

The magazine of the Columbia Spectator
27 October 2011 / vol. 11 issue 6

the
eye

BABIES & BARNARD

by Margaret Boykin





Editor in Chief
Amanda Cormier

Managing Editor
Ashton Cooper

Art Director
Cindy Pan

Deputy Editor, Features
Tala Akhavan

Deputy Editor, Lead Story
Jennifer Fearon

Deputy Editor, Online Content
Frances Corry

Senior Design Editor
Cathi Choi

Visuals Editor
Anthony Clay

Eyesites Editor
Margaret Boykin

View From Here Editor
Julia Miller

Interview Editor
Liana Gergely

Features Associates
Jon Edelman
Meredith Foster
Molly Speacht
Emma Stein

Multimedia Associate
Paul Hsiao

Business Deputy
Steven Cook

Visuals Staff
Thuto Durkac Somo
Maddy Kloss
Stephanie Mannheim

Production Staff
Megan Baker
Allie Carieri
Asia Carter
Naomi Cohen
Somala Diby
Zack Etheart
Anna Hippee
Youjung Jun
Parida Tantiwasadakran

Head Copy Editor
Emily Handsman

Spectator Editor in Chief
Samuel Roth

Spectator Managing Editor
Michele Cleary

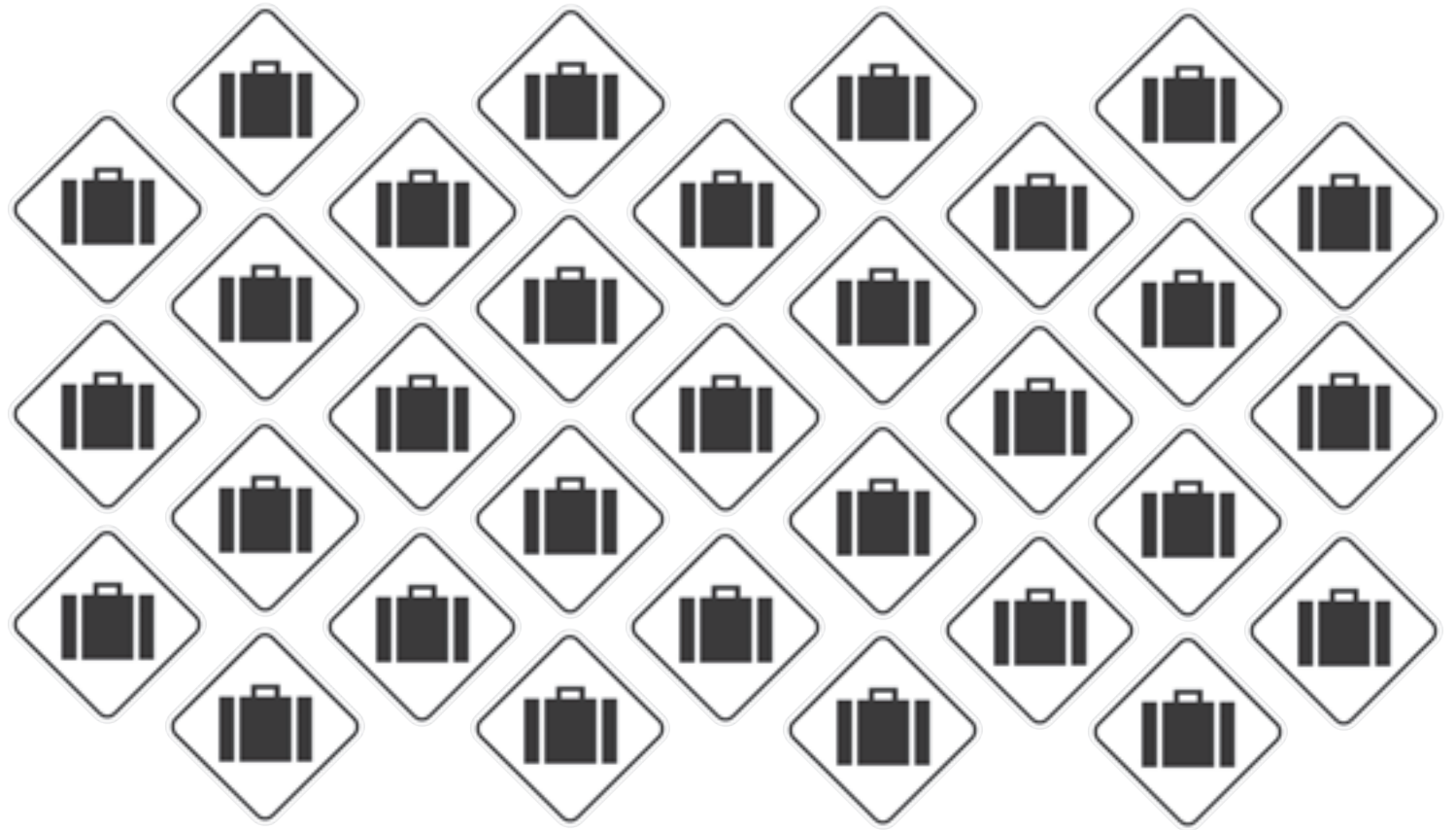
Spectator Publisher
Aditya Mukerjee

Find Us Online:
eye.columbiaspectator.com

follow us on Twitter:
[@TheEyeMag](https://twitter.com/TheEyeMag)

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

© 2011 The Eye,
Spectator Publishing Company, Inc.



BABIES & BARNARD

why you can't have it all, pg. 07

by Margaret Boykin
cover photo courtesy of
Melanie Monroe Photography
cover illustration by Anthony Clay
back cover by Cathi Choi

CONTENTS

03 EYESITES

IDEAS

04 **Pay it Forward** *Andrea Chan*

EYE TO EYE

05 **Let's Bounce** *Anneliese Cooper*

FILM

06 **From Stage to Screen** *Anneliese Cooper*

IDEAS

12 **PETA's Porn Provocation** *Jessica Gingrich*

THEATER

14 **The Steampunk Rager** *Hannah Page*

VIEW FROM HERE

15 **School of Life** *Liana Gergely*

LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

For whatever reason, national magazines are attuned to the zeitgeist this fall.

And it's stressful as hell for the rest of us.

Three recent pieces in particular have made overarching claims about The State of Things Now. And the weird part? A lot of the game—name that zeitgeist!—is about babies. Babies, those things that Columbia students avoid with such aplomb that you'd think we were allergic.

A September issue of New York Magazine asked the question: Is there anything wrong with being 53 and pregnant?

Columbia actually played a key role in one couple's quest to have a child, the woman at 48 years old. Columbia's medical center took on the couple for conception through a donor egg.

"A donor was identified, ejaculate dispensed into a sterile cup. Some of the resulting embryos were immediately transferred into Maloney's uterus, the remainder sent to the deep freeze for future use."

The article goes on from there pretty predictably.

The November cover story of The Atlantic is about the death of marriage, which seems a bit dated, right? The writer, 38-year-old Kate Bolick, backs up research on the decline of marriage with

some anecdotal evidence:

"Do I want children? My answer is: I don't know. But somewhere along the way, I decided to not let my biology dictate my romantic life. By blithely deeming biology a nonissue, I'm conveniently removing myself from arguably the most significant decision a woman has to make. But that's only if you regard motherhood as the defining feature of womanhood—and I happen not to."

The final zeitgeist piece is actually not about babies. It's about "our generation." And it comes to these conclusions:

"This is not just a rotten moment to be young. It's a putrid, stinking, several-months-old-stringy-goat-meat moment to be young."

Though the pieces seem unrelated, they all promise epic societal pressures for post-grad men and women, particularly when it comes to deciding whether to have a family now, later, or ever.

Margaret Boykin is a brave soul for trying to navigate these conflicting societal messages in this week's cover story. And upon graduation, every one of us will have to do it ourselves.

Amanda Cormier
eye@columbiaspectator.com

UNCONVENTIONAL HALLOWEEN COSTUMES TRICK-OR-TREAT

EYESITES

As an alternative to your standard slutty kitten or “God’s Gift to Women” costume, we suggest some not-so-average ideas to help you trick-or-treat in style.

BY MARGARET
BOYKIN AND AN-
NELIESE COOPER

Sexy Feminist

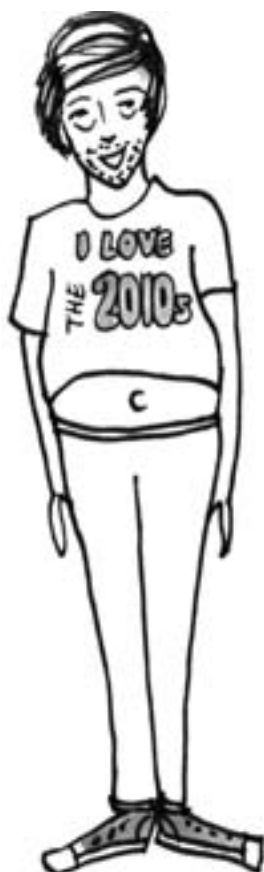
Think Susan B. Anthony & Simone de Beauvoir...if they were in *Mean Girls*.

