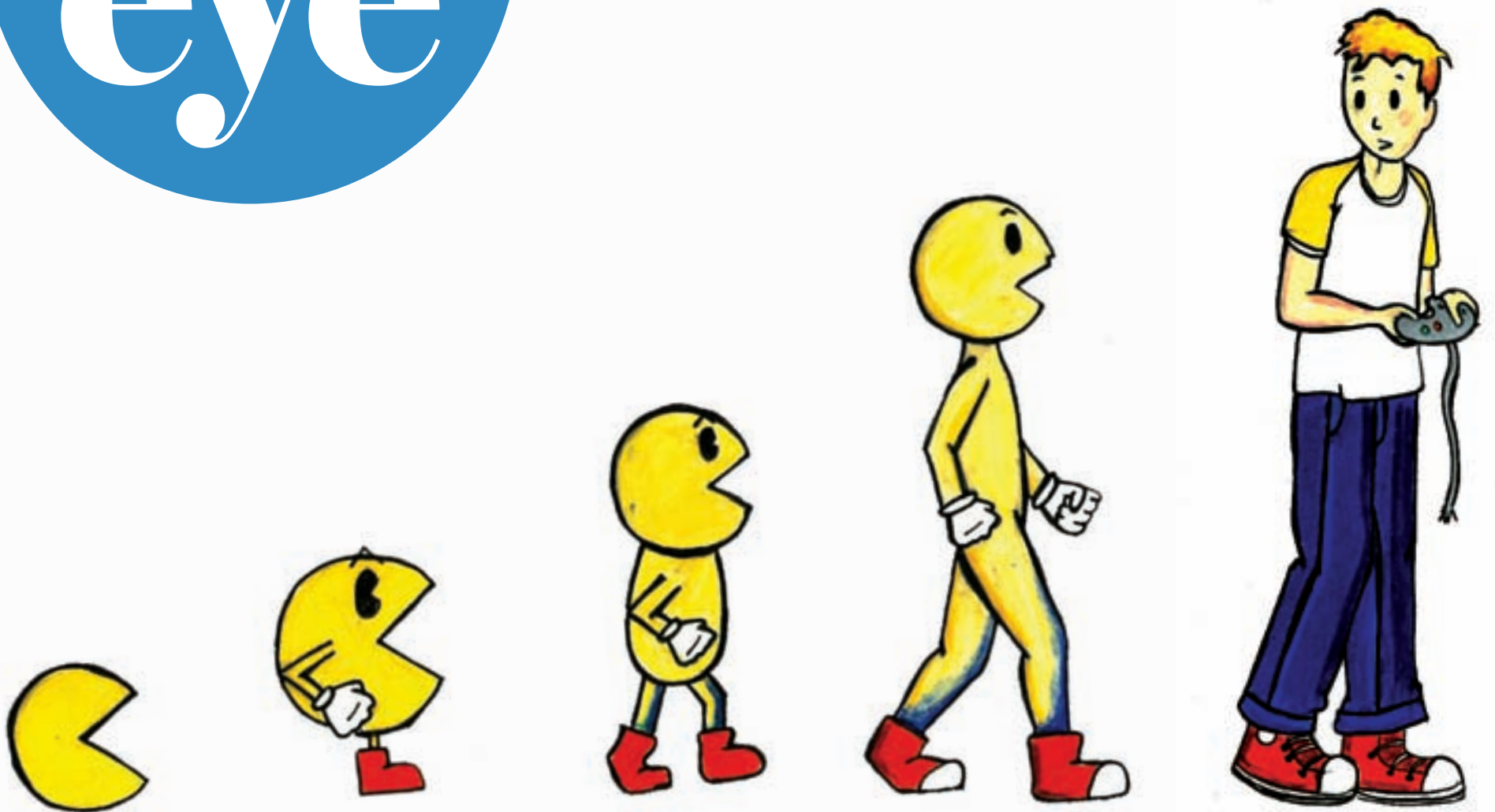


the eye



arcade nouveau

by Frances Corry



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eye@columbiaspectator.com
Editorial: (212) 854-9547
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ARCADE NOUVEAU

the evolution of video games as art,
pg. 07

by Franny Corry
cover illustration by Julia Stern

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LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

This week's cover story is about the incipient trend of video games as high art. A dutiful editor would write her letter about the importance of video games in her life, or a recent news story pertaining to video games. I'll be honest, though: I've never been that jazzed about them.

My older brother owned all of the classic consoles (Nintendo, SEGA Genesis, N64), but the only games I remember playing regularly on consoles are Duck Hunt, Cruisin' USA, Sonic the Hedgehog, and Aladdin on SEGA. Like everyone else, I played Oregon Trail—but my favorite part was buying provisions. I also dabbled in Amazon Trail, Oregon Trail's tropical offshoot.

But the enchantment that my peers felt about Halo and Madden—basically, anything post-N64—skipped me. I stopped paying attention.

The video game trend in

high-art, though, appeals to the gamer hidden deep within me. The fact that 8-bit video games—some participatory, some not—are being exhibited at places like the Whitney is a bit confounding. The medium seems...well, a bit inappropriate for the Upper East Siders who patron the hallowed halls of New York contemporary art.

In order to make it that far, the artists had to touch at something deeper than kitschy nostalgia. That elusive something—not contingent on "sweet graphics" or technical skill—is what compels the haute crowds in the city to see the works, and what inspired Frances Corry to figure out exactly what that "something" is.

Amanda Cormier
eye@columbiaspectator.com

BLAST FROM THE PAST

BY MARGARET BOYKIN

Considering Rikki Novetsky's article on the slow death of our nation's bookstores, we decided to take a look at the ghosts of gadgets past, from the golden years before your favorite gadget had to start with an "i."

YOUROWNLINE

Remember how psyched you were to get a personal room line? You were like "Yo, mom and dad, listen—I'm gonna be getting a lot of calls and my brother keeps picking up the home phone and making fart noises." So they complied, and you were free to chat the night away on your bean-bag chair, twirling the cord and hoping the bill wasn't too high. Nowadays, I'm not even sure what my parent's home number is. Is there an app for that?



iPHONE

A slippery little gadget with a delicate screen and a million functions, the first iPhone sailed into your life in '07 and the newest one is rumored to be on its way—we're not sure exactly when, but I'm sure there's an app for that.



WALKMAN

Remember when your nanny made you awesome mixtapes of Ricky Martin and Faith Hill and the Spice Girls, and wrote all the song names on the tiny lines on the back of the plastic box? No? Well, maybe not those bands, but there was an age when a mixtape was an actual tape of mixes and not a metaphor.



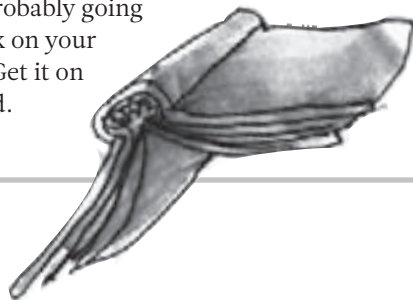
iPOD

There appears to be a theme here. This MP3-filled glory's popularity rocketed in the age of closed-down record stores and discarded CDs in 2001, providing you with a lifetime of music in the palm of your hand.



ACTUALBOOKS

Remember these guys? They're heavy and you can actually turn the pages. Sometimes, you can store them on a shelf. Crazy stuff, right? But then again, who even reads anymore? What are you doing with this in your hand? You're probably going to get ink on your fingers. Get it on your iPad.



E-BOOKS

Books smell bad, right? Totally. So now, as Borders falls to ashes around us we can carry our sleek, skinny little pseudo-book e-books. The iPods of the book world, these bad boys were launched into popularity amidst librarians' tears with the Kindle in 2007.



VIDEO GAME VIOLENCE

This week, Frances Corry's lead story on video game art has got The Eye thinking about the years of adolescent angst (or perhaps last weekend) we spent in the fantastical world behind the controller, so we decided to ask the editors—if you could fight any video game character in real life, who would it be and why?

