4 December 2008 / vol. 5 issue 12

the eye

AIDS IN THE MEDIA, PAST AND PRESENT

moustache discourse \\\ the best albums you didn't listen to in 2008 \\\ a columbian rockette

the eye

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AUDIO/ VISUAL AIDS

From *Philadelphia* to *South Park*, the depiction of AIDS in film and TV has a varied past—and a troubled one.
pg. 07

by Betsy Morais and Joy Resmovits

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LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

This is the 24th issue of *The Eye* under my editorship—and the last. This weekend, we'll interview some very talented candidates to determine who will carry it on. By this time next week, we'll have chosen one and fêted him or her with champagne. And by this time next year, you'll likely be looking at a very different publication—aspects of its design, content, and overall vision will all, hopefully, have changed under the leadership of a new editor-in-chief.

This is also the 23rd of these letters I've written (Hayley Negrin wrote one). Their topics have ranged from Lindsay Lohan to the reproductive habits of ducks, and I'm sort of glad this is the last one—I think I've run out of things to talk about.

Almost.

Seeing as how this is my last letter, how about a little transparency? In some ways, I think this issue serves pretty well to illustrate the progress we've made over the course of the last 12 months. For one thing, our (excellent!) lead story on AIDS in the media was written by *Spectator* news editors and functions as the culmination of a series in *Spec*. This, I think, is a step in the right direction—the relationship between *The Eye* and its mother publication has been an oft-debated topic for as long as the former has existed. The level of autonomy *The Eye* should have—whether writers and editors should be forced to commit to one or the other—is a question the next editor will have to answer, just as I have attempted to do.

Two of this week's features also speak to an element of *The Eye*'s psyche: its reputation—a fading one, I hope—as a "hipster rag." Elliot Smalling's style article on mustaches and Fern Diaz's eyesites feature, an examination of hypocritical ("hip"-ocritical?) hipsters in general, both pay tongue-in-cheek homage to this aspect of the magazine's cultural history. And our articles in the interview and art sections this week do something for which I think *The Eye* was expressly designed: focus on Columbia students and alums doing something cool in the real world, something you might not yet know about.

I'm so honored to have worked with a dedicated, passionate, at times terrifyingly smart staff for the past year. Together, we've put out 24 issues of one great magazine—the last year at *The Eye* is something I'm truly proud to have experienced. And to the next editor, good luck—there's much left to be done!

*-**Alexandria Symonds***

This Is England

TEXT BY ALISON BUMKE
PHOTO COURTESY OF SUSAN WEEBER

"Shit. Oh, shit. Shit. Shitty shit." Such was our cox's reaction to our rudder string snapping as we edged toward the starting line. It was the first race in the Christ Church Regatta, Oxford University's November tournament for novice rowers, and our boat—the first rowed by St. Edmund (aka Teddy) Hall women this term—was drifting leisurely toward the bank, with little we could do to control it.

A frustrating first race, but also absurdly comic (and only relatively disastrous, compared with an oar catapulting a male Teddy Hall rower into the river a few days later). And like the races we've had since, it was an excellent chance to bond with the other rowers.

I have a confession: as one of 20 American visiting students at Oxford University's Teddy Hall, I've ended up socializing primarily with Americans this term. We've all been making British friends, but ultimately our close-knit group provides a comforting haven of shared cultural background and context. So when opportunities to bond with Brits pop up, it's particularly exciting—and it helps ease the strangeness of being an American at Oxford.

My crew has also been bonding off the water, like at our pre-regatta, carb-filled dinner at a noodle bar. Someone spotted the lead actress from the *Narnia* movies at a nearby table, apparently on a date (which inspired talk about sightings of another Oxonian actress—Emma Watson, who plays Hermione Granger in the *Harry Potter* films). As we agreed that the *Narnia* actress' looks outstripped those of her date, a nerdy Oxford type, it was comforting to know that "great personality" has the same coded meaning for Brits as it does in the States for Americans.

As much as I enjoy getting to know British students, there are times when I'm grateful to have Americans around, like on Thanksgiving. As we expats devoured the holiday's familiar foods at a college-hosted feast, we shared stories of our typical family celebrations. But interestingly, the uniquely British touches were what made the meal memorable. A sausage had crept onto our plates next to the turkey, and the dinner was followed with "Winter Pimm's," a traditional English ale. Most endearing, though, was the presence of our tutors and the college principal—who were there, in the words of the dean, to serve as our "extended family" for the traditionally family-based holiday.

To mark the end of term and the start of the holiday season, the Hall hosted its annual holiday feast last Sunday—a celebration that helped us Americans feel even more integrated and at home. The evening began with an Anglican Carol Service in the college chapel, with traditional English carols and readings. Then there was the much-anticipated dinner. As soon as we sat down at the festively decorated long tables, everyone crossed arms and yanked on the ends of Christmas "crackers" with the people sitting next to them. Donning the paper hats that exploded out of the crackers, we dove into our first course, chilled melon, followed by roast turkey (again!) with all the trimmings. Our plates were whisked away and replaced with mince pies and plum pudding—the first I had ever tried, after reading about them so often in the descriptions of Christmas celebrations in English novels. Wine glasses were refilled generously and often, and when it was time for the most celebrated part of the evening—carol singing—everyone was feeling properly boisterous. We stood on our chairs and sang an enthusiastic version of "The Teddy Bears' Picnic"—a Teddy Hall favorite—followed by more traditional carols, and a reprise of "Teddy Bears" by popular request.

Bring on the bonding, extended family.

AS MUCH AS I ENJOY GETTING TO KNOW BRITISH STUDENTS, THERE ARE TIMES WHEN I AM GRATEFUL TO HAVE AMERICANS AROUND.

Alison singing a traditional English carol at Teddy Hall's annual holiday feast.

COMPILED BY HILLARY BUSIS AND RAPHAEL POPE-SUSSMAN

Editors' 10

what we're into this week

1. The annual tree lighting ceremony: "For one magical night, Columbia students rally 'round one cause we can all support: hot apple cider and pretty, nondenominational holiday lights. As if that weren't enough, the event's Facebook page promises 'free tree lighting scarves.' Free scarves, people!"
—Hillary Busis, deputy features editor

2. *Tomb Raider: Underworld*: "Lara's latest adventure is grander than ever before. Compared to the last game, not one thing has seen a reduction in size. Not one thing."
—Kevin Ciok, video games editor

3. The Slanket: "It's a simple concept: a blanket with sleeves! I got one for my dad for his birthday last year, and cuddling up with it over Thanksgiving weekend convinced me I should buy one for everyone I know. Just don't stand for the cheapo as-seen-on-TV rip-off, the Snuggie. Cuter name, inferior product!"
—Alexandria Symonds, editor-in-chief

4. Drinking a large cup of coffee and then taking a catnap: "I dream that I'm writing brilliant papers, and then I wake up in a surge of panicked caffeine."
—Learned Foote, film editor

5. Cranberry relish: "My grandmother makes jars and jars of this stuff for Thanksgiving. You can put it on basically any Thanksgiving dish, and it will add exponentially to the deliciousness of that dish."
—Raphael Pope-Sussman, humor editor

6. Shaq's Twitter: "Yes, Shaquille O'Neal has a Twitter. Yes, he updates it all the time. And yes, it's awesome."
—Thomas Rhiel, senior design editor

7. Leftover turkey soup: "Best enjoyed while listening to (finally in season!) Christmas music."
—Shane Ferro, food editor

8. Finals: "Not only is it so cold and miserable that staying inside and staring at a computer screen is vaguely justified, but I have so much to look forward to in the month following! These things include sleeping and working in the cultural wasteland that is the Massachusetts suburbs."
—Jennie Rose Halperin, music editor

9. Using honey instead of sugar for baking: "You're left with a richer, more nuanced flavor—and an excuse to lick the 'leftovers' off your fingers."
—Melanie Jones, interview editor

10. *McSweeney's* Recommends: "From 'fields of cut hay' and 'watching your son pitch his first-ever Little League baseball game' to Hulu and Steve Martin's book *Born Standing Up*, the editors at *McSweeney's* have compiled a list that will both warm your heart and give you inspired ideas for Christmas gifts."
—Rebecca Evans, managing A & E editor

The Eye's Guide to Penny Pinching

As the holiday season approaches, already-broke college students find themselves scrounging for good buys in an increasingly bad economy. But before you visit the "old standbys," consider *The Eye*'s alternatives—some hidden treasures of NYC.

BOOKS
You Might Know:
Strand Book Store (828 Broadway at 12th Street): 18 miles of good-quality used books for very cheap
But Did You Know:
Housing Works Bookstore Café (126 Crosby St. between East Houston Street and Jersey Street): Smaller than the Strand, but with similar prices and all proceeds benefitting the homeless with AIDS

MUSIC AND DVDS
You Might Know:
Virgin Megastore (52 E. 14th St. between Broadway and Fourth Avenue): The holiday season ushers in yet another $10 sale on many of their DVDs and CDs
But Did You Know:
DVD's Palace (733 8th Ave. at 46th): Featuring a huge selection of affordable DVDs, they often have additional holiday sales

ASSORTED GOODIES
You Might Know:
Holiday Market at Union Square (Nov. 22 through Dec. 24, 11 a.m. to 8 p.m. Mon through Fri, 10 p.m. to 8 p.m. Sat, 11 p.m. to 8 p.m. Sun): Over 100 outdoor vendors, and close to other great stores for warming up
But Did You Know:
The Holiday Shops at Bryant Park (Nov. 22 through Dec. 28, from 11 a.m. to 8 p.m. Mon through Fri, 10 a.m. to 9 p.m. Sat, 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. Sun): Over 120 artisans and vendors from around the world, free ice skating, and (new this year) a gift-wrapping booth

Eye Spy: Special Holiday Edition

***Eye* editor's grandmother:** Can I have a knish?
***Eye* editor's uncle:** A knish? But I hardly know you!
—Thanksgiving dinner, Brooklyn

Eye Get It!

