

Natural Selections

A NEWSLETTER OF THE ROCKEFELLER UNIVERSITY COMMUNITY

REFLECTIONS ON NORTH CAMPUS—PART I

JOSEPH LUNA

For the first time since its construction in 1916, the interior of Flexner Hall is being systematically demolished. This probably does not come as a shock to those who walk by the building every day. Over the past month, the quiet, tree-shaded driveway in front of Flexner has given way to large trash containers, blue barricades, and covered walkways. The new residents of Smith Hall have watched an exterior elevator shaft rise to aid the Flexner renovations. And each day, crews have been hard at work tearing out lab benches and cabinets from the aging building as part of its first-ever comprehensive renovation, now over two years in the making.

Most everyone at this institution, this author included, welcomes the university's commitment to invest in its laboratory space. Flexner, for all its historical charm, has over recent years garnered a reputation as at best a mild nuisance and at worst a crumbling laboratory workspace. The paint, for a time, literally peeled off the walls. Laboratory benches were old, stained, and apparently, asbestos-ridden. The building had so thoroughly aged that with renovations looming, a broken air conditioner in the third floor went unfixed for a year, much to the discomfort of the third

floor occupants.

Yet, there was more to Flexner Hall than dereliction as I discovered in late August, after the labs had moved out but before Turner construction took the place over, during which I had the opportunity to explore and photograph the spaces in Flexner¹. Many laboratories boasted handsome, and still fully functional, wooden cabinets and drying racks. Some chemical fume hoods were not clad in modern swaths of light and steel but were instead airy wooden frames with tall glass panels and porcelain air vents. One locker on the 2nd floor contained an old U.S. Navy uniform, perfectly pressed amidst the dusty lab coats. A particular lab bench on the 4th floor was notable for having been a target of some famous vandalism: Rockefeller chemist R. Bruce Merrifield carved his name inconspicuously on his bench in 1963, the year he published his paper on solid phase peptide synthesis which later garnered him the 1984 Nobel Prize in chemistry².

It's as easy (and tempting) to compare Merrifield's bench to a Jackson Pollock painting as it is to over-romanticize a Flexner Hall that no longer exists. But what is undeniable is the caliber of work that went on in Flexner Hall over the years and the inimitable sense upon walking into its ruin that important things happened here. That memory, the sort that only a building could tell, appears to be carted out each day by the truckload.

Smith Hall offers a good example of the lack of such memory. Built in the 1930s, Smith suffered a similar aging trajectory to Flexner; it was a difficult lab space to work in, haphazardly renovated over the years but generally run-down and not fully adaptable to modern lab-life. So in 2007 the labs moved out and Smith was closed for a three-year renovation. This past summer, Smith Hall reopened and many labs moved back in. And while it seems premature to declare Smith a complete success as a lab space, it is evident that every corner of the building has been re-engineered. The primary lab spaces are open and inviting, and the support systems thoroughly re-worked and upgraded. The CRC building, which bridges Flexner and Smith, adds to the contemporary feel, with its swirling glass façade, stunning conference rooms and plush modern furniture. By all measures, Smith Hall is a properly modern lab space in the shell of a building built nearly a century ago. Yet for all its modern pizzazz, it feels sterile when it shouldn't. Gone is any semblance of what occurred in Smith previously: the floor layouts have all changed (for the better admittedly), but any pre-renovation history has been completely whitewashed. Only the exterior shell remains constant. For those wishing to actively consider the staff and scientists who worked before in the space, this is disappointing. Yet as a graduate student, I cannot deny the excitement of being given a blank slate of building to spend my scientific youth in, free from any history or legacy.

So what is it that we lose by renovating Flexner? And what can we learn from Smith? We'll explore these questions in next month's installment by asking the people who've worked and discovered in Flexner over the years, as well as having former and current Smith residents weigh in on the building's transformation. I hope you'll stay tuned. ☉



Flexner 520, Kreek Lab. Photograph by Kristen D. Windmuller.



Flexner 122, Tomasz Lab. Photograph by the author.

References:

1. For more photos of Flexner, check out the Incubator blog.
2. See <http://incubator.rockefeller.edu/?p=167>—I have it on good word from the Vice President of Scientific and Facility Operations, Dr. John Tooze, that this piece of RU history will be preserved.

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Teenagers...Can't Live Without Them?

COLLENE LAWHORN

Many people have asked about my preschooler's new fascination with college. He introduces himself: "Hi, I'm not in college." He introduces his little brother: "He's one and he's not in college." And for the past few months he has been enamored with writing in notebooks: "I'm doing homework, but it's not for college." While we've reserved taking him on the college tour circuit until at least elementary school, it seems the culprit behind his newfound obsession is my sixteen-year-old niece, who spent the summer with us while participating in a pre-college science program at New York University.