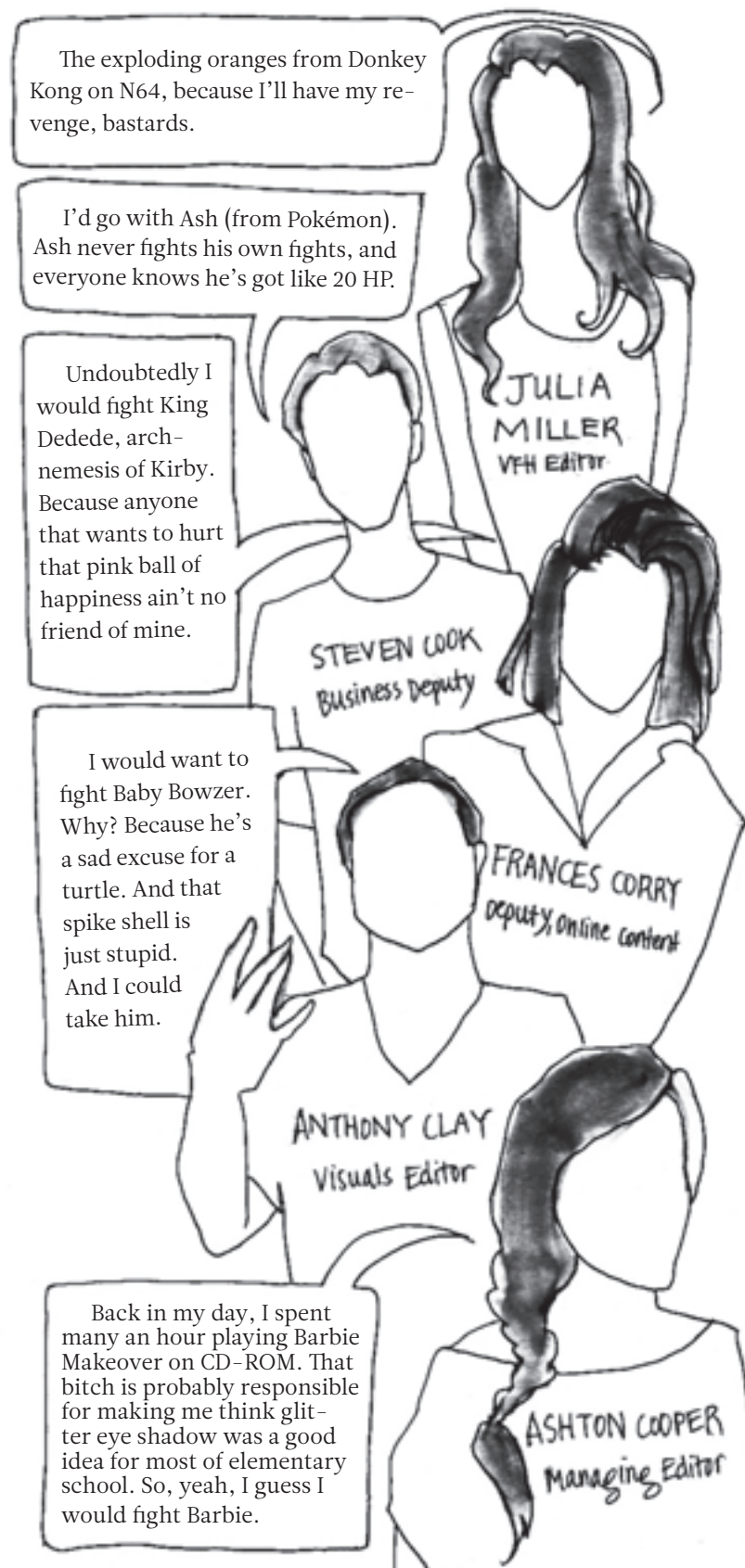
The exploding oranges from Donkey Kong on N64, because I'll have my revenge, bastards.

I'd go with Ash (from Pokémon). Ash never fights his own fights, and everyone knows he's got like 20 HP.

Undoubtedly I would fight King Dedede, arch-nemesis of Kirby. Because anyone that wants to hurt that pink ball of happiness ain't no friend of mine.

I would want to fight Baby Bowser. Why? Because he's a sad excuse for a turtle. And that spike shell is just stupid. And I could take him.

Back in my day, I spent many an hour playing Barbie Makeover on CD-ROM. That bitch is probably responsible for making me think glitter eye shadow was a good idea for most of elementary school. So, yeah, I guess I would fight Barbie.



COMPILED BY MARGARET BOYKIN
ILLUSTRATION BY CINDY PAN

Art on the Streets

the face behind morningside's chalk art

BY CHARLOTTE MURTISHAW
ILLUSTRATION BY LIZ LEE

You're on your way to class, late as usual. You lapse into a haggard sort of run-jog as your brain flips between trying to remember what the reading was about and wondering whether you look weird. You resign yourself to the inevitable doom of lateness without slackening your speed, dodging luxuriously slow walkers.

But something happens. You break your pace, come to a standstill. And up from the sidewalk, Hungarian economist Friedrich Von Hayek beams up at you, looking like some highly amused pug, each wrinkle in his brow clearly delineated. The portrait is rendered with incredible realism, the colors jumping off the sidewalk, in stark contrast to the gray neutrality of the surrounding terrain. You're not quite sure what you're looking at. And across the top in white, uppercase letters, almost surprisingly simple, is the name HANI.

"I want the memory of the experience to last," says Hani Shihada, who goes simply by Hani. "Not all people look up, not all people look to the side—all people look down." And though his art—the chalk portraits covering Broadway's pavement—erodes, the memory of the experience does last.

Hani's chosen canvas—the sidewalk—becomes both immediately accessible and startlingly fixating. In part, it's the suddenness of the experience which grips the viewer, the surprise of discovering Titian instead of trash, portraiture instead of pigeons, da Vinci instead of dirt.

Hani claims to be the only one of his kind in New York City, a roving priest of pastel who has spent much of his time on his hands and knees since his arrival from Italy, where he was introduced to the sort of street art he now emulates. There, street painters known as *madonnari* have been working since the 16th century. The Madonna, a recurring subject for Hani himself, was a common theme. The *madonnari's* work was documented in Kurt Wenner's film *Masterpieces in Chalk*, documenting his life as a street artist in Rome in 1984—the same year Hani came to New York.

"I lost my faith in institutions, as a young man trying to study art whose country didn't really support him," Hani says. "I found lots of obstacles in my way, but the people helped me. I was very afraid, but the people supported me ... I am really very shy and scared of being rejected. But people are so nice; they help me and touch me more and more and more all the time."

It's because of this that Hani continues to do public art. "I keep going back. I believe in taking my work to the people," he says. His tone is amazed, almost bewildered, as he recounts praise and encouragement bestowed on him by passersby.

The public isn't the only group that has em-

braced Hani. A sizable percentage of his work is devoted to paid commissions by sponsors such as MTV, Adidas, Chrysler, Disney, NBC, CBS, Armani, Nickelodeon, and numerous other corporations, usually for eye-catching and unique ads. He was featured in a commercial with Rafael Nadal for the 2008 US Open, and painted a mural in Bono's "Save the Children" music video.

"I AM TAKING A RISK, PUTTING IT OUT THERE. ANYTHING CAN HAPPEN. ANYTHING CAN HAPPEN IN PAINTING AND IN LIFE."

The newest Morningside Heights pieces, which include Von Hayek, American economist Thomas Sowell, and former British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher were actually commissions from MIT research fellow Michael Schrage. In a post on Facebook, Schrage wrote, "As a long-time Upper West-sider, I had observed and appreciated Hani's art. He did a wonderful job capturing a certain kind of icon.... I thought it would be fun in a 'back to school/recovery summer' kind of way to celebrate people who bring a different insight and intensity to ideals of personal freedom, choice and opportunity." Indeed, Hani often chooses political and social figures as the subjects of his work.

"I remember the Obama he drew outside of American Apparel in the time of the elections," says Jae Ahn, a 2004 graduate of Columbia's Graduate School of Architecture, Planning, and Preservation, as he sits on a bench outside the Journalism building almost three years later. "I'm not a political per-

son, I'm not saying there is a right vote, but it was a kind of motivation for people to go to work and get involved with politics."

The process by which Hani renders these figures is painstaking. First, he drafts the image on the sidewalk, drawing the basic lines which will illustrate the main subject of the piece. Using homemade pastels, he fills in the drawing with appropriate colors and shading. Depending on the size and complexity of the piece, this can take anywhere from a few hours to months. While he's not working on them, he covers the incomplete art with a piece of cardboard. After it is finished, he sprays the work with sealant to help preserve it, at least for a time.

Like the process itself, the amount of time it will last is variable. "Some may last hours and some years. I have done some that lasted four or five years," Hani says.

That vulnerability is perhaps the most striking aspect of these creations: No matter how big or small, elaborate or simple, they will all succumb to the wear and tear of weather and traffic, and dissolve back into concrete. However, when asked about this, Hani is dismissive. "No, no, it is just common sense," he says. "I am taking a risk, putting it out there. Anything can happen. Anything can happen in painting and in life."

This doesn't mean he isn't occasionally disappointed. "I do all this work and I'm proud of it. I did four Haitian girls once," he recalled. "I worked for like a month and then it was defaced before I finished. I feel sorry for that, it would have looked really nice. All I have is a photo of the incomplete picture."

Although his work comes with difficulty, Hani is an optimist. "I am a person who obviously decided to do something different," he says. "I do what I want to do in the best way possible." ●



In Your Opinion

catherine orenstein reconstructs the classic op-ed

BY RAVENNA KOENIG

PHOTO COURTESY OF CATHERINE ORENSTEIN

*Catherine Orenstein is a journalist, social entrepreneur, and writer on issues pertaining to women, pop culture, mythology, human rights, and politics. She is the author of *Little Red Riding Hood Uncloaked: Sex, Morality & the Evolution of a Fairy Tale* and is also the founder and director of *The OpEd Project*, an initiative to expand the pool of contributors to the op-ed pages of major print and online forums. She talked to us about why the opinion pages matter, why the public sphere needs to start hearing more from women, and why youth expertise could transform the journalistic world.*

What is The OpEd Project?

We are a social venture that was founded to diversify the world's conversations. We do that by scouting and training women and other diverse underrepresented experts to take leadership positions in their field. We match them with high-level media mentors across the nation, and we channel the best ideas of experts directly to media gatekeepers who need them.

