Professional Art Practice: *Twee Kante van 'n Storie*

Mini-Thesis: Storytelling Through Video Game Artworks – *Twee Kante van 'n Storie*

By

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Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirement for Master of Fine Arts at Rhodes University

02 March 2023

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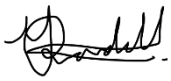
DECLARATION OF ORIGINALITY

I declare that this thesis is my own work and that all the sources I have used have been acknowledged by complete references. This thesis is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirement for Master of Fine Arts at Rhodes University. I declare that it has not been submitted before for any degree or examination at another university.

Signature: 

Date: 02 March 2023

ABSTRACT

This mini-thesis serves as a supporting document for my Master of Fine Art (MFA) exhibition, '*Twee Kante van 'n Storie*'. The exhibition explores my culture and experiences as a 'Coloured' woman in Makhanda through storytelling. I use the term 'Coloured' with quotation marks to remain respectful to those who do not wish to reclaim the term. My mini-thesis analyses how video games as artworks can be a mode of storytelling and can encourage sociocultural awareness. In my research, I use storytelling as a tool and autoethnography as a methodology to both discuss and influence my practice.

For my MFA installation, I have created a digital interactive website that uses the same language as a video game. Throughout my process, I have used two video games, *That Dragon Cancer* and *Boet Fighter*, as case studies, in order to help the building and creation of my autoethnographic art video game. My art video game explores my experiences of my culture and living in a small town. Through the creation of four fictionalised characters, which are loosely based on true life experiences and first-hand observations, I can reveal and unpack cultural experiences and biases that I have observed over the years. Each character in the game grapples with one of three prominent themes; stereotypes, 'swagger' and texturism.

Furthermore, through using autoethnography as a methodology and the researcher as the phenomenon (Ellis, 2004: 45). This study contributes to the gap in 'Coloured' cultural diversities that exist outside the lens of the Western Cape experience. This is a perspective not commonly found within academia.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to acknowledge my theory supervisor, Professor Ruth Simbao, for her support throughout my postgraduate journey. Thank you for motivating me to obtain my master's degree and allowing me to be part of the Arts of Africa and Global Souths research centre at Rhodes University and part of the NRF/DSI SARChI Chair research programme in Geopolitics and the Arts of Africa.

Thank you to my practical work supervisor, Rat Western, for her continuous support over the past six years of my entire higher academic journey. Her influence has shaped the way I view art today and inspired my fondness for the digital medium. Her constructive critiques and support have always pushed me to keep the momentum going. Thank you to Rhodes University Fine Art Department staff for their guidance during my time as a student.

Thank you to my friends, family, best friend and boyfriend for the emotional support and for allowing me a space to air out my academic frustrations, grappling with my research topic. It has not been an easy journey, however your kindness and support are much appreciated.

This research was funded by the National Research Foundation/Department of Science and Innovation SARChI programme in Geopolitics and the Arts of Africa. The financial assistance of the National Research Foundation (NRF) towards this research is hereby acknowledged. Opinions expressed and conclusions arrived at are those of the author and are not necessarily to be attributed to the NRF.

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INTRODUCTION

Plaasmeisie

Plaasmeisie, loosely translated as 'farm girl', is an Afrikaans term given to a girl or woman from a small town, often used in a condescending way. Growing up, I was always ashamed or annoyed when being called '*Plaasmeisie*' by relatives or even strangers who resided in bigger cities like Cape Town or Gqeberha. Today, I choose to reclaim the word and make it my own. Being born and raised in the small town of Makhanda has its ups as well as its downs, despite many outsiders thinking of it only as a tragic and mundane lifestyle. While I agree to a certain extent that life in a small town can be quite boring, from my experience, it is through that boredom that a sense of community came about.

Makhanda, formerly known as Grahamstown, mostly famous for the annual National Arts Festival, is situated in the Eastern Cape, an hour away from Gqeberha (Heshu 2020). I reside in what the locals in my community would refer to as 'the Coloured area'.[1] I must note that the town itself is still quite racially segregated. Families still live in their arranged areas that were set up by the apartheid government (Hoefnagels, Irvine and Memela 2022). Our spaces are quite condensed and being in a close-knit community means that everyone is familiar with everyone else. This has its advantages and disadvantages, but I will get back to that later in this mini-thesis. As mentioned above, living in a small town can be quite tedious. As a child, there was not much to do in Makhanda. There is no beach, no public park, no public pools, no amusement parks or any sort of entertainment catering to the youth. There is also a sense of elitism in Makhanda; you would have to know someone with a pool in order to enjoy such privileges. Most new spaces and shops are catered to upper class citizens, with countless cafés, bakeries, boutiques or lavish restaurants. Being bored on a weekend was and is always the norm.

From a young age, I was taught to depend on myself for entertainment. In my area, this mainly consisted of playing with the neighbourhood kids in the street. Games passed down from previous generations were a popular choice. My personal favourites were '*poppy-ousie*' (also known as 'playing house'), '*tou-tou*'[2] (skipping rope) and '*skalulie*' (a form of dodge-

[1] The apartheid government established a Group Areas Act in 1950, which is where the term may have originated (Heshu, 2020; 27). Many members of my community still choose to use the term to describe their neighbourhood.

[2] '*Tou*' is an Afrikaans term for rope (n.d. https://www.translate-afrikaans.com/en/dictionary-english-afrikaans/rope)

ball). I never really noticed until recent years that there is a sense of culture within the games themselves. Although these games are familiar to many, there is a specific way each community or culture plays them. For example 'Tou-tou' has its own games and songs, many of which we played in Afrikaans, however through school we got to share and learn games from other cultures and languages. From our isiXhosa peers we learned the game '*Emeli*', whereas we taught them '*So rond om die bos*'.

Years passed by and the age of the internet crept in and became more accessible. From my early teen years, I became familiar with the computer and the internet and that is when I started playing browser games. Soon my weekends were mostly spent in front of a screen, immersed in some virtual fantasy world. In Grade 4, I was privileged enough to get a PlayStation 2 console. Many of my childhood friends visited to play from a selection of games. Gaming played a big role in keeping me entertained throughout my youth. Which is why I am using the action 'play' and gaming as a medium. Besides my fine art major being in digital art, I have always been drawn to interactive works. This moves away from elitism and engages more people who do not have the artistic knowledge to comprehend or enjoy most artworks. Games are for everyone; through games I can easily convey a narrative or story to the player in a way that is simple to grasp and follow.

Video games as art

There is a long and constant debate on whether video games can be classified as art. In terms of the European modern art canon, the definition of art has evolved and become something more abstract, compared to its traditional mediums. Anitra Nettleton (2011) states that modern art in Africa is often framed in the Western notion of art. For this thesis and my research scope, I will use the term art in its contemporary period, specifically the South African post-apartheid context. Contemporary art in South Africa refers to art created within the present day, which is often a reflection of our reality, post-apartheid (De Jager 1987). Today, more artists are making use of new technologies to explore different ways of art making (Richman-Abdou 2021). Although video games share many similarities with the arts, there are also distinct differences between them. For example, competitive gameplay is a concept not often used within the arts (Tavinor 2009: 192). Therefore Tavinor (2009: 196) states that video games should be considered as a new form or distinctive medium of art.

In my research, I prefer using the term ‘art video game’. Erin Gavin (2014) defines art games as any interactive experience that uses non-mainstream narratives or other strategies while drawing upon game tropes. In other words, art games are interactive and use video game language to convey certain narratives or concepts to the player. My artwork is an interactive web page, mimicking a video game, in order to narrate the story of my experiences in my community and of my culture. Through this, I hope to share cultural aspects with both insiders and outsiders of my community.

Through experience and social media, I have noticed that many local South Africans have a specific idea of what culture is and what can be classified as a culture. The idea that ‘Coloured’ people do not have a specific culture is false (Shepherd 2020). Many believe in this notion because of the oversimplified definition of culture learned in schools. In class, examples were given to explain culture, often pertaining to Xhosa, Tswana, Ndebele, Zulu or Hindu cultures. These cultures are each more grounded in historical writing (Ruiters 2009). Contrary to this, my ‘Coloured’ culture in Makhanda specifically, is not as well grounded in academic or historical writing and does not have tangible representations such as traditional attire. While we do perform ‘rituals’, many do not describe them as such. Therefore, it is so important to first dissect and explain these terms, to further elaborate and show that complex ‘Coloured’ cultures do exist.

Much like the term ‘art’, ‘culture’ is also a broad and complex term that is difficult to define. Many theorists have coined their own definitions. For my research, Steven Hofstede’s definition of culture (1980 in Booysen 2007) seems most fitting. He states that almost everything has a specific culture, therefore people are multicultural (Hofstede 1980 in Booysen 2007: 61). Your gender could determine a certain culture, your occupation or even the role you play in the household. Culture is not inherent, it is learned through social contexts (Hofstede 1991 in Booysen 2007: 59).

There are different kinds of rituals, daily rituals, religious rituals or cultural rituals. There are many anthropological definitions for what ‘ritual’ is. For this context and research, I will be referring to Buckser’s definition. Ritual refers to any activity that is considered formal and has no vital purpose (Buckser in Lan 2018: 9). This definition is broad and can speak to many cultures, both contemporary and ancient. Through Buckser’s definition, my understanding is that a ritual is an activity that serves no essential purpose to survival, it is an activity that has been passed down from previous generations and is shared amongst a group of people.

Although it serves no inherent purpose it is still seen as important; it establishes culture and a sense of belonging.

My culture

The racial term 'Coloured' was coined and given to a massive group of interracial people. For a while there was no cultural similarity amongst these people, as compared to other sociolinguistic groups like the Zulu or Ndebele people with their rich histories. Most cultures have a strong history that stems from many generations back. It is through colonial apartheid segregation that a new culture, 'Coloured' culture, began (Ruiters 2009). People could relate to one another through shared trauma. Through segregation, music and culture came about; for example, 'Jazzing', is a type of dance deriving from the Latin salsa dance that originated in the Cape Flats and spread across the country. Today, 'Jazz' or 'Jazzing' is an important part of my culture (Pillay 2014). Another example is 'Yaardt Music'. Yaardt music also derives from Cape Town and involves remixing old-school music with African house beats (Mabula 2017).

Although I experience an overwhelming sense of frustration when people think of Cape 'Coloured' culture as the only 'Coloured' culture that exists, there is no denying that many of our cultural tropes and traditions derive from Cape Town. The cultures in Cape Town are quite rich, resulting from their history (Isaacs-Martin 2014).[3] However, Cape 'Coloured' cultures became regarded as a blanket phenomenon for all other 'Coloured' cultures and communities in other geographical locations. One must understand that cultures vary depending on location (SAMHSA 2014) and that both location and environmental factors have a major influence on it (Booysen 2007). As mentioned above, culture in 'Coloured' communities stemmed from shared trauma and segregation. There are a few similarities between 'Coloured' cultures that we all relate to, to a certain extent. However, there are also many differences, some cultural tropes and traditions that are present in Cape 'Malay' Culture[4] or Cape 'Coloured' communities are not present in my own community, for example the 'Kaapse Klopse'[5] (Bickford-Smith 2012).

[3] There is a complex history of the 'Coloured' communities in Cape Town, because of the migration and slave trading that happened around the Cape Colony.

[4] The Cape 'Malay' people have one of the most vibrant cultures in South Africa. Deriving from enslaved Southeast Asian people, including Indonesian people, the Cape Malay community are also known as the Cape Muslim community, practising the Islamic faith (Kader, 2021). However, not all 'Coloured' communities in Cape Town are Muslim, some are Christians, which I simply refer to as 'Cape 'Coloured' communities'.

[5] The Cape Town Minstrel Carnival that takes place every 2nd January to celebrate the new year (Collison 2016).

The culture I want to focus on is my own culture in Makhanda, in the Eastern Cape. I must note that I am not a voice for all 'Coloured' people residing in Makhanda. My opinions and experiences do not define what our culture is, nor do I intend to do so. Theodore Petrus and Wendy Isaacs-Martin[6] (2012) state that 'Coloured' cultures are fluid and ever-changing, much like any other culture. What I will do is simply share my experiences of my culture, what rituals I partake in, what cultural tropes I have observed over the years and how all of these influence my art game.

My concept

The Makhanda Municipality is known for its poor service delivery (Moosa 2021) and there were not many, if any, recreational activities, parks or places for the youth to enjoy. However, in our community there were game centres[7] that played big roles in being forms of entertainment. As I grew older, game centres soon became a thing of the past. There are currently no public facilities for teens to hang out, as arcade machines became outdated and removed from certain spaza shops. It seemed as though my love for gaming faded simultaneously. I started spending less time on my console, which evidently also became outdated. I never fully returned to the gaming culture and instead I opt for mobile games whenever I feel bored.