Though she seemed to spend as much time answering a million questions from our four-year-old as she did completing her many daily assignments, I have to admit that he wasn't the only one enraptured with her. Every morning we were all amazed at her expert curling iron skills. In the afternoons we sat in awe, as she'd tell us the stories of her never-ending Facebook friends. Our evenings were spent dancing to her MTV favorites. It was a "coolly" refreshing few months in our otherwise child-centered existence. And though my years of enjoying teenage sons will be here soon enough, it made me stop to think about what it would mean to share my life with a teen for longer than one summer. Because of the critical need to help unfortunate children,

foster care and adoption are ongoing topics of discussion in our family. But I've always imagined that any new addition would be someone in the range of requiring a booster seat to get around. It didn't strike me until this summer that a MetroCard-carrying teenager might be the person to fill that void.

According to the Administration for Children's Services (ACS) there are 15,492 children in foster care in New York City. The modern foster care system was designed to improve the lives of young children in poor living circumstances who need temporary or permanent homes. Unfortunately, this system does not adequately address the special needs of the more than 30% of adolescents and teenagers that are in the system. As a result, adolescents and teenagers have largely ended up in group homes or institutional settings with fewer opportunities to receive individualized attention, build trusting relationships with caregivers, and develop lasting friendships.

While few will argue against the idea that a stable home environment is optimal for most children, the bureaucratic and emotional challenges facing families raising teenagers in foster care can be daunting. According to a 2002 report, "Child Welfare Watch," from the Center for New York City Affairs, families that fostered teens had a lack of adequate support from agencies regarding age-appropriate training

that addresses the developmental needs of teenagers, the desire for more flexible spending budgets to support teens' extracurricular interests, and the need for a system that would allow teens more opportunities to participate in the decisions involving their future. In addition, many of the teens in foster care will go through the "tumultuous stage" experienced by most adolescents. However, they may also present with additional emotional difficulties from a history of neglect, abuse, or trauma—creating special challenges to family caregivers.

According to the New York State Office of Child and Family Services, the goal for most children in foster care is to return to their homes or to a family member once the issues that initially brought them to foster care have been resolved. Foster parents are supposed to work with birth parents to assist in that process. For many other children, the goal is to be adopted into a new family. However, a significant portion of children who enter foster care at a young age remain there as teens because neither of those goals are met. Recently, several states have faced scrutiny for their "aging-out" policy—where teens are released from the foster care system at the age of 18 to deal with life on their own. There is some debate over whether 18 is too young for this transition, and whether or not teens are given adequate

resources to cope—including finding affordable housing, learning how to shop and cook independently and deciding whether to enter college or seek employment.

In New York City, teens are allowed to remain in the system until the age of 21. New York City Public Advocate Bill de Blasio and many others have recently argued that even after 21 years old, young adults should be tracked by the government to determine if they are using services that will help them thrive as adults (obtain a driver's license, have health care, obtain housing, identify adult resources, etc.).¹

Stories of the inadequacies of the foster care system in NYC and across the United States are abundant. Dealing with the underlying issues of poverty, mental health, and ethnic disparities that create the need for the foster care system will not easily be resolved. Widespread budget cuts to social service agencies don't leave much room for vast improvements in the near future. However, the potential to change a few lives for the better has made the challenge of taking in teens worthwhile for some foster families. The many ACS success stories of teens and adolescents who were initially judged to be

too old to assimilate, but were given a chance to demonstrate otherwise, have begun to reshape the mindset of foster care placement agencies and interested families. Success stories have included improvements in grades, increased civic awareness, and greater self-esteem. Most importantly, they have included the development of lifelong nurturing relationships that not only enrich the lives of teens but the lives of foster families as well. ☉

Reference:

1. <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/04/15/nyregion/15foster>

Book Reviews: *Resistance, Rebellion, and Death* (essays) by Albert Camus; *Aesthetic Theory* by Theodor W. Adorno

BERNIE LANGS

There are two genres of philosophical writings, in my opinion: the approachable and the near-impossible. That said, I am at a stage of my reading where I only read non-fiction, focusing on art, history, and philosophy. It is a complete intellectual joy when these three themes are combined in a single book, and that is the case with two books I've just completed, Albert Camus' *Resistance, Rebellion, and Death*, and Theodor Adorno's *Aesthetic Theory*. In the hierarchy of the approachable, reading this book by Camus is like listening to a brilliant friend who is speaking with animated passion late at night over several glasses of wine. On the other hand, last year *The Wall Street Journal* described Adorno as a "Marxist provocateur" with a writing style in German that "almost resists comprehension, let alone translation." I spent just a few weeks reading the Camus and over half a year with the Adorno. At first, I didn't know why I continued to read *Aesthetic Theory* because it was so difficult—near impossible—and then, slowly, but surely, the main ideas began to settle into my own dense mind, and the book became a source of incredible excitement, exposing limitless possibilities for how I will view art and history in the future.

