method of making a political statement, a reality the covering of the Wall Street bull statue in pink and purple this past May can attest to. From filled-in potholes to buses doused in yarn, these images are only a quick Google search away—an ongoing demonstration of knitting taken to the streets.

### Finding Your Knitche

“In through the front door, run round the back, out through the window, off jumps Jack”—and conquering the needle is as simple as that. In only a few hours spent with Buchman, I watched myself go from clueless newbie to tentative master of this skill that once seemed so removed from the realm of possibility. According to Paulin, once “Jack” (a basic knit stitch) has jumped, there remain five basic essentials to knitting:

- how to cast on the needle
- how to knit
- how to purl
- how to increase and decrease for shaping
- how to cast off

As simple as it all sounds, I couldn’t even make it through the first step: the Park Slope knitters had to cast on for me several times (and cast off thanks to the knots I caught myself in). Honestly, my “mastery” only actually extends to step two. On the other hand, my best friend Caroline, who I dragged with me to the meet-up, hit the ground running: not even two minutes had passed before she was two inches into a now five-foot long scarf.

I soon realized my bringing her along was destiny woven by the Fates. Caroline knitted on the train ride to the East Village; during an experimental concert; in front of a head shop on St. Mark’s Place; and all the way home to Harlem. Honestly, she’s probably knitting as you read this. Witnessing her near-instant knack and obsession was a testament to the power of knitting in its rawest form: that it offers the knitter a personal, low-key experience, which she can shape, both literally and figuratively. There’s a comfort in knowing that, at any point, you can stop and start over again—that you are



**“WHY SHOULDN’T WOMEN GO TO THE MOON? ... SO WHY SHOULD IT ONLY BE WOMEN WHO KNIT?”**

ultimately responsible, on every level, for what you create. “You can make all your mistakes go away,” says Buchman, “but you have to be prepared to make all your mistakes go away.”

I left Knitty City that first night without even fully acknowledging how transformative an experience it had been: I felt better than I had in weeks, and I pondered the new approach to managing my everyday existence extolled by Paulin. “Why should I waste time? I think it’s so precious,” he says. “There are so many things I have to knit before I die. I don’t know how much time I have left. Do you?” Knitting, I now realize, aside from being a fruitful source for puns, is a lot more constructive and fulfilling than grandma might let on: it can be physically and psychologically beneficial, if you let it. Paulin’s words are a reminder that my busy and repetitive everyday life should have as much value as the repetitive stitches that weave together to create something wonderful. Knitting is simply a mode of discovering that value. ●



# Once Upon a Primetime

what fairy tale tv shows say about us

BY JULIEN HAWTHORNE

ILLUSTRATION BY ZHOUNAN XIE

"Once Upon a Time, there was an enchanted forest filled with all the classic characters we know. One day, they found themselves trapped in a place where all their happy endings were stolen—our world."

So begins the opening caption to ABC's new series *Once Upon a Time*, a show that imagines classic fairy tale characters dealing with everyday problems in the modern world.

*Once Upon a Time* is one of two new primetime shows, the other being NBC's *Grimm*, that put classic fairy tale characters from children's stories into worlds characterized by drudgery, violence, and unhappiness. These shows are only the latest examples of modernized fairytale adaptations that address the conflict between the simplicity of a fairy tales and the complexity of the real world. Both *Once Upon a Time* and *Grimm* bring the optimistic reality of fairy tales into a convoluted modern reality.

*Once Upon a Time* tells the stories of characters like Snow White (Ginnifer Goodwin), Prince Charming (Josh Dallas), and Rumpelstiltskin (Robert Carlyle, less scary than he was in *Trainspotting* or *The Full Monty*) as they try to find happiness in a fictional town in Maine called Storybrooke. *Grimm* is a drama that follows two detectives solving crime in a world populated by characters inspired by the Brothers Grimm tales.

While shows like *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* have dealt with fantasy before, primetime television has never directly dealt with classic fairy tales, especially not with semi-famous actors like Robert Carlyle and Ginnifer Goodwin. These shows are part of a miniature flurry of modernized fairy tales whose audience is adults, rather than children. This December, Emily Browning stars in a modernized *Sleeping Beauty*, directed

by Julia Leigh, that takes place in the sordid world of prostitution. Another provocative version of this classic fable, *The Sleeping Beauty*, by French filmmaker Catherine Breillat, came out earlier this year and deals with the theme of sexual awakening.

Why are fairy tales aimed at adult audiences having a moment? "Right now we have a war that it seems no one can deal with, a lack of employment and jobs, and fairy tales are a way to look at a world where justice and hope exist," Jack Zipes, a University of Minnesota professor emeritus who has written extensively on folklore and fairy tales, says. The fairy tale phenomenon serves as a way for viewers to cope with contemporary problems, though Zipes warns that escapism might not be the best solution. "It may be deceptive. Fairy tales provide a naïve morality," he explains. "Nonetheless, fairy tales attempt to provide hope for a solution, and help people look at the world in a different way."

**"RIGHT NOW WE HAVE A WAR THAT IT SEEMS NO ONE CAN DEAL WITH, A LACK OF EMPLOYMENT AND JOBS, AND FAIRY TALES ARE A WAY TO LOOK AT A WORLD WHERE JUSTICE AND HOPE EXIST."**

According to Zipes, the problems of the 21st century are particularly convoluted, and fairy tales might be particularly useful because they provide

simplicity. Entertainment provides escape from the job market (or lack thereof), the sad state of the economy, and the seeming inability of Congress to properly address either of these issues. He believes that the simplicity of a fairy tale in a modern context can make these webs of complication seem more comprehensible.

When familiar fairy tales emerged around the 15th century, storytellers could not have envisioned an era where texting, Facebook, and eHarmony could be such intrinsic parts of a happy ending. What role can fairy tales serve in a society that is so vastly different from the times in which they were conceived? "Certain fairy tales do become more relevant when certain social issues emerge, and fairy tales adapt to particular issues that are troubling to us, but people have always needed stories," Zipes says. Technology has influenced but not revolutionized fairy tales. "They have always been a part of the modern culture. Technology made them easier to disseminate, but didn't bring them about."

People want the comfort of looking at their own relationships through the lens of a tale or fable. Fairy tales provide relief from people's disenchantment from war and a defunct political system, and they also show that there can be simple moral solutions to these problems.

