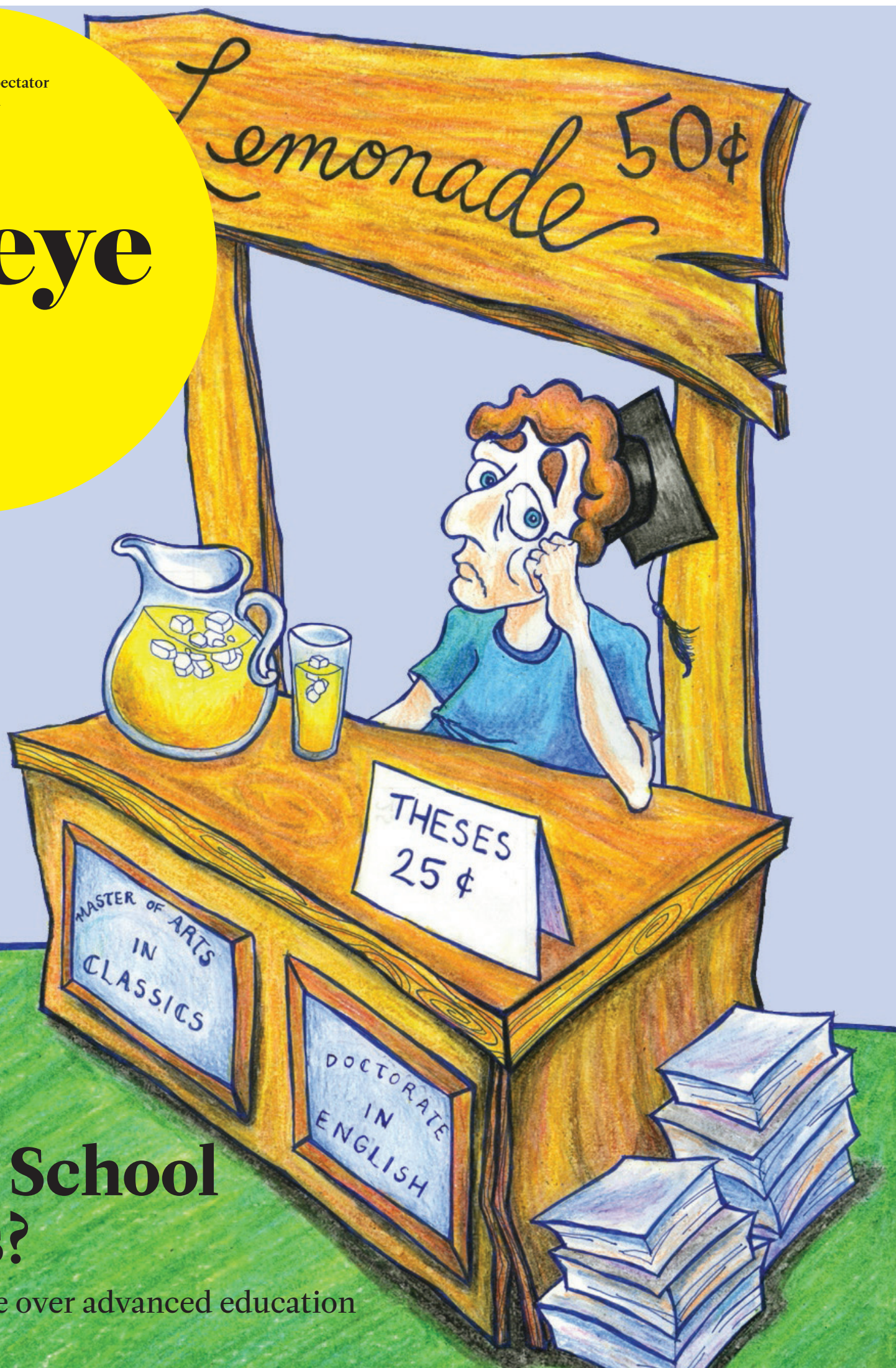


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the eye



Is Grad School Useless?

inside the debate over advanced education

by Anna Feuer

why swine flu's not so bad \W street vendor food fights \W behind the curtain at fashion week

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IS GRAD SCHOOL USELESS?

Inside the debate over advanced education, pg. 07

by Anna Feuer
cover illustration by Rebekah Kim

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LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

Fellow Columbians, these are undeniably trying times. Back-to-school elation (see “Letter From a Freshman” on the next page) has given way to disillusionment and exhaustion. The weather, so briefly welcoming, has taken a turn toward miserable and gray. Baucus’s health care bill is a disaster. Kanye West ruined the VMAs. The Tasti D-Lite in Lerner has been replaced by a hot dog vending machine. And, as Anna Feuer reports in this week’s cover story, those of you thinking about going to graduate school may want to rethink your entire life plan.

We’re sorry we couldn’t start the semester off on a more positive note.

As Feuer explains, grad schools are in a precarious position. While professional school students are more or less guaranteed cushy jobs after they graduate, the typical grad student leaves

school with \$20,000 in debt and a slim chance of securing tenure. Mark Taylor, chair of Columbia’s religion department, suggests that we scrap the whole system and start all over, replacing today’s hyperspecific (and unmarketable) courses of study with broader, arguably more practical “zones of inquiry.” Want to spend your post-undergraduate years studying “water”? Think a degree in “body” will land you a job? Have any better ideas?

Fortunately, here at The Eye we’re not having such an identity crisis. We’re still bringing you a thoughtful, exhaustively researched piece of narrative journalism each week. We’re still covering the latest in intellectual and cultural developments. We’re still interviewing awesome people. We just don’t know what we’re doing after we graduate.

—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.

LETTER FROM A FRESHMAN

BY JONATHAN KAPLAN, NATHAN McALONE, AND EVAN OMI

Dear Brooke,

My dorm, Carman, is so awesome. It’s like hav-ing a 24-hour after-prom, but you don’t have to worry about cleaning up Smirnoff Ice puke ’cause we have a cleaning service! The cinderblock walls may be ugly, but I got these wonderful, sassy Audrey Hepburn posters that totally flaunt my individuality. The guys next door are such rebels, they used nails to hang this bad-ass “Pulp Fiction” poster even though it’s against housing rules, OMG. BTdubs my RA is the best. He not only lets me drink, he brings pre-made mixed drinks to my room! Living with a roommate isn’t all that bad. She’s staying with her BF from high school doing the long-distance thing, and I actually got “sex-iled” twice! And one time the RA was super nice and let me stay with him.

People might talk shit about dorm food, but I luv John Jay. Unlimited soft-serve and cupcakes

biatch! Plus I hear they put laxatives in every-thing, which means I don’t have to worry about that freshman 15. There is also this great restaurant called Koronets. I heard good things about New York pizza but WOW. So this is what they meant by great cuisine!

The social life here is amazing too. Thanks to Facebook, I already had tons of friends before I got here. I can’t believe there are so many people who share my interests: hanging out with friends, chillin’, and listening to music. Carmen 6 for life y’all! I feel like my floormates really “get” me, un-like those anti-social weirdos who live in John Jay. I think some of us are going to organize a group to go down to Times Square on a Friday night to get a real taste of what NYC has to offer.

I haven’t even started classes and I already know I’m going to love college. Keep you updated girrrr!

Luv,
Ashley!

THE PAST

WE KNOW WHAT WE DID THIS SUMMER

BY JONATHAN KAPLAN

SCHOOL ENDS	
“Veckatimest” May 26 “Just like so fucking beautiful dude.”	“American Idol” Finale May 29 Adam Lambert loses “American Idol” and announces he is gay. One of these things is apparently shocking.
“The Hangover” June 5 Roofing yourself suddenly seems like a good idea.	H1N1 reaches global pandemic status June 11 If you are sick, please quar- antine yourself. If you are also attractive and female, there’s a special quarantine set up on the third floor of Watt.
Ahmadinejad “re-elected” June 12 “In Iran we don’t have fair elections. In Iran we don’t have this phenomenon. I don’t know who told you this.”	Farrah Fawcett dies June 25 The biggest celebrity to pass away this summer for a span of three hours.
Michael Jackson dies June 25	People talk about how Michael Jackson died June 25 to September 8
SCHOOL STARTS	

THE WAY WE DIE NOW

WHY SWINE FLU’S NOT SO BAD

BY EVAN OMI

- Odds you’ll die this year of:
- Regular seasonal flu — 1 in 8,446
- Uncontrolled fire in building or structure — 1 in 113,300
- Falling off a bed or other furniture — 1 in 329,819
- Contact with inanimate machinery — 1 in 392,725
- Swine flu — 1 in 637,442

BUYER BEWARE

RISE OF THE VENDING MACHINES

- A robot can sell you a “grilled” hot dog in Lerner.
What ridiculous thing will Columbia bring us next?**
- The Live Lobster Claw Game Vending Machine — Osaka, Japan
 - The Medical Marijuana Vending Machine — San Francisco, CA
 - The Independent Poetry Magazine Vending Machine — San Jose, CA
 - The iPod Vending Machine — assorted airports, Macy’s (Do people actually use these things?)
 - The Live Bait Vending Machine — Elverson, PA
 - The Used Panty Vending Machine — Tokyo, Japan