These two feminists are already rolling in their graves at the sight of knee-highs and push-ups, so why not bring the empowerment-through-sexuality to a head? Simone loved black turtlenecks—but how about going backless, American Apparel style?



Justin Bieber, c. 2037

Oh, Baby. Justin’s gained fame and fortune, yes, but also a pot-belly, stubble, a comb-over, and an awkward reoccurring appearance on VH1’s “I Love The 2010s.” How the mighty have fallen.



Harry Potter: Frat Boy Edition

What if Hogwarts was a very, very different place, and Harry dueled some mean behind-the-back shots? We know the boy’s good with his wand hand.



Mary-Kate and Ashley if they were Conjoined Twins

I mean, seriously—what if? There’s definitely enough room under MK’s hobo-chic muu-muus from the early 2000s to fit a twin, if not triplets.



WHAT YOUR FALL WARDROBE SAYS ABOUT YOU FOR DA BOYZ

BY P.J. SAUERTEIG

MAN SCARVES

Your pimp hand is strong. You’ve been to Europe in the past couple years, and you’ve seen Italian stallions and Swedish Svens wearing them, and now it’s your turn. It’s also an effective hickey cover-up.

VARSITY JACKET

You have never actually played sports. In fact, the most physical exercise you’re used to is making the subway trip to Topshop to look for one of these gems. Oh, really, you got it at a thrift store? No you didn’t. No you didn’t.

ZANY SOCKS FROM URBAN OUTFITTERS/J.CREW

You’re sexually frustrated. You’re caught in a limbo between no-socking it and showing off that ankle cleavage, or giving into the standard blue knee socks of your religiously repressive upbringing. Be strong. At least show us some argyle.

MITTENS

Are you Emily Dickinson? This says “I consciously choose to give up the God-given advantage of five fingers so that I can have two ineffective, yet very sweaty, warm crab claws.”

BEANIE CAP

You’re respectable. You’ve chosen a head covering that is both functional and cost-effective, and you’re vaguely reminiscent of a romanticized lumberjack.

BEARD

Your pimp hand is very strong, too. You’ve got so much testosterone and Fleet Foxes pulsing through your veins that you barely notice all the biddies who want a taste of your pudding. It’s cold outside. They want to stay warm. Beards are warm. You’re an evolutionary winner—they know it, and you know it.

Pay It Forward

food enterprises that make the world better—and profit from it

BY ANDREA CHAN

ILLUSTRATION BY MADDY KLOSS

“Social entrepreneurship” is a term that’s thrown around a lot these days. It’s not uncommon to see businesses boasting a socially beneficial addition to their product, like TOMS Shoes or Anya Hindmarch’s I’m Not A Plastic Bag venture. Attaching a feel-good sentiment to materialist impulses certainly makes charity easier, especially in the food industry, with its permanent place in daily life. Yet, is this social message merely a marketing gimmick, or are these for-profit companies trying to go beyond profit maximization?

A trip to Starbucks, Westside Market, or Whole Foods will offer up a display of KIND Bars, a whole grain and nut snack with a mission. Buyers of the product are encouraged to join the “Kindaholic” community, where each month members are asked to “Do the KIND Thing” by carrying out a simple act of kindness in return for a larger charitable venture funded by its company, KIND Healthy Snacks. A large number of Kindaholics sent thoughtful notes to women who had impacted their lives, and now KIND will be partnering with the National Breast Cancer Foundation to provide comfort kits to hundreds of women undergoing treatment.

Daniel Lubetzky, who envisioned the company as “not-only-for-profit,” founded KIND in 2003. Lubetzky’s credentials as a social entrepreneur are impressive: he previously founded Peaceworks, the organization which sells products made jointly by workers from conflicting regions such as Israel and Palestine in the name of “promoting peace through business.” Although KIND promotes a different kind of peace, to date, spokesperson Elle Stassen proudly says, “We just reached what was, for us, a pretty big milestone, in the fact that a hundred thousand acts have been done as a result of our efforts.”

In addition to social concerns, environmental issues are also increasingly addressed through entrepreneurship. Brooklyn Grange Farm, a 40,000-square foot rooftop farm in Queens, is one such example. The farm, producing organically grown vegetables ranging from beets to salad greens with low toxicity, is entirely commercial and for-profit, selling to farmers’ markets, clients in a farmshare (who get a weekly share of produce) and restaurants such as Roberta’s and Marlow and Sons in Williamsburg. They do not deliver more than five miles away, thus boasting a remarkably low footprint compared to produce sourced from elsewhere. “I feel like everybody who grows their own food and is growing food locally is doing something good for the environment and for the food system,” co-founder Gwen Schantz says.

But, as for for-profit businesses, profitability



is central to both KIND’s and Brooklyn Grange’s operations. KIND has proved to be a thriving enterprise, with the number of snack bars sold just last year numbering 30 million. Recently, they have also expanded their range to include a line of snackable whole-grain clusters, which have been popularly received. As a young business, Brooklyn Grange Farm (founded in 2009) has yet to reach its financial goal. Although Brooklyn Grange has covered its production costs, its founders are still working without pay until further profit has been made, and it relies heavily on volunteer labor, much of which comes in the form of college students in New York. However, Schantz is optimistic about its economic sustainability, saying, “we’re on track to being profitable.”

“IT STOOD OUT THAT WE WERE DIFFERENT BECAUSE WE WERE WORKING TO ACHIEVE SOMETHING MORE.”

However, because KIND’s social agenda of encouraging kindness has nothing to do with food, it is easy to be skeptical of it as a means of publicity. As an emerging brand, its social edge helped to differentiate it from other products. Stassen explains, “It stood out that we were different because we were working to achieve something more.” However, Stassen denies that this is a marketing gimmick, saying, “I think there’s a lot of that out there now, and I think that causes a lot of people to be skeptical, but for us, it’s in our DNA, it’s in everything we do.”

On the other hand, Brooklyn Grange’s social mission, to promote healthy eating and to support the local economy, is intrinsic to their product, thus creating a direct correlation with their income.

But when asked whether people buy KIND bars for the quality or for the social aspect, Sassen responds, “Hands down, I would say taste.” Health experts and magazines such as *O: The Oprah Magazine* and *Women’s Health* who have raved about the nutritional benefits and taste of the KIND Bar confirm this. Thus, rather than a marketing technique, it’s more likely that KIND’s social mission benefits from the success of the company’s quality product, rather than vice versa.

The same applies to Brooklyn Grange, whose environmentally-friendly business is dependent on its financial sustainability. Schantz says, “We want this green enterprise, we want this socially responsible enterprise to exist forever.” She continues, “If someone’s making money off of this farm, it will always exist.” Professor Pamela Hartigan, at the Columbia Business School, agrees that customer satisfaction comes first, “If it’s just window dressing, then that’ll be found out soon enough. People aren’t stupid, you know.”

Jay Goltz of the New York Times blog *You’re The Boss* asks: “If it’s mostly about the social good, what makes it entrepreneurship? And if it’s mostly about the entrepreneurship, what makes it social? Isn’t the phrase an oxymoron?” Rather than a gimmick, the social good can form a beneficial symbiotic relationship with a company’s financial good in motivating its workers. Professor Hartigan explains, “I mean how many people get up and go, ‘Wow, I’m so excited about going to work today, I’m really maximizing shareholder value!’? Nobody does that. Motivation is very important to having a successful business.” ●

Let's Bounce

big freedia wants america to get their azz-shaking on

BY ANNELIESE COOPER
PHOTO COURTESY OF BIG FREEDIA

With the arrival of Big Freedia (pronounced “Free-da”) on the Louisiana music scene, New Orleans is becoming known for more than mardi gras, jazz, and food. Her fierce attitude and provocative lyrics have helped establish Bounce music, a genre that is leading to a surge of booty shaking in America and abroad. The Queen Diva of Bounce—she was born a man but identifies as a woman—is using her “sissyness” and avid interest in butts to make a statement about the expanding genderqueer community. She has been the topic of interviews for the New York Times Magazine and Rolling Stone, and continues to contribute to the evolution of hip hop music. In anticipation of her concert at the Brooklyn Bowl this Saturday night, Big Freedia enlightened The Eye on pronouns, being gay, and her hope that everyone will get their “azz-shaking” on.

How might you describe Bounce music to somebody who didn't really know too much about it? What are the key features that differentiate it from other kinds of dance music or hip hop?

