

DIGITAL ARTS POST-GRAD HANDBOOK 2022

OVERVIEW VERSION

A FOCUS ON HONOURS, MASTERS & PhD RESEARCH IN THE
DIGITAL ARTS DEPT. OF THE WITS SCHOOL OF ARTS



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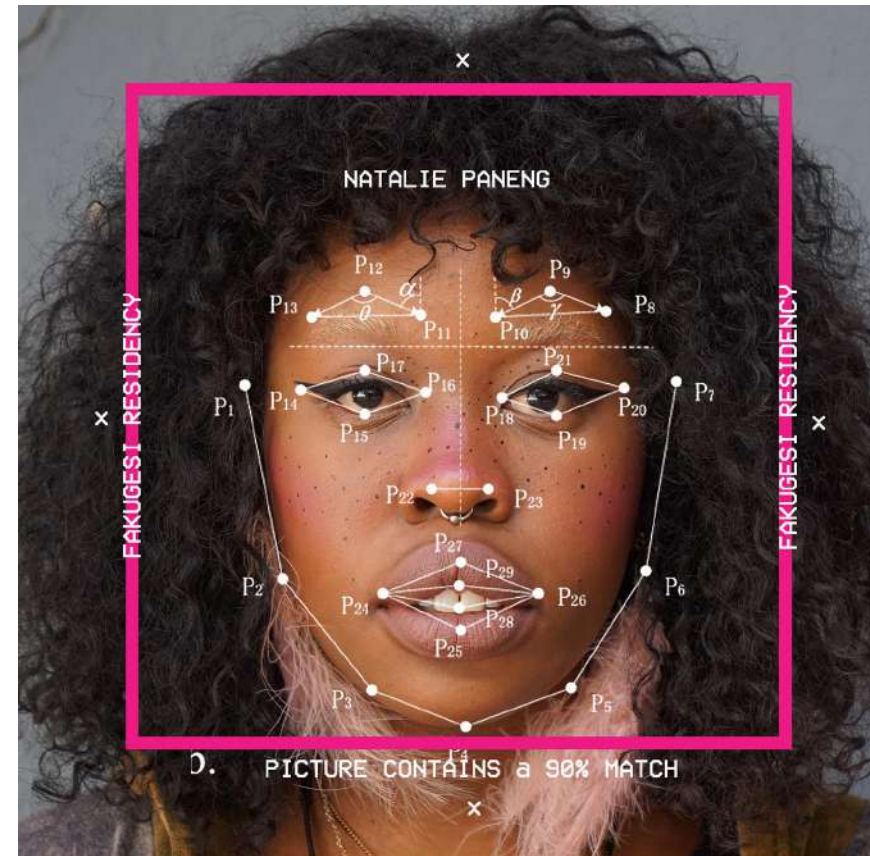
1. INTRO & MANIFESTO

Welcome to the Post-Graduate Handbook. A Digital Arts Department guide, location, inspiration and help book for postgraduate's studies.

Through this handbook we aim to enliven the questions of research for digital art, technology and culture and bring together our staff and students under a singular vision for the digital creative sector and its research.

A FUTURE OF DIGITAL ART RESEARCH & PRACTICE

- We aim towards research that looks to service equitable futures at the intersection of culture and technology.
- We aim towards cultural and arts research that documents, critiques and grows the present view on technology towards a future that serves humanity.
- Our work is aimed at influencing the agenda of how digital creativity is spoken about and read from the African continent.
- We acknowledge that we are working from Johannesburg, a contemporary African City that is also home to multiple Pan-African and global identities.

