

Mike Sacks: The quality of the humor and comedy is incredibly consistent, and the amount (these panelists) put out is incredibly impressive. So for me to find out behind the scenes how it happens, it doesn't happen by magic, it happens by hard work, is interesting to me, and hopefully it'll be interesting to you. So let me introduce: to my left, Chris Monks. He runs *McSweeneys.net*, and has run it since, he said, 2007. That's a long time. Chris Monks, all the way from Boston. *(applause)* To my right, Susanna Wolff, Editor-in-Chief of *Collegehumor.com*, a great site, all the way from Prospect Heights, Brooklyn. Thank you for coming. *(applause)* Dan O'Brien, Senior Writer at *Cracked*. He actually flew in from California for this, so I appreciate it. *(applause)* And his parents are in the audience, so applaud and laugh at whatever he says. I don't know where they are, but thanks for coming. So we were talking about print humor, mostly, for this weekend. This is digital humor. Let me just ask you, how many submissions do you receive on average in a typical day?

Chris Monks: A typical day, I guess around forty, between forty and fifty.

MS: And how many of those do you read?

CM: All of them.

MS: How does one submit? What's the address for *McSweeney's*?

CM: Websubmissions@mcsweeneys.net. There are different columns. For main features, that's the address, and then for lists, it's lists@mcsweeneys.net. "Open Letters" has its own address.

MS: So what are some common mistakes you see across the board from those who are submitting to *McSweeney's* who aren't getting published on *McSweeney's*?

CM: People don't read the guidelines. It's my pet peeve. It seems like the simplest, most common sense approach before submitting to a place. We get 200-250 submissions a week, and I'm the only person reading them. And it's a little annoying when someone formats something in the wrong way, or writes a 500-word cover letter when there's no cover letter needed, as it says in our submission guidelines. Or they'll send something as an attachment when we don't accept attachments. It's just annoying after a while, it builds up. It creates a lot of angst on my end. *(laughs)*

MS: We were talking about the difference between pitching fiction and pitching non-fiction. A non-fiction pitch is often is just a summary, a synopsis of what you want to do. So when you pitch to *McSweeney's*, how should they pitch it? An entire piece, or just a part of a piece?

CM: Don't pitch. Just send the whole piece.

MS: Submit the whole piece?

CM: Yeah. I think a lot of times, writers, I did this when I was submitting a lot, they get tripped up on the pitch, and you oversell the pitch, so that by the time you read the actual piece, there's a letdown, or it doesn't match what the pitch was, and so the expectation that the editor had for the piece, it doesn't match. So we say, strictly, no cover letter, no pitch. I read it, and I promise I read it and get back to everyone in a

week. Just make it as simple as possible, follow the guidelines, and boom. *(laughs)*
Maybe you'll get through.

MS: Maybe you'll get through. So Susanna, how many readers are there for *College Humor*?

Susanna Wolff: There's one person who's specifically in charge of vetting everything that first comes in, and then once stuff is deemed kind of good, like it has potential, he'll open it up to probably three or four other editors. And then we'll all kind of jump in with notes, and then the original editor will go back and e-mail the person to say, "Here are a few things you can do," or it'll just be a totally perfect piece and we'll put it up and send the person money.

MS: How often does that happen?

SW: Not super often. I wish it happened more, because it's amazing when it does, but generally I've found that when there are people who initially submit and have a couple of ideas, and then actually take edits and improve the original piece, they'll pick it up after and then those people will be able to start submitting stuff that's just fully-formed articles.

MS: Do you find that there's sometimes resistance from young writers to make editing changes to a piece?

SW: Yeah, and it's really infuriating. It's kind of an instant thing that, even if the idea was good enough to begin with, if the writer is really super-resistant to any changes or notes, it kind of sours the entire process. You just don't want to work with that

person anymore. Obviously, if they make a valid point about something they were going for in an idea, that's fine, but sometimes people can get very, very precious with their ideas, and you want to be like, "You're writing a thing for the internet. Just make it funny. That's all you need to do. This is not going to be your one masterpiece."

MS: Well, we were talking about that yesterday. If you want to succeed and write consistently, just be easy to deal with, because nothing you write is so precious that you have to fight to the death for it. And if you're a professional comedy writer, you should be able to come up with joke after joke anyway.

SW: Yeah, definitely. And at *College Humor*, the staff isn't made up of people who just edit, we all have to write stuff as well, so if there's a moment where the amount of work going into editing a piece is more than if the writer just wrote something by themselves, it's just like, "Well, this isn't helping the overall product. We could just coast by ourselves without that."

MS: So would that name become associated with someone being difficult, and you would then avoid working with that person?

SW: Yeah.

MS: OK. And on the other hand, there are people who are, I'd imagine, easy to deal with who you seek out, who will take changes...

SW: Absolutely. Those people, we'll go to them with extra ideas, and they just automatically start getting preferential treatment, where their pitches can be looser

and we'll understand what they're doing and work with them. And then, honestly, those are the people, when we have staff jobs open up, that we hire.

MS: How many submissions do you receive a day on average?

SW: Probably about sixty or seventy.

MS: And all of those are read?

SW: Yeah. A bunch of those will be instant, obvious nonsense garbage. You can just see it and say, "This is nothing in the whole world that could be comedy."

MS: Do you remember any in particular where you just thought, "Instant garbage"?

SW: Yes. Sometimes people will just send in what feels like selfies, with just words.

(laughter) You look at it and you just go...

Dan O'Brien: You still haven't gotten back to me on that, by the way. *(laughter)*

SW: And then sometimes you get, I don't know how up to date you guys are on your Gamer Gate knowledge, but we get some people who will send in this vicious anti-woman stuff. And it's just like, one, this is not comedy at all, and two, no, you're a terrible person. *(laughter)*

MS: We were talking before about pitching with visual ideas to *MAD*, to the last page of *GQ*. Being visual, should a submitter include attachments, examples of what they want to have, how the final piece should look?

SW: I think it depends. Sometimes it works, sometimes people can get a little over-excited and suddenly it's like a small idea and they've got this idea that they're going to get frigging oil pastel art to go with all of it, and it's like, "OK, this is going to be an issue to work back from." I think the best thing people can do is, I mean, across the board, really look at the type of content that we have on the website, and then kind of use some of the existing articles as reference points, like "I have this idea that I'm kind of picturing looking like this article," or something like that. So we can understand the level that you're looking at, but it's not like, "Oh God, this person is expecting to have a 25-image beautiful thing, but they wrote four sentences."

MS: What's the submission e-mail? Is it easily found on the site?