Bounce music is an up-tempo, heavy bass, call-and-response type music that's party music and ass-shaking music.

So, there's a dance scene around it, I imagine.

Oh yeah, definitely. All the songs have dance moves.

Are there specific dances that go with each song, or is there just a general way that you move to it?

Well, you know, certain people will maybe do one song that's specified to one dance, like “Spinning Top” has only one specific dance that goes with it. Sometimes we put numerous dances in a song, and sometimes we just leave it to a few, like two or three.

How did you first get started in the Bounce scene?

Well, Bounce has been around for over two decades. I first got started backgrounding for my best friend Katey Red, who was the first transsexual male to come out with Bounce Music in New Orleans in about 1998. And I backgrounded Katey for like a year and a half, almost two years, and then we started doing a duo thing—Big Freddie Kay Ready—and then we started doing solo projects, and, you know, it just went on and on and on.

So, I've heard that, even within Bounce itself, you're in a sort of subgenre called “Sissy Bounce”—which I find especially cool because I feel like, in the music industry, there isn't often a platform for genderqueer artists, and it seems like Sissy Bounce represents a place for that.

Well, we don't separate it here in New Orleans. There's no such thing as “Sissy Bounce.” It's all Bounce music and we have a few gay artists that work within the Bounce culture, but we don't separate it. That just got misinterpreted through an interview that was done a while back, and they named it “Sissy Bounce” or whatever, but here in New Orleans we don't separate it at

all. Everybody just calls it Bounce music—and, you know, myself [and] Katey Red, we represent a part of that, and we're gay artists.

Oh, awesome! That's almost more powerful, I think. Also, I have a sort of logistical question, I suppose, in that vein: on your website, all of the writing describes you as “Big Freedia, she,” but then in talking to your publicist, I got a lot of “he”—

It really doesn't matter what they say, he or she. I'm comfortable with myself and I know who I am, you know. I'm very proud to be gay, so I have to say, that's one thing that really doesn't bother me—the different pronouns, he or she. It's not a big thing for me at all. But I'm more comfortable when they say she.

WELL, YOU KNOW, I BRING THE PARTY. I BRING NEW ORLEANS TO ALL THE DIFFERENT CITIES AND GET THEM IN ON HOW WE ROCK AND HOW WE ROLL.

So, you mentioned New Orleans—and, of course, in the reading that I've done about Bounce, it seems like it's very tied to its home culture. Now that you're going on tour, I'm wondering how that spirit has translated to other cities.

Well, you know, I bring the party. I bring New Orleans to all the different cities, and get them in on how we rock and how we roll. Everybody gets into it. Most of the places that we're going I've been to a numerous amount of times; they're familiar with my music and they're familiar with me, so it's just going to be a better show.

I saw, too, that you had been overseas in the past—in Paris, London—

Yes: Paris, London, Italy, Amsterdam.

How did Europe react to Bounce?

Oh my God, everybody reacted so amazingly toward it. It was just like, the shows were packed, they came out to support—four million people were listening in when I was on the radio. It was just so amazing, how much they showed love, how packed it was at the Nike Stadium. They really accepted it and got the message, and I was very appreciative of all the people who came out to support me.

Do you think there's an ideal audience for Bounce music?

Well, in New Orleans, everybody does it—young kids, middle-aged, teenagers, adults, older people, when they hear it. It's our culture. People are 99 and they still dance here with it. It's a music for everybody. People love it; that's all they think about, that's all they dream about, that's all they play. It's like a whole family, and it just keeps on getting better and better. ●



From Stage to Screen

polanski's interpretation of *the god of carnage* rings a bell

BY ANNELIESE COOPER

ILLUSTRATION BY THUTO DURKAC SOMO

"I believe," oozes Christoph Waltz, in the same sinister drawl that earned him an Oscar for Tarantino's *Inglourious Basterds*, "in the God of Carnage—the God whose rule has gone unchallenged since time immemorial."

Dressed as a modern American lawyer in a Paris-shot-for-Brooklyn parlor, he's lending his villainous appeal to *Carnage*, the latest cinematic foray of infamous auteur Roman Polanski, which opened this year's 49th Annual New York Film Festival. The film, based on Yasmina Reza's Tony Award-winning play *The God of Carnage*, chronicles a conversation between two bourgeois couples—the Longstreets (Jodie Foster and John C. Reilly) and the Cowans (Waltz and Kate Winslet)—as they confer about a violent dispute between their young sons. During the film's eighty tense minutes, what began as a civil meeting of suburban parents quickly devolves to a drunken shouting match worthy of its gory title—a scenario that can't help but recall Edward Albee's play of living room warfare, *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*, adapted for the screen by Mike Nichols in 1966.

Still, something about these adaptations seems fundamentally curious: both *Woolf* and *Carnage* are particularly bereft of opportunities for cinematic spectacle, their single interior sets and single digit casts almost destined for life behind a proscenium arch. What is it, then, about such tightly-wound verbal drama that makes it worthy of the silver screen?

An initial clue, of course, lies in production companies' endless quest to line their pockets: when Jack Warner bought the film rights to *Virginia Woolf*, it was the toast of Broadway, an especially lucrative seat-filler he hoped could pack countrywide cinemas as readily as it did New York playhouses. However, while Reza's play was certainly critically acclaimed, it stirred up comparatively little public recognition: "I don't know that there's a crying desire among the mainstream film audience to see *The God of Carnage*," David McKenna, a Columbia Film professor and longtime theater director, says. "Among other things, they changed the title, which would suggest that the play doesn't have great cachet."

What its source material lacks in prestige, though, the film finds in spades with its stars, all four of whose names sport an "Academy Award"-related prefix. Thus, the appeal of mass-exporting this show can be understood as a desire to immortalize and share these particular performances—and what performances they are, each actor gliding seamlessly from minute muscle twitches to spat derisive jibes, grading ever upward to an inevitable breaking point.

In fact, one wonders whether such delightful subtlety might have gotten lost on the breadth of a



Broadway stage—or, especially, if *Carnage*'s scope had been widened in an attempt to make it more traditionally cinematic. "When it comes to optioning plays and turning them into film, the holy grail has always been, 'how do you open it up,'" explains Evangeline Morphos, a Columbia professor and producer for film, theater, and television. "I often wonder if that's a wrong thing to think about." She goes on to cite Nichols's attempt to cinematize *Woolf*, finding fault in the additional scenes shot outside that one infernal living room—because, "if you break the agreed-upon reality—that they're stuck there—then the play doesn't make sense."

Meanwhile, the success of *Carnage* lies precisely in Polanski's refusal to back off. Just as these characters jab and nitpick each other's semantics, so does the camera move ruthlessly inward, holding on almost uncomfortable close-ups—the red of Foster's straining face, Winslet's fingertips playing anxiously against the sofa—a theater's restrictive proscenium echoed not only in the walls of the set, but also the frame of the camera itself. Moreover, this visual imprisonment only serves to strengthen the themes lurking in Reza's text: the strictures of politesse, the denial it takes to consider ourselves cultured—what Morphos terms "the claustrophobia of being a parent—that notion that, yes, you want to do the socially, politically correct thing, but your real impulse is to protect your kid."

Of course, as McKenna points out, "Polanski has been making claustrophobic films for quite some time"—from *Knife in the Water* (1962), which plays out in the confines of a boat, to *Rosemary's Baby* (1968) and its demonically imbued architecture. What might fall limp in less capable hands crackles in his, ensuring *Carnage*'s produc-

ers another marketable asset: "I look at it and go, 'What is Sony selling here?'" McKenna says. "Well, they're selling a Roman Polanski film."

Still, trading on the clout of an acclaimed filmmaker takes on potentially tricky significance in this case. Polanski, though certainly a celebrated figure, is also an especially controversial one: after pleading guilty to "unlawful sexual intercourse" with a thirteen year old girl in 1978, he was arrested again in 2009 at the Zurich film festival for evading an outstanding U.S. warrant. (The Swiss eventually released him, but he is still wanted on six charges from the case in this country).

WHAT IS IT, THEN, ABOUT SUCH TIGHTLY-WOUND VERBAL DRAMA THAT MAKES IT WORTHY OF THE SILVER SCREEN?

