

CHARUNKA is dead



2023

Acknowledgement

Tharunka acknowledges the Bedegal, Gadigal and Ngunnawal peoples as the traditional custodians of the land upon which UNSW's three campuses are located and where this publication was produced. We pay our respects to their elders past and present, and extend that respect to our Indigenous and Torres Strait Islander readers. We acknowledge that Tharunka was produced on stolen land whose sovereignty was never ceded.

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Content Warning:

The following issue on page 4, 12 and 30 contains references to Racism, Sexism, Sexual harassment and Assault, Domestic Violence, Genocide, Colonialism and other forms of trauma. Reader discretion is advised.

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THA • RUN • KA

Anh Noel

‘Tharunka’ is stolen

In 1953, Tharunka came into being. Its birthparents, the editorial ran by Sid Dunk and Harold Spies, states in the first printed edition:

“It is with appreciation that we acknowledge our debt to Australia’s Aborigines from whom the name ‘Tharunka’ is borrowed. ‘Tharunka’ means ‘message stick’”.

The paper’s frontpage was proudly stamped with a figure carrying a message stick. An image that remained on all the subsequent editions for the rest of the year. The ‘message stick’ became a sort of emblem, a symbol by which Tharunka is still associated with to this day. One Google search on the publication and you’ll receive an entry from Wikipedia which states: “The name Tharunka means “message stick” in a Central Australian Aboriginal language”. However, the source of this sentence remains uncited.

We know from Dunk and Spies (and apparently Wikipedia), that it is an Aboriginal word that means ‘message stick’, but there is an important question yet addressed: from which specific region and language was the word taken from?

To this question, I turned to the only other address on the naming of Tharunka; an Editorial by A.D. Zenere, A. Costoulas, and P.J. O’Neill from 1955. Expanding on the choice of name, it says:



In other words, 'Tharunka' is most likely stolen.



“When looking for a name for this journal some years ago, an attempt was made to find a truly Australian technical name. To find a truly Australian word, we went to the first Australians, but, unfortunately, it was found that they were not very technically minded and, consequently had few, if any, technical words in their language. The nearest suitable name we could find was “Tharunka” or “message stick”, and as the years roll on this name becomes more and more suitable and, we hope, more widely known.”

EDITORIAL EXCERPT

It is fitting, I suppose, that one should start the year with an explanation of what “Tharunka” is, what it stands for and how it is published.

First of all, “Tharunka” is an aboriginal word meaning “message stick.” When looking for a name for this journal some years ago, an attempt was made to find a truly Australian technical name. To find a truly Australian word, we went to the first Australians, but, unfortunately, it was found that they were not very technically minded and, consequently, had few, if any, technical words in their language. The nearest suitable name we could find was “Tharunka” or “message stick,” and as the years roll on this name becomes more and more suitable and, we hope, more widely known.

Although the core question of this investigation remains unanswered, it did indicate the processes undertaken in naming the publication. To start, instead of real information regarding the specific language and region the word was taken from, we’re provided with a statement of serious colonial and racial prejudice; an implication that First Nations people were “unfortunately” not “technically minded” enough. In talking to representatives from Nura Gili, I also found that this lack of information points to a high possibility that the word was taken without appropriate permission or consultation with First Nations people.

In reaching out to the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS), Lauren Reed, the Assistant Director for the AIATSIS Centre for Australian Languages said the following about the proper practice in using Indigenous languages:

“Aboriginal languages are part of the Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property (ICIP) of relevant Traditional Owners. Before using ICIP,

permission must be sought from the relevant community or communities”. In other words, ‘Tharunka’ is most likely stolen.

A closer look into student publications’ history reveals an emerging pattern. It was just in 2022 when the Sydney Arts Society’s Journal (SASS) was forced to change its name from ARNA to AVENUE given evidence that the original name was likely stolen from the Barngala people. The publication’s name had been ARNA since 1938, and recent evidence proves that it was incorrectly attributed to the name of ‘a sun-god’. Like Tharunka, their 1938 editorial also explains that it was chosen from an “unspecified Aboriginal language”, giving no evidence of which language group or whether it was obtained with consultation or permission.

Earlier this year, River McCrossen, an editor from the University of Wollongong’s student magazine Tertangala, reached out to us regarding the origins of their own publication’s name. Tertangala was first published in 1962. McCrossen wrote that they believe the word ‘tertangala’ means ‘smoke signal’, and was originally assigned as a counterpart to

our 'message stick' (Wollongong university used to be a part of UNSW). Again, there was no indication on which language group 'tertangala' was taken from, nor if it was used with proper consultation. In the process of our correspondences, we also found that former Tertangala editor, James Breach, wrote in 2000 that it was discovered that "Tertangala is a made-up word, not remotely to do with known Aboriginal languages".

It's an unfortunate pattern. Laid out clear is that most student publications with names taken from Indigenous languages did not actually follow the correct and responsible process in order to use that name. One could then wonder if the first editors were "technically minded" in the process of naming the newspaper themselves. I don't know which is worse, for no one to have questioned this from the very beginning or that it's taken us this long to finally address it.

So, where could they have taken the word from?

Is 'tharunka', then, also an invention? Throughout my research, I found it impossible to trace the word 'tharunka' back to any NSW language groups, or to find an equivalent of it that means 'message stick' in any languages at all. Asides from the Wikipedia entry or from the Tharunka website itself, there are no other sources that confirm that 'tharunka' actually means 'message stick'. After weeks of trawling through archives and dictionaries, I was beginning to think that word was a sham when I stumbled upon an investigation by Rory Thomas in a 2008 issue of Tharunka.

The article, published with a number of typos, found that the word 'tharunka' appears on a list of 'Aboriginal words and their meanings' compiled by Joah H. Sugden prior to 1949 (the actual list is undated). The list simply mentions that the word means 'message stick' and comes from a 'Central Australian Dialect' but fails to identify which specific language. Here is where I also suspect the Wikipedia page got its information from.



I chose a scorching day in August to go down to the University of Sydney's Rare Books & Special Collections Archive where they stored a (very rare) copy of Sugden's list. The list itself shows a collection of random Aboriginal words attributed to certain regions but never the specific language group. Like Thomas has claimed, the word 'tharunka' does appear in the list assigned to a 'Central Aboriginal Dialect'.

After taking notes of other words in the list that were also attributed to the same region, I compared them to words found in major Central Aboriginal languages. From here, I found that most of the words attributed to a 'Central Aboriginal Dialect' in Sugden's list corresponded to words from the Arrernte language of Central Australia.

Searching through various Arrernte language resources yielded me no word that's spelt in the exact same way as 'tharunka'. However, I did find one that comes phonetically close:

The word 'tjurunga'.

Does 'tharunka' even mean 'message stick'?

Given their phonetic similarity, I wanted to find out if it was possible 'tharunka' was an Anglicisation of the word 'tjurunga'. However, assuming this comes with a number of issues. The major one being that tjurunga are not considered message sticks from an anthropological context.

The word 'tjurunga', also spelt 'churinga' and 'tjuringa', refers to objects of religious significance by the Arrernte people. It was originally a word referring to a particular type of sacred wooden object or stone. However, the term has now developed into a generic anthropological term used to identify a wide variety of religious objects.

