

*Bomb thy
Neighbour*

*Adventures in
Reproductive
Autonomy*

Homelessness

*When People
Just Won't Die*

tharunka

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THE
RIGHTS
ISSUE



ATC
UNSW Student Life

Editorial

This is a public service announcement... with guitar! Welcome to the "rights" issue of *Tharunka*. According to the late great Joe Strummer, you should know your rights. Naturally, we concur:

- The right not to be killed, (unless it is done by a policeman or an aristocrat)
- The right to food money (providing of course, you don't mind a little investigation, humiliation, and, if you cross your fingers, rehabilitation)
- The right to free speech (as long as you're not dumb enough to actually try it!)

Some claim, as Mr Strummer notes, that this is not enough! People whisper darkly of violations of other so-called rights, things like religious freedom, a dignified death, not being offended, privacy, employment. Are these rights too? Do such things constitute rights or are they mere aspirational statements, and does declaring a right to employment merely distract and detract from the importance of real political rights? Who knows. You're not likely to find an answer here. Try a political philosophy class or ask your mum or something.

Instead, in this issue, we explore past *Tharunka's* battles with censorship by reprinting a poem called Eskimo Nell which once got people arrested and charged with obscenity. The poem is absolutely fucking filthy, but we don't think we're in any danger of repeating the 1971 editorial team's clash with the law. Ryan Gilbert Wilson, however, might have some problems, as he points out that he knows how to make bombs in a spirited argument that it's the lack of terrorists and not the strength of security and anti-terror laws which keep us safe.

We also explore the limits of reproductive freedom, discovering that as a young adult, you can't get your tubes tied just because you want to, which is pretty bloody outrageous. Emily Bek suggests maybe we give too many rights and resources to the terminally ill, whilst Sean Lawson argues that we persecute gun owners for no good reason.

As usual, we have all the regulars, Matt Kwan says some things for some reason, and there's some sex as Petya Miteva exalts the utility and comfort of 'love hotels' in Buenos Aires. So, readers, as far as we're concerned you now have precisely one right. The right to shut up and read on!

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Fishing

DEAR EDITORS,
Can Matt Kwan please clarify if he is trying to be humorous? It's difficult to tell.

KYLAR LOUSSIKIAN

Debate on a Human Rights Act

DEAR THARUNKA,
Any discussion about rights in Australia would be incomplete without acknowledging the huge white elephant in the room. Australia is the only liberal democracy without a legal instrument protecting basic human rights. In the Howard era, the High Court found in Woolley, Behrooz, and Al-Kateb that the government's indefinite detention of asylum seekers (including children) in harsh or inhumane conditions was perfectly legal. Anti-terrorism laws continue in force: no charge or trial necessary. Are we willing to leave our fate entirely in the hands of the government? Or do we hope bad publicity and media shock jocks will control the government? Because the law will not. Does Australia need a Human Rights Act? From 6pm on 1 June in Law G04, you will have a chance to listen to, and join in the debate between a former Prime Minister of Australia, Dr Mohamed Haneef's barrister, the former President of the NSW Court of Appeal, and two academics from the Gilbert+Tobin Centre of Public Law. See: www.amnesty.unsw.edu.au

MICHELLE WEN
Amnesty International Australia UNSW

No Excuse for Bad Economics

DEAR EDITORS,
Alison O'Connor makes a number of points that, although better than comments from others of her political ilk, are not well founded in economics ('Food and the GFC', Issue 3). She failed to make the distinction between price gouging and price discrimination. The reason that McDonalds is upping the prices on its food in certain areas is because its market analysts tell them that people in that area are willing to pay more for those products. This shouldn't come as a surprise to anyone. When mom and dad are working two low end jobs, it's not difficult to bundle all the kids into the car and go for cheeseburgers. Yes McDonalds bases its prices partially on costs of inputs (fries, beef, the 14 year old behind the counter), but they're not exactly a not-for-profit. If they can make more they will charge more. And despite her assertion that because they happen to sell food they should be held to a higher standard of corporate responsibility is nonsense. We're talking about Happy Meals in a developed nation, not grain in Somalia. There are any number of alternatives to the Golden Arches, even in Liverpool. Yes the GFC is bad news, but it's no excuse for bad economics.

Most amusingly, despite her indignation at price discrimination, Ms. O'Connor was perfectly happy to highlight her preference for another form of price discrimination, fair trade. A company would make the most money if they knew exactly how much money each individual customer was willing to pay for a product. Fair Trade is a fantastic way to price discriminate. Customers that buy it announce that

they are ethically conscious (or as I like to call them, suckers) to the retailer, who is more than happy to use that information. Coffee shops that charge more for Fair Trade usually take a little extra off the top. According to Ross Gittens a few years ago, ('One Item, Two Prices, That's Fair Trade', SMH, June 7 2006) some coffee shops take more than a little off the top... something like 90% of the difference goes straight into the pockets of some coffee shops.

Her arguments concerning price discrimination in rural supermarkets are slightly more convincing, because then there are few alternatives and the goods found in a supermarket are somewhat more essential to life than 6 chicken nuggets. But again she fails to mention the enormous additional cost of trucking fresh produce and other goods to rural areas. Comparing prices between Sydney and Woop Woop is sometimes not sensible. And although the 90000 people writing in to complain about the big supermarkets in Maleny is inspiring, I might suggest the more direct thing to do would be for one of those 90000 to open a grocery store and the other 89999 to shop there. What we'll likely find is that while intentions are often good, economic practicalities are stronger. People vote with their wallets. Just ask any main street retailer in the US what happens when Walmart comes to town.

MATT COBB-CLARK

Old man on campus

In a sea of young whipper-snappers, it is unsurprising that someone like Roger Davis ('University of Yesteryear', Issue 3) would feel out of place. If being twenty-one is considered old in university terms, mature age students must really be feeling it. As a retired old man, he would stick out in any university environment like a sore thumb. In the eyes of young people, they are simply weird and don't belong.

I am not surprised that Davis is confused by our desire to pursue careers. This is because he has satisfied his career goals and is now

retired. We are still yet to fulfil our lives in this regard. We do not always have the luxury to leisurely study for fun, especially if undertaking a professional degree.

Davis also laments the lack of desire of some people to do their readings, something which apparently didn't happen in the late sixties and early seventies. This is perhaps true, but then it may simply be a reflection on the lack of desirability of the readings. Perhaps teaching standards have declined. But then again, perhaps not. A former lecturer once recounted tales of meetings with his tutor in which he and his fellow undergraduates would blurt out "drivel", in response to a set topic area, upon which the tutor would go into "spasms" of intellectual thought. This was at Oxford, one of the world's best universities. It seems Davis has simply romanticised the memories of his university days of past.

On a personal level, I have shared many classes with mature age students, almost all of them positive. One of my early debating partners was a mature age student. Not only do they offer invaluable expertise and commitment to discussions and group projects, they are usually studying for enjoyment, so they are fun to be around. They can also provide support, acting as unofficial mentors to younger students.

If younger students such as me put in the effort to get to know our older counterparts, we will get rewards. However, older, mature age students must be willing to engage socially. If they forever see university like the place it was thirty years ago, deriding the younger generations for whatever perceived shortcomings, and sticking only to those (older people) they know best, they will forever be seen as weird old people who should probably be doing old people things like knitting, lawn bowls and making doilies.

MATT KWAN

Kevin Rudd surrenders to China in fluent Mandarin

Chinese tanks entered Canberra yesterday to end the Australian war of liberation. Freed from the shackles of bourgeois oppression, former Prime Minister Kevin Rudd broadcast the surrender to our new masters in what President Hu Jintao praised as "flawless, idiomatic Mandarin." Rudd's linguistic and diplomatic skills were put to a stern test throughout negotiations. Drawing on his extensive knowledge of Chinese history and culture, he was able to insist on terms most favourable to the former Australia. For example, the parasitic political class will not be executed as per Chinese negotiators' original demands. Rather, they will be imprisoned in remote Outback facilities where they will be permitted to work while enjoying the benefits of re-education. Additionally, slave labourers tasked with extracting Australian mineral wealth for the benefit of the Middle Country's glorious industrial development will only work 16 hour days, negotiated down from 18 by Rudd, a staunch advocate of workers rights and industrial relations reform.

All glory to the Revolution! All glory to our new Chinese protectors! All glory to Kevin Rudd, governor of the Australian Special Administrative Province!

BRITNEY SPEARS

Family Last wins Senate seat

Yesterday marked a milestone in our political history with the first election of a candidate from the new Family Last party to the Australian senate. Mr Rupert Satanswirth, speaking with difficulty through the festering syphilitic sores around his mouth, outlined his party's core goal: to wreak misery upon the lives of Australian mums, dads and children. Said Mr Satanswirth: 'Australian families have had it too good for too long. Only with the death of all hope, joy and security will they be driven to escape the foul reality of their squalid lives through the depths of hedonistic and destructive excess.'

DIRTY DISHES

stand-off enters third week

There are no clean dishes left in a sharehouse of four full time students. Greasy plates languish alongside bowls encrusted with yesterday's cereal. Utensils stack up in the sink, filled with greying water. The drain is clogged with bits of pasta. Everybody sees the stack, but nobody wants to undertake the task of cleaning up.

This battle of wills has evolved into an intricate, unspoken cold war characterised by contrasting strategic approaches. Some members of the household have taken to ordering pizza or eating out in order to avoid the necessity of washing dishes. Others have adopted a policy of "bearing witness", that is commenting loudly on the putrid state of the sink whilst making no effort to intervene. A third faction favours passive resistance, washing what they need in order to cook whilst avoiding engagement with the overall mess.

Most sides agree that an end to the stand-off is not yet in sight, though many expressed their expectation that Ellie, the cleanest resident, will inevitably be the one to crack and wash everything as per usual.

CHANNEL TEN
SWITCHES TO
ALL-SIMPSONS
LINEUP

Family Last comes with a broad raft of policies. The party seeks to address areas from education and health to science, technology and morality. Mr Satanswirth spoke at length about his ambition to create injectable alcopops for minors, incorporate compulsory penetrative masturbation into the curriculum, and replace mothers with mechanical 'carer-bots' for children under five. His eyes grew misty as our talk turned to his own mother, a single, lesbian, HIV-positive sex worker who conceived him through IVF and supported Rupert and his siblings through her work as a provider of illegal abortions. "Not in my backyard meant something special in our household, I can tell you," he confided with a wink.

tharunka editors leave office unlocked

now i am in here and I can write whatever i want hahahaha !!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!11 woooooo fuck shit nigger boobies fuck fuck fuck

NRL PLAYER HAS CONSENSUAL SEX WITH ONE WOMAN

Socialist Revolutionaries seize power in student union

In a carefully calculated first step towards the overthrow of bourgeois capitalism and the establishment of a global proletariat dictatorship, the Revolutionary Socialist Marxist Party's youth wing yesterday seized power in a local university's student union.

The socialists attained power democratically. Despite their rejection of liberal democratic precepts, they see the ballot box as a tactical tool for the furthering of revolutionary goals. They swiftly moved to consolidate their hold by marginalising reactionary opponents in Council discussions, issuing a series of press statements condemning government policies, and voting to redirect union funds away from clubs and free breakfasts, in favour of revolutionary goals such as the funding of workers' communes and the establishment of a street militia.

With such enormous power at their disposal, the revolutionaries plan to use the money and support base of the student union to mobilise workers ahead of a general strike which will bring the edifice of global capitalism to its knees. Speaking from the university's Union building, the leader of the socialists called for all the dispossessed peoples of the world to rise up and overthrow their own capitalistic and imperialistic student unions. "At last, the inevitable triumph of the working class over the capitalist running dog student politicians is at hand!"

Reaction to the news was swift. Markets took a dive, industrialists quaked with fear, and panic buying spread across the nation as bourgeois consumers anticipated the institution of socialist redistribution schemes and seizure of private property.

TERMINALLY ILL CHILD WISHES FOR END OF MAKE-A-WISH FOUNDATION

Brandon Hutchens, a 12 year old boy with incurable cancer and a serious attitude problem, was granted his fondest wish yesterday when the Make-a-Wish Foundation dissolved itself and left thousands of other children without a chance of a little happiness in their bleak existence.

The little emaciated malcontent giggled with glee at the idea of ruining so many other lives, as he heard the stories of young cancer victims no longer able to meet sporting heroes, swim with dolphins, ride ponies, and have other such wishes fulfilled with funds generously donated by kind-hearted philanthropists.

"It's a proud day for us," said a spokesperson for the Foundation, "seeing young Brandon's eyes light up as he laughed at the misfortune of others really made my day." He added that he was worried by his sudden unemployment, but that it was worth it to see the little bald bastard's heinous dreams brought to fruition.

SEXY GONE AGAIN

Drunk friend isn't racist

Several beers into the house party you attended last week, your friend assured you that he wasn't racist before explaining why he doesn't like members of several ethnic groups. As evidence of his lack of racism, he claimed that he has friends from other cultures and that they're good people. Leaning in closer, he expressed fears that in the future, "they" will overrun "us," in a manner which suggested he believes you are part of this "us." Rather than express the discomfort and outrage you inwardly felt at his comments, you nodded in vague but noncommittal agreement and continued to sip your beer whilst looking for a way to end the conversation.

