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the eye

GREAT BOOKS

why alternative
distribution matters

by Devin Briski





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GREAT BOOKS

why alternative distribution matters,
pg. 07

by Devin Briski
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LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

Today, for the first time, I plan to Occupy Wall Street.

It's something I've thought long and hard about. And I won't lie: I'm a little nervous.

For the past two months, I've watched the Occupy movement unfold with some hesitation. At a school like Columbia, where each and every student seems to have a really! important! cause! for which they are dying to get your email address, one's filter for this kind of thing becomes pretty strong.

When I first was invited to the protest via Facebook, I politely declined to respond at all. It was a novel idea, which I admired—a nonspecific, ideological, nonhierarchical protest, addressing something I cared deeply about. What slowly enraged me and ultimately convinced me that I needed to get involved, though, was one event that took place on Monday night's Zuccotti Park raid.

The NYPD threw out the majority of more than 5,000

books in the park's People's Library. Bloomberg claimed that they would be recovered, but that promise is holding tenuously, from the news that has been reported thus far.

This event seems contrary to everything I've ever learned about America. And so when I head downtown tomorrow, I'll be protesting the city's restriction of free speech as much as I'll be protesting the broken state of our economy and government.

But the NYPD's actions did bring into the public sphere a burgeoning conversation about information and how it's disseminated. Throwing books into a dump truck is an explicit restriction of information, but as Devin Briski reports this week, some methods of distribution and restriction are more subtle.

There's a conversation happening on campus—I hope you'll join.

Amanda Cormier
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THE SLICE IS RIGHT

WHAT YOUR PIE SAYS ABOUT YOUR GRADES

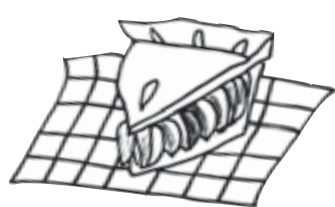
BY RAQUEL WILDES
ILLUSTRATIONS BY CINDY PAN

Yes, Thanksgiving is a holiday for us to return home to our families and give thanks for our loved ones, DVR, Free Cone Day, and everything else that matters, but we know what's actually on your mind these days—the home stretch. In one month, finals will be upon us, and we're all wondering how it'll turn out. Well, luckily, your favorite Thanksgiving dessert reveals everything you need to know about your academic performance.



PECAN PIE

You're uptight. You enjoy the protein in this pie for its sustaining properties and probably run through the park reading your bio textbook, training for a triathlon, and listening to Mozart's *Don Giovanni*. You'll keep heading full-force through your exams, but be careful to take a second to look around so as not to run straight into the giant maple tree in your path. Take a second to smell the roses. After all, you can't afford a concussion at this point in your education. Maybe after you're accepted into grad school...



APPLE PIE

You've traveled from afar (or just Canada) to study at Columbia, expecting a wholesome, American collegiate experience, which is why you're attracted to this all-American dessert. You're a happy participant in Greek life and play on the top intramural team. You drink milkshakes at Tom's and eat pizza at V&T. You would never dare to disrupt the natural order of things and have a study system that works. You frequent Butler between the hours of 12 and 4 a.m. You're happy being an average student. Keep up the good work; you can never go wrong with apple pie.



PUMPKIN PIE

The earthy flavor of pumpkin appeals to you, man. Maybe when you entered Columbia you were majoring in economics, but now that Wall Street has been "occupied," you're studying philosophy instead. You've started doing yoga during your discussion sections and take the first five minutes of every exam to practice your "ohms." After all, it helps the oxygen reach your brain, which might make up for your rudimentary study skills. You would probably do better at a place that doesn't have such a rigorous core (and doesn't believe in grades). This is going to be a long month. Hang in there.

PROGRAM PLANNING

A+ CHOICES

BY DAVID SALAZAR

HIST W3528 The Radical Tradition in America
Prof. Eric Foner
MW 4:10–5:25 PM

If you don't know who Eric Foner is, you've also likely never read anything about the Civil War. His most recent book, *The Fiery Trial: Abraham Lincoln and American Slavery*, recently won a Pulitzer. Take this class, because the man has a Pulitzer.

EYE RATING ●●●●

VIAR R3701, Photography I
Prof. Thomas Roma
MW 9:30 AM and 2:30 PM or TR 9:30 AM

This class will bring you back to a time before iPhones and Instagram, while teaching you how to develop your own photos. There's a waiting list and you will need a film camera. According to my source, everyone should try it, but a thick skin and desire for growth are necessary.

EYE RATING ●●●●

Registration begins this week, and Eyesites knows that it can be difficult to find an enriching class to take that won't ruin your social life or GPA. But fear not! We have compiled a somewhat-definitive list of classes that can't be missed, so check some of them out this spring.

V3222 Tolstoy and Dostoevsky
Prof. Liza Knapp
MW 9:10–10:25 AM

Is reading every word of *War and Peace* on your bucket list? If so, taking this class will allow you to cross that off, and get a lot out of the experience. The best part is that the class lets you read those Slavic tomes at a reasonable pace.

EYE RATING ●●●●

PSYCW1001 The Science of Psychology
Prof. Brian Rakitin; Patricia Lindemann
MW 6:10–7:25 PM; TR 2:40–3:55 PM

There's nothing like satisfying a science requirement while learning about mental disorders and how the brain works. Sure, you could take calculus and hate yourself, or you could take psych and finally understand your roommate's neurotic tics.

EYE RATING ●●●●

EDITORS' PICKS

THANKSGIVING MEMORIES

EYESITES

The Editors tell us about their most memorable—that's right, memorable, not pleasant—Thanksgivings past.



Paul Hsiao

Multimedia Editor

My favorite Thanksgiving memory is my Dominican host family giving me wine for the first time. Apparently, I danced to Ricky Martin quite well.

Jon Edelman
Features Associate

The year my family finally said "Fuck it," and started eating ham instead of turkey. We're terrible Americans and terrible Jews.



David Salazar
Online Associate

My best Thanksgiving has been every one after four years ago, when I spent three days in rural New Mexico with the stomach flu—because Chinese food in New Mexico is about as good as it sounds.

Franny Corry
Online Editor

One year at Thanksgiving I got stuck behind the toilet. Another year I got a concussion running into a tree while playing football. And another year my mom caught me drinking a beer. I was grounded. Turns out, I don't like Thanksgiving very much.



COMPILED BY MARGARET BOYKIN
ILLUSTRATIONS BY CINDY PAN



Being Evergreen

what can we learn from the muppets' indelible staying power?

BY DAVID SALAZAR

ILLUSTRATION BY THUTO DURKAC SOMO

The doors to the Museum of the Moving Image in Astoria are marked by neon pink letters. Inside, there's a wall covered by black and white photos of silent film stars. There's the mask that Robin Williams wore in *Mrs. Doubtfire* and the red sequined suit that Richard Gere wore in *Chicago*. But this is just the opening act.

The headliner is upstairs, where display cases contain a series of polyurethane animals: a frog sitting on a log, a pig in a wedding dress, and a dog playing a piano. Individually, they're Kermit the Frog, Miss Piggy and Rowlf. Taken together, they are the Muppets, a group of characters that have been around for decades, but are having a come back as part of the exhibit "Jim Henson's Fantastic World" that coincides with a new movie, to be released on Thanksgiving.

The film, co-written by Jason Segel and starring both him and Amy Adams, will see the cast of the original television show on an all new adventure. The movie promises to be filled with musical numbers and, as always, self-referential jokes. Their return is a testament to the Muppets' ubiquity in popular culture. But how did a band of puppets rise to such revered status? The answer lies with their creator and what his work has managed to do for 42 years.

"Jim Henson's Fantastic World," which is coordinated by the Smithsonian Institution Traveling Exhibition Service, encompasses Henson's entire career which, though cut short by his unexpected death in 1990, was undoubtedly prolific. Henson has entertained children for nearly two generations, and the 40-year longevity of his creations imply that the Muppets are more than just memo-

rable characters. The puppets send a message that remains relevant during changing times for television, especially the near-death of puppetry outside of the Henson sphere.