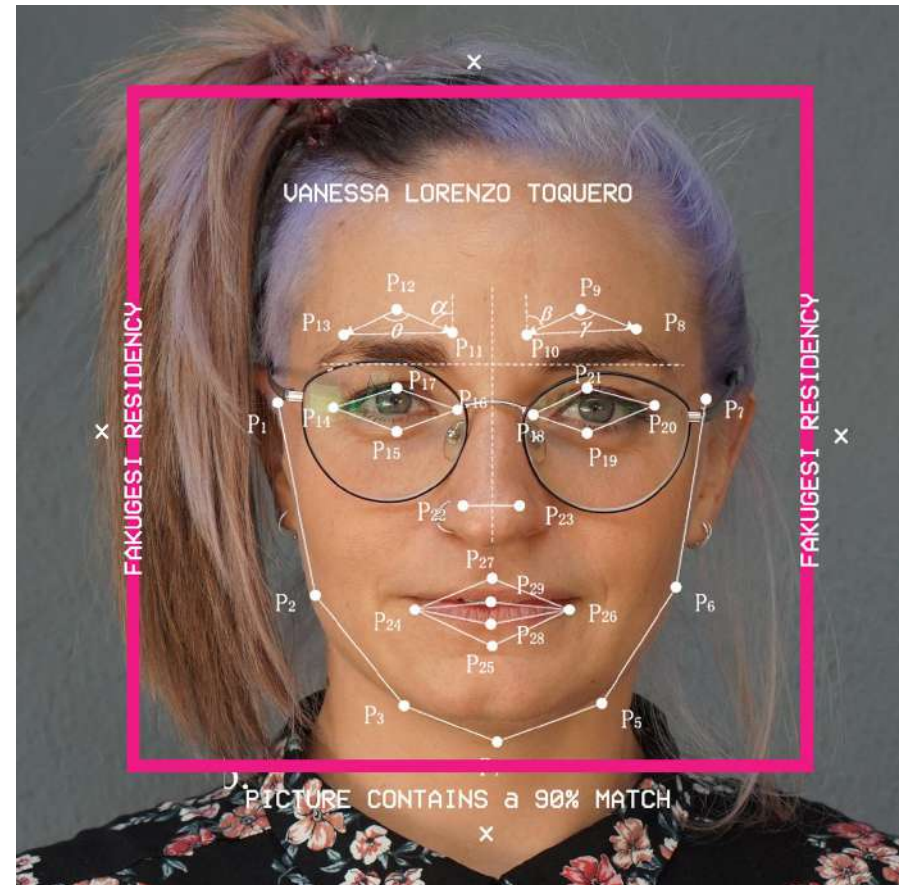


South African Digital Artist, Natalie Paneng. Photo: Bubblegum Club

HOW WE DO IT TOGETHER

- **Expand the field of digital culture and creativity;** where the role of a digital creator is critically engaged, and understood as laying the future of technology and culture.
- **Produce knowledge and digital creativity that are not limited to the University;** we look beyond academic circles to influences from and on the sector and society.
- **Accommodate a variety of positions;** including but not limited to the active role of students in decision making, idea generation, and curriculum design.
- **Embrace the specialisation of our staff;** this includes, but is not limited to animation, gaming, digital art and virtual reality. Digital Arts staff are artists, thinkers, cultural workers and researchers with experience across a variety of disciplines.
- **Offer a range of teaching and research methodologies;** ways of thinking and doing that allow us to engage a large range of conceptual tools and modes of expression.
- **Link to the world;** we (students and staff) are linked to a local and international community of studios, expert makers, distributors, researchers and developers whom we will engage in our research and development.

**This manifesto is a living document, an ongoing questioning of our program, our practices, processes, thinking, ideas.*



Digital Artist, Vanessa Lorenzo. Photo: Bubblegum Club

2. RESEARCH EVENTS & SEMINAR SERIES

Building an environment for collective knowledge and aiding in developing a community for research.

2.1. 'SOURCE CODE' RESEARCH SEMINAR & EXHIBITION SERIES

Digital Arts postgraduates and staff are ALL at some point in research and creative development of their own; either in PhD's, MA's, writing books or papers for academic journals or producing creative work for exhibitions in extension of research.

The **SOURCE CODE SEMINARS & EXHIBITION Series** aims to give insight into what everyone is working on, as well the opportunity for us to invite guests we are engaging with.

→ *Invited guests can include collaborators and / or theorists, industry specialists and creatives who inspire us.*

This is an opportunity for you to share your research, inspirations and to test concepts and theories on a focused digital arts research audience.



Subterranean Imprint Archive, Lo-Def Film Factory. Source: [Bubblegum Club](#), 2021

Source Code: Staff Led Seminars

Presented either by staff themselves or by guests invited by staff. These guests should be theorists, researchers or creatives who's work staff are exploring, inspired by or are collaborating with.

Source Code: Student Led Seminars

Presented either by students themselves or by guests invited by students. Students can work collaboratively with supervisors to invite guests or present jointly developed research. These guests should be theorists, researchers or creatives who's work students are exploring, inspired by or are collaborating with.

2.2. MA RESEARCH PROPOSAL PRESENTATION SEMINAR

This is the annual (around July) seminar at which MA candidates present their research proposals to a panel of readers, guests and supervisors. The proposal presentation seminars are a requirement for all MA candidates and open for all students and staff to attend to learn more about MA research being developed in the Dept.

