

PETERSHAM

LUCAS IHLEIN

APRIL 4 - MAY 31 2006

just \$5.00 (\$4.00 for locals)

the 'sham FAQs

What is Bilateral Petersham?

It's an art project. For two months (April/May 2006) I will be undertaking an artist-in-residence in Petersham, a suburb of Sydney, Australia.

Don't you already live in Petersham? You mean you're doing an artist-in-residence in your own suburb?

Yep. I've lived here for nearly two years. I wanted to be artist-in-residence in my own place, rather than going away somewhere exotic.

Is it true you won't leave Petersham for the whole two months?

Yeah that's right. I am restricting myself to stay within the suburb boundaries (as drawn up by Marrickville Council).

Hey Lucas, I'm having a party/screening/exhibition/wedding...but it's in Surry Hills/Newtown/Vaucluse/Stammore. Can't you make an exception just this once?

Nope. Sorry.*

Can I come and visit you?

Sure thing!

Where exactly are the borders of Petersham?

Good question. See the map on the back page...

O—K. Umm, so tell me again...WHY are you doing this?

Read "beginning bilateral petersham" - it might shed some light...

Hey, I know something/someone amazing about/in Petersham. How can I let you know about it?

I would LOVE to hear from you. Email me on shortleftleg@yahoo.com or leave a comment in the blog. Better still, get in touch and we'll meet up and talk about it / visit it / eat it.

Is someone funding you to stay at home for two months? How can I get in on that??

Yep, Marrickville Council is funding it with their artist grants. Cool eh? Contact the council for more info. (see <http://www.marrickville.nsw.gov.au>)

*(Ahem. In hindsight, this was a little hasty. A few border transgressions did take place during the project. Read about them inside...)

Acknowledgement of Country: Petersham is situated within the traditional lands of the Cadigal Wangal people. All boundaries and borders discussed in this blog are the recent fabrications of the European invaders of this country.

For more info see the Cadigal Wangal website: <http://www.cadigalwangal.com.au/>

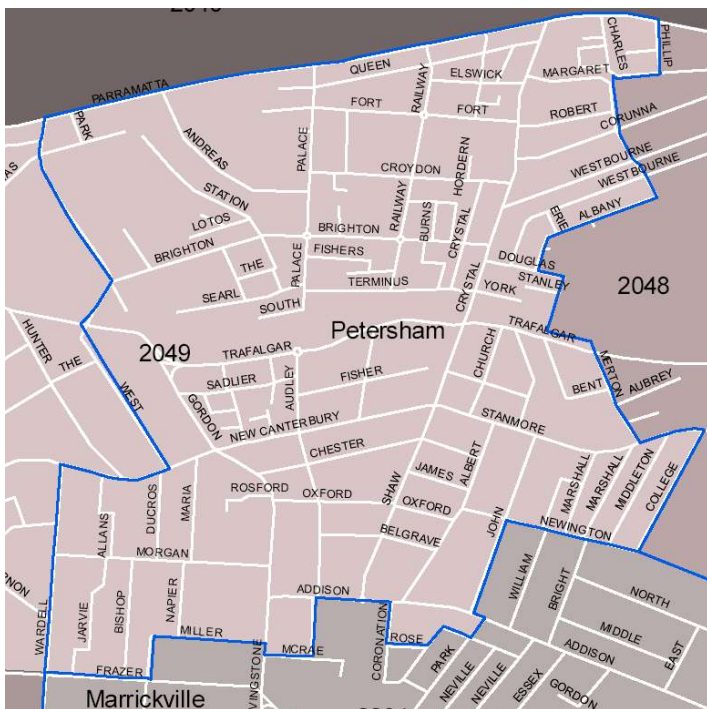
The PETERSHAM banner used on the front of this document is appropriated from a 1902 poster for the sale of land on the Blair Athol Estate (roughly the current location of the bowling club. Thanks to Chrys in the archives, where the poster is housed).

Big big thanks to Bec the flatmate, Luciana from next door, Rachelle and Wolfie, Anna BB from the council, Vanessa, Lisa del Nord, Daniel B, Vince, Chrys, Lester, Fiona, Jasmin, Ruben, Drazic, Anthony from the bottlo, Sam the Mayor himself, Mum, Dad, and the dozens of locals and ring-ins who feature in these pages, not to mention all you loyal commenters and blog lurkers, and those of you I'm still yet to meet.

May we all rendezvous in the not-too-distant future for rollerskating at the Majestic.

Technical note: these pages are a printed out version of a blog. A blog is a “web-log” ie an internet diary. Peppered throughout the text are underlined words which might not mean much to you - they are “hyperlinks” - and if you were online, you'd be able to click 'em to go to another web page. They make your reading experience that much richer. You may wish to look up the blog www.thesham.info from time to time to chase up these links. There's a bundle of photos online linked to the blog too. And if you're online, you can leave comments relating to any of the entries you're reading.

This hard-copy version of the blog is printed for your convenience. Your eyes will go square if you try and read the whole thing on the screen. However, undoubtedly more content will be generated after you receive your printout. Feel free to print out pages from your own computer and add them to your ever-growing 'sham folder. To print, choose a particular post, then click "file"- "print" (you may need to switch off background colours).



Sort of a disclaimer: this document is undoubtedly riddled with errors. The experiences recorded herein are the product of the fallible mind of Lucas Ihlein, and often do not reflect objective reality. Apologies to those who feel they've been inaccurately represented. Please get in touch, lucas@thesham.info, and we'll try and sort it out eh. Alternatively, leave a comment on the blog.

Final note: although this project is “officially” finished at the end of May 2006, I am continuing to live in Petersham. Please get in touch and we'll keep the whole shebang running (albeit less intensively) indefinitely. The blog will remain online and active.

All the best, Lucas Ihlein.



This project was generously and somewhat unexpectedly supported by the Marrickville Council Art Grant Scheme.

beginning bilateral petersham

The clock ticked round to midnight and I sat in the kitchen watching it. When all the hands pointed to twelve, I took two photos. Without the flash, the clock looked yellow and blurry. Flash-frozen, on the other hand, it looked like it had been caught in the act. Embarrassed at having been sprung doing something vaguely shameful but essentially harmless.

That's how I brought in the third of April. The beginning of "Bilateral Petersham," aka "my Petersham project," aka "The Petersham Lockdown." There was no tangible difference between one moment, where I was not "on the job," and the next, when the "project" had officially begun. No fanfare, no ribbon cutting, no glass of champagne. I went to bed and read a bit and then fell asleep.



For two months (well, a bit less actually) I will not leave the suburb borders of the mighty Petersham. Petersham is a smallish neighborhood in the "inner-west" of Sydney. It runs between Parramatta Road (at the north end) and Addison Road (at the south end), and is surrounded by such glamorous destinations as Leichhardt (north), Lewisham (west), Marrickville (south), and Stanmore (east). And I will remain entirely within it until the end of May, as (self-appointed) artist-in-residence of Petersham.

Why am I doing this?

It's a bit of a long story, but here's the haiku version. In April-May last year, I was artist-in-residence in Kellerberrin, a tiny town in the West Australian wheatbelt. 1000 residents, wheat and sheep, declining population, etcetera. For the two months I was there, I kept a blog each morning, about who I met, what we talked about - a document of mutual curiosity between a city dweller and his rural hosts. That blog is here: <http://www.kellerberrin.com> (email me if you'd like a hard copy). My question on returning to Sydney was: "how would this exact same process work in my own neighborhood?"

So here I am.

The Kellerberrin project came out of my interest in developing a "gardening" approach to making art - how, I wondered, could I do a little bit every day, not too fatiguing, and at the end of a period, the work would be done? No more busting a gut trying to reach a deadline, racing around like a madman to produce an explosive, climactic event, and then mopping up the fallout afterwards. The daily blog writing seemed to do the trick. I was getting towards some sort of integration between art and life, even if I had to disappear to a place three hours drive from Perth to do it. But why should I have to do that? To go somewhere exotic - to BE someone exotic to the locals, in order to achieve this integration? Could this be done at home?

Ahem. Perhaps this is a project doomed to failure. A city suburb is not a small country town, where folks stop and chat outside the chemist for twenty minutes before getting on with their day. I've been living in Petersham nearly two years now, and I know only a few of my nearest neighbours. I nod and smile at the folks in the deli, but they don't know that my flatmate and me grew a great crop of tomatoes this year; that I had some art in an exhibition which opened last Saturday; that this last year I've been a gibbering emotional mess; that I'm studying for my PhD. They don't even know that I can't indulge in the Portuguese charcoal grilled chicken for which our main street is renowned. In the city, we somehow stay strangers for a very long time.

Is this an artificial attempt to make friends with my neighbours? Why do I need to use "art" as an excuse to meet people? Am I exploiting my fellow citizens for some sort of pseudo-ethnographic study (which, by the way, will have none of the rigor or tangible research outcomes as that discipline)? Is this just a Big Brother style "reality show" - a document of the process of slowly going nuts through self-deprivation, so you all (dear readers) can get yer voyeuristic kicks?

I hate to say it, but: “only time will tell.”

This entry was posted on Tuesday, April 4th, 2006 at 11:41 am and is filed under ['sham dailies](#).

One Response to “beginning bilateral petersham”

1. *nick* Says:

[April 9th, 2006 at 8:56 pm e](#)

I think this is a beautiful project. I love your ideas of life as art and art as life. Makes me smile just to think of it.

Creating community is an extremely valuable thing for any society.

In a small town you are forced to interact with people who you have nothing more in common than a place, in a city we have the luxury of choosing our friends. Sometime I wonder what we lose by having this choice.

Petersham Tuesday April 4, 2006

Luciana came around about ten. She's my nearest neighbor, from the flat next door. She's from Milan, and we speak “recreational” Italian with each other (usually only when the topic of conversation is not too complicated, or we don't need an urgent resolution to a practical issue). Otherwise its English all the way. Lately, though, I think she has decided that I need the practice, so there's been more Italian, even when it gets a bit hard-going. Yesterday, for instance, we were convening to write a list for our landlord about security issues. Luciana was broken into last Tuesday. Our next neighbours across, Rachelle and Rob, were burgled on Thursday. Bec and I were cleaned out in early February. The cops said Petersham is being “done over” in a big way, lately. All this has created an atmosphere of mild paranoia, and we're demanding that the landlords install better locks and maybe some bars on vulnerable windows. From Luciana, I learned that the word for lock (which needs fixing on her screen door) is “serratura”. Her windows have “serrature” installed, but some of them are a bit wobbly (“molle”) and hardly inspire confidence. We also need gates (“cancelli”) at the front of the whole building - there are none, and so the crooks can easily slip down the side passage and carry out their dastardly schemes, virtually invisible from the street. We made up this list, drank some coffee, and bitched about thieves (how could they be so bold?) and landlords (how could they be so stingy?)

Common enemies bring neighbours together. This truism seemed to be a major theme of last night's reading group. I'm part of a book club started by Anne Kay, made up of about a dozen artists and interesting folk. I agreed to host last night's meeting, since I was Petersham-bound anyway. The reading was a text by a guy called Dave Graeber, the first chapter of a thick book called “Towards an Anthropological Theory of Value: The False Coin of Our Own Desires” (or something offputting like that). Graeber's problem seems to be the following:

Economic theories are based around the idea that individuals seek to get the maximum amount of things they desire, and try to sacrifice as little as possible to do so. However, there are many examples where this is clearly not the case - where “values” other than economic maximisation are seen as desirable - for instance, “honour”, “happiness”, and “belonging”. These values are fiendishly difficult to quantify (they do not seem to be exchangeable for money), and even more confounding, they do not seem to be able to be compared across different cultures. Could a cross-cultural theory be formulated which took into account these “infungible” yet desirable values? (“[Fungible](#)” means exchangeable).

Whew. It's a lofty project. As Virginia said, kind of like asking for the meaning of life.

Closer to earth, we talked a fair bit about the idea of gift giving. The way that giving a gift creates social bonds. When I gave Rohan, who lives around the corner, a pumpkin from our garden, it bound us together in some way. A relationship of “reciprocity” was established. And in fact, he immediately invited me to come over and try his homebrew some time. (To be fair, he's been trying to get me over for beers for ages). But even if there is nothing “exchanged” in this way, the giver does in fact receive something in

return - a good feeling, a sense of wellbeing, a self-importance about my vegie-growing prowess, possibly even a superiority over the gift recipient. For whatever reason, it seems we are addicted to giving, binding us together in a social network of (unspoken) obligation which (maybe) makes us feel like we belong.

“Belonging” seems to be a biggy. Last Wednesday I went to a meeting run by the local council. It was for “strategic planning” and we had focus groups talking about what we liked and don’t like about our neighbourhoods. It seemed that in Petersham, what we love is the “sense of community”. Somehow this is associated with “strip shopping” (like old village main streets), and definitely lacking in big malls like the Marrickville Metro. Knowing your neighbours - having little chats to them when picking up a loaf of bread - is a “value” we esteem highly.

We talked a lot about this stuff. Jane and Anne (who live near Marrickville station) told a story about their neighbour, an old Greek lady who is a kind of a “node” in the neighbourhood network. Her nosiness means that she’s a conduit of information about everyone up and down the street. When they moved in, she even asked Jane and Anne if they were married. Anne told her that they were partners, but by law they were not allowed to marry. She figured that if the lady was going to pass along gossip, she might as well get it right. The “node” lady was mildly irritating perhaps, definitely intrusive in a way we are not used to, but I don’t think they would want to trade her in for a “private” street where everyone just minds their own business.

Everyone filtered off from the reading group, and I made vague plans with Lisa to “ride the boundary” of Petersham sometime later this week. I’ve got the maps, I just need to mark them up with the exact streets where the ‘sham butts up against the other burbs. Then we’ll hop on our bikes and get an idea of exactly how much territory I’ve got to play in. Until then, I’m not sure exactly how claustrophobic I should be feeling...

This entry was posted on Tuesday, April 4th, 2006 at 12:01 pm and is filed under [‘sham dailies](#).

2 Responses to “Petersham Tuesday April 4, 2006”

1. *lisa* Says:

[April 9th, 2006 at 8:57 pm e](#)

I gave a gift of a pumpkin from my garden to a neighbour who’d caught me red-handed picking lavender from theirs. The offering was flavoured more by mortification, guilt and reparation than any good vibes, and went totally unacknowledged. Maybe there’s an instance of gifting without return...

I reckon there’ll be stiff competition on the node-front from Papa Borsellino. He seems to know/act like he knows everyone in the shop at any given time. Perhaps it’s the false intimacy of the merchant, but he dishes out conception advice to J & S at the checkout, much to J’s horror!

Elegant blogging as always Lucas...

2. *infra dig* Says:

[April 9th, 2006 at 9:00 pm e](#)

sounds like you are destined to become the local node-lad, during the next two months, with eyes and ears to the ground. enjoy the lock in.

Petersham Wednesday April 5, 2006

I’m sitting in my living room, gazing blankly at the computer screen, on the third morning of my Petersham *artist in residence in my own neighbourhood*. It’s just after nine, and I’m finding it difficult to concentrate. About fifty metres away, construction work is going on, grinding pulsing abrasive rasping noises which permeate the house. I feel this noise in my body as much as in my ears. It’s unsettling, irritating, and difficult to ignore. “Luckily,” we live three houses away from the building site. I can’t imagine what it must be like for the folks who live next door.

This noise started up at 7.32am. I know this because I looked at the time on my phone - I had slept in and missed the make-up yoga class I was supposed to go to, after already missing last Friday's class. So there I am, lying in bed, staring at the ceiling, doubly punished for my sloth. First, missing yoga is a punishment in itself. Yoga is like flossing - it makes me feel good about myself. Whether I floss or "dog-pose", I'm taking a moment out from just using my back to hold up my head as I type, or my teeth to chew carrots dipped in hommous. These body bits finally get some of the attention they deserve. Going to that yoga class helps me to organise my mind, too, so I can concentrate better.

So: the second punishment for sleeping in, is my inability to concentrate right now on writing these words (exacerbated, of course, by the construction din).

It almost doesn't need saying that doing a residency in Petersham - where I already live - is a completely different thing to doing one in Kellerberrin, two thousand miles from home. There's been no geographical shift to displace me from my everyday. I'm still here, sitting in amongst all my stuff. A lot of it is calling to me: "Lucas, come and read me!" (books); "Lucas, come and tidy up my dodgy code!" (unfinished websites); "Lucas, come and work through this list of things to do!" (other collaborative projects still in process). Juggling all these things in my head makes it hard to find a moment of clarity and simplicity. Which (I think) is what I crave.

[...pause while I answer three phone calls...]

Despite all this distraction, I did manage to find some time yesterday to "be here". I was sitting on my balcony eating lunch in the sun, looking down over Chester Street as folks came and went. There's a fair bit of lunchtime parking goes on, since we live just around the corner from Silva's (the Portuguese chicken shop). In the apartments across the way, a lady has been working hard for about a week now. She's been painting the inside of the place, and I assumed that she was the new owner about to move in, or that she was the landlord doing a bit of renovating in between tenants. Both of these assumptions were wrong.

I went over with a pumpkin from the garden and said hello. Her name is Marie, and it turns out she's the sister of the Barbara who lives there. Barbara is very frail looking, I sometimes see her walking slowly around the neighbourhood, but we've never actually met. Barbara is in hospital at the moment. Last week she fell and hurt her hip, and Marie said it was three days before discovered her at home. While she's in hospital, Marie is taking the liberty of fixing a few things up. Even though Barbara has been renting there for fifteen years, the landlord refuses to invest a few grand on repainting, replacing carpets, fixing up dicky electrical sockets, etc. Marie's been pushing them to get their act together, but at a certain point she got fed up and just decided to do it all herself. I told her that if she needed a hand with anything, especially, you know, since I'm tall and all that, she should just give me a yell. I'm almost always at home. She said Barbara loves pumpkin, and she would cook up something to take to the hospital. I told Marie to watch out for break-ins too, since our recent local crime wave. But she said she'd already been already clued in, from some guy passing by walking a dog.

As we talked, a guy passed by, walking a dog, and waved "hi". It got me thinking about these dog-walking people. I might have to get myself a surrogate dog.

About three o'clock, I went for a walk, over to the north side of the station. Just wandering aimlessly, with a stop in at the yoga place to arrange for the make-up class I missed this morning. Away from the main drag, Petersham is pretty quiet, on the whole. Near Terminus Street, at a cul-de-sac, I said hi to an old fella sitting on his porch. Kids from school filtered through to the station, gossiping and chatting away as they walked along. I went past the bowling club. A dusty sign urged me to "learn to bowl." I'd really like to, actually. I remember hearing that the club was in trouble, so I'm not sure if people still bowl there. There wasn't any action yesterday, but the greens still looked pretty well kept. I looped around the Petersham Tafe on West Street, and headed for home, saying hi to a young man in a lurid shirt out the front of a boarding house. He looked surprised and pleased to be greeted.

On the home stretch, I called into Wenchai Publication, a small offset printing office on Canterbury Road. I think I need to get some cards made up, with the blog URL, and a little info about what I'm doing here in the 'sham. Maybe having an official looking card will help to make it a bit clearer for people to see what I'm trying to do here. Or, um, a bit clearer for me.

Petersham Thursday April 6, 2006

Up way too late last night compiling statistics for the MCA's education programme. They hand out all these questionnaires to school groups who attend workshops, with answers on a scale of one to five. You know the sort of thing, one is agree strongly, five is disagree strongly, and you have to interpret the numbers in between as best you can. This was chronically boring work, but my boss, Justine, was nice enough to send it my way, since I obviously can't come into the museum for work. My first experience of "telecommuting" was a bit dull. Compiling statistics made me wonder about the process of gathering information - how the technology for recording pretty much determines what results you're going to get. I wonder what that means for this blog?

In the early evening I went down to the Petersham Town Hall, for the Heritage and Conservation awards ceremony. Apparently it's Heritage week (or month?) and there have been bike rides and tours and talks, looking at old stuff around the area.

(Coincidentally, it's also "Seniors Week", but I don't think the two are related...)

About seven projects were nominated, from various house renovations which "retain significant aesthetic and material elements from the original"; an environmental scheme to stop ammonia-infused runoff water going into the Alexandra Canal; to that big Silo apartment conversion thing down in Newtown.

The silo project won it. I guess it was the most ambitious of the proposed schemes, and it's better to use it than let it rot. But I do know there's plenty of people who don't like that one. Whether the reasons for not liking it are its "modern" architectural style, and the fact that it's "bringin' in the yuppies," I'm not sure, but it does raise some interesting problems about the concept of "heritage". I'd like to know more about ways to negotiate the quicksand of heritage. The trick is to honour the aesthetic styles of the past (without fetishising them) while at the same time rewarding innovative new design; and "preserving the character" of a neighbourhood while allowing it to change and develop (and avoid stagnation). Whew, it's a biggy, and at the very polite awards ceremony, nobody was really going there. At the very least, Marrickville Council doesn't seem to be urgently gripped by development-bucks fever a-la Frank Sartor, so there's time for these problems to be pondered.

One of my fave nominated projects was the restoration of Eliza Donnithorne's grave in the Newtown Cemetery. Eliza, apparently, was due to get married in 1856, but her betrothed stood her up on the wedding day. She decided to wait for him, declaring that the wedding table (cake and all) would not be disturbed until he arrived to claim her. Well, he never did, and when 30 years later she died a bitter spinster, the cake was finally tidied away. Legend has it that Charles Dickens based Miss Havesham on Eliza, when he wrote *Great Expectations*. This story - both the wedding bit, and the Dickens influence - is pretty much unsubstantiated. On the ever-trusty web I found an account of the life of Eliza by Matt Murphy. Matt found that there may have been more than a pinch of willful mythmaking which snowballed as the story was passed along:

Much research I had done has only turned up unsourced newspaper articles giving various accounts of the story and the Dickens connection; each article seeming to be loosely based on those that preceded it.

See Matt's webpage for all the juicy gossip and myth debunking about poor Eliza:

<http://www.sydneyarchives.info/Memories/donnithorne.html>

Regardless of the truth of her tragic tale, Eliza WAS buried in Newtown, where she rested in peace for over a 120 years. Last year her grave was vandalised - the tombstone pushed over and smashed onto the ground. The local community, rallied together by the St Stephen's church rector, pulled together and got some restoration students and expert stonemasons to reassemble the grave, better than ever. I reckon it's interesting that a somewhat dubious historical account can still inspire such "fervour to preserve". The truth of the story is evidently much less important than the pleasure of the tale. And we love the idea that "one of our own" could be immortalised in Dicken's landmark of English literature (even if in doing so she had to sacrifice her entire normal life).

It's strange - this historical stuff - it's all just stories, just "fiction" until we find some personal connection with it ourselves. At the awards ceremony, I met a feisty lady called Florence Bell, who last night won a special recognition prize for her work in digging the dirt on the Petersham plane crash. Apparently, during the second world war, a "Mosquito" plane crashed into the local school (now the Petersham West Street Tafe). Florence was there at the time, and she's spent many years piecing together the history, tracking down the families of the pilots, and creating a memorial down at the Tafe. She told me that the families were sent a telegram saying only that the plane had been lost. They were delighted to finally have some concrete place to visit and hang their memories. I asked Florence how the plane crashed in the first place, but she said nobody ever found out. From the other end of the tale, however, there's no limit to the disclosure - last year (or the year before?) Florence organised a function which brought a whole lot of the class of '45 out of the woodwork, to tell what they remembered: "I was in year two, in Mrs Bloggs' class, and all of a sudden we heard this horrible screech coming from across the way..." and so on...

Peter Dunn has a short account of the crash here: <http://home.st.net.au/~dunn/ozcrashes/nsw20.htm>
His most macabre snippet is this one:

Bill Fitch who was eight years old at the time of the crash, remembers hearing what he described as a petrol tank exploding. He ran into the playground and discovered one of the airmen's body embedded in the bitumen.

I would have liked to spend more time with Florence, but she was a popular lady, and had many folks to attend to. Who else was there? Tom Uren was the guest of honour, he launched the night with a great speech about how everything in the world was connected. It was a pretty new-school concept for an old-school Labor politician. His presence might have had something to do with the fact that Marrickville (our local council) now has a Green mayor, a fella called Sam Byrne. The story goes that as soon as Sam was elected, he relinquished his mayoral Fairlane for a bicycle. I must contact him and ask him about that one...

*

Good news on the dog-front. I have located a pooch to be my surrogate walking pardner. Wolfie, his name is, and he lives next door. Here is the correspondence which led to this breakthrough. The background is that my neighbours, Rachelle and Rob, have a couple of kids who look pretty promising as artists, and I recommended that they take em down to the MCA for school holiday workshops. I followed this up with the dog request...

hi there rachelle, seems odd sending you an email from next door, but here you go!

here is a link to the MCA for their art workshops. its seems there will be some happening during the easter hols' - if you book in, talk to melina, and tell her youre my next door neighbour. she'll get a kick out of it...

http://www.mca.com.au/default.asp?page_id=55

hey, i was wondering if i can ask you guys a favour?
you know how i am doing this petersham project where i dont leave the suburb for 2 months?
well, in a way, its about meeting more neighbours and locals. i am writing up each day in a blog (at the moment its here - <http://bilateral.blog-city.com>- but i will be moving it to its own location soon...)

anyway, it seems like a good way to bump into folks is while walking a dog. so, maybe, if its alright with you guys, could i take woofy for walks? i know im not exactly the best dog person in the world (unlike bec for instance), but i think i would do ok. in fact, maybe i could take bec with me too.

what do you think of this crazy idea? would it work out? if so, when is a good time to do it? in the mornings early? (seems lotsa folks walk dogs then before work...) if not, any time would be fine at your convenience!!

bilateral petersham

i hope this request isnt too odd...cheerio, lucas

lucas

Yes it does seem a bit weird. Thanks for the info I think the kids will be very interested and I love the café!

The request is not so weird. Everyone comes to talk to you when you have a dog. Wolfie would love to go for walks. Most times of the day there is somebody with a dog although morning and afternoon are peak times. Maudrell Park and Petersham park are hot favourites but have seen a few dogs at the park off Livingstone road (is that still in Petersham I wonder?) Wolfie has some friends that he sees sometimes in the afternoon. Whatever suits you - for me you would be doing a huge favour particularly on days that I work. The guy across the road walks most days. We always walk to school and home on Mondays (if I am not working) so you are welcome to join us. Let me know what you think. Or call across the fence!

Rachelle

thanks rachelle

i think i missed you over the back fence tonight, i went out to a heritage awards ceremony at the petersham town hall. what a bewdiful building.
well that great news re wolfie, sorry for emasculating him with the moniker woofie, i just assumed that was his name cos thats what he does!!

ok, well thursday'd be great, i'd love to take him out. i can do any time, except at 530pm the real estate agent is coming around so we can bother him about security issues. maybe i'll catch you in the morning before you leave for work, and you can give me the low down on the poo picking up and things like that. i really am a bit ignorant about canines. x lucas

This entry was posted on Thursday, April 6th, 2006 at 2:23 pm and is filed under ['sham dailies](#).

One Response to "Petersham Thursday April 6, 2006"

1. *infra dig* Says:

[April 9th, 2006 at 9:06 pm e](#)

Well, things are certainly hotting up for you in Petersham, un-earting the past seems to make the present more vibrant somehow. Speaking of Seniors week, it is also Youth week in NSW, which seems mad. There are another 51 weeks in the year, you think that the virtues of 'youth' and seniority could be celebrated in different weeks. It does conjure, however, great images of dance parties with mixed crowds of under 25's and the over 60's- no middle dwellers. Happy dog walking!

[Petersham Friday April 7, 2006](#)

One for the fans only: this post is going up on Saturday arvo, whereas it was really written on Friday. I also wrote for [Barbara Campbell](#) yesterday, which threw me out a little. Not that I had to do any extra work - I just edited down the second section of this entry to squeeze in under her 1001 word limit. Once I'd done this chopping, it felt like quite a different piece. I wasn't sure whether it was better or worse. Nor do I really have any criteria for judging. I tried to make it a bit less wordy, so it would be easier to read out aloud (which is what Barbara does, each day, at sunset). But then I thought, hmm, maybe I should use the reduced version in my own blog, so I put off putting it up online to think about it. To cut a long story short, here's what I've done: the original longer wordier version is below. If you want to compare and contrast, check out the brief [version in Barbara's archive](#).

OK, enough boring admin talk, on with yesterday's post...

My first walk with young Wolfie was fairly uneventful. Rachelle said that earlier in the morning (say before eight) is the time to go. I guess that's when people go out for some exercise before work. Of course, being me, I only picked him up at a quarter past eight. Wolfie's a friendly little fellow, black and very fluffy and about medium-sized, for a dog. Certainly not mean and lean and "hungry like a wolf". He comes up to your knees I guess. He's not too old, maybe about six months. Bec and I remember when the family brought him home. We could hear him yapping away happily next door.

Rachelle put on his lead, which fastens over the mouth and the back of the head. Apparently this is more comfortable than the traditional neck-strangling kind. And off we went. Straight up Chester, under the shadow of the old water tower, left at Crystal Street, and a long wait for the lights to change in the sunshine outside the jellywrestling pub. Then across Canterbury Road, which changes its name to Stanmore Road at that point, and down past the crazy collectable toy store to Maundrell Park. It was deserted. Maundrell's a smallish green space, with a gazebo and some playground equipment. Wolfie and I did a few loops around.

I'm pretty sure we were both thinking: "is this all there is to it?"

There was a message stapled to a tree: someone had found a set of keys in the park. I took a photo of this probably illegal (but clearly good-willed) grassroots communicative action. For some reason I liked the idea of the sound of a staple gun firing off in the peaceful park.

Speaking of messages on poles...Wolfie sniffs the base of almost every tree, but he never seems to leave his own messages. Nor did my canine friend poo even once, on our walk, though I had a plastic bag just in case. We left the park and crossed over, past Borsellino's vegie shop and down John St, crossing over to stay in the morning sun. John is a grand wide street with a gentle incline, and some beautiful big old decrepit terraces. At the foot of the hill we turned right into Addison, and said a friendly hello to the lollypop man. At the T junction we took a right into Livingstone, where a bunch of locals waiting for the bus smiled at us, tall man and fluffy black dog.

From there, its just a short hop back up to Chester and we're home. No other dogs encountered along the way. We'd clearly missed peak hour.

*

In the afternoon, I decided to hit the Petersham op shops. In the almost two years I've lived in the 'sham, I have never visited them. This was clearly an oversight on my part. On the other hand, I wonder if it's an indication of a changing lifestyle. I used to be addicted to op shops. But accumulating stuff doesn't seem like such a great idea anymore. I've got nowhere to put it, and besides, there's the whole guilty sense of responsibility to salvaged junk which "just might possibly have a use" sometime in the future.

However, (here comes some home-grown philosophy) I do feel strongly that visiting an op shop while in the throes of an art project is a little bit like channeling some divine energy, or the gods of chance, John Cage style. I think other artists might back me up on this theory. It's not for nothing they're got "opportunity" in the name. And it's not just the inert objects sitting on the shelves which make these divine chancey vibrations. It's you. You're open to the "value" of stuff beyond mere utility or style. You let the shop speak to you, inspire you. Anything could happen.

I dunno, maybe this is how regular people feel when they go shopping normally, and I'm just making a big deal out of it.

Anyway, a charge of electricity ran through my body when I entered the "community shop" up on Crystal Street. A gust of wind banged the glass door closed behind me, whacking me on the butt. I was immediately drawn to the book section, where I struck gold. Here's what I found:

Ursula Meyer, *Conceptual Art*, (1972). In the back cover blurb:

An essential aspect of Conceptual Art is its self-reference; often the artists define the intentions of their work as part of their art. Thus, many Conceptual Artists advance

propositions or investigations.

The book is more an anthology of projects, and there are some great ones I haven't seen before. Like Vito Acconci's *Step Piece* (1970) on page 3:

An eighteen-inch stool is set up in my apartment and used as a step. Each morning, during the designated months, I step up and down the stool at the rate of thirty steps a minute; each morning, the activity lasts as long as I can perform it without stopping...Announcements are sent to the public, who can see the activity performed, in my apartment, any time during the performance-months.

Acconci's endurance improved dramatically: over the course of 28 days, his stepping time increases from three minutes to twenty three!

Joseph A Devito, *The Interpersonal Communication Book* (8th ed. 1998). Uh-oh, there's some serious stuff in this uni text book which I am going to have to deal with ASAP. Take this section called "outing" on page 79:

Self-disclosure...is a process by which you reveal to other people information about yourself. Although at times you may be forced to self-disclose, we normally think of it as a voluntary process in which you control the amount of information you reveal to others about yourself. There is, however, another side to self-disclosure and that occurs when someone else reveals your hidden self, when someone else takes information from your hidden self and makes it public.

Moving right along, I also picked up what looked like a shocker of a pop-psych number by Edward de Bono. I couldn't resist - it was called *I am Right - You are Wrong* (1990) ... and Italo Calvino's *Marcovaldo, or, The Seasons in the City* (1963) a gorgeous set of tales which starts off with an urban mushroom hunt. This one I will pass on to my friend Diego who's doing a project about weeds as misplaced botany ... and *Sleeping Problems (Including Directions for Making an Analysis of Your Sleep and Keeping a Sleep Diary)* by Dr Dietrich Langen ... finally *Krapp's Last Tape* and *Embers* by Samuel Beckett, a book which I don't know anything about, but at twenty cents for such a specimen of high culture, how could I resist?

As I pottered around the shop I couldn't help but overhear a conversation between Pat and Caroline, two of the op shop ladies. Pat's a volunteer, Caroline obviously holds a role of higher responsibility. Pat was anxious about the upcoming Easter break, and wondering how the roster would be filled since a lot of the shop volunteers were going away. Caroline was reassuring her that she would make up a roster and they'd find a way to keep things running smoothly. My mind stopped in its tracks. Without thinking, I cleared my throat: "Um...if you're having trouble with finding people during the holidays, maybe I could help out? I'm just hanging around at the moment, and I've got a bit of spare time..."

Caroline quizzed me about what I do, am I a student?, etc etc. Before long I was telling her everything about the Petersham residency. She was clearly curious. She said she was into art, especially collaborative artworks, where many people contribute to a communal output. These projects can "bring people out of themselves". Caroline described a project she'd worked on in Manly (?) where an artist had done a drawing on a canvas using silicone. The canvas was then worked over by many people. When it dried, the artist peeled off the silicone, cutting a crisp line through the overpainting and leaving a beautiful interwoven surface - many images layered on the one canvas. She liked this a lot.

I explained that it's been some years since I've made a painting, that I work mainly with text now, but who knows what could happen? Since I have to put together an exhibition towards the end of my residency, maybe some sort of collaborative artwork could be made. I described my process a bit, you know, allowing the shape of an exhibition to emerge through a process, not laying it out fixed in advance, just trusting that by the time of the show, something will happen. Caroline diagnosed me as a particular personality type, based on the Meyer-Briggs scale. I can't remember what type I am, it was represented by an alphabetic letter. But anyway, it was to do with those who function better by working towards a deadline. NO! I protested, I'm trying to get away from that! That's why I've got this process of working a

little bit every day and then when the time has passed, the work is done. No more big explosive projects, no more having to mop up the mess afterwards and spend a week in bed sick from fatigue.

Well, she wasn't convinced. Perhaps I was trying to work against my normal way, but even *that* fact indicated that this daily stuff doesn't just come naturally to me.

Caroline is also interested in the process of diarising. In fact, she's thinking to start a course in harnessing your inner creativity called "The Artist's Way". It's about writing "morning pages" each day. I have heard a little about this method, although I've never tried it. Probably it would channel some powerful stuff, especially since it's not at all about releasing your writing to the public.

Caroline thought the op shop would be a good place to hang out and meet folks. I left my phone number for her, and she suggested I pop back in again soon and spend a little more time, to see if it was the right place for me.

*

Later on, my real estate agent and landlords came around to look at our security issues. There have been three break-ins recently, and we sent them a letter requesting bars on the windows down the side lane, where the crims climbed in. They pretty much poo-poo'd this suggestion. It was clear they just didn't want to spend the money, but they made up some story about "fire safety being compromised by the bars, in fact, for that reason, window bars are now illegal", etc etc.

I didn't really buy it. I must do some more research on that. The most striking thing about the visit was the demonstrated lack of sympathy for our situation. An unwillingness to express concern for fellow humans who have undergone an unfortunate event. For me, the overall impression I got was that to make this concession - to attempt to understand how we might feel - would leave the floodgates open to litigation, to compensation, in short, to further claims for expensive domestic improvements. The encounter left me irritated and depressed.

*

Postscript:

Late last night, I [googled "Meyer Briggs"](#) and found this great [personality test](#). It's full of true/false statements like:

- As a rule, current preoccupations worry you more than your future plans.
- You often think about humankind and its destiny.

and my favourite,

- Deadlines seem to you to be of relative, rather than absolute, importance.

I completed the 72 questions, revealing that my personality type is "ENFP" - which stands for "Extraverted iNtuitive Feeling Perceiving."

Apparently, ENFPs are characterised [thusly](#):

ENFPs are both "idea"-people and "people"-people, who see everyone and everything as part of an often bizarre cosmic whole. They want to both help (at least, their own definition of "help") and be liked and admired by other people, on both an individual and a humanitarian level. They are interested in new ideas on principle, but ultimately discard most of them for one reason or another.

Finally, [here's](#) another possible character analysis, which describes us ENFPs as "champion idealists" (!):

For Champions, nothing occurs which does not have some deep ethical significance, and this, coupled with their uncanny sense of the motivations of others, gives them a talent for seeing life as an exciting drama, pregnant with possibilities for both good and evil.

on the other hand...

All too often, however, Champions fall short in their efforts to be authentic, and they tend to heap coals of fire on themselves, berating themselves for the slightest self-conscious role-playing.

This entry was posted on Saturday, April 8th, 2006 at 1:39 pm and is filed under ['sham dailies](#), [walks](#).

Petersham Saturday April 8, 2006

On Friday morning, I knocked on Luciana's door. I had two things in mind. First, to debrief about the real estate visit. And second, to get her to help me carry the bench from our balcony at the back of the building, out to the front porch. That way, we can sit out there in the morning and drink our coffee. This serves three purposes. First, we catch the morning sun. At this time of year in Sydney, the air is cool, and to spend time in the sunshine is a pleasure. All humidity has disappeared.

Second, we get to check out the neighbourhood - we become local "vecchietti" (little old men and women who sit on their front porches and watch the world go by). And third, by occupying the porch, we send a message to would-be burglars that this place is not empty - so they better not try any shenanigans on us.

Like me, Luciana was pretty upset about our landlord's lack of sympathy. On the plus side, they did agree to install front gates, and I think they will send a handyman to tinker with Luciana's wobbly window locks. So I suppose that's something. We carried the bench around, and sat there with coffee. Very few people came past. I guess it was about ten by this time. One or two old folks walking by waved and said hi. It was peaceful. Not too many aeroplanes. It felt good to be there.

Later, I worked on the map given to me by Vince, Marrickville's town planning guy. It's a combo map of Petersham and Lewisham (collectively known as "the 'shams") - but since I'm only concerned with Petersham, I had to manually inscribe the border between the two. For this, the council's cool [interactive map](#) function on their website came in very handy. (Unfortunately you need Internet Explorer to use it).

I packed up my basket, picked up [Wolfie](#), and we headed out to collect Lisa for our boundary walk. Lisa lives on the other side of the tracks, the north side nearer to Parramatta Road. You get there by ducking under the railway tunnel. In the tunnel there's a mural painting of the local streetscape. Some of the paint is peeling off the walls now, and there's been plenty of graff sprayed over the top, but it still looks great. Terraces swamped with foliage bundled up against one another. I imagine the artist worked from photos, since you can see a wonky juxtaposition every three or so houses. I like this a lot.

Last week, Lisa and I talked about riding around all the boundaries of Petersham. Lisa's a keen cyclist, but I figured, since we had Wolfie at our disposal, we might take it slow and walk instead. That way, we could [consult the map](#) - which we needed to do, a lot. The suburb boundary between the 'shams can get a bit crazy sometimes. For instance, most of "[Petersham West Street TAFE](#)" is in Petersham (as you would expect). But [one small block](#) of buildings has been sliced away, and belongs to Lewisham. What crazy planning history made this so?

Another border conundrum happens within the grounds of the primary school (also on West St). As far as we could see, the boundary line runs right along the side of a netball court, before disappearing between the backyards of a set of houses. We had to backtrack and scoot around New Canterbury Rd to find the line again. The border then runs south down Wardell Road, but the map did not indicate where exactly the 'sham finishes, and Dulwich Hill begins. It could be Frazer St, where I took [a photo](#), but I'm not sure. That was it. Wolfie and I began to run out of puff. We covered only about one third of the periphery - the Western Boundary which divides Peter from Lewis. The afternoon sun was fading. We dropped off Woofie to Rachele, and had a cup of tea.

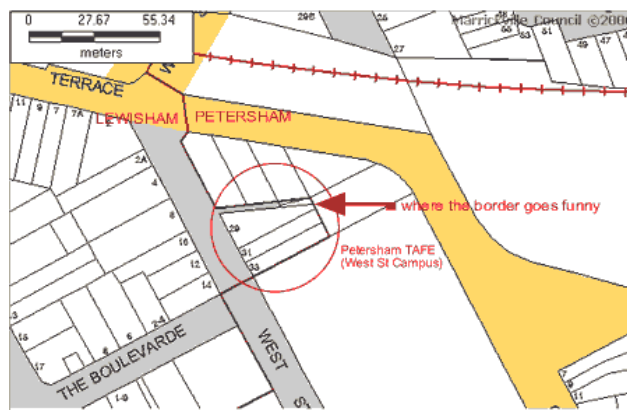
bilateral petersham

*

Educational outcomes:

Things which ARE in Petersham, (although I didn't know they were):

- Rick Damelian's prestige car shop on Parramatta Road.
- A new restaurant which looks pretty fancy, called "Manna". Lisa said its in the same spot where (damn I've forgotten the name) used to be. It was an eatery which served old fashioned roast dinners quite cheaply in the mid to late 1990s.
- A very pink shop on New Canterbury Road selling [Fashion Aids](#) - including: "Hollywood Fashion Tape" ("From hiding bra straps and securing revealing necklines, to fixing dropped hem lines, it's the hottest fashion item you won't see this season"); and "Nippits" ("Gentle on the skin, nipple covers let you keep your nipples out of sight without losing your shape, and give you the confidence to front up to meetings, greetings, and events on your terms").



Things which are NOT in Petersham (but goddam, I wish they were!):

- [Georgiou's Confectionary](#), [Officeworks](#), [The Huntsbury Hotel](#), [Portuguese Radio](#)... These are all on the north side of New Canterbury Road, and thus part of Lewisham.

Things which are NOT in Petersham (but which I'd like to know more about):

- [OZANAM Village](#) (run by the St Vincent de Paul). What goes on here?

General discoveries:

- The [fruit shop](#) near the western part of New Canterbury Road has closed down. It was only open for a number of months. Why did it shut? There was a nice Italian lady and her son running it.
- The primary school has tennis courts available for after school use, and also outdoor [chess tables](#)(!)

*

Speaking of educational... Lisa, librarian extraordinaire, borrowed two great historical books for me from the uni:

- [The Story of Petersham](#) (1793-1948), compiled by Allan M. Shepherd (former Town Clerk), Published by the Council of the Municipality of Petersham, December 1948. Gorgeous [aerial photos](#) of the 'sham, from when it obviously covered a lot more territory than it does now.
- [Petersham Public School](#) 1878-2003, by Hilary Davies, Copyright Petersham Public School P&C Association, 2003. The front cover boasts the slogan: "Our Efforts Make Us". I like this idea a lot. To which I might add: "our lack of effort also makes us". But that goes without saying. There's an exciting chapter called "The Great Tuckshop Debacle". More on this soon...

This entry was posted on Sunday, April 9th, 2006 at 1:58 pm and is filed under ['sham dailies](#), [walks](#), [the borders](#).

2 Responses to "Petersham Saturday April 8, 2006"

1. *lisa* Says:

[April 9th, 2006 at 9:16 pm e](#)

Camo's that restaurant was called Lucas...

2. *MikeL* Says:

[April 10th, 2006 at 10:07 am e](#)

....boundary defining is big stuff lucas.... GoogleWorld will show only images of buildings like the one you're in right now, not the invisible boundaries. Invisible, like the relations between neighbours, like What is Allowed.

There's a site I'm kinda monitoring in the UK. The site is [Geograph](#). Or if you want to follow some of [my thoughts](#) about the site. They discuss 1km squares quite a bit!

correspondence with barbara

A short email exchange with Barbara Campbell about serendipity and op-shops...

Hi Lucas

Thank you for your story. Have just finished doing a tiny bit of editing on it. I think it's interesting that it has that chance feel to it and then when the prompt appears, one is forced to think, oh so either, that is an extraordinary coincidence, or perhaps the whole thing is contrived. Some lucky book finds that's for sure. When I was reading your bit about channelling and op shops, I remembered this thing I'd written recently about second-hand bookshops:

The experience of going to a bookshop has always been for me like visiting the Oracle at Delphi. For a long-time I lived near Nicholas Pounder's second-hand bookshop in Darlington. The books in the window would at first glance seem unrelated to each other but if I stood looking through the glass long enough, all kinds of beautiful patterns would emerge and the synapses would start firing in sympathy. Of course they weren't as random as I in my youth had initially presumed. There really was a hidden code. One that had been written by a former owner, consciously or unconsciously following his or her own interests perhaps over a lifetime, perhaps until that life ended, until Nicholas or Simon from the bookshop was given the task of sifting through that collection, of adding the commercial imperatives of bookselling to the personal predilections of the former owner, but none the less collaborating in the act of selection and finally, of placing an even-more refined selection in the window for me to wonder, at the great serendipity of finding just the right thing, just here, just metres from the laundromat I attended every Sunday. What great good fortune.

I look forward to performing your story at 5.42pm

cheers

Barbara

—

barbara

thanks for your story about the bookshop, it was great. perhaps i can reproduce it within the blog?

yes, the delicate procedure was contrived. i didnt think it was a problem that the text prompt wasnt included in the story, but then it seemed to fit just right there.

i was not sure if this story was all that great. i cut it down a lot from a larger amount of words. in one way, i thought it improved, because it became less wordy. on the other, cutting words sometimes jeopardises flow. what do you think? then again, it was written "in the moment" and i have no distance from it yet.

Cheers

Lucas

—

Hi Lucas

On 07/04/2006, at 11:07 PM, lucas wrote:

barbara

thanks for your story about the bookshop, it was great. perhaps i can reproduce it within the

blog?

Yes, that's fine - I kind of like these interminglings between projects.

yes, the delicate procedure was contrived. i didnt think it was a problem that the text prompt wasnt included in the story, but then it seemed to fit just right there.

I'm glad you were able to insert it. I think that shock of seeing it there created interesting questions about what we were reading.

i was not sure if this story was all that great. i cut it down a lot from a larger amount of words. in one way, i thought it improved, because it became less wordy. on the other, cutting words sometimes jeopardises flow. what do you think? then again, it was written "in the moment" and i have no distance from it yet.

I thought it flowed well. I wonder what it would be like to take that journal feel of the writing and write it in a different way - the way a novelist might tell such a story for instance. Just a question for me, as I come to read more and more blogs. I like the way 1001 nights cast can accommodate different kinds of writing. It's a very handy umbrella.

And this is what I got back from Lionel:

*mmmm i like it have been reading him every day
thought it good to extend my loyalty from one project to two. he has beautiful observations
and works well at making connections. the crystal street community shop sounds lovely
doesnt it.*

and

*speaking of op shopping i had the same wondrous experience as lucas today always think that
the op shop holds s a work waiting to be unveiled today i scored a beautiful silver salt and
pepper shaker set which will become point/legs in a form, at some stage objects are so
loaded (aren't they Neil!)*

*[referring to my late partner Neil Roberts:
www.neilroberts.com.au]*

x

Barbara

This entry was posted on Sunday, April 9th, 2006 at 7:33 pm and is filed under [correspondence](#).

One Response to "correspondence with barbara"

1. [Nicholas Pounder](#) Says:
[April 23rd, 2006 at 1:50 pm](#) [e](#)

And on the other side of the window behind the books, and further back behind me, were many postcards issued each year by BC. Tacked to the flaking dampness with bluetack they chronicled a whacky creative progress through her art in 12 months and pointed obliquely to a possible direction next.

Nicholas Pounder

[hold yer horses...](#)

I'm struggling a bit to hang in here. I'm very much enjoying "just being" in Petersham, but the writing is

not coming as easily as I would have hoped. In Kellerberrin, the form of the project - blogging each day - seemed to grow from the place itself. It came easily. Here, it seems partly like I've taken a strategy from somewhere else, and attempted to apply it in another place. In fact, that's exactly what I've done. And it's an uncomfortable fit.

Something about the town of Kellerberrin being "different," and "new" to my experience meant I could write with a freshness. I *felt* that freshness. The very task I set myself - to see if I could experience that freshness in my own neighbourhood - is proving more difficult than I expected. Or maybe, I *did* expect this difficulty (it's built into the project brief), but I haven't developed a method of moving through it yet.

So, to hammer away on the daily writing regime might make me seem a busy boy. But is it distracting me from something else?...to allow something to grow from this specific place...

...while you wait for me to work through this one (or even better, while you're contacting me with your brilliant ideas!) have a look over at these photos of the [Great Petersham Pub Crawl](#). Hooroo!

This entry was posted on Sunday, April 9th, 2006 at 9:12 pm and is filed under ['sham dailies](#).

4 Responses to "hold yer horses..."

1. *Lionel* Says:

[April 10th, 2006 at 10:22 am e](#)

Hi Lucas,

this isn't really a suggestion to help you work through the daily writing challenge, but rather another writing project which i thought would adapt nicely to connecting to your local environment and for one day atleast would be a different way to approach the writing task, and put it directly out in the 'sham.

check out 'learning to love you more' and click on assignment 10. web address below.

I Have been meaning to do this assignment for a while.

It is an inspiring site done by some US artists- Harrell Fletcher, Yuri Ono and Miranda July (the artist that last year made the film- 'you, me and everyone we know') in which anyone can take on the projects that they have invented- involving writing, sound, video or object making. Very oriented around the personal, the connections between people and making little interventions in your local/daily life.

<http://www.learningtoloveyoumore.com/hello/index.php>

"Assignment #10

Make a flier of your day.

Write a paragraph describing a typical day in your life. Make one hundred Xerox fliers of the description (you don't have to include your name) and post them all over your neighborhood."

Obviously the very nature of the 'sham project has altered the nature of your day, but just thought it could be something you would find inspiring.

2. *shortleftleg* Says:

[April 10th, 2006 at 12:56 pm e](#)

thanks lionel

i appreciate your suggestion. i reckon its a great one. i am aware of learning to love you more, tho i havent looked at it for a while. i will definitely do this. and...while we're at it, you should too! then we can compare notes...

3. *Camperdowner* Says:

[April 11th, 2006 at 8:56 pm e](#)

Wow, you're moving along at a cracking pace Lucas. Only one week in and you're already feeling those familiar artist-in-residence-type feelings: self-doubt, frustration, depression, home-sickness

(even though you're actually residing at home). Has anyone written The Seven Stages of Residencies? You're doing just fine.

4. *cake lady* Says:

[April 14th, 2006 at 8:36 am e](#)

I recently met this couple who told me about this great book they'd found. It was by an artist and had assignment kind of things you could do while travelling. It was aimed at trying to carve out another kind of travelling experience other than the usual one of the tourist. So lots of the assignments were things like 'go to a famous sightseeing spot and take photos of everything around except for the icon itself'.

I thought of one of them as I was reading your blog, and thought maybe you could try it out in your neighbourhood, although you might need to change it around a little ...

So the original assignment is: You and a friend / partner arrange to arrive in a foreign city on the same day. Take different forms of transport to get there. Do not make a place to meet. Try and find your friend / partner.

Maybe you could try it out in Petersham?

Good Grief

It's been a week. I've just spoken to Chris in Perth, who knows my history (more than nearly anyone), and I feel clearer now about what needs to be done.