Sesame Street characters like Big Bird, Bert and Ernie, and Grover not only teach kids the alphabet, but act as relatable guides to the trials of adolescent life. At the museum, the appeal that the *Sesame Street* characters have with children is evident. Tiny visitors are drawn to the case that houses Bert and Ernie—characters that are friends despite their differences—a somewhat trite but nonetheless important lesson that is the duo's takeaway. In the same room are Miss Piggy and Rowlf, iconic characters from the *Muppet Show*, the program that moved Henson's puppets to prime time, thereby proving that Muppets weren't just for kids.

The Muppets, as Erik Adams writes in the A.V. Club article, are "a troupe of misfits, bound together by irrepressible spunk and the desire to entertain." The original *Muppet Show* was constructed as a variety show in the vein of *30 Rock*. Sketches and musical pieces were perforated by behind-the-scenes vignettes. These vignettes, which typically chronicle difficulties like difference of opinion and feelings of marginalization, are where the character development takes place.

Therein lies Henson's brilliance: the Muppets are just caricatures of how we interact with people in the real world, in the same way that the *Sesame Street* characters are caricatures of how kids are at school. Through these caricatures, adults and kids alike are able to see through the bad jokes and parodies and get to the messages that these characters are trying to get across. And judging by the large family crowd at the exhibit, parents know the value of the Muppets in regards to their

kids. Even people who don't have kids, like Jason Segel, can tell that these aren't your run-of-the-mill hand puppets.

"THE PUPPETS SEND A MESSAGE THAT REMAINS RELEVANT DURING CHANGING TIMES FOR TELEVISION."

"When they bring kids to set with the Muppets, something really magical happens," Segel said recently in an interview with Jay Leno. "A puppeteer is standing right here, with a puppet there, and the kid is looking directly at the puppet, they don't even notice the puppeteer—they phase them out somehow, and every time I see that I think, that's why I'm doing this movie."

At the exhibit, a crowd gathered around a large screen playing a documentary with clips from the *Muppet Show*. The kids laugh at the silly jokes, but the parents and older people chuckle quietly to themselves for reasons only they can know. For decades, Jim Henson united different age groups through his ability to create memorable characters that have children and their parents and grandparents laughing at the same thing for different reasons. This unexpected unity that the Muppets brings might be why Segel and his colleagues want to bring them back. Maybe it's nostalgia, but maybe it's that people still recognize the power of Jim Henson's creations: to teach, entertain, and mirror our lives in a way that isn't preachy or contrived, but is effective nonetheless. ●



Join the Art Party

talking politics with bob and roberta smith

BY ASHTON COOPER
PHOTOS COURTESY OF PIEROGI GALLERY

Last Friday night, British artist Bob Smith (who makes work under the name Bob and Roberta Smith) staged a political revolution and the first ever meeting of the “Art Party” at gallery-cum-warehouse The Boiler in Williamsburg. He gave out “Join the Art Party” pins and read an Art Party manifesto. Smith has been exhibiting satirical politically-minded text and performance pieces for the past 25 years. The Eye spoke to him about Obama, British conservatives, and how art can change the world.

Your show opening on Friday is called “The Art Party (Gotham Golem).” What exactly is the idea behind the Art Party?

It won’t actually be a political party. The idea is to think of it quite like the Tea Party, actually. The Tea Party isn’t a distinct political party running against the Republicans in races. It’s a pressure group. The idea about the Art Party is to say “this is a point of contact for people who agree that the arts are important.”

And what is the “Gotham Golem” aspect? Is that a character you have created?

The Golem is a 16th century Jewish mythological figure, and he’s sculpted by the rabbi in Prague as a giant to save them from the anti-Semites. Humanity summons him up in times of trouble. The idea is to say that artists have the power to make things which can help us get out of difficult situations. That’s why I wanted to make one now. Also, the Golem has a relationship with what’s going on in Britain at the moment. We’ve got quite a conservative government who is running the country, and they only talk about austerity and deficit reduction. It is depressing people because they’re not giving anybody any hope. What

I was trying to say with this exhibition is to say to liberal Americans who are a bit fed up with Obama [that], actually, what he is doing is trying to hold off those forces. I can see why people are disappointed in Obama, but from my perspective, Obama looks like an absolute savior.

I’ve seen your piece that reads “I wish I could have voted for Barack Obama.” What is your interest in American politics? As an artist who lives and works in England, do you feel you have an outside perspective on American politics?

“I DON’T THINK THE COMMERCIAL ART WORLD THAT LIVES IN CHELSEA IS THE WHOLE OF THE ART WORLD AT ALL.”

I do slightly. I think my perspective on it is [that], after 9/11, [there] was an absolutely disastrous response. Obama’s election in 2008—it was just a fundamental shift away from after 9/11 into something much more hopeful and optimistic and encouraging. So I was trying to make an optimistic show about the power of human beings to put it back together again and not wallow in destruction, which is what George Bush did. People in Britain are quite anti-American, really, but they will never be able to vote for a black head of state. So that is amazing. It’s just so amazing that he was elected. The show is about a positive message about hope and how art can be part of the story.

Right, but there is that element of humor and satire to the creation of an “Art Party,” which is

something that runs throughout your work. Why is the combination of humor and politics so important to you?

It’s two things: One is that politics is so important, but also that politics is so stupid. I always think that people should get involved and think about these issues very seriously, because if you don’t get involved in it, you don’t have any power in it. I also think the hubris that the political world has to embrace in order to gain power is something that should be ridiculed.

A piece in the current show reads “The Director of the Museum of Modern Art in New York is Much More Important than the British Prime Minister.” What was the inspiration behind this piece?

The people who are in control of culture—they’re incredibly important people [and] much more important than some of these politicians. But I don’t really like the current British politicians. I’m not a big fan of the current prime minister.

There is definitely a reactionary tone to the work in this show. This type of text-based, humorous, politically-minded work is having a moment in New York. I’m thinking especially of William Powhida’s show at Postmasters right now, where he writes an open letter to the art world. Do you think art is a viable agent for social change?

Art is really, really powerful, and it is really a viable space for social change. The art world is kind of one part of that, like museum culture might be or magazines. I don’t think the commercial art world that lives in Chelsea is the whole of the art world at all. [The art world is] all of the people who teach art in schools and all of the people who enjoy images, which is all of us, really. That is really powerful and can be an agent for social change, and I believe that very profoundly. ●

Occupy Culture

the intersection of activism and the art world

BY RAVENNA KOENIG
ILLUSTRATION BY NICCI YIN

During the Progressive Era, when lilies were gilded and political parties were run by corporate marauders, American novelists like Upton Sinclair, Edith Wharton, and Theodore Dreiser used creative expression to bring social issues to public consciousness. When the Black Power movement of the 1960s began gaining momentum, its political work was balanced by a host of novels, paintings, poetry, music, and dance that shifted conversations of identity, racial pride, and equality into an artistic context. Social and political movements throughout history have been tempered, expanded, and refocused by companion movements in the arts. It is only fitting, then, that the latest social movement is the rightful heir to this tradition.

From the outset, the Occupy Wall Street movement gained notoriety for its creative and witty signs. Zuccotti Park has been christened a “street art utopia” by some in the media, and a site of populist expression for the mediums of puppetry, sculpture, poetry, and performance art. The Arts and Culture Committee of the movement has utilized art, not just as a means of casting a critical eye on the status quo, but also as a means of active protest.

But five weeks after the occupation began, art made the transition from tool of protest to object of political derision when a group calling themselves Occupy Museums began a series of protests outside the MoMA and the New Museum, while also pointing to The Frick Collection as another institution worthy of their efforts.

Why? The protestors’ responses to media inquiries cited goals that ranged from more free museum nights, to using “the democratic process to bring people together and learn what a society that is not about money is like”—a comment made to the San Francisco Chronicle by Noah Fischer, a Brooklyn based artist (’04 SoA) who instigated the protests. The protestors haven’t made clear the specific changes they would like to take place. In interviews Fischer has given, he seems disinclined to put forward any concrete requests, relying instead on vague gestures to the Occupy movement as a whole, saying things like, “Understanding Occupy Museums is understanding what Occupy is,” in an interview with Paddy Johnson of Art Fag City.