Why is a transformation of the op-ed pages necessary?

We could have a richer world, and a richer world conversation, if we had a greater way for all the best ideas and information and voices to be heard regardless of where or who they came from.

"IF THE HIERARCHY OF EXPERTISE SEEMS TO EXCLUDE YOU, THEN YOU NEED TO INVERT THAT HIERARCHY."

The OpEd Project on the surface seems to be about women. Why should we care about women's increased contribution to thought leadership?

The project is about diversity of ideas and enrichment of public knowledge. Diversity is not about diversity of anatomy. It truly is about diversity of voices so we can be a smarter world. Women are an obvious undercapitalized asset. They're 51 percent of the population, and there are so many women out there who are highly educated and highly experienced. We have about 15 percent share of the voice. If you were a banker or a fund manager and your fund was public knowledge, that would be the obvious



first thing to invest in. We don't see ourselves as advancing women, we see ourselves as investing in women to advance public knowledge.

How do you think college students can be of value as thought contributors?

Well, when was the last time you heard anybody talk about education policy who was under 21 or who was actually in school? One of our very early successes was by a young woman at Barnard actually. She wrote a piece on plagiarism in the college application process. I remember talking to her, and she felt she didn't have anything of value to say. That piece, on the front of the Washington Post's Sunday Outlook section, was the most hailed article of the day. It was a really important piece. If the hierarchy of expertise seems to exclude you, then you need to invert that hierarchy. For example, most people perceive a hierarchy of expertise which starts with the young and inexperienced at the bottom and old and experienced at the top. You need to be able to say something like: sure there are lots of people with education and experience talking about education policy but when was the last time any one of them was in a classroom? When was the last time any of them was a student? I am a student and I can tell you about education policy from the inside.

As undergraduates, many of us are still working up the courage to put our ideas out to air in public, potentially facing fear of failure or criticism. What is the benefit of criticism in the public forum?

The thing about fear is that we all have it

and it never really goes away. You want to shift the frame so that your life isn't about fear, it's about value. I used to teach literacy; they were all adults going back to school and they were the most amazing people. They read at a 6th grade level but they were people with deep life experiences and I thought we could get them something that had a more adult potential [like] *Tuesdays with Morrie*. I thought I would write to the author or the author's agent and ask them to supply books for my literacy students. It's something I never would have thought about doing, I would have been like, "is this a dumb idea? Should I do this?" The thing is, I looked at my students and I thought: they so deserve something that will address adult situations. Suddenly my entire conversation in my head was "I don't care if this is a dumb idea, I don't care what anyone thinks, they really deserve a book like that." It just changed the way I thought about it, and it changed the way I thought about almost everything afterwards. Fear of criticism is the same thing. If you are going to put yourself out there in the world in any way, if you say things or do things of consequence, there may be consequences. But the alternative is to be inconsequential. It's a fundamental question of mattering.

And learning from criticism?

Ideas develop very slowly when left in one brain. The velocity of ideas and thoughts exponentially increases when you exchange them. Criticism is not bad. Criticism comes in all kinds of forms; sometimes it can be helpful to think of it as development of ideas. ●

Getting Kickstarted

can the fundraising site revolutionize the restaurant industry?

BY ANDREA CHAN

ILLUSTRATION BY ZACK ETHEART

"I think there's an entrepreneur in almost everyone," says Avani Patel, co-president of the Columbia Entrepreneurs Organization.

This is precisely the inspiration behind Kickstarter.com, the Internet startup for startups, where selected hopefuls pitch their ideas for creative projects to the Internet masses. Entrepreneurs state monetary targets and appeal for donations ranging anywhere from five to 10 thousand dollars in return for rewards of varying sizes.

Since April 2009, Kickstarter has helped more than 11,500 projects reach their financial goals, and has most recently started featuring restaurants. But will Kickstarter make it possible for chefs who are not named Daniel Boulud to open restaurants? Or will it just increase the already overwhelming failure rate of the culinary industry?

"Kickstarter is not like some kind of market place or a retailer or a store where you might buy a product; it's a place where you're going there to fund somebody's dream," Kickstarter spokesman Justin Kazmar says. Popular Kickstarter projects have ranged from a comic book called "Cursed Pirate Girl" to colorful rain boots. One of the most successful food-related "dreams" funded by Kickstarter was the Coffee Joulie, the snazzy metal coffee bean that cools down hot coffee three times as fast and keeps it at optimal temperature for twice as long. The concept simply blew potential backers away. It even prompted rave reviews in *Wired* and on *The Today Show*. *Popular Science* called it a "must-have accessory." Within 60 days, Coffee Joulie had raised \$306,944 from 4,818 people.

However, with Kickstarter's strong emphasis on being a platform exclusively for the creative arts, it was not until later that it allowed people to pitch restaurant ideas. This shift was the result of three managerial veterans at the acclaimed restaurant Public who convinced Kickstarter that opening a restaurant was no less of an art form. Tamer Hamawi, Emelie Kihlstrom, and Elise Rosenberg, now proud co-owners of Colonie, a chic New American restaurant in Brooklyn Heights, were initially rejected because their project was seen more as a business venture than an art. The three, however, wrote back and compared running a restaurant to running a theatrical performance: "We open every night at the same time, kind of like curtain call every night, the restaurant is essentially our theater, the open kitchen is kind of like the stage," says Hamawi.

Colonie was accepted by Kickstarter and within 60 days received \$15,000. Since its



opening in February 2011, Colonie has received extremely favorable reviews from both the *New York Times* and *Zagat*. It is so successful, in fact, that the owners will be opening a second restaurant in Dumbo in 2012.

The success of Colonie and its professional managers was closely followed by that of Littleneck—"Brooklyn's first New England style clam shack." But unlike the owners of Colonie, the owners of Littleneck—despite being discerning clam shack frequenters—have had no experience in the restaurant industry whatsoever. As a result, the trio had to turn to something other than experience to convince strangers to invest in their restaurant. Littleneck founders Aaron Lefkove, Andy Curtin, and Charlie Moody put together a short video and description about their vision for the project, emphasizing the restaurant's originality. They pitched their dream to provide authentic clam shack fare and to build the restaurant using as much reclaimed materials as possible. The trio raised \$13,000, exceeding their original goal of \$8,000 and Littleneck is set to open in Gowanus, Brooklyn later this month.

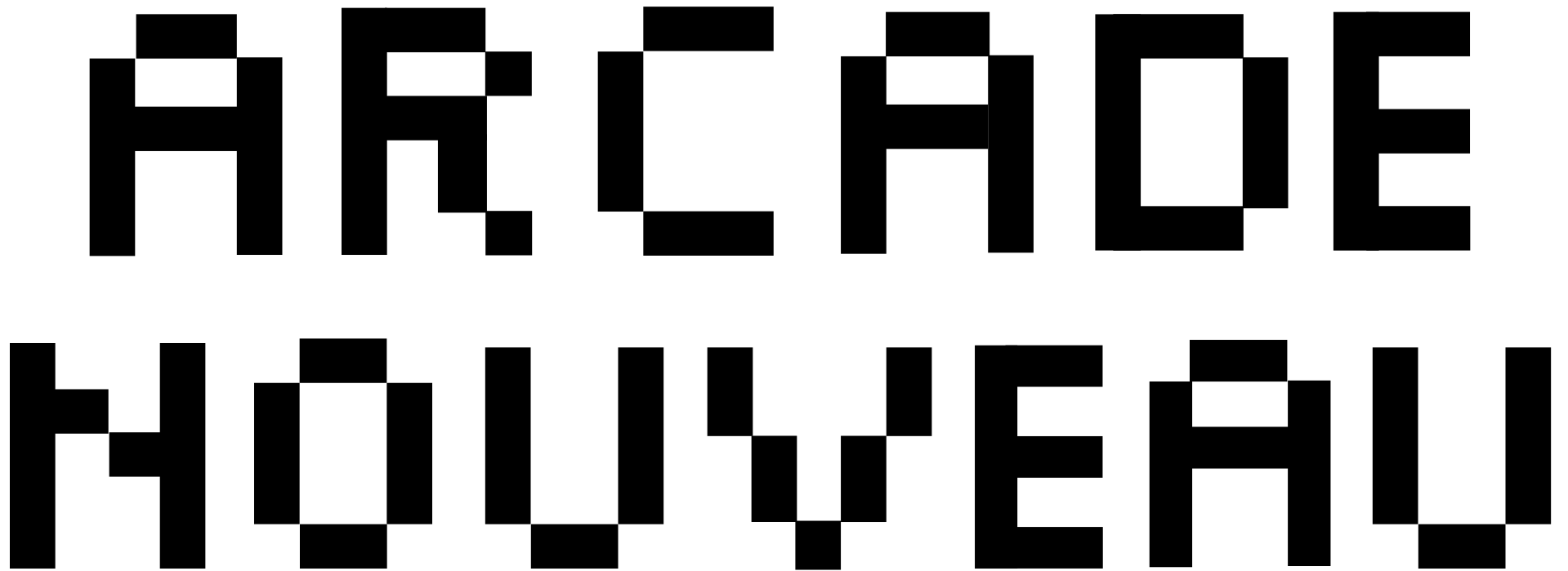
Patel, a student at the Columbia Business School and co-president of CEO, says: "I think it's interesting to see people give money to people who don't have any background in whatever they're doing, but that being said, you never know, you don't have to be trained to do something to be good at it." Fernando Ng, a fellow CBS student and co-president of CEO, believes that it was the trio's clear vision of Littleneck that won over the public: "[Backers] want to see people achieve something they haven't done themselves, something outside of their usual bread and butter, so they're willing to contribute money," Ng says. In practical terms, it is possible to overstate the role of Kickstarter, since many of the backers of Littleneck were family and friends, and \$13,000 only formed a small portion of the vast total cost. As Lefkove of Little-

neck puts it: "No matter how much money you have, for a venture like this, it's never enough. You could have a hundred thousand dollars, you could have ten million dollars and it still wouldn't be enough."