As a high school ceramics student, I often felt confined in terms of creativity and mediums of art. Clay was my main medium and we were often instructed to make pots, vases or plates. Starting my Bachelor of Fine Art degree at Rhodes University I was introduced to a variety of mediums, including mediums that are not considered 'conventional art'. This was intriguing and my love for the 'unconventional' grew. Shortly, I found myself creating an interactive web page for my honours exhibition *Mundane Marcadia*. The web page resembled a video game, using pixel art and recreating classic arcade games into games that portrayed my experience of the COVID-19 pandemic. Unfortunately, the pandemic meant we had to have an online exhibition, thus I could not really see players/audiences reactions to my game. For my MFA, I wanted to extend this process into my master's research, however with a different context and narrative. In 2021, I had the opportunity to exhibit my fourth-year work at an

[6] Theodore Petrus and Wendy Isaacs-Martin are both professors in Department of Sociology and Anthropology. They are known for doing research situated around anthropology of crime and violence including recent research on the relations between gangsterism and 'Coloured' identity dynamics in an Urban setting in Port Elizabeth. (n.d., https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Theodore_Petrus)

[7] Our 'game centres' had pool tables, a foosball table and some arcade machines, it also functioned as a spaza shop.

event ‘Organic Live’.[8] This was the first time I experienced seeing people play my game and their live reactions. To some extent there were cultural aspects present in my game. However, the game was mainly based on my experiences of COVID-19 and lockdown. Many enjoyed it; some had questions about the language I used in the game and others found certain aspects amusing, which to me was just part of my culture and my community. Seeing the audience/players being curious and intrigued by the multiple cultural tropes in my previous game inspired me to create another game that goes into more depth on my culture, home town and experiences thereof. I must reiterate that this is not a representational game for my community. This is simply a story about the self and my experiences of my community.

Using the same autoethnographical approach in research, I created another interactive web page based on my experiences of my culture and community. Autoethnography centres on the researcher as the phenomenon and bases the research on ‘the self’ (Ellis 2004: 45). This methodology will be discussed further in chapter 1. In the same chapter, the rich histories of ‘Coloured’ communities will be analysed and discussed, followed by an analysis of my culture and experiences in a small town. Later there will be a brief discussion on what are considered art video games, followed by a short introduction to my exhibition ‘*Twee Kante van ’n Storie*’. ‘Twee Kante van ‘n Storie’ loosely translates to ‘two sides of a story’ which is similar to the popular English idiom, two sides to every story. I’ve chosen this specific title because it conveys one of the main concepts of my art video game. My art game provides a platform to experience the same events and encounters through different characters. Most encounters happen between two characters. These characters each portray a different perspective on things, which ultimately shows viewers that there are two sides to every story.

[8] Organic Live, an organisation mainly comprised of Rhodes students who organise events that celebrate both music and art.

CHAPTER 1

Questioning 'Coloured' Identities and Cultures

Previously in this mini-thesis I gave a brief introduction of myself as the artist. This is important since my methodology is autoethnography. I briefly discussed some background, not only of myself and my practice but my culture and the main concept of this exhibition. In this chapter I aim to unpack the historical background of 'Coloured' identity, my culture, the use of art video games as storytelling within my exhibition '*Twee Kante van 'n Storie*' as well as my methodology, autoethnography.

'Coloured': A legacy of creolisation

The 'Coloured' population of South Africa is a diverse group of people descended from Europeans, Indigenous Khoisan people, as well as others of African and Asian descent (Petrus and Isaacs-Martin 2012). The term 'Coloured' was coined by the apartheid regime to racially classify a diverse group of people that did not fit under the White, Black or Asian racial groups. The term 'Coloured' has since become more socially accepted in post-apartheid times, as compared to when the term was first coined (ibid.). Professor Mohammed Adhikari[9] states that 'Coloured' cultural identities, like the term itself, have gone through rapid transformations in the post-apartheid era (Adhikari 2004). Much like any other creole community, 'Coloured' identities tend to engage in making and re-making their own identities, in a process which is also known as creolisation (Adhikari 2009). Today, being 'Coloured' is more commonly accepted as an ethnicity, as opposed to a race. However, there is still an ongoing debate on whether people should reclaim the term or discard it because of its controversial history (Adhikari 2005).

In Adhikari's edited book *Burdened by Race*, Michelle Ruiters[10] (2009: 124) states that Nguni cultures like Xhosa, Zulu and Sotho are present in historical writings and can thus prove their belonging to Africa in terms of shared culture and language, as opposed to 'Coloured' cultures. In this way, 'Coloured' cultures are not perceived to have the same level of authenticity. Wendy Isaacs-Martin (2014) speaks about the phenomenon of the racially

[9] Professor Mohamed Adhikari has published several books on 'Coloured' identity and politics in South Africa for nearly 3 decades. (University of Cape Town, n.d., http://www.historicalstudies.uct.ac.za/hst/people/emeritus/mohamed-adhikari)

[10] Dr Michelle Ruiters is a senior lecturer at the Gordon Institute of Business School and teaches courses on human behaviour (Gordon Institute of Business School, n.d. https://www.gibs.co.za/about-us/faculty/pages/michele-ruiters.aspx).

obsessed South African psyche, which conveys that identity can only be confirmed through ethnic symbolism such as genetic phenotype, religion and a distinct language. The burden of proving 'Coloured' people's existence and the validity of their ethnicity and cultures can be tiresome. During apartheid, accusations that 'Coloured' people lacked ethnic identity were made. Many believed 'Coloured' people had no language, no history, territory or religion (Isaacs-Martin 2014). Unfortunately, today those accusations remain. However, it is important to tackle these falsehoods and uncertainties first before continuing the discourse of 'Coloured' communities multifaceted cultures and identities. There are no authentic cultures or traditions, because identities and cultures do not happen in a vacuum (Ruiters: 110). In post-apartheid South Africa, many are reconstructing their identities by using shared histories and shared spaces.

Through apartheid, many social barriers were created and enforced. Besides the 'Coloured' residential areas, people were further confined to having their own schools, churches and social spaces (Ruiters 2009). Through these shared spaces, cultures and identities were born. Therefore, geographical locations play such a significant role in the formation and influence of cultures. 'Coloured' people do not experience creolisation in the same way, because we face different social and economic factors in different areas (Strauss 2009: 27). This leads to cultural differences. Moreover, Ruiters (2009) states that through segregation and separation, cultural memory is formed and interconnections are created through shared history and experiences.

A common misconception is that 'Coloured' identities are homogeneous, this homogeneous identity is often a stereotypical 'Cape Coloured' identity (Ruiters 2009: 112). I think the reason for this misconception could be that most academics and scholars who grapple with the discourse surrounding 'Coloured' identities are often from the Western Cape. Scholars like Mohammed Adhikari, Vernon February, Zoe Wicomb and Zimitri Erasmus, to name a few, are either from the Western Cape or situate their research within the Western Cape. Most articles, journals and papers are written from the Western Cape perspective, specifically Cape Town. The reality is that the majority of 'Coloured' people are resident in the Western Cape, according to Census South Africa (Isaacs-Martin 2014). As Cape Town is one of the most popular cities in South Africa, as well as a historically significant part of South African

history,[11] it is easier for content from these spaces to make it into the mainstream. People outside 'Coloured' communities learn about their cultures and ethnicities through media that is mainstream and accessible. Thus, people assume that the Western Cape experience is representational of all 'Coloured' communities in other geographical locations.

Wendy Isaacs-Martin wrote an article 'National and Ethnic Identities: Dual and Extreme Identities amongst the Coloured Population in Port Elizabeth' (2014) which focuses on the 'Coloured' population's ethnic identity in Port Elizabeth, now known as Gqeberha. In it she states that the highest proportion of 'Coloured' people within the Eastern Cape are found in Gqeberha. Isaacs-Martin states that most studies on 'Colouredness' have focused on the Western Cape population and only a few have dealt with the population in the Eastern Cape. Furthermore only a few studies focus on unpacking the complexities of 'Coloured' identity, independent from the political oppression and racist stereotyping (Isaacs-Martin 2014).

Isaacs-Martin conducted a study to see how 'Coloured' South Africans self-identify, by using a Linz/Monero scale (2014). The Linz or Moreno scale uses two extreme identities on each side of the spectrum. One being the identity of 'South African not Coloured' and the other 'Coloured not South African', with the middle choice being a duality of both identities. The results were captivating, as 50.2 % viewed national identity, South African, as their only identity, whereas 27.9 % viewed their ethnic identity, 'Coloured', as their only identity (Isaacs-Martin 2014). The ongoing debate of whether to reject or reclaim the term 'Coloured' continues, which is why I opt to use the term within quotations.

Helene Strauss's[12] chapter 'Confused about being coloured: Creolisation and coloured identity in Chris van Wyk's *Shirley, Goodness and Mercy*' in the book *Burdened by Race* (Adhikari 2009) analyses the impact of creolisation theory on South African coloured identities. Strauss (ibid: 24) uses Chris van Wyk's 2006 childhood memoir *Shirley, Goodness and Mercy* as a case study. The term 'creole' and the concept of creolisation has only fairly recently been applied to 'Coloured' cultures in South Africa. Adhikari (2009: 21) states that

[11] South Africa was first invaded by colonists in 1600s, landing at the Cape. The history of Cape Town thus dates back centuries, with importations of enslaved people from other parts of Africa and the East Indies (Swingler, 2021).

[12] Helene Strauss is a professor at the University of Free State, in the English department. Many of her published works tackle cultural studies, as well as politics in contemporary South African public and protest cultures (https://www.ufs.ac.za/media/media?NewsItemID=5221 2014).

Zimitri Erasmus[13] was the first to apply creolisation theory to 'Coloured' identities in South Africa.

Erasmus uses the term 'creole' in a cultural context to analyse 'Colouredness' becoming an identity in South Africa (Strauss 2009: 27). Strauss says that the term 'creolisation' has been used in postcolonial studies to account for cultural change that has been happening during slavery, colonisation and now globalisation. Moreover, the term also accounts for the ongoing process of transformation within 'Coloured' identities (ibid.). It is important to note that creolisation is a process that depends on many social and economic factors, like geographical location or class (ibid.: 27). Therefore 'Coloured' communities experience different processes of creolisation. This demonstrates the nuances and multiplicity found within 'Coloured' communities.

Strauss goes into more depth and explains this phenomenon using Chris Van Wyk's autobiographical writing as a metaphor for creolisation process. A segment of Van Wyk's book is analysed, in which he speaks about the 'art of eavesdropping' as a child. Strauss (2009) claims that the act of eavesdropping calls for attentive listening, learning as well as unlearning and negotiating information that has been retained through overheard exchanges. Strauss (2009: 35) sees this occurrence as a similar process to creolisation within 'Coloured' identities. Through different social interactions, people gather fragments of information through friends, the media, the school or family from other communities to format their own cultural identities (Strauss in Adhikari 2009: 32).

In Mohammed Adhikari's book of essays *Burdened by Race*, the first chapter, 'From narratives of miscegenation to post-modernist re-imagining: towards a historiography of 'Coloured' identity in South Africa' by Adhikari himself (2009), looks at the overall history of 'Coloured' identity and how the identity has been described by previous academics in comparison to post-apartheid times. Adhikari (2009: 5) starts off his chapter by explaining how the research or study of 'Coloured' identity back in the 1980s was seen as controversial and even racist. Many within the academic field disapproved of his work. With time, and after the ANC publicly acknowledged the importance of allowing 'Coloured identity' a space

[13] Zimitri Erasmus is an Associate Professor of Sociology at University of Witwatersrand her scope of research includes, but it not limited to, post colonial studies and critical race theory (https://wits.academia.edu/ZimitriErasmus n.d.).

within post-apartheid South Africa, research around 'Coloured' identity became more acceptable (Adhikari 2009).

The complex histories of 'Coloured' identities have already been discussed previously in this mini-thesis. However, the main points from this chapter are what Adhikari (2009) describes as the four approaches to 'Coloured' identity: the essentialist approach, the instrumentalist approach, social constructionism and creolisation theory. The essentialist[14] approach was the first approach to argue that 'Coloured' identity came from miscegenation, making racial hybridity the essence of 'Coloured' identity. Adhikari (2009) states that this approach does indicate that 'Coloured' identity existed during the early phases of colonial rule. However, the approach portrayed the identity as a given and fixed, which perpetuates the idea of Coloured identities as a homogeneous group (Adhikari 2009). Adhikari maintains that, although the essentialist approach does stem from a Eurocentric viewpoint, not all the writings within this genre are racist. He then mentions a few authors, such as Johannes Stephanus Marais, whose writing aided in breaking down racial barriers and revealing injustices within South Africa's racial system (Adhikari 2009: 9).

The second approach, known as the instrumentalist approach, viewed 'Coloured' identity as an artificial concept given by the white supremacists. Much like the essentialist approach, this approach also perpetuates the notion of 'Coloured' identity as fixed (Adhikari 2009). Importantly, Adhikari says that instrumentalists tend to think of 'status' and 'identity' as one. The label 'Coloured' can be given, however an identity cannot. Identity is the product of its bearers; outsiders may have some sort of an influence but cannot determine the identity of others (Adhikari 2009: 13). Moreover, it is important to note that this approach is quite a political one as it derived during the peak of the anti-apartheid movement, shortly after the Soweto Uprising (Adhikari 2009: 12). Adhikari states that the fault with both the essentialist and instrumentalist approaches is that they shift the agency of creating identities away from the 'Coloured' communities to the ruling establishment. This brings us to the third and fourth approaches.