2.3. HONOURS RESEARCH GROUP PRESENTATIONS

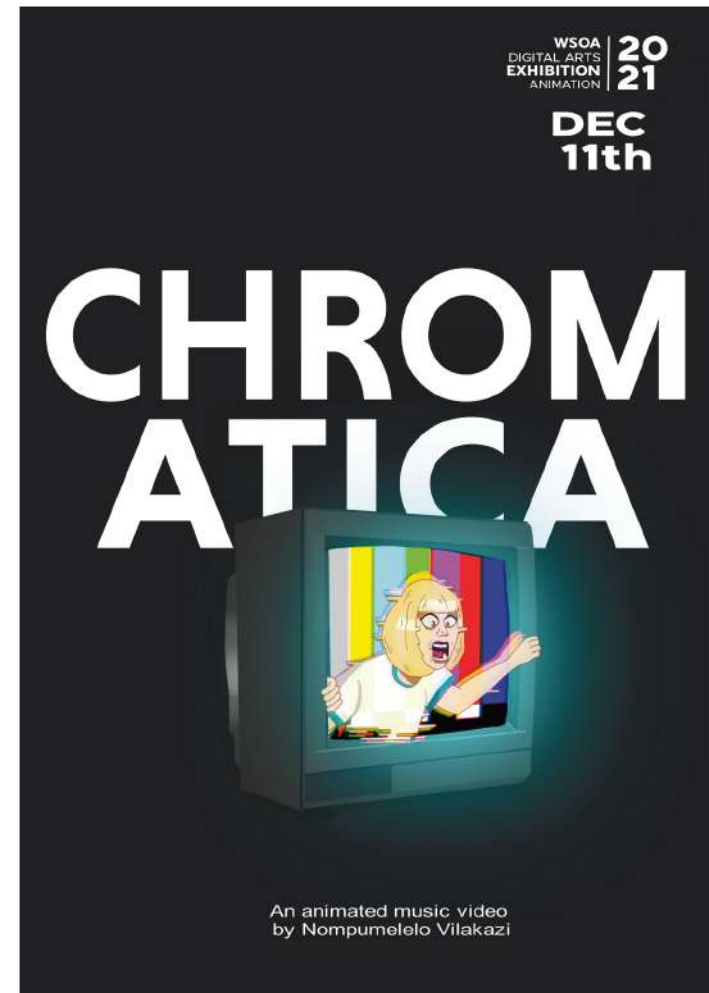
Towards the end of the year Honours Research Groups have the opportunity to present to guests, staff and other students the focus of their research groups and the outcomes towards their final submissions.

2.4. PLAY TEST WEEK

The Digital Arts academic year culminates in Playtest Week. During this week all students will be invited to share their work with peers from all year groups.

2.5. YEAR END (OR YEAR START) EXHIBITION

A final year exhibition across all genres of work, focusing on, but not limited to the final year 3rd & 4th year outcomes being seen publicly and by industry.



Chromatica (2021). Credit: Wits Digital Arts year end Exhibition by Nompumelelo Vilaka

3. OVERVIEW OF DIGITAL ARTS POSTGRADUATE PROGRAMMES

3.1. PhD WITS DIGITAL ARTS - AN OVERVIEW

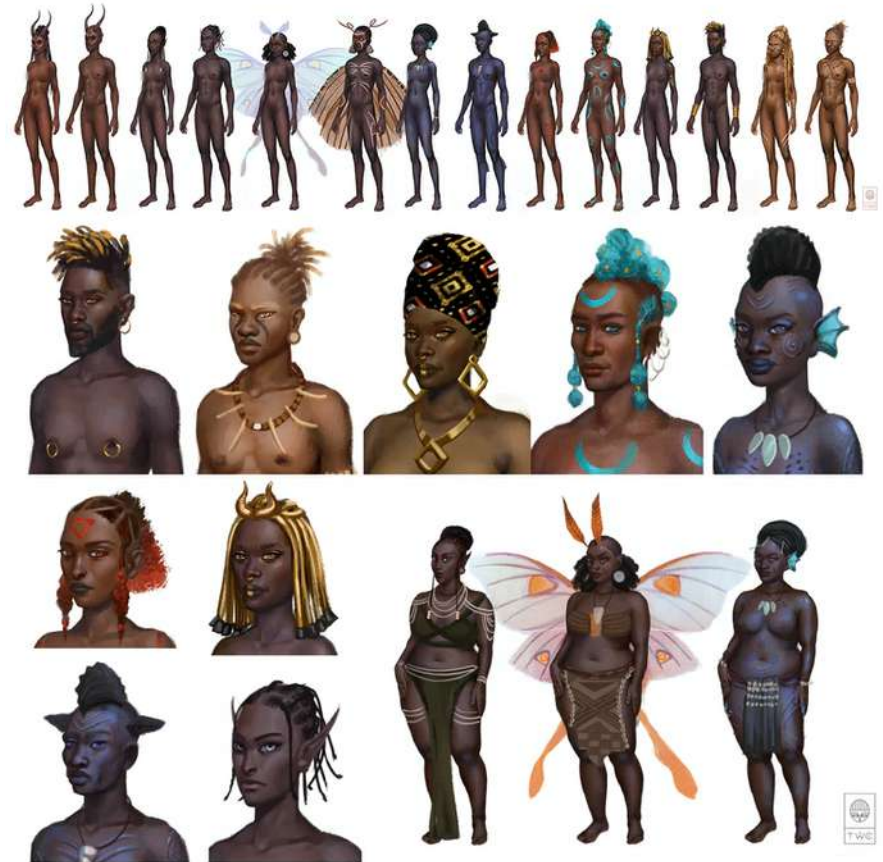
WHAT IS A PhD

A PhD (Doctor of Philosophy) is an exit degree, meaning it is the highest academic degree. Conducted after a Master's and when a researcher or creative practitioner is in a position to contribute new knowledge to a field or subject.

The contribution to new knowledge is not easy and requires extensive understanding of the field being engaged, in addition to a well developed methodology for the exploration or generation of new knowledge.

A PhD at the Wits School of Arts can be taken full time or part time over 4 to 6 years. Part time proposals complete within 12 months of registration and full-time proposals complete in 6 months of registration.

PhD applications are assessed at School level and accepted on an above 65% MA average, the merits of an expression of interest and supervision capacity. PhD's ranges between 70 000 to 100 000 words, the Wits School of Arts allows for creative research submission as a contribution.