Following my post from yesterday, where I expressed concern that I was not "feeling the freshness" - that I was going through the motions a bit - that it all felt like a bit of "a job" (heaven forbid!) - I received several encouraging emails and comments, urging me to keep "powering along" with it. To all who wrote, thanks. It helps. At least I know what I've done so far hasn't been entirely tedious, tepid, or turgid. However, I still think a change is called for.

Up 'til now, I have been (unconsciously) hoping that folks in the 'sham will spontaneously come and talk to me, that the project will evolve effortlessly from some kind of delightful cosmic chance procedure. How lovely would that be, eh?

But its clear that this is not happening. And why should it? I am just an ordinary guy in the 'sham, and nobody knows that I'm in the throes of an (agonisingly self-reflective) art project. This is exactly the problem. I think it's an interesting one.

You see, I've had a bit of a crisis of strategy. In Kellerberrin, things flowed because of the existing structural situation - outsider in a small town, invited artist-in residence from the big city, naturally curious, dashing good looking (ahem, sorry).

What I mean is, I didn't really have to do much to make it flow. I was lucky, and my "skill" (if you can call it that) was having a gregarious nature, recognising that the communicative flow was happening, and harnessing it.

Here, of course, things are not the same. There is no framework which might shift the relationships I have with my neighbours. There is no local host to introduce me around. Six months ago, two weeks ago, today, things are the same - I'm just a local guy toolin around the 'hood, buying bread and a paper, having coffee on the balcony, planting some vegies in the garden. To imagine that juicy conversations will naturally evolve, just because I would like them to, is tantamount to claiming the apparent ease of Bilateral Kellerberrin as a result of some sort of ineffable internal social instinct I possess but only barely recognise.

Sorry, getting a bit wordy here. What I mean is this - when things work, one rarely asks why. When they don't work so well, it's a good opportunity to find something out.

There's a connection staring me right in the face. It's between my neighbourly relationships, and the more personal kind. Here's a caricature: if a relationship is working out the way you want it to, fine. No need to do anything, right? If it's not going fine, you can dump it, ignore the problem, or try to change things.

To attempt to change something is to take an active step in the direction of "how I would prefer things to be". There is no point hanging around in a half-baked relationship for the purposes of "observing" it. Or, maybe it will have some academic value, but I don't imagine its something I would consciously choose to repeat (er, if I could help it, that is).

What I'm saying is this: it's time to be clear about what I want, and not snoop around hoping that I'll just get it by chance.

I've been holding back a bit from a public declaration of my project, partly because I really wanted to do it from the point of view of a "normal" neighbour. And a normal neighbour wouldn't go around handing out flyers or dressing up in funny costumes to attract attention and generate conversations. I didn't want to have to take on a role.

Then again, it's probably time to acknowledge that I'm no "normal" neighbour. In fact, is there any such thing? In pretending to be "normal," I'm acting just as much as I would be if I were to (say) drag a telegraph pole down the main street dressed in a cowboy outfit (apologies to Lone Twin, you know I love your work). So the question remains: if I don't want take on a theatrical role, what should I do? "What would Lucas Ihlein do in this situation?"

Besides, haven't I an obligation to let the locals "in on it"? After all, YOU (dear reader) know what I'm doing, don't you? Is my unethical behaviour merely feeding your voyeuristic pleasure?

*

Speaking of voyeuristic pleasure, I'll just let you in on something else. I mentioned last Wednesday that it's hard to concentrate. It aint easy to clear space in my mind when I'm still surrounded by all my shit, when I still have work commitments, and so on. But, in light of the above, I need to acknowledge that this IS the scenario I find myself in. This is the territory of "home."

There have been heaps of things going on this week that haven't made their way into the blog. Visits from friends, dinners with interstate travellers, worrying news from my dad, not to mention work on a long paper for uni that I should have handed in two weeks ago.

For some reason, I've compartmentalised my mind and declared certain things "Petersham-specific" and others not. I'm not sure if this is the best idea.

On the other hand, if I wrote about absolutely everything that happened in the course twentyfour hours, I would have no time to do anything the next day (and neither would you, if you tried to read it).

Good grief. It's after midnight. Time for bed, eh?

This entry was posted on Monday, April 10th, 2006 at 12:49 am and is filed under ['sham dailies](#).

One Response to "Good Grief"

1. [nobody](#) Says:
[April 11th, 2006 at 2:26 pm](#) [e](#)

i must amdit this is the first time i actually stopped myself to read what u write, actually is the second, i had a brief browse thru your kelleberrin publication at the cross art the other day, got hooked n now i'm here.

i reckon you should definetly come out with it, print your dayli postings n go around the locals to show teh m what you doing, if u're not opening yourself why would u expect the ppl to?

love your work mate

x

[ketchup](#)

Since I've shaken a little of my beginners anxiety, let's recap the last few days. There's no way I can cover everything, but some highlights at least...

Saturday

Mum comes to visit. She's been to Venice on a tour, and is stopping in for a few days en route back to Perth. I pick her up from the station and we head to [Big Brekkie](#) for scrambled eggs with gruyere cheese. Yowzer. Big Brekkie's the only place for this delicious stuff in the 'sham, and it's always packed. Tables scattered on a grassy empty lot in the sun. I spy **Helen** across the way. I wave to her, but she doesn't recognise me. Later, when I use the loo, I realise why: I look haggard, scruffy, and unshaven. It's like I'm running from the law. (I must see if I can get a shave from "The Locals Barber Shop" soon...) Helen is off overseas, but promises to catch up when she returns...

A garage sale over on Newington. Two families combined - the old parents who've been there forever, and the son and his family, who now live in Paddington. The son(now in his early 40s) is a friendly fella who explains that they tried living in Alexandria, but it wasn't easy for the girls to go to school there. In Paddington, they can at least walk to school.

I sift through some of the clothing the girls have outgrown, and pick out a few tops to send to my niece Pippa, who's four and a half. It's good quality "kids fashion" and I'm hoping it'll further my ambition to be "favourite uncle." I also pick up an aluminium spirit level, an old Nikon lens for my 1975 camera I'll probably never use again, and a set of dominos with handpainted vegetables instead of numbers.

Someone arrives at the sale with trays of oysters. They're left over from a restaurant delivery business, and damn they're good. A Greek priest shows up and buys a clock (or something, I forget) and although he is quoted three dollars, he hands over five. I explain to the garage salers about the 'sham. They tell me that the dad of the house makes his own Mead - honey wine. He learned this trick from a guy up on Stanmore Road. This guy runs a second hand shop which is hardly ever open. He keeps his own bees.

In the evening, Anne visits, and we are joined by Bec, Stuart, and Lisa for the [Great Petersham Pub Crawl](#). We start with dinner at the White Cockatoo, looking over the Petersham books Lisa got out of the Library. (The juiciest story is the "Great Tuckshop Debacle," which I will reproduce in full in another installment). Bec and Anne peel off home, and the rest of us hit the [RSL](#). It's Greek Night, and there's relentless eardrum perforating old-school Greek circle dance mania going on. It looks pretty exciting. I ask Stuart what it must be like to be in another country, and to get together with all the ex-pats for some home-style dancing. He shudders. Stuart came out from England at the age of 14.

Next stop is the [Oxford Tavern](#), winner of many recent "adult industry awards". It looks shady on the outside, three bouncers smoking in the dark entryway. But they're cheerful enough. Inside, it's not all that different to the RSL. Plenty of pokies, fairly uncomfortable tables. The front bar looks fun, though the ladies are just packing it up. We've arrived too late. The girls serving beer are scantily clad, but certainly not "skimpy" by any stretch. Stuart says he is "disappointed, but kinda also a bit relieved". Well, we've crossed that threshold, and all that remains is to come back another night when its a bit more pumping. Wednesday night, say, for the Oxford's trademark [jelly wrestling](#)(!)

It's nearly midnight when we arrive at the Newington. The guy behind the closed glass doors makes a bodily signal, a bit like the line umpire in a baseball game. It's pretty clear this place has already closed up for the night.

The only place left is the Livingstone. It stays open til six in the morning, though it's not clear why, since the place seems totally empty. But we find a hidden cache of poker machines. There must be thirty people in this electronic Aladdin's Cave, sitting on stools in the neon gloom and ceaselessly feeding coins into coinslots.

We sit near the door where we can still get a sense of the outside. We're nearly finished our beers when Mickie and Ammo arrive on their bikes, to celebrate the end of the crawl with us. Mick gets in a beer, and we talk about [Reclaim the Streets](#), which apparently blocked off the new cross city tunnel today. But it's getting late, and the Livingstone has a very soporific atmosphere. By now it's clear (even to Stuart, who is



always last to leave a party) that we've squeezed all we can from the night.

[Postscript: Pubs we missed: the one on the corner of Parramatta Road and Crystal Street, they do comedy there I think; and the [Huntsbury](#), which is really close but falls into the Lewisham zone, unfortunately.]

Sunday

Luciana drags me along to an early Pilates class up at [Yoga Togo](#).

Man it's just what I need. Some serious stomach muscle workout. Sitting at a desk all day makes for some slack action in the abdomen, I can tell you.

Bec heads off to the [Tour of Beauty](#) and I stay home to work on my essay. I pretend my desk is a sovereign state all of its own, the "Independent Republic of Study", and not in Petersham at all.

Monday

Still in the IRS, I stay here all day. Luciana's studying next door, and she puts together a delicious lunch for us. At half four, Mayhem rings, and we do a radio interview about the 'sham for her spot on 2ser. During the show, Sonia from Ciao Magazine calls up the station. She wants to do an article about the project. I take Sonia's number and promise to call her back.

I speak to Chris on the phone, and we [untangle](#) some of the problems I've been having with my Petersham "method". I feel a lot better afterward.

Tuesday

More study. My dad comes around for lunch, and we sit, very sad, together in the kitchen for a couple of hours. I make him a coffee, but he says he can't eat anything. I devour his sandwiches as well as my own.

I pick up Wolfie, and we drop Dad off at the station. I walk around the north side a bit, checking out if the job's still going at the Palace Pantry. It is, but the owner is busy talking to builders out the back. I figure I'll check back again in a quiet moment. Do I really want a job anyway? We pop over to see if Lisa's home. She's not, but in her doorway I spy an old copy of Ciao Magazine. I can't work out if it's just a "lite" lifestyle mag intended to generate advertising, or if it's a marketing front for a conglomerate of real estate agents. Either way, it's published in Petersham, so I guess I'll find out...

This entry was posted on Wednesday, April 12th, 2006 at 6:28 pm and is filed under ['sham dailies](#).

ONE LINE ONLY NO SCREAMING

Jasmin called me several weeks ago to discuss the 'sham project. She said I should expect various levels of jealousy about what I am doing here. I get to stay at home, mooch around, take some time out. It's like a holiday at home. It's like being a tourist in your own town. Not to mention the inevitable "but is it really art?" etc etc.

I was surprised. I guess I hadn't thought much beyond the confines of my own list-of-things-to-do. But notwithstanding the curly question "is it art?" (which I will add to the FAQ's, and attempt to answer - hopefully with your help - in the near future) I bet yer all gonna be jealous of what I did yesterday!

I rollerskated at the [Majestic RollerRink](#).

Yes sir, and damn, was it fun!

Here's what happened. Earlier in the week, Sunny from the Herald emailed: "I have just spent about 2 hours reading the blog and feel like I've woken up out of a nice dream!" She was keen to do a story, and extra keen on getting inside the RollerRink, where she spent every Thursday night of 2001. Now, I had been thinking how cool it'd be to get in there, but of course, I hadn't done anything about it. And here she was, excited enough to do all the ringing around for me. The power of the press.

Just before half one, I checked in with Luciana to see if she wanted to come and check out the rink. I remembered she was a big fan of skating too. We'd been reminiscing on the porch about how cool it used to be, what a loss it was to the 'sham that it had closed up. She looked a bit stressed - she's got a presentation to work on for uni, about Baudelaire - but she couldn't resist the lure of the rink.

Rachelle was excited too. She called Wolfie so he could come along with us and be in the photos. She brushed bits of dry grass out of his coat and fussed a bit like a mum. And we were on our way. Down at the rink, a cute old fella showed up, and opened the door for us while we waited for Sunny. Luciana and I couldn't believe it. Inside, the place was exactly as we remembered. The skates were still up there on the shelves. The woodpanelling at the skate counter still had remnants of the texta-inscribed instruction: "ONE LINE ONLY NO SCREAMING" (the word "SCREAMING" almost worn completely blank by the contact of countless writhing bodies).

Oh, there was [plenty](#) of [priceless signage](#) still up:

NO SMOKING
NO CHEWING GUM

PREGASI USARE
LE
ALTRE SCALE

PLEASE NOTE
TO AVOID ACCIDENTS,
ROLLER SKATES ARE TO
BE WORN AND TAKEN OFF
DOWNSTAIRS.
Thank you.

WARNING
Roller Skating is a
dangerous sport.
All patrons are advised
that although the
management takes all
precautions to ensure
your safety, you are
advised no responsibility
is taken and that you
are Roller Skating
entirely at your own risk.

Apparently, despite these efforts to warn skaters that no responsibility would be taken for accidents, this is precisely what led to the rink's demise. A lady had some sort of heart failure in the late 90s, and sued for several millions. They managed to come to a smaller settlement (maybe half a million) but then no insurance company would touch them after that.

Public liability claims another scalp, and fun becomes just too expensively risky. Luciana and I sighed. Nostalgic. Angry. Sad. Resigned. These stories are just too predictable.

Last year, I remember signing a petition at the chemist about the old RollerRink. I thought maybe it was to fight against development going through. But no, it was just to make sure that when the apartments

(inevitably) get built, the owner puts in sufficient carparking. Probably the least inspiring petition I've ever put my name to.

But it seems that sale has now fallen through! And even better - there's a new deal in negotiation - believe it or not, to turn the place into a cinema!

The photographer arrived, and set me up to pose with Wolfie in the middle of the empty rink. After a few hundred shots like that, Luciana and I strapped on our skates (size 6, size 10). We did loops around and around (me pulling along a rather reluctant Wolfie) trying to get ourselves in just the right spot for the [perfect shot](#). It felt great to have the wheels spinning under my feet (although, just like the old days, the skates had a tendency to veer off to one side).



By the end of this, Wolfie was pooped. We posed a bit more outside, but the poor little fella kept flopping onto the pavement for rests. I tried propping him up and giving him pats and encouraging words, to get him to stand tall for the picture, but he was over it.

Sunny and I sat outside [Sweet Belem](#) for a coffee and natas. It was time for the interview. She had one of those "microcassette" recorders with the teeny tapes inside to record every word of infallible wisdom that passed my lips. But on New Canterbury Road, trucks roar by every few minutes, no doubt obliterating the good bits and leaving instead banalities like "yeah man, it's all about the blurring of art and life" and turning statements of true genius like "I don't think its unfair to say that artists now are using the ideas developed by avant-garde artists in the 1960s like tools to make a new kind of socially connected art work" into potentially libellous declarations such as "I don't [...] like [...] work."

Sunny asked me if I always over-intellectualise things. That was a good one. And although it seems she really likes the project, she said a few folks she'd mentioned it to around the office were a bit indignant. The old "once again artists are getting away with these easy scams!" - and - "Heck, I wouldn't mind being paid to stay at home for two months" etc etc.

I ranted a little about the curly concept of the "sense of community", how local councils sometimes seem a little too keen to push rhetoric about "togetherness and belonging" - and how within this schema, "unity" and "diversity" are somehow two sides of the same coin. I'm really at the beginning, but I'd like to find a way to think more deeply about these ideas. You know, over-intellectualise 'em a bit.

Sunny paid for the natas, and bought a few extras on the Herald account for me to take home. We acknowledged that this had been a kind of writers' exchange - she's covering me, I'm covering her covering me. I get in first though - her article won't come out til Tuesday.

As she was jumping in the cab, I asked if there was any chance of reading her piece before it gets published. She said not really, and sped away. Fair enough. She hasn't proof-read this one either...

This entry was posted on Thursday, April 13th, 2006 at 2:17 pm and is filed under ['sham dailies](#).

11 Responses to "ONE LINE ONLY NO SCREAMING"

1. *keg* Says:
[April 13th, 2006 at 5:19 pm e](#)
OF COURSE WE'RE JEALOUS!!!
2. *Mickie* Says:
[April 13th, 2006 at 6:01 pm e](#)

KEN OATH!!! I'll sign whatever disclaimer i need to to regain the right to crack my noggin on that big floor.

3. [Sarah Haid](#) Says:
[April 20th, 2006 at 9:09 am e](#)

Hey Lucas,

My name's Sarah and there've been Petershamites in my family for as long as I can remember. I saw your artical in the Herald last night and felt a pang of pride...but most bloody importantly I nearly peed myself when I realised the photo was taken inside the Roller Rink.

I put on an indie-pop disco night which rocks some SERIOUS socks. It's pretty small scale at the moment but fabulous fun and growing. I would kill to have one of my parties inside that mofo rink and have spent months calling the council and roller-skating associations and the like, but no-one I speak to knows who I should contact about it.

I'd be eternally grateful if you could help me out in any way. Do you have a contact number for the Rink or could you point me in the direction of someone who does? If I can make this happen you would be guest of honour at the party and definitely have something to write about! It'd be a shame not to have a massive goodbye bash at the world-famous Petersham Majestic Rollerink before it forever fades into cinemanness.

And by the way, my sister throws some killer shindigs at her place on Bishop St...we'll let you know when the next one's on if you're interested.

Hope to hear from you soon!

Sarah

4. [shortleftleg](#) Says:
[April 20th, 2006 at 9:28 am e](#)

sarah

i will pass your note along to sunny, who organised the photo shoot. the reason for the closedown was public liability, so it seems unlikely that the space would be opened up again for a public event with all the risk that entails. still, there is no harm at all in trying eh!

lucas

ps i would love to come to a bishop street shindig, or even perhaps a quiet bishop street cup of tea with yer sister. cheerio

5. [margie](#) Says:
[April 20th, 2006 at 11:15 am e](#)

Can We start a petition at the chemists to turn the rink into a cinema? Best thing I could have thought of!

6. [shortleftleg](#) Says:
[April 20th, 2006 at 12:24 pm e](#)

sure margie

are you a local? ya wanna co-author the petition?

(oh, ya must be a local, if you know about the chemist?).

on the other hand, i'm not sure this is a petition-able issue. who would we be petitioning?

you see, much as i hate to say it, "the free market decides" (sigh). its all up to whoever buys the building, and their plans for it...

I'm interested in how the chemist becomes THE site in the street where a petition might happen. something about it makes it kinda "public" or an "official" point of call...is it to do with the fact that it sells serious items that you really need, rather than the relative frivolity of the cake shops or delis?

7. *Alex Broun* Says:

[April 21st, 2006 at 12:58 pm e](#)

Hi Lucas,

So cool about the cinema. What a great idea ! And now I found out how you got inside too.

I heard they use to have Gay Roller Doscas there on Friday nights ! Is that true ? My ex-girlfriend would like to go.

Bw,
AB

8. *Liz* Says:

[April 22nd, 2006 at 10:03 am e](#)

I don't like how they called the article, 'Sham Artist Refuses to Push Boundaries', it feels like a disguised insult, somehow.

9. *Ray* Says:

[April 25th, 2006 at 11:59 am e](#)

Wow! thanks for the photos :-)

I used to go to the rink every tuesday night, but when it shut down I never really got to take any photos. Was always disappointed that I didnt, but now you've done got a whole bunch of them! I always still have hope that one day it will reopen, but I dont like my chances.

ray.

10. *Rob* Says:

[May 8th, 2006 at 10:14 pm e](#)

Another Icon GONE

I used to skate at that georgeous old rink 26 years ago(I was 12) and I was surprised at how upset I was when I read you article.

Skating was the best part of my childhood, thanks for the screams Majestic...

11. *jana* Says:

[May 15th, 2006 at 2:42 am e](#)

Is there any chance you'd pass my details on to Sunny too? I had just given up on my dream of a Xanadu Roller Disco for my 30th til someone sent me this link!!

cheers

I was a-bloggin' away on Wednesday morning when the screen went dark and all was quiet. No more faint high pitched whizzing of the hard drive, and no more low whirl of the fridge from the kitchen. I blinked. The power had cut out. Aha, I thought. This has happened before. I hot-footed it around to the front porch to see if the guy from the electricity company had switched us off and left a mean note about not paying the bill. But the switch was still on. I figured that the construction site down the road had tripped something. There was nothing to be done but to get out of the house.

Rachelle was talking to Therese, two doors up, to see if her power was out too. It was. Up the street, shop-keepers were standing around in doorways with their hands on their hips, looking up and down as if the answer was going to be delivered in a taxi speeding down Canterbury Road. The traffic lights were out, motorists were left to their own devices. It was a genuine neighbourhood event.

The Post Office still had power though. I overheard the guy behind the counter saying they had their own

generator there, so they could still “get the mail through,” rain hail shine or blackout. Someone in the queue contributed the news that the power was out all over the Marrickville area.

I headed up Fisher Street, past the Council Chambers, where a couple of dozen council office workers were having a celebratory cigarette in the late morning sunshine. I guess they had the same problem as me: no computer, no work. Everyone loves a minor natural disaster.

Up at the Crystal Street Community Shop I was greeted with “There’s no power! We can’t even open the till!” - and then - “But of course you’re still welcome to come and browse...” I asked if Caroline was in. She wasn’t, not due til Thursday. I nosed around a little, considering whether to pick up a nice old chequered woolen blanket, and a professional-looking set of dominos, heavy faux-ivory, in a leatherette case. I put them down again, considering the unavailability of the cash register.

At that moment, a bearded man with a cap breezed through the door. “Is the power out here?” he asked. “Yes!” we all chimed. The Crystal St Shop is a bit like [Cheers](#). It might look like there are four or five people sifting through the second hand clothes for a bargain, but it turns out they all work there as volunteers, or, like me, are just hanging around. It’s right next door to a set of boarding houses, that run all the way up to the corner of Crystal and Stanmore, so I figure plenty of the fellows who live there are regulars at the shop.

As was this one. Bruce, his name is. He was just doing some washing at the laundromat around the corner when the power went out mid-drying-cycle. The lady who runs the laundry was worried, he said, so he’d taken it upon himself to do a mission to find out what was going on. Bruce sized me up and asked who I was. We introduced ourselves, and I explained what I was doing in the ’sham. He looked curious. “Stay right there!” he said, and dashed back around the corner to let the laundry lady know that there was nothing to worry about, the blackout was suburb-wide.

Bruce returned, and we sat down on the comfy couch opposite the till for a chat. “So what do you want to ask me about?” he said. That was a good question. I don’t really have any questions, per se. And it didn’t really matter with Bruce. The conversation meandered here and there, topics included graffiti, censorship, boarding house life, facial hair and the removal thereof, the colour of our eyes and the various levels of colour-blindness, new-fangled technologies and telephone wake-up call services, and the available sizes of the nice brown five dollar sneakers in the basket next to the couch (unfortunately they only go up to size nine). It was a fragmented exchange, but not at all unpleasant, and certainly I think we took a shining to each other, although I’m not sure that each of us really “got” where the other was coming from.

Bruce kept coming back to his father, who was “a jack of all trades, master of none,” very good with his hands, with woodworking, not so clever with electronic things, and had been in the military: “a very directed man,” he said. And, in a way, so was Bruce. He had a penetrating gaze (which I told him), and sometimes he worried that I found it too disconcerting.

Barbara, the lady in charge of the shop for the day, and another lady, began dragging some big black garbage bags filled with clothes towards the door. Bruce jumped up to help, and I followed. We carried these sacks, which had masking tape labels inscribed “VINNIES” to Barbara’s car. I asked her why one op shop was taking stuff to another op shop. There just wasn’t enough space, she said. While we were walking along she asked me where I was from, and we talked a bit about the nature of the suburb. She doesn’t live in Petersham, but she goes to the church around the corner, which runs the shop. She said she thought it was an interesting place, lots of different sorts of people around, from the boarding house guys to fairly wealthy folks in big houses.

We re-entered the shop. The power had come back on. Bruce went off to check whether his clothes were dry, and I waited for him on the couch. Soon after he returned, a fellow came through the door with a bag filled with hot cross buns. “Is Caroline in?” he asked. (Caroline must be an important person in the world of the op shop). He left the buns for us, and Barbara made us a cup of tea. It felt cosy in there.

A mum and her son came in. “Hello!” they said to us as the door whacked the son on the backside (just as it had done to me the week before). He apologised to all and sundry, but “us regulars” were used to it by then. They were looking for clothes for his dad, who lives up the coast somewhere, and needs new shoes and shirts. The mum kept getting the son to try stuff on. Not that he was in any way the same size as the

dad. But somehow they used the consistency of the too-large sizes as an index. The son would refer to Bruce and I, sitting there on the couch, as if we were “fitting experts” and this was a classy boutique. We recommended the five dollar brown sneakers in the basket next to the couch, and indeed, they went for a pair.

A fellow staggered in clutching the handle of a five litre cardboard wine box with his curled up fingers. The box had a nice colour photo of a garden salad on the label. He rummaged through the shells on the counter, selected a few, and then looked around the window display. Bruce looked concerned, and went and stood officiously behind the till. He looked like he was worried things were going to get out of hand, and he called out to Barbara.

In the meantime, the wine guy had found a painting in the window display. He was very taken with the painting, touched and stroked its surface with his fingers. He brought it to the register. “How much for all that?” (including the shells) he asked, pulling out a five dollar note. The painting alone was ten dollars. He tried to get Barbara to let him have it for less, even offering to pay her “double next week”. But she was firm on the price, suggesting that he might like to come back later on, when he’s sober. “What’s sober?” the fellow joked, staggering back out the door again.

“He gets a bit inappropriate when he’s drunk,” said Barbara.

It was getting on towards one, and I had my [appointment with Sunny](#) to make. Bruce and I exchanged phone numbers, and I said goodbye to him and Barbara as I dashed out between the traffic on Crystal Street.

This entry was posted on Friday, April 14th, 2006 at 2:44 pm and is filed under ['sham dailies](#).

[an easter-ly dilemma](#)

...he he you just KNEW this was gonna happen, didn't you...?

I've been made an offer to LEAVE THE 'SHAM (temporarily of course), and I don't know what to do.

I'm putting this up here, at midday on Saturday, and anyone who happens to be online has a little under 24 hours to chime in with an opinion.

My Dad is in town, and he's none too well. I won't go into the details here, I'll just say that its unusual for him to need the help of others in this way. He's been staying with his brother Michael (who also lives in Sydney with his wife Gosha) and he's due to go back to Perth on Monday.

Dad rang me up yesterday. He said “I know you've got your project on and all, but if you could see your way clear to coming to visit for lunch on Easter Sunday, Michael and Gosha and I would love to have you here. Anyway, let me know what you think.”

Now, it's rare enough for me to hang out with my Dad, and even rarer to see my uncle. The two of them together I have not experienced for maybe fifteen years. It's a pretty special invitation.

I rang Stuart, who I know is my most hardcore adherence-to-the-rules watchdog. He thought it was a great problem. “Nah, you have to stick to your guns, he said. You *knew* something like this was going to come up.”

I tried the old “But maybe this is the exception that proves the rule?” to which he replied: “I've never really understood that idea of the exception that proves the rule...”

I tried proposing tricky ways to get around it. For instance, what if I blindfolded myself upon leaving the 'sham, and didn't take off the blindfold until I was inside the house. Or what if I kept the blindfold on the entire time? Maybe it was interesting to go somewhere else, just this once. Sydney's suburbs are quite different from each other, and by going across town, I would become instantly more conscious of the differences between Petersham and Darling Point (where uncle Michael lives).

“Yes, it's called a comparison” Stuart said drily.

I tried a historical precedent. “You see, when Josef Beuys went to America, he refused to touch American soil. He was blindfolded, and carried into the gallery, which operated as a kind of Embassy, where he remained until he was carried back out again to his aeroplane. It was a sort of political statement.”*

This story had some impact on Stuart. He was coming around.

“Look. Whatever you do, it only makes the project more interesting”, he said.

So I’m back to where I was. Any thoughts?

*can any Beuys fans verify this story? My rudimentary google search has failed to come up with a reliable source...

Postscript: while writing this, Dad rang up. He wanted to know if I’d made up my mind. I told him I was still turning it over. “Obviously,” I said, “The thing to suggest would be, that in order to indulge my whimsical project, you all should come over here for lunch instead.” But he said there were Gosha’s parents, and some other friends of theirs coming over too, and Gosha was catering big time, and by the way, as soon as I decide I should let them know cos she has to know how many to cook for.

It’s not that there is any pressure, and I think they’ll understand (as much as anyone can) about a silly rule like this - or maybe not. I wonder if this rule makes any sense at all outside of the “world” it has created between me and you, gentle reader?

This entry was posted on Saturday, April 15th, 2006 at 11:43 am and is filed under [‘sham dailies](#).

12 Responses to “an easter-ly dilemma”

1. *lisa* Says:

[April 15th, 2006 at 12:30 pm e](#)

bugger Beuys (that story kind of shows up the shyster in the shaman), it’s about your Dad & your family, of course you should go to lunch...

2. *shortleftleg* Says:

[April 15th, 2006 at 1:48 pm e](#)

so i should skip the whole blindfold idea in your opinion lisa>??

3. *lisa* Says:

[April 15th, 2006 at 2:28 pm e](#)

well I guess if it makes you feel better... though it’s not like Beuys wasn’t in America & it’s not like you won’t be in Darling Point. Unlike Tang Da Wu, who didn’t visit Australia for Situation because he couldn’t condone our government’s policies. But I don’t think you have a point of protest with Darling Point (?), and family business presents a different set of ground-rules, doesn’t it?

4. *deborah* Says:

[April 15th, 2006 at 3:20 pm e](#)

hallo lucas! I said i’d send a postcard, but here i am, sending argumentative advice, instead.

i would say you have to go, because in the contest between art & rarely seen, not very well parents/their siblings, your dad should win.

and then, if the length of the petersham internal exile project matters a real lot, start again.

plus, while i am opining, that Beuys stunt sounds fucking appalling.

Worse even than when Greer announced at a public lecture in London that she would only come here if she were greeted by Aboriginal elders. Phooey!

dkx

5. [mayhem](#) Says:
[April 15th, 2006 at 3:28 pm e](#)

Hey Lucazoid

Couldn't your Dad have waited until I worked out some sort of Prize money?

I remember from my favourite Beuys book that I took camping with me to Byron Bay when I was running away from 3rd year painting - that they had all these photos of him being strapped onto a stretcher and blindfolded and carted from the plane to an ambulance - and then from the ambulance - still on the stretcher - up the stairs and into the cage with the coyote - where he was unwrapped.

I think he touched american soil afterwards - but he was certainly all insulated by the fat felt and fur before he 'arrived' on the place.

My instinct would be the same as Stuart's - I mean - rules are rules eh? CAN'T you get yer dad to come over for dinner or something afterwards? he could bring yer uncle and the extreme sports catering aunt. You could even shout them all a cab and make it some sort of art project.

Or you could do a Beuys style thing and get someone to cart you over there a-la hannibal lecter - and then you could spend the whole time in the corner of the house with wolfie - who could, like double for some coyote. But it might be a bit of a distraction for the fam - and wreck the point of being there.

On the other hand, we're meant to be artists and to see beyond such black and white choice type structures.....

fam vs sham?

I reckon you could work out some creative way of not leaving petersham and not being out of petersham, and not really being in that other place. Maybe a really long piece of string? And the blindfold and NOT touching anything with your flesh. so you'd have to wear gloves during lunch and squat over but not sit on the toilet if you had to do a number two, and ... well... why don't you ask your Dad for some suggestions? Everyone has seemingly pointless rules that they try to live by - that's the nature of the social contract - so your Dad and uncle probably have enough life experience somewhere to know how to negotiate complicated dilemmas rather than just forcing some intense BILATERAL choice onto someone.....?

good luck

6. [shortleftleg](#) Says:
[April 15th, 2006 at 5:31 pm e](#)

this text message came through from josh, my brother in perth, weighing into the debate:

Sent:
15-Apr-2006
18:09:03

Read the blog.
Go to lunch.
Easter sunday
doesnt count.
Travel blind
folded thatll
cover it. J

Sender
Josh

7. [shortleftleg](#) Says:
[April 15th, 2006 at 5:58 pm e](#)

I decided to follow some of Mayhem's advice. That is, the BILATERAL part. Why should I foist my decision on them without consultation? So I rang up, and asked Dad and Michael if they had any suggestions (offering the blindfold idea as one possibility). Both of them have experience making tricky decisions for large companies. But in this case, Dad just chuckled, said "I have absolutely no idea" and handed the phone over to Gosha. She felt that the blindfold through the entire lunch would not only be OK, it would in fact be "hilarious".

So that settles it. She was just worried that if I was to take a taxi, to make sure he didn't overcharge me. And, whether I was going to be able to feed myself. I assured her that I would be fine transporting food from plate to mouth(although actually I am not so sure, since I've never eaten blind). Gosha suggested I practice tonight...

8. *Lionel Says:*

[April 16th, 2006 at 2:28 am e](#)

a bit late to this dilemma-
missed all the fun

but obviously it has been a provocative shake up and it is good that you are taking the performative option.

i would have suggested taking a sham representative along with you (like bruce who your met at the crystal st op shop or someone random), to keep the spirit of the sham in high content during the border crossing.

guiding food to your mouth blindfolded should be ok, but getting it on your fork or spoon without doing a 'pretty woman'- turn and flinging your snail or what-ever across the room might be tricky. goodluck.

9. *Jasmin Stephens Says:*

[April 16th, 2006 at 9:00 am e](#)

Lucas

I am following your blog avidly. Your self-assurance is being tested during this residency in a way that it wasn't in Kellerberrin so thesham.info makes more compelling reading.

As a novice blogger, I am learning that the timeliness of replies is essential for their incorporation into the narrative of your residency. So here are some thoughts which are probably for later.

Overnight I have been thinking about why it was such a hard decision to leave thesham. I have been wondering if there is something in the literature of cloistered orders and the lives of the saints for you. In the tradition that I am most familiar with, through acts of denial and abstinence individuals experience an enlarged sense of self. They are empowered in the eyes of their communities through their absence and are charged with the task of interceding on behalf of others.

It can be argued that is because of your separateness as well as your immersion in thesham that Marrickville Council is positioning you as a conductor for society and civility in your neighbourhood. I sense, however, that they are going to get more than they bargained for. You are exceptionally equipped as Kellerberrin demonstrated to perform this function, but I am wondering if the people of thesham would be as open with you if they didn't grasp the circumstances which led to you leaving thesham? Not to mention, the derision that your wider public via the Sydney Morning Herald may express if they learn that you have faltered in your resolution?

There is a current of humanity calling you out of thesham. I must confess I wish you weren't going - even blindfolded. I respond to the formalism of your project - the clock ticking, riding the boundaries, the global position, the encyclopedia entry, the spectacle.

Jasmin

10. *Raquel Says:*

[April 18th, 2006 at 9:47 am e](#)

hello Lucas

Being a Bueys "fan" I have some extra info on the performance where he was transported from airport to gallery in an ambulance warped in felt and blindfolded. This is the work called "I love America and America loves me" (I think that is title but as I am avoiding important work I am not going to look it up- perhaps there is a subtitle of "coyote"). Anyway the important piece of information here is that the whole not-leaving-the-gallery-and-living-with-the-coyote-being-blindfolded-the-whole-time was a total and utter sham.

While in Vienna I had a chance to view the entire film documentation of that performance. It was part of a workshop run by Maria Eichhorn, and she showed it to us to raise the question of ethical representation. Basically like lots of Bueys works there are huge myths that surround his work that then become part of the reading of the work.

Its true he was transported to and from aeroport wrapped and that he spent a lot of time in the gallery building a rapport with the animal, but he also left the gallery to have long boozy lunches and slept elsewhere- not in the gallery. (Maria had inside info- I can't remember how).

Anyway the work was still interesting knowing this info, and the film was very beautiful in quality and in the way everyday things have changed- the ambulance was especially cool. With lots of Beuys things it interesting how the legend becomes the "rule" or "standard" that other artists apply to their work.

I made me quiet sad to read that your father is unwell, and sadder and angry to read that you considered not meeting him on one of those few chances that you get each year. I hope you took the blind fold off during lunch.

11.*Raquel* Says:

[April 18th, 2006 at 11:24 am e](#)

After posting the above I reflected on your preference for creating drama (events? performances?) around simple decisions. I guess you set the whole scenario up- posting the offer, decisions, viewer feedback, as a way of justify the decision you would have come to in the end anyway- ie. to see your dad.

Sorry as usual my goat seriousness gets the better of me.

12.*Liz* Says:

[April 21st, 2006 at 10:52 am e](#)

Sorry I'm so late getting into your blog Lucas - My opinion on this matter is now null and void, I'd imagine, but my advice would have been to (in the name of art) not go to the family do.

bad language will NOT be tolerated

Sent:

11-Apr-2006

11:15:10

Just saw this -

Good Friday

brunch 9-12

noon Psham

bowling club,

homemade hot

cross buns LX

Sender:

Lisa

Although I've been past there before, and it's only a stones throw from the swimming pool, I still managed to get us lost. We went through the railway underpass, then turned left into Brighton Street. I had a moment of indecision, and then proclaimed that the club was *definitely* further north, and we should continue up Palace street and take the next left. This proved to be utterly false, demonstrating that when

it comes to geographical positioning, my instincts are invariably the opposite of reality. Conversely, this may just be one of the things which keeps me from going insane when restricted to one small suburb. My goldfish memory.

We realised once we'd hit Parramatta Road that we were seriously out of the zone, and I rang Lisa to find out what street the Bowling Club was on. Brighton Street, of course.

The crisp hard level surface of the empty bowling greens, the cloudless blue sky, the deadly quiet of Good Friday, the succulents growing in pots at the edge of the green: it was like we'd gone back to an idyllic imaginary [1950s suburban utopia](#).

[Inside](#) the pavilion, three cheerful young ladies were cooking up a breakfasty storm before our eyes. Home made hot cross buns were laid out on the counter, but I couldn't go past the "Big Bowl": eggs and mushrooms with smoked salmon and roast tomatoes. The author of this feast was Fiona, who's only recently transplanted (a month ago?) into North Petersham. She was headhunted from Canberra to cater to the locals. I think she's loving the 'sham. Tonight she emailed me with this:

Just wanted to say thanks for popping in and telling us about the project - sounds really interesting and curiously enough parallel to the process that I'm going through as a Petersham novice. I've been struck by the community feeling in Petersham and indeed just in the streets surrounding the Bowling Club. At some stage you should ask more permanent residents about the ongoing campaign to save the Club as a community space, its a fascinating reflection of what people value financially, socially and physically in their immediate surrounds.

We sat near the big glass wall overlooking the bowling green, watching as two men set up an [ad-hoc game](#) in the sun. It was clear that the older one was better than the younger one. After a few rounds, the younger fellow bounded back into the pavilion wiping his brow, declaring: "you could be selling beers out there in this heat!" That was Paul - he's on the board of the club. He and Lisa (who runs the drinks) told us that the saga of the Petersham Bowling Club wasn't too different from the plot of [Crackerjack](#), that goofball Aussie bowling movie. Dwindling memberships, hostile takeover bids, older bowlers dropping like flies: "the rope on the flagpole wore out from being raised and lowered too many times!"

But it seems the locals want to retain the club, and not just have it sold off as an unviable business venture. Recently there was a move to redevelop the bottom green as a childcare centre. But the board, populated by residents who live close to the club, are strongly opposed to losing it. And the funny thing is, most of them don't even bowl themselves. "Oh they *do* bowl," said Paul, "you know, casually on a Sunday arvo...but the days of the competitive leagues are over." (Which is a shame, according to Bec. Mainly, it must be said, because she was getting all excited about scoring an old lady's bowling outfit, which I can imagine her wearing, very ladylike, in the shade while watching the rest of us work up a sweat on the lawn.)

I asked Paul how far the locals come from to visit the club. He said the majority of enthusiasts are living right here, in the tidy renovated terraces which face onto it. Then, up to about three streets away, that's the main constituency. Some come from up on top of the hill on Palace street, but really, that's not very distant either. So in essence, what we have here is an issue about proximity to open space, and a valuable social resource for a small neighbourhood. It's not really about bowling per se.

"Most of the people on this street know each other through coming to the club," Paul said. I could just imagine it: someone you might nod at as you walk to the train station. But you never say much more than hi. You bump into them down at the club. "Hey, you're the people from number 27, right?" ... and so on. We all seem to want this kind of relation. Or am I wrong? Is it just that the unheard majority, who simply want a quiet time without being bothered by nosy gregarious neighbours, are at home with the shutters closed?

Paul suggested that if I *really* want to talk to someone interesting, I should seek out this particular old lady - she's over eighty, blind, a former magistrate - who lives close to the club behind a white picket fence. He took my number and said he would call her first, because she doesn't answer the door to strangers.

I must say, we all got pretty excited about the club. It seems to have an openness to it, a vulnerability that implies one might be able to get involved, might be able to make it somewhere we could really get into. I remember my cousins used to drink up at the Ashfield club, they knew everyone and would hang out there for hours playing pool too. Only one of them ever actually bowled.

I have thrown down the gauntlet and proposed a North-versus-South Petersham challenge. Lisa will assemble her team from the smelly Parramatta Road end, and I will pull together a team of trusty champs from the mighty southern realm of our noble 'burb. Date to be announced. If you live in the 'sham and want to be a part of it (no experience necessary, we ourselves have none) please get in touch.

On the way home, I stopped and spent a pleasant half hour with Eric, who runs the [Palace Pantry](#), on the corner of Palace and Brighton. It's a ye-olde style corner store cum cafe in the process of expanding into a 50 seat restaurant. But Eric's story, (as well as that of Bruce, who called me up for a constitutional late in the afternoon) will have to wait for another day. With all the excitement re my [impending exit](#) from the 'sham, I've got to hit the sack and get a good night's sleep.

This entry was posted on Saturday, April 15th, 2006 at 10:33 pm and is filed under ['sham dailies](#).

One Response to "bad language will NOT be tolerated"

1. *lisa* Says:

[April 17th, 2006 at 1:55 pm](#) [e](#)

Only folks who don't know their way around need end up on smelly Parramatta Rd when visiting the eucalyptus-lined, stately, chicken-free tranquility of 'Sham North...

Yr bilateral sledging doesn't change the fact that I've already got the whole club board & locals on side... name the date!

[the great escape](#)

Bec offered to drive me, if I'd look up the address. I went out to her car to grab the directory. Marie and Chris were across the way, still fixing up Barbara's flat. They waved me over.

"Hey, where are YOU going?" Marie asked. "We-e-ell"... I began. How could I do this? They were onto me.

The only thing for it was to come clean. I explained my dilemma, the importance of spending the day with my Dad, the idea of the blindfold as a "legal loophole" in my own rules. They thought about it. Chris felt it could work. "It's true, family comes first, you should definitely go. But you HAVE to keep on the blindfold the WHOLE time." Marie was less sure: "If you ask me, leaving is leaving, no matter whether you cover your eyes or not." They were still debating it between themselves as I sat in the [passenger seat](#) putting one of Bec's silk scarves [over my eyes](#). I waved to them blindly as we drove off.

Riding along with a blindfold induced a vague nausea. Luckily the trip from Petersham to Darling Point didn't take too long on Easter Sunday, when the streets are empty. I felt the lefts and the rights and imagined the trajectory, occasionally checking in with Bec: "So, we're turning right into Eddy Avenue now, right?"...

Dad came out when he heard us arrive. He thanked Bec for dropping me off, and gave me a hug. Then he grabbed my two forearms from behind and guided me down the corridor. "OK, there's a step coming up, yep you've got it, now its straight for a while, then another step down, and now, stop here, I'll install you in this chair." I was greeted by Gosia and Veronica, with kisses to both cheeks. Dad and Gosia started in straight away. "Now look, this place is actually "Poland". No wait, its an embassy, that's right, so we think you should take off the blindfold now."

I wasn't so sure. I mean, I think if there was a strong popular push to "liberate" me, I would have gone with the flow. After all, I was on foreign turf, and who am I to impose my will on the rest of the luncheon party? But, well, I figured, it wouldn't hurt to delay my decision for a moment. Gosia asked if my scarf was

comfortable. She brought out an elasticated eye-cover, the sort of thing they give you on long-haul flights, and I put that on instead. That was much better.

Gosia's friend Perry arrived. She had a Irish accent. There was the inevitable round of questions about what the hell I was doing. It wasn't all that easy to answer at first. I kept wanting to resort to handing out my FAQ page. It's difficult to address a tricky question when you can't look your interlocutor in the eye. There's no way to gauge whether they're interested, or if you're in danger of losing them. All you can do is wait for an appropriate break in the conversation and then jump in, speaking firmly and loudly, in full sentences, until you've said what you need to say. And then wait for the reply (assuming the other person is still there).

Uncle Michael appeared. I stuck out my hand to be shaken, and then he disappeared into the kitchen to make some drinks. Veronica and Perry began a conversation about a project to recycle paper into fertilizer by adding some enzymes or bacteria to break it down. It sounded interesting, but Perry was a bit skeptical. Who was running the enterprise, and were they mainly profit motivated? she wanted to know... This led into a discussion about organic fruit and vegetables, and the way that vegies these days are pretty devoid of nutritional value. I was glad to have Perry around, I felt her wholistic approach was philosophically close to my own. She could come in handy if the blindfold-removal pressure became tough.

Gosia's parents were the last to arrive. Again I stuck out my hand. I could hear Polish explanations going on, the only discernable word being "Petersham" (pronounced "Piet-r-sciam") peppered throughout. No further enquiry was made. Jokes at my expense, of course, were popping up fairly regularly. The most popular (perpetrated, it must be said, by my Dad) was the old: "Wow, you really should take that blindfold off, you know we're all naked in here except you!"

Eventually it was time to move to the dining room. Dad led me through. It was back along the hall: up those two steps again, and then a right turn after the bathroom. Along the way, Dad muttered under his breath "So...At some point you're going to have to decide whether you're keeping this up the whole time." I was glad of this private moment to suss things out. "The main thing I'm worried about is whether I'll be freaking anyone out. Do you think this is making Gosia really uncomfortable?" I asked. He wasn't sure. We agreed to just monitor it as it went along.

I was seated at the head of the table, nearest the door, with Dad on my left, and Gosia's father Andrzej ("Andrew") on my right.

Being blind at a dinner party felt like channeling the experience of an old man. You sit, you stay put, you are served and looked after, you speak when you are spoken to, and you *really* appreciate the attention when you get it. But there's no nimble jumping around from topic to topic, spotting when someone is bored or thoughtful, judging the situation and guiding it in a better direction. Soundwise, it's either on or off.

On the other hand, I found I could follow two conversations at once, surprisingly well (as long as I wasn't participating in either of them). I could tell by volume modulation whether an exchange was "public" (ie intended for the whole table) or private (just between two people). I wonder whether the rest of the table was aware, when I was just sitting quietly, that I was taking all that in?

Gosia had prepared some delicious dishes. The best was a fish tartar, which apparently contained *three* kinds of fish, as well as roe (!) and if I understand correctly, it was mashed and then reconstituted as a solid. It had a delicate aromatic flavour, almost sweet. Dill was the strongest recognisable herb. There was also a balsamic vinegar tomato salad, and another salad with beans and a soy mayonnaise. Various kinds of bread, hard boiled egg, antipasto. There was also a soup but it had bacon in it so I skipped that one.

Eating wasn't nearly as difficult as I had anticipated. I learned to probe around in the bowl, sliding the fork under a morsel, and judging from the change in weight whether I'd been successful in picking up a chunk. The tomatoes were the easiest, cos you can spear 'em. The salad was the trickiest, with its little bits, and towards the end I had to resort to using my other hand to guide the food onto my fork. When my plate was removed, Andrzej was amazed: "Not much mess!" I groped around with my hands to make sure he wasn't just having me on...

Andrzej and I got on very well. I imagine what we must have looked like, two old men leaning in conspiratorially to talk about important things like taxi-driving (he's driven for eighteen years), tennis (he plays four days a week) and which TV stations are the best (ABC and SBS, in that order). It didn't seem to bother him at all that I couldn't see. I enjoyed his taxi-philosophy - he knew a lot about politics, history (although sometimes his facts on the formation of Polish democracy were contested by his daughter and granddaughter) and chemical food-growing: in Poland, he had done a masters in Agricultural Engineering.

At a certain point, the more mobile guests dashed off for an Easter egg hunt masterminded by Michael. They were gone for a while. His clues were cryptic and not at all easy to decode. Andrzej picked up my camera. I tried to explain to him how to set it up without the flash, but we didn't quite make it there. He shot a couple of photos of us standing together facing the mirror. I asked him how they looked. "I don't know. They're all a bit dark" he said. I imagined him shaking his head as he inspected the (poorly designed) camera interface.

Later, Anja showed up. She's another Polish friend of Gosia's. It was her birthday. We all sang happy birthday. It was a little weird singing to someone you've never met. When the song finished, she asked: "And WHAT is THIS?" Something in her voice indicated that she was talking about me. "Ah...that's my son," said Dad. "He's got ... a terribly contagious eye condition." The matter wasn't raised again until later...

Andrzej leaned over and said "Oh, Lucas! I think you should take off this blindfold now. You are missing out on something quite beautiful. You are a man, and you should not avoid seeing a beautiful woman. And she is only turning twenty-five today." Of course, he was having me on. But I had to concede, there was nothing in Anja's voice to give away her age. Indeed she could have been anywhere between twenty-five and fifty-five. Anja, Perry, Andrzej and his wife: I had never laid eyes on any of them before. I had absolutely no mental picture to associate with their voices. There was something quite lovely about this, something open. Their eyes are so quick to judge, to separate and grade based on an instantaneous image. The eyes are the organs of the connoisseur. Ears are more generous. It takes time, listening, to generate an impression through sound.

Anja sat to my left, between me and my Dad. I asked her how long she had been in Australia, why she had come, and so forth. "Oh, it's a long story," she said. But long stories are what I needed. I was (as they say) "all ears". Her voice sounded warm and strong. At the end of her tale (arrival in Sydney without a word of English, miraculously making her way into uni, struggling through semiotics and post-structuralist theory, scoring a job as a tape editor at the ABC, taking voluntary redundancy and ending up at Foxtel, always learning something new...) I felt like we were firm friends. "And, you? What about you?" she asked. It was time to let her in on the fact that I (thankfully) don't actually have a contagious eye condition...

All in all, I must say I thoroughly enjoyed my day as a blind man. It was calming. Despite the mild nausea, which stayed with me the whole time (and I must point out that for this reason I deliberately avoided alcohol), the social event felt very simple. I was totally unaffected by the schizophrenic sensation that, even though you are talking to one person, maybe you should, at that moment, be talking to another. I sat still, for longer than I would have thought possible. I only needed to visit the toilet once. I gave my eyes (ravaged by my umbilical attachment to this damn glowing screen) a rest.

*

It was time to wrap up. Michael, Gosia, and Dad decided to go out for a coffee. Instead of calling a cab, they figured it'd be easier to march me down the street and hail one. But "down the street" involved "down a lot of steps", steep narrow old fashioned steps which felt like they were cut into sandstone. I gripped Dad's bicep with my left hand. He had the dog Oscar on a leash on the other side. Dad moved quickly, and I soon gained my confidence, trusting that I wouldn't whack my head into some low-hanging branch. I could smell some powerfully strong flowers.

Nobody moved to holler for a taxi. It seemed that I had been conscripted into coffee too.

So here we were, sitting in a public place (an outdoor cafe in Double Bay, or so I was told), and me with a blindfold on. I felt no sense of self-consciousness. Embarrassment is something for the sighted to worry about. We drank our coffees and huddled around the table, talking about sensory deprivation. Taking away only one sense (we have a whole FIVE!) really sharpens all the others. At a certain point the conversation

drifted away, and all I could hear was a nearby TV (ugly channel nine advertising sounds) and further away, the faint chatter of people.

