partment’s annual country reports on human rights) ran to three broadsheet pages of criticisms, complete with photographs of the Fort Hood massacre and abortion protests. Most evocative, given China’s imperial past, was an accompanying cartoon of a corpulent, nude Uncle Sam admiring himself in a full-length mirror that showed him clothed as emperor.

Finding a vocabulary to narrow such differences would seem the urgent business of education, conducted face to face. And so at midday on March 19, in the last official gathering at the Harvard Center Shanghai, it was encouraging to hear the GSD studio students report to Dean Mostafavi and alumni on what they and their teachers had learned in snowy Beijing (from which they had just arrived).

One by one, students offered examples of how their eyes had been opened. Daniel Hadley observed that, given the pace of change and the scale of the project, the databases on which the class had depended proved already obsolete: housing exists where none had been shown. For Julie Gawendo, seeing the transportation infrastructure and proximity to Beijing underscored both the likelihood of rapid development and the need and potential to shape it in planned ways. Diane Lipovsky said that touring some of Beijing’s remaining traditional hutong housing had strongly inclined her to plan for preservation—but when the students visited Sujiazu and saw the poor living conditions that some villagers now endure, her views evolved.

Small lessons, perhaps, but not merely for classroom discussion. Later that warm, sunny afternoon, the GSD students, Faust, Mostafavi, and alumni boarded two buses for a visit to the frantic construction site that was to be ready, by May 1, to begin welcoming 70 million visitors to Expo 2010, Shanghai’s world fair. As billions of dollars worth of country pavilions, overhead roadways, and a dedicated new subway line passed beyond their windows, the buses made for the one genuinely green design on the whole gigantic Expo campus—along the Huangpu River where Yu Kongjian and his Turenscape colleagues had been commissioned to reclaim a waste industrial waterfront as the new Shanghai Houtan Park, which they call “landscape as a living system.”

Along a newly constructed wetland—designed to clean the river’s polluted water naturally—the designers built pools, oxygenating cascades, and terraces reminiscent of the region’s agricultural past where they planted crop species (rape-seed, rice), native grasses, and dawn redwoods and other indigenous trees. Here—in the midst of official China’s urgent drive to build monuments and raise the nation’s profile in concrete and steel—a different vision of the future, however small, is also taking root. Early the next week, the park won the American Society of Landscape Architects’ award of excellence.

At the end of her banquet address, President Faust invoked the memory of the University’s first Chinese instructor, Ko Kun-hua, hired in 1879 to teach undergraduates Mandarin. Upon his death in 1882, she said, “[A] keen observer of his life at Harvard put it this way: ‘May [his] work bear fruit in a better understanding, a more confiding and generous friendship, between the oldest civilization on earth and the newest.’ May the Harvard Center Shanghai and our work here bear similar fruits of friendship, knowledge, and understanding”—not only between those civilizations, she might have added, but within each of them as well.

THE UNDERGRADUATE

I Saw You...Standing There

by Spencer Lenfield ’12

A few days into reading period last semester, Tej Toor ’10 presented her final project for Computer Science 50. She had created a very simple website, called “I Saw You Harvard” after its inspiration, “iSawYou.com.” iSawYou is a “missed connections” site, a sort of hybrid between a personals section and “America’s Most Wanted.” The idea is that if you see someone in the Square who catches your eye, but disappears before you can get a name, you can write about it on I Saw You Harvard and have at least some chance, however remote, of getting in touch.

Lamont bottom floor

I saw you...Blond, I think, heading downstairs in Lamont, I was heading upstairs, we smiled, I looked back as I walked up the stairs and you were looking at me through the glass door. Who are you?

or

At my boring job...

Posted at 12/07/2009 7:07 pm, F spotting M
I saw you...At work. I always try to pick up shifts I know you’ll have so we can talk. I asked you to hang out the other day but you had a paper...hopefully next time you’ll be free.

Although now I’m nervous to talk to you and ask... The site proved a huge success, spurred on, doubtless, by the fact that it provided the entire College with a convenient and addictive distraction from reading period and exams. Those first few days saw a frenzy of “sightings,” as posts are called: some 2,400 lovelorn utterances issued forth from the laptops and iPhones of Harvard undergraduates in that first incredibly busy week. It’s a marvel that the University’s Wi-Fi network didn’t burst from the sudden outpouring of anonymous romantic tension.

It quickly became clear, though, that very few of the posts were missed connections in the strict sense. More frequent were the unspoken, nondescript crushes.
What had been a relatively amusing, if occasionally nauseating, catalog of infatuations began to look like a vast bathroom wall.

Almost immediately, people began to parody the entire concept of the site. Things quickly turned self-referential and mocking:

internet
Posted at 2009-12-13 20:00:54, F spotting F
I saw you...killing my productivity. Thanks, isawyouharvard.

Or:

On isawyouharvard.com
Posted at 2009-12-15 03:48:13, M spotting F
I saw you...far off in the distance as I posted to isawyouharvard.com. It was nice knowing you, dignity...

