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Elections McGill is accepting nominations for the following positions with the Students' Society of McGill University (SSMU):

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7. Student Senators
(one from each faculty)
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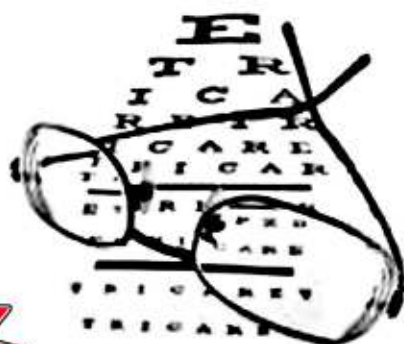
Elections McGill is also accepting nominations for Yes/No committees for the next set of referendum questions. Nomination kits are available online at www.electionsmcgill.ca or from the Elections McGill office, Shatner 405.

**Nominations are due Tuesday,
February 20th at noon.**

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(Macdonald Campus students ONLY - email apps accepted)

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Contact:

Joan Butterworth
leadership.training@mcgill.ca

514-398-8991 or
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Profs friend their way onto Facebook

Middle-aged users are now the social networking site's largest demographic

Thomas Kim
News Writer

With 36,908 Facebook users on the McGill network, it's not surprising that an increasing number of professors are turning to this and other social networking devices, such as MySpace and Gmail, to communicate with students.

Dr. Paul Wiseman, an associate professor in the department of chemistry, was introduced to Facebook in 2004 by one of his students.

"An undergraduate research student and later a graduate student in my lab added me to Facebook, and told me that it was a Harvard study to examine degrees of separation," Wiseman wrote in an email to The Daily. "I had no idea what it was morphing into, as far as a social network site."

Wiseman, who commonly teaches over 1,000 undergraduates per year, and has a Facebook network of over 1,300 friends, says that he accepts almost anyone who adds him – assuming that they're former students.

"What is interesting is that now almost all of my requests come from high school or university friends, which shows how ubiquitous Facebook has become, and how it has changed," Wiseman added.

In five years, Facebook has undergone a rapid evolution, with the middle-aged its largest growing age demographic. From its initial start as a social

network available only to Ivy League college students, it is now accessible to everyone with Internet access, and hosts over 175 million active users.

Wiseman said Facebook could be used for academic purposes as well as social ones, explaining that a Nigerian science writer who volunteers in a malaria clinic added him after Wiseman's lab developed a new way to detect malaria infection in blood cells.

When asked about using the limited profile function when accepting students' "friend" requests, Dr. Jim Kanaris, a professor from the Faculty

Facebooking.

U2 International Development Studies student Olivia Perdana said she didn't mind political science professor Rex Brynen being privy to her personal information, having had him from a first-year class in Leacock 132.

"I don't think I ever checked his profile and I doubt he'd be interested in checking mine.... Even if he did, it wouldn't really matter since I doubt he'd know who I was anyway," Perdana said.

U3 Physiology student Dan Beamer had no problem having Dr. Paul

"There isn't anything on Facebook students wouldn't discover by spending time with me."

Dr. Paul Wiseman, Facebook user and McGill professor of chemistry

of Religious Studies, was unconcerned about what his students learned through his profile.

"There really isn't anything on Facebook that students wouldn't discover by spending time with me during office hours," explained Kanaris, a self-described social bug. "Students like to know their professors are more than they seem: automata."

Kanaris added that he often "friends" students from his smaller classes, and communicates with them via Gchat over Gmail.

Students don't seem to have a problem with their professor's

Wiseman as a friend on Facebook.

"He was [my] chemistry professor in first year. Good guy, one of the best teachers I've had here. I've run into him at hockey games [both] at the Bell Centre and McGill."

While both Kanaris and Wiseman continue to use more standardized forums like WebCT to communicate information to their students, they expressed that Facebook is just another means of communication.

"I'm always on the look out for new technology," Kanaris said. "Call me crazy, but I consider it a valuable medium of communication."



Sasha Plotnikova / The McGill Daily

Genocide victims were pawns in political game

Human Rights Watch director weighs in on the role of the international community in Rwandan and Sudanese genocides

Josh Nobleman
News Writer

International politics nullified domestic law in Sudan and Rwanda, sites of Africa's most recent genocides, argued Georgette Gagnon, Executive Director of the Africa division of Human Rights Watch (HRW), at a lecture held by the McGill Centre for Human Rights and Legal Pluralism yesterday.

"In our experience, politics trumps law every time," Gagnon said. "Our advocacy at Human Rights Watch is about taking that into account – not giving into it, but to address it and give

our recommendations credibility."

HRW is working in Africa to make politics accountable to law, thereby ensuring that human lives are not sacrificed in a larger political game. The organization performs strategic investigations to uncover human rights violations and hold oppressors accountable for their crimes.

Gagnon suggested that political forces were at work in the international community's reluctance to label the mass killings of nearly one million Rwandans in 1994 as a genocide. She listed Rwanda's lack of political muscle, oil, gold or other resources; the United States's recent withdrawal from Somalia; and an

overriding sense of racism of the western world as possible causes for international apathy.

A similar situation exists with the crisis in Sudan, according to Gagnon, who said United Nations Security Council members from China and Russia have perpetuated the crisis in Sudan because they have a political stake in the oil and arms business in the country, respectively.

Gagnon criticized the international community's impulse to deploy troops to conflict zones when alternative, non-violent methods could be more effective. She suggested that radio jamming – disrupting the signals that in Rwanda were used to spread racial hate and to communicate violent commands to troops – could have been a practical and effective method of intervention. The Pentagon ruled against the tactic, claiming the cost – \$8,000 an hour – was too expensive.

A law student voiced a concern

commonly expressed in developing countries: that non-governmental organizations like HRW hand down universal principles, failing to account for unique political situations. HRW is currently criticized for urging the redress of current Rwandan ruler Paul Kagame, who they claim is keeping the region stable. Kagame's government killed 30,000 people in its early years after the genocide.

"We don't interfere with political decisions. All we can say is, impartially, if he is committing war crimes then he should be brought to trial," Gagnon replied.

Gagnon noted that HRW does work with grassroots organizations.

"In Africa there are vibrant local human rights communities that are pushing for the same things we are – universal human rights – and we always try to reach out and connect to those."

She also acknowledged that poli-

ticians are forced to choose between peace and justice.

"The law should be applied impartially. Our job is advocacy and redress, but the more practical and realistic we are, the more likely [our policies will be effective]," Gagnon said. "Thus we should acknowledge our compromise. We say there is no durable peace without justice."

A member of the audience noted that the work of human rights organizations is mainly reactive and reports violations, asking how groups work to prevent human rights abuse.

"Everything we do is preventive. It's corruption, lack of access to resources, nepotism, social and economic violations of rights which lead to this kind of genocide," Gagnon said.

Economic and social legal violations are predictors of political abuse, she added, which is where HRW can help.

WE'RE TAKING A BREAK FROM IT ALL

AND SO SHOULD YOU

The Daily is taking a few issues off for reading week, but we'll be back two weeks from today, on March 5. Stay tuned for our annual art supplement, complete elections coverage, and much more!

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Annual General Meeting

The annual general meeting of the Daily Publications Society (DPS), publisher of *The McGill Daily* and *Le Délit*, will take place

**Thursday, March 19
in Leacock 232 at 6pm.**

The DPS requires candidates for its 2009-2010 Board of Directors. The election of the directors will take place at the AGM. Nominations to the Board will be accepted from February 16 at 9am to March 18 at 5pm. Potential candidates must fill out a nomination form, available at

www.dailypublications.org

or in the DPS Business Office (Shatner B26).

For more information, please contact the Chief Returning Officer, at
cro@dailypublications.org

THE PROVOST'S ADMINISTRATIVE TASK FORCE ON DEALING WITH ECONOMIC UNCERTAINTY



McGill

**TOWN
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How will McGill meet the challenges
of the global economic downturn?

Principal Heather Munroe-Blum and
Provost Anthony C. Masi invite students,
faculty and staff to a series of Town
Hall meetings to discuss ways to cut
costs and increase revenue while
maintaining academic excellence.

**Thursday, February 12
12:00 pm – 1:30 pm**

Leacock Building, Room 232
855 Sherbrooke St. W.

**Monday, February 16
12:00 pm – 1:30 pm**

Jack Cram Auditorium
Education Building, Room 129
3700 McTavish Street

**Monday, March 2
12:00 pm – 1:30 pm**

Desautels Faculty of Management
Bronfman Building
MBA Lounge—3rd Floor
1001 Sherbrooke St. W.

**Monday, March 2
3:00 pm – 4:30 pm**

Macdonald Campus
Raymond Building, R2-045
2111 Lakeshore Road
Ste. Anne de Bellevue

INFORMATION: provost.office@mcgill.ca

Submissions are also welcome at www.mcgill.ca/economictaskforce

Courts disrespect tried Rwandans

Defense lawyer criticizes post genocide International Criminal Tribunal

Marguerite Bravay
News Writer

Paul Skolnik, a high-flying defence attorney at the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR) and McGill alum, articulated his dissatisfaction with court proceedings to a small but captivated audience of about 30 at Chancellor Day Hall Monday.

Skolnik discussed the malpractice he witnessed at the ICTR while he represented Colonel Théoneste Bagosora, former Cabinet Director to the Rwandan Defence Minister and mastermind of the genocide, as well as Gratien Kabiligi, the Chief of Military Operations in the Rwandan Armed Forces.

He described the trials as “scandalous,” and recounted numerous breaches of what he called the fair trial concept: one judge was found to be living with a woman on the prosecution; thousands of arrest warrants were issued without evidence; and the right to a trial without undue delay was not respected.

Erfrat Shemesh, a McGill Law student specializing in human rights who attended the event, called for universal recognition of human rights for all those present in a court of law.

“[As future lawyers], we must do our best to ensure that human rights are respected globally, and granted not just to the victims, but also to the perpetrators,” Shemesh said.

Skolnik was also appalled that Kabiligi was held for 11 and a half years before he was acquitted of his charges of crimes against humanity, genocide, and war crimes.

“The only people who worked under [Gratien Kabiligi’s] command worked in offices making war plans, like for every nation,” he said, explaining Kabiligi’s direct role in the genocide. “He did not have any subordinate combat troops.”

Freedom in Tanzanian detainment

According to the UN, detainees of the ICTR

- Can communicate by letter or by telephone with their families and family, and can receive visitors under supervision
- Have full freedom to communicate with their attorneys
- Socialize with other detainees during religious observance, educational classes, or physical exercise
- Are fed meals appropriate for their age, health, and religious and cultural practices of the detainees

When asked about the purpose of genocide trials, Skolnik said that it should “promote national reconciliation,” adding that proceedings must be conducted in the name of humanity.

However, he felt, that national reconciliation had not yet been achieved in Rwanda.

“The only thing preventing the conflict from exploding again is the country’s extremely oppressive dictatorship,” he said.

The Rwanda genocide started on April 6, 1994. The Hutu militia conducted mass killings of the country’s Tutsi population for over 100 days, by which time over 800,000 individuals had been murdered.

The International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda, held in Arusha, Tanzania, is the third in history, after the Nuremberg trials post-World War II, and the ICT for Yugoslavia, at The Hague in 1993.

Skolnik was invited to speak at the Faculty of Law by McGill’s Centre for Human Rights and Legal Pluralism (HRLP). The event was co-sponsored by the student-run Human Rights Working Group.



Marjorie Lipan for The McGill Daily

Robert Fisk speaks at Concordia tomorrow at 7:00 p.m. - reservations are necessary.

Middle East journalism is changing: Fisk

Reporting independently from the frontlines of war is an increasingly rare engagement for journalists working for major international media outlets. From Iraq to Afghanistan, reporters are increasingly embedded in advancing western forces on the front lines, making it challenging to maintain an independent voice.

When Israeli military forces launched an invasion into the Gaza Strip, international journalists were barred entry into the territory by the Israeli government. Major international media outlets, including CNN and the BBC, reported on Gaza from hilltops in Israeli controlled territory, kilometres away from the actual conflict.

Reporting from the Middle East, British journalist Robert Fisk has offered decades of fiercely independent accounts of the region’s conflicts. Stationed in Beirut, Lebanon, Fisk reports for the U.K.-based Independent newspaper, which has a large global distribution. Fisk spoke recently with local journalist Stefan Christoff, offering comments on the media response to the recent war in the Gaza Strip.

in Lebanon went down to the border and looked across, not because they were looking at northern Israel but because they were looking at the northern part of Palestine as they had known it. Some could actually see the villages that their parents or grandparents had come from in 1948.

So there is this whole Diaspora around the state of Israel who can’t go home because our home is on the other side of the border, and this reality revolves around the whole issue of United Nations General Assembly resolution 194 on the right of return, [which stipulates that] these Palestinian refugees have the right to return to their homes.

Well over half of the people living in Gaza are families, either survivors or descendants of Palestinians, who lived only ten or 12 miles in what today is Israel. So when you hear the Israelis say “the terrorists are firing rockets into Israel,” the Palestinians in Gaza can in many cases say “well my grandson is firing a rocket at my town because before 1948, these areas would have been Palestinian property.”

MD: What were your perceptions on media coverage during the latest war in Gaza?

RF: The international press allowed for their own humiliation: Israel told the press that they couldn’t go into Gaza and they didn’t really try to, so the press sat outside Gaza and pontificated from two miles away. Israel wanted to keep the international press out of Gaza and they were kept out; that was that.

It is instructive to note that no major western media outlet had a reporter based inside Gaza who would have been there when it started. Clearly after the kidnapping of a BBC reporter, who was based in Gaza, it is not surprising that the international news agencies were hesitant to base reporters in Gaza. However, it is also instructive to note that it was the

Hamas government that had the BBC reporter released, which is not often mentioned now.

Faced with the fact that the only journalists left inside Gaza were Palestinian reporters, the major networks were forced to hand over their reporting to Palestinian Arabs, who in many cases were refugees inside Gaza.

This meant that you had Palestinian reporters on the ground talking about their own people, unencumbered by western reporters cross-questioning them, or trying to put 50 per cent of the story on one side and 50 per cent of the story on the other side.

Al-Jazeera came out as the heroes of journalism because they had both their international service, their English service, and also their Arabic service fully operational from offices inside Gaza.

Individual Palestinians working for western news organizations showed that they could be competent journalists and the western journalists who sat outside Gaza looked as pathetic as their reporting on the Middle East is becoming.