SW: Yes, it's submissions@collegehumor.com, but we've always had, from the very beginning, a process where you can just make an account on the site, and submit through a little button in the top right-hand corner. That's for if you have just a truly, fully-formed article that you think, "This is it, it's done." But you should e-mail the submissions e-mail if you've got part of an idea, and you're not sure about it, and you want some more notes before you fully submit, or if you have a bunch of pitches and you want to be told, "Work on this one, scrap this one, and we'll coach you through it."

MS: So *McSweeney's* publishes one piece a day, and often smaller pieces like lists.

CM: Yeah, a main feature and then two sub-features.

MS: OK, so as far as your site is concerned, how many do you purchase on average for a typical day?

SW: Oh God, we purchase as much as we can. Whatever is coming in and is good. Probably the goal is like five things a day to be purchased, and then the staff has to write the rest. So if there's more stuff coming in, we'll buy that too, and everyone who works there can just chill a bit. *(laughs)*

MS: So it's advantageous to you to get great stuff every day.

SW: It is incredibly advantageous to get really good freelance stuff coming in. And we'll build up relationships with these people too, and we pay as well. We pay money for ideas.

MS: How much do you pay for these?

SW: It's a flat rate of fifty dollars, and then you get bonuses based on the page views. So all the way up to a thousand dollars for a piece, because if you're helping us with our traffic, we want to give you some money back.

MS: Dan, we talked about this a while ago. *Cracked* has a very interesting submission process. Can you talk about that?

DO: Yep. We have a writer's workshop on our forums, so everything is as transparent as we can possibly make it. Literally anyone in the world can sign up, we don't care if you're an eighty-year-old antique dealer or a fourteen-year-old antique dealer. *(laughter)* There's a button that says, "Write For Us." You click it and you get access to our workshop, where we give you all the guidelines for how to

pitch, and then you'll pitch an idea that'll be seen by readers, casual fans of the site, but also people who have been writing there for a number of years, and also the entire editorial staff. We go in, and we've got veterans giving advice, and we've got the editorial staff going in and saying, "Yes" or "Not yet." It's very rare that we say "No" unless something is, again, very obviously horrible. But most of the time, nine times out of ten, we're saying, "Here's what's good about your premise, here's what it needs before we can whip this into shape so that it'll run in *Cracked*." Sometimes a piece will come in, and we'll give notes, and they turn it back a few days later, and we say, "Great," we do an editing pass, and it goes up on the site. Sometimes it takes months of someone working on the same piece, just because we work with justified observation, or non-fiction list-based comedy. So we're always looking for more examples, and more sources on things. Someone will pitch an article with six entries, and a few of them don't work, so we just keep coming back, we'll bring it to another meeting, (maybe say) "Now I like these three but I don't like these two," kick it back to the writer, back to another meeting.

MS: That's incredible, and really very rare. You don't see that often, where editors will spend that much time on a piece that's not a hundred percent.

DO: Well, we like to think of ourselves as a teaching website, which is a thing that I made up just now. *(laughter)* It's very tempting to see someone who responds negatively to feedback right off the back, and you want to say, "All right, kid, you're banned, get out of here, we don't have to deal with you anymore." It's much better for us in the long run if we shape them and sort of beat that negativity out of them,

which is easy to do with as a community as robust and supportive as the one at *Cracked*. There are people who started out being very petulant. They would pitch their genius article, we'd say, "Hey, I'm not really sure about that, here's some feedback," and they'd be like, "Well, I'll just take it somewhere else then!" And now they're some of our editors. There are people who lost that petulant side. We didn't say, "Hey, man, we like your attitude, you seem like a rad dude, you're hired!" We just worked with them, and we'd say, "That's not going to get you far here. Please listen to us and trust us. You can have your ideas, and you think this piece is better as one angry person ranting, that's fine, that's a style of comedy that exists, and people have used it to great success. It's not going to work on our site, so if you'd like to get paid for something and let it be shown to our audience, here's what you need to do." And the petulance gets beaten out of them, and they turn into the veterans that give other people advice.

MS: That's incredible. That just didn't exist pre-internet. You would just get a form rejection letter. The fact that you do this is very smart, and for the brand itself too, because then you have loyalty and you have those who have come up in the system like you did.

DO: Yeah. It's worked out so far. We've never gone outside to hire anyone for the site. It's always someone who started out in our workshop, writing articles like anybody else, and good writers turned into great freelance editors, who turned into full-time employees.

MS: How many readers do you have on average in a month? Online readers for the site?

DO: I'd say sixty-four million. I'm not sure about that.

MS: That's incredible.

DO: If it's true, it's very incredible. I have no idea. *(laughter)* I think it's about that.

MS: Doesn't matter either way, it's just incredible. *(To Chris)* Let's talk about your experience. One of your teachers at school, this is at Wisconsin, was Lorrie Moore.

CM: Yep.

MS: So you were a creative writing student?

CM: No, but I took creative writing classes. I was a Communication Arts student, but I'd been writing since high school, and so I did a lot of writing in Wisconsin, and she was my instructor at one point.

MS: What was she like as a teacher?

CM: She was really good. She wasn't particularly warm, but she also was able to cut through the BS in your writing, and she was very matter-of-fact, and was instructive, and her office hours were always open, and I felt like I learned a lot. I basically mimicked her writing. I tried to be my own Lorrie Moore when I was in her class. She didn't call me out on that, thankfully, and embarrass me. It was good, I felt like I learned from her.

MS: So how do you go from that to eventually ending up as the head of *McSweeneys.com*?

CM: My route was very unconventional. I left Wisconsin after I graduated, moved back to Boston, got into teaching, taught third grade for three years, and then had three kids and decided to become a stay-at-home dad. So, during nap times, I would write and blog. I heard a thing on NPR about these blogs, and I went, "Oh, wow!" *(laughter)* "I could be famous!" Because I did a lot of theater arts in college as well, and in high school, and I've always sort of been compelled to entertain in some way. And so I started my blog, and I just started writing in the fictional voice of a bored stay-at-home dad, and I would write these crazy little stories about toddlers sitting at the library, and getting into an argument with a cashier at Whole Foods, and basically making fun of myself. It was a lot of self-deprecating humor. I started writing more and more, and then I started hearing about all these humor sites. This is around 2002, 2003. And there were lots and lots of humor sites, like *Ha'Penny* and *Yankee Pot Roast*, that aren't around anymore, and *McSweeney's*...

MS: This was '98?