Kickstarter has been instrumental in spreading the word and generating support beyond entrepreneurs' circles of family and friends. Hamawi explains that during construction, simply having the Kickstarter link placed on the window encouraged both locals and the media to find out more. Hamawi says: "There were a lot of haters out there who thought it was ridiculous that we were using it as a fundraising tool and that if we think we're going to be able to fund a restaurant using Kickstarter then we're kidding ourselves." However, he says Kickstarter was, "more about getting the word out there and further developing our network."

POPULAR KICKSTARTER PROJECTS HAVE RANGED FROM A COMIC BOOK CALLED "CURSED PIRATE GIRL" TO COLORFUL RAIN BOOTS.

While it has certainly not revolutionized the restaurant industry, Kickstarter has presented itself as a valuable option for prospective restaurateurs to broadcast their ideas and gain support. Patel says that the reason a website like Kickstarter works is because of a feeling of altruism in the entrepreneurial community. "Why are they doing it?" she asks. "They're not really getting a piece of the equity. It is just the feeling of helping somebody. I think this is a new way of doing it and I think it's really cool." ●



the evolution of video games as art

by Frances Corry

“F, press F!”

“No, no, D’s where you should go. D!”

I have no idea who these kids yelling behind me are, but I’m looking to survive, and I’m dangling from a golden ring on a cliff face, and the water’s rising below me, and so I decide to take a leap of faith and trust the last yeller and stick my leg out and press my foot down, and I look up and ...

Game Over. My pixelated avatar falls. Should’ve gone for F.

Not to worry, I was later told. Mega GIRP is difficult. Few people have beaten the game, and those that do are physically exhausted by the time they reach the top. (“My arms,” one scrawny, sweating player said to me, “they just gave out.”) Made up of four modified Dance Dance Revolution pads, some tangled cords, a console, and a projection screen, Mega GIRP challenges the player to reach the top of a gray, craggy cliff by holding onto rings labeled with letters. Save for one spot, every square on the DDR pad has a letter corresponding to a virtual ring on which you stomp to swing, sideways or upwards, and slowly climb away from the rising water level. Every time the simple, long-armed avatar swings to a new ring, the player has to simultaneously press one DDR square, labeled GIRP, and one letter, in order to grab on. It’s like a digital Twister that’s more maddening than Tetris, more physical than Kinect, and more fun than, well, most video games I’ve ever played.

The thing is, Mega GIRP is no ordinary video game. And it’s not located at some ordinary, neon-lit, quarter-devouring arcade, either. It’s at Babycastles, an underground arcade and music venue marked only by



Cory Arcangel, "Various Self Playing Bowling Games"



Bennett Foddy, "GIRP"

an unlabeled door on Williamsburg's Kent Avenue. Babycastles has been described as a "1970s rec room reimagined by hackers" by the New York Times , the "CBGB of video games" by an anonymous interlocutor in the Los Angeles Times , and "the video-game equivalent of being at a Minor Threat concert, circa 1981" by a writer for Motherboard, an offshoot of Brooklyn rag VICE .

Something exciting is happening at Babycastles. Make it through these articles' allusions to bearded 20-somethings, cheap beer, and excessive perspiration, and there remains a feeling that the hype surrounding Babycastles and independent gaming is more than just some new New York scene to be made, reported on, used up, thrown out. That maybe gaming, a pastime borne with the earliest computers, popularized with the arcade, translated to the home console, and put on the Internet, just might mean something far more than musty base-ments and high scores.

At 33, Cory Arcangel is still an obsessive gamer. He's vaguely reminiscent of a character from a feel good '90s teen TV show—perpetually wearing a

goofy smile, a goofy sweatshirt, a baseball cap, maybe a visor swung a little sideways. Yet Arcangel is considered by many to be not only one of the darlings of digital art, but perhaps its contemporary founding father. He was the first artist of his kind to have a solo show at a major New York art institution—that is, the exhibition "Cory Arcangel: Pro Tools," which opened at the Whitney Museum of American Art late last May. People commented on his age, of course, when the show was announced. A young New York artist given the laurels of a high-art, high-profile show? That's the stuff art world dreams are made of. But it was how Arcangel got there that was interesting—not through his drawings, his sculptures, nor his music, though those all helped—but through his modified video games.

To get an idea of just what an Arcangel video game mod is, imagine you're playing Super Mario Bros. One of the old school editions, with that glitchy soundtrack, those pixelated bricks, the green tubes, angry mushrooms, golden coins, scared turtles, an unchanging blue sky, and two, maybe three, puffy clouds. Now, take away Mario. And the bricks. And the green tubes and angry mushrooms, the golden coins, and coin counters, the scared turtles, and finally the soundtrack. You have clouds, and the unchanging blue sky, and, most conspicuously, silence. The clouds slowly pass from right to left, changing minutely, pixel by pixel. In 2002, Arcangel did just this and called it Super Mario Clouds .

The piece slowly grew in popularity, for, as Arcangel notes on his site, the Internet couldn't support video just nine years ago: "It sounds funny now, but remember YouTube didn't start making waves till like 05ish??" More importantly, though, Arcangel posted the directions to make it on his website: it was art for the masses, that you could make, alter, disseminate. It was the art of the hack, done up in 8-bit. Just how did he do it? By getting

Pippin Barr, "The Artist Is Present"

an old Mario game cartridge and using a wire clip, desoldering braid, 28-pin low profile sockets, some existing chips, some downloaded code, a soldering iron, and, voila—a piece that would divide gamers, theorists, art critics, and, more importantly, the internet masses, who would just happen across it, like most memes, while surfing.

Some commentators viewed Super Mario Clouds as an intense and pointless experience, or a meditative process, not unlike playing video games themselves. Others looked at it as homage to surrealism. Arcangel, in a late 2009 interview with The Guardian, explained it as a sort of abstract societal representation. "Now, looking back on it all—it's about ... what do these pixelated clouds represent? It represents the whole progression of humans, communication and technology. But I couldn't write that down." And yet, in its YouTube incarnation, viewed over 50,000 times, there are more likes than dislikes, and the comment board is a maelstrom of users defining art, interpreting the game, or knocking Arcangel and Super Mario Clouds.

BUT THAT WAS WHAT ARCANGEL WANTED OF HIS AUDIENCE: FAILURE. INESCAPABLE, ENDLESS, INEVITABLE FAILURE.

"This is stupid. What a load of shit," wrote BlackMesaProgrammer, while litnguy said, "this is crap art. Arcangel's work shouldn't be included in the annals of history under the category of art. Nice try Cory, but there are Programmers out there that actually program, not just erase what others have done. You're a joke..." "Right," the user percieval said to litnguy, "programmers program. Artists make art. The intersection can be a really interesting place." It was the push and pull of art commentary, outside of the white walls of galleries and museums, thrown on to the exceedingly messy canvas of the Internet. The work was complicated and contentious and done in a medium that was all too familiar, and yet foreign. Video games became a means, and a subject, about which and through

which you could say something. And the high-art world took notice—by and large, it accepted video games as a medium. In 2004, Arcangel's piece was included in The Whitney Biennial. And then in 2009, The New Museum featured Flywrench, a video game by programmer Mark Essen in their exhibition Younger Than Jesus. Then, in late 2010, The Whitney used CLICKISTAN, an avant-garde online video game by Internet duo UBERMORGEN as a part of their annual fundraiser. And then 2011 came—MoMA included video games in its design show Talk to Me, which focused on communication between objects and people. Placed in these contexts, the games felt new and slightly rebellious. It seemed that, maybe, a new movement in the art world was shaping up.

And, of course, in 2011, Arcangel got his solo show at The Whitney. The hype was big: profiles or reviews in almost every major New York publication. The show featured game mods, but also drawings, sculptures, chromogenic prints, and appropriated videos (not to mention free Wi-Fi).

Yet for the seeming acceptance of Arcangel's digital medium, and the hype that Pro Tools attracted, it appeared that, once the show arrived, people didn't really know what to think. Art critics, upon seeing the show, struggled with reconciling their historical knowledge of high-art media and high-profile names with Pro Tools' YouTube mash-ups and use of PlayStation 3, Arcangel was compared to high-art names, Bruce Nauman, Richard Prince, Joan Jonas, Paul Sharits, Thomas Ruff, Jeff Koons, Jackson Pollock, and Marcel Duchamp. And this was just one review.