The third approach is social constructionism. This is the approach that resonates most with Adhikari, as it views 'Coloured' identity as an ongoing process. People have the agency to make and remake their identities and realities. The main objective of this approach is to

[14] Essentialism refers to the belief that categories, such as race, have an underlying true nature or set of attributes that are necessary to their identity (Soylu Yalcinkaya, Villalta and Adams, 2017).

involve ‘Coloured’ communities themselves into the process of shaping their own identities (Adhikari 2009: 14). Adhikari believes that social constructionists histories have analysed the complexities of ‘Coloured’ identities. Factors like their positioning in the racial hierarchy, experiences of marginality and the negative racial stereotyping have influenced ‘Coloured’ identities and their political consciousness (Adhikari 2009). Additionally, he states that while identity can be influenced by outsiders, it cannot be imposed onto people. Identity is a product of its bearers (ibid.). Finally, the fourth approach, creolisation, is fairly new and draws on postmodern and postcolonial theory (ibid. 2009). In this approach ‘Coloured’ identity is not necessarily a creation of miscegenation, instead it is cultural creativity and a product of creolisation (Adhikari 2009).

Based on my findings, I see the creolisation approach along with social constructionism, as most sound and appropriate. They both analyse how and why ‘Coloured’ identity came about, as opposed to trying to define the concept in an overly simplified way. Both are quite critical of the essentialist and instrumentalist approaches and hence could work hand in hand. ‘Coloured’ identities are created through shared experiences and social interactions. From my experiences, some people who were born in our community and have shared the culture and similar experiences can be regarded as ‘Coloured’ regardless of their race. Thus, I view being ‘Coloured’ as part of a creolisation process.

Autoethnography as a methodology

There is a gap in academia in relation to ‘Coloured’ cultures and identities outside the Western Cape context. Being a ‘Coloured’ woman from the Eastern Cape, my story could contribute to closing this gap. Hence my methodology of choice is autoethnography. Carolyn Ellis, Tony Adams and Arthur Bochner[15] (2011), in their article ‘Autoethnography: An overview’ define autoethnography as a research approach which uses and describes the personal experiences, ‘the auto’, in order to understand the cultural experience, ‘the ethno’. Autoethnography goes against traditional methods of research by including the researcher's voice within the study’s findings. This methodology takes on a subjective approach to research, which was often frowned upon within other disciplines, mainly in the sciences.

[15] Carolyn Ellis is a university professor who has published multiple books and articles on qualitative research. Tony Adams is an assistant professor who teaches and studies communicative theory and qualitative research. Arthur Bocher is a distinguished professor of communication who has published many articles and books on qualitative research. (https://www.qualitative-research.net/index.php/fqs/article/view/1589/3095 2011 n.d)

Traditional methods, especially in social research, were known for placing emphasis on social factors and universal truths, which made objectivity a significant element (ibid.).

Ellis et al. (2011) describe autoethnography as both process and product. The process refers to the method of emotional recall, remembering events and using epiphanies to create field notes about cultural or social experiences. Whereas the product refers to the writing, which often results in evocative and emotional writing that captivates the reader (ibid.). Within autoethnography there are different forms and approaches. The two key forms, which fit well with my research, are personal narratives and reflexive ethnography. Personal narrative refers to the process where researchers 'view themselves as the phenomenon' (Ellis 2004: 45). This involves personal stories, also known as evocative narratives, which offer subjectivity and often compel emotional responses. Reflexive ethnography refers to researchers working through their own experiences in order to understand their culture (Ellis et al. 2011).

In their chapter 'Autoethnography, Personal narrative, Reflexivity: Researcher as subject' in the *Handbook of Qualitative Research*, Ellis and Bochner (2000) take on a practical approach in their writing. The entire chapter is written in narrative style, including constant dialogue between the two authors as well as a guest 'Sylvia' who is a PhD student interested in the methodology of autoethnography. Through reading the story and dialogues, knowledge and information on the importance, benefits and disadvantages of autoethnography are communicated. Through dialogue, Ellis explains reflexive ethnography to Sylvia. I have noted that reflexive ethnography places emphasis on the researcher's personal experiences. The use of field notes and journals are a common method within reflexive ethnography (Ellis and Bochner 2000). However, for my research, I aim to collect data and observe things using other methods such as animating and storytelling through a video game. Scripting dialogues in the game based on real life encounters and conversations is another way of using epiphanies to recall experiences.

Later in the chapter, Arthur Bochner's speech on personal narrative and the meaningfulness of the method is written out, verbatim. Key points I have taken from this speech is that personal narrative involves evocative narratives, personal stories need to be emotionally compelling (Ellis and Bochner 2000). Personal narratives are not used to come to an undebatable conclusion, instead they should offer lessons for further discussions and conversations to happen (ibid.). I think this statement is particularly important and speaks directly to my practice and research. As noted, I do not intend to define 'Coloured' cultures or the Makhanda experience, instead I would like to start a discourse on these topics and

create an open space for more people to have a conversation and speak about their experiences. The use of autoethnography in relation to my research will be further discussed in chapter 3.

My culture in Makhanda

In my family, hosting parties and celebratory events is common. Since our town is so condensed and close-knit we keep in touch with family through these parties and events. Almost everyone in this community is connected to each other. Although many of the events I am about to mention are also celebrated in other cultures, the difference to me is the extravagance of the events. From themed baptisms, extravagant first birthday parties, to having a 'reception', or what we call a '*tafel*'[16] for matric farewell. Celebrating children's milestones are important rituals that are part of our culture and community. Twenty-first birthdays are also a huge event, where a key is gifted from the parents to the child (Bruinders 2017). In my family, we would host themed parties for birthdays and have family lunches on Mother's Day and Father's Day. We would also take turns to host Christmas lunch. I have very close relationships with second and third cousins as well because of how often our parents keep in touch and visit. The majority of people in Makhanda are either a familiar face, family friends or family.

In terms of religion, specifically in Makhanda, 'the City of Saints'[17], Christianity is the main religion. Compared to 'Coloured' communities in Cape Town, it is rare to find 'Coloured' people who are Muslim, or of any other religion besides Christianity. Going to church and being baptised is a norm and seen as an important ritual. In an online article Alex Isaacs[18] speaks about the importance of food within 'Coloured' cultures, specifically her family and community. Food plays an important role within our communities, especially the making of the food, that is where most memories are made (Isaacs 2020). I found this article quite relatable and it reminded me of the cooking sessions I would have with my family on a Sunday. Music is never absent and the playlist is often filled with golden oldies and old-school music. It brought the kitchen to life and everyone helped to create a somewhat '7

[16] *Tafel* is an Afrikaans word for table. In our community it refers to having a spread on a table of different finger foods for guests to enjoy.

[17] Makhanda is home to many churches, thus it was given the title 'City of Saints'. (https://southafrica.co.za/grahamstown-creative-city.html).

[18] Alex Isaacs is a Cape 'Coloured' woman who often writes articles on FOOD24, including articles on food and her heritage (Isaacs 2020).

colours'[19] meal. It is also important that every Sunday lunch includes roast chicken and baked potatoes (Isaacs 2020). It is a standard practice that most households in my community participate in. The chicken and potatoes are usually accompanied by meals such as rice, pumpkin, curry, brown stew or macaroni and cheese (ibid.).

Continuing the topic of food, I cannot forget the importance of pickled fish in our community and across other 'Coloured' cultures. Pickled fish is something we take a lot of pride in, as it is something that originated from our own ancestors. Originating in Cape Town, fishing was important in Cape Town's communities (Brodie 2018). Since there were no fridges to preserve the fish, our ancestors came up with their own recipe to preserve their fish (The Journalist 2015). This recipe was passed down, generation to generation, and became a staple for the Easter Holidays, specifically Good Friday. Other dishes like biryani or 'breyani' and bobotie are heavily influenced by Indonesian and Malaysian cuisine, therefore curries and spicy foods form a big part of most 'Coloured' cuisines (Thompson 2022).

So far, I have discussed the historical background of 'Coloured' communities, along with a brief discussion of what I consider my culture to be in Makhanda. I will now introduce and analyse what art video games are and how I have come to use this medium within my exhibition.

Art video games

Video games can be described as having a screen which projects moving images that can be controlled by input device, such as a controller, joystick, or keyboard (Kirriemuir 2002: 1). These systems, through which a game is played, range from a console, PC, mobile phone or other devices such as an arcade machine (Kirriemuir 2002: 1). Academics often debate whether video games can be classified as art. Aaron Smuts (2005), in his article 'Are Video Games Art?', argues that by any major definition of art, video games should be considered an art form. However, instead of using a single definition of art to defend his claims of video games being art, he uses different theories of art to support his claim. Historical, aesthetic, institutional, representational and expressive theories of art are all used (Smuts 2005).

Furthermore, museums and art institutions have also incorporated video games into their spaces, hosting exhibitions and including the skill into their curriculums. It is apparent that video games do indeed fit within the category (ibid.). Throughout his article, Smuts makes

[19] The '7 colours' meal is often served on a Sunday and includes meat, rice or pap, brown stew, potatoes and sides of beetroot, pumpkin, gravy or cabbage (Trapido 2015).

comparisons and uses other video games as case studies to strengthen his argument. I must state that the games used as case studies all stem from a similar genre of shooting games and war-based games. This is unfortunate as there are other contemporary games from other genres that are heavily narrative-based, placing emphasis on aesthetics while dealing with social issues. Smuts (2005) thus comes to the conclusion that only some video games can be considered art.

Froschauer, Arends, Goldfarb, Weingartner, & Merkl speak about how 'serious games' that deal with understanding cultures started in the military context. 'Serious games', a concept defined by Mike Zyda, means computer games that use entertainment to promote corporate training, learning, or education on health, public policy and strategic communication objectives (Zyda in Froschauer et al. 2011). *ICURA*, for example, is a 3D game that teaches players Japanese etiquette and what is considered appropriate behaviour in that culture (Froschauer et al. 2011). *Boet Fighter*, a South African fighting game, also brings about sociocultural awareness. However, this is done in a less direct way than in *ICURA*. *Boet Fighter* will be further explained and analysed in chapter 2 as a case study.

Twee Kante van 'n Storie

For my art practice, I have created an art video game based on my experiences living as a 'Coloured' woman in Makhanda. The game involves four main characters (Fig. 1), each is fictional, however their experiences draw from an amalgam of real-life events.

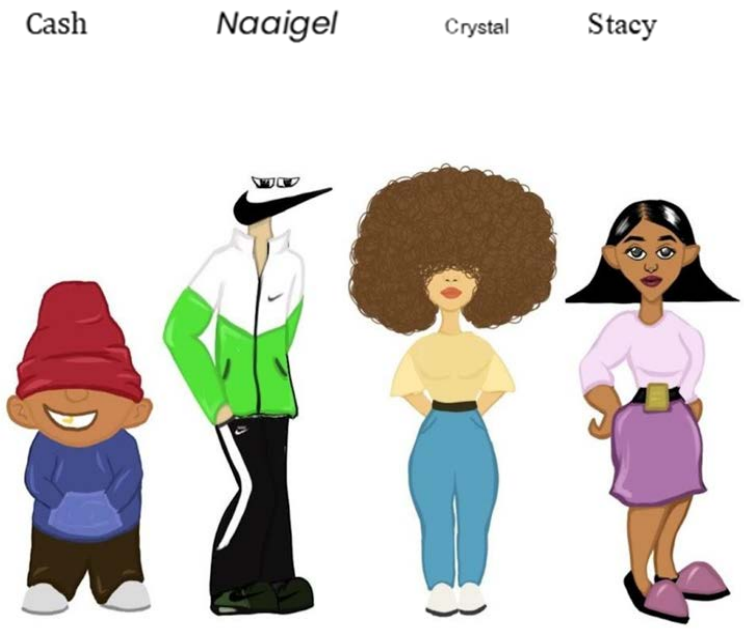


Figure 1. Tasmin Randall, *Main Characters* (2021), Digital Drawing

Each character has their own storyline and players[20] have the choice of which character to play in order to view life from each character's perspective in a small, close-knit community. The plot of the game takes place on a Saturday morning and players get to experience a day in Makhanda through these four characters.

Players experience how different people enjoy their leisure time in a town that is known for being mundane. Each character has their own unique morning routines and preferences on how they opt to spend their leisure time, however all the characters cross over at the end as they all make their way to a stance event[21] within the community. This is a common phenomenon I have observed within my community, you would find most people from my community attending the same events, because of the lack of events and functions. The game takes a tongue-in-cheek approach, using satire and humour to further engage the players. Along with the main characters, there will be extra characters, also known as Non-Player Characters (NPCs), which deal with other issues and cultural aspects through humour. For example, the 'CCTV aunties', refers to the prying elders in our community (Fig. 2). These Non-Player Characters will be further discussed in chapter 3.

Figure 2. Tasmin Randall, *CCTV Aunties*, (2021), Digital Drawing

Each of the four main characters (Fig. 1) explores three themes that I have identified in my community: 1) stereotypes, 2) texturism and 3) 'swagger'.

[20] For this research I will refer to 'audience' as players, as my body of work is an art video game and the act of 'playing' is crucial to my interactive MFA installation.

[21] 'Stance' refers to the customisation of a car (Chauke 2021). A stance event acts as both a gathering and a platform for everyone to showcase their customized cars.

