

Majority of interim student suspensions stemming from on-campus pro-Palestinian protests lifted

Of the 23 who received interim suspensions following a May 6 protest, two remain active.

By **Ellie Montemayor**
PUBLISHER

The information presented in the following article comes from a series of interviews between The Tech and members of the pro-Palestinian campus movement, faculty members, and other individuals with knowledge of the situation. These accounts were corroborated by additional documentation, emails, and other written communication obtained by The Tech.

“Dear [student]: We are writing to address concerning behavior that you engaged in on May 6, 2024, at the unauthorized encampment that has been on Kresge Oval since April 21, 2024.”

On May 8, several students received a letter from the Division of Student Life (DSL) notifying them that disciplinary action has been taken against them—they have been interim suspended for their participation in the campus pro-Palestinian movement.

23 different students received these suspensions; over the following weeks, they engaged in what they described as stressful, demoralizing meetings with representatives of the administration while continuing to engage in increasingly escalated process action, in a weeks-long review process that ultimately saw many of these sanctions lifted.

Students receive interim suspensions following high-profile protest

The May 8 letter, signed by Vice Chancellor and Dean for Student Life Suzy Nelson and Senior Associate Dean for Student Life Dean David Randall, came just two days after an emergency protest action in front of the pro-Palestinian student encampment on Kresge Oval.

That day, on May 6, dozens of pro-Palestinian demonstrators and hundreds of onlookers swarmed the Student Center plaza in response to an evacuation order by President Sally Kornbluth and tore down a set of six-foot-tall barricades, amidst a threat of disciplinary sanctions by Chancellor Melissa Nobles. Separate articles from The Tech detail the events from that day and the resulting aftermath, most notably the May 10 dismantlement of the encampment and a slew of student arrests.

The May 6 written warning from Nobles, distributed shortly after noon, had threatened that student protestors not voluntarily exiting the encampment by 2:30 p.m. would be placed on

immediate interim academic or full suspension “lasting through Institute commencement activities.”

Mila Halgren G, who is entering her 7th year as a PhD student in neuroscience, recounted the timeline of events which led to her suspension. “There had been some threatening emails sent out a day or two before [May 8] threatening disciplinary action that was dismissed by other people in camp as a pretty naked scare tactic,” Halgren said, noting that many viewed the threats as a sign that the encampment was significantly putting pressure on the administration.

“So, that morning I blocked the parking garage for a few hours, marched through Lobby 7 and chanted, then went to camp, went into my lab briefly—and then I got an email saying I was suspended, and then [I] didn’t really receive any word for a week after that,” she added.

Nelson’s May 8 letter which issued these interim suspensions noted that while most students ultimately exited the encampment within the deadline—but for five students who remained in the enclosure until the barricades were torn down by other protestors—“students encouraged others to join a rally protesting MIT’s efforts to end the encampment,” and that the suspended students “exited temporarily but continued to engage in escalating activities that endangered members of the community.”

“The administration and the COD [Committee on Discipline] together, we view this interim as a necessary action when we really need to stop things,” President Sally Kornbluth said in a May 15 interview with The Tech. “There were many reasons I really felt that the encampment was getting dangerous, for the people in the encampment and for others in the community.”

The interim suspension mechanism was initially set up for cases of sexual assault; their use in these cases is a point of criticism from students and faculty who see the suspended students as being compared to alleged perpetrators of sexual assault.

“You have a group of students who are asking for MIT to withdraw from complicity in the genocide—basically asking for peace—and they have not attacked anyone,” Professor of Linguistics Michel DeGraff said in a May 18 interview with The Tech. “How can you... compare students that are [doing] the right thing with potential rapists?”

A suspended undergraduate student echoed this statement: “It [the interim suspension mechanism] was meant to be used for literal safety is-



ALEXA SIMAO - THE TECH

Graduates display banners protesting the suspension of pro-Palestinian protesters and calling for MIT’s divestment from the war in Gaza at the front of the OneMIT ceremony, Thursday, May 30.

sues, and not peaceful protesting. I think they’re really stepping out of lane in trying to use that,” the student said.

In a typical suspension case, the Committee on Discipline (COD)—a Standing Committee of the Faculty charged with reviewing and responding to cases of alleged misconduct against students and student organizations—reviews the complaint presented to it in a series of meetings and hearings with the accused individual. Any Institute responses, among them suspension, expulsion, or revocation of a degree, are not implemented until after the COD has heard a case in full. The interim suspension mechanism instead goes into effect immediately, during which time the committee goes through its review process.

The May 8 letters issuing these interim suspensions were distributed in a sparsely-populated email by Suzy Nelson, titled “Important Disciplinary Information,” that only read: “Dear [student]: Please carefully read the attached letter and contact osccs@mit.edu if you have any questions.”

The letters, which were different from student to student, made no mention of specific policy violations and noted that “at this stage, no findings have been reached.” Some students received academic suspensions, which prohibited them from engaging in academic and extracurricular activities, but were still permitted to utilize campus services; others’ suspensions were noted as “full suspensions,” which entirely barred them from utilizing campus services (except for MIT Health medical services) and evicted them from campus housing. All students were referred to the COD for full review, who would then determine whether to officially uphold the suspensions.

“You must leave campus immediately,” the letter read for students facing interim full suspensions.

Justifying the reasoning behind the evictions, Kornbluth said that “during the interim suspension, you can’t participate in any campus activities. And

if you live on campus, it becomes very difficult to implement that in any way.”

Nearly two dozen students referred to disciplinary offices in weeks-long review process

Ultimately, 23 students—a mix of undergraduate and graduate students—were struck with varying levels of interim suspensions. Many of these students, though not all, were among the 23 students arrested this semester for protest action. (Five were arrested on April 26 as part of a crackdown at Emerson College’s encampment; eight were arrested on May 9 during a sit-in at the Stata Center parking garage; and another ten were arrested during the May 10 sweep of the Kresge Oval encampment.)

In all cases, the May 6 action was pointed to as the leading cause for the suspensions.

The following correspondence that the students received came as an electronically-distributed letter from the Office of Student Conduct and Community Standards (OSCCS) on May 14. (The OSCCS, as per its page in the Division of Student Life website, is the “beginning point of all conduct and academic integrity complaints.” The office facilitates and oversees the case review process alongside the COD.) This letter expanded on the disciplinary notice put forward in the preceding May 8 letter; among its contents, the letter identified specific protest actions the students were allegedly part of which contributed to the suspension decision and described specific policy violations.

Such protest actions noted included a May 1 protest which led to the establishment of a temporary second encampment on 84 Mass Ave, the high-profile May 6 protest, the May 8 and May 9 blockades of the Stata Center parking garage, and a May 10 protest at Lobby 7 that concluded in a street march to Building E1; the individual letters to each student listed some combination of these specific protests and other noted actions.

The letters then went on to list the policies that the students were charged with violating: all students were charged with violating the “Use of Facilities” clause of the MIT Policies & Procedures as well as some combination of clauses from the Mind & Hand Book (such as “Disorderly Conduct,” “Improper Use of Institute Property,” and “Reckless Endangerment”). The policy violations listed did not connect to specific actions where they were alleged to have occurred.

Many students described that their letters made reference to protest action which they did not actually take part in.

“In my initial letter that DSL sent me, they said that I was involved in certain actions that I physically just was not there at in any sense... They were just saying things that I straight up didn’t do,” Jonathan Anziani ’25 said.

The various suspended students, in the following two weeks, then met with representatives of OSCCS to further discuss the sanctions. In the meetings, students were accompanied by faculty advisors from the Alliance of Concerned Faculty (ACF), a faculty-organized group formed to support students engaged in campus tensions from administrative backlash; graduate students were additionally accompanied by a steward from the Graduate Student Union (GSU), which had been contesting the sanctions placed by MIT on its graduate students as violating the current union contract and various relevant labor laws.

Halgren described the meetings as feeling “farcical.”

“It was someone in admin asking a series of relatively open-ended questions... and asking about things which were factually incorrect, like asking if I hopped the fence [on May 6]—which I didn’t; asking if we had blocked an ambulance [during the May 8 blockade], which we let through that morning,” Halgren said.

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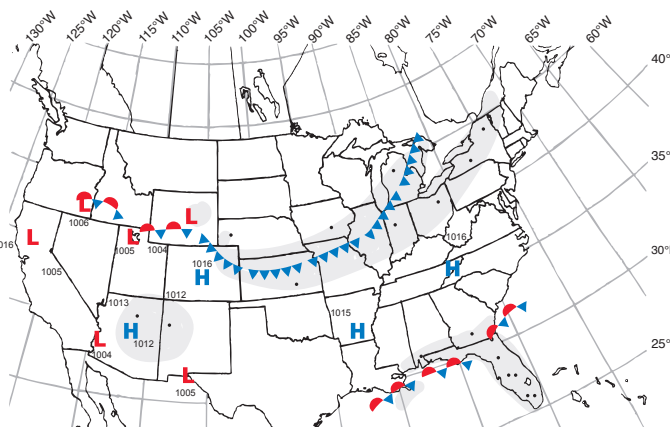
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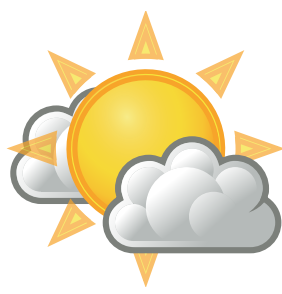
Weather Systems	Weather Fronts	Precipitation Symbols	Other Symbols
High Pressure	Trough	Snow	Fog
Low Pressure	Warm Front	Rain	Thunderstorm
Hurricane	Cold Front	Light	Haze
	Stationary Front	Moderate	
		Heavy	

Compiled by MIT Meteorology Staff and The Tech

Sunny Summer Skies

By **Adrienne Lai**
CHIEF METEOROLOGIST

Starting the summer off right, today's high is 84°F (29°C) and the sun is shining! Be sure to wear lots of sunscreen and stay hydrated as you enjoy the weather! It wouldn't be summer without a good storm, which will come through on Friday. Chance of rain is 60% during the day and increases to 80% in the evening. Don't worry, the clouds won't last for long with the weekend bringing mostly sunny skies and temperatures in the 70s, perfect for outdoor activities! Winds will be around 10 mph throughout the week in case you are interested in sailing along the Charles!



Extended Forecast

Today: Sunny with a high of 84°F (29°C) and South winds 8 mph.

Tonight: Low of 67°F (19.5°C) with 14 mph Southwest winds. Partly cloudy.

Friday: 60% chance of rain with a high of 84°F (29°C). Winds 16 mph Southwest.

Friday Night: 11 mph Southwest winds with a low of 63°F (17°C). 80% chance of precipitation.

Saturday: High of 73°F (22°C) and a low of 59°F (15°C). 9 mph Northwest winds. Mostly sunny.

Sunday: Sunny skies with a high of 74°F (23°C) and 9 mph Northeast winds.

UA discloses report regarding UROP student experiences

UA also encourages undergraduates to “share [their] thoughts” anonymously

By **Russel Ismael & Alex Tang**
EDITORS

In an email to the undergraduate community on May 22, the MIT Undergraduate Association (UA) sent an email to all undergraduates regarding the “Final Report on the MIT Undergraduate Research Opportunities Program.” Paul Irvine ’24, UA Chair of Public Affairs (UAPA), stated that the report, which was written by himself, Lindsay Bollino ’24, Enoch Ellis ’26

Miguel Buitrago ’26, and Haylea Brock ’27, is a compilation of what the UA has learned regarding the student experience with undergraduate research at MIT.

“While the vast majority of UROP experiences are overwhelmingly positive, we recognize that there are an alarming number of reports of serious offenses that undermine the dignity of our student workers and volunteers,” Irvine wrote.

The report highlights several issues including coercion into logging fewer hours than actually worked, work in toxic or unsafe work environments, disruption of academic priorities, and dissuasion

from applying for funding. These issues were derived from dozens of detailed responses in the first week from an anonymous survey that asked students to share details from their UROP experiences.

In response to these issues, the UAPA is considering several reforms to improve the UROP system such as phasing out volunteer UROP positions, setting maximum hours for UROPs, moving up direct funding deadlines, and introducing mandatory training for first-time UROPs.

The report also states that they are exploring ways to increase UROP hourly wages and enhance the time-sheet enforcement to “reduce the number of unproductive paid hours.”

“I hope my two years here has showcased the need to fight for respectful treatment of all workers, including young ones, especially as a tool to economically uplift our communities,” Irvine wrote. “We have got to, and will, keep pushing to maintain the dignity of all young workers, one conversation at a time.”

Irvine encouraged undergraduates to continue sharing their experiences with the UROP via an anonymous form.

Barnhart PhD ’88 announces formation of the Future of the Arts at MIT Committee

Committee to share findings in spring of 2025

By **Alex Tang**
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

In an email to the MIT community on June 3, Provost Cynthia Barnhart PhD ’88 announced the formation of the Future of the Arts at MIT Committee to “advise the Institute on new ways to envision the place of the arts in our community.” Course 8 (Physics) Professor Peter Fisher PhD ’88 will chair the committee. Members of the committee include several MIT faculty and individuals from outside of the Institute, including Paola Antonelli, curator of design at the Museum of Modern Art and Paul Ha, director of the List Visual Arts Center.

Barnhart drew parallels between the current initiative and that led by Emeritus Professor Paul Joskow in 1986. 40 years prior, the Joskow report, according to Barnhart, “solidified the Institute’s commitment” and “articulated a bold vision” for the creative arts at MIT.

Barnhart stated that since Joskow’s report, MIT has met many goals set forth in the report, including the expansion of academic and extracurricular offerings, construction of new facilities, and creation of public displays.

In her charge to the committee, Barnhart highlighted an increasingly salient presence of artificial intelligence and large language models, stating they have “accelerated rapid changes in art at MIT, causing art to blend into all five schools and the college in exciting ways.” She added that the advent of these technologies, along with mixed reality digital technologies, pose “new challenges to [the Institute’s] core values.”

Barnhart emphasized that the committee’s mission is to “conduct a broad review of the creative arts at MIT.” Additionally, the committee is tasked with evaluating the changes made to the arts at MIT since the Joskow Report was made, developing guiding principles and outlining a vision for the arts at MIT.

The committee has already begun its work and according to Barnhart, will share their findings by Spring 2025. Those interested may contact futurearts@mit.edu.



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Interim suspensions reversed after weeks-long review process

Student Suspensions, from Page 1

Parts of the meetings were dedicated to reviewing the specific evidence brought to the COD by the DSL. Among other documentation, the evidence presented include CCTV photos, on-the-ground photos taken by the MIT Police Department, screenshots of social media posts, and stills from broadcast news coverage. One student shared that, regarding the evidence behind their suspension, “I think a lot of it was just hearsay.”

The meetings were reportedly highly emotional, with some students sharing that “my meeting was 30 minutes of me crying, out of 45 minutes of meeting.”

Upper-level DSL administrators David Randall, Helen Wang, and James Reed were among the representatives that administered the meetings.

At the same time, faculty members part of the ACF engaged in a concerted effort to have the administration lift the suspensions. A motion put forth for the faculty to call for the lifting and hotly debated in the May 15 and May 17 Institute faculty meetings was ultimately rejected in a 154-191 vote, as previously reported by The Tech.

From there, interactions between the students and OSCCS diverged into case-specific action.

In the week that Institute faculty held their meetings to discuss the suspensions, the students that had been hit with interim full suspensions packed up their belongings and moved out of campus following their eviction. (The students were told that they were to leave campus housing within seven days following receipt of their suspension notices.)

“I’ve heard things like ‘please don’t let students sleep on park benches or send them back to conflict zones.’ That’s not the MIT way in any way... I really think it’s administered humanely—no one should suffer because of this,” Kornbluth said.

The students forced to move out refuted this account: “I [lost] my housing because I think that genocide is bad,” one student said.

“Throughout the entire process, DSL and COD—they kept saying things like... ‘Why didn’t you tell this was affecting you? Why didn’t you

reach out to us to explain how this has been impacting you?’” Anziani said of the stress that the suspension and corresponding eviction had put on him. “Why would I have to tell you that removing my housing is bad?”

In the following weeks, after back-and-forth conversations and meetings between the students and OSCCS, alongside private discussions between the OSCCS and the COD, most of the suspensions were gradually lifted.

In the end, the only direct line of communication between many of the suspended students and the COD was in the lifting of their suspensions.

Students respond to interim suspension claims

Many students who received the suspensions expressed frustration with the decisions made by the administration on who was to be suspended.

A graduate student who had been suspended said that they only began to participate in the campus movement days into the beginning of the encampment. “I honestly think the main reason I was suspended was that I happened to be front and center of the AP [Associated Press] live stream on Monday [May 6] because it’s not like I’ve been involved in the CAA [Coalition Against Apartheid] or anything until a week before that point,” the student said.

“I was never an organizer or anything, and the only reason I feel like they came after me is because they [the administration] just personally didn’t like me,” Anziani said.

The suspended students also shared frustrations with their charges: specifically, many pointed to the Reckless Endangerment charge—with reckless endangerment being defined as “conduct that could reasonably and foreseeably result in physical injury even if no injury actually occurs,” according to the Mind & Hand Book—as being “ridiculous,” as described by one graduate student.

“The only time[s] people were hurt were when police violence happened,” Anziani said.

Five students mistakenly receive suspensions, soon lifted

Among the 23 suspensions issued relating to the May 6 protest, five were

quietly lifted by the Institute in a first round of reversals due to insufficient evidence or misidentifications.

“Some of those suspensions were based on evidence that was just straight racist. They [the administration] literally mistook one person for another because they both have brown skin and are roughly the same size,” Prahlad Iyengar G, who was also struck with a suspension, said.

Daniel Shen G, a 3rd-year PhD student in the EECs department, is among those who mistakenly received suspensions. Shen’s interim full suspension was also based on the May 6 protest, but he “wasn’t physically in the encampment” that day.

“In my case, I wasn’t even physically in the Boston area when they claimed I did the things—so I’m just really not clear how they came up with these charges or came up with the list of people to issue these kinds of disciplinary notices to,” he added.

Suspensions reversed as semester came to a close: two suspensions still active

By the time of this article’s publication, 21 suspensions have been lifted by the administration. Some received word through formal emails sent by OSCCS soon after the initial meetings in mid-May while others were informed in private calls with administrators. Many liftings were done by the COD around the time of commencement, although some students had their suspensions removed as early as mere days after their hearings with OSCCS.

The reversals delivered by the COD were sent to students through an emailed letter from Committee on Discipline Chair Tamar Schapiro. “The COD recognizes that your actions are forms of civil disobedience motivated by sincere political conviction and that they are largely peaceful,” the letter wrote. “That said, you have displayed a willingness to persist in conduct that disrupts Institute operations and forces the Institute to divert an undue share of resources away from normal operations.”

These letters restated the specific policy violations the students had been charged with and presented the specific findings that led to them being brought up; they noted whether the students were found “respon-

sible” or “not responsible” for each violation they were charged with.

The reversals were not made without conditions, and most students—besides the five that had been incorrectly issued suspensions—were sanctioned to disciplinary probation for the next year. “Probation is a strong warning from the Institute that your behavior in this situation violated Institute expectations,” the letter read, which also noted that during this period additional violations would result in more serious sanctions but that the probation is not to be noted on students’ transcripts.

For the undergraduate and graduate students allowed to walk in commencement and graduate from the Institute this semester, they instead received bans from campus grounds for periods of one to two years.

There is no appeal to these decisions, as they were reached via “administrative resolution.” As per the COD’s charter publicly available on the Faculty Governance webpage, disciplinary actions such as suspension and expulsion decisions “may be appealed to the Chancellor.”

Anziani noted that even after the lifting of his suspension, “I felt like the police were watching me at all times.”

Anziani shared several anecdotes of what he considered to be undue, inappropriate police supervision of his activities. “There was one specific situation where I was not even on MIT’s property, I was just walking down Mass Ave and talking to a friend, and a[n MIT] police [officer] decided to call for backup and started taking pictures of me,” he said.

Mass Ave is considered public property and is not legally part of campus grounds.