CM: No, this was later. This was like 2001, 2002. So *McSweeney's* had been around for like five years at that time. So I just set a goal: submit to *McSweeney's*, get it in *McSweeney's*, and I'll be happy the rest of my life. And I got rejected a dozen times, but I kept on writing and writing. The rejections were kind, and sometimes they were specific, and sometimes they were just kind. But they were always encouraging, and as I was getting rejected by *McSweeney's*, I was submitting to these

other places, and I finally landed something in *Ha’Penny*, which was great. Did you ever have anything in *Ha’Penny*?

MS: I think so, yeah.

CM: *Ha’Penny* was a really funny site.

MS: I think all their stuff was limited. You can’t even find it.

CM: No. I know. It’s not even on *The Wayback Machine*.

MS: Right. So what’s going to happen with *McSweeney’s*? Is it always going to be a site?

CM: I think so. I hope so. It better be. *(laughter)* So basically, I submitted and submitted, I get in, I start becoming a relatively frequent contributor, and then the editor at the time, John Warner, at the time he was teaching at Clemson, wanted to take more time to devote to his teaching, and so I became an interim editor after an interview with him and Dave Eggers, the founder of *McSweeney’s*. After a year, I became permanent.

MS: Well, you’ve told the story, but you wanted to go back to teaching, but something prevented that. Can you tell them what happened?

CM: Good prompt.

MS: Thank you. *(laughter)*

CM: The writing thing was just a thing that I was doing on the side, as I was taking care of my kids, and I thought I'd always go back into education. This is actually before I got the job at *McSweeney's*. In 2006, my youngest son was ready to go to preschool full-time. I figured I'd go back to teaching at my old school system, and I was proud of all the writing I had done in my time away from teaching, and I thought it would look really good on my resume if I listed all the places I'd been published, and also mentioned my blog. And I was like, "Of course, what public school system wouldn't want an awesome, funny writer to be a teacher?" And I also had a good record. For three years I did very well, I enjoyed it, I made a lot of connections. I thought it was a slam-dunk that I'd return. So I was sitting in an interview room, and my blog and online writing came up, and none of it is particularly illicit. It's adult, but there's nothing profane or pornographic about it. There's one thing that I did do, is I wrote these fake fan letters to Star Jones.

(laughter) And it was basically from the voice of this really clueless stay-at-home dad. And I would write them with a Sharpie and scan them and then post them on the site. It was basically just asking for stupid things, like, "How do I treat an ingrown toenail?" I would sort of hint at jealousy about the guy she was seeing at the time, but it was all very tame and totally ridiculous, and totally fictionalized. But it came up in the interview, and one teacher who was interviewing me was really uncomfortable with it. And it was unclear whether or not she really thought I was stalking Star Jones. *(laughter)* And that really threw me for a loop, because I was a teacher, that's basically all I was qualified to do at the time, and although I liked

teaching, it clearly wasn't my calling, because with the writing I'd been doing, I was falling in love with that side of myself.

MS: Oof. *(laughter)*

CM: I embraced myself! And so I just totally had this existential crisis, like, "Well, wait a second, I really want to write, and writing's the wrench in me becoming a teacher again." So I withdrew my candidacy, and I didn't get a job there, they clearly weren't going to hire me *(laughter)*, and then I withdrew my candidacy from the school system, and a week later I got a random e-mail from an editor at Random House saying, "I read your blog. I think you could write a book. Let's work together and write a book." So I was very lucky. Out of that, I got a book idea, and then it just so happened that the editor at *McSweeney's*, John Warner, was starting up a humor imprint. He accepted the book idea. I worked with him on the book, and then during that time is when he decided to step aside from *McSweeney's*, and that's how I got the *McSweeney's* job.

MS: So it all started with the blog, really.

CM: It started with the blog, and just writing every day.

MS: Right. How about you, Susanna? You started as an intern?

SW: Yes. I started as an intern at *College Humor* in 2007, when I was still in college. And I pretty much just dug my hooks in very intensely, just slowly taking responsibilities across the company until they had to hire me, because I did

everything. And I pretty much just stayed the whole time, until I was put in charge of it. *(laughter)*

MS: That's incredible. You start off as an intern and now you run it.

SW: Yeah, it's just me being mad with power all the time. *(laughter)* It's pretty easy to bulldoze comedians. *(laughter)* They're reluctant to take the power, so I took it for them.

MS: That's an excellent lesson.

SW: Yeah, they're all trying to be friendly and stuff, and I just...no. *(laughter)* I don't have time for that.

MS: But when you started, a lot of people, I've noticed at *Vanity Fair*, they don't want to do tasks that they feel they're above. Did you have to do that when you first started as an intern?

SW: Yeah. And I just took all the tasks. That was pretty much my strategy, because if you have all the tasks, they need you. It was fine. There are some people who like to do kind of a sneaky move of being bad at the tasks they think that they're above, and so they stop having to do that. But everyone can see when they do that, and it's really irritating. And so I started as an intern having to do... there's a lot of dumb crap involved in running a website where you have to go through the flagged comments, and seeing just thousands and thousands of horrible comments from people. But I just did that as well, and kept going.

MS: It's a real throwback. It's like those who succeeded in the fifties working in the mailroom of William Morris, and literally rising up through the ranks because they were willing to do the shit work, and not complain about it.

SW: Yeah. I mean, you couldn't get a lot by doing the shit work. But as long as you shut up about that, they'd give you the other work too, and then slowly you hire your own interns, and then you make them do the stupid crap. *(laughter)*

MS: So Dan, you started off as an intern too, right?

DO: Yeah, it was a very similar story. In 2007, while I was still in college, I started interning for *Cracked*, which started just as me submitting freelance articles on a whim that they took, and then they had me do some freelance editorial work, but I really wanted to, similarly, get my hooks in there. So I was just saying yes to anything, any garbage task they had, I'd say, "Yeah, I absolutely want to do that." I would teach myself Photoshop so I could make funny images for the site, I taught myself HTML so I could code everything. My first year there, there were three employees. It was me, David Long, and our Editor-in-Chief Jack O'Brien, who is not related to me. O'Brien is just a title. You work hard, you get promoted to O'Brien. *(laughter)* So it was three of us, so there was plenty of work to be shared, and I just took as much of it as I could to also make myself invaluable and to learn all these things, and because my job before that was bartending, and that had some shitty things too that were shittier than learning HTML and learning Photoshop.

MS: Well, that's the thing. Every job has shit qualities, right?

DO: Yeah. The worst thing at *Cracked* wasn't as bad as the worst thing about working at a movie theater, or selling shoes, or whatever other weird jobs I've apparently had.

MS: What was the worst thing that ever happened at the movie theater?

DO: I don't want to say it, but I can't think of anything else. But a man did a very inappropriate thing to himself, with himself, in a movie theater, and had to be escorted out. And it was (during) *Jurassic Park 2!* (laughter) It was a very silly situation.

