Editorial

Hi UNSW,

Sometimes we at Tharunka get sick of the serious, so this edition is themed ‘Pop’.
Oh yes! On page 8 Su-Min Lim explains why Lady Gaga beats the crap out of Zooey Deschanel. More controversial than the Islamic Society? Only time will tell. Alan Zeino explores the diminishing gap between indie and mainstream on page 18, while Kylar Loussikian looks at the crappiness of suburban architecture on page 24.

There is also some stuff which is a little bit deep. In our ‘University’ section, Bobby Chen explores the experience of student ‘poverty’ - can noodle-eating twentysomethings really be described as destitute? Bart James also goes to a wedding and finds it kind of creepy and patriarchal.

And in related news, Tharunka has launched a brand new website! (Actually we launched it at the start of the year but forgot to tell anyone about it.) You can read a full digital version of the magazine, leave comments on selected articles or write us a letter using our contact form.

Happy reading,

Tharunka Editorial 2010
Dear Tharunka,

Thank you for raising some awareness on the Friday prayer issues. I have received calls to clarify issues that Su-Min did not touch upon in her article. The article fails to present a historical overview of issues that existed even before I began studying here. It parrots “sources at UNSW” without appreciating the fact that the university is itself divided on how to treat this issue. Whilst some junior staffers have secretly made negative comments about Muslims and “hygiene issues” concerning the prayers, others have pondered over why the university has been “unreasonable” on some issues of concern to Muslims at UNSW. Ask anyone at chancellery whether they believe that the provision of prayer facilities is a mere “courtesy” and you will be surprised at the range of responses. [Ed’s note: See [1] below]

The article makes several sensational and baseless claims that I will not deal with here. The author has not contacted the various Muslim student [local, international, post-graduate, women’s] and staff communities with whom ISOC and its affiliated bodies work with to infer that the Muslim community is “bitterly divided” [2] on this issue. Nor has she inspected the facilities currently available to Muslim women at UNSW and their long-standing campaign for better facilities not related to the Friday prayers. The author, an atheist herself, did not attempt to understand the importance of prayer on the spiritual wellbeing of religious communities; the same healthy “community spirit” that UNSW readily advertises in the Islamic world and for which it reaps millions in revenues! [3]

There is a precedent for Muslims using Sam Cracknall [SC] for many years. It was UNSW’s former Chief Operating Officer who took the students and staff out of that place and put them in the Squarehouse in Jan 2008 on safety grounds. The gymnasium, Scientia and other venues have been offered also. We would be happy with those facilities. [4] Around 500-600 people come to Friday prayers each week for just one hour! From one service alone in 2009, almost 500 students and staff members signed a petition asking the university to provide safe and adequate facilities for the Friday prayers. SC is licensed for 120 people. No one at UNSW will personally warrant that SC is safe to cater that many worshippers. Late comers remain in prayer after services end; near exits, on ledges and stairs; there is a dangerously small exit out of SC and post-graduate students/staff have been complaining to us for years. ISOC does not conduct Friday Prayers [a group of international students do]. The deputy Vice-Chancellor offered to give us “insurance” for 2 weeks last year in July. That offer was never repeated in November or this year.

Friday prayers are taking place on the grass because it is safe there. It is not a “demonstration” of some sort despite your imaginations. [5] Yes Muslim students are “protesting” against the university’s unwillingness follow up on its offers to work to a solution. But that protest has been going on for a very long time. We are hopeful that a good solution can be reached. The article did not explore what options each side is working on.

I find it most offensive that this issue has been used by Tharunka and some of its supporters to take pot shots at Islam. The idea that Muslims are using liberal values to promote illiberal values, without saying what those “illiberal views are” is deeply offensive to all Muslims. [6] We do not force people to pray; we do not wish to exclude other students and staff from UNSW facilities. We just want a safe venue for one hour each week. It is called making “reasonable accommodation”; it is not turning UNSW into a mosque. How a religion can benefit from a protest or safer facilities is beyond me. This is about student’s welfare, not religious indoctrination.

Elias Attia
President Islamic Society of UNSW

And some clarifications from Su-Min:

[1] I am at a loss as to which “sources at UNSW” Elias is referring to, as none were quoted in my article. All university-related information is factual and has been confirmed by Elias. The allegation that UNSW staff members have made discriminatory remarks is a serious one. Tharunka has not been presented with any evidence that this is the case.
[2] The words ‘bitterly divided’ do not appear in my article. I do state that Muslims on campus are not a homogenous group - no group of 5000 people ever is. I felt it was important to stress this point as Elias and the current leadership of ISOC were not elected, despite claims to the contrary on their website and Facebook group. This, to my mind, calls into question their claim to be representative of UNSW Muslims.

[3] The Islamic Society initially presented Tharunka with no examples of the alleged false advertising. When pressed, they directed us to a line on the Arabic section of the UNSW International website which translates as “support services and facilities of religious prayer”. I consider that by providing access to facilities such as the Sam Cracknell pavilion, this promise has been met. ISOC also drew attention to a quote dated 2008 and posted on the Australian Education Website. It states that: "Today, Friday prayers at UNSW are attended by more than 400 students.” As Friday prayers at UNSW in 2008 were attended by more than 400 students, Tharunka does not consider this statement to be misleading. Indeed, as of 9 April 2010, a section of the ISOC website last updated in 2008 still reads: "ISOC has been entrusted by the university with good facilities to help it meet the needs of its members. The facilities include a prayer room and facilities for ablutions.” If UNSW is being accused of false advertising, it seems that the Islamic Society is equally guilty.

[4] The Scientia building was offered in weeks 1 and 2. The Islamic Society demanded that the booking be extended for 8-10 weeks and continued praying on the grass outside Sam Cracknell.

[5] Considering that the prayers have been taking place alongside placards reading ‘FIGHT UNSW RACISM’, I consider that a ‘demonstration’ is an appropriate description of the Friday prayer events.

[6] One example provided in the article was the claim that the university is discriminating against Muslim women, when in fact it is the Islamic Society’s decision to prioritise prayer space to men first and women second.

A Letter from the Sisters

Dear Editors,

After reading Su Min Lim’s piece in the last issue of Tharunka [Prayer and Protest], Issue 2, I felt obliged to respond to her absurd claims and even more subjective views on both Muslims at UNSW and the Islamic Society on Campus (ISOC).

Not only does Ms Lim neglect to narrate the extensive history of the Friday prayer debacle and the ongoing disputes with the university administration in full, moreover, she assumes that ISOC is a one man (or woman) show. Her article relies on quotes from the President and sources from the university administration which she does not reveal. Nowhere in her article does she approach ISOC members, Friday prayer worshippers or the ‘sisters’ who composed the emails which she also quotes in her article.

Her rejection of the ‘sister’s’ interpretation of the word ‘empowerment’ only serves to solidify her naive stance. Who is to say what the correct definition of empowerment is? In limiting the scope of interpretation we merely impose strict boundaries on the definition of such terms. This only serves to repress individual interpretations which may sound like ‘empowerment’ to some, like Ms Lim, but certainly does not fulfill my idea of the term.

If Ms Lim truly intended to obtain a cross sectional account of the Friday prayer issue then she would have used her investigative journalism ‘skills’ to explore the thoughts and opinions of others who the issue has affected. Her sensationalist account only serves to deliver the university administration’s take on Friday prayer. The fact of the matter is Muslims have been praying on the main walkway for months now; if the university was concerned about the issue they would have done something about it long ago. I am sure spaces such as the Scientia Building and the University Gymnasium amongst others can accommodate for the size of our Friday congregations. These spaces might not necessarily be available every Friday but I am sure the university can work something out in order to ensure a more appropriate and permanent facility is provided.

Regards,
Sumaya Hadid
Man Likes Tharunka

Dear Editors,

I was interested to read Su-Min Lim’s article canvassing the issue of Islamic prayer spaces on campus. As a relatively objective member of the student body (I am neither a member of the Islamic Society nor the university administration), I feel that the article encapsulated the tension in both a fair and insightful manner.

Though it may be easy to sympathise with the Islamic Society at having been displaced from the Squarehouse, it must be acknowledged that the University is a secular academic institution. Irrespective of one’s religious persuasion, the primary role of the University is to foster learning and research amongst students and academic staff. Though it should not ‘discriminate’ between faith groups, the University administration is not obliged to bend over backwards to accommodate the needs of religious groups or any student collectives at the expense of their primary goal to facilitate learning.