The title of the Camus, *Resistance, Rebellion, and Death* sounds dark and depressing, but this is not the case. Camus was lumped in with the Existentialist school of philosophy, a categorical description which he denied and was at odds with. These essays do expose an idea of a Godless world with no meaning, and then uplift the reader with the animated charge and mission of filling the world with purpose, freedom, and liberty to defeat nihilism, fascism, totalitarianism, and other forms of repressive society. Camus, a Nobel Prize winner in literature, died in a tragic auto accident in 1960 and I found myself wondering what he would have made of the societal changes that occurred in the sixties.

Among the finest of the essays by Camus in this collection were his descriptions of his colleagues and their work in the French Resistance during World War II, and I especially enjoyed the section called "The Artist and His Time," a collection of his thoughts on the place of the artist in society and the responsibilities facing those that create. These essays are enshrined with numerous inspirational quotes, such as "...there is not a single true work of art that has not in the end added to the inner freedom of each person who has known and loved it" and "To create today is to create dangerously. Any publication is an act, and that act exposes one to the passions of an age that forgives nothing." I was less interested in his ideas on the controversies surrounding French Algeria (where he was born) and also found that the essay against the death penalty bordered on—excuse the pun—overkill. But, on the whole, the book is inspiring and always fascinating. It gives one great lessons on why we keep going in the face of the

difficulties and cruelties of the world.

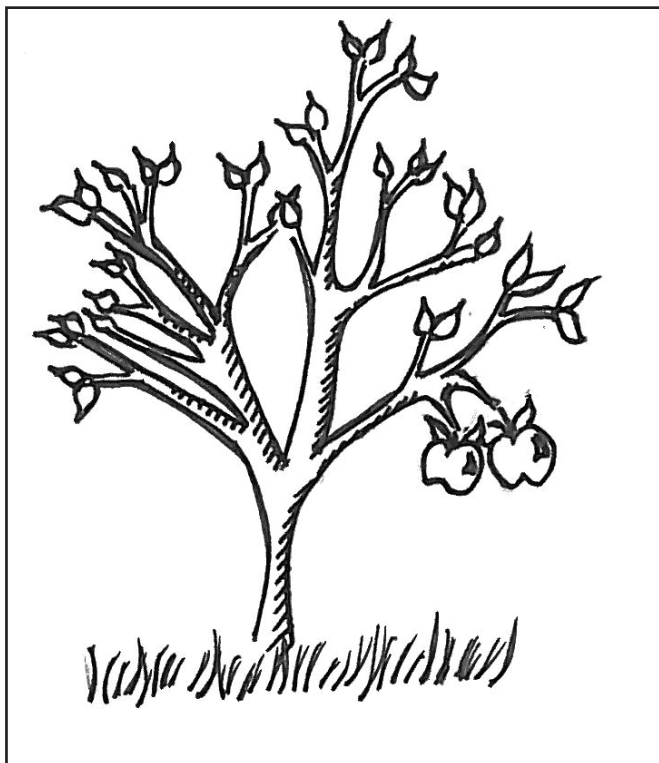
It was a great coincidence that in the week I read Camus' attack on the idea of "art for art's sake," Adorno was railing against the same concept in *Aesthetic Theory*. Camus also discusses the notion that "every artist today is embarked on the contemporary galley slave," which seemed to support the leftist leanings of Adorno, who decries the menace of "the culture machine" and what it does to the psyche of an individual in our society, leaving one blind and unable to appreciate the difficulties of true art (my interpretation and embellishment of his words). Adorno passed away in 1969 before finishing the editing of *Aesthetic Theory* and as much as I wondered how Camus would have reacted in 1968 to the Parisian upheavals, I am sure that Adorno would have simply died (again) if he witnessed the state of art today and took in the crushing and numbing power that the culture industry now wields.

