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the eye

Rosenthal: A Retrospective

a professor looks back on four decades at columbia

interview by Raphael Pope-Sussman

joanne abbot green talks cmj \\\ keeping choreography alive \\\ the mfa's future

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ROSENTHAL: A LOOK BACK

A professor looks back on four decades at Columbia, pg. 07.

*interview by Raphael Pope-Sussman
cover photo by Alyssa Rapp*

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LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

Last week, my Art Hum professor turned off a Parthenon PowerPoint and led our class out into the neoclassical wonderland that is Columbia's campus. "Why might the architect of Schermerhorn have chosen to use Corinthian columns?" he asked. An answer was offered, a nod was given, and the tour moved onward, past the Doric splendor of Earl Hall and the Ionic glory of Low.

It's tempting to see Columbia's architectural grandeur as evidence of its long-held stature. Nicholas Murray Butler, the president of the University for a large chunk of the 20th century, famously likened the school to the Acropolis, a designation that at the turn of the century may have been ridiculous. But perhaps he had foresight.

So argues professor Michael Rosenthal, the subject of this week's cover story—although

Butler was a bit of a windbag, he adds. Rosenthal, the author of a Butler biography and a man who's spent four decades at Columbia himself, may know more than anyone about the University's past 100 years. Speaking to The Eye, he makes it clear that the campus Butler inherited at the beginning of the century was far more impressive than the University then situated on it. And although Butler was pompous—that Acropolis talk was "absurd," Rosenthal says—it was Butler's vision that transformed a middling school into something more, something finally deserving of columned buildings.

In these days of limitless cynicism, Rosenthal's advocacy of all things Columbia—from the Core to Manhattanville—is refreshing. He may just make you a believer.

—**Thomas Rhiel**

Submit your creative writing to The Eye.

We are now accepting short stories, narrative non-fiction, and humorous essays. For more information, e-mail eye@columbiaspectator.com.

ASK A BITTER GS STUDENT

HELLO, CHILDREN

BY NESTOR, GS '18

Among students in Columbia College, the notion that all General Studies students are strange seems as un-questionable as the Core Curriculum. Perhaps it is time for me to confront this reputation and start a dialogue in the community that will broach pressing issues vis-à-vis GS's role on campus. I will be using this column to answer CC students' questions about what life is like for those of us in GS.

Q: What do GS students do for fun?

A: Some of us go to the racetrack to bet money on horses; others frequent strip clubs to drool over women young enough to be our granddaughters. But most of us like to sit in our bedrooms alone, drinking cheap whiskey, and resting our arthritic knees as we plot our vengeance against society for having wronged us throughout our lives.

Q: Why didn't you graduate college sooner?

A: First of all, it's "graduate from college," but I guess reading all those books doesn't guarantee you a good education after all. I didn't graduate earlier because I discovered the pleasure of watching CC kids head to Goldman Sachs or law school, end up in unloving marriages with children who take them for granted, and finally find themselves bald and unhappy, living an existence in which joy is as fleeting as the cute little YouTube videos they currently gush over.

I hope these answers have been helpful to those of you in CC, and I look forward to continuing these efforts toward mutual understanding. If we work together, I truly believe we can make the Columbia community one in which all undergraduates have a place. Thanks for reading!

REGRETS

PAINFUL OMISSIONS FROM BUTLER VIDEO

BY JONATHAN KAPLAN

Missing from the new video collection, post-Kim's.

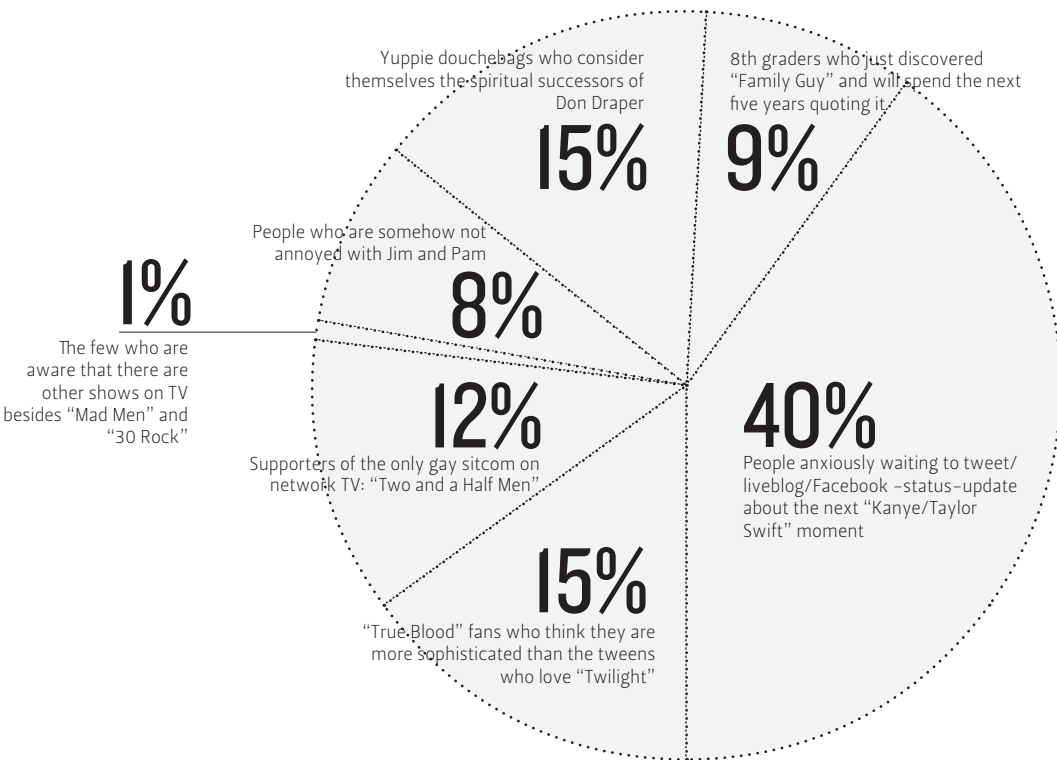
- "Pineapple Express"
- "Half Baked"
- "Harold & Kumar Go to White Castle"
- "Dude, Where's My Car?"
- "How High"
- "The Wizard of Oz" synced to "Dark Side of the Moon"
- iTunes visualizer synced to "Dark Side of the Moon"
- "James and the Giant Peach"
- "Meatballs"
- "Good Burger"
- "The Big Sleep"

THINGS WE MADE UP

EMMY VIEWERSHIP BREAKDOWN

BY EVAN OMI

A brief and very unscientific rundown of who was watching on Monday night.



EDITORS' TEN

WHAT WE'RE INTO THIS WEEK

1. Tom DeLay: A disgraced former House majority leader now dances on prime-time television. What a beautiful country.

–Thomas Rhiel, editor in chief

2. Union Square Trader Joe's: First year off the meal plan, and this grocery store is my savior!

–Devin Briski, food & drink editor

3. Ginger chews: They're scrumptious and good for you too (at least according to my mum).

–Kristina Budelis, visuals editor

4. A life-size ceramic bust of Elvis Presley: I bought it at the Salvation Army near my house over the summer. He is sitting on our dining room table, freaking out and delighting everyone who comes to our suite. Long live The King.

–Rebecca Pattiz, music editor

5. Greek life: All of the back-to-school interest events have really gotten me into the pan-hellenic spirit. As a happy member of Kappa Alpha Theta, I can confidently say that joining a sorority was the best thing I have done in college. So, a shameless plug for the Columbia greek community: first-years (and sophomores, and juniors, too!): Go Greek!

–Meredith Perry, senior design editor

6. Gmail's "Tasks" to-do list application: With it, Google has officially devoured my soul. (Heck, you can even turn e-mails into to-do items...)

–Yin Yin Lu, books editor

7. Fall food: Autumn weather inaugurates the season of crisp apples, hot soup, fresh-baked pies, hot chocolate, and cider. Not to mention delicious holiday favorites come Thanksgiving.

–Tess Rankin, associate copy editor, features

8. Hand sanitizer: Despite the fact that I can't walk around campus without seeing a hundred auto-matic dispensers, I'm paranoid if I don't use some.

–Catherine Rice, dance editor

9. The "Next to Normal" cast recording: It's just the best thing to listen to, whether you're angsty or sad or angry or even happy. There's a song on there for every mood.

