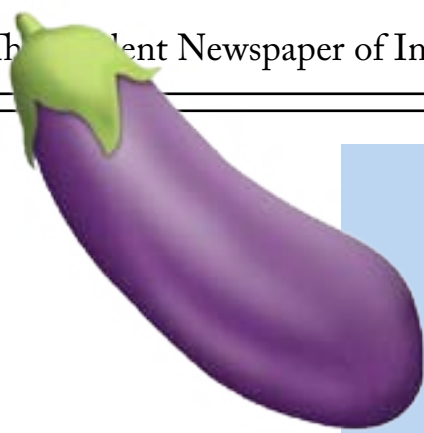




# FELIX

The Student Newspaper of Imperial College London



The Sex Survey has come. Have you?

PAGE 8 FEATURES

Reflections on the year's sabb circle-jerk

PAGE 7 COMMENT



## It's harder to get into Imperial if you're black

Huge gap between offers and applicants from black and disadvantaged backgrounds even when they're predicted the same grades



UCAS has released data that shows Imperial is one of the country's worst offenders in terms of giving fewer offers to black and poorer students.

UCAS' data shows that in 2015, 2014 and 2012, there was a statistically significant difference between the offer rate for black applicants and the average offer rate, even when the smaller number of black applicants is taken into account.

Black students in the 2015 June application cycle were 6.5 percentage points less likely to receive an offer of a place compared to all applicants applying to the same course with the same grades.

UCAS says the general trend

across the 130 British universities surveyed was that there was a "broadly fair" process of offer-making. However, Bristol, Oxford, Cambridge, and Imperial were some of the few who had large gaps between the offer rate applicants' grades and subjects would predict, and the actual offer rate for students from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Last year at Imperial, those coming from the most disadvantaged backgrounds were 4.2% less likely to get an offer than you'd expect from their grades and subjects. Our stats are slightly worse than Cambridge's, where students from the most disadvantaged groups are only 3.7% less likely to get a place.

On the other side, at Imperial, applicants from the most

advantaged group were 2.3 points more likely to be awarded an offer, and when you look at the random variability considering the number of applicants and the average offer, this is unlikely to have happened by chance. Again, Imperial is even more likely than Cambridge to give offers to the most privileged applicants.

UCAS used something called the POLAR3 classification to define students' socioeconomic background. This grouping puts students into five equal sized groups from the most to the least advantaged, by how many are involved in higher education, with quintile one being the most disadvantaged...

*continued on page 4*

## Another Castle

THE GAMING MAGAZINE OF IMPERIAL COLLEGE LONDON



Interpreting  
The Sims

The Fall and Rise of  
Introversion Software

And Much More

# FELIX EDITORIAL



felix@imperial.ac.uk

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## A word from the Editor



**Y**o gang, and thank you for tuning into my final editorial. Sweet! You know that picture on the right isn't even of me. It's a Getty stock photo of 'Happy Mixed Race Female Outside Berlin Dancehall' that I stole from the internet.

What a year man – we've had some scoops, some scandals, and lots of great pieces this incarnation of FELIX, not least this issue's sex survey results, the resurrection of our gaming magazine, *Another Castle*, and various nuanced, delicate and shouty end-of-year reflections in the comment section. I hope you've enjoyed reading it as much as I've enjoyed making it, because the bits that weren't so traumatic that my brain forced me to forget them (I hear this happens in childbirth too) were great. I do not remember term one.

My biggest thanks go to the haters: those mansplaining commenters, those Islamophobes, and best of all the men who sat me down and tried explain sexism to me. Bless your cotton socks, ass-hats.

Big love also goes to anyone who

has pity-faved my late night GIF-enabled Twitter breakdowns and weaker Instagrams. I see you.

Heart emojis to everyone who wrote for us, edited a section, and the guy who came to the office because he'd heard there was a "really great puzzle last week" and he wanted a copy for a long trip.

Bless everyone who bought me drinks and chocolate raisins, stroked my head or called me pretty. Without redonculously great support from Tessa, Fred, Cem and Jess, I would not be the carefree Desi girl you see before you. I am really truly grateful to you guys. No, you're crying!

A shout out goes to all the brown ladies who have given me life and inspiration this year: the Indiras, the Simrans, and Ayonijas of the world, and plus my close personal friends (in my head) Mindy Kaling and Nadiya from *Bake Off*. Most inspiration comes from the one brown lady who did literally gave me life: my grandma, who David Cameron wants to deport but who, when she arrived in a white London in the 60s, followed home a woman



she didn't know, purely because she was wearing a sari too, and in doing so made a lifelong friend. Go through life with all the open-heartedness that my grandmother had for that sari-wearing stranger on the bus, and the world will be kind to you.

Now it's time for me to pop off, but this isn't all about me, don't forget: drink some water, take your meds and call your mum.

Fuckity bye!

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## The gang





# Top investor buys shares in Imperial Innovations

Neil Woodford now owns 20% of our research and development arm

Matt Johnston  
News Editor

One of the UK's top investors, Neil Woodford has invested a further £11.6 million into Imperial Innovations, the intermediary between Imperial research and the wider world, taking his stake over 20%.

Imperial Innovations had posted a pre tax loss of £5.9 million in the six months before the end of January, but its share prices have bounced back to £3.45 a share, largely in part to the purchase by Woodford, whose fund now owns 21% of the company, up from 19.9%.

Woodford is also the manager of Capita Financial Woodford Equity a fund which has a huge chunk of its portfolio in the tobacco industry. Eagle-eyed readers of FELIX will notice that this is the fund where Imperial College have themselves

been investing £5.8 million of their endowment fund, of which almost £1 million goes directly into tobacco companies. All in all Woodford and Imperial (in one form or another) are linked, a link that ties a university which focuses on research

Woodford has previously heavily invested in the tobacco industry



These people are running around terrified because of Brexit. Photo Credit: ICL

into cancer, directly to the tobacco industry.

Imperial Innovations has a sole commercialisation rights deal on technology coming out of Imperial College research until 2020 and have recently been in the news after selling its remaining shares in Alkion Biopharm, an Imperial College spinoff company, to

chemical giant Evonik Industries. Imperial Innovations also oversee Yoyo Wallet, the app which means you can still by drinks even if you drunkenly lose your debit card at ACC.

Woodford has also waded into the EU referendum debate this week, saying that Brexit or a Bremain was not really the most important issue

affecting the global economy in the long term, and that the things that he believes are likely to cause the chaos (growing wealth inequality, the Chinese credit bubble and the aging population to name a few) will not go away in either scenario.

So in essence whichever way you vote on June 23<sup>rd</sup>, we might all be fucked regardless.

## UCL in financial hot water

And it's not because of that rent strike

UCL expansions are putting a strain on their finances and are in the process of taking out the largest loan ever by a UK institution from the European Investment Bank. The £280 million is in order to help fund the £1.25 billion expansion plan aimed at expanding both the student body and the research capacity of the university.

During the last decade UCL has expanded its student body to 35,000, an almost 50% rise, and doubled its research capacity. A merger between UCL and Imperial was also touted in 2002 in order to create an Oxbridge beating supercollege by the then rector, Richard Sykes (the one who tried to ban the hijab and hoodies and up tuition fees to £10,500).

Addressing the academic board, Michael Arthur (the man

responsible for setting the academic budget) emphasised that UCL only had 42 days of cash in hand as opposed to the average 90+ days that other universities have. Essentially if all cash coming in stops, they can only pay staff for 42 days which isn't ideal.

Cash has also partially dried up from the rent strikes that UCL has held this year, with the missing

A merger between UCL and Imperial was touted in 2002

payments totalling over £1 million, small but not insignificant. The attempts by UCL to reclaim any of this money have been minimal with the university demanding just a £25 fine from each of the thousand strikers, a gesture that is a drop in the ocean.

This may however be a sign of things to come with UCL students planning to issue an ultimatum while disrupting UCL's open day this month. The Cut The Rent campaigners are threatening that if the college didn't cut rents by their demanded 40% then they would take matters into their own hands and only pay 60% of accommodation fees. UCL themselves have said that this would be a "huge loss" financially and that they could "no longer provide it [accommodation]" if they were not able to break even.

MATT JOHNSTON



They do have a nicer campus than us, though. Photo Credit: Wikipedia



# Imperial is one of Europe's most innovative universities

## We've come second in the Thomson Reuters innovation list

Matt Johnston  
News Editor

Thomson Reuters this week released a report listing the most innovative universities in Europe, with Imperial coming in 2<sup>nd</sup> on the list just behind KU Leuven in Belgium.

Innovation was defined by using ten different parameters, notably the volume of academic papers it published (indicating the basic research) as well as the number of patents filed by an institute (showing how well it furthers this research). A key factor in this may be the partnership the college has with Imperial Innovations (see the

article on the previous page) which has helped to foster development of ideas coming out of Imperial.

Lagging behind Imperial were University of Cambridge in 3<sup>rd</sup> and University Oxford in 8<sup>th</sup>, with Manchester and Dundee coming inside the top twenty. The University of London, the parent that Imperial left the nest from in 2007 came in 30<sup>th</sup>, with 17 UK universities making the top 100. This is in comparison to 24 German universities, the most of any European country, showing how on the innovation forefront, the UK is a major player, but not quite the best.

It should be known that this takes the innovation of a university as a whole and so individual departments may be better from

On the innovation forefront the UK is a major player but not the best

one university or another but overall Imperial stands tall.



Dat innovation tho. Photo Credit: Imperial College London

# Imperial application bias revealed in UCAS stats



We literally couldn't find any pictures of black people graduating in Imperial's promotional picture database. Photo Credit: Thomas Angus

*continued from front page*

...and quintile five, the least disadvantaged.

Things like references, work experience and quality of personal statements are not taken into account in this data. However, grades and courses are arguably the most reliable when predicting whether a student will get an offer.

Only data concerning 18-year-old home applicants was collected and it was released as part of an effort by UCAS to be more transparent, and to help universities look out who they're letting in and to improve their practises.

A spokesperson from Imperial told us: "Imperial is proud of its highly diverse community and strives to ensure that its doors are open to the best and brightest students, whatever their background."

"We have a broad portfolio of activities targeted at academically talented pupils. This includes working with schools, colleges and

community organisations to raise aspirations, change perceptions, support teaching staff and stimulate interest in STEM subjects from primary school through to A-Levels."

"Imperial welcomes the publication of this data. We are working to further understand what factors are at play, and how we can act to improve our admissions process."

As far as outreach, Imperial has a dedicated department for reaching disadvantaged students, running summer schools, lectures and taster days for school children.

Jennie Watson, the union's DPW told FELIX: "It is inexcusable that fewer black applicants are receiving offers, however this is nothing new and not unique to Imperial. It's been known for a long time that there are unconscious biases in the Higher Education recruitment process. This data represents a wider societal issue though, insofar as the educational trajectory of an individual is set

long before they apply to university, therefore this problem cannot be solved only by universities' initiatives to widen access to education."

If it's the parts of their applications that aren't from predicted grades that are letting disadvantaged students down, college may need to change its enrolment process to account for schools not giving their students the best advice on applying, in order to really level the playing field. Otherwise, college will continue to inadvertently not offer places to the best students, discounting the benefits of their background.

Last year, David Cameron announced that UCAS applications were going name-blind from 2017 in an attempt to remove some unconscious bias on the part of universities. UCAS says ethnic minority applicants are up since 2006, but that it is keen to increase "participation from disadvantaged groups".

GRACE RAHMAN

# FELIX COMMENT



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## I am a person, you know me, and I am gay

Being a member of the LGBTQ+ community shouldn't have to be a big deal, but it is



Lef Apostolakis  
Science Editor

I am gay. I'm sorry if this is a surprise. I meant to tell you naturally, over dinner maybe, or drinks. It may have come up as you'd have told me about your latest heartache and I'd have told you of mine. You may have been surprised, but you wouldn't have let it show. And just like that, we would order another drink and me being gay would have been something normal. No big deal.

So this shouldn't be an article. It shouldn't be a big deal. I shouldn't have to publicly explore my sexuality with thousands of people watching. But it feels irresponsible and immoral at this point not to. Because a man killed 49 people on Sunday in a gay club in Florida.

People he viewed as deviant, undeserving of love, kindness, and in the end, the right to life. People like me. He didn't know what their favorite colour was. He didn't know if they liked dogs over cats. He didn't know if they donated to charity, if they wanted children, if they were dreamers, if they were good or bad people. Would that have made a difference?

I shouldn't have to publicly explore my sexuality

When I woke up on Sunday and read the news, although I wasn't there, although I didn't know the victims, I felt crushed in a way I never thought I'd feel. For the first time I fully understood homophobia, despite often having been a victim of it in the past. Despite strangers on the street calling me disgusting for daring to hold the hand of the man I loved in public.

It's hard to explain what homophobia feels like, especially in the extreme form that it took on Sunday. But imagine finding out one day that someone hates you,

wants you dead for no reason other than that you dare exist. And now imagine this one person is actually hundreds of people. Thousands. Millions. From all over the world. People you don't know. People that don't even know you exist. Yet they hate you.

Many of these people will never even meet a queer person. Or so they think, because so many gay men and women live a lie, repressing their true identity in fear of being ostracised or worse. In some extreme cases, repression can lead to denial, delusion and self-rejection. So the haters go on hating, unaware that some of the people they love and admire are gay; parents, siblings, friends, idols.

I told my youngest brother that I'm gay on Monday. He lives in Greece so I couldn't do it face to face. My parents think he might still be too young, but I was afraid to wait any longer. Afraid that in the absence of a visible gay person in his life, blind hate might take root in his heart.

Greece, despite its modern facade, is steeped in tradition. Unfortunately this can often manifest as sexism and homophobia. Although my immediate family and friends

know (and have been extremely supportive), the rest of my family back home is, I presume, blissfully unaware of my actual sexual preferences. Something unlikely to have been helped by my own years of repression and confusion.

If I'm honest, I've been reluctant to come out to them. It's been easy. We live in different countries and our reunions are few and far between. I don't want to have to do this. I don't want to be the source of polarisation in my family (does anyone?). I'm afraid some of them

might be deeply homophobic. But maybe if they knew, they wouldn't be.

So today, even though I feel like I'm still exploring love within myself and with others, even though I hate being pigeon-holed by a society that sometimes reveals itself as deeply intolerant, today I am a proud gay man. And my favorite color is turquoise.

I love the sea, the life it harbours, the feelings it evokes. I need colour in my life, when I wake up, when I work, when I cook. My humor is at best black and at worst lacking. My style is questionable. I like crumpets smothered in butter. I used to only drink lager, but I've developed a love for chocolate stouts. My dad is Greek, my mum is Greek-Australian. I like dogs, but only if they're big. Otherwise I prefer cats.

So starting today you know me as a human first and as a member of the LGBTQ+ community second.

And maybe next time someone says fags are a plague you'll think of me and maybe you'll say 'No, that's just not right. This guy is wrong. I should say something.'

And maybe you will say something. And maybe one day we won't be hated.

In the absence of a visible gay person in his life, blind hate might take root

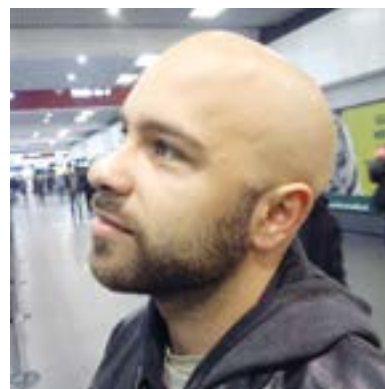


The Orlando shooting is a harrowing reminder of the bigotry LGBTQ+ people face. Photo Credit: eonline.com



# Imperial taught me how to be a better DJ

It might not go on your CV, but here's my advice on an invaluable life skill



Pietro Aronica  
Writer

This will be my final article for FELIX, as, after nearly nine years, my time has come to leave Imperial. This newspaper has been an important part of my experience here, back from the very first copy I acquired in freshers' week and kept because it had the instructions on how to operate washing machines.

FELIX has given me much, though I never figured out at which point of the cycle you have to put the softener in, and it has afforded me space for some rambling articles that wouldn't be out of place on an unread hipster blog, but which thanks to FELIX allow me to add "amateur journalist/writer" to my CV and keep a straight face.

It has given me so much that perhaps I can try to give something back; maybe I can pass my wisdom to the next generation on one of the skills I have found most useful during my time here: DJ-hood.

Let's say you're at a party, or in the laboratory, or in some other location where Spotify or an iPod has been hooked up and music is being played. Sure, you could let that playlist go on until it gets to those bands with more glockenspiels than followers, but isn't it better to stand next to a computer all night, trying to come up with a new song every three minutes?



There are some songs everyone will sing along with – whether you like it or not.  
Photo Credit: music.bligo.es

Your first instinct might be to put on music that you like, and if you're like many people at Imperial you might want to put some metal on. Here's my first tip: never put any kind of metal on. No Maiden, no Metallica, no Priest. It's long and riff-heavy and screamy and generally not good for casual gatherings of people – unless it's specifically metal fans, in which case metal will already be on. Good job, go back to drinking.

Here's my first tip:  
never put any kind of metal on

The same usually goes for techno, dance and electronic music. In most contexts, it won't be any good unless people are drunk and dancing, in which case anything with a strong, fast, repetitive bassline will do. The Prodigy tends to be appropriate in these circumstances, as a lot of people will recognise their songs



These guys don't want Simon & Garfunkel. Photo Credit: themrbenagency.co.uk

even if they are not especially familiar with them.

That is the key to being a good iPod DJ: good but recognisable songs. It doesn't matter if it's something you personally ended up loving after the twentieth repeat, slightly tipsy people will enjoy a song more if they can vaguely remember the words to it and hum out the tune. Most of The Beatles fall into this category, as does virtually everything on Michael Jackson's Thriller.

Songs that appeal to '90s kids' include 'Smells Like Teen Spirit', 'Song 2' and 'The Rockafeller Skank'; other older but well known pieces are 'Should I Stay Or Should I Go', 'Superstition', 'Fortunate Son', 'Satisfaction', and many others. The absolute king of this class of songs is 'Don't Stop Me Now' by Queen, which virtually everyone knows and loves and will dance to. And I can also guarantee you that everyone will be dancing to the 'Infernal Galop' by Offenbach.

But don't get too hung up on the specific songs: there are just too many to recount here. Build a mental library of good pieces, switch up the genres and, most importantly, look at the people. If they're bouncing, tapping their feet, singing along, then it means you're doing a good job; if not, switch it up, change type of song, try something else.

Or maybe you could mingle with others and talk to them instead of trying to dictate what everyone listens for the night. Rather than getting hung up on the entertainment, you could actually get to know other people and dance with them instead of staying in the corner and watching them dance?

Switch up the genres and, most importantly, look at the people

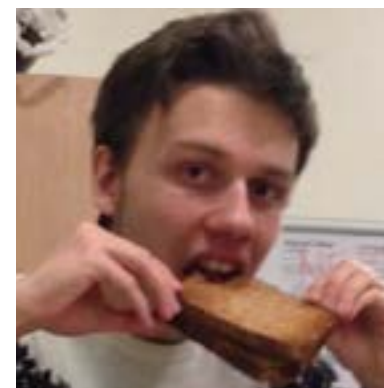
Nah. I was the iPod DJ most of the time, and it ended up alright for me. I'm writing for FELIX an article that can be summed up as "Good songs are good": does it get any better than this?

So goodbye, Imperial and Imperialites, I hope that I might have entertained you at some point and taught you something. So long, and be good.



# The inevitable reign of Boris

Voting leave will push this country in a very dangerous direction



Samuel Read  
Writer

Previous comment articles have outlined how there are progressive, liberal reasons to leave the EU. Shadowy TTIP lowering our standards of welfare and increasing the influence of US megacorporations behind closed doors. Imperialist attitudes towards an EU superstate such as those of former European Commission president José Manuel Barroso: "I like to compare the EU as a creation to the organisation of empire. We have the dimension of empire."

Last but not least, the treatment of the Greek people, who repeatedly have austerity forced down their throats in the name of the EU ideal of neocapitalism.

The lack of democracy exhibited above can only be outdone by the sheer ineptitude of the democratic system we face at home, however, and it's the effect that this referendum will have on our domestic affairs that we really need to worry about. After all, the House



Do you actually want these people to be in charge? Photo Credit: The Guardian

of Commons Library determines that an "average of 13.2% of UK instruments are EU-related" (with "instruments" referring to laws, acts and regulations). We need to focus on the 86.8% that we make.

With the SNP controlling 54 of the 59 seats in the former labour stronghold of Scotland, and the Murdoch press (who have backed

every general election victor since 1979) thoroughly blue, the prospects of a Labour win at the next general election seem bleak. So bleak, in fact, that as someone who considers himself at the very least left-leaning, I find myself genuinely caring for the first time in my life about which seemingly interchangeable 'old boy' leads the Tories.

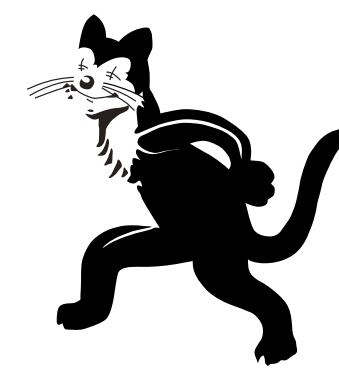
A vote to leave the EU would be seen by all as a massive vote of no confidence in Cameron's Britain. The disarmingly likable buffoonery of Boris would be vindicated. He would undoubtedly become leader of the Conservative party before the year was out.

Nobody knows what Boris really stands for – he is unquestionably populist in his approach to politics. It is the harshness of his fellow conservative leave campaigners (who will all be in line for massive promotions should we vote to leave) that I fear: Michael Gove, a proud Zionist, NHS hater and pro-interventionist zealot; and Priti Patel, a thinly-veiled lobbyist for the tobacco and alcohol industries.

I never thought I'd find myself in a position where I'd be clamouring for the longevity of Dodgy Dave, but that's the situation I find myself in now. If you thought the cuts were bad with Dave in charge, just you wait till Gove, Johnson & Co. get their hands on the country's assets.

# Does anyone benefit from #sabblife?

The sabbs are a financial drain on college and an emotional drain on everyone around them



Anonymous  
Writer

Sabbatical officers at every university are the same. They're all self-important, egotistical, and narcissistic, with an inflated sense of the importance of their role. They enter this multi-generational circle-jerk of sabbs, stroking each other's egos and sucking each other's dicks, both literally and metaphorically.

Some of our sabbatical officers are great: they care about the students, and they manage to implement some changes during their year in the role. But let's face it, most of them don't. Most of them spend the year sitting in meetings they don't contribute to, drinking in the union bar as early as they can possibly get away with, and building relationships with the rest of the

Beit Quad Cartel, which ends up being a pool of people that they will fuck throughout the next few years until they fade into insignificance. And why is it that we pay them so much money to do this?

Having sabbatical officers is great, in theory. Having 'students' who engage with the mechanics of the Union and represent the interests of the student body is essential to its function. But the Union itself strangles this intention by preventing the sabbs from having any real power to make even slight changes to anything, while at the same time telling them constantly that they are all-important. What this means is that instead of actually helping students, they delude their smug selves into thinking that they're making a difference when all they're actually doing is adding to the incestuous links on the sabb sex map.

As students, we don't really gain much from them apart from the incorrect, yet comforting idea that

maybe someone might be looking out for our interests. Are the sabbs at least gaining anything from their year in power? Does being a sabbatical officer act as a training centre for the real world?

Being a sabb looks great on your CV, for sure. You probably do gain some #transferableskills that will help you in a future workplace environment, although in this case, these are mostly 1) wearing suitable work attire instead of jeans and a ripped freebie t-shirt, 2) being

They enter this multi-generational circle-jerk of sabbs

able to show up to work at 9am even when you're still drunk from the night before, and 3) being arrogant enough to assume that any contributions you make in this condition are worthwhile.

But beyond becoming entitled enough to think that this role makes them a better person, sabbs seem to suffer for their year. For many of them, their mental health goes downhill, their grades take a swift nosedive (if they are undertaking this year in the middle of their degree), and god only knows how many STIs are being passed back and forth as ex-sabbs shag in various permutations at every Union social event that they still feel the need to attend despite their long being old news.