It would be a true injustice if space designated for the learning of COFA students was instead offered to a student society. Words and phrases such as “rights”, “disempowerment” and “discrimination” have been thrown around willy-nilly simply because the Islamic Society is a religion-based group. They are words totally unhelpful to the cause of the Islamic Society and detrimental to rights movements more broadly. The Islamic Society should be regarded as a student society like any other. Simply because their activities involve religion does not mean they should be entitled to any additional concessions which would not be afforded to other student groups. Obviously, this includes the right to use spaces at the expense of student learning.

The voice of the Islamic Society would be more credible if it conducted itself in a more rational and reasoned manner, and less in an inflexible manner more befitting groups such as the Socialist Alternative, involving YouTube publicity stunts and overwhelming sense of entitlement.

Justin Rassi

Man Dislikes Tharunka

Dear Editors,

I am ashamed at being a UNSW student after reading Su-Min Lim’s article in your last issue (Prayer and Protest, Issue 2).

I doubt Tharunka has a claim to the role of representing the ‘UNSW Student Voice’ any more. Since when did this voice consist of Mr Attia’s and not any other of the 40,000+ students that attend our university? How can you claim that you represent the general student body when it is obvious from Ms Lim’s article that she vehemently denies everyone else at the university a voice?

I felt obliged to send in a response in order to have MY voice heard. The Muslims have been praying on the main walk for well over a month now, at least ever since semester began, so I don’t see how the University is bending over backwards to accommodate their demands. Offering the Scientia for 2 weeks is not doing such. If the University were fulfilling all of ISOC’s requests as Ms Lim conveniently suggests, then I am sure they would find no problem in bending over a bit more in order to offer a permanent location for Friday prayers.

The author continues to discuss that the Islamic Society doesn’t take into account the requests for space by other students, well why should they? When we have a university as big as ours, with over 100 different rooms, which I am sure are not occupied every single hour of the day. [Ed’s note: The Islamic Society requires flat floor capacity for 500 worshippers in a fixed location for one hour every Friday.]

She goes on to claim that “The University is a secular institution. Its purpose is to provide an academic education...” If this was the case, then why don’t we get rid of all clubs and societies and focus on the “academic” side of things. Let’s go one step further and ban the existence of the UniBar. How would we stomach that! Until this happens, every student on campus no matter what society they are from has the right to use UNSW facilities. If this means giving the Muslims a sufficient place to pray then I am all for it.

Frankly I am sick of seeing their backsides prostrate in prayer week in week out.

Regards,
Ronald Smith
Letter Writing Controversy is Controversial

I was dismayed to find that instead of the student paper supporting Muslim students in finding an adequate prayer space, they outrightly supported the racist stance of the university. The university has stated ‘over and over again’ that it will cater for the needs of Muslim students. It is clear however, that they have not.

The offer of Sam Cracknell Pavilion as the Islamic society (ISOC) mentioned in last week’s article, is inadequate. It provides safely for 120 students, when weekly there have been hundreds praying. ISOC have put forward other possibilities, but the university again has refused to offer any consistent place of prayer.

The reality is that the University does cater for religious freedoms for many students on campus and has excluded Muslim students specifically. It is clearly out for the ‘cash cow’ that is the international student market in advertising explicitly that it does.

Su-Min Lim, and Tharunka for publishing this article must therefore agree that freedom of religion is not something the university should support, and thus I find it surprising that no articles have yet been published condemning students of other religions exercising their rights to use their prayer spaces of choice.

And this is before even beginning to look at the context of the ‘war on terror’ and the current persecution of Muslims throughout the world. This is the context in which this attack on Muslim students right to prayer takes place. I condemn the University’s justification of lack of funds or space to provide for Muslim student’s needs on campus, while constant building work surrounds campus life and Hilmer himself earns a 1 million dollar salary. I feel that not providing for the needs of any student on campus affects all students on campus.

Lim’s ending quote “It’s like a child crying when they don’t actually have a broken foot” is nothing less then discrimination, and provides for nothing other then Tharunka providing a cover for the University’s continued racism.

I strongly suggest that Tharunka retract the article claiming that Muslim students wanting adequate prayer facilities are “taking the concept of human rights and cheapening it”. Tharunka should instead support the human right to freedom of religion, and freedom from this universities clear discrimination and racism towards Muslim students on this campus.

Rebecca Hynek

Former Editor’s Two Cents

Dear Editors,

What a great article by Su-Min Lim about the Islamic Society’s prayer space protest (Issue Two). Good to see that this magazine remains in capable hands.

Student protests in a stable democracy like Australia are vacuous and hyperbolic at the best of times, particularly given the tendency for Socialist Alternative psychopaths to turn any perfectly mundane administrative quibbles into FIGHTS AGAINST EVIL RACIST CAPITALIST OPPRESSION. But really, UNSW is racist because due to lots of competing demands on limited space and resources, they won’t give you a big enough space to pray? Really?

Don’t get me wrong, the university administration is Kafkaesque at best, and nowhere more so than CATS, but that just makes them incompetent, not racist.

As for ISOC: guys and gals, I’d think long and hard about letting greasy opportunists like Socialist Alternative bring their rent-a-crowd to hijack your dispute for their own ends. SAlt don’t care about your cause except that it lets them gain publicity, and, in their minds, more support for la revolución. If they ever got power [which they won’t because they’re ineffective screaming weirdoes] you’d be shot or locked up for having reactionary bourgeois afflictions like religious sentiment.

Just be patient, I’m sure you’ll get your preferred venue back after the COFA kids leave campus.

Sean Lawson
2009 Tharunka Editor
I’ve always had a lingering unease about Zooey Deschanel. Beautiful she undoubtedly is, creamy and dreamy and doe-eyed. Pretty much all of my male friends adore her. Thinking of Zooey I used to imagine taste, alternativeness, the discerning man’s heartthrob. Two things troubled me: that I couldn’t remember any of her movies, and that I only listened to her music while doing the washing up. Could it be that this fantasy hipstergirl was not actually very talented? No, that was impossible. The entire male indie population of the globe couldn’t be wrong.

Imagine my relief, then, when I stumbled upon “An Open Letter to Zooey Deschanel’s Admirers”. This wonderful contemptuous screed on the Pursuit of Harpyness blog explains that

“My issue isn’t with Zooey herself. It’s with you guys. No silicone for you dudes, no bottle blondes or string bikinis, but you like what you often refer to as “quirk”. By “quirk” you appear to mean that you’d like a girl not to act passively, to have a little personality, as they say. But what you’d like as much as that is for it to be an act, because fundamentally, quirk doesn’t threaten you. It makes for cute outfits and the occasional crazy eye makeup, sure, but none of these require that you treat a woman like anything more than an empty vessel...A cipher that you dudes worship, in the same, boring, empty way that men worship the much more “conventional” hotties.”

I read this, and I thought two things. Firstly: She’s right! My God I love the internet. And secondly: This reminds me why I worship Lady Gaga.

A word on Zooey first. She’s been in a few movies - ’Elf’, ’The Hitchhiker’s Guide’, ’500 Days of Summer’ – usually playing some iteration of the quirky love interest or deadpan best friend. She also comprises one half of the folk-pop duo ’She and Him’, has a sweet voice and creates generally cutey, inoffensive music - the sort of thing Hello Kitty would sing if she had a mouth, really. Basically, she’s a decent performer with an absolutely lovely face who holds a particular appeal for the Man of a certain demographic. He’s intellectual, politically progressive and usually, but not always, studying Arts. He wears tight jeans, drinks coffee and is ostensibly disdainful of your typical mass-marketed female celebrities; no Jessica Simpson screensavers for him.

Now, I was planning on writing a measured, reflective piece about the hypocrisies of hipster culture. I intended to refrain from personal attacks on Ms Deschanel entirely. That was, at least, until I read the following quote regarding Britney Spears and her infamous ‘no undies’ shot:

“I’m scared for young women, because we’re not necessarily progressing. People think that it’s good to use sex as power. They think that’s new. Flaunting your body, going around half-naked and being sexy to get your way - it’s so missing the point. We’re not even talking about the fact that women still don’t have enough role in running the country.”

Alright Zooey. YOU’RE DISSING BRITNEY??!? THE GLOVES ARE OFF.