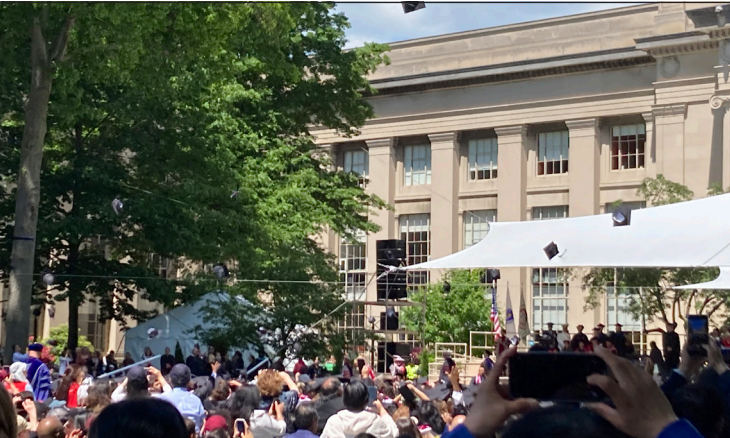
“Even when I was unsuspended, there were still police constantly keeping their eyes on me... [One time], a police officer was just staring at me practicing [fire spinning] and—according to my friend who was listening to the police scanner—[the police officers] were trying to issue a trespass warning for me,” Anziani said. “I was perfectly allowed on campus... It makes me feel really unsafe, especially being a Black student.”

“My charges are no different from other people’s charges—it’s not like they decided to go after me because they had a particular charge that was different,” Iyengar added.

“There is a particular alum[nus] who they have not banned from campus, and that man’s name is Bibi [Benjamin] Netanyahu,” Iyengar said. “They consider us enough of a danger to campus to ban people from campus, but they don’t consider the man who is the architect of a genocide dangerous enough to ban from campus.”



VIVIAN HIR - THE TECH



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Jewish, Israeli students celebrate community and culture amidst pro-Palestinian protests

Moore: “The Jewish and Israeli communities have really come together across all levels through a really tough time.”

By Ellie Montemayor
PUBLISHER

In the final weeks of the semester, Israeli and Jewish students came together on a number of occasions to celebrate community, culture, and identity in the aftermath of pro-Palestinian protests on campus.

May 14 — Israeli Day of Independence

On May 14, MIT Hillel, a campus affinity organization centered on Jewish life, held its annual Israeli Day of Independence event on Kresge Oval. Known in Hebrew as Yom Ha'atzmaut, this celebration marked the 76th anniversary of the creation of the State of Israel and took place four days after the dismantlement of a pro-Palestinian student encampment that had taken up the space since April 21.

The gathering was touted as a celebration of Jewish self-determination and Israeli culture, featuring various catered foods and activities.

Several dozens attended the event, including a mix of undergraduate and graduate students, affiliated researchers, faculty, and other Jewish and Israeli-identifying members of the MIT community.

“I’m glad we get to celebrate our country without making it about the debate,” Daniel Asherov PhD ’23, a postdoctoral researcher in Linguistics, said. “It’s very important, but there’s also life around it.”

Still, collective grief hung over the attendees as they engaged in merriment: reflection stations and hostage memorials were set up during the event to allow participants to voice their emotions amidst the ongoing Israel-Hamas war and the surrounding pro-Palestinian protest movements in the U.S. and at the Institute.

“This tent holds both grief and joy. We are grieving all innocents lost, the hostages still in Gaz, and all who’ve been horrifically impacted by this war and the October 7th terror attack,” a sign posted by the tent read. “And we are also filled with gratitude for Israel, our homeland, where we can live freely as Jews in the land that is at the core of our sacred text, our holidays, our history, and so much more.”

Three paper boards hung on the back interior of the tent asked attendees about their grievances and hopes. Some wrote about hope for continued peace and prosperity, and others grieved the loss of a cultural openness that had allowed Jewish culture to thrive for years across the nation. Many wrote

about the ongoing war — “I hope the war to stop,” one note read.

Next to the tent, 132 folding chairs were arranged in a circle facing a banner that read, “Bring them home,” in reference to the Israeli hostages in the Gaza strip. (As of June 8, 2024, 120 Israeli hostages remain in captivity.)

The event was initially set to take place on May 7, but was postponed due to the presence of the encampment. A second, unofficial celebration hosted by the MIT Israel Alliance (IA) instead took its place on

May 16 — “We Will Dance Again” Concert

The Israeli Day of Independence event took place just days before a student-led party co-organized by MIT IA on Hockfield Court, titled “We Will Dance Again: Uniting in Rhythm.” The event, a concert and “siyum” held in honor of those killed in the Re’im music festival massacre on October 7, was co-

sponsored by several local and national affinity organizations such as MIT Hillel, the Israeli American Council, and the Jewish National Fund.

“In Jewish tradition, we mix sorrow with joy, remembering the past even as we celebrate the present, affirming our commitment to dialogue, coexistence, and peace,” a press release by MIT IA ahead of the event read.

The event was partially funded through an online crowdsourcing platform and raised \$36,395 of an initial \$50,000 goal across over 400 donations.

Some students raised concerns about the nature of this funding method, describing it as violating policies set in the Student Organization Handbook and various rules that Association of Student Activities (ASA) student groups are bound to. In response, administrators noted that the event, while sanctioned by the Institute, was not organized through the Student Organizations, Leadership and Engagement (SOLE) office — and

as such was not bound to policies from the Handbook. “If any department on campus wants to hold an event, sell tickets, collect money through a third party, that has nothing to do with SOLE. If there is an event that is conducted outside of our scope, they can do whatever they want within the Institute’s parameters,” SOLE Assistant Director Ramon Downes wrote in private email communications between SOLE and the ASA Executive Board obtained by The Tech.

The event took place from 5 p.m.

been through on campus.”

According to MIT IA, over a thousand people attended the event.

“There are a lot of people in the community who suffered loss or have experienced a tough time, and I think just coming together in support and saying that we will dance again despite the hate is very important,” MIT IA co-president Eitan Moore ’26 said of the event in a later interview with The Tech. “Coming together with a positive message of peace — I think it’s rare and often hard to hear now, but it’s a message that we have to push forward and that we definitely try to emphasize. It’s something that I think has been heard at a lot of our rallies, including at the ‘We Will Dance Again’ celebration.”

Looking Forward

As the semester came to a close, student leaders reiterated a focus on maintaining community.

“There’s an intention to focus on positive things,” Moore said of plans being made by student leaders in preparation for the fall semester. “Obviously connecting as a community, but also showing Israeli culture and Jewish culture in a positive light.”

Moore described plans to seek opportunities for dialogue — he described a commitment to reaching out to other groups and engaging in productive discussion while also informing of the hurt that the Jewish community has felt in the past months.

Looking forward, Moore said that student leaders in the Jewish community plan to remain focused on building positive experiences. Stemming from the strengthened connections made over the course of the past months amidst adversity, one such avenue is in the relationship between students and faculty.

“I think it’s been really amazing to see the support of the Jewish and Israeli faculty since October 7th... we’ve seen an outpouring of support from a lot of the faculty,” Moore said.

Moore pointed to biweekly faculty lunches that continue to be held, among many other campus events that have brought the Jewish community together.

“Broadly, the Jewish and Israeli communities have really come together across all levels through a really tough time. At the end of the day, we also want to bring a positive message and put an emphasis on positive things, and to come together and stand up for who we are,” Moore said.



ELLIE MONTEMAYOR - THE TECH

MIT celebrated the Israeli Day of Independence on May 14 with a gathering on Kresge Oval.

Class of 2024 reflect upon their time at the Institute amidst commencement celebrations

This past year was a time of reflection for many, reevaluating their priorities ahead of their last months in undergrad.

By Ellie Montemayor
PUBLISHER

On May 31, the Institute’s Class of 2024 gathered at Killian Court for the Undergraduate Ceremony, part of three day commencement proceedings. 1099 undergraduates received their diplomas.

Diplomas presented; pro-Palestinian graduates protest

The ceremony began with an introduction from class president Penny Brant ’24 and an instrumental performance by Phoebe Lin ’24 and William Wang G. Chancellor Melissa Nobles then addressed the graduating class. She highlighted an experience shaped by the pandemic and the resilience displayed by the class of 2024 in navigating a generational crisis. “Look around at your classmates, strangers who you met on Zoom and became tight friends under tough circumstances,” Nobles said. Following her remarks, Adanna Abraham-Igwe ’24 then sang a rendition of gospel song Lean on Me.

Afterwards, graduating seniors were presented diplomas by Sally Kornbluth and various deans from the schools comprising the Institute. No major disruptions occurred, unlike the previous day’s OneMIT Commencement ceremony in which dozens walked out in protest. Some graduates however, donned keffiyehs, unveiled Palestinian flags or cloth signs with pro-Palestinian messaging, and held signs in silent protest.

After the conclusion of the ceremony, The Tech asked members of the graduating class to reflect on their experiences at the Institute.

Graduating seniors celebrate graduation, reflect on time at MIT

The celebrations also coincided with Tech Reunions for the Class of 1974 and Class of 1999, with many from the Class of 1974 alumni sporting red blazers and vintage hats around campus.

Speaking generally about Institute culture, some seniors spoke at length about the wealth of friendships to be made within campus grounds.

“I think being a part of MIT is meeting people from different places... experiencing different cultures within very small spaces that you can come to, and people from different places. You make friends from different countries,” Nickie Mpofu ’24, who will be travelling to Kenya as part of MISTI Africa, said. Mpofu is set to work with a semiconductor company while in the East African country.

Many shared this sentiment, pointing to their peers as making up a significant amount of their experience at the Institute and cherishing memories created in shared spaces. Others lamented not having expanded their social circles more during their times as undergraduates.

This past year was a time of reflection for many, reevaluating their priorities ahead of their last months in undergrad.

“It was the beginning of the fall where I sat down and I was like, oh this is finite, this is coming to an end,” Thomas Brooks ’24 said. Brooks, just graduated with a degree in Course 2-A, is staying at the Institute to pursue a Master’s in Electrical Engineering.

John Feliciano ’24, who spoke alongside Brooks, expanded on the statement, saying: “I just tried

really hard to find out, ‘What is it that I really love here? Who are the people and the things that I really care about, and what can I do to spend more time in those spaces?’

Feliciano, a 6-2 major, attended MIT on an ROTC scholarship under the United States Navy and will depart for South Carolina in August to work in the military. He found satisfaction in this mindset of self-reflection and self-fulfillment, more so than in maximizing academic standing in his final semesters.

Adeena Khan ’24 and Riki Smah ’24 also shared regrets from the ways they spent their last two semesters. “I didn’t really do stuff that I wasn’t already familiar with... I wish that I had taken a class that’s completely unrelated to my major, or [that] I had joined a club that I had never done,” Khan said.

Summarizing her senior year in one word, Maria Garcia-Garcia ’24, a Course 9 major, described it as “unexpected.” She described this year as a period of learning and personal growth, cherishing the opportunity to learn more about herself and her peers.

“Realizing how much I’ve grown as a person, really reflecting on that, it’s like: ‘Wow, I’m a completely different person than I was when I started here.’ I’ve learned a different way to handle myself, my emotions, my academics, [and] my friends,” Garcia-Garcia added.

As they look ahead to the summer and the coming fall — especially for those who are not staying to pursue a Master’s or preparing for grad school — seniors shared a level of uncertainty and excitement in their plans and future endeavors.



ELLIE MONTEMAYOR - THE TECH

New graduates take photos following undergraduate ceremony, May 31.

“I think this is the limbo period,” Mpofu said.

Garcia-Garcia, who is staying in Boston and working at a cafe, is currently in the interview process for two jobs: one as a paralegal at a Harvard law firm, and another as a research assistant at a lab in Harvard. “I’m kind of at a point where I’m a little lost and confused about what to do next, but I’m also very excited,” she said.

Smah and Khan echoed the uncertainty. Smah will be volunteering at the Furst Lab, but is still “hung up between grad school and jobs”; he will continue job-searching in the next coming months and is considering applying for grad school in the next applications round this fall.

Kathy Yung ’24, an 18-C, is moving to Seattle to work for a startup in software. Yung is looking forward to a more structured life in the coming months, and is excited by the prospect of free time moving forward as she is no longer burdened by classes and problem sets.

Finally, the new graduates addressed the Class of 2025, who are soon entering their senior year, and offered advice. Some graduates focused on time management and finding a consistent rhythm. “Plan your time,” Brooks said.

Others challenged rising seniors to experiment with their hobbies and activities, pointing to the breadth of extracurricular opportunities found at the Institute and in the city. “Any time there’s an event or something, go for it,” Garcia-Garcia said.

Ultimately, every senior The Tech spoke with had one prominent instruction for the Class of 2025: to enjoy time with friends.

“Just take every opportunity to spend time with the people you care about. Figure out who those people are, and just spend as much time with them as possible,” Feliciano said.

“If there’s any reason to stay up late, or to do something that you didn’t expect to do — just be spontaneous and be flexible with the people you care about because those are the memories that will stay,” Feliciano added.



VIVIAN HIR - THE TECH

People display signs advocating for LGBTQ+ rights at the 2024 Boston Pride Parade, Saturday

Email us at
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CATCH!

World & Nation is a two-page column featuring news articles syndicated from a selection of major newspaper outlets, covering topics of public interest and critical information which extend beyond the bounds of The Tech's coverage as centered around the MIT and local community. Ownership of syndicated content is retained under their original respective publications, and is republished in this format to serve as an easily-accessible, printed digest for The Tech's readership.

The column consists of two pages, with Side A focused on US news and politics and Side B on topics of international concern. The articles featured here are abridged as to contain only their most essential points; readers are directed to read more about an article from its original publication.

Hunter Biden convicted on all 3 charges at federal gun trial

A federal jury has convicted Hunter Biden on all three federal felony gun charges he faced, concluding that he violated laws meant to prevent drug addicts from owning firearms. The conviction marks the first time a president's immediate family member has been found guilty of a crime during their father's term in office.

The jury, which deliberated for just under three hours, returned guilty verdicts on all three charges, which stemmed from a revolver Hunter Biden bought in October 2018 at a Delaware gun shop. The first two counts were for lying about his drug use on a federal background check form, and the third count was for possessing a gun while addicted to, or using, illegal drugs.

— Marshall Cohen & Holmes Lybrand, FROM CNN
ORIGINALLY PUBLISHED JUNE 11, 2024

Baltimore shipping channel fully reopens after massive cleanup

After a colossal cleanup effort, federal and state authorities fully reopened the main shipping channel to the Port of Baltimore on Monday, transforming a site of ferocious destruction into a symbol of resilience after an errant container ship downed the Francis Scott Key Bridge in March and killed six workers.

Authorities restored the federal channel to its original 700-foot width and 50-foot depth, providing a moment of hope after a painful period in Baltimore.

"Yet again, Baltimore was counted down and out," Mayor Brandon Scott (D) said in an interview. "And yet again, Baltimore proved the world wrong."

— Michael Laris, FROM THE WASHINGTON POST
ORIGINALLY PUBLISHED JUNE 10, 2024

Who will be Donald Trump's pick for vice-president?

The competition to become Donald Trump's vice-presidential candidate is heating up. Trump has teased crowds with a lengthy short-list. However, if tradition holds we still have weeks before learning his selection - running mates are often revealed around each party's national convention. The Republican National Convention takes place in mid-July.

A number of potential vice-presidential candidates have received vetting materials, including inquiries about their financial background, according to the BBC's news partner CBS News. Among them are Senator Tim Scott, North Dakota Governor Doug Burgum, New York Representative Elise Stefanik, and Florida Senator Marco Rubio.

— Holly Honderich & Sam Cabral, FROM BBC NEWS
ORIGINALLY PUBLISHED JUNE 6, 2024

Florida transgender medical care restrictions struck down by judge

A federal judge on Tuesday struck down parts of Florida's restrictions on transition-related medical care for transgender minors and adults, declaring several statutes that ban such care unconstitutional. The law, championed by Republican Gov. Ron DeSantis, made Florida among the most restrictive states for transgender care in the nation.

Transgender opponents are of course free to hold their beliefs," Judge Robert L. Hinkle of the U.S. District Court for the Northern District of Florida, Tallahassee Division, wrote in his opinion. "But they are not free to discriminate against transgender individuals just for being transgender. In time, discrimination against transgender individuals will diminish, just as racism and misogyny have diminished."

— Jo Yurbaca, FROM NBC NEWS
ORIGINALLY PUBLISHED JUNE 11, 2024

Serious heat wave to scorch the eastern United States next week

The eastern half of the United States faces an intense heat wave starting late this week and peaking next week that could produce dangerously high temperatures over a large area for an extended period. It could threaten records and place vulnerable groups of people at risk from heat-related illnesses.

Over the weekend, widespread highs in the mid-90s to around 100 will spread across the southern Plains, South and Midwest. By Monday, the heat will swell into the Ohio Valley before reaching the Mid-Atlantic and Northeast shortly thereafter.

For much of next week, a punishing combination of heat and humidity will remain lodged over the East — although some relief may arrive in the Upper Midwest during its second half.

— Ian Livingston, FROM THE WASHINGTON POST
ORIGINALLY PUBLISHED JUNE 12, 2024

US inflation cooled in May, price pressures may be easing

Christopher Rugaber
FROM ASSOCIATED PRESS
ORIGINALLY PUBLISHED JUNE 12, 2024

Inflation in the United States eased in May for a second straight month, a hopeful sign that a pick-up in prices that occurred early this year may have passed. The trend, if it holds, could move the Federal Reserve closer to cutting its benchmark interest rate from its 23-year peak.

Consumer prices excluding volatile food and energy costs — the closely watched "core" index — rose 0.2% from April to May, the government said Wednesday. That was down from 0.3% the previous month and was the smallest increase since October. Measured from a year earlier, core prices climbed 3.4%, below last month's 3.6% rise, and the mildest such increase in three years.

Fed officials, who will end their latest policy meeting later Wednesday, are scrutinizing each month's inflation data to assess their progress in their fight against rising prices. Even as overall inflation moderates, such necessities as groceries, rent and health care are much pricier than they were three years ago — a continuing source of public discontent and a political threat to President Joe Biden's re-election bid.

Most other measures suggest that the economy is healthy: Unemployment remains low, hiring is robust and consumers are traveling, eating out and spending on entertainment.

And Wednesday's report indicated that consumers are beginning to get some relief from the price spikes of the past three years. Grocery costs were unchanged, on average, from April to May, after actually falling 0.2% the previous month. Food prices have risen just 1% over the past 12 months, though they're still up about 20% from three years ago.

Average gas prices tumbled 3.6% nationally just from April to May, though they're 2.2% higher

than they were a year earlier. Those declines have continued, with gas averaging \$3.45 a gallon Wednesday, down 17 cents from a month ago. Americans didn't drive as much over the Memorial Day weekend as they have in previous years, reducing demand, and oil prices have fallen.

Overall inflation also slowed last month. Measured from a year earlier, prices rose 3.3%, less than the 3.6% increase a month earlier.

"It's certainly welcome news," said Tom Porcelli, chief U.S. economist at PGIM Fixed Income.

Later Wednesday, the Fed's policymakers are expected to reduce their forecast for interest rate cuts by year's end to two, down from three in their previous forecast in March. Before Wednesday's mild inflation figures were released, many economists worried that the Fed would predict just one rate cut this year. But most analysts said the inflation slowdown, if it continues, makes two cuts more likely.

Is this the end for mandatory diversity, equity statements?

Jeremy Peters
FROM THE NEW YORK TIMES
ORIGINALLY PUBLISHED JUNE 6, 2024

For years, conservatives condemned the use of diversity statements by universities, which ask job applicants to detail their commitment to improving opportunities for marginalized and underrepresented groups.

Critics called such statements dogmatic, coercive and, in one lawsuit seeking to end the practice in California, "a modern day loyalty oath" that recalled when professors were required to denounce the Communist Party.

But the use of diversity statements continued to grow, and eventually became a requisite when applying for a teaching job at many of the country's most selective universities. That seems to be changing.

Harvard University's Faculty of Arts and Sciences and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology have each recently announced that they will no longer require diversity statements as a part of their hiring process for faculty posts.

The decisions by two of the nation's leading institutions of higher learning could influence others to follow suit.

"The switch has flipped as of now," said Jeffrey S. Flier, the former dean of Harvard Medical School. Many professors on hiring committees, he said, may have been reluctant to voice their concerns about mandatory diversity statements before now. "But I think the large, silent majority of faculty who question the implementation of these programs and, in particular, these diversity statements — these people are being heard."

The University of California system was the first to require diversity statements, starting about a decade ago. To supporters of the requirement, such statements were necessary if colleges wanted to build a welcoming environment for a diverse student population.

Today, some universities use the

statements early on in the hiring process, to screen applicants before they are even granted an interview. Others consider the statements later, as applicants reach the final rounds.

When Harvard and M.I.T. asked their faculties about the worthiness of diversity statements, though, they found little support.

Even some of the most ardent proponents of diversity initiatives seem lukewarm, at best, about requiring applicants to submit a statement.

"While it has value, I also believe that value is limited," said Paulette Granberry Russell, president of the National Association of Diversity Officers in Higher Education.