After a moment, Gosia asked me: what did you think about when it was quiet like that? I wasn't sure. I told her that there was no way to interpret a break in the conversation. Was everyone sitting around uncomfortably, trying to come up with the next thing to say? No, she said. We were all gazing away, lost for a moment, looking at something beautiful.

My taxi driver didn't ask any questions at all. We discussed the best route for the return journey. Parramatta Road? he asked. Yeah, that'd be fine, I said. Or else, Salisbury, off City Road, would be ok. No, he said, Cleveland Street is packed now. Oh, some sport thing? I asked. Yeah, rugby, he said. So Parramatta Road it was. Again, I could trace the route in my head, feeling the lefts and rights. When we hit the long straight stretch on Parramatta, though, I was lost. I had no idea of distance, and the lurching, squelchy softness of the taxi ride was raising my nausea again. I was able to tell him to take a right at the Oxford Tavern, then a left at Silvas, then right again. The fare was twenty five dollars sixty. I gave him the fifty that Dad had slipped me for the ride, and he gave me two notes in return, clearly stating "twenty-five-dollars-change". He asked if I needed any help. No, I said, I'll be fine. I groped around for the handle, opened the door, and stepped out. When I could hear the taxi move away, I raised the blindfold, blinking into the cool air. What a relief.



Inside, I looked at the photos. Dad had taken a few of me [sitting stiffly](#) at the table. These are good documentary evidence, to show that I really went through with it. But my favourite photos were the ones shot by Andrzej, with the two of us in the mirror. The light meter (its judgement distorted by the camera's own flash) overcompensates, and the photograph is almost totally black.

This entry was posted on Monday, April 17th, 2006 at 9:07 pm and is filed under ['sham dailies](#).

9 Responses to "the great escape"

1. *Lionel Says:*

[April 17th, 2006 at 10:27 pm](#) [e](#)

The blindfold is an interesting device to soften the blow of breaking the rules.

The whole episode reminds me of a story that my mother has mentioned over the years, concerning one of her mother's cousins. If I was a better story teller i would check my facts but i will just ramble from memory.

The cousin was a nun in a very strict catholic order and the nuns were not supposed to leave the convent (perhaps this was only for certain periods of the year) so they basically lived in isolation and had no contact with their families. I'm pretty sure they had taken a vow of silence. A time came when the Nun's mother was on her deathbed and the family knew she only had a little while to live. The nun had not seen her mother for a long time and her mother wanted to see her again before she passed away. For the nun to leave the convent and see her mother was in violation of the rules of the order and therein lied the conundrum. So the family were forced to organise a covert operation. Some of the nuns at the convent were sympathetic to the dilemma and were keen to help although they could not allow the nun to visit and talk to her family. So the nun came up with a solution, a little like your use of the blindfold- to somehow soften the fact that the rules were being broken. A date and time were set and the mother sat on the front verandah of the family home, right on the street. The nun/daughter was driven past the house by another nun in the convent stationwagon. The vehicle didn't stop, it just slowed down and drove slowly past the house, allowing the mother and daughter a passing glimpse of oneanother, a strangely isolated,

sad farewell.

She had not technically gone to see her mother, merely passed by.

Your body might have left Petersham but your eyes never did.

i have always wondered how the nun must have felt after her mother had died, did she think “why didnt i just get out of the car and go and hug my mother?” or whether seeing her had been enough, more infact than she was ‘allowed’, within the rules.

really enjoyed reading this ‘great escape’ entry. very beautiful and transporting writing.

2. *Jasmin* Says:

[April 18th, 2006 at 7:19 am e](#)

A very fine account with your characteristic sense of mischief. It made me recall the Woody Allen film, Crimes and Misdemeanors, a family drama in which the wisest character can’t see. How unexpected for you and your father to share in your work.

3. *nicholas b* Says:

[April 18th, 2006 at 8:31 pm e](#)

:: under exposed mirror photos

hi lucas..

we met on the squatspace tour, and I’ve been fascinated by the ‘sham project..

chrisie cotter gallery is 2 minutes walk from my place, so i look forward to whatever it is you end up doing there when this is over..

i don’t know what your photoshop skills are like, but I had a hunch about the two mirror photos that ended todays entry, and you can see the results of the levels being constrained in the links below..

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/bilateral/130670159/>

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/bilateral/130670600/>

i hope you don’t mind me taking liberties with your photos, but digital cameras often know more than they let on..

cheers

4. *deborah* Says:

[April 18th, 2006 at 8:50 pm e](#)

Lucas-it is a very good story, well told. Thankyou.

I’m glad you went. I bet your dad is, too- & how about you? are you?

I wish you could fiddle with the levels in the photo of you & your uncle in the mirror so i can see outlines of your heads.

Reading Lionel’s sad, stupid nun story made me remember acutely my (still) burning rage at Catholicism.

& also, one of the last moments of my long, slow disengagement from it, which has a curious connection to your easter lunch.

In year 12 at my Catholic girl’s school, we still had to do 3 periods a week of religion, and in the very last class for the year (ie. forever), our important nun teacher (also, sadly, the school principal) gave us an extra special whole hour session on Why Virginitiy Is Crucial.

I might have been elaborately rolling my eyes at my best friend, Maria- but in any case, the nun

insisted I share my thoughts with the class.

I said, wellll... if there's a God, he gave us eyes, right? And you don't insist we walk around blindfolded.

Pandemonium erupted, the nun gasped like a beached flathead, the class walked out towards our futures.

Our sexy futures!

5. *deborah* Says:
[April 18th, 2006 at 8:55 pm e](#)

p.s.

while i was slowly typing my story, that photoshop whizz, Nicholas B, just DID what i was lamely suggesting by 'fiddle with the levels'. that's exactly what i meant- it looks great.

6. *shortleftleg* Says:
[April 18th, 2006 at 9:14 pm e](#)

thanks all.

interesting how the "shaman-showman" (or in my case, "sham-man") allusion to beuys has led us into spiritual discussion.

deborah: thanks for your hilarious tale. i love how you got "the last word!" interesting, too, to see the "seeds" of one's later activities in an earlier action. (I hope you saw the "intelligent design" programme on the tv tonight. it was illuminating, to say the least. thrown out of court. interesting tho, how some folks at the forefront of the catholic church hold that there is no contradiction at all between evolutionary theory and faith.)

Deborah, I was VERY glad to have gone. There was a moment when I was sitting there at the table, and I thought to myself - well, you've really done it this time, Lucas - you'll NEVER be invited for lunch again...

but actually, i think it all went down surprisingly well. and yes, it was lovely to be with my dad again. it was an intimate moment, being led by him down the steps, holding onto his right bicep with my left hand, trusting that i wouldn't "come a cropper".

lionel: thanks for your lovely tale. of course, like my blindfold "loophole" the nun's driveby was based on a technicality, and not upon the "spirit of the law". sometimes i think we get so accustomed to a rule that it begins to seem as if it's a "natural law" and not something that was arbitrarily imposed by a human being (and therefore, equally easy to reverse).

nicholas_b: in light of the above, your "unveiling" of my dark photos (thanks!!) begins to have spooky undertones too. more poltergeist than religious, perhaps? and though I am fascinated by your comment, that "digital cameras often know more than they let on" I must say, I also liked the idea of people like deborah having to squint, frustrated, at their computer monitors...a small bodily analogy of my experience for you...

jasmin: i have added "crimes and misdemeanors" to my list of films to watch, in my "what to do" page...

7. *shortleftleg* Says:
[April 20th, 2006 at 1:06 pm e](#)

update:

yesterday was my dad's birthday. i rang him in perth. he was driving, but stopped his car and called me back. he told me that he had shaved his beard off.

now, my dad has had a beard ever since I was born. except in great daggy early '70s photos, i've never seen him cleanfaced. "so when did you shave it off dad?" i asked. "oh, about a week ago", he said.

so his beard was gone at the lunch on easter sunday. i was the only one who didnt see the transformation...

8. *nicholas b* Says:

[April 21st, 2006 at 10:58 am e](#)

hello again lucas..

like i said:

digital cameras often know more than they let on..

now comes [this](#) : A patents for technologies that would allow to determine which camera a digital photo has been shot with..

9. *Liz* Says:

[April 22nd, 2006 at 9:52 am e](#)

Hm yes well maybe it was better you went to that Easter do, it seems you got a lot out of it.

arbitrary lines on a map

In the afternoon, the [Cake Lady](#) came to visit, bearing [natas](#) fresh from Sweet Belem. I made us coffee and we sat in the kitchen chatting away. She's staying at the Regent's Court Hotel in the Cross, its a kind of artist-in-residence where the hotel puts you up in exchange for watering the plants in their beautiful rooftop garden. Not a bad exchange. The Cake Lady's working on some new animated films, which generally channel her rich vault of memories growing up in North Queensland. Recently she's been running art workshops with the kids who travel around with circuses. But the conversation meandered wildly and I forgot to interrogate her about that. Which is a pity, cos I reckon it'd be an interesting story.

The Cake Lady had suggested an assignment to be carried out in the 'sham:

You and a friend/partner arrange to arrive in a foreign city on the same day. Take different forms of transport to get there. Do not make a place to meet. Try and find your friend/partner.

We adapted this project, since we were already both here. Instead of arriving separately, we decided to walk the southern border of the 'sham, starting at opposite ends, and working our way towards each other in the middle. We made up two identical kits: camera (Cakey with a digital, me with my old SLR), a roll of electrical tape, a stanley knife, a brown paper bag.

It was a pleasure to step out in the warm afternoon with our hats. We agreed that if we did not bump into each other along the way, we'd simply rendezvous back at home. No mobile phones on this walk.

The southern border is perhaps the trickiest of all. In the south, the division between Petersham and

Marrickville (and bits of Dulwich Hill) sometimes cuts between houses, and at odd points up narrow laneways. Often, you have to consult the map, and count the number of houses between a known cross street and the boundary line, to properly locate the edge (and thereby avoid overstepping it).



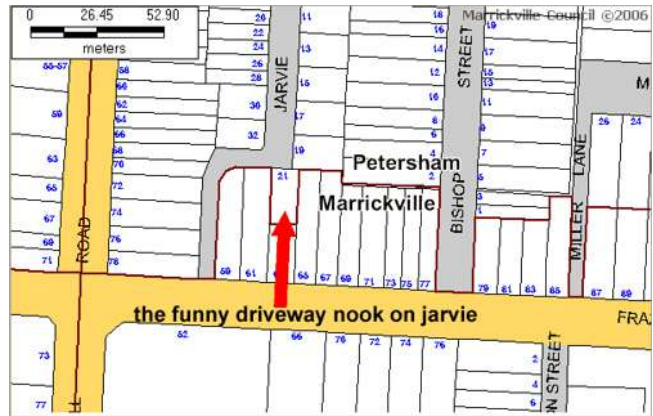
I began at the south-west (on Wardell) and Cakey at the south-east (corner of John and Addison).

Frazer Street is the southern border of the 'sham. This is not marked on my map, but I confirmed it by counting 29 houses along Wardell Road between Morgan and Frazer. Thus I was able to slink along the

footpath on Frazer, right on the edge of Marrickville, before popping back up into Jarvie Avenue. Jarvie's a lovely little crookneck hideaway. Strangely, the boundary runs right up the lane, and seems to carve away the driveway of the house at the end of the street.

It's a weird feeling, to stand there, with this big map unfurled, in the middle of a very quiet street, looking up, then down, then up again, and muttering to myself: "yes, that's it, that's definitely it!" - when there really seems to be no meaning to these land divisions at all.

A little into Jarvie, I took a shot of an array of soft toys hanging over a driveway. A few doors down, a man and his mother were working in the garden, tending the most cleancut manicured hedgework I've ever seen. They had limited space to work with, the hedges were like a miniature labyrinth. "What are you taking photos of?" the man asked me. "Oh, all those toys a few doors down" I replied.



He asked me if I was working for the council. I explained that I was trying to locate the exact border, and showed him the map with the funny little driveway nook at the end of Jarvie. We agreed that it was a weird demarcation. He introduced himself. His name is Neil. His mother is Maria. They said that everyone knew everyone on Jarvie. At the end of the year, they have a big party and all the households come out together onto the street. Maria came out from Portugal maybe thirty years ago. I asked her why she came. Oh, I don't know, she said, maybe because my sister was already here.

When they first arrived in Petersham, the family, all five of them, were living in a single room in the house opposite. When the hedge place came up for sale, they grabbed it straight away, and moved eight metres across the street, where they've been ever since.

I asked Maria why there were so many Portuguese people in the 'sham. She didn't really know. There's also a lot in - [another suburb, and damn if I've forgotten which one she said] - but Petersham is the main one. I complimented Maria on her amazing hedges. Ah, she said, they were better before, but I had the accident. She was hit by a car. "You should have seen her before," said Neil "she was out here twenty four seven!"

Using Morgan Street as a launchpad, I investigated Bishop, Napier, and Miller Streets. All these streets run onto Frazer, like fingers off the hand of Morgan.

On Napier, I bent over to inspect an odd looking guitar amplifier that had been dumped on the sidewalk. It was triangular in shape. When I straightened up, I noticed a big fella standing next to his gate, with a beer in his hand. He said hi and waved, and I wandered over to greet him. His name was Brett, and the place is a mens' boarding house. With the big old fashioned camera hanging around my neck, I guess I looked like a photographer. Brett was pretty interested to hear about the things I was shooting. What, like houses and stuff?

I explained that I wasn't really all that into photography, it was just something extra to do while I walk around. You know, maybe I shoot an interesting plant, a detail on a building, the place where the imaginary border lies. "You should go down to the park in the early morning, you'd get some good shots there!" he said. But when we looked at the map to see which park he was talking about, it was actually out of my territory. We stood there for a moment, examining the layout of the suburb, me holding one end of the big map, him the other, jabbing our fingers at landmarks we could mutually identify. The wind blew up suddenly. Brett said I'd better roll up the map or I'd lose it, and maybe I'd like to come inside and take a few shots.

Inside there was a concrete courtyard with a washing line. A man was sitting quietly on a plastic chair in the middle of the yard in the sun with a beer. "Yeah, take a photo of him!" Brett said. But the seated man

wasn't interested in having his photo taken, and quickly disappeared inside.

We sat in the yard for a little while, musing about photography and creativity. Brett had lots of questions. Like, "So, are you doing this for an assignment for uni?" and "but what if they gave you a really boring suburb to research?" I argued that anything was interesting if you only paid enough attention to it. I don't think he had a problem with that. He's been living in Petersham for eight years.

Brett said he's started a course in video production at the community college - their project is to make instructional videos for African migrants on how to use public transport. But he's not really very creative, he said. He's more technical, anything technical he's fine with.

I made a move to get on with my border walk. Two guys were standing in the yellow sunlight in a doorway. "Get a shot of them!" Brett said. But they weren't interested either. I didn't blame them - they didn't know who I was, or what the photos would be used for. But Brett was really into having his shot taken. He posed at the gate, exactly as he was the moment I first saw him. Beer in hand. Snap.

Miller Lane is a curious one. The border runs right down the middle of the lane. To your left and right you are in Marrickville. Hanging over the fence was the remnant of an old pea crop. There was still the odd pod left unharvested, and so I gleaned one. There were two peas in the pod. I ate one, and put the other in my paper bag for the Cake Lady.

On Rose Lane, an enterprising resident had struck back against littering, with a [hand made sign](#). I turned it over and took a photo: DON'T DUMP YOUR JUNK IN OUR LANE, texta-scrawled onto a rectangle of lino, hanging on the fence with string, with UDL cans strung up to it.

I reached John Street without encountering the Cake Lady. We must have missed each other while I was chatting with Brett. I was kinda glad, because I was having fun, and I wanted to keep going to the end. I spotted Charm's orange Kombi. I had forgotten that she and Mon had a place on John St. The front door was open, and I hollered out down their dark corridor. They were home. Mon's just given birth, exactly one week ago, to a beautiful baby boy. He hasn't got a name yet, but it's going to happen soon, she assured me. She also hoped that his umbilical stub (not sure of the technical term) was going to drop off soon. It's supposed to take seven to ten days, and its getting a bit smelly.

Mon and Charm were a fount of leads: from a guy that lives a few doors down who believes that Petersham is the "best suburb in the world", to the Michael Jackson double who runs the toy store, and of course, Steve at Borsellino Brothers. I know I have to talk to Steve soon. He's essential. But I'm just building up to it.

The Cake Lady had beaten me home. We compared notes, and had a look at the great shots she'd taken with the digital (you'll have to wait for mine until I get them processed). In some cases, Cakey had been a lot more rigorous than me. For instance, at the corner of John and Addison, she had worked out the exact point that the boundary ran through. At this spot, she affixed a red cross with her electrical tape, and took two photos: one of the house which was within Petersham, and one looking out across the border and into Marrickville beyond.

[Before signing off, I'd also like to point out that while we were fooling around the neighbourhood pondering the arbitrary divisions of suburbs, "Australia" has been introducing [new laws](#) so that even if refugees succeed in crossing shark-infested-waters to reach the mainland, they will now be sent offshore again to have their claims for asylum processed. Effectively it means the national borders are now kinda everywhere, and at the same time, nowhere...how odd. xL]

This entry was posted on Tuesday, April 18th, 2006 at 9:33 pm and is filed under [sham dailies](#), [walks](#), [the borders](#).

2 Responses to "arbitrary lines on a map"

1. *Natalie Bryce Says:*
[April 19th, 2006 at 9:56 am](#) [e](#)

Hi there

This is a great project and you've chosen a fantastic suburb. We lived at 18 Jarvie Ave for 2 years before my husband got transferred to Melbourne and I'm consumed with longing to go back - best street I've ever lived in and its true about the Christmas parties (but we never went).

I've got a Petersham story for you and also a suggested activity. My Petersham story first: I am a lawyer and a trifle impatient. I called a taxi to go into work early one morning and it was taking ages and ages to arrive. Finally a taxi pulls into the street and without even noticing the branding, I stopped it in the middle of the street and jumped in, roundly abusing the hapless driver for making me late etc etc etc. We drove for about 10 minutes before he turns to me and says: You know, I am not your taxi. I am your neighbour two doors down. I was just finishing my shift and going home to get breakfast. Didn't I feel like a shit! He then became my regular driver. He was lovely. My suggestion: go to a branch meeting of every political party that has a Petersham branch. The Petersham ALP branch that meets at the Town Hall is really nice. Best of luck. Natalie

2. *Big-sister Bec Says:*

[April 20th, 2006 at 11:17 pm e](#)

Um...maternal worry button has been pressed... I feel a sort of responsibility to mention that if a baby's umbilical cord stump is smelly, I think that's not a good thing and you're supposed to get it checked out. M's certainly wasn't and I'm sure when I left the hospital they said to see a doctor or community health nurse or someone if it started oozing or was smelly...

[a short note on "method"...](#)

OK, here's what I do.

I wake up really early every morning, make myself a strong black coffee using the aluminium stovetop percolator, and I boot up the computer. In my dream like state, the words just flow out of me, my fingers machine-gunning the keyboard until all of my memories from yesterday are vomited up into the blog. This process takes about an hour, and then I'm free to go about the day however I please.

Hmm. That's the theory at least.

The practice is more like this: I crawl out of bed about nine am. While I've been lying there, semi-comatose, vaguely aware that I should get out of bed, various sounds have filtered through my window. Wolfie barking next door (he's woken up first and wants his brekkie), the construction site starting up with its excavation, the first aeroplanes of the day, the slow build up of traffic. Then I drink a slow, milky coffee, sitting in the kitchen with Bec, hardly making any sense as we utter fragmentary statements of fact like "uh. hard to get up today." and "man, even that one glass of wine makes me feel like shit in the morning" and "aren't you just the cutest little angel in the world" (this last one is Bec to her cat Drazic). Bec fusses around getting ready for work while I boot up the computer, checking email and looking at the Herald website and generally seeming "busy". Then Bec heads off to the gallery. About this time the phone calls start to come in, and maybe I get a visitor from outside the 'sham, just popping in for coffee, or wondering if I can look over a grant application or something. Late morning, I'm alone. Finally it's time to write. But I'm hungry now, having only had coffee for breakfast (or maybe actually two coffees by now) and I can't write until I've eaten something...

You get the picture. The epitome of inefficiency. To the point where I end up needing to get out of the house, not having written about yesterday, and go off for a walk somewhere. It's often late afternoon / early evening by the time I write. I'm tired, I have the sense that it's overdue, that my readers have been waiting for an update. Then there's photos to process. [Flickr](#) may be the greatest tool in the world, but it takes AGES to upload shots, and give em titles, descriptions, and the all important tags. And if there are photos to be included in the blog entry, there's *no way* I can finalise it until the Flickr work is done. By now I'm tired, I've got screen fatigue, my eyes themselves have begun to flicker. And it's gotten so late that there's no hope of waking up early to get the jump on the day...

This entry was posted on Wednesday, April 19th, 2006 at 9:56 am and is filed under ['sham dailies](#).

2 Responses to “a short note on “method”...”

1. *Michele Purcell* Says:

[April 19th, 2006 at 11:40 pm e](#)

Lucas dear...

I suggest you resort to an old habit of yours...eat a bowl of ten WeetBix and good full-cream milk as soon as you open your eyes. Worked well in the past!

Mum xx

2. *crazy cat lady* Says:

[April 20th, 2006 at 4:15 pm e](#)

Drazic rocks!

Ruben doesn't like dogs I see trouble ahead...

[‘Sham artist refuses to push boundaries](#)

Sunanda Creagh has written an article about little ole me, [here](#).

If you get the print copy of the paper, there's a picture of Luciana and Wolfie and me rollerskating. Perhaps some clever bored person who steals time from their office job to read this will make themselves look busy scanning in the article and email it to me. Hint hint. Then I can post it up here and send you a thousand thanks. [NB! This has been done! [Thanks to Lisa](#) from North Petersham, and also to Sarah from the Marrickville Council.]

Oh, and if you'd like to compare stories...MY account of Sunanda's visit to the 'sham is [here](#).

Anyways, just in case the Herald website goes belly-up some time in the future, I'll include a transcript of the article below. Hooroo.

‘Sham artist refuses to push boundaries

By Sunanda Creagh

April 19, 2006

IF YOU were in Double Bay on Sunday, you may have seen a young man wearing an airline-style eyemask at an outdoor cafe. It was the artist Lucas Ihlein, pretending he was in Petersham.

The PhD student is part way through an art project called Bilateral Petersham, which requires him to stay within the boundaries of the inner-west suburb for two months. An unforeseen but important family commitment led to the emergency trip to Double Bay, but the blindfold protected the project's integrity - in the past fortnight he hasn't laid eyes on anyone or anything outside of what he has come to refer to as "the 'Sham".

Apart from the Double Bay blip, Ihlein has stayed within the council-defined borders of Petersham, even honouring the Petersham/Lewisham border, part of which runs down the middle of a netball court. "We have most things here," he says happily, waving an arm towards New Canterbury Road. "But things like underpants and socks - you know how you would normally go to Kmart or something? There's really nowhere round here apart from the op shops. I'll have to look into that."

Ihlein's blog (www.thesham.info) records in fascinating detail his daily experiences: visiting the suburb's defunct rollerskating rink; his first drop-in to the local bowling club; walking his neighbour's dog, Wolfie.

"In April-May last year, I was artist-in-residence in Kellerberrin, a tiny town in the West Australian wheatbelt," he writes. "For the two months I was there, I kept a blog each morning, about who I met, what we talked about - a document of mutual curiosity between a city dweller and his rural hosts. My question on returning to Sydney was: 'How would this exact same process work in my own neighbourhood?'"

Quite well, apparently. Ihlein is reluctant to admit it, but while he wanders the streets with Wolfie - meeting people and learning local stories - his project is starting to look suspiciously like community building.

“Sometimes it takes somebody to take a little bit of time out of their life and look at what’s going on for everyone to realise what they value around them. Maybe that’s a role that an artist is able to take on,” he says.

A week before his council-funded project began, Ihlein attended a neighbourhood meeting where residents discussed the Petersham they would like to see. “One of the things that almost everybody talked about was the word ‘community’,” he says. His aim is to create a work that investigates and responds to the idea of community, without becoming a clunky work of public art.

“But public art can be actually doing stuff rather than just whacking a sculpture somewhere. In a way, I feel like my contribution is about creating knowledge through doing something, rather than just theorising about it,” he says.

Ihlein says the project is easier than he thought it would be, but he gets the odd yearning for life outside the ‘Sham.

“The other day my friend Mick sent me a message saying, ‘Would I be a bastard if I said this was a perfect day for the beach?’ “

This entry was posted on Wednesday, April 19th, 2006 at 10:09 am and is filed under [correspondence](#).

5 Responses to “‘Sham artist refuses to push boundaries”

1. [j-lem](#) Says:

[April 19th, 2006 at 12:54 pm e](#)

G’day, saw the herald article online and went straight to your blog. Thought you might be interested in knowing that there is a picture of you and your mate on rollerskates here:

http://www.smh.com.au/ffximage/2006/04/19/petersham_wideweb_470x330,2.jpg

(Only works if you copy the address and paste in a new window - odd but true)

Super idea by the way - reminds me of some of the things Danny Wallace has done. I’ve just read one of his books which might interest you: ‘Join Me’. He seems to do things just to see what happens.. and I must admit I’m becoming a bit of a fan.

have a super day Lucas!

j-lem

2. [mushroom](#) Says:

[April 19th, 2006 at 1:31 pm e](#)

Dude I live in leichhardt and never leave and it aint no experiment ;-)

3. [Mick](#) Says:

[April 20th, 2006 at 2:00 pm e](#)

Great article!

i love the mention i get at the end!

And look what the paper reports on the very next day:

<http://www.smh.com.au/news/unusual-tales/look-at-the-writer-mummy/2006/04/20/1145344190995.html>

x>mick

4. karizy Says:

[May 10th, 2006 at 2:45 pm e](#)

****THIS IS THE SHAM MASSIVE ROUND TABLE****

who are you and why are stealing our dope lingo?
we've been living your little experiment for years now.
it's old and unoriginal.
we think it's time you step off.

5. shortleftleg Says:

[May 10th, 2006 at 3:11 pm e](#)

Hey SHAM MASSIVE! Tell me more! I am curious...Certainly I pose no threat to your territory...
I'm just an artist who's been in Petersham for about two years, not very long I know...but I wanted
to give some attention to the neighborhood I live in.
I do kinda writing and web projects, as well as working with the groups [SquatSpace](#) and [NUCA](#).
It'd be good to feature you guys here too, if you'd be into it. I'd heard about something called the
SHAM MASSIVE but didn't know how to reach you...

the lost vignettes

It's come to my attention that I am writing too much. I need to cut down, see if I can say what I need to say, but in fewer words. Because of my excessively verbose accounts of some recent events, a lot of great stuff has dropped through the net. Here are a few brief "vignettes" to get us all up to speed...

I met Chris a few weeks back. She was helping Marie do up the place for Barbara. She'd heard that we had been burgled. She wanted to ask me this: Did I have any friends who were punks? I said, I dunno, you mean, like with mohawks and stuff? No, she said, all in black with piercings and curly hair. I'm not sure, I said. Well, about the time of your break-in, I saw a young man who looked like that trying to jump over your back fence. Ah, I thought, that'd be Mickie for sure.

He doesn't have piercings, but I can understand how Chris' eye might have drawn em in.

*

On Monday, Chris and Marie were putting the finishing touches on Barbara's flat. They've replaced the carpet, scrubbed, spacked, and painted the walls, overhauled the bathroom with every chemical known to man, and even painted the kitchen cupboards and table. It's a rented flat, but the landlord has been so slow to act that they took it upon themselves. Barbara's been living there fifteen years. She doesn't have a clue what they are doing. When she gets home she will either be delighted or absolutely furious. Marie, it has to be said, is fitting all this in between *two* jobs - one fulltime day job, and one weekend night job. These women are amazing.

*

After visiting the bowlo last Friday, I spent some time with Eric at the Palace Pantry. We sat in the sun and he told me his grand plans to expand his corner store cafe into a larger place serving meals in the evening. All did not go smoothly with his development application. Plenty of mean-spirited objections. He feels that some of his neighbours didn't understand that he, too, is a family man. He doesn't want to have "yahoo-ing" going on til the wee hours of the morning. Just a place to eat quality food, fresh organic stuff, nothing cheap and nasty. Eric was bored just running a mixed business. He knows almost everyone who comes into the Pantry. He's a "[neighbourhood](#) node" for sure.

*

On Friday arvo, Bruce called up. We met outside the RSL, and went for a walk, under the railway tunnel and over to the North side. We strolled around the cricket pitch at Petersham Park, stopping in the late afternoon sun. Bruce took off his shirt and shoes and sat letting the light fall on him. We admired passing

dogs. Each [time](#) I [stopped](#) to [take](#) a [photo](#), Bruce would quickly grab my shopping basket, so I could shoot with a steady hand. Heading home, someone phoned him up, outside the Commonwealth Bank on Audley Street. He whispered “see you soon Lucas!” We shook hands and gave each other big grins.

*

On Saturday, after doing our southern-border walk, Cakey and I needed a bottle of wine. At the liquor store, we got chatting with Pamela. She and her husband Anthony live upstairs. Anthony has grown up in that building. He’s spent every year of his life there, except for one. Pamela said it’s hard sometimes, living and working together, and sleeping above the shop. She’ll lie awake at night thinking about orders that need placing. Anthony was an un-corkable font of information. He knows the full history of Canterbury Road, and poured out story after story, including about the first Portuguese real estate agent / travel agent to set up, a few doors down. It was because of this fellow that the Portuguese immigrants found places to live in the area. Anthony was an accident prone child. He broke his wrist (?) at the RollerRink, and his leg, at age ten, carrying ten cartons of KB cans on a trolley. He was not so optimistic about the future of the RollerRink. The cinema idea, he thought, would be hard to get off the ground because of the heritage stuff. You can’t touch those [balconies](#)...

This entry was posted on Wednesday, April 19th, 2006 at 2:13 pm and is filed under '[sham dailies](#)'.

7 Responses to “the lost vignettes”

1. *Liz Goodyer* Says:

[April 19th, 2006 at 3:01 pm e](#)

Well there Lucas,

Here i am sitting Doha Qatar- probably the same size as Petersham and low and behold who do I see when I look up the Arts hub for some local news but my darling cousing rollerskating. Well done babe - reading your lblog and feeling extremely homesick. I feel like I am joining inthe experiment with you - not being able to leave the boundaries of Doha due to work and there is no Kmart here either - though a couple of Marks and Sparks and only 1 bottle shop - how do the expats live?? I will keep on reading - you should call mum and nan and drag them to Petersham - Mum told me you were in stanmore so I think they need an update.

Lots of Love to you.....

2. *Raquel* Says:

[April 20th, 2006 at 8:35 am e](#)

Hi Liz Hi Lucas,

the 'sham project dfinalty needs a visit from Nan and Gabe. Nan should bring over one of her vegetarian food pacels which you could review. I also recome she brings a large quanitiy of meranges which i will come up and help you eat.

Hope you find some suburban entertainment in Doha Liz!

Where's Drazic!

3. *Alex Broun* Says:

[April 20th, 2006 at 2:15 pm e](#)

Hi Lucas,

Read about you in the SMH. Well done to you !

I live at 2/9 West Street, Petersham - although it maybe Lewisham. I'm not sure. It's right next to Petersham Oval but I walk to Lewisham train station in the morning to go to work.

Am I in Lewisham or Petersham ? If I am then you might know Janine, she walks her little dog Riley in the park. She lives below me and was help run the Cracker Comedy Festival so she's bneen pretty busy !

I don't go to Sweet Belem. I'm more a Gloria's person. My favourite place in Petersham is the new Portuguese Deli near the old Portuguese butcher across the intersection from the Korean fruit shop.

The place I hate the most is the Corner Shop near the "nude" Bowling Club. It's never open and it is the most expensive corner shop in the world ! I think the owners got lost on their way to Mosman. They've made so much money from their rip off prices I see they're getting renovations. Good for them.

I can't believe you got into the Skating Rink. Did they open it up for you ? Isn't it closed ? Do you ever go to Officeworks ? I like that too. How boring am I. Or is that pass the borders ?

What are the borders ? Anyway enough from me.

Bw,
Alex Broun

4. *Alex Broun* Says:

[April 20th, 2006 at 2:19 pm e](#)

Another thing I really hate is all the 'tag' graffitti. It is not art ? I'm sorry.

And they do it on people's houses ! Especially the white place on the corner near the most expensive corner shop in the world.

Can't you stop them ? They are vandals and have no respect for people's rights at all !

"tag" graffitti ain't art - it's crap. Some graffiti murals are beautiful but "tags" are just a waste of paint and time.

5. *lisa* Says:

[April 20th, 2006 at 2:58 pm e](#)

hi there Alex, I reckon it will depend on which side of West St you're on, but once we know you could have the right royal pleasure of playing for your country, Petersham NORTH, in the North vs. South bowlo tournament! Not sure about the "nude" bit, but do stay tuned...

6. *mayhem* Says:

[April 20th, 2006 at 10:46 pm e](#)

woah alex wots tha deal with tags?
surely there's worse eyesores in the sham to get het up about.

i mean they're a bit thin and inspid - but have YOU tried doing a bit of spontaneous graffitti lately?
- you gotta be fast - especially with those creepy rip of merchants next to that great white building

btw - I've got a PRISTINE LAWN BOWLS outfit if anyone wants to borrow it. Its a laides size 14-16 - wiht a dress, hat and size 6.5 shoes. i'm not from the SHAM - but I'm sure the dress would appreciate a wear....

7. *shortleftleg* Says:

[April 21st, 2006 at 9:25 pm e](#)

-alex, the best thing i can suggest re the graffiti tags is that i request my friend mick to write a short account of the relationship between "legal" and "illegal" graffiti. perhaps rather than thinking that tagging is a crime that should simply go away, we could think about it as a social phenomenon to do with the ownership of space...

Petersham, Thursday April 20, 2006

Wednesday:

Things are returning to a more manageable pace. I had coffee with Anna from the council, down at Sweet

Belem. She hurt her back at the Cook's River Festival last week, and is only just beginning to recover. The most exciting news Anna had for me was that a pair of Filipino artists is heading for the 'sham! They arrive in early May, here to set up an installation for the [Sydney Biennale](#). As part of their residency here - above the Petersham Town Hall - they are required to do some kind of public presentation. This is great news. I suggested we join forces and do a slideshow down at the bowling club, with drinks and Fiona's catering and music and all. I reckon the Filipinos will have some amazing tales to tell. And for me it's a good chance to answer that curly perennial question: "So, what kind of art do you do?"

[Speaking of the Bowling Club, [this Sunday](#) will be a good time to check out how the noble game actually works, how many folks are needed for teams etc, in preparation for our big North versus South 'sham bowl-off. After this research, I will set a time and date and we can start training in earnest... Do get in touch if you'd like to join in the tournament. I reiterate, no prior experience required...]

*

Jay came to visit for lunch. In true Jay style, he was a whole hour *early*. He brought food - sausage roll for him, cheese and spinach pasty for me - and plenty of greenery, cheese, and of course, raw cloves of garlic. And his dog Leo. Leo and Drazic growled at each other, and Draz disappeared around the corner to take refuge at Luciana's. Jay and I had business to attend to. I've been asked to write about his photographic archive for [Photofile](#) magazine. We sat at the kitchen bench and paged through his snapshots stuck with tape inside plastic sleeves. Jay takes photos of ordinary surfaces around the house. He then cuts bits out of them with a stanley knife, and swaps the bits into another, similar photo. The result is a kind of visual puzzle, and even *he* finds it difficult to piece 'em back together sometimes. They are visually elegant, intellectually satisfying, and quite humorous. He also has an ongoing diaristic series with an old chrome pram he's converted into the equivalent of a "ute" - he carries his spirit level and tools to worksites when he does handyman and renovation work. I wish he'd left a folder with me so I could put a few pictures up online, but he packed 'em all back up when he left.

*

Around four, I gave Luciana a yell, and we went for a walk. It's unbelievably warm for this time of year. We headed over to the video store, where she needed to return some tapes. (The store's called Stanmore Video Ezy, but oddly (and luckily) enough, its actually in Petersham!)

[note: this information is INCORRECT. In the process of verifying the locality of the store, I have actually discovered that Video Ezy Stanmore [really IS in Stanmore](#). This is a colossal error on my behalf, and I put it down to the fact that I have not yet done the eastern boundary walk yet. The boundary runs along College Lane, and Video Ezy is *clearly east* of this point. My sincerest apologies to all concerned...What a gaff! And what a bummer, no more taking out videos. Sigh. I leave it to you, dear readers, to work out if I am to be forgiven for this (honest) mistake...]

I took out *Kitchen Stories* (a Scandinavian movie - the blurb says the director was inspired by real "post WWII 'home science' studies that tried to chart housework efficiency through in-home observation"), and *Crimes and Misdemeanors* (recommended by Jasmin, since its all about blindness). Luciana and I strolled down Crystal Street. We called in to say hi to "Moz". He's a hairdresser at the corner of Trafalgar. Luciana used to get him to cut her hair but it's been a while since she could afford it. Moz is a cheeky fellow. He asked if we were "out for a lovers' walk," and made all sorts of innuendo of this sort. His teasing was slightly irritating, but friendly enough so that if you were to express annoyance, it'd just show you're just a bit stuck up. Clever fellow. Luciana said he knows a LOT about what's going on in the 'sham. In fact, that's the first thing he asked me when I walked in, whether I live locally. I must go back for a cut, or at the very least, to lie back in those special sinks to get my hair washed. And even more importantly, to discuss "male pattern baldness" with someone in the know - I sense the beginnings of a thinning on top...

At the bottom of the hill, we stopped for a moment to peer in a window as a lady was clipping a poodle. The dog looked pretty happy up there on a shelf being pruned. We wondered who could afford such a service, but we couldn't quite build up the courage to go ask her about it. Maybe I'll take Wolfie down

there next time...

Around the corner, we stumbled upon [City Scrapbooking](#). What the hell is “scrapbooking”? Inside, we found an array of very fancy square papers, and pricey-looking stationery accoutrements. We asked Jenny, who runs the shop, about this phenomenon. Basically, what you’re looking at here is a kind of hyper-customised personal photo-album creation activity. Instead of just whacking your photos in a shop-bought album, and slipping them behind plastic pockets, you start with a special paper, arrange the shot how you like it, add collage and text around it...pretty much tell the story of the photo by contextualising it. It’s a framing technique I suppose. Oh, and its all acid free. The City Scrapbooking website says:

Scrapbooking has a way of bringing people together. What is more important than our family and friends and the memories that bind us? Nothing! That’s why it is so important to safely document and combine our precious photos and memorabilia with the appropriate tools and materials.

I asked Jenny if she knew about [Flickr](#), and explained how you upload the shot, title it, add searchable key words, and descriptions etc. Oh, you mean “digital scrapbooking!” she said. So there you go. The world of fiercely personalised self-publishing is alive and well at the North East corner of *Petersham* (contrary to their website, which says it’s in Leichhardt. We all make mistakes I guess). They have free beginners workshops too...

We lingered in front of a few shopfronts on Parramatta Road. It looks like shops on the ‘sham side suffer a lot more than those on the Leichhardt side. Plenty of boarded up places, retail ideas that look like they had a short lifespan. Will we ever know the crucial factors that make a store thrive or perish? Evidently successful despite the odds are the “[Casa del Disco](#)” (Luciana chuckled over the posters of washed up Italian pop stars who still seem to have a following here in Sydney) and [Eiger’s Swiss Restaurant](#) (serving delicious roesti - those potato cake things...I *really* wanna eat there).

Left onto Palace, and we popped in to see if Lisa was home. She wasn’t, but her next door neighbour was out checking the mailbox. She greeted us with uncharacteristic warmth for a stranger. Luciana and I were a little taken aback. This lady’s “hello!” seemed to imply that further conversation was required, rather than just a polite “hi” and move on. We shuffled closer. She remarked on the incredibly warm weather. Yes, I said, those idiots have closed the swimming pool too early this year. I would be swimming right now if it was open. She introduced herself. Her name is Lucy, and she’s from Chile. I think she misses her children, who are both overseas. She invited us to come back for a cup of tea sometime. We arranged to visit around six on Thursday...

This entry was posted on Thursday, April 20th, 2006 at 7:45 pm and is filed under '[sham dailies](#)'.

One Response to “Petersham, Thursday April 20, 2006”

1. *Big-sister Bec* Says:
[April 20th, 2006 at 10:55 pm e](#)

Hiya Luco

Have you ever read the children’s book ‘Walking the boundary’ by Jackie French? Your adventures walking your own Petersham boundaries put me in mind of it... there’s a website link with some info about it: <http://www.jackiefrench.com/walkbound.html> I quite enjoyed it when I read it years ago - when I was babysitting J in Kununurra for a week while Mum was back in Perth on some conference. I got it out of the Kununurra library, joined for one week and the librarian was reaaaaally suspicious about it too...charged me a \$50 deposit for my temporary membership :). got a library in Petersham?

[sustainable transport](#)

On Wednesday night Bec came home late from work. We watched a bit of TV together. On Lateline, there was a report about the booming price of petrol. It’s now pushing \$1.40 a litre, and there was the

treasurer, looking somewhat amazed that the hike in transport costs hasn't really resulted (yet) in a general lift in inflation. "So far, so good," he said to the camera.

Bec: "We *really are* going to run those oil supplies down to nothing before we start thinking about different energy sources, aren't we?"

Me: "Well, it's just human nature. For instance, in theory it should not be difficult for us to predict when we are going to run out of toilet paper or washing powder at home. But we *always* do, we run em down to nothing and then there's a minor crisis before we get around to doing anything about it. The oil issue is more or less the same thing on a larger scale..."

Sure enough, yesterday, my dirty clothes were piled high in the basket, and my stubble was moving from "designer" to "vagrant". There was nothing for it. It was time for a visit to the chemist. I got washing powder and shaving cream. To show how highly evolved I am, I even splashed out on toilet paper, although we still have a roll and a half to go.

I walked west down Canterbury, past the old Roller Rink, to look in the window of the barber shop. Maybe, I thought, I could kill two birds with one stone and have a shave in there. It's a great old fashioned joint called "The Locals Barber Shop," so I figure I qualify. But there were already two locals waiting for the solitary barber. My shave will have to wait for another day. I picked up some bananas from K.Jim, and headed back up the road. Outside Sweet Belem, two "young people" were playing chess and eating pastry. They looked up and said Hi!, and asked if I'd like to join them. Sure, I said.

"I was just saying," said the one whose name turned out to be Heather, "That one of the things I like is meeting strangers." Tully, her companion, agreed. They were playing a local variation on chess. In their version, each time a move is made, you have to declare something that you like. And it can't just be the name of a TV show or some pre-packaged product, it has to be something about it that you like, some connection you yourself have to the object of liking. Needless to say, I liked them both immediately. I settled in to watch them play.

The other peculiarity about this game was that they were playing it sideways. Instead of the more aggressive frontal-attack style, Tully and Heather were experimenting with a more detached, lateral approach. That way, you could see both sides, and appreciate the whole game, rather than being so partisan. We ordered second coffees, and Heather paid for them, seeing as I had (conveniently) just shelled out my last shekles on toiletries.

Heather was taking a "mental health day" from her job as a sustainable transport planner. Tully is a procrastinating psychology student. He's got two rather large essays to work on. One is about reading cognition and dyslexia. Something about how you can be: a good reader but a poor speller; a good reader and a good speller; a poor reader and a poor speller (obviously); but it's extremely rare to find a good speller who is not also a good reader. It's all to do with how you see words as shapes. Yes! I said. I love this kind of talk. I can spot a spelling mistake at twenty paces - but there are others (like my friend Anne) who are even more spelling-fanatical than me.

(Incidentally, if you spot any spellos, misplaced apostrophes, or inappropriate commas in this electronic tome, be sure to let me know. It really does irritate me, and I promise not to be offended).

Tully's other essay was on a subject a lot heavier, perhaps more to do with mental health, but I forget what.

It turns out that Heather and Tully live just a stone's throw away, right next door to Rohan! When we did our [Petersham Pub Crawl](#), two Saturdays ago, they had been throwing a party. Stuart had been keen to crash it, and in retrospect, we were wrong not to have trusted his party instinct. Apparently, at this shindig, there were two boxes at the door: one with boys' names and one with girls'. You had to dip your hand into the box of your choice, and draw out your new name to be used for the rest of the evening - they were all old fashioned ones like Elfriede and Gertrude and Maximillion (I just made these up, but you get the gist). We really should have gone to this party, instead of ending the night at the moderately depressing, and almost entirely empty [Livingstone Hotel](#).

I enlisted my new friends to the Petersham South Champions Bowling team.

Later, I called in with a pumpkin for their house. Only Heather was home. She showed me around their huge old terrace. Six people live there. Their dates of birth were listed on the fridge in whiteboard marker. I was shocked. They were ALL born in the '80s. Upstairs, there's a great view of Canterbury Road. We stood there for a moment, admiring Rohan's chili and capsicum plants on the next door balcony. I fired off a shot into the afternoon sun.

We headed for the north side to throw a frisbee. I took Heather past the bowling club. Oh, she said, that lawn looks amazing, I'd love to turn cartwheels on it. Let's do it then! I replied. (By "let's" of course I meant "you"). There was a man with two metal watering cans on the upper green. Heather was a bit worried he'd get cross at the cartwheel shenanigans. We decided to go ask him if it'd be ok. His name was Peter. He's not the greenskeeper, but he maintains the beautiful succulents and flowers around the perimeter of the green. Peter's been living in Petersham for years. He said the area has changed a lot recently, and frankly, he wasn't all that keen on the way it's changed. Used to be you could buy flowers, hardware, all sorts of things, up on Canterbury Road. Now it's all chicken. Good if you like spicy chicken, Heather offered cheerfully. I don't, he said. Peter gave Heather permission to cartwheel to her heart's content. As we were heading off, he was laying wet newspaper in a plastic tub. Apparently when you lay flower seeds on the paper, they germinate more quickly.

Across at Petersham Park, Heather and I headed to the middle of the cricket pitch. Her frisbee action wasn't as good as her cartwheeling, but it improved slightly as we threw and chatted away. She had a ton of questions for me, good and challenging ones too. Like: "What exactly is the "art" part of my project? It looks more like some sort of sociological thing"; and "How long do you think it takes to make connections in the big city?" (she only moved into the 'sham a month ago); and "Do you think that good architectural design can make for a better sense of community?" These were tough - especially this last one.

For her part, Heather is a hard core cycling fan. She rides all the way to work at North Sydney every day. Her company provides consulting advice for designing sustainable development solutions. I reckon you'd have to be an optimist to work in that field in this city...And she definitely is an optimist.

The light was fading, and Heather had to get back for her shift at the food co-op in Enmore. I, too, had an appointment for a cup of tea with Lucy on Palace Street. I was a bit early, so I sat on the verge reading *The Glebe*, and waiting for Lucy to come home. Pretty soon she arrived. Where's Luciana? she asked me. I told her something had come up for Luciana, and explained what a crazy busy life she leads. I was a bit worried how things looked - letting a strange man into the house. I asked if Lucy felt ok about it. "Oh no, it's fine, I trust you!" she said.

Lucy's from Chile. She's been in Petersham since the late '70s (ie before anyone in Tully and Heather's house was even born!) Her two children have gone overseas, the daughter in France, the son is finding his roots back in Chile. She misses them a lot. Her husband died a long time ago, and her house feels a bit too big for her. Spanish radio played loudly in the kitchen the whole time we talked. Lucy's mad about plants. She's about to graduate from her third certificate in horticulture at TAFE, where she learned to identify hundreds of native plant species. She's now studying floristry, and thinking to set up a small business from home arranging flowers. "You know, I like to keep learning new things" she said.

I really believe this about her. Lucy did most of the talking while we sipped our tea, but the few times I chimed in with my related experiences, she leaned in and listened intently. I could see she was checking my stories against her existing ways of thinking about the world. For instance, she said that it's always more fun to travel together with a friend. On the other hand, I said, when you travel alone, sometimes unexpected things happen. She asked for an example.

When I went to China in 1999, I had a single phone number in my pocket. That phone number resulted in lunch with an artist I had never met before, then dinners and tours with an expanding circle of friends, and ended up with me giving a slide show in a radical French(!) bookshop. When you're travelling in a pair, sometimes you just play it safe and stick together.

We talked about loneliness, and the difficulty of finding a new partner when you have an existing life. You have to find someone who is kind, and good around the house, and good with the kids, and fun to be with. Then, she said, men are often jealous of the love a mother has for her children. But what they don't understand is that a woman has *all kinds of love*, in unlimited quantities. She has love for her husband,

love for her children, love for her friends, and all these can sit side by side with no problem.

When it was time to leave, Lucy said, "Well, thank you for visiting me. I like you Luca, there is something gentle about you." I liked her too. I suggested that Lisa and I might visit during the day next week, and look at her garden a bit. She also asked me to send my best to Luciana, who she hoped to see again too.

This entry was posted on Friday, April 21st, 2006 at 9:00 am and is filed under ['sham dailies](#).

7 Responses to "sustainable transport"

1. [Alex Broun](#) Says:
[April 21st, 2006 at 1:17 pm e](#)

Hi Lucas,

Great story. I'm reading it at work.

I work at ACP as a Rugby Journalist. I also write and direct for the theatre. I have two plays coming on soon but they are in Balmain and Woolloomooloo so you won't be able to come and see them.

You can check one of them out in this link. (<http://www.oldfitzroy.com.au/trs/default.asp>)

My play is The Prince of Brunswick East.

I also run a short play festival called Short & Sweet - have you heard of that ?

I think I must be in Petersham because I live just in front of the Park. I think I'm on the right side of West Street - the Petersham side. Go Petersham !

I have lived in Petersham for almost three years. I used to live with my ex-girlfriend but we broke up and she moved out. But she still lives in Petersham too ! How cool is that.

You could go and visit her too. She got the cat - Lily - who is really cute but her house is always very messy. Boy she is going to be mad when she reads that.

You should come and visit - Janine who lives downstairs has big scrabble nights. You should come and play - that would be fun. Last time I played I won - I got 220 points and used all my seven letters in one word to get 50 bonus points.

You and Lisa could also come and watch rugby with me one night at the Livingstone Hotel. I watch a lot of a rugby as I'm a Rugby Journalist.

Bw,
AB

2. [Tully](#) Says:
[April 21st, 2006 at 2:07 pm e](#)

I was wondering where that pumpkin came from.

I told some of our hosuemates about your project and now they're eager to meet you. You (and perhaps your house?) should come over for dinner some time. We love guests.

3. [Ross Stevens](#) Says:
[April 21st, 2006 at 2:15 pm e](#)

Hello Lucas,

I just wanted to say thanks for a nice read. After a day of reports and opinion pieces in the paper, it's nice to observe the unhurried observations of a different life.

And Heather is my sister, so it's nice to hear somebody else say what a special (and unusal) person she is. I don't see her enough.

Thanks again, Ross.

4. *B F* Says:

[April 21st, 2006 at 5:12 pm e](#)

You are a beautiful writer. I just stumbled upon the Story of Petersham and I was amazed to read such a lovely story. My boyfriend used to live in Petersham. I visited him there from Melbourne when we first met. His house was a mess and damp but we sat on the balcony and drank beer and listened to the jets and looked out across the city to the harbour bridge. It was one of the best times of my life.

B

5. *shortleftleg* Says:

[April 21st, 2006 at 9:08 pm e](#)

Oh I just remembered one of the things heather said she liked, after making a move in chess. she said "i like watching an ant trying to carry something".

-alex, I'd be delighted to watch rugby with you at the Livingstone. Let me know when there's a match on. ditto for the scrabble, and your ex girlfriend. and apologies for the delay on your 'sham status. I know you've probably been on tenterhooks. With pleasure I can report that you are *definitely* in petersham. I have posted a map of your place, here:

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/bilateral/132340243/>

-tully, we'd love to come for dinner! that's one of my project dreams "[get invited to dinner by neighbours](#)"!! name the night and we'll be there!

-thanks for your story, too, B F! I take it you are no longer "local"...