Some may contest, saying that Fischer is recruiting the movement’s buzzword for a cause that hasn’t maintained connection with its purported roots. When I spoke with Justin Stone-Diaz, the on-site information coordinator at Zuccotti Park, the moment that the words “Occupy Museums” left my lips, he laughed, declaring “I have a lot to say about that.”

“The word ‘occupy’ has become the best way to brand whatever your activism is,” Stone-Diaz says. He contends that a number of different movements have sprung up in recent weeks that have appropriated the word “Occupy” without having any real affiliation with the original movement. “It’s really unclear what their goals are and how they fit in to our organization. We haven’t really seen them here,” he says. Several articles from different sources say that Occupy Museums was, in fact, a project of the Arts and Culture Committee of Occupy Wall Street. However, no one I spoke to at Zuccotti Park could confirm this.

“Splinter groups have the capacity either to add to the principal movement’s momentum or to steal some of its thunder,” says Paula Franzese, professor of political science at Barnard. “In this case, it would seem that variations on the Occupy Wall Street theme can only add to its force. The challenge is for OWS to more coherently and strenuously put forth a prescriptive agenda for reform.”

It’s not only a prescriptive agenda that’s missing from Occupy Museums, but a focused conversation on a large scale about what issues the arts are really facing. In Fischer’s manifesto, he puts forth abstract criticisms of the “absolute equation of art with capital,” but there’s no specific mention of the sorts of problems that plague, say, art programs in the public education system, or in low-income communities.

Michele Elam, professor of literature at Stanford University, echoes this criticism. “I think it’s not just a complaint that they don’t have a plan,” she says. “It’s about connecting the dots, connecting it to a larger conversation.” Elam, who wrote a piece for CNN Opinion about the role art plays in the OWS movement, hopes that the movement will gravitate toward a more focused examination of what makes art possible in our society: for organizations and individuals to produce, for students to have in schools, and for people to experience in their daily life.

The decentralized nature of the Occupy movement creates a space in which any one person’s goals, desires, or criticisms can be voiced. Aspects of New York museum culture may, in fact, have much in common with Occupy Wall Street. It is certainly unsettling, one of MoMA’s trustees, Kathleen Fuld, is the wife of Dick Fuld, CEO of Lehman



Brothers this year’s symbol of Wall Street criminality. Not to mention that this year the world’s leading auction houses are taking in record revenue, generated by the same top-tier executives whose fiscal hubris tanked the economy.

“THE WORD ‘OCCUPY’ HAS BECOME THE BEST WAY TO BRAND WHATEVER YOUR ACTIVISM IS.”

But are museums really the most culpable party in the problematic relationship between art and wealth? They wouldn’t be able to keep their doors open, and certainly wouldn’t be able to provide for free nights, without the funding and support of powerful people. Furthermore, is it the most productive use of time, energy and resources to upbraid museums without submitting feasible suggestions for how they could alter the way they operate? Issuing rambling, obscure manifestos or insisting that \$25 is too much to pay for admission isn’t going to endear the movement to the public. If Occupy Museums wants real change in the art world, it not only needs to identify the specific attributes of the current system that it takes issue with, but also prescriptive measures for change. ●



Great Books

why alternative distribution matters

by Devin Briski
photos by Samuel Draxler

An encounter 3,000 miles from home reminded Steven Hann of the importance of his job.

“About five years ago, I was in Berkeley visiting a friend. A girl comes up to me and says, ‘You told me to read Hart Crane, and I liked him so much, now I’m doing my Master’s on him!’” says Hann. “That really showed me that I made a difference with somebody. And I think that is important, that you do make a viable connection with the community.”

Far from an inspired recommendation during a professor’s office hours, this grad student’s fateful tip-off took place in front of what is now Milano Market, where Hann has been selling books off and on since 1974. A self-described “area book purveyor and general curmudgeon,” Hann displays a handpicked selection of science fiction and mystery-laden pleasure reading alongside more academic and theoretical books. The set-up is inherently interpersonal; customers inevitably become entangled in conversations about fiction, neighborhood gossip, haggling wars, and contentious debates over Hann’s fold-up table.

In 1999, sociologist Mitchell Duneier published *Sidewalk*, a compelling ethnography of sidewalk book vendors on Sixth Avenue. The book grounds Duneier’s own observations and interviews in theory, demonstrating how the actions, personalities, and relationships between these vendors shaped public space in downtown Manhattan. He centers the book around Jane Jacobs’ dictum in *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*: that public characters offer eyes upon the street to discreetly maintain norms. Duneier’s research was conducted 15 years ago, fresh on the heels of New York’s crack epidemic and Giuliani’s “broken windows” crusade. Today’s New York is markedly different: We are witnessing Bloomberg’s controversial third term and the public protest of New York’s financial sector through the Occupy Wall Street movement.

Late Monday night, the NYPD and the Department of Sanitation cleared the OWS protesters from Zuccotti Park, making 150 arrests. Perhaps one of the more symbolically startling casualties of the eviction: 5,554 donated books the movement had organized into a library that operated on the honor system were taken away in dumpsters. Bloomberg later announced that Occupiers could pick up their “property” from the Department of Sanitation, but volunteers looking to reorganize the library in Foley Square report on their blog a significantly diminished and damaged inventory. Earlier in the weekend, book vendor Fred Woolfolk, who sells and sleeps near Duane Reade on 111th Street, had his property—including the inventory of books he sells for income—seized by the 26th police precinct during the night after a neighborhood resident repeatedly complained about his presence on the street.

As the OWS movement has gained international momentum, questions have arisen about the interplay of capital, power, and access to space and information in this city. This semester, a group of students launched a weekly book swap called the “The Poetics of Exchange” to encourage a more active and participatory information exchange,

reflecting the goals of the OWS people’s library. I set out to replicate Duneier’s project with a different focus: What role do sidewalk book vendors play in shaping the intellectual life of Morningside Heights? Similarly, what are the implications of disseminating information through an alternate model in the shadow of mammoth Columbia?

The Poet / Polemicist of 113th Street

Even before my conversation with Hann began, it had already been interrupted. A man walked up to the table facing Milano and wordlessly set down five books. Hann picked out three, and handed two back. The man looked at me: “You like vampires? This looks like it’s up your alley,” handing me a large-print book that Hann had just rejected. Ouch.

Meanwhile, I watch Hann display *One Hundred Years of Solitude* and a new bilingual poetry collection entitled *Lebanon: Poems of Love and War*. “Bilingual things are always interesting, and this one especially,” he says authoritatively. Forty-six years selling books in Morningside can teach a vendor some tricks of the trade. The man selling to Hann is part of an extensive network of street regulars with whom Hann has cultivated reciprocity over the years. This man brings Hann found books for a few extra bucks, and Hann expands his inventory without leaving his chair. It’s a public, grass-roots exchange—one that incorporates candor, conversation, and a degree of chance.

I quickly learn that more than physical books

“THAT’S WHEN KNOWLEDGE BECOMES POWERFUL—WHEN IT IS LOCKED UP IN SOME SECRET LOCATION AND USED BY PEOPLE IN POWER.”

are exchanged across this table. Hann’s discussion on vending strategies is interrupted when another man hands him a container of fried rice. “We ship food back and forth, because he’s got the Chinese place right by him. And I get him stuff from Milano’s or Deluxe,” Hann explains.

Hann is affectionately referred to as “Papa Smurf” among the other vendors. The origin of his paternal status is clear: he has successfully developed an extensive network in the immediate area. These connections fuel book vending success, and fund his creative side projects: writing fiction, poetry, and journalistic articles.

He shows me a personal poetry collection titled “Blonde, Blue-Eyed, and Handsome” that he sells for five dollars alongside used books at his vendor table. The collection was published by Fractious Press, a small subset of Seven Story Press, in 2010. He has sold 400 copies, and notes that, “The way I see it, I don’t have 400 friends. So I must have sold them because I’m good.”

As students, we read required and recommended books, we argue about them in seminars, we compare them in essays, we use them to inform our political views and sense of morality, and some of us decide on our majors—possibly even our life courses—as a result of the books we read. We must be aware of the influences—professors, friends, and media—that direct the ideas we are exposed to, and contribute to how we understand the world.

