

LETTERS
TO THE
EDITOR

THANKS FOR A JOB WELL DONE

I wish to let you know how much I have enjoyed *the Bulletin* and am quite saddened by the news that it may no longer be available in print.

Reading *the Bulletin* has been more like a leisurely and pleasurable activity — being happy to discover what might show up on the pages. While the online format may likely be more cost-effective and energy efficient, it does not offer that sense of pleasurable discovery at a leisurely pace. I will miss enjoying the process of reading and will inevitably focus more on getting through one item and quickly clicking on the next one.

Nevertheless, I would like to convey my appreciation to *the Bulletin* team for producing such a fine publication.

CHRIS NG
WOODSWORTH COLLEGE

VISUAL BLIGHT ADJACENT TO CAMPUS
NEEDS TO BE ADDRESSED

Last August *the Bulletin* published a letter by me (Privacy and superzealousness, Aug. 24). The letter addressed two topics. In the first topic I expressed my concern about the superzealousness of the privacy office on the campus to the point where internal faculty directories became largely dysfunctional because (at least this is true of the law faculty) most faculty members cannot be bothered to volunteer their home phone numbers even though that information is only meant for the use of other faculty members.

The second half of my letter dealt with what I politely described as “visual pollution” in the streets immediately adjacent to the campus. My particular concern was over the overwhelming number of posters of every size and description, invariably one on top of another, that festoon the utility poles, parking meters, mailboxes and anything else that catches the fancy of the poster-mongers. I had hoped for a least a modest amount of reaction to my letter. Regretfully there wasn’t even a peep, so it’s time to address the issue again and this time more forcefully.

The university authorities take considerable — and to a large extent successful — trouble to keep the main campus free of unauthorized posters and free of posters of every description on fixtures not designed for them. Why should that concern not extend to the areas immediately adjacent to the campus: Queen’s Park to the east, St. George Street to the west, Hoskin Avenue to the north and College Street to the south? I suppose the answer is that this is the responsibility of the City of Toronto but it is entirely inadequate for the following reasons. So far as I know the university has brought no pressure to bear on the city authorities to purge the public streets of the poster scourge. Second, the visual mayhem also regularly spills over onto the campus itself. Last week, for example, dozens of posters appeared on Tower Road (almost invariably multiple copies on the same fixture) advertising crash bartending courses for students so they could earn easy money this summer! Third, visual degradation in the areas adjacent to the campus affects our perception — and the public’s — of the main campus itself.

I fear, however, that the true answer to my question is widespread indifference in the university community to esthetic values. I find the indifference puzzling. How can we hope to cultivate informed and creative minds among our students if they lack sensitivity to their physical environments? In western Europe, the two have long been regarded as inseparable. University authorities in Oxford and Cambridge (to use two random examples) are quick to oppose any proposal to add new buildings or change existing ones that will disturb the existing visual harmony. There is a total embargo on posters anywhere except on official notice boards, and those notice boards are carefully policed to prevent the visual mayhem so prevalent on the U of T campus. The streets themselves are kept clean of posters. Both cities attract huge number of tourists every year precisely because the visitors appreciate the architectural and visual delights offered by these university towns.

U of T has an architecture faculty. One hears very little about its activities. Surely faculty voices should be heard? Surely they should also be in the forefront in the fight against visual ugliness and visual chaos and promote far greater sensitivity to the physical environment than exists at the present time?

JACOB ZIEGEL
FACULTY OF LAW

HE SAID SHE SAID

Going cuckoo:
Time marches on

BY CAZ ZYVATKAUSKAS

When our family achieved a state of prosperity that allowed for luxury items, my father decided to buy an object evocative of old-world charm and craftsmanship — a symbol of refinement. The actual purchase of this item was so significant and solemn an occasion that children were prohibited.

One day it just arrived — our brand new hand-carved cuckoo clock.

There was no doubt it was a fine thing — in the general shape of an alpine cottage with splendid wooden leaves adorning its perimeter. At the top of this masterpiece, above the face of the clock, was a veranda and set of doors supporting a man and a woman in traditional native European costume. Hanging straight down from this ornate creation were two heavy cast metal pine cones suspended by chains. To emphasize each detail an artist had painted it in colours that stirred the heart and mind to imagine a forest bright with the season of spring. It was a work of art as vivid and joyous as the painted frieze of the Parthenon once was.

Once it had been placed in the dead centre of the living room wall we were invited to sit at a respectful distance to wonder at it. My father set the time by hands on the clock face and then wound the device by pulling on the pine cones. It sprung into life ticking and tocking like no other clock we had known. The most amazing feature, though, was yet to reveal itself. Upon the hour a gong sounded, the small double doors opened and a yellow bird popped out announcing “cuckoo.” It repeated this chime every hour.

After the show was over my father retired to his Naugahyde La-Z-Boy chair situated directly across from the clock. In the following days he smiled in amazement each time the hour was announced by the clever little bird who had also figured out how to chime every half-hour and quarter hour.

It seemed after a week that the chiming never ended and the ticking never stopped. Time marched relentlessly onward — even when everything else was quiet. The air was punctuated with gongs and resounding echoes. In between these noises, in the few sullen silences, one could sense a resentment building. Ominously, each tick rang hollow. Each cuckoo

was shrill. It was an Edgar Allen Poe story in the making.

And then without ceremony the clock was gone. There is no recollection of when it came down or how it suffered its final hour. We children all imagined that we had learned never to

be lulled by the cuckoo’s call. However, the hardest learned lessons are not always the loudest. Decades later when a well-wisher brought a present back from a trip to Europe I was presented with a small, charming, plastic battery-operated cuckoo clock and was delighted.

What harm could it do? It was so reduced in size and complexity that it lacked a proper cuckoo bird. The only moveable part on it was a petite lady in an painted skirt and apron

who swung rhythmically from two plastic threads. It gave off such a small benign tick that in the business of the day, the dinner-time rush and above the din of sports games and other noises it couldn’t be heard.

Then one afternoon the house fell silent and sitting alone whilst having a cup of tea I heard it — ticking and tocking — each note resounding off the plaster walls.

The relentless presence of this noise amplified well beyond the chest cavity of the tiny timepiece. Suddenly I remembered my father’s predicament.

Obsessed by the pounding I refused to have it decommissioned, preferring to sit and wait — to endure. Why no one else noticed it I couldn’t say, but one day the battery died. That was years ago.

After a good spring cleaning this past March the little clock was released from a veil of cobwebs and its long silent battery replaced. Gone in an instant were all the fond memories of these clocks.

It is unlikely today’s young will experience time as we once measured it — with the tintinnabulation of repeated mechanical hammerings. The clever changeable digital devices of today offer such a selection of distracting noises that one is neither forced to endure or notice the passage of time as marked by a singular noise.

We can now defy the relentless advance of time by moving deftly between past and present with an array of songs and sound mixes. Perhaps that more accurately reflects the bendable nature of time but it doesn’t provide the intense, certain, solitary, and sometimes unerving experience of being aroused by the call of the cuckoo.

Caz Zyvatkaukas is a U of T history student who doubles as designer of the Bulletin. She shares this space with Paul Fraumeni.