-and Ross, why don't you come on out here and visit your sister in the 'sham?

6. *Tessa* Says:

[April 29th, 2006 at 9:30 pm e](#)

Hi Lucas,

My friend Tully told me about this site - it's cool!

In fact, I use to live in the house Tully and Heather now live in. I had the room with the balcony, huge, and I could see to the horizon. I found it in February 2005, waiting for my housemates to come back from adventures in South-East Asia (Heather was one of the people, but it was Alanta, her travel buddy, who was the original housemate). 5 of us moved in, and started having lots of parties and intense discussions about law, politics and art, around chocolate on the kitchen table. (This happens when you put law students in the same house as Arts graduates, politicians and theatre directors.) We called ourselves the Petersham Tarts.

Anyway, when I went to England for a month last July, Tully stayed in my room - and never left. He liked the 'sham so much, he moved into the Lilting Houses next door, but was with us most nights. As one by one the original housemates (who were also all born in the '80s) moved out, the house you have now was formed.

I was at the party a couple of weeks ago, by the way, and it was raucous. I was Daphne, and my boyfriend was Wesley.

I think I'm about to move back into the 'sham, however Tully informs me it is technically Stanmore, as I am on the wrong side of the street.

Yay! this is fun,

Tessa

p.s. you have a 'spello' in the story about Lucy - you wrote "an radical French bookshop". Ta.

7. *shortleftleg* Says:

[April 29th, 2006 at 11:34 pm e](#)

Tessa -

a great little micro history there. I love it: the “Petersham Tarts”. Houses you’ve lived in carry special resonance for a long time, don’t they?

And thanks for the spellcheck, eagle-eye! Fixed now!

An appointment with Vince

Vince is a town planner for the Marrickville Council. I first met him at the resident feedback session some weeks back, where he gave me the big printed [maps](#) I’ve been using to chart the boundaries of Petersham. I decided to pay him a visit down at the council offices on Fisher Street.

The council has a cool ticketing system for when you need to talk to them about your rates, pay a fine, or get your dog released from the pound [see footnote]. It’s a bit like down at the RTA, except there are only about three chairs, so my guess is that enquiries would be processed just as well with a less sophisticated queueing system. Be that as it may, I was pushed right to the front, given my exceptional foresight in having phoned ahead for an appointment with Vince.

While I waited for Vince to fetch me, I nosed through the array of brochures on display near the incredible coffee and tea machine at reception. I’m serious: it’s the kind of appliance my Dad had at his corporate office in 1982, with individual chutes for tea, coffee, sugar and milk. You turn a knob (a bit like the channel selector on an old TV set) and a measured quantity of your choice of beverage powder shoots out into your polystyrene cup. My visual memory is not sophisticated enough to recall the exact colour of this labour-saving device, but if pressed, I would hazard a guess at solid orange, with brown-tinted transparent plastic holding the powders.

Vince arrived, and took me up to a meeting room. Actually, it was a kind of cubicle, more than a room. For the whole time we were in there, I had the sense of activity buzzing all around me, with only a slim particle-board membrane separating us from the hum of the council’s well-oiled machinery. To tell the truth, I was a bit disappointed. I had hoped that Vince would take me to his very own office, so I could see how a town-planner lays out the ergonomics of his own workspace. Would it be a complete mess? - revealing the workings of a nutty professor type - textbooks, manila folders with papers spilling out of them and hardbound copies of landmark planning cases piled high, and only enough room for an old wooden chair to wedge in? Or would it be scrupulously tidy, all surfaces meticulously dust-free, and standardised, alphabetically ordered, plasticated archive boxes lining the walls, revealing a mind as rigid as it is well-organised? I’ll never know. But perhaps Vince’s decision to meet with me in a room set aside expressly for the purpose of public consultation tells you all you need to know about this thoughtful professional.

I started with the issue of the [boundaries](#). I’ve been walking the boundaries of the ’sham, trying to locate the exact points where they lie. Sometimes, they run down the middle of roads, sometimes along one side; often the boundary divides adjacent properties via their rear fencelines, but on other occasions, the line seems to select one house as part of (say) Marrickville, on a street otherwise entirely within Petersham. What was the reason for this seemingly arbitrary allocation of borders?

For a start, Vince said, individual suburb borders are *not* allocated by local council. They are decided by state government, and the council is left to administrate what is given to them. Second, there are lots of historical reasons for the lines to be drawn where they are - change is laid upon incremental change - which results in kooky and sometimes unfathomable boundaries. And if you feel really strongly that a border has been misdrawn, you can actually apply to have it moved! The [Geographical Names Board](#) takes care of such enquiries. Mainly, changes are requested when a particular building, business, school, etc, located right at the border, feels itself to be much more a part of the suburb on the other side of the line. (In my case, I could apply to have the Video Ezy moved from “Stanmore”, into Petersham where it really belongs). Obviously, over time, such allegiances [allegiances](#) can wax and wane, and what we are left with is an idiosyncratic graphical division. Some of these divisions, as I discovered on the south and west sides of the ’sham, may eventually become meaningless. Vince disappeared for a moment, re-emerging with a

beautiful big blueprint map of the whole of the Marrickville area, for me to borrow.

Moving onto even trickier issues, I asked Vince about the relationship between individual lives lived, and the construction of planning policies.

[NB: I've been sitting here at the keyboard for twenty minutes trying to re-assemble the exchange that we had about this. Perhaps I should have taken better notes. Possibly the best I can do is to try and ask the questions I would like to have answers for *now* - rather than remember what we talked about yesterday... And maybe if Vince comes online, and is feeling generous with his time, he can try and address a few of these. Or maybe others can...]

So here are my questions: you have a whole bunch of people (over 6000 in Petersham) and they all live particular lives and have individual experiences. How do you extract what is essential from these experiences, and construct the best policy in order to plan for the future? Whose interests should you take into account? How do you know if the same demographic is going to be there in fifteen years when the plan takes effect? And how can you tell whether people even know *themselves* what's "best" for them? In essence, the question is: how do we reconcile the life of a person on the ground, with the lofty birds-eye view of a planner's charts and maps?

As a "citizen" my questions to myself at the recent strategic planning sessions were: How do I know whether my opinion is even going to be listened to? How can I begin to formulate an opinion if I don't know the system of decision-making through which it will be channeled? And: have I become so disillusioned with the possibility of change, that I have entirely lost the ability to imagine how I'd like my local environment to be? Is all that remains for me the instinct to react negatively against things I think I *won't* like in the short term?

Vince emphasised that the role of the planner was non-political. He will state his professional case on proposed changes, independent of the current party in power. He felt that his job was respected within the council, and that he was able to do this without any pressure to toe the line. Having said that, he said that some other councils become stacked with real estate agents and local businessmen, who serve a year or two as councillors, then step down. After this they know the inner workings of the ~~beaurocracy~~ bureaucracy, and are able to push through proposals and developments with relative ease. Thankfully, Vince didn't think Marrickville suffers from this particular malady.

I asked him about the process of development applications - say, when a proposal is lodged to extend the opening hours and alter the business of a shop, or to add a level onto a house. I pointed out that I'd heard a few stories about real animosity being generated between neighbours over this kind of thing. Vince agreed. Far worse than large apartment constructions, he said, are the "neighbour-v-neighbour" conflicts. It's often very difficult for a resident to understand the lofty intentions, and appreciate the domestic dreams, of the guy next door, when it means that a bit of sunlight will be blocked, or a window will overlook "my backyard". For this reason, objections to DAs are often petty, off the point, and unable to be taken seriously. On the other hand, for those who have lodged a DA, an objection can be like a slap in the face. How dare you tell me what I should be doing on my own land?

We talked about aesthetics, about greedy developers, and about density versus sprawl. Again and again, Vince kept coming back to the idea of "experience." When faced with a particular proposal, he is able to weigh it up against a whole host of previous, similar examples, and project into the future, visualising how it might turn out, how it might look in ten years' time, what kind of transformations it could introduce into the area. None of these things would be readable without many years of seeing the transition from idea, to plan, to built product. On the other hand, no two cases are ever exactly the same, so an "educated guess" is often called for. Planning is not an exact science.

I would have liked to ask Vince about the difference between property owners and tenants, when it comes to citizen-feedback. I seem to remember I was the only renter at the recent feedback session, and I suppose the reason for this is that we tenants move around a lot. Thus it stands to reason that we would have less to offer to a meeting that is about long-term planning. But if a large proportion of residents are renters, then surely their way of life should be considered too? But how could you harness these transient opinions?

However, our hour was up, and my brain was pretty full anyway. As I was leaving, I told Vince about the upcoming talk at the MCA by [Teddy Cruz](#). Teddy is an architect from San Diego, who sometimes deliberately breaks local planning regulations to accommodate the communal lifestyles of Mexican immigrants. Recently, the councils there have gotten wind of his mischief. But rather than cracking down on him, it turns out they like what he's doing, and are now bringing him in as a consultant on zoning law.

[footnote]:

I'm not joking. While I was waiting for Vince at reception, I found a brochure "Your Pets and the Law" which states:

All dogs in a public place which are not on a lead (under effective control) may be seized and impounded.

All dogs seized and impounded by Council must be microchipped and registered before being released.

This entry was posted on Sunday, April 23rd, 2006 at 12:34 am and is filed under ['sham dailies](#).

One Response to "An appointment with Vince"

1. [Steven B](#) Says:

[April 24th, 2006 at 8:21 am e](#)

hey Lucas, I hope you're enjoying your residency as much as I am reading about it. Great work!
S

[jelly wrestling wed night!](#)



This Wednesday night is Jelly Wrestlin' night at the famous Oxford Tavern. The action starts at 9pm. We will be there. Feel free to come along! If you like, join Jim and Shimada and me* at the Portuguese Tapas Bar on Audley St for some "throwdowns"*** and a snack, from 7pm, before the Jelly slinging begins! Send me an email if you need further info...

*grammatical correction [thanks to [camperdowner](#). Previously, this sentence read "...join Jim and Shimada and I..." Essentially, what I mean to say here is "join us for a drink" therefore the [pronoun](#) should be "me" not "I" (I wouldn't say "join I for a drink", would I?!)

***"throwdowns" - the small bottles of beer they serve at the tapas bar and gloria's. It's good, cos they stay cold.

This entry was posted on Monday, April 24th, 2006 at 1:46 pm and is filed under [adverts](#).

2 Responses to "jelly wrestling wed night!"

1. [David](#) Says:

[April 24th, 2006 at 4:32 pm e](#)

Hey Lucas

Having a great time reading the blog, a very cool project you have going on. I'm just finishing up five years as director of Wollongong's short film festival, Short Sited (www.shortsited.org), and I've always tried to encourage people to make films about their local surroundings, someone interesting in their neighbourhood, a band, an artist, a political issue, that kind of thing, but it has

always been hard work, although occasionally someone will get out there and do it (jelly wrestling does seem to be missing in Wollongong, but maybe I haven't looked properly or it just hasn't been caught on tape yet).

So it has been great to read about you getting out in to your neighbourhood and finding out more about it ... I have a friend who lived in Petersham in the late 90s (Westbourne Street, I think, in a pink building that had some kind of commercial laundry downstairs), but whenever I visited her, we always spent time in Leichhardt, so I never really got to see the 'sham.

I once sent a piece of writing to a friend of mine about an experience I had, when I got a big smile from a complete stranger in a 7-11 style shop, which made me think that I knew her ... until I realised that she was just being friendly. My friend sent me a message back saying that she loves those moments - seeing a stranger on a bus or train or on the street, maybe making eye contact or seeing them more than once, and wondering what it would be like to be their friend or lover, or just knowing them. And it seems like you're finding out who all these people are.

And as someone who work at the uni here providing support to Arts postgrad students, I have to say it would be great to have someone doing something like your project down here. :)

Looking forward to reading more.

Cheers
David

2. *Camperdowner Says:*
[April 25th, 2006 at 7:29 am e](#)

Now I'm doing this because you said you wanted us to pick you up on spelling errors and the like. The first is a "and the like", ie a grammatical one. Very simple to make and you're certainly not the first in history to make it, oh no, not by a long shot.

It appears under the jelly wrestling photo.

"...If you like, join Jim and Shimada and I at the Portuguese Tapas Bar..."

Yes, it's the use of that wicked personal pronoun. In the case above, you'll notice, now that you have a clear head, that "I" is in fact one of the objects of this sentence which means it needs to be "me".

Second instance is indeed a spelling error. Again, completely understandable, given it's one of those horrid French words that we've taken unto our collective linguistic bosom. And the word is bureaucracy (not beaurocracy as you have it in the [Vince story](#)). When I was in Paris I completely understood why this word was so quintessentially French. It is their national pastime after all. Oh dear, just noticed another error on my way through to find the last: alliegences should be allegiances.

Now that the spelling spanking's been done, we feel so much better don't we?

"Life. Be in it."

What a day! Five events on a single Sunday. Life in the 'sham is certainly subject to cycles of compression and relaxation. After yesterday, I felt like hiding away at home, pulling down the blinds, vacuuming the lounge room, having a bath, clipping my toenails. I was thinking to call up Lucy for a visit to her garden, but I've put it off for another day. I'm no superhuman when it comes to social interaction.

The Five Events of Sunday:

1.

Pilates class up the road. Luciana has been going there for a while, and now I, too, am addicted to the mild abdominal pain that results from lying on your back with your legs at a ten degree angle from the floor. The division of gender is a bit of a worry, though. It's a big class, maybe 25 people, and there's only ever about two men. What's with that?

2.

Coffee with Bec and Luciana. Since the beginning of the residency, Bec and I have been spending more time with our nearest neighbour. We've begun to do more things together - things that previously we might each have done simultaneously in our own flats. The main activity that falls into this category is drinking coffee. Up on the balcony, in the late Sunday morning sun, the street was alive. The neighbour from across the way was out, vigorously washing her car. Chris and Marie had the doors flung open, spraypainting new chairs for Barbara's place. Heaps of cars arriving and leaving for their char-grilled chicken. Meaty charcoal smoke billowing up and over the yard from the main street. The late morning tends to be the worst time for this fowl smog.

I hollered over to Chris, and took Luciana and Bec down to meet her. She told them what she'd told me: that a woman in one of the back flats at her block had been bashed by an intruder, after which the police came and held a little community meeting. The cops strongly suggested that the landlord install bars on all the windows. This was only last year. Luciana said she's been having trouble sleeping at night since the break in.

And speaking of intruders: Chris brought up the "punk" that she had seen trying to jump over our back wall a few months back. I thought she was talking about my friend Mick. But it definitely *wasn't* Mick, Chris said. She had noticed *him* visiting me last Monday. No, Mick was all in black with shaggy hair. This punk she had seen had a mohawk, and lots of piercings. Yes, he was a "traditional" punk.

3.

Art in the Park. By the time I got down to Maundrell Park, things were already in full swing. I hadn't realised that the park houses an "outdoor gallery." By this we're talking a series of pedestals in one corner, linked by a footpath. You can promenade up and down looking at the sculptures. I stopped and had a chat with Nick. I hadn't seen him since we worked together on Lisa and Jo's progressive studio collaborative [kit-in-a-bag](#). He's running a course at Sydney College on collaboration and sculptural casting. It's a way to break the students out of the "one artist=one object" paradigm - to get them to loosen up and be a bit more playful with their art making. I thought it sounded like a great idea. Of course, it's a shame that he has to reinvent the wheel so much.

And to tell the truth, *Art in the Park* could itself have done with a little more playfulness. The availability of a set of plinths to put objects on was probably too tempting to knock back, but it seemed like a pretty old-school default to me. The old "[plop art](#)" phenomenon in action. Not to take away from the inherent quality in any of the individual works, but if Marrickville Council were to solicit my opinion (and its obvious they should, since I'm such a widely published and highly respected expert in this field) then they could try and think about context and audience. There has to be some sophisticated re-thinking of the role of art beyond the appreciation of static objects - whether in a white space, or out in the open air. And for their part, exhibiting artists need to consider what kind of transaction with the audience is happening when they transport their carefully crafted pieces out of the studio and put them on display in a totally different context.

(NB: there were some pieces which transcended the plinth, notably Kelly Leonard's woven matrix of shredded computer printout paper, and Sam Wittingham's stuffed soft sculptures hanging like [polyyps](#) from a lightpost. Nick Strike's mangling of the ubiquitous mount franklin water bottle drew ironic attention to its own pedestal. And Rod Nash's generator-powered mechanical bull, bucking back and forth, could hardly be described as "static". So much for sweeping generalisations!)

We had a nice picnic, and kids were running wild, shaping clay, drawing with textas, making their own envelopes to post letters stuffed with autumn leaves to grandma. It just seemed to me that this part of the day - the getting together to eat, the mucking around with kids - was the crux. I thought of the fun we used to have with those "[Life. Be in it!](#)" activity trailers in the early '80s (stilt walking, tug-o-war,

fireman's toss). Now *that* was some exciting, three-dimensional participatory action. By contrast, the sculptures in *Art in the Park* (no matter how good) merely provided the pretext for a pleasant picnic. Surely art can do more than that?

Ahem. Rant concluded.

On the upside, I finally met Sam (the mayor himself) who had come down to launch the event. Anna introduced us. I told Sam a little about what I'm doing here in the 'sham. I explained my series of whimsical sub-projects. One of these is to "to go cycling with the mayor." You see, Sam's from the Greens, and upon his election, he famously relinquished his mayoral Fairlane for a bicycle. No joke. He said sure, why not, give me a ring and we'll cycle the 'sham. His business card is printed on brown recycled paper.

4.

The Bowling Club. A group of drum and base DJs run this event called "Green Beats" where you can bowl all you like for five bucks, and drink beers on the green. We rummaged around in a dusty locker room under the clubhouse for balls. All the equipment down there is ancient. It feels like its been passed on by club members who have themselves passed on. Most of the bags still had the former bowlers' names on them. I was bowling courtesy of Mr O'Callahan.

Ostensibly, this was a [research trip](#). Lisa and I wanted to learn [the rules](#), so we can plan for our North-vs-South tournament. With a little help from a young Irish fellow who was bowling next to us, as well as John (a member I found in the clubhouse who doesn't actually bowl himself but has watched it a bit on TV), and a small yellow rule book from 1989, I here present **The Rules Of The Game** (Abridged Version).

The Rules Of The Game

The game is played on a "green" - and the particular bit of the green you play on is called a "rink".

A bowling team can consist of two, three, or four players ("A Pair", "Triples" or "A four"). In order of bowling, the players are called "Lead", "Second", "Third", and "Skip".

Any number of "teams" can go together to make up a "side".

"Jack": shall be round and white, and between 8-10 ounces in weight.

The aim of the game is to get your bowls as close to the "jack" as possible. The team with its balls closest to the "jack" will win the "end".

"End" - an end consists of everyone in the teams rolling all their balls towards the "jack". When there are no more balls to roll, that's the "end".

Each player bowls two balls per "end".

"Bias": all balls have "bias" - which means they are weighted on one side. As a result they tend to curve to one side as they slow down. You have to take this into consideration when rolling 'em.

The "mat" is placed down at one end of the "rink". At the moment of delivering a bowl, a player shall have one foot remaining entirely within the confines of the mat. Failure to observe this law constitutes "foot-faulting".

"Touchers": a bowl which touches the "jack", even though such bowl passes into the "ditch", shall be counted as a "live" bowl and shall be called a "toucher".

"Ditch": the shallow channel at the end of the "rink".

"Bowl accounted dead": a ball which, not being a "toucher", winds up in the "ditch", is a "dead ball".

bilateral petersham

If the “jack” is knocked outside the “rink”, the “jack” is “accounted dead”.

When the “jack” is “dead” the end shall be regarded as a “dead end”.

“Possession of the rink” shall belong to the team whose bowl is being played. The players in possession of the rink shall not be interfered with, annoyed, or have their attention distracted in any way by their opponents.

“The shot” - or shots - shall be adjudged by the bowl or bowls nearer to the “jack” than any bowl played by the opposing players.

Where it is necessary to measure between a bowl and the “jack”, the measurement shall be made with the ordinary flexible measure. Callipers may be used to determine the shot only when the bowls in question and the “jack” are on the same plane.

Spectators: persons not engaged in the game shall be situated clear of and beyond the limits of the rink of play. They shall preserve an attitude of strict neutrality, and neither by word nor act disturb or advise the players.

Bowls cloths: shall be white and may include a sponsor’s or club authority logo in one corner. Such a logo shall not exceed an area of 50 sq. cms.

Maimed, or limbless players: shall be permitted to use a support and/or artificial limb when delivering her bowl. Such support shall be suitably shod with rubber.

So there you go. I was joined on the “rink” by Sr Joan and Nobody (the only players in [regulation white](#)), Mayhem, Keg, the other Lucas, Dodo the husky, Lisa, Somchai and Josie.

Great potential was shown by [Josie](#), who ignored the “bias” of the balls altogether, and simply barrelled them down the “rink”. She’d grown up ten-pin bowling in Penrith, and wasn’t going to change her style now. Josie, like me, lives in South ’sham. We conferenced secretly about some of the possible pageantry, pomp, and costumery we could bring into play to deepen the pleasure of our unquestioned triumphant defeat of the North side, in the forthcoming tournament (dates TBA).

Keg and Sr Joan had bowled in school, and their wealth of experience was evident. Nobody, by contrast, was a newcomer, but displayed remarkable talent, or beginners luck. I’m not sure how many “ends” we played, but by about 5pm, the light was beginning to fade, and with several shandies under our belts, so were the players. The feeling was unanimous that drum and base music is *not* ideally suited to lawn bowls, being regarded by our “side” as rather too raucous for such a contemplative sport.

Towards the end of the day, Eric showed up with his family, who began playing soccer on the green in between the rinks. It is a testament to the flexibility of the Petersham Bowling Club that this kind of shenanigans was tolerated, and even encouraged. Then again, Eric and co. are locals, and most of the groovy young things doing the chicken dance to drum and base were clearly “not from around here”.

5.

Trivial Matters. Bit by bit, our “side” drifted off home. Lisa and I decided to have a pub meal, so we found our way to the White Cockatoo. Things were in a bit of a bother there. There had been a tip-off from the cops, that the Cockatoo was going to be robbed that night. The nice young duty manager we spoke to was a bit on edge. “But,” she said pragmatically, “I just wish they’d get it over and done with early. I don’t wanna be down the station all night”.

There’s been a spate of hold-ups in the past few months, with sometimes several local pubs being “done over” in a single night. Lisa and her talked about walking around Petersham at night. Lisa doesn’t feel safe - there’s lots of dodgy men about. The manager agreed, but said she often brings her dog with her. Also, she tells any would-be assailant that she comes from Campbelltown. For some reason, that seems to scare ‘em off. She recommended we go eat at the Newington Hotel.

Up at the Newington, a trivia night was in full swing. The place was packed, so we joined in with a team called "La Triviata" (groan). La Triviata were obviously pretty good - they were in the top five teams. We tried to help out. Lisa even got the answer to a question about Tina Turner ("what was the name of the hit song written for Tina by Mark Knopfler?" - a special 'sham prize for the first correct answer posted in the comments, as long as you don't use google to find out...)

I quickly came to realise that I am no good at trivia. The guys from La Triviata consoled me by saying that the best thing to do is to assemble a team with a range of special interests. At the end of the game, Paul the trivia master crooned:

Remember: whatever troubles befall you -
don't give it a second thought...
For it will all turn out to be: Trivial.

The game was over, and the pub emptied out.

Lisa and I had another glass of wine. We began talking about our families, having children, getting older. I asked whether she was worried about getting old. She said she's started to notice wrinkles, and that's been a bit alarming. But in general, she really likes it. The wisdom, the confidence, the "having seen this one before".

I also like these aspects of ageing. Certainly, I can't be "the youngest one in the gang," the precocious one, the promising young upstart, forever. And I *did* spend plenty of time playing that role. It's just taking me a while to adjust to not being in my twenties. I guess I thought (rather illogically of course) that it was going to last forever.

Now, when I hang out with twenty-somethings, I begin to feel the gap in experience. It's slightly alarming. How should I cope with this responsibility of acquired knowledge? What new role to take on? How to retain [beginners mind](#) when all I feel is "here we go again"?

This entry was posted on Monday, April 24th, 2006 at 10:15 pm and is filed under ['sham dailies](#).

One Response to "'Life. Be in it.'"

1. Mick Says:

[April 25th, 2006 at 1:31 pm](#) [e](#)

heh, luca, you always seem to have trouble with the names of music genres. And you really start to sound like the old man you talk of becoming when you say, "The feeling was unanimous that drum and base music is not ideally suited to lawn bowls". Not because it's unsuited, but because it's 'Drum and Bass' not 'Drum and Base' (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Drum_and_Bass)

[security is important](#)

Some days the desire to get out and hit the streets just aint there. Its drizzly and grey outside, and it's a public holiday to boot. My internet's running slow, I'm bored with all my music. What to do? Just go with it eh? Have a bath and read a book maybe. An invite from the 'sham [scrabble club](#) would go down a treat right now...

Yesterday I woke up restless. I had to get out of the house and do something, give some structure to my day. I looked up the yoga schedule. At ten am there was a casual class: "Yoga For Anxiety". That sounded like the ticket. The strange thing was, the closer I got to the yoga school, the more anxious I felt. The door was locked, but I could see people inside. I rattled the handle like I had made some kind of mistake, like the door was jammed.

A lady came up from the street with keys. "Oh, it's YOU!" I said, oddly - even though I had never seen her before in my life. She gave me a funny look and opened the door. Inside, eight or so women were waiting silently on the couches. I felt my anxiety levels rising again. The teacher was late. We all sat there, not

talking, waiting til she arrived.

The class itself was, of course, just what I needed. Lots of breathing, lots of concentration on the movement of the stomach in and out, lots of lying with the spine flat on the floor.

On the way home, I walked past the White Cockatoo. A security guard was standing outside. I asked him whether the place had indeed been held up the night before. “No,” he said, “nothing happened. But thanks for checking in. Security is important. People don’t realise that.” We shook hands and I crossed over the railway bridge to the south side.

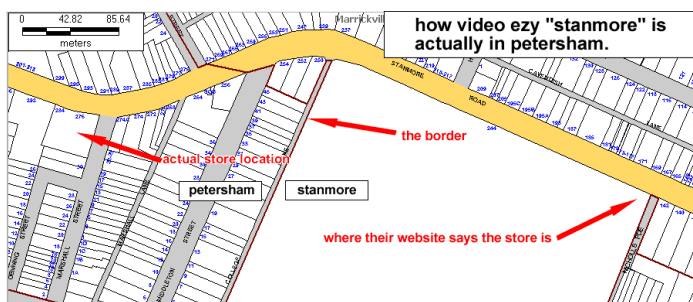
Luciana was waiting for the lights at Audley and Canterbury. We waved and stood there, on opposite sides of the road, neither of us sure who should be the one to let the other cross. She signaled that she was going to Charlie’s Deli. Well, I thought, I’ll go to Charlie’s too. I could use some eggs.

Inside Charlie’s we were greeted by Sam. Evidently Luciana and Sam speak Italian together when she goes in to shop. I never have myself, being too shy to try it out, but with Luciana for moral support, we engaged in a solid exchange. Sam told us he’s been working in the store for 26 years: “But if you want the *really* interesting stories about our history, you should speak to my mother,” he said. I thought about this later. Twenty six years is a fair amount of time to accrue one’s own set of stories, I would have thought. But perhaps Sam’s mother is the family raconteur (racconteuse?). I look forward to spending some time with her. She is a handsome woman, all in black, a classic Italian *vedova*. There’s often a baby hanging out in the store too, and they toddle around together. The two of them are just too beautiful for words. So simple and happy. Sam suggested I come back during the week - but probably not Thursday or Friday.

This entry was posted on Tuesday, April 25th, 2006 at 3:37 pm and is filed under ['sham dailies](#).

[the choice is ezy](#)

It is with great pleasure that I announce: “Video Ezy Stanmore” is *actually* in Petersham. What a relief! This means two things. First, that my [transgression](#) of last week was not in fact a transgression at all. And second, that I am free to patronise the video store. Phew. I was getting towards the idea of requesting the [Geographical Names Board](#) for a shift in the boundary.



The reason for this glitch has now become clear: Video Ezy have made a mistake on their website. While on [this map](#), the store is shown to be at the corner of Stanmore Road and Nichols Parade, in reality, the store is really at the corner of Marshall Street.

My theory is that the store was once actually situated in the location that’s

indicated on the website. At that point, it *really* was in Stanmore. When the opportunity arose to move to the more salubrious 'sham location, they jumped at it. But for simplicity’s sake, they kept the same name. Problem solved.

[thanks to Bec for help in clearing up this one].

This entry was posted on Tuesday, April 25th, 2006 at 4:35 pm and is filed under [the borders](#).

2 Responses to “the choice is ezy”

1. [Tully](#) Says:
[April 26th, 2006 at 12:24 pm](#) e

So, in keeping with the rules of this project, and were the video store to actually be in Stanmore,

would you be able to walk down to the store and hire videos so long as you kept your eyes closed?
How about if you wanted chocolate or office supplies?

The metaphysical implications are doing my head in..

2. *shortleftleg* Says:

[April 26th, 2006 at 4:46 pm e](#)

no tully, i think i've used up my "get out of sham free" card on the blindfold thing. that trick will get old if used too often. regarding office supplies, i think jane is coming to visit on friday. i will stand on the border while she goes into officeworks to get me a new cartridge for my inkjet printer. if i want chocolate, i will call YOU for assistance.

locked out

I've just been let back in by Luciana, who has a spare key to our place. This morning I locked myself out. So the blog is looking a little thin on updates, as a result of not being able to sit here in front of the incandescent screen. But that's good news for tomorrow - cos while I was locked out I had lots of adventures. Stay tuned...

[apologies also to Sunny, Tully, and Bec. I *know* we walked the Stanmore/'sham border last Saturday, and i WILL update on that adventure soon...(lazy alternative: feel free to write your own reports n I will post em up here!)]

This entry was posted on Wednesday, April 26th, 2006 at 4:41 pm and is filed under ['sham dailies](#).

2 Responses to "locked out"

1. *sunny* Says:

[April 27th, 2006 at 10:37 am e](#)

I'd prioritise writing up last night's jelly wrestlin adventure - that's what the fans want to read.

2. *Tully* Says:

[April 27th, 2006 at 11:49 am e](#)

we did what?

Wrestlin' in the Back Room

[NB: *the following blog post has been rated M: for Mature Audiences. It contains Nudity, Gambling, and... Adult Themes.*]

Go on. Admit it. You've been past there *dozens* of times. You've joked about it. You've used it as a landmark when giving directions between Leichhardt and Marrickville. You've admired the neon signs. You've "always wanted" to go in - to see what Jelly Wrestling at the Oxford is all about. But you just never quite got around to it, did you?

Well, last night, a brave contingent of locals and ring-ins alike finally breached the threshold of Petersham's Oxford Tavern.

To be fair, some of us had been to the Oxford before. But on [that occasion](#), the pub's front room was closed off, and we perched uncomfortably in "Rita's Late Nite Lounge" between the pokies and the door, feeling rather cheated (but also mildly relieved) at how tame the whole thing had turned out to be. The full Oxford Experience was yet to come.

Nobody and I were the first to arrive. I'd urged him not to be late - I didn't want to miss a second of the jelly-slinging action. But we needn't have worried. It was a fair while before anything even faintly

resembling “action” was to be unleashed on the decidedly un-rowdy crowd of dour looking blokes. There was only a smattering of the fairer sex - their numbers, I’m proud to say, significantly boosted by the ladies in our party.

“The Waiting” was a big part of the night. Between acts there were long periods of sitting around at the bar. There is absolutely no doubt this was a deliberate ploy to get us to buy more drinks. And fair enough too, since at only seven dollars door charge, Jelly Wrestling is just about the cheapest entertainment your money can buy. Even a serving of the special meal of the night - *Rissole and Chips* (advertised in a sign blutacked to the wall) - cost more than to witness the wrestling.

But by now I’ve kept YOU waiting long enough, dear reader. On with the action...

Next to the main bar of the Oxford is an elevated platform surrounded by a small brass rail. The platform is mounted with the sign “PLEASE KEEP CLEAR”, and backed by a huge mirror. This is where the strip shows take place. The first was by “Lola G”. She wore long, long boots. Her various personas during the course of the evening included a pirate, a french maid, and an office worker. Her outfits were outrageously skimpy versions of what you’d expect a pirate, maid, or secretary to wear. For instance, the office worker’s outfit was only recognisable as such by the judicious use of pinstriped fabric on a “skirt” and “shirt” - these items hardly larger than the underwear they traditionally conceal.

The best way I can describe Lola’s performance is that she “went through the motions”: shimmying around the stage, writhing on her back, wrapping her long legs around a handy metal pole, discarding bits of clothing along the way. Lola was *very* flexible indeed. We all admired her controlled and muscular routine. It was a bit like seeing an excellent practitioner of [Astanga Yoga](#) at work. And perhaps that description isn’t too far off. Lola never quite seemed to be in the room with us - her gaze simultaneously distant, and internally focussed. This made her somewhat inert - somehow unaffected by the impassive groups of men huddled around their schooners. Athletically, Lola was a real pleasure to watch. But performatively? Her routine felt a little flat.

After a seemingly interminable break, the disembodied voice of an MC called “Robbie” urged us to move into the “back room” for the wrestling. The back room?! Well, things were certainly getting more interesting now...

The “back room” was like the den of a suburban house. Wood panelling and old carpet and a low ceiling. Two or three rows of stackable seats, the kind which you’d find at a wedding reception, were arranged in straight lines around the ring. The ring was inflatable. It looked like it’d been well constructed, but not recently. Every foot or so the rubbery surface was repaired with what appeared to be bicycle tyre patches. Over at one side, a hand pump was connected via a plastic umbilical tube. The ring was rectangular, perhaps three metres across, and mounted on staging blocks topped with cheap mattress foam. It was filled to about fifteen centimetres deep with red jelly blobs.

I’m trying to be fairly precise with this description, because it’s as close as you’ll get to feeling the atmosphere of the jelly den, without going there yourself. You see, photography is banned in the “back room.” As Robbie took pains to point out, in his abominable diction (my mother would be aghast at how badly he butchered the English language) blasted through the mike:

OKBOYSTHERESONLYTWO RULESHERETONIGHTONTHISWEDNESDAY
NIGHTHEREATTHEOXFORDTAVERNFORAVERYSPECIALANDEXCITING
EVENTYESTHATSRIGHTTHEJELLYWRESTLINGTHERESONLYTWO RULES
ANDTHETWO RULESARERULENUMBERONEISTHEREISNOPHOTOGRAPHY
ALLOWEDSOPUTYOURPHONESAWAYKEEPYOURPHONESINYOURPOCKETS
YOU CANALWAYSTEXTYOURMUMLATERBOYSJUSTKEEPTHEMINYOUR
POCKETSOKBOYSANDRULENUMBER TWOISTHERESNOJUMPINGIN THE
RINGATALLKNOJUMPINGINTHERINGTONIGHTUNLESSYOUREINVITED
BYONEOF THEGIRLSOKYOU GOTTHATTHETWO RULESANDNOWLET’SJUMP
STRAIGHTINTOITLETSHAVEABIGNICELOTTANOISEFOROURFIRSTTWO
BEAUTIFULGIRLSTONIGHTWEVEGOTMADISONANDREBECCACMONLET’S
MAKESOMENOISEBOYS!!!!

What to say about Robbie? He looked vaguely familiar. He had an air about him that suggested maybe he was a former contestant of Big Brother or something. You know, slightly famous for being slightly famous. But he only had one volume (loud) and one speed (fast). Poor Nobody. He's gotta go for an inner-ear operation soon, and Robbie's auditory explosion was almost more than he could handle. Lisa lent him her earplugs.

The first "wrestlers" (Madison and Rebecca) sauntered into the ring, wrapped in towels, which they quickly discarded to reveal skimpy bikinis. They were in their twenties I guess. Not particularly aggressive wrestlers. They would *never* survive the rough and tumble of the [Marrickville Jelly Wrestling Federation](#). Here's the routine: slide around a bit, sit on top of each other, throw a bit of jelly out into the crowd. Every so often one of them would pin the other down for the count of three. But there didn't seem to be much real struggle going on out there. Each "round" (the match has three rounds) lasts as long as a suitably chosen song played over the PA system. The only one I can remember now is "I got the Power" - can anyone else in attendance recall other tunes?

The point of the first round is to build suspense for the second round. The second round, you see, is where the girls remove their bikini tops. Robbie yelled:

COMEONBOYSLETSMAKESOMENOISEFORTHESECONDROUND OF
WRESTLINGNOWIFYOUWANNASEETHOSETOPSCOMEOFFIWANNAHEAR
SOMENOISEOUTTHERE!"

Of course, whether the "boys" make a lot of noise or not (and generally speaking, they don't), the tops still come off, like clockwork.

Robbie's constant use of "BOYS" - effectively ignoring the women present in the audience, irritated the highly evolved members of our party. We like to think we are conscious of the inextricable links between language-use and sexual inequity within our patriarchal society. So in a quiet moment, Lisa approached Robbie, reasoning with him. Perhaps he could acknowledge that the entire audience was not just made up of "BOYS"? She returned to her seat. Robbie had told her "YEPNOWORRIESLOVEI'LLTAKECAREOFYOUSE!!" When he took to the stage once more, he announced

ITSBEENBROUGHTTOMYATTENTIONTHAT THEREARELADIESINTHE
AUDIENCEANDI'DJUSTLIKETOSAYITSGREATTOHAVEYOUHEREANDI
LOOKFORWARDTOMAYBESEEINGAFEWOFYOUINTHERINGYOURSELVES
LATERONHEY!

At this, Nobody hollered "It's YOU we want to see in a bikini, Robbie!" This brought on a fresh round of heckling from the crowd. Someone shouted "C'mon, Robbie, show us your tits!" to which he replied, sotto voce, "Aw, fuck off."

The highlight of my night came during the third round, when I became involuntarily involved in the action. At a certain point, perhaps a brief pause in the unbearable intensity of the fight, Madison leaned over the side of the ring. I was sitting in the front row, between Nobody and Lisa. Madison pointed her finger at me. Me? Yes, you! She reached over, and took my glasses off. She put them on herself, then quickly took them off again, rubbed them over her nipples, slapped me on the face(!) and replaced my glasses. For one fleeting moment, I was the centre of attention at the Oxford Tavern - the object of envy of every man and lesbian in the joint. Never mind that my glasses were smudged with jelly grease for the rest of the night. I had been *chosen* by Madison. I was, somehow, special.

The rest flowed pretty much in this way. We would be trooped back out to the front bar so we could buy more drinks, there would be a strip show out there, then we'd be trooped back into the wrestling pit for another bout. Out in the front bar, we watched Claudia, an infinitely more engaging performer. Her most memorable act was a "wild west" cowgirl concept (to the tune of that "Wild Wild West" song from [the movie](#)). Claudia made eye contact with the audience - she teased us by *almost* removing a piece of clothing, and then demanding that we egg her on. She even pitted one side of the crowd against the other, to see who could cheer the loudest (and thus who would be treated to the first glimpses of her tanned and supple flesh as it emerged, almost wilfully, from her pvc outfits. Yes, Claudia was really *in control*. Our table thought she was great, and she knew it.

There's one point of business I have to add. One by one, the performers would shed their dainty items and toss them casually to the rear corner of the stage for safekeeping. If, perchance, a panty or bra was poorly thrown (and thus in danger of tripping the stripper) a big bouncer fellow would lean down, pick up a wooden stick (like a sawn-off broom handle) and reach out with it, dragging the clothes closer to the edge (and thereby out of harms way). This seemed to constitute a "system." The comic absurdity of the use of broom handle as a "tool," crafted specifically for the purpose of dragging undies across the floor, did not escape our table. Such a crude and over-engineered solution could only have been invented by a man. Or, possibly a committee of them.

The night wound up with four wrestlers in the ring for an all-in battle, culminating in the fantasy-turned-reality of a punter being dragged into the fray. Our party was undecided as to whether this audience participation schtick was real or staged, spontaneous or scripted. Here are the arguments for and against:

- *Real*: the fellow was wearing a watch. If he had known he was going to get in the ring, he would have taken his watch off beforehand.
- *Staged*: when he was targeted, he took off his shirt straight away, *without hesitation*. If he were not a "plant", he would have hesitated before removing his shirt.
- *Real*: the whole time the lucky man was in the ring with the girls, the pub's big bouncer hovered nervously, as if unsure whether to intervene. If the "ring-in" were a set-up, the bouncer would have been more relaxed.
- *Staged*: in the process of writhing around with the babes, the male wrestler became completely saturated. His jeans and socks were soaked through. If he were a real punter, this could have caused problems for his health during the remainder of the evening. On the other hand, if it were a set-up, he could wrestle without fear, knowing that he had a clean set of clothes in the dressing room, right?

As the evening wound up, Robbie encouraged us:

DONTBEASTRANGERLETSHOPEWESEEEYOUNEXTWEEKATTHEOXFORD
TAVERNFORMOREBEAUTIFULGIRLSYESTHATSRIGHTCOMEBACKAGAIN
FORJELLYWRESTLING!!

We shuffled out the door. Besides the poker machines, which never sleep, the pub itself was closed. We stood on the sidewalk, shuffling in the cool air, laughing and reliving our favourite moments. After a while a few of the performers came out, fully dressed with their travel bags. They spotted us and said goodnight. Claudia recognised us. "Oh, you guys were the BEST!" she said.

[footnote: the wrestlers are from an organisation called [SEX BOMB PROMOTIONS](#) There are a few pictures of jelly wrestling on their site, to give you an idea... Oh, and here's their excellently designed [flier](#) juxtaposed with my nipple-smudged glasses...]

This entry was posted on Thursday, April 27th, 2006 at 4:40 pm and is filed under ['sham dailies](#).

3 Responses to "Wrestlin' in the Back Room"

1. *lisa* Says:

[April 28th, 2006 at 11:03 pm e](#)

a funny & faithful account, excepting that it was Rebecca's attentions you & your glasses enjoyed!

2. *mayhem* Says:

[May 1st, 2006 at 5:48 pm e](#)

top Stuff Lucazoid and I'm gnashing my teeth that I wasn't there.

I found some great research article ages ago - one of those scarey US observer participant things - on jelly wrestling in some mid-west US bar..... I rekcon the oxford tops it tho.

RU interested? Let me know and I'll ferret for it in my honours files

3. *lisa* Says:

[May 3rd, 2006 at 12:20 am e](#)

Mayhem be there for Round 2! Details at <http://www.sydneyladiesartistsclub.blogspot.com>

[the annotated eastern boundary](#)

Saturday, April 22, 2006: The time had come to walk the Eastern Border between Petersham and Stanmore.

I rang around for some company. Surprisingly, at such short notice, I managed to rustle up four worthy companions. Locals included Bec, Tully, and Tully's flatmate Polly. Sunny was our special guest ring-in from Stanmore.

The rendezvous was Tully's place. Nearly all his flatmates were home, including Heather. Heather told me that after reading the blog, [her brother](#) had called her up. They've now arranged to spend some time hanging out. So there you go. *Bilateral Petersham*: bringing families together.

We set out, maps in hand. Tully had his mega professional camera, which still uses old fashioned film. It was a rather festive atmosphere: new friends, out on an autumn afternoon, embarking on a rather pointless activity.

Almost immediately, Sunny found an item of clothing hanging on a fence. A [small black top](#). Bec thought it might suit Luciana, so we gleaned it.

Our route took us from the corner of Addison and John (the bottom corner where the 'sham meets the 'ville) all the way up to the top end - where Phillip Street terminates at Parramatta Road. In the meantime we had a plethora of tricky twists and turns to negotiate. While you read, you may wish to refer to this [handy visual reference](#) - an annotated map of the journey (start at the bottom).

*

At the south-east corner, the boundary runs along the rear of the John Street property-line. A little way along, there's a lane which allows access to the border. Positioned in the rear corner of this lane, next to a recycling bin, is a tall [cactus in a bucket](#). We stared at the cactus, and at the fence itself. When there's a wooden barrier stopping your progress, the reality of the border becomes tangible. Unlike the imaginary line dividing the 'sham from it's neighbours, the borders between individual houses are visible, physical, impassable obstacles.

While we were standing in the lane, an aeroplane passed overhead. It left a [clear white line](#) almost directly above.

*

The corner of Denning and Newington presented an interesting dilemma. The border runs right to the edge of the property line. In order to avoid straying from the 'sham, I had to [jump across](#) a little corner. I marked this point with red electrical tape. Sunny placed a welcome mat (which she found in the back of a nearby ute) for me on the other side.

*

College Lane is our eastern-most point. The lane backs onto the Newington High School. We could see into [the art rooms](#): cardboard boxes stacked high with visual art diaries. I imagined myself standing in the lane, safely within Petersham, delivering a guest lecture - the students peering at me, through the windows, from Stanmore.

*

The top of College Lane butts onto Stanmore Road. However, for some reason, the borderline doubles back around the three buildings. These belong to Stanmore. In order to continue down Stanmore Road, we had to backtrack. We thought about scooting through someone's yard: into the house and out the front door

again. This way we'd be sticking as close as we could to the border. Someone was home in a nearby house, but no amount of hollering would rouse them. We continued back down the lane until we found an empty lot.



It was big and grassy, the lawn freshly mown, and the sun streaming down into it. Tully and Sunny were game. You've gotta love gung-ho accomplices. We jumped the fence, making a racket as the gate wobbled back and forth. Bec wasn't keen on this momentary trespass. She continued around the long way. It was peaceful in that empty yard. It seemed huge. We hopped over the other end and waited for Bec. Nobody noticed us, nobody came to ask what we were doing. So much for neighbourhood watch.

*

On Middleton Street I spied a [discarded photograph](#). It was a shot of someone's stereo and video-game joystick thingies, posed rather artlessly. It was like the kind of image people use to sell their stuff on e-bay.

*

At the corner of Middleton and Stanmore is a Hungarian butcher. Hand cured and salted meats hang from hooks in the ceiling. A husband and wife team work there. I bought a "[beigli](#)" (a sort of dense walnut cake) and some home-made pasta.

*

Video Ezy sits at the junction of Stanmore and Marshall. Since it has now [unequivocally](#) been declared a "green zone" we sauntered right on in. Both Tully and I had DVDs to return. Jo was working behind the counter. She was a bit too busy to be able to listen to my diatribe about the injustice of the store being called "Video Ezy Stanmore", when it's really in Petersham. I will return another day, when she has more time to fully appreciate the gravity of such issues.

*

The boundary line strikes the edge of the railway at a diagonal. On the brick wall at this point, amongst countless indecipherable tags, some cheeky vandal has sprayed the words: "[VISUAL POLLUTION](#)".

We had to scoot around Crystal Street to rejoin the border on the northern side of the railway trench. Not even Tully was up for running across the train lines.

*

There's an old Harpsichord shop on Crystal Street. Does anyone know anything about this anachronistic retail outlet? It looked well shut.

*



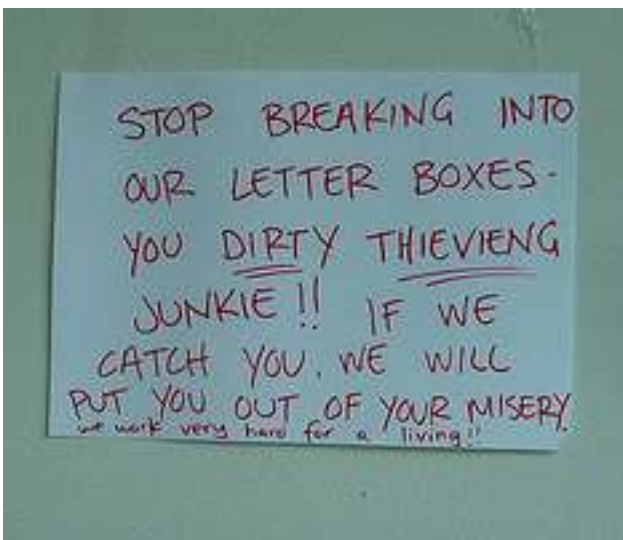
York Crescent is a cute little street which empties out onto a gorgeous triangular yard. We were momentarily blinded by this picturesque spot. Before we knew it we had stumbled into foreign territory. We were in Stanmore!



As you can see from this photo, the street sign clearly indicates that Stanley Street is in Stanmore. We beat a hasty retreat. (For the sticklers out there, rest easy, this transgression has been logged).

There are some beautiful old ivy-covered [warehouses](#) at the corner of Charles Street and (I think) Westbourne. Evidently in a past life they belonged to “MacFarlane’s Furniture Company”. Above the front doors, they each

bore the moniker “[MATERIALISED](#)”.



Nearing the end of our trail, we encountered the old Petersham Inn. I seem to remember it was a gay venue in the late nineties, but it’s since been redeveloped into “luxury apartments”. A nasty handmade sign was pasted up above the letter boxes in the foyer. My favourite part is the small print at the bottom. I can just imagine the “dirty thieving junky” thinking to himself “You know, they’re right. Perhaps it’s time to stop sponging off society, and find myself an honest job.”:

And, just outside, this fossilised spew:



This entry was posted on Friday, April 28th, 2006 at 3:01 pm and is filed under ['sham dailies](#), [the borders](#).

2 Responses to “the annotated eastern boundary”

1. Tully Says:

[April 28th, 2006 at 11:05 pm e](#)

The boundary walk was nothing if not educational, and I know I’m starting trouble, but I have to ask - is this art?

We instigated a moment of culture, so there's a relation to art... but how were we imitating, supplementing, altering or counteracting nature? Were we "being" in the second person singular present indicative? If this is all some kind of elaborate performance, why aren't I being paid?

I feel pretentious, that's a good sign I think... well suppose I should imitate life and invite you to a barbeque on wednesday night.

2. Michele Purcell Says:

[May 4th, 2006 at 11:31 pm e](#)

Lucas

that plant on the bucket isn't a cactus, it's a sort of philodendron.

It looks just like the one outside our house in fact, only they've trained it to be tall and lanky.

Perhaps it needs a few workouts at the gym too!

Mum xxx

the D word

It's Friday night, half past ten. You may have detected from the tardy, irregular updates, that I've been having a bit of a hard time knuckling down this week.

Not that it's been "unproductive". Sure, I've been meeting people. There's been no shortage of good feedback about the project, and exciting new adventures are lining themselves up for next week. Best of all, some of the friendships I formed early on are really starting to firm up.

For example, who could believe that only a week has passed since I first met Tully (and he's already buggin me with [curly questions](#))? Or that things could be quite solid with Lucy, after only two cups of tea? Or that I lived in Petersham for nearly two years before starting a conversation with Carmela and her daughters from Charlie's Deli? And who would have known that Chris ("eyes on the street") could turn out to be such a strong local ally?

Bit by bit, the connections are spreading and blossoming. Gaps are slowly filling in. After four weeks of confinement, the suburb is beginning to feel familiar. I'm receiving a constant flow of visitors from the outside. Locally, the events are piling up: there's the big [music gig](#) happening tomorrow in "Darren's Backyard"; a BBQ invite from Rachelle and Rob (Wolfie's parents) on Sunday; a visit to the [local historian](#) on Tuesday; yet another BBQ at Tully's locked in for Wednesday; and a tentative arrangement to step back in time, to the 'sham circa 1976, with [Vanessa](#) on Thursday. I'm waiting for the mayor to get back to me about our collaborative bike ride, and, if you can believe it, I've even booked in for a "trial session" at the local gym(!).

So what's the problem?

I think "the problem" lies with the activity of writing. I'm trying to use text as a documentary tool. My eyes and ears are a camera, my mind the film stock, my keyboard an editing suite, the blog is the cinema where you watch it all played back again (and the comments are the seats from which you heckle).

My "mission" has been to write, each day, about the people I meet, and the things we talk about. What we see, and what we do. Piecemeal writing. Writing without knowing how it will end - just getting it down before the next wave of experience washes over me. As Barbara wrote in an email on Monday:

I think there's something happening there that you won't be able to see until it's over. You're just seeing the trees at the moment, but we, your readers, can see the woods. And it's a beautiful ecosystem you're describing for us Lucas, it really is.