Ms. Granberry Russell said that while she thinks conservatives have misrepresented diversity statements to indict all diversity programs, she thinks that the way to ensure a diverse applicant pool is to identify candidates from different backgrounds early in the recruiting process.

Trump found guilty of all 34 charges in hush money trial

Kara Scannell, Lauren Del Valle, & Jeremy Herb
FROM CNN
ORIGINALLY PUBLISHED JUNE 7, 2024

A Manhattan jury found Donald Trump guilty of all 34 charges of falsifying business records Thursday, an unprecedented and historic verdict that makes Trump the first former president in American history to be convicted of a felony.

Not only is Trump the first former president to be found guilty of a felony, he's also the first major-party presidential nominee to be convicted of a crime in the midst of a campaign for the White House. And if he defeats President Joe Biden in November, he will be the first sitting president in history to be a convicted felon.

The verdict in the hush money trial was announced after jurors deliberated for nearly 12 hours over two days.

It will ultimately be up to voters in November to decide the significance of the guilty verdict

delivered by 12 ordinary New Yorkers, which, on a legal basis, does not prevent him from being elected president again.

"This was a rigged, disgraceful trial. The real verdict is going to be November 5, by the people," Trump said after leaving the courtroom. "We didn't do anything wrong. I'm a very innocent man," he said as he vowed to continue fighting.

Manhattan District Attorney Alvin Bragg, a Democrat, announced charges against Trump last year and presenting the first indictment of a former president, accusing him of falsifying the re-payment of his former lawyer Michael Cohen in order to cover up a \$130,000 payment Cohen made to adult film star Stormy Daniels to keep her from speaking out about an alleged affair with Trump before the 2016 election. (Trump has denied the affair.)

At a news conference Thursday evening, Bragg acknowledged the historic nature of the case and the conviction. While Trump is a

U.N. Security Council passes Gaza ceasefire proposal

Abigail Williams, Andrea Mitchell, Raf Sanchez, & Corky Siemaszko
FROM NBC NEWS
ORIGINALLY PUBLISHED JUNE 10, 2024

The United Nations Security Council passed a U.S.-drafted ceasefire deal aimed at halting eight months of bloody fighting between Israel and Hamas in Gaza.

The draft of the resolution, which President Joe Biden approved, was finalized Sunday after almost a week of negotiations among members of the 15-member council.

For it to pass, the resolution needed at least nine votes in favor and no vetoes by the countries that have the power to send any ceasefire proposal back to the drawing board — the U.S., France, Britain, China or Russia.

China made no move to block it, and Russia abstained.

"Today, we voted for peace," said the U.S. ambassador to the U.N., Linda Thomas-Greenfield.

In March, China and Russia vetoed a Gaza cease-fire resolution, saying it would give Israel a green light to attack the city of Rafah. Before, it was the U.S. that vetoed three draft resolutions, two of which would have demanded an immediate cease-fire.

Biden announced on May 31 that Israel had proposed a three-part plan that would ultimately lead to a permanent cease-fire in Gaza, as well as the release of all hostages who have been held there since Oct. 7, when Hamas launched a bloody surprise attack on Israel.

Israeli forces have killed more than 37,000 Palestinians, including thousands of women and children, since then, according to Gaza health authorities.

Nate Evans, spokesperson for the U.S. mission to the U.N., said Sunday that it was important for the Security Council to put pressure on Hamas to agree to a proposal that Israel has accepted.

"Israel has accepted this proposal and the Security Council has an opportunity to speak with one voice

and call on Hamas to do the same," he said.

But there already are signs that Israel may not be on board with this proposal.

The dramatic rescue of four hostages Saturday strengthened Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's determination to continue the Gaza invasion rather than agreeing to a cease-fire, a senior Biden administration official told NBC News on Sunday.

Hamas, on the other hand, said in a statement, in part, that it "welcomes what was included in and confirmed by the Security Council resolution regarding a permanent ceasefire in Gaza."

There had been concern that because so many Palestinian civilians perished as a result of the Israeli rescue raid Hamas military leader Yahya Sinwar, who has held out against any deal with Israel despite intense pressure for a deal from Qatar and Egypt, would take an even harder line against the new ceasefire proposal.

— Bethan McKernan, FROM THE GUARDIAN
ORIGINALLY PUBLISHED JUNE 12, 2024

Nigeria confronts its worst economic crisis in a generation

Nigeria is facing its worst economic crisis in decades, with skyrocketing inflation, a national currency in free-fall and millions of people struggling to buy food. Only two years ago Africa's biggest economy, Nigeria is projected to drop to fourth place this year. The pain is widespread. Unions strike to protest salaries of around \$20 a month. People die in stampedes, desperate for free sacks of rice. Hospitals are overrun with women wracked by spasms from calcium deficiencies.

The crisis is largely believed to be rooted in two major changes implemented by a president elected 15 months ago: the partial removal of fuel subsidies and the floating of the currency, which together have caused major price rises.

— Ruth Maclean & Ismail Awwal, FROM THE NEW YORK TIMES
ORIGINALLY PUBLISHED JUNE 11, 2024

Europe to hit China with EV tariffs that its own automakers oppose

The European Union plans to impose tariffs on imported Chinese electric vehicles, marking an early victory for officials who view the imports as a threat to the region's powerful car sector despite deep divisions in Europe over the issue.

The baseline level of tariffs, calculated at 21% for companies that cooperated in an EU probe, would come on top of the EU's existing 10% tariff, the bloc said Wednesday. While some individual companies would face lower or higher tariffs, they are still well below the duties the U.S. announced recently, likely blunting how much they can disrupt the flow of Chinese EVs to the continent.

— William Boston & Kim Mackrael, FROM THE WALL STREET JOURNAL
ORIGINALLY PUBLISHED JUNE 12, 2024

Macron gambles on snap election after crushing loss to far right

France's President Emmanuel Macron has dissolved the country's parliament, the National Assembly, and called a snap election after an exit poll showed his Renaissance party is set to be trounced by the far-right opposition in European parliamentary elections on Sunday.

After initial projections, the far-right National Rally (RN) party came out on top with 31.5% of the vote, more than double the share of Renaissance, which scraped into second place on 15.2% of the vote, just ahead of the Socialists in third with 14.3% of the vote.

— Niamh Kennedy, Christian Edwards & Xiaofei Xu, FROM CNN
ORIGINALLY PUBLISHED JUNE 9, 2024

Greece closes schools, Acropolis as possible record heat is forecast

Intense heat in Greece prompted a mini lockdown for two days starting on Wednesday, with some schools closing and the Acropolis restricting visiting hours, as the authorities searched for two foreign hikers just a few days after a British medical journalist was found dead on the island of Symi after going for a walk in searing heat.

The onset of sweltering temperatures, which meteorologists said might set a record on Thursday, prompted the Health Ministry to issue a warning to older people and people with chronic ailments to stay indoors. The authorities also advised anyone who works outdoors to avoid strenuous activity from noon to 5 p.m.

— Niki Kitsantonis, FROM THE NEW YORK TIMES
ORIGINALLY PUBLISHED JUNE 12, 2024

The Internet's final frontier: Remote tribes in the Amazon

As the speeches dragged on, eyes drifted to screens. Teenagers scrolled Instagram. One man texted his girlfriend. And men crowded around a phone streaming a soccer match while the group's first female leader spoke.

Just about anywhere, a scene like this would be mundane. But this was happening in a remote Indigenous village in one of the most isolated stretches of the planet.

The Marubo people have long lived in communal huts scattered hundreds of miles along the Ituí River deep in the Amazon rainforest. They speak their own language, take ayahuasca to connect with forest spirits and trap spider monkeys to make soup or keep as pets.

— Jack Nicas, FROM THE NEW YORK TIMES
ORIGINALLY PUBLISHED JUNE 2, 2024

GUEST COLUMN

I Was The Token Man And I Had to Leave

Forget third wheeling—I was the spare in the trunk.

By An Anonymous Man

You (the reader) have seen the memes, I bet. Of sneaky school photographers casually snapping pics of minorities to highlight diversity websites and pamphlets. The classic—if goofy—example of being tokenized. I thought that wouldn't happen to me. In fact, I even conform to traditional stereotypes—Asian, male, computer science and math double major, among other things that would deanonimize me. So how did that happen? Strange circumstances and bad luck.

See, within The Group (henceforth referred to as “you,”) I was the only man. This wasn't and certainly isn't an inherent problem. But I think, all else equal, it set the stage for everything that followed, most of which you honestly probably haven't recognized, even now. Still, this isn't an angry indictment of ignorance, more so a matter-of-fact record of events. I never confronted any of you about it, so if you read this... thanks for sticking around.

Firstly, I'm somewhat convinced that you saw me as the weird-but-nice outsider man. Maybe not that weird, and maybe not that much of an outsider, but together it was enough to form a barrier that always stayed up. I was just that “guy” who wasn't where he was “supposed” to be, hidden away. The guy who would understandably be the last in the loop but the first to share in an attempt to bond. Well, actually, I stopped sharing. I'm not trying to look at this through a “quid pro quo” lens, but I was literally scared of confiding in you about a life-altering medical situation. I figured you

would think it's TMI, which hurt. It hurt so much that I went public with it before you overheard it elsewhere, so I didn't have to tell you face-to-face. So what was the point?

If you're reading this, I'm genuinely curious if you ever thought about this whole dynamic. Here's a concrete example for the readers: Ring Delivery 2023. Sophomore year, we all dressed up and did our cute little rounds taking pictures. I don't blame you for not seeing what went wrong because the evidence kind of obfuscates it. I still go to my Google Drive and look at the pictures I saved. It looks like harmony: pictures of us as a group, pictures of you all, and so on, smiling with closed fists, showing off thousands of dollars in pretty cylinders of metal.

But that's precisely the problem. Dig a bit deeper, and there were a few pictures with me and you all, but tons of pictures of just you all. I was auxiliary. The extra dude on the side and/or back of a picture—I'm tall by MIT standards, by the way—but not a core member.

See, if I were actually integrated into The Group, you all would've taken more pictures with me beyond the obligatory ones. There would've been photos of me with various strict subsets of The Group, photos that you initiated because you actually wanted photos of me. If I was anything other than the outer layer of The Group, we would've had cute, organic candid, not just the glitzy professional Instagram photos everyone took at those booths.

OK, maybe you think this example is stupid, but I think Ring Delivery photos are a great way to analyze this type of thing. For

the record, I don't think you would ever actually crop me out from a photo and post it. That would be horrific. Rather, I was mentally cropped out and compartmentalized in a strange moment of mental groupthink that just...happened.

Again, I don't hate anyone involved, but you all wore me down. You go on various self-defined girls' trips, some big, some small. Now, I understand maybe not getting invited to go to, say, East Asia with The Group during IAP. But why do you plan little day trips and then toss me half-hearted half-invites that I'm supposed to decline? Is a four-hour time block with me too little return on investment (ROI) for your week-end? Maybe even negative ROI?

By the way, whenever I wanted to tag along, I'd catch a hesitant glance on all your faces, and half the time I'd walk it back. I usually said I was busy. Letting you know now I wasn't busy most of the time, I just wanted to save you guilt. I tried giving you the benefit of the doubt—maybe my repeated “neverminds!” made it seem like I wasn't interested. But that can't be true. Because until the very end, I always faithfully circled back to The Group, just to get bombarded with more pseudo-rejections. I'm not sure why I did.

I never was honest, and what was the point? The one time I semi-officially left The Group in my junior fall, three of you guys threw an intervention with this weird, weird interview of sorts. I was eager to get things off my chest, but as I gently expressed concerns, I caught strange looks of guilt, sadness, and confusion on your faces. Genuinely, how were you confused?

If that's how you reacted to the homeopathic-level dilution of the truth, how the hell could I say everything I actually wanted to? I couldn't—that's what this article is for. Because the one thing I would hate more than this dynamic (again, hating the situation, not the people involved) is being fake-included in The Group because I was whining about it. But honestly, I wouldn't mind if they reached out now to talk about it. A post-mortem, if you will.

There's more. Remember that one time you booked an entire birthday party in the Cheney Room, which is reserved for women and gender minorities? The birthday party you invited me, a man, too? You fixed it in the end when someone pointed it out, but that, too, is a perfect microcosm of what happened: accidental, nonmalicious exclusion. That whole little incident, while easily resolved, made me feel uneasy as you partied at the new venue. Like, after realizing the issue, you all messaged (things to the effect of) “oh unfort.” I know that's just your default way of communicating “oops,” but I often wonder if I should've just left so you didn't have to settle on that “unfortunate” second-choice venue. The inferior venue you almost forgot you needed because of a guy.

So, here's to my 10-month anniversary of leaving the group. Because you bet I'm going to be a main character during my graduation pictures next year. I will not be the male-photographer-friend-you-feel-bad-for-so-you-take-a-few-pictures-with-him again. I'll be an actual core member of Another Group. I'm finally going to be more valued than just some dude.

GUEST COLUMN

Free Listening

Figuring out what it means to be a good person

By Keiji Imai

A strange loneliness crept over me when I noticed the man with a “Free Listening” sign sitting on the steps of Lobby 7. It had occurred to me that I had approached him the day before because nobody else wanted to talk to me. I stood there, wondering if I would be able to form lasting friendships at MIT as I waited for my next CPW event before eventually building up the courage to talk to him again.

“Hey, how's it going?”
“It's a beautiful day,” he said, putting down his book.

“How long have you been doing this?”
“Since 2018 or so, but only when the weather is decent.”

“Dang, that's a long time,” I said. “Why do you do it?”

He thought for a moment.
“I think that bad things can happen when someone has nobody who listens to them,” he said. “There was a point in my life when I really needed someone to talk to, and I don't want what happened to me to happen to anyone else. That's why I want to listen to people.”

I was taken aback by his kindness. He was giving up so much of his time to help others. His worldview seemed fundamentally different from the MIT students I'd talked to all weekend. They would work unbelievably hard to become researchers and engineers, yet it felt like the only time they would go out of their way for others was when it would benefit themselves in some way.

It occurred to me that I was just as self-serving. I wondered if I only did nice things for my friends and family so that they would see me as a good person. How many nice things would I have done if nobody would know that it was me who did them? Would I have done them for a stranger? To be honest, if I knew that it wouldn't affect my life at all, I probably wouldn't do too much to help others.

“I can't think of the last time I did something truly selfless,” I said, suddenly tearing up. “I feel like I'm only pretending to be a good person.”

“I'm sure you've done plenty of good things,” he said gently. “What does it take for a good thing to be selfless?”

I hadn't thought about that before.

“You have to be doing it to help others, not yourself,” I decided. “Like cleaning a park when nobody's watching. It's not selfless if

you're only doing it so that other people will see you doing it.”

“I see,” he said. “So you have to do good things for the right reasons.”
“Yeah.”

“You strike me as a good person though,” he said. “You want to be selfless, and that has to mean something.”

“I feel like I'm just pretending to be a good person,” I said again. “I tell myself that I want to make the world a better place, but when I think about it, everything I do is just to benefit myself. Maybe that's the only way to get into a school like this. Maybe that's just how everybody is. But I feel like a fraud. I want to be a good person, like you, not just someone who pretends.”

He thought about that for a second, then said, “You know, I think people are like trees. When you're young, you need to focus on growing. Eventually, you'll become a big tree and you can give back. It's okay to focus on yourself right now.”

Two years later, I sometimes remember my conversation with the “free listening” man, who goes by Kip, and think about what it means to me to be a good person. The conversation made me realize that I don't necessarily have to feel bad about doing things to benefit myself. Prioritizing my classes and projects allows me to become an engineer who can change the world for the better, and choosing an impactful career makes my studying about something bigger than myself.

I wasn't upset about not doing enough for the world though—I felt bad about doing good things for selfish reasons. Couldn't Kip also be doing it all for himself? Maybe everything that we do is self-serving at some level. But even if nothing is entirely selfless, at least listening feels genuine even if you derive personal fulfillment from it. Pursuing an impactful career because you want to feel good about the difference that you made in the world is still admirable. It's possible to be self-serving and good, as long as I'm driven by my own principles more than external rewards.

At the time, I didn't understand why Kip cared so much about listening to people. I knew that listening was important, but I had always felt that most people, including myself, have people who care about them and are happy to listen to them. I thought that the hard part was making people comfortable with opening up, not listening.

But when I found myself fighting depression, I began to appreciate the importance of listening. I would open up to people, and yet, I wouldn't feel understood. Sometimes, people wouldn't care; other times, they would care, but they wouldn't understand.

Being a good listener is like being a good person—you can't fake it. Opening up to someone who really cares about your feelings and tries to understand them feels different from talking to someone who listens out of obligation.

But listening skills are also needed to make someone feel understood. When I started therapy, I immediately noticed how my therapist would ask questions that showed that they were trying to understand my feelings even if they didn't get it right away. Feeling depressed made me care more about other people's feelings, so I started making more of an effort to put myself in other people's shoes. I realized that I sometimes said things in a way that was easily misinterpreted or responded with suggestions when I should have focused on understanding. With practice, I began to learn how to be a better listener.

My understanding of what being a good person means has also changed throughout my life. I used to think that being a good person was about what you do to make the world a better place, but I've realized that it's not just what you do; it's also why you do it. I could donate all my savings to charity, but instead of making me feel like a better person, I would feel like someone pretending to be a good person. Even if I managed to hide it from everyone, I'd feel like I was trying to convince myself I was a better person than I was. What's the point of doing good if, deep down, I don't mean it?

Kip, on the other hand, cares about people so much that he wants to spend his afternoons listening to strangers. When you have a conversation with him, you can tell that he is enjoying it. He cares about you as a person, and he isn't just doing it to make himself feel better. Being a good person has to come naturally: by living life and building empathy.

As awful as it was, depression made me a better person by making me a better listener. At the end of my sophomore year, I finally understood what Kip had told me during CPW. I don't want anybody to feel like nobody cares about them. So whenever given the opportunity, I try to listen wholeheartedly.



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AN ELLIE FOR YOUR THOUGHTS

Dear Ex-Girlfriend

A letter to a lost love. It's time I moved on.

By Ellie Montemayor

PUBLISHER

Editor-in-chief's note: *This piece contains mentions of drinking.*

Dear ex-girlfriend,

I miss you.
I said I love you, and you said it back.
When I met you in the fall, you were just what I needed.

It was the start of the semester when I met you. You joked about being a grave digger as your job outside of school. I was in bed, probably eight drinks in. You made me laugh for the first time in days. I texted something, and you didn't respond. I checked the next day and your contact was gone from my phone. I thought we clicked, but I guess we didn't, and that was alright.

A couple of weeks after, you texted again. I was watching a show in the basement of McCormick (my dorm, if you remember), I was lying on the couch half-asleep, and my friend had tagged along to watch with me. We were eating crisps together, and I was halfway through my third seltzer. You texted something funny and made me giggle. My friend asked me who I was talking to, and I told her about you.

On our first date together, we went to Newbury Street. That place still reminds me of you.

I was finishing up a meeting on campus and ran straight across the bridge to meet you. I wore a white button-down and, on top of it, I had on a black trench coat with flowers sewn on. My French teacher from 7th grade had given it to me.

It was dark by the time I got to Newbury; the street was all lit up, the hanging lights overhead swinging softly in the wind, all the people walking beside me and around me with their own dates and their own lives.

We couldn't find each other for thirty minutes, do you remember? We spent all that time looking for each other because I had walked to the Mass Ave side and you got off the train on Copley. You heard my voice for the first time when I called you as I was running all over Newbury looking for you, and you called my voice cute.

Eventually, I found you. You were ordering a cup of tea from a bakery for us to drink together while I was looking for you. It was Levain, I think. I sat on one of the chairs right outside, and you found me while you were coming out with our tea, and I said *Hi*.

You were gorgeous.
You had on this black lace dress with dropped shoulders and these black leather boots that made you look a foot taller than you actually were. You had on this black coat with sequins in the back in the shape of angel wings. Your hair was in a messy bob, and it was dyed a faded blue. You had your glasses on; you said you didn't think you looked that good in them, but I said they made you look even better.

We walked down Newbury together, and it was the best night I had in a while. It was really lovely, and all of the things I was so wrapped up in—work, school, life—everything went away as I looked into your eyes and we talked and—really—it was really, really lovely.

We went to Newbury Comics and looked around. We ate at a pho place. We went to the Nuts Factory and joked about

planning a heist at the store. We got to the end of the street and doubled back. We talked all night.

You told me, among many other things, about your medical problems, about your mental health problems, about your family problems. You said no one had ever understood. I said I did, and I made a promise to always understand.

We were heading back and the wind was getting strong, so we hid under the Boston Architectural College Library for a bit.

We had our first kiss on the bridge. You were cold, and I had given you my trench coat to keep you warm.

