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the eye

Digital Manipulation

reading homer in the digital age

by Anna Feuer

updating the field trip \ a hip-hop guide to staten island \ the controversial double zero

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DIGITAL MANIPULATION

Is the Internet changing our
experience of the Core? pg. 07

by Anna Feuer
cover photo by Andra Mihali

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LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

As I read over this week's lead story about new media's effect on the Core, I wondered: what's the proportion of those who read the *Eye* online versus in print?

I have a feeling the answer might depress me (and our print layout editors, who put an unbelievably admirable effort into the design each week—conversely, our online editor, Neel, would probably be happy). As Anna Feuer notes in her article, the physical experience of reading a book is undeniably different from that of reading a PDF downloaded from CourseWorks. Likewise, I think, the physical experience of reading a magazine is different from that of clicking through sections of a magazine's Web site. Sure, the latter is more convenient—read *Time*'s coverage of an event, then *Newsweek*'s, then the *New Republic*'s for free and without ever having to change out of your pajamas.

But what about the tactile experience of holding one of those magazines—the feeling of turning its pages? And what about the reassurance you get from reading a magazine cover-to-cover? If I read an issue of *Newsweek* in full, I can close the magazine and feel pretty confident that I'm caught up on the week's news—the Internet, in its infinitude, is impossible ever to “finish.” And speaking of reassurance, perhaps cynically, what about the social capital of reading a magazine in public? (Let's level with each other:

it's one of the reasons I subscribe to *Vanity Fair*, and I know I'm not the only one.)

Of course, there's a solipsistic element to my concern. When you're a young person interested in journalism, adults constantly advise you to learn HTML or start a blog, dabble in new media in one respect or another. The unspoken second half of the sentence goes something like: *because by the time you're old enough to edit a paper-and-ink magazine, there will be none left to edit.* When I went to a journalism conference at Harvard this spring, I couldn't go three minutes without hearing someone throw around the phrase “death of print media.” A Google search of the same (ironic, no?) yields over three million results.

I think print journalism is important, but I'm hardly an objective party. If I had to say why, exactly, the prospect of a media hosted solely on the Internet is so daunting, I think my answer would be twofold. For one thing, beyond a basic understanding of HTML tags and Mac shortcuts, I don't know much about how to build a Web site. But my second reason is more philosophical: maybe it's simplistic, but our print edition is tangible. The Internet still feels to me like a compilation of ephemera. You can burn the *Eye* or throw it away, but there will still be evidence of its having physically existed—it can't be deleted forever with a few keystrokes.

—Alexandria Symonds



Don't Bank On It

BY RAPHAEL POPE-SUSSMAN

PHOTO COURTESY OF THE NATIONAL ARCHIVES

Many students at Columbia dream of becoming rich. Sometimes, they awake from these dreams to discover that they have drooled all over their \$600 Louis Vuitton handbags.

Anatole France, a famous guy—who, based on his name, we will assume was from France—once said, “The law, in its majestic equality, forbids the rich as well as the poor to sleep under bridges, to beg in the streets, and to steal bread.”

What a weird guy. I mean, what kind of rich person would sleep under a bridge? Sure, if you have a pied-à-terre in the so-called “DUMBO” region of Brooklyn, you could technically sleep under a bridge, but I don’t think most rich people would go for it.

They would prefer to sleep in a silky bed of Apple iPod MP3 players and engorged goose livers.

But this dream of richness is in danger. The financial economy is falling apart.

You may not be frightened right now, but you should be. If you are not shitting yourself over this financial crisis, I recommend you start. It’s not going to change anything, but this way at least later on, when you are living under a bridge, you won’t consider it your lowest moment.

The economy is in shambles, and Columbians are terrified. My roommate often makes hideous moaning noises in his sleep. I do not know for sure what causes these noises, but I must assume it has something to do with this global credit crisis I keep hearing about. He may claim these noises are caused by the myriad of sexual experiences he relives in his mind, but that’s just ridiculous. I mean, the guy couldn’t even seduce a blow-up doll. So it’s clear he’s broken up about the economy.

Even for a sexually frustrated guy like my roommate, it hurts bad to have your dream of working on Wall Street crushed. That’s why we, as a community, must come together to heal the broken dreams of would-be investment bankers.

It seems like only yesterday that so many bright young idealists at Columbia could grow

up to drown in an infinite pool of greed, powder cocaine, and revoltingly high-class trim.

And yet today, those bright young idealists face the prospect of competing for low-paying jobs with the sort of sniveling proletarians who think Gap is a “name-brand.” We’re not talking about the kind of low-paying jobs that allow you to flounder around in a finite pool of greed, marijuana cigarettes, and comfortably middle-class trim.

We’re talking about way crappier jobs.

With these jobs, the kind of scratch necessary to experience true greed will be far beyond your means. But, if you work hard and save, one day you may be able to experience the joy of penny-pinching. In that you will literally lust after individual copper pennies. And, if you’re lucky, you’ll have enough to indulge in the fleeting highs and crushing dizzy spells of huffing industrial solvents.

The immediate future is not too bright. Those who dreamt of a life on Wall Street may find themselves actually living on Wall Street. Yet it’s important to remember that things could always get worse. My roommate, for example, faces both a life of pecuniary want and severe vas deferential incontinence. So don’t despair.

Instead, remember the imponderable question Langston Hughes once asked: “What happens to a dream deferred?”

I don’t remember what he said next, but I’ll assume it was that nothing too awful happens to the deferred dream. Today we must defer our dream of sublime sybaritism, but that dream need not die. Rather, we must keep the dream alive, so that one day—when the Dow Jones is north of 15,000 and Lehman Brothers are just the Jewish twins down the hall—Columbians will again have a fighting chance to profit spectacularly from usury.

It is said that you should make hay while the sun shines. But it is also said that the sky is darkest before dawn. It would probably be best, then, for us to just make hay in the dark. That way, the dream will still be alive when this crisis comes to an end. And, if it doesn’t, at least we’ll have some delicious hay to snack on.

Plus it will give my roommate something to do with his time. That might take his mind off the debilitating sexual rejection he faces daily.

COMPILED BY HILLARY BUSIS
AND RAPHAEL POPE-SUSSMAN

Editors’ 10

what we’re into this week

1. Gorilla Coffee: “Awesome dark roasts that wake me up in the morning—and take me back to my summer as a Brooklyn hipster (even though it can be bought at Whole Foods).”

—Shane Ferro, food editor

2. Barack Obama’s Mix N’ Match Magnetic Wardrobe:

“A change of clothing we can believe in.”

—Raphael Pope-Sussman, humor editor

3. Fruit, fruit, and more fruit: “For new celiacs like myself, it’s one of the only foods that can make our stomachs happy. Soon I’ll be so used to having a disease where I can’t eat wheat, barley, or rye that you’ll see me around campus wearing a ‘Silly Yak’ t-shirt.”

—Hayley Negrin, features managing editor

4. Remixes of Britney Spears’ new single, “Womanizer”:

“Ambitious DJs started playing with the song as soon as it was released two weeks ago. There are a wealth of good ones, but my favorite remixes are from You Love Her Coz She’s Dead and The Teenagers.”

—Alexandria Symonds, editor-in-chief

5. Roti Roll: “It’s two pounds of heavy Indian fast food in your stomach. Then you can take a nice leisurely walk back to campus, which burns 2 percent of that meal.”

—Learned Foote, film editor

6. School-boy blazers: “It’s the perfect weather right now—crisp without being chilly—for wearing blazers. I have a classic shrunken navy blue one that goes with pretty much everything in my closet. Wearing it with jeans and a t-shirt makes me feel a little more academic and ready to conquer the day when I go to my 9:10 class every morning but have only slept a few hours.”

—Helen Werbe, production editor

7. Clips of *Fantasia* on YouTube: “These are especially fun to watch after taking Music Hum and learning that the original version of ‘The Rite of Spring’ was accompanied by a depiction of a crazy pagan death orgy, not dinosaurs. The more you know.”