Stereotypes stem from flattened misrepresentations portrayed in mainstream media and are present in all minority communities (Hall, 1997: 258). The stereotypes projected onto 'Coloured' communities often include alcoholism, laziness, violence, drugs and gangsterism (Isaacs-Martin 2014). To elaborate and delve further into the stereotypes of so-called Coloured people, Vernon February[22] (1981) wrote a book, *Mind Your Colour*, explaining and stating the different stereotypes that are present within our society and how some white authors viewed and wrote about 'Coloured' people. The stereotypes derived from the initial Colonial white supremacists views of South Africa's Khoisan Indigenous peoples. These stereotypes were then imposed onto so-called Coloured people and are still present today. 'Coloured' people are seen as lazy alcoholics, dirty, carefree, humorous, witty and loud-mouthed. These stereotypes have been used in many literary works and films dating back to the apartheid era and even in contemporary films (February 1981).

In *Mind Your Colour* (1981), February speaks about Cape 'Coloured' stereotypes in South African literature. Most Afrikaans literature was written by white people, through the white, colonial perspective. In much of the literature, harmful stereotypes of Khoi people from historic writings dating back to the 1600s, have been imposed on the Cape 'Coloured'. February (ibid.) makes a distinct example by quoting F.C.L. Bosman's thesis and reviews on a play, *De Temperantisten*, which includes stereotypical Khoi characters. Bosman makes clear comparisons between the Khoi Characters and Cape 'Coloureds' stating that the Cape 'Coloured' has a love for alcohol violence and immorality, similar to that of the character in the novel. February (1981) further makes reference to 'Coloured' authors themselves. Dedicating an entire chapter to Adam Small, a 'Coloured' author who viewed 'Kaaps'[23] as a legitimate language and further used the language in his writing, despite many critics' objection to it.

According to Sicoe (2013) actively using stereotypes for a character could be flat, however if the stereotypical character shifts and counters said stereotype that makes the character more compelling and interesting. Stereotypes can make characters easily recognisable. Employing the use of stereotypes onto characters could convey to the players that people are more than

[22] Vernon or Vernie A. February was a South African activist and a professor at Leiden University. Born in the Western Cape, his literature often pertained to South African politics and identity politics (https://peoplepill.com/people/vernie-february n.d.).

[23] Afrikaaps or 'Kaaps' is a language created in the 1500s in South Africa. Today it is mostly used by working-class speakers in the Cape Flats (Haupt 2021).

just their stereotypes or are not connected to their stereotypes at all. In this way, using stereotypes as a plot device to create a certain expectation of a character and then twisting the plot to stun the viewer, proving the assumption wrong, could be profound (ibid.).

Texturism refers to the discrimination against certain hair types, specifically African hair textures (Shepherd 2018). Hair plays a big role in our community because of the colonial influence apartheid had on the 'Coloured' communities. It is a racist ideology embedded in my community, which stems from westernised standards of beauty. Erasmus states that naturally straight hair is considered to be the beauty standard, thus having to chemically straighten your hair to 'conform' is seen as humiliating (Erasmus in Richardson 2013: 85). I still face discrimination against my hair and often get taunted for it. Thus, this is an issue I want to bring awareness to within my community. I will elaborate on this concept further in chapter 3, in relation to a game character.

Appearances play an important role in my community. In my research, I will use the term 'Swagger' to explain its importance. 'Swagger' is the performance of style and class through the use of clothing (Mason 2018: 1118). Both the women and men in my community place an emphasis on branded clothing. Many opt to wear the Nike brand, specifically, as it is seen as high-end. While there is a stereotype of 'Coloured' people capping their teeth with gold, it is not a norm within my community. Flashy 'stanced' – customised – cars are praised and deemed as valuable by many men in my community. Thus stance events are quite popular and create a space where people can get together and showcase their cars, while enjoying each other's company. Another term for this is 'park-offs', which take place on weekends as a form of entertainment for our community. It is for this reason that stance has been chosen as one of the main events the characters attend in my art video game. These three concepts mentioned previously will be discussed further, in chapter three.

In chapter two, I will focus solely on two video games, *That Dragon, Cancer* and *Boet Fighter*, as case studies. The chapter will make an in-depth analysis of how these case studies influence my practical research and the creation of my art video game.

CHAPTER 2

Indie Video Games that Transcend the Norm

In chapter 1, I discussed the historical background of 'Coloured' identities, whilst examining the concept of video games as artworks. This acts as a foundation on which my practical research is built and generates a deeper understanding of my research through a myriad of texts that elaborate on the different concepts and methodologies used. My identity, methodology, choice of medium and the overall concept of my game have been analysed and discussed and will be discussed further in chapter 3.

In this chapter I analyse in depth how art video games as a mode of storytelling can potentially bring about sociocultural awareness as well as empathy within the player. In this chapter I analyse two video games as case studies, *That Dragon, Cancer* and *Boet Fighter* to further influence my practical research and how I construct, design and develop my art video game.

That Dragon, Cancer

Creating a sense of understanding and empathy through a video game can be challenging. *That Dragon, Cancer*, a game created by Ryan Green and his wife, Amy Green, takes a deep dive into the experiences and realities of raising a child, their son Joel, who suffers from cancer (Schott 2017). Through this case study I aim to gain knowledge on how to create empathy through video game language and observe the creativity it takes to bring about empathy from the player. I hope to gain knowledge on how autoethnography played a part in the creation of *That Dragon, Cancer* and how the producers incorporated their personal experiences in an immersive gaming world. For this case study I will only be speaking about certain chapters and scenes that play a key role in creating and conveying empathy, as opposed to summarising and dissecting the entire game.

The Greens used the game to document their experiences. Along with the video game, a documentary film, *Thank You for Playing*, was also released in 2016 (Eilon 2018). The documentary shows what happens behind the scenes of the game, the creativity, scripting and how they have translated their reality and real experiences into a video game. I took the time to watch the documentary, however I will not be giving it an in-depth analysis and summary, as it is not the main focus of this chapter. The documentary is 80 minutes long and gives insight into the vulnerability and painful experiences of using autoethnography as a method

for video game creation (Eilon 2018). Furthermore, the documentary shows how many people struggled to wrap their heads around the idea of speaking about trauma and grief through a medium like video games. Ryan Green often received harsh criticisms by the public and was shamed for using his son's illness as a theme in their video game.

That Dragon, Cancer, takes around two hours to complete (Auxier 2018). Filled with numerous metaphors, the world-building techniques used and design of the game are a combination of stylistic and realistic animation (ibid.). There are a number of reviews *That Dragon, Cancer*, which was quite successful and has obtained a few awards over the years, as well as recognition from major gaming platforms like *Wired* (ibid.). It is not a competitive game and cannot be 'won'. Instead it is narrative-based game taking the player on a journey through the Green's experiences of hope, faith, loss and grief over their son's life (Eilon 2018).

The game certainly left a mark on me and is quite memorable. However, I should note that certain aspects of *That Dragon, Cancer* did not affect me as I imagine it would someone who is also a parent. Nonetheless, there is no denying that the game did bring about a sense of despair.

The game is set up and coded so you take the role of the parents, Ryan and Amy, seeing Joel's journey through their perspective. In some scenes, the perspective changes and you play as a bird at the beach or as yourself, viewing the scenes from a third person's perspective. Filled with many metaphorical scenes, the game conveys emotions through indirect, almost mythical, experiences. A great example would be scene 8 'Adrift', I which the house is torn apart (Fig. 3), resembling a shipwreck, each room pinned on the rocks in the ocean.

Figure 3. *Adrift* (2016), Numinous Games, Game Screenshot, iOS

When entering each room, you can hear the parents' conversations with their middle son, explaining why Joel isn't developing like the average five-year old. Some rooms have more light-hearted conversations, filled with giggles. In other rooms more uncomfortable conversations take place with their children trying to navigate through their emotions on moving and missing out on school when they need to go to special hospitals outside their hometown. Ryan also expresses his envy for his wife's faith and how much hope she has. Based on my observation, I think scene 8 'Adrift' (Fig. 3) is a metaphor that displays the effect cancer can have on a family and household. Sometimes it can tear households apart; it is extremely stressful and difficult to handle, thus can even cause conflict within the family.

One of the most profound scenes, which is also included at the start of the documentary, is scene 7 'Sorry Guys, it's Not Good'. Before the doctors enter the room, there's a toy with buttons and as the player you have to click those buttons to entertain Joel and make him laugh. After a while of button-clicking and Joel's giggles, the doctors enter and Ryan and Amy are faced with bad news. Joel is terminally ill and does not have much time left to live. The toy changes from farm animals to the faces of Ryan, Amy and the doctors as the buttons. Each button reveals the thoughts and inner dialogue of these characters as the conversation of Joel's illness continues in the background. The rewind button shows how this moment kept replaying in Ryan and Amy's heads. A sombre and bitter moment, almost as if there is some sort of disbelief and thus the repetition of the doctor delivering the bad news of Joel being terminally ill is needed. After a few replays, the scene becomes dark; it starts raining and the room becomes flooded. The discussion between Ryan, Amy and the doctors intensifies and echoes, increasing in volume. Uncertainty, questions and concerns are raised as they go back and forth. The storm and flooding intensifies and you then find yourself in a boat with Joel (Fig. 4).

Figure 4. *Joel in the boat* (2016) Numinous Games, Game Screenshot, iOS

From my understanding, the scene could be from Joel's perspective, experiencing a sense of confusion, not understanding what's going on but acknowledging the tension and fear from his parents.

In scene 11 'Dehydration', Ryan and Joel are in the hospital room. Joel is extremely upset and sick. The scene is quite agonising even through the virtual perspective; Joel constantly screams and cries. As the player you feel limited, clicking around on different areas in the room, pacing up and down, in an attempt to calm Joel down. Throughout this scene, Ryan expresses his exhaustion trying to put Joel to sleep and how he has been crying for hours. Options to click on other items are present in the room, but nothing works; the crying continues. At some point, Ryan just sits and there are no more options and buttons left to click. All that is left to do is wait and listen to Joel's crying. The crying intensifies and attempts to feed him fail as Ryan says that Joel vomits everything up. The scene ends with Ryan saying a prayer amidst the intense screaming, and Joel slowly calms down and is finally asleep. In my opinion, this scene successfully conveys the experience and feeling to the player and actively puts us in the position to understand and condole with Ryan, thus creating empathy.

In scene 5 'Temple of Man'**,** after an MRI scan Joel plays in some sort of outer-space world. The scene feels extensive, with no clear instructions on what to do and at some point I wanted to quit. It did appear to be a coding glitch, but perhaps the point was to show how exhausting it can be to hold on to so much stress and pain while trying to put on a happy face and play with Joel, ensuring that he is happy. In some sense this did work and conveyed the message to me, but I can't say the same for other players and how they would perceive the scene. After a few minutes of playing, which felt like hours, the next chapter finally commences.

While metaphors are a creative way to convey certain emotions and experiences to the player, I think in some cases more direct approaches are needed. For example scene 5 needed clear instructions, so someone who might be less patient or does not have the gaming knowledge of the average gamer can know what to do and understand that the scene is meant to appear prolonged and confusing. I think a simple, 'Play with Joel by clicking *'X'* as we wait for the MRI scans' would make more sense. That way a clear instruction is given and the player knows that they are waiting for something, hence the extensive waiting period.

After watching the documentary *Thank You for Playing* along with playing *That Dragon, Cancer*, many pointers have been taken on how I could convey my lived experiences through an art video game. When including experiences in a video game, they do not have to be spelled out and mirror what actually happened. Metaphors help guide and shape our understanding of things in the world (Young 2013: 884). Different metaphors can encourage creativity and innovation; furthermore, metaphors are meant to be used as a way to expand on thought and aid in understanding different realities (Young 2013: 882). The use of metaphors in a video game can evoke certain feelings within the player. For example, feelings of exhaustion can be conveyed through creating extensive scenes and playing on people's patience by coding a scene to be long and boring with little to no interaction. Audio can also be used to increase feelings of annoyance or boredom if the same sound is playing repetitively.

The Greens sometimes re-enact and record conversations that were had in the past, to include in their game. They also film certain movements for reference for animations; for example for the drowning scene, Ryan got into a pool and filmed himself for artistic and design references. Similarly to how I draw and create certain scenes, I often find myself re-enacting movements or posing like the characters as a visual reference to draw from. I also use actual kitchens and rooms for references and to draw inspiration from. It is clear that using autoethnography to create works can be a fearful and vulnerable activity (Ellis and Bochner 2000). Your experiences are open to being critiqued by the public and you have no control on how the work may be perceived. Although it is a suitable methodology that matches my practical research, I do feel wary of the judgement that may take place.

Boet Fighter

The following case study will focus on the cultural tropes in video games and how cultural identity can successfully be conveyed to the player through game design and world building.[24] In contrast to the previous video game, *Boet Fighter* takes on a lighter theme and uses humour to entertain its players. Released in 2019, the game was created by a South African company named Cali4ways games and quickly became viral on Facebook (Swanepoel 2019). Having strong influences from the stereotypical South African 'Boet'[25]

[24] World building refers to the creation of a story's world, including the environment, the politics, the culture etc. (Kench 2022)

[25] 'Boet' is an informal Afrikaans term for brother or mate.

culture, the game is set in Fourways, Johannesburg (Magill 2020). The game is also directly influenced by South Africa's environment, both in social and economic contexts.

Figure 5. Califourways, *Boet Fighter* (2018), image. Available at: https://www.facebook.com/boetfighter/posts/ [Accessed 14 January 2022].

Taking on the character of 'Hard Eddy' (Fig. 5), a stereotypically muscular white man living in Fourways, your journey to saving a damsel, or as a Boet would say 'binnet', in distress occurs in the late night club scenes and depths of Johannesburg (Swanepoel 2019) as you fist-fight your way through bars whilst jugging down creatine and protein shakes to increase your health bar[26].