It is nearly impossible to describe in a nutshell the nearly impossible *Aesthetic Theory*. The meaning slowly seeped into me over the months. It was interesting that as Adorno described the experience of interacting with a work of art, my imagination would mostly flow towards Renaissance paintings in thinking of his theories, but it soon became obvious to me that he himself was thinking mostly in terms of classical music. But that's neither here nor there, since his theories are applicable to any art form. What I've taken away from Adorno's book was the sense that aesthetic experience is beyond description. But, he gives clues to what leads to an endpoint where a "constellation" of the work of art itself—its historical place in time and society, the artist's intention and the intention the work of art itself frees itself to express—mixes with the viewer's own set of parameters that include personal experience and the viewer's own moment in history. The number of layers, categories, universalisms, particularisms, and so on, that is unleashed often left my head literally spinning. But when I got it, when I truly saw what he was saying, it was completely and utterly exhilarating. A lot of what Adorno was writing of I'd been doing all along in museums, at classical concerts, and also when listening intently to the echoing guitars of The Rolling Stones and the exacting harmonies of The Beatles. The book crystallized this and gave me more to work with.

As hard as it was to read Adorno's masterwork, a last bit of praise must be given to the translator of *Aesthetic Theory*. How Robert Hullot-Kentor took the notes and pieces left behind by Adorno at his death and then made it in any way accessible to the reader in English is a feat of Herculean stature. ☉

A Dowdy Tree Has Its Day

CARLY GELFOND



Cartoon by Carly Gelfond

I couldn't believe it had finally happened, but there they were: two tiny green Granny Smith apples, clinging to one another on the tip of a branch, like infant twins alarmed to find themselves blinking in the daylight. The little tree had been the wimpy newcomer to the backyard for years—a skinny little shrimp of a tree surrounded on all sides by its taller, thicker, fruit-bearing elders, all planted a generation earlier by the house's previous owners.

The story of the tree's origins was fairly unexciting. Its planting had not been part of a coherent plan to revive the aging orchard we'd inherited when my parents bought the old farmhouse in New Jersey years prior. No, the little sapling had been a solitary purchase, an only child—like me—a Father's Day present I'd hastily thought up after the sweaters and mugs and button-downs had all been done and done and done. We had planted it and given it a little mesh fence to keep the animals out. Then we let it alone, figuring it would need a few years to mature.

Each fall, my dad and I would haul out duct tape, rakes and buckets, and construct what could reasonably pass for a decent—if somewhat lethal—homemade apple-picker. The produce from the large dark-leaved Red- and Golden-Delicious trees (never sprayed with pesticides, one of those rare happy instances where frugality and environmentalism coincide) was always bug-eaten and scarred, but the flavor was strong and tart. And yet one stubborn little tree seemed unable to bear fruit. Year after year, it remained small and fragile, its leaves nibbled by deer. I could fit my hand around the circumference of its trunk. No apples appeared.

Until now. Who knows what slight change in temperature, what tick up or down in the acidity of the soil or what absence or presence floating in the air had jumpstarted the tree's inner system? Whatever the reason, I now found myself staring out the window at two tiny green Granny Smith apples, nearly ripe for picking. The little sapling, scrawny, inelegant, leaf-eaten, and homely, had finally taken root.

I knew exactly what I would do with them.

APPLE PANDOWDY

Adapted from *The New Best Recipe*, from the Editors of Cook's Illustrated

Pandowdy is true fall comfort food, a sort of deep-dish pie made with sweetened apples and covered with a thick piece of pastry, then baked. Before being served, the pastry is scored into little squares and then squashed—there is really no other word for it—down into the fruit so that it absorbs the fruit juices beneath. There is an art to squashing: you don't want to completely submerge the crust in the fruit, or it will become soggy. And even I—the kid who would walk away from a bowl of Cheerios for fifteen minutes to let them soak into pale milklogged versions of their former selves—know that there is a time and place for sogginess.

I'll admit it—it was the name of this pie that initially drew me in, but it was the crisp, flaky, sweet-tart dish that emerged fragrantly bubbling from my oven that sold me in the end. Culinarily speaking, I've come a long way since my Cheerio days.