Palestinian reporters were telling their own stories. In the case [of the *Independent*], our Palestinian reporter inside Gaza had his father killed in an air strike – his father who was a pro-Palestinian Authority, English-speaking, well-educated judge, killed in his orchard. So the *Independent* had on our front page, this terrible and tragic story of this innocent man destroyed, atomized into pieces of flesh by an Israel air strike in his orchard, a story reported by his own son in our newspaper.

So this was the kind of journalism from Palestine that we hadn’t seen in the major [western] press, so there was an upside to the [international] press being banned from Gaza. However, the work of the international reporters was truly pathetic.

—compiled by Stefan Christoff

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Shatner 2nd floor cafeteria, Mondays at 5:30.**

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This March, check out...

Use Your Leadership Skills to Spice up Your CV

Does your CV need a bit of a boost? Being a leader is a great way of showing your future employer your capabilities. This workshop will help you highlight your leadership skills and experience, to make your CV more marketable.

Macdonald Campus: Tuesday, March 3, 5:30-7:30pm

Registration: Send an email one week before workshop to: leadership.training@mcgill.ca with your 1) full name, 2) student ID, 3) club, 4) position, 5) McGill email, 6) telephone number.

Downtown Campus: Thursday, March 5, 5:30-7:30pm

Registration: In-person, one week in advance, on a first-come, first-served basis, in the First-Year Office.

For more info, drop by the
**First-Year Office in the Brown Building,
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McGill University
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McGill More Information: (514) 398-3025 • www.medicine.mcgill.ca/mnmsmi/als_2009.htm

The Astrobiology Lecture Series is made possible through grants from the Beatty Memorial Lectures Committee and the Faculties of Science and Medicine of McGill University.

Photo courtesy of the National Aeronautics and Space Administration

DEBATES SPRING ELECTIONS

Come hear the candidates running for Undergraduate Senate, FERC, and the referenda committees present their electoral platforms and discuss issues pertaining to YOU!

SSMU Exec Candidates Debate

Date : **March 4th**
Time : 5:00 pm - 10:00 pm
Location : Lev Bukhman

Undergraduate senator and Referenda Committee Debate

Date : **March 9th**
Time : 5:00 pm - 10:00 pm
Locations : Clubs Lounge

Shatner, salle 405
(514) 398-6474
contact@electionsmcgill.ca



FART MATTERS

**Join The Daily for an evening of Art and Music
March 7. Search facebook for details.**

Education funding runs out

Students push to scrap cap on aboriginal postsecondary education funding

Chelsea Howard and Ian MacDonald
The Muse (CUP)

An ongoing petition by the Kitigan Zibi Anishinabeg First Nation Community and the First Nations Education Council is asking Parliament to remove its cap on funding for aboriginal postsecondary education.

While the Canadian Federation of Students (CFS) – a national student lobby group – and its member union at Memorial University of Newfoundland (MUN) have not officially endorsed the petition, they are working for similar results.

“Even though aboriginal people are a growing demographic in Canada, the funding stays at this two per cent cap. It’s not enough funding for all the people who want to attend postsecondary institutions,” said Melissa Penney, director of advocacy for the MUN Students’ Union and

regional aboriginal representative for the CFS.

Penney is also Newfoundland and Labrador’s representative on the National Aboriginal Caucus (NAC), a CFS caucus that acts as a voice for aboriginal students in Canada. She said the petition has been on NAC’s

Nations Peoples.

“There’s not a lack of aspirations keeping people from attending postsecondary studies,” she said. “There’s no lack of interest; there’s a lack of funding to go.”

The petition, expected to reach 10,500 signatures this month, calls

“It’s not enough funding for all the people who want to attend postsecondary institutions.”

Melissa Penney Regional Aboriginal Representative, Canadian Federation of Students

radar, and it is starting to get materials together to push a similar campaign of its own.

Penney felt putting more money into aboriginal education would mean increased enrolment and higher success rates among Canada’s First

for the removal of Parliament’s two per cent annual growth cap for the amount given to Indian and Northern Affairs Canada – the federal ministry that funds aboriginal education through the Post-Secondary Student Support Program (PSSSP).

After PSSSP gives the money to the individual bands, they are then given the responsibility of deciding where the money must go.

“Some bands are facing really hard decisions, like: ‘Should we fund everyone in their last year of education, or should we give so much to each student and then they don’t have enough money for rent and food?’” Penney said.

Last year, the Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Development published a report titled “No Higher Priority: Aboriginal Post-Secondary Education In Canada,” which recommended dealing with the extension of postsecondary support to non-status First Nations and Métis students.

In the Conservatives’ 2009 budget, funding for on-reserve aboriginals and schools was directed to infrastructure projects alone, while also directing \$200-million for skills training to help reduce unemployment rates.

Bridge enthusiasts fall outside age stereotype

Nicholas Smith
The McGill Daily

Bidding blackwood, jumping to two no-trump, and ruffing in dummy: these are all standard card game terms to the over 200 members of the McGill Bridge Club, four of whom qualified earlier this month for the Educational Foundation Collegiate in Washington D.C., to be held this July.

Bridge is a four-person, trick taking card game modelled after Whist and similar to Hearts that involves intense strategy and technique. Contrary to the widely-held belief that most bridge players are seniors, a significant proportion of the estimated 60- to 100-million bridge players worldwide are spry, young enthusiasts.

Christopher Chalcraft, the current president of the McGill Bridge Club, explained that the variety in play is what keeps him playing.

“I like how intricate bridge is,” Chalcraft said. “The more you learn about bridge, the more addictive it becomes.”

While the basics of bridge can be taught in an hour, players are constantly learning new techniques, and playing with new partners and opponents.

“It’s not something that you figure out once and then it’s done,” said Shaz Taslimi, a former president of the club who has been playing for five years. “It does require analytical thinking. You do need to visualize the cards you can’t see.”

But while the game can satisfy the curiosity of the mind, many enjoy playing because of the friendly atmosphere.



Partners sit across from each other, with the declarer (far right) controlling her partner’s visible cards.

“A lot of people start playing because it’s a social activity,” said Julia Evans, one of the four team members who qualified for the Collegiate tournament, who explained that meeting new friends at the table from nearly every McGill faculty has increased the value of the game.

The attraction of the friendly atmosphere is echoed by Paul Linxwiler, the managing editor of the *Bridge Bulletin*, the monthly magazine of the American Contract Bridge League.

“Bridge is the greatest game

because of the partnership element,” Linxwiler said. “Trying to maintain communication between the partnership...that’s an art.”

Linxwiler also remarked that each game being a new experience has helped the game survive in its current form for nearly 100 years.

“Any game you could learn in five minutes is unlikely to hold your attention for a lifetime,” Linxwiler said. “It has an internal complexity and an internal beauty that keeps people playing.”

Chalcraft added that the supposed

demographic skew is probably due to the stereotypes attached to the game by people who have never tried it, and that people need only need a few hours to get hooked.

“Bridge is a game of all ages. The reason most elderly probably play it [as opposed to youth] is because they have more time on their hands.”

The McGill Bridge Club meets Thursdays at 6 p.m. in the Trotter cafeteria. They can be contacted at mcgillbridgeclub@gmail.com.

WHAT'S THE HAPS

Poetry and Cupcakes

Friday, February 20, 11:30 a.m. - 12:30 p.m.

Arts 160, 853 Sherbrooke O.

The Scrivener creative literature review is hosting an Open Mic for all poetry about love-longing, unrequited love, love-hate, etc. Donations of \$3 to raise funds for their next edition will be accepted. Entrance includes a LOVELY cupcake.

The Yellow Door Coffeehouse Presents

Friday, February 20, 8:30 p.m.

3625 Aylmer

This McGill Ghetto community staple continues 40 years of coffeehouse entertainment. Friday’s line up includes The Bogghoppers & Nancy Snipper with an open mic to follow. Tickets are \$5 for students and \$8 for adults. Doors at 7:30 p.m.

Seventh Annual Homelessness Marathon

Monday, February 23, 5 p.m. –

Tuesday, February 24, 7 a.m.

ckut.ca/homeless.html

CKUT will broadcast live from outside of the Native Friendship Center of Montreal, giving homeless people and their allies a chance to take to the airwaves and start a nationwide discussion on homelessness and poverty. Free listening for your ears.

Green Drinks Montreal

Tuesday, February 24, 6 p.m.

Thomson House, 3650 McTavish

Claude Masse, director of regional services for Environment Canada, will discuss “Weather information challenges and their impacts on wind energy integration into the energy system.” Free, with refreshments, from PGSS Environment Committee.

Behind the Genocide: A forum on Darfur

Thursday, March 5, 6 - 8 p.m.

Bronfman 151, 1001 Sherbrooke O.

STAND McGill presents a free forum on the current Darfuran situation with Devin McDougall, Professor Khalid Medani, and the Honourable Irwin Cotler, with a reception to follow.

Disparity Dinner- Dine at the world’s table!

Thursday, March 5, 7 p.m. - 9 p.m.

Maison De L’Amitié, 120 Duluth E.

Learn what it is like to live on \$2 a day, as 2.6-billion people do, by getting a sample “developing world” meal, or be one of the few to get a full meal. Tickets are \$5 and available from McGill Global AIDS Coalition (MGAC) members or in the MGAC office (Shatner Room 433).

Send your not-for-profit events taking place after reading week to news@mcgilldaily.com with haps in the subject line.



Photos by Stephen Davis / The McGill Daily

Claudius, a corn snake eats his dinner – a thawed, pre-killed mouse.

Eating up reptile culture

Nikki Bozinoff discusses the who, what, and where of keeping reptiles with an animal lover

Daniel Hoops, animal enthusiast and friend, sits with one leg crossed over the other, telling me about the snakes he keeps under his bed. More precisely, he keeps them in large Tupperware, like the ones your mother uses to store old sweaters. He is wearing a baggy T-shirt that says, “nature can’t be re-stocked,” and his red corn snake, Claudius, slides between and around his hands.

“I’ve always had snakes, turtles, frogs, and lizards,” he says, shrugging his shoulders. “It’s just part of who I am.”

I think I knew Hoops’s voice, and the shape of the back of his head, before I ever met him. His was the hand that was always stretched up from within the sea of heads in our 700-person first-year biology classes. A lot of the time, I had no idea what he was asking – that would have required keeping up with the readings.

I distinctly remember a moment in second year, when a professor gave us a lecture about invasive species and included the classic example of the brown tree snake that invaded the island of Guam. Our professor diligently reported to us that the snake had likely arrived

as a stowaway on a cargo ship coming from the South Pacific. Once it had colonized the island, it nearly obliterated all bird life and caused the extinction of at least three bird species. The next class, our professor showed us a picture of a smiling student holding a brown tree snake. Apparently, this student felt that the snake had been unduly vilified; that student was Hoops. That year, I sat down beside him in one of my classes; it became something of a habit in classes to come.

When I travelled with him to East Africa last year as part of the Canadian Field Studies in Africa program, our whole group would report reptile sightings to him, and he diligently told us their scientific names – you see, Hoops had always spotted the same reptiles, only a few hours earlier than the rest of us. Children from areas nearby would hear of Hoops’s interest and bring him turtles to identify. He also compiled the longest bird identification list of any of us – it had over 400 species.

There is something a little bit mesmerizing about the amount of knowledge Hoops possesses about the creatures of our world. He has worked on breeding birds in New

Zealand, on sea turtle tagging in Australia, and on chimpanzee and monkey rehabilitation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, among other projects. He also likes to care for reptiles, and has kept over 100 in his lifetime.

“Most people react surprisingly well,” he says, referring to his under-the-bed pets. I wasn’t especially surprised when he told me about his slithering friends, and his roommates don’t seem to mind either.

He keeps three snakes – two corn snakes and one bull snake – and has four mud turtles that live in an aquarium. Hoops explains that it’s not that he prefers reptiles over other animals; it’s simply that reptiles are much easier to care for.

“A plant is more work than a snake,” he says. “They [snakes] actually prefer to be left alone.”

Hoops feeds each snake one thawed, pre-killed mouse every two weeks. He also has a space heater to keep the temperature slightly warmer in his room, and he places an electric heating pad under each of the containers so that the snakes can warm up if they need to. A snake’s body temperature varies with that of its

environment, so if Hoops didn’t heat his apartment, the snakes would probably freeze. For this reason, Hoops notes that snakes are commonly and erroneously known as cold-blooded animals.

“Cold-blooded isn’t really the right word, because reptiles actually often have warmer blood than humans. The proper term is actually ectotherm,” he says.

While Hoops doesn’t recommend keeping animals you don’t like, he says that compared to other animals, keeping reptiles is pretty easy and inexpensive for university students. He cautions however, that students should be careful which snakes they buy.

“All the time, I see animals that are endangered [in pet stores] and it’s very destructive,” he says. “I’m very careful to buy animals that are common in the wild and are bred in captivity.”

He asks me if I want to hold Claudius. I think about myself, the snake, and a cool Facebook photo, but decide that I just really don’t especially like snakes.

“Maybe another time,” I say. Maybe, but probably not.



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Changing concepts of governance

Un-conference uses technology to make democracy more participatory

Shannon Palus
 Sci+Tech Writer

"How do we re-imagine government and governance in the age of participation?"

On Saturday, January 24, 140 participants attended an un-conference – a term applied to participatory-style conferences that seek to reject conventional notions of a conference, such as participation fees – held at the MaRS Centre in Toronto. The event was part of Change Camp, an initiative designed to explore the question of governance in the age of participation.

Change Camp is led by Mark Kuznicki, a media and social change consultant with an interest in creative communities. It seeks to re-draw the line between government and citizens, to explore what citizenship between elections can mean, and to examine how public policy makers can engage members of the community in formulating laws and draw upon their expertise and knowledge.

Change Camp came about after this past November's Web 2.0 summit in Toronto – an exploration of the role of the Internet in government. Kuznicki felt that more discussion of a re-envisioned government was in order.

"[There was] an openness, a readiness, to think about the issues of participation and technology," he said of Change Camp's beginnings.

Participants at the un-conference included technologists, designers, social innovators, and public policy representatives, including City of Toronto officials. Kuznicki stressed, however, that participation in Change Camp is not limited to professionals

"There's [also] the curious, the people who are coming out because

they have a sense that there's more that they could be doing," explained Kuznicki.