Media theorist Marshall McLuhan argues that “the medium is the message” in *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*. Any medium embeds itself in the information or commodities it transports, influencing how knowledge is received. On a macro scale, the nuances of a particular technology will determine its impact on society (its “message”), more so than any information or commodities it may transport.

On an individual level, purchasing a \$4 used copy of *Republic* from a sidewalk book vendor versus buying it on Amazon may or may not lead

to a conversation or a chance encounter that shapes the buyer’s reading of the text. However, a society that distributes literature primarily through public tables with vendor-curated book selections—versus one that does so via self-directed database searches and algorithm-informed recommendations—will necessarily have different social and epistemological potentials.

The Columbia University Library System houses 10 million volumes, but as CC senior and initiator of Columbia’s new book swap Alex Klein points out, the organization of a library determines paths of exposure to certain ideas.

“On the one hand, books are allowed to circulate, but on the other they’re all stacked in this one place and they can only circulate to people with this little ID card,” he describes. “That’s where knowledge becomes powerful ... when it is locked up in some secret location and it’s used by people in power—they have the privilege and the power to access this sacred knowledge.”

Back on 113th Street, another passerby interrupts Hann’s discussion on the implicit classism of restaurant selection on Broadway—“Deluxe is part of a chain. So is Le Monde. What they mean is they don’t want a Burger King and McDonald’s because they attract ‘the wrong kind of people,’” he fumes—to alert him that a nearby super may have a collection of architecture and urban planning books to clear out.

Later, Hann is describing a loaded experience where another journalist misquoted him—“Next time I’ll sue their ass. I’ll get people who can. I know people who can. I’m also a member of PEN—it’s a writers union”—before being distracted by two young students professing their love of Terry Pratchett.

It’s hard to tell which is more frequent: opinions expressed by Hann that may offend a touchier person, or the number of inquiries from friends and customers, purchasing items, and stopping by to check in. Departing from title scanning in the Butler reserves and algorithm-determined Ama-

zon recommendations, it’s Hann’s personality that distinguishes this site of exchange. Customers may or may not agree with his opinions, but they definitely cannot avoid them.

His “Mayor Bloomberg’s third term is illegal” rant is cut short by a student asking about his progress on a freelance article. He squeezes in a recommendation for an artist called “Viagra and the Hitmen” from a Detroit-based art-collective named “Destroy Our Monsters” for a customer purchasing a Shaggs CD, before launching into a polemic revealing animosity towards Columbia students:

“The only time you’ll really know that this Occupy stuff is working is when you wake these kids at Columbia up. ... These kids will be the last to support this because their mommies and daddies are the 1 percent,” he declares. “Most of them will not go below 110th or above 125th the whole time they’re here. ... They have this air of entitlement that is disgusting.”

Some students would beg to differ, at least with regard to Hann’s comment about students waking up. Despite Hann’s depiction of Columbia as a citadel of unjust wealth, student participation in the Occupy movement is growing, as demonstrated by this week’s activist events. In line with Klein’s comments about knowledge and power, many of the efforts target the establishment of new models for discourse and dissemination. The recent OWS book confiscation put ideas about free access to knowledge on the radar of even lukewarm sympathizers.

A few blocks north of Hann’s table on a chilly afternoon, students gather around a guitar case with a bubble lettered sign reading “The Poetics of Exchange,” and a sheet listing their personal past course books and pleasure reading. As passersby pick up flyers for local activist events pinned to string hanging from the guitar case, an impromptu saxophone-guitar-harmonica jam session erupts.

Klein describes why facilitating an active exchange (as opposed to maintaining a passive in-

ventory) is important. “It’s nice to imagine where they [these books] will go and how they might change someone else’s life,” he explains. “There’s word of mouth and then there’s dissemination. I think that’s what’s really nice about dissemination is the influence these little seeds will bring is totally indeterminate. You never know, but you know something will be shared.”

The swap is loosely held from 12 to 2 p.m. on Fridays, and uses gift economy logic to facilitate a more open, participatory forum for recommending books and sharing ideas than is found elsewhere on campus. Its position facing Butler’s neoclassical facade lined with preeminent philosophers does not seem accidental.

“It [the book swap] is a way of putting knowledge out in the open, rather than sequestering it away, which is one kind of mission or dream that a lot of people I’ve been talking to have,” says Klein.

“THIS IS MY MAIN HANG. I’M HERE AS LITTLE AS POSSIBLE: WHEN I NEED THE MONEY OR WHEN THE WEATHER’S NICE.”

“In a lot of departments, knowledge is behind locked doors. And there are a lot of ways to reinscribe the purpose of the intellectual.” In the wake of activist movements, lecture halls can seem claustrophobic and critical theory empty without an equally vigorous effort to share the ideas and perspectives cultivated within Columbia outside the gates. Likewise, what’s a seminar without a diverse set of experiences to ground and direct the conversation.

And despite his hostility toward the general Columbia student body, Hann wholeheartedly approves of the book swap. “I’ve heard of that [the book swap]. Good! The more the better.”

Meanwhile, Klein is supportive of sidewalk book vendors, tying their public presence to the



The summer of 1995, Larry took photos of his regular customers, fellow sidewalk vendors, and local business owners. Some of his photographic subjects are still regulars on the street, while other figures have moved on.

FROM THE LEFT: Steven Hann vends outside Milano; Danny Elias sells records and comic books in front of CitiBank; John is local resident and Broadway regular

TO THE RIGHT: Morning was a book vendor that passed away; Scott was owner of former business Academy Hardware (location of today’s Vareli); Alex also worked for Academy Hardware



goals of the Occupy movement. “All these little encampments on the sidewalk, people trading things, people playing chess or selling books, they’re like these little points that create tangles in all the threads of people passing, and that’s where communities gather,” he says. “Any kind of occupation of public space like that encourages discourse and collisions and overhearing and all that kind of stuff is a really positive way to subtly resist this hidden knowledge of the state and those in power.”

The Unintentional Documentarian Between 111th and 112th

“I’ve been around like a donut.”

Dry humor aside, Larry—a vendor who sells sporadically between 112th and Broadway—hints at a striking truth about sidewalk vendors: they run Broadway’s longest lasting businesses. As restaurants like Empanada Joe’s and bars like Campo become dated references in the span of one undergraduate career or even a semester, sidewalk book vendors are here to stay. Larry notes that when he first began vending twenty years ago, only four to five of the businesses on the stretch from 110th to 116th were the same as they are today.

He reveals himself to be somewhat of an unintentional block documentarian when he pulls out a box of photos from the ‘90s, all taken from behind his table. He flips through, relating brief memories and anecdotes about the subjects: vendors, local business owners, and neighborhood regulars, many of whom are still around.

“She works at Columbia; she got her doctorate here; she’s a teacher who lives in the neighborhood,” Larry lists off in a gravelly voice. “I don’t know where he lives, but he works downtown and he comes to the neighborhood with his dog. Here’s a guy who’s in Utah now, he used to own a bookstore around here, his father...”

He periodically calls to passerbys who may recognize the subjects and the era. A number walk over and share a moment of nostalgia. Each photo shows a single person in dated wear standing proximate to Larry’s vending table. To Larry, these photos are “just fun”—he doesn’t consider himself a neighborhood historian by any means, but a guy with a camera who knows a lot of people.

Across the street, record vendor Danny Elias blinks when I show him Larry’s photo: “Is that me?” Elias recognizes Morning, a deceased book vendor, and Scott, owner of the former Academy Hardware without prompting. Elias, Larry, and Hann have worked here for over twenty years. Their presence has socialized the space, and these images reflect a shared consciousness that binds the vendors to each other, to these streets, and to the neighborhood regulars. They remember who was there, and what it was like. They also remember what the neighborhood has lost.

Many eyebrows have furrowed over the ability of independent bookstores to stay afloat in the information age, and, with the recent bankruptcy of Borders, the future of even corporate bookstores seems uncertain. In Morningside, we’ve recently witnessed the closing of Morningside Bookshop and Teachers College Bookstore in the past few years.

Hann lists off, “The one used bookstore at 118th

and Amsterdam and Columbia tripled the rent on that so they went under. They were called Last World Books. Now they’re another copy center. It’s like, Borders closed, Barnes and Noble is talking about it...”