Ingredients—Crust:

1 cup (5 ounces) unbleached all-purpose flour, plus more for dusting the work surface

½ teaspoon salt

2 tablespoons granulated sugar

2 tablespoons vegetable shortening, chilled

6 tablespoons (¾ stick) cold unsalted butter, cut into ¼ inch pieces

3 to 4 tablespoons ice water

½ teaspoon ground cinnamon

1 tablespoon milk

Ingredients—Filling:

2 large Granny Smith apples (about 1 pound), peeled, cored, and cut into ¼ inch slices

2 large McIntosh apples (about 1 pound), peeled, cored, and cut into ¼ inch slices

½ cup (2 ½ ounces) packed light brown sugar

1 teaspoon grated zest from 1 lemon

½ teaspoon vanilla extract

1. For the crust: Place the flour, salt, and 1 tablespoon of the granulated sugar in a food processor and pulse until combined. Add the shortening and process about ten seconds, or until the mixture has the texture of coarse sand. (It's fall! A wonderful season in its own right, but it's a little sad that this may be the closest to the beach you'll get for the next several months.) Scatter the butter pieces over the flour mixture. Cut the butter into the flour until the mixture is pale yellow and resembles coarse crumbs, with butter bits no larger than small peas, about ten 1-second pulses. Turn the mixture into a medium bowl.

2. Sprinkle 3 tablespoons of the ice water over the mixture. With the blade of a rubber spatula, use a folding motion to mix. Press down on the dough with the broad side of the spatula until the dough sticks together, adding up to 1 tablespoon more ice water if the dough will not come together. (Don't worry if there are still a few unblended pieces of butter at this point. Like most things in life, it will all come together in the end.) Place the dough on a sheet of plastic wrap and press into either a square or a circle, depending on whether you are using a square or a



*This Month Natural Selections interviews Mayra Murphy, cashier.
Country of origin: Dominican Republic.*

New York State of Mind

1. How long have you been living in New York? Since 1993—about 17 years.

2. Where do you live? I live in Westchester County.

3. Which is your favorite neighborhood? Cross County Mall. And McClean Avenue in Westchester, where they have a nice pizza place.

4. What do you think is the most overrated thing in the city? And underrated?

Overrated: For me it is the subways. Customers spend hours waiting for a train. And Central Park—it's dirty and there are rats everywhere.

Underrated: La Cabaña in Queens. There you have green fried plain-tains and fried beef or pork, only for about 7 bucks.

5. What do you miss most when you are out of town? My pets. I have 2 cats, 1 Yorkie. I also miss my family.

6. If you could change one thing about NYC, what would that be?

The housing, because the landlords, they don't want to spend money in those apartments where people live, while the people pay to be living there. (And I would try to educate people to be cleaner everywhere in the city. Subway people leave garbage everywhere.)

7. Describe a perfect weekend in NYC. Saturday morning: going out to do my groceries with my husband. Later: stop in some restaurant, eat, see a good movie together, or take a trip to Atlantic City.

8. What is the most memorable experience you have had in NYC? It was when I met my husband in the 7th Ave subway. We were in the same train together for a long time. I was young. I was wearing a short skirt. He would always look at me, I would ignore him. One day, he walked

up and said, "Hello. How are you?" My English was bad but we started talking. We've been talking ever since. Also, my first Christmas in New York. And 9/11. I was at the time working in Sony Music when that happened. I saw on the television when it was happening.

9. If you could live anywhere else, where would that be? I wish I lived in Hawaii. I love tropical places. Plus I was there for two weeks on my honeymoon and loved it.

10. Do you think of yourself as a New Yorker? Why? Yes, because you have to get the city and entrench yourself. I love New York. Everybody loves New York and if they say no, they lie. ☺

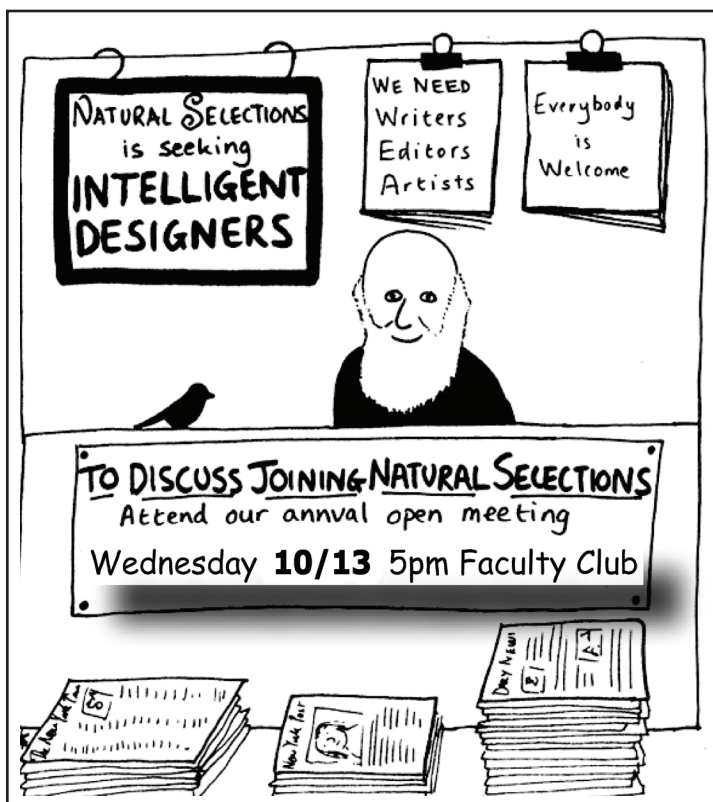


round pan. Wrap the dough in the plastic and refrigerate at least 1 hour or up to 2 days before rolling out.

