



Source: Abraham Rabinovich, 'Abbas is irrelevant, Israeli leaders warn', *the Australian online*, 28/02/06.

Tags: [streets](#), [racism](#), [violence](#), [travel](#), [magic](#)
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From the outside it seems impenetrable, faceless. But from the inside the city lives, breathes and swarms, following its own patterns. And the hordes, they do have faces.

I sit outside the Crystal Palace Hotel at the top of George Street. It's Saturday night and I watch the doof doof cars slowly do the circuit. Cars waiting; cars full of girls pull up beside cars full of boys; exchange numbers through the windows. I see a group of boys on push bikes, nicely groomed, slicked back hair. They're weaving between the cars, moving faster than the traffic, meeting plenty more girls than the boys in the cars.

I eat at two or three in the morning. My choice is Korean or Chinese for a sit-down dinner. I see families with young kids eating out late too. I try out all the pubs from the old ones in the Rocks, to the skanky ones around Central, the weirdest basement holes, the smallest dozen seaters, and the done-up ones with pub grub and happy hour.

I wear overalls and I'm stared at as I walk down George Street past the Queen Vic Building heading north. I feel like it keeps people on their toes—that's toes in good leather and heels up high. I walk the streets in protest. I block the traffic. I wave and shout 'come down' at people who stick their heads out their office windows. I perform for friends in the middle of the night, in the concrete amphitheatre, in Martin Place, north of the Queen Vic; boys on skateboards my Greek chorus.

By day I do my job, swinging the Pyrmont Bridge that spans the water at Darling Harbour to the west of the Queen Vic. Plenty of people there, crossing my bridge, walking under it. I don't like that my bridge is a gazetted terrorist target. I don't like the huge police presence on the streets at night. I don't like that people feel too scared to come into the city. I help the people who have lost their way. I do a lot of that. Must be my magic combination—look friendly, don't squint, no dark glasses

and white as white skin. Works other places too I find out. Day three of overseas trip I'm standing at a tram stop in Warsaw and a round woman in black is asking me directions. I speak no Polish. She thinks I'm a local. I laugh out loud. She does not.

I get to China where I'm called 'big nose'; I ask for directions and someone will always want to practice their English on me. A crowd of locals will gather to watch. I am a spectacle. I am white, therefore rich and I am surrounded in the subway by buskers demanding more money. I am given babies to hold while the parents take a photo of the two of us. The baby will scream for I am a monster. On train trips people will file past me, slowly, looking without shame. I make a friend on a train. We cannot speak in the other's language, so we draw, we make faces and we mime. We swap knowledge. I learn how to count and bargain and he learns how to make a green salad. Back at home, Chinatown, the Haymarket is my back yard and my dining room. I can walk there. I am comfortable there. The waiters know me, greet me and never sit me next to the toilet door.

There is the ugly face. A mugging in the back lane, or late at night out the front. I stick my head out the window to break it up. I pick up wallets and bags and passports and take them up to the cop shop. Cars are broken into. Windows are smashed for the fun of it. Local shopkeepers have golf clubs behind the counter. Local kids come in with baseball bats shouting for money. I hear there's a criminal gang living around the corner. Tourists are held up at gunpoint.

I've been lucky. Maybe I look local, rich but not rich enough, white as white face, or some other magic combination.

Adapted for performance by Barbara Campbell from a story by Michelle Outram.