Malcolm Turnbull: "There will always be less people dead from influenza under a Coalition government"

INTERVIEW WITH THE LAWYER

REBECCA ZAMAN

Why is Australia the only liberal democracy in the world that does not have a Bill of Rights, whether constitutionally entrenched or as a Human Rights statute? Human rights lawyer Geoffrey Robertson QC explains to Rebecca Zaman why the law needs to change.

Whenever change is canvassed, voters are easily convinced that they live in the best of all possible worlds where, if it ain't broke, it ain't worth fixing. When the sun shines and the beach beckons, a better world is difficult to envision, and too much bother to build. Those who do bother seem whingers and spoilsports, importers of problems or, even worse, lawyers

Geoffrey Robertson, *The Statute of Liberty*

Tharunka prides itself on independent journalism. We mock the pretensions of the portentous, the foibles of the mighty, we lance self-importance like a pustulent boil.

So what do you do when your subject is known for a certain florid pomposity but he's so genuinely impressive that it's hard to remember to snark? And when the cause he's propounding is so damn worthy?

Ladies and gentlemen: Geoffrey Robertson QC.

Host of Hypotheticals. Human rights lawyer, advocate and judge. Pretty much single-handedly stopped the death penalty in the Caribbean. UN war crimes judge in Sierra Leone. Dared to appear in a Zimbabwean court to defend a journalist from censorship. Author of a host of books (half of which are clustered on my bookshelf, like *The Tyrannicide Brief*, *The Justice Game* and *Crimes Against Humanity*). Baffled the British public by leaving the sumptuous Nigella Lawson for feisty Kathy Lette (and has picked up her predilection for puns, if the title of his latest book, *The Statute of Liberty*, is anything to go by).

But undoubtedly one of the coolest things about him is that when he was in Australia last month for a whirlwind book tour, he didn't forget his roots. In between primetime TV slots, radio interviews and huge keynote addresses in each city, he found the time to give Tharunka a call.

"My first speech in court was for Tharunka", he explains, "defending the editorial board from an obscenity charge." (To think that once upon a time, the fabulous article "CUNT: reclaiming a great word" from Tharunka's last edition would have seen our intrepid editors arrested.) And in fact, he was also one of the early teachers at UNSW Law School, teaching National Security and the Law. So Geoff and us? We go way back.

Still, it's been a long road since then, and Geoffrey Robertson has spent most of his career in the UK. Now that he's back to advocate Australian law reform, he's anxious to affirm his connection to the sunburnt motherland.

Shortly after saying "hello" (and well before my brain can register much more than "Geoffrey Robertson!" and "squee!" and "ironic detachment, remember the ironic detachment") he's already launched into an extensive explanation and apology for his "speech defect"—that is, that somewhat English accent.

Do not be fooled by these plummy elongated vowels, he declares, for, as he says in deep and resonating growl "I am an Australian". And here he has returned to spread the message of enlightenment in the form of his book, *The Statute of Liberty*.

Steady on. What's it all about?

Our Geoff explains that Australia is the only liberal democracy in the world without comprehensive human rights laws, whether 'entrenched' in the constitution, like America's Bill of Rights, or as an ordinary Act of Parliament, like the Human Rights Acts in the UK, the ACT and Victoria. Instead, the legal protections for our liberties are seriously weak—"a patchwork quilt of anti-discrimination Acts."

But (I hear you cry), does it really matter if our rights aren't expressly protected by law? This is Australia. Laws or no laws, we're doing okay on human rights. Right?

"LAWS OR NO LAWS, WE'RE DOING OKAY ON HUMAN RIGHTS, RIGHT?"

Well... no, actually. "We're not as good as we think we are and not as good as we could be," says Robertson. There's the high profile bungling in individual cases—think Dr Haneef, Cornelia Rau, Vivian Alvarez-Solon—and the dodgy laws, like the attempt in NSW to criminalise "annoying" behaviour for World Youth Day. And don't forget that the Australian Government has gone before the High Court claiming the power to keep non-citizens in detention for the rest of their natural lives. (It won.)

You might think this criticism is unfair; that these failures were just (a series of) one-off cock-ups, and besides, we're still better than the Joneses in Zimbabwe.

Zimbabwe he'll grant you, but then Robertson reels off the stats on Australia's comparative human rights standing. It's a disturbing picture: "Australia is no. 38 on the Freedom House Index, behind Hungary, Costa Rica and Lithuania. We're 21st on the Global Gender Gap Report, behind the Philippines, Latvia and Spain. We're 41st on the World Bank Income, behind Canada, Croatia and Greece; on Indigenous welfare, we're bottom."

Alright. So the Lucky Country ain't so lucky. The Rudd Government agrees; last December they established a National Human Rights Consultation Committee (chaired by Jesuit priest, Father Brennan) to consult the community on how best to protect human rights in Australia.

The dominant model for reform, and the approach that Robertson advocates in *Statute of Liberty*, is an Australian Human Rights Act that gives legal and symbolic expression to our rights.

But wait a tick. What happens when you pass a law protecting rights? What about situations when individual rights should be limited in order to protect society, like requiring people to obey traffic rules, or quarantining people with swine flu?

Our Geoff fields that one with ease. Human Rights Acts around the world recognise that rights are limited by the competing rights of others and by the reasonable needs of a democratic society. So if you're diagnosed with swine flu, it would be legitimate for the government to limit your freedom of movement by confining you until you cease to be contagious.

And what about power this gives judges? Critics say that statutory bills of rights allow unelected judges to make political decisions that should be left to elected governments. Bob Carr is a major proponent of this view (which is kind of ironic given that taking power from the current NSW Government and giving it to someone remotely competent would probably be quite popular.)

Robertson dubs this the “mad tyrant judges” argument. “It’s propaganda,” he says. As he explains in *Statute of Liberty*, a Human Rights Act, being an ordinary Act of Parliament, wouldn’t give judges the constitutional power to strike down laws. Instead, it would operate “by directing the courts, where a statute is ambiguous or the common law unclear, to interpret and develop law consistently, so far as possible, with human rights principles. Even if a law is obviously in breach of those principles, the courts cannot abolish it or strike it down: they issue instead a ‘declaration of incompatibility’, which draws the inconsistency to parliament’s attention. Even then, parliament does not have to do anything, although it may decide to amend or re-write the offending law rather than to leave it as it is.”

In other words, a Human Rights Act requires Parliament to fix laws that have an unintended or unnecessary impact on human rights, and to be totally upfront about intended human rights breaches (like ‘annoying’ laws) and justify to the Australian people why they’re necessary. If anything, it increases democratic accountability.

And a Human Rights Act isn’t just about legal enforcement. Robertson is keen to laud the important symbolic and educative role of a statute of liberty. “In the UK, they’re bringing in a school course in civics based on the Human Rights Act,” he says. “In Canada, it has enhanced national pride—and they don’t have a great deal to be proud of over there.”

He also stresses its normative role as a yardstick for the formation of government policy. In his view “the most important effect of the Human Rights Act [in the UK] has been educational.” Human rights language provides a framework for challenging the “stupid, pointless and unthinkingly cruel practices that can develop in the public service unless public servants are made to remember that the people they deal with deserve a little dignity.”

All in all, it’s difficult to find fault with his conclusion: “a Human Rights Act may be no great big deal but it does notably improve the lives of vulnerable people.”

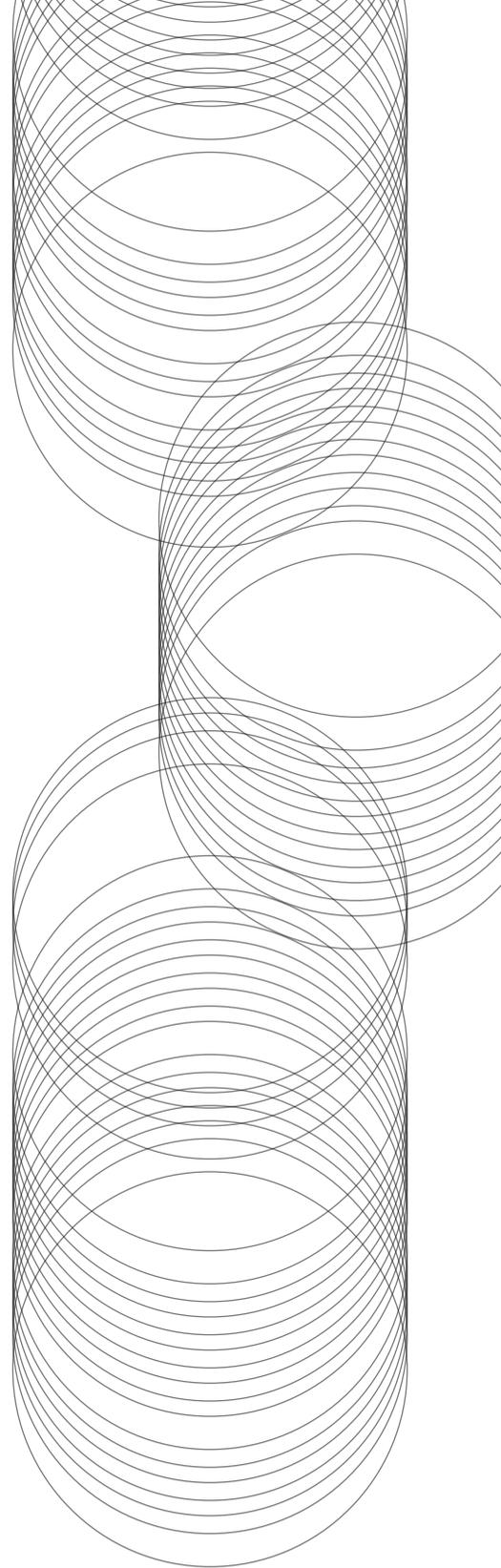
So what impact does Our Geoff expect his latest book will have on Australia’s human rights protections?

“I want Australians to be outraged enough to write a letter to their MP, to call up a shockjock and argue on air”. In other words, to engage in the National Human Rights Consultation (to find out how to have your say, check out: www.amnesty.org.au/yourhumanrights/consultation/)

As an entry point to the debate, it’s hard to go wrong with *The w*. It’s a slim, accessible volume, simple without being simplistic, and sets out the issues in an entertaining and intelligent way. Its tone is comical and often scathing, and the chapter where Robertson demolishes the arguments of Bob Carr and other opponents is delicious.

A major strength is the way it weaves Australia’s unique history, politics and identity into an argument for the need and appropriateness of our own Human Rights Act. All in all, it is a persuasive, readable and deeply humanistic read.

Except for the puns, which are a crime against humanity all of their own.





A BUS OF RIGHTS

George Williams has got it all wrong. Media-savvy politician though he may be, there is a more effective way of selling a good, legally and ethically sound policy to the voting public than simply listing all the freedoms that (some) minorities will finally enjoy under a federal Bill of Rights. Sure, the Bill might help asylum seekers and indigenous communities. But if its hawkers are going to persuade anyone then it is time this project was advertised to the people on the basis of what it can do for them.



A good start in this regard is to append a statutory charter of rights and responsibilities with respect to getting on the bus. It would be very similar to the Charters of Rights adopted in Victoria and the ACT, which protect freedoms but place some reasonable limits on them. Any liberal philosopher will tell you that rules and restrictions prevent douche-bags from impeding the autonomy of everyone else. I want a legal framework to guide my behaviour, and the behaviour of other bus riders just as misguided as me. With these qualifications I feel authorized to draft the following prescription of what the Bill of Bus Rights would look like and how it could be presented to the public.

Any liberal philosopher will tell you that rules and restrictions prevent douche-bags from impeding the autonomy of everyone else.

Some types of behaviour are clearly unacceptable. Let's look at freedom of movement. Some bus users choose to get up and try moving over to the back door before the bus has come to a complete stop. Sudden foot jabs at the brake by the bus driver inevitably hurl such passengers forward and sideways onto other people. *Charter Right No 1: no freedom of movement.*

What about the right to privacy? This is a right I believe must be accorded to all bus passengers, and most especially those who attempt to squeeze in next to the person sitting in the cramped seat just behind the back door. It is not desirable to have a contest of wills with stout surly passengers who refuse to move their right thigh over and thus make it necessary for two grown men to have their thighs touching for the entirety of their journey. This is not the way to make friends.

Some people, however, take this right too seriously. If someone looks across the bus at you to see something out the window, do not become weird. They are not staring

at you. You are not permitted to stare back at them, pretending to see out the window when in fact you have started some kind of cowboy western face-off of the right to stare out the window no matter how many faces I seem to be staring at. *Charter Right No 2: privacy yes, sociopathy no.*

Freedom of speech, of course, is generally a good thing, and whilst sharing one's private life on the phone in a public arena can be illuminating and sometimes entertaining, it is not always so. The right to free entertainment must be balanced against freedom from cruel and inhumane treatment. If you are arguing with your grandma or goldfish or whomever is on the other line and exclaiming: "But I told you a thousand times. You're so annoying. No!" over and over in an endless loop of inanity, a threshold of tolerance has been crossed. *Charter Right No 3: no speech, unless funny.*

Bus drivers should also have certain obligations. Drivers often like to complain about handling change when they are in a hurry to get home or are simply feeling a bit surly, and that's a tradition that should be respected. The Charter should prescribe this conduct carefully. Drivers can only complain if they do so in as theatrical and melodramatic a manner as possible, always with a sneer and palm barely extended with a sinister long fingernail on the pinky. *Charter Right No 4: the freedom to perform forced labour.*

This Charter won't appeal to everyone unless there is something positive in it, so we should include a section on the right of passengers to enjoy playing games, especially on long journeys. If you want to play the popular game 'I Spy' on public transport, however, please only do so with Matt Kwan. Strangers will not join in to shout out the answer and mercifully end the game unless he is playing. If you want to make animal noises, simply defer to Bart Cummings. He does an excellent rooster imitation. Such noises are only acceptable if Matt Kwan is blamed for them. *Charter Right No 5: freedom of association.*

If the Bill of Rights is packaged in this way, bus journeys at least will be much more pleasant. In fact, with the right choices, they could become fun. Legal reformers take note.