3. For the filling: Adjust an oven rack to the middle position and heat the oven to 425 degrees. Toss the apple slices, brown sugar, lemon zest and vanilla together in a large bowl until the apples are evenly coated with the sugar. (Eat a couple. Baking is half about tasting the filling, licking the spoon...) Place the apples in an 8-inch square or 9-inch round glass baking pan.

4. To assemble and bake the Pandowdy: You're almost there! Mix together the remaining 1 tablespoon granulated sugar and the cinnamon in a small bowl and set aside. If the dough has been refrigerated longer than one hour, let it stand at room temperature until malleable. (Probably not enough time to put away the laundry, but the perfect amount of time to watch *Mad Men*.) Roll the dough on a lightly floured work surface to a 10-inch square or circle. Trim the dough to the exact size of the baking dish (or if you're like me and have nibbled on a good portion of the dough throughout, try to stretch the dough so that you have enough to cover the entire dish). Place the dough on top of the apples. Brush the dough with the milk and sprinkle with the cinnamon-sugar mixture. Cut four 1-inch vents in the dough. Bake until golden brown, 35 to 40 minutes.

5. Score the pastry with a knife into little squares as soon as it emerges from the oven. Use the edge of a spatula to squash the edges of the crust squares down into the fruit without completely submerging them. Because the crust will soften quickly, serve the pandowdy warm. Serves 4 to 6. ☺



Metropolis

ADRIA LE BOEUF

Imagine a desert valley. Flat everywhere you look, and far into the distance, violet mountains encircle you. At your feet, the earth is cracked and dry, covered with soft white dust, fine as talcum powder. It's hot and you are sweating.

Now superimpose a city of 50,000 people onto that vision with little to no infrastructure, which pops up once a year for 1 week. With no incoming water or power, the city is made up mostly of immobile cars, RVs, bikes, and tents. Yet these boring objects are overshadowed by their more extravagant cousins. Grandiose art cars, otherwise known as mutant vehicles, prowl the streets. Strange, flamboyant and billowy housing/hanging out structures line the

dusty roadways. Art cars drive about the city, putting their quirks on display while providing public transportation for those without bicycles. It's a lot of fun to hitch a ride on a giant elephant-shaped vehicle. In addition to all of this, sprinkle some art installations throughout this vision, some in the city itself, then many more out in the surrounding desert. Some of these installations are enormous and can be seen from great distances, enticing you from afar with their mysterious shapes and colors. Imagine a 40-foot tall metallic sculpture of a woman dancing, delicately balanced on one foot. A sphere of air and metal which periodically puffs fire. A chain of

hundreds of interconnected balloons drifting through the sky, each lit by its own LED. Other installations you may not notice until you are quite close, where they surprise you with their unexpected creativity. Imagine a collection of 3-foot-long metallic cockroaches hanging out on the desert floor. Now take all these visions, and throw in about 10,000 more bikes than you'd had in there before, and make sure to decorate them. If you shift this vision from day to night, imagine the whole city glowing, lit up like Las Vegas.

Now finally we can add the people, the residents of this city. Attire, when worn at all, is something akin to a cross between Halloween, a rave, and a bunch of hippies going camping. When you go and interact with these people, they are warm, friendly, and generous, happy to share what they have and inflict smiles everywhere they go.

When one typically thinks of cities, one thinks of economy and of money underlying that economy. Here, surprisingly, there is no money exchanged. In fact, rarely are things exchanged at all. Rather, things are freely given: food, booze, cozy spaces, and the products of people's plentiful creativity. You might play a concert for people on one side of the city, then, while biking through the dry heat, you might be treated to a shower of mist. Further along your path, you might be offered cool ice cream. Around the corner you may see a tent of people offering massages, or Bloody Marys, or lessons in sustainable farming practices, or who knows what else...

At the end of the week, this bountiful creation shifts toward destruction. Many of the installations are burnt to the ground, surrounded either by music, dancing and revelry, or by solemn reverential silence. The residents of the city disperse as quickly as they came, leaving the desert as barren as it started, leaving no trace.