Q: Why did the old fool cut off his foot?
A: He needed a stocking stuffer!

Q: Why did the Jewish kid spin his dreydl all day?
A: His dad told him to make "hay" while the sun shines!

Q: Why do the women across Broadway take Christmas so seriously?
A: Christ himself was born in a barn'ard.

Q: What does Dean Quigley say to his kids before Christmas?
A: If you're bad, yule be sorry!

Q: How does PrezBo celebrate Christmas?
A: Merri-Lee!

The Long and Winding Road

BY RAPHAEL POPE-SUSSMAN
PHOTO BY KHISCOTT

Lao Tzu, the great Chinese philosopher, once said, "If you do not change direction, you may end up where you are heading."

Wise words. And I'm not just saying that because I once (true story) walked into a metal pole and required 10 stitches in my head. No, I mention Tzu's wisdom because this is my final column as humor editor of *The Eye*. For the last year, I've written almost every week on these pages. So before I bid you (my readers) farewell, I want to share some of the lessons I've learned as humor editor—and to say my thanks to those who helped me along the way.

Many people believe that being a humor editor is easy. "You just write jokes," they say. "And sometimes you just make shit up."

When these people belittle my job, I smile. Because I know, in my heart of hearts, that they are jealous. That I nailed their moms. But being humor editor means so much more than writing juvenile jokes that insult my critics. It means looking for the absurdities of Columbia, of New York, of America. If that search yields no material, I strive to fabricate stories that will tickle your funny bones.

A humor editor is like a knight. He clings to old manners and traditions. Many people claim that the days of chivalric behavior are gone. But us humor editors would beg to differ. We know all too well that "chivalric behavior" can be rearranged to spell "Bivalve Chair Choir." That's not something we'd give up on.

A humor editor is noble and courageous. He always holds the door for a lady and washes his hands after using the toilet. Sometimes, he washes the toilet after using his hands on a lady.

A humor editor will make you laugh when you feel like crying. He will make you cry when you feel like laughing.

A humor editor is a loyal friend and a good lover. Sure, he'll bring you untold pleasures in the pre-marital bed, but he'll also listen to your problems and knit you a sweater at Christmas.

A humor editor is just two little lines away from being a human editor. Think about it.

And that's the most important lesson I've learned as humor editor—that a humor editor is both a human and an editor.

Seriously though, it's a pain in the ass writing funny stuff every week. Other people on this magazine have actual stories to cover—I just have to pull hilarity from the ether, or when that fails, out of my ass. I've had a great year here, and I hope you readers have laughed a little.

In any case, I do want to thank my editors here at *The Eye*, Alex, Hayley, and Hillary, and the excellent people in design and photo who made the humor page look sharp as shit all year. Shout-outs also to cartoonist Liz Pipal, and my unofficial editor from home, Pete. Also, I have a girlfriend (crazy world, eh?) who reads my stuff. In her honor, I dedicate the following joke:

Q: Why do sea cows go to strip clubs?
A: For mana-T&A.

There are plenty of other people to thank, but limited room, so if we've ever met, consider this a formal token of my appreciation. I should also thank my roommate Ben Kurland, of Solon, Ohio, who had loud, drunken sex while I was in the room, and then allowed me to write exceedingly unflattering things about him in this magazine. Thanks, Ben!

It's been a great ride this year. There is, after all, no greater pleasure than making the world laugh. Not the kind of laugh that sounds like a rusty machine gun. No one likes that kind of laugh. No, the job of a humor editor is to make the world laugh so hard and so deep that milk shoots out of its nose. It's not an easy job, but it's a blessed job.

So perhaps what Lao Tzu was saying was this: when you're driving down the highway of life, grab a copy of *The Eye*, and turn to the humor page. If we've done our job, you'll laugh so hard you accidentally turn your car into a cornfield.

Otherwise, you may end up where you were heading. And who wants that?

Hipsterdom and Its Discontents

a closer look at columbia's skinniest belly-achers

BY FERNANDA DIAZ
PHOTO BY MOLLY CROSSIN

"So… is this a hipster party?"
"Yeah, just look around you, 99 percent of the people here are total hipsters!"
"Are you a hipster?"
"Fuck no!"
—*excerpt from a conversation in* Adbuster's *"Hipster: The Dead End of Western Civilization"*

I couldn't help but laugh when I read the above exchange in an article published this summer. The writer, attempting to prove that the "hipster" was the scummiest youth culture icon this country has ever seen, had inadvertently stumbled upon the root of hipster evil. And the root of the problem was, in a way, me—the girl who has a conversation like that one at least once a week.

Whether I'm complaining about how every girl huddled around the entrance of 1020 is wearing grandma glasses, or rejecting claims about my own qualifications as a hipster, I've recently realized I have a slight addiction to the push-and-pull, "everyone here is a hipster… except me" mentality. My ongoing fascination with this back-and-forth might suggest jealousy, or insecurity—a kind of meta-defense mechanism against a culture to which I don't belong, but maybe wish I did. But it could also be a way to hide my own complicity in a culture of conformity disguised as authenticity.

Watch the hating on hipsters, you might just become one yourself.

Either way, I have a problem. One that's fun to talk about when there's nothing else to talk about—mocking hipsters is one of the only sports I play—but worth breaking down if I'm ever going to get over it. There's nothing sadder than a not-quite hipster complaining about the hipster plague, while secretly wondering if she's simultaneously making her own contribution to the downfall of counter-culture.

I've been wondering about this since last week when, unexpectedly, my brother said to me, "Fern, you do realize that you can't get away with acting like a hipster just because you're doing it 'ironically,' right?" I had just made a comment about downloading a Cut Copy album, followed with a quip about how lame I was for downloading the latest in electropop. And then it hit me—there's nothing worse than the person who does hipsterish things, enjoys them, and then tries to brush it all off as a joke while mocking those who at least have the guts to buy into it completely.

It's common consensus by now that the hipster is no longer a figure on the fringe of culture. He is no longer "out of the mainstream" or "alternative." Fitting most of the checklist items on the hipster stereotype list is practically unavoidable at this point: do you wear American Apparel? Download Lykke Li remixes on The Hype Machine? Own at least one ironic T-shirt? Yup, that technically makes you and me so-called hipsters.

It's understandable—skinny jeans are often the only type available and free music is awesome. But the very fact that the term "hipster" has turned into a slur rather than a self-imposed label proves we've reached an impasse in the evolution of a counter-hipster aesthetic. Here's the problem: if you really are a PBR-drinking, American Apparel-wearing, remix-obsessed person by choice, the term "hipster" is offensive because it clumps you into the mainstream when your whole goal is to stay outside of it. If you're just a PBR-drinking, American Apparel-wearing, remix-obsessed person by default—because there's nothing else to drink and nowhere else to shop and that's just what people do—you use the term "hipster" to describe everyone else who actually takes those things seriously.

What's wrong with this picture? Mostly everything, but mainly the fact that "hating hipsters" really is not a valid form of protest against the abstract umbrella of hipsterdom, especially if we're all starting to look like a uniform mass of post-adolescent hoodie-wearing bums. We need to draw the line somewhere—and that somewhere should be at least by retiring the term "hipster" as the default descriptor for anything that annoying 20-somethings do.

During sophomore year, my suitemates and I designated another suite whose parties we frequented the "hipster suite." As I was writing this article, I realized how long we've been using this term and how it reflects more pathetically upon us than upon them. "The only thing there is tonight is a hipster party," one of us would say, to which the rest of us would reply: "Ugh, really? OK, fine, let's go." Then we'd spend two hours in a cramped hallway holding a cup of Nikolai Vodka mixed with Country Time Lemonade while debating the genius of Joanna Newsom's music versus Regina Spektor's. By referring to this group of friends as such, we were differentiating our style from theirs—the fact that they were hipsters allowed us not to be. But calling other people hipsters in disdain isn't going to make the concept of the hipster go away—it actually removes the opportunity for self-reflection and awareness of how the label affects our own tastes and how those affinities can make up completely different niches under the larger hipster (ugh, so sick of it) umbrella.

It's Hip to Be Square

This week, Fernanda Diaz examines the hipster, a label that's often lobbed at Columbia students. But what about the rest of us, those who still shamelessly shop at Urban Outfitters and harbor a pure, unironic love for *America's Next Top Model*? These are the people on your holiday list who will expect more than a pack of cigarettes in their stockings. Read on to find four gift ideas for the non-hipsters in your life.