The game's aesthetic and animation is highly stylistic, with characters having exaggerated features, adding to the humorous effect (ibid. 2019). From extremely buff gym-fanatic 'Boets' to scrawny intoxicated men, Hard Eddy has to win countless fist fights. As with the previous case study, I will not provide a summary of the entire game, instead I will describe certain aspects, world building and the overall game design.

In the first level, Hard Eddy is in a club setting, where his girlfriend, also known as 'binnet', gets 'stolen' from another boet. On a quest to save his girl, Hard Eddy fights any and every guy he encounters. The audio in the game is quite hilarious, displaying a thick Johannesburg 'boet' accent, Hard Eddy passes commentary as he fights other characters. Texts are also

[26] Boet Fighter is a game centered around fitness and gyming, hence the use of creatine and protein shakes as in-game items to increase your character's health bar.

included, instead of the usual 'K.O.' (knock out), terms like 'finished', 'moered'[27] and 'flattened' are displayed when characters are defeated (Fig. 6). These are some of the first cultural tropes I have noticed being used in the video game and are quite familiar to most local South Africans.

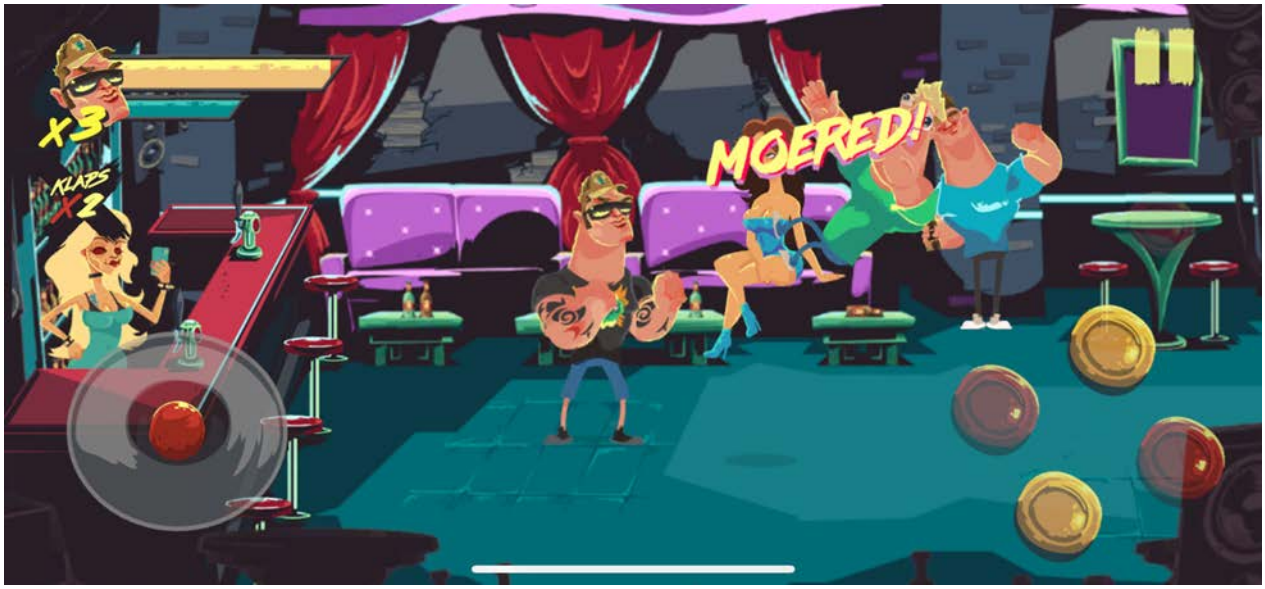


Figure 6. Califourways, *Moered*, (2018), Game screenshot, Steam.

After successfully 'moering' all the characters in the club, Hard Eddy makes his way through Johannesburg traffic and fights even more boets, whilst dodging speeding minibus taxis. This is a second cultural trope, as taxis in South Africa, especially Johannesburg, are known for driving recklessly (Randall 2021). The taxis closely resemble the old rundown Toyota taxis and appear to be packed with passengers. The backgrounds for the game are stylised but have familiar traces. For example on one of the traffic levels, the Johannesburg cityscape is featured in the background, specifically the popular Hillbrow tower. Some fictionalised buildings are also incorporated in the world building of Fourways. Two shops in one scene, called 'Laan Lager' and 'Dop en Chops', are a clever play on words, using popular slang like 'dop', which means alcohol, to refer to a pub, and 'chops' which refers to grilled pork. Other stereotypes and issues in South Africa are also tackled in a comical way, for example police corruption. One of the first interactive dialogues happens with 'the popo', another term for the police. The interaction ends with a bribe, which unfortunately is a common occurrence in South Africa (Petrus 2021).

[27] 'Moered' an Afrikaans slang term which means violently attacked of beaten up.

The developers make use of in-between scenes, which are animations of dialogue that further explain the narrative of the game, thus making it easy for the player to understand the overall plot. These in-between scenes sometimes provide a brief explanation and introduction on the characters the player is about to encounter. The dialogue before 'the popo' level was quite humorous, as Hard Eddy makes a statement that the police are here to 'self-serve and neglect', commenting on the corruption within the police force.

Many critics state that the game is quite repetitive and you are limited to only kicks, blocks, punches, head dives and 'klaps'[28] (Swanepoel 2019). Each level involves fighting different 'boets' with the same techniques, which make the game-play slightly difficult. Although there is some degree of difficulty there is no points system and little or no rewards are offered (Magill 2020). I must state that these critiques are relevant to video games that enter the competitive video game domain for commercial purposes. My art video game is not for commercial purposes, but for artistic research. Thus the criteria of games being compelling enough to buy and having an increase in audience replaying, is not applicable to my art video game. Furthermore there is not much character development within *Boet Fighter*, as Hard Eddy remains the same stereotypical white Johannesburg male character throughout the game, along with the other flattened and stereotyped characters.

What I have analysed and learned from this case study is that cultural tropes should be picked wisely. Common, popular tropes need to be used to create a sense of relatability and familiarity. Many inside jokes are present within the game that may not land with an international audience or player, which is perfectly fine in this case. The game was created by South Africans for South Africans and having a game with a very specific niche of humour creates greater chances of authenticity. In terms of my art video game, I make use of the slang that I speak with my friends. I have gone as far as using informal spelling of certain words such as 'moeni'[29] and 'relack'[30]. Perhaps this was subconscious at first, as I am so accustomed to spelling and texting Afrikaans words informally. However, I do not intend to change the spelling to more appropriate or 'academic' Afrikaans. I think the use of slang and informal language will be more relatable and speaks to the culture I have experienced. As mentioned previously, *Boet Fighter* has little or no character development so the players have

[28] 'Klap' an Afrikaans term meaning slap.

[29] Moeni(e) is a shortened Afrikaans term for 'Moet nie', which means don't.

[30] Relack is a slang term we use for 'relax'.

no insight on why characters are the way they are. Although character development may not be the focus for *Boet Fighter*, for my art video game, flattened characters could lead to controversy, especially when using stereotypes as a plot device. To counter this, I created scenes where some background on the characters, including non-player characters, is shown. One example is when the character Crystal engages in dialogue with her aunt. As the conversation progresses, her aunt becomes more inquisitive and nosey, passing rude remarks about others. Simultaneously her aunt's head transmutes into a camera as she's gossiping, resembling the CCTV aunty character. This conveys some sort of backstory to the CCTV character and thus is not perceived to be as flat or boring.

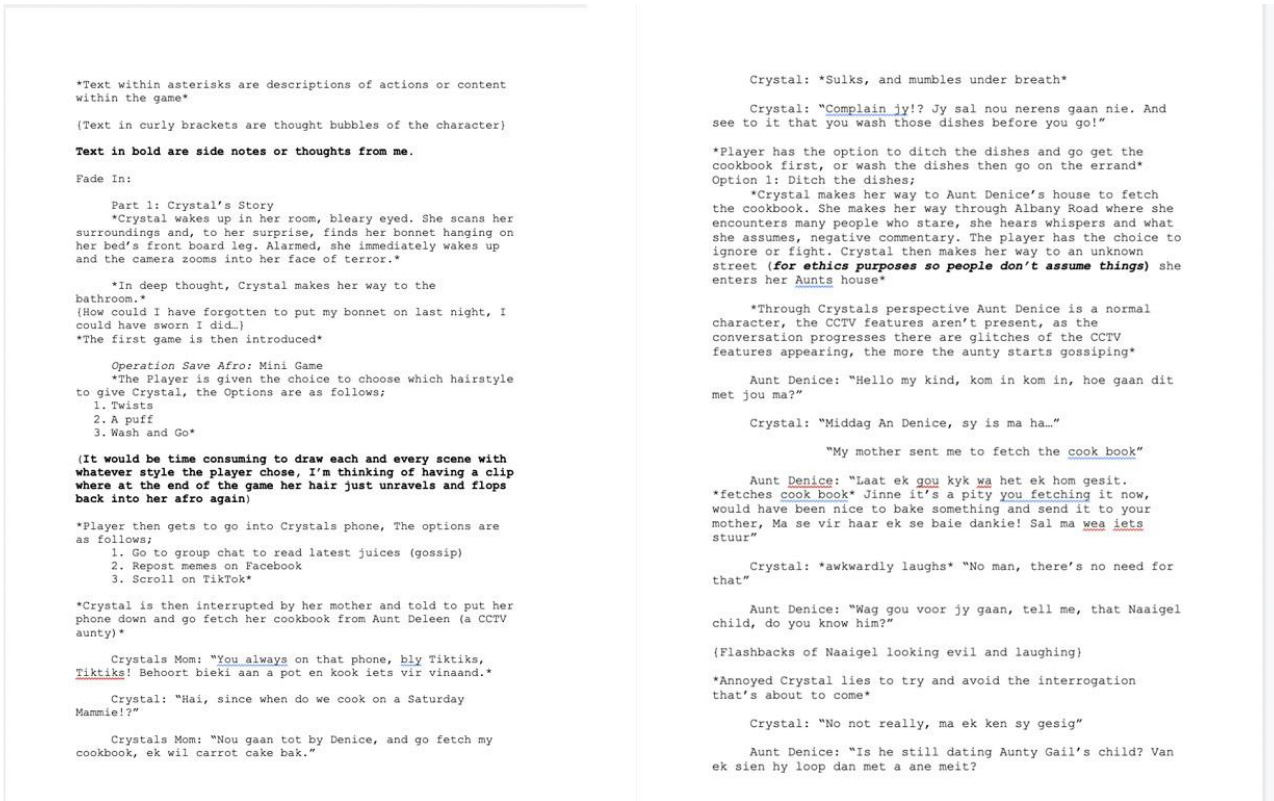
In chapter 2, I have analysed and discussed the use of autoethnography as a means of creating a video game, as well as the use of cultural tropes in a video game to create familiarity, ultimately leading to the possibilities of both sociocultural awareness and empathy. I have reflected on both case studies and acquired guidance on how to create an art video game that uses storytelling to bring about empathy within the player. The implementation of the knowledge I have acquired from these case studies will be further discussed in chapter 3.

CHAPTER 3

'*Twee Kante van 'n Storie*': The Installation

This chapter provides an in-depth analysis of my MFA installation, in relation to the three themes briefly discussed in chapter 1: stereotypes, texturism and 'swagger'. The process, along with the implementation of autoethnography, will be further explored within this chapter.

The art production and creative process makes up a greater portion of my MFA, so a lot of time and effort has gone into production. When it comes to digital art, much planning and troubleshooting takes place, especially when coding is involved. For my art video game, I decided to write a script for each character's storyline (Fig. 7). The script mostly deals with dialogue, therefore creating storyboards to accompany the script was needed. The storyboards were created for visuals and game planning. They went into thorough detail of the different options the players had in the game, as well as the outcome of each option chosen. With script writing I found it quite challenging. As an artist I mostly work intuitively, hence planning in such detail was new to me. Since I am a visual person, writing was never a strength of mine, especially creative writing.



Text within asterisks are descriptions of actions or content within the game

(Text in curly brackets are thought bubbles of the character)

Text in bold are side notes or thoughts from me.

Fade In:

Part 1: Crystal's Story
Crystal wakes up in her room, bleary eyed. She scans her surroundings and, to her surprise, finds her bonnet hanging on her bed's front board leg. Alarmed, she immediately wakes up and the camera zooms into her face of terror.

In deep thought, Crystal makes her way to the bathroom.
(How could I have forgotten to put my bonnet on last night, I could have sworn I did…)
The first game is then introduced

Operation Save Afro: Mini Game
*The Player is given the choice to choose which hairstyle to give Crystal, the Options are as follows;
1. Twists
2. A puff
3. Wash and Go*

(**It would be time consuming to draw each and every scene with whatever style the player chose, I'm thinking of having a clip where at the end of the game her hair just unravels and flops back into her afro again**)

*Player then gets to go into Crystals phone, The options are as follows;
1. Go to group chat to read latest juices (gossip)
2. Repost memes on Facebook
3. Scroll on TikTok*

Crystal is then interrupted by her mother and told to put her phone down and go fetch her cookbook from Aunt Deleen (a CCTV aunty)

Crystals Mom: "You always on that phone, bly Tiktiks, Tiktiks! Behoort bieki aan a pot en kook iets vir vinaand.*

Crystal: "Hai, since when do we cook on a Saturday Mammie!?"