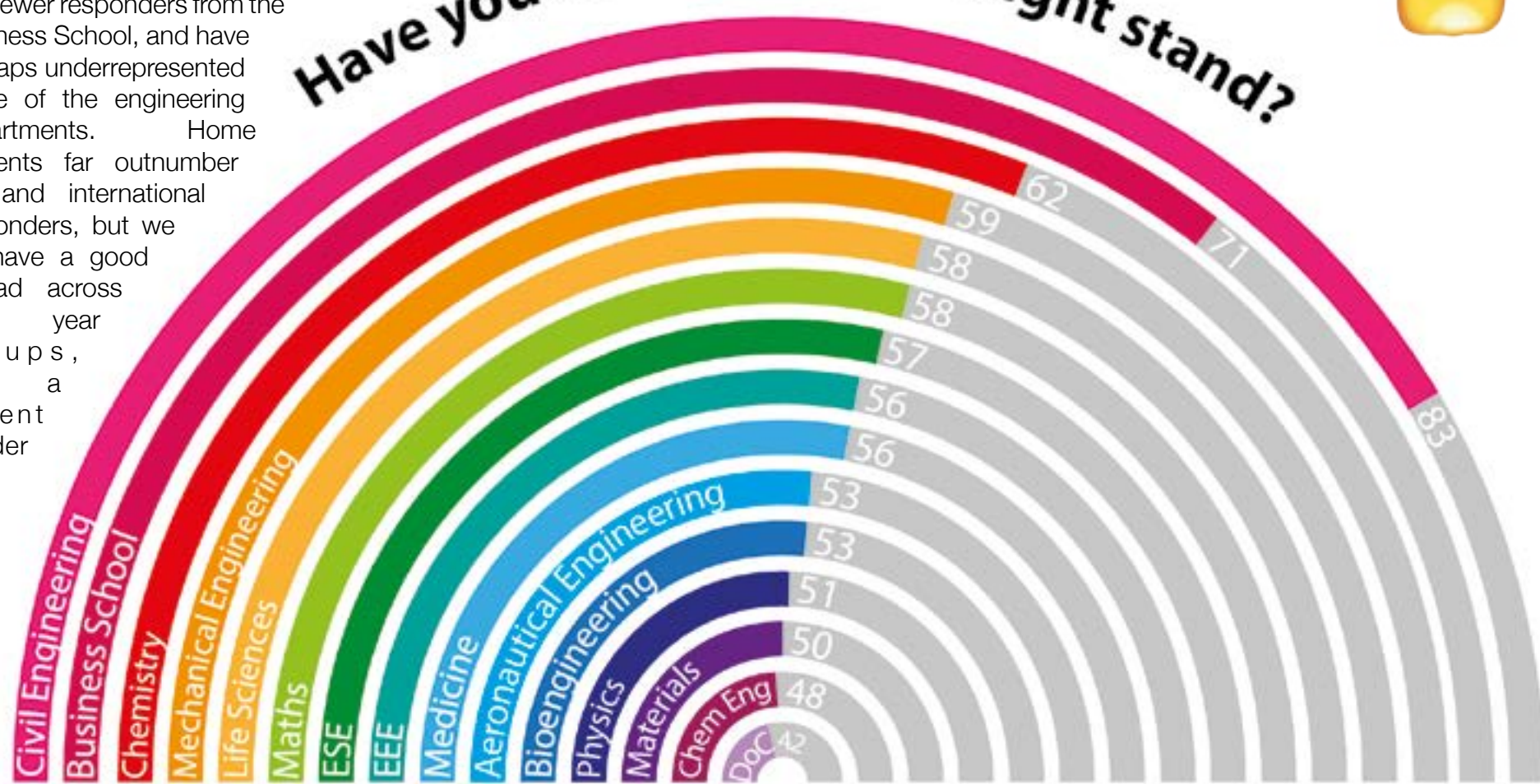
As an entity spanning beyond their year of service, sabb culture is bleak. So many of them stay stuck in the Imperial College Union circle forever, because they can't exist in the real world because there, no one cares what they're doing.

# The FELIX Sex Survey

There are a lot of assumptions we make with the sex survey. Yes, our 600 respondents are likely to be a little more swayed towards the sexually active, because let's face it, it's more fun to talk about sex if you're having it. We

had fewer responders from the Business School, and have perhaps underrepresented some of the engineering departments. Home students far outnumber EU and international responders, but we do have a good spread across the year groups, and a decent gender ratio.

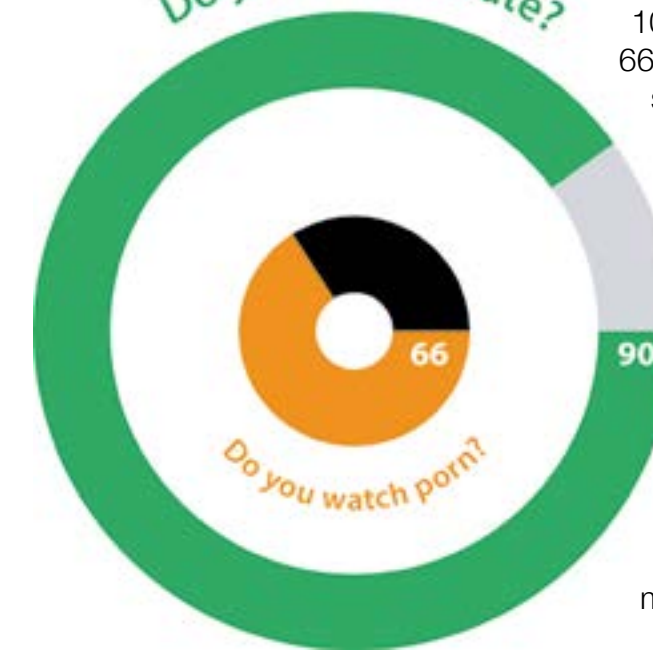
Have you ever had a one night stand?



Here it is, for the sixth year running, the infamous FELIX Sex Survey results. Thank you so much to everyone who trusted us with your deepest, darkest, and occasionally unrealistic and obviously made-up secrets (we deleted those responses from our data). Six hundred or so of you took the time to fill it out though, and we are very grateful. Your data was always anonymous, and now it will be deleted forever, but remains immortalised below in emoji-enhanced infographic form, for generations to come to enjoy. We've looked at how student sexuality has changed over the years, whether or not it really is harder to find a girl if you're a guy at Imperial, and which departments are most into butt stuff – looking at you, mech eng. Enjoy!

“Please add a diagram of where the cliterous [sic] is. Please FELIX, please.”

Do you masturbate?



### Self Love

10% of you said you didn't masturbate. 66% of you watch porn, with those seeing multiple people being the most prevalent watchers, of whom 75% are regularly tuning in. A whopping 22% of you have masturbated on campus, not including in halls. In terms of regularity, just over half of you are putting aside time to self-love once a week, but 30% of you had masturbated on the day you took the survey. Singletons and those seeing one person non-exclusively were masturbating the most often.

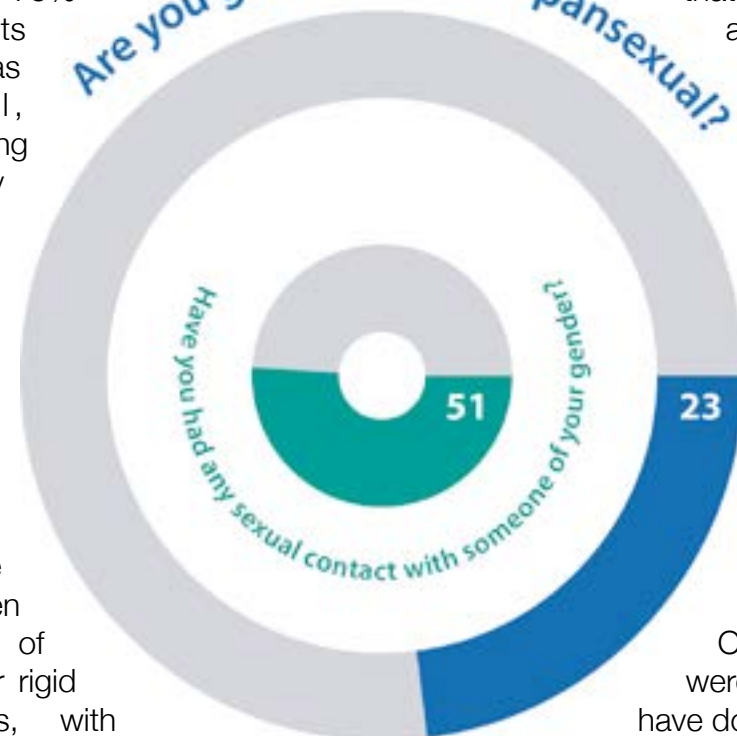


“Where are these tunnels I hear about?”



Interestingly, just over half of respondents reported having had some sexual contact (anything from kissing to full on sexy times) with someone of the same sex. 75% of respondents identified as heterosexual, with 7% saying they were gay and 12% were bisexual. Gay men vastly outnumber the number of gay women who took the survey, whereas there were more bisexual women than men. 3% of you rejected our rigid sexuality labels, with the most common unlisted

Are you gay, bisexual or pansexual?



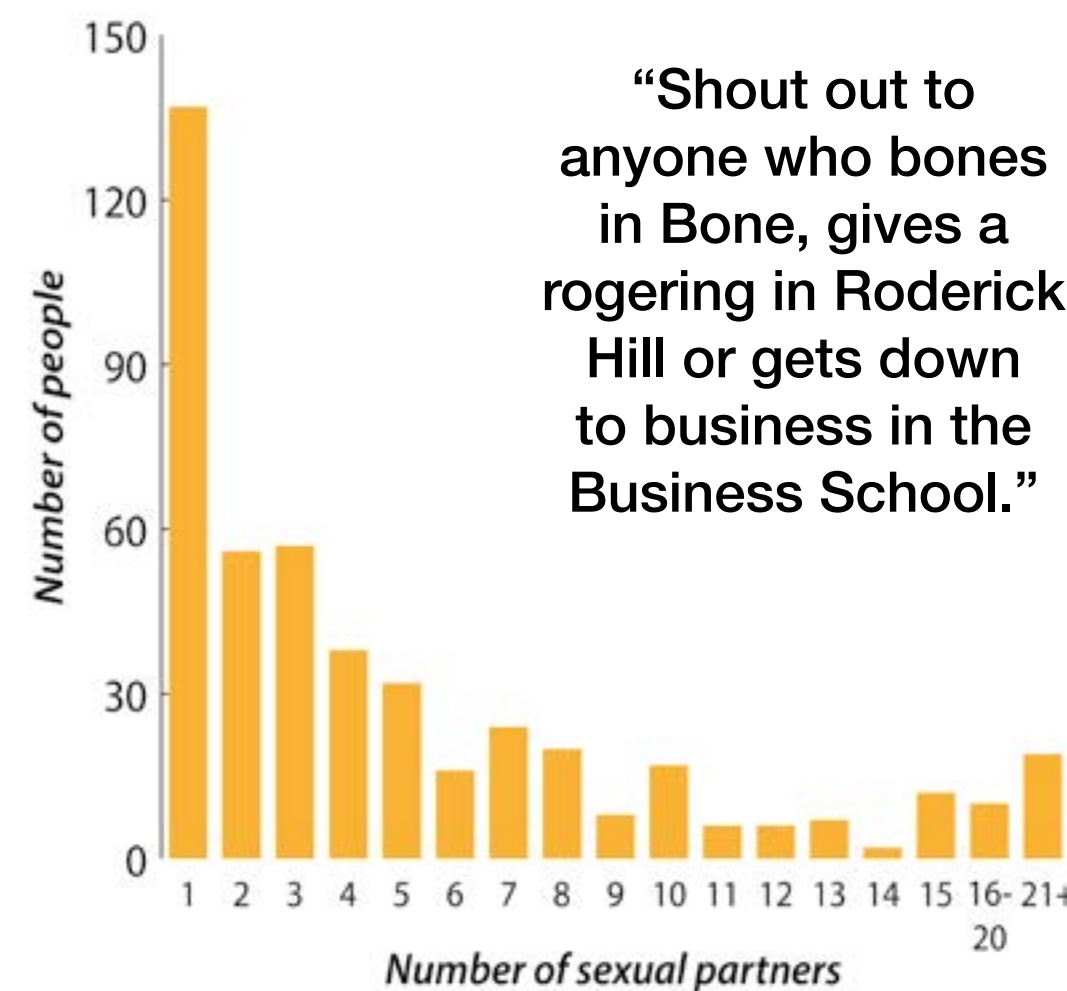
sexual orientation being pansexual.

Our sex survey results in 2011 reported that 83% of

those surveyed identified as “straight”. The decrease in this Imperial figure over five years is reflected in other studies in recent years, which have shown that young people’s attitude to rigid boundaries on sexuality have changed to become more fluid. 40% of those who identified as heterosexual said they’d had some kind of sexual experience with a member of the same sex. Overall, women were more likely to have done so (60%) than men (43%).



“Sex is healthy, do it nerds.”



“Shout out to anyone who bones in Bone, gives a rogering in Roderick Hill or gets down to business in the Business School.”

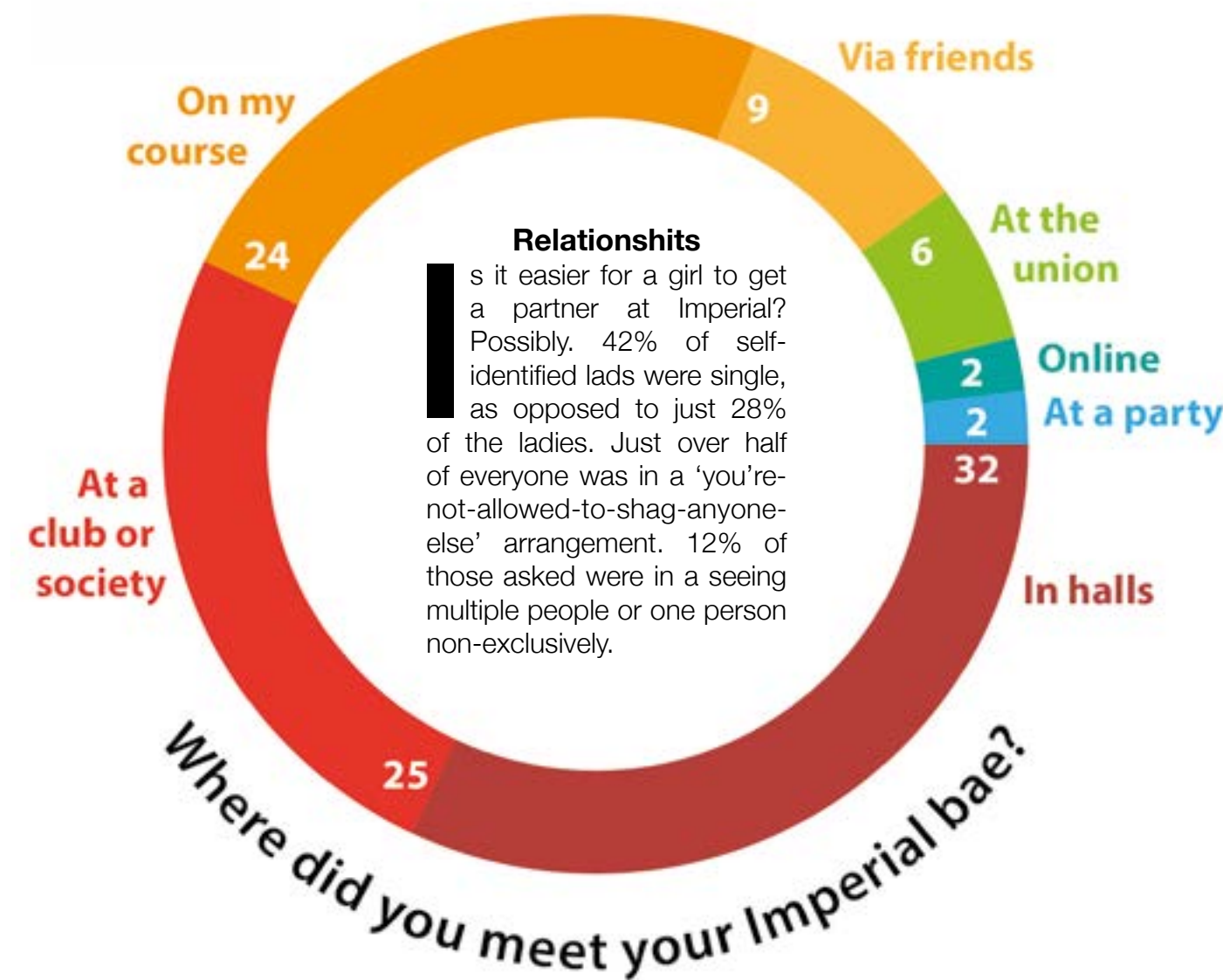
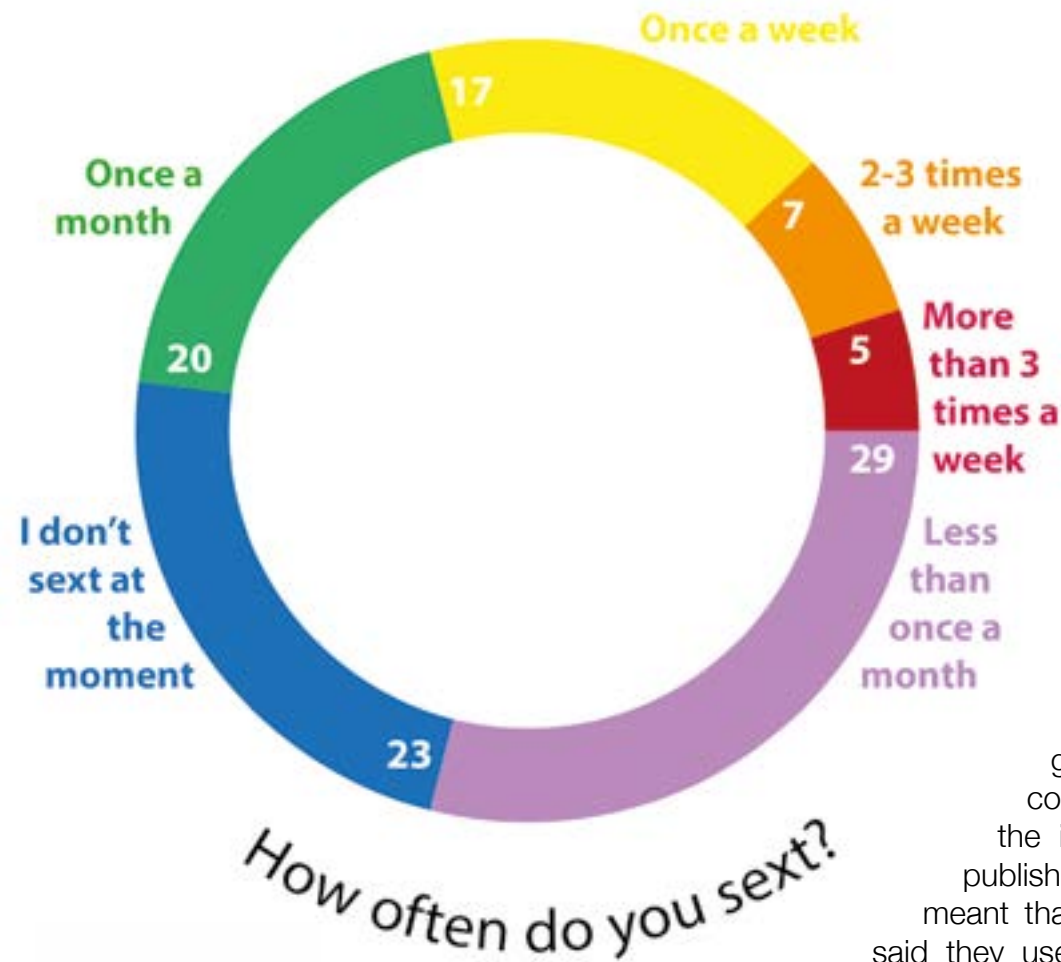
### Love n stuff

Woah! 19% of you said you'd cheated on a partner. But you're a damaged lot, because 19% also suspected they'd been cheated on.



When we asked you if you were in love, a surprisingly high number of you were. 77% of those in exclusive relationships said they were, with 46% of those asked overall admitting to being in love. On the other hand, 15% of you chose the response ‘what is love’? Fair.

“After having sex in the Great Hall, we stood naked on stage and took a bow.”



**Relationships**  
 Is it easier for a girl to get a partner at Imperial? Possibly, 42% of self-identified lads were single, as opposed to just 28% of the ladies. Just over half of everyone was in a 'you're-not-allowed-to-shag-anyone-else' arrangement. 12% of those asked were in a seeing multiple people or one person non-exclusively.

**Sexting**  
 It's 2016, and you don't have time to have actual sex. A whopping 44% of you say you like sexting, and half of those of you in monogamous relationships say you do it on the regular, whereas a mighty 75% of you who are seeing multiple people are fans of this particular method of sexytimes. As for your methods, the overwhelming winner is Snapchat. Of those of you who said you were into sending dirty pics, 56% used Snapchat. The next most popular medium was Whatsapp, with the good old-fashioned text coming in third. Presumably the inherent risk of accidentally publishing a picture of your dick out meant that only 17% of those asked said they used Facebook messenger to send their tasteful nudes.



**Sexual health**  
 This year, we put a particular focus on your contraception habits. Folks who said they'd had a one night stand were way more likely to have had unprotected sex: 75% in comparison to 55%. Across all surveyed, two thirds of you have had unprotected sex. Have you lot even been reading the paper this year? Safe sex is best.

An eye-watering 44% of you said you'd never had an STI test, but only 4% of all respondents admitted to having had an STI. 21% of you said you got tested every time you switched partners, and 19% said they only bothered if they were worried about the sexual health of a new partner. Those seeing multiple people were the best at getting semi-regular STI tests – 70% had had one in the last year.

69% (giggle) of those relying on the pill to stop them becoming mums and dads were in monogamous relationships, and unsurprisingly, condoms were the contraception options of choice. After these two, pulling out was the most popular 'method' of contraception respondents said they relied upon. You know this doesn't work, right? Perhaps most worryingly, the 20% of the medics who responded said they had used pulling out to prevent pregnancy. Two little words for you, baby doctors. Pre. Cum.

**What are you into?**

A huge 48% of you said you didn't even want to try receiving anal, whilst the departments where butt stuff is most popular were ESE and Mechanical Engineering, where 20% said they liked it. On the whole, people seemed more up for the idea of giving anal, with 15% saying they would try it.

46% of you want to try having a threesome, with 18% of Chemical Engineering saying they knew they liked it already. This was far more popular with male respondents. 38% of women, in comparison to just 11% of men said they didn't want to try it. Similarly, the idea of orgies was much more appealing to men, of which 36% wanted to try it, compared to just 14% of women.

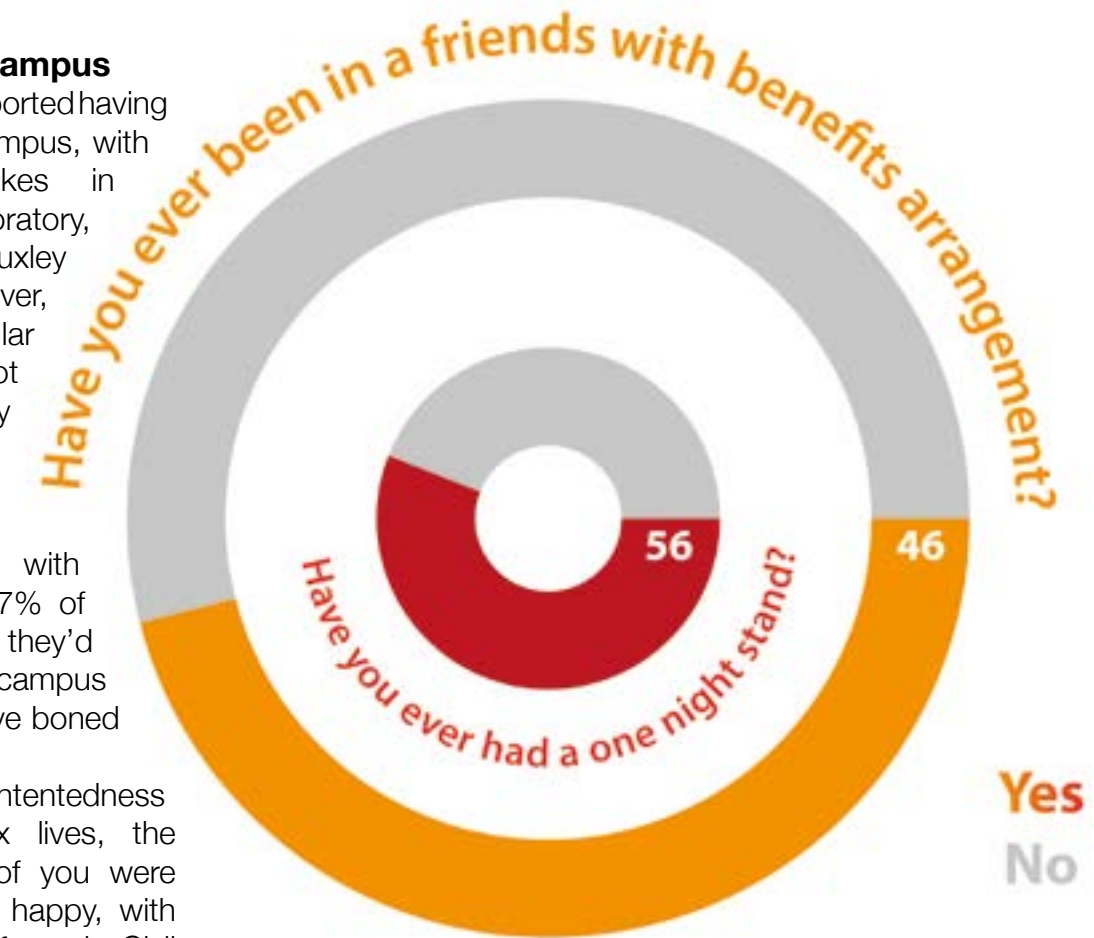
Pretty much everyone is into, or at least into the idea of restraints – with both making up two thirds of the voters. 22% of you didn't want to try public sex with a pretty even split on gender. After sexting, sex toys were the most mainstream thing you liked, with 35% of people saying they liked it, and 30% saying they wanted to try it.



**Sex on campus**

19% of you reported having had sex on campus, with particular spikes in Blackett Laboratory, SAF and the Huxley Building. However, the most popular on campus spot for a cheeky shag was the union building, including the union offices, with a whopping 27% of those who said they'd had sex on campus reported to have boned there.