Britney Spears' *Circus*
The tabloid staple's latest album features tunes like the monotonous but infectious "Womanizer" and the covertly dirty "If U Seek Amy" (try saying the title quickly if you don't get the message).
$10.99, iTunes

***People* magazine subscription**
53 issues of America's classiest tabloid—no, that isn't an oxymoron—cost just as much as some of the entrees at Community Food and Juice.
$24, people.com

***7th Heaven*, seasons 1–7, on DVD**
Dawson's Creek's tamer, more family-oriented cousin is finally available as a complete boxed set. Remember the time Simon dated that pregnant girl he met on the bus? What was that about?
$160.77, overstock.com

Ugg brand moccasins
Yes, Ugg boots are big and ugly and always, always heinous when paired with a miniskirt and leggings. Ugg moccasins, however, are cozy and understated, if still a bit on the pricey side.
$104, zappos.com

The Tales of Beedle the Bard
A companion to the *Harry Potter* books that should help tide us all over until the sixth movie is released in July. Stories include the awesomely titled "Babbitty Rabbitty and her Cackling Stump."
$7.14, amazon.com

Actress Awakening

melanie jones interviews remy zaken

BY MELANIE JONES
PHOTO COURTESY OF *SPRING AWAKENING*

Remy Zaken has been acting since she was 10 years old—one reason she applied to Columbia was to be close to the Great White Way. But the cross-streets weren't as new to her as one might expect: at 16, she joined the original cast of *Spring Awakening*, a rock musical about sexuality and identity that went on to win eight Tony Awards. At 19, after almost three years playing the character Thea on and off Broadway, Zaken left the show for college. With *Spring Awakening*—and many other shows—closing due to pressures from the economy, Zaken looks back on the unexpected success of the show and her own "awakening."

How did you end up on Broadway at only 16?
Well, the first time I auditioned was for the Lincoln Center reading of the show [*Spring Awakening*]. I got really far, to the final callback, and they didn't pick me. The scene they wanted me to read for was the "beating scene," and I was like: "I'm 12! I've always played little girl roles!" Now I get this scene where the girl asks the guy she's in love with to beat her with a stick so she can feel something—I was like, I can't do this, I'm not talented like that.

But the second time went better?
I remember saying to my dad: "If I don't get in this show, there is something wrong with the world. That was awesome!" And I don't normally say that. If I did poorly, I know that I did, you can get vibes from the room. Michael, the director, was like, "So where do you live?" I said "Connecticut. But it's just a train ride away, I promise." He was like, "So is Chicago, honey!" And I thought, okay, I'm in.

Did anyone expect the show to do so well so quickly?
No, no. My opinion of the show when I got the whole script was, "Oh my god, one of these songs is called 'Touch Me.' How is this supposed to work?" ... I wasn't sure what the reception would be like, but I knew the show was great. I thought, people are either going to hate it or really love it. You can't be in the middle about it—you have to pick a side. As it came together more and more, I knew it was going to be something fantastic.

You started *Spring Awakening* as the youngest member of a young cast. Was it strange to be singing and acting out things that were happening to you in real life?
My sexual awakening was in *Spring Awakening*. I mean, I grew up during the show. I started out when I was 16 going on 17 and left when I was 19. Those are three very important years of your life. ... You would not recognize who I was before the show. I was so shy, and I always walked around with my shoulders up. I was always so introverted, and I kind of bloomed in *Spring*.

MY OPINION OF THE SHOW WHEN I GOT THE WHOLE SCRIPT WAS, "OH MY GOD, ONE OF THESE SONGS IS CALLED 'TOUCH ME.' HOW IS THIS SUPPOSED TO WORK?"

Remy Zaken, joined the cast of *Spring Awakening* at 16. eventually deferring her acceptance to Columbia for a year to continue her run on the Great White Way.

But there were some rough points?
The first song we learned was "Touch Me." The choreographer was like, "you can see it in these gestures, all this sexuality." I was really scared. I was 16 then and wasn't comfortable. My dad can't see me touching myself, that's weird! Nowadays it's like, "okay, we're doing the moves." We actually performed on this morning show where they said, "we really want you to do 'Touch Me,' but you cannot do any of the gestures." And I flipped out, I was so upset, because that's the show, and it was so normal to me, I was so comfortable with it.

***Spring Awakening* isn't your typical Broadway show: on-stage orchestra and seating, actors singing directly to the audience. Did you feel any distance from the audience at all?**
It's really hard not to acknowledge the fact that there are people sitting next to you, and it's harder for the audience not to touch you or talk to you. I'm not saying I was groped or anything, but people have whispered "good job" and "that was awesome," and I just had to sit there and take it because you can't break character ... but it's also awesome because you really get that response. You get their energy.

You deferred from Columbia for a year to continue with *Spring Awakening*. Do you ever regret that decision?
At the time, it was the hardest decision I'd ever made. I was worried that if I didn't go to school I'd be lagging behind. At the same time, I didn't want to leave *Spring Awakening* prematurely and not get everything I wanted to out of it. I decided I'd rather be at *Spring* for another year and just ride out that wave than just cut it off and go to school. I got my fill when I left the show: I was sad, but I was mostly proud of everything and happy that it happened.

You've done some TV work recently too, like an episode of *Law & Order* and *Gossip Girl*. That must have been disconcerting, shifting from a stage to set.
On Broadway, everything is cohesive. You run through your two and a half hour show and you do that arc. With this, you shoot the scene with the camera, five times facing me, five times facing them. It's so broken up. But if you say a line wrong, you can just start over and say it again. They have so much power [on the *Law & Order* set]. They change their lines sometimes because they don't think their character would say it, which I thought was so cool. Everything is very improvised, very on-the-spot. I definitely want to do it again.

This economy is taking out a lot of Broadway shows, *Spring Awakening* included. What's next for the musical?
The show deserves a much longer life. It's touched so many people who are really upset [that it's closing], but if you don't have enough money, even as a low-maintenance production with a small cast, then there's no point. ... There's a national tour right now, and there's a Swedish production and I think one in the West End, and talk about a movie. Its life isn't over.

courtesy of Harpo Productions

AUDIO/VISUAL AIDS

aids in the media, past and present

BY BETSY MORAIS AND JOY RESMOVITS

A MAN WITH HIS BACK TURNED TO THE CAMERA walks toward his shadow. He drags along his I.V. The screen is tinted blue, and though you cannot see his face, you can hear the music tell his story:

"I don't smile anymore, too many smiling faces lie / I don't pray anymore 'cause too many of God's children die, yes they do / And I don't love anymore, you said you knew where love is / I never knew where you was coming from / But I don't mind anymore 'cause now my mind is wasted on a dream."

This music video for Urge Overkill's "Take a Walk" came out in 1994 as a part of a Red Hot Organization fundraising effort that aimed to increase awareness of HIV/AIDS around the country. That year, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reported that 63,000 Americans were diagnosed, and 41,930 people had died from the disease.

Since then, the CDC's latest tallies show that approximately 1.2 million people live with HIV/AIDS in the United States, around a quarter of whom don't know they have it. About 56,300 new infections occurred over the past year, according to a September report. The new methods for measuring these rates mark a 40 percent increase over previous estimates for the decade.

American film and television are still pervaded by old stereotypes about the virus as a minority disease when, by the numbers, AIDS is a bigger national problem than ever. The current statistics total 19 times the number of diagnoses counted by the CDC in 1994. Yet HIV/AIDS has left an enigmatic mark on the American consciousness—bound up in social stigmas, cast down by prejudice. It was never merely a virus, but a terror. It was a phenomenon that afflicted the marginalized but was intent on spreading its tentacles toward the center. And the disease of body has become a malady of culture. As more people around the country are living with HIV/AIDS than ever before, statistics show that the fastest growing group of afflicted individuals is heterosexual women under 30.

But still, the issue's depiction in media falls short of its increasingly widespread medical gravity. Richard Brody, film critic at the *New Yorker*, points to Hollywood as lacking the courage to portray AIDS as an American problem. "Hollywood's avoidance of it is the story," Brody says.

Brody compared conspicuous cinematic absence of AIDS to Hollywood's stance on abortion. "There's a movie I'm waiting to see, the story in which a woman gets pregnant, she decides to have an abortion, and she lives happily ever after," Brody says. "It's a movie we're not going to see very soon. We see movies where teens decide to give birth, and maybe live happily ever after. We see *Stephanie Daley* where a teenage girl conceals her pregnancy, gives birth on a bathroom floor—the baby is dead—and is brought up on charges of homicide. I just saw *Revolutionary Road* in which a self-administered abortion ends unhappily. For all of its so-called notorious liberalism, Hollywood is not courageous on the issue of abortion and AIDS."

Origins of a Stigma

At first, doctors called it GRID, "gay-related immune deficiency." In layman's terms, it was "gay cancer" or "gay plague." Newspapers first began to report cases in the spring and summer of 1981. On July 3 of that year, the *New York Times* wrote that the CDC's Dr. James Curran asserted the disease posed no apparent danger to heterosexuals. "The best evidence against contagion," he said, "is that no cases have been reported to date outside the homosexual community or in women."

By the time the term "acquired immunodeficiency syndrome" was adopted by the CDC in 1982, it was too late for AIDS to shake the stigma of the old language. In large part, identification of the virus with homosexuality accounted for its absence from the moment's media stage. Film, television, and mainstream music lagged behind news coverage, just as policies of discrimination stunted medical research.