BART CUMMINGS, WITH MATT KWAN



Most shooters accept and support reasonable licensing, training requirements, and registration, which have existed for a long time pretty much everywhere except Tasmania where they were instituted in 1996 after Port Arthur. Licensing and registration of weapons is fine and separates criminals from law-abiding shooters. However, the last decade has seen arbitrary reclassifications and bans of different weapons every couple of years as a populist response to a scary crime. This is not okay, and it's symptomatic of a society whose thinking on this issue extends roughly to "guns are scary and bad."

FREEDOM: GENERALLY CONSIDERED A GOOD THING

Let's start with the principles at stake. Quite often I hear people say things like "nobody needs a gun" as though this alone justifies bans. What the hell, people? Where else does that argument work? The idea that you must 'need' to do something in order to be allowed to do it is incredibly dangerous and kind of offensive, not to mention unfair.

Freedom matters, damn it, and this includes the freedom to pursue whatever hobby or lifestyle, unless there's a damn good reason to deprive you of it. We may not understand or agree with recreational shooting or gun collecting, but surely the fact that half a million people own and use guns enough to pay for a license and registration indicates that it's an entirely valid hobby and lifestyle.

To get a gun license you need to pro-actively demonstrate a good reason, and "I like guns and am trained and want to own them" is not considered a good enough reason by itself. This sucks. I can't think of another dangerous implement where there's that level of burden for licensing. When you get a boat license they don't make you demonstrate a "good reason" for join a boating club.

If I were a gun owner over the last 15 years, I would feel bullied, scapegoated and misrepresented by my treatment from the press and from major political parties, I'd be pretty angry at my subculture being labelled criminal and threat. Remember when John Howard wore a visible bulletproof vest to a meeting with sport shooters? How insulting!



**LEAVE THEM
SHOOTERS
ALONE**

SEAN LAWSON

Just to point out the obvious, law changes only affect those who followed the licensing rules to begin with. Not bikie gangs or drug dealers, just honest sport shooters and farmers. For gun owners, every knee-jerk "tightening" of laws, every change to the categories and licenses, is a bureaucratic hassle, often costs money, and suddenly renders prized personal possessions illegal to own. This is pretty much exactly the definition of punishing the wrong people. It's frustrating as hell to be on the receiving end of blunt populist legislative instruments. Just ask anyone who values an uncensored internet about how it feels to be collateral damage in the fight against child porn.

CORRELATION AND CAUSATION

So, given that morally, imposing restrictions should require them to actually work, let's look at the statistics of the situation. Have our laws worked? Do we at least have cause for these ever-changing impositions on law-abiding shooters? The gun debate abuses statistics like no other, everything works on gut feelings and dodgy distortions. The problem both sides have is that they are trying to prove causal relationships that don't exist. In gun debates, correlation always means causation. No. It's all bullshit. How can we isolate a factor like gun ownership levels or laws as a cause of crime rates? Internationally, there are countries with many guns and low crime (Finland, Switzerland), many guns and high crime (the USA), few guns and high crime (the UK) and few guns and low crime (Japan), and just about every dot on the chart in between. Guns are obviously not the key variable.

Looking at Australia, there's zero provable relationship between the successive changes in gun laws and our crime rates. The last decade's waves of laws have not altered the situation, all the trends currently in existence were there before Port Arthur and Howard's laws. Gun crime, like other crime, has been dropping since the 1980s. Murder, armed robbery and attempted murder have all been trending downwards since the 1980s or earlier. Aside from assault,

Why is a drug dealer or bikie gang member going to care if an illegal gun charge is added to their rap sheet?

serious crime is going down across the board! This should be a cause for celebration! The 1996 laws (aside from forcing Tasmania to adopt a proper licensing system) and all subsequent restrictions have been pointless and done nothing except taking a bunch of valuable stuff from people who weren't a danger to anyone.

OUTLAWS WITH GUNS...

In terms of statistics and gun laws, one is key. In 2006, according to the Australian Institute of Criminology, only "13 per cent of offenders who used a firearm were licensed to own the firearm and 10 per cent of the firearms used were registered to the offender." This is why licensing and registration are good things, they separate good gun owners from bad ones, because drug dealers and other ne'er-do-wells are not exactly keen to register with the government. Most crimes have always been committed with illegal weapons. The way you fight gun crime is through an effective customs regime and better anti-trafficking enforcement. Let's spend money on that instead of buying back random formerly legal guns.

If you think about it, how could buybacks and bans on certain weapons be possibly expected to work to reduce gun crime rates? Claims like "gun buyback halves deaths" are statistical nonsense, yet they are often made by governments and advocacy groups. Are we safer when the government takes a bunch of rifles off farmers and sports shooters and makes people weld shut their antiques? Why is a drug dealer or bikie gang member going to care if an illegal gun charge is added to their rap sheet? Do gun buybacks stop bikies from arming themselves illegally like they've always done? Where is the incentive? Given that illegal guns are mostly the ones used in crimes, how the hell is any restriction on legal firearms going to affect that?

So if the laws don't affect crime rates either way, why do they keep being tightened? The answer is that it's good politics. It's a simple pattern. A major shooting occurs, the easiest thing for Labor or Liberal to do is enact some new law, which means picking some type of gun to ban or adding some new requirement to license laws to make them harder to get. Guns and people that own them legally are a powerless scapegoat, their most powerful voice is a weird fringe party that gets constantly mocked. Any protest or complaint about the latest arbitrary rule changes just makes people think of those kooks in the anarchic gun-riddled dystopia that is America.

Let's get serious. Laws are not magical and won't stop criminals from being criminals. Freak rampages will occasionally occur, we can't legislate against the determined lone nut. Gun laws, beyond the very basic degree of customs enforcement, registration and licensing which we've had for a long time, are not keeping us safe. Illegal guns exist and can't be stopped with strict regulations on legal firearms ownership.

Maybe by continually tightening legal ownership, we're affecting the black market supply slightly, but all that does is push the cost up a little. It doesn't change the fact that a committed person can acquire some seriously scary black market weaponry in any major city for a few thousand dollars. By changing the rules on legal gun owners every few years, we're basically bullying people from a fringe subculture to make ourselves feel better about crime and safety, without actually affecting the situation at all. Maybe it's time to back off and leave the shooters alone.

One Night in Germany

ELSE KENNEDY learns what it means to live on the street.

One night of a month-long cycling journey through Germany, I found myself without money and alone on the streets of one of the country's biggest cities. In the city's central park I met a woman called Miriam, a homeless person with obvious mental difficulties who had lived the past eight years on the streets. This is partly her story, partly mine.

Miriam is a tired looking woman with a nervous, high pitched laugh and bristles on her chin. She is 41, but in the darkness and her big hat and clothes she could be any age. She sees me sitting alone, and by way of greeting, she asks if she can drink my water. "Bist du auf der Strasse?" Are you on the streets? I am exhausted and crying, but she doesn't ask why until later. "Tonight, yes". She tells me that she is hungry, she is always hungry. With the little money I have, I go to buy us a pizza.

She is afraid to let me go, only reassured when I leave my pack under her bench. When I do come back she holds my hands and says she knew we could trust each other. "Du und ich, Elsa". You and I. "We can sleep next to each other tonight."

The other homeless men come to hassle her sometimes. She says she didn't sleep at all the night before, for fear of them. "Du und ich, Elsa." She rests her head on my shoulder and holds my arm like a child. "Kein Angst Heute Nacht." No fear tonight. She laughs suddenly, high-pitched and nervous. She has only one half-black tooth in the right front of her top row. Pizza oil and tomato sauce line her bottom lip.

When it gets dark I lie down on the grass. It is a warm night and with my jacket on and my sleeping bag behind my head, I am not cold.

Miriam paces around nervously. We are in a small grove between clumps of trees. One side opens out to a lawn, and there is a walking path about fifteen metres away. A lamp shines through a gap in a big, low-branched pine tree. She worries that it is too bright and that 'the men' can see us here. She knows another place, she says, where there are benches by a monument. But it's even worse over there. The benches are uncomfortable and you can't stretch out.

Eventually she comes and lies down beside me. "I'm glad I met you," she says. She asks me why I was crying, and I tell her I went been to the 'Bahnhofs Mission' to ask for a place to sleep and they sent me away. "That was why you were crying?" she asks. "Eight years I am on the streets now. I don't cry any more."

She still recalls the day with excitement. She spends the day's money the same day she gets it, and it rarely buys a full meal. That night she has 50 cents in her pocket. Her food for the day was a roll of bread and a cup of coffee.

This is one of the richest cities on earth, and there are no public taps or free public bathrooms. Every day she must spend 30 cents each time she wants to use the toilet or fill her bottle with water. There is nowhere to sleep and she gets no assistance from the government.

I found myself without money and alone on the streets of one of the country's biggest cities.

As I drift off to sleep there is movement under the branches of the pine tree. I sit bolt upright and clench my fists, straining to see where it comes from in the darkness. The movement freezes. "Hallo?" I venture. "Nein, sei ruhig," says Miriam. Be quiet. She is lying beside me, calmly sorting and re-sorting a collection of photographs torn from magazines that she keeps in a plastic pouch on a string around her neck. The movement starts up again. There is a dark shape beneath the branches. I can just make out a sleeping sack being unrolled. The shape lies down and begins to mutter in a long, monotonous rhythm.

At 5am the park begins slowly filling with light. Miriam and I, both in our sleeping bags now, had slept side-by-side, surrounded by a circle of our belongings. At 5.30 the first bike-riders ride along the path, looking curiously but without surprise at our makeshift camp. The ducks by the pond begin to splash into the water, and everywhere birds begin lifting into the air. I get up quietly and pack my things.

Miriam is still asleep when I leave at 5.45am. The grass is damp with dew and shining with the first light. I do something I will regret: I don't say goodbye. When I leave I don't go back with the breakfast I promised. I am afraid Miriam will freak out, tell me that she needs me, ask me to stay.

Depart. Decamp.

I leave because I can. Because I have enough money to survive. Because I am young and able, with skills and labour I can sell, and friends and relatives to fall back on when I am desperate.

Desert. Evacuate.

I leave because I know that there are millions of men and women like Miriam. That I cannot buy them all breakfast, and that even if I could, tomorrow they would be hungry again.

Abandon.

I reconciled my careless departure by telling myself that Miriam was one of thousands. Telling myself she wouldn't mind, that street people come and go all the time. But she was more than one of thousands. She called me "my friend from Australia". After eight years living alone on the streets, she said she didn't have any friends. "You are a good person," she said. "You are not afraid of me."

She was my friend, and I was perhaps her only friend. For a night I eased the pain. For a night she ate until she was full and slept without fear. And then I was gone, my absence a fallen bridge between two worlds. I should at least have said goodbye.

Thou Shalt Not Bom

Ryan Gilbert-Wilson knows how to build bombs, but doesn't because he loves you all.

When was the last time you considered stealing something? I mean seriously thought through and planned a process that would involve the transfer of something desirable into your possession with no money changing hands? If you sat down, put in some planning, possibly even got a few mates involved, there is no reason you couldn't successfully plan and carry out some form of heist. Getting caught is a possibility but if you go about it right the probability is extremely low. Were suspicion even to fall upon you it would be unlikely to stick – you're an upstanding member of the community, attend a fine tertiary institution, you have no real motive and no necessity to steal. End result: you gain, society loses, it's a tempting equation, so why haven't you stolen something recently?

For the majority of you the reason why you don't commit petty larceny isn't just because you are a wuss who stresses about getting caught. The real reasons have already been stated above – you don't need to, and on the whole you quite like society. These two reasons are actually intertwined, because the reason you quite like society stems from the fact that it has given you an environment in which to live where theft is an unnecessary extravagance that you can get by without (see, you're not just a wuss).

For all we complain about it, on a relative scale Australia is a great place to live. It provides a low risk, low crime environment with excellent opportunities in whatever field you wish to pursue. It's only natural that you feel a sense of belonging and gratitude to the functional and cohesive society in which you live and hence that you're resistant to damaging this society for purely your own personal gain.

If this gratitude that Australian society engenders is enough to prevent the majority of us from committing small crimes against society such as iPod theft, is it any wonder that the enormous societal damage caused by committing a domestic terrorist act is utterly abhorrent and inconceivable to most residents of this country?

As with theft, it is not that the opportunity is not available to us if we were to purposefully put our minds to it. As a chemistry student, I have daily access to reagents which can be used to create a similar bomb to those used in the 2005 London underground bombings. A bomb which could bring down a plane or kill many on a crowded train, with far reaching and damaging consequences for Australian society, wouldn't present any major difficulty to construct. Your initial response to this statement may be to ban all materials capable of making a bomb. Unfortunately this is neither feasible nor possible given materials as innocuous as a bag of flour and a match are capable of blowing up a room under the right conditions.

