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THARUNKA

THE TEAM

/

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BEDIGAL PEOPLE OF THE EORA NATION, ON
WHICH OUR UNIVERSITY NOW STANDS.

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FEATURES

07 SEMONSTERS: AN ALTERNATE UNI-
VERSE

08 ALLIGATORS AND ROLLS ROYCES:
FOUNDATION DAY THROUGH THE DECADES

12 SATIRE IS DEAD

16 THE PROBLEM WITH WAMS

18 WHERE'S YOUR HEAD AT: A PORTRAIT
OF UNSW'S MENTAL HEALTH POLICIES

22 TEN WHITE SWANS: AN EXPLORATION
OF "COSMIC HORROR"

24 GETTING T(HERE)

26 UNSWHISPERS: WHAT'S YOUR BIGGEST
SECRET?

28 CHALLENGING THE CONSERVATIVE
PARADIGM

CREATIVE

20 I'VE BEEN GOOD THANKS

25 THE BIRTH OF THE WEST

29 DRAG QUEENS

30 INTERCHANGE

32 THE BIG SMOKE MIGHT BE CLEARER
THAN THE COUNTRY AFTER ALL

34 TRACING THE PAST

REGULARS

04 LETTERS FROM THE EDITORS

06 AGONY IBIS

14 SPOTLIGHT ON

35 REVIEWS

35 SRC REPORTS

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(WRITING, ARTWORK, IDEAS, FEEDBACK, LOVE LETTERS, PICTURES OF
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CONTENT WARNING

THIS ISSUE DEALS WITH
THEMES OF:

-SUICIDE

CONTENTENTS

Letters From the Editors



MANAGING EDITOR

BRITTNEY RIGBY

Welcome to Semester 2! Here's hoping that our first issue back finds you well, and your break gave you a chance to recharge and rejuvenate.

This Foundation Day issue, we strive to honour *Tharunka's* history of an annual satirical edition by imitating *The Daily Mail*. In a year of "alternative facts" and "fake news", it's important we keep holding the truth close and demanding more from our media.

Satire is one way for us to do just that. But in approaching satire, it's important to understand its purpose: to punch up, to keep the powerful accountable, to deliver an important message in a way that's humorous but accessible.

The sub-theme of this issue is "Challenge". Because that's what *Tharunka*, and especially our Foundation Day edition, should do: challenge our university's administration, challenge authority, challenge what we think we know, our own privileges, the status quo, the discriminatory and unfair and oppressive.

This issue, and our limited print

space, explores just some of the challenges we face. Australians. Students. Us.

Twoey Jones writes from an alternative universe where UNSW has a trimester-based system and is looking to implement scary "semesters". Emily Azar reflects on her hometown in a nuanced and interesting way. Alex Linker asks how students with disability can properly access their education when even getting to and from campus is harder than it should be.

There's an investigation into the WAM system, an interview with a young, Indigenous artist and an exploration of "cosmic horror". There's secrets you've shared with us and a short story on love and heartache and feature artworks that so beautifully capture what words sometimes can't.

I hope this issue prompts you to challenge what you know and who you are, but also to challenge me. While I'm really proud of what we achieved in Semester 1, I know that we can be bigger and better in Semester 2. This issue is just a tiny slice of that, but I'd love to hear your thoughts on how we've

done so far and where we can go from here.

And, as always, we'd love to see your work. If you have something you've been working on, or a little spark of an idea, send it through. We're on the hunt for great contributors this semester, for both our online and print platforms, for the tried and true sorta pieces, but most importantly, for the pieces we haven't done yet. Let's get the good stuff from your page to our pages.

I hope you love this issue. I hope you spend some time with it.

Here's to the challenge.



FEATURES

ALICIA D'ARCY

"Challenge" is the type of topic area that makes "belonging" look interesting.

Nonetheless, it's an exciting theme for this edition because it allows for a wide range of ideas to be tackled and unpicked.

Jordan Daly takes a timely look at the dubious place of satire in our current media consumption, Stella Ladikos provides genuine and sensitive insight as to how UNSW can (and must) improve the way in which it deals with students' mental health, and Jack George Mangos writes about the honestly fascinating niche genre of cosmic horror.

To use some Year 12-level analysis: challenges are hard but, at the end of the day, we can overcome them.

We editors have frantically prepared this issue for you whilst surrounded by the mind-numbing and library-scented chaos of exams. Amazingly though, by the time you pick this edition up, exams are long gone, as is (hopefully) the knowledge we learnt for them.

Semester has started afresh. There are new subjects to learn and forget. There are new challenges to be found.



CREATIVE

SHARON WONG

Challenge.

Writing and art in all forms are always, at some point, challenging something; whether it be an existing belief, a visual boundary, or reshaping a perspective, challenge is about making room for our voices to be heard, and creating change. It's about recognising those rules and voices that tell us "No", but still going ahead anyway.

This issue in no way explores all the complex problems that we still face every day at a personal level, as a community and as a global society. But in providing a space for these voices to be heard, at the very least, it's a start.



ONLINE

DOMINIC GIANNINI

When people said three Transformers movies was enough, Michael Bay said, fuck you. When people said that the proletariat were destined to work and serve, Karl Marx said, fuck you. And when *A Current Affair* proved that journalistic standards had hit rock bottom, *Pedestrian TV* said, fuck you!

These achievements happened when people refused to accept the status quo. Whilst this Foundation Day issue focuses on a myriad of "challenges", I want to take a minute (a paragraph?) to discuss a personal one.

Mental health, especially amongst students and young men reluctant to seek help, can be an overwhelming challenge. A recent article I wrote for *Tharunka* online spoke about suffering from anxiety and panic attacks, and made the point that it's integral to talk about such issues, even when they're challenging. The challenge is the exact reason we should tackle them together.

So this issue, I challenge you to open up, let yourself be vulnerable, and allow *Tharunka* to be the platform for your trials and tribulations (*managing ed's note: shameless plug, 'ey? I like it!*). Or perhaps you just want to challenge yourself to write a more incoherent article than *Pedestrian TV*. It's up to you.



DESIGNER

LEO TSAO

The worst part about designing this issue was that I was repeatedly exposed to the *Daily Mail's* website and the absolute trash that is their articles, all in the name of research. The best part was that I actually had a ball copying their terrible design decisions. I've waited my whole life for a chance to make a "then" and "now" piece, and putting together some dramatic and moody Pauline Hanson pics is always very satisfying. Enjoy.

Agony Ibis



Dear Agony Ibis,

One of my great passions in life is the humble queue. Whether it be at the bank, the post office, or waiting for a bus, there is nothing quite as equal and orderly as a queue.

Unfortunately, my time at UNSW has been very disappointing in this regard. The 891 “line” at Central resembles more of a moshpit-style, “every (wo)man for themselves”, Lord of the Flies-esque, shamble, with little regard for the noble tradition of the queue. Tell me, Agony Ibis, how can we #MakeThe891QueueGreatAgain?

Kind regards,

Queuein’ Quentin

Dear Quentin,

It’s a dog-eat-dog world we live in, and no amount of hoping and praying for the return of orderly queues will solve the issue of the 891 crowd. Given the dire circumstances, I suggest you purchase a Taser and have it in easy reach when waiting for the 891, enabling you to quickly and mercilessly disarm your 891 line opponents and proceed to the front of the pack.

Tasers are generally only available to police officers, but since they are notorious for using them at any convenient opportunity, I’m sure our pals in the blue uniform wouldn’t have a problem with you Taser-ing a dozen or so of your peers.

I’m told you can purchase a Taser on the internet from overseas, with delivery in 5-10 working days. With any luck, an 891 bus may turn up in that same 5-10 day period too!

Yours in solidarity,

Agony Ibis

ART BY AMY GE

FEATURES

Semonsters: An Alternate Uni-verse

Somewhere out there, an alternate universe exists. UNSW has always had a trimester model, and is currently switching to a new model with two teaching periods each year that they call... “semesters”. In this alternate universe, one thing remains the same – the SRC is up in arms about any form of change.

Why adopting semesters will have terrible consequences for students

INCREASED STUDY LOAD

Currently, I take three subjects in a 10-week period. Under a semester model, a standard load will be four subjects in 13 teaching weeks – 14 if you include the mid-semester break. Despite what UNSW would have you believe, the addition of a mid-semester break won’t mitigate the increased rates of burnout that such a drastically longer teaching period will cause. Combining this with the increased difficulty of balancing four courses (and four exams in a two week exam period) in a semester will only lead to increased student stress and anxiety.

