ARGUING ABOUT ARCHITECTURE

Joan Wickersham’s exploration of “Bricks and Politics” (September–October, page 50) evokes a famous remark, attributed to Marcel Duchamp, that “all great art is irritating at first.” This does not, of course, imply that all irritating art becomes great. Personally: Hollein yes, Spangler Center no.

Dan Rosenfeld, M.B.A. ’79
Beverly Hills, Calif.

We have been cursed with the sort of architectural abomination that darkens the cover of this issue of Harvard Magazine, the high-rise housing complex at One Western Avenue. The worst of the 1990s could not have produced a more jumbled, less attractive building on that site. It reflects nothing of its context. It mars and shadows the beautiful neo-Georgian campus of the Harvard Business School and will be an eyesore as well for the new Harvard campus in Allston.

Sadly, one of the truly commendable recent additions to Harvard’s building inventory, the Spangler Center, by noted architect Robert A. M. Stern, is dismissed by critics who favor “visionary” designs as looking like a very nice country club. However, Stern got it right when he argued for continuing Harvard’s venerable red-brick-Georgian look. It is an important marketing asset in a fiercely competitive era for students and ought to be perpetuated.

This is doubtless why Princeton University has taken a very different approach. It has hired an award-winning architectural firm to lead the development of a long-term plan for its campus. As a spokesman for the architectural firm said: “The University has adopted an approach of planning complete neighborhoods, rather than individual buildings, in order to avoid ending up with a series of projects that are disconnected.” Word has it that Princeton also wants its new buildings to reflect the style and context of its historical campus.

To me, this sounds like the exact opposite of what Harvard has been doing.

If you are wondering why the Boston Society of Architects’ Parker Medal has not been awarded to any Harvard building since 1994, you need only look at most of the non-traditional buildings Harvard has chosen to construct since then—buildings that honor their context for the most part only by opposing it.

John A. McMullen, M.B.A. ’71, J.D. ’73
Burlington, Vt.

The problem with Harvard architecture is Walter Gropius. Harvard brought him over from Europe instead of hiring America’s seminal architectural genius, Frank Lloyd Wright. Gropius brought with him a distorted vision of Wright’s modernism,
1929. When the world’s first twin lens camera, the legendary Rolleiflex, was launched, Vacheron Constantin was 174 years old.

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A WRITER’S PERFORMANCE
I read with some astonishment the majestically self-congratulatory piece by Stephen Greenblatt purporting to be about writing (“Writing as Performance,” September-October, page 40). It is, I suppose, endeavors so demanding and distinguished a critic and scholar could find in his own practices useful instruction for others. But as we discover how much he hated to give up working even for a day on his current project, the loss and recovery of Lucretius’s “great” philosophical poem; as we learn why (he thought) he didn’t get into Harvard College; as we are led through the opening paragraphs of various of his articles to see how effective they can be; as we find that he was asked to give the Adorno lectures in Germany after the “important” philosopher; and as we share in his delight at the jolly bantering he enjoyed with President Clinton regarding Macbeth, it is difficult to avoid the impression that this piece is less about the craft of scholarly writing than an advertisement for the life, works, and achievements of Professor Greenblatt. Writing as performance to be sure, but must all performance be so depressingly narcissistic?

MICHAEL ROSENTHAL ’58
Campbell professor of the humanities
Columbia University
New York City

GREENBLATT’S recollection of his father’s advice about the proper subject for a Harvard interview—“You have to talk about sports”—reminded me of an interview situation of my own.

One based on pure geometry and technology which lacks the human factor and, consequently, is not organic.

Perhaps Harvard should first look at whether continued growth is appropriate to the quality of education it wishes to provide. The Harvard College experience diminishes as the size of the class and classes grows.

Great architecture must be organic, namely it must grow in unity with its site, era, and environment. If it does that, style becomes irrelevant and designs should satisfy the neighbors as well as the client.

WILLIAM ALIN STORBER ’58
Adjunct professor of architecture,
University of Texas at Austin
Frankfort, Mich.