Since it is almost impossible to prevent those with major grievances getting their hands on some form of destructive material, what truly protects us from terrorist attack is that our society doesn't inspire enough hatred for most people to

Ab Thy Neighbour

contemplate a heinous act of destruction against us. Obviously there are those in the world who hate Australia, whether with reason or without. Good foreign policy goes some way to combating this problem but overseas born-and-bred terrorists are not our major risk factor as a nation. Experts in the field have stated an attack on Australian soil is most likely to be from so called 'home-grown terrorists', similar to the London bombings of 2005 where it was English residents and citizens who were so disillusioned with their own country they were willing to slaughter innocents just to strike a blow against the state.

Home-grown terrorists live in the same society, reside in the same communities, are subject to the same laws and governed by the same politicians as you and I. For all people wax lyrical about their distrust of our politicians and hatred for John Howard/Kevin Rudd etc., their policies are rarely crazy enough to incite violent or radical action against the state. Given that most of us like the society in which we live enough to avoid minor crime, it's not surprising that to this point we have had very few examples of home grown radicalisation against Australian society.

Our true defence against terrorism stems not from harsh anti-terrorist laws or punitive restrictions on possible bomb making materials, it stems from our society's ability to provide a good life for each of its citizens. Restrictions on dangerous goods and laws affecting investigation and prosecution of terrorist activities have been the extent of our response to the perceived increase in threat from terrorists. Far more important to our safety is nurturing a society which embraces all its citizens equally and provides the best opportunity for a fulfilling life – a true stakeholder of a functioning and enjoyable society is not likely to commit a terrorist act against that society. Embracing and engaging with citizens and groups in our community that are at risk of becoming disillusioned with their lot in life is far and away the most important policy for protecting Australians from terrorism.

That is why it's so dangerous when elected officials single out and target minorities or vulnerable groups, like Kevin Andrews did when he singled out Sudanese immigrants for not integrating. Twee as it sounds, it's our society's ability to provide a good environment for all its citizens which governs our safety from terrorists much more than any antiterrorist laws we introduce. It's important not to lose sight of this fact when dealing with the threat from terrorism, and to remember that Australia is kept safe by the fact it is currently a great place to live for all its citizens. Any anti-terrorist laws which threaten that fact will do much more harm than good.

Materials as innocuous as a bag of flour and a match are capable of blowing up a room under the right conditions.



ADVENTURES IN REPRODUCTIVE AUTONOMY

I have always known that I will never have children. It's not so much an active dislike as an absence of desire, and an absence is harder to describe than a presence. Most people, however subconsciously, tend to plot out their future on a mental landscape where children are as essential as the sky. My mental landscape, on the other hand, is a strange and cluttered place. It features a lot of reading and learning, lots of friends, love and sex, hilarious and sometimes heated arguments, and more different kinds of food than you can possibly imagine. It just doesn't have kids in it.

It's one thing to say you don't want kids. Ever. It's another thing to act on it. Late last year I decided to act. In more clinical terms, I decided to get myself sterilised. What transpired was a long, frustrating and ultimately unsuccessful process. But it taught me a few things about autonomy, consent, and the way our medical system responds when a young person makes a decision that goes against the norms of how we are told to lead our lives.

The first step was making an appointment with my local GP. Dr Fisher*, as we will call her, was a small, cheerful woman in a bright tropical skirt and clever glasses. Her eyes widened slightly when I told her why I had come, and she asked me to explain. So I did.

I explained that for me to fall pregnant at any stage of life would be catastrophic. That I had engaged in extensive research regarding contraception, and had determined that sterilisation was the best choice in terms of reliability, invasiveness and compliance. I described how a wonderful and improbable relationship had become unexpectedly serious, and how I wanted my partner to know with certainty that this was one thing he could not get from me.

I explained that while I understood I might regret the decision later, I had thought long and hard and found this extremely unlikely. Moreover, the risk of regret needed to be balanced against other factors. The distress I would experience were I to become pregnant. Damage to my relationship if my partner were to maintain unrealisable hopes. Relief from the daily stress of contraception.

Finally, somewhat defensively, I explained my feelings – or lack thereof – regarding children. “I know a lot of people would say this makes me cold,” I said, as if saying it on their behalf would cancel it out. “People tend to say that about people who aren’t like them,” she said. This is something I intend to keep in mind.

She was less than encouraging about my prospects of success, warning that personal values and fear of litigation would put a lot of doctors off performing the operation at the age of 21. But I had her support, and a letter of referral to a gynaecologist in my pocket, and that was enough.

So off to the gyno, Dr Chang*, whose first reaction was a theatrical cry of horror. “What – so soon, so young!” This quickly cooled to the admission this was not the first such request she had received. “These days there are many young women asking this. I think it’s because they are worried about the global warming.”

Despite her eccentric turn of phrase, Dr Chang turned out to be sensible and forthright. Observing that I seemed rational enough on the outside, she agreed to perform the operation subject to the approval of a psychiatrist, who would determine if I suffered from an underlying complex or disorder which distorted my reasoning. “Psychiatrists know these things. They will ask you questions, turn up all the dark corners of your mind.”

That is how I ended up at the office of one Dr Richardson*, therapist-at-large in a successful inner-city practice – the final hurdle in between me and complete reproductive autonomy.

Now Dr Richardson was a practitioner of no small repute. A couple of years ago, he’d given a talk about mental illness that had made one of the national papers. He maintained a successful private practice and lectured at a large university. Most importantly to my mind, he was the first hit when I searched his name on Google. I was confident he would make a fair and thoughtful assessment.

‘It’s one thing to say
you don’t want kids.
Ever.
It’s another thing to
act on it.’



In person Dr Richardson was thin and softly spoken, and had a slow stare that seemed to scope me out without looking me exactly in the eye. He took notes constantly as we went through what I imagine are the standard things that come up on a therapist's couch – my family and childhood, my relationship with my parents. I described my aversion to motherhood, as well as some basic statistics about contraception, a topic with which he seemed unfamiliar. He quizzed me about mood disorders, depression and stress.

The interesting bit came about fifteen minutes into the interview. "Now, of course I'd be generalising here..." he began, and my heart sank. Much like the oft-maligned "No offence, but...", I have rarely known the phrase "Of course I'm generalising" to be followed by anything less than inane.

"Of course I'm generalising, but - children are very important for people of your...well, your background?"

"Um, not particularly. My parents wouldn't be happy about this, for lots of reasons, but my background really wouldn't be the issue."

"And your partner is of the same...background?"

"Um, no."

"So what...background – is your partner?"

"White, actually." And then, in case that wasn't definitive enough to put a stop to this line of questioning, I added "Quite white."

The rest of the interview was unremarkable. When it was finished, Dr Richardson said he wouldn't be able to give an answer straight way. He said he needed to research the nature of the procedure I was seeking before reaching a decision.

A month later, I returned to my GP to receive the outcome, which turned out to be a decisive No. Dr Richardson had concluded that I was "too young" and that I might regret my choice in future. Furthermore, his research into alternative contraceptive devices had led him to believe that other methods were sufficient.

I think that Dr Richardson got it wrong.

I am sure he is usually an excellent psychiatrist and a decent individual. He sincerely tried to do his best for me, and to make a clear appraisal of my interests¹. However, I believe he failed to respect my right to autonomy as an individual and an adult. In doing so he overstepped the boundaries of the relationship between professional and client.

1. It was also kind of him to bulk-bill the half hour session as I had recently lost my job.

If this sounds like a big call, let me explain. Dr R wielded power over me as a professional. His decision constrained the choices available to me. It took away a tool I could have used to shape the course of my future.

I think most people would agree that individual freedom is important. Authority and coercion should be exercised sparingly, and only as a last resort. The professional-client relationship is one of the special circumstances in which we allow one adult to control the behaviour of another.

We give power to professionals because they know things we don't. For example, a doctor may diagnose my cold and give me a prescription; without the prescription, there are certain drugs I'm not allowed to buy. This is fair because the doctor has medical expertise. She is better placed to choose a drug than me. Similarly, a psychiatrist may diagnose a disorder such as depression which might cloud my judgement and obstruct me from making a rational choice.

There is no other area in which autonomy is so desperately, urgently important as that of reproductive rights.

If Dr Richardson had based his refusal on the suspicion that I suffered such a disorder, or that my rational capacities were otherwise impaired, he would have been within his rights to withhold approval for the operation. This, however, was not the basis of his decision. In his letter to my GP, he referred to the effectiveness of alternate forms of contraception and suggested that I use them instead. Now Dr Richardson is no family planner, as evidenced by the fact that I actually spent time during the interview explaining how failure rates for contraception are calculated. If anyone in that room could be considered 'expert', it was me. So why should he be able to override my decision?

Then there's the 'background' thing. Frankly, this just shouldn't have entered the conversation. To deny someone access to a service based on ancestry is discrimination, plain and simple. Now Dr Richardson is certainly not your garden-variety bigot. I want to stress that he and his staff treated me with courtesy at all times. Still, I can't see how my ethnicity could possibly have been relevant to anything. Even if it were true that non-white people enjoy reproducing more than white people, this wouldn't be a reason to withhold the procedure. That would say in effect that my job is to lead a standard ethnic life, as opposed to determining my own course as an individual.

Finally there's the question of regret. Theoretically, I know it's a possibility. I just don't see why it justifies blocking off my options. People are allowed to take risks in all other

areas of life. A 21 year old can get married, take out a mortgage, vote Liberal – hell, they can even have kids if they want. There’s an irreversible decision if there ever was one.

Saying I shouldn’t get sterilised because I might regret it later only makes sense if you view parenthood as the norm, and childlessness as an aberration. Maybe I will want to get pregnant in future, and be sad that I can’t. Or maybe I will end up having a child that I don’t want as a consequence of being denied this procedure, and suffer feelings of guilt, anger and loss. Saying that one of these risks is acceptable and the other is not reveals a tacit assumption that a life with children has greater value than life without.

I know plenty of people who believe that “bearing and raising a child is the most profoundly human thing that we can experience”, to quote Clive Hamilton. The continuity of generations makes life worth living. Motherhood is the full realisation of femininity. Etc. I happen to think that a truly flourishing life can encompass a thousand things other than children, but that’s by the by. Everyone’s entitled to an opinion. They can shout it from the rooftops, if they like. Just not in my fallopian tubes.

Ultimately, Dr Richardson’s job as a psychiatrist was to assess my capacity to make a rational judgement. Having done so, he should have removed himself from the equation. His feelings and values and fears had nothing to do with it.

These days there are many young women asking [about sterilisation]. I think it’s because they are worried about the global warming.

There is no other area in which autonomy is so desperately, urgently important as that of reproductive rights. There is nothing else so personal, so intimate and so immune to outside critique. Only you can know the depths of your desire to have children, and only I know the strength of my conviction that I do not. And only my body will bear the consequences of that decision.

Dr Richardson’s decision was relayed to me via Dr Fisher, at the same local clinic where it had all begun. She commiserated with my disappointment, and said I might try again in a few years. With her wonderful doctorish pragmatism, she also suggested that if I wanted to avoid the pressure to have kids, I should just tell future boyfriends that I “couldn’t”. “Most people won’t ask – they’ll just assume it’s something physical.”

It’s good advice, I think. Neither would it strictly be a lie. Psychologically, I really am unable to be a mother. Still, I’d prefer to play things straight. “I don’t want children with you or anyone, and I have taken steps to ensure this is physically impossible” seems to be more honest way of dealing with the issue than half-truths and induced misunderstandings. Thanks to Dr Richardson, this is not an option available to me.

I remember how during my first consultation Dr Fisher had shared some of her own experiences. She’d had a child with her first husband and wanted another, desperately, but he hadn’t been willing. They’d split for unrelated reasons and she’d ended up having a second baby with someone new. It seemed like a large part of her life had been marked by the longing for children. Interesting that she, in contrast to others, was able to imagine I could lead a life of undiluted wonderful without.

I still don’t want kids. Ever. And I am hopeful of finding a physician or psychiatrist, perhaps two or three years down the track, who will assist me in rendering this permanent and irreversible. It doesn’t have to be so hard to comprehend that people are different, that some people want different things from others, and that there’s room in the medical system for all of us.

It takes shrewdness, imagination and a bit of a stretch of empathy, but it can be done. In the meantime, I will be trying to get on with some of that childless undiluted wonderful. Psychiatrists of the world watch out!



ALISON O'CONNOR

For more than three years, I have read every article, report and public document I could find about private military companies, or PMCs; then sought out more which were not a matter of public record. When I was on exchange in England, much of my time revolved around finding employees of these companies and asking them to talk about their experiences.

PMCs occupy a spurious position in public consciousness. There is something alluring about the industry, claiming to protect those incapable of protecting themselves. It gives them the aura of avenging righteousness like Batman cleaning up Gotham City, rather than a vigilante with an ABN. In my experience, they fall somewhere in-between these two characterisations.

Every aspect of a PMC is contested: what constitutes a PMC, what tasks they should undertake, should they even be allowed to exist at all. However, simply by persisting they are becoming an accepted part of the political and military landscape. ArmorGroup held the contract to protect UN Headquarters in Iraq, and even NGOs like the World Wildlife Fund have been known to commission them. America sent Dyncorp personnel in lieu of troops in East Timor. The Iraqi and Afghani police forces were trained by PMCs.