LESS AVAILABLE STUDY SPACES

Increasing the number of subjects from three to four, while decreasing the number of teaching weeks from 30 to 26 per year, will inevitably lead to more students on campus at any one time. This is going to put additional strain on student facilities – both study spaces and classrooms. There’s no good reason for the university campus to be unused for half of the year, yet this is what is being proposed.

LESS FLEXIBILITY WITH CENTRELINK BENEFITS

At the moment, a student can still be considered full-time for Centrelink purposes if they are enrolled in just one subject for a trimester, as long as they enrol in six subjects

over the course of a year. For students who balance university with work, live out of home, or have family commitments (especially students who are parents or carers), being able to lighten their workload for a couple of months is a necessity. Under a semester model, a student will be forced to take at least three subjects in a semester – which will hit students already struggling with university the hardest.

LONGER DEGREES

Currently, I can accelerate my studies and finish ahead of time (particularly if I am studying a combined degree). Under a semester model, students will be compelled to stick with their study plans, with little option to accelerate. For students who are paying rent, this is just going to increase the financial burden of study – who wants a three-month summer break when it’s costing at least \$200 per week just to keep a roof over your head? I’d rather be getting through my studies and moving into a full-time job that alleviates the cost of living stresses sooner.

LOWER QUALITY OF EXTRACURRICULARS

Student societies can currently use the three breaks each year to plan events for the coming trimester. Introducing semesters would limit this to the summer break and the mid-year break, forcing students to balance

their extracurricular commitments with an increased study load and fewer breaks. There’s no way that students will be able to plan events, workshops, and activities of such a high standard under a semester model, given their current reliance on the flexibility and number of breaks of the trimester system.

CASUAL STAFF WILL SUFFER

A reduction from 30 to 26 teaching weeks will mean less work for casual university tutors, who already receive far less pay than their lecturer counterparts. Data released by the Australian Tax Office this year showed that the annual income for a university lecturer in Australia is \$98,980, while for a tutor, it is \$26,230. A reduction in workable hours, proportional to the reduction of teaching weeks, will lead to a potential pay cut of nearly \$3,500 per year. Semesters will unfairly target staff who are already on relatively low incomes.

It’s clear that the higher-ups at UNSW are putting students last under this proposed semester model. Make your voice heard by joining the “Stop the UNSW Semonster” campaign today.

were getting really wild ... Every gay joint in Oxford Street got flour hurled through their front door,” he said.

“Angry shopkeepers with raised fists would advance upon the parade, then fall back puzzled.”

The procession ended when the police confiscated the Student Union’s permit for the rally that they were ultimately going to hold in Hyde Park. (I wonder whether it was the victimisation of the queer community or rich dudes that really put the nail in the coffin for the parade.)

Tharunka has also often played a part in the festivities by publishing hoax stories and special satirical editions. In recent times, *Tharunka* published a prank article in 2014 claiming that pro-Palestine protesters occupied the Max Brenner on campus.² *The Daily Telegraph* picked up the story. One of the more bizarre (and ethically dubious) pranks was when students kidnapped an alligator from Taronga Zoo in 1964. They managed to wrangle a “ransom” of 100 pounds out of the Zoo.

The UNSW Facebook page, when relaying this anecdote on 4 August 2016, noted, “we are not proud and we do not condone this behaviour :”).³

Kidnappings continued throughout the years. In 1981, students kidnapped the Chancellor, Gordon Samuels, from outside his house and made him drive to his chambers. Mr Samuels was freed after the University Council and senior officer met ransom demands, which were then donated to charity.

Current Foundation Day celebrations truly pale in comparison. In fact, Foundation Day doesn’t even seem to stick out as a special event in the student consciousness (except for perhaps college students).

When I ask my friends about their thoughts, I am met with general bemusement and unhelpful comments such as, “It was the day we were founded, right?”

Last year, Arc hosted events on the Main Walkway with, “free food, milkshakes, bungee jumping, obstacle course and games.” At the time of writing, Arc informed *Tharunka* that this year’s plans are the “same deal” as last year (although, unfortunately, the dodgem cars that were on the cards at one point have since fallen through).

Most of the actual celebrations seem to be relegated to the colleges.

My main memory of Foundation Day is from first year, when drunken and scrappily-attired Warrane College boys sat in the back of my 9am English lecture, heckling my poor lecturer, who was nervy at the best of times.

An ex-New College student described his Foundation Day celebrations to me.

“We’d wake up and have a champagne breakfast at 7am, which was basically just goon, and some people would be trying to do 10 [drinks] before 10, but most people would be having a couple of drinks,” he said.

“Then we’d just wear silly outfits, of anything really, and would run around campus drinking and trying to be semi-disruptive youths.”

And it didn’t stop there.

“We’d go into lecture theatres with goon sacks and make College kids who had bailed on the celebrations to go to class do goon laybacks in the middle of the lecture,” he said.

“And then you all go to the party that night. At the Roundy.”

The sanitisation of Foundation Day reflects a broader trend of the university clamping down on anything that doesn’t directly contribute to profit or otherwise possess an element of the uncontrolled. It is inconceivable that Ian Jacobs would allow himself to be kidnapped in a spirit of playfulness. Any student who dared attempt such a feat would be rewarded with a stern talking to at best, and a visit to the police at worst.

A university isn’t the place to have fun or take risks, or so the university’s logic goes; rather, it is a place to be productive and to (ultimately) contribute to the university’s coffers. Even if we had a university-wide scheduled day off, I can imagine that many students would use it to work, study or get a good night’s sleep for once in the never-ending rat race to line our CVs and pay unaffordable rent.

A lot of the content produced by UNSW about Foundation Day is ironically nostalgic of Foundation Day’s rowdy past. Yet, nothing is being done to reinstate this so called glory.

This is a message directly for Vice-Chancellor Ian Jacobs: there is nothing wrong with flour and mud riots. We promise we won’t target any Rolls Royces.

In the meantime, our desire to free the “bottled up annoyances of modern life” will have to remain corked.

2. Max Brenner would be absolutely delighted to have 30 paying customers now.
3. This is a very strangely placed smiley face. My hot take: the university actually *does* condone animal cruelty.



SATIRE IS DEAD

Satire is dead. At least, good satire is.

Two reasons: there's a satire bubble of sorts, and now life has imitated art to the point where reality is virtually indistinguishable from that which parodies it.

Regarding the bubble, everyone's pumping out satire articles, as investigative journalism is simultaneously becoming an almost extinct creature. Let's take a Sydney-centric look. The *Betoota*, *Sydney Sentinel*, *The Shovel*, *The Backburner*, *The Chaser*, *SBS Comedy*...even *Honi* and *Tharunka* are getting in on the action. Then you have every person with a camera spouting their opinion on YouTube or Facebook and everyone with a tablet becoming a cartoonist. In contrast, we have four decently sized papers – the *SMH*, the *AFR*, *The Australian* and *The Telegraph*. And there's *The Guardian*, if you're further left than Karl Marx.

Go and read a Domain write-up about any young person with a property portfolio. Let's take the recent magnate who told young people to "buy less coffee". That's all well and good, barring the footnote stating his grandfather gave him \$34,000 and Sydney homes cost around \$360,000 at the time. That figure is around \$52,000 in today's money and a Sydney home costs around \$1.15 million on average. There's a bit of a discrepancy there, but sure, just give up every luxury in life to own a plot of land and a box on it. Virtually the only difference between the original *60 Minutes* puff piece and the *Betoota* and *Chaser* piss-takes were the titles. We're at the stage where the only difference between reality and parody is honesty, rather than exaggeration.

We might live in a big, well-connected world, but it feels like the ratio of people taking a swing at everyone else to actual news, opinion and analysis is getting very lopsided. Everyone thinks they have a hot take, but let's be real: all that wit is not being optimally used.

Yes, I realise I'm being a bit hypocritical. Why don't I be the change I wish to see in the world by creating some hard-hitting pieces? Firstly, as you may have gathered, I'm not that witty. Secondly, satire gets clicks that dry analysis can't. No one seems to have the attention span or time to dig into the issues.

Is it a sign of the times? Fucked if I know, but given how popular satire is, why not spend some of the time spent reading said articles channelling your outrage into a campaign or candidate that reflects your values? If everyone who is upset about housing affordability petitioned, made calls or doorknocked, we'd have real action. But that would involve getting off your laptop for a bit.