Modernized fairy tales are not totally new, but putting them in a primetime television format is. The experiment seems to be working. Both *Once Upon a Time* and *Grimm* have been picked up for a full season, and ratings for *Once Upon a Time*, in particular, have been terrific for a freshman show—proving that audiences are engaging with the moral simplicity of fairy tales week after week. These primetime television shows reflect the next evolution in fairy tales changing to keep up with a digital era, in which information comes faster and faster every year. Just as you face challenges and fears week by week, whether it be from an evil boss or an evil queen, so do these characters.

We want to believe in justice and happy endings, and maybe at a time of recession and war, those aren't bad morals to take away from a TV show. Zipes says these shows demonstrate that "even in the real world, naïve morality can triumph if given the chance." ●

# *HOW WE'RE DOING*

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## REFLECTIONS ON *WELLNESS, COMMUNITY, AND FRIENDSHIP*

by WILFRED CHAN AND SARAH NGU

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### WHAT IT MEANS TO BE WELL

by Wilfred Chan

I used to think there was something seriously wrong with me, because my life looked nothing like the Columbia admissions brochure. Judging by *The Blue Album*, Columbia students are “embraced” by the “warmth of a close-knit community.” They are flawless, radiant, and successful. They do research while juggling classes and community service, throwing Frisbees on the lawn, and hitting SoHo every weekend.

So when I looked at myself, a lonely, unhappy, and overwhelmed freshman—I blamed myself. I was scared to tell people I was unwell, because everyone else seemed so put-together. I couldn’t admit that I had become terribly lost when all I wanted was to seem normal and to fit in. I would’ve rather died than let people think I didn’t understand how to be a perfect Columbia student.

Instead, I played the “I am fine” game. I smiled, put on a happy face, and bragged about how long I had stayed up in Butler Library, or how few hours of sleep I had gotten, as if it were nothing. I attempted to legitimize my miserable appearance. I took ownership of my sadness, as if the suffering was the product of *my* choices and I was *proud* of it. But in reality, I wasn’t in control. I was in denial.

Now, in my third year, I realize that I was far from alone. The truth is, many students who are suffering don’t really admit it. At Columbia, stress and misery are treated as harmless norms, and



# ‘WE WEREN’T JUST STRESSED COLUMBIANS ANYMORE. WE WERE HUMAN.’

competitive commiseration has become the official school sport. We brag about how little sleep we get (“You got five hours? That’s not bad, I got two!”), and act flip about how much we “hate” our lives. Few speak about wellness, because shared misery, not shared joy, is what validates us as Columbians. As a June 2011 Columbia Health Services study phrased it, “Stress at Columbia is a unifying experience and the only commonality (norm) across all schools with which students can identify.”

But when stress is recast as a harmless, shared culture, many students end up suffering in silence. According to Dr. Anne Goldfield of Columbia Psychological Services, 60 percent of Columbia students have felt “hopeless” at some point, 25 percent report sleeping problems, and 6 percent have seriously considered suicide.

So when Tina Bu, a Columbia College junior, quietly took her own life in River Hall this October, it was no surprise that many strangers instinctively recognized her as one of our own. I didn’t know her, but the loss devastated me. I felt guilty and helpless. *If only she knew how many others were going through similar things ... If only we could’ve been there for her.*

The more I’ve gotten to know Tina’s close friends in the month since her death, the more I realize that there was probably little I could’ve done. Tina was loved and was getting help from the school, but ultimately suicide has an unimaginable logic of its own. Nevertheless, the tragedy seemed to invigorate a thorough re-examination of our own lives. The tremendous outpouring of grief and solidarity from over a hundred and fifty

stopped pretending to be fine, and as we talked, cried, and hugged, we also started to heal.

On reflection, I realized that this sort of deep, searing honesty is required if we want to get past simply being “fine” and think about what it means to be truly *well*. We all suffer in life, and a high-pressure college like Columbia will inherently come with its challenges. But denial and masochism only gets us so far. It is only by deeply confronting our suffering that we can think about hope; only by facing our pain can we think about healing. Forcing ourselves to act “fine,” or living with the idea that Columbia students should relish our own misery, only means that we are oppressed. Only once we end the cruel façade will we understand the idea of wellness.

Wellness is not an end, some sort of point B that we can reach after X years; an item to be checked off a list of objectives. It is not a thing that we ‘have’ when we’re happy and don’t have when we’re stressed. True wellness is a balanced, multi-dimensional concept of healthy living; a deep sense of self-love that stays with us even when we are struggling. It is a patient and ongoing process that helps us strive towards a life of balance and purpose. It is a refusal to simply say “life sucks;” it is a faith in the possibility of fulfillment and joy. It is knowing we deserve to feel like our best selves. If we can live this way, then we will no longer be a community of false toughness, but a community of genuine strength.

However, it is now December, and the stress of finals is once again upon us. Will all of this dialogue be remembered as a temporary reaction to

Student Health Advisory Committee, the Columbia Neuroscience Society, and the student councils, the project has one aim: to creatively and pragmatically combine students’ ideas to promote wellness at Columbia. We’ve begun to lay the groundwork for an online student-run wellness hub that will centralize campus resources; a new peer-to-peer wellness mentoring program; improved NSOP program—menting about mental health and stress; a student-led healthy eating co-op; and campus puppy therapy, just to name a few. In reality, these are just a few simple steps. Many other groups on campus are hard at work doing similar things, and the possibilities are truly endless.

However, students should not bear the entire burden. The administration must step up as well. A Columbia Health Services survey found that 45.6 percent of Columbia students rated “University administrative processes” as the number one cause of non-academic stress in their lives. Columbia Psychological Services sees over 4,000 students annually, yet it can take three weeks to have an appointment. Columbia Student Advising has made improvements to its booking system, yet many still feel that it is hard to find an adviser that understands them. The financial aid office can be daunting, and students tell stories about being shuffled for hours from department to department. The list goes on, and on.