We went right back to McCormick, and you spent most of the night at my place. You left a few hours later; I wished you'd stayed.

One day, I walked out of recitation for my cognitive neuroscience class from the Northwest Building at Harvard—you loved neuroscience, and I remember us having the fiercest debates about the brain. I don't remember them at all; all I remember is how your face lit up whenever we would talk about it—and I texted you.

“Hey, I had a great time with this really nice girl the other day, but I misplaced her phone number. Can you help me find a way to reach her?” I said playfully.

“Oh no, she must be a very special girl.” You played along. “She must have been very lucky to meet a person like you.”

The next few months went by in a blur.
On our second date, we went to a nightclub. We didn't last long there; we had pissed off the bouncer by heading in too early, then leaving and trying to come back, and then leaving again way too early.

We made out against the graffiti-lined wall, cigarette butts strewn around us on the sidewalk. We went back to McCormick. You didn't stay for that night again either, and I spent the rest of the night by myself, head in the clouds, waiting for our next encounter.

I found out how alike we were. We made a promise to each other to watch every single Hunger Games film because we wanted to see Songbirds & Snakes at the cinema together. We never did. We watched Rick and Morty together, and we would have nights where we talked about it all night long. We talked about all of the different things we liked. You liked the same things I did, and I liked you.

Sometimes, you called me in the middle of the night crying, asking me to tell you that everything would be okay; I told you it would be. When I would call you in the middle of the night, you would say it right back.

During Thanksgiving Break, I thought of you. You told me about how you talked to your uncle about us, how he said we were perfect for each other.

One night, when we were together, we made it official. You were crying into my shoulder; you said you didn't want to lose me. I said you wouldn't—I said that I would always be here for you. I made a promise to always be here for you.

I don't regret making that promise.

I was your first girlfriend. You had never let yourself be in a relationship before because you didn't feel you could trust anybody to stay if they knew who you actually were. You said you tried, and no one ever listened. You trusted me, and I understood what that responsibility meant. I listened, I listened every day, and I would have con-

tinued to listen forever and ever if you had let me.

Over winter break, I thought of you again.

I couldn't wait to spend all spring semester with you, to learn more about you, for you to learn more about me, for us to watch Songbirds & Snakes together.

I said I love you, and you said it back every time. The first time I said it during one of our dates, right after Thanksgiving Break, I was terrified. I didn't know how you would react. But you said it back. Every time I said I love you, you said it back.

Then, one day, you stopped.
One day, you stopped saying it, and one day, you stopped saying anything at all.

I didn't know why. I still don't.
You never told me what went wrong.

Now, sometimes, when I'm with someone else, their soft snores filling up the space in my room, I still think of you. When they snuggle up next to me, eyes closed, nestled into my shoulder—still, my mind wanders to you. And the happiness, the ease, goes away, and my world starts to revolve around you, again, every time.

I don't remember you ever doing that, nesting into my shoulder. We cuddled sometimes, but you were always distant.

Hell, as I'm writing this letter, I'm nestled into someone else's shoulder, listening to their soft sleeping breaths. It's 10 AM now, and they're still fast asleep. I like them a lot, but I like you more. I would still pick you.

I never blocked your number, and I probably still won't. I'm leaving this line open if you ever want to talk.

Sometimes, I wonder what would happen if you did text me back.

I saw you post on your public Instagram once, back in March, a new painting you did. You never did ask me to follow you on your private one, and you never showed me your public one either. I was worried about you, and I looked for it. I wanted to make sure you were okay.

You were—you are.
I'm not.

I cried that night: harder than I've cried in years.

You were always a secretive person. You told me some, but I never got a full picture of you. I never really knew who “you” were, I'm realizing. You never brought me to your apartment. You didn't tell me until the days before you stopped replying to my texts that the name I was calling you (that you had told me to call you from our first meeting) was your last name. The first planet from the Sun, atomic number 80, the messenger of the gods. I don't think I ever got to call you by your first name.

I told you everything about me; we talked for hours on end about so many things. You did tell me some, but no matter how hard I tried, I didn't end up getting all that much from you. I wonder how much of what you did tell me was actually true. Did you ever even tell your uncle about me? Did he ever even say that we were meant for each other? Did you ever mean it, all the times you said you loved me back?

I want to believe it; I really do. I want to believe that you meant everything. I want to believe that when you said you'd take me to meet your grandparents, you meant it. I want to believe that the stories you told me about your family were all true.

I want to believe you when you said you loved me.

I will believe that you did because it would only hurt me again if I didn't.

I don't really know why you're still here, even though it's been so long since you left. My previous relationships have never left me this broken. I think it's because I never gave myself time to heal—it's always been one person after another. The only times I “got over” a relationship was when I jumped right into another one. In the times I didn't, I found a way to hate that ex: they scorned me, or they did me wrong, I would tell myself. And I wouldn't need to move on: because I wouldn't care.

I can't hate you; I could never hate you. But I can't keep doing this to myself; I can't keep loving you. I've loved you for months; I've loved you just these other little flirts that never got off the ground, that tried their best to fly and flap their wings, that didn't make it.

And all the while, I waited for you. I waited for you to text.

You never did.
I was your first girlfriend, you said, when we made it official. I made you a promise that I would always be here for you. I don't regret making that promise.

I'm writing this letter, one that you will probably never get, to say I'm moving on—or at least, I'm trying to. It's 6 PM now, and I'm just about done with this letter. I had to stop a few times: to cry, to drink, to walk out and have a smoke and scream at the sky, to figure out what I could possibly say to you.

Well—it's 11 PM now, and I just woke up. I woke up wrapped in a thin blanket in the front living room of my co-op, and the room is dark. A half-empty seltzer sits on the table next to me. The double sliding door leading into the center room is closed, with a little bit of light creeping in from the centerfold.

From the other end, I can hear my friends singing together and messing around on the piano without me. All day, I thought of you. All day, I cried while thinking of you. All day, I drank myself half to death while trying not to think about you. And all the while, I missed my friends hanging out without me—I missed life happening without me.

I am so sorry for whatever I did that made you want to leave. I am so sorry for whatever happened that made you need to leave. I wish we had dealt with it together, like we did all those times before: the late-night calls, the crying on my bed together.

Some nights, I wait for your text, hoping against all reason that you will write to me. You never do. Still, I wait. Because I promised you I would listen. Because I promised you I'd always be here for you, and I will never regret making that promise.

You probably hoped I'd forget about you when you turned off your phone after seeing one of my texts for the last time, hoping I'd just move on. I hoped so, too. In an earlier iteration of this letter, I called you by name—I wanted to do it for the first (and last) time. And maybe I will if I ever see you again.

But until then, I'm going to try and make life happen again.

Because I said I love you, and you didn't say anything back.

Forever yours,
Ellie



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ALBUM REVIEW

Obsession, grief, and club bangers: 2024’s brat is Charli XCX’s best album to date

The queen of innovative pop is back and better than ever

★★★★★

brat

By Charli XCX

June 7, 2024

By Alexis Yi
STAFF WRITER

I first listened to brat while sitting in an Oreo-themed diner in Hamad International Airport, jet-lagged out of my mind, and moist from walking around for half an hour in search of a table. The lighting was fluorescent; the tall suited men who stood in front of every nearby store were creepy. The vibes were decidedly surreal, yet this was the perfect place to hear pop innovator Charli XCX’s most recent album.

The album title is stylized either brat, BRAT, or Brat, depending on where you look: the comically sparse album cover; the album’s Spotify page; or Wikipedia. I’ll go with brat. Genre-wise this album is quintessentially Charli: packed with energetic hyperpop, EDM and club music tracks while retaining the experimental flavor of some of Charli’s strongest prior work. Lyrically, brat dives into Charli’s

experiences as a woman in the music industry, exploring jealousy and obsession over other women, rumination over the past, and the archetypes of female celebrity, with some of the most honest and confessional lyrics of Charli’s career so far.

brat is a perfect blend of high-energy bangers and soft ballads. Its fast-paced club tracks include “Club classics,” “Von dutch,” “B2b,” and “Mean girls,” the first three of which were released earlier in the year as promotional singles, and all of which feature thumping bass lines and brash lyrics. The album has more vulnerable moments too. On “I might say something stupid,” Charli reveals her feelings of insecurity in the music industry over soft acoustic instrumentation. Later on “So I,” perhaps the most powerful moment on the album, Charli mourns her collaborator and friend SOPHIE, a highly influential producer who passed in 2021 in an auto-tuned lament. She quotes SOPHIE’s track “It’s Okay To Cry”: “And I know you always said ‘It’s okay to cry’ / So I know I can cry, I can cry, so I cry.” Connecting the club music and the quieter moments are more conventional tracks like “Talk talk,” a fun pop song with a club beat, and “Apple,” a track that explores generational trauma and Charli’s relationship with her parents with a light touch and comical lyrical stylings, like the way Charli pronounces “airport” to sound like “apple.”

Charli XCX is at her strongest when she

experiments, and that adventurous flavor permeates this album too. But while the experimental twist of Charli’s previous work lay mostly in the production with lyrics that were otherwise relatively simple, in brat we see Charli writing more emotionally incisive lyrics alongside the meme-able repetitive quality of some of her previous work. She also explores topics like alienation, jealousy and obsession in the world of celebrity with an honesty not yet seen in mainstream pop. Consider the line “I don’t know if I belong here anymore” in “I might say something stupid,” a resigned admission of Charli’s sense of not fitting into the archetypes of fame that surround her in the industry, or “When I’m on stage, sometimes I lie / Say that I love singing these songs you left behind” in “So I,” a gut-wrenching line in light of the fact that Charli frequently performs songs she and SOPHIE worked on together in her live performances and tours. The lyrics on this album are also more visual than in previous work too. In “Mean girls,” Charli XCX sings about a Lana Del Ray-listening internet “it” girl who calls men “Daddy” while “fingering a gold cross”; in “Rewind” she reminisces about a time before fame, sitting in her bedroom and “putting polish on [her] toes.”

This review wouldn’t be complete without mentioning the music videos for “360,” the first track on this album and the last promotional single of brat in early May, and “Von dutch,” which are a welcome addition to the

new self-aware and ironic strain of pop music videos. In the “360” video, we see Charli and a bunch of glammed-up, dead-eyed women strut around a quiet suburb wreaking havoc. In the “Von dutch” video, Charli runs around an airport while throwing punches at the camera, before ultimately being pulled away on a baggage claim conveyor belt. The music video for “360” was what first pulled me into Charli’s discography. Before this video came out in early May, though, I hadn’t actually heard much of her music at all beyond the more well known songs (which are also her worst).

The lyrics and production on brat are blunt, bitchy, and firmly cemented in the present, a bold step against the wave of retrospective production and wishy-washy, navel-gazing lyricism taking over the rest of pop music right now. If brat sparks your interest, here are some other Charli tracks to check out: the 2015 track “Vroom Vroom,” produced by SOPHIE; “claws” off her quarantine album how i’m feeling now; “I Got It” off of 2017’s Pop 2; and “ILY2” off 2017’s Number 1 Angel. For long-time Charli fans, brat is a shining addition to an already sparkling discography. For new listeners, it’s an excellent introduction.

Genres: hyperpop, EDM, dance

Duration: 41:30

Favorite tracks: Talk talk, So I, Apple, B2b

Least favorite tracks: None - actually, everything is good

CONCERT REVIEW

Tech Night at Pops: a long-lasting tradition worth attending

Holden Mui ’25 solos with the Pops, performing Rhapsody in Blue

Tech Night at Pops

Boston Pops

Conducted by Keith Lockhart

Holden Mui ’25 on piano

Boston Symphony Hall

May 31, 2024

By Vivian Hir
EXECUTIVE EDITOR

The first night of Tech Reunions on Friday, May 31, 2024 began with the 126th Tech Night at Pops in Symphony Hall. Conducted by Keith Lockhart, the Boston Pops performed a repertoire appropriate for the festive occasion: well-known celebratory pieces, iconic film scores, and jazz masterworks. The film score trilogy concluded with “Harry’s Wondrous World,” an interesting piece that starts with an uncertain and mysterious tone but then transitions to a hopeful melody, suggesting that the world has yet to be explored.

The orchestra started the concert with familiar pieces that evoked feelings of not only joy, but pride. Listening to Edward Elgar’s Pomp and Circumstances at a live performance was delightful because each

instrument had a distinct sound, from the xylophone’s penetrating notes to the horn’s brassy, march-like tune.

Although Pomp and Circumstances was jovial, Gustav Holst’s “Jupiter ” from The Planets suite stood out more because the movement resembled a cinematic story. “Jupiter” opened with the rapid movement of strings that bristled with excitement, then developed into a well-recognized lyrical melody that transfixed the audience because of its uplifting effect. Following “Jupiter” was In Praise of MIT, MIT’s school song. The slow, sweet melody tinged with nostalgia kindled rare feelings of school spirit among the whole audience.

Afterward, the Pops played a well-curated triptych of John Williams’ film scores. The trumpet’s dotted rhythms and syncopation in “The Raiders March” had an adventurous and playful mood. On the other hand, the calm and airy sounds in “Yoda’s Theme” were highly evocative of the celestial wonders, a pleasant change in timbre from the previous pieces that were predominantly jubilant. The film score trilogy concluded with “Harry’s Wondrous World,” an interesting piece that starts with an uncertain and mysterious tone but then transitions to a hopeful melody, suggesting that the world has yet to be explored.

The second part of the performance consisted of the Pops playing a diverse selection of jazz pieces; each work provided a different

facet to the wide array of tone colors. Duke Ellington’s “Caravan” had a busy and upbeat nature, while Ellington’s “Mood Indigo” had a drowsy and melancholic effect. George Gershwin’s works complemented Ellington’s because they highlighted jazz’s lively and ever-changing energy, whether it was the rapid ascending chromatic sequences in “Three Preludes” or the mischievous trills in “Fascinating Rhythm.”

The main highlight of the concert was Gershwin’s famous Rhapsody in Blue, a concerto-like piece that combines jazz and classical music. Holden Mui ’25 was the piano soloist for this piece. Rhapsody in Blue began with a hazy, ruminative clarinet solo that takes on a jazzy sound, a trait not typically associated with this woodwind instrument. The call and response among the woodwind and brass instruments was amusing because it was like a dialogue between various human characters in a story.

Watching pianist Holden Mui’s rendition of Rhapsody in Blue was a one-of-a-kind experience. His execution of the chords was spot on as they were crisp and crystal clear, loud without having to slam the keys. It was impressive to see him play the fast-paced sections meticulously, as if the notes vanished into thin air. Besides demonstrating great mastery in the technical aspects of the piece, his solo flowed well with the orchestra: the light piano staccato paired well with the pizzicato of the strings.

Mui’s stage presence was also captivating: he lifted his hands off with flair without being flamboyant. He was deeply absorbed in the music, which was evident based on how well he employed the rubato. These subtle changes in tempo allowed the piece to take on a fuller dimension, reflecting the pianist’s creative interpretation and improvisational tendencies. By doing so, Mui provided the audience with a refreshing take on a classic American work.

Rhapsody in Blue ended on an interesting note because of the music’s complex style and emotions. While the orchestral work is best known for its jazz-like characteristics, parts of the music sounded like melodies from the late Romantic Era and early 20th century. The last part of the piece experienced many transitions, from the incredibly moving melody to the boisterous, momentous finale. The moment after the piece ended, everyone in the audience gave a standing ovation for Mui and the orchestra. There were cheers and hollers from the crowd, with some yelling “Encore!”

The concert concluded with Gershwin’s “S Wonderful,” a suitable choice because everyone came together to clap to the rhythm. A light-hearted piece, “S Wonderful” had the piccolos as the spotlight, and their special timbres were analogous to the pleasant chirps of cheery birds. Right before the performance ended, red confetti suddenly came down onto the audience, ending the 126th Tech Night at Pops with a bang.

MOVIE REVIEW

Spaceman fudges an impossibly cosmic setting to half-heartedly deliver a deeply human drama

Adam Sandler plays a depressed spaceman whose mission to explore the stars is interrupted by a failing marriage and a giant spider.

★★★★☆

Spaceman

Directed by Johan Renck

Written by Colby Day

Based on “Spaceman of Bohemia” by Jaroslav Kalfar

Starring Adam Sandler, Carey Mulligan, Paul Dano, & Kunal Nayyar

Released February 20 (Berlinale) & 23 (Netflix), 2024

Rated R. Now streaming on Netflix.

By Ellie Montemayor
PUBLISHER

Note: I’ll be testing a three-tiered rating system with this review — a rating for *insight to marvel at artistic and narrative inventiveness and the vision of the work’s messaging, a rating for implementation to regard the technical achievements involved in the making of the work and the execution of the director’s vision, and a rating for interest to judge how overall enjoyable the work is as independent from its creative accomplishments. The three elements will then be averaged to consider the work’s overall rating.*

Insight: ★★★★★
Implementation: ★★☆☆☆
Interest: ★★★★★

We open the film with a man wading through a forest stream, geared in the un-

comfortable get-up of a baby-blue space-suit emblazoned with the Czechoslovakian flag. This is a fitting image for a man ever-obsessed with his dreams of seeing beyond Jupiter, never taking his eyes off the vast sky, never truly seeing the spirited world around him. It’s a dream; he wakes up and is wrapped in a sleeping bag in a compact cabin of Jan Hus 1, a spaceship commanded under the fictional Czech space program.

(The real-world Czech Republic has never launched its own space program, although a Czech cosmonaut reached space under the Soyuz 28 mission in 1978. To date, there have been two registered Czech cosmonauts.)

Act One

Spaceman begins with Czech cosmonaut Jakub Procházka (Adam Sandler) on Day 189 of his solo mission to the fictional Chopra cloud, a nebular mass of purple space dust that mysteriously appeared in Earth’s sky four years prior. He is being radioed in from Earth by his handler and mission control technician, Peter (Kunal Nayyar), to present for a broadcast recording hosted by European Space Agency commissioner Tuma (Isabella Rossellini). Jakub feels the weight of his mission and, at the midway point of his journey to the Chopra cloud, sees himself as a hero.

The Czech mission races against a contingent from South Korea, both groups vying to be the first to investigate the Chopra cloud’s origins and its mysterious appearance.

Yet, Jakub’s desire to commit to his sworn task is impeded — his pregnant wife Lenka (Carey Mulligan) hasn’t connected with him on the proprietary asynchronous video-calling system CzechConnect in days (a set-up not unlike the way Cooper and Murph communicate in Interstellar). A device was set up in the couple’s bedroom back on Earth for them to remain in contact despite the millions of miles of distance, although he is unable to focus on his work as his wife has seemingly gone missing. Back on Earth, a video message from Lenka intercepted by mission control technicians declares that she is going to leave him; they decide not to let the message go through. Jakub remains

oblivious to his deteriorating marriage.

Things begin to go wrong on the ship: Jakub finds many of the cameras installed for mission control to keep tabs on the spacecraft broken, his toilet buzzes a loud and distracting sound, and the ship’s lights flicker on and off. He begins to be weighed down by the stress of his mission, and he remains unable to reach his wife. Increasingly psychotic hallucinations fill his head as strange occurrences haunt the ship. Unease is setting in.

It’s a fantastic set-up for a fear-inducing, anxiety-provoking suspense flick. At this point, a third of the way into the film, I’m half-expecting the narrative to see Jakub—in a mimicry of a classic psychological thriller’s first act—be slowly driven to the edges of insanity in his isolation in the deep of space. (I had come into the film entirely blind, with no prior knowledge of what the story was supposed to entail.)

Spaceman offers many moments of eerie quiet as it builds up its suspense-filled atmosphere. Musicless close-ups of its characters going about their life and work give a glimpse into their emotions only through the tenseness of their frowning expressions, and the wrinkle lines etched across their faces. Strain and stress grip the film’s squat cast in a multitude of ways: Jakub in the dread of his months-long solitude, Peter in the concern for his cosmonaut’s worsening mental health, and Lenka in the unpredictability of her new-found freedom.

Jakub’s hallucinations manifest as a sort of giant anthropomorphic tarantula (voiced by Paul Dano). (The scene where they first meet, when Jakub walks into the ship’s bathroom and is surprised by the spider-creature’s presence, reminds me somewhat of the final scene in Denis Villeneuve’s Enemy.) At first, his hallucinations are sparing: brief sights of the creature. Then, he begins to hear it talk.

At some point, its hallucinated presence is so unnerving that Jakub locks himself in the airlock and deploys a decontaminating agent all throughout the spacecraft. Despite Peter’s growing concerns about his mental health, Jakub is smart: he knows not to let him know about the spider. Jakub knows not

to compromise the integrity of the mission, as Peter tries to push forward in trying to ascertain Jakub’s true state.