Let’s start with the idea that ‘sex as power’ is bad. I don’t agree, so long as other avenues of power such as creativity and intellect are also available. Unfortunately, the entertainment industry tends to obsess over women’s bodies rather than their creations. At the height of Britney’s humiliation it was difficult to remember that ’Baby, One More Time’ is a great song – which it really is, more fun than just about anything, my Year 6 dance wouldn’t have been the same without it.

But you know, the response to the predatory nature of entertainment is not to summon up all the old tropes of slut-shaming. (’Going around half-naked’ – how scandalous!). And it’s certainly not to blame BRITNEY FUCKING SPEARS for the lack of women in politics.
Forget voter inertia, internal party dynamics, the second shift - the REAL reason why there’s never been a female president of the United States is the video for ‘Toxic’! The one where Britney plays the futuristic airline stewardess!

No, Zooey, the correct response to the patriarchy is to carve out new roles for women. Roles that extend beyond love interest and titillation, roles that acknowledge our genuine humanity, which is why your remarks smell like SHEER BLIND HYPOCRISY to me. Just because you don’t show flesh doesn’t mean you’re not trading off sex appeal, it could just mean that you’re trading in a different market. Does Zooey Deschanel seriously imagine that the five thousand hundred thousand boys queuing up to see ‘Summer’ were there for the ACTING??!!?! Katha Pollitt’s description of Deschanel’s character might as well have applied to all the characters she’s ever played:

“[She] has all the external trappings of individuality -- aloofness, a sly smile, vintage clothes and indie tastes -- but she has no more inner life than Petrarch’s Laura. She’s there to break the hero’s heart and rekindle his ambitions. What will she become? Someone else’s wife.”

Thank goodness that there are women carving out these roles. The interesting thing is that a lot of them don’t seem to be located in hipster culture. They’re located in pop. This is an extract from a dialogue which occurred in my house recently:

Housemate [watching Beyonce dance in a video]: She could kill someone with a roundhouse kick.
Me: She probably has!

Now, I’m not saying that Beyonce’s lyrics are in the least bit feminist. The fact that Beyonce’s early songs are often lauded for their ‘womanpower’ is a sad testament to the state of music generally, in which the very act of being a ‘survivor’ is considered subversive. Lyrically she has a tendency to swing between extremes, from the escort-cum-housekeeper in ‘Cater 2 U’: ‘What you wanna eat boo…just tap me on the shoulder, I’ll roll over’ to the callousness of ‘Independent Woman’: ‘When it’s over please get up and leave’. If feminism is about women’s agency, this is reaction not action – the hurt girl lashing out at the boys who wounded her.

The thing about Beyonce, though, is that any un-feminist sentiment in her lyrics is negated by the sheer force of awesomeness that is Beyonce herself. I mean, just look at her. The words of ‘Single Ladies’ may imply that all women want to be ‘owned’ by a man, but the extraordinary physical power and control in this dance—that-launched-a-thousand-clips tells a different story. My favourite is the little boy sobbing after being told by his dad that he is not, in fact, a single lady.] The figure of Beyonce is a mess of contradictions: a woman who claims to follow ‘The Rules’ of dating but reportedly signed an extensive pre-nup with Jay-Z, a woman who congratulates her man for ‘working hard’ to ‘provide’ but is worth an estimated US$100 million herself. She may not be talking feminism, but she’s living it. Power to you, B.

Which brings me to what was intended to be the original point of this article: Lady Gaga. And having written those words I need to step back from my laptop a moment, drink some Milo and calm down a bit, because my heart is going into palpitations.

Right. Better now.

Has there ever been a more brilliant, a more riveting piece of walking, talking, singing, crotch-flashing performance art than Lady Gaga?

Possibly. But none of them wore a dress made of mini-Kermits. That’s the thing about Gaga – you can never quite tell whether it’s genius, madness or exhibitionism. Sometimes her songs are good and sometimes they’re mediocre, sometimes her outfits are inspired and sometimes just bizarre. Whatever it is she’s trying to do, she’s putting more effort into it than most people invest in their entire lives, and when someone displays that level of energy, determination and rapacious mutant creativity it’s hard to do anything other than stand and salute.

There. I salute you, Lady Gaga.

On the same afternoon I read the Zooey Deschanel blogpiece, I also stumbled upon a compilation of the ten best Lady Gaga quotes from a Vanity Fair article. My own favourites:

“I feel that if I can show my demise artistically to the public, I can somehow cure my own legend.”

“What I’ve discovered is that in art, as in music, there’s a lot of truth—and then there’s a lie. The artist is essentially creating his work to make this lie a truth, but he slides it in amongst all the others. The tiny little lie is the moment I live for, my moment. It’s the moment that the audience falls in love.”

“A year from now, I could go away, and people might say, ‘Gosh, what ever happened to that girl who never wore pants?’ But how wonderfully memorable 30 years from now, when they say, ‘Do you remember Gaga and her bubbles?’ Because, for a minute, everybody in that room will forget every sad, painful thing in their lives, and they’ll just live in my bubble world.”

“She’s sleeping.” [The ‘She’ in question was in fact Lady Gaga’s human-hair hairbow.]
Tony Abbott missing, presumed drowned, at Victorian beach

Opposition Leader Tony Abbott is presumed drowned after disappearing beneath the waves at Cheviot Beach on Port Phillip Bay yesterday. The search continues but authorities say that by now there is no hope of finding the Opposition Leader alive. Mr Abbott, a noted fitness enthusiast, had been visiting the area during tour of Victoria when he decided he wanted to go for a swim. Surf was rough, Cheviot Beach is notorious for its strong currents, and advisors warned Mr Abbott not to enter the water. However, Mr Abbott is known as a man of conviction who is not swayed by the opinions of others, and so he ran into the surf regardless, disappearing beneath the waves as he dove in. Within moments those present sensed that something was wrong, and called for help. Prime Minister Kevin Rudd has expressed his condolences to the family of Mr Abbott, saying that he “died doing what he loved” and will be sorely missed. A memorial service will be held at St Patricks Church in Manly, where Mr Abbott spent time in his youth. Rumours that Mr Abbott was a Chinese spy returning to the fold via submarine have been dismissed as “unlikely” by those close to him.

RICHARD DAWKINS STATES THE FUCKING OBVIOUS

Invited to a major conference, noted atheist Richard Dawkins stated the fucking obvious when he pointed out that religious people believe silly things which are not true. The scientific genius explained, as though it was some stunning revelation, how the mythological notions held by many people around the world are, shock fucking horror, not actually legitimate scientific theories. He subsequently subjected these popular religious fairy-tales to derision which he seemed to think was cutting and original. The pompous smarty-pants went on to say, in a well-remunerated speech which might be considered brave and shocking in Saudi Arabia or medieval Spain, that religious people do terrible things and that religious doctrines have caused much suffering in the world. He concluded by reminding us that atheists are very clever people indeed.

SOCCER FAN ONLY CALLS IT “FOOTBALL”

Zachary Arenovic, 26, is a keen fan of soccer – a sport more properly called Association Football, of which soccer is an abbreviation. However, Mr Arenovic calls the sport “football” and insists that you do too. Recently, Mr Arenovic’s friend expressed a fondness for soccer. His response was a derisive snort and a reminder that “it’s called football”. When it was pointed out that there are four sports called “football” in Australia and that gets confusing, he mocked the idea that games where players use their hands and play with non-round balls could be considered “football” and then mumbled something about “hand eggs”. His friend protested, saying that he liked watching soccer, but the use of non-preferred terminology further provoked the soccer fan, who responded that the name “Socceroos” was an embarrassment and even when Australians watch “football” they don’t understand it. He went on, his voice now rising in volume, saying that Australians were brainwashed idiots who didn’t understand the subtle beauty of “the world game” because they were bamboozled by other violent thuggish sports like “thugby” and “gayFL”. Mr Arenovic then wondered aloud why the sport was struggling to get more popular in Australia.

MUM JOKE MADE TO ORPHAN

...
CRUELTY AND TOXIN INDUSTRIES PROMISE “CLEAN EVIL”

A new era of greener, cleaner evil was heralded today by representatives of the toxin, pollution and cruelty industries as they announced new self-imposed environmental standards to reduce the carbon footprint and ecological damage caused by their evil activities.