From PC Game 'The Wagadu Chronicles' by Twin Drums . Image from Twitter: [@WagaduChronicle](https://twitter.com/WagaduChronicle)

3.2. MASTERS BY RESEARCH OR MASTERS BY RESEARCH & CREATIVE WORK - AN OVERVIEW

WHAT IS A 'MASTERS'

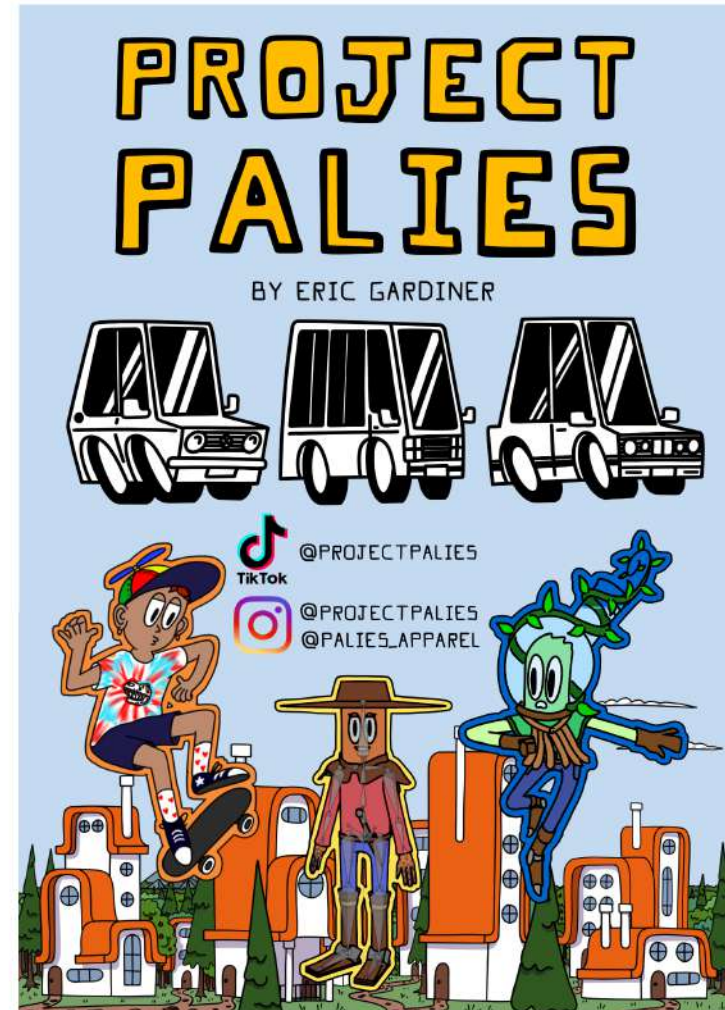
Completing a 'Masters' shows that you are a 'master of' or have 'mastered' a chosen or specified field or subject. Thereby proving that you are so well read and researched that you understand it well enough that you can ask and defend a significant research question in that field or subject.

This Digital Arts MA can be taken full time in 12 months (usually February to February) or part time over 2 years. It is a research intensive MA in which you work towards a single dissertation outcome often accompanied by creative work and with a subject specialist as supervisor.

Research areas for an MA with the Dept. are described under the following general sector categories: Animation, Gaming & Interactive Media, BUT as the range of expertise and specialisation of supervisors in the Dept. are far broader than this, we accept a range of topics under the definitions of digital culture and digital creativity.

WHAT IS EXPECTED

Candidates are expected to produce research that is relevant to current research in the chosen field, is critical in nature, forms a strong argument and is academically sound.



Project Palies (2021). Credit: Wits Digital Arts Exhibition, Eric Gardiner

The value of our MA is it allows for part of the examinable output to include creative work - you can therefore submit your MA in the following research vs creative work formations:

- 1) **100%** Written Research
- 2) **60%** Written Research with **40%** Creative Research
- 3) **50%** Written Research with **50%** Creative Research

The percentage balance is an important choice that should be led by not only the research you are conducting and how the creative work relates to the research, but further if your creative work is considered examinable at an MA level.

MA DEVELOPMENT & RESEARCH CONTRIBUTIONS

There are three major contributions to your MA development in the research community.

1) **The Research Proposal & Proposal Presentation**

A research proposal (2 000 - 3 000 words) is presented after 6 months for candidates registered full time and 12 months for candidates registered part- time.

2) **SOURCE CODE Research Seminars**

In building an environment for collective knowledge and aiding in developing a community for research, MA students are invited to present their research or invite guests to the SOURCE CODE research seminar series.

Guests should be researchers or creatives who's work you are exploring or inspired by. You can also work with your supervisor to identify and invite guest speakers.

3) **Final Research Submission**

A final submission is submitted at the end of 12 months (usually by 15 February the year after registering) for candidates registered full time or after 24 months for candidates registered part-time.

All submissions must have ethical clearance and meet the non-plagiarism criteria in order to be examined.

In the final submission written research is expected to meet the following word counts:

- **40 000 to 45 000** words for 100% written research
- **24 000 to 27 000** words for 60% / 40% written and creative work split.
- **20 000 to 22 000** works for 50% / 50% written and creative work split.