–Ruthie Fierberg, theater editor

10. The Great Burrito: The Mexican place on 79th and Amsterdam makes burritos the size of which would make Chipotle blush. Fresh chips and salsa are rounded out with tacos that have an extra half-shell stuffed into the middle. Yum.

–Melanie Jones, managing editor, features

Modern-Day Shackles

the veritas forum struggles to find solutions to sex slavery

BY PHIL CRONE

PHOTO BY EMBRY OWEN

Somaly Mam was born in the Mondulkiri Province of Cambodia in the early 1970s. Her family, part of the minority Pnong ethnic group and living in abject poverty, abandoned her at an early age. Bouncing between caretakers during her prepubescent years, Mam faced discrimination on the basis of her ethnic heritage. At the age of 15, she was sold into sex slavery by a man claiming to be her grandfather. Mam was subsequently raped and tortured on a regular basis and witnessed firsthand the murder of one of her close friends at the brothel where she was forced to work.

Last Monday night, the Veritas Forum at Columbia hosted a discussion to shed light on the plight of women like Mam. The featured guests of the evening were Nicholas Kristof, a two-time Pulitzer Prize-winning author and columnist for the New York Times, and Kaign Christy, a legal professional and director of operations for Southeast Asia at the International Justice Mission. Moderating the event was Mirta Ojito, a Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist and professor at Columbia's Journalism School. As the speakers made clear, Mam's sad story is quite common. The United Nations estimates that between 700,000 and 2 million women are trafficked across

international borders and forced into prostitution or servitude every year. Of course, these numbers do not even include those women who are sold into slavery within their own countries. There is documentation of girls as young as 5 being forced into brothels, and many of them never live past their 20s after succumbing to HIV/AIDS.

“THE GREATEST UNEXPLOITED RESOURCE IN THE WORLD IS ITS WOMEN.”

Christy, who began Monday night's proceedings, is currently working to combat this global phenomenon through his work with the IJM. The organization has only been operating for 13 years but already has a presence in 10 countries worldwide. For Christy and the IJM, the key to solving the problem of human trafficking and sex slavery is in effectively enforcing laws that are already on the books in much of the world. To that end, IJM primarily works with foreign nationals operating within their own countries, as well as with local law enforcement agencies, to provide relief for victims, hold perpetrators responsible, and make structural changes to, in

Christy's words, “ensure that justice systems protect the poor from oppression and violence.”

Kristof took the stage next and framed his talk around the notion that the central moral issue of the 21st century will be that of women's liberation and empowerment around the world, likening the oppression of women today to slavery in the 19th century and totalitarianism in the 20th. Having written about human rights abuses on the Op-Ed page of the New York Times for eight years and with a new book out (“Half the Sky: Turning Oppression into Opportunity for Women Worldwide”), Kristof was warmly received by the audience. Peppering his speech with a series of anecdotes about his world travels on journalistic assignments, Kristof emphasized both the moral and pragmatic dimensions of the subjugation of women. “The greatest unexploited resource in the world,” Kristof told the audience, “is its women.” Returning to the main theme of the evening, Kristof emphasized the importance of fighting sex slavery and providing women with economic and educational opportunities in order to equalize their social standing with men throughout the world.

Throughout the evening, the two speakers used compelling anecdotes to emphasize the importance of seeing cruelty and oppression firsthand to motivate them to carry out their work. While these vignettes were emotionally gripping, they also framed a discussion that shied away from more contentious ethical issues. Problems such as the appropriate role for Westerners in activism in underdeveloped countries, the importance of cultural context, and the role of poverty in shaping the conditions that make sex trafficking a viable economic option were not thoroughly explored. Occasionally, these issues were addressed via Ojito's questions or the audience's articulated concerns. Kristof talked about the malleability of cultural norms, and both he and Christy agreed that even seemingly minor structural changes can have profound cultural impacts. Christy mentioned poverty as a motivating factor for brothel owners and human traffickers, but also pointed out that countries in worse economic conditions than Cambodia have had much better records in terms of sex slavery. And while they did speak of the United States and Latin America when prompted by questions, both Christy's and Kristof's expertise on the sex trade seemed to be geographically limited to Southeast Asia.

Still, the discussion provided encouragement for those looking to take a proactive stance against human trafficking and sex slavery. Christy asked the audience to “look at what you have in your hands,” to use what skills and expertise are at their disposal to fight sex slavery, just as he put his legal knowledge to work at the IJM. Recalling Mam, who was able to escape her brothel and start an NGO providing care to former sex slaves, Kristof said that his work was “profoundly enriching, not a burden at all,” and attested that every time he returns to Cambodia or another country plagued by sex slavery, his spirits are lifted when he sees the courage of those who stand up against it. ●



(More Than A) Music Marathon

the eye interviews joanne abbot green

BY ZACH DYER

PHOTO COURTESY OF JOANNE ABBOT GREEN

The College Music Journal Music Marathon & Film Festival, now in its 29th year, is by far the largest music event in the city. In a few weeks, thousands of artists and fans will descend on New York to participate in all that the event has to offer. The Eye sits down with founder Joanne Abbot Green to discuss her role as parent to the Marathon and her place in the one musical world where money isn't a concern.

What has your role been in CMJ from its beginnings until now?

I joined CMJ in 1983. Bobby Haber founded CMJ in 1978, and we met and discussed this little event that he had conceived of as a small conference of less than 100 people that started in 1981. When I came in, in 1983, I renamed the event CMJ Music Marathon, and I have been executive producing the event since that point. ... I am now a co-owner of the company as well—Bobby and I co-own CMJ together.

“IT SEEMS THAT NEW YORK NOW FEEDS OFF THE ENERGY OF CMJ.”

What was the marathon supposed to accomplish? What was your mission for it?

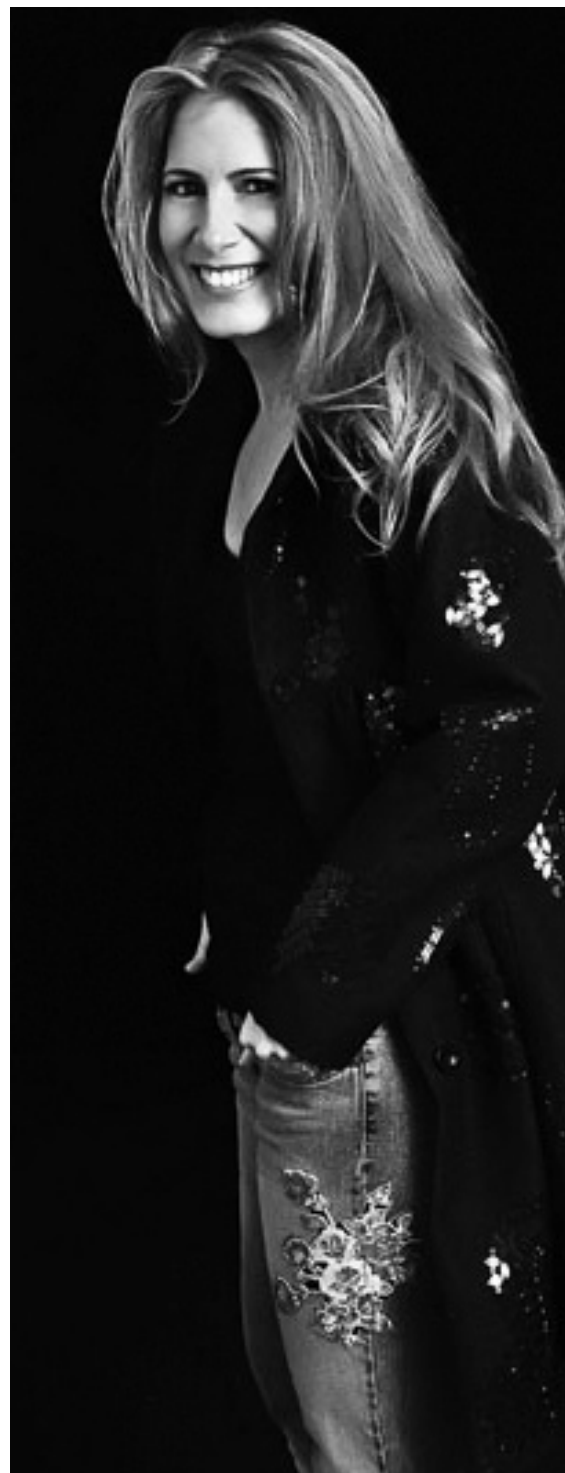
Well, it actually began as a way to bring college radio subscribers together with record companies, and at that time CMJ was strictly serving college radio stations across the country and the musicians who were seeking airplay on them. It was obviously a time before the Internet, and CMJ was the convention, as we called it back then, that those two groups could communicate in. It began as a business seminar, and it grew in the late '80s and early '90s into the festival, broadening its mission to present some of the world's best new music to fans as opposed to just industry folks in New York and around the world.