The fear and strangeness of the emerging disease led to early representations in the world of slasher cinema—homophobic horror flicks came in response to AIDS. In 1982, *Deathtrap* depicted gay murderers who kiss as they're about to kill. *The Hunger* portrayed a lesbian vampire in 1983, and 1987's *Prince of Darkness* featured quasi-lesbian attacks on women. According to Harry M. Benshoff and Sean Griffin, authors of *Queer Images* (2006), critics have interpreted these homoerotic films "as cultural responses to the AIDS crisis, since the generic imperative of the slasher film seems to be that 'those who have sex will die horribly.'" Moreover, this struck a chord with a national sentiment of AIDS as gay retribution.

In 1985, Hollywood darling Rock Hudson died of AIDS. The major studios that had once elevated the closeted gay actor to stardom steered clear of the circumstances surrounding his death. But that year, a made-for-TV movie, *An Early Frost*, debuted as the first feature-length film depicting AIDS directly. *Frost* told the story of a young lawyer who is forced to open up about his homosexuality once he is infected with AIDS. Movies like this gave accounts of AIDS patients as people rather than mere statistics but were slow in coming from the mainstream media that had the power to create broader impact.

An AIDS film finally took home an Academy Award four years later—1989's Best Documentary, *Common Threads: Stories from the Quilt*. The "Quilt" itself was created by the interwoven stories of HIV/AIDS victims and became a memorial in their honor.

But the turn of the decade brought a shift in media attention, particularly when basketball star Magic Johnson announced his infection in 1991. The L.A. Lakers point guard had been a sensation, a role model. Suddenly, he became the new face of AIDS: a heterosexual African-American. Johnson held a press conference that November in which he declared he would "battle this deadly disease" and become a national spokesman about HIV. "Safe sex is the way to go. We sometimes think only gay people can get it, that it's not going to happen to me," he told reporters. "And here I am saying that it can happen to anybody, even me, Magic Johnson."

Enraptured by Magic Johnson's celebrity status, the media—and specifically television—began to develop a new cultural notion of the HIV/AIDS victim as a marketable character. Though AIDS was still tied to its roots as "gay cancer," America was beginning to feel the disease emerge on a grander scale. Only then would the media begin sincere artistic efforts to address it in mainstream culture.

Making it to the Silver Screen

That year, 1991, *Angels in America: A Gay Fantasia on National Themes* premiered at the Eureka Theatre Company in San Francisco. The Pulitzer Prize-winning play was written by Tony Kushner, CC '78, who experienced first-hand what it meant to come out into a gay community smeared by fear and loathing in the United States. When his *Angels*—an epic narrative of two couples in relationships that unravel in the winds of AIDS, prejudiced politics, and transformations in understanding

courtesy of Comedy Central

courtesy of HBO

sexual identity—took the stage, Kushner was called a visionary and a revolutionary. In 2003, it was made into a critically acclaimed HBO miniseries, directed by Mike Nichols.

"One of the reasons that we need art and value art is that … it allows you a confrontation with something that's almost too frightening or too upsetting or too wonderful to encounter in waking life," Kushner said in a recent interview with HBO. "It gives you a safe environment in which you can encounter it."

His masterpiece took a stride in the right direction, creating characters who were not merely defined by their virus. Yet his play still played into the stereotype of AIDS' place in the gay community and did not push beyond this limit.

Perhaps the most famous AIDS film, *Philadelphia*, came out in 1993 to an entranced audience, rewarding star Tom Hanks with the year's Oscar for Best Actor. It was a historic movie, but also a fundamentally flawed one. The Dec. 22, 1993 *New York Times* review wrote that it "mostly succeeds in being forceful, impassioned and moving, sometimes even rising to the full range of emotion that its subject warrants. But too often, even at its most assertive, it works in safely predictable ways." The review goes on to describe the young, white protagonist as "a gay Everyman whose love of opera—awkwardly underscored in a scene that shows the audience how little it really knows about Andrew—hardly qualifies as a distinctive trait."

Yes, the film made tremendous headway by presenting AIDS in the mainstream (TriStar Pictures was the first major studio really to tell a human story of AIDS), but the movie was still rife with stereotypes, ultimately reinforcing the notion of AIDS victims as marginalized figures.

By the time *Philadelphia* hit theaters, the notion of AIDS as "gay cancer" was diminishing. It became known as a disease that afflicted other historically marginalized groups as well—African Americans, women, the poor—in addition to drug users and the homeless. That year, the CDC reported HIV as the leading cause of death for African-American men ages 25-44, and the second leading cause of death for African-American women of the same ages. By 2005, blacks made up 49 percent of diagnosed Americans, compared with 31 percent whites and 18 percent Hispanics, according to CDC reports. An estimated 9,708 women were diagnosed with HIV/AIDS that year, comprising 26 percent of the national total adult and adolescent cases.

The next year, 1994, Hanks starred in another film that dealt with the virus. In the number-one box office hit *Forest Gump*, Hank's love interest is presumed to die of AIDS in the '80s, and marks one of the darkest shadows cast on the decade.

A Case Today

Eric Cartman and Kyle Broflovski are standing in Magic Johnson's living room, pinning their dreams on his survival. It's *South Park*'s season 12 episode "Tonsil Trouble," which originally aired on March 12, 2008.

"You boys both have the virus? Are you sure?" Magic Johnson asks.

Cartman replies, "We're not just sure. We're HIV positive."

After Kyle berates him for making light of tragedy, Cartman rebuffs him, "Sometimes when things seem their darkest, you just have to stay HIV positive. But if you want to be so HIV negative all the time…"

In this *South Park* misadventure, the hugely overweight yet endearing Cartman goes to the hospital to get his tonsils taken out. But things go awry during the operation, and the doctors accidentally contaminate his blood with the AIDS virus. When his frenemy Kyle laughs at the news—it seems like retribution, since Cartman is "always such a dick and stuff"—Cartman decides to teach the chuckler a lesson by sneaking into his room at night and injecting HIV into Kyle's bloodstream.

Toward the beginning of the episode, Cartman decides to hold an AIDS benefit in his own honor. Pretty much nobody shows up. The event waitress explains: "I'm afraid AIDS benefits aren't as popular as they used to be. AIDS was more the '80s, '90s disease. It's all about cancer now." Cartman gets so mad it becomes silly—but her comedic line speaks to a serious truth about the lost prevalence of the disease in American film and television, as well as the national consciousness at large.

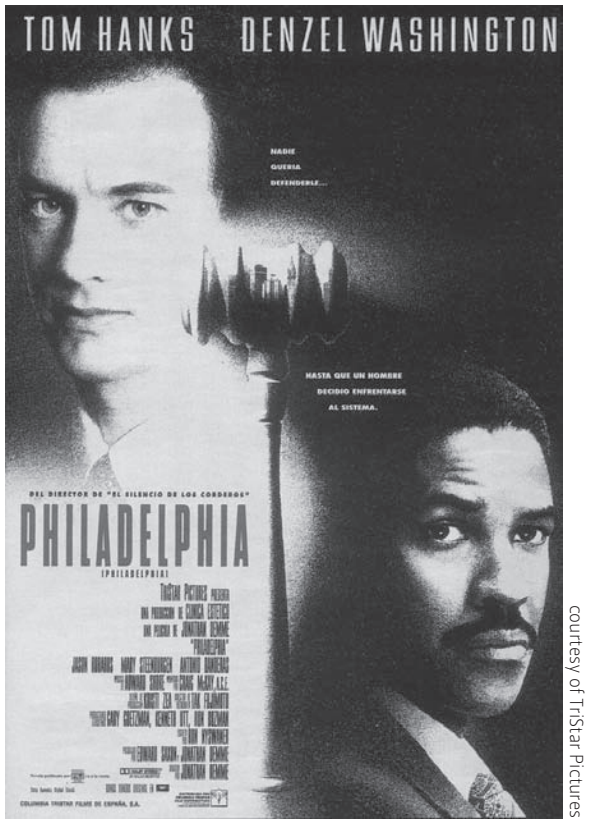
Even the benefit's headliner, Elton John, skips out to play a gig at a cancer event. Instead, Cartman is stuck with Jimmy Buffet, singing "AIDS Burger in Paradise" to which the poor, sick cartoon boy replies, "Nobody likes Jimmy Buffet except frat boys and drunk chicks from the South!" As if having AIDS wasn't hard enough, listening to Buffet is the last straw.

When Cartman calls his friends out for missing the benefit, they shrug it off and say they forgot. "Yeah you forgot!" he shouts back at them. "Just like a lot of people lately have forgot—that AIDS is still killing people! Seems like all of America has forgot that HIV is a serious disease!"

As usual, *South Park* successfully plays the court jester of national media, revealing reality in satire as nobody can in a solemn tone. Cartman's eruption "you forgot!" calls out the contrasting feedback to *Rent*—the musical that took Broadway by storm in 1996 and the movie that came out in 2005. Whereas the musical both had a staggering impact on the theater world and made AIDS a hot-button issue of the day, the film received lukewarm criticism and made meager bucks at the box office. Though this disparity is due to multiple factors, including the fact that the movie was just not as good as the stage production, it is also part of a sweeping trend. As another line from *South Park* puts it, "AIDS. Wow. That's really—retro." AIDS simply doesn't seem to get to us the way it used to.

This could be, as Brody said, because Hollywood doesn't touch the subject due to AIDS

courtesy of Arwin



courtesy of TriStar Pictures

politics. "When you treat the subject, you're treating the issue," he says. "Hollywood does not have trouble dealing with homosexuality anymore. But it has trouble dealing with the behavior involved in the spread of AIDS, whether unsafe sex or drug use. AIDS is not strictly a gay issue. … They don't want to stigmatize, or give the impression of blaming the victim, so they just steer clear."