Though now an independent business, Book Culture was opened with the support of former Provost Jonathan Cole, and it can count on the semester to semester demand for specific course books. Bank Street Bookstore is affiliated with Bank Street College, while Hue-Man bookstore on 125th and Frederick Douglass Boulevard is Harlem’s stand-alone indie bookstore.

Independent bookstores can uniquely cater to their neighborhoods, serving as a venue for local authors to host readings and sell their merchandise. Book Culture owner Chris Doebelin describes an obligation the store feels to serve Morningside’s diverse constituencies, which he identifies as University affiliates, the local literary scene, and people involved with N+1, Dissent magazine, and other New York-based journals. Hue-Man collaborates with businesses to offer discounts to local residents and free books to neighborhood schools through an initiative named The Power of One. Independent bookstores have also been associated with providing access to underrepresented, controversial or niche literature.

Chief Financial Officer of Hue-Man Kenneth Allen offers insight into the necessity of a physical space: “When you get together people of a lot of different opinions and they manage to find common grounds on areas, it becomes a meeting of the minds. ... That becomes an integral reason why a physical store exists, because people who might not ever sit in the same room manage to cross each others’ paths.”

Sidewalk vendors may not be able to offer four walls and a temperature-regulated space for conversation to patrons, but they also don’t have to pay rent. While the viability of independent bookstores continues to be in question, the sidewalk vendors on Broadway seem confident that their position is secure.

THE LANGUAGE OF “CLEANING UP” AND “SANITATION” WAS USED TO JUSTIFY BOTH SEIZURES.

“Everything changes,” Larry comments. “The only thing that doesn’t change is the books. The books have a lifetime. They last. You can buy them and compete with the new published books.”

He sounds poetic, but Larry is speaking literally: The demand for specific books doesn’t change much from year to year compared to the demand for other commodities. Despite tenuous claims about new and improved editions and revamped cover art, used classic books are functionally the same as new ones.

Book vendors can lead comfortable lifestyles if they learn the craft; Hann points to his 26th Street residence as proof of his success.

The flexibility of vending also allows for vary-

ing degrees of participation, and accommodates a spectrum of ambitions. Larry prioritizes less time on the sidewalk. “This is my main hang,” he dryly comments. “I’m here as little as possible—when I need the money, or when the weather is nice.” As far as dividing inventory, he keeps it simple. Scarce antique books are sold online, while “formula books: Fitzgerald for English, and Freud” are sold on the street.

Fred Woolfolk, who sets up in front of Duane Reade on the same block as Larry, takes a different approach. Woolfolk has only been vending a year on Broadway, and he only sells books he finds or books that are donated to him.

He also doesn’t worry that much about his selection or his profit. “Anything I can find, anything I can put out,” he says. He’s not the reader that Hann is, but he doesn’t mind making do with little. “I just take a wild guess on what people would like. Some days I have \$1 days, some days I have \$2 days. ... I’m not a person that needs a lot.”

Woolfolk sleeps on the same block he vends on during the day, making him somewhat of an omnipresence. While Larry and many others vend exclusively when they need money, Woolfolk approaches vending as a way to pass the time, an excuse to interact with people, and a supplementary income.

“What else would I be doing right now? Homeless and nowhere else to go. Getting into trouble, going to jail, that’s not me. I’m a lot smarter than that.”

The New Vendor on the Block

The second time I talked to Fred Woolfolk, he wasn’t having a great week. Woolfolk’s sprawling sheets with his eclectic selection were replaced by two flattened cardboard boxes and a humble inventory. Gone were his vintage theater advertisements and his usual luggage containing his personal belongings.

As I was asking him what happened to his inventory, a late-aged woman with short reddish hair walked by. The two exchanged tense looks and she shook her arm, hand clenched around her cellphone. Woolfolk looked pained.

Apparently, this is Dorothy, bane of the sidewalks. Woolfolk had described her to me in our previous interview: “She’s like 80 years old, and she wants to clean up Broadway.”

According to Woolfolk, the 26th precinct had seized his personal property and his book inventory after continued pressure from this Morningside Heights resident.

“She called the corporate office at Duane Reade and told them that I have all my books out here. They came here Friday morning with a garbage truck and took all my books, my clothes, everything. It’s the second time,” he accuses. “She called sanitation on me, she called police on me, and she called the Parks department.”

He also has a court date scheduled for Nov. 21. “She’s saying I snatched her phone out of her hand and hurt her wrist,” Woolfolk relates, explaining the gesture I had just witnessed.

“She calls up people and tells them that she’s on the board at Columbia University, and that gives her the right to tell them to take the books from where I’m at,” he accuses. I could not locate the Dorothy in question for her side of the story

Steven Hann sells his poetry collection “Blonde, Blue-Eyed and Handsome” for \$5 alongside his usual inventory.

THE “OH MY GOD” GIRLS

They’re always female. Always college students. I’ve never heard anybody younger than 18 or older than 25 use the phrase so much. Everything is so-so-so “Oh my god!”

—I saw you in class 10 minutes ago.

—Oh my god!

—That’s a nice dress you’re wearing.

—Oh my god!

—Let’s have lunch.

—Oh my god!

—I don’t have anything else to say.

—Oh my god!

If Jesus Christ Himself came down to Earth they’d say

—OH SHIT!

And do it.

covered novels are protected alongside the rhetoric of Aristotle and Angela Davis. A literate population is seen as an end in and of itself.

In Western civilization, the written word has been historically associated with critique and knowledge in a way other media are not. To the people who deal with books, this makes sense.

“If you’re watching a documentary, you’re getting out of it what a film maker and his little trolls decide to put in there,” Hann comments. “I’m sure if Philip K. Dick had ever seen *Blade Runner*, he would’ve puked. ... Film is basically presenting a book or any kind of knowledge—if you can call it that—to the lowest common denominator.”

Hann similarly deplores the number of students he sees more interested in movies than books. He notes with disgust that a local librarian said the nearby New York Public Library lends out more DVDs than books.

“Reading is much more in depth and involved medium than most of the others,” adds Allen. “In our African history section you get at things that can’t be covered without volumes.”

The news of NYPD confiscating the Zuccotti Park library was so shocking partially because of the association of books with dissenting ideas. The scene was reminiscent of *Fahrenheit 451*, Ray Bradbury’s politically-charged novel about a dystopic future where the state actively polices the possession and distribution of books. Written during the reign of McCarthyism in Congress, the opening scene describes “firemen” rushing into a to spray an elicit library with flames that destroy period books, but not the house’s futuristic flameproof walls. The firemen use hoses to start fires.

With the recent Zuccotti Park evacuation and the seizure of Woolfolk’s book inventory, the language of “cleaning up” and “sanitation” was used to justify policing and confiscation efforts. Striking photos of the Department of Sanitation power hosing the park complement the movement’s Tweets about thousands of books being hauled out in dumpsters. When Occupiers retrieved the books Wednesday, they reported that between 2,000 and 4,000 books were missing, and much of the inventory had been damaged or destroyed.

All the same, the event has invigorated the movement: ReOccupiers have begun rebuilding a library in Foley Square and attention has lead peoples’ libraries—physical and digital—to sprout up nationwide.

Back on Broadway, Woolfolk is also building his found and donated inventory anew.

Despite New York’s protection of book vending, Woolfolk could have been cited for breaking several other regulations. Books must be displayed on a fold up table rather than the sidewalk directly, and there are numerous sanitary, fire hazard, and space restrictions that could have justified the seizure. Woolfolk is sure that the seizure was targeted at him: “Everyone knows my stuff is by the phone booth,” he says.

This isn’t the first time there has been tension between book vendors and businesses. Though Hann cites a general supportive spirit between vendors and Morningside shops, Doebelin de-

scribes Book Culture’s relationship with the vendors as “an uneasy one.”

“There are several people outside that might sell books stolen from our store,” he claims. “That can be challenging.” Spectator has previously written on this issue, to the chagrin of Hann, who mistakenly ended up in a photo accompanying an article not about him.