Part of this is unavoidable. Former Columbia Dean of Students Roger Lehecka explains that large colleges tend to “parcel out” students’ needs into compartmentalized bureaucratic units to deal with specific student issues. Yet, he says, “there have to be some people here who can talk to you as though you were a whole person, and not just refer you to somebody else.” Recognizing this, schools such as Ohio State University, the University of California, and our own Barnard have created innovative and highly accessible student wellness centers that take a personal, open, and holistic approach to student well-being. These wellness centers unify campus resources and offer broad guidance to students who may simply need general help. As Lehecka points out, “Many administrators and advisers of necessity have areas of special knowledge, but students have one life.”

Just as the administration can enact large wellness initiatives, it’s often the small personal touches that make all the difference. Bureaucrats take heed: Columbia’s most beloved figures—from former Dean Austin Quigley down to Public Safety’s “Sir Mike” in Carman Hall—are the ones who take the time to smile, say hi, and treat students like real people. In a school as obfuscating as Columbia, gestures of care shine through like rays of light. “Couches in the Financial Aid office would be so easy,” Ryan Mandelbaum, a junior at Columbia, says. “Free cookies and fruit in student common areas during exams would be an inexpensive way to raise student spirits,” suggests Lehecka.

This is not a complete list of solutions. Still, a community that treats us well helps us each treat ourselves well. As Sophie Luo, sophomore in CC, points out, “Our school pride has a relationship

with our own feelings of self worth.” There is simply no sense in continuing a Columbia culture that condones misery as a harmless fact of life. Though

life’s short-term pressures. Let us be honest to ourselves, and to one another about the challenges we each face. Let us listen to one another, and cre-

*There is simply no sense in continuing a Columbia culture that condones misery as a harmless fact of life.*

we can never get rid of stress, we can change the way we think about it.

Moving forward, we can learn to pursue long-term community wellness even as we manage

ate an environment where students can not only ask for help, but share their feelings of joy. Let us not just be satisfied with how pretty this school looks in *The Blue Album*. We should strive to build

## OUTSIDE, LOOKING IN by Sarah Ngu

It was on a Sunday night. I found my friend Tina and her mom in the back corner of Ollie’s, both drinking noodle soups. Tina had told me that her mom was visiting for the weekend and wanted us to get dinner. I tried to keep the conversation light, but it was hard not to notice that Tina was mustering all she had just to be present. After a while, I turned to her mom to loop her into the conversation.

“Mrs. Bu, how have you been? It must be tough going through all of this, too, trying to help,” I asked.

She nodded her head.

“There are some feelings that me and Tina’s father can’t really understand. We come from China, and it’s different for Tina, who grew up here. But I’m here, and I just want Tina to get better ... faster,” she replied.

Mrs. Bu and Tina were of different generations and cultures, and Mrs. Bu didn’t fully understand her daughter’s pain. But knowing that her daughter was hurting badly was enough for her to fly in from South Carolina. A week later, on Oct. 23rd, Mrs. Bu, along with the rest of her family, was informed that her daughter had taken her life.

As news of Tina’s death spread, hundreds of comments poured in on Bwog and Spectator. “I didn’t know her, but damn this still made me cry,” one wrote on a Bwog article. Another commented on the same article, “If anything remotely ‘good’ can come out of this, it’s that hearing about her situation has made me realize I’m not the only one struggling to get by on this campus, and that it doesn’t have to be this way. I think I’ll make an appointment with CPS tomorrow to start turning things around. R.I.P. Tina, I would have loved to be your friend.” Pain connects even strangers, and suicide is the loudest of all cries of pain.

A few days after Tina’s death, a group of students, including me, came together to form the Student Wellness Project. It was odd to see my friends, student leaders, and administrators all talking about Tina, as most of them did not know her. It was surreal to see Tina, who was not heavily involved in the “campus scene,” suddenly pop up everywhere in my public, student-leader sphere.

I met Tina two years ago in the lounge of Schapiro on the 14th floor, where we both lived. I came to cook, and she came to microwave her sandwiches. As Tina was naturally friendly and easygoing, it wasn’t long before we started talking. I invited her to a service at my church, after which she gave me a big hug, thanking me for the chance to meet my friends. She was eager to meet people, partly because, as I found out shortly after, she had taken a year off due to her depression. I was a little stunned when I found out that this cheery girl was on medication and seeing a therapist weekly.

*It was as if there was a fire going on in the house, and Tina had opened the windows but kept the door locked.*

That whole year, she was more or less fine. She made friends, reconnected with old ones, and got involved with Barnard’s Toddler Learning Center, as she loved kids. She became my go-to person for unwinding after a long day. Her slow, Southern pace was refreshing compared to my overworked schedule. Once, worried for me, she made me a

a real community around the ideals of wellness, support, and genuine self-love.

All of this starts with self-discovery, which is a highly personal, subjective — and often difficult — journey. But if we can start with just one thing, let us remember to simply remind those around us that we really care. All we really have is each other. As one commenter on Bwog notes, “The reason I am proud to be a ‘Cumbian’ is because of the amazing peers, faculty, and alumni, and I know that in the future I will not remember the 20 page paper I have due tomorrow, but the people who get me through the night.”

*For more information about the Student Wellness Project, please see [cuwellness.com](http://cuwellness.com)*

*The tremendous outpouring of grief and solidarity from over a hundred and fifty anonymous strangers on Bwog is a haunting testament to how intimately Columbians understand desolation.*