EDITORS’ TEN

BEST MOMENTS OF OUR RESPECTIVE SUMMERS

1. Falling asleep on the beach to waves crashing and the sun on my skin. It was worth the sunburn.
—Melanie Jones, managing features editor
2. When Bwog reported that Emma Watson was coming to Columbia. Can you guess what the worst moment of my summer was?
—Zach Dyer, interview editor
3. Eating my first authentic burrito after a long Mexican-foodless year in New York. Every burrito I ate after that is tied for my second-favorite moment.
—Devin Briski, food & drink editor
4. Seeing Woody Allen and Soon-Yi walking on the Upper East Side. Though I contemplated an “I’m not worthy” session, I opted instead for a subtle smile of recognition.
—Rebecca Pattiz, music editor
5. Hitchhiking from a yoga ashram in the south of France to Paris ... with a Portuguese yogi I had just met. By some stroke of luck, we were picked up by a delightfully cheerful, wise old French woman who introduced us to her gregarious family and invited me to stay at her house the next time I visit France. The experience boosted my confidence in my French skills and in the kindness of strangers.
—Kristina Budelis, photo editor
6. Discovering Brighton Beach. Between the street signs in Russian and the genuine Russian food on the boardwalk, it was like taking a day trip to a beach in Russia.
—Sophie Meislin, View From Here editor
7. Indulging in a \$150 complimentary breakfast at Norma’s for “Inside New York.” Who knew the most important meal of the day could also be the most decadent?
—Yin Yin Lu, books editor
8. Volunteering for SummerStage in Central Park. My favorite shows were Paul van Dyk and Explosions in the Sky (the torrential rain was a nice touch!).
—Helen Werbe, style editor
9. Yankees-Tigers. Warm July evening. Fourth-row tickets behind first base... for free. America’s great-est pastime at its best.
—Peter Labuza, film editor
10. Seeing Prince Harry play polo on Governor’s Island. World-famous polo star Nacho Figueras was also there, and he was truly a master of the pitch. Or whatever they call the field in polo.
—Raphael Pope-Sussman, deputy editor, features

COMPILED BY EVAN OMI

Taking the Guggenheim by Storm

three fellowship recipients talk about their projects and passions

BY JIA AHMAD

PHOTOS COURTESY OF SUBJECTS

Offered to established professionals who demonstrate exceptional capacity in their respective fields, the Guggenheim Fellowships are well-respected prizes in both academia and the arts. Award recipients—be they novelists or historians, filmmakers or mathematicians—are given grants for six to 12 months in order to freely explore their creative pursuits. This year, of the 180 awards that were distributed in the United States and Canada competition, 10 were given to members of the Columbia University community. We spoke to some of the recipients to see what they'll be doing with all that free time.

Pierre Force

From the cozy armchairs of collegiate faculty lounges to, well, collegiate faculty lounges on other campuses, people have long wrestled with the problem of originality: how do you decide whether someone has said something new? With his Guggenheim Fellowship in hand, Columbia professor Pierre Force will give an early-modern spin to this classic question. As he explains: "Looking for 'originality' in the modern sense of the term in early modern authors is anachronistic. ... On the one hand, the modern notion of originality does not adequately capture what early modern authors were aiming at; on the other hand, early modern authors did see novelty as highly desirable. Now, if 'saying something new' is not a synonym for 'being original,' what did it mean to say something new?" Force intends to publish the results of his study soon in an as-yet untitled book, but his research interests don't end there: the former chair of the French department at Columbia is also interested in literature and eloquence, the history of hermeneutics, the philosophy of history, and French classicism and its reception. After publishing, he'll embark on a different project altogether: "a micro-history of an indoor ball court (jeu de paume) located in a small town in the French Pyrenees in the context of a broader study of jeu de paume in early modern France."



Nick Turse

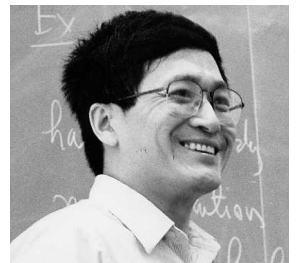
Think your term paper for last semester's anthro seminar was lengthy? Nick Turse—who recently graduated from Columbia with a Ph.D in sociomedical sciences—wrote a dissertation on U.S. war crimes during the Vietnam War that was over 1,000 pages long. Published in periodicals like *The Nation*, the *Chicago Tribune*, the *Los Angeles Times*, and the *San Francisco Chronicle*, Turse has written on topics as varied as the military-entertainment complex and economic abuse and domestic violence during the global financial meltdown. But armed with funds from the Guggenheim Foundation, Turse will be returning to the subject that occupied his time here: atrocities committed during the Vietnam War. While it may share the same title as his dissertation, "Kill Anything That Moves," the book manuscript in progress is a radically different project. As Turse explains, it "focuses a great deal more attention specifically on civilian suffering and the widespread devastation of Vietnam as a result of the 'American War,' as the Vietnamese call it." The book also draws from entirely different sources. Turse reflects that "since my dissertation was written primarily from U.S. records, there was a real dearth of Vietnamese voices. ... The Vietnamese were mostly nameless, faceless, voiceless victims." To rectify that dilemma, Turse spent months with his wife, photojournalist Tam Turse, interviewing witnesses of U.S. war crimes to provide a richer depiction of the conflict. While working on his book, Turse will also be a fellow at New York University's Center for the United States and the Cold War.



"ART IS A PART OF MATHEMATICS. I DO IT BECAUSE IT IS BEAUTIFUL."

Shou-Wu Zhang

At the end of a weaving narrative that incorporates the birth of philosophy, art, and mathematics, professor Shou-Wu Zhang comes to an elegant conclusion about his lifelong research interest: "Art is a part of mathematics. I do it because it is beautiful." Sparked by an early interest in Goldbach's Conjecture (a theory that states that every even integer greater than two can be written as the sum of two prime numbers), Zhang's decades-long passion for number theory and arithmetical algebraic geometry has landed him a tenured position in Columbia's mathematics department. He's currently puzzling over the Birch and Swinnerton-Dyer conjecture, which posits that there's a simple way to tell if an equation defining an elliptical curve over rational numbers has either a finite or infinite number of solutions. For non-math majors, that translates to a \$1 million prize from the Clay Mathematics Institute, which has a dedicated \$7-million prize fund for any mathematician who can solve one of seven famously unsolved math problems. Zhang plans to use his Fellowship funds to take leave next semester to refine and publish articles he conceived of in 2005. Despite his plans to confer with colleagues in Asia and Europe, his devoted graduate students shouldn't worry. "It's not like I'm going to an island to write a novel," he says. "I'll be around." ●



NOTES FROM THE FELLOWS

"The Guggenheim Foundation operates in a gently old-fashioned way. ... All important business is done by postal mail. The notification about the fellowship came in the form of a brief, nicely worded letter from the president of the foundation." —Force

"It would have been worth applying just to attend to the reception for new and past fellows. I met so many exceptionally smart and interesting people and learned about many fascinating research topics that absolutely blew my mind." —Turse

"Beyond the grant itself, the benefits of the position include the symbolic recognition. It was nice receiving so many congratulatory messages, not only from friends and colleagues, but also from neighbors, and people I hardly knew." —Force

From Biggie to Bach

the eye interviews emily wells

BY ZACH DYER

PHOTO COURTESY OF BIG HASSLE MEDIA

Emily Wells is a 20-something singer-songwriter who has no eye for labels and no desire to fit into the neatly defined boxes so many musicians subscribe to. Finding no proper home with existing record labels, Wells started her own and has been slowly but surely carving out a space for herself in the music world. Described by many as, improbably, a classical violinist dropped into a world of hip-hop, Wells boasts a comfort in almost any genre and easily incorporates folk, rap, rock, and as her latest album indicates, full blown symphonies. The Eye sits down with Emily Wells to map out her journey across the genres and discover how she went from a violinist trained in the Suzuki Method to an artist who claims that “absence of genre makes the art grow fonder.”

To start with, if you had to name a couple of your biggest influences that come out in your music, who would they be?

Well, I have my big three that haven't changed since I was little, and that's Nina Simone, Biggie Smalls, and Bob Dylan.

That speaks pretty well to your music! I mean, one of the reasons your work is so unique and wonderful is the fact that it is sort of that square peg that doesn't fit into any genre's round hole. How do you take so many seemingly contradictory styles and fuse them without missing a beat?

I definitely have so many influences. Like I am so open to so many different kinds of music, especially jazz, not that it necessarily comes out, but I know it's a huge influence for me. But I also love a lot of the new stuff that's coming out now, like Grizzly Bear and Fleet Foxes and the such, you know? As far as how I get it all to work together—well, I love collecting little strange toy instruments just because I'm so interested in sound as an idea and being able to capture that and capture melodies and making them come through in ways that are maybe unconventional. It's not that I set out to be weird or quirky—I set out with an open mind and open to interpretation.

With such an obviously open mind as to how you want your music to sound, how do you go about recording a track?

For the most part, I recorded all the phonic stuff live because even though they are looped-based parts and incredibly repetitive, I wanted to actually play out all of those parts. So I went in and literally played out something like 21 violin parts to have enough tracks to do it right. Then Joey, who plays bass, and Sam, who plays drums, they'll come in and they'll play their part. Then you know, I'll keep adding, adding, adding: production, synth, and even little glockenspiel or bell

parts. Sam and I do a lot of post-production too, where we run things through reverb, delays—all analog-style production that's all after the fact. I mean, besides the drums and bass and this one time my friend came to do the cello, it's all me.