American Spotlight on… Africa?

Today, though, when American activists, corporations, and celebrities do take on AIDS as a cause, they seem hardly to acknowledge the problem on their own continent. In January 2008, stars Jessica Alba, Alicia Keys, and supermodel Iman launched the "A Dollar Saves a Life" advertising campaign intended to raise awareness of AIDS in Africa and India. The Elton John AIDS Foundation focuses on eight African countries, four in Asia, and four in Europe. Starbucks is donating a small contribution from the proceeds of three winter drinks to Red, a group that distributes antiretroviral treatments to AIDS victims in Africa.

This seems sensible, since AIDS numbers are through the roof in Africa. Former South African President Thabo Nbeki believed the poisonous words of AIDS deniers, and as a result, those infected throughout the country did not receive antiretroviral treatment. A recent Harvard University study calculated that Nbeki's actions led to about 365,000 premature AIDS deaths.

President George W. Bush augmented the Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief—he requires foreign governments to devise national AIDS strategies before the U.S. will give them money. The plan's requirements call the national AIDS strategy crucial to the plan's success. But the U.S. has yet to follow its own advice. We have no plan. Although there are many treatment, prevention, and education programs nationwide, they are too decentralized and disconnected to provide the necessary breadth of care. Despite the obvious need for AIDS awareness and prevention overseas, Americans tend to forget or ignore the reality in their own backyards.

Healing the Cultural Virus

Policies that ignore the trauma of AIDS in the U.S. echo the media's blind eye. After an initial burst of representations of the virus, the subject has all but faded from film. CDC Director Julie Gerberding says of American perceptions of HIV/AIDS: "One of them is shame. People are ashamed to have the infection. The other is stigma. They're punished if someone else finds out they have it. And then the third is ignorance."

"You wish that there were better education on the subject," Brody says.

Though we have yet to see a resurgence of AIDS portrayals in mainstream entertainment, ad campaigns that target America's youth have been cropping up.

Two young lovers rock a car back and forth. Over strains of solemn piano music, the camera then zooms in on two similar scenes set in bedrooms. Then, each couple pauses for what one expects will be a still moment of quiet intimacy. A kiss, a whisper, those three little words. But instead, the man in the car reaches into the glove compartment and takes out a gun. He and the two men in the other scenes each point the guns at their partners' heads. They pull the triggers.

This advertisement is part of MTV's campaign to raise AIDS awareness today. This time, though, it's not the gay disease. "The fastest growing group of people infected by HIV and AIDS is heterosexual women under 30," text on a white screen says. The ad finishes with the image of a bullet caught in a used condom. "Demand that your partner wears a condom."

In 1998, MTV launched the Staying Alive Foundation, a global organization whose mission is "to encourage, energize, and empower young people who are involved in HIV/AIDS awareness, education and prevention campaigns." It grants Staying Alive Awards to those who make concerted efforts to fight the virus. The Foundation's Web site features educational and informative tools for those potentially prone to exposure to HIV/AIDS infection.

The frequency and scope of AIDS representations in film and other media have evolved throughout the disease's relatively brief history. But despite its many phases of development and transformation, the trope has hardly changed: in every story, it is the disease itself that necessarily drives the plot. The victims are typically gay. The virus defines every other facet of their lives. An unacknowledged discomfort with treating the subject—whose weighty baggage is laden with moral questions and stigma—yields a vicious cycle of mimetic repetition.

As the critic Richard Brody is waiting to see a film about abortion that ends on a happy note, we're waiting on another. Imagine: a protagonist living with AIDS, but while the disease is inevitably a factor in her life, it's not the plot's focus. This film would treat HIV/AIDS as one trial of life's complexities—and ultimately, would treat a broader infection in American media.

BEYOND THE STREETS OF *PHILADELPHIA*

After the early '90s boom in AIDS-related films, spotting HIV-positive characters in movies and TV shows has become difficult. When characters with AIDS or HIV are present on television or in film, they tend to appear on melodramatic medical shows (like *ER* or *Grey's Anatomy*), soap operas (like *General Hospital* or *Beverly Hills, 90210*), or programs designed for a largely gay audience (like *Queer as Folk*). Failing that, AIDS tends to be a punch line—see *South Park* and *Team America*. Here's an incomplete list of notable AIDS-related entertainment from the past 12 years.

1996: *Rent*
Jonathan Larson's Pulitzer Prize and Tony Award-winning musical is centered around a diverse group of New Yorkers living with AIDS. A widely panned film adaptation was released in 2005.

1997–2003: *Oz*
The gritty HBO drama, set in the Oswald State Correctional Facility, features several HIV-positive characters—many of whom are confined to the prison's AIDS ward.

2000–2005: *Queer as Folk*
The HIV-positive characters in this series about gay white men are almost uniformly—surprise!—gay white men.

2000: *Sex and the City*: "Running With Scissors"
Samantha, the most promiscuous of the show's four main characters, finds that a man won't sleep with her until she gets tested for HIV. Her test comes out negative, of course.

2004: *Team America: World Police*
From the creators of *South Park*: a puppet movie complete with a wicked *Rent* parody in the form of a musical called *Lease*. The show's big finale? An elaborate production number entitled "Everyone Has AIDS."

2007: *South Park*: "Tonsil Trouble"
Cartman somehow contracts HIV after getting his tonsils removed, then finds out that nobody cares about AIDS anymore.

2007: *Girl, Positive*
A classic Lifetime made-for-TV cautionary tale about a teenage girl who loses her virginity, then discovers that she's HIV positive.

2008: *Private Practice*: "A Family Thing"
A teenager who wants to have sex with his girlfriend for the first time finds out that he's actually been HIV positive all his life—his parents just haven't told him until now.

—Hillary Busis

Just in Case You Weren't Listening: 2008

some notable releases for a symphonic finals week

PHOTO COURTESY OF BEHIND THE NOISE

Classical

It's easy for your music library to be dominated by a handful of labels when online classical music sources tend not to present a varied selection of recordings. That's why it's important to remember the lesser known, smaller-scale labels, as well as the up-and-coming orchestras and underground classical artists.

Landor Records has released a recording of the Sinfonia Classica with Gernot Süssmuth, playing some of Joseph Haydn's lesser-known symphonies as well as chamber music, of which Haydn had a prolific output. Sinfonia Classica was lucky to be paired with Gernot Süssmuth: The relatively new British ensemble formed just five years ago, and is already working with a conductor who is highly experienced both in quartet playing and in standard orchestral pieces. This is evident in the suppleness and the sprightly quality of his interpretations of Haydn's lesser-known works, which require a keen sensitivity to humor.

A recording of Brahms' clarinet sonatas offers an intimate look at the music's sweet, woody sound. As a freelancer, Jon Manasse may not get as much recognition as he deserves, but this new album from Harmonia Mundi is proof of his fine playing. Manasse presents these staples of clarinet literature with a finesse that is accessible to both the lover of Brahms' mysteriousness and the amateur listener. There's something in Manasse's playing for everyone, because he's not afraid of putting his heart on his sleeve.

The Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra performing Strauss' *Don Juan* with Mariss Jansons is destined to be a classic. Dubbed the number-one orchestra in the world by *Gramophone* magazine, the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra presents this thrilling rendition of Strauss' *Don Juan*, a piece that requires flexibility and versatility, as it abruptly shifts back and forth between heroic forte sections and sentimental adagios. The Royal Concertgebouw successfully depicts Don Juan's romantic plight as it takes the listener through the harrowing journey of the legendary libertine.

—Catherine Rice

Indie Rock

It's essential to remember that indie rock is no longer about the production, but about the music itself. That said, the three best indie rock albums of 2008 are Gnarls Barkley's *The Odd Couple*, The Kooks' *Konk*, and Ray LaMontagne's *Gossip In The Grain*. Each of these albums has permeated the indie rock genre to become so much more than just another indie album.

Gnarls Barkley cannot be pinned down to one genre. Notably, though, its second release is not just a set of eclectic songs and sounds, but a solid, unified album where each song fits perfectly into a given place—a dying concept when individual song sales vastly surpass album sales. Riffing on this idea, the band released the entire album for free on its Web site. As any dedicated music pirate knows, this is as good as giving an album away. But in true indie spirit, it's all about the music.

The Kooks released its much anticipated *Konk* this year to general extol. Knowing the album was expected to go platinum within a week of its release, the band released the album with an additional ten tracks. They were nowhere near as well-made or catchy as the rest of the album, but the band members figured that its dedicated fan base would enjoy the songs. This blatant disregard for industry standards made an incredible album even more monumental.

Ray LaMontagne's *Gossip In The Grain* is the perfect example of an artist stepping outside his genre to produce incredible effects. Typically resigned to the sad camera-panning parts of romantic comedies, LaMontagne stepped up in this album to show that indie folk really could be indie rock.

—Zach Dyer

Gnarls Barkley's unique sound on albums such as *The Odd Couple* embodies the indie vibe.