And viewers? Well, they struggled with the pieces in Pro Tools, too. But that was what Arcangel wanted of his audience: failure. Inescapable, endless, inevitable failure. The exhibition was haunted by it—it greeted you at the beginning of the exhibit and followed you until the end. Arcangel's Various Self Playing Bowlinr "g Games (aka "Beat the Champ") was the first failure: a monstrous, six-panel projection that subsumed the first room, while the trill of its soundtrack boomed throughout the rest of the museum. Each of the six projections showed a giant bowling video game, ranging from the earliest, pixelated version of the 1970s on the far left, to, finally, a complex, three-dimensionally rendered game on the right. They were on a pro-

grammed loop—no one used the controllers that sat on a table, which visitors weren't allowed to touch. Avatars and locations became more complex, the games went from no dimension to having realistic perspective to having multiple perspectives. Rules stayed, for the most part, the same, and many had consistent measures like pin count or power or accuracy.

And so you watched all the games playing themselves, mesmerized. Then you realize something. That the game's a bit ... off. The avatars, no matter their pixel composition, weren't hitting any pins. They'd aim, walk up, swing, roll the ball, and it would veer to the gutter. Again and again. Gutter ball. Gutter ball. Gutter ball. Power? Accuracy? Ha. Fun? Not really. Funny? Maybe. Depressing and isolating? Indeed. Arcangel showed us the impression of amusement, the evolution of technology, the appearance of things getting better; but all we were left with was repetitive defeat.

Pro Tools officially closed at The Whitney on Sept. 11. It just happened to be the same day that, on the opposite bank of the East River, Babycastles debuted Mega GIRP in Williamsburg. The man who created Mega GIRP wasn't there that night, though. Bennett Foddy was an ocean away in Oxford, probably sleeping, as players in Brooklyn tried for the first time to translate their foot movements to cliff climbing. It was that first night of playing Mega GIRP that, for me, something apparent was finally made important: Arcangel never let you play his games. I wasn't pretending to bowl when I watched those games. I wasn't playing Super Mario Bros. as the clouds passed by. Foddy, however, let you play. So, while climbing the golden rings of Mega GIRP, a question came up: do video games have to be non-playable for you to get meaning out of them?

Foddy, however, thinks differently and programs differently. He wants you to have fun, for the most part, when you play his games, and he's created a few that are pretty popular on the internet. GIRP, the keyboard and computer predecessor to Mega GIRP, and QWOP, where you try to coordinate the body movements of a runner's thighs with the keys QW and those of the calves with the keys OP, are responsible for accruing millions of hits to his website. But Foddy isn't a video game designer by day. He's the senior research fellow and deputy director of the Programme on Ethics of the New Biosciences at the James Martin 21st Century School of Oxford. Which, to put it plainly, means he's a

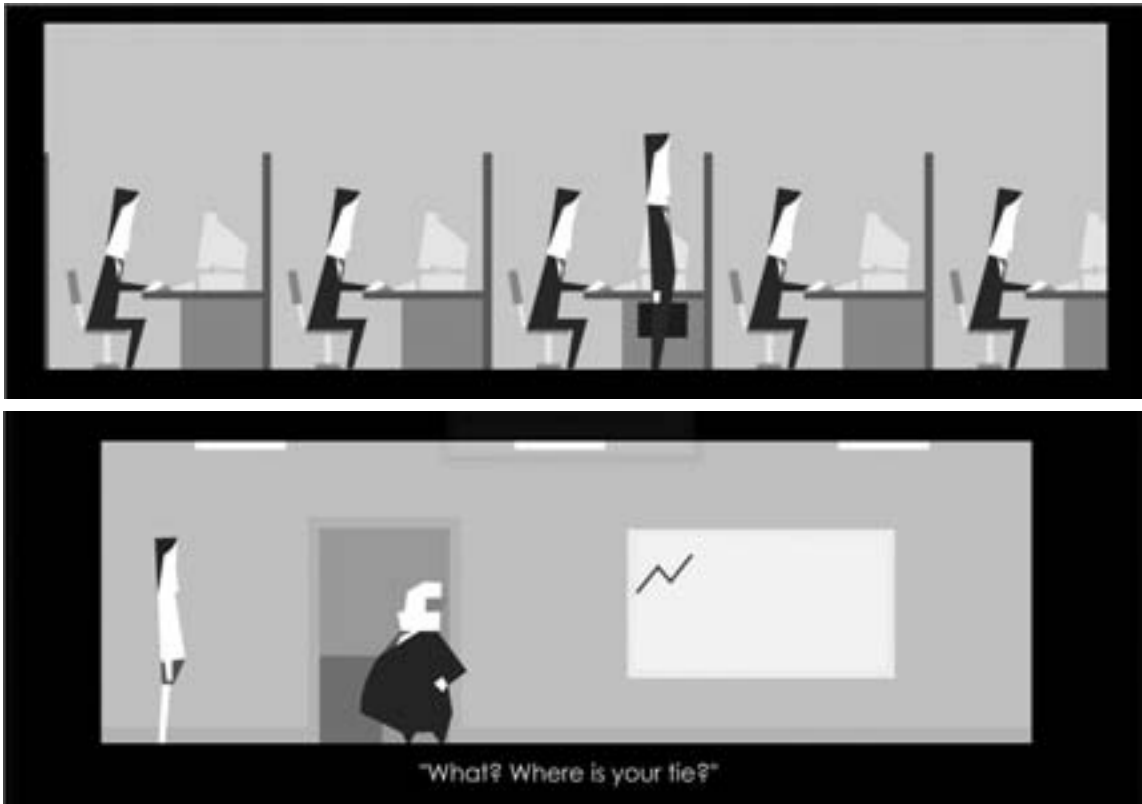
philosopher. The man isn't the type to do something without thought—he's not mashing some pixels together, putting an arbitrary goal into the system, and calling it a game. So QWOP, GIRP, and Mega GIRP are independent, fun, challenging, and thought out. But are they art?

Depends who you ask. "I know a lot of Japanese gamers have classified QWOP as a 'kusoge,' (shit game)," Foddy tells me in an e-mail. "But I am trying to make *good* games, even though they are all experimental, unfinished, and unpolished. And sometimes silly." Like many people who have dug past the surface layers of gaming, he resists saying what art games are, or whether they exist, or what they do, exactly. "When you say 'art games,' I guess you [are] indicating games that are pursuing art at the expense of function (let's say, a fun or compelling experience) or commerce. That's what we mean when we say 'art films' or 'high art,' anyhow: we mean that they have a commitment to being works of art, over and above their functions as pieces of entertainment or commercial products." But the fact of the matter is, as Foddy tells me, he thinks all games are art. GIRP. Mega GIRP. QWOP. Even FarmVille .

HE RESISTS SAYING WHAT ART GAMES ARE, OR WHETHER THEY EXIST, OR WHAT THEY DO, EXACTLY.

"One of the real secrets to the value of video-games is that you can sit still, like a meditating person, and enter a kind of trance where you become embodied in an electronic world," he says. And a lot of his games deal with this analogy between body and game: QWOP dissociates your keyboard typing from the body movements of the avatar. Mega GIRP closely mirrors them. It's virtual, but at the same time, our body acts in a physical way, as if it's reality. It's a strange experience when you realize that. An experience not unlike the transcendent moment you can have when a painting or sculpture or film or photograph really affects you. Yeah. It's just like that. Except a lot more fun.

To really understand the moment gaming is



Molleindustria, "Everyday the Same Dream"

having now, you have to go back to 1978. A peanut farmer was in the Oval Office, the arms race between America and the USSR was ever-present, and Space Invaders—the name that would bring gaming from sideshow to center stage—was released in Japan. It was a simple shooter game: a grid of aliens descended, firing pixelated lasers (nothing more than dotted lines) at your shooter, and you tried to shoot back at them. Hit one, and you got some points: annihilating the total grid of aliens would get you a score of 990. Rumor has it that the highest score ever achieved was just above 55,000.

Space Invaders was one of the originators, along with predecessor PONG and follower Pac-Man, that would come to define the first portrait of the gamer: high score mongering and quarter collecting, a little bit manic. These were the initial geek gamers. The people that first played Space Invaders are often referred to as being "old school gamers." These were the kids who made arcades a viable economic entity in the '80s, the kids who forced Pac-Man into our cultural canon. And they were the kids who were harbingers of our technological obsessions today—after all, Steve Jobs started out as a technician for Atari.

Most people think they understand this era. I mean, the '80s practically are happening right now—what with the endless rehashing of punk, shoulder pads, Madonna-figures, neon, get-ahead business ethos, buy-it-now consumer habits. But for those that missed this era, Gen Y'ers and following, there is some illusion about what gaming was really like in those days. We can play first edition Frogger and Super Mario Bros. on the Internet all we want, but something was fundamentally different when those games were collected in an arcade.

"That sort of environment of going to a central location to play video games with your friends and strangers is something that I think a lot of younger gamers don't realize," Cayden Mak, an adjunct professor of media theory at the University at Buffalo, says over Skype. "That's how gaming started. It was this hypersocial, hyperlocal activity where

even if you didn't play at the same time as somebody, you were still competing with someone from your town at Pac-Man, [for example]." Meaning, those three letters representing someone on the high score list would be someone from your town, your arcade, maybe one of your friends. Maybe, if you were that good, it was you.