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LETTERS

In 1983, I was being interviewed by Justice Byron White for a Supreme Court clerkship. I was far more clueless than Greenblatt about sports, but even I knew that Justice White’s earliest claim to fame was as football star “Whizzer” White. I’m pretty sure I hadn’t planned to talk about sports—how could I?—but when I saw an opening in the conversation I mentioned that I’d recently read A River Runs Through It, the first line of which famously reads, “In our family, there was no clear line between religion and fly fishing.” I knew nothing more about fly fishing than what I’d read in the book—nor, at the time, did I know that Justice White was an avid fly fisherman—but I sensed a definite heightening of interest on his part. Of course, I can’t be sure of the factors that went into the justice’s decision, but I did get the job. Fortunately, I was never called on to discuss sports with him again.

Natalie Wexler ’76, G ’79
Washington, D.C.

I am writing to call attention to the inappropriateness of the conventional translation of the title of Lucretius’s poem De Rerum Natura as On the Nature of Things (not Professor Greenblatt’s fault). Joshua Whatmough, the late professor of comparative philology, translated De Rerum Natura as “On the Generation of Nature,” which is more meaningful and reflects the tradition of the genre. Several pre-Socratic poets were natural philosophers and titled their poems in Greek Peri Physeos or “On Nature.” It is to this tradition that the poem of Lucretius belongs. The conventional translation of its title is most fatuous.

Lloyd B. Urdahl ’45, A.M. ’49
Rochester, NY.

PROFESSOR’S POLITICS PANNEd

I write in response to the Harvard Portrait of Professor Howard Gardner (September-October, page 61). I would think the magazine would want to highlight people who actually make the University look good. Gardner certainly does not. The article states that Gardner has argued “for upper limits on the amount of income an American should be allowed to keep and the amount of wealth that can...” No, he does not. The article states that Gardner has argued “for upper limits on the amount of income an American should be allowed to keep and the amount of wealth that can...” No, he does not. The article states that Gardner has argued “for upper limits on the amount of income an American should be allowed to keep and the amount of wealth that can...” No, he does not. The article states that Gardner has argued “for upper limits on the amount of income an American should be allowed to keep and the amount of wealth that can...” No, he does not. The article states that Gardner has argued “for upper limits on the amount of income an American should be allowed to keep and the amount of wealth that can...” No, he does not.

The Editors

A CAREER COLLEAGUE

Christopher (“Kit”) Reed debuted on the masthead of the Harvard Alumni Bulletin, as this magazine was then known, in the issue of September 30, 1968—volume 71, number 1. As managing editor, he joined editor John T. Bethell, then in his third year at the helm, in launching a new design, a new printing process, new features, and a new publishing schedule. The temper of the times put a premium on the new: the cover of that first issue focused on “The Revolution.” By the end of that academic year, of course, Harvard’s campus was shaken to its core by that new tide: in the occupation of University Hall, the bust, and the strike, memorably covered by the magazine of April 28, 1969.

In the many years since, Reed enhanced the magazine’s content invaluably, contributing hundreds of thousands of words on every imaginable subject (and covering more than one-tenth of Harvard’s 356 Commencements, in whose ceremonies and costumes he delights). Had he not written with such humor and grace, and with such wry appreciation for the University’s traditions and foibles, his colleagues would have resented bitterly his calm confidence at the keyboard, no matter how pressing the deadlines.

It is with deep appreciation and affection that we thank Kit Reed for his service to our readers as he retires with this issue (volume 110, number 2), after crafting here and in the September-October magazine features on an art exhibition and on an extraordinary plant scientist—subjects in which he has always been deeply interested. Our sense of loss is tempered by his continuing work at the handle of The College Pump, in ranging across Harvard in search of Treasure, and on occasional reporting assignments.

We welcome to our ranks associate editor Elizabeth Gudrais ’01, a former Harvard Magazine Ledecky Undergraduate Fellow—the first such alumna to graduate to the staff—in the early years of another promising writing career.

~The Editors
be passed on to beneficiaries ($4 million a year and $200 million, respectively)." Gardner continues, “The right wing isn’t just taking over the country, it’s shang-haiing all our values. If there’s a Republican administration after the next election, I would join in efforts for some sort of secession.” Both his policy proposals and his words on secession are completely outrageous.

It is no one’s place to tell others how much income they may keep. I am shocked by his audacity. Threats to secede because you are upset with a political party’s role in the country’s affairs are immature, not to mention unpatriotic. Be a part of the process. Don’t just get upset and stomp off. Is this the type of position the magazine approves of and feels good condoning? If so, you need to take a long, hard look at yourselves and reevaluate what it means to be a responsible member of this great nation.