Research (written & creative) must be academically sound, have a clear methodological trajectory and make a strong and defended argument of a central research question.

3.3. HONOURS IN DIGITAL ART - AN OVERVIEW

WHAT IS AN 'HONOURS'

An Honours Degree is a professional degree in which a 4th year of specialisation is completed - not only in a subject area, but also in academic writing and research. It is additionally understood as preparation for a Masters Degree.

The Digital Art Honours can be taken by candidates completing their 4th Year in the Digital Arts undergraduate programmes OR by candidates that have completed an NQF level 7 degree (3 Year BA or equivalent) from another college or university. In the latter candidates join the Dept. for the final Honours year only. This mix of candidates makes for a really great community of digital makers coming in from lots of different programmes. The Honours can be taken part-time over two years or full-time in one year.

WHAT IS EXPECTED

The Digital Arts Honours is a research and coursework programme and can be taken in one of three subject areas: Animation, Interactive Media, Interactivity & Writing or Game Design.

The coursework programme includes:

- A one year written research project, either as Digital Arts Research Project or Long Essay.
- A year long Digital Arts Creative Project.



Cat-Astrophe! (2021). Credit: Wits Digital Arts Exhibition, Siyathnda Nontolwana, Linda Sumbu and Nhlanhla Langa.

- A semester long theory course: Digital Arts Theory.
- One honours / 4th year level practice course in either Animation, Game Design, Interactive Media or Writing & Interactivity - these are to be taken at either '**introductory** - year long' or '**advanced** - semester long' level - on advice of the supervisor and based on the applicant's academic history or experience in the respective field.

HONOURS RESEARCH CONTRIBUTIONS

There are three research contributions to your Honours development and the research community.

1) Research Project or Long Essay

As a written research contribution, students can choose between a Research Project which is developed with a group in a seminar and work series under a specific research area OR a Long Essay which is developed by the student independently (on approval) with a supervisor.

2) Creative Project

The Creative Project is your opportunity to explore a creative output of your choice for the Honours. You will have around 6-8 months to complete your project. It will be examined and exhibited at the Dept.'s year end exhibition.

The creative project is unlinked to any other course, however you have the option to further your research through this creative project and use it to support the research project or long essay.

4. SUPERVISORS & RESEARCH EXPERTISE

4.1. DIGITAL ARTS SUPERVISORS



Installation View UFA – University of African Futures from 10 April to 10 August 2021 at le lieu unique. Photo: David Gallard

Dr. Tegan Bristow

Senior Lecturer and Fak’ugesi Principle Researcher, Bristow additionally acts as Editor in Chief of the WSOA [Ellipses Journal for Creative Research](#). Bristow directed the [Fak’ugesi African Digital Innovation Festival](#) from 2016 to 2020 and now works closely between Fak’ugesi Festival, Tshimologong Innovation Precinct and the Wits School of Arts developing research on the Digital Creative Industries in Africa.

In 2021 Bristow won the *National Science and Technology Forum Award* for Sustainable Development in the Creative Industries for her work in co-founding and directing the Fak’ugesi Festival.

Beyond teaching, research, curation and directing festivals, Bristow is a developer of interactive digital media in installation, interactive-performance screen-based and online media. Exhibiting most recently in 2021 a work titled a [School for Vernacular Algorithms](#) with the [University of African Futures](#), curated by Oulimata Gueye at Le Lieu Unique in Nantes, France.

Bristow completed her PhD with the Planetary Collegium at the Centre for Interdisciplinary Arts at Plymouth University, U.K titled [Post African Futures: Decoloniality and Actional Methodologies in Art and Cultural Practices in African Cultures of Technology](#).

Tegan’s Research Areas Art, Culture and Technology in Africa, Interactive Media Arts, AI & ML and Art, Vernacular Algorithms, Algorithmic Thinking in Culture & Society, African Futures & Post African Futures, Decolonising Methodologies in Knowledge Production, Digital Creative Industries in Africa, Culture & Policy Development with 4IR & Innovation Sectors.

Tegan’s [Wits Staff Profile](#)



Character Design by Steve Cloete (2021)

Stephen Cloete

Steve Cloete has lectured in the Digital Arts program since 2014. He has a background in Fine Arts with a focus on digital production and 3D asset creation. He was involved in the early phases of the Game Design program at Wits and helped to develop several of the courses which are now taught as part of the degree.