So where did we get the idea that gamers were often isolated, Vitamin D-deficient basement dwellers? Blame it on the home console. Arcades started slowly fading out in the late '80s, when the boxy behemoths of SEGA Genesis and the Nintendo Entertainment System (then Super Nintendo) were popularized in the marketplace. Super Mario Bros. made its blockbuster debut, consoles transitioned from 8-bit to higher resolution 16-bit, and people found that they would spend just as much money renting games and owning consoles as they would at the arcade. As Mak says, between the interest of capitalism and the evolution of high tech, gaming became a loner sport.

SO WHERE DID WE GET THE IDEA THAT GAMERS WERE OFTEN ISOLATED, VITAMIN D DEFICIENT BASEMENT DWELLERS?

And, since then, it's been a whirlwind of gaming developments: the Dreamcast, N64, PlayStation, PlayStation 2, Xbox, GameCube, PlayStation 3, Xbox 360, Wii, Kinect, Wii MotionPlus, and, inevitably, something else. Games got more realistic, faster, more complex, more complicated. They hooked up with the Internet, engaged your body, and could store more information. Like the pre-19th century history of Western art, games have mostly followed the swift track towards figuration. So why are people today again attracted to the lo-fi, 8-bit aesthetics, old-school soundtracks, and relatively simple prem-

ises used by independent and/or art games?

Maybe it's nostalgia. The good old days of Sonic on SEGA and Super Mario on NES. When games weren't terrifyingly real, and your mom still made your dinner, and life wasn't so goddamn complicated. But it's more than just that. It's the fact that the people making these games are different from those working in Silicon Valley. Old games are easier to modify and easier to code. They are made by individuals or small teams from around the world. No one's making a ton of money from them. They circumvent the typical gaming industry and the typical gaming paradigms. And so they get to do a lot of stuff that normal games can't do. It's like la vie bohème of the gaming world, an alternative version of alternate reality.

There's something comforting in knowing that it's possible to make games like this. That you can create something totally your own, or that you can take a game cartridge or console produced by some big, unintelligible industry, and craft something new from it, something that's your own—or at least plays by your rules. So when Arcangel shows you failure in his games, he's also giving you some sort of quirky, digitized hope. Sure, it seems like losing is inevitable. That it's out of control. But these are game mods, game hacks, quite literally, game changers—and they give us some sort of handle on what often seems to be the big, bad and totally unstoppable world of technology.

Even this doesn't explain today's video-gaming moment. What does explain it is the same thing that made arcades popular two decades ago, the same thing that makes Babycastles viable today. It's being engrossed in something with other people. One of the most compelling things about this new scene isn't the digitized worlds people create, but that you get to explore these worlds with some friends, or perhaps, some strangers. It's a transcendent experience you get to have within a community. Call it Schopenhauerian, maybe, or new-age, even. Or fun. Or, if you want, call it art.

Because in the end, I think video games can be art. But there's something in me that wants to say no, too, in order to rescue independent video games from the white-walled existence of museum-life. The thing is, I can't remember the last time a painting in MoMA has drawn people together like video games have, making them want to talk and write and debate about some sort of human creation.

I'm standing around Mega GIRP at Babycastles again, watching people watch a gamer, who watches the pixelated figure, who's got a firm grip on two rings, U and Y. We've all been here for a while, yelling out letters he should choose, like a Brooklynized audience on Wheel of Fortune. The figure is pretty far up the cliff—much farther than I've ever made it, at least. He puts his foot on A, puts his hand on Grip, and moves up, little by little.

The next logical step is A to X. X goes his foot, Grip goes his hand, and swing goes the pixelated figure. Something went wrong. Splash. The player turns to a scruffily-bearded, confused-looking kid just coming to the group. "Want to try it?"

The kid's hand pulls at his beard, eyes flitting between screen and player. "I don't *really* get how you do it."

The player steps off the mat. "Well, really," he says, grabbing his beer, "you just gotta play and figure it out." ●



The Problem with *The Help*

the racial politics of this summer's blockbuster

BY OLIVIA HULL
ILLUSTRATION BY STEPHANIE MANNHEIM

This summer's film adaptation of Kathryn Stockett's bestselling novel *The Help* is certainly a tearjerker—even the elderly man sitting next to me in the theater was dabbing his eyes. But despite the film's ability to make viewers weep, it's received a significant amount of negative reviews. Many critics have placed it in the category of "white savior" films with *The Blind Side* (The Orlando Sentinel), *Mississippi Burning* (Christian Science Monitor), and *Driving Miss Daisy* (Buffalo News). It's been called "simplistic" by Christian Science Monitor's Peter Rainer and "sneaky" by the Boston Globe's Wesley Morris as well as "crude and obvious" by New Yorker film critic David Denby.

The premise of the film is this: a bright-eyed southern belle fresh out of college, Skeeter Phelan (Emma Stone), is moved by curiosity and compassion to interview a group of black maids about their experiences working in the homes of her friends. The role that Skeeter occupies as a "white savior" who "courageously" speaks out on behalf of helpless and voiceless black maids has been one of the main criticisms of the film in the wake of its release. Peter Rainer writes that the film "implicitly overvalues the historical contribution of whites to the civil rights era."

Fredrick Harris, director of the Institute for Research in African-American Studies, and a professor of political science, is wary of "romanticizing" the past. "I grew up in Atlanta in the early Post-Civil Rights era," he says. "I had relatives who were domestic workers and I don't remember them sentimentalizing being the help. Their experiences were demeaning, although some did form friendships with their employers, in some contexts."

Harris says the race divide surrounding the employment of these domestic workers or "mammies"

led to their exploitation—lower wages, working on weekends with no pay, even sexual exploitation in some cases. "It's not to say that people don't develop intimate relationships in those situations, but the power dynamics make it complicated." While *The Help* may avoid delving deep into political nuance, can the ends justify the means?

"Sometimes there's fiction that is more true

"I THINK THAT AMERICAN MOVIEGOERS ARE MORE SOPHISTICATED WHEN IT COMES TO EXPLICIT RACISM, BUT UNCONSCIOUS RACISM IS STILL VERY MUCH A PROBLEM."

than reality," says Marcellus Blount, professor of English and African-American studies. "I don't think that's the case [with *The Help*]." Part of what's missing, he says, is violence. "The Civil Rights era is depicted as largely peaceful for whites. Race is sanitized. I found it distressing because this moment is such a violent one in history." The movie deals with violence sparingly and indirectly. The murder of Medgar Evers, a Jackson, Mississippi civil rights activist, is briefly addressed in one scene, and in another one of the maids is abused by her husband, who is kept off-screen. "He is silent, and we never get his story," Blount says. "It's as though all African-American men are abusive."

Despite good intentions, the film still tells a small, sentimental story that glosses over the hard facts of the Civil Rights era. For Blount, *The Help*'s overarching "Hollywood narrative"

is kinship, the ultimate bond formed between a white woman and a group of black women, a theme that eclipses the real issues of racism. The film does not tell the story of far-reaching social change—but rather the story of the less significant, anecdotal tolerance of a few individuals. "You don't get enough of a sense of African-Americans as actors on a political stage," he says. The sit-ins, the marches, the bus boycotts are all left out. Blount points out that the intended heroine is Skeeter, not the maids.

Yet, Blount calls *The Help* an "effective" film, especially in terms of gender. "Women are at the center here. I like that it's an interesting part of the film," he says. But he adds that the film exaggerates the extent to which women lived their lives independent of men; depicting a social autonomy that he says wasn't characteristic of the time.

Some viewers are willing to ignore criticisms and find the movie is, at its core, to be well meaning. "I found it touching," says Haben Fecadu, a Columbia Law School student. "I mean, of course it's annoying when it's a white woman telling the stories of black women." Law School student Adelle Fontanet hasn't decided whether she wants to see the film. "I'm worried that it will be another moment for white people to pat themselves on the back for what they did," Fontanet says. "Another *Blind Side*, a black person's success story that glorifies white people in the process."

Blount, who calls *The Blind Side* (2009) flat out "offensive," says his reaction to *The Help* was more complicated. Still, he doesn't see the film as an indication that mainstream films are getting better at portraying race relations. "I think that American moviegoers are more sophisticated when it comes to explicit racism, but unconscious racism is still very much a problem," he says. "We still have a long way to go. Hollywood blockbusters are less ambitious when it comes to race. They tend to reward biases more often than they challenge them." ●



E-book Revolution

can independent bookstores weather the digital storm?

BY RIKKI NOVETSKY
PHOTOS BY ANTHONY CLAY
GRAPHIC BY ALLIE CARIERI

This month, Barnes & Noble became the sole national chain of booksellers in the United States. Barnes and Noble's newfound primacy comes in the wake of the bankruptcy, closing, and liquidation of more than 400 Borders bookstores. While the megastore's close may have come as a shock a few years ago, now the shuttering of Borders speaks poignantly to the ever increasing fragility of the bookselling industry.