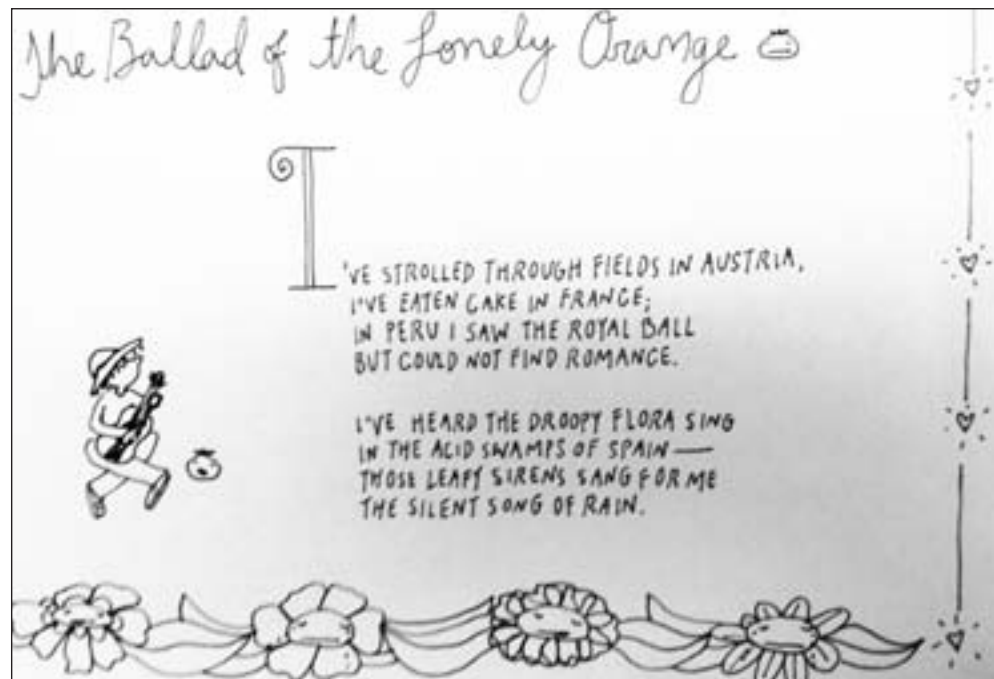
anonymous strangers on Bwog is a haunting testament to how intimately Columbians understand desolation.

After her death, it was as if our masks came off. A close friend called me the night Tina died and tearfully confessed that she had also been thinking about suicide—after we spoke, she resolved to seek help. Acquaintances who I hadn’t spoken to all year shared stories of depression, loneliness, or how Tina’s passing affected them even though they never knew her. In turn, they listened as I expressed my grief. And, when a small group of fellow students and I met with Dean Valentini to share our thoughts and feelings about the tragedy, he opened up to us about his feelings and ensured we knew he truly cared. We weren’t just stressed Columbians anymore. We were human. We

an isolated tragedy, or can it become a flashpoint for a more permanent transformation? According to the June 2011 Health Services study, “Students would like to see [the culture of stress] change but none are willing to take this on because their time here is transient.” Yet, as one commenter on Bwog heaves, there is a “duplicitousness in acknowledging an extremely unhealthy culture and at the same time being unwilling to address it on any meaningful level.”

As the saying goes, “In order to change, we must be sick and tired of being sick and tired.” Our meeting with Dean Valentini after Tina’s death inspired me to start an open movement called the Student Wellness Project. Now comprised of students from all four undergraduate schools, including members of the groups like Stressbusters, the





Tina Bu often drew humorous cartoons, submitting them to student publications.

worse is when depression strips you of the tools to deal with it and then creates a pseudo-reality.

She called at random times in the middle of this summer, crying, always apologetic, not wanting to take up too much time. I would talk to her privately in the restroom, fumbling over what to say, staring at the threads of the bathroom mat, praying silently.

Fall semester began. She began to sleep away many hours of the night and day. TK, her best friend, began visiting her every day, just to be safe. In early October, I came over to her room and saw that she was in terrible shape. She confided that she had thought about death but assured me that she was not suicidal. I asked her to stay over at my place for as long as she wanted to, because I didn't want her to be alone. She was reluctant to do so, citing logistical complications, so I didn't press it.

Afterwards, she reassured me that she was feeling better. She started attending classes again, and her mom visited for the weekend, both actions I took as good signs. During that dinner at Ollie's, she assured me that she was really thankful for her mother and her friendships with TK

chatted on the phone Friday afternoon for a bit, as I was in a meeting and couldn't come over, and she seemed sad as usual but fine.

At around 6 p.m. on Sunday, I bumped into TK just outside of Broadway. He broke the news to me. We went over to River, the dorm where she lived, and saw the medics loading a wrapped-up body on a stretcher into an ambulance.

In articles like this, one is supposed to lift lessons out of tragedies with a few deft strokes of a pen. The call that Wilfred has made for honesty, solidarity and administrative change to improve community wellness needs to be heeded. While it is clear that there are general things that ought to be changed, when I examine my individual story with Tina and what it means to be a friend on the sidelines, I don't have any solid answers, just open questions about the intransigent problem of communication.

The first question is translation: how do you translate perceived emotion into instructions for action? When Tina told me how she was feeling, I wasn't always sure how to respond, afraid I would do something wrong. In the fallout after her death,

watching from the outside. Then again, how much was my interpretation of her signals dependent on my availability? If I wasn't in a meeting that Friday afternoon, would I have picked up on how she was actually feeling?

The third question is not so much a question as a Catch-22: If you're not suicidal, then you're not suicidal. But if you are suicidal, you are most likely not going to tell anyone because you don't want anyone to stop you. In the last week, Tina made sure that no one—from her RA, to her friends, to her family, to CPS—would think she was at the edge of the precipice and that they would not feel like a “bad friend” once she left.

The cry of pain is universal, but sometimes it is misheard, heard too late, or heard with little to no hints of what to do. The story of Tina's death is not a story about how someone fell through the cracks. People in Residential Life, Advising, and Psychological Services and her close friends all knew and were keeping tabs. Perhaps we could have reacted in overcompensation to intervene, but would our intervention only have delayed the inevitable? For no matter how much care was thrown her way, it always hit an internal wall. It was acknowledged by her, even gratefully so, but ultimately repelled.

During dinner at Artopolis, I asked Tina's younger brother when he visited with his parents a few days after the death, how he felt about everything.

He said, “It doesn't seem like Tina would have done it. I feel like they were two different people—my older sister who I knew and the person who killed herself.”

I recalled his words as I sat on the chairs, staring at the stiff, wooden funeral casket, wondering at the fact that it contained Tina while disbelieving it at the same time. It technically held her body, surely, just as her depression had held her in a vise of unreality, but neither of them captured her.

A guestbook was passed around for attendees to sign their names and leave brief notes. After signing my name, I looked at the book for a while, before deciding finally to write, “I hope you're free at last.”

*The cry of pain is universal, but sometimes it is misheard, heard too late, or heard with little to no hints of what to do.*

and me. Her mom wanted her to come home with her to South Carolina, but Tina said she wanted to wait until Thanksgiving break to see if she could get her grades up. Things must be looking up, I reasoned.

She called many people to tell them she was grateful for their friendship on Thursday night. The RA on duty on Thursday night chatted with her for at least half an hour. Yes, she was fine, and she wasn't thinking about hurting herself at all, she reassured him, almost too cheerfully. We

many friends knew I was grieving and offered to get me anything. Yet I felt bad making requests of them and felt relieved when my InterVarsity Christian small group simply dropped off dinner and cookies.