Crystals Mom: "Nou gaan tot by Denice, and go fetch my cookbook, ek wil carrot cake bak."

Crystal: *Sulks, and mumbles under breath*

Crystal: "Complain jy!? Jy sal nou nerens gaan nie. And see to it that you wash those dishes before you go!"

Player has the option to ditch the dishes and go get the cookbook first, or wash the dishes then go on the errand
Option 1: Ditch the dishes;
*Crystal makes her way to Aunt Denice's house to fetch the cookbook. She makes her way through Albany Road where she encounters many people who stare, she hears whispers and what she assumes, negative commentary. The player has the choice to ignore or fight. Crystal then makes her way to an unknown street (***for ethics purposes so people don't assume things***) she enters her Aunts house*

Through Crystals perspective Aunt Denice is a normal character, the CCTV features aren't present, as the conversation progresses there are glitches of the CCTV features appearing, the more the aunty starts gossiping

Aunt Denice: "Hello my kind, kom in kom in, hoe gaan dit met jou ma?"

Crystal: "Middag An Denice, sy is ma ha…"

"My mother sent me to fetch the cook book"

Aunt Denice: "Laat ek gou kyk wa het ek hom gesit. *fetches cook book* Jinne it's a pity you fetching it now, would have been nice to bake something and send it to your mother, Ma se vir haar ek se baie dankie! Sal ma wea iets stuur"

Crystal: *awkwardly laughs* "No man, there's no need for that"

Aunt Denice: "Wag gou voor jy gaan, tell me, that Naaigel child, do you know him?"

(Flashbacks of Naaigel looking evil and laughing)

Annoyed Crystal lies to try and avoid the interrogation that's about to come

Crystal: "No not really, ma ek ken sy gesig"

Aunt Denice: "Is he still dating Aunty Gail's child? Van ek sien hy loop dan met a ane meit?

Figure 7. Tasmin Randall, *Script from Crystal's Storyline* (2022), MS Word document

Autoethnographic storytelling is a new concept I learned over the course of my research. Many researchers do not see the notion of 'research based on the personal' as sound (Chen 2016: 53). Nonetheless, this method allows me not only to communicate and explain my perspective to others, but also to investigate my own perspective and learn more about myself and my experiences. Many scenes in my script were inspired by real-life events or personal experiences. In some cases, I wrote from an outsider's perspective, not having seen things first hand. For example, one of the characters comes from a lower-class family, whereas I grew up in a middle-class family, experiencing more privileges than others in my community. Linda Tuhiwai Smith speaks about storytelling as one of the 25 indigenous projects (Smith 1950: 144). 'Each individual story is powerful. But the point about the stories is not that they simply tell a story, or tell a story simply. These new stories contribute to a collective story in which every indigenous person has a place' (Smith 1950: 144).

Similar to Smith's ideology of storytelling as an indigenous method, once again, I want to reiterate that my story does not count for the entire Makhanda 'Coloured' community's experience. It is simply a contribution to a collective of stories that are yet to be told and brought to the mainstream. While my attempt at creating empathy in a player and bringing humour into the plot was especially challenging, scripting the dialogue did help in some instances. With the use of inside jokes and a language specific to my community, I am able to create a sense of familiarity and understanding. However, for the most part, I relied on visuals and the designs of characters to bring forth a humorous aspect in the game.

The plot

Throughout the game, the characters' journeys intersect one another, making it possible for the player to view those interactions from both perspectives, hence the title '*Twee Kante van a Storie*'.

The characters – an introduction

Crystal has a rocky start to her day, forgetting to protect her Afro with a bonnet. Rushed by her mom to collect a cookbook from her aunt, on her way, she encounters people of her community with their ignorant, anti-black comments. Does she resist their foul commentary or does she retaliate and use her super power to zap them with her Afro? The choice is up to the player. Although many deem her as the sassy 'angry coloured girl' stereotype, she is a bubbly person who enjoys company and ends up at the stance event later that day.

Cash, a graffiti artist, starts off his day by dealing with his busy and noisy surroundings. Having a less privileged background, Cash works to support his family whilst having a burning ambition for the arts. His drive for spreading his creativity through graffiti later leads him to the stance event, where he encounters potential nemeses or companions.

Stacy, unlike Cash, grew up in an upper class urban area, experiencing more privileges. Due to her upbringing her parents can be quite snobbish and instil a lot of problematic ideologies within her. She thus tries her best to portray the perfect 'golden child' persona, to impress her parents. Stacy later has the choice either to sneak out and go to the stance event with her friends, or to remain a diligent daughter and focus on her studies. Again, this decision is up to the player.

Lastly, *Naaigel*, being quite despicable yet comical, has an evident obsession with the brand 'Nike'. Naaigel uses humour to deal with his struggles and anxiety stemming from his situation at home. As a big fan of stance himself, should Naaigel attend the event to ease the stress or be considerate and stay at home to take care of his grandmother and younger brother? Once again, the choice is up to the player.

The characters and the three themes

Much thought was placed into character development. There are four main characters, with distinct storylines, who collide and overlap at some point in the game. I must state that designing and illustrating the characters' rooms was most enjoyable. In turn it helped strengthen each character, bringing them to life and assisting in communicating their personalities and a bit of a backstory to the player. 'Crystal' was my first attempt at designing and creating a character (Fig. 1). I relate to this character the most through the experience of texturism.

Texturism was once a foreign concept to me and I believe it could still be a foreign concept to others. Growing up straightening hair was seen as a norm; hair is seen as something very important within our community (Richardson 2013). In fact, in South Africa, hair is quite political. During apartheid, your worth and privilege depended on your hair. The 'pencil test' was one of the most degrading and controversial tests created to measure someone's proximity to whiteness (Richardson 2013: 5). It involved sticking a pencil into a person's hair. If the pencil fell out, hassle-free, they were considered white or at least white-passing. If the pencil remained in the hair they were either classified as Black or 'Coloured', depending on other factors.

This ideology was internalised within many 'Coloured' communities. You were seen as superior because you were considered white passing, or because you had 'good' hair (Ruiters 2009). Many in my community do not understand how deeply rooted racism is within their beliefs and remarks on hair. Calling straight hair 'good hair' and coarse African textured hair 'bad hair' is essentially racist. Anti-Blackness is so normalised in 'Coloured' communities, that some people do not even realise the racism that is intrinsic to some beliefs or standards. Many believe that not hating black people automatically means you are not racist, but it is deeper than just slurs and hatred. The discourse of hair, in 'Coloured' communities needs to be addressed, which is why I created the character Crystal, who speaks on the experiences of 'Coloured' girls who choose to embrace their natural hair.

In these contemporary times there are many girls and women, including myself, facing discrimination and taunting because of our hair. Terms like *kroes kop'*[31] and *boskop*[32] are often used in a derogatory way to offend people with African textured hair (Lion-Cachet 2018). Albeit some people in other 'Coloured' communities have taken these terms and embraced them or made it their own. The artist Traci Kwaai, for example, took the expression 'Goema hair' and made it her own, including it within her artworks and depictions of natural hair (Lion-Cachet 2018).

I was recently made aware of the concept of a natural hair journey in which you do 'a big chop' and cut off all your relaxed hair and then start regrowing your natural hair without using any harsh chemicals, such as dyes or relaxers, or straighteners or even heat. I started my own journey in 2018. The natural hair journey for many 'Coloured' women, also involves healing and self-love. Learning to love your hair, how to style and take care of your hair is just as important. For others, being natural is a political stance; everyone has different reasons for embracing their natural hair (Erasmus 1997).

Today, I have moved away from the political and the natural hair community itself, although I still wear my hair naturally and do not use chemical straighteners to alter its texture. I view my hair as normal, not as a political statement or an inroad into a community that often comes over as elite[33] (Ruddock 2022). My hair is just my hair, and I have learned to love

[31] *Kroes kop* is a derogatory term given to people with African textured hair, commenting on the hair texture.

[32] *Boskop* is a derogatory term to describe African textured hair, it directly translates to 'Bush head'.

[33] Within the natural hair community, itself, there is still a sense of elitism and discrimination. Many often favour looser curls over coarser, coily textured hair (Ruddock, 2022).

every stage of it, be it curly or straight and blown out when I need to ease the amount of labour it takes to style my hair.

For Crystal, the font ‘Krungthep’ is used in her dialogue scenes (Fig. 1). While the font is quite simple, it does have a subtle sci-fi geometric design to it, commenting on her fondness for gaming and her supernatural hair abilities. Illustrating Crystal’s hair was challenging, not in a practical manner but in terms of context and how people might perceive the visuals. I feared that my animations of her hair could be mistaken for satire or mockery. While the Afro may appear exaggerated and excessive to some, many women do have hair that grows to that extent of length and thickness. Nonetheless, illustrating her hair in a way that covers half her face was a form of hyperbole. Although I do find it inconvenient, especially in hot and humid weather, I still take pride in my hair and the volume of it. I hypothesise that my fondness for my hair stems from years of oppression through both society and school or corporate systems (Tanis 2016). The ‘hair rules’ in our schools’ code of conduct is all too familiar to women and children of colour. What may have appeared as the norm at the time, reflecting on those rules revealed how many of them were quite discriminatory. For instance, in the 2016 student protests at Pretoria High School for Girls, a young scholar protested against their school's code of conduct due to hair discrimination against African textured hair (Tanis 2016). Similarly to those hair rules, girls at my school were forced to ‘tame’ their hair, which often alluded to using relaxers and straighteners. At my school, certain braid styles were not permitted, as well as dreadlocks. Some teachers took it upon themselves to measure girls’ Afros using a ruler. The ‘no longer than 5 cm’ rule was ridiculous and quite frankly a reflection of systemic racism, as many of us were forced to cut or straighten our hair.

A lot of this pent-up anger and frustration was channelled through Crystal’s character. The notion of an Afro coming to life and being able to ‘zap’ people when they mock or ridicule it is comical, but also resonates with me. I should note that ‘Coloured’ women in particular face discrimination towards their hair from the corporate world, schools, their community and even their own households (Richardson 2013). Today, I am still faced with people and their ignorant sly comments. These same sly comments often lead Crystal to be on guard and in defence mode whenever people look at or comment on her hair. Even though hair plays a big role in this character's story, there is more to Crystal than just her hair. A part of her frustration is how people often see her as just ‘that girl with the hair’. Crystal has a big personality, she is outgoing whilst being a gamer. She enjoys spending quality time with her friends and is a big fan of sci-fi.

I cannot speak about texturism, without speaking about the anti-blackness present in many 'Coloured' communities. Although these racist ideologies have been instilled in people through the apartheid government (Adhikari 2009), I do feel that at some point we cannot continue to blame the apartheid government for our communities' prejudices against black people. People need to take accountability and unlearn what has been indoctrinated. The need to assimilate to whiteness and disown your blackness is rooted in self-hate (Adhikari 2005: 11). We cannot deny that the very act of constantly straightening your hair and using harsh chemicals on it is rooted in colonialism (Richardson 2013: 19). Although many do opt to rather straighten their hair, it is also important to be informed and enlightened on these ideologies and the politics behind straightening hair. How people choose to style and wear their hair is their choice, however it becomes an issue when people view their straightened hair as superior or as 'good' hair, in comparison to those that opt to wear their natural curly hair.

'Stacy' was initially created to deal with the obsession with straight hair and the perpetuation of Eurocentrism and its beauty standards. Through character development and the creation of a backstory and supporting characters, the character slowly leaned more toward the discourse of anti-blackness. The notion of 'straight hair is good hair' links directly to texturism (Richardson 2013). I recall being asked by fellow colleagues why Stacy, the girl who is trying to assimilate to whiteness, has darker skin. The choice of skin colour was deliberate, although many may assume that someone with fair skin, for example Crystal, is most likely to assimilate to whiteness because they could be seen as trying to pass as white. While this is true, it is not a foreign concept for people with darker skin in my community to attempt to do the same. The reality is that many people suffer with self-hate because of how anti-black their community can be (Ruiters 2009). In many ways you are taught to dissociate from your blackness; in some instances children are scolded for playing in the sun too long as 'their skin will get too dark'. This is a direct form of colourism, which many experience in my community. These concepts all go hand-in-hand with anti-blackness.

For Stacy's character I chose a Serif font, 'Times New Roman', as opposed to the other main characters. The serif font embodies her prim and proper personality (Fig. 1). We see this through her character's gameplay. Stacy's storyline follows a schedule with a set of duties, commenting on her perfectionist personality. Eventually as the game proceeds and the player decides to rebel, the schedule no longer pops up and Stacy's storyline continues separately from the schedule.

For Stacy's character, I created her parents 'The Snobbish Rents'[34], to deal with the notion of 'self-hate and anti-blackness' (Fig. 8). These are Non-Player Characters, or NPCs, which will be further discussed, later in this chapter.