In terms of contentedness with your sex lives, the vast majority of you were happy or very happy, with the happiest of you in Civil Engineering (who are also the ones having the most one night stands – just saying). Those in EEE and Computing were the least happy, with 33% of each course saying they were



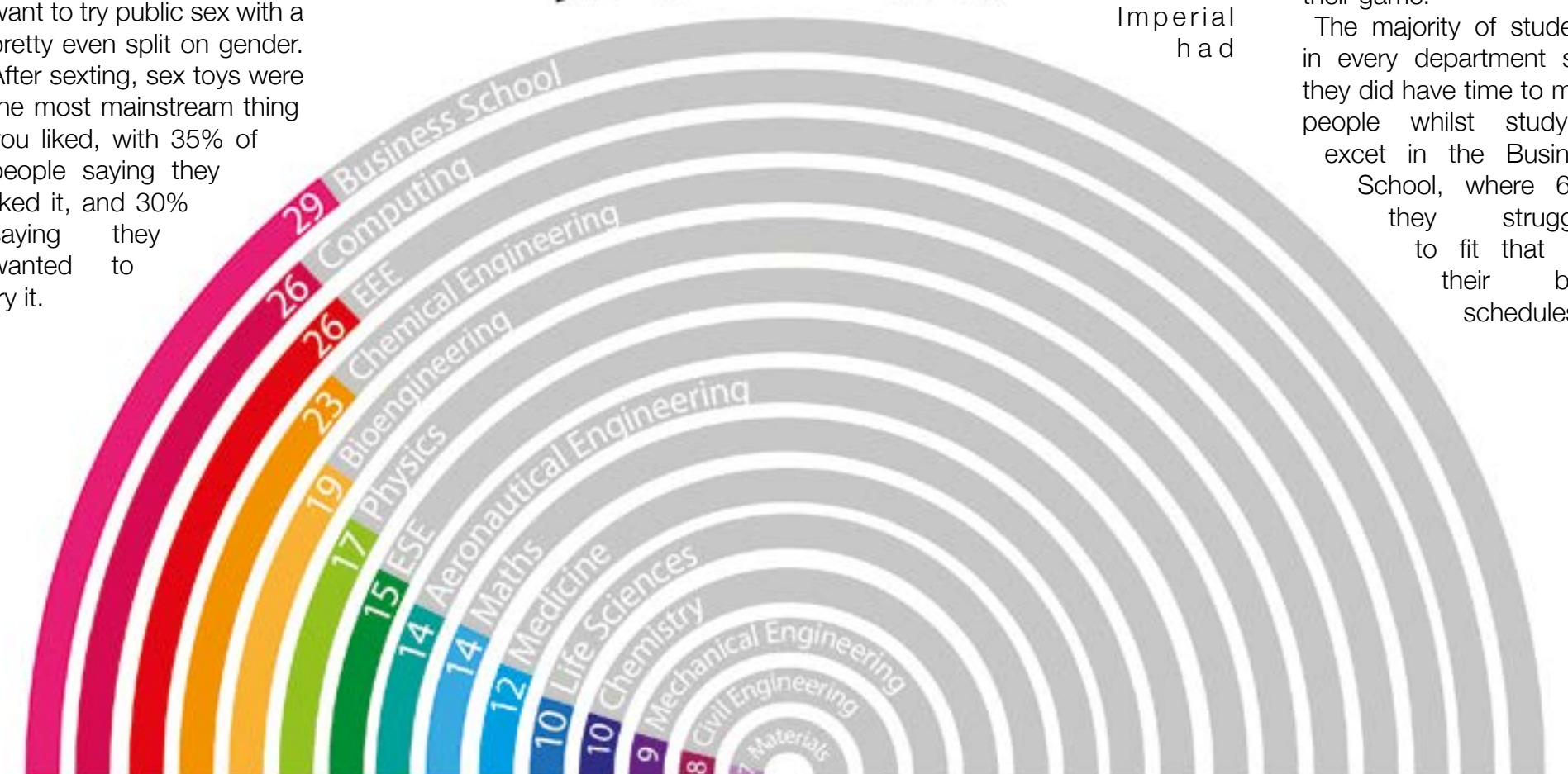
either unhappy or very unhappy with their sex lives.

Contrary to what you might think, most responders didn't think Imperial had negatively affected their sex lives, with 35% of responders saying they thought being at Imperial had

not had changed their luck either way. Female responders were a few percentage points higher than men in saying that being at Imperial had positively affected their sex lives, whilst slightly more men than women said going here had damaged their game.

The majority of students in every department said they did have time to meet people whilst studying, except in the Business School, where 67% they struggled to fit that into their busy schedules.

**Are you a virgin?**







## Science, what's good?

Jane Courtnell  
Science Editor

### Predicting earthquakes

New research from the University of Montana suggests that when it comes to earthquakes, things are even more complicated than we originally thought. The team of scientists looked at GPS records of surface motion during the 2015 Gorkha earthquake, that ravaged Nepal, killing over 8000 people. They found that the earthquake failed to rupture the Himalayan faults (planar fractures) and resulted in afterslip which released aseismic-movement equivalent to a magnitude 7.1 earthquake. Such 'incomplete' earthquakes seem to happen quite frequently and are the main reason behind geological shifts. The research, albeit shedding light on the inner workings of earthquakes, also highlights the fact that we are even worse at predicting earthquakes than we thought.

Mencin et al. 2016 @ *Nature Geoscience*

### Cats know their physics

Despite the hundreds of cat fail videos on the interwebs suggesting otherwise, new research from Kyoto University in Japan confirms that cats indeed possess an understanding of physics. The research suggests that cats can not only understand the principle of cause and effect, but also some elements of physics. The science is not exactly groundbreaking though. Experiments consisted of putting objects in containers and testing whether cats could predict whether the containers were empty or not based on the sounds they made. The researchers also noted that cats seemed to stare longer at containers that sounded empty but ended up hiding an object inside and the other way round. Prolonged staring is the cat equivalent of bewilderment FYI. So if you've watched those videos of cats playing Cups and Balls and wondered how the cats seemed to get it right every time, the answer is physics. Oh, and a good sense of hearing.

Takagi et al. 2016 @ *Animal Cognition*

### Chiral space molecules

Scientists at the Science Foundation's Green Bank Telescope oiled through their highly sensitive radio telescope to observe the first complex chiral molecule. The molecule, hiding under the thick cover of a cloud of stardust is named Propylene Oxide (CH<sub>3</sub>CHOCH<sub>2</sub>). If you are not familiar with the popular chemistry term 'chiral molecule', it refers to molecules which have left-handed and right-handed conformations while being identical in every other respect. Just like our hands, a mirror image of each other. Why is this discovery so...handy? Chiral molecules are essential to life on earth. Thus, their discovery is a pioneering leap for understanding the origin of life and how our prebiotic molecules are built in the universe. The next stage is to observe which handedness is of excess; stay tuned as more exciting discoveries are sure to follow.

McGuire & Carroll. 2016 @ *Science*

### Is this song sad or is it happy?

Emo or ecstatic? How do you feel when sad music loops on your Spotify playlist? Researchers at Durham University have found that sad music affects different people in different ways. 2436 individuals from the UK and Finland participated in the survey that investigated the impact of music for mood control. While some people felt an essence of joy when sad music was played, others found music physically straining and deflating as it spurred the dreaded remembrance of loved ones and other painful experiences. The disparity in reactions is thought to mainly be due to music associations with certain environmental experiences, thus the research has implications for music therapist to carefully consider the music representations for their choice of music. So if next time you play 'Barbie Girl' your flatmate starts to ugly cry as he's singing along to the chorus, don't be too surprised.

Eerola & Pertola 2016 @ *Plos One*

### Earth-like sea on Europa

The drug ixekizumab has been shown to clear 80% of psoriasis suffering patients. Dr. Kenneth Gordon, dermatology professor at Northwestern University Feinberg School of Medicine, first author of the paper publishing the results of the phase three trials, explained that these positive responses persisted for at least 60 weeks. Psoriasis is an immune-mediated inflammatory response which is also associated with increased risk of depression, heart disease and diabetes. The drug functions by neutralising the immune system pathway which is known for promoting psoriasis. Participants of the trials suffered from psoriasis ranging from moderate to severe. Drug effectiveness was measured via comparisons with a placebo. Clearing the symptoms is finally a reality. The drug has been approved by the Food and Drug Administrations, however the safety of the drug for longer than 60 weeks still needs to be studied.

Amato et al. 2016 @ *New England Journal of Medicine*

## Is vaginal yoghurt the future?

Alexandra Lim  
Writer

If you haven't already, I implore you all to read *The Diet Myth* by Tim Spector, the acclaimed work by professor of genetic epidemiology and consultant physician (sadly at a rival university here in London). It finely elucidates all the factors which play gargantuan roles in the way we react to and absorb all the nutrients in the food we eat. One chapter on the nutritional benefits of mushrooms particularly intrigued me, for reasons more than merely spore-related. Namely, the way we can develop yoghurt specific to our vaginal microbial population, to ward off fungal infection. Yum.

Let's start at the beginning. Fungi such as mushrooms are basically

large collections of microbes that feed off dead or decaying matter in the soil, in order to grow and reproduce. They also happen to adore living off humans as well. No use fretting over mushrooms sprouting all over you, though something of the sort can happen on a minor scale if you don't, say, dry your feet and in between your toes properly, since these critters thrive on moisture and humidity. All that aside, fungi also live in our gut as yeasts. Nothing to worry about here either, since they live happily in a symbiotic relationship with the microbes that reside there. However, with improper antibiotic treatment usually administered in an effort to correct the yeast population (very typical in Chinese medicine), it's easy to throw off the delicate balance of our natural microbe flora. These microbes help

defend against fungal infection, and minute populations of yeast are invaluable to our body's immune system. This leads to dangerous and severe fungal infections such as candida, usually seen on the mouth and tongue. Candida of the vagina (also known as thrush) is actually quite a normal part of being female, for it develops at some point in a female's life, though it's nicely warded off by our friendly gut inhabitants lactobacillus bacteria. Could you perhaps recall the food type teeming with lactobacillus?

Yoghurt is probably the first thing that comes to mind. The popular probiotic was tested as a treatment for candida in randomized trials, however, most cases have not been particularly successful, purely because each individual's microbe population is incredibly diverse and differs between individuals.

Thus, immunologists have started developing vaginal yoghurt – yoghurt containing specific lactobacillus strains resembling the rather specialised vaginal microbe.



Self explanatory. Photo Credit: Mark Freeth

We can ingest this tangy concoction to ward off candida infections, and this could also potentially help fight infections like HIV and AIDS. Dessert, anyone?



## Public healthcare cuts cause otherwise preventable deaths

Naomi Stewart  
Writer

We all witnessed the devastating effects of the 2008 economic crisis, as ordinary people lost their jobs and homes, and saw their hard-earned savings and financial security evaporate. Now a team of researchers are warning that the financial collapse may have also led to the preventable deaths of hundreds of thousands of people. With the NHS already facing enormous pressure and under threat from cuts from disingenuous politicking, this discovery doesn't bode well for the UK. In a study published recently in *The Lancet*, researchers uncovered damning links between slashed public health spending, unemployment, and 160,000 cancer-related deaths in the EU alone in the fallout of the recession.

The team analysed data from the World Bank and World Health Organisation from 1990-2010 for almost 80 countries with different incomes and healthcare

systems, accounting for over two billion people. They compared healthcare spending leading up to and following the recession with deaths from different types of 'treatable' and 'untreatable' cancers. Unemployment and funding cuts were markedly tied to increased cancer mortality, and countries without universal healthcare, like the United States, fared much worse.

"The US actually spends three times as much per person on healthcare than the UK, but the issue is that it doesn't provide universal healthcare coverage...we found that between 2008 and 2010, the UK didn't experience any additional deaths, whereas the US experienced around 18,000 additional cancer deaths – we believe – because of the economic crisis," explained lead author Dr. Mahiben Maruthappu of Imperial College, Senior Fellow to the CEO of NHS and a practicing doctor.

Connections between healthcare availability and mortality might seem obvious to those of us who have experienced difficulties accessing adequate care or

treatment. But previous studies in global 'healthconomics' have only looked at deaths related to higher levels of stress, like suicide and heart disease. This study is first of its kind to isolate cancer in this light.

Other researchers have been cynical of the study, and cautioned against over-generalisations. Dr. Eliana Barrenho, a health economist at Imperial College London, said using cancer rates as a health measure can produce distorted results because "the distribution of prevalence and mortality of these are not homogeneous across the globe... [and] richer countries with more access to health care have showed higher levels and degrees of cancer screening which, per se, might increase incidence".

These concerns were echoed by Dr. Laurence Roope, a development economist at the University of Oxford. However, he did also say that the findings were still very plausible and "it's obvious that access to good quality healthcare is what matters to whether or not people survive".

Study authors acknowledged these limitations, arguing that these

macroeconomic studies are not showing direct cause and effect. Rather, they hint at indirect but potentially lethal ripples in the wake of economic collapses.

As a result, scientists are keen to do more research about what has happened since 2010, considering the "effects of the economic crisis have been quite long-lasting and global unemployment remains significantly higher than before", according to Maruthappu.

Still, it's a compelling argument that universal healthcare actually protects human lives during tougher economic times, "because when you factor it in, the link between unemployment and cancer mortality disappears," said Maruthappu.

If this study holds true, and future data shows that a lack of universal health care coverage does lead to cancer-related deaths that are otherwise preventable, government attempts to reduce NHS services and access is something British citizens will want to be wary of. The NHS may not be a perfect system, but in the face of pending economic uncertainty like that of Brexit, it may literally save our lives.

Universal healthcare actually protects human lives during tougher economic times



During periods of economic austerity easily treatable illnesses thrive. Photo Credit: pudgefeet

## Science & the City

The year has come to an end. We've jammed and transformed our brains, learning some things better than others. We've prepared ourselves with the tools we need for the next chapter in our lives. As we all go our own ways this summer (unless you're stuck here on campus toiling away while everyone jovially twirls outside in their freedom, like me) what are the really important things to remember from all we've experienced this year?

Hopefully we've learned that the individual components of science can be fallible, and so they should be. Something that cannot be tested or tried with the likelihood of failure is something that cannot improve, learn, and reach the next rung on the ladder of progress. As practitioners of science, we constantly revise old methods, ideas, and materials, while creating and uncovering new ones. Science accepts that old ways of thinking must change in the light of new knowledge

And this fallibility and willingness to change and grow, is perhaps one of the most subtle yet powerful lessons science has for us as human beings. We constantly face a world that tests the mettle of our character and makes us question our old ways of thinking and being, in the ways we treat the world and each other.

At the risk of sounding like I'm proselytizing, I propose we should use this scientific technique of self-correction to improve ourselves; to become kinder and better people. In the light of the types of events that have shaken the consciousness of the Western world recently (and one can barely imagine the events the rest of the world endures without the light of our media lens) which threaten to destabilise an understanding of the collective unity of humanity, science can help guide the way. Self-correcting our prejudice, hatred, and selfishness by reviewing the 'literature' and seeing that it never, ever does the world good. Changing our practices to those loving, accepting actions that have proved to increase our individual and collective happiness time and time again. Call it humanity or call it science – there's no better choice for us but to grow and learn from our mistakes.

NAOMI STEWART



## A huge congratulations to The Union Awards winners!



Monday 13 June was our Union Awards, our annual celebration of our volunteers. The ceremony gave recognition of student volunteer's hard work and dedication.

Nominations were put forward by members of the Union who had witnessed leadership and transformation of their community from their peers. The nominations were then considered by students and they had an extremely difficult decision to come up with the shortlist and winners of the specialist categories.

### Congratulations to the nominee, shortlistees and winners!

- ▲ **Academic Rep Network PG Team of the Year**  
Winner: Chemical Engineering
- ▲ **Academic Rep Network UG Team of the Year**  
Winner: Horizons  
Shortlist: Biomed Science, Physics
- ▲ **Academic Rep Network Rep of the Year**  
Winner: Rachael Shuttleworth  
Runner Up: Abhijay Sood
- ▲ **Community Connections Volunteer of the Year**  
Winner: Jia Wei Teh  
Runner Up: Charlotte Chow
- ▲ **Campaign of the Year**  
Winner: Circle Line Volunteering  
Shortlist: Islamic Soc, ICSM Parent Group, ICSMSU Study Skills
- ▲ **Club, Society or Project of the Year**  
Winner: Funkology  
Shortlist: CivSoc, Malaysian, Cross Country, DramSoc, Jazz and Rock
- ▲ **Contribution to College Life**  
Winner: Nell Freeman
- ▲ **Event of the Year**  
Winner: Circle Line Volunteering  
Shortlist: Islamic Society's Mental Health Awareness, MTSocs production of Sweeny Todd, ICSMSU RAG Circle Line Volunteering and PhysSoc Festival of Bad Ad Hoc Hypotheses
- ▲ **Innovation and Enterprise Awards**  
Winner: Paul Beaumont
- ▲ **Project of the Year**  
Winner: ICSM Parents Group  
Shortlist: Circle Line Volunteering, ICSMU Vision

For a full list of those who received Union Colours and Outstanding Service Awards can be found at: [www.imperialcollegeunion.org/news/union-awards-2016-night-celebrate](http://www.imperialcollegeunion.org/news/union-awards-2016-night-celebrate)

## Departure Weekend - get involved!

Can you spare a few hours to lend a hand? We are joining up with Imperial Estates Department to collect all non-perishable food that is left behind in Halls and donate it to Emmaus, a charity that works to end homelessness in the UK. Students have been asked to bag any clothes or goods they don't want to take with them which will be given to the British Heart Foundation and sold in stores across London.

With just a few hours to clear all Halls, we are looking for a team of enthusiastic volunteers who are willing to get stuck in to help collect as much food and goods as possible for these worthwhile causes. Last year saw students collect 1.7 tonnes of unwanted food and 144kg of cutlery and over five tonnes of goods for British Heart Foundation – can we beat this record?!

Join us on Saturday 25 June, 10:00 – 12:00 and see what difference you can make!

## Volunteer at the Summer Language Socials

This Summer Imperial College Union are teaming up with the Centre for Academic English (CfAE) to support social events for their pre-session English learners.

Join students from around the world in a range of social events and activities and get everyone talking together. Students on the pre-session course will be looking to improve their conversational English and you can play a key role in their learning outside the classroom.

The most important part of your role is to make students feel part of an Imperial community and grow in confidence when communicating in English. Be the first to join a brand new team of volunteers and get involved this summer!

To find out more visit: [imperialcollegeunion.org/summersocials](http://imperialcollegeunion.org/summersocials)



# FELIX SCIENCE

## Sh!t Science

Sentimental columnists concludes all science is worthwhile science

MARIANNE GUENOT



A fitting tribute to the wackiest of fictional scientists. Photo Credit: Heather Paul

At Sh!t Science, we've been trying to provide evidence that the scientific method that is in place is an effective filter, and that as such, there is no such thing as 'shit science'. But as it is the end of the year, and you might be going off to glorious academic careers, here are a few things you should know to be able to judge a scientific paper critically.

Scientists need to publish to survive. A scientist's worth is evaluated depending on the number, or the 'quality' of articles that he or she publishes, and that influences who the funding bodies are going to choose to fund.

While scientists, on average, work on a paper for publish for four years, their work is condensed in about 5000 words. That means that scientists will have a tendency to only present the most convincing arguments to support their story, and can be inclined not to publish

the experiments that haven't worked. Peer-review is a fantastic and necessary process. However, because you have to ask people that are in the field to comment on the science, and because a specific field in science can be very narrow, you often ask people's competitors to judge the work, and it has been shown that reviewers sabotage their competitors' work to make their research publish before their competitors'.

Journals are attributed an 'impact factor' which is determined according to how many people read the content of the journal. The higher the impact factor, the more prestigious the journal is thought to be, and the more scientists will want to submit their articles to that journal. However, to maintain that traffic to their journal, editors might be tempted to reject a perfectly good article on the basis that it is not 'cutting-edge' or trendy enough.

It is a system put in place by humans and limited by human envy. However, it is the best system that we have, and all in all, it ensures a high level of integrity within the scientific community.

I know that during this past year, together we embarked on a journey that looked at the lighter side of science, packed with sarcasm and a questionable sense of humour.

But I honestly hope as this final term draws to the end, that you have been convinced that all science is helpful, even though it is a human-driven process, and as such has its pitfalls.

So whether you're reading about the wobble of obese penguins, the painfully difficult Mario Bros stages, or the ability of fish to hate, don't raise your eyebrows, don't shake your head. Instead marvel at how it expanded our repository of knowledge.

Natasha Khaleeq  
Writer

## This week's science picture

With Euro 2016 in full swing there is no better time to explore the science of football. Why are some players such as Cristiano Ronaldo naturally gifted whereas others need to work hard in nurturing their skill? Dr. Manning, at the University of Liverpool, published research that suggests football skills may be genetic. The ring to index finger ratio might hold the genetic key. Plyometric training targeting muscle and the nerve fibres controlling it is required to enhance skill, because it enables footballers to switch between concentric contractions that shorten muscles and eccentric contractions that lengthen and hold them under tension. Science is also involved when it comes to scoring goals. Bernoulli's principle and the Magnus enable a ball with the right amount of power and spin to pass the wall of defenders as it slows into laminar flow before reaching the goal keeper.



Bucky-ball. Photo Credit: Brian Jeffrey Beggerly

**Rosencran**



# Another Castle

THE GAMING MAGAZINE OF IMPERIAL COLLEGE LONDON



## The Rise and Fall of Introversion Software

ISSUE 0



Back in 2008, Tom Roberts, Azfarul Islam and Michael Cook launched *Another Castle*, a multi-format gaming magazine. In their first issue, they secured an interview with Peter Molyneux, an industry behemoth at the time. Gaming has changed a lot since then (Peter Molyneux all but disappeared into the ether) and the way we write about games has changed too. Kieron Gillen (comic book writer and former music and games journalist) published the manifesto for *New Games Journalism* in 2004, which set out a new way of thinking and discussing games, where a reviewer's personal experience was core to their analysis and reflection. In the past half-decade numerous publications (from *Kill Screen* to *Feminist Frequency*) and existing publications have adopted these ideas. Now it's the turn of Imperial students to continue this great exploration of gaming culture.

This issue is my attempt to resurrect interest in games journalism at Imperial and it's a project that is far from finished (hence issue zero). It begins with an interview with Mark Morris, an Imperial graduate who helped found Introversion Software, telling the story of a games company that has seen unprecedented success despite almost going bankrupt after the release of one of their games. Harry Mitchell writes fondly about *Half-Life 2* more than twelve years after its release, while Dani Hernandez Perez gives us a brief history of storytelling in videogames. Film editor, Tilda Swinton fanatic, and Guardian Student Media Awards nominee, Fred Fyles, interprets *The Sims* in an essay that goes beyond what even Kieron Gillen envisaged for games journalism.

Over the last year I've almost singlehandedly kept the games section of *FELIX* alive but I need your support if I am to continue. If you're interested in helping to shape the future of *Another Castle* please get in touch. ✉

Cale Tilford

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[@felixgames](https://twitter.com/felixgames)

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Dedicated To Grace Rahman

# The fall and rise of Introversion



## An interview with Mark Morris

Words by Cale Tilford



# An Imperial Success Story

*You started at Imperial in the late nineties, studying Computing. A lot has obviously changed since then. How was your time here and how – having revisited the department – have things changed?*

There was a big change that occurred in the department about five or six years ago, and since then it doesn't seem to have changed much. When I first went to Imperial for my walk around day (I didn't have an interview) it was just a sort of 'come and have a look at the university', that would have been the Spring of 1997. At the time I wanted to do a Computer Science degree, but I had this fascination with, or I thought I had a fascination with, AI. In those days there were all these old Sun SPARCstations with these huge monitors and really crappy optical mice. I don't know if you even remember mice with balls in them but that was the norm back then. In order for these mice to work you had to have a little mousemat with a grid on it. Hardly any of the mice worked, because the grid had faded off. And there were these old dot matrix line printers you could use; it was all pre-laser and no Wi-Fi, no mobile phones. None of that kind of stuff.

I was in Weeks hall, and I remember one of the reasons why I applied to Weeks hall was because it was one of the few – it was the only hall actually – that gave you a network connection. On a Computer Science degree I knew I was going to be able to want to work from home. I'm not sure broadband was around to be honest; I think we were all on dial-up modems. We were really at the back of the birth of the internet. It was kind of an exciting time for Computing and the internet but the department hadn't really caught up with that. So very quickly after leaving I felt quite out of touch, despite being a very recent Computer Science graduate. We'd done very little HTML, very little JavaScript. We'd done no PHP.

They're a bit odd, but that's Imperial's way. They give you these problems, they give you the high level skills, but none of that instantiation of web development was covered at all. Which was quite different to classical imperative programming which I was spending most of my time doing. But I look back fondly on my days at Imperial, I'm still friends with three of the other guys I went to Imperial with.

*Back then, was there any sort of game development community?*

None. There was nothing at all. Chris had written a few games in his spare time. I think he'd written three or four before coming to Imperial, and he came to Imperial with a game called Shadows. I'd never even

considered game development but I'd been a gamer up until going to university. There was no community at all as far as we were aware. Chris had been telling me in a pub of this game idea he had for a hacking sim, which ultimately ended up being *Uplink*. And he said: 'you watch these films like *Sneakers* and *Hackers* and *Lawnmower Man*, but no one's ever really made a game that simulates that'. I still don't really have the vision to keep up with Chris. Until I see it, I can't really deal with it. Even then I didn't know what he was talking about, I had no idea how he was going to make this thing fun to play, or interesting.