At this point it's considered New York City's largest music event. It has an estimated attendance of 25,000 concertgoers in 75-plus venues across the city over five days and nights. So what started at a really tiny business conference has just exploded.

But most music events never last this long.

I think the city itself provides such a special backdrop for the event. It's the most cosmopolitan

city—it's edgy and advanced, and the festival really feeds off of that energy. And it seems that New York now feeds off the energy of CMJ. It's grown so much that it has become inextricably a part of the city, and I think that that's a strong part of it. I think because Bobby and I have grown this event together as a team it really works. Our focus on finding the best new innovative music has truly never wavered. We've been very invested in that. ... I kind of view it as looking at a prism—you view the facts that are there, but to get it, you have to go beyond that. And that's the way we go about this—we really push ourselves. We have become involved in Broadway: for example, we brought “Spring



Awakening” and Duncan Sheik to perform at CMJ last year. ... We have become a rather international destination as well. We had something like 40 countries worldwide apply to CMJ. Twenty percent of the bands apply from international territories and about the same percent end up performing. I think that we've really stretched CMJ to its limits, and we are always seeking new types of involvements. We haven't really tried to reinvent the event, but rather, seen how we can apply every area to it.

But I'm sure as the exec for this event you must have to think about the financial aspect to keep everything up and going.

Well, certainly the economy this year is interesting. But honestly, Bobby and I have a pact about this. The event really is a child of ours, and, like a child, we leave no room for failure as far as letting it go. We are constantly feeding the event and nurturing and nourishing it, and with that comes other people's support.

So no problems getting sponsors?

We're solid in the way that we are doing business. People look to these events because they do really need them. We provide so much as part of this event, between our daytime panels ... we have around 65 panels that focus on the music industry and culture and politics and art and film and they are all really mentoring sessions. We have over 400 panelists and moderators that are involved. We have a CLE [Continuing Legal Education] program that we have partnered with the New York State Bar Association that has become very popular. We have attorneys attending that one day for five or six panels that focus on the legal issues that are facing the industry. We have keynote speakers that talk about absolutely everything. Obviously, our showcases at night and our film festivals are a huge attraction. There is so much that we do and that we offer that it becomes a destination for people to learn about what is going on in this music industry of ours and the turmoil that it has been in.

And has CMJ been this involved in the industry from the start, or is it a more recent development?

We had several panels back then, and as the years progressed, we became more focused on the culture and politics of the industry. In 1992 we had Reverend Jesse Jackson as our keynote speaker three days before the presidential election. And that really got us more involved in politics. Last year, CNN became very involved and broadcast from there as well. There has been so many progressions each year with the festival and so many different directions we have gone in, but even though the concerts seem to be one of the biggest attractions now, the panels and the discussions are really at the root of things and they have always been there. ●

THE EYE ABROAD

‘Britain’s Other Eye’

adjusting to life in edinburgh

BY CARLA VASS

Before I came to Edinburgh, Scotland, I had all different notions and plans and fantasies about what it was going to be like. You know the ones I mean. I was going to meet the coolest people ever, never get bored, succeed in all my classes, and adjust to a new culture without any trouble at all.

Months later, I am sitting in my “flat”—the small studio that is going to be my home for the next year. I’ve only been in Edinburgh for a week or so, and I’m still a bit jet-lagged and disoriented. I have travelled a bit in my lifetime, but this is my first time in Scotland, and my first time living on my own. My preconceptions of what Edinburgh (for the record pronounced “Edin-burr-oh”) would be like are slowly dissolving as I discover the city for myself.

Edinburgh is gorgeous, full of that uncanny mix of old and new that one cannot find anywhere in the States. In America, people wonder at a 19th-

century building. Here, you can have a drink in a pub that’s been around since the 1600s. And the history isn’t limited to battle sites or museums. I ate at a restaurant yesterday that used to be an insane asylum, and I had coffee where they once performed public hangings. Even the little flat my mother and I rented for the week overlooks a graveyard famous for the loyalty of one of its inhabitant’s dogs, a Sheltie named Bobby. Legend has it the dog sat at his master’s grave for 14 years after the owner died. Of course, being American, one of my favorite bits of living history is to have coffee and snacks in the shop where J.K. Rowling wrote most of “Harry Potter.”

Along with being five hours ahead in time, Edinburgh also seems to be several months ahead in terms of weather. My first day here was cold and gray, the kind of day one might encounter in November in New York, and for the first time I understood the Scots’ reputation for copious whiskey-drinking. Now that the weather has been better, people treat every sunny day as if it might be the last (which it very well might be). They park

themselves outside of pubs, drinking from noon until dusk, soaking up every last ray of sunshine.

Now, I know people say that New York is a great city for walking, but here you don’t need to worry much about being mowed down by a bike messenger or aggressive taxi. You do, however, need to remember to look right instead of left when crossing the road. I can never think of which way the traffic is coming, so I’ve taken to looking each way about three or four times. I’ve almost been run over twice now.

I am living right near the city center, and as I exit my building I can meander along the high street, home to various little shops and restaurants. Then, I carry on over to the Royal Mile, which houses the old Parliament building and a lovely cathedral. At the very end of the long street is Holyrood Palace, where the Queen stays when she comes to visit. If I’m feeling really adventurous, I can hike up to Arthur’s Seat, a mountain formed from volcanic rock, which is located close to the Royal Mile.

I ATE AT A RESTAURANT YESTERDAY THAT USED TO BE AN INSANE ASYLUM.

Last week was wonderful and exciting. Then, on Sunday, my mom left, after staying with me the first week. Suddenly, I had to fill all those hours that I’d previously spent unpacking, exploring, and joking around. Here is the one thing that no one can really convey about studying abroad until you’ve experienced it yourself: the excruciating loneliness. I’m sure it’s easier for some people, but I felt it to my very core. I remember learning in high school that human beings need water, food, shelter, and companionship in order to survive. I questioned the idea of companionship, but now I understand it.

I had the company of a good friend who already goes here. But no one wants to be the desperate, tag-along friend. I needed to find my own people, and I was suddenly convinced that it would never happen. I tried to think back to every new experience I’ve had: starting college, starting high school. I could vaguely recall feeling exactly the same way, but though this was somewhat reassuring, I was still convinced that this would be the time that I would never meet anyone. And then, even as I was meeting people, I was worried they wouldn’t like me.

The feeling was at its worst the first three days. And then, at all those orientation events that I dragged myself to, I did meet new people. I went to the zoo, went on tours, joined the Debating Society and the Cocktail Appreciation Society. Slowly, the feeling began to subside. Even now, it’s not completely gone. But it’s getting better. Because here’s the thing: no matter how much you vow that you’ll never make stupid comments or be stumped for conversation while abroad, it turns out you’re the same person you were before when at home. And since I’ll be living in a different time zone for the next months, maybe having that security going in is one of the greatest advantages you can have. ●



Rosenthal: A Retrospective

A PROFESSOR LOOKS BACK ON FOUR DECADES AT COLUMBIA

INTERVIEW BY RAPHAEL POPE-SUSSMAN • PHOTOS BY ALYSSA RAPP AND COURTESY OF MICHAEL ROSENTHAL



PROFESSOR MICHAEL ROSENTHAL has spent more than four decades studying, teaching, and (in his words) “deaning” at Columbia. This fall marks the beginning of his final year here, as he will retire at the end of the spring semester. Rosenthal, who received his doctorate from Columbia in 1967, began his career as an instructor in the English department. From 1969 to 1971, he was an assistant professor. Then, in 1972, he left the classroom to become associate dean of Columbia College, a title he held for almost 20 years. In 1989, he returned to the English department. More recently, Rosenthal has served as the Roberta and William Campbell Professor in the Teaching of Literature Humanities. He also is the author of three books, the most recent of which, “Nicholas Miraculous,” is a biography of former Columbia President Nicholas Murray Butler.

In an interview with *The Eye* in his book-filled office in Philosophy Hall, Rosenthal discusses 40 years of Columbia, his love for the Core Curriculum, and his “deadly” jump shot.