The Un-conference's main goal was simply to bring to light the idea of an open government, and to ignite discussion on how this might be achieved. According to Kuznicki, tangible progress was made in ideas for web and software applications that help make government more transparent, and on ways to further the City of Toronto's open data initiative – a commitment to making more public information available in the public realm.

Change Camp is itself a highly participatory event, and uses imaginative ways of organizing ideas, information, and people. The movement takes advantage of Web 2.0 technology; during the un-conference, participants live-blogged and took video, allowing rapid communication to occur and key ideas to be on record for future development. Platforms such as Twitter, which allows account users to "follow" one another as they post updates consisting of no more than 140 characters, were also used.

Daniel Goldberg, faculty lecturer in the department of art history and communications at McGill who teaches Communications and Democracy, commented on the power of recent web innovations like Twitter.

"These technologies are still in their infancy, really, but they are already showing their potential for vast mobilization of committed individuals and the dissemination of new and socially innovative ideas."

Technology is not the only unique aspect of Change Camp. As Goldberg explained, the participatory nature of such a platform also makes things interesting.

"When we talk about an un-conference, we're really talking about embracing the concept of 'open everything' – information is free, content is



Sally Lin / The McGill Daily

shared, and the collective builds upon the innovations of the individual."

The content of the un-conference is fuelled almost entirely by the ideas and conversations of the participants. It is facilitated only by an opening question, a set of conference rooms available for groups of participants to utilize as they begin to naturally form discussions and ideas, a few ground rules, and lots of space to record the plethora of solutions and conversations that ensue. The goal of such a format is to brainstorm without inhibition, and to catalyze conversations and interactions between participants which might not otherwise occur. The model of the un-conference is in many ways analogous to the shift in government that it seeks to catalyze; leadership and organization forms from within the group, derived from discussion and consensus, rather than simply being implemented by an authority.

Kuznicki is confident that hosting a conference without dogmatic leadership, and without the limitations of a strict agenda, will bear fruit.

"I think the ideas, the conversations are powerful. Talking is doing," he said. "By talking, you're propagating an idea into other people's minds that they can take and run with and do something with, take action with."

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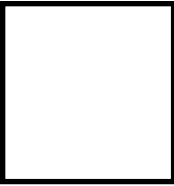
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Re: “Separating politics from human rights” | Commentary | February 16

Far-flung foreign divisive distractions do little to help the cause of justice close to home, where we can actually make a difference.

Isaac Binkovitz U3 Honours Geography (Urban Systems)

Publicity should not invite violence

Re: “Why don’t you just do it inside?” | Letters | February 12

In response to Stephanie Ränkin and Hillary Walker’s letter regarding Julie Alsop’s article “Why Don’t We Do It In The Road?” I would like to offer up an anecdote. One Friday night, I was walking down St. Laurent with my girlfriend, simply holding hands. As we approached a group of guys one of them pointed and shouted, “Hey, look! It’s two girls!” We kept going but just as we passed one of them turned around, shouted again, more aggressively this time, and started walking towards us. Luckily one of his friends intercepted him and they turned around, but in that moment I was more scared for my safety than I ever have been in this city. And I wasn’t even making out, just holding hands with someone I love. Tell me, do you think that would happen to a straight couple?

I agree that “publicity invites viewership” but since when does publicity invite violence? You say that a space can be heteronormative and not homophobic, but heteronormativity is exactly what breeds homophobia and makes it seem okay.

If those guys had not been under the impression that all sexualities besides their own are something strange and threatening, I doubt I would have been in danger that night. It’s just a short jump from gawking to violence. The idea that queer PDA is a “novelty” is the part of your argument that is the most offensive. I think we would do better to examine why exactly queer identities are deemed novel by society than to tell queer people to shut up and get used to it. It’s precisely this attitude of heterosexual privilege that makes public spaces unwelcoming and unsafe for anyone who isn’t straight.

Kate Bass
U1 Cultural Studies

How many equity complaints will it take?

Re: “Choose Life becomes full-status club” | News | February 16

I believe my opinion on the SSMU club Choose Life, as represented in this article, needs some clarification. The article reads: “Woolf pointed out that denying Choose Life the right to exist as a club *would* limit students’ freedom of speech” (my emphasis). My point was precisely the opposite – to deny a club status is not tantamount to stifling discussion on campus, as so many people argued.

Students are always encouraged to gather and discuss important and often divisive issues on campus, but it is simply wrong to claim that one requires club status to do so. As I was correctly quoted: “Students have opinions; clubs have goals.” To give Choose Life space within the SSMU umbrella is to implicitly endorse the pursuit of their goal – which, despite what their constitution states, is to convince you not to have an abortion.

We banned blood drives in 2006 because they contravened SSMU’s constitutional mandate to protect its students from oppression. Choose Life is oppressive to women on campus, and unlike blood drives, we can’t even agree that their existence benefits our community. As long as Choose Life continues to put on events found to be oppressive by members of our community, equity complaints will continue to be filed – I just wonder how many complaints it will take before the powers that be (cough cough, SSMU Council) see fit to shut them down.

Sarah Woolf
U1 Political Science & Women’s Studies
Arts Rep to SSMU

Let’s focus on issues close to home

Re: “Separating politics from human rights” | Commentary | February 16

Louis-Guillaume Roldan urges us to draw a line separating human rights from politics. The problem is that where he chooses to draw that line is itself political.

It is not that I support the bombing of schools anywhere. I certainly do not. What I object to is the inconsistency of indignation: that we do not pass motions condemning the terrorist attacks of recent months in Mumbai, that we are complacent in front of the ongoing Canadian presence in Afghanistan, and that scarcely a comment is made concerning the daily horrors taking place the world-over and the amplitude of local injustices present in our own city.

The issue of mutual allegations of misconduct obscured by battleground haze is one quite distant from us, as much as we may wish it to be otherwise. We here in Montreal cannot see through the fog of war to decipher the complexities of a violent battle between two entities far more threatened and vulnerable than anything within our ability to comprehend here in Canada. Even the UN is unsure what happened concerning the school in Gaza. What we can legitimately see and comment about is what takes place right here in our own city and country.

Concerned for the right to education? Why not take up a motion condemning the firebombing of a Jewish school right here in Montreal? The perpetrator was just sentenced. In just over three years he’ll be free, free perhaps to firebomb more Jewish institutions, attempt to burn more schools, threaten more gay men, and continue his plans to blow up the train station in his effort to convert “westerners” to Islam.

Concerned about the right to education? Why not do something about the fact that more than 30 per cent of Montreal students drop out of high school? These are issues we are close to. These are issues about which we have relevant knowledge and credibility. These are issues that demand our attention. Far-flung foreign divisive distractions do little to help the cause of justice close to home, where we can actually make a difference.

Isaac Binkovitz
U3 Honours Geography (Urban Systems)

Like, a for-real hug, Sana?

Re: “For real seriously, Zucker?” | Letters | February 16

You want a hug? Don’t insult my intelligence.

I still can’t figure out what represents a bigger insult to the intelligence of McGill students: the fact that we were asked to vote about one of the most complex issues out there with a simple yes or no, or the notion that in defeat, SPHR advocates can only conclude that Jewish students want to stifle free speech and “avoid discussion.” To me, it seems clear that those who proposed the Gaza motion are most in need of some discussion. Sana, you say that many of you had reservations about the motion. Yet, I did not hear anyone of the sort speak up, and it’s abundantly clear from the actual wording of the Gaza motion that no such discussion took place.

Worst of all, is the fact that this motion was presented under the guise, or should I say disguise of human rights, which I think we can all look back on as nothing more than a failed marketing slogan. Why? Well, here’s a newsflash: there are still some free-thinking individuals out there, many of whom consider themselves to be the staunchest of liberals, who realize that the notion

of human rights doesn’t discriminate between the nationality of civilians. Believe it or not, this actually implies that the fact that Israeli students were nestled in bomb-shelters while Hamas rained rockets on Israel should be just as alarming as the apparent bombing of educational institutions a few kilometers away

If you want to hug people on the other side of the room, you might want to give them a little more credit instead of pontificating on their true intentions. I mean, for seriously, Sana? That’s the best you could come up with? McGill students emphatically reject a very political and one-sided motion and that means Jewish students don’t support freedom of speech and want to “avoid discussion?” Sounds like sour grapes to me. Next time, may I suggest something a little more intricate than “Human Rights are good, Israel is bad,” if you’re looking to dupe people.

If your goal is to foster discussion on such issues, the consensus is clearly that it not be put to vote, and I would add that you should maybe not insult the intelligence of those on the other side of the room first. Then, we can talk about hugs.

David Rimock
U3 Political Science

Rankings don’t attract students

Re: “Would the real Harvard nix Humanistic Studies” | Commentary | February 16

Aviva Friedman’s attempt at defending Humanistic Studies needs to be addressed.

She wrote that McGill’s actions in dissolving the Humanistic Studies program has led her to question the claim that McGill is “the Harvard of the North.” Why would she possibly not want to question this statement? The assumed validity of this statement destroys her entire argument for saving Humanistic Studies.

This statement is based on the controversial ranking system that has placed Harvard at the top of the American list, and McGill at the top of the Canadian one, hence giving foreground for this analogy. But unlike what she stated, the reason why employers hire

Princeton and Harvard students has little to do with their so-called “rounded education,” but in fact more relies on this controversial ranking system which undermines the entire purpose of educational institutions. That purpose isn’t to attend a school for its top ranking, but for its capability to produce a well-rounded individual.

I’m not going to argue that dissolving Humanistic Studies is an innately right or wrong action to take, but rather, that people arguing for continuing this type of study need to come up with a more legitimate reason than a fallaciously pretentious T-shirt slogan. So, Aviva, U3 Humanistic Studies Students’ Associate President; I vote to impeach.

Alex Nachamkin
U1 Philosophy

The Daily received more letters than it could print this issue. The rest will appear in the first issue after break. Send your letters to letters@mcgilldaily.com from your McGill email address, and keep them to 300 words. The Daily does not print letters that are racist, homophobic, or otherwise hateful.

SAVING THE WORLD BYTE BY BYTE

Hilary Best ventures into the Burnside basement and gets up close and personal with the McGill Science Computer Task Force

It's 5:30 on a Tuesday evening and students are flooding out of the Burnside basement. As the usually busy tables and couches are vacated, the warmth and light from the McGill Science Computer Task Force (CTF) office suddenly becomes more pronounced. Take a closer look and you'll see that inside, it's buzzing; it's nearly time for the Task Force's weekly meeting, and members are returning from a day of classes.

Students seek out the CTF when they have a printer jam, need a staple, or can't find a computer anywhere. But on this occasion, I'm looking for something else. Sure, I've heard that CTF is a one-stop-shop for science students' computer needs, but against the odds of this often-impersonal institution, CTF also has a reputation for being like a second home.

Any desperate student who has ever stumbled upon CTF in a time of need knows how friendly these folks can be. When students are at their most frazzled, teams of CTFers fix printer jams, offer tech help, and ease the uncertainty of using campus computers on strict deadlines. They've even been known to help out the occasional intoxicated Carnival-goer who needs a stapler but just can't remember why. With 6,468 pages printed on this particular day alone, CTF plays an integral role in many a McGill student's academic experience.

The Task Force administers 136 computers at various locations on the downtown campus, manages printers in Burnside, and provides web-hosting and other services for student societies and science undergraduate students. These are your Wikipedia-editing, web site-developing, printer-jam-fixing geeks, saving the world one byte at a time.

The returning Task Force members join their compatriots, some of whom have spent the better part of the afternoon playing poker together. CTFers are diligent workers, but the axiom "work hard, play hard" applies in the depths of Burnside as well. I find a chair outside of the tight circle of five guys engaged in a vigorous round of Texas Hold'Em and I am suddenly made aware of my stature and sex. The office is teeming with guys. Unkempt, bedraggled *guys* who redefine the term "lanky."

Sundanse Oberman (many of the CTFers go by nicknames) welcomes me to the table. He reminds me of the smartest guys in middle school; the ones who danced circles around me in math class but never quite mustered up

the stuff to bump booties to the teeny-bopper hit of the day. But sitting here with Sundanse, I realize that those same guys probably aren't so quiet anymore.

Sundanse's enthusiasm for the poker game is clear, but he wastes no time in distinguishing the pastimes in the office. "There are poker players and there are gamers," he says. Indeed, along the northern wall of the newly refurbished office, other CTFers are engaged in an interactive game of DoTA (geek-speak for a computer game called *Defense of the Ancients*). The competition is fierce. Before CTF chair Eric Bolo and co-chair Logan Smyth call the meeting to order, many CTF members are defending the world from the other team's ancients. "Try double fire, ultimate," someone shouts from across the room. All in a day's work for the Task Force.

It turns out that gaming isn't only a self-indulgent pastime. Indeed, the world changers at CTF have found a way to turn their love for ancient ass-kicking into a vehicle for social change. On Friday nights, when the Burnside basement labs lie empty, CTFers and their game-loving pals pile in for LANimal, networking together to play multi-player computer games. The proceeds from these events go to Leucan, the Science Undergraduate Society's primary charitable partner. The events themselves help build the sense of conviviality that characterizes the Task Force.

In spite of their proclivity for computer games, CTFers know how to have a good time without a keyboard. Many are working furiously on a math problem Zhe Tian recently posted. Zhe wears his passion for mathematics on his sleeve. Literally. His shirt has symbols on it that I've only seen the likes of on the chalkboards of empty MATH 263 classrooms. "It may be grade eight math," he boasts, "but the problem is not trivial." The whiteboard reads:

$$X^2 + Y^2 = 40$$

$$3X + 3Y = 2XY$$

Solve this for donut

Show all work, no electronics allowed.

No one has solved the puzzle by the time I leave, but that doesn't stop the Task Force from trying. Sliding across the linoleum floor in their roly-chairs, CTFers help each other out with everything from "non-trivial math problems" to voltages and chloroplasts. Since many of the Task Force members come from the same departments in the Faculty of Science, it isn't

uncommon to find a friend to help you through challenging web work or an impending assignment.

A sense of belonging to the CTF is clear from the moment one steps inside the office. CTF members are drawn to something intangible within these four walls – something beyond the nice chairs and computer games.

When asked what he thinks contributes to the "family atmosphere" of the CTF, Eric jokes, "the mini-fridge." There may be a grain of truth to this. CTFers come back to the office to share meals, family-style, around their "kitchen table." When I arrive, it is covered in leftover lunches, chopsticks, and a coffee-table copy of *Brownian Motion and Stochastic Calculus*.