He has a Bachelor's degree in Fine Art, and a Masters degree in Digital Art, as well as a diploma in Graphic Design. His MA thesis

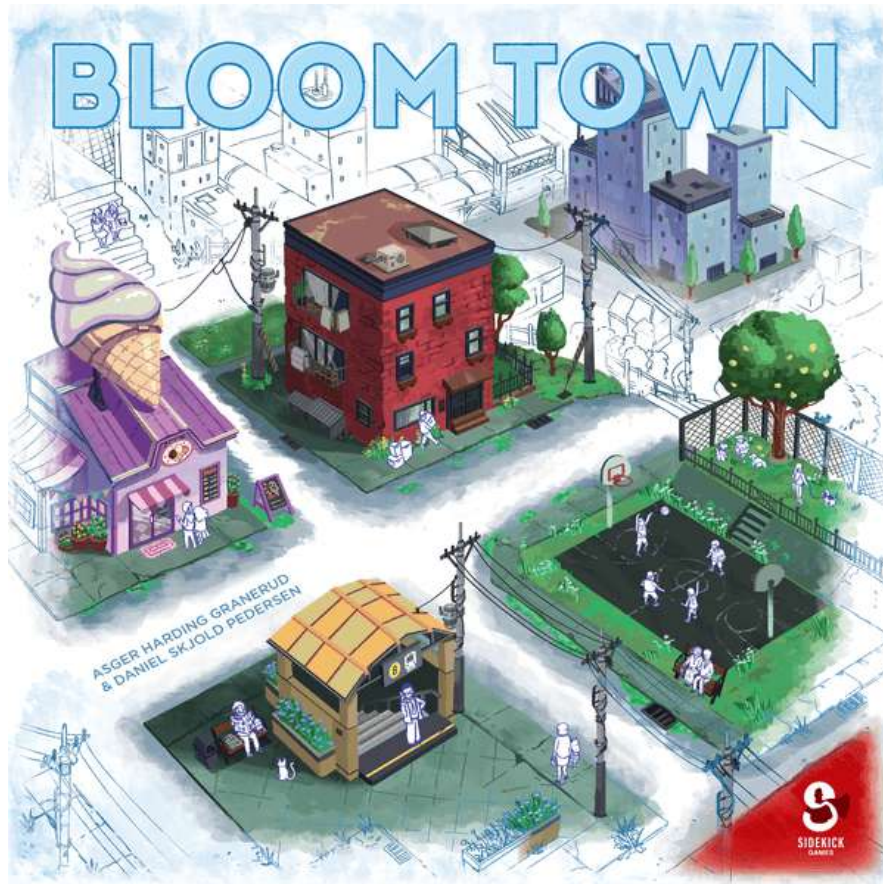
focused on the intersection of Anthropology and Table-Top Roleplaying games.

His teaching is primarily focused on practical asset creation and integration for games and interactive media, with primary interests in character design, animation, narrative integration and communication, and procedural asset creation.

His current research interests revolve around spatial practice and its implications for the production of virtual space within interactive media. This extends from his earlier research, in which he investigated the possible connections between liminoid ritual spaces and practices (as described by the anthropologist Victor Turner), and the textual foundations and play-driven implications of table-top roleplaying games. He is primarily interested in the relationship between games and broader socio-political phenomena. He is concerned with situating games within a cultural context, and identifying the specific mechanical and aesthetic characteristics of gamic texts and processes that allow them to connect with and inform other areas of cultural life.

Steve's Research Areas: Spatial practice and production in virtual environments, digital artistic production, the anthropology of games, socio-politics of virtual spaces/places.

Steve's [Wits Staff Profile](#)



Bloom Town (2019) box cover. Developed by Kirsten du Preez.

Kirsten du Preez

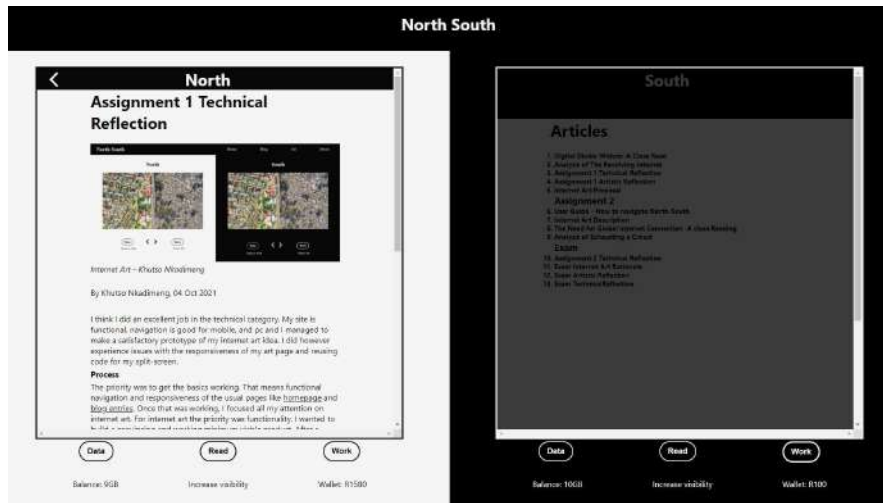
Kirsten du Preez has taught in Digital Arts at Wits University since 2018, becoming an Associate Lecturer in 2022.

Kirsten has a background in theatre, where she has written, directed, and stage managed numerous student and professional productions. This work was the beginning of learning and experimenting with crafting an audience's experience. Looking for ways to make those experiences more interactive, she found her way to Wits Digital Arts. Kirsten's MA dissertation focused on narrative design in board games, further cementing her interest in interactive storytelling.

Kirsten has a wide range of industry and commercial experience. She has worked on a number of published (and yet-to-be) board games, and has developed gamification programmes for many national and international companies.