Peter is smart, too; he keeps Jakub in the dark about the actual situation regarding Lenka, fearing a disruption to the mission. At the same time, an intertwined subplot follows Lenka as she seeks solace and joins an utócište (a so-called “place in the country for pregnant women who are alone,” as Lenka describes the commune-like refuge to her mother).

Act Two

As Jakub is forced to interact with the spider creature, he reluctantly begins to accept it into his life. Interestingly enough, the spider isn’t menacing or mindlessly aggressive; it’s actually rather intelligent. Jakub names it Hanuš, recounting the story of the 15th-century clockmaker who supposedly built the Prague astronomical clock (the legend of which, in the real world, is now known to be false). The two start to discuss various topics as they start to see themselves in one another. Hanuš, claiming itself a telepathic extraterrestrial, adds another layer to Jakub’s situation by inducing flashbacks of his past with Lenka.

Sandler and the spider debate the philosophy of their existence; they talk about life and the universe, and they talk about Lenka, which Jakub is initially resistant to, pushing back against a kind of tarantula-facilitated talk therapy. The pair offers each other a level of empathy that is not truly attainable by anyone other than those who know the solitude of space to its deepest extent. (At this point, it’s still kind of unclear if Hanuš is a hallucination or a real creature.)

In its exploration, Hanuš begins to learn its own version of empathy as it connects with Sandler’s depression. During this time, we learn that the spider (as it claims to be) is a vastly old entity, a creature that had witnessed “The Beginning” (a.k.a. the Big Bang). It is of an arachnid race whose planet was destroyed by another group of aliens named the “Gorompeds.” Hanuš was able to escape and became fascinated with humans after passing by Earth.

It eventually found its way to Jakub, attracted by his unique situation and intrigued by his loneliness.

The film weaves between suspense and drama, unable to find a balancing point between its portrayal of psychosis-inducing solitude in the deep darkness of outer space and a romance-centered drama between two “star-crossed lovers.” (The film is very direct in its imagery, going so far as to play an excerpt from Rusalka — a tragic opera that is literally about star-crossed lovers. Hell, Hanuš even references that irony when Jakub plays the song in-scene.)

Somewhere along the way in the film’s deeply muddled second act, we also learn more about Jakub’s past and the context behind his failing marriage. His father was a pig farmer and informant for the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia and was murdered when his status was revealed. Jakub hasn’t forgiven his father for leaving him. We also become privy to the consistent neglect that Jakub shows towards his wife, best exemplified in a memory when she suffers a miscarriage and he ignores her, still wrapped up in his cosmonaut training.

Despite all of these revelations, Jakub remains committed—more than to his wife or his newfound friend or anything else—to his mission. Jakub continues to break every promise to everyone but himself. He will reach beyond Jupiter, even if he loses everything he’s ever loved along the way. “When you’re alone, you think. She’s had too much time to think,” a character in the film says, referencing Lenka’s decision to leave her husband. Jakub, despite it all, still fails to grasp the irony of his situation: he is so centered on how “alone” he is without her, still unable to contact her, that he doesn’t realize she’s been alone for years — even in the times they were together.

Hanuš sees the unconscious cruelty of his friend and decides to leave, too. “My interest in you has expired,” it says to a frustrated Jakub. Following this exchange, Jakub comes to the startling realization that maybe he was the problem all along. In a point of rapid character growth that ultimately comes off as forced, Jakub comes to terms with the pain of the family and friends he had shunned for years — just as the climax of his mission arrives, and the Jan Hus 1 reaches the edges of the Chopra cloud.

And with that, the film closes.

phoned apology to Lenka, who at this point has integrated herself into the community of the utócište. “I have lived a life for all the wrong reasons,” he says to a mournful Lenka. Jakub reenters his guilt into attempting fulfillment and he reconciles with Hanuš.

Jakub’s personal development takes a backstage as the Jan Hus 1 plunges straight into the Chopra cloud, and the film tries to reframe itself as a sci-fi flick; as he tries to collect data to send back to Earth, the luminiferous particles and the extreme pressure of the nebula tear Jakub’s ship apart, and he makes the decision to abandon his mission and save Hanuš, who was suddenly ejected from the ship.

Jakub grabs onto Hanuš, and they barrel into the depths of outer space. For a moment, the poignant scene we see in Hanuš’s slow death by the Gorompeds (which turn out to be a species of tiny parasites that consume the arachnid from the inside out) and Jakub’s grief transforms the film into a proper sci-fi drama à la Interstellar. Along the way, he and the dying Hanuš fully enter the Chopra cloud and witness the “past and future,” a colorful explosion of particles and vibrations paired with all the sounds and sights he’s ever seen and will see.

The pair rocket into a wormhole and emerge into a thick crimson nebula. It’s a beautiful and incomprehensibly cosmic sight, but all Jakub can think about is his estranged wife, Lenka. It’s everything he’d ever dreamed of; for years he’s wanted nothing but to see beyond Jupiter, but now he just wants to come home.

Hanuš dies, and Jakub is left alone in space. He and Lenka call for each other, and Lenka becomes aware of her husband reaching out for her as a stray Chopra particle floats beside her. Jakub is picked up by the South Korean mission that was trailing behind Jan Hus 1, and over the phone, the estranged couple reconciles.

Closing Thoughts

Despite its outlandish and cosmic theming, Spaceman drops its celestial facade to render a deeply human struggle between two people who want to be in love.

As Spaceman concludes its nearly two-hour runtime, I can’t help but feel disappointed. I have really mixed feelings about this film—its message is fantastic, its theming is exquisite, its pacing is messy, and its execution is downright abysmal.

I don’t mean execution as in the technical aspects; other than the fact that Hanuš’s model on occasion reminds me of an oversized Lucas the Spider, the mechanics of the final product were rather outstanding for a Netflix original. (The film had a budget of \$40 million.)

and the opening episodes of Vikings, served as the director for Spaceman.)

I will admit that Spaceman addresses its characters’ worldly struggles in a very mature way, even if not perfectly. When portraying the pain and hurt of Jakub and Lenka, the film excels in a surprisingly relatable way. When addressing the broken nature of their relationship, the film avoids exacting justice on Jakub by painting him as a mean, neglectful narcissist but instead portrays to a realistic degree how his career ambitions and personal history involuntarily drove conflict with Lenka. When trying to cobble together a cohesive denouement, the film appropriately depicts a shared understanding between Jakub and Lenka to work together on repairing their relationship rather than finding it miraculously fixed forever.

Still, even this is muddled: the film’s half-hearted attempts to center mental health into the conversation (such as Peter’s attempts to show concern for Jakub’s well-being and offer to source psychiatric help for the cosmonaut) end up shallow and unfruitful. Not particularly well, Spaceman addresses to the vaguest extent the issue of astronauts’ mental health and the stress they accumulate from their line of work. This comes across more as a pandering last-minute addition to more neatly fit the ethos of the film (a weird “coming-of-age” for a middle-aged man with a successful career and a disastrous marriage) — and in Hollywood canon, it feels largely like Netflix’s way of quietly course-correcting for a generation of overly ambitious, career-obsessed young adults with failed personal relationships.

Despite the plot being about Jakub learning to attend to others and not just himself, almost every single interaction in the film is ultimately centered around Jakub and his own growth. A painful lack of detail on anything other than the estranged couple, from Peter and mission control and the origins of the Chopra cloud to the mystery behind Hanuš’s dead rare and the alien Gorompeds (“you never asked about me,” Hanuš says to Jakub in one heartrending scene), just further demonstrates a fatal miscalculation on the part of the writers’ room to anticipate the expectations of their viewership. The film doesn’t hit, and rather than cheering on Jakub’s and Lenka’s reunion, I am left with a list of never-to-be-answered questions about literally every other part of the narrative.

Ultimately, Spaceman is a hollow film that masquerades as a philosophical exercise by posing a lot of hard-hitting queries about the nature of the universe and human interaction—and ultimately doesn’t deliver.

To quote Hanuš: “Everything that begins must end, skinny human. Even the universe itself.” The same can be said, I think, for Spaceman. And while I enjoyed it while it lasted, I’m not unhappy that it’s over.

COMMENCEMENT

Ginkgo Bioworks COO Reshma Shetty PhD '08 delivers speech for College of Engineering, Computing advanced degree ceremony

Shetty: "A startup is the best way to work on problems that matter to me."

By Vivian Hir
EXECUTIVE EDITOR

On Wednesday, May 29, Ginkgo Bioworks Chief Operating Officer Reshma Shetty PhD '08 delivered the keynote speech for the 2024 MIT School of Engineering and Schwarzman College of Computing Advanced Degree Ceremony.

Shetty obtained her PhD in Biological Engineering at MIT and subsequently founded Ginkgo Bioworks, a biotechnology company based in Boston that uses synthetic biology in various industries, including agriculture and pharmaceuticals.

Inspired by Steve Jobs' famous commencement speech at Stanford in 2005, Shetty outlined her speech in the form of three stories: the origins of Ginkgo, challenges that Ginkgo faced, and life as a series of choices.

Shetty's first story began with her fascination with solving biological problems. She credited her interest in biological engineering to her advisor, Professor Tom Knight. He introduced the idea that "biology is fundamentally programma-

ble," identifying parallels between binary numbers in computers and DNA bases in cells.

During her schooling, Shetty shared that it was difficult for her to write computer programs for biology; many of them did not work. These problems inspired her to make engineering and programming biology easier in order to "solve some of the world's most pressing problems."

"A startup is the best way to work on problems that matter to me," Shetty stated, so she started Ginkgo Bioworks alongside fellow MIT students and Knight.

While it may appear to graduates that the choices people present to them revolve around choosing between different industries and professions, Shetty stated that the most important choice is "picking a problem in the world that matters to you and figuring out the best way to solve it."

Her second story highlighted the challenges Ginkgo experienced as a new startup.

Starting a company was incredibly difficult because of the 2007-2008 finan-

cial crisis. "No one had any interest in funding for students and a professor with no technology, no IP (Intellectual Property), no business model, and no money," Shetty said. She confessed that her team was "on the verge of giving up."

Thanks to Saul Griffith '04 PhD, they didn't.

Knowing that they had the "most important skill of starting a company" because of their experiences "living cheaply" as graduate students, Griffith further advised Shetty and her team on how to fundraise for Ginkgo, such as through side projects like consulting work and bootstrapping, or fundraising a company using minimal external capital.

In her last story, Shetty spoke about her life choices and how many of them led to outcomes that weren't "made in the hopes of getting into where I am today."

In Shetty's case, she conducted research in a biology lab in high school, studied computer science in college, and ultimately did her PhD research in programming cells. What motivated her to make these decisions was based on what

interested her at that time. Life, for her, is "a series of choices," and the future entails making more choices.

Shetty advised graduates to make choices based on "problems that matter to you," rather than "where you want to be 10 years from now." She gave examples of people spending time on research or work that they don't enjoy because they view it as a "stepping stone to an imagined future for themselves." Shetty closed off her speech by encouraging graduates to "optimize locally, not globally."

After the ceremony, The Tech spoke to Dean Anantha Chandrakasan about selecting Reshma Shetty as the keynote speaker. Citing an MIT Faculty Newsletter article about women in biotech, Chandrakasan said that there is significant underrepresentation of women as founders of biotech startups, making Shetty's role as a founder and senior leader an outlier in the industry.

He noted Shetty's invaluable contribution to Ginkgo Bioworks, as she oversaw the company's growth from a small team of five MIT scientists to a publicly traded billion-dollar company.

MIT first Biotechnology Life Sciences Group holds Poster Session

Dozens of students brought to life projects took the initiative to explain their topics, ranging from drug delivery to sea robots.

By Russel Ismael
NEWS EDITOR

Author's Note: Shankar is one of The Tech's News Editors. She was not involved in this article's publication.

On May 8, the MIT Biotechnology Group held their first Life Sciences Poster Session event, where dozens of undergraduates presented highlights from their UROPs, ranging from drug delivery to sea robots.

Investigating Lipid Nanoparticle Delivery of mRNA to Colorectal Cancer Cells

Mercedes Randhahn '27 at the Traverso-Langer Lab is developing more efficient nanoparticle formulations for treating gastrointestinal (GI) metabolic diseases. Her group is building on mRNA COVID-19 vaccines, which teach human cells to make proteins that target the specified virus, inducing a therapeutic effect.

"I'm interested in studying more about gastrointestinal treatments and trying to help more individuals across the world," Randhahn said to The Tech.

Randhahn stated that her long-term goal is to treat GI diseases through oral drug delivery methods instead of needle injections. Her team wants to transition into minimally invasive treatments like oral delivery, which may make patients more open to therapeutic care. She stated that her project will continue "several years down the road."

"Right now, we're trying to optimize our formulation in vitro [outside an organism]," Randhahn said. "Eventually, we will extend this to in vivo [inside an organism] research with a long-term goal of pursuing a clinical trial."

Machine Learning for Aquaculture Hatchery Production

Unyimeabasi Usua '27 and Santiago Bor-

rego Garcia Cancho '26 are part of the MIT Sea Grant, and their research involves how to make aquaculture hatchery production more efficient.

"[Aquaculture hatchery is] basically just these tanks that have thousands and thousands of shellfish larva in them," Cancho stated in an interview with The Tech. "This is in a hatchery in Cape Cod, and [other Sea Grant researchers] assess the health of these larvae over time and try to help them grow."

This involves measuring how many larvae have died. To do so, Cancho explains that they have to view a water sample under a microscope and "count the living and dead ones by hand," which is an "obviously slow process." As such, Usua and Cancho's team is using machine learning to automate the process of identifying live and dead larvae.

They process water sample images to enhance their clarity and accentuate each individual larva for easier counting. Cancho and Usua then trained a "classifier" to specifically look for those larvae, which had an 80% identification rate. Of the 80% of larvae identified, the classifier had a 93% accuracy in determining whether it was dead or alive. As such, the time they saved allowed them to focus more on grouping different larvae.

To classify larvae, Usua stated that they are exploring convolutional neural networks (CNN). She said that CNN works better for the larvae images because it can extrapolate from the images and predict where larvae might be in a non-constrained directive. Before CNN, Usua stated that they identify larvae based on their geometry type.

"Our previous identification process was based on the [larvae] circular shape, but when the hatchery gave us new images with unique shapes in them, our current model wasn't working," Usua stated. "CNN would be able to look for individual larva and classify them based on pixels."

Their next steps are to expand on their model and train it to classify different larvae species.

Synergistic Effects of siRNAs and Small Molecule Drugs for Nanoparticle Delivery Systems in Ovarian Cancer

Valeria Mejia '27 is looking into how to combine small interfering RNAs (siRNA), which are RNAs that prohibit certain genes from being expressed, with small molecule drugs at the Hammond Lab. siRNAs are noncoding RNAs that prohibit certain genes from being expressed. Mejia stated that siRNAs and small molecule drugs alone have many disadvantages as therapies, as siRNAs can lead to high tumor resistance rates by inducing more mutations, and some small molecule drugs can be highly toxic to patients.

By combining siRNAs with small molecule drugs, Mejia stated that the "synergy" will reduce the disadvantages of both methods. "The Hammond lab is very much nanoparticle based," Mejia said to The Tech, so they "introduce these synergistic combinations into nanoparticle systems, and test them out in both in vivo and in vitro experiments."

Mejia used luciferase-based assays, a method that uses a protein that can activate or deactivate certain genes, to see which cells would respond based on their luminescence. To determine the viability of her cell fibroblasts, she used PrestoBlue assays to compare her cells.

Mejia said she plans to test her methods on mice soon after finishing her in vitro tests. She also stated that her methods would also likely "work in other cancers" in addition to ovarian cancer and is hopeful in its applications.

Predicting Gene Regulatory Functions with Deep Learning

Jayashabari Shankar '27 attempts to "decode human evolution" by using human ancestor regions (HARs) and human ancestor quickly evolved regions (HAQERs) in the human genome.

"There are thousands of regions called [HARs] and [HAQERs], and these regions are key to making us human," Shabari stated to The Tech. "They distinguish us from other animals like chimpanzees and gorillas because we share 98.8% similarity in terms of genomes."

Shankar stated that analyzing genome sequences in humans can take years, which is what happened with her postdoctoral research mentor. To accelerate this process, Shabari fed HARs and HAQERs of interest into Enformer, a deep learning model with a library of genes, to predict "what the gene expression will be, where it will act, and what it will do."

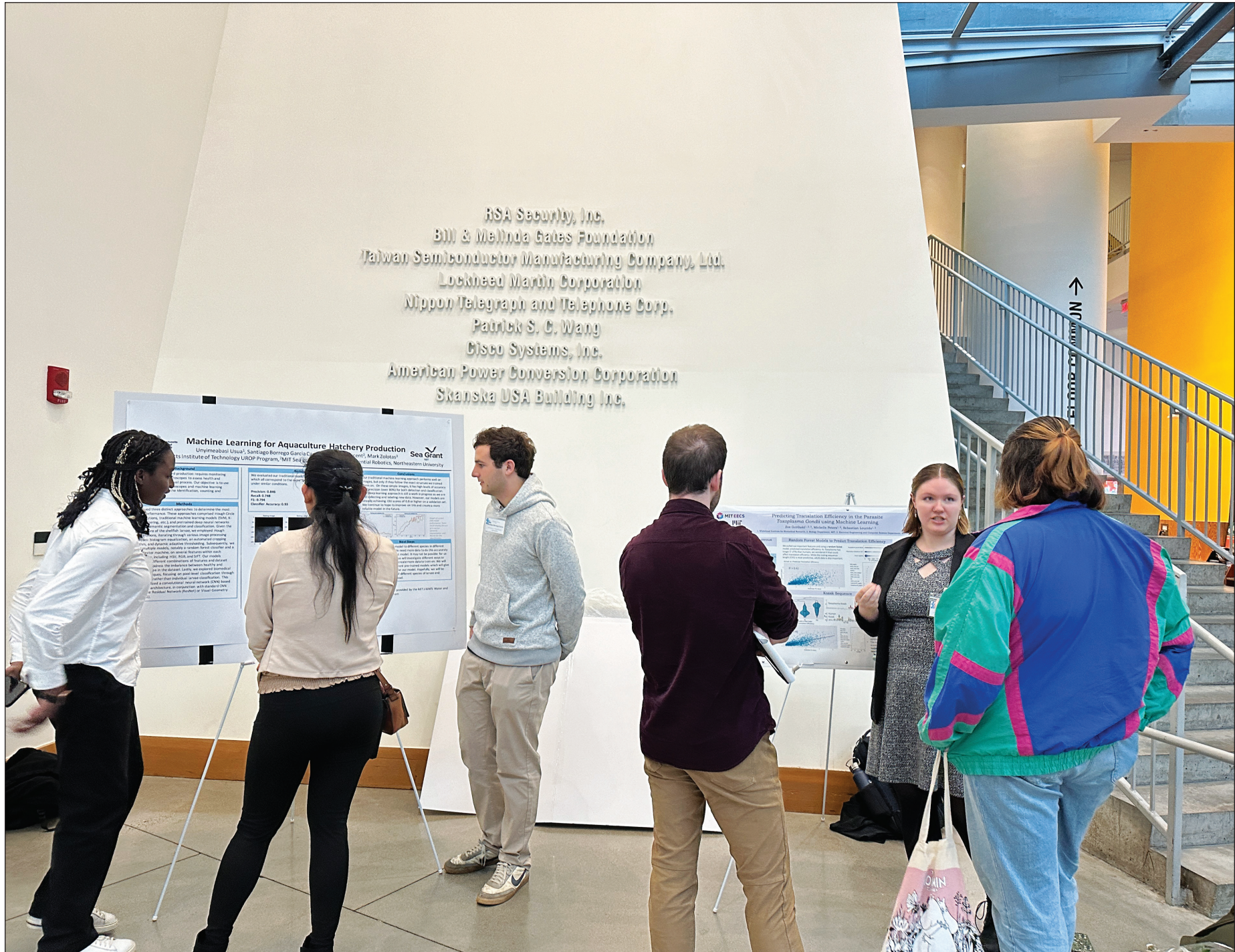
"For instance, for this HAR only expressed in astrocytes [a type of cell in the central nervous system], you can find a lot of specific things," Shankar said. "If there is a lab that focuses on astrocytes, they'll be able to find your specific HARs in these astrocytes instead of looking at all 3,000 astrocytes."

By using the Enformer model, Shankar's team is able to streamline the wet lab portion of the project. She also said that since they know what the HARs will do, their work will also help future researchers working on similar topics because her work will be added to the Enformer database. She said her next step in the project would be to analyze thousands more HAQERs in the summer.

