

*Memoirs of a
Photocopy Bitch*

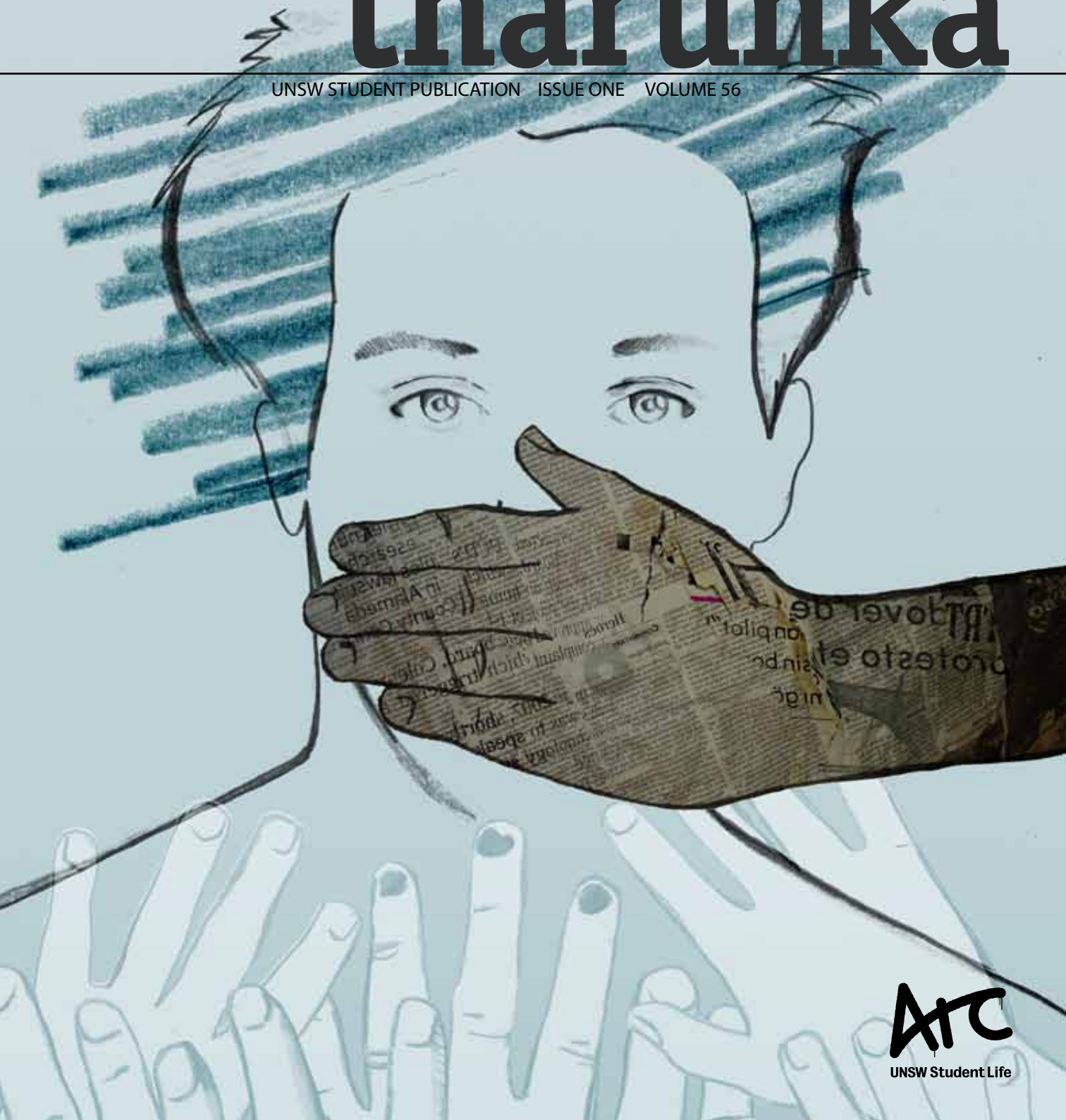
*Repression and
Resistance in
Honduras*

*Why Words
Matter*

*I Wish You'd
Fuck Off But
Please Don't*

tharunka

UNSW STUDENT PUBLICATION ISSUE ONE VOLUME 56



ATC

UNSW Student Life

Editorial

Welcome readers of UNSW! Tharunka is easily the best magazine at our university and one of the oldest student rags in Australia. We've survived a couple of defamation cases, an obscenity trial and the wrath of both Lawsoc and Yellowshirts. We're not sure which one was scarier. We hope to bring you many SCANDALS! in future and maybe, if the planets align, a bit of provocative, thoughtful and incisive commentary. If we can come up with some provocative, thoughtful and incisive commentary on a scandal, then so much the better.

Everyone likes the sound of their own voice and Tharunka is no exception. The theme of this the inaugural issue for 2010 is Speech, in all of its value and ugliness and uses and misuses. On page 14 Rosie Wong brings an eyewitness account of repression in Honduras following the 2009 coup, while on page 5 Thomas George keeps things highbrow with sandy vaginas. In uni news, Rory Thomas bitches about student politics to the 3 people who care while James Fehon examines the dodginess surrounding the National Union of Students. This edition of Tharunka is full of loud, opinionated and idiosyncratic voices and regardless of whether you agree or disagree with them, we hope that they make you laugh and think. Or at least rip up the magazine in disgust.

Thanks for reading this far! Keep doing it,

Tharunka Editorial 2010

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The Sensible Guide to Surviving 2010

Matt Kwan

When you were a child, adults probably told you to “be sensible”, otherwise bad stuff would happen. This is because not being sensible can result in significant harm. Like death. Because at Tharunka, we have a social conscience, we have prepared some sensible tips on how to survive 2010.

Be sensible in the surf

Recently, New South Wales has been rocked with a number of adults perishing in the surf.

Two men drowned in separate incidents whilst attempting to rescue people who had been swept out to sea by rips. In one incident on the South Coast, a man jumped into the water to attempt to single-handedly pluck three kids out of the water. He actually succeeded, but died in the process. In another incident, a mother jumped into the water after her children were swept out by a rip. Failing to accomplish that task, the father jumped in to rescue her, and in a double failure, died without preventing the death of his wife. Ironically, all three children survived.

When you see people in trouble, it is not a good idea to jump in and try to be a hero. It is understandable when they are family members, but still not sensible. There is no excuse for irrationality. To conduct any rescue, let alone a contact rescue, involving conscious people in deep water involves such a high degree of skill that qualified individuals generally avoid doing it. Therefore, do not do it. Only in Baywatch do lifesavers swim out on their own. In the real world, only foolish people do so; boats and jet skis are used instead. Rips are not even that dangerous. Simply wait until the tide's energy disperses and swim back. Follow the golden rule of life saving – self-preservation. Some say this is selfish. I say it is better to be selfish than dead.

Be sensible on the road

Recently, in Victoria, a P-plater named Steven Johnstone got drunk, foolishly packed his car with five other people, and crashed into a tree at 140km/h, killing himself and four of his passengers. Everyone would have survived if he had simply used common sense.

Holding a provisional licence means you are not actually deemed fully capable of operating a motor vehicle and you should probably take it easy. The P on the P plates does not stand for ‘pedal to the metal’. In most cases, it stands for ‘pathetic’. When real drivers see P platers on the road, the sensible thing to do is to be extremely wary. This is an unfair imposition; therefore P platers should simply stay off the roads during peak times. It is generally not a sensible idea to go above the speed limit anyway. They were created for good reason. In any case, driving at 140km/h on a winding road is insanity. It may be temporarily fun, but only until you die. No-

one thinks big of speeding. Speeders don't think big of speeding because they are all dead and thus can't think at all. Therefore, be sensible, and obey road rules.

Be sensible when breaking the law

Breaking the law is usually not very sensible. However, if you do want to break the law, there are sensible ways of doing so. For example, you should generally do it in a way that makes you undetectable. Recently, Pete Doherty, a famous singer in England, was caught with heroin in his possession following his sentence in court for a driving offence. You would think that a secure court house is not a place to be bringing all your gear. Clearly heroin rotted the brain of Doherty so that rational thought was beyond him. The golden rule of criminal enterprise is ‘don't get caught’. Committing crimes in a court house is just active defiance of that rule. Doherty would have gotten away with it if he had simply behaved sensibly.

If you intend to break the law, it is also a sensible idea to not tell anyone about it, especially the police. Recently, a SWAT police officer in the United States decided to engage in armed robberies of local banks and businesses. He was very successful, but then, a detective questioned him about why he had been near the scene of the last crime and he confessed to everything he had done. If he had simply behaved sensibly and shut up, he would have still been free.

Be sensible when drunk

It is inevitable that one day in your life you will be drunk. That day has probably happened already. Getting drunk is not sensible. However, you can take steps to mitigate this by discovering some sensibility in your state of inebriation.

I recently was told a story about how a woman got drunk and pinched the bottom of a male police officer. She thought he was a stripper. This is not sensible behaviour. Look before you touch. Strippers generally do not carry semi-automatic pistols. If she was sensible, she would have simply avoided him like regular people. But she was not sensible and ended up getting arrested.

There's no excuse

It is easy to be sensible. It is simply using the rational processes of human thought. People die prematurely often because they are not rational and do dumb things. Use your brain and you will survive 2010.

Thomas George exercises his right to freedom of speech.

Many readers will undoubtedly be annoyed by the blatant offensiveness of my title. But you know what? I honestly don't give a fuck. Maybe it's me, but I'm always wondering: what's with all the people pissing and moaning about being offended? To take the immortal words of old Chop-Chop, why can't we all just harden the fuck up?

I'm constantly on the shit-list of feminists, new-age hippies, people/morons with strong political views. Pretty much anyone with an opinion on anything because when presenting an argument, I not only come at them from a different angle but also with absolutely no regard for "political correctness". Perhaps I should take a lesson in manners, but my logic is that in any argument your opponent is trying to force their own agenda over yours. They are trying to "ought" or "should" you. For example: you should give to charity, you should respect women, you should love the Jesus, you should respect my feelings.