Why spend your entire career at Columbia?

The freedom of an urban environment is really what appeals to me. Although, because I grew up in New York, I didn't want to go to school here. But once I came back to graduate school, I began to feel this really was my mature home.

And that's been wonderful. To me, a community that is entirely academic is suffocating, and so I delight in the fact that one has one's academic environment here, but then you go five blocks away and you're in another world. That, to me, is life-giving. I think Columbia is very much a life-giving place, which is why I find it so attractive. And why I think when it works for students—which it doesn't always do—but when it does, it really works in serious ways.

I mean, you know, the best thing about having gone to Harvard is that one doesn't have to worry about not having gone to Harvard. I never found anyone—and this can't be true—but all the people I knew were not particularly shaped by Harvard in any sort of way. And that's not true of Columbia kids. I think Columbia students, because of the curriculum, because of the city or whatever, when it works on them it really does give them something, it turns them into something interesting. I don't think Harvard does that.

You went from instructor to associate dean of Columbia College in four years, then later returned to the English department as a professor. Has what you've called this “strange, backwards career” affected your perspective on Columbia as an institution?

Well, I think it did. First of all, I liked what I call my “deanly life.” It's fascinating to see how institutions work, and where the power is and how one negotiates all these things. But since the normal trajectory is to teach, until somehow, your ambitions for a certain kind of power or your boredom of teaching leads you to become a dean, I think it's sort of life-giving to begin deaning and then to decide in a fully conscious way that what one would really like to do is to return to teaching and to writing and to being with students.

So I think my returning to the classroom, having been a dean, was invaluable to me as a means of understanding what the institution is about.

I think Columbia faculty tend to live really fairly particular lives in departments. Departments are really what run the institution, not the divisions. And so you only learn essentially the affairs of the department. ... You don't really have a sense of what the whole thing is doing. When I became a dean, I didn't know anything about the college. I knew about the English department. So learning about the college was extraordinary and then learning about the institution. So who knows how it in any particular way affected my teaching, but I think it gave me a perspective on the University that I like to think was useful to the students ... when I returned to teaching.

I'M TOLD THAT NOT ALL COLUMBIA STUDENTS COME HERE KNOWING THERE IS A CORE CURRICULUM, WHICH I FIND ASTONISHING.

How has Columbia changed in your time here?

Clearly, the fundamental change was the admission of women, which turned the place entirely into a more interesting, vibrant, vital, funny, terrific place. And so half the students that were admitted almost immediately were women, and that clearly changed the whole ambience and nature of the place.

People always ask me, “Are the students now much smarter than the students were?” Because now there are 25,000 people that apply, so they statistically have to be, and I say, “No, they're really quite different.” But it's not clear to me, you know, they're more sophisticated, they're more affluent, they obviously have all sorts of skills dealing with

technology. But they're not as committed to books as a means of understanding the world as they were when I first got here. And you can lament that, but I think that's just the reality of things.

When I was first teaching, if one mentioned Philip Roth or Norman Mailer or whatever, there would be kids whose eyes would light up, who would have read them, or would go and read them.

Now if you mention those things, people just look at you as if, “Who are those people?” With some exceptions, obviously.

Book culture, which was really so much a part of the Columbia spirit, has diminished. Other things have taken their place. That, to me, is a huge change.

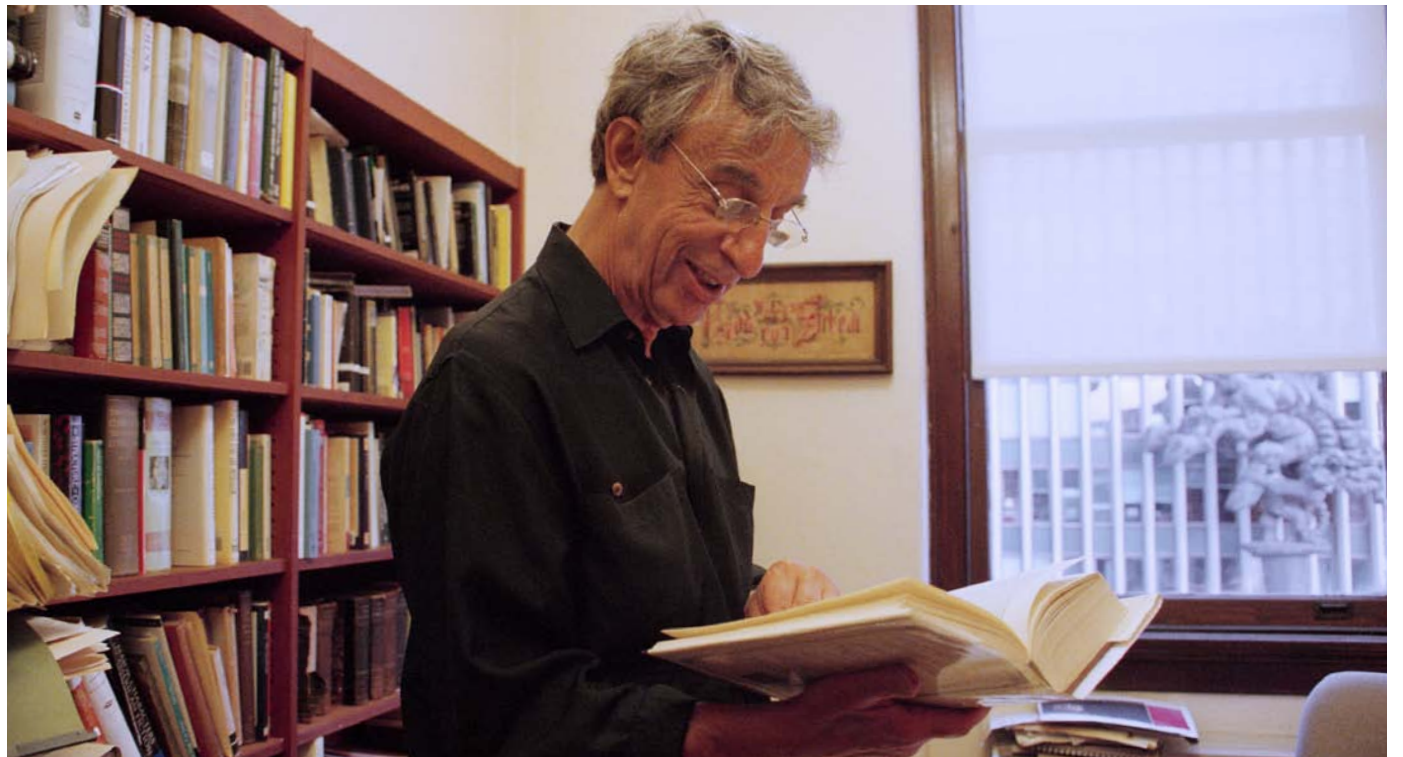
Kids are much more affluent now. More kids from prep schools. That has both a good and a bad effect on the place.

The whole nature of early decision has changed the profile of applicants, in ways that are not always salubrious. ... The downside of early decisionism is that people who know about early decision are people who tend to be more affluent, who don't need to weigh scholarship offers. And so it's a different profile of kids.

And what the consequence is—though I think the University doesn't want to talk about it—that the financial aid bill is kept under control. Now, on the one hand, that's fine, because money is money. And you have to look to the budget. On the other hand, that's not so fine. So that's a concern.

You're a big advocate of the Core Curriculum. What do you find so appealing about the Core?

I think the curriculum of Columbia College is a big piece of what's great about Columbia College. To read Homer and to read Aeschylus and to read Dante and Boccaccio—these are major formative intellectual, and even emotional, experiences. So I think that Columbia students are extraordinarily lucky, although I'm told that not all Columbia students come here knowing there is a Core Curriculum, which I find astonishing. But assuming they have chosen to come here because of the Core Curriculum, I think it's a great choice, and I



think they emerge with all sorts of valuable things that occur. Ways of thinking, experiences with great literature, dealing with themselves as they confront difficult texts. It's all wonderful—when it works. And I have no illusions that every single Core section is brilliantly taught. But I think by and large most of them do succeed. So I think the Core is terrific.

And I think it's a tribute to Columbia that it hasn't turned away from it. And having heard Dean Moody-Adams talk about it, I'm confident that it will go on.