"We've only done 3,000 when there's actually, I think, a few million HAQERs," Shankar clarified. "It's all a matter of putting it into a supercomputer and analyzing that, but it's going to be a summer project for me, for sure."



Ginkgo Bioworks COO Dr. Reshma Shetty '08 PhD delivers keynote speech for the 2024 MIT School of Engineering and Schwarzman College of Computing advanced degree ceremony.



Undergraduates exhibit their research at MIT Biotech Group's life sciences poster session in Stata, May 8.

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EDITORIAL

The Past, Present, and Future: What we do at *The Tech*

A reflection as MIT student journalists amidst trying times.

By *The Tech* Editorial Board

Our most recent editorial was written in April 2021. It presented the majority opinion of the Volume 140 Editorial Board regarding COVID-19 vaccination requirements heading into the Fall 2022 semester. In the past three years, much has changed: we installed a new president and watched as our Institute propelled itself into the future through the creation of new academic majors, construction of new facilities, and the inception of countless initiatives.

In the past eight months especially, we have witnessed heightened national interest in the Israel-Palestine conflict following the October 7 Hamas-led attacks on the State of Israel and the ensuing events that have ensued in response to the carnage and senseless loss of life.

In the United States, this furor has been most strongly felt on college campuses. MIT is no exception.

What has followed is heightened scrutiny of the way newspapers handle reporting surrounding the impact of the war, dissatisfaction with the decisions made by governmental and administrative forces, and ever-increasing polarization between factions that comprise members of our community that we cherish so dearly.

This editorial centers on MIT and seeks to give insight into how *The Tech* approaches campus affairs and more importantly, the role of media in mediating discourse during times of conflict.

Our campus

The end of the Spring semester saw our campus retreat into the summer after one of the most pivotal periods for universities nationwide in decades. Members of our community found themselves planted strongly on one side or the other in a fierce worldwide debate on the fate of the Gaza strip: so strongly that each side censured the other publicly via various forums.

Social media sites such as Instagram and X, formerly known as Twitter, have become forums for polarized perspectives on the war; students have verbally attacked and doxxed one another in posts and videos that have shown unique, unfiltered glimpses into the campus community.

Media organizations, from *The Boston Globe* to *The New York Times*, have closely communicated with spokespersons from both protest movements and regularly solicit interviews from student representatives. Many of these interviews largely involve charged statements regarding their personal views on the war, calls to action directed towards community members, and criticisms of the opposition.

Some have taken their cause to our elected officials: in recent months, delegations of Jewish and Israeli students have met with influential politicians—from House representatives in Washington to Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and his cabinet in Jerusalem—to decry antisemitic rhetoric on campus while pro-Palestinian protestors have stormed administrative spaces and city governmental offices such as the Massachusetts State House or Boston City Hall in protests and marches. Vocal public sentiment has notably led the Boston, Cambridge, and Somerville City Councils to pass ceasefire resolutions.

Scores of protestors and counter-protestors—each composed of a mix of students, faculty, alumni, and so-called “outside agitators”—have taken place on the campus nearly every week for the past several months.

Ceasefire resolutions made their way into the ballot boxes of the Undergraduate Association (UA) and the Graduate Student Union (GSU), where students of both organizations voted in a majority to adopt the resolutions as official policies.

The MIT administration issued interim suspensions to dozens of students in connection to a high-profile protest on May 6. Ultimately, responses were strong but mixed: many voiced dissatisfaction with this act, but some nonetheless regarded it as necessary.

All sides regard each other's actions unfavorably—the establishment of the

Kresge Oval encampment by the campus pro-Palestinian movement, its dismantlement by the administration, the student suspensions, and their eventual uplifting have been met with criticism. Some perceive inaction as a mark of complicity, others perceive it as abetting hateful rhetoric. No one wins amidst division.

Firstly, we call upon the MIT community to reflect on this past semester and acknowledge the ever-changing circumstances that have led us to this point. We call upon the community to grasp the nuances and complexities of an issue that has affected many of us so dearly. We call upon the community to truly understand what it means to be a witness to the present times: to indiscriminately reject the humanity of the “other side” is to impede our ability as a community to cultivate a culture of tolerance and understanding.

In the spirit of accountability and reflection: from here, we then analyze *The Tech*'s actions throughout this past academic year.

Our first steps

At the beginning of this conflict, *The Tech* felt it was best practice to mitigate coverage of the conflict. Not because we lacked interest but because, frankly, we weren't ready to handle it. Doing so would have been an insurmountable task that our staff couldn't bear in a year of dwindling finances and shrinking personnel. After many, often heated, discussions within the senior leadership of *The Tech*, we observed how reporting was conducted by other student newspapers and the consequences it had at the time on their own.

Much of our reporting at the time was based on official statements from senior MIT administrators. Such accounts paint only a vignette, not a comprehensive portrait, of the larger, overarching truth surrounding the events on campus. On-the-ground coverage and true engagement with the various student groups and communities involved was lacking.

Our first article on campus responses following the October 7 Hamas-led attack on Israel was published on November 10, about the high-profile Lobby 7 protest—the article largely centered on a video address and corresponding community email from President Kornbluth. The second and third articles, published November 30 and December 14, respectively, reported the December 5 hearing held by the U.S. House Committee on Education and the Workforce in which Kornbluth was summoned to testify. These and the articles following, again, stemmed second-hand from official press releases and vetted statements: they lacked student perspectives and direct reporting. In a face-to-face interview with President Kornbluth in January, little attention was paid to an evolving campus conflict but to some standard questions about efforts towards campus unity and the Institute's “vibrant” partnerships in the Middle East.

Our foremost priority in the Fall semester was safety: we were not willing to risk the safety of our journalists, most of whom had not in themselves been engaged in the conflict at any scale for many reasons. From the eyes of *The Tech*'s senior leadership, it was unreasonable to compel the student volunteers who made up our reporting staff to interject themselves into a volatile situation coupled with deeply personal hostilities across the MIT community. Too much was uncertain then.

We did a disservice to the community when we backed away from this conflict. Simply put, we could have done better.

What changed

As the Fall semester drew to a close along with our 143rd Volume, we realized that it was our duty to tell the stories that truly matter in the wake of events that could not possibly be characterized as tangential to our existence as members of the Institute.

Our first significant piece centered on the student groups engaged in these campus divisions. Although still heavily reliant on official Institute accounts, it reported on the suspension of the Coalition Against Apartheid, published just weeks into the

Spring semester.

As the conflict continued and events on campus escalated, *The Tech* had to re-evaluate its responsibility in objective, unbiased reporting: it was unsuitable for us to continue standing by. We had to hold ourselves to a higher standard. To dwell in the status quo would be an act of deprivation, an act of depriving the community of a critical resource: information. As universities across the nation became microcosms of a wider national rift, we had to live up to our charge of chronicling the Institute's history. We looked to the past, our own even, during years of anti-war protests spanning the duration of the Vietnam War. We looked to the present: scores of student journalists across the country have put themselves at great risk in taking up their duties. And we thereby looked to our future.

We sat down again and reconsidered our plans. We thoroughly reevaluated the policies that led us to this point. More discussions followed regarding staff safety, conflicts of interest, fair and truthful representation of events, and many other concerns pertaining to the work we were to take on.

From there, we heightened our coverage with reporting focusing on campus protests and focused our efforts on establishing connections with student groups that represented the diverse, and often conflicting, perspectives on the war. In the following weeks, we took a critical lens to every new campus protest and counter-protest, administrative response, and broader nationwide events. Our reporting on the conflict was deferred to seasoned reporters—the news editors and the executive committee—those who would be best equipped to handle the nuance and perspective required for such pieces. Although this meant that we weren't able to cover every single event, we felt it managed to prioritize staff safety and perpetuate an ethos of quality over quantity.

By the end of the semester, *The Tech* was able to develop a system for rapidly mobilizing a reporting team, albeit small—on-the-ground reporters, photographers, and desk editors—in response to specific developing situations. For the entirety of May, our entire news staff was on high alert as teams were sent out for reporting at any time of day. From the rapid establishment of the Kresge Oval encampment to its abrupt early-morning dismantlement, during a point of extreme pressure on the community in which hundreds bore witness to protestors physically tearing down barricades amidst retaliatory action by the administration, and as closed-door meetings revealed deep divisions among faculty in the wake of disciplinary action to involved students, *The Tech* doubled down on efforts to provide critical reporting.

The now

As summer sets in, *The Tech* is continuing its efforts to maintain the momentum that has carried us through the past months.

Although major events are to lessen in magnitude and frequency given a reduced on-campus population, we will continue to follow up with the various communities involved in this conflict and ensure that their perspectives continue to be represented. We will continue to pay attention to any further steps by the administration. And we will continue to serve as a bastion of accountability.

While we celebrate our successes and learn from our mistakes, the developments of this year have shown us that there remains work to be done. Better-defined policies and procedures that our staff can be trained on will allow for more consistent and rigorous content output. Another area, as has been for years now, is staffing shortages: limited bodies, time, and resources means that not everything that happens gets written. Sometimes, that manifests as delayed or dropped articles within the content pipeline as we reallocate and reassign hours before publication. And most importantly, building and maintaining bridges with the many members of the MIT community is paramount

to our duty as student journalists.

The lessons this year have taught us to go far beyond what has happened on our campus, and they will inform our approach to journalism for years to come. We don't work within confined bounds; in fact, we are compelled to investigate their sources, understand the facts surrounding them, and see beyond what can be seen.

What really happened

At this point, we've provided a general overview of what *The Tech* has done and where it is headed. Still, we would be remiss in not detailing the specific predicaments we have faced in the past year.

Even before our article at the start of the Israel-Hamas war was published, *The Tech* has been accused of bias. These criticisms have come from all sides of the conflict. Pro-Palestinian voices scrutinized our initial efforts at coverage and found fault with our reporting of administrative action in the past months while pro-Israeli voices criticized our publication of numerous pro-Palestinian opinion pieces. In each new issue filled with diverse perspectives—both from our news desk and the guest opinions that come to us—we have been accused of silencing voices (both pro-Palestinian and pro-Israeli). Increasing animosity and aversion to our reporting have led to numerous potential interviewees withdrawing from coverage and adversely impacting our reporting work. Such difficulties culminate in content that only exacerbates complaints from such parties.

We've moved through the semester under some of the most intense scrutiny, both within the walls of our office and out of it, that the organization has seen in years, if not decades. The microscope of perception that has brought college campuses into an relentless and unforgiving light has magnified our voices and our words. The process of telling stories, from our initial reporting to publication, face exceedingly close attention. All this comes amidst a growing nationwide distrust of the media industry bleeding into our relationship with the community.

On the ground, our reporters have faced harassment and intimidation by protestors and counter-protestors, administrators, and law enforcement. Our executive committee has been inundated with complaints about our reporting, our staff have been reported to administrators in attempts to stymie our mission, and our newspaper has been vilified as a one-sided machine by both sides. As always, we affirm our commitment to the entire MIT community.

Like every other student and professional newspaper in this country, *The Tech* has become its own player in the campus climate, one that is under fire from all angles.

The Tech does not purport to stand by any frame of reference when engaging with campus tensions. Our staff, a diverse group of students from across the MIT community, holds a wide range of views; consequently, we absolutely do not, as an organization, endorse a perspective on this war.

This we believe

The Tech does not endorse a perspective on this war, but we do take a stance on the actions of the Institute's administration: this administration is silencing those who seek to deliver the truths of the community, namely the press.

The administration has silenced the media: we've watched media correspondents' removal from campus as they peacefully and lawfully carried out their duties. Our on-the-ground news teams have observed first-hand that professional reporters, camera crews, and photojournalists have been escorted away by administrators and officers during times of heightened action. We saw the dismissal of Al Jazeera reporting teams from campus grounds led to the May 1 pro-Palestinian protest and the establishment of a temporary second encampment on 84 Mass Ave.

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A statement of purpose from *The Tech* Editorial Board

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Our student reporters, who have just cause to set foot on campus grounds, have similarly been intimidated by several uniformed officers. We have been compelled to exit an area where we have a definitive right to reside. These were targeted efforts; our on-the-ground reporters have been specifically singled out for our reporting work. Our reporters have been photographed (and likely cataloged in some fashion) by both uniformed and non-uniformed officers during points of tension on campus; we have been met with hostility by the entities that lead this Institute. When we analyze the significance of photography of students becoming suspended students, it begs the question of what intentions the administration had in taking ours.

These actions constitute one word: repression.

Do these actions truly champion the values of this Institute: excellence and curiosity, openness and respect, belonging and community?

To you, the reader

Above all, *The Tech*'s actions are centered around a commitment to accountability. When a shared space is taken up by a myriad of overlapping, conflicting voices, all vying for their perspective in a

deeply politicized, nuanced, and multidimensional affair, our duty as an organization is to filter through these voices in search of a larger truth. When we can't determine such an overarching truth, we narrow our efforts to faithfully represent each one within the context of a larger narrative.

We want to share everyone's perspective. That requires engagements between us and the many parts of the MIT community being made in good faith.

We ask our community to meet us with a mutual commitment to accountability. We encourage you to communicate your voice authentically with the press. Represent yourself faithfully in interviews and discussions with reporters and seek out active collaboration with the journalists on the ground. Our work is at its best when we have unfettered access to the perspectives of the communities that we hope to portray, and this work is most accurate when a group's actions match their sentiments.

Regularly create official statements and press releases that clearly delineate your position as an organization and allow for perusal by journalists and the wider community. And lastly, have faith in a reporter's ability to find the facts and portray your perspective appropriately. Trust us to tell your story.

We have been through this ourselves: reporting requires taking risks and like-

wise our parties featured may face potential consequences. Not everyone will be positively impacted by a story, and we acknowledge that. Our work is always in search of the truth, and that truth is not always perfect. We strive to honestly and faithfully represent each perspective.

The situation becomes greatly complicated when considering the media industry as a player in the same game as everyone else: we are compelled to conduct our work in the face of very real danger.

For journalists on the ground in the US and elsewhere, the word “press” has become a target. Student and professional journalists alike all across the nation have not only been harassed and beaten but jailed and arrested during their reporting.

To date, over 100 journalists have been killed in Gaza since the beginning of the Israel-Hamas war. (Some reports list this as 108, and others as high as 122.) Many more have been injured and arrested. Foreign correspondents who are often in the line of fire, more so than any other representative of the media industry, have been charged with the ultimate burden of communicating scenes of carnage to the rest of the world.

To be a journalist in this age is to consign oneself to an industry that is straining under the weight of scrutiny and public distrust.

Finally, we call on the various coalitions in our community, representing the

dissenting voices of the conflict, to re-engage respectfully with one another and with the press.

A newspaper's marker as “good” or “bad” should not be based on how well their reporting aligns with one's personal beliefs, nor should it be based on how favorably one's chosen groups are represented in reporting. Every group must recognize the merit of a critical lens—if anything, equal reporting of both strengths and faults can offer an opportunity to improve and acknowledge to the community one's past mistakes. Seek out content that may center more around the uncomfortable and analyze it with an open mind. Reflect on how the world around you has been shaped by this ongoing conflict.

To our community: trust us. Trust that our efforts lie in a devotion to the public good. Trust the many other parts of the media industry that are working day and night to faithfully represent the countless voices that have risen up in the wake of global upheaval.

Our matters.

Editorials are the official opinion of The Tech. They are written by the Editorial Board, which consists of Publishers Jyotsna Nair and Ellie Montemayor, Editor-in-Chief Alex Tang, Managing Editor Kate Lu, Executive Editor Vivian Hir, and Opinion Editor Srinidhi Narayanan.

GUEST COLUMN

Is MIT's #MindHandHeart for a #BetterWorld compatible with its complicity in Israel's genocide of Palestinians?

By Michel DeGraft

What could make an elderly senior faculty at one of the nation's leading institutions of higher education so upset that he stood up, banged his cane on the floor, and demanded that the discussion of recently suspended MIT students protesting against the genocide in Gaza come to an immediate halt because of the turn it had taken.

On May 15, 2024, at an MIT faculty meeting with record attendance, this professor was reacting to a senior administrator evoking the danger posed by rapists as part of the justification for the temporary suspensions that were levied, without any due process, against students who had been part of the Scientists Against Genocide Encampment (SAGE) on campus.

Most of these students, like the senior faculty, are Black and Brown; and, most shockingly, the administrator compared the reason for the suspensions to the urgent need to stop rapists in their tracks in order to ensure the safety of potential victims. The rationale: The suspensions were as urgently needed as in the hypothetical rapist case — in order to preempt irreparable harm to the community. As the images of Emmett Till in his coffin remind us, this comparison echoes racial stereotypes that have long been fatal to minoritized individuals in the US. Yet, what the students were protesting against is MIT's complicity with the actual irreparable harm caused by Israel's ongoing genocide of Palestinians in Gaza. Why, then, would they be compared to rapists?

That's what things have come to at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology — in spite of our slogans #MITMindHandHeart for #BetterWorld.

Regardless of where you stand on Israel's war on Gaza, you might agree that the students' suspensions and the beyond-the-pale comparison with rapists are part of a larger campaign to suppress free speech at MIT — in this case, the righteous demands of students engaged in peaceful protest but falsely accused of creating unsafe conditions for the MIT community. Some of those students, along with their families, were threatened with housing eviction — including an Air Force veteran with his 5-year-old daughter. Some were unable to graduate because the timeline of lifting the temporary suspensions interfered with their finishing up their last classes. So their futures still hang in the balance. These temporary suspensions could have permanent life- and career-related consequences.

At another faculty meeting, on May

17, 2024, to MIT President Sally Kornbluth, I've raised one question about her stunning claim on that day that faculty are “out of bounds” when present at students' protests in front of her home, then another question about her and her administration's oft-repeated statement that academic freedom justifies MIT faculty's collaboration with Israel's Ministry of Defense. I still have not received any answer. So I'll ask again here:

Are MIT professors really “out of bounds” when present at student protests? How about our own freedom of speech? How about faculty who, applying said freedom of speech and their moral principles, joined students in protesting the Vietnam War? How about faculty who joined students in protesting apartheid in South Africa? Were they all “out of bounds” due to their noble ethical imperatives toward a #BetterWorld?

Now when it comes to MIT Administration's Orwellian (that is, doublespeak) appeal to “academic freedom” for licensing complicity with genocide, let's look at yet another case of double standards that apply directly to me as a senior professor at MIT:

For nearly 6 months now, my colleagues at MIT Linguistics have heightened to an unprecedented level their scrutiny of a “Special Topics” seminar that I have proposed for Fall 2024 on “Language and linguistics for decolonization and liberation and for peace and community-building from the river to the sea in Palestine and Israel to the mountaintops of Haiti and beyond.” I doubt it's a coincidence that this exceptional level of scrutiny — in effect, censorship — is led by my department head, an Israeli, who had previously yelled profanities at me and accused me of being “out of [my] mind,” in a Zoom meeting in the presence of my 6-year-old-daughter during which he criticized my anti-genocide writings on social media? This yelling was triggered by his disagreement with my use of terms like “genocide,” “Amalek,” “apartheid,” “settler-colonial Zionism,” “antisemitism,” etc.

He would have preferred the use of “ethnic cleansing” over “genocide”; he rejected my analysis of Israeli leaders' use of the biblical “Amalek” figure as denoting genocidal intent; he disagreed with my opinion that Zionism is a form of settler-colonialism; he took it as “antisemitic” that my letter to President Liz Magill of UPenn highlighted the role of Zionist Jewish donors in pressuring her to attack freedom of speech in order to silence criticism of Israel...

A few weeks after apologizing for yell-

ing at me, my department head was joined by all the other MIT Linguistics faculty in raising “concerns” that my course might not “fit” our linguistics curriculum, then they claimed that I didn't have the required expertise to include contents about the Middle East — even though, among already confirmed guest speakers, the seminar will rely on eminent specialists on the politics of language, on meaning and power, and on language-related issues in Israel and Palestine. Then I was also told that the reason for this unprecedented review was the unprecedented political climate at MIT. Please note that this climate — an updated version of McCarthyism — was created by, among others, the antagonistic congressional leader Virginia Foxx. This is the climate in which Danny Fox, MIT Linguistics & Philosophy Department Head, and other colleagues would decide what we can or cannot teach at MIT, as determined by fear of political backlash! This saga is all documented in a very long email thread from December 5, 2023 to June 9, 2024.