A substantive amount of research on tjurunga found that there existed terminological confusion between them and Aboriginal message sticks throughout history due to their deemed similar appearances. A paper by Piers Kelly (2019), states:

“The material diversity of message sticks has had consequences for their historical classification by scholars and collectors ... As a result, sacred tjurunga from central Australia, identifiable by a restricted set of recurrent ritual motifs (Anderson, 1995) are advertised by auctioneers as ‘message sticks’, leading to functional as well as terminological confusion.”

Lindy Allen, in 2015 also documented similar linguistic uses of tjurunga that labelled them as message sticks, providing further evidence on how the object could have been mislabelled by anthropologists.

“As a linguist, my sense is that ‘tharunka’ is an Anglicisation of tjurunga or churinga (and several other similar spellings)”, Lauren Reed told Tharunka, “Tjurunga are sometimes referred to as ‘message sticks’, although this is incorrect.”



“Tjurunga are sometimes referred to as ‘message sticks’, although this is incorrect.”

A Central Land Council representative also provided the following comment:

“I had a look at my Arrernte dictionary, but nothing jumps out at me. Then again, the settlers did horrible things to language words, rendering some unrecognisable.”

Could the original editors have mistaken tjurunga for message sticks?

Whether the original editors could have possibly mistaken tjurunga for message sticks is a complicated question. However, the answer seems more likely than not.

During the 1940s and 50s, the false definition of tjurunga as message sticks made way beyond academia and into popular culture.

The Australian anthropologist, Charles P. Mountford, was a key figure. In anthropological circles he was known to identify the difference between tjurungas and message sticks as between ‘ceremonial message sticks’ and ‘secular message sticks’, confounding further confusion between the two objects. Though these categories have been disproved by later anthropologists due to the objects’ difference on material and lexical grounds, Mountford’s influence as a writer and filmmaker caused for many to misidentify tjurungas as message sticks at the time.

Mentions of tjurunga can be found in several of his influential works. *Brown Men and Red Sand* published in 1948, and more significantly the short film *Tjurunga* — the story of a stone age man in 1946 (a companion film to the famous *Walkabout: A journey with the Aboriginals*).

These films were documented to be of ‘immense popular success’ and were particularly popular among students. Due to these reasons, I believe that there is a possibility that Dunk and Spies relied on information either presented by or referenced in Mountford’s work in order to name the newspaper ‘Tharunka’.

**Tharunka must change its name.
Because it is the right
and smallest thing
that we can do.**

The case for a change of name

The end of my research marks also the approaching end of my time as a Tharunka editor. Within the last few months, I've shared the findings of this investigation with the Student Development Committee (SDC) at Arc with the calling for a change of name with the arguments presented above.

Given where Australia stands today, post-the very recent referendum that Marcia Langton poignantly cemented as "whatever the outcome, reconciliation is dead", the changing of a mere student paper's name seems trifle. There is, however, great importance in acknowledging and correcting what has been done wrong. An importance in taking responsibility.

In writing this, I acknowledge my limited capabilities as a non-Indigenous person and hope to extend this process and dialogue towards Indigenous students and staff at UNSW. The changing of Tharunka's name should be carried out with great precarity and should not be done in isolation amongst the Tharunka editorial alone.

For now, research on 'tharunka' will be continued by Arc and (hopefully) the next editorial with the aims of reaching a full confirmation on the origins of the name. If there's anything to be learnt, it is that we must take the proper care, time and process.

I hope that this investigation results in other dialogues that reassess the current practices of student journalism at UNSW, and to encourage students to look further into the history of the institutions from which they benefit.

Tharunka must change its name.
Because it is the right and smallest thing that we can do.

Ripping, Rearranging and Re-trialling

CONTEXT: This is a chosen student essay that discusses *Zong!*, an experimental work by the Trinidadian/Canadian poet M. NourbeSe Philip. The poem's title refers to the devastating 1781 massacre, in which more than 130 enslaved African people were thrown overboard the British slave ship, *Zong*. Following the massacre, the ship's owners filed an insurance claim for their loss of 'cargo', resulting in a court case that debated the financial impact of the mass murder. M. NourbeSe Philip's poem uses the text of the resulting legal document, *Gregson vs Gilbert*, to create an evocative, distressing, transporting collection of poems.

QUESTION: M. NourbeSe Philip's *Zong!* can be read through the practices of found-object and readymade art and cut-up text. With consideration of the particular 'found object' used in *Zong!*, identify some of the ways these techniques create the structure, and meaning/unmeaning of the text.

Zong! by M. NourbeSe Philip utilises the legal document of *Gregson vs Gilbert* as a found object, violently cutting up its words, syllables and letters of to rewrite the corporate court case, weaponising its language against itself, undermining, critiquing and destroying the text from the inside out. Philip achieves this through using the dismembered words as readymade art, rearranging them into a disorientating structure which reproduces the sights and sounds of *Zong!*, forcing the audience to witness and experience the massacre. These reorganisational techniques reshape the meaning of the text, resulting in a retrial with the audience as present-day jurors. Philip dismantles the original document's financial and legal meaning, and successfully places the lives and deaths of the slaves at the heart of the case, emboldening the audience to convict the "Good Captain Collingwood" and his crew as guilty of a brutal massacre.

Philip's *Zong!* follows the literary tradition of found-text poetry, displacing and reorganising the words of *Gregson vs. Gilbert* to formulate a revolutionary new piece. Philip participates in constrained writing, utilising her found object as a "word store", and locking herself into its "particular and peculiar discursive landscape", consisting of stock phrases, formal grammar and Latin writs.

In this way, Philip is metaphorically “at sea” having “cut [herself] from the comfort and predictability of [her own] language.” Through this constraint Philip redeploys the words of Gregson vs Gilbert, cutting up the text to create poetry radically opposed to its original legal purpose. Philip undermines the way language was used in Gregson vs Gilbert to normalise atrocities and to “disappear human beings” by dissolving them into objects, Philip’ undermines this indifference through “castrating verbs, suffocating adjectives, murdering nouns”, the violent verbs echoing the atrocities committed throughout the Atlantic slave trade.

Philip then treats each singularised word, letter and syllable as readymade art, rearranged to convey the devastating experiences of the murdered, rather than the financial struggles of the murderers. Where Gregson vs Gilbert was “certain, objective and predictable”, Philip’s *Zong!* emulates “sadness, anger and despair”, the contrasting tricolons highlighting Philip’s drastic subversion of the found text.

The fragmentation and reorganisation of Gregson vs Gilbert creates a disorientating structure that emulates the “frenzy” of the massacre, transforming the legal discourse into a narrative of fear and confusion. According to Hurston in ‘Barracoon’, the Atlantic slave trade is full of “the words of the sellers. But not one word from the sold.” The fragmentation of Gregson vs Gilbert allows the poet to create an evocative structure that “sn/ap[s] the sp/ine of tim/e”; the disturbing sibilance here also catching the audience within the confronting sounds and sights of *Zong!* Philip allows the severed words of Gregson vs Gilbert to drift freely in the first section of the work, *Zong! #1*, creating an immersive structure. The layout forces the reader’s eye to track the disjointed lines vertically and horizontally across the page, mirroring the dangerous swelling of waves, and leaves large spaces between the letters, representing human carcasses on the sea’s surface. This confronting illustration of the Zong massacre also includes a sonic component that echoes the haunting noises of drowning and death. The repeated ‘ah’ sounds in “w/a/wa/t/er” echo the groans of the slaves, and the pauses between each syllable create powerful silences, as heads are dragged underwater.