Of course, it's not true that the faculty necessarily supports the idea of the Core. The people who are the most passionate are the alumni. And I think when people think about, "Well, we don't need it"—it's a very expensive operation to have 60 sections of Humanities, 60 sections of CC—I think it's the terror of the alumni unleashed on the school that leads them to put aside financial exigencies and maintain what is, intellectually, a superb curriculum.

So the curriculum at Columbia I think is marvelous. That doesn't mean that Columbia College students are always well served in services. In my deanly years, that was of enormous frustration for me. Columbia is probably the only major institution—undergraduate college—in which the president once raised the issue of whether Columbia should be an undergraduate college or just a university. This was Barnard, not President Butler. Though when Butler became president in 1902, he made this extraordinarily prescient statement that "in the long run, the great research universities will be those that take best care of their undergraduates." And I think that's proved to be correct. Butler never really believed it. He thought that undergraduates were simply there as fillers to go into the graduate faculties.

So the college has always been—in spite of the various rhetoric articulated by presidents—the undergraduate college has always been seen as something less central to the institution than it should be. And that's too bad.

Why do you choose to teach Lit Hum?

It's a great learning experience for the professor. It seems to me that professors of literature ought to be thrilled to teach these books. I understand that they're not of immediate professional advantage, and it is four hours a week, as opposed to two hours a week. But how can you not want to teach these books? These are extraordinary books. And I read them every year. And one learns things, one sees the excitement that students have. So it's actually disturbing that more faculty don't choose to do it—they have to be coerced to some extent, which I think is too bad. But if you're going to spend your life in literature, why wouldn't you want to teach Aeschylus, Shakespeare, Sophocles, Dostoyevsky, etc., etc.? To me, that's what teaching is all about: it's smart students and rich, complicated, wonderful texts. So I do it with great pleasure.

When I was in the dean's office, I had a vision of an ideal breakdown of instructor-level. There would be one-third senior faculty, one-third full-time junior faculty, and one-third graduate students. Now I never achieved that, but that was always my goal, it seemed like a nice thing. But it's nothing like that anymore, which I think is too bad. It's not to say that senior faculty ... are better than graduate students, but I think the commitment



on the part of a department to putting senior faculty into the Core says something to the students. I wish there were more of that.

What about the Global Core?

If you can awaken students' sensibilities to other cultures and so on, that's great. I don't buy the notion that the Core is somehow crippled by being dead European males—I think that's all preposterous. Every culture has its sacred texts which are read by educated people and by artists and by writers and poets, and those are books people should

I DON'T BUY THE NOTION THAT THE CORE IS SOMEHOW CRIPPLED BY BEING DEAD EUROPEAN MALES—I THINK THAT'S ALL PREPOSTEROUS.

familiarize themselves with. Should there be other options in the curriculum? Sure, and there are—Asian humanities and Latin-American humanities. All that seems to speak to the proper embrace. But do I feel there is something amiss with the Core as it's currently constituted? No, I don't. You know, I'm kind of old-fashioned in those ways.

You were involved in the decision to go coed. Twenty-five years on, how do you think it's turned out?

One of my frustrations now about the whole process by which Columbia became coed is that the dean of the college at the time was Arnold Colclery, who was an economist who had come from Amherst. ... Arnold was really the motivating force behind getting all the energy started for coeducation among the students and the faculty, with Roger Lehecka, and I was involved in that as well. And the official record now in "Stand, Columbia," literally doesn't mention Arnold's name, as if he were not involved whatsoever, and attributes everything to the decision of the president—which was clearly an important decision. But I've always felt that that was a totally unfair historical record. So that doesn't speak to the joys of coeducation, but it does speak to the reality that the man who in my mind was very much involved in making it happen gets no credit at all.

It was a fundamental moment in the college's life. And I think it's fair to say we worked very hard in making it work successfully, and I think we succeeded. Of course coming at the end of every other school in the world, we had lots of things to consult. But I think we actually avoided all the problems that other places encountered. And the very first year was something like 43 percent women. There were people who questioned the sincerity—or interest—in admitting women on a full and equal basis, which was I think crazy.

There were those who felt we were doing it only



to make the place more attractive to men, which is really an obscene notion. It was more attractive to men, but also we wanted women because we wanted women. To go into a classroom where there are 20 men and to go into a classroom where there are 10 men and 10 women is simply a different experience. When we said we were going to admit women, I think we had one letter from an alumnus protesting. And there were people who thought, well football would be affected. But basically everybody was enthusiastic, and it's been great ever since.

WOULD COLUMBIA HAVE BEEN COLUMBIA WITHOUT BUTLER? IT WAS QUITE CLEAR THAT IT WOULDN'T, THAT BUTLER SOLD COLUMBIA. HE HAD A VISION THAT COLUMBIA WOULD, IN FACT, BE THE GREAT INSTITUTION IN AMERICA.

What are your thoughts about the effect coeducation has had on Barnard?

One of the reasons that various presidents did not want Columbia to admit women was the thought that it would be seen to be destructive to Barnard. I think it is probably true that the first couple of years, the Barnard admissions pool probably suffered somewhat. But now Barnard is a full, thriving, happy place. I think that President Sovern said on the record that he didn't want to be known as the "Butcher of Barnard." And I think the reality is that Columbia admitting women did not destroy Barnard. In fact, I think in some ways it made Barnard sharpen its definition of what it was and what kind of school it was for women. So the notion that this was a bad thing simply did not work out, thankfully. And it was great for Columbia.

It was a long, tricky business. There was some concern that Columbia wanted to find some arrangement short of coeducation, to give the illusion of coeducation without actually achieving it. Because

there were various gimmicks about, you know, if Columbia students took CC and if Barnard changed its curriculum in some ways, would that give the illusion, statistically, of being at a coeducational school.

You spent more than 10 years on "Nicholas Miraculous." What compelled you to stick with it all that time?

I like to finish what I start. And by the time I am thoroughly overwhelmed I'm already into it. And he was fascinating. It was not just Butler, but it was Butler and America and the history of higher education—all those things coming together. I was driven on by curiosity, by a sense that I had to finish this. And every year that you put into it is another year and another reason not to give up. So I just—I wanted to get it right. And I suspect there won't be too many other people who will try and do this. I just had to finish "Nicholas Miraculous."

But why Butler in particular?

He was fascinating as a representative of a distinctly American institution, who came to power at the same time that America came to power. And so there was clearly that parallel—the story of Butler was the story of American higher education, which is a piece of American power and prestige. And so, in following Butler's life, I felt I was following and learning about larger currents in the culture. You know, the great American presidents, Butler and Eliot, were like the great American entrepreneurs. And they were building empires. And Butler was a fascinating, self-advertising genius. And I found that to be symptomatic of how you sell things and how you sell the culture and how you sell the country. And he wasn't just a college president. He was the president of the Carnegie Endowment, he was involved in politics, he ran for the Republican nomination in 1920, he got the Nobel Peace Prize—God save us.

So it was all those features, it was endless stuff there. He might have been stuffy and was indeed stuffy and pompous. But the story of Butler I thought was interesting, fascinating.

What vestiges of Butler's tenure can you see at Columbia today?

The funny position of the college is in part a legacy of Butler. But, you know, Columbia was not destined to be a great research university. When I began the book, that was the question that plagued me: would Columbia have been Columbia without Butler? And as I got into it, it was quite clear that it wouldn't, that

Butler sold Columbia, he had a vision that Columbia would, in fact, be the great institution in America.

And he likened it to the Acropolis. Now that's, on the one hand, absurd. On the other hand, if you have a vision like that, it animates the place. And so Butler was—with all of the preposterous claims he made for the institution—those claims actually helped make Columbia a great place. And so, NYU has sort of recently come to boil. But for years, NYU was simply a place that no one paid attention to. And there was no reason on earth why Columbia should have been any different, except that Butler somehow drove it and himself, and made it what it is. The very fact that we're all here, that we understand that Columbia is a great place, with all of its problems and deficiencies, is absolutely a tribute to Butler.

What are your thoughts about retirement?

I always thought that retirement ought to be a conscious choice and not simply a playing out of the string until people beg you to leave. I see retirement as leaving at more or less the top of my game. It occurred to me that with the retirement of professors Kroeber and Rosenberg, I had become the oldest member of the department, and since I remember when I was more or less the youngest, that, I thought, was not a good sign. One should leave when one can still do other things. So what would I like to do? I would like to do different kinds of writing. I'd like to travel at times not in the summer. The problem with an academic life is that you never get to travel in the fall. And just explore. Do I have a set of plans? No, I don't. Is that sort of scary? Indeed, it is. But the books we read talk about having courage and being willing to confront the unknown, adventure, all that. I think that's the way to do it.