That's a lot of tracks going into a single song. How can you possibly do this live during your tours?

Well, we want it to be different than the album because it's like, why go to a show if you can just sit at home and listen to the record? But the way that we get that whole ensemble thing is through live looping. I do a ton of live sampling on stage; it's sort of oriented towards a hip-hop production where you can bring in and out different elements. You can record limitless layers, it's just a matter of organizing it and doing it fast enough to make sure the audience doesn't get bored. I actually just started sampling off of vinyls during shows thinking, “Oh, maybe I can challenge myself a little bit more!” Anything that can be played can be sampled, and we really push that on stage.

“ABSENCE OF GENRE MAKES THE ART GROW FONDER.”



So by live looping, you mean you loop what you actually play on stage? That sounds incredibly challenging...

Yeah, definitely, and it's something I've been working on for a couple of years, perfecting. I had a loop pedal for a number of years that I would mess around with but it wasn't until I approached it as a new instrument entirely, instead of something I could just screw with. So I really set my

mind to learning it because you have to be really on point with your timing and everything like that for it to work out at all.

You seem to play, and very well I might add, an incredible number of instruments. I know your first musical training was in violin. When did that start for you?

I was really young—I was 4 years old. I went through the Suzuki Method which is entirely ear-oriented. The philosophy is that you can learn how speak before you learn how to read or write. So you learn music as a language as opposed to a written or read discipline; so you build your background through that, then eventually you learn the theory. So it's really a part of me, it's all sound-oriented, which I know I wouldn't have done any other way, but it makes it so I don't approach music from a traditional way, I really approach it just based on what it sounds like and figure out what the fuck I'm doing later.

So when did everything else come in? Where did all these other influences come from?

Well, I became this teenage girl who was like, “Fuck playing Bach!” I wanted to play the guitar and learn how to write my own songs! There was definitely a period of trying to play other instruments, then I got really into recording and taught myself based on sponging information out of any studio experience that I had. And then just starting with a four-track. I got a four-track when I was 16 and became completely obsessed with the idea of being able to record more than one thing and add parts. That was all really, really, exciting for me. Then over the years, I set up a studio, grew at different instruments, getting more and more gear and being super geeky about it! Also, trying to learn how to play anything I could because I'm just so curious. I hear sounds in my head, and I think, “How can I make that happen?”

When you go into the studio, do you ever have a set plan? Or do you just know where you're going to start, sort of feel it, and go from there?

That's an interesting question because the last records have been really based on that live-looping. We were doing all the songs live before we ever started recording, so a lot of the parts were really present already—we knew which parts we were going to play when we went in. So I definitely had a nice tree trunk to start with, then it was a lot of just filling it in through messing around in the studio and getting sounds. But the new record that I'm working on now hasn't been taken to the studio at all, and I think I might try to approach it a little bit different and have more of a plan so that maybe the string parts are recorded with several string players playing all together and definitely trying to capture that live aspect. The studio is incredible, but it can be a little sterile without that live thing. ●

And Then I Got There

a student's first days on the banks of the neva

BY WILLIAM HOWE

PHOTO COURTESY OF THE AUTHOR

To all and sundry—I made it! After sweating my kokhony off (use your vivid imaginations) at a non air-conditioned Bard orientation in upstate New York, we got this show on the road.

One transatlantic flight and one semiconscious trip to the hotel later, I finally felt I could say that I had arrived, and set down my bags on the floor of my “business class” hotel room. The motto printed on my welcome sheet in garbled English reads: “We don’t aspire to be the first, but won’t let anyone to be better than we are.”

The business class aesthetic was completed by the fact that the would-be courtyard area of the hotel also served as a Russian Federation military base. My view thus not only includes the tops of many beautiful, 18th-century pastel-colored buildings and the occasional Russian Orthodox church spire, but is dominated by an armored vehicle the size of a small plane. A vehicle no more than eight inches away. Welcome to St. Petersburg!

I thought the worst of the travel requirements to Russia was already out of the way, but I had counted my proverbial chickens far too early. There was yet one more chapter in the never-ending nightmare of international visa applications.

In addition to the two HIV tests stateside, with which I grudgingly complied (I am not a needle person), another one awaited us upon arrival.

In a wise move, the program coordinators struck when we were still in a post-lunch coma/post-arrival shellshock. They led us to the “Euromed: American Style Medicine!” clinic like a group of senseless cattle headed for the slaughterhouse. HIV test number three unfortunately caused me to revert back to my old ways of dealing with pointy objects: fainting (middle school or earlier, I swear).

Luckily, Russian nurses are not only quick of mind but quick to employ a shockingly powerful backhand or three, as well as an exceedingly generous dose of smelling salts. With help from my savior, clad in starched whites with the hat to match, I survived the bloody ritual and just barely retained consciousness the whole way through.

Stumbling out of the clinic with Bot-ticellian red cheeks (this devushka really knew how to make it sting) and head swirling, I bumbled my way back to the hotel. I also passed my first police questioning along the way, an occurrence that will, I hope, become a rarity as I “go native” over the next few months.

Exhausted from the day’s proceedings, I melted onto my bed after setting my trusty watch alarm for 18:30 (time is expressed on the 24-hour clock), plenty of time for the 19:00 dinner meeting. Naturally, I overslept, and dinner with the group had come and gone. Undeterred, I set out with a fellow oversleeper, Noah, to find some rations and take the banks of the Neva by storm.

How foolish of me to think that I could do something as simple as grab some grub at a grocery

store without appearing totally out of place. It should be noted that I barely made it out of the store at all. I did not have exact change, and in St. Petersburg this is a cardinal sin.

It should also be noted that “the customer is always right” is both unheard of and downright laughable here. If the clerk wants to smoke and gossip with her friend on the phone for 15 minutes, you are damn well going to wait for her (and I did). While we’re at it, I also committed cultural coinage faux pas number two by directly handing my rubles to the all-important devushka at the check-out counter, instead of placing it in the little glass dish on the countertop.

Fortunately for me (fortunately because the experience was so traumatizing that I can say with certainty I’ll never repeat my folly), she refused to take the money and only glowered impatiently. She then made indecipherable motions towards the transparent dish, which I had figured for some bizarre magnifying lens intended for the viewing of cigarette packs, based on its perch above their glass case.

MY VIEW IS DOMINATED BY AN ARMORED VEHICLE THE SIZE OF A SMALL PLANE. NO MORE THAN EIGHT INCHES AWAY.

After extensive rumination and some Holmesian deduction, I hesitantly dropped the money in its intended location, from which it was picked up, deposited in the register, and my deserved change arduously withdrawn and placed back into the dish. As I left sheepishly, I received a glare that would have put Medusa to shame. Lesson learned.

Luckily we are still in late summer here, and Noah and I were able to make good use of the waning Belye Nochi (White Nights)—being far north in the summer means lots of sun—by munching on pirozhi and strolling around a considerable amount of the Admiralty Island waterfront until the sun began its languid descent into the Gulf of Finland at about 23:00.

Which left me back where I began, enjoying the comforts of a Russian hotel, punctuating my writing with an occasional glance out the window at the rear wheel of a no-nonsense war vehicle poised gracefully to my left, as only a Russian troop transport can. With that picture fresh in your minds, I look forward to the coming weeks, to write again when time allows. Bud’te Zdorovy, everyone. ●