The second question is interpretation: how do you interpret mixed signals? What do you do when a friend seeks help and then pulls back and seems happier? It was as if there was a fire going on in the house, and Tina had opened the windows but kept the door locked. We were left

# Liberté, Egalité, Menagerie

professor gregory wawro's double life

BY DAVID SALAZAR  
ILLUSTRATION BY THUTO SOMO

*Gregory Wawro is an associate professor and deputy chair of the political science department on campus, and member of faux-French band Nous Non Plus off campus. He's an expert on Capitol Hill and French Pop music, and when he's not discussing filibusters and congressional procedure, he's behind a drum set. The band's most recent album, Freudian Slip, was released in July of this year. Wawro, whose stage name is Professeur Harry Covert, talked with The Eye about coups d'état, music videos, and pretending to be French.*

**The band you're in, Nous Non Plus, has been around since 2005, but existed before that in a different form. Where did the idea come from?**

The idea for a band that essentially sang in French, composed of a bunch of Americans who wanted to sing in French, originated with Bill Carney, who's also known as Clermont Ferrand. He's one of the lead singers in Les Sans Culottes. So essentially it started as a cover band, covering these French pop artists from the 1960s and '70s. Then the band morphed—other people joined the band and had different ideas about what to do with it. I was in a band called The Irreversible Slacks, and we had played some dates together; we appeared on a Japanese television show together. There was a common bond formed between the bands, so we started to play together, and when things weren't working out with the drummer for Les Sans Culottes, I was asked to join.

I was in that band for a few years. There were some internal differences in Les Sans Culottes, and a group of us decided that we wanted to do something different with the band and essentially staged a coup d'état. We worked out a deal whereby we would be called something different, we would be able to refer ourselves as former members of Les Sans Culottes, and we would keep rights to recordings that we had performed on and rights to the back catalogue for Les Sans Culottes. So that's essentially what the settlement was, and Nous Non Plus was born.

**Everyone in the band uses pseudonyms—why? And did you choose yours?**

There was this humorous aspect to the band. It started out as a cover band and then other people, as they came on to the project, contributed other ideas, like: "Let's actually pretend we're French." And so when we have our inter-song banter we'll pretend we're French with these stereotypical French accents and attitudes. Part of that was dressing in the clothes you saw in your junior high school French textbook—the

clothes don't always match, they're kind of funny because they're from the '70s, so it's just all part of the act, right? There were these bands that were taking themselves very seriously and we were just like: "Let's not. Let's have fun with it." I didn't come up with my own pseudonym, but there were other names that came up, which I don't remember, which I rejected, so I decided to go with Harry Covert.

**You talked about making serious music, but still having fun. I notice that your music videos are a lot of fun—I especially like the one for the song "Catastrophe." Where do music video ideas come from and where do you film them?**

It was—the video was actually filmed in Paris. Our lead singer, Céline Dijon, grew up in Paris ... So that was filmed at her parents' house in Paris—a beautiful apartment in central Paris right off the Seine. We had done videos before, but they were bigger productions. When we were promoting *Menagerie* [our second album], we were in Paris at the time performing some shows and we just thought—we should make videos.

**Do the French like Nous Non Plus?**

We've had a great response. We've played in France several times, we played at the FrancoFolies festival, which is a Francophone music festival [in Montreal] where all the bands sing in French. It's interesting because it's actually uncool—it's uncool in France to sing in French, they sing in English mostly, whereas we thought it'd be cool to sing in French in America.

**THERE WERE THESE BANDS THAT WERE TAKING THEMSELVES VERY SERIOUSLY AND WE WERE JUST LIKE: "LET'S NOT. LET'S HAVE FUN WITH IT."**

**Have you played any recent shows? I noticed on the band's website that the last dates were in 2009.**

No, the band has transformed in many ways. The best term is that we've been other-directed.

**So was it harder to record the newest album?**

With the latest album, with which my involvement was pretty minimal, we demoed stuff out, record stuff on our own and distribute it to each other. I was sent MP3s from other band members and tried to work out drum tracks. It's all a very non-centralized process now. With any band there are certain individuals who



are more creative and the driving forces of the band, and I've never been one of those. While still a member of the band, I'm more on the periphery these days.

**Why is that? Because of your book, *Filibuster: Obstruction and Lawmaking in the U.S. Senate*?**

With the book, with having a baby. Having a newborn around the time that things were ramping up for recording made it really hard to be much of a participant. I will say that we hope to get together and perform. We've talked about just having shows here and there. Les Sans Culottes was always a hardworking band where we played at least twice a month or something like that. Nous Non Plus moved away from that model, in the sense that it's fun to perform, but it's also a lot of work. We're mainly a coastal band—we played up and down the East Coast and on the West Coast, mainly LA and San Francisco. It was a conscious choice on our part to not be a touring band—not be a band that's going to play regularly in New York. But hopefully, we'll get together and head back to Paris, even. ●



# Health Over Weight

reordering america's dietary priorities

BY ANNELIESE COOPER

PHOTO COURTESY OF THE ADIPOSITIVITY PROJECT

"So, who do you want to look like?" The question catches me off guard. She smiles sympathetically, folds a stray piece of honey blonde hair behind her ear, and rephrases: "I find it's helpful to have a goal in place—a physical role model." She grabs a dog-eared *People* from behind her desk and opens it.

"What about Kate Winslet? She's pretty healthy-looking, don't you think?" I'll admit, when I entered this nutritionist's office I was hoping for something a little different—given that none of the previous three had produced lasting results. Despite layers of meticulous meal logs and food pyramids camouflaging my fridge, I remained a significantly overweight (and therefore significantly distraught) 13-year-old—weary of feeling socially inferior to my classmates because I was physically larger. So when the doctor brought out her pictures of Kate, I smiled back and nodded and prayed silently that this plan, please, would stick. Thinking about it today, I wish I could somehow travel back there and, with some well-placed righteous indignation, save myself from years of yo-yoing scale-readings and roiling emotions.