So why should I pander to their feelings when they clearly don't give a rat's testicle about mine? Don't think for a second that I'm some uneducated heathen who simply delights in being the social pariah. [Editor's note: Well, I have sometimes suspected...] Okay, I do sort of enjoy the whole pariah thing, but that doesn't make me wrong. It comes down to a question of respect and this misguided assumption that we all inherently deserve it.

I was raised with the saying that respect had to be earned. Now perhaps it was a mass conspiracy by my parents and teachers to keep me in line and generally mind-fuck me, but if you pause in your indignation to consider, it actually makes logical sense. If we all respect each other automatically, respect itself becomes a worthless currency. In that world, I would respect a pedophile just as much as I would a priest. I'd make no distinction in respecting a policeman as I would a serial rapist because they all inherently deserve "respect".

This is untenable to me, so to my mind the opposite must be true. We don't inherently all deserve each other's respect. All aspects of life point towards inequality. We are born unequal, we live our lives unequal and our experiences are unequal. This isn't necessarily a bad thing because adversity breeds prosperity and gives the opportunity for one to rise above and conquer it. This is a part of life that we must accept as being unchangeable, but that doesn't mean we should stop trying to change it. The journey is always more important and meaningful than the destination.

So then who do we respect? Do we automatically respect our politicians or our esteemed Rugby League players. Do we, dare I say it, respect our parents?

That is up to the individual to decide. I respect many people in this world, but all those that I do share one thing in common: they've earned my respect. They either did it intellectually, ethically or by simple actions which speak infinitely louder to me than words ever will. I will never respect anyone automatically and without question.

In the last few years I've read many angry complaint letters and chuckled quiet heartily at those who clearly didn't get it. Sadly only a few have been directed at me, so perhaps I'm not pontificating hard enough. Yet I have noted that more and more people don't seem to be able to comprehend irony. Maybe it's a sign of the times that our attention spans are getting shorter and if you can't blog your message in a few paragraphs you'll have lost the audience.

So in essence, I don't respect you, dear faceless reader because I've never really met you. So if you're in a bit of a huff about my language or point of view in this article, I'm sure you'll write in to Tharunka to let them know about all that sand that's making you cranky but bear in mind, it won't bother me at all.



Why Words Matter

Alan Zeino

Winston Smith saw the world in a woman, and the universe in the things she did and sacrificed for him. Julia saw the value of what can be given from something little. Nineteen Eighty-Four told their story, but it didn't end the way anybody would've wanted it to. Most of us will never meet an end like theirs, but some of us will realise how important the little time we have is. To this effect I sit in a Melbourne pub writing this article with the idea of evaluating the notion of 'love' - though however realising that countless more talented people than me have written about this very same topic. What does it all really mean? Why do we go through peaks and troughs of pain and happiness? I'm not sure. My mother once said "These experiences are an important lesson of life;" but really, what the fuck have I learnt from love and loss? You might say I learnt the value of a gesture -- after all I was the guy who gave a girl a fucking book on our first anniversary (which didn't go down well).

Maybe there's an inevitable imbalance in relationships nowadays but I recently learnt that isn't a good thing at all. Just yesterday did I remember a time when a girl brought cold pizza to a date because she knew I was running low on funds that week and in that story lies the clear ignorance I held about what that gesture meant. I wasn't just being fed, I was being shown that even when not faced in person I was being thought of. Even when you're not compelled to think of someone, it means so much more if you do. What was the value of that pizza? Probably very little, if you think about the money it cost.

And what about words? I remember learning the hard way when I was in primary school the lesson that 'words matter' (I called my teacher 'bitch' in Year Two). People like being heard but people also like being spoken to, having a story shared with them and being included in the development of another person's life. What does this mean? If you're reading this and you're male, have you ever been told by a girlfriend that, "You never talk to me about how you're feeling"? That's what I mean. As men we spend so much fucking time trying to uphold this persona of being tough as nails but when you tear away this absurd idea you realise that as humans the only thing we have is our words and without sharing them, writing them, or without saying them then why let your brain formulate them in

"Writing something down might be a sign that you actually believe the shit you're saying."

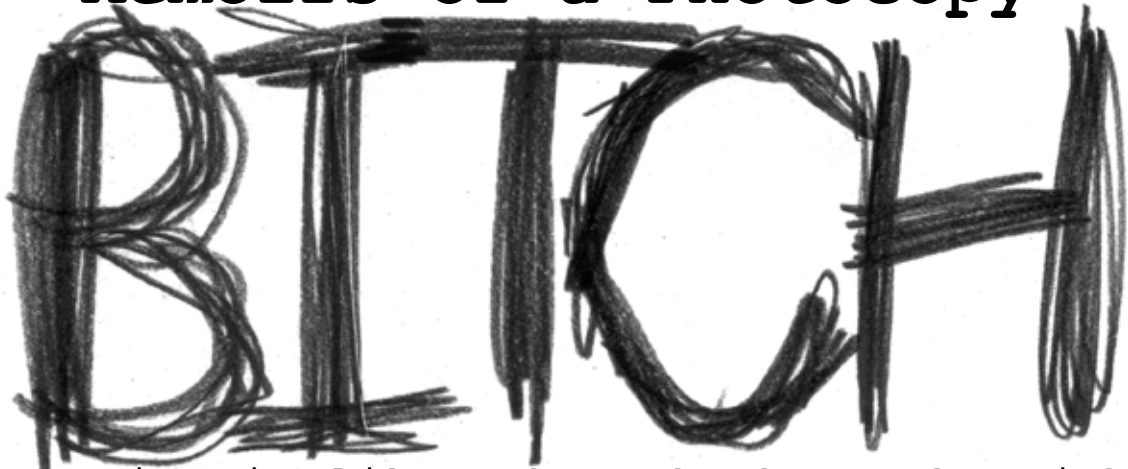
the first place? I once thought that the persona of being untouchable was a good thing to have - after all no-one wants the person that hurt them to know they did so - but I quickly discovered that stance leads to a clusterfuck explosion of depression when you finally 'deal with it'.

Moreover if you live online as I do, you might spend most of your time communicating with others via technology rather than by the written letter. Before that moleskine I got last year to use as a journal I really had no idea how much more value a handwritten piece of text holds than one which is typed. Have you ever read the comments that reside with a video on Youtube? Then why the fuck do universities insist on having essays typed? If anything, writing something down might be a sign that you actually believe the shit you're saying. So much of a relationship now is digital that I wonder if really there is anything tangible, worth holding onto that isn't written down. But the journal wasn't the only thing that showed me the value of a pen - it was the continued request I received for 'a letter' from an ex-other.

At the time, I just couldn't understand why she wanted one so much - why anyone would want something that took time, that took effort and that they would have to wait for when the same message could be typed out and emailed within an hour. Of course the astute among you might see why in that sentence; writing something out means you value the words so much (and the recipient who their for) that you're willing to spend a few hours dedicated to their creation. I can download files, surf the web and yak on iChat as I write this. But when I finally wrote that letter (two months too late if you're wondering), it was my only task. It was worth more than any other gesture I'd ever made, and while unsuccessful (it is grand to assume that even a mere letter can make a difference, though history shows it has happened) it was another lesson that I needed to learn.

So where am I now? Well I'm more knowledgeable than before and though it all ended up being an experience not altogether pleasurable it did end up being a necessary one. Julia and Winston never had a chance to write to each other when it was all over because the ending was truly the end. Next time you find yourself lying on your bed wondering whether it was all worth it you should sit up, and write something down. Even if someone else never sees it, you will.

Memoirs of a Photocopy



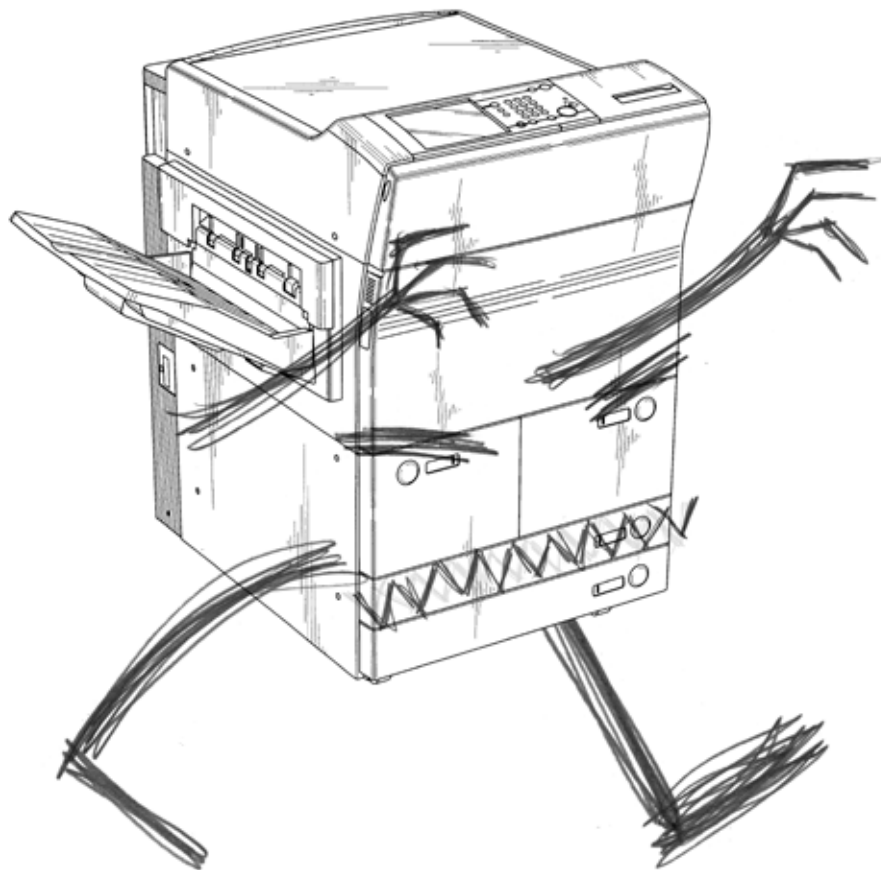
Su-Min Lim likes that she hates her job.