Could my own ignorance be my best asset? I don't know where *The Story of Petersham* is headed. How could I possibly know? But what I do sense is this: that if I leave too much time between "the having" of an experience, and getting to the computer to hammer it out - even just one or two days - the events fade a little in my memory. They fade - not a huge amount, but just enough, so that their craggy, variegated surfaces smooth over and become, instead, a generalised flowing narrative. They lose the detail they

need. Irrelevant episodes are discarded. Banal observations drop away. The documentation of particular, minute occurrences becomes obsolete.

And then, worst of all, the joy ebbs out of the writing. That's when it becomes a chore, and instead of a wandering, blissfully ignorant beginner with a wicked turn of phrase and a keen eye for grammar, I become an indentured journalist with a day job. Ugh.

So what's the solution? I hate to admit it, but I think it might be ... discipline.

Yep. Almost a month has passed. A terrific start has been made. But I can hear Estelle's voice in my head right now: "Come on now. No excuses! You've got everything going for you, Lucas. No rest for the wicked!"

The solution? I think it's this: to wake up earlier and write first thing every morning, without fail. To not compromise on this one appointment. Could it be that simple?

This entry was posted on Friday, April 28th, 2006 at 9:56 pm and is filed under ['sham dailies](#).

4 Responses to "the D word"

1. *Your sister* Says:

[April 28th, 2006 at 11:16 pm e](#)

Hey Luco,

Do you know why is Petersham called Petersham? I tried to find out via your wik. link but no joy. Bec

2. *shortleftleg* Says:

[April 28th, 2006 at 11:32 pm e](#)

Good question my sister. According to the marrickville council [website](#):

PETERSHAM was named by Lieutenant-Governor, Major Francis Grose after his native village on the Thames, near Richmond, England. Petersham was one of the earliest settlements in the colony. Facing a severe food shortage Grose in October 1793 ordered a timber yard 200 feet square formed, nine huts for labouring convicts built and 60 acres of government ground cleared of timber, twenty of which was sown with Indian corn.

We have a sister 'sham in [Massachussets](#), USA (as well as the original in [Richmond](#), in England...)

I'll have more to say after my visit to the archives on Tuesday...

3. *another margie* Says:

[April 30th, 2006 at 5:13 pm e](#)

Forgetting is important too.

The details you leave out can be as useful to the craft of storytelling as those you leave in.

(On a practical note, always carry a pen and a Notebooks :))

4. *nobody* Says:

[April 30th, 2006 at 8:07 pm e](#)

Tully Says:

April 28th, 2006 at 11:05 pm

The boundary walk was nothing if not educational, and I know I'm starting trouble, but I have to ask - is this art?

so, hi all, you lu, master peppeteer n all of you other ppl out there by now addicted like me to this virtual 'Big Brother'.

It IS art, why? the answer lies in what you reader define as art:

if you define art as something which looks good on the mantelpiece or above the sofa and possibly matches the colour theme in the room then this blog is not, but if you reader expect from art a delivery of ideas/comments/suggestions and above all criticism, then this blog is art.

I see artists as cultural/social critics, who use their skills and creative output to define what we are and where we stand as a society and community, sparking debate and hopefully enlightening viewers, opening up issues which would otherwise be forgotten or, worse, missed.

With this blog lucas is turning the whole of the 'sham into a big brother-style voyeuristic bonanza. I envy u guys living in the sham now, and i'm sure there's plenty of non-'sham residents out there which feels the same way.

I envy you because you have the chance to be recorded as the colours of this beautiful and hiper-realistic picture lu is painting of you all.

Yes i was fortunate enough to be mentioned a couple of times in the blog as i was present in a couple of events, n lucas got ideas about pulling me in to cum n have a look at the weeds in your backyards (u'll get this when times cum) but still i'm n outsider, a redfern resident, not one living in ramsay st, therefore not one you may have the chance to re-encounter over n over while the puppet master slowly unfold the script of the next episode...

And yet lu, you where right when commenting in your post-mortem of www.kellerberrin.com, that keller social reality was self contained and therefore finite, while petersham lies between stanmore, marro, leichhardt n more, directly linked to a much wider audience/cross-pollinating social reality...

uhmmm who m i writing this for?

nbdy

Lucy, Lucas, Luciana

Saturday, 7.21am:

An overcast morning. I open the kitchen door to survey the street. The block of flats across the way has done a big "hard rubbish" purge. An old mattress, metal ironing board frame, wooden clothes rack, dead TV. Actually, it looks like someone has moved out. That's the second family this month. Chris said the building's owned by the church - they house refugees there for up to six months at a time. A man shuffles past the pile of junk, noses around, selects a plastic mop, and continues on his way. Without warning, Drazic appears at my feet. Has he been out all night? I scoop some grutz into his bowl. He wolfs down his breakfast.

And now, I'm sitting in the dark, with a cup of lemon and ginger, typing. All is quiet.

So far so good.

Friday:

7.45am:

On the way back from Yoga, I bump into Pete Van Vliet. He's picking up some furniture from a friend on Terminus Street. Pete's moving in with his sister in Coogee, and they're cobbling together a household. I would never have expected to see Pete in the 'sham. He jumps out of his car, his face beaming. "Oh it's a pleasure to see you!" he says. "I saw the article in the paper. Man, you are a GENIUS!" We shake hands about a dozen times before parting company.

10am:

I collect Luciana, and we head north to Lucy's. Some wonderful smells are coming from her kitchen, filling the whole house. She's baking a cake. It was supposed to be ready for our morning tea, but, well, she'd gotten waylaid because the radio reception dropped out. Lucy had spent the morning lurching around the living room with her stereo system, trying out different positions in an attempt to pick up her favourite Spanish station. The radio is an important presence in her house.

She seems pleased to see us. "Lucas tells me you are a very busy woman!" she says to Luciana. "You must try not to work too hard!" They speak in Spanish together. I can follow what they're saying, but I reply in English, throwing in the odd word like "guapo" every so often, just to show I'm hip with the lingo.

Luciana, on the other hand, speaks five languages fluently.

This week, Lucy's been painting her children's bedrooms. It's turned out to be a bigger job than she expected. Moving the furniture, preparing the surfaces, selecting the colours. "Did you know, my son's favourite colour is actually baby blue?" she says. Her children are both overseas, and not due home any time soon.

She's also thinking to cover the ceilings in wood panelling. The house, at the northern end of Palace Street, is on a hill, and the foundations are unstable. When they shift slightly, cracks begin to appear in the plasterwork. Lucy's theory is that the wood panelling will be able to flex and accommodate these minor seismic movements. Quite a few surfaces are already clad with pine. We laugh. By the time she's finished the place will look like a Swedish sauna.

Lucy puts on the tea, and I open up the take-away container of Tiramisu I've brought for us to share. It was made by Fiona at the Big Bowl. We sit on an overstuffed yellow leather couch, surrounded by the furniture from Lucy's children's bedrooms, the sounds of Spanish radio, the smells of the cake in the oven. We talk about religion, about the mystery of Easter Island (now owned by Chile, who don't want to grant it independence), about the origin of European Languages, about Greek mathematicians. I point out that Pythagorus was a vegetarian. From memory, I think this was some kind of political statement. It's a good story, but I must verify this fact before using it again...

After our tea, I ask to see the garden. It's a big rambling mess of flowers, succulents, plants for eating, citrus trees, grape vines. Lucy points out each plant, caressing it with her thumb and forefinger as she names it, describes where it's from, what kind of flower it produces, how long it's taken to grow. At the front of the garden plot is a row of plastic pots where she's "propagating" - a skill she learned in horticulture courses at TAFE. Each type of plant needs a different treatment. A lot of the little shoots in these pots are gleaned cuttings from gardens around the neighbourhood. She smiles cheekily: "You know, I pinch them! And they grow up pretty good." There are even pomegranate seeds ready to be planted. She's got big plans: to uproot a whole tree that's too close to the lime, replant it somewhere else, and to overhaul a fallow patch. Plastic blocks of sugarcane mulch lie about, ready to be spread over the ground. "This way, you see, I keep active. I keep my figure!" she says.

Back inside, the cake is ready. It's an enormous orange and poppyseed. Lucy cuts us a huge slab which she puts in the Tiramisu container for us to take home. A Cake Exchange. We invite her to come and find us on the south side next time. We could sit in our garden, drink tea, and she could give us advice on our raggedy vegetable patch. Lucy is becoming our Petersham Auntie.

On the way home, it occurs to me: Lucy keeps talking about "keeping busy"; Luciana, on the other hand, is one of the busiest people I know. And me? For a little while longer, my business is simply drinking tea.

*

4.45pm:

Mick comes to visit. We take Wolfie out for a walk. There are dozens of dogs at Petersham Park. They get all excited and tangle up their leashes together. Sheepish owners chuckling and extricating their canines. Even though some dogs are hulking beasts, and some are tiny fluffballs, they all recognise each other as *dogs*. Why is this?

This entry was posted on Saturday, April 29th, 2006 at 8:38 am and is filed under ['sham dailies](#).

5 Responses to "Lucy, Lucas, Luciana"

1. Mick Says:

[April 29th, 2006 at 5:13 pm e](#)

Pythagorus WAS a vegetarian!

"Good company: Some of the world's most brilliant and influential people have practiced and promoted the vegetarian way of life, including Pythagorus, Leonardo da Vinci, Albert Einstein, Benjamin Franklin, Gandhi, Charles Darwin, George Bernard Shaw, just to name a few. Wouldn't

you like to join them?" <http://vegkitchen.com/tips/reasons-go-vegetarian.htm>

2. [Tully](#) Says:
[April 30th, 2006 at 1:58 pm e](#)

Lucas,

to be blunt - your project has started a shit-storm in our house. half the house thinks you're an artist, half the house thinks you aren't. I'd suggest some form of explanation on wednesday or holy wars may commence..

3. [shortleftleg](#) Says:
[April 30th, 2006 at 2:37 pm e](#)

Tully,

Wow. who would have thought? OK. i will come prepared with an explanation on Wednesday. Do you have access to a data projector? Or maybe i can just use your laptop. I'm thinking some sort of powerpoint presentation, constructing what's known as an "historical narrative" which connects what I am doing with art projects from the past. In this way you will see the incremental steps which can lead from one thing to another, and which enable me to present something as "art", even when it might not have the outward appearance of art. How does that sound?

4. [Tully](#) Says:
[April 30th, 2006 at 8:21 pm e](#)

That sounds good to me.

5. [Tully](#) Says:
[April 30th, 2006 at 11:47 pm e](#)

By the way, I'm on the pro-artist side, though mainly because I wish I'd thought of it first :)

consultations

I had a steady stream of visitors yesterday. *Bilateral Petersham* has begun to draw folks in from the outside world. You see, if my friends want to spend time with me, they have no choice: it's the 'sham or nothing, mate!

Jane arrived early and we headed up to Big Brekkie. She's in the final stretch of her thesis now. We talked about small details and minute observations. She's looking at this stuff in relation to some experimental filmmakers. Her argument is that the analysis of films tends to focus on grand, schematic explanations, ignoring the tiny details that knit together and give the films their texture. These details are embedded in the time and place that the film was made, and thus they almost give the film an [ethnographic](#) quality (even if this was unintended by the filmmaker).

I'm still stretching my brain to accommodate some of the implications of this stuff. Obviously it relates to my own work - the gist being that in order to really be in a place, you need to try and disregard the fact that it belongs to a broad "type" (eg Petersham is similar to Stanmore, it belongs to the Inner-West, and the suburbs in the Inner-West are all more or less the same). How can I go beyond this typology, and see the particular arrangements and rhythms of *this* place? How do I choose what details are included, and which to ignore?

After breakfast, Jane and I found a garage sale on the corner of Audley and Addison. I complimented the hosts on the graphic design of their pole posters: bold and simple, blocky capital letter fonts. They thought this was funny. I gave them my page of [Petersham FAQ's](#) and asked if they'd be interested in inviting me around for tea sometime to talk about life in the 'sham. Jane bought a teacup for fifty cents.

I needed new printer cartridges, and Jane needed a new ergonomic chair. So it was off to Officeworks for us. But Officeworks is out of bounds. Jane crossed the street into Lewisham and went shopping while I

squatted at the corner of Canterbury and Wardell, outside Petersham Bulk Cleaning Supplies, opposite Budget Petrol. It's an aggressive set of traffic lights. Cars jockey for pole position, changing lanes, blocking oncoming traffic, edging out into the intersection, turning illegally into garages. This western end of Canterbury Road is the least pedestrian friendly. Lots of empty shops, no place to stop and park your car. Bigger, more industrial businesses. Retail outlets tend to be large, functional, and serious. No flim-flam here, no custard tarts, no delicate cuts of meat, no lingering for a coffee. Even Georgiou's Confectionary feels like a factory outlet rather than a nice place to browse for chocolate. After about twenty minutes, Jane phoned from inside Officeworks to let me know the price of a cartridge, and I authorised the purchase. Unfortunately, the chair she wanted wasn't in stock. She would have to go to the Alexandria store instead.

After Jane left, I had a visit from the Cake Lady. We sat in the backyard drinking lemon verbena tea. She's doing an artist-in-residence at the Regents Court Hotel in the Cross. In return for staying there for free, all she has to do is water the garden a little. A nice deal. Then Claire rang up. She's an old friend of mine who lives in France. She's been visiting Sydney for the Writers' Festival. Cakey said goodbye, and I set out for the train station to collect Claire. Out on Audley Street, Tully was driving past. We waved to each other. He hopped out. Polly and his other flatmate were with him. "Well? [Is it art?](#)" he snapped. "Well", I said, "there's a long and a short answer. The short answer is yes. The long answer - as to *why* it's a yes - you'll have to wait for that." They crossed over to Charlie's for icecream, and I continued on my way.

Claire was waiting at Trafalgar and Regent. She's cut her hair short, sort of asymmetrical with a loop hanging down the left hand side. I said I thought it looked great. I asked what she thought of Kylie's post-chemo hairdo. I've never found Kylie all that interesting, but I reckon she's hot with her new [short style](#). Claire hadn't seen it. A rare occasion where I am more up-to-date on pop culture than my friends.

We passed the [RSL](#). The elections were on for the board of directors. Being a card-carrying member, I went in to exercise my democratic right. There were three cardboard voting booths in the foyer. A man sitting at a desk, looking official, leafed through a large lever-arch file for my name. I peered at the pages as he turned them. Every couple of sheets was a single name highlighted in orange. "Not many people voting, are there?" I asked. "Nah," he said, "maybe only a couple of hundred out of how many... maybe ten thousand members."

I wasn't sure who I should vote for. How can you vote for someone you've never heard of? Luckily, each candidate had a passport photo stapled to a handwritten page. This text gave a brief picture who they were. My job was to select two of the four candidates. One, I could immediately discard from my options. He had been in the navy, fought in the first gulf war, and was particularly dedicated to the armed forces side of things. Perhaps this was narrow-minded of me. After all, RSL does stand for "Returned Servicemen's League", right? Surely he is the perfect man for the job! But I didn't dwell on it. I operated on instinct. He was out.

Another fellow looked very friendly in his photo, but his handwriting and grammar was so poor that it was impossible to work out where he was coming from, or what he stood for. So I discarded him too, poor fellow. Who knows, maybe English was not his first language, and I'd effectively rejected a broader ethnic base which would serve to radicalise the club. Claire thought I was being unfair on this guy. She thought he was cute. But it was my decision in the end, and as far as I was concerned, poor grammar was a good enough reason for rejection.

That left the remaining two candidates. One was a woman, already on the board, who emphasised her commitment to indoor sports (including ten pin bowling) and parcelling out money to charities. Never mind that this money originates from poker-machine gambling addictions. She sounded good to me. My other vote went to a man who said simply that he had been a member for many years, and wanted to give something back to the club. Easy. We noticed that none of the four candidates actually lived in Petersham.

*

Waiting for the lights to change, I spotted Daniel zooming past on his bike. I shouted out to him. He stopped and turned around, beaming. I haven't seen him for a long time. Daniel lives in Stanmore. We met doing a course in web design at TAFE a few years back. I invited him over to have lunch with us.

We sat in the kitchen. Claire warmed up some Thai leftovers which Bec had brought home from work, and I washed a mountain of dishes. I'm always behind with the washing up, and it only ever seems to get done when I have visitors.

Around half past four, I dropped Claire off at the "Rail Bus" stop. The bus came almost immediately. Claire said she was dissatisfied with the amount of time we had spent together. She was right. There's so much to talk about, we hardly even scratched the surface, and it could be a long time before we see each other again.

But there's a strange feeling, when I receive visitors in the 'sham. It's a bit like I'm some sort of professional, making appointments for short talk-oriented consultations. We talk about life, inevitably I talk about what's going on in the neighbourhood, I hear news from outside, about parties I've missed or lives-in-process. In theory, my seclusion from the flux of the wider city should give me some time and space to relax into these conversations. But I don't ever feel quite relaxed. Why is this?

This entry was posted on Sunday, April 30th, 2006 at 5:12 pm and is filed under ['sham dailies](#).

[seemingly insignificant detail](#)

I arrived at "Darren's Backyard" just before five. A band was setting up to play. This was [Caxton](#). I weaved through the cool nerdy rocker kids shuffling about on the gravel until I spotted [Vanessa](#). I've never met Vanessa, but I recognised her face from her [Flickr site](#). It was a bit like a blind date, but without the sub-plot of romance. Don't get me wrong - it certainly is romantic to meet someone for the first time whose work you have long admired. Vanessa is something of a legend in the zine world, and I'm a big fan of her obsessive writing projects. So it was super flattering to get her email saying she'd been following my blog, and inviting me to this backyard gig. I guess it must be a bit like this for people who "meet" online and then travel halfway across the globe to eyeball each other in the flesh. All the standard mini anxious anticipations apply: What will she think of me? Will I be able to live up to the online persona I've constructed? Will there be misunderstandings as to our intentions vis-a-vis romance? etc etc.

But in this case, Vanessa and I seemed to get along very well immediately. She's got a dry dry wit, which could lean towards cynicism, if it wasn't coupled with her obsessive enthusiasms for tiny, seemingly insignificant detail. For instance, one of her famous zines is about the 23rd day of the month. Each and every month, she would write, at exhaustive length, about what she did, down to the finest banalities, on the 23rd day. This zine, "[Laughter and the Sound of Teacups](#)," ran for *five years*. In another project, she collected shopping lists found dropped from trolleys in supermarkets or on the side of the road, and constructed elaborate imagined narratives about the lives of these shoppers. Since she moved to Petersham, she's been researching Parramatta Road, circa 1976. Apparently this was a time of great urban upheaval. And so she's going to take me on time-travel-tour, back thirty years, this coming Thursday. "I hope I have my outfit and clipboard ready by then," she said.

Vanessa seems to like carefully assembled chunks of communication. Her very sentences are crafted bullets of humorous content, delivered with deliberately chosen phrasing. She told me that, in fact, the email she had sent me was *not her first attempt* at making contact. No: she had composed a note, found out my address, and posted it in my letter box. For some reason, I never found the note. Did she really write it? Is this all just a fantasy she has created? But the writing and hand-posting of a note certainly would seem to be in keeping with her obsessive, precise way of doing things - not to mention her preference for the physical over the virtual. So where did that piece of paper end up? Vanessa said she still has the first draft (!), and she will try to recreate the note for me.

My conversation with Vanessa was carried out while we listened to Caxton play. They're a fun, keyboard led band with a saxophone section. They seem to be quite serious about what they do - the stage was littered with metal stands holding sheet music. It was an intimate gig. Vanessa introduced me to Darren, the host. He's only recently moved to Petersham, but this is about the fifteenth gig he's produced in various backyards around Sydney. I told Darren I wasn't leaving Petersham for all April and May. "Oh,

that's YOU!" he said. He invited me to come back and hang out, any time. Just knock on the door.

Vanessa had to run off to another party, some sort of sailor theme, for which she had the "perfect" outfit all lined up. Damien arrived just as [the Triangles](#) were starting their set. They'd come all the way from Melbourne for this one gig. "Hello Peters-Ham!!" they cheered! The drummer asked the crowd if this was the right pronunciation. We set them straight.

(Come to think of it, why *don't* we pronounce it like "the ham which belongs to Peter?" Surely "Ham" is from "hamlet" meaning small village. "Sham," on the other hand, means nothing. Is this just an Aussie bastardisation? Or am I wrong? I will email the good folks of Richmond, England, and see how they pronounce their Petersham...)

The Triangles look like they really like each other. All the band members sing, their lyrics are funny, and



they even have a song about margarine. Damien and I sat down in a fragrant patch of rosemary towards the front of the crowd, blowing bubbles for some kids, who were trying to pop them as fast as they could come out of the bubble pipe. After the gig I went and introduced myself to the band, and asked if we could have a photo together. Damien took the snap. It came out perfect: a terrific, typical, bad "fan with the band" photo. "This is the best gig we've ever done in Petersham," said the drummer (on the right).

*

Damien and I drifted over to the bowling club, where we were a little late for the [Moroccan feast](#). A table of seven friends had already assembled. Fiona had made labna, savoury pastries, a delicious dip, olives, chick pea tagine, and a curious doublemeat combination for the non-vegetarians. Then dates, baklava, turkish delight. The club was as warm and convivial as ever. You feel like the people cooking, pouring beer, serving tables, are doing it out of the goodness of their hearts. The whole thing totters between homely and hokey, and yet still maintains a sense of quality. I may have said this before, but the place really does, in fact, feel like a "club" and not just a business. Of course, they *are* on the verge of bankruptcy...It's funny to begin to feel "local" there, when my first visit was only a few weeks ago. Now it's for others to be amazed by the badge board, the carpet, the "Bad Language will NOT be Tolerated" sign, the vintage poker machines, the deceased estate equipment for bowling downstairs...

Towards the end of dinner, when we were onto the turkish delight, a lady called Jo came and introduced herself. She's on the board of the club, and was wondering if she could talk to me for a second. I excused myself from our table and went with her. She was sitting with John, Sally, and Roberta. The club wants to enter a [competition](#) to get ABC radio to come out and do a broadcast live from the Bowlo. And they were wondering if I had any ideas. Basically, what happens is, this DJ called James O'Loghlin comes out to "your living room, your community centre, your social club" etc, and runs a whole three hour show from there. You provide "local talent", musical acts, activities, games, etc. So what they're thinking is that the club is the perfect spot, and Petersham the perfect locality, to coax James out here.

I suggested a few leads I thought we could follow up, vis-a-vis local talent: like the guy who runs the collectible toy store up on Stanmore road, and is a seasoned Michael Jackson impersonator. Or Anthony, from the Liquor store, who has a host of amazing stories about the history of New Canterbury Road. We could rope in the visiting Filipino artists, who'll be here from the 9th of May. And there's always the enthusiast on John Street. Apparently this guy reckons that Petersham is the best suburb in the whole world. I must follow up on that. Jo and Roberta liked these ideas. Part of their project is to disprove the recent media reports about Sydney's Inner-west being the [most unhappy place](#) in Australia. It turns out all four of them - John, Sally, Roberta, and Jo - live on Searl Street. I'm thinking Searl Street is a pretty special place...

In the meantime, my table had cleared out. The stragglers were outside bowling. We were joined by Max and Antoinette, who brought along some West Papuans to try their hands at bowling. These guys - Titus,

Patianus, and Arvo - were in Sydney for a few days for a [flag raising stunt](#) in front of the Indonesian Embassy. They were surprisingly good at bowls.

Damien joked, "That's it - now their demands will increase: Independence, *and* Bowling For All."

This entry was posted on Sunday, April 30th, 2006 at 5:28 pm and is filed under ['sham dailies](#).

2 Responses to "seemingly insignificant detail"

1. *miss K* Says:

[May 1st, 2006 at 9:43 am e](#)

Hi, I play percussion in Caxton. We refer to Caxton as "A Musical Sweatshop". Jono is very keen on things being played correctly and often that requires music. Even we think it is far too serious with music stands.

I'm glad you could come. Vanessa Berry is wonderful isn't she?

2. *Miss Helen* Says:

[May 2nd, 2006 at 8:55 pm e](#)

Hello Lucas!

I met you at the show briefly, but I was in a rather flighty mood. I'm friends with Vanessa Berry, and although I don't live in Petersham(I was the person yelling out PETER'S HAM! PETER'S HAM! to the Triangles), I live in the outer burbs and when I need somewhere to stay in the big smoke, Vanessa generally takes me in. I also came up with the name "musical sweatshop" for Caxton, but I like to call it "Jonathan Gerber and the musical sweatshop".

Anyway, the reason why I am commenting, is to tell you that if you get bored and or lonely towards the end of your time in Peters ham, ask Vanessa and we can come over and I can teach you to knit. It is a practical and relaxing skill that all modern humans should know how to do.

I haven't told anyone this before, and saying it on your comments seems as good an idea as any, but my friend Miss K(who commented above) and I are campaigning to change Canterbury Rd to VanessaBerry Road, and to name New Canterbury Road after her sister Fiona. This seemed like a very good idea when we were driving to Peters Ham, and it also seems like a very good idea now (after consuming red wine).

There are lots of photos of the show on the internet, on account of the high number of nerdy types with digital cameras:

http://www.flickr.com/photos/miss_k/tags/backyard/

and

<http://tibbycat.livejournal.com/49903.html>

That is all I can find right now. But there are lots.

[local talent](#)

Does anyone know any famous folks who live, or have lived (sorta recently) in Petersham? We're trying to hook up for the [ABC](#) to come out to the 'sham and do a broadcast from the bowling club:

Basically, what happens is, this DJ called James O'Loghlin comes out to "your living room, your community centre, your social club" etc, and runs a whole three hour show from there.

You provide "local talent", musical acts, activities, games, etc.

Do get in touch and I'll pass on your info to Jo and Roberta, who are putting together the Petersham Pitch.

This entry was posted on Sunday, April 30th, 2006 at 6:28 pm and is filed under [adverts](#).

11 Responses to "local talent"

1. *Anonymous* Says:

[May 1st, 2006 at 12:56 am e](#)

Could you have it at the roller rink?

2. *Vanessa* Says:

[May 1st, 2006 at 8:40 am e](#)

Darren's famous!

<http://www.darrenhanlon.com/>

3. *shortleftleg* Says:

[May 1st, 2006 at 9:28 am e](#)

anonymous - the idea behind the pitch is to re-invigorate the bowling club. arguably, the roller-rink needs re-invigoration even more, but that's another battle altogether...

vanessa - is darren the same darren of [darren's backyard?](#)

and...there's been a tip off that famous author [Gabrielle Carey](#) (she wrote puberty blues together with Kathy Lette) is a 'sham local... gabrielle, are you out there?!

4. *Vanessa* Says:

[May 1st, 2006 at 11:59 am e](#)

Yes, the same Darren. I had Gabrielle Carey as a teacher a few years ago. I shall see if I can find her contact details amongst my avalanche of papers.

5. *lisa* Says:

[May 1st, 2006 at 2:57 pm e](#)

'veteran film and TV producer Penny Chapman' lives & works out of that ivy-covered warehouse you admired...

6. *mayhem* Says:

[May 1st, 2006 at 5:42 pm e](#)

Gabrielle's brother lives down the road from me so if you have no luck - then let me know.

Who's the next bowling do? I'm hanging to get in uniform, cheers, mayhem

7. *Roberta* Says:

[May 1st, 2006 at 7:42 pm e](#)

Great news. We have been shortlisted for James' show, and will find out on Wednesday or Thursday. So, any suggestions, or ideas warmly welcome!
Thanks Lucas for your help!

Roberta

8. *Mick* Says:

[May 2nd, 2006 at 9:35 am e](#)

In an earlier posting you linked to Fort Street High School and i noticed they list past pupils gone famous. or sorta famous. Like Michael Kirby, Donald McDonald (not that ya want him), Mary Kostakidis the ABC newsreader... ok, it's not a great list, but maybe something interesting could come of it.

9. *Georgia* Says:

[May 2nd, 2006 at 10:03 pm e](#)

My dad used to live next door to Gabrielle, in Petersham, she's very recently moved out of the 'Sham.

And Mick, Mary Kostakidis reads the SBS World News, not ABC news.

10. [Mike Stone](#) Says:

[May 6th, 2006 at 5:42 pm e](#)

How famous do you have to be?

Don't famous people have enough publicity already?

How about ordinary Petersham people that have done extraordinary things or have interesting stories about Petersham?

<http://www.photo.net.au>

11. [shortleftleg](#) Says:

[May 6th, 2006 at 5:50 pm e](#)

Exactly, Mike.

Nah you don't have to be famous to be on the radio show! We were just wondering if there were any big names out there. Interestingly, it seems that the 'sham is a bit deficient on high profile celebs. But there's no shortage of ordinary extraordinaries! (I look forward to visiting you soon, too, Mike!)

it moved with stealth...

Believe it or not. Around this time last year, a [UFO was sighted](#) in the 'sham:

UFOINFO Sighting Form Report

Name: Chris Flynn

Location: **Petersham**, Sydney, NSW, Australia

Date: Sunday, 10/04/05, 19.55hrs (Local)

Approach Direction: East

Departure Direction: West

Witness Direction: North

Date: Sunday, 10/04/05, 19.55hrs (Local)

I reclined on my garden bench to get a better look at the constellation of Orion, which lay directly above me, periodically using my binoculars to get a more detailed view. After a while I noticed what can only be described as a large shadow moving in a controlled fashion across the sky. It could only be seen as its contrasted very slightly with the not yet dark nightscape. I quickly raised my binoculars to check the ghostly image only to see a very dark (Black) boomerang or 'V' shaped object silhouetted against the evening sky. It moved with stealth and was completely silent. I found it impossible to gauge how big the craft was but the lights which were visible (only with binoculars) around its circumference gave me the instinctive feeling that I was looking at something significant [...] This experience left me both excited and shaken.

And not only that! It seems that the [other 'shams](#) attract these unidentified thingies too!

THREE DAYLIGHT DISCS CAVORT OVER MASSACHUSETTS

On Saturday, April 27, 1996, at approximately 6 p.m., a man standing on the eastern shore of the Quabbin Reservoir, just west of **Petersham**, Massachusetts, spotted three UFOs in the sky over the huge man-made lake.

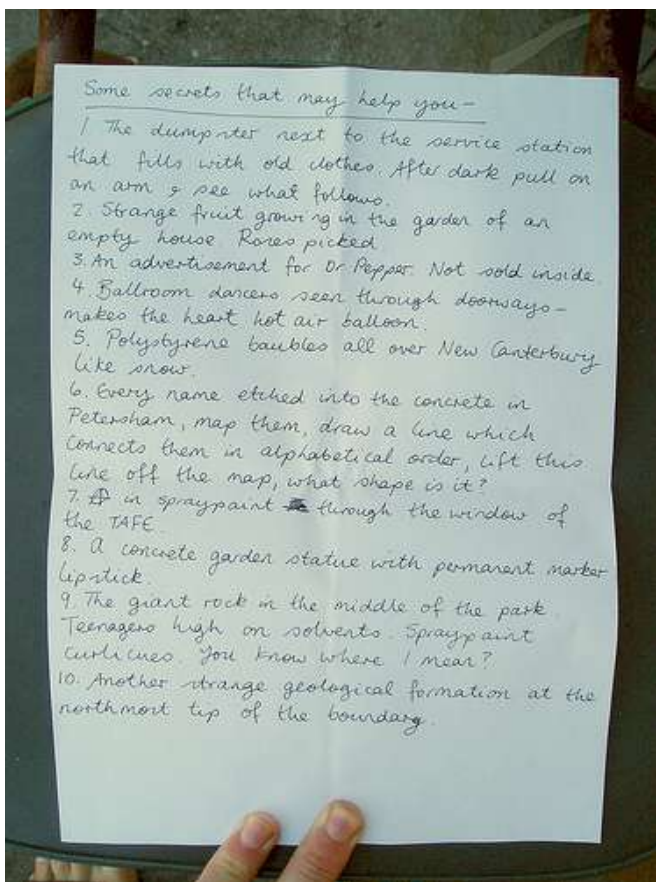
"I saw them moving in a circular, sweeping sort of motion," the man said. "They made no noise and produced only a brightening light that seemed to silhouette them against the sky." At first "the UFOs appeared as lines in the sky," he added, "but by their

appearance I judged them to be flat or concave in shape. The area (of flight) was west of my position looking over the Quabbin. The objects were moving at what I would say was 30 miles per hour in a north-south rotation, switching directions in the air. I watched them for about five minutes until the objects zipped over the (Berkshire) hills to the west."

I love these descriptions. Since it's clearly impossible to show photographs, the UFO reports must rely on words alone. The verbatim accounts give an authentic, "eyewitness" feel to something entirely unsubstantial.

This entry was posted on Tuesday, May 2nd, 2006 at 12:15 am and is filed under [the paranormal](#).

[the snails ate my mail](#)



Exciting items in my mailbox this morning! A two page handwritten [letter](#), and a list of "some secrets that may help you".

This must be the reconstructed version of the note that [Vanessa](#) delivered two weeks ago, and which mysteriously disappeared. Inserted in the letter was a [rabbit shape](#) cut out of floral contact (the sticky stuff we used to cover books with at school). I stuck the rabbit on my mailbox, [around the corner](#) from my new "no junk mail" plaque.

This entry was posted on Tuesday, May 2nd, 2006 at 10:51 am and is filed under [correspondence](#).

[more jelly fun](#)

The following is lifted from the [SLAC](#) (Sydney Ladies Artists Club) website. For those of you who missed last week's [Jelly Wrestling Extravaganza](#), we offer you a second chance!

The idea, cooked up by Lisa, was to try and get as many *ladies* into the pub as possible. We reckon this will change the entire dynamic of the event. It's a valiant demonstration of the power of audience participation! So keep next Wednesday night in yer diary, ladies! (Of course, men welcome too...)

It's wet, it's wild, it's the contentious gender spectacle of live jelly wrestling!

SLAC joins forces with Bilateral Petersham for a second round of soft-porn sightseeing at the infamous Oxford Tavern. Soak up the view (& flying jelly) from front row in the

back room. Enjoy strip shows between rounds by consummate performers with truly impressive command of their hamstrings. But best of all, be there as we collectively effect a subtle intervention in the event dynamics and displace the primacy of the heterosexual male gaze... we're going to stack the joint with Sydney Ladies, Artists or otherwise!

where: The Oxford Tavern, corner New Canterbury Rd & Crystal St Petersham
when: Wednesday 10th May 9pm
\$7 door charge

bring your lady friends!

This entry was posted on Wednesday, May 3rd, 2006 at 9:57 am and is filed under [adverts](#).

10 Responses to "more jelly fun"

1. [Tully](#) Says:

[May 3rd, 2006 at 3:14 pm e](#)

Yeah! Let's smash the patriarchy!

..but why do things by half, shouldn't the ladies be walking around poking the eyes out of these vicious evil heterosexual men? I'm coming, if only to promote the degenderising and deheterosexualising of the concept of the gaze.

Our house have been there a couple of times, they don't have a problem with a bunch of women turning up. Also they've got the cheapest housewine out of all the locals.

2. [Georgia](#) Says:

[May 3rd, 2006 at 8:37 pm e](#)

Oh Tully Tully Tully, so many books (well, two) that I need to lend you. Also, last I heard, you were not a woman!?

You and Lucas both must read 'Female Chauvinist Pigs: Women & the Rise of Raunch Culture' by Ariel Levy. I can lend. It is the counter-argument to SLAC's idea of what is achieved when women look at women. Also, given Lucas' really spot-on account of how actually un-sexy it is to see a woman 'going through the motions' rather than really enjoying herself, I'm not sure why anyone would want to support this.

3. [Tully](#) Says:

[May 3rd, 2006 at 10:51 pm e](#)

You know that book isn't the bible,

My old housemate Poppy read the book twice and ran me through all the arguments. Ultimately I heard a bunch of discussion on 'raunch culture' by women who had never really been part of a culture anything like that described in the book. I understand that liberation is separate to excessive displays of male or co-opted female chauvinism. I understand that sexuality is about needs and desires, not meaningless displays of sexual power.

Going to see Jelly wrestling may be meaningless for some, but it won't be for me. I'm intrigued, there will be naked women so I'll probably be stimulated, there will (probably) be some open-minded people there and I don't know what the effect will be.

Do you need to be a woman to talk about the male gaze? last I heard it was a concept as well as an experience. I have seen and experienced similar forms of female gaze towards men. There are some gender issues that women are not prepared to be pluralist about in a post first-wave feminist world.

4. [mayhem](#) Says:

[May 4th, 2006 at 1:52 pm e](#)

Oh GODDD!!!!

I just spent AGES trying to find some great article I read 2 years ago by some ethnographer student who was DOING JELLY WRESTLING as part of her research. and i can't bloody find it!!!!

anyway - tully etc. I havne't read "raunch culture" - but I have read a LOT of really interesting informative critical challenging and FUN research by and about female strippers and the gender politics of perve.

There's have been 2 feminist waves in my lifetime before that the first one was in the 19th century. So i guess we're like post third wave. but I'd prefer to take some pluralist position to accepting that people are curious and confused everywhere rather than labelling everything under some called of zeitgeist.

do you rekcon i can get from Ryde to petersham in under 60 minutes?

5. [shortleftleg](#) Says:

[May 4th, 2006 at 10:20 pm e](#)

hey georgia: what's the second book you were going to suggest?

6. [Georgia](#) Says:

[May 5th, 2006 at 12:11 am e](#)

Susan Faludi's 'Backlash', just for good measure. I read it (having started it a number of times) recently, after reading Levy's book, and it's helpful to see what the backlash against feminism that occurred in the eighties did to prepare the soil for raunch culture. Levy's book admittedly is about the US, not Australia, but it's still of enormous value. I don't hold the bible in any sort high esteem, so I'm not sure why Tull has made that comment! It was just brilliant to find that someone had written the book I realised needed to be written, when I was a first year at uni some years ago! I feel that what she says in it is really urgently important.

7. [Tully](#) Says:

[May 5th, 2006 at 10:44 pm e](#)

I LOVE YOU GEORGIA!!!! :)

8. [lisa del Nord](#) Says:

[May 6th, 2006 at 4:03 pm e](#)

Well I've got a copy of 'Female Chauvinist Pigs...' to bring along on wednesday night and keep this moving. Perhaps the housewine will do it some favours, it seems kind of screechy-preachy at a glance. Like Tully I'm all for open-minded & playful forays into sexual politicking, and a plural PRACTICE of feminism by men & women, queer & straight, on the ground in daily life. And I doubt you could get more quotidian than the Oxford...

9. [Tully](#) Says:

[May 7th, 2006 at 9:19 pm e](#)

Even better, I wondered whether I could get quotidian in the oxford, and [it suggests](#) that we makes the visits daily. How about that then.

[in the archives](#)

Every Tuesday, the Marrickville Council [archives](#), upstairs in the [Petersham Town Hall](#), are open to the public. I arrived just after eleven. A ballroom dancing class was in progress in the [Hall itself](#). Graceful Chinese couples spinning and twirling. It was just as Vanessa had [described](#):

Ballroom dancers seen through doorways. Makes the heart hot air balloon.

I was seized with a sudden craving to join them on the dancefloor. Perhaps I could convince Vanessa to be my dancing partner next Tuesday morn. Then I could show off some of the scorchin' moves I learned in highschool...



(An image of the old Council Chambers, now the archives room. Re-photographed from the book *The Story of Petersham*, edited by Allen M. Shepherd, Published by the Council of the Municipality of Petersham, December 1948.)

The archives are housed in the old Council Chambers. It's tiny in there, a set of overstuffed armchairs arrayed around a half-donut table. Banks of neatly-labelled filing cabinets divide the room into two browsing areas: the old curved table for solid objects like letters, maps, and photos; and a new "modern" area for computers and microfilm. There's no doubt that Chrys, the historian, has found her true calling. Joy radiates from her face as she

explores some tiny corner of Marrickville's History. As Chrys speaks, it's hard to keep up with the crackling electricity of memories flooding in from her brain. I recognise aspects of my grandmother in the (much younger) Chrys - both take affectionate possession of a set of stories that belong to many many people. Both gather in these tales one by one, and keep them alive by constant retelling.

Chrys began with a story about parks in the Marrickville area. Apparently, some of the parks were originally brick pits - areas of land rich in clay. Speculators bought up plots and dug huge holes to extract the clay. Once the deposit ran out, they'd move on. It was pointless to try and sell the gaping holes, so they'd simply abandon them. The holes would fill up with rising groundwater and local garbage, becoming treacherous artificial lakes tempting local children to take a dip. Chrys said sometimes kids would dive in, and their limbs or heads would snag in old wagon wheels or construction waste invisible under the surface. Plenty of drownings. Some of the watery graves were as deep as eighty feet. Eventually, the council stepped in, reclaiming the swamps as public land, and filling them in again. These became parks.

Chrys herself has a personal connection to one of these reclaimed brick pits. The largest of them all, owned by the "Standsure" company, was transformed into [Henson Park](#), now a big oval near Illawarra Road. For over thirty years, her father was the groundskeeper of Henson Park. The gates of Henson Park are named after him.

Of course, *Petersham's* parks did not begin this way. Petersham was a much more genteel borough from the beginning. Being high on a hill, it was the "country" retreat for businessmen from the city, who could look down on Botany Bay from their stately homes. No heavy industry was based here. Chrys had a map showing the old council boundaries in 1887. The Municipality of Petersham stretched all the way from Dulwich Hill in the west, encompassed Lewisham, took in Stanmore (then known as Kingston), and terminated at Johnston's Creek, at the edge of Camperdown. It was a long horizontal stretch bounded by Parramatta Road to the north, and New Canterbury Road to the south. That's right: in 1887, a huge chunk of what is now "South Petersham" was actually part of Marrickville - including my place on Chester Street.

Perhaps this accounts for the tangible change in atmosphere I feel when I walk through the railway underpass to the northern side. It's like emerging into a quiet country town filled with polite and civilized citizens. The south, by contrast, is a bustling thriving urban melting-pot. Sure, this is a fictional mythology I have been deliberately cultivating. But now I have some dangerously half-baked historical authority to bolt onto it. What use is history if not for bolstering one's narrow world view?

Chrys showed me some old [advertising posters](#) for the subdivision and sale of the land which is now the Bowling Club. There was also a bill of sale for "The Town of Norwood" - the land south of Petersham train station. The invitation to purchase a part of Norwood is topped by a panoramic pastoral scene with cows grazing peacefully and looking down on the bay in the distance. Notwithstanding the ugliness of the name

“Norwood,” the bill of sale is worth quoting - if only to expose, by comparison, the linguistic poverty of today’s real-estate profession:

The position of NORWOOD for a Township, is one of the
MOST ELIGIBLE
To be found in the COLONY. It occupies that picturesque and
Splendid Site,
PETERSHAM HILL,
Immediately over the
RAILWAY STATION,
Any portion of the Town being within FI VE MINUTES WALK
of the Station. The TRAINS to and from Sydney will not oc-
cupy more than TEN MINUTES, thus affording a
PLEASANT, ECONOMICAL, AND EXPEDITIOUS
MODE OF TRAVELLING
To the Metropolis, the distance being only
THREE AND A HALF MILES.
NORWOOD is also accessibly either by the
PARRAMATTA ROAD,
By which it is about Twenty Minutes drive to Sydney or
THE NEW TOWN ROAD,
passing by Enmore. From the great elevation of the town, it
commands views of EXCEEDING BEAUTY: towards the
north-east there is a most
MAGNIFICENT LANDSCAPE,
Including
BOTANY HEADS,
THE BAY,
THE PACIFIC OCEAN,
NEWTOWN, and all the adjacent country, several GENTLE
MEN’S SEATS diversifying the scene. Also a most picturesque
view of NEWTOWN CHURCH.
Towards the south-west there is altogether a different character
of landscape and equally as pleasing in the immediate foreground,
is the Railway Station.
[...]

The auctioneers could dwell much longer on the pleasing duty
of illustrating the splendid site selected for Norwood, but they
think enough has been said to awaken the desire of intending
purchasers to see themselves the beauties of nature displayed to
such advantage.

Unlike Chrys, I have no particular feeling for history. Facts and figures, names, places and dates swim in and out of my brain, muddling up with each other and leaving only vague traces and broad sensations. I let her stories wash over me, thankful that she, at least, is an embodied local encyclopedia. No supercomputer fed with all the accumulated data in the archives could transmit such pleasure in the regurgitation, in the transformation of this data into a connected web of stories. Chrys has years of projects ahead of her. The brickworks seems to be her current preoccupation. Some years back, she wrote to Sydney Water, to try and get them to open up the old reservoir under the [Water Tower](#) to historical exploration. They didn’t even deign to answer her letter, but I suspect that she hasn’t given up on that one.

And then there’s the flood of contemporary events, which she and her assistant Glenn attempt to harness, clipping articles, local posters and flyers, and even house auction ads, in new and ever expanding files. And believe it or not, they have already started a file on *me*! As we were sitting there, looking through old

maps, Glenn leant across and showed me the [photo](#) he'd just clipped out of the Inner-Western Courier, showing me standing pretentiously, rolled up map in hand, in my new Petersham t-shirt, in front of the old Fancy Box Piano Roll Warehouse on Stanmore Road.

A few other archival tid-bits:

- The pavement [street signage](#) I have been photographing around the 'sham are made from brick embedded flush into the cement. Often new concrete has been poured, leaving a small island within which the old sign remains.
- Petersham was amalgamated into a much larger Marrickville Council in 1949. The amalgamation was strongly opposed by the locals, who produced a brochure entitled "SOME REASONS WHY..." The whole thing is eerily similar to the current Frank Sartor schemes to rezone boundaries and, if "necessary" take over local council's planning development powers. There's a lot of talk in the brochure about the very undemocratic lack of consultation. Here's just one of the reasons the 'sham was opposed to the merger:

Local Government is [...] that form of Government which is nearest to the people, because it comes right into your homes and effects every day matters. Its Aldermen and Councillors are public spirited citizens who carry on the local affairs of the area to the best of their ability in a spirit of local interest. Under any of the schemes proposed, this personal touch will be lost.

The brochure urged citizens to get involved and "Write to your State Parliamentary Representative TO-DAY":

REMEMBER, apathy of the people is the greatest enemy that true democracy can have. Time is short.

- I asked Chrys about the Indigenous history of the 'sham. There's always plenty of hoo-har in the media about the Italian and Portuguese influence, but not much is heard of a contemporary Aboriginal presence here. I've been wondering about this for a little while. Chrys and Glenn worked with the Aboriginal community through the Marrickville Aboriginal Consultative Committee to produce the Marrickville Aboriginal History Project. It explores Indigenous culture through oral history, photographs, maps and a [timeline](#) from Dreamtime to contemporary time. There is also the [Cadigal Wangal website](#), another collaborative project of Council and the Aboriginal community. Chrys suggested I contact Lester Bostock, who is a respected Elder in the Marrickville Community, to find out more...

This entry was posted on Wednesday, May 3rd, 2006 at 12:42 pm and is filed under ['sham dailies](#).

2 Responses to "in the archives"

1. *nobody* Says:
[May 3rd, 2006 at 9:23 pm e](#)

lu, are you spicing up the blog?
are we witnessing virtual flirting with Vanessa?
2. *shortleftleg* Says:
[May 4th, 2006 at 9:39 pm e](#)

I can neither confirm nor deny that rumour.

[food](#)

I turned right onto [Hordern Street](#). Presumably, the famous [Anthony Hordern](#), who ran a huge department store in Sydney, lived around here. I figured I'd be able to weave through to Parramatta Road. But half

way down, I could see it was a “no through road”. In a garage at the end of the *cul-de-sac*, a woman was fussing over piles of cardboard boxes. I waved and walked up to her. She was packing vegetables. Organic vegies in Petersham!

Jenny was packing, and she called out to Georgie, the boss. She came out of the adjoining house, wiping her hands on her jumper. I introduced myself. Georgie read my FAQ sheet and chuckled to herself. She said she’d be happy to tell me all about the vegie game.

But I had to go - I had an appointment to make, and I promised to call back later.

Believe it or not, my “appointment” was at the local gym! Last week, when I was locked out all day, I walked past “The Sports Pit”. It’s at the northernmost end of Petersham, on the corner of Palace and Parramatta. There I had talked to an instructor called Chris, who convinced me to come back for a trial session. So I figured: why the hell not?

Just after one, there I am, standing in the reception, feeling a bit foolish. I’d brought tracksuit pants to change into. The changerooms smelt like sweat and men. Trashy magazines were piled up at strategic points around the gym, perhaps to ease you through moments of exhaustion.

Chris showed me through some of the machines. We started on the treadmill. I walked for twenty minutes on the revolving rubber mat, jabbing my finger at the digital display to move the speed up and down, and feeling my legs respond accordingly. In front of the treadmills there are four TVs, each showing a different station. Techno music pumps throughout. You can’t help but march in time. The handles of the treadmill have metal sensors to test your heartrate.

The second machine was some kind of cardio workout thing, where you pump the arms and legs back and forth in a dynamic walking scissor motion. This is the classic exercise device you always see advertised on TV, “giving a total body workout!” Chris said he wanted to see me get my heart rate up over 150 beats per minute. It hovered at 145 for ages, then I pumped it a little faster and it spiked alarmingly, to 180. I backed off a bit and it plummeted to 130. After thirteen minutes Chris returned. “You’re not even sweating, Lucas!” he said. He put me on the rowing machine. I rowed and rowed, and watched *The Bill* for another thirteen minutes.

Then we were onto the weight lifting machines. There are about half a dozen of these, each designed to put strain on a different part of the body. Systems of levers and pullies only requiring the addition of my flesh and muscle to set them in motion. Unfortunately, these are designed for people with some existing degree of muscle mass. I had to remove *all* the weights in order to be able to even shift the damn things an inch. So there I was, lifting just the skeletal armature of the machine itself, and even that was agony.

To his credit, Chris was very un-macho about the whole thing. He understood that I’m not at all interested in “bulking up”. Instead, what he had in mind for me was to “keep my lean physique, but make it ripped” (whatever that might mean) and to put on maybe five or six kilos. He wants me to start eating more fish, two or three tins of tuna a day (!), and high-protein bread. He wants a minimum of three workouts a week.

I’m not sure I’m ready to join the universe of the gymnasium.

Working out, talking to Chris, watching all those TVs, I felt completely absorbed. It was hard to believe that I could possibly have lived all my life up to this point without going to a gym. He offered me a really good deal to join, and even tailored a payment plan so I wouldn’t have to outlay one bulky payment.

I rang Bec. She thought it sounded like a great idea. But I don’t know. There are so many options in the big city. Am I ready for such a radical transformation?

*

On the way home I swung past Hordern Street again. Georgie had gone out on a delivery, but Jenny was still there packing boxes. I stood at the garage door distracting her while she distributed broccoli amongst the hampers. At the entrance to Hordern is a building site, an apartment development which she said has been on the go forever. They got as far as installing all the Smeg appliances, but some delay in construction has meant that the flats are not ready to be occupied yet. So a security guard has been

employed, full time. He lives in the building itself, amongst all that luxury, night and day. Jenny doesn't like him. She says he spies on her from his perch in the apartments. It must be a pretty boring job, guarding whitegoods in an empty building all day.

This entry was posted on Wednesday, May 3rd, 2006 at 2:43 pm and is filed under ['sham dailies](#).

4 Responses to "food"

1. [mayhem](#) Says:

[May 4th, 2006 at 12:56 pm e](#)

Lucazoid - that as one of the nicest descriptions of going to a gym that I've read for a while. There needs to be more literature about gyms coz THEY ARE REALLY WEIRD.

I reckon if you signed up to the 5kg ripped bosting program it could do your head in - a bit like the matrix - coz for a while there you just think you're flirting with an alternate reality and then you'll find yourself suddenly being sucked in.

It's a little known fact that gyms have these weird portals in the space time continuum that zap you out into a parallel universe. Be very wary. there's one at Chatswood train station too.

2. [sunny](#) Says:

[May 4th, 2006 at 4:27 pm e](#)

hey lucas keep us posted on the vegie biz. plenty o readers would be very interested i think, specially if they do vegie boxes.