Still, I hold no personal grudge. This doctor was simply playing her part in a familiar American contradiction: the ever-rising numbers on our collective bathroom scale marching hand-in-hand with the ever-slimming waistlines of those we're asked to idolize. But I now believe that her attitude—and, indeed, our national outlook on weight loss—is in need of a fundamental makeover. We need to remove the concept of "looking healthy" from our collective vocabulary and focus instead on truly *being* healthy.



adipositivity.com

## A Problem of Epidemic Proportions

Since Surgeon General David Satcher coined the term "obesity epidemic" in 2001, the phenomenon has only continued to swell. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, each of the 50 states had at least a 20 percent instance of obesity in 2010—up from 1985, when the highest reported range, found in only eight states, was 10–14 percent. Moreover, the National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey shows that today 33.8 percent of American adults are obese. They're joined by approximately 17 percent of children: 12.5 million, aged 2–19. With statistics like these, it's no wonder that Americans recoil from the bathroom scale. Or that Michelle Obama aggressively campaigns to reduce childhood obesity, proposing that compulsory weight loss initiatives be integrated into public education. But these numbers do not tell the whole story. As it happens, they're based on a very suspect criterion: the Body Mass Index.

The BMI was developed in 1832 by Belgian mathematician Lambert Adolphe Jacques Quetelet. It's a number derived by dividing one's mass (in kilograms) by one's height squared (in meters). Today, an index from 25 to 30 is considered "overweight," and above 30, "obese." As Jeremy Singer-Vine noted in his *Slate* article "Beyond BMI," Quetelet's goal was only to "define the 'normal man' in terms of everything from his average arm strength to the age at which he marries. This project had nothing to do with obesity-related diseases, nor even with obesity itself." Quetelet was just recording norms.

Astonishingly, BMI fails to take into account the type of mass being measured (e.g., muscle vs. fat) and where fat is located on the body, a factor that can play a major role in determining health risks. Even the CDC's online BMI calculator hedges significantly, saying "BMI provides a reliable indicator of body fatness for most people"—the key word being "most."

The quest to debunk BMI is at the heart of documentarian Darryl Roberts' new film, *America the Beautiful 2: The Thin Commandments*. In its predecessor, *America the Beautiful*, Roberts investigated the many facets—and the many dangers—of the industries sprung from our obsession with good looks, including fashion, makeup, and plastic surgery. This time, though, he's zeroed in on weight, especially on its most dubious quantifier. For example, in one particularly revealing sequence, Roberts scrolls through a series of images of trim celebrities from pop icon Mariah Carey to seven-time Mr. Olympia winner Arnold Schwarzenegger, revealing each one to be, by the standard of BMI, obese. The adoption of such a flawed index seems baffling when one considers how many crucial bureaucratic determinations are based on it. Not only does BMI lie at the heart of the "obesity epidemic" claim, it also plays a

deciding role in most insurance companies' rate and risk calculations. In the film, Roberts's sister explains that her doctor refuses to proceed with in vitro fertilization until her BMI drops under 25—below the standard for "overweight."

Indeed, BMI's inadequacy ultimately affects people of all shapes and sizes. As Ragen Chastain, international dance champion and "Health at Every Size" activist, explains to Roberts: "[BMI] doesn't just do a disservice to fat people—by creating a lower class of people who are seen as unworthy and without self-discipline, etcetera—it does a disservice to unhealthy thin people... [suggesting that] it doesn't matter that all you eat is fast food and you never exercise, because your body is thin and therefore you're healthy."

Chastain points out that medical studies linking obesity with life-threatening illness are correlational, not causative: though high percentages of those who present with certain health problems are "obese," the data don't prove that body mass itself is to blame. "I, personally, am 5' 4", 284 pounds. I'm type 3 Super Obese: I'm as high as you can get on the BMI chart. You can't get fatter than me," she reveals, matter-of-factly. "But, I'm metabolically in perfect health, I can do the splits, I can press a thousand pounds with my legs, and I dance at a professional level." By declaring weight a suitable proxy for health, we end up condemning athletes, from Chastain to Schwarzenegger—and, even in pursuit of our best intentions, condoning damaging and ultimately counterproductive trends.

**ROBERTS SCROLLS THROUGH A SERIES OF IMAGES OF TRIM CELEBRITIES, FROM POP ICON MARIAH CAREY TO SEVENTIME MR. OLYMPIA WINNER ARNOLD SCHWARZENEGGER—REVEALING EACH ONE TO BE, BY THE STANDARD OF BMI, OBESE.**

## Less Food, More Problems

If you want an illustration of America's backwards approach to weight loss, you need look no further than *Maggie Goes on a Diet*, a controversial picture book published last month. Over the course of the story, its fourteen-year-old protagonist goes from fat and teased to slim and popular, by virtue of calorie-counting and soccer. As author Paul Kramer explained on *Good Morning America*, he wrote the book "to have children feel better about themselves, discover a new way of eating, learn to do exercise, try to emulate Maggie and learn from Maggie's experience." Though it seems Kramer's heart is in the right place, the incentives he sets up are problematic: ultimately, Maggie diets to avoid the ridicule of her fat-phobic classmates, not because she genuinely wants the



health benefits of good food and exercise. She may indeed be improving her health in these attempts to manage her weight, but her goal is mainly to fit into the dress she's holding on the book's cover.

Recommending dieting to children is dubious—if only because, put plainly, diets rarely work. Roberts spends a good portion of his film subjecting himself to various dietary crazes (raw food detox, Weight Watchers, Lean Cuisine). But as soon as he ends each regimen, his cravings, heightened by the period of deprivation, drive him back into the arms of KFC. He regains every pound he lost, every time, following the classic "yo-yo" pattern.

Data from the Renfrew Center Foundation for eating disorders backs him up: regaining lost weight is the fate of 95–98 percent of dieters. Worse, an interest in dieting can quickly transform into a compulsion. According to the Renfrew Center, up to 24 million people in the United States suffer from an eating disorder—either anorexia, bulimia, or a binge-eating disorder—and most report having used dieting as a gateway.

Perhaps the most sobering scenes of *The Thin Commandments* are spent with Roberts's friend Candi, a Chicago real estate agent who, in a quest to "get more dates," develops such a fixation on slimming down that she visits the gym through blizzards, intent on getting in reps despite a debilitating flu. In another memorable sequence, Roberts interviews a group of young boys, some barely into their double digits, who have subjected themselves to lasting physical and psychological trauma—restricting, binge-eating, and purging in an attempt to "look good for girls."

