

Lee de-Wit, TomFest 30 March 2012, University of Bristol

Breakfast at Troscianko's

I met Tom just over 10 years ago, as a somewhat naive 18 year old, at a 'meet your tutor' gathering in Gregory's café. Somehow our first conversation drifted onto a topic I found a tad embarrassing, Tom quickly realized this, and with a slight grin on his face and twinkle in his eye, quickly changed the topic. I quickly realized tutorials with Tom were going to be one of the best features of my education at Bristol. Tom's tutorials were for me the first real taster of an education motivated by the pleasure and sense of adventure that comes with expanding ones knowledge and understanding. Tutorials with Tom were often brought to life with stories that began, I was riding on my motor cycle to a conference when... Tom would also discuss his ongoing research; I particularly recall Tom discussing his attempts to automate the detection of dangerous incidents via CCTV, and his suggestion that rather than designing an algorithm to solve the problem, it would probably be more effective to wire the CCTV footage into the living-rooms of old people, who were stuck at home worried about crime.

Tutorials with Tom were however not all about motor cycles and suggestions for granny enforced surveillance systems. Tom knew we had essays to write and exams to take, and always provided support. Indeed Tom approached the pastoral side of a Tutor's job very earnestly, and I'm particularly grateful for the time Tom took to discuss what I might do with my future. Here Tom gave me some very useful and concrete advice, namely that were I to become an accountant after graduating, Tom would shoot me. Tom also once told me that he would volunteer to be able to do his job, he was just lucky enough to actually get paid to do it. Whenever I've got frustrated with science, this very generous way of thinking has always reminded me to take a bit of perspective, to remember and appreciate the pleasure that comes from a life discussing and researching the human mind.

After graduating I would find excuses to meet up with Tom, either inviting him for talks or heading to the conferences I knew he'd be attending. The more I learnt about psychology and vision science the more I came to love discussing science with Tom. Tom had a the capacity to dive into a discussion on any topic, from the experimental details of a talk we had just attended to the role of ecological utility in shaping the type of representations the visual system uses, and naturally by extension role of ecological utility in shaping aesthetics and the meaning of life. Conversations with Tom were an adventure in their own right. An adventure that for me contained the mix critical to any genuine discussion, where the nerdy details and the big picture simultaneously have their place. I'd always come away from discussions with Tom feeling I had gained an insight into something, like my world view was somehow broader than it was before.

Meeting Tom at conferences also continued a lesson in the compatibility of science and enjoying life (I'd not otherwise regarded the compatibility as self-evident, and it might have otherwise evaded me). After a dinner in Brussels one evening, I was ready to head back and go to sleep, Tom however felt we should explore a little first. I hesitantly agreed. Based on the curious mosaic on the outer wall Tom picked a bar close to La Grand Place. My inclination to go back and rest was quickly washed away with some Belgian beer and the ambience of a Frenchman singing at the bar's piano, and Tom and Carol's good company. I remember thinking to myself, life should be like this more often. I often had the feeling, life was

somehow richer when Tom was around. And indeed it really was something about Tom. I've been back to that bar in Brussels several times since, but it has never been the same.

To the title, "Breakfast at Troscianko's": while visiting Tom in Bristol, he 'constructed' a rather curious breakfast, that was, I thought, a rather suspect combination of milk, orange juice, cereal, nuts and fruit (all in the same bowl). My skepticism was misplaced though, it was truly a perfect breakfast. Again however there was something uniquely Tom about it. I've tried making the same breakfast again, but have always ended up wishing I'd just kept the ingredients separate.

From creative breakfasts, to nerdy conversations on big topics, there was something unique about being with Tom. Something that one cannot replicate. Something that I miss. I count myself very lucky for the administrative accident that made Tom my Tutor 10 years ago. I count myself lucky to have learnt something from Tom about approaching my research, and my life, with a sense of adventure and fun.