What if you miss the latest scrap of outrage?

What if you miss a cracker of an article?

Is the risk worth it?



SPOTLIGHT ON

Rheanna Lotter

Rheanna Lotter is an Indigenous artist from New South Wales's Southern Highlands. We caught up to chat about painting a soccer ball for Arsenal, designing a jersey for the AFL's Indigenous Round and being an Indigenous woman.

HOW LONG HAVE YOU BEEN A PRACTICING ARTIST FOR?

I've been painting since I was a kid; my mother taught me. I was very sporty when I was growing up and was travelling all around Australia for it. That took priority over painting most of my childhood.

Painting was something I did for fun. I would get into these moods where I would paint non-stop for around a month, then I wouldn't paint for six months. It's only been over the last two years that painting is actually embedded into my daily life. It's my third job, I'll spend time on it everyday.

YOU PAINT FOOTBALLS, AND HAVE NOW DESIGNED JERSEYS - WHEN DID THE IDEA COME ABOUT TO LINK INDIGENOUS ART AND SPORT?

About two years ago, I saw an indigenous design on some soccer boots and I knew there were some possibilities. I get to combine the two things I love the most which is pretty great.

HOW DID YOU BECOME AFFILIATED WITH CERTAIN FOOTBALL AND AFL CLUBS?

I worked for the AFL for around three years and I had an amazing boss. She knew I was

painting and gave me the idea of painting a ball for the reception. She believed in me, that's definitely where it started. I ended up painting two AFL balls for them.

I also sent an email to the Western Sydney Wanderers asking if they wanted any designs. I ended up painting four soccer balls for them; one of the balls is going to Arsenal as a gift.

YOU DESIGNED THIS YEAR'S INDIGENOUS JUMPER FOR THE GREATER WESTERN SYDNEY GIANTS. HOW DID THAT COME ABOUT?

I sent an email to the Giants asking if they wanted a hand-painted ball for their reception. They got back to me after looking at my designs but asked if I could design their indigenous round guernsey.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE AN INDIGENOUS WOMAN MAKING ART?

To me it means connecting with my culture and my family. My business is named in memory of my amazing grandfather, so every time I paint and I get to write Ngandabaa (my pop's nickname - it means red belly black snake) on the back of the painting, it's such an incredible feeling.

My job allows me to combine my love for sport and the love for my indigenous culture. It's something I plan on doing for many more years.

Indigenous players, (from left to right) Nathan Wilson, Jeremy Finlayson, Luke Penrith Artist and two of his children (Luke painted boots for all three players) and Zac Williams, with Rheanna Lotter and the jersey she designed.



Zac Williams of the Giants celebrates kicking a goal during the round 11 AFL match between the Greater Western Sydney Giants and the Essendon Bombers at Spotless Stadium on June 3, 2017. (Photo by Cameron Spencer/Getty Images/AFL Media).



THE PROBLEM WITH WAMS

The Weighted Average Mark discourages students from taking risks at best, and is inaccurate at worst. So why do we still give it so much faith?

We have all been assessed on our educational ability. Over the last 15 years, the marks I've achieved on tests have granted or denied me opportunities, and this pattern has only intensified as I've attended university.

At UNSW, the system for determining your academic standard is called the Weighted Average Mark (WAM). The system is remarkably simple: your WAM is the mean of your overall assessment marks for every subject, “weighted” by how many units of credit the courses are. It is used to determine whether a student is eligible to change their degree or access scholarships, and is an indicator to employers about the talent of a graduate. It is clearly important then that we have faith in the legitimacy of this score.

I do not have strong faith in our current system. Not only is the WAM open to a wide variety of contingencies that would allow for undue variance in achieved scores, but the way in which the WAM is calculated discourages students from taking risks, a key element of genuine learning.

THE ASSUMPTIONS BEHIND “AVERAGING”

The inherent problem with the WAM is that marks across a variety of subjects are synthesised into a single score. This requires some kind of equality of marks between subjects: a student equally talented and hard working in both microbiology and English literature should expect to get similar marks for both subjects. When we begin to draw comparisons between the marks obtained in different subjects, we necessarily need a way to quantify the difficulty of subjects, so that a

low mark in a difficult subject can correspond to a high mark in an easy subject.

Determining the difficulty of a course and the talent of a student is often precarious. Schools and faculties will compare the marks obtained by students in a course from year to year and subject to subject to establish whether a course has a higher or lower than expected average. Often, administrators need to be careful with these averages: some courses will attract high quality students and others will encourage high quality work, in which case the averages will be higher than the norm. Sometimes, however, courses will not have a good reason to have a higher or lower than expected average, in which case the school or faculty will suggest to the convener that students be marked to a curve.

But “marking to the curve” is not a silver bullet. This method means that students who receive relatively higher than average marks than their peers will receive a relatively strong final mark, by ranking students and adjusting their marks accordingly. It can certainly be an incredibly useful tool, as it ensures that contingencies, such as a particularly difficult exam, will not distort an individual's final marks. However, marking to a curve does come with its own set of problems.

When a course convener is making the choice about what grading curve they use, their only choice, ultimately, is to predict the mean mark and degree of variation, and whether the class will be skewed towards higher or lower marks. Often, the opaque mathematics of marking to a curve covers up the inherently subjective aspects of marking and designing examinations.

A stark example of this is a subject I took last year. The final exam was so difficult that 15 marks were automatically added to everyone's score in response to the difficulty. How was the score of 15 determined? Intuition, I gather, of the quality of the class was key. No such calculations are explained on your final score, however.

This highlights that, despite any attempt to quantify difficulty or make marks for individual subjects “fair”, it's impossible to properly quantify difficulty. Despite the best efforts of staff to ensure that the way in which courses are marked are checked and balanced against other courses in the schools and faculties, Dr Upton, Academic Programs Manager for the Faculty of Engineering said to me, “[the marking system is] certainly not perfect and it cannot be objective as it involves human judgements along the line.” This is an honest way to view the WAM, but one that is perhaps not wholeheartedly adopted by the university, given that the WAM is used consistently as a clear measure of performance. What remains is that, if the scope for potential error in each subject is averaged over the length of an entire degree, two identical students in two different years could end up with vastly different WAMs. Why should this variance be tolerated, if your WAM is often used to access scholarships, program transfers, and job opportunities?

ACADEMIC “STRATEGY”

What makes the variations in marks between students worse is that many students understand the way in which the WAM works, and play it to their advantage.

If a student wants to maximise their WAM, then subjects have value only insofar as they can generate marks for the student. This translates to skipping unnecessary classes, ignoring non-assessable content, and participating as little as possible in classes. Knowledge ceases to be an end in itself, but a means to achieve higher marks. When marks are the key goal of subject, the subjects themselves become “games” to achieve these marks. This generates an awful cycle for course conveners and students: course conveners need to make more of the class assessable so that students are incentivised to learn it, but this reduces the quality and quantity of content that can be expressed.

This has resulted in, in my own experience, assessments like multiple choice exams for philosophy courses – a format that is clearly unsuited for the learning outcomes of the course, but highly suited to following the assessable content of the syllabus.

Within individual subjects, students are more likely to stick with comfortable opinions and arguments, instead of trying new approaches or studying new areas. Since the WAM encourages high assessment marks over other metrics, a strategic student would complete assessments with as little effort as possible, especially given that time effectiveness is a key part of completing all tasks in a semester.

When it comes to choosing subjects, a strategic student would choose classes that are well within their ability, as to ensure that they are at the top of each class they attempt. An easy way to do that is to ensure the class is below your level of expertise, or ensuring you are with classmates below your potential ability.

These three strategies are choices that I guarantee nearly every student has employed to some extent. Employing these strategies makes it more likely that you will get a good WAM, but also makes it less likely that you will learn deeply. Critical learning requires you to take risks. It takes more than cramming content. It means analysing and rejecting new approaches, learning critical skills, and being unintimidated by challenge.

WHAT DO WE DO NOW?

Despite this critique, I sympathise with the inherent problem the university is faced with: they aim to balance genuine teaching with meaningful ways to measure students' abilities.