He wrote *Uplink* when Tom and I were out drinking – we were going out most nights and he was staying in most nights coding. We'd get back at three in the morning and he'd be up programming. Sure, he'd come out occasionally but that was definitely his passion. There was a competition in our final year run by the business school for £10,000 for the best business plan. And Tom, my Electrical Engineering buddy, had taken all the corporate programmes. He was a lot more clued up on the operation of companies.

I said to Tom and Chris: 'Chris you've got a game idea and Tom you've got the business knowledge, should we just write this business plan'. We never intended to run a business. We were going to do our best to win and if we won we'd get ten grand, we'd split it three ways and pay off a bit of student loan, and that would be the end of it. We wrote the business plan, but it became very clear to us quite quickly that Imperial weren't really interested in supporting that. They were much more interested in new ideas and new technology that they could exploit.

They wanted innovative technology that had broad appeal, rather than a videogame. Everytime we went to the meetings they were like: 'rather than selling a game you could sell the technology to make games'. We stopped bothering going forward with the competition but we had this business plan that said we were going to make a few posts on a forum and we were going to set up a website to take some credit card orders. It took off relatively quickly, within a few months we were able to order 3000 units of *Uplink*, which we shipped around the world. That's kind of how it began.

There was nobody else at Imperial making games, and when we started launching the business properly and going to trade shows it appeared to us at the time that there was nobody else making games at the scale we were. There were no other small, micro-studios. Everybody that was making games, was like EA or Frontier – the big studios. Subsequently it turned out there were a few other developers around and making money then, but we just didn't know about them. There certainly wasn't the community that there is today.

Perhaps there were more on the West Coast; there's always been a nice burgeoning community there. The internet was very new so it was difficult to track down these groups of developers. We felt that we were trailblazing to a certain extent.

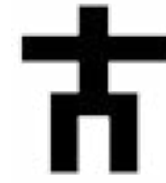
*So why do you think Uplink did well? Was it the community you created online?*

With video-games it's 99% the game and 1% everything else around it. That 1% is important as really good games can get missed but fundamentally the game has to be wonderful to be successful. And I think what we did with *Uplink* was combine our technical knowledge – or Chris' technical knowledge – with a very emotive, tense and well crafted mystery story. You were as close to believing you were a hacker, choosing to support or down this big organisation, than any other hacking game that has been made. I think *Uplink* stands up today. There's a few tweaks that could be made but fundamentally hacking is exactly the same as it was 15 years ago. Now there's script kiddies but that's about the only difference. The actual principles of hacking are pretty similar. There's new stuff like jacking into Wi-Fi that *Uplink* doesn't simulate.

There's a lot of technical people in the world that like playing games, intelligent people like everyone at Imperial, MIT and Oxford and Cambridge, that are a little underserved by the mainstream media. Everything – and it's changing a bit now – tends to be dumbed down to try and broaden the appeal. The problem when you're smart and you see dumbing down, is that the suspension of disbelief is broken. Suddenly you go 'this is bollocks!' if you ever watch a hacker movie and see someone like this [Mark clatters on the keyboard] you go 'that's bollocks!' They're not really there, they're not really doing that. The only time I've seen it filmed well is *Mr. Robot*. You're looking at the commands they're typing and it looks to me as if they're doing is pretty close to what they'd need to be doing.

A lot of people played *Uplink* and the community definitely helped drive it – that's the 1% I'm talking about. The forum and things we set up, that was quite new then. We did a little treasure hunt where you actually had to hack our website; we brought *Uplink* into the real world. The fact that *Uplink* had this branching pathway fueled the discussions on the forum. People were having radically different experiences which added to this sense of mystery. *X-Files* was probably a big touchstone for *Uplink* – a mystery where you don't really know what's going on. I think those were the factors that caused *Uplink*'s success. There was nothing else like it. It was a young internet where everyone was tech savvy. The audience came together well.

# From Uplink to Darwinia



Uplink.

How did you get the game out there then? Did you send it to games publications or was it just through word-of-mouth on the internet?

We were reviewed in *PC Gamer*. We sent copies of it to every magazine out there – not just the gaming magazines but also lifestyle magazines. I remember I'd gone skiing with Tom and we got back and the *Linux Format* review was the first review to hit. I thought the *Linux* guys were going to love *Uplink* and the *Linux Format* reviewer gave it 61%. I remember picking it up in the newsagent at the airport and I was crushed. We thought that this was the end of this adventure for us. We didn't think we would be able to pursue a 61% game. About two weeks later, the *PC Gamer* review came out. Now obviously *PC Gamer* is bigger than *Linux Format*. The reviewer, Kieron Gillen, only gave us have a page but it turned things around for us. After that every score was 80% plus.

Then we asked ourselves, what's the next step? At this point we were selling it boxed online and the obvious next step was getting it into the shops. In those days, and still now, my thinking is to go back to first principles. If I'm going to put a game into the shop, what are they going to do to add value. They were just putting games on shelves in front of a consumer. We went to a distributor rather than a publisher and did a deal with them. They charged about a quid a box, which sounded reasonable to me. The indie game stores took it. Zavvi refused it. Game refused it. HMV were the only major store that carried *Uplink*. WHSmith's wouldn't carry it, they said it was immoral. We made a bit of money from this but not a lot. We'd done our UK retail deal so then we looked to North America. Rather than working with a distributor over there we knew we had to work with a publisher, because we couldn't do the marketing ourselves. We went to a couple of trade shows and eventually hooked up with a company called Strategy First, a Canadian company. They were going to advance us \$50,000 dollars for distribution across the United States with a ten percent royalty. We were only three guys so we were quite happy with this. Strategy First renamed it *Uplink Hacker Elite* – which Chris hates – and redid the packaging. So, they distributed it and we waited for our \$50k cheque to come back and then they declared Chapter 11 bankruptcy protection in Canada, which means they didn't have to pay any of their debts. So we didn't see a penny of the sales over there. I don't think it did very well either.

So at this point you weren't digitally distributing the game on your website?

No. We actually padded the build size out with an encrypted MP3 of Chris playing his guitar to something

that would take three hours to download over a 56k modem. We determined that three hours we be too long for pirates to share the game. There was no real online distribution at this point but that was our novel counter-piracy strategy. It didn't work. Nothing works.

After Uplink, the next game you released was Darwinia. Could you tell me more about how that came about?

Chris had finished writing *Uplink* the day Tom and I got involved in the business. We were desperately looking at how we could make more money from it: a *Linux* version, a *Mac* version, and all those distribution deals I talked about. We even looked at Pocket PCs and PDAs. But Chris had been on *Uplink* for two years and he was finished with it so he went on to write *Darwinia*. There was quite a lot of tension in the company at that point because we wanted him working on *Uplink*. *Darwinia* took him a long time to get finished. *Uplink* had been developed at university in his spare time so we expected the next game, a full-time project, to be delivered in about a year. Ultimately, for various reasons *Darwinia* took three years to make so we were well and truly out of money after that period. We were broke, flat broke. Tom and Chris were selling all their CDs and signing on to benefits to try and keep things going. Then we launched *Darwinia*. And *Darwinia* was a tough old sell. Now we had a lot more experience and our route to market was more open. The game reviewed very strongly; it got 90% in *PC Gamer*. They loved it. It went into the IGF Awards [Independent Games Festival] and won three prizes that year because it was like no other indie game. Independent games in those days were much smaller. *Darwinia* was what Chris likes to call triple-I. This was pre *World of Goo*.

People in the games industry were really excited and wanted to see what would become of the indie game scene. They were willing to look past *Darwinia's* QA problems and its control problems to see the game for what it really was. But commercially it was a flop, we struggled to make any money back.

Now, at that time Valve were just about to launch their digital distribution platform called Steam and they reached out to us (or we reached out to them) and we had a big debate internally about whether we should put *Darwinia* on Steam. We were looking at the sales for our site, which were pretty small, and decided that even if they did cannibalise our sales we were making so little money it didn't matter. The status quo was that we were fucked. So, we did the deal with Steam. Which was of course the best deal we've done in the history of Introversion. Everything we've made, we've made through Valve. *Darwinia* didn't immediately pick up but obviously Valve brought the audience and the sales did eventually increase enough for us to get *Defcon* done.

*Defcon* was a really big moment for us. It was massively popular, more popular than anything else we'd ever seen. In those days you had to hire a physical box, and our servers just died under the load. It took us five or six hours to get them back up. I don't know how much money we lost in that time. Still, it was by far the biggest commercial success we'd had up to that point. But the perception was that *Darwinia* was the bigger success. This is where things started to go wrong for us. Microsoft, or an agent, reached out to us and said that *Darwinia* had won all these awards and Microsoft were launching the Xbox 360 and would be doing digital downloads. Microsoft were very interested in *Darwinia* and new IP. They wanted really cool indie titles.

Even though *Darwinia* hadn't been particularly popular we then got involved into what turned out to be a six or seven year mammoth project. They wanted every game on XBLA to be multiplayer – that was part of their strategy. *Darwinia* had originally been a multiplayer game but ended up being singleplayer. We thought it would be as simple as just reactivating the multiplayer mode of the game. We tried to do that and it just didn't work. It was shit.

That ended up with Chris working on our fourth game, *Multiwinia*. The company got sidetracked down this multiplayer route that we had agreed to deliver for Microsoft. And we had done so much work for this multiplayer game. Even though it didn't review well and no one bought it, *Multiwinia* was still a brilliantly fun game. We launched it on PC and nobody played it. Everybody who had enjoyed *Darwinia* looked at *Multiwinia*, which was a completely different gameplay experience, and said 'I don't want to play this'. And the rest of the world who had played *Darwinia* and hated it didn't want to play the sequel. We ended up targeting a niche of a niche.

At conferences people still come up to us and tell us that *Uplink* is the best game they've ever played, that *Darwinia* is the best game they've ever played, or that *Defcon* is the best game they've ever played. And there have been more than ten people in the last ten years that have said *Multiwinia* was the best game they'd ever played. So we must have done something right with it.

It was a big flop on PC but we were still working on the console version of it. This was going to be a bigger, shinier version of the game. Eventually we burned the company into the ground – there was no money left. We were going to launch *Darwinia* and *Multiwinia* together on XBLA as *Darwinia+* about six years after we had intended to do that. And it flopped too. The day after we launched we knew things hadn't gone well. I phoned everyone up and sacked them. I shut down the office. We had quite a lot of debt that we'd taken on, so I had to restructure all of that. I didn't think that

was going to be easy. I wasn't really a businessperson at that time, I was just a person. And when you owe someone money as a person you go to court and they come round to your house and take your stuff. What I didn't realise was that companies aren't quite like that. With everyone I owed money to, we made a payment plan over about a two year period. If anyone one of them had rejected the payment plan they would all lose all of it. Obviously, they all accepted it. After a little while we suddenly realised that there was a reasonable amount of money still dripping into Introversion from the back catalogue on Steam. And to be fair, a little bit coming in from Microsoft. All of these little trickles were merging into a stream of money. That was enough to keep me and Chris employed. That's when Chris came up with *Prison Architect*. At that point Humble Bundle had just launched. They'd already done a Frozenbyte bundle and we went out and asked if there was any interest in an Introversion one. We would bundle our games and give them other stuff like tech demos and they liked this idea. Kieron Gillen was the first time the company was saved and Humble Bundle, in my view, was the second time. We made about three quarters of a million from the 'Humble Introversion Bundle' and that just gave us enough cash to get to the alpha version of *Prison Architect*. That takes us up to 2012. Within three days of *Prison Architect* launching we'd made \$100,000 dollars. Now we've made about \$22 million. Humble gave us just that little bit of resource to get us to *Prison Architect*, which was our first mega-hit.

I remember buying that bundle at the time, and that was the first time I had ever heard of the company. Do you think that the bundle's success helped with getting your name out there and played a part in Prison Architect's success?

One of the things that I learnt relatively early on was that everyone else's view of Introversion was not the same as mine. I kind of assumed everyone knew all of our games and knew we were the company behind *Uplink*. I'd lived it. There was this natural assumption that someone who had bought *Uplink* would buy *Darwinia*. The reality is that it's nothing like that at all. You stand on each game separately. I'm quite big on trying to push the Introversion brand. I want people to say that they're buying the next Introversion game because they know it's going to be good even if it doesn't review very well, like Tarantino. People go and watch his movies because there hasn't really been a bad one. There's been great ones and mediocre ones but they have never been awful. So I think the Humble Bundle brought a new audience to us and *Prison Architect* built a new audience on top of that.

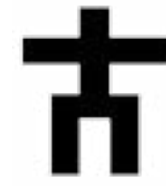
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**Kieron Gillen was the first time the company was saved and Humble Bundle, in my view, was the second time**

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# Beyond Prison Architect



Prison Architect.

Where did the name Introversion come from?

We'd just learnt at university about Myers-Briggs' personality test. It's basically a model to codify different personality types into one of 16 categories. Both Chris and I were intrigued that this was possible. Both of us, when we learnt about the personality test, had resonated quite a lot with the categories we ended up in.

When Chris wrote the opening sequence for *Uplink* it flashed through all of the Myers-Briggs indicators, ending on introversion. We named the company when we wrote the business plan, and when we asked Chris what to call it he suggested Introversion Software. We thought it sounded pretty cool. Nowadays, we'd probably have to call ourselves something like "Bing Bang" or some fucking nonsense word, or put a monkey in it. Game Gibbon?

With the financial success of Prison Architect, what's next for Introversion? Are you looking to expand?

No, we're not going to expand. We like our size. Well, we'll expand slowly at our own rate. We take interns from Imperial and we've had about three now. I'm trying to make that process, which in the past has been a bit ad hoc, more formal.

This was the first year that we had advertised for an intern and we selected one recently who's going to come and work for us. If our interns are very strong, and they want to work for us, there will probably be a place. That's how we will expand, rather than aggressively thinking we need to hire loads of coders.

Each game project has its own unique requirements. Because of the indie revolution, the ecosystem now is much richer than it once was. The guy who did all the art for *Prison Architect*, a very talented man called Ryan Sumo, had been the artist on *Spacechem*. Chris knew roughly what sort of talent he wanted for *Prison Architect*. Now Ryan lives in the Philippines but after a few emails and contracts, suddenly we had a world class artist working with us. Now that the game has come to an end, Ryan's doing his next thing. That's important because the next game from Introversion doesn't require a 2D top-down art style.

Short-term for Introversion we have *Prison Architect* coming out on Xbox One, Xbox 360, and PS4. We're not doing that work yourself. I like to describe the team porting a game as like a car tuning company; they take a really well crafted core game experience on PC and turn it into an outstanding console experience. They rework every interface, the control mechanisms, fix annoying bugs, and add in support to make the

progression a little more gentle for the console audience. They don't dumb the game down; that's wrong. They make the ramp into the game less steep than it is for the PC audience.

We've got some other platforms in development but we want to move away from *Prison Architect* this year. Internally, we're working on some new ideas that we're going to be showing at Rezzed. With these new prototypes we want to do a market test and see which prototype players resonate with the most. We can then use that information to feed into what we're doing for the rest of the year.

Prison Architect is a simulator. What do you think makes a good simulator? How do you balance the complexity with a game actually simple and fun to play?

Balance is the key word. There are a lot of factors that you have to get right. The player has to be able to understand action and consequence. That was something we always worked really hard on with *Prison Architect*.

We could simulate everything but the player has to know why that prisoner just died. If it's too covert then there's no fun in that situation. There might be a degree of fun in trying to figure it out but you have to get the balance right.

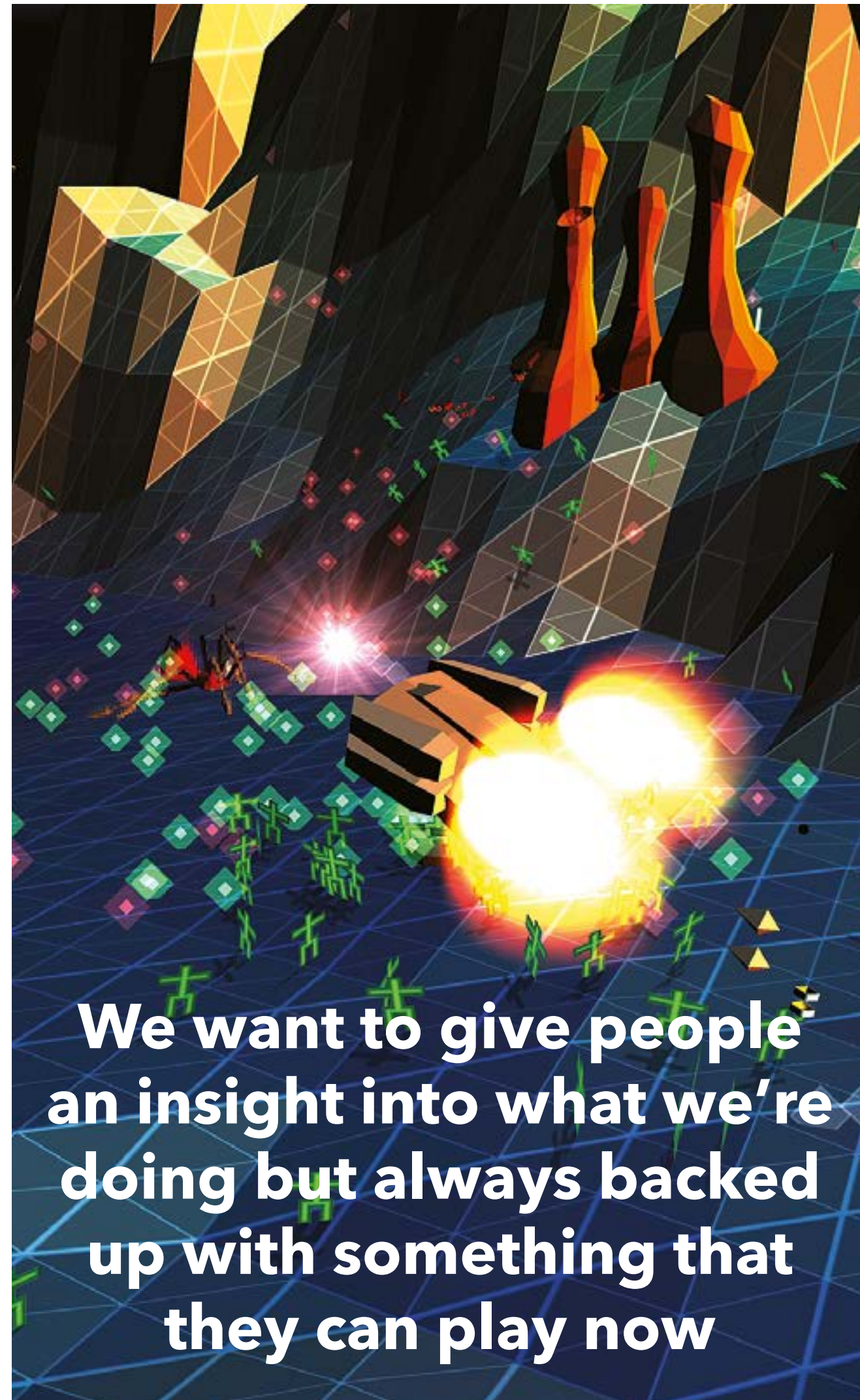
A really good example of this is the contraband screen. When you find contraband it backtracks through the contraband flow into your prison. There's a deadly fight and you have a dead prisoner on your hands. Now you need to know that one of the prisoners used a screwdriver to kill the guy and you need to understand where that screwdriver came from. Then you need to know what you can do to prevent that from happening in the future.

If you make that process too easy, then people are not interested in playing because there's no challenge to it. If you make it too hard, you'll lose players quickly because they won't understand why all this shit's going on. So a lot of the work we did was about trying to manage that.

What worked well was the alpha process, being able to drop in new systems on a monthly basis and to see whether that system worked or not. Rather than dropping the entire complexity bomb out there at once, which would have been a QA nightmare, we were able iteratively add new systems like contraband distribution via the laundry system.

We'd then look to see if we had broken the game. If not we could then move forward and layer something else in. There were some features we'd add in that would ruin the game, and then we would backtrack.

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Darwinia.

**We want to give people an insight into what we're doing but always backed up with something that they can play now**

You released Prison Architect in "early access" on Steam. The process you have described is what many in software development would call agile. Do you think you'd develop a game in that way again?

I think that it applies to some games more than others. That development methodology particularly worked for *Prison Architect* but it also had a massive impact on our ability to market the game. Chris and I made monthly update videos, and we've built an audience now that expect a monthly update from us. And we'll attempt to continue with that.

As we move onto different projects we'll see a drop off but we don't know yet how big that will be. We hope that Chris and I will be able to transition *Prison Architect* fans into core Introversion fans - fans that want to understand about game development and enjoy the banter between Chris and I in the videos. We want to give people an insight into what we're doing but always backed up with something that they can play now. It's an exciting time. ✌



# Eight Games Under Eight Minutes

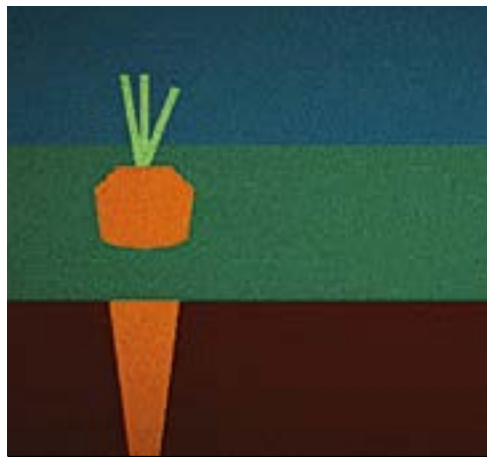
## One



*Cuckoo Curling.*  
*Grenadine*

Curling is a sport few millennials will ever have dabbled in but most will have played Connect Four. *Cuckoo Curling* combines these two games into a wacky turn-based strategic sport. Players take turns to slide their coloured discs across the screen into a grid, match four of your own colour in a row or diagonally and you win. However, unlike Connect Four, the added element of curling allows you to push your opponent's discs out of the play area. Twisting the formula even further are the two animals that will snatch up your disc whenever it falls outside the grid. This is all rendered in stylised orange and grey cel-shaded graphics. From the charming animations to its catchy music, *Cuckoo Curling* is easily worthy of a few minutes of your time.

## Two



*Carrots and Cream.*  
*Aergia*

The faint crunching of food has never been more terrifying. *Carrots and Cream* simulates gardening and food preparation, and emulates horror movies all in under five minutes. The screen softly vibrates with a filter of television static, as the player ends the short lives of a number of innocent carrots. After this culinary massacre, the tables are turned and as a worm you must escape the deathly slice of a garden shovel, only to be grated to death. Truly horrific stuff.

## Three



*Solitude.*  
*Alexandre Ignatov*

For many, our bedrooms are places of isolation, separated from the rest of the world. Increasingly, it is a space we never need to leave, with internet services providing anything at any time directly to our door. *Solitude* takes place in a single room. Notes, emails and a diary entry give you a clue to the meaning of this place and its importance. The player, an unknown and faceless character, has become a 'hermit'. By giving us only a single room to explore, Ignatov shows us how this single space has come to define a person. Try to leave and only darkness greets you.

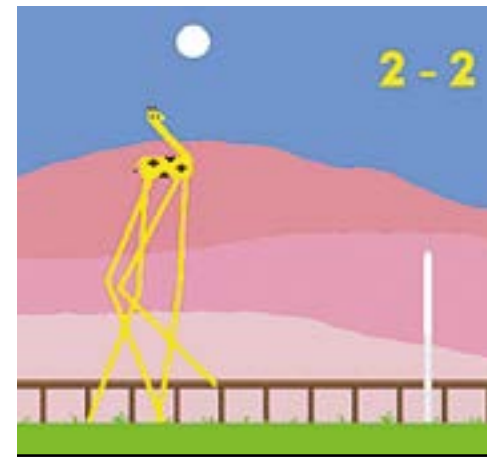
## Four



*90 Second Portraits.*  
*Tangram Games*

Great art often results when artists limit their tools and techniques but few limit the amount of time they have to produce their work. In *90 Second Portraits* you play as a speed-painter, painting the portraits of five customers – each in a minute and a half. You're given two different paint brush sizes and a bucket which can be used, with varying force, to throw paint onto the canvas. Together, these constraints force you to be creative. And your final work, displayed after serving all your customers, will look like the rushed output of a toddler on Microsoft Paint. In those 90 seconds, you have little time to reflect and really think about what you're creating. The result isn't art, it's a poorly rushed product.