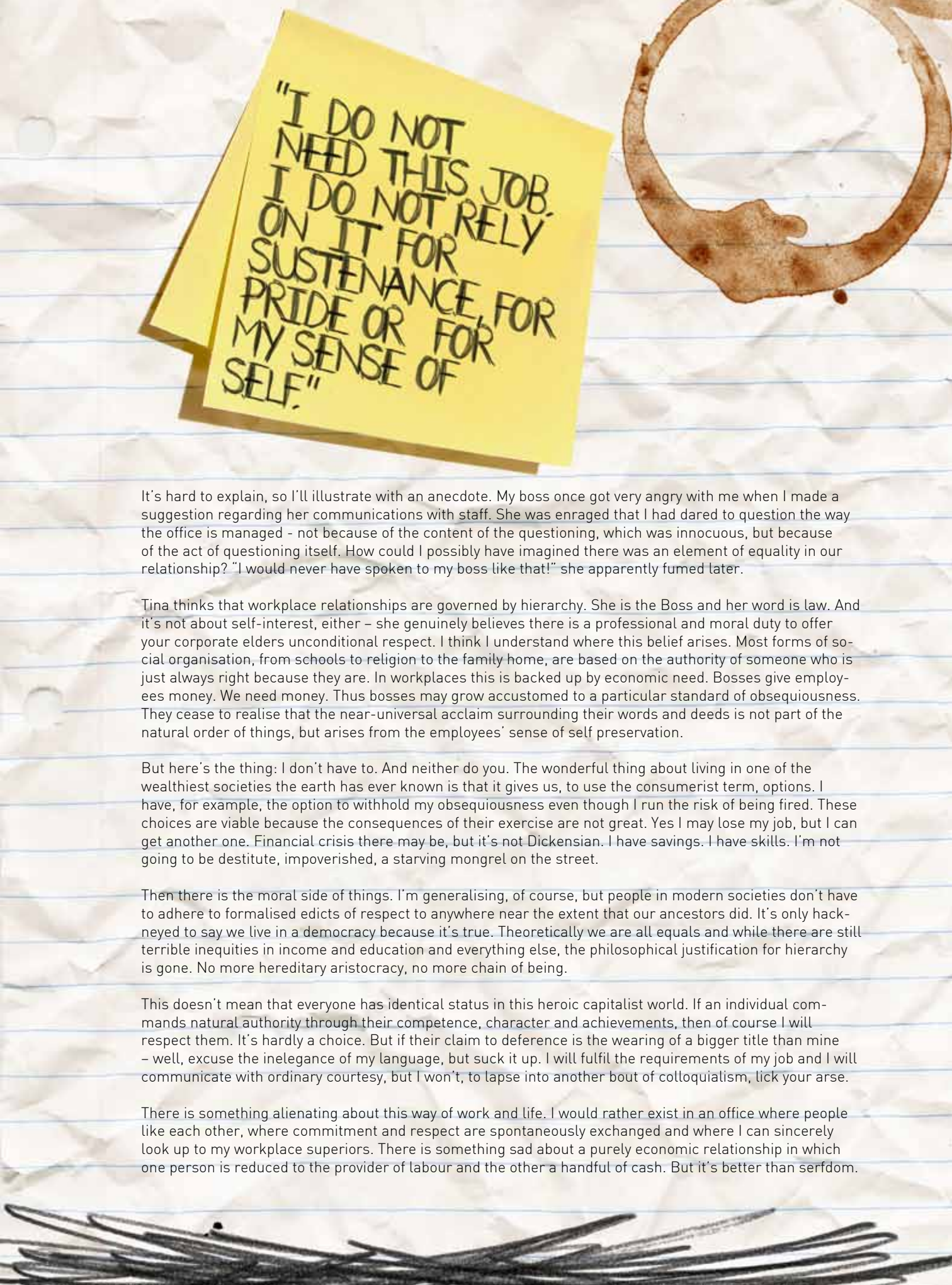
Let me tell you about my office. In the midst of the towering futility that is my job I sometimes wonder what the point of work is at all. This, I know, is an overreaction; there are plenty of non-futile activities which people perform for the exchange of money. Just not at my workplace.

The office is full of characters, mostly bad ones. My immediate overseer is a woman for whom the world divides into the givers and receivers of orders. She, of course, falls into the former category. Her day is spent deploying minions to perform acts on a sliding scale of pointlessness: dusting the office pigeonholes. Being timed while filling the kitchens with teabags. Following instructions on a post-it note for a task so utterly trivial, she could easily have completed it in less time than it took to write the note itself. She adds smiley faces to emails, speaks in a baby voice with a little pout and pins pictures of cats in front of our desk. These displays of faux-childishness are intended to soften the edges of her deftly wielded authority. Her title is the same as mine except with 'Senior' in front of it.

Workplaces squeeze people, transforming them into nasty and unrecognisable shapes. There's the boss, Tina*, a robust, sharp-eyed woman who would be likeable if she didn't insist on near-feudal obeisance from her employees. There's Jeffrey Kernagan*, the senior staff member whose blokeish, reassuring phone manner belies a stolid lack of curiosity or knowledge about anything at all. Then there is Lisa*, the personal assistant to someone else's personal assistant whose perpetual cheeriness belies a fatalistic resignation to her role as the office orifice. "Su-Min, in this place we're like this," she said to me once, rubbing the sole of her shoe into the carpet. And then she smiled.

And yet, strangely enough, I like my job. I like it because it makes no demands on my dignity, my identity or – and I'm choosing the word carefully – my freedom. I do not need this job. I do not rely on it for sustenance, for pride or for my sense of self. No-one at my workplace can compel me to do anything I don't want to do – or, more importantly, to feel anything I don't want to feel.





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It's hard to explain, so I'll illustrate with an anecdote. My boss once got very angry with me when I made a suggestion regarding her communications with staff. She was enraged that I had dared to question the way the office is managed - not because of the content of the questioning, which was innocuous, but because of the act of questioning itself. How could I possibly have imagined there was an element of equality in our relationship? "I would never have spoken to my boss like that!" she apparently fumed later.


Tina thinks that workplace relationships are governed by hierarchy. She is the Boss and her word is law. And it's not about self-interest, either - she genuinely believes there is a professional and moral duty to offer your corporate elders unconditional respect. I think I understand where this belief arises. Most forms of social organisation, from schools to religion to the family home, are based on the authority of someone who is just always right because they are. In workplaces this is backed up by economic need. Bosses give employees money. We need money. Thus bosses may grow accustomed to a particular standard of obsequiousness. They cease to realise that the near-universal acclaim surrounding their words and deeds is not part of the natural order of things, but arises from the employees' sense of self preservation.

But here's the thing: I don't have to. And neither do you. The wonderful thing about living in one of the wealthiest societies the earth has ever known is that it gives us, to use the consumerist term, options. I have, for example, the option to withhold my obsequiousness even though I run the risk of being fired. These choices are viable because the consequences of their exercise are not great. Yes I may lose my job, but I can get another one. Financial crisis there may be, but it's not Dickensian. I have savings. I have skills. I'm not going to be destitute, impoverished, a starving mongrel on the street.

Then there is the moral side of things. I'm generalising, of course, but people in modern societies don't have to adhere to formalised edicts of respect to anywhere near the extent that our ancestors did. It's only hackneyed to say we live in a democracy because it's true. Theoretically we are all equals and while there are still terrible inequities in income and education and everything else, the philosophical justification for hierarchy is gone. No more hereditary aristocracy, no more chain of being.

This doesn't mean that everyone has identical status in this heroic capitalist world. If an individual commands natural authority through their competence, character and achievements, then of course I will respect them. It's hardly a choice. But if their claim to deference is the wearing of a bigger title than mine - well, excuse the inelegance of my language, but suck it up. I will fulfil the requirements of my job and I will communicate with ordinary courtesy, but I won't, to lapse into another bout of colloquialism, lick your arse.

There is something alienating about this way of work and life. I would rather exist in an office where people like each other, where commitment and respect are spontaneously exchanged and where I can sincerely look up to my workplace superiors. There is something sad about a purely economic relationship in which one person is reduced to the provider of labour and the other a handful of cash. But it's better than serfdom.



"I will fulfil the requirements of my job
and I will communicate with ordinary courtesy,
but I won't lick your arse."

There is one more way in which a workplace can steal your self away and that is when your identity becomes tied to your profession. "You won't be here forever, you'll be going on to better things:" Lisa the shoe-rubber once told me. "Thank goodness we won't be in admin for the rest of our lives!" exclaimed one of my fellow minions. The problem with this approach is it concedes that, temporarily at least, your servility is your degradation. If you derive your dignity from the knowledge that in future you will perform a job with status then your current, menial employment is implicitly a reflection of your current status. I'm not content with that. I also don't hold with the corollary that those who will be working menial jobs forever are forever degraded. I can't believe that the world and the workplace are divided into the peers and the peons, the people who matter and the people who count teabags. This is not the way it has to be.

I don't need my job. But more than that, I am not my job. I am no more degraded by the fact that I photocopy things for people to throw away than you are because your consumer durables were made by an impoverished Asian in a sweatshop. My life, like all lives, has many faces and my work is only one of them. Indeed, the futility of my job is almost an advantage in that I am never confused as to the distinction between my work and my self. I am never tempted to hang my pride on a profession, simply because my profession is a joke. It is very liberating having one less illusion to feed.