According to Allen, things are different in Harlem with Hue-Man and its nearby vendors. They send customers to each other, and regularly support and facilitate the others’ endeavors. “We try and drive business for each other because we’re all in the same business, and we’re all one community,” Allen says. “Simply put, knowledge is our main goal, not just the selling of books but the dissemination of information to better everyone.”

“EVERYTHING CHANGES. THE ONLY THING THAT DOESN’T CHANGE IS THE BOOKS. THE BOOKS HAVE A LIFETIME.”

As far as inter-vendor tension, it is clear that Woolfolk is somewhat of an outlier due to his newbie status. He’s only been vending a year, and his approach is different from those of veteran sellers Hann and Larry.

Larry describes, “He’s the new one—he’s more social than booky.”

Woolfolk is happy to shed light on this observation. He explains, “Other vendors don’t like me because my prices are low and I give away a lot of stuff. ... I’m here for the people; I’m not here for the books.”

Woolfolk is forming connections on this block that may ensure his continued station in front of Duane Reade. He has befriended food cart operator Khan. Woolfolk claims that Dorothy has also called the Health Department on Khan’s food cart, leading to a fine, but Khan refused to comment on the situation.

Hann explains that the vendors “get along fairly well—nobody really steps on each other’s toes.” Elias adds, “Sometimes we kick each other’s butt, but mostly we get along.”

I walk by Woolfolk’s stand to confirm a few facts only to find him fast asleep in his chair. A young man attempts to wake him and purchase a book, before a passerby says that he should just leave Woolfolk a dollar.

As I scan his inventory, the buyer in question starts talking to me about the book he was planning to purchase, *LSD and the American Dream*. “The back cover quotes Cary Grant saying he did not know what love is until he tried LSD. Isn’t that incredible?” I turn to him. “Huh?” He keeps talking, “If you want it, I can also just buy it on Amazon.com, it costs like a cent there.”

Now it’s my turn to poke Woolfolk, but, after a gentle tap, I decide to heed the earlier passerby’s advice. “I’ll come back later anyway,” I think as I leave a neat stack of change by his chair.

“It’s kind of cool right?” the other customer says as he watches me. “Not a lot of places in New York that still operate on the honor system.” ●

(and there is no “Dorothy” on Columbia’s Board of Trustees), but the manager at Duane Reade confirmed part of Woolfolk’s story. “There’s a lady that complains from time to time,” he confirmed. “We call the cops, that’s it,” but neglected to give further comment.

Another street vendor that requested anonymity confirmed many of Woolfolk’s comments. “Everybody knows about this lady. Supers, handiman, food vendors, the vegetable store, everybody knows. Everybody is tired of this lady, nobody likes her,” the vendor says. “She says she’s a community member. If she is a community member why doesn’t she come during the night time? Why does she come day time and screw up everybody? It’s not right.”

Duneier narrates the story of young City Council member Edward Wallace aggressively petitioning and successfully passing a bill protecting the right to sell written work in New York City. The bill was inspired by a poet named David Ferguson, who was repeatedly arrested and harassed by police for distributing his literary magazine, *Box 749*.

Signed by Mayor Edward Koch in 1982, the Wallace amendment affirms that “it is consistent with the principles of free speech and freedom of the press to eliminate as many restrictions on the vending of written matter as it is consistent with public health, safety, and welfare.” Today, any vendor selling written matter is exempt from the non-essential restrictions placed on general merchandise vendors.

It’s interesting to note that this bill does not just protect political or creative not-for-profit books; Snooki’s best selling memoir and Fabio-

The Kids Are All Write

not your typical after-school program

BY ADINA APPLEBAUM

ILLUSTRATION BY CINDY PAN

The editor at 826NYC is covered in athlete's foot. He's six feet tall, smells kind of funny, and his name is Mr. Mildew. Fortunately, he's also imaginary, but that doesn't mean the kids participating in one of 826NYC's numerous after-school programs are any less terrified upon hearing Mr. Mildew's voice over the loudspeaker in the building's Brooklyn location. Both students and teachers alike quake in fear at the editor's grumpy reminders to get busy, hoping that if they turn in their latest creative writing project, they won't have to face Mr. Mildew's wrath—or his body odor.

Mr. Mildew is just one of the many ways the nonprofit organization uses creativity to keep students engaged. Established in 2003, 826NYC offers free programming to students ages 6–18 of varying educational backgrounds, with the hopes of helping them improve their writing abilities. Many kids lack enthusiasm for writing, so the goal of the learning center is to make it fun for them, according to Scott Seeley, executive director and co-founder of 826NYC. The best way to do this is by tying writing to things students already enjoy, like music or video games. Last summer, 826NYC offered a film workshop for high school students, in which the teens cast themselves in a screenplay they had written. The films were then screened at BAM (Brooklyn Academy of Music). Seeley says programs such as these help make writing “tangible” for students. “They realize for themselves, ‘I can do this.’”

The hope is that students will not only emerge as better writers, but that they will be enthusiastic about writing. Helping kids improve their writing is essential, because it is a skill they will need for any activity they may pursue later on in life. “No matter what you choose to do, you need to know how to read and write,” Seeley says. 826NYC hopes that students will use the abilities fine-tuned in these after-school programs to help “contribute to democratic society” later in life.

Intent on “filling in the gaps” of the public school system, 826NYC offers multiple types of programming aimed at strengthening writing skills and developing creativity. Some workshops are “all about fun,” Seeley says, and allow students to explore the field of creative writing. 826NYC hosts field trips at various sites during the school day. After-school tutoring provides a free service for students who need help with their homework. There is also a Williamsburg Tutoring Annex for students who don't live near the 826NYC home base. The nonprofit also sends volunteers to New York high schools to provide students with one-on-one aid during class time.



Since New York public schools have such large class sizes, it can be difficult for students to get the attention they need. “It’s been proven that 35 to 40 hours a year with one-on-one attention, a student can get one grade level higher,” 826 founder Dave Eggers said in a 2008 TED talk. 826NYC tutors work with students, providing them with personal attention to ensure that they’re not struggling through their courses.

Despite a network of over 1,000 volunteers and thousands of students, 826NYC serves as a community for its participants. “We always joke that this is a clubhouse,” Seeley says, explaining that the writers and teachers who make up the organization’s volunteers are close-knit. “We’re a family, definitely.”

Programmers are dedicated to ensuring that each student succeeds in his or her own way, and volunteers put effort into each student’s growth and development. “Some of these kids just don’t plain know how good they are: how smart and how much they have to say. You can tell them. You can shine that light on them, one human interaction at a time,” Eggers said. The New York branch of the program certainly embodies this philosophy. One student, Seeley mentions, had a passion for journalism that went unfulfilled because her school did not have a newspaper. 826NYC stepped in, started a journalism session at her school, and helped the student create a class magazine. When a student decided she wanted to be a playwright, 826NYC was with her through every step of the college process. Now a student at Tisch School of the Arts, she often volunteers.

Seeley notes that students such as these are not rarities. There are many others who have

returned to the organization after college to serve as volunteers. The nonprofit strives to maintain a connection with all students who are participants in programs, not only those who work for the organization. Seeley says that there are some students from 826NYC’s first year that the founders still have a connection to eight years later. Even parents have become involved in 826NYC, acting

“NO MATTER WHAT YOU CHOOSE TO DO, YOU NEED TO KNOW HOW TO READ AND WRITE.”

as members of the nonprofit’s board, alongside a number of respected writers like Sarah Vowell and Jonathan Safran Foer.

Although the 826NYC programming is currently only available to students ages 6–18, Seeley says they hope soon to develop a program that will reach out to college students so they’re not simply “turned loose” when they finish high school. Honing creative methods and writing skills is certainly applicable to those who are college-aged, and many still find they need help with work once at college, particularly college-level essay writing. 826NYC reminds kids distracted by video games, internet, and boundless technology that there is still value in creative writing. With 826NYC providing support and encouragement, kids can finally realize that the world is waiting to hear from them. ●

Crust(y) Punks

the plight of the aging punk rocker

BY DANIEL MERRITT

ILLUSTRATION BY STEPHANIE MANNHEIM

David Johansen takes the stage in a pair of tight jeans and suspenders. His wiry frame hunches toward the microphone, androgynous hair thrashing, as his band, the New York Dolls, starts their song “Trash.” “Trash, go pick it up, don’t try to take my life away!” Johansen screams to a packed house at legendary New York dive, Max’s Kansas City. It’s 1973—and the kids go wild.