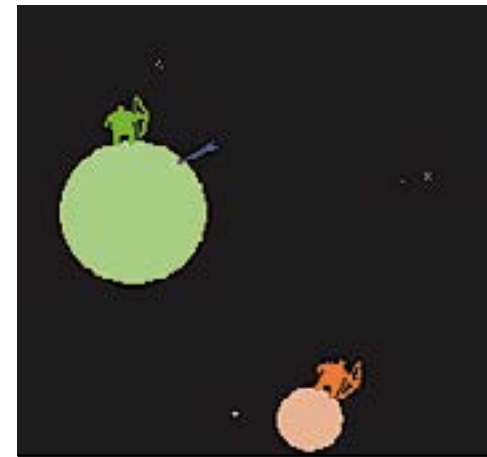
## Five



*Giraffes Volleyball*  
*Championship 2016.*  
*Sandwich Puissant*

It's an idea so obvious (and genius), I'm surprised it hasn't been done before. Giraffes with their ridiculous necks and, in this case, infinitely extendable legs are a perfect match for everyone's favourite summer sport. Awkwardly controlled arcade games are the indie scene's bread and butter, and while *Giraffes Volleyball Championship 2016* isn't quite QWOP, it's still a lot of fun. With extendable legs, you have full movement in the 2D plane which you'll have to use to beat the devastatingly difficult AI, Amazing Giraffe. This is another game best played with a friend.

## Six



*Sagittarius.*  
*George Prosser*

For years, Team 17 have churned out small variations on the Worms formula, never straying far from the iconic 2D deathmatch gameplay that has made them so successful. With *Sagittarius*, Prosser has achieved more than Team 17 have in over a dozen sequels. Like *Worms*, *Sagittarius* is turn-based with each player equipped with a bow and arrow. The similarities don't end there: gravity also plays a major role. Planets with their own gravity guide and ground the arrows that kill opponents in one shot. It's hugely satisfying lining up the perfect shot through the gravity fields of numerous planets – a feeling that is only matched by an epic ricochet in PopCap's *Peggle*.

## Seven



*Barb.*  
*Kenney*

The monochrome world inhabited by Barbara guides players through a morning routine. Bright red household objects highlight what the player must interact with next. The ordinary rituals of drinking coffee, showering, getting dressed and checking your phone are familiar to all. They become second nature, beyond our own control. They come to define us in ways we are not cognizant of. And only when we stop and change routine do we realise what we were doing. *Barb* is the embodiment of this idea. The twist that it ends on might be shocking for some but it shouldn't be. For players that don't quite get what is going on Kenny gives them a hint: "I didn't realise who I was until stopped being who I wasn't."

## Eight



*Cooldog Teaches Typing.*  
*Cooldog*

Over the years we've seen a surprising number of typing games based on franchises as wide ranging as *Pokémon* and *The House of the Dead*, yet none are as rad as *Cooldog Teaches Typing*. From the yabbering of cooldog to the warped voice of your retro computer, the sound is what makes *Cooldog* so humorous. Each time you type the wrong character on your keyboard the computer erupts with a loud squeak or boink. Underneath the comical interface and characterisation, *Cooldog* is a reasonably competent typing tutorial.

# Half-Life 2 Revisited

The tale of a scientist and his crowbar

Words by Harry Mitchell

When I was 13, for Christmas I asked for Valve's *The Orange Box*, a collection of games which are now commonplace in most gamers' Steam libraries: *Team Fortress 2*, *Portal*, and – last but not least – *Half-Life 2*. While my brother and sister played with their new festive gifts, I went straight to the family computer, put in the disk, and left it to download during Christmas lunch. And the typical Christmas evening television began, I began my journey into the dystopian world of Gordon Freeman.

*Half-Life 2* is, unsurprisingly, the successor to the 1998 game *Half-Life*, which saw Gordon Freeman, the employee of the 1970s-era Research Facility known as Black Mesa, take part in an experiment which went horribly wrong. As far as it goes, opening a hole in the fabric of space, allowing hostile beings to charge through and attack the facility, was probably the worst outcome imaginable. Dr Freeman charges his way through the facility, defending himself against threats, terrestrial and otherwise, until a mysterious figure offers him an even more mysterious job. Cut to darkness, and *Half-Life* ends.

*Half-Life 2* begins in the same way its predecessor begins: on a train. However, over the next few minutes Valve sets a scene slightly more ominous than your average South Kensington tube station. The train stops at a drab, worn down platform, guarded and controlled by mask-wearing police officers, and you soon see several of these officers attacking a civilian in an alleyway – the final evidence of the dire situation you're in. It emerges you've found yourself several years after the original *Half-Life*, where an invading force known as the Combine has taken over the planet.

It feels unnerving to start in such a hostile environment with no weapons, but soon you are equipped with many, including an ordinary crowbar, shotgun, a rocket launcher, and a zero-point energy field manipulator (fondly nicknamed the gravity gun). With these tools, you shall carve a rebellion into the face of this

dystopian world, one click at a time.

The physics engine is one of a kind. There are many puzzle-like parts earlier on in the game which highlight this, and unlike current games which possess physics gameplay that mainly facilitates fantastic and chaotic destruction, the physics engine from *Half-Life 2* is shown off as a means to solving problems throughout the game. There is a part in the sewers below City 17 where a beam lies across a big lump of concrete like a seesaw; like a caveman learning how to use tools, the player slowly works out that the breezeblocks in the surrounding area can be used to weigh down one side of the beam, to allow access to a pipe higher up in the room. The capability of this engine led to the infamous sandbox game *Garry's Mod*, which uses the physics and assets from *Half-Life 2*.

On the other hand, sometimes the physics made the combat feel slightly awkward. When you encounter an enemy they show no visible reaction or distress when attacked, and when their health is completely drained they immediately become a ragdoll at the drop of a hat. Bungie's *Halo 2* was released seven days prior to *Half-Life 2*, and another Valve game, *Counter-Strike: Source* was released eight days prior to this. In *Halo*, you can blaze your way through an army of invading hostile aliens, wielding nothing but a battle rifle on a militarized quad-bike, whereas in *Counter-Strike* you and your team must carefully prevent bombings and hostage situations using modern weaponry. Both franchises, although focusing on totally different styles of combat, are renowned for their excellent shooting mechanics. In comparison, *Half-Life*'s strengths lie in the plot and other aspects of gameplay.

I returned to *Half-Life 2* during the long summer before my first year at Imperial started. There are some great achievements in the game, specifically one which I pursued in the final episode: Little Rocket Man, which asks the player to carry a garden gnome for over half of the game, and send it off into space. Simple, right? Not so simple when you

have to drive a beaten down truck across the baron wasteland, with nothing to hold your new ceramic friend in place but a ridiculously unstable passenger seat. It took me three days to get that achievement, but it was fantastically rewarding. The second episode ends with Gordon Freeman and his partner in crime, Alyx Vance, about to head off to a research facility (or more accurately, accidentally teleported freighter) in a frozen wasteland. The epic tale concludes with Alyx's father, Eli, being attacked and mortally wounded by one of the alien overlords, his fate unknown. With this inconclusive ending, people craved a third episode which could sate their desire to put crowbar to hand, and apply crowbar to enemy. However, Valve moved onto *Left 4 Dead 2*, *Portal 2*, and many other brilliant games. While fans have found hints of *Half-Life 3* in *Dota 2* code, and suggestions of a virtual reality game, Valve have remained silent about anything involving a possible third episode.

Personally, I hope that there is no *Half-life 3*. Of course, based on Valve's track record, the gameplay would be fantastic and innovative, but that is not the point. *Half-Life 2* is a classic, one of the first games I played, so naturally there's a sense of nostalgia which I don't think a reboot could live up to. Reboots in any media format can be remarkable; *Star Wars: The Force Awakens* made one billion dollars in the first twelve days of release, the fastest movie to ever reach that that feat. This was achieved because of an army of writers, actors, fans and supporting crew understood what *Star Wars* is all about. The problem with returning to 'old' franchises is that companies change and the people working for them do to. Marc Laidlaw, the main writer of *Half-Life 2* and its expansions, no longer works for Valve; since the plot and writing were core to *Half-Life 2*'s critical success, the absence of Laidlaw could put a sequel (or reboot) on thin ice. Of course, much like *The Force Awakens*, another instalment of Gordon Freeman could be a masterpiece, but only time (and Valve) will tell. ✎

# Through a computer screen darkly



## Interpreting The Sims

Words by Fred Fyles  
Images by Indra Mallik

The fire started in the kitchen. First shooting up from the cooker, it soon spread across the wooden countertops and engulfed the refrigerator, which began to darken and burn. There wasn't much furniture in the house – the family had only just moved in after all – but there was enough. Bella, who was home at the time, saw the wisps of smoke and went running into the kitchen; upon seeing the flames she panicked, and, rooted to the spot, she could do nothing as the fire consumed her. The children came home from school to find the kitchen reduced to a pile of dust; their mother's ashes contained in a gleaming metal urn.

This is my clearest recollection of *The Sims* by far. The fires may have just been a pattern of pixels – looking at screenshots now, they

retain a subtle menace; their artificiality, their ludicrous orange hue, only heighten the intuition that they should be feared – but to 7-year-old me they seemed very real. I immediately exited the game, threw down my headphones, and did not approach it for at least a week. But I did return. I returned to *The Sims*, and to its numerous expansion packs; I returned to *The Sims 2*, released a few years later, and have vivid memories of going to a friend's for Easter lunch, only to spend the whole time playing it upstairs; and I returned to *The Sims 3*, which is still installed on my parents' computer back home.

What I am trying to say, really, is that for my entire gaming life, *The Sims* has formed an indelible backdrop. It was the first game I really played seriously, and even today, when I go back home for the holidays I may find

myself tempted to load it up, slipping back into the comforting reminders of childhood. Between then and now there have been countless hours spent on the Xbox, a fleeting fraternisation with Nintendo, and an even briefer month or two of MMORPGs, but *The Sims* occupies a special place in my heart. Originally this essay was meant to involve me revisiting my favourite childhood game, but as I read up on the origins of *The Sims*, and more of my early memories were unearthed, I began to realise just how complex the game actually is. In trying to replicate our own existence, the creators of *The Sims* actually created a great work of art; and like any great work of art, *The Sims* cries out to be analysed, deconstructed, and critiqued.

But why interrogate a game, something that



Figure 1: *The Sims* allows the player to create virtual avatars, who can represent any number of real-life individuals. Above is Bella Goth, a member of one of the premade families available to play from the start of the game.

*Sims* goes one further: where a work aims to straightforwardly reproduce life, examining the aspects of the simulacrum that make us feel uneasy can provide us with important lessons. Lived reality may provide the inspiration for *The Sims*, but *The Sims* can provide us with insights into our own existence. In the words of Frasca: “videogames could become a mirror where players could look for answers to the problems of their lives”. The fact that the MoMA included *The Sims* in the original 14 videogames acquired as part of their Architecture and Design Collection, only speaks to the importance of *The Sims* to the wider world. And this is why I believe it is important to critically interrogate *The Sims*; to interpret it, and locate it within a conceptual framework, allowing us to identify what the game is trying to say, and what we are able to hear as players.

### §

The fact that my clearest memory of *The Sims* is of a fire seems fitting, since it was a fire that provided the impetus for designer Will Wright to create the game. In 1991, a firestorm raged across the hillsides of Oakland, central California. A combination of dry, hot weather, and brisk gusts of wind – a type of weather characteristic of the area; Joan Didion wrote of it: “the wind shows us how close to the edge we are” – lead to a wildfire that destroyed an area twice the size of the City of London, before being brought under. More than three thousand homes were destroyed in the fire, among them Wright’s. At the time, Wright was a successful game designer and co-founder of the studio Maxis. His breakout game, *SimCity*, was released in 1989. A simulation game that put the player in charge of designing a metropolis, kick-started the city-building game, and was an instant success.

Following the loss of his house, Wright needed to rebuild, and this provided the inspiration for a home-design simulation game; initially titled *Doll House*, the game was a straightforward building simulation, an architect’s toolbox. Somewhere along the line, Wright realised that it would be more interesting for people to control the building’s inhabitants, and thus *The Sims* was born. Released on 4<sup>th</sup> February 2000 to rave reviews, it quickly became one of the best-selling PC game of all time, shifting a total of 11.24 million units. Expansion packs followed, such as *The Sims: Unleashed*, which introduced pets, and *The Sims: Hot Date*, which added a ‘downtown’ area to the neighbourhood. A sequel was released in 2004, then another in 2010, and the most recent iteration, *The Sims 4*, hit the shelves

three years ago – all have been resounding successes for Maxis, but none have come close to the innovation and success of the first iteration.

*The Sims* sits uneasily among the canon of videogame classics. Typically, the experience the game developer aims to provide is one that acts as a radical departure from our normal lives, from the exploration of ancient ruins in *Lara Croft*, to running and gunning in *Grand Theft Auto*. Even in the earliest games, players were thrust into improbable scenarios, whether it be the earth-defence mission of *Space Invaders*, or the hallucinatory endless labyrinths of *Pac-Man*. In sharp contrast, *The Sims* simply aims to replicate the player’s life. We are able to create little avatars of ourselves, and spend our downtime watching them live out lives similar to our owns; in a meta-twist, *The Sims 4* allows sims to play *The Sims* on their own computers. *The Sims* therefore provides us with that most mundane and complex of fantasies: real life.

The central theme of *The Sims* is work. Once your family has been created, they are provided with the arbitrary sum of 20,000 simoleons (§), the in-game currency, with which to buy a property. Presumably, the simoleon was used as a stand in for any real life currency, but given the fact that the neighbourhood consists of archetypes of American vernacular architecture set against an isometric suburbia, you’d be forgiven for merely viewing it as a pseudonym for the dollar. §20,000 isn’t much – just enough to purchase the house and furnish it with the most basic of necessities.

Upon opening ‘Buy Mode’, pausing the game and initiating catchy music, you are presented with a selection of different objects, ranging from cheap plastic flamingos and lawn chairs to modern sculptures and plush sofas. Those items that you cannot afford are visible, but covered in a forbidding red filter – like in all

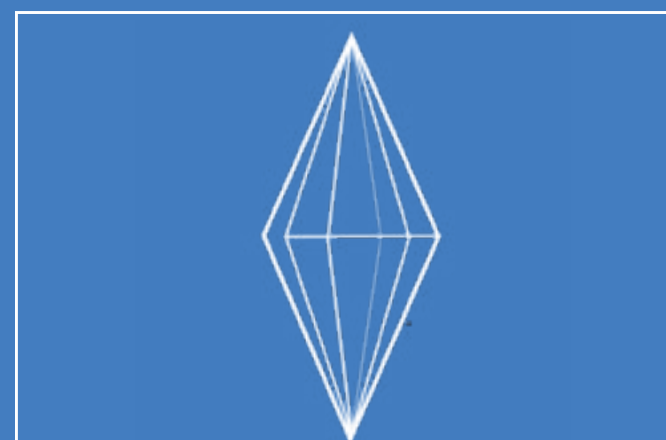


Figure 2: The “plumbob” indicates which sim you are currently controlling. Originally intended to be a placeholder before the designers created something else, it has gone down in gaming design history.



Figure 3: Players are faced with three different game options: Live, Buy, and Build. Acting as a vast catalogue, the Buy Mode shows players all the things they could purchase, once they begin to work and earn money

consumerist societies, the objects you need, or are told you need, are dangled just out of your reach. Since the cheapest objects impact negatively on your sims’ ‘Room’ mood score, and generally fail to efficiently satisfy their needs, *The Sims* forces the player to adopt an aspirational mind-set, wherein they pine for flat screen TVs and matching dining sets. Add to this the fact that utility bills continually pile up, and the player is left with no other option than to force their sims to work.

While some areas of *The Sims* are close approximations to reality, other aspects are beguiling. One such feature is the lack of weekends or time off: for your sims, every single day is a working day, and any relaxation must be done in the period between clocking off from the job and going to bed, preparing for another day of labour. The seven expansion packs to the game added in Frankenstein monsters and genies, magic spells and movie superstars, but did not include the concept of ‘retirement’. The sims must work every day of their lives, which – provided there are no accidents, are endless. A lifetime of work without end stretches out before us like a Kafkaesque nightmare. The closest comparison in the world of videogames I can think of is *Molleindustria’s Every Day The Same Dream*, a short art-house game in which you control a faceless individual navigating a grey world of repetitive work, and disenchanted by modern alienation of labour. It makes its point in a radically different way to *The Sims*, but both share a deep sense of unease.

*The Sims* itself doesn’t have victory conditions; there is no actual ‘end’ to the game, which can continue as long as the player’s attention-span allows. However, it is possible to reach the ‘end’ of a career, past which point your sim will no longer be promoted. Promotions are achieved through increases in both the number of friends a sim has, and their relevant skills – a hearts and minds approach to career development, if you will. The ‘Politics’ career path, for example, requires high levels of charisma, as well as huge numbers of friends – in *The Sims*, as in real life, it’s all a popularity contest. The result of this mechanism is to transform features of

life like friendship and knowledge, which are traditionally viewed as intrinsically valuable, into things possessing mere instrumental value. Friends are only used to secure your next promotion; knowledge is a means of increasing your sim’s labour value.

The centrality of work to *The Sims* can be seen in the etymological myth that has surrounded the company. Although untrue, many believe that ‘Maxis’ refers to 6 AM spelt backwards, a legend actively encouraged by the easter egg in *SimCity 3000* that stated “Do you know that Maxis spelled backwards is Six AM?” 6 AM is, in Western society, heavily associated with the beginning of the working day; the shrill tone of an alarm going off at such an early hour is, across a variety of media, indelibly linked to the beginning of work. In *The Sims*, it is the time that your sims will naturally wake themselves, ready to begin another day in their endless life of labour.

### §

Another key theme in *The Sims* is that of simplification, which is understandable, given the vast diversity of human life and the limited processing power of computers. Your sim’s personality is shrunk down to five main characteristics: neatness, niceness, outgoingness, playfulness, and activeness. The entire diversity of human temperament in *The Sims* is reduced to a balance, or imbalance, of these five factors. Similarly, the realm of possible knowledge is represented by 6 different ‘skills’, which can be improved by interaction with objects; for example, a sim may increase their logic skill by playing chess until the bar above their head fills up. Some have criticised this as being far too simplistic, such as Janet Murray, the seminal digital media scholar, who said that humans were far more complex than that. While undoubtedly true, one only has to look at the continuing popularity of psychometric tests, such as the Myers-Briggs classification, to see how many of us yearn to be reduced down to simpler individuals.

While *The Sims* may represent a radical departure from the goal-orientated action-based games of the 1990s, it has a number of features in common with the Role Playing Game (RPG) genre. Like RPGs, simulation games are centred around an open-ended state of play, one in which the ‘end’ is relative, and often set by the player. *The Sims* also shares with RPGs an emphasis on ‘grinding’ – an engagement in repetitive mechanical tasks in order to progress to a new level. While traditionally associated with MMORPGs, such as *World of Warcraft* and *Runescape*, *The Sims* uses the

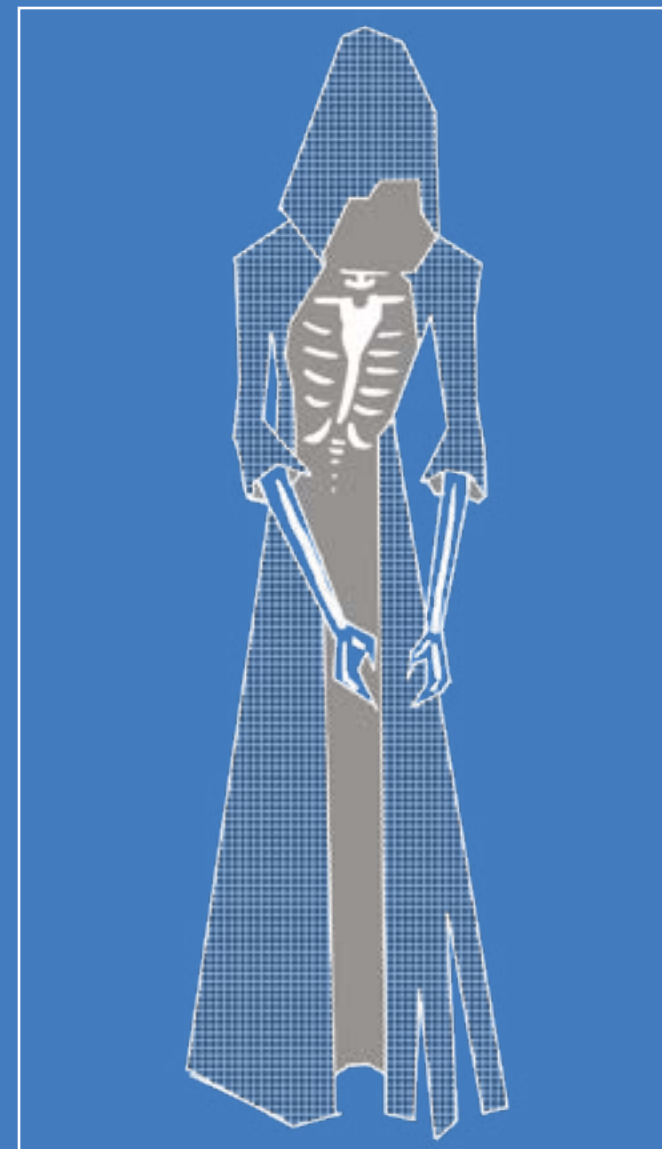


Figure 4: If your sims happen to perish, they will receive a visit from the Grim Reaper. They are given the opportunity to “cheat death” by playing *Rock-Paper-Scissors*, but if they fail they are removed from the game, leaving behind ashes in an urn, and a mourning family.

career path algorithm to encourage players to force their sims to repetitively work on their skills, in order to gain the points needed for career progression.

So far, so innocuous, but where the grinding aspect in *The Sims* becomes more questionable is in social interactions. The relationship between two different sims may be measured using the relationship bar, which spans from -100 (indicating mortal enemies) to 100 (indicating best friends); clicking on another sim will open up a number of different possible interactions, which may be friendly, romantic, or mean. In order to increase your relationship with another sim (an indirect form of ‘levelling up’, as it were), you will need to repeat particular social interactions over and over again, ensuring that your conversational partner does not get bored. In real life, telling someone seven jokes in a row will earn you a bemused look, but in *The Sims* such practice is actively encouraged. By reducing human interaction, something so nuanced, so complex, to a series of grinding tasks, *The Sims* encourages us to see relationships

as mere algorithms – kind interactions in, an increase in the number of friends out – which in turn lead to further career progression.

But not all of us play the game in such a straight-forward RPG style. Some stay true to the architectural origins of *The Sims*, and attempt to build luxurious dwellings, filled with expensive, yet tasteful, furniture. Whether or not the player chooses this method, or focuses on career progression, the end result is largely the same: a manor house filled with the trappings of wealth, and all that a sim could desire. But what then? What happens to the game once this endgame of the American dream has been reached?

For me, it is at this point that the game begins to lose interest. Where a sim family is rich enough that no object in the Buy catalogue is out of their reach, we begin to enter a sense of listless purposelessness – once we have attained all the possessions (a limit quantified by need, not by supply – in the sim-world, resources are infinite), the goal of our sims' lives is removed. *The Sims* centres itself around work, and as such seems to clearly reflect entrenched capitalism, where we can only find meaning through cycles of labour and consumption. Once our virtual avatars have attained enough wealth, we are faced with an existential crisis out of which there are two escapes: starting over, or death.

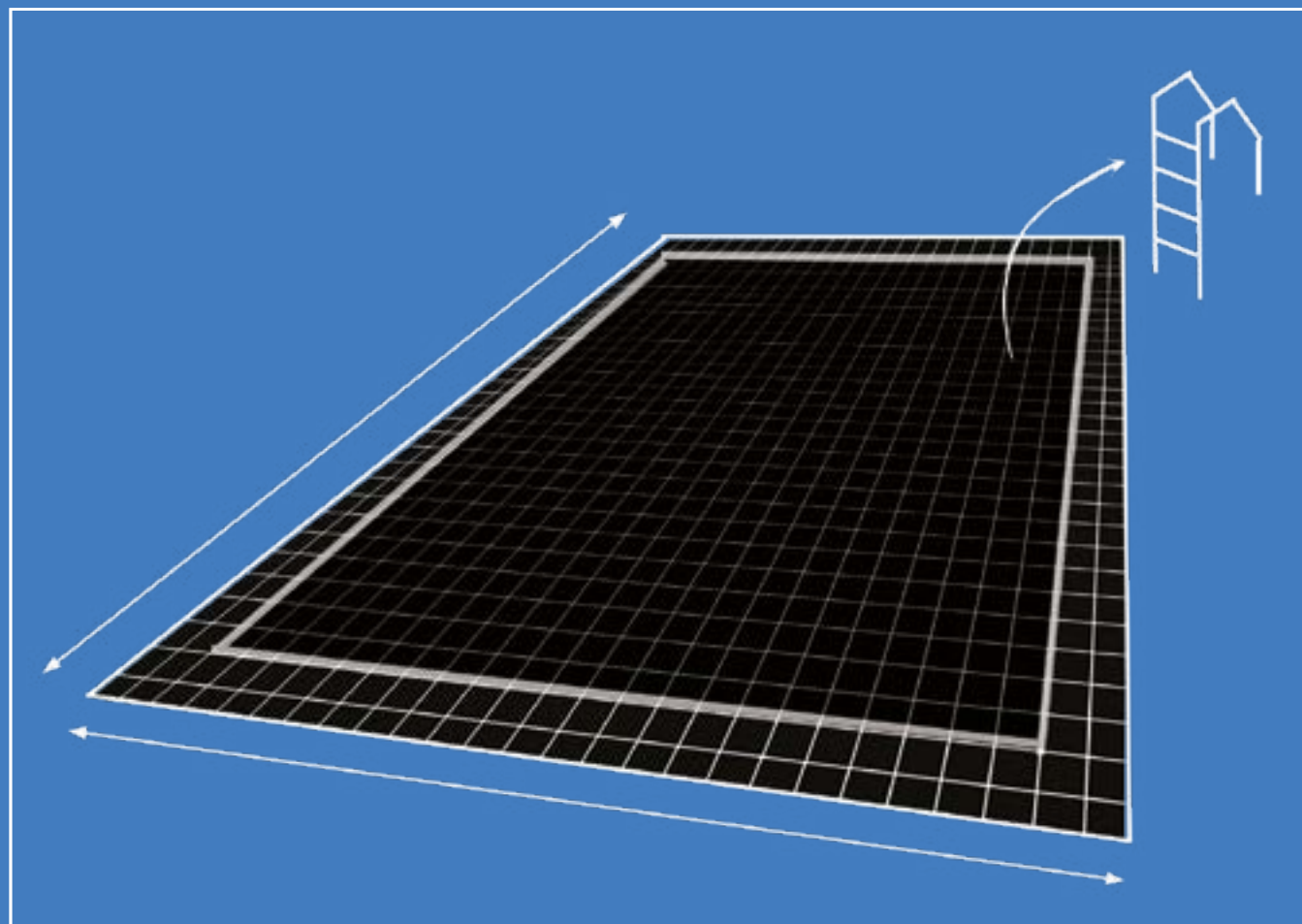


Figure 5: Alongside electrocution, immolation, and starvation, the final method of death in *The Sims* is drowning, which players typically achieve by placing their sim in a swimming pool and removing the ladder. Unable to exit the pool, your sim will instead flounder around until they tire, before sinking to the bottom of the pool. Many players have strong memories of doing such an act as soon as they had a copy of the game.