This separation of work and self becomes harder to maintain over time. All around me friends are becoming more and more career focused, and I find myself left behind but with no desire to follow in their footsteps. I'm not very old but I'm getting older. When you're eighteen everyone works casually and brims with romanticism. But around the time you graduate from uni, your licence to be idealistic seems to expire.

There is the possibility our material conditions might change. I can afford to leave my job because I can get another one, and I can get another one because my society is rich. There's nothing natural or inevitable about this kind of wealth. Most people in history have not even imagined such abundance. There's no saying it won't turn out to be ephemeral, that we're not about to descend once more into the routine poverty which has characterised most of human existence. Maybe in future I will grovel for my bread and things like dignity and self-respect will be the least of my worries.

Still, that would require some pretty extraordinary changes. And this much I know: in the event of such a catastrophe, such a calamitous overhaul of the way our society creates and distributes wealth, my bosses are just as likely to end up on the rubbish heap as I am. This vision consoles me very much.

I told you workplaces squeeze you into nasty shapes, and I was right.

** Names changed to protect the guilty*



INTROVERSION -

I WISH YOU'D
FUCK OFF,

BUT PLEASE
DON'T.

BART JAMES COUNTS THE COST
OF BEING AN INTROVERT



Being introverted bothered me in the beginning because I would catch myself hating people for the most trivial things. Speaking too much in tutorials. Laughing loudly. Slurping tea. Making small talk. Setting off fireworks. I do all of these things myself, except the fireworks. Not such terrible things, really, especially when people are just trying to enjoy themselves. But this needling person-hatred really concerned me when, just after a recent minor operation and still high on the morphine, I committed exactly the same 'faults' by asking for an ice-cream and then asking if I could "choose the flavours".

Yes, you idiot, of course you can choose the flavours. I was excited about the ice-cream – I just wanted to share my joy. The words just bubbled out before I could stop them. The man behind the counter was, unlike me, not a misanthrope and only smiled. The thrill of my tiny rush of extroversion made me suddenly wonder what was wrong with me the rest of the time.

Introvert is the label that psychologists puts on people displaying a cluster of behaviours (quiet, reserved, preferring of solitude) which I've now realised are anti-social, degenerative and with any luck eventually fixable. I've gone through a back and forth swing of the opinion pendulum to arrive at this conclusion, possibly because vacillation is a dominant trait of the introvert. First I thought being quiet and solitary was holding me back from enjoying myself at parties. Then I read something which gave me reason to think that it was harmful even to consider introversion as a problem. Now I've come to the belief that personality is just a function of brain structure, which in turn is alterable by stimuli, force of will and habit. The benefits of introversion are small; its costs are as big as the universe. I'm going to alter my brain.

In 2003 there was an article in The Atlantic online which soon became one of its most-hit pieces. It's called "Caring For Your Introvert", by Jonathan Rauch. This

is how I first learned that introversion is physically, neurologically real. Introverts have more internally generated brain activity in their frontal lobes than extroverts, which causes them to become overstimulated and uncomfortable in social situations (and whenever there are loud noises such as fireworks), and also less inclined to become bored when alone. Very reassuring news to people like me who thought they had a problem. It's 'natural' and quite common, so it can't be wrong.

But then, all Rauch describes is the prevalence of the condition; not whether it is immutable, let alone desirable. My happiest moments are when I'm with other people. Any condition which reduces my enjoyment of social activity is a bad one, and any condition which actively harms my friendships is a very bad one. You cannot walk around a shopping mall at two kilometres an hour in company and say nothing and expect this to be acceptable behaviour in a civilised society. There is such a thing as a duty to be happy, especially when you hang out with others implicitly demanding that they provide happiness and good times for you.

Even if this weren't a matter of the ethical treatment of friends, there would still be self-interested reasons to stop being a hermit. As with most problems which don't appear to be problems, comparisons can be useful. While introversion may occur naturally, so does depression, which seems to be very closely related to this (much milder) disability. People with depression get medication and therapy to fix their problem. People with introversion are encouraged to accept the condition as their natural identity.

Why should I be concerned about changing from an introvert to something closer to the mean – not all-out extroverted, maybe, but mostly extroverted? For the same reason that I would want to alter my brain if it were in a depressive state. It carries too many costs

"I'M GOING TO ALTER MY BRAIN."

to tolerate. In the case of depression, it stops you from getting out of bed in the morning, and from feeling love for the people closest to you. Who would put up with a mental disorder that makes life seem meaningless?

Introversion is not quite so bad, but judging by its symptoms it's on the same end of the spectrum: chronic inaction; mental slackness; repetitive and reductive planning and speculating without any impulse or desire to test one's thoughts against the real, physical world; and as a result of these things, an absence of genuine stimulation either from friends or leisure. It's a state in which the brain drifts lazily and mildly unsatisfied for hours and hours every day. I use the word 'mildly' with care, because if the feeling were any more intense than that the introvert might actually be driven to do something. It's like staring at yourself in the lift mirror and never getting off the lift.

I have entertained some delusions about my introversion in the past. Romantic ideas about being a silent brooding type, or a reclusive thinker, or an heroic outsider. Generous friends have called me 'Mr Darcy', or described me as "enigmatic". Others

have called me "the corpse". Most people, of course, leave me to my awkward devices and go off and have a brilliant time with someone who has a heartbeat.

It isn't surprising that people can be defensive about their introversion. You may have heard somebody say this to you once: "Great minds discuss ideas; average minds discuss events; small minds discuss people". As if setting up random hierarchies of people doesn't already betray a paranoid over-interest in them. The truth is that spending lots of time alone and silent is usually just circular introspection. Science, philosophy, the creative arts, all of the great productive activities of human beings are always a response to and a passionate study of external stimuli, not maudlin self-reflection. My brightest friends are the ones who think aloud and often, and in company.

Having confirmed that introversion is real, and that it is in fact a problem and not to be regarded as a badge of honour, I now want to mitigate it as much as possible. The solution seems to be stress management, good regular sleep, and protein in my lunch. Great. Next time you see me, I'll be in deep reflection – not over myself, but over a rice paper roll with prawns at the Roundhouse. Hopefully in company.



**“You wouldn’t get safe-sex
advice from a pimp.”**

Bobby Chen

ENEMY AT THE CLIMATE-GATE

I am not a vegan, I am not an investigative journalist, I am not a well-informed average Scandinavian citizen, I am not a climate scientist, I am not a meteorologist, marine or atmospheric scientist. I am not even a scientist, scientific commentator or student of science of any sort. However, none of this has ever made me doubt which side of the climate-change debate I am on.

Without meaning to sound like a union official, it is a fucking no brainer. If the ‘smoking causes cancer’ debates taught us anything it is that the majority of the world’s scientists don’t make up shit for no reason. Companies and politicians on the other hand have every reason to bullshit. This is not as simple as saying that scientists are GOOD and corporations and politicians are BAD. But if you have a whole industry making billions of dollars from a product that slowly kills people, then the material incentive to lie or perhaps just wilfully blind oneself to the ‘inconvenient truth’ is obvious.

The material incentive, indeed the incentive of any sort, for the scientific community to act in a similarly unscrupulous way is not so obvious. Why the hell would scientists try and fight against all the entrenched interests of the world (and there are a lot of those) - just to trick everyone for a bloody lousy prank? Yes there are scientific frauds committed all the time, but these are by individuals and their cohorts, not the entire international scientific community. Not even Dan Brown would entertain a conspiracy this huge, meaningless and fickle. It would be the equivalent of the world’s largest flashmob spending 30 years working full-time to make a bad pun.


You would be crazier than a warehouse sale to trust your tobacconist’s advice on smoking-related illnesses over your doctors. Yet that is what people did. That is why it took over 30 years from when large-scale tobacco-related cancer research was published in the fifties for there to be popular acceptance that smoking causes cancer. Fuck.

You can never convince people using science alone, and that’s fair enough. Scientists don’t always appreciate the intricacies of economic theory or interpretive dance either. But the climate-change debate is ultimately not based on science, it is a debate based on power and interests. What does this mean? Basically, it means you wouldn’t get safe-sex advice from a pimp.

It is no coincidence that, like the tobacco industry before them, those who are most vocal and active in denying the phenomenon of climate-change are those who have the most to lose. To miss this point and nitpick at the science is the equivalent of getting pimp-slapped.

REPRESSION AND RESISTANCE IN HONDURAS





Rosie Wong's eyewitness account of the 2009 coup.

When life gets rough, I have a tendency to run away to Central America. The region will always occupy a soft spot in my heart. So when I began reading back in June 2009 that a military coup had taken place in Honduras, that a youth had been shot dead in a peaceful demonstration, that human rights abuses were spiralling and that international observers were needed, I had to go. The history of Guatemala was very much on my mind: selective repression, massacres, domination by foreign interests. The Honduras coup, however, does not belong to history. It is happening today. I wasn't going to pass by an opportunity to oppose these abuses.

If you've read about this coup, it's likely that you've been told that President Zelaya was overthrown because he broke the law by trying to change to constitution so he could be re-elected. THIS IS NOT TRUE. Even if he had been successful, his re-election wouldn't have been possible because of the timetable for changing the constitution. His plan was to have a popular, non-binding consultation to see if the people wished to have a fourth voting box on the day of the presidential election. The unrealised fourth voting box was to have given voters the chance to say yes or no to the formation of a people's national assembly for constitutional reform.

Zelaya is a wealthy landowner from the conservative liberal party. However, he responded to several large grassroots demands including raising the meagre minimal wage by 70%, declining further mining concessions, and preventing privatisation of the national telephone service. He also proposed to build a commercial airport to replace the US military base and to support the fourth voting box described above. These reforms and proposals precipitating the coup upset a lot of powerful interests including the Honduran elite and foreign interests including the US and Canada.

