

Natural Selections

A NEWSLETTER OF THE ROCKEFELLER UNIVERSITY COMMUNITY

ROOSEVELT ISLAND TRAM GOES TO HOLLYWOOD

ANA DOMINGOS

Some of us in the RU community had been using the Roosevelt Island Tram to commute between the Island and Manhattan. This month, I move onto the Island and when it is running again, I will start using the tram on a regular basis. However, the ride I will never forget happened before I moved in, a month ago.

The tram got stuck, hanging over the East River, for twelve hours with 47 people in it, including me, my parents, my brother, (also a postdoc at RU who lives in Faculty House), and his son. I took this trip to show my family how great it is to live on the Island. I guess I'll have to try harder to convince them...

This incident was a treat for the newspaper headlines. My four-year-old nephew was a star in many New York newspapers.

The tram has been featured in many motion pictures such as Billy Crystal's *City Slickers* and Sylvester Stallone's *Nighthawks*. It is currently featured in a popular attraction at Universal Studios Theme Park in Florida where King Kong "attacks" a tram filled with "passengers."

The crowd in the tram was, just as in the movies, a good example of the New York melting pot: a family of Orthodox Jews with many kids who started praying at sunset; tourists from Israel, who did a good job entertaining the Jewish kids, singing in Hebrew; a shaggy guy with a severe nicotine craving and terrible bad breath who persisted in chatting with everyone; Bellevue nurses who knew how to deal patiently with panic-like behavior; a cranky old lady with a crutch who wanted to beat up the cops during the rescue when they were holding her in the air over the river; a *torero*-style couple from Madrid who stoically faced the vertigo of the water under the tram as if they were facing a bull; members of the Island's luxury tennis club that already knew that "it was not a good idea to take public transportation: what if there was a terrorist attack?"; a

very talkative French woman, who played the role of the French Resistance informer. She called her many informer friends who were watching us on TV, to keep us informed of what was going on. Of course, we heard nearly nothing from the MTA—the tram's intercom was broken, as well as the emergency power and the diesel engine that should have worked in case the emergency power fails.

The Swiss-made tram dates from 1976, and there is no engineer in the city capable of maintaining the system. This suggests that there is a woefully inadequate budget being invested for maintenance. The tram is run by Interfac, on behalf of the Roosevelt Island Operating Corporation of the State of New York (RIOC). RIOC is a state public benefit corporation created in 1984 to run the Island's services and complete the Island's development. The MTA has a deal with RIOC to be able to profit from using the tram, and trusts Interfac to keep the tram going. However, Interfac's motto seems to be "run it until it breaks, and then we'll see if we can fix it."

The MTA subscribes to the same philosophy. Two winters ago, the A train stopped running because of a fire. A homeless person used an underground subway room as his winter home. While trying to make it warm, he lit a fire that destroyed electrical outlets required for the proper functioning of the A train. The MTA could not fix it because such outlets were made by factories that were already closed by the 1940s. The MTA announced that it would take more than five years to modernize the A train, one of the most important lines of the NY subway system.

Unless that happens, people will have to put up with continual irregularities in the running of the A train. Modernization can take men to the moon, but it's not there yet for the people of New York.

But let's get back to the tram and make a long story short. At the end of too many



My mother, me, and two of our rescuers

hours holding primary necessities, we were informed that we would be rescued by hanging metal cages. The rescue operation was improvised by the NYPD emergency team and the Orthodox Jews tested the first trial of the rescuing operation. They had priority because they were the ones with the most kids. It was a success; they arrived alive and safe. Mayor Bloomberg came to the Island, gave them a big hug in front of the cameras, and declared a happy end to the drama that, just as in the movies, featured NYPD and the Fire Department as the main heroes.

The central question that was forgotten in the middle of the media entertainment was "Why weren't the two backup emergency systems working?" MTA users don't need Hollywood heroes, they need modernization and decent maintenance of the services they pay for. In other words, MTA users need good use of the money they spend on taxes and fares. ☉

Rockefeller Reflections

GEORGIA PATIKOGLOU

As the 2006 Rockefeller University Convocation nears, three Rockefeller University graduate students, who will receive their Ph.D.s at this year's ceremony, reflected with *Natural Selections* on their experiences at The Rockefeller University.

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Natural Selections (NS): What has been the most memorable experience for you at The Rockefeller University?

