

A Journey in Vain

Stephen looked up and saw a hundred faces. Thousands perhaps, a staring expressionless mass. He wanted to know their thoughts, no he was just curious about them, wanting to casually observe but not interact. Ah yes, to observe... What a life to lead! The life optimised for learning without emotional vulnerability, Stephen would say.

“I wish they piped radio stations down here like in the Harbour Tunnel. At least I could zap all those breakfast DJs...”, Stephen muttered to himself, barely moving his lips and his voice a low whisper. He observed (and rather sarcastically noticing that concept yet again) that such an internal conversation -speech without the mouth or ear - invokes the lips even if for certain syllables, or is that phonemes?

Walking between the ticket inspectors - CityRail actually bothers with them during peak time - the Elizabeth Street exit loomed near, gateway for a million workers. Through the gateway, wait for the walk signal, and go. Off to his job, a job nobody else wants and almost nobody else gives a stuff about. Attempting to establish a permanent alternative to the situation within one of Australia's largest and most bureaucratic companies was never going to be easy. The expressionless masses masquerading as middle management made sure of that.

“A conspiracy?” Stephen wondered. “No, I am not paranoid, just different. Being different has been enough to be persecuted in the past though, but in this case it is apathy rather than with a purpose.” and as such the internal conversation continued, unknown to all except God. Stephen's brother, a visitor to Sydney, saw Central station as a giant bathroom, with its wall after wall of floor-to-ceiling tiles. Stephen laughed for a moment, looking beyond the ordinary into a unique interpretation. Were others looking at his strange, possibly confronting behaviour? He did not care. “I won't be seeing any of you ever again in my entire life, so my actions at this point in time are totally inconsequential”, he retorted to any possible querying, not that he expected any.

Sitting in the end of the train compartment one recent morning, Stephen saw the platform pull up (relatively speaking...) outside the opposing doors as his office building came into view. A wave of fear paralysed him momentarily, and it was this moment which Stephen came to symbolise as the first step towards a decision to change. To change not jobs, but rather entire lifestyles. The decision did not come for several months, and when it did it was not with thought and deliberation, a paradox to Stephen. He reasoned that the expressionless mass rejected him, for he was not one of their own.

Stephen thought as he reached the surface: “Am I irrational, or even mad? Obviously I can control my behaviour to be within social customs, so I am not mad. As for being irrational, every person is to some extent. It is just a matter of attempting to minimise one's own.”