"More seriously," Eric says, "I believe one reason for [our family atmosphere] is the sheer amount of time that most of us spend in the office – we really get to know and trust each other."

Xin Feng echoes this sentiment. When I sit down to speak with him over his dinner, he seems quiet and unassuming. His grey cotton turtleneck is neatly rolled over once, the way your mom might have done back in grade three. His thick glasses fit the "geek" image to a tee. When I ask about his involvement with CTF, his enthusiasm begins to shine through.

"I didn't know anyone in CTF before I joined," he says. "But it has become a family to me. I spend a lot of time here." Xin, with an interest in computers and java programming, has enjoyed the company of other so-called "computer nerds" since joining in September.

Unlike many other McGill clubs, which have a tough time retaining their membership, CTF seems to be pretty successful at keeping new members hooked. So what keeps them around? "I can't really speak for everyone here, but I stayed because I wanted to learn cool computer stuff, and to work and hang around with a team of fun, smart geeks and feel a sense of belonging," Erica explains.

Logan agrees. "I think the best part about CTF is the people: specifically, the amazing cross-section of backgrounds and interests

CTFers have even been known to help the occasional Carnival-goer who needs a stapler but just can't remember why.

that we gather. No two people have the same history, and you get to learn and experience things that you never would have even known you were missing."

The CTF is also unique in terms of their decision-making structure. Though Eric and Logan were elected by the CTF membership, much of the decision-making for the Task Force is done by consensus. "All major decisions are collective," says Eric, "So our members feel like they have a stake in the choices we make."

Fifteen minutes later than anticipated, the office is now packed with CTF members, ready to catch up with friends and attend the weekly meeting. Eric and Logan take to the whiteboard to present the issues at hand. The side conversations begin to die down and the meeting begins.

First item of business: clean the fridge. Members relay tales of woe – soggy leftovers, crusty utensils, and unclaimed lunch bags. One member gleefully claims a salad that has recently celebrated its expiration date, to the amusement of other CTF members. Like any good family meeting, CTFers offer etiquette tips to their peers: "Clean your utensils after you use them," someone pronounces. The point is well taken.

Second item of business: to great acclaim and applause, Logan announces that he has created a program to restart printing jobs remotely. "Does this mean we don't have to walk to the lab anymore?" someone asks. "Does it fix a printer jam?" another jokes. Gales of laughter and appreciation fill the basement.

Third item of business: how to prevent students from leaving garbage in the labs. Like most computer labs, CTF's terminals are meant to be free of food and beverages. Get caught and you're likely to garner some stink-eye from the members who battle evil on a regular basis. So, will putting a garbage can in the lab support



The guys who run the Computer Task Force are no strangers to the axiom, “work hard, play hard.”

All photos by Chase Moser / The McGill Daily

users’ law-breaking habits or keep the place tolerably clean? The Task Force speculates on the morality and behaviour of the average McGill student. Will posted signs do the trick? Are they too lazy to use the garbage cans outside? Someone suggests a poster with a giant eye. Given the variety of opinions on the matter, the Task Force decides to move the discussion online for further debate amongst members.

Final item of business: a new layout for the CTF office. Another enterprising CTF member, Kin Cheng, has a suggestion for a new office layout that will shield visitors from the intensity of DoTA. “This way,” he suggests, “people coming in will just see geeks clicking furiously.” Given the large CTF membership, some are worried about losing precious space. The prospective

interior designer offers up some computer-aided designs to better display his ideas, which seems to satisfy the membership.

With this, the meeting is adjourned. Some members warm up their dinner and settle in for a long evening of work, saving the world, and friendly warmth. Others reluctantly pack up their bags and get ready to leave CTF for the night. The day may be winding down at CTF, but tomorrow will surely be as busy as this one. There are printers to fix, computers to save, staplers to offer, and technologically imperilled students to rescue.

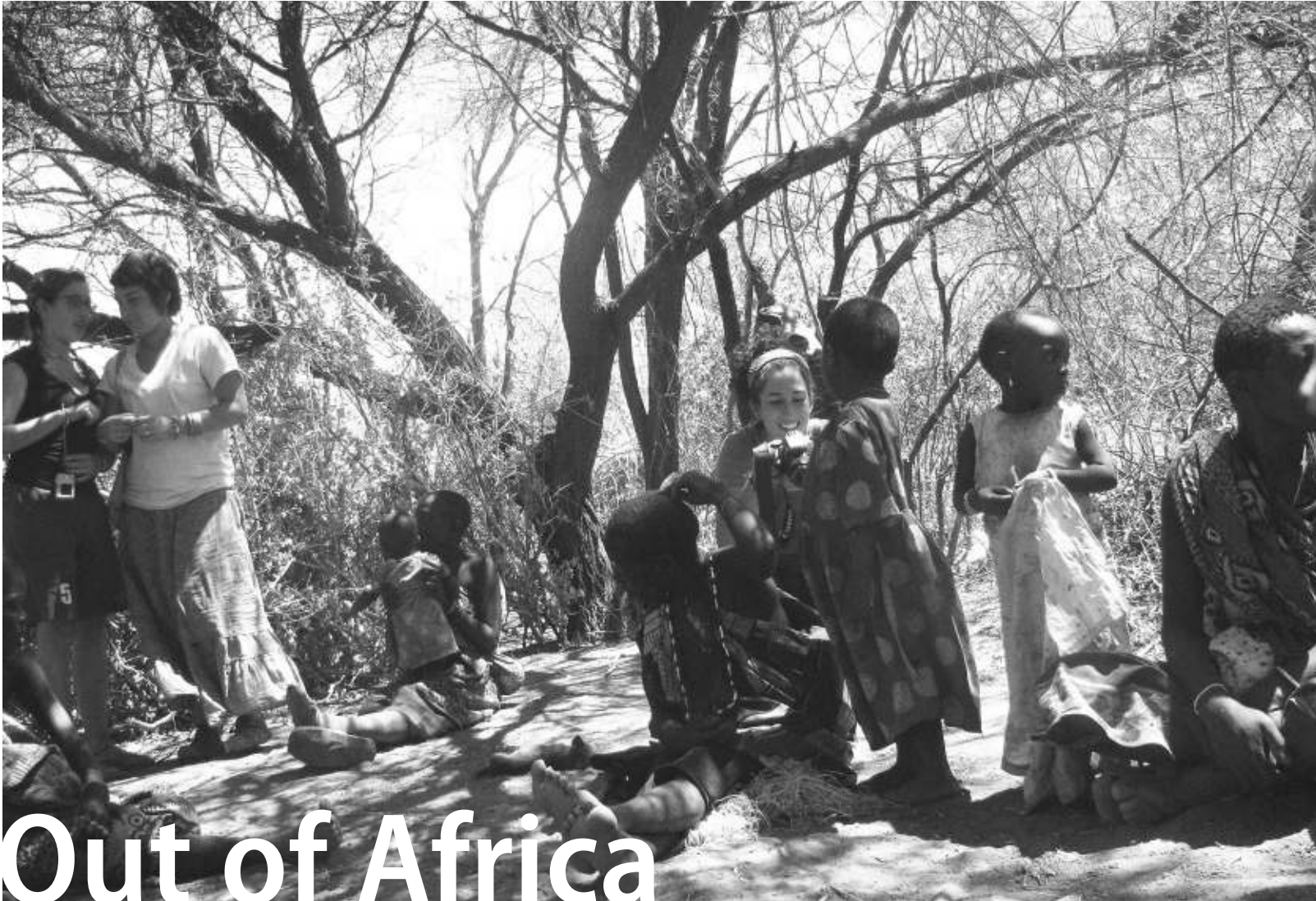
Looking toward the future, Eric and the rest of the Task Force are dreaming big: “We want to keep the service rolling. We want students

to have continued access to our 24/7 computer labs and printers. This means making sure the equipment is up-to-date and adequate to student needs, as well as transmitting CTF’s technical and organizational know-how,” he says.

On their world-saving mission, CTF will pursue sustainability in the coming months. “We’re looking into more environmental printing services and electricity savings. We also want to become ‘carbon-neutral’ by offsetting all greenhouse gas emissions associated with our activities,” says Eric proudly.

As I pass by the circuit board keyholder on my way out of the Task Force office, I am reminded of the CTF geeks’ sage wisdom: “Being logged-in does not equal being there.” Each of us belongs to McGill in some sense.

At the most basic level, our coursepacks and tuition, our student numbers and ID cards, are signs of our existence in this place. And if we want, for three or four years, we can keep our belonging to the bare minimum. We can log in to the system and then swiftly logout. But to do more than just survive, McGill requires each of us to engage. In the nooks and crannies of the darkest corners of this place, we can find folks who help us to be better people, to join together to leave the world a better place, and to hopefully have some fun along the way. The members of CTF demonstrate with nerdy exuberance the value of passionate commitment and whole-hearted devotion. Most importantly, they show that true community can bring light to the darkest corners.



Rachel Kutler for The McGill Daily

Despite language barriers, students studying abroad attempt to interact with the Hadzabe tribe, some snap a few pictures.

Out of Africa

Talia Gordon explores the implications of photographic documentation as an outsider

It is nearly unheard of to visit Paris and return sans at least one photograph of the Eiffel Tower; you would have a lot of explaining to do were you to travel to Egypt and fail to capture a pyramid; folks would doubt the validity of a claim to have seen the Grand Canyon, or the Great Wall of China, were that claim not accompanied by the requisite snapshots. The fact that thousands of people have the exact same photograph in their possession does little to deter the next thousand from wanting to replicate it for their very own album or mantelpiece. Pictures have become badges of sorts; maybe they're proof that you truly were where you say you were, and that you really saw what you say you saw.

There are obvious drawbacks to viewing a world wonder or an architectural masterpiece entirely through a camera lens, but photography sometimes presents other, more troubling implications. Specifically, what do we turn to when there are no wonders or masterpieces to photograph?

I spent last semester in Kenya doing a study abroad program which focused on health and development. This was my first time visiting Africa.

Oh, Africa. We'll never stop talking about Africa. Say it loud and there's music playing, say it soft and it's almost like praying, say it at all, and before you can pronounce "Darfur," you've conjured up images of bloated, malnourished children covered in flies, machete-wielding tribal bushmen, half-naked women carrying water on their heads and babies on their backs, and probably an elephant and a zebra or two. I blame *National Geographic*, though maybe blame is

the wrong word, and maybe someone else deserves the credit for the perpetuation of these icons of Africa.

Now, I don't deny that such images are, to a great extent, visually representative of certain aspects of a certain Africa. At the beginning of the semester, I was asked by one of our Kenyan professors what the most ludicrous thing said to me was prior to my departure. The list of answers that ran through my head was at once embarrassing and insulting (from my uncle, "Make sure to triple wrap!" and from my father, "Don't sleep with anyone"). But beyond the cautionary "Don't get AIDS" reminders, a lot of my friends and family had made the only slightly less offensive assumption that my semester would be spent living among the very collage of African stereotypes listed above.

Needless to say, this was not the case. There were, however, many moments which did, if only visually, fit a *National Geographic* cover story.

Quite early on in our trip, a group of my peers took a walk through Kibera, the largest slum in East Africa. A friend of mine took out her camera, and was promptly lambasted by another classmate for daring to "exoticize the culture" by attempting to capture people's real lives on film. The surface implication of her comment was that my snap-happy friend was letting an inappropriate level of voyeurism direct her experience. The deeper implication, however, was that by snapping a picture or two, this friend was perpetuating the mutually held perception of Otherness between us as white Westerners and the people whose

country we were visiting.

I want to emphasize our "whiteness" with no intention of racializing the issue, but because the colour of our skin hugely impacted many of our experiences and interactions merely as a fact of difference. While I would like to believe that it was our status as foreigners, or the fact that we dressed differently, or spoke poor Kiswahili, none of these were the real reasons it felt impossible to fit in. However hard we tried, the colour of our skin gave us away. As obvious outsiders intending to be respectful visitors, and as students entering into another culture, we had all committed to ourselves, and professed to each other in earnest, how sensitive and careful we intended to be, wanting to avoid any measure of ethnocentrism or exploitative tourism. We were perhaps hyper-aware of our outsider role in Kenya, and always erred on the side of cultural caution. That is, as long as it didn't stop us from taking pictures of everything and anything that was unfamiliar and interesting to our Western eyes.

At first, we were all very cautious about where and when we took out our cameras. Taking pictures of giraffes was acceptable, sure, but we were collectively mortified when one of our peers dared to ask if she could take pictures of the babies at an orphanage for children living with HIV. But, slowly, people became less careful about what and who they were photographing. First there was a strange period when we felt we needed to provide justification: "Apparently they don't mind as long as you ask beforehand and show them the picture after," or, "I'm not

going to show anyone; these pictures are for myself." Then we began to take our appropriate-picture-taking cues from each other, rather than from what the situation dictated. Then we all but forgot ourselves and began snapping as many pictures as our memory cards could hold. We were unabashed and too often the photos bordered on exploitative. But hey, we had come to Africa, and we wanted the pictures to prove it.

I include myself in this "we," because I was admittedly just as much at fault as my peers for the way we conducted ourselves. As far as my awareness and dedication to maintaining cultural sensitivity carried me, I certainly snapped a few of my own *National Geographic*-esque photos. And while I have perhaps exaggerated the extent of our camera-wielding brazenness, it was an issue that brought up a number of questions.

Firstly, and perhaps most importantly, what are the implications of white, Western foreigners taking pictures of Africans living in Africa, just because they were, well, Africans living in Africa? And secondly, what are the real intentions behind our desire for photographs?

The answer to the first question demands a long look at colonial legacies, the effects of Western presence in parts of Africa today, and an examination of how these have affected many African's own perceptions of the role of foreigners in Africa. It is also necessary to consider how being the subject of so many photographs affects people's self-perception, especially in cultures where photography may not mean the same thing it does in the Western world.

To answer the second question we must turn our lens inward and take a look at ourselves. Is the desire to capture what we are seeing a product of innocent voyeurism? Is it merely that there is an inherent exoticism in observing a culture so vastly different from our own? Or is there a twisted sense of gratification in owning pictures of things that appear in global aid campaigns and human rights pamphlets? As if to somehow drive home the fact that *we were there*, that we were witness to, and, by extension, a part of, the images that represent an entire continent to the rest of the world.