There are clearly forces within the university that are attempting to change the culture of marking for the better. Richard Buckland, from the School of Computer Science, has talked extensively about how to motivate learning without assessment. He found that by designing courses around alternative sources of motivation – such as competition, passion or challenges – course participation rose significantly. Of course, by removing the measurability of the course, it was hard to tell whether his new approach was successful. But, given that The Times University Ranking 2016 recently rated UNSW's Computer Science program as the 51st best in the world, and the QS Subject Ranking 2016 ranked UNSW's program as #35, it seems very likely that this new approach has had a positive impact on his students.

This attempt at encouraging experimentation through creative course design has the potential to catch on. Dr Upton, the Academic Programs Manager in the Engineering Faculty, explained that, although the faculty encouraged staff to design creative and challenging assessment tasks, “we are aware of the need to ensure students have sufficient technical knowledge to be able to apply creative approaches so we do still have a strong focus on examinations and so on.” Despite still focusing highly on technical assessments, he said there is much potential for change.

“This is changing though so watch this space.”

However, reducing dependency on marks to motivate students has not been the broad push within the university. Given the current push towards trimesters, and the potentially harmful way in which the university is intending to implement online content, there is also a clear drive towards courses needing to have easily quantifiable, although not necessarily challenging, assessments. And

given how consistently the WAM is used to determine a student's opportunities, this is only going to further encourage the negative learning practices I outlined above.

To give credit to the university administration, there seems to be an acknowledgment of the precariousness of using the WAM as a clear measure of academic performance. As the Deputy Vice Chancellor (Education) Merlin Crossley said to me, “Unflinching faith in anything is the exception rather than the rule. We are like umpires – because we make the tough calls, the game can proceed.” Although it is reassuring that the administration is aware that the WAM is a rough measure, this is not always reflected within its own (and external stakeholders’) policies. Certainly, the current importance placed on the WAM encourages students to act strategically for marks, rather than passionately for learning, far too much.

I believe that measuring progress and quality teaching are compatible. However, it is clear that UNSW currently has an imbalance in favour of measurement. Given the inherent inaccuracies with the WAM, and the way in which it encourages students to form a negative relationship with learning, it is clear that we ought to abandon our unflinching faith in a standardised mark to measure performance, and accept the WAM more as a generous estimation as opposed to a cut off. This requires that, as students, we reform our relationship with our marks, and ensure we are not compromising our education for strategy. But as educators, this to approach learning needs to be encouraged institutionally far more than it is currently. At the moment, the way in which we measure marks is causing educational quality to suffer. That is cause for concern.

Where's

At:

Head

Your

What words come to mind when you think of mental health?

Depression? Anxiety? Stress? Bipolar? Whilst I didn't ask you to list mental health disorders, it is totally reasonable that you may have thought of those words. In fact, after I surveyed a handful of students from different faculties at UNSW, almost half of respondents used the word "depression" when prompted with this question, followed closely by "anxiety".

Although society has come a long way with mental health literacy and awareness, the concept of "mental health" is still largely misunderstood. It is still attributed to notions of illness and vulnerability. I'll tell you something right now: *all* of us engage with our mental health every day, regardless of if you have been diagnosed with a disorder. Let's think about it this way. If you were to think of the term "physical health", what words would you use? Strength? Eating well? Staying fit?

In this instance, why don't we think of a broken leg, the flu, cancer or hearing loss? We simply don't visualise "physical health" in the same way we do "mental health." Physical health = good. Mental health = bad. *This* is the gap that I am interested in. This is the reason why I have been volunteering with headspace for the past three years, planning and implementing community projects. It's

why I chose to study an online Certificate of Mental Health alongside my Bachelor of Media, and acts as the driving force behind running an entire mental health awareness month in my final year of high school. I want to be part of a "revolution" with the aim to change society's perception of mental health and emphasise how uneducated and ignorant we can be.

I want to present you with two pieces of information that changed my perception of mental health and fuelled my passion to do what I do today. The first is merely a definition from the World Health Organisation, however I think it beautifully encapsulates what mental health is (and in such a positive light):

"Mental health is defined as a state of well-being in which every individual realizes his or her own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to her or his community."

This second piece of research was presented in my first Mental Health First Aid Training, which compares the debilitating effects of mental and physical illnesses. According to their findings, mild depression is the same feeling as having the common cold, while moderate depression is said to be similar to severe hearing loss. On the most severe

end of the spectrum, severe depression is as debilitating as disseminated breast cancer. Severe schizophrenia is as debilitating as severe dementia or stroke.

But, being a university student, it is most useful to focus on the university context and how we can achieve greater understanding, awareness and mental health literacy on campus.

One such idea I heard was at UNSW's Student Minds Conference in 2016, where they proposed that mental health education should be integrated into particular areas of our learning. Essentially, it could be embedded into assessments, or in the introduction of all courses. For example, an assessment to analyse a media campaign becomes an assessment to analyse a mental health campaign.

Most survey respondents agreed with this proposal, believing that it would be "of enormous help as I imagine that many students, as well as myself, do not really understand what mental health is".

Other respondents expressed that the integration of this education into an already existing course would not take away from its learning outcomes, but rather it would "supplement" their learning and add a sense of "relevancy".

A Portrait of UNSW's Mental Health Policies

A fraction of respondents opposed this model, believing that it would add unnecessary content and pressure and would bring up lived personal and traumatic experiences. Rather than integrating education into university syllabi, one respondent suggested, "extra mental health education within high school ... is definitely needed". Whilst I do agree with this point (and am actually involved in this through presenting at school visits through headspace), I also believe that something drastic needs to be done in universities.

We are fortunate at UNSW to have a range of services such as Counselling and Psychological Services (CAPS), the Psychology Clinic and a GP. A whopping 74% of students that I surveyed were unaware that we have a Counselling and Psychological service on campus, as "there is little awareness of the help that UNSW offers."

One survey respondent suggested that the university advertise the available services "in a more open and broad way, bringing these issues to the forefront of our university culture." An issue that repeatedly came up was the fact that CAPS is insufficiently staffed to meet all students' needs and that it is difficult to get an appointment.

I actually work at CAPS as a receptionist, and yes, I have had to turn back people in need simply because there are insufficient spots available. This is something staff members

cannot remedy, without increased funding to employ extra staff members.

As well as services offered by the university, there are also a number of student-run initiatives available, such as Student Minds (which I also volunteer with). As a volunteer or member of Student Minds, you gain access to Mental Health First Aid and Literacy training as well as opportunities to learn more about mental health, meet like-minded passionate people and be the student voice of mental health at UNSW.

Those who are aware of the importance of mental health education in a university context suggested some creative and plausible ideas. Unless the University Board conducts a thorough investigation into mental health on campus and seeks student input, these ideas will never be heard.

One respondent explored the idea of better equipping university lecturers and tutors with adequate and accredited training:

"A large positive difference can be made to mental health outcomes by having people who interact with students on a weekly basis even vaguely looking out for them," they said.

"Preparing tutors with information about what campus services are available and how to approach students with that kind of information off the cuff would be hugely valuable."

Looking back on my first tutorials for this semester, my psychology tutor (surprise, surprise!) was the *only* tutor to even mention the existence of CAPS and how we can access it.

How many of you remember the ELISE quiz that we had to pass by week 5 in our first year, in order to enrol in session two? Whilst plagiarism and learning how to utilise the library is super important, so is our mental health. Interestingly enough, the idea of creating a compulsory "ELISE-style" quiz on mental health was brought up at the Student Minds Conference and in my survey responses. I imagine that such a program would inform new students on the services that UNSW offers for mental wellbeing but would also get people thinking more about looking after their mental state from the get-go.

I think that's something we can *all* get behind. Together, we must acknowledge the existence of stigma in society, work together to break it down and urge university leaders (and students!) to be change-makers.

We are the only way forward.



Ten White Swans

An Exploration of “Cosmic Horror”

Imagine you are in a park, sitting on a bench, overlooking a pond. It’s a clear day, and a single white swan lands in the pond and floats on the surface. You’ve never seen a swan before. A second white swan joins it, and then a third. Soon, ten white swans float upon the water. Having never seen a swan, you soon assume that all swans must be white. Shortly afterward, a black swan appears.

This scenario is a disguised thought experiment, which outlines an idea, originating with David Hume, called “the problem of induction”. Keep this experiment in mind, for it forms the crux of this entire essay and we will return to it shortly.