Reissues and Box Sets

Though the time may be about right to pick up the new Johnny Cash Christmas box set, several other artists re-released and boxed some major material this year. Lou Reed, who just gets better with age, performed his seminal 1970s cult album *Berlin* at St. Ann's Warehouse in February and produced a remarkable live DVD. Fatboy Slim re-released his best work, *You've Come a Long Way, Baby*, reminding us that he is still the dance-floor master. 2008 also saw re-releases from aging hippie Graham Nash (*Songs for Beginners*) and nouveau-hippie The Microphones (*The Glow Pt. II*). Creedence Clearwater Revival released a number of 40th-anniversary special edition albums. New Order embarrassingly recalled hundreds of poor-quality collector's sets, though fans wondered whether it was the five-album collection's remastering or the late material that was bad quality.

Last week, *USA Today* asked if buying music box sets, "the Cadillacs of the record industry showroom," is worth it, and with sets such as *Motown: the Complete No. 1's*, the answer is obviously, "Hell yes!" Others, such as the ABBA box set, shed little new light on over-exposed artists. It's hard to decide when it's worth it to trade in a beloved EP or unmastered CD for a shiny new box and liner notes, but with musical nostalgia at a high point, it may be a good purchase for a mother or a lover this holiday season.

—Jennie Rose Halperin

Hip-Hop

If radio play is any judge, Lil Wayne ruled hip-hop in 2008. With *Tha Carter III*, Wayne took his place as the strangest and most important artist in hip-hop. Wayne is a lyrical genius. *Tha Carter III* is rich with crazy metaphors—such as the relation of sexual prowess to a Bowflex exercise machine—and allusions to everything from Lionel Richie to sickle cell anemia.

Other artists released equally exciting albums. Written while T.I. was under house arrest for weapons charges, *Paper Trail* came close to outdoing *Tha Carter III*. Unlike many post-arrest releases, the album manages to be neither depressing nor preachy. T.I.—the King of the South—delivers survivor anthems and raunchy jams along with radio-friendly hits. And lest the cockiest man in hip-hop be forgotten, Kanye West reminded us of his ingenuity with his just-released *808s & Heartbreak*. Singing, not rapping, on most songs through an Auto-Tune (that futuristic voice thingy that T-Pain made famous), West has been accused of following the herd. Nonetheless, *808s*, following the death of West's mother, is his most self-reflective album to date, and it just may just may shatter his egomaniacal image. Maybe.

For all the radio play received by the holy trinity of hip-hop that was Wayne, T.I and Kanye, some artists took a different path, sacrificing record sales for experimentation. Illinois duo The Cool Kids brought the '80s back in a big way with *Bake Sale*. From their throwback fashion sense to the spare beats on their debut album, the duo isn't ashamed of being old-school. When glossy production and new fads get tiresome, The Cool Kids' musings on Sega and Star Wars are the perfect remedy. Finally, The Neptunes, hip-hop's most in-demand producers, released *Seeing Sounds* as their band N.E.R.D. The album is just a little too rock n' roll and features a bit too much piano for some of the hip-hop heavyweights that employ the members of N.E.R.D. as producers. But when heard as an album in its own right, *Seeing Sounds* is an infectious, nonsensical journey through the minds of hip-hop giants. These five albums encompass all that was hip-hop in 2008—a little bit of the future, a little bit of the present, a little bit of the past, and a whole lot of Lil Wayne.

—Rebecca Pattiz

Eye Can't Get No Satisfaction

the best movies of the year, and why we hate them

PHOTO BY PARAMOUNT PICTURES

Iron Man

I hated *Iron Man*, and I don't know whom to blame.

Robert Downey Jr.'s take on weapons whiz Tony Stark is charming. I can't fault him for being mired in such predictable "playboy is transformed into honorable superhero" schlock. Gwyneth Paltrow's strawberry-blonde locks had incredible bounce. It wasn't her fault that her sidekick character's name was "Pepper Potts" and had a personality of equivalent depth. The movie's references to arms dealing and Afghanistan were Culturally Relevant; its nod to corporate social responsibility was Timely. Perhaps I should throw up my hands and laud *Iron Man* just like everyone else has—if only for not being as bad as a movie about battling robots ought to have been.

Nevertheless, the fact remains: I rented *Iron Man* off iTunes only a week ago, and have already forgotten how it ends. I still have some vague impressions. I'm sure there was a spot of car crushing, a dash of mano-a-mano combat in the sky. It's all a bit fuzzy, though—lost in a haze of formulaic plot twists and pseudo-scientific mumbo-jumbo. Hero is captured. Hero develops moral conscience. Hero powers electromagnet protecting his heart from shrapnel with an "arc reactor" implanted in his chest. Fill in the rest of the blanks with material from any other superhero movie your twelve-year-old brother made you watch over the summer. Spare me.

It's telling that I still do remember a slew of minor but exasperating details, and with remarkable clarity: The blinding gleam of villain Obadiah Stane's bald head as he lurks around, pretending his double-cross isn't utterly predictable. The absolute, distracting absurdity of Pepper Potts' five-inch heels tottering across an expanse of shattered glass during a chase scene. And the unavoidable fact that no matter how high-tech you get, robot voices—even impassioned ones—still sound silly.

—Becky Davis

Indiana Jones and the Kingdom of the Crystal Skull

American moviegoers shelled out over $317 million to see *Indiana Jones and the Kingdom of the Crystal Skull*, giving it the third biggest box office revenue of 2008. Though popular, *Crystal Skull* is the painfully harebrained black sheep of the Indy family. It stands with *The Godfather Part III* and *Rocky V* in that most notorious category of one-sequel-too-many trainwrecks. It is that unfortunate final film one is forced to buy when getting a series box set.

Crystal Skull's cataclysmic failure came on many fronts. The plot was tortuous and nonsensical, and the ending was so asinine you wanted to grab Spielberg by the collar and cuss him out. Shia LaBeouf proved to be anything but a young Harrison Ford (though he make take over future Indy movies, a terrifying prospect). The action scenes were lackluster and laughable, to the point that their ridiculousness has infected our lexicon. "Nuking the fridge"—in reference to the early scene in which Indy survives a nuclear blast by huddling in a refrigerator—has now replaced "jumping the shark" as the go-to idiom for a film or television series that has gone on too long, a relief to no one except Fonzie. All in all, Spielberg & Co. should have heeded their own title for the last Indy movie and made *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade* just that.

—David Berke

Harrison Ford is so last year. Just like all of these 2008 films on which you might as well skip out.

The Dark Knight

With over $500 billion in receipts, unanimous praise from critics and audiences alike, and guaranteed Oscar nominations, *The Dark Knight* has become a cultural phenomenon. Everyone has an opinion on what makes it great, including the gritty action sequences, the insightful political ideology, and of course, Heath Ledger's final and already iconic performance. But does the movie truly deserve all of its praise?

THE SUCCESS OF *THE DARK KNIGHT* IS NOT BASED ON THE FILM'S QUALITY.

The Dark Knight is a strong film with many weak elements, especially as its third act fails to fully realize the themes set up in the first two acts. After the excellent interrogation sequence, it takes a drastic and quick shift in plot that loses sight of its characters, especially Harvey Dent (Aaron Eckhart). Dent is the only character with a fully realized plot, but his transition in the third act comes off as rushed. Dent's character, along with an incoherent final action sequence, leaves *The Dark Knight* a slightly incomplete film which never really sees its ideas on human nature come together.

It's hard to see how a film with such blatant flaws came to be understood as the best film since *The Godfather*. *The Dark Knight* rises above the normal comic-book movie status to bring in a whole new audience. But Warner Bros. also exploited new marketing to build anticipation beyond belief—many were calling it the greatest film ever made before they had even seen it.

What *The Dark Knight* illustrates, then, is not just political allegory, but also a revealing insight into today's film culture. In a world where the blogosphere has become the predominant venue for opinion, the success of *The Dark Knight* is not based on the film's quality, but on the fact that everyone wanted their unique—and unanimously adulatory—voices on the film to be heard and explored. It was the type of film that everyone wanted to talk about—and they got their word in.

—Peter Labuza

Babes in Gotham Toyland: Spectacular or Saccharine?

what happens when the toy soldiers march into town

BY MADDY KLOSS
PHOTO COURTESY OF JEN VOGELSONA

Musicals featuring artificial snow and Santa Claus impersonators might not sound like crowd-pleasers in a modern, urban environment like New York City, but in the constantly shifting theater world, there is almost nothing more consistently popular than holiday shows. Though they may seem unsophisticated, dated, or even downright abhorrent to many "cultured" theatergoers, somehow holiday musicals have found their groove in the last 50 years or so, and have been drawing massive crowds ever since.

Having celebrated its 75th anniversary last year, the *Radio City Christmas Spectacular*, prominently featuring the Rockettes, is known the world over. But this year the trademark kick lines are joined by *Irving Berlin's White Christmas*, a jukebox musical featuring the songs of (you guessed it) Irving Berlin.

Both of these shows are steeped in the desire of many city-dwellers to return to the "good old days" of America, when Christmas was more about singing and dancing than about who would find an iPhone under the tree. Still, this back-to-basics mentality is contradicted by the shows' extravagant sets, costumes, and cast sizes. Christmas shows often attempt to simultaneously evoke nostalgia and over-the-top grandeur, and such a combination can be read as cheesy rather than as truly affecting.