Daylon James (DJ): The most vivid memory I have from my experiences at Rockefeller was the day I accidentally "nuked" my thumb. I was working with a high concentration of radioactive p32 for a Southern Blot and I didn't realize that I'd broken through two pairs of gloves at the tip of my thumb while closing an Eppendorf tube. I ended up with so much p32 in my nailbed that, even after clipping the nail and scrubbing the tip until it was raw, it was still shooting off the scale on a Geiger counter. Lab Safety even called in the nuclear oncologist to consult—pretty heavy. I like to imagine I acquired some uncanny mutant abilities that day—and oddly, a 3-inch cutting of a cactus I took around that time (~3 years ago) is now as tall as I am. If I was an X-Man, they would call me "The Green Thumb."

Anonymous 1 (A1): Having a party with lab friends on the roof of GSR the night of the Blackout.

Anonymous 2 (A2): I have to say that it was my thesis defense. I was SO nervous!

NS: What do you think is the best part about The Rockefeller University that you will miss the most?

DJ: In my opinion, the best part about The Rockefeller University is its history. The intellectual pedigree of the university instills a sense of pride, confidence, and responsibility in every member of the Rockefeller community. And this is balanced by a pioneering spirit that spurs innovation and encourages bold, ambitious thinking. I will miss walking from one end of campus to the other imagining the details of revolutionary moments past, present, and future in the Rockefeller laboratories.

A1: The great environment in which we work: the faculty club, the beautifully landscaped grounds, the historical buildings with all the great science that's been done in them.

A2: What I will miss the most is the high caliber science that is done here at Rock-

efeller and that I was fortunate to participate in.

NS: What do you think is the worst part about The Rockefeller University?

DJ: The worst part of The Rockefeller University is no fault of the administration. In fact, I can't reasonably blame New York City, nor HSBC, but the most distressing aspect of my graduate education was financial anxiety. I suppose I should be thankful that I've got more than your average opportunity to get my hands on some "experimental subject" money. But I realized the other day, in the middle of an elaborate scheme I arranged to get me across town and back on one metrocard fare (M57 west/M31 east, by the way), that life is too short.

A1: Not enough real collaboration and communication between labs.

A2: I wish I had more money to enjoy all the wonderful, expensive restaurants on the Upper East Side on a regular basis!

NS: What was the most important thing that you learned as a student at The Rockefeller University? On a scientific level? On a personal level?

DJ: I won't boil it down to one thing on a scientific or personal level. But to put it simply (and perhaps obnoxiously), I became a better scientist and a better person. Apart from the technical gains I made in the laboratory, I learned that progress is often slow and incremental, and sometimes, a revolutionary advance is seeded in a failed experiment—every day, every result needs to be used fully. Outside the lab, I grew a lot personally. No need to get into the specifics, but the arc of a thesis is not always so clean, and oftentimes, I got stuck by dead-end experiments or held up by technical bottlenecks. At times like these, it was easy for me to step back from the lab work and follow more personal passions. This time I spent outside the lab was a valuable part of my Rockefeller experience, and it allowed me to come back to my thesis work refreshed and with a new perspective.

A1: I learned how to be a scientist!

A2: I learned how to do science...Basically, every time an experiment failed (and it did...many times) I learned how to improve as a scientist.

NS: How have your expectations about a career in science changed, if at all?

DJ: I never had great expectations for a ro-

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mantic life as a millionaire scientist/playboy, but I think I definitely have come to some realizations regarding a career in science. First of all, I used to imagine science as a relatively solitary pursuit—long hours in the lab poring over your results rewarded with the scarce epiphany. But I've realized that modern science is less and less about an individual's pursuit, than it is about the consolidation of technical and intellectual resources. I believe this is progressive and has certainly fostered innovation, but we have also seen how personal ambition, ego, greed, and ideology can handicap scientific collaborations. With increased attention to the sciences in the media and their resultant politicization, I am aware that my career in science must be chosen with a close eye to the changing landscape on which research is conducted.

A1: My expectations about a career in science have not changed. I still feel that it's a very difficult path to take, and one that requires an inordinate amount of dedication and personal sacrifice.

A2: I have always loved science...and this is what I want to do.

NS: What, in your opinion, should be done to improve the graduate program?