Indeed, there may be some wisdom to glean from *Carnage* itself: at least for its four hyper-critical protagonists, misinformed judgment and moral superiority lead only down the ugliest of roads—bulging veins and boozy rants, social animals gone feral. Though Polanski's transgressions may well prove unforgivable, that's up to each of us to decide for ourselves—to follow what McKenna calls "the free market of the film business" and decline to add our \$13 to its box office tally, if that's ultimately our wont. However, to do so is to risk missing this expertly crafted verbal bloodbath—a violent unearthing of the hypocrisy inherent in our tenuous grasp on civility. ■



BABIES & **BARNARD**

why you can't have it all

by Margaret Boykin



FULLY-PAID MATERNITY LEAVE



There are ovaries by my orange juice. Don't be alarmed—it's just the word, a collection of black letters strewn across a page of the Wall Street Journal under the glaring headline "My Fertility Crisis"—the article torn out and left surreptitiously next to my breakfast. It is the summer vacation before my junior year, and my mother is innocently humming her way around the kitchen, closing cabinets and pretending not to notice as I scan the page. I find myself staring into the dejected eyes of Holly Finn, a woman in her 40s whose forays into in vitro fertilization have left her exhausted, childless, and posing for forlorn pictures under a tree. One pull quote has been furiously underlined in a familiar shade of blue: "When we were young, we were taught again and again that we shouldn't get pregnant. Now we can't."

I'm about to put the article aside when my mother, whisking away in her bathrobe, calls over her shoulder: "Just saying. It's all downhill from 35." I pick up my glass and sip the bright, pulpy liquid without tasting it, the gravity of her statement settling like a caffeine headache between my eyes. "And I want grandkids."

The Baby Buzz

Like many college-aged women of my generation and demographic, I'm not exactly looking to be with child anytime soon. My life revolves around a chaotic but structured pattern of week and weekend, class and internship, papers and parties. My conversations do not circulate around sonograms or very small socks. I am one of many driven Barnard women who exist to succeed, to graduate, and to excel in the way our college has prepared us to—to work one day in a profession on the same level as our male peers, in whichever field we desire. But that sunny summer morning a black, vaguely baby-shaped cloud impeded my images for the future—apparently, I'd forgotten to consider children. Barnard has prepared me for graduation and the work world, but has it pre-

pared my peers and me for the wealth of pressures that society has placed on women?

As it turns out, my mother and the Wall Street Journal aren't the only people concerned with fertility. Recently, developments in reproductive technologies have created an open season on the topic. The New York Times published a story over the summer titled "Are You as Fertile as You Look?" reminding older readers that even if their hair is still shiny and their bodies are yoga-fit,

"FOR US, YOUR EDUCATION IS THE MOST IMPORTANT. I WANT TO KEEP YOUR EYE ON THE PRIZE."

their ovaries might not be similarly youthful. New York Magazine capitalized on this debate in their Sept. 25 issue in "Parents of a Certain Age," featuring a cover image of a woman who appears to be in her late 60s, posed, Demi Moore-style, with her protruding pregnant belly on display. The article profiled several different women, ranging in age from 48 to 53, who had given birth with the assistance of fertility treatments for a variety of reasons—delayed career aspirations, lack of a relationship until later in life. Debora Spar, president of Barnard College and author of the book *The Baby Business: How Money, Science and Politics Drive the Commerce of Conception*, comments on this new pregnancy surge in the over-40 crowd. "As [fertility treatments] became more and more socially acceptable, women who were dealing with infertility moved faster to go to donor eggs, and that's just driven the explosion in women over 40 giving birth," Spar says. "It's become commonplace—and to some extent, trendy—to give birth at an age that, in the past, would have been inconceivable."

And fertility is not the only aspect of motherhood under the media spotlight. The conflict of being a mother in the working world is discussed everywhere—Facebook's chief operating officer Sheryl Sandberg, who spoke at the TEDWomen conference last December and more recently, at Barnard College's 2010 Commencement, has spoken about women navigating between their personal obligations and their work world. And she's not the first—at Barnard's 1998 Commencement, Joyce Purnick, the then-metropolitan editor of the New York Times, created a whirlwind of press by flatly stating she wouldn't be where she was professionally if she'd decided to have kids.

Similarly, Forbes and the Huffington Post have called attention, in recent years, to the fact that the United States and Australia are the only developed countries that do not mandate paid maternity leave. Employees are guaranteed 12 weeks of unpaid leave in companies with a staff of over 50—which is less than half of all companies. By comparison, Bosnia and Herzegovina offer 52 weeks—paid. And Chile, India, Mexico and Morocco all offer at least 12 weeks.

Just by picking up a paper it becomes immediately clear that the women of my generation have a multitude of choices concerning if and how we will handle motherhood—and we're entering a society with absolutely no efficient policies or work-life constructs with which to support us. As a college student, it is easy—and to some extent healthy—to exist in an idyllic, purely academic world, but there's a world of voices like my mother's lurking outside the Barnard gates, waiting for graduation day. Considering all these looming pressures of time, money, family, and society, I couldn't help but wonder—has my women's college ever thought to warn me about these issues?

It is difficult to talk about issues of fertility and motherhood at Barnard. Administrators do not want to revisit a bygone era when motherhood and a "Mrs. Degree" were a young woman's only option, and are reluctant to press the topic with-

PARTIALLY-PAID MATERNITY LEAVE



Source: United Nations Statistics Division
Graphic by Cathi Choi

out a marked show of student interest.

Abigail Lewis, program director of Barnard's Athena Scholars program—a program designed to instruct students on the theory, practice, and implementation of leadership in their personal and professional lives—points this out. "I don't think this is a huge conversation, and on one hand I think it needs to be, and on the other hand, I don't think it should be. You're 20, you should not be worried about that, and for the most part I think that that's true," she says. The administration's sentiment on this matter bleeds into the Barnard atmosphere—Alexandra Fields, a senior at Barnard, notes that, though there are some students who favor more traditional roles, the dominant campus culture is one that's career-driven, not mommy-driven. "The faculty can preach to the choir about pursuing careers—it's not a bunch of women who want to pop out babies at 18."

Lewis admits that within the Barnard culture, graduation is key. "There's a certain attitude here about what's important—for us, your education is the most important. I want to keep your eye on the prize," she says.

When asked about the difficulties of raising awareness about fertility and starting an on-campus conversation, Spar points to failed public service announcements of the past. In 2000, the American Society for Reproductive Medicine let women know the effects of things like age and cigarettes had on their fertility. "They ran into massive opposition from women's groups that said it was a scare tactic, women need to control their own fertility. And so they pulled the campaign," Spar says.

It's easy to imagine the scores of angry students protesting outside the Diana Center about anybody telling them what they should do with their bodies. However, there's a reason that various interest groups tried to inform the masses about these issues. "There have been a lot of studies that women actually don't know the age at which their fertility declines," Spar says. "It's 35. And it falls

off a cliff." Still, the demand needs to come from the students before any programs, lectures, or even posters can be produced. "If we, the administration, submit a policy on fertility awareness, it's not going to go over well," Spar says.

Strong, Beautiful Barnard Women

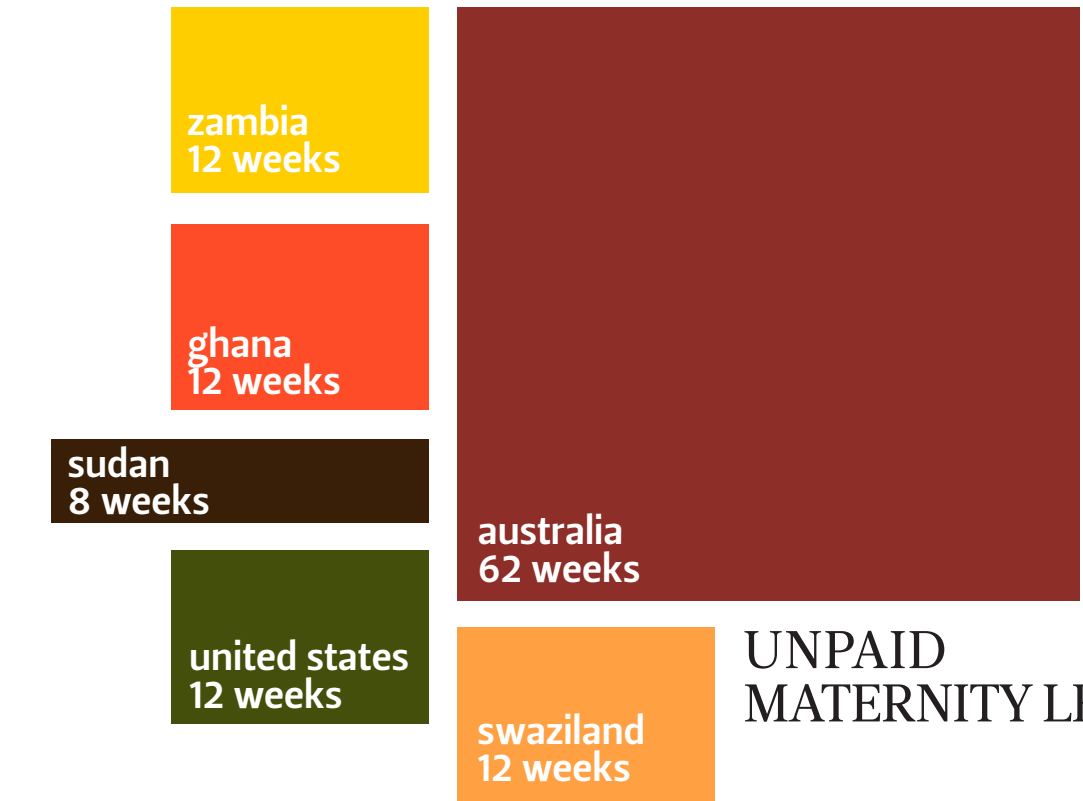
But do students want to talk about fertility, motherhood, and the effect of both on their future careers? I will confess that a large incentive for me to write this article was to seek out the opinions of my peers and see if they were feeling similarly overwhelmed by family pressures and media coverage of these topics.