Yet something can be said in support of the enduring Christmas musical: People always go. For the week ending Nov. 23, *White Christmas* was selling to 87 percent capacity, according to the weekly Broadway grosses reported by the League of American Theatres and Producers. Just prior to its official opening, the show, playing at the Marquis Theater, ranked seventh in overall revenue out of the 31 Broadway shows that report their earnings to the League. Moreover, the *Radio City Christmas Spectacular* fills nearly 6,000 seats in Radio City Music Hall each night—about a 4,500-person increase from the Marquis.

Longtime New York resident Eliza Shapiro, CC '12, pins the popularity of the *Radio City Christmas Spectacular* on its long history as an emblem of the Big Apple. "I know that some native New Yorkers go and it's a tradition—you go see the tree at Rockefeller Center, then you go see the Rockettes," she says.

Daniel Flicker, CC '12, agrees, saying, "I think just the image of the Rockettes is such a quintessentially 'New York' Christmas icon."

The addition of *White Christmas* to the mix is a further attempt to tap the crowd that comes to New York every winter just to glimpse the holiday institution that is the *Radio City Christmas Spectacular*. Theater industry professionals know that tourists will often gladly shell out the big bucks to feel like they are a part of the greater Christmas-in-New York "experience."

"Living in New York, I know that it [the *Radio City Christmas Spectacular*] is a big tourist attraction, and people come here to see it," says Shapiro of out-of-towners looking for the thrill of such an illustrious production.

"It seems like something you have to do once in your life," Flicker adds.

While both Flicker and Shapiro readily admit that they personally aren't big fans of the generally ostentatious, saccharine nature of holiday musicals, they also see the fun such shows have to offer. Especially in the case of the *Radio City Christmas Spectacular*, an earnest and cheerful spirit compensates for the tackiness. Reflecting on his memory of seeing the *Radio City Christmas Spectacular*, Flicker says, "I thought it was cheesy but I enjoyed it … I think it's enjoyable and has that sort of art deco, grandiose New York spectacular feel to it."

So while the *Radio City Christmas Spectacular* is sure to dazzle both tourists and traditionalists again this year, the future is also promising for *White Christmas* as the newcomer to the holiday show scene. The *White Christmas* Web site proudly proclaims, "Get ready to discover a delightful new show … that's as fresh and rare as newly fallen snow!" I wouldn't exactly call it either "fresh" or "rare," but the show is indeed likely to delight.

Santa and his long-legged helpers combine holiday cheer with high-kicks in New York's classic winter shows.

HEATHER DUCKWORTH, CC '10: TOEING THE LINE THIS HOLIDAY SEASON

As other Columbia students don their comfiest sweats and lucky socks for finals this month, Heather Duckworth, CC '10, puts on her dancing shoes. Six days a week, Duckworth hits the stage as a Rockette in the *Radio City Christmas Spectacular* in Nashville, Tenn., fulfilling one of her wildest childhood dreams.

"Ever since I started watching the Radio City Rockettes perform in the Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade, I have wanted to be a Rockette," says Duckworth.

To become a Rockette, Duckworth attended an audition in Chicago last May. Such a thrilling opportunity, however, did not come without a cost.

"The Rockette audition fell right in the middle of Columbia's final exam schedule. So, I had to reschedule almost all of my final exams so that I could go audition for the job," says Duckworth.

Still, the risk and trouble was clearly worthwhile. Duckworth's enthusiasm and wealth of experience in a variety of dance styles helped her ace the intense two-day audition.

Now, as a Rockette, Duckworth is taking a semester off from Columbia, but keeps a jam-packed schedule that is both exciting and physically demanding.

"We [the Rockettes] perform, on average, 12 shows a week with over 200 kicks per show," explains Duckworth.

Between shows, Duckworth must be extremely careful not to injure herself so that she can keep up with the constant performances—sometimes four in a single day. When not resting, she works out regularly to maintain her stamina and strength.

In addition to dancing, the Rockettes also have an extensive PR campaign, including TV interviews and smaller holiday performances.

"All and all," Duckworth says of her job, "it's pretty grueling, but absolutely worth it and so incredibly enjoyable." There is nothing she likes better than seeing the joy of the audience as they watch the Rockettes perform their trademark eye-high kicks. "It is such an honor to watch the audience light up every night with holiday spirit," Duckworth says.

Remembering the way she marveled at the Rockettes on TV as a young girl keeps her grounded, and she is truly grateful for her chance to spread that joy to others. It's hard to imagine that in just a number of weeks, Duckworth will be back on campus cracking the books like any other Columbia student, but the valuable experience of being a Rockette is something that will always set her apart. \\\

Christmas Lust List

BY SHIRLEY CHEN

The economy may be in a shambles, but there's no reason yet to give up on fashion. Designers have taken it upon themselves to supplement your wardrobe with chic yet modern staples. With retailers offering up to 80 percent off this holiday season, these items may be within your grasp during post-holiday sales. Sure, you may have to give up that Starbucks habit and sell a few old textbooks, but think of these as long-term investments in your beautiful sartorial future.

PS1($1595-$4250, Barneys.com): the indisputable "love, death, want, need!" (it induces ultra-extreme emotions) item of the year. While the Chloe Paddington is done, and Balenciaga is enjoying a nostalgic retirement due to some new hardware, Jack and Lazaro's new it-bag has universally set hearts aflutter. Not named after Proenza Schouler as previously believed, but after the New York public school system—how egalitarian—the PS1 comes in a variety of skins, sizes, colors, and in a messenger shape or a jumbo clutch. With no visible branding, it is subtle, yet envy-inducing for those in the know. With no ad campaign, the PS1 was instead cleverly distributed to "close friends" like fashion elite Vanessa Traina and Mary-Kate Olsen, then marketed to the masses via paparazzi photos. Check out the PS1 at Barneys and prepare to start lusting. Don't say we didn't warn you...

Moncler jacket ($790-$1350, Barneys.com): Unlike most shapeless winter-wear, these Italian-made puffer jackets are cut to flatter the figure. They come in shiny or matte polyamide, three different lengths, and some have fur hoods; all will provide maximum chic yet abundant warmth.

3.1 Philip Lim dress: A Philip Lim dress is always a happy addition to any girl's wardrobe. His unique, ultra-feminine pieces transition easily from day to night, and need little accessorization. The prices are not completely over the top, and his fall line is already on sale. For example the Siamese dress worn by Emmy Rosum was $525, and is now $367.50 on net-a-porter.com

A.P.C. tights ($60, APC.com): If you're sick of ripped tights (no, it doesn't look like Alexander Wang) or fading colors, A.P.C. tights are your solution. This high-quality buy doesn't break the bank either.

The cornerstone of any outfit: Statement shoes, the crack cocaine of the fashion industry. Branch out from the usual Louboutin fall-backs with shoegasms from Kirkwood, Givenchy, Alaia, Balenciaga, Vuitton, or Marni. \\\

Moustaches, Seriously?

the resurgence of upper lip hair

BY ELLIOT SMALLING
PHOTO COURTESY OF CELEBUZZ

While Italian men's style has been characterized by its sleek look and British style by its traditional patterns and classic tailoring, American style has to work to establish its own identity. The thrift-shopping craze that has developed in the past few years has shifted the American style identity from the Ralph Lauren-inspired prepster look to what can be termed the "it's so bad, it's good" look. Taking elements from long-forgotten past styles, such as suspenders and the bowtie, has become the fashion norm, so it's no surprise that the moustache is seeing a return to popularity. Being the ultimate dated, "bad" look; it, more than anything, can be seen as indicative of the direction that American men's style is taking.

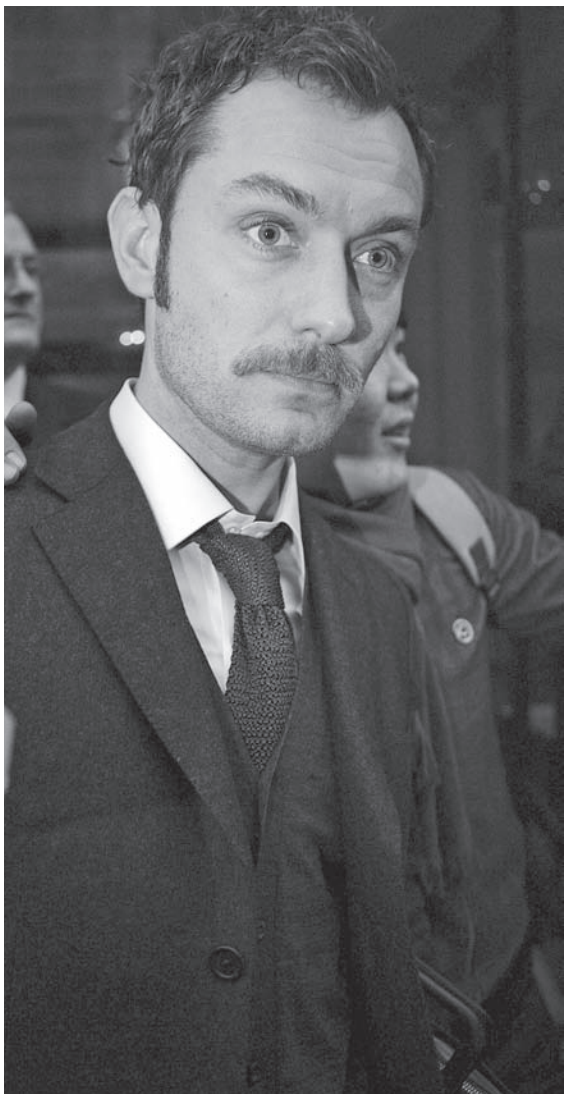
This is not to say that the general population has completely bought into the idea of man wearing a moustache. Actually, most people recoil in horror at the sight of one. However, it was not long ago that sexy men wore them with confidence. Clark Gable, "The King of Hollywood," still makes hearts beat with passion as he woos Marilyn Monroe and Vivien Leigh onscreen—even while sporting a well-groomed moustache. For those with more intellectual tastes, Salvador Dalí and Friedrich Nietzsche had mustaches that were integral to their iconic looks.