## §

The original base-game of *The Sims* provides us with only four possible deaths: electrocution, starvation, fire, and drowning. Later iterations and expansion packs added in a myriad of other creative ways for us to torture and dispose of our sims, but there is an attractive simplicity to these original four methods of death: they remind me of the points of a compass, or perhaps the four humours – fixed and exact (and exacting). Sims are not only unable to die from old age, but seem immune from the aging process altogether: child sims do not turn into adults, and – just as adults are stuck in a cycle of work – children must go to school every day (it is worth pointing out that the penalties of breaking out of this cycle are more severe for children – they will be sent off to military school, never to be seen again).

The striking result of this is to transform all instances of death in *The Sims* into a personal failing on the part of the player. While in the real world death can be seen as a chance of misfortune – blameless, although certainly not victimless; by eliminating deaths from illness, or crime, or old age, *The Sims* confers an enormous responsibility. As it says in the manual, “if they die, it is your responsibility

alone”. If your sim starves, it is because you haven’t provided them with enough food; if they burn, it is because you lacked the foresight to install fire alarms. As such, despite the fact that you can turn on ‘autonomy’ in the settings, *The Sims* embraces a form of determinism in which the ultimate decisions – those of life and death – are controlled by the player, who is raised to the status of a miniature God.

There is a deep undercurrent of unease that runs through *The Sims*, one that is reinforced by the glee with which some players torture their sims. In my instruction manual for *The Sims*, the language used tends to encourage players to experiment in making their sims’ lives as miserable as possible: it speaks of “mismanagement” of their affairs, of how you can “ruin their lives”. The internet is littered with innumerable videos of players torturing their sims in a number of ways, typically by placing them in a small room with no exit, and watching as they slowly starve. *The Sims* highlights the delight which we inflict cruelty, albeit virtual, giving credence to the Nietzschean idea of an instinct for cruelty.

So does *The Sims* – with its emphasis on endless consumption, its bland presentation of modern suburbia, its endless cycle of work and rest – represent a parody of modern capitalist culture? Wright certainly intended for it to be read as a satire of society: “If you sit there and build a big mansion that’s all full of stuff...you realise that all these objects end up sucking up all your time...and it’s actually kind of a parody of consumerism, in which at some point your stuff takes over your life” However, others disagree: Frasca writes that while *The Sims* may poke fun at consumerism, ‘since it rewards the player every time she buys new stuff, I do not think this could be considered parody’. For Frasca, the more important ideological claim made by *The Sims* is merely that life can be simulated.

While the nature of videogames, whose designers legislate algorithmic laws, make them ripe for interpretation, I believe that *The Sims* functions as neither a parody nor a tacit endorsement of consumer society. As Frasca writes, “the author does not set the meaning of a simulation, but it is rather interpreted by the player” – regardless of what Will Wright intended, once *The Sims* has been downloaded onto our computers, it takes on a life of its own. In some sense, when we play *The Sims*, there occurs a cybernetic version of Roland Barthes’ ‘death of the author’, where the programmer’s intentions do not carry over to her creation – this is a feature exacerbated by allowing the player to take screenshots and establish a ‘family album’, encouraging the player to form their own narrative.



Figure 6: In *The Sims*, it is possible to pause, fastforward, and “superspeed” the game. This reduces the mundanity of watching your sim sleep, or waiting for your sim to get back from work, but doesn’t change the fact that you’re actually just spending your free time living the lives of others. While *The Sims* may allow the player to act as a God by speeding up time, it doesn’t allow us to rewind it – when we make a mistake, the mistake is forever (unless you’ve got a save backed-up).

What *The Sims* is doing, therefore, moves past parody. It is fruitful to bear in mind the distinction expressed by post-modern theorist Frederik Jameson between parody and pastiche: while both involve a sense of mimicry, pastiche is a neutral mimicry, “without parody’s ulterior motive, without the satirical impulse, without laughter”. In this sense *The Sims* is nothing more than a mere ‘blank parody’. In its recreation of human life, *The Sims* does not express an opinion; it is emotionally blank. All it does is reflect our existence, allowing us to be the judges. Whether we read it as a parody or an endorsement of consumerism says more about ourselves than the game.

## §

My own reading of *The Sims* is that it works as a videogame version of a security blanket, shielding us from social, economic, and political worries. *The Sims* replicates real life, but with all the rough edges smoothed off, rendering it hospitable and welcoming. Consider things like racism: in a nod to diversity, the game allows you to alter the skin tone of your avatars, but these are nothing more than lines of code, and make absolutely no effect to what happens in game; even the skin colour of your sims’ offspring is decided on randomly, eliminating any ideas of race. Similarly, same-sex relationships are possible within the game, but they do not provoke any reaction from your sims’ friends and neighbours; and anything women sims can do, male ones can do too, bar getting pregnant. *The Sims*, therefore, provides us with the idealised utopia of a world that is post-gender, post-sexuality, and post-race; logging on allows us to forget that bigotry exists in the real world, even if only for a couple of hours.

As well as looking forward to this utopia, *The Sims* allows players to look back. While the buy catalogue is large enough to cover a number of different eras, the relentless optimism and endless consumption reminds me of the 1950s and 60s – that period of

American dominance, regularly referred to as a ‘simpler time’, when, with the benefit of rose-tinted glasses, all was right with the world. The game also takes us back to the specific time before the events of 9/11, and the ushering in of a terror-obsessed panoptic world. As terms like ‘war on terror’ and ‘Patriot Act’ become more and more commonplace, people in Western society began to experience a sense of unease, and the emancipatory vision of the computer as a means of social liberation disintegrated, to be replaced with NSA monitoring, ‘Big Brother’ society, and mass data surveillance. To play *The Sims* allows us to forget that politics exists – the closest *The Sims* comes to a political statement is in forcing all players to buy their homes, making society based around property, but nothing else forces the player to look at political quandaries.

When we play *The Sims*, therefore, we are soothed by this lack of economic and political turbulence. *The Sims*, while it is supposedly modelled on the world, removes anything from the world that could be provoking or challenging: the family we create does not need to worry about whether or not they will be able to get a job, they do not need to worry about Brexit, or the Middle East, or the presidential election. *The Sims* provides a pancea for our modern sense of alienation and confusion, taking us to a world before it was made difficult.

I believe that *The Sims* will continue to carry this kind of nostalgia with it, but in the coming years it will also begin to accrue another kind of appeal. In their book, *Inventing the Future*, left-wing writers Nick Srnicek and Alex Williams make the case that increasingly sophisticated technology, coupled with an increase in automation, could usher in a post-capitalist age. As the neoliberal project begins to falter, evidenced by the financial crisis and the lurch towards austerity, Srnicek and Williams put forward a new vision of the future, one in which working hours will be cut and a universal basic income implemented. Whether or not this will actually occur, their

prediction that our burgeoning technological power will undercut the need for raw labour seems to be sound, and in the future it is likely that – unless things rapidly change – we may be facing a world without work. In such a world, *The Sims* may provide us with a different kind of attraction: with its emphasis on the centrality of labour, the ease with which your sims can find and keep jobs, *The Sims* can serve as a throwback to a time when work was a reality. In *The Sims* there will be no technological revolution. There will be no post-capitalism. And so when we plug in, *The Sims* can provide us with a nostalgic look back to before the world was automated.

As we have seen, *The Sims* leaves itself open to a multitude of interpretations: the neutral isometric world of pixilated suburbia allows us to read it in any number of ways. *The Sims* may be an anti-consumerist parody of American life, a soma-esque escape from the problems of the real world, or a nostalgic amusement in a post-capitalist future. In attempting to replicate life, *The Sims*’ innate blankness holds a mirror up to our society. Astonishingly advanced for its time, and ground-breaking in the videogame world, *The Sims* provides us with much more than an opportunity to play God: it offers us the chance to take a deep look into our own human nature, and come out the other side enriched. ✎

# The History of Storytelling in Videogames

Words by Dani Hernandez Perez

Videogames tell stories – not just through their images, text and sound, but also through their interactivity. The first commercially successful videogame that began defining the medium was *Pong* in 1972. In the 40 years since we have created an industry that handles more money than the entirety of the music and film industry combined, and tells tales that are equally compelling. How did we get here? How did storytelling develop from fake ping pong paddles to crying over Aerith's death in *Final Fantasy VII* and beyond?

In the early days, games were all about mechanics: game creators did not bother with immersive plotlines. Hardware could barely run anything, constraining game design. And most arcade games were seen as technological feats of their time, with the ability to play with a machine enough of a novelty on its own. Much like the early days of cinema, the first true games displayed their mechanics through a shallow plot that could barely be regarded

as a story, much less part of a bigger 'lore'. The aim of *Space Invaders* was not to make you feel like the last line of defense against an alien invasion, and when *Jumpman* (Mario's original name) came out, all of its narrative was laid out in the accompanying manual, with very little development to the story itself playing out on-screen – not an uncommon practice at the time.

By the mid 80s, a change to the way experiences were delivered had emerged. *The Legend of Zelda* was released in 1986, introducing a save system. This opened the fourth dimension to game design, as each game session did not have to start from the beginning of the game, and was subsequently adopted by the vast majority of game genres with a few exceptions. The state of the game could be stored, stopped, and resumed. Open worlds became possible, and the concept of playing through a story was born. Instead of revealing a game through mechanics, the interaction of these mechanics with the world

**By the mid 80s a change to the way experiences were delivered had emerged**



*Space Invaders. Taito*



*The Secret of Monkey Island. LucasArts*



*The Legend of Zelda. Nintendo*

– the stages and levels – became the focus of attention, plot development, and game exposition. This also meant that a larger set of game features could be expanded upon: Link could not only slash his sword, he could spin, shoot arrows, plant bombs, and acquire new items, creating a sense of achievement and progression that previous games were severely lacking.

As time progressed, tales began to be told outside of the playable mechanics. Mirroring the success of the film industry, a whole branch of games were born. *The Secret of Monkey Island* (1990) gave a critically acclaimed start to graphic adventures. And even today, titles like *Heavy Rain* (2010) or *Until Dawn* (2015) keep refining the interactive movie scene, allowing you to step into your favourite generic American teenage horror movie. A personal favourite is the innovative 'environmental narrative': this emphasises storytelling through map layout, enemy location, item drops, music, and much more. FromSoftware, creators of the *Dark Souls* franchise, do a wonderful job of it. For example, the player can deduce a connection between a boss, and two previous bosses in the first *Dark Souls* title through the incorporation of musical motifs of the characters from the original game in the theme of the new boss.

The games that started the industry, those interested in engaging mechanics with little focus on a storyline, also evolved and improved over time. From *Tron* (1982), *Super Mario Bros* (1985), all the way to the modern age with titles such as *Skate* (2007) or *Mirror's Edge* (2008). While you might not think the latter two fall into this category, try to imagine *Tony Hawk's* without any skating mechanics, or *Portal* without, well, portals. Beautiful things happen when this method meets storytelling. The *Hotline Miami* saga (2012-2015) makes its mechanics, and how the player feels about them, a major piece of its storytelling. And *Undertale* owes part of its might to how every battle is tailored to each enemy, with personalised combat mechanics for each encounter. These tell you more about the world you're playing in, and what you're fighting for and against.

In the end, videogames differentiate themselves from other mediums because they allow players to play a story, to be part of it, to shape it to their own liking. Literature, film, performing, painting, cannot deliver this. Of course, this is not an easy task. Even when a game's story is well written and its mechanics are compelling, there may not necessarily be coherence between the two. This is known as ludonarrative dissonance: the conflict between a game's narrative and its gameplay. Take for instance the newly

**Even when a game's story is well written and its mechanics are compelling, there may not necessarily be coherence between the two**

released *Uncharted 4*: its story pivots around the idea that Nathan, the main protagonist, wants to leave his adventurous life behind, and thus ending all the maddening slaughter that has been the focus of the whole saga. Yet somehow the game manages to make you go through endless stages of cover based shooting, entirely defeating the point that the game is trying to make. In fact, if you stick around enough to kill a 1000 enemies, you will be rewarded with a trophy named 'Ludonarrative dissonance'.

**“I declared as an axiom that video games can never be Art. I still believe this, but I should never have said so. Some opinions are best kept to yourself.”**

**Roger Ebert**



# **ntz and Guildenstern are Naked**

**DramSoc presents: Rosencrantz and  
Guildenstern are Dead**

**Union Concert Hall**

**20<sup>th</sup>, 21<sup>st</sup>, 22<sup>nd</sup> June 8pm**

**Tickets £2 pp**

**Written by Tom Stoppard  
Directed by Nathan Patel**





# Royal Academy Summer Exhibition

This summer's headline event showcases the work of artistic duos



Last year's coordinator Michael Craig-Martin has his work on display. Photo Credit: Stephen White

Indira Mallik  
Arts Editor

The Summer Exhibition at the Royal Academy is a bit like Glastonbury of the arts world, if the people who went were 97% white with a mean age of sixty. Along with fixtures like Wimbledon, it heralds in the summer, bringing together established artists from all the different disciplines: printmaking, painting, sculpture, video, while offering a platform for the work of lesser known artists and amateurs through the open submission policy.

Each year, a single sculpture in the courtyard sets the tone for each exhibition, and this year the space has been given to **Ron Arad's** creation, 'Spyre'. It is a towering, rotating artist's mannequin arm that moves its joints at random. The tip of the sculpture carries a small camera that records its field of vision. The swooping images of sky, building, and exhibition-goers,

seen as though through the eyes of a bird flying, and diving through the courtyard are replayed on a giant screen that spans the entrance to the Royal Academy. It's innovative, unusual, and focuses on the process of making art, a theme that the

It's innovative, unusual and focuses on the process

exhibition inside aims to replicate.

This year, the Summer Exhibition's 247<sup>th</sup> iteration, has been coordinated by the British painter and sculptor **Richard Wilson**, who has chosen to focus the exhibition on artistic duos, **Gilbert & George**, **Tim Noble** and **Sue Webster**, and many more, who eschew the image of the

artist as someone who works alone. The collaborative effort of creating art is highlighted in the central hall which contains the glittering neon sign by Noble and Webster, and also features a fossilized petrol pump by **Allora & Calzadilla**.

Increasingly, the Summer Exhibition mutates according to the coordinator in charge. Last year, **Michael Craig-Martin** painted the walls in neon colours; pink and turquoise. This year the walls have stayed white, presumably in order to let the works shine. Whether all the works on display are shining examples of great art is up for debate. The quality of the work varies wildly from room to room, which have been broadly designated by medium. Two print rooms lead onto a space for photography, another for architecture, whilst sculpture is placed throughout the gallery and gets a rooms all of its own.

Over 1200 works have been selected for exhibition. The sheer volume means that the works are hung piled on top of each other,

several to one square foot of wall space. From a distance, this gives the gallery space a busy, vibrant feel, almost cosy. It does mean that the smaller works get lost amongst the bigger hangs, and can be easily missed.

The hang also reveals the skewed

The quality of the work is patchy, varying wildly from room to room

playing field the open submissions face. Works by the established artists are hung with more generosity, even when the work itself is lacking. This is particularly evident in the case of **Tracey Emin's** quick drawings

rendered in photogravure, a type of printmaking. These are hasty productions, fluid, but messy, wholly unexceptional. Had they been anonymised before being sent in, they would without a doubt never have been exhibited, yet they hang in pride of place. The frame is lined with tiny red dots that signify that nearly 50 people are willing to cough up over a thousand pounds to get their hands on an original Emin, regardless of quality.

That's not to say there isn't compelling, beautiful work to be found. **Norman Ackroyd's** series of monochrome prints are as eye-catching as ever, and have attracted a series of little red dots themselves. I was a particular fan of **Olwyn Bowen's** highly textured botanical paintings, as well as the minimalistic pencil drawings by the late **Ellsworth Kelly**. The **Singh Brothers'** take on the subject of the London riots in the style of illuminated medieval manuscripts is a gorgeous swirl of mustard yellows, and scarlet with a sense of humour;



Boris Johnson comes charging in from the top corner, broom in hand.

If the quality of the paintings has decreased from last year, then sculpture has fared better. Sure there's the weird; a disquietingly fluffy tarantula, a grey, very detailed sculpture of Iggy Pop. In a conscious effort to be edgier, **Michael Stokes** has created tiny, very explicit, pornographic, sculptures. They are veering on the grotesque, and deeply uncomfortable to look at, but that's beside the point. What's worse is that they seem to serve no higher purpose than to shock with its X-rated content.

This year, the exhibitors have made a conscious decision to be edgier

There are treasures to be found too. **Aono Fumiaki's** beautiful rendering of old Japanese books moulding into old vases are small, but perfectly crafted. By contrast, **Yinka Shonibare's** 'Balloon Man' is huge; a life-size, garishly dressed man with a round featureless head, trying to keep his balance on a tall white plinth as a bouquet of helium balloons tied to his waist threaten to lift him off the ground completely. Viewers of the BBC's *What Do Artists Do All Day?* will have seen

the process it took for the creation of this sculpture earlier in the year, and appreciated the small army of craftspeople it took to bring the sculpture to life from a series of sketches.

For others, it is the placement that allows the work to carry weight. **Laura Ford's** 'Silent Howler' is a bronze of a small girl sobbing into her hands. She's placed just at the edge of a doorway, head buried in her hands, looking impossibly forlorn. One could almost mistake the sculpture for a real child who's lost their parents in the bustle of the crowd.

One of the most memorable is a shipping container stands in the middle of another room. Look closer, and there are several tiny round windows to peer through. The scene inside the container is one of destruction. A tiny scaled down suspension bridge has collapsed, tiny scaled down cars are either falling into the river below, or stand abandoned at the side. Tiny, scaled down police officers survey the damage. Blue lights flash. This glimpse into a Lilliputian land is oddly transformative.

For me, the most impressive was another sculpture. **Kutluğ Ataman's** 'The Portrait of Sakıp Sabancı' hangs over gallery one like an enormous blue cloud. It is vaguely reptilian, made of ten thousand scales of LED monitors that glow and flicker to display a mass portrait of all the people that the late Turkish businessman Sakıp Sabancı encountered in his life. There are family members here, friends, colleagues; the whole population of his life. It took three years to



An installation by sibling duo Jack & Dinos Chapman. Photo Credit: Stephen White

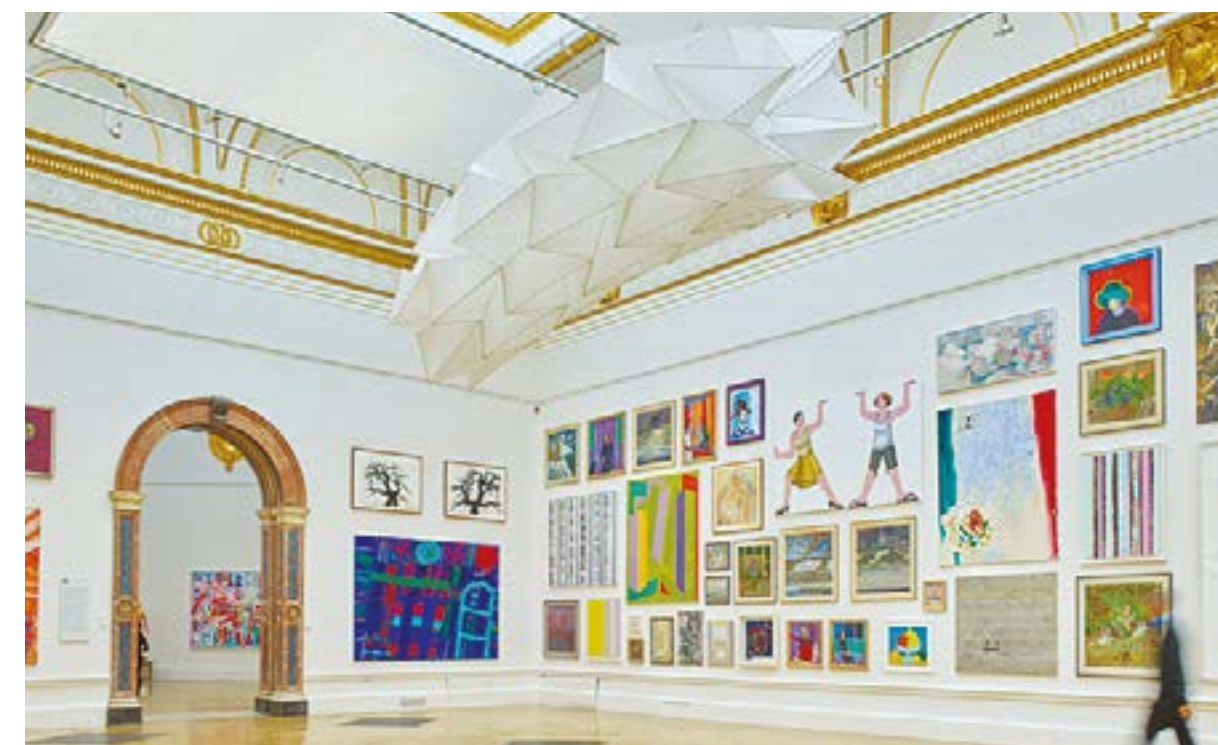
make, which in some ways seems an extraordinarily short amount of time to pull off such a feat. It showcases powerful art can be when technology and true artistic vision

come together.

It also highlights the best that the Summer Exhibition can be. The walls of the gallery in which Kutluğ Ataman's work is housed are densely

filled with work from the open submission, many of it as different as you can get the sculpture, watercolour landscapes, traditional domestic works. The Summer Exhibition skips through the different styles, and movements of art lithely, sometimes stumbling, sometimes soaring. It can be overwhelming to walk into a gallery that trying to be everything to everyone, but it generates the spirit of discovery. It allows visitors to enjoy art they wouldn't have paid to see exhibited on its own, and gives established artists freedom to explore beyond their usual techniques and subject matter. You might not find yourself enjoying everything in the Summer Exhibition, but that's the point. It's celebratory, filled with unusual work displayed in unusual ways, and always surprising. That chance of discovering something completely unexpected alone is worth the ticket price.

Until 12<sup>th</sup> August at the Royal Academy. Tickets from £12.