“The time has come for us to clean up our act and carry out our dastardly activities with as little footprint as possible,” said Cruel and Toxic Industry Association president Skenk Haraldgar. “There are many simple practical measures we can take to achieve this goal.” Mr Haraldgar suggested, for example, that after the heads of bunnies are crushed, instead of simply sending them to landfill, they could be processed into a slurry suitable for fertilising newly planted carbon sink forests. Likewise, instead of poisoning trees and children with toxic sludge, he said that more biodegradable poisons could be found in the natural environment.

In his concluding remarks Mr Haraldgar excitedly exclaimed, “...and there’s no reason we can’t give people cancer with clean solar energy instead of dirty polluting chemicals!”

Academics concur. According to Dr Wendy Grimmenswald, Head of the Evil Environmental Science department at Sydney University, there is no reason why evil activities cannot form a part of a transition to a sustainable economy built on renewable moral dubiousness and low level bastardry.

In fact, Dr Grimmenswald said, a transition to sustainable evil was vital for the long term health of the industry, because “in the end, the economy and society are a function of the environment, so if we lose the environment, that leaves the cruelty and toxin industries with nobody on which to unleash their unspeakable acts.”

She welcomed the announcement, but also warned that the industry announcement could merely be “greenwash”, designed to give the illusion of a new, cleaner form of evil whilst unsustainable practices continue. “These are evil industries, after all,” she said. “Lying is kind of what they do.”

The Government also welcomed the news, with the Minister for Evil Activities saying “Evil is a significant driver of the Australian economy and we welcome these moves. We hope that the coal and forestry industries can follow suit and play their part in reducing the ecological impact of evil on the Australian environment.”

Coal industry spokespeople could not be reached for comment.

SIMPLE ANSWER FIXES EVERYTHING

Academics and researchers were shocked to discover this week that a knee-jerk policy instituted by a poll-driven government at the last minute has in fact completely solved a previously complicated and intractable social issue.

“It’s certainly surprising,” commented Georgina Jorgensen, a prominent researcher in the field, “when the policy was implemented, we in this field said that it was a quick fix that ignored underlying social conditions which cause and exacerbate the problem.” Experts had warned that the policy was a feel-good measure that displayed ignorance of the real conditions on the ground and contempt for victims.

Dr Jorgensen and other academics had been confident that the policy, which came in response to a ministerial scandal and campaign by tabloid newspapers, would actually worsen the problem by punishing the wrong people and victimising the vulnerable.

Newspaper pundits trumpeted the success, calling the policy’s success a victory for the spurious pseudo-common sense of the uneducated and ill-informed against the forces of evidence-based analysis, long-term thinking and academic research. Flush with the positive outcomes from their stupid reactionary policy-making, the Government has commissioned new studies into the effectiveness of other simple answers to other complex and controversial social issues. Areas of research could include locking the fuckers up, banning things, violence, kicking the bastards out, and prayer.
EUROCHEESE

WILFRED BRANDT visits the birthplace of high-class culture and terrible, terrible pop music

Each year around now I anticipate one of the highlights of the calendar. A time when people of all nations come together to revel in joy and happiness, laying down our arms, relinquishing old grudges, and celebrating the unsinkable, unstoppable human spirit.

I’m not talking about Easter, daylight saving, Christmas, or even my annual rectal exam. No, I’m talking of course about the Eurovision Song Contest.

For the uninitiated, the Eurovision Song Contest isn’t about singer/songwriters artfully crafting melodies, painting pictures with their lyrical prowess, or plucking out folk songs about protest, civil rights, and weed. In this contest, songwriting is all about pop music – the more saccharine the better!

Established in 1956, the Eurovision Song Contest is one of the longest-running television programs in the world. Participating nations elect a song to represent them (and the band that performs it), and then the people in each country vote. Every year, it takes pop music to new unbelievable – presumably unbeatable – lows, until the following year, at which time the bar is dropped even lower.

Last year’s winner was Norway’s Alexander Rybak, a diminutive twink who looked like a cross between Zeke from Neighbours and a woodland fairy. Alexander pranced about the stage playing the violin and singing, while dancers jigged and frolicked behind him, backflipping and singing along. The chorus refrain to his hit song was melodramatic, with Alexander swooning: ‘I’m in love with a fairytale/even though it hurts’. Whuh? That doesn’t even make sense.
“This made me feel like I was in a bad gay porno.”

One can only assume that along with literal meaning, something was lost in translation when Europeans began writing and producing pop music. We unimaginative Westerners have always insisted on taking our pop music with at least a degree of seriousness. We demand a believable degree of levity, meaning, or coherence from even the most frivolous of pop stars (look into the scandal caused by pop stars Milli Vanilli for proof).

However, Europeans – in regards to pop music – demand about as much dignity as an overweight, hirsute German couple at a nude beach. By that, I mean, metaphorically speaking, they at least keep their sandals on (practicality, of course). It’s kind of astounding, but perhaps understandable, that while Europe invented much of what we call high culture today, they really grapple with the concept of ‘low’ culture. Perhaps it is a situation where, not being native speakers of ‘crap’, they have a problem separating the wheat from the chaff. They know that pop music is good, dumb, disposable fun, but they don’t know where to draw the line.

On a recent trip to Venice, my partner and I marveled at the exquisite architecture, the centuries-old art classics, the stunning vistas, and the fantastic cuisine. Yet never in all my travels have I heard so much bad music. Not bad enough to be good – just bad. Many bars and restaurants pumped out vocal-free ‘pop’ music, featuring synthesized drums and saxophone stylings. This made me feel like I was in a bad gay porno.

Even worse were the actual radio hits we heard. Everything from Lionel Ritchie to the MC Hammer rap theme to the Addams Family movie. I couldn’t make this stuff up! That was playing on the iPod of a well-dressed waiter in a classy, delicious pizza restaurant. He rushed over to skip the tune, but I ask you – who in their right mind would have the Addams Family soundtrack on their iPod? Did he buy the album off iTunes, or just the single? Or did he have the CD in his collection and think, ‘oh, better put this on my iPod so I can listen to it on the go’?

People in the UK, the Americas, and the Antipodes often go on about how Europeans have such taste when it comes to clothing, design, and food. And this may be true; but when ‘casual Friday’ rolls around, geez. There’s a reason the term ’Eurotrash’ exists.

Maybe Europeans are so accustomed to the high life that when told to dress casual, they simply freak out. When someone tells them to let their hair down, they don’t know where to stop. Or they can’t stop overthinking their outfit when someone tells them to just, ‘slip into something more comfortable’. Every casual sneaker has a million trinkets, and even a beat-up, throw-away singlet has dramatic trim styling.

The Eurovision Song Contest beautifully embodies every cliché of the tacky side to European culture. The performers mug and ham it up. They have carefully-styled bedhead and pencil-thin beards. There’s an over-abundance of jewellery and lots of
shiny, glittering stuff on stage. The back-up dancers twirl and somersault; the crowd goes wild. The whole thing feels so contrived and creepily sanitised, like an audience on high-grade anti-depressants cheering for three days of back-to-back performances by the Jonas Brothers and Delta Goodrem.

The winning performance in 2008 saw a Russian dude in an all-white outfit singing a slow jam. Alongside him was a fellow white-suited comrade frantically playing his violin, whilst an an ice skater circled both of them, and a smoke machine blew on all three. This isn’t irony, and it’s not kitsch. This is the Eurovision Song Contest.

The final day of the Eurovision Song Contest will be a day unlike any other. That is, unless you are a drag queen, giant plushy theme park mascot, habitual LSD user or carnival freak. Or maybe that’s it. Maybe the Europeans have figured out what I theorised the Japanese had discovered when I first saw Japanese television – that TV is meant for people who are stoned.

I must confess. I do like pop music. I don’t love it, I don’t buy it, but it’s also not a guilty pleasure. There is such a thing as great pop music, and I always enjoy a catchy song with a clever lyric, a stupid lyric or a funny lyric. Miley Cyrus’ eminently hummable ‘See You Again’ (or her brother Metro Station’s equally able, ‘Shake It’). Phantom Planet’s ‘California’. Beyonce’s ‘Single Ladies (Put A Ring On It)’. ‘1 Thing’ by Amerie. Or, a favourite of mine from back in 2004, ‘Leave [Get Out]’, in which 13-year-old chanteuse JoJo is chastising her ex-boyfriend, stating that she has learned of his amorous indiscretions with her best friend, then holding up his mobile phone to the camera and adding, ‘because you left her number on your phone’.