DJ: There's a whole squad of people devoted to improving the graduate program, and they're doing a great job. My advice, in addition to all the administrative, infrastructural, and scientific progress that is ongoing at Rockefeller, is to engage the non-scientific community more. One of the great things about a graduate experience in New York is the city itself and the wealth of experience it provides. I've lived here all my life and still found more of

the city in these years than I would have guessed. I hope all the students at Rockefeller have the same opportunities.

A1: I think the graduate program is wonderfully run and was perfect for me. I think there is maybe a lack of cohesiveness among the student body, which may be encouraged by having more student events, but I'm not convinced that would be the best for everyone.

A2: Everything was great. One thing that I probably would have liked to see is more graduate student seminars to give us more opportunities to present our work outside the lab. ☉

Addicted to What?

JOSÉ F. MORALES AND ALLAN COOP

The relationship between Science and Society has been an ongoing subject in our previous articles in *Natural Selections*. This relationship seems to follow a story as old as life itself. It is a story that sees lovers' attentions constantly shifting in an eternally self-fulfilling dance. One partner showers the other with gifts that eventually become taken for granted as attentiveness wanes and other interests call. The first partner, unexpectedly jilted, becomes cold and withholding. The other, suddenly feeling the loss, once again becomes attentive. Renewed intentions restore and affirm the relationship and favors and gifts flow freely as the partners go round again. We consider that this simple metaphor may also describe the relationship between Science and the Public, who also appear to revolve in similar codependent cycles.

As with any relationship, the liaison between Science and the Public is based on a social contract, a contract where federal funding favors are received in exchange for Public benefits. Just as many partners make promises, Science claims not only that more basic research means "more jobs, higher wages, shorter hours, more abundant crops, more leisure for recreation, for study, for learning how to live without...the burden [of] ages past", but also on the basis of its capacity to contribute to the value of political decision making that it is "key to democracy". In turn the Public promises that, in return for the Public benefit, US federal investment in Science will be true. This vow was maintained during the Cold War with the major recipients of federal research funding being the physical sciences. Subsequently, the vow

has been renewed with the biomedical sciences.

As no relationship exists in a vacuum, the Public-Science affair has been strongly influenced by its historical milieu. Based on a strong commitment by the Public to Science during the Second World War, the history of this relationship describes a spiraling game driven in turns by either the Public's shifting concerns or Science's financial need. Thus, Science most satisfied its curiosity in fields of basic research linked to the Public's changing priorities, both political (Cold War, war on terrorism) and economic (the Internet)³.

The Public's lack of concern about how Science actually delivers the benefits leaves Science remarkably free to choose its goals and methods albeit within the Public's constraints. However, Science tells a tale that gives the opposite impression⁴. All who would listen have been regaled with stories of henpecking by Public intrusion (via government) and willful neglect in the face of Public hostility and ignorance. Science was so convincing that, for example, the total federal research spending in universities has gone up every year without fail, in both good and bad economic times. This spending started at \$253 million in 1953 and rose to \$26.3 billion in 1998 (2001 dollars)⁵. However, the long-term record of Science and the Public's relationship shows that a greater and greater Public research allowance predictably goes hand-in-hand with more complaints of inadequate support. Further, Science gives dire warnings of the urgent need to avert serious damage to the relationship, and to the future of Science's research programs⁶. The Public gives and gives, while

ACADEMIA NUTS



cartoon by Sean Taverna

"Is THAT enough GFP expression?"

Science continually complains of never having enough.

The stability of the relationship has been based on the truthiness of Science's funding pleas that have never really coincided with the Public's concerns or political intent. When Science needed funds, Science would wring its hands and plead with the Public to prevent the inevitable negative outcomes of any shortfall. The Public answers, for example, by first doubling Science's NIH allowance, but ultimately leveling it and then reducing it.

One might ask if such a relationship can really be healthy and if so, can it go on, or is there a way to improve what has always been accepted as a fruitful balance? Currently, the real question is whether for all of Science's claims of importance ("key to democracy"), can it survive a collision between its vow to provide benefits and the Public's meandering political interests and desires? ☉

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many more stories like this, and hiking or biking in these mountains quickly brings you to historic places of true or imaginary stories and of course the ever-present *Nibelung* saga. That requires a lot of beer to quench the thirst and calm the nerves at the end of the day.