I arrived on 1 September, picked up by a youth of the Resistance. He explained the helicopters by saying the march must be near by because the helicopters follow to intimidate. Meanwhile he got a call from a friend who had received an anonymous death threat on Facebook. There was a huge crack in his windscreen; someone had thrown a heavy object in his direction. He is an unemployed graphic designer and has a wife and baby. The walls of Tegucigalpa (the capital of Honduras) were covered in writing. He took me to an office where I met the person who had organised for me to come, Andres Conteris of Democracy Now.

I helped with their project to organise an international fast for Honduras, looking up and contacting solidarity organisations around the world and doing translation. When I had time I went to the marches too. The first one was amazing - such a broad based movement and such a magnitude of people. Over three hours we covered a lot of distance, climbing many hills in tremendous heat. Amongst the things we yelled: 'We are not 5, we are not 100, soldout press, count us well!!!' The energy was incredible. 'Are you tired? No! Are you scared? No! So? Adelante! Adelante! Because the struggle is ongoing!' While the numbers and the route varied this march repeated itself daily from Monday to Friday for over 5 months. On Saturdays the Resistance held an assembly and planning meeting. On Sundays there was a concert for resistance at the university.

There was also fasting, in resistance against the coop. So many amazing people joined us: poets. Sociologists. Mothers and fathers. Homeless people. A beautiful run-away child. Doctors. Lawyers. Greenies. Human rights activists. Shoemakers. So many people, so many stories. We lost permission to have a tent from day 3 onwards, so from then on we just went without cover.

It was morning at the fasting tent when we heard president Zelaya was back. At first I thought it was impossible - how would the army allow it? But soon I joined the others in the area where he was said to be. He returned clandestinely. There was so much joy; everywhere people were hugging and full of emotion and smiles. When the military people screamed at them to get out, and they LEFT, I naively thought the people had won. At 3pm on the 21 September, a curfew was called. Traffic came to a standstill, lines for collective taxis were long and growing by the minute and panic and fear was everywhere, except for those who defied the coup by remaining outside the Brazilian Embassy where Zelaya was.

The curfew ended up lasting 40 hours straight. After two days it was suspended for a few hours, and then it was on every night for 2 weeks. The sound of helicopters was intense and constant. Media sources critical of the coup constantly lost their signals. The internet connection was terrible but a good source of information when the emails finally opened. Curfew does not simply mean having to stay put. It meant knowing unimaginable things are happening to people who dare to go outside, who have no choice but to go outside or whose houses are invaded. Hundreds of people were illegally detained and locked inside baseball stadiums where torture and abuse took place. On the second night of our curfew I heard people marching; we stood behind the door in amazement only to hear police chasing after the mass of young people. On the third night we heard a woman screaming. The soldiers had captured her son and she was screaming to let him go and they hit her to the ground and bashed and injured her other son. Luckily after a lot of work and phonecalls his release was secured the next day. This repression is all about trying to stop people from marching and speaking up.

I went home to Australia a few days after that. At home I was paralysed by the news I was reading, of media shutdowns, of decrees to take away people's right to organise and meet.

To date 140 leaders and resistance members have been killed since the coup. Thousands have experienced illegal detention. Hundreds have been beaten up. Ten women have been reported raped and tortured. Many alternative media sources have

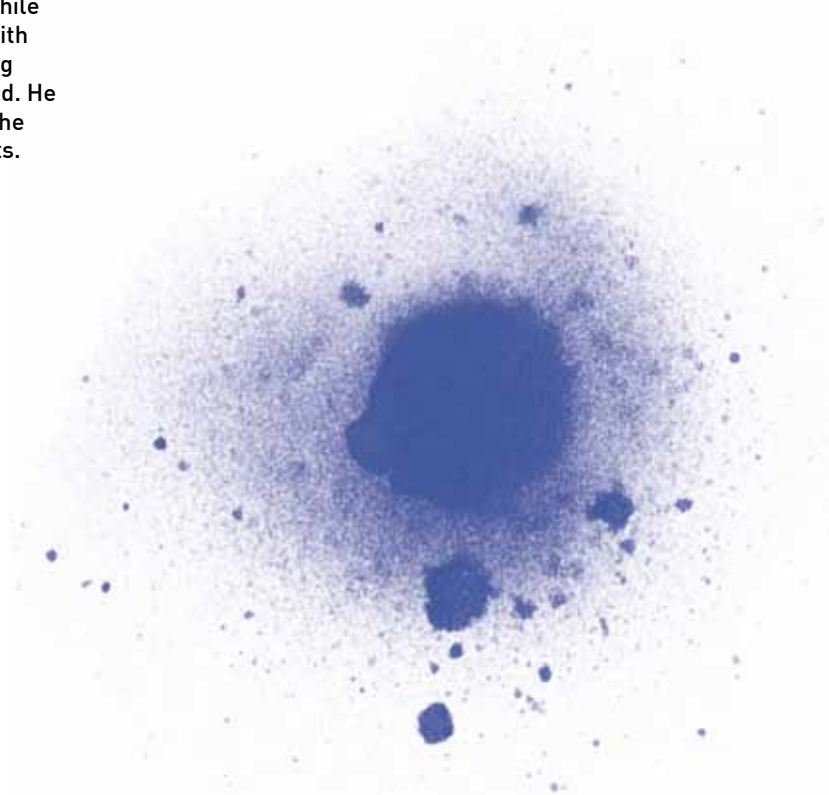
"WHEN LIFE GETS ROUGH, I HAVE
A TENDENCY TO RUN AWAY
TO CENTRAL AMERICA."

"ARE YOU TIRED? NO!
 ARE YOU SCARED? NO! SO?
 ADELANTE! ADELANTE! BECAUSE
 THE STRUGGLE IS ONGOING!"

been shut down while mainstream and international channels proclaim calmness, saying nothing about the deaths and persecution of people who form the non-violent resistance. An election has taken place but under the control of this military regime, and it was popularly boycotted. Even after the election, 10 assassinations took place.

Illegally elected Pepe Lobo is now in power. On the day of his inauguration and the farewell of president Zelaya, 300,000 marched in support of Zelaya, against amnesty, and in support of a people's Constituent Assembly, while the inauguration ceremony in a stadium that seats 35,000 was not full despite the presence of thousands of soldiers and international right wing representatives. There are huge concerns about ongoing human rights abuses.

There is so much I could tell you, but you will have to go online to find out more. Learn about the coup at www.sydney-says-no2honduras-coup.yolasite.com. Get involved at latinamerica.emergency@gmail.com. I write this in memory of Walter Trochez. A human rights defender against the coup, for the GLBT community, killed 13 December 2009 by a driveby gunman while he was walking home from his solidarity work with sex workers in the evening, just days after having been kidnapped, abused, threatened and escaped. He was 27. A humble and committed person, I had the honour of meeting him at the fasting tent. It hurts.



Sprechen Sie Sydney?

Wilfred Brandt is a stranger in a strange land.

I've lived in Sydney off and on for seven years now, after migrating from the US. I still find it a beautiful, disjointed, fabulous, frustrating, and strange city – and country. You're a weird mob, alright.

I've often said that moving from the US to Australia was possibly a more difficult adjustment than moving to some exotic locale with swarthy people speaking in strange tongues and eating fried insect intestines. In that situation, I would have known of the differences up front, and been surprised by the similarities later. Here, I assumed I knew the similarities, but was surprised by the (subtle and nuanced) differences.

Like, have you ever told an Australian to go fuck himself? For some reason people here get really offended by this. It just doesn't translate from the US. Have you ever been to New York City? Jesus, every other phrase is a directive to go fuck thyself. "Fuck you, cabbie"; "Here's your groceries, ma'am, go fuck yourself"; "I now pronounce you man and wife, now get fucked". You get the idea.

Sydney reminds me of my last adopted hometown, Los Angeles, partly because nothing is necessarily what it seems at first glance. Some things are pleasantly and surprisingly much better and more interesting, whilst some things are disappointingly less interesting, predictable, or worse. Sometimes the bad, daggy, and tacky things are ironically the bits you love the most.

The complex contradictions, machinations and idiosyncrasies of this great city can't be summed up in a single sentence or analogy. For me, this is unfortunate, as a favourite pastime for Americans is stupidly simplifying things. Like when asshole tourists blithely decree, "Sydney's like LA and Melbourne's like New York". It's like saying syphilis is orange juice and chlamydia is Diet Coke.

Look at fashion in Sydney. "People in Sydney spend a long time getting dressed so they look like they spent no time at all", said my boyfriend, a Sydney native. I'm incredibly grateful to live in a city where jeans and T-shirt are de rigueur. It suits my lifestyle, and budget. But upon closer inspection – how many of those threadbare, casual T-shirts are designer brands made to look like white-trash grease monkey attire?

Sydney's dress code is casual, but there general seems to be two types of denizens here who interpret this prescript in starkly different ways. There are the labourers, bogans, drunks, stoners, and drunk stoned bogan labourers who just wear whatever without a hint of self-awareness.

Then there are the fashionistas, yuppies, and trend-heads who spend hours each morning carefully cultivating the image that they just rolled out of bed and forgot to shave, in a \$125 designer T-shirt made to look like a threadbare vintage tee for a fake sports team (preferably from some exotic locale, like Shinjuku, or Des Moines). In short, the ones who try to look like they're not trying.

This subterfuge works well for me, as I am a genuine, bona fide slob, and the class confusion allows for my real rags and stained singlets to act as slob-o-flage. People must think I'm fabulously wealthy and eccentric when I'm in a nice restaurant, or inspecting a ten million dollar apartment for sale wearing frayed Daisy Dukes and a stained thrift-store T-shirt with iron-on cartoon cats.

Then there's the thong thing. In the US, of course, a thong is g-string style underwear, or "butt floss". Thankfully I learned what we call "flip flops", you all call thongs, before any embarrassing incidents. The same cannot be said for my aforementioned Aussie boyfriend, who on a trip to Las

“Have you ever told an Australian to go fuck himself? For some reason people here get really offended by this.”