These are just off the top of my head, but they’re all great songs. Understated, or simply catchy without being cloying. These aren’t songs which people will choose for their wedding nuptials, or funeral march – I hope. These songs will not change lives, inspire artists, or unite nations.

That is, of course, unless they were in the Eurovision Song Contest.
Music Review:
FANT-ASH-TIC
MATT KWAN

Ash
A-Z Vol 1
Liberator Music
Album released 22 April 2010

Dom-Editor’s note: It was the second week of March that Matt came into our office carrying a stack of mail in his arms. Buried amidst the pile of letters and leaflets was a promotional copy of an album by the band ‘Ash’, sent to us for review. Matt immediately ripped it open and plugged it into the computer. “This... this is ridiculous! This music is crap! I can’t believe how crap this music is!”

At that point I left the office to run an errand. I took about ten minutes or so. When I returned Matt was still listening to the same track. “Hmmm, this music is actually OK! This music is growing on me!”

I then went off to a two hour lecture. When I came back Matt was still there, still listening to the same song in a state of growing excitement. “This band is awesome! This band is fantastic! This is my new favourite band!”

...this is his story.

I recently came across this album lying in the Tharunka pigeon-hole, carefully packaged in bubble-wrap. I had never heard of Ash, despite the promotional blurb describing them as ‘[p]op veterans’, having ‘sold over 8 million albums worldwide’.

Further investigation via the internet revealed that Ash is a Northern Irish band that has been around since 1992. They were really popular in the mid-nineties, with a number one hit in the UK in 1996. Having flirted with the idea of a quartet, they have now settled into a three-piece format.

A-Z Vol 1 comes from the A-Z Series; an ambitious project Ash began last year to release a single each fortnight. Each single is identified by a letter of the alphabet. With singles A-M having been released, Vol 1 is the showcase for the first half of their project.

Upon first listening to it, only two songs vaguely caught my ear. The others sounded like songs rejected from previous albums of The Killers. I remarked to a fellow editor that two good songs out of thirteen was a terrible hit rate and that I would not want to listen to this again.
However, I did, and I couldn’t stop! There was just something very compelling about the album. After listening to all the songs more closely, I discovered a greater appreciation for the almighty musical brilliance that is Ash.

The addictiveness of Ash comes from its distinctive sound, driven by catchy guitar hooks, an undercurrent of synthesised sounds, and controlled drumming. Delicate mixing produces a final product that is not too heavy, not too soft, but just right for a good afternoon of magazine editing.

The album’s first single, ‘True Love 1980’, exemplifies every good quality about this album. It is pure pop pleasure. A gentle, yet fun and mood-lifting synthesiser introduction expands into a continuous motif in the song. Bursts of guitar in the chorus take the song to the next level, just, and only, at the right time. True love? It’s a yes from me.

The tempo is quickened in ‘Space Shot’, perhaps reflecting the physical need to attain a high velocity to execute a successful launch into space. Ignoring the lame rhymes: ‘Sub-zero; 50 below/Can’t take the pressure; it’s going to blow’, this is a successful melange of pop and rock, with a hint of the blues. Playing behind the beat, rather than the typical four on the floor, gives this song effortless power, and maximum enjoyability.

Showcasing their versatility, Ash includes a number of pure old-school rock songs, including the deliciously titled ‘Dionysian Urge’. Despite its name, however, this song’s driving drum beat is simple and steady, totally at odds with Dionysus, Ancient Greek God of ritual madness. It is this drumming, so important in rock music, which makes this song enjoyable and easy to listen to.

In the film Music and Lyrics, Hugh Grant’s character described lyrics as being secondary to the music, to the disdain of Drew Barrymore’s character. In A-Z Vol 1, Hugh Grant’s assessment is definitely more correct. The album is made by the music. The lyrics merely complement it. What are the lyrics? It doesn’t matter. Just listen to the music. In fact, I would prefer it if no singing occurred. It just detracts from the music.

A-Z Vol 1 is pure and simple fun. It’s an album that makes you smile without you knowing. That’s hot! I, for one, cannot wait for the second volume of thirteen songs.
The date is 14 June 2008. The best selling album on the Billboard Hottest 200 is Usher’s long-awaited opus, Here I Stand. (If you were alive in the 2000s you were listening to Confessions.) The album was your typical ‘pop’ LP – over-manufactured, heavily marketed, and shipped to any and every retail point in existence.

Fast forward a year later and the landscape has changed. The best-selling album is still fairly typical: ‘Relapse’ by Eminem. But the eighth spot has been taken by an album called ‘Veckatimest’ by Grizzly Bear. I might’ve said ‘little known’ in that sentence, but clearly eighth place on the Billboard chart doesn’t solicit that description. If you trying to imagine what a music world apocalypse would look like, the idea of any Indie album on this chart is it. Indie is in, and is more popular than ever.

So what is Indie? Originally, it meant music with independent roots – albums released without the marketing power of a major label. Indie albums had to work for a place on the charts since they wouldn’t have the pre-order buying power afforded by the big chain stores. After a while, it became a genre of its own and symbolic of the latest alternative offshoot – lo-fi, home production. If it wasn’t popular and had guitars that weren’t tuned for shredding, it was probably Indie.

This change has led to our current predicament. Indie isn’t just applied to music anymore. Film, style and writing can all be considered Indie now. That Ellen Page film? Probably indie. That kid with the skinny jeans and button up shirt? Indie. Your friend’s tumblr blog? Yeah, Indie, and probably juxtaposed with a sampling of her black and white photography. Sydney and Melbourne already have American Apparel stores, and rumour has it that Sydney is getting a Gap on Pitt Street by the end of the year. Be prepared for an even bigger onslaught of preppy clean-shaved hipsters because, hell, even I’m shaving more often now (and I spent $80 on a shirt from AA just last month!).

Even the soundtrack for the latest Twilight film is a veritable sharehouse of Indie music stars. And sure, while most of the tweens who saw that film probably hated that soundtrack, it still says something about the pervasiveness of this phenomenon.

But it’s not all bad news. Indie-ness and apathy have their roots in the Alternative scene which is indicative of probably many of you reading this right now. If you were ever called ‘weird’ at school for listening to music which wasn’t on 2Day FM, a ‘freak’ for spending your time in the library in books, or ‘gay’ for not dressing like a moron (white Nike caps, track pants and miscellaneous sporting brand tees), you probably fit into the Alternative genre.
"I for one welcome our new coolness overlords."

But Indie is just an extension of that - quirkiness is in and you only need to look so far as Zooey Deschanel and Michael Cera to see that this is what's cool now. Movies like Juno show that the 'coming of age' genre pioneered by John Hughes is still alive and kicking, and I for one welcome our new coolness overlords.

Indie also says something about the people who live in it. Over the past year I've bought moleskin, cried during films, and started collecting Penguin Classics. Maybe it's because I'm pretty feminine as it is but I would never have done those things if I was still listening to Iron Maiden and playing competitive sports. And, it should be noted that the next place I plan on taking a girl to on a date is the IKEA near Homebush. Yes, I'm a metrosexual hipster wanker with four pairs of skinny jeans - and that's the way I like it.

So what does this bode for the genre itself? Previously, when I started listening to Indie music I began to despise everything that I considered commercial - reality television, music on the charts, and books that were sold at Target. When fully immersed in the ecosystem, I would ridicule friends on their taste, and lament when I saw heroes of mine like Thom Yorke releasing exclusive music for Stephanie Meyer pictures.

But, after a while I realised that the more this phenomenon became mainstream, the less I would see of things I disliked. It was one thing for me to rip on Lady Gaga for being the latest pop music plastic-fantastic but even I realised after a while that she embodied a lot of what I liked about the Indie genre: self-influenced art and look, and songs and lyrics written and produced by the artist herself. While it was in the pop style, Gaga was fighting a battle against normalcy and for being 'different'. She might have a penis, but hell, that'd sure make a lot of family groups angry. I, for one, am happy that she's outselling the Neo-Christian pop juggernaut that makes crap music and brainwashes kids into wearing purity rings. I think we should welcome what this whole shift represents, and if more kids are finding out that the Radiohead frontman is a Grade-A dickhead, at least they won't cry when he snubs Taylor Swift at the Grammy Awards.

