the course’s traditional introduction to economic theory.

Leadership online. Harvard Kennedy School has introduced its “Public Leadership Credential,” a six-unit online program (two segments each in evidence for decisions, leadership and ethics, and policy design and delivery), leading to a credential and, for those so inclined, a possible pathway into the mid-career M.P.A. The credential broadens access to the school’s lecturers and expertise; opens new avenues for revenue; and, like Harvard Business School Online’s foundational offerings, can expand the pool of potential degree-seekers on campus.

Urbanism online. The Graduate School of Design’s “future of the American city” project—conducting research initially in Miami, on subjects ranging from transportation to adapting to climate change—has launched an e-resource (http://fotac.gsd.harvard.edu/) to disseminate its findings.

Miscellany. The Arnold Arboretum has installed a solar array with 450 kilowatts of capacity, and associated storage, to provide up to 30 percent of the energy required to run its Weld Hill Research and Education Building....Rothenberg professor of the humanities Homi K. Bhabha, director of the Mahindra Humanities Center since 2005, concluded his service as of July 1....Harvard University Health Services announced that effective June 17, it will stop providing in-person overnight urgent care; calls for service made between 10:00 p.m. and 8:00 a.m. will be referred to a nurse advice line, a model it tested beginning last December....Of the 1,950 successful applicants to the College class of 2023 (see Brevia, May-June, page 30), some 83 percent accepted—up 1.3 percentage points from last year; that high yield left only a few spaces open for applicants on the waiting list....Loeb associate professor of engineering and applied sciences Jelani Nelson, an algorithm specialist whose University appointment was widely hailed (Harvard Portrait, May-June 2015, page 19), is departing for a professorship at the University of California, Berkeley.

At first, we were geniuses. Eрудite intellectuals with a subtle eye for shifts in mood and a proclivity for name-dropping the film theorist Walter Benjamin. We bandied words like “juxtaposition” and “interiority,” belabored skepticism of documentary’s “objectivity,” and referred to every directorial decision as “interesting...” This was before we’d discover our own footage was shaky, our two-minute sound excerpts full of microphone noises and rustling. Each week we’d watch experimental films from Harvard’s Sensory Ethnography Lab—which The New York Times lauded for producing “some of the most daring and significant documentaries of recent years”—and bask in all of our grand possibilities.

Our first assignment in Visual and Environmental Studies 52 (“Introduction to Nonfiction Videomaking”) was to film a two-minute scene without zooming or cutting. I rented a tripod and Sony Z150 camera from the equipment lab in the basement of Sever and lugged them to the Dudley Co-op, where my friend (and the other current Ledecky Fellow) Isa was in the kitchen chopping broccoli. At first, my hands fumbled while tilting the camera, and I struggled to extend my tripod to the right height. But after some practice, the motions became intuitive. Tucked into a corner, my back pressed against the refrigerator door, I watched life unfurl in front of me: Isa flitting from the spice cabinet to the industrial oven, radiant in her magenta jacket; friends sniffing around for the previous night’s sourdough; the exuberant greetings; the vegetables sizzling; the spontaneous harmony of all of these activities occurring at once, so that the kitchen ceased to be a kitchen but became its own little society instead.

“Part of the attraction to film is its affinity with life itself: the movement on the screen evoking the movement we ourselves experience outside the cinema, the seeing evoking our own seeing, and hearing evoking hearing,” my Cross-Cultural Filmmaking handbook had said. What I found engrossing about filming was the ability to communicate how I experienced the world to those outside my walled-off interior space: the humor of plastic bags of pasta hanging over Isa’s head, the political correctness of care expressed by tattered “Support the Strike” signs. Later, my classmates praised my “intimate framing” of the Co-op and marveled at the poise with which Isa holds herself. I was moved by my sense that they could see in her what I see through the rhythms of our three-and-a-half-year friendship.

Junior year, most of my friends took part in a mass exodus from River Central to the Co-op at 3 Sacramento Street, north of the Yard. Without geographic proximity, our relationships felt tenuous, fastened only by memories of prior happiness. I regularly misinterpreted their introversion as coldness or dislike. So when I formalized stipend for completing 100 hours of service. During the summer, they will be in contact with faculty and public-service staff members through webinars, and with Harvard student peers and fellows through summer work. The whole class will then be invited to participate in a pre-orientation day of service in Cambridge, Somerville, or Boston.

Khurana said, “We were inspired by President Bacow’s call for a public-service role for the University,” and sought ways to “infuse our mission” of educating students through transformative experiences “that will prepare them for a life of service and leadership”—in this case, “right from the start” of their undergraduate years.

The program’s origins, details, and role in public-service programming—and pending changes to integrate those activities with students’ academic and curricular work—are detailed at harvardmag.com/service-summer-19.

~J.S.R.

THE UNDERGRADUATE

Documentary Styles

by Catherine Zhang ’19

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my relationship to the Co-op by signing on as a “quarterboarder” this semester, it felt like liberation from insecurity. I served trays of misshapen gnocchi for dinner and blew rainbow bubbles in the front yard; on Thursdays, I bought into the weekly beer fund. As graduation approached, I felt an ardent desire to preserve memories of my friends before we once again splintered away. In February, I asked the Co-op community if I could film my first documentary there.