Kirsten's current research is exploring the relationship between behavioural economics and the act of playing board games. By identifying board game players as economic agents, Kirsten is studying their decision making through economic models (and variations therein).

Kirsten's Research Areas: Board games, Gamification, Behavioural Economics, Narrative, Playful and Interactive Storytelling, Theatre, Applied Games, Serious Games. Game Design and Development, Player Studies and Research, Diversity in Games.



Screenshot of Digital Arts Honours Interactive Media project: NorthSouth (2021) by Khutso Nkadimeng, <https://nkadimengk.github.io/north-south/#/>. Last accessed 2022-02-10

Hanli Geyser

Hanli Geyser is a Lecturer in Digital Arts at Wits University where she was Head of Department of Digital Arts from 2015 - 2019.

Hanli developed the Game Design Programs at Wits, which kicked off in February 2012, as well as the BA in Digital Arts degree. These programs provide an introduction to the technical, conceptual and critical foundations needed for students wishing to enter the field of practice that merges technology and the arts.

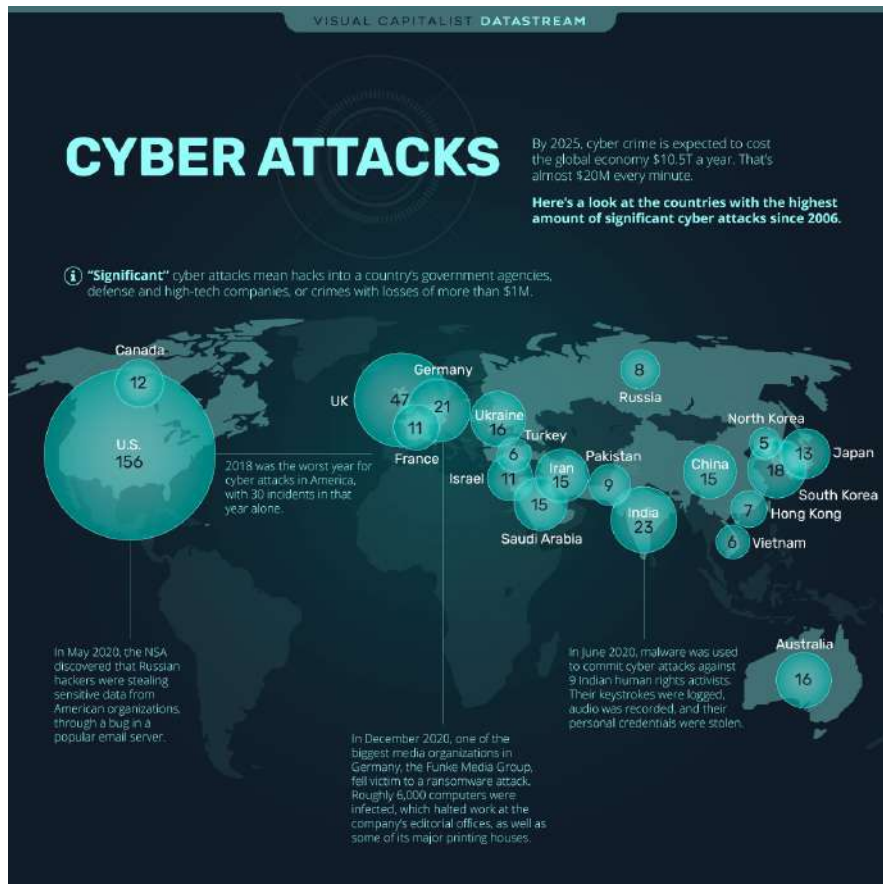
Hanli graduated with an MA in History of Art from Wits. She is fascinated by the conjunction of visual arts and narrative texts

found in games, interactive and experimental storytelling, comic books and film.

Her current research investigates the pedagogic frameworks for teaching programming, in a South African context, with a focus on Decolonisation and Curriculum Transformation.

Hanli's Research Areas: Decolonising Programming Education, Critical Code Studies, Interactive and Experimental Storytelling – user participation in the narrative: literary, visual and experimental storytelling forms.

Hanli's [Wits Staff Profile](#)



The Most Significant Cyber Attacks from 2006-2020, by Country. Source: Visual Capitalist,
<https://www.visualcapitalist.com/cyber-attacks-worldwide-2006-2020/>. Last Accessed 15 Dec, 2021

André Gopal

André Gopal is an Associate Lecturer in Digital Arts at the University of Witwatersrand since 2021.

He started his academic career abroad designing the Network Penetration Program for Computer Sciences in August 2017 at Shandong University, China. These new programs provided instruction as to the technical and conceptual components of programming in the face of the rising need for defense against Cybercrime for those who wish to enter the popular field of Digital Security.

André graduated with an MSc in Computer Science from the University of Kwa-Zulu Natal and holds several other professional qualifications such as the CISSP and OSCP - and is enthralled by all things puzzling in code and technology.

His current research interests cover a broad range of subjects that interlink at various levels of the economic, cultural, and psychological landscape.

André's Research Areas: Gamification of Cybercrime in the Digital Era, Economic shifts in response to Global Digitalization, Social shifts (psychological, cultural, political) due to increases in Rapid Digitalization.