And you leave Columbia behind optimistic about its future?

Columbia is a great, wonderful place, and it enriched my life enormously. And I think the expansion into Manhattanville is absolutely critical—whether the economics of the next two decades or so are going to permit Columbia to have its expansion. Columbia will always be one of the few great institutions in the world. And it deserves that. The problem with the future now is money.

Columbia needs to expand, it needs more science facilities, it needs to take advantage of artistic things in the city. Universities either grow or they die—that really is true. And Columbia has not grown in a long time.

We've heard you're a crackshot on the basketball court. Are the rumors true?

This is all true. Deadly, deadly is the answer. My shooting is still fabulous. I rarely miss. The problem is that I grew up in an era of two-handed set shots. The problem is whether I wish to make my two-handed set shots from three-point range, but in the process incur humiliation in doing so, or to try my one-handed jump shots from beyond my range, as I really didn't grow up doing. Though I have a deadly one-handed jump shot as well.

But also, basketball, it turns out, is a sport where quickness is of some urgency. And when I last played a former student of mine, I found that I was rooted—not unlike a tree—to the ground, as he danced his way around me. And I thought that was chastening. But my shooting is still as great as ever. ■

WHAT DO YOU DO WITH AN MFA IN WRITING?

columbia writing chair binnie kirshenbaum might know

BY YIN YIN LU

PHOTO COURTESY OF MARION ETTLINGER

The question of whether or not creative writing can be taught in a classroom is as contentious and unanswerable as “What came first, the chicken or the egg?” MFA writing programs have always incited criticism, especially recently—most notably in Mark McGurl’s “The Program Era,” which was released in April. As Louis Menand notes in his New Yorker review of the book, McGurl’s underlying message is that “teaching creative writing should always be a scandal.”

McGurl’s attack is no surprise, given the economic purgatory we’re in. Beyond the issue of whether “creativity” can be taught lies an even greater one: the practicality of getting a non-professional, non-academic degree. Just last week, The Eye’s lead story questioned the utility of graduate school—and if toiling away for six years to get a PhD in literature or mathematics doesn’t guarantee a job, why should anyone bother investing tens of thousands of dollars to obtain an MFA in fiction or poetry?

Binnie Kirshenbaum, the chair of Columbia’s graduate writing program, may have a convincing answer. According to her, as many people as ever are enrolling in MFA programs because “the state of the economy and getting an MFA are mutually exclusive. They have no bearing on one another.”

Peter Barrett, a second-year fiction student in the program, goes further by claiming that writers are actually “well-suited” to the recession: “The economic climate caught up to us. Literary fiction has been a dying field for a long, long time.”

And Barrett and Kirshenbaum agree not only that creative writing can be taught, but also that MFA programs are effective in doing so. “It’s no different than the study of any art form,” Kirshenbaum says. “We look at the work done and ask good questions with no easy answers; we make comments, suggestions. We have a conversation. We read, and we scrutinize what we’ve read. We dare each other, and the work improves.”

The frequency of the word “we” in Kirshenbaum’s response is significant—it’s the underlying reason why MFA programs are so appealing. By nature, writing is an isolating activity; writers need a community to stay motivated and sane. This community, of course, consists of both

students and faculty. “I’ve learned a whole lot,” says Kirshenbaum, who has been teaching at Columbia for 11 years. “Just the atmosphere—being around people who are excited about what they’re doing ... there’s always invigorating conversation.”

Barrett’s reasons for applying for an MFA in the first place are grounded in the program’s communal nature as well. “The MFA is like an extended residency in that you have a space and a time to do your work,” he explains. “It creates a structure where it’s socially acceptable to pursue your art. This doesn’t match up with the reality of the publishing world.”

Kirshenbaum and Barrett also concur that Columbia’s MFA program possesses characteristics that make it superior to most others. “It’s much more rigorous,” says Kirshenbaum. “Students that come to Columbia take far more classes ... We don’t just hand out a degree. We have all these special seminars and lectures that are geared toward teaching reading the way a writer would read.” The preponderance of other MFA writing programs are, as Barrett notes, “very workshop-heavy.” But only three workshops total are required at Columbia; the two years of coursework are mostly focused upon “craft-oriented lectures and seminars,” he says.

“THE STATE OF THE ECONOMY AND GETTING AN MFA ARE MUTUALLY EXCLUSIVE.”

And then there’s the fact that Columbia is located in America’s literary capital. Not surprisingly, many members of the program’s faculty work in publishing. “We have a foot in the door of the publishing world,” Barrett says. “This is reflected in the number of students who have gotten book deals.”

But those students are the exception rather than the rule. The book market has always been cutthroat, and now, with bookstores and publishing houses crumbling left and right, the future of literature seems bleaker than ever. The potential death of fiction was even the topic of a panel at this year’s Brooklyn Book Festival, which featured three contemporary novelists: T Cooper, Elizabeth Nunez, and Keith Gessen. Cooper immediately began the discussion by quoting Derek Strauss,



one of her friends: “People have been trying to send fiction to the sick room for fifty years.” Later, in a moment of impassioned frustration, Nunez declared, “I think I’m a good writer. But nobody’s buying the books.”

So is there hope for MFA graduates, aspiring writers who haven’t even gotten a toe in the publishing door? Strangely enough, the answer is yes. Although huge commercial companies like Random House and HarperCollins are, as Barrett explains, “turning away from literary fiction because it’s no longer economically viable for their model,” a lot of smaller presses like Graywolf, Turtle Books, and Akashic are opening up. According to Cooper, these presses are uniquely positioned: “They publish less books, and publish better. They know how to select products and where to send them,” he says.

It’s a reciprocal relationship. Small presses care about each and every one of their books, and their editors have a close relationship with their authors, whom they don’t view as commodities. They ensure not only that fiction writers will continue to be published, but also that they will be “well-published,” as Kirshenbaum puts it.

Would-be Jonathan Safran Foers can also try turning to the Internet. But Kirshenbaum, at least, is skeptical about resorting to this kind of self-publishing. As she says, it hasn’t been “fully explored or exploited yet ... It’s exciting, but I don’t think it’s quite found its professional level.” Then again, who knows—maybe “myuselessthis.com,” a MFA grad’s bildungsroman, might end up surpassing fanfiction.net in popularity sooner than we think. ●



Kristina Budelis

FLAVOR OF THE WEEK

fresh and inventive looks hit the runway

BY JAMES DEWILLE

For many people both on and off Columbia's campus, Fashion Week is less than a blip on the radar. These people are apprehensive, confused, or even hostile towards the pomp of the fashion world—and the fashion world, in turn, may seem callously condescending to those outside it. But the changes occurring on runways this season might just show that both sides want some reconciliation.

Many designers are shifting focus and direction, changing their expected aesthetic and making their collections more relatable to those who usually might not be interested in high fashion. These shifts maintain the high standards that have kept some designers and their wares on the A-list for years even as they allow those designers to innovate. Aesthetic changes and the designer teams behind them are both a driving force behind and a result of the changing relationship between fashion and the world outside of it.

For his Spring 2010 collection, Alexander Wang, an industry darling known for his rock-girl-rough wares, seemed to have moved towards the all-American athletic—some may even say avant-collegiate. Perforated leather and sexy black mesh were replaced by football uniform-inspired sweatshirt material and khakis.

Other designers were changing course as well. Another crowd favorite, Charlotte Ronson, eschewed last season's slashed fabric and black

severity for a pink-and-gray '80s exercise look. Meanwhile, Rodarte strayed from their futurist aesthetic to a swampy slew of jungle women, clad in tattered, raggedy fabrics that, through it all, showed expert handling and skill.

Although these new directions may not please every fashion insider, they nevertheless show direction—and confidently, at that. While Wang's devotees may still cling to the studded black pants and motorcycle jackets of the past, they should remember that aesthetics can and should change. Sometimes a designer can express more by switching things up than by digging a deep, dark pigeonhole. These somewhat radical aesthetic changes also reflect a reaching-out on the part of designers, an attempt to keep things fresh and catch the eyes of those who might normally give a Rodarte dress a raised eyebrow instead of a second glance.