MS: At least it wasn't *Schindler's List*, right? (laughter) (to audience) Any questions from the audience?

DO: About *Jurassic Park 2?* (laughter)

MS: How many articles have you written over the years?

DO: Close to three hundred, I think, at this point.

MS: So what is your typical day at *Cracked* like? What is it like behind the scenes there? How many people work there, what kind of office is it?

DO: We're a company that's owned by a larger company called Demand Media that owns a number of sites, like *eHow* and *Live Strong* and *Saatchi Art* and *Society6*. So they've very wisely buried *Cracked* in a little hole away from the serious people doing real work. We've got a bunch of cubicles with people who matter and are important, and then a hole full of Nerf guns and toys and candy and posters, and

that's *Cracked*. There are seven full-time video people in total, and they're writers, performers, editors, anything else that we need to do. There are nine full-time editorial people, some of whom are remote. And most of the time now is (spent on) pitch meetings. We're getting into all of the pitches that are coming in, whether it's for video columns or articles, and we go over them and we say what we like about them, what we don't like about them, and say every horrible thing about the freelancers where, if you've ever been a freelancer and you suspect that editors are slamming your name, it's true. We're all doing it. All of your worst fears are true. And then we're giving out assignments when necessary.

MS: It's a busy day.

DO: It's a busy day, yeah. There are some days that are looser pitch meetings. When it's just video we get into a room and just ask, "What does everyone want to do? What are some ideas? What are people excited about? Let's break out this new show we're working on," or "What are some fun, stupid ideas we can try out in the next year?"

MS: Is it a twenty-four hour cycle? When you go home, if there's a breaking news story, would you have to quickly edit or quickly write something?

DO: Not me. We have the "Quick-Fix" section of our site, which is the quick-reacting thing that is run by someone else on our site named David Bell. We didn't ask him to do this, he just decided to do it. He gets up at about three o'clock in the morning every day, and that's his workday starting. And he goes through all the news that's happening, and has freelancers that are in Australia, where the time moves

backwards. It's different there. *(laughter)* So they're awake at that time anyway, and they're work shopping things. I'll wake up sometimes at 8 AM, and they've already responded to something that's happened overnight, because that's just their work schedule.

MS: Why did he take on that role? Was it to move forward? Or does he just like working overnight?

DO: I think it's a move forward. It's a smart move. The quick-fix team is still pretty nascent, and we wanted to make it even faster, and he's a worker like Susanna. He just said, "This is a thing I can do that might not be the most pleasant thing in the world, but it's a service that we need right now, so I'm going to take it." And that's my favorite employee in the world.

MS: How about you, Susannah? What's a typical day like?

SW: It's pretty hectic, but everyone works a little more separately than Dan's team. We come in, everyone has some base running articles that they've been working on that they know they need to get out. We've got a few things that we've said, "This is what we want done today, so if you're not done with it, hurry." And then we're trying to keep on top of things that are coming up, and what we should be talking about. The workflow has changed a lot since Facebook became the way anyone gets traffic to things, because you have to be a lot more obsessed with the finishing touches for a product, like the title and what the thumbnail is. It used to be that, once the meat of the article was done, you'd put it up and it didn't matter what the title was, and then you moved on. And now it's a lot more of, once we have an actual

good thing, we have to figure out how we can trick people into clicking it while they're looking at dumb crap on their Facebook newsfeed.

MS: Now is that pressure from on high? Does the corporate aspect affect the title or the content of the piece to drive more traffic?

SW: Not really, because I think they wish it did, but I don't care about that, so I try as much as I can to make it not any kind of click-bait, grabby crap like that, that's pandering. But you do have to do some of that to make it so that people will actually click on your thing.

MS: Has that changed over the years, the fact that more money's involved now, there's more of a corporate aspect to it?

SW: Yeah. It's definitely a little bit more of a business. But we still get to just make as much fun stuff as we can. The only concession is having to care a little bit more about the packaging, because people don't really do the thing they used to of having websites that they would go to, like you'd go to the homepage and you'd just click on whatever's there. Now it's much more that you have to pull people out of their newsfeeds or social feeds. So you're getting people, first of all, out of context, and often were not really interested in reading comedy in the first place, which sucks a little bit, but it works out, because you can sometimes surprise people. And sometimes you can really, really screw with people by just lying in the titles about what they're going to get.

MS: How about you, Dan? Are there any limitations on subject matter or language or anything since *Cracked* has become a little bit more corporate?

DO: No. We've never really had pressure from above, no matter how corporate we're getting. The only pressure they give us is, "Hey, you did this many views this month. You know what sounds better? More than that." (*laughter*) But they don't want to sit in on our titles meetings, which we have. We have to take titles very seriously, and thumbnails very seriously too, because that's the nature of the business. And as much as the corporate folks will say, "More traffic," they'll never say, "We think an article like this will do well," or "We think you should try this strategy," which is great. They've always been very trusting and hands-off and accommodating. All of the pressure of traffic is our own internal need to do well.

MS: So you have a free hand editorially.

DO: Yeah, and it's not just my hand. It's a great team that we have, just loaded with O'Briens. But the reality of the business is that now we have to understand Facebook. That's the worst part of the job now, is changing with the internet and trying to figure out what's important now. Time was, back in 2007, 2008, Digg.com was the number one referral of traffic for everything. It was the "front page of the internet," as Reddit calls itself now. Digg was just where people went to get their news and their info and their entertainment. So a lot of our strategy was, "What kind of titles do well on Digg? Do we need to meet with and talk to Digg power users," which is a thing, "and see if they will share our article because their word goes a long way in the Digg community?" And then Digg did a redesign, and the site

destroyed itself, and then no one went to Digg anymore, and now Facebook is the new dig. Facebook is the place where everyone's going to find their news. So we have to, as much as we're all people who got into this business because we like writing jokes and we like making each other laugh, now we're a bunch of stupid internet comedy monkeys who have to figure out Facebook's algorithm.

SW: And I don't think *they* even know what it does.

MS: But have you noticed certain stories drive more traffic than other stories?

DO: We have. There's some really disappointing things we learned. We'll have a video or an article that does better than any other piece that week, and we'll think, "Oh, is it because it was by this writer? People really respond to that writer. Is it because of this thesis?" And then we'll realize, "Oh no, the thumbnail on our site is a picture of a woman showering. That's probably it." *(laughter)*

SW: Yep. That's a strategy. *(laughter)* Boobs.

MS: *(to Chris)* How about your typical day? Do you have to answer to Dave? Does Dave Eggers read each of these pieces?

CM: I think he still reads the site, but not nearly as much as he used to. I'm pretty autonomous.