Cut to 2009: Johansen sings those same words, except now, he’s backed by only remnants of his former line-up, his comparatively cropped hair expertly coiffed above his designer leather jacket. The kids, too, are replaced by a docile studio audience. Max’s has turned to the swanky set of *Later... with Jools Holland*, a British music TV program furnished with a glossy stage and gaudy lights—miles away, in every sense, from their former grit and grunge.

On Dec. 30, the New York Dolls are set to take the stage at Irving Plaza in New York, and though this venue is certainly closer to home, it’s possible the show might still disappoint. Though fans will certainly get to hear their favorite songs live—a chance never afforded those who weren’t yet born in the band’s heyday—one has to wonder at the implications of experiencing these cheeky lyrics belted out by someone old enough to be a grandfather. Indeed, punk music in particular seems irreducibly tied to being young. As Legs McNeil, one of the founders of the movement’s seminal *Punk Magazine*, opined in his book *Please Kill Me*, “This wonderful vital force that was articulated by the music was really about corrupting every form—it was about advocating kids not to wait to be told what to do, but make life up for themselves.” So, can a band that was founded on championing the power of youth still pack the same punch when their lead singer is well into his sixties? What happens when punk rock meets old age?

This is one of the questions at the heart of Andrea Nevins’ new documentary *The Other F Word*—that word being “fatherhood”—which opened at Film Forum on Nov. 2. The film is composed of interviews with myriad punk legends who’ve since grown up and taken the plunge into family life: Fat Mike from NOFX, Duane Peters from U.S. Bombs, and Lars Frederiksen from Rancid, to name a few. Though her film features a cast any punkophile would kill for, Nevins chose to approach the issue from a sociological, rather than a musical, standpoint. “Nobody can ever explain to you how [parenthood] is going to rock your world,” she says, “But if you’re a punk rocker, it could only rock your world that much more.”

Indeed, when watching Fat Mike encourage his young daughter to wear a dress with skulls on it to school, or when seeing other parents clear their children out of the playground where a forehead-tattooed Lars Frederiksen idly pushes his son on the

swings, one gets a sense of just how difficult it is to integrate punk and parenthood. As Nevins explains, “We all might have called ourselves rebels when we left our parents’ households and tried to define ourselves, but these are men whose identity was based on being a rebel.”

This inherent dissonance between a nihilistic, fuck-shit-up persona and a necessarily more mature temperament causes significant amounts of tension in the lives of Nevins’s subjects. For example, the film centers around the Odyssean journey of Pennywise’s Jim Lindbergh after 236 days on tour, a grueling experience that forced him to miss his daughter’s first day of school and countless soccer games—the traditional tokens of parental support. Lingering shots of Lindbergh sitting silently in his chaotic tour bus or in his impersonal hotel room make one wonder what he’s doing this for—and, by extension, why any of these now-grown rockers would subject themselves to such an infamously taxing grind.

CAN A BAND THAT WAS FOUNDED ON CHAMPIONING THE POWER OF YOUTH STILL PACK THE SAME PUNCH WHEN THEIR LEAD SINGER IS WELL INTO HIS 60S?



One answer, of course, is money. Like any adult, Lindbergh has to work for a living, and working, in his case, means touring. As a father of three, Lindbergh is forced to put on his punk rock persona nightly just to feed his family and pay his bills. In the film, Lindbergh recognizes the irony of his situation: he essentially has to “fight the system” in order to survive in it.

Of course, there’s a fair chance that bands like the Dolls are also riding this paradoxical line—in it, at least on some level, for the paycheck. Indeed, reunion tours of once-popular bands must be particularly lucrative, as venues are assured the ticket sales of an established fanbase. Attendees may even shell out for inflated ticket prices just to say they were in the same room as their musical heroes. The implications of this trend are somewhat depressing. For one, the introduction of large sums of money into music threatens to tag those involved as “sell-outs.” More importantly, however, this kind of nostalgia-based marketing is, in and of itself, an undeniable sign that punk’s heyday has, indeed, passed.

Still, all it takes is one listen to the New York Dolls’ anthemic “Personality Crisis”—a song that champions rebellion and personal identity—to realize what’s really important: the music that helped cement punk as one of the most powerful cultural forces of the 20th century and the dedication of the men who made it. One can only hope that, through the complexities of age and economics, these geriatric rockers remain on the road because they still want that voice to be heard. As Nevins said, “All of these men try to tell their truths as clearly as possible, to live their truth”—and if that truth sounds best slammed out in three chord rock, then so be it.

Aesthetics aside, it seems these aging punkers haven’t changed a bit. Their entire careers were spent promoting defiance, and now, by defying what is expected of people their age, continuing to spread this take-no-prisoners message through their music, bands like the Dolls can still embody the ethos of their movement, wrinkles or no. Although they’re no longer misfit kids, they’re still making life up for themselves—and what could be more punk than that? ●



Playing Hide/Seek

the controversial exhibition comes to the brooklyn museum

BY DANIEL MERRITT

PHOTO COURTESY OF THE BROOKLYN MUSEUM

In the art world, it seems that anything goes. Nothing is too controversial and nothing is sacred. But in October 2010, Jonathan D. Katz and David C. Ward curated an exhibition at the National Portrait Gallery at the Smithsonian in Washington, D.C. that rocked both the art world and the nation at large.

"Hide/Seek: Difference and Desire in American Portraiture," in the words of the NPG, is "the first major museum exhibition to focus on sexual difference in modern portraiture." Immediately declared by the Catholic League president Bill Donohue as "perverse," the exhibition incited outrage amongst the American right. On Nov. 17, "Hide/Seek" will travel to the Brooklyn Museum.

"I WANTED TO SHOW A HIDDEN SEXUALITY THAT HAS BEEN IN PLAIN SIGHT ALL ALONG."

Jonathan Katz, director of the doctoral program at SUNY Buffalo, conceived the exhibition. Starting his career in 1989, Katz worked as a practicing art historian for years before curating "Hide/Seek." Generally, the exhibitions he curated before "Hide/Seek" were held in smaller, independent museums. However, after a crucial meeting with David C. Ward, a curator/historian at the National Portrait Gallery, Katz's concept for an epic, blockbuster exhibition dealing with sexual difference was given a national stage. "I wanted everything to be a masterpiece, and every piece had to have been in a museum show previously," Katz says. "I wanted to show a hidden sexuality that has been in plain sight all along." Portraits of Walt Whitman hang in the same show as Warhol's "Camouflage" series.

There were concerns about the exhibition's controversial subject matter because the Smithsonian is government-funded. But Marc Pachter, then director of the NPG, accepted the show without a second thought. While public funding makes up 55 percent of the Smithsonian's money, the rest comes through fundraising. "We raised a staggering \$750,000 in eighteen months," Ward notes. This large sum allowed the museum to collect over 105 masterworks dealing with sexual difference.