Initially, I was surprised—I appeared to have missed a dose of optimism pills. Ambitious Barnard students have a hard time visualizing failure, and being unable to juggle personal and professional goals is similarly hard to imagine.

"There are so many more opportunities for women in this time," says Jordan Alam, a junior at Barnard. "You're not just choosing between a stable relationship and being a harlot." Jordan feels that students are reluctant to discuss motherhood because they're just not overwhelmingly concerned about it—their eye, as Lewis remarked, is fixed on the prize, and they are focused on their aspirations for the future. "Motherhood itself is such a slippery topic, because we hear about it from our parents as a thing we should be thinking about, but when it comes to the forefront, we're more concerned with immediate stuff like graduation and work," Alam says.

Similarly, Fields was nonplussed—in fact, she's looking forward to being a role model. "I'm open to staying home, but I don't think I necessarily have to make a choice and I don't feel bad pursuing both," she says. "I think it's a great example to show your kids that you can have both—if I have a daughter: look, mom works full-time, and is successful, and is still a great mom."

It is difficult to insert a vial of doubt into a community culture of ambition. The women of my



UNPAID MATERNITY LEAVE

generation have received positive messages from our university, our peers, and especially from the feminists of our parents' generation who worked hard to push the message of "You can have it all." This message has been questioned in Sarah Jessica Parker movies for years now, but students seem reluctant to look the message in the face: sometimes, this ideal balance is not feasible. Barnard students have excelled at an elevated academic level through confidence and micromanaging—why should we have doubts about negotiating what we want in the future, when these tools of organization and management have worked for us for years?

Reality Bites

Frankly, the notion of "You can have it all" is a myth, and symptomatic of an unhealthy obsession with micromanaging—a habit which finds its home in our competitive academic setting.

The practice of sublimating biological conditions in order to achieve greatness is cemented by a mindset cultivated in college. At Barnard, and at many colleges, it is the norm for students to have a full course load and an internship, straight As and a great set of extracurricular activities. Students overload their schedules and forgo sleep, proper meals, and often, sanity, in order to keep all the balls in the air. But with this extremist devotion to academics and passive attitude to our physical selves, what does the future look like? If you spend your college years ignoring your body's needs in order to get ahead, what's to stop you from accepting an 80-hour workweek in the future? What's to stop you from being too afraid to ask about maternity leave, or cheating the biological clock to satisfy your professional dreams even if you desire children?

Spar believes that the developments in reproductive technologies collide with the "You can have it all" message to encourage the micromanaging of your own biology.

"I think one of the mistakes that my generation

is imposing on your generation is too much of a sense that you can manage your family and career in these nice, neat, discrete, life packages, and I think it's rarely true," she says. "I think it potentially leaves your generation quite vulnerable to falling into the trap of that old cartoon where the woman hits herself on the head and says 'Oops, I forgot to have a baby.' So you all might decide, generationally speaking, at 38, 'Oh, okay, now's the time to buy my donor eggs or unfreeze my own eggs.'"

The world after Barnard is very different. Negotiating a work week on top of personal commitments—to friends or family, let alone children—isn't like writing a paper or cramming for an exam, and the academic tools college provides aren't always the ones needed to find happiness in the world outside Morningside Heights. Jessica Cannon, BC '03, coordinator of health promotion and education at Well-Woman, a wellness-promotion organization formed to help Barnard students deal with the stresses of academic life, acknowledges this difference. "Work-life balance feels very different when you're balancing an academic schedule that varies day-to-day, versus when you're going to have to be in the same place from 9–6 Monday through Friday," she says. "I think it's appropriate to talk realistically about life after college. It feels much more honest to me than just saying 'Of course you can do anything.'"

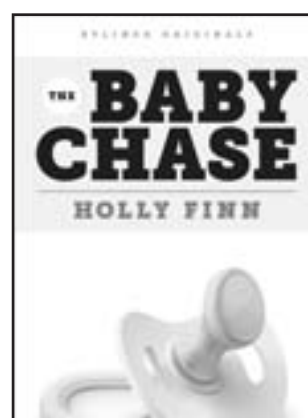
Lewis also thinks that it's important to educate students on the difficulties of the world after college, and to urge them to break their work-driven mindsets. She encourages educating Barnard students on what we're up against in the career world as women, without using scary words like "fertility."

"You're entering a [work] world that doesn't entirely accept motherhood as part of it. We still live in a very patriarchal world, and all the institutions still kind of run on that ideal," she says. If a law firm requires its employees to work 80-hour weeks, and a woman wants to get ahead, she doesn't generally challenge that requirement, even if that policy challenges her ability to have children.

"We ask how we can add children to that, instead of saying 'No, we shouldn't have to be doing that, whether we have children or not.' That's an issue that has not fully been addressed in terms of really revolutionizing how we view our own time," Lewis says. Elizabeth Castelli, the acting director of the Barnard Center for Research on Women, agrees that campus conversations shouldn't stop at motherhood. "It's important to think not just about issues of reproductive technology or issues of work-life balance, but how to change work in a way that allows you to have another life," she says. Discussions of motherhood stretch beyond discussions of fertility—the struggles women have in the career world affect everyone, regardless of if they can or wish to have children. Opening up students' minds to the fact that it's incorrect and unhealthy to labor like robots makes them less susceptible to hostile workplace conditions in the future, and unafraid to ask for balance and policy changes.

Taking Action

So, how do you address a college full of women bursting with aspirations that perhaps they actu-



ally can't have it all? Gently. Marianne Hirsch, a professor of English and comparative literature at Columbia as well as a professor in the Institute for Research on Women and Gender, recognizes that topics about women in the career world come up often in class, but are difficult to implement into student's realities. "These topics come up on a theoretical level rather than a practical one,"

"THERE ARE PRESSURES FROM THE OUTSIDE THAT WE AREN'T GETTING. I DON'T THINK WE'RE PREPARED FOR FIGHTING FOR WHAT WE WANT."

Hirsch says.

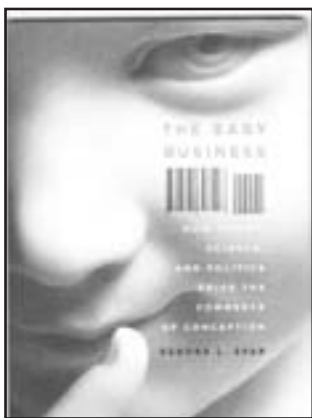
Currently, Barnard offers courses on everything from feminist theory to a course specifically examining the portrayal, patronage and position of women in the art world. History of Sexuality, Women and Health, and Gendered Controversies all discuss these issues—but how should Barnard broach this subject outside the classroom?

Programs like Well-Woman were created to attempt a more holistic approach to education, and to help students recognize that it's important to have a life outside of school. Presumably, these programs hope students will retain this mindset post-graduation. Barnard is rare in its development of this catch-all wellness service—most colleges have programs which offer specific services like stress-relieving backrubs or substance abuse counseling. Well-Woman, on the other hand, advises and cares for an array of issues associated with college, ranging from academics to body im-

age. Their program emphasizes body awareness, and seems like the perfect place to raise questions about the future. Cannon says she thinks that as long as questions of motherhood and future pressures are being asked, then they're issues Well-Woman cares about. "You read and hear a lot about 35 as being a scary age for some women because of statistics on fertility—what does changing science mean about how far we can push that back? We certainly have room to talk about that kind of thing here," Cannon says.

Well-Woman also has peer-educators with whom students can speak with in a safe, less-serious atmosphere about their stresses and concerns. Alam, who is a Well-Woman peer-educator, feels that a body-awareness message carves out a place for information about fertility. This campaign primarily focuses on the importance of not ignoring your body's needs. "From that, you could definitely bring in 'Do you think in the future you would want to have a child or be a mother?' Always having more information is better rather than going on blindly and finding out at 35 that you want to have kids."