If *Indiewire* is to be believed, some of the best horror films of 2016, such as *10 Cloverfield Lane*, tell the stories of people trying to escape from, or do battle with, monsters that are beyond their understanding. Taking a slightly broader view, fear generated from incomprehensibility has been the basis of a number of other recent works of storytelling, such as season one of the HBO series *True Detective*, and, in one of the most successful and discussed video games of the last few years, *Bloodborne*. A number of recent non-fictional works have also achieved popularity in attempting to investigate this style of horror fiction, such as Eugene Thacker’s *In the Dust of this Planet*. This fictional subgenre is called “cosmic horror”. To me, this is one of the most interesting and engaging styles in all of fiction, and deserves explanation on its own

merit. However, I think it is no coincidence that cosmic horror has seen popularity recently, as it relates to our sociopolitical climate just as much as it exposes some fundamental human truths.

Cosmic horror began in the Romantic era, but reached its peak through a writer called H. P. Lovecraft at the turn of the 20th century. The genre has a number of consistent features, but the most important is that humans come into contact with threats that are both not understood and cannot ever be understood. Hence, the threats in these stories are often interdimensional, summoned through occult rituals, or emerging from the depths of the sea or from outer space. In all cases, these threats are beyond our understanding and enter violently into our reality.

Lovecraft’s best-known example (the flag-bearer for this style of horror) is Cthulhu, an ancient God-like creature that slumbers on an island in the Pacific Ocean, but is accidentally awoken in one of Lovecraft’s stories. Cthulhu became the starting point for Lovecraft’s creation of an entire mythos of cosmic creatures. Taking inspiration from Lovecraft, a similar pantheon of cosmic beings, called the “Great Ones”, is seen in *Bloodborne*. In the game’s lore, human efforts to engage in a Catholic-style communion with the Old Ones, through the transfusion of their blood, causes a nightmarish plague to descend upon the city

of Yharnam, into which the player is thrust.

However, as described by Thacker, the possibilities are limited only by the author’s imagination. Lovecraft’s “At the Mountains of Madness”, for example, features the “shoggoths”, creatures made up of shapeless accumulations of “protoplasmic bubbles”, which can form appendages and eyes through the rearrangement of their constituent substance. These creatures are “both non-anthropomorphic and misanthropic” in their total rejection of what human beings understand to be life, and are therefore a form of “blasphemous life... life that is living but that should not be living”. In the manga series *Uzumaki*, a fictional small Japanese town is afflicted by the recurring symbol of the spiral. It appears in the grass covering the hills, in clouds, in rising ashes from fire, and eventually in the hideous transformation of people’s bodies. In this story, the threat to us is a purely geometric idea, a Platonic “absolute” that begins to manifest itself in our reality.

Due to their exposure to truths that human minds are not prepared for, which theorist Laura Kenny describes as encountering “status quo-shaking space demon apparitions”, a common fate of characters in cosmic horror is to go mad. In *Bloodborne*, for example, direct exposure of the player’s character to certain enemies, those in possession of the superhuman “elderitch truth”, induces a frenzied state and

can lead to the character suiciding. However, exposure to this truth is also the requirement for fully experiencing the game world, as certain features of the playable city only become visible when one’s character has collected enough knowledge. Thus, *Bloodborne* demonstrates a very important aspect of cosmic horror – the suffering of the characters in these stories is often due to exposure, not to the purely horrific, but to the horrifically real.

The effect this style of fiction has on the audience is quite unique, and is best described as a feeling of dread. When one reads or watches cosmic horror, it is not only fear that is experienced (as would be expected in any horror story), but a sensation of perversion; one has a feeling that something is occurring that should not be permissible, as if fundamental laws of nature are being broken.

Now we can return to our thought experiment and to Hume’s problem of induction. As it was originally proposed, the problem of induction is a challenge to the possibility of gathering knowledge from the empirical observations of the sciences. Irrespective of what data we gather, and what models we form, there is always the possibility that a “black swan” will appear and overturn everything we think we know. This is, of course, an important part of the scientific method: we must adjust our theories based on any new data gathered. However, it means that data gathered empirically will never grant us the authority to say, with certainty, how the world does or does not work. This is the door through which cosmic horror enters our actual lives – the contingency of inductive reasoning means we are unable to confidently assert our own safety.

It is here that the intersection between cosmic horror and pessimism occurs. Given our isolation, our complete vulnerability, and the myriad possibilities of inhuman threats, cosmic horror challenges the fragile ground on which we assert the positive value of human life. Our existence is reduced to a largely unfortunate, and terrifying, coincidence, one that receives no respite from the altogether indifferent, and possibly hostile, universe which we inhabit. This aspect of cosmic horror is seen quite strongly in season one of *True Detective*, which tells the story of a police investigation into a string

of murders in rural Louisiana. The gradual revelation of disturbing links between the murders and the occult, in combination with the show’s Southern Gothic aesthetic, gives the audience a gnawing unease, and makes us feel as though we are going “down the rabbit hole” in uncovering something deeply wrong. This atmosphere primes the audience for the Schopenhauer- and Nietzsche-inspired philosophy of one of the detectives, Rust Cohle, to whom the torture and murder of the victims is indicative of the “nightmare” of existence, with suicide our only discernable way out.

This brings us to why cosmic horror has seen recent popularity. I think it’s related to media saturation on the topics of climate change and environmental degradation, which in both cases involve natural forces challenging our sense of security. Climate change in particular is an advancing existential risk for humanity, a risk that is accelerating daily, one where a significant amount of damage has already been done, and about which most people can do next to nothing. It is not a far leap to go from these real circumstances to a similar fictional position of helplessness.

Sadly, there is no happy ending to this essay. This is a particularly bleak area of thought, but in my opinion, a fascinating one nonetheless. Thacker’s book is an excellent place to start for further analysis, and a great introduction to fictional cosmic horror would be *True Detective* or the first four stories of Robert C. Chambers’ collection “The King in Yellow”. For those of you who want nothing more to do with cosmic horror, I don’t blame you. All I ask is that you remember the ten white swans.



Getting T(here)

By now, everyone knows about the current struggles with Sydney's public transport system, particularly when it comes to getting to UNSW. However, for students with disability, getting to uni has been a struggle since long before this year.

Like many people with disability, I find the public transport system difficult to navigate. My balance and pain issues mean that I need to sit down; but I look young and healthy, so I can feel awkward and uncomfortable asking for a seat.

I experience a lot of anxiety when travelling on public transport, and the chaotic nature of it often leads to sensory overload, which is a wholly unpleasant experience.

For those who use mobility aids such as wheelchairs, it can be even harder to navigate the system. Not all buses are accessible for wheelchair users, and often the elevator to access train stations and their platforms can be difficult to locate.

Buses and train stops are also often located far from one's actual destination. When light rail construction commenced, Anzac Parade bus stops were moved further away from UNSW's entrance. For people with limited mobility due to injury, chronic pain, or illness, this can make actually getting to university from the bus stop that much harder, and can lead to students avoiding university due to access difficulties.

Of course, there's also the issue of the 891 waiting times. I'm lucky to live in the opposite direction, so I don't have to deal with this, but as the SRC Students with Disabilities

Officer, I've had the chance to listen to the stories of those who have had to deal with the 891 on a daily basis.

I spent an afternoon putting myself in their shoes, catching the 891 to Central and waiting in the ridiculous lines. It was hot, and I was exhausted after a full day of class (and teaching) – all I wanted to do was get home and nap.

But instead, I got in the line for the 891.

And I waited.

And waited.

Even with my noise-cancelling headphones, the sounds around me started to overwhelm me. My ankles, knees, and shoulders were hurting. Five minutes in, I had to put my backpack down.

I had forgotten to fill up my water bottle, and at some point I started to feel dehydrated. If I left to get water, I would lose my place in the queue. My head was pounding, but I had committed to this experience and I was going to see it through.

Eventually, after what felt like forever, I got onto a bus. Of course I was unable to find a seat, and as usual, I felt too uncomfortable to ask someone to move for me. So I stood.

I had to place my bag in the luggage rack at the front of the bus; there was no way I could keep my balance with it on my back. I stood near the front, holding on to the railing with both hands so I wouldn't fall.

The sounds of the bus and everyone around me were becoming almost impossible to bear. This was compounded by all the people brushing up against me, sending me further into sensory overload.

I turned up my music to try and tune it all out, held on tight, and tried to avoid the people surrounding me.

Finally, after (again) what felt like forever, we arrived at Central. I almost left my bag, but remembered it at the last second. I felt like I needed to sleep for 100 years to get over how I was feeling.

And that was just my experience. One experience. Everyone with disability will have their own experiences and their own stories.