Following Borders' closing, questions linger for businessmen and bibliophiles alike: Does the failure of the once-triumphal Borders represent a universal trend, or one of bad business planning? The answer, it seems, is a bit of both.

Borders' problem, at least in part, seems mostly to be a failure to adapt, especially in comparison to its largest competitor, Barnes & Noble. In a piece for NPR, Yuki Noguchi hypothesizes that

executives at Borders missed the mark on several strategic decisions. In the 1990s, executives chose to expand physical blueprints and to focus their energies on CD and DVD inventories, while simultaneously, Barnes & Noble spent their resources creating a more impressive online inventory and developed the Nook, an e-reader. The result of these decisions would seem to be: go digital or go home.

With e-readers on the rise, paper books have never been closer to extinction. From 2008 to 2010, e-book sales rose over a thousand percent, and in 2010, Amazon revealed that it now sells 80 percent more electronic books than printed books. A morning commute is enough to support e-book statistics. "On the subway, all I see is flashing screens," says Kyoko Yamamoto, a Barnard freshman.

Slashed prices have catapulted e-books to popularity, especially among students. "I bought the entire works of Shakespeare on my Kindle for 99 cents," says Jess Phlugrath, a Barnard freshman. "I hate the idea and feel of e-books, but

"ELECTRONIC BOOKS ARE NOT THE WAY I PERSONALLY READ, BUT IF THE MOVEMENT IS GOING TO HELP MORE PEOPLE READ MORE BOOKS, THEN I AM IN FAVOR."

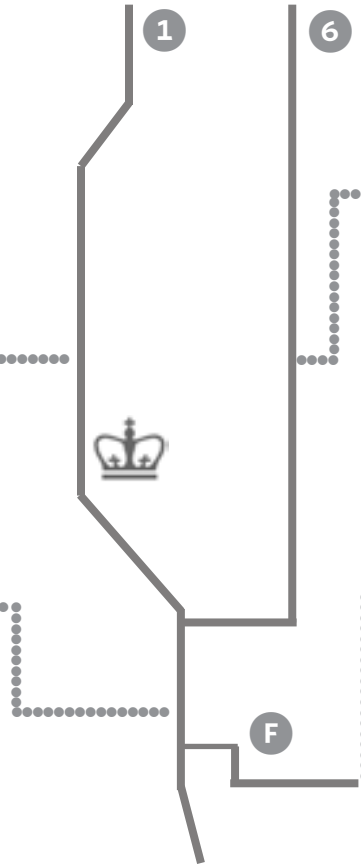
if it's cheaper, it's going to happen."

While some works may be cheaper to buy technologically, one sector of book publishing remains untouched—textbooks. According to David Moran of Shakespeare & Co. Booksellers, an independent bookstore in NoHo, "Textbooks have been much slower to move to the e-sphere than novels. Our store has been fighting tooth-and-nail to continue staying alive for 30 years, and we hope to continue

BOOKSTORES WORTH THE SUBWAY SWIPE

Hue-Man Bookstore & Cafe
2319 Frederick Douglass Boulevard; take the 1 train up to 125th street
Located in the heart of Harlem’s business district, Hue-Man Bookstore specializes in African-American interests and authors, and regularly hosts speakers to discuss issues of race and ethnicity. With a self-defined mission “to inspire, motivate, and educate,” the store’s community-minded ideology maintains a focus on central Harlem.

Books of Wonder
18 West 18th Street; take the 1 train down to 18th street
Feel like a kid again at the city’s oldest and largest independent children’s bookstore, Books of Wonder. The store’s wide selection includes just-published books, out-of-print editions, and everything in between. Customers can relax and read (perhaps an out-of-print edition of Charlotte’s Web) at the in-house Cupcake Café. Before leaving, check out the world-famous Oz collection.



Kitchen Arts & Letters
1435 Lexington Avenue; take the 1 train to Times Square, shuttle to Grand Central, 6 train to 96th Street
Hungry? This bookstore – the biggest of its kind in the world – carries over 13,000 culinary-themed titles. The selection includes cookbooks for gourmet chefs and beginners alike. Kitchen Arts & Letters is known for its knowledgeable staff who are always willing to help customers find out-of-print books. In addition to the usual fare, they also stock foreign language cookbooks as well as cookbooks dating back to the 19th century.

Bluestockings
172 Allen Street; take the 1 train to 14th, transfer to F to 2nd Avenue
This Lower East Side bookstore specializes in gender and sexuality. Run on a volunteer system by a women’s collective, Bluestockings carries over 6,000 titles on topics ranging from feminism, democracy, and black liberation. The store’s specialities do not stop at books; they define themselves as an activist center, as well, and boast an organic vegan cafe.



to do so.” Kerri Campbell, the textbook supervisor at the Columbia University Bookstore, run by Barnes & Noble, says students are reluctant about using e-books. “Students are hesitant to move to e-books with their textbooks mostly because professors don’t want to let e-books into their classes. Students want tangible options, so textbooks will only move into the e-book sphere when the generation becomes completely technological.”

But the disappearance of print books may not be the tragedy that bibliophiles fear. The popularization of the e-book makes literature accessible to digital natives, who are accustomed to reading online. Sam MacLaughlin, a bookseller at McNally Jackson, is open to the idea of greater access to literature—regardless of the form. “Electronic books are not the way I personally read, but if the movement is going to help more people read more books, then I am in favor.” At McNally Jackson, employees reach out to readers with their lively Twitter feed and blog, which they hope will entice the tech-savvy, yet-still-book-loving customer.

“OUR STORE HAS BEEN FIGHTING TOOTH-AND-NAIL TO CONTINUE STAYING ALIVE FOR 30 YEARS, AND WE HOPE TO CONTINUE TO DO SO.”

The quirkiness of some New York independent bookstores sustains their presence in the city and their business in the e-book age. Partners & Crime, in the West Village, specializes in mysery books. The friendly man behind the counter, Dan Finton, has no shame in admitting that he dislikes the e-book revolution, simply because it hurts his bottom line. He explained that high rent is a big problem for small bookstores. “We play a big part in helping to improve the neighborhood, and then the neighborhood becomes too expensive for us to

stay afloat,” he explains.

While a specialty genre like mystery books may make it hard to maintain a customer base, not all independent bookstores need to fight to stay alive. The owners of the ever-trendy Strand Bookstore near Union Square have owned their sprawling property for generations, which helps immensely with financial woes. Carson Moss, a book buyer at Strand, added that what makes Strand unique isn’t the books, but the workers. “Most people who work for us have creative outlets outside of the store. That may be music, painting, acting, or writing. The majority of the people we bring in are creative, and that creates an interesting environment for both other workers and customers alike.”

While Strand is now a downtown staple, a lack of local, independent bookstores is the reality in many rural parts of the United States. B. Dalton, a bookstore chain owned by Barnes & Noble, liquidated its franchises in 2010 and left Laredo, Texas as the biggest city in America without a bookstore. “I had to drive two hours to the closest bookstore,” says Claudia Flores, a Barnard freshman from Laredo. “Now I just order books online.”

In a harsh market, no commodity, however time-honored, is safe. “It may not be good for business, but I see e-books as a natural evolution,” says Moran. The bookselling market is so dynamic, he argues, that soon products such as the Kindle will become obsolete, with readers simply downloading books onto their cell phones.

While e-books are cheaper and easier to attain, their technological removal can’t replace the intimacy of a familiar local store. McNally Jackson bookseller Sam MacLaughlin says, “When you find a bookstore you love, you find a collective mind,” he said. “Every store has its own character—I would be so sad if the independent bookstore down the street closed.” ●

The Third Dimension

the aftermath of avatar

BY DAVID SALAZAR

ILLUSTRATION BY THUTO SOMO

In 2009, James Cameron's *Avatar* became the highest grossing movie in history. But it's clear that the movie's overall appeal wasn't the plot or acting—it was the promise that the film's 3D technology would revolutionize the way we make and watch movies.

Though *Avatar* wasn't the first movie in the latest wave of 3D resurgence (that title belongs to 2004's *The Polar Express*), it was arguably the first one that showed the seductive possibility of extremely advanced digital 3D technology. Cameron didn't use *Avatar*'s 3D technology for cheap effect, he utilized the medium to add depth to the movie. While the success of *Avatar* has inspired a plethora of sci-fi knockoffs, these recent 3D films are not fairing as well, and studios are suffering.

A June 21 New York Times article reported that DreamWorks Animation's stock fell 18 percent in a month, and that Regal Entertainment stocks were down 18 percent, likely as a result of a 24 percent drop in RealD stocks. And while the market is grim for companies, it's even grimmer for the quality of movies. With the exceptions of *Toy Story 3* and *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows Part 2*, few 3D movies have received large critical or financial success.

Recent release *Shark Night 3D*, which boasts a Rotten Tomatoes score of 15 percent, has only grossed \$17 million total—not even enough to cover the estimated cost of production. *Glee: The 3D Live Concert* also flopped in mid-August. Yet in spite of these flops, executives remain hopeful.