—Hillary Busis, deputy features editor

8. Queen Latifah: “Not only was she hilarious as Gwen Ifill in SNL’s vice-presidential debate skit, but the *New York Times Magazine* ran an absolutely amazing feature on her on Friday, Oct. 3. As she sang in *Chicago*, life’s been “good to Mama” this week.

—Rebecca Evans, A&E managing editor

9. Gilbert and George at the Brooklyn Museum: “These men are huge, literally. The two contemporary performance and digital artists create giant work for display. They’re also in every single work, creating a sort of ‘where’s Waldo?’ effect. While the *Times* thought the exhibit was too big and ultimately heartless, the exhibit left me wanting to be a bohemian in mod-ish England. Or simply to be friends with David Hockney.”

—Jennie Rose Halperin, music editor

10. E-cards: “I like unconventional avenues of communication. It keeps people on their toes.”

—Lucy Tang, books editor

Eye Spy

Probable economics major: “I’m going to make so much money, guaranteed. I’m going to spit on President Bollinger, even though I love him. I’m going to be like, ‘What are you making?’ And he’ll be like, ‘Upper six figures.’ And I’ll be like, ‘I’m making more than you. But want to come over for dinner tonight?’”

—EC Townhouse

Girl: “I want two eggs, scrambled, with monster cheese.”

Guy behind counter: “Munster cheese?”

Girl: “Yeah, monster cheese.”

—In Pinnacle

Did You Know?

- ▶ The annual tradition of homecoming was born at the University of Missouri.
- ▶ According to a *New York Times* article from 1925, homecoming at Barnard that year featured “a one-act farce and dance ... tea from 4 to 6 o’clock in the College Parlor, and a basketball game at 6 between Barnard and Teachers College.” The article did not mention whether those events involved a rented parking spot at Baker Field, a beer funnel, or witty anti-Jersey t-shirts.
- ▶ Columbia’s homecoming loss continued a streak of failures against Princeton—the Lions have not beaten the Tigers since 2003.

eyeTunes

This week, Caroline Mort interviews Cut Copy, an Australian three-man, electro-disco band that crafts nearly perfect dance-pop songs as timeless as they are infectious. Their sophomore album, *In Ghost Colours*, released in April on Modular, only left us wanting to hear more. A primer, for the uninitiated:

1. **“Saturdays”:** On their 2004 debut, *Bright Like Neon Love*, Cut Copy heralded the return of disco as an exciting genre, rather than a dead one. Their first hit is a good place to get started.
2. **“Lights & Music”:** Unrelentingly poppy, the Cut Copy tune most likely to get stuck in your head is that rare dance song that gets better the more you listen to it.
3. **“Hearts on Fire (Joakim Remix)”:** This sprawling nine-minute remix gives the song the sense of drama it needs—Joakim doesn’t even kick in the vocals until four and a half minutes in.
4. **“Bright Neon Payphone”:** Simply put, this song makes you feel like a good dancer, even if you aren’t one. For best results, turn it on when you’re three beers into the evening.
5. **“Eternity One Night Only”:** The last song on *In Ghost Colours* might be unfairly overlooked because it isn’t as lively as the rest of the album, but its slow progression proves the boys can do ambient with the best of them.

Hooked on Electronics

COMPILED BY ANNA FEUER

Our lead story this week examines how reading has changed in the digital age—and, specifically, how it affects Columbia’s Core Curriculum. Below are a few scary statistics about the status of reading in the United States today.

- A 2007 *Wired* survey reported that one in four people didn’t read a single book that past year.
- In 1984, almost one-third of 17-year-olds read almost every day for fun. In 2004, just over one-fifth of 17-year-olds said they did the same.
- In 2004, 19 percent of 17-year-olds reported that they never or hardly ever read for fun. Only 9 percent of 17-year-olds said this in 1984.
- A Kaiser Family Foundation study reported that out of 2,032 8-to-18-year-olds, almost half used the Internet on a daily basis—in 1999, less than one-quarter of the same age group went online that often. These children spent an average of one hour and 41 minutes online every day in 2004, as compared to 46 minutes in 1999.

Source: The *New York Times* (“Literacy Debate: Online, R U Really Reading?” by Motoko Rich, July 27, 2008)

Less Money, More Problems

financial aid for international students

BY DAVID BERKE

PHOTO BY COURTESY OF
HOUSTON'S CLEAR THINKERS

The first university ceremony for the Columbia class of 2012 began with a parade of national flags. About 150 of them, each representing a country from which Columbia drew students, were carried through the crowd by NSOP volunteers and placed behind the convocation speakers. These pieces of cloth were the opening sentence for the collegiate careers of the entire first-year class. Though many speakers referenced them, no one seemed too concerned with the details—whether there were 152 or 150 flags—the point was their abundance.

When President Bollinger was chosen as Columbia's president in 2001, he stressed his hope for Columbia to grow into "a truly global university." In 2003, when discussing his Supreme Court battle for affirmative action with Bill Moyers, Bollinger noted that status as an international student should improve one's chances of college acceptance. Then in 2006, he attended the University Leaders Forum in Davos, Switzerland to discuss global partnerships with universities in Europe and Asia. Again in 2007, while laying out his plan to make Columbia a global university, Bollinger reiterated his desire to bolster the international student population, and today it remains a key element of his globalizing initiative.

Bollinger wants to keep adding flags—but Columbia's policy on financial aid for international students, coupled with the impossibility of getting private loans and the challenge of obtaining a student visa, is a major roadblock to his goal.

There is a major difference between students entering Columbia who come from abroad and those represented by the stars and stripes.

As Adriana Hernandez, CC '12, put it rather bluntly, "most of the international students here have money."

Chances are they have to in order to attend Columbia because for students without U.S. residency, Columbia is not need-blind, nor does it offer the accepted international students much financial aid.

According to Alice Butera, CC '12 who came from Italy this year, this policy stops many international students from even asking for aid—even if they need it—for fear that they will not be accepted.

"For international students, they are more careful. ... Some other international students, their parents can't pay," she says. "It's quite a precarious situation."

For Ishmael Osekre, a GS senior from Ghana, his family's financial contribution was his plane ticket to New York.

"Most of my friends who had applied [to top tier American schools] ... had support from their schools," Osekre explains. "Of course I was naive. I came all the way from Accra."

Columbia's financial aid did not meet his full need, and Osekre's family had no money to spare. As a non-citizen, he had no hope of receiving private student loans. After finding a network of supporters, Osekre privately raised funds for his tuition.

"It definitely wasn't the easiest of paths," he says.

The unpredictability of cash flow meant that Osekre often had debts and a hold on his student account at the beginning each semester, preventing him from registering for courses on time. Even now, in his last year, he rarely buys books for classes, borrowing from friends or using library copies instead. Plus, he spends a considerable amount of his time raising thousands of dollars to pay his way.

"I don't know why Columbia isn't doing more, especially with international students," Osekre says. To him, a lack of awareness is not the issue. "I haven't been silent about it," he adds.

It is easy to look only at the size of Columbia's endowment—over \$7 billion—and cry financial foul over the University's policy. But the amount of endowment per student is far lower at Columbia than the per-student amount for the eight American schools that offer need-blind admissions to international students.

Williams College, one of those eight, has an endowment below \$2 billion, but its per-student endowment is close to \$900,000, while Columbia's is under \$300,000. Williams is also in northern Massachusetts while Columbia has a costlier city campus, the expensive Manhattanville expansion, and other ambitious capital projects. The per-student endowment comparisons play out much the same way for the other seven need-blind schools.

Even once accepted, international students

unable to scrounge up funding may not be allowed on the plane to New York because of federal immigration regulations, explains Ellen Cohen, an associate director at the International Students and Scholars Office.

Cohen is quick to note that her "office is not involved at all with financial aid." However, her office does issue international students the documentation necessary to enter the U.S. And in order for the ISSO to issue international students an I-20, a form confirming their enrollment that is required for a student visa, they must document their ability to pay tuition.

The money does not have to be cash on hand—proven access to money through savings, loans, and relatives works as well.

Elba Garza, SEAS '11, went through the I-20 application process in 2006. She was accepted at Cornell as an international student, and she had to document her ability to pay for all four years.

