

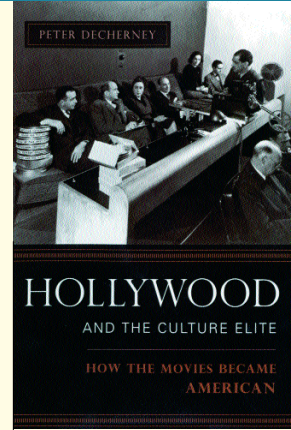
BLAST Off

The view through even the best telescopes on Earth is obscured by the atmosphere, and the cost of putting one in orbit is, shall we say, astronomical. How then, can scientists get a better peek at the stars for bargain-basement prices? Easy. Suspend a Chevy-sized instrument from a 33-story balloon, and float it up into the very edge of space. That’s what **Mark Devlin** and an international team of scientists did in June with the Balloon-borne Large Aperture Sub-millimeter Telescope (BLAST) that they created. “Balloon-based astronomy offers many of the perks of space-based telescopes at a fraction of the cost,” says Devlin, the Class of 1965 Endowed Term Associate Professor of Physics and Astronomy,

who heads the project. BLAST’s journey carried it from the launch site in Kiruna, Sweden, to Inuvik in the north Canadian tundra. During the five-day flight, 260 detectors harvested photons from far-off regions of the universe. The data “will address some of the most important cosmological and galactic questions regarding the formation and evolution of stars, galaxies and clusters,” Devlin reports. A second and longer data-gathering mission is planned for the end of 2006. “It’s relatively uncharted territory,” the cosmologist notes. “Not only are we collecting some unique and interesting information about the universe, but we’re also pioneering technologies that will pave the way for other planned balloon projects.”



Mark Devlin



East Meets West

Tabloids keep us up to date on the frolics of glamorous stars and the backstabbing of ruthless powerbrokers in Tinseltown. In his latest book, *Hollywood and the Culture Elite: How Movies Became American*, **Peter Decherney** examines the flipside of pop culture and reveals surprising connections between Hollywood bigwigs and the stewards of high culture at such places as Harvard, Columbia, and the Museum of Modern Art. Decherney, an assistant professor of cinema studies and English, writes that “Film didn’t become art until Hollywood moguls decided it was good business for film to become art *and* the leaders of American cultural institutions found it useful – politically useful – to embrace and promote Hollywood film.” His book looks at the mutual embrace of highbrow institutions on the East Coast and a money-making pop-culture enterprise on the West Coast during the golden era of Hollywood’s studio system. Both centers of influence wanted to reach a mass audience that spanned the coasts. East reached out to West to “maintain their hold on American art, education, and the idea of American identity itself.” The studios met East-Coast establishments halfway to solidify their hold on popular culture and to benefit financially. That collaboration with museums, universities and government, writes Decherney, “redefined Hollywood as an ideal American industry, the perfect marriage of art and commerce.”

Gaelen Mandlen

Death Delayed

“Why do I overlive?” Adam cries out in *Paradise Lost*. Author **Emily Wilson**, in *Mocked with Death: Tragic Overliving from Sophocles to Milton*, uses Adam’s dark lament as the basis for a literary analysis of living too long. Wilson, an assistant professor of classical studies, probes the fate of living on when death seems preferable in works by Milton and four of his literary predecessors: Sophocles, Euripides, Seneca and Shakespeare. Each writer composed works in which the main character undergoes unbearable suffering or loss and calls out for death but goes on living. The tragic tradition, she argues, sometimes finds its energy in a character’s living on rather than in dying when readers would expect. “Why am I mocked with death, and lengthened out/To deathless pain?” Milton’s Adam moaned. Certainly in our time, we sometimes hear echoes of Adam’s anguished cry in patients hooked up to life support or from those enjoying the mixed blessing of a longer life. “Tragedies of overliving disturb the ... reader,” Wilson writes, “by reminding us that life may feel too long and endings may seem to have come too late.”



Emily Wilson

Marco Roth



Andrew Taylor/Dreamstime.com

Continental Divide

When surveying the national landscape, Penn sociologist **Jerry Jacobs** and NYU professor Kathleen Gerson point to the “dramatic changes in the ways Americans organize their work and family lives.” In their study of family time pressures, *The Time Divide: Work, Family, and Gender Inequality*, Jacobs and Gerson argue that society’s “dilemmas and conflicts” come from the diversity of families in the workforce – from two wage earners to single mothers to workers without kids. Their research punctures the prevailing myth that Americans are working longer hours, suggesting that the time squeeze is far more nuanced. “Understanding the average is important,” explains Jacobs, the Merriam Term Professor in Sociology, “but there are more exceptions to the rule than ever.” If you look at working families, instead of individual workers, the coauthors say, “time divides” – between the overworked and the underemployed, between women and men, between parents and non-parents – are apparent. “Many feel tremendous time pressures due to demanding jobs, especially in dual-career families,” explains Jacobs, “but others are looking for more work. Managers and professionals work very long weeks, but the work week among those with less education has not grown over the last 30 years.” The book makes many recommendations, and the authors’ insights should find their way to the conference rooms of policy-makers.

Talk It Out

New research has shown that cognitive therapy, which teaches people to understand and change harmful thoughts, works as well as changing people’s body chemistry with pills. A recent study by psychology professor **Robert DeRubeis** and a colleague at Vanderbilt challenges American Psychiatric Association guidelines that tout medications as the best treatment for depressed patients. Published in the *Archives of General Psychiatry*, the study is the largest yet to determine the relative merits of the two approaches. The experiment divided 240 depressed patients into three groups, treating one with antidepressants and another with cognitive therapy. The third group was given a placebo. After 16 weeks, the results for those receiving talk therapy and those on drugs were statistically identical. The researchers also found that subjects who were given drugs were more likely to relapse into depression, suggesting that cognitive therapy continued working after treatment ended. “We believe that cognitive therapy might have more lasting effects because it equips patients with the tools they need to manage their problems and emotions,” says DeRubeis, who is also associate dean for the social sciences in SAS.