The structure of the complete work emulates the violence, pain and disorientation of the massacre. In *Zong! #3*, for instance, the disjointed “over/board” reduces the massacre into two violent stages, the boat and the sea, life and death. The severed sentences jar the audience, but the poem’s use of enjambment forces them to keep reading. After experiencing this disorientation, we are faced with the final, haunting abbreviation “etc”, brutally dismissing the mass murder of helpless people.

The Atlantic slave trade is full of “the words of the sellers. But not one word from the sold.”

In other places, Philip reorganises the ‘readymade’ words into columns and lists, a structure that condemns the categorisation of slaves as cargo: in *Zong! #9*, the two columns allude to an account ledger, evoking order and simplicity through the epistrophe ‘in’. However, the poem undermines the ledger’s sense of summation and balance to condemn the absurd logic of Gregson vs Gilbert by forcing the reader’s eye to slash across the page, in search of relationships between the words in each column, which cannot be found. This replaces order with chaos and redefines the account ledger as a symbol of the “vertical positions of bodies, hurled into the water”. *Zong!* is an Entropic text; disorder and chaos intensifying as it progresses. By the final section ‘Ebora’, the words of Gregson vs Gilbert have been fractured into diminutive pieces and reorganised in increasingly illegible ways, a dense and layered structure. Through the truncated sentences “My plea is...”, “A sea...”, “groan...” the language of Gregson vs Gilbert has been reduced to unintelligible screams and cries. This is the climax of Philip’s poetry, emulating the frenzy, disorientation and fear of the Zong massacre.

Mutilating Gregson vs Gilbert results in the ‘unmeaning’ of the legal document and allows for a new meaning to be created in *Zong!*, a “hauntological” project that raises the dead, and retrials the massacre. In *Zong! #12* Philip states, “It/was”, a hopeless and final past tense statement which encapsulates the massacre’s irreversibility. However, a form of present-day justice can be achieved: through cutting up and reorganising Gregson vs Gilbert, Philip inflicts chaos and disorder onto the logical document, rejecting its absurd rationality and destroying the financial historical record. In its place, Philip creates “hauntological” poetry, that allows the slaves to haunt the modern audience through their fractured testimonies, troubling the reader long after they have closed the book. The moral imperative to “defend the dead” lingers due to its memorable dental alliteration, and the auditory imagery of ship bells, “Ding/dong/ding/dong”, continue to echo in the ears of the present-day juror. Philip is able to “exhume” the slaves from the water, recovering their bones and the memories attached, allowing them to exist in the present through remembrance. This haunting emboldens the present-day jurors (the readers) to conduct a retrial of the massacre and condemn the “Good Captain Collingwood” of mass murder.

Through found poetry Philip undermines the legal discourse of Gregson vs Gilbert that disappeared human beings, and attempts to convey the suffering of the slaves through an evocative structure, achieving a modicum of justice through truth-telling and rewriting history. Despite this, the anguish of the slaves can never truly be emulated by the fractured and rearranged words of Gregson vs Gilbert, and the dead can never be awakened to tell their stories. The bodies and memories of the massacred will remain at sea.

“Ashling Carroll’s essay on M. NourbeSe Philip’s Zong! sustains attention to both the brutality and the fragility of the poem’s (counter) representation of slavery and murder. It is difficult to write about literature that seeks to dismantle the inherent connection between language and colonial violence. Ashling’s essay is open to the complexity of meaningless meaning and traces the ways the poem dissects the logics, the syntax and the structures that enabled colonial butchery.”

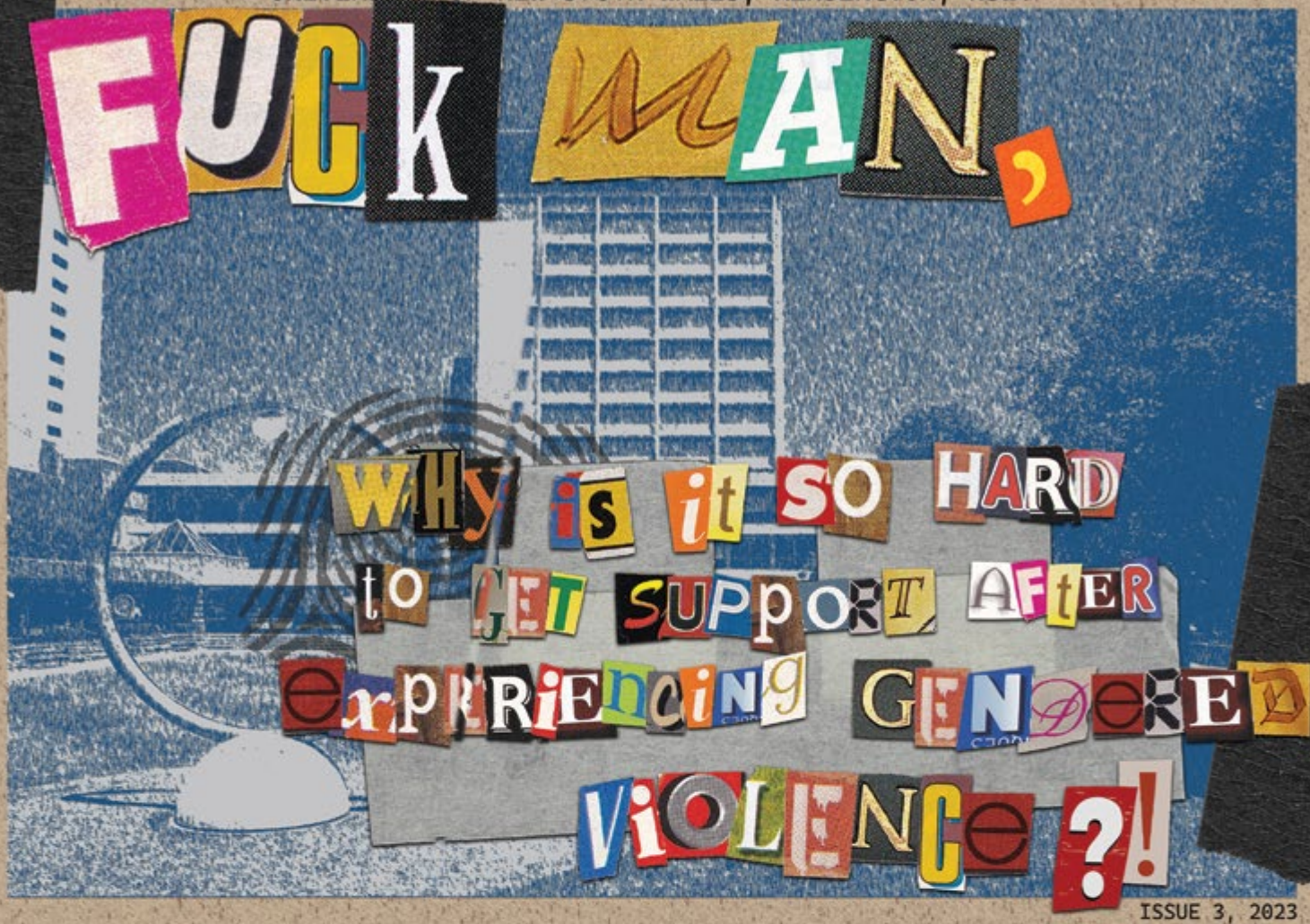
— Dr. Elizabeth McMahon

Author: Ashling Carroll

Designer: Jackie Tran

Illustration by Kelly Quach

Feature Selected by Dr. Elizabeth McMahon



What has happened to me is sadly not a unique experience, and I feel that this university does not yet have the resources needed to adequately support students who have experienced gendered violence. When I experienced sexual assault on campus, I was not fully aware of what had happened to me, as though I had disassociated from the entire situation. I could remember it, but it was as if it had happened to a different person. It felt isolating and painful. The sad news is I think I wouldn't have been as affected in the long-term if I was able to access support for my mental health and safety sooner.