But more so, you should head out of the mountains to the northeast to the river Main. Here you find lovely towns such as Miltenberg, known for their fine wine. I particularly enjoy springtime there since the pastures along the river are covered with blooming trees a little earlier than in many other places. Leaving the river quickly leads you back into beer countries around Nuremberg or Bamberg. There you will also encounter sausage and sauerkraut again either combined with Schlenkerla “smoke beer” in Bamberg, which I am told is absolute heaven, or with a Tucher Hefeweizen in Nuremberg to celebrate a game during the soccer championship.

The nice thing about Germany is that the public transportation system is quite well developed and you can travel by rail even between smaller places. After spending quite some time in the south of Germany, I would like to introduce you to the coast of the Baltic Sea. Traveling east from Thomas Mann’s Lübeck brings you to bigger and smaller towns along the coast line of the Baltic Sea, which fashion the characteristic brick buildings of the *Hanse*, a union of rich trading cities in Europe formed in the late Middle Ages. Some

yummy marzipan from Niederegger in Lübeck will help you over phases of low blood sugar levels when cruising along remote but lovely parkways, which seem to end only beyond the horizon. And then there are the beaches: long, sandy, and white, such as on the isle of Usedom, also known as the bathtub of Berlin.

Once you have spent enough time in the salty waves of the Baltic Sea, you should head back to Berlin and explore the buzz and vibes in various neighborhoods. A tour on foot through “Mitte” past historic sites, old and new government buildings, embassies, and museums is a must. But don’t be afraid, there are plenty of street cafes and beer gardens in which to relax and refresh, and of course the Bundespressestrand, a beach on the river Spree in the district of the government where everybody is invited to relax from heavy duties.

This should be the end of my piece were it not for my hometown, which deserves the last note. Cologne—or Köln as we say it—is of course the greatest place in the universe, and every time I return to the city I twist my neck in the train to get the first glimpse of the “Dom,” our cathedral, which still dominates the silhouette of the city. Although you will inevitably encounter quite some beer, sauerkraut and sausage during your trip in Germany, I hope that I could convey the idea that there is much more to this country than just food and soccer. ☉

Summer in the City

AILEEN MARSHALL

New York City has been called the “Capital of the World.” There are so many exciting things to see and do in the city. Unfortunately, it can also be one of the most expensive cities to live in or visit. That makes it tough for us in the academic sector who don’t make Wall Street salaries. However, come the hot summer days, there are a wide range of outdoor activities that are either free or inexpensive.

Probably the best known are the free concerts on the Great Lawn in Central Park. The New York Philharmonic will present its usual two concerts this year: on Wednesday July 12, works by Tchaikovsky and Dvořák; and Tuesday July 18 featuring Prokofiev and Beethoven. Concerts start at 8 p.m. with fireworks afterwards. In August, the Metropolitan Opera gives two free presentations: *La Traviata* on August 22 and *Rigoletto* on August 23. These four concerts are famous for people picnicking on the Great Lawn, usually with wine and cheese. Enter the park at 79th or 85th Street and Fifth Avenue. If you are more interested in hearing the concert, arrive early to get a place up front. The more serious picnickers are toward the south end. More information about these concerts can be found at <http://www.lincolncenter.org>.

Another great Central Park event series is SummerStage. At Rumsey Playfield, the series showcases a wide range of music, dance, and spoken word productions. Most events are free, but there are a few benefit concerts put on throughout the summer. The headliners this year include Audra McDonald, Edie Brickell, Joan Didion, Bonnie Raitt, and Fiona Apple. Enter the park at 69th Street and Fifth Avenue, and follow the path to Rumsey Playfield. For some of the more popular artists, a line forms in front of the gate well beforehand. There are bleacher seats in back and Astroturf up front, sometimes with folding chairs. You can bring in food, but no glass bottles. There are food vendors inside. For a complete schedule, go to www.summerstage.org.

One of the best Central Park activities is Shakespeare in the Park. Produced by the Public Theater and presented at the Delacorte Theater, this year’s plays will be *Macbeth*, from June 13 to July 9, and Bertolt Brecht’s *Mother Courage and Her Children* featuring Meryl Streep, from August 8 to September 3. Tickets, though free, must be obtained by standing on line in front of the Public Theater on Lafayette Street or at the Delacorte Theater in the park. Tickets are distributed at 1 p.m. on the day of the performance. These

are very good productions which usually draw a crowd. The complete schedule can be found at www.publictheater.org.