I am not professing to be able to truly answer any of these questions, and it's possible that I am being too hard on the numerous students who visit Africa who do so out of a real sense of connection to these cultures; I am maybe even placing too much value on the effects of their (our, my) actions. Who knows. Perhaps we did no harm. Perhaps the Facebook albums of smiling Kenyan children will send positive messages of hope and change. Perhaps the photographs of slum life, taken not by distant professionals, but by myself and my peers, will spark conversation and become a catalyst for a new world order. I hope so. But I will continue to grapple with the questions I have raised above as long as I see picture after picture of "Africans" be represented with no deeper association to specific situation and culture. We must recognize how our drive for documentation – or whatever it may be – serves to perpetuate stereotypes of more than an entire people, but an entire continent full of peoples.

Delighting in their craft

The brewmasters of Benelux show their geekier side - sort of



All hopped up

Joseph Watts

In December, an installment of All Hopped Up was devoted to demystifying homebrewing by breaking it down to four essential steps. Given the right equipment and some very basic know-how, anyone who can read a recipe can brew beer. What many people don't know about the drink, however, is that all beer is made with variations on these four steps. Benoit Mercier, the head brewer and owner of Benelux, graciously lent his brew pub and expertise to show that any beer – from Rickard's to Rolling Rock, craft-brew to homebrew – is made using the same fundamental process.

Keep an eye out for Benelux's 3rd anniversary bash in April, and for inside tips on the best beers of the bunch, e-mail Joe at allhoppedup@gmail.com.



1



3



2



4

1. All good beer begins in the mind of a good brewer. More often than not, a brewmaster starts brewing on his stove and upgrades his set-up again and again, until one day he has a brewery. For Mercier, homebrewing was a "super cheap way for a 19-year-old to make 12 per cent beer." But as craft brewing picked up in Montreal, it caught his interest.

Mercier is fascinated by both Belgian brewing traditions and highly-hopped West Coast styles. The tap list at Benelux aims for originality with creative hybrids like the Semuta, a Belgian saison supercharged with hops from the Pacific Northwest.

2. Today Mercier brewed his West Coast India Pale Ale. Rather than employing Belgian influences, Mercier toned down a recipe for a strong Imperial IPA he concocted when Benelux opened in April 2006.

Like homebrewing entirely with grains, the first step is to mash barley malt and extract all the sugary liquid. The second step, the sparge, is contained within this commercial mash tun.

3. Assistant brewer Philippe Tremblay adds a dose of hops to the brew kettle as the unfermented beer, known as wort, boils.

Though Mercier and Tremblay both deny their status as beer geeks, citing professionalism, Mercier's eyes light up when he talk about hops. "Pacific hops can be broken down into three categories of taste," he explains. "For instance, you can taste grapefruit flavors in most big American varieties, but Simcoe hops have interesting resiny cedar flavors."

4. Still, it's not hard to at least look like a geek in a brewery. After the wort cools, it is pumped into 900-litre fermenters seen here. One major difference between homebrewers and professionals is the attention given to yeast, held here in flasks. Major breweries will have scientists and labs devoted to culturing yeast and keeping it healthy. Their methods and yeast strains are often kept under tight lock and key.

All photos by Camille McOuat / The McGill Daily

Seeing ourselves in the fruits of life



The conversationalist

Rosie Aiello

"I don't know how you feel about coriander. I like it, but not everybody does. Some people find that it smells like cat urine; others find it quite exotic and nice-tasting," says David Wees, a professor in plant science and farm management and technology. Our affinity for plants and other living things is not a matter only of their flavour, or of their appearance. It is something much more fundamental and deep-rooted. Some people's relationships with plants begin straightforwardly, as a profession or a hobby. Wees was drawn to his field of study simply because he prefers to be surrounded by greenery than by "four ordinary-looking walls."

It is a symptom of biophilia, or "a love of living things." The term was first coined by social psychologist Erich Fromm and later explored by entomologist Edward O. Wilson. We are innately attracted to all things living and life-like – an idea that is consistent with the expansion of such fields of study as urban horticulture and horticultural therapy. Plants are integral to our psychological well-being – a common, though not an immediately logical idea.

Visiting with Wees, I found myself drawn to seemingly mundane facts about apple varieties: their various anthropomorphic names – McIntosh,

Granny Smith, Pink Lady, Suntan; their family histories – "Braeburn and Gala came together, and so the Jazz was born." McIntosh and Red Delicious formed the Empire. All apples, pears, raspberries, plums, and so on are actually descendants of the rose plant.

Wees also told me of the mysterious phenomenon of the "chance seedling." One in a while, an unexplained tree will crop up in the middle of a farmer's orchard. She will not have planted it; the tree might not even resemble anything else on his acreage; it will arrive, purely, by chance; and it might so happen that this anomalous tree will bear bigger, juicier, and more delicious fruit than the rest. In fact, two of the most popular apple varieties – red delicious and golden delicious – were not bred for their particular characteristics, but were themselves chance seedlings.

Considering Wilson's idea of biophilia alongside my discussion with Wees, it becomes clear that our relationship to plants and animals, our specific way of sympathizing with them and of either humanizing them or mystifying them, speaks not to the nature of the plant or animal itself, but to the human condition.

"We are human in good part because of the particular way we affiliate with other organisms," Wilson writes in his book *Biophilia*. "They

Humans have an affinity for all things living. We just can't help it.

are the matrix in which the human mind originated and is permanently rooted, and they offer the challenge and freedom innately sought. To the extent that each person can feel like a naturalist, the old excitement of the untrammelled world will be regained. I offer this as a formula of reenchantment to invigorate poetry and myth: mysterious and little known organ-

isms live within walking distance of where you sit. Splendor awaits in minute proportions."

It seems that our relationship to nature, and even movements like environmentalism, are therefore not simply about preserving nature for nature's sake, but are about preserving our sense of our own humanness. Our innate love for the living helps

sustain life; although it is an optimistic and somewhat simplistic notion, it may also be read in a pessimistic light, as proof of the unerring egotism of the human species.

Are you a closet biophilic? Send your roses and other lovable objects to Rosie at theconversationalist@mcgilldaily.com.



Cathleen Archambault-Wallenburg and Simone Lucas for The McGill Daily

HYDE PARK

McGill must rally around equality and freedom

Nadim Roberts

UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has recently ordered an inquiry into the attacks against UN facilities in the Gaza Strip, including educational facilities. While Ban Ki-moon, Amnesty International, and many other human rights groups are looking for answers regarding Israeli military aggression in the Gaza Strip, McGill has shamefully excluded itself from the process of seeking truth and establishing justice and equality.

A recent motion submitted to SSMU's General Assembly that called for the condemnation of Israel's bombing of educational institutions in Gaza was not even given a chance to be discussed or debated; as it turns out, even human rights can be "postponed indefinitely."

Students at McGill presented the motion to support the under-

able right that an individual has to education, in Palestine or anywhere in the world. It is critical today that students at McGill and beyond fight for human rights to be understood as universal, and act in solidarity with those experiencing human rights violations around the world, including those in Palestine. Human rights are not selective, and Israeli actions that undermine Palestinian human rights must be confronted.

On December 28, 2008, Israeli military forces bombarded the Islamic University in Gaza (IUG), destroying the Science and Engineering buildings and damaging several others on a campus that serves over 20,000 students in Gaza.

Dr. Akram Habbab, a professor of American literature at the Islamic University in Gaza, wrote on the morning after the bombing, "Last night, during the second night of Israel's unprecedented attack on Gaza, I was awakened by the deaf-

ening sound of intensive bombardment. When I learned that Israel had bombed my university with American-made F-16s, I realized that its 'target bank' had gone bankrupt. As an independent professor, not affiliated with any political party, I can say that IUG is an academic institution which embraces a wide spectrum of political affinities."

If McGill students, who are so blessed to be receiving an education in a safe environment, cannot rally behind the call of other students across the world that seek this same basic human right we take for granted, what can we say for ourselves as an educational community supposedly based on ideals of equality and freedom?

It is peculiar that those opposed to this motion did not even allow a debate to occur, but instead attempted to silence those who spoke in the name of those without a voice, the Palestinian students in the Gaza Strip.

It is also important to note the tactics used by those mobilizing against this motion, which included massive rallying of anybody on campus who could be marshalled into that cramped room for a vote, no matter what their opinion or education was on the subject matter.

The *Canadian Jewish News* said in a recent article that the motion was postponed indefinitely "because [SSMU] is not the appropriate forum for debate over the Palestinian-Israeli conflict." This analysis is an evasion, and also wildly fallacious.

Anyone who attended the assembly that evening knows that this motion was suppressed because Israel supporters on campus claimed that it "demonizes Israel." It is upsetting that there are individuals on campus who put allegiance toward a country before allegiance to fellow human beings in need.

The day must come that we stop distancing ourselves from catastrophes

that occur across the world by calling them a "Middle East conflict." The current situation in Gaza is not a "Middle East conflict" – it is a dire humanitarian issue, and a university is an ideal place for such a discussion to take place. If not here, then where else?

These are indeed challenging times for human rights at McGill, but I take solace in the fact that over 200 other individuals stood in solidarity with human rights. To the students in Gaza who expected solidarity from us, we apologize. Your ongoing steadfastness in the face of the ongoing Israeli siege on Gaza is an inspiration for many students at McGill and around the world.

Nadim Roberts is a U3 Political Science student and a member of Tadamon! Montreal, a collective working in solidarity with struggles for social justice in the Middle East. You can reach Nadim at info@tadamon.ca.

HYDE PARK

McGill profs defend call for boycott

Sam Noumoff, Abby Lippman, Sajida Alvi, Gregory Baum, Jay Brophy, Wael Hallaq, Steve Jordan, Thomas LaMarre, Anthony Paré

Four members of the Arts Faculty criticized (The Daily, 12 February) those who had signed an open letter appearing in *Le Devoir* at the end of January that called for a global Boycott, Divestment, and Sanction movement to express solidarity with others peacefully protesting Israeli government actions that violated international human rights and, most recently, included direct attacks on academic institutions in Gaza.

We are among those who signed the College and University Workers United (CUWU) letter in *Le Devoir*, and would emphasize that our call is for an academic boycott directed against institutions, not individuals. Israeli institutions take part in blocking information and cutting off discussion and debate through their discriminatory admissions, language, and travel policies. As well, these institutions have built on land usurped from Palestinians on the West Bank and thereby take part in the UN-condemned practice of settlement building. Many individual Israeli academics support a boycott and recognize that outside pressure is essential if Israel is to be made accountable and end its “aggression.” We offer that support.

The McGill writers call our parallel to apartheid South Africa a “facile...misleading and pernicious...demonization of Israel...[that] does nothing to foster any serious and credible peace process.” Using invective neither advances their argument, rebuts ours, or acknowledges how those who experienced the apartheid system in South Africa, including the Nobel Laureate Desmond Tutu, have documented the parallels between it and current Israeli policies of separation of and discrimination against Palestinians.

The four further claim that academic boycotts have proven to be either illegal or founded for lack of support. If so, and the boycott movement is inexorably doomed to failure, why don't they just ignore it and let it die its natural death? Or could it be that the boycott movement is actually gaining strength? How else interpret the immediate call for a retaliatory boycott of Hampshire College by Alan Dershowitz within days, if not hours, of his learning that this esteemed institute in Massachusetts had voted for divestment?

The Daily letter writers also employ a common diversionary tactic when they go after those who

criticize Israeli government policies and support a boycott by accusing them of being “one-sided” in their analysis, failing to mention missiles aimed from Gaza into southern Israel, Hezbollah, other Arab states, or Iran. No doubt, there are different points of departure for a debate. While the McGill four chose to begin with the rocket fire from Gaza and Israel's need for security, those in CUWU point to the Israeli occupation and blockade as “root causes” of the crisis, noting that those who are occupied have the right to resist even if we do not always agree with their chosen methods of resistance.

Unfortunately, diverting attention from these root causes leads to erroneous thinking that “security” comprises merely the cessation of rocket fire into Israel and fails to recognize that authentic security requires the ability – if not the right – of Palestinians to walk streets safely, have gainful employment, and provide the basic necessities for one's family. Moreover, without security for all, finding a just and lasting peace between two viable states will not be possible. Our McGill colleagues are all social scientists; surely they must recognize that “terrorism” can be practiced by individuals, groups, and states. Many, including those in CUWU, now find that Israeli state terrorism has become integral to its occupation policy and must be addressed directly.

Calling for a boycott on Israeli institutions is not a “zero-sum” activity, nor does it require any ranking of world disasters. Many of us do give attention to ongoing global horrors in Myanmar, the Sudan, and the Congo, to mention but a few, but this is not relevant to calling for an academic boycott in Israel.

Israel has brought the world's attention – and international reactions of various kinds – to itself through its recent assault on Gaza and the casualties it inflicted, actions in which the Canadian government was complicit. Gush Shalom, an Israeli peace organization, and others note that an economic boycott is a “non-violent act, enabling all citizens to express their views through their available means.” Those calling for a boycott in the letter in *Le Devoir* acted in this spirit, motivated, too, by some words of Abraham Lincoln: “Those who deny freedom to others, deserve it not for themselves.”

The authors of this Hyde Park are members of the McGill Faculty and are affiliated with CUWU, the group that placed the ad in *Le Devoir*. You can reach them through abby.lippman@mcgill.ca.



Aquil Virani / The McGill Daily

When comic books went for profit their morals went down the tube.

HYDE PARK

Comics in the mainstream: boobs and the X-treme

Duong Pham

There's a urban legend about influential comics scribe Will Eisner that claims he coined the term “graphic novel.” The tale says that while pitching his idea to a publisher in the seventies, Eisner, thinking that the publisher wouldn't take his idea seriously if he pitched it as a comic book, claimed he had written a graphic novel. The publisher ate it up and published his book, *A Contract With God*, which became one of the most important works of comics in the modern era. So the legend goes.

Ten years after *Sandman*, 20 after *Watchmen*, and 30 years after *A Contract With God*, graphic novels are becoming movies, comic writers are hired to write for shows like *Lost* and *Heroes*, and Hollywood writers like Bob Gale and Joss Whedon are somehow writing graphic novels. Comic books have hit the mainstream – again.