"I had to show that I had \$250,000 in my pocket," she says.

But what happens to a student who cannot document the funds?

"If there are prospective students unable to document those resources, then they don't make it," Cohen says.

Columbia Office of Public Affairs issued a statement explaining that the University's first priority is increasing aid for domestic students. Though "in the future, it is our goal to provide similar financial support to the remainder of our international population."

While the flags on parade were just an opening sentence for the class of 2012, they are an integral part of Bollinger's educational thesis and hopes for Columbia's future—a future that looks rocky for students like Osekre. ■



Australian Rock, Cut and Paste

caroline mort interviews cut copy

BY CAROLINE MORT

PHOTO COURTESY OF GIRLIE ACTION

Cut Copy is an alternative electronic band based in Melbourne, Australia. Dan Whitford (vocals, keyboard, guitar), a former DJ and graphic designer, began recruiting members in 2004. Soon they were touring with Daft Punk and Franz Ferdinand. Sometimes described as alternative dance music or electro-pop, Cut Copy is often compared to The Dandy Warhols, New Young Pony Club, and Midnight Juggernauts. Caroline Mort sat down with band member Tim Hoey (bass, guitar, sampler) to discuss deejaying, touring with friends, and the Australian music scene.

Your two New York City concerts at Webster Hall with The Presets were sold out by July! Have you been selling out across the country?

Yeah, that's been the most amazing thing about being in America. Everything we hoped it would be. We were initially worried because it has been so long between our two records. We were worried if we still had an audience, but when the record came out everyone got where we were coming from. We felt like we had achieved what

we had wanted to. It's been crazy, the shows. The people go crazy—they stand up and watch. It's been amazing.

Does having such a large American fan base surprise you?

Well, not totally. When we initially toured in the States, the audience here was quite loyal, quite organic. It felt more like played shows, where people came to see the shows and then the same people came back down. It grew really naturally, as opposed to the UK, where you tour for press frenzy—you're chewed up and spat out quickly. The U.S. is quite organic.

Where is your favorite place to perform?

So far this tour had certainly been the best of our shows, like New York, along with Chicago. These have been our most vocal audiences. It's kind of funny, I think, because I don't know if we have a precedence. But if the audience is having a really good time, makes our job easy.

Dan started out as a DJ before forming Cut Copy, and Cut Copy has a fair amount of remixes out in the music world. Would you say that the deejaying or the original band work is more representative of the Cut Copy name?

Definitely the band. Certainly, with the new record out, we had more time to do deejaying work. We captured the energy of the band, like in the studio this time around. With a lot of things, we try to make the deejaying part of our name quite musical as well. We try and make it enjoyable for the listener and make it a musical kind of feeling, not just a dance party. The visual part is important as well, as the band has a graphic designer background, so we do all the designs and t-shirts and video and art work for Cut Copy.

How was touring with Daft Punk a few years back?

Every modern band has an influence or reference regardless what genre. Daft Punk was a huge influence to us when we started. So were The Beach Boys, My Bloody Valentine, and ELO. They influenced us in all different kinds of ways. Sharing the stage with Daft Punk was a huge honor. It was amazing, with crazy stadiums and theatrical shows every night.

How about touring with The Presets? How did that come about? Do you all have a good time together?

Absolutely, this has been one of the best tours we've ever done. We used to tour in Australia together back when neither of us had an audience. It's good to be on tour with friends and people you respect as musicians and artists. It's what touring is all about. Sometimes touring can be such a drag and really tiring, day in and day out. Touring with friends lets you keep going.

Who would you next like to tour with, and where?

Hmm, I don't know. We've done the States a few times, Canada, Mexico, Europe, and the UK. We haven't really done much in Asia. Early next year we'll trek around and do a few major cities in Asia.

I THINK IT'S IMPORTANT TO HAVE LONGEVITY—I DON'T WANT TO HAVE A BREAK-OUT RECORD AND FADE AWAY.


You've released two albums, *Bright Like Neon Love* in 2004 and *In Ghost Colours* in 2008. Did you notice a change or progression between the two albums? Do you think there will be a big change in your next album?

I think so. With the new album we've really come a long way. Over the three years between albums we became more confident with what we were doing. We collected a lot of records while on tour. We gained more confidence and more aspects to our music—song, dance, more harmonies, and more instruments. We've been experimenting a lot more. We were really proud of *In Ghost Colours*, and now we already have a lot of ideas for the next album. I think it's important to have longevity. I don't want to have a break-out record and fade away. We're just learning so much, and we have so many ideas we want to apply to what we're doing. We want to turn over another eight to 10 records—that would be just amazing.

Many Australian bands seem to have a similar electronic, psychedelic vibe. Do you think growing up and living in Australia affects its musicians?

Certainly, at least back in the day. Now you can access all kinds of music. But growing up in Australia it was really hard to find music outside of Australia. There were only a few key record stores. It was all about going down to the record store and trying to find new, interesting stuff. There was never really a dance music thing in Australia, except for a small phase in the '90s. Australia was very much rock music back then, but certainly it's changed a bit now. It's great for us. Yeah, I think it was a lot harder to get access to different kinds of music back when we were growing up. ●





Digital Manipulation

reading homer in the digital age

by Anna Feuer

*The most technologically efficient machine
that man has ever invented is the book.*

—Northrop Frye

It's an experience with which every Columbia student is familiar. I'm online, on CourseWorks, skimming a PDF of an essay by Epicurus for my Contemporary Civilization class. Sitting in the sun on the Low Library steps, I've got my laptop balanced on my knees and music playing softly through my iPod earbuds. On the screen, two or three Internet tabs compete for my attention. After a few paragraphs of Epicurus, I succumb: I open Facebook and begin chatting, promising myself that I'll turn back to my CC homework in just 10 minutes.

Contrast that scene with old black-and-white photographs of Literature Humanities classes from the 1950s. Blurry and water-stained, one photograph depicts 18-year-old boys, some with hands raised, seated around a seminar table headed by an animated professor. Fifty years later, the Core Curriculum has seen several changes—most significant is the inclusion of women and minorities in the previously WASP-dominated courses. But there’s another difference to be noted: Columbia students in the 1950s wrote their essays with paper and ink and took notes in the margins of their books. Many of today’s students aren’t taking notes by hand but typing them into MacBooks. White earbuds peek out of every student’s bag—one even spots a Kindle here and there. These objects signify a change in academics—a revolution, in fact—that cannot be overlooked.

Established in 1919, the Core represents an incredible continuity of academic thought—that Homer speaks to me in the same way that he spoke to pre-World War II Lit Hum students attests to the timeless universality of the Great Books. But one of the Core’s most considerable pressures has been the arrival of a digital culture in which all current students are wholly—and somewhat unconsciously—absorbed. Do today’s students, most of whom spend more time with their iPhones or BlackBerries than with pen and paper in hand, read *The Republic* in the same way that Columbia sophomores did 50 years ago? Given the neurological and psychological changes brought about by the Internet, the Core takes on new significance for those who were taught to type before they learned to write cursive.

“I’m not thinking the way I used to think,” wrote Nicholas Carr in *The Atlantic*’s July/August cover story. “I can feel it most strongly when I’m reading. Immersing myself in a book or lengthy article used to be easy. ... Now my concentration often starts to drift after two or three pages.”

Carr’s article, titled “Is Google Making Us Stupid?” was one of many published this past summer that addressed the effects of digital media on reading comprehension and attention span. Of course, there have been dramatic changes in our reading material—we’ve all spent countless hours procrastinating by reading blogs, not to mention MySpace, Facebook, and Web sites like FanFiction.net. But recently, scientists have wondered if Internet culture has spurred internal changes as well.

“We are not only what we read,” Wolf says, “we are how we read.”