Figure 8. Tasmin Randall, *Snobbish Rents* (2022), Game Screenshot

There is a scene in the game where Stacy and her parents have a conversation on Zoom. Her parents are away on a business trip and the player gets a clear sense of how snobbish the mom can be through dialogue. At some point during the conversation the mom 'Coleen' yells at Stacy for her skin colour appearing 'too dark' and her being out in the sun too often. This is direct commentary on the colourism present within my community. While the character's parents do perpetuate racist ideologies, I created Stacy to not only deal with texturism but to reflect on the effect such strict and biased parenting can have on a child. Over the years, I have witnessed many friends and peers both from the Makhanda community and outside from other 'Coloured' communities, deal with parents who are anti-black. Although many make the efforts to unlearn and educate themselves, there is still an incredible amount of discomfort in educating and correcting their parents. Some parents even went to the extent of hating and disassociating from their own ethnicity and community. To me, it appeared that one of my peers had to live a double life, hiding many aspects of it: sneaking out to spaces that were predominantly Black or 'Coloured' or being told to not befriend certain people because they were deemed as 'too coloured'. These harmful biases are perpetuated and indoctrinated in a child's mental development and behaviour, making it a challenge for them to unlearn. This is a phenomenon I try to show through Stacy's character and storyline.

[34] 'Rents' is a slang term, short for parents.

Both these previously mentioned characters deal with deep, painful and uncomfortable discourses. However, these conversations are important and they need to be addressed by many ‘Coloured’ communities. Anti-blackness is something that is actively being perpetuated in many of these communities.

In order for me to speak more about my culture I created a third character, ‘Naaigel’ (pronounced Nigel), to deal with the concept of ‘swagger’. ‘Swagger’ is something that is quite prominent in the youth of my community. I would like to think that swagger is also a part of our culture, specifically within the young men of our community, which is why I chose a male to portray this character. In this specific context ‘swagger’ denotes an obsession with luxury brands, specifically sports brands (Mason 2018). The most popular choice is Nike; the swoosh of the Nike brand is seen in so many ‘Coloured’ boys’ and men’s wardrobes. At least one item of the Nike brand is needed. I, too, once indulged in the importance of owning sports brand clothing. I owned my first pair of Nike sneakers in Grade 7 and purchased my first Adidas tracksuit in Grade 8. Prior to having these items, I recall being teased for wearing ‘no-name’ brand sneakers. My parents never believed in buying branded clothing especially for younger children, since they outgrow their clothing quickly. For Naaigel’s dialogue scenes, I chose the font ‘Futura’, which is the same or similar font to that used by the Nike brand. The choice of this font is quite self-explanatory.

Swagger is related to hip-hop culture, which started in the 1970s in United States of America (Alridge and Stewart 2005). From there, hip-hop culture made its way to South Africa and first emerged in Cape Town, amongst ‘Coloured’ people (Künzler 2011: 28). However, in the 1980s the United States enacted the Comprehensive Anti-Apartheid Act, which put an end to US trade and investment in South Africa (Marsh 2019). It was during this period that vibrant subcultures, such as hip-hop, grew amongst numerous communities as a resistance against apartheid. Designer Anthony Smith states that members of his community would take inspiration from fashion magazines and MTV VHS tapes – which somehow made it to the country despite the US ban – to make their own home-grown version of street fashion (Marsh 2019). Today, the fashion trends include sports branded hooded sweatshirts, tracksuits and sneakers. Swagger is also often associated with criminality or with ‘ungovernable’ working class (Archer in Mason 2018). This is because sports branded clothing and high-end fashion brands like Nike, Gucci, Fendi are often seen as being connected with people within the drug business (Archer in Mason 2018).

In my art video game, I refer to these assumptions and stereotypes through a CCTV aunty and Cash interaction. The prying aunty questions Cash and asks whether he knows if Naaigel sells drugs or how he's able to afford expensive branded clothing.

According to Will Mason in '"Swagger": Urban Youth Culture, Consumption and Social Positioning', two interviewees from his focus groups state that 'swag isn't just about what clothing you wear it's how you wear the clothing' (Mason 2018: 1126). From my perspective and what I have observed, there is a recurring joke within our community about how young 'Coloured' men tend to pose for pictures. The 'thumbs up' pose is seen all over social media, being made by not all, but most men in our community. I have thus included this pose within my game on the main page, animating Naaigel to pose with his thumb, commenting on this specific type of swagger found in my community (Fig. 9).

Figure 9. Tasmin Randall, *Splash Page* (2022), Game Screenshot

I have come to the conclusion that in most cases, owning branded clothing can stem from peer pressure. Today my sense of fashion has totally changed, opting to wear extreme platformed shoes and Demonia-styled boots. I often get side-eyed by people in my community because of my choice of fashion, which many could deem as atypical.

As with most communities, clothes can be an identifier or a form of self-expression (Mason 2018). People make assumptions about others based on their clothing. Deciding to use the word 'swagger' to describe this specific phenomenon or ideology, took much thought and consideration. My initial idea was to use the term 'materialism', however this term has negative connotations to it, which I am trying to avoid. Swagger is a part of my culture and community. Although not everyone, myself included, engages with or holds branded clothing

in high regard, it is still quite prominent in my community and a large portion of the youth and younger generations find some form of identity with branded clothing, specifically the Nike brand. My reason for choosing the term ‘materialism’ at first, stems from the prominent tangible items and tropes I have observed in my community. Many of these things could be considered quite materialistic, from branded clothing to excessive jewellery, as well as – for example – dropped suspensions in modified or ‘stanced’ cars. These were things that I found to be popular and common in my community. Although there are people who do not engage in owning stanced cars or Nike branded clothing, it does give a sense of common culture to include these tropes in my game. Many in my community will relate to these things either through association or by mere experience because we all notice these possessions within our surroundings. In Naaigel’s storyline, there is a scene that takes place in his friend’s garage, in which the player gets to cut the springs of a car in order to drop the suspension. This is something I have observed when visiting my cousin. They would often gather in his garage to cut hair, smoke a pipe or prep their cars for the next stance event or park-off, be it in Makhanda or outside town.

There is a reason behind this specific spelling of the character’s name ‘Naaigel’ (Fig. 1). The name is meant to be a pun, the term ‘naai’ is an Afrikaans word for ‘sew’. However, in my community it is used as a swear word which has several meanings that are too vulgar to mention in this thesis. For this context, the term can also mean someone who is despicable or a scoundrel. The reasoning for this specific spelling is that Nigel is seen as quite a despicable yet comical character. He portrays some of the encounters I have had with a number of immature ‘Coloured’ men that are known for taking a joke too far, or that perpetuate sexism and anti-blackness. ‘Naaigel’ is a character that can sometimes be misunderstood. His situation at home could be the reason for his behaviour. Having to take care of both a sick grandmother and younger brother by himself can be emotionally taxing.

Naaigel’s mother is present in the game, however she prioritises making money over raising her children and helping Naaigel to care of his sick grandmother. The burden of actual parenting is left for Naaigel. Since Naaigel has a lot of stress from his situation at home, he often uses humour to deal with his issues or to mask his pain. Therefore, he is seen as this comical yet despicable character, that often makes inappropriate jokes. Although the character’s main purpose is to deal with ‘swagger’, I think it is important to have characters deal with different issues at the same time. This, in turn, conveys that there are nuances to

these characters which bring them to life and could possibly bring about empathy from the player.

The fourth character, ‘Cash’, was created to deal directly with stereotypes. As mentioned previously, the stereotypes of ‘Coloured’ people are gangsters, violent behaviour, alcoholics, or people involved with crime (Isaacs-Martin 2013). Cash is a male character, a graffiti artist, designed to visibly resemble what society and my community deems as a ‘skollie’ or gangster (Fig. 1). Many might make this assumption based on Cash’s ‘embodied disposition’; this refers to posture, body language, use of slang and so on (Mason 2018). However, Cash is the complete opposite. Coming from a lower-class family, Cash’s lack of privileges and access to decent education made it difficult for him to pursue his dreams of becoming an artist or even studying. Being a graffiti artist, there is some rebellion to the character and many can misunderstand Cash as a person, thus the assumption that he is a ‘skollie’ often comes into play. At heart, Cash is ambitious, creative and does everything in his power to get his art noticed, hence the public vandalism. Cash does not place emphasis or power on his appearance; he does not follow the social cues or contract of wearing and purchasing name brand clothing. This is because he works to support his family and devotion to his art.

It is important to note that Cash’s sketchbook includes drawings directly derived from the internet, a comment on how some artists use online examples to influence their artwork and style. Cash is still in the midst of perfecting his craft, therefore copying from other artists or internet sources helps in practising it. In designing Cash, it only made sense to for me to use a graffiti-like font in his dialogue scenes. However, the struggle was finding one that’s legible enough for the players to see. I chose, ‘Marker felt’ (Fig. 1), a more subtle font for legibility but which still gives off the art/graffiti vibe. The font is a script-like aesthetic having a slight playfulness to it through the angles and shapes of the letters.

Other characters in the game also tend to stereotype Cash because of his appearance. When Stacy encounters Cash, as a player from Stacy’s perspective you have the choice of trusting the character, or stereotyping him and avoiding him in fear of your safety. This interaction is complex, because of South Africa’s history of gender-based violence and a high crime rate (Mutizira 2022). The most sane option, as a woman especially, is to rather be safe than sorry. Through animation and coding I have also warped the interaction to appear different from both characters’ storylines. This comments on how people’s perception and biases can often warp reality and misinterpret situations easily. The interaction takes place in a street behind a popular building, the Dakawa Arts Centre. On her way to Mikayla’s house, Stacy

accidentally drops her wallet. Cash notices and attempts to call her to return the lost wallet. In this instance, it is easy to assume a guy, with Cash's appearance, has other motives. The player then has the choice to either respond or just walk off and ignore Cash.

In a scene between Cash and his dad, Cash tells his father he got a gig to paint a mural by the stance event. Instead of congratulating him or showing his son support, the father questions Cash and his passion, stating that 'artists starve' and they are already struggling financially. This is commentary I quite often receive from relatives and many others in my community when they find out I have a degree in fine arts. Luckily, my parents have been nothing but supportive when it comes to my studies. However, they can be slightly confused as to what exactly my degree encompasses and why I am creating a video game instead of painting large-scale portraits. Digital art is a medium that many are not familiar with.

The Non-Player Characters

Alongside the main characters, I also designed and created Non-Player Characters (NPCs). NPCs play a vital role in bringing the gaming world and story to life, whilst being supporting characters to strengthen the main character's storylines. My first attempt at creating an NPC was the 'CCTV aunties' (Fig. 2). This was my attempt at bringing in a humorous aspect to my game, however I was fearful that the characters might perpetuate a harsh stereotype. I feared that the gown in which each was dressed could potentially symbolise or perpetuate the 'lazy' stereotype which could counter my entire concept of the game. To avoid this, I created scenes in which the player can see and understand why certain characters are the way they are. For CCTV aunties, a scene in Crystal's game shows her aunt as a normal human being. As the conversation progresses and the aunt becomes more curious and prying, a glitch happens and the aunt's head turns into a CCTV camera (Fig. 10).

Figure 10. Tasmin Randall, *CCTV Aunty glitch* (2022), Game screenshot

These scenes gives the NPCs more of a background and character. I must reiterate that some NPCs that I have created stem from a place of my lacking information and being inexperienced. These are just my perspectives; I do not know every character's background and why certain people in my community behave the way that they do.

Stacy's parents, 'The Snobbish Rents' (Fig. 7), are another example of characters that stem from a place of lack of understanding on my part. Although I have encountered people that are anti-black and ignorant, I have never experienced being parented by people that hold such strong and extreme beliefs or norms. While the CCTV aunties do have some form of backstory or scene that explains these characters more, I did not to do the same for 'The Snobbish Rents'. It could be my lack of understanding, or just my lack of interest in trying to understand and empathise with people that perpetuate and instil such harmful norms within their children. Furthermore, Stacy's parents also forbid her from interacting with some of her 'Coloured' friends or going to the 'Coloured' area. This is a comment on how a few people in my community often battle with classism, self-hate and biases even towards their own ethnicity. The interaction with the 'Snobbish Rents' is short but I made it a point to add these statements to show the player why they are labelled as 'snobbish'.

Naaigel's mother, also known as the 'damsel in distress' is quite young and immature. Although she supports her family financially she neglects most of her parenting responsibilities. The financial responsibility and illness of her mom weighs heavily on her, thus she tends to indulge in a bottle of wine every so often. Splurging on clothing, Naaigel's mom tries to make up for her emotional and sometimes physical absence through money and buying branded clothing for Naaigel (Fig. 11). Her relationship with her youngest is different compared to her relationship with Naaigel, her eldest. Naaigel was raised by his ouma (grandmother) and thus Naaigel and his mother never really fostered a mother-son relationship. Instead, she treats Naaigel like a friend or brother, often overstepping boundaries with him. Although she attempts to be present for her youngest son, she still depends heavily on Naaigel for support in raising him.

Figure 11. Tasmin Randall, *Naaigel's Mom* (2022), Digital Drawing

In my game, I try showing the player why Naaigel's mom drinks and behaves the way she does. It is important to not just present flattened characters because it will lead to perpetuation of previously mentioned stereotypes. Many people turn to alcohol as a coping mechanism. Naaigel's mother has an incredibly demanding job and the stress of being a single mother and sole provider in her household can be overwhelming. At one stage, before she has an argument with Naaigel, the player sees a short clip of her phone buzzing endlessly with numerous work emails and reminders. She then grabs her bottle of wine and in the background you see her mother, Naaigel's ouma, sighing in discontent.