I knew what had happened felt wrong and that this person had hurt me in some way, but it was only when a friend pointed out to me that I was sexually assaulted did the gravity of the situation weigh on me. It was as if there was this fog over me where I didn't really absorb the event — I just felt numb. Once reality settled in, I immediately contacted the accused and told them to never contact me again because what they had done was unforgivable. My emotions were all over the place and because I was living out of home, the only people who I really saw were my friends who I had not known for very long. I had finally built up the courage to go to my mum a few weeks after the incident and she took me to the police.

Reporting to the police

The entire situation was daunting but the police at the Randwick station were actually quite nice. I remember it took forever to get a detective to see me and the waiting just added to my anxiety and stress about the whole thing. I gave my statement to two people: the Victims of Assault Officer and her supervisor. Even though both of them were really friendly and laid out my options, I just didn't want to pursue it any further because at the time I was exhausted. All I wanted was to focus on myself and avoid my attacker on campus.

However, I soon realised how difficult this would be because the perpetrator started to leave me gifts at work. They escalated from sunglasses, to a manipulative letter begging for forgiveness, to a vibrator. I didn't know what to do and didn't know who to turn to. I spiraled into a deep depression and locked myself into my college room, hiding from the outside world. No locked door was going to stop the suicidal thoughts from creeping in or the intense self-hatred. Eventually I built up the courage to reach out to my mum again. She took me back to the same police station and made an additional report to them. This time I got an Appended Violence Order (AVO) to try and keep my attacker away. Even though I had the AVO it took me a while to actually do anything with it. You have to understand that a part of me was robbed and even though I ached to have my life back and achieve a sense of normalcy within myself, I was afraid to step out of my room. Every movement I made on campus put me at risk of being face to face with my attacker. Moving home wasn't an option because there was physically no room for me, but in hindsight, maybe I would've been best off sleeping on my parents' couch.

Reporting to college

My grades had suffered after the assault, so I reached out to the dean of the college I was staying at about a month after. I booked a session with her because she was concerned with my academic standing. During the session, I told her what had happened and that it had happened in the college rooms. What I wanted from her at the time was guidance on how I could get support from them and the university but I also needed her support. At the time, my attacker was emailing me and sending messages through university forums. While she was empathetic towards my situation, the only support offered to me was the UNSW mental health page and a vague suggestion to talk to security. Although she offered to move my room, she did not offer to help me with those processes. I never heard from her again and once again I was left in this depressive limbo for months after reporting to the police, college and UNSW.



Reporting to Security and UNSW gendered violence portal

I reported the assault to UNSW's gendered violence portal before I spoke to college. I included the reference to the police report, the report number and I chose not to remain anonymous but gave them ways to contact me. To this date, nothing has been communicated to me about the progress of that report or if the administration has taken any disciplinary steps against the accused. The portal did advise me to go to UNSW Security and inform them on what had happened but it was daunting to go alone. I wanted to have support throughout this process but there just seemed to be no one there. When I walked into the Security office, I made my report to them and provided the police report number. I had no idea what I needed to ask or even how they could help but all I wanted was for them to ensure that I never saw my attacker again. I know I didn't ask the right questions but my nerves were at their wit's end and their only response was 'we will see what we can do'. They did say they would be in touch with updates on their progress but after a month there was nothing. I was the one that had to reach out. I was the one following them up, never to receive a response. Exhausting does not begin to describe this experience; it felt like the systems meant to help me were just exacerbating the trauma. At this point I had jumped through a lot of hoops with no real outcome and the futility of it all really sunk in.

Tharunka also reached out to the writer's college, whose current dean was not in the role at the time of their assault. I once again had to provide information on the police report and the previous report made to the gendered violence portal. One of the queer officers has been incredibly helpful since I reached out and has been helping me stay up to date with what progress has been made.

Finally, I heard from UNSW Conduct & Integrity Unit. It was only then that they offered support on how to best keep myself safe. I was given contacts to Arc Legal & Advocacy, and advice on how to speak with security about my situation. This has been incredibly helpful but it very sad that I only got access to this after leaping through multiple hoops over and over again for over a year.

Reaching out to UNSW WellBeing

I had one appointment with a counselor who focused on the mental health side of things. At this point my sole focus was figuring out a way I could make university a safe space for me again. At this time, I had already organised to see an external psychologist and the counselor advised me to stay with them because they knew me best. After that meeting I got the impression that they didn't want to see me. I could have misunderstood but the communication was unclear and incredibly confusing from them.



Regaining control of myself

We are now in 2023 and as the university year was just starting up, I was in this weird 'it gets worse before it gets better' phase. I have inadvertently seen my attacker both on and off campus. Once was when I was with friends in Chatswood, and the other time when they approached me in the Law Library. Both times they tried to come and talk to me but before they got a word in, I left. After this some friends had informed me that my attacker had been involved in another incident and that made me feel incredibly low. I had done everything right; made two reports to the police, an AVO, reported to security, reported to the university, reached out to wellbeing and nothing had been done about it.

I feel a lot more optimistic about my mental wellbeing and my safety than I did at the time immediately following the assault. Especially since making connections with people within the university who are helpful and who are guiding me through processes that should have been easily available last year. They are actually making sure I am safe. It is important to remember you are not alone. One of the ways I noted that I was getting better was when I felt a lot more connected to people. I want to emphasise that because my friends were there for me and made sure that I was participating in life again (dinners and social events) that it really encouraged me to want to get better. That desire to ace therapy (lol)!

If someone is going through what I am going through I hope that they don't feel alone and that they will be more compassionate to themselves than I was when the assault happened. Please reach out to friends or family because they are such an integral part of healing. It really fucking sucks that it seems impossible to easily access support from the Uni, and hopefully this will change in the future. What kind of learning space would this be if students aren't getting supported after experiencing violence on campus grounds?! No matter what you have to keep working but I feel like it shouldn't have been as difficult as it was for me. I believe there should have been better processes in place. I shouldn't have to chase up paperwork constantly because it is not conducive or relevant to the healing process. It may not be my place to tell people how to do their job but people should not have to follow up safety and support services to make sure they are getting what they need because it exacerbates the trauma and defers help. These areas need to change and become a unified process that communicate among each other, or else other students will be left feeling as hopeless and alone as I once was.





Tharunka reached out to UNSW Security regarding the matters referenced in this article. In response, we received this statement from UNSW Media:

In response to your inquiry to UNSW Security, the safety and wellbeing of UNSW students and staff are always paramount and gendered violence, including sexual misconduct has no place at the University. We are committed to providing a rewarding and safe learning, research and teaching environment.

UNSW encourages reporting of all forms of gendered violence, current and historical, so that we can offer active support. Reports can be made anonymously and are managed consistent with a trauma informed approach.

The University takes all reports of gendered violence seriously and has comprehensive processes to receive and respond to any allegations made involving UNSW students, staff and members of the public, occurring on campus, off campus and on-line.