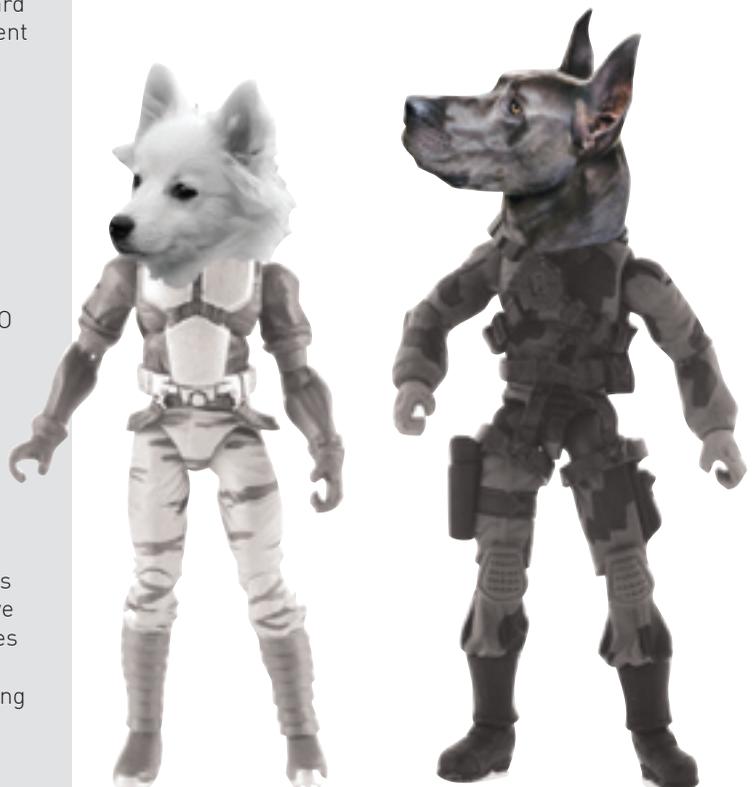
In Iraq especially, the PMC has been a vital part of both the invasion and reconstruction process, perhaps more than in any other conflict. There are more than 20,000 personnel currently serving in Iraq from private military companies. Considering that they are designed to provide "support" they certainly have been hands-on. During the invasion of Iraq, PMCs had responsibility for weapons systems onboard ships, and were responsible for offensive tactical equipment including B-2 Bombers and Apache Helicopters.

THE DOGS OF WAR

Each company has a distinct culture and clientele, and a different understanding of what their role is in any given conflict. Blackwater is perhaps the most (in)famous PMC after their employees were involved in the shooting of the Iraqi Vice-President's bodyguard, as well as the deaths of up to 17 Iraqi civilians in Baghdad Square. The former CEO of Blackwater, Erik Prince, was renowned for his cowboy attitude to the US Senate Inquiry into PMC actions in Iraq.

The resignation of Prince, and the renaming to Xe in an attempt to separate the entity from its reputation seems to have been in vain, given that the US Government has declined to retain their services and has awarded the contract worth an undisclosed amount to Triple Canopy. Re-branding is common in this industry – trace back Aegis Defence, and you'll find a surprising overlap with Executive Outcomes, and other companies before that. As companies become associated with scandal, they are dissolved and new entities created using the same personnel, often taking existing contracts.

Bringing the Dogs of War to Heel



It is promising that despite the reprinted business cards and new teddy bear mascots (I'm not joking) Blackwater is starting to become subject to legal regulation. Five former Blackwater employees are facing trial over the events of 16 September 2007 - the massacre of 14 Iraqi civilians, according to the indictment. The Iraqi Government maintains it was 17 civilians. The contractors could not be touched under Iraqi law because of "Order 17" which decreed that there was no legal liability for US personnel in Iraq. Order 17 was repealed by the US Congress in 2007, and this is the first case of non-Defence Department personnel being held liable under the Military Extraterritorial Jurisdiction Act. It is a test case, and if successful would set a precedent for PMC personnel facing criminal proceedings for human rights abuses, irrespective of where they're committed.

This has great potential, as it is not only Blackwater personnel who have been involved in misconduct. Employees from CACI and Titan were involved in the mistreatment of prisoners at Abu Ghraib. Although, to return to Blackwater, there is another point to consider: US State Department complicity.

A Blackwater employee killed the body guard of the Iraqi Vice President. In an email sent after the story broke on Al-Arabiyah television, a Blackwater representative said that "At least the ID of the shooter will take the heat off us". They also acted with alacrity to ensure that his Christmas bonus, Fourth of July bonus, Completion bonus and return airfare were not paid. No further punitive action was taken by Blackwater.

These actions are deplorable. It gets worse though. A US State Department employee advised Blackwater to lower the compensation payout, because "A sum this high will set a terrible precedent", before apologising for "drop[ping] this in [your] lap right after Christmas".

As long as the email is courteous ...

BOLTING THAT STABLE DOOR

There are puritans who are calling for an end to the use of PMCs altogether. There's a phrase involving a horse and a stable door that seems relevant at this time, especially since the PMC is not simply a phenomenon of the War on Terror.

In 1987 and 1993 more than 5 million soldiers around the world were made redundant. The end of the Cold War saw reductions in military sizes, especially forces which were not capable of small scale, rapid deployment in civilian contexts. The expansion of PMC activity can be seen to stem from the end of the Cold War, although companies like ArmorGroup have existed since the 1960s and Vinnell Corporation was created during the Great Depression.

In the 1990s, PMCs were intimately involved in "stability" programmes in cases of State break-up or break-down. PMCs have had a discernable presence in police training, intelligence-gathering, and in peacekeeping operations in Bosnia, Kosovo, East Timor, Haiti, Congo, Sierra Leone,

and Papua New Guinea, among others. There have been reports about how cost effective they have been, and how useful in creating a sense of order, and doing tasks that the military could not otherwise manage. There have also been reports of rape and racketeering by PMC employees and prostitution rings in Bosnia run by Dyncorp employees.

Despite this litany of poor behaviour by PMCs, there is a legitimate argument for their existence. There are some tasks for which the military is ill-equipped, including having adequate translators for local dialects, or for protecting non-military targets when combat is increasingly urban and infrastructure is a popular target for guerilla groups. As the concept of legitimate and illegitimate targets blurs, the PMC is often used to protect auxiliary targets.

TIGHTENING THE LEASH

To be honest, I haven't been a rabid Obama enthusiast. I felt no need to brand my Facebook profile with "Yes We Can", and although I was excited about the potential he represented, I wasn't convinced that rhetorical change would result in policy change. I've now become increasingly optimistic as President Obama unveils plans to walk back much of the 'War on Terror' policy, including promising to shut down Guantanamo Bay.

For the first time since I've been chasing these events, I feel we're seeing encouraging movement. Obama is discussing overhauling the bidding process for contracts, and changing the structure of the contracts themselves to make PMCs more accountable. Individuals shouldn't be used as scapegoats in a context where systems and Government policy are likely just as culpable.

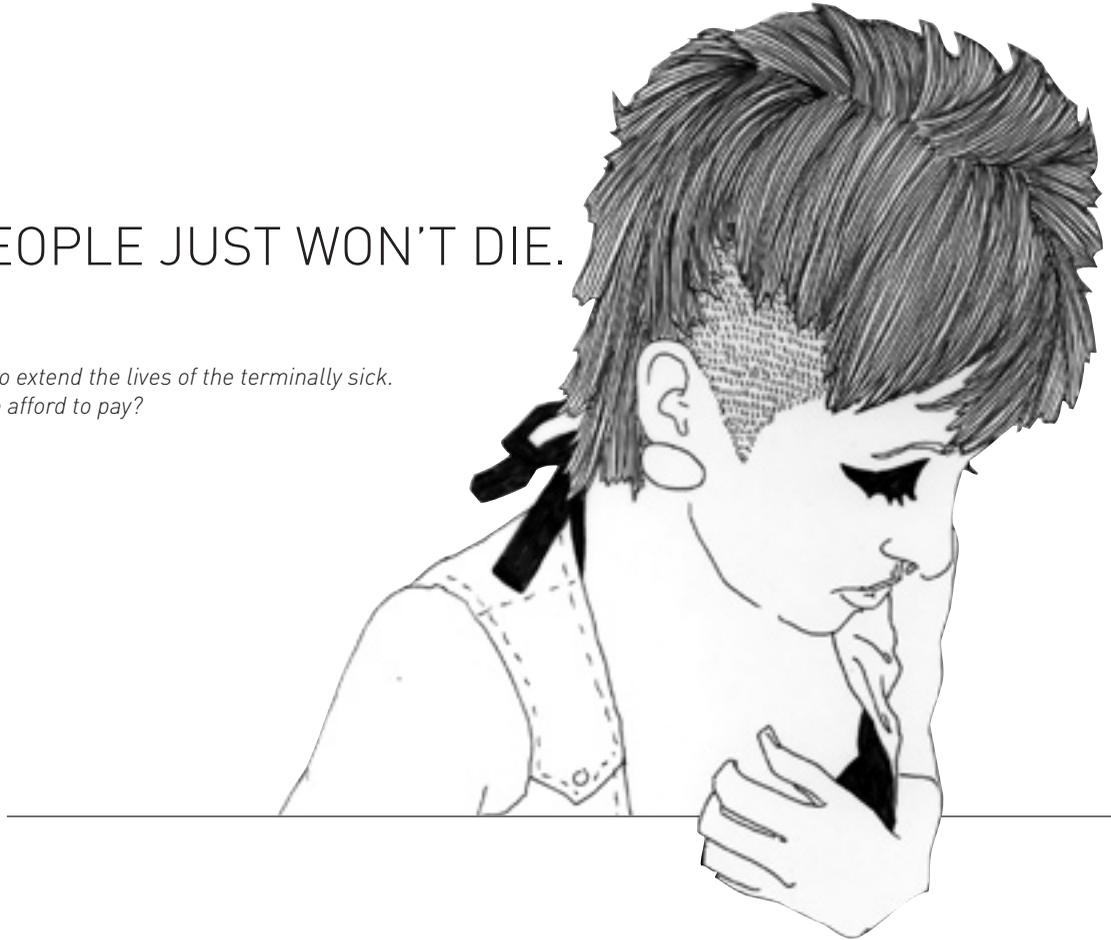
Individuals are being held responsible for their actions and hopefully we're seeing structural change as President Obama implements his policies. Could this unfamiliar feeling be optimism?



WHEN PEOPLE JUST WON'T DIE.

EMILY BEK

*Soon we will be able to extend the lives of the terminally sick.
But how much can we afford to pay?*



Sooner or later, we are going to 'cure' cancer – and it'll feel like an anticlimax. Drugs are already transforming cancer from a terminal disease to a chronic one. Some of these treatments are available now; others will become available over the next ten to twenty years. Cancer sufferers will be able to survive until another cause of death 'intervenes' - that is, they will be able to live long enough to die of something else.

There is no doubt that this represents a huge medical advance. It will bring a quantum change to the implications of a cancer diagnosis. However, it will also add to another growing challenge – how society manages ever-increasing numbers of people with chronic illnesses.

Currently, we have some fairly limited ideas about the rights of people with chronic disease. In most circumstances, they have the right to choose their treatment or to refuse treatment. They also have access to publicly funded medical care. They are entitled to nursing home care if they need it, and financial support if they are unable to work.

However, the elderly and chronically ill also have certain responsibilities. We expect that they will fund their own living expenses when they can no longer work through the superannuation system. Those who can afford it must pay for all or part of their nursing home care. For some expensive drugs, the right to publically funded medical care is also limited. Patients are required to pass regular 'fitness' tests to demonstrate that their condition is improving. If not, the PBS subsidy for the medication is withdrawn.

Should these existing rights be extended or reduced? More bluntly, how much are we willing to pay to care for the chronically ill – whose numbers are set to explode?

Cost is of the essence. Cancer accounts for over 30% of deaths in Australia each year. If cancer patients start living longer, there will be a vast increase in the number of elderly people living longer without necessarily being fit enough to work. However, the kind of medicines that will allow people to survive for extended periods are enormously expensive. Drugs like Gleevec, Imatinib and Herceptin currently cost around \$25,000 per year for maintenance regimes.

Let's put these numbers in perspective. If the average wage in Australia is \$50,000 subject to 30% tax plus 10% GST, that's \$20,000 tax revenue per worker per year. So for each cancer patient receiving treatment, more than one taxpayer will be required just to meet their drug costs - let alone other medical expenses. Although it appears self-evident that sick people have a right to medical care, that might not be a right we are able to provide.

These issues can be resolved in part by negotiating cheaper access to drugs. Pharmaceutical companies will not charge so much if no-one can afford to pay their prices. That doesn't make business sense. However, these new drugs will be more expensive to develop and manufacture than drugs currently on the market. Since 1970, the amount of money invested by pharmaceutical companies in research and development has increased by 13% per annum. Despite this expenditure, the number of applications that the FDA receives for new drugs has remained constant, and even started to decline in the last few years. This represents a 10-fold decrease in the returns to R&D.