But in retrospect I should not have been surprised by this Palestine exception in my department under the veil of curricular “fitness” or lack thereof. In addition to its political motivation, this particular Palestine exception seems related to an overly narrow mission statement that separates our linguistics curriculum from the central roles of language in education, human rights and social justice for Indigenous communities. Given linguists' work on these key issues, I've offered an amended mission statement, to no avail — as if liberatory linguistics, the revitalization of Indigenous languages and the role of language for social justice were all outside the scope of linguistics proper! Then, in trying to justify their censorship of my course proposal, my MIT Linguistics colleagues, after appealing to our outdated and narrow mission statement, appealed to a paragraph in MIT's Report on Free Expression regarding freedom of teaching whereby “faculty do not have total discretion over their course content. For example, a class titled ‘Beginning Chinese’ cannot be taught as an advanced calculus class.” In effect, my colleagues are saying that the study of language and linguistics for the sake of decolonization and liberation — a topic that I've worked on for decades — is equivalent to the study of Chinese in a calculus class! Am I the “invisible man” of MIT Linguistics?

On June 7, 2024, in the latest round of this saga about genocide-related language of Israel...

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GUEST COLUMN

Our Intifada

By Richard Solomon

Publisher's Note: *The following article is abridged to fit in print from a longer piece submitted by the author. The full version can be read online on The Tech's website.*

*...The ones we love have gone.
They left,
Their ships have not cast anchors,
The lines of the distant port
Have not erased the eyes of the departed.*

*Oh my sad homeland:
How much we, and you, have drunk
Cups of bitter juice.
In festivals of sorrow and death.
We are not satiated, nor are you.
Indeed, we will remain thirsty
Near the sad wells, we will remain,
Thirsty,
Until the dead are raised,
With the dawn they embrace,
An undying vision
That nostalgia will not corrode.*

- Fadwa Tuqan, from "The ones we love have gone"

May in America witnessed the most impressive wave of student militancy in half a century. Like a gale of spring rain, tens of thousands of students on nearly 140 college campuses in 45 of 50 states built encampments, occupied buildings, and committed acts of civil disobedience in solidarity with peers across 35 countries.

Our demand to hostile administrators and the government remains clear: end the US and Israel's horrific assault on the besieged Palestinians of Gaza and divest from financial and research ties to Israeli apartheid. We publicly challenged MIT to stop doing weapons and surveillance research for the Israeli Ministry of Defense and immediately end Israeli military funding for campus research. To beat down the "student's intifada," as it came to be called, police forces across the nation—city, state, county, highway, and campus—arrested almost 3,000 of us.

From our vantage point at Kresge Lawn, the peculiar fact about the encampment was not its composition. Ours was a popular, broad coalition of students from all backgrounds of life—Jewish, Muslim, Christian, atheist, Black, White, queer, Desi, Hispanic, and so on.

Peculiar rather was the admin's apologetic response. In fact, it was President Minouche Shafik's fateful decision on April 17 to sic the New York Police Department on her own students at Columbia that did the most to rocket the encampments into high gear. The spectacle of violence, as Tobi Haslett once wrote, can be a radicalizing magic action. It sets into motion social forces no one can fully anticipate.

MIT and the Nation

Although the media floodlights made our intifada seem like a spontaneous eruption, the truth is that we built on earlier momentum. Since October, our movement at MIT has registered real gains. Despite the February ban on the Coalition Against Apartheid and suspensions against student organizers, our scrutiny pushed MIT International Science and Technology Initiatives (MISTI) to quietly remove from its grant listings a seed fund sponsored by Lockheed Martin to connect MIT researchers with its weapon offices in Israel. An early target of our divestment action, this was an unsung victory. It accompanied rounds of naming and shaming the projects and laboratories that accepted money from the Israeli military. At least one PI promised to concerned workers in the lab that it will not renew Israeli funding. Conversations between other PIs and lab workers are ongoing. By March, a referendum in the MIT Undergraduate Association passed a resolution with the highest turnout in its history and a 63.7 percent yes vote, calling on MIT to immediately cut all research and financial ties with the Israeli Ministry of Defense. The Graduate Student Union soon followed in April, with a referendum passing by 70.5 percent.

By mid-April, more than a thousand MIT students had signed the Scientists Against Apartheid pledge, and on April 21, we had established the Scientists Against

Genocide Encampment (SAGE) on the very Kresge lawn where in 1987, the original Coalition Against Apartheid set up a shantytown encampment to pressure MIT to divest from South Africa. SAGE was not new. In fact, our whole repertoire of contention—the building occupations, encampments, sit-ins, walk-outs, chants, strikes, art builds, and so on—is part of the political tradition of students in this country. Our campaign drew on the historic memory of MIT's past complicity with militarism and apartheid. "MIT, MIT, we know which side you're on," we chanted. "Remember South Africa, remember Vietnam."

At first, MIT administrators opted for what seemed a more subtle strategy—banning Al-Jazeera from the camp, stalling negotiations, letting the pro-war agitators become increasingly antagonistic, and framing the encampment demands in cherry-picked and misleading ways. We continued to prod the administration for pressure points, briefly establishing a second welcome center on May 1 in honor of the slain journalist Wael Dahdouh, as the administrators stalled. On May 3, I awoke to the scrape of metal fences set up to encircle the encampment. These fences constricted egress, but the admin and police cynically alleged the fences and mesh screen were there for 'safety' from pro-war agitators, whom the Israeli consulate had arranged to descend on MIT's Lobby 7 steps.

After an exhausting day of verbal abuse from these agitators and after a weekend of broken promises to take the fences down, their real intent became clear. The walls served not to protect but to isolate and humiliate. "No one wants to look at you," one policeman told us. The scene developed an uncanny resemblance to those Palestinian villages like Qalqilya, which are ringed on all sides by the apartheid wall. I watched as agitators imprinted their Israeli flags and rape propaganda on the walls around us with increasingly shameless triumphalism while the MIT administration, in a surrealist finale, imposed a checkpoint to enter and exit the encampment, as if we were living in the walled Palestinian enclave of Bir Nabala and the Israeli occupiers had decided to inflict collective punishment.

This was May 6, the day of the fabled Siege on Kresge, when Chancellor Melissa Nobles and President Sally Kornbluth issued a hastily written and confused ultimatum to suspend anyone who stayed in the encampment past 2:30 pm. Complying with human rights law and MIT precedent was evidently too politically costly for the admin, and so they chose to inflict state violence in the name of campus safety. As the police swelled, a high school march arrived to block Massachusetts Avenue for several hours while my comrades briefly occupied Lobby 7. I, along with four of my MIT colleagues, peacefully stood our ground in the SAGE, preparing to face the jail cell. I will never forget the cathartic feeling when MIT students, in a spontaneous outburst of solidarity and defiance, overwhelmed the barricades that had done so much to isolate and humiliate us and retook the camp as state troopers retreated in exasperated defeat.

SAGE survived another four days against the incursions of increasingly aggressive counter-protesters, power cuts by the admin, and heavy rains, even as we expanded the front of protest escalations to the actual site of weapons research. It was there on May 9 in front of the Stata parking garage that, for the first time in the campus' living memory, MIT students braved arrests for political activity and civil disobedience. These escalations reflected the tactical insights of the U.S. Civil Rights movement as we understood them; MIT students decided that the best way to conserve our reserves was to avoid a large-scale arrest event like what happened to our colleagues in Emerson and Northeastern. Instead, we opted for carefully planned, small-scale actions that could foment what Martin Luther King Jr. in his Birmingham Jail letter called "a situation so crisis-packed that it will inevitably open the door to negotiation." If divestment is too politically divisive, we resolved to make investment more divisive.

On May 10, when an estimated 200 riot police armed to the teeth and on thousands of dollars of overtime pay emerged

in the dead of night to demolish the encampment and arrest the survivors, they found, to their surprise, an empty and quiet affair. Only ten students went to jail; we conserved our arrest reserves. Despite the intimidation, it is inevitable that dissent will continue until MIT complies with its obligations to human rights law. The disruptions will continue.

To punish acts of political speech and civil disobedience, MIT suspended me and dozens of other students on an interim basis, which took a shredder to state law, MIT policy, and grad workers' collective bargaining agreement. We were guilty before even hearing our charges. Although some of us are still on the chopping block, many cases were shoddily constructed and got watered down or tossed out by the faculty-led Committee on Discipline. The real aim for most of them was not to stick. Rather, the MIT admin desperately needed a public show of force in order to mollify the pro-Israel crowd and tie up organizers until the summer. Students were banned from campus, classes, exams, and graduation. Our funding and salaries were frozen. Some were illegally evicted from MIT housing without court orders or face imminent deportation.

History may vindicate us once the moral panic about Palestine activism fades and the belief that Jews and Arabs between the river and the sea should live in freedom and equality becomes as obvious as the fact that the Israeli settler apartheid state and US support for its client state are the great barriers to that future.

According to the provost Cynthia Barnhart, the bans were justified on the basis of an interim mechanism originally designed to protect reporters of sexual violence from their attackers. I know personally of at least one MIT student with multiple sexual harassment and battery allegations who still walks the campus on paid leave. No interim suspension was ever filed for him. No suspension was ever filed for the Zionist agitators, as far as I know. It's therefore tempting to conclude that notions of due process, ethics, and campus safety are useful fictions at MIT.

Why We Fight

Yet our problems pale in comparison with the immense suffering of the Palestinian people. The Gaza Strip is a densely populated, ghettoized territory six miles wide and a marathon long, where 2 million people are trapped and cannot leave. In just 7 months, the Israeli military, with the full-throated backing of the American government, has killed at least 40,000 human beings in Gaza, including about 5,400 students, 260 teachers, and 100 university professors. Oxfam reported in January that this is the highest recorded death rate of any armed conflict in the 21st century—more than those in Syria, Iraq, Sudan, and Ukraine.

There is a word for "acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnic, racial or religious group." It's genocide. Genocide is happening now in Gaza. Frequently, Zionist critics dismiss the genocide claim as a rhetorically inflammatory exercise in competitive victimhood. They point to survivors and say they're not dead yet, so it can't be genocide. They call it war, so it can't be genocide, as if nearly all genocides do not unfold in the context of war. They say it is only genocide when Palestinians are killed en masse for the sole, official reason of being Palestinian, not under the limp pretext of Israeli security or collateral damage.

It is difficult to find a more accurate description of Israeli policy in Gaza. For months, students were chided to calm down and be patient, that administrators were very concerned with "the conflict in the Middle East," that the U.S. government would self-correct, and that divestment was impossible. But the massacres continued, and MIT renewed its Israeli military funding.

For more than half a century, the state of Israel has enshrined a regime of apartheid—the domination of one ethnic or national group over another—present in all aspects of non-Jewish, Palestinian life. Apartheid is present in Israel proper, and the territories of the West Bank, East Jerusalem, and Gaza have been occupied

since 1967. It has inspired violent, at times brutal resistance by the PLO and Hamas, as well as civil disobedience and a failed peace process. The apartheid analogy is not a recent polemical invention. Comparisons to European settler projects in Africa were popular among the architects of the Zionist state. The comparison is endorsed today by established human rights groups in Israel and abroad.

Apartheid in Israel predates October 7 and will likely continue absent a spirited global campaign against it. Even if, God forbid, 100,000 or 200,000 Palestinians die in Gaza, the Palestinian people will not be erased from the land. There will still be between the river and the sea, about 7 million Palestinians and 7 million Israeli Jews, one national group without the same basic rights as the other. That is why the movement for Palestinian liberation at MIT chants with love: 'Long live the intifada.' As scientists of conscience, we say let there be no peace for MIT as long as it continues to foment violence and abet atrocities against our brethren in the Holy Land.

A squishy humanitarian pity is woefully inadequate for that task. As my comrade Austin Cole reminded us at the People's Graduation, resistance to evil is at the heart of love. We owe it to ourselves to resist, to disrupt, to sabotage, to not go down gently, and to rage against the dying of the light. The alternative is death and self-degradations; we adjust to a profoundly sick society and lose our humanity and our love for each other in the process.

Here at MIT, we are engaged in building a global alliance today, with the hope of going beyond the South African case to realize even deeper promises of repair, decolonization, and equality. Our coalition includes many Palestinians at MIT. It also includes many Jews, alongside a broad, multi-ethnic fabric of student organizers. The encampment was the most visible manifestation of that solidarity, but our core demands are shared by the MIT public. Submit any thoughtful resolution for a referendum to MIT affiliates to cut research ties with the Israeli military, and we will win it.

Towards a Political Economy of University Divestment

For a demand so popular and focused, it might seem puzzling why MIT and other schools chose violence at such a scale. Israeli military funding is a minuscule fraction (only .03%) of MIT's 2023 allocated research sponsorship, while many university endowments already have responsible investment policies that bar 'sin sectors' like tobacco, alcohol, pornography, and sometimes fossil fuels. An extension to the arms industry or the Israeli bond market could be framed as a straightforward compliance decision. At MIT, recent decisions on research sponsored by the Skoltech collaborations and Saudi ARAMCO provide a good narrative cover, and a coordinated announcement with another school like Harvard could reduce the fallout. Why bother with nightsticks, tear gas, and rubber bullets when you can concede?

To understand why U.S. universities like MIT chose violence, it's useful to sketch their decision-making structure and the balance of forces that pull them at various levels. At MIT, the bans on individual students were made by the Division of Student Life, headed currently by David Randall and Suzy Nelson. These deans answer to the office of Chancellor Melissa Nobles, who, along with the various provosts and vice provosts, reports to MIT President Sally Kornbluth. The president, along with the treasurer and other Corporation officers, is appointed by a 75-member board of trustees mostly composed of older and very wealthy alumni. At all levels of this hierarchy, the professional incentives overwhelmingly stack toward a preference for risk aversion and law and order.

At the higher levels, law and order emerges as a priority because the bureaucrats worry about the university's image. Their incentives are strongly aligned with whatever will bring MIT more prestige and donor money. Here, it can be tempting to crudely psychologize, projecting, for instance, that because President

Our Intifada, from Page 16

Sally Kornbluth is a 63-year-old Jewish woman from New York, she should feel X type of way about our demands, but because Chancellor Melissa Nobles wrote something about decolonizing academic spaces, she should think Y. The truth is that the administrators are probably more keenly aware of current events in Palestine than they let on. However, their personal feelings are irrelevant to how they behave publicly because formal decision-making power on major university decisions is highly constrained, and the leadership selection mechanisms filter heavily for a certain type.

The more accentuated the division of labor or lack of shared decision-making between administrative units, the more intense this seduction. When a university treasurer decides, for instance, that divestment is not worth the risk, the treasurer is only held responsible for that decision. The treasurer then displaces the fate of the encampment onto, say, the chancellor and the deans of student life. With the option of granting a concession foreclosed (the treasurer said it can't be done) and the students defiant, the only way for the chancellor to restore law and order is to call the police.

So far, this characterization explains why administrators follow rules, dislike risks, and avoid stepping on each other's toes. But why is divestment from the Israeli military a particular risk to MIT's finances or prestige? The simple answer is that administrators are being pushed by pro-Israel forces on the other side—big donors, alumni, trustees, and reactionary members of Congress. It is not necessary that this pressure is explicitly articulated, only that it's perceived; the billionaire hedge-fund manager Bill Ackman does not need to get on the phone to threaten Sally Kornbluth or tell the media exactly what he and his friends will do if MIT decides to divest. Key administrators and trustees simply need to have a dim awareness that big donors will withdraw in outrage following a divestment decision. Similarly, the House Republicans do not need to threaten a Congressional subpoena for a hearing about campus anti-Semitism; the MIT president is already quite familiar with that experience.

There are also a few PIs at MIT who may believe that taking money from the Israeli apartheid state is their God-given constitutional right and a few appointed judges who might agree. Moreover, the Israeli Ministry of Defense funding at MIT appears to be repackaged Foreign Military Financing grants provided to Israel by the U.S. military. By refusing the minuscule percent of research sponsorship by the IMOD, it's conceivable that MIT administrators may anger the U.S. federal government and Pentagon, thereby jeopardizing a much larger share of campus research funding.

Of course, I have yet to hear MIT administrators admit to any of this explicitly. Instead, they cook up useful fiction, like the current one about academic freedom. The chancellor claims that the comparison between our divestment demand and MIT ending its collaborations with the Moscow-based Skolkovo is a bad analogy

because Skoltech was an "institute-level programmatic commitment" while the IDF-sponsored grants today are "independently sought by laboratory heads." However, MIT's financial records show many laboratory heads taking independent grants: in 2022, at least 26 PIs took funding from Skoltech, representing 45 grants and nearly ten times the amount currently sponsored by the Israeli military. Following the invasion of Ukraine by Russia, MIT admin unilaterally ended Skoltech funding mid-stream without PI input and offered transitional funding.

The difference between the Israeli case on the one hand and the Russian case on the other is not technical or administrative. It's political. In democracies with a constellation of political interests more sympathetic to Palestinian rights, college endowments are having no trouble at finding the bolder position.

Does that mean we have to wait around until politicians change? No. In the early 1980s, university campuses led the charge with Free South Africa, not elected officials. By 1984, about 53 universities had partially divested from apartheid. Congress passed the Comprehensive Anti-Apartheid Act two years later, overriding President Reagan's veto.

Yet in university officialdom, to the extent 'divestment' is considered in good faith at all, it becomes a question of applied ethics: "yes it's horrible, but where do we draw the line? How do we create rules and procedures that automate this process?" Thus, the bureaucracy, in order to make the divestment cause legible to itself, narrowly reformulates an act of costly political signaling into a stultifying discourse of internal ethics and institutional liability. Although it has such rules, like the criteria of its own Suri report it created following the Jeffrey Epstein scandal, it has yet to apply them to Israel.

Administrators also like to get hung up on narrow concerns: will this isolated divestment decision actually 'work' to reduce a complicit company's long-term share price or debilitate Israel's offensive capacity? If the answer is no, then why bother? If students cannot prove that MIT drone research contributes directly to the current Israeli assault on Gaza, where is the complicity?—an argument made recently in a guest opinion column published by The Tech.

For some, it's not altogether clear why universities should ever refuse dirty money so long as their own activities are socially good. Or the scientist deceives herself into believing that her research is morally neutral and its applications are not a concern. Similarly, MIT's decision to take Israeli money sends a signal to Palestinians at MIT that it does not value their life.

Dirty money also perverts the political judgments of institutions. When MIT takes money from the Israelis or collaborates with an arms manufacturer, it degrades its own judgments, exposing itself to motivated reasoning and political influence. In the long term, military patrons also shift campus research toward capital-intensive, belligerent applications. The world gives us endless technical and scientific problems to solve; some help ordinary people, others kill them.

We in the divestment campaign for Palestine are much less concerned about outlining abstract funding ethics rules or fetishizing an artificial line between Good and Bad money when the truth is that all economic value cycles through networks of exchange and production rooted deep down in the exploitation of labor and enclosure of the commons. Many of us feel that there is ultimately no perfectly ethical funding under capitalism and no 'moral' state violence under empire. To be consistent about Israeli money would require us to demand MIT reject American military funding, too—a much heavier lift, politically speaking.

Zionists often use this point as a reductio argument, a 'gotcha' that supposes if you cannot condemn all the human rights issues in the world or win against the Pentagon, you should shut up about Israel. But the point of progressive politics is not to articulate the most morally or politically demanding position conceivable and then despair when institutions fail to capitulate. Instead, you must dedicate your life to building coalitions and making inroads to state power. To build moral coalitions, you must point to an ambitious but conceivable line and say, 'meet us there.' Then, once we're at that line, we move it again. This is one way to keep hope alive.

A Path Forward

The Palestinian national movement is often tarred by Zionists as a chauvinistic, violent, and illiberal cause, but the truth is it carries the promises of an old political liberalism: rule by the consent of the governed, separation of religion and state, popular sovereignty, and the fundamental injustice of all hereditary privileges. Yet among the impoverished activist state of mind are that numeral majorities on a polarized issue like Palestine are essentially given and to be respected; that power is a thing lying around somewhere in the Chancellor's office, and that people upset about a policy should either vote or protest outside the building like atomized, 'embittered loners.' Do not dare disrupt anyone else's day.

Power is not seized; it is made. You build momentum during your long march through the institutions. You establish a web of mutual aid and solidaristic companionship, which helps you in the next front of struggle. You slay a Goliath like the US government in part by conquering the lower giants, the universities, where you have more leverage. Then, you set the giants on their own collision course with Goliath. That is why we arrived at the correct intuition that polite emails and clever arguments will not bring divestment to MIT. It's only in conjunction with disruptive, at times divisive protest in the arena of mass politics that we may hope to provoke what Antonio Gramsci called an "organic crisis" that shatters the legitimacy of an institution.