Neurological research shows that a brain raised on gigabytes and pixels may function differently than a brain used to paper and ink. In 2007’s *Proust and the Squid: The Story and Science of the Reading Brain*, Tufts University neuroscientist Maryanne Wolf emphasizes that “human beings were never born to read”—that is, we have no genes specifically allotted to enable reading. A child’s brain must synthesize the more basic neurological structures for vision and language in order to grasp the meaning of a printed word. Consequently, the development of the written word profoundly expanded the human capacity for deep thought. Wolf writes, “As literacy became widespread in a culture, the act of reading silently invited each reader to go beyond the text; in doing so, it further propelled the intellectual development of the individual reader and the culture.” As reading necessitates more complicated brain circuitry, it also enables us to think more complicated thoughts.

The medium through which we process text determines the wiring of our brain circuitry. For

example, those who learn to read ideograms, such as Chinese characters, develop very different synaptic patterns from those who learn to read alphabets. “We are not only what we read,” Wolf says, “we are how we read.”

What happens, then, when our writing systems become computer-generated? As of now, cognitive scientists have only speculated about the neurological effects of URL syntax. However, Wolf worries that the fast-paced nature of the Internet will undermine the kind of deeper thought that reading enables. “Will the split-second immediacy of information gained from a search engine and the sheer volume of what is available derail the slower, more deliberative processes that deepen our understanding of complex concepts, of another’s inner thought processes, and of our own consciousness?” Wolf asks. Once the brain experiences the instant gratification allowed by search engines and other online information storehouses, will the brain cease to engage in more meditative and intricate thought?

By contrast, some researchers argue that online reading generates more complex neurological pathways and thus enhances our ability to analyze and integrate information. Joy Hirsch, neuroscience professor and director of the Functional Magnetic Resonance Imaging Laboratory at Columbia University, argues that the Internet is well-suited to the human brain. “When in digital reading mode,” Hirsch says, “the brain processes huge amounts of multimedia information in a more high-level, integrative fashion. The brain is an information-gathering system. The Internet exercises the brain.” She writes off Wolf’s concerns about the negative effects of digital media: “The more global nature of the Internet enables us to integrate disparate topics. High-level integration is what humans do best. The Internet is one of the best things that’s happened to the brain in decades.”

But science aside, critics also worry that the experience of reading—the curling up on the couch, lost-in-a-good-book kind of experience—is in jeopardy. Now, instead of reading *To the Lighthouse* with their roommates in a Butler Library alcove or while lounging on a blanket in Central Park, students discover Woolf by the glowing light of their computer screens.

We’ve all crawled under the covers with Woolf or Dostoevsky or even just a *Cosmo* magazine, reading late into the night by lamplight. It’s an entirely solitary activity: we turn each page at our leisure, excitedly opening the book again when we crave another hour or two of time alone. I don’t find online reading to be the same experience, not with multiple tabs open and Facebook beckoning me from my favorites bar. Lee Siegel, author of *Against the Machine: Being Human in the Age of the Electronic Mob*, distinguishes between reading a book and reading online in a National Public Radio interview: “The great thing about a book is that you’re allowed to be passive. ... You’re learning how to be alone with yourself. But when you’re reading on a screen, there’s always the potential for interactive engagement with the text. You’re thrust again into the transactional world of everyday life.”

There is a difference, Siegel affirms, between the information one finds on Google and the knowledge extracted from a good book.

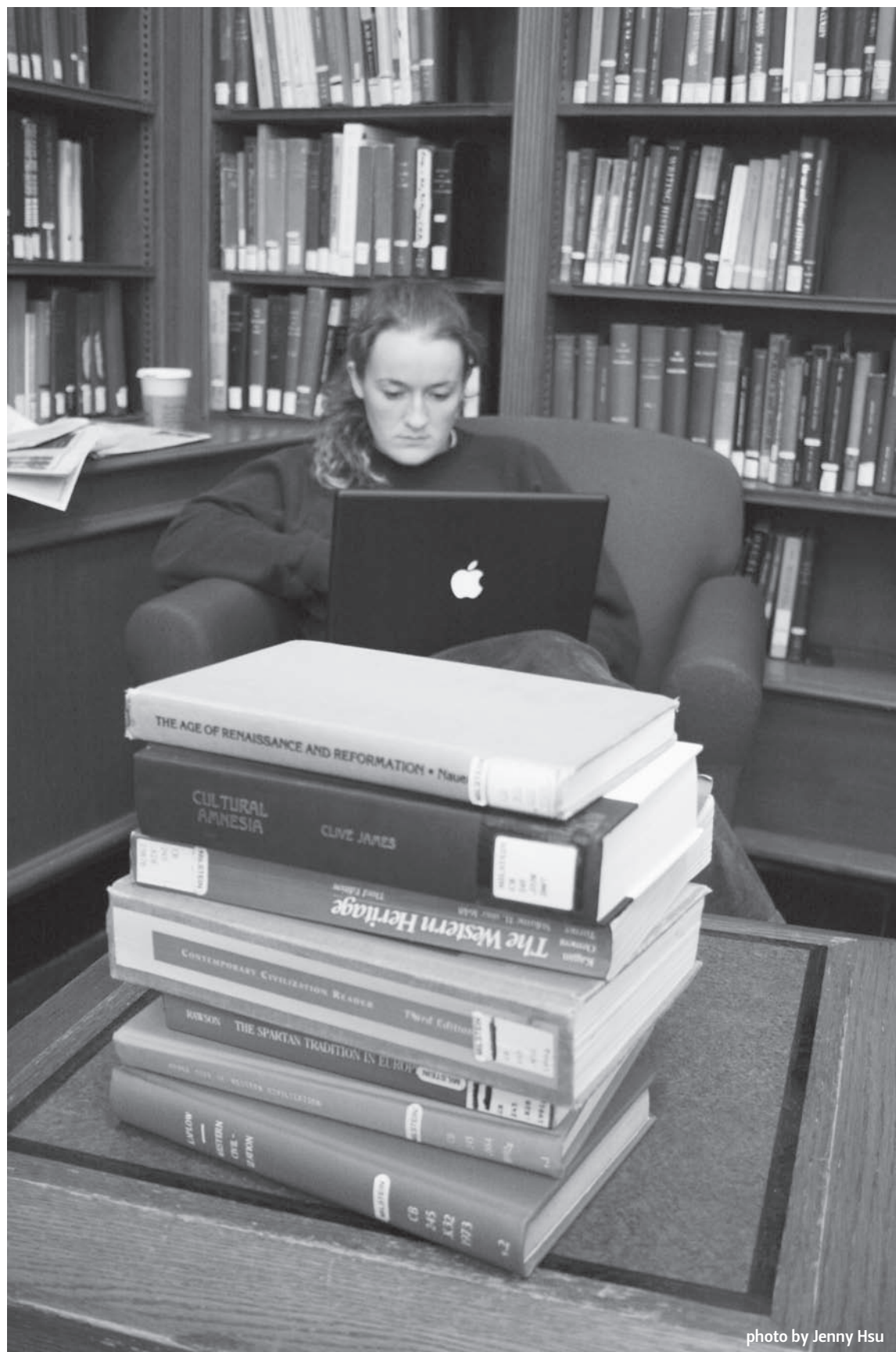


photo by Jenny Hsu

Knowledge is a meal, he says, but information is a snack, and we’re snacking online. Think of the short summary paragraphs you find on Wikipedia—useful when you haven’t done the reading for your history seminar, but potentially fatal when the goal is deep analysis and understanding.

It seems an inherent contradiction that the Internet attempts to present “knowledge meals” of any discipline in snack format. Columbia English professor Jenny Davidson writes a popular literary blog, *Light Reading*, on which she posts links and short excerpts from online articles. In a phone interview, Davidson dismissed the concerns of critics like Siegel. “There’s no point in being so nostalgic,” she says. “I’m really skeptical about

those claims. It seems like those people don’t spend that much time on the Internet.”

What about the many distractions present online? How can one read a long and difficult text when faced with flashing hyperlinks, AIM chats, and pop-up messages? Davidson noted that an 17th-century Shakespeare folio would include many footnotes, causing readers to draw their gaze from the page and refer to another, much like the way we click on links. What about getting lost in a good book, sitting on the porch, or lying in bed with a copy of *Oliver Twist*? “That’s not strictly the model,” Davidson says. “It’s only a small slice of literature that seems to transport us—Dickens is an example.” For the most part, she affirms, the

Internet provides us with a wealth of pragmatic material, such as electronic, easily-navigable versions of reference books.