"The jury's still out on 3D, and there have been so many bad 3D retrofits and sloppily-made 3D

movies that audiences have cooled a bit, especially given the high pricing. But 3D has huge creative potential—we loved how it worked for *Coraline* for us at Focus, so I'm still hopeful it has a real future, especially if 3D television takes hold," says Focus Features CEO James Schamus, who also serves as a professor at the Columbia School of the Arts. Indeed, with an estimated 300,000 3D televisions sold worldwide, Schamus may not be far from the mark.

"THE JURY'S STILL OUT ON 3D, AND THERE HAVE BEEN SO MANY BAD 3D RETROFITS AND SLOPPILY-MADE 3D MOVIES THAT AUDIENCES HAVE COOLED A BIT, ESPECIALLY GIVEN THE HIGH PRICING."

But the 3D movie market may be on the upturn after the recent re-release of Disney's *The Lion King in 3D*. According to a Sept. 19 Times article, the re-release topped the box office that weekend with a revenue of \$29.3 million. Though the popularity of this film may be more indicative of people wanting to see a classic film in theaters, or maybe grab a pair of those gold 3D glasses, than it is a solidly increased interest in 3D itself. The 3D nostalgia of *The Lion King* may simply be a precursor to the 2012 release of James Cameron's *Titanic 3D*, released on the hundredth anniversary of the di-

saster. In the history of the medium, though, there are times of boom and stagnation.

3D images were fairly widespread during the mid-1800s. Spectroscopic photography worked in very much the same way that 3D film works now: two pictures are taken from two separate points of view. Then the two pages were put on the 19th-century version of a View-Master to create a three-dimensional image—like *Jackass 3D* but with George Custer instead of Johnny Knoxville. In the 1950s, 3D movies enjoyed a short period of widespread popularity but were later dismissed as gimmicky. Alfred Hitchcock filmed 1954's *Dial M for Murder in 3D*, but ended up releasing it "flat."

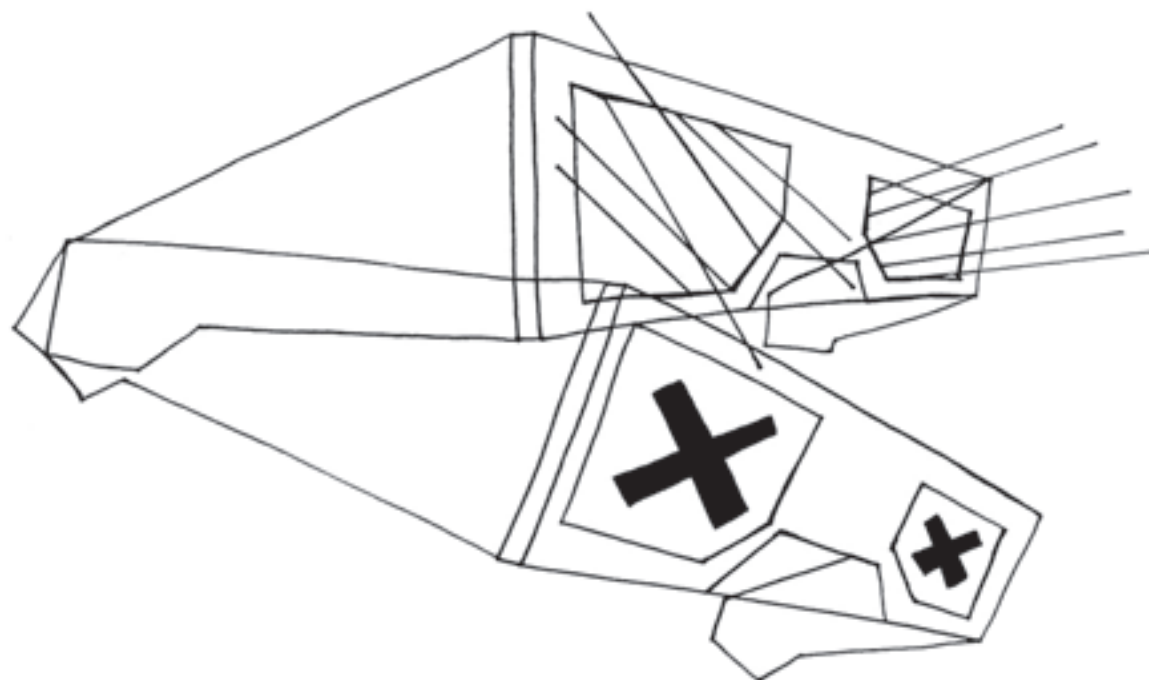
In the aughts, *The Polar Express* and the re-release of Tim Burton's *Nightmare Before Christmas* breathed fresh life into the 3D industry. And following *Avatar*, the 3D craze has exploded even beyond the film industry with gaming stations and cell phones that shoot and play 3D pictures and video. The move into portable 3D comes at the same time as a marked decrease in ticket sales for 3D movies. Some feel that it's not so much a decrease in interest in 3D so much as it is a decrease in interest in movie theaters in general.

"The real problem is that theater attendance is simply going down—something like between five and eight percent per year since 2004, with the exception of 2010, when 3D did bring great audiences for *Avatar* and *Alice [in Wonderland]*," Program Director of the Film Society of Lincoln Center and Columbia professor Richard Peña says. "But ... the charm wore off, and the majority of later 3-D productions were unsuccessful, and theater attendance is down again this year. ... The decline is masked somewhat by a rise in ticket price."

It is possible that an increase in 3D television popularity or an upcoming blockbuster will lead to another boom in the genre. Peña, for his part, believes that there will soon be a departure from movies in general.

"I don't happen to think American cinema is going through a particularly brilliant period, but I don't think that's the problem," he said. "We are witnessing the gradual but persistent decline of the 'theatrical model,' and I predict that there will be fewer than 50 percent of the 36,000 screens currently in operation in ten years. There always will be movie theaters ... but like opera, that experience will be more of a museum-like experience."

Is there a definite reason for the decline of 3Ds popularity? No, but I'm willing to bet that *Spy Kids: All the Time in the World* had something to do with it; and if not that, then surely the rise in ticket prices and the availability of home theater options are huge factors in 3D's latest decline. Still, the medium has already outlasted the Confederacy, phonographs, and the Model T. It would seem 3D is here to stay. ●





Below the Mason-Dixon Line

a barnard transfer reflects on her first collegiate experience

BY ANNA MARCUM
ILLUSTRATION BY MADDY KLOSS

The week before classes started was reserved for Sorority Recruitment.

Though a relatively small percentage of campus was Greek, university events still seemed to revolve around Greek interests and schedules. We, the potential new members, were paraded from house to house in a never-ending string of choreographed parties. At the end of each day, my face was sore from fake smiling, and my vocal chords ached from hours of mindless conversation. (Oh, you like to read? So do I! You know Alpha Alpha Alpha has girls that love to read! I think you'd be such an asset to our chapter!)

In many ways, it was harder to get into a good sorority than it was to be admitted to the university. After we received our bids, we were brought to the university amphitheater. As I stood at the top of the hill, I looked on to the sea of overly energetic sorority girls, decked out in their symbols, letters, and colors. We were told to run down the hill to our new "sisters." Some girls took off sprinting at this announcement. I just walked because the whole event seemed a little ridiculous to me. I made my way to my new chapter and found my bid day buddy. My new "sister" barely recognized me and had a very vague idea of who I was. (Oh my GAWD! We are SO happy to have you

with us today! During rush we called you "Teen Vogue Girl" cause you were in the magazine that one time, right?) We walked back to the house through the tunnel of rambunctious fraternity men getting a good look at the new pledge classes. Some of them had brought their desk chairs on to the street for optimal viewing comfort. It smelled like tequila and cigarettes.

The football stadium dominated the university skyline. It was the first thing one saw upon driving into the city and its lights were visible for miles. My art professors, in their typical non-conformist manner, would always claim that one could fully tell the university's priorities by the size of the buildings, and the stadium was by far the biggest. In the year before my arrival on campus, a \$6.1 million true HD "jumbo-tron" was installed in the stadium; I can only assume that this project was undertaken to try and bring our 50,000-seat stadium up to par with its 100,000 seat SEC counterparts. At night, when they tested the football graphics on the HD screen, the sky lit up violently as though the small southern town was being bombed. Most students agreed with the superfluous expense of the "jumbo-tron." If I tried to reason with my peers and make an argument that the alum's generous donation would have been put to better use in the underfunded English and art departments, I was met with incredulous protests (But now we have the largest jumbo-tron in the SEC, the second largest in all of college football! Did

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you see that they were playing American Chop-pers the other day?). Clearly, popular concern was properly aligned.

Game days were by far the biggest events the university, even the town, saw in the course of the year. On the evening before the game, at 5 p.m., people would line up on the sidewalk in front of the jumbo-tron to claim their tailgating spots. By the next morning, thousands of tents populated the grassy areas surrounding the stadium, some simple with a few lawn chairs, barbecue, and beer, others fully equipped with couches, HDTVs, and a smorgasbord of culinary delights surrounded by white picket fences to keep out undesirables. Girls arrived at the football games in cocktail dresses, heels, and full hair and make-up, while guys donned crisp button downs and the optional bow tie. When I was younger, my dad and I used to make fun of the overdressed girls stumbling to the stadium through the tents, their spike heels sinking in the damp soil.

Naturally, I wore wedges. ●