Although Well-Woman is on the right track, it appears that Barnard's Career Development is leading the march by opening the floor to conversations with alumnae about these issues. Victoria Passarella, a career counselor for Barnard's Career Development, agrees with Lewis that it's best to tackle discussions about the possibility of motherhood from a career-angle. "Typically when I'm working with a student they're thinking 'I need to get a job, I need to get an internship,' and they're not thinking 'How, would this career path impact my life holistically?'" Passarella and her colleagues have developed programs that encourage students to consider all aspects of their prospective careers by encouraging alumnae to discuss the decisions they've made and their experiences negotiating between the personal and professional worlds. It's



been long recognized that women trying to make it in the professional world need to support each other, to create their own version of “The Old Boys Club”—and it appears that Career Development has found a way to facilitate those unions.

“IF WE, THE ADMINISTRATION, SUBMIT A POLICY ON FERTILITY AWARENESS, IT’S NOT GOING TO GO OVER WELL.”

“As a women’s college, one of our biggest resources is our pool of alumnae. If women are going to be in leadership positions, and we are going to make up for this history of inequality, there needs to be a mentorship process,” Passarella says. Through both the MAPS program—Matching Alumnae to Partner with Students—and the series of informative panels called “Careers & Coffee,” the Career Development office is providing students with opportunities to ask other women how they’ve handled decisions about their careers and work-life balance. At the panels, Passarella acts as a moderator and is always sure to ask a question about how the women handle work-life balance—and there’s an entire upcoming event dedicated to “Work-life Fit.” “These questions about work-life balance, like: Did you do your own career transition? Did your values change?—you can’t Google that,” says Passarella.

And students do come away from these panels with a new frame of mind. Passarella described one student interested in finance who, after the “Careers & Coffee: Women in Finance” panel, learned about the intense hours and traveling required for her area of interest. “She was like,

‘Okay, these aspects of finance are not going to work for me, because I do want to have a family soon, and I need to think about this.’ It was like a light bulb went off—she was like ‘Oh, I have to think about how this is going to impact me, maybe not even after I graduate, but 20 or 30 years from now,’” Passarella says. The importance of having a safe space to ask questions about motherhood and work-life balance is enormous, and Career Development gives students a forum to candidly discuss issues, ranging from asking employers about work-life balance, to the logistics of requesting maternity leave down the line.

They also seem to be setting a trend. Last night, an alumnae-organized event called “Working Mothers, Barnard Daughters,” brought Barnard alumnae to discuss their own work-life decisions. Their daughters, current Barnard students, commented on how growing up with a working mother effected them. Tina Wahrman, BC ’78, was inspired to organize the event because her life “was very different than my own mom’s,” she says. Her work in legal practice over the years has kept her from ever really taking a break. “Often I felt that I was flying without a map, and would wonder how this was working for my three daughters,” she says. “Having mentors and support along the way made a big difference for me.”

A Place to Talk

Despite these programs, there is still a lack of visibility in conversations around this topic. Many students I spoke with were unaware of these panels, and I myself did not know about them before conducting research. Action is being taken, but perhaps it needs to be more explicitly implemented within residence halls and orientation groups, or through honest conversations between administrators and students on how Barnard women want these topics to be addressed. Through Well Woman, Career Development, and a strong network of alumnae, perhaps it will be less difficult to produce student awareness on looming issues of fertility and the possibility of motherhood than it might seem at first glance. Even within my interviews, when our conversations moved into the specific stressors involved in considering motherhood, students acknowledged the stress surrounding their future.

“I think being in an oasis of women that are so driven to do work in career or education has given me a perspective of ‘I can do whatever I want,’ which is great, but at the same time, it makes you a little naïve,” Alam says. “There are pressures from the outside that we aren’t getting. I don’t think we’re prepared for fighting for what we want—Barnard needs to talk more about the non-ideal.” Alam is also interested in the idea of campus-wide discussions on the “politics of motherhood.” “It’d be really interesting if we had a panel about being a mom in third-wave feminism and choosing to be this, that we’re fighting for our rights in a different way,” Alam says.

This issue presses more firmly on the minds of some students than others. Over 40 percent of Barnard students self-identify as Jewish, and many are Orthodox or have a background that encourages more attention to family and community life. For example, Frances Adams, a junior at Barnard, is Jewish and grew up in a close-knit Syrian community in New York. Her family has

always encouraged her to marry young and marry within the community. She says she wishes there was more of an on-campus conversation about the trials of wanting a family.

“I’ve been thinking about kids since I was 16 years old,” she says. “I do think that at Barnard, and particularly the women I associate with, have a very independent approach to life, and being a stay-at-home mother is relegated as inferior. People need to be more open-minded to other people’s goals—if it’s to make a family and care for kids, then that’s an amazing goal.”

Adams seems comfortable and aware that she will not be able to control every element of her future, and feels that her generation is obsessed with perfection, and the “neat, discrete packages” Spar spoke about. “We’re trying to make it so rational. We think about everything—careers, marriage, men. That’s why people get married and have kids at 40. They haven’t found the ‘right one,’ but is there ever a ‘right’ one, a right partner, or right time to have a child?” Adams says. “That sort of mentality is even more dated than the ’50s housewife ideal. It’s from the Renaissance. There’s no such thing as perfect. You just try to be happy and you just try to make it work.”

Barnard shouldn’t push motherhood on everyone. Many of the professors and students I spoke to reminded me that motherhood is not for everyone—and nor should it be. Women have fought for their right to choose, and if you’re reading this article and uninterested in having kids, you may think the topics I’m discussing are irrelevant.

However, issues surrounding fertility and maternity affect everyone. The most compelling part of the argument for on-campus conversations about fertility and motherhood is this ripple effect. The lack of equal treatment of men and women in maternity leave affects the wage gap. You may be uninterested in having children, but you’re most likely interested in not getting paid less just because you’re a woman. You may be uninterested in having fertility treatments, but you can’t ignore that women becoming pregnant at 50 not only raises important moral and medical questions, but is also symptomatic of an unhealthy work-life divide that has pushed them to extremes. The issues surrounding fertility and motherhood affect our world not only on a personal level, but also on a societal one.

It is beautiful that Barnard can be a place where women feel that they have no limitations. It’s not that I want Barnard’s administration, curriculum, and student programs to tell young women that we shouldn’t have it all—just that we may not be able to have it all at the same time. That there’s a world beyond the Diana Center and our classrooms that doesn’t always believe in us, and that in order to get what we want, we will have to both fight and make compromises.

“I always go home inspired from school, saying I want to be this or that, and my family says ‘Oh, Columbia and their liberal ideas,’” Adams says. “But it’s true—when I’m here I think purely as an individual. My life is about me, and I’m going to be as selfish as I want. I’m going to change the world.” She pauses. “But at the same time, I hear a voice that tells me it’s important to look at the bigger picture, and I’d like Barnard to be a place to talk about that.” ●

PETA's Porn Provocation

will sex sell animal rights?

BY JESSICA GINGRICH

ILLUSTRATION BY IAN MARSHALL

Your roommate finally left for class! You've been waiting for these fifty minutes all day. You close your blinds, light some candles, and sit down at your desk. Feeling adventurous, you decide to check out something new. You disable the safe search on Google, find a promising site, and prepare for what's coming your way, and then—what the hell? A video showing animals being tortured replaces the porn you were watching.

This scenario may become a reality next semester. People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals submitted an application to register the domain name PETA.xxx during the week of Sept. 5. Although it has yet to be approved, PETA hopes that a porn site will attract a broader audience to their animal rights campaigns.

"While some groups seem to run from opportunities like .xxx websites, we see it as yet another chance to introduce people to animal rights through an accessible medium," Ryan Hurling, PETA's Manager of College Campaigns and Outreach, says. "The content will be graphic in more ways than one."

The erotic videos and photo galleries will occasionally be interrupted by graphic clips of animal mistreatment, in addition to "a few other surprises" that Hurling would not disclose.

PETA is no stranger to sexuality. The group has become infamous for their print-ads depicting nude celebrities alongside the tagline "I'd rather go naked than wear fur." Less well known is PETA's annual "State of the Union Undress," an online video that features a PETA spokeswoman stripping while discussing PETA's accomplishments. The launch of the first State of the Union Undress in 2007 resulted in PETA receiving the greatest percentage increase of all terms searched that day on Yahoo.

Hurling argues that PETA's racy marketing campaigns are essential to achieving their mission by forcing people to pay attention to animal rights issues. "Our purpose is to stop animal suffering, and we use all available opportunities to reach millions of people with powerful messages. Sometimes this requires tactics—like naked marches and colorful ad campaigns—that some people find outrageous or rude, but part of our job is to shake people up and even shock them in order to initiate discussion, debate, questioning of the status quo, and, of course, action."

While these gestures may raise awareness of PETA, they do not necessarily translate into people caring about their message. "Having Google hits doesn't actually mean anything as far as raising awareness for your issue, if people are just bewildered by what you are doing or just want to see tits," Brooke Burrows, a freshman in CC, says.