Pragmatic and easily navigable: those are key words for us as college students. At a school where we often face multiple papers or midterms in a single week, the Internet’s efficiency is by far its greatest appeal. But at what cost to intellectual experience? As a Columbia sophomore, I visit the Butler stacks only rarely—I do most of my research online. But when I do go to the library, I find it to be a vastly different intellectual activity from typing search words into JSTOR or Project MUSE. There is, I think, something valuable in the time and effort spent sitting on the floor of the Butler stacks, flipping through indexes and skimming chapters with a stack of reference books at your side. As the antithesis of the Internet’s instant gratification effect, the library propels us sideways from book to book, allowing us to encounter new information along the way. Researching the good, old-fashioned way may be a pain, particularly when you have two other papers to write that week—but it permits research that is both a mile wide and a mile deep.

In those moments when we return to the “old” way of reading, whether we’re sitting on the South Lawn with a copy of the *Iliad* in our laps or squinting at call numbers in Butler, I can’t help but wonder if, entrenched in our digital worlds, we’re missing something—if, in turning to search engines and blogs for intellectual stimulation, our academic experience is lesser than that of those boys sitting in a 1950s Lit Hum class.

Professor Gareth Williams thinks it might be. Leaning back in an arm chair in his book-filled office, he sighs. “We’re all going at 100 miles an hour,” he says. “Let’s try to slow it down to 40.”

Knowledge is a meal, he says, but information is a snack, and we’re snacking online.

As the Violin Family Professor in the Core Curriculum, professor Williams is a resolute advocate of the curl-up-on-the-couch kind of reading. But he doesn’t attribute the new difficulties associated with this reading to the Internet alone. “It’s our instant-access culture, beginning with the Touch TV in the ’50s,” he says. “The more general cultural picture makes reading difficult. And reading a book is about the experience, holding the book, turning the pages. It’s slow. That’s somewhat incompatible with instant-access culture.”

The main premise behind the Core, and behind any other Great Books curriculum, is that the human truths conveyed in canonical literature are universal and will speak to anyone from any time, place, or cultural background. It’s obvious that any first-year taking Lit Hum this year can identify with Hamlet’s anger, fear, and hesitation, even though we may have to turn to footnotes to understand most of Shakespeare’s 16th-century references.

But what if students don’t read *Hamlet* in Butler or even at their desks in their dorm rooms?

What if they read it on Google eBooks while bidding on a pair of shoes on eBay, or worse, what if they don't read it at all but instead get a summary—an "information snack"—on SparkNotes? A book is just a receptacle of knowledge, not knowledge itself. So does the means by which we read a classic text fundamentally alter its content, causing us to experience *Hamlet* very differently from the way Lit Hum students read it even a few decades ago?

Lecturer in the English and comparative literature department and an expert on intellectual development as related to technology, professor Lejla Kucukalic says yes—but with the Internet, we have the opportunity to enhance the receptacle beyond the traditional limits of pen and ink. "The Internet comprises an intellectual revolution equal to that of the switch from oral to printed culture," she says. "We are moving our knowledge into digital format. But in doing so we're making the

text into a more sophisticated object that is going to save us as readers. The Internet turns a page of text into a multi-dimensional object."

In fact, digital media has allowed the Committee on the Core Curriculum to add compelling audio and visual components to the curriculum. Now students can access images of classical Athens and explore interactive maps of Herodotus' Mediterranean through CourseWorks. Ironically, digital media brings students closer to a text's historical context than does traditional reading: while sitting in front of our laptops, we may have a better sense of Plato's Athens than we would while reading on the couch. Moreover, wikis and CourseWorks allow students to interact with one another and share ideas outside the classroom setting. In that sense, digital media allows for more continued access and exploration of Core material beyond the one hour and 50 minutes of twice-weekly Lit Hum.



photo by Daniella Zalcman

Boris Mindzak, SEAS '09 and president of Free Culture @ Columbia, believes a text is a text, no matter how it's read.

Free Culture @ Columbia is an on-campus organization that is committed to reforming copyright laws in order to enable public access to online information. Last year, the group handed out digital copies of the Lit Hum and CC texts on flash drives for free.

Boris Mindzak, SEAS '09 and current president of Free Culture @ Columbia, thinks that these kinds of digital resources can only enhance the Core. He says: "That's the cool thing about the Internet. Before it would take much more effort to get a copy of those texts." But does staring at an e-reader on a computer screen offer a lesser experience than holding a well-worn copy of Homer's *Iliad*, with dog-eared pages and notes in the margins? "I don't think so," Mindzak says. "People don't even really think about it. It doesn't change what you get out of the book. The information is still there, however you read it."

When I asked professor Kucukalic the same question, she responded: "Well, the *Iliad* was originally an oral tradition. So our study of Homer is already removed from the original form." Her solution? To embrace the digital age and run with it. "No one learns Latin and Greek anymore, even though those languages are an intrinsic part of these Core texts," she says. "Our next step is recognizing that there should be a next step, that we must experience the Core digitally. Professors need to take action in that direction. The Internet can provide Core students with greater contextual details, images." Soon, Kucukalic suggests, we may even conceive of narrative as defined by the Internet—not as a preset story, but as an interactive and wholly engaging structure, something like those *Choose Your Own Adventure* books we read as kids.

Personally, I'm nostalgic for curled-up-on-the-couch reading. I like reading best when I stake out an empty armchair in the Butler cafe and spend a few hours alone with a book—when it's just me, without Facebook chats popping up on my desktop or new e-mail alerts. I do feel as though I'm learning to be alone with myself, to use Siegel's words. And even though the Internet's effect on the Core is inevitable and possibly very beneficial, I still love the romance of the Core, the idea that my classmates and I are linked by an invisible string to Columbia students of the post-war '40s and the radical '60s because we all read the *Iliad* in just the same way. I hope for the future that this kind of experience is timeless, regardless of the medium through which one encounters Homer.

Professor Williams is a bit nostalgic too. "You get new enlightenment from reading books slowly and carefully," he says, without the distractions and rushed efficiency of the Internet. "We are better interpreters of language that way. We gain new knowledge." Perhaps that's the Core's true purpose, to slow things down, to ensure that while reading the classic texts, we have time for both intellectual enjoyment and self-reflection. Hence the Core takes on an additional role for the Internet generation: it preserves and perpetuates the old way of reading in a new digital world. "Lit Hum is a highly interactive internet in itself. Students devise their own internet connection while talking amongst themselves," Williams notes. While that connection may be slower, it is also deeper than those forged across cyberspace. ●

Taking it Outside

how columbia's art history department uses new york city

ART

BY HELENE EISENSTEIN

PHOTO BY JESSICA FREEMAN

Field trips did not go extinct after apple picking in third grade, roller skating in fifth grade, or even visiting the White House in eighth grade. Thanks to the Columbia and Barnard Art History Departments, field trips are actually mandatory for a large percentage of the University population. With the Columbia University ID working as a virtually universal free pass to culture and art, students explore the New York art scene not only outside of class, but also during the school day as part of class trips and individual assignments.

The mission statement of the Barnard Art History Department reads, "The department, fortunate in being located in New York City, one of the world's great art centers, takes full advantage of the rich resources of the city's museums and galleries in its course of study." After speaking with Holger Klein, director of Art Humanities, Elizabeth Perkins, a current Art Humanities instructor, and several Columbia and Barnard students, it seems that the Museum of Modern Art, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, and the Frick Collection are the most highly sought-out art spaces for class outings. The Met is utilized for its Greek galleries, which relate to the Art Humanities unit on the Parthenon, MoMA comes into play with the discussion of Jackson Pollock and Pablo Picasso, and the Frick is used for an individual paper assignment to discuss a specific piece of art or gallery space. Some instructors encourage students to incorporate a gallery in SoHo into their paper assignments, while others urge students to trek uptown and write about the Cloisters.