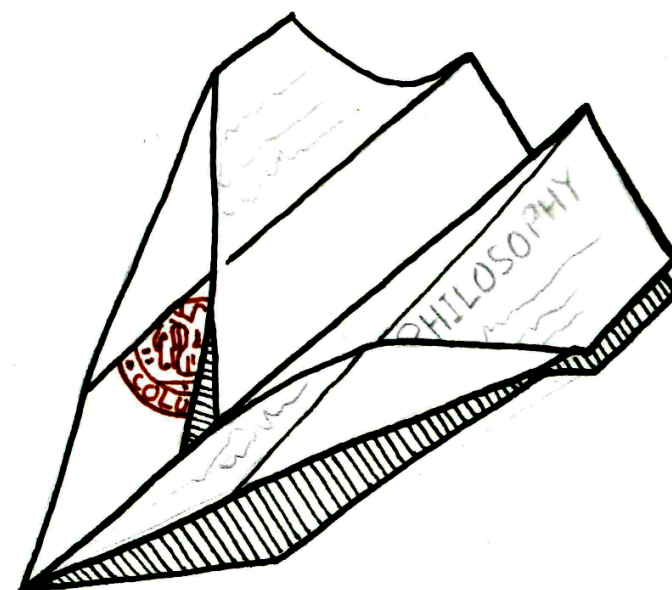
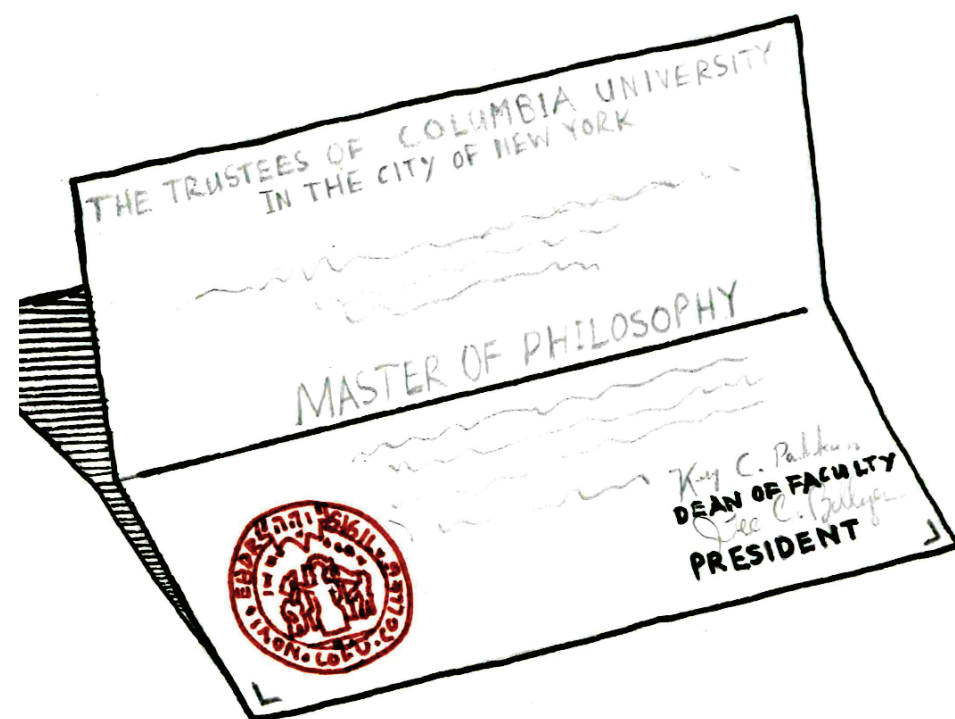
IS GRAD SCHOOL USELESS?

inside the debate over advanced education

by anna feuer • illustrations by rebekah kim and matteo malinverno

IN 1981, ERIKO AMINO RECEIVED HER PH.D. from Columbia University in comparative literature, writing a dissertation on medieval French literature. When all goes well, a doctorate marks the beginning of an academic career, but for Amino it marked the end. “When I graduated,” she says, “many of us did not find anything other than adjunct positions.” While a friend secured a teaching position in South Dakota, Amino did not want to relocate to a place far from a metropolitan center. Unable to find a teaching position near a city, Amino took a job at a bank. “The decision,” she says, “wasn’t a happy one, but a practical one.”





Almost 30 years later, Amino reflects, graduate school students face similar obstacles. “I have a friend, who is in his 30s, who received his Ph.D. in English from Stanford,” Amino says. “He sent out 40 letters in the hopes of finding an academic position and got no acknowledgement of a single one.”

In recent months, universities have cut faculty costs and imposed hiring freezes to ease the impact of the recession. The Modern Language Association’s university job listings in English, literature, and foreign languages dropped 21 percent in 2008, their biggest decline since 1974. Since May 2008, the American Mathematical Society’s job listings have dropped more than 25 percent. Yet universities across the country continue to award doctorates by the tens of thousands. Columbia’s Graduate School of Arts and Sciences alone confers hundreds of doctoral degrees every year.

Victims of bad timing, this year’s graduates will face a particularly tough job market. But the recession has only brought into starker relief the fact that job prospects in academia have been slim for decades. Today, less than 50 percent of all Ph.D. candidates will secure tenure, according to education writer Thomas H. Benton’s reports in the Chronicle of Higher Education. The rest must accept low-paying adjunct positions or—like Amino—leave academia entirely.

That many of those with doctorates cannot expect to find jobs in academia should be enough to give pause to anyone thinking about pursuing a Ph.D.—and that’s before considering the significant investment of both time and money grad school requires. The typical grad student—who will spend an average of eight years studying for a doctorate—will accrue \$20,000 in debt

in graduate school, on top of any undergraduate debt. While top private universities like Columbia provide students with grants and living stipends (at Columbia, a nine-month stipend comes to \$22,500), they do not fund master’s degrees, which are now required for admission into many Ph.D. programs. Master’s tuition at Columbia is \$18,000 per year, still a sizable chunk of change for any student.

THERE IS, AFTER ALL, SOMETHING A BIT ODD ABOUT A RIGOROUS PROGRAM OF STUDY THAT TRAINS STUDENTS FOR JOBS THAT DO NOT EXIST.

Frustrated with a graduate school system that demands steep tuition but cannot guarantee jobs, Mark Taylor, chair of Columbia’s religion department, published a scathing op-ed in the New York Times last spring titled “End the University as We Know It.” In the article, Taylor argues that graduate programs have been abandoning their students at graduation—that schools fail to offer their students decent-paying jobs in their fields of study, rendering their years of arduous research pointless. To remedy this problem, Taylor wants to reinvent graduate education, so that doctoral programs teach students skills more readily applicable to the world outside academia.

The response to Taylor’s article ranged from laudatory to vitriolic. Stan Katz of the Chronicle said Taylor’s list of reform measures was “a bewildering mélange”; Christopher Kelty, professor of anthropology at Rice University, called it “a plank out of the dying Republican Party’s tattered playbook”; and Daniel Drezner, who teaches international diplomacy at Tufts University’s Fletcher School, labeled one of Taylor’s proposals “utter, complete, ridiculous crap.” On the other hand, Taylor says the article produced a significant positive response and that he continues to receive e-mails from current students, teachers, and former academics applauding his ideas.

There is, after all, something a bit odd about a rigorous program of study that trains students for jobs that do not exist. Graduate programs in law, business, and medicine prepare students for a range of lucrative, relatively plentiful jobs. When compared to these professional programs, which boast of placement rates above 90 percent, the state of graduate schools looks particularly bleak. At Columbia, for example, the law school Web site claims that “98% of the Class of 2008 was employed by graduation in a variety of legal fields,” and the business school reported that 92 percent of graduates in 2008 accepted jobs within three months of graduation. In the wake of the financial crisis, those figures will likely have dropped significantly, but there’s still a tremendous disparity between professional and non-professional programs.

Institutions like Columbia’s GSAS aren’t going to place nine of 10 graduates in relevant fields anytime soon. But if graduate school is going to remain relevant, reform—possibly painful reform—will be necessary.

For Taylor, that reform will require far more than minor tweaks or patches. It will mean overturning the graduate program as we know it. “Abolish permanent departments, even for undergraduate education, and create problem-focused programs,” he writes in his op-ed. He calls for the elimination of distinct departments of religion, philosophy, or history, to be replaced with “zones of inquiry.” These zones would function as umbrella topics uniting students across disciplines—biology, sociology, political science, or physics.

“Think about it,” Taylor says in an telephone interview. “‘Moby Dick’ is one of the most important analyses of religion we have. Why is ‘Moby Dick’ only in the territory of the English department?” The key to his plan is eliminating barriers—among departments, genres, and sub-

fields. “Webs, not walls,” he proclaims. “To bring the American university into the modern, global society, we need to move from a world of walls to a world of webs.”

These walls exist between and within departments. As academic jobs grow scarcer, scholars must look for their own narrow niches in order to publish unique work. Hyperspecialization, Taylor believes, atomizes the academic community, detracting from the quality and practicality of the research that is produced.

Contemporary Civilization lecturer Paul Weinfield, who received his Ph.D. in religion from Columbia in 2008, echoes Taylor’s view that fields within fields are little more than “smokestacks within smokestacks.”

“There’s a disconnect between the kind of research universities want and the kind of teaching they want,” Weinfield says. As a student, Weinfield specialized in medieval Iranian mysticism, but after graduation, he found that employers were looking for candidates with a broader body of knowledge. “After 9/11, religion professors have been asked to teach very general classes on Islam. But scholars are interested in conducting research on very specialized themes, research that doesn’t apply to undergraduate courses.” In his job search, Weinfield discovered there was minimal demand for his expertise. Most positions, he found, “required more of a basic knowledge of politics and current events than an in-depth knowledge of Islam.”

When Weinfield was part of Columbia’s religion department, he didn’t perceive that the University was tending toward hyperspecialization. He was required to take a few interdisciplinary courses, including survey courses on both Western and

Eastern religions, but he feels they fell short of their mission. The courses “were co-taught in a very fragmented way, and basically everyone sleep-walked through them.”

BEGINNING THIS ACADEMIC YEAR, DOCTORAL CANDIDATES IN THE RELIGION DEPARTMENT ARE REQUIRED TO TAKE AN EXAM IN THEIR CHOICE OF FIVE ZONES OF INQUIRY: TIME, SPACE, BODY, MEDIA, AND TRANSMISSION.

Cloistered in his own narrow subfield, Weinfield received little preparation for jobs in fields outside of academia. His specialization was “a real problem ... more of a badge of one’s credentials than an actual skill set.”

Taylor believes his zones of inquiry would address the concerns of people like Weinfield. These zones, he says, would encourage scholarly collaboration and offer students a more practical education. Instead of studying religion, a student in Taylor’s university might study water.