Vanessa Spano, a co-president of Columbia Students for Animal Protection and a junior at Barnard, was also skeptical: "Who is going to watch porn and then know that they have a disturbing image after?"

Additionally, PETA's marketing techniques have raised criticism by those who believe that they exploit and demean women. Agathe Joly, a senior in Barnard, says that PETA is, "using one abusive system for another ... I mean, it is certainly provocative, and it will get people's attention, but a lot of the underlying messages are questionable."

LESS WELL-KNOWN IS PETA'S ANNUAL "STATE OF THE UNION UNDRRESS," AN ONLINE VIDEO THAT FEATURES A PETA SPOKESWOMAN STRIPPING WHILE DISCUSSING PETA'S ACCOMPLISHMENTS.

Brielle Nalence, Program Associate for the National Organization for Women, foresees a potential problem for PETA with the feminist community. "The website is not coming out of a desire for personal expression and sexual exploration, sensuality, et cetera," she says. "It's an advertising campaign. As with other degrading forms of media, I am sure the feminist community will not stand idly by."

If PETA's marketing scheme does indeed exploit women, it raises larger moral questions. Is it possible to justify the exploitation of women in the name of animal rights activism?

"If you are trying to end a serious injustice

in one segment of society, I don't really see the strategy behind taking on or acting controversially in terms of how you treat another area of potential injustice in society," Henry Wilson, a sophomore in CC, says. "Tacitly, it offends people, and intellectually, it undermines their moral seriousness."

Hurling, however, disagrees with these accusations. "It may be sexual, but it's not sexist. It's a woman's prerogative to use her body as a political instrument, and it's anti-feminist to dare to tell her that she needs to put her clothes back on."

CSAP dedicated a meeting several weeks ago to discussing the implications of PETA's advertising and the creation of PETA.xxx. Although CSAP works with PETA, many members felt uncomfortable with the creation of PETA.xxx. Abby Tutor, a first-year at Teachers College, articulated many of the same criticisms expressed by other members of the Columbia community. "They do have some material that is purely factual and shows what is going on in factory farms ... but I do think that PETA sends some really bad messages to people and turns them away from animal rights. It is a huge problem, especially when you are trying to form a grassroots movement that supports veganism as well as human rights, and sees them as connected."

Nadya Ali, a Co-President of CSAP and a junior at Barnard, expressed concern over the type of people the website would attract. She says that the combination of sexual and animal abuse videos remind her of stomp porn, something that CSAP and PETA both protest. Stomp porn, also known as crush porn, is a type of fetish porn in which animals are tortured and stomped on by women in high heels.

In spite of being against PETA's tactics and the creation of PETA.xxx, many animal allies might agree with a comment made by Abby Tutor. "The sad thing is: would anyone be talking about animal rights at all if PETA wasn't doing all this crazy stuff?" ●

I'D LOVE TO STAY AND CHAT,
BUT I REALLY



Welcome to the Punderdome

new york's most intense pun competition

BY DAVID SALAZAR
ILLUSTRATION BY CINDY PAN

It's a Tuesday night, and instead of sitting in Butler 209, I'm sitting on a folding chair in a bar in Brooklyn. The two women next to me are chatting about their day, and one turns around and finds someone who was roommates with a friend of hers. The mood in the bar is so familiar that I feel like I've walked into a high school reunion or something.

Punderdome 3000 began in May in the basement of Southpaw, a bar and event space in Park Slope, Brooklyn. According to Jo Firestone, the event's creator and co-host, the first Punderdome was attended by about 40 people from the area. Lucky for Jo, one of those people was Eileen Reynolds, who wrote a piece about Punderdome for The New Yorker's Book Bench blog. Since then, Reynolds has sat in twice as Punderdome's celebrity judge, and the audience has grown to the point that the basement of Southpaw can no longer contain the audience—a move to the street-level main stage was in order.

Hosted by Jo and her father, Fred Firestone, who flies in from St. Louis for every event, Punderdome is as unique as its contestants. It's certainly not the only pun competition in existence, but it differentiates itself by managing to make punning into a spectator sport. While it is similar to the O. Henry Pun-Off held annually in Austin, Punderdome differs in the fact that there are no set judges—the audience is the judge. One unlucky soul dons a cardboard contraption dubbed the Clap-O-Meter and does her best to gauge the audience's feeling about the contestants. The contestants who receive raucous cheers are deemed “punderful” and move on to the next round.

For their part, the Firestones do a hell of a job hosting. After Jo outlines the rules, Fred reads the setup of a well-known pun and the audience has to finish it. “The lights in the Chinese restaurant

were too bright, so that manager had to ...” Fred says, leaving the sentence hanging. Those quick enough to shout “dim sum” get PayDay candy bars pelted in their general direction. The girl next to me managed to deflect a candy bar before it hit her full on, but couldn't keep herself from laughing hard at the pun.

As Reynolds put it in her New Yorker post, at the Punderdome there is a “concentrated, unabashed silliness that I longed to bottle and smuggle out in my purse.” This is a sentiment that everyone—from the pun contestants to the audience members to the bartenders—can agree with. Yes, it's a silly idea, but highbrow silly. Like the web comic “Hark! A Vagrant,” Punderdome is funny in a way that some people just may not understand, but for those who do, attendance is regular.

IT'S CERTAINLY NOT THE ONLY PUN COMPETITION IN EXISTENCE, BUT IT DIFFERENTIATES ITSELF BY MANAGING TO MAKE PUNNING INTO A SPECTATOR SPORT.

The real stars of the Punderdome are the contestants, all of whom show up as a way to test their pun-making mettle (and hopefully win a prize). Everyone who competes chooses a punny moniker. Notable names include Forest Wittyker, the Punticator, Alison in Punderland, and, my personal favorite (despite their poor performance), Six Puns None the Richer. Punning can be tricky, especially when the contestants are only given 90 seconds (or however long it takes the

audience to sing the *Friends* theme song) to come up with their puns. It takes some skill, but most of all, it takes courage to get up in front of a room of strangers and try to be funny.

“It's clear that many of the competitors don't spend tons of time on stage ordinarily, but in this setting they're willing to get up and try something that's really quite difficult in front of a crowd,” Reynolds says in an email, adding that “the narrowness of the pun format levels the playing field a bit.”

For the most part, Reynolds is right—the contestants are all given a nice introduction and a decent amount of time to be punny—but that doesn't mean that the crowd won't let you know if your pun is terrible. Indeed, a small group of contestants receive little more than a smattering of applause. But, to be fair, they weren't very funny—and that, in the end, is what matters.

“It's fun to think about just what it is that makes a pun funny,” Reynolds says, reflecting on her experience as a judge. “Is it the surprise? The inevitability? Something about the way the person delivered it? Other questions arise, too: better to go with a single, brilliant pun, or a whole string of them, rapid fire? Something classic or timely? Dirty or clean?”

There may not be a formula, but judging by the increasing popularity of the Punderdome, it seems that the contestants may have a while to figure it out. The latest count of audience members puts attendance at about 200 people, some of whom are regulars and others who maybe heard about it from coworkers or friends and want to see what it's all about. It's curiosity and the enjoyment of puns that get people to Southpaw, but it's the community spirit of the thing that keeps them coming back.

The future of the Punderdome may hold the promise of a traveling event, but for now they are “growing a home base at Southpaw,” Jo says. “It's nice seeing a community form around this really silly event.” ●

The Steampunk Rager

partying like it's 1899

BY HANNAH PAGE

ILLUSTRATION BY CINDY PAN

If there are people gawking at Shien Lee's flowered hat and vintage striped shirt, she doesn't seem to notice. She sits calmly and coolly, in the café downtown she has chosen for our interview. Her features barely peep through the black netted veil wrapped around her face. As we start to talk, though, she slowly begins rolling up the netting, exposing heavily made-up eyes. "I've worn much less comfortable," she says of the veil. "I usually have eye patches, big collars. I have a different outfit, but I'm going to put it on before my event." In less than an hour, she will be hosting a party at Le Poisson Rouge on Bleecker Street, but you wouldn't know it: right now she appears entirely composed.

Lee runs the event production company Dances of Vice, which organizes a variety of period-themed, nightclub-type parties every month. Although most of her soirees are costume parties where guests are encouraged to dress up in all manner of vintage, period, and fantastical clothing, the events are also meant to allow patrons to revel in spectacles inspired by times past. In doing so, the events foster creativity and friendships between people who share an appreciation for anachronistic dress, music, and often dance styles. "Dances of Vice is really big on experiential events where you feel like the event's a living theater, where you're part of the spectacle," Lee says. In the parties she hosts for Dances of Vice, she strives to incorporate a "myriad of anachronistic and New Romantic influences in Dadaistic celebration of the liberating effects of beauty, fantasy, and surrealism."