This years exhibition has over 1200 works on display. Photo Credit: Stephen White

The rooms skip through different styles, it can be overwhelming but generates a sense of discovery





## The Editors' picks of the past year...



### Absent

Site responsive performance is certainly something of an artistic niche. While I had occasionally come across the genre before, I had never really given the field a full and fair consideration nor was I particularly aware of any particular artist practicing it. DreamthinkSpeak's *Absent* changed that for me. Probably best described as a walk-through experience like one might find at the London Dungeon (but with none of the cheap fake blood or lack of merit), the time and effort devoted to site responsive work based in the Shoreditch Town Hall must have been truly staggering. A real revelation in what is artistically possible, *Absent* might not have been the best example of this surprising art form, but its individuality and its skill in totally enveloping the viewer left me feeling both genuinely enlightened and impressed which, given my usual cynicism, makes it my stand-out show of the past year. *MF* Photo Credit: DreamThinkSpeak

### Frank Auerbach

This sharp and biting retrospective from one of this country's most revered and wonderful artists wowed from October to March at the often underappreciated Tate Britain. With work spanning from Auerbach's early self-portraits to the landscapes from his Mornington Crescent studio, the vivid use of colour and strong textured canvasses strike home as truly unique in today's cluttered world of contemporary art. In the same class as the revered Lucian Freud and Francis Bacon, Auerbach truly is one of today's great living artists and this exhibition powerfully and convincingly justifies his legendary status. *MF* Photo Credit: Frank Auerbach



### Painting the Modern Garden

Firmly in the Impressionism wheelhouse it may have been, and staid and comfortable compared to some of the modern art exhibitions on show this year, but no less joyfully exuberant for being so. It featured the greatest hits from **Matisse, John Singer Sargent, Van Gogh**, and more, and exhibited the greatest collection of Monets I have had the pleasure of seeing. It brought the sunshine of French and Spanish gardens to a gloomy February. It was the perfect exhibition save for the actual experience of going to see it; I missed the press view and went on another day with seemingly all of London, and their uncle. Even on a Tuesday afternoon, big name exhibitions can inspire the sort of crush that Oxford Street dreams of. All of which is to remind of two important lessons: a) never pass up an exhibition of Monets, no matter how many times you've seen a reproduction, seeing the paintings up close can be an experience, and b) if you want to go see a big-time exhibition, seriously, go to the press preview with your free ticket courtesy of FELIX Arts, no need to slum it with the hoi polloi, ain't nobody got time for that. *IM* Photo Credit: Monet

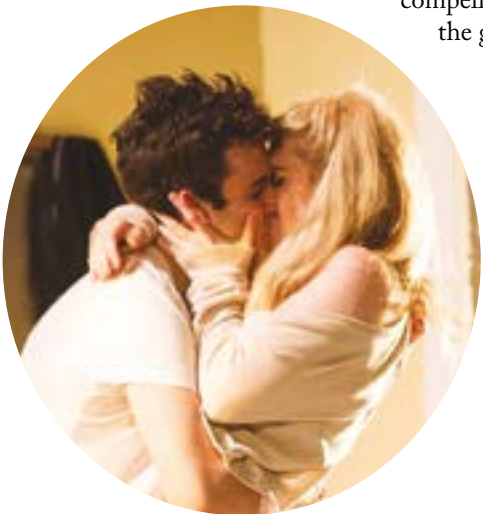
### Electronic Superhighway

This exhibition brought together 50 years of artists exploring the internet. It wove together sculpture, video, more painterly techniques, featuring everything from *Pac-Man* to internet spam karaoke. Showing the work of artists produced at the birth of the internet to artists working now, it displayed our love affair with the world wide web, exploring its evolution from the romanticism of a hyperconnected world, to the Orwellian near-dystopia of constant surveillance, dipping into the evolution of video games, and the intricacies of internet chat rooms along the way. Like the internet itself, it was by turns compelling, confusing, fun, and ever so slightly creepy all rolled into one; an exhibition worthy of one of the greatest inventions of the modern age. *IM* Photo Credit: Smithsonian American Art Museum



### The year's worst... Consensual

It is rare that any show can anger me so much that the thought of it still makes me queasy the next morning. But, as I write this article, it is only the National Youth Theatre's production of *Consensual* which has consistently infuriated and upset me on an almost weekly basis since I saw it all the way back in October. Had it been a fully professional production by a (poorly) paid cast, the anger and disappointment would have been enough already. However, as the flagship production to show off the best from the National Youth Theatre, this production both embarrasses this institution to which I had proudly called myself a member, and completely scandalises the interest and intellect of today's young people. Displaying London's youth as selfish, stupid and sex-crazed, many other publications lauded what they called a powerful and "provocative" production. However, not wanting to step on their toes, I can happily say that this must have been the singly worst show I have ever seen. *MF* Photo Credit: NYT



## ...and our picks for the summer!

### The Serpentine Pavilion

The Serpentine Gallery's Pavilion, a mere stone's throw from the South Ken campus, is perhaps one of the best places to amp up the culture factor on a sunny summer's day. It's free, it's outside (bang in the middle of Hyde Park), and it houses a caf. The Pavilion project was created to showcase the best in architecture and design, last year, was a kaleidoscope of bright colours, like stepping into a futuristic deconstructed stained glass window. This year, it's gone monochrome; the Bjarke Ingels Group has created an 'unzipped wall'. What seems like a straight tower flares out in a spiralling three dimensional space; a pyramid that's been put through spin cycle. It's built from stacked fibreglass bricks creating a structure that is surprisingly fluid and beautifully undulating. It's functional too; the Park Nights programme is housed there which will showcase a line up of musicians, writers and performance artists. *IM*

Photo Credit: Iwan Baan



### Mary Heilmann

Mary Heilmann is that rare breed; a female abstract artist. Now in her seventies, she's recently begun to find the big-time art world fame that eluded her for most of her career. In this retrospective at the Whitechapel Gallery, her first full exhibition in the UK since 2001, Heilmann brings to London the colour, and effortless cool of the American West Coast. Her work, ranging from paintings, furniture, and ceramics is based on grids, architectural shapes filled with riotous, sunny colour. Each piece is autobiographical in some way, referencing everything and anything from her grandmother's house in 1940s San Francisco, to surfing, doing acid trips, The Sex Pistols, and the mid century New Yorks arts scene. *IM*

Photo Credit: Joe Gaffney



### Shakespeare 400 Events

This marks the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary since Shakespeare's death, in celebration of his work, events have been going on throughout 2016. You may already have seen *A Midsummer's Night Dream* as staged by Doctor Who's Russell T Davies, or the *Hollow Crown*, as starring the culturally omnipresent Benedict Cumberbatch on TV. Unsurprisingly, the Globe Theatre is leading the vanguard for events in London. *A Midsummer's Night Dream*, *Macbeth*, and the *Taming of the Shrew* are all being staged in the summer. Additionally, Shakespeare's Globe will be running a series of lectures, workshops, and other educational events exploring the work of Shakespeare in greater detail. There's a great breadth of options, so if their website is well worth visiting. *IM* Photo Credit: Johan Persson



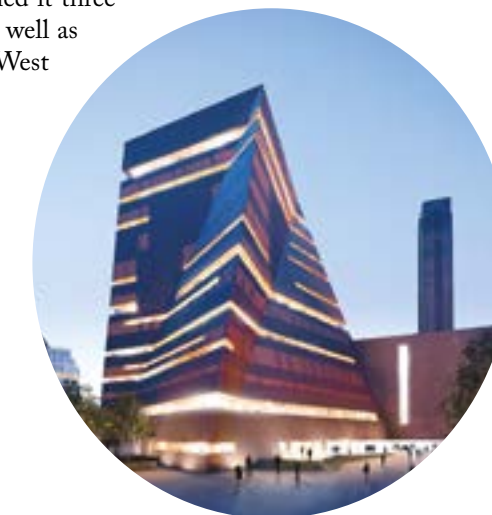
### In The Heights

Musicals may not be high art (in the case of *Hamilton*, this editor would vehemently disagree) but they are fun, and it would be hard to more fun than this. *In the Heights* is Lin Manuel Miranda's (he of *Hamilton* fame) lesser known musical, essentially based around a love story set in the Washington Heights, a rough area of New York, it's a colourful, its music an eclectic mix of salsa, soul, hip-hop and R&B. Its feel-good, punchy grooves earned it three Olivier awards earlier this year, and a Tony award for Best Score during its Broadway run. As well as being a great night out in and of itself, it's the perfect preparation for *Hamilton*'s arrival to the West End in October next year. *IM* Photo Credit: Robert Workman



### Tate Modern Extension

After 16 years at Bankside power station, the Tate Modern has become one of the leading global arts venues attracting over five million visitors in the last year and making it the world's seventh most popular museum. Having started on the original conversion with the renowned architects Herzog & de Meuron in 1995, this latest extension by the same architects has created (what I hope to be) a wonderful new space to house the vast unseen collections of the Tate. With more works in their vaults than could possibly fill their walls, this new extension gives the public a real chance to appreciate a breadth and quality of art otherwise only seen by the privileged few. While the extension's success is still to be seen, the devotion of more space to the arts can surely be nothing but a good thing. *MF* Photo Credit: Hayes Davidson and Herzog & de Meuron





# *The Deep Blue Sea* at The National

Helen McCrory thrives in this passionate revival of Rattigan's masterpiece



Dark Passions – Tom Burke and Helen McCrory in *The Deep Blue Sea*. Photo Credit: Richard Hubert Smith

Waleed El-Geresy  
Writer

This is the frustrating, and tragic tale of a woman called Hester Collyer. She is, as the title of the play suggests, stuck between a newfound lover and her husband. The play is a strange but intriguing one which explores the difficult relationship the trio shares, centred of course around Hester. The husband, a high-ranking judge, makes matters more complicated because of the stigma attached to divorce. This beautiful play was written by the renowned playwright Terence Rattigan, and has its roots in his own difficult personal experiences. Carrie Cracknell's direction is brilliant and reveals the complex emotions of Hester and those close to her, the performance is multidimensional, both in its characters, and even in its scenery.

The play is intricately subtle with

cast and direction doing it the justice it deserves. Hester is played by Helen McCrory, and her performance is, in a word, astounding. She conveys with the utmost authenticity the turbulent emotions of a troubled

## A cacophony of self-hatred, depression and elation

mind, a cacophony of self-hatred, depression and elation, all fuelled by the hot rage of a full on mental war between logic and love. Hester Collyer comes across as a strong woman, but within lies a weak helplessness in the face of this choice. Helen McCrory's portrayal is exquisitely transparent; the audience knows and empathises with exactly what Hester is going

through. Her interaction with the other characters, especially the two men in her life, are realistic and, more importantly, revealing.

Sir William Collyer, Hester's husband, is portrayed by Peter Sullivan as a stalwart man who holds his standing in society in the utmost regard, he seems formal with Hester, and oddly seems to regard her relationship with her lover, Freddie Page, very much as a matter of fact rather than something to be resented. However, there are times when deeper feelings do manage to penetrate his upright exterior. In sharp contrast Mr Page, played by Tom Burke, comes across as erratic, possibly due to his personal troubles working as an RAF test pilot. Collyer's relationship with her lover is passionate at times, and there are sporadic bouts of longing, lusty desire. However, these are often restrained by the shackles of the past, and of the sticky situation that incarcerates them.

Another interesting character is

Mr Miller, a doctor struck-off for mysterious reasons, who seems to share a lot more in common with Hester than might first appear. Nick Fletcher manages to play the

## Clever splashes of black humour make the show a delight

part perfectly; soberly at times, and yet exposes Mr Miller's more sophisticated make-up in a heated one-on-one confrontation with Hester later on.

The show contains dark themes throughout. Despite this, characters such as Mr Welch (Hubert Burton), a middle-class husband, and Mrs Elton (Marion Bailey), an overly-

talkative landlady are almost inappropriately funny at times. Even the more restrained characters such as Mr Miller had the audience laughing out loud when, in response to being asked why Hester might have tried to commit suicide, he states sarcastically that "she wanted to die, I suppose". These clever splashes of black humour make the show a delight to watch.

It is also not only the characters who are multidimensional. The scenery is creatively constructed consisting of multiple different rooms, where simultaneous events take place through smoky blue screens, giving a sense of multiple goings-on without ever being distracting. I thought this was a great addition to the play helping to add realism and possibly representing a physical manifestation of Hester's own isolation, as indistinct shadows moved about outside of her lonely abode.

*Until September 21<sup>st</sup> at  
The National's Lyttelton Theatre*

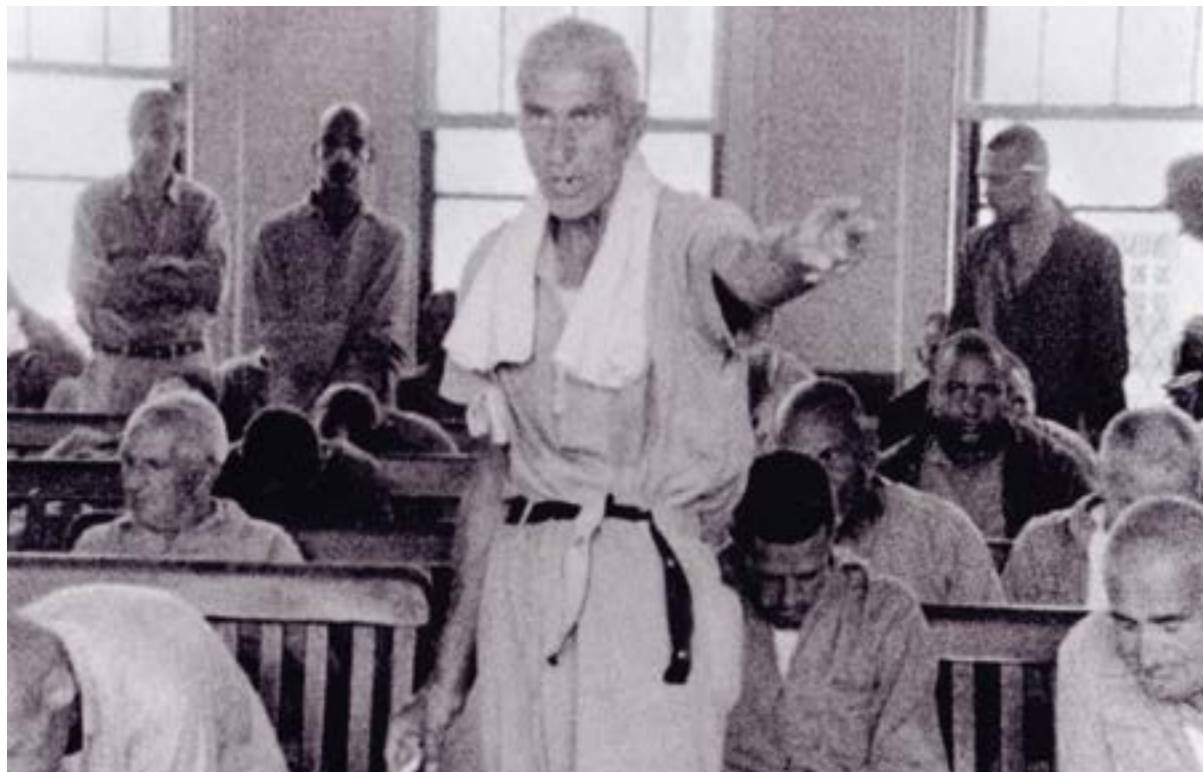


## Documentary corner: *Titicut Follies*

Fred Fyles  
Film Writer

It seems fitting that Documentary Corner should end with a beginning. *Titicut Follies* is the first film from director Frederick Wiseman, a giant in the documentary world, who stormed into the Bridgewater State Hospital for the criminally insane in 1966, armed only with a camera and a whole lot of chutzpah. Over the course of 84 minutes, Wiseman exposes the goings on in the hospital, from the mundane to the horrific: we see prisoners being force-fed, stripped, and relentlessly taunted by the guards, who are on the whole indifferent to their charges' well-being.

In one horrific scene, we follow a man back from a shave, who is mercilessly mocked by the guards, until he begins to scream at them in a rage; once back to his cell, he enters into some kind of trance, and paces around the room, stamping down his heels. Cameraman John Marshall, previously known for his ethnographic work, takes all this in impassively and relentlessly. The film takes its name from the in-hospital talent show, scenes from which bookend the film, and are the stuff of Lynchian nightmare. As the lines between inmate and guard blur, it becomes more and more difficult to



*Titicut Follies* takes an unflinching look at mental health in America. Photo Credit: Zipporah Films

distinguish between individuals, the whole scene spinning out of control like some kind of vision of hell.

What is astonishing about *Titicut Follies* is that it set a pattern for Wiseman that he has not yet deviated from. Over a career spanning five decades, he has stuck to his signature style: lengthy shots, no voice-over, no interviews, and no explanation. While his films may have gotten longer, he has doggedly

remained faithful to these principles, resulting in over 40 arresting works, a large number of which focus on single institutions: 1995's *Ballet*, which looked at the American Ballet Theatre; 1987's *Missile*, which investigated the training courses for ICBM operators; and 1975's *Welfare*, which took place in a single welfare office.

Through his work, Wiseman reveals himself as one of the world's

best editors. Eschewing any notion of objectivity in cinema, Wiseman admits that all film will be biased: 'the editing,' he says, 'is highly manipulative'. Often ending up with at least a hundred hours of footage, he will go through it, picking out the best sections, and cutting it down to a taut narrative (that usually runs over several hours).

In *Titicut Follies*, Wiseman forces us to ask the question of what

the ethical limits of documentary filmmaking are. He holds the camera still for as long as he possibly can, and then even further, breaking down the lines between observation and voyeurism. The ethics is complicated by the fact that he only received consent forms from the guards, and not from the prisoners, many of whom were not competent.

Just before its release in 1967, the government attempted to ban the film, and in 1968 they succeeded, making it the first film to be banned for reasons other than obscenity and national security. In 1987 inmates' families sued the prison after a number of fatalities, and the prosecution team argued that releasing *Titicut Follies* in 1967 would have led to reform.

In many ways, Wiseman reminds me of Diane Arbus, whose photographs forced the viewer to look at something they would normally shy away from. 'A lot of people,' Arbus wrote, 'they want to be paid that much attention. And that's a reasonable kind of attention to be paid.'

Originally trained as a lawyer, Wiseman's films stand up for their subjects, providing individuals with the means to represent themselves; in *Titicut Follies* he attempts to shine a light in one of society's darkest corners, leaving us all enriched.

## Editorial: Thanks y'all

And so, we've come to the end, just as every brilliant film must do. My year as Film Editor has provided me with the extreme privilege of seeing first-hand some of the amazing, insightful writing we students are capable of. Over the last 28 issues, we've had numerous contributors, who have all produced absolutely incredible work. In no particular order, I would like to thank our writers: Tom Stephens, Ben Collier, Meryl Anil, Thomas Carroll, Diego Aparicio, Alex Heib, Cale Tilford, Arnold Duralliu, Max Lewis-Clarke, Ioanna Morianou, Jonathan Masters, and Diogo Miguel Geraldés – you guys have all made my job worth-while, and I



Me, right now, thinking about all you guys. Photo Credit: Orlando PR

thank you from the bottom of my chilly celluloid heart.

Over the last year we've reviewed 85 films (really, I've counted!), from

the incredible (*Carol*, *The Witch*, *Youth*, and *Anomalisa* are all worth a mention) to the awful (here's looking at you Gaspar Noé). A common topic in film journalism is whether or not we are currently experiencing a 'golden age' of cinema; I would just like to say that there are so many amazing films being made right now – from shorts to features, from dramedy to documentary, from the UK to the Philippines – that there has never been a better time to be a lover of film. In a city like London, with the BFI and ICA right on your doorstep, there is no excuse for not getting involved.

This is the last piece I will be writing in this year's FELIX, but we will be returning, inevitably, in

the new academic year (although we will be losing our amazeballs Editor-In-Chief Grace Rahman, who is moving on to join the Press Association and the wild world of professional journalism). And, we will be looking for a couple of new Film Editors to join the team! As well as getting to work alongside a great team of writers, copyeditors, and section editors, you will get the opportunity to go along to press screenings, drink some of that free wine, and develop your love of film. If you're interested, or you've got any questions at all, then please send along an email to [film.felix@imperial.ac.uk](mailto:film.felix@imperial.ac.uk) – we're waiting to hear from you.

**FRED FYLES**



# Embracing the depths of humanity

*Embrace of the Serpent* is a hallucinatory journey into the psyche of the Amazon

## Embrace of the Serpent



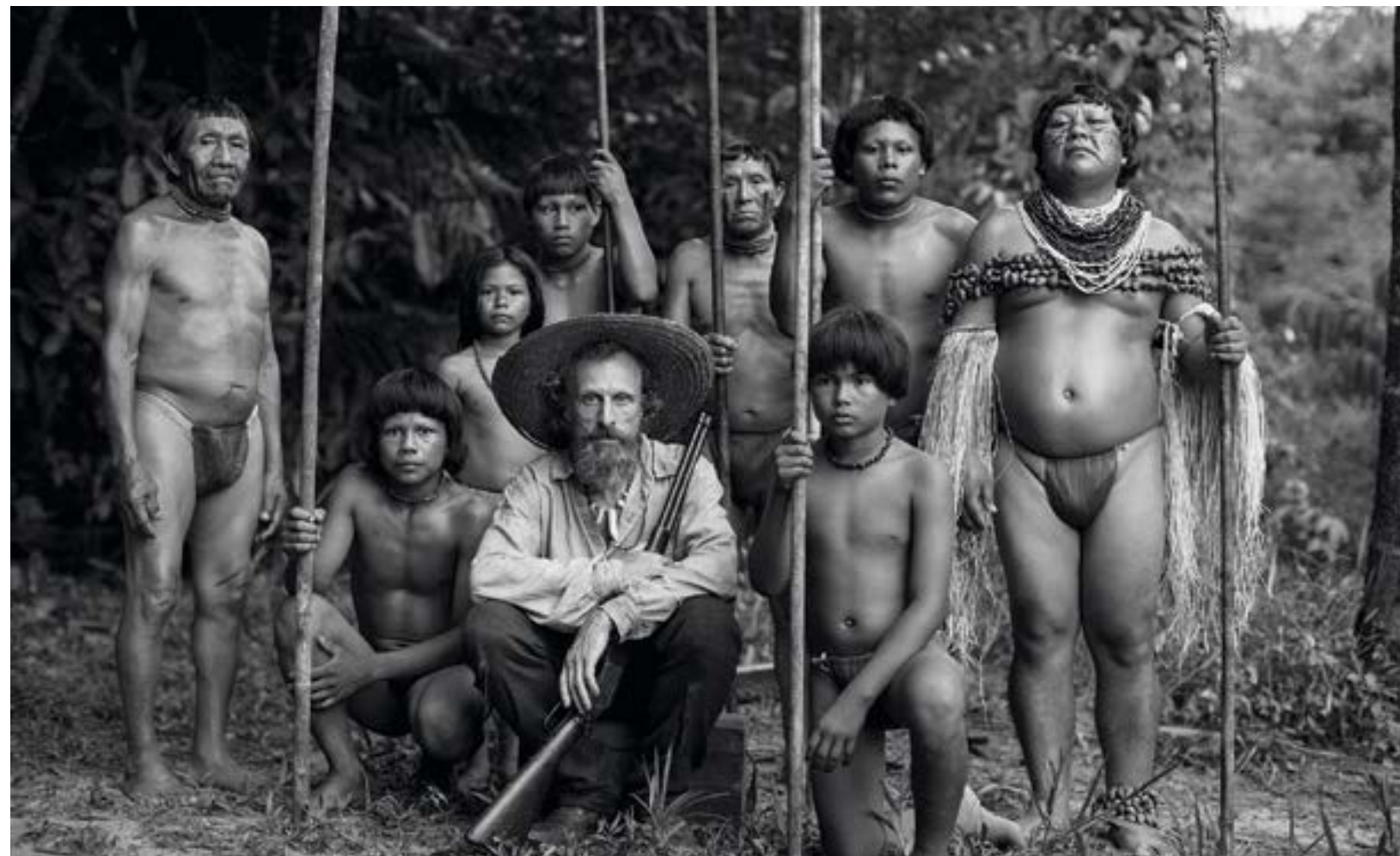
★★★★★

*Dir:* *Ciro Guerra. Script:* *Ciro Guerra, Jacques Toulemonde Vidal. Starring:* *Nilbio Torres, Jan Bijvoet, Antonio Bolivar, Brionne Davis. 125 minutes.*

Fred Fyles  
Film Editor

Much like the braying politicians slugging it out over the Brexit debate currently raging, many films currently being released can be divided into two distinct camps: there are those that exploit the inherently visual nature of cinema, to create works that are visually astonishing, while perhaps lacking in terms of plot and pacing – call them ‘team look’. And there are those that craft an engaging narrative, chock full of delicious, naturalistic dialogue (or not. Looking at you, Sorkin!) and a plot that grabs the viewer, but an absence of aesthetic flourish – call them ‘team plot’. But there are those rare films that manage to combine both worlds, resulting in a finished product that speaks to the viewer on a number of different levels: visually, culturally, intellectually, and personally. *Embrace of the Serpent* is such a film.

Loosely based around the journals of German ethnologist Theodor Koch-Grünberg and American ethnobotanist Richard Evans Schultes, *Embrace of the Serpent* sees the intertwining of two plotlines: in 1909, Theo (Jan Bijvoet) is terminally ill, and is combing the Amazon rainforest to try and find the yakruna, a sacred plant that will cure him; in 1940, Evan (Brionne Davis) is researching plants in the same area, and also trying to find the yakruna, which possesses both hallucinogenic properties, and the ability to increase the output of rubber trees on which it is grown. Their stories are connected by Karamakate, a mystic shaman, and the last of his tribe, who guides both men through the forest. Just as the Westerners are searching for their plant, Karamakate is also searching



*Embrace of the Serpent* offers up a visual, intellectual, and metaphysical feast. Photo Credit: Alamy

– initially for members of his tribe, but later on for mere memories of them. The themes of memory and rebirth feature heavily in the film, as the main principles cycle around each other, tracing and retracing familiar paths.

The fact that the actor playing the older Karamakate, Antonio Bolivar Salvador, is himself one of the last of the Ocaina people only adds emotional heft to what is already an incredibly charged film. *Embrace of the Serpent* looks at the devastation Western colonialism can wrought on an area: the repeated references to the rubber farms, the slaves tortured by plantation owners, the brutality of the leaders of the Christian missions, the hysteria induced by mystic cults, which rushed in to fill the gap left by the destruction of the indigenous religious. It all speaks to the vast, indelible legacy left behind by colonialism, which Frantz Fanon incisively referred to as ‘germs of rot’, infecting both the minds of the people and the very land itself.

The land, the particular nuances and idiosyncrasies of the Amazon basin, form another key player in

the film. Its title is taken from an Amazonian myth, which states that ancestral beings were brought to Earth on a giant anaconda, and went into the Amazon to teach humans how to live in harmony with nature; the body of the anaconda became the Amazon river, whose torturous paths cradle

*Embrace of the Serpent* raises questions about the politics of power

indigenous communities. The two stories take place more than three decades apart, but all that has really changed is reflected in the jungle’s human inhabitants; we can see the passing of time in the lines on Karamakate’s face, and the decay wrought on the Christian mission’s buildings, but the jungle remains the same, unaffected by age, isolated from regular temporal progression.