Lincoln Center hosts some fun and inexpensive events in the summer. Lincoln Center Out of Doors presents a range of international music and dance events, with some special events for children. This series is free and runs from August 4–27 this year. Midsummer Night Swing is a run of dance events with everything from salsa to disco. There are group dance lessons at 6:30 p.m. and live music at 7:30 p.m. Tickets are \$15 and can be purchased on the day of the event or online. Both series are on the Josie Robertson Plaza at Lincoln Center. More information can be found at <http://www.lincolncenter.org>.

HBO sponsors a summer film series at Bryant Park on Monday nights. The movies this year range from Hitchcock’s *The Birds* to *Rocky*. Blankets and food are allowed. The lawn opens at 5 p.m., but there is usually a crowd gathered well in advance to get a spot. The movies begin at sunset, and they show an old Warner Bros. cartoon beforehand. People will cheer for Porky Pig’s famous sign off (...That’s all folks!). The complete schedule is at <http://www.bryantpark.org>. At both the Central Park Great Lawn concerts and

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Bryant Park, it is traditional to have some members of your group arrive early to secure a spot, and have some predetermined arrangement of balloons or a flag for the rest of the group to find.

Another great venue is Hudson River Park. It runs for five miles along the river and hosts a plethora of summer events, all free. The MoonDance series features a live band on Sunday nights, ranging in styles from swing to tango. On Pier 54, on West 14th Street, dance lessons are given at 6:30 p.m. and the bands start at 7 p.m. The RiverRocks series, also on Pier 54, focuses on up-and-coming musicians. The River Flicks events

features two series of outdoors movies. The Wednesday night movies are held on Pier 54 from July 5–August 23. The theme this year is “One Mean Summer” including such great movies as *Rosemary’s Baby* and *Goodfellas*. The Friday night movies are more family oriented, including such fare as *Willy Wonka* and *March of the Penguins*. These are shown on Pier 46 at Charles and West Streets. Both movie series start at sunset. Free popcorn is available if you get there early. Some seating is provided, or you can bring a blanket to sit on. The RiverFlicks events are usually not as crowded as the Bryant Park movies. The Hudson River Park Trust also host several other series of free summer events; more

information can be found at <http://www.hudsonriverpark.org>.

The River-to-River Festival, meant to boost the downtown economy, hosts almost 500 different free cultural events June through September. Information about these many events can be found at <http://www.rivertorivernyc.org>.

Two good websites to find information about these and other events in the city are [newyork.citysearch.com](http://www.newyork.citysearch.com) and <http://www.newyorkkled.com>. The NewYorkkled site also includes a complete calendar of the city’s many street fairs. With all of these options available, one can have a great summer in the city without going broke. ☉

Elevated Status

ROB W. NAND

Midnight. Moonlight. April. The dimly-lit first floor basement of Weiss Building. A figure lies unconscious on the floor, both arms outstretched wide. A cleaner ending her shift stumbles across the body, raises the alarm, and the victim is transferred to hospital. The rest is silence, until now.

I was a doctor in the Emergency Room that night. As the patient began to regain consciousness, he fretfully murmured strange discordant fragments of conversation. Suddenly I recognized a name, and then another, but what he was saying was beyond recognition, beyond understanding. He was talking about The Rockefeller University where I did thesis work as part of my M.D.-Ph.D. training. Before I left the ER I had heard a strange and terrible tale that shook me to my very foundations. I have spent some time carrying out my own independent investigation of what he said, and I have now gathered evidence to prove that he was speaking the truth.

The man in the hospital had recently joined RU as an elevator technician. Despite his best efforts at his work, he could not remedy the excessive wait time, overcrowding, and periodic complete unavailability of elevator service across campus. He began to notice that the elevators were showing unusual patterns of activity, and one day whilst carrying out a routine repair the reason was revealed. The RU elevators have been fitted with a calling system (known as “Rising Phoenix” technology) that is activated by a simple remote control small enough to be added to a keychain. A subset of Faculty has these remote control devices, enabling them to usurp the eleva-

tor system at will. The most powerful individual of the group even has the capacity to make an elevator run express, his transportation known as Elevator Force One.