3. [shortleftleg](#) Says:

[May 4th, 2006 at 6:40 pm e](#)

sunny

i will find out how you can get in touch with the organics. it's all about the home delivered vegie box. and i bought a box, it was terrific. even organic BASIL!!

4. [shortleftleg](#) Says:

[May 4th, 2006 at 10:01 pm e](#)

OK here's where you can get your organic vegie box:

the company is "2u Organics" and the phone number to order is 1800 252 535 or 9568 3947, ask for Georgie, she's really friendly!

Petersham, Thursday May 4th, 2006

Two ginger cats in the house now. We keep trying to get them to meet and work out their differences. But whenever Drazic comes inside, Ruben hides under the bed. And on the odd occasion when Ruben ventures out into the kitchen, Drazic gracefully absents himself to the garden. This has been going on for four days.

*

After seven, Roberta called me up. Was I still coming over? The Petersham Bowling and Community Club had been shortlisted to host an [ABC radio show](#) with James O'Loughlin. Along with the other contestants, Roberta was booked in to do a live pitch on air. James was then going to announce the winner immediately. Some club people were gathering at Roberta and John's to drink a drop of champagne and lend support. I got out of the bath where I'd been languishing, and made my way over to Brighton Street, stopping for some hot and very salty chips from Silvas to line my stomach in preparation for the booze.

Roberta and John live right next door to the club. So it makes sense that they're involved in the "save the bowl" campaign. John answered the door. He was so excited he couldn't sit still, bouncing around and organising glasses of wine and cheese for us. John said he's never really been into blogs before, but *the*

'sham has turned him into a real blog geek: "I come in from work and and turn on the computer, and I wonder: 'what he's been up to today?'"

I asked what he thought of the poll to find out where my blog readers live. "Oh, it's fun isn't it! And the 'sham is still winning! But only just..."

A few other neighbours were there too, including Jo, who's been working with Roberta on the campaign. We sat nervously on the back porch drinking our white wine. It was agreed that even if the pitch went nowhere - even if the radio decided *not* to come to the 'sham, some interesting work had been done. Getting together the list of "local talent" had been an end in itself. Roberta and Jo had tee-d up a Portuguese singer, some old bowling club veterans, and (ahem) me. There's a tentative arrangement to get the vintage toy store fellow to go on air, not to mention a live bowling match happening during the broadcast. Even if the radio didn't come off, working towards it had led to some ad-hoc solidarity around the club and across the burb. And who knows where that might lead?

Shortly after eight, the phone rang. Roberta ducked into the kitchen, and I followed. She'd asked if I could be there in case she needed to hand the phone over, so I could explain my project to James. But it was unnecessary. The whole thing about "doing a live pitch on air" was a big furphy. The competition had already been decided. And the Petersham Bowling and Community Club was the winner! "Oh that's wonderful!" Roberta cried. John and I danced around the kitchen whooping it up. We hoped ABC listeners would be able to hear our cheers on air. John popped a fresh bottle of champagne. The cork flew over the back fence and into the grounds of the bowlo.

This entry was posted on Thursday, May 4th, 2006 at 10:06 am and is filed under ['sham dailies](#).

7 Responses to "Petersham, Thursday May 4th, 2006"

1. *nicholas b* Says:

[May 4th, 2006 at 11:19 am e](#)

despite my youthful demeanour, i'm a dedicated listener to what my girlfriend calls "grown ups radio", and as such, find this news most exciting.. congratulations to all involved.. when will the broadcast be happening?

2. *Nick Vickers* Says:

[May 4th, 2006 at 5:04 pm e](#)

I used to live across the border in Stanmore but frequented the coffee shops of Petersham, especially for Portuguese cuisine. I also listen to the James O'Loughlin programme when stuck in the traffic heading towards Five Dock. Do you think that your blog could be included as a NORMAN Quiz question?

3. *Lisa* Says:

[May 4th, 2006 at 9:10 pm e](#)

what night is the broadcast?

4. *shortleftleg* Says:

[May 4th, 2006 at 9:31 pm e](#)

lisa, i just got back from a meeting with the "bowling club radio sub committee" (we ate delicious souvlaki at the "big bowl bistro"...)

at this stage the broadcast looks to be happening in june. see the abc radio website:

<http://www.abc.net.au/sydney/stories/s1631013.htm>

i will update when the exact date is confirmed...

and...suggestions for “local talent” to feature on the programme are still open!

5. *Caroline Says:*

[May 5th, 2006 at 10:50 am e](#)

Wow, that’s fabulously cool. My friend had her Sydney wedding party at the club (the other was in NZ) so I love the place.

Is Drazic named after the character in Heartbreak High? Please say yes or I will be mortified that I admitted to remembering that!

6. *Bec the housemate Says:*

[May 5th, 2006 at 2:41 pm e](#)

Dear Caroline

Yes, [Drazic](#) is named after the character on ABC TV’s [Heartbreak High](#). He’s a little punkrat, just like his Heartbreak [namesake](#). He doesn’t have an eyebrow piercing because he doesn’t really have eyebrows, but he does find it difficult to focus on his studies (due to a wonky eye). Lately he has been getting into some aggro in the schoolyard with the new kid on the block, Reuben.

7. *texta Says:*

[May 5th, 2006 at 3:49 pm e](#)

Just dont get your hopes up that the cats will ever be friends, i knows cats. just watch that dont angry wrestle when your back is turned or Drazic might have two wonky eyes...

[the pedalling mayor](#)

I was about to page for Sam at reception, when he rode around the corner on his bike. He wore jeans and a tan polo shirt. He looked very casual, for a mayor.

Some background: Sam is from the Greens. His “claim to fame” is that when elected mayor of Marrickville, he [traded in](#) his right to a fancy car for a bicycle. Thus, one of my whimsical dreams for *Bilateral Petersham* was to go cycling with the mayor himself. And now, by golly, here we were! Strapping on our helmets, limbering up, posing for a photo before setting off to ride the boundaries.



We coasted down Fisher Street and turned left. I pointed out my house as we continued along Audley towards the southern border. At the bottom of the hill, where Audley meets Macrae, there is an empty lot with a metal fence around it. We stopped our bikes and looked into the yard. I was hoping Sam might be able to tell me what it was, but he didn’t know. There’s no signage, but it doesn’t look like an domestic block of land. “Maybe something to do with the water board?” he suggested.

To the right, at the end of Macrae, is a big [apartment complex](#). Apparently it used to be an old hospital. In order to continue, I said, we would have to backtrack, and circumnavigate via Addison Road. “No,” replied Sam. “We should be able to cut right through the middle of the complex.” Apparently, when the owner’s development application was passed, the council stipulated it should stay open, to avoid becoming a “gated community”. We tried each gate, one after another. Locked up tight, the lot of them.

“Very interesting,” he said. “You see, it’s good to go cycling around like this. I should be taking notes!”

Sam and I meandered up John Street and around Newington Road, following the south-eastern border. We rode along pretty slowly, side by side, chatting as we went. “So, what about this giving-up-the-car business?” I asked. I thought it sounded like a pretty good schtick. Sam said there had been significant opposition to the idea within council.

“Preposterous! The mayor on a bike? Huffing and puffing along? Showing up red-faced and sweaty to official ribbon-cuttings and hand-shakings? In lycra? His hair all mussed up, a crease in his forehead where the edge of the helmet cuts in? Slurping Powerade from a plastic squirty bottle instead of clinking champagne with the dignitaries? Suit trousers shredded when they get caught in the chain? Grease on his fingers from a minor repair job en route? Impossible!”

Surely this half-baked bicycle idea made a mockery of the role of mayor, not to mention of the whole Marrickville municipality!

But of course, that’s just pushing the argument too far. For your information: when Sam needs to meet-n-greet, he takes a cab. Easy. Most of the time he rides, or else takes public transport. And this is important - by doing this he can *see for himself* the dire state of the bus system - he can see where so-called “bike lanes” disappear into a row of parked cars. He’s not insulated from it all inside an upholstered bubble, merely responding to the pleas of cycling anarchists and transport activists. Because, he’s one of them himself. The irony of the council’s vehicle system is that the more prestigious your position in the hierarchy, the more gas-guzzling the car you are allocated. Sam traded in a Holden Statesman V8 for his nifty blue Schwinn mountain bike...

We reached Maundrell Park. Sam proudly pointed out the sandstone sign at the gates on Hopetoun Street: [South Kingston Park](#), 1925. We sat down for a cup of tea. I’d packed lemon and ginger in a thermos, some little orange tea cups, and a paper bag of organic grapes from [Georgie’s](#) fruit business. The grapes were good. Across the way, some men lay motionless in the sun. A couple of mothers were having a late picnic with their eight year old daughters. As we watched, one of them trundled across the park. The daughter squatted down behind a tree and peed while mum watched. “Ah, this is good!” said Sam. “It’s interesting to see how people really use the park.” Some time back, the council had removed the public toilets. There’s a perception that toilets are expensive to maintain, not to mention the hazards of vandalism and other “unmentionable” uses.

We set off again, teetering along the edge of the train line until we got to Crystal Street. Sam pointed out the Odyssey JeansTown billboards on the brick walls as we passed over the tracks. The council has been trying to get rid of these for ages. But the walls, and the land, all belong to RailCorp. I was a bit confused. What’s wrong with billboards? I asked. Ah, they’re just ugly, he said.

On York Crescent, I showed him the triangular yard which divides Petersham from Stanmore. According to the old map Chrys photocopied for me, this unusual slice looks like a remnant from the old Annandale Estate, owned by the Johnston family. We stopped in the middle of the cul-de-sac, pondering the map. A teenage girl in school uniform approached. “Are you lost?” she asked. “No”, I said. “We’re just riding the boundaries between Petersham and Stanmore.” She gave us a funny look. “O-oo.....kay...” she replied, as she walked away down the path towards Stanmore station, with a long and significant pause between her “O” and her “K”. The mayor called after her: “Hey! We’re not *that* weird, you know!”

We progressed into the quiet genteel northern streets of the ’sham. Sam asked me, “So what should the council be doing better, Lucas?”

Damn. I should have prepared a list of demands. I didn’t really have anything tangible to ask for. (Perhaps we can use the comments section below for that...) I mentioned the arts grants scheme (of which I am a lucky recipient) - and how, in order to get a grant, you have to state how your proposed project will satisfy a whole swathe of “community outcomes and benefits.” And yet, the council doesn’t seem to have the resources to follow up on these in any meaningful way. It seems that there’s a desire for art to have a social “use” but no real system to best assess how this might be put into practice.

In retrospect, I would have liked to have had a conversation with the mayor about the nature of small-scale democracy. About how things shift from individuals with an axe to grind; to small consensus-based action groups; to larger, spokesperson-based forums; and finally to the corporation which is a municipal council. It’s still a mystery to me how it all fits together, and anything ever gets changed.

At the corner of Charles and Robert Streets, there is an old fashioned corner store. Not a corner store “fashioned to be olde.” This one is *actually* old. In the window is an [ad for Dr Pepper](#) cola. It reads, “The doctor is IN”. We stopped our bikes for a moment. I wanted to check something. I asked the proprietor if

he sold Dr Pepper. “No,” he said. “We haven’t had Dr Pepper in the store for a long time.” I think I may well be able to tick off another of Vanessa’s “[Secrets that may help you.](#)”

We rounded Phillip Street, nearly at Parramatta Road, and stopped in front of the old Petersham Inn. There’s now a very large apartment building hulking over the former pub’s heritage facade. Sam told me he had once played a gig at the Petersham, many years ago. His band was called “Beneath Contempt.”

Sam was running out of time. We had to get him back to the office by half past four. I waved to Chris at [the gym](#) as we turned left onto Palace Street. I wanted to stop in at the park on Brighton with the boulder in the middle. Friends of mine who went to school at Fort Street in the mid-nineties tell stories of sneaking into this park to smoke dope. The park has a wooden gate. Dogs were gambolling around inside. Some kids had one of those plastic tennis ball throwing devices, a bit like an artificial arm, so you don’t have to get your hand dirty with the dog’s slobber. I told Sam that the residents of Petersham would very much like an off-leash dog park. At the moment there’s none. And there’s a lot of dogs here, especially on the north side.

The boulder sits in the middle of the park, still proud despite the graffiti. Two huge rocks adjoin to form a [kind of seat](#), which catches the afternoon sun, and is sheltered from public view. “Yep. It certainly looks like the kind of place where you’d come to smoke dope,” I said. “So, didja bring any then?” joked Sam. (At least, I *think* he was joking...)

Our final stop was the bowling club. I told Sam how there’d been some excitement about the idea of turning the bottom green into a permaculture garden. He didn’t seem 100% convinced by this idea. But whatever the case, he said, it should remain open space. There was a stack of chipboard sheets and old real-estate signs at the driveway to the club. Sam stopped and looked at it. Hmm, he said. That should have been picked up by the council days ago.

Hard rubbish is an interesting Petersham phenomenon. Perhaps I’ll do an unrelenting expose’ in a future post...

Back at the council building, Sam showed me his office. High up in the building, it overlooks the whole suburb. Late afternoon sun juts through tinted windows. On the table is a collection of knick-knacks from Marrickville’s [sister cities](#). Some sort of sceptre from a Spanish mayor, a hard-bound book from a suburb in Taiwan, statuettes from Greece, plaques from Portugal...

Before sending me on my way, Sam took me to the council chambers. “This is where it all happens!” he said. There’s a row of seats fitted out with microphones. At the end of the row is a spot for visiting speakers. Once, Sam said, a guy was presenting his case to council. His time limit ran out and he was asked to step down. But he kept on talking. So they cut his microphone off. At which point, the man reached down into his sports bag and pulled out a megaphone. He was, of course, escorted from the room, ranting all the while into the loud-hailer. He would not be silenced.

[postscript: Marrickville Council is currently reviewing its bike plan. You have a few weeks to have your say... For all the details, visit the [cycling in Marrickville page](#).]

This entry was posted on Saturday, May 6th, 2006 at 12:07 pm and is filed under '[sham dailies](#), [the borders](#).

2 Responses to “the pedalling mayor”

1. *Your sister (editor crank) Says:*
[May 6th, 2006 at 12:56 pm e](#)

I really enjoyed this'chapter' , what a cool mayor!

Sorry to be boring but I'll put on my editor's hat. You've written a sentence that could give readers two different mental images ... I assume you mean eight-year-old daughters and not eight year-old daughters? (Though admittedly anyone with knowledge about children would be surprised at the advanced toilet skills of a one year old weeing on your tree.)

Bec

2. *shortleftleg* Says:

[May 6th, 2006 at 1:08 pm e](#)

Ha! Good call Bec. Nah, there were a few daughters, which I judged (without any evidence whatsoever) to be about eight years old.

Can you imagine taking eight individual year-old daughters to the park? You'd need four double prams!

[front porch](#)

Mick and I are sitting on the front porch, drinking coffee in the sun. A man with long brown hair passes by. We say hello. He stops momentarily and hovers at the letterboxes.

"Hey, are you the guys who live around the back?"

"Yeah, around the back of this place, that's right."

"You didn't leave a DVD player out on Chester Street on that old suitcase, did you?"

"Nah, that wasn't us."

"Oh. Never mind then."

"Why, what happened?"

"Oh, I was just going to ask, if it was you that left it out...I was going to ask if you had the remote."

This entry was posted on Saturday, May 6th, 2006 at 5:55 pm and is filed under [sham dailies](#).

One Response to "front porch"

1. *Mick* Says:

[May 7th, 2006 at 4:52 pm e](#)

My Dad texted me today and with his usual absence of flourish the text read, 'What did u do with the remote for the DVD'. I thought that after my recent visit to the family home in Perth i was being accused of misplacing his remote, so i sez, 'What remote for what DVD player? I didn't watch anything when i was in Perth! X'

The reply was, 'Just reading lucas thing on internet about DVD and remote'

:D

[thirty years ago](#)

Vanessa invites me on a tour of Parramatta Road, 1976. I show up at her place, a bit late, offering a pumpkin. We drink some tea. She's made sesame seed biscuits. Vanessa plays me a few songs from an op shop record, a Polish singer called Mieczyslaw Fogg. A real crooner. The [excellent typography](#) of the album cover claims he is the "Sinatra of Poland".

Vanessa has been researching a particular set of shops along Parramatta Road. In the mid seventies, it seems, traffic was restricted from parking or stopping for great stretches along this major thoroughfare. This was the cause of much consternation to the owners of the shops between Petersham Street and Railway Street. The shopkeepers predicted business would falter if their customers could not park outside and duck in to pick up a few things.

Throughout 1976, the local paper ran a full page layout each week all about "Parramatta Road". It was a thinly veiled advertising feature for this struggling set of shops. Nearly every week, articles featuring local councillors' opinions on the seemingly insoluble parking crisis were surrounded by advertisements for the ailing retail outlets. The overall tone of these news pages contained an inherent contradiction. On the one



hand, hard-hitting criticism of the parking law changes hinted at the possibility of imminent financial collapse; and on the other, an atmosphere of jaunty optimism attempted to instill confidence in existing customers... "Business as usual".

One edition of the paper, a Christmas special, contains an ad for all the shops participating in a "Bring your children to see Santa" promotion. This is Vanessa's source material. Dressed in her best mid-70s polyester and beads, and clutching a clipboard, she leads me from one shopfront to another. We go back to 1976. In front of each store, we stop, and she delivers a short report on the secret lives of the people who work inside.

- The *CBC Bank* at the corner of Petersham

Street has pens with a writing action so smooth they are always being stolen: yanked off their strings by louts, or snipped by cunning old ladies with nail scissors...

- The owner of *Action Canvas* is recovering from having his hand-made Open/Closed sign pinched... at *Miramare Italian Restaurant*, a lone diner has eaten the same meal every night for three months...
- The *Aeropolis Milk Bar* becomes a haven for non-macho construction workers...
- Rivalry between *John Wayne*, who runs a discount shoe store, and Andrew, from *Eagle Star Dry Cleaners*, has almost reached breaking point...
- and *Doria Furniture-Electrical* make the outrageous claim that their couches will be "as good as new in 30 years"...

As we work our way along the shopfronts, east to west, I take a few photos. Vanessa narrates, and I try to reconcile hopes, dreams, and aspirations from 1976, with this set of rag-tag businesses in 2006. The chemist which now occupies the former home of *John Wayne's Discount Shoes* has its very few items laid out sparsely on ample shelves. A set of combs here, a couple of toothbrushes there, separated by vast expanses of empty space. There's a [jewellery store](#) which at night seems abandoned. In the day, however, old men sit right down the far end of the shop, grinding metal on ancient machines. Some of the shops have been knocked down altogether, replaced by the the smooth khaki corporate surfaces of the Inner-Western Courier newspaper office. [Several](#) are [simply empty](#), and it seems they've been that way for some time.

We reach the end of the row, at which point it becomes apparent: of the 18 shops that existed in 1976, not one remains today.

This entry was posted on Sunday, May 7th, 2006 at 12:17 pm and is filed under ['sham dailies](#).

One Response to "thirty years ago"

1. Janet Says:
[May 8th, 2006 at 7:32 am e](#)

I have lived above a shop on Parramatta Rd for more than a decade, and things are always changing... Shops and people come and go, the only real constant is the incessant noise of the traffic (it helps to be slightly deaf).

Lucas I love this site and this project!

[autumn](#)

The strangely warm weather during the days lately has been followed by rather chilly nights, and it's got me. I've come down with a cold. I'm going to spend today in bed nursing my fuzzy head.

This might be a good time for those of you who have a moment to tell stories about YOUR Petersham. What happened over the weekend?



This entry was posted on Monday, May 8th, 2006 at 9:35 am and is filed under ['sham dailies](#).

16 Responses to "autumn"

1. *Mick Says:*

[May 8th, 2006 at 11:01 am e](#)

Oh dear! Look after yaself. No Doctor Allison for you should ya get worse. ...although - let's hope you don't need it - but maybe she could do a housecall. How good would that be?!

2. *Mike Stone Says:*

[May 8th, 2006 at 6:44 pm e](#)

On my way to the corner store I came across a pile of junk tossed out on the street Ever on the scrounge for a freebee :) I came across A Macintosh Powerbook 160 funnily enough I also have the identical (and dust gathering) model at home so was able to fire it up. I works fine and has a Black and White screen but more interestingly the previous owner left all their info on it including thoughts, emails, letters .I even know that in 199 she was charging \$75 an hour for here work. She's actualy a famous choreograpaher and dancer who has worked around Australia, in China and is (according to a quick google) currently in the USA performing and/or choreographing. I guess it's quicker than a blog just throw out your computer with all your info on it and see what happens ..!

3. *Vanessa Says:*

[May 8th, 2006 at 10:47 pm e](#)

I came across another brown suitcase similar to the brown suitcase of mystery near your house. This one, rather than containing an empty wine bottle and some pieces of trash, contained nothing. I thought how with brown suitcases dumped in alleyways the worst scenario: human remains and the best scenario: cash. Once, on what now is the street I live on, I found a suitcase full of letters. So I was interested in the digital equivalent, above! I hope you aren't feeling too snuffley.

4. *shortleftleg Says:*

[May 8th, 2006 at 11:47 pm e](#)

mike: very resourceful! i trust that the personal details of the former mac owner are safe with you. and I bet current macs don't have such a lifespan...

vanessa: the brown suitcases of petersham. there's no shortage. where do they come from? i think this calls for a photographic expedition (possibly also incorporating my hard-hitting hard-rubbish expose)

5. *Mike Stone Says:*

[May 8th, 2006 at 11:50 pm e](#)

SAFE ..? YOU MEAN I HAVE TO LOK AFTER THEM? OMG..!!

6. *Mike Stone Says:*

[May 8th, 2006 at 11:52 pm e](#)

DID I SAY THE THE CORNER SHOP IN pETERSHAM? Daam Caps

7. *Mike Stone* Says:

[May 9th, 2006 at 12:12 am e](#)

I would just like to introduce my photographers forum:

<http://www.photo.net.au/photoforum/index.php>

yes i live in p/sham

8. *worthless half-brother* Says:

[May 9th, 2006 at 12:44 am e](#)

That reminds me of the Ye Olde bown suitcase that we had since we were little. With the old "Feed the Man Meat" sticker on the top.

CLASSY!

9. *Mick* Says:

[May 9th, 2006 at 10:51 am e](#)

Lucas, i've just found out about an affliction called the "blog life crisis" and "Blog Depression". I really hope this is not what you are suffering from.

It's fully described and illustrated here:

http://thenonist.com/index.php/weblog/a_nonist_public_service_pamphlet/#ext2181

They say: "There is a growing epidemic in the cyberworld. a scourge which causes more suffering with each passing day. As blogging has exploded and, under the stewardship of the veterans, the form has matured more and more bloggers are finding themselves disillusioned, dissatisfied, taking long breaks, and in many cases simply closing up shop. This debilitating scourge ebbs and flows but there is hardly a blogger among us who has not felt it's dark touch. We're speaking, of course, about blog depression."

Hope this helps my friend!

10. *iwantphuong* Says:

[May 9th, 2006 at 4:28 pm e](#)

Wow. Sounds like everyone's been getting sick! (Or catching it off other people.)

Mum recommends Tiger Balm.

Doctor recommends Pholcodine Linctus and/or Panadol.

Friend recommends garlic, chilli, lemon, ginger.

11. *shortleftleg* Says:

[May 9th, 2006 at 6:37 pm e](#)

thanks everyone for your concern about my health!

i spent monday under a blanket... feeling a little better today.

mick, there's certainly something in that blog life crisis thing...i've definitely backed off a bit from my compulsion to "record everything" - letting it flow a little more now with the rhythms of my body, my attention span, my gregariousness, trying to avert carpal tunnel...after all, "man is not a machine"!

12. *Vanessa* Says:

[May 9th, 2006 at 8:43 pm e](#)

Sometimes it is good to say obvious things: autumn leaves can be very beautiful. And even more simply: leaves can be very beautiful. One time I spent a long while at Officeworks colour photocopying autumn leaves I had collected that day. I was very absorbed by my project and the pleasing results. (Thinking of papering a room with them.) I turned to see a frustrated line of people waiting to copy their CV's and plans for house extensions. I thought about the many

different ways of being in the world as I collected my leaves and photocopies and let them go for it.

13. [Tully](#) Says:

[May 10th, 2006 at 1:08 am e](#)

Today I walked down to Sweet Belem. It was closed.
So I walked down to Honeymoons. It was open. I bought coffee.
I walked home. I tripped. The coffee exploded over my pants. I was sad.

14. [Alison](#) Says:

[May 11th, 2006 at 5:57 pm e](#)

Hello Lucas. Loving yer blog.
I too am an artist (but a commercial one mostly). I too am sick with mutant phlegm. I believe it may be some sort of voodoo curse.
I too live in Pea&Ham.
Where did you get that pretty red leaf? It's the same as the ones that grow on the tree in my yard, corner Searl St and The Avenue.
I saw the lovely pic of your beaming melon in The Glebe. Some of my house is in the background, on the far left.
So you've been hanging round my house.
Pinching my autumn leaves.
Possibly spreading 'flu while doing so.
I may perish from consumption as a result of your residency.
But I will die happy, and forgive you, if you do this one thing for me:
Where, o where did you get your mad blue 'n' white Petersham skivvy????
Please tell. Need one. Now. Get well soon.
Regards, A Proud 'Hamster.

15. [shortleftleg](#) Says:

[May 11th, 2006 at 6:11 pm e](#)

yeah alison, it came from more or less opposite the bowlo on brighton. what kind of leaf is it? i'm all better now. nothing a day in bed with a hot waterbottle and a bowl of soup wont fix.
Get your Petersham custom T shirt [here](#).
Perhaps I'll meet you on Searl. You don't have a nice cat that hangs out on your front corner, do you?

16. [Alison](#) Says:

[May 14th, 2006 at 5:43 pm e](#)

Yes...yes I do! If you mean the chatty, chubby black and white one with the red collar- her name is Craig. She has a large public following. There is also a suss-looking black one called Maclad- extra points if you manage to pat him.
Craig will be thrilled when she realises you know her name now, and will come if you call her, the gullible sap. Mind you, now the 'leckie blankie's on, outdoor appearances may be less frequent.
I don't know what sort of tree it is. It looks like something out of a storybook. I love it. It was lucky to be left alive by my Italian landlord gardeners. If we all pretend it's not about to make the wall fall on to the footpath, it may survive a few years more.
I'll be sorry when your residency is over- the results of your self-imposed imprisonment are the coolest thing ever.

[moving on](#)

The African couple that lived in the apartment across the street has moved out.

At least, I think they were African. I never actually met them. I always wanted to. We used to sit on our

balcony, eating dinner in the summer, or more recently, drinking coffee in the orange afternoon light. The door to their balcony would swing open, presumably to let a little air into their small flat. The husband, if he spotted me, would wave his arm in a big arc and grin, and I'd do the same in return. Often, I saw them both, husband and wife, running off up the street, or returning home with a plastic bag of chicken from Silvas. We always waved and smiled. But we never actually met. Now, carpet cleaning men, and window repair men, come and go. Wooden wardrobes, a single blue innerspring mattress, and a floral armchair, sit outside the building, awaiting council pickup.

*

Saturday night games at Janine's. (Janine lives downstairs from [Alex](#)). Bec and I make a batch of new friends. Most of them are hyper-literate bookworms, and they crush us at [Boggle](#). I fare a little better at a crazy card game called [EcoFluxx](#), even winning once or twice, but I must admit I have no idea why. It's a game which changes its rules almost every round. I suppose this is meant to simulate "real life," but I just find it bewildering, and it irritates me vaguely. I have the feeling that maybe I could follow what's going on in EcoFluxx if only my attention span was better developed. Perhaps this feeling is exacerbated by the red wine, my oncoming cold, and the vast quantities of junk food we are consuming. It's like a teenager's dream: chips and jellybeans and nachos and pizza and a [remarkable punch](#) with watermelon liqueur, champagne, ginger ale, and lemonade. Games nights at Janine's are really something. Sometimes, she says, they go on 'til four in the morning..

Janine tells me that on the evening of Easter Sunday, at the Opera House, she met someone called Perry. Perry had just come from a very strange lunch in Darling Point. Throughout this lunch a certain young man in attendance - in fact, the nephew of the host - had worn a blindfold. And he was from Petersham.

This entry was posted on Tuesday, May 9th, 2006 at 6:26 pm and is filed under '[sham dailies](#)'.

[pigeons](#)

A deliberately quiet day. My health is improving, and I'm padding myself out in beanies and thermals just in case. At lunchtime, Luciana came around with some hot chocolate. I helped her with a database search for her essay on Cuban cinema. In the afternoon I rugged up and headed north of the tracks to get some vegies from [Georgie](#). Quite by chance, on the corner of Brighton and Palace, right outside the Palace Pantry, I bumped into her. She was walking her kids home from school. I tagged along, the smallest girl dawdling all the way. She seemed to find fascinating details in every crack of the sidewalk. "If I just keep on walking, she eventually catches up," Georgie said.

*

On the way home with my box of vegies, I bumped into Rohan. He was just returning from work. I've known Rohan since the late nineties, when he ran a gallery in Chippendale. Last year he moved in around the corner. But we've never really hung out in the 'sham. We just spot each other by accident every now and again, and chat on the street corner. Usually, we have those kind of encounters which start out as "just a quick hello", without any intention of lasting more than twenty seconds, and then evolve into a twenty minute yarn. Because the conversation is always on the verge of ending, I stand there, uncomfortably, with my heavy box. To put it down would be to shift mode, to begin "serious" conversation. To stand like this, halted in our separate trajectories, is to steal time. This is not a meeting. That's what I like about it. He tells me about exterminating pigeons. The finer details of this occupation of his are fascinating and disturbing. Gradually my shoulders droop, my wrists begin to go numb. Fatigue sets in. "You should come over some time!" Rohan says, and we say goodbye.

This entry was posted on Wednesday, May 10th, 2006 at 12:43 pm and is filed under '[sham dailies](#)'.

One Response to "pigeons"

1. [Tully](#) Says:
[May 12th, 2006 at 3:40 pm e](#)

Something regarding writing about the people you meet. From an interview with [Norah Vincent](#).

As a writer friend of mine told me when I embarked on this project, “When you write this intimately about real people, you are an assassin.” And he’s right. Almost invariably people object to something you’ve written about them. Either they say you got them wrong, or it didn’t happen that way, or that’s not how they remember it. I expect some of the Rashomon effect: The story of the same event will be told ten different ways by ten different observers. All the versions will be true and none of them will. The people in the book will recognize themselves. They’ll agree with the compliments and they’ll object to the disparagements, and that is to be expected.

in which the wrestling turns ugly...

Here we go again. That’s what I was thinking. Yet another trip to the Oxford for jelly wrestling. Could I bear it? I certainly wasn’t carrying with me the “fresh anticipation” I’d felt [just two weeks ago](#): the curiosity of trying out something new, the concrete experience of seeing something for yourself which is so locally famous. To run through the whole routine again? The strippers doing the same set of yogic maneuvers? The traipsing back and forth between main bar and back room? The fake cheering for the fake contest between fake opponents, narrated by the fake MC? How to experience this anew?

This trip was organised by the [Sydney Ladies Artists Club](#), following Lisa’s gender-conscious ponderings after our last visit. Her idea was to get a significant posse of ladies together - just enough to tilt the mood of the room and slightly shift the event. We had observed, from our previous expedition, that the five girls who came along with our group had a positive impact on the enjoyment of some of the performers. I think the performers felt a certain solidarity when they saw women out in the audience cheering them on.

As it turned out, last night the mood certainly *did* tilt, but not at all due to our “intervention”...

As we entered the pub, it was immediately clear that things were *not* going to turn out as we had expected. The place was packed, much more so than before. There were large groups of young men lurking at the edges of the room. Members of the audience were checking each other out. All the tables were taken. We were standing in a thoroughfare. People kept brushing past. I felt an uneasy nervous tension.

Strangely, this tension seemed to evaporate when we passed into the back room for the wrestling itself. There were so many folks in attendance - “standing room only” - that the event lacked the intimacy (if you can call it that) which I had detected last time. It was this intimacy, I thought, which gave the whole thing a sort of hokey backyard flavour, and made me feel like it *really mattered* that I was there. By contrast, I could zone out in this bigger crowd, and nobody would be any the wiser.

On the other hand, the wrestlers themselves were much more “into it” than before. Claudia, who we had seen (last time) stripping with such panache, was now a wrestler.

(This puts paid to my two-tier theory, that there are wrestlers and strippers, and that the strippers, on account of their costumes, superior flexibility, and solo performance routines, occupy a higher rung on the ladder.)

Claudia was now in the jelly ring herself. And she was “going off”: ramping up the audience into an ever-louder cheer squad.

One young lady in the crowd, who may have been rather drunk, and wearing a green dress, was punching her fist into the air and cheering as she sang along passionately to the songs which blared out through each bout. These songs were sort of Green Day/Blink-182 ish songs, you know, that kind of privileged US frat boy mid 1990s post-punk revival idea...You know what I mean?? Anyway, this girl knew ALL the words.

Claudia attempted some pretty risky athletic moves, at the sight of which I imagine even [WWE](#) wrestlers would tremble. At one point, she bounced atop the inflatable side of the ring - one, two, three times, in a mock-menacing way - then dive bomb/somersaulted into the jelly, landing flat on her back. I'm sure Anne - who is a registered nurse - was watching with the same trepidation as me. Later, I noticed Claudia wearing a [wrist support band](#)...

After this fairly raucus beginning, we filtered back into the main bar. A proportion of the evening's punters had already left. And by the end of the second round, the place seemed even more empty. I guess, by now, all of the girls "had been seen". There was no new flesh to be revealed. The only difference in the final round is that it's an "all-in-battle", so I suppose you get more writhing-flesh-per-unit-glance...

Because of this exodus, by the beginning of the last wrestle the room had regained its intimacy. One of the special features of the final round is the attempt to drag a member of the audience into the ring. This time, because of her visibility, the Green-Dress-Girl was targeted. And this is where things began to turn nasty.

Green-Dress-Girl had been dancing on top of a chair, singing along as usual. All four jelly wrestlers gestured towards her, coaxing, shouting "c'mon!" The boys in the crowd cheered her on. They began chanting: "In-The-Ring! In-The-Ring! In-The-Ring!" But it was clear that Green-Dress-Girl did *not* want to get in the ring. In my opinion, that's where it should have ended. A little teasing, a little persuading, and then stop.

But the MC, who was obviously flustered by the failure of this campaign for audience participation, yelled into his mike: "C'mon! You CAN'T dance like that on a chair all night and then NOT get in the ring!"

At this point (and here I get a bit technical) the atmosphere moved from persuasion to [coercion](#). Claudia jumped out of the jelly pit, scattering punters to both sides as she lunged for the Green-Dress-Girl. They had a tussle on the carpet at the back of the room, as Claudia tried to pick her up (!) and literally carry her into the fray. Green-Dress-Girl cried out "I paid my seven dollars to watch, like everybody else!" The attempt to drag her in failed. Claudia returned to the ring, amidst the deafening boo of the crowd, and the wrestling recommenced, *sans* ring-in. The wrestlers were clearly disappointed, and they flung jelly at the Green-Dress-Girl as a kind of half-baked punishment.

At the end of the match, Claudia and the Green-Dress-Girl confronted each other, yelling abuse and insults into each others faces. The boys in the crowd clustered around, again chanting "In-The-Ring! In-The-Ring! In-The-Ring!" There was a strange logic to this suggestion - as if a fight between the two of them, in the jelly, would resolve the fact that one of them was, in fact, resistant to the idea of getting into the jelly in the first place...

Things weren't looking so good. We were worried about Green-Dress-Girl. She was pretty safe in the pub, with the nice burly bouncers clearing the decks, but what about once she stepped outside? How would she defend herself from the frustration of these men, who by now were shouting "TEASE!" and demanding mockingly: "TITS OUT FOR THE BOYS!" It was getting ugly.

Anne's feeble cry - "No Still Means No!" - fell on deaf ears.

We funneled out onto the street. Two groups formed: the supporters of Green-Dress-Girl, who were looking out for her until she could jump into a cab; and "the boys" who gathered at a safe distance down Crystal Street to recommence their jeering. We loitered in the middle, wanting to make sure she was OK, but not really wanting to get directly involved unless absolutely necessary.

Eventually both groups disappeared into the night. We were left milling around on the sidewalk, keyed up and needing to debrief. We chatted with a man sitting on a bus-stop bench. I noticed he was the same fellow who had *himself* been dragged into the ring the fortnight before. I asked him whether it had been a set-up, or spontaneous. Well, he said, it *wasn't* a set-up. He was actually a friend of one of the wrestlers, and came along to support her. That's why she dragged him in. And his jeans? What happened? Did he go home completely sopping wet? Yep, he said. It was a bit cold, but I went home and got changed, and then we went out again...

His sober tones restored us a little. We all said goodbye, and I walked Josie down Shaw street before

peeling off towards home.

This entry was posted on Thursday, May 11th, 2006 at 1:13 pm and is filed under ['sham dailies](#).

10 Responses to “in which the wrestling turns ugly...”

1. *anne* Says:

[May 11th, 2006 at 2:44 pm e](#)

Yeah, this experience really changed my perception of Jelly Westling. It was my first time and although I found something about the venue a bit off-putting, I actually thought it was all a bit of good clean (or mildly filthy) fun initially.

I found the hammed-up lesbian action in the jelly ring, which was intended to titillate the predominantly male audience a tiny bit disturbing. Mainly because I'm in a Lesbian relationship and I hate to think of that form of lovemaking being turned into a spectacle for consumption by randy men. But it seemed like it was in a spirit of fun and was pretty cheesy, so I gave myself over to cheering them on and having fun with the situation.

The nasty turn of events that Lucas describes was scary! It was mob behaviour and there was a huge power imbalance, one petite woman and her female friend, versus a large, loud gaggle of looser louts. The worst thing about it was the assumption that if the green dress girl was wearing a skimpy outfit and making a spectacle of herself by standing on a chair and pumping the air, then she lost the right to say no to doing something she didn't want to do!

DIDN'T WE ALREADY DEAL WITH THIS FUCKING QUESTION!!!!

When we stayed around to see she got away OK (she wasn't doing herself any favours - mouthing off and being verbally aggressive right back at anyone who was yelling at her) it was because there was the threat of sexual violence.

When we were talking outside the pub, a flash yellow car full of more morons yelled out something in an ugly tone about whores. That really made me think about the background thinking of these men towards women.

As Jane my girlfriend said, I'm glad we saw that - not because she wanted it to happen or thought it was good, but because that's the underside of that kind of show. and you might not realise it was there.

I don't know if I'd want to go back, I feel very differently about it. And it makes me think more broadly about the whole issue of rape (or the threat of rape) which is still obviously such a real part of our lives.

2. *janepolk* Says:

[May 11th, 2006 at 3:04 pm e](#)

Thanks Lucas for a “de-briefing” of a very unsettling evening.

I still feel spooked by how quickly the mood turned from hearty laughs and good natured cheering to one woman being targeted and pressured by a large crowd of chanting men (plus the lady wrestlers).

It was incredible to witness how easily the mood shifted into an obnoxious, coercive, violent and (perhaps a naive thing to say about a strip club) sexual atmosphere....

For me the raw nerve of what is REALLY happening in that environment was revealed. I was enjoying myself up until that moment. Admiring the strippers doing their thing, laughing along with the wrestlers as they seemed to be having fun. The audience watching... the sexual nature was kind of understated up until that moment when it all turned....

Anyway... it was fascinating, and I must say that the kind of ‘ironical’ pleasure I was getting earlier in the evening has been wiped out... forever?

3. *sunny* Says:

[May 11th, 2006 at 4:09 pm e](#)

full on!! what a horrible experience for green dress girl! Like last time, it's as though if you're there and you're a woman, you've only got one role to play: entertainment for the boys. The menacing, physical danger element you describe is really fucken worrying.

4. [mayhem](#) Says:

[May 11th, 2006 at 11:11 pm e](#)

Woooahh! that sounds SOOOO much more full on than being squashed on a peak hour bus crawling along some freeway out to macquarie university parking lot. Is Anyone still up for a night at Sydney's Las Vegas at the marrickville RSL?

5. [iwantphuong](#) Says:

[May 12th, 2006 at 1:12 am e](#)

How sickening! Chauvinist male mob mentality. I wouldn't be surprised if a lot of the men there were thinking "She was asking for it! She shouldn't have worn that dress!" And the scary thing is that I wouldn't be surprised if the women jelly wrestling were thinking the same thing!

It sounds like a competition/power-play for Claudia, who appears to be an attention-seeker and control freak! How dare she force another woman (or try to) into doing something she explicitly said "no" to? And then have the nerve to verbally attack her afterwards for not playing the game for the men? Disgusting! Absolutely disgusting!

6. [shortleftleg](#) Says:

[May 12th, 2006 at 4:00 pm e](#)

to be fair, iwantphuong, all performers are "attention seekers" and this is what makes them engaging to watch. Claudia is by far the most accomplished of the performers I've seen at the Oxford.

And furthermore, as Anne said, the green-dress-girl wasn't doing herself any favours. Claudia claimed that she had been shouting obscenities at the wrestlers from her perch on the chair. I didn't hear these taunts myself, but that doesn't mean they didn't happen. This is, I suppose, why Claudia confronted the green-dress-girl afterwards, because she felt she had been seriously insulted. Her actions could be perhaps excused as having happened in the "heat of the moment".

Anyway, I suppose my concern is not to analyse the dispute between individual parties. I guess it was just interesting to see how quickly things moved from "hearty laughs" (as Janepolk says) to a more volatile mood.

7. [wife](#). Says:

[May 12th, 2006 at 8:55 pm e](#)

wow. i'm glad i left when i did. i'm really sorry to hear that it all took such an ugly turn. ugh. i guess they weren't game enough to pick on the lovely lady in the 'feminazi' shirt ;) i'm glad i got to meet some of you! (btw i was the short haired girl with the pink cardigan.)

i actually enjoyed the night, but did feel a little uneasy with some of the guys there. most of them ignored me & my friends, but i did hear some homophobic comments pass by us when we were in the front bar. i must say, i enjoyed the stripping in the front bar a little more than the jelly wrestling. i think it was the lady in the sailor suit, all that teasing with her undies was just right for a wednesday night in the 'sham.

the second set of jelly wrestling was really boring! and as my friend, sarah, pointed out, the blonde wrestler won each time! (even though claudia is not a natural blonde).

i also liked the bar staff in their underwear, their tip jar was funny "considering what we're wearing, you should leave a tip", or something to that effect.

maybe i'll go back on topless tuesday?? xxxo wife.

8. l.kell Says:

[May 13th, 2006 at 3:49 pm e](#)

hey there wife,

nice to hear from someone who still has a slightly UP take on the evening. Like JP (our friendly Feminazi) says, all that happy fun was vaporised in a nano-instant. I remember thinking at the time it was a good thing you guys had called it a night. But it was cool to meet you too! JBD just yesterday filled me in that YOU'RE wife... wow, your sewing circle for Sheilafest sounded the best, wish I'd been there...

9. iwantphuong Says:

[May 15th, 2006 at 12:06 am e](#)

Short left leg says:

'all performers are "attention seekers" and this is what makes them engaging to watch'.

I do agree with this comment, but it's one thing to be seeking attention and performing, and completely another thing to take the performance one step too far and begin preying and victimising other people.

Short left leg says:

'Claudia claimed that she had been shouting obscenities at the wrestlers from her perch on the chair'

I'm sorry, previously you had only mentioned green-dress-girl "cheering" and "singing" prior to Claudia attempting to get her into the ring. But regardless of that, were other men in the club not "shouting obscenities at the wrestlers"? Why is it that when it's a woman who's doing it, the situation is completely different?

Short left leg says:

'as Anne said, the green-dress-girl wasn't doing herself any favours'.

And as Anne said "it was because there was the threat of sexual violence."

I'm not trying to start an argument as to who was right and who was wrong - what I'm trying to point out is that there's a definite element of sexism at play and issues such as these are still rampant in today's supposedly progressive society.

Perhaps any further discussion of this topic should be done via email so as to prevent the clogging up of the 'sham...

10. shortleftleg Says:

[May 15th, 2006 at 9:33 am e](#)

iwantphuong, you're right of course...about the victimising thing. a performer has a lot of power. And the pub in general (of which the performer is an employee) has a responsibility for the safety of its patrons.

sorry about the "cheering-vs-shouting obscenities" discrepancy. sometimes due to my own laziness, fatigue, forgetfulness, etc, essential facts aren't included in the main body of my blog posting, only to emerge through discussion. Or I only realise they become essential when comments begin to roll in. I understand that makes it a bit odd for commentators like yourself, when the "goalposts of truth" change en route...

I think that if a male punter in the crowd had been standing on a chair and shouting obscenities at the wrestlers, he would have been removed by a bouncer, rather than things getting to the point where Claudia could "take the law into her own hands"...

Tis fine with me to discuss this topic here, in "public" - the beauty of the web is that there's no such thing as "clogging up"!

AM, PM

AM

I call up [Tully](#). For some reason he didn't make it to the [Jelly Wrestling](#) on Wednesday night. I'd sent him a teasing text message from the pub, saying:

I can't believe
you are missing
this...You of all
people

to which he replied:

What are you
kidding? I've got
jelly and a lack
of clothes at
home!

But given how it all panned out, I *do* wish he could have made it along. And now I want to debrief. We meet at Sweet Belem for coffee and chess, and I tell him the whole story. Phew, he sighs. Wow. I *do* wish I was there.

He has to scoot: more essays to procrastinate over. As we part at the lights, we make a tentative arrangement to meet again, to drive around Petersham scoping out photogenic sites. He's a keen photographer, you see...

PM

After we visit Geoff at the church, Vanessa and I go for a coffee at Papa Cafe on Crystal Street. This place is famous for being a mecca for soccer fans around World Cup time. Apparently, hundreds of people come, they block off the whole street. And this year is no exception. Posters and news articles plastered all over the walls. A TV set pipes in an Italian talk show on cable, the topic is "New Haircut, New Man?"

We talk about our relationships with our parents. Vanessa has a book to show me, all about maps. One map, my favourite, shows the layout of the territory of the path to hell, including the Creek of Gambling, the Tributary of Sloth, and the Falls of Final Damnation. Another good one is the [Map of a Woman's Heart](#). I walk her home and she gives me some home made biscuits. "I can't stop baking at the moment!" she says...

This entry was posted on Friday, May 12th, 2006 at 12:32 pm and is filed under ['sham dailies](#).

a very small project



Vanessa dropped this tiny cardboard package, the size of a matchbook, in my mailbox. I will take it to my Portuguese neighbours, two doors down, for interpretation...Any hints? ("Creative" suggestions welcome).



This entry was posted on Friday, May 12th, 2006 at 2:58 pm and is filed under [correspondence](#).

11 Responses to “a very small project”

1. *Caroline* Says:

[May 12th, 2006 at 3:25 pm e](#)

hmmmmm.

It looks suspiciously like creme caramel to me. In which case I have no idea how you would prepare it from packet mix. All I can decipher is vanilla, salt,

2. *Anonymous* Says:

[May 12th, 2006 at 3:55 pm e](#)

mandarin pudding

3. *David* Says:

[May 12th, 2006 at 6:13 pm e](#)

I'm just wondering how much pudding (or 'pudim'?) you're going to get from 4.8g worth of ingredients in a pack the size of a matchbook. Maybe one little creme caramel thing?

Although the finished result in the bowl does also look a bit like his hat.

I'm intrigued that the barcode has the little scissor symbol for cutting it out, as if you could maybe cut out a number of them (perhaps there are different flavours) and send them somewhere (Portugal? China?) to win a prize. Maybe a hat.

4. *iwantphuong* Says:

[May 13th, 2006 at 2:04 am e](#)

Yeah, I reckon it's Chinese-style creme caramel. I've seen asian creme caramel around Cabramatta and it's denser than the regular types of creme caramel you purchase from the supermarket. They're baked or something.

The packet seems to contain liquid, but measured in grams. Perhaps it contains all the flavours that would make up the flan?

But yeah, if you're around Cabramatta and want to give the Chinese version a try, just find a dessert store and ask for flan!

5. *mayhem* Says:

[May 14th, 2006 at 4:03 pm e](#)

Here's my fudged guess based on bits of spanish, french and english. I reckon the gaps make it interesting - and you could add random words and end up with a whole yum cha banquet.

Mandarin flavoured pudding

Preparation: Mix contents of one packet with 3 spoons of sugar syrup. Something half a litre of milk is necessary to something this pudding something something a small portion something something to dissolve. Put the rest and when the milk rises something add to mixture until it dissolves, something something mixing always turning for a few minutes. Place aside something something in a mould, already caramelised something something.

Ingredients: flour, something, salt, artificial colours, artificial flavour (vanilla)

6. *Your sister (editor crank)* Says:

[May 14th, 2006 at 11:57 pm e](#)

something I can't quite remember leads me to think that 'mandarin' actually means orange flavour and not mandarine.

Interesting that there is no actual orange or mandarine in the ingredients though, just those artificial colours and flavours. mmm mmm. And surely one of the ingredients (perhaps 'mayhems' "something") is sugar?! I'm guessing the first or second...

7. *deborah* Says:

[May 15th, 2006 at 8:40 pm e](#)

I don't think it's creme caramel- I reckon it's something more like a portugese version of junket, this DISGUSTING dessert my nana loved from the depression. It was made from these kind of pastel-coloured tablets full of synthetic non-foodstuffs, the addition of milk, waiting, turning, and then dismay, as your grandchildren ran out shrieking.

8. *deborah* Says:

[May 15th, 2006 at 8:41 pm e](#)

um, I forgot to look at the picture of the pudim itself- I am talking out of my arse, alas. that's creme caramel.

9. *shortleftleg* Says:

[May 15th, 2006 at 8:57 pm e](#)

Ok folks. Enough blustering about. If we've learned anything, it's that the 'sham has zero Portuguese readership. That will have to be addressed. In the meantime, here's the scoop on the Pudim.

I went into the Portuguese deli and asked the nice young lady what it was all about.

The scratchy notes I wrote about how to prepare the "pudim":

Mix 3 tablespoons of sugar in with the powder in the packet.

Get 1/2 a litre of milk ready.

Mix a small amount of this milk in with the powder/sugar, just enough to dissolve the mixture - you want it more runny than a paste but don't add more milk than you need to dissolve the powder. Mix it good to get rid of any lumpy bits.

Put the remaining milk on the stove, let it come to a boil, then turn the stove down.

Let the powder-mixture trickle slowly into the hot milk on the stove, stirring continuously. Make sure it's all mixed in so none of the powder-mixture sticks to the bottom of the pan as it will burn and the whole thing will be ruined.

Turn the heat up a little more, and once it comes to the boil again, take it off the stove, and pour it into little cups.

Whack em in the fridge to set, then serve cold.

For advanced users: you can make a little caramel syrup by [caramelising sugar](#) and putting the resulting gooey stuff in the base of the cups before you pour the mix in to set. That way, when you tip the dessert out for your guests, the nice runny caramel will drool down the silky surface of the Pudim. Impressive!

[ps: the Deli lady said she didn't know why it was called "Flan Chino" - she said it's got nothing to do with Chinese cuisine. In fact, she's wondered about this herself ever since she was a kid. I'm throwing my hat in the ring with the clever David in guessing that the shape of the Pudim looks a bit like the Chinese fellow's hat, and that's where the name comes from...]

10. *Vanessa* Says:

[May 16th, 2006 at 10:56 pm e](#)

Did you try to make it? It sounds like a very delicate procedure, like a chemistry experiment, or surgery.

11. *shortleftleg* Says:

[May 22nd, 2006 at 6:26 pm e](#)

Flan made, folks. And a success it was.

A letter to Mum

Dear Mum,

you'd be pleased to hear I went to church last Sunday night. It wasn't Catholic, though. It was a place called the [Metropolitan Community Church](#). A gorgeous octagonal building on Crystal Street. Well, I don't know if everyone would say it's gorgeous. Certainly, from the outside, it's a bit brown and blocky. It sort of hides its light under a bushel, to use a [possibly biblical cliché](#). Inside is a lovely airy [intimate octagonal hall](#), with wooden parquetry and very high ceilings and a strange fake plaster pipe organ.