I drive to university on most days. Even though I live close by, I work and go to therapy in the Bondi area, which is often too difficult to get to by public transport for me.

I pay exorbitant amounts of money to park on campus, because I often can't face the walk from the nearest all-day parking. And even then, the two major car parks (Barker Street and Botany Street) are only just now having lifts installed, so I have to trek up and down five flights of stairs daily.

I'm lucky though, and I recognise my privilege: I have access to a car and I am able to afford parking at UNSW.

Students with disability deserve access to their education. But if we are unable to even get to or from UNSW, how can we?



UNSWispers: What’s Your Biggest Secret?

Amongst young adults, mortifying stories are considered especially secret. At UNSW, the dedicated detectives who investigate these juicy stories are members of an elite squad known as *Tharunka* and an anonymous Google Doc form. These are their stories. *dun dun*

ASBeware

I’ve made it a personal goal to have sex in every classroom and bathroom in the ASB. It’s a little "fuck you" to the School of Business. I’ve already ticked through every disabled toilet, all of the small Level 2 rooms overlooking the lawn, the break rooms, as well as room 232, so you probably don’t want to use the desks there ... or the floor ... or the chairs.

Before anyone asks, I haven’t told any partners about this goal. It just so happens that we’ve been around the ASB in the wee hours and I’ve been a bit thirsty.

THE TRUTH ABOUT TRIMESTERS

i hate trimesters
oh wait
that’s not a secret

DIRTY DANCING

Sometimes, I fart on the dance floor and walk away, then look back to see people’s reactions. The music provides great cover.

FANCY A FLYER?

\$50 is a lot of money to a 12-year-old.

The year was 2005, and 12-year-old me was broke (as most 12-year-olds are) when a distant family friend offered me \$50 to deliver flyers to letterboxes around town, advertising the play she was directing at an amateur theatre company.

\$50?! For going on a few walks?! Where do I sign?!

As it turns out, the stack of flyers she wanted delivered easily numbered 1,000. It was the height of summer (or at least, my memory recalls a few long and sweaty Saturdays...) and naturally, my dedicated and loving parents refused to drive me anywhere in my pursuit of flyer delivery.

After traipsing up and down the blocks in the nearest few kilometres to my suburban house, I had hardly made a dent in the box of flyers. I looked at the pale orange flaps of paper despairingly. "So this is what awaits me in my adult years of employment..."

I started to get desperate. Sure, \$50 was great, but you know what else is great? GETTING THESE FUCKING FLYERS OUT OF MY LIFE. They say a problem shared is a problem halved, so I enlisted the help of my trusty best friend. I offered her \$20 (again, a huge amount of cash to a primary schooler) if she would cover the hilliest parts of town with me. On perhaps the hottest day of all, we covered a good chunk of the town with the flyers. Surely a 70-seat theatre running around 10 shows hardly needs this much advertising?!

We even got sneaky and stopped in at a bakery, hair salon and the town’s golf club, pleading with the owners to leave a wad of flyers on their front

counters. Still, after what seemed like an eternity of letter box dropping, there remained at least a few hundred flyers.

That Sunday night, I sat on the edge of my bed, gloomily staring at the remaining flyers. I was fed up. I had spent at least 20 hours delivering these bad boys, which meant I was getting paid about \$2.50 an hour (and even less after I promised \$20 to my best mate). I caved and came up with a plan.

Dumping them in my own wheelie bin was too obvious – what if someone found them?! What if my Mum went through the bin and saw them?! No, I was too cunning (even at 12) for that. I considered my other options. Dump them in a neighbour’s bin? Still too risky. Toss them into a bin at school? Nope, still traceable to me.

What about dumping them in ANOTHER school’s bins? GENIUS! One of the main schools in town was also a bus interchange, which meant there were thousands of students from at least 15 different schools traversing the area each weekday. One morning that week, I wrapped the remaining flyers in a plastic bag until they were no longer identifiable, and shoved them into my school backpack. I left slightly early for school to give me time to dump the flyers without raising suspicion. There was no going back now. All I had to was act cool, dump the flyers and keep going.

I gulped as I approached the interchange. There were swarms of people – surely someone will wonder what the huge thud in the bin is?! At this point, I had no choice. I got the package out of my bag, ready for a swift drop. I approached an open-lidded bin (no time to stuff around with a lid) and, without looking around (obvious sign of shenanigans) or into the bin, coolly tossed the flyers into the bin as though they were just an empty chip packet.

Palms sweating, I walked briskly to my bus, feeling like I’d just gotten away with the perfect crime.

SEXUAL SNACK

I once said "I love you" on the phone to my boyfriend while a guy ate me out in his bed.

DISTRESSED DOMINATRIX

I’m a girl. I’m dominant and like to be in control. Truth is, I feel I’ll never find a guy who just likes to follow orders and be taken care of in a relationship.

DOUBLE DATING

Despite having a long-term girlfriend, I’m on Tinder nonstop. I run out of swipes every day. I love the thrill and the possibility of meeting new people, feeling that spark, and getting laid. I’m afraid of being discovered, but at the same time, I don’t really care. I don’t plan on double-timing, but why stop?

SICK OF YOUR SHIT

One of my good friends in high school lived on a cattle farm and would often have sleepovers (and, as we grew older, barn parties) in her fairly good sized farmhouse. There tended to be a core group of about 5 or 6 of us invited to her sleepovers, and they were always super fun: we would muck about on the farm, make ourselves sick eating mulberries from their mulberry bush, watch scary movies (think Saw, When a Stranger Calls etc), make pancakes for breakfast and discuss the finer details regarding the male species.

One of the things about farm life is that often the infrastructure is not as well developed as it is "in town". In this case, my friend had limited connection to town water, and her toilet was run using tank water (collected from the farm and pumped from the creek). We were warned by my friend’s mother not to use too much toilet paper when using the toilet, because the

toilet could easily become clogged and would then need to be plunged. As you can imagine, this struck fear into all of our hearts. The last thing a 14 year old girl wants to be known for is clogging up her friend’s toilet – and especially not in front of all of her other friends at a sleepover.

As luck would have it, during the course of one particular sleepover, it became apparent to me that I needed to use the bathroom for something more serious than a wee. At this point, can I say that it’s difficult to know if you’re using too much toilet paper, because the amount of toilet paper necessary to clean oneself is an entirely subjective thing.

Anyway, I did my business, closed the lid of the toilet, flushed, washed my hands, left the bathroom and returned to the evening’s festivities. Unfortunately, not long after, my friend’s mum emerged to inform us that the toilet was indeed clogged, and that she would need to plunge it. No one said a word. I racked my brains trying to think whether my friends were observant enough to know that I was the poo-clogger. Anxiety set in. A stronger person would have 'fessed up, apologised and offered to get stuck into the plunging. As it turns out, I am not such a person.

While I sat with my friends, everyone avoiding the elephant in the room – me wishing the ground would swallow me whole/my parents would call at that moment to say that we were moving to Zimbabwe effective immediately and to bid farewell to your friends/some other major life event would overshadow the poo-clogging incident and the trauma of it all would erase everyone’s memory of my mistake – my friend’s mum plunged the toilet back to life.

I felt then, and still feel, absolutely awful that my friend’s mum had to endure that task, and that I never apologised or owned up. So, Leanne, if you ever read this, I am sorry that I did not heed your warning, and I am even more sorry that I was too much of a coward to own up to my mistake.

MAN BABY

I have a crush on a guy who’s over 20 but still uses the term “pee-pee”.

FRIENDS WITH BENEFITS

When I was in Year 5 and 6 at primary school, a few of my friends and I were interested in sex but didn’t really understand what it was at that stage. Our conception of sex was making out under the bedcovers. We often had sleepovers or went over to each other’s houses, where we “practiced” by making out with each other. One of the most memorable moments was when I was at a friends house and we were playing “families,” but got caught by her parents! I’m still good friends with some of those girls, but we’ve never brought it up since! I wonder how common it is...

IT’S NOT EASY BEING (ANNOYED BY THE) GREEN(S)

Honestly, I’d love to throw every Greens and Socialist Alternative member on campus out of a helicopter. I’m sick of them preaching outside of the library against capitalism. My family fled China during the Cultural Revolution. My great-grandpa had to leave his brother behind and he was killed. Either that was "real communism" or it wasn’t. If it was, how is that an admirable goal? If it wasn’t, then why are they fighting for a violent revolution to take place in order to implement a never-before tested system? What the fuck is wrong with these people.