"WE ARE PREPARING NOT JUST SCHOLARS AND ACADEMICS, BUT ALSO FUTURE CURATORS TO MUSEUMS."

Indeed, the passions and interests of particular instructors certainly influence their classes' destinations. Holger Klein went so far as to call the Metropolitan Museum of Art the true gem of the New York art community. Why? No matter Western, East Asian, African, or Indian art, the Met has a gallery dedicated to the finest antiquities and pieces of its kind. "There aren't many places in the U.S. where you have collections of such



Some art history classes meet exclusively off campus, utilizing museums when they are closed to the rest of the public.

magnitude," says Klein. "The Met is only one example of the great resources that New York has to offer. We are preparing not just scholars and academics, but also future curators to museums."

Breaking out of the Western tradition, New York has an impressive repertoire of galleries devoted to non-Western art. Classes ranging from Masterpieces of Indian Art and Architecture to Japanese Prints and Contemporary African Art immerse themselves in art that originated thousands of miles from Manhattan at the Asia Society, the Museum for African Art, and the International Asian Art Fair. Klein adds, "All of the great programs on the East Coast take advantage of art in New York. It adds a completely new dimension to learning that is invaluable."

According to Elizabeth Perkins, the class visits are designed for the students to "immerse themselves in the art, walking around a sculpture that was otherwise two-dimensional on class slides and studying textures far too subtle to see on reproductions." Furthermore, she notes that class visits focus on the layout and setup of a temporary or permanent exhibition itself, seeing where and how pieces are displayed.

For those students seeking more than the two-museum visit limit the Core Curriculum Office enforces on Art Humanities classes, there are special courses offered at Barnard and Columbia that completely immerse themselves in museum culture. The Culture of Public Art and Display in NYC is an anthropology seminar that focuses on the visual, social, and cultural aspects of specific New York museums and public art venues. Barnard's outreach into the art community extends

to the International Center of Photography, where select seniors choose from a smattering of photography craft classes and show their work as part of their senior visual arts concentration thesis projects.

While most art classes meet regularly at an on-campus location and occasionally travel out of Morningside Heights for art, Maryan Ainsworth's Introduction to Connoisseurship is held at the Met every Monday. With an emphasis on how to judge art, particularly paintings, there is virtually no better place than the Met to study materials, technique, and condition through the eyes of a connoisseur. Meeting on Monday mornings, when the museum is closed to the general public, it is no surprise that the class is exposed to VIP tours and plenty of behind-the-scenes action.

As a first year, Jennifer Abrams, GS/JTS '10, was initially overwhelmed by the thought of studying pieces in the Met for Art Humanities. But she found that the assignment actually served to narrow her focus and make the encyclopedic museum a bit more approachable. "I thought it was really helpful to go to the Met with a purpose in mind," she says. "Just going to browse is kind of daunting, but to go with a certain lens is easier."

According to Perkins, it's common for first-years to have no idea how to approach a museum such as the Met, and Art Humanities opens them up to the New York art scene, teaching them how to put these skills to good use long after the semester ends. Perkins says, "I count a museum visit as a success if even one student e-mails me after the semester regarding a gallery or exhibition that they recently visited." ●



Modern-Day Chorus Line

the increasingly intense demands of life in the ensemble

BY RUTHIE FIERBERG

PHOTO BY ANDREA BACHOFEN

Belting out the chorus of the catchy tongue-twister “Supercalifragilisticexpialidocious” is just another day at work for Janelle Anne Robinson. As a current ensemble member in Disney’s *Mary Poppins* on Broadway, her crazy creamsicle costume and Whoville hairdo enhance her individual character in this full-company number. But her roles in the ensemble were not always so whimsical—she started her career in the classic *Show Boat*—and her labor-intensive job has certainly evolved.

As the face of Broadway continues to shift from traditional musicals to the ever-common jukebox and movie musicals that now fill Times Square, the productions’ cast members, specifically the ensemble, feel the change in tempo.

“The role is much more demanding than it was, say, 10 or 15 years ago,” Robinson says. Allyson Tucker, a former ensemble member of shows such as *Man of La Mancha* and *Chita Rivera: The Dancer’s Life*, agrees that in today’s theater world, much is different.

“There is a greater proliferation from theater programs at the undergraduate level,” Tucker says, partially attributing theater’s transformation to the numerous formal programs.

Robinson recalls a one-directional philosophy reflected in her undergraduate training when “whatever wasn’t your thing, you took the minimum requirement and worked with your strength.” This is quite different from the current music theater programs in which you “can’t work around it,” she says.

Training has mirrored the state of musical

theater. Back in the old days, musicals employed individual singing and dancing choruses, in which the members of these ensembles were responsible for only their respective discipline. “They could afford it that way,” Tucker says, “[but] now that they have combined the singing and dancing choruses, you don’t get a break.” Production teams expect ensembles to do it all. It seems that from the moment the curtain rises, the ensemble is onstage about as much as any leading lady.

“Shows are more complex,” Tucker says. The larger productions, the increasing number of styles of choreography, the rising number of ensemble members understudying multiple lead roles, and the longer average length of a show’s run are combining and putting greater stress on ensemble members.

The creative modifications and technical effects of these more complex shows also dictate change. “The amount of concrete and steel ... is tearing apart people’s bodies,” Tucker says. “Choreography has changed so that you are not just strutting across the stage, but you are dancing with an extra 40-pound costume on your body.” For performers, this makes taking care of their bodies much more difficult.

Tucker says that “what will give you longevity is the singing and acting, because your body will break down.” Yet judging by the crop of musicals on Broadway today, the dancing is still quite crucial to success. Styles like “hip hop or contemporary dance [have] come through in musical theater,” Tucker says. And Robinson admits that there are styles that her young fellow cast members can pull off that she cannot. Casts as whole entities, including ensembles, represent a younger demographic than in the past, in part due to this stylistic advantage. All in all, there appears to be less of a traditional musical theater “edge.”

Shifts in theatrical training at the undergraduate level impact Broadway chorus casting calls and demands for triple threats.

Many critics claim that dumbed-down theater is the trademark of these changes, including the creation of a generic ensemble. Tucker agrees that the quality of shows may not be what it was, simply

because casting directors can more easily “find ten dancers who dance at a mediocre level than ten dancers who dance at a top level,” she says. Still, nowadays, those who do dance well may find New York work the easiest, since a “dancing ensemble is always needed,” Robinson says.

In classic top-ranked spectacle shows like *42nd Street* or *The Phantom of the Opera*, Robinson believes it paid to be a triple threat. Today, required ensemble skills are more “indicative of the show,” Tucker says. The triple threat may not be crucial for every show, but singularity won’t work anymore either.

“If a person is serious about honing their craft, they will do what they need to do to be a good singer, dancer, and actor,” Robinson says. When it comes time to step into that audition room, “you want to be able to access and believe in yourself, that you are capable of all of these things.”

Both performers say that the lifestyle of eight shows a week is not easy, but Tucker describes performing as a “sickness.” It is what she and Robinson love to do. The unique work of an ensemble member requires determination and ingenuity, and both women pride themselves on their ability to “make it work” every time. Though it has developed with the evolution of theater and continues to adapt to the shows arriving on Broadway, the ensemble role maintains some fundamental qualities.

IF A PERSON IS SERIOUS ABOUT HONING THEIR CRAFT, THEY WILL DO WHAT THEY NEED TO DO TO BE A GOOD SINGER, DANCER, AND ACTOR.

Robinson says “each piece is a jigsaw puzzle and you [the ensemble member] have to be a part of the jigsaw puzzle in order to create the big picture.” Each person must have a reason for being on that stage.

“What makes an ensemble interesting is that they are not just cardboard cutouts,” Tucker says. Each ensemble is its own living character, like the individuals that create it. The chorus must “move as a unit but still maintain a special identity,” she says. Though the face of the modern-day chorus line may be continually changing, the artistry of the ensemble as an integral part of the theatrical vision—whimsical or traditional—is something that will never change. ■

The Littlest President

presidential election drama and student council drama: wherein lies the difference?