Students, staff and members of the public can report incidents on our Gendered Violence Portal (Portal), to UNSW Security, by making a student or staff complaint, by contacting University support services, to one of five First Responders, or to their University or affiliated accommodation provider.

All reports to the Portal, where contact details are provided, receive a trauma-informed, person-centred response within 48 hours with information, appropriate support and referral to on- and off-campus services. UNSW has a process in place to minimise the number of times a report is required to disclose their experience and the response is informed by the report's wishes.

*Best regards
UNSW Media*

Tharunka also reached out to the writer's college, whose current dean was not in the role at the time of their assault. They thus declined to comment on those grounds as well as lacking the approval of the writer. After stating this, they proceeded to outline UNSW's incident reporting processes on the Gendered Violence Portal and UNSW Security.

Author: Anonymous
Editors: Dominique Lakis, Anh Noel
Designer: Antonia Tsang

QUEER COLLECTIVE

Over the course of 2023, we've been focused on building a stronger community for queer students at UNSW, pushing for stronger protections both on and off campus, and producing support resources for the queer community.

Community

In September, we crossed 650 members, meaning the Queer Collective now composes 1% of students on campus. We've also run over 20 events this year already (at the time of writing), with 3 more scheduled before the end of term 3. We've also collaborated with the UNSW Law Society, Queer Students in STEM, the UNSW Sapphic Society, and the UNSW Postgraduate Council on providing educational and social events that are accessible to all students at UNSW. We're also working with Shalom College to run Queer Sensitivity training for Residential Advisors, which we hope to expand to other UNSW Accommodation providers in 2024.

Campaigns

We've started 3 key campaigns this year, all aimed at improving the outcomes for queer students.

In March, we started a campaign to introduce more gender-neutral bathrooms across UNSW's Kensington and Paddington campuses. We believe that the availability of bathrooms is essential to our vision of equity for queer students both on and off campus, and that gender-neutral bathrooms provide an important recognition of queer students from the university.

In July, we reinvigorated our campaign for a new queer space, providing a safer space for our students on campus with better accessibility and security. Our aim for this initiative is to modernise the queer space, enabling us to host events and meetings in a manner that is in line with our goals of accessibility and equity for all Queer Collective members. At this stage, Estate Management is still confirming which facilities are available to move into, but we're hoping for a move in early 2024.

In early October, we committed to a campaign for fighting transphobia across UNSW's academic settings, including in course content and tutorials. We've since engaged with the School of Social Sciences to address student concerns in their lectures, and have been in discussions with the ADA and Science faculties to create policies that extend this goal beyond the Collective.

The Future

In 2024, we're aiming to expand our reach even further:

- Increase our reach at Paddington campus, including QC meetings and events.
- Introduce a merch line for queer students at UNSW.
- Work with Ally@UNSW and the EDI team to improve queer outcomes in academia.

SRC
Reports

unsw.gay/register
unswqueer.co/

Pepsi and Rebecca Blundell
2023/4 Queer Officers 17



**CONINGS
LEGG
SINCE**



SWAY FACED 1953

The Squandered Potential of Video Games

Marcus Pepperell

Editors: Eloise Wajon, Anh Noel
Design by Jackie Tran

Have you ever had a moment where something you have long believed to be true is suddenly proven? When you could finally point and say “Look, there, right there! I was right all along!”

That was me, several weeks ago, after finishing *The Red Strings Club*.

I’ve been playing video games since I turned nine years old, when my parents gave me a 3DS for my birthday. I’ve watched countless video essays on game design and the medium’s history. I taught myself to code because of video games. I’ve made several simple video games, and for a time believed game development was the career I wanted to pursue. And in all that time, no game has had as big an emotional impact on me. As an arts student, I’m fascinated by narrative in nonconventional mediums. This is also why I love rock operas.



Over the past several years, I’ve developed the belief that video games have immense, untapped narrative potential- potential that is unknown to the majority of the audience and overlooked by mainstream game developers.

Despite being a globally recognised art form, the worth of which is measured in the hundreds of billions, video games are not afforded the same artistic respect as other mediums. They have no Hamlet, no Citizen Kane, no Watchmen.

There are a number of reasons for this. The relative youth of the medium, the desire of mainstream game publishers to appeal to the widest possible audience, and the massive teams set to work on each project that ultimately lead to a dilution of the core vision. But I believe the most significant factor at play is that, when it comes to narrative, video games seem almost ashamed of themselves.

Every medium has its own strengths and weaknesses. What works in a book will not translate perfectly into a play, nor can it play translate perfectly to sculpture or song. Many games clearly have no interest in narrative, and that’s fine. John Carmack, the lead programmer of revolutionary first-person shooter, *Doom*, once said that,

“Story in a game is like a story in a porn movie. It’s expected to be there, but it’s not that important.”

This view is clearly reflected in many games from across the history of the genre. And some of them are great - *Doom* (both the 1993 original and 2016 reboot) are among my favourites, but it seems a tremendous shame to disregard the narrative potential of an entire medium. To say that the emotional range of video games is limited to the immediate catharsis of action does the art form a disservice.



Today, the majority of mainstream video games that purport to have a deep narrative ape the stylings of film. As developers heap ever more money on lavish cutscenes and talented voice actors, the word “cinematic” has become commonplace in game reviews. But we already have a cinematic art form. It’s called cinema, and video games cannot hope to beat it at its own game. Until they move on and forge their own artistic identity, video games will forever be in the shadow of other mediums.

The defining characteristic of video games, that sets them aside from every other mainstream art form, is interactivity. It’s not some actor that performed an incredible feat of agility, or made an incredible deduction. It was you. It happened because of you.

This is what lent *The Red Strings Club* its power. The thing that left me emotionally devastated in my room at two in the morning, questioning my own morality. *The Red Strings Club* is a short game, about four hours long, made by just a handful of people. But it forced me to confront theological and philosophical questions of free will and ethics. And I had to live with the decisions I made.

The only games that do receive widespread attention for their use of interactivity in storytelling are role playing games, exemplified by the output of Bethesda Softworks. But these games typically take a quantity-over-quality approach to storytelling, clustering stock genre tropes together

in the hopes that their sheer scale will hide how thinly spread it all is. The only exception to this that I’ve come across is *Fallout: New Vegas*, which was published by Bethesda but developed by Obsidian Entertainment. There came a moment during my playthrough when I looked at myself and thought “Oh God... what have I become?”

Within the game’s freeform narrative, I had pushed away my friends and allied myself with a fascist regime, all while trying to do the right thing, which made it infinitely more impactful. I’m sure there are other games out there that use the strengths of the medium to tell compelling stories and foster nuanced discussion. But they’re very much the minority, and are obscured by multiplayer behemoths and cinematic extravaganzas.

I hope more of these games get made. I hope they get the attention they deserve. And I hope the medium gets the respect it deserves. Is this likely? Maybe not. But video games have only existed for about 50 years, and I believe they have a lot of growing left to do. Theatre existed for two millennia before Shakespeare, after all.



Could AI kill the album cover?

Author: Rahemma Azwar

They're iconic, immediately recognisable, and the visual representation of an artists' body of work.

Album covers are one of the most memorable factors of the music we listen to today. It was the first thing we saw when buying a CD, and remains the first thing we see when clicking play on a new release on Spotify.

You might not know the artist but you sure as hell know the art.