Dances of Vice serves a growing coterie of people who love to celebrate the aesthetic and culture of the past. "I think there's a lot of romance that is kind of lost in this sort of mass consumer society," Lee says. "A lot of things are ... just manufactured, so the design is not as good as they used to and the quality is not as good [as it was historically]."

The anachronistic community, whose members once included those who attended more standard renaissance fairs, is transforming into a larger, more diverse one. Dressing up is not confined to any one historical era—in fact, movements such as steampunk, which became prominent in the early 1990s, combine historical Victorian styles of dress with a futuristic aesthetic.

Steampunk has become increasingly popular in recent years, emerging from the fringes to the mainstream. In fact, The Way Station, a bar in Prospect Heights which opened in 2009, caters specifically to steampunk tastes. The bar hosts events ranging from CD release parties, to stand-up comedy nights, to Dances of Vice-style balls. It is run by proprietor Anders Heide, who describes steampunk as "kind of like Goth for adults. As you get a little older, you trade in black for brown."

Sean Proper, a regular at The Way Station and a member of the steampunk community, attributes the growing interest in the steampunk community to the internet: "Even since [the] mid to late '90s, a person could plug in just about any interest, no matter how obscure, and be able to learn more about it and find out there are others who have a passion for the same thing. But especially now, with social networking sites, it's easier to connect and have community with those people." Proper notes that with the recent increase in interest in steampunk in particular, "other subcultures that also combine past and present" tend to get lumped in with steampunk as well.



"FOR A LOT OF PEOPLE WHO COME TO MY PARTIES, IT'S LIKE A LIFESTYLE. A LOT OF COMMUNITIES AND FRIENDSHIPS HAVE BEEN BUILT THROUGH DANCES OF VICE."

Like Lee, Proper longs for the quality, hand-made goods that existed before 20th-century mass production. He sees it as one motivation behind participation in period activities. "There is something to be said," he notes, "for being nostalgic for ages when people seemed to care about the items they produced. With mass production and the excessive use of plastic, we just don't get nearly as much of that attention to quality and detail that they did back in the day."

Lee, however, is unlike Proper in that she is careful not to categorize herself or Dances of Vice as subscribing to one particular aesthetic. Lee's introduction into the anachronistic community, in fact, came from a '20s and '30s party she had attended in Los Angeles called Bricktops. "That was a big inspiration for me," she says. "You had older people next to young people, everyone was dressed up in some kind of weird style. It didn't have to be period, but most of it was period. I just loved the energy, creativity, the show, and so that was a big inspiration."

She recalls that after attending the Bricktops event, she wanted to host one of her own, but it wasn't until she moved to Manhattan to pursue a degree at Columbia's Teachers College that she had the idea for Dances of Vice. "I felt like if there was any place that I could have a party like this, it would have to be New York ... I wanted a place to bring ... creative people together."

Two hundred guests attended Lee's first soiree in 2007 at the Pussycat Lounge, modeled largely on the party she had attended in Los Angeles. "I started this as a [monthly] 20's and 30's party, but soon I felt like it got kind of boring, and I wanted to try something different. So I started doing bigger events with a more general historic costume theme. I did one that was a Victorian ball." It turned out that larger numbers of guests flocked to these themed parties, which suited Lee just fine: "I love a lot of different eras. I also really love the 50s, so I've done a few rockabilly parties." By the time she graduated two years later with her M.A., Lee realized she could throw these types of parties for a living, and since she has become a professional event planner.

Lee's next event, which takes place this Saturday, Oct. 29 at Riverside Church, will bring her back to her Columbia roots. It also stands out among her usual fare because, although it is certainly a period party, it's also an interactive murder mystery theater game. The event, *Beyond the Veil: A Victorian Murder Mystery*, will feature an array of burlesque performers, live music, a dance company, and actors who will play the murder suspects.

Lee says that, when people ask her why she "dresses up," she often refers to the Oscar Wilde aphorism that "beauty elevates the soul." But, the reasons behind the growing participation in period events and the anachronistic community in general are not quite that simplistic. "For a lot of people who come to my parties it's like a lifestyle," says Lee. "A lot of communities and friendships have been built through Dances of Vice. A lot of different groups and artists, a lot of friends... people who came to Dances of Vice as a guest at first have turned into artists and they've performed at my events. So I really love that this is a sort of a venue for creative growth." In that vein, the performers at Dances of Vice events do not attempt to be "faithful reproduction[s] of the past. It's something new and exciting. [It's] an homage to the past." ●

School of Life

settling into serenity

BY LIANA GERGELY
ILLUSTRATION BY STEPHANIE MANNHEIM

I was reading a book once and came across a line that said “find the life under your life situation.” Perplexed by the complete incoherence of the statement, I read it again. I stared at it. I thought about it. I analyzed it. I could not see a difference between my life and my life situation, other than, of course, four additional syllables. But I was unhappy and struggling with my crazy universe, and couldn’t quite figure out what was wrong.

A year later, I sit here and reflect on the moment when I realized that this statement was one of the most important things I’ve ever learned. I thought that my life was everything that happened to me, everything I did, every circumstance I encountered. My boyfriend, my grades, my family, my past, the pimple on my forehead, my weight gain, my weight loss, how many friends I had, the mistakes I had made, my Facebook profile picture, the internship I had, Mel’s turning away my fake ID, and what college I went to. When things went “well” in the realm of circumstance I was happy and felt worthy, and when things went “badly” I faced self-pity, low-self-esteem, and sadness. My happiness was just as ephemeral as my sadness, and my moods felt like the roller coaster at Six Flags—yes, nausea and embarrassing photos included.

Taking all these things to be my life, I found living extremely difficult. Basing my security on all these fluctuating externals made me feel like I was surviving from one moment to the next, waiting for things to go right. Waiting for that A. Waiting for that boy. Waiting for the compliment. Waiting for the job offer. And when I got the thing I thought I needed to be happy, to be okay, to feel secure, the joy came and left before I could even grasp it. I began to wonder: what kind of happiness actually sticks around? How could I find a way to let the discontent dissolve and to enjoy my life?

By realizing that all these things I thought were my life were actually my life situation, I began the unending adventure of discovering what is meant by the word “life” and how to extract it from the drain of the life situation.

My life consists of the things that really matter: my relationship with myself, my trust in the process, my ability to be grateful for the things that I have, my choice of what thoughts I put in my own head, what environment I create around myself, and the energy I bring out into the world. Although I may be powerless over the ebbs and flows of my life situation, I am not powerless over the quality of my life.

Feeling so uncomfortable with uncertainty and change, I was looking for one thing I could



count on and take for granted. None of the things “out there” could ever give me that sense of stability and true satisfaction. Believe me, I tried, but somehow I had this void that all the straight A’s, relationships, and achievement could not fill. What “happens” in your life situation is the most unstable place you can be.

This is what I learned: You are not your problems. You are not your social life. You are not your job. You are not your partner. You are not your successes. You are not your failures. Instead you are the complex being who gets to wake up every morning and decide how to respond to the things the world throws at you. Your life is the graceful and honest way you approach your life situation. Unhappiness is not what happens to you, but your opinions about what is happening to you. Through the lens of your life situation, things could appear to be going horribly wrong. Through the lens of your life, things could be going right for the first time. The perfection of life lies so beyond what is happening or not happening, who said what or did what, and even what you did or didn’t do. The perfection of life is in your ability to be present with whatever the situation may be and have the clarity to see “this is just a situation—this is not me.”

Watch your thoughts. What do you judge as good or bad? Necessary or unnecessary? Make a choice to act as if everything is happening for your highest good, because guess what, it is. You may not see the entire path, but that is no reason not to take the first step. Don’t fight your life situation—that won’t serve you. Accept what is,

and choose your perception. Choose to see endings as both inevitable and wonderful because they make room for new things to bloom. Choose to see heartbreak as a softening of your heart and a clearing out of old feelings that keep you from enjoying the wholeness of your life. Choose to see making a mistake as a great moment of humility—and a chance to see that you are imperfect, which, in the realm of life, is perfect.

**ALTHOUGH I MAY BE
POWERLESS OVER THE
EBBS AND FLOWS OF MY
LIFE SITUATION, I AM NOT
POWERLESS OVER THE
QUALITY OF MY LIFE.**

Fill yourself up with thoughts of self-love, thoughts of adequacy, thoughts that say “you know what ... this is exactly where you’re supposed to be. I’m so proud of you. Keep going.” Rise above the daily happenings of the external world, and sit in the space that lies beneath. It is sustaining, joyous, and calm. And most importantly, it doesn’t change. You can always find your life, whatever your life situation may be.

And I must admit: the view from here is better than anything I could have ever imagined. ●