So, give it up. If you hated this hipster scene then it's probably time to give in. Buy a pair of skinny jeans. Start collecting vinyls. Start a blog about cats with belligerent expressions. You'll eventually turn. If you needed any more of a sign that this isn't going to stop, you only need to look at the Billboard albums chart for January 30, 2010. The album in the number one position is called 'Contra' by Vampire Weekend. Vampires, Indie music, and popularity - together at last.
The sausage shape and form has infiltrated human history in a mostly positive way. Many people enjoy food substances that are shaped in a sausage-like formation; sausages, sausage rolls, sausage sizzles, salami, baguettes and of course those sacred things that hang between a man’s legs.

Up until now you would be forgiven for thinking, ‘wow, being shaped like a sausage seems like a cool way to live’. Unfortunately though, if you happened to be born looking like the entrails and arsehole of an animal wrapped in semi-synthetic meat skin, you’ve got a bumpy road ahead.

Case in point: if you are a sausage dog you may have noticed the following things that cause difficulty in your life:

- you struggle to sit on a chair without slipping off and are subsequently labelled a fool or drunk
- you have severe back problems from a young age
- your small sausage frame makes your other features look extremely large and thus you are a disproportioned mess.

Sausage Styling
It pains me to be the bearer of bad news, but I’m sure you all know that you are all just regular human/dog beings that just happen to be shaped like a sausage and it doesn’t mean you aren’t an equal or aren’t special with emotions and intelligence and feelings.
Snaggies and Chipolatamen, there is an important issue that needs to be discussed immediately: sausage-shaped body parts. I know what you’re thinking, but of primary and mostly uncovered concern are SAUSAGE FINGERS. Some say they are cute; some lovingly refer to them as stubby. But the truth of the matter is they are a freakish occurrence that is too shocking to even air on Embarrassing Illnesses. Maybe I’m being a little harsh, some one very close to me has this infliction and who am I too judge another’s body, let alone their edible fingers? In fact over the years Saustina’s* pork paws have become a lovable little flaw that are always mocked and thus enjoyed at Christmas time. Although one’s breath is not a body part per se and doesn’t exactly take on a sausage form, ‘saus breath’ must be mentioned here as it is most certainly a downfall. Any sausage will make you guilty of this crime against humanity, but for more details refer to the chart below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SAUSAGE</th>
<th>BREATH</th>
<th>DOWNFALL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cold</td>
<td>Grizzly and old</td>
<td>Black on teeth and increased smell</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wang</td>
<td>Cheesy and whorish</td>
<td>Bye bye dignity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italian</td>
<td>Spicy and overwhelming</td>
<td>Immediately associated with sleaze and oil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dagwood</td>
<td>Carny and fried</td>
<td>Poisoning and/or grease lips</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chipolata</td>
<td>Garlic and middle eastern</td>
<td>Refer to breath section</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There is also the other aforementioned ‘member’ that is reminiscent of the sausage and as also mentioned has the capacity to give one ‘saus breath’. However, I’m sure any ordinary individual can think of all the woes that come with that one – downward being its major downfall of course.

*not her real name
I've lived in poverty for the past 3 years. Just last week I went to the movies, got fish and chips and spent way too much time on Facebook. Scurvy hasn’t been a problem yet.

I’ve got many other friends who are also studying and living in poverty. One of them saw Lady Gaga recently, while another went hitch-hiking in Tasmania and ended up sleeping in a van with strangers. Poverty really isn’t that bad. In fact, I would even recommend it under limited, controlled circumstances.

I’m not trying to sound flippant – it’s obvious I’m not referring to poverty in the sense of starving malarial brown-faced children. I am referring to ‘first-world poverty’, a relative concept. In Australia the poverty line sits at $401 per week if you are in active employment, and $325 if you’re not. By this definition, most university students who are not supported by their parents are living in poverty. This includes law students on clerkships, aspiring dentists and students taking Honours in Finance with an eye on investment banking.

Now, $401 per week is quite enough money for a pleasant little existence. I’m living on less than that right now, and still have enough to shout you the occasional beer at the Roundhouse without robbing you afterwards. This doesn’t show that the poverty line is meaningless. There’s a difference between someone who’s temporarily slumming it and someone who’s struggling to earn $401 a week, period. If you’re a uni student, you probably expect to make most of your income after you finish your degree. Saving is not a priority because there will be a huge shift in your material circumstances once you hit that graduate job.

But for someone who’s already in the workforce, $401 a week is serious. It means they can barely afford to run a car, let alone get a mortgage on a home (or buy tickets to the Lady Gaga concert). There’s no graduate job at the end of the line and no sudden, dramatic spike in earning potential.

Which brings me to the SRC ‘Student Poverty’ campaign, run in collaboration with the National Union of Students. It has been the most public SRC
campaign in recent years, complete with National Day[s] of Action, sit-ins, free breakfasts, and most recently ‘Noodle Day’. For those who missed it, this involved giving out nine hundred servings of instant noodles to highlight the plight of poor students everywhere. Oh, and there’s a Guinness World Record involved in there somewhere.

There are some good policies behind the campaign, addressing issues such as fair Youth Allowance and housing affordability. My issue is with the cry-poor tone of the whole thing: “University students around the country have turned en masse to instant noodles to draw attention to their impoverished plight”

“Every day disadvantaged students around the nation eat noodles as part of their daily meals... It’s really hard for students to afford to live”

“Eating two-minute noodles for breakfast, lunch and tea is not a rite of passage, it’s evidence of politicians short-changing young people wherever they can”

The term ’Student Poverty’ reminds me of when politicians talk about ‘working families’. Yes, there are real families out there doing it tough. But every time a politician says the words it’s with a wink to all those other families as well. You know, the ones that buy organic aubergines and play Wii Fit Plus together. Similarly, the Student Poverty campaign implies that it’s all about helping the poorest of the poor, when in reality hipsters do quite well out of it too. The recent government changes to student income support are particularly juicy. There’s even a $650 start-of-semester bonus payment, so perfectly timed that you might as well call it the iPad Allowance.

There’s also the irony of the whole thing. Centrelink is an organisation whose sole purpose is to give people money, yet somehow it gets more hating served on it than a Hitler moustache at Passover. I agree with this supporter of the campaign: “Student Poverty is... a chocolate mud cake and a kilo of yoghurt in the fridge”. The same person later admitted that “Alright, I’m not really experiencing student poverty, just really bad food management and atrocious grocery buying tactics”.

I spoke to SRC Welfare Officer James Still via satellite link from his mountain retreat. James emphasised that the campaign is about making access to education equitable. He concedes that there is a big difference between “poverty” and the much more common situation of ”student financial stress”. Many of the policies advocated by the National Union of Students do help to address problems such as class and financial barriers to tertiary education. But that just goes to show there are enough reasons to reform student income support without convincing people that half of all students on campus are paupers. While I agree that ‘Students in Financial Stress’ doesn’t quite roll off the tongue, I still can’t support the continuing use of the word ‘poverty’, unless in a very specific sense to describe actual incidences of poverty within the student population.

Student poverty isn’t so bad. It builds character, teaches you important skills like cooking with frozen vegetables, and can actually help you study when there’s not much disposable income around to play with.

If in doubt, I think this sets the parameters for the word ‘poverty’ pretty well:

“There is poverty within Australia. There’s poverty among the homeless, poverty in many Aboriginal communities. There’s poverty in struggling single parent households who can barely afford rent, let alone food.”

Or something catchier:

“Go to Haiti, that’s poverty.”
Homes Without Heart

KYLAR LOUSSIKIAN hates ugly houses.

The home, your private world, until the public seeps in: family values, the war on drugs, the nightly news, the neighbours, Neighbours, two kids and a dog.

You can go to HomeWorld and browse the homes like a catalogue. A bedroom for brother! A bedroom for sister! How about an AV room, a rumpus room, informal dining, formal dining, home office and a kitchen with all the widgets spilling out from the walk-in pantry?

No wonder the house is spread out over a hectare. No need for a garden though, it’s not like the kids will move from the TV set where they take their breakfast and dinner. No wonder your precious children look like fat human slugs. At least you have the home bar near the second laundry to take your mind off the problem.