Vegas told a casino-running colleague, “In Australia, men aren’t allowed to wear thongs to a casino”. That raised some eyebrows.

It’s one thing to slip on a pair of thongs popping out to the shops, or up from the beach to the snack shack. It’s another thing to steadfastly refuse to ever wear closed-toe shoes, whether riding a bike, or operating heavy machinery, or attending a wedding, or texting and running to catch a bus in the pouring rain. Wouldn’t it be easier for you (and everyone around you) if you just slipped on some shoes?

However, on the upside, I’m glad Australian men have no leg phobia and will happily wear shorts that creep above the knee. In the puritanical US, wearing or even swimming in anything skimpier than baggy, hoop-legged cargo shorts slapping ‘round your mid-calf is met with open derision if not stoning. Plus, short shorts allows Sydney’s denizens and visitors to get a great eyeful of men’s legs everyday, which is always a good thing.

Short shorts are just one of the cute things I love about Australians. What about all that adorable slang? There’s something extremely camp in the water when people are talking about having a “sanger”, going on a “smoke-o”, taking the “Esky” and eating “good tucker” for “brekkie”, or “chucking tanties” cuz the “sparkie” and the “chippie” didn’t get there till the “arvo”.

Even when the “footy” players get into a fight (in their short shorts, no less), it’s called a “biffo”. How adorable! Is Australia possibly the cutest nation on earth? Strewth! I wouldn’t have it any other way.



Don't Throw Away the Key

Kristyn Glanville explains why the rhetoric of criminal justice is all wrong.

Young people are villainous. We hang around in public, scaring old ladies, using offensive language and generally damaging the social fabric that the baby-boomer generation have worked so hard to create. We need to be taught a lesson - there need to be harsher penalties, stricter control mechanisms, and zero tolerance to deviance.

This is the rhetoric of what it is to be a youth. While it's easy to dismiss it as the outdated sentiment of media trash like Today/Tonight, the sentiment is far more pervasive. Politicians may spin it but it's society that wants to hear it. I can't tell you how many times I've heard my baby-boomer parents launch into a tirade about why it's my generation that will ruin Australia. Young people weren't like that when I was young! People left their doors open! Men didn't date-rape! No meant no!

Bullshit.

Looking back on our youth with rose-coloured spectacles always leads to unfavourable comparisons to the now. People talk about crime now - rape isn't hidden away and dealt with behind closed doors. Crime is out in the open and everyone is encouraged to have an opinion. This is not to say that the nature of crime hasn't changed since our parents were young. But more that it's impossible to accurately know in what ways - personal accounts can be very deceptive, and what we consider as crime and are willing to report and discuss publicly as being crime has changed greatly.

In fact, getting personal is the very problem with our current mindset regarding crime - we've become so horribly individualistic, caught up in fighting individual baddies, avenging individual victims (think: Meghan's Law). Sure, there are individuals who are bad eggs, and crime is a terrible thing to happen to any person. But basing a system on the experiences of individuals is a terrible way of running a coherent institution. Rather than dealing out huge sentences to appease victims seeking retribution, we need to look at the big picture. What causes crime outside the individual pathologies of offenders? What forms of punishment and sentencing actually work at reducing crime and preventing re-offending?

The reality is that most young people who commit crime will grow out of it, without any form of intervention needed. Extending the heavy hand of the law to these people serves only to satisfy the punitive urges of the masses. In fact, increasing their contact with the criminal justice system will only increase their probability of re-offending.

“Young people weren’t like that when I was young!”

We need to recognise crime does not exist in a vacuum. Young people are not inherently bad. Young offenders are likely to have a background of poverty, childhood abuse, lack of schooling, undiagnosed mental illness/behavioural disorders, drug abuse and social exclusion. If we want to stop crime, this is what we need to be focusing on. Increasing punishments will have only a limited effect - young offenders clearly don't heed the consequences that already exist. Many do not think they will be caught. Many do not even care if they're caught - they're desperate and feel that they have no other choice. For others, the decision to commit crime is not a rational weighing of benefits to consequences, but influenced by drugs, mental illness or behavioural disorders. Spending longer in detention will only exacerbate the factors leading their committing crime, and in fact make them 'worse' criminals by providing them with a criminal network in prison.


Even if we assumed that increasing punishment decreases crime, an approach which intervenes using welfare and rehabilitation mechanisms is certainly more humane than locking young people up. It respects their human dignity, ability to make choices and does not deny their liberty.

Juvenile detention centres should be the very last resort when all else has failed. They are not places where people go to “learn a lesson”. Young people are locked in a cell with limited educational opportunities, random strip searches, limited privacy, limited access to counselling and limited means of reintegrating back into society when they're out. When you're released onto the streets with no accommodation, no skills to gain employment, no money and are likely have an untreated mental illness; dealing drugs and committing theft seem an almost inevitable alternative to poverty. The only lesson they learn from 'juvey' is that the system doesn't care and won't help them.

But then there is the logic that holds, “It's their kid, why should I pay for it to go to school/get counselling/eat/be socially included?”. The answer is simple - if you don't pay for that, then you pay in the long term. It costs around \$150,000 per year, per incarcerated offender to house juvenile offenders in a detention centre, plus the cost of policing and court costs. You pay heightened insurance premiums because people steal cars. You pay for the local council to paint over graffiti. We all pay for crime in the end.

It's time to stop believing the hype of older generations and politicians, and call for a new rhetoric in youth justice. One which bases policy on evidence, not personal experience. One which deals with young people humanely, and recognises that we have a responsibility to these people whether we like it or not. One which is not afraid to be unpopular on Today/Tonight. We need a youth justice system that is actually a system, not a cobbled together patchwork of inconsistent philosophies and under-resourced programs. We need a system which sets a good example to young offenders, which shows and teaches respect, rather than bastardising them and further alienating them from society.





The Thinking Snake's Guide to Student Politics

**“University politics are vicious precisely because the stakes are so small.”
- Henry Kissinger**

For better or for worse, student politics is often likened to a festering snakepit. It is brutal, harsh, full of various ever-changing alliances and cults-of-personality.

So it's no surprise that many of you reading this will have no interest whatsoever in being involved in politics at UNSW. You may well wonder what relevance these petty squabbles and power-plays have to your own life. But is that the only attitude? To ignore it and leave it to the student politicians? There are many things at uni which could be improved - are you going to leave it to those few people who ran a week-long campaign to try and fix those problems?

At the very least, it's good to know who these people are, so if you've got a problem you can know who to harangue to try and fix it. Elsewhere in this publication, you may have found Office Bearer reports from your Student Representative Council. These will, of course, have been written to show the SRC in a very positive light, inspiring confidence in those SRC members. But they won't tell you very much about them as people. Or even much about them as politicians. So here I am, one snake amongst many, giving you the gossip on student politics, UNSW-style.

To start with, there's the Factions. These are mostly (but not always) linked with Australian political parties. They aren't quite the same as 'tickets', which are what run for election (which will be covered in a future column). At UNSW, on the current SRC, we've got: National Labor Students (NLS), composed of left-leaning

members of the Labor Party. There's also Socialist Alternative (who you may well have encountered shouting various things around campus by now).

Outside of the current council, we've got Student Unity (a misnomer of course, they comprise right-wing Labor members), the Australian Liberal Students Federation (the Young Liberals, more or less), as well as a few people calling themselves WHIGS (right-wing 'independents').

Most of the current SRC is non-factional (indeed, this has been the case for a few years now), referred to in student-politics-speak as 'small "I" independents' (to distinguish from the 'big "I"s', a West Australian faction). Bear that in mind whenever you hear people talking about the 'Labor-dominated SRC'.

So now, we can move to looking at the people themselves.

First up: Osman Faruqi, SRC President, 'small-i'. The first non-Labor President since the early '90s (so you can imagine that people in both Labor factions are somewhat taken aback). He's quite nice, as far as SRC snakes go. Since he's non-factional, he's also significantly less likely to pay attention to what the National Union are likely to be saying.

Jelena Samardzic (also known as Helen) is the Education Officer. She has made clear her intentions to become the next President (for NLS). What is less certain is

just what she intends to do in her current role. Her immediate predecessor was more interested in filling out his CV than activism – will this tradition be continued?

James Still holds the Welfare role. He's been very active over summer, printing off a new version of the Cheapskate's Guide. We will all be watching to see whether his enthusiasm continues throughout the year, or whether he burns out (as did his immediate predecessor).

Ben Noone and Nicola Karcz are sharing the role of Environment Officer. The Enviro role is usually shared by two people. Sometimes they get on and do a lot of fantastic activism together. Sometimes, they do not.

There are a group of positions sometimes referred to as 'Equity' roles – they represent special-interest groups, typically groups that historically have faced persecution. Jess Mobbs as Women's Officer, Shuang (Samantha) Guo as International Students Officer, Marita Morgan as Students with Disabilities Officer, Felicity Lee and Anna Khan in Ethno-Cultural, April Long and Peta MacGillivray sharing the Indigenous Students role, and Nick Atkins and Squish Ramsay are the Queer Officers (the last of these I hold in a special place – a student politician snake who keeps snakes!). The Equity Officers are usually devoted to their special area, and do good work in it. If they don't, they may well find themselves replaced by someone even more passionate.

And then we come to two particular roles. These roles aren't necessarily problematic, more to do with the individuals holding them. You see, Anh Pham as Postgraduate Students Officer and Rebecca Hynek as cofa Campus Representative are members of Socialist Alternative. And the thing about SAlt is, they often fight for good things. But the methods they use are nasty. Attacking the individual, repeating mantras instead of engaging in debate, 'with us or against us' attitude in general. Pham and Beck may well rise above this usual method of SAlt behaviour, which I hope occurs. But I cannot be confident of this.

If you're over at cofa, then you get another group of Office Bearers as well. In this snake's experience, cofa OBs are inspired and full of fun. They have miniscule budgets, but great ability to make the money work.

