



Source: Abraham Rabinovich, 'As Olmert faces oblivion, Livni vies to replace him', *The Australian online*, 17/03/07.

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What do you do? He has always been petrified by that question. Part of it has to do with not really knowing what it is that he does, part is to do with doing more than one thing, and part to do with the fact that saying 'artist' as a response always engages the possibility that people will think that he makes paintings, which he doesn't. Not that he has anything against paintings, or even painters, per se...

He accepted an invitation to a holiday drinks party from the neighbours across the way. Thus far, he had only experienced these neighbours through the *Rear Window* effect of peering across the communal courtyard. He was excited about the possibility of seeing the inside of the flat that he had only ever glimpsed through a distant window, and even more excited about the possibility of seeing his own flat from the outside through a distant window as a distant window. This seeing the outside from another inside is perhaps analagous to the problem he faced in trying to determine how he was perceived by others in the world. (Maybe that's overdoing it. It was, after all, only an invitation for a drink with a neighbour.)

When he arrived at the party he became very anxious indeed when he realised that of course everyone there was a complete stranger, including the hosts, and that they were all going to ask him 'what do you do?'. The panic that arose from this realisation was multiplied one hundred fold when the hostess volunteered the assembled crowd for a game of what she called, 'Guess what I do for a living'. (He was horrified at the prospect of this game given his fear of the question that lay at its premise but couldn't help seeing how perfectly poetic the whole thing was. It was almost as if the whole world had engineered a turn towards him, that his neurosis had become the centre of the universe, and he pretty much abandoned himself with a perverse schadenfreude to become a malicious spectator of his own fate.)

The game got going. 'Okay Justin', she said to the guest who was by her side, 'you guess what people do round in a circle, and when you guess somebody's job correctly, they take over, but you have to keep going until you get someone right.'

He realised that actually this might not be too bad because, well, it was really up to someone else to say what it was that he did and he would hopefully only have to explain it once, and that if Justin, or whoever it was, happened to say 'artist' then at least, when he replied 'yes', he wouldn't have to say that word, 'artist', which always sounded so constipated on his tongue; as if all there was to come out was shit and not even that would come out.

Justin went round the circle. He thought the first woman was 'probably a mum' but his guess was wrong, so he went on to the next person.

The next person, it had already been established before the game was announced, was a dentist. 'I think you work in the City,' Justin, who clearly hadn't been listening, said, 'a banker, or trader.' His guess was also pronounced incorrect by the dentist.

He wasn't doing very well. In fact Justin didn't guess anyone correctly. He had a very limited imagination for thinking of jobs. Women were by and large 'mums' and men 'worked in the City'; which, as it turned out later in the evening, merely described Justin's own situation. 'I wonder if he will think that I work in the City too', our hero thought as Justin turned at last to him.

'You're in the media,' Justin said. Although it should be acknowledged that there was a grain of truth in this statement the firm response came back: 'No!'

'Well it's something like that anyway, something arty,' Justin said dismissively, looking him up and down.

At this point the hostess, fearing her game was not really going according to plan, and wishing she had not chosen Justin to go first, decided to abort the game. 'We're going to have to stop this now or no-one will ever have an opportunity for proper conversation, so why don't we all just say what we do and get it over with. So, if you're not in the media, what do you do?'

Long pause.

'I'm in Criminal Law,' he replied with perfect diction. Everyone seemed to perk up. 'Oh!' said the hostess, 'How fascinating! Any interesting cases at the moment?'

If there is one thing that he can't stand, it is lying. He doesn't like it when other people lie to him and neither did he feel it acceptable in himself. But, he had to admit to himself, that he loved telling these complete strangers that he was 'in Criminal Law' and loved noting the change in the way that they viewed him once they had been told. He decided in this case that it wasn't so much that he had lied but rather that he had told a kind of behind-the-scenes truth. Answering the question 'what do you do?' he hadn't made do with the truth but had told a lie to tell a greater truth. His performance of 'being' a Criminal Lawyer revealed an artistic strategy; that in responding to the presumption that he did something 'arty' with the statement that he was 'in Criminal Law', he had problematised the common sense assumptions and stereotypes that people who go round for drinks have and that this is what it meant to be an artist and that it didn't therefore matter that he wasn't 'in fact' a Criminal Lawyer in any way except in the twisted world of his own lying words.

*Adapted for performance by Barbara Campbell from a story by Joshua Sofaer.*