Designed to address the problems of water shortage and management, a water program would incorporate scholarship from ecological, cultural, economic, and religious perspectives. By uniting disciplines for a practical common

DANIEL DREZNER, WHO TEACHES INTERNATIONAL DIPLOMACY AT TUFTS UNIVERSITY’S FLETCHER SCHOOL, LABELED ONE OF TAYLOR’S PROPOSALS “UTTER, COMPLETE, RIDICULOUS CRAP.”

purpose, the university would bring scholars out of their bubble and provide them with the skills to join non-academic industries. That, at least, is Taylor's theory. "In many areas, it makes sense to erode some departmental boundaries," he says. "I think of zones like nodes—points of intersection between disciplines."

Taylor has already implemented elements of his proposal at Columbia. Beginning this academic year, doctoral candidates in the religion department are required to take an exam in their choice of five zones of inquiry: time, space, body, media, and transmission. Body, for example, encompasses studies in neuroscience, biomedical ethics, and gender.

"What's involved here," Taylor says, "is a different vision of higher education for the global world of the 21st century. The current system is 200 years old and tied to outdated political, economic, and social structures. How can we create an educational opportunity that will prepare students for today's world?" His proposal takes a stride toward solving the problem of employment for doctoral candidates by widening their skill sets and areas of expertise.

Taylor's program is based on certain assumptions of what is useful or practical. But it's also based on the philosophy that we can reorganize or re-imagine our systems of knowledge. "The way in which knowledge is structured is not set in stone," Taylor says. "The world is not divided up into disciplines. Today, scholars develop expertise in a particular area first and then look at problems. But what if we looked at problems first and then figured out what kind of expertise we need to solve the problem?" Taylor wants us to view knowledge as cross-disciplinary, cross-cultural, and applicable to real-world questions, rather than contained within rigid categories. By considering solutions from a wide variety of angles, he insists, scholars will formulate more useful approaches to their fields.

Critics have pointed out some fundamental organizational weaknesses in Taylor's plan. Should students in the water program be building bridges instead of civil engineers? Can students gain an in-depth knowledge of both environmental biology and the sociology of coastal communities in the same program?

David Bell, dean of faculty at Johns Hopkins University, wrote a response to Taylor's op-ed in the *New Republic* the day after Taylor's article ran. Deeming Taylor's piece a "yawn of pain," Bell's article calls for further proof of grad schools' obsolescence. He notes that competition for spots at top universities is as fierce as ever, and America remains the world leader in Nobel Prizes.

"Intellectual inquiry has its own logic," Bell says in an interview. "The logic is often one of specialization. We're not going to turn Ph.D. programs into vocational programs." It's

conceivable to see how something like Taylor's water program might provide jobs outside of the academy for sociologists or anthropologists. But as Bell himself asks, "What do you do with a field like classics?"

Taylor's response to this criticism reveals the most radical aspect of his program. "I don't think knowledge for knowledge's sake is enough," he says. "It's only viable if someone else is paying the bill, and as we know, private patronage is drying up." The only way we can continue to fund the humanities, Taylor argues, is to emphasize the broader societal contribution the study of arts and letters can make. And not every area of study can make a contribution. "We live in a world of limited resources, and not everything that can be done should be done. Some fields will emerge and others will disappear." As Taylor sees it, no field is eternal and none should be. Classics may be among the disciplines that cannot justify their own existence.

As one might expect, professor James Zetzel, chair of Columbia's department of classics, has a different perspective. "I would be very worried about an academic world which thought that ancient Greece and Rome should be the center of university education; I would be equally worried if they were banned as obsolete," he writes in an e-mail.

Taylor replies that Plato and Aristotle won't necessarily fall by the wayside. "Do you need a department of classics to study Aristotle?" he asks. Universities can still cover the canon—students will simply study the great thinkers in the context of different zones or themes, rather than as part of a curriculum structured by time period. In fact, Taylor adds, "when you only study Hegel in a contemporary philosophy class, you can't fully understand Hegel." A fuller understanding of Hegel, he explains, comes from examining his work from different perspectives and within different frameworks.

"I DON'T THINK KNOWLEDGE FOR KNOWLEDGE'S SAKE IS ENOUGH," HE SAYS. "IT'S ONLY VIABLE IF SOMEONE ELSE IS PAYING THE BILL, AND AS WE KNOW, PRIVATE PATRONAGE IS DRYING UP."

Still, he acknowledges that his system may sacrifice those areas of study that don't prove useful. His university would only invest in programs that either contributed to contemporary problem-solving or aided students in the post-grad job hunt.

Others in the academy see Taylor's reforms as impinging on the intellectual experience that graduate school is designed to provide. Kirsten Ellicson, who studies 19th-century French literature at Columbia, is due to receive her doctorate this fall. "I don't think that it should be the mission of graduate programs to prepare us for jobs outside academia," Ellicson writes in an e-mail. "They should continue to train us to think and do research, to become producers of knowledge—while also encouraging us, as my department has, to communicate clearly what we do to people in other fields as well as to people outside academia." The Ph.D. program is not a means to an end but "an experience in itself," Ellicson says. "At the beginning, what I knew is that I wanted to continue reading and analyzing literature, to push my reflection on literature farther."

Instead of complete reform, Ellicson proposes that graduate programs reduce the time it takes to receive a doctorate. "The longer the program takes, the harder it can be to envision yourself, and the job climate, upon completion," she says. "I do think that some departments could more rigorously push its graduate students to finish earlier, by providing more feedback along the way, by demanding regular exchanges between advisors and grad students." A shorter Ph.D. program might alleviate some of the intense pressure placed on graduate students to secure tenure-track jobs. If graduate school is more an opportunity for personal and intellectual growth than an expensive and lengthy means of jumpstarting a lifelong career, success for a Ph.D student would mean more than just a professorship.

There appears to be an unbridgeable gap between Taylor's and Ellicson's visions. Is it possible to offer a deeply intellectual and practical education without corrupting both ends? How can universities launch their students on a career path while still allowing for in-depth study of the "impractical" subjects?

Maybe they can't. And maybe that's not such a bad thing. Rigidly adhering to tradition for its own sake is foolish, but whatever its flaws, the current system has brought us some tremendous scholarship. Creating zones of inquiry in lieu of departments might improve grad students' job prospects, but it would do so at the expense of the rigor that has produced real intellectual breakthroughs. In the academy, vast banality is often accompanied by a few sparks of genius.

But that genius requires cultivation and refinement. Even men like Einstein and Foucault went through the grind of graduate school. ●

STAGE TO SCREEN AND BACK AGAIN

a broadway guru chats about movies, musicals and everything in between

BY RUTHIE FIERBERG

ILLUSTRATION BY JIN CHEN

Musicals and movies go together like ramma-lamma-lamma ka dinga da dinga dong—to quote “Grease,” one of the most well-known movie musicals to date. Over the years, movies and stage musicals have overlapped so often that it can be difficult to discern what was first a stage musical and what originated in cinematic form.

Right now, movie musicals are hotter than ever. This fall, much-anticipated film versions of “Nine” and “Fame” will premiere. Discussions are also in the works for an “In the Heights” movie. In addition, a PBS special documentary on the Tony-winner aired this past summer—and two other musical documentaries were recently released. Ticket sales of recent movie musicals have been strong. Back in 2002, “Chicago” earned a whopping \$170,684,505 at the domestic box office, and the more recent “Dreamgirls” (2006) and “Mamma Mia!” (2008) raked in \$103,338,338 and \$143,704,210 respectively.

But are the stage versions of shows thriving like their cinematic complements, or are musical films drawing potential audiences away from the Great White Way?

Broadway box office returns indicate that not only is all well, but that movies are actually fueling live theater. “Many recent releases of movie versions of shows have helped the Broadway box offices hugely,” insists Brig Berney, company manager of Tony award-winning musical “In the Heights.” After working at The Producing Office—

the production company responsible for the current revival of “West Side Story,” “In the Heights,” “Avenue Q,” and “Rent”—on and off for 13 years, Berney has witnessed the rescue of shows firsthand.

“‘Phantom,’ ‘Chicago,’ and ‘Rent’ [the 2004, 2002, 2006 film versions] added at least another year to each of those show’s runs,” he says. In fact, the revival of “Chicago” is still alive—much like the singing, dancing, guilty murderesses at its core—after over 12 years on Broadway. Strangely enough, even a bad movie adaptation of a musical seems only to benefit the live theater version. “Neither movie [Phantom, Chicago, or Rent] was really great, but there was so much advertising and press prior to the release, so many reviews mentioning it being based on ‘the Broadway musical,’ followed by all the ads while the movie is out, then more coverage with the DVD release,” Berney points out. “It’s an ongoing reminder to people that these shows still exist.”

This was not always the philosophy behind movie musicals. “In the late ‘60s,” Berney says, “producer David Merrick wouldn’t allow the movie of ‘Hello, Dolly!’ to be released before the original run of the show ended. He was concerned that no one would want to see it live, if they could see it in a movie theater with Barbra Streisand.” But movies are undeniably more accessible than Broadway theater. “It [a feature film] does give people who choose not to go to live theater, don’t live in a big city or cannot afford theatre ticket prices, a chance to see ‘versions’ of shows,” grants Berney. And because of this, more producers—unlike Merrick—have jumped on the motion picture bandwagon.