BY DAVID BERKE

PHOTO COURTESY OF SUH FILMS

Trumpeting change, the inexperienced candidate battles the veteran leader for the executive office. The politics of race and gender turn the election on its head. Rancorous fights over media objectivity plague the press. All these epic and familiar antagonisms drive the documentary film *Frontrunners*—but the candidates might not be what you expect.

“I love verité campaign films like *The War Room* and *A Perfect Candidate* ... and I love the sport of politics,” director Caroline Suh, CC ’93 and a School of Architecture alum, says, explaining her reasons for making the documentary. “But I wanted to do it in a light and funny way.”

Frontrunners portrays the drama of school presidential elections at Stuyvesant High, the most selective public school in New York City. A New York teacher, a friend of Suh’s, urged her to profile Stuyvesant, as the pressure-cooker atmosphere of the competitive institution breeds a serious political process in its precocious student population.

Suh also “knew about Stuyvesant through Columbia because a lot of people from my [college] class were from Stuy, and they were impressive people ... they definitely stood out.” Suh sees a parallel between the atmosphere at the downtown high school and Columbia. “There’s a great New York City feel to both Columbia and Stuyvesant,” she says.

In the midst of this bustling city milieu, the campaigns battle it out for a full month, passing out flyers to bleary-eyed students in the morning and plotting plans for victory late into the night. Candidates also have to navigate the primaries (which only two tickets will survive), a televised debate, and the all-important newspaper endorsement. An unofficial pundit adds commentary on the twists and turns of the race throughout the film. All these formal elements bring a prestigious feel to the secondary-school election cycle.

Four presidential candidates, each with their own vice president, are on the hunt for electoral glory. The quirky slate of contenders makes the film more engrossing than one might expect a typical school election to be. The overachieving candidates transcend basic high school caricatures. George Zisiadis, current chief of staff of the Student Union—the student government body—is an eccentric insider who touts his ticket’s “synergistic amiability far beyond the reaches of human comprehension.” Hannah Frieman is an accomplished actress and political outsider, “a Ronald Reagan actor-type thing,” as Suh describes her. Mike Zaytsev is the odds-on favorite, but his laconic arrogance and lack

of enthusiasm threaten to undermine his campaign. Alex Leonard is a basketball player suffering from a dearth of dedication. (Oddly enough, his destiny as an also-ran echoes that of the jock candidate from the Matthew Broderick and Reese Witherspoon film *Election*.) For Suh, this character’s complexity defines the film’s success. “We didn’t know if there would be a story,” Suh says. But thankfully, “the candidates were really interesting, and there was real competition between them.”



The student elections at Stuyvesant, featured in Caroline Suh’s film *Frontrunners*, find striking political resonance.

Though she detected the chemistry early on, Suh felt the film starting to come together as she recorded a meeting of the school newspaper, *The Spectator* (the name of which is allegedly an offshoot of Columbia’s *Spectator*). The editors, loudly debating how best to cover the event, are deeply embroiled in an argument on proper reporting. Some editors want more opinionated coverage, while others fear the paper will become “like FOX News.”

RATHER THAN NUCLEAR PROLIFERATION OR GENOCIDE, THE HOT-BUTTON ISSUES ARE PROM TICKET PRICES AND CAFETERIA FOOD.

While the editorial board wrangles with their paper’s approach, the potential Stuyvesant presidents are forced to cope with precarious ethnicity and gender identities. The school is half Asian, so an Asian presence on the ticket is close to a must. The current Student Union president stresses the importance of “spanning the races” on a successful ticket, and another student asserts that “you would have to have eight ethnic peoples inside you to win.” A step ahead of McCain and Palin, three of the tickets are male-female. Suh notes that Palin’s vice-presidential candidacy makes viewers “see the film through a different lens.”

The drama and detail of the campaigns, intensified by the newspaper coverage, constantly mirror the presidential elections in America. “We wanted those parallels to be there,” Suh says of the film’s microcosmic aspects, “but the story had inherent parallels that we couldn’t control.”

Even with the salient parallels and higher-education drama, the film can be tedious at points. However juicy, the election still takes place in a high school. Rather than nuclear proliferation or genocide, the hot-button issues are prom ticket prices and cafeteria food. It is difficult to fill 80 minutes with such adolescent concerns. Suh does her best to keep the film moving with well-edited montages of campaigning (and a spunky alt-rock soundtrack that includes Of Montreal and Elf Power).

Other than the occasional tedium of the subject, the film is enjoyable and witty. Suh promises “lots of laughing,” and she delivers. *Frontrunners* is ideal for followers of politics who have overdosed on the national race and are looking for happier political story lines. If the existential threats clouding the national stage have become too much to bear, *Frontrunners* is a great way to decompress while still enjoying the thrill of a political race.

Frontrunners will be showing at the Film Forum starting Oct. 15. Director Caroline Suh is slated to give a talk on *Frontrunners* at Columbia in February. ●

A Wu-Tang Guide to the Forgotten Borough

hop on the ferry for a hip-hop tour

BY JUSTIN GRACE

PHOTO COURTESY OF MICHAEL FRUMIN

It would not be a stretch to assume that Staten Island is unarguably the lamest borough. Besides Millay poems and ironically named landfills, it hasn't offered us all that much to cherish. When one thinks of Staten Island—as one so seldomly does—hairspray and Mafia hangouts come to mind. If you're lucky, maybe you've kissed a girl on the ferry, or watched the snow cascade on a misspent night in Rosebank. But these are only contextual enjoyments. Take away the girl, or the weather, and all you're left with are the regrets and repentances of having traveled so far to see so little. Because make no mistake about it: Staten Island is a miserable place. But it is only out of misery that we can have triumph. And so it is that only out of Staten Island that we could have "Triumph." No matter how many gray days and environmental disasters you've given us, Staten Island, no matter how many mob movies and underwhelming zoos you've made us endure, you've also given us RZA, GZA, Raekwon, Ghostface, and Method Man. In other words, you've given us the Wu-Tang Clan, Staten Island, and for that we are forever grateful (we'll even forgive you for U-God).

This is Wu-Tang's borough. Consider yourself schooled.

Stapleton Housing Projects

Childhood home of the RZA and Ghostface, the Stapleton Houses are perhaps best summed up in a few bars from "Impossible:" "Innocent black immigrants locked in housing tenements/Eighty-five percent tenants depend on welfare recipients/Stapleton's been stamped as a concentration camp." That's not exactly something you'd find in a co-op brochure. Located in the northeastern neighborhood of Stapleton, the Houses opened in 1962 and quickly became notorious for their high levels of crime. What the Clan tends to remember, though, is their strong sense of unity. In "Maxine," from Ghostface Killah's *Bulletproof Wallets*, he describes in harrowing detail the story of a drug supplier who thought he could make a show of force in the projects, only to be met with a group of kids who were all too ready to throw him out of an eighth-story window. As he says, "On the count of three, he landed on the first floor balcony/Blood, brains splashed, he was dead, and the cops never came/That's Stapleton." They also recognize, though, the dark toll that drugs can take on a community's spirit. "Woodrow the Basehead," a skit from Ghostface Killah's album *Supreme Clientele*, shows the dicey line Ghost walks in dealing the drugs that come to ruin former friends.