This is the core wisdom at the heart of our civil disobedience. By discretizing the moral field, we demarcated who MIT can serve—its students or its donors—and forced it to choose. We subjected its purported values of critical thinking, free speech, safety, and ethics to the stress test and made MIT show its true face, even if it means inflicting state violence on our per-

sons. That true face, it turns out, is ugly, cruel, and hypocritical. But their violence showed our love and commitment to Palestinian freedom. With arrests and suspensions, we sent a costly message to the people of Gaza and to ourselves about what it means to choose resistance in a time of grief. To choose love in a time of war.

The point of the Scientists Against Genocide encampment wasn't there just to score wins against the admin but to be with each other in solidarity. The task before us then is to swell the ranks and continue morally isolating the state of Israel. MIT's repression is a strange gift. The SAGE immersed us in a densifying network of interpersonal ties. The admin's violence then radicalized that network by persecuting it. Yet hammer blows will only shatter their glass and harden our steel, exposing the cracks of their own morally bankrupt system. At every opportunity, we will ram our crowbars into those cracks and heave. For the state of Israel, its fundamental moral contradiction is that it claims to be and is understood in the West as a "symbol of the suffering of humanity" forged at the expense of another people innocent of guilt. Our task is to sharpen that contradiction and expose the ideology as a pack of lies. We must "reverse the symbols" of Exodus and the Holocaust and show Palestinians for who they are: human beings. A people worthy of love and sacrifice and equality.

The other task is, in some ways, harder: to keep the barriers to enemy defection low. To be honest, I was mad as hell when I first got banned. In my anger, I saw MIT as essentially a company dictatorship—one that makes up rules and imposes them on who it wants, so it can keep exploiting scientific labor to do the lucrative research that kills children and builds dystopia.

I contemplated leaving. I felt like the white collars on campus were smoking the crack pipe of their own shimmering 'progress' and 'civility' while they tell themselves at night they're doing it for the love of the students. In church, I prayed this whole empire of blood-stained cotton and gold collapses under the weight of its own contradictions.

I am still mad as hell. But this kind of uncompromising rebuke to burn it all down does not convince people on the fence. Every successful revolution I know of required a critical mass of the security forces to defect. Similarly, we must welcome even the last guest to the table of the liberatory feast. To forgive is also part of our humanity. As Malcolm X said, "Don't be in a hurry to condemn because he doesn't do what you do or think as you think or as fast. There was a time when you didn't know what you know today."

Richard Solomon is a PhD student in the MIT Department of Political Science where he studies Middle East politics and the political economy of trade. He is a member of the MIT Coalition for Palestine and the MIT Grads for Palestine. Before MIT, he worked as a consular diplomat with the U.S. Department of State in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. The views expressed above are his alone and do not represent the views of the U.S. government or any MIT affiliated organization.

Have something to say?

Write opinion for *The Tech!*

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Reaching for a #BetterWorld amidst hate and suppresion

#BetterWorld, from Page 15

— a saga that started with yelling and profanities from my department head on December 8, 2023 — I am now being told by the same Department Head and by the Directors of Graduate and Undergraduate Studies at MIT Linguistics that my course proposal is still not approved because I have not “engage[d] in productive conversation about [my] proposed class” and because their “efforts to initiate any real communication with [me] were repeatedly rejected.

Such statements are yet another round of Orwellian doublespeak when we consider the 39-page email thread about this course, including the 2-page course description that I provided since April 10 — with many more details and much longer in advance than any previous proposals for “Special Topics” linguistics seminars in my 28 years at MIT. I have provided extensive details about my course, in writing, even though I had already realized that I was the target of a Palestine exception.

Do the linguists at MIT really consider written communications with all sorts of details about my course proposal — themes, readings, guest speakers, learning objectives, etc. — outside the category of “real communication”? Should I follow the lead of my department head and yell profanities to express disagreement with my colleagues

in order for me to engage in what they call “productive conversation”?

Now, to go back to MIT President Kornbluth, if, despite freedom of speech and academic freedom, she still judges that I am “out of bounds” for joining protests against genocide and against MIT’s role in it while I am also being censored by my department apparently due to political disagreements about Palestine and Israel, how can the same Kornbluth appeal to “academic freedom” as a license for MIT faculty’s complicity in genocide with an Israeli state whose Prime Minister calls her own students “Nazis” when they protest this complicity?

And, perhaps most importantly, what about MIT’s “red lights” principle, adopted from the Suri report written after the university’s fiasco with an actual rapist, Jeffrey Epstein?

This report led to an “elevated-risk project review process” that prohibits MIT faculty’s collaboration in projects whose “research outcomes will be used in ways that would infringe on political, human, or civil rights in a foreign country, or [where] the engagement will indirectly legitimize violations of political, human, or civil rights in that country” or projects with “the risk to the MIT community of providing support for actions that run counter to MIT’s core values, or that are not aligned with its academ-

ic mission, or that might lead to discrimination between members of our community.”

Are MIT’s “core values” compatible with MIT faculty aiding and abetting genocide as part of their “academic freedom”? Are MIT’s “core values” compatible with attacks on the academic freedom of MIT faculty proposing a seminar to help demystify the weaponizing of language in service of genocide?

Those students in the encampment were demanding nothing more, and will accept nothing less, than MIT applying the red lights in Suri report, which entails a halt to MIT’s collaboration with the Zionist project and with the red line that Israel has crossed in Gaza — collaboration that violates MIT’s core values, but that MIT president Sally Kornbluth calls “vibrant.”

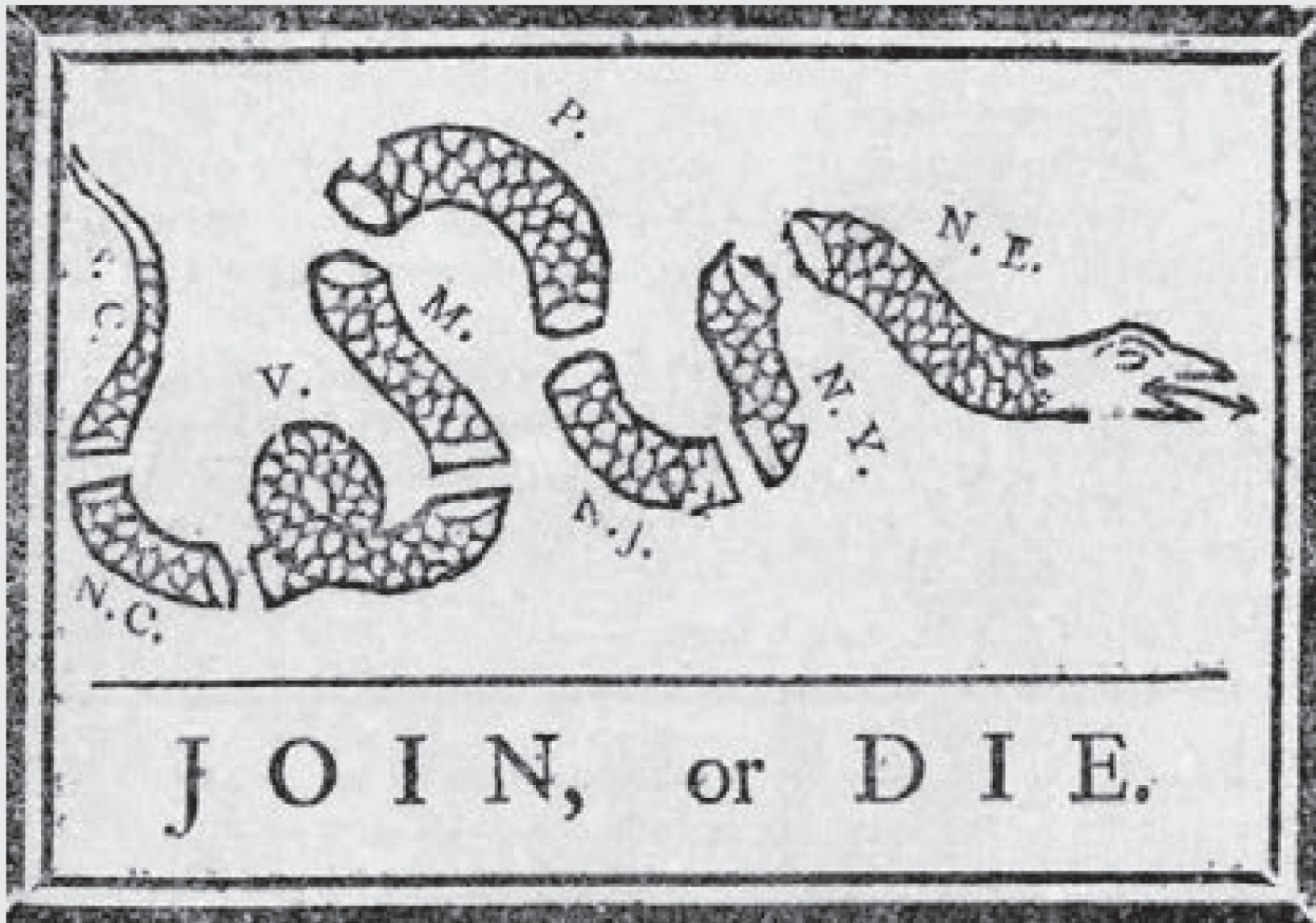
Recall that MIT faculty who collaborated with Epstein were asked by MIT administrators to publicly apologize because of their engagement with a pedophile rapist — not an hypothetical one. Now it’s a senior administrator who compares the SAGE students to some hypothetical rapists in terms of the alleged threats they represent to the MIT community. Kornbluth herself appeals to “academic freedom” in order to trump human rights and allow MIT’s complicity with genocide to continue. Yer she and no one in her administra-

tion are saying or doing anything to preempt actual violations of academic freedom as in the case of my proposed seminar.

This raises four final questions for now: Why is the MIT Administration so disproportionately punishing students who have broken relatively minor rules in their acts of civil disobedience while the same administration is breaking the very rules that were explicitly designed to put “red lights” on MIT’s contributions to the worst crimes against humanity? Why this Palestine exception? Why is MIT willing, in order to defend Israel, to sacrifice the very essence of what an institution of higher education means and is supposed to stand for? Why have my colleagues at MIT Linguistics, for the past 6 months, attempted to censor the contents of a seminar whose very objectives — including analyses of language in the service of dehumanization and genocide — are in line with MIT’s mottos #MITMindHandHeart for a #BetterWorld?

Michel DeGraff is Professor of Linguistics at MIT, co-founder and co-director of the MIT-Haiti Initiative, and a founding member of the Haitian Creole Academy. If you are interested in this seminar and would like to participate in any way, then please fill out the survey at <https://forms.gle/uxUi2XR6HjBDE89o7>

The Tech is looking for editorial cartoonists.



STAFF SPOTLIGHT

A librarian of human stories

Meet Ms. Emilie Songolo, Head of Distinctive Collections

Name and Title: Emilie Songolo, Head of Distinctive Collections
Department: MIT Libraries

By Vivian Hir & Russel Ismael
EDITORS

This interview has been edited for length and clarity.

What made you interested in becoming a librarian?

Being a librarian wasn’t what I pursued at first. I wanted to be a translator because in Cameroon, where I grew up and went to college, [being a translator] is amazing and has many opportunities. So I got a B.A. in French and English as a foreign fellow, and immediately I figured that opportunities for translation in the US are very hard, and so my horizons will be limited. So I started thinking of different areas. Library and Information Science became very interesting when I found out about it.

I discovered libraries when I went to Cardiff in Wales for my language training during my junior year university, and I was wowed. In my country, book buying means buying a lot of your materials, so the library is not well stocked. Some libraries are mostly made up of gifts that are like 20-year-old books.

So I started looking for library schools and programs because a lot of people have lives, experiences, histories that aren’t even represented in these libraries. So that became my passion: I wanted to use my language expertise to make sure that we have materials in languages other than English in American university libraries, so I applied to UCLA and to USC.

What is the day in the life of your job as the Head of Distinctive Collections?

I don’t want to open my Outlook calendar. I spend a lot of time in meetings, most of them are on Zoom in front of a computer screen.

Distinctive Collections are a collection of archives that are special and rare materials. For example, we just purchased an artist book that is so big in size you cannot close it. It is like an art piece with a QR code. When you scan that code, you get access to digitized manuscripts in Arabic from Timbuktu. There are a lot of manuscripts going back to centuries that are a risk. A number of us in the community work collaboratively to make sure that these manuscripts are preserved and made accessible, because they’re very important for learning and research.

I work in the area of collections and strategy for implementing the goals of the library. We are a digital-first library, so we make sure that we expedite acquisition and access to materials that are in digital format. One of our philosophies is to promote and advance this area of computational research. I oversee the material of five amazing teams: the Aga Khan Documentation Center, the Institute archives, the Conservation Lab, the visual collections, and the public services.

In my work, I call my manager’s my think tank, and we collaborate on projects. We work on tools that make our work easier and up-to-date. For example, one of the things that we are actively working on is reparative description. You have materials that have been in the collection but they’re not described positively in the way that the people who are studied in the material would see themselves. Today, one of our philosophies is diversity, equity, and inclusion, and we’re committed to doing this;

my team is just top-notch in this work.

I meet with students and faculty to let them know about us and how we can meet their research needs and teaching needs because there are some classes where the curriculum really could use architectural collections. As stewards of these types of materials, it’s our role to raise awareness.

How does MIT collect rare, old documents? What is the process of organizing and storing them?

We want to make sure that we collect materials that are the core of mens et manus (mind and hand) and also materials that advance learning in science and technology. A large percentage of what we have is donated to Distinctive Collections. We have papers of MIT faculty, students, staff, and leaders. Some of these are records while some become archives because we are keepers of MIT’s history. We are the ones that store these [MIT’s] publications because in a given academic year, so much work is done and recorded and that is history that needs to be preserved. Our interest is in the past, the present, and the future.

Some of the things we have are donated, and we try to make sure that we have certain legal forms in place. We have questions about digitizing for access; if you don’t want us to digitize something, we will make sure that things are done based on the wishes and the preferences of the donor. There are certain things that families donate after a loved one passes away. I have someone on staff who is in charge of relations.

No library can have everything. Advances in digital information and computational approaches to curate and preserve make it easier for people to have access to materials that are on here. Our goal is to collect, preserve, and foster the use of these materials in all formats. Now, we’re getting more and more papers in digital format because they were created digitally, and this is where our work is very dynamic.

Sometimes we curate. Our work is not only collecting but also preserving and making it accessible. When the pandemic hit, the library was closed, and instruction was delivered online. Library materials were delivered online, and that was when our digital-first philosophy really stepped up. We had a team on campus when everyone else was home working madly to digitize and send you the digital version.

When we curate an exhibit, there is a digital counterpart. When we had an exhibit [South Asia Meets the Institute] last year, it was so well received. There is an online version that is going to live online for as long as that online space exists because the physical footprint to our gallery has been reduced.

Campus life is very important to us. We collect ephemera; we collect campus events. Ephemera is very dear to my heart because that gap needs to be bridged. Considering the current events, we collected the posters that were made for commencement. We are working with other units on campus to collect posters and signs related to the protests and encampment since October 7.

Are there any particular objects or documents in the Distinctive Collections that stick out to you?

We have a program in Distinctive Collections called Women at MIT that is extremely important. Why? Because women’s access to MIT was problematic at that time. What the early women went through is a story that needs to be told, known, and shared. People have been donating materials to us: women who went to MIT, women who taught at MIT, the first women to get a degree here at MIT. These women made



PHOTO COURTESY OF MYRIAM BURCHER

Emilie Songolo is the head of MIT’s Distinctive Collections.

things possible, and some of them became leaders in the field. There are fields that even exist today thanks to the first woman at MIT, chemist Ellen Swallow Richards.

People say that she is the founder of home economics. When she came, it was very difficult for her to work in the lab when she needed to use the restrooms because they were designed for men. Thanks to her, there were restrooms for women entering the lab space at MIT. So that collection is extremely important.

Right now, we are working on a project to repair the description of materials that are audio materials in indigenous languages. These are the kinds of things that we really need because we have to make sure that they aren’t lost. The old audio tapes that professors collected have stories that shouldn’t be sitting somewhere, not getting used. To summarize my answer, materials that increase visibility of the historically marginalized stick out to me.

How can more students and faculty members at MIT make best use of MIT’s Distinctive Collections?

You should explore it and go to our website. If you go to the distinctive collections website, there’s a link there to explore and browse our collection. You can search by keyword. You can search and enter the name of a scientist that you write about. You can even search by the name of a professor. You’d be surprised to find someone who’s currently teaching; we may have materials donated by some professors who are currently teaching and doing research here. You can search by scientific advancement. You can search by a time period that is important in what they’re studying. You can search via all kinds of ways.

They not only can search, they can also contact us. They can schedule an appointment with us. Maybe they’re working on a

research project in a class, and they want to know whether we have materials that they can use. A big part of our work is learning and research support. It’s very important for students to use distinctive collections in their own work. Online, there’s a link also on requesting something for a class—“I’m teaching this course number, and I would like to bring my student to show them what you have.” So, we work with the professor and design a class. The student can do that also for their own purposes, whatever the purpose.

Is there anything that you wanted to say that I did not get a chance to ask you?

Well, I just want to say something about the core principle of MIT Libraries. We have our director, and he’s a very dynamic person [Chris Borg], who leads us into approaching our work in a way that is meaningful to the research community.

This work is centered on what is called our general philosophy of “enduring vision.” So, everything we do, we want to make sure that it hits one of the six tenets of this philosophy. The first one is the “digital library.” The second tenet is the pursuit of a more open and equitable scholarly landscape. The third one focuses on the digital collection as the essential core. The essential core being collections that cannot be replicated in the digital or online context. The fourth one is equity, diversity, and social justice. The fifth one is being socially responsible and advancing computational research and learning. The last one, in particular, is bold leadership.

[Chris Borg] inspires us to really be bold. I’ve been here for almost two years, and you see the action. Collaboration is a big part of this, you know, because, as an African, I grew up steeped in my culture. We have a saying that one hand cannot tie a bundle — you are stronger together.

DID YOUR MIT ESSAYS GET YOU IN?

The Tech is collecting successful application essays (**hint:** yours!).

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OneMIT Commencement Ceremony 2024 (May 30th)



ALEXA SIMAO - THE TECH

2:52 PM: Graduates and guests make their way onto Killian Court for the OneMIT ceremony.



ALEXA SIMAO - THE TECH

3:05 PM: Members of the class of '74 wear 50th reunion red jackets as they process to their seats.



ALEXA SIMAO - THE TECH

3:21 PM: The Chorallaries perform at the OneMIT commencement ceremony.



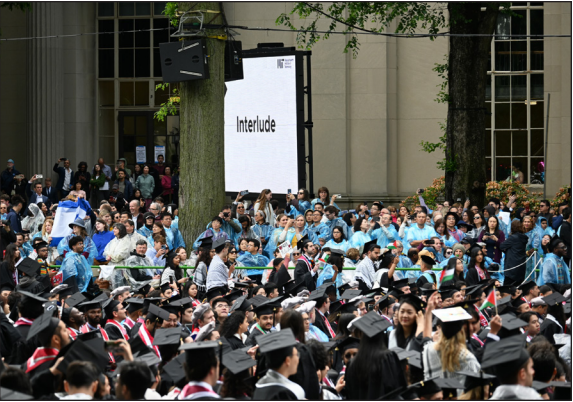
ALEXA SIMAO - THE TECH

3:27 PM: Graduates display banners protesting the suspension of protesters and calling for divestment.



ALEXA SIMAO - THE TECH

3:29 PM: Pro-Palestinian graduates and supporters walk around Killian Court.



ALEXA SIMAO - THE TECH

The webcast for the ceremony set in an interlude amidst a pro-Palestinian walkout.



ALEXA SIMAO - THE TECH

Pro-Israeli attendees wave Israeli flags during student walkout.



ALEXA SIMAO - THE TECH

A pro-Israeli sign reads, "Good riddance to Hamas terror fans."



ALEXA SIMAO - THE TECH

Attendees hold up banner in a walk along the tent.



ALEXA SIMAO - THE TECH

Pro-Palestinian graduates hold up a Palestinian flag.



ALEXA SIMAO - THE TECH

Attendees walk out in protest of MIT's engagements with Israeli organizations.



ALEXA SIMAO - THE TECH

"All of Gaza's universities have been bombed," a pro-Palestinian banner reads.



ALEXA SIMAO - THE TECH

The commencement speaker for the OneMIT ceremony.



ALEXA SIMAO - THE TECH

A speaker at the OneMIT ceremony.



ALEXA SIMAO - THE TECH

Penny Brant '24, officiating the turning of the Brass Rat.



ALEXA SIMAO - THE TECH

President Sally Kornbluth speaking at the podium.



ALEXA SIMAO - THE TECH

President Sally Kornbluth speaking at the podium.



ALEXA SIMAO - THE TECH

More scenes at the OneMIT commencement ceremony.