MS: So you have final say on these pieces.

CM: Yeah. My day is very different, because I work from home. And so I get up, I check submissions, and then I give my boys breakfast and see them off to school,

and then I'm just reading submissions and replying and readying submissions for future postings. So there are no team meetings or anything like that.

MS: Sounds like a pretty great life.

CM: It's a very nice life. *(laughter)* I really lucked out.

DO: Yeah, but you don't know anything about Facebook's algorithms! *(laughter)*

How can you call yourself a comedy writer?

CM: I know. That's interesting to me. *McSweeney's* has never been driven by traffic at all until recently. And so we've started posting stuff to Facebook. We've always done Twitter, and Twitter is just, and maybe you find this too, the traffic goes *(makes up motion)* and then *(makes downward motion)* right away, because it just gets lost in millions of other tweets. So on a random whim, I posted an article to our Facebook page for the first time this past January, and the traffic it did, I was blown away.

MS: What was your article?

CM: It was about snowstorms. I timed it right. It was during a snowstorm that hit NYC in January. *(laughter)* And it was about "Snowstorms: Then and Now." This writer was talking about how snowstorms were different before she had kids, and how they were much different now that she has a family, and how the romance of snowstorms is totally out the window. And it went crazy. And so I was like, "Oh, hmm. Maybe we should start posting more stuff on Facebook."

MS: But why do you want traffic? You don't have ads on *McSweeney's*, do you?

CM: Well, we just started doing ads this summer, for a trial period. I sort of understand. They're deck ads, they're not pay-per-click ads.

MS: Explain what a deck ad is.

CM: I'm not even sure what a deck is, but from what I understand, it's like a conglomeration of other sites that are similar, products that are similar, and they pool their resources together and put their ad on various web pages, and they're all connected. It's run by this guy named Jim Coudal in Chicago. So we've just started doing ads, and our trial is up, and I think we've done pretty well, and the hope is that eventually we can pay our writers. We've never paid our writers. So hopefully, through these ads, we'll start being able to pay writers as well. So Facebook helps, and Twitter helps. No one's able to click on the ads, you just see the ads, and we get a fraction of a penny or something.

MS: And enough of that will build up to a sizable...

CM: Nothing like what these guys are doing, but still.

MS: Do the numbers go straight to the ad agencies? Do they look at the numbers and say, "Well, this month was good..."

DO: I have no idea how much I'm allowed to say about advertisers.

SW: We're amongst friends. *(laughter)*

DO: Legally, any of you would have to tell me if you work for Axe Body Spray.

(laughter) The way it works is, we guarantee a certain number of clicks to

advertisers for a certain amount of money, and it's based very intelligently on the kind of content that they want to buy. We know, historically, how well it performs. We know what day of the week performs better than other days of the week. So we can give them, not 100% accurate, but a fairly close idea. We can guarantee roughly these many "impressions," which is suit for clicks and views. And if we don't do that, they're very mad at us, and we try to make it up later with more clicks and impressions on something else.

MS: It's interesting at the top level, which you're at. It's very much a business.

DO: It is a business, yeah. Still a better business than any of the other businesses with which I've been associated. You go from a pitch meeting to a meeting where you're talking with brands and sponsors and advertisers, and they're saying, "My name is John Mountain Dew, and my campaign this fall is 'Get Really Extreme With Pumpkin Spice Mountain Dew.'" *(laughter)* "What kind of articles can you guarantee are on point with that brand messaging?" And then we brainstorm and say, "Here are some things that we feel comfortable putting the *Cracked* name behind, but that Mountain Dew could feel really chill about." *(laughter)*

MS: Will it say "sponsored" for a piece like that?

DO: It depends. Some of them, if the brand comes back enough times making changes that we feel are not in the *Cracked* voice anymore, then that's a different deal, and it becomes a piece of advertorial content, where it doesn't live in one of our main spots on the site, it lives somewhere else, and it clearly labels itself as an ad. If Mountain Dew says nothing, or "Write it in your voice, write whatever you

want, we don't get final say," then that's great, and it'll just say "Presented by Mountain Dew" somewhere, but it'll feel more like actual editorial content.

MS: How about you (Susanna)? Does that work at *College Humor* the same way?

SW: Yeah, it's pretty much the exact same system, except that our writers don't ever talk directly to the brand people.

MS: That's smart.

SW: Yeah, because we're jerks, *(laughter)* and you need people who are a bit more polite. So instead, there are a bunch of middlemen involved, and then we get in a room with all of the requests from advertisers with how much money they have, and we come up with scalable ideas based on that. It can be fun. When it works out well, advertising a hundred percent makes sense. When it's people advertising to exactly the sort of people who come to *College Humor* and enjoy our content, and then it's just like, "Oh yeah, here's a reminder that this movie they're definitely going to enjoy is coming out," and it's just around it and it's simple... And then, sometimes, you guys have all seen commercials that are not so good.

DO: Sometimes you have to hear, "Skittles has some notes about your comedy video." *(laughter)* And I have to listen to what Skittles says...

SW: Yeah, because they're comedy experts.

MS: Well, this happens in TV, I know, where sometimes advertisers, if they're upset with the content, they can have a say in it. But it seems like you have more freedom online to do what you want without any input from the advertisers.

SW: Well, in TV, you have the commercial space, and then that's kind of it. Online, you've got a whole bunch of different ways that you can display ads, and how you can have them represented, so you can have the video ad that has all of their brand names in it. They're going to be a little bit more involved in that, but if it's just a tangentially related topic with an article, and then their ads around it, usually they're OK.

MS: Have you found yourself editing differently now that you have advertisers?

CM: Maybe a little bit, but not really. With the ads, I don't even really know who's advertising. I have no communication with people who are putting ads on the site.

MS: Are the ads on the site itself, though?

CM: Yeah, they're on there. We've been putting more ads on there. Basically, the website was started as a window for the rest of *McSweeney's*, which publishes books and a quarterly and magazines, so it wasn't a money-making enterprise to begin with. And I think we've been very honest about how we've been floating along financially these fifteen years. We just became a non-profit this past week, actually.

MS: Well, how *were* you floating along?

CM: With really strong wings. *(laughter)* I'm the only *McSweeney's* person who doesn't work in San Francisco. I'm in Boston, three thousand miles away, which is also another ideal thing about my job, is that I'm sort of removed from the daily grind of independent publishing. And my purview is the website, and that's what I've been focusing on. So I touch base with people on a weekly basis in the home

office, but in terms of the overall big picture about the site, I know things, but again, I'm just the website guy.

MS: Let's get some questions. *(to audience)* You have a question?