The discussion of my potential film seemed only to confirm earlier insecurities. “It’ll only be shown to the nine people in my class,” I said nervously, as 20 pairs of eyes stared at me over Sunday dinner. One by one, my friends expressed their reservations: they worried that they’d feel alienated in their own home, that the film would be “fetishizing” or “commodifying” the space. They feared that a tidy, somehow misleading narrative would be imposed on their lives. I felt like a little girl getting let down by a crush who was never in her league. How stupid, I thought. How ignorant of the way things work. I began to cry. The humiliation of crying publicly—face flushed, immobilized at the head of the dining table—triggered a secondary wave of sobs, and then a third, for paralyzing moralities. “In a small close-knit society, who you think.”

Hirsh became exasperated with me: “You seem to have a moral opposition to shooting anything.”

For most of my time at Harvard, my perceptions of filmmaking have been dominated by cocky, well-intentioned men whose “Do now, apologize later” approach is a source of resentment and envy. On one hand, they sometimes act as though everyone else exists at their disposal. On the other hand, they fundamentally believe in their capabilities. Unlike me, they do not undermine their accomplishments with vague statements like “I did a thing.” I met a few of them freshman year, when I signed up to become a director for the sketch comedy troupe On Harvard Time, and became so intimidated during the first workshop that I dropped out.

For the first few years of college I restricted myself to behind-the-scenes work, organizing shooting schedules and trying out sketch writing. I nudged my way into artistic production: a private email, a small addition to a joke-brainstorming document. As my age began to confer more authority, I made my way onto set as a producer. But by senior year, I was tired of depending on other people to articulate my vision. “I want more immersive experience in the actual camera work instead of just logistics and management,” I wrote in my VES 52 application.

Several weeks after the deadline for the semester’s main project proposal, I settled on making my documentary about hip-hop at Harvard from the late 1980s to the present. In 1988, two white Jewish sophomores living in Cabot—David Mays ’90 and Jon Shecter ’90—circulated a one-page newsletter to advertise their hip-hop show on WHRB. That newsletter went on to become The Source, a pioneering force in hip-hop journalism and the longest-running rap periodical in the world. Hip-hop is filled with braggadocious, self-promoting characters who have little patience for abstract conversation about the ethics of things; in this sense, they’re ideal subjects for vicarious living, enabling me to imagine a world in which paralyzing moralities do not inhibit me. I spent spring break sending cautious emails confirming that I had explicit permission to film. “Would it be okay if…” they’d always begin. I lined up shoots very slowly.

Most sequences I filmed entailed one-on-one interactions with familiar faces: a beat-making demonstration in an Adams dorm room, a tour of Harvard’s hip-hop archive with my more confident friend Marcelo. But in order to demonstrate how widely hip-hop permeated Harvard’s campus, I needed to meet students after hours, at a party. I sent a few tentative Facebook messages to the WHRB president, who directed me to the pregame for the radio station’s hip-hop and electronic section.

Even so, I texted a friend, asking if I could film his birthday party instead: “If you could
just play ‘Gold Digger’ for like two minutes, I'll be all set.” He never answered.

When I arrived at the WHRB event, I saw a group of mostly strangers bathed in lilac lighting. I panicked, keenly aware of the intrusiveness of the camera, notifying everyone that their movements were being watched. The host of the party gave me a slight nod, and I shuffled over. “I’m nervous that guests will be mad at me because

I didn’t get their permission,” I said to him, as if actively constructing a reality in which they’d be upset, to absolve myself of the responsibility of being there. He shrugged off my worries: “You’re fine, dude—no one really cares.” And they didn’t, really. I sat on the edge of someone’s bed and caught people pouring gin into Solo cups, talking about new music, dancing. And when the pregame ended, I slipped my camera into my room and walked over to Sacramento Street to party with my friends.

In college, I gravitated toward writing as a form of concealment, retreat. I found it reassuring that when putting words on the page I got to process life on my own terms, turning over experiences until I settled upon what precisely to reveal. I couldn’t determine how people would receive what I say, but I could calibrate my presentation; I could meticulously select and arrange anecdotes to circumscribe how they could interpret me. Best of all, I created and failed privately. No one knew what went into the Google Doc, except my editor. When my thoughts were finally released into the world, open for all to see, I could restrict them to their initial location by not sharing, leery of establishing definitively: “This Is What I Think.”

With documentary filmmaking, what I captured seemed less subject to my control. There are relationships to manage that are altered by the presence of the camera; the people you film may not know fully what they’re consenting to. Then again, neither do you.

This uncertainty, while nerve-racking, can be strange and beautiful, too: my documentary led me to develop a funny friendship with Jon Shecter, who drove to Cambridge for my film and showed some old issues of The Source to a small crew of undergraduate hip-hop fans I’d gathered to meet him. I posted information about my documentary screening publicly on my Facebook and sent the link to some of the people I used to be intimidated by. When I immersed myself in these relationships, exposed my vulnerabilities, I subjected myself to a process of change that cannot be controlled. It’s not just how the camera transforms your subject, but how it transforms you.

Berta Greenwald Ledecky Undergraduate Fellow

Catherine Zhang ’19 is trying to film another documentary.

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