Pharmaceutical companies have in the past recouped their R&D costs by patenting new drugs and then selling them widely. Think Viagra. However, this model is not applicable to the emerging treatments for cancer. The diversity of tumours means that the market for any one targeted drug therapy is likely to be very small. The basis for these new management therapies lies in treating the unique underlying genetic cause of each tumour. For example, a recent analysis of colon cancers found that close to 50% of tumours have a mutation in a protein kinase gene, but only 3-5% of patients shared mutations in any particular gene.

In addition to the problem of smaller target markets, many new medicines have high production costs. Complex nanoparticles, or protein-based drugs like antibodies, are hard to manufacture on a large scale, sensitive during distribution, and have a short shelf life. We should certainly endeavour to make drugs cheaper, but it will not be possible to make them cheap enough for unlimited access.

Can we limit access to drugs for the chronically sick? The idea is distasteful and something of a taboo - but it is one we must somehow find the language to discuss.

Imagine these case studies. First, a mother with two young children, whose breast cancer can be managed with healthy lifestyle and maintenance treatment with a new therapy costing \$25,000 per year. In this case, I expect most Australians would be happy to subsidise those drugs. But what about a 60 year old single man with chronic myeloid leukaemia, whose condition can be controlled with long term Imatinib and will require full time nursing home care. For how long should taxpayers cover these drugs? 20 years? That will cost \$500,000 for the Imatinib alone, plus nursing home costs and any other medical treatment.

Finally, what about a 75 year old grandmother with breast cancer, also dying of kidney failure, who might live for another one or two years if her breast cancer is managed with the same drugs. Can the taxpayers of the future afford to pay \$25,000-\$50,000 to extend her life?

UNLIMITED ACCESS TO DRUGS MAY NOT ALWAYS BE IN THE PATIENT'S BEST INTEREST.

If we control our healthcare spending by discriminating between patients, is there a fair basis for discrimination? The pattern we risk falling into is one where patients can have access to 'established' drugs, but not to 'new' drugs. That is not a fair distinction because it is not based on the health or disease of patients, but rather on the logistics of drug development and approval. It also creates a disincentive against developing new drugs. So can we provide drugs based on the health of the patient, or the quality of life the drugs can provide?

If we do manage to cover the full costs of therapy for these three people and all others like them, we create another risk. By funding such expensive treatments, we risk making pharmaceutical companies so dependent on revenues from chronic illness that they are reluctant to invest in developing cures.



Cures are inherently low volume drugs: they work quickly and effectively. While they can probably be sold at a premium, it would have to be a huge premium to compete with 20 years of ongoing sales from maintenance drugs.

We could make governments fund the development of cures – but this would be quite a shock for governments! Of the 284 new drugs approved in the US between 1990 and 1999, 93.3% were developed by industry and 3.5% with funding from non-profit organisations. Only 3.2% were developed using government funding. If we are to avoid the difficult process of weaning ourselves off private money, we must preserve the incentives for pharmaceutical companies to develop illness-ending drugs.

Unlimited access to drugs may not always be in the patient's best interest. The proportion of cancer patients who receive chemotherapy in the last two weeks of their life is steadily rising. Not only is this very possibly a waste of medications, it generally does nothing to improve the comfort of the patient as these drugs often have terrible side effects. Many physicians are reluctant to advise patients to 'give up', and so the choice to cease treatment may not be properly presented to the patient even though a comfortable, dignified death might be better for all concerned.

THE IDEA IS DISTASTEFUL AND
SOMETHING OF A TABOO – BUT IT IS
ONE WE MUST SOMEHOW FIND THE
LANGUAGE TO DISCUSS.

Some patients, however, choose to end their lives. The Swiss organisation Dignitas is the only legal organisation that provides a euthanasia service. They cater for Swiss citizens and for international visitors, through a system that involves numerous consultations with doctors and the prescription of a high-dose sleeping medication or helium gas. In

Australia, the language of the euthanasia debate has been focused up to this point on the terminally ill. This is something that will almost certainly change as there is less terminal and more chronic illness in our society.

In conclusion, increasing numbers of chronically ill people in the future will raise these questions:

Who will pay for their drugs, and for how long? Is there a fair way of discriminating between patients? Who will invest in cures? And finally, should people with chronic illnesses be given the right to die?



ESKIMO NELL



When a man grows old and his balls grow cold,
And the tip of his prick turns blue;
When it bends in the middle like a one-string fiddle,
He can tell you a tale or two.

So pull up a chair and stand me a drink,
And a tale to you I'll tell
About Dead-Eye Dick and Mexican Pete
And a harlot named Eskimo Nell.

When Dead-Eye Dick and Mexican Pete
Go forth in search of fun,
It's Dead-Eye Dick that swings the prick,
And Mexican Pete the gun.

When Dead-Eye Dick and Mexican Pete
Are sore, depressed and sad,
It's always a cunt that bears the brunt,
But the shooting's not so bad.

Now Dead-Eye Dick and Mexican Pete
Lived down by Dead Man's Creek,
And such was their luck that they'd had no fuck
For nigh on half a week.

Oh, a moose or two, and a caribou,
And a bison cow or so,
But for Dead-Eye Dick with his kingly prick,
This fucking was mighty slow.

Dick pound on his cock with a huge piece of rock,
And he said, "I want to play!,
It's been almost a week at this fucking creek,
With no cunt coming my way!"

So, do or dare, this horny pair
Set off for the Rio Grande:
Dead-Eye Dick with his kingly prick,
And Pete with his gun in hand.

Then, as they blazed their noisy trail,
No man, their path withstood.
Many a bride, her husband's pride,
A pregnant widow stood.

They reached the strand of the Rio Grand
At the height of a blazing noon.
To slake their thirst, and do their worst,
They sought Black Mike's saloon.

The swinging doors they pushed back wide,
Both prick and gun flashed free.
"According to sex, you bleeding wrecks,
You'll drink or you'll fuck with me!"

Now, they'd heard of the prick of Dead-Eye Dick,
From the Yukon to Panama,
So, with scarcely worse than a muttered curse,
The fellows all sought the bar.

When Dick walked in to a house of sin,
The whores all cursed their luck,
Not even a tart dared let out a fart,
When he said - "I want to fuck!"

The girls they knew of his playful ways
Down on the Rio Grande,
And forty whores pulled down their drawers
At Dead-eye Dick's command.

For they saw the finger of Mexican Pete
Move on the trigger grip,
So they didn't wait and at a fearful rate
Those whores began to strip.

Now, Dead-Eye Dick was breathing quick
With lecherous snorts and grunts,
So forty butts were bared to view,
And likewise forty cunts.

Now, forty butts and forty cunts,
If you can use your wits,
And if you're slick, at arithmetic,
Makes exactly eighty tits.

Sure, eighty tits are a gladsome sight
For a man with a raging stand.
It may be rare in Berkeley Square,
But not on the Rio Grande!

Now Dead-Eye Dick had fucked a few
On the last preceding night,
This he had done just to have some fun
And to whet his appetite.

His phallic limb was in fucking trim.
As he backed and took a run,
He made a dart at the nearest tart,
and scored a hole in one.

The lady he bore to the dusty floor,
And there he filled her fine,
And though she grinned, it put the wind
Up the other thirty-nine.

When Dead-Eye Dick lets loose his prick,
He has no time to spare,
With speed and strength, combined with length,
He fairly singes hair.

He had made a dart at the next fair tart,
When into that harlot's hell
Strode a gentle maid who was unafraid:
Her name was Eskimo Nell.

But Dead-Eye Dick had got his prick
Well into number two,
When Eskimo Nell let out a yell.
She bawled to him, "Hey, you!"

Dick gave a flick of his muscular prick,
And the girl flew over his head,
He then wheeled about with an angry shout;
His face and his balls were red.

Nell glanced our hero up and down,
His looks she seemed to decry.
With utter scorn, she sneered at the horn
Which rose from his hairy thigh.

She blew the smoke of her cigarette
All over his steaming knob.
So utterly beat was Mexican Pete
That he failed to do his job.

It was Eskimo Nell who broke the spell
In accents clear and cool:
"You cunt-struck shrimp of a Yankee pimp!
You call that thing a tool?"

"If this here town can't take that down,"
She said to those cowering whores,
"There's another cunt that can do the stunt,
But it Eskimo Nell's, not yours."

She dropped her garments one by one
With an air of consummate pride,
And as she stood in her womanhood,
They saw the Great Divide.

She seated herself on a table top,
Where someone had left a glass.
With a twitch of her tits, she crushed it to bits
Between the cheeks of her ass.

She flexed her knees with supple ease,
And spread her thighs apart.
With a friendly nod to the mangy sod,
She gave him the cue to start.

Now, Dead-Eye Dick knew more than one trick,
And he meant to take his time,
For a woman like this was orgasmic bliss,
So he played the pantomime.

He flexed his asshole to and fro,
And made his balls inflate,
Until they looked like the granite knobs
On the top of a palace gate.

He blew his anus inside out,
His balls increased in size,
His mighty prick grew twice as thick
And reached almost to his eyes.

He polished his dick with alcohol,
Then, to make it steaming hot,
He finished the job, when he sprinkled his knob
With a cayenne pepperpot.

Then he did neither start to run
Nor did he take a leap,
Nor did he stoop, but with a swoop
Began a steady, forward creep.

As a marksman might, he took a sight
Along his mighty tool,
And his steady grin as he pushed it in
Showed a calculated cool.

Have you ever seen the pistons
On the mighty C.P.R.,
With the driving force of a thousand horse?
Well, then you know what pistons are.

Or, you think you do, but you've yet to see
The ins and outs of the trick
Of the work that's done on a non-stop run
By a fellow like Dead-Eye Dick.

But Eskimo Nell was no infidel,
As good as a whole harem
With the strength of ten in her abdomen
And the Rock of Ages between.

With nary a scream, she could take the stream
Like the flush of a watercloset.
Now, she gripped his cock like a Chatswood Lock
On the National Safe Deposit.

But Dead-Eye Dick would not come quick,
He meant to conserve his powers,
For if he'd a mind, he'd grind and grind
For sixteen solid hours.

Nell lay a while with a subtle smile,
Then the grip of her cunt grew keener,
And a squeeze of her thigh then sucked him dry
With the ease of a vacuum cleaner.

She performed this trick in a way so slick
As to set in complete defiance
The principal cause and basic laws
That govern sexual science.

She calmly rode through the phallic code
Which for years had withstood the test,
And the ancient rules of the classic schools
In a moment or two, went west.

Right here, my friend, we come to the end
Of copulation's classic:
The effect on Dick was sudden and quick
And akin to an anaesthetic.

He fell to the floor, and he knew no more,
His passions extinct and dead,
Nor did he shout as his cock fell out,
Though 'twas stripped right down to a thread.

Then, Mexican Pete did leap to his feet
To avenge his pal's affront,
With a jarring jolt of his blue-nosed Colt,
He rammed it up Nellie's cunt.

He rammed it hard to the trigger guard,
Then fired two times three,
But to his surprise, Nell closed her eyes
And smiled in ecstasy.

She rose to her feet with a smile so sweet,
Then "Bully," she said, "for you.
Though I might have guessed that that was the best
That you two poor pimps could do.

"When next, my friend, that you intend
To sally forth for fun,
Buy Dead-Eye Dick a sugar stick,
And yourself an elephant gun.

"I'm going forth to the frozen North
Where the peckers are hard and strong,
Back to the land of the frozen stand
Where the nights are six months long.

"It's hard as tin when they put it in
In the land where spunk is spunk.
Not a trickling stream of lukewarm cream,
But a solid, frozen chunk.

"Back to the land where they understand
What it means to fornicate,
Where even the dead sleep two in a bed
And the babies masturbate.

"Back to the land of the grinding gland,
Where the walrus plays with his prong,
Where the polar bear wanks off in his lair,
That's where they'll sing this song.

"They'll tell this tale on the Arctic trail
Where the nights are sixty below,
Where it's so damn cold the jonnies are sold
Wrapped up in a ball of snow.

"In the Valley of Death with baited breath,
That's where they'll sing it too,
Where the skeletons rattle in sexual battle
And the rotting corpses screw.

"Back to the land where men are Men,
I'll say 'Terra Bellicum,'
And there I'll spend my worthy end,
For the North is calling: 'Come!'"

Then Dead-Eye Dick and Mexican Pete
Slunk away from the Rio Grande,
Dead-Eye Dick with his useless prick,
And Pete with no gun in his hand.

When a man grows old and his balls grow cold,
And the tip of his prick turns blue,
And the hole in the middle refuses to piddle,
I'd say he was fucked, wouldn't you?

A Little Context...

GOOD MORNING,

Many years ago my sister attended NIDA. I loved reading *Tharunka*. In the course of recent house moving I have lost a box of precious personal papers, including issues of *Tharunka*.

The copy I'm particularly referring to had a wonderful irreverent homage to getting old. It was a poem which I think was entitled "Eskimo Nell" and began with the lines

"When man grows old
And his balls grow cold"...

Any chance anyone as old as me has a copy of this great "ode"? I don't want an archival copy of *Tharunka*, just a copy of the poem. If you can find the time to ask around this old disabled ex-hippy chook would be very grateful.

And keep the revolution alive. Peace man.
Right On.

Regards,
SHERIDAN DE GRUITER

PUBLIC LETTER TO MY CLIENTS

Top Bunk
Cell Block 77B
Long Bay Correctional Complex
Anzac Pde, Matraville

Dr Lurk

Dear Patients,

I write to you from behind the sullen bars of a public prison facility. Your letters have not been reaching me because the prison warden here has a streak of malice and finds it humorous to send me fake mail concocted by his own imagination. He has used this method to trick me into giving a diagnosis for his pet hamster against my will. The hamster had athlete's foot from too much time on the hamster wheel, but that is neither here nor there.