Sydney, it seems, has an infatuation with development. Not sensible, thoughtful development that preserves what little architectural history and sense of place that our suburbs still contain, but a hostile, greedy urge to demolish what has been standing for fifty years or more, and replacing it with a monstrous house, or worse, twenty miniature dwellings.

More and more are middle-Australian families cashing in on their bricks-and-mortar millions and leaving their ex-neighbours with an ill thought-out house; a huge alienating nightmare that turns into a planning disaster too.

Instead of growing up into a mid-density city where real care is taken in the erection of buildings that are meant to last hundreds of years, we build awful, soulless buildings that are often nothing more than concrete boxes with slabs of coloured plastics attached to the side.

Apparently this is what passes for design in Sydney’s suburbs. You don’t need to look far to see this either; amongst the art deco gems in Macleay Street, Potts Point, a developer has decided to build perhaps the most heinous mega-building. Just beyond the Anzac Bridge, in Pyrmont, rise several of the most ugly towers imaginable.
‘It’s no longer possible to blame the developers. We need to blame ourselves.’

The middle and outer suburbs have their own problems. Small redbrick houses and mid-century dwellings become monsters, or home to a multiplex of ‘town-homes’. We recede further back into our bedroom areas and enormous houses. These are the places cut off from urban life by a lack of transport and a greater lack of soul.

It’s no longer possible to blame the developers. We need to blame ourselves. We have become isolated, estranged. No longer do we (metaphorically) care to go out in the evenings; why not just sit and watch the home entertainment system, drink at the home bar, swim through the pool, the jacuzzi and the splash pond. We bring the city to us. We have no need for the theatre; for the cinema; for the bar; for the pub; for the beach; for the park.

Of course there is a growing menace in the suburbs (at least according to the Daily Telegraph): graffiti; drugs; crime; violence. The only folks out at night are exactly those outcasts that shun the drab world of the six o’clock news and Two & A Half Men. It’s a last gasp for creativity; for something different; something unfamiliar. We no longer design parks and playgrounds. We have designer streets instead, with homes in a choice of three styles.

Could there be a better way to illustrate the absolute death of imagination when houses now need to be picked out of catalogues? You’re picking a place to live, not picking out a fridge!

The solution is not environmental design; it’s not extending the tram from Palm Beach to La Perouse; it’s not about designer gerbils. It’s about stopping the retreat; about decent planning to give Sydney a communal atmosphere that forces people to consider others each and every moment. If you don’t want to, then move to the mountains. You live in a city; there are other people here. Deal with it.

When we retreat, we insulate ourselves. No wonder xenophobia, homophobia and absolute conservatism flourishes most in insular suburban communities. I’d like to think that we could all agree this is not the best thing for a so-called world-class city we like to thing of ourselves as living in. Then again, I often forget about the people who build two metre high fences, then paint them fluorescent green.
Bad Weddings...
BART JAMES

I had to go to a wedding the other day. It was for a guy I used to be friends with at high school. Weddings really bother me and I wouldn’t have gone to this one if I didn’t think it might have hurt Bill’s feelings if I’d said no.

The Church was in a country town called Bungendore about 40kms out of Canberra. Canberra has no public transport system to speak of. I seriously considered bypassing the church service entirely and playing Wii at my friend’s place until the reception started. Who ever heard of paying nearly a hundred dollars just to get to someone’s party?

Unfortunately I have a conscience and decided to diligently check if one of the other guys was driving there and could give me a lift. Merv obliged. His partner Samantha was there and I got in the backseat. Merv and Samantha are lawyers at Freehills. Merv asked me what I thought of the soon-to-be-married couple.

“Well, it’s strange actually,” I said. “When I asked Bill on his buck’s night why he wanted to marry Amy, he gave me all the reasons why Amy wanted to marry him.”

Merv sniggered.

“But then I suppose we were surrounded at the time by twelve other guys and a naked stripper, so maybe he wasn’t quite ready to open his heart to me.” They laughed.

But this was just a pat line to reassure the marriage-believers. I knew what Bill’s reasons were for getting married.

“You don’t understand,” Bill had said. “She’s got really low self-esteem. I can’t even speak to other women. I’m not allowed to have any female friends.”


“She’s been treated like shit by her family her whole life. I have to constantly tell her how beautiful she is, how she could easily be a model. I tell her she’s just as intelligent as me; she’s funny; she’s super-hot. I’ve just been trying to build up her confidence.”
At this point Bill was swept away by his brother and some other bucks friends to change into a yellow cocktail dress. He spent the night in that feathery outfit cleaning windscreens with a squeegee in traffic while everyone cheered from the sidewalk. I saw at least one other guy in the Rocks that night, also on his buck’s night, also wearing a woman’s dress.

Amy probably wanted the emotional security of a locked-in relationship. Bill liked it that she depended on him. Presumably marriage would seal these goods for them both. I observed at least two things to make me question this: 1. Later that night I saw Bill chatting up several young women at the bar. And 2. A week later, on the way out of the wedding service, among all the community help pamphlets in the church foyer there was one that said ‘Can I get an annulment?’

There is no such thing as security.

I walked into the Church and filed along one of the pews. In the hymn book were such titles as “Do not be afraid”. I tried to share the joke with Merv but he didn’t smile.

The priest waved his arms at someone in the upper choir chamber and the wedding music started. First came the bridesmaids, stepping right foot forward, two feet together, left foot forward. I glanced around the church: men and women were looking up and down, weighing them up, ogling.

When Amy slow-marched up the aisle with her Dad, I realised what the problem was. She looked brilliant; the whole effect was quite beautiful. But it was the embarrassed, deeply pleased expression on her face that made me wonder: who is she doing this for? It was strange that she was bashfully waiting to be ogled, rather than openly claiming the attention she must have wanted.

The priest did his usual thing and it was over quickly.

Outside we were walking toward the car and some guy I know held my hand as a joke, as if we were a gay couple. I used the opportunity to say that it would be great to see a gay wedding at a Catholic Church.

“But marriage is between a man and a woman,” said Samantha, the lawyer from Freehills.

“Yeah Bart, didn’t you know that?” said the guy who made the gay joke.

The wedding reception was held at the Hyatt, which is Canberra’s most expensive hotel. Several weird things about the reception:

1. The bride doesn’t make a speech, but the bride’s father, the groom’s father, the groom’s best man, and the groom himself all do.

2. The bride’s family is meant to pay all expenses for the wedding. This amounted to about $20,000 in this case. If they don’t, it is a source of embarrassment and apologies, which Amy’s Dad made at least three times during his speech.

3. The groom delivered his speech almost entirely in the voice of Borat. I laughed with everyone else, but he even used the voice when describing why he’d proposed to Amy. “Amy, you look...very nice.” Later on I found out he wasn’t even drunk.

If you haven’t read The Female Eunuch, I highly recommend it. It’s not only about women’s rights but repression generally. One thing Germaine Greer says is that white weddings are the ultimate in kitsch. I guess by this she means that even loving relationships aren’t guaranteed to last, so we should try to avoid oversentimental rituals which disguise the risk of committing yourself to someone. It might not work out. And break-ups really suck. But if marriage means promising to stay with someone even if it’s against your will, then it’s either repressive or a lie. The exchange of vows at Bill’s wedding included this line: “Love bears all things, believes all things, endures all things.” Kind of sounds like the human experiment from a horror movie – it actually believes anything you say! It will endure anything! It’s incredible!

People can just get divorced. But in that case, why go through this charade at all? Because it’s about the married couple’s status, it’s a big show of wealth, and a modern day initiation rite into adulthood. Well, so long as it doesn’t affect me that’s fine. Bill and Amy can have it to themselves.

I told Bill I was pleased for him and I honestly was. But I was already pleased for him before the wedding. He and Amy seem to be genuinely in love. It’s a shame they couldn’t flick this kitschy patriarchal ritual that clings to people’s relationships like a mutant limpet.
It might have slipped under most of your radars, but a couple of weekends ago Sydney hosted the biggest conference on Feminism in Australia in 15 years. F Conference, held at the Teacher’s Federation Conference Centre in Surry Hills was a great success in reinvigorating the Feminist movement and the topics discussed, including “Why is Feminism relevant?” “Women and Education” and “Feminism and the Environment movement”, were insightful and a reminder of the inequities that still exist in our society. It was great to see 10 students from UNSW attending and the Womyn’s Department of the Student Representative Council awesomely donated money to help make the conference happen.