The Faculty members in possession of these remote controls belong to a shadowy and sinister group known as *Opus Darwini*, a secret organization of descendants of

technician went to confront a secret meeting of *Opus Darwini* that was taking place in the opulent restrooms on the first floor of Weiss. The ruthless individuals laughed at his pleas for fair and equitable elevator access. After he was brutally attacked, to reinforce their contempt he was left on the floor with his arms positioned to symbol-



“I say we take the stairs.”

Charles Darwin who conspire to suppress the true story of intelligent design in order that they may maintain their positions of power and luxury lifestyles.

They try to avoid all contact with individuals not of their group, hence the need for their own elevator system. The key creed of this organization is scientific purification through pain, which they achieve by inflicting barbaric ritualistic experiments on their scientific underlings.

On that fateful April night, the elevator

ize the elevator open door button.

The most disturbing part of the whole horrific situation is that I have also discovered that *Opus Darwini* is planning to use The Rockefeller University for the completely diabolical scheme of...Sorry, my food delivery is here, I’ll e-mail the rest after dinner. ☉

Editor’s note. We did not receive any further e-mails, and despite repeated attempts to contact him by e-mail, phone, or in person, we have been completely unable to locate Rob. If anyone can help us to find him, please get in touch.



This month, *Natural Selections* features Oscar Flores Jr., Mailroom Clerk
Country of Origin: USA

New York State of Mind

1. How long have you been living in New York? Almost my whole life. When I was 17, I moved to Philadelphia for about six months with a friend from high school. I just needed a change of atmosphere. It was OK; but I felt homesick from the moment I stepped on the bus and saw the World Trade Center Towers disappear in the distance. I could have filled buckets with my tears.

2. Where do you live? I'm about 20 minutes from the city in Ridgewood, Queens. A quiet little neighborhood.

3. Which is your favorite neighborhood? It's a toss up, between Williamsburg, Brooklyn and The Village in the city. Both very hip and trendy areas, loaded with interesting and open-minded (successful) young people. I like surrounding myself with positive energy and it's easy to find in these places. They're also great places for networking.

4. What do you think is the most overrated thing in the city? And underrated? The most overrated thing in the city would have to be the ball dropping on New Year's Eve. Being packed in with thousands of other people in the blistering cold is not my idea of fun, simply for the comfort factor. The most underrated would be the amount of compassion New Yorkers are capable of showing to others. My experiences have allowed me to see differently i.e. the World Trade Center attacks.

5. What do you miss most when you are out of town? My Mom (laughing out loud). Central Park after dark with a full bodied grand cru (in my experience, great wine is hard to come by out of town, unless you're in Europe), a velour blanket, a pillow and good company. NYC's nightlife, everywhere I've been outside of NYC is a ghost town after 2 a.m.

6. If you could change one thing about NYC, what would that be? I think that children and young adults should be made aware of their power to control the decisions made by officials of the City of New York. People should learn that changes shouldn't have to wait till election day, and to be involved in decision making. We should be involved in procedures and be educated on rules and regulations that govern our city daily. The less involved we are, the less power we have.

7. Describe a perfect weekend in NYC. After work, head towards the West Side just off 7th Avenue to "The Place," one of my favorite spots in the city for new American cuisine, intimate atmosphere, great food. Afterwards, we're off to experience New York's nightlife. Salsa, reggae, hip hop, dancing at New York's trendy clubs is a great way to burn off the calories and meet new people.

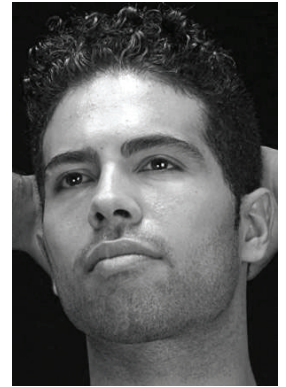
Clubs close at 4 a.m. so when the party dies down we cab it to 32nd Street just off of 5th Avenue to Wonjo's. My favorite Koreatown restaurant, open 24 hours a day, you can get Surf'n Turf, marinated to perfection. On the second floor you can even have your meal barbecued over an open flame in the center of your table. You can't get a better meal at 6 a.m. After satisfying my taste buds, it's off to the beach. Rockaway Beach Bay 4 is usually a great place to get away from crowds. A blanket and a warm wind is all you need to induce a nap that will replenish your energy. Saturday afternoon is a good time for rock climbing at Chelsea Piers. With a ten thousand square foot man-made climbing wall, time flies. Fun has never been so physically beneficial. From Chelsea Piers we head towards Macdougall, just off West 3rd Street to Lantanera. The best spot for gourmet brick oven pizza (goat cheese and prosciutto...Mmm, my favorite) and high quality wine. Mood music, fireplaces, candlelight, and the best homemade desserts in the city. The pumpkin cognac cheesecake is enough not only to impress, but to have