So those are your Office Bearers for 2010. Then we've got Councillors, both Undergrad and Postgrad variants thereupon. Councillors usually aren't that noticeable. The role is notoriously undefined; it's not quite clear who they represent.

They generally fall into three groups. First off, you've got the up-and-comings who didn't manage to snag a position as Office Bearer. Next, you've got the old hands, staying on for an extra year. Then you've got the randoms, people who got the position simply for being in the right place at the right time.

And why am I doing this? Well, I'm just another snake slithering around this snakepit. I was on Council for two years, first as a Tharunka editor, then an Office Bearer. Maybe I'm waiting for another chance to get involved. Or maybe this snake is sick and tired of the whole shebang, but can't quite muster up the courage to let go. Time will tell.

Until next time,
Rory Thomas





An Anthropologist's Guide To The Mountain Tourist

Kylar Loussikian
**observes a common
species.**

The Mountain Tourist is an odd creature. Its native habitat is normally the red-brick house of an upwardly mobile family in a bedrock suburb of some Anglo-American country and its range is far and wide. Mountain Tourists can be found grazing in the foothills of Tibet, drinking at the watering holes of Beirut and navigating the tricky landscapes of the Cambodian Railway ticketing system.

If you want to spot a Mountain Tourist, the safest bet is to scrutinise the auspiciously named 'hostels' more often than not recommended in a Lonely Planet guide as 'homely and local', 'fading charm' and possessing of a 'friendly, relaxed traveller vibe'. One can make out a Mountain Tourist by identifying his or her conversational posturing and loud one-directional rhetoric most commonly aimed at another Mountain Tourist (a form of mating), or at bemused or irritated listeners. Topics for lecture range from the causes and apparent solutions to the Palestinian conflict, at which point a Mountain Tourist will characteristically arrive at an obvious but original solution, to habits of his or her native countrymen and his or her views on American foreign policy. Observers may be puzzled by the conflation of these three topics into one extended argument, but undue

alarm should not be caused as this is merely a call from one Mountain Tourist to another for companionship. It should be noted that extreme care should be taken not to alert the Mountain Tourist to your presence as this may result in some awkward backpedalling to extradite oneself from an overindulgent and lengthy conversation on the strength of coffee or the quality of artworks hanging in the Mountain Tourists' dwelling.

Other characteristic traits of Mountain Tourists in their natural habitat include a loud, patronising speech, a phenomenon whose origins we have yet to verify. Most often directed at the local populace, regardless of their level of English proficiency, Mountain Tourists can be seen (and heard) blasting out queries in the order of "WHERE IS THE BUS TO...", "I AM LOOKING FOR..." and "ARE THESE REAL GUCCI BAGS?". Truth be told, experts are often at odds as to the reasons behind the behaviour of Mountain Tourists, but consensus is building behind the idea that these sorry creatures suffer from a crippling misconception that they are of the local populace. Often, the Mountain Tourist will even eschew the most popular historical and touristic landmarks, which are designated as such due to their cultural, national or aesthetic



“They are what the non-scientific community refers to as massive wankers.”

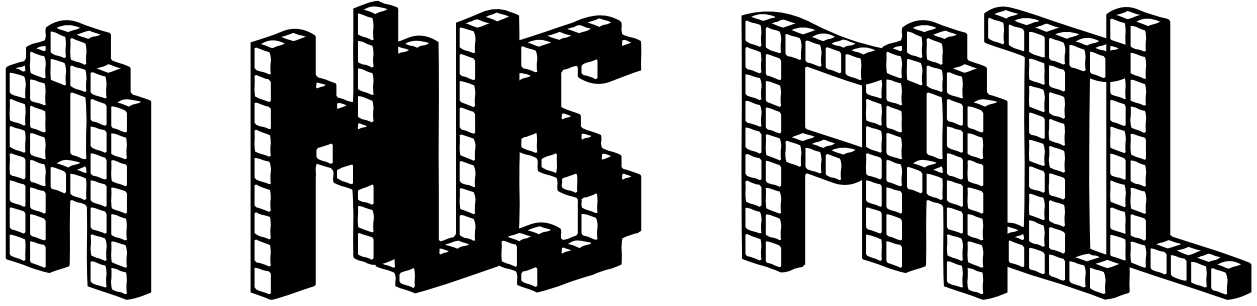
importance, to live as the locals do, even if only for their two day stop-over in Tashkent. Often Mountain Tourists make such a pilgrimage with backpacks full of local wares such as Kathmandu vests, Kathmandu jackets, Kathmandu mountain pants and the necessary Kathmandu safety kit, alongside the Versace sunglasses and a daily spending allowance that could feed a local Uzbek family for a week.

Thus encumbered, the Mountain Tourists avoids the conventional tourist transportation choices of minibus or taxi in favour of local transport. This includes the slow bus, hailing passing cars and the third-class train carriage. There, many imagine that their pale whiteness causes them to be perceived by the native populace as albino natives. Others imagine that the locals, besides being colourblind, somehow perceive their inability to converse in Uzbek as merely a quirk of an eccentric local.

It is an irony then, that the Mountain Tourist's natural predator is the very local the Mountain Tourists seeks to emulate. The local often awaits the opportunity when the Mountain Tourist has been separated from the pack before attacking. Often this comes mainly in the form of offers of friendship leading to the sale of poorly made carpets, or in the form of constant harassment with an assortment of useless souvenirs until the Mountain Tourist breaks down altogether and retrieves his or her American Express. Predatory locals often use simple

visual clues to differentiate the Mountain Tourist from a regular tourist; Mountain Tourists are quickly identified by a variety of silly headgear (e.g. the Che cap, the Nepalese hat, the Arab Bedouin head dress), or by the nose-buried-in-the-Lonely Planet look, popular amongst the Mountain Tourist population. In rare cases, a Mountain Tourist may become so engrossed in his or her effort at being 'a local' that they may, by a stroke of chance, happen upon an establishment on the outskirts of an industrial town in the hope of observing and understanding the native populace. Arriving at these venues, such as the Rwandan Workers' Club and others of that ilk, the Mountain Tourists life expectancy drops by an estimated 60 per cent, thanks to a combination of severe food poisoning (as the hearty local cuisine impacts upon the soft Anglicised stomach used to the delicate taste of modern Australian cuisine and Westernised Asian foodstuffs), and fatal stabbings as locals clamour for the Rolex that will feed the town for fifteen months.

Still, as patronising and dim-witted as a Mountain Tourist appears to be, it is best to allow them ample breathing room and refuse to communicate till as many months pass as needed to remind them their knowledge of the language of the destination just visited is not sufficient to begin sprinkling in Swahili or Arabic into everyday English speech. At the end of the day, they are what the non-scientific community refers to as massive wankers.



I've got nothing against student politicians – some of my friends' best friends, to channel Pauline Hanson, partake in that particular choice of pastime. However, I do feel a healthy cynicism towards their role. My attitude is less dismissive than the average student's – I believe that we benefit from someone doing the job. My cynicism arises from knowing that while their words, for the most part, are in the right place, their eyes (hearts?) are usually set on Canberra.

The factionalism, political games and power struggles which precede the National Union of Students' (NUS) National Conference each year almost saw my cynicism reaffirmed this December, and nearly caused the collapse of the Union itself. To have a healthy, viable and effective national representative body for students we have to be able to hold our office bearers to account. So despite one National Labor Student hack warning, "I know people at UNSW, so will know if you publish any of this." I'm sharing here what I've learnt over the past two months about our elected representatives.

On December 18 the first news had filtered through of problems unfolding at the NUS conference being held at La Trobe University in Ballarat. The factions had failed to make their usual deals; some universities were being blocked from taking part, with their affiliation to NUS & therefore voting status in dispute. The problems mounted as the days passed. Socialist Alternative delegates decided to protest on Day Two over delegates not turning up on Day One. National Labor Students (Labor Left) came together to pull a co-ordinated rapid-fire motion-passing stunt. This caused Student Unity (Labor Right) to literally storm from the conference floor. (Apparently there's video in existence of this last event. If you've seen it I'd love to get a copy.)

There were rumours of ambulances being called, security escorts being required to walk near conference accommodation, emergency 3:00 am factional meetings. Although I'd love to be able to say it's all true, there wasn't anyone from Tharunka at Ballarat, and accounts have been patchy at best and occasionally conflicting.

That the National Conference, with its total budgeted expenditure of \$200,000 of students unions' money, failed to conduct its constitutional requirements is a detriment to the student political system underlying its basic operations. It also raises questions about the motivations of a number of those involved in organising this year's Union.

Four days after a Special General Meeting convened by NUS to see themselves either resurrect or die, I visited Trades Hall in Melbourne – the Union's shared headquarters. It's an impressive building from the street, all dignified and stately; its rundown interior could serve as a metaphor for the difference between the public and private faces of the organisation. To be a little nicer, you could say the NUS offices authentically replicate a student sharehouse aesthetic – slightly shabby, but not a mess. In my brief visit to the office, it was clear that along with our taste in decor, Tharunka editors and NUS office bearers have a few of things in common – we're both elected, both have empty bottles in our offices (ours organic cola, theirs the remains of various liquors – presumably from celebrating campaign wins for students in previous years) and we're equally as passionate in our ideologies.

Despite this passion, however, the Special General Meeting hasn't addressed the flaws which almost brought NUS to its knees. The behaviour at the 2009

James Fehon investigates what went wrong with NUS and how to fix it.

Conference jeopardised NUS' future for the sake of factional gains. Disappointingly, it's not just those who'd like to see NUS destroyed who partake in these games. Outgoing NUS President Rose Jackson said in 2006: "Often in NUS we've had people elected not because they're good candidates but because they're from the right group." Even more concerning is the fact that in 1997, NUS Delegate Corinne Glenn was telling a story which is eerily similar to this years events:

"The [1996] conference sessions didn't start until around midnight, after hours of number crunching had ensured that all decisions had been made before voting began. In short, it was a bureaucratic and undemocratic farce, inaccessible to students and mostly irrelevant to their needs."