The idea is to keep theatrical work at the forefront of the audience’s brains no matter what the

medium. Movie musicals are the financial aid of live theater. “If people see one, they may go to see another,” proposes Berney. “Seeing the movie of a show makes people want to see it live onstage.”

With this partnered marketing, it may come as a surprise to know that many Broadway producers don’t initially have film versions on their radar when putting a show together. After all, it took “Dreamgirls” over 25 years to make it to the silver screen and the upcoming “Nine” longer than that.

The dialogue between film and stage has offered a greater volume of theatrical art—despite some arguments from fans who claim that movies kill the art of theater. In Berney’s opinion, “Movies present Broadway shows in different ways. It’s not the same experience as seeing it live.” Cinematic interpretations add to the mix. “A film can be more realistic, plots can be opened up, songs added or cut,” suggests Berney.

“SEEING THE MOVIE OF A SHOW MAKES PEOPLE WANT TO SEE IT ONSTAGE.”

But diehard fans of some shows adapted into disappointing movies, like ‘Rent,’ might not be comforted by the idea of extra “art.”

Filmmakers have begun to answer such complaints. The creators of the most recent wave of movie-musicals have been careful to take preservation of the original stage versions and initial creative processes into consideration. Spike Lee’s summer release of “Passing Strange”—a 2008 Tony nominee for Best Musical—mixes behind-the-scenes documentary with excerpts from the June 19, 2008 live performance. The objective of this film was to sustain a piece of black history and one man’s creative experience rather than to elongate the run of the show, which closed only three months after it opened at the Belasco in Midtown. The summer 2009 documentary “Every Little Step” also contributes to the conservation of theater history. As an investigative piece, it compares the original and revival stage versions of “A Chorus Line” before delving into the personal stories of those auditioning for the 2006 revival. Documentary and filmed performances, rather than movie adaptations, are an option to protect the original theatrical content while simultaneously appealing to the masses.

By cleverly marketing shows and catering to both theater fanatics and average Joes alike, movies and musicals maintain separate creative boundaries while participating in a joint endeavor. A mainstream vehicle, movies act as the fast-speaking, widely-heard auctioneer for the classic and staying tradition of live theater. ●



TAKING IT TO THE STREETS

the rough world of food vendors in new york city

BY DEVIN BRISKI

PHOTO COURTESY OF DESSERT TRUCK

PHOTO BY MIKE DiSENZA

"I don't care if you're a licensed or a non-licensed vendor, blue, yellow, or white. You should have rights!" exclaims Bart, a yellow-card-holding, disabled veteran street vendor whose name has been changed to protect his anonymity. He's speaking at a meeting for the Street Vendor Project, a subsection of the Urban Justice Center. Their goal is to secure rights for food and general merchandise vendors selling their wares on the streets of New York.

The meeting feels like a civil rights rally: street vendors from all walks of life congregate to discuss being harassed by cops, red tape in city hall, and the trials and tribulations of everyday street vendor life. Even Columbia grads face difficulties in the cart-eat-cart world of street vending, as students learned when the beloved downtown pit stop the Dessert Truck—founded by Columbia alumni—was shut down in early August after its owners were unable to renew their permit. With the Vendy Awards, which select the best street food in New York City, only a week away, street vendors—their supposed turf wars and the black market dealings surrounding obtaining a vendor permit, specifically—have made their way into the forefront of city politics and gossip.

In-the-Black Market

New York City stopped issuing new street cart permits in the 1970s, meaning that only a few dozen new permits become available every year.

But there are three magical words that always guarantee a vendor a permit: disabled war veteran. While the waiting list for non-veterans is years long, veterans are guaranteed permits for desirable locations, meaning that many food trucks are run either by vets or by people partnered with them.

"It was Abraham Lincoln who said that everyone, even our poor and our disabled, should have something to make a living for themselves with," Bart asserts. The most profitable spaces in Manhattan, like Times Square, are reserved for blue-card war veterans, while yellow cardholders can sell everywhere blues cannot. While space is open for more yellow cardholders, the waiting list for white cards—the only type of permit available for non-disabled veterans—is thousands long. Although there is some antagonism between those who hold different permits, most of the vendors' resentment is channeled toward the city. "They [the city] should give permits to those who deserve them," complains Hussain Asghar, a fruit cart seller.

"Fifty percent of vendors sell their permits—they don't even use them," Asghar continues. "I am a vendor of fifteen years and I have never had my own permit. Some people came yesterday, and they have a permit." This shortage has fueled a thriving and profitable black market. In June, the New York Times reported that six people had been arrested and

charged with fraud for selling illegal underground food vendor permits. Of the city's 3,000 vending permits, around 500 are held illegally.

"My friend had to buy a permit on the black market, and it cost him \$8,000," says Mohammed Ali, who runs a hot dog stand on Liberty Street. By contrast, it only costs \$60 to obtain a permit through legal means—a nearly impossible feat for a vendor without veteran status.

Petitioning the city to reform street vendor permit laws is one of the many goals of the Street Vendor Project, a grassroots activism project that bands together street vendors and brings their goals to the attention of the city and public. "The goal of our organization is to educate and empower street members to start their own business. People are looking for a job, a chance to create and innovate, but they can't pay the sky-high rent," explains Cheikh Fall, vendor and Street Vendor Project board member.

Yellow Lights and Red Tape

No one knows more about the city's frustrating regulations on food carts than Jerome Chang, CC '99, and Chris Chen, CBS '08, cofounders of city favorite the Dessert Truck. Their innovative food cart sold gourmet desserts to passersby, a business model that has since been taken up by copycats like the Treats Truck and Street Sweets. After an almost two-year run as one of the first and most successful upscale food trucks in Manhattan, the Dessert Truck was forced to shut its doors this August because their business partner—a disabled war veteran—had trouble renewing his permit. "The decision not to renew it is being appealed, but there's only one person in charge of that, so the appeal may take about a year," explains Chang. In the meantime, the Dessert Truck is catering private events in the city.

While the Dessert Truck obtained a permit fairly easily by partnering with a disabled war veteran, the business also faced numerous complicated and arbitrary regulations that didn't take into account the individual needs of separate street vendors.

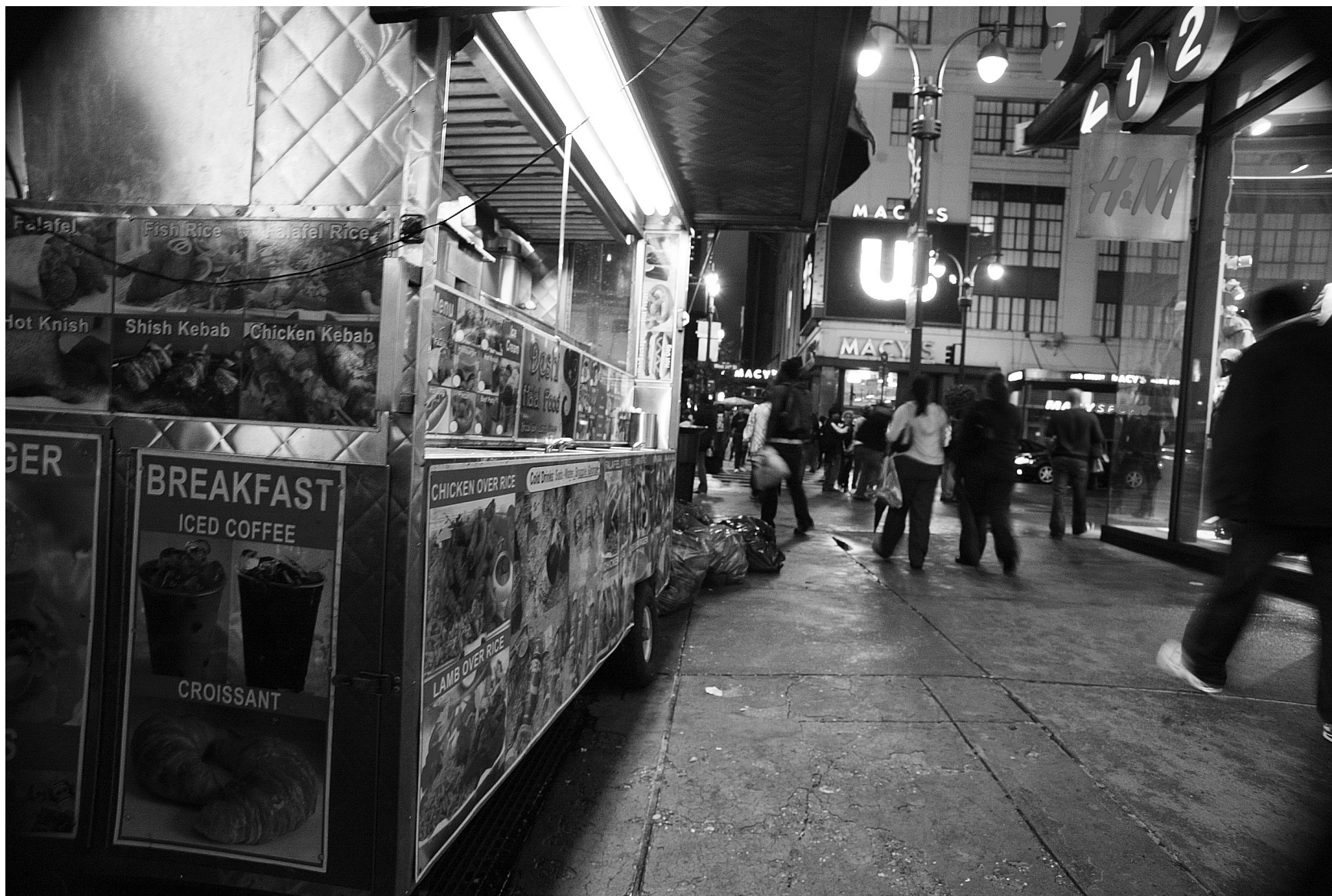
"There's a big reason why more creative businesses like ours can't thrive on the street: because of all the inefficiencies and red tape in the system. In a Starbucks, only one person needs a license to handle the food, but everybody working in a truck needs a license—even the cashier," Chang explains. "The application process [for a food handling license] can take maybe three months if you're diligent. That's a lot for someone who just wants to serve food on the street." Food trucks also have to save receipts when they purchase their food, a burdensome regulation to which restaurants are not subjected.