It sounds like a magical place, no? Try visiting Black Rock City next summer, when it comes into its temporary existence, August 29 to September 5, 2011. ©



Photographs provided by the author.

Voluntary Strangers

ENGİN ÖZERTUGRUL

It is 6:00 a.m. on a Monday. As I look for a spot to park my car, faceless people in line for the bus glide past me like mannequins on a conveyor belt.

Even as I am surrounded by more people than I could possibly get to know in a lifetime, silence is real and unnerving. It is in many ways a boring fifteen minutes standing, waiting for the bus to stop and take us to New York. I can almost always feel the rising tension among my fellow riders if the waiting extends beyond the scheduled time. And it almost always does.

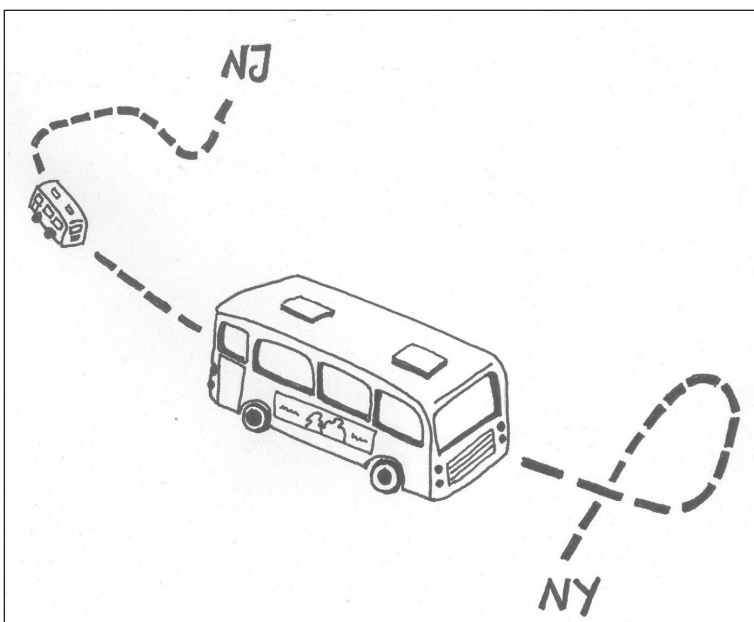
I do not know these people. Not personally. But they are not altogether strangers to me. And some are not here at all. They wait in their cars while their personal items stand on line for them. These can be anything, including umbrellas, plastic bags, backpacks, suitcases pencils, key chains, and even a golf ball. These are not just lifeless things; they are important parts of their owners, and because of these objects, I have a pretty good idea of who they belong to, what their owners do, how they dress, and even what their hobbies are.

The third item in front of me is a leather bag with big red “Colgate” letters on a white background. This is my “Colgate Man,” a nickname I came up with about a year ago. If you were a Martian with no concept of human clothing, his dark suit and white long-sleeved shirt would appear to be his skin, as I have never seen him without them. His extremely unwrinkled and tidy slacks and shirt always puzzle me. I see no point in it, as after an hour and a half of sitting, they always look like he slept on them. I used to see the Colgate bag behind me. Today must be an unusual day for him; he is not an early riser.

The big plastic red heart key chain, which holds the second place in line, belongs to a woman who, well, at least does not hold very fond memories of me. It was about nine months ago when she approached me with noticeable irritation in her voice, claiming “You know, you cut in front of me!” I couldn’t hide my embarrassment and hastily mumbled back something apologetic while I repositioned

myself behind her. I remember that in this particular instance I was preoccupied with work and, with no success, was telling myself not to think about the backlog of emails waiting for me at my desk after two weeks’ vacation. Deep within these thoughts, I did not remember cutting her off.

The big light blue bag with a dark tropical tree silhouette that is sitting at the end of the line belongs to our late riser. It is rare that she can make the 6:25 a.m. bus. I see her in NY at Port Authority, and on the return bus to NJ more often than here. Once, during one of those high-level terrorist alerts, after a frustrating 40 minutes of



Cartoon by Rossana Henriques

standing in the bus line, she unexpectedly turned to me and said, “Maybe I should go back to Croatia—I was a teacher you know.” I awkwardly smiled back and purposefully glanced at my watch a couple of times. I was just too stressed to start a conversation. Thankfully, she stopped talking. Months later, I saw her waiting next to her car with the hood open in the parking lot. Her car was next to mine and there was nobody around, so I felt obligated to speak with her and offered her a jump start. I remember that we exchanged names at the time but we never had a chance to use them. We see each other now and then but we pretend not to.