Then January came, the campus cleared out, and except for a few posts, the site lay dormant. When spring semester began, the site was still attracting traffic, but less of it; what had been hundreds of posts per day slowed to a few dozen, and gradually leveled off somewhere between 10 and 20. Moreover, while the actual sightings diminished, the mélange of commentary, complaint, and joking stayed. Crossfire began, with users trading posts and ripostes. Some of the fun was gone, and what had been a relatively amusing, if occasionally nauseating, catalog of daily infatuations began to look like a vast bathroom wall.

This has happened before. In March 2007, Lizzie Widdicombe ’06 wrote in the New Yorker about boredatlamont.com, which, in effect, was trying to be a vast bathroom wall: it consisted of a single, scrolling, unmoderated message board. At the time, Bored At Lamont had accumulated more than 170,000 posts—in terms of sheer volume, immensely more than I Saw You Harvard.

I entered Harvard in the fall of 2008, and never once did I hear anyone say a thing about Bored At Lamont. When asked, almost none of my classmates even know what it is. Juniors and seniors speak of it as a kind of distant memory, getting the same look on their face as my parents do when remembering Ed Sullivan. Within a year and a half, a website that at one time had an average of 25 posts for every student in the College had become a relic. If you visit Bored At Lamont now, you will find a largely defunct website, defaced by students from other schools and visited by only a few truly bored souls—the online equivalent of a ghost town.

Harvard FML, a side project of the online student magazine The Voice, was launched at the beginning of the current school year. The site is a Harvard-specific version of “fmlife.com,” in much the same way as I Saw You Harvard imitates isawYou. Every post ends with the abbreviation “FML,” which stands for “f**k my life,” and ideally consists of some sardonic mishap from daily life (“I go to Lamont so that I can focus on Facebook. FML”), but many are indistinguishable from simple complaining (“I have a midterm, in a class I have not attended since January. FML”), and sometimes downright unfunny (“I have leukemia. FML”). Harvard FML, like I Saw You Harvard, is a moderated site, which helps keep out some of the dreck that covers Bored At Lamont, but the fact remains that both sites are at the mercy of
what people—these mysterious, anonymous Harvard students—produce for it. In the end, all such sites suffer the same crisis of purpose: why are people writing this stuff? And who’s reading it?

It’s easy to turn these questions into a jeremiad against the Internet, or the shallowness of youth culture and its fads, or the failure of students to make meaningful real-life connections—all of which might be fair to some extent, but ultimately miss the point. There’s nothing terribly new here: the outlet, perhaps, but not the impulse. (The virtual bathroom walls were preceded by actual ones.) It’s the allure of anonymity, but also the sense that you have something to share—the thought that if you were released from all responsibility for a statement, free to speak with complete honesty, you could get at the heart of what goes on not only in your own mind, but in others’ as well. People don’t think that they’re writing with Shakespearean wit (much less profundity), of course, but neither do they think that their posts are completely worthless—otherwise, why bother to write in the first place? This is true of both the drippingly sincere and the bitingly sarcastic. Irony and honesty blend together. It is impossible to tell whether the leukemia poster was being serious or facetious. The difference stops mattering. The point is being able to touch something at the core of the everyday, whether it’s a bitter complaint, a secret crush, or a disdain for the notion of either.

But it’s only a fantasy, and it gets old fast. Those things aren’t really the heart of the everyday; they’re the surface. The sad fact is that thinking takes work, and so what goes on in your head when you’re bored at Lamont sinks no further beneath the surface than any of the other thoughts you have from moment to moment. Feeling like everything is going wrong, or wondering if the person you passed was someone special—these are experiences everyone has, and for that reason, they might be interesting for a bit, but ultimately only tell you what you already knew. It’s thrilling to find that there’s someone out there who thinks the same thoughts as you, but, in the end, it’s not very helpful. That explains why these things tend to appear, flare up, ebb, and all but disappear: after a while, all the flirtations and the frustrations start to resemble one another. And, though we occasionally like to entertain the fantasy that we’re at Harvard because we’re at least a bit out of the ordinary, that’s as true here as it is anywhere else.

Berta Greenwald Ledecky Undergraduate Fellow

Spencer Lenfield ’12 will be at Cambridge University this summer, studying English literature at Pembroke College.

**SPORTS**

Game, Match, and High Set

*A contrarian approach to the “philosopher’s stone of tennis”*

In 1970, while watching tennis, Bruce Wright had a life-changing moment. He’d been invited to a professional match in Washington, D.C., that featured the legendary Rod Laver. Wright, an outstanding gymnast at Springfield College, hadn’t seen much tennis, but found himself hypnotized. He observed Laver’s on-court movement with a gymnast’s eyes, ignoring the flight of the tennis ball but soaking up details of how the great Australian lefty carried himself.

“I couldn’t even tell you who his opponent was,” Wright says. “But I noticed a subtle thing. Laver had optimized the height of his center of gravity while moving to and from each shot. Later, with much more study, I realized that this was the single factor that distinguished Laver and put him head and shoulders above his peers—not stroke production, not fit-

Former gymnast

Bruce Wright brings unconventional views to the tennis court.

Photographs by Stu Rosner

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