Unfortunately, I was recently arrested during my latest squabble with the New South Wales Police outside a popular disco club known as "The Stone Wall". I tried to explain to the security staff and, subsequently, the squadron of officers on duty, that all of the normal laws of society are suspended behind the Stone Wall but they would not accept this. I went to the discotheque with ten of my medical colleagues and used my stethoscope to joke around with some rugby league identities who didn't seem to enjoy being drugged and mentally overpowered by a group of older authoritative men. They have pressed charges against me, and my stethoscope has been confiscated and sterilized. Modern justice is just like Kafka said, I'm afraid. A large blind cockroach.

It troubles my professional instincts to leave what is, no doubt, a veritable refugee camp of ailments unattended among my constituency, and so I can only work from first principles and guess haphazardly at what afflicts you all in order to disseminate this week's medical advice.

Let me begin to organize your likely cases into three categories:

'Doctor, doctor, I have eaten a stale chewy cheeseburger at a university campus outlet whose food does not reflect the good character of its proprietor. I now have severe abdominal pain, nausea, vomiting and diarrhoea. Could it be bacterial food poisoning?'

It certainly could, but I would be careful to cast aspersions on the hygiene standards of a reputable campus food outlet. Young folk these days are far too eager to complain about a hint of feet in their pasta, or phlegm in their tabouli. I cannot complain of the catering here at Long Bay, but I remember my own breakfasts at the Round House back when I was a student - deary me, the horrors we put up with then. Bacon and eggs arranged to look like a woman's genitalia shocked my gentle eyes every single morning. It's a wonder I kept coming back, day after day.

'Doctor, I've been going jogging a lot lately and I seem to have a really sore knee which only gets worse each time I run. Could there be some meniscus missing or something?'

Physiotherapy isn't the only racket in the medical profession, but it is one of the slimiest. The last time I was given a good rub down by my sports medico he twisted my body into so many contortions that I left the waiting room looking like a pretzel! It was one of those times where you can say, "hey, I really feel like a pretzel", and the literal meaning corresponds with what is true!

I recommend you give up these notions of knee soreness and meniscus and examine the cause of your ailment: criminal idleness. Get a life or something, chappy. Life is too short to spend it hob-nobbing around a park in large stumpy circles while I accelerate past you in my gold Mercedes.

'O my God, I have swine flu!!'

It is curious to me that the outbreak began in Mexico, a refuge for brigands and people smugglers. If it weren't for the taco I would join the rest of the world in ostracizing that hovel, since I have nothing but disgust for so much shameless poverty. It is only a matter of time before our own lawless neighbours generate a similar pandemic, through their connivingly malnourished sea boat adventurers (brazenly self-labelled "asylum seekers") and this is probably what you have contracted. Don't call it "swine flu", call it "Sino flu". 'Out! I say!'

That is all. If you could contribute some money to my bail, I would be much in your debt. See you at the 'Wall,

Good regards,

Dr. Gordon Lurk



HOT

Babysitting as a teenager

So, when we were young we all babysat every weekend because we had no friends to hang out with on a Saturday night, right? Well I didn't, I babysat even though I was absolutely BRIMMING with friends, I was like a pond full of tadpoles where the pond represented my awesomeness and the tadpoles represented permanent fun-times. Except as someone who did and still does value money over anything else, I would go babysitting as regularly as possible, in order to save money for The Important Things like Hanson videos and ugly hairclips.

Babysitting was just one of those things that everyone did when they were young; it seemed that as long as you weren't the weird guy from my school who wore army fatigues to every mufti day, you could be assured that some poor desperate couple would pay you ten dollars an hour to play dress-up games with their kids and then eat all the packets of chips in their pantry that they were saving for school lunches.

My sister and I would often babysit together, and it would be a lot of fun. The night would start with one of the little girls asking to watch an Olsen twins movie. We'd plaster on an expression of grudging acquiescence as our pulses secretly raced with oppressed euphoria. When the girls wanted to snack on junk food we'd usually let them, unless they wanted to eat something we'd already earmarked as our own designated snack for when they went asleep. And then after we'd forced them to brush their teeth ("MUM AND DAD SAY WE DON'T HAVE TO EVER") we put them to bed and told them a story.

But here's the thing about the story. Those kids didn't want any old story about "that boy in PE with the twinkly blue eyes smiling at me" or "that boy in PE with the twinkly blue eyes saying that no, he didn't want to go out some time". They were only interested in one type of story: times when we had hurt ourselves. A typical story would go something like this:

Jess: So I guess I can tell you about the time that my sister broke her wrist.
Kid: Did it bleed?

Jess: ...No. It just broke. She didn't rip her hand off.

Kid: Oh.

Jess: She just wore a cast for a few months.

Kid: Can you tell us a story where you or her bled a lot or went to hospital?

Jess: I don't think so. We've been lucky...we haven't had that many injuries.

[Pause]

Kid: Ok. Goodnight.

NOT

Slogan t-shirts

Don't get me wrong, my friends: there are some t-shirt slogans that are great. For example, my friend Mike recently got one to wear clubbing that says "She's not my girlfriend" and I'm thinking of getting one to wear whenever I go somewhere with him that says "But I'm still carrying his child". I also have a shirt that says "Your a loser", which I have to supplement with my other Arts student clothing so that people know that I totally understand the irony. What a hilarious muddle! Making fun of bad spelling and grammar! Ha-Har! No wonder I am so well-loved!

But here's the problem with slogan t-shirts: if you're wearing something witty, or with a message, you feel like you've got to be 'on' all day, ready to converse about the t-shirt subject, or share a joke, or dodge punches to the crotch. It's why I stopped wearing my 'V is for Vegetarian' t-shirt. Every time I went to a restaurant the person serving me would say something like "How about offal pie? Hah hah hah!" and I would have to laugh along with them at their amazing joke. And herewith is the problem, readers. What if I'm not in a joking mood? What if I don't feel like being judged instantly by strangers? What if I suddenly get a crazy hankering for bratwurst? I know irony is a pretty elastic concept, but even I can't stretch it that far.

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JESS BELLAMY

Welcome to this week's Bellamy's Barometer, all about rights. I've chosen to define 'rights' in the most superficial way possible of 'the opposite of wrongs'. That way I can spew out the same old tripe you've come to know and love, while helping your quality of life improve exponentially thanks to my amazing life coach skillz. But that's enough of a hard-hitting political discussion; let's get into the MILD FUN TIMES!

My first impression of Buenos Aires was that people are extremely open-minded and especially tolerant towards public displays of affection. I was thrilled that people would get so intimate that you might confuse it with the opening of a porn movie, right there on the footpath, with passers-by having to swerve around them. And nobody, not even cranky old ladies, found this the slightest bit disturbing.

I thought I had finally discovered a paradise of open-mindedness, where there is no condemnation of sex and sexuality. I was slightly bewildered to have stumbled upon it in a very Catholic country, But there it was in front of my eyes, so I had no choice but to believe it and dance with joy. However as it turned out just before my departure, I was wrong. Argentines only seem approving of sex and intimacy. They do not care as long as it is not in their own home. Once the home is involved, however, they suddenly become the epitome of religiosity, and you can only do so much on the street, even in Argentina.

So in Buenos Aires, to circumvent the sacredness of the home, there are *albergues transitorios* (literally, "transit hotels"). These are externally unostentatious places in ordinary buildings, usually with just one electric sign to indicate their status, nothing else revealing their nature. However, from the inside they have rooms perfectly equipped and furnished for the best and most comfortable sex, which you and your partner can rent by the hour, and a lounge where couples can wait and even start their foreplay if they so desire. Some more up-market ones even offer themed rooms and various other additions to the bare minimum for people to enjoy their "stay" as much as possible.

Don't be confused, these love hotels are not just a handful of hidden spots scattered around the city in places where only locals can find them. If you know what to look for (the electric sign), you will discover one at least every block. It doesn't take much searching. And unlike the cheap American motels of the type seen in *American Beauty* they are not just for people cheating on their partners, prostitutes or perverts. Everyone uses them. I mean everyone.

I found out about this little Argentine secret in the most obvious way: I was invited to one. Naturally, at first I didn't understand the invitation, which usually consists of the words *vamos a un lugar* ("let's go to a place") after a good amount of acceptable PDA. In my case it was accompanied by the guy pulling out the business card of an *albergue* and wondering where we could go, since we were in a neighbourhood he didn't know. At which point I grasped his meaning and was completely shocked, feeling insulted, abused and all the other feelings that rush to a girl's mind when she's been considered easy or a prostitute. So naturally I ran away and probably left the guy quite bewildered.

Without this incident, I would have never raised the subject with my Argentine girl-friends, thanks to whom the secret was finally revealed and explained to me, with plenty of laughter because of my reaction to the very innocent invitation of the poor boy.

It turns out that because of religious beliefs and cultural norms, it is unacceptable for Argentines to bring their partner home. And the economic situation is such that young people with an average job can't live independently, so very often they stay in their parents' house until they've found a partner with whom they can share expenses, or have advanced enough in their careers to be able to afford a place by themselves (the first scenario is much more common). Furthermore, there are parents with small children, whose apartments are not big enough for any privacy.

On the other hand, it is part of Latin American culture to constantly be in some form of a romantic relationship, so they need a place to be alone. To all this, the cheap and effective Argentine solution is the *albergue transitorio*, with no stigma or shame attached. And from personal experience, I think that Argentine love hotels are quite decent and reasonably priced. And very useful.

PETYA MITEVA

make
not out
SEX & PRIVACY
IN BUENOS AIRES

Dear Readers,

The courts have blocked me from answering Matthew Johns' desperate plea for guidance. But never fear! Today we abandon the usual Agony Aunt format to delve into something much more sinister, a war of letters between yours truly and Jess Bellamy of Bellamy's Barometer fame. Let's look at how Jess began her attack on my credibility:

"WHAT THE FUCK, AGONY AUNT DAVE?"

You know what I'm talking about: the comment in your latest column that Bellamy's Barometer is "500 words of observational humour, minus the humour part". THAT DOESN'T EVEN MAKE GRAMMATICAL SENSE, AGONY AUNT DAVE. Observational humour minus humour = 'observational'. That's an adjective searchin' for a noun to qualify it, a bit like how you're a douchebag searchin' for a drunk first year to jerk you off in the Roundhouse toilets.

And I'll also thank you to leave Dr Lurk out of the argument - I don't know him, but I feel like that dude could hold his own in a knife-fight.

Love and kisses,

- JESS BELLAMY

P.S. Maybe we should date."

Following this, Jess "I'm so Newtown I only eat my Thai food if its served by a lesbian" Bellamy stalked me down on Facebook and posted on my wall:

"Dave's Agony Aunt column? That's 500 words of witty advice from a charming purveyor of social nous, minus EVERYTHING ABOUT THAT SENTENCE ESPECIALLY THE BIT ABOUT HIM BEING CHARMING AND HAVING FRIENDS. Here's a guess as to his advice this week: making fun of Austrian rape victims."

I regain my composure. I'm a professional. I've already helped the Fritzl's; I can no-doubt exercise compassion regarding the self-esteem of

(Dave) the Agony Aunt

another abuse-loving basement dweller. My prompt reply:

"What's hot: Plagiarising the form of your satirical attacks from my articles. What's not: The sombrero in your profile picture.

P.S. A date? I think you know where in the Roundhouse you can find me."

I think I'm home clear...until I awake to discover her retort on my wall. A poem about David Maher. That's right, a poem. Apparently I need to shake up the form in which my vitriol is delivered:

"It's in free verse 'cos that's how I roll.

*David Maher, Agony Aunt
Your Info page tells strangers where you live,
Chris Moore said I should piss in your letterbox,
But I probably won't go to the effort of commuting to **** St North Bondi,
Just to piss in your letterbox.*



*David Maher, perhaps our antipathy needs to be nipped in the bud
Because it'd be awkward if I ever had to talk to you,
If someone pisses in your letterbox, look to Chris, not me,
I am not the vengeful type."*

WHAT THE!?! This is weirder behaviour than eating a chicken drumstick with cutlery. But then I am overcome by a wave of sentimentality. This is the closest thing to a love poem the Agony Aunt has received.

I do the gentlemanly thing. I look up her email address of Facebook, sign it up to lots of gay porn, and dedicate about 30 seconds to composing a poem of my very own:

*"Roses are red,
Violets are blue,
No-one likes your articles
And mummy and daddy didn't like you."*

I trust this resolves the matter. I now return you to regular Agony Aunt programming:

Dear Agony Aunt,

Goo goo ga ga?

Sincerely,
-MADELINE MCCANN

Dear Maddy,

Stop making all that noise!
People will discover where I've hidden you!