Comic books first became legitimate forms of storytelling in the late '80s, when Art Spiegelman's *Maus* won the Pulitzer Prize, Alan Moore's *Watchmen*

won the Hugo, and Frank Miller wrote *The Dark Knight Returns* and *Batman*. The astounding success of these Holy Books of Comicdom attracted to the industry speculators who thought comics were a goldmine, and hoped that every first issue would be as successful as a future Action Comics #1 – where Superman first appeared.

But, then people started buying comics for resale value, not caring about the quality of the story. The comic book industry responded by printing covers made of fur – seriously – and drawing women with bodacious tatas. Sure enough, the industry collapsed on itself, companies went bankrupt, and comic book aficionados were left with piles of worthless of comics full of bad writing, ugly art, and the word X-TREME somewhere in the title.

The Will Eisner anecdote – regardless of its veracity – introduces a problem with comic books. The problem is that comic books never really went mainstream. They just hit puberty and changed their name to seem more suave. When a subculture goes mainstream it undergoes what a neighbourhood does when it's gen-

trified: it's cleaned up, the substance is thrown out, and it is stripped of what made it great in the first place. In that sense, comics haven't gone mainstream at all. There are still tons of great books out there from all types of genres. You don't become mainstream just because some intellectual properties are sold to a film industry that is devoid of ideas and faces declining profit margins at the box office.

Instead of reassuring me that I am no longer considered a weirdo for my comics fetish because comics are now cool, just enjoy comics for what they are. Whether it's a real life account of day-to-day life or a cliché story full of plot devices, big boobs, and the word X-TREME somewhere on the cover, there's something there for everybody. And at the end of the day, if reading comics takes my mind off of the impending economic apocalypse, who gives a hoot if Joss Whedon is writing *X-Men*?

Duong Pham is a U3 Economics student. Share your comic book lovin' with him at duong.pham@mail.mcgill.ca.



Where weird punk blooms

Braving strangers' sweat and subliminal messaging at Montreal Knows No Wave

Veronica French
The McGill Daily

I can't really say if what I'm hearing are the euphoric and muddled sounds of self-expression, or just noise, but by the way my heart is racing and my hips (and everybody else's) are moving, I'll go with the former.

Montreal's music scene is like a beautiful garden, bedding the seeds of potentially the most exquisite smelling flowers, and the stinkiest. Nevertheless, it's a big garden with just too many types of blooms to even begin to classify. Luckily for us, places like Casa del Popolo's cantina-chic café/bar and artsy loft lab.synthèse host evenings where a handful of local bands can perform.

On January 29, Casa del Popolo embraced the presence of three up-and-coming bands – Dead Wife, Grand Trine, and The Other Thing – for the 19th volume of Montreal Knows No Wave (MKNW). Almost every month, the homey Casa puts on MKNW, a concert series where

aspiring bands can perform for all their drunken friends and hipster strangers, busting their self-esteem-metre up a notch.

Before the show, I checked the handy-dandy online guru (Wikipedia) to see what this no wave business was about. Apparently, no wave was a contemporary art scene (involving music, film, and other artistic forms of expression) that began in New York City during the mid-1970s—think early Sonic Youth. The term is supposed to be a “satirical wordplay rejecting the commercial elements of the then-popular new wave genre.” Basically: a counter-movement of a counter-movement.

But what does this all have to do with a monthly gig in the Mile End in Montreal? I asked the founder/organizer of MKNW, Brian Seeger, this very question. No wave was particular to a period in time and space that cannot be replicated. According to Seeger, no wave music was “essentially nothing,” just weird punk music. MKNW attempts to bring back this openness to the “outsider,” giving Montreal's

abundance of experimental bands a little encouraging push. New wave, no wave, it's all just rock 'n' roll, really.

While waiting for the show to begin, Seeger took upon himself the heavy burden of DJing, which was probably the best part of the night. He's a smaller, slightly older fellow, and quite a character. In his nerd glasses and eighties sweater, he swayed his body to tunes like “Smooth Operator” and “Hollaback Girl.” Before the show even began, I knew the place was legit. When Seeger's not lending a helping hand to the small bands, he too plays at MKNW, featured in bands like the Brian Seeger Buffet and Super Brian Seeger.

Casa is a choice venue for the series. Small and intimate, the place filled up very quickly. Luckily, Casa's tiny size made the music only *that* much more amplified. The chill vibe and dimmed lights will make you not even care that you have the sweat of three different strangers on your body. But don't be too naive; signs on the mirror in the bathroom warn you of pickpockets.

The Other Thing was the first band to take the stage. It took me a few minutes to realize, “No, this is not the rehearsal,” and, “No, the keyboardist isn't shaking convulsively; he is actually playing.” Despite the mix-up, I found the band's childlike way of banging their instruments – juxtaposed against their 40-year-old-man physiques, complete with greys and a belly – rather enjoyable.

Experimental punk can be kind of hard on your ears, but Dead Wife kicked ass in my book. Three chicks jamming and screaming is a no-brainer for me. Last to play, Grand Trine was probably the most cohesive of the three bands. The melodies were in sync, the drummer definitely knew how to hit that thing, and the singer vaguely resembled Emile Hirsch... except high. To be fair, it was difficult not to feel intoxicated by the echoing effects of his voice ringing in your head – making me think for a moment that no wave is the best thing since Pop Tarts. I still believe there were subliminal messages involved.

On Friday, February 13, members

of Grand Trine performed again, this time in the 15-person Black Feelings Cosmic Overdrone. Lab.synthèse is another fantastic joint, a hole-in-the-wall loft near Beaubien and Parc. Besides being a music venue, Lab is also an art space for expos, theatre performances, and film screenings. As usual, the performances slipped me into a haze of green flashing lights, painted faces, and vibrating arm-hairs. The space reflected the music: no wall was left bare of art canvases and posters. Flower baskets hung from the short ceiling, and photographers lurked the ground like wolves on the prowl.

Besides the usual hipster-fest scene, everyone and their uncle was there. When I asked people how they found out about the event, many either responded by pointing a finger at a nearby friend or proudly stated that they were supporting a band member. As one observer put it: “It's a nice experiment.... It's a corner of the city where ideas can ferment.” Indeed, ideas were in fact fermenting in every direction.

Don't let a good crisis go to waste

Peter Victor's vision for a more sane economy

Mark Brooks
Culture Writer

Could the current economic crisis also represent a rare opportunity? Peter Victor thinks so. He is an Environmental Studies professor at York University, and was at McGill last week to discuss his new book, *Managing without Growth: Slower by Design, Not by Disaster*. We spoke following his talk.

Victor believes that unless we begin to move away from the ever-increasing production and consumption of energy and materials as the modus operandi of our economic system, we risk serious social and ecological crisis. Victor sees a precious opportunity during the current economic downturn to

redesign our economic system in more environmentally and socially desirable ways. And the best way to do this is to fundamentally question the wisdom of the prevailing economic policy objective of virtually every country on earth: economic growth.

As it is currently practiced in industrialized countries, economic growth is an unquestioned public policy mantra, and among the discipline's most holy grails: the more economic growth we can produce, the better for our society. But according to Victor, growth has largely failed as a public policy objective in eradicating poverty, alleviating environmental destruction, and narrowing income disparities. In some cases, it could be argued that growth has exacerbated these prob-

lems. "The promises of economic growth, have not been kept," Victor says. "In many ways, poverty has gotten worse in Canada over the last 30 years, income distribution has become more unequal, [and] the generation of greenhouse gases and nuclear waste have increased. These are all related to growth."

To be sure, he admits that growth has helped produce enormous wealth in some countries and could yet bring benefits to developing economies. But the problems associated with continued growth now seem to be overwhelming the benefits. "If a country is very poor, getting richer [through economic growth] can really make people better off, but that connection doesn't stay that way forever. You can reach a point where you are rich enough

that getting richer doesn't solve your problems."

According to Victor, even if we were to try to sustain economic growth indefinitely, it is no longer a viable option for us from an environmental standpoint. "There comes a time when a population should say 'we've got enough' and [equitable] distribution becomes more of an issue. When you have an economy that is operating at about \$15-trillion dollars – as the Canadian economy now is, that's a lot to work with for 33 million people. We don't lack the resources."

Victor says the process of transforming our economy will not happen overnight, nor should it, but it is high time we acknowledged that the current approach is not working, and start considering alterna-

tives. "[The current economic situation] provides a welcome opportunity to re-direct the economy, and it makes sense to act on it," he notes.

Whether we will act is another matter entirely, and Victor is not sure the political will exists when most leaders seem preoccupied with "growing" our way out of the current recession. But he remains optimistic. "There are lots of emerging movements – the hundred mile diet, the voluntary simplicity movement, and so on – all of these are indications that people want to make changes in their own lives.... Politically, I think it's still an open question. How do we address the economic problem at the same time as dealing with the environment. That would be leadership."

Genuine exposures

Terence Burns' portraits aim to capture authors in their natural setting

Ryan Healey
Culture Writer

The author stares through the sepia photograph, hand-to-face in a way that calls to mind Rodin's "Thinker." Shelves of books surround him in the background, with blurred busts of authors past in the spaces in between; hundreds of years of literary history prop the author into legitimacy. For more romantic types, there's a haggard-looking man in another photograph leaning his hip against a brick wall – and we get it, we get it, he's urban with a firm grasp on the vein of common life.

"This pose is 4,000 years old," says Concordia's Professor Terence Byrnes. "So many of the photographs are so highly conventionalized that you can almost substitute the letters A-U-T-H-O-R over the photo." Byrnes recently published a collection of author portraits entitled *Closer to Home*, a sweeping revision of the field's monotonous norm.

In *Closer to Home*, Byrnes took photographs of authors in their intimate dominions, "where they lived, worked, or played." The portraits show a diversity of approaches to the literary photograph, beginning in part with the pose itself. Byrnes did not guide his subjects on their pose. Any aesthetic distance from the false modesty of the typical author snapshot is welcome in the collection – some authors stare maniacally, many seem entirely disinterested, while others look pleasant and warm or agonizingly conscious of their atmosphere and demeanor.

A previously unseen spectrum of emotion envelops the portraits: senses of weariness, nostalgia, activity, and concern. There is a conscious effort to defy the norm of literary portraiture.

The photo of writer Mikhail Iossel is a notable example; he sits on the edge of his bed, looking tranquil, holding a frame of an old portrait of himself in which he stares menacingly, smoking a cigarette with a glossy Hollywood-face, shadows burrowing over his eyelids. The juxtaposition of what Byrnes has designed as the "real" author in his natural setting, with this romanticized snapshot of exaggerated personality, comically engages with the discrepancy in literary photographs between the author as an individual and as a marketing product.

Similarly, we see writer Raymond Filip standing idly in the center of a barren walled room. Paint marks typical of a construction site streak the walls and ceiling, debris litters the floor, and Filip smirks with distinction. There are no signs of authority to support this writer, no arcane tomes or busts of Homer to illustrate that he is endowed to write, that you must listen to him. The environment no longer makes allowances for deficiencies in the individual's talent. The author is on his own.

"Writers generally have a strange kind of vanity," Byrnes says. "There is this romantic, anti-intellectual strain in Anglo-American writers' view of themselves. It says, 'I'm all about experience, with my roots in the soil, or the asphalt.' A specific Hemingwayesque rawness." This strange vanity seeps into most authors, a complicated kind of self-conscious – with consciousness of one's audience, and the anxiety of the influence of hundreds of years of literature mixed in. Byrnes actively deconstructs this anxiety with a sense of domesticity and intimacy, as the photographs are, eponymously, closer to home. The authors look less like authors (whatever that means), and more like your uncle, aunt, or cousin. Writer



Roxana Parsa for The McGill Daily

Glen Rotchin, bespectacled with his arms hanging down on his side, stands like a child with contained giddiness amongst the mechanical pipes of an empty manufacturing room he knew as a boy. The pipes wrap themselves around the room, dotted with metal valves, while Rotchin stands in the center facing the camera. This no longer seems

like a man concerned with literature or the anxious business of art, but a man taking delight in who he was and who he is.

At one photo session, poet Anne Carson told Byrnes, "You can only take one picture of my face." He began taking photos of everything in her room, the writing desk, the globe, the window, and slowly

made his way onto her body, her back, her hair – a strange crescendo incrementally building up to the moment where she looks to her left, leans back in her wooden chair, and stares glumly at the camera, her toes pointed on the ground. She sits there still, transfixed and looming, made whole by the shutter of the camera.

Hands off!

Speakers at McGill stress our right to take control of our bodies

Shea Sinnott
Culture Writer

Bodily self-determination is the idea that you, and no one else, decide what your body is and what you do with it. Four women gathered at McGill last week for a panel discussion entitled “Bodily Self-Determination: Reimagining a Feminist Framework,” and each speaker discussed the importance of bodily self-determination within feminist, trans, and disability rights theory and practice.

According to Indu Vashist, one of the head organizers of the panel, the impetus for holding the talk grew from the feelings of some that the “battle is not yet won,” in light of recent “neo-conservative” tendencies that pose a threat to the bodily sov-

ereignty many of us take for granted. Vashist cited legislation such as Bill C-484 that reminds us “we need to be constant in our vigilance in keeping these rights.”

Counselor and former abortion-clinic worker Maryruth Stine began by discussing the history of the pro-choice movement. She framed the criminalization of abortion within the context of 19th century industrialization in an attempt to offset the tendency to “de-historicize” and “de-radicalize” abortion issues. Rather than solely being a question of morality, Stine claimed, the criminalization of abortion stemmed largely from the desire to control bodies and people for socioeconomic purposes.

In this way, Stine illustrated the importance of bodily sovereignty as a possible “through line” or means of connection between the pro-choice

movement and other human rights struggles.

Nora Butler Burke works at Action Sante Travesties et Transsexuelles du Quebec, a Montreal organization which aims to promote the health and well-being of trans people in Quebec. Burke took a more concrete approach to the panel's themes, as she spoke about the institutional barriers that “criminalize, police, and medicalize our bodies.” Above all, she stressed the importance of access to hormones, government identification, detox centers, and shelters as one of the central issues that shape and define the lives, and bodies, of trans people. Nonetheless, Burke proffered these institutional barriers as the “strategic places where we can make alliances.”

Next, Toronto-based artist and author Anne K. Abbott spoke about

the difficulties she faced growing up with a disability. Abbott recounted chilling memories of doctors poking and probing her body – times when she recalled feeling that “[her] body was not quite [her] own.” She also spoke about her family, friends, and careworkers dismissing her childhood dream of becoming a mother, claiming she was “too delicate and unprepared to have children.”