Drew Thornley, J.D. ’05
Austin, Tex.

Even though Professor Gardner may have multiple intelligences, his sum total is still not enough to let him understand that his “upper income limits” idea is just the old jealousy tax again. Tenured professors like Gardner are just extremely jealous of the harder-working citizen (who isn’t a “bright” Harvard professor) who either makes a lot of money per year, or amasses a nice fortune to leave to the children.

Park Weaver Jr., M.B.A. ’60
La Mesa, Calif.

THE TEACHER AND THE TREES
It was a pleasure to read your article on Peter S. Ashton (“Honorable Forester,” September-October, page 34). The article did not, however, do justice to Professor Ashton’s service as an enthusiastic and inspiring teacher and mentor for undergraduates. I took the freshman seminar in 1982 that he and Professor P.B.

SPEAK UP, PLEASE
Harvard Magazine welcomes letters on its contents. Please write to “Letters,” Harvard Magazine, 7 Ware Street, Cambridge 02138, send comments by e-mail to yourturn@harvard.edu, use our website, www.harvardmagazine.com, or fax us at 617-495-0324. Letters may be edited to fit the available space.
LEON LEADERSHIP

8 November - December 2007

“Engineering renewed” (September-October, page 65) states that the new School of Engineering and Applied Sciences (SEAS) “emerged as the Division of Engineering and Applied Sciences in 1946.” The name was the Division of Engineering and Applied Physics from 1946 onward, although its science scope was broader than just physics when I graduated in 1969. Some—(please turn to page 111)

Toward the end of an adulatory appraisal of Professor Hoffmann, one reads that he considers Charles de Gaulle to be the greatest statesman of his lifetime. Can it be that the professor is unaware of such towering figures as Franklin Roosevelt and Winston Churchill? Or is it possible that Hoffmann’s Francophilia has over-come his judgment?

Norman Birnbaum, Ph.D. ’58
Washington, D.C.

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Washington, D.C.

JIM YONG KIM, M.D. ’91, Ph.D. ’93

Education: Brown ’82, Harvard University M.D. ’91, Ph.D. ’93

Background: Dr. Kim is François-Xavier Bagnoud Professor of Health and Human Rights at the Harvard School of Public Health and Professor of Medicine and Social Medicine at Harvard Medical School. He is chief of the Division of Social Medicine and Health Inequalities at Brigham and Women’s Hospital. From 2004 to 2006 Dr. Kim served as director of the HIV-AIDS program at the World Health Organization. In medical school, Dr. Kim co-founded Partners In Health with Dr. Paul Farmer. Dr. Kim received a MacArthur “Genius” Award in 2003 and in 2006 was selected as one of Time magazine’s 100 most influential people.

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LE PROFESSEUR ON LEADERSHIP

Like many colleagues, I have learned a great deal from Stanley Hoffmann (“Le Professeur,” July-August, page 52). One of the things he conveys is that a bit of self-deprecatory wit goes a long way to cure us of the recurrent threat of that fearsome academic pathogen, pomposity. I recall debating with him three decades ago on what was termed “Eurocommunism.” Stanley expressed some skepticism about the efficacy of the largest of Eurocommunist parties, the one in Italy. I declared that he was being ungenerous, especially since its leader, Enrico Berlinguer, had asked me if Stanley was likely to be Secretary of State. “That,” Stanley responded, “proves my point: they are not fit to govern.” Let’s hope he is with us for a good deal longer.

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Washington, D.C.

WINNING WOMEN’S BASKETBALL

I was perplexed after reading the plainly untrue opening line of “Rebound & Transition” (Sports, July-August, page 74): “Harvard has never won an Ivy League basketball championship.” This myopic observation carelessly—or sex-isly—neglects the 10 league titles won by the women’s basketball team, including during this past 2006–2007 season. The women’s team, under the direction of head coach Kathy Delaney-Smith for the past 25 years, should be celebrated for its success. Your slight of the team in the same issue that features Harvard’s first female president on the cover should be a reminder to readers that women are still not given the respect afforded to men in our society.