Pink Floyd's *The Dark Side of the Moon*, designed by Storm Thorgerson, and Joy Division's *Unknown Pleasures*, done by Peter Saville, are some of the countless iconic album cover art that have been printed on t-shirts and tote bags to be sold to people worldwide.

But the tides are changing for this artform,



with signs of its slow disappearance more and more. And it all has to do with AI generators like MidJourney and DALLE 2.

Debates on platforms like MidJourney, and whether its use in creative fields is a true representation of art or just a mimic of stolen art are regular. Stories of artists having their art style absorbed by these platforms and processed out as 'original work' constantly flood artist forums online.



With the ongoing lawsuit, commercial use of AI art in pop culture has been scarce. But recently, actress Halle Berry was in the news for her disapproval of it. And it involved Drake, SZA, and slime.

Earlier in September, the Toronto-based rapper released cover art for his upcoming single with SZA titled *Slime You Out*, with the artwork seemingly showing the famous actress drenched in green slime at the 2012 Kids' Choice Awards.

Although she specifically asked for the image to not be used by Drake, the rapper continued to use it as the alternate cover art for the single. This angered Berry, causing her to speak out on it on her Instagram.

"Sometimes you have to be the bigger guy ... even if you're a woman," she shared in a post. "[Drake] did have his people call my people and I said NO.

"I didn't like that image of slime all over my face in association with the song. And he chose to do it anyway! You see ... that is the disrespect."

But, why does this have anything to do with AI?

But, why does this have anything

This year saw a collective of artists filing a class-action complaint against MidJourney, DreamUp, and Stability A.I. in the US. The three artists involved: Sarah Andersen, Kelly McKernan and Karla Ortiz term these websites as "21st-century collage tools that violate the rights of millions of artists."

They claim that the creation of these platforms has led to it stealing their jobs and livelihood. With these sites, users can input a prompt and generate images that closely resemble an artist's visual language.

to do with AI? 



The cover art was fed through an AI program which gave it a distinct, uncanny-valley-like smoothness to the features of the subjects. It is likely why, other than copyright issues, nothing could be done legally by the starlet to refuse fair usage of the image.

Technically, it is legal that the artists use the image in the US. It has already been altered and edited. However, ethically, the question remains of when no consent was given for its use.

The issue of consent and ownership is a major factor to the disapproval of AI art use in commercial spaces. Artists are likely unaware that their work was being stolen by data scrapers via online public access and regurgitated for profit gains by people likely not fazed by the problem of ethics.

However, supporters of these platforms claim that its efficiency allows for more experimentation and accessibility, democratizing art for all.

MidJourney's mission statement is to 'help expand people's imaginations' through user interaction with machine learning. However it does not take either the artist's voice or the taste of the audience into account in the process of creation.

The human aspect of album artwork is what we truly connect to, even with no human subject in view. It's the orchestration of colours, subjects and meaning that make an album cover iconic.

Audiences can often tell when a piece of art was made with creative intent or for economic gain. Although albums are commercial items in themselves, they contain a message that the singer wants to project to the world. That is what we come back to time and time again.

We've seen, though sparingly, recording artists explore the use of AI in their visual work. The most well known example thus far is rapper Lil



Yachty's recent album *Let's Start Here* (2023).

The album cover shows an AI-generated image of suited music executives with their faces distorted in greedy glee, laughing directly at the listener. The cover is supposed to represent music boardrooms, the disconnect between them and the industry they control.

Artistically, that detachment is reflected in the artwork in a powerful way. It's visualising his own experiences as a young and successful rapper in the industry. Having to deal with executives wanting most not to present an individual in the most authentic way, but in a fashion that makes them profit.

It's AI with purpose but the loss of human touch in the artwork is cold. It can come off as heartless. The absence of imperfections makes the art sterile at a glance.

The Grammy Awards have a category for Best Recording Packaging where an album with the best visual look is awarded. Given by the Academy, it is the most prestigious music award a visual artist could receive.

Greedy music executives are driving the further use of AI. In the future it wouldn't be surprising to see a MidJourney-generated album cover get the award where visual artists once celebrated.

Editor: Lychee Lui

Designer: Frida Morales Vargas



▲▲ **And it is a question for us, as listeners, to look at with admiration or dismay as we hit play.** ▼▼

With the war between the nations ongoing since 2014, the recent escalations in Russia's invasion of Ukraine have become topical. However, Russia's invasion is not limited to the subject of land, but also seeks to dominate the subject of Ukrainian culture and arts.

Pursuing imperialist ideals and attempting to revert back to the geography of the Soviet period, Russia launched a full-scale invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022. Yet the battle Ukrainians fight is not for their land alone. Burying the Ukrainian origins and inspiration behind their works, Russia has promoted many iconic figures as their own. The list of such artists is lengthy, but a particularly discernable one is the author Mykola Hohol (1809—52) - famously and internationally known as Nikolai Gogol.

Does *Crime and Punishment* sound familiar? How about *The Metamorphosis*? Fyodor Dostoyevsky and Franz Kafka are only two of many authors whose works and writing styles have been influenced by and attributed to Mykola Hohol. French author and literary critic Eugène-Melchior de Vogüé once even said "we all came out of Gogol's Overcoat", referencing one of Hohol's most recognised works.

Needless to say, Mykola Hohol is a dignified body in the literary sphere. Which makes it all the more important that his origin as a Ukrainian is recognised. Hohol was born and raised in central Ukraine, not venturing out and into Saint Petersburg until the age of nineteen. We commonly identify artists by the location of birth and ancestry, not by language or later abodes.

Do we not still refer to Samuel Beckett, the author of *Waiting for Godot*, as an Irish novelist despite his work being written in French? And what about Eva Hoffman, who wrote about her experiences as a Polish person in *Lost In Translation* while using the English language? It removes a significant amount of context and identity to ignore the place of origin of an artist, diminishing the complexity of their art itself.

Although Hohol wrote in Russian, the influence of his place of origin is undeniable. Ukrainian settings, folklore, history and mentality are abundant in his work; ignoring his Ukrainian roots is ignoring the core essence and subtle nuances within his art. One conspicuous example would be his short story collection, *Evenings on a Farm Near Dikanka* (1830). He deliberately sets this work in Ukraine and explores village customs, dress, superstitions and ideas unique to this context. Hohol's birthplace - as with all artists - significantly contributes to his lived experiences and ideas that manifest into the art he created.

It is crucial to also recognise the reasons that may have contributed to Hohol's decision to write in Russian. In the early 19th century, the Ukrainian language was often reduced to being an "illegitimate" language or even viewed as a kind of Russian dialect. There were frequent attempts from the authorities at the time - the Russian Tsars - to censor and refuse to publish works that were written in Ukrainian, all in an attempt to establish one national language. So, Hohol and other Ukrainian authors were forced to make the difficult political decision between having their work reach an international audience or writing in Ukrainian.

It can be argued that Hohol also identified as Russian - as well as Ukrainian - for similar reasons. Partaking in and becoming a subject of discussion in Russian high society, Hohol and his literature were often accused of being too devoted to Ukraine and not fond enough of Russia. In 1844, he was asked: **"In your soul, are you a Russian or a Ukrainian?"**.