In the 1970s, America saw a resurgence of the moustache in popular culture, although the moustache-wearer himself became decidedly less classy. The likes of Ron Jeremy and the Village People gave the moustache seedy connotations. This might explain why there still exists a certain aversion towards upper lip hair. However, if the wildly patterned polyester shirts of the '70s are now being bought in thrift stores across America, there is no reason for people to scorn the 'stache.

BEING THE ULTIMATE "BAD" LOOK, IT, MORE THAN ANYTHING, CAN BE SEEN AS INDICATIVE OF THE DIRECTION AMERICAN MEN'S STYLE IS TAKING.

Johnny Depp, an international sex symbol and flouter of conventions, is perhaps the first to rock the modern moustache by wearing one both on- and off-screen. Then came Jonathan Rhys Meyers' growth of a moustache for Showtime's sex-soaked *The Tudors*. Even heartthrob Jude Law followed suit. However, the new Age of the Moustache is not limited solely to Hollywood eccentrics and the stars of the new Sherlock Holmes movie. Even the fashion world is embracing the moustache. It made numerous cameos on the Spring 2009 runways, including appearances at Rag & Bone, Thom Browne and Jean Paul Gaultier. The award for Boldest Use of the Moustache, though, certainly goes to Vivienne Westwood's Fall 2008 look, in which a moustache was painted on the ethereal Iekeliene Stange's face, making the model the first to pull off the feminine facial hair look since Frida Kahlo.

While the trend most likely will not catch on with women, the prevalence of the moustache in the media and on the runway, as well as the firm history of prominent moustachioed men, are testaments to its viability as a popular look. The hipsters of Brooklyn and Portland have already embraced it, and if the "trickle down" theory of fashion is correct, America as a whole will, too.



Jude Law sports a snazzy moustache, a trend that has taken off recently.

A Waffle Grows in Brooklyn

the public art fund and two columbia grads transform the morning commute

BY ANDREW WAILES
PHOTO BY RAUL GONZALEZ

The MetroTech Center in downtown Brooklyn has been taken over. A larger-than-life melting waffle, a tower of furniture dollies, and a mysterious glass box, complete with abandoned handcuffs and chains, now dominate the space.

These artworks compose the Public Art Fund's latest exhibition, titled "Trapdoor," which features work by two Columbia MFA graduates. But what exactly is this complex exhibition? Why has the Public Art Fund chosen downtown Brooklyn as its location? And what does it have to say about the often-underappreciated art form that is public art?

The nonprofit organization has been commissioning and displaying public art throughout New York since 1977. "We consider ourselves to be something like a museum without walls," explains Rochelle Steiner, the director of the Public Art Fund and curator of "Trapdoor." "The idea is to bring art outside the walls of the museums and galleries and into public space."

For the past 16 years, the Public Art Fund has sponsored an annual group exhibition at the MetroTech Center. Because tourists, students, and residents all stroll through the grounds on a daily basis, "it's an incredible crossroads," Steiner explains. "We like that there's such a wide cross-section of people that get to see public art."

"Trapdoor" consists of work by four local artists, two of whom are Columbia graduates: Ethan Breckenridge, Sara Greenberger Rafferty, both MFA '05, Francis Cape, and Martha Friedman. The Public Art Fund selected these four artists because their previous bodies of work have all explored, in some capacity, the idea of transformation, which is the installation's theme. Once chosen, the artists worked with the Public Art Fund to create pieces that focused on this idea.

The exhibition's title, "Trapdoor," evokes the same sense of surprise fostered by the four works of art. Like discovering a trap door, which transforms and upends the surrounding environment, these installations cause the viewer to experience the space in a radically different way. Friedman's piece, for example, is a large yellow waffle shown melting into the grass. The grid of the waffle echoes that created by the windows of the building directly behind it. The waffle transforms a commonplace building into a geometric visual pun.

"The idea of transformation is something that is particularly prevalent in New York and particularly Brooklyn right now," says Steiner. Though Steiner herself says that this is merely an interpretation of current cultural happenings in the area, it is true that for some time now Brooklyn has been talked about as being "on the rise." This increase in popularity and shift in cultural status could very well be reflected in the transformative qualities of this year's display at the MetroTech Center in the heart of Brooklyn, the site of a great deal of growth and development in recent years.

But the uniting theme does not lead to a homogenous installation. Each artist featured at the MetroTech Center explores transformation in a very distinct way. Ethan Breckenridge created a 16-foot tower of furniture dollies. Francis Cape's *On Main Street* and *Blue Piece*, which look like pared-down fragments of a home, sit in the lobby of One MetroTech. Both are works of minimalist sculpture that nonetheless appear radically different when viewed from different angles and locations. Rafferty's piece, titled *After Harry*, consists of a seven-foot-high Plexiglass tank that is completely empty, save for a pile of abandoned ropes and chains at its bottom.

"THE IDEA OF TRANSFORMATION IS SOMETHING THAT IS PARTICULARLY PREVALENT IN NEW YORK AND PARTICULARLY IN BROOKLYN RIGHT NOW."

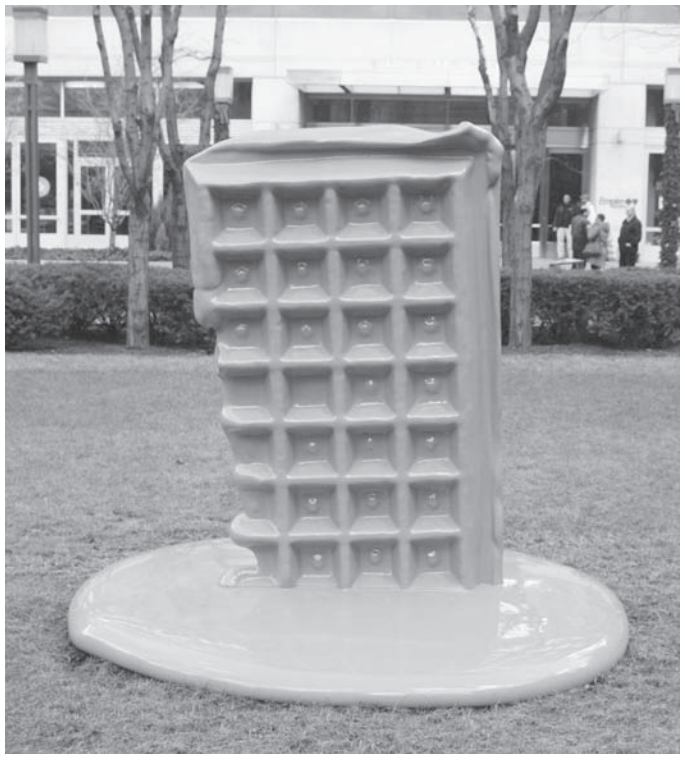
Rafferty is known for incorporating elements of theatricality and performance into her work, both of which have huge potential for transformation. "I was very concerned with site specificity, but at the same time making a piece that was consistent with my body of work," says Rafferty. She explains that she finds creating art to be like solving a math problem. "There are a number of really specific constraints, but then there are a number of other possibilities that show up," she says.

Rafferty expresses her gratitude for her experience in the Columbia MFA program, saying, "It really forms the basis of my community here in New York in terms of art making. One of the things about Columbia, for better or for worse, is you have a lot of access to the New York art world." Rafferty will be returning to Columbia in the spring semester to teach and work with senior thesis students.

For Rafferty, the public location of *After Harry* had a crucial role in determining the final product. She explains that she wanted to create a sort of still-life street performance. Instead of using living, breathing street performers, Rafferty wanted to make an object perform. And the limp ropes and chains in *After Harry*, as well as the piece's title, do suggest past action. The feeling of escape that the hanging ropes and chains evoke strikes a stark contrast with the ominous-looking courthouse across the street.

Rafferty adds that the personal significance of *After Harry* only continued to grow after she was called for jury duty to sit in on a murder trial shortly after the sculpture's unveiling. Rafferty maintains, however, that the minimalist nature of the piece allows its significance to change relatively easily depending on the context. With regards to the recent election and our financial situation, it is a voting booth. With regards to the bailout, it is a box trapped underwater.

The changing significance of *After Harry* touches on a very crucial part of public art: audience interaction. Public art is different from other forms of art in that it must be created with the public in mind. Just as Rafferty can view her own work in so many different lights, so too is the public expected to infuse its own beliefs and views into the public artwork on display. Rafferty stresses that it is very important to consider both site specificity and audience interaction when creating public art. The importance of audience interpretation ensures that each work transforms with every new viewer. Says Rafferty, "You have to make a piece that's open enough so that the people who see it are going to add to the work by their interpretations."



Two Columbia MFA grads joined forces with the Public Art Fund to transform Brooklyn's MetroTech Center into a playground for contemporary art.

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