And though she proved them wrong by having kids after all, Abbott pointed to the infamous “Ashley X” case as an example of the ongoing sterilization of disabled people. Ultimately, she called for the need to “take control of our own bodies” and subsequently “be in control of our destinies.”

Similarly, A.J. Withers – an author and activist on radical disability politics – spoke about the widespread misuse of pre-natal testing. Often,

pregnant women are encouraged or pressured to abort disabled fetuses, yet these egregious violations of bodily self-determination go unchallenged. In these cases, as she emphatically argued, this is “not choice, it's coercion.” Thus, Withers stressed the need for women to have the necessary opportunity and support, whether they decide to terminate the pregnancy or not.

Withers ended with a rallying call akin to that of the other speakers – asserting that “we all must work to tear down [conceptions of] certain types of bodies and minds that have more value than others,” align ourselves with all those who suffer from oppression, and “recognize the tremendous commonalities between us.” In so doing, we can reimagine a feminist framework premised upon inclusion, solidarity, and unified action.

From high-waisted to high fashion

Hipster appropriation of nerdy style leaves no pants behind

Erin O'Callaghan
The McGill Daily

Look up from your paper right now. Chances are, if you're on campus or in a café somewhere, you can spot one. That guy sitting beside you, wearing the faded, skinny blue jeans with obnoxiously bright neon shoes, a tight button-down plaid shirt and a leather jacket, he's one of them. The girl walking toward you with a baggy t-shirt from the eighties tucked into a high-waisted denim skirt, sporting lace-up granny booties and oversized reading glasses is another. These people fall into the class of hipsters, and in this city, on this campus, they are everywhere.

Hipster fashion is ubiquitous: suspenders, high-waisted skirts and skinny jeans, over-sized sweaters, vintage t-shirts, and unnecessarily big glasses that serve absolutely no purpose to your eyesight whatsoever. There are the vests, bright accessories, party dresses – some that resemble ones I wore as a child, others that resemble my grandmother's – and an inordinate amount of revamped eighties workout clothing: American Apparel. I am not saying this fashion is ugly, or commenting on the people that swear by it; in fact, I myself am a part

of the hipster fashion world, though perhaps not to the same extent as the diehards.

Take a moment to examine the next true hipster that walks by, someone straight out of *pregnantgoldfish.wordpress.com*, a blog dedicated entirely to hipsterdom and all its wonders. Do they resemble anyone, perhaps a stereotype that has existed for decades?

Hipsters seem to have appropriated all fashion that society has traditionally associated with geeks, and reworked it to make it cool and “hip.” The high-waisted pants, button down shirt combo is a classic for geeks, but also for hipsters. So are hipsters merely geeks revamped? Are hipsters poking fun at the traditional geek, or by creating a hybrid of geekism and trendiness, are they creating a brand new stereotype of the hipster?

When you walk by the next girl wearing glasses, a cardigan belted over top of a high-waisted skinny jeans, and lace-up ankle boots, ignore the vintage cool of the pieces and really examine them. They are the clothes that we have always associated geeks with, decon-

structed and combined with some old-school class and modern-day cool. Without the alligator skin belt, the cardigan is just a plain cream wool sweater, a little too short and buttoned awkwardly over jeans that cover more than half a girl's body. The little hand-me-down boots are simply substitutes for the “it” shoe of the last five years, Uggs.

Geeks have always been the outcasts of society. In TV shows like *Screech* from *Saved by the Bell* or *Steve Urkel* from *Family Matters*, they are lovable, but unfashionable and out of touch with the trends. Hipsters have taken this traditionally outcast fashion and brought it out into the lime-light, showing that which was once uncool and lame can be turned into a major fashion statement. However, what does this really say about hipsters? By creating a new version of the geek style, have they eradicated the traditional stereotype? Personally,

my descent into hipster fashion was gradual, and I did not consciously appropriate all geek fashion possible, but I did purposefully seek out clothing that was less mainstream and more unique. Now, my “unique” fashion follows me everywhere; at least with hipster fashion in its most extreme form, you rarely find someone wearing the exact same vintage eighties cardigan. That only happens with American Apparel, the store that brought hipsterdom to the masses.

The fact that hipsters identify

with geeks, the traditional outcasts of society, reflects that those who truly rock hipster fashion see themselves as outsiders. Unable to identify with the mainstream trends of the time, hipsters took something old and lame and made it new and cool again. And so the circle of fashion goes, what is old must be new again at some point. Go forth, hipsters, and rock the geek fashion, but please, if you don't need glasses, don't wear fake ones. That's one trend too excessive and unnecessary, even for a clothes and accessories whore like myself.



Bears, beets, Battlestar Galactica

Getting to the bottom of the show's geek mystique

Kelly-Marie Albert
Culture Writer

I consider myself a geek, but there is a level of geekiness that I have yet to attain: one that embraces *Battlestar Galactica*. Is it just me, or are there more people talking about *Battlestar Galactica* these days? For those who have only heard whispers of it, *Battlestar Galactica* is a television show with a growing cult status.

Initially a short-lived 1970s television show, since its 2003 revival as a mini-series and eventual return to regular television, it's produced more pop culture references than you can shake a stick at. The title of this article comes from an episode of *The Office* in which Dwight Schrute made reference to the show – and it seems that *Battlestar's* pervasive influence is affecting more than just Hollywood. Though I've never seen the show, it seems to me that it's an acquired taste. So I decided to take it to the streets to dispel some myths – I asked, what is so great about *Battlestar Galactica*?

Chris Kearney, a self-proclaimed sci-fi geek, is an avid follower of the show. According to Chris, although *Battlestar* adds to his geek-mystique, it is not the reason for his geekiness. "It is compelling television," he said. "They try to show the ethical and moral dilemmas that are faced in political office and war." It seems that there is more to this show than meets the eye.

Chris agrees that the show's plot

is really no crazier than the more mainstream television show *Lost*. (Be warned: if you are not up-to-date with the latest season of *Lost*, his next comment contains a spoiler.) "*Battlestar* is a serious television show. [The fact that] there are spaceships and robots doesn't take away from that. Most people don't say that *Lost* is geeky, but the plot-lines are just as far-fetched. I mean, come on, it's [set on] a time-travelling island." Of course the sci-fi fanatic would defend his beloved show. However, I dug a little deeper to find out what his girlfriend of nearly a year thinks.

Melanie, a U3 Marketing student at Concordia, is anything but a sci-fi geek. She exudes a *Sex and the City*-chic vibe, even if her Mr. Big is Mr. Big Geek. Yet even she was impressed with the show. She admits that she began watching because of Chris. However, even she appreciates elements of the show. "Honestly, it's not as bad as I was expecting it to be. There is a lot of action and the graphics are pretty good too." Maybe I was jumping the gun a little when I assumed that the show was all geek and no grit. There are strong contemporary moral undertones worked into the show. As I found out, though, the series will be coming to close shortly.

I asked my sci-fi guru whether the series finale would contribute to the show's cult

status. Chris disagreed. "I think the way they aired the show gave it a cult following. They aired ten episodes and then took a year off, repeatedly. This allowed fans to stew on each season. And if you know anything about geeks, we like to stew about what will happen next."

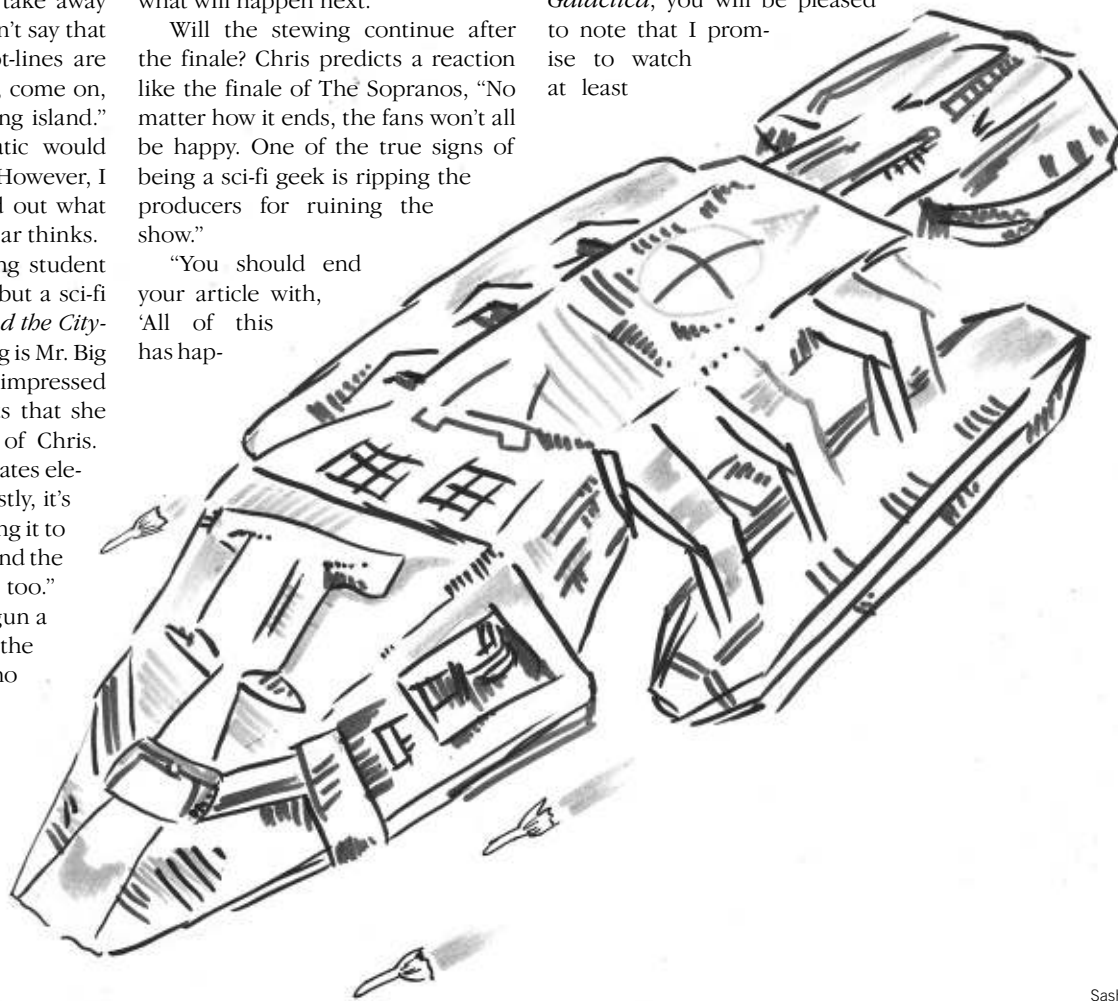
Will the stewing continue after the finale? Chris predicts a reaction like the finale of *The Sopranos*, "No matter how it ends, the fans won't all be happy. One of the true signs of being a sci-fi geek is ripping the producers for ruining the show."

"You should end your article with, 'All of this has hap-

pened before and all of this will happen again,'" Chris told me as we finished off the interview. "All the *Battlestar* fans will enjoy that." I won't go quite that far, but I am willing to compromise. For those readers who are die-hard fans of *Battlestar Galactica*, you will be pleased

to note that I promise to watch at least

one episode over reading week. I'll give it a try and determine if I can see where the intrigue lies. But if the show's taste is as acquired as the buttered popcorn Jelly Belly, then no dice, my friends, no dice.



Sasha Plotnikova / The McGill Daily

Cosying up to Craig Cardiff

Canadian singer-songwriter takes an unconventional approach to performing

Pamela Fillion
The McGill Daily

Like many McGill students, I balance my love of music with my academic commitments. Or at least I try to. On February 11, Canadian folk singer-songwriter Craig Cardiff performed at Thomson House to a full crowd in an intimate setting, and I was very glad to take part in the cosy experience. The venue was well suited to Cardiff's musical style: he's known for playing in living rooms, churches, and basements. Indeed, Cardiff invited the audience into a collaborative musical process, welcoming them to sing along. The performance was also

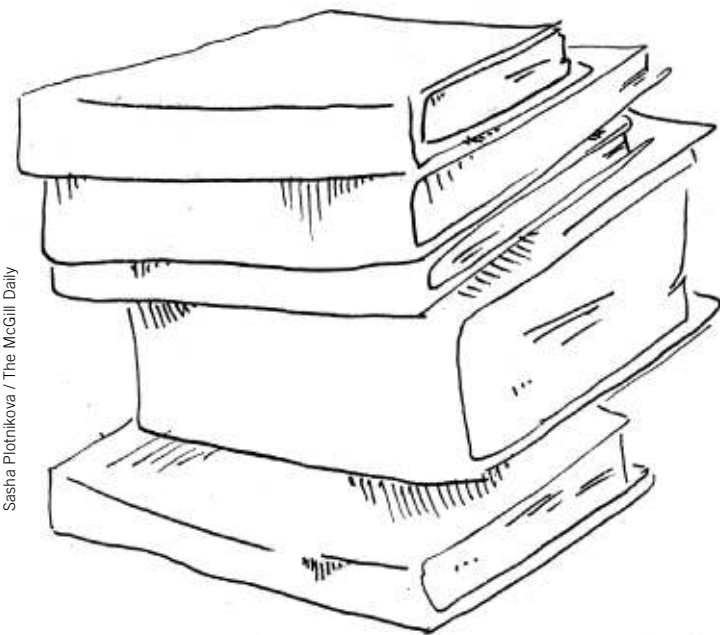
recorded live, and the tracks made downloadable to all of those whose voices, curiously well-pitched, came together that night.

The show at McGill's Graduate House was produced in part by Hello Darlin' Productions and as part of Cardiff's tour for his 2009 album *Goodnight (Go Home)*, his 11th effort in ten years. The album's tracks include "When People Go," which was written in response to the death of Cardiff's young daughter, and "Smallest Wings," a song inspired by the organization Now I Lay Me Down To Sleep, which helps parents of terminally ill newborn children deal with the loss of their infants.