ACCESSIBLE CLOTHING DOESN'T NECESSARILY TRANSLATE INTO A LACK OF INSPIRATION OR A COP-OUT ON THE DESIGN END.

Wang's evolution, like that of many designers across this season's Fashion Week, tells us that designers still can and will make what they want. But they're also thinking of their audience—be it the ferocious editors perched at the edge of the

runway or more low-key weekend shopaholics—without pandering, and this is apparent in the quality of the clothing and the careful way in which these designers are setting a new course. It suggests that in terms of collections, most designers have something to say beyond making their clothes marketable—though that desire is factoring into the equation now more than ever.

Fashion has always straddled the line between art and function, between what's wearable and what's just kooky. For example, Alexander Herchovich closed his show this season with wildly colored dresses armed with massive shoulder flourishes that dwarfed the model heads between them. Giant birdcage skirts also arched around a few tiny waists. A girl who actually purchased these pieces would have to give her legs as well as her credit card a workout—no one's taking a seat in a boxy hoop miniskirt. But most of these ensembles aren't destined for a boutique on Howard Street—like many designers, Herchovich has sent out a few looks that are never even intended to make it to the stores. Instead, they're simply part of the spectacle of the runway.

Sometimes, this kind of spectacle bubble that is a part of fashion becomes its own black hole. The addictive shine of Fashion Week can almost overshadow the clothes themselves. Some attendees seem more focused on the glamour, glitz and free basil-infused cocktails than what's stomping down the runway. Crowded and debauchorous after-parties can also take focus from the shows for which they're playing end credits.

Still, there is a purpose to the mayhem, and the distance between the world of fashion and the real world is not as far as one may think. While the parties may throb on, the clothes and the work that went into their construction remains. Even the fashion-averse should take note of this, especially because designers are giving their collections a fresh accessibility while maintaining a creative edge and a strong voice this season. While Alexander Herchovich sent out dramatically

football-padded maidens that may never make it off the runway, he also premiered some beautifully constructed peach satin pants and boxy short-sleeve tops that most definitely will.

Similarly, while the quiet quirk of Wang's game-ready girls won't work for most shoppers, some of his pieces, like a richly roasted brown leather coat, can find a place on anyone's shoulders. Other designers also turned out wearable looks that didn't detract from their vision. Ronson's ladies, especially those in gray, acid-washed jeans and shorts, plaid shirts and army jackets, didn't lose a sense of Ronson herself, though the looks themselves would do just as well on College Walk as the catwalk. Philosophy's layered, undeniably optimistic looks are also worth noting. They might not turn heads on the street, but their simplicity speaks for itself. Anyone, including those who are only confused by the idea of a runway show, can "get" these clothes. This fall's Fashion Week proved that what designers show does not have to be shocking and eccentric to be good. Accessible clothing doesn't necessarily translate into a lack of inspiration or cop out on the design end.

The fashion industry itself is also making more of an effort to get the attention of the uninitiated. During the first-ever Fashion's Night Out, a one-night event with joint manifestations from London to Tokyo, some 700 stores across New York City stayed open late and fueled shoppers with freebies, blaring music, champagne, and h'or dourves. Everyone and anyone was invited, giving the whole city a taste of the exclusive reveling usually reserved for fashion's insiders. On top of that, recent films like "Valentino: The Last Emperor" and the devilishly good "The September Issue" have given unfamiliar audiences an inside look into the workings of the fashion world.

FASHION HAS ALWAYS STRADDLED THE LINE BETWEEN ART AND FUNCTION.

It seems that fashion is finding a new place for itself in the hearts and minds those who previously may have believed that fashion was superficial and superfluously sealed off. In its opening weekend, "The September Issue" grossed over \$240,000 from a mere six theaters, making it the fifth largest debut for a documentary ever according to indieWIRE. If this, and the crowds who flocked to Bergdorf's for Fashion's Night Out, are any indication, many people are genuinely curious about and interested in the fashion world. Meanwhile, designers like Wang and Ronson have kept larger audiences in mind while maintaining their own voice and direction.

A new popular awareness of the fashion world means that the subtle and not-so-subtle design shifts spotted in shows like Wang's may not go unnoticed by the general public. Designers continue to innovate while extending their collections to a wider, increasingly curious audience. Masses might just be starting to embrace the world of fashion. Just don't wrinkle the Marchesa. ●



Kristina Budelis



Kristina Budelis



Cara Buchanan



Kristina Budelis

Above: Knitting at Barney's was just one of the many unusual events to lure shoppers during Fashion's Night Out. Photo by Joey Shemuel.



Michael Disenza

LIGHTS, CAMERA, CAMPUS

the politics of letting tv crews film at columbia

BY LILY CEDARBAUM

ILLUSTRATION BY MATTEO MALINVERNO

Going to school in New York City means that it's possible to walk around any corner and run into a television crew. And while any old tourist might witness a street closing due to "Law and Order" filming, only students at Columbia—and, okay, maybe NYU—can boast that scenes are shot on their very own campus.

But no matter how fun watching a moment in the spotlight may be for a TV-loving coed, for Columbia's administration, TV crews on campus are more a logistical nightmare than a teenybopper fantasy realized.

By setting up strict filming restrictions, Columbia's Office of Communications and Public Affairs tries to maintain the campus as at least one location in the city where students can study without distractions. Robert Hornsby, director of media relations, certainly takes seriously the matter of filming on campus: "Our policies for news media and filming at Columbia are designed to ensure that University events and daily activities are conducted without disruption and that the privacy of students and other members of the Columbia community is respected," he explains in an e-mail.

And Columbia has gone out of its way to stick to its promises. While television shows with high-profile stars—like "Gossip Girl," HBO's "Bored To Death," and upcoming drama "The Wonderful Maladys," starring Sarah Michelle Geller—have recently been filmed on campus or in the immediate area, all filming has been efficient and unpublicized. "Gossip Girl," in a move now famous around campus, shot their "Yale visits" episode

here in August of last year—much earlier than they would have otherwise—in order to avoid causing a distraction for incoming students.

Getting permission to film anything on campus is a difficult process. There's a long list of forms and requests that outside groups have to fill out, and the Office of Communications and Media Relations is tight-mouthed on the subject of how they decide which projects get the green light. Columbia is very specific about where camera crews may go; as a policy statement on the Communications office's Web site reads, "Cameras are not allowed inside auditoriums, cafeterias, classrooms, corridors, dormitories, gymnasiums, laboratories, libraries, lobbies, residential halls, theaters, the Lerner Hall student center and other interior spaces unless permission is granted."

"THERE'S ALWAYS THAT CHANCE OF RUNNING INTO CHACE CRAWFORD."

Some sorts of projects are routinely rejected. "Commercial entities, including such enterprises as entertainment television programs and fashion magazines, routinely request campus access as locations for filming or photography," says Hornsby. Since Columbians are rarely stopped by Agyness Deyn while on their way to Hamilton, it's easy to infer that many of these requests get declined.

But no matter how beauracatic the process, there's no denying the rewards that come from opening Columbia to film and TV crews. Although the Office of Communications and Public Affairs declined to comment on the amount of money Columbia annually receives from allowing film

crews on campus, there's no doubt that the school profits—even after rejecting requests from most "commercial entities." Given our economic times, the incentive to ditch student tranquility for extra cash seems higher than ever. If filming serves as an unwelcome intrusion of the commercial world lurking right outside our gates, is the monetary gain the filming also brings still worth it?

When asked, Columbia students don't exactly seem worried about the commercial machine's possible incursion through filming. "I think it's something relatively innocuous and fun for students to have on campus," explains Vir Patel, CC '12. "As long as Columbia gets paid for the use of its grounds and the crew doesn't use up vital space for too long, I see no harm in it."

Other students worry about the symbolic power of film crews on campus. As Yufei Liu, SEAS '12, says, "It depends on the nature of the show. A show involving homicidal investigations shouldn't be filmed on campus." Liu goes on to propose that any show filmed on campus should "not [be] politically charged, and it has to have a disclaimer that frees Columbia from any responsibility and stereotyping."