Why would I go to church?

Well, it was Vanessa who suggested it, although I was vaguely curious myself. Or, maybe its truer to say that I didn't realise I was curious until she suggested it - at which point my latent curiosity rose immediately to the surface. That's pretty normal for me. I think I don't really allow myself to admit I want to do something until it pops up right in front of my face. Generally it's a problem with sloppy planning, never making lists, etc. On the other hand, I'm pretty good at jumping at a chance once it presents itself. So here was that chance.

The Metropolitan Community Church is kinda famous for being the one which openly lets gay and lesbian worshippers come along. They've got rainbow flags outside and everything. It's really "out" for a church. So, since it's right here in Petersham, we figured it was something pretty special. Not something you get in every suburb, anyway.

So it was no surprise that the first thing we noticed when we went in (besides the amazing octagonal interior) was a lot of gay men. More men than women, for sure. And quite a few had come along as couples. They weren't especially old. Not exactly young, but certainly not your grey hair brigade.

As we found seats towards the back, the thought occurred to me - as it sometimes does when I think of you, Mum, and your path through [theology](#) - that people who go to church are often faced with a choice. Well, maybe all churchgoers make this choice, even if they don't know it.

The way I see it, there are three options, if you're not happy with the way the church is run (and here I'm thinking of the Catholic Church, since it's the one know best). You can get jack of it, just give up and walk away (as I did, and I think as a lot of people do). Or you can get used to it, and continue going to church out of habit, just because "that's what our family does". Or you can stick around and try to change it, which, I think, is what you've been doing for a fair while, Mum, don't you think?

I imagined these nice gay men attending Catholic mass, standing side-by-side in the pews, holding hands, or with their arms around each others' waists, or with one hand posted into the back pocket of the partner's jeans. And I wondered how that would all go down in the Catholic Church. I don't know, maybe things have loosened up since I left, but I can't imagine those nice straight Catholics would feel too comfortable about such open displays of homo-affection. (Or am I wrong?)

So I thought, if I were gay, *and* also seriously committed to God - (of course I am neither, so this is a hypothetical "leap of faith"!) - *if* that were the case, what would I do? Quit in disgust? But then, what to do with my belief, my need to belong to a Christian community?

So that's pretty much why the MCC started up. In some ways, the mass we attended on Sunday was remarkably "normal." All the bits that I remember from the Catholics were there - the Eucharist, the (fairly daggy) songs, the handshaking "peace be with you" bit, the gospel, the sermon. Actually, it was all a bit too familiar, to tell the truth. At times I felt a bit twitchy, because it was so similar to what I remember from my own Christian past... I admit, I wanted it to be radically different: an complete overhaul of the concept of church, to go along with the MCC's radical acceptance of homosexuality.

But in retrospect, I don't think the MCC's policy of open acceptance really is all that radical. Or perhaps, only radical by comparison. As we sat there, during the mass, it all seemed just... kinda normal. Which of course exposes the *other* churches' resistance to change as rather absurd.

The MCC's alterations to the mass were not in *content* so much, as in the way each little process was

carried out. For a start, there was an interpreter for the deaf, “translating” the whole proceedings into AUSLAN from the front. Then there were the “[prayers of the faithful](#),” which were delivered, freeform, by an earthy enthusiastic woman who drew prayer from her own very personal stories.

The most amazing part of the evening, though, was “[communion](#)”. The MCC has a policy of allowing *anyone* to take communion, even if they’re not a member of any church at all. You’d think this might, I dunno, cheapen the whole thing. I mean, what about the whole process we had to go through at age seven, preparing for weeks on end to progress through the sacrament? But, Mum, if you saw how they do it, you’d realise why they can be so [open](#) about letting anyone come.

What happens is this: there are three or four “stations” where the bread and wine (actually grapejuice) are available. Punters are invited to come forward, singly, in couples, or in groups. They move towards the person with the bread, and the person with the wine, and this results in a huddle, a bit like a scrum, with everyone holding onto each other, heads pointing down. They remain in this position, quietly talking together, for a few minutes. Mum, it was pretty confronting to watch. It’s called “communion” - and there they were: communing! Such a far cry from the formalised ritual of [“Body of Christ” / “Amen” / (NEXT!)] which we’re so used to in the Catholic mass. To take communion at the MCC is really to be committed. It’s to DO something rather than to merely eat something. There’s no “just going through the motions” here.

And generally, that’s what I liked most about the MCC. People were there because they wanted to be. There was no meaningless habitual routine, or satisfaction of one’s guilty sense of obligation. If you didn’t want to go, you just wouldn’t go.

It’s taken me this long to write about last Sunday, because I didn’t want to say all this stuff until I’d been to visit someone from the church. I didn’t want to slip in like a spy and observe the service, unobserved myself. So I rang Geoff at the the office, and arranged to go and have a chat with him. And yesterday, that’s what I did. Vanessa came along too.

I had a bunch of questions for Geoff. Like: what do [other churches](#) think of the MCC? He said, well, most of them tolerate us. [George Pell](#), the Catholic archbishop, of course *he* doesn’t approve. The [Uniting Church](#) folks are going through their own soul-searching at the moment. Apparently, someone high up in the Unitings, a woman minister, has recently declared her homosexuality publically...

And what about the “anyone can take communion” thing - surely other churches would think this wasn’t really a “true experience” of the sacrament? But Geoff said no, the MCC follows the example of Jesus, who would never turn anyone away, whether they’d been through some sort of formalised initiation ceremony or not. Of course, this makes perfect sense, I thought.

Oh, and I forgot to mention, the MCC can perform the sacrament of the Eucharist without even having an ordained minister present. In fact, on Sunday, the service seemed to be run by “committee” with four or so people presiding over different parts. This is acceptable within the MCC, but not really ideal. They’re waiting for a new Pastor to arrive soon...

I asked how it could be possible for the trans-, ah, transmogri-, umm, (“[transsubstantiation](#)?” Geoff suggested) - the turning of the bread into the “body of Christ” - to occur without a “proper priest” - surely this is something the Catholics would have a problem with? For them, the priest is a go-between - the link between the people and God, God acting through this representative.

And perhaps this is the most radical idea the MCC has developed - a less mediated channel to God.

I really enjoyed talking with Geoff. He was strong and articulate and warm. He made us feel at ease with our curiosity. We didn’t have to hide the fact that we were “non-believers,” and he was plenty curious in return. He said he was originally from another church (I can’t remember which now) - he’s an ordained pastor, but stopped presiding over mass when he came out. His old church didn’t give him the boot, but they do have a policy of not taking on any new pastors who are known to be gay, so he decided to move on. But he still has an amicable relationship with them.

Geoff showed us around. The church has a fully decked out PA and theatrical light system, controlled by a proper “bio box” with sliding switches at the back of the room. This was all donated from a nightclub in Darlinghurst which was renovating. During the ceremony, if the scripture describes the “coming of the

light”, the lights can rise up slowly, illuminating the room in a dramatic embodiment. A bit cheesy, sure, but you can’t help but be affected. There’s also a set of banners, hand sewn, like quilts, with a square each for someone who has died of AIDS. And sadly, there’s no shortage of filled-in squares...

Geoff told us that the church, before the MCC moved in, was a factory for pianola rolls. That all finished up around 2000. The MCC had a lot of work to do to remediate the damage that had been done by years of manufacturing work. In fact (as I discovered in “[The Story of Petersham](#)” book, the building had begun its life as a church - “[Christ the Scientist](#)” - it was built in the early ’40s, I think.

Anyway Mum, that’s the story of going to church on Sunday. There are plenty of other churches in Petersham, probably more than our fair share, in fact. Including the [Assembly of God](#), which, if I’m not mistaken, is associated with [Fred Nile](#). Well, I’m not 100% sure of that, but I seem to remember seeing Nile election posters in the windows of the AOG at the corner of Audley and Trafalgar...so I imagine they’d be frowning on the MCC’s gay-friendliness...

I thought you’d be interested in the MCC, since it contains lots of the ingredients I know you have agitated for within the Catholic system - women priests, more grassroots participation, a breaking down of the hierarchy, etc etc.

I hope you are well and enjoying your new job. Josh said you can’t believe you actually get paid for your time to prepare for meetings, not to mention full lunch and morning tea breaks. I won’t tell the [IR inspectors](#) if you won’t! He he.

Lots of love from your son,
Lucas

This entry was posted on Saturday, May 13th, 2006 at 6:03 pm and is filed under [sham dailies](#).

3 Responses to “A letter to Mum”

1. *Michele Purcell* Says:
[May 15th, 2006 at 12:38 am e](#)

Thanks Lucas...for your mother’s day wishes and the article...

It took a long time to read your blog tonight because I am about a week behind and I keep getting distracted and clicking on interesting links.

I love your work. I couldn’t believe you had a ride with the Mayor Himself and I was a bit disappointed that he was so thin, handsome and young and didn’t wear round his neck a large medal of office. Not the Stereotypical Mayor at all! Did you notice a small engine in the paddock? About your church visit:

I liked the way you interviewed the minister. Very ‘Ninian Smart.’

You might be surprised at what’s happening in churches these days! When you said, ‘Not something you get in every suburb, anyway. ‘ you based the remarks on recent statistics I suppose?

I think you should visit all the churches. You could ask the parishioners why they attend and ask them their sexual orientation while you were at it. Of course you might get a few punches on the nose. Church goers are a feisty lot! But I guess you’re running out of time at this stage.

Did you ever visit Ted Kennedy’s parish in Redfern before he died? Mark took me there a few times years ago and it was very inclusive and very uplifting and a real community. Have you read his book, ‘Who Is Worthy?’ Quite challenging. Of course the parish has radically changed since Ted died. He was featured on one of [Geraldine Doogue’s Compass](#) programmes recently.

I think saying there are ‘three options’ re church going is a bit simplistic. There are as many options as there are people of course! Not too many people attend mass these days out of fear or obligation, but more as a desire to belong to community as well as innumerable other reasons. Did you know I am really more into Religious Education than Theology per se? Although that is rapidly changing as I get into this new work.

I like to think, dearest son of mine, that the opposite of one truth is another truth, and also that one truth doesn’t have to be discarded as another truth is embraced.

Remind me to tell you of the radical way Maria's church community celebrates Reconciliation.
Keep up the good work.
Love to you always
Mum xxx

2. *deborah* Says:
[May 15th, 2006 at 8:33 pm e](#)

dear Lucas,
I wanted to rabbit on about Assemblies of God (Family First, Guy Sebastian, a touch of the Premillennial Dispensationalists about them)

but then I read your mother's totally great brilliant challenging comment & imagined her really tall & quizzical (like a lady you) teasing you so lovingly ... & you, earnestly interviewing parishioners as she suggests, and dodging nose-punchers!

& oh, it's just so much better than relating data on homohating Jesuswielders.

d

3. *wife*. Says:
[May 23rd, 2006 at 9:54 am e](#)

Assemblies of God? There's one in Petersham, opposite the Rail Corp training school/Petersham Station, on the corner of Audley St. My dear friend, Cass, used to live opposite and had to drown out their Christian Rock rehearsals with some hardcore riot grrrl punk rock.

[a footnote in my autobiography](#)

Vanessa says, "You never seem to remember your dreams in Petersham!"

But this morning, two small dreams stick with me.

In one, my friend Anna emails me a very long story about her life. It's a convoluted and difficult tale, but I can't see any reference within it to Petersham. She now lives in Glebe. And then I find it, one tiny sentence, a footnote in an autobiography:
"From age one to nine, I lived in Petersham."

In the second dream, I bump into Rohan on the street, just outside my gate. "My flatmate found your blog!" he says. "And he wanted to say how much he admires you!" His face is flushed and smooth, rosy cheeks, hairless, like a waxwork model of himself.

*

A breakfast date with Helen and Barbara at Big Brekkie. We shift the table around in the sun. Both Barbara and I want the feeble autumn light to touch our exposed skin. But Helen needs shade. It's like having a vampire to breakfast, I joke. (An image comes to mind of [Spike](#), the vampire in Buffy, running through the streets with a blanket over his head, body steaming in the broad daylight).

I can't remember why, but at a certain point in the conversation Helen declares: "Fifty percent less effort!" - it's something her Zen teacher has advised. That makes sense, I think. But I forget to follow it up.

While we're eating, Heather and Polly and Nay, my neighbours from around the corner, show up. I haven't seen [Heather](#) since our frisbee escapade. That seems like weeks ago now. Since the first attempt at a dinner invite fell through, they invite me around once again. "We've still got that pumpkin you gave us. We'll make soup!" says Heather. It occurs to me that if I'd known it was going to take so long to cook up that pumpkin, I could have left it growing in the ground. It'd be twice as big by now...

I walk with Barbara down to [Cass Bros Plumbing](#) supplies. She needs a wide PVC pipe to roll up some fragile

prints for transport. On the way, a text message comes through from Vanessa:

Made stunning
apple pie
yesterday. If
you are nearby
today, you are
welcome to stop
by + have some.

This is great, I've been wanting Barbara and Vanessa to meet. Barbara is about a third of the way through a demanding project in which she must do a webcast, every night, at sunset, for [1001 nights](#). The text for each online performance is "donated" by a different writer each day. It's a delicate balancing act for Barbara, co-ordinating all those writers, without whose textual gifts her project would collapse. And I reckon Vanessa, with her prolific (dare I say obsessive) output, would be a perfect contributor.

The apple pie is indeed stunning. It has a delicate balance of spices, and just enough sultanas to make it interesting. Vanessa says she has cold hands, which Barbara notes is a good thing for a pastry chef.

This entry was posted on Sunday, May 14th, 2006 at 10:44 am and is filed under ['sham dailies](#), [dreams](#).

5 Responses to "a footnote in my autobiography"

1. *worthless half-brother* Says:

[May 14th, 2006 at 1:28 pm e](#)

"..Vanessa says she has cold hands, which Barbara notes is a good thing for a pastry chef"

I recently saw a japanese cartoon, dedicated to the story of a boy who discovers the joy of Baking bread...

Kazuma has the magical "Hands of the Sun" whose warmth makes them particularly suited to making bread.

It's pretty over the top. I will have to send it to you Luca.

see pic of Kazuma's Grandfather who tastes his special bread for the 1st time.

http://www.jascii.net/newanime/jascii.php?jascii_view=199

2. *Tully* Says:

[May 15th, 2006 at 2:35 am e](#)

Well then.

Well then well then.

A bunch of us listened to you on the radio. We waited for the explanation of how this is art. We are still split. We're going to need slides.

3. *shortleftleg* Says:

[May 15th, 2006 at 10:11 pm e](#)

invite me round to dinner and ye shall have your slides served up with an explanation!

4. *Vanessa* Says:

[May 15th, 2006 at 10:17 pm e](#)

That's you singular, not you plural. As in: Lucas does not remember his dreams.

I do, however.

Is reading other people's dreams interesting? Sometimes I think yes, sometimes no.

Looking out my window, Petersham had changed into a suburb with square fibro houses surrounded

by ramshackle yards. In front of one house a dragon made out of wire and coloured plastic strips rises out of a pile of rusting metal. The only cars parked along the street are taxis. Taxi drivers walk around with their coin holders, negotiating which taxi to choose. From my window the houses across the street appear very close, as if I am looking through binoculars. One man is sitting on the end of his bed and filming himself talking. He turns to me and nods. I feel embarrassed that he has noticed me because I am spying and also because of my strange clothing - red fishnets and a large red checked men's business shirt.

Nevertheless, I leave the house in this outfit. The houses on my street are filled with people. One has been made into a makeshift church, in another some kind of working bee is going on inside. At another, people shuffle through large piles of cds. In one of the houses Lucas is sitting with a group of people on plastic chairs (the ones you find in high schools - I call them bucket chairs but don't know if anyone else does). The light is yellow, like a in photograph taken in low light. Lucas says: "I don't know that there's anything more to Parramatta Road" and some other things I can't remember. I leave and have a fight with a group of Harujuku girls in an alleyway behind my street. They are dressed elaborately, like they've just stepped from Fruits magazine. They are winning, but I manage to somehow throw them all over a back fence (where I know there is a swimming pool full of mud!) and escape.

5. Tully Says:

[May 16th, 2006 at 4:48 pm e](#)

Alrighty, working on the dinner invite.

Meanwhile, want to go take some photos on friday? I'm in the mood for some cross-processing.

Monday morning, ten past ten

Rain starts to fall in heavy drops. The cats slink back inside, fur plastered down. I put aside my coffee and stand in the doorway, smiling beneficently at my lettuce seedlings.

This entry was posted on Monday, May 15th, 2006 at 10:17 am and is filed under ['sham dailies](#).

One Response to "Monday morning, ten past ten"

1. *Worthless Half Brother* Says:

[May 15th, 2006 at 1:11 pm e](#)

Hi Luco, I just read this article this morning. It happned at Petersham RSL.

<http://www.news.com.au/story/0,10117,19138568-13762,00.html>

Rug runner takes Bert's wig

From:

From Sydney Confidential

May 15, 2006

WOULD the bald man who walked out of Petersham RSL yesterday afternoon wearing Bert Newton's hairpiece please return it immediately?

An unknown, follicularly challenged man was handed the famous piece of horsehair during a concert at the club by Bert's wife Patti as part of a gag, but left before the rug could be retrieved. The situation is desperate for the Channel 9 star, as Bert owns only three toupees.

The missing rug is apparently worth a substantial four-figure sum.

Club entertainment director Mark Kristian said the man with Moonface's hairpiece probably hadn't meant to take it.

"Bert is freaking out. He says he didn't know Patti was going to do it," Kristian said

“When Patti realised what had happened, she ran into the auditorium to try and find the man who had it, but she couldn’t see him.

“He probably just thought it was a joke and kept it, but it’s actually worth a lot of money.”

Mothers’ Day

In lieu of spending time with our own mothers (who are in Perth and Milan) Luciana and I decide to take Lucy out to brunch at the Big Bowl. Lucy’s become our Petersham Auntie. On Thursday, I swing past her place to leave a note in her letterbox. On Friday she rings me back, very excited: “Are you SURE you want to do that? Because, you know... no pressure!” But *of course* we want to, we wouldn’t have suggested it otherwise...

We pick her up a bit late - it’s noon by the time we arrive at her place on Palace. While she’s getting herself together, I pop out the side door and say hi to Pepita, the big black dog, and I call for Lisa over the fence. We set out for the Bowling Club: two pairs of neighbours. Who said north and south Petersham couldn’t get along?

Tim’s waiting for us on the new couches - we’ve got the whole place to ourselves. We’re joined by Darrin and Liz and their little girl Delia, who’ve come all the way from Marrickville to visit. What with Fiona’s tunes blaring from the ghetto blaster in the kitchen while she cooks up a storm, our gang makes a pretty festive atmosphere. Fiona’s corn fritters are good, but its the slow roasted tomatoes that bring the house down. “Yeah, well, they get better, the later you come to breakfast”, she says.

Lucy is the life of the party, holding the floor with her philosophies derived from lived experience. “Sometimes,” she says, “people don’t like it when I say what I think. For them I am too critical. But I am just always thinking about life, and for me that is not a negative thing.” But we reckon her way of thinking is fresh and inspiring.

She’s pretty good at saying what she thinks in any given situation. Except, she tells us, when it comes to her sister and kiwi fruit. For some reason, her sister has a thing for generously bringing her big bags of fruit. Lucy doesn’t like kiwi at all, but she just can’t bring herself to admit this to her sister. She thinks she’ll disappoint her too much.

I suggest another possible narrative: that maybe her sister brings her the fruit because she’s under the false impression that Lucy likes them so much. Perhaps she goes right out of her way to find kiwis, even when they’re not in season, thinking that she’s giving Lucy a special treat. Surely it would be better to just come clean?

We part - the northerners up Palace, we southerners headed for the wrong side of the tracks. Lucy skips out into the middle of the intersection. “You know, I feel like my batteries are recharged!” she says.

This entry was posted on Monday, May 15th, 2006 at 10:31 pm and is filed under [‘sham dailies](#).

3 Responses to “Mothers’ Day”

1. *iwantphuong* Says:

[May 16th, 2006 at 4:00 am e](#)

Perhaps Lucy could direct her sister’s attention to a piece of fruit that she actually likes. She could say something just as easy as “Hmm... I’m having a massive craving for XYZ” or “Thanks for the Kiwi (again). But you know what? Wouldn’t it be great if we all could have an endless supply of XYZ (instead of Kiwi)?”

2. *shortleftleg* Says:

[May 17th, 2006 at 12:10 am e](#)

sage (and canny) advice as always, iwantphuong...

3. *shortleftleg* Says:

[May 24th, 2006 at 6:37 pm e](#)

tim has put up a bewdiful set of photos from his visit to the club on mother's day. they're here:
<http://www.flickr.com/photos/mikofanclub/sets/72157594143653087/>

exhibition

Yep, I know it's crazy, but the 'sham is soon coming to a close. On Saturday the 27th of May, I'll be hosting a launch at the Chrissie Cotter Gallery. And yes, you're right, it's not in Petersham. It's in Camperdown. Here's my rationale. Camperdown used to be the easternmost limit of the Municipality of Petersham. The banner image I've used in the flyer was photographed (thanks Lisa) from the pavement on Parramatta Road, at the former boundary of the 'sham, Johnston's Creek. So the trip to Camperdown will give us all a chance to find out exactly where that line *used* to be drawn. A final border walk.

Here's the lowdown. There are two options. A dinner on Friday night at the Petersham Bowlo, and an exhibition on Saturday arvo at Chrissie Cotter.

EXHIBITION

SATURDAY 27 May, from 2.30pm to 6pm

Chrissie Cotter Gallery, Pidcock Street Camperdown (off Mallett Street, and not far from Parramatta Road).

with afternoon tea, a little excursion to Johnston's Creek, and, if we're lucky, a ribbon-cutting by the Mayor Himself, Sam Byrne.

It'll be your chance to get a hard copy printout of the blog to put next to your toilet...

DINNER

FRIDAY 26 May, 6pm

Petersham Bowling Club, cnr The Avenue and Brighton Street.

with delicious dinner cooked by Fiona, bowling shenanigans, and a slide show by some amazing [visiting Filipino](#) artists who are here for the Biennale, Alfredo Juan Aquilizan & Maria Isabel Gaudinez-Aquilizan. There'll also be a powerpoint presentation by yours truly, which hopefully will satisfy the likes of [Tully](#) and his household. Dinner available at the cheap Big Bowl prices.

This entry was posted on Monday, May 15th, 2006 at 10:57 pm and is filed under [adverts](#).

8 Responses to "exhibition"

1. [David](#) Says:

[May 16th, 2006 at 12:08 am e](#)

So, Lucas, with the 'sham almost at an end, are there things that you just absolutely haven't been able to do/buy within the boundaries of your suburb (I know OfficeWorks was outside the boundary), or things that you have really missed? I seem to remember reading early on that you were contemplating not being able to buy underwear. :)

the 'sham has got me thinking about the boundaries of my own suburb (North Wollongong), so I checked out the map tonight, and found out that apart from the fact that it's a very odd shape, the street I live on (Bourke Street) actually forms part of the southern boundary, but that some houses on it are classed as being part of Wollongong (a very jagged line).

http://www.wollongong.nsw.gov.au/Downloads/Documents/North_Wollongong.pdf

So, I have a pub, a Novotel hotel, car yards, some kind of giant fruit/veg and meat discount warehouse, a fish 'n' chip shop (which also sells newspapers), a kebab shop, and a mini supermarket ... one cafe down the road at the beach is in North Wollongong, but the one next door

to it isn't. And no bookstore, music shop, video store, cinema ...

It's also got me thinking about 'community' and the places you spend the most time in ... during the time I was running the film fest, I was based in two different warehouses - the first had no good food places nearby (I'm not counting the collection of McDonalds / Chilis / Burger King down the road), so late nights always involved a drive somewhere else; the most recent one is in the city, at the end of the restaurant strip, with a friendly 24-hour corner store down the road. Being able to walk outside and find food, before heading back to keep going with festival work, made for quite a different experience, with the woman at the corner store always asking how it was going, and being able to see the city at night, Chinese grocery stores loading in supplies, checking in at the secondhand bookshop ...

Have loved reading the 'sham, and everyone's contributions, good luck with the exhibition.

Cheers
David

2. *Mick Says:*

[May 16th, 2006 at 8:50 am e](#)

David's response to the idea of the boundary of a prescribed suburb and its limitations is interesting. The idea has worked really well for Lucas who is nestled very much within Petersham's boundaries. But if like David you live bang on a suburb's boundary or even very near to it, then the radius of connection to place will extend outward over two or more suburbs, and so the official zoning of a suburb may not be very useful to you.

I thought about this long ago when i received a Yellow Pages 'Local Directory' but found that i was on the outer edge of the chosen 'locality'. This meant that businesses and services that might be only a few blocks away from where i lived were not in this 'local directory'.

3. *David Says:*

[May 16th, 2006 at 11:33 pm e](#)

Mick is right, a lot happens elsewhere, the CBD of Wollongong (next suburb over) with supermarkets and shops is a couple of minutes' drive away ... and parts of North Wollongong really don't seem connected to others, there's a weird industrial estate bit that seems very removed from the beach (North Beach) that the suburb is known for.

I lived in Scarborough, half an hour north of here, for a year ... the only things other than the few houses there were a pub, train station and a one-man police station/house. You had to plan your days carefully, make sure you got everything done in the city before heading home. The nearest supermarket was 10 minutes drive away, so you tended to stop in on the way home, because popping out for something wasn't so easy. But there is very much a northern suburbs community up that way, people dropping in on each other, lots of artists, musicians, performers.

I also lived right in the city (strangely enough, practically across the road from the friendly corner store), and everything was within walking distance, a minute or two away. But deserted on weeknights, you could walk down the middle of a normally very busy street, it would be dead quiet, and there was no real sense of knowing anyone nearby, because it's not very residential, it's a very transient space, people in there during the day to work, or at night to eat at the restaurants, but not staying.

And that's enough of a trip down memory lane ... also glad the creme caramel ingredients and method have been unveiled, sounds good.

4. *shortleftleg Says:*

[May 17th, 2006 at 12:07 am e](#)

thanks david

Things I've missed: asian groceries, especially vegie dumplings. Some friends have been secretly importing them for me!

Much excitement in the neighbourhood recently - with the opening of an Indian diner where the old fish n chip shop was on New Canterbury. It's already doing a bustling trade. Seems like just what the locals wanted!

Yep, shops are socially important, aren't they? There's a real difference between living in a place which has a range of little shops on a street, and having to go to a mall. I haven't missed malls at all, with their fluorescent lights and zombie atmosphere. Petersham has no malls. You know what else? No McDonalds, no KFC, no Pizza Hut, etc. Why is the 'sham so resistant to this stuff?

Someone at the bowling club told me the difference between north and south Petersham is that southerners patronise Marrickville Metro, whereas northerners go to the posher mall in Leichhardt...

5. *Lisa del Nord* Says:

[May 17th, 2006 at 12:40 am e](#)

well ya (that'll be my snootiest north 'sham accent), I do use the shopping conglomeration on Norton St, but exactly because I'm on the outer limits, moving into the overlap, just as David & Mick have so nicely observed...

6. *margie borschke* Says:

[May 24th, 2006 at 10:27 am e](#)

I will be there with bells on!!! Bringing all my petersham friends with me too.

7. *Michele Purcell* Says:

[May 25th, 2006 at 1:37 am e](#)

Have a great exhibition lucas. Wish I could join you. Love mumxxx

8. *Owen* Says:

[May 25th, 2006 at 10:11 am e](#)

Will the Mayor arrive on his best pushbike? Will he wear a blindfold? Will you wear a blindfold when you jump the boundary (sort of a ceremonial conclusion to the 'sham). Break a leg - hope the exhibition/celebration rock. See ya soon, Dadxx

[not the safest](#)

A huge rollerskating party, but not at the [Majestic](#). It's in a grand old abandoned building with a cavernous open space. The floor is tiled, like my bathroom, in grey and pink. However, you can't skate on those tiles. From the surface rises a handmade wooden scaffold. This rickety structure projects up into the room, maybe a hundred metres, where it's topped with a layer of plywood. *This* is where the skating takes place.

But I'm not at the party. The party has happened at some time in the dream's past. I only hear about it later from Sunny, and I couldn't have gone anyway, because the building is outside the perimeters of the 'sham. I wonder why all these people who keep sending me emails wanting to skate at the Majestic don't just go to this scaffold-skate-place instead.

In the dream-present, my Petersham project is over. Nobody and I go and see the building. It's heavily guarded by security guards, but Nobody walks right in without being noticed. I follow. Soon the wobbly ply platform is full of curious trespassers. It occurs to me, in the dream, that this is not the safest place to be rollerskating...

This entry was posted on Wednesday, May 17th, 2006 at 11:30 am and is filed under [dreams](#).

[...and finally, the northern border](#)

Hi Lucas

Bec mentined you are walking the Petersham border. I would love to join you sometime. Let me know when you plan the next walk. xxSue

Dear Sue

well, I've still got the northern border to go. Why don't you come out sometime and we'll walk it.

X L

Sue arrived five minutes early. I was just returning from WenChai publications (who are going to print my exhibition flyer) when she showed up on her bike. We drank tea, and I rolled a map out over all the dirty dishes. I don't think Sue had realised that the northern border of Petersham is, in fact, just Parramatta Road. The boundary between Petersham and Leichhardt runs smack down the middle of Sydney's great artery (or, as it has been described, [varicose vein](#)). I think she was a bit disappointed. Sure, on the surface, it doesn't look as interesting as all those little variegations, twists and turns and inaccessible fenceline runs which characterise the other three borders. But looks can...well, you know the cliché...

But before we got to the border, I had vegies to pick up from [Georgie](#). In all the fuss getting the flyer to the printers, I'd forgotten to collect my organic box. We set off for Hordern Street. "Thank god you're here", Jenny said. "I've gotta pack your box and run to the pub in a sec." It was only just after four. She packed me a mighty box with a whole lot of leftover stuff from the vegie run. I like it this way - not having the luxury of choice, just taking whatever remains. Georgie wondered whether there was something wrong with me, that I think like that. Perhaps when you work in the trade, you pride yourself on being able to provide *exactly* what the customer wants. What to do with a customer who just wants the scraps? (I didn't tell her that it wasn't too many years ago that I pulled food out of dumpsters...)

On the floor of the garage I spied a strange looking object, like a dirty apricot coloured mis-shapen football. "What's that?" I pointed to it. "Sweet potato. We can't sell it, it's too big," Georgie said. My heart went out to this bloated tuber. I knew a household in the 'sham which could take it on. I got Jenny to pack the potato up for us. It was too big for the box, so Sue carried it in her hands.



We swung past home and then set out for the northern border. This time we travelled along Livingstone to West Street and up past Janine and Alex's block of flats, with Petersham Park on our right. At the corner of West and Station, I pulled up abruptly. What was this? New signage on the footpath. "[West Street](#)" sunk into the ground, cast concrete with the text scoloped out and painted brick red, in a kind of [po-mo](#) imitation of the [original](#) municipal sidewalk signage.

There was [another one](#) at the corner where Parramatta Road and West Street slice up Petersham, Lewisham, and Leichhardt. It seemed a bit odd to me, to have pavement signage on this car-heavy street. How many pedestrians promenaded up Parramatta Road? We stood there at the corner for a moment. It was getting dark, and the traffic was coming into peak-hour. The noise was terrific. We'd really chosen the right time for this border walk.

Sue and I dawdled eastwards on the footpath. Sue pointed out a ma-and-pa sandwich shop (now closed for the day) which she remembered having had a really homely feel. It's called BEEFBURGERS, and they pride themselves on using "real meat" in their burgers. I've been in there once too. The husband sizzling imperfectly shaped patties of ground beef on a black grill next to onions. The wife bustling around in an apron cutting up tomatoes for a sandwich. Sue had stopped in with her mum one day on a trip to the blue mountains. Her mum felt comfortable in there amongst the wood panelling and brown décor, with her instant coffee.

Not much further along is Rick Damelion's prestige car yard. None of your "Jalopy Shoppe" rubbish here. North Petersham plays host to only the finest Ferrari and Porsche, and other odd brands I'd never heard of, including one [absurdly long black thing](#) which had a price tag of \$700 000. Yes, that's right. Seven.

Hundred. Thousand. Sue wondered what kind of guarantees we'd need to show in order to secure a test drive. How ridiculous. For roughly the same price, you could have a fleet of...lets see (calculates...) four hundred and sixty six trusty old 1978 Ford [Transit Vans](#).

Beyond Rick's car yard is another big institution: Fort Street High School. There's a [sign](#) announcing "STOP AIRCRAFT NOISE AT FORT STREET HIGH SCHOOL" topped by "NOT HAPPY JOHN". Presumably, given the "not happy" bit, this sign dates back to before the last election. I wonder how successful the campaign was. For those readers who live outside of Sydney, you may not know that that Petersham is under the flight path. I haven't made much of a big deal of it in the 'sham, partly because I've gotten used to the thundering, conversation-stopping racket that regularly punctuates our days. But for some folks - like the [No Aircraft Noise](#) political party (based in Petersham!!) - this is a battle still underway...

There's a Parramatta Road overpass at Fort Street School. Sue and I climbed up and onto it. We figured we could stand right in the middle of the overpass, directly on the border, and watch the cars flow east and west. But when we got to the middle, our vision was blocked by two enormous billboards. The only place to look was [up and into](#) the dark sky. Instead, we moved to the side of the billboards. Standing there, looking down onto the white and red strings of light, it was somehow...almost peaceful. The constant din smooths out thought. At least, like this, you can't hear your own tinnitus. Sue told me she's just bought a video camera. She's going to set it up and interview her mum, who's now eighty. Probably, she says, it's the only way she'll be able to extract her mum's life story...

Below us was the thin "island" dividing one stream of traffic from another, separating Petersham from Leichhardt. It's a raised concrete channel about forty centimetres wide. Just wide enough to walk on. We looked at each other. "Let's do it," I said.

We lasted about fifty metres on the island. It was nerve-wracking. One false move and you're wiped out for good.

Back on the safe wide footpath, we stopped outside a cake shop. Something drew us in. I wanted cake. Now. We couldn't have chosen a better refuge. A lady called Elaine greeted us. She brought veggie quiche, just out of the oven, spinach and cheese triangles, and tea. Elaine hovered. Are you a writer? she asked me. Yeah, I said. How did you know? Elaine said she was a clairvoyant. She can just tell these things.

I asked Elaine how long she'd been running the cake shop. "Oh, it's not mine," she said, "It's my daughter's business. I just come and visit sometimes, and make cups of tea." Elaine's been on Parramatta Road for over thirty years. Her original business, in the early seventies, was a florist. It was just on the Stanmore side of the border: Sydney's first twenty-four hour florist. Why would you need a twenty-four hour florist? Well, she said, a lot of shiftworkers and so on used to shop there. Once, a fellow drove all the way from the Snowy Mountains after midnight to buy some yellow roses. His girlfriend said that if he could find her a bunch of yellow roses - immediately - then she would marry him. Elaine ended up doing all the flowers for their wedding...

We liked Elaine a lot. Soon she stopped hovering and just sat down with us. She asked about my project. "So...you're actually an artist, not a writer?" Yep, I said. "But your medium is writing?" That's right. "Interesting," she said. "Cos people used to always tell me that when I was a florist, I wasn't an artist. They thought it was craft." I suggested that art was more about a state of mind...a particular kind of sensibility...rather than whatever particular materials you happen to use. Elaine liked that. "In that case, we've got an artist out the back, right here in the cake shop!" she said. And soon enough, we were tasting those cakes. A stunning crackly-topped, still gooey, oven-warm lemon tart, and a pudding-ish mud cake. "It's not like those rubbery mud cakes you find around. This one has real eggs and butter" she said.

I told Elaine about Vanessa's research on [Parramatta Road in 1976](#). Elaine said she knew of that particular stretch of shops. She remembered the mid '70s debacle, when parking was banned along the street. It was the death of small business. Before that, she said, the footpath teemed with shoppers. To me, that seemed impossible to imagine.

She even remembered Raz, from Raz Boutique (formerly at number 484) and said she'd probably be able to track her down with a few phone calls. I promised Elaine I would bring back Vanessa so we could follow up on this very exciting development.

Time was marching on. Sue had to be home by eight, and we had much more territory to cover. We hustled along now, pausing only when shops (or empty shopfronts) exerted an irresistible pull on us. The jeweller which looks like an abandoned building but actually houses a workshop far in the back. The [most boring office](#) in the world. And a glass-fronted place, its windows painted out, the door open just a crack - maybe some kind of private social club for old Greek men? We were too intimidated to go in.



At [Jura Books](#), we stopped. It was open. Petersham's only anarchist bookshop was open! I've often been past, but never inside. There was a sale section out the back, two dollars and under. We spoke briefly to the nice Uruguayan volunteer, but it was clear that we would have to keep moving or we'd be sucked into a time-vortex of fascinating conversation amidst bargain second hand anarchist publications. I took a note of their opening hours (Friday, 2-7pm is my next opportunity) and we hurried away.

Back at my place, Sue unlocked her bike and rode off. We'd "done" the northern border, but it felt like there was still so much to explore.

I popped over to Heather, Tully and Polly's place to give them the monster sweet potato. They put it on their kitchen bench next to the big pumpkin from my garden.

This entry was posted on Wednesday, May 17th, 2006 at 8:24 pm and is filed under ['sham dailies](#), [the borders](#).

2 Responses to "...and finally, the northern border"

1. *sue pedley* Says:

[May 18th, 2006 at 8:04 pm e](#)

Hi Lucas

A good read and a great walk.

Thanks Suex

2. *Your sister* Says:

[May 19th, 2006 at 12:27 am e](#)

Another good read. Was the 'awesome art' box (in the background of your photo of bloated sweet potato) some kind of subliminal message for Tully's housemates?!

We had a similar thing happen to us not so long ago (potato I mean). We were shopping at our favourite little corner fruit 'n' veg shop and the only sweet potato for sale was ENORMOUS but Pippa knew we had sweet potato on the list so she kept trying to convince B that we needed it. After explaining it was too big, we only needed a small one, the shopkeeper presented it to her as a gift on the way out the door saying it was too big to sell. She was thrilled!

(It didn't taste so good though ... kind of tough and stringy)

Bec

[day release](#)

On Thursday morning, I will be leaving Petersham for a few hours. Here's why...

[Chrys](#) gave me the number for Lester, an Aboriginal elder in Marrickville, to follow up some local Indigenous stories. Last week I called him up, and explained my project.

"So, when do you want to come and visit me?" he asked.

"Well, you see..." I began, awkwardly explaining my border restrictions. There was a silence at the end of

the line.

“Don’t worry about that, mate!” he said. “Those suburb borders were drawn up by the white invaders. Just come and visit me in Marrickville.”

So there you have it. I guess you could call it “permission”.

(But for the purists out there, don’t worry, I’ll be back in the ’sham by lunchtime.)

This entry was posted on Wednesday, May 17th, 2006 at 8:49 pm and is filed under ['sham dailies](#), [the borders](#).

Wednesday

A fragmented day.

I went in search of Anthony at the bottle shop. When I first met Anthony ([weeks ago now](#)) he recommended I visit this fellow who ran a real estate / immigration agency on New Canterbury Road back in the '60s. I'm pretty sure, from what Anthony was saying, that this guy was responsible for finding houses for lots of Portuguese folks around Petersham. Hence the large Portuguese population here. But I couldn't remember where Anthony said I could find him. So I stuck my head in the bottle shop to find out. But Anthony wasn't in. He was off delivering booze somewhere.

I wandered down the street, thinking to get a haircut at “The Locals” barber shop. But there were already a few people in the queue for cuts. Instead, I bought a take-away samosa from the new Indian place which everyone's so excited about, and headed over to see Geoff at the [Metropolitan Community Church](#). The [last time](#) I visited, I promised to come back and show him [The Story of Petersham](#). On page 125, there's a photo of the MCC building when it was brand new, circa 1940s. But when I rang the bell, it wasn't Geoff who answered. It was a guy called Russell.

Russell invited me in. We went through to the office where he photocopied the page from the book. He said he's one of the only people who still remembers what the old church was like inside. He went to mass there once in the early '60s. Not long after that visit, the [5th Church of Christ the Scientist](#) shut up shop, and the premises was sold to the Mastertouch Company as a factory for pianola rolls.

[Start of digression:

Incidentally, around 2000, Mastertouch moved in next door to Borsellino's up on Stanmore Road. They've only recently finished up there too. I don't know why...

The best account for the failure of the pianola roll business is at the [Wired4Sound](#) website - it seems that the crisis wasn't due to a lack of demand for the rolls themselves, but a dwindling in the supply of the sundry materials needed to produce them:

From the commercial point of view the most significant aspect of the Petersham years was that there was a gradual withering of the “support” industries to roll manufacture. The roll leader tags for example, had always been made “out of house”. Suddenly with accounting rationalisation the suppliers decided it would only be practical to supply orders of 500,000 or more! Mastertouch was forced to make its own tags! It then became Company policy that the whole product should be produced “in house”.

They even had to begin manufacturing their own boxes for the rolls, which led to the establishment of a whole sideline in box-making: The NSW Fancy Box Company.

That article is worth reading. It's a testimony to the will to belligerently soldier on, in full belief that the product is good and worthy, albeit “somewhat” anachronistic. (Pianola Rolls in the age of the MP3!) My favourite part of the article is this - that with the advent of television, the pianola industry was in crisis *even as early as 1956!!* But “because of his sentimental attachment to the machinery and piano roll manufacture,” the boss agreed to keep it going, until - fingers crossed - “good times came along again”.

...end of digression.]

But I digress. Russell asked about my Petersham project. I told him what I'm doing, wandering around, talking to folks, perhaps being passed along from one person to another to follow some whimsical lead. The writing being as much about the process of meeting people as it is about the information itself. "Hmm. As a sociological study, it's kind of anecdotal, isn't it?" he said.

[Start of digression:

If you google "anecdotal evidence", you come up with sentences like "*Unfortunately this is all anecdotal evidence because we don't actually have...*" and "*The only evidence for me being in gaol is flimsy, anecdotal accounts...*" etc etc. I'm getting the idea that in sociology, "[anecdotal](#)" (as opposed to "[empirical](#)") is not regarded as a particularly reliable sort of evidence.

...end of digression.]

"Yeah, you're right," I said. "In fact, it's *entirely* anecdotal."

He told me about a study (I imagine an somewhat more scientific one) that was done in Bowral. In this study, the research findings were so "close to home" that they had to change everyone's names - including the name of the entire town. Bowral was changed to "Bradford"... While writing this entry, I've been trying to find out more. But the only thing I came up with online is that Bowral was the childhood home of Donald Bradman. Coincidence? (Russell, if you tune in, can you help us follow up on the Bowral story?)

I trundled back towards the main street. Anthony was back. He took me down to Harvey World Travel, where apparently this old Portuguese fellow works. But he won't be back 'til Tuesday. Anthony stood with me in the doorway of the bottle shop for a while, looking up and down the street, casting his mind about, trying to come up with more places for me to visit. Here's a few New Canterbury Road things I learned from Anthony:

- the [old National Australia Bank](#) on the corner of Livingstone is heritage listed. Someone tried to open up a Brazilian nightclub in there, but it got knocked back by the council. "Why?" I asked. "Have you ever heard a Brazilian nightclub?" Anthony replied. "They're pretty loud, and they go all night!"
- There's still a sign out the back of the roller rink which says "[Majestic Theatre](#)". Before being a roller rink, he said, it was some sort of vaudeville strip club place...
- The old building on the corner of Audley is a factory for the fabric linings of the insides of coffins. I kid you not. A sarcophagus upholsterer, right here in the 'sham!
- "Cathay Studio (Major Credit Cards)" is indeed a brothel. I've often wondered about it. It certainly didn't look like a credit card shop. Anthony said the council demanded they should, for legal reasons I don't understand, have "a window display and an open door" at the front. Initially, their window display contained lingerie, but before long they just painted the glass pale green...

This entry was posted on Friday, May 19th, 2006 at 1:32 am and is filed under [sham dailies](#).

[a blind date with Alex](#)

In the evening, I had a "blind date" with [Alex](#). He's an avid 'sham reader who happens to be a playwright and a rugby journo, but we'd never met in the flesh before. We arranged to rendezvous at the Newington to watch the big fight between [The Man](#) and [The Machine](#). But Alex arrived too late for the fight. He's crazily busy, directing about three plays around town at the moment. Instead, I spied my friend Darrin from Marrickville in the crowd, sitting with his buddy Lobster. Lobster told me he lives right on the Petersham/Stammore border. None of us could make head nor tail of the rules of boxing. However, I was interested in the fact that Danny Green had advertising drawn on his back with texta, and Anthony Mundine didn't. And I liked Mundine's teasing performance. Sometimes he would stick his tongue out at Green in mid-box.

As the pub was emptying out, Alex arrived. He told us about one of his plays: "[The Prince of Brunswick East](#)". The play is a father-son Aussie Rules story. For some reason it's been playing to smaller audiences

than he would have expected. Alex's theory is that people who are into sport are maybe just not into going to plays. Or, it could be the AFL/Sydney mismatch. Either theory sounded pretty feasible to me. But then again, I'm neither a big fan of watching sport, nor attending the theatre. But, you know...I'll try anything once. So we arranged for a "rematch" - and set another date - this time at the Livingstone on Friday arvo to watch the big rugby union match. "I'll teach you all about rugby," Alex said...

This entry was posted on Friday, May 19th, 2006 at 1:56 am and is filed under ['sham dailies](#).

[fort street festival this sunday!](#)

Yep, this looks to be great. I'd like to invite all those former Fort Street Students who read the 'sham to come along. I want guided tours, trips down memory lane, where you got up to mischief, etc etc. Looking forward to it!

This entry was posted on Friday, May 19th, 2006 at 10:48 am and is filed under [adverts](#).

2 Responses to "fort street festival this sunday!"

1. [Tully](#) Says:

[May 20th, 2006 at 10:57 pm e](#)

Come let the strains resound
That echo Fort Street's glory
With laurels she is crowned
And famous is her story
Let us proclaim our school's immortal fame

Then hip hip hip hip hip, hurrah!
Hip hip hip hip hip, hurrah!
Hip hip hip hip hip, hurrah!
Our school's immortal fame!

2. [Tully](#) Says:

[May 20th, 2006 at 11:01 pm e](#)

and let us not forget - "*Faber est suae quisque fermentum*"

[situationist flan](#)

Just after two, Reuben arrived. I was checking my lettuces. Some of them have been eaten by snails. They're so vulnerable in that way.

I made us coffee, and while we were drinking it, I proposed we make the flan/pudim which has been the focus of much speculation lately.

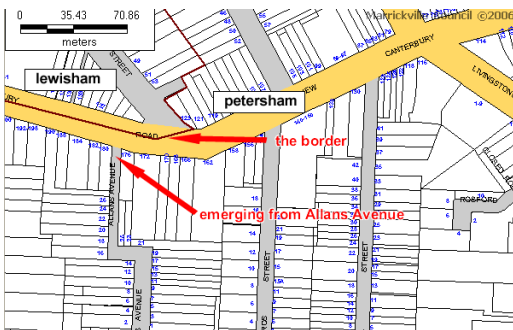
Inside the cardboard box was a tiny sachet containing a pinkish powder. We [emptied](#) it into a bowl, added what seemed to be a lot of sugar, then a drizzle of milk to make a [runny paste](#). Immediately, the powder mixture turned the [colour](#) of egg yolk. But at least it dissolved pretty well. When the milk was hot enough on the stove, Reuben [trickled](#) in the paste while I stirred and took a photo. It began to look like custard, and took on a kind of eggy smell. We [poured](#) the resulting solution into two round takeaway containers, whacked em in the fridge, and went out for a walk.

I had a few chores to complete. We picked up Wolfie from next door and went down to Wenchai Publication to check on my exhibition flyers. They wont be ready til Monday. On Maria Street, we walked past the crazy cat lady house. Jane and I first checked this place out last week, and I wanted to have another stickybeak. The cat lady's next door neighbour was out on her porch. She told us there were forty cats living in that house. The cats seemed really happy, a jumble of tabbies and the occasional ginger, no

doubt all inter-related, snoozing together on a couch. A massive platter with remnants of catfood stood on the cement outside the door. The neighbour said, "I like animals, but they shit all up and down the street." Wolfie was getting a bit restless with all these cats. He started to growl at one sleeping in the back of a ute on the other side of the road. We said our goodbyes.

I wanted to show Jarvie Street to Reuben. My spatial memory is rather poor, so of course, I got us lost along the way. Finally we found it. "Wow, this place feels special..." he said. I told him the story about how they have big Christmas parties here, where the whole street comes out. And [Natalie's story](#), where she mistakenly jumped into the passenger seat of her neighbour's car, thinking it was a cab (after that, she and the neighbour became friends, and they drove around together regularly). I showed Reuben the hedge place where I'd first met Neil and his mother. And next door, there he was! Neil was chatting with his neighbour, David, in the yard with all the soft toys strung up. We waved hello. "Hey!" Neil said, "how's your project going?" I told him I'd drop around an exhibition flyer when I get them back from the printers.

At the Jarvie dog-leg we stopped momentarily while I told Reuben about the old man whose project is to walk all the streets of Sydney. On [his website](#), there's a photo of him in this exact location (scroll down to see it...)



We wandered up some streets I'd never seen before, and found a [dead TV](#) dumped on its side, a [mural](#) depicting Petersham as a pastoral paradise linked to the city by train, some home made [bits of signage](#). As we emerged from Allans Avenue onto New Canterbury, I had a moment of dread, that our meandering had led us outside the boundaries and into the foreign soil of Lewisham. But no fear, we were safe.

On the tiles under the shop window of the second hand place on New Canterbury is sprayed the command: "[NO](#)

[BEGGING](#)". I took a photo while Reuben went into the Portuguese deli for some cornbread.

As we rounded the corner onto West Street, Reuben began telling me about the concept of the "[dérive](#)" (it's French for "drifting"). It's a situationist thing, to do with "[psychogeography](#)". Apparently the dérive is a kind of wandering which involves letting the urban environment influence you emotionally, rather than having any kind of fixed itinerary. I felt a bit embarrassed not to know about this already, but well, there's a first time for everything, eh? It *does* sound like a key text for my project... Apparently, dérivé is best done in small groups of two or three, letting the conversation be a journey too, which interweaves with and influences the physical journey...

On the north side of the tracks, we turned up Fisher's Reserve. A beautiful [hand painted letterbox](#) with a hippo and a stork. A man (who we assumed to be the letterbox artist) was visible inside his front room. We waved to him mutely, pointed down at the box, and gave him a big thumbs up. He returned with a grin and a thumbs up of his own. Around the corner, a [slumped beanbag](#), another [dead TV](#).



By the time we got home, the flans had set. They were solid and wobbly as jelly. I pulled one out of the fridge, and [sliced](#) around the edge to encourage it to pop out. It schlepped onto the plate, [retaining the shape](#) of the takeaway container. Two spoons, and in we dug. And you know, it wasn't bad.

[ps. Reuben forgot to take his cornbread home. I gave it to Mayhem.]

This entry was posted on Friday, May 19th, 2006 at 1:22 pm and is filed under [sham dailies](#), [walks](#).

6 Responses to “situationist flan”

1. *mayhem* Says:

[May 19th, 2006 at 2:13 pm e](#)

tell reuben thanks for the cornbread coz I'd run out

2. *Mick* Says:

[May 20th, 2006 at 12:14 pm e](#)

Man, that old guy who walks the streets of Sydney is hilarious. He takes great pleasure in finding urban peculiarities.

I love the drift concept. Didn't think to make the observation between it and your project. One of my favourite situationist proposals was for greenways across a city that were equal in number to roads and interlaced with them in such a way that you could walk to any place in a city and only ever walk on grass,

3. *Caroline* Says:

[May 21st, 2006 at 4:57 pm e](#)

Hiya,

There is another crazy cat house in Petersham, on the same street that I used to live on. The house that I lived in had an interesting (aka dubious) history. Drop me a line if you would like me to take you on an excursion. I haven't noticed that street on your blog, yet. Even though you are probably completely snowed at the moment!