Ted Klupinski ’93
Columbus, Ohio

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RADCLIFFE RUGBY

What great, nostalgic fun to read the recent article “Rugger Mothers” (September-October, page 76)! As a petite African-American woman, I still get a kick out of telling people that I played for the Radcliffe Rugby team. For maximum “shock and awe” I casually slip it into conversations with obstinate male colleagues. Works like a charm!

Yvette (Austin) Smith ’92
New York City

CRIMSON SCIENCE FICTION

Indeed, pulp sci-fi had a strong early connection to Harvard via the author Ralph Milne Farley, pseudonym of Roger Sherman Hoar (“Space Invaders,” September-October, page 92). Although I do not know Hoar’s biography thoroughly, I know he was both an alumnus (1909) and professor at Harvard, and a relative (although not direct descendant) of Leonard Hoar, early president of Harvard [1672-1675]. He was, in addition to being a scholar and statesman, a popular and prolific sci-fi author in the 1920s.

Susan Carter ’90
Somerville, Mass.

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Susan Carter ’90
Somerville, Mass.
time later the broader science role was recognized and the name changed to Division of Engineering and Applied Sciences. The SEAS has long been a leader in science and engineering and it is appropriate that it receive the recognition and stature that it deserves within Harvard. Hurrah!!

Jeffrey D. Eagles, S.M. ’69, M.B.A. ’81
South Orleans, Mass.

Editor’s note: Speaking at the SEAS celebration on September 20 (see page 74), President Drew Faust noted that following World War II, the name morphed from the Division of Engineering Sciences to the Division of Applied Science (1951) to the Division of Engineering and Applied Physics (1955) to the Division of Applied Sciences (1975) to the penultimate Division of Engineering and Applied Sciences (1996).

UNFORGIVING FAITHS
In “foundations of faith” (September-October, page 14), Professor Martin Nowak puts forth a rather romantic and unhistorical view of the nature of religions, in claiming they are “generous,” “forgiving,” and “want to help people,” and thus encourage cooperation. Taking the Christian religion as an example, it is hard to imagine a more dreadful history of dissension, intestine wars, persecutions, tortures, killings, et cetera. Apologists may contend that this is a perversion of “true” religion, as it comes down pure from heaven. I don’t know about that; we can all quote Scripture to any purpose, but there can be no question about the actual behavior of religions in this world.

Gibbon ends his famous chapters on Christianity thus: “[It must still be acknowledged, that the Christians, in the course of their intestine dissensions, have inflicted far greater severities on each other, than they had experienced from the zeal of infidels.]”

More recent examples are too obvious to need mention.

William J. Jones, J.D. ’60
Chatham, N.J.

HIGH-STAKES TIDDLYWINKS
My wife, Patricia, pointed out the Yesterday’s News report (September-October, page 67) on our national Tiddlywinks championship team in 1962, and I must say Mark Steele’s wonderful illustration makes it look even more fun than it was—if that’s possible.

Basically Tom Houston and I—who were classmates, classics majors, and founding members of the short-lived Gar-goyl humor magazine—followed up on some fall triumphs at several Ivy universities, and when we came home to Los Angeles at Christmas we set up a National Championship match between ourselves and some hapless local teams who arrived for the championship tournament not knowing what a Tiddlywink was, exactly.

Tom and I hijacked our girlfriends for the tournament as cheerleaders, complete on pom-poms, and we held the event on the rim of the Pacific in a park in Santa Monica, California, overlooking the ocean. It was surreal. The pom-poms were so effective we both married the girls in gratitude and are still married to these same women today. In fact, I think I can see them in Mark’s illustration and he’s got it exactly right. They look exactly the same today.

Hank Schwarz ’64
Long Beach, Calif.

FED FACTS
In the errata column on page 8 of the September-October issue, it says the president “did not direct the Federal Reserve to orchestrate a run on the currency.” It is a misunderstanding to think that the president can direct the Federal Reserve to do anything. The Federal Reserve is an independent agency within the government, but not of the government. Most presidents would like to have had control of the Federal Reserve so as to directly influence interest rates. Fortunately the Federal Reserve does not respond to presidential direction.

John E. Sheehan, M.B.A. ’60
Former member, Board of Governors,
Federal Reserve System
Arnold, Md.

FAN MAIL
I am writing simply to express my gratitude for the September-October issue of the magazine. I found every article in the issue to be of great interest. Congratulations on a job well done!

David Allyn, Ph.D. ’96
Newark, N.J.