Over the next couple of weeks there a couple of big campaigns and events organised by the SRC and Arc coming up. We’re about to launch a Fair Trade campaign to get Fair Trade accreditation for the campus and campaign for stronger environmental initiatives and greater funding for environmental programs from the University.

In the interest of improving international student life at UNSW, Arc is creating a questions and answers style event for international students (think ABC’s Q&A without Tony Jones…and at UNSW). The evening will cover topics pertinent to international students, such as:

- Immigration and Legal help
- Career and Employment
- Safety on and off campus
- Study @ UNSW

It will be held on Tuesday the 4th of May at the Club Bar (Level 1 of the Roundhouse) between 5 and 6pm.

If you’re interested in any of these campaigns or events drop me a line or just come by my office in the Blockhouse.

Alice Lang
Student Development Convenor
a.lang@arc.unsw.edu.au

Hi everyone,

It’s been a very busy and exciting month at Student Development. Recently, student coordinators have been appointed for three of Arc’s most recently introduced volunteer programs: The Mob, Global Village and Volunteer Army. These are programs led by students, for students, and there are lots of opportunities to get involved and give something back to the community. Check out http://www.arc.unsw.edu.au/Volunteer.aspx to see how you could help new students settle in to UNSW and find their way around the city, volunteer at events and places all around Sydney, or set off overseas with Habitat for Humanity!

Lots of clubs have been putting on great events recently. Congratulations! Remember to keep in touch and let us know how we can support your club even better. The next round of applications for Off Campus Activity Grants and Campus Community Grants close on 14 May (Friday of Week 10), so think about getting those applications in!

Jessica Mobbs
Womyn’s Officer
j.mobbs@arc.unsw.edu.au

Well, I am pleased to report that Womyn’s Week was fantabulous, events were well attended, there was much enjoyment had by all, and even some of the University’s ‘suits’ came down to have a look at the ‘Our Times and Sexual Assault’ forum.

On the 10th and 11th of April, one of the biggest events for feminists in our society happened, yes that’s right, ‘F: A Festival. A Conference. A Future’ was here! It was a weekend of seminars, workshops and amazingness that reinvigorated the feminist scene like never before. I am glad to say that a couple of UNSW Womyn of the past years was involved in the organisational side.
Hi everyone!

Transport costs are the main focus for our Collective this year. There was a rally organised by the National Union of Students (NUS) on 31 March [check date], marching from the University of Sydney to the University of Technology, Sydney. The unfairness of not having travel concessions was a big part of the rally, and we’re hopeful that more efforts will be held to put pressure on the government to grant them.

We’re also organising a photo competition titled Days of Our Lives with the aim of raising awareness of the lives of international students. Look out for details after the Easter break.

If you would like to get involved with international students’ issues, rock up to Training Room [number], Level 1, Blockhouse, every Monday from 1-2 pm. Otherwise send us an email. Remember, we are your representatives, so have your say!

Anna Khan and Felicity Lee
Ethnic Affairs Officers
ethnic@arc.unsw.edu.au

Harmony Week in Week 4 was amazing! We want to say a giant thank you to everyone that came to our events, or helped out throughout the week. It would not have been such a success without the people! If you’re feeling a serious lack of festive events, do not worry, we are working on Acceptance Week for Session Two right now!

In the meantime, we would like to encourage everyone to come to our weekly Collective meetings, whether it is to meet new people, to have some free food, or talk about anything that may be concerning you! In the meantime, please feel free to e-mail us.

James Still
Welfare Officer
j.still@arc.unsw.edu.au

Noodle Day was an incredible, stupendous success! We had over 1000 students on the Library Lawn on 24 March to set the world record for the most amount of people eating noodles simultaneously! The event was aimed at raising awareness of student poverty on campus and we definitely succeeded. We got media coverage from the Southern Courier, MX, and Sydney Morning Herald. I was also interviewed by 2UE Radio. Thanks to the National Union of Students for coordinating this great campaign and the SRC for all your help on the day!

In other news, I have implemented the Calculator Borrowing Scheme, now available from all Arc stores. For 48 hours all you need is a small security deposit! Welfare Week is this week [Week 7], so look out for it! I’m also updating/reprinting the Cheapskates Guide to UNSW. Come help me out and come to the Welfare Collective, 1-2pm every Tuesday in the Blockhouse.

Nicola Karcz
Environment Officer
n.karcz@arc.unsw.edu.au

The first half of semester has shown the Environment Collective at its best. Whether chilling out in a kayak to blockade the world’s largest coal port in Newcastle, or cooking up a storm with a vegetarian barbeque and music night, there has always been a suitable combination of activism and fun!

Now that the mid-semester break is over, we’ll be rallying to encourage our University to put its money where its mouth is with regard to renewable energy. Despite the fact UNSW is a world leader in photovoltaic research, and offers fantastic degrees in environmental management, the University’s 2007 aim of purchasing 7.5% GreenPower by the end of 2010 will probably not be met. This is a woeful result in an area where we need to see improvement.

Want to get involved? Shoot us an email or come along to a meeting, every Monday 12-1pm on the Quad Lawn. Our website is: unsw.envirocollective.com

April Long and Peta MacGillivray
Indigenous Officers
indigenous@arc.unsw.edu.au

The Indigenous Collective has welcomed many new members recently! If you are passionate about indigenous rights in this country or simply want to learn more about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and our cultures, then come along on every Friday at 4pm in the Blockhouse. All students are welcome!

Close the Gap:
We recently held a Close the Gap student forum-which was a great success! UNSW students were able to hear firsthand how the life expectancy gap affects indigenous students at UNSW. We also had over 40 students pledge their support for the campaign and sent off 30 letters to Kevin Rudd demanding more action! Special thanks to the Oxfam Society, Nura Gili and Arc @ UNSW for their support.

Indigenous Week:
Planning is underway for Indigenous Week [Week 13], so watch this space! Preliminary ideas include an exhibition of indigenous students’ artwork, a native cook-up night hosted by the Indigenous Collective as well as an indigenous film night.
Dulce et Cetera
By Henry Cornwell

He would never be hungry again.
The thirst would burn like love,
    Clean water cool like reluctant reciprocity.

    "I’d cry if I lost you,"
    Said the General to War.

A rippled body hits the floor,
    An express to the heart of sleep.
    Hard earned, deep and fast as fuck.

    "I’d cry if I lost you,"
    Said the Cancer to the Bone.

The purpose, the friendship, the comrades, the glory,
    Bullets for regret and remorse.

    "I’d cry if I lost you,"
    Said the Night to the Moon.

Love for the country stronger than Mother,
    Weaker than flying steel.

    "I’d cry if I lost you,"
    Said the Shackles to the Slave.

He found his peace, he found his place.
    A grave in a hostile land.

    "I’d cry if I lost you,"
    Said the Soldier to his Guns.

I don’t know his name,
    it wore off long ago.
Goats eat the grass
    that lives off his remains
And students trample the ground where he lies.

Never hungry
Never thirsty
Never tired
Never sad.

    Pro patria, que?
Milk cartons march against LACTOSE INTOLERANCE

What did lactose ever do to you?

Our cause shall never expire!

End discrimination now!

Don't tolerate intolerance!

We have rights too!
We welcome contributions including opinion pieces, satire, scoops, fiction, pornographic fiction, artwork and anything else you can think of. If you want to be heard, write for us! Refer to the Tharunka style guide, available at http://tharunka.unsw.edu.au, for tips and pointers. Submissions should be sent to tharunka@arc.unsw.edu.au, as an email attachment in either .rtf or .doc form. Please don’t send files in .docx format. The computer doesn’t like it.

Submissions deadlines for each edition can be found at the website above, or on our Facebook page. Join our Facebook group to receive periodic reminders when articles are due. The deadline for edition 4 is 26 April. If you have a rough draft, an idea or a ‘pitch’ for an article and want to talk it through with someone, email us at the same address and we can work through it together.

While we do our best to respond to everyone’s emails, there are a lot of you and not many of us. We also need to put some time aside for eating and showering. Please take it as a given that we hugely appreciate any expression of interest in Tharunka. And please keep writing, even if you’re not accepted the first time.

We do not pay for one-off submissions. Sorry, do we look like blitz to you?
Or, write us a letter! Angry letters are always appreciated but if you particularly enjoyed an article, we’d love it if you let us and the writer know.