The critically acclaimed show was immediately faced with scorching dissent from right-wing conservatives, specifically the Catholic League, which charged the Smithsonian with a hate crime. "It was entirely predictable that the right would try to bash the show for their

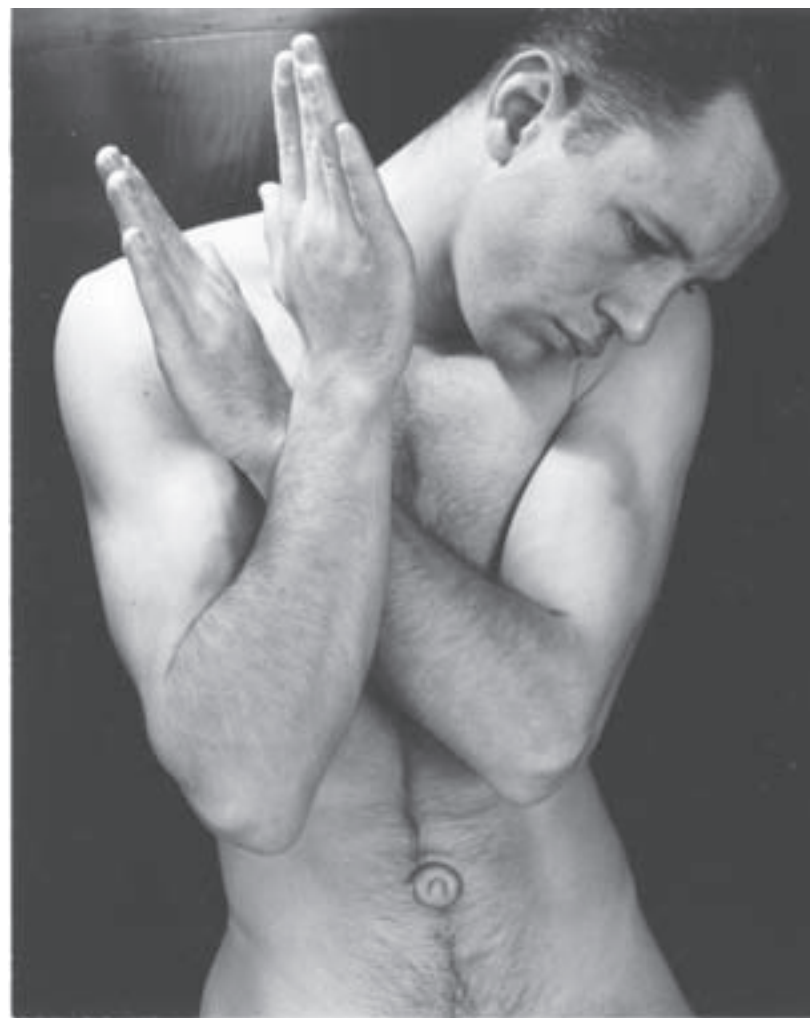
own agenda," Katz says. "The Catholic League and other radical conservative groups—they're parasites that feed off controversy. That's how they make money. I knew that and so did the Smithsonian." Around the time the show opened, the Smithsonian offered Katz training in press relations.

When the government officials got involved with the Catholic League's protest of the show, Katz was enraged. "The leadership of the Republican Party crawled into bed with these freaks," he says. "There will always be a lunatic fringe in the country, but the problem occurs when major political groups connect and make it into a national and political issue. While I can dismiss the Catholic League, it's not as easy to dismiss the Republican Party."

But Donohue sees it differently. It is not only the homosexual subject matter that he takes issue with, but also the exhibit's treatment of Christianity as a whole. The video piece "A Fire in My Belly" by artist David Wojnarowicz caused a huge stir in DC last December when it was banned by the NPG. The video depicts ants crawling on a crucified Jesus. "We wouldn't have ants running over Martin Luther King Jr.'s head, now, would we?" Donohue asks. "Go put the ants on Mohamed and go tell the Muslims! See how that goes." Despite these sentiments, the Brooklyn Museum will show "A Fire in My Belly."

"We are under a contract with the National Portrait Gallery, and there were only a certain number of additions we could make," Tricia Laughlin Bloom, the project coordinator from the Brooklyn Museum, says. The show displays 96 percent of the same pieces as the DC show. "This show has a more 'New York' feel," she says. "The signature image that was chosen, Minor White's 'Tom Murphy,' is basically a nude male body in a poetic, dance-inspired gesture." This is certainly a different image from the NPG's tame signature image of Berenice Abbot's "Janet Flanner."

One has to ask, though—why is this first major show on sexual difference in portraiture, especially in New York? Katz essentially attributes this to



Tom Murphy, Minor White

"THE CATHOLIC LEAGUE AND OTHER RADICAL CONSERVATIVE GROUPS—THEY'RE PARASITES THAT FEED OFF CONTROVERSY."

one group of people: museum trustees.

"They are rich and powerful and sit at the top of the social hierarchy," he says. "They have been exerting a rightward pull on museum culture for 25 years. The Metropolitan Museum of Art and MoMA, museums connected [to trustees] by an umbilical chord of gold, were too frightened to even lend pieces to the show." On the other hand, Donohue points out that the Ford Foundation, which provided most of the money for the Hide/Seek exhibit, is "anti-Catholic."

Katz says that the future is not entirely bleak for the contemporary queer art scene, and that the upcoming generation of younger artists will create a greater diversity of images. "Sexuality will be articulated ... I worry about the lesbian in Omaha who's never seen her image reflected on a wall. That terrifies me." ■

Toddlers, Tiaras, and Tears

parents just don't understand

BY SOMALA DIBY

ILLUSTRATION BY STEPHANIE MANNHEIM

I never imagined that Zack and I would end up in Butler's reading room to watch after-show clips of *Toddlers and Tiaras*. And yet, there we were, fixed intently upon his 15-inch MacBook Pro, to watch little Rebecca Alley and her mom Stacey strut their Temple, Texas "stuff" across the pageant stage.

Apart from the accidental *Dance Moms* session with my floor mates, I stay away from "reality" television—I almost felt guilty occupying a desk for this. But *Toddlers and Tiaras* is now a pseudo-phenomenon on New York City culture blogs and an ironic badge of pride for those who watch the show religiously. It was time for me to investigate—all in the name of journalism, that is.

I met two-year-old Ava, seven-year-old Rebecca,

10-year-old Meaghan, and their parents, David, Stacey, Phyllis, in Episode 1: "Universal Royalty National Pageant." There wasn't anything especially "national" about the Austin pageant; each competitor hailed from the far reaches of the state of Texas to claim a crown fit for a queen. Most intriguing, however, was that the moms competed with their daughters. The intrigue turned sour when the narrative reached the swimsuit portion of the competition: a sharp reminder (especially to Zack, who cringed at the muffin tops) that *Toddlers and Tiaras* should stick to the title. Suburban moms getting their groove back aside, the show illustrates the demands of preparation and competition, what it takes to win in the rough world of toddler pageantry. Unfortunately, little Ava, who fell over on stage struggling to tug away from her mom, lacked the gumption.

But the game doesn't rest on the toddlers alone. The show paints a picture of teamwork: parents

constantly bargain with disagreeable toddlers in order to get them to comply with futile requests to perform. It's clear that pageants aren't actually about the kids. I suppose *Dance Moms*'s creative team was more self-aware than those behind *Toddlers*. Both shows glorify a tendency to live vicariously through your child's fake boobs, cone bras, rhinestones and spray tans. In a clip titled "Pretty Woman," a mom dressed her daughter to resemble Julia Roberts' character from the movie—including wig, crop top, and thigh high boots. She later lamented that stage moms "already take a huge rap for what we're doing [to] our little girls." An interesting choice of words. When it came time to

IN A CLIP TITLED "PRETTY WOMAN," A MOM DRESSED HER DAUGHTER TO RESEMBLE JULIA ROBERTS' CHARACTER FROM THE MOVIE—INCLUDING WIG, CROP TOP, AND THIGH HIGH BOOTS.

crown the queen, 50 moms prayed for the other little girls to falter, but in the end, Meaghan claimed the \$5,000 cash prize.

Despite all odds, the mini beauty queens show signs of growing into real people. Queen Meaghan wanted to visit a snake farm if she beat her mom in the pageant—an odd reward, reminding me that a weird little girl still exists behind the caked foundation and glitz.

On the "Top 10 Most Controversial Parents" clip, available online, one mother of fraternal twins BreAnne and AshLynn, explained, "BreAnne wins most pageants ... [She] does look a lot like mommy—probably the prettiest out of the five," she says. "AshLynn is really skinny, and has a bit larger nose than BreAnne." In a confessional moment, AshLynn says that she doesn't "like competing against [her] sister because it's hard to win."

Most crying on the show, however, comes from the parents. When season 1's Ava failed to win a title in the Universal Royalty National Pageant, she left the pageant with a smile on her face, while her father David grappled with how he was going to break the news to her. This twisted parenting is a large part of the strange appeal of the program, and apparently, American viewers are hooked. Stage parents claim that an environment of human-dolls with painted faces is "inspiring" for their kids. If at first it's funny, in the end, it's plainly sad, even plainly obvious that a fascination with the grotesque feeds the show's fame. ●