Audience member: Dan, I remember when I was reading *Cracked* in high school and college, there'd be a lot more stuff about Tesla being cooler than Edison, and that kind of thing. Now there are a lot more articles about the harsh realities of being a sex slave. What brought on that shift to that kind of content? I mean, that earlier stuff still exists, of course, but what was involved behind bringing in more serious stuff to write about?

DO: A number of things. We started when we were all a little bit younger and a lot bit dumber *(laughter)*, and more experimental. When I was first brought on as a columnist, I was specifically instructed to do weird stuff and find out what works, and other columnists were doing that same thing. And gradually over time, we found that weird, silly experimental pieces were super fun, and rewarding for the writers, and great at building long-time, very dedicated fans, but those pieces didn't perform as well as pieces that were just telling you something but were garnished with jokes. So we were just responding to reality. We're based solely on what it looks like our audience wants right now. The sex-slave article that you brought up specifically, that is all part of the brainchild of my former intern, now full-time employee, Robert Evans...sorry?

Audience member: He's fantastic.

DO: Yeah. I will tell him that. He's a journalist at heart that ended up at this comedy website, and just had an idea for a new piece of content for the site, and that's what we pay him for, is just to create new ideas. He brought a team of journalists that he trained, and they go out and just find people's stories, and they work with them, and as much as they need to, turn to someone who's like, "Hey, I'm not a writer, but I was once a human sex slave, and I know what that life is like," so the journalists work with them, and now we have this piece of actual journalism, actual information. We're not just going through different websites and books for sources anymore. We're actually interviewing people. I'm describing a very basic concept of journalism as something we invented, *(laughter)* but it's been very rare for the internet. It's not all about sex slavery as well. We've interviewed people who tell us what it's actually like to be a blind person, we're going to talk about that, what it's like to be an ice cream truck driver, that's an article coming down the pipe. It's all still based in this core *Cracked* belief that everyone everywhere has something interesting about themselves...

MS: And possibly something funny about their jobs.

DO: Right.

MS: I think that's a great thing, to attach it to reality like that. It has a bigger punch.

DO: It does. It's the closest thing to important that we've ever done, and I can brag about it without feeling like a jerk, because I have nothing to do with it. It's completely Robert Evans and the team that he's built. I'm a fan of it the same as you are.

MS: *(to audience)* Any other questions? Yeah.

Audience member: When Facebook changes algorithms, it totally affects your traffic, I would imagine.

SW: It depends. The sites that are entirely Facebook-dependent, and really do clickbait-y headlines, the ones that are like, “Wow, you won’t believe this crap thing, blah blah blah...”

DO: *The New York Times.* *(laughter)*

SW: Those sites experience a much bigger dip. *College Humor*, what we get from Facebook is usually about fifty percent of our traffic. And so there’s no change they’ve ever done that has harmed us too much, but sometimes it’s like, “Oh, this particular timing or phrasing is not as good anymore. We’ve got to figure out what the hell changed and then make tomorrow better.”

Audience member: I guess that’s what I’m asking: Is figuring that out, reading Facebook and thinking about that, part of your job?

SW: Yeah. A fun little discovery is that, when you want to get into the job, you have to do all the shitty work, and then once you get to be at the top, you have to do the shitty work again.

DO: So the sweet spot’s in the middle. Aim for the middle. *(laughter)*

SW: Yeah, the middle’s really fun. Obviously, Facebook’s algorithm is very, very important to a lot of websites, so the moment anything changes, there are like fifty

articles about everyone's guess about what changed and how it's affecting things, and then you try to tackle it in a bunch of different ways. There are a whole mess of services that have come out of Facebook's power over things, so we have these different ways to test titles by having them be like, "Fifty percent of people who come to the site will see this title, fifty percent will see this," and then figure out which one is actually working and go with that. *College Humor's* a little bit new to the tech side of this. We've always led a little bit more with just what we think is funny and hope that people will get it and be into it, but there's just been so many different services.

DO: I think that's still true of what you're doing, though. We've talked a bunch about algorithms and Facebook and impressions and so on, but you're not changing your content for Facebook's algorithms.

SW: Yeah, we never write anything thinking, "This thing is probably going to do well on Facebook, let's write it even though we don't have any jokes." Which some places definitely do, and you can feel it immediately. Because no matter what, even if a lot of traffic's coming in through Facebook, if they get to your site and the thing that they found is crap, they won't stay, and they won't read anything else. So it's very important as a portal, but I don't think that we want to ever change the core content enough to be like, "We're just doing anything to get clicks."

Audience member: Do you have to pay to promote your content?

SW: I don't think that we do. There may be certain times where, for extra-business-y reasons, there's something, but for the most part we don't really need to. We have a

really big Facebook fan base, so you get a lot of interaction, and then, oh God, all the Facebook crap, there are these nonsense algorithms, like, "If people are interacting in this way and in this timeframe, it'll go up more on the newsfeed," and it's like, "Oh God, I don't know what this is, it's so terrible."

DO: It certainly can feel arbitrary, because you've got however many Facebook fans just for *College Humor*, and these are people who have said, in the eyes of the Lord, "I like *College Humor*, I'm a fan, I follow everything they do," and Facebook still won't let you reach every single one of them. You can't post a piece of content that will get to every single one of those people who have said, here in the world, that they like you. But Facebook, I don't know. We're gonna go to their office one day, and there's just gonna be a guy hitting buttons. *(laughter)*

CM: Well, I find our most successful Facebook posts are in large part due to the fact that people come upon it and don't realize that it's satire. They take it for face value.

SW: Oh yeah. Do you get those really good comments from people being like, "Fuck this, this is garbage! This is wrong!" *(laughter)* And you're like, "Obviously it's wrong! Look at the URL, stupid!"

DO: "I don't think that Joe Biden's starting a band at all!" *(laughter)* You know Facebook is changing that as well. They're going to start, and sites don't have any say over what gets this, but they're going to start tagging things with "Satire."

CM: Oh, I saw that, yeah.

SW: Oh yeah, I've been seeing that on *The Onion*. I thought *The Onion* did that as a joke, because it was really funny, and so, so stupid.

MS: *(to audience)* You had a question?

Audience member: Yeah. Basically this is for Susannah. I've been reading *College Humor* since I was in high school. I understand you have to change with the times according to Facebook, but there has also been a change in terms of the audience, right? It started out more like things about college, and now you're dealing with more things about getting a job and going out into the real world, like you've grown with your audience. How do you manage to keep that audience, but at the same time still court people just getting into college?