THE BIG O

I have never had an orgasm. Ever. I have been sexually active for four and a half years and ... nothing. I hear a lot of platitudes about fireworks and white lights but I don’t get near that. Sex is fun and interesting. I worry that I am too stuck in my head to actually get there. No one knows. My boyfriend would be devastated. I am devastated.

CHALLENGING THE CONSERVATIVE PARADIGM

Facts: Trump won, Brexit won, Turnbull won. Pauline Hanson is back, media reporting is piss-poor and most importantly, Rage Against the Machine hasn't released a good album in almost 20 years. The fights haven't changed, people haven't changed but middle Australia seems to have tuned out.

Things don't bode well for progressive causes worldwide. The question stands: how do we challenge conservatives and regressives in Australia? The answer is simple, comrades. Accelerationism. That's right, we just keep getting conservative parties popularly elected and keep eroding workers' rights until the population rises up against the elites. Simple. Just like me.

Forget about affecting change through elections and lobbying. Petitions, rallies and boycotts are more difficult, expensive and tiring. But look at how successful they've been over the past few years! They've reversed the Fair Work Commission's decision on penalty rates, brought back Gonski and defended Safe Schools. Right?! A change of government couldn't easily accomplish this! Why bother campaigning for a given party or candidate when we can engage in protest after protest in the hope the media and wider public will pick up our cause. Everyone knows partisan party hacks don't have progressive visions, only real activists do. Besides, whining about the status quo is easier than leafleting, doorknocking or doing calls with GetUp or a trade union you like.

“Anti-establishment” politicians are popular because many voters have lost faith in our judicial and legislative institutions. A man with zero legislative, administrative or foreign policy experience is now President of the United States, while people like Jacqui Lambie attack Muslims based on harmful stereotypes and distortions.

Why rebuild faith in political institutions as things that serve the people when we can knock them down and encourage a revolution? Why bother reforming, streamlining or strengthening them when we can privatise and gut them? Why bother participating in actions like pre-selections when we can just complain about mediocre candidates? Why encourage media scrutiny when we can write off all politicians as being the same?

The major parties are all the same. Let's look at the contrast between state governments as an example. Daniel Andrews is instituting reforms and building infrastructure and Jay Weatherill sassed Frydenberg, whereas the Berejiklian government literally sold the Land and Property Information, despite it having a solid return on equity. If selling the sole body that regulates land titles, property information, valuation, surveying, and mapping isn't the embodiment of anarcho-capitalism I don't know what is. It's clear the government are the true revolutionaries here.

The major parties are so obviously the same – one introduced the *Fair Work Act*, the other introduced WorkChoices. One introduced Gonski, the other trashed it. One wants to make housing affordable, the other wants to add fuel to the housing price fire by allowing people to use superannuation to buy a home.

Ok, real talk. For those that say, “The parties are all the same” – there were 151 candidates in the 2016 NSW Senate ballot paper.

“But seriously, none of them represent my particular ideology. I'm very unique.”

k.

Being an activist is hard work, but to paint this house red, you don't need blue paint.

CREATING A TIT WIT



Interchange

“*The next train to arrive on Platform 2 goes to Berowra, via Chatswood. First stop...*”

It was a strange ritual I did every day on the way back from uni. The ashen, humid gloom of Town Hall always weighed upon me uncomfortably, a heavy blazer on an eight-year-old child. Maybe that was the point.

That’s why I never stayed there for long. I lived in Roseville, one of those suburbs where the train never seemed to stop. It’s almost as if it was far too insignificant and tiny to even be considered by the Waratahs that brushed past in a flurry of aluminium and yellow.

Usually, people who similarly couldn’t stand the claustrophobic tunnels of Town Hall took the train to Chatswood, a considerably more pleasant station, and changed there.

I, however, always got off at Wollstonecraft.

It’s a curious station, this one. There’s a curved platform, banana-shaped, so that you couldn’t see where the front of the platform is if you alighted at the back.

But there was a little park next to Platform 2. A park – no, just a square of grass, really, with shaded patches of yellow and green and brown – that’d seen better days. Amongst it all, there was a swing. Sprinklings of rain hit the chain with a soft glistening, as if a greeting, and...

And it was spring. With the spring and the bright yellow of the sunlight came a permeating smell of green and strawberry-scented hair, and memories of a childhood counting the days on a pendulum swing beside Wollstonecraft Station. I could smell tree sap – or hair, I wasn’t sure which. But all I could see ... well, that was her hair, her smile, her happy squeals while I pretended to be stern with her.

“Careful,” I said, with my typically overprotective grumpiness. “You’ll hurt yourself.”

Her mousey brown hair fluttered, and she shot me an amused smile.

“Mikey. I’ll be fine.”

I snapped out of my reverie to notice my train cruising away with a metallic wail.

“Not this again,” I muttered, realising that there was a 15 minute wait ahead, my third in a week.

I was here to hunt for something. No, I can be clearer than that. I was here to see *her*. I just wanted to know how she was doing, pointless as that may be, to meet again in person rather than flicking through Facebook images and old messages, trying to rekindle a friendship that was just a bunch of bittersweet memories flooded beyond repair.

The weathered wood of the swing hung motionless from its kinked chains. It had been a seat of a fantasy princess and her prince once, but now it was simply another dilapidated memory amongst a collection. The chains hung motionless on the tubular, ivy entwined framework, orange spots of rust peppering them. The smooth wooden seat I remembered was now rough, split and warped, with a pool of water resting on top. Faded red paint peeled off in curls. It swung gently in the breeze, creaking, remembering a moment long ago, with two children now grown up.

The grass beneath waited to catch a girl who had flung herself from the swing at the apex of its arc. I walked towards it with a stutter, and shook the seat so the raindrops splattered onto my shoes. The chains soaked the cuffs of my sweatshirt. I sat down and gripped them, allowing my body to rest backwards, my polished blacks lifting as I swung. I couldn’t make my mind up about the smell the chains imprinted onto my palms and fingers. It was somewhat comforting, like a childhood memory, but also unbearable, much like – much like she was. That day...

“No, it’s not *that* you have a problem with, chica. You’re just being you again.”

“No, it isn’t.”
I looked at her worriedly, trying to make eye contact, but my

She went home by bus from anywhere, so I don’t know why I thought I’d ever catch sight of her here. It’s the definition of insanity, I’m pretty sure: when you know something won’t work, but you keep trying. And every single day, I got off at the back of the curved platform and went to the swing. Somehow, I believed (hoped – they’re both the same thing to me) that she’d remember times gone by and visit the swing. It’s fate, surely. Maybe we’d make up. Either way, I knew that, until I saw her, I needed to keep coming back.

Today, though, I found someone else. I saw the blonde hair first, a kind of blonde unavoidably associated with adjectives such as “dumb.” She kept walking towards me, expectantly, almost as if she was waiting for me to do something. She stopped and looked around.

“Uh, oh sorry, d-d-do you want the swing?”

“If that’s ok,” she muttered.

I slid off, dug my toes in too hard and tripped. She chuckled, the ice – and perhaps my toe – broken.

quizzical glance met only the side of her face. I stopped the swing’s momentum with my arm and crouched, clutching her knees. She turned her face towards the station.

“Chica?”

“I’m just not feeling it.”

“What?”

“I’m just not feeling it.”

“Rightio...”

“I’m not sure how I can break it to you.”
I let go of her knees and backed away. A few steps, and I sat down by our typical position on the greener grass, waved at her and motioned for her to lie on my lap, as she was wont to do.

She didn’t move.

“I’m not really feeling – well, I’m not really feeling our relationship.”

“Sorry, what?”

“I’ve – I’ve found someone else. It’s no offence to you. I just – I can’t really help it.”

“So, uh, what’s your name?”

“Evie,” she said, hesitantly.

“Mikey.” I held out my hand and she shook it.

We walked and chatted a little about some superficial stuff – what unis we were at, the degrees we did (mine psychology, hers chemistry). For the next twenty minutes (was it more?) we simply talked like any two people would after first meeting. Once you get over “stranger danger”, girls are rather easy to talk to, I find.

Evie had a way of thinking I found interesting. She had a twinkle in her eye, a movement in her feet that I felt like I’d never be able to cope with.

For now, I had a request I wanted her to grant. I interrupted a lull in conversation, as a train rattled its way past.

“Evie?”

“Mikey?”

“Do you want to go back to the swing again?”