a date fall in love with you. With closing time at 4 a.m., it's perfect for a late night snack. A short walk away is Bleeker Street, home to many bars providing live band music and great social atmosphere, check out the Bitter End. An hour or so before sunrise my feet guide me to Battery Park City where Blue Light Park is the perfect place to unwind. Then it is time for breakfast. Yaffa's on St. Mark's is a punky/geek chic style diner open 24 hours (great waffles). After the grub, we migrate uptown to Central Park roller skating rink to use up the remainder of our energy. Once we're spent, the L train to Lorimer Street in Williamsburg, where one block away from Metropolitan on Leonard Street you will find Fortunado's. Real Italians serve the best cappuccinos and natural gelatos. You should have just enough energy to get home and keep your eyes open to make it through an episode of *The Sopranos* and get enough rest to be prepared for Monday.

8. What is the most memorable experience you have had in NYC? Approximately four years ago the local news reported the possibility of a meteor shower that would be close enough to be seen from Strawberry Fields in Central Park. I was fortunate enough to bring a blanket, and at 2 a.m. witnessed a once in a lifetime two-hour light show provided by the cosmos, unforgettable for a city boy like me.

9. If you could live anywhere else, where would that be? I must say I wouldn't mind having a small villa in the Caribbean, St. Maarten to be exact, but I still don't think that I would be happy being away from my concrete paradise. Life isn't the same without the constant feel of life.

10. Do you think of yourself as a New Yorker? Why? Why? I think I am the prime example of a New Yorker. I was born and raised in Brooklyn, New York. Growing up in the South Side of Williamsburg wasn't easy. But my parents instilled in me morals, values, and the understanding that the most important things in life are the love of family, the love of self, and the continuous struggle to accomplish goals. They also taught me that success is a never-ending journey; once you have accomplished your goals you must create new ones. I have taken what they taught me and let it guide me and motivate me. Today I have a day job at Rockefeller University. I am also pursuing an acting career, which is moving along pretty quickly. I have been paid to do leading roles in film shorts and I have been an extra in a few commercials and movies to be released in the near future. I write poetry and screenplays which I hope will be published and produced. And I have also recently been certified by the National Academy of Sports Medicine and have started my own Web site for specified personal training of all populations. Being ambitious, determined, business-oriented, well-rounded, optimistic, resourceful, and well aware of the world and all that it has to offer, is what I feel makes me a New Yorker. It is not a cake walk and often times I compromise sleep and personal time to make it all work, while also making time to enjoy the many things New York has to offer. Knowing that success is a road with no end and sticking to the path with a steady pace and a head held high is what makes me a New Yorker. It's a long and winding road, a tough journey, but whoever said being a New Yorker was easy? ☺



The Rockefeller Hit List

SRIRAM

It has become so commonplace to use Internet search engines that “google” has entered the English lexicon as a verb. The British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) recently reported that “most people using a search engine expect to find what they are looking for on the first page of results. At most, people will go through three pages of results before giving up”. In other words, if people do not find your Website on the first three pages, for all purposes, you do not exist in the virtual world. How good is the presence of The Rockefeller University and its celebrated faculty on the World Wide Web? Here are some findings of *Natural Selections*’ investigation into the “googleability” of our university.

If one searches “Rockefeller” on Google, one indeed finds that the homepage of The Rockefeller University (<http://www.rockefeller.edu>) appears as the first result. This, of course, does not mean that most people querying for “Rockefeller” are looking for our university instead of Rockefeller Center or information about the Rockefeller family. In this regard, a subtle hint is provided by Google Trends², a new Google tool that allows one to see how often a particular search term is used over a certain period of time. Entering “Rockefeller” in Google Trends indicates that the volume of the search is markedly higher towards the end of November, presumably coinciding with the annual Christmas tree lighting ceremony at the Rockefeller Center. Given that thousands of tourists are getting our university Website as the first hit when they search for “Rockefeller,” should we start blaming Google for the common confusion between Rockefeller University and Rockefeller Center?