Park Hill Projects

Known to the Clan as Crack Hill or Killah Hill, these houses in the neighborhood of Clifton are where Raekwon and Method Man spent the majority of their childhoods. In recent years, they've been

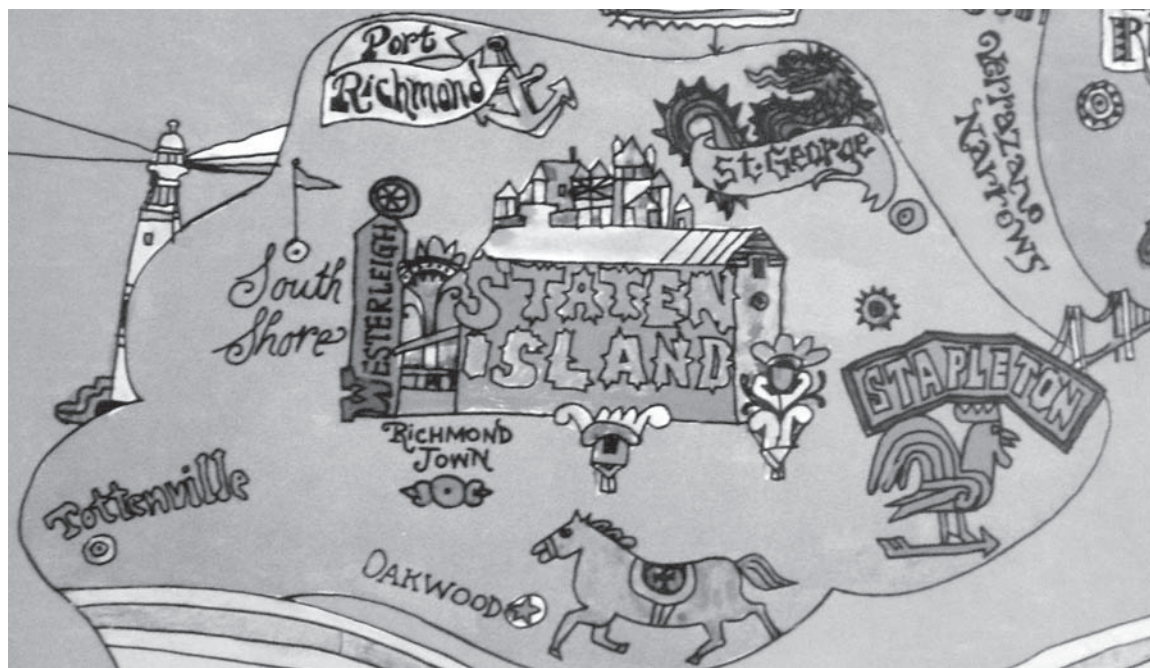
cleaned up and converted into private apartments, but the memories of its infamously dangerous days are never far from the minds of the Clan members. There's pride in its toughness and reputation—as Meth says on his song "Gravel Pit," "From Park Hill, the house on haunted hill/Every time you walk by, your back get a chill"—but also a sense that escaping was something they feel forever blessed to have done. On Clan friend Cappadonna's "Milk the Cow," Meth describes his struggle to get out of Park Hill: "Strivin' for perfection, the only way I got/My life back was through investin', devotion/Movin' my soul toward the skit, vocabulary/Comin' out my ass like shit, to feed my babies." Luckily for him, he had a strong mother figure throughout his ordeals. As he says, "My mother told me when I was so stressed out/'All you gotta do is put your best out'/And I did." This is sweet, but stories like this are sorely lacking in Wu-Tang's Staten Island.

Wu Wear Store

Formerly located at 61 Victory Blvd. in the neighborhood of St. George, the original Wu Wear location has since been converted into a unisex hair salon. Its influence on the hip-hop community, though, is remarkable. After all, it was at this store that the very first mainstream hip-hop clothing label was launched. In the wake of its success, hundreds more labels were started, to the point where now it seems quaint to find any rappers who lack their own designs. Without Wu-Wear, there'd be no Sean John, no Rocawear—not even a Rich Yung Society (man, does Fabolous suck). To their credit, the Clan never claimed to be above pimping the label in their songs, most egregiously in "Wu-Wear: The Garment Renaissance," which still stands as the most shameless combination of rap and advertising this side of "My Adidas." Uncharacteristically deficient in the lyrics department (I blame Cappadonna), the song tries to shoehorn together a sales pitch onto an otherwise mediocre love riff. It is notable, however, for being the only song in rap history to use the phrase "monosodium glutamate," so bully for them.

"Can It Be All So Simple" graffiti

"See the logo? A monument in hip-hop." So says GZA on Ghostface Killah's "Wu Banga 101." He's speaking, of course, of the famous Wu mural, which is spray-painted on a wall near Park Hill's Targee Street. The mural was created in 1994, soon after the release of *Enter the Wu-Tang (36 Chambers)*, and while the location doesn't exactly scream hip-hop (it overlooks a Home Depot), it's a testament to Staten Island's respect for the Clan that it has yet to be tagged over—because this sucker is ugly. Mundane colors, skewed perspective: this thing is so ugly it wouldn't make the credits of *The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air*. There's practically no reason to go see the mural, save perhaps finding the hastily scribbled names of Raekwon and Method Man in the top right corner (alongside such other hip-hop luminaries as "Pooky" and "Papa Chaz"). This indicates that they might have had some hand in its creation, but since there's no way of being sure, why not save time and go listen to the eponymous track in front of your favorite Biggie Brooklyn bodega memorial? Betting odds say you'd have a better time. ●



New York's least favorite borough may be unpopular, but it's produced an invaluable treasure: the Wu-Tang Clan.

Not for Everyone

the marketing of the double-zero standard

BY LAURA TORRE

PHOTO COURTESY OF SS08

The International Fashion Weeks may be over for this season, but their effects will linger for a long time. In addition to dictating trends in fashion, makeup, and hairstyles, the culture of fashion also influences the public's perception of the female body. The perseverance of the stick-thin model, and the message this sends to the public, are issues that have been addressed and re-addressed by conscientious fashionistas and people outside the industry alike. Yet all over the world, the girls on the runway were as skinny as ever. This aids the creation of a culture in which, no matter what their healthy body type is, girls aspire to be a size 00.

Skinny models are more than a fashion industry notion. They reinforce a societal standard that can cause dangerous habits. Niki Patterson, CC '12, says,

THE PROBLEM IS NOT THAT THIS SIZE EXISTS, BUT THAT IT IS PORTRAYED AS THE STANDARD.

"I see a lot of people around Columbia to whom I just want to say, 'You need to eat!'" Of course, the choices of fashion designers are only one of many factors affecting this problem, but as major players in the game (and the main influence on all other brands), it's time that designers rise to the challenge and start designing for real women.

The 2006 ban of models with a BMI (body mass index) of less than 18.5 in Milan started a movement within the industry to promote a healthy image. However, these efforts are only partial and have often failed. The movement toward "skinny" has started to affect male models as well, and many of the men's shows this year were filled with "manorexics" who lacked the muscle definition that used to be the norm.

The stick-thin ideal has moved off the runway and into department stores and everyday labels. Abercrombie & Fitch, J. Crew, and other houses that have proven popular with students carry the 00, or petite 0—a size generally worn by the thinnest of models, or by 8-year-old girls. The problem is not that this size exists—there are plenty of healthy women who have small frames and require such sizing—but rather the way that it is portrayed in the media as the standard, as opposed to the extreme.

For Columbia students, who live in New York and attend a prestigious and high-pressure university, matters are only made worse. With many wealthy classmates displaying the latest trends in their closets and on College Walk already, it's hard to feel good about yourself if you don't at least have the requisite body type. Christina Tekie, CC '11, has found this to be the case among college women, saying that "women who are obsessed with their weight project this towards other people as well." Ultimately, she admits, "Everyone wants to look [like] a supermodel."

Petite women are certainly part of the population, and denying them a size that fits them well would frustrate customers and cause losses for department stores and brands. Saks Fifth Avenue had to bring back their petite section after customers complained about its closing, proving that demand is high enough to warrant such sections. But there are few women who are 5 feet tall, which means that most people will not fit into petite sizes, or even small sizes such as 0 or 2 (the new 4 in fashion). Advertisers and designers continue to use skinny models because they help sell clothes. These extraordinarily thin models instigate self-loathing in most people, who typically react by coveting, and thus buying, what the models are advertising. The trends for this season are also designed for the slender, as skinny jeans have been supplanted by even more form-fitting tights and leggings, and waists are nipped in sharply.

What's more beautiful than a dress that accentuates, rather than punishes, curves? What could be more appealing for women than to see their own body types reflected in store advertisements, and to recognize that they are beautiful just as they are? It is time for stores to shelve those 00s where they belong—in the petite section. ■



The cult of skinny has gone too far when, after a recent weight gain, Gemma Ward is considered by some to be too fat for the industry.

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