We are the commuters constantly in motion between NJ and NYC, hopping up and down on buses, dashing back and forth in the streets of Manhattan before reaching our determined destinations,

then returning back where we started, all before dark. Except for the times of arrival or departure of buses and trains, we do not discover much about the city. Formal suits, dresses, and PCs reveal a certain truth about us: we are deskbound. Some of us may work in the Financial District downtown or some may work in a Midtown office. Except in rare cases, we do not spend a drowsy afternoon in Central Park or watch the ships go by on the Hudson River. Not many among us ever awakened to Manhattan’s morning or spent silent moments in the reading room of the Public Library. We pour rolling down the city from the mountain valleys like ants with the rising sun and we retreat when the sun burns like glowing coals on the wide windows of tall buildings. We are no vacationers; we pay attention to the filthy streets of the city and they sicken us as we fly through them. By the time we arrive at our destinations, we’re already thinking about returning.

And we return. The bus can almost be as quiet as in the morning. Part of the reason for this, no doubt, is circumstances. For one thing, unlike my countrymen and women (from Turkey) who can comfortably display even their deepest passions on a bumper sticker, New Jersey residents do not wear their frustrations and their clashing hearts on their sleeves. They do not bleed their everyday down-to-earth problems such as their bank credit cards, 30-year mortgages, and car loans as comfortably with each other as natives of Turkey. There may be other cultural factors that account for the differences among international commuters. I remember once, during my junior year as a commuter, I attempted to give my seat to an elderly woman (an expected practice in Turkey) who had been standing next to me for more than an hour. I was politely rejected and even received a dirty look.

Yet beneath the surface, there is a kind of commonness, a shared belief among all commuters regardless of where we are, who we are. That is, we seem to know why we commute and what it is all worth. ☉

The US Open and the Tennis Mystery: an Opinion Piece

ALEXANDRE BOLZE

New York City is home to the US Open, and to the arena of last month's historic victory of Rafael Nadal. It is the biggest tennis tournament of the year, and if you have a chance to go to Flushing next year, go!

As much as I had a great time watching Youzhny and Wawrinka fight in a dramatic five-setter for a spot in the men's semifinals, I also wondered how it is possible that men and women share the same prize money for this tournament and all tennis grand slams in general. It is nonsense!

I don't understand how Kim Clijsters, the winner of this year's women's title, won as much as Nadal. If any economic logic was followed then women would win less. The women's tournament is not as attractive to sponsors and to the public. Following an RU Classifieds email, it took ten minutes for a postdoc to sell her tickets to the men's quarter finals, and she then had to send another email to stop all the requests. On the other hand, another RU member had to offer a \$40 discount to sell two tickets to the women's semifinals. For the

same reason, the men's final is on a Sunday, as opposed to a Saturday night, and the tickets for each final are not at the same price. At the time of this article's publication, the US Open ticketing website was not accessible anymore, but tickets for the women's final of the Australian Open, which is the next tennis grand slam, are \$50 cheaper than for the men's final for an adult seat (\$289.90 versus \$339.90).

The main reason for this economic difference is that women's tennis is just not as good of a show. First, it is shorter. If you paid to see Clijsters win, you saw a 6/2, 6/1 victory in exactly one hour. The lucky few who had tickets for the last day saw Nadal beat Djokovic in a thrilling three-hour and 45-minute battle (6/4, 5/7, 6/4, 6/2). And this is not a rare phenomenon. If we take the last ten grand slam finals, the women's final went only once to three sets (2010 Australian Open), whereas there have been four five-set and one four-set finals on the men's side. I prefer not to give too many details on the actual rallies and the number of unforced errors or double faults.

If the media and the public recognize a difference in the quality of the show, then why should the prize money be the same? We can't even say that men and women have the same merit to win their respective tournaments. It is less competitive for a woman to enter and win the US Open, as more men play tennis around the world. It is difficult to obtain data from the USTA (US Tennis Association), but to give an example, in France, 76.8% of the tennis players with a club membership are men. And Kim Clijsters illustrates this difference of overall level: she won the 2009 tournament just two months after coming back from a two-year retirement! Such a dream-story is not realistic on the men's side. For example, Juan Martin del Potro (2009 winner) had to forfeit before the tournament because he only had two months of training after recovering from a wrist injury.

So why is tennis different than other sports such as soccer, basketball, or hockey, in the sense that men and women win the same prize money? ☹

Life on a Roll



Untitled by Carly Gelfond