Cardiff's songwriting, the development of his career, and his approach to musical performances are particularly interesting to me because of the model that they offer for aspiring singer-songwriters who have little desire to be a part of the music industry. When I strum my guitar and I think about the words I write, one of Cardiff's songs reminds me of the kind of music I strive to create. "Dance Me Outside," which tells the story of young girl dying of exposure to the cold, is a jewel of a song that

is both disarmingly heartbreaking and genuine. Cardiff explains that the song's title comes from Canadian writer W.P. Kinsella's collection of short stories about life in an Albertan First Nations community. "We have third-world pockets in Canada that people in Montreal, Toronto, Halifax don't know about," Cardiff says. "It's embarrassing. Horrible things pop up in the media...and then everyone just forgets about it. There are so many songs out there that are not saying anything. The idea for [my] songs is to have some meaning."

That evening, another voice made a strong impression on the audience. Twenty-four-year-old Allison Lickley, the opening act for Cardiff, was adorable, her music and rapport with the audience sweet and inviting. Since her recent move to Montreal, Lickley has released her first full length album, *You Might Find Me Here*. "I'm really happy and excited," she explains. "In a lot of ways, deciding to follow music as a career was a lot like starting my own business. I'm still figuring out what kind of life I want, but as I go I'm discovering how different artists are doing this, and I'm learning from these experiences."



Sasha Plotnikova / The McGill Daily

MORE houses get their nerd on, officially

Yael Greenberg
The McGill Daily

The last night of January was exciting for residents of 3471 Peel, McGill Housing's newest addition to the MORE House family. The 31st brought with it a most momentous of occasions: the coronation of the House Nerd.

How do you decide who is nerdier: A female computer engineer with a pink TI-89 graphing calculator who enjoys examining slowflakes with a microscope, or a long-haired male Classics major whose hobbies include playing Tetris, reading, and drinking scotch from a brandy glass? When faced with the aforementioned excruciating decision, one Peel resident saw no choice but to devise a systematic method to impartially rank the respective nerd capacities of her housemates.

Early in December 2008, U0 Peel residents Evan Dakota* and Sage Porger* called upon a third house member to determine which of the pair was the nerdier.

After careful yet unavailing deliberation, the judge, one U0 Arts student Rafael Gruenberg* created the Nerd Point System of Determination (NPSD) to decide whom to name House Nerd. A brief sketch of the rules follows:

Each House Member's name shall be writ down on the same flimsy whiteboard sheet provided by the McGill Housing Office, with ample space beneath.

The flimsy whiteboard sheet shall be prominently displayed on the refrigerator. This House's Nerd Point Competition shall extend through January 2009.

Each time any House Member does something deemed nerdy by others present, one person shall call the action to question and ask for the agreement of at least two additional House Members. If those two House Members vote to confirm the allegation, the perpetrator of the nerdy

action shall be granted one Nerd Point.

Nerd Points shall be recorded as stars marked next to or below their recipients' names.

Non-House Members may call an action to question but may not vote to confirm allegations.

Nerd points may be awarded only for actions committed during the duration of the competition. They may not be awarded for any previous nerdy behavior.

Each time a Nerd Point is awarded, the reason for the Point shall be recorded on a separate note pad that shall reside atop the refrigerator.

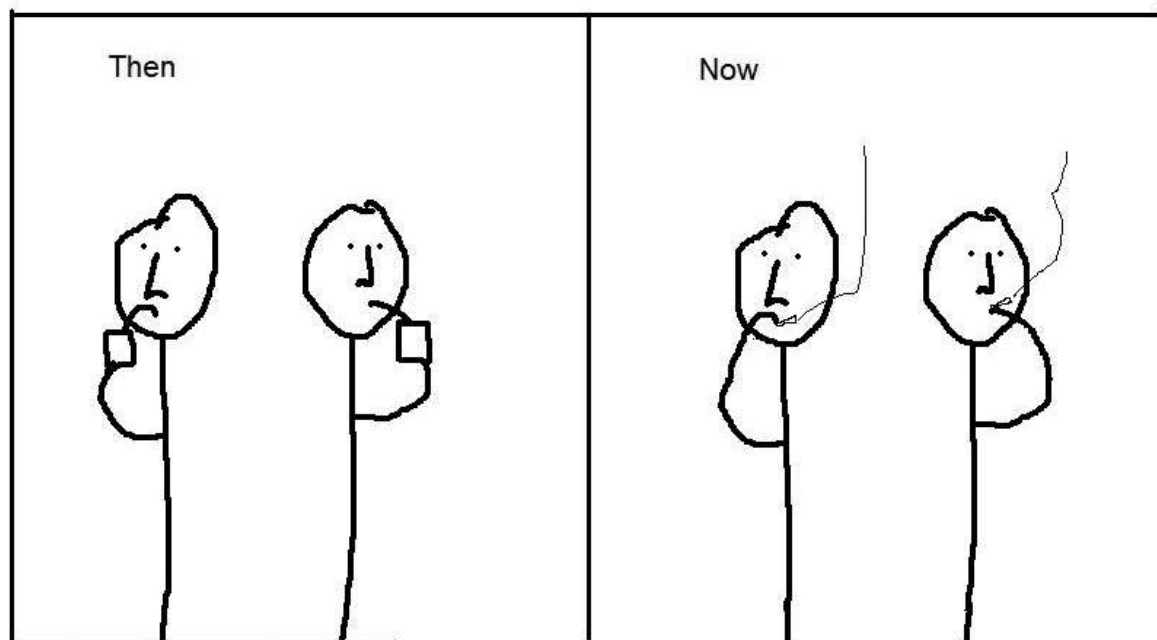
Whichever House Member holds the highest number of Nerd Points at the end of January 2009 shall be deemed House Nerd.

Rafael was unanimously awarded the first Nerd Point for contriving the competition, but quickly lost the lead to Evan, Sage, and an Australian exchange student, Jordao Crossking*.

"I spent my first three weeks at the house misunderstanding the rules and attempting to garner as many points as possible," Jordao said, "but soon I understood it was like golf - the fewer points the better." Jordao, Evan, and Sage were in close competition until the final days of January, when the rivalry turned desperate and nearly cutthroat.

Although Evan was unavailable for comment, a January 30 Facebook message from Sage captured the mood quite aptly. "NOTE TO HOUSE! PLEASE PLEASE PLEASE find reason to dub Jordao OR Evan with additional nerd points!! Competition ends tomorrow." But her entreaty was to no avail. As Jordao put it at the inauguration ceremony, "I stood out of Sage's way and called her on the winning point. It was a close competition, but I truly believe the nerdier person won. I think we should all congratulate Sage."

**Names have been changed to protect the identities and reputations of those involved.*



Connor Reilly for The McGill Daily



Send your Spring Back packing list to margot.nossal@gmail.com.

New club fails to see irony in beliefs

Anti-Choice Crew seeks to fill niche by forcing its values onto others

Winston Jeffries
The McGill Daily

After making choices with regard to future life events, McGill undergrads in the Anti-Choice Crew (ACC) have banded together to make sure that no one experiences the trauma of being able to truly explore all options before making an informed decision.

Instead of realizing that, in fact,

they had made a choice – something that could even put them under the category of “thinking choice is pry’okay” – and affording everyone else on campus that same right, the ACC are aiming to remove other people's choices.

And word around the Shatner building is that they were just awarded interim club status. Despite concerns from the gallery, SSMU Councillors made it clear they had thought through the broader impli-

cations of ACC's status carefully.

“Fuck man, you should've seen their paperwork abilities – that shit was off the hook!” one councilor said, adding, “Literally, it was not hooked onto anything.”

Another added, “They couldn't just do paperwork, they could fuckin' fiiiille paperwork, and like, hand it in on time. Sheeeeeiiit,” reminiscent of that dude on *The Wire*.

The group's next event will showcase the virtues of their opinions.

oh hey again just another grey box here wonderin' what you're up to way up there in space just hanging around being able to move and breathe and experience things because when you think about it you have like the taj mahal of life experience compared to me sittin' here on this page that's lighter than the colour of the box but why do people always bring the taj into things it's not like it asked for it you know it just has to sit there and be big white and monumental like I wonder if it even wants to be and who are we to appropriate that symbol for our everyday speak it's not like today is any different than other days but it is in so many different ways and that's what's beautiful about life you know it's different but it's also the same because what's anything when it's coming at you from directions not knowing where to go or what to go when the rabbit's pissed in your shoe and you step in it wondering why the raccoon shat on your doorstep and maybe if pouring hot water will do anything except waste your time and who made up time anyway if we can change the clocks to make it what we want forget deadlines they're so fatalistic I can't even handle that being a grey box and all

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EDITORIAL

Campus is no place to limit choice

Across the country, university student associations have been revoking club status from pro-life student groups. And while Choose Life – which SSMU Council granted full-club status by a secret ballot last Thursday – has been easy to work with so far, their events have taken a one-way approach to dialogue that limits choice and options for women. The Daily strongly supports the promotion of dialogue on campus, and we're not against Choose Life because their ideology doesn't agree with ours; we're against their methods.

Having a pro-life group on its own wouldn't be a bad thing, but after waiting six months, we've seen that Choose Life is primarily an anti-abortion group focused on vilifying women who have had or are considering an abortion, rather than providing support to pregnant students choosing to carry to term. This message has come through in Choose Life's two most notable events – a fetus display at the Y intersection and a talk by Mary Meehan. During her speech, Meehan said, "Some choices really should not even be considered, because they do involve harming or taking the lives of other people." The Daily finds this attitude offensive, and we disagree with the SSMU Equity Officers' decision to deem the fetus display appropriate.

In considering whether having this club makes students feel unsafe, or whether it targets a vulnerable group on campus, SSMU has argued no – it's not so simple – but we disagree. Targeting pregnant university students with shock tactics is different than barraging omnivores with animal cruelty pamphlets. Though no two women facing the choice of abortion are the same, the choice is a difficult one – the outcome they choose is irreversible, intimately tied up with their own body, and comes with considerable social pressure surrounding it. A campus group does not have the right to make an individual feel ashamed for her choice, when it does not take into account the diverse factors that can lead to unwanted pregnancy – or the external pressures and practical realities that might guide her choice.

Besides that, we already have referral services on campus, for instance with the Union for Gender Empowerment and the Sexual Assault Centre of the McGill Students' Society (SACOMSS). Despite being a resource primarily for survivors of sexual assault and their allies, SACOMSS already offers referrals to a variety of services – including ones for adoption, post-abortion counseling, and student-parent support – for everyone, and their volunteers undergo extensive training. While we worry that Choose Life might only guide students who approach them to centres that share their ideology, SACOMSS's services are offered in a non-directional way, meaning they believe each person knows their situation best.

The Daily also supports any group that seeks to provide support for students who choose to go through with their pregnancies, and for reducing the stigma directed toward student-parents. We are not, however, in support of club status for a group that has clearly demonstrated that one of its intentions is to limit choice. By targeting students who have had or are considering an abortion, Choose Life does a disservice to undergraduate students at McGill – and being polite, filling out paperwork on time, and removing the intention to provide "post-abortion help" from their mandate are not sufficient reasons for Council's decision.

Only dialogue can allow pregnant women to inform themselves in making what they feel to be the best decision. Limiting choice has no place in that process.

EDITORS' NOTE

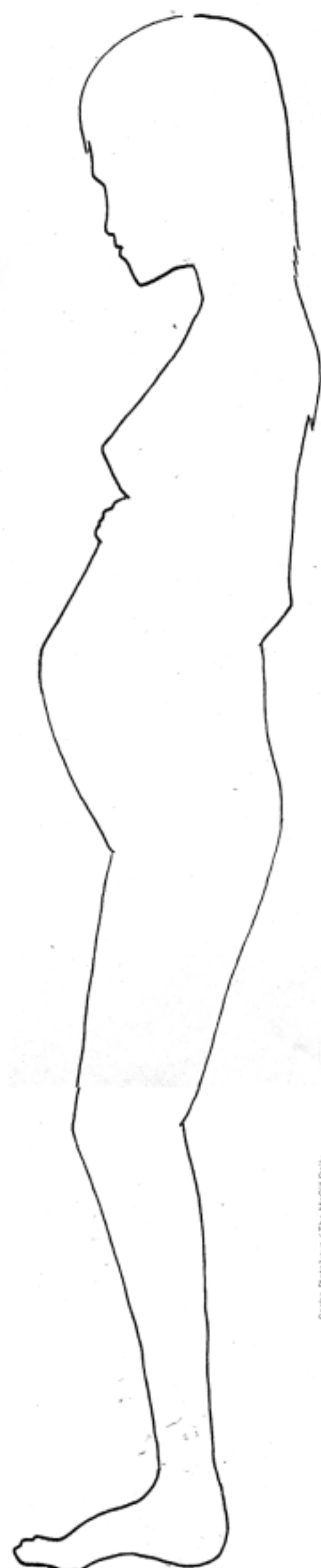
Celebrating geeks

So what is a geek? Is it a pejorative term for the technologically-minded, or maybe does it just require excessive knowledge of something inglorious and bizarre? Throughout this special issue – with articles ranging from bridge to *Battlestar Galactica*, the McGill Computer Task Force to beer – we wanted to make it clear that the moniker of geekiness is far from set in stone.

These days, we like to think of geeks as those uncelebrated individuals who have a quirky obsession with something found in murkier areas of the mainstream map. Geekdom is no longer confined to the world of computers or Star Trek; one can obsess over far more than ever before. It almost seems as if everyone has a bit of a geek inside.

There's nothing wrong with being obsessed with obscure things. In the current world of specialization, where we all have to hold on to that little quirk that makes us unique, it's hard not to be a geek, and the Internet has made it easier for those with nuanced interests to band with others with similarly quirky interest. There seems to be a slow acceptance of geekiness; pop culture now embraces geek icons like Weezer, Steve Jobs, Quentin Tarantino – even Obama sometimes cracks the odd Star Trek joke. We might just be living in the Geek Age, where the onslaught of geekiness has diffused into hipsters, indie rockers, and rappers alike.

From Ancient Geeks like Plato and Parmenides, Newton and Napoleon, Copernicus and Curie, Darwin and Dawkins, our history is full of geeks. So we say to you, bring out the geek inside yourself. Celebrate it, and think about how geeks like yourselves make the world go round.



Sasha Plotnikova / The McGill Daily

Erratum

In "So you want more Theatre in The Daily, do ya" (Commentary, February 12), The Daily wrote that

Tuesday Night Café (TNC) puts on four per year, most of which sell out, resulting in 1600 tickets sold.

In fact, TNC put on three shows this year, with only about half selling out, resulting in at most 1200

tickets sold.
The Daily regrets the errors.