#### Worth a Thousand Words

Just as health isn't a concern reserved for fat people, "body image" isn't a concern reserved for teenage girls. Indeed, we may already be a nation of compulsive dieters. The National Eating Disorders Association estimates that Americans of all ages spend over \$40 billion annually on products meant to help them lose weight. Though pressure to get thin certainly comes from this booming diet industry—manufacturers of products like Slim-Fast, for example, who profit off of consumers' insecurity—at this point, the message has metastasized to every form of media. Check out any curbside magazine rack: guaranteed, it's a panoply of digitally slimmed celebrities accompanying headlines offering the newest secret method for shedding pounds. Shows like NBC's cash cow *The Biggest Loser* and A&E's morbid *Heavy* crowd out programming like *Huge*, a sympathetic teen drama set at a fat camp, which ran for only ten episodes on ABC Family.

With public perception so thoroughly steeped in "skinny," it's hard to imagine what a viable fat-friendly media campaign would even look like. At least according to photographer Substantia Jones, it looks like real, big women—"doctors, lawyers, artists, moms, writers, teachers, musicians, clerks," even the occasional Columbia student"—"[dropping] trou" and posing for portraits in her ongoing photo series, the Adipositivity Project. The title—a portmanteau of "adipose" ("of or relating to fat") and "positivity"—indicates Jones's intent: "The concept was one of fat acceptance, but being a fat woman, it was also personal," she explains. "Seeing myself in ways only visible to me

through photographs made me realize photography—a tool often used in creating body shame—also had tremendous potential to impact one's body image favorably. And perhaps even change the way fat people are perceived by others." The photographs revel in the very fat Americans are taught to fear—the curves and folds of each body celebrated where they would usually be covered by Photoshop or slimming pinstripes—the results are, strikingly, aesthetically beautiful. "Many have said they view posing for the project as a step toward physical self-acceptance," Jones says. "One woman told me it was the first morning of her adult life that she'd not cried about her fat body ... I think about her almost every day." Jones hopes to turn her online series into a gallery show and a book. Its underlying message: "Learn the role of happiness in health, and the importance of overall wellbeing. Learn to respect nature and embrace human variation. And most of all, learn that if you put your life on hold until you've attained the unattainable, you're going to end up one pissed-off dead person."

These last words ring all too true to people like me and Roberts's gym-obsessed friend Candi—we

millions who too long have tormented ourselves before our mirrors in shame. However, with activists like Roberts, Chastain, and Jones making their voices heard, there's a chance the tide is beginning to turn—that, gradually, Americans can lose our fear of looking fat, focus instead on being healthy, and perhaps even gain some traction on that seemingly Sisyphean path to self-acceptance. Even if we don't look like Kate Winslet. ●

**"YOU CAN'T GET FATTER THAN ME," SHE REVEALS, MATTER-OF-FACTLY. "BUT, I'M METABOLICALLY IN PERFECT HEALTH, I CAN DO THE SPLITS, I CAN PRESS A THOUSAND POUNDS WITH MY LEGS, AND I DANCE AT A PROFESSIONAL LEVEL."**



# The Art of Memory

how art can help us understand the past

BY PARUL GULIANI

ILLUSTRATION BY IAN MARSHALL

“If you can remember who you are, you can remember anything.”

Those words informed Professor Rosalind Krauss’ decision to undergo cognitive therapy after awakening from a month-long coma due to a ruptured aneurism. Krauss—one of the century’s most important art theorists, who has taught at Columbia for almost 20 years and has published numerous works (including co-founding respected art publication *October*)—could remember only two things: language and her own identity.

“The idea is that if you can remember who you are, you have a scaffolding of associations that you can attach to,” Krauss explains. And after six months of cognitive therapy, her memory improved. “I can now remember strings of numbers,” she says. “I can remember anything.”

When she realized that the idea behind cognitive therapy had merit, Krauss decided to apply it to her own area of expertise: art. Krauss’s new book, *Under Blue Cup*, looks at what she calls the “post-medium condition”—the idea that conceptual art has caused the specific medium to become obsolete—and what contemporary artists are doing to combat the erosion of the specific medium.

According to Krauss, the medium serves as a tool of memory for the artist—a way for the artist to remember his or her past and identity. To know the history of painting—the history of paint on canvas—is to know what painting is. But the rise of conceptual art has caused the traditional art supports (for painting, oil on canvas; for sculpture, plaster on armature; for fresco, color on plaster) to become obsolete.

According to Krauss, contemporary artists such as Ed Ruscha, Sophie Calle, William Kentridge, Harun Farocki, Christian Marclay, and James Coleman have tried to solve this problem by inventing new “technical supports” in place of traditional ones. Ruscha’s technical support is the automobile, whereas Calle’s is photo journalism, and Kentridge’s is the animated film. “The idea of separate mediums has a long history,” Krauss says. “Each of these artists has invented a technical support that they can treat in the same way that artists in the past treated mediums.”

An example of this is Carlito Carvalhosa’s “Sum of Days” exhibit, which was on display at the Museum of Modern Art in November. Carvalhosa’s exhibit, in its lack of traditional art support, is exactly the type of art Krauss examines in *Under Blue Cup*. According to the exhibition’s website, the display is a “complex, elliptical network of pathways through a structure of translucent white fabric.” Carvalhosa’s technical supports are



microphones that hang at different heights, recording ambient noise, and each day the previous days’ noises are played. What is also interesting about Carvalhosa’s exhibit is that the subject of his art is memory and the past. The exhibit creates a layering of sound and time to produce a memory of auditory experience. It is this desire to explore the past that English professor Marianne Hirsch focuses on in her book, *Rites of Return*. In it, Hirsch explores the 21st century’s obsession with understanding historical roots through a number of artistic genres, including personal narratives and essays as well as photography and art.

While Krauss looks at how postmodern artists are creating new histories, Hirsch focuses on how people in general look at the past through art. “The past is very much constructed by the present, really our needs and desires in the present,” Hirsch says. “One of the questions the book examines is: why now? What wrong are we trying to right? What kind of future are we envisioning by going back to these dark moments?”