Having witnessed the sterling reputation of RU on Google, it was natural to investigate if the RU faculty also came out on top. What happens if one clicks on the first hit obtained by googling the name of the faculty member? Of the 73 faculty listed on the Rockefeller Website³, one finds that the first hit obtained by querying for first and last names together successfully yields some information for 65 of them. A majority of the successful first hits either correspond to the lab Web page or a brief research description. The number of successes improves to 72 if one uses middle initials in the search query as well. There is just one instance of an RU faculty member being upstaged by a more famous namesake.

This exercise becomes more entertain-

ing if one just uses first names or last names. Interestingly, a couple of RU faculty pages appear as the first hit by querying for first names alone. Last names fare better, with 22 successful first hits. While these numbers might be disappointingly low, the milieu of first hits that one gets as a result of “failures” is fascinating in itself. One finds, for instance, the Web page of a former Mr. Universe (Günter Schlierkamp) and of a former presidential candidate (Senator John Kerry), a site dedicated to a tennis star (Maria Sharapova), the webpage of a widely read op-ed columnist (Tom Friedman), and a couple of mature content sites. One also learns of the requirement of Criminal Offender Record (CORI) checks in the state of Massachusetts. Why Criminal Offender Record is abbreviated as CORI and not COR remains a mystery.

At this point, one might justifiably wonder if the successful hits are a result of the uniqueness of the name or because of popularity on the Internet. Naturally, we don’t expect our faculty to be as popular as “Britney Spears,” but how often does a netizen search for an RU faculty member? Google Trends provides a partial answer: only 8 of the potential 73 queries (each query consisted of the first and last name without any initials) have sufficient volume to generate frequency statistics. It is hard to decipher the intent of a search query and it is quite possible that the high volume is an artefact. For instance, the “George Cross” is a prestigious gallantry award and is probably the reason for the high search volume for that query. However, there is one individual in whose case we may rule out artefacts on the basis that the first three pages of search results contain references to this individual alone. That individual happens to be our president, Sir Paul Nurse. What is even more surprising is that in December 2004, there were more queries for “Paul Nurse” than “Rockefeller University.” A closer analysis reveals the reason: the search volume for “Paul Nurse” was unusually high on December 21, 2004, a day after the president appeared on *The Charlie Rose Show*!

So that brings us to the end of this little exercise. Our investigation has revealed some curious facts, and given us the great satisfaction of knowing that RU enjoys the top position on Google. You may now draw your own conclusions about the “googleability” of RU and its faculty. *Natural Selections*, however, recommends that you focus

on searching for results rather than results of searches. ☉

Disclaimer: Given the distributed nature of Google servers, and the routine updating of their index, search results do vary from time to time. Some of the numbers in this article may change as a result of this variation.

References:

1. <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/technology/4900742.stm>
2. <http://www.google.com/trends>
3. <http://www.rockefeller.edu/research/heads.php>



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Movie Screening

ANDRÉS GOTTFRIED

Shot on location in St. Petersburg, Mexico City, Nairobi, and Los Angeles, *Transit* follows four main characters on a journey across four continents that finds them exploring emotion and sexuality in a candid and gripping way. Tatjana dreams of escaping St. Petersburg. She thinks she has found a man that can take her away. In Mexico City, Champinon struggles to find himself a girlfriend under the shadow of his confident, good-looking best friend, Blanco. In Los Angeles, Asha discovers that Vip, the man of her dreams, has been cheating on her. In Kenya, Matthew finds inspiration and enlightenment by diving into Nairobi’s burgeoning hip-hop culture. The heat is on, and our cast of characters reacts to the building pressure to create *Transit*.

Transit is a striking window into the issues and consequences that young people are facing today due to the increasing presence of HIV/AIDS worldwide.

Transit is Staying Alive’s first ever TV film, which premiered on World Aids Day in December 2005. Staying Alive is an international campaign which provides information on HIV/AIDS prevention and protection, promotes safer lifestyle choices, and encourages people to fight the stigma and discrimination which still surrounds the disease.

Transit (2005) by Staying Alive will be screened on Monday June 5 at 8 p.m. in Caspary Auditorium. Admission is free.