**The Ukrainian
Body behind the
name; An artist
that Russia has
'claimed'**

Initially, he responded defensively and interpreted the question to be an attack on his character and morals. This response is very telling of the political climate of the time, where Ukrainian links were viewed as an imperfection in Russian identity and, by extension, a moral issue. Two months later he re-addresses this by writing that he “would grant primacy neither to a Little Russian [Ukrainian] over a Russian nor to a Russian over a Little Russian. Both natures are generously endowed by God”. Hohol embraces these two identities here, yet his struggle between celebrating his Ukrainian identity and grappling with the political repercussions of it is very clear. Considering the conventions at the time, Hohol likely felt the need to conform to Russian identity, yet he still did not reject his identity as Ukrainian despite this.

So, why and how does Russia neglect the significance of Hohol and other iconic artists as Ukrainian? As mentioned previously, Russia’s imperialist and nationalist ideals seek to assimilate Ukraine and its culture into the Russian nation. Russia describes Hohol as a Russian author, and his place of origin - Ukraine - is often mentioned indirectly or in passing, if at all. In school curriculums and lesson plans accessible online, Hohol is directly described as a Russian author - even claimed as a “glorious son of Russia” - and Ukraine is occasionally referred to as a “distant” inspiration for parts of his work. Even the Russian Encyclopedia classifies Mykola Hohol as Russian, and Ukraine is only mentioned in relation to Hohol’s general interest in historicism, stating that his “history studies went in parallel with the development of artistic and historical ideas.”

While there are infrequent acknowledgements of his Ukrainian origin, it is often addressed using the term “Little Russian” rather than Ukrainian, creating a limited distinction between the two countries and continuously keeping Russia at the forefront when

discussing the author. And even in the cases where his birthplace is mentioned in this way, there are still claims of Russia being his “homeland”. While a few more recent Russian sources do delve into the significance of his Ukrainian identity more deeply, googling “Is Nikolai Gogol Russian or Ukrainian” in Russian still produces quite a significant number of results that go so far as to ridicule the idea of his Ukrainian status.

On a broader scale, however, Russia protests the Ukrainian identity of cultural figures by utilising this method of intentional ignorance and also that of physical force. Russia has not shied away from destroying and removing historically significant works of art, especially not since their invasion in 2022. UNESCO has verified that between February 2022 and June 2023, Russia has damaged 112 religious sites, 22 museums, 94 buildings of historical and artistic interest, 19 monuments, 12 libraries and 1 archive. The attack on Ukrainian culture does not end there, as Russian troops are estimated to have stolen 2000 Ukrainian artworks already by May 2022. And where they can’t carry away the work, there is still an attempt. For example, Russian forces were unable to dismount the monument to the Ukrainian poet Taras Shevchenko in December 2022, so instead left a plaque rebranding him as a Russian poet. Both through deliberate ignorance and physical force, Russia has continuously been stealing and relabeling Ukrainian artists and culture.

Mykola Hohol is just one Ukrainian artist from a pool of names that have been promoted as Russian. Erasing the origins of these individuals, a fundamental part of their identity, is not only a political move but an active disregard of the quality and context of their work. Ukraine is not just fighting a harrowing war for land but for its culture.



Not too long ago I happened to be a part of a conversation that took an unexpectedly existential and regrettably relevant, turn. It went something like, “they say you become a true adult when

you experience the death of a parent”. At the time, I wanted to wholeheartedly disagree, yet two facts stopped me in my tracks. The first was that I didn’t want to trauma dump on unsuspecting strangers, and the second was that my father’s death a year ago had cracked open such a deep wormhole of confusion in me that I didn’t quite know how to move forward, either in life or that particular conversation. In light of these facts, I’m willing to yield to the idea that in the face of the infinite amounts of heart-wrenching, life-changing suffering that takes place in every second of every day for people around the world, nothing can prepare anyone for the continuous explosions of physical and emotional pain that reverberate through you after a loss. Or, more accurately, the ache and uncertainty of having to rediscover and rebuild your understanding of

the purpose of life, what you believe, or who you are in the face of a reality where that person (and your past self) no longer exists.

you become a true adult when you experience the death of a parent

In my navigations around the world of coping with grief, I haven’t been able to find any kind of map. This has proven incredibly frustrating for a perfectionist like myself, particularly when looking for a fast track to the end-of-the-movie resolution. The moment where the main character would be staring into a sunset or horizon, having just completed a bucket list or tumultuous adventure, tears streaming down their face as they are overwhelmed with a sense of revelation and resolution that will comfort them through the rest of their days.

My experience with the search for grief’s sixth stage, recognised by David Kessler as ‘finding meaning’, has demonstrated a complete contradiction to that image. In practice, loss looks much more like a lumped ball of Christmas lights. Cords and emotions

Can someone hand me a map, please?

Emma Tanttari

you need to slowly unravel, things that used to bring you joy have turned into light bulbs flickering out, and suddenly all associated memories carry a surprising shock, as if touching an exposed wire. Recently, a lot of my time has been spent looking for others who share a similar lightning strike of sorrow, hoping that someone will be able to hand me the mythical emotional road map; a sense of direction in how to cope and relearn and feel whole again. I've searched through the spaces of online grief groups, scoured endless YouTube videos and podcasts, and discovered similarly deeply-drained people through seemingly fateful exchanges. I didn't find what I wanted. Instead, I encountered a revelation. While people may share in the tangible experience of loss, no story of loss and grief will exactly mirror yours. Logical understanding or emotional connection may provide temporary relief, but it won't completely take away the suffering.

It has been through this journey that I've discovered the honest chaos that is life: one version of the many twists and turns that may be hidden on the road. It was these disruptions that broke down any subconscious ideal I may have carried that hoped for life to be a somewhat linear path. There will be highs and lows that

can't be controlled, a mind-boggling mix of joy, struggle, fulfilment, and regrets. I've never wanted to accept it, but life can't be perfect. You will lose others, and sometimes you will lose yourself. No matter the scale, story, or specifics of the loss experienced, stories will continue to be a part of you, grafted into your core as you walk through life. From where I am now, I don't have enough hindsight to provide any meaningful advice. All I can suggest is a sliver of hope. A tiny hope that throughout the strange, ineffable road trip that is life, you will be able to rebuild piece by piece as you stumble upon fragments of meaning. A hope that, in the midst of the mess, tells you to keep trying. To get out of bed. To look for peace again. To make the most of life and existence and the potential of who you can be with the memory of who you once had. Right now, I'm not sure how much work it takes to rebuild, or if the work is ever going to be finished. All I know is that every day is a chance to experience the pain, the beauty, and the opportunity, and that's all I need to make it through this journey one step at a time.



Editor: Shree Baskar
Designer: Annie Nguyen

The Complete Queer History of The Teletubbies

Eloise Wajon

When someone speaks of “the quintessential four-piece British group” they could be referring to The Beatles, or perhaps The Stones. An esoteric individual may be referring to Bloc Party. It is unlikely anyone would use that term to refer to Coldplay. Statistically, it has been proven that when someone speaks of the greatest British quadruplet of all time, they are most likely referring to none other than Tinky Winky, Dipsy, Laa-Laa and Po. In the late 90s to the early 00s, *the Teletubbies* were a worldwide phenomenon, as inescapable as tax season, hair loss and death. Stoners and ravers alike were enchanted by the Teletubbies and their gently psychedelic universe, and during the show’s original 365-episode run, it also gained popularity with a secondary demographic of children. *The Teletubbies* matched every descriptor of a revolutionary cultural force: slightly incomprehensible, united behind self-declared moral watchdogs, and a tiny little, eensy weensy bit queer.