Additionally, trucks must be parked in a commissary, with rationale that they will prepare their food on site. "They're more disgusting than a regular parking lot!" says Chang. "With the more creative trucks, you're not going to be able to prepare your food there."

"WE GET PUSHED AROUND BY COPS, THE BUSINESS DISTRICT, COMMUNITY COUNCILS."



Upon its entry into the food cart world, the Dessert Truck became popular with college students by offering gourmet desserts for low prices.



Members of the Street Vendor Project sell food by day and fight for vending rights by night.

Vendin' Dirty

After the extensive wheeling and dealing required to obtain a permit and the hassle involved in following regulations, food carts still have to deal with the street authorities. "We get pushed around by cops, the business district, community councils," laments Bart.

"THE DESSERT TRUCK IS THE FIRST BUSINESS ... [TO] OFFER HIGH END-GOURMET FOOD ON THE STREET."

Many food vendors complain that policemen sometimes arbitrarily exert their power, using their authority mainly to enforce petty regulations like the distance between cart and curb. "Most police are just doing their job, but a lot of them come with a nasty attitude," says general merchandise vendor Tyrone B. "A lot of police aren't veterans, though, and I think they're envious of us."

The complicated regulations governing where vendors can and cannot sell is unfamiliar to a lot of cops. "The police come out and have had no training in what the various licenses are and what they mean," Bart explains. "I met a cop who spent eight

years pushing around vendors and didn't even know the difference between a blue and a yellow license."

Surprisingly enough, relationships between vendors are much less tense than their relations with the NYPD. Despite publicity on supposed turf wars, food carts' owners actually maintain an uneasy truce. "We never did [have any problems with other vendors] because we made a point not to step on any toes," Chang says of his experience. "A lot of people [new vendors] are having trouble because they're being jerks about it."

Tyrone agrees: "There are petty fights [among food cart vendors]. It can get ugly, but generally it doesn't. Merchandise vendors are a different story, though. It goes to war, believe me."

Competition for merchandise-selling locations in high traffic areas and on street corners can get especially heated. "Last year some thugs from Egypt tried to push me in front of a taxi cab in order to get my spot on the street," says Bart.

It's Hard Out There for a Vendor

In spite of the hardships faced by food and merchandise vendors alike, many maintain that selling on the streets still has appeal—especially compared to the high-rent alternative of operating a café or store. "The dessert truck is the first business of its kind in history, where you offer really high-end gourmet food on the street and make it available to everybody," says Chang. "In my

time at Columbia, I majored in African American studies. I feel like with the Civil Rights movement, people started to fulfill the Declaration of Independence: 'Everyone is created equal.' With the truck movement, it's about giving everyone access to really good food. There's a connection there."

Chang should feel proud of himself: he and Chen helped to spearhead the new trend of bringing gourmet food to the masses. With new trucks like Cupcake Stop and People's Pops appearing regularly on the streets of New York, high-end desserts are no longer the exclusive territory of elitist bakeries.

But despite their influence, vendors must continually struggle to earn a living in the face of police and city regulations—especially the more traditional halal and hot dog cart owners. The Street Vendor Project now has 800 members, a significant chunk of the 10,000 or so vendors in New York City, including many that will not be backing down anytime soon. "I'm a firebrand—I start trouble, and I don't like to be pushed around," Bart asserts. Many vendors are banking on the Street Vendor Project as a vehicle for change, or at the very least, as a strong voice to represent a frequently overlooked group in city politics.

And regardless of the difficulties associated with the job, many vendors wouldn't change careers even if the opportunity presented itself. "It's a rough business," admits Tyrone. "You have to deal with other vendors, you have to deal with the police. But I love this job because I'm a people person. I love people." ●

GUILTLESS PLEASURES

making a case for embarrassing music

BY REBECCA PATTIZ

PHOTO BY KRISTINA BUDELIS

The first time I heard the Backstreet Boys blasting from somewhere down the hall my freshman year, I assumed an ironic, nostalgic dance party must be in session. By the fourth time I heard “Show Me the Meaning of Being Lonely,” it became clear that whoever was playing this music actually liked it—no winks or knowing nudges implied.

For all first-year students, college is a time of transition, exploration, and growth—especially when it comes to their taste in music. What you liked in high school can often be a source of humiliation and discomfort in college. Listening to the wrong music can be social suicide, and no one I interview will admit to liking something they find embarrassing. Instead, many attest to the poor tastes of others, and to second-hand embarrassment on their part. No matter what we listen to, I found, everyone is a critic.

“I don’t want to sound like a snob,” starts Samuel Segal, CC ’13, when asked if he ever judges his classmates by the music they listen to. “A lot of people listen to catchy, loud—what I find obnoxious—rap and pop-rock,” he says. Segal’s own tastes run toward folk music, especially

Bob Dylan. But much to his surprise, he’s found that many of his fellow freshmen have never heard of Dylan. “I pity them, and I envy them,” he says. “It must be cool for them to hear it for the first time, but everyone where I come from knows Bob Dylan.”

Like Segal, Zoe Harris, BC ’13, shyly admits that she can sometimes “judge people way too harshly on the music they listen to”—even as she attempts not to sound condescending. But she expects that people are judging her as well, assuming that she’s “some strange freak-out indie kid.” Though Harris, a New York City native, listens to mostly local rock bands, she says she has “gained a little more appreciation for Jack Johnson,” thanks to her roommates. She describes their taste as “much more mainstream” than her own. “Mainstream,” like “interesting” is one of those words which, when said the right way, can be surprisingly cutting.

Segal and Harris speak to the twin blessing and curse of music geekery. Though they might look down on their classmates for listening to “Now! 86” on repeat, they’re still nervous about being judged themselves and also afraid of coming off as snobs.

For many first-years on the other side of the musical obscurity fence, the humiliation brought on by musical ignorance or frowned-upon inclinations can come coupled with a desire to grow and expand their sonic horizons. Soya Seo, CC ’13, came to Columbia with a proclivity for “whatever comes out that’s good and popular,” like Justin Timberlake. Seo is not alone—for every vinyl-collecting music nerd on campus, there are probably 20 people who don’t know what vinyl is.

THE WORD “MAINSTREAM” CAN BE SURPRISINGLY CUTTING

Though Seo says she’s not ashamed of her tastes, she also admits that her musical knowledge is rapidly expanding at Columbia. “My roommate is actually, like, a mega music zealot, and she listens to old New York punk music. And those are songs I’d never really listened to before coming here, but she puts it on 24/7 and I love it,” she says.

For Jessica Ruby, BC ’11, coming to college also meant coming into her own, musically speaking. Though she “only listened to the radio until 10th grade,” she began scouring the Internet for new music toward the end of high school. In college, her tastes, which were unusual and unpopular at her high school in Richmond, VA, suddenly became cool. When Ruby joined WKCR as a programmer, she was introduced to old soul and blues music, radically transforming her taste. Looking back at her freshman year, Ruby cringes.

DIRTY LITTLE SECRETS

We did the searching so you don’t have to. Here’s when your favorite embarrassing artists are coming to the city:

Sept. 22 at 7:00 pm:

Plain White T’s at Beacon Theatre from \$34.50

Oct. 4 at 7:00 pm:

Fall Out Boy, All-American Rejects, and Blink 182 at Madison Square Garden from \$12

Oct. 5 at 8:00 pm:

Pink at Madison Square Garden from \$49.50

Oct. 6 at 8:00 pm:

Kelly Clarkson at Hammerstein Ballroom from \$49.50

Oct. 15 at 6:00 pm:

Hanson and Hellogoodbye at Nokia Theatre \$29.50

Nov. 12–14 at 7:00 pm:

Rob Thomas with OneRepublic and Carolina Liar at Beacon Theatre from \$45.50



“Indie rock—I hate the word,” she says. Though Ruby believes that Columbia’s music culture is slightly more sophisticated than colleges outside New York City, she also grants that lots of people here really do like Dave Matthews, if only secretly. But even when pressed, she refused to disclose the names of any DMB-lovers she knows.

Ruby also emphasizes that the changes in her music taste since coming to Columbia were not the result of a desire to feel cool or accepted by a music-snob roommate. She believes that everyone should listen to the music that makes them happy, regardless of whether people judge them for it. “People like what they like, and if you actually like it, then great.”