“Careful,” she muttered, with some grumpiness. “You’ll hurt yourself.”

I shot her an amused smile.

“Evie. I’ll be fine.”

The Big Smoke might be clearer than the country after all

Today, when asked, “What is the country to you?” I thought of canola paddocks stretching for yellow kilometre upon yellow kilometre. I thought of night skies littered with stars unfettered by city lights and smoke. I thought of dry summer days and crisp winter nights.

I used to think “belonging”. I used to long for the familiarity of it. Like knowing that when you walked down the street, you’d probably see someone you know. Like knowing that there was no such thing as anonymity and basking in it. Like knowing that if your car broke down or you looked like you’d been crying, someone would ask whether you needed help.

I used to think that the country was a place where I wanted to raise my kids.

I used to get defensive when my friends from the city would laud the backwardness of the country. I used to argue and rationalise away the high rates of suicide and depression. Sure, there were narrow-minded people in the country, but weren’t there people like that in the city too? I convinced myself that if I wasn’t narrow-minded, then that had to be proof that there were other people in the country that weren’t either.

However, over this past year, I had an epiphany. I realised that in becoming caught up in the semantics of the “Country versus City” debate, I had become narrow-minded after all. At the very least, maybe I had become unwilling to reflect on why I believed in what I believed in.

I realised that maybe I was able to defend living and growing up in the country because I was not “different”.

I do not identify as a member of the LGBTQIA* community.

While I am ethnically ambiguous in appearance, most would identify me as white.

I do not identify as being indigenous.

And, because I wasn’t different, I was able to survive and thrive in the country.

You see, when reading the local newspaper’s Facebook page, it’s hard not to comprehend why some people should (and do) avoid living in the country.

I didn’t have to look any further than the comments section of a post about Anthony Mundine’s decision to remain seated during the Australian anthem at his upcoming fight.

“I hope he gets slaughtered by green and shuts him up all together stupid pricks there is no one alive that were the first people here so give it a rest I say and the complainers are all 1/2 1/4 etc cast anyway”

“Another whitey with a teaspoon of Koori in him having a sook.”

And sure, maybe you’ll say those comments only represent the views of a small but vocal group within the community.

And yes, I’ll happily admit that not everyone in the country is like that: racist, ignorant, offensive. Certainly, my closest friends aren’t.

However, my experiences of returning to the town in which I grew up have proven, time and time again, that even though they may be a minority, the ignorant in the country have loud and influential voices.

One such experience was with a group of family friends. A motivational speaker, with impaired vision and also identified as a member of the LGBTQIA* community, had spoken at their children’s high school. He had spoken to the students about struggling with his sexuality and the bullying he had experienced living in a small country town.

As someone who likes to think of themselves as progressive, I thought this was a great idea. No one had come to my high school to talk on topics such as this. However, the people I knew were outraged.

“How could the school let a gay person come to speak to the kids?”

“By letting that man speak, the school is basically saying that it’s alright to be gay! They’re encouraging kids to be gay!”

I remember sitting there, stunned. Never in all my life would I have imagined that these vile words would come spilling out of their mouths. I tried talking them through things. Informing them that being gay wasn’t hearing someone speak on the topic and deciding to try on that identity. They didn’t want to listen.

Such ignorance explains so much about what is going on in the country. No wonder some of my friends who are members of the LGBTQIA* community find the prospect of returning home so nerve-wracking. It isn’t difficult to draw connections between these kinds of attitudes and the high rates of suicide among adolescents and young adults in regional Australia.

On the drive home from the family friend’s house, I remember looking out across the sheep-filled paddocks. A group of lambs chased each other along the fence. Paterson’s curse, vibrant and the deepest of indigo, skirted the highway. In the country, there is always new life and, for the right people, there are always new opportunities.

And yet, I don’t think I can call it home anymore.

I once read that “being from the country wasn’t a style, it was a way of life”. To be honest, I’m not sure I want to be associated with the “country way of life” anymore.



PRESIDENT’S STATEMENT

G'day UNSW,
Welcome to Semester 2!

Semester 1 was really exciting for the SRC, and we’ve listened to you on issues such as the 891 lines and Trimesters. Hopefully you’ve had a chance to catch up with us at one of our meet ups, stalls, or maybe even snagged some Free Brekky or enrolled yourself in one of our subsidised RSA courses.

All these things and more will be back in Semester 2 – come and say hi to us at Semester 2 O-Week with your issues and ideas, or if you'd rather stay on holidays for just a little bit longer, you can always drop us a line at srcpresident@arc.unsw.edu.au, or any of our collective’s emails!

Aislinn Stein-Magee

ABOUT COLLECTIVES

Our collectives include Education, Environment, Ethno Cultural, Indigenous, International, Queer, Students with Disabilities, Welfare and Women’s.

The Collectives are a great way to get involved in a community, make some friends, and campaign around the issues that matter to you

Campaigns include:

- Fix the 891 Queues - Accessible and safe transport to and from UNSW
- Divestment - UNSW must divest from fossil fuel companies and invest in a sustainable and ethical future
- Stop the UNSW Trimonster - Fighting back against the introduction of harmful trimesters
- End Sexual Violence on campus - After the release of the Australian Human Rights Commission survey on 1 August, action must be taken by universities and governments to end sexual violence on campus
- Free Speech Isn't Free – Focusing on the mistreatment of Women of Colour who have spoken out in the media
- Free Breakfast
- And heaps more to come in Semester 2!

ABOUT THE SRC

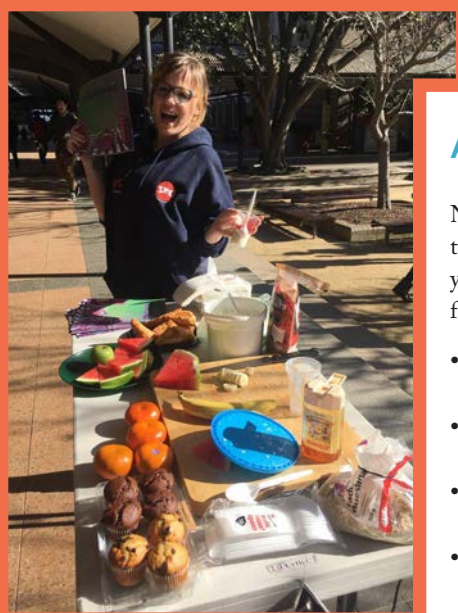
The Student Representative Council (SRC) is the peak representative and advocacy body for students at UNSW. We run campaigns aimed at improving UNSW for all students, fighting for the issues you care about, and also providing you with a community to chill out and socialise with. The SRC is a platform for you to shape your own educational experience, create real change for you and your fellow students and make community connections that will last you a lifetime.



WHAT’S ON

Check out our website in Semester 2 to check out what’s happening!

<http://www.arc.unsw.edu.au/voice/src/upcoming-events>



ABOUT SPACES

Need somewhere to chill out on campus? A quiet place to study? A place to connect with like-minded people? Maybe just a microwave or fridge for your lunch? The SRC has you covered. We have equity rooms – safe spaces for you to hang out, nap, or get some readings done.

- Welfare and Disability Room - A place for autonomous collectives, and also for any student to chill out in the meantime.
- International & Ethno-cultural Room - A safe chill place for ethnically and culturally diverse students and international students.
- Women's Room - The women's room is a safe and autonomous space for women identifying students.
- Queer Space - A safe autonomous place to relax and connect with other LGBTIA/Queer students. Meetings and other activities are run by the Queer Collective on a weekly basis.

Head to the website to find out where the rooms are located and how you can use them.



COLLECTIVE TIMES

Check out our website and Facebook page to find updated Semester 2 Collective times!



Got a story for us?
Email us at tharunka@arc.unsw.edu.au



UNSW updates slogan to "always stand still" as 891 line extends into Pacific Ocean at Coogee



3 comments 172 shares

New citizenship test to include question "Have you ever dogged the boys?"



13 comments 117 shares

Minister for Transport declares light rail progress "startling success" after only 63,587 commuter complaints



David Leyonhjelm states "Muslim last names are too hard to pronounce, get an Australian one like mine"



18 comments 2 videos 5 shares

Male student mansplains course to female lecturer: "actually..."



Housing crisis causes stressed Malcolm Turnbull to rent fifth holiday house



CoalBank can: CBA says Adani is the best thing since sliced bread



Donald Trump confirmed dead, according to alternative facts