Hirsch believes that the increasing interest in origin amounts to much more than nostalgia. “It also had to do with all of the documented injustices the 20th century has produced,” she says. “People have to look back and figure out how to deal with those massive losses. They have to travel back to sites where [they] have lost their families.”

Hirsch’s book also looks at what she calls “Museums of Conscience.” Hirsch believes that like art, museums and memorial sites are trying to convey a sense of the past to viewers. New museums are about learning something not only cognitively, but emotionally.

For example, visitors at the Holocaust museum in Washington feel discomfort and slight claustrophobia when boarding the elevator—which is a

steel box—and when getting out on the third floor where the walls are opaque glass. The idea, according to Hirsch, is to try to give “a sense of what the experience might be like, but also to make it clear that you’re not there.”

**“PEOPLE HAVE TO LOOK BACK AND FIGURE OUT HOW TO DEAL WITH THOSE MASSIVE LOSSES. THEY HAVE TO TRAVEL BACK TO SITES WHERE [THEY] HAVE LOST THEIR FAMILIES.”**

The 9/11 memorial, which features two waterfalls and reflecting pools, tries to be similarly experiential. “It’s trying to honor something that was there but also trying to induce an experience of being there,” Hirsch says.

Both Krauss’ and Hirsch’s books document an increasing academic interest in the relationship between art and the question: “where has our history gone?” This connection between art and memory is complex, and one that has recently become the object of scientific study. Scientists are now looking into how art therapy has helped patients with Alzheimer’s and dementia remember who they are. Even the University’s own Italian Academy recently launched its “Art and Neuroscience Project,” joining Krauss and Hirsch in the exploration of the relationship between art and memory. ●



# Under Pressure

taking a year off and learning to let go

BY KIERSTIN UTTER

ILLUSTRATION BY STEPHANIE MANNHEIM

I'll begin the way I always do: Last year, I took a year off.

Normally, I hope and pray that I can leave it at that and change the subject—but it never works like that. Alas, you people have the good-natured inclination to ask, "Why?" and I end up lying to your face. I tell you I needed to work, that I wanted to travel, that I'd voluntarily deferred for a whole rainbow of vague reasons in a desperate effort to avoid the unattractive truth. The ambiguity leaves you confused. I can tell you want more details, but I say nothing else. Instead, I awkwardly ask you about yourself. You're honest with me, and it breaks my heart. That's usually where it ends. Altogether, I come off as pretty cold.

So I'm going to stop lying, and tell you the real story.

It didn't start as a year off at all. I came to Columbia in the fall of 2010, a proud member of the class of 2014. At the time, getting into an Ivy was confirmation I belonged in the world. Academic achievements were my safety blanket and my ammunition. I was going pre-med. I was concentrating in music. I was taking 20 credits. I was in silent, white-hot competition with everyone around me. I was making life as difficult for myself as possible, to prove that I was strong. To prove that I could handle it. But the truth is, I was weak. What's weaker, after all, than needing trophies and ribbons and compliments to bolster your self-worth? I wasn't doing anything out of want—I was doing it out of need. I was dependent

on it all. I would fall apart without an impressive-sounding academic schedule. I was clinging to extracurriculars for dear life. I was clinging because they were familiar, one of the few things in life that didn't confuse or terrify me.

I had been clinging to something else, too, for too long. Anorexia. I used to be one of those people who didn't believe eating disorders were real. But then, suddenly, I had one. Or rather, it had me.

Even now, I can not accurately explain what it means to have anorexia, let alone on this one page—it is far too complex. If it were easy, perhaps more people would talk about it. Perhaps the word wouldn't make people so damn uncomfortable.

But hear me at least on this—it is an illness, not a choice. If it had been up to me, I would have stopped—or more accurately, never even started—long before it got to the point it did. Long before I was asked, by the Columbia health team, to pack my bags and leave, just one month into the fall semester, because they couldn't risk being held responsible for me any longer.

This verdict was delivered in a nurse practitioner's room of the Broadway Practice Group. I stared vacantly at a jar of cotton balls as she told me. I heard, "Minimum two semester leave ... inpatient treatment ... understand you're upset ... seems like forever ... you're very young." I don't recall saying anything in return. I walked out, a zombie, to the bathroom, and sat in a stall for five minutes. I went outside. I walked around the block. Only when I got back did I realize I was soaking wet, and that it had been pouring rain. I went back to my room. There was a brief denial phase, and then shame.

In the few days between being officially de-registered and waiting for my parents to come get me, I did not leave my single in John Jay (the building is still a very eerie place for me). I couldn't look anyone in the eye. I listened every night to the rest of my floor coming and going, laughing, pumping Taio Cruz, doing cartwheels, whatever—and I hid behind my closed door, packing my bags, crying more than I've cried in my entire life, wishing I could be like them.

I didn't say anything to anyone, not even goodbye. I was just gone. Poof.

**I USED TO BE ONE OF THOSE PEOPLE WHO DIDN'T BELIEVE EATING DISORDERS WERE REAL. BUT THEN, SUDDENLY, I HAD ONE. OR RATHER, IT HAD ME.**

What happened between then and now is recorded in two beat-up journals I will keep forever as prized possessions. Their contents, once again, I simply can not sum up. What I can say is this: The most important things I've learned in life have come from my time away from school. I've gained the most insight from the times I was easy on myself. It took getting out—and staying out—for a whole year, to realize that academic prestige is actually one of life's more shallow pursuits (sorry, everyone). I can stand alone now, without my grades, my classes, my awards. I can have none of those things, I learned, and be okay with myself. It is of this that I am most proud.

My time away taught me what true strength is. It's not struggling to be who you feel you "should" be. It's finding the courage to be who you want to be. Strong is not holding on—it's letting go. It's not running five miles every day because you feel like you have to. It's taking a day, a week, a month off and loving yourself anyway. That is the true challenge for us high achievers: being comfortable with ourselves, no matter what.

Strong is being good to myself, no matter what my peers are doing. It's going to bed early, despite getting teased for it. It's eating three square meals a day, even when I'm the only one. It's doing what's best for me, getting called a 40-year-old woman for it, but doing it anyway, because I've spent enough time doing exactly the opposite.

This year is my fresh start. I thought I'd see Columbia as a whole new place, but I was wrong. Columbia is the one seeing me as a whole new person. Columbia is the same, but I am changed, and that has made all the difference. ●