4. *Bec the housemate* Says:

[May 23rd, 2006 at 2:38 pm e](#)

I like the photographs you took on the walk with Reuben. I think your photography momentarily improved while Reuben was with you exerting his curatorial influence. Your muse for a day.

I think you should show some of your pics at your exhibition. Are you going to do that or is it a bit too “art object” for you?

I can help with getting the printing done if you like?

5. *shortleftleg* Says:

[May 23rd, 2006 at 2:43 pm e](#)

thanks for the compliment bec! what do you suggest? i suppose i'd been thinking to have a “slideshow” continuously projecting on a loop, of photos taken during the project. do you think it's more interesting to do hard copy printouts?

6. *Bec the housemate* Says:

[May 23rd, 2006 at 5:39 pm e](#)

I do like the series like “holding things in my hand” etc. I think that the derive has great potential as a printed series too.

I think slideshows of the walks will be good as they have a natural time's-arrow feel about them.

I guess it depends on whether you want to risk shifting the focus from the printed blog, as folks will definitely look at the printed work as art, like a product of the residency. The slideshow may be more in keeping with your blogger intentions.

[Then what?](#)

Things are piling up behind me, a wave of events and meetings and memories that seems to swell up, ready to crash. As I come towards the end of my period of self-imposed suburban lockdown, connections are leading to further connections, first-time meetings are rolling over into follow-ups, which slowly become...relationships? These second, third, fourth meetings develop a more easy casual flow. Perhaps some sort of rapport begins to build. Or maybe it's trust. As I walk around the neighbourhood, it's rare not to wave and say hi to somebody I've met through this project.

A little more than a year ago, in Kellerberrin, [I wrote](#):

I feel like I am withdrawing, bit-by-bit, from this town. With only ten days to go, and an ever-mounting list of things to do, I'm finding it more difficult to pursue pointlessness with the same rigor as I did in April.

I guess it's become apparent that the aims of these two projects are quite different. In Keller, I was interested to see how much I could succeed in drifting, in not setting fixed goals, in just living in the present moment, rather than working towards a deadline. The pursuit of pointlessness seemed to be an aim in itself. (And it's surprisingly difficult!) Considered from one angle, the town of Kellerberrin was merely the backdrop for that personal project.

When I began the 'sham, the question seemed to have changed. With the space to reflect, I realised that the relationships developed in Kellerberrin were one "outcome" of the residency- somewhat intangible, sure, but nevertheless real. Since then, pursuing pointlessness, for some reason, has dropped from my list of things to do. Why is that?

For a start, *Bilateral Petersham* is a self-initiated project. It began with a plan, a proposal, an idea. In Kellerberrin, I was invited to be an artist in residence, and I had few preconceptions. That blog project just grew, like an unexpected weed watered and fertilised by me and the townsfolk. It took its own shape (and, fortunately enough, that shape was kinda beautiful).

But having stepped back and recognised what went on there, I then decided to adopt the Keller interaction-and-blogging model as a tool, thinking it might be able to be used in other places too - namely in my own neighbourhood. A tool - or a framework - giving me time to look around a bit, and a structure to reflect on what I saw. As a bonus, the blog sometimes feeds back into the neighbourhood - becoming a catalyst for further meetings and experiences.

So I think back on what I wrote, a year ago, about beginning to withdraw from the town of Kellerberrin. How are things different at *this* point in Petersham?

I have no such sense of withdrawal. Sure, I'm getting busier as more meetings and connections come together, and as the contacts I've made begin to overlap and interconnect.

But there's no sense of urgency. There's no need to get "everything" done by the end of May. As you may have noticed, I've become less anxious about documenting every damn interaction which takes place. Some meetings, some things just exist for themselves. They stay with me, maybe I'll tell you about them face to face. Maybe they're secrets I'm entrusted to keep. Maybe they're just not translatable to text. Maybe I'm too tired to remember them until later. Or maybe I don't even have the capacity to recognise them consciously.

But when *Bilateral Petersham* "ends", I'll still be here. I'll wake up on the first of June and the project will be over, but I'll still go down to Charlie's Deli for my milk. I'll continue to hang out at the bowling club, and I certainly hope I get invited to more games nights at Janine's. Wolfie and I will still potter around the 'hood. The "artwork" will be done, but my life will have changed. Then what?

This entry was posted on Saturday, May 20th, 2006 at 2:30 pm and is filed under ['sham dailies](#).

3 Responses to "Then what?"

1. Michele Purcell Says:
[May 21st, 2006 at 10:07 pm e](#)

Perhaps, Lucas, it would have been nice if your blog could have been published in the local paper each week for the benefit of those who don't have access to the internet. But I suppose your actual presence out and about is more immediate and powerful.

Will hard copies eventually be available at the council and in the library?

mum xx

2. *shortleftleg* Says:

[May 21st, 2006 at 10:19 pm e](#)

hi mum

Yep, you're right. I still haven't got my head around this virtual/physical divide. On the one hand, the blog is dynamic and (relatively) 2-way as a communicative tool. And comments usage is more than double in this project, compared to [Kellerberrin](#). But on the other hand, there's some folks that just don't use computers at all. For them, there will be the hard copy version, which I'll release at the exhibition. Of course, the trouble is, by then, all this writing will be "in the past"...

I reckon this computer access issue really is something for me to consider tackling for "next time"... (Oh, and wouldn't it be great to do an entire project without using a computer at all!)

3. *Mick* Says:

[May 22nd, 2006 at 6:02 pm e](#)

No computer at all! Boff!

Wednesday arvo, Thursday Night

Wednesday arvo:

I call up Neil, Mayhem's friend who works for the railways. There's a RailCorp training centre in Petersham, and I'd love to see what goes on there. But Neil says he's not stationed in the 'sham at the moment, and besides, he's just a trainee. Best to contact the folks at HQ and get permission through the proper channels. Of course, I never get around to making that call.

But as I'm walking past the station, I spy a group of uniformed rail workers huddled around a fire in a metal box. One by one, they all have a go at putting out the fire. Big clouds of white steam drift into the air. Each worker hunkers down with arms extended, upwind of the flames. The trick is to get the extinguisher as close to the fire as possible, while keeping your body at a safe distance. Once the fire is out there's a small ripple of applause from the rest of the group. Then the boss takes his gas applicator and starts the blaze up again for the next person's turn. I stand and watch through the cyclone fencing, my fingers clinging onto the wire.

Thursday night:

The Petersham "[radio talent committee](#)" meets at the bowling club. I arrive late, accompanied by Mayhem. In fact, we're too late for dinner, but Fiona serves up some hefty and delicious apple crumble. It's a meal in itself. The latest news is that the broadcast is going to happen on evening of the 21st of June. It's going to be a big affair, with music, bowling, food, drinks, with [James O'Loughlin](#) riding the airwaves from right inside the clubhouse.

Marie (who's on the committee) tells me that one night, a few months back, she was flashed as she walked up Palace Street in the dark. The flasher stepped out of the bushes, presenting his naked body in a proud display. Marie sprung back and cried out, aghast. She hurried along home to call the police. She remembers only a few essential details. The man was naked, wearing only a headband (not a tennis sweatband, more of a printed bandana), gymshoes, and a beer gut. And yes, we had to ask...apparently, he wasn't particularly well endowed...

I also meet Danni and Gary, who live just across the way from the Bowling Club. So close, in fact, that you can see their place from the window. The clubhouse is like their second living room. Tonight, for the first time, their experimenting with a hi-tech radio transmitter. They've left their baby fast asleep at home, and in theory, the transmitter will alert them at the first sign of crying. In the middle of his beer, Gary

pops home just in case....

This entry was posted on Saturday, May 20th, 2006 at 6:01 pm and is filed under ['sham dailies](#).

One Response to “Wednesday arvo, Thursday Night”

1. *Bec the housemate* Says:
[May 22nd, 2006 at 7:33 pm e](#)

The fire training you saw is kind of a regular, office-type thing. Not just for train drivers. Fulltimers will understand (hehe).

The trick is to aim the extinguisher nozzle at the base of the flame and then sweep from side to side and forwards. You do have to get pretty close to do this though.

Before you get to use the extinguisher they show you this panic-inducing film about a normal room bursting into flame from one carelessly discarded ciggie (down between the sofa cushions, as you do). Within about 2 minutes the fire reaches a so-called “flashpoint” where the temperature is so high that everything just combusts.

We can have a crack at the extinguisher I have in the lady’s mercedez if you want. I think it’s illegal (circa 1980).

[trophy up for grabs!](#)



Come one, come all, to the North-vs-South Bowling Match this Friday night at the Petersham Bowlo!

Vanessa (a seasoned op shopper) found this pearler of a dish, which she has donated to the cause.

All are welcome to bowl, you don’t need to be from Petersham. All you have to do is align yourself to “North” or “South”, depending on which end of the compass you feel represents you best. The triumphant side will carry off the Bowler’s Ten Commandments Dish!

This event is running concurrently with the dinner and slide show on Friday night. Kick off at six.

This entry was posted on Monday, May 22nd, 2006 at 11:06 pm and is filed under [adverts](#).

3 Responses to “trophy up for grabs!”

1. *MVC* Says:
[May 23rd, 2006 at 12:01 pm e](#)

Yo

I dunno what all this is about cause you say your an artiste but your not doin no painting and from the looks of it all you do is do bowling but you gots a site claiming to represent petersham (or the 'sham' as you elloquwently putting it). Unfortunatelley for you the 'sham' is within MVC's territory and none of us remember getting a requestt from you requestting permission to use the 'sham' as you're playground. The crew is quite unhappie with all of this.

When duz your fiascoe end? It best be soon cause our patients are running high. This is MVC's territory and you are attempting to be artistic without permission. If your trying to represent, do it properly.

2204 Represent & Acnowledge

From: MVC

P.S. Art is gay and for hippies

2. *shortleftleg* Says:
[May 23rd, 2006 at 12:39 pm e](#)

Hey there MVC

Sorry if I've stepped on toes. Unintentional.

Just nosing around the suburb I live in, I don't claim to represent it any more than from my own experiences. You're right, I don't paint. The "art" is in the stories, I guess. The project finishes at the end of the month.

Tell me more about MVC. I couldn't work it out from your website. You want me to put a link over from my blog? Any other ways I can represent and acknowledge?

3. [MVC](#) Says:
[May 23rd, 2006 at 4:50 pm e](#)

MVC (Marrick-Ville-Crew) are a small yet powrfull congglomerat of individules who live inside the boundries of MarrickVille municipal councils. Tjhis includes your 'sham' the other 'sham' lewisham stanmore and offcourse MarrickVille itself (2204) amongst the other subrubs. We formed around for years ago when me n some of the fellaz decided to make a crew (not gang).

We pride ourselves in being the no# 1 crew in the district and we have delt with many atempts to take our no#1 spot. We dont do nothing necessarilly bad and we respect our fello mv countrimen. Lets just say we run this place.

Thank you for acnowlegeing cuz thats all we ask and we'll let you carry on your experiments now.
Peace

Companion trades

Friday arvo. I join Alex at the Livingstone. The Waratahs are already being beaten by the Hurricanes. Alex says the locals are being surprisingly tolerant tonight. They despise rugby union, and resent having it shown on the TV in the pub. (Union's a toff's game). Alex explains "ruck" and "maul". The players put their heads down and mesh together in a ruck, the matrix of muscley men pawing the grass and lurching about like a great twenty-legged beetle. Actually, it's not bad to watch. Alex knows the names of all the players, and calls out to them in familiar tones, as if they might hear him through the TV set. He asks if I want a drink. "Yeah, how about a shandy?" I ask. "Oh man, I hope none of the locals hear me ordering that!" he says. As soon as the game ends he puts down his red bull and rushes out the door. He's got to get across to Woolloomooloo. The [play he wrote](#), about AFL, is due to start any minute...

*

Tully tells me he knows more about his flatmates through reading the blog than by interacting with them himself. After finding the entry about the [monster sweet potato](#), he pads down to the kitchen to see for himself. "Damn," he says. "there it is!" It's like the internet has manifested the vegetable, right in front of his eyes...

*

Friday night. Finally, pumpkin soup is booked in at Heather's place. When I arrive, she and her friend are painting each other's faces, and no dinner has been prepared. I pop home for a few essential kitchen ingredients they lack (including a blender) and we all pitch in together. It feels oddly comfortable to be cooking just forty metres from home. The habitable parts of the neighbourhood begin to multiply.

Heather asks whether, in my opinion, we *really are* friends...or am I just pretending for the sake of the art experiment?

We head down to the RSL, stumbling upon a Latin dancing frenzy late into the night. Heather and I, enthusiastic but rhythmless "[skips](#)" that we are, make no friends on the dancefloor amongst the compact South American hip-swivellers. A particularly pro couple steers past nervously as we recklessly fling ourselves across the parquet. The woman hisses at Heather through clenched teeth:

"This-is-meant-to-be-a-CLOSE-dance!"

*

Saturday. Vanessa and I call in on Elaine at Miss Dee's cakeshop. I first met Elaine last week while walking the [northern border](#) with Sue. Vanessa pulls out the [newspapers](#) from 1976. Elaine recognises a photo of one of the council Aldermen, a fellow with a huge handlebar mustache. He's her old landlord. She laughs out loud at the seventies hairstyle. "So, what can I help you with, loves?" she asks.

But we don't have anything in particular to ask. I suppose we'd imagined that by bringing the news articles and Elaine together in the same place, something might catalyse. That some lead could emerge, taking us onto further adventures. That maybe she'd put us onto Raz, or John Wayne from John Wayne Shoes... Or that perhaps one golden memory might rise to the surface, bringing back to life the tiny chunk of Parramatta Road between Petersham Street and Railway Street, circa 1976. But we don't quite reach it. Instead, we drink black tea and munch on carrot cake fresh out of the oven. The present moment seems more pressing than thirty year old memories. In the front room of the cake shop, on a cold Saturday arvo, Elaine and her daughter bicker amicably about their lives in the cake business, the flower business, and the funeral business. Companion trades.

*

Rohan is probably Petersham's greatest do-it-yourselfer. His latest project is [makin' bacon](#). He tells me he's been hanging out with the Portuguese butcher down the road, to find out how it's done. Now he's seriously toying with the idea of buying a "whole hog". No matter that it will end up costing more than just buying rashers from Charlie's Deli. For Rohan, the process is its own reward.

*

Sunday. Vanessa's very excited about the [Battle](#) of the [Bands](#) at the [Fort Street Fete](#). In particular, she's idolising a boy band called "A Joker and His Gun," who are featured on the cover of the Glebe. Black hair with long fringes which droop down and cover the eyes. Seems to be the style of now. She's cut their picture out and stuck it on her bedroom wall. A troop of us descend on the fair, we pick up Lisa on the way. Some of the stalls are incredibly cute. I try my hand at "guess the number of lollies in the jar". It's fifty cents a pop, and there's a poem on the jar about a dragon guarding the lollies. There's a homemade [jelly and prawn crackers](#) stall. One enterprising fellow has imported boxes of "wheel shoes" - kind of like roller skates which strap onto your sneakers. I give them a go, wobbling up and down the pavement. Danae and Tully sing the old Fortian [school anthem](#), not so hard to remember as it contains a lot of "hip hurrahs!" Fort Street is a proud old school.

In the main hall, the battle is raging, teenagers dressed in their best street wear jostle and mosh to the distorted guitars of their peers. One all-girl band, Ink Avenue, nervously admits they've only been together for a month. They seem pretty competent, thrashing out feminist rock tunes, but never quite sure how to end a song. It matters not: the cheers of the crowd drown out their faltering final chords.

Eventually, A Joker and His Gun step onto the stage. They've got quite a following, and spend an inordinate amount of time setting up. Tight hipsters, big hair. The anticipation is killing us. They begin: heavy melodic guitars laid over with the growling voice of the lead singer. The first song brings down the house. Between numbers, the lead singer says: "This one goes out to you guys down the front here! I love you guys! And also a big shout out to all you cunts over there!" It's a slip of the tongue, a twisted term of endearment. But it doesn't win the Jokers any fans in the staff room. Quicksmart a casually dressed thirty-something teacher ducks around to the back of the stage. In an instant the microphones have been turned down. The singer's guttural growl has been reduced to a faint whimper which sounds like its coming from a

few blocks away. He looks up, confused, points questioningly at his mike, and suddenly realises what he's done. It's written in his face. The band runs through the rest of their set, deflated. Their defiance has ebbed away.

After the gig, we sit outside the stage door waiting for A Joker and His Gun to emerge. They're surrounded by fans and parents. The scandal is the talk of the playground. It's destined to enter school folklore. As we leave, I approach the band, breaking in on their little circle. "You guys were great!" I say awkwardly. They eye me suspiciously with my white crocheted beanie and funny chequered pants...

Vanessa says, "Rock music should only ever be played by teenagers"...

This entry was posted on Tuesday, May 23rd, 2006 at 1:24 pm and is filed under ['sham dailies](#).

3 Responses to "Companion trades"

1. [Vanessa](#) Says:
[May 23rd, 2006 at 10:28 pm e](#)

The picture of AJAHG is on the fridge at the moment, rather than the bedroom wall, because every time I look at it I keep thinking how the singer looked so broken when he realised that there was no point singing because he'd been turned down, and the band kept going, and he was just standing there. It was pretty awful thing to do to a fifteen year old. Their first song was a hardcore angst opera, it had all these changes and during the quiet bits the guitar player would do this kind of goth dance where he made his hands into snakes. They will make it - they had the cutest fans. I like the fact that when we fled the hall afterwards, the core group of girl fans were just in front of us, and one of them was throwing up in the bin in the corner. I like to think it was from overexcitement. No musical performance has ever made me vomit. I was impressed.

I hope they won the people's choice award.

My other favourite moment from the day was when I was loitering around the cakes and tea stall, eating the cupcake I'd just bought. The lady in charge of the stall tried to make Tully pay for my cake and said, aggressively, "HAS THAT CUPCAKE BEEN PAID FOR?" I've never heard anyone speak this sentence before.

2. [Tully](#) Says:
[May 23rd, 2006 at 11:04 pm e](#)

Vanessa has a crush on the lead singer, oooOOOooooh

3. [Benedict](#) Says:
[May 24th, 2006 at 9:40 pm e](#)

Hello Lucas!

I am struck with bittersweetness. On the one hand I am delighted to have discovered this lovely project of yours; on the other I am disappointed to learn that it will draw to a close so soon.

I have a confession to make. I ticked the 'I live right here in the 'sham' box on your little survey, but I lied. I actually live on Frazer St, also known as the de-militarised zone between the 'sham and m'ville. Actually, from some angles it also looks a lot like Dulwich Hill. Consequently my flatmates and I often refer to our little patch as 'Dulvillsham'. We're pushing for our own postcode.

I enjoyed wandering through your blog almost as much as you seemed to enjoy wandering through the 'sham itself. I love this neck of the woods and I enjoyed seeing it through the eyes of another happy inhabitant. I chuckled with recognition at the encounter between Wolfie and the cats (my own dog, Hugo, also gives them short shrift); I was delighted to hear about Elio's cornbread, also being a little wearied by the crusty white stuff; I particularly liked the reference somewhere to the habitable parts of the neighbourhood multiplying. Great stuff.

Benedict

gulp...

When I woke up this morning I made a list of things to be sorted by Friday and Saturday for the dinner and exhibition. There are a fair few, to say the least. Complicated, of course, by the fact that the exhibition is happening out of my boundaries, and I haven't even seen the gallery recently...

And here I am still aimlessly wandering around meeting people and walking dogs. It might (!) be time to get down to business.

I'm just off to meet the visiting Filipino artists...more soon...

This entry was posted on Wednesday, May 24th, 2006 at 10:24 am and is filed under '[sham dailies](#).

a short trip to Marrickville

With a slight shudder, I carried my body across the intersection of Livingstone and Frazer, and into Marrickville. I looked up and saw one of those [white stripes](#) left in the sky by an aeroplane. There was a stillness in the air, and the light seemed sharply focussed. The day was warm, I was out of the house by ten. I hate to say it, but it felt good to leave Petersham.

I was on my way to visit Lester Bostock, to have a chat about some Aboriginal histories of Petersham.

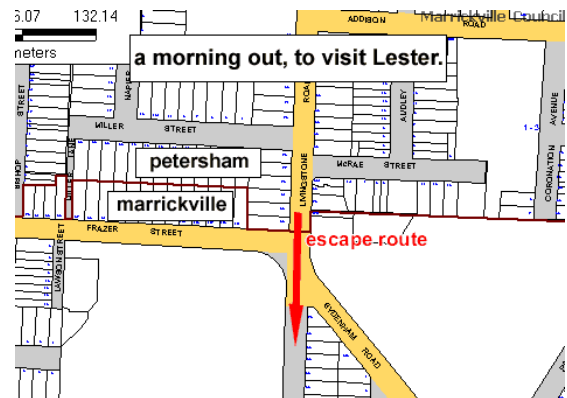
When I called him up [last week](#), he told me that my treatment of the suburb boundaries is actually a bit problematic (to say the least). Things don't divide up quite as neatly as "Petersham this, Lewisham that..." Aboriginal histories, especially, are often difficult to pinpoint to exact spots (not least because of the wholesale clearing of the land throughout Sydney). Which is why Lester thought there should be no contradiction with my leaving Petersham for a few hours to come visit him in Marrickville.

As I [crossed](#) Frazer and travelled south along Livingstone, I noticed tangible changes. Gardeners here seem to favour [succulents](#). Front yards are [capped with tiles](#), and potted cactuses are arranged neatly on top. Houses are more squat, newer, and generally in better condition than those in Petersham. This northern section of Marrickville lacks the the 'sham's proliferation of decrepit grand old terraces. It looks like it was put together in the fifties and sixties.

Lester works at the Inner West Aboriginal Community Company (IWACC), in the grounds of the [old Marrickville Hospital](#). It's actually not very far south of the Petersham border, in a quiet street a few blocks away from Marrickville Road. Just outside the door a fellow was sitting having a smoke. He took me through to the reception. "Is Uncle Lester about?" he asked the lady there. She indicated I should go through to Uncle Lester's office.

Lester came straight to the point. "It's very difficult," he said, "to pinpoint specific things within Petersham." Not many traces remain of Aboriginal activity remain here. The high lands which constitute modern day Petersham were once forests. They would have been craggy and windblown, and not favoured as a place to sleep by local people. The low-lying areas near the Cook's River were much more accomodating, and, in fact, there is evidence of pre-invasion Aboriginal dwellings there. On the other hand, Petersham, having a good population of kangaroos, was a popular hunting ground. To the white invaders, this equation was reversed. High country is prize territory, and Petersham was one of the earliest settlements - initially as a place for chopping down trees to provide firewood to the colony, and subsequently for crops. Later the area was parcelled up as estates for wealthy landowners.

All of this - the transient use of the land pre-invasion, and the white appropriation after 1793, meant that strong Indigenous connections to Petersham were severed very early in the piece. Added to this, Lester said, was their decimation by smallpox, which some believe was a deliberate act of germ warfare. "You've



got to understand,” he said, “that this was a military occupation - not sympathetic to the Aboriginal way of life, and certainly without regard for documenting that way of life.” The post-1788 documentation of Australia is told from the point of view of the whites: “It’s definitely a case of history being told from the ship, not from the shore,” he said.

In fact, as I sat with Lester, I became conscious of two completely incompatible systems for thinking about land. On the one hand, here I am, stuck in my little boundaries, every damn inch of the suburb paved with concrete, or else levelled out and grown over with grass. There’s not one bit of Petersham that remains intact. And when I look at the map, hard thin lines carve it up - not only separating one suburb from the next, but also each house and yard from the neighbours. We call these individual chunks “properties”. In clear contrast is this statement from the Cadigal Wangal website:

“The Traditional Owners believed that they were the caretakers of the land and as they did not have ownership of the land, they did not have the right to barter it. This concept was one of many Aboriginal viewpoints which the British had great difficulty understanding.” (from the [Cadigal Wangal](#) website)



On the wall of Lester’s office is a map showing the territory of hundreds of traditional Aboriginal language groups around Australia. It’s a patchwork of [coloured pastel shapes](#). And when I look closely, I notice the edges between one shape and another: they’re blurred.

*

Some weeks back, when I visited Chrys in the [archives](#), she mentioned that Lester had been pivotal in the establishment of Redfern’s [Black Theatre](#) back

in the early ’70s. I asked him about this. “I wasn’t an actor,” he said. “I was more of a producer, an administrator - a bit of an agitator, actually.” And this is pretty much what he’s been doing ever since. He was the first Indigenous radio broadcaster in Australia, on [SBS \(then 2EA\)](#) in 1979. He continued broadcasting through the ’80s, and began producing documentaries too.

“Some people,” Lester said, “call me the father of Aboriginal media production”. Back in the day, one of his famous sayings was, “The development of Aboriginal media is Land Rights of the airwaves!”

Another thing I was keen to find out about was the “[acknowledgement of country](#)” thing. You’ve probably noticed these announcements that come at the beginning of every speech and every official public meeting, at local and state government level. The mayor stands up and before anything else happens, he says something along the lines of “I would like to acknowledge that this meeting is being held on the traditional lands of the (appropriate group) people.” Well, Lester has been heavily involved with the development of these protocols, and he’s often called upon by the council to give advice on the right ways to go about things.

He ushered me around the back of his desk to show me some pictures on his computer screen. A smoking ceremony at the council chambers in Petersham from a year or so ago. A traditional wooden bowl containing ashes and eucalyptus leaves is carried by Aboriginal dancers in traditional costumes through the chambers to purify and cleanse the space as a new set of council staff is inaugurated. These are strange and interesting photos. The fire is lit on the roof of the council and then doused before it’s brought inside... Everyone traipses down the stairwell, and stiff council workers in suits watch on politely as the dancers, with their body paint, move freely through the chambers under the fluorescent lights.

I asked Lester if it sometimes seems a bit tokenistic. I mean, aren’t the official speakers sometimes just going through the motions in acknowledging the prior custodianship of the land? He agreed. “Not everybody gets why these are important things to do. Sometimes, you can hear it in their voices - they’re only saying it because it’s compulsory.” It’s unlikely, for instance that we’ll ever hear John Howard doing an Acknowledgement of Country. But Marrickville, at least, seems to be trying pretty hard to get it right...

Before leaving, I asked Lester nervously about some other Indigenous residents of the old Marrickville Hospital: spiders... There seem to be a lot of [spider identification charts](#) posted up all over the place. It's because the hospital site is so old. Eventually the council is going to shift its whole operation here, from their current location up on the hill in Petersham. But that's going to take a lot of work, since the old hospital tower is riddled with asbestos. Hopefully, when the changes come, there'll still be room for IWACC...

*

I left Lester with a spring in my step. How would I use my hour of freedom? Like any red blooded male, I headed straight for the library. Of course, I got lost. Standing on Marrickville Road, looking up and down the street, I was busted by Jodie, out for a walk with her baby in a pram. "Hey! Aren't you meant to be in Petersham?" she asked. Ahem. Well. I explained. It seemed to satisfy her. She pointed out where I needed to turn for the library.

After nearly two months of isolation in Petersham, the [Marrickville library](#) was an ethnic explosion. Shelves sorted under "Non-Fiction / Vietnamese"; "Large-Print-Books / Italian"; "Fiction / English." I loved how English just became one language among many. I went to the computers and looked up (of course) "Petersham". Lots of the local history stuff is in the archive up at the Petersham town hall, but there were a few titles on the shelves. (One particularly intriguing book was called: *Who Murdered Doctor Wardell of Petersham: An Historical Tragedy* (by Tom Kenny, 1971).) But I didn't have time to linger. I had to be back in the 'sham before long to meet up with Reuben. I hurried along to get a few [supplies](#) unavailable in the 'sham: two kinds of tofu, bean sprouts, sweet potato chips, fresh sardines from the fish shop...

- - - -

Footnotes:

Petersham (and the Marrickville local government area in general) was the traditional land of the Cadigal and Wangal people. According to the Cadigal Wangal [website](#), "In 1788, the number of Aborigines between North from Broken Bay and south towards Botany Bay was estimated at greater than 1,500. However by the mid 19th century, due to the British invasion, the forced the retreat of the Cadigal and Wangal bands into alien territory, deprivation of food sources and their spiritual connection with their country, a vast number had died." (from the [Cadigal Wangal website](#).)

Also worth checking out is the interactive [Cadigal Wangal Timeline](#) since 1788...

Finally, that map showing the blurry language groups is available as a downloadable PDF from here: <http://www.decs.sa.gov.au/corporate/pages/default/aboriginalaustralia/>

This entry was posted on Wednesday, May 24th, 2006 at 11:02 pm and is filed under ['sham dailies](#), [the borders](#).

dream

Instead of the Oxford Tavern, there's an op-shop on the corner of Crystal and New Canterbury. Standing outside the shop is a cardboard removalist box. It's full of rejected clothing, that even the op-shop itself doesn't want. I pull up on my bike. Surely there's *something* in here that can be salvaged. Standing casually, smoking a cigarette next to the box is the barber from The Locals Barber Shop. He laughs and says he's been thinking the same thing about this box. We rummage through it together. It contains old crimplene dresses that are nearly interesting, but with patterns we just don't quite like. At the bottom of the box is a eighties silk suit, brand new, still on the hanger. "What about this one?" he asks. I consider it. It has a peach and brown design, more brown than peach. It's almost passable. He lifts it out so we can look more closely. On the back, the pattern changes from an angular abstract motif to a predominantly peach colour scheme, in fake Aboriginal dots and squiggles. We don't need to say anything. Back it goes in the bottom of the box. Now we understand.

This entry was posted on Thursday, May 25th, 2006 at 9:12 am and is filed under [dreams](#).

[a little Portugal](#)

Finally, the moons line up and I'm in the right place at the right time. Manuel only comes in on Tuesdays to the travel agency. The girl at the desk says he's definitely the right person to talk to if I want to hear a Portuguese story. Manuel is attending to what looks like an old and loyal customer. I wait for a little while, thumbing through the package tours to New Zealand and Tasmania. These tours seem uniquely unappealing to me. Thousands of dollars blown in a fortnight where your every move is circumscribed. And what's more, you have to pay a "singles supplement" as a punishment for not having a travelling companion!

Manuel waves me over. "So, why me?" he teases. "Why me?" And before I can answer, he launches into a long joke about a famous football player who also asks "Why me?", when there's a stadium full of eighty thousand fans, not to mention twenty two footballers and two referees. I won't spoil it by revealing the punchline. If you pass by on a Tuesday you might be able to hear it for yourself.

I explain how I've been passed on by Anthony from the bottle. Anthony told me that Manuel's former real estate business was pivotal in the Portuguese history of the 'sham.

That's true, he says. More or less, this is how it went.

Manuel came to Petersham in the late seventies. At that time, he recalls, there were only about half a dozen Portuguese families here. But before long, he had employed a girl to work full time, sitting right there (he points to the position now occupied by his son Gill, facing the shop door) specifically providing assistance and advice to the growing ranks of Portuguese locals.

Before coming to Petersham, Manuel ran a real estate agency in Paddington, specialising in finding homes for Portuguese immigrants. In those days, a lot of Portuguese folks lived around Paddington and Surry Hills, and in some of the eastern suburbs like Randwick and Maroubra. They came to Australia often not knowing a shred of English, and Manuel provided more than just a commercial service for them. He helped with filling out forms, opening bank accounts, securing jobs. Whatever skills they had, their lack of English meant most of the new immigrants were destined to become "factory fodder". Many worked for the Water Board. There was a huge shirt factory in Paddington which employed hundreds of ladies. Oxford Street was a Portuguese hub in the early seventies, and in those days, Manuel ran the Portuguese language newspaper, *O'Portugal*, from an office on Taylor Square.

Towards the end of the seventies, Manuel transferred his business out here to New Canterbury Road. His customers followed. Although Paddington was still cheap back then, a lot of the Portuguese had agricultural backgrounds, and they liked the idea of having a backyard where they could grow their own vegies. The proximity to Manuel's services were another drawcard. One by one, the neighbourhood (especially around Audley, Oxford, Albert Streets - the south-eastern corner of the 'sham) began to fill in.

These days, the community seems to be moving further out - Earlwood is a new centre, again due to the lure of cheaper and larger plots of land. But Petersham has "stuck", and become the place most identified with the Portuguese people in Sydney.

I begin to get the idea that Anthony has definitely put me onto the right guy. I ask Manuel whether he's always had a sense of responsibility to help others. It seems he's played a key social role. "Well, he says, "you know, in those days, there were no decent government services to help out immigrants. We had to do it ourselves. I felt a duty to do something for the community." That's not to say he didn't benefit himself: "In the late 1960s, we saw the possibility of a niche market. It came out of recognising a need for finding places to live."

Manuel tells me a little New Canterbury Road real estate history. "You see over there" he says, indicating the southern side of the road, where the chicken shops now trade, "well, back in the seventies, you couldn't give it away. But the same size building on *this side* was worth a lot." It's all to do with the vagaries of passing trade. Now, the chicken shops lure customers across the street, but it's still considered the less lucrative side.

In fact, there are still a lot of empties on New Canterbury. It's odd. Half the places seem to be thriving,

the other half can't find a tenant at all.

Manuel tells me plenty more stories. Portuguese politics, intellectual exiles, personal histories. I spend over an hour with him, listening to his soft voice in the travel agency. His son Gill is the boss now, but Manuel comes in on Tuesdays to look after certain clients and keep an eye on things.

Before I leave, Manuel says he thinks it's good to be able to learn from each other. We can't know *everything* ourselves, can we? And although life is good now, and we're richer than before, he still looks back on the seventies as a golden period. "That was *really Australia* back then. Now, this place is like anywhere else in the world. OK, maybe we've improved in terms of quality of life. But we've paid the price with the quality of our relationships."

"Anyway," he says, "Perhaps I've talked long enough. I think you might have got more than you bargained for, eh?"

This entry was posted on Thursday, May 25th, 2006 at 9:27 am and is filed under ['sham dailies](#).

One Response to "a little Portugal"

1. [Enda](#) Says:
[May 25th, 2006 at 10:02 am e](#)

Hi Lucas, tried to find this site when u had the article in the SMH but i wasn't able .

Mickie gave me the URL on Sat night and I've had a look and the site is great! X enda

[having an experience](#)



I drift inexorably towards my conclusion. I trust less and less the prediction made by [Caroline the op-shop lady](#). Back in early April, she assessed my personality, and judged that I "function better by working towards a deadline". But here we are, with only two days to go 'til my exhibition, and I'm still blundering about like Mr Ryder, the pianist in [Ishiguro's novel](#) *The Unconsold*.

The entire time I've been working on the 'sham, I've been reading this novel. And I feel like it's had some powerful yet subtle influence over my writing, not to mention the way I move through time and space in the suburb. In *The Unconsold*, Mr Ryder arrives in an unspecified European city. He's a famous pianist, and is booked in to do some sort of presentation on "Thursday night". Trouble is, everyone seems to know what he's supposed to be do except Ryder himself. Worse still, it appears he's agreed to countless minor appointments between "now" and Thursday - none of which he can

recall. He rushes, flustered and irritated, to make each meeting, only to be waylaid en route by someone who has been expecting him somewhere else. In fact, he should have been at *that* encounter more than half an hour ago. And so on. Each journey bifurcates, and every subsequent path is itself diverted... After four hundred and thirty seven pages (I'm not yet at the end!) Ryder *still* hasn't arrived at Thursday night.

In novel time, less than three days have passed. But for me, it's been more than fifty days. And although most of my days in Petersham have been nowhere near as frustrating as Ryder's, to a certain extent I share his feeling, that I'm not quite master of my own destiny. And even more: the absurd sense that the looming deadline is somehow rather meaningless. In my case, all the more so, since my exhibition is going to take place in Camperdown. And still, I allow time to wash over me, moving me closer to the end.

Yesterday I met another Caroline. Like [Alex](#), Caroline is a reader. She [contacted me](#) through the comments

section of the blog, offering to take me for a walk and show me “the house she used to live in”. We agreed to meet outside Big Brekkie at ten am.

Tuesday was cold. Word was, it was snowing in the Blue Mountains. I put on my thermals and scarf and big black jacket, topped it off with my old man hat, and set out. I arrived a little early and stood with my hands jammed in my pockets on the street corner. Before long, a tall thin woman with a pram approached.

“Caroline?”

“Lucas?”

We shook hands. Her two year old, Polly, “looking like a bag lady”, was asleep in the pram. Caroline said she’s experimenting with letting Polly dress herself. Actually, she looked pretty cool. Plenty of layers in various pinks.

As with Alex, meeting Caroline in the flesh was a little like two penpals coming together. I wouldn’t say it was awkward. In fact, if anything, things were surprisingly easy. The conversation flowed smoothly, we had an immediate rapport, I think it wasn’t too hard to like each other. In fact, it quickly became obvious that we were from very similar worlds. As it turns out, we both studied art at the University of Western Sydney, finishing within a year of each other. And we have many friends in common. In 1997, Caroline even attended my 22nd birthday party at a house called “Trumpet Week” in South Newtown. It was an “underwater” theme (I dressed up as a [Kreepy Krauly](#)). Despite all this, we’ve never actually met.

So what was it that was odd?

My theory (and bear with me, I’m only just working this out as I sit here and type out these lines) is based on the idea that relationships (of any sort) are solidified through shared experiences. We need to actually “undergo” something together. It’s not enough to tick all the boxes of “interests in common” - that’s just stats. All the right vital statistics and you could still end up with a mismatch. But when we actually *do something* together, and when that activity runs its course in a satisfying way - or even in a frustrating way - then we can feel that we have “had an experience”. This can be built upon. (Equally, it can be evidence enough that no more building is desired.)

At any rate, the shared experience is something that we own together. Something that belongs to us no-one else. And before our walk, Caroline and I lacked that. Perhaps this lack was emphasised by the fact that our lives are so similar, and we’ve been living under each other’s noses so long.

Whatever the case, we were on our way to having our first experience together - even one as simple as strolling around Caroline’s old neighbourhood, snooping in driveways and grubbing up memories. She took me down Albert Street towards a house she used to live in. On the way, we stopped at a huge mansion which looks like it’s been divided up as a boarding house or cheap flats. There’s a lot of that goes on in the ‘sham. Caroline said that there used to be dozens of cats living under the house, they accessed the basement through a broken panel under the patio.

But when we got there, the panel was boarded up, a fresh coat of paint had been applied, a tradie was carrying a ladder to his ute, and there were no cats in sight. We stood there looking over the fence, slightly stunned. Caroline, incredulous that her pre-existing mental image didn’t match with current reality. And me, not sure what to think, trying to map Caroline’s image of cat-chaos onto this site I’d never seen before. There was definitely something odd about this moment.

Further down the hill, she showed me her old house. Apparently it had a somewhat shady history. When Caroline and her partner moved in, they found evidence that an underground room had been used as an intensive dope growing enterprise. Holes drilled through the floorboards and cupboards for electrical cables, tell-tale paraphernalia still lying about. The clincher was an \$800 unpaid electricity bill. Her next-door-neighbours, on the other hand, were do-it-yourselfers of a more upstanding-citizen kind. They were Portuguese, and had an extensive little market garden happening in the back yard. Purple and white beans, tomatoes, vegies of all kinds. They even produced their own potash for fertiliser. Caroline had really liked living there. But eventually, the landlord evicted them. For no reason. One day, a letter arrived stating, somewhat absurdly, that “the tenants were not happy”, and therefore the rent had to go up. Utter nonsense, but a self-fulfilling prophecy, to be sure. So Caroline and her partner and their kids

lowered their standards and shuffled to Stanmore, just across the border.

We turned back, and sat down for a little while in the park on the corner of James and Albert. Caroline had brought a thermos of tea, and some very chocolatey cookies the kids had helped make. Polly was still fast asleep in her pram. Mayhem had told me that in this park is a herb garden for blind children. But there was little on the go. A bit of lavender, perhaps, but not much else. Caroline told me about a pole poster someone had put up in Stanmore, advertising a [lost shoe](#). That beats even the crazy “[poisoned parsley](#)” poster on Fisher Street Vanessa found last week. The reward for finding the shoe is fifty dollars, and you get to hear the story of how it was lost.

After a while, we picked ourselves up and walked under the shadow of the old water tower. I took Caroline and Polly to see the cat house on Maria Street, then we popped back in to my place, where I picked them some herbs and a small pumpkin.

Tonight, Caroline emailed me some pictures. Last night’s dinner: “Super yummy [pumpkin and roasted garlic soup](#) with ricotta and sage [stuffed mushrooms](#)”... and a photo of the lost shoe of Stanmore (it’s an RM Williams).

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Footnote: some of the half-baked ideas about “having an experience” come from a chapter of the same name in John Dewey’s 1934 book *Art as Experience*.

This entry was posted on Thursday, May 25th, 2006 at 10:03 am and is filed under ['sham dailies](#), [walks](#).

4 Responses to “having an experience”

1. [mayhem](#) Says:
[May 25th, 2006 at 10:39 am e](#)

I feel for the shoe guy.
yesterday I lost my nannas brown knitted hat - somewhere between erko and sydney uni. I
backtracked but to no avail.
I was having a really bad hair day too!

doesn't the park still have those furry 'lambs ears' plants growing amongst the lavender?

2. [Benedict](#) Says:
[May 25th, 2006 at 11:28 am e](#)

Caroline’s story about her old joint’s shady past brought to mind a couple of snippets about the goings-on my place has seen. (NB: I as far as I can tell, the house itself lies about 7 metres outside the 'sham proper). Taken together I find these hints wonderfully suggestive.

Snippet the first: A few weeks back there was an incident on our street to which the cops were called. I was talking to one of the officers and she told me that when they heard the name of the street, they assumed the trouble was at my place, having had cause to visit it many times in the past.

Snippet the second: the graffitied underside of the table out the back of our place that we inherited when we moved in. Among the usual crudities, was a poem pennned by ‘Mick the Mac, the Mayor of Marrickville’ and ‘Mick D, the Duke of the Huon Valley’, titled ‘For Fallen Heroes’:

We drank, we ate, we pissed, we smoked
And we both agree life in Marrickville is no joke
From black and gold to everything bold
You’re my friend (for a tray of Carlton Cold)
Roll up a spliff and let it be known
That the Mayor and the Duke are setting the tone
And we’ll meet again on Perth’s Golden Shores
Till then we’ll roam free, until the crowd roars,

Lest we forget

3. *Mick* Says:

[May 25th, 2006 at 8:25 pm e](#)

ah poo, i thought that hotlink to 'kreepy krauly' would take us to a pic of you dressed as one.

4. *shortleftleg* Says:

[May 25th, 2006 at 9:03 pm e](#)

hold that thought mick, latest word from caroline is she might have some random photos from that party with me in 'em!

statistical analysis?

Anyone know how to interpret this data?

It pleases me to know that a large proportion of readers are from Petersham itself, and from the Inner West more broadly. I like the idea that the project communicates with the same people who are featured within it. My fear from the [Kellerberrin blog](#) was that most of my readers were in Sydney, although apart from comments I had no way of testing that. But even the thought itself made me feel a bit odd - a kind of exoticism, urban subjects spying on the countryside...



But to what extent can we trust these 'sham stats? For instance, a nice man called Benedict has [admitted](#) to voting himself into Petersham, although he actually lives in Marrickville. How much of this is going on? To what extent are locals more likely to vote, out of pride? To what extent can we measure the apathy of out-of-town readers? Are there other stats issues that I'm not even aware of here?

[footnote: I have applied to be a census collector in the 'sham later this year. A few days ago I got a call from a nice fellow indicating there might be a possibility I've got the job! I'll keep you posted, and you might see me at your doorstep with some forms to fill in soon...]

This entry was posted on Thursday, May 25th, 2006 at 6:09 pm and is filed under [correspondence](#).

4 Responses to "statistical analysis?"

1. *Tully* Says:

[May 25th, 2006 at 7:46 pm e](#)

umm.. I voted twice. Although I was in petersham the first time and in Balmain the second. So technically I wasn't scamming the system.

2. *Tully* Says:

[May 25th, 2006 at 8:30 pm e](#)

Alright, being the procrastinating Psychology student that I am, here's the analysis:

Test for difference

All groups: Chi-square statistic is 723.2 (df=4, p *Significant*
Last two groups: Chi-square stat is 2 (df=1, p=0.3146) -> not significant
First three groups: Chi-square stat is 288 (df=2, p *Significant*
(all tests within also significant)

Conclusion: There is evidence to suggest that a majority of your readership lived within the inner-west but outside of Petersham. The next highest amount of readers live within Petersham,

followed by readers in greater Sydney. It is unclear whether the remainder of your readership lived inside or outside of Australia.

3. *iwantphuong* Says:
[May 26th, 2006 at 12:42 am e](#)

Hahaha! Umm... great analysis, Tully! I wouldn't have figured it out otherwise! =D

Re: voting, I found that it would be possible for me to vote multiple times. I've voted once before but a couple of days later realised that the window popped open with the stats no longer showing and the voting options available to me again. Not sure how that happened, but definitely saw a flaw in the system. And no, I've been good and haven't voted a second time.

4. *Your sister* Says:
[May 26th, 2006 at 10:44 am e](#)

this is like 'confessions of a poll voter'!!

i only voted once but i was drawn to see the total vote count each time i tuned in and was strangely satisfied when it finally ticked over 100. Now i feel duped. :)

your 'sham

(bonus section for those of you who have made it this far...these are some of your stories...)

- Sarah* Says:
[May 3rd, 2006 at 1:21 pm e](#)

The Ham really seems like the centre of the universe. You oughta be proud of yourself Lucas, I love your blog, I'm ready to move there-!

Vanessa Berry rocks!

- Alison* Says:
[May 3rd, 2006 at 4:48 pm e](#)

hey lucas... I feel like I know you I have been following your blog it takes me on a journey every afternoon.

I'm not from your side of the bridge (i'm on the North shore) and was lost the other day and worked out where I was when I saw the roller skating rink and office works... who needs maps when we have art...

So thanks for helping this little lost chicken find her way!!

- Gail Penney* Says:
[May 13th, 2006 at 1:07 pm e](#)

Cat'o'nine tales

The first thing you notice about a Muffin on Andreas Street, is, that inside that luscious blend of ginger with subtle white marshmallow hints is a heart of purr gold. Now, I love the taste of a great latte BUT the taste of a great latte is improved only by the accompaniment of a truly delicious Muffin ... and she is!

Muffin is my neighbour's cat, she's so light and fluffy she poses a direct threat to the aussie-owned Greens whose muffins (by all their names) may be 97% Fat Free but unlike this Muffin can't boast a definite reprieve on the hips. But, I digress.

An anonymous bard once said, "For a man to truly understand rejection, he must first be ignored by a cat." I know. Really, I do. Rather, I used to. We have a Sunday ritual, Muffin and me. We've taking to dancing.

Particularly lately, in these incipient autumnal noons. They provide an ideal backdrop. Atypically

less Shakespearian than I'd prefer, but then, this is dancing NOT drama. Our signature dance is the 'sham-rock.

This is no eXtreme Hip Hop, Popping, Locking, Cardio Funk or Urban Cheer dancing, it's more your glide-together, glide-together, tippy-toe-out-of-reach sort of thing. Purr one two three, back one two three, purr dribble dribble purr.

Muffin is the only cat on Andreas Street whose name I truly know, there are others, but they're a conspiratorial mob so I've taken to naming those ones myself ... like

Larry

I first met him sprawled out on the floor of my lounge soaking up the afternoon rays. He looked perfectly at home. So perfectly in fact that I felt guilty for intruding. He looked 'happy as' so I called him Larry. Makes sense. Well to me anyway.

He arrives via the missing 14th paling on the back wooden fence. We haven't had a formal introduction yet, but we will, one day. He has a Glaswegian air about him, burly, no nonsense. The first thing he mewed was, "howzitgaun?" It was a dead giveaway. But it was a shock too.

I vaguely remember blathering some welcoming felicitation to which he growled, "Awayan'boilyrheid" which loosely translated means, "I'd appreciate it if you'd stop talking nonsense!" And so I will ...

Coming to live in the 'sham has proved a delight. If you're interested, I have other Cat'o'nine Tales.

Cheers, Gail Penney

P.S. Come and have a cuppa sometime.

Melissa Says:

[May 2nd, 2006 at 12:12 pm e](#)

Hi Lucas,

I read about your project in the paper and have been following your blog avidly since. I think it is a fantastic project and you write really well about your experiences connecting with community and art in the 'Sham.

I lived in the 'Sham for several years, on Morgan St, although I have since moved down the road to Dulwich Hill. My partner and I had a very 'Sham romance - I was living in Morgan St and he on Fort St when we first started seeing each other. We used to go to the Livingstone Hotel sometimes, the Cock (White Cockatoo) and also to the bottle shop on New Canterbury Rd as well as walks in the park. He later moved to Brighton St and had also previously lived in Marshall St.

I love going past the town hall on Crystal St on Saturday nights and seeing people ballroom dancing - it seems like something out of time, especially as we often have am radio on in the car as we go past! Hmm, and speaking of Crystal St some friends of mine celebrated Valentine's Day by going to the jelly wrestling at the Oxford - they were disappointed by the jelly - they said there wasn't enough of it and the consistency was very poor.

I was excited to see your photos of the skating rink and pleased to hear that there are cinema plans afoot. And I am thinking of visiting the bowling club as I have never been there and have always been intrigued by it. And you may be interested to know that as a result of clicking on your link to the Cake Lady's blog twogirls and seeing a fantastic picture of the Niagara Cafe we are planning a trip to Gundagai to see it.

Best of luck with your project, I look forward to your next instalment.

Melissa

Mike Stone Says:

May 4th, 2006 at 12:18 pm e

I live in Searl Street I run an Ebay Business from home
drop around sometime ...
I'm also a photographer..

www.photo.net.au/gallery

Tim Hutcho Says:

May 8th, 2006 at 4:03 pm e

Hey Lucas,

This site is awesome i love this suburb and i have lived here for over a year as a student in Railway Street. Where apparently they filmed the ABC show GP at 26 Railway Street. And fondly enoguh, i came across it on the net one day as the filming location as well, i will try and find the site. I was a bit young but i can kind of remember the show.

When i first came across petersham on the net on Wikipedia i noticed how it mentioned the Portugese Cbicken and water tank for land marks!!! hahaha.

And everyone i mention Petersham to, say about the chicken.

I have jumped over the wall at the water tank to take some pics, its a good view, i don't recommend jumping off the wall though!!!

Keep up the work

-Tim :)

Megan M Says:

May 25th, 2006 at 5:27 pm e

Hi Lucas,

I moved to Petersham from Leichhardt in 2005 with three others. Two moved out much to the relief of us remaining two. At present, several of us live in the one big share house on Livingstone Road.

It could be defined as a "goth" house, given that everyone who lives in our house frequents the goth clubs in the city. As with most share houses, it's not without its dramas. Dramas aside, we're a close-knit sharehouse (and we should maintain the status quo) and the staff at Silva's know most of us on a first-name basis. We've had more than our fair share of dodgy housemates, but they've either moved out, skipped out on us or got kicked out. We were sad to see one go, who moved out last week.

Nevertheless, we love Petersham, apart from the seedy pubs and the abundance of chicken shops (not that we're complaining about that!), not to mention the fact that we have a water tank!!

shortleftleg Says:

May 25th, 2006 at 5:47 pm e

megan - a water tank! lucky youse!

would you say that petersham is becoming more of a destination for goths? is it a gradual seep out of newtown as it becomes increasingly expensive?

tim - thanks for the tip off about the GP house. Tully, who lives around the corner from me, was briefly in that TV show when he was in highschool. One day recently we went looking for the specific house used in the show, but he wasn't convinced we'd found the right one...

melissa - thanks for your romantic story... let us know how your trip to the Niagara goes. It is indeed a lovely spot. Never woulda thought the 'sham would lead folks to Gundagai! (When you get there, don't forget to check out Rusconi's [marble masterpiece](#)).