It's precisely because our political system rewards this kind of manoeuvring that student politicians try their hand. NUS continues to be described as a training ground for future (Labor) MPs, and involvement in student politics in general as a sort of apprenticeship for aspiring politicians. Experience in factional wheeling and dealing is arguably a key competency."

Just look at Rudd and his numbers focus, or the deal which has us stuck with Conroy's cooky idea for censoring and slowing our internet. Indeed David Wilkins, the 2009 NUS Secretary General and one of the key players in the events which took place in Ballarat, is now working for Federal Labor MP Kate Ellis.

Some have expressed their belief that the system of factional deals is a necessary evil for NUS to achieve its stated aims. With that kind of attitude, a general sense of ideological urgency and a love for the game, it's unlikely reforms will come from within.

I say it's time to remind them that as students we can disaffiliate our unions, and make a few demands. It's encouraging to see moves underway to reform the Union and remove opportunities for factional influence on its representative function. UNSW, as one of the universities whose status was in dispute, could take a leading role in seeing this happen.

NUS is not too big to fail. It needs to reform to ensure the chance to learn from last year's mistakes isn't passed by.





Presidents Report - Osman Faruqi

Welcome to all new and returning UNSW students from your 2010 Student Representative Council President!

It won't take you long to realise that university life is not just about attending classes and writing essays but that there are a whole bunch of exciting opportunities out there waiting to be taken advantage of.

UNSW is an incredibly diverse community that offers all students the chance to get involved in wide range of student-run activities; including campaigning for students' rights and ensuring that the student voice is heard loudly throughout the university.

That's where your Student Representative Council comes in. We're a group of students elected each year by you to advocate on your behalf to the university and government, and campaign on the issues you think are important.

Our departments represent important student issues and areas we know students care about like Education, Welfare and the Environment.

Some of the campaigns we'll be working on include getting fairer Youth Allowance and rent assistance, protecting course diversity and creating a more environmentally sustainable campus.

If you want to get involved in the Student Representative Council, help out with these campaigns or have ideas of your own, come down and visit us on Level 1 of the Blockhouse, opposite the Roundhouse (where you drink beer)!

If you have any problems or concerns please feel free to contact me at o.faruqi@arc.unsw.edu.au

Student Development Committee Convener – Alice Lang

Hi everyone,

The SDC (Student Development Committee) is the part of Arc that has the really fun job of handing out money to student societies and encouraging people to get involved in volunteering and activities at UNSW.

So come to Arc to see how we can support your club, and get excited about all the opportunities for volunteering this year! As well as the familiar O-week, UNSweetened, Shack Tutoring, Mosaic Fusion Forums, Hypesmiths, CONTACT, Walama Muru, International Cookbook and The Pod, you can also get involved with Habitat for Humanity, Duke of Edinburgh, Relay for Life, the Stationery Re-Use Centre, the Free Trade Fair and the Volunteer Army! There's plenty to choose from so do get involved!

Postgrad Report - Anh Pham

Hi, I'm Pham and I'm the new Postgrad Officer for this year Student Representative Council (SRC). This year we will be campaigning around issues concerning postgraduate students, such as stopping university course cuts, campaigning for equal marriage rights, and campaigning against the closing of the prayer room.

I have been working closely with the Islamic Society of UNSW to put out a press release against the closure of the prayer room. I have also been working with other SRC departments to help to fund and advertise the upcoming rally for equal marriage rights on the 20th of March. If you have any comments please contact me at postgrad@arc.unsw.edu.au

Welfare Report - James Still

The Welfare Department has been ÜBER busy! First of all, the Cheapskate's Guide to UNSW has been updated with new information: there are copies available at Arc stores! It's an incredibly useful little booklet that outlines practical ways to save money on and off campus. This includes cheap food, bargain buys, or broader issues such as applying for Youth Allowance and a run down of your rights when living in student housing or in the workplace.

I have also worked with the Students with Disabilities Officer to set up the new Disability and Welfare Room as a means of supporting students with disabilities and as well as financially struggling students through their university degree. It is located on Level 1 of the Blockhouse and is wheelchair accessible. I'm also working on creating a Calculator Borrowing Scheme which will mean any student who wants to borrow a scientific, exam-approved calculator can do so free of charge. If you need to contact me feel free to do so at welfare@arc.unsw.edu.au.

Students with Disabilities Report - Marita Morgan

Hi All! I'm Marita Morgan and I am the Student with Disabilities Officer for 2010!

Well, there has been a lot happening within the SRC Students with Disabilities Department so far this year. We have organised a wheelchair basketball match during O-week which will be exciting. The Disability and Welfare Room has finally been established and is now located in the SRC Wing of the Blockhouse. It is free and open to all students. It is fully accessible. So come along and chill out on the couch, have nap on the bed.. there are also facilities to make yourself a sandwich or a cup of tea!

I will be around every Wednesday during semester so feel free to drop by and see me. Don't forget we have our e-list which is: <http://groups.google.com/group/unsw-swd-collective>
My email is : disabilities@arc.unsw.edu.au

Queer Report - Nick Atkins & Squish Ramsay

The Queer Department has been hard at work. The campaign for marriage equality picked up momentum at last years rally and the Queer Collective is proud to be supporting further action this year. O-Week itself will play host to a number of (currently illegal)

marriage ceremonies as well Queer Space tours, zine making workshops, Mardi Gras working bees and the Queer Space Housewarming party.

On the Saturday after O-Week, UNSW will march with the Cross Campus float under the banner of "GenerationQ:" "The future is here, the future is Queer" to celebrate the bright future Queer students are currently working towards.

The Officers are working with a variety of organisations including; twenty10, ACON, Sydney Gay and Lesbian Choir and the Convicts Rugby Club to ensure a semester filled with vibrant opportunities for Queer and Queer-friendly students. Events throughout the year will all be published in the new Queer handbook.

Cheers, Nick

Enviro Report - Nicola Karcz & Ben Noone

This semester we think you should come along to the Enviro Collective. We meet once a week on the Quad lawn (look for the banner), and we even have snacks. Check our website or Blitz for this semester's day and time.

We're a group of environmentally minded students who run campaigns, get together with students from other universities and run events like Environment week on campus.

Coming up in a few weeks, we'll be joining hundreds of people at a people's blockade of the world's biggest coal port, from 10am on Sunday the 28th of March in Newcastle. Get in contact for more info.

See you at O-week!
Ben and Nicola,
enviro@arc.unsw.edu.au, www.unsw.envirocollective.com

Indigenous Report - April Long & Petra MacGillivray

The Indigenous Department has had a great start to the year so far. In conjunction with the O-Week Organising Team we have arranged an official Welcome to Country and a 'Native Cook Up' BBQ, so come along on the Monday of O-Week and taste some kangaroo, crocodile and emu whilst getting to know the Indigenous students at UNSW.

There will be many opportunities during O-Week to connect with the Indigenous Collective. We will have a stall opposite the Red Centre where we will have information about not only the Collective, but also Indigenous services on campus. We invite all students to come and place their hand print on our banner in support of Reconciliation.

Both Indigenous and Non-Indigenous students are encouraged to join the Indigenous Collective, an opportunity to socialise and engage with the diversity of Indigenous cultures on campus (IT'S FREE!).

If you need to contact us please do at indigenous@arc.unsw.edu.au

Womyn's Report - Jessica Mobbs

Well it has been an exciting lead up to O-Week and many things have been a-happening. First thing's first, the Womyn's Room has been refurbished, so it is extra comfy for female-identifying students on campus. Though there have been some events over the summer that have set the agenda for this year. At St. Pauls College, Sydney Uni there was a Facebook page containing alleged incitement to rape, raising the ever-present issue of violence and sexual assault on our campus. I have had meetings with other Womyn's Officers across the state and at the national level to come up with a national strategy to keep our campuses violence-free.



Womyn's Week is coming up in Week 3, Semester 1, and already we have exciting events lined up to do with womyn and religion, sexuality and what it means to be a modern feminist. The Womyn's Collective holds meetings every Monday, 2-3. In sisterhood,
Jess
women@arc.unsw.edu.au

International Students Report - Samantha Guo

The International Student Department will focus on the campaign of granting international students concession on public transportation this year. The first step is to get the university to express their support on the issue to the public. A petition is under preparation, which is planned to be located at in the SRC Ethnic/International stall during O-week. The completed petition will be sent to the university and the State government to show students' concern about the concession issue. A letter to the university's Vice Chancellor is also being drafted up.

What's next? Getting in contact with clubs and societies for overseas students around campus, and discussing on how we can work together this year on some of the events and activities. Preparing materials to be kept at the SRC Ethnic/International stall during O-week

Collective times are Monday 1-2pm, if you have any problems please contact me at international@arc.unsw.edu.au.

SUBMIT TO THARUNKA...

... AND NOT JUST IN A
DIRTY WAY, EITHER.



We welcome contributions including opinion pieces, satire, scoops, fiction, pornographic fiction, artwork and anything else you can think of. If you want to be heard, write for us! Please email your work as an attachment to tharunka@arc.unsw.edu.au, preferably in .rtf or .doc format. Include a title, wordcount and byline (author's name) at the top of the document. Refer to the Tharunka Style Guide available on our website <http://tharunka.unsw.edu.au> for tips and pointers.

If you have a rough draft, an idea or a 'pitch' for an article and want to talk it through with someone, email us at the same address and we can work through it together. Bear in mind it may take us a few days to respond. We receive a lot of emails. We also need to put some time aside for eating and showering.

Or, write us a letter! Again, these should be directed to tharunka@arc.unsw.edu.au. Angry letters are always appreciated but if you particularly enjoyed an article, we'd love it if you let us and the writer know.