SW: We've found that, often, people who are younger respond a lot to the older content, which works out perfectly, because everyone on staff got old as hell *(laughter)*, and we don't remember things about college. But we also always have younger freelancers and younger interns who can do more content like that, and be aware of trends, so we're not still writing articles about away messages and things *(laughter)* that were big when we were in college. Kids are still into that, right? *(laughter)* It's been fun to see that the tone has mostly remained the same, so even as the subject matter's gotten a little bit older, what matters is that we all still think it's actually funny, as opposed to just forcing ourselves to write stuff about midterms. You don't know when they're happening when you're out of college.

MS: All three of you here have devoted your writing to the page, not hard copy, necessarily, but writing to be read. What was the advantage to that as opposed to writing for TV or movies, which most people, it seems, want to write comedy for?

DO: If anyone here is hiring movie writers, I'll do that instead. *(laughter)* That'd be fun. I like it because, and I think I've told this story before, but when I went to Rutgers University for school, I didn't like the satire paper that existed there, because it was very, very crass, and I was a very enlightened nineteen-year-old idiot. I didn't want to write there, but I still wanted some kind of outlet, and my only real goal was to make people read something. I just wanted eyes to see things that I made. And so I just started printing stories that were about Rutgers, and had jokes in them, and it was called *The Monthly Daniel*, because my name is Daniel, and it came out monthly. *(laughter)* And I printed it out through my own computer, and spent money on paper and ink, and just stacked them everywhere I could in the school. And very often, people who ran the school would come by and throw them out, but every once in a while you'd see someone flipping through it. There wasn't any contact info on there for me, beyond "Daniel," and I wasn't like, "Help me pay for ink and paper" or anything, because the goal was just, "Oh, is someone reading it? Good. That was what I wanted to do. Good." And that didn't change when I started writing for *Cracked*. I just wanted to see if people liked this and could connect with this in some way. It still hasn't changed now. I still like the notion of, "I have an idea, I can make it and give it to people."

MS: An idea you can make in your own vision, right?

DO: Yes.

MS: Is that a large part of it, having control over what you write?

DO: It is now. I'm not sure how it was when I started, because I was certainly content to pitch to magazines when I was still in college, but now I'm so spoiled, having the amount of control and power and freedom and flexibility that we've been given at *Cracked*. It's going to be really tough to give that up.

MS: How about you (Susanna)?

SW: Well, my initial interest in comedy writing was because I was interested in TV and that sort of thing, and then when I was in high school, I started doing stand-up comedy in the city. And if you ever want to just have any desire to perform drilled out of you, be a sixteen-year-old girl doing stand-up comedy in New York (*laughter*). It was just so terrible that the moment there was a job, like "Oh, I can write jokes still but do it with no other people, safely by myself with my computer for the internet" (*laughter*), "and not talk with creepy dudes," that seemed great. There's definitely a fun challenge to both having all of the control over what you're writing, but also, you don't really have that much control over how the reader's going to read it, as opposed to when you make a video or something where you get to say, "This is exactly what they're seeing, this is exactly what they're hearing." Otherwise, when you write text, it's kind of like, "I hope they're reading this in the correct tone," because often they're not. People come in through Facebook and they get it all wrong. It's a fun challenge to have all of that power, but there is also a fair bit of

video writing for *College Humor* that happens. I'm still excited about the whole future of that industry.

MS: You guys sold a TV show, right? You sold a pilot to...

SW: Yeah, probably. *(laughter)* I didn't have anything to do with that. But I'm very excited about where all of TV is going, with Netflix and everything. I think it's much more exciting.

MS: Do you think it's going to merge, that *College Humor* and Netflix and Amazon can kind of meet in the middle, create videos?

SW: Probably. Netflix and Amazon are getting it a lot more, that there's a value to being distribution, and that people are actually finding this stuff. You don't need to force it down their throats. Obviously, people are interested in getting properties from existing brands that have a fan base. That's why the only movies coming out anymore are sequels and remakes of things, because everyone just wants an existing fan base, and then it'll go from there. Writing videos is fun, but writing straight text is still super enjoyable, as long as it's not stand-up comedy. *(laughter)*

CM: Yeah. I would miss that independence and control. My writing was sort of all based on this voice that I created too, so I felt like it was something that I had to do on my own. If people read it, they got the voice, but it would've been a different thing had I worked with other people to create that voice. It was me.

MS: For the writers I know for print, not now but before, there seemed to be a desire to go out to Hollywood and write for TV and write for movies and make a lot of

money. But from what I saw, the majority didn't have the control that they had originally, and there was a big disappointment on their part. And they sort of missed having that control, even though they had more money. Does money play into it at all, or is it the control aspect that remains more important to you?

SW: I would be super cool with getting TV-writing money. *(laughter)* I would enjoy that a lot. I would probably give up a whole bunch of power to have that.

MS: Is that something you want to do, in the future?

SW: Yeah, that seems like a fun challenge. Part of it is that when you get to have all of the power of having final say on a product, it's really fun and exciting, but as Dan said, you get a little spoiled. There's something exciting about being just bad at a thing again, and having someone tell you, and just be doing something wrong.

(laughter) It's hard to be doing something wrong when you're in charge.

MS: How about you (Dan)?

DO: I think about TV a lot. I love it very much, I would love to write for TV. I'm holding out hope that there will be some kind of merger of internet and TV and all that kind of content creation, using Youtube as an actual real player, not players like video player, but a real *(in facetious tone)* "player in the space." Everything I've been able to do at *Cracked* has been like, "I was doing this for a while, and then maybe I'll look somewhere else because I want to stretch this new muscle," and then we just said, "Instead, why don't we just add that muscle onto *Cracked*? Why don't we let *Cracked* be a place where you can make sketches?" We as a team started to be antsy

with prose and wanted to get into sketches, and now we've launched Cracked Studios, which does narrative shows. It's based on the fact that we have talented, hungry writers who want to get into the narrative space, they want to write for TV shows, and we're sick of seeing our best writers leave all the time, so let's make *Cracked* a place where you can scratch that narrative itch, and then we'll get as good at it as we can. And if there's a version of the future where *Cracked* could release twenty-two minute TV shows, that's a vision of the future I like. I don't really have a reason to leave *Cracked* if I can make it exactly what I want all the time.

MS: (to audience) Any other questions? Yes, Andrew.

Andrew Clark: This is for Chris. What do you think are the characteristics of a great *McSweeney's* list?