Several other supporting characters have been created, including friends and family of the main characters. Contrary to the CCTV aunties or snobbish rents, some of these other NPCs have less screen time. They are either supporting characters that add to the plot or that form part of the world-building process discussed below.

The Process

World building is the process of constructing a world that in most cases is fictional. It involves not only the design of the aesthetics or visuals but the creation of the languages that characters speak and how that specific society works (Kench 2022). I would like to think of my game's world as a hybrid of fiction and non-fiction. Since my world is based on a non-fictional town, Makhanda, I have added certain fictional aspects to the world through character creation and NPCs.

For my reference pictures when illustrating certain streets and spaces, I used Google Maps. I made sure to choose certain streets and main roads that are familiar with my community, for example Albany Road, the Dakawa Arts and Crafts centre and ‘Cassim’ the blue shop at the end of Albany Road. These are just a few spaces out of the many that I have chosen to include. One of the challenges I faced was remaining ethical in choosing certain streets and houses, making sure that the characters’ houses do not make reference to actual houses in my community. People could make assumptions and think characters are based on them, when they are all just fictional characters. There are a few cultural tropes present in my game, not just language and spelling, but household items I have come to notice are present in many households in my community. For example, the notable soup cup, a vintage design which includes a soup recipe (Fig 12).

Figure 12. Tasmin Randall, *Soup Cup* (2022), Digital Drawing

This cup is included in a scene in Naaigel’s game, where he dishes soup for his grandmother. Soup is another popular dish within my household. With a specific recipe that has been passed down from older generations, it is often made on rainy or cold days. In Cash’s kitchen scene, I included scenes which showcase his fridge and kitchen cupboards. Compared to Stacy’s fridge, it appears almost empty. Moreover, in Stacy’s bathroom the cupboards are filled with high-end products, as opposed to the ‘Shoprite’ or no name branded items in Cash’s household. The different consumer products in each character’s household is a direct commentary on the socio-economic differences within our community. Music also plays a big role in my game as well as in my community in general. Cleaning with music is a norm,

especially old-school music, which I have learned from my mother and grandmother. Many of my peers and their families do the same. In my game, Stacy has the choice to clean to one of four classic albums[35] that are quite familiar to me and my family (Fig. 13).

Figure 13. Tasmin Randall, *Music to Clean up* (2022), Game Screenshot

Through coding, I brought all these processes and designs together in a format that is interactive and entertaining. World building was just one of the processes toward a completed game. Since the software, Dreamweaver, which uses HTML coding, is quite limiting, there were certain things I could not do or achieve with this coding format. When certain scenes were edited out, I had to come up with alternative ways to include a similar scene or actions that can portray what I am trying to communicate to the player. Nonetheless, this game is an art video game and thus does not follow the normal game logistics of using arrow keys and having full control over the characters' movements. The game is click-based, giving the player the illusion of choice and movement.

In addition to my art video game, I have designed and created posters that represent each character. Each poster reveals some part of the character's personality and story (Fig. 14).

For Crystal I chose a sci-fi poster design, since she is a 'gamer girl' and a sci-fi fanatic. It further matches with the concept of her hair having a 'superpower' and coming to life to

[35] The classic albums include; Tevin Campbell *I'm Ready*, Whitney Houston *The Greatest Hits*, Verd *Kulud*, Tamia *Tamia*.

‘zap’ people. The background makes reference to a section in Albany Road, where most of the ‘zapping’ encounters happen.

Naaigel’s poster takes on a more simplistic sportive design, directly influenced by Nike commercials and promotion posters. This makes reference to his obsession with the sports brand, Nike. For Naaigel I have included both versions of his character (Fig. 14). The top depiction shows the way he perceives himself, whereas the illustration at the bottom shows the abnormal ‘Nike kop’ persona all other characters know him as. The colour palette for his poster is quite dull which references the gloomy situation within his household and family.

For Cash, the obvious choice of design was a graffiti-style poster. I used more vibrant colours and instead of having a realistic depiction of his character on his poster, I drew him in a stylistic graffiti way on a wall.

Lastly, for Stacy, her poster is less busy and more simplistic, which could be a reference to her perfectionist persona due to her snobbish and classist upbringing. The style of her poster resembles a clean modern aesthetic, however there is a slight contrast with her desk being slightly cluttered with her schedule and academic work.

Figure 14. Tasmin Randall *Posters* (2022), Digital Posters

My MFA installation took place at a site-specific location. Site-specificity refers to a location or place which is quite significant in further strengthening an art work, exhibition or installation (Kwon 1997). The art is created to fit within a particular location or site and thus adapts to that place's characteristics. Furthermore, site-specificity insists on the viewer for completion of the work and may become meaningless when not within the specific site (Kwon 1997: 86). Therefore, without an audience or the players actively playing my game, the work is incomplete. Having my final exhibition in a site specific location has assisted in meeting the objective of communicating issues I have experienced within my community, to my community. The art was thus accessible to many.

The site for this installation was a building where our Game Centre used to be on our main road, Albany Road. The venue of the Game Centre or 'GC' is the owner's garage. After the Game Centre closed down there was a tyre shop renting the space. The owner now uses the space as his garage. Using this space for my exhibition is quite fitting and brought about a sense of nostalgia for some. This building is where I spent most days in my youth back when there was a game centre (Fig. 15). Our weekends were less mundane, because there was a space catered for us to hangout and be entertained. As a tyre business subsequently occupied the space, the floors are quite damaged. Hence temporary carpeting was placed in certain areas, not only for aesthetics but to ensure people do not trip over missing tiles or uneven floors when visiting the exhibition.

Figure 15. Tasmin Randall, *The GC* (2022), photograph

For the installation, I installed five computers through which the art video games were played (Fig. 16). Along with the screens, I had the game play screen recorded and projected on the wall towards the back of the venue (Fig. 16). This ensured that people could also watch the game and see how it is played, since there were only a limited amount of screens to play on.

Figure 16. Tasmin Randall *Exhibition* (2023), Photograph

Having fewer computers speaks directly to the shortage we had with arcade machines at the Game Centre. There were no more than two arcade machines, which meant people had to crowd around each machine and wait their turn to play. In some ways, watching someone else play was quite entertaining on its own (Fig. 17). To get the community more engaged, I included other more familiar games like dominoes and cards as well as a skipping rope within my exhibition.

Figure 17. Tasmin Randall *Exhibition Games* (2023), Photograph

In terms of audio, there was always music present at our game centres back when I was a teenager, therefore I did the same and had a speaker with music playing for more ambience. The stations with the computer screens each had a set of headphones to create an immersive space of my art video game and not interfere with the overall audio. In terms of refreshments I recreated what we know as a '*tafel*' in our culture, the table displayed all the foods that we cherish on special occasions, such as samosas, 'vetkoekies', minceballs, koeksisters and so on (Fig. 18). Before inviting guests to help themselves to refreshments, my uncle said a prayer and blessed the table, which is a standard practice in our community. Alongside the refreshments wine and juice was served, however, given the context and venue, plastic cups were used because of the exhibition's informal nature.

Figure 18. Tasmin Randall *Die Tafel* (2023), Photograph

Besides the physical exhibition, I also have a website for my art video game. This will ensure that people from outside my community can also view and experience the game, which will further aid in conveying marginalised perspectives towards the mainstream. My website (https://tasminrandall.co.za/exhibit/exhibit.html) consists of my game, an artist's statement that introduces the player to my artwork, as well as a gallery with all my posters and documentation of the exhibition.

CONCLUSION

Reflecting on my Story

When I first started this research, I was almost certain that I knew exactly what I was doing. However, this was a learning journey; through peer engagement, advice and self-reflection I learned more about my culture and even about myself. As mentioned previously, the lack or limit of academic resources that dealt with 'Coloured' experiences and cultures outside of the Western Cape was one of the motivations for this research. Over the course of my master's degree programme, I also found that there is a lack of South African video games that are based on ethnicity, culture or just the South African context in general. This lack of representation was what motivated me to choose art video gaming as a medium for my art practice. Nonetheless, I soon realised that attempting to represent any marginalised groups can quickly appear as 'speaking on behalf of an entire group' which can lead to overgeneralisations.

Ironically, this is exactly what I want to avoid. I wanted to debunk stereotypes and show that my culture is not homogeneous and it exists outside the lens of the Western Cape experience.

The best way to do this is to speak about the personal. In that way my story can add to a collective of other stories and contribute to filling in a gap present in academia. Autoethnography as a methodology best suited the type of research I wanted to do. I did not know it was possible to centre the self in research, as most disciplines prefer research to be objective, offering little to none of the author's voice (Ellis, Adams and Bochner 2011). Through the use of case studies and an in-depth analysis I have been able to create an art video game that not only conveys my experiences but also brings about a sense of culture through the use of cultural tropes I have observed in my community. Using humour as a tool in my work helped to deal with uncomfortable topics, as the themes in my work are quite heavy and not often spoken about.

Reflecting both on my video game and on this supporting document, I never thought it would be necessary to speak about my queer characters in my game because that is not my main focus and it does not relate to any of my main themes. Being surrounded by people who identify as queer was just part of my life's experience and I thus added it to my game without really analysing and discussing this decision. Most of my friends are queer or are a part of the LGBTQIA+ community. The characters 'Chad', as well as Stacy's friends, 'Samantha and

Abigail' all identify as queer. Not only does this show diversity, but it mainly reflects my lived experience.

Previously in this mini-thesis I have gone through in detail how I relate to Crystal, through texturism. In terms of Stacy's character, although my parents have expressed biases to some degree in the past, mainly texturism, as well as having their fair share of strictness in raising me, I am blessed to say that I have not experienced being parented by people who hold such strong and prejudiced values as the 'snobbish rents'. This storyline mostly derives from first hand observations of friends or peers with extremely strict parents.

Cash's storyline is something I have also not experienced first hand. I am quite privileged, unlike someone who can relate to Cash's experiences, therefore this storyline stems from a place of not knowing. I do recall meeting people who are talented yet do not have the resources to perfect and profit from their talent. Many *Grahamstown's' Got Talent* shows have been hosted pre-Covid at the Recreational Hall in Albany Road. Through these shows, I recall seeing many young, talented people with incredible singing voices and impressive dancing skills. Some had a knack for spray painting, even if it meant vandalising the walls of our community. Unfortunately, some of those talented people could not pursue a career in which they utilise their talents for profit. Some have even fallen victim to drug addiction. Although Makhanda is small and not known for having gang violence or gangs, there is still an epidemic of drug use within the youth of this community. This is another heavy topic which I have not really touched on in my game nor have I spoken about it previously in my mini-thesis.

Lastly, one of the most challenging and uncomfortable topics to grapple with in this thesis and research is alcoholism. The thought of including anything alcohol- or drug-related in my game made me wary of perpetuating harmful stereotypes. These stereotypes are so prominent, I almost felt compelled to not include any of these issues within my game at all. However, that would be unjust to what my experience in Makhanda truly is. In February's (1981: 26) paper he speaks about the 'tot system' in the 1800s and how alcohol has been used by colonists and slave owners to control the enslaved. Liquor would often be given as compensation for work or simply to keep the enslaved in an agreeable state while working. This, in turn created a dependency within the enslaved and thus the 'alcoholic' stereotype was created. It is further important to note that alcoholism can be hereditary and unfortunately from my experience from an early age I have been exposed to relatives who battle with it, often due to work-related stress. While it is a harmful stereotype, for some

alcoholism is a reality. Thus it took much thought whether to include this topic or any hints at alcohol within my game. However, drinking is something that is present in almost all communities and cultures; it is a social activity that many engage in globally. Therefore, I have included subtle hints with the fridge scene in Crystal's game and Naaigel's mother who often indulges in a few glasses of wine after work.

Overall, the game is mostly centred around the players' choice and judgement of another character. This itself is a comment on how people within our own community judge and make assumptions about one another. Some of us tend to even perpetuate harmful stereotypes which were fed to us by the mainstream. The Stacy and Cash interaction is a prime example of how easy it is to assume someone's character based on something as insignificant as their clothing or the language they speak. Ultimately, I hope that my story not only brings laughter, but some sort of empathy and introspection in relation to the stereotypical yet nuanced characters that depict different, yet relevant, experiences.

Through my MFA research, practice and writing I have discovered that every individual story is powerful and, in turn, can also contribute to a collective story in which everyone can exist. Although the apartheid regime has given the label 'Coloured', it cannot give or impose an identity or culture. This happens with the agency of its bearers, our communities. I know that my culture exists, I engage with it and experience it every day. Towards the end of this research, my fixation on proving the existence of my identity and culture has eased. I no longer feel as compelled to validate its existence. I have also deduced that attempts to prove and represent its existence as a common culture can further perpetuate stereotypes and simultaneously exclude people from the narrative. Everyone's experiences are different because 'Coloured' identities and culture are multifaceted and heterogeneous.

I have come to the understanding that a self-identifying process is an ongoing journey. Thus it feels odd to come to some sort of conclusion. However, I will conclude that storytelling through art video games can be an exceptional tool in bringing about empathy in a player. This was analysed and demonstrated through the case study in Chapter 2, *That Dragon, Cancer*. When done thoughtfully, feelings and experiences can be conveyed and shared with the player or audiences through games and animation. I hope people both inside and outside of my community enjoy playing my art video game and come to understand that 'Coloured' identities are multifaceted and nuanced.

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