Still, Ruby’s accepting optimism does not truly characterize Columbia’s stance on what is okay to listen to. Columbians are simultaneously judgmental and afraid of being judged when it comes to our music taste. Ideally, this leads us to try new things and open our minds to whatever weirdness is coming out of our roommate’s speakers. Too often, though, it causes us to laugh at that kid who’s wearing a Guster t-shirt while furiously rocking out to Shakira—completely unironically. Maybe, then, it’s not worth all the CD hiding, the faked sarcasm, and the failed attempts to really like noise music. Try just hanging up your Hanson poster and letting your uncool flag fly. Who knows—you might just enjoy yourself, for a change. ●

BEAUTY AND BRAINS

five questions for model student cameron russell

BY NORA ROJAS

PHOTOS BY MARCIO MADEIRA

In New York, where Mercedes-Benz Fashion Week is something of a cultural institution, the shows are a familiar and celebrated spectacle. But what happens behind those chic curtains? Cameron Russell, an economics major in the School of General Studies, founder of the community-based documentary project Interview New York, and working model with a dozen seasons under her belt, discusses the world of high fashion.

What's the process of booking a show like?

It's different for a new model than it is for a more established model. As a young model, you have to run around before Fashion Week, going to lots of castings, trying to walk as many shows as you possibly can. As a more established model, the designers already know whether or not they want you in their shows, and it's also less important to walk in so many because people already know who you are.

Do you enjoy doing Fashion Week? What goes on backstage and how does it feel to walk the runway?

I don't think any model will tell you that Fashion Week is her favorite time of year—unless maybe a reporter asks her. But I have made some of my best model friends sharing hotels during Milan and Paris show weeks. Backstage, you catch up with friends, spend an hour or more in hair and makeup and wait for them to call first looks. It depends on the show, but sometimes [when walking the runway] you're



"I DON'T THINK ANY MODEL WILL TELL YOU THAT FASHION WEEK IS HER FAVORITE TIME OF YEAR."

just focused on keeping your shoes and clothes from falling off. I like shoots better: you spend more time with the team, and you get to work together to produce something rather than showing up after a designer has worked for months and taking part in a five-minute show; [it's] the culmination of someone else's hard work.

How do you find time to do school work?

If I did a full season of shows like I used to—that's 60 or 70 shows in three or four cities—I probably wouldn't have the time. These days, I only do a few shows in each city, which leaves me time for school and to develop Interview New York.

Do you think of fashion as art?

It can be. I respect fashion because it's a universal language. If you walk into a room wearing a sexy Yves Saint Laurent dress, it garners the same reaction whether you're in New York, Paris, or the United Arab Emirates. The downside is that fashion is often focused on status and consumption.

How does one become a model? Is it talent that can be honed, as reality television would have us believe?

Honestly, to have initial success as a model it's simply a matter of having the right look—and that's not really something that you have control of. To have longevity, as in most fields, you have to be able to get along with the people you work with. ●



When Fashion Looks Forward

BY ELLIOT SMALLING AND RACHEL ALLEN

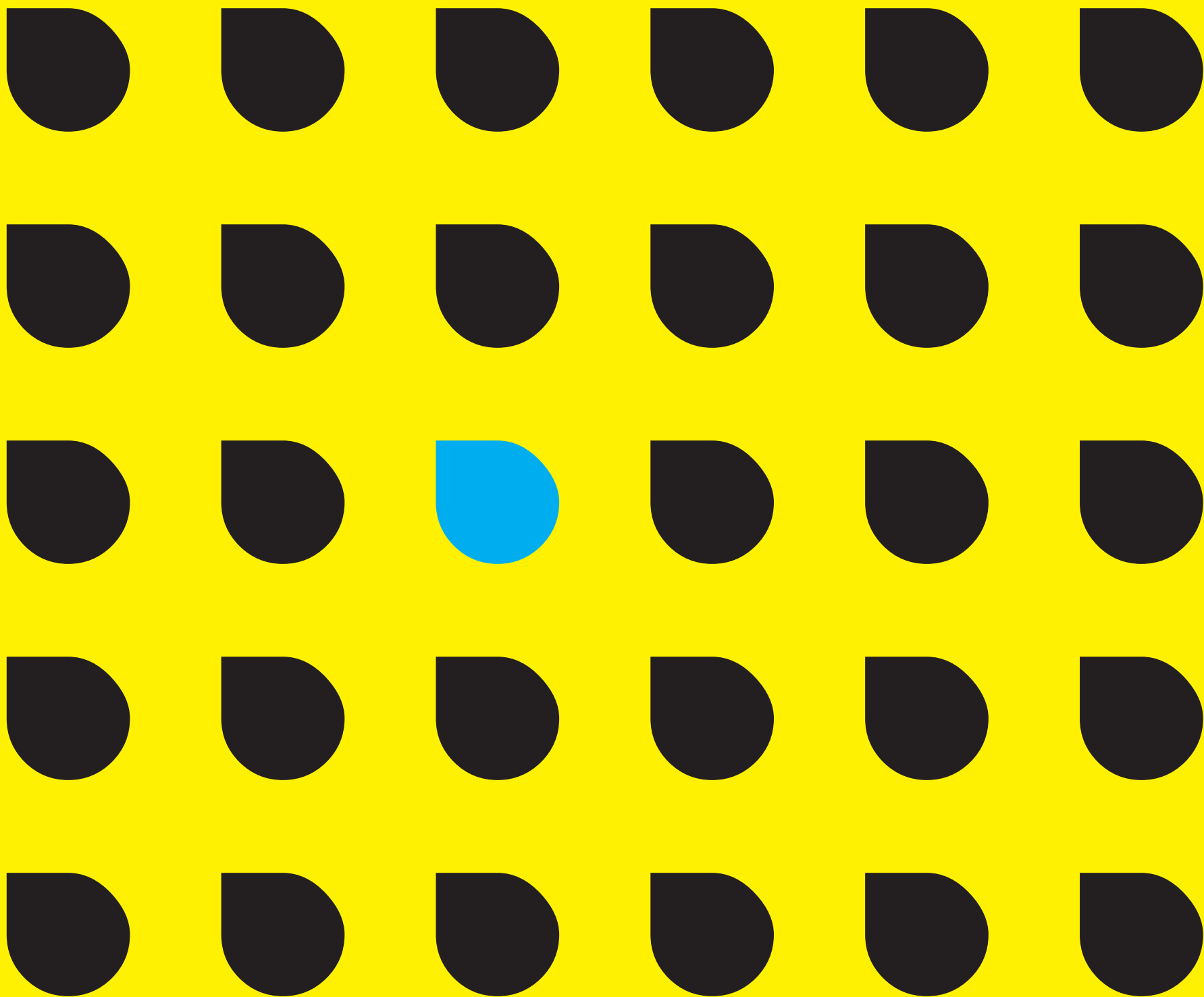
The catwalk, the A-list front row, the frenzy backstage: this is what comes to mind when someone says "fashion show." But alternative ways to present a collection are becoming increasingly common. These two unorthodox shows stood out from the rest:

Commonwealth Utilities Menswear Collection

A barbershop, a quintessentially masculine institution from the days of yore, was an apt place to stage the Commonwealth Utilities S/S 2010 show. While the label's past two collections have bordered on too sexy for some tastes, designer Anthony Keegan toned things down by presenting an array of suits and sportswear that, just like a barbershop, were classic. The extremely well-tailored shorts and seersucker suits called to mind a Brooks Brothers aesthetic for the modern man, while the pairing of sweatpants with formal blazers (a trend that has popped up in a number of menswear shows this season) broke the rules in an intriguing way. What really made the show stand out, though, was the work of Richard Christiansen, the brand's marketing director and organizer of the presentation. A show where models spring up from barber's chairs and throw off their capes to reveal impeccably designed outfits is truly unforgettable, and it's also what transformed Keegan's work from a line of clothing into a clever work of art. Like a good haircut, classic wardrobe items will always make those who wear them feel confident.

Marc Bouwer Womenswear Collection

Accessibility has always been one of Fashion Week's problems: only a limited few can experience the runway. Marc Bouwer has decided to change that. Bouwer, the pioneering mind behind the virtual fashion show, released his Spring/Summer 2010 line to the world at 9 a.m. yesterday on his website. At the show's shooting, Bouwer explained the ideas behind his move online: "How can we spend this money to get our message across, you know, but still have somewhat of a traditional fashion show? And I thought, well let's use the internet. That way everyone can have a front row seat, and instead of showing to 200 people we can show to the entire world." In an inspired collection featuring 46 looks, and designed entirely for his new muse, model and heiress Lydia Hearst, Bouwer is working to revive shoulder pads and sparkles. His collection also features many of the classic flowing gowns that make Bouwer a celebrity favorite. Further demonstrating his unique sensibility, Bouwer chose to go with red as his centerpiece color rather than traditional pastel spring hues. When asked to describe his most recent line he declared it "strong, graphic, bold, colorful and fun to wear." Whether other designers will follow Bouwer's lead remains to be seen, but with the fashion world in economic turmoil designers are finding more creative ways to spend less and reach a larger audience: a trend originating in Bouwer's virtual vision. ●



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