*Embrace of the Serpent* raises questions, therefore, not only of the politics of power, and Western colonisation, but also metaphysical ones on the nature of reality – the heavy emphasis on the centrality of hallucinogenic plants to indigenous culture is a reflection of a different train of philosophical thought, one that embraces the phenomenologist emphasis on consciousness and appearance.

The film’s director *Ciro Guerra* (astonishingly, *Embrace of the Serpent* is only his third full feature film) handles such narrative complexities with extreme grace, and simultaneously manages to craft one of the most visually astonishing films in recent memory. Nearly the

entire film is shot in a brilliantly crisp black and white, which reflects the anthropological photographs taken by explorers during the era, several of which appear during the film’s credits.

In many ways, the closest comparison the film evokes for me is the work of Sebastião Salgado, the Brazilian photographer whose work is a reflection on the epic and the sublime power both of nature and of humanity. Cinematography *David Gallego*, who like *Guerra*, only has a handful of credits to his name, has rendered the Amazon in exacting style, and the result is a masterwork of visual force.

*Embrace of the Serpent* is that rare beast: a film that manages to exploit the formidable ability the camera has to tell a story and raise questions, while still managing to be a wholly beautiful work. *Guerra* takes us on a hallucinatory journey into the deepest part of the jungle, forcing us to confront the very nature of power and humanity. *Embrace of the Serpent* is a film that leaves us humbled, nourished, and sublimely, wonderfully, wholly enriched.



## When Marnie Was There



★★★★★

*Dir:* *Hiromasa Yonebayashi. Script:* *Masashi Ando, Keiko Niwa. Starring:* *Sara Takatsuki, Kasumi Arimura, Hana Sugisaki, Hitomi Kuroki. 103 minutes.*

While Studio Ghibli have gifted us with numerous adaptations of children’s tales, they have clearly never come across *The Boy Who Cried Wolf*. For the last few years, every announcement of a new film comes with a warning that this may be their last. While the creative heart of the company, *Hayao Miyazaki* announced his retirement in 2013, he is still working to create short films, and – after all – he said exactly the same thing in 1997. And so the news that their latest, *When Marnie Was There*, is to be their last film for the foreseeable future, does not fill me with dread; or maybe it’s just wishful thinking, optimistically keeping the truth at bay, for – most can agree – that Studio Ghibli have made some of the most technically impressive, emotionally complex animated films of the last half-century.

Based on the novel by *Joan G. Robinson*, the film concerns *Anna*, a young asthmatic girl who is sent from *Sapporo* to the rural seaside town of *Kushiro* for her health; as well as her breathing, *Anna* is suffering from some kind of

psychological strain, linked to the difficult relationship she has with her well-meaning foster parents. With a talent for drawing, *Anna* simply wants to be left alone, eschewing the company of local children in order to sit for innumerable hours looking across the salt marsh at the abandoned mansion, overgrown with gothic sentiment.

Rowing across to the mansion one night at high tide, she meets *Marnie*, a young girl of the old-time-Europe variety (golden curls, bright blue eyes, pretty ruffled dresses), with whom she immediately makes friends. What follows is an exploration of the role of memories and the imagination: is *Marnie* a real person? Or just a figment of a lonely child’s imagination? These themes, along with the strong indication that *Anna* has some kind of anxiety/depressive disorder, makes this heavy-hitting stuff – the idea of exploring the mansion of her imagination makes me think of a child-friendly remake of *Jacques Rivette’s* masterpiece, *Celine and Julie go Boating* – but it is a pity that director *Hiromasa Yonebayashi* doesn’t follow up this initial promise. Instead all the loose ends of *When Marnie Was There* are tied up very neatly, with a near-implausible family revelation discovered at the end of the film. While naturally constrained by the source material’s plot, it would have been fantastic if they could have held onto the eerie, unsettling atmosphere that made the first half so captivating.

FRED FYLES



*When Marnie Was There*, apparently the ‘last’ of the Studio Ghibli films. Photo Credit: Studio Ghibli



*Michael Moore* takes to the seas, raiding Europe for his latest documentary work. Photo Credit: Dog Eat Dog Films

## Where to Invade Next?



★★★★★

*Dir:* *Michael Moore. Script:* *Michael Moore. Starring:* *Michael Moore, Borut Pahor, Vigdís Finnbogadóttir, Krista Kiuru. 120 minutes.*

*Michael Moore* is back. After an absence of seven years, the agent provocateur of American documentary filmmaking returns to our cinemas with his

latest, *Where to Invade Next?*, a light-hearted look at the benefits of European-style socialism, which *Moore* hopes to import as a solution for the problems in his home country.

In a modernised version of the ‘Grand Tour’, *Moore* zips through Europe, looking at the particular aspects each country excels in: from France he takes the idea of nutritious school meals; from Iceland the emphasis on women in roles of power; from Norway the rehabilitation-focussed prison system, and so on. Along the way he briefly mentions the difficulties facing America, with a montage of footage that runs from the Korean War, all the way up to *Eric Garner’s* last moments.

He also gives statistics that – to UK ears – sound horrific, such as the fact that systematic electoral manipulation means that in states like Florida, up to one in three black men cannot vote. Those watching in Europe may feel smug, but they cannot escape culpability: at one point, *Moore* lists the companies that use American prison workers – including *Microsoft* and *Delta Airlines*. We are all Americans now; none of us can take the moral high-ground.

*Moore* concludes the film with the bombastic claim that – surprise, surprise – all these things are actually American ideas. While the truth of this statement is certainly debatable (despite the fact that women marched in support of the

Equal Rights Amendment several years before the election of *Iceland’s* *Vigdís Finnbogadóttir*, I don’t think America can lay claim to the totality of the idea of women’s rights), it serves to highlight *Moore’s* willingness to clearly display his ideological heart on his sleeve. This is a feature of *Moore* that is both frustrating and endearing – particularly when you consider that much of *Moore’s* work is borne from deep-seated frustration at the current American administration, and a desire to better the lot of society’s most marginalised individuals.

Ending the film like this, however, simply begs the question: just where did America go wrong? And unfortunately for *Moore*, this is a much more interesting question than the one he is asking. *Moore* works much better when he looks to his home turf, such as in his exemplary *Bowling for Columbine* and *Fahrenheit 9/11*. In some ways, *Where to Invade Next?* resembles his 2007 film *Sicko*, which saw him look at European models of socialised healthcare: both films carry with them a certain cherry-picking sensibility, where Europe is made out to be some kind of paradise. *Where to Invade Next?* works best as a breezy examination of European sensibilities, but eschews any deeper look at the problems of power structures on both sides of the Atlantic, and does not seem to add anything new to the conversation.

FRED FYLES



# This week on *Game of Thrones*

It's season six, episode eight!



This just says "Army pls?" then a load of emojis. Photo Credit: HBO

Harry Wilkinson  
Writer

We're coming up to the final episodes of the second to last season of this show and they apparently still have the time to meander around for an episode with nothing particularly interesting happening. Ah well, here's a recap anyway.

We open with Lady Crane giving her monologue as Cersei at Joff's death again, but we can see that she took Arya's advice to bring anger to the scene. As she leaves the stage she finds Arya, stabbed and bleeding, in her bed asking for help. Bit of a turnaround there. Two days ago Arya decided to not murder her at the last minute then now she's begging for medical help? Arya has a quick chat about her career aspirations before getting drugged up.

Next up, we have a few guys sitting around in a forest, fingering each other. I love a bit of bromance. The Hound marches in and puts a stop to that with some axework and commits the definition of adding insult to injury "You're shit at dying, you know that?". Later he runs into the guys that actually killed his mates about to be executed by the Brotherhood without Banners (They are really liking the throwbacks this season aren't they?) and Beric and Thoros allow him to kick them off their hanging blocks.

Next up, we have a few guys sitting around in a forest, fingering each other



The Backstreet Boys reunion tour didn't go as well as hoped. Photo Credit: HBO

she tries to return Jaime's sword to him but he declines. When they get down to business (not like that) she reveals her plan to get Blackfish and the Tully army back up North, Jaime's just like 'Look you can try if you like but that plan is awful'. I'm inclined to agree with that one. Just a little bit more sexual tension between the two before she heads into the castle to talk to Blackfish. He explains to her that he's not going to abandon his ancestral home to travel all the way North to die for his great-niece that he barely knows. Honestly, you could've predicted that response Brienne.

Back in Meereen Tyrion's using peer pressure to get his friends to drink. Initially they refuse but he tells enough bad jokes that they decide that they definitely are going to need to get drunk for this. Grey Worm goes for a bit of banter too but his is so bad that the Wise Master's begin bombarding the whole city (ShitLAD). He freaks out at Tyrion's poor negotiating skills then Dany storms into the palace like a BAMEF.

Back to Riverrun and Jaime's chatting with Edmure Tully, first offering him a nice life in a castle before dropping the 'I will murder your baby because I want to fuck my sister' bombshell. Edmure complies. As soon as he lets himself back into his castle he tells them all to bitch out of the fight so he can see his fit wife. Brienne escapes in a boat but the Blackfish decides that he might

as well die now in a blaze of glory. Sadly, the show didn't have the budget for that swordfight so we get the news when some random soldier tells Jaime he died. We then get more sexual tension in the form of an awkward boat wave.

We finish up the episode with Arya's surrogate mother being murdered followed by the Waif chasing down Arya like the bloody Terminator, this ends poorly for the Waif. Arya then displays her face as a trophy for Jaqen, like when a cat kills a bird then drags its corpse into your house. Honestly, this is probably the weakest episode of the season. There was a lot of wasted time which you wouldn't expect so close to the end of the season, particularly the Tyrion scenes could have had much more purpose to them. Oh well, next week we have The Battle of the Bastards, that much be where the swordfighting budget from this episode went.

*Game of Thrones* is available on Sky Atlantic and Sky Go

Probably the weakest episode of the season



# Your summer of binge watching

Eight shows to help you burn through time rather than yourself

Anurag Deshpande  
Writer

Summer's here, which means actual free time again without the constant spectre of revision hanging over your head. You might be wondering just what to do with it all. Well, there's always the classic fall-back; say 'screw it' and watch some TV. Here's a list of eight great shows to help you do just that.

*Happyish* is a show to check out if you're a fan of existential satire and/or Steve Coogan. In it, Coogan stars as middle-aged man working

at an advertising agency as he trudges through his mid-life crisis and deals with the ennui of modern life. Featuring frequent jaunts into the surreal and wonderfully dark comedy; this short but consistently funny show definitely bears a watch.

*Downton Abbey* was once described to me as 'EastEnders for the petty bourgeois'. Looking past the generous serving of douchebaggery in that sentence, it's not an inaccurate assessment. We follow the lives of the Earl of Grantham's family and servants on the cusp of the 20<sup>th</sup> century; exploring the effect that rapid societal change has on their lives. Always expertly acted, and consistently engaging; the series is a must watch for anyone who enjoys dramas or historical pieces.

*Unbreakable Kimmy Schmidt* springs forth from the mind of Tina Fey and *30 Rock* producer Robert Carlock, *Unbreakable* maintains its predecessor's offbeat and unique flavour of humour. The show tracks the journey and struggle of Kimmy Schmidt to fit into modern day New York, after having been kidnapped and locked in a bunker for 15 years. This seemingly heavy set-up is handled deftly, and much of the comedy stems from Kimmy's interactions with a colourful, yet still believable, supporting cast. If you liked *30 Rock*, or are a fan of Wes Anderson films, you'll like this.



It's not a drinking problem if you never stop long enough to get hungover. Photo Credit: Floyd County/FX Networks for EW

*11.22.63* has a pedigree that is immediately evident in the names attached to it; the series is based on a Stephen King novel and stars James Franco in the leading role. It centres on a disenfranchised school teacher, who discovers a time-portal to 1960 in the back of a diner, and is persuaded to try and stop the Kennedy assassination. He quickly discovers, however, that the web of conspiracy is more intricate than he is prepared for. And then there's the small matter that time itself does not want to be changed.

*Archer* can just about be summed up with the phrase 'James Bond as an ultra-alcoholic lovable asshole'.

A superbly animated parody of the spy genre; the series chronicles the misadventures of 'the world's most dangerous spy', the titular Sterling Archer. Featuring a stellar supporting cast in the form of his co-workers at spy agency ISIS (2009 was a more innocent time); the show could also easily be described as an office-comedy a la, well, *The Office*. There are excellent action sequences and consistently funny comedy that has reached meme levels. Starring the inimitable H. Jon Benjamin, this seven season behemoth cannot be recommended enough.

*Batman: The Animated Series*, is perhaps the perfect distillation of the Dark Knight in any medium. This show is recommended for fans and newcomers alike. It manages to be dark, poetic, heartfelt, and hopeful all at once; capturing all the angles of The Batman, and

showing just why it is he endures in the public imagination. The series also contains character defining portrayals of Batman and the Joker, from Kevin Conroy and Mark Hamill (yes, Luke Skywalker). If Batman v. Superman left a bad taste in your mouth that you'd like to wash out, or if you're just wondering what the big deal is with this Bat-guy, this is the one to watch.

*Psych* is one of those 'special detective' shows, where the lead character is able to solve any crime by the power of being amazing. Thankfully, it doesn't take its premise seriously and has lots of fun with it. Shawn Spencer is the son of a police officer, and a brilliant detective in his own right, who doesn't much care for the commitment or discipline of the force. So he pretends to be a psychic detective who subcontract on cases. Much of the humour comes from the excellent banter between characters, and the show features one of the greatest bromances in TV history.

*True Detective*, as its name implies, is an anthology show, with each series chronicling a different group of individuals dealing with crime. Hauntingly atmospheric, frequently poetic, and always enthralling; the show is a must watch for mystery buffs. The first season is sublime, with powerhouse performances from Mathew McCaughey and Woody Harrelson. But be careful; just do yourself a favour and avoid the second season.

It manages to be dark, poetic, heartfelt, and hopeful all at once

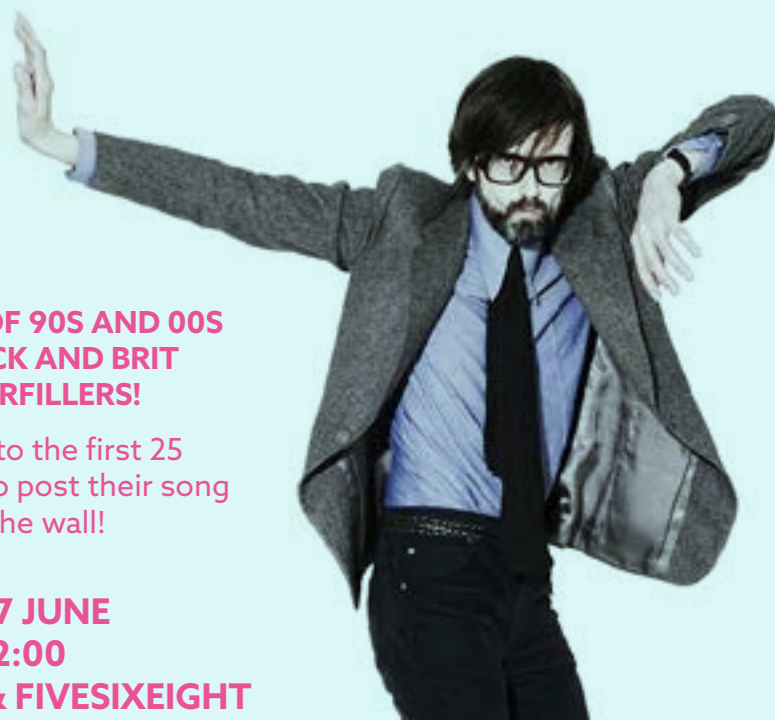


Sometimes the best solution is to run from your problems. Photo Credit: Showtime



# FRIDAY 17 JUNE

## COMMON PEOPLE



**A NIGHT OF 90S AND 00S  
INDIE, ROCK AND BRIT  
POP FLOORFILLERS!**

Free entry to the first 25  
people who post their song  
choice on the wall!

**FRIDAY 17 JUNE  
20:00 - 02:00  
METRIC & FIVESIXEIGHT**



**REYNOLDS  
BAR**

## COCKTAIL CLUB

Buy two cocktails for £7.60

## COMING UP!

| Venue                 | Regular Events    | Time          | Day                |
|-----------------------|-------------------|---------------|--------------------|
| FiveSixEight          | Super Quiz        | 20:00 - 22:00 | Every Tuesday      |
| Metric                | Cocktail Night    | 18:00 - 23:00 | Every Tuesday      |
| Metric & FiveSixEight | CSP Wednesday     | 19:00 - 01:00 | Every Wednesday    |
| Metric & FiveSixEight | Club Night        | 20:00 - 02:00 | Every Friday       |
| h-bar                 | Pub Quiz          | 19:00 - 21:00 | 2nd & 4th Thursday |
| h-bar                 | PGI Friday        | 16:00 onwards | Every Friday       |
| Reynolds              | Quiz Night        | 19:00 - 23:00 | Every Monday       |
| Reynolds              | Board Games Night | 18:00 - 23:00 | Every Tuesday      |
| Reynolds              | Pool Club         | 18:00 - 23:00 | Every Wednesday    |
| Reynolds              | Pizza Club        | 18:00 - 23:00 | Every Thursday     |
| Reynolds              | Cocktail Club     | 17:30 - 01:00 | Every Friday       |
| The Foundry           | Quiz Night        | 19:30 - 22:00 | 1st & 3rd Thursday |
| The Foundry           | Karaoke Night     | 20:00 - 23:30 | 2nd & 4th Friday   |
| The Foundry           | BBQ Festival      | 16:00 - 23:00 | Friday 17 June     |

# FELIX HANGMAN



felix@imperial.ac.uk

## NEWS WITHOUT THE NEWS



WHEN YOU FIND OUT YOU'RE GETTING LENTILS AND A NEW BIKE FOR CHRISTMAS



BREXITERS: "WE ARE FINALLY IN THE MAINSTREAM...OF WATER THROUGH LONDON"

## HOROSCOPES



ARIES

This week you're Kim Jong Un and are caught smoking during the middle of an anti-smoking campaign in North Korea. You decide you need to quit once and for all and so visit Imperial as they've stopped selling cigarettes but sadly you leave once you find out just how strict their censorship is.



TAURUS

This week you get given an anti-EU condom by the Vote Leave campaign. Ironically you're safer in now.



GEMINI

This week you're in Wetherspoons getting hammered after your last exam but you forget about their anti-EU stance. 10 pints down you end up drinking with their Brexit-campaigning owner and wake up on Queens Lawn wearing only a Union Jack.



CANCER

This week you celebrate the Queen's 90<sup>th</sup> birthday the only way you know how, plenty of alcohol in the Union Bar. Queen Liz decides to drop by and takes the yard of ale record and knights Chris Kaye for services to pizza bases. He's almost reigned as long as her too.



LEO

This week you're part of the Battle of the Thames, in which Nigel Farage captained a fleet of anti-EU boats past the Houses of Parliament and clashed with a pro-EU flotilla. Last time someone that drunk tried to board a boat, the medics rowers got turned back from Dover.



VIRGO

This week, you're desperate for a third person to join in your romantic rendezvous. You decide to invite the editor of your student newspaper, via the sex survey. Despite the generous offer, delivered to her in an cell in a Excel file, she declines.



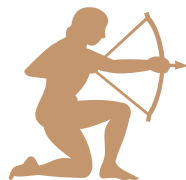
LIBRA

This week you're the sabbs. Your year is finally grinding to a halt, productivity stalls and you accomplish next to nothing. In fairness we could print this every week.



SCORPIO

This week you're a contestant on "shit, it's the last week of term and you still haven't found a house". Let's have a look and see what's behind door number 2. It's £170 a week, a shit hole and in Zone 5. Bargain.



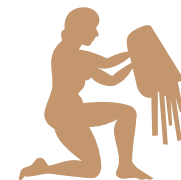
SAGITTARIUS

This week you're your mum. She's waited for this moment for 9 months. The moment when you're home for more than a week. Guaranteed she'll be fed up of you within the fortnight.



CAPRICORN

This week, you don't understand why there's no *men's* scholarship for the Imperial MBA, not realising that merely having external genitals is a scholarship to the school of existence and having a much fucking easier life.



AQUARIUS

This week, you're vocal and angry that there's no *men's* scholarship for the Imperial MBA. Ralhhhh! Raaaaaah! That the sound of your future employer finding your terrible opinions on Google and not hiring you.



PISCES

This week, you've finally realised why you weren't invited to the Women@Imperial event. You don't need an International Women's Day, because you're too busy living your international women's LIFE.





# Brb, I'm drowning in cocktails

FELIX attends a cocktail launch at Shoryu SoHo

The lives of successful bloggers have always appeared somewhat glamorous, superficial and materialistic to me – press events around the world, nights in 5-star hotels, sponsorships from high-end brands... And all they seem to do for a living is just go take a few effortless photos for #ootd, film a humble #haul video showcasing their latest luxury purchases, ending the day off with a sleepy #nomakeup #selfie on Instagram. All this was happening while I'm slaving away in the totally unglam Central Library facing debt and unemployment. I know. Life is unfair. There, there.

As some of you may know, I am actually a blogger myself, disguised as a Chemical Engineering student running up and down ACEX every day. I am by no means famous in any way, but with a year of slow growing exposure in the world of social media, I have finally landed my first taster of that mysterious lifestyle: a summer cocktail press event at Shoryu, a hip Japanese ramen restaurant/cocktail bar owned by Japan Centre with various locations including SoHo, Covent Garden, Liverpool Street and Carnaby Street.

To be exact, it was, according to the PR manager who contacted me personally a few weeks before, a two-hour Summer Cocktails and Masterclass Blogger Event held in their SoHo branch conveniently in the evening after my last exam (woohoo!). All complete with an opportunity to “interact with



The four summer-themed cocktails available at Shoryu Soho. Photo Credit: Christy Lam

fellow press people in the industry”, while tasting their “delicious range of Japanese cocktails alongside a delicate array of exquisite accompaniments”. Also known as free food, free booze, and party in student language.

After a shy peek through the main

entrance, I was greeted by a friendly manager who quickly led me through the restaurant and down to the secretive, dimly lit basement which housed the press room.

It was more of an intimate event than the big, fancy party I had imagined. Two tables were beautifully set with mini cocktail glasses, side plates and chopsticks all ready for the proceeding drinking and dining.

The bar manager, who has worked in Japan and has thorough expertise in all things sake (a Japanese wine made by fermenting rice), introduced us to the history of the restaurant and her inspirations for her four summer creations, pouring in the various components into her cocktail shaker as she spoke. The waitresses dished out bowls of sea-salted edamame, plates of freshly made California rolls, and platters of their signature pork belly buns to compliment the alcohol.

The cocktails were, of course, strongly influenced by Japanese

flavours and summer fruits. Even the names had Japanese references. First up was Akai Rhubarb (with akai meaning red in Japanese), with shots of Josen sake, Bombay gin, and Aperol, shaken hard with homemade rhubarb syrup, served in a white wine glass and two rhubarb stalks. Like the name, the cocktail was a beautiful light red with bittersweet notes.

Next was Natsu No Watermelon (meaning summer watermelon). Fresh watermelon and strawberry juice was mixed with Cointreau and Shochu (a Japanese distilled alcohol) and served in a martini glass with a sprig of orange peel. Strong, but fruity, juicy and fresh tasting in a sunset coral red, perfect when paired with their tonkotsu ramen.

The third cocktail, my favourite, was Nikkei Rose, made from namasake (unpasteurized sake), Pisco, fresh grapefruit juice, syrup, and rosewater in coupe glass with two dried roses floating on top. This

was in a delicate pastel pink, mild and sweet, designed to be paired with sushi.

Finally, Mango Suppai (suppai means sour). This was probably the most complex in terms of ingredients and flavour. Yuzu Umeshu (yuzu is an oriental citrus fruit and Umeshu is a liqueur made from steeping plums in Shochu) is infused with genmai tea (also known as popcorn tea here) beforehand, then shaken with Frangelico hazelnut liqueur, Josen sake, and fresh mango, served in a rocks glass embellished with blackberries and a single bamboo leaf. A surprising balance between the sweet mango and nutty Frangelico on the palette.

Shots of the cocktails were served for all to try and the remaining time was free for us to socialize and to take photos. It was the first time I felt completely relaxed with my blogging business. The hidden, embarrassed photo-taking sessions transformed into bold, stand-up, hipster style aerial shots, perfect for #tablesituation.

The event quickly came to an end. We were sent home with generous goodie bags and a bottle of Matcha Cool Down (matcha green tea mixed with Malibu). After talking to a few honest people who actually blog as a career, I realized that my perceptions of this social media lifestyle was completely wrong. It isn't as easy and glamorous as it appears to be on the pages of those glossy magazines. Not everyone can become famous overnight – many built up their reputation by years of dedication, commitment and hard work. It means constantly paying attention to the trends, comments, reviews, and discovering new places that no one has been to before, and brainstorming new ideas for captions or articles or videos. Not every photo or video is perfect – that 10-minute video could have taken hours of preparation, filming and editing. That effortless #ootd photo may not be so effortless after all.

Taking account of all the risks involved in working in social media, would I still continue with blogging and developing my hobby into a potential career? I certainly would.

CHRISTYLAM



The signature pork belly buns complement the drinks. Photo Credit: Christy Lam