CM: It's funny. It's smart. The writer clearly knows and appreciates what they're making a list of. I think my predecessor John would describe our audience as "upper-middle-brow." So the *McSweeney's* audience, they watch *House Hunters*, but they're familiar with Shakespeare. They're very savvy pop culture-wise. And so a list that's savvy, and smart, and funny, and dumb, a little bit dumb, in a smart way. It makes me laugh. We had a list a couple of weeks ago that I thought was really funny. It was "Boat Parts or Names of Unvaccinated Children?" (laughter) So it was like "Anais," and "Stanchion." (laughter) Commenting on the debate about whether or not to vaccinate your kids, and also playing with the fact that a lot of these unvaccinated kids are kids of rich white folks. And I just thought it was smart. That, to me, was right in the money zone, being a liberal northeastern child of hippies.

MS: Can you see the influence of the *McSweeney's* comedic sensibility out there? I see it everywhere now, like in college humor magazines. It's a very specific type of sensibility.

CM: Yeah. A lot of the people who wrote for the site, not a lot, but some, have gone on to be in television, and write for late night talk shows. When you think about *Parks and Recreation* or *The Office*, I see a lot of *McSweeney's* in the temperament of the humor.

MS: How would you describe... oh, I'm sorry, you had a question (Dan)?

DO: I had a question about *McSweeney's*, actually. Because there's a minimum of three people at every single editorial meeting, you'll always have two people, and also we rotate, so you'll get lots of different eyes on a piece of content. Because it's just you, I wonder, do you have to work yourself into a place where you're ready to look at things? If I'm in a bad mood where everything looks like garbage to me, it's OK, because somebody else will stop me from making horrible decisions. Are there days where you wake up and you're like, "No, not today"?

CM: No, I can't, because it's just me reading them, and I make a priority of reading every one, and getting back to everybody within seven or eight days.

DO: But what if it's raining? *(laughter)*

CM: I pick my moments. I work in the morning, particularly. Early in the morning. And then also after I get my kids to school, I work then. And then I'm constantly checking my e-mail. It's almost like a condition. I've been doing it for so long that,

sure, I can read a title and read the first couple of paragraphs and know this is something we should pursue or not. Like Mike said, the *McSweeney's* aesthetic is pretty tight. There's a *McSweeney's* style of humor. And so, fortunately, a lot of people get that. I'm making hard choices every week about what to keep and what to politely reject.

MS: I'd think it would be hard, too, for it not to become white noise, in a sense. You're receiving so many pieces that are the same length, and the same style and voice. How do you differentiate those who stand out, or is it just something that you feel?

CM: I'll quote my predecessor John again. He says it's like pornography. He knows it when he sees it. And so I feel like with a *McSweeney's* piece, I know it when I see it. It's very subjective, and it's always been. It's always been one editor of the site, and that's how it's always been. Hearing about these teams that you guys are on, it fascinates me (*laughs*) because it could be a really novel approach if we ever tried that. We don't have the means to do that. But it doesn't get tiring, for some reason. I really enjoy it. And I enjoy the fact that, to get back to the control and independence thing, I'm deciding what millions of people are going to read the next day. I'm very loyal to *McSweeney's*, and I feel like I lucked out. You'd think it would be a burden after all these years (*laughs*), but surprisingly it's not.

MS: Dan talked about working with writers, sometimes for months. Do you work with a writer if it comes in at eighty percent?

CM: Oh yeah. Definitely. Like Susannah was saying it'd be like fifty percent stuff where it hardly needs to change. And a lot of the time, it's very subtle tweaks that really make the piece. You were talking about titles and stuff, and titles are so important to lure people in.

MS: Sometimes the premise of a *McSweeney's* piece will be the title.

CM: Yeah. At *McSweeney's*, the title is just explaining what the whole conceit's going to be. *(laughs)*

MS: And that was a new thing, wasn't it?

CM: Yeah, I don't remember seeing that much of it before, no, definitely.

MS: So for those in the audience who want to write for *McSweeney's*, *College Humor*, *Cracked*, we'll start with *Cracked*, what would you recommend they do? When they go home tonight, how do they submit?

DO: The very first thing you want to do is read the site. Read as many articles as you can. That's what I did before I submitted my first article in 2007. That's what they train you to do if you want to submit to any magazine in the world, and those rules still apply, even though it's the internet. Read the site, because that's the best way to know the kind of articles that *Cracked* runs. Sign up for the workshop. There's a button that says "Write for us" in the top right corner, it's yellow. Click on it, and then you can spend as much time going through our archives. We have every pitch that has ever been accepted in the site's history, and we start from one person saying, "Here's my idea for an article, here's my pitch, here's how it goes," all the

way to the article getting notes from the editors, to completion. You see the entire process spelled out for you. Go through there, learn from everybody else's mistakes, because they made all the ones that you could potentially make already. Learn as much as you can, and then follow the guidelines and submit a pitch.

MS: Susanna?

SW: Ours is very similar. There's an extra feature that you can do on *College Humor*, which is if you go to our Articles section, make it so you search from most viewed of all time, and you'll see all of the articles that have really killed and really hit. It's a very diverse collection, but it's a good place to start and see what works. Then, just make a *College Humor* account and submit through the little thingy, or e-mail submissions@collegehumor.com. You don't need to have a fully complete piece. You can do really anything, just don't start your e-mail with, "So yeah, I have an idea." (*laughter*) That's really annoying. And don't get scared off if your first idea doesn't work. Just keep coming back with different stuff, and we'll help you find something that works.

MS: Dan, you once told me the worst pitch you ever got. It has to do with an animal. I have it written down, but do you remember it?

DO: No.

MS: OK. You said that a woman wrote demanding that *Cracked* cover the unfair treatment of lizards by the liberal media. (*laughter*)

DO: She thought that lizards were getting a really bad shake in the media (*laughter*), and that I was the media, and so she and I could work together to fix this. And I responded to her, “Hey, I know.” (*laughter*) “You’re right. I have eleven lizards myself. Here are their names. We should talk about this.” And then she responded with a list of her lizards, and then I was just really sad. (*laughter*) For me, it went from being a playful thing to, “Oh, is she insane? Never mind.”

MS: How about you (Chris)? What would you recommend to anyone who wants to submit to *McSweeney’s*?

CM: The same. Read the site, follow the guidelines. Also, our policy is that you can submit something, and then as soon as you hear back from me, you can submit another thing. There are maybe about ten percent of writers who can do that. Otherwise, there are a lot of writers who just look desperate, and are just throwing things on the wall and seeing what sticks. So really be very careful with your editing before you send something off, and maybe, instead of sending something every week, send something every couple of weeks, every three weeks. Eventually, you’ll probably land something. (*laughs*) It works out for everyone in the end.

MS: Chris Monks, all the way from Boston, thanks for coming.

CM: Thank you!

MS: Susanna Wolff and Dan O’Brien from California, thank you very much!

(*applause*)