Dear Local Council

I'm writing to praise your recent efforts in attracting a great deal of developers into the street where I live. I believe you must have been working very hard to convince these good people to build nearly twenty-three houses where a few short months ago, there were only three. However, I think in your focused and determined state in pushing forward these well-thought-out developments, you forgot to take note of some things. Please, allow me to be of assistance:

Firstly, by moving an additional 20 families onto our street, there may be need for additional transport. I urge you to forget building bus stops and lobbying our well-functioning state government into building long-term infrastructure. Instead, I think the easiest and most cost-effective route would be to expand the local two-lane road into a bustling eighteen-lane highway. I'm not sure what incompetent fool thought two lanes would ever be enough, but they should be drawn, quartered and used in the bitumen mix for paving. If you're worried of the cost in this project, I'm sure you can contact the state government (see Mr. Sartor) for their network of private contractors who can build these roads with a reasonable, moderate toll of only \$26.55 (\$33 peak hour).

Further, please find attached a map of local ecologically important sites that flank the east and north of our suburb. I believe that these areas should be targeted for new high-rise apartment blocks, which you can market with clever lifestyle shots of marina's and coffee shops (even if we all know the local coffee tastes like piss and you'd need a serious investment in ladder technology to glimpse the water). In all seriousness, why let a bunch of frogs that insist on not dying out stop the march towards progress, people and tax dollars. It's called Darwinism, isn't it?

Finally, please find attached a copy of my own development proposal for the 571sqm site where I currently live. Whilst you can skim over and rubber stamp the details later, I think some minor points should be explained. My proposal is to demolish the one-storey residence and instead build a forty-three level building with a mix of lifestyle shopping facilities, cinema, small boutique studios for the upwardly mobile who have grown sick of Castle Hill, and several hundred apartments. This will set a standard for the area (and the local residents, quite literally) to look up to. In order to save space, the vertical transport requirements will not be filled by lifts but by an external magic carpet that will hover between floors. To allay the fears of our local Greens chapter, I'll instruct the builders to paint the building green and plant a small Elm tree in the lobby.

Please feel free to contact me at any time to discuss matters arising from my letter or any political donations you may need,

Commendations and regards,

Kyler Lousekian



A Dent In Your Good Life

MATT KWAN

Andrew Denton is often regarded as one of the greats of modern Australian television. People say he seamlessly switched from comedy to serious interviewing. I say he has done neither with great proficiency. He switched from being a tool to being a bore.

In research for this article, I watched Denton's earliest show, called *Blah Blah Blah*. This was basically a late-night show where Denton interviewed people in a jocular tone. The silly name is a pretty good representation of how awful it was. Here is a snippet of an interview between Denton and Graham Lee, member of famous rock band The Triffids:

Denton: And Graham Lee, not Lees, um, of course you're known as Evil Graham Lee.

Lee: That's right.

Denton: You won't take any offence, but, you just don't look all that evil to me.

Lee: Well, you don't know me.

Denton: Okay, so, ah, in what way are you evil?

Lee: Well, I do nasty things with cows.

Denton: Graham, I hardly think that's unusual behaviour, I was looking for something extraordinary.

At this stage I became quite disturbed at the idea that Denton was into having sex with cows. This exchange is not only evidence of Denton's deviant sexual fantasies, it highlights that in 1988, Denton was not funny and had a stuttering interview technique which confused people.

Fast forward to the twenty first century, where Denton again found fame with a talk show, this time called *Enough Rope*. The title is clearly in reference to having enough rope to hang yourself after watching this show. I watched some interviews on Youtube and compiled a list of things I would rather do instead:

Attend a microeconomics lecture;
 Watch *Better Homes and Gardens*;
 Watch a netball game on television;
 Watch a game of lawn bowls on television;
 Join the Australian Democrats;
 Join the Australian Communist Party;
 Listen to an album by Nickelback;
 Listen to an album by Pink;
 Run naked through Pitt Street Mall on a busy Saturday afternoon.

No, *Enough Rope* was not a very entertaining show. I have never taken a sleeping pill, but watching *Enough Rope* on Youtube is about as close as I have come. Denton displayed the same poor technique he used in *Blah Blah Blah* – essentially, no technique at all. He just asked random questions, nodded, laughed and seemed to get away with it all.

This little man's popularity baffles me. I fail to understand how an unattractive man with zero charm could end up being a well-recognised and liked television personality. What makes him so compelling? Why does his mediocrity result in great success? His shows are about as entertaining as the 'Up-Late' Game Show hosted by former Big Brother housemate Simon 'Hot Dogs' Deering. Fair dinkum, 'Hot Dogs' is funnier than Denton!

Then, one day, wallowing in self-pity after fantasising about hosting Love Song Dedications on Mix 106.5, I had an epiphany. People like Denton purely because he's pathetic. His guests are comfortable with him because they know he is much less talented. Attractive but dim-witted people who are interviewed by Denton feel superior because they are better looking. Intelligent people know they can easily communicate with far greater eloquence. His presence simply makes people feel a whole lot better about themselves.

Yet, this does not explain why Denton remains a kind of protected species in Australian television. Why has no-one criticised him for being useless? Why does no one make fun of him, or parody his attempts at effective communication? These are questions I feel will never be answered by anyone other than me.

In my opinion, it is because Denton is much too nice a person. He does not seek to make fun of anyone. He has been controversial in the past, but never offensive. Denton

"This little man's popularity baffles me."



is a polite, reserved interviewer, despite his deficiencies in real talent. His mild irreverence and oddness endear him to old people who watch lawn bowls on the ABC and went to UNSW when Tharunka was one of Australia's most controversial publications.

I say that's great, but too bad. These are not excuses. Mediocrity cannot go unpunished. It certainly cannot be rewarded. But has he been rewarded? Denton has won a grand total of zero Logie awards. It seems even Andrew Denton can't make a dent in everything.

HYPOTHETICALLY SPEAKING

You're at a party, and a friend is snapping photos of the guests. When she goes to the bathroom, she gives you her camera to hold. Scrolling through the photos you find several unflattering photos of yourself. Are you entitled to delete them?

Alice Lang

Of course you have a right to delete these photos. It serves no-one's interest for them to remain in existence.

Let's consider what might happen. Your friend might delete the photos herself. They might languish on her computer and never see the light of day. Or they might be splashed around in various public fora including but not limited to the internet. You could be humiliated and suffer serious emotional harm. If the images find their way to an employer, they might even harm your career.

You have broad rights over the way your public image is presented, some of which are formalised through the law of libel and defamation. This is because you have no way of defending yourself when someone else broadcasts your image to the world, especially when it happens without your consent. A photo is part of your identity, your persona and your social presence. You shouldn't be subjected to the humiliation of ugly pictures being splashed around on Stalkbook or uniwalk.

A good friend has no morally sound justification for wishing to publicise unflattering pictures. Since she wouldn't use them anyway, you're not changing the situation by deleting them. In fact, you're saving her effort and freeing up space on her memory card for better photos. On the other hand, if she does have malicious intent and plans to humiliate you, either publicly or privately, she ought to be stopped. Deleting the photos will protect her from her own spiteful tendencies.

We should think carefully before destroying someone else's property. However, this is a pretty minor act of destruction. Deleting a photo is not the same as smashing the window of a car, or throwing eggs at someone's house. There are usually dozens of photos snapped at a party. It's unlikely your friend would suffer real distress at the loss.

Are you breaking your friend's trust by deleting the photos? Should you just hope that she'll do the right thing by you, and delete the photos herself? This would be a naïve position to

take. Even if she intends no harm, it's quite possible she'll post the photos publicly, simply because she's unaware of how you feel about them.

Deleting a couple of bad photos does not reflect on the way you deal with trust and communication in the rest of your relationship. It's hard to imagine any other circumstance in which she'd have material evidence of your depravity, and you'd have a chance of deleting it. This is an isolated instance. Furthermore, you're not acting out of a desire to harm her – you're acting out of concern for your own rights and wellbeing.

A photo is part of your identity, your persona and your social presence. You shouldn't be subjected to humiliation.

What about asking her to delete the photos on your behalf? There are two possibilities if you do this. One, she'll acknowledge your concern and delete them straight away, in which case there is little to be gained by waiting instead of doing it yourself. Two, she'll ignore or even be goaded by your concern and use the photos anyway, creating an even more harmful situation.

Ugly photos don't enhance anyone's quality of life. They can cause real harm to your feelings, your interactions and your career. The only possible "benefit" they could have is feeding your friend's insecurities, which is damaging in itself. They don't serve any purpose and you have every right to destroy them.

HYPOTHETICALLY SPEAKING

your friend is snapping photos of the guests. When she goes over your camera to hold. Scrolling through the photos of yourself. Are you entitled to delete them?

Jarrah Job

No, you are not entitled to delete them.

Firstly, you are attending a party. This is a public event, as opposed to a private moment where you have the expectation of not being observed. You have seen your friend taking photos and have not made an objection. Nor have you given any indication that photos taken of you must be flattering, or with your permission, or with your direct knowledge that a photo is in the process of being taken so that you may strike a flattering pose.

Your friend has given you the camera to hold - not to peruse the photos taken so far and pass judgement. It is a breach of trust to look at the photos without permission. There may be private photos from an earlier occasion, or photos of the party not meant for you to look at.

The photos belong to your friend, not you. The physical data that comprises the photos is your friend's private property that may not be destroyed without her knowledge and permission. Furthermore, she possesses copyright over the images.

Your friend may not be aware of the unflattering photos if she was taking many in quick succession. Perhaps she has every intention of deleting anything she knows you would object to! The best course of action is to point out the photos to her, and request that she delete them as a gesture of friendship.

If she doesn't, she's not much of a friend.

This is a public event, as opposed to a private moment where you have the expectation of not being observed.

POSTGRADUATE OFFICER

Georgie Smith

I have a big plan and I WANT YOUR HELP.

Did you know UNSW used to have its very own Postgraduate Council? This is like the current Student Rep Council, except it was by postgrads, for postgrads. VSU killed it, but it's coming back! I'm laying foundations now, and I need YOU.

Do you think you'd like to help represent postgrad (coursework and research) perspectives? Wanna speak up for those around you? See things that aren't as they should be? Well by being on the Postgrad Council, you'll have the space and the voice to make positive change happen.

I'm calling on anyone who cares and who has a couple of hours a week to contribute. The groundwork's starting now, with elections for 2010 to be held towards the end of the year. If you want to know more, please contact me: postgrad@arc.unsw.edu.au.

PRESIDENT

Charishma Kaliyanda

It's coming up to the insane end of semester when there seems to be an assessment everyday. The SRC is here to help. If you'd like a break from watching the words on your page blur, come by our stall on the Library Lawn 11-2 every Tuesday and Wednesday. You can find out more about what's going on with the SRC, give us feedback or just have a whinge if assessments are getting the better of you and you feel buried under a mountain of snowy white paper. And remember, if you have any concerns or would like to get involved in the SRC, send me an email.

c_kaliyanda@hotmail.com



WOMEN'S DEPARTMENT

Lucy Geddes & Jody Earles

The last few weeks have been fairly hectic for the Women's Department. Week 5 was Women's Week which was really successful. Events held included:

- A bumper edition of SISTA
- “Fight Like a Girl” Self Defence Class
- Women and the Environment Forum
- Spanish Movie Night held in conjunction with the Postgrad Dept
- Painting Day in the Women's Room

At the moment we are organising safety awareness week along with other departments, scheduled for week 10. We are hoping to run another self defence class, as it was so well received last time. We're also looking to have Karen Willis and Nina Funnell, respectively director and committee member of the NSW Rape Crisis Centre, attend a breakfast which we are looking at holding in the boardroom.

In other news:

NOWSA registration opens this week and we are hoping to have as many collective members along as possible.

We aim to establish, together with Welfare and Postgrad Departments, another parents' room on lower campus.

We are in talks with Oxfam and Amnesty societies on campus, looking to organize events with them for next session.

Email us: women@arc.unsw.edu.au

WELFARE OFFICER

Matthew Ward

OK guys, lots of exciting things have been happening so I will keep it brief. The National Day of Action has been and gone and it went great. A big thanks to all who took part. We got some good media attention and the word out that student income support is currently not good enough. Then we had Welfare Week which despite some minor setbacks went well. I hope those of you that took part had a good time. I also want to take this opportunity to thank Arc's student support services department for all their support because it would not have happened without them. So as you all know the budget is coming up and if we want positive changes to income support we need to be visible. If you want to know more about any of the other goings on of the Welfare Department, drop me an e-mail at welfare@arc.unsw.edu.au

ETHNIC AFFAIRS OFFICERS

Aaron Chan & Celeste White

A POEM

The Ethnic Affairs Department
Is about culture and race
And discussing those dilemmas,
That in Australia we face.
In our collective meetings
We talk about racism and hate
And any other kind of cultural intolerance
You care to contemplate.
Aside from discussing racism
We talk a lot about current affairs
And how to deal with issues
That have caught the country unawares.
We talk about difference,
Dialogue and respect
We talk about situations head-on
There is no need to be circumspect.
These things aside,
To make the university welcoming
is our goal
To promote harmony and acceptance
Is really our role
So if these are principles
To which you can relate
Come join our collective
And take part in the debate.
Collective meetings are held weekly
On the Quad at one in the afternoon
So hopefully on Mondays,
We will now be seeing you soon.

For further details, email
[Aaron a.chan@arc.unsw.edu.au](mailto:Aaron.a.chan@arc.unsw.edu.au) or
[Celeste c.white@arc.unsw.edu.au](mailto:Celeste.c.white@arc.unsw.edu.au)

*Are you an image-maker?
Interested in padding your already impressive portfolio?
To contribute imagery to Tharunka, email our Designer :
elliottbryce@gmail.com*