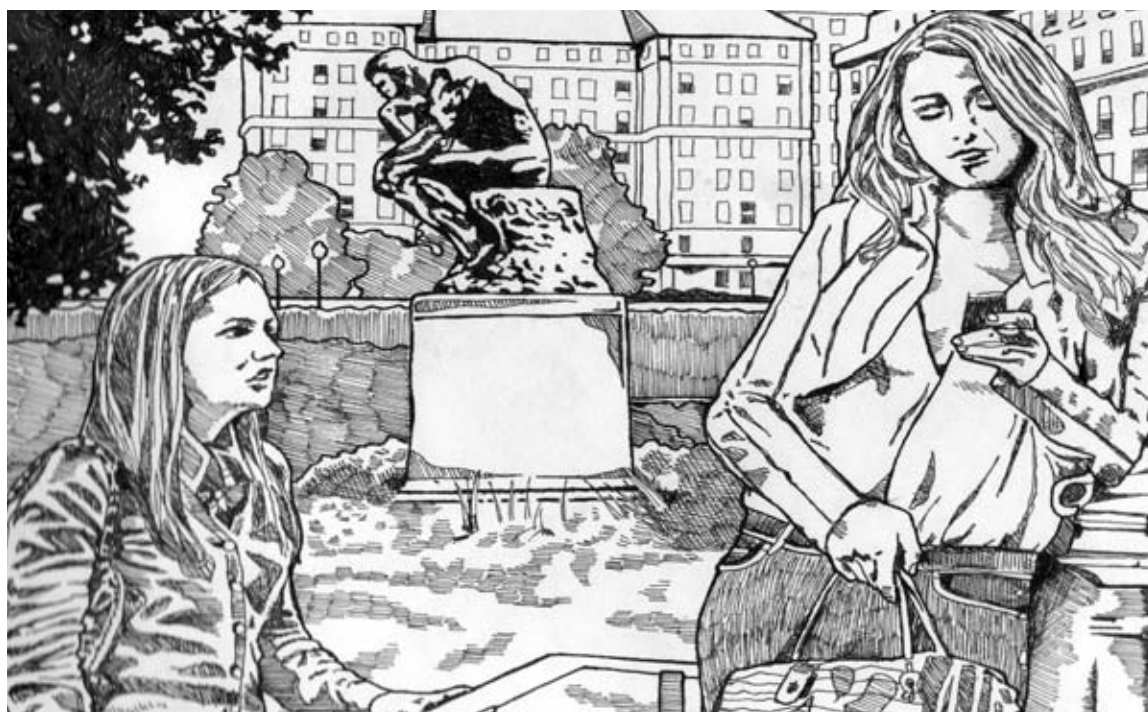
Still, Liu has no qualms with shows like "Gossip Girl" being shot at Columbia because, he says, "[the show] is believed to be somewhat similar to real college culture, so it isn't totally out of place." But the verisimilitude of "Gossip Girl" is pretty questionable. By allowing association between our school and the show, we may be giving a false representation of the average college student's life.

That's fine with Christina Chao, BC '13. As she explains, "It ['Gossip Girl' filming at Columbia] made me very excited to go here because there was always that chance of running into Ed Westwick and Chace Crawford randomly." While on the surface this seems perfectly understandable, it's a little frightening to think how events on television could possibly reflect on the real life university in question—the line between "Gossip Girl's" college life and Columbia could become blurred.

Concerns over Columbia's image becoming tainted by too many mass-market tapings are valid. After all, Butler Library is inscribed with the names of great intellectuals, not plaques that say "Blake Lively was here." Columbia is meant to be a place that promotes intellectual culture, not shallow commercialism.

Then again, the possibility of gaining money and bragging rights makes embracing filming on campus awfully tempting. As long as we remember why we're here, we can take pride in seeing the beauty of our campus as a backdrop—and we can respect the decisions of administrators who know better than we do how fast our endowment is shrinking.

And I have to admit, I'll always get a kick out of re-watching that one episode of "Gossip Girl" and knowing that Dan is being hazed by some fictitious secret society on a spot where I ate lunch last week. ●



POINTES OF PRESERVATION

how dance companies attempt to keep choreography alive

BY HANNA OLDSMAN

ILLUSTRATION BY REBEKAH KIM

I've now seen Christopher Wheeldon's pas de deux from "After the Rain" three times. It is a quiet piece, all pale leotards and glowing late-afternoon light; the dancers' steps are small and sometimes tentative, sometimes languorous, yet the entire work brims with the power of sweet sadness, or perhaps sad sweetness—some fleeting emotion distilled to the precise tension in the dancers' bodies, the peculiar movements of their heads and arms and feet.

Dance is an ephemeral art form. It's not like a poem, with words that you can return to again and again, ink that will stay bound to a page. Nor is it like a painting at the Met, its frame affixed to the wall for years. To me, this is part of what makes dance beautiful: the certainty that I will never see "After the Rain" or "Swan Lake" performed in exactly the same way again. Recordings may allow a few performances to exist past their normal lifetimes, but what video could capture the smallness of Juliet as she gathers her strength in Kenneth MacMillan's "Romeo and Juliet," the panoramic vastness of the beginning of Balanchine's "Serenade," the frenzied jubilation at the end of Alvin Ailey's "Revelations"? As dancer, choreographer, and Barnard junior Amanda Kostreva muses, dance "creates a moment that the audience and dancers share together," and this unique energy is lost when translated to film.

Still, trying to record the experience and spirit of a performance and attempting to record the choreography itself are two very different things. Dance

truly lives only in performance, and so having the ability to restage a work has become a great concern in the dance world. "Unless tackled and performed," says Patricia Kent, a former dancer with the Merce Cunningham Dance Company, "[a dance] simply disappears." With the recent deaths of choreographers like Cunningham and Pina Bausch, the preservation of choreography seems more essential than ever. Kent and others have begun to develop "Dance Capsules," permanent records of about 50 of Cunningham's most important works. She and her colleagues have put together as much information on these pieces as possible, from Cunningham's own notes to video of rehearsal and performance to details on music and costumes and lighting.

DANCE IS AN EPHEMERAL ART FORM. THAT'S PART OF WHAT MAKES IT SO BEAUTIFUL.

There are three ways in which dance has traditionally been preserved for future generations: coaching, video, and dance notation—written records of choreography that specify certain movements. While most choreographers and dance experts feel that all three are necessary, many consider coaching the most important: Ellen Sorrin, director of the George Balanchine Trust, says that while coaches who restage Balanchine's choreography may use video, their expertise in Balanchine's style and knowledge of his intent are most crucial in passing down his works. Though Mary Cochran, head of Barnard's dance department and former dancer with Paul Taylor, consults written notations occasionally, she also emphasizes the importance of oral tradition.

According to Barnard dance professor Lynn Garafola, notation is often the most accurate of the three methods, and when combined with coaching it can be very successful. At the Royal Ballet, experts in dance notation routinely record choreography made for the company, allowing revivals of the work to occur decades later. Yet many U.S. companies do not have the resources for notation, and written notation is not a language in which most dancers and choreographers are fluent.

Video, which flattens space and can hide the technical aspects of many steps—the way in which much tricky partnering is achieved, for example—is also often the less expensive way to record choreography. Two young choreographers, Emery LeCrone and GS senior Lydia Walker, have both used video to keep records of their choreography. Walker, founder and former artistic director of the Columbia Ballet Collaborative, says that CBC has videotaped all of its performances and that this has proved helpful in restaging the pieces. When she and fellow dancer Philip Askew restaged a piece of their choreography for an Ivies at Cunningham

performance, having the visual record of the original performance was useful even if it was, as she puts it, "already frozen in the past."

Emery LeCrone, a professional choreographer who has set pieces on CBC, adds that it is essential to know the work that has come before her. Video has allowed her to study the works of Balanchine, Forsythe, and other choreographers, as well as given her insight into what makes their choreography so effective. Moreover, she says, video allows young artists to see their work critically and revise it.

Choreographers, then, must choose how to preserve their work based on their resources and on their comfort with the various forms, while remaining mindful of the fact that works recorded by more than one method are more likely to survive. When debating how best to preserve choreography, it is important to remember that the final goal is to make sure that these dances continue to be performed.

A couple of weeks ago, I went to a "disappearing" art show called "A Book About Death." Approximately 500 artists had each sent in 500 copies of a postcard about death, and those attending the show were meant to take postcards with them when they left, gradually depleting the supply. In practice, however, the show demonstrated an unwillingness to let anything disappear without some record of it: People roamed around snapping photos and taking videos, while others scrambled to gather entire collections of their own. In preserving choreography, the aim should not be to acquire boxes of videos and files filled with notes that simply suffocate on shelves, like the postcards surely stuffed in drawers and forgotten. Instead, these memories should be used to allow forgotten dances to breathe again. ●



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