André's [Wits Research Profile](#)



Pax Pamir: Second Edition (2019)

Source: Polygon,

<https://www.polygon.com/2019/9/11/20853419/pax-pamir-second-edition-review-afghanistan-historical-board-game>. Last accessed 25 Feb 2022

Kieran Reid

Head of Department, Wits Digital Arts

Kieran Reid is a teacher, theatre maker and play and games scholar.

He has been teaching at the University of the Witwatersrand since 2012 in Theatre and Performance and Digital Arts. He has been involved in Wits Digital Arts and the Game Design programme

since its inception in 2012. His teaching focus is on analogue games, play studies, theatre and interactive narratives.

Kieran has also worked extensively as a production manager, director and facilitator in the theatre and gaming sectors. He has directed theatre pieces both for Joburg Theatre and the National Arts Festival and has hosted and produced MegaGames. He served as a project manager for the Fak'ugesi Festival and A-MAZE festival from 2013 - 2018. Kieran has also worked as a game consultant and co-designer.

Kieran's current research is focused on using the field of media archaeology to examine the history and landscape of modern hobby board games. In part the research aims to interrogate the ways that and reasons why play has changed.

As additional research and practice Kieran is interested in developing and understanding digital literacies and pedagogy in a South African Context.

Kieran's Research Areas

Audience Studies, Player Studies, Board Game Studies, Game Literacy and Pedagogies, Histories (Gaming), Media Archaeology, Theatre Studies, Digital Gaming, Digital Narratives, Interactive Storytelling, Theories of Decision Making.

Keiran's [Wits Staff Profile](#)

4.2. IACS SUPERVISORS

The Digital Arts department often assigns and offers supervision in collaboration with the Interdisciplinary Arts and Culture Studies Department



Image by Scpio from NounProject.com

Dr. Catherine Duncan

Catherine Duncan is a researcher and lecturer in the Department of Interdisciplinary Arts and Culture in the Wits School of Arts. She has a PhD in Media Studies and a M.Ed in Higher Education and a MA in Journalism and Media Studies. Her current research interests are popular media and the participatory cultures that

arise in relation to them. This includes audiences broadly defined, as well as different kinds of interpretive and creative communities that orbit media texts and the fan cultures that both draw from, and feed into the flow of cultural consumption and production. Catherine is primarily interested in working via ethnographic methods (both digital as well as more traditional face-to-face methods in physical sites) and is currently focused on the intersection of media practises in everyday life including work, home, and leisure.

Catherine's Research Areas: Audience studies, fandom studies, participatory media cultures, translocal and transcultural consumption, creative and cultural industries, creative methodologies, critical theory.

Catherine's [Wits Staff Profile](#)



Reaction video thumbnail on YouTube. Source: Family Reacts Channel
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A7kZCN7GiDw>

Dr. Haseenah Ebrahim

Haseenah Ebrahim (Ph.D., Northwestern University, Illinois) teaches in the Dept. of Interdisciplinary Arts and Culture Studies (IACS) in the Wits School of Arts at the University of the Witwatersrand.

Her research interests, teaching and postgraduate supervision span a range of topics in the fields of film, media and cultural studies, and storytelling across various media and cultural contexts. She has published on gender representations in Pixar

animation films, African spirituality in independent African American cinema, South African women screenwriters, Bollywood in South Africa, and the political economy of micro-entrepreneurial filmmaking in South Africa. Her current research focuses on reaction videos on YouTube.

Dr. Ebrahim's Research Areas: Film Studies, Media Studies, Cultural Studies (representation, ideologies, power relations, etc.), Genre Studies, Narratology/Storytelling, Intercultural discourse on YouTube, Reaction videos on YouTube

Dr. Ebrahim's [Wits Staff Profile](#)



Lev Manovich's Instagram @levnanovich, 14 July, 2020

Dr. Benita de Robillard

Benita de Robillard (Ph.D., University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg) is Senior Lecturer in the Dept. of Interdisciplinary Arts and Culture Studies (IACS) in the Wits School of Arts at the University of the Witwatersrand. In 2014 she completed her Ph.D.,

which investigates the machinic assemblage of sexualities, socialities, and politics in the post/apartheid conjuncture. In 2006 she was selected to participate in a Doctoral Summer School convened by the University of Amsterdam, the Wits Institute for Social and Economic Research and the Universidad Federal de Bahia in Salvador de Bahia, Brazil. She is the recipient of a number of research grants including a multi-year National Research Foundation grant and two Carnegie Mellon grants.

Her current research projects use interdisciplinary critical perspectives to explore various body-technology involvements and recent publications have examined the vexed interconstitution of race and animality in the contemporary South African setting.

Dr. de Robillard's Research Areas: Visual Cultures, Film and Media Studies, Cultural Studies (e.g. embodiment, race, sexualities, disability), Critical Digital Humanities e.g. (platform capitalism, the digital self, platform labour, social media), Science and Technology Studies, Medical Humanities, Human-Animal Studies (race and animality), Critical Posthumanism.

Dr. de Robillard's [Wits Staff Profile](#)