Hold onto your britches, dear reader. I am not implying that the Teletubbies themselves, those sweet technological toddlers full of pre-9/11 lust for societal advancement, are sexually inclined. Perhaps a bare bones explanation of the Teletubbies and the conceptual ideas behind their formation is in order.

Tinky Winky



The Teletubbies were a deceptively simple answer to an ever-expanding question: how is the increasingly technology-reliant universe affecting our children? The characters are chubby, much like their target audience, but they have the stature of unrivalled dunk masters. The tallest teletubby and man of the hour, Tinky Winky, stands at 10 feet tall. They live in a green, hilly landscape that resembles the Windows XP default wallpaper and occupy the “Tubbytronic Superdome”, amongst the Voice Trumpets, the Sun Baby and a sentient vacuum cleaner known as “Noo-Noo”.

The program was significantly different in its approach to education than others aimed at the same age group, like Sesame Street. Teletubbies had no number and letter of the day - indeed, there appears to be very little evidence that any member of the ensemble cast was literate. The show was formulated around the then-newfangled idea of “play-based learning”. That is, children learning through the process of play, rather than being plopped down in front of a whiteboard.

The then-newfangled idea of “play-based learning.”



There were no incredibly explicit educational outcomes that *the Teletubbies* purported to teach. Instead, creators Anne Wood and Andrew Davenport aimed to have the bobble-headed little freaks show examples of cooperative play and transitions a young child would experience throughout the day in a non-preachy, fun way. Some critics failed to see any educational value in *the Teletubbies* at all - and on paper this seems justified, as the crayon-coloured gargantaurs spoke mostly gibberish, and infants are of course known for their scholarly dialects. Those naysayers have been mostly proven wrong by further research into early childhood education, and of course are rather un-queer, so we will not be discussing that debate further.

So now that you understand what the Teletubbies' M.O. is, do you still have questions about how those tubs of fleece and lard are queer? Surely not. You do? Okay. Alright. But I feel like you won't believe me when I tell you where it all started. Yes, I'll get into it anyway. Stop rushing me.

Okay, so the ten-foot tall Teletubby, Tinky Winky, although on his driver's licence his name is listed as Tinkothy Winkingtham. Tinky Winky has a magical bag - although it looks rather like a handbag, one of those unfortunate numbers they don't lock in a cabinet at David Jones (one must assume not even larceny enthusiasts would sport one). It is confirmed by video evidence that it is, in some shape or form, enhanced by magic. In some instances it appears to work much like a clown car, as Tinky Winky extracts each one of his Tele-siblings' favourite items from it (these are, respectively, a scooter, a ball, and a strange, unfashionable top hat). It also appears to possess some recording and playback ability, as it plays each topsy-turvy loser's favourite song for them at various points in the show. Seems innocent enough, if not indicative of seriously poor taste on Mr Winky's part. What was the big deal?

Jerry Falwell died in 2007 and has likely been reincarnated into thousands of tapeworms in the 15 years since. But in 1999, he wrote a fun little tidbit for his girlblog, aptly titled **JERRY FALWELL'S NATIONAL LIBERTY JOURNAL**. In the column **PARENTS ALERT...PARENTS ALERT**, Falwell speculates that due to not only his handbag, but his colour (purple, which admittedly, is the gayest one) and the triangle on top of his antennae, Tinky Winky is queer as the sunset.



Itsy-Bitsy Entertainment, the institution the Teletubbies entrusted the US-based part of their estate to, seemed utterly bewildered by this. In a statement that was likely accompanied by lots of slow blinking, representative Kenn Viselman commented:

“Tinky Winky is simply a sweet, technological baby with a magic bag. He’s not gay. He’s not straight. He’s just a character in a children’s series.”

That’s the page where the official story on Tinky Winky’s queerness was closed, for quite some time. Keyword: the official one. The LGBT community started to write their own in response to Falwell’s theories.

That one goes a bit like this; yes, yes of course the children’s show character is not gay. That would be just so inappropriate, and even a bit absurd, really. But I’m sorry, hear me out - no please, do hear me out, between these escaping giggles... I can’t help but wonder... no, I just think that it might be... a little bit, just a smidge, completely, absolutely fucking hilarious if that 10 foot tall babbling purple figure was like, our new icon.

There is nothing quite as queer as the tongue-in-cheek, irony-laced embracing of such a stab of vitriol. We have a unique ability to neutralise symbols of hate by snatching them away from those who wield them, and we are gifted at pretending that they’d always been ours. At Mardi Gras 1999, a pack of Tinky Winkys marched proudly with a picture of Falwell stitched onto their belly-screens. They carried a sign stating they were “Krewe de Falwell”. Tinky Winky was elected Grand Marshal of The 1999 San Francisco Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Pride Celebration. It didn’t matter that Tinky Winky likely had no concept of gender, much less sexuality and by all canon sources, was just a **FAT FUCKING BABY in a TELEVISION SHOW FOR OTHER FAT FUCKING BABIES, you WEIRDOS.**

Tinky Winky was queer.

It seems that after 1999, all parties involved accepted this, and life continued as normal. The original run of the show ended in 2001. Strangely enough, in 2007 the Polish Ombudsman for Children Ewa Sowińska opened an investigation into Tinky Winky and his magical handbag, aiming to have “the effects on children” analysed by psychologists. She came back with her tail between her legs, declaring “The opinion of a leading sexologist, who maintains that this series has no negative effects on a child’s psychology, is perfectly credible. As a result, I have decided that it is no longer necessary to seek the opinion of other psychologists.” Everyone rolled their eyes, presumably including Tinky Winky, who must have swiped away that notification on his newly-released iPhone with something of a chortle.



Everything was quiet on the official front for years and years. The original audience of the Teletubbies came of age. Many presumably grew up straight as grass, mercifully spared from that big purple bastard and his fugly magic bag's indoctrination. Some of us - perhaps you, but definitely I - were not so lucky. In 2021, after over 20 years of radio silence, WildBrain, the company that now owns the Teletubbies brand, emerged to declare:

**“Teletubbies
“Teletubbies Love Pride!”
“Teletubbies Love Pride!”
“Teletubbies Love Pride!”
“Teletubbies Love Pride!”**

In 2022, a limited run of Teletubbies gender-fluid fashion was released, with all proceeds donated to GLAAD. MindBrain accompanied this with a statement: “The Teletubbies have always embraced their own offbeat quirkiness and sense of style. This Pride Month, we’re celebrating that ‘love who you are’ spirit through our Collection of ready-to-rave fashion that makes Tinky Winky, Dipsy, Laa-Laa and Po very proud!”

It would be a snide, simplistic way to conclude this piece if I were to say that Falwell was responsible for the now-canon queerness of the Teletubbies. It would be funny, and I would kind of hope that Falwell’s estate would catch wind of it and sue me. I would wear the Koi Footwear Teletubbies-branded ankle boots to court - they’re red and fleecy, like Po and they have a six-inch heel.

But he simply postulated that Tinky Winky might be gay. In the absence of any actual inklings of sexual orientation from a fictional children’s character, it would have been merely a cruel insult to slap upon the poor idiot had the queer community not shrugged their shoulders and snickered amongst themselves, in time declaring “So what if Tinky Winky’s gay?”

Tinky Winky is queer, because we decided he was. Next, I propose we come for a minor character from Bluey, or Scooby Doo.

